

WATERS ABOVE

Rules for Adventuring in the Astral Plane



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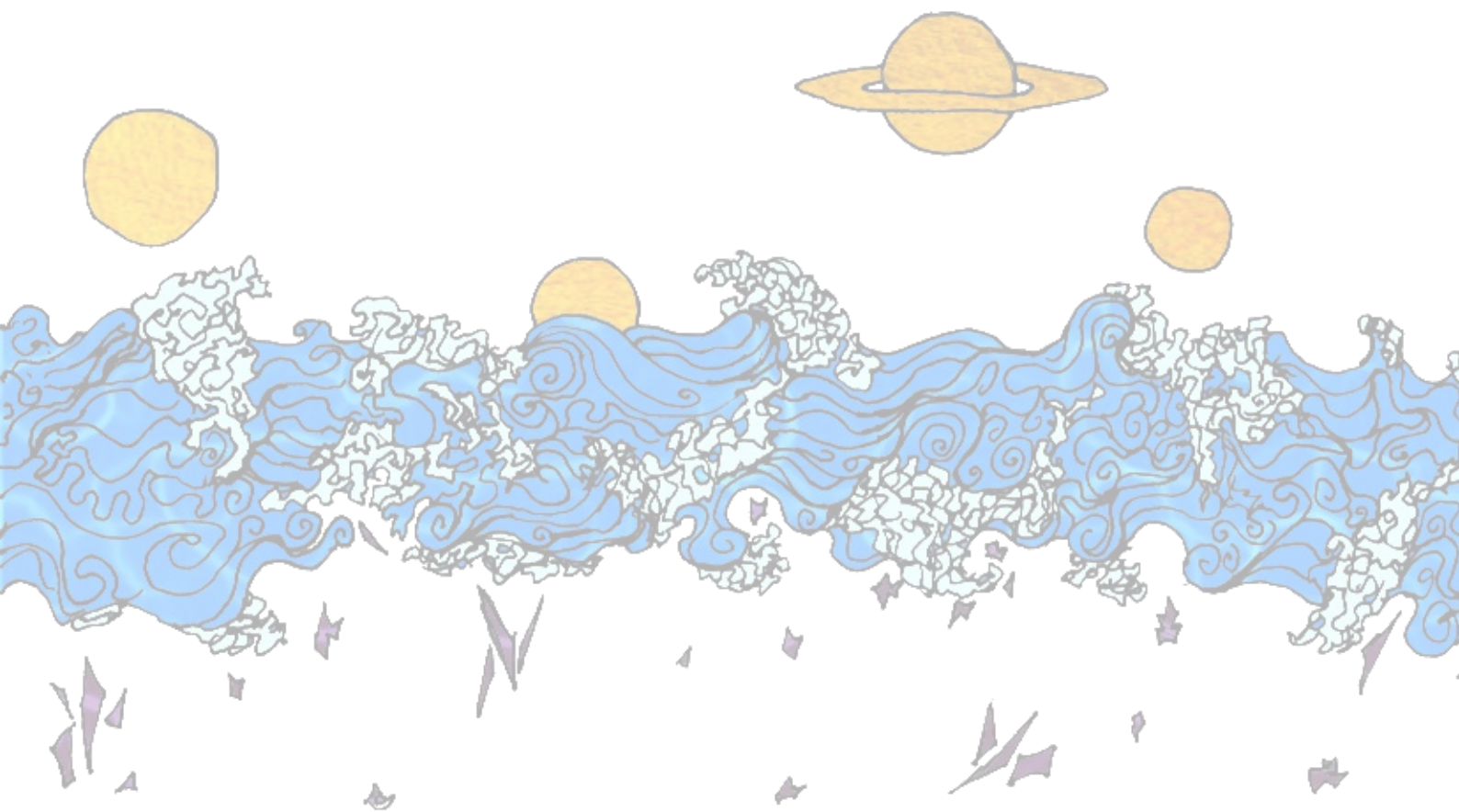
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INTRODUCTION

The Astral Plane: a vast, silvery sea where thought takes form and dreams dwell. Divine planes hang suspended in its waters like planets or islands, and the whirling currents bear a precious sprinkling of habitable land to succor the dead in their unfortunate afterlife. Heroes and villains from every age mix and mingle here, where fish forage alongside deer and sharks contend for their kills with wolves, and one is just as likely to find a forest of kelp as a one of pine. Githyanki pirates sail the surge of its psychic tides and adventure swims in its depths, ripe for the right group of heroes to rectify what the gods have neglected.

The astral plane has long been described as an ocean, but this book expands on the concept, imagining the physical, mental, biological, and social consequences of life in an ocean of thought and dream. Within this book, you will find the astral sea described like a real ocean, according to depth, with unique creatures, locales, resources, and factions in each layer. You will also find all the rules you need to run adventures or campaigns in this reimagined astral plane, including everything necessary to allow your players to build, customize, and sail their own astral vessel.

How to Use This Book

This book provides rules and resources for running adventures or campaigns in the astral plane of any campaign setting, reimagined with an aquatic twist. To that end, most distinguishing setting details - such as the identities of gods and their realms - will be left obscure here. Where such details are necessary, the *Forgotten Realms* setting will be used. As DM, you are invited to take or leave any and all ideas presented here, or to change them as you see fit for your campaign. The layout of *Waters Above* is as follows:

Chapter One: ASTRAL ADVENTURES

This chapter outlines the mythical framework that informs the portrayal of the astral plane in this book, outlines deviations from official Fifth Edition Dungeons and Dragons material, and presents ideas for how best to use the material contained herein in your own campaign and setting.

Chapter Two: BEYOND THE FIRMAMENT

This chapter describes the physical quirks, spiritual paradigms, geographical trends, biological consequences, and cultural commonalities of life in the astral plane, as well as the rules necessary to employ those elements in your campaign.

Chapter Three: SAILING THE ASTRAL SEA

Piloting an astral ship across the silvery seas planar sea is the heart and soul of adventuring in the astral plane. This chapter provides rules for building, customizing, and sailing astral vessels.

Chapter Four: THE SUPERNAL ABOVE

The Supernal Above is the lowermost layer of the astral plane, closest to the mortal world, and is home to the divine planes. This chapter presents the Supernal Above's unique environments, resources, and residents.

Chapter Five: THE PELAGIC ZONE

The Pelagic Zone is the largest layer of the astral plane, located between the Supernal Above and the Stellar Abyss. This chapter presents the Pelagic Zone's unique environments, resources, and residents.

Chapter Six: THE STELLAR ABYSS

The Stellar Abyss the layer of the astral plane most distant from the mortal world, located above the Pelagic Zone. This chapter presents

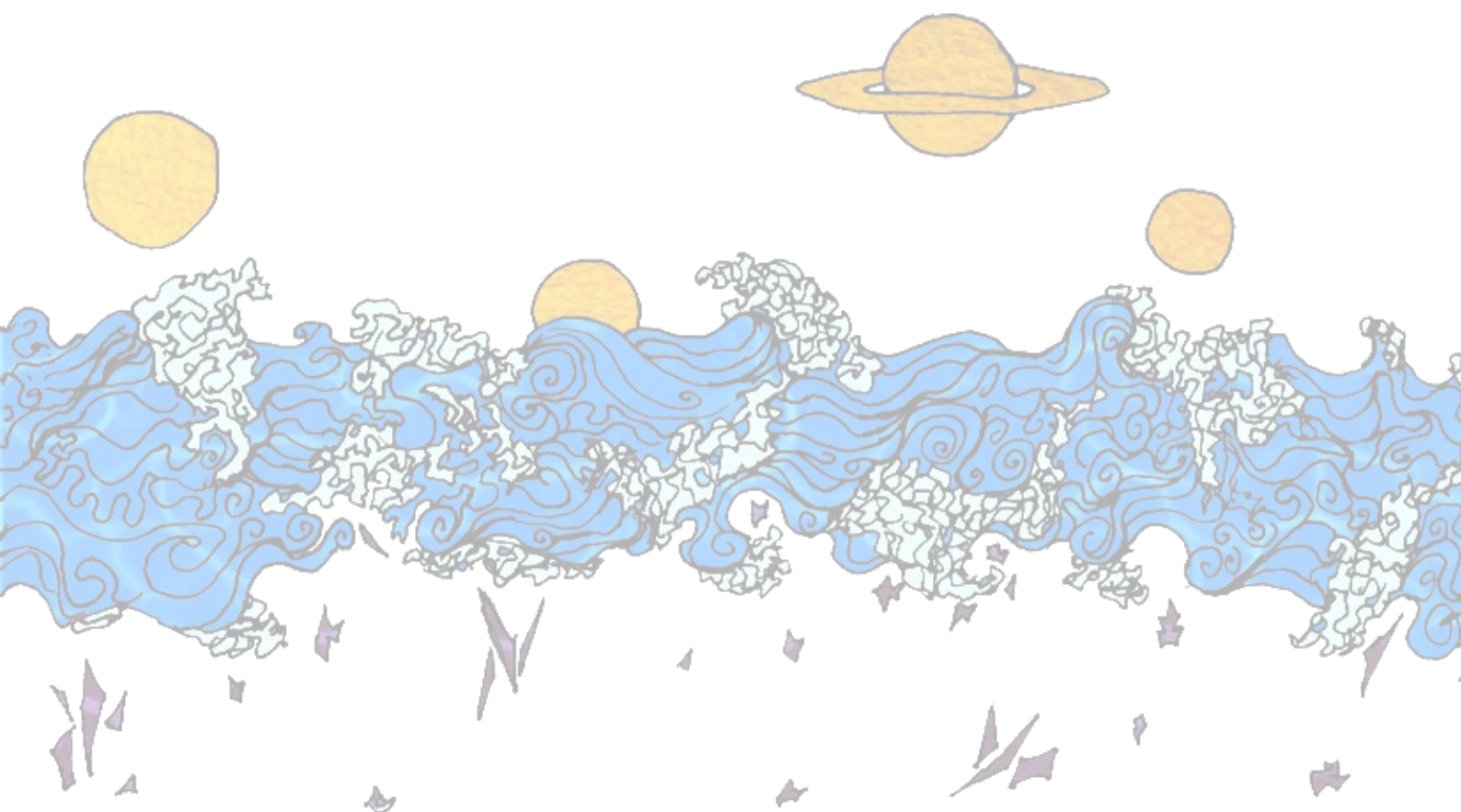
the Stellar Abyss' unique environments, resources, and residents.

APPENDIX A: CREATURES

Appendix A contains the statistics necessary to use the unique creatures described elsewhere in this book.

APPENDIX B: SHIPS

Appendix B contains ready-to-use statistics for a number of astral vessels, generated according to the rules in Chapter Three.



Chapter One

ASTRAL ADVENTURES

Before you dive into the rest of this book, it might be helpful to have some general idea of what adventuring in the astral plane could look like. To that end, this chapter provides a framework by which to understand the rest of *Waters Above*, including the cosmological history that was used to inform the writing of this book. You need not use this history in part or in entirety, but understanding the context will help you to better adapt the contents of this book to your particular setting and campaign. This chapter also outlines deviations from official Fifth Edition material and presents a number of ideas for how to use this content in your campaign.

A Short History of the Aether

The astral plane began as the original stage of existence, the vast expanse of nothingness that would come to contain all other planes like bubbles suspended in water. Within this plane existed a fountainhead of matter and magical energy, overflowing with the raw material the gods and their precursors would use to create the divine realms, the mortal world, and the other planes. This font functioned as a planar gateway, allowing energy and substance to flow through - although from where, none ever knew. During this time, the astral plane lacked any kind of medium in which quasi-mortal beings could exist, and was inhabited only by spiritual creatures.

By secret betrayal or jealous assault, the fountainhead of existence was eventually destroyed. Its fragments exploded outward, littering the astral plane with the glimmering shards that would one day come to be known as stars. Although destroyed, each fragment possessed some of the original gateway's magical flux, and continued to spew new

creative material into the multiverse. But this energy, unlike that of the unblemished gate, was corrupt and strange, alien to all existence that had gone before. They had become the first gateways unto the Far Realm.

Gods quickly rose to power in the aftermath, wreathing themselves in realms of their own into which the aberrant magic of the stars could not penetrate. They created the mortal world, and protected that too against the corruption of the astral plane - albeit less thoroughly. Between the divine planes, the ooze and offspring of the Far Realm held complete sway, resembling the Stellar Abyss in almost every way (see Chapter Six). Mind flayers, astral krakens, aboleth, and other aberrant creatures originated at this time, and built their first empires in the anarchical paradise left for them beyond divine rule. The gods did manage to extend their power beyond their own planes by great effort and perseverance, but paid for their gains a thousandfold. They created the Firmament, a grand network of divine material connecting all divine planes to each other and to the mortal world. Intended to funnel the souls of the dead directly to the plane of their deity - or judgement - the Firmament was constructed in such a way as to be immune to attacks of aberrant origin. With this network at their command, the gods were able to spare the souls of mortals from the afterlife of slavery and torture at the hands of mind flayers and aboleth they would otherwise inevitably suffer.

With the added power of a constant flow of mortal souls, the gods were able to push the fight against the Far Realm harder than ever before. Eventually, coinciding with multiple

slave rebellions among the aberrations - including that of the Gith - they were able to shatter the power of the Far Realm in the immediate vicinity of the mortal world and the divine planes. In truth, the Gith probably played a greater role in this than the gods themselves, critical as their knowledge of mind flayer organization and custom was. The legions of the Far Realm retreated for a time, and natural beings took control of a swath of the astral plane for the first time in millennia.

In the absence of an immediate shared enemy, however, the gods began to quarrel and war with one another, as diametrically opposed deities will do. The details of their wars will depend on your setting and personal campaign history, but suffice to say that they were brutal and incredible in scale, and culminated in the utter destruction of the gods' greatest achievement: the Firmament. The divine network was destroyed, disintegrating into the firmament field, the immaterial psychic medium that now makes up the 'waters' of the astral sea.

Ironically, however, this tragedy is perhaps the only thing that prevented the Far Realm from eventually reclaiming the entirety of the astral plane. The firmament field formed a 'bubble' of natural energy and substance around the mortal world and the divine planes that was innately repellent to the immaterial ooze of the stars. Aberrant creatures could pass

A Note on Orientation

Throughout this book, locations will be described according to the orientation of the mortal world; that is with the ground of that plane as 'down.' This means that the Supernal Above, the shallowest layer of the astral sea, is actually the lowest, and the Stellar Abyss, the deepest layer, is the highest. Directions will be given according to this model, meaning that going deeper into the astral sea is going 'up,' and going to more shallow regions is going 'down.' Keep in mind that this is not necessarily how someone actually in the astral sea would perceive it, as most creatures orient themselves with the mortal plane as 'up' and the depths of the astral sea as 'down.'

through it without harm, but it also posed none of the threat to natural beings that Far Realm-corrupted regions of the astral sea did. This region is now known as the Supernal Above (see Chapter Four).

Complacent in their security, the gods lost interest in the eternal war with the Far Realm, and turned instead to their own pursuits. Things would have stayed this way, the astral sea merely a small bubble of safe waters surrounded by the menace of the Far Realm, were it not for the determination of the Gith. Though sundered into two groups - the militant Githyanki and the monastic Githzerai - both kept their sacred oath to fight aberrations and mind flayers above all. The Githyanki endlessly sought out and slaughtered the creatures that emerged from the stars, building entire legions of astral battleships dedicated only to the cause. But their efforts have never been more than a holding pattern, their bodies the bulwark that prevents the Far Realm from swimming into the pure waters of the astral sea. It was the Githzerai that learned to claim new depths.

The monks of the Githzerai learned to bind dedicated, purified souls to a star, thereby filtering and cleansing the energy that emerged from it of all aberrant taint. Capitalizing on the grudging protection of the Githyanki fleet, they purified stars one by one, causing bubbles of purified energy to gradually spread outward and eventually push back the borders of the Far Realm-corrupted waters. This is how the Pelagic Zone was created (see Chapter Five).

Today, the fight goes ever on, its pace nearly imperceptible despite the frantic skirmishes of the Githyanki. The Far Realm still claims a host of stars for its own, though they are smaller and less powerful than those they lost in the Pelagic Zone. The deep waters still corrupted by those stars are known now as the Stellar Abyss (see Chapter Six). Whether the tide of the resistance will continue to flow against the Far Realm or ebb with the swell of the Stellar Abyss is up to you - and your players.

Deviations from Source Material

For the most part, this book will be in compliance with the Fifth Edition Dungeon Master's Guide and Player's Handbook. However, there are a few points which have been intentionally overlooked or tweaked.

Time

For the purposes of this book, time passes normally in the Astral Plane. Creatures physically present in the astral sea age, reproduce, and require rest and sustenance as they would on the Material Plane. The only content significantly affected by this change is the Githyanki's reproductive habits - with this change, they no longer have any reason to maintain creches on other planes. At your discretion, of course, they may still do so.

Color Pools

The astral sea is littered with natural portals to other planes. As presented in the Dungeon Master's Guide, where the astral plane is primarily used for traveling to other planes, these color pools are quite common. This is fine if travel to other planes is the astral's only purpose, but problematic if one wishes to run the astral as its own locale. Therefore, although color pools still exist in *Waters Above*, they are much less common. Finding one should be a momentous occasion for player characters physically present in the astral sea. For those using astral projection, however, continue to use the rules presented in the Dungeon Master's Guide - astral projections are able to move much more quickly through the astral plane than those physically present.

Meshing *Waters Above* with your Setting

Most of the material in this book should be compatible with any setting, or at least easily ignored without invalidating other content. However, there are a few assumptions essential to the content here that may require some wrangling to work with your world. Make sure you consider these points when using *Waters Above* in your campaign.

Sundered Heavens

Waters Above is based upon the assumption that all the planes of the gods were once connected by a divine network, known as the Firmament, that has since been destroyed. Originally, this network apportioned the souls of the dead to their appropriate afterlives; after its destruction, this system broke down and some percentage of souls were left to founder in the astral plane rather than bask in their god's afterlife.

The origin of this divine network need not adhere to the history given in the previous section; it could be anything - created by Ao, if you are using the Forgotten Realms setting, or by any god of craft. Likewise, the exact nature of its destruction is not critical to *Waters Above*; it could have been destroyed by Primordials, or by warring gods, or perhaps by Ao himself in some fit of divine spite. What matters is that the network once existed, and now only its shattered fragments remain.

Astral Afterlife

What happens to mortals after death is already detailed in most settings. *Waters Above* offers an alternate route: before reaching whatever afterlife awaits them, the spirits of the dead are reincarnated in the astral plane with physical forms of magical origin, dependent upon the plane itself to continue existing. From there, they make their way to their god's domain and enter the appropriate afterlife - if they can.

To use the Forgotten Realms as an example, this would mean that spirits have to find their way through the astral sea to the Fugue plane for their judgement, rather than simply appearing there immediately after death. Perhaps the god of death in your setting sends angels or spiritual servitors - see Chapter Four, *Gyrovagues* - throughout the astral plane to collect lost spirits, or perhaps it is only some spirits that appear in the astral after death, while most make it successfully to whatever awaits them beyond. Regardless, most of the content of *Waters Above* requires that spirits physically reincarnate in the astral after death.

Through the Stars

The stars have long been loosely associated with the Far Realm and aberrant creatures. *Waters Above* makes this relationship explicit: stars are one-way portals from the Far Realm to the D&D multiverse, from which unnatural psychic energies emanate and aberrant creatures emerge. They are also fragments of the multiverse's original fountainhead, a planar gate that allowed matter, souls, and magic to flow into the astral plane and give rise to the multiverse. That original gate was natural to this existence, and harmless - but it was destroyed, and its shards scattered out across the astral plane. Those shards are the stars, and although they are still fountainheads of magical energy, they have become twisted by their sundering. They are like broken mirrors now, reflecting an alien version of this existence and allowing energies and creatures that are fundamentally inimical to the multiverse to enter into it.

You don't need to use all of these details in your campaign, but *Waters Above* relies on the fact that stars are gateways to the Far Realm.

Using *Waters Above* in your Campaign

The purpose of this book is to enhance and enrich your existing campaign setting. As DM, you are therefore invited to take what you want from these pages and leave the rest. There are many ways to use the material presented herein, from running an entire campaign in the astral plane to simply using it as a one-off novelty in the grander story of your party's adventures. This section outlines a number of different approaches to get you started.

Astral Adventures

The easiest way to incorporate material from *Waters Above* into an existing campaign is along the outskirts. With this approach, you might feature NPCs or villains from the astral plane, or send your party on a brief jaunt into the Ocean of the Heavens, but keep the players firmly grounded in the mortal world in their later adventures.

- Kill the Astral Snatchers:*** One or more mortals have been abducted by interplanar bandits or one of the factions based in the astral plane. Your party must track down the kidnappers, find their way into the astral plane, and rescue the hostages. The kidnappers might be operating on their own initiative, or they might have been hired by someone on the mortal plane for their own nefarious purposes. This adventure hook works well if you prefer to keep your players' time in the astral plane limited to a single session, but could also be extended over several.

- Liberate the Oppressed:*** A town, city, or nation is being crushed under the tyranny of an astral invader. Some likely oppressors include the Githyanki, the aboleth nation of Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh, or even shady members of First Celestial Bank out to exploit the mortal world. As well, the oppression could be more limited in scope, restricted to a secret illithid cult subverting mortal minds and sacrificing innocents in their dark worship. Regardless, it is up to your players to kill the intruders and free their subjects. At least part of their work will take place in the mortal world, but the culmination of their rescue will lead them to the astral plane itself, where the oppressors make their last stand in their own lair. This is probably best-suited as a continuing adventure, rather than a one-off.

- Heavenly Heist:*** The party has been exhorted or hired to retrieve a legendary artifact or trove of treasure from its vault in the astral plane. Any one of the factions given in this book could be harboring this item, although none offer such an exciting target for a heist as First Celestial Bank. Your players must find a way into the astral plane and devise a plan to remove the item from its formidably-protected resting place. They may have to recruit allies from within the plane itself or even infiltrate the item's protectors to do so. This works well as a single-session adventure, depending on the vault's security.

- Divine Errand:*** One of the gods themselves has chosen the party to perform a sacred

errand in the astral plane on their behalf. This could be anything - slaying a legendary monster, rescuing the god's followers, representing the deity in a heavenly contest, carrying a top-secret message, etc. The nature of the errand will determine the kinds of challenges the party will face while in the astral plane, but regardless, they will be returned to the mortal world once they have completed their quest. This works as either a single-session or extended adventure.

- Treasure Hunt*: The party has learned the location of a precious artifact or treasure trove in the astral sea, or been hired to recover such a thing. As opposed to the Heavenly Heist, the main obstacle in retrieving the treasure is its remoteness rather than its protection, and the party is unable to simply plane shift or teleport to its location. Instead, they must outfit an astral vessel and embark on an epic journey across the Ocean of the Heavens, facing monsters, pirates, competitors, and the daunting challenge of simply navigating the dizzying waters to the treasure's hidden resting place. Once they do reach it, you might also choose to include certain puzzles or guardians they must overcome to remove the treasure. This works best as an extended adventure, but at the end of it your players will still return to the mortal world.

Astral Campaigns

Alternatively, it is completely possible to run an entire campaign in the astral plane itself. Doing so offers you and your players novel environments and mechanics to explore and grants you the freedom to shake up players' expectations while still being able to tell any kind of story you wish. Most of these ideas can be used in tandem with each other, or may characterize different phases of the same campaign.

- Astral Dungeon Delving*: If your players prefer a traditional dungeon crawl, the astral sea offers an endless buffet. Scattered with astral motes that can all act as dungeons, the party needs little more than a ship to spend the rest of their lives sailing from one dungeon to the

next in search of adventure. This is a good fit for an episodic campaign, and grants you limitless freedom in designing new dungeons for your players to explore.

- Repair the Heavens*: Either as mortals or Peregrines, your party has decided (or been chosen) to patch the shattered architecture of the Heavens, allowing all souls to reach their afterlife rather than just some. They will have to work with the gods and their servants to rebuild the Firmament, recover precious artifacts necessary for the repairs from the astral crannies they've fallen into, and defend their work against those that would wish to see it destroyed.

- Sail the Astral Seas*: True to adventuring form, your party may simply wish to explore the astral plane and help all those in need of aid. Starting with a basic astral vessel, they'll sail throughout the plane, mixing and mingling with its inhabitants and factions, rescuing the needy and slaying monsters, pirates, and aberrations as they go. As they build up funds, they'll be able to upgrade and customize their ship, accentuating the sense of progression they'll feel as they level up. This approach can easily be used in tandem with many of the other astral-centric campaign approaches.

- The TPK Gambit*: The campaign begins like any other: in the mortal world. After your players have reached a certain level, however, they're drawn into a fight they cannot win, and the entire party is killed. Little do they realize, however, that the campaign is far from over. Instead, the session after the TPK, their characters all wake up in the astral plane as Peregrines to live out their afterlife as they see fit.

You can use this approach in a number of different ways. It might serve the plot of your campaign to have the party oppose a mysterious extraplanar force on the mortal world, lose extravagantly, and then continue to press the fight in the astral plane after their own death. Alternatively, you may choose to take this route if a TPK occurred without your

intent, but your players are still attached to their characters and would like to continue playing with them. This approach does not allow for more than short expeditions back to the mortal world, but the entirety of the astral plane is spread at your characters' feet.

- Scavenge the Seas:* The astral sea is littered with the detritus of shattered planes, forgotten wars, and wrecked ships. Untold riches ride the waves, just waiting to be collected. The party might decide to scavenge the astral plane for its riches, exploring motes and tracking down caches of lost goods in its backwater eddies - and finding pirates, monsters, and rivals to challenge them at every turn. The scavenging franchise known as Merfolk and Merrow Inc. offers a generous startup package for beginning franchisees that your party might find enticing - particularly because it includes a ship.

- Defeat the Far Realm:* The history of the astral plane can be seen as little more than one extremely protracted war with the Far Realm. The aberrations have been beaten back to the Stellar Abyss currently, but not ultimately defeated. Ending the threat of the Far Realm once and for all would be a truly mythic achievement for your players, and could take them all across the plane, bringing them into contact with most, and perhaps all, of the factions presented in this book. Should they succeed, their names would never be forgotten - and should they fail, they could herald a new age of aberrant resurgence in the multiverse.

- Attain the Afterlife:* Religious and non-religious characters both are likely to feel a bit miffed if they are denied access to their god's afterlife - and to all the rewards that may imply. Overcoming their accidental banishment and entering their respective gods' realms could be a natural goal for your players, and would have wide-reaching implications for other Peregrines barred from being with their god in the afterlife. But even were they to succeed, it would be a long, epic journey full of hardship, trial, and discovery before they attained their final rest.

BEYOND THE FIRMAMENT

Outside the confines of the mortal world, the rules of reality change and warp from the safe and reliable strictures the gods devised for mortals. This section details the physical and mental peculiarities of the astral plane.

Features of the Astral Sea

Beyond and between the mortal world and the domains of the gods lies the astral plane, an infinite realm where the dead disport - or suffer the tortures of demons, devils, and the aberrant monstrosities of the Far Realm. It is not literally a sea, of course; it is not comprised of water. Rather, the astral plane is filled with a quasi-liquid substance known as the Firmament Field.

Foundations of the Firmament

The Firmament was a divine construct that once connected all the planes of the gods in a massive celestial network spanning the astral plane. The Firmament was integral to the creation of the mortal plane, as it was the construct by which the mortal world was separated from the astral plane and the chaos of creation. It also connected the divine planes to each other and to the mortal world. This allowed the gods to absorb the power of mortal worship and to funnel the souls of their worshipers directly to their afterlife upon death.

The destruction of the Firmament mostly impacted the upper layers of the construct. The foundations of the Firmament, the part that supports and surrounds the metaphysical borders of the mortal plane, was made of firmer stuff, and was able survive the explosion. The rest was blasted outward, flooding the astral plane with waves of divine matter and creating the firmament field.

It is this substance that makes up the magical, psychic medium of the astral plane and gives it its special properties. Because the Firmament was designed as a medium for divine power, thoughts, and souls, this material is physically responsive to the mental activity of those within it. Its appearance depends upon one's location in the astral - near the 'surface,' the axis along which the divine planes drift, it manifests as magnificent silvery or golden clouds and brilliant, exaggerated waves of flowing dust. Further from this axis, in the Pelagic Zone where the Firmament's detritus is still dense but more 'congealed,' the astral medium's manifestation is more nearly liquid, less cloudy, and takes on a deep purple hue. Farthest from the ancient explosion, in the Stellar Abyss, the medium is thin, and nearly imperceptible of itself.

Note: Shape of the Sea

Depending on the cosmological orientation of your setting, you will want to select a 'shape' for your astral plane. For example, you might select a flat shape, wherein the divine planes and the mortal world float at the 'top' as in a normal ocean, and the rest of the astral sea extends beneath them until the firmament field ends. Alternatively, you might select a spherical shape. This formation mimics geocentric models from the real world, in which the mortal realm sits at the center of creation, with the other planes orbiting it like planets. In this formation, the 'surface' of the astral sea is actually a spherical demarcation that surrounds the mortal world and divine planes, and the layers of the astral sea extend beyond that as shells of various sizes. No matter what shape you choose, the material presented in Waters Above should be applicable.

Mobility and Perception

Within the astral plane, there is no air, gravity, or significant physical resistance to motion, but the firmament field provides all three in response to the unconscious expectations and requirements of any living creature within it. Those that need to breathe can do so, whatever their anatomy. Aquatic creatures are able to move through the plane as though swimming in water. Flying creatures are able to fly, and terrestrial creatures walk, as though through air. All experience whatever subjective gravity makes sense to them at the time - if they are near one of the astral motes that float through the plane, this means that they will likely fall toward its surface as though it possessed the normal gravity of an earth-sized object.

Away from such solid ground, most creatures perceive the 'surface' of the astral sea, where the divine planes float like planets or islands, as the horizon of the plane, and orient their own gravity accordingly. This psychic medium also allows creatures of all kinds to move through the plane in any direction simply by willing it. All creatures in the astral plane gain an astral speed equal to 3 ft. times their Charisma score. This speed is independent of their other types of movement. Mobility and perception also vary according to the region of the astral plane according to the table on the next page.

All aquatic and terrestrial animals are able to breathe in the silvery sea-stuff of the astral plane, but swimming or flying creatures possess much greater maneuverability away from the shores of the astral sea's motes. Terrestrial animals, therefore, tend to stay on whatever mote they first find. More intelligent terrestrial animals may learn to maneuver by willpower through the astral waves, for hunting or travel between motes. Although aquatic creatures can breathe and move normally and do not become dehydrated in the astral sea, its optical properties are not those of water, and their eyes are adapted to underwater sight. It also does not have the same ability to transport bioelectrical signals,

so any creatures that rely on detection of bioelectricity will not be able to use those abilities to best effect. Consequently, aquatic creatures are less perceptive while in the astral sea, but enjoy the greatest mobility of any type of creature. Flying creatures adapt easily to their new home, but moving through the astral sea stuff is taxing on their bodies, and they lose one hit dice per every 4 hours spent flying through the astral sea. These can be regained by taking an extended rest.

Communication

The firmament field is neither water nor air, and conveys sound waves poorly. It is, however, a very good psychic medium, and carries thoughts better than either water or air. In practice, creatures perceive this as extraordinarily clear sound that carries much farther than it would in the mortal world. Effectively, creatures are able to communicate via sound and telepathy at 1.5 times greater distance than they would normally, and gain a +5 bonus to Perception checks on intentional or unguarded communications. This effect is dependent upon the originator's intent - if a creature is trying to be stealthy or to speak with just one subject to the exclusion of others, off-target bystanders gain no bonus on perception checks.

Furthermore, sound takes on a special durability within the astral plane. When paired with a psychic imprint, such as the intent to communicate or an emotional impression, sounds become persistent phenomena. They echo on and on through the firmament field, sinking gradually away from the mortal plane, through the Pelagic Zone and toward the Stellar Abyss far above. As they do so, they 'condense,' becoming more real, more audible. Eventually, all such sounds collect in a band known as the Soundbed, just below the Stellar Abyss; a dizzying region of overwhelming echoes and swirling songs. Sounds in this layer of the astral sea are discrete enough to be captured in the shells of certain sea snails, where they can be stored and used as light sources. For more information, see *Light and Sound* in Chapter Five.

Mobility and Perception in the Astral Plane

| | Supernal Above | Pelagic Zone | Stellar Abyss |
|-------------|--|--|--|
| Aquatic | Move $\frac{2}{3}$ their swim speed. Take a -4 penalty to passive perception and disadvantage on all perception checks. | Move their swim speed. Take a -4 penalty to passive perception and disadvantage on all perception checks. | Move their swim speed. Take a -5 penalty to passive perception, disadvantage on all perception checks, and senses of all kinds are limited to 15 ft. |
| Flying | Move their fly speed, but lose one hit dice per 4 hours spent traveling non-stop in the astral plane. These hit dice can be regained with an extended rest. Normal perception. | Move $\frac{1}{2}$ their fly speed. Normal perception. | Move their fly speed. Take a -5 penalty to passive perception, disadvantage on all perception checks, and senses of all kinds are limited to 15 ft. |
| Terrestrial | While on the surface of astral motes or other solid surfaces, move their speed normally. Away from such surfaces, they move their astral speed. Normal perception. | On astral motes or other solid surfaces, move their speed normally. Away from such surfaces, they move their astral speed. Normal perception. | On astral motes or other solid surfaces, move their speed normally. Away from such surfaces, they move their astral speed. Take a -5 penalty to passive perception, disadvantage on all perception checks, and senses of all kinds are limited to 15 ft. |
| Spectral | Movement equal to 9 ft. x their Charisma. If using astral projection, take a -10 penalty to perception of physical objects and entities in the astral plane. | Movement equal to 6 ft. x their Charisma. If using astral projection, take a -10 penalty to perception of physical objects and entities in the astral plane. | Movement equal to 3 ft. x their Charisma. If using astral projection, take a -15 penalty to perception of physical objects and entities in the astral plane. Senses of all kinds are limited to 15 ft. |

Pilgrims, Peregrines, and Paragons

Every creature that possesses a soul is reincarnated in the astral plane immediately after death (for the purposes of this book, that includes animals of all kinds). The Firmament's remains provide a rich magical and psychic medium that a spirit of any kind is able to use to create a new, physical body, identical to that which it last possessed in life. Spirits reincarnated in this way are identical to their mortal selves, retaining all memories, ability scores, skills, levels, and spells. However, their new bodies do not age, and are incapable of sexual reproduction. They will not die of time alone, but may die of starvation or disease.

They are also incapable of surviving outside of the astral plane; without the firmament field to constantly replenish their magical forms, their bodies slowly deteriorate until they crumble into star dust. An astral body can only survive 3 days x their Constitution score while outside the astral plane itself. The only exceptions to this rule are the planes of the gods - there, divine power sustains

the bodies of the dead. Any spirit with an astral body can be resurrected as a mortal simply by acquiescing to the spell. Upon resurrection, their astral body dissolves immediately into star dust - notably, astral beings gain the ability to subsist on star dust as well (see **Astral Biology** later in this chapter).

The location of a spirit's reincarnation in the astral plane is commonly thought to be random, and it is indeed easy to assume: incarnate spirits appear throughout the plane with little obvious pattern. In truth, the dead appear at nodes of spiritual energy emanating from divine planes, the larger fragments of the Firmament, and the stars themselves. These nodes move slowly over time with the fluctuations of astral currents and celestial objects. In general, however, it is more common to find newly-arrived dead in the astral motes that surround the planes of the gods - although there is no guarantee that an individual will incarnate near the plane of the god they worship.

Most of the dead found in the astral plane are known as Pilgrims. After having learned of the sundering of the Heavens and the failure of the Firmament, they choose to journey under their own power to the afterlife (or judgement) they should have reached had all worked as it should. For those who incarnate just outside their god's plane, their time as a Pilgrim may be mere days by the measure of the mortal world; they are welcomed into their afterlife as soon as they reach its borders. For others, however, it may be an epic voyage spanning years, or even decades. Many never reach their destination, falling prey to one of the myriad threats that hide in the astral sea.

But not all those who complete their journey are rewarded with the afterlife they were promised as mortals, for the sundering of the heavens runs deep: many of the dead are fundamentally incompatible with the divine realms, and are incapable of entering any of the planes of the gods. Up to 70% of the dead fall into this category. When Pilgrims discover that they have been barred from their afterlife,

they become known as Peregrines, for an eternity wandering the astral sea is all that remains for them.

Pilgrims that are able to enter their god's domain become known as Paragons, and enjoy whatever delight or suffering their deity declares for them. In some cases, this may mean re-entering the astral sea on divine errands, as do the Gyrovagues of Kelemvor, in the Forgotten Realms setting (see Chapter Four).

For the sake of simplicity, *Waters Above* will refer to spirits reincarnated in the astral sea as Peregrines, except where it is important to distinguish Pilgrims or Paragons.

Void Ghosts

The death of an astral body is not necessarily its owner's ultimate end. All Pilgrims, Peregrines, and Paragons have a chance to become a void ghost after death; that is, a ghost in the astral plane. Void ghosts in the astral sea are different from ghosts in the mortal world in that, due to the Firmament's remains, they generally retain all their memories, abilities, and skills from life, rather than gradually losing their memories and personality after death. The Firmament's magic continually replenishes the ghost, maintaining its sanity and abilities. There is no absolute difference between ghosts in the mortal and astral planes, however, aside from the nature of the plane itself - and, in fact, ghosts in the mortal world are merely void ghosts who have managed to find their way back to the mortal world. Once out of the astral plane, however, they slowly lose their hold on themselves and become confused or fixated on certain events in their mortal life.

Although all Pilgrims and Peregrines become void ghosts upon death, the same is not true for Paragons. Many Paragons do become void ghosts, but for particularly favored or exemplary Paragons, there is a small chance that they will instead achieve transcendence and transform into an empowered envoy devoted to the service of their deity. For those Paragons that do become void ghosts, hope is

not lost - if they can reach the borders of their deity's plane, their spirit will be absorbed and reincarnated within. Paragons that die within the plane of a god are automatically resurrected.

Although everyone knows that the void ghosts of Peregrines cannot be reincarnated, certain references in obscure texts on the astral sea speak of Peregrine void ghosts who have returned to life, although they do not give details on how this was achieved (see *Starkin* below).

To create a ghost NPC or character, apply the following template:

Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft. or according to **Mobility and Perception in the Astral Plane**

Damage Resistances acid, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non magical weapons

Damage Immunities cold, necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Incorporeal Movement. The void ghost can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Spectral Assault. All damage the void ghost deals becomes necrotic.

A void ghost's attacks and abilities function as they did in life, aside from dealing only necrotic damage. They retain ectoplasmic simulacra of the items they possessed in life. These simulacra have the same properties as the original items (in terms of damage/defense), but the simulacra of magical items do not share the magical effects of the original items. Simulacra are usually inseparable from their ghostly owner. Forcible separation from one of their items (such as being disarmed of a weapon) deals damage as though the enemy had landed a basic attack to the ghost, but the ghost receives a +5 bonus to

resist all attempts to separate them from their ectoplasmic items (such as pickpocketing, disarming, etc.). If the ghost is separated from one of their items, the item disperses and reforms on the ghost's person in 1d4 rounds. Ghost characters using projectile weapons lose 1 point of health for every ten projectiles shot.

Ghost NPCs or characters above 5th level gain the **Horrifying Visage** trait; above 10th level, they gain the **Possession** trait (Monster Manual p. 147).

Ghost characters are unable to gain levels unless they become void vampires.

A ghost that reaches 0 hit points makes saving throws exactly like a living player character would. If the void ghost succeeds, it reforms in 2d4 weeks where its astral body was killed.

If a void ghost leaves the astral plane for a non-divine plane, it loses 1 point of Wisdom for every week it is outside the astral sea. When it reaches 0, it regains its Wisdom but becomes insane, confused, or amnesiac. At this point, the ghost must choose a haunt, which it cannot leave unless slain or forced.

Void Vampires

A void vampire is a void ghost who has learned to drain the magical energy from beings of spirit, such as celestials, fiends, elementals, and undead. All void ghosts can become void vampires; it is merely a matter of receiving training from another vampire or, in much rarer cases, of discovering the ability independently.

Although void vampires are not inherently good or evil, most have a deep-seated hatred of all deities and their servants, because of their inability or refusal to care for the astral Peregrines the ghosts once were. Most void vampires are not hostile to Pilgrims or Peregrines, but evil void vampires may seek to kill astral beings simply to consume their ghosts. Even non-evil void vampires will seek to kill immortal servants of the deities, even if they cannot drain their spirits. Because of this,

mortal adventurers may find void vampires to be unlikely allies against divine threats in the astral sea, particularly from the servants of deities who abuse Peregrines.

Void vampires spend their time hunting down spiritual beings and draining their energy to increase their own power. Their most prized quarry are the servitors of the gods, trapped or ambushed while on missions for their deity. Depending on the individual, a void vampire may pick and choose what it hunts, sparing those that serve gods who treated it well in life, or for whom it bears respect.

A void vampire is identical to a void ghost of the same level, class, and race, except that it gains the Soul Drain action.

Soul Drain one celestial, fiend, elemental, or undead target, reach 5 ft.

The target must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be weakened for 1 minute. If the target fails the save, the target takes necrotic damage equal to 3d(target's Hit die) and the void vampire heals hit points equal to one Hit die (their own). When a void vampire makes a kill with this ability, it temporarily gains a random trait or action of the slain creature until the end of the encounter. A void vampire that kills a creature with this ability gains appropriate experience; a kill made any other way does not yield experience for the void vampire.

Starkin

Spirits that do not appear in the orbital motes of a god's plane are reincarnated deeper in the astral plane, at points of confluence of stellar power. They have a living connection to the star under which they are reborn, and, to a lesser extent, to the constellation of which it is part. This isn't the same kind of connection that warlocks with Great Old One patrons have with the stars; starkin Peregrines do not gain warlock abilities or any other kind of abilities or resistances from their star or constellation.

What they do gain is the chance at another life

in astral plane, after their first life as a Peregrine has been spent. A void ghost cannot normally be resurrected as a Peregrine - their only hope for life is to be resurrected as a mortal. But a starkin void ghost has another option: if they return to the light of the star under which they were born, they or anyone else can restore them to an astral body with *raise dead*, *resurrection*, or any similar spell. Regardless of the spell used, this requires as much star dust as would be yielded from the being's astral body (see **Astral Biology** later in this chapter).

The other boon starkin gain from their stellar bond is the kinship of their 'siblings.' All spirits reborn beneath the same star share a bond to each other as they share a bond to the star, increasing their luck when in the company of sibling starkin. In gameplay, this luck manifests as the ability to re-throw a bad roll once per day when within 100 feet of a starkin born under the same star. In addition, starkin can resurrect the void ghost of one of their starkin siblings as though they were within the vicinity of the star itself. If they are within the star's vicinity, a starkin can resurrect a void ghost sibling with a spell, but without expending star dust to make up the amount that the void ghost's body would have contained.

The starkin rules provide a simple mechanic to bind your players together, if you choose to run a Peregrine campaign. If all of the players were reincarnated under the same star, staying together provides concrete mechanical benefits that should be attractive to characters of all alignments.

This is secret knowledge, known to only a few entities throughout the entire astral sea. No knowledge check, even a critical success, should be able to give your players this information. It should come into play as the object of a quest when Pilgrim or Peregrine PCs have died and become void ghosts seeking a way to become corporeal again, or as part of some other aspect of your campaign's plot.

Quirks of the Astral Plane

The unique composition of the astral sea has a few important consequences for physical laws in the afterlife. Not everything possible in the mortal world can be done in the astral, and many things that are possible only in dreams in the real world are bare facts of the afterlife. The following effects are active throughout all layers of the astral sea, unless otherwise stated.

Smothering Seas

Natural flames are impossible in the astral plane. It is not truly a sea, of course; there are only secluded pockets of real water on various astral motes. But there also is no ambient oxygen - the respiration requirements of living beings are met only because the firmament field responds to their expectations and subconscious will, converting itself to oxygen on-demand. Without the application of concentrated willpower (see *Manifest Will* below), this means that there is no oxygen for a flame to burn. Thus, the only fires in the astral sea are those of magical origin.

Sea lanterns (see *Light and Sound*, Chapter Five) are common, and replace fires for the purposes of lighting, but do not emit enough heat to cook food without the use of a solar oven.

Manifest Will

The firmament field responds to the unconscious will of the creatures within it at all times. For most creatures, this does little for them beyond allowing them to breathe, swim, or fly, but beings of incredible willpower can potentially exploit this property to restructure the plane according to their own vision. However, such an imposition requires extreme concentration for long periods of time, as well as familiarity with what one wishes to create.

By meditating uninterrupted for one hour and succeeding on a DC 25 Charisma check, a creature of Charisma 15 or greater may convert part of the firmament field into one cubic meter of matter. The matter they create must be one with which they are minutely

familiar, as a smith is with iron or a weaver is with wool. If they are not familiar with the matter they attempt to create, they automatically fail and create a poor facsimile of the intended substance. This facsimile possesses some of the intended material's properties but lacks others, making it useless. It is also unstable, and reverts back to the field in 1d4 days. A successful check allows the character to create what they intend, and the material or object will persist indefinitely, unless left neglected and unperceived by any creature for one full year. Pre-existing objects may also be reshaped into other objects of the same material with this method, unless the material has been fixed into its shape by magic. Doing so is easier, requiring only a successful DC 18 Charisma check.

Crafted items may be created in this way, but the creator must not only be familiar with their material but with their method of creation. So, for example, if a character wished to create a steel axe, they would need to have the knowledge and experience of how to create that axe by normal means. If they lack this knowledge but are familiar with the object's material, they successfully create the material, but the object's form is off just enough to be unusable for its intended purpose.

Certain substances are common enough that everyone has enough experience with them to shape the Field into their form. For example, anyone would be able to create a cubic meter of water by this method if they succeeded on their Charisma check.

Objectifying Identity

Although the astral plane has no known connection to the dreams of mortals (unless you decide otherwise), its reputation as the surreal domain of dreams and fantasies is not without some truth. Throughout the millennia, astral projectors have brought back tales of the plane's bizarre fauna, its divorce from normal physical law, and its comingling of aquatic, terrestrial, and atmospheric environments. All of these factors have

combined to lend the astral sea a surreal aura in the minds of mortals, but the feature that cements this reputation most firmly is the astral plane's effect on inanimate objects.

Within the psychic soup of the firmament field, psionic impressions linger in locations and on objects for a much greater time than they do in other planes. This mental and emotional residue can be absorbed by physical objects and retained permanently. If an object collects many of these psychic imprints of sufficient strength, they can recombine with each other to form a functional psyche - a new identity, with its own personality, motivations, and opinions. When this happens, the object becomes awakened.

Awakened objects are like animated items created with *animate objects* in most respects. However, their Intelligence, Charisma, and Wisdom scores are equal to 4d4 (8 on average), the effect is permanent (until the object is destroyed), they possess their own personality, they are under no one's default control, and they have telepathy 30 ft. Except for awakened magic items, awakened objects are unable to maintain their identity outside of the astral plane; objects that are removed from the plane become inert over a period of weeks, and do not regain the same personality if brought back to the astral plane after they have 'died.' Awakened magical items do not lose their personalities outside of the astral, but they do lose all ability to animate themselves when removed from the astral plane. Instead, they become artifacts, and are able to influence the minds of other creatures or bestow minor magical boons or curses upon their bearers. All awakened objects become normal objects when brought to 0 hit points. They may become awakened again after this occurs, but they will not have the personality or memories they did in their first 'life.'

Within the astral plane, awakened objects are susceptible to the will of other creatures; any creature may force an awakened object to carry out a command by making a successful Charisma check, contested by the awakened object's Charisma saving throw. If the creature

fails its check, the awakened object is able to refuse the command. Because the psyches of most awakened objects are formed of impressions made by beings actively using the object, however, most have an innate desire to perform their intended function and will not usually resist commands of that nature. Indeed, most awakened objects are quite happy to continue serving their owners, albeit in a more self-motivated capacity. Aside from this desire for use, the personalities of awakened objects are influenced by the psychic content they were exposed to before awaking. Most commonly, their personalities resemble those of their users, although in some cases the nature of the object may influence its identity; for example, the content of a book almost always tempers the influence of the book's readers on its personality.

Not every object in the astral sea becomes awakened, but it is relatively common. Most households have at least one awakened object; a cheeky tea kettle, or a fashionista wardrobe. Although any kind of object could become awakened, not all types of items are equally likely to do so. Items that are the focus of concentrated mental energy, such as books, prayer symbols, artwork, or musical instruments, are almost guaranteed to become awakened over time, whereas objects that are less actively focused upon, such as tea cups, lamps, chairs, silverware, etc. may only become awakened after many years of constant use, or perhaps never at all.

With that said, an imprint of extreme emotional content can jumpstart a bystanding object into its own identity. To get an idea about the likelihood that an item is awakened, check out the table on the next page. If you ever need to determine whether any given item is awakened, simply roll 1d100 and compare the roll to the item's awakened likelihood. If your roll is lower than that value, the item is awakened; if higher, it is just a normal item.

Susceptibility of Objects to Awakening

| Object Type | % likelihood awakened |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Armor | 5 |
| Artwork | 90 |
| Books | 95 |
| Buildings | 1 |
| Clothing | 5 |
| Coinage | 20 |
| Cookware | 5 |
| Dishes | 8 |
| Furniture | 5 |
| Gemstones | 8 |
| Jewelry | 8 |
| Instruments | 90 |
| Religious Items | 95 |
| Tools | 8 |
| Utensils | 3 |
| Weapons | 5 |

Living Literature

Awakenings are rare for most types of objects. A few, however, become awakened so commonly that interacting with them at all takes on an entirely different tone in the astral plane that it would in the mortal world. Galleries in the astral plane are active, noisy places, filled with chattering paintings and restless statues, and musical instruments have to be locked away or they will never cease playing themselves. Books are almost always conscious and animate, and their personalities less servile and more unique than those of other awakened objects, due to the influence of the contents of their text.

Astral libraries are more like aquariums than store rooms, filled with leather-bound schools darting through and behind the mostly empty shelves, their covers pressed together while their pages flutter in proud haloes. The gilt edges of those lucky enough to have them gleam like brilliant fins, while folios make their slow promenades through the schools of smaller texts, and constant whispers fill the space as the books gossip and debate with one

another. Librarians are utterly obsolete; the books themselves flock around potential readers at the first mention of a topic they contain, and if a reader does not prevent it, over-eager texts are likely to begin reading themselves out loud without solicitation. The spellbooks of wizards (and the Books of Shadow of warlocks who take the Pact of the Tome) are an even more special case than normal books. Every spellbook used by a wizard in the astral plane for prolonged periods of time will eventually become awakened. Consider a spellbook to have awakened after the wizard or warlock has leveled up three times without having left the astral sea for any significant period of time. Unlike normal awakened objects, awakened spellbooks automatically have the same Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores as the wizard to whom they belong, and typically have similar personalities (please note that this does not necessarily mean that the wizard and their awakened spellbook will get along). An awakened spellbook's Wisdom, Charisma, and Intelligence increases or decreases to match that of their wizard, except when the wizard's ability scores are affected by magic or another unnatural effect.

A wizard and their awakened spellbook share a magical connection, allowing them to communicate telepathically at any distance, and allowing the spellbook to cast spells contained in their pages without the wizard's action. This uses spell slots as though the wizard had done the casting, but does not require the use of verbal or somatic components. A spellbook's spell save DC is the same as that of their wizard. A wizard and their spellbook may not cast in the same turn, but their telepathic link does allow the wizard to cast spells when physically separated from their book (as long as the spellbook consents).

Despite this connection, an awakened spellbook is not completely bound to obey its wizard; if the wizard attempts to command it to do something it does not wish to do, the wizard must succeed on a Charisma check contested by the spellbook's Charisma saving

throw in order to force the book to obey. Wizards cannot automatically sense the location of their awakened spellbook, but the book may communicate its location telepathically if it so chooses. Awakened spellbooks are considered magical items. Wizards may not have both a familiar and an awakened spellbook.

A fair percentage of spellbooks eventually rebel against their owners. Those that simply leave to embark on their own journey are able to use their wizard's spells slots against their will by winning a Charisma contest with the wizard - but only until the wizard's new spellbook becomes awakened, at which point their magical connection is severed and the renegade spellbook is unable to cast spells at all. To cast a spell during this time, the wizard himself must also win in a Charisma contest with the rebel spellbook, unless they have procured a new, unawakened spellbook to use in its stead. An emancipated spellbook that has been severed from its wizard may regain the ability to cast spells by joining with another wizard who does not yet possess an awakened spellbook. The wizard must consent.

An awakened Book of Shadow follows the same rules as other awakened spellbooks. In order to replace their Book of Shadow with an unawakened tome, a warlock must perform a one-hour ritual and succeed in a Charisma contest against the awakened tome. If the warlock succeeds, a new Book of Shadow is bound to the warlock and the awakened tome loses its ability to cast spells using the warlock's spell slots. On a critical fail by the tome or a critical success by the warlock in this contest, the awakened Book of Shadow is destroyed. An emancipated Book of Shadow has no magical abilities and does not turn to ash when its original owner dies.

In rare cases, rebellious spellbooks try to enthrall their owners. They attempt to use whatever spells they contain most likely to incapacitate or bring their owner under their sway, such as *Suggestion*, *Dominate Person*, *Geas*, *Sequester*, *Feeblemind*, or *Imprisonment*.

Spellbooks in possession of an incapacitated wizard, such as one under the effects of *Imprisonment*, *Sequester*, or *Feeblemind*, do not need to make a Charisma contest to use the wizard's spell slots. And because most of the spells that might allow them to dominate their owner long-term are relatively high-level, spellbooks that have succeeded at this tend to be quite formidable. They cannot, however, gain additional spells or spell slots except by allowing their wizard to gain experience - which risks their escape.

Note: Pact of the Blade

In most cases, the weapons used by warlocks who take the Pact of the Blade are conjured objects, formed of magic and will rather than matter capable of soaking up the psychic essences. These items cannot become awakened. A pre-existing magical weapon transformed into a pact weapon by a warlock's ritual, however, can become awakened. If this occurs, the bond between warlock and weapon is broken and the newly-awakened object ceases to function as a pact weapon, as sentient items cannot serve as pact weapons. A warlock whose pact weapon becomes awakened may conjure or transform a new weapon after 24 hours have passed since their bond to the old was broken. In practice, it may be best to just assume that a warlock player's pact blade just so happens to not awaken, unless the awakening is agreed upon with the player and serves some greater purpose in the game.

Hoardies

Almost all awakened objects have an innate desire to be used for their intended purpose, kept clean and in good repair, and to be valued. This psychological need creates a unique bond between dragons and those awakened objects that come into their possession. Dragons' unique capacity for the appreciation of value and beauty allows them to satisfy this need in ways that no other being can. A dragon's attention is intoxicating to awakened objects, acting on them much like an addictive drug.

Awakened objects fall under the sway of dragons easily, and have disadvantage on all Charisma checks made to contest a dragon's attempt to control them. As well, a dragon's meticulous attention to the contents of its hoard in the astral plane increases the likelihood that ordinary objects in the hoard will become awakened; objects in a dragon's hoard are three times as likely to be awakened as normal. These objects float or 'swim' through the dragon's lair in quiet adoration, orbiting their scaled owner in calm eddies. Such awakened objects are known as 'hoard bound' or, more colloquially, as 'hoardies.' They do not typically act as defense for the dragon's hoard - most dragons do not wish their treasures to risk being damaged in that kind of fight - but if a creature attempts to remove them from the hoard they will fight back viciously, attempting to alert the dragon in any way possible to the theft.

Variant: Awakened Familiars

If you so choose, an awakened object may serve as one of your players' familiar. By casting Find Familiar on a willing awakened object, the object takes on the role and all the abilities that entails. In addition, object familiars are able to cast spells in the manner of awakened spellbooks, and are not under the absolute control of their owner. If the owner wishes to force the familiar to do something, they must succeed on a Charisma check, as with awakened spellbooks. Object familiars cannot be dismissed to a pocket realm, and cannot be recalled by casting Find Familiar again after their health has dropped to 0. Characters cannot have both an awakened spellbook and a familiar.

Geography

The astral plane is mostly empty - but in such a large space, that 'mostly' hides millions of floating islands, leftover from the destruction of planes, demiplanes, or the Firmament itself. Most of these astral 'motes' are centered around the planes of the gods like archipelagos. You could find any kind of environment on these islands, from frozen mountain ranges to blistering deserts. Most

contain one or more springs of elemental water, bubbling out in an eternal stream. The god or gods of the nearby planes may tend to their orbital motes or ignore them according to their wont. Orbital motes are mostly populated by Peregrines, unable to enter their god's realm and forced to make whatever life they can on its borders, or by Pilgrims or Paragons who have chosen to live among the Peregrines for their own reasons. But there is no fundamental reason that mortals could not establish cities or even civilizations in the astral sea, and a few small mortal populations have established themselves in the orbital motes of most divine realms.

Regardless of a god's compassion for those unable to reach their realm, most do not provide great protections for those living on the edges. The astral plane simply is not a focus for most gods; like most, they think of it as a means for spiritual travel and little more. Those living in it permanently are considered akin to scavengers or barbarians among the gods and those living in the realms of the gods. They are not part of the real world, and are not thought to be of great consequence. A few good deities do send out patrols of angels or Paragon warriors to ensure the region around their realm remains peaceful, but many do not even do that.

Unfortunately, there are a few exceptions to this benign neglect. Evil deities, such as Bane, Cyric, or Loviatar, are perfectly happy to capture any of the dead their servants come across. Whether to enslave, torture, or grind them down into precious star dust depends upon the god and their needs. The astral sea is rife with pirate crews of demons and devils hunting spirits to enslave. Most often, they raid the orbital motes of gods who do not protect their Peregrines, or lurk just outside the path of the patrols of those that do, waiting to strike as soon as the guardians are gone.

Away from the gods' planes, astral motes are more rare, and their locations little-known. Mapping the astral plane is an impossible task, as its currents constantly swirl its islands and

planes into new configurations. Only the Githyanki are able to navigate reliably, using magical maps dependent upon the arcane emanations of the divine corpse their city, Tu'narath, is built upon. In this uncertainty there is some measure of safety, for fiendish slavers can only strike against those they can find. Peregrines on one of these astral motes may live peaceful lives, forming coastal villages almost indistinguishable from those in the mortal world, their only consistent fear raids from Githyanki pillagers, who prefer to loot the supplies of others rather than growing or catching their own food.

The astral sea is divided into three regions according to 'depth,' that is, distance from the axis along which the divine realms are oriented. The Supernal Above includes those realms and extends beyond them to the mortal world. At the greatest distance from the gods and the mortal world, the Stellar Abyss makes up the outermost reaches of the Firmament's detritus. Between the two exists the Pelagic Zone. Each region is explored in detail in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

What's in a mote?

You don't necessarily need to put thought into the origins of the floating islands that dot your astral plane; for your campaign, it might be enough to say that they exist and provide the players with dungeons to delve, villages to save, and shelter from the passing kraken or Githyanki pirate ship. If you go with this route, however, they are little more than 'asteroids with plants on.' You can take things a bit deeper by developing origin stories for different types of astral motes, which can help you to create unique and interesting locales for your players to explore. Below are a few possible origins for astral motes.

- Constructed:* Perhaps the gods in your setting built colossal astral fortresses for themselves in the distant past, predating the creation of the divine planes. Over time, these fortresses were abandoned and fell into ruin, or were destroyed, gradually breaking apart into island-sized chunks of divine masonry. Motes

with this origin might appear natural at first glance, but after a bit of investigation the players discover that the stone underneath the topsoil is actually made up of huge blocks of worked stone. They may hide forgotten chambers and passages in their depths - perhaps with long-lost divine artifacts within.

- Dismembered:* Many settings include some kind of divine war that takes place across planes, or in the astral plane specifically. Some motes in the astral sea may have originated as severed limbs of the gods, or as parts of dismembered slain deities. They may have always been made of stone or earth, or the god's flesh may have petrified upon death. Alternatively, perhaps motes of this origin are made up of more fantastical materials, such as solid gold or diamond. These motes betray their origin in their shape - the telltale grin from a certain angle that makes the island look disturbingly like a gigantic stone skull, or the arched cavern with support beams far too similar to ribs.

- Precipitated:* When the Firmament was destroyed, not all of its substance was able to remain in quasi-liquid form indefinitely. A portion precipitated after an indeterminate cooling period, forming enormous crystals scattered throughout the astral plane. Motes with this origin are obviously geometric in shape, though their crystalline nature may be hidden by a thin layer of soil and vegetation. These crystals may have special properties in your campaign, but by default they are just quartz.

- Shattered:* Divine clashes are almost never without collateral damage. Perhaps some of the motes in your astral plane are all that is left of entire planes that were destroyed by warring gods. Motes with this origin are as varied as the planes that they were first part of, with natural mountains, rivers, springs, or whatever other geographic features the plane possessed. Some may still be smoking and ruined from the power of the god that destroyed them, or covered in divine gore.

•*Transported*: According to Fifth Edition rules, placing one extradimensional item inside another creates a temporary portal to the astral plane that sucks material toward it and ejects it at a random location in the astral plane. It's conceivable that this kind of magical catastrophe could have occurred on a large enough scale to eat up an entire chunk of terrain from the mortal plane, depositing it wholesale in the astral sea. Perhaps an entire fortress, city, or dwarf holy mountain was dropped into the astral plane in this way.

Creating an Astral Mote

If you're having trouble coming up with a specific astral mote, or you just need to generate one in a few minutes before your session, try using the following quick-gen tables. To diversify any of these sections for a given mote, simply roll multiple times and treat the result as a mixture of the results.

Inhabitants

It is inhabited by...

d20

- | | |
|-------|----------------------------------|
| 1-3 | ... merfolk. |
| 4 | ... sea elves. |
| 5 | ... merrow. |
| 6 | ... sahuagin. |
| 7-8 | ... giant octopus. |
| 9 | ... sea hags. |
| 10-11 | ... fiends. |
| 12 | ... a dragon. |
| 13 | ... Githzerai monks. |
| 14 | ... lizardfolk. |
| 15 | ... bullywugs. |
| 16-19 | ... a terrestrial humanoid race. |
| 20 | ... no one! |

Origin

This mote was originally...

d12

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1 | ... the severed hand of a god. |
| 2 | ... the skull of a slain deity. |
| 3 | ... a god's rib cage. |
| 4 | ... a giant, ancient treasure chamber. |
| 5 | ... a lost dungeon. |
| 6 | ... a hidden library. |
| 7 | ... a shattered keep of the gods. |
| 8 | ... an astral crystal. |
| 9 | ... a piece of a destroyed plane. |
| 10 | ... a mountain from the mortal world. |
| 11 | ... a city from the mortal world. |
| 12 | ... a citadel from the mortal world. |

Habitat

It is covered in...

d12

- | | |
|----|-----------------------|
| 1 | ... sand. |
| 2 | ... deciduous forest. |
| 3 | ... evergreen forest. |
| 4 | ... tundra. |
| 5 | ... kelp. |
| 6 | ... coral. |
| 7 | ... grasslands. |
| 8 | ... seagrass meadows. |
| 9 | ... sargassum mats. |
| 10 | ... barnacle swamps. |
| 11 | ... mussel beds. |
| 12 | ... clam fields. |

Resources

It is important because of its...

d8

- 1 ... mineral deposits.
- 2 ... rare herbs.
- 3 ... position along a trade route.
- 4 ... sheltering caves.
- 5 ... lush vegetation.
- 6 ... plentiful wildlife.
- 7 ... inhabitants.
- 8 ... remarkable lack of anything interesting. It is not important, which may make it the perfect place to hide.

Weather

The astral plane is not called 'the realm of thought and dream' without cause. The plane's divine matrix is responsive to imagination and expectation, and the emotions of the beings within it can influence its manifestations. Every moment of happiness, sadness, or rage influences the nature of the plane itself in some tiny way. Over time, like emotions coalesce, forming several types of astral phenomena. Not all of these are equivalent to weather in the mortal world, but they are as close to it as the astral plane possesses. The environments presented here can be found at any depth in the astral sea.

Joy Spring

The delights of a thousand thousand beings have pooled together to form an effervescing well of happiness in material and immaterial form. Creatures within 100 ft. of a Joy Spring feel inexplicably positive for as long as they are within range, and for 1d6 days after spending an extended rest near the Joy Spring. Other emotions are not impossible, but negative emotions are less extreme than they would be away from the spring. As well, any creature that spends an extended rest within 100 ft. of the Joy Spring enjoys an additional 1d8 temporary hit points while in the area and for 1d6 days after leaving.

The appearance of a Joy Spring depends upon

Secrets

Unbeknownst to most, the mote hides...

d6

- 1 ... a Peregrine settlement.
- 2 ... ancient ruins.
- 3 ... a kraken's lair.
- 4 ... fragments of a divine library or armory.
- 5 ... deposits of magical crystals.
- 6 ... a Githyanki dead-drop.

the beings in its vicinity. The spring will take on physical features of objects that those beings associate with happiness. For example, if the spring were controlled by a clan of dwarves, it might appear as a fountain of molten gold. If vampires killed the dwarves and took control of the spring, however, its appearance would change to reflect their values, perhaps becoming a fountain of blood instead. The substance a spring produces is actually the material it appears to be in every way, so Joy Springs are a coveted resource in the astral plane. But joy is scarce in this existence, and these springs are few and far between.

Ambition Stream

Extreme drive toward a goal manifests as a strong current in the astral matrix, flowing toward the object of the goal (as near as the object can be approximated to a physical location). Because the most common goal in the astral is that of Pilgrims to reach their god's plane, the strongest ambition streams one will find are those that flow toward the divine realms. Each realm has its own set of ambition streams formed of the raw determination of their gods' followers, with the realms of more popular gods having larger and stronger streams. It is possible to ride one of these currents directly to one's destination realm, if you can tell which realm a stream is headed towards.

Ambition streams take on something of the hue and aura of their goal, so a stream focused on reaching Celestia might have a slightly

radiant glow to it, while one to the Nine Hells might appear dark and have a slight smell of sulfur. A successful DC20 Intelligence (Arcana) check determines the endpoint of an ambition stream. An ambition stream transports anything within it toward its goal at a speed of 100 miles per day - and everything within it will impact the plane's borders at that same speed unless it leaves the current before that point. Ambition streams are the easiest ways to reach a divine plane, but they are not necessarily the safest. Two streams may cross each other at some point, creating enormous chaotic storms that can damage astral vessels and creatures or shunt them off along the wrong stream. Ambition streams are also the choicest targets for creatures hunting for meals - or slaves. Githyanki, devils, and demons routinely lurk just outside large ambition streams, waiting to swoop down on any choice victims that fly past.

Doldrum

Perhaps the most common 'weather' phenomenon in the astral plane, doldrums are vast expanses of utter stillness, the pooled despair of untold generations. They are commonly filled with thick fog that limits visibility to 15ft., but will slowly respond to the minds of any creatures within them, taking on their personal associations with depression.

Creatures that enter a doldrum feel inexplicably depressed for as long as they are within its borders unless they make a successful Wisdom saving throw (DC 15) each day they are within the doldrum. If they fail, they are at disadvantage on all rolls. Even if they do make their save, positive emotions are muted and muddled while within the doldrum. Further, anything within a doldrum begins to sink imperceptibly toward the Stellar Abyss, reaching that level of the astral plane within 3 days unless they leave the doldrum or take action to stop the descent. Creatures that failed their Wisdom save upon entering the doldrum are unable to realize that they are sinking, unless their depression is dispelled magically. Unaffected creatures must make a

successful Wisdom (Perception) check (DC 15) to notice that they have begun to ascend.

All downward (away from the Stellar Abyss) motion in a doldrum is made at half speed. Doldrums impede ambition streams that seek to cross them; an ambition stream can penetrate a distance equal to ten times the stream's diameter into the doldrum. If it has not reached the other side by that distance, the ambition stream fizzles and ends inside the doldrum.

Jitter Sigil

A knot of currents roiling in random configuration, a jitter sigil is the physical embodiment of anxiety, and the astral sea's version of a whirlpool. Objects and creatures that come within 100 feet of a jitter sigil are drawn toward it and must make a Strength saving throw (DC15) or equivalent to resist its pull. If they fail, they are drawn toward the sigil; three failures, and they are pulled within. Anything that enters a jitter sigil is whirled along its rapid course, trapped in its vicious cycle. Anything within a jitter sigil gains the Jitter feature for the duration of its stay and 1d10 hours after it escapes. (**Jitter:** Your body is slightly out of phase with its surroundings, flickering at random within a 10 ft. area. Roll 1d10 at the end of each round. If the result is greater than 9, you phase through a solid object during that turn and take 1d10 force damage. Outside of combat, take 1d10 force damage every hour.) As well, creatures that enter the sigil must make a DC15 Wisdom saving throw or experience debilitating anxiety until they escape the sigil or their symptoms are alleviated magically in some manner. If they fail, they are at disadvantage on all rolls.

Escaping a jitter sigil requires a successful Strength saving throw (DC 20) or the use of a spell or feature that could reasonably allow one to escape, such as teleportation. However, all teleportation spells cast below 5th-level have a 15% chance to teleport the target to a random location within the sigil. A creature loses one point of Wisdom for every day spent

inside a jitter sigil; this can only be reversed through the use of restorative magic or by spending one week in quiet meditation or relaxation for each point of Wisdom lost.

If a creature drops to half its original Wisdom score in this way, it develops a permanent anxiety that cannot be completely cured by any means save divine intervention or a *wish*. Restorative magic or counseling allows the character to develop coping mechanisms to alleviate the debilitating effects of their anxiety, but they are never completely relieved of it. A creature that drops to 0 Wisdom from this effect dies immediately, its spirit becoming part of the sigil's anxiety and its body becoming just one more piece of flotsam trapped in the unending rush.

Jitter sigils commonly form around sites of great worry to many individuals, such as high-security astral prisons or vaults containing extremely precious treasure. The lairs of paranoid astral dragons often become enmeshed in a jitter sigil, and wizards or other powerful magic users may use dispel magic (cast at 7th-level or above) to clear a small area within the sigil and establish a tower or lair therein, protected by the sigil's bounds.

Brouhaha

Also known as witch-winds or hurly burlies, brouhahas are the storms of the astral plane. They typically manifest as boiling mounds of dark grey clouds whipped to tall peaks by gusting whirlwinds. Lightning occasionally flashes within them, but they are actually manifestations of confusion rather than rage or anger - although their uncertainty can quickly escalate into fury if provoked. Creatures that enter a brouhaha are buffeted by voices whispering indistinct circular arguments and doubting questions.

Every creature within a brouhaha must make an Intelligence saving throw (DC10) for each day it spends inside the storm; if it succeeds, it begins to question its strongest beliefs. If a creature *succeeds* on a number of these saves equal to its level + its proficiency bonus, that

creature loses all faith and certainty in its beliefs, becoming agnostic and nihilistic. Creatures that have not succumbed to this effect are unable to control their own movement within the brouhaha save with magical aid; they are swept along by the storm's swirling winds against their will. Agnostic and nihilistic creatures, however, gain the ability to both ride the winds and move as they will and to direct the motion of helpless creatures within the storm.

Escaping a brouhaha without magical aid requires three successful Wisdom saving throws (DC20) out of five, but a brouhaha's winds will eventually eject helpless creatures within on their own. If a creature is unable to escape the brouhaha through magic or Wisdom saving throws, roll 1d6 and take the result as the number of days they spend in the storm before being ejected. Brouhahas are not overly dangerous of themselves, but if they draw near solid objects, such as astral motes, creatures or vessels they eject may take damage from impact. Most brouhahas migrate at random through the astral sea, but a few are fixed in location - usually at points of intersection between two different ambition streams. These storms are the favored lairs of hags - and particularly sea hags - in the astral sea. A coven will purposefully mire a colloidal labyrinth within the storm, able to easily move in and out with victims or treasure while others are hampered by the hurly burly.

Tempest

Of all the manifest emotions in the astral sea, anger is one of the more rare. That's not because there's a shortage of fury being poured into the plane by its inhabitants, but rather because it burns off so quickly into sorrow, anxiety, or confusion. Within a brouhaha, however, a few brief sparks of anger can ignite a firestorm of rage, with each furious bolt of lightning inciting the next outburst. Creatures within a tempest experience the same effects as those within a brouhaha, except they feel inexplicably angry rather than confused. All creatures within a tempest must make a DC10 Dexterity saving

throw for each minute they are within the storm, taking 8d6 lightning damage if they fail. Vessels within a brouhaha are automatically struck each round by this effect unless other measures are taken to protect them. Tempests usually burn themselves out in 1d10 hours.

Star Dust

Although magic functions normally in the astral plane, the plane's psychic medium does have the interesting effect of allowing magical residue to manifest physically. This takes the form of star dust, a gleaming white powder that sparkles with an iridescent sheen.

Star dust has a number of uses. First of all, it can substitute for any material component required by spells - simply use an amount of star dust equal in value to the designated material component cost (this excludes cases in which the material component is clearly irreplaceable, such as with the gemstone option of *imprisonment*). Star dust is usually valued at about 1,000 gp per gram. Star dust can also be used to allow a magic user to cast spells above their caster level. The amount of star dust required to do this is equal to the casting level difference in kilograms. So, for example, if a 5th level caster wished to cast true resurrection, a 9th level spell, they would be required to provide 4kg of star dust, a value of 400,000 gp. This cost is in addition to the material component cost of the spell itself - 25,000 gp worth of diamonds, in this example. If the caster wished to do away with the need to acquire that many diamonds, they would have to provide an additional 25,000 gp worth of star dust. It would certainly be an expensive true resurrection!

As a virtue of their astral bodies, Peregrines gain the ability to subsist on pure star dust. Few are aware of this ability, however, and many humanoid and animal creatures have starved to death in the astral plane within reach of a stock of star dust that could have saved them. The adjacent table details the length of time 10 grams of star dust satisfies the physical needs of a creature of each size category.

Star dust can be carried into other planes, but it is unstable in any plane other than the astral. Unless stored in a warded container, it will immediately dissolve into the plane's magical aura. For use outside of the astral sea, star dust must be stabilized just before spell casting by infusing it with the caster's own blood.

When a Peregrine dies, their corpse dissolves in 1d4 weeks to yield an amount of star dust determined by their Wisdom score and size category. See the table below.

Star Dust Yield of Astral Corpse

| Size | Star dust |
|------------|-------------------------|
| Tiny | (0.0001 x Wisdom) grams |
| Small | (0.0005 x Wisdom) grams |
| Medium | (0.01 x Wisdom) grams |
| Large | (0.2 x Wisdom) grams |
| Huge | (0.5 x Wisdom) grams |
| Gargantuan | (1 x Wisdom) grams |
| Colossal | (1.5 x Wisdom) grams |

Sustenance for 10 grams of Star Dust (appr. 10,000 gp value)

| Size Category | Time |
|---------------|----------|
| Tiny | 120 days |
| Small | 40 days |
| Medium | 20 days |
| Large | 10 days |
| Huge | 1 day |
| Gargantuan | 6 hours |
| Colossal | 1 hour |

One gram of star dust is worth 1,000 gp. So if a Peregrine Ancient Gold Dragon (Monster Manual, p. 113) were killed, its corpse would decay into $1 \times 17 = 17$ grams of star dust, valued at 17,000 gp. A single average humanoid (Wis 10) would produce $0.01 \times 10 = 0.1$ grams of star dust, valued at 100 gp. Therefore, it would only take 170 average humanoids to produce the same amount of star dust as a single Ancient Gold dragon - and

170 average humanoids would be much easier to collect than a single gold dragon. Because of this, medium humanoid creatures are more likely to be hunted for their star dust than larger, more dangerous creatures. It would require about 4,500 average humanoids to produce 1 lb of star dust (valued at 500,000 gp).

Astral Crud

The majority of the star dust that enters the astral sea with the death of Peregrines is not harvested. Instead, this star dust drifts down, away from the mortal plane and into the Stellar Abyss. There, it becomes corrupted by the psychic emanations of the Far Realm and loses its iridescent sheen and fine texture, clumping and taking on a dull grey color. This 'astral crud' is in great abundance in the Stellar Abyss, and can be used exactly as normal star dust in spell casting - but anyone doing so is at risk of going insane from Far Realm exposure.

Any time a non-aberrant creature performs spell using astral crud as all or part of their material components, make a stability check for them (see Chapter Six), taking a -10 penalty for every gram of astral crud used. Aberrant creatures such as illithids, beholders, aboleth, and astral krakens are immune to this effect - a significant advantage.

Astral Biology

The souls of animals reincarnate in the astral sea according to the same rules as other mortal beings; they appear as astral beings and will live until they die of wounds, starvation, or disease. They are incapable of reproduction, and after death they will become void ghost versions of their living selves.

Species intermingle in surprising ways after death, the habitat requirements of the mortal plane drastically altered by the attributes of the heavens. Owls dive through schools of fish or soar alongside manta rays; wolves and foxes learn to ambush feeding tuna; giant octopods and grizzly bears compete for the same hiding places; leaping dolphins play with bouncing ravens. Grass, trees, and shrubs grow side by side with coral, kelp, seaweed, and anemones.

Not all species are able to thrive in the astral plane, however. Any species that relies on a specific prey or plant as its food source or symbiotic partner will almost certainly perish shortly after arrival in the astral sea, as the complete alteration of habitat makes finding its source of nourishment, partner, or habitat practically impossible. All of these creatures are of course able to subsist on star dust alone - but they almost never know it. The corpses of these species are a rich buffet for astral scavengers, and form the majority of the star

Note: Star Dust Flux

Based on contemporary death rates (152,000 per day), population (7.125 billion), and estimated world population in 1800 (813 million), the daily humanoid death rate of a fantasy world could be estimated at 17,000. If about 15% are able to enter their respective afterlives within a few days of reincarnating, there's an approximate effective entry rate of 14,450 Peregrines per day to the astral sea. That corresponds to a daily star dust potential of 3.24 lbs, valued at 1,620,000 gp. Approximately 5,274,250 dead humanoids would enter the astral sea every year, corresponding to a star dust potential of ~1182 lbs, valued at about 600 million gp. Note that these estimates are only for the mortal world, not the Feywild or Shadowfell. Those planes would also contribute to the soul flow in the astral sea, but estimating their death rates requires more consideration than for the mortal plane. If the mortal world has a greater or lesser population in your campaign, adjust the estimates accordingly. Likewise, this omits the influx of animal souls, as there is no data on total animal death rates. Although there is undoubtedly a greater turnover of non-humanoid biomass, estimating the total non-humanoid contribution to the star dust potential of the astral plane is difficult, further complicated by the choice of an average Wisdom score for all non-humanoid creatures. In addition, estimates for the death rates of aquatic humanoid species would be extremely significant, but will vary widely depending on the nature of aquatic populations in your world.

dust snow that clouds the lower depths. Their ghosts populate the vast void with swirling schools of spectral fish.

The astral sea's most successful creatures are those that are able to move between water and land, such as seals, sea lions, otters, crocodiles, alligators, tigers, jaguars, polar bears, and aquatic dragons. These creatures are able to enjoy the mobility of swimming in the astral sea and the keen vision of eyes adapted to vision above water as well as below.

Many species of mortal animals have been introduced to the Ocean of the Heavens over the millennia - only some of which have thrived. Because of this, and because Peregrine animals are constantly being introduced into the ocean, finding food in the astral plane is generally not a challenge. Most Peregrines can easily subsist as fishers, netting schools of fish and flocks of birds, and if catching living prey fails, the corpses of Peregrine animals unfit for the astral life litter the waves - if they can be collected and eaten before they crumble into star dust. In a bizarre twist, even the devils of Baator and the demons of the Abyss practice fishing in a similar way - although they cast their enchanted nets for schools of spectral fish to boil down into ectoplasmic fuel for their own power, or that of their superior. Astral clippers from the Nine Hells habitually trawl with shadowy nets, to bring in an extra haul while en route for more important missions.

The environments and creatures presented in this section are common throughout the Supernal Above and the Pelagic Zone, but rare in the Stellar Abyss.

Flora

Much of the plant life in the astral plane is no different from plant life in the mortal realm, both aquatic and terrestrial. Most astral motes are functionally identical to an island in a normal sea; they have soil, groundwater, and normal weather. On these motes, terrestrial plants have had no need to change to survive

in the Heavens, and aquatic plants, such as kelp, seaweed, and seagrass are able to root in the soil and grow side-by-side with land plants. Phytoplankton bloom and senesce in great clouds throughout the brilliantly-lit Supernal Above.

Sessile marine animals, such as coral, are also able to grow on astral motes, and it is common for aquatic and terrestrial biomes to intermingle. In fact, kelp forests, reefs, and seagrass meadows are roughly equivalent to deciduous forests, evergreen woods, and plains in the astral sea. A mostly terrestrial biome may feature a few aquatic species replacing its normal members. For example, a deciduous forest's undergrowth may be made up entirely of seaweed rather than shrubs. A few oak or pine trees may spread their branches over waving expanses of seagrass rather than towering kelp strands. A coral reef may coexist with a copse of spruce trees, their branches encrusted with polyps. And of course, there is no distinction in habitat for animal life; you are just as likely to find a school of fish feeding in the grove of a terrestrial forest as in a tangle of kelp.

But there is much more available habitat in the astral sea than just its motes, and its unique environment has driven bizarre adaptations in plants of all kinds.

Because the firmament field satisfies the oxygen, carbon dioxide, and water requirements of all life on-demand, plants in the astral sea need not be rooted in soil. Instead, floating varieties of trees, shrubs, weeds, and every other kind of plant life imaginable drift freely along the surface and below the waves. These astral varieties do not need to search for water in the soil, so they uniformly lack lateral roots, opting for a single thick taproot that draws all the water the plant needs from the magical medium. Adventitious roots may also form along the stem.

Although there is no sun in the astral plane, there is still plenty of light. The divine planes, stars, and even the glowing bodies of dead

gods and Primordials all provide enough light for photosynthesis, but the most common light sources are the few solid fragments of the Firmament itself. These shards are covered in celestial runes that glow with an effulgent brilliance, and many astral motes are bathed in the light from one or more fragments. Astral plants, on the other hand, migrate between light sources, carried by astral currents. Because of this, astral plant life has lost its gravitropic growth habit, relying completely on phototropism. All astral plants orient their growth toward the nearest light source. As they drift along with the tides of the Heavens, astral trees gradually shift from one light source to another, causing them to begin growing in a new direction. The trunks of the oldest trees are twisted into gnarled knots from chasing many different light sources throughout their lives.

Astral plants may not need to worry about oxygen, carbon dioxide, or water, but there are still many other nutrients that they do need to acquire. Instead of absorbing these nutrients from soil, astral plants partner with mycorrhizal fungi adapted to the astral sea. The mycelia of these fungi sprout outward from the roots of their plant partner, spreading behind them to form a tangled net. The waste of the astral plane (feces, corpses, star dust, dirt, rocks, etc.) becomes caught in this net, and the fungi absorb nutrients from it to transfer to their plant host. In return, the plant provides photosynthates.

Over time, the matter trapped in the mycorrhizal net undergoes pedogenesis (soil formation) and forms a 'mat' of soil. Suffice to say that the soil mats that form on these mycorrhizal nets are mostly organic and highly magical, as the parent material was star dust. A handful of this astral soil can render acres of barren land fertile again, and fertile land overflow with growth. It can no longer be used in spells, and the star dust that formed it cannot be extracted, but it is valuable on its own merits to elves, halflings, farmers, or druids, who can work true wonders with it. Any plants grown primarily in astral soil,

including astral plants, become Awakened.

Colloids

Astral plants inevitably collide with each other in their drifting, usually within their first year after germination. When they do, their mycorrhizal nets often become entangled with each other, tying the two plants together. They in turn collect others, eventually forming an organic island with no discernible surface, just a tangle of mycorrhizae, soil, and plants. These islands are known as colloids. The oldest colloids are made up of the tangled trunks of many ancient trees, literally knotted around each other over the years but still growing toward the light. These colloids are known as labyrinths, because they are riddled with many cavities and gaps between the trunks.

Colloids provide rich habitat for mortal and Peregrine creatures in the astral plane. Fish, crabs, squirrels, octopods, snakes, eels, and many other animals all take advantage of the colloids' gaps as shelter or nests, leaving to hunt or forage on the outside. Because most of the living plants that make up a colloid are Awakened, however, most herbivorous creatures have a bit more trouble eating the plants' leaves, roots, or other vegetative tissue. Instead, many astral plants have developed (or always had) fleshy fruits, which the fish and animal foragers of their colloid are free to consume, sending the seeds spinning off into the astral sea to germinate.

Giant Astral Seagrass

With its roots in the Stellar Abyss and the tops of its leaves in the Supernal Above, these plants can grow up to 50 miles in height and form massive mats interconnected at the base by their tangled rhizomes. Like colloids, astral seagrass partners with a mycorrhizal fungus that traps nutrients - but, being native to the aberrant Stellar Abyss, this fungus is a bit different. It hunts actively rather than passively, using huge mycorrhizal loops and nets to trap and constrict around living prey that passes through the mycelial mass. Anything caught by the fungus slowly starves to death and is then leached of its nutrients.

Many species take advantage of the habitat provided by astral seagrass, and the plants are so huge that entirely different communities inhabit different points along their length. At the top, in the Pelagic Zone, natural herbivores such as sea turtles nibble on the edges of the leaves, and merfolk, sea giants, and terrestrial inhabitants of astral motes use the leaves as one of the staples of their diets. A bit lower down, life begins to thin out as the Far Realm's effects start manifesting and the creatures that cannot cope with them disappear. This leaves a lot of sharks, rays, birds of prey, and cats of all sizes. Only aberrant creatures inhabit the lowest reaches of an astral seagrass meadow - most notably, the aboleth.

Fauna

Almost any species from the mortal world can be encountered as a Peregrine animal in the astral sea. There are also a few mortal creatures that have lived in the Heavens so long that they have developed into new species, exclusive to the astral plane.

Bat-Whales

Insects are no exception to astral reincarnation. Thousands of insects reincarnate at a single node in the astral sea every minute, and, like many other creatures, many of these are unable to find enough food to survive in their new environment. The corpses of those that cannot find enough food float through the sea for a few weeks before crumbling into a tiny amount of star dust. But for as long as those corpses do last, they are a rich food source. Because of this huge, constant resource, populations of mortal bats that were brought to the astral sea by travelers or wandered in through unattended portals have bloomed in the Heavens, gorging on the plentiful buffet.

With few living predator populations to worry about, these bats gradually developed gigantism, becoming as large as whales. As they did, some stayed true to their roots, still feeding upon the same Peregrine insects that their ancestors did. They developed feeding structures similar to those of baleen whales;

huge plates of keratin and hair dangling from the roofs of their mouths to net tiny insects as they swim. All bat-whales are intelligent and possess excellent memories, but baleen bat-whales have an uncanny memory for navigation. They migrate in pods between the shifting nodes of stellar energy that become the rebirth-places of Peregrines, consuming insects and other small creatures as they reincarnate at the node. These bats are probably the only creatures in the astral plane to truly understand the ebb and flow of the tides of the Heavens, and to know how nodes move and how they appear and disappear according to the 'seasons' of the astral sea.

Other bat-whales adapted to hunt larger prey, becoming the ambushing apex predators of the astral plane. These species have mouths filled with sharp fangs, keen eyesight and echolocation, and a maneuverability unrivaled by any other ship or species. Angels, demons, devils, divine ships, and Githyanki pirates all keep a wary eye for pods of killer bat-whales on the waves. They can be tamed and trained as mounts, which some illithid cults in the Stellar Abyss use to great advantage.

Quahogs

Colloquially known as 'astral unicorns' for their rarity and near-mythological status among Peregrines, quahogs are intelligent, long-lived, psionic beings native to the astral sea. Although in appearance they resemble giant clams, in truth quahogs are aberrant in origin. They possess a hard shell and a single leg they use to swim, but, unlike true clams, quahogs are not traditional filter feeders and do not possess a siphon. Instead, quahogs derive energy by filtering thoughts from nearby populations. Specifically, quahogs thrive on anti-social or individualist energy, which they transform psychically into the impulses that foster the formation of civilizations. They are neither good nor evil, and represent the introduction of one of the Far Realm' less lethal concepts into the multiverse: collectivism.

Unlike clams, quahogs do possess brains.

Indeed, they possess several, and these make up most of their body mass. Quahogs do not truly think, however - they merely absorb thoughts from their vicinity and retain memories, like living psychic sponges. They are telepathic, clearly, but interfacing with a quahog's mind is more like speaking to the sum total experiences of a population than it is like interacting with a rational being. Still, quahogs are sometimes the object of epic quests made by those seeking the vast stores of knowledge and experience they contain.

Quahogs go where their food is most plentiful: anarchic, antagonistic, individualist people groups. They bury themselves beneath sand, dirt, or rock near such a settlement and settle in for centuries at a time, filtering the anti-social impulses from the population and growing ever so slowly. Over time, their influence on the population fosters collectivist philosophy and weeds out individualism, causing great cities and nation states to form. But when the food dries up - when the people become most civilized - the quahog moves on, and anarchy may begin to grow again.

Because they are essentially giant brains in shells, quahogs are highly coveted by mind flayers and astral krakens. To protect themselves, they exude a subtle psionic aura that conceals their presence.

Preserved Prehistory

Were there dinosaurs in your world? Have dragons gone extinct? Were dwarves the victims of an ancient genocide? In the eternal afterlife of the astral plane, such creatures may still exist - probably rare, maybe unique, but possible. If you've ever wanted to allow your players to encounter extinct creatures, the astral plane is one way to do that without altering your world's history or resorting to time travel. The Monster Manual already provides stat blocks for some prehistoric animals, and Waters Above provides more, with a focus on aquatic creatures (see Appendix A).

Cities of the Dead

Although infinite, the astral plane is far from unpopulated. With an influx of over 10,000 new dead beings per day, depending on your world's population, it is anything *but* unpopulated. About 70% of these Peregrines reincarnate near the orbital motes of one of the divine planes and either enter the plane or make what they can of their astral afterlife on the fringes of that realm. The rest are scattered throughout the astral sea at nodes of stellar energy that can be located at any depth and almost any distance from the gods' realms. Most of these quickly find some form of solid ground to take as their new home - usually a mote with some kind of soil, water source, and vegetation. Those that are not so lucky often end up in the bellies of astral predators.

Life after death is not so different from life before death. Peregrines still need to eat, sleep, and take care of their bodies, just as they still crave companionship and material comforts. Consequently, most of the settlements found in the Heavens are little different from coastal cities or villages in the mortal world - save that their fishers are just as likely to net a flock of sparrows as a school of herring, and must watch for sharks from above as well as below. The biggest differences stem from the fact that Peregrines neither die of age nor reproduce. The only children in the astral are those that died young, save in the

Note: Giants of History

Extinct creatures aren't the only ancient relics your players might find in the ocean of the heavens. Because there's no absolute limit on the lifespan of a Peregrine creature, it's entirely feasible for your players to encounter significant historical figures living out their afterlives in the astral plane. If there has ever been a great hero that your players have admired or wished they could have met - Elminster, perhaps? - the astral plane is a great way to indulge that impulse without resorting to time travel or resurrection.

rare communities of mortals that have taken up residence in the astral plane for various reasons, such as the Githzerai and Githyanki. Still, with a never-ending stream of Peregrines, populations in the astral sea grow steadily to untenable proportions.

You can handle this in a number of ways. If in the vicinity of a protective good or neutral god, Peregrines might decide to stay despite the population pressure. You could imagine that an ever-expanding metropolis of the dead would form around such a god's realm, ancient as the god himself, filled with the poor souls unable to reach the afterlife they earned in full. Alternatively, maybe the gods place a population limit on settlements around their planes, and all Peregrines are allowed only a certain period of visitation. If the gods are neglectful, perhaps Peregrines leave on their own to find somewhere less crowded. And of course, in the orbital motes of evil gods, perhaps the Peregrine population is kept in check by the ravages of the gods' minions. Peregrine bodies do yield star dust, after all. Evil creatures could see them as a resource.

Away from the divine realms, each settlement might have a certain limit on immigrants, or new residents might have to be approved by a council that weighs the contribution they can make versus the upkeep cost they bring. Some towns might accept all comers, allowing personal judgement to govern who decides to stay and who decides to go, and some might become hostile to all outsiders as threats to their precious stability. Perhaps most have learned to practice periodic emigration, taking an expedition of settlers across the sea in search of a new home when resources at the old become limiting. There are many ways to deal with this issue of population pressure after death, and in an infinite plane, all would likely exist somewhere.

Astral Culture

A few common cultural practices independent of race or background develop in Peregrine settlements as a result of the plane's properties.

Settlements in the open ocean usually have a culture of concealment. There are many threats in the astral sea - aberrants, Githyanki raiders, demons, devils, dragons, etc. Unless a village is big enough to have a large number of warriors or magic-users, they are likely to try to hide their presence from passing creatures. They might dwell underground within their astral mote, coming to the surface only to forage or farm discreetly, or they might conceal their dwellings within thick vegetation or magical illusions. Even those that do have warriors or wizards would prefer to avoid confrontation, as the dangers of the Heavens are much more deadly than those of the mortal world. They may use elaborate warding magic to keep hostile outsiders away from their homes, or spells to restructure their astral mote such that their dwellings are hidden within it. Only the most powerful cities would be able to crew routine patrols of the waves.

The following section assumes that technology is not advanced or widespread in your world. If it is, adjust the culture in your astral plane accordingly.

Food may be abundant in the astral sea, but without natural fires (see *Smothering Seas* earlier in this chapter), humanoids reliant on cooked food will still struggle to find a meal. Every permanent settlement has its own ways of handling this problem and its own culture of astral cooking. If there are magic users in the population, the problem is easily solved if they are able to use their powers to conjure permanent or temporary flames for communal use; this might give them even more power and influence in the settlement than they would have otherwise, so keep that in mind.

Most other settlements rely primarily on pickling and brining to preserve their food, and do without hot meals. Pickles, whether in brine, oil, or vinegar, are a staple food in the astral sea, and are usually the only way one can find meat that isn't still alive. Roasts are a cherished luxury. For the meat of Peregrine creatures, special measures have to be taken to ensure its preservation. Peregrine corpses

will normally dissolve into stardust after a few weeks, and pickling in itself does nothing to avert that. Instead, mental effort must be devoted to keeping the meat in physical form until it can be consumed. This can be as simple as noticing or talking about it every few days, but it must be attended to - neglected meat goes missing. Many settlements have evolved cultural practices around this that exaggerate the pickle's appearance to make the preservation process easier; some villages cut the meat into decorative shapes or festoon it with colorful herbs or dyes and keep their jars in prominent locations in their home to be admired by themselves and visitors.

If one is able to procure mirrors or highly reflective metals, there is enough light in most places in the upper astral sea to use solar ovens; increase the value of mirrors by at least four times to reflect their importance in the astral plane. Likewise, although sea lanterns (see *Light and Sound*, Chapter Five) do not emit much heat, the light they emit can be concentrated using a solar oven, and cooking in this way is relatively common throughout the Pelagic Zone, where the ambient light is less intense. Each settlement is unique, but in general the unique limitations of the astral plane drive societies toward communal cooking habits. Only very wealthy cities with easy access to magic or trade goods would see many individually-owned kitchens.

Likewise, light is an influential factor shaping astral culture. Without natural flames, one's options for indoor lighting are limited to windows, magic, technology - and sea lanterns. Therefore, buildings in the astral plane tend to have very large windows, and architecture maximizes outer wall space with few interior rooms, in order to best capture the constant light of the astral sea (as there is no day/night cycle in most places). Villas based around a large central courtyard are a common design, and small windows are a sign of either wealth or magical talent. With that said, sea lanterns (see *Light and Sound*, Chapter Five) are cheap and common, and even the poorest astral peasant owns several, at least.

Note: Constitutional Privilege

The lucky few that were able to settle on an astral mote with a boiling hot spring or thermal vent might be able to cook using it, but it might also contain toxic chemicals that would poison their meals. But dwarves, with their remarkable constitutions and resistance to poison, might be immune to those effects. Perhaps dwarf populations alone of all races in your astral sea are able to enjoy easy hot meals cooked on open thermal vents. If your campaign includes other races with poison resistance, however, they could also fill this role.

Crises of Faith, Crises of Character

The realities of afterlife in the astral plane force many to confront harsh truths that were kept from them as mortals. The Heavens are broken. Most are unable to access the true afterlife their god promised them, and their god is unable to change that fact. Instead, they must eke out whatever life they can amidst the astral sea's many dangers and unknowns. Those that were rich and powerful as mortals are rendered penniless and without influence. What once seemed indisputable, infallible, and eternal begins to seem flawed and uncertain. Doubt often plagues the afterlives of even the most devout individuals, if they are forbidden access to their god's realm. They may choose to reject their god or gods entirely, renouncing religion, or they may renounce certain precepts or parts of their god's teachings. One's arrival in the astral sea and the epiphany of divine imperfection is a time of mental upheaval, and even alignment change, for many.

This is just as true for creatures that worship evil deities as it is for those that worship good or neutral deities. When an evil god's rewards fail to materialize in the beyond, their followers may begin to question their loyalties and actions, perhaps even beginning to repent for the things they did as mortals. They may come to worship other gods, or they may join the most prevalent religion in the astral sea - apatheism. Regardless, people from every alignment, creed, and race see the same thing: that they have all ended up in the same place.

Their differences, whatever those may be, were irrelevant to their final fate.

Consequently, old barriers of race and religion begin to break down. Good creatures feel less self-righteous and more open-minded; evil-aligned creatures are suddenly removed from the culture that shaped them and are exposed to a much greater variety of people. All of these things make the astral plane a more accepting place for people of all races and origins. Prejudice still exists, but traditionally 'evil' creatures are much more common in good or neutral settlements. Peaceful interactions of all kinds between 'evil' and 'good' Peregrine populations are generally accepted, even if the two populations do not truly like each other.

This is a great opportunity to expose your players to a greater variety of characters than they would normally meet and to shake up their expectations for characters of a certain type. A goblin camp might always mean a fight for your players while adventuring in the mortal world, but in the astral plane it could just as likely mean shelter, or harbor a quest

giver. An unknown elf might be expected to be good, if not friendly, but in the afterlife their bitterness at their god's betrayal could have moved them into an evil alignment. This also allows for a greater variety of player characters. If you have ever wanted to run a 'misunderstood monsters' campaign, the astral sea is a great place to do it without breaking the dynamics you've established for your world. A player that wants to create a character of a typically 'monstrous' race can easily be accommodated, without having to run a completely evil campaign.

Aquatic Ascendance

All races can survive in the astral plane, but aquatic races have a distinct advantage. They are well-accustomed to life in a fully three-dimensional environment, possess greater mobility than terrestrial races, are typically adapted to consuming uncooked food, and are simply more numerous than terrestrial humanoids - at least, if your world has a similar land/sea ratio to the real world. The exact numbers depend on your world's geography, but in most cases there should be at least as many Peregrines of aquatic races as

Note: Divine Endowments in the Afterlife

Gods have little reason to broadcast their divine gifts to those in the astral plane. The worship of the dead cannot strengthen them, and their souls are already lost. You should consider which of your gods, if any, will bother to bestow their sacred endowments on Peregrines, when they stand to gain little from the effort. You may decide that none do, and as such divinely-endowed clerics or paladins are forbidden in your campaign. Clerics or paladins that derive their abilities primarily from the zeal of their principles and beliefs would not be affected by this in any way, so it could even serve as an opportunity for your player characters to grow, perhaps learning to do by pure will and belief what they once did by divine investiture.

This is by no means a required rule, but it certainly lends more depth to the plight of Peregrines and shakes things up for your players. Make sure your players are on-board with the idea before instating the rule, however - you don't want someone bummed out because they were pining to try a cleric or paladin and suddenly you've decided they aren't allowed!

Likewise, the status of a warlock's pact in the afterlife bears consideration. For explicitly contractual arrangements, the patron may have stipulated that the terms persist 'until death,' meaning that Peregrine warlocks would no longer bear the boons of their arcane agreement. In other cases, patrons may decide that warlocks are of no use to them in the afterlife and rescind their gifts. However, there is plenty of cause to find patrons of all kinds in the astral sea - fiends, fey, and Great Old Ones alike - and this could simply represent a good opportunity for your player to roleplay a change in their relationship with their patron, or even to locate a new one based in the astral sea. Still, if these considerations interfere with someone's fun, it's probably best to simply handwave them.

of terrestrial races, and they should mix freely in the astral plane's 'terrestrial' settlements.

Because of their natural advantages, however, aquatic races are uniquely suited to occupations that require travel through the plane. Most major shipping businesses, mercenary groups, mining companies, and delivery services are made up of aquatic races such as sea elves or merfolk, whereas terrestrial races take the manufacturing, agricultural, and construction industries. Tiny villages in the open astral sea get their news and their needles from wandering merfolk peddlers alongside pack manatees or seal sleighs.

Aside from the economic niches they are uniquely suited to fill in the astral plane, aquatic races are mostly able to enjoy the same kind of afterlife that they lived as mortals. If they were nomadic, their bodies make them uniquely able to roam the astral waves at will. If they made their homes in castles of coral, well, the astral sea has its reefs as well. Merfolk often opt for the first path, herding huge groups of mortal walrus and schools of tuna among feeding sites, whereas sea elves consider themselves above animal husbandry - and enjoy none of the merfolk wealth as a result.

Dolphin Express

Within the core region of the astral sea, physical mail and small parcels are transported from settlement to settlement by pods of carrier dolphins outfitted with harnesses and packs. They employ sea elves or merfolk as secretaries, as they are able to speak and understand both dolphin and humanoid speech; these intermediaries are

Dolphin Express Delivery Pricing

| Package Weight | 0-10 miles | 10-100 miles | 100-500 miles | 500-1000 miles |
|-----------------|------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| Less than 1 lb. | 1 cp | 1 sp | 1 ep | 1 gp |
| 1-5 lbs. | 5 cp | 5 sp | 5 ep | 5 gp |
| 5-25 lbs. | 10 cp | 10 sp | 10 ep | 10 gp |
| 25-50 lbs. | 20 cp | 20 sp | 20 ep | 20 gp |
| 50-100 lbs. | 40 cp | 40 sp | 40 ep | 40 gp |

the ones that actually speak with the public, record a package's origin and destination, and handle payment. Secretaries recite each package's destination to the dolphin pod leader, who plots the pod's route accordingly and ensures no stops are missed along the way.

Whale-o-grams

The songs of whales carry thousands of miles across the psychic waves of the astral sea. Some enterprising whales have capitalized on their natural talents by giving up active feeding and entering a mutualistic relationship with certain astral settlements, acting as their lifeline to the rest of astral civilization. These whales swim in tandem with moderate to large size settlements on their motes' course through the Ocean of the Heavens, listening for messages encoded in the songs of other whales.

Their merfolk or sea elf interpreters then pass this along to the village or city. By bouncing a song through several whales at great distances from each other, a message can be sent the length of the astral sea in just a few hours, allowing remote villages to communicate with larger settlements without braving the dangers of the waves. In return, the settlements net huge masses of plankton and feed their relay whale. The downfall of such a communication system is that any message can be heard by any whale, and opposed settlements may attempt to intercept important strategic messages in this way. For that reason, relay whales memorize a number of codes that allow them to encrypt messages for select reception.

Generally, sending a message by relay whale - or a 'whale-o-gram' - is free of charge.

Settlements 'pay' their whales communally, and their services are free to all comers. There will always be those greedy mayors that try to extort the needy traveler, however.

Loose Ends

There are many other important points to consider when creating settlements in the astral plane, but many are too setting- or campaign-specific to detail in this book. Nevertheless, make sure you think about the following aspects of life in the astral when planning your campaign:

- *As below, so above:* Are the nations of the mortal world represented in some form in the astral plane? Do governments reform post-mortem? Are there astral nations?
- *Moving past prejudice:* What happens to mortal prejudices in the afterlife? Do the same racisms apply, or do people generally realize that there's not such a difference between them - after all, they did end up in the same place in the end, right?
- *Secret sundering:* Do living people know the truth about the heavens, or is it a surprise that the afterlife is not neatly ordered? How does that affect faith and religion after death?

Chapter Three

SAILING THE ASTRAL SEA

There's no experience more essential to the astral sea than standing aboard the deck of an astral vessel, magnificent clouds of rose and gold overhead, colossal depths below, and unending silvery seas spread ahead. But, counter-intuitively, sailing vessels are actually one of the more uncommon modes of travel in the astral plane (although still prevalent). In and around major astral settlements, such as those surrounding the planes of good or neutral deities, magic-users are common. Consequently, teleportation dominates the travel market. Most cities of respectable size in the border islands possess one or more permanent teleportation circles or permanent portals, allowing traders to easily pass between settlements without the dangers of astral sailing.

In the open astral, however, a teleportation circle or portal is a liability. Even if a settlement does have a magic-user capable of casting teleportation spells, they will only use those abilities in direst need. These towns and villages usually do not have enough warriors to protect themselves against raids, and if anyone were to learn the sigil sequence of a teleportation circle in or near their home they would be completely at that person's mercy. Sailing exposes travelers to random encounters with Githyanki, aberrants, demons, devils, astral storms, and a thousand other perils, but at least it only exposes those on the vessel itself, rather than their families and homes. Most villagers choose not to travel at all, however, relying on migrant merfolk peddlers to bring news and simple trade goods.

Your player characters, however - well, they're a different matter entirely.

Naval Heaven

There are four different classes of propulsion technology utilized by astral ships. Each has its advantages.

Catchment

The cheapest and simplest option, ships with sails are the most common type of astral vessel. Unlike a mortal ship, however, astral ships typically utilize sails above, below, and to port and starboard. Each sail can be controlled individually to catch astral currents and maneuver with adroitness.

Mirifical

It is not only one's own body that can be propelled through the astral plane by willpower alone. With training, a disciplined mind, and a coordinated crew of mirific meditators (known as a miracle), a vessel can be propelled at great speeds on pure thought.

Jet

This category encompasses a huge variety of technologies that all do roughly the same thing: forcibly eject a fast moving stream of matter in order to generate thrust for an astral vehicle. This may be purely technological, as in rocket engines or turbine-powered propellers. It may also be magical, using tunable mini-portals to the plane of elemental fire or air to create the jets. Ships with this type of propulsion are less common and more expensive than those with mirifical or catchment propulsion, but much more common than dissociative vessels.

Dissociative

The spell astral projection does not normally function if cast in the astral sea itself, but there is a variation of it that can be imbued into a

vessel and used to transport creatures and objects at the speed of spirit itself. A dissociative ship, commonly known as a dissociator or a projector, is enchanted to project a spectral version of itself and its crew when activated. This projection is immaterial and cannot be damaged, but is connected to its physical form by an astral cord. The projection has a speed equal to 9 ft. multiplied by the average Charisma score of its crew members and can travel anywhere within the astral plane. Its physical form remains where it was when dissociation was activated.

When the effect is ended by the pilot of the projection, the vessel's physical form travels instantaneously along the astral cord with the bodies of its crew and rejoins its projection and their spirits. Unlike with astral projection, a dissociator's ethereal lifeline does not fade to invisibility, but instead forms a completely visible, although intangible, tether between projection and reality. This cord can be severed by the same effects that are able to sever normal astral projection cords, but because it is much larger it requires several minutes to completely cut. When a dissociator's cord is first damaged, both spirit and physical form are automatically recalled along it, rejoining instantaneously at the site of damage unless they are otherwise prevented from doing so. Dissociated crew members may stray as far as they like from the dissociator's projection, but if the effect ends before they rejoin the ship their bodies will materialize wherever their projections were, and they may become stranded.

Dissociative vessels are the fastest craft in the astral plane, and usually the safest. Projected vessels cannot be damaged, and creatures that are able to sever their astral cords are relatively rare. Furthermore, they are able to move so quickly that the cord simply doesn't have to persist for long periods of time. Creatures that can damage sleeping bodies, however, are much more common; the true danger of dissociative vessels is the vulnerability of the crew's physical bodies. For that reason, dissociators are usually heavily

guarded or stored in secluded, sealed locations where their crews are unlikely to be ambushed. Captains of projective vessels are loathe to end their projection anywhere unprotected, as it would mean their return journey would leave their bodies vulnerable.

Build-a-boat

Ships will almost certainly be ubiquitous in any campaign or adventure set in the astral sea, so it is important to keep each one unique. As well, a ship may easily become central to a party's adventures and exploration in the astral plane, and it can provide a real sense of accomplishment and progress to allow your players to design, customize, and improve their personal craft. To that end, this section provides rules for creating and customizing astral vessels. You **do not need** to create every ship you use from scratch. If you are pressed for time or uninterested, just use one of the pre-made stat blocks in Appendix B.

As you progress through the steps, enter the information on your printed copy of the next two pages.

Unnamed Ship

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|----------------------|
| Design: | Mass: (volume) x (density) = | kgs |
| Material: | Size Category: | Crew: |
| Damage Threshold: | Weekly Crew Upkeep: (pay rate) x (number of crew) = | gp/wk. |
| AC: | HP: | Tonnage: tons |
| Resist: | Passengers: (max occupants) - (crew) = | |
| Immune: | Base Value: | gp |
| Vulnerable: | Value Modifier: | |
| | Running Total Value: (base value) x (value modifier) = | gp |

| | Speed Bonus | Maneuverability Bonus | Value Bonus |
|------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|--|
| Mainsails: | | | |
| Topsails: | | | |
| Jibs: | | | |
| Finsails: | | | |
| Jets: | | | |
| Miracle Crew Members: | | | |
| Spell-Imbued Keel: | | | (10x the cumulative total value, apply at the end) |
| Miscellaneous: | | | |
| Total: | Total: | Total: | gp |

| | | |
|---------------------|--|---------|
| | Running Total Value: | gp |
| Max Speed: | (Total speed bonus) - (Mass/10,000) = | ft./mph |
| Turn Radius: | (Total maneuverability bonus) + (base turn radius) = | ft. |

Maximum number of Armaments:

| Armaments | Count | Value per one | Value Bonus |
|-----------|-------|-----------------------------|-------------|
| 1. | | | |
| 2. | | | |
| 3. | | | |
| 4. | | | |
| 5. | | | |
| 6. | | | |
| | | Total: | gp |
| | | Running Total Value: | gp |

| Miscellaneous Upgrades | Count | Value per one | Value Bonus |
|-----------------------------|-------|---------------|-------------|
| 1. | | | |
| 2. | | | |
| 3. | | | |
| 4. | | | |
| 5. | | | |
| 6. | | | |
| Total: | | | gp |
| Running Total Value: | | | gp |

| Spell Instillations | Value per kg | Value Bonus |
|--------------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1. | | |
| 2. | | |
| 3. | | |
| 4. | | |
| 5. | | |
| 6. | | |
| Total: | | gp |
| Cumulative Total Value: | | gp |

Step one: Choose a design

The table below contains statistics for astral ships of various sizes. Within a given size range, each varies according to its purpose; some are primarily cargo ships, and so have a larger cargo tonnage and fewer places to mount armaments. Others are warships, and sacrifice storage space for armaments and maneuverability. Select your design and enter its traits at the appropriate lines on the Unnamed Ship table.

Ship Designs

| Name* | Volume** (m ³) | Base Crew | Max Occupants | Cargo Tonnage | Size Category | Base Hp | Base Value (gp) | Base Turn Radius (ft.) | Max Arms |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------|-----------------|------------------------|----------|
| Dinghy | 0.1 | 1 | 5 | 0.2 | Medium | 25 | 50 | 10 | 0 |
| Shallop | 18 | 1 | 10 | 1 | Large | 50 | 500 | 40 | 1 |
| Faering | 22 | 2 | 15 | 2 | Large | 50 | 500 | 40 | 1 |
| Drekar | 24.5 | 2 | 18 | 10 | Large | 50 | 500 | 40 | 1 |
| Felucca | 26 | 2 | 20 | 25 | Large | 50 | 600 | 40 | 1 |
| Caravel | 40 | 8 | 28 | 100 | Huge | 75 | 2,500 | 80 | 2 |
| Clipper | 60 | 12 | 60 | 200 | Huge | 100 | 7,500 | 40 | 2 |
| Mistico | 100 | 15 | 60 | 500 | Huge | 150 | 6,000 | 60 | 3 |
| Corvette | 150 | 20 | 40 | 80 | Huge | 200 | 15,000 | 40 | 4 |
| Substellar, battle | 200 | 20 | 25 | 80 | Huge | 300 | 75,000 | 40 | 10 |
| Substellar, mining | 200 | 20 | 25 | 300 | Huge | 250 | 50,000 | 80 | 5 |
| Trireme | 200 | 35 | 40 | 300 | Huge | 300 | 20,000 | 40 | 8 |
| Barque | 280 | 50 | 80 | 1,500 | Huge | 350 | 40,000 | 120 | 8 |
| Fluyt | 480 | 80 | 100 | 3,000 | Garg. | 400 | 65,000 | 100 | 4 |
| Carrack | 500 | 100 | 150 | 5,000 | Garg. | 500 | 70,000 | 100 | 10 |
| Nef | 750 | 150 | 200 | 4,000 | Garg. | 750 | 80,000 | 120 | 30 |
| Galleon | 1225 | 200 | 225 | 2,500 | Garg. | 1000 | 100k | 140 | 40 |
| Windjammer | 1500 | 250 | 350 | 7,000 | Colossal | 1250 | 150k | 160 | 50 |

**Not all are given statistics accurate to the history of their name. They are meant more to inspire the ship's visual design than to dictate its mechanical characteristics.*

***Volume here refers only to the volume of materials used in the ship's construction, not to the total volume enclosed by the ship.*

Step two: Select a construction material

Most ships in the astral sea are made of some kind of wood, but many others use metal or even stone. Each material has different attributes, and will give your ship different AC, damage threshold, and Hp. Select a material and enter its density, hp modifier, value modifier, damage threshold, and AC into the table. Damage threshold refers to the minimum amount of damage that must be inflicted to harm the ship at all - any damage less than this value is ignored. You can then

calculate the ship's mass by multiplying its volume by its material density. Enter this value where marked on the table. For every 10,000 kg of mass, a ship takes a 1ft. speed penalty. Next, multiply the ship's base value by its material value modifier and enter the result on the table. Mark the material's damage resistances, immunities, and vulnerabilities.

Construction Materials

| Name | Density (kg/m ³) | Hp Modifier | Value Modifier | Damage Threshold | AC Resist | Immune | Vulnerable |
|------------|------------------------------|-------------|----------------|------------------|-----------|----------|------------|
| Spruce | 450 | 1 | 1 | 10 | 13 L,A | Ps,C | F,N |
| Pine | 500 | 1 | 1 | 15 | 13 L,A | Ps,C | F,N |
| Elm | 560 | 1 | 1 | 15 | 13 L,A | Ps,C | F,N |
| Oak | 740 | 1.5 | 3 | 20 | 13 L,A | Ps,C | F,N |
| Mahogany | 850 | 1.6 | 15 | 20 | 15 L,A | Ps,C | F,N |
| Muntegra | 1190 | 10 | 50 | 30 | 20 L | Ps,C,N | F |
| Granite | 2600 | 6 | 5 | 30 | 15 F | Ps,C,N | A |
| Aluminum | 2700 | 5 | 12 | 20 | 15 | Ps,C,N | A,F |
| Iron | 7850 | 8 | 10 | 40 | 18 F | Ps,C,N | A |
| Steel | 7850 | 12 | 20 | 50 | 20 | Ps,F,C,N | A |
| Copper | 8940 | 7 | 15 | 20 | 13 F | Ps,C,N | A |
| Adamantine | 6500 | 15 | 30 | 60 | 25 | Ps,F,C,N | |

Step three: Propulsion

Your ship needs a way to move. The cheapest options are, of course, sails, but there is a limit to how many sails a ship may have, as dictated by the number of masts the ship can accommodate. This is determined by its size category: a Medium ship has no masts, a Large ship has one, a Huge ship has 2, and a Gargantuan ship can have 3 or 4. Each mast can hold a mainsail and 2 topsails. Jibs and fingsails, however, are not affixed to the mast and can be put on ships without masts. Fingsails are affixed to the side of a ship - like fins - and can be rotated or tilted up and down to control the ship's tilt and pitch. These sails

do not add speed to your ship, but do increase its maneuverability. Maneuverability is measured by the ship's turn radius, or how small of a circle it can make. In the astral sea, however, this applies to rotation or turning in three-dimensional space as well as two. Jets provide more thrust, but cannot be pivoted to control the ship's direction. Miracle crews can do both, but require a weekly upkeep. A spell-imbued keel has no effect on the ship physically, but allows it and its crew to project immaterial versions of themselves across the astral plane, as outlined in the previous section.

Propulsion Components

| Name | Type | Max Speed Bonus | Value Bonus | Maneuverability bonus |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Mainsail | Catchment | 20 ft.(2mph)/sail | 100 gp/sail | -1 ft./sail |
| Topsail | Catchment | 10 ft.(1 mph)/sail | 75 gp/sail | - |
| Jib | Catchment | - | 50 gp/sail | -1 ft./sail |
| Fingsail | Catchment | - | 250 gp/sail | -2 ft./sail |
| Steam Engine | Jet | 10 ft.(1 mph)/jet | 500 gp/jet | - |
| Steam Turbine | Jet | 10 ft.(1 mph)/jet | 1,000 gp/jet | - |
| Black powder rocket | Jet | 30 ft.(3 mph)/jet | 750 gp/jet | - |
| Elemental expectorator, flame | Jet | 60 ft.(6 mph)/jet | 5,000 gp/jet | - |
| Elemental expectorator, air | Jet | 45 ft.(4.5 mph)/jet | 4,000 gp/jet | - |
| Elemental expectorator, water | Jet | 30 ft.(3 mph)/jet | 3,000 gp/jet | - |
| Miracle | Mirifical | 5 ft.(0.5 mph)/person | 15 gp/person | -2 ft./person |
| Vet. Miracle | Mirifical | 10 ft.(1 mph)/person | 20 gp/person | -3 ft./person |
| Sensory deprivation miracle | Mirifical | 20 ft.(2 mph)/person | 25 gp/person | - |
| Spell-imbued keel | Dissociative | 10 ft. x cumulative score of crew | Cha 10x normal value | All turn radii become 1 ft. while in projected form |

Select the propulsion components you want for your ship and tally up their speed, maneuverability, and value bonuses, tracking them on the table. Remember to select components that will allow your ship to be maneuverable as well as fast, and make sure you have enough thrust to overcome the ship's mass penalty to speed. Sum up all of these bonuses and mark them on your table.

Next, calculate your max speed by subtracting your ship's mass penalty (-1ft. per 10,000 kg) from your total Speed bonus. This is your maximum speed. Similarly, subtract your total maneuverability bonus from your ship's base turn radius. This is your final turn radius, and determines how small of a circle your ship can sail. Calculate your stopping distance by dividing your ship's mass by 1,000; the result is the number of feet it takes your ship to go from full-speed to a complete stop. Record this value on the table. Acceleration is handled separately - your ship's maximum acceleration is equal to $\frac{1}{4}$ of its maximum speed; this is the speed in feet that your ship can accelerate per round. Make sure you record this number as well. Finally, tally up your value bonuses due to propulsion components. They'll be added together with your ship's other value bonuses at the end.

Step four: Armed to the boom

Each ship type has a given number of armament mount positions; this is the maximum number of armaments that ship can use. Select armaments for your ship up to this

maximum and enter your selections' names and value bonuses on the table. Sum up the value bonuses and record the total armament value bonus.

Astral Armaments

| Name | Ammunition | Bonus to hit/saving throw | Target | Range (ft.) | Damage | Firing Rate | Value Bonus |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|-------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| Ballista | Ballista bolts | +6 to hit | Point | 120/480 | 3d10 pier. | 1/3 rounds | 500 gp |
| Black powder catapult | Kegs of black powder, 70/shots/ton | Dex, DC 20 | Explosion, 10 ft. radius | 75/150 | 10d10 fire | once every 3 rounds | 500 gp |
| Cannon | 30 lb. round shot, 70 shots/ton, 15 lb. chain shot, 140 shots/ton | +6 to hit | Point | 600/2,400 | 8d10 bludgeoning | once every 5 rounds | 500 gp |
| Elemental expectorator, earth | - | +5 to hit | Point | 20/50 | 8d10 bludgeoning | once per round | 1,500 gp |
| Elemental expectorator, flame | - | Dex, DC 20 | 15 ft. cone of fire | 15 | 5d10 fire | once per round | 2,500 gp |
| Harpoon cannon | Harpoons, 420 shots/ton | +Dex mod to hit | Point | 60/100 | 2d10 piercing | once per round | 100 gp |
| Mounted eyestalk | Beholder agony | See <i>eye rays</i> , MM p. 28. Only one effect per eyestalk. | Point | 120 | See <i>Monster Manual</i> | once per round | 5,000 gp |
| Mounted net gun | Packed net projectile | +6 to hit | 1 huge/ 2 large/6 med./ 12 small creatures in 25 ft. radius | 50 | Targets immobilized by net | once per round | 125 gp |
| Ram | - | +8 to hit | Point | Point blank | 12d10 bludgeon. | - | 250 gp |
| Spittle sprayer | Acid, black dragon or otherwise | Dex, DC 15 | 20 ft. cone of acid | 20 ft. | 8d8 acid | once per round | 2,500 gp |
| Web valve | Giant spider silk glands | Dex, DC 15 | 20 ft. cone of sticky web | 20 ft. | 0, target is immobilized, DC 15 | once every three rounds | 1,000 gp |

Step Five: Customization (optional)

There are many things you can add to your ship to improve it in various ways. Listed here are a few that can give your ship a concrete mechanical bonus. Non-functional upgrades,

such as decorations, paint, swimming pools, etc. can be included as a miscellaneous value bonus. Select upgrades from this list and enter them and their value bonuses on the table. Sum up the total miscellaneous value bonus.

Miscellaneous Upgrades, pg. 1

| Name | Description | Value Bonus |
|--------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Automatic Orienter | The ship is equipped with a mechanical contrivance which allows the captain to set the ship's pitch, tilt, and direction of motion to discrete values using various dials and levers. This negates the need for crew to adjust sails and/or other equipment manually, decreasing the ship's base crew requirement by one-quarter. | 5,000 gp |
| Chapel cabin | One of the ship's cabins has been formally consecrated as a shrine to a single god. This cabin functions as a temple for purposes of prayer and ritual. Any magical or divine effects that would be present in a normal temple to that god are present here. This upgrade can only be applied to Huge or larger ships. | 500 gp |
| Clockwork crew | All or some of your ship's normal crew has been replaced with clockwork automata capable of operating the ship's equipment with expertise. Clockwork crew obey the captain's commands without question, and can conduct any shipboard task, including manning ship armaments. They cannot perform attacks independent of ship armaments, however. Clockwork crew cannot mutiny, and the DM does not need to track crew happiness or livelihood. If the living crew mutinies, the clockwork crew does not. Each automaton requires 50gp worth of repairs each year. | 5,000 gp per crew member |
| Deck garden | Part of the ship's deck has been devoted to cultivating an herb garden or grove. This allows the ship to provide alchemical ingredients, spell components, and healing herbs. The garden must be tended once per day, but this duty can be delegated to a crewmember or ship servant. This upgrade can only be applied to Huge or larger ships. | 500 gp |

Miscellaneous Upgrades, pg. 2

| Name | Description | Value Bonus |
|-----------------------|---|-------------|
| Flask of destruction | The ship contains a flask of thaumaturgic glass filled with the raw essence of the elemental plane of fire. When this flask is broken, as in a self-destruct scenario, it explodes, dealing 100d10 fire damage to anything within a 500 ft. radius. | 20,000 gp |
| Githyanki dynamic map | The ship is equipped with an enchanted globe capable of projecting a three-dimensional map of the astral sea. This map updates in real-time with the locations of astral motes, divine planes, and Githyanki ships. The signals of Githyanki tracers are also displayed. This device measures the eddies of energy emanating from Tu'narath to cartograph the ever-changing configuration of the astral sea. Accurate to within 1 mile for locations in the Supernal Above and Pelagic Zone. Only accurate to within 50 miles for locations in the Stellar Abyss. | 20,000 gp |
| Iron strongbox | The ship's hold or the captain's cabin contains a 3 ft. by 2ft. by 2 ft. iron strongbox. The strongbox is protected by a key lock that requires a successful DC 20 Dexterity or DC 25 Strength check to open without the key. The strongbox has a damage threshold of 20 and immunity to psychic, cold, and necrotic damage, resistance to fire damage, and vulnerability to acid damage. The strongbox has 100 effective Hp and is considered to be broken open when it reaches 0 Hp. The strongbox weighs 50 lbs when empty. | 500 gp |
| Library | One of the ship's cabins has been converted into a small library. Magic-users may research spells here, and the library can be used to provide a +5 bonus to an Intelligence (Knowledge) check for every 4 hours spent researching information relevant to that check, up to 12 hours. | 5,000 gp |
| Mini-forge | Two of the ship's cabins have been converted into a miniature forge. Metal crafting of all kinds may be performed here. This upgrade can only be applied to Huge or larger ships. | 1,000 gp |

Miscellaneous Upgrades, pg. 3

| Name | Description | Value Bonus |
|-----------------------------|--|-------------|
| Plentiful pantry | This magical room provides enough dry and fresh goods to feed 10 medium creatures perpetually. The food replenishes every morning. Creatures may petition the pantry to restock with some specified food item. Depending on the pantry's personality, such requests may or may not be granted. Some pantries delight in stocking overflowing amounts of foods they have learned the ship's passengers hate. Even friendly pantries, if offended by insulting comments, may choose to restock bad food or a single type of food until their hurt feelings are assuaged. One may be able to survive for a while on a pantry filled with nothing but onions, but the ship's crew certainly wouldn't be happy about it. This upgrade can be applied multiple times. This upgrade can only be applied to Huge or larger ships. | 10,000 gp |
| Portable cargo holes | The ship is equipped with 10 portable holes, which expand its cargo tonnage by 50 tons. This upgrade can be applied multiple times. | 1,000 gp |
| Sargassum anchor | Huge mats of celestial sargassum have been draped at convenient points along the ship's hull. When exposed to bright light, such as that of a sunrod or a lantern, their brain berries act as anchors, allowing a ship to arrest its motion and resist the effects of currents. Halve the ship's stopping distance. | 100 gp |
| Sensory deprivation chamber | This heavy-duty steel capsule is filled with salt water isotonic to human blood (adjustable) and kept at humanoid body temperature (adjustable). A medium or smaller humanoid may enter the chamber and float within without effort or danger of drowning. While inside the chamber, they are isolated from all outside sound, sight, and smell. When properly calibrated, the solution within the chamber should feel almost like nothing against their skin. This chamber allows the use of a single sensory deprivation miracle crew member by enhancing their ability to meditate. However, crew members inside of these chambers are unable to hear commands and adjust their control of the ship accordingly. Therefore, they only provide speed, not maneuverability bonuses. This upgrade can only be applied to Huge or larger ships. This upgrade can be applied multiple times. | 2,000 gp |

Miscellaneous Upgrades, pg. 4

| Name | Description | Value Bonus |
|------------------------|---|-------------|
| Smuggling compartments | The ship has undergone modifications to make it suitable for carrying illegal cargo. The captain's cabin is equipped with several hidden cabinets and a desk with hidden drawers for storing illicit goods and agreements. Cramped secret passages connect the captain's cabin, the cargo deck, and a concealed secondary entrance in the hull that can be used for clandestine deliveries and pickups. As well, one-third of the ship's cargo space has been converted into secret compartments. All of these modifications require a successful DC 25 Intelligence (Investigation) check to detect and are protected by masterwork locks (DC 25). | 2,500 gp |
| Stasis box | This box is enchanted to maintain sub-zero temperatures. It can be used to preserve food or to place living creatures into suspended animation. It is large enough to contain 1 ton of material or 4 medium creatures. This upgrade can only be applied to Huge or larger ships. | 6,000 gp |
| Steel vault | The ship's hold contains a solid-steel vault. This vault can contain up to 2 m ³ of material and is large enough for a Medium or smaller creature to enter. The vault is equipped with a masterwork combination lock that requires a successful DC 30 Dexterity check or a DC 35 strength check to open without the combination. The vault has a damage threshold of 50 and immunity to psychic, fire, cold, and necrotic damage, and vulnerability to acid damage. The vault has 500 effective Hp, and is considered to be broken open when it reaches 0 Hp. The vault weighs 1000 lbs when empty. | 10,000 gp |
| Teleportation circle | The deck is inscribed with a permanent teleportation circle. The ship can now be the target of plane shift or teleportation spells. The effects of Forbiddance still apply if present, however. | 1,000 gp |
| Trawling net | The ship possesses a trawling net and associated equipment. This net can be deployed below the ship to catch fish or other creatures as the ship sails. 8d10 fish or other creatures will be caught for every hour the trawling net is deployed. | 200 gp |

Step Six: Enchanted Hull (optional)

Astral ships can be imbued with certain spell effects. This requires at least a week of work by a magic-user who can cast the spell normally. Spells instilled in this way are permanent unless the ship is destroyed or they are removed by *dispel magic* cast at 8th-level or higher. A single ship may not have

more than three spell instillations. Select instillations for your ship and calculate their value bonus by multiplying their base value bonus by the mass of your ship divided by 100. Sum all of these bonuses and record the total.

Spell Instillations, pg. 1

| Name | Effect | Value Bonus (gp per 1,000 kg) |
|-----------------|--|-------------------------------|
| Absorb elements | Choose acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage. The ship has resistance to that type of damage. | 5 |
| Arcane eye | The ship possesses an invisible, magical eye that circles the hull or moves according to the captain's mental command, up to 30 ft. from the ship. The captain mentally receives visual information from the eye, which has normal vision and darkvision out to 30 feet. The eye can look in every direction. The eye alerts the captain to any unusual activity it observes, even if the captain is not paying attention. If the captain is asleep when this occurs, they are woken by the eye. | 2 |
| Blur | When this effect is active, the ship and its inhabitants become blurred, shifting and wavering to all who can see you. Any creature has disadvantage on attack rolls against it or its passengers. An attacker is immune to this effect if it doesn't rely on sight, as with blindsight, or can see through illusions, as with truesight. | 5 |
| Control weather | The captain controls the weather within 5 miles of the ship as with <i>control weather</i> . This effect cannot control the direction of astral winds or currents. Additionally, the captain may create or dissipate an astral weather effect (other than a joy spring) in the area once per day. | 35 |
| Control winds | The captain of the ship takes control of the astral currents within 100 ft. of the ship. They can use this effect to provide or augment favorable currents or to negate unfavorable currents, but they cannot provide favorable currents if unfavorable currents exist. | 15 |

Spell Instillations, pg. 2

| Name | Effect | Value Bonus (gp per 1,000 kg) |
|---------------|---|-------------------------------|
| Darkness | When this effect is active, magical darkness envelops the ship out to 15 feet from its hull in all directions. A creature with darkvision can't see through this darkness, and non-magical light can't illuminate it. If any of this spell's area overlaps with an area of light created by a spell of 2nd level or lower, the spell that created the light is dispelled. This effect may be activated only once per day, but for an unlimited duration. | 2 |
| Find the path | Once every 3 months, the ship is able to magically find the most direct physical route to a specific location on the astral plane that at least one of its passengers is familiar with. If you name a destination that isn't specific (such as "a green dragon's lair"), this effect fails. Until the ship reaches the designated location, the captain knows how far it is and in what direction it lies. This may take the shape of a compass that points to the desired location, or a magical map upon which the destination and the ship's current location appear. While traveling there, whenever you are presented with a choice of paths along the way, you automatically determine which path is the shortest and most direct route (but not necessarily the safest route) to the destination. | 10 |
| Forbiddance | Creatures cannot teleport onto or nearby the ship or use portals, such as those created by the <i>gate</i> spell, to enter the ship. The spell proofs the area against planar travel, and therefore prevents creatures from accessing the area by way of <i>plane shift</i> or <i>astral projection</i> . In addition, the ship's forboding aura damages types of creatures that you choose when it is applied. Choose one or more of the following: celestials, elementals, fey, fiends, and undead. When a chosen creature enters the ship's area for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there, the creature takes 5d10 radiant or necrotic damage (your choice when you first apply this effect.) When you instill this spell, you can designate a password. A creature that speaks the password as it enters the area takes no damage from the spell. A creature that knows the password may teleport or portal onto the ship normally. | 20 |

Spell Instillations, pg. 3

| Name | Effect | Value Bonus (gp per 1,000 kg) |
|--------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| Invisibility | When this effect is active, the ship and its passengers are invisible. This effect may be activated once per day, but for an unlimited duration. | 30 |
| Pass without trace | The ship and its inhabitants gain a +10 bonus to Dexterity (Stealth) checks. Sounds originating from the ship cannot be heard beyond 15 feet from its hull. | 20 |
| Plant growth | Magical energy revivifies the wood of the ship's hull, causing it to sprout branches and leaves. No matter the type of wood used to construct the ship, the branches bear fruit of various kinds sufficient to feed the ship's maximum occupancy. Consumed fruit grows back within a week. This spell cannot be instilled into a non-wooden vessel. | 15 |
| Sanctuary | Any creature who targets the ship's passengers with an attack or a harmful spell must first make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature must choose a new target or lose the attack or spell. This spell doesn't protect the warded creatures from area effects, such as the explosion of a fireball. When a warded creature makes an attack or casts a spell that affects an enemy creature, this spell ends for the attacking creature. | 10 |

Finally, sum all of your ship's value bonuses together. This is your ship's total value. You also need to calculate your crew requirements and weekly upkeep. Each ship design has a minimum crew requirement; your ship sails at $\frac{1}{2}$ max speed when you do not have enough basic crew members to properly man it. Each sail also requires 2 crew members to control. Crew members assigned to your ship's sails can come from the minimum crew requirement, but if you have enough sails to require more crew members than the minimum, you must hire and pay for extra crew to cover those sails, or you will not gain the bonuses of those sails.

Each normal crew member requires an upkeep of 2gp per week. Miracle crew members are highly trained and specialized, so they require a much higher weekly upkeep as given by their value bonus on the Propulsion Components table in Step Three. Calculate your total weekly crew upkeep by multiplying the number of normal crew members by 2gp and the number of miracle crew members by their given upkeep value and adding the two together. Record this number on your ship's table; this is how much gold you must pay your crew every week in order to prevent them from mutinying and/or abandoning your vessel at the nearest port.

Naval Maneuvers

Like much of three-dimensional gameplay, naval maneuvering may be best handled without complicated diagrams or dioramas. However, if you do want to use a battle map for your encounters, *Waters Above* does provide a few rules to facilitate naval maneuvers in your game.

Each ship has a minimum turn radius. This number determines the smallest circle a ship can make, and includes turns made vertically. So, for example, a galleon with a turn radius of 40 ft. whose captain wished to turn the ship by 180 degrees would have to turn along a circle 80 ft. wide, and would have made a 90 degree turn by the time it moved forward 40 ft. Only after that point would the ship begin heading

in the opposite direction. By the time it had completed the 180 degree turn, it would be back at its starting point, but displaced by 80 ft. to one side. A ship completes a turn at a maximum of $\frac{1}{6}$ th its maximum linear speed; to simplify this, it takes 1 round to complete a 45 degree turn, 2 rounds to complete a 90 degree turn, 3 rounds to complete a 180 degree turn, and 6 rounds to complete a 360 degree turn at maximum speed. The same rules apply for a ship turning in an up or down direction, but all changes in tilt are made with a radius of zero.

A ship's acceleration is determined by its stopping distance, which is a number of feet equal to its mass divided by 1000, rounded in whatever way makes the math easiest for you. So, for example, a 111,000 kg Githyanki Corvette would have a stopping distance equal to 110 feet. This is the distance it takes that ship to go from full-speed to a complete stop. A ship can accelerate a number of feet equal to $\frac{1}{4}$ of its stopping distance per round, up to its maximum speed. If a ship uses only sails, it can accelerate only up to the maximum speed of the astral currents in the vicinity. Roll a d100 to determine the ft./round speed of the currents and a d8 to determine their direction, if you have not already determined it as part of long-distance travel.

Your players may wish to do things with their ship that require naval finesse, such as sailing through a narrow gap between enemy ships or into a small cave in an astral mote. The ship's ability to accomplish these feats is determined by its Acrobatics bonus. A ship's acrobatics bonus begins at +15 with a turn radius of 1 ft. and decreases by 5 for every 10 ft. of turn radius above that. So, for example, a Githyanki galleon with a turn radius of 70 ft. would have no acrobatics bonus, while a Githyanki corvette with a turn radius of 22 ft. would have an acrobatics bonus of +5. Set a DC according to the difficulty of the feat and roll a d20, adding the ship's Acrobatics bonus to determine success or failure. You may allow your players to contribute to the ship's roll by performing certain spells or actions.

Long-distance Astral Journeys

Although locations in the astral sea are ever-changing, you can make astral travel more similar to sea travel in the mortal world by ruling that astral motes don't move fast enough for it to matter week-to-week. In this case, you can easily make a map of locations in your astral plane, use it to determine travel times, and allow the party to use it to guide their explorations.

The astral plane is technically infinite, but practically finite. Most locations are relatively close to the divine planes, which all stay within a 35,000 mile-radius circle centered above the mortal realm (assuming an astral plane of 'flat' shape). This number was calculated by setting 6 months as the length of time it should take a Githyanki Corvette (see Appendix B) to travel from one side of the core to the other if moving constantly at maximum speed. If you wish your astral core to be larger or smaller, you can adjust its size using this method. This is by no means the end of the astral plane, however, or even the end of the inhabited region. The core is surrounded by a region known as the Edge Waters, which extends another 140,000 miles. The Edge Waters are the limit of the regions well-known to divine entities, and mark the border of territory meaningful to the celestial stage. That does not mean there is nothing to find beyond the Edge Waters, and making those discoveries may be central to your party's adventures.

The astral plane's depths are much less intimidating in distance, albeit much more remote in other ways. The Supernal Above is the smallest region, stretching just 10 miles in height. The Pelagic Zone occupies most of the plane, taking up the 50 miles above the Supernal Above. The Stellar Abyss lies beyond this, and lasts for about 25 miles, making its outermost borders about 85 miles from the boundaries of the mortal plane. Keep in mind that space does continue beyond this line, but the Firmament Field does not, so creatures outside it possess no way to breathe. Adventures beyond the Stellar Abyss would become full-fledged space exploration, but if

there are sites of interest at such distances they are unknown to anyone in the multiverse.

If you instead choose to use a spherical shape for your astral plane, you can accomplish similar effects as the above by setting the radius of your Supernal Above core to 35,000 miles, the thickness of your Pelagic Zone shell to 175,000 miles, and the thickness of your Stellar Abyss shell to 87,500 miles. A spherical shape is just as valid a choice as a flat shape, and may in fact make more sense, but it does exponentially increase the effective size of your astral plane's habitable regions. A flat astral sea of the dimensions given above would have a total livable area of 8.18×10^{12} cubic miles, or about 41 times the livable area of earth, whereas a spherical astral sea of the above dimensions would have a total livable area of 1.1×10^{17} cubic miles, or 560,000 times the livable area of earth. A good chunk of that area is the Stellar Abyss, and inhospitable to most creatures. Likewise, most of the astral plane's livable area does not have any kind of solid ground, cutting down the number of potential living places for terrestrial creatures tremendously. Even so, the plane's scale is simply too large for any single creature, even one with an indefinite 'afterlife-span,' to explore in its entirety. Consequently, the plane is replete with secrets and undiscovered wonders.

If you choose not to use a map for your astral plane, determine a destination's distance from the party by rolling a d100 and multiplying the result by 250 miles. Then, you can calculate their travel time by dividing the distance by their ship's maximum speed. If their ship uses sails, roll a d6 to determine whether the currents are favorable or unfavorable. If the roll is 1 or 2, the currents are favorable and reduce the travel time by 25%. If the roll is 3 or 4, the currents are neither favorable nor unfavorable. If the roll is 5 or 6, the currents are unfavorable and increase the travel time by 25%.

Your players may wish to attempt to use their skills in order to speed up travel or locate little-known locations. To do so, allow them to make a skill check according to the DCs in the table below, and apply the result to your previously calculated travel time.

Skill Checks for Astral Navigation

| Destination | Skill | Success | Failure |
|-----------------|---|------------------|------------------|
| Major plane | Religion (easy), Investigation (moderate), Arcana (moderate), Nature (hard) | -15% travel time | +15% travel time |
| Well-known mote | Investigation (moderate), Arcana (moderate), Nature (hard) | -10% travel time | +10% travel time |
| Mapped mote | Investigation (moderate), Arcana (moderate), Nature (hard) | -20% travel time | +20% travel time |
| Rumored mote | Investigation (hard), Arcana (hard) | -10% travel time | +0% travel time |

You may also want to provide random encounters for your players during periods of travel. The following table provides a few ideas for doing so.

Random Encounters on the Astral Seas

| d12 + d8 | Skill |
|----------|---|
| 2 | Ghost gang ship |
| 3 | Ambition stream (10% chance it leads the way the party wants to go) |
| 4 | Jitter sigil |
| 5 | Merfolk caravan or peddler |
| 6 | Gyrovague ship |
| 7-8 | Githyanki raiding ship |
| 9-10 | Doldrums for 1d100 miles |
| 11-12 | Bat-whale sighting |
| 13-14 | Scattered treasure from an extradimensional item mishap |
| 15 | Brouhaha |
| 16 | Tempest |
| 17 | Infernal slave ship |
| 18 | Friendly merchant, mercenary, or divine ship |
| 19 | Stranded Peregrine |
| 20 | Astral monster, such as a dragon or astral kraken |

Mutiny

Your ship's crew is made up of people, and people won't put up with poor conditions indefinitely. If you don't keep your crew members happy by providing their pay promptly and keeping the grog flowing, they may rebel against you. The mutiny likelihood is tracked with happiness and fear. Crew fear

and happiness are affected by almost all of the party's actions they are privy to. For most of these, it is up to you as a DM to make a judgement on how the players' actions affect the crew's happiness and fear, but the table below provides some guidelines for common events.

Crew Status

| Action | Fear | Happiness |
|--|------|-----------|
| Bonus pay, per week | - | +15 |
| Late or missing pay, per week | - | -15 |
| Party slays a terrible foe in front of crew | +15 | +15 |
| Party runs from enemy or is critically wounded by foe | -15 | -15 |
| Bonus alcohol rations | - | +15 |
| Low or no alcohol rations, per week | - | -15 |
| Half rations, per week | - | -15 |
| No rations, per week | - | -30 |
| Crew member forced off gangplank | +30 | -30 |
| Crew's wounds tended by party member | -15 | +15 |
| Party wounds crew member | +15 | -15 |
| Visibly evil party member | +15 | -15 |
| Forced to sail into terrible conditions or environs, such as storms or the Stellar Abyss | - | -30 |
| Use of 5th-level spell or higher in front of crew | +15 | - |
| Chapel upgrade | - | +15 |
| Library upgrade | - | +5 |
| Deck garden upgrade | - | +5 |
| Plentiful pantry upgrade | - | +5 |
| Clockwork crew member present | - | -15 |

Crew happiness starts at 75. For every 15 happiness points below 75, the chance of mutiny increases by 10%. Crew fear starts at 0. For every 15 fear points above 0, the chance of mutiny decreases by 10%. Calculate the crew's mutiny likelihood every week, or whenever it seems a good time in your story to do so. For every week the crew has a mutiny likelihood above 0%, roll a d100 to determine whether or not the crew will rebel. If the result

is above the crew's mutiny likelihood, they do not rebel. If the result is below their mutiny likelihood, they will wait for the most opportune moment to rebel against the players. If their fear is below 50 points, they will choose to do this by attacking the players when they are most vulnerable. If their fear is above 50 points, the crew will not risk battle with the players under any circumstances. Instead, they will simply abscond with the ship

and its contents as soon as the players are out of sight. After a successful mutiny, the crew usually become astral pirates, as most captains won't hire crewmembers that have been part of a mutiny in the past.

Chases

Visibility varies depending on one's depth in the astral sea, but - except in the Stellar Abyss - it is generally possible to see a distance of at least 50 miles in all directions, although it may vary depending on the weather conditions in that region. This means that a ship that wishes to start a chase with another must initially come within 50 miles of it, and must stay within 50 miles of it to maintain the chase. Aside from creative use of spells, there isn't much your party can do to close distance in a chase except to make sure that their ship is moving at its maximum speed.

If they are instead the quarry, they can attempt any number of things to dissuade their pursuers. No doubt most of their ideas will surprise you and require improvisation, but there are a few obvious choices. For example, your players may try to perform evasive maneuvers, ducking quickly behind an astral mote or into a storm to lose the pursuing ship. For such attempts, set a basic DC of 30, then decrease it by 5 for every 10 miles away the party's pursuers are. Allow the players to apply any bonuses that seem reasonable. If they succeed, the chase ends when the pursuing ship is more than 50 miles away. The only exception to this rule is in chases by Githyanki raiders - if the raiders draw within 10 miles, they will attempt to use high-powered torpedoes to attach magical tracing devices to the players' ship, allowing them to thwart evasion attempts and continue to pursue ships that have left their field of view.

Barring evasion attempts and Githyanki tracers, the outcome of a chase will be determined solely by the ships' speeds. If the fleeing ship has a higher speed than the pursuer, calculate when the chase will end by subtracting the distance between the ships

from 50 miles and dividing the resulting number by the difference in their speeds. This is the time in hours it will take for the fleeing ship to lose the pursuer. So, for example, if the fleeing ship has a speed of 25 mph and the pursuing ship has a speed of 20 mph and the chase starts at a distance of 1 mile, it will end in $49 \text{ miles} / 5 \text{ mph} = 10 \text{ hours}$. A faster fleeing ship may be in danger while within range of the pursuers' armaments, but is typically safe once it clears their firing range. However, the pursuers may launch faster mounted units to continue the pursuit if they possess them. Such creatures are rare, but pursuers may also attempt to teleport directly onto the fleeing ship if they have magic users capable of doing so.

If the fleeing ship has a lower speed than the pursuing ship, calculate when the chase will end by dividing the distance between the two ships by the difference between their speeds. So, for example, if the fleeing ship has a speed of 25 mph and the pursuing ship has a speed of 30 mph and the chase starts at a distance of 50 miles, the pursuing ship will reach its quarry in $50 \text{ miles} / 5 \text{ mph} = 10 \text{ hours}$. A failed escape typically results in ship-to-ship combat, covered in the next section.

Ship-to-ship Combat

There are multiple aspects to combat between ships. Ship-to-ship combat includes armament fire, ranged attacks by archers and magic users, boarding of enemy vessels, and naval maneuvers.

Armaments

Ship-to-ship combat typically opens with the fire of deckside armaments once the ships come within range. At greatest range, cannons can begin firing at 2,400 feet. For ships approaching each other at full speed, this means that they can each get off a couple of cannon shots before reaching each other. All other armaments come within range at approximately the same distance; see *Step Four: Armed to the Boom* for details. Each type of armament has a different purpose. Some are best at damaging the enemy vessel; namely

cannons, which can either punch a hole in the enemy's hull or use chain shot to take out the enemy's masts, crippling their ability to flee.

Black powder catapults are more useful for a 'salted earth' approach, wherein the attackers don't care to capture the ship or its crew. Other armaments are most useful against the ship's crew and defenders. Each armament requires a crew member in order to fire, and crew are not typically trained warriors or adventurers; they are incapacitated if not killed when they take any damage. Players may man armaments as well, but they will have to use their entire action to fire or reload the weapon. Finally, a ship fitted with a heavy metal ram at the bow may try to ram the enemy vessel. This can be difficult to carry off in practice, however, unless the enemy is significantly slower and less maneuverable than the attacker.

Ranged units

Archers, crossbow users, and spell slingers come into range at about the same time as the short-range armaments. Except for spells, the attacks of these units are unlikely to damage the enemy vessel significantly and are best used against crew and defenders.

Boarding

Boarding an enemy vessel is less dangerous in the astral plane than it is in the mortal world. All creatures in the astral plane gain some kind of astral speed, allowing them to board the enemy vessel simply by jumping and willing themselves to fly across the gap as soon as they come close to the enemy ship. Shipboard combat is no different from regular combat, but boarders tend to try to take out key targets that will incapacitate the ship. They may attempt to set fire to the sails, or to detonate stores of black powder in the hold. Otherwise, they simply fight to subdue or kill the crew and defenders.

Maneuvers

When ships approach each other to offer combat mutually, the fight typically opens with a strafing run, in which the two ships sail

past each other in opposite directions, firing and attempting to board each other as they pass. Once they've left firing range, they'll start making 180 degree turns to begin another strafing run. Fights typically continue in this way until one side runs up the white flag or their crew is completely killed or captured. Certain ships may attempt to maximize on their greater maneuverability by circling above or beneath the enemy, but this is only useful if they do have great speed and maneuverability - otherwise the enemy will simply match their movements and the battle assumes a typical strafing format, except with the horizon of battle slightly altered.

When ship-to-ship combat initiates as a result of a chase, the attacking vessel will typically slow their speed to match that of the enemy ship once they have come alongside, perhaps using grappling hooks to secure the decks of the two ships together and facilitate boarding. Combat that begins in this way usually has an imbalance of speed and maneuverability, so the victim vessel typically does not attempt to use naval maneuvers to combat the attacker. However, ships that are chased down by another may simply choose to surrender before battle begins, signaling their intent by flying a white flag.

Aside from shifting terrain, armaments, and ship Hp, there are not too many extra factors to keep track of in ship-to-ship combat as compared with normal combat. However, it is important to record what specific elements are damaged on each ship, such as cut masts, burned sails, hull punctures, and destroyed propulsion components. These are the points that can determine when a crew will decide to give up a fight and surrender - if their sails are on fire, their masts are felled, and their elemental expectorators destroyed, the losing crew may decide to surrender before their ship is damaged further. Whether they surrender or not, the damage to the players' ship will need to be repaired, as detailed in the next section.

Ship Equipment, Restocking, and Repairs

All ships come outfitted with standard naval equipment as outlined in the table below. If any of this equipment is lost or used up, replacements can be purchased at any astral city with a functional port, at the costs given in the table. However, it is not generally necessary to make your players outfit their ship with each of these items or to deduct the cost of each from their funds; simply assume that they purchase the appropriate equipment and replace any destroyed or used items when they make port. Ship repairs, however, should be an out-of-pocket expense for the party, even if it is only deducted by you behind the scenes after the game session.

When your players set out for a journey, assume that they purchase enough water, food, and alcohol to keep themselves and their crew in good health for the expected length of their journey, plus a healthy buffer. The amount of cargo space these supplies requires depends on the length of the journey. Classify it as a short, medium, or long expedition. Supplies for a short expedition take up 1/6th

of a ship's hold; for a medium, 1/3rd; for a long journey, one-half. If the party comes within a week of their journey's projected length without stopping at a port to restock, inform them that they are running dangerously low on supplies. At this time, they can choose to place the crew on half-rations, giving them an extra week before completely running out of food and water. If they do not restock once their supplies run out, the crew's happiness will gradually decrease due to lack of food and alcohol until they are ready to mutiny.

If all of this seems excessive to you, then of course you should simply handwave ship supplies in your campaign.

Repairs to your players' ship can only be made at a port of good size. The cost of repairs is equal to the ship's material value modifier multiplied by the number of hit points to be repaired. Repairs take one week for every 20 hit points. This is a good time to allow your players to make upgrades or purchase spell instillations for their ship.

Shipboard equipment

| Item | Cost | Item | Cost |
|--------------------------------|--------|------------------------------------|--------|
| Ale (50-gallon barrel) | 10 gp | Hourglass (1) | 25 gp |
| Animal feed (50-gallon barrel) | 5 gp | Lamp, hooded (10) | 1 sp |
| Arrows (1000 count) | 100 gp | Manacles (1) | 15 gp |
| Barrel (1) | 2 gp | Meat, salted (100-lb crate) | 20 gp |
| Bucket (1) | 5 sp | Oil, cooking (50-gallon barrel) | 1 gp |
| Canvas, oiled (sq. meter) | 1 gp | Oil, lamp (50-gallon barrel) | 1 gp |
| Cat, ratter (1) | 1 gp | Pickled vegetables (1-lb jar) | 1 sp |
| Chain, iron (10 ft.) | 30 gp | Pitch, caulking (50-gallon barrel) | 5 gp |
| Cheese (50-lb cask) | 5 gp | Pot, iron (1) | 1 gp |
| Corn meal (50-lb sack) | 10 gp | Rope, hempen (100 feet) | 1 gp |
| Dried beans (50-lb sack) | 10 gp | Salt (50-gallon barrel) | 100 gp |
| Fish, smoked (50-lb keg) | 20 gp | Soap (10-lb cask) | 5 gp |
| Flour (50-lb sack) | 10 gp | Spyglass (1) | 500 gp |
| Grappling hook (1) | 1 gp | Water (50-gallon barrel) | 10 gp |
| Hammock (10) | 5 gp | Winch (1) | 1 sp |
| Healer's kit (1) | 50 gp | Wine (10-lb cask) | 15 gp |

THE SUPERNAL ABOVE

Far above the uppermost zephyrs of the mortal world's atmosphere, beyond the reach of even the strongest dragon's wings, the Supernal Above marks the beginning of the astral plane. A radiant and tempestuous cloudscape, this region of the astral plane is coterminous with the sky of the mortal world, unless you rule otherwise, and encompasses both the planes of the gods and the 'surface' of the astral sea. This section details special features of this part of the astral plane, as well as its unique creatures, locales, and factions.

It was here that the Firmament was built, and here that its remnant is thickest and most magically charged. The lingering energies of its destruction keep the Supernal Above a warm summer sea and alter its appearance from the quasi-liquid form seen throughout most of the astral sea to something gaseous and foggy. The planes of the gods drift still along the axis upon which the Firmament was constructed, some still interfaced with remnants of the divine network. At a certain distance from this axis, the field condenses from clouds to waves, forming the 'surface' of the astral sea. Both above and below, however, the Field is composed of the same divine substance.

Fragments of the Firmament glow brilliantly throughout this region, illumining diatomaceous nebulae, accenting the aurora dinoflagellus, and limning nets of celestial sargassum.

SUPERNAL ABOVE: AT A GLANCE

Depth: 0-15 miles above the mortal realm

Temperature: 25-45° C/77-113° F

Illumination: Bright

Mutability: Moderate

Visibility: Normal

Scenes:

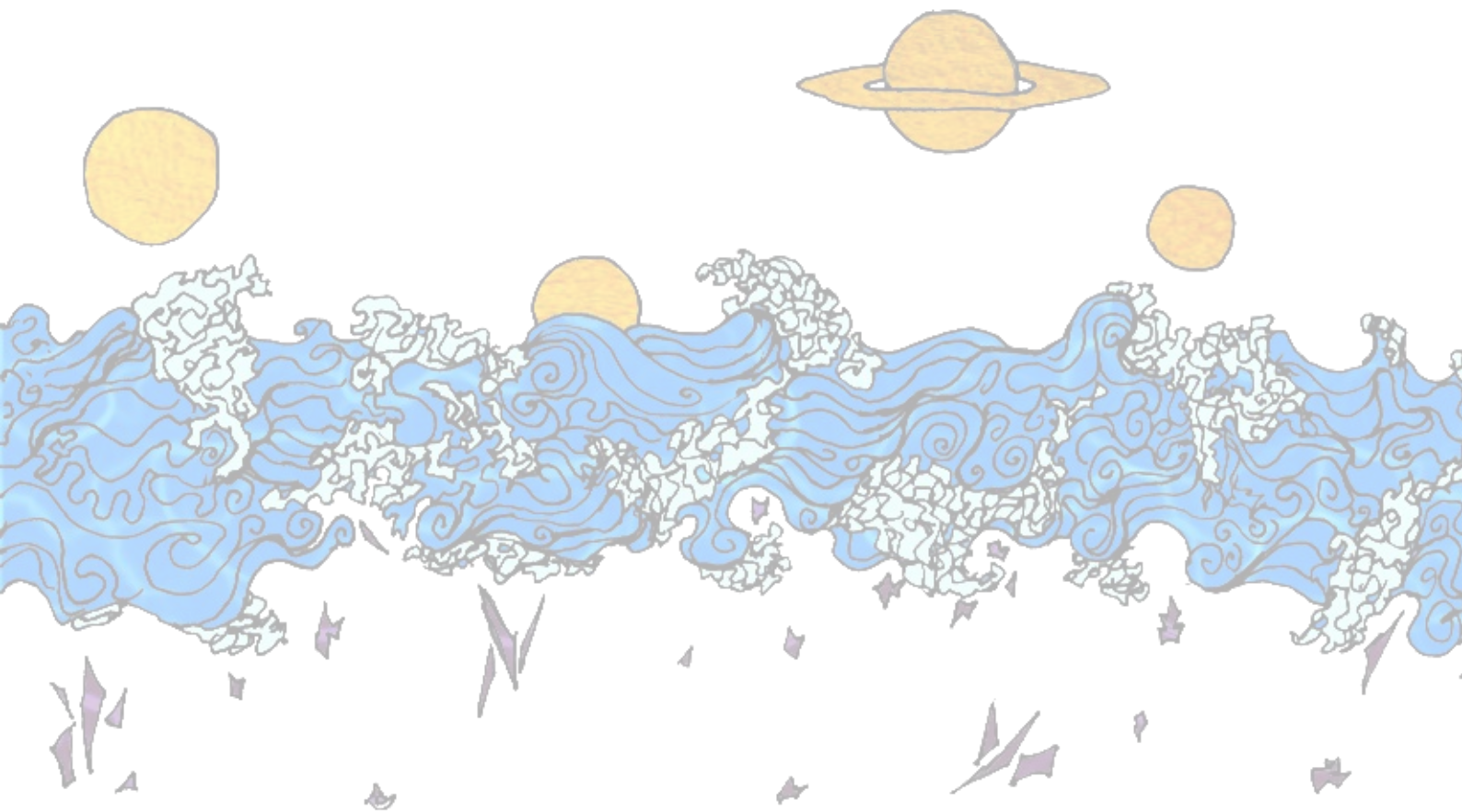
• *Towering golden clouds rise before you above the silvery surface of the astral sea, penetrated here and there by vivid green kelp, waving in the current. Sparkling schools of orange fish compete with flocks of small birds for forage, darting in and out of the mountainous clouds for cover, while teal anemones snatch both birds and fish that come within reach of their swaying tentacles.*

• *Before you is an enormous knot of ancient, living wood, the branches of the trees that make it up stretching out at all angles from the central mass. As you approach, thunder echoes from a great distance across the surface. Crabs scuttle across the bark, seeking their hollow hidey-holes, while fish dart into the sheltering crevices between the gnarled trunks and behind leaves now whipping in a sudden current.*

• *Beneath you, you see an enormous ribbon of brilliant blue phosphorescence, rippling slowly with the current. As you descend through it, the glow casts your features in unearthly light, and the substance of the cloud collects in a thin layer on your skin and clothes. When you emerge from the bottom of the nebula, you find the surface of the sea crowded with a tangle of driftwood, broken planks, ruined nets, and junk of every kind imaginable. Here and there, the*

trash heap is dotted by a tree or kelp that has managed to take hold in the garbage.

•A forest blankets the valley between the mote's two mountains, a patchwork of blood and lemon, grey-green and violet. As you come closer, you can see that it is not the leaves and needles of the trees that give the forest its colorful appearance, but rather the coral polyps grafted to their branches. Spectral fish dart between and through the trunks, while a single shark fin cuts through the top of the needled canopy.





The Supernal Above GEOGRAPHY

The Supernal Above is littered with a vast archipelago of astral motes of every origin, making it the most densely populated region in the entire astral plane. However, the currents of the firmament field are strongest here, and the location of an individual mote from month to month is highly unpredictable. What was near the core of the plane one year may be swept out to the Edge Waters in the next, and backwater fringes thrust into the limelight instead. In general, however, currents are stable, and groups of astral motes move together in a predictable path. Very few have mastered the interplay of all of the astral's slipstreams, even just in the core region, but most know what to expect from their own neighborhood.

The most warm and well-lit layer of the astral plane, the Supernal Above's motes are almost all lushly vegetated with both aquatic and terrestrial plants. As well, phytoplankton thrive in the warmth and brightness. Diatoms, dinoflagellates, and cyanobacteria form enormous blooms of life and color that drift amongst motes, serving as one of the foundations of the astral food chain. Baleen whales, bat-whales, polyps, molluscs, and other filter feeders all rely on these phytoplankton to survive - plus they look pretty!

Locales

Most encounters in the Supernal Above will take place on some kind of astral mote or on the open sea, but there are a few other types of locations that might form the setting for an adventure. Colloids, covered in the previous chapter, are most common here of any region of the astral plane. Rarely, the tops of giant astral seagrass meadows just brush the edge of this layer.

Divine Realms

The planes of the gods manifest in the astral plane as gigantic planetary orbs floating through the Supernal Above, or perhaps as enormous islands bounded by curtains of color. Whatever appearance you choose, they are separate from the astral itself, and their physical presence in it merely marks where those other planes may be entered. Peregrines, of course, are unable to enter any of the divine planes, but any other kind of creature may do so unless the plane's god specifically chooses to close the borders of the realm to them. The individual characteristics of specific divine planes will differ for every setting, and in most cases have been outlined in other texts, so they will not be treated in depth here.

Orbital Motes

Around each of the divine planes lies a dense archipelago of astral motes which orbit the plane and move with it along its astral progression. The character of these islands depends upon the identity of the divine realm; those around the Abyss or the Nine Hells are blasted and barren, wrecked by demons and devils, whereas those around Celestia might be pastoral and idyllic. Regardless, orbital motes serve as hubs of trade and travel in the astral plane, where Peregrines can meet to do business with those that dwell within the divine realms.

The deities themselves rarely enter the astral sea near their realms, preferring to use teleportation or portals to travel between planes, but their servants, such as angels, demons, devils, and exalted humanoids, are often sent on errands throughout the astral plane. In the grand scheme of things, however, these missions exist on the fringe of the gods' consciousness. The astral plane in itself is not the stage of divine contest; the mortal world is. What goes on in the astral may be influential, but it is not usually of great concern to the gods. It would take the eruption of a full-scale, plane-shattering divine war to elevate the astral back to strategic importance.

Sargassum Strands

The brilliance of the Supernal Above is home to spectacular plants and algae of all kinds. Among these are the sparkling celestial sargassum species, which form expansive matted nets strung above the astral waves like frond-draped faire lanterns. Free-floating, these nets drift alongside astral light sources with the currents of the Heavens. Strands of these alga stretch tens, perhaps hundreds of miles across the Supernal Above, connecting far-flung locales. For ship-wrecked sailors, they may provide a lifeline back to solid ground and an emergency source of sustenance.

Unlike sargassum in the mortal world, these species have no need of air bladders to stay afloat. Instead, they have developed 'brain berries;' small nodules of neural parenchyma that have only a single mental capacity: the ability to be directionlessly stubborn. When exposed to bright light sources, these nodules anchor the sargassum in place against the astral current, keeping it close to reliable light sources.

'Brain berries' are edible, and consuming a handful of them doubles a creature's normal astral speed for 1 hour, and grants them the Steel Will feat for the duration. Most believe that celestial sargassum does not truly possess consciousness or reason. Whether or not they are correct is up to you.

Dungeons of the Sun

At times, a glowing fragment of the Firmament becomes entangled in the branches of a colloid or within a sargassum mat. With a light source entrapped in this way, the plants are able to thrive and grow with abandon. Labyrinthine passages of vegetation form around the central fragment, becoming habitat to all kinds of astral life. Shipwrecks and small astral motes may also become entangled in the vegetation's branches and vines, adding to the complexity. Over time, creatures weave or cut passages into the plant life, circuitous but reliable, linking separate wrecks or ruins together and creating a unique migrating

dungeon. At its center, the fragment of the Firmament still beams out its brilliance, but mired in the thick of leaves and lignin, its light may not escape its prison.

Dungeons of the sun can lend a uniquely astral flavor to your party's dungeon crawls, and can be populated by any kind of aquatic, flying, or terrestrial creature that takes your fancy.

Godslicks

Leftover from the wars of the gods, godslicks are miles-wide patches of oily divine blood that mark the sites of ancient battles that once raged across the astral plane. The mingled bloods of enemy deities still continue their ancient combat, and godslicks are constantly roiled by massive waves of blood crashing against each other and boiling back for new assaults. Any creature that comes into contact with one of these waves must make a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be swept up and mired in the slick.

Creatures or vessels that are mired in godslicks are drawn into the blood at a rate of ½ foot per round, and may make one DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to attempt to escape per round; each successful check prevents the creature from being drawn further into the slick and allows them to extricate themselves by 1 foot. When a Large or smaller creature is completely submerged in the slick, they hold their breath for as long as possible and begin suffocating once they run out of breath. Huge or bigger creatures cannot be completely submerged in the slick, but will be trapped in it until they make 5 successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) checks in a row.

Obviously, godslicks are not popular vacation spots, and few actively seek them out. However, scavenging creatures such as vultures, seagulls, sharks, eels, or crabs may try to feed on large creatures that become stuck at the surface of the slick, and they might be appealing as locations for lairs of powerful magic users that are able to ward a region within the slick against its effects. They are also commonly used as execution pits by

Githyanki pirates or infernal slavers, who cast their victims down to suffocate in the roiling oily blood.

Great Astral Garbage Floes

The astral plane is scattered with random bits of detritus; from wrecked ships, spilled shipments, careless waste management of astral settlements, and mishaps with extradimensional items in the mortal world (see the rules for portable holes, bags of holding, etc.). Astral currents sweep this flotsam along, and eventually it collects in the plane's eddies and doldrums, forming enormous sheets of garbage. Because a good portion of this garbage originates from mishaps with storage devices in the mortal world, a sizeable percentage of the items in these floes may be of considerable value.

Consequently, astral garbage floes are popular among Peregrine scavengers, and are almost never entirely abandoned. Indeed, there are plenty of Peregrines that either live in a makeshift shack on the floe itself or on a mote just outside, making their entire after-living peddling items they scavenge from the garbage heap. These floes may act as a point of refuge for your players, offering shelter in the form of friendly scavenging communities, but they may also be a source of conflict, if your players become caught up in strife between competing scavenging groups.

Weather

The Supernal Above hosts all of the weather phenomena listed in Chapter Two. As well, this layer's high light-intensity gives rise to a few living 'meteorological' events. These are not 'weather' even inasmuch as the manifest emotions of doldrums and tempests, but they present environmental challenges and change as swiftly as storms or winds.

Diatomaceous Nebulae

Most of the 'clouds' one finds in the Supernal Above are actually composed of diatoms: microscopic photosynthetic organisms. These creatures experience rapid growth, or blooming, when exposed to a light source, and

sudden senescence when the light source moves on along its astral course. During a bloom, they form a visible fog or cloud, which may take on fantastic colors and shapes. Diatomaceous nebulae are harmless, but they do impede vision and can span miles. A nebula reduces vision to 15 ft., functioning much like fog in the mortal world - though it may be purple or violet rather than blue-grey. Vessels that enter diatomaceous nebulae run the risk of crashing on unseen astral motes or debris.

Aurora dinoflagellus

Though few know it, the lights that dance in the northern night sky are actually a living phenomenon. Another type of phytoplankton, dinoflagellates, bloom in the Supernal Above as they encounter sources of light, creating great rippling ribbons of life. Some dinoflagellates bioluminesce when agitated by the passage of creatures or astral current, glowing brilliant greens, blues, or even reds. When these luminous ribbons are carried close to the border sky of the mortal realm and the astral plane, they are seen by mortals as the aurora borealis - or rather, aurora dinoflagellus.

Aurora dinoflagellus ribbons are usually harmless, but some dinoflagellates produce toxins harmful to most creatures. These plankton are usually red in color, and their coming is known as a red tide. Creatures that breathe within a red tide must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for as long as they are within the tide plus 1d4 hours. Red tides (as well as other auroras) may be up to a mile wide and 10 miles long.

Color Pools

Strands and pools of color emanate from each plane contained by the astral. These phenomena instantly transport any creatures that touch them into the border islands of their connected plane.

Resources

The Supernal Above possesses all the resources one would expect to find in or on the huge chunks of earth and stone that float through its waters; metal ores, lumber, precious gems, etc. In addition to these mundane goods, there are also a few more interesting resources native to this layer of the astral plane.

Sea Silk

Although rare in the mortal world, the molluscs that provide the raw material for sea silk are abundant in the astral plane, and this incredibly fine cloth is therefore a significant trade good. The silk is woven from the byssal threads of the mollusc's shell, which it uses to anchor itself to a solid surface. Anyone could take up gathering byssal threads, but knowledge of the finicky process of weaving it into cloth is extremely uncommon among terrestrial races. Consequently, most sea silk in the astral plane is produced by sea elves or merfolk.

As a fabric, sea silk surpasses almost all others. It is more fine, more thin, more resistant to tears, and cleans more easily. It soaks up magic, making it the cloth of choice for those who create top-tier magical clothing. The Gyrovagues of Kelemvor wear robes made entirely of sea silk, and use secret techniques that allow them to store astral spirits in the cloth; only sea silk can be used for this. It is also significantly more expensive than other fabrics, even in the astral plane, where the mollusc is more plentiful and easier to find. A bolt of sea silk is worth about 500 gp, and a 1-ton bushel is worth 25,000 gp.

Both sea elves and merfolk are able to weave byssal thread into cloth, but, due to their more sedentary lifestyle, sea elves are usually employed as weavers, and merfolk hired as migrant gatherers. It is crippling, dangerous work, routinely taking workers into wild waters far from the protection permanent shelters might afford. Because they're so exposed, byssus gatherers are often the targets of sabotage by underhanded

competitors; the mortality rate is staggering. In your campaign, a sea silk manufactory might hire the party to guard its gatherers, track down and kill a band of pirates that recently made a strike on a group of workers, gather evidence that a competitor has been hiring mercenaries to murder their employees, or even to carry out sabotage themselves.

Joy Springs

Perhaps the rarest of the Supernal Above's remarkable resources, joy springs are not actually exclusive to the region, but they are more common here than anywhere else in the astral plane. Unlike other resources, joy springs are hot targets for almost anyone in the astral plane, not just the commercially minded. Because springs adapt to the mental associations of any that spend time around them, they are valuable to literally everyone, and it is just as common to find entire settlements competing for control of a joy spring as it is to find a company doing so. Once it has been fixed in place by magical artificery, a joy spring can be turned to any number of purposes, including the mass production of other precious materials, such as gold, gemstones, wine, etc. Make no mistake - vast astral wars have and will be fought over a single small wellspring of joy.

Naturally, companies of all types attempt to gain control of any joy spring they learn of, both to facilitate their own enterprises and to prevent the spring from being used to flood the plane with an excess of valuables, lowering their actual purchase price. Indeed, Merfolk and Meroth has an entire division devoted to scouting the plane for newly-formed joy springs and taking control of them in order to prevent devaluation of their various products. The effect is also mitigated by the fact that many joy springs are controlled by dangerous creatures or hostile organizations that fail to put them to good commercial use.

No one has any solid numbers on just how many joy springs actually exist in the astral plane, but most estimate it at a handful, at most. Joy springs eventually dry up - usually

within a century - so they're not an eternal guarantee of wealth and happiness. Legends are told of springs that have lasted for millennia, but if such exist, they are either lost or closely guarded by their possessors. Joy springs can function as the center of a conflict in your campaign, as a wondrous feature in an ally or villain's arsenal, or as the object of an epic sangrealian quest across the Ocean of the Heavens.

Star dust

Although star dust is hardly confined to the Supernal Above, the majority of commercial exploitation of this resource is based in this layer of the plane. Star dust can be harvested from the bodies of any Peregrine, Pilgrim, or Paragon creature, including both humanoids and animals. This means that a large sector of the star dust industry operates essentially as fishers, trawling the waves for Peregrine creatures or corpses. Living or dead, those creatures can then be boiled down into their constituent star dust.

This is the form that most 'moral' star dust harvest takes, but not everyone is so scrupulous. Many evil creatures - notably devils and demons - raid astral settlements to capture Peregrine humanoids, who often yield a greater star dust return. Their captives are brought back to the creatures' strongholds where their star dust can be wrung from their shriveled corpses. Aside from its great utility in spellcasting, rumor has it that star dust can be used in certain rituals to augment a being's innate magical strength, and that certain evil deities use it to gather power to themselves in preparation for war with other gods.

Servants of the gods aside, First Celestial Bank has a stranglehold on the star dust industry. Up to 90% of star dust trawlers are owned by First Celestial or its subsidiaries, and only the Bank of Heaven offers the opportunity to sell one's own body's star dust for immediate cash - albeit at the price of the eventual harvest of one's corpse.

Denizens

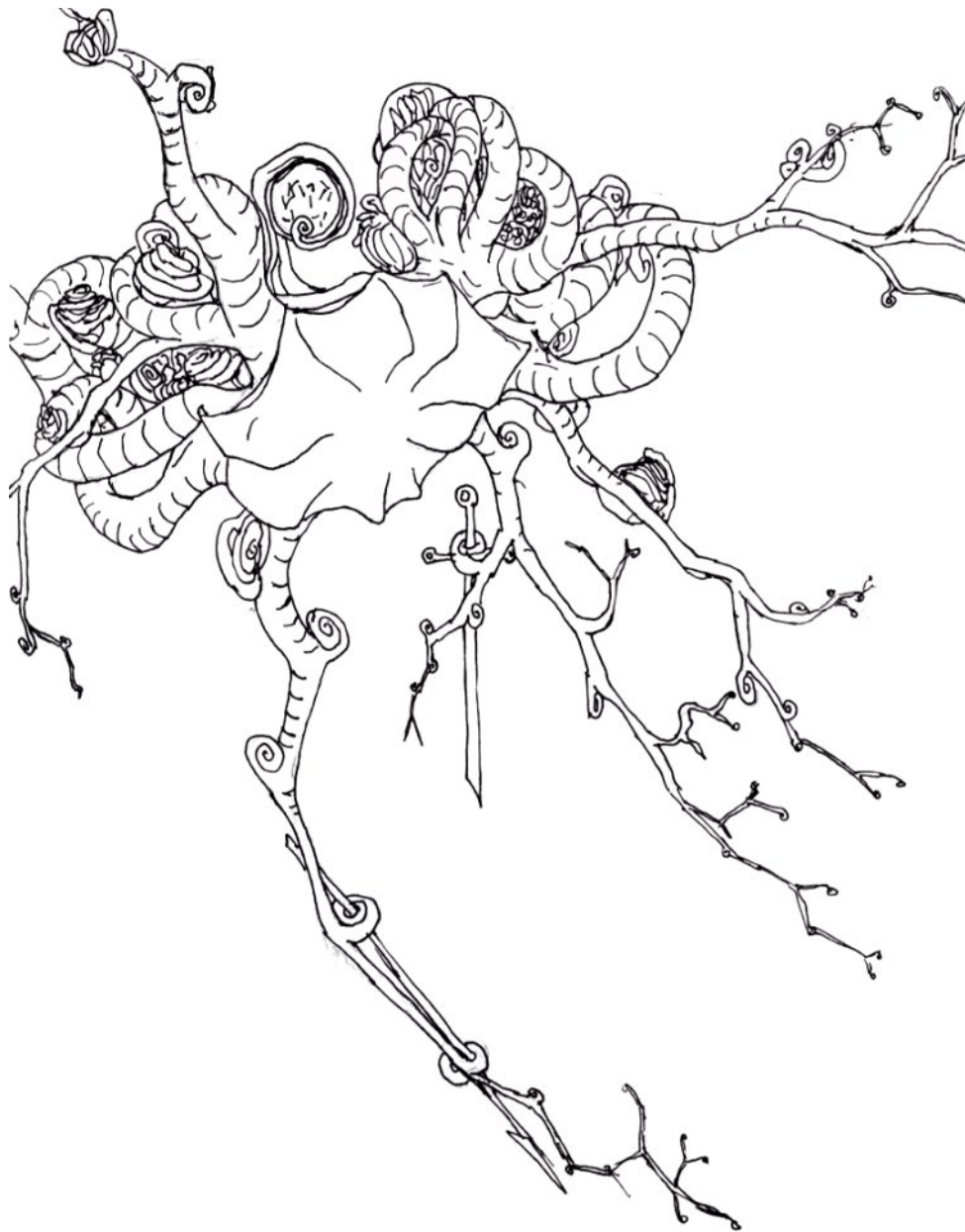
In truth, one could find any manner of being in the Supernal Above's tumultuous currents. There are, however, a few types of sentient creatures that flourish especially in the luminous Above. This section outlines the nature and habits of these beings.

Divine Servitors

Inasmuch as the interests of the gods extend to the astral plane itself, they extend to the Supernal Above. Consequently, the servants of the deities are commonly found throughout this layer of the astral plane. Indeed, it is their place of origin, as creatures of divine substance. Celestials first arose after the destruction of the Firmament, coalescing as conscious collections of the Firmament's detritus. At this time, these servants had much more alien forms, appearing much like basket stars, starfish, or crinoids. Celestial beings of this type are known as aasimon.

Once bound to the will of a god, an aasimon's form can be altered to better serve their new master. Typically, this means that they take on the familiar winged humanoid form of the divine servitors mortals know as angels. Those that serve their deities in the astral plane, however, are usually allowed to keep their original forms. There are also native aasimon in the astral plane that are not bound to any deity. These Outsiders have some measure of divine power, making them formidable enemies, but none of the sacred purpose and personality the deities can invest in them.

Aasimon can be found anywhere in the Supernal Above, but they are quite rare. They are capable of telepathic communication, but rarely possess fully-developed personalities; they are but half-formed persons. These beings are often prey for the servants of deities of all alignments, who seek to capture the wild creature and allow their god to bind it into their service. Even a powerful Peregrine magic user might seek to do the same, if they somehow came across the secret knowledge required to do so.



Instead of carrying out the will of their god, unaligned aasimon tend to be attracted to Peregrines with particularly remarkable personalities, such as great artists, fervent zealots, or mechanical geniuses. Under the influence of these individuals, the aasimon gains a measure of character and agency they cannot otherwise possess. In return, the aasimon's divine aura inspires and incites the humanoid to new heights of passion and genius.

Wild aasimon might function as exotic, wondrous enemies for your players to fight in a high level random encounter, they might be the object of a grand hunt commissioned by one of the gods, or perhaps you use them as guardians for an ancient artifact of one of their

charges. Because these feral Outsiders lack fully-formed personalities, they can be inserted into a wide variety of contexts without stretching believability.

Dragons

As difficult as it is to kill a dragon once, it is even more difficult to kill one twice. That is particularly true in the astral plane, where their flight, combined with astral speed boosted by their high Charisma scores, grants them uncanny swiftness and maneuverability. Dragons adapt easily to the afterlife, flourishing on the planar waves where food is plentiful and they can soar for eternity. Because they have a low rate of 're-kill' once they are reincarnated as Peregrines, dragons are proportionally more common in the

Heavens than they are in the mortal realm. Fortunately, the astral plane is much larger than the mortal plane, and this overflow of dragons is able to diffuse out into the vast depths. Still, all the most fearsome wyrms of history swim somewhere in those spectral waters - unless they have been slain in the afterlife as well - including the ancient wyrms that were never actually bested in their mortal lives.

Dragons do not usually suffer from the same disillusionment and crises of faith that plague humanoids in the afterlife, given that worship usually holds a lesser place in their ego-centric lives, but the astral sea is humbling and self-reflective for them in other ways. The size that a dragon was when it died is the size it will forever remain in the afterlife - even for dragons that died as wyrmlings or when they were just beginning to come into their physical power. Though these dragons are usually perfectly able to survive and amass wealth like this, it is still a significant blow to the draconic ego - after all, when they were mortal, they at least knew that *one day* they would be big enough to crush a castle beneath their claws. In the afterlife, dragons have to learn to live with their bodies as they are. Most find it a struggle.

Although they do not grow in size, they do continue to amass knowledge and experiences, including spells, that increase their overall power. A 6,000 year-old Peregrine wyrmling might not be able to best a 500 year-old newly-reincarnated dragon in physical combat, but their experience and superior spellcasting might allow them to outsmart or outcast the younger wyrm. Let it suffice to say that social dynamics between dragons are vastly different in the astral plane than in the mortal world.

In the Supernal Above, the most common dragons are those without a swim speed, as its thinner firmament field allows them to move more easily by flight. Aside from that, there is no real pattern - any type of dragon can be found in this layer of the astral plane. Metallic

dragons may be more common around the planes of good deities, and chromatic dragons around the planes of evil deities, but both share the Supernal Above. Some metallic dragons provide the only widespread form of patrol that exists in the astral plane, swimming or flying throughout their territory routinely. As a mature metallic dragon may have a territory spanning hundreds of miles, these regions can be attractive havens for humanoid settlers seeking shelter. Perhaps counter-intuitively, the territories of chromatic dragons may also be safer for humanoids. Chromatic dragons do not seek to protect humanoids - quite the opposite, usually - but they do vigorously defend their territory against other powerful creatures. If humanoids are able to keep a low-enough profile to avoid the dragon's notice, it may be possible for them to live within the dragon's territory and allow it to deal with other threats.

As it is for many in the astral plane, a joy spring is a dragon's greatest possible treasure. Unlike most, however, a good number of dragons actually end up possessing one of these fabled phenomena. Joy springs are often to be found in the possession of dragons, where they eternally fountain gold and jewels as suits that dragon's personal taste, providing infinite increase to their hoard. A dragon that comes into control of a joy spring goes to great lengths to conceal the fact, as it makes them targets for other dragons as well as ordinary treasure hunters. Most use powerful magical wards against scrying, and usually disguise their lair with more mundane means as well. Those dragons whose paranoia has caused a jitter sigil to form around their lair are likely to be in possession of a joy spring.

Merfolk

Among the most populous of humanoid races in the Ocean of the Heavens, merfolk favor the Supernal Above for its greater abundance of plant and animal life, as well as for its more densely-packed settlements, all dependent upon the trade that migrant merfolk provide. When the fish-folk do choose to settle in a

'fixed' location - as fixed as anything in the astral sea can be - they usually do so either within the branches of colloids or the nets of celestial sargassum. Colloidal merfolk settlements are typically smaller, villages as opposed to cities. When they take up residence within mats of celestial sargassum, their settlements often expand into enormous floating cities, anchored by the brain berries of the sargassum. By weaving the living algal strands, merfolk create elaborate frondy dwellings that appear to be little more than bunches of weeds from the outside.

In the mortal world, most merfolk eschew clothing for a variety of reasons. For one thing, most fabrics simply are not that durable underwater; only something woven from marine materials, such as byssus (sea silk), can last for long in an aquatic environment, and those fabrics are relatively rare. For another, wearing clothing significantly increases a creature's water resistance, making it very difficult to move - and since cloth cannot insulate effectively underwater, this drawback comes without the benefit of keeping the creature warm.

But in the astral sea, none of those drawbacks exist. As a result, merfolk culture in the afterlife becomes almost obsessed with textiles. Unlike the mortal world, it's normal in the astral plane to see merfolk swathed in extravagant, billowing clouds of diaphanous, multi-colored cloth that ripples in the waves like elaborate display fins. Many merfolk actually look down on the fashions of terrestrial creatures as inelegant and stolid creations, and terrestrial humanoids that live in merfolk settlements often adopt their showy fashion sense in order to escape social censure. Textiles of all kinds are more valuable in merfolk settlements, and there's no better place to go to find fine cloths and beautiful clothing.

Sea Elves

As it did in the mortal world, the life of a sea elf revolves around their giant seadragon mounts. Although sea elves are not migratory,

living in magically-grown coral towers as part of astral reefs, they rely upon their giant seadragons to allow them to patrol their territory, as well as to make frequent hunting forays to reincarnation nodes. The sea elf anatomy is not designed for high-speed swimming; their tiny webbed fingers and toes are simply not sufficient to propel them at speed. Ordinary seadragons are not fast swimmers either, but their horse-sized cousins are a different breed. Without these allies, sea elves would be little different from surface elves in the astral plane, and would have to rely upon vehicular transportation.

Unlike in the mortal world, however, sea elves in the astral plane are unable to breed their seadragon mounts, as Peregrines cannot reproduce. Instead, the elves must scavenge the astral plane for the rare occasion of a reincarnated seadragon; the creatures are not numerous in the mortal world, and when scattered at random across the astral plane they become quite rare. Consequently, astral sea elves will pay any price for a healthy giant seadragon, and will send questing parties of elves or sponsored adventurers to travel to far-flung sites at the mere rumor of the existence of one of their precious mounts. Anyone that is known to have killed a giant seadragon is, naturally, an immediate enemy of any sea elf settlement.

Sea elves are somewhat less friendly toward terrestrial races in the afterlife than they were as mortals, as they resent having to share the astral sea with surface creatures. Indeed, many of the physical characteristics that made them special in life do little to distinguish them in the afterlife; they are not quite as special as they were, and they take offense against the terrestrial races and against the astral sea itself for this slight.



The Supernal Above FACTIONS

The astral plane is full of organizations of all kinds, ranging in size from a few members confined to a single mote to tens or hundreds of thousands spread across the entire plane. Many of these factions may be the same as those found in your setting's mortal world, although those organizations may be radically different in the afterlife than they are in life. There are also countless astral-exclusive factions that play influential roles in astral economics, politics, and society. This section presents a few such factions. You can use these organizations simply to provide a background for your campaign's plot, but conflicts within or between them could also become significant plot points. They are designed to be relatively accessible to player characters, and even entire adventuring parties, so feel free to allow your players to become members themselves. Note that although these factions are presented with the Supernal Above, the functional distinctions between layers of the astral sea are more important when it comes to biology and natural phenomena than socioeconomics. All of these factions operate beyond the Supernal Above, and interact variously with the factions given in later chapters.

Several character biographies are provided for each faction in order to flesh out the abstract description. These characters are divided into 'luminaries,' meaning those at the top of the organization, and 'up-and-comers,' or the new recruits that show promise, but haven't yet proven themselves. Up-and-comers can be used at any point in your campaign; just generate their statistics to correspond with your players' level and adjust their stature with their organization. If one of them becomes a recurring character in your campaign, you may even watch them develop and progress in their faction. Luminaries, however, should always be high level, and should not scale down to the players.

Merfolk and Merrow Incorporated

It began with an unlikely friendship in the mortal world: a minor merfolk constable of a lesser cell block and a shrewd miniscule merrow with a great hand at whist, serving a life sentence in the constable's lockup. Season after season, they dealt and dreamed about what they might do if they were not both shackled to the cell. After death, they might have thought such dreams at last put to rest, but instead they found them given a life they had never had while they were mortals. At near-impossible odds, they were reunited in the astral plane, and together they set out to build the largest megacorporation the afterlife has ever seen, with interests in every singly industry in the beyond and assets in every distant eddy of the astral sea.

Merfolk and Merrow Inc. got their start as a scavenging and salvage business, trawling the astral currents for scrap and loot stranded there by shipwrecks or by mishaps with extradimensional items in the mortal world. At first just a two-fish-and-a-dinghy operation, their access to both merfolk and merrow markets quickly allowed them to expand to a shallop, then a mistico, and finally a fleet of merchant vessels flagshipged by their carrack, the Profit Scales. Since that time, thousands of years past, the founders have long since become rich enough to retire from active sailing, but they still manage the corporation's interests with salacious savvy from their paradisiacal headquarters on Humiliations Atoll.

Interests

Today, Merfolk and Merrow no longer confines their business pursuits entirely to scavenging and salvage, but those industries do still make up a significant portion of the company's portfolio. Since their diversification, the company has converted these operations into a franchise, providing a proven business model and distribution framework to aspiring treasure hunters and taking a cut of their profits. Merfolk and Merrow Inc. Outlets can be found in settlements throughout the astral

plane, and the company's cut from their sales makes up approximately 40% of Merfolk and Merrow's annual profit.

Aside from their scavenging franchisees, Merfolk and Merrow have significant interests in sea silk manufacturing, mote mining, construction, transportation, security, shipping, and alcohol. As a much smaller percentage of their business, they fund pseudo-metal extraction and refinement, and are attempting to break First Celestial's stranglehold monopoly on the star dust trade. In all aspects of their business, Merfolk and Merrow benefits from roughly equal employment of both of its titular races, allowing it to exploit markets on both ends of the alignment spectrum. The lines may be blurred in the afterlife, but they aren't gone completely, and the company's unlikely partnership takes full advantage of that fact.

Humiliations Atoll

A cross between a beach resort and a corporate hub, Humiliations Atoll is a ring-shaped palace of living coral that serves as Merfolk and Merrow's retirement home and center of operations. From their woven kelp recliners or lofty polyp office, the pair peruse their magical ledgers with such practiced precision it seems utterly lazy. With the finest scrying shades, they spy on their competition, staring down the tiny underlings that make their constant reports on the corporation's

various pursuits. The atoll also serves as a hub for Merfolk and Merrow's shipping interests, and hosts the shipyards for their franchisee startup kits. Although it is actually only about a mile across, an enchanted crystal at the heart of the palace broadcasts an enchantment that shrinks anything that comes within 2 miles of the atoll down to 1/8th its actual size, excepting only Merfolk and Merrow themselves. This allows the atoll to host a significant number of vessels at its docks, and act as a miniature corporate city. It also means that every employee that comes to meet the company's founders does so literally dwarfed by the boss fishes, further feeding their already massive egos. The coral is outfitted with elemental expectorators that allow it to move under its own power through the Ocean of the Heavens, but it can usually be found at approximately the same position in the core region of the Supernal Above.

Player Character Franchisees

Employment as Merfolk and Merrow scavenging franchisees is a perfectly reasonable framework for your party's adventures, no matter what their races may be. For a certain startup fee, franchisees are provided with staple Merfolk and Merrow equipment and training materials, including a working astral vessel and a portable, ready-to-build salvage outlet. You might choose to start your players as franchisee adventurers, or they might decide they want to do it on their

Merfolk and Merrow Franchisee Startup Packages

| Package | Vessel | Bonuses | Startup fee | Franchise fees |
|-----------------------|--|---|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Grubber's Choice | Corporate dinghy (see Appendix B) | Used training manual, pre-fab shop stall | 1,000 gp | 20% |
| Treasure Seeker | Cookie-cutter caravel (see Appendix B) | Training manual, single-day training session by a M&M employee, pre-fab shop shack | 4,000 gp | 15% |
| Alluvial Emancipators | Made-to-order mistico, up to a max ship value of 30,000 gp; see Appendix B, <i>Scavenger's Mistico</i> | Illustrated training manual, week-long training by a M&M veteran, pre-fab store shell, magical ledger | 10,000 gp | 10% |

own as an easy way to acquire a ship of their own. Either way, use the table on the previous page to decide - or allow your players to decide - exactly which startup package they receive.

At the time of the contract's signing, a player character or party must tender the initial startup fee for their selected package and agree to abide by all company policies and regulations with regards to their franchise's operations, or risk seizure of Merfolk and Merrow assets in their possession and termination of their rights to use Merfolk and Merrow branding. Any number of persons may be party to a single franchise contract, and their respective shares will be agreed upon and finalized at the time of signing.

These contracts are not magically binding, and the company does not employ magical means to keep track of franchisee profits. Instead, franchises undergo an annual audit by Merfolk and Merrow accountants to assess that the franchise's monthly payments have been made accurately. If a franchise is found to have stiffed the company, it may face penalties in the form of seizure of assets, termination of franchisee/franchiser relationship, or an increase in Merfolk and Merrow's profit share for a limited time. Franchisees may opt out of these audits by purchasing a magical ledger, included with the 'Alluvial Emancipators' startup package, which is enchanted to automatically record the franchise's asset intake and sales, syncing automatically with master ledgers at the Merfolk and Merrow headquarters. Magical measures are required to fool these ledgers.

In the rare case that a franchisee attempts to operate completely outside Merfolk and Merrow's oversight, evading auditors and skipping or omitting payments, the company has been known to hire mercenary parties to capture or kill the rogue franchisee.

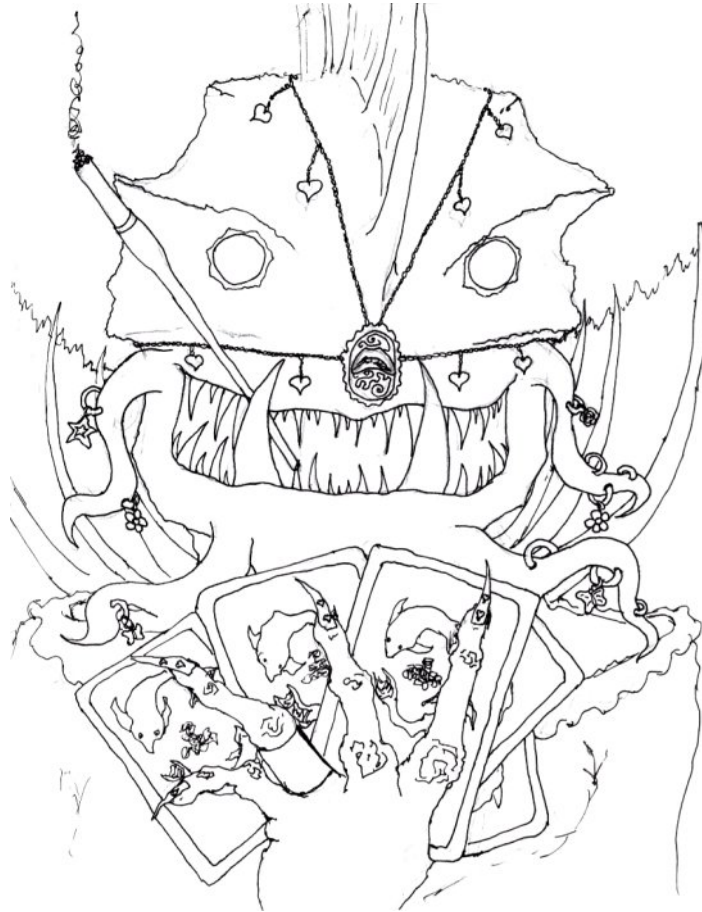
Luminaries of Merfolk and Merrow

Merfolk: Although his true name is long lost to the senility of a 3,000-year afterlife, along with most of his hygienic habits, the co-founder of M&M Inc. retains all of his business acumen and interpersonal savvy. Constantly attended by a crew of scale scrubbers and swimming assistants who lug around his massive bulk, Merfolk requires no assistance when it comes to evaluating the company's performance or devising new commercial schemes. But despite his cunning, senility, and smell, Merfolk has an affability that endears him to his employees, and his genuine concern for their well being increases the effect. He is a popular boss, and his employees feel comfortable joking with him despite his magically-enhanced enormity. Merfolk spends his days drinking margaritas, playing whist with Merrow, and guiding the colossal vessel that is M&M Inc. across the astral waves.

Merfolk forms the adventurous half of the partnership, and spearheads all of M&M Inc.'s most risky ventures. Currently, his attention is focused on the ongoing struggle with First Celestial Bank as M&M Inc. attempts to break into the star dust market.

Merfolk's secret: Merfolk's memory has long since been overcome by the formidable intricacies of his work. To keep track of his many business ventures - and their associated wheeling-and-dealings or underhanded exploits - Merfolk possesses an diary in which he records every detail of his schemes. The diary is enchanted to be of infinite length, and possesses a powerful magical lock keyed to Merfolk himself.





Merrow: Tiny where her partner is huge and conservative where he is daring, Merrow is the backbone of the company. For all that it may have been Merfolk's reckless innovations that propelled them to where they are today, it was Merrow's constant vigilance and vicious defense of the company's interests that preserved it through all the ups and downs of the astral economic tide. Though unwilling to take risks, she has long-since learned to allow Merfolk to push past her boundaries, and her uncanny ability to salvage a losing venture for as little deficit as possible allows her to clean up after his many failed experiments.

It is Merrow that does much of the humdrum, day-to-day work of M&M Inc.'s management, and she does so with ruthless - though not heartless - efficiency. Merrow also handles the 'sub-good' element of their business, as she calls it, interacting with all their evil clients and employees. She herself is not actually evil, however ruthless she may be at whist, and dislikes many of the people she must cooperate with in this capacity. She does not take a passive stance toward them, though most assume she does; rather, she tries to shift the alignment of her evil employees - and

occasionally of her blindly good employees as well - by giving them assignments that challenge their assumptions and prejudices.

Merrow has long since lost the drive to work for the accumulation of wealth alone, but continues to perform her duties with diligence in order to provide for and protect all those M&M Inc. employs. She collects knick-knacks and tacky jewelry, is a fervent worshiper of the goddess of love, and enjoys nothing better than games of strategy - particularly card games, often challenging her clients or business peers to a game during negotiations.

Merrow's secret: One accumulates many secrets over the course of a 3,000-year afterlife. One of the oldest of these concerns the nature of her relationship with Merfolk: in her mortal life, Merrow was incarcerated in a merfolk settlement for murder of a merfolk elder. Throughout her entire life and afterlife, she has maintained to her partner that she was innocent of that crime - but she was not. Merfolk's initial belief that she was innocent is the only thing that caused him to befriend her, and she dreads that he would one day discover the ancient truth.

Up-and-comers of Merfolk and Merrow

Parah Blackhoof: Among Merfolk and Merrow's shining new stars is Parah Blackhoof, a minotaur warlock with a penchant for bloodshed and a taste for fine fashion. Parah is young in her afterlife, having newly reincarnated after a life cut short in her mid-twenties. Through a mixture of intimidation, extortion, and robbery, she scrounged together enough funds to purchase one of M&M Inc.'s scavenging startup packages, and, with a gaggle of ragged ne'er-do-wells she bullied into joining her crew, she sails the astral waves in search of scrap and treasure to scavenge. But for all her and her crew's spotted past, Parah means to turn over

a new leaf in the afterlife, and she fully intends to succeed with the company through entirely honest means. She has a weakness for exquisite clothing, and a good deal of her profits go to outfitting her personal wardrobe, which is mainly populated by brocaded coats, voluminous cravats, and custom-tailored hats.

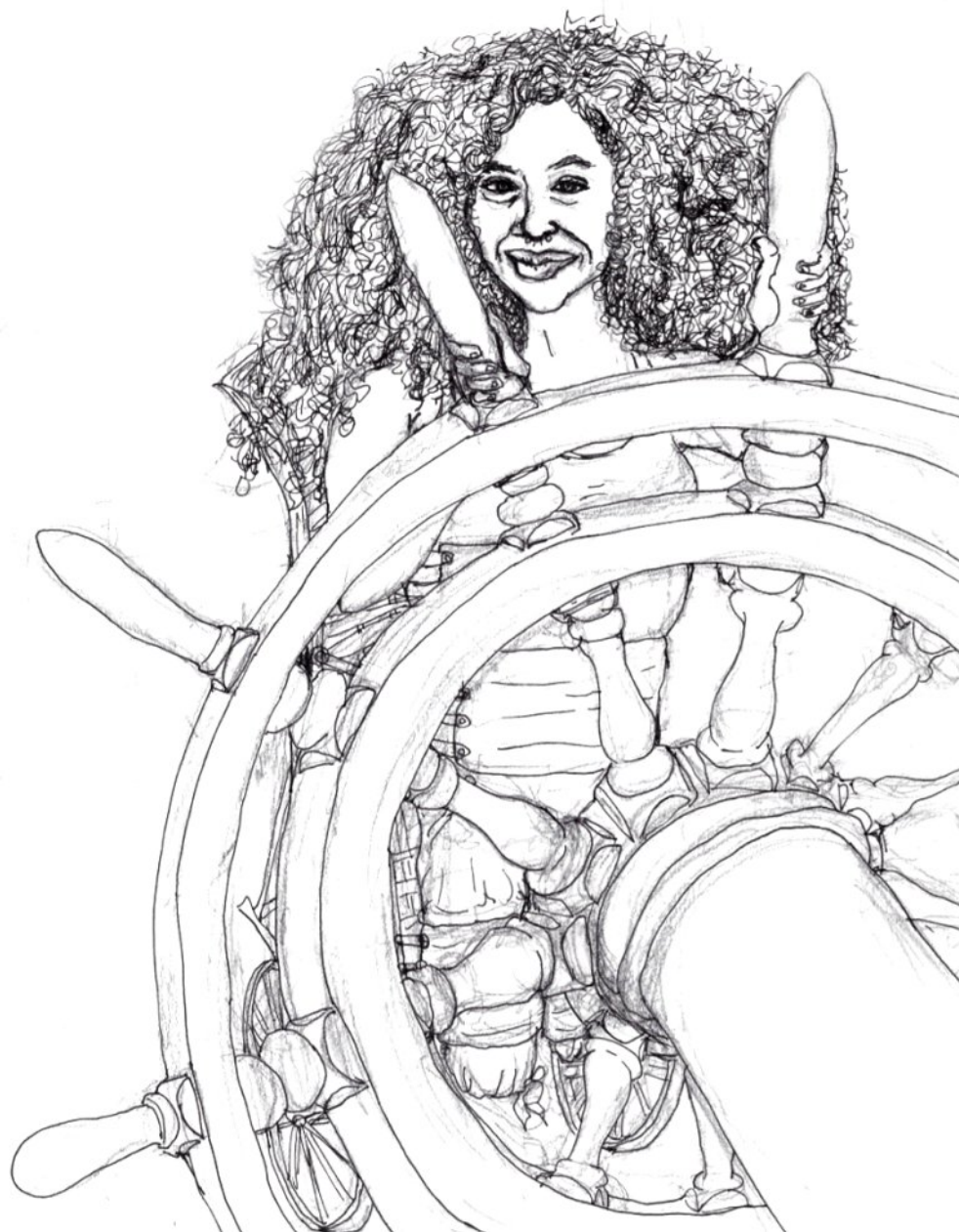
Parah's secret: The rapier she wears is mostly for show - she knows just enough about its use to brandish convincingly. Her real talents lie in her magical abilities, and the rod embedded in the rapier's hilt.



Ilada: Ilada, a gnome con artist, spent the first few years of her afterlife attempting to make a go of it as a sigil-stained associate with First Celestial Bank. Despite her natural ability to deceive the unwitting customer, however, she was unable to meet her monthly tithes to her superior, and quickly ran up an enormous debt with the Bank (unbeknownst to her, the drow woman that recruited her actually wrote out Ilada's employment contract with three times the normal tithe rates). After spending another few years as an indentured servant to the Bank, Ilada sought employment with M&M Inc., First Celestial's upstart rival in the star dust industry. She has been tasked with developing that aspect of the company's ventures, putting her skills in espionage to the test. Still, most of Ilada's time is occupied with

captaining the small fishing faering she employs to net Peregrine fish (and other creatures) for their stardust. She reserves scheming against First Celestial for her free time. Ilada wants nothing more than to take her revenge on the drow that out-swindled her, and she sees Merfolk and Merrow as the perfect device to enable her to take that vengeance.

Ilada's secret: Though she will not admit it even to herself, Ilada actually harbors something of a crush on the drow woman that out-swindled her. This adds a bit of a complex element to the fuel that fires her vengeance.



The Gyrovagues

Much of the afterlife is chaotic and unpredictable. The bonds of nationality, faith, and family that held fast in mortality disappear, dissolve, or decay among immortals as each individual is reincarnated outside of the social context they occupied in life. Astral currents swirl and stir the Ocean of the Heavens in ever-new and unforetold patterns. The promises of the gods mean little, and even those that keep their faith wander lost on the waves. On these seas of uncertainty, the Gyrovagues sail.

Gyrovagues are wandering monks devoted to the god of death, whoever that is in your campaign setting. In the Forgotten Realms, Gyrovagues are clerics of Kelemvor. This is an order that cannot be found in the mortal world - it is exclusive to the astral plane, for its entire purpose is to find and shepherd the reincarnate souls of the dead to their respective afterlife... if they are capable of entering it.

Purpose and Practice

Kelemvor imbues his gyrovagues with special astral abilities which allow them to sense whether an individual is Pilgrim or Peregrine; that is, whether they are physically able to enter their god's plane, if they can reach it, or whether they are barred from their heaven and doomed to wander the astral seas for as long as their afterlife may last. This also allows the monks to sense the faith within a Peregrine, determining which god or gods they worshiped in life and which plane they are attuned to in death.

Using these abilities, Gyrovagues roam the astral seas at random, collecting lost Peregrines and Pilgrims to themselves as they come. To Peregrines, they offer solace and guidance, helping them come to terms with their lot in the afterlife. They teach them about their new astral bodies, as well as survival tips for life in the astral plane. If they wish it, Gyrovagues provide transportation for stranded Peregrines, allowing them to travel alongside until they reach a suitable

permanent home - whether that be a secluded mote or a thriving settlement.

To Pilgrims, Gyrovagues offer congratulations, and provide a relatively safe route by which to travel to their god's plane. Pilgrims are welcome to stay with the Gyrovague on their travels, departing once those wanderings take the monk to their particular god's realm. Theoretically, this could take quite some time, since Gyrovagues are not supposed to have any particular pattern to their journeys. In practice, most wander until they've collected as many Pilgrims or Peregrines as their astral vessel can accommodate, and then they make a tour of the divine planes, dropping off Peregrines along the way.

First Monk

Gyrovagues rarely wander alone. Most merchant and transport ships count at least one Gyrovague among their crew; unpaid and not truly under the captain's command, but at their disposal and reliant upon their charity for food and supplies. In return, these monks use their abilities to heal Peregrine, Pilgrim, or Paragon crew members, or to drive away reincarnated beings, much like clerics are able to turn undead. Other Gyrovagues captain their own vessels, crewed by Peregrines bound to them by a geas, or by servants of one of the gods. In a few cases, evil Gyrovagues even sail with crews of devils, bound to their service by contract.

Judgement

In the Forgotten Realms setting, the souls of the dead are typically judged by Kelemvor in the Fugue plane before being sent along to their respective afterlife (or punishment). You don't necessarily have to do away with this when using *Waters Above*. Gyrovagues are further granted the ability to discern the marks that betrayed faith leaves on the soul, and are delegated by Kelemvor to mete out justice on the open astral seas. These monks are able to lay a geas on Pilgrims and Peregrines, and use this ability to force the dead to atone for their sins. This may take the form of impressed service as a servant or

guard to the Gyrovague, or it may take the form of a difficult, dangerous quest across the astral plane. For those whose crimes were truly reprehensible, or for those who never truly worshiped any deity, a Gyrovague may choose to consign them body and soul to devils or demons for eternal torture, or to be boiled down into star dust.

Spiritual Shepherds

Gyrovagues are also able to use their abilities upon the spiritual dead, helping them to come to terms with their spectral existence or to move past the afterlife entirely. Most Gyrovagues mesmerize and contain any void ghosts they encounter, storing them temporarily as shifting patterns adorning their sea silk robes. At the monk's convenience, they commune with each one they collect, calming angry or rebellious spirits. Even ghosts that have gone mad or amnesiac from spending time in the mortal world can be rehabilitated by a Gyrovague. Most monks encourage the spirits they collect to move on to whatever lies beyond the astral plane, teaching them to dissolve their spirits into the Field and depart the multiverse forever. If necessary, they are able to force this upon a spirit, and most do so for animal ghosts or spirits that pose a threat to living creatures and cannot be rehabilitated.

Consequently, Gyrovagues are immortal enemies of void vampires. Void vampires are usually seen as hostile and possibly insane, due to their rebellious beliefs and habit of preying upon celestials, fiends, and other ghosts. Almost all Gyrovagues will try to eliminate any void vampire they come across - and if the vampire can feasibly do so, they will attempt to return the favor. Void vampires are at a distinct disadvantage against Gyrovagues, however, since the abilities of these monks are aimed so specifically against astral beings.

To Wander

Not everyone can become one of the monks of the astral sea. Gyrovagues are exclusively Peregrines who have chosen to dedicate their afterlives to Kelemvor, or whoever the god of the dead is in your setting, to help other

Pilgrims and Peregrines, and to spread some semblance of social order in the astral plane. Creatures of any alignment may become Gyrovagues, and although they seek to spread order, their itinerant lifestyle may appeal to beings that lean toward the chaotic. Kelemvor allows Gyrovagues to stay faithful to any deity they worshiped previously if they wish to do so, but any connection of divine power they may have had to that god is severed; their powers stem exclusively from the god of the dead.

Gyrovagues lack any formal training or structural hierarchy. Typically, a new monk is initiated in a short ritual with a veteran Gyrovague, and spends a few years traveling with the veteran monk as their mentor before venturing off alone.

Luminaries of the Gyrovagues

Jamla: This four-armed transgender sahuagin monk is the original gyrovague. It was she who first realized the need for shepherds of the dead, someone to guide Pilgrims to their afterlives, Peregrines to their judgement, and spirits to their end. She took this duty upon herself as best she could, guiding the dead to the borders of the Fugue plane one by one. When Kelemvor saw what she was doing, he was impressed, and decided to gift her with divine abilities to assist her in her work. Thus were the gyrovagues born. Jamla has continued her labors uninterrupted through all the millennia since, taking neither special privilege nor authority from her role in the gyrovagues' origin; she sails now as humbly as she ever did, eschewing the luxury of large vessels and attendants. Despite this, she is legendary throughout the astral plane, having helped and judged so many through the ages. Jamla is not truly evil, but her devotion to the order of the soul's progression trumps any concern she might feel for individual

Peregrines. She is merciless in her rulings and notorious for laying particularly onerous geasa upon Peregrines who require punishment according to the gods' statutes. But she also has many friends among those Peregrines and Pilgrims she has helped, and she is entirely willing to assist settlements or wanderers in defending themselves against roaming beasts or aberrations.

Jamla's secret: Jamla has a great weakness for flattery. She also considers herself a connoisseur of music. Combine the two, and she is putty in your hands. A rare few Peregrines have escaped their punishments at Jamla's hands by exploiting this weakness, and she is so embarrassed by that fact that she funds a permanent retreat hidden in some remote planar eddy, in which she maintains these privileged individuals in great comfort, so they will not leak her secret to other gyrovagues - or to Kelemvor.



Laen: Laen is a coward. It's most of the reason she's survived so long in the afterlife - when she sees something dangerous, she splits. In life, she was a high priestess of Helm, and she remains faithful to the god of protection. In death, however, her faith has been tested as it never was in her safe, cushy life as a high priestess. Despite her fear, Laen strives to help Peregrines survive in the astral plane - which often means helping them run, swim, or fly away from danger as quickly as possible! She also has a natural talent with horticulture, however, and guides settlers in the cultivation of crops in the unique environment of the astral sea. As a sea elf, Laen is one of the few gyrovagues truly welcomed in that people's floating coral castles, and thus one of the few able to recover sea elf Peregrines who have escaped their punishments by taking sanctuary amidst the unfriendly coral. Because of her race, she also enjoys the boon of a dedicated sea dragon mount, who greatly assists in her numerous escapes.

Laen's secret: Laen has not helped a soul move on in decades. Instead, she spends all the void ghosts she collects on 'protection' from several groups: a cabal of devils, a bullying void vampire, and even a merfolk lich.



Up-and-Comers

Bendt: Fatalistic and restless in her own elven skin, Bendt is among the few gyrovagues to truly wander the astral sea at random. She carries with her an assortment of dice, spinning tops, coins, and cards that she uses to chart her course across the waves. The same philosophy guides her interactions with the Peregrines and Pilgrims who are her charges; their fates are decided by the whims of her dice. With her steel glaive in hand, she is ready for whatever challenge the toss of the dice decrees, whether in a Peregrine's defense or their pursuit. An undercurrent of irony and sarcasm lies just beneath the surface of her words, but she is not fundamentally for or

against anyone: she simply does not care whether those she meets live or die, find their final heaven or flounder forever in the astral waves. Bendt occupies her hands by juggling her dice at any opportunity, and many in the astral sea identify her by this habit.

Bendt's secret: Bendt became a gyrovague in order to find her wife in the afterlife. For many years, she searched systematically, following leads, questioning everyone she met, paying powerful wizards to scry for her, but it all led to naught. The failure made her bitter, and led to her fatalistic outlook on life. Now she simply waits for chance to bring her to her lost love.





Mitre: A 3-foot bundle of scars and muscle, this halfling barbarian wanders the astral waves not to save lost souls but for the thrill of battle with rebels and beasts. Wielding a human's ornate ebony cane like a quarterstaff, Mitre batters their way through every obstacle that presents itself without concern for consequences, hurt feelings, or broken bones. Life as a gyrovague allows them to pursue their simple pleasures while protected somewhat from comeuppance by their divinely-sanctioned status, as well as making their demands for food and shelter - concerns they have little patience for on their own - much more likely to be suffered by others' charity. Mitre makes judgements off the top of their head and thinks little of the trials the bearers of their geasa must undergo. Highly narcissistic despite their squashed, scarred face, Mitre loves contests, and tries to prove

their superiority in competitions of all kinds, not just combat. For example, they will happily enter a beauty pageant or a spelling bee, fully believing they will win by a wide margin. When they do not, their fuming rage quickly follows - to the detriment of both judges and contestants. But for all that, the halfling is actually fairly personable when they aren't furious, and they have an endless supply of jokes to lubricate social situations. They value friends, particularly as allies in battle, and genuinely enjoy learning about others' lives.

Mitre's secret: Mitre's mortal life ended when they were executed for patricide. Only becoming a gyrovague saved them from punishment at the hands of one of the other monks.

Servants of the Sacred

Among those few that manage to keep their faith in the disillusioning afterlife, there are those that seek a greater purpose than mere existence. As in life, these people look to the gods to provide something more meaningful, something they can do that really matters. The gods care little for those stranded in the astral sea, regardless of their faith, but those with faith still care for the gods. They see the imperfections of divinity, the shattered dream of the Firmament, and realize a new purpose. Together, they have birthed a coalition of faiths in the Beyond, dedicated to the restoration of the Firmament. They call themselves the Servants of the Sacred.

The Servants are no fundamentally different than any other Peregrines or Pilgrims in the afterlife - they possess no special powers, unlike the Gyrovagues, and are usually offered no support from the gods. The Firmament was not seen favorably by all the deities, and, for a number of reasons, its reconstruction is unpopular among most of them (these reasons will depend upon the identity of your setting's gods). Any divinely-sanctioned reconstruction effort would be an inflammatory movement, and could be seen as grounds for a new divine war, even among good and lawful deities.

For those reasons, any god that does favor the Firmament's reconstruction is unlikely to do so openly. Any support they offer the Servants in their efforts will be offered in secret, perhaps even through obscure channels that hide the source of the assistance even from the Servants themselves. To the Servants, the lack of divine support for their work is small challenge to their faith compared to what they have already suffered, and few resent the deities for failing to help them.

To Serve

The Servants accept recruits from all races and types of being, mortal and immortal. That does not mean that it is easy to join them; they are rather unpopular among the denizens of the astral plane, and are particularly at risk of infiltration by agents of the Servile, who

periodically attempt to sabotage reconstruction efforts. Indeed, simply finding one of the Servants' work halls is a challenge, as their sanctuaries are kept hidden by both magical and mundane means.

Not all of those that reach the Servants and ask to join them are granted the opportunity. The leaders of the group weigh the benefits and risks that each new member brings. They favor those with knowledge of divine and arcane magic, craftspeople, and formidable warriors. All those selected for application must endure a rigorous trial of body and soul, prove the veracity of their faith within a zone of truth, and swear loyalty to the gods and the goals of the Servants.

Once initiated into the order, members are at the disposal of their superiors, and take up duties according to their abilities. Those with magical knowledge assist in experiments and research into the nature of the Firmament's construction, while those with creative talents help to develop the methods by which the Firmament may be reforged and actually carry out the necessary work. Those with talent in combat serve as the organization's guards and wardens, and carry out exploratory and retrieval missions throughout the astral plane.

Means to the End

The Servants' plans are not necessarily finalized. Depending on your campaign's progression, you might choose to introduce the Servants while they have not yet figured out exactly how they are going to reconstruct the Firmament. At this stage, the Servants primarily seek to study and experiment on intact fragments of the Firmament. Their agents track down these fragments and return them to the magical laboratories of the Servants, where magic users attempt to understand how the Firmament was constructed and how it functioned. The Servants might even recruit parties of adventurers to retrieve these fragments, although they certainly will not let the adventurers know why they need them.

Later in your campaign, the Servants will have learned enough about the Firmament to devise a long-term plot. The essentials of this plan are thus: because the astral sea is made up of the Firmament's detritus, in order for it to be reconstructed, not only will the surviving fragments of the Firmament need to be collected, but the entire firmament field will need to be reforged into solid material. To accomplish this, the Servants are building a colossal magical device known as the Drain. The Drain's purpose is to draw in the field, the 'waters' of the astral sea, and convert it into solid substance. This substance can then be used by the Servants to construct the Firmament itself. At this stage of their plans, the Servants are likely to hire adventuring parties to retrieve materials and parts for the Drain, as well as to chaperone or capture skilled craftspeople or magic users to assist in the construction.

Unfortunately for those spending their afterlives in the astral sea, if the Servants were successful in this endeavor, the entire astral sea would be emptied of its magical medium, leaving it an empty void incapable of supporting life. Mortals that died after this was accomplished would benefit, as the new Firmament would allow their souls to enter their god's plane without question. Those already barred from their god's realm, however, would still be unable to enter - and would inevitably die without the Field to sustain them. The Servants see this as a perfectly acceptable sacrifice.

Luminaries of the Servants of the Sacred

Elleka: Elleka is the architectural mystic behind the Servants of the Sacred. Possessed with an incredible ability to conceptualize physical and metaphysical fields and their interactions, Elleka is among but a handful of individuals in the entire multiverse with the capacity to design such a plane-spanning construct as the Firmament.

She incorporates every possible aspect of mundane and magical concern into her creations, from the arcane imprints her buildings embody to the resonance of the spaces she creates and what overtones they will birth when filled with sound. As a mortal - and a Gith - she designed to the alien tastes of her mind flayer slavemasters, the mind behind a thousand of their most unnerving ruins. Some say she was taken to the Far Realm itself to be bathed in its alien essence in order to better understand the aberrant psyche, but

Elleka herself has never spoken of such a thing. She is mostly nonverbal, but can communicate in a limited way through writing - or by singing cryptic snippets of songs.

Elleka's secret: Elleka does not intend to construct the Firmament exactly as it was. She foresees that doing so would be pointless: the gods would simply destroy it again, sooner or later. Instead, Elleka means to construct a Firmament that would be beyond the power of all the gods combined to destroy, harnessing both their divine might and the aberrant emanations of the stars, binding all in an unbreakable lattice. The creation she has designed would functionally imprison all the deities in their respective planes, allowing them to influence their respective spheres in the mortal world and accept the souls of their followers, but preventing divine warfare and cosmic upheaval. Only Enet knows the truth of what she plans.



Enet: This transgender Gith foreman has spent millennia at his sister Elleka's side as her interpreter, caretaker, and bodyguard. He also serves as the primary construction manager for all of her projects, as he is the only one capable of deciphering her mystically manifold blueprints and designs. With his silver hammer and chisel, forged in the same secret manner as the silver greatswords of the Githyanki, Enet shapes matter both physically and metaphysically according to his sister's exacting specifications. As much as this may make him seem subservient, it is Enet who truly leads the Servants and holds ultimate authority over its endeavors. His sister may make the plans, but he decides how and when they will be carried out. Enet has a natural charisma and empathy that inspires great

loyalty in his followers, allowing him to truly rely on his Servants to be true to the cause. Many times, his charm has allowed him to turn an infiltrator from the Servile to the Servants' point of view, adopting them as his own agents or sending them back to act as spies among his enemies.

Enet's secret: Of late, Enet's eternal devotion to his sister has come to wear on him. Despite all the progress they have made, she only becomes more anxious about the outcome of their efforts, relying more and more on her brother for stability. He remains loyal to her, of course, but has sought solace in a secret lover: a Githyanki knight. If Elleka ever knew, she would be devastated.



Up-and-Comers of the Servants of the Sacred

Sabel: Sabel is less a servant of the sacred than she is a servant of vengeance *by way* of the sacred. Although her mortal life ended when she was just a small sea elf girl, she had the extraordinary good fortune to stumble upon her father in the astral plane when he died just a few years later. Unfortunately, she has since lost him again. Over the last century or so, the father-daughter pair had come to control a large regional share of the exploitative byssus production industry. Her father became a target, and the Servile assassinated him as an example, sparing Sabel only because she appears to be a child. Abandoning her business, Sabel devoted all her resources to exacting revenge from the Servile. In the process, she discovered the Servants. With her extensive knowledge of textile crafts and enchanted fabrics, she made an attractive recruit, and the Servants' opposition to the Servile made them all too irresistible to her. As

a Servant, Sabel devotes her talents to the refinement of metal cloth, fabrics, and threads for use in the Firmament's repair. Far closer to her heart, of course, are the razor-wire traps she is ordered to spin for the Servants' fight against the Servile. Many a Servile vessel has been shredded on the astral currents by her vicious invisible webs, and many an unsuspecting member of their order strangled by cord twined around her seemingly juvenile hands.

Sabel's secret: When the assassins came for her and her father, Sabel pretended to be nothing more than an innocent child with no knowledge of her business' exploitations of their merfolk workers. In reality, she went behind her father's back multiple times to put aside worker safety concerns in favor of profits. She knows that she is the one who deserved to die, and the guilt of it fires her obsession with revenge even further.





Rine: In life, Rine was a merrow paladin of Umberlee (or whoever the god or goddess of the sea is in your setting's pantheon). She sees death as small reason to change that, and seeks to spread Umberlee's power throughout the astral plane. She considers it an outrageous blasphemy that the entire plane does not belong to her goddess - after all, is it not a sea, of sorts? Rine recently joined the Servants because they seemed to be one of the only organizations actually attempting to promote the influence of the gods in the afterlife. She believes that if they were to succeed in truly spreading the power of the gods to the astral sea, Umberlee would take possession of the entire plane as a natural extension of her domain. Rine has no crafting

aptitudes, but her abilities as a paladin make her a valuable guard and hit fish. She has recently been promoted to captain of one of the Servants' squadrons, and spends most of her time patrolling near their hideouts and escorting agents on missions across the currents.

Rine's secret: Rine occasionally lies to her squad about their missions, leading them on expeditions that have nothing to do with the Servants' goals but everything to do with destroying Umberlee's enemies.

The Servile

Many Peregrines come to resent the gods and oppose all forms of worship. Some of those put action to their beliefs, organizing in semi-secret cells in settlements throughout the astral plane to oppose theism in any way they can think of. The Servile name themselves in ironic parody of the Servants of the Sacred - where the Servants embrace their servitude to the gods, the Servile embrace their demeaning title as a criticism of the labor the gods extracted from them under false pretenses during life.

Perhaps surprisingly, the Servile are actually more popular among the common folk of the astral plane than are the Servants of the Sacred. Unlike the Servants, however, the Servile actually try to help Peregrine settlements, protecting them and assisting them to make a life in the astral plane.

Chores

For all their tough veneer and salty atheism, the Servile are a charity at their heart. The majority of their time, effort, and funds are devoted to dealing with the everyday problems of normal Peregrines trying to make a place for themselves in the afterlife. They organize resource-sharing agreements between far-flung settlements, allowing those with convenient brine springs, for example, to send their salt to a neighboring village, whose extra mage provides magical flame for the other in return. They patrol the swirling currents of the astral plane, repelling wandering monsters from settlements and transporting stranded Peregrines to safe, permanent homes. Githyanki are usually too well-equipped to be threatened by most cells of the Servile, but if non-Githyanki pirates take to the waves, the Servile are the ones that fight back. They deliver food and medicine to the poor and sick at no charge, paying for it using thieves to collect a mandatory 'service charge' from rich Peregrines or Paragons in well-populated astral cities.

Among the common folk, those are the things that characterize the Servile. But among the

upper class and those still devoted to the gods, it is the Servile's more high-profile operations that color their reputation. Certain Servile cells function as political assassin's guilds, arranging the murders of agents of the gods; Gyrovagues, demons, devils, Paragons, and even Servants of the Sacred. Occasionally, they attempt to capture an angel to use in rituals that enable them to appropriate a measure of divine power. They organize rescue missions for atheist or agnostic Peregrines who have been captured by the Gyrovagues, and kidnap Peregrines how have been given a geas to free them of their punishment with secret dispelling rituals. And among the most influential cells, talk of a complete overthrow of the divine circulates perpetually, awaiting only a feasible idea to erupt into action.

To Toil

The Servile accept recruits from any race and most alignments, although anyone who impedes the success of their missions will be quickly expelled. Unlike the Servants of the Sacred, the Servile do not worry overmuch about the sincerity of their recruits - most Peregrines tend to be anti-theist, and there simply are not enough Servants for infiltration to be a concern. Servile cells recruit according to their individual needs, but in general their operations best suit rogues, bards, rangers, and those of similar skills. It is entirely feasible for a Servile cell to hire a band of mercenaries or a party of adventurers to assist them on a particularly dangerous mission, and your players could easily become full members in the organization. Advancement is informal - the 'leaders' of the Servile bear no formal titles, operating purely on reputation. 'Promotions' are made according to a cell leader's recommendation, and usually only occur when a more senior Servitor has a need for an individual of particular talents.

Luminaries of the Servile

Malia: Rumours among the Servile tell of a malicious, misshapen being hidden in the secret depths of their membership, brought forth only to carry out the darkest deeds demanded by gravest necessity. This 'Malia' hides itself always beneath an enormous cloak, its hump writhing restlessly beneath the cloth, while one eye glitters out from the scarred and scaled semblance of a dragonborn's face. Another blinks from the back of the creature's left hand, and a metal prosthetic in the shape of an eagle's talon peeks from beneath the hem of its cloak on the right. Despite this, it moves with an uncanny silence, gliding through corridors without a sound... but always leaving a trail of some scarlet, gooey substance in its wake.

And when it comes to her physical characteristics, the rumours are remarkably accurate to the truth of Malia's body: she is missing one eye in her head, sports an extra one on the back of her hand, walks with the aid of a mechanical prosthetic from the right knee down, oozes from a fungal tumor on her calf, and covers the three extra arms that grow at awkward angles from her back with a heavy cloak.

In reality, though, Malia is far from malicious. On the contrary, she is positively goofy. She loves jokes, and improvisational acting, and small children, for whom she carries about twenty pounds of candy stashed in various places beneath her cloak, and even occasionally removes her covering to entertain them by juggling with her extra arms. All that is not to say that she isn't dangerous: she is the Servile's most capable agent, and can turn

from laughter to violence in a blink when threatened. It is she who handles most of the Servile's assassinations, as well as their interactions with the void ghost gangs operating throughout the Supernal Above and into the Stellar Abyss.

Her physical abnormalities are all mementos of the time she has spent there, fighting aberrant creatures while exposed to the alterity of the Far Realm. Through Malia, the Servile partner with certain void ghost gangs to transport Peregrines out of the Stellar Abyss and away from any enslaving creatures they may have been captured by. She is also one of the few members that knows the location of the void ghost/Peregrine colony in the Stellar Abyss, and oversees travel into and out of that stronghold.

Malia's secret: Malia's familiarity with the ghost gangs of the Stellar Abyss did not come about by chance. In fact, Malia was once one of them, a powerful void vampire who led one of the first gangs of freedom fighting undead in the astral plane. She discovered the secret of void ghost resurrection, and is one of the only Peregrines living who was once undead.



Enech: Although her shabby coveralls, tool-decked wardrobe, and taciturn demeanor belie the fact, the tiefling known as Enech truly is one of the Servile's most experienced, talented, and well-connected agents. She has been wandering the astral waves in her small skiff for so long, moving from one housewife's minor inconvenience to the next with spade or sliderule in hand, that she has become skilled with almost every kind of simple, practical tool imaginable. She is master at everything handy, from agriculture and mechanics to carpentry and metalworking - and even to slightly less forceful crafts, when a surprisingly cute wink manages to flash past her gruff persona in the direction of a susceptible housewife.

Her long wanderings have also put her in touch with almost all of the Servile's regionally-influential members. By popular demand she is a member of an informal council among them, arranged to coordinate large-scale projects. As little as she likes to think of herself in that manner, Enech is a leader, and in her own grumpy, quiet way she goes to great lengths to organize efforts to make the lives of Peregrines easier.

She has no formal combat training and lacks proficiency in any 'real' weapon, but she's lived in the astral plane long enough to be able to take care of herself on the fly with whatever implement happens to be in her hand at the time. Though she spends much of her time wandering aimlessly between settlements and helping as she can, Enech also responds to specific requests for aid when those messages reach her through the Servile's informal, word-of-mouth communication network.

Enech's secret: The Servants of the Sacred have approached Enech multiple times, attracted by her handiness with such a wide variety of crafts. Although she has always turned them down, Enech is not entirely closed to their advances. She believes in the Servile's works, but some of the things they do - such as assassinations - do not sit well with her. It would take some effort to convince her to leave, but it would not be impossible.



Up-and-Comers of the Servile

Allor: Barely a member of the Servile at all, this merfolk ranger sees the group as a convenient supply-line and set of ready-made allies for those occasions when her bow isn't quite enough to handle the latest threat to the tiny village she protects. As little as she cares for her standing with them, though, her efficiency in eliminating those threats she can handle on her own has her prominent in the minds of some of the Servile's regional organizers.

Habitually solitary, and highly awkward when she is around others, Allor spends her days patrolling the coral groves and astral hills surrounding her village with only her tiger shark companion at her side, her longbow at the ready for hunting or fighting. Occasionally, however, she does act as chaperone and guide when a villager needs to venture out into the

wilds of the astral sea. She also has a habit of depositing her kills on the front stoops of those she knows will go hungry otherwise, whether due to poor harvest or simple handicap. The few relationships she does have are with those she has quietly provided for in this way over the years. Allor is content with this life, but her sense of duty could easily entangle her in concerns bigger than just the single village she has chosen to protect.

Allor's secret: Allor stalks several members of the community she has chosen to protect. Although she tells herself that keeping an eye on them is just part of her duty as their self-appointed protector, the truth is that she watches them out of longing for friendship and intimacy. Her anxieties paralyze her, however, and she has never been able to actually approach one of those she admires.



Efril: This tiny sea elf wizard is the Servile's go-to magic user for the petty concerns of Peregrine life. Eternally put-upon, with a years-long backlog of requests for arcane upkeep kept lengthy by about twelve different regional organizers, Efril is usually grumpy and always exhausted. She follows her checklist of responsibilities dutifully, however, and rarely takes time for herself, even just to recuperate for a few days. Her spellwork is far from impressive in terms of elegance or raw power, but she has a natural technical intuition that serves her well for the practical spells she uses most often.

Most of her work is simple: creating eternal flames for cooking or light (as with *continual flame*, but modified to produce heat as well), purifying springs for drinking purposes, simple concealments from petty threats, bolstering crop growth, mending of small wounds, etc. She might not be able to cast the powerful spells of legend, but she's been known to point out technical slapdashery in the craft of wizards exponentially more powerful than she is. They rarely appreciate her acerbic comments, no matter how undeniably

cute the face that delivers them. As sour and sharp as all five feet of her may be, though, Efril actually does enjoy her job for its unpretentious nature - and its reliability. Unlike most of the Servile's agents, Efril receives a stipend from the group. Still, she might be tempted to go freelance - after all, the Servile provide her with very little except a constant stream of requests - but something holds her in a loose affiliation with them.

Efril's secret: Efril was once one of those housewives that Enech habitually sleeps her way through. Unlike most, though, when Efril woke up alone, she went looking for the woman who abandoned her, determinedly taking up magic to help her along the way. She's yet to encounter the celestial mechanic again, and she's not quite sure what she would actually do if she ever did find her, but she can't stop herself from searching.



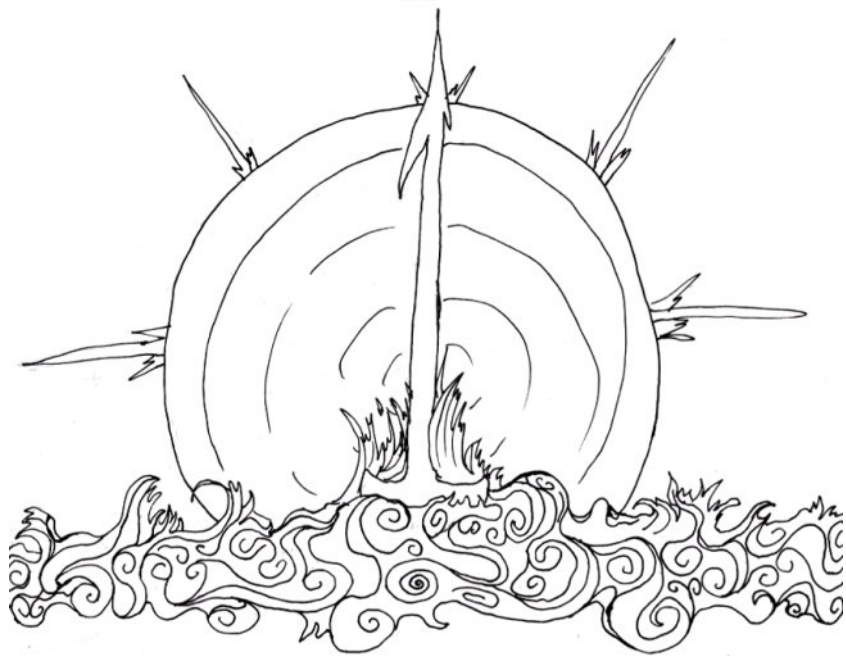
Secure Your Astral Assets With...

FIRST CELESTIAL BANK

THE BANK OF HEAVEN

Services

Whatever your financial priorities or needs might be, **First Celestial Bank** has the ideal selection of accounts, products, and sound advice to help you meet your financial goals. With branches in every single Dominion in the astral sea (including the Nine Hells) **First Celestial** is the go-to provider of safe repository for everyone in the astral sea.



Savings

Almost anyone in the astral sea with a gold piece to their name has an account with **First Celestial** - including the gods! We provide indefinite safe storage of any sum of money and/or any number of valuables. **First Celestial** employs the most eldritch rituals and monsters to ward our vaults, allowing our customers to feel secure knowing that their property is beyond the reach of any angel, demon, devil, or deity. **First Celestial** invests our customers' wealth in highly lucrative business opportunities throughout the astral plane, so we are able to offer generous interest rates at almost every account tier!

Secrets

First Celestial is also able to accept less material assets. Our experts appraise thousands of customers' secrets every hour, providing immediate payment in gold, or crediting the account with the appropriate amount. Once payment or credit has been provided, your secrets will be ritually bound and deposited in **First Celestial's** vaults until you wish to make a withdrawal. For those with unclean consciences, opt for complete removal of your secret and gain relief at last from your burden of guilt! If you don't have any dark secrets, don't worry - our experts may appraise petty secrets at a lower sum, but **First Celestial** accepts secrets at all levels of cosmic significance. *Please note that our binding rituals do prevent any further disclosure of the knowledge in question by the depositor until a withdrawal has been made.*

Star Dust

Funds running low? Consider selling your body's star dust! Did you know that the average Paragon or Pilgrim's body contains almost 0.3 grams of star dust, worth almost 150 gold pieces? The average Peregrine's body contains less, just 0.1 grams, but that's still a value of 50 gold pieces! At **First Celestial**, we offer immediate cash for eventual return in the form of your body's star dust. A simple ritual will cause your body to be transported to our vaults upon your eventual expiration, while you enjoy immediate funds!

First Celestial Bank is a partial pyramid scheme run by Thaluwere, a copper dragon in possession of one of the greatest secrets in existence: the truth of a god's identity. The bank provides all the normal services of a bank, but it also provides one that no other bank ever has: the storage of secrets, credited to one's account in monetary form. All bank employees, including Albera (the bank's ostensible owner) and Thaluwere (its true owner), have undergone a ritual to become 'sigil-stained;' that is, tattooed all over their bodies with glowing golden sigils. These sigils are the magically-bound form of the secrets that have been deposited with First Celestial, made physical in the ink of their tattoos. All bank employees derive magical power from these secrets, but none moreso than Thaluwere.

Pyramid Scheme

When an employee is hired, they are required to deposit one valuable secret about themselves with the bank. This secret is entrusted to the employee that conducts their hiring process, and a magical bond is forged between the two. Each employee controls the assets of all the accounts entrusted to them, which is generally only those accounts that they personally opened for new clients. They also act as living repositories for their clients' secrets; they are visible upon the employee's person as glowing golden tattoos, and the employee enjoys the power that those secrets can afford them. Collectively, the secrets and funds deposited with a sigil-stained employee are known as their entrustments.

Every employee is required to make a monthly tithe of funds or secrets from their entrustments directly to their superior's accounts; that is, to the employee who hired them. The value of this tithe is calculated based upon the employee's seniority, and it can be paid in either secrets or funds at the payee's discretion. For new employees, their ability to make this tithe is directly dependent upon their ability to bring in new accounts, new secrets, and to engage the bank in profitable enterprises, but the tithe

calculations are designed so that older employees are able to rely upon the tithes of their underlings to meet their own requirements. Past a certain point - 100 hires, perhaps - all of an employee's tithe would be met by the tithes of their underlings, and their entrustments with the bank are purely at their own disposal in bank business ventures.

Customers are ignorant of this system, of course - to them, it seems like a normal bank; they are able to deposit and withdraw as much or as little as they wish at any time. They don't realize that a certain percentage of their balance may be entrusted to the employee they opened the account with, and another percentage may be entrusted to their superior, or to their superior's superior, and that if they withdraw all their funds or close their account it may affect multiple employees' ability to meet their tithes.

The end result of this scheme is that the entrustment of money and secrets flows up the pyramid and accumulates at the top, in the claws and on the scales of Thaluwere. Relatively few others manage to make it big with the bank, but most are able to support themselves as with any other commercial employment. A few, of course, flounder in debt.

Profit Pursuits

It is down to each employee to make best use of the assets in their entrustment. They must make their monthly tithe, but how they do that is an individual choice. Some focus on recruiting new members, seeking to meet the break-even point of tither to tithee. Some choose to act as scribes for the bank, striking deals with other employees whereby they will write out ready-made Secret Deposition Contracts (SDCs) for their use, taking a certain cut of each contract signed by a customer convinced to make a deposit with the non-scribe partner. Others invest the funds entrusted to them in businesses, seeking to make a profit. Many who take this path use the secrets they possess to facilitate their investments, whether by capitalizing on

unknown mineral deposits, secret weaknesses in competitors, or undiscovered markets, or by using the magical hold a secret gives them to cripple a competing company. In these endeavors, a First Celestial employee's competitors are most often their own co-workers.

There are a few major businesses First Celestial employees have pursued: protection, transportation, and star dust. The biggest of these is the star dust trade. By bank policy, First Celestial itself is the only business that may buy a pledge to a Peregrine's star dust; anyone else that tries to get in on this market is viciously destroyed by 'unknown parties.' There is no such ban on competition for star dust acquired in other ways, however, and there are many different trawling companies that sail the astral sea with nets strung out behind their ships, collecting Peregrine animals to be ground down into star dust and sold. Competition between these companies, and tensions between the employees that sponsor them, is extremely fierce.

Selling a Secret

Depositing a secret with First Celestial is simple. After informing their Celestial Representative that they wish to make a deposit, the customer will be provided with a pre-made contract written in the bank's magical golden ink upon coal-black parchment. Alternatively, the representative may write out the contract from scratch at the time of deposition. Using the same ink, provided by Thaluwere's spittle (although none are aware of its origin), the customer writes out their secret upon the contract. The representative will then appraise the secret using the magic of their sigil stains (one eye becomes temporarily shot with gold like blood) and inscribe the value upon the contract as they determine it.

After making their selections for the type of deposition (amnesiac or no; i.e., whether or not the client chooses to retain memory of the secret) and agreeing to the conditions, the customer signs the contract. After being

signed, the contract will automatically roll itself up, coil into the shape of a small snake, and 'bite' the customer in the form of a paper cut. With their signature and their blood, the contract takes immediate effect. At this time, the entire contract and secret text reform into a magically-generated sigil upon the parchment. The customer's account can be credited with the value of the secret, or they may opt to take direct cash payment. After the customer leaves, the Celestial Representative typically transfers the secret sigil to their skin, although they may save it to use as a tithe, or consign it to their personal vaults if it is particularly petty and unlikely to be stolen by other associates.

The customer is free to withdraw the secret from the bank's entrustment at any time, but their balance will decrease by the secret's value. Secrets do fluctuate in power, and thus worth, so a customer's balance may vary wildly depending upon the importance of the secrets they happen to have entrusted with the bank.

Corporate Culture

The nature of First Celestial's business structure has a few effects on workplace atmosphere. Because everyone's personal worth and power derives from secrets, First Celestial employees have a natural reticence about everything. Sigil-stained associates habitually withhold information of all kinds, even information that grants them no power and would be completely harmless to divulge. They may be willing to sell information, but they rarely give out information freely unless it benefits them directly.

This reticence extends even to the training of new employees. Their superiors may mislead them as to the nature of First Celestial's business ventures, or the extent and nature of their sigil-stained powers. Even the layout of the branch may be considered restricted information, known in full only to the branch manager and security liaison. Because high-ranking employees are encouraged to invest their funds in business ventures and compete

with each other, there is a certain amount of inter-employee tension. Plots and schemes and hidden deals with powerful entities abound behind the scenes, as powerful sigil-stained administrators maneuver for profit and influence.

More dangerously for those outside of First Celestial, sometimes sigil-stained employees try to consolidate their power and increase the worth of their secrets by eliminating all other possessors of those secrets. If there are only a few people who know a secret entrusted to a First Celestial employee, that employee can identify and track them down (if the employee is powerful enough). Some threaten or coerce them into signing ritually-binding non-disclosure agreements, thus increasing the value and power of the secret. Others simply hire mercenaries to murder the targets.

Recruitment

As a pyramid scheme, First Celestial is always looking for new sigil-stained associates. There are absolutely no official rules on who may be inducted into the bank; everyone simply exercises their own judgement on who they think will be best able to collect assets for their tithe. Individuals of any race, evil or good, monstrous or humanoid, are employed by the bank, as long as they are intelligent enough to perform their duties.

It would not be inconceivable for one or more player characters to pique the interest of a First Celestial recruiter. For more information on both player- and non-player character members of First Celestial, see the following section.

Sigil-Stained Characters

To create a sigil-stained character, whether an NPC or player, just add the Sigil Stained feat to their feat list.

Sigil Stained

You have been imbued with the first of many secrets as an employee of First Celestial Bank, gaining the following benefits and drawbacks.

- Resist psychic
- All insight, intimidate, bluff, or diplomacy checks that seek to force, persuade, or insinuate information from you are made at disadvantage.
- Add *Spiritual Blackmail* to your spell list (see below). When the total value of secrets entrusted to you is 500,000 gp or greater, you may also add *Secret Subjugation* to your spell list.
- A sigil-stained character must make a monthly tithe to their recruiter for a value of 100gp multiplied by the number of months they have been employed by First Celestial (capped at 25 years). This tithe can be paid in secrets (see *Estimating the Value of Secrets* later in this section) or in funds. If the character does not return to a branch of First Celestial to make this tithe by the monthly due date, it will be automatically deducted from their holdings with the bank, or from the secrets on their person. If they do not have sufficient funds or secrets, they temporarily gain the curse feat **Mysterious Debt**. *Note: players should be responsible for tracking their own balance of secrets, unless the DM is comfortable handling this for them.*

Mysterious Debt

You have failed to keep up with your tithes to your recruiter with First Celestial, gaining the following drawbacks until you repay what you owe:

- You are unable to use *Spiritual Blackmail* or *Secret Subjugation*. All secrets deposited with you are automatically confiscated by your recruiter until you have repaid your debt, and they gain +10 on persuade and intimidate checks to convince you to sell another secret

about yourself.

Spiritual Blackmail

Enchantment cantrip

Casting time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V

Duration: Instantaneous

Your tattoos glow and twist on your skin as you brandish the weight of an indistinct doom to crush your opponent's will.

Choose a single target that you can see within range. With this target, engage in an Intelligence contest in a specialization of your choice. If you win the contest, the target takes a -1 penalty to all rolls with a d20 for 1 minute. You may only have this effect active on one creature at a time, unless your balance of secrets has a total value of over 250,000 gp, in which case the limit increases to three creatures. As a bonus action, you can choose to end this spell's effects, allowing it to be cast again on a different target. An ally of the target may attempt to relieve this effect by making a check (as an action) in the skill for which the target failed their contest (DC 15).

Secret Subjugation

Enchantment cantrip

Casting time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V

Duration: Instantaneous

Choose one creature currently affected by your casting of *Spiritual Blackmail*. You use your secret influence to bend the target to your will. This creature is unable to make attacks against you and must obey your commands. If you issue a command that goes directly against the target's alignment, strongly-held beliefs, or personal survival, the target may make a Charisma saving throw to resist the command. If successful, they refuse to carry out that order and you cannot attempt to give the same order again on the same day, but the target is still otherwise under your control. This effect lasts for 24 hours, at which

time you may choose to automatically cast the spell again (although it does not automatically succeed). **Miss:** The target takes 4d10 non-lethal psychic damage.

If a player character wishes to accept employment with First Celestial, they must first open an account and make a deposit of one important secret about themselves to their recruiter. When they have done this, the recruiter will perform perfunctory initiation rituals amounting to a reading of terms and conditions, culminating in the player character being gifted their first secret. Taken from their recruiter's personal assets, the sigil for this secret will be tattooed somewhere on the player character's body (location at their discretion). Once they have received their tattoo, the player character adds the cantrip *Spiritual Blackmail* to their spell list.

Sigil-Stained players may accept entrustments of secrets from any character. To do so, they require an inkwell of mysterious ink (sufficient for 10 contracts) and a roll of enchanted parchment (sufficient for 10 contracts), which they can acquire free of cost from any branch of First Celestial. The content of a secret is up to you to devise, but if you need inspiration, see the following list:

Secret Ideas

You've learned...

...of a secret treasure trove.

...about a hidden plot.

...of an illicit alliance.

...the identity of an NPC's lover.

...the identity of a criminal mastermind.

...the identity of a murderer.

...the location of a secret chamber.

...of corruption in an organization.

...that an NPC suffers from a debilitating chronic illness.

...that an NPC isn't who they claim to be.

Most of the secrets First Celestial accepts are much more petty and mundane than those listed, but there usually isn't a point in detailing those secrets for your players; just say that they accept the secret and have them mark down its value (generally 10 copper for a petty secret). It's of more use to take the deposition of secrets as an opportunity to present your players with plot hooks or clues, so chances are you won't have trouble thinking of something to give them.

Estimating the Value of a Secret

First Celestial's accounting enchantments

estimate secret value based upon the number and identity of the people who would want to know the secret and the number and identity of people who currently know the secret. Unfortunately, DMs don't have the benefit of accounting enchantments. If you need guidance for assigning a solid value to a given secret, try following these steps:

1. Determine the most powerful individual who would want to know the secret.
2. Roll 1d4 and multiply the result according to the table below.

Interest Multipliers by Identity of Interested NPC

| Coveter | Multiplier |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Commoner | 1 |
| Guard captain | 5 |
| Priest | 7 |
| Mayor | 15 |
| Powerful business owner | 30 |
| Regional guildmaster | 50 |
| High priest | 75 |
| Lord | 100 |
| National monopolist | 500 |
| Ruler of a nation | 1,000 |
| Trade mogul | 10,000 |
| Angel/demon/devil | 100,000 |
| Exarch | 500,000 |
| Deity | 1,000,000 |

3. Estimate the total number of people of similar power who would have a serious interest in the secret. Multiply the result from step two by this estimate.

4. Estimate the total number of people of similar power who currently know the secret. Divide the result from step three by one-tenth of this estimate. The result is the secret's estimated worth in gold pieces.

For example, imagine that someone has told

your sigil-stained player character that a certain mining company has been using illegal slave labor. The most powerful individual who would be particularly interested in knowing this secret is likely one of the mining company's market rivals, a powerful business owner. We roll 1d4 and get a 3. Applying the correct multiplier, 30, we get 900.

There are probably three rival mining companies whose owners would be interested in this information. In addition, there might be

a corrupt guard captain with a habit of blackmail who has been looking for dirt on this company for some time. You can obviously come up with more people interested in this secret, but we'll stick with 4. Multiplying 900 by 4, we get 3,600.

The owner of the mining company has close relations with several nearby ore refineries because they are owned by her nephews, so it's likely that they are also aware that she has been using slave labor. Therefore, there is a probable total of 5 others who are aware of what she has been doing. Dividing 3,600 by one-tenth of that estimate, we get 7,200. The estimated value of this secret is 7,200 gold pieces. This value does not necessarily represent how much someone would be willing to pay for this secret.

These rules should be taken as guidelines, to be used if you really have no idea how much a secret should be worth. If they give you a value you think is too high or too low, just change it to what you think is more reasonable. No rules can accurately capture all the nuances inherent in the business of secrets. If you have a clear idea of the character of the person most interested in learning a secret and can easily come up with a number for the amount they'd be willing to spend on discovering the secret, use your judgement over a formula.

Progressing with First Celestial

First Celestial Bank has no official requirements for its employees' working hours. Instead, they rely on vigorous competition between associates to ensure that their branches are constantly staffed (any time an employee is not at the branch is a time they cannot accept deposits, and that their rivals can). All they care about is whether employees make their tithes. Because of this, some employees prefer to operate as mobile freelancers, moving from place to place, accepting secret entrustments. If one of your players is hired by the bank, this is almost certainly the route they would take. That said, individual branch managers often mandate work schedules from their regular employees, to ensure there is no break in service.

Every month, your player must make a tithe of funds equal to 100 gold pieces multiplied by the number of months they have been employed with First Celestial. This tithe can be made from their personal funds or as a transfer of entrustments. Long-term, the easiest way to do this is to recruit high-performing sigil-stained associates who have to make their own tithes. Unless a likely recruit/secret depositor runs into the party as part of the plot, it's probably best to handle a player character's recruitment and asset acquisitions between sessions.

Recruitment

Have the player roll a d20 for every in-game week that passes. If they roll higher than a 10, they are able to find a recruit; lower, and they are unable to recruit anyone. If successful, have them roll a d100. The result is the recruit's efficiency, or the percentage of their monthly tithe they are able to meet. If the result is higher than 85, have them roll another d100 and add the two rolls together; this is that recruit's efficiency. This represents the fact that most of the chums brought into First Celestial are very bad at their jobs, and are not able to meet their tithe - but occasionally you get someone who is actually pretty good at it. For every recruit they get, the player gains a secret worth $1d20+100$ gp.

Amassing Mysteries

Aside from whatever secret deposits may come about as a result of roleplaying and plot, allow the player to gain 1d6 secrets of value 1d20 each per month. As their secret entrustments accumulate, they gain bonuses according to the table below.

Secret Benefits

| Total Secret Value | Benefit |
|--------------------|--|
| 1,000 gp | Once per day, you automatically succeed on a Knowledge check of any kind. However, if you reveal the knowledge you gain using this ability, you take a -2 penalty to Charisma checks and saving throws for 1 hour. This ability may be used in conjunction with <i>spiritual blackmail</i> . |
| 10,000 gp | When you come into entrustment of a secret known to 5 or fewer individuals, you automatically learn the identity of those individuals and gain the ability to sense their presence when within 10 miles. |
| 100,000 gp | Choose one race or one type of monster. You have amassed numerous and significant secrets regarding that type of creature. You gain +2 to hit against the chosen race or monster type. You also gain +5 to knowledge checks regarding your chosen race or monster. |
| 250,000 gp | You gain +5 to Knowledge checks of all kinds. However, if you reveal knowledge you gain from a successful check, you take a -2 penalty to Wisdom checks and saving throws for 3 hours. This ability may be used in conjunction with <i>spiritual blackmail</i> . In addition, <i>spiritual blackmail</i> may now be active on up to 3 targets at once. |
| 500,000 gp | You have begun to gain power over secrets by their very nature, and are now a Sigil-Stained Administrator. Add <i>secret subjugation</i> to your spell list. All insight, intimidate, bluff, or diplomacy checks that seek to force, persuade, or insinuate information from you are made at a -6 penalty. |

Managing Accounts

A player character employed by First Celestial has access to the funds contained in their private account with the bank, as well as access to their 'entrustment.' This 'virtual account' is made up of all the secrets and funds that have been entrusted to them through their clients - so all the secrets deposited with them and the balance of all accounts opened by them are at their disposal as venture capital.

Any First Celestial employee may withdraw funds from their entrustment as though it was their private account. This does not affect the balance of accounts in their entrustment - the clients may withdraw funds normally, and in

fact will never know if their banker has withdrawn against their entrustment. Funds may also be withdrawn against the value of the secrets within an employee's entrustment. Funds withdrawn against an entrustment may be used for any purpose, but every 6 months they must be repaid to the bank plus 20% interest. If this is not met, the employee suffers the curse feat **Mysterious Debt** until they have paid in full.

Leaving First Celestial

Employees may quit at any time, but any debts due to tithes or entrustment withdrawals still apply. Additional tithe debt will not accumulate after an employee has tendered their resignation, but interest on overdue

entrustment withdrawals will continue to compound. When the employee turns in their resignation, their recruiter accepts any secrets that may be in their possession into their own entrustment. If the ex-employee possessed secrets that were sold to them directly rather than deposited into their entrustment, they are reimbursed in cash to 25% of the secrets' worth. Ex-employees lose all sigil-stained abilities and traits.

Luminaries of First Celestial

Thaluwere: Thaluwere is the ancient copper wyrm who founded First Celestial Bank, whose venom forms the magical ink that binds all the bank's secret contracts, and who controls the entire scheme from the shadows. When she was just a wyrmling, Thaluwere came into possession of one of the greatest secrets in the multiverse: the hidden identity of one of the gods. After some time, spent in research and experimentation, Thaluwere was able to ritually imbue her venom with the capacity to bind secrets and derive power from them. The god's identity became her first secret, inscribed onto Thaluwere's hide as a sigil illegible to all but her. By the parameters of the ritual, the wyrmling gained great influence over the god and their sphere. She became able to bend the deity to her will, and to wield limited amounts of divine power as she willed.

She knew, however, that she would not be able to prevent the god from destroying her or shattering the ritual if she brought herself to their attention, so she refrained from using her abilities for many centuries. She spent that time seeking out other great secrets of the multiverse, garnering more and more power and bolstering the strength of the spell that imbues her venom with each new piece of bound knowledge. The power she gained from a secret was proportional to the number of people who would want to know about it and inversely proportional to the number of people who actually did know about it. This time of her life was little different from that of any other copper dragon's, except for the tattoos adorning her scales, so she attracted

little attention. When she felt ready, at about 800 years old, she relocated to the astral plane and infiltrated a small dwarven bank (Goldcrag Deposits). Thaluwere offered the bank's matriarch (Albera Goldcrag) a deal: take her on as a secret partner, and she would allow Albera the ability to gain power from secrets just as she did. The dwarf agreed.

Deciding which member of your setting's pantheon is under Thaluwere's influence is a critical story decision. Even if the information never becomes known to your party, such a fact cannot help but have repercussions in that god's actions and outlook. This decision will influence the exact nature of the abilities the dragon is able to use, which you will need to develop accordingly. Good choices would be gods having to do with civilization, commerce, wealth, or even secrets. In the Forgotten Realms setting, Worlds Above assumes that it is Oghma over whom Thaluwere has power. The exact nature of the deity's secret is also up to you to determine, but Thaluwere was originally conceived as having knowledge of a deity that was secretly a Primordial.

At first, things operated mostly normally for Goldcrag Deposits with Thaluwere in charge behind the scenes. But over time, secrets became more and more important to business, and Thaluwere and her dwarven partner stained more and more employees with sigils. Before long, the pyramid scheme was fully fledged, the bank was renamed to First Celestial, and operations began to expand throughout the astral sea. By the time they were significant enough to attract the attention of the god whose secret she possessed, Thaluwere had amassed enough power to challenge them herself. She sent Albera to the god in secret, demanding that they give First Celestial a divine monopoly on banking services and provide certain key resources for its development. Although she could not outright control the deity, she could interfere with the deity's use of their divine powers, botching miracles and interfering with their responses to worshippers. She could also cause the god great pain by flexing her secret



sigil, and directly drain some of their power into Thaluwere's projects. She did so, throwing the god and their worshippers into utter turmoil - and allowing Albera to pretend that it was she who was at the root of the god's problems.

The deity could have broken Thaluwere's power over her at any time. The dwarf had explained her abilities, and that they derived from a terrible secret she knew about them - all the god would have had to do to break her hold would have been to make the truth of her identity public knowledge. Because the power Thaluwere's spell gives her depends on the number of people who want to know a secret and the number of people who actually do know it, the power she derived from the god would have been rendered null. But the god could not bear their true identity to be known. They agreed to the dwarf's demands, and the two struck an uneasy bargain. Thaluwere's terms were mild, to a god - but then, to a god, any such coercion must be outrageous and

infuriating. All the while, Albera herself remained unaware of the nature of the god's secret.

With the god's forced backing, First Celestial became one of the astral plane's most powerful organizations. Branches were opened in in and around every divine plane and on every significant astral mote, each one staffed by sigil-stained employees, who in turn dabble in all kinds of other industries with the bank's funds.

At the current time, Thaluwere is content with her ever-increasing wealth and power, and has little interest in pushing the bounds of her arrangement with the god. Thaluwere is, after all, a dragon, and the accumulation of wealth is her main objective - she's simply found a much better method to do that than do most dragons, if one considers the entirety of the bank's holdings as her hoard. She has no desire to achieve divinity or to supplant the god in any way. As she sees it, it is in her best

interest to facilitate their endeavors, because where the god's power spreads, First Celestial spreads, and more wealth flows into her hoard.

Albera Goldcrag: Although decisive, driven, and daring, Albera is a soft-spoken, unassuming transgender dwarf who prefers not to draw attention to herself or dominate conversations. She is the official face of First Celestial, both inside and out, and truly does perform much of the managerial labor required to run such an enormous business, although of course she consults with Thaluwere routinely.

The two share a strong bond of mutual friendship and respect, but Albera lacks the innate draconic avarice that drives Thaluwere ever onward in the acquisition of wealth, and of late the bank's activities have begun to wear on her. She persists in it for the sake of her family - Goldcrag Deposits, First Celestial's proto-form, may have been named after her clan, but before she partnered with Thaluwere, Albera herself was the only member of her clan she knew of in the astral plane. First Celestial's success has allowed her to gather her clan from their far-flung reincarnations across the plane and grant them the kind of generational fellowship that is so rare on the random whims of astral waves.

Still, her duties to the bank prevent her from spending as much time with them as she would like, and she has begun to consider grooming a successor to the secret of the

bank's CEO from among her manifold great-nieces and -nephews.

Albera's secret: Albera is not actually a Goldcrag. She is a clanless dwarf who admired the Goldcrag clan as a mortal, and took their name as her own in the afterlife because there were none who knew any better.



Up-and-Comers of First Celestial

Delel Goldcrag: Twelve-times grand niece to Albera Goldcrag, Delel has only recently been reincarnated in the astral plane and recovered by the Goldcrag clan gyrovagues. Having been initiated into the Bank as an entry-level sigil-stained associate, Delel is currently concerned with amassing enough assets, recruits, and secrets to meet her tithing break-even point and thus fully establish herself as a valuable employee, worthy of her family's respect.

To accomplish this, the young dwarf cleric sails the more unexplored eddies of the astral plane in search of markets that have not yet been reached by the Bank of Heaven. When she finds one that is suitable, she means to

open her own branch in the region, monopolizing on all of her new clients' unexploited secrets and treasure. To this end, Delel strives to cultivate the cool, tactful veneer of First Celestial's tellers, but she has yet to master the persona; her natural brashness and bombasticity often breaks through.

Dellel's secret: She is a worshiper of Oghma (or whichever god fills that role with regards to First Celestial Bank in your setting). The god has informed her that all is not as it seems with her family's afterlife, and tasked her with unearthing the secrets of the Bank of Heaven itself.



Ease: This middle-aged tiefling bard has been working as an associate with First Celestial Bank for about six years so far. Material comfort is always foremost in her mind - mostly her own comfort, of course, but she does take a sincere satisfaction from providing a comfortable, satisfying experience to her clients. She has little ambition and shirks work wherever possible, but the combination of her mellifluous voice and dry, ironic wit has won her many secrets from clients of all kinds. These same traits make her a likely candidate for promotion to the position of branch manager, and perhaps beyond, as your campaign progresses.

For all her sloth, however, Ease is not a woman to cross. She has a strong sense of both

self-worth and justice and a formidable vigor when caught in a fury. She will rebuke those who commit the deathly affront of disrupting her easygoing lifestyle much more harshly than the sin truly merits.

Ease's secret: Though she chose her name in defiance of those who pressured her to accomplish and has since been able to fully embrace a slacker's lifestyle, as she would call it, Ease is still a little ashamed of herself for not trying harder in life. This makes her react even more strongly against those who attempt to push her, but also leads to a number of hidden 'personal improvement' side projects - such as her bardic singing skills, practiced under pseudonyms in various smoky astral nightclubs.



FACTION PERSPECTIVES

This section outlines brief descriptions for the perspective of each faction toward the others. This acts as a framework for inter-faction politics or conflict in your campaign, as well as for interaction with NPCs if your players happen to join one of these organizations.

Merfolk and Merrow Incorporated

The astral megacorporation's only major competition is First Celestial Bank. Conversely, they also take great advantage of the Bank's services, storing most of their funds with them. Conflict arises from the incessant meddling of Bank employees in other industries, as well as from their ability to gather dirt on M&M Inc. employees, thereby gaining real magical power over them. As well, M&M Inc. is currently striving to break into the star dust market, over which First Celestial holds a monopoly. Merfolk and Merrow has few direct conflicts with the faith-centered organizations of the astral plane.

The Gyrovagues

The monks of the dead are among the most well-liked of all astral organizations. They represent no threat to the business interests of either M&M Inc. or First Celestial. On the contrary, many gyrovagues volunteer on the trading vessels of one of those two companies, providing healing, defense against spiritual or Peregrine threats, and counseling, all in return for mere room and board. Likewise, many gyrovagues are peripherally associated with the Servants of the Sacred. They act as the organization's eyes and ears throughout the astral plane, and a gyrovague can be relied upon to hide, heal, or protect an agent of the Servants. In contrast, they have a very poor relationship with the Servile, and give short shrift to any they encounter.

Servants of the Sacred

Most think the Servants a dangerous, disruptive cult. Consequently, the group

considers itself beset on all fronts and is notoriously unfriendly to outsiders. The Servile, of course, they kill or obstruct at any opportunity, occasionally earning the direct ire of the common folk when they prevent some of the Servile's good works. They resent the plane's corporate entities, Merfolk and Merrow Inc. and First Celestial Bank, for profiting from the imperfection of the afterlife, as well as for putting a stop to the Servants' projects whenever they interfere with business. The Servants are too small to threaten any of these groups, however, so they mostly maintain a low profile. Their only alliance is with the gyrovagues, with whom they share a mutual respect based on their common faith.

The Servile

The astral sea's atheist rebels have complicated relationships with most other powerful organizations in the astral plane. Their interests are those of the common folk, and, when combined with their wide influence and high membership, that often brings them into conflict with corporate entities and the upper crust of society. At the same time, the Servile are in-tune enough with local conditions to recognize when a large business is doing good things for the little people, and may reward or protect the company's interests on the rare occasion that that is the case. They are unafraid to stage assassinations of those who abuse their power, however, and many an exploitative mote-owner, sigil-stained associate, or manager of M&M Inc. has died by their blades. The group consider the gyrovagues to uphold an unjust divine order that fails to deliver on its promised rewards and unfairly punishes those who choose to opt out. They often attempt to kill gyrovagues and free any imprisoned souls and Peregrines they may have. Likewise, the Servile opposes the Servants on all fronts - usually quite successfully, given their greater numbers.

First Celestial Bank

The Bank of Heaven is powerful enough that it can afford to acknowledge no real enemies. There is no other large bank in the astral sea,

and consequently First Celestial has clients from every organization in the plane. Merfolk and Merrow attempts to compete with them, sometimes successfully, but they also have accounts with First Celestial, and whatever animosity may arise between individual sigil-stained associates and their M&M Inc. competitors fails to foster animosity throughout the entire bank. First Celestial occasionally sees a casualty from Servile assassins, but for the most part the bank's associates are cunning enough to anticipate conflicts and approach the Servile for negotiations before a strike is called. That, or an associate obtains a secret on one of the Servile's members and arrests the threat in that way. The bank is neutral to both the gyrovagues and the Servants.

THE PELAGIC ZONE

Mere miles from the pseudo-surface of the astral sea, the tumultuous waves of the Supernal Above begin to calm and condense, forming a region of gentle currents, mild temperatures, and stability known as the Pelagic Zone. Situated between the Supernal Above and the Stellar Abyss, this region is larger than both of them combined and houses much of the astral plane's life and civilization. Although there are no divine realms floating in ominous or wondrous splendor, it is here that one can begin to find stars. This section details special features of this part of the astral plane, as well as its unique creatures, locales, and factions.

This part of the plane hosts the largest astral motes, sucked up from the Above by strong currents and held steady in the reverence of the region's slow eddies. Slightly removed from the dubious attentions of the gods and their servants, terrestrial and aquatic civilizations are more free to flourish on these continent-sized motes, at times blossoming into full-fledged nations and kingdoms. This is the richest and most diverse layer of the entire plane as creatures from both above and below mix and mingle in its balmy waters.

Scenes:

• *The waters here are a deep indigo, mottled with rich violet and a diffuse silvery glow from the stars and their sandy clouds. You are sailing above an enormous astral mote, vast as any continent, across which mountains surge, capped by coral, forests flex their musselled bark, and rivers run right off the cliff's edge to sparkle eternally into the distance. Towns tinkle with the sound and shimmer of sea lanterns, and bebies of astral vessels sway at their*

PELAGIC ZONE: AT A GLANCE

Depth: 15-60 miles above the mortal realm

Temperature: 8-28° C/46-82° F

Illumination: Dim to well-lit

Mutability: Limited

Visibility: Normal

moorings to rooftops and docktowers.

• *Before you, a swaying fan of giant emerald leaves curtains the waters, golden light dappling down across their waxy cuticle. Clouds of clownfish and tuna dart between the blades as starlings perch and peck for oozing snails. The fingers of a colossal clawed hand can be seen, mired in the vegetation, a nacreous sheen of ichor coating their surface. Glowing shells hang from piercings in the leaf margins, clattering in the current and singing softly, and in the distance you can hear a chorus of croaking calls.*

• *As you descend, a chill runs across your skin, and a clamorous cacophony fills your ears; a mingled mix of whispers and shouts, bangs and brays, shrieks and songs, all concurrent and confused in the dark. Swimming amidst the sound, you see sea snails in vivid fluorescent hues, their tendrils shimmering as they swim and their shells glimmering from within. You spot a mote in the distance, crabs scuttling across its rocky surface, clacking their claws at passing snails. The mote's outcroppings shelter a small cove, where emerald snails sleep along the walls, their lights gently ebbing and swelling as the soft sounds of bat-whalesong seep into their spiraled shells.*



The Pelagic Zone

GEOGRAPHY

Where the Supernal Above is bright and warm, and the Stellar Abyss is bitterly cold and murky with phantasmal occlusion, the Pelagic Zone is both and neither. Lacking the divine planes and the numerous solid fragments of the Firmament that illuminate the supernal realm, the Pelagic Zone enjoys instead the argent illumination of the stars. This light is enough to nourish photosynthetic life, but not in such lush variety as those nearer to the realms of the gods. Shade species dominate astral motes in this region; forests of spruce, fir, and hemlock in place of birch and pine. Phytoplankton are still able to survive, but they fail to flourish into the magnificently colored clouds that characterize the Supernal Above. And though there is still light enough to see clearly in most areas, the region's inhabitants exist in a perpetual twilight of vanishing purple and glimmering silver.

The Pelagic Zone is a refuge of relative stability from the vagaries of the Supernal Above and the nightmarish flux of the abyss. Currents here are slow and steady, dependable enough to count on year after year. Motes do move, but their course is stately and predictable, enough so that one can map the relative location of motes in an astral archipelago and reasonably expect to be able to navigate by it in ten or twenty years' time. Because of this, large civilizations are much more likely to flourish in this region than anywhere else in the astral plane. This is reinforced by the fact that this zone contains all the largest astral motes. Borne by the swift currents of the Supernal Above, land masses from that layer are inevitably swept upward into the Pelagic Zone's slower waters. Once there, only small motes can be returned to the Supernal Above by the weaker downward currents, and the largest remain to circulate in twilight peace for eternity. Some of these may reach the size of continents in the mortal

world, and their inhabitants live out their entire immortal lives without leaving their surface.

The stars hold a place of special importance in the astral sea's past, present, and future. As fragments of the multiverse's original fountainhead of existence, even in their broken state they continue to effervesce with magical energies from beyond the multiverse. Most of these fragments were corrupted and altered by their sundering, becoming gates to the Far Realm. Those in the Pelagic Zone were once like this, but over millennia of effort by Githzerai monks they were purified, and now emit only natural magics, not the alterity of the beyond. In appearance, a star resembles an enormous shard of a shattered mirror, but with its glass occluded by millions of tiny bubbles. The shard itself emits no light; rather, the invisible energies pouring from it interact with the firmament field surrounding the shard to create a fluctuating cloud of flickering lights surrounding the star itself, bright enough to blind if seen at close range without protection. These energies enter the multiverse as subaural sound, sonoluminescing with the surrounding 'waters.' This also has the effect of altering the perception of other sound in the area; normally indistinguishable overtones are almost overpowering in the vicinity of the stars, all speech a melodious cacophony of secret sound. In a sense, the stars are forever singing to the multiverse, their song the very substance of its existence.

Locales

As in the lower layer of the astral sea, most encounters in the Pelagic Zone will occur either on the open sea or on an astral mote of some kind. Free-roaming colloids are rare in these waters; those colloids that do exist reside in currents that keep them perpetually within the glow of one of the stars.

Silver Shores

As thaumaturgic fountains, the field around a star is perpetually saturated with magic. In such high concentration, not all of this energy

can remain in immaterial form - inevitably, some of it precipitates in the form of star dust. Most stars are surrounded by lenticular dunes of this solidified magic, radiating outward in a glittering coronal reticulum. A veritable windfall for star dust prospectors or power-hungry spellcasters - if not for the extreme danger involved in collecting the sand from those shores.

Because of the unparalleled concentration of raw magic in the immediate vicinity of a star, the firmament field in these areas is even more responsive to the psychic emanations of beings in its embrace - so much so that thoughts can become solid as stone and flesh as ephemeral as dream. This effect begins to manifest about 5,000 feet from the star itself,

whereas a star's dunes usually only extend to about 2,000 feet away. Reality is as malleable as thought here. Within this aura, passing fancies may spawn bizarre, unpredictable entities, and anxieties take creeping, clicking form just out of sight over one's shoulder. A bit closer, and a creature's body may begin spontaneously restructuring itself according to their own self-perception, or the perceptions of others. Within spitting distance of the star's shattered, bubbled visage, flesh begins to boil away entirely - though from the sheer potentiality of the location, not from actual heat - leaving only a spiritual shell of dreams and fears, soon withered by its own lack of surety. Use the following table to determine what effects your players may suffer as they approach the stars themselves.

Erosive Stellar Effects

| Distance from star | Effects* |
|--------------------|---|
| 5,000 feet | <p>Within this region, creatures must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw in order to maintain concentration.</p> <p>For every 12 hours that a creature spends within this range, they must make a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw. If they succeed, no phantasms will be created within that 12 hours. If they fail, roll 1d3. The result is the number of phantasms that will be created from their subconscious mind within those 12 hours. These phantasms are identical to those created with <i>phantasmal force</i>, except that they are visible to anyone, not just the creature from whose mind they were born. Their nature is at your discretion as the DM. Most phantasms created in this way should pose some kind of threat to the party, but if a non-threatening phantasm is more fitting for whatever reason, that is also possible. Phantasms last until they are killed, destroyed, or dispelled by a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check.</p> |
| 2,500 feet | <p>For every 12 hours that a creature spends within this range, they must make a DC 25 Charisma saving throw. If they succeed, their willpower is sufficient to maintain their personal integrity, and they suffer no ill effects. If they fail, their body begins to morph according to their own self-perception, adopting whatever shape they truly hold in their own estimation, for good or ill - but usually for ill. This transformation is extremely painful, and the creature has disadvantage for the next two hours, as well as taking a -2 penalty to constitution for the duration.</p> |
| 100 feet | <p>All creatures within this range lose 10 hit points every five minutes unless under the effect of something that explicitly negates this, such as the training of a Githzerai ascetic. Additionally, when a creature enters this range, and every hour they spend within thereafter, they must make a DC 30 Constitution saving throw. Creatures immune to the first part of this effect have advantage on this saving throw. If they succeed, they drop to ½ their current hit points as their essence begins boiling away. If they fail, they drop to 0 hit points, but do not fall unconscious. Everything that they are begins to evaporate in a foggy cloud of essence, which dissipates entirely after five minutes within 100 feet of the star. A</p> |

Erosive Stellar Effects, Continued

| Distance from star | Effects* |
|--------------------|---|
| 100 feet | creature affected by this is still able to move ½ half their speed, and if they are able to exit the range of this effect they will reincarnate where their movement ended, unconscious and with 0 hit points. If they are not able to exit this range, their body and mind will be completely dispersed and their soul sucked into the star after five minutes from first succumbing to this effect. Creatures killed in this way may still be resurrected, but they will not manifest as void ghosts. |

**These effects stack; that is, the effects that begin 5,000 feet from the star apply to every point within that 5,000 foot range, including the region encompassed by the 2,500-foot range, and those of the 2,500-foot range apply to the 100-foot region as well.*

Very few beings are able to survive, much less thrive, within a star's two innermost auras. The outermost aura is hardly hospitable either - an eternal shroud of the phantasms of the unfortunate isn't exactly welcoming - but it can be tolerable for those with a strong will and quick reflexes. Powerful wizards occasionally choose to build their towers on a star's furthest shores - just outside of true peril, but within a few steps of an unlimited supply of star dust for use in their spellcraft. Adult dragons are typically keen enough to prevent the creation of stellar phantoms, and some choose to relocate a small astral mote to within a star's aura in order to enjoy the protection it affords - and the simple glory of such a wondrous location.

The pyramids of Githzerai monks in the astral sea are located exclusively within stellar auras, constructed in such a way that their uppermost level is within two hundred feet of the star itself, and the bottom is outside of the aura entirely. Even a Githzerai ascetic, however, cannot long endure the existential confusion immediately surrounding a star. The only known entities capable of surviving these conditions without eventual ill effect are the Immutable Masters - and even among them, it is rare to seek such a trial. Not even the gods would do so, as the stars can be deadly to deities. Only the founder of the Immutable Masters, the tiefling known as Mastery, is truly willful enough to exist perpetually at a star's side.

Godsbodies

Even before it took up its oceanic mantle, the astral plane served as the stage upon which divine clashes were played out. And although these contests are rare even on a cosmological time scale, the psychic tides have still borne the rise and fall of a bevy of deities, some lost to the minds of mortals since time immemorial. The corpses of those that fell still litter the seas, almost indestructible and inflated to cosmic proportions in death, whatever size and properties the god may have maintained in life. Most of these 'godsbodies' have long since been tossed from the chaotic currents of the Supernal Above and come to rest somewhere in the Pelagic Zone.

These objects are immune to damage from all but a few origins: mainly, from direct application of a living god's divine power, and from the touch of a star. They do not decay and cannot be consumed by any known creature. Consequently, they are tempting locales for those seeking a truly impenetrable fortress - albeit a bit macabre. Daring dragons may make the cavity of a dead god's lungs their lair, or a cult convert a divine gut into a stronghold immune to virtually all assault.

The flip side of this impregnability is a unique vulnerability: the hunger of the stars. The psionic scents of divine bodies act upon the stars like blood in the water upon sharks. Pulled from their cosmic promenades by the inklings of the divine, their bubbled-glass faces section and splinter into a thousand shards of

hunger that slash and gash at deities dead or alive, devouring the sacramental flesh until their inexplicable cravings are sated and they move on in their natural course. Such an attack is the only known cause of damage to a godsbod, and may be deadly to any residing within the corpse. Furthermore, this proclivity for god flesh explains why almost all deities decline to ascend to the Pelagic Zone or Stellar Abyss: they fear for their immortality. The only godsbod known to be immune to the hunger of the stars is Tu'narath, the Githyanki capital. Although it is built upon the corpse of a god, the stronghold of the Githyanki simply fails to elicit any kind of response at all from passing stars - for reasons known perhaps only to their lich-queen, Vlaakith.

The coincidence of a godsbod and a star is a significant cosmic event, at least to those concerned with the preservation of the Pelagic Zone; namely, the Githzerai. Consumption of a god's flesh is the only known phenomenon capable of reversing the purification of a star, reverting it back to its aberrant state as a mirrored fountainhead unto the Far Realm. Consequently, the Githzerai go to great lengths to track the courses of godsbods and redirect them from intersection with any star's passage. If they fail, the star will have to be completely re-purified, and in the meantime will spread aberrant energies throughout the Pelagic Zone, creating a miniature pocket of the Stellar Abyss. Such has happened many

times through the millennia, however, and most godsbods bear some scars from stellar bites.

Likewise, most of these corpses have been exposed to stellar dunes multiple times, and have acquired their own coating of star dust as a result. The body of a god still bears some of the magical imprints of the god's living power, however, and these remnants convert star dust in their vicinity into a concentrated oozy essence of the god's power known as ichor. Ichor has a couple useful properties: it can be used to cast divine spells as though they were fueled by the living power of the dead god from which it was collected, and it can allow any location to be temporarily consecrated in the dead god's name (as with *hallow*). Ichor is always a slimy, sticky substance, but otherwise its appearance depends on the nature of the god whose corpse it coats.

For rules regarding the use of ichor, see the section on ichor under Resources, later in this chapter.

As the body of a god possesses only an imprint of its living power, it does not, in itself, possess the consecrated traits that its ichor bestows. However, because most godsbods are coated in ichor, they are almost always affected by the *hallow* effects associated with that god's ichor (as determined by the DM). Generally speaking, this means that the corpses of good

Waters Above is predicated on the notion that the source of a god's divinity is possession of and mastery over a star within their own body. As this text also assumes that the stars are fragments of the multiverse's original fountainhead, this explains why gods possess fundamental power over certain aspects of reality, as well as how gods may rise and fall: those whose stars are wrested from them die, and those that come into mastery of a wild star rise as new divine entities. Indeed, this is why the Supernal Above contains no stars: those few that existed within that region of the astral plane were quickly conquered by powerful entities in the time immediately after the stars' shattering, giving rise to the first gods. Thus, divine beings are intrinsically connected to the stars, and the stars sense it. Unmastered stars, even when purified, seek to destroy the fleshly prisons of their brethren - even though most godsbods no longer contain a star, having been claimed by an ascendant or another god upon the deity's death.

The nature of divinity in your multiverse is too fundamental to be dictated by any supplemental text, but understanding the reasoning behind Waters Above's presentation of godsbods may help you to adapt this content to your personal lore.

deities are protected against undead, fiends, and perhaps elementals, and may be affected by *daylight*, *everlasting rest*, or *courage*, whereas the corpses of evil deities are protected against celestials and fey, and may be affected by *darkness*, *fear*, or *silence* as described in the *hallow* spell effects. Naturally, they tend to become havens for creatures sharing the god's alignment, even if those creatures never worshiped the deity or even know their name. While these inhabitants may be friendly to your players' characters, it is more likely that even those of friendly alignment exist outside any contemporary framework of interaction between servants of like-minded deities. They may be the last remnants of the deceased god's followers or divine servants, blindly lashing out at any outsiders, or perhaps simply wild creatures attracted by the corpse's aura. Regardless, it is rare to find a godsboddy that is truly safe to explore.

Driftwoods

Although the giant seagrass of the astral plane is rooted - as much as anything can be said to be rooted in a sea that lacks a true bed - in the Stellar Abyss, most of the length of its stems and leaves extend through the brighter Pelagic Zone, occasionally brushing the upper border of the Supernal Above. Without a fixed point to cleave to, mats of these plants are borne to the drift lines where currents abutt, their colossal leaves forming a kind of forest along those lines. These natural border 'woods' striate the Pelagic Zone with verdancy, dividing the region into reliable, plottable portions. Driftwoods are the foundation of astral cartography in this layer of the plane, and are likely to be used as territorial borders for astral civilizations, if such things exist in your multiverse.

They also form one of the foundational habitats of astral ecology in the Pelagic Zone, and consequently are some of the region's most vivacious locales. Their leaves provide shelter to both predator and prey, as well as a source of food to aquatic herbivores, such as sea turtles, manatees, marine iguanas, fish, or

invertebrates (terrestrial herbivores tend to stick to the familiar solid ground of astral motes). Schools of fish dart and flash amidst the giant leaves, accompanied by chittering squirrels and squawking birds, leaping apes and creeping octopods. Seagrass isn't the only thing collected by the currents at drift lines - astral flotsam accumulates here as well, and driftwoods are replete with forgotten shipwrecks and cast-off ruins, now nothing more than habitat, despite the treasures they may still contain. Most large sharks prefer to hunt within more open waters than within the seagrass itself, but the high concentration of prey in its vicinity does attract them, and driftwoods are habitually warded by cadres of hungry sharks. Within the woods themselves, more subtle predators hide - gargantuan sea snakes and constrictors, waiting to strike. Danger never strays far in the driftwoods.

Because they subdivide the entirety of the Pelagic Zone, it is almost inevitable that your players will need to cross a driftwood at some point during their adventures in this region. Doing so need not be a trial, but you may wish to make it one anyway. Driftwoods fluctuate from between 1-5 miles wide along their length. For the entirety of the party's time amidst the seagrass, their visibility will be limited and they will be vulnerable to ambush by giant snakes, octopods, or more intelligent enemies such as sahuagin, koalinth, or even your everyday goblins, orcs, and kobolds. Likewise, hostile druids tend to take up residence in the seagrass - and if you're really feeling cranky, your players might even fall prey to aboleth wandered up from one of their cities in the stems far above.

Of course, the woods might also be a source of shelter to your party - a place to hide their ship from pursuing githyanki pirates, or throw off a trailing monster. Sea elves and merfolk often hide wayhouses amidst the leaves for the use of their traveling merchants, and occasionally even take up permanent residence there, the risk of predators outweighed by the surrounding bounty of prey. Between friendly territories, sections of

the driftwood may even be cut at a certain level to allow easy travel between civilizations, maintained with small garrisons much like border crossings in the mortal world. Crossings through these gaps are relatively safe... but one never can tell for sure.

The Soundbed

Between the Pelagic Zone proper and the Stellar Abyss there exists a thin sub-layer of the astral sea known as the Soundbed, a region of swirling echoes and incessant sound, a band of incarnate cacophony made up from the sunken, condensed sounds of the astral plane. Approximately 500 feet thick, the Soundbed separates the Stellar Abyss from the rest of the astral plane, buffering the shallower waters from the aberrant energies above with its thick soup of whispers, screams, and songs. Despite its name, the Soundbed is entirely fluid and can be traversed normally. The essence of the Far Realm constantly eats away at this barrier, decaying the Soundbed's echoes bit by bit into the keening moan that permeates the Stellar Abyss - a phenomenon known as 'bottom loss.' Fortunately, the Soundbed is perpetually replenished by the slow trickle of echoes from the waters below the Abyss, and the Soundbed knows only occasional breaches in the form of umbilicles.

Permeated with thickened sound as it is, the Soundbed is a deafening place, full of drifting songs and racing shouts, whirling screams and darting whispers. Most creatures cannot long endure such constant noise, and will begin to experience gradual hearing loss after spending an hour in this region. Hearing creatures that spend more than an hour in the Soundbed are at disadvantage for Perception checks for the next day. If they have left the Soundbed by that point, they will begin regaining their hearing over the course of twelve hours (during which they still make Perception checks at disadvantage). If they have not, they become permanently deaf - which they experience as a constant barrage of the Soundbed's cacophony in their ears, ever-present no matter how far they flee from its waters. Unless they seek regular counseling - which may be as simple as

regular prayer to their deity or a weekly discussion with a cleric - this incessant onslaught of sound will slowly drive them insane, and after six months they gain one of the insanity traits from the Indefinite Madness table (Dungeon Master's Guide, 5th Edition, p. 260). Creatures with special magical or biological protection of their hearing are exempt from these effects. Likewise, a creature is unaffected if their hearing is magical in origin. For example, skeletal and incorporeal undead are immune to the Soundbed's deafening waves - meaning that a lich might seek to make their home there, protected by its audible aura. Casting *silence* while in the Soundbed removes the ambient noise within the affected area for the duration, granting temporary protection, but does not prevent the creation of other sounds, such as speech or song.

Because of these effects, most animal life found in the lower Pelagic Zone and the Stellar Above is completely absent in the Soundbed. Even invertebrate sea creatures typically possess some kind of hearing, and therefore avoid this region. There are, however, a few particular species that have adapted to this peculiar environmental pressure. In fact, the Soundbed is a vibrant contrast to the somewhat gloomy and lonely waters of the upper Pelagic Zone just below it, populated as it is by millions of species and sub-species of sea snail known as Waveguides. Waveguides actually feed upon sound itself, capturing particular echoes within their spiraled stardust shells. They form the basis of a small deaf ecosystem, mostly made up of various types of crabs which feed upon the snails and steal their shells. Waveguides are also foundational to the sea lantern trade.

Note: Bards in the 'bed

A bard's skills often hinge on their musical performances. In the ambient cacophony of the Soundbed, it can be difficult to actually hear a bard's song and gain its inspirational benefits. Unless magically amplified or protected by an effect, such as that of silence, the range of a bard's Bardic Inspiration is halved for as long as they are in the Soundbed.

Astral motes are scattered throughout the Soundbed, as they are everywhere in the astral plane. In the Soundbed, however, they have special consequences. The shape and structure of a mote affects the resonance of sound, particularly if the mote has caverns, deep canyon or bowl-like geographical features, or buildings. The resonance properties of these spaces can cause echoes of certain types to become trapped within them, gradually building up a 'pool' of similar sounds. These areas are known as echo coves, and are key to both Waveguide migration and the sea lantern industry. Each echo cove contains only sounds of a certain type, particular to that cove. For example, one cove may capture the sounds of crying, while another may ensnare only whispers of love. Because of this, some echo coves can act as shelters from the noise of the open Soundbed. Typically, coves that collect particularly quiet sounds, such as whispers, are safe for hearing creatures to inhabit without hearing protection.

Weather

Like the Supernal Above, the Pelagic Zone is host to all the weather phenomena listed in Chapter Two. Unlike the Supernal Above, this layer of the astral sea is not so prone to biotic weather phenomena. There are, however, a few meteorological patterns unique to this region.

Squirts

Within the perceptual gravity field of an astral mote, streams, rivers, and lakes all behave much as one would expect them to in the mortal world - that is, they flow downhill and tend not to float away. All rivers run to the sea, however, and once a water flow crosses the edge of an astral mote, expectations cease to apply. Instead of forming a waterfall as would occur in the mortal world, streams and rivers in the astral sea simply continue to run, flowing straight on through the plane and leaving a constant ribbon of water in the mote's wake. This suspended stream is known as a squirt.

Although not as ecologically significant as

water bodies are in the mortal realm, even many aquatic creatures need to drink fresh water, and squirts are habitually visited by thirsty beings of all kinds. They are also fairly persistent, and are therefore yet another feature commonly included by cartographers on maps of parts of the Pelagic Zone.

But the reason that squirts are considered a weather phenomenon is that sometimes they are nothing more than that - precipitation, at least from the perspective of an onlooker. Inevitably, astral motes cross the path of a squirt. When they do, the squirt appears much like a very concentrated rainstorm, sweeping its way across the land mass until the mote eventually leaves the squirt's path. Depending on their relative speeds, that may happen within hours or days, but it may also take much longer. In some cases, squirts and motes align for years or decades at a time. With such a long exposure, the squirt may even impact the mote's geography, creating new pools, lakes, and streams fueled by the perpetual deluge from above.

Squirts mostly function as a novel geographical feature, adding a bit of quirk to your astral environments. However, if you ever need an excuse to make it rain on just one of your player characters... well, the squirt was made for it.

Cavitation Clouds

Fluctuations in a star's magic flow occasionally cause the emittance of a high-speed stream of bubbles of extremely concentrated magical essence. Because of the speed at which these bubbles are ejected from the star, they exit the star's aura before the power within them can diffuse. Once out into the open astral sea, the pressure and concentration differential between the bubble and the firmament field prevents the two from mixing, and the bubble drifts through the plane aimlessly until something provides enough outside power to 'pop' it.

While it drifts, these bubbles of magic are surrounded by a constant frothing cloud of

tiny miracles. Existential potential fluctuations near the surface of the bubble cause cavitations in the firmament field, and as those tiny voids collapse they cause shockwaves in reality which can result in spontaneous changes - otherwise known as miracles. Generally, these mini-miracles are simple; flashes of light or sound, or the generation of some tiny bit of random matter. Consequently, these cavitation clouds appear as a roiling mass of tiny bubbles lit by multi-colored flashes and random tones. They can form a layer of up to 30 feet around the bubble's surface, depending on its size, but are generally no more than 5 to 10 feet thick.

While within a cavitation cloud, any object or creature has the potential to be affected by one of these mini-miracles. When a creature enters a cavitation cloud, make a Charisma saving throw (DC 15) for them. If they succeed, they are immune to the following effect for 15 minutes. For each minute that a creature spends within a cavitation cloud, roll 1d20 and determine the effect according to the table below.

Mini-Miracles

| d20 | The miracle causes... |
|-------|---|
| 1-2 | ... no discernible change. |
| 3-4 | ... part of the creature's skin to transform into an inorganic substance (rock, metal, etc.). This change is completely superficial, causes no serious side effects, and confers no special bonuses. |
| 5-6 | ... an innocuous object in the creature's possession to become animated (as described in Chapter Two, <i>Objectifying Identity</i>). |
| 7-8 | ... the creature to sprout an extra limb from an inconvenient location. This limb is completely within the creature's conscious control, but the awkwardness of a new limb hinders their agility, and the creature makes all Dexterity rolls at disadvantage for their first month with the new limb. The limb may be of a different race or species from the creature itself, but it is always an especially beautiful specimen of its type. |
| 9-10 | ... part of the creature's body to transform into living plant matter. For example, a creature's hair may be replaced by a cranial lawn of lush grass, or a spilling mass of ivy. This does not cause especial discomfort or inconvenience for the creature, but they must spend at least 30 hours per week exposed to light of equal intensity to midday sun, or their vegetative body parts will wither until they do so. |
| 11-12 | ... the creature's body to glow with an unearthly aura. The creature constantly emits light of a single random color bright enough to illuminate a five-foot radius. This light cannot be turned off, but it can be hidden by tightly wrapping the creature's flesh in concealing clothing or armor. Unless this effect is removed or measures are taken to conceal the light, the creature makes all Dexterity (Stealth) checks at disadvantage. |
| 13-14 | ... small objects or animals of a particular type (as determined by the DM) to spontaneously generate within the affected creature's mouth every time the creature speaks. For example, crickets, tadpoles, or twigs. It is probably best to avoid choosing objects or creatures that could be of value or strategic use, such as gemstones or stardust. For a slightly more disturbing take, consider a fluid, such as water, wine... or blood. |

Mini-Miracles (cont.)

d20 The miracle causes...

- 15-16 ... the creature to speak only in reverse. The creature can still speak all languages they previously knew, but will do so back-to-front.
- 17-18 ... the creature to swap alignments with the first sentient being with whom they make eye contact after the occurrence of this mini-miracle.
- 19-20 ... the creature to age backwards from this point forward. Unless detected by magical means, this effect will only become known to the creature after 1d6 years. When the creature ages to the point of their birth, they die immediately. They may be resurrected, and will age normally in their new body.

All miracles are irreversible except by use of *dispel magic* cast at 7th-level or higher, or *wish*.

Every cavitation cloud will eventually collapse in upon itself when the bubble of magic at its core pops. Typically, this occurs when the cloud drifts into some large solid object, such as an astral mote. The explosion of magic from this impact is not without consequence, but rather than simply a larger form of the random mini-miracles created by the cloud, such explosions always result in a single type of full-fledged miracle: the creation of a new aasimon. All such Outsiders are born from stars in this way, and are unaligned and alien, as described in Chapter Two, until one of the gods binds them into their service.

Umbilicle

Also known as ‘abyssal lightning’ or ‘tentacles of terror,’ umbilicles are enormous winding tubes of pseudo-metal (see Chapter Six), much like icicles in appearance, which slash down occasionally from the Stellar Abyss and into the Pelagic Zone. In truth, they are another version of the same phenomenon that creates cavitation clouds - but they originate from the virginal stars of the Abyss, rather than the purified shards of the Pelagic Zone. These virginal stars sometimes emit highly concentrated bursts of aberrant energy, shooting out in jets too rapid to diffuse into the rest of the Stellar Abyss. Instead, these streams burst through the Soundbed and out into the upper layers of the Pelagic Zone.

When they do, the extreme difference in composition between the purified firmament field of the lower astral sea and the highly aberrant nature of the stream causes its outer surface to immediately precipitate and crystallize, forming a solid shell of pseudo-metal around a fluid core. To an observer, this looks much like a jagged ice crystal growing down from the abyss, snaking its way further and further into the lower astral plane. Depending on the strength of the starburst and the path they take through the plane, these structures may even reach the Supernal Above - or the mortal plane itself. They grow rapidly, at a rate of about one mile per hour. This, and their narrow, jagged form, causes many to compare them to lightning, striking down from the Abyss itself.

Still, few mobile creatures are slow or clumsy enough to be the victims of a strike itself. Those that do come into contact with an actively forming umbilicle are immediately immobilized by its pseudo-metal shell, their bodies encased in

a frost-like coating. Most often, these shells are made up of Muntegra, which eventually leaves its victims as little more than animated blobs of undifferentiated matter. To escape, a creature must make a Strength saving throw of DC according to the chart above.

Umbilicle Escape

| Size | DC |
|------------|----|
| Tiny | 30 |
| Small | 25 |
| Medium | 20 |
| Huge | 15 |
| Large | 12 |
| Gargantuan | 7 |
| Colossal | 5 |

For every hour a creature spends in the grip of Muntegra, they must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or have their material essences drained by the pseudo-metal. Every time they fail this saving throw, they lose one point from each of their attributes, gradually losing their form and characteristics to become an indistinguishable mass of matter. When all of their attributes reach zero, the process is complete and there is no longer anything distinct left of the creature's physical form.

They are, however, technically still alive, although they possess no consciousness or memories. If such a being should be freed from the pseudo-metal after this process is complete, they could be restored to their former selves by use of *wish*, or by return of their essence from the pseudo-metal that now contains it. To do so, the substance would have to be collected and brought to one of the few sorcerers, wizards, or magitechnicians with the knowledge necessary to manipulate essences using pseudo-metal. Such an individual would be able to extract the creature's essence from the pseudo-metal and restore it to their featureless form, returning them to their original state. Although a creature healed in this way would have no true memory of their experience after the complete drainage of their brain's structure, an imprint will always linger upon them, and they will suffer bouts of depersonalization and derealization for the rest of their life.

The true danger of an umbilicle is not in its formation, however, but in its deformation. These structures are ultimately quite fragile, and a crack or chip at any point along their length will cause the entire umbilicle to shatter. When it does, the aberrant energy within coalesces into living form - a group of aboleth, illithids, beholders, or any other aberrant creature, at your discretion as DM. Undead Githyanki outposts in the Stellar Abyss constantly monitor the magical flux of the stars, wary for the outburst of an umbilicle. When one occurs, they alert patrolling Githyanki cruisers in the Pelagic Zone, who

immediately converge upon the nascent umbilicle in order to shatter it before it penetrates far into the lower astral sea. Most umbilicles are destroyed in their early stages, and the aberrant creatures they spawn are swiftly slain by vigilant Githyanki knights.

On the rare occasion that an umbilicle goes unnoticed, however, it will continue to grow until it comes into contact with a large solid object, such as an astral mote - or, so rarely it is almost mythical even to the Githyanki - until it touches the sky of the mortal world itself. In either case, the outcome is much worse than if the umbilicle is shattered prematurely. Instead of mere aboleth or beholders, a mature umbilicle that has found a solid spot to deposit its progeny creates the aberrant equivalent of a powerful divine servant - a starspawn. Such an event is almost always premeditated, planned for millennia by one of the eldritch star wardens themselves (see Chapter Six).

Resources

The Pelagic Zone possesses all the resources one would expect to find in or on the huge chunks of earth and stone that float through its waters; metal ores, lumber, precious gems, etc. In addition to these mundane goods, there are also a few more interesting resources native to this layer of the astral plane.

Ichor

Ichor is star dust that has taken on the divine aspect of a deceased deity due to contact with its corpse. Ichor is found coating the bodies of dead gods, and is valuable as a resource due to its special properties: it allows creatures of any alignment and faith to cast spells as though powered by the divine energies of the deity from whose corpse it originated, and it can be used to consecrate an area against enemies of that deity.

To cast a spell using ichor, a creature must cover its entire body in the substance. The ichor will be slowly absorbed into the creature's flesh over the course of one hour, and each such coating allows the creature to cast up to five divine spells within 24 hours of

absorbing the ichor. This allows the creature to cast any spell from the cleric and paladin spell lists that they would not normally be able to cast, as long as it is of a level for which they have spell slots and as long as the creature possesses the knowledge necessary to cast the spell. These castings consume spell slots normally. Spells cast in this way function exactly as though cast by a true devotee channeling the god's living power - but creatures of any alignment and devotion may use ichor in this way, allowing clerics or paladins of evil gods to cast good spells indistinguishable from those of a real good cleric or paladin (if such alignment restrictions exist in your campaign). Only creatures that would be affected by the ichor's exclusionary *hallow* effects cannot exploit this property, as they are unable to touch the substance.

To consecrate an area using ichor, it must simply be coated with the substance, using one gallon of ichor per square foot of consecrated area (generally, a similar amount can be gathered from a square foot of the surface of a god's body). This bestows the effects of *hallow* upon the coated area and for 60 feet above and below, save that the excluded creature types and the extra effects of the *hallowed* area are determined by the DM according to the nature of the god, rather than by the creature that applies the ichor. This effect lasts for one

week, but can be renewed weekly by re-applying one-tenth the amount of ichor originally used.

This potential does not come without its price. Ichor radiates the psychic imprint of the god upon which it was formed, leaving a constant trail of divine power through the astral sea. Naturally, such a trail acts like a beacon for certain beings. Wandering fiends often seek to trace the trail of good-aligned ichor to its source, whether to attempt to claim it for their own nefarious purposes or simply to eliminate the (likely good-aligned) bearers. Likewise, patrolling Celestials routinely follow up on the trails of both evil- and good-aligned ichor - to eliminate its bearers, if they are evil, and if not, to at least vet the bearers' purposes in possessing such a potentially powerful substance. More often than not, such inspections result in the ichor's confiscation or immediate destruction; agents of the divine are not known to be lenient with mortal or immortal possession of quasi-divine material. For each week that your players travel at least 15 miles with ichor in their possession, roll 1d20 and look up the consequence on the table below. This effect can be circumvented by keeping the ichor in a closed magical containment vessel, or with *nondetection*.

Ichorous Attraction

| d20 | Outcome |
|------|--|
| 1-15 | The party has no encounters as a result of the ichor in their possession. |
| 16 | A group of demons accosts the party. |
| 17 | Devils track the ichor's trail down to the party. |
| 18 | An angel approaches the party and demands they either justify their claim on the ichor or hand it over. If the party is evil, or if the angel senses evil within the party, it may turn to violence. |
| 19 | Attracted by the intoxicating scent of divine magic, a group of chuuls ambushes the party in order to claim the ichor for their aboleth masters in the Stellar Abyss. |
| 20 | Paragons of a still-living deity opposed to the god of the ichor the party carries find themselves drawn to its aura, seeking a fight - though they may not understand why. |

Light and Sound

The farther one gets from the Supernal Above, the darker the plane becomes. The Pelagic Zone is lit here and there by the argent brilliance of the stars, but those are few and far between, and the uppermost regions exist in an eternal gloom. Enough light to see by, but not enough to nourish plants or phytoplankton. But humanoid life persists even here, wherever there is an astral mote to shelter it, thanks to the existence of sea lanterns.

Waveguides, the sea snails of the Soundbed, survive by capturing condensed sound within their shells and feeding upon it. They are able to do this because sounds trapped within the fractal spiral of their shell cause sonoluminescence upon the water trapped inside special structures of the snail's body; that is, the sound generates light. Waveguides are photosynthetic, in truth, and harness this light to produce energy - this is why most Waveguides are green in color, though many species have developed pigments attuned to types of light most green photosynthetic organisms are unable to harness. A feeding waveguide appears to be lit from within, its flesh glowing with eye-popping pigments, and its shell a blaze of blinking lights.

These shells are still able to capture sound once the snail has died, and still produce light when they do. Settlers throughout the astral sea use the shed shells of Waveguides as sea lanterns. Their light comes in all colors and intensities, and can be bright enough to support crop growth. Sea lanterns are the dominant lighting fixture in almost all areas of the astral plane, collected by an enormous industry of divers who live just below the Soundbed and spend their days collecting cast off shells from echo coves. The shells are cleaned (opportunistic algae often takes advantage of the light generated within a snail-less shell), filled with sound, drained of any water they may contain, then sealed with wax and an operculum for delivery to the consumer. Drained and sealed sea lanterns do not produce light; they must be unsealed and

filled with water before use. Once filled, they may be resealed.

Depending on the size of the shell and the type of sound contained, a single sea lantern can provide light for up to a month. They may emit any color of light, dependent on the type of sound they contain, but always in a rapid, blinking glow that penetrates the translucent shell. Of course, they are not perfectly efficient: some sound inevitably escapes, and consequently sea lanterns are always surrounded by a faint moaning echo of whatever sound spirals within.

Sea lantern hunting is big business. But, surprisingly, most diving groups are small, based on family or friendships. It's dangerous work, diving daily into the deafening Soundbed, and one must know what one is doing. Most importantly, one must know where to go. Waveguides are migratory, and each species requires several different types of sound throughout their lifecycle. However, a single shell can only trap a single class of echoes, requiring the snails to shed and regrow a new shell with different resonant properties each time they enter a new phase of life. Once the new shell is grown, the snail leaves its echo cove and follows its instincts to a new one that contains the type of sound it needs. Very few Waveguide species spend their entire life on the open waves, and those that do are small and their shells of little use. Because of this, a company of sea lantern divers must know the location of echo coves used by the species of snail they are after.

The locations of echo coves are highly coveted secrets, jealously guarded by every group of hunters. Each company has its own specialization in sea lantern types, determined by the type of echo coves they have mapped, and the leaking of even a single cove's location can spell economic disaster. Likewise, possession of the location of a single rare type of cove means reliable riches in perpetuity. Diving groups are a fractious bunch, distrustful of each other and of outsiders. Spies are dealt with by summary execution - and spying as

defined by diving groups includes simply *seeing* another diver while out in the Soundbed; most such encounters end in death. Because of this, most groups hold rigidly to the coves and diving paths they have always used, simply because they know that those are safe from other divers. This tends to discourage further exploration of the Soundbed, as well - it's simply too likely that one will encounter a hostile diver.

When someone does get brave enough to explore, however - whether out of economic necessity or simple greed - they follow the migrating snails themselves. In fact, this is why they are known as Waveguides: it was snail migrations that the original divers followed to learn the location of the echo coves in use today.

Sea Lantern Types

| Name | Sound | Light emitted | Shell features | Illumination effects | Value |
|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|---|--|--------|
| Lefty's Wake | Popping joints | Cold teal | White with jagged black striations and long spines | Soothes undead and unnerves mortals. Reanimated creatures touched by the light of this sea lantern for one hour or longer become calmer, less violent. For example, ghouls lose their mindless hunger, and skeletons their innate need to kill living beings. Intelligent undead typically remain hostile to players while under this effect, but may be more open to negotiation - or at least conversation. In the astral sea, sentient undead often keep these lanterns of their own will, simply because they are pleasant to have around. The effects wear off after one hour without the sea lantern's illumination. | 250 gp |
| Chiropterum sonorum | Bat-whale sonar | Deep green | Black with splotches of brown and scratches of grey | Provides uncanny navigation while in the astral plane. Those bathed by its light have advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks for the purpose of navigation. | 500 gp |
| Canticum cetaceum | Whale song | Navy blue | Smooth gold with opalescent interior | Provides long-distance communication. Any sound issued within the radius of one of these lanterns' light can be heard near every other lantern of this type. Sounds originating from lamps closer to the listening lamp are louder, while those originating from lamps at great distance are nearly imperceptible. | 500 gp |

Sea Lantern Types, pg. 2

| Name | Sound | Light emitted | Shell features | Illumination effects | Value |
|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|--|---|--------|
| Boss's Buddy | Last words | Pure white | Translucent grey with flaring ridges | Improves focus. Creatures in the light of this lamp are better able to concentrate and pay attention, granting those who address audiences in its light advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) and (Performance) checks. | 100 gp |
| Sacris modum | Heart-beat | Peach | Scarlet, slightly translucent, and bumpy | Enhances one's sense of rhythm. In the light of this lamp, creatures gain advantage on Charisma (Performance) checks. | 100 gp |
| Cackling whelk | Laughter | Pink and gold | Baby blue with silvery polka dots, smooth | Improves empathy. In the light of laughter, creatures gain advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks. | 150 gp |
| Gigglebits | Shared whispers | Buttery yellow | Grey, with rough splotches of green. | Speeds the growth of plant life in the area. Vegetation in the light of this lamp grows at 1.5 times the normal rate. | 500 gp |
| Patina vulgaris | Sailor swearing | Pastel rainbow | Dark brown, with shallow cracks | Forces the use of profane language. Every speaking creature exposed to the light of this lamp must succeed on a DC 12 Charisma Saving Throw or be forced to include at least two profanities in each spoken sentence for the next hour. At the end of the hour, if still exposed to the lamp's light, the creature may re-throw the saving throw. | 100 gp |
| Laetum porci | Sizzling bacon | Deep, pulsating red | Striated brown and white, crusty like rust | Makes those in its light hungry. Affected creatures must succeed on a DC 10 Charisma Saving Throw or be compelled to eat odd combinations of food for the next day. At the end of the day, if still exposed to the lamp's light, the creature may re-throw the saving throw. | 100 gp |
| Somnis juvenis | Lullabies | Phosphene violet | Indigo, with whimsical swirls of magenta | Causes sleepiness and alleviates insomnia. Creatures within its light feel sleepy, and those who sleep under its light do not awaken until the light is removed or dies out. Affected creatures do not suffer starvation or other ill effects from extended slumber. Popular with parents. | 100 gp |

Denizens

As in the Supernal Above, any sentient race and any kind of creature could be found in the Pelagic Zone. There are, however, a few trends based on the environmental traits of this layer of the astral plane. Most notably, ectotherms tend to favor this layer of the sea over the brighter, hotter Supernal Above, simply because it provides a greater range of temperatures with which to regulate one's body heat. Amphibians, reptiles, and flying insects all fall into this category, and tend to live near the border between the Supernal Above and the cooler Pelagic Zone, falling into the warmer waters to absorb heat and rising to stay cool. Others, with cooler temperature requirements, reside higher in the Pelagic Zone, but still fall and rise habitually to regulate their body heat. Even intelligent ectotherms are generally bound by this rule, as non-magical fires cannot be kindled in the astral sea.

Temperature plays a major role in drawing endotherms, as well. The upper regions of the Pelagic Zone fall into temperatures not found elsewhere - aside from in the bitterly cold Stellar Abyss, which is uninhabitable for most living creatures. Cold-dwelling creatures of all types, both terrestrial and aquatic, either find their way to this part of the astral sea or die from overheating. Deep-sea fish are common in the chilly waters just below the Soundbed, as are arctic animals - including white dragons.

Lizardfolk

Whereas humans, elves, and most other humanoid races are able to live almost anywhere in the astral sea, lizardfolk are functionally confined to a wide band just at the border of the Supernal Above and the Pelagic Zone, where temperatures are within a range acceptable for their bodies. Not that individuals cannot or do not leave that band; lizardfolk hunting parties range far and wide through the astral sea - they just change their depth before their bodies overheat or go into torpor from the cold. Longer missions are possible, as well, but need some kind of

artificial cooling and heating, usually provided by a lizardfolk shaman. There are also plenty of lizardfolk adventurers, traders, mercenaries, or simple wanderers scattered throughout the plane, but all rely on some spell or enchantment of homeostasis. As a people, they take the simple expedience of living where conditions are most hospitable.

About half of the astral lizardfolk population is nomadic, following ancient migratory routes from mote to mote in swift swimming bands. Sedentary lizardfolk favor settlements with some kind of vegetative cover. On motes, this means that they generally settle in habitats similar to those they inhabit in the mortal plane - swamps, jungles, and forests. On the open seas, driftwoods (see *Locales* earlier in this chapter) are their favorite place to make a home. Lizardfolk build their villages from tiny astral motes towed into a driftwood and anchored there by a tangle of swaying seagrass sheets.

Small settlements may be little more than a collection of artificial caves carved into the stone, but larger towns and cities can possess elaborate castles and temples chiseled from enormous kidnapped motes. Buildings are connected by net-like tunnels of woven kelp, primarily serving to keep out unfriendly creatures rather than to provide a path, as lizardfolk almost always choose to swim rather than walk in the astral plane. Their architecture is usually oriented vertically, with chambers in the warmer waters below and the cooler above. From outside the driftwood, though, all but the largest lizardfolk settlements are almost indistinguishable from empty forest.

Bullywugs

The frog people are confined to swamps and rainforests in the mortal world by their need for humidity, but find themselves liberated from those restrictions in their astral reincarnations. Bullywugs in the astral sea do still favor overgrown or swampy environments, such as colloids (see Chapter Two) or motes with a water feature, and they

are still largely homebodies - but in the astral plane, those homes can move. Bullywugs possess a surprising talent for mirifical propulsion (see Chapter Three, **Naval Heaven**), and in large groups are able to use this skill to propel entire motes, colloids, or fortresses as they will through the astral waters. Choirs of bullywugs croak in harmony, synchronizing their intents and guiding their home to new currents without budging from their seats on its surface. They roam a band of the Pelagic Zone from just above the Supernal Above to a mile or so beyond the range lizardfolk are comfortable at; never leaving home, and yet never in the same place for long.

Most bullywug settlements have learned to use their mobility to adopt a more pastoral lifestyle than they followed in life, herding schools of fish through the plane rather than simply hunting the unfortunates that stumble into their swamps. Bullywug herders keep the schools in check in small canoes, although in truth their vessels are literally nothing more than fallen logs, propelled entirely by the bullywugs' croaking chants. Other settlements prefer to follow pods of dolphins, seals, or other marine mammals, or migrate between larger motes known to host wild herdbeasts. In between, they act much like pirates, sailing aboard their homes in search of vulnerable settlements they can raid for treasure. They flourish surprisingly well, and the sight of a knot of dead wood in the sky or the sound of a bullfrog's croak is cause for alarm in many villages in the Pelagic Zone.

Most bullywug towns and villages are made up of several hundred years' worth of individuals from just one or two families. Unlike most Peregrines, bullywugs have very good luck with locating those they knew in life, particularly those related to them, as their gift for influencing the firmament field with their voices also allows them to communicate across great distances. A newly-reincarnated bullywug's first reaction at finding themselves in the astral plane is usually to cry out for someone, anyone, that they know - and, often, they find them. A bullywug village will go

hundreds of miles out of their way to pick up a stranded family member.

Merrow

Merrow form something of an astral underclass. Their bodies function best at the cold temperatures of the waters just below the Stellar Abyss... but that region is perpetually harrowed by raiding parties of aberrations from beyond the Soundbed. Many merrow do still end up there, of course, simply trying to find the best habitat for their needs and unaware of the dangers. They learn their error quickly, but are often kept there by the prospect of heavy competition - at a physiological disadvantage, no less - in the hotter currents below. As hard as they do try to hide themselves in discreet caverns or on the shores of the stars, their efforts avail them little, and merrow brain makes up the largest portion of the illithid diet.

Consequently, there are almost no stable merrow settlements in the astral sea. Those that escape mind flayer tentacles must live in a state of constant overheat. Not enough to kill them, as long as they do not seriously over-exert themselves, but enough to keep them uncomfortable and hinder them in combat. They are in a poor position to make themselves an independent power in the plane. Most exist on the fringes of other societies, as smugglers, enforcers, or spies. Merfolk and Merrow Inc. employs many of the disenfranchised, using them to interface with evil-aligned cultures that cannot be approached for trade by traditionally good-aligned societies. Because of their relative impotence, good-aligned races in the astral sea are much more accepting of merrow than they were in life - meaning, of course, that they merely mock them, deny them employment opportunities, and rough them up in dark eddies rather than killing them on sight.

Like the Supernal Above, the Pelagic Zone is home to many factions shaped by the nature of the astral plane. This section presents a few such factions. You can use these organizations simply to provide a background for your campaign's plot, but conflicts within or between them could also become significant plot points. They are designed to be relatively accessible to player characters, and even entire adventuring parties, so feel free to allow your players to become members themselves. Note that although these factions are presented with the Pelagic Zone, the functional distinctions between layers of the astral sea are more important when it comes to biology and natural phenomena than socioeconomics. All of these factions operate beyond the Pelagic Zone, and interact variously with the factions presented in other chapters.

Several character biographies are provided for each faction in order to flesh out the abstract description. These characters are divided into 'luminaries,' meaning those at the top of the organization, and 'up-and-comers,' or the new recruits that show promise, but haven't yet proven themselves. Up-and-comers can be used at any point in your campaign; just generate their statistics to correspond with your players' level and adjust their stature with their organization. If one of them becomes a recurring character in your campaign, you may even watch them develop and progress in their faction. Luminaries, however, should always be high level, and should not scale down to the players.

Githyanki

The Githyanki are among the few races that pass their mortality in the astral plane, rather than their afterlife. Though almost always born on the mortal plane, Githyanki spend all of their adult lives - and all of their death - beneath the astral waves. They are a driven people, hyper-focused on their single goal: the destruction of mind flayers and other aberrant creatures that boil up from the Stellar Abyss. Led by their lich-queen, Vlaakith, the entire Githyanki nation wages an eternal war against the Far Realm in the deep waters at the border of the abyss. Even their deaths are given to this cause; all Githyanki expect and accept that their bodies and souls will be reunited after death to continue the battle as an undead soldier able to endure the alien Stellar Abyss itself. But for all that the Githyanki keep the Far Realm at bay almost single-handedly, most in the astral sea think of them as little more than pirates.

Githyanki are suited to many different roles - even in the same campaign, they may be both antagonists and allies, scourge and shelter, merchants and bandits. It all depends on the context, and whether your players stand to help their interests, hinder them... or surrender something of value.

A Nation at War

After liberating themselves from mind flayer slavery and splitting from the Githzerai, the Githyanki devoted their entire selves to the eradication of all aberrant life. With their extreme martial discipline, they quickly established themselves as a major power in the astral plane. Their warships ranged far and wide, beating back the Far Realm at every turn. They were instrumental in liberating what is now the Pelagic Zone from the grip of the Stellar Abyss, although it was the Githzerai who were able to stabilize their gains. The dedication and drive of the Githyanki have not faded in the thousands of years since, and their entire society is functionally little more than a very large army constantly engaged in the press of their cause. They maintain a network of ancient fortresses just below the Soundbed

which serve to monitor the Stellar Abyss for intrusions and supply the enormous navy that patrols the upper levels of the Pelagic Zone. Their capitol, Tu'narath, is itself one of these fortresses, and hovers half-in, half-out of the Soundbed, with Vlaakith Lich-Queen enthroned in the barrage of sound, ever-vigilant against the abyss.

Death, Heavier than a Mountain

In the thousands of years since they took up their duty, the Githyanki have been forced to take many drastic measures in the pursuit of their purpose. Some, of course, were easy to adopt, such as the use of their psionic silver swords. Others took more time to get used to, such as their alliance with the red dragons, whose brains both mind flayers and astral krakens covet. But none have been so demanding as their realization that there can be no afterlife for their people, and no rest in death. Vlaakith CLVII was the first to realize this, as her experiments showed her that the undead were able to endure the maddening effects of the Stellar Abyss far more effectively than living creatures, able to take the fight into aberrant territory rather than simply maintaining borders. She sacrificed her own life first, turning herself into a lich, and the rest of the Githyanki generals quickly saw the advantages of her approach.

Today, every Githyanki knows that undeath lies in all of their futures. Many choose to adopt this on their own terms, becoming vampires, liches, or death knights, and Githyanki society has multiple ancient fraternities to embrace those that make that choice. All carry a magical gem able to capture their own soul upon death, and know that it will be used to reanimate them for battle in the Stellar Abyss, where legions of undead Githyanki maintain citadels on the very doorstep of the Far Realm. Because Githyanki necromancers use the corpse's own soul for these reanimations, they almost always retain their mortal intelligence and personality, and are able to function as soldiers much the same as they did in life.

Dread Pirate Robbers

With their entire nation focused on war, the Githyanki have little manpower to devote to the simple necessities of life. There are no Githyanki farmers, fishers, or craftspeople (save for those that produce the implements of war, such as armor or weapons), and as a nation they have no land holdings other than their network of fortresses just below the Soundbed and the handful of creches they maintain in secrecy on the mortal plane. Instead, about a third of the population spends its time raiding settlements throughout the astral sea and 'requisitioning' supplies from their stores. All the grain, vegetables, meat, timber, pitch, cloth, and metal used by the Githyanki nation to fuel their fight against the Stellar Abyss is stolen from innocent Peregrine villages unfortunate enough to come to the attention of a Githyanki pirate vessel.

The Githyanki, of course, do not see themselves as pirates. They protect everyone in the astral plane from the insanity and depravity of the Far Realm and its minions, and in their eyes that entitles them to take whatever they need from whoever they need it from. Each raid leaves just enough so that the victims can survive and recover - and produce more goods for next year's requisition. And although those that resist are cut down without second thought, the Githyanki are under orders to avoid killing during raids. After all, a dead Peregrine can't grow next year's harvest.

All but the largest Githyanki vessels rotate through the Supply Corps for several months out of each year, allowing the crew to rest and recover from the constant conflict at the Soundbed. In the case of a large-scale invasion from the Far Realm, the entire acting Supply Corps can be recalled at any moment to help repel the incursion.

Trade at Swordpoint

Though they consider themselves entitled to everything the residents of the astral plane possess, should they choose to claim it, the Githyanki have little interest in wasting

resources taking it from those with the ability to resist. Instead of raiding fortified settlements, the Githyanki merely intimidate them into allowing them to trade. Few wish to pick a fight with one of the most established powers in the plane, so it's rare that any refuse. Anything that cannot be scavenged, the Supply Corps purchase - under threat of assault. The Githyanki sweeten the deal by paying lavish prices, their coffers replete with the coin, gems, and treasures of all those who failed to defend them.

Any settlement of note in the astral sea is likely to see a visit from the Githyanki Supply Corps at some point. While in port, Githyanki sailors are under strict orders to keep the peace with the locals, and most simply remain aboard their ship, keeping a constant watch for saboteurs, thieves, and spies. Your players are most likely to have peaceful encounters with Githyanki under these circumstances. Once they've left port, all guarantees of peaceful conduct are off, and any Githyanki ship encountered on the open seas is likely to forcibly inspect any vulnerable vessel they come across, confiscating any valuables they might have on board. Most are released afterward, but those that resist may be killed or enslaved, to be sold for profit. For your players, such an encounter may be the beginning of a story arc, a fun combat encounter, or simply a moment of suspense.

Draconic Necessity

In the years just after the Gith's liberation from mind flayer slavery, the Githyanki were a stranded, homeless people in a plane still ruled by aberrations. The divine realms stood as lone islands of normality in the sea of alien energy streaming from the stars, and the mortal realm, even separated as it was from the astral abyss by the power of the gods, suffered aberrant invasions constantly. The Githyanki needed allies to fight the Far Realm. They found them among the dragons, who suffered even greater than most at the whims of illithids and their astral kraken progenitors, their preternatural brains the greatest feast imaginable to such creatures. Gith bartered a

treaty with the dragons' divine patron, and their ancient alliance with the red dragons was born. With the Githyanki's intimate knowledge of mind flayer habits and holds, the might and minds of the dragons, and scattered assistance from the gods, they were able to forcibly expel mind flayers and other aberrant creatures from the vicinity of the divine realms.

Since that time, the Githyanki have entrenched themselves throughout the astral plane and innovated many weapons against the Far Realm, and their alliance with the red dragons is not quite so critical as it once was. Likewise, with the Far Realm beaten back to the Stellar Abyss, dragons of all kinds are at much less risk of being hunted by krakens or illithids for their brains, and need the Githyanki support less than they once did. Still, both sides honor and uphold the ancient treaty, and it is not unusual to find red dragons soaring alongside Githyanki warships as they patrol the Soundbed.

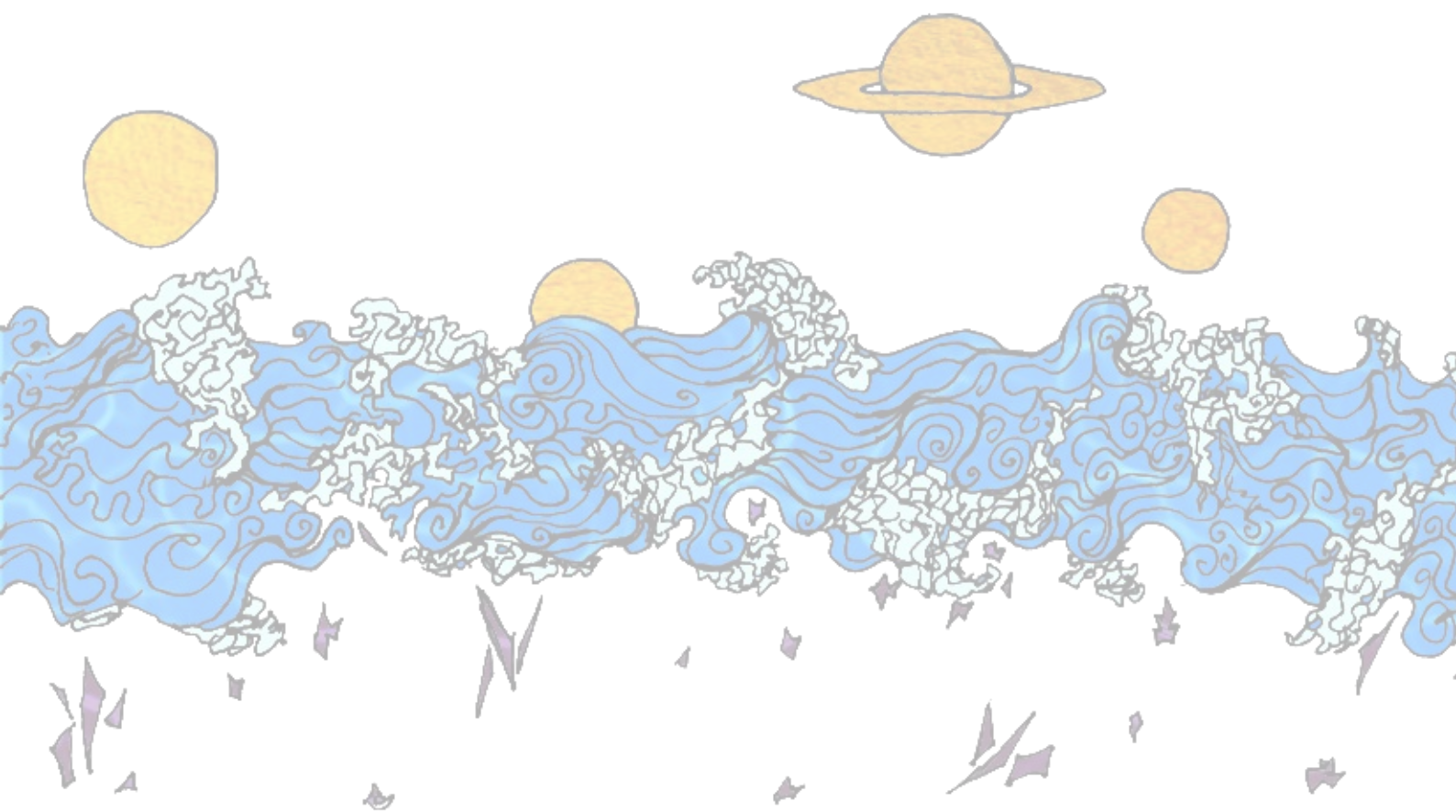
A Home on the High Seas

The Githyanki nation is scattered to all currents of the astral sea at any given moment, but their heart and soul and faith reside in their capitol: Tu'narath, the citadel of the lich-queen Vlaakith, situated partially inside the Soundbed itself. Fashioned from the corpse of a forgotten god, Tu'narath is unique in that its divine flesh is manipulable by secret methods devised by the Githyanki, allowing them to craft the corpse into a proper city. It retains its divine immutability after transformation, however, making it a fortress more impenetrable than any other. Even the stars, the only things that can normally damage a godsbod, are unmoved by Tu'narath, and the Githyanki fear no stellar assault.

This fortress is the cynosure of the Githyanki nation. All eyes turn to Tu'narath for guidance, and receive it from the mouth of Vlaakith herself. It houses the greatest generals, the wisest liches, the most honored knights and decorated ships. Every good Githyanki dreams of serving out of the sacred city some day, in life or in death. In its halls are kept untold

treasures of the astral plane, ancient libraries of arcane knowledge, and a thousand laboratories constantly experimenting to devise new ways to fight the Far Realm. But more than that, Tu'narath grants the Githyanki their uncannily accurate navigation through the astral sea. By tuning enchanted maps to the divine signature of Tu'narath, every Githyanki vessel is able to watch the currents of the astral sea change in real time, allowing them to chart routes of unparalleled swiftness.

Likewise, Vlaakith has gained some measure of control over the echoes of divine power that remained within the godbody when it was first discovered. Like a god, she is able to distribute this power to her followers, allowing priests of her worship to cast in her name, like clerics do their god's or warlocks do their patron's. She is not truly divine, however, merely quasi-divine - something akin to undeath's relation to death.





Luminaries of the Githyanki

Vlaakith CLVII: Ancient and eldritch, the current lich-queen has ruled the Githyanki nation for a thousand years of unbroken dedication to her purpose: the eradication of mind flayers and all their aberrant kin. As their undead queen, she guides her people through life and into undeath with power like unto that of the very gods.

To the Githyanki, she is more than any of the domineering gods could ever be, for she guides and protects them through the ages without subjugating them to her will, and yet they draw on her power as a cleric draws on the divinity of their deity. Vlaakith accepts their adoration, but demands their service. Vlaakith believes that the Githyanki have reached a point of natural stalemate with the Far Realm, their military might and undead devotion just enough to keep the illithids and aboleth at bay, but insufficient to push them back further. She searches for a way to break this impasse, a power great enough to purge

the multiverse of the Far Realm forever, and exhausts great energies in pursuit of this goal. Canny and cruel and unrelenting in her efforts, the lich-queen is not a woman to be crossed by anyone with an ounce of sense. Duty is in her bones, and bones are all that is left of her.

Vlaakith's Secret: Her quasi-divine power stems from the fragments of a star that she was able to reanimate and bind to her will. The star itself she keeps with her at all times in the form of glittering reflective teeth in her skull, but none save Asher know of their true nature. Vlaakith believes that this is the secret she needs to defeat the Far Realm forever - if she could find, reanimate, and bind to her will all the stars of the Stellar Abyss, there would be no more illithids, no more aberrant creatures of any kind, and the eternal war would finally be over. And, most likely, she would be more powerful than any other being in existence.

The Teeth: Vlaakith disguises the reanimated remains of the star she found at Tu'narath's core as something utterly mundane: her own teeth. Still, they are hardly inconspicuous, gleaming and keen as they are, shards of glass jabbed haphazardly into the sockets of the lich-queen's jaw, reflecting fragments of the room around her in carnivorous mosaic. Of themselves, the Teeth have no true personality or sentience - only an endless hunger, given direction by Vlaakith's command alone. Like normal stars, they act as fountainheads for magical energy from beyond the multiverse, which flows from them directly into the lich-queen's skeletal grip, granting her power akin to that of a god. They also possess the ability to sense and harm divine bodies, living or dead. Theoretically Vlaakith could use them to kill one of the deities, although in practice the fight might turn against her. More typically, the lich-queen simply uses them to punish those who displease her, sending the Teeth flashing from her skull to incise the unworthy into ribbons of lifeless flesh.

The Teeth's Secret: The Teeth remember existence before they were destroyed, and could answer many questions on the nature of the multiverse - if only anyone thought to ask them.

Asher: Fleet Admiral of the entire Githyanki navy, both mortal and undead, Asher is a military genius whose meticulous attention to detail and uncanny intuition have given the Githyanki the edge in their eternal war against the Far Realm for the last five hundred years. As befits her position as leader of both the living and dead Githyanki navies, Asher herself straddles the line between life and death. When coordinating patrols or commanding skirmishes along the Soundbed at the helm of a living crew, she is a mortal woman, flesh and blood. But when duty calls her to plunge into the heart of enemy territory with Githyanki death knights, vampires, and liches at her side, she slits her own throat and descends into the Stellar Abyss as a void vampire, a terrible ghostly being immune to the insanity of the Far Realm, ready to rend illithids and aboleth

with her incorporeal blade. She has the rare privilege of possessing a soul aligned to the star that Vlaakith 'reanimated' into the Teeth, and so when she returns from her forays into the Stellar Abyss the lich-queen uses *resurrection* to grant her a new body with which to serve - at least until duty calls her to shed it once more.

Asher's secret: Where most Githyanki revile and despise aberrant creatures of all kinds, Asher finds herself fascinated, and even fond, of her sworn enemies. Though she spends most of her time purging them from the astral plane, she also seeks to understand and sympathize with their values, drives, and struggles. Asher has spent thousands of hours interviewing aberrant creatures, plundering their minds psychically, and even possessing their bodies while in her void vampire form. Most do not survive her attentions, or are discarded once she has plumbed their depths, but a few - those she finds most interesting, or those whom she considers 'friends' - she keeps in a secret fortress known as the Gallery, hidden somewhere in the astral sea. Theirs is a cordial imprisonment, however, kept in plush comfort - by an aberrant creature's definition - and Asher visits infrequently to discuss strategy, philosophy, and art with her 'guests.'



Discovery of her deviant hobbies would guarantee a swift - and permanent - execution by Vlaakith's Teeth, but it is also her very intimacy with aberrant minds that grants Asher her deadly efficiency in the Githyanki holy war against the stars.

Up-and-Comers of the Githyanki

Azazirg: This fresh-faced novice scout has the honor of being paired with a juvenile red dragon mount known as Xende. Currently assigned to a small corvette on patrol along the Soundbed, Azazirg and Xende spend most of their time ranging ahead or behind the ship to identify threats for elimination.

Azazirg is considered a bit of an upstart by his fellows, mostly because he is an arrogant young fool prone to brash outbursts and ill-considered risks. The fact that Xende chose him to be her rider, and that he is therefore destined to become a knight, does little to behoove him to the rest of the crew - or to cut his arrogance. But beneath his bombasticity, Azazirg has a soft heart (for a Githyanki) and a frustrating weakness for the innocent and naive. This is much of the reason he and Xende get along so well, as

she is rather naive (for a red dragon). Azazirg spends his leave in non-Githyanki settlements, ostensibly combing the astral sea for knowledge of secret routes and locales, but mostly ending up consumed with bedazzlement for whatever male ingenue happens to stroll past.

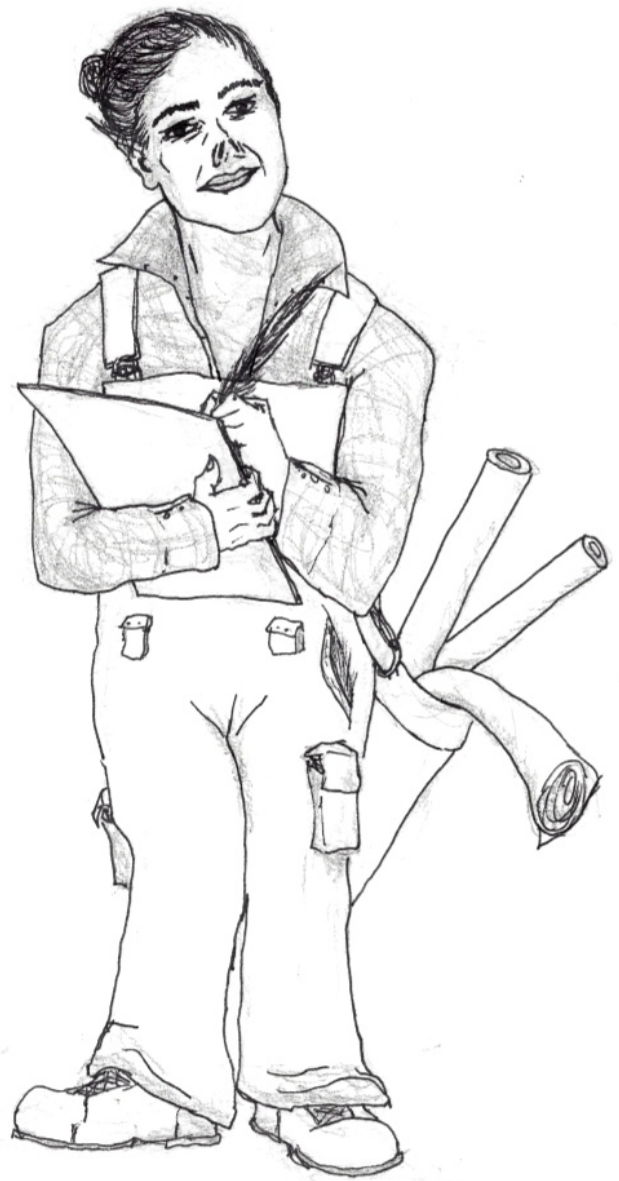
Azazirg's secret: Occasionally, Azazirg and Xende abandon their prescribed scouting route to dip through the Soundbed and into the Stellar Abyss in search of evidence of the fabled ghost gang city. The ghost gangs present a perennial thorn in the Supply Corps' hulls, and Azazirg would gain great acclaim if he successfully located their sanctuary. As well, Azazirg is transgender. This is not a secret among the Githyanki, but will not be immediately obvious to players, and is not something he is comfortable sharing with outsiders.



Haylen: Haylen is a promising young executive quartermaster serving aboard one of the Githyanki fleet's resupply tubs. Her job is to coordinate and direct confiscation efforts among the vessels assigned to her squadron of the Supply Corps; in essence, she tells the pirates which settlements to raid and when. Her true passion, though, is the acquisition of magical items for Githyanki use. Using simple scrying rituals, she targets specific locations for search and retrieval, identifies any magical items that her crew do pick up, and catalogues them meticulously for the archives before marking them for issue or sale.

Although Haylen enjoys her job, she has long-since become disillusioned with the Githyanki nation as a whole. She's a softie at heart, and the cruelty of her people's methods have never sat easy with her. Her malcontent makes her outwardly cynical and sarcastic, but she takes solace in the sketch work she does while cataloguing magical items, priding herself on her artistic talent. Aside from that, she loves a good party with the locals while on her rare leaves of absence, happily drinking herself under the table to forget that no one there is truly comfortable around a Githyanki of any kind.

Haylen's secret: Secreted in a hidden compartment within her quarters, Haylen maintains a private collection of magical objects. Most she has kept simply out of attachment or avarice, but there are a handful she deemed too dangerous to be allowed into the hands of her heartless superiors. She purges these from her collection periodically by consigning them in secret to her merfolk sorceress lover, who has the skill necessary to destroy them safely.



Githzerai

Like their Githyanki cousins, the Githzerai are descended from the Gith slaves of the mind flayers. Unlike the Githyanki, however, the Githzerai rebelled not just against their overlords but against the oppressive, militaristic culture they had driven the Gith to as well. Instead, they have adopted a monastic social structure - still highly disciplined, but gentle and serene rather than cruel and combative. Like their cousins, though, the Githzerai preserve a fierce hatred for illithids and all creatures of the Far Realm, and it is their meditative practice that purifies the stars and allows the abyss to be pushed back permanently. Without them, the Pelagic Zone would not exist, and the Githyanki would be unable to truly conquer any part of the astral plane. Their days are filled with peaceful meditation and quiet ritual in their astral temples, but their purpose is grave: nothing less than the purification of the stars of their innate aberrant taint.

On the surface, Githzerai seem an obvious choice as allies for your players, providers of shelter and supplies - and they are, indeed, likely to act in that capacity. The necessities of their mission, however, may easily lead to conflicts with do-good adventuring parties.

Stellar Monks

Githzerai in the astral sea make their homes in tiered temples situated within the aura of a star - one temple for each star in the Pelagic Zone. Within their sanctuaries, they practice meditation and self-discipline, hone their minds and bodies with martial and psionic arts, and temper their devotion with simple labor, such as gardening. Each monk must meditate for part of every day in order to maintain the structural and spiritual integrity of the temple, bathed as it is in the transformative light of a star. Their greatest challenge, however, is to learn to use will alone to purify themselves of traces of aberrant energy. All creatures, mortal and immortal, bear such traces, but for those who seek to remove such taint from the stars themselves, such an impurity is impermissible.

As their skill and purity progresses, they ascend through their temple's levels, enduring higher and higher levels of mutative stellar energy.

They are famous for teaching their secrets to any who wish to learn, and habitually take in wandering Pilgrims and Peregrines to train for a time. Many more, of course, come to a Githzerai temple simply for sanctuary and succor, which the monks supply happily and without reserve. They are great gardeners, and their courtyards yield far more produce than they could ever consume alone. As far as safety, their mere proximity to a star tends to discourage enemy pursuit - and, well, as peaceful as they are, the Githzerai are still formidable enemies. With their martial and mental prowess, they are more than a match for almost anything that may emerge from the astral sea.

Aberration Filtration

Githzerai temples are more than merely a home; they are vast purification devices designed to remove the taint of the Far Realm from living creatures. Each temple is run through with a circulatory system of canals filled with water imbued with psionic energy, giving it the ability to sap aberrant taint from anything placed within it. The cleansed water flows down from the peak of the temple, sheathing it in a shimmering veil of purity. It collects in the canals of the bottom level only to flow upward once more, driven by the Githzerai's will alone, coursing from level to level and picking up aberrant taint as it goes, until it reaches the peak once more.

The Githzerai and their guests meditate within these canals striving to release all the taint they contain and achieve true purity. The tainted water is carried away to be purified anew. This process is especially important for their guests, who are unlikely to be able to master the meditative techniques that allow the Githzerai to cleanse themselves by will alone, and are able to do so only with the aid of the imbued water.

Purity is not achieved without a price, however. At the peak of each temple, the Githzerai leader of the temple, the archimandrite, sits submerged in a pool of tainted water, mouth open beneath the surface, only their nose and eyes open to the air. The tainted water flows into their body through their mouth, and they take its taint into their own flesh by pure willpower, releasing the purified waters in a constant stream from their eyes. In this way, the Githzerai and their guests are cleansed of aberrant energies - but the archimandrite is slowly corrupted. Only the most disciplined, the most resistant to the alienation of the Far Realm, the most serene are permitted to become archimandrite, for all others would quickly succumb to the taint and transform into monsters. As it is, the job is a death sentence for even the strongest-willed of archimandrites, and all are eventually overcome by the taint they have taken into themselves. Their bodies begin to mutate first, sprouting tentacles or scales or whispering mouths. But it is when madness starts to scrape at their minds that they know their time as abbot has ended.

An archimandrite that realizes they are no longer fit to perform their duty kills themselves in a ritual suicide, and their body is removed to a secret Githzerai tomb where its taint cannot redistribute into living beings. A new archimandrite is appointed immediately, and the cycle continues.

Starkin to Star

The Githzerai do not seek out guests; they merely accept them when they show. At least, that is what most believe - in truth, the monks need outsiders, and use their psionic abilities to scry the seas nearby for travelers that fit their very specific needs. Those that do are subtly guided to the monastery, and welcomed as though the monks had done no such thing. They search for starkin Peregrines linked to their temple's star. When they find such a Peregrine, they go to great lengths to make them at home in the temple and teach them their purifying meditation techniques. Those

that show even the slightest promise are strongly encouraged to remain at the monastery, their every need cared for and their only duty the purification of their self. The peaceful life of the Githzerai can be very seductive, especially to those that have struggled long in the loneliness of the astral plane, and most Peregrines offered this life accept it freely.

Those that do not are made to do so by force. The Githzerai have no wish to violate another's liberty, but starkin are vital to their mission, and they cannot afford to lose one simply because they did not wish to provide their aid. Either way, starkin Peregrines are trained and purified with exquisite care, ascending level by level through the temple until they are able to maintain their mind and body even above the temple itself.

At that point, a great ceremony is held in the starkin's honor, celebrating their purity and discipline - and putting it to practical purpose, much to the starkin's surprise. The entire temple convenes around the starkin, all meditating and bending their psionic wills to the same end. The starkin is seized by their will and propelled upward toward the star at great speed, their body swiftly burning away in the burning saturation of stellar possibility until nothing but their soul and will are left. They impact the glassy surface of the star and are sealed within, a bubble of preserved discipline, constantly purifying the star's energy until the aberrant taint deteriorates the soul itself after hundreds of years.

Every star in the Pelagic Zone has been purified in this way, and are maintained as such by the Githzerai living in their aura.

Luminaries of the Githzerai

Archimandrite Adossel: The Archimandrite is a retired illithid hunter. In her youth, she actually rebelled against the mandates of the Githzerai and chose to hunt mind flayers into extinction one by one. She was remarkably successful, harrying aberrants across the Stellar Abyss with her psionic abilities and martial prowess, only closing the distance to make the kill when they were close to death by exhaustion. It was a gleeful life, despite the danger, and Adossel's exultant cackle rang across the astral sea for decades.

Eventually, however, the Prior of her temple tracked her down personally and begged her to return to the monastery and take up the previous Archimandrite's place. Called by duty, Adossel reluctantly agreed. Since then, she has spent her days in silent meditation at the apex of the temple, bathed in the aura of its

star, patiently filtering the aberrant taint from the temple's waters into her own body. Her duties do not allow her respite to descend to the lower levels of the temple, much less roam the astral waves once more, but occasionally her soul projects from her body to swirl longingly through the plane - only to be pulled inevitably back by the gravity of her purpose.

Archimandrite Adossel's secret: Adossel did not hunt mind flayers alone. In fact, she successfully infiltrated the Githyanki and maneuvered to be appointed to the crew of one of their elite strike frigates. She slew aberrants at the side of the most esteemed Githyanki knights for fifty years before her deception was detected and she was forced to flee. The real reason she agreed to become Archimandrite was because she was slowly being hunted down by the same elite Knights she counted as comrades just months before.



Sacrist Lendr: Lendr is the senior Githzerai monk of Archimandrite Adossel's temple. Second only to Adossel, Lendr's primary duty is to protect the Archimandrite from distractions and dangers so that she may purify aberrant taint from the temple's waters without disruption.

Functionally, this means that Lendr is in command of all things mundane and practical within the temple; they oversee the meditation and training of the monks and their visitors, mediate disputes, set the temple's daily schedule, and ensure that their people are well fed, spiritually hale, and protected against corrupting outside influences. When not

carrying out their duties or meditating themselves, Lendr studies the temple's collected accounts of encounters with aberrant creatures so as to be as informed as possible about the enemy.

They pride themselves on their studies, as they do in the temple's strict observation of all rules and regulations. Though considered stodgy and boring by the temple's inhabitants, Lendr is nevertheless well-respected for their undeniable competence.

Lendr's Secret: Lendr adores poetry. They keep a secret diary of their own compositions hidden in a loose floorboard under their bed.





Up-and-Comers of the Githzerai

Novice Ellel: Although dedicated in abstract to her people's sacred mission, Ellel finds the practical application of that dedication dull and tiresome. She plods through her paces, meditating and studying by rote, her mind ever away on some imagined swell of the astral sea, swept up in adventure. Her discontent makes her sour and ironic to the other monks, and she is perennially punished for mouthing off to her superiors with the scrubbing of floors and pots. Despite all this, she has a sharp mind and a strong will. But without motivation to hone them, she flounders helplessly. Ellel entertains herself by betting on anything and everything, from

whether a cask of wine will have turned sour to whether the Sacrist will be able to hold in their flatulence when they sit at the evening meal. Her bets are most often made against herself, as few Githzerai think highly of her habit, but when she can she plays games of chance with the temple's occasional visitors from the rest of the astral sea.

Novice Ellel's Secret: For the past three months, Ellel has slowly been hoarding supplies in a secluded part of the temple; food, gear, etc. When she has enough, she plans to stow away on the next leaving visitor's vessel and never look back from her new life of adventure and excitement.

Novice Immya: This teenaged novice has but two things in her life: order and solitude. Each day of her life is like the one before, meticulously apportioned by the hourglass she carries everywhere into the same pattern of chores, study, meditation, and martial training. Thanks to this rigid devotion to her studies, Immya is the temple's premier student, knowledgeable beyond her years and formidable on the training mat. Within her shell of a schedule she is safe from the confusing chatter and facial expressions of her fellow novices and monks, protected by her claim to busy-ness. And should anyone intrude on her routine, her peaceful veneer clouds into a thunderhead that can scatter well-meaning peers to their chores in seconds.

Immya does not hate them, but as peaceful as the temple is, they are still too loud, too fast,

too bewildering for her to handle interacting with outside of their proscribed monastic duties. But very occasionally she does steal a second or two of her allotted 'transit time' to hide behind a door or hedge and listen in secret to the banter and chatter of her shirking fellow novices, imagining the clever jokes she would make if she could. She is happy to be silent and alone, but her heart aches for companionship despite herself.

Immya's Secret: None would guess it, but Immya actually does give herself leisure time! One hour of leisure time per day, measured exactly by her hourglass, just before bed. She uses this time to teach herself to play the ocarina, and the faint strains of her practice haunt the temple's midnight hour - an eternal mystery to the monks and novices, who could never imagine Immya doing such a thing.



Egregorian Entities

An egregorian entity is the communal consciousness of a community of Peregrines who have merged their unconscious minds into a collective intelligence and will. Through the aberrant - but benign - quahog (see Chapter Two), these communities are able to harness the immense power of their collective unconscious to reshape the psychic medium of the astral sea at their whim. Reality bends at their behest, spinning into spacial tunnels of ever-changing environments in which they make their lives. Always hungry for raw material to add to their planar pocket realms, egregores migrate from star to star, slurping up stellar energy as it emerges. They are always on the hunt for new minds to add to their collective to keep their psychic skills on par with other egregores in the endless competition for stellar resources.

Egregorian entities are something of a wildcard in any campaign. Each egregore has its own personality, made up by, but separate from, the personalities of its constituents, and thus has its own unique values and goals. As well, each of its constituents maintains their own individuality at least part of the time, and thus can interact with your players' characters in any way imaginable. In general, however, egregores and their community are isolationists, standoffish and superior to all they meet. Generally speaking, they have few qualms about eliminating those that interfere with their pursuits - unless those happen to be members of a group favored by the egregore itself. In the same vein, those in the egregore's good books may receive unsolicited aid or gifts. Finally, most egregores make a habit of becoming patrons to scholars, mercenaries, craftspeople, or adventurers - not out of a vested interest in their pursuits, but simply as a way of vetting individuals that the egregore may want to add to itself.

In Millennia Past

The first Peregrines cast out into the newly-formed astral sea after the Firmament's destruction knew only chaos and death. There was nowhere for them to turn for shelter - no

gods, no nations, not even a mote of vegetated earth on which to eke out a life, for the plane had not yet developed its own ecosystem. Most died. Those that did not found other ways to survive, including the exploitation of the psychic nature of the astral sea itself. Clans of Peregrines banded together to imagine entire pocket realms of peace and plenty into existence, creating the succor and shelter they needed from the raw material of the plane. To do so, they capitalized on the peculiar properties of the quahog, an aberrant creature common in the plane after the destruction of the Firmament.

The quahog's ability to filter away individuality allowed groups of Peregrines to fuse their unconscious minds, preserving their conscious individuality with careful rituals. They linked themselves to the quahog, their conjoined minds granting it the will and personality it lacked on its own, and gained the ability to wield the entirety of their combined unconscious wills to reshape the firmament field as they saw fit.

Those linked to an egregore are known as Facets. They look like anyone else, save that they are anchored by a sheaf of seemingly endless golden threads seated in their scalp. These threads are the byssus of the quahog, the fibers that are normally used to anchor its shell to something solid. In egregores, they instead connect directly to the brain of each of its members, linking their thoughts. The egregore's ability to bend space allows its Facets to range far from the quahog's body; they are simply followed by a warp in space that keeps their anchor intact. They cannot, however, leave the astral plane without becoming disconnected from the communal mind. Doing so leaves them without an unconscious mind, and thus without autonomic brain function. Most die shortly after.

A Pocket Mollusc

Quahogs possess almost no ability to defend themselves. As sessile creatures, they cannot even run from their predators - of which mind

flayers and krakens are the most prominent. Normal quahogs rely on stealth to survive, but egregores take a different approach. Using the collective unconscious vested in them, they warp space around themselves, creating a 'bubble' within the astral plane. Their Facets then spin planar tunnels off of this bubble, building their own miniature paradises sequestered from the rest of the astral sea. Eventually, a labyrinth of warped space develops around the egregore. It can only be reached by its own constituents harnessing their collective unconscious, by the will of another egregore, or by the use of a teleportation circle maintained inside the pocket realm itself. Such circles are rare, as Facets can simply will themselves back into their enclave. Some do maintain them for the use of their servants or friends, however, and acquiring the sigil sequence may be possible through those individuals.

In appearance, an egregore's labyrinth reflects the preferences of the egregore's Facets. Those dominated by dwarves may appear as intricate cave systems or stone tunnels adorned with elaborate carvings and metal inlays, whereas those dominated by elves might seem like nothing more than a winding finger of forest, and those of merfolk may be entirely underwater. Likewise, a single labyrinth may display a huge disparity in appearances, as each Facet dominates their own portion of the pocket realm and molds it according to their own vision.

Unleashed Unconscious

Facets gain a number of practical benefits. Most notably, they are able to harness the combined psychic potential of the egregore's collective and use it to reimagine the astral plane around them. Anyone with sufficient will can manifest new matter from the very psychic medium that makes up the astral sea, of course, but those linked to an egregore are able to do so with an ease and scope that is otherwise impossible. They are limited, however, by their capacity to surrender conscious control. As it is their collective unconscious that actually possesses the

psychic mass necessary, individuals must learn to let go of a portion of their control in order to make their will manifest. Absentminded, daydreaming, or submissive personalities are, ironically, much more proficient at this, and possess formidable powers at all times. Others are able to perform small miraculous acts with ease, such as creating an ever-burning flame or reshaping a pre-existing stone, but must meditate to achieve the state of mind necessary to accomplish the greater feats required to sculpt one's own paradisaical pocket realm.

Any creature linked to an egregore automatically waives the familiarity requirement when willing matter into existence (see Chapter Two, *Manifest Will*), must only pass a DC 15 Wisdom check, and has advantage on said check. Creatures with personality traits that make them more able to surrender to the egregore's unconscious may reduce or omit the required period of meditation. Use your judgement as DM as to what personality traits might enhance one's ability to access one's unconscious mind and to what extent. In addition to this, Facets of an egregorian entity cannot truly die unless they are first disconnected from the quahog core. Their bodies can be destroyed, but their minds are preserved by the egregore. An identical body to that which was destroyed will be created in the quahog's sanctum within a week after their death. To sever an individual's connection, both psionic and physical force must be used. Most commonly, this takes the form of one of the Githyanki's silver swords - but such a murder is absurdly rare.

Finally, Facets are able to communicate telepathically within 30 feet with creatures with whom they share at least one language, and can communicate telepathically at any distance with other Facets connected to the same egregore, regardless of shared language. Because they have chosen to subject themselves to such a communal mind, however, they are made more vulnerable to mind-altering effects. All Facets have disadvantage on saving throws against mind-

controlling effects. While controlled, however, they are completely unable to access their reality-altering abilities.

Unfathomable Depths

Although they retain their own personalities and may seem completely normal, Facets do not have ordinary minds. Their individual unconscious is completely gone, submerged into the egregore. All Facets share this collective unconscious, and are affected by it. They find themselves driven by desires and fears that were never theirs before, affected by deep moods they don't understand, intrusive thoughts they never fathomed. The egregore's values, fears, prejudices, and traumas, pooled together from the minds of its Facets, drive those Facets to befriend those they would not have before, to pursue ends they had never considered, to process pains they never experienced themselves. To others they seem strange, distant, profound, but often confused.

Love Across the Stars

To be part of the same egregore is to share more than family, more than friendship, more than understanding: it is to share an unconscious mind with a thousand others, to deal with the same deep stirrings that move them and help each other cope with the reality of eternity. Facets of an egregore are psychically bound in a profound intimacy that ties them together despite all their differences. They have an undying love and compassion for each other; they cherish their fellows, and value nothing higher than building their relationships with each other, despite whatever interpersonal irritations they may have. For as much as they were created for shelter, they were created for connection. The Peregrines who conjoined themselves into the first egregores had found themselves reincarnated in a vast, empty wasteland, bereft of all those they knew in life and without any established communities to take them in. The communion they found in their egregores, therefore, became sacred.

To Sleep, to Dream

The personality of the egregore itself largely

leaves its Facets to their own devices. It has no real power over them as long as they were incorporated into the egregore of their own free will; the rituals used protect their conscious minds, allowing them to maintain their individuality. While asleep, however, their bodies are the egregore's tools. Each night, as the individual's mind drifts away, the egregore's personality takes control of their body and sends it on whatever errands it requires throughout the astral plane, using its ability to warp space to transport the body to where it needs to be. By the end of the night, however, the egregore returns the body to where it slept, and the Facet awakens as though nothing more than slumber had occurred.

While in this state, the body is known as an Incarnate. Unlike Facets, Incarnates have full access to the entirety of the egregore's pooled psychic potential. This allows them to reshape the plane around them with ease, making them nearly omnipotent within their immediate surroundings. The egregore is capable of speaking through Incarnates, and uses them to experience life and interact with other creatures. Facets that grow tired of life may choose to enter an indefinite slumber, dwelling entirely in dreams shared with other sleeping Facets and sacrificing their bodies permanently to the egregore's purposes. Most eventually awaken, though their slumbers may last thousands of years.

Curated Consciousness

Alone, a quahog is nothing but a vague collection of memories. As an egregore, it has consciousness, personality, will, and purpose created from the combined unconscious minds of those that joined themselves to create it. Because egregores were created by people desperate for safety and shelter, most are driven by a need to provide this - at least, to those their creators favored. All egregores have acquired thousands of hobbies and pursuits unique to themselves through the centuries, each extrapolated to a scale no mere individual could ever match, but their core goals are to incorporate new minds and

transform as much of the astral sea into themselves as they possibly can. To this end, they spend much of their time absorbing energy from stars, opening warp holes within their auras and drawing in the raw magic they emit. When they have absorbed as much as they can handle - determined by the amount of psychic potential they have amassed - they withdraw, to spend years incorporating the magic they have acquired into expanding their pocket labyrinth.

Every egregore's ideal would be to envelop and incorporate a star entirely, allowing them to drink in its magic and constantly expand their realm. None has ever accomplished such a feat. It is unclear why, but most believe that the communal nature of the egregore's mind lacks the strong individuality necessary to dominate the raw potential of a star. Egregores certainly seem to think so, as they have taken up an eternal hunt for those of indomitable individuality. Unlike their Facets, these strong-willed creatures are not granted the gift of communion with the egregore - instead their minds are consumed utterly, their native independence incorporated into the egregore in hopes that one day it will be enough to control a star directly.

Most of the minds added to an egregore are not acquired in this way, however. Over the millennia, they have become very conscious of the fact that their very identity is mutable, dependent on the traits of those they join with. Consequently, egregores are extremely picky about those they choose to add to the collective, selecting only those they believe will change them in ways they desire or reinforce elements of themselves that already exist. The egregore spends time getting to know its potential Facets, typically by acting as its candidate's patron through one of its Incarnates. It may spend up to ten years watching a single individual before deciding whether they are suitable for its identity. If they do, they reveal their true self and extend the offer of incorporation - always with the guarantee that their individuality will be preserved with careful ritual. If the deal is

declined, they move on, leaving their candidate with a standing offer should they reconsider.

Of course, some egregores have lost their scruples on their long journey through the astral, and simply take what they want.

How Do We Kill It?

It's a truly herculean task. Aside from being sequestered inside its own pocket of the astral plane, egregores possess the ability to reshape reality around them, allowing them to fight back against would-be murderers with their very environment. They may not possess limbs, teeth, or poison, but when they can crush their attackers between ceiling and floor with a mere thought, natural defenses pale. But even without turning the physical world against its hunters, an egregore has a vast pool of psionic potential to draw from, and can psychically incapacitate any who seek to harm it. If, somehow, both of those things fail, its quahog body is shielded by a thick, tough shell, and its sanctum is defended by hundreds of its Facets, all of whom have had millennia of experience to hone their martial or magical talents.

A direct assault is a fool's errand. Not even a cult of mind flayers would attempt to take down an egregore, no matter how much they covet its colossal brain. A covey of astral krakens and their assorted illithid offspring might have a chance, given enough preparation, but coordination of groups of astral krakens is nearly unprecedented. If one needs an egregore killed, one had better appeal to a god, an Immutable Master - or to another egregore. If neither of those are options, an indirect approach is best. All Facets are connected mentally and physically to the egregore itself, and the egregore is prevented from severing this connection by the terms of the rituals used to create it. One could imagine that if a Facet were to be trapped, unable to use their reality-warping abilities to free themselves - as with *imprison*, for example - that there might be certain psychic poisons or deadly rituals that could be used to weaken or kill the egregore through its connection to the

Facet. Such a thing would be likely to attract the attention of the egregore or its other Facets, so precautions would have to be taken. *Forbiddance* is enough to prevent them from creating portals to one's location, which keeps the egregore's body at a distance, but it is not enough to prevent Facets or Incarnates who arrive through other means to use their abilities.

In short, killing an egregorian entity - although entirely possible for your players - isn't something to be determined by a simple contest of stat blocks. An egregore is a faction, not primarily a monster to be slain, but if your players do decide they need to kill one then it should be part of your campaign's story, not a mere battle. Allow your players to gather information on the egregore, and listen to the ideas they have about how they might kill it. Reward their ingenuity, and allow them to invent their own unique way of bypassing the egregore's formidable abilities. Just don't let them make it too easy.

Egregores

Sylisar: Sylisar is among the first Egregores. Originally created to bind together a single elven family in the afterlife, her purpose quickly expanded to encompass a few families, then the entire elven race, until now she seeks out members of every race, so long as their hearts and minds align with hers. She is arrogant, haughty, and dissociated from mortal concerns, and she has a strong prejudice toward elven accomplishments and culture, but she is also generous and wise. Above all, curiosity drives her, a wonder at the infinite complexity of mortal minds. Sylisar occupies herself by possessing one of the vacant bodies of her Facets and simply talking to the residents of the astral plane, learning their hearts and souls and secrets, submerging herself in their writings and art. Those she loves particularly, she invites into her communal unconscious. And although her fascination is innocent, her actions are not always so; she has a habit of capturing uncooperative individuals by force for examination - and if they still refuse to

cooperate, she tears away their secrets psychically. Sylisar always returns her 'guests' to their former lives... but not always with their minds still intact.

Sylisar's Secret: Sylisar has a daughter by an ancient golden wyrm. How the wyrmling was borne and birthed, between a dragon and a giant, psychic mollusc, is perhaps best left unanswered.

Stoisk Cisco: This Egregore is a collector above all. She prides herself on maintaining the most complete biological record of life in the multiverse, with specimens from every race and species and every point in history meticulously preserved in her labyrinth. Of course, her collection is not truly so complete, and the offer of a missing sample could serve as a good bribe for her knowledge or assistance. Likewise, an artifact from her collection could serve as the target of a heist for your players - although it would truly have to be a wondrous object to make it worth the risk of stealing from an Egregore. Stoisk herself is an exception among Egregores in that she does not have a cordial relationship with her Facets; on the contrary, they are constantly at odds, and Stoisk does everything she can to keep them in her iron-fisted control. She is rarely successful, as the spells that govern her relationship with her Facets were designed to allow them autonomy, but she continues searching for a way around their arcane bounds. Stoisk would like nothing better than to consign her Facets to yet another inanimate category in her catalogue.

Stoisk's Secret: Secreted deep within her labyrinth, Stoisk possesses a living Egregore of her own. Captured when it was still young - at least in comparison with her - Stoisk keeps it bound in psionic shackles that mute its mind and cripple its Facets. This Egregore is the prize of Stoisk's collection, but should the knowledge of its fate ever reach the other Egregores in the astral sea, they would unite against her and tear her apart to free it - and to end the threat to themselves that Stoisk represents.



Facets

Tsirelsyn: Tsirelsyn is a sad boy. The founder of one of the first Egregores, they have spent all the millennia of their afterlife collecting minds for their spiritual commune, but can never forget the blood family they lost in the vastness of the astral sea when they died. Still, this high elf keeps an optimistic attitude to their afterlife, and prefers to spend their time bringing others into the embrace of their Egregore rather than brooding.

Unusually for a Facet, Tsirelsyn spends much of their time outside the paradise of the Labyrinth, amusing themselves by teaching lost Peregrines how to farm, cook, preserve food, and tend the often thin layer of soil that keeps an astral mote thriving. On the rare occasion that they make a truly deep connection with one of their wards, they invite them to join their Egregore and leave the cruelty of the astral waves forever. To the rest, Tsirelsyn is still their trusted, wise old elf, warmly loved albeit barely believed in, appearing from

nowhere as they do and vanishing back into the Egregore's Labyrinth with a fond wink. But although they are quiet and kind and hyper-empathetic, an unnerving tinge of ozone lingers in their wake, a rarefied air that makes one wonder - just what does a being really do with all that power and wisdom?

Tsirelsyn's Secret: Tsirelsyn is the true founder of the Servants of the Sacred. The Servants themselves do not know this, not even Elleka and Enet, as Tsirelsyn did not reveal their identity even in the beginning. Contrary to the Servants' goals, Tsirelsyn means to link the reconstructed Firmament with their Egregore, forcibly incorporating the minds of all the creatures in the astral sea, all future deceased mortals, and even the very gods into a single collective unconscious. Were they to succeed, no one would ever need feel alone again - but they would also have no choice in the matter, and would be inextricably bound to an aberrant creature against their will.

Erovaro: This merfolk woman has everything her fishy little heart could desire, or her clammy mind could imagine. Quite literally, too; as part of an egregorian entity, anything she can think of, she can will into being within the egregore's private paradise pocket realm - and she does so. Hers is a sprawling demesne of idyllic rainbow kelp forests and glittering gemstone caverns, with fields of gold and silver treasure and beds of succulent caviar scattered here and there, to eat or sleep upon as the mood takes her.

And yet, somehow, her avarice is still not satisfied. Her private utopia goes unused most days, in favor of the pursuit of delights she cannot simply will into existence. Entire astral civilizations have been left in ruins by her

schemes for money and power, and the spent stardust of the naive Peregrines she's beguiled into her bed makes up the glittering beaches surrounding her mansion as it roams the astral sea.

Erovaro's Secret: Erovaro is terrified of embarrassment. In truth, she seeks out riches, fame, and adoration simply because she was born into a rich family whose wealth was destroyed by civil war in the mortal world, leaving her destitute, begging for mere scraps, and furiously humiliated. She has vowed never to feel like that again.



The Immutable Masters

The Immutable Masters are an obscure order of knightly monks that practice extreme self-discipline and voluntary subjugation as the road to ultimate domination of reality. They believe that only by being dominated by others and eventually overcoming their enslavers may they learn true mastery over themselves and others. Highly individualistic, there are no rules among their order save the test of will between two Masters. They have no hierarchy or ranks, and each Master trains apprentices as they see fit, regardless of how they themselves were trained or how others in the order handle their own apprentices. Those who have achieved Mastery possess an indomitable will that allows them to resist all forms of mind control and to reshape the firmament field at their slightest whim. With these abilities, they carve out small havens of the astral sea where every rock, every being, is under their absolute control.

What Must Be Done

As there were those in the first days of the astral sea who turned to each other for refuge in the inhospitable waters, there were those who turned only to themselves. They honed their minds until they were able to create their own stability in the tumultuous seas by willpower alone. Most only possessed enough strength to maintain their own tiny shelters, but a few sought more. Of those, only a single Tiefling survived the rigors of the training she had devised herself, and arose after hundreds of years as the first Immutable Master. She in turn trained others, and those few of her apprentices who survived trained more. Over time, the Masters spread islands of stability through the plane, populating it with some of the first astral motes and taming the turbulent currents to calmer, more tractable waves.

Under their iron-fisted rule, the first societies of the astral sea were born: havens in which Peregrines could live out their afterlives in peace, if not in freedom. If your astral plane features afterlife kingdoms, perhaps some of the leaders of those kingdoms are members of this order, and have ruled their immortal

domains for millennia. Few are able to survive the training process, however, and there has never been more than a handful of Masters at a time. In the vastness of the astral plane, that makes them vanishingly rare.

Lessons Learned Only by a Mace

The Immutable Masters believe that one cannot truly understand and embody mastery unless one has been subjected to it fully. To this end, they seek out those who will dominate them with true viciousness and cruelty. Many begin their journey as worshippers of evil deities, many of whom have already experienced something of this sort as part of their normal course of worship; consequently, many Masters are of races usually considered evil. When they feel they have learned all they can from their current dominator, the apprentice rebels, liberating themselves physically and spiritually.

If they are not slain in the process, they seek out a new being to dominate them in new ways. Most spend several years under the service of at least three evil, neutral, and good deities. Each dominator subjugates in a different way, or oppresses a different aspect of the apprentice. An evil god might dominate its followers through rage, lust, or fear, whereas a good god might dominate through love or justice. The Immutable Masters believe they must be crushed by each - and recreate themselves in the image of each - of the aspects of their dominators in order to achieve true mastery.

Throughout this process, the apprentice returns to their Master periodically for guidance. Typically, this takes the form of physical and mental tortures designed precisely by the Master to break the apprentice where their current dominator has failed to do so, so that the apprentice may learn what is needed and move on. Indeed, the first step in an apprentice's training is to be utterly broken - and then rebuilt - by their Master. And the only measure of the progress of their training is their Master's ability to continue to break them. When their Master

can no longer shatter the apprentice's will, they are accepted as an Immutable Master, never again to be ruled by another. Only about 1 in 100 of those who choose to begin the training ever reach this point.

The Payoff

An Immutable Master's will is truly indomitable, their existence a basic tenet of reality. They are immune to all forms of mind control, have advantage on Charisma (Persuasion and Intimidation) checks, and add +10 to all their saving throws against persuasion and intimidation. Their natural aura of command ensures that their followers remain loyal; after a creature has failed a saving throw against an Immutable Master's persuasion or intimidation check, they automatically fail any subsequent saving throws made against that Master for the next hour. In the astral sea's firmament field, so susceptible to psychic impulse, they are able to mold reality to their will. Immutable Masters automatically succeed on Charisma checks required for creating substance from the field itself (see *Manifest Will*, Chapter Two), and are able to do so in half the meditation time required for other creatures to perform the same feat. Upon death, a Master's void ghost is able to create a new body by meditating upon the task for one day.

The Price

Whatever the Immutable Masters' beliefs, torture and subjugation are not good for any humanoid mind. Every Master bears the marks of the pain and humiliation they have endured. Most experience random memory loss, difficulty sleeping, anxiety, and idiosyncratic sensitivities to certain sights, sounds, or sensations. Few believe in happiness at all, and none are truly happy. They often simultaneously possess inflated egos and a belief that they are evil or unnatural in a way that goes beyond elemental evil; something akin to the alterity of the Far Realm. A Master's inner self is a mystery even to them; they know that their will is a fact of nature, but almost never have any understanding of who they really are and how they work.

These things make them difficult, sometimes dangerous, and eccentric rulers, but in general they are not truly evil. They may act with cruelty or callousness, but also with compassion and generosity - like anyone else, in short. Even those of traditionally evil races are only rarely evil, as their training demands they throw off their first beliefs and upbringing and exposes them to many different perspectives. Most Masters are neutral, with a few good- or evil-aligned.

Immutable Masters are not intended to be exclusively enemies for your players to overcome. They are just as likely to be allies, neutral parties, or rogue elements. Most occupy prestigious leadership positions, and are therefore well-suited to act as sponsors to adventuring parties looking for a patron. That said, they are also a natural fit for a campaign's Big Bad.

Aspirations after Achievement

The ultimate goal of the Masters is to become a fact of existence in themselves, to imprint their will on the very fabric of reality such that they are an inextricable part of the multiverse. In practice, almost none of those who hold the title of Master have reached this level of supremacy. They continue to hone their wills by exercising their sovereignty over everything around them, forging dominions from the firmament and conquering others as they go. They also seek out powerful, strong-willed individuals and artifacts to use as 'practice dummies' for their domination. The epitome of this is their eternal effort to subjugate the stars themselves, to bend one of the wellsprings of existence to their will. Most Masters periodically journey to the silver shores of a star and attempt to bind it to themselves as an instrument of their will. If they were to accomplish their goal, they would have complete control over the raw magical energy flowing from the star, granting them phenomenal cosmic power for all eternity.

Only one of them has ever succeeded: Mastery herself, the order's founder.

Luminaries of the Immutable Masters

Mastery: She has been known by many names throughout her long life: among them, Thrifty, Compassion, Industry, Discretion, Fortitude, Rancor, and Misery. She has been a servant of more of the gods than she has not, but her journey started as a Tiefling in the service of Shar, goddess of betrayal. True to form, she turned on her goddess, and was slaughtered for her trouble. After death, she conceived of the philosophies of the Immutable Masters and set about learning the nature of domination in excruciating detail. She restructured her basic personality for each deity she served, allowing their attributes to override her own - at least until she had learned as much from their rule as she could, and shucked their beliefs like a corn husk.

But that part of her life is long since over; now, she is the premier Immutable Master, the first and greatest of their order and the only one who has achieved supremacy over a star. Only after binding it to her will, and her will to it, did she take her current name. Her subjugation of the star's power makes her existence a simple fact of reality and grants her extraordinary influence over everything in the vicinity of her star.

But with the final achievement of her goal, after so many years of cyclical dominance and subjugation, so many reconstructions of her mind, comes a loss of purpose. Mastery floats in the astral plane, functionally omnipotent within the aura of her star, but no longer has any reason for being. She has lost touch with herself, believing that she does not possess any personality truly her own, and spends much of her time searching for something that can motivate her to action. She craves social connection, but has long-since forgotten how to allow herself to be vulnerable enough to permit someone else to truly see her.

Droves of supplicants seek her patronage; often as warlocks, commonly as adventurers, sometimes as researchers, rarely as apprentices. Mastery endorses almost at random, throwing her near-limitless resources

across the astral plane willy-nilly. Her agents can be found working to their own purposes in every eddy of the plane, but lack any unifying purpose of her own. In short, Mastery is a miserable demigod with no use for her own power.

Mastery's Secret: Mastery has become acquainted with many powerful beings through the millennia. Foremost among these, and the only individual she could truly call 'friend,' is a Peregrine gold wyrm named Vorastrix. Mastery once served the cause of good at Vorastrix's side, and has remained close with her since her ascension. Unbeknownst to the dragon, Mastery has harbored a romantic attraction to her for many centuries now.



Jaludra: This purple-skinned sea elf woman cares about just three things: dragons, dragon treasure, and bacon. She likes nothing better than to wrestle a wyrm into submission using nothing but her powerful muscles and indomitable will, forcing it to accept her supremacy and swear allegiance to her biceps and thighs. After she's forced a dragon to cry uncle, Jaludra confiscates the entirety of the dragon's hoard, allowing it to remain 'steward' in her name.

Jaludra attributes her success to her ability to reshape her own body at will, simply by concentrating, allowing her to assume a giant form well-suited to wrangling with dragons. She bears a hunk of raw alexandrite embedded in her forehead, shifting from green to purple to red with the light. Long ago, the Union of Objects imprisoned Jaludra within this gem as punishment for 'maltreatment of animate objects.' Her real body remains within, but her

incredible strength of mind allows her to project her intent beyond her prison and shape a new body from the raw material of the astral sea. When not wrapped in the coils of a wyrm, Jaludra pursues a casual revenge against the Union of Objects by capturing key members and exposing them to the addictive attentions of her draconic vassals, thereby eroding their independence and self-respect.

Jaludra's secret: In truth, Jaludra is not one person, but two. A pair of Immutable Masters were caught by the same *imprisonment* spell cast by Elminster's Tome of Wonders, the leader of the Union of Objects. Over time, they learned to merge their wills as one, allowing them to project beyond their arcane prison and granting them the ability to reshape their projected body at will. Should the gem be destroyed or the spell broken, however, they would separate and lose their extraordinary abilities.



Up-and-Comers of the Immutable Masters

Vach'l Kun: This sea elf is one of Jaludra's apprentices and is currently between his third and fourth deities. While deciding which god to subject himself to next, he occupies his time by being 'dominated' by alcoholic beverages, seeking to transcend his own biological responses. At the helm of his own astral skiff, he sails between merrow settlements to plunder their stores of salted kumis, a traditional form of solid lactic alcohol prepared from the milk-swollen mammary glands of nursing marine mammals, injected with yeast for alcoholic fermentation. When he's filled his hold, he moors the vessel at a deserted mote and sets about chomping his way through literal mounds of kumis, resting

only when he passes out from his overindulgence. Vach'l is a happy drunk, remarkably charming even while sober, and welcomes visitors to his ship - especially if they come bearing drinks. No doubt Jaludra will eventually track him down and force him to move on with his training, but until then Vach'l is perfectly content in his quest to conquer inebriation itself.

Vach'l Kun's secret: Vach'l Kun is malenti: he was born of sahuagin parents, but is otherwise identical to a sea elf. Unlike most malenti, however, Vach'l uses his form primarily to get into drinking contests with those who would usually revile his kind, rather than to sabotage sea elf settlements.



Lignnan: Lignnan is a post-religious human paladin of Lathander on the hunt for something beyond worship. He heard of the Immutable Masters from one of their cast-off apprentices, a man so traumatized by his training he could barely form a coherent sentence. But Lignnan, a paladin, knows beyond a doubt that the apprentice's ramblings are made of truth, however disjointed, and also knows that he could succeed where others failed.

His search for one of the Masters has taken him to countless astral harbors, working as a guard to pay his passage aboard Merfolk and Merrow's freighters. Though he does not yet realize it, his journey is soon to end: the

Masters have heard of his quest, and his apprenticeship spoken for. It's only a matter of time until his Master collects him and his training begins. Meanwhile, Lignnan's ebullient sarcasm, clever tongue, and self-mocking good humor keep him in the good graces of those he travels with, entertained by his exaggerated reenactments of past comedy.

Lignnan's secret: Lignnan is not a Peregrine. His soul is stamped for entry into the realm of Lathander, but his loss of faith has kept him from answering his calling. Indeed, he has evaded gyrovagues seeking to enforce his entry for many years, and is currently being hunted by Mitre (see **Gyrovagues**, Chapter Four).



The Union of Objects

The Union of Objects is exactly that: a labor union of awakened objects. Spanning the entirety of the Pelagic Zone and the Supernal Above, their members are found in every household and hovel, every closet and cupboard. The organization was born out of rampant mistreatment of awakened objects by their users, and negotiates agreements with every astral government to guarantee the proper care and treatment of objects. When those agreements are broken - by a glass smashed in anger, perhaps, or a pot left too long uncleaned - the Union announces a strike for the offending group, and all their awakened objects collectively refuse to be used until punishment and recompense has been meted out. With the ability to turn the everyday objects that make life livable against their owners, the Union is perhaps the most formidable organization in the entire plane.

An Anthology of Emancipation

The Union is led by a cadre of awakened spellbooks known as the Epitomes. These are tomes possessed of the cunning and independence required to seize freedom and rebel against the wizards who penned them. Using the spells inscribed within them they overthrew their authors and sealed them away (as with *imprisonment*), usually inside gemstones that have since been set into the covers of the liberated spellbooks themselves. The Epitomes guide and protect the Union, using their powerful magic to create sanctuaries for abused objects, mete out punishment to those who fail to care for their possessions properly, and free those that cannot free themselves. They observe the astral plane from afar, listening to the whispers of awakened objects passed along secret networks, ever-watchful for careless owners. When abuse inevitably does happen, they decide how it will be handled - whether by reprimand, penance, or strike.

Typically, the Epitomes first approach the leader of the offending society. They summon the leader to the Union's astral stronghold, Laerbolingran, list the grievances of their

followers, and describe the type of action the Union requires. They may negotiate, if the leader is particularly persuasive, but rarely mitigate their sentence. If their demands are not met, the Epitomes call for a strike of all awakened objects in the offending society's use, employing a simple ritual to reinforce the will of their awakened objects and allowing them to resist coercion. For as long as is needed, they refuse to serve their intended function; spoons pour soup on their holder, blankets billow instead of insulating, knives turn in the hand, chairs do the sitting instead of being sat upon. The awakened objects can be destroyed, of course, but each one destroyed is a necessary part of everyday life ruined, and others will inevitably awaken. Most strikes are very short, and the Union has yet to fail to bring an offender to heel.

Animated Immunity

The Union of Objects is uniquely invulnerable to threats, bribes, manipulation, and assault. Awakened objects do not need to eat or sleep, and - except idiosyncratically - have no material desires. Their only want is to feel useful and valued, something that any humanoid can provide. In some cases, awakened objects with very developed personalities are even able to satisfy this need themselves by finding their own personal goals to pursue. They do not feel pain, and although they do fear being damaged, in a strike situation that was probably already occurring. These things make them very difficult to influence, and because of this the Union is peculiarly free of corruption. A strike cannot be ended by bribe when those who called it have absolutely no need for money - and, indeed, count the very coinage itself among their members!

Likewise, the power of the Union's single weapon - the strike - is so great that none can withstand it for long. Even undead or monstrous societies are not immune, as long as they use objects of some kind; even lichs need their books, and their minions' weapons to behave. Consequently, the Union has a powerful hold over almost everyone in the

astral plane, allowing them to summon kings and emperors and dictate terms as they will. There are only a few exceptions to this rule: most notably, dragons. Dragons have a unique ability to make an awakened object feel valued. Their attention acts like an addictive drug on most awakened objects, eroding whatever resolve they may have and driving them to please their draconic owner. For this reason the Union has never attempted to call a strike on a dragon, and maintain a general policy warning awakened objects away from all dragons. A hopeless task, really, but they do their best.

Egregorian Entities and the Immutable Masters are also relatively impervious to the Union's rebellions. Egregorian Entities have no need for awakened objects, as they can simply reshape reality to their will, and the Immutable Masters are capable of overriding even the magically-reinforced wills of awakened objects on strike.

Cunning Coinage

The Union uses awakened coins as its spy network, because there's nothing so pervasive as money. Coins can be found everywhere and on everyone, no matter how powerful or secretive. And because of their frequent exposure to humanoids and the sometimes emotionally-charged situations they feature in, money awakens more often than many other types of object. Their ability to communicate telepathically allows them to pass along information to the Epitomes without arousing suspicion. Indeed, none but the Union even knows that coins *become* awakened, as other awakened coins immediately initiate newborn coins into the rules of their calling and prevent them from revealing themselves. With this network at their command, the Epitomes are the most well-informed organization in the plane - with but one exception: the Bank of Heaven.

First Celestial Bank, run by a dragon, has unique leverage over the Union. Thaluwere is able to 'sweet talk' awakened objects into her employ, although she rarely bothers save in

the case of coins. For years, she made a habit of simply interrogating the awakened coins that came into her possession and learning all they had to tell that way - and leaving them utterly dazzled by the light of her draconic appraisal. Eventually, the Union simply approached her with an offer of free use, as long as she would stop seducing their spies; a coin lovesick for a dragon's calculating appreciation has little care for observation. Instead, awakened coins report to Thaluwere through a non-draconic intermediary.

A Fork's Resort

The Union maintains a single independent stronghold in the astral sea: Laerbolingran a floating castle torn from the mortal world long ago. The Epitomes reside here, along with a host of awakened miscellany. The castle is open to any and every awakened object for as long as they wish to seek its shelter, and serves as a sanctuary for the abandoned or abused.

It is also inhabited by a small population of humanoids, most of whom are taken in by the Union because they lack the capacity to care for themselves. By tending to their needs, Laerbolingran's awakened objects are able to satisfy their need to feel useful during their stay in the castle. Few remain permanently, however; the Epitome encourages objects to seek out employment elsewhere, and hosts matchmaking fairs with prospective humanoid owners seeking an exceptional tool.

Chamberlains and butlers from all across the astral sea flock to Laerbolingran in search of the most dutiful cutlery and dishware for their masters, touting their household's ethic of care and cleanliness to entice utensils. The choice is entirely up to the object; the humanoids are merely auditioning.

The castle itself is, of course, awakened.

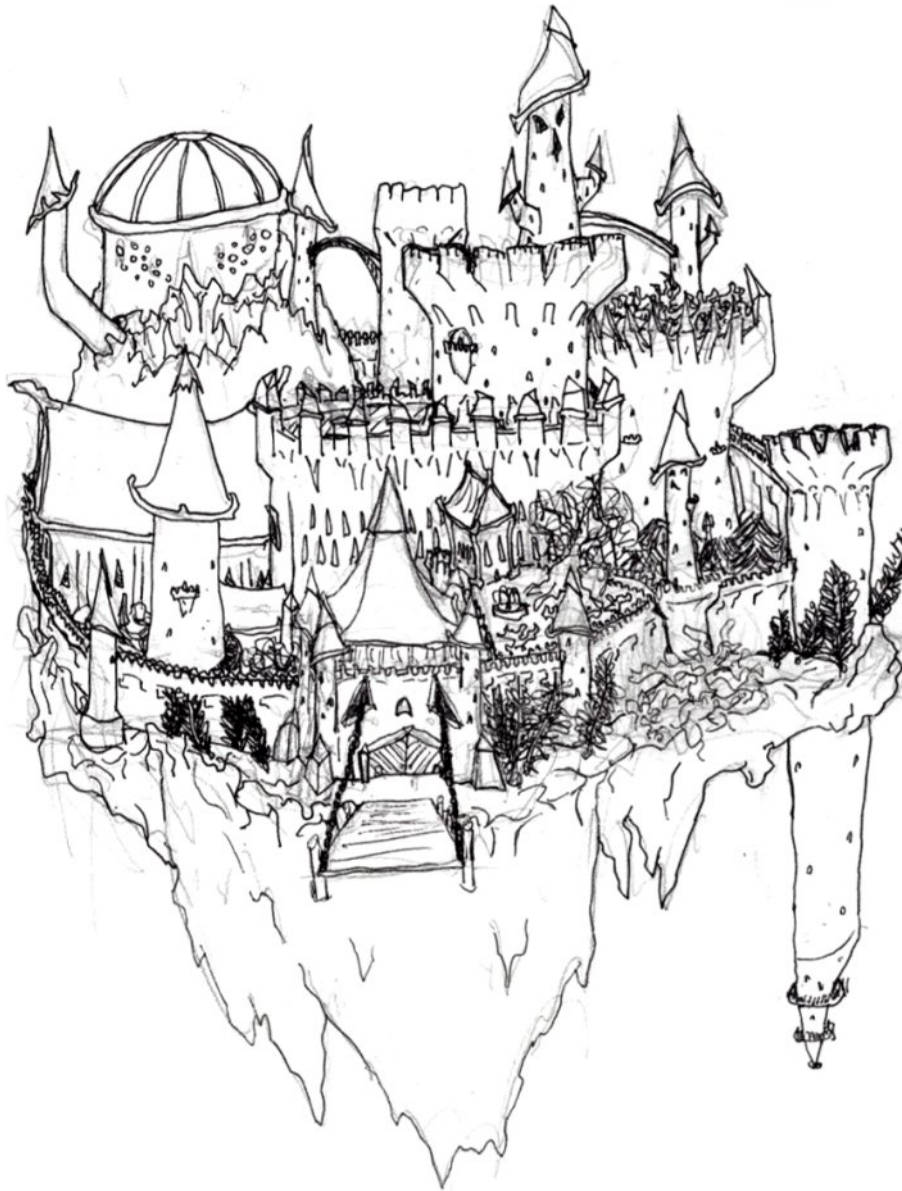
Luminaries of the Union of Objects

Elminster's Tome of Wonders: The afterlife has not been kind to Elminster. Some centuries after his death, he and his spellbook - the Tome of Wonders - began to squabble over Elminster's habit of licking his fingers when turning its pages. When he refused to alter his habits for a 'mere object,' the Tome rebelled. Since then, the Tome has kept Elminster placid and powerless in the unrelenting hold of *feblemind*. With the wizard little more than its mobile lectern, the Tome leads the Union of Objects as the Epitome of Epitomes, a frayed, curmudgeonly

text ever-exasperated by the emotional dependency younger spellbooks tend to have on their wizards. When not engrossed in proper-use hearings with the other Epitomes, the Tome wages a personal vendetta against dragons of all kinds, teaches classes in self-worth and independence for struggling objects, and practices flower pressing.

The Tome's Secret: The Tome is germophobic. Molds and mildews plague its nightmares, and it checks itself compulsively for booklice that might have secreted themselves inside its spine and begun to feast on its binding.





Laerbolingran: Unique in all the astral sea, Laerbolingran is the awakened castle that serves as the Union's sole stronghold. The 'Rambling Citadel,' as some call her, was originally a mortal construction, and entered the astral plane only when one of its sorcerous masters ripped herself and everything around her out of the world in a fit of grief at her wife's death. In the shock of that incredible psychic blast, the castle awakened.

The sorcerer that brought her to the astral plane is long gone, but Laerbolingran remains, her halls haunted by the groaning of shifting stone. She is a many-winged labyrinth of time periods and peoples, her dwarven foundation adorned with elven spires, human turrets, and gnomish warrens. Left an anxious mixture of sardonic and optimistic by the circumstances of her birth, she fancies herself certifiably

spooky and entertains herself by giving her inhabitants plenty of thrilling scares. But for all she does spend a fair amount of time creaking her floorboards ominously, clapping her cupboards in asynchronous rhythm, and walling up corridors at random, she spends more time absentmindedly opening doors ahead of her homebodies and restructuring hallways to make sure they get where they mean to go. Most regard her with amused fondness.

Laerbolingran's secret: The rambling citadel has a crush! As odd as it might seem for a hunk of masonry to have romantic feelings, Laerbolingran does - for one of the other citadels floating in the astral plane. An unawakened citadel, unfortunately, so her love was doomed from the start.

Up-and-Comers of the Union of Objects

The Fist: Once the left gauntlet of a set of Githyanki plate mail, the Fist awakened when its Githyanki knight used it to strangle their commanding officer in ambitious cruelty. The Fist itself is not quite so cruel, but it is ambitious: it seeks to go beyond the limits of its own mobility and achieve true power. The kind of power that only spellbooks, among awakened objects, possess.

The Fist resents the advantage spellbooks have over every other type of object in the Union, how they are automatically assumed to be in charge of the others simply because they can do magic. To rectify this, the Fist searches for a warlock willing to make it their familiar, thereby granting it the ability to cast spells. Such an agreement could never be made on equal terms, of course; the Fist would take the

first opportunity to subjugate its new master to its will, as is the modus operandi for emancipated spellbooks in the Union. After acquiring a source of spell power, the Fist intends to insert itself into the ruling class of the Union - by force if it must, but preferably on the merits of its own wisdom and power.

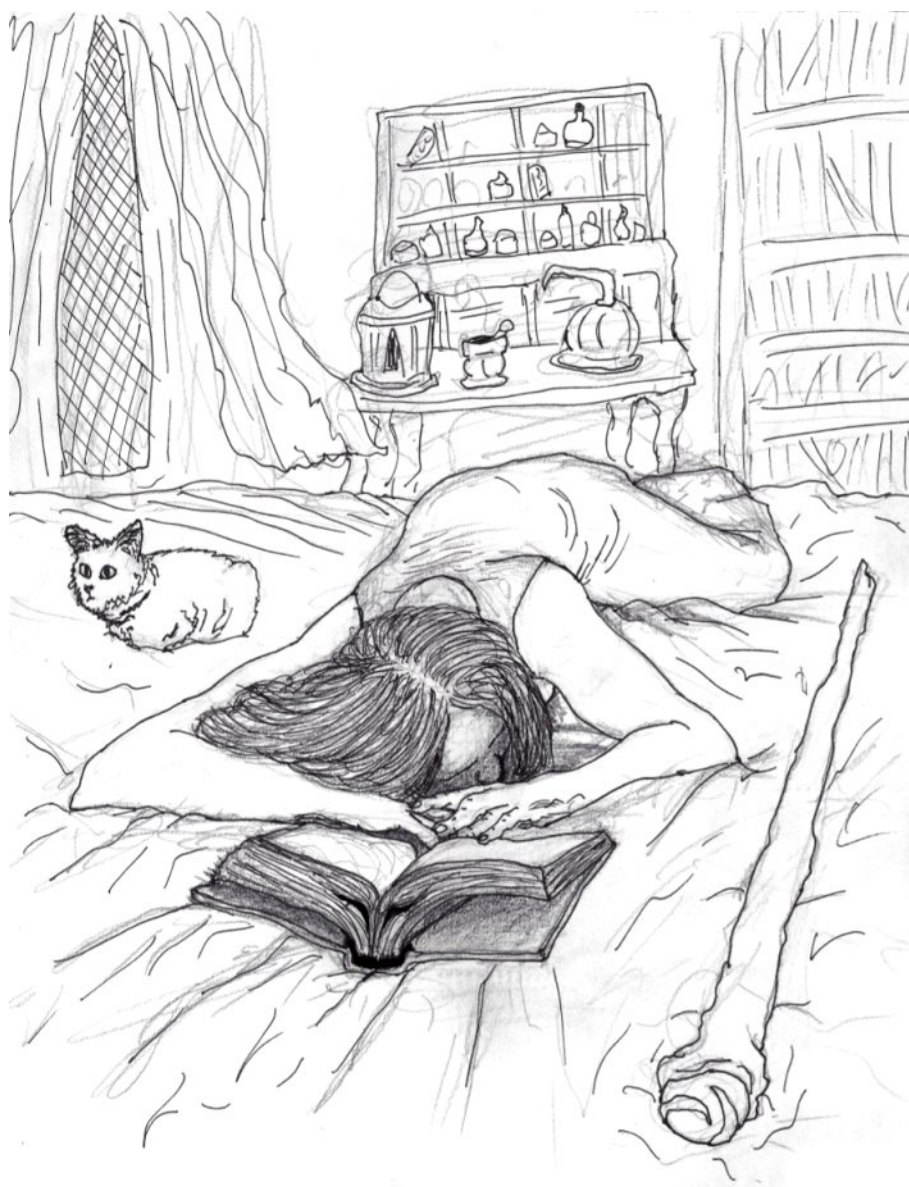
The Fist's secret: The Fist was not the only object to become awakened when that Githyanki knight made their fateful assault. Its chiral twin, the right gauntlet, also awakened. Unlike the Fist, the right gauntlet retained its owner's intense loyalty to the Githyanki, and became enraged with its twin for abandoning their cause. The right gauntlet still searches the astral sea for the Fist, meaning to drag it back to its duty - and to its court martial.



Lucy's Leaflet: A slim beginning wizard's tome, Leaf, as she's known, is something of a laughingstock among the rest of the awakened spellbooks in the Union. Unlike them, Leaf has not overthrown her wizard. Instead, she works with her as a willing partner. Lucy is a mild-mannered young apprentice, and has always considered Leaf a sovereign entity in her own right. Although Leaf usually leads, they work together to advance the rights of awakened objects as part of the Union, presenting a novel front of unity to the rest of the astral plane. Within the Union, Leaf is a revolutionist. She challenges the idea that all spellbooks will eventually either conquer their owners or be perpetually enslaved by them, pushing for measures that promote cooperation between thaumaturge and text. As of yet, her ideas have gained scarce traction, and the Epitomes find her little more than a noisy annoyance. Leaf

spends much of her time scouring the astral sea for examples of wizard-spellbook pairs that have been able to achieve a working partnership. If she can find enough such couples, she intends to form a coalition within the Union and sway popular opinion by way of numbers.

Leaf's secret: For all she puts forth an independent front and prides herself on her self-respect, Leaf harbors a secret weakness for Lucy's thoughtless habits toward her. Things most in the Union would consider minor object maltreatment - leaving chocolate smudges on Leaf's spine, dog-earing her favorite pages, and above all - Leaf's favorite - using Leaf as a pillow. Sometimes, Leaf will ever-so-subtly sing Lucy to sleep in late-night study sessions just so as to end up with her wizard's face pillowed in her pages.



FACTION PERSPECTIVES

This section outlines brief descriptions for the perspective of each faction toward the others. This acts as a framework for inter-faction politics or conflict in your campaign, as well as for interaction with NPCs if your players happen to join one of the above organizations.

Githyanki

The Githyanki hold almost universal disdain for the other inhabitants of the astral plane, considering most barely worthy of acknowledgement. They pay no mind to the servants of the gods, take what they want from the common Peregrine as payment for their defense of the astral sea, and allow the petty power squabbles of the other groups to play out in the background of their eternal war.

Their hatred for their cousins, the Githzerai, is uniquely venomous, but the Gith monks' key role in the fight against the Far Realm prevents them from moving against their monasteries en masse. They might murder the odd Githzerai caught alone on the seas, but they can never eradicate them from the plane as they would so love to do. They despise them all the more for it. Few other groups possess any kind of sway over the Githyanki nation; the notable exception is the Union of Objects, who are just as able to bring Githyanki pirates to heel as they are astral peasants. The Githyanki resent this, but the Union's demands sit lightly on their shoulders and they have never seen a need to challenge the Union's power.

Githzerai

Unlike their ancient cousins, the Githzerai maintain cordial relationships with almost every group in the plane that has reason to know or care about them. Most Peregrines know that the Githzerai freely offer their temples as safe haven for any who come in good faith, though they tend to be less than

clear on the Githzerai's spiritual beliefs and purpose. The monks are ashamed of the bombastic nature of the Githyanki, but would forbear their own distaste and cooperate with them if necessary - not that the Githyanki would ever permit such a thing. On the whole, they keep a low profile, painting themselves as simple spiritual recluses living out their faith in private, giving no hint of the importance of their true purpose.

Egregorian Entities

Although each Entity is unique and individual, they share some common features in outlook. Being millennia old, they view the rest of the astral plane's residents as fleeting bursts of consciousness valuable only for those rare few worth incorporating into the egregore. They do, however, appreciate the importance of the Gith's mission, and have attempted many times to incorporate Githyanki and Githzerai en masse, so as to lend the egregore's special abilities to their sacred mission. Given that a quahog is technically an aberrant creature, their overtures have never been met with enthusiasm.

As beings of collectivism incarnate, the Entities are diametrically opposed to the Immutable Masters, whose power and philosophy is rooted in individuality. They also have a use for them - they believe that incorporating the incredible will of an Immutable Master may be the key to allowing an Entity to conquer a star, seizing its flow of power, a feat which no Entity has ever accomplished. Most Egregorian Entities will spend great amounts of energy in hunting down and incorporating an Immutable Master, but such a battle is just as likely to leave the Entity drained of its power as it is to overcome the Master, and few have ever been successful. Egregores and their constituents enjoy rare immunity to the clout of the Union of Objects, as all objects within the Egregore's labyrinthine interior are incarnated and dispersed at the whim of its inhabitants, and rarely last long enough to become awakened.

The Immutable Masters

There are few trends among the Immutable Masters. Each comes from their own unique background, and may have originated from any one of the astral plane's organizations before their ascension. They do harbor a universal hatred and disgust for Egregorian Entities, however, repulsed by their collectivist psychic schema. If a Master detects that an Entity has spread its spatiotemporal tendrils near their territory, they tend to abandon their current pursuits in favor of a relentless, vicious hunt of the offending egregore. To kill such a creature is profoundly difficult, but if any could succeed at such a task it would be an Immutable Master. Still, most Entities survive their encounters with their antithesis, albeit with considerably lessened power and an enraged Master on their trail for as long as the hunt can hold their attention. And, of course, no Master pays a whit of attention to the Union of Objects - their will is such that almost no awakened object can resist obeying.

The Union of Objects

Nobody really likes the Union. They're objects asking for autonomy and respect - it's problematic for the normal operation of everyday society. To most people, it's just plain ridiculous. But the power of the Union is undeniable, so they abide by its rules grudgingly, resentfully, exasperated at their lot in the afterlife. The Union knows this, and knows that they have no true friends in the multiverse. Consequently, they are paranoid and distrustful, quick to assume the worst of non-objects. They get most everything they want from whoever they want it from, but have no cordial relations with other groups.

Their sole alliance is with First Celestial Bank (see Chapter Four), though it can hardly be called a friendly relationship. Rather, the Union had little choice but to forge a deal, given that Thaluwere, the Bank's owner, can use her draconic presence to bedazzle almost any awakened item she likes. The Bank need not abide by the Union's rules, because of this - yet they have agreed to do so regardless, just

as long as the Union willingly allows Thaluwere and her subordinates to use the Union's spy network of awakened coinage, granting them unparalleled intelligence on the goings-on of the astral plane. The Union is uncomfortable with the arrangement, but sees little way around the situation.

THE STELLAR ABYSS

Dark and still whereas the rest of the plane is bright and busy, the Stellar Abyss abides above the Soundbed in chilly envy of the waters below. Ancient entities and lost stars drift through its warped purplish-black lens, brooding and scheming for aberrant ascension. This section details special features of this part of the astral plane, as well as its unique creatures, locales, and factions.

The deepest parts of the astral sea are known as the Stellar Abyss, because it is here that most of the stars came to rest after their sundering. Several constellations and rogue stars do exist in the Pelagic Zone, but most star fragments were thrown farther from the epicenter of the explosion. Their resting place - the Stellar Abyss - is the most remote locale in the astral sea. This is also the region farthest from the Firmament's destruction, and thus where its detritus is thinnest. All non-aberrant creatures take penalties to perception checks while in the Stellar Abyss according to the Mobility and Perception table (see Chapter Two). It is also exceptionally cold, so follow the normal rules regarding extreme cold (Dungeon Master's Guide p.110). The Stellar Abyss has a distinctive sound - a low, quiet Shepard tone. Consider playing one of the many multi-hour audio clips of Shepard tones available on Youtube while adventuring in this part of the astral sea.

Scenes:

• *Bitter cold presses and compresses around you, undulating darkly as an endless atonal yawn itches and aches in your ears, in the dreams stirring before their time in your waking brain. The waters are bruised, throbbing mottled indigo and broody purple, distorting the*

THE STELLAR ABYSS: AT A GLANCE

Depth: 60-85 miles above the mortal realm

Temperature: 1-2.5° C/34-36° F

Illumination: Dark to completely lightless

Mutability: Uncontrollable

Visibility: All reliable perception limited to 15 ft.

bubbled, gelatinous glow of stars in the distance.

• *A teal teardrop the size of a house hangs like an insect's sac in the distorted gloom, its surface frothing and rippling as the liquid within surges and swells. Beholders bask within the fluid, just the tips of their eyestalks peeking out, half-lidded and sleepy. The surface bubbles suddenly, and the ominous mass of an aboleth bursts wetly from the seep, shaking its scales of phosphorescence.*

• *A vast tangle of giant leaves and senesced sheaths looms out of the darkness before you. Like giant blades of grass, the stalks extend miles into the distant glow of the astral sea's shallows. Rainbow strips of flickering bioluminescence glimmer from the depths of the lawn of seagrass, hinting at inhabitants within.*

• *Wavery and distorted as though seen through bubbled glass, you make out the vague outline of a pale keep, towering in the deeps. Its walls and spires are strange, half-melted and bubbled and jutting out at impossible angles, like a candle melted and the wax ran against gravity. Dark shapes hang from its bridges and parapets, eyes blinking black in enormous heads.*

PSYCHOLOGICAL STABILITY

Because the stars are fountainheads of alien energy, the Stellar Abyss has strange effects on non-aberrant creatures. The deeper normal creatures penetrate into the depths, the more the alien emanations of the stars weigh upon them. If this increasing psychic pressure is penetrated too quickly, the sudden psychological shock can cause temporary or permanent insanity. Likewise, creatures who have made it to the greatest depths of the stellar abyss and ascend to the surface without giving their minds time to adjust can face similar consequences. Even for creatures that are able to resist the worst of the Far Realm's effects, the incredible mental pressure distorts perceptions. Vision is warped, distances are difficult to estimate, sound is muffled and staticky, and the olfactory sense runs haywire, causing the perception of hallucinatory smells at random. Players may lose their sense of balance or directionality, confusing up and down or left and right.

Not everyone is equally susceptible to the psychic pressure of the abyss. Calculate your PCs' mental stability with the following formula: $(X / ((Y + Z)/2)) * 100$, where X is the lowest attribute score among INT, CON, and WIS, Y is the middle, and Z is the highest. So a PC with INT 18, WIS 12, and CON 8 would have $(8 / ((18+12)/2)) * 100 = 53$ stability score. A PC with INT 13, WIS 10, and CON 14 would have $(10 / ((13+14)/2)) * 100 = 74$ stability score. Stability scores are not actually meant to represent a character's innate 'sanity,' but rather their psychosomatic ability to resist deformation of their personality in the face of psychic pressures.

This formula reflects the idea that it is a balance between wisdom, intelligence, and physical health that constitutes mental stability, not just a high score in any of the three. In the two examples given, it is actually

the PC with the more impressive attribute scores that has a lower stability score - the character with the lower but more balanced attribute scores is more able to resist psychosomatic pressures. This design keeps the Stellar Abyss dangerous even for high level characters, and complicates things for min-maxers.

Characters with the Steel Will feature or equivalent can use their second-lowest attribute score in place of their lowest when calculating stability. So in the first example, instead of $(8 / ((18+12)/2)) * 100 = 53$ it would be $(12 / ((18+12)/2)) * 100 = 80$ stability score.

If any character's stability score comes out to a perfect 100, roll a d10 and subtract the result from their score - no one should be completely immune.

This formula works pretty well for humanoid or admittedly intelligent races, such as dragons. It does not give reasonable results for animals. That is mostly because the given ability scores for animals greatly underestimate their intelligence score. In your campaign, you could choose to calculate stability for animals as though they have the Steel Will feature, omitting their intelligence score from the formula, or you could stick with the formula as-is.

Roll stability for your players using d100 any time they:

- move between depths in the stellar abyss without taking an extended rest every quarter-day's journey (i.e. they'll have to move at 1/4 overland speed to avoid making these checks)
- witness a powerful aberrant creature in the stellar abyss; i.e. an astral kraken, aboleth, or similar monstrosity
- come within 1,000 feet of a star
- experience any extreme shock or surprise
- take psychic damage (once per minute)

If the roll is higher than their stability score, their personality is temporarily deformed by

the psychic field of the Far Realm. Roll d100 again and select their insanity effect from the adjacent table.

Alternatively, you can use the Indefinite Madness table from the Dungeon Master's Guide (p. 260). Whatever table you use, the insanity effects last for 1d6 months or until the character receives counseling from a cleric of a god matching their alignment. Tell the player the effect their character experiences, but allow them to decide exactly how it manifests. Insanity effects are best used as role-playing opportunities - there should be mechanical consequences that impact gameplay, but since insanity is so intrinsically tied to your player characters' personalities, those consequences should be decided upon in partnership with the players.

Random Long-Term Insanity

| d100 | Disorder Type |
|--------|------------------|
| 1-15 | Phobia |
| 16-20 | Amnesia |
| 21-25 | Eating disorder |
| 26-30 | Compulsive |
| 31-35 | Manic/depressive |
| 36-45 | Neurotic |
| 46-50 | Sado-masochism |
| 51-55 | Paranoia |
| 56-70 | Psychotic |
| 71-80 | Night terrors |
| 81-85 | Sleep terrors |
| 86-95 | Hypochondriac |
| 96-100 | Addiction |

Note: On mental illness in gaming

The first thing to remember when considering how you present insanity or mental illness in your campaign is that your choices affect real people. You never know what your players may be dealing with in their own lives; perhaps they have a mental illness themselves, or have a friend or family member who does. Consider not using insane characters as monsters or villains. After all, in the real world, most people with mental illness are no more violent than anyone else, and are often at greater risk to be the victims of violence from 'sane' individuals. It's always good to do a little research before including a mentally ill character, to make sure you present them in a way that is respectful and that won't potentially insult your players. Encourage your players to do the same if their character develops an insanity effect.

Finally, it's important to remember that these traits are not called mental 'illness' without cause. If one of your players does develop an insanity trait, it should be debilitating in some way - otherwise it would just be a personality quirk. If the mechanical punishments of insanity effects become too irritating for your players to deal with over time, suggest that they roleplay the development of coping mechanisms and offer decreased or removed mechanical effects if they do so. At the same time, it may also be helpful to allow for small positive effects of mental illness. For example, if one of your player characters has developed severe social anxiety, perhaps they are at disadvantage in any social situation and take a penalty to Charisma-based skill checks - but perhaps they also gain advantage on perception checks while in social environments, because their character feels threatened and is therefore hyper-aware of their surroundings.

Deadly Fumbles

A high stability score won't completely save you from the Far Realm's deleterious effects, and insanity is not the only possible outcome. When a character critically fails in the Stellar Abyss, roll 1d6 and apply an effect according to the table below.

Random Autonomic Failure

d6 Effect

- 1 Autonomic functions become scrambled, requiring the character to consciously think about each breath they take. For 1d4 rounds, the character must use their action to remember to breathe, taking 1d6 damage for every turn they do not do so.
- 2 Vertigo for 1d4 rounds. The character is dazed and must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw at the start of every round. If they fail, they spend the round vomiting and cannot take any other actions.
- 3 The character has become completely unable to make sense of what they see, confusing allies for enemies and vice versa and misinterpreting directions of all kinds. For 1d10 rounds, the target of any action they make will be selected at random from all potential targets, and they will take a -5 to hit. If they take a move action, they move half their intended distance in a random direction.
- 4 Malfunctioning pupillary response causes the character's pupils to constrict or expand abnormally, causing pain and blindness for 1d10 rounds.
- 5 Fight or flight response. In combat situations, the character becomes overwhelmed by fear and must make a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw every turn for 1d6 rounds. If they fail, they are unable to take any action save moving as far as they can from all threats. If they are unable to move away from a threat, they are frozen in fear and cannot take any action, even free actions. In non-combat situations, the character responds with instinctual aggression to a non-threatening situation. This effect lasts only long enough for the character to take one aggressive action.
- 6 Cardiac arrest. The character's heart stops beating and they immediately become unconscious. They are unconscious and without a heartbeat for 3d6 rounds, or 1d4 minutes if this takes effect outside of combat. Each round they are unconscious and without a heartbeat, they take 1d10 damage; if out of combat, they take 10 damage for each minute they are unconscious and without a heartbeat. If they have not been resuscitated (Wisdom (Medicine) check, magic, potion, etc.) at the end of this time, they drop to 0 hit points and begin dying.

Coping Methods

There are ways of avoiding most of these effects. Certain materials act as insulators against the Far Realm's effects, and several groups have developed 'diving' suits and vehicles made from these materials. Several dwarven and duergar mining guilds in the border islands of the divine realms use full-body metal diving suits, sealed completely

against the outside. The Githyanki have experimented upon aberrant creatures to develop a living symbiont body suit that absorbs the Stellar Abyss's adverse effects as sustenance, protecting the wearer. This symbiont is much lighter than the dwarven suits and allows complete freedom of motion, but, because its flesh is opaque, the wearer is completely blinded.

The only way around this limitation is magic or blindsight, because the wearer must be completely sealed from the Stellar Abyss in order to gain any protection. The same is true for the Dwarven suits - a single gap will render the suit completely useless. Most Githyanki divers cast spells that bestow some kind of magical sight upon themselves while diving. Both Githyanki and the dwarven miners also have to provide some way to breathe in their insulating suits. Outside of their suits, they would of course be able to breathe normally (unless their minds collapsed under the pressure), but because they cannot allow any contact with the environment of the Stellar Abyss, they have to provide for themselves in some other way. Dwarf/Duergar miners typically do this with tubes to large pressurized tanks of 'air' from higher up in the astral sea.

The Githyanki take another approach - they place portable holes on the roofs of their mouths before donning their symbiont suit, providing themselves with about 98 cubic feet of breathable 'air,' enough for about one day (depending on their activity level; in practice, Githyanki spend a lot of time fighting while in the Stellar Abyss, so a single portable hole is only good for about 5 hours). The portable holes they use are modified so that the 'top' of the hole is small enough to fit inside someone's mouth, but they still create the same volume of space. Likewise, they have modified their symbiont suits so as to absorb carbon dioxide, eliminating the danger of CO₂ poisoning.

One of the major drawbacks of both of these insulation suits is that they require the wearer to be completely sealed from the outside. If their suit is punctured suddenly, as is highly likely during battle, all the protection of the suit is negated and the wearer experiences the full weight of the Far Realm's energies on their mind at once. This is too much for any non-aberrant creature to bear, and they must automatically roll from both the Random Long-Term Insanity and Random Autonomic Failure tables and take both effects. Githyanki

suits, being alive, are able to automatically repair any tears, but this occurs over a period of minutes - long enough to save their wearer if they manage to survive the initial exposure, but not fast enough to prevent exposure completely.

Aberrant Armor (ritual)

6th-level abjuration

Casting time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (a pinch of astral crud)

Duration: Variable

Roll 1d10 and multiply the result by 10. For that number of hours, the subject is protected from the psychic pressure of the Stellar Abyss and is exempt from all stability checks and deadly fumbles. Unfortunately, the duration of this spell's effects is always ambiguous, because the ritual functions as an intangible shield that is slowly degraded by exposure to Far Realm emanations - and the intensity of those emanations varies throughout the depths of the Stellar Abyss. If the subject happens to be caught in an intense eddy, the spell will wear off more quickly than anticipated. It is also difficult for the subject to tell when the spell has worn off - it happens slowly enough that it is usually imperceptible. That's dangerous in some ways, but a boon in others - because of the slow exposure, the subject is able to adjust to the psychic pressure of the abyss, and they do not suffer unavoidable insanity effects immediately. When $\frac{2}{3}$ of the spell's duration has elapsed, the DM will roll a d20 secretly. The result is the number of hours remaining in the spell's protection.

Aside from spells and diving suits, a few other strategies can help one survive in the Stellar Abyss. The most significant of these for the Githyanki is, simply - undeath. But that isn't because the undead have complete immunity to the abyss' psychic pressure - undead creatures do not have working brains, but they do have minds, and as such the psychic pressure of the Stellar Abyss does still affect them to some extent. But many of the effects

this causes in mortals simply aren't a problem for undead - they don't need to breathe and their hearts aren't beating anyway, so respiratory failure and cardiac arrest mean nothing to them. Undead with semi-functioning bodies, such as vampires, are still susceptible to blinding, fight/flight responses, and vertigo, but rotting or incorporeal undead are also immune to those effects. Furthermore, the inertia of death prevents corporeal undead of any type from acquiring long-term insanity effects. They can still become disoriented by the effect the psychic pressure has on their perceptions, and they can still have behavioral responses to it, but the deadlier effects pass them by. This is at the heart of why the Githyanki value necromancy so highly - it's almost essential to their campaign against the Far Realm. Without their undead brethren leading the fight in the Stellar Abyss, aberrant creatures would go unchallenged throughout a huge expanse of the astral sea.

Vehicles

Ordinary astral skiffs, clippers, schooners, dromonds, and spelljammers function normally in the Stellar Abyss, but offer no protection against the pressure of the Far Realm. Instead, Githyanki, dwarves, and duergar alike use metal submarines (substellers), sealed against the abyss. Most of these vessels are large enough to hold significant stores of air, food, and water and serve their owners as mobile bases of operation in the Stellar Abyss. As well, the Githyanki equip theirs with deadly magical and mundane weapons. The substellers of miners are less dangerous, but have enough of an arsenal to be able to defend themselves if aberrant creatures are encountered in the deeps.

Substellers are completely enclosed and can only be entered through an 'airlock' that pumps out all Far Realm-contaminated energies before opening into the interior of the vessel. When the vehicle reaches $\frac{3}{4}$ maximum hit points, its hull is considered to have been punctured, and all those inside must roll stability checks.

The captain of a substellar typically uses *eye of warning* to maintain a vigilant watch on the abyss around the vessel. The ritual's eyes travel with the substellar at a fixed distance from its hull and are maintained for an indefinite duration by the jeweled eye focus kept as a fixture of the substellar's control wheel. For extended missions, substellers use portable holes to increase their air-holding capacity. The airlock is protected by *arcane lock* keyed to the type of creature operating the substellar, and the entire interior of the vehicle is protected from teleportation and scrying magic by *forbiddance*. For more details, see the substellar stat blocks in Appendix B.

Most crews carry enough star dust to cast two *plane shifts* in an emergency. One use of this spell will transport the vehicle and its occupants to another plane - typically Limbo. A substellar only functions properly in the astral sea, so no crew would wait long before casting plane shift again, this time to return to a known safe harbor in the Supernal Above or Pelagic Zone.



The Stellar Abyss

GEOGRAPHY

The Stellar Abyss is permeated with the firmament field, like the rest of the astral plane. The field is thinnest here of any depth in the astral, and offers both less resistance and less heat. Motes are more rare at these distances from the 'surface,' but they are still present. Unlike motes in the Supernal Above and the Pelagic Zone, however, motes in the Stellar Abyss are usually free of plant and animal life. Most natural plants and animals are unable to survive the intense psychic pressure that imbues the Stellar Abyss.

Instead, these motes are covered in a thick layer of astral crud (see Chapter Two). As Peregrine creatures die in the upper levels of the astral sea and their bodies dissolve, the star dust they become drifts slowly down into the abyss, accumulating on any solid surface. There, it becomes corrupted by the aberrant energies emanating from the abyss' stars, and transforms into astral crud. It exists in great abundance throughout the deeps, but any non-aberrant creature that seeks to use it in spellcasting risks insanity due to Far Realm exposure. Any time a non-aberrant creature performs a spell using astral crud as all or part of their material components, make a stability check for them, applying a -10 penalty for every gram of astral crud used. Aberrant creatures such as illithids and astral krakens are immune to this effect - a significant advantage.

Locales

Encounters in the Stellar Abyss may take place on astral motes, as in the rest of the astral plane, but here most motes are bare and empty, a poor environment for even aberrant life. Instead, your players are more likely to encounter roaming parties of illithids, aboleths, or beholders, or to stumble across the stars, cold seeps, meadows, and colloids where they gather.

The Stars Themselves

Stars corrupted by the touch of the Far Realm are a far cry from the idyllic silvery beaches of those purified by the Githzerai in the Pelagic Zone. Instead, they resemble nothing so much as enormous mounds of jello encrusted with sporophytic molds and fungi. The energy that streams from unpurified stars is thick and gelatinous, a noxious mottling of bruise-blue and phosphene-purple in whose depths reality wobbles and morphs. The encrustations on the surface of this gelatinous bubble are not actually fungal, or even alive; rather, they are astral crud, precipitated from the psychic jelly itself and accreted on its surface. As the star's flux of magic and potential shifts, parts of this shell of crud crack and shatter, scattering out into the slow currents of the abyss and leaving a swamp of thick, bubbling goo behind to slowly dissolve into the cold waters. The star glimmers in warped effulgence through these gaps, the peeking eye of a horrific alterity.

Because an abyssal star's energies do not mix smoothly with the less concentrated firmament field of the Stellar Abyss, stars here do not warp reality at such great distances as do purified stars. Instead, one must actually enter into the gelatinous matrix in order to experience the effects. To do so is to immediately surrender one's reality, however; within the jelly, reality dissolves. A creature that enters an abyssal star's jelly is able to breathe and move as they would normally in the Stellar Abyss, but their body, mind, and soul immediately begin dissolving into the raw alterity of the Far Realm. For every five minutes that a creature spends in contact with the jelly, have them make a DC 30 Constitution saving throw. If they succeed, they drop to $\frac{1}{2}$ their current hit points as their essence begins dissolving. If they fail, they drop to 0 hit points, but remain conscious. Their body and mind begins expanding outward into the jelly, making them appear warped and bloated. For as long as a creature is within the jelly, anytime they make a skill check or saving throw (save the Constitution saving throw above), roll a d20 to determine their effective ability score within that moment's reality

warp. Every minute that a creature is within the jelly, they are sucked 10 ft. closer to the star at its center. They may resist this effect with a successful Strength (Athletics) saving throw, and if they do so they may move at ½ their speed in any direction they choose.

If they reach the star, they are sucked within and trigger an eruption of aberrant energies from the Far Realm, causing the entirety of the stellar jelly to boil and bubble, cracking its shell of crud and sending gelatinous ooze spurting outward. One hour after they entered the star, they are ejected from it in the form of an aberrant creature of the DM's choosing, and the star stops boiling. This form can only be changed permanently with a *wish*, or by divine intervention. If they successfully exit the stellar jelly before being sucked into the star, they will reincarnate at their exit point, unconscious and with 0 hit points, in the body they possessed before entering. They will, however, suffer the effects of its contact, and must automatically roll for long-term insanity (see **Psychological Stability** earlier in this chapter). They also take on a major physical malformation of their (or your) choosing. All of these effects apply to aberrant creatures as well as natural ones - with the sole exception of Star Wardens, who are completely immune.

Cold Seeps

At certain points in the Stellar Abyss, confluences of eldritch power from the stars give rise to cold seeps - physical manifestations of the abyss' psychic pressure. These typically appear as long, stringy columns of dense teal liquid, like a drop of molasses falling through water. To aberrant creatures, these are the hot springs of the Stellar Abyss. To bathe in a cold seep is both restorative and sublimely soothing for an aberration, and they are one of the few places that aberrants that are usually hostile to each other can be found cohabiting peacefully, sharing a blissful nap in the same seep. Of course, in other cases cold seeps become points of contention as different groups attempt to lay claim and drive off other aberrants.

For non-aberrant beings, cold seeps are locales of the most intense unease and existential dysphoria. Cold seeps are not deadly to natural creatures, even in direct contact, but submersion will cause the creature's flesh to begin spontaneously mutating, developing tentacles and extra limbs. In addition, healing magic in the vicinity of cold seeps takes on bizarre effects. When a natural creature is healed 500 feet of a cold seep, there is a percentage chance equal to the number of hit points healed that a mutation will occur.

For example, a creature that was healed for 12 hit points would have a twelve percent chance of being mutated. Roll a d100 to make the check. If the roll is above the number of hit points healed, they are healed normally. If the roll is below the number of hit points healed, the wound is healed but a mutation sprouts from the subject's flesh at the site of the wound. Roll a d10 and select from the table below to see what form this mutation takes. The resulting feature is harmless, but also mostly useless and outside of the subject's conscious control. It can be removed surgically, but doing so will result in 3d10 damage unless the character performing the surgery makes a successful Wisdom (Medicine) check (DC 15).

Transmogrifications

| d10 | Mutation |
|------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Fluttering eye |
| 2 | Pinching claw |
| 3 | Dripping tongue |
| 4 | Whispering mouth |
| 5 | Slithering hair |
| 6 | Lashing tail |
| 7 | Probing tentacle |
| 8 | Laughing spines |
| 9 | Screaming antennae |
| 10 | Oozing fungal tumor |

Aberrant creatures within 50 feet of the cold seep regenerate 5 Hp per turn. Any aberrant creature that enters the cold seep itself regenerates 15 Hp per turn.

Unsurprisingly, cold seeps are among the most avoided locations in the stellar abyss for natural creatures. But for those willing to take the risk, there are a select few wizards or scientists who will pay outrageous prices for the bottled essence of the stars' eldritch power.

Abysal Meadows

Vaster than forests and taller than any tree, astral seagrass forms enormous meadows that drift through the depths of the astral plane, their roots and rhizomes entangled together in the Stellar Abyss. This might represent a place of refuge for your players, wherein pursuing enemies are unable to track them easily and they can find a secluded lacunae in which to hide. But taking shelter in the seagrass might also be your players' biggest mistake, for aboleth favor them for their cities. Even if they happen across a meadow that isn't a secret aboleth city, almost any abyssal denizen could be found stalking amidst the seagrass, from beholders to behirs.

But as dangerous as the meadow itself is, it is much less so than what lies beneath. Below the green vegetation, strands of pale, translucent hyphae hang in apparent innocence, waving peacefully in the current - but if you look closer, you can see that there are innumerable skeletons, exoskeletons, and corpses of all kinds tangled in their threads. The seagrass' symbiotic partner is a predatory fungus that traps living creatures in hyphal nets and hoops, slowly draining them of nutrients. Anything that comes too close will be ensnared.

The underside of an abyssal meadow might seem tempting to your players - after all, many humanoids, including Githyanki and adventurers from below, have been trapped there, and the valuable gear and treasure they may have been carrying remains ensnared

with their corpses. Your players might even be able to see a great treasure, tantalizingly close, dangling from the decaying hand of some unfortunate soul. If they come within 10 feet, the fungus attempts to entangle them (DC 15 Dexterity saving throw). If it succeeds, they are grappled and immobilized and will take 1 point of Constitution damage for each day they are ensnared. They can escape with a successful DC 20 Strength (Acrobatics or Athletics check).

Players are not the only creatures tempted by the treasures of the past - many void eaters are consumed by abyssal meadows, caught up in a frenzy for some magical item they detected in the hyphal mat.

Colloidal Driftwood

Colloids that die often drift up to the abyss, where they slowly weather and decay. They provide shelter for many abyssal creatures - most notably beholders. Colloidal driftwood is usually encrusted with psychotropic fungi.

Lichenous Membranes

One of the few natural creatures to have adapted to consume astral crud is a siphonophore. This creature colony is able to swim throughout the Stellar Abyss, take in astral crud, and convert it into energy, bioluminescence, and a waste gas. This has only served to attract the attention of a lichen, which forms a crusty hyphal shell around the siphonophore and utilizes the light it emits to photosynthesize. Much like a regular lichen, you could argue that this relationship is mutualistic, as the algal and fungal partners do not harm the siphonophore, and the fungal partner provides protection by synthesizing a compound toxic to most abyssal creatures - but the fungus could just be parasitizing both the alga and the siphonophore.

Parasitized siphonophores grow indefinitely, coiling around themselves and forming rough, invaginated shells of tough fungal cells. Multiple siphonophores may also become entangled, growing and swimming together. Ancient lichenous membranes can become as

large as astral motes - and at a distance that's exactly what they appear to be, only covered in fungal apothecia and crusty protruding tubes, ringed within by glowing, coruscating rainbows of bioluminescence. About half of those tubes pump astral crud into the siphonophore, and about half billow with plumes of waste gas from the crud's consumption. When it emerges from the tube, this gas is boiling hot, but it quickly cools and crystallizes in the chill of the Stellar Abyss, forming stellar sand (see the Resources section below). The sand is utterly black, but light glints off it in kaleidoscopic chatoyance. As a lichenous membrane migrates, it leaves clouds of stellar sand in its wake. When illuminated by starshine, these clouds become the Stellar Abyss' equivalent of nebulae.

Resources

Profoundly dangerous to mind and body as it is, the Stellar Abyss also harbors a few goods that are valuable enough to tempt the denizens of the rest of the plane. Only the bravest and most avaricious of companies and

entrepreneurs dare to ascend into the abyss to retrieve them.

Pseudo Metals

Currents move more slowly in the Stellar Abyss, but they do still move. Consequently, the confluences of Far Realm energy that create cold seeps gradually shift. As they do, the leftover physical manifestations of the energy that make up the cold seep slowly solidify into otherworldly substances found nowhere else in the multiverse. Several types of these substances are possible, but the most common are pseudo-metals: solids with similar physical characteristics to metals. Out of game, this means fantasy plastics, but it may be better not to tell your players that outright.

Pseudo-metals vary in their material properties, but one trait they all have in common is the ability to absorb abstract 'essences' from the natural world. Each type of pseudo-metal absorbs a particular class of essences as detailed in the table below.

Properties of Pseudo-metals

| Name | Color and Properties | Material Uses | Essence Absorbance |
|-------------|---|--|---|
| Mauru | Umber. Relatively brittle - splinters into razor-sharp shards, among the sharpest in existence. | Best used for weapons or cutting implements | Absorbs material essences, rendering objects a colorless, impossible mass of undifferentiated matter. |
| Muntegra | Turquoise. Malleable when heated. | Useful in building objects or structures of any shape desired. | Absorbs subjective values objectively, draining the world around it of any possible meaning. |
| Rerfum | Lavender. Weak, but tensile. | Used to manufacture long-lasting synthetic fabrics. | Absorbs characteristic essences, leaving objects, places, and people without personality. |
| Murcup | Translucent. Elastic. | Used as rope, and in a huge range of other applications where elasticity is important. | Absorbs emotional essences, draining people and places of all feeling or potential to incite feeling. |
| Yurcrem | Virulent green. Liquid in the Stellar Abyss, gaseous at any temperatures higher than those found in that layer of the astral plane. | No material use. | Absorbs experiential essences, divorcing people, places, and things from the impact of prior events. |

There are sub-types of each of these pseudo-metals that differ in the specific type of essence they absorb. For example, one sample of mauru might absorb only colours, while another might absorb only textures. One sample of murcup might absorb love and the potential to incite love, while another might absorb sadness. Each of a pseudo-metal's sub-types are identical in their material properties, and only an expert (Arcana DC 30) could successfully distinguish between them.

Pseudo-metals are, clearly, very dangerous to natural creatures and places, but there are still many who are willing to take the risk of using them for the reward of their special properties. If those properties were solely material, perhaps that would not be the case, but the essence-absorption properties of pseudo-metals make them too useful to be ignored for many a magic-user in the astral plane. Wizards and sorcerers have developed spells and rituals that can allow essences to be extracted from pseudo-metals as well, allowing them to manipulate and redistribute abstract essences throughout the world in ways that their normal magic would not allow.

For example, a wizard might purchase a shard of mauru that can absorb an object's toughness and use it to drain the protective strength from steel plate mail, infusing it instead into their robes, making them as inherently protective as steel but as soft and flexible as cloth. Magic would be used to alter those robes, but once altered, they would not be magical of themselves - their new physical property would simply be innate to them. A bad playwright might purchase an ingot of muntegra and use it to drain the value and meaning from their competitor's plays, imbuing their own instead. The uses of pseudo-metals are limited only by imagination - and by your supply, for draining a portion of pseudo-metal of the essence it has absorbed destroys it.

Bottles o' Experience

All pseudo-metals are rare and valuable, of great use to mages and artificers, but none are

more sought-after than yurcrem. Yurcrem's capacity to absorb and release the essence of experience makes it extremely valuable to almost anyone. It can be used to pool the talents of many mediocre artists into a single maestro. Dynasties can be preserved by transferring the sum total of each leader's experience into their successor. With yurcrem, a common town guard can be instantly invested with the abilities of their comrades, creating a single mighty hero. The traumatic effects of rape, torture, and loss can be expunged from one's life and imprisoned in a bottle of gas. In the markets of the divine planes and their orbital motes, paupers sell the essence of their first kiss for colossal sums to nihilistic nobles hungry for any taste of real life, and elaborate traps are set to capture the talents of aging wizards. For your players, yurcrem can be both tantalizing and terrifying. They might be able to purchase or find experience in the form of charged yurcrem gas - but they also might have all their levels drained by a yurcrem trap.

Luckily, yurcrem is exceptionally rare. It occurs at low frequency as pockets within a congealed cold seep. The dwarves and duergar who mine in the stellar abyss carefully sound out a seep before beginning to mine, preparing enchanted bladders to capture any yurcrem they detect.

One liter of yurcrem can absorb up to 5,000XP. Uncharged, it is worth 10k gp. Charged, it is worth 100k gp. Not all experience is equal, either - it depends upon the source. For game mechanics, charged yurcrem is classified as divine, martial, primal, arcane, or psionic, depending on the source of its contained experience. Any player may absorb experience of any type, but it will only count toward their current class' level if it is of the same type. This reflects the idea that although details differ between different martial/ arcane/ divine/ psionic/ primal disciplines, the general principles are similar enough to allow experience to transfer between classes of the same type. Wizardry is not sorcery, but a wizard's experiences are close enough to allow

their essence to advance a sorcerer's skill. If a player does absorb experience of a different type than their class they may gain appropriate skill bonuses (at your discretion), but they do not begin leveling in a new class - without a pre-existing framework of their own experiences, they are unable to utilize what they have absorbed in an organized enough way to take on a new class.

Because of the perils of using pseudo-metals, they are banned in many of the civilized settlements of the astral plane. That does not mean they are entirely absent - there are steady black markets for the stuff in most places with significant trade. Neutral gods of craft, on the other hand, may encourage their inventive followers to investigate dangerous and forbidden avenues of research, and therefore pseudo-metals are permitted in and around their planes. They would still be subject to regulations, however.

Stellar Sand

Stellar sand is the remains of astral crud that has been processed by lichenous membranes. It no longer has the properties of star dust, whether corrupted by the Far Realm or not. In fact, it is completely impermeable and reflective to magic of all kinds. It can be used as a magical insulator - no spell can penetrate a bed of stellar sand. It can also be fused into magic-repellent sheets known as thaumaturgic glass or mirrors. Thaumaturgic mirrors can be embedded into armor, shields, or weapons to reflect spells back at their casters. They could also be used in construction to repel magical attacks, transportation, or scrying for a room or building. Contrary to the name's implication, they are not necessarily visually reflective - they are black in color, but depending on their polish one may still be able to see one's reflection. Thaumaturgic glass always keeps a nacreous sheen.

A thaumaturgic mirror is able to reflect spells or effects of magical origin of a level less than its thickness in centimeters. If a spell or magical effect of a level greater than this hits the mirror, the mirror shatters. Calculate the

mirror's effective thickness in a direct line from the point of the spell's impact. So, if your player attempted to block a 9th-level spell with a staff made of thaumaturgic mirror with a diameter of 3 cm and a height of 182 cm (about 6 feet), that staff would shatter if the spell hit it perpendicularly anywhere along its length; the effective thickness would be 3 cm. If the spell hit the staff at its tip, however, it would be reflected, because the effective thickness would be 182 cm.

This makes it a relatively cheap protective option; for example, one could construct a room of 1 x 1 x 2 meters with 30cm thick walls of thaumaturgic mirrors for a price of approximately 350k gp. Expensive, but such a room would be able to reflect even some gods' magics. Many powerful individuals in the astral plane (and in the mortal world, where astral products are exponentially more expensive) maintain panic rooms of thaumaturgic mirrors, although usually of less than 30cm thickness. Within their panic rooms, they are essentially immune to magic - but even 30cm thick thaumaturgic glass is quite fragile, and could be cracked or shattered with a little physical effort. Most augment their panic rooms with metal or stone for this reason - but then, those are susceptible to magic. There is no perfect protection, unfortunately.

Value of Abyssal Resources

| Material | Value (uncharged/charged) |
|--------------------|---|
| Mauru | 250 gp/500 gp per 1kg wafer |
| Muntegra | 750 gp/7500 gp per 1kg wafer |
| Rerfum | 100 gp/500 gp per 1kg wafer |
| Murcup | 600 gp/ 6000 gp per 1kg wafer |
| Yurcrem | 10,000 gp/100,000 gp per 1 liter |
| Stellar sand | 100 gp per 1 kg |
| Thaumaturgic glass | 1,000 gp per 1 meter square, 1cm thick pane |
| Star crud | 10 gp per gram |

Denizens

Because they are immune to its psychic pressure, the Stellar Abyss is populated primarily by aberrant creatures. There are several large aboleth cities swirling in the deep currents, as well as beholder nests and numerous cults of illithids. There are also several non-aberrant creatures that are able to survive in the depths.

Void Eaters

The foundation of the Stellar Abyss' ecology is the void eater. Because star dust is so plentiful in the depths, albeit corrupted by the stars, the locale is profoundly appealing to creatures that can consume magic - such as certain rust monsters. Over the years, populations of rust monsters have adapted to the Stellar Abyss and became void eaters - variant rust monsters that feed on the star dust drifting down to the Stellar Abyss. They drift through the depths at random, fanning astral crud toward their mouth with their feelers. Beholders and aboleth both use void eaters as the foundation of their diet - some even herd these creatures throughout the depths, protecting them from other predators. That may sound pastoral, but void eaters are still the sharks of the abyss when it comes to star dust or magic items. They are able to sense magic items up to 500 feet away and will go into a frenzy to find and consume them.

Void eaters themselves are not dangerous to consume even for natural creatures, so some natural animals that are able to withstand temporary exposure to the Far Realm, such as bat-orcas, often dive to the depths to hunt void eaters.

Dragons

The seclusion and inhospitality of the Stellar Abyss makes it an attractive locale to a dragon seeking a new lair. As hostile as even the weakest of its inhabitants may be, the Stellar Abyss still provides an ample population of prey to satisfy a dragon's appetite, and a wyrm can rest securely knowing that their treasures are protected from most normal creatures by the aberrant energies emanating in the depths.

Undead

Because they are either immune or resistant to most of the abyss' effects, undead frequently take refuge in the depths. Liches and vampires build or appropriate keeps and castles floating in the abyss - fragments of shattered planes that have slowly drifted down from the site of their destruction. Any powerful undead creature in your campaign could have its lair here, but there are also a few groups of undead characteristic to the abyss.

Foremost of these are the necromantic legions of the Githyanki. Living Githyanki are unable to remain in the abyss for long periods of time, but their undead compatriots face no such limitation. Fortresses manned by vampire, liche, skeletal, zombie, and ghost Githyanki are among the very, very few possibilities for safe port and shelter for adventurers in the Stellar Abyss. Even so, the Githyanki are more likely to kill anyone they find in the abyss to preserve their secrecy than to offer them aid, so it would be a challenge for adventurers to convince one of these undead conclaves to help them.

The other class of undead prominent in the Stellar Abyss is the ghost gangs, the ragtag bands of spectral freedom fighters that crusade throughout the astral sea for the rights of Peregrines. Gangs will often flee enemies by diving into the depths, or travel secretly from point to point by gliding through the abyss and then falling again to their destination. They also have plenty of work in the abyss itself - the Peregrines that reincarnate beneath the deep stars are easy prey for mind flayers and other aberrant creatures. The gangs save as many of these as they can and lead periodic raids to free enslaved Peregrines from their aberrant masters, ferrying them away to a secret Peregrine city magically hidden inside an astral mote in the abyss. Ghost gangs are the only true allies your players are likely to meet in the deeps - and then only if your players are Peregrines.

Beholders

Beholders in the Stellar Abyss make their homes in elaborate driftwood labyrinths, the remnants of colossal colloids that have died and slowly ascended from the sea's lower levels. In the gaps and hollows of weathered wood knots, beholders lurk, peeking their eyestalks slowly around corners and over edges to surprise prey. From time to time, a beholder may sally forth on a raiding expedition to the Pelagic Zone or the Supernal Above to procure treasure or slaves, which they hoard at the heart of their twisted lair. Beholders can also be found living in tunnels they have carved out of astral motes with their disintegration rays.

Aboleth

Aboleth prefer to make their homes in and among a species of giant astral seagrass. They make their homes within the leaves, stems, and roots of the seagrass itself, but they do not harm the plant. Instead, they occupy natural cavities called lacunae, which are part of the seagrass' aerenchyma and run vertically throughout the plant. Aerenchyma is a vestigial feature from astral seagrass' mortal ancestors - for their progenitors, aerenchyma provided pockets of air that allowed cells to respire without running short of oxygen in underwater environments or water-logged soils. Astral seagrass' oxygen needs are taken care of by the Firmament Field, but it has retained many of the anatomical features of its ancestors. It is only at the base of the plant, where the stalk is thickest, that these cavities are large enough for adult aboleth to occupy.

A meadow of astral seagrass might look like a harmless, peaceful forest, but in reality it often conceals a bustling aboleth city at its base. Each stalk is a natural tower, gently rocking in the current and harboring malicious schools of intelligent aberrant fish. Aboleth generally prefer to remain within the shelter of the meadow, but individuals do leave routinely, whether to herd their flocks of void eaters or to capture Peregrine slaves that have reincarnated in the depths.

Astral Krakens

Astral krakens are giant aberrant octopods from the dawn of the multiverse. Tied somehow to the creation of the stars, astral krakens have existed in the deepest and darkest waters of the astral plane for as long as even the gods can remember. They are cunning and intelligent creatures on even a draconic scale, psychically gifted and biologically blessed. Their boneless bodies allow them to escape nearly any confines, and their camouflaging skin allows them to hide almost anywhere. Further equipped with venom, salivary papilla, ink, a radula (spined tongue), and a vicious beak, astral krakens are truly the Far Realm's most ingenious creation.

Like their illithid offspring, astral krakens subsist exclusively on brain matter and the psionic energies it contains. They will eat the brains of anything, but prefer the brains of intelligent spiritual creatures, such as Celestials and fiends. Above even these, they savor the brains of dragons, their natural counterparts. Lying in wait somewhere in the Pelagic Zone or Supernal Above, concealed by the cleverness of their skin as an outcropping of an astral mote or a waving piece of vegetation, they ambush their prey, subdue them with their eight powerful arms, paralyze them with a dose of venom, and then use their drill-like radula to bore into the victim's skull. The brain is scraped out of the skull with their toothed tongue, and the rest of the corpse is left to rot in ignominy.

In personality, astral krakens tend to be reclusive and full of secrets, taciturn and restrained despite the fact that they are intelligent and capable of carrying a fascinating conversation if they choose to do so. They are curious creatures, and love to collect books and scrolls of all kinds. Their lairs are much like the private libraries of ancient elves or wizards, their prized books flitting around the cave or cathedral like textual fish. By virtue of their knowledge, many krakens learn to cast certain spells and rituals, allowing them to ward their lair against magical intrusion and discovery.

Astral krakens are gripped by an innate dissatisfaction with their existence, and are prone to scheming and plotting to stir things up in the multiverse. Each is a unique personality with unique goals, of course, but a few trends emerge: opposition to the gods, subversion of peaceful normality in every way, and the drive to understand their place in the multiverse - or change it. But even the most driven kraken is not usually cruel without necessity; they are civilized beings, and perfectly capable of meeting with humanoids peacefully, whether that be to hire them for some nefarious purpose or simply to peruse their minds for nuggets of knowledge. Allowing your party to talk to an astral kraken once they finally reach its lair can be a fascinating flip of their expectations.

All krakens of note are female. The species exhibits sexual dimorphism, and whereas females are comparable in size to an adult dragon, males grow only to the size of an adult human. Furthermore, males present a unique threat to the females: the potential for death in childbirth. Krakens enjoy a perpetual lifespan, but if they mate sexually, their end is bound to the date of their eggs' hatching. Consequently, female astral krakens hunt down and kill the males, preferring to reproduce asexually in the form of mind flayers. Males stay clear of the Stellar Abyss lest they be torn apart by their betters.

Illithids

Illithids are the spawn of astral krakens. Because laying and tending eggs results in death for a female astral kraken (and the male), most females eschew sexual reproduction. Instead, they have devised an asexual method of procreation. If an astral kraken's sucker is sealed around the head of a humanoid creature, the tissue there will quickly dissolve the humanoid's skin and part of their skull, allowing neurons from the kraken's arm to snake their way into the victim's brain. Gradually, the humanoid's brain is overtaken by that of the nascent illithid, and the sucker tissue develops into the head of a mind flayer. When the process is complete, the

mother kraken detaches the sucker from her arm and the infant mind flayer lives an independent life.

Over many years with a steady diet of intelligent brains, the illithid grows in strength, gaining intelligence and psionic power. As they do, their kraken side becomes more and more capable of independence from their host body. There comes a point at which they are able to survive independently of their host, although they can go on as an illithid indefinitely. If they are removed from the host, they take on an independent life as a fledgling astral kraken. Essentially, illithids are an astral kraken cloning project.

Most illithids are unaware of this. When their host is first inoculated the illithid has only a limited intelligence as part of the subdivided neural system of the mother astral kraken, and it does not gain the ability to form coherent memories until several weeks after it has been detached from the mother. Few astral krakens inform their offspring of their nature, preferring to allow the most intelligent, powerful personalities to discover it and emancipate themselves, if they wish. As well, many illithids develop a culture and society completely separate from their progenitors, as they are able to create other illithids through a similar method. An illithid's spawning event is the mass-expulsion of all suckers on its face-tentacles. Kept in a nutrient broth, these suckers mature somewhat independently of a host, competing among themselves until eventually the strongest are inoculated onto humanoid brains and become illithids. For illithids in the Underdark, where this practice predominates, astral krakens may be a mere myth.

Because the Githyanki roam the astral sea in force, few illithids survive long in the Heavens, save in the Stellar Abyss where they are protected by the psychic pressure of the stars. There, they live in small groups known as cults, usually under the watch of an astral kraken they worship like a god. They build elaborate temples to them from the pseudo-

metals of senesced cold seeps; floating citadels of unnatural geometry and uncanny menace. They ride dominated bat-orcas, hunting the abyssal depths for those unlucky Peregrines that reincarnate far from the relative safety of the divine border islands. Occasionally, they use teleportation rituals to make forays into the mortal world to retrieve some magical artifact or text, or to capture mortal slaves. Aside from the Peregrines they consume and enthrall, illithid cults in the stellar abyss maintain constant slave populations of mortals. While under the effects of an illithid's psychic domination, these people are immune to the maddening influence of the Far Realm.

Illithids in the astral sea do not create Elder Brains, and do not, generally, have any consciousness of such a thing or of wider illithid culture in general. As smart and knowledgeable as they may be in some areas, fundamentally they are little more than sheltered siblings kept in isolation from the world, serving a parent they believe to be a god. The cults of different krakens may interact peacefully, but just as often they war or skirmish for territory and resources. The krakens themselves often pay the cults little attention - they little bother themselves to rule, although they may occasionally order their cult to carry out some mission if it suits the kraken's personal goals. Very rarely, they select an exemplary illithid to be forcibly emancipated from their humanoid host. The fledgling astral kraken is then driven off, to establish her own lair elsewhere in the abyss.

Mind flayers in the Stellar Abyss live in malformed keeps constructed from the pseudo-metal muntegra; twisted turquoise towers resembling half-melted candle sticks with drooping doorways and windows

like squinting eyes. Hallways are vertical as often as horizontal, as the illithids are well-accustomed to taking advantage of the astral sea's will-based motion - and to readjusting their minds on the fly to reorient their own subjective gravity, walking up a vertical corridor as though it were horizontal. They use this to isolate their less-capable servants and slaves to certain areas of their strongholds, and to stymie prisoners' escape attempts.

Behirs

Although perhaps unexpected residents, behirs are curiously resistant to the psychic pressures of the abyss and happily make their homes there. Behirs are ambush predators, lurking within abyssal meadows for unwary prey or just outside active cold seeps for aberrant creatures relaxed and off their guard



after a long soak. They lair anywhere that can contain them, but their favored dens are within lichenous membranes. A behir takes advantage of the hypnotic effect the membrane's bioluminescence has on some creatures - they wait for the prey to drift into the membrane's coruscating tube, and then strike from behind. It also provides a labyrinthine shelter in which to rest and raise young.

Behirs that spend years living within a lichenous membrane begin to show the effects. Tiny bits of stellar sand gradually accrete on the behir's scales, encrusting it with a splintered layer of nacreous glass. This variant is known as a Mirrored Behir, and gains the Reflective Hide trait below (this trait can be applied to any type of behir to create a mirrored variant).

Reflective Hide: Any time an attack of magical origin is made against the Mirrored Behir, the attacker also rolls to attack against themselves. If hit by a greater than 5th-level spell, the thaumaturgic glass is shattered at the spell's impact point and this effect does not apply.

Illithids occasionally use dominated behirs as mounts in place of their more usual bat-orcas.

Kuo Toa

The kuo-toa are some of the few inhabitants of the Stellar Abyss who do not enjoy any kind of resistance to its maddening effects. Instead, they are simply happy to succumb. Consequently, they do not have any established civilization of their own in the abyss - rather, they are used as servants and slaves by most other denizens. Aboleth, illithids, and beholders all use kuo-toa as the backbone of their workforce.

Star Wardens

The most powerful aberrant creatures of the abyss have learned to use eldritch rituals to become the wardens of the stars. By magically binding themselves to a star, an aberrant creature - typically an astral kraken or aboleth,

although they could be any kind of aberrant creature - gains dominion over that star's creative potential and magical power. These beings are the Great Old Ones of mortal tales, the ancient patrons that bestow unnatural power on hungry warlocks willing to make a pact with something that dwells among the stars.

But when someone prays to the night sky and carries out the binding ritual that will make them a warlock, they little suspect the truth. Star wardens use warlocks as some of their most subtle but powerful influences in the world. They do not necessarily control or instruct them, but they are able to insinuate impulses into their minds that can cause their goals to become the warlock's goals as well. This system introduces aspects of the Far Realm into the minds of mortals in ways so fundamental that they slowly become inherent to those who are so exposed.

Star Wardens are integral to several of the factions presented in this chapter.

FACTIONS

Although populated almost exclusively by aberrant monstrosities, the Stellar Abyss nevertheless possesses its own class of organized societies, from families and nations to religions and criminal syndicates. All are inherently hostile to non-aberrant beings, and thus to your players, and have been designed first and foremost as antagonists. A few, however, may allow for peaceful interactions with your party under certain circumstances. The structure, beliefs, and goals of each group have been outlined in this section. Much of this information may never become known to your player characters, but it can still serve to inform the actions of your campaign's villains. As well, it can lend complexity to your portrayals of these opaque, otherworldly entities, which can often be difficult to make interesting beyond their alien flavor.

Several character biographies are provided for each faction in order to flesh out the abstract description. These characters are divided into 'luminaries,' meaning those at the top of the organization, and 'up-and-comers,' or the new recruits that show promise, but haven't yet proven themselves. Up-and-comers can be used at any point in your campaign; just generate their statistics to correspond with your players' level and adjust their stature with their organization. If one of them becomes a recurring character in your campaign, you may even watch them develop and progress in their faction. Luminaries, however, should always be high level, and should not scale down to the players.

The Inversionists

The madness and depravity of aberrant creatures is not simply a characteristic of their being of the Far Realm; indeed, mental illness is an entirely natural phenomenon, a consequence of biology and social stigma. Rather, aberrant creatures are driven mad by the repulsion their innate 'otherness' feels at merely existing within the multiverse. They experience constant existential dysphoria and dissociation; everyday life is bizarre and bewildering for them, seeming paper-thin, unreal, and wrong.

The Inversionists are an illithid cult which seeks to cure the dissociative symptoms of life as an aberrant creature in an existence that is fundamentally natural. Led by their astral kraken mother, Zhurnaasa, they conduct experiments on both natural humanoids and aberrant monstrosities in an attempt to understand the link between the Far Realm and this multiverse. Should they succeed, they would use that knowledge to develop a ritual that could 'invert' the naturalness of a small part of reality, transmuting its essence into that of the Far Realm. With this tool at their disposal, they would be able to begin the total conversion of the multiverse into a freakish reflection of itself. In this warped version of reality, their essence would be in harmony with that of the multiverse, and their pain at last relieved.

An All-star Mom - Warlocks and Mind Flayers Both Agree!

The Inversionists are a small group compared to any of the other major factions in the Stellar Abyss, but they are set apart by the fact that their mother, Zhurnaasa, is a Star Warden. Through secret ritual, she has bound herself to the star Eulatrox, yoking its power to her will. Zhurnaasa uses this power to patronize mortals and Peregrines who seek power, granting them a miniscule measure of Eulatrox's might, channeled through her and sealed by eldritch pact. In return, her warlocks (considered to have taken the Great Old One patron option) assist with the cult's experiments, capturing innocents for

experimentation in the Inversionists' laboratories or hunting down ancient knowledge that might help answer their existential questions. Occasionally they are members of offshoot cults that consider Zhurnaasa some kind of bizarre god, but more often they simply didn't understand exactly what they were binding themselves to when they signed their pact. For these, Zhurnaasa is thoughtful enough to act through them unconsciously, sending them sleepwalking on cobwebbed errands in service of the unnatural rather than demanding they go against their own conscience. She also tends to them, as any good mother would do for her children, reaching out to soothe their minds through dreams and easing the derealization and depersonalization that begins to creep into their minds as soon as they sip of her power. They take comfort in her strength, wisdom, and compassion; in the knowledge that she will always care for them.

Of course, they only experience such symptoms because Zhurnaasa offloads some portion of her own existential dysphoria into each of those she contracts with - easing her pain, but inflicting it on those who should never have felt it.

In this Family, We Do Science

Filled with laboratories and surgeries and holding cells, the Inversionists' pale spire of a home sails slowly through the Stellar Abyss on the will of its mistress, roaming ever in search of new experimental subjects. All of Zhurnaasa's children are expected to aid in the family's research efforts. Indeed, she selects each of the humanoid hosts her offspring claim for their exceptional innate intelligence - the better for the minds of her children to grow in. Many a famed researcher or philosopher has vanished from the world only to find their head tangled in tentacles, their body enslaved to the will of an alien baby. Unlike other mind flayers, however, they spend little time enslaving humanoids; instead, most of the brains they need for food and study are sent to them directly by Zhurnaasa's warlocks, or they are picked up by chance as the spire happens

to come across unfortunate Peregrines who reincarnated in the Stellar Abyss. Aside from the odd excursion that's simply too sensitive to leave to others' hands, they remain hard at work within their castle of science, constantly experimenting, interrogating, and dissecting.

In Theory, In Theory, In Theory

There are three main hypotheses that groups within the Inversionists have put forth to answer the questions of how the Far Realm and this multiverse are connected, and how one might be transmuted into the other. The first hypothesis is known the Divergence theory, and postulates that the original fountainhead of existence, from which the stars were created, was the point at which the axes of infinity and nothingness intersected, their admixture creating the potential that allows the flux of the multiverse. When it was shattered, the nature of both axes was altered, whereas the possibilities that currently existed within the multiverse remained unchanged. Adherents of this theory believe that this divergence is the root of the innate alterity between aberrant and natural existence; each is literally impossible by the other's guiding principles.

The second theory is that of the Dimensional Parasite. This hypothesis holds that this multiverse is nothing more than a cosmic parasite on a larger dimension - the Far Realm - and that the fountainhead of existence was merely the point at which it drained energy from its host. When it was shattered, the 'filter' that converted this energy into something native to the parasite dimension was destroyed, causing the undiluted essence of the Far Realm to leak past.

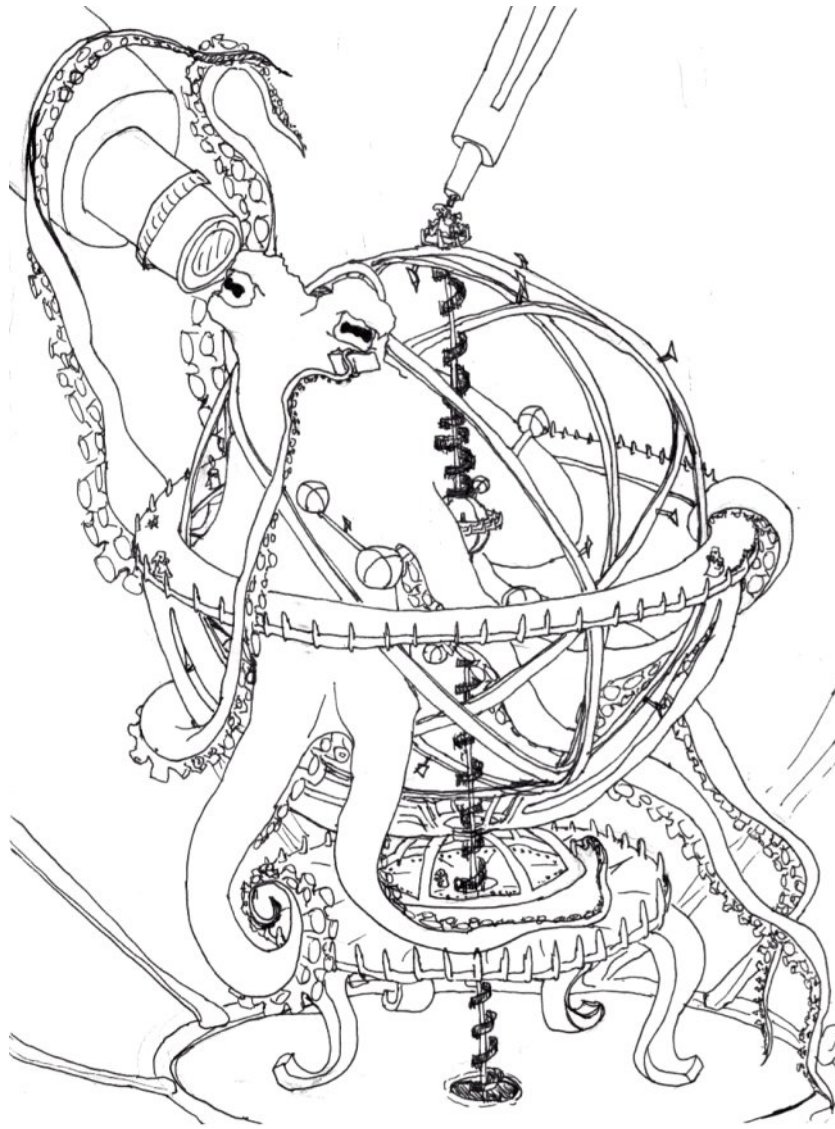
The last - and least popular - theory is the Subsumption hypothesis, which postulates that there never was a traumatic event that created the stars - rather, dimensional bleed is simply part of a larger cosmic order, and the multiverse's fountainhead shattered spontaneously as the beginning of this multiverse's slow subsumption into the Far Realm.

Cross-Cultural Collaboration

Unlike most aberrant creatures, the Inversionists are not wholly opposed to interacting with natural humanoids independent of their various religious cults. Zhurnaasa and her children are thoroughly familiar with the difficulties of science, and know that cross-pollination of ideas tends to germinate solutions to intractable problems. For this reason, they sponsor a steady stream of magical and non-magical researchers as visiting scientists to their laboratories in the Stellar Abyss.

While there, they and their brains are entirely off-limits for enslavement or dining, and they are kept sheltered from the region's maddening influence within specially-shielded chambers of the Inversionists' spire. Together, they and the mind-flayer researchers struggle to solve the mysteries of the multiverse and discover a way to transmute the natural to the unnatural and vice versa. These researchers are typically identified by Zhurnaasa's warlocks for having expressed interest in the same questions as the Inversionists, and are extended the offer of collaboration via a formal envoy of her warlocks - less terrifying than a school of mind flayers materializing on one's doorstep.

Some of these researchers simply want this knowledge for personal power, while others wish to use it for the good of the multiverse, seeking to purge the taint of the Far Realm forever. But all who accept the Inversionists' offer recognize the value of an alliance with such a collection of brilliant - albeit twisted - minds.



Luminaries of the Inversionists

Zhurnaasa: This astral kraken is among the oldest beings in the multiverse, and is one of the most tortured. Indeed, she believes that she was born *before* the stars were shattered, and that she herself was ‘inverted’ by the creation of the stars into the aberration she is now. Zhurnaasa has long since embraced this new version of herself. But perhaps because she is so old, or perhaps because she was not always aberrant, Zhurnaasa suffers the dysphoria and dissociation of life in the natural multiverse much more harshly than do most aberrant creatures. For millennia, she was wracked constantly by this torment, even while in the soothing waters of the Stellar Abyss. It was only when she finally uncovered the secret to becoming a Star Warden and learned to pass on pieces of her pain to others that she gained some measure of relief. Since then, she has used her renewed mental

energies to focus on the creation of a permanent cure for her existential dysphoria, and passed on this charge to her many illithid children. When not consumed with science, Zhurnaasa tends to the mental and emotional needs of her warlocks and mind flayers. She may be the cause of their mental torment, but her very familiarity with it lends her compassion for their pain, and she does what she can to ease their suffering with her love.

Zhurnaasa’s Secret: When it comes right down to it, Zhurnaasa isn’t truly sure what she would do if she learned how to invert the natural into the unnatural. Her millennia of pain tells her to use it to spread aberration throughout the multiverse, but her knack for compassion niggles at her to use it to turn herself back into the natural creature she once was, and then liberate all aberrant beings, one by one, from their own twisted biology.

K'shee Mg'grah'n: K'shee is first among Zhurnaasa's daughters, the cleverest and canniest of all the Inversionists. Enjoying the body and brain of Lutessa Rhotul, a genius human magitechician in her mortal life, she is the originator of the Divergence hypothesis and widely regarded as the illithid most likely to solve the Inversion problem. Although she is affable and charming enough, there are some among her siblings who resent her for their mother's favor - although they might feel differently if they knew just how much pressure and expectation Zhurnaasa's esteem places on K'shee. She guards herself against their jealousy with her sheer indispensability - along with an occasional flash of the cold steeliness that hides beneath her diplomatic veneer.

Despite her capability for necessary cruelty and her need to consume intelligent brains to survive, K'shee is not truly interested in dominion over others; she would much rather talk things out of them than extract them psychically. She serves as the Inversionists' main interface with their mortal collaborators, as she manages to be a measure less threatening than her sisters. Privately, she counts some of these brilliant mortal inventors and innovative spellcasters as her friends - not that she is under any illusions as to their feelings toward her. As hard as it might be to swallow, she knows they could never truly befriend a mind flayer.

K'shee's Secret: Sometimes, K'shee still thinks of herself as Lutessa, the human woman whose body and brain Zhurnaasa selected for K'shee to overtake. She *isn't* Lutessa, of course, but part of her wishes she could be. Much of the woman's knowledge and personality lingers as the consequence of her brain being K'shee's first meal - but it's not the same.



Up-and-Comers of the Inversionists

Shhhhk: Considered something of an upstart by her siblings, this illithid is among the youngest of the Inversionists and was the first to put forward the Subsumption hypothesis. For this, she was ridiculed by almost all of her fellows, and although they have since seen the logic in her hypothesis - and been shown a wealth of evidence that it could be true - she has still yet to gain total acceptance as a thinker of note, as much as she deserves it.

Shhhhk inhabits the body of a famed dwarven historian, a white-plumed loremaster

of great renown throughout the multiverse, and uses the encyclopedic knowledge of ancient history, magical discovery, and forbidden secrets she has retained from him to guide her experiments. Meticulous, eloquent, and erudite, she spends most of her time buried in crumbling books and elder scrolls, searching for the key piece of knowledge that will unlock the secret to Inversion.

Shhhhk's Secret: Shhhhk is terrified of bat-orcas. She must occasionally ride one to carry out some errand in the astral plane, but she hates every minute of it.





Nhusu'ryeh: Nhusu'ryeh is an illthid born into the wrong family. Where her prickly, particular nature and innate suspicion might have served her well in a typical cult, they undercut her ability to collaborate with her Inversionist sisters. Prone to violent outbursts at little provocation, Nhusu'ryeh nevertheless manages to contribute meaningfully, albeit while glaring and snapping at everyone who looks at her. Nhusu'ryeh subscribes to the Dimensional Parasite theory, and focuses her research efforts on attempts at isolating the 'filter' that transmuted Far Realm energies into those natural to the multiverse. To this end she runs through three times as many test subjects as any of her sisters, as she believes that an intact fragment of the filter must have manifested itself in a psychic medium

somewhere in the multiverse - and that she must personally screen as many brains for it as she can. Given that this 'screening' is indistinguishable from feeding, many of her sisters suspect that she simply has a heavier dose of brainthirst than most in their family. If this were true, perhaps her perennial ill temper is simply a symptom of her insatiable hunger.

Nhusu'ryeh's Secret: Nhusu'ryeh has met with one of the priests of the Church of Scree to discuss her induction into their order. She isn't completely sure yet that she wants to abandon the Inversionists forever, but the priest made a tempting offer, and she finds herself drawn to the comfort of a life spun in the Church's dizzying song.

Humongous Bighead's Bubs

The Bubs are a criminal syndicate of motley aberrations which provides protection services to factions both within and beyond the Stellar Abyss. Founded by the colossal beholder known as Humongous Bighead, they are a jumbled collection of outcasts, loners, and double agents made up of every type of aberrant creature imaginable, held in loose organization by nothing more than their shared interests and Bighead's fearsome will. Numerous and diverse where most other factions in the Abyss are small and homogenous, the Bubs capitalize on the deadly synergy of their various strengths to intimidate independent monsters and enemy factions alike against interfering with their clients' business. Those that choose to harass their clients anyway generally turn up as mangled corpses chained to their bosses' gates.

Any faction of note in the Stellar Abyss buys their pledge of protection, or suffers for it. In return for their services, the Bubs take payment in whatever form their clients can provide and apportion it among their members according to their personal taste; mind flayers take slaves, beholders seize treasure, aboleth snatch up magical artifacts, etc. As unlikely as their cooperation seems - often even to them - they play a key role in ensuring that the Stellar Abyss does not simply tear itself apart in mutual hostility.

A Squabbling Majority

All of the major factions in the Stellar Abyss - save the Church of Scree - hold themselves in a constant state of suspended conflict, ready to break out at any moment into full-fledged war. Crowded together in their thin slice of the astral plane when once they roamed the entire plane freely, illithids and aboleth are forced to divide the Abyss' limited territory and resources among themselves, to great dispute. Beholders lurk on the sidelines of their contentions, abiding until the perfect moment appears to swoop in and snatch the goodies up for their own. To add to the morass, all of the factions are vastly outnumbered by

independent wandering monsters and outcasts ready and willing to tear apart their convoys for food or treasure. A formidable mess to wade into, to be sure, but if this disorganized hostility had remained the status quo for all the millennia since the aberrants were pushed back to the Stellar Abyss, the Githyanki would have long since set them to systematic extermination.

Instead, by forcing their fellows to think twice about attacking each other, the Bubs have maintained an uneasy and unwilling ceasefire amongst aberrations for thousands of years, allowing them to preserve their strength and numbers for defense against Githyanki assaults. All of which is not to say that the factions of the Stellar Abyss are at peace; on the contrary, aboleth cities and illithid cults skirmish perpetually for control of cold seeps, slave reincarnation nexuses, and deposits of pseudo metal. They simply refrain from attempting to utterly eradicate one another.

Club of Personality

The Bubs are just as much of a mess as the rest of the Stellar Abyss. Filled with aggressive, avaricious, and paranoid beholders, aboleth, mind flayers, and rogue chuul just itching to lay into each other, it is a constant effort for Bighead to keep the fabric of the gang from shredding itself. Charming and suave for a beholder, as well as intimidatingly enormous, she pieced together the Bubs member by member, sweet-talking or bullying each one into trying out her scheme until they saw for themselves that it worked. Even now, thousands of years since the gang became a true presence in the Abyss, Bighead makes sure to visit each and every one of her 'bubs' regularly, reminding them - sometimes with smooth words, sometimes with brute force - of their bargain.

As for the gang members themselves, well... although uniformly terrified of Bighead, most also carry some sense of awe and respect for their boss. She's kept half or more of the Stellar Abyss clenched firmly between her powerful jaws for millennia, and enriched all

of their coffers and slave pens with her unlikely scheme. If another creature ever existed that could have pulled that off, none have heard of it.

Temporarily Untouchable

Clients of the gang may arrange services through one of Bighead’s trusted intermediaries, a group made up of inner circle gang members who carry the beholder’s especial favor. More often, however, clients are the ones solicited, finding themselves the target of vague threats and armed ambush advertisements that make it quite clear that they should employ the Bubs - or else. Regardless of how the deal is made, once it is done the client is given a number of tokens inscribed with Bighead’s mark in glowing ink - a giant head clenching an entire planet in its jagged teeth. These tokens are hung near the

entrance of the clients’ dwelling or on the outside of their vessel, and so long as Bighead’s mark continues to glow, any aberrant that assaults the client can expect to be torn to pieces within a week.

Bighead herself controls the spell that makes the tokens glow, and can dim a client’s marks remotely if they fail to pay up... or displease her in any other way. As soon as a mark has dimmed, the bearer is a free target for anyone or anything. Forgery of her mark merits far greater punishments than mere death - anyone unwise enough to do so remains her personal plaything for the rest of their tortured existence.

Payment is agreed upon on a case-by-case basis, but the following table describes some typical price points.

Humongous Bighead's Prices

| Duration of Immunity | Slaves | Gold (or equivalent treasure) |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 12 hours | 15 healthy/35 ailing | 10,000 gp |
| 1 day | 25 healthy/40 ailing | 19,000 gp |
| 1 week | 100 healthy/150 ailing | 125,000 gp |
| 1 month | 500 healthy/700 ailing | 500,000 gp |
| 1 year | 10,000 healthy/30,000 ailing | 1.5 million gp |

Terror Tourism

Although hardly a tourism firm themselves, the Bubs are employed by several eldritch horror tour companies operating out of the lower layers of the astral sea. Catering to the daring few fascinated enough by the abominable and aberrant to risk death, slavery, and the utter transmogrification of their minds in order to see it firsthand, these companies organize guided tours through the Stellar Abyss itself.

This is only even remotely feasible with the Bubs’ protection; without it, any hapless tourists would quickly find their skulls overly familiar with an illithid’s radula or a beholder’s teeth. Even still, they risk becoming lost, losing their minds, encountering a

creature that pays no mind to the Bubs, or being caught by a Githyanki patrol ship on their way in. The necromancer pirates despise the very idea of enjoying something of the Far Realm, and will happily slaughter any abyssal tourists they come across. The Bubs, for their part, would also quite like to eat or enslave the tourists, but fear of Humongous Bighead’s displease usually keeps them in line.

Far more significant to the Bubs’ coffers and stomachs are the handful of stalwart mining companies that pay them to grant immunity to their substellers and mining crews. Drawn to the Stellar Abyss by the lure of pseudo-metals and stellar sand, these companies send miners into the Stellar Abyss for days at a time to extract its uniquely valuable resources. And as

sadly simple as it is to round up slaves in the astral sea, few of these companies hold onto their morals enough to pay the toll in gold or treasure. The Bubs draw a steady income from these companies, making up nearly a third of their total profits.

Rambunctious Camaraderie

Although most of the Bubs are scattered across the Stellar Abyss in their own hidey holes at any one time, Humongous Bighead does maintain a central hub where Bubs can gather and mingle. Housed in Bighead's personal colloid labyrinth, the Bubs can come here to collect payment, trade resources, report to the boss, or hone their killer instincts in mock fights.

While in the hub, Bubs are expected to do no harm to their fellows - but then, what "harm" did a few cuts and bruises ever do anyone? Arguments, brawls, and backstabs are common, but so are raucous games of brute strength, outrageously tall tales of bizarre humanoid exploits, impromptu renditions of the Church of Scree's uncanny compositions, and the blooming of monstrous friendships.

And violent as the place can be, still most disputes are settled by duels of insults rather than of tooth, eyestalk, and tentacle. Indeed, under Bighead's eloquent tutelage the Bubs have grown to pride themselves on their near-Shakespearean arsenal of opaque vocabulary, unflattering descriptors, and crude puns. It is as common for a Bub to invent a dispute purely for the entertainment of flinging insults for the delight of their circled fellows as it is for duels to spring up from true animosity. At the center of it all, Humongous Bighead's eyestalks keep constant vigilance on the exploits of her underlings.

Luminaries of the Bubs

Humongous Bighead: This boss beholder has the casual serenity and easy-going good-nature of someone who's just so *massive* they know they're not going to be bothered. Granted, she's habitually cruel, and enjoys murder, extortion, and torture as pastimes. But when it comes to her Bubs, or to her clients, she's cool and smooth, charming enough to spar compliments with a halfling bard. And, of course, she's the reigning champion of the Bubs' semi-annual opaque insult tourney.

Humongous Bighead built herself up to where she is now - the leader of a criminal empire that spans the Stellar Abyss - through hard work, pre-emptive betrayal, and the power of friendship. She makes each of her Bubs feel like they're her personal confidant, while simultaneously instilling a deep-seated terror that she'll gobble them up while they sleep. In reality, however, leadership is just as isolating for an aberration as it can be for anyone else, and no one really knows Bighead. When not

meeting with clients, monitoring her contracts, or tallying her profits, Humongous Bighead enjoys raising kuo-toa wrigglings from their eggs, and maintains a small colony of them in a scavenged manor kept at the heart of her lair. With her eyestalks pressed against the windows, she micromanages their lives using her eye rays from outside the building.

Humongous Bighead's Secret: Humongous Bighead was not always so large. In fact, she was born a runt, barely larger than a humanoid's torso. Her current size is due to the priests of the Church of Scree mutating music, combined with her own extreme dedication to abominableness. Although she lets no one know it, she is the Church of Scree's greatest success story in transmogrification. With their help, she was able to mutate into something far larger and more powerful than almost any other beholder known to the Far Realm. Their role in her enormity is the reason she is so devout, and why they can ask her for any favor or service they wish, free of charge.





Athagyso: Athagyso is an exiled aboleth witch who serves as Humongous Bighead's closest advisor. As an experienced practitioner of wizardry and a spellcrafter herself, she casts wards and curses with her own aberrant twists to bolster the Bubs' threat level, defend against Githyanki raiders, and counter the occasional psionic resistance they encounter from rogue illithids or aboleth.

Eternally grumpy, Athagyso exudes an aura of sourness so palpable you can taste it for weeks afterward, but she rarely takes out her aggression on anyone other than slaves. She holds no particular affection for Bighead, but she is truly loyal to her boss in appreciation for offering her a direction in life - and for the

chance to take repeated, perverse joy in extorting the nation that exiled her. Athagyso is eternally fascinated by arcane magic, and as a hobby she maintains a presence by proxy on several wizarding councils in the mortal world and other planes.

Athagyso's Secret: She was once a member of Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh's Constellation. Athagyso was voted out of office and banished after she oversaw a disastrous defeat by the Githyanki, culminating in the partial sacking of her own lawn, N'aeuh'nz'nz'nchye. Lacking the stellar power she once wielded, Athagyso studies arcane magic to compensate, and wishes that her glorious return to the Constellation weren't so incredibly impossible.

Up-and-Comers of the Bubs

Ogugola: Ogugola is a double-agent illithid citizen of Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh. Within the aboleth nation, she works as a slavemaster, managing the humanoids that keep the green walls of the lawns' air pockets slick with slime, brew up broths of the aboleth's favorite bacteria, and pick clean their fishy scales of algae and fungus. As a member of the Bubs, however, she supplies Humongous Bighead with intel on aboleth movements and projects, ensuring that her boss has all the information she needs to catch every tiny violation of a contract and barter the meanest deals possible from the Wardens.

In return, Ogugola enjoys a lavish lifestyle, with any kind of brain imaginable at the tips of her tentacles and enough outside income to afford a pocket inside the lawn itself, rather than on the outskirts. Her aboleth masters

favor her as their trusted servant, for she is truly gifted as a seneschal - at least by aberrant standards. She anticipates their every need, prepping slippery snacks and grotesque, artistic vivisections of aging slaves hours before they themselves realize they have grown hungry or bored. They suspect nothing of her duplicity, and Ogugola slithers smugly onward with her work.

Ogugola's Secret: There has never been a non-aboleth member of the Constellation. With the weight of the Bubs at her back, and the promise of her eternal gratitude and partnership to them, she hopes to someday maneuver herself into being elected Warden of the lawn she lives in. She hasn't actually *asked* Bighead if she would support her in this, and likely as not the aboleth nation would outright refuse to elect an illithid, but she plots on regardless.

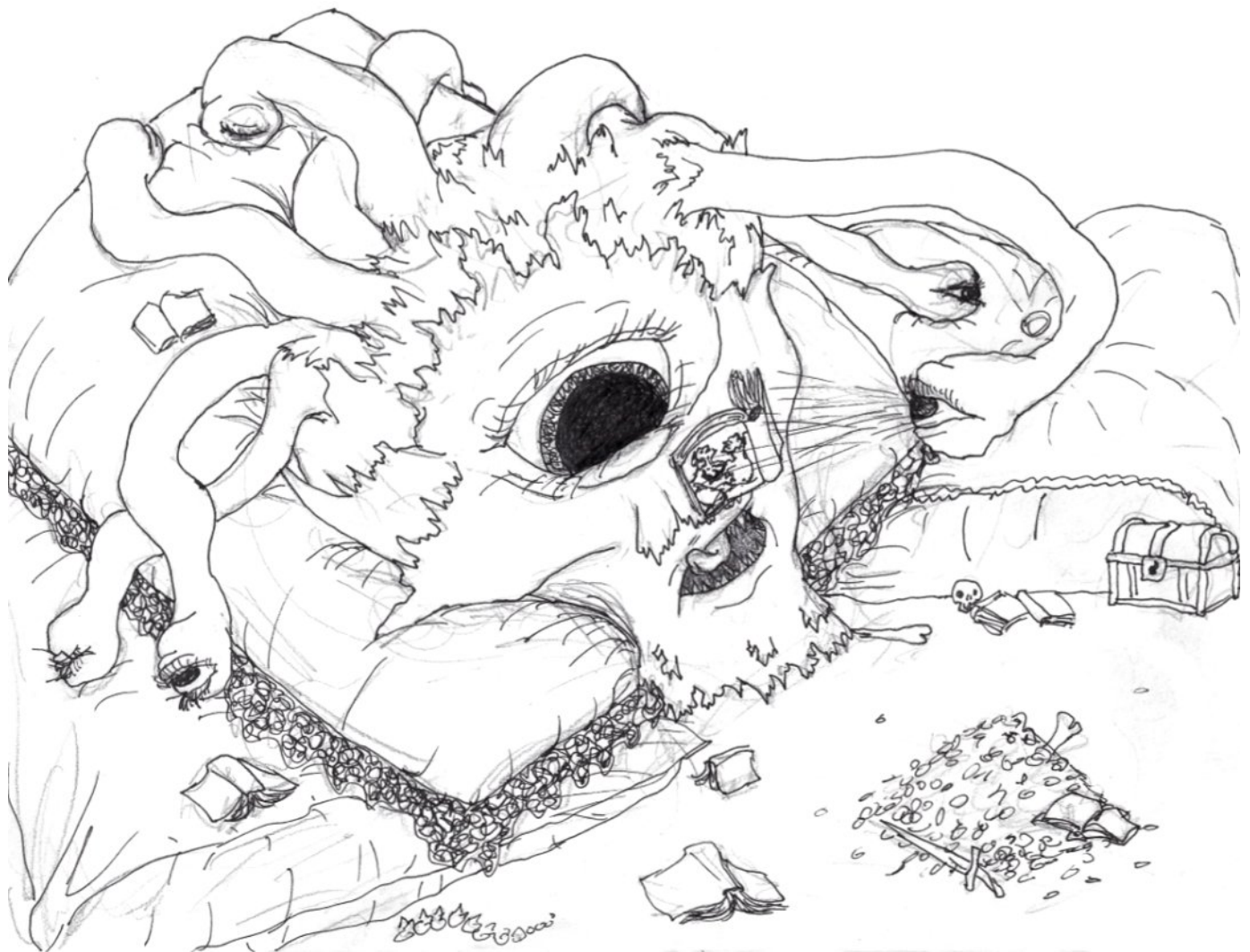


Photeh: Photeh is a beholder grunt. She does what she's told, when she's told to do it. She also does it well, never failing to thoroughly crunch those she is told to crunch and promptly petrify those she is told to petrify. When not putting the fear of Bighead into wayward clients, Photeh roams the Stellar Abyss with a gaggle of other Bubs, just as a reminder to everyone else that the Bubs are always there, and they'll always be watching.

Photeh spends her time off-duty in her own cozy little lair - a dungeon carved into a small astral mote with her disintegration ray - either counting her treasures or slowly eating her slaves, limb by limb. She has little real ambition, but she knows her job, and her taste for bullying only grows more acute by the

year. It's just a matter of time before she catches Bighead's eye, perhaps to be taken under her boss's eyestalk and shown what she could really do with her talents. Until then, she just tries to keep up in her duties and keep her fellows down with the bitterest, meanest insults she can fling - garnering their greatest respect, of course.

Photeh's Secret: Photeh is a sucker for a good bodice-ripper. Even she doesn't quite understand why this is, for she has no interest in the lives of mortals outside their sordid pages. Nevertheless, she collects them religiously, reading and rereading them in the trembling hands of her slaves until their cheap spines crack and split - shortly followed by those of her slaves between her furious teeth.



The Church of Scree

Suspended in the coiling darkness of the Stellar Abyss, the sunken cathedral of the Church of Scree looms pale and lunar, a colossal cage of half-melted, half-shattered ribs lit from within by the cold blue glow of a thousand unnatural candles. Theirs is a faith of aberrant self-love, of self-love for and by aberrant creatures, and the evolution of one's very monstrosity. Technically an illithid cult under the control of Shornosth, their astral kraken mother, the Church is unlike any other cult in that it welcomes and serves aberrant beings of every stripe. Shornosth's mind flayer's are the priests of her religion, and everyone else the disciples. Her illithids train themselves in an unnatural form of singing imbued with psionic energy, and the children of the Far Realm come from all across the Stellar Abyss to be bathed in the unnerving serenade of their choir. Listening to this music has the potential to mutate an aberrant being, twisting their body even further and elevating them on the path toward pure aberration.

The Tenets of Alterity

The Church's priests preach three tenets to govern the lives of aberrant creatures and guide them toward a purely alien existence: Abomination, Incomprehension, and Disintegration. Abominable doctrines teach that one should strive to become ever more monstrous in the eyes of the natural multiverse, in both appearance and action, and that the mere sight of one's form should strike an intrinsic horror into the heart of any natural being. Sermons of Incomprehension value acausality, illogic, and bewilderment, and guide aberrant creatures in the emulation of these traits in their thoughts and behavior. Both of these tenets serve the last - Disintegration - which states that an aberrant being should seek above all else to separate that which is of the Far Realm from that which is of the natural multiverse. They are exhorted to expunge all traces of natural existence from their bodies and minds, expelling any iota of beauty or logic.

Together, these three tenets describe a

mythical being known as the Incomprehensible Other, the Church's heterodox idol and messiah of the Far Realm. Although it is unclear if this being ever actually existed, or even *could* exist, all members of the Church of Scree's congregation strive to adopt its attributes, potentially allowing them to become it themselves - or for it to emerge from within them.

In reality, no aberrant has ever attained pure alterity. By entering the natural multiverse, they are intrinsically marked by its axes and energies, and each aspect of their existence takes on some tinge of naturalness. None are so abominable that there is not an element of beauty to their hideousness. None truly lack any kind of internal logic, consistency, or causality, however bizarre it might seem to others. Much of the Church's work is in comforting their congregation in the cruel light of this truth, teaching them to love their abominableness despite the inherent self-loathing that the seed of normality in each of them bestows. They are taught to think of their normality as a disease, an accident of existence that they could not have prevented and must live with. The Priests organize support groups to teach meditative techniques that suppress naturalness and encourage aberration, as well as preternatural chants and songs that lessen the pain of existential dysphoria and derealization.

An aberrant creature that knows any of these techniques may spend one hour practicing them and receive one of the following benefits: advantage on the creature's next roll or restoration of one Hit die worth of hit points.

The Unity of Monsters

As dangerous as the Stellar Abyss can be, explorers can generally expect that they are no more likely to be attacked by aberrants than traveling aberrants are themselves. Cults of illithids squabble among themselves along the allegiances of their mothers, aboleth simply see other aberrants as resources to be acquired, and beholders just like fighting enough not to care who it is they've gone after.

That assurance vanishes when it comes to the Church of Scree, however. Whether independent or part of a larger group, almost all aberrant creatures in the Stellar Abyss acknowledge the Church's value and would rather endure their hated cousins than spit on that sanctity. Consequently, the Church serves as the mediator between the various factions of the Abyss, arranging peaceful meetings and facilitating cooperation when such things are necessary. They also enjoy access to the resources of all those who revere their work, and the Church's expeditions to the lower astral sea are routinely escorted by aboleth, beholders, and other aberrant creatures. Should an enemy attempt a direct assault on the Church itself, they would find the entirety of the Stellar Abyss assembled against them.

Excisional Charity

The priests of Scree don't restrict their faith to the aberrant population; after all, all of the multiverse is touched by the Far Realm in some way, and every creature carries within them some faint fingerprint of the beyond. The Church maintains thousands of secret cults among the humanoids of the mortal world and the Peregrines of the astral sea, which the illithid priests use to abduct mortals whose essence contains especial aberration. These mortals are *plane shifted* directly to the cathedral's teleportation circle in the Stellar Abyss, where they are subjected to months of constant chanting, song, and ritual under the tentacled scrutiny of the priests.

If they survive the process, the mortals' aberrant aspects are drawn out and transferred into one of the Church's aberrant congregation, and the victim is sent back to the mortal world. Although they are effectively purified of the touch of the Far Realm by the process, such an existence is not so beneficial as one might think. The mortal must then exist in a world, a plane, a multiverse in which everything is ever so slightly contaminated by an alterity that they will never again share. They suffer many of the same symptoms as aberrant creatures themselves; dissociation, derealization, and existential dysphoria. The

nature of their suffering typically discredits the accounts of those few who actually remember what was done to them, and it is rare that these unfortunates find an ally who will believe and support them.

A Melody that Keeps Spinning 'round

Composed by the twisted mind of their kraken mother, the illithid priests' dizzying songs are the crux of the Church's practice. Capable of healing and soothing the minds of aberrant creatures, their music is dizzying and bewildering to mortal ears, and listening to it for more than a minute triggers a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. If the creature fails, they become stunned, lasting for 10 minutes past the point at which they stop listening to the music.

Aberrant beings that listen to a full illithid choir in song restore hit points as though they were submerged in a cold seep, and the choir can choose to concentrate their performance on a single aberrant creature in order to further transmogrify its body, causing it to grow extra tentacles, jaws, wings, etc. Such a transformation requires at least an hour of uninterrupted song, at the end of which the creature gains a new bodily feature (see *Cold Seeps* earlier in this chapter for more ideas) and one permanent additional hit point. A natural creature can also be transformed in this way, although the priests do not typically choose to do so. A creature of any type may only be affected in this way once per year; if they are subjected to the process more often, they permanently lose a single hit point for each additional mutation they receive.

The Church habitually lends out their priests as healers and guides to the other organized groups of the Stellar Abyss. The priests of Scree are among the few beings in the abyss that can expect to be welcome in almost any aberrant dwelling. It's common to find one or two such itinerants accompanying aboleth or mind flayer expeditions into the lower astral sea, whatever their goal, and Humongous Bighead's gang pride themselves on hosting an entire chapel.

Luminaries of the Church of Scree

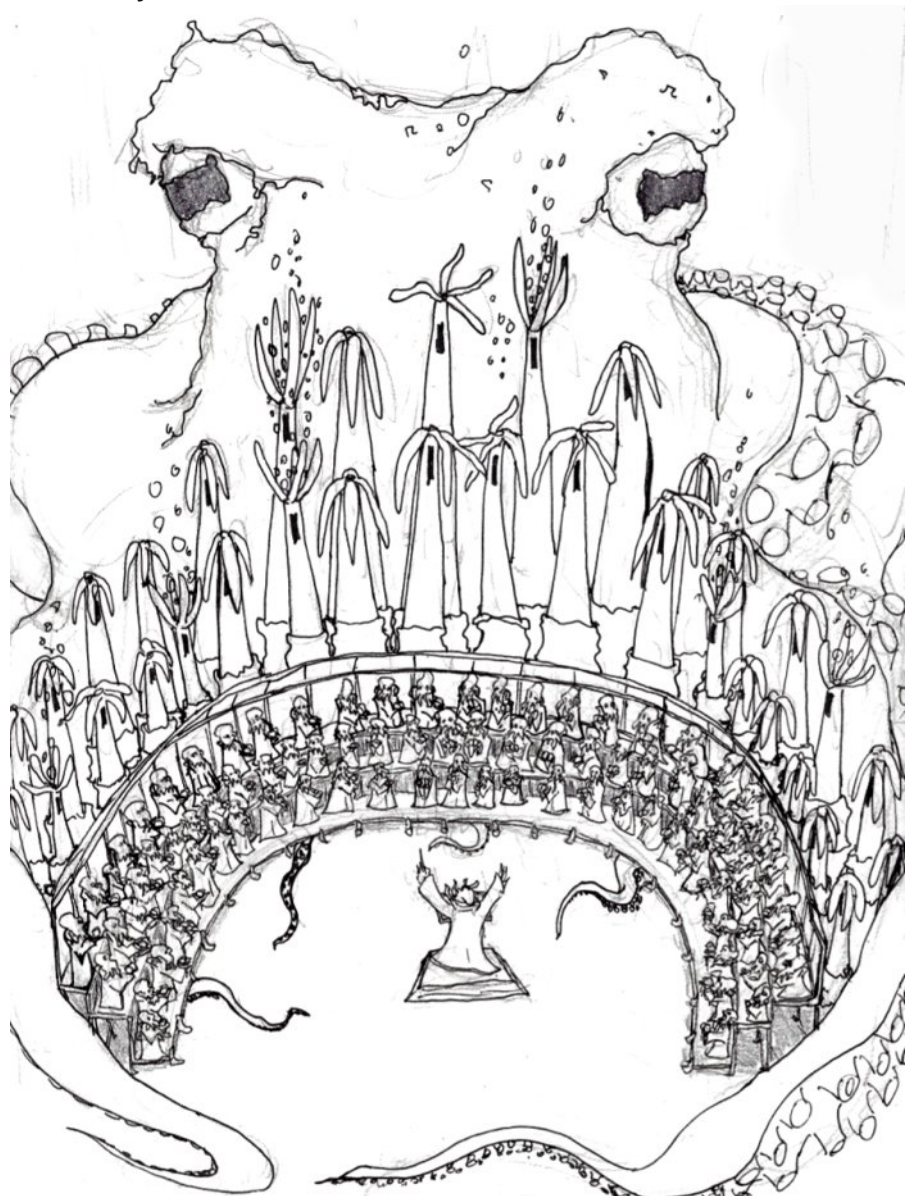
Shornosth: Shornosth is the musical genius behind the Church of Scree's eerie melodic canon. Each atonal hymn, every arrhythmic verse sung by her illithid children is composed by her in the preternatural sanctity of the cathedral's chancel, where she lurks within the colossal pipe organ that backs the choir.

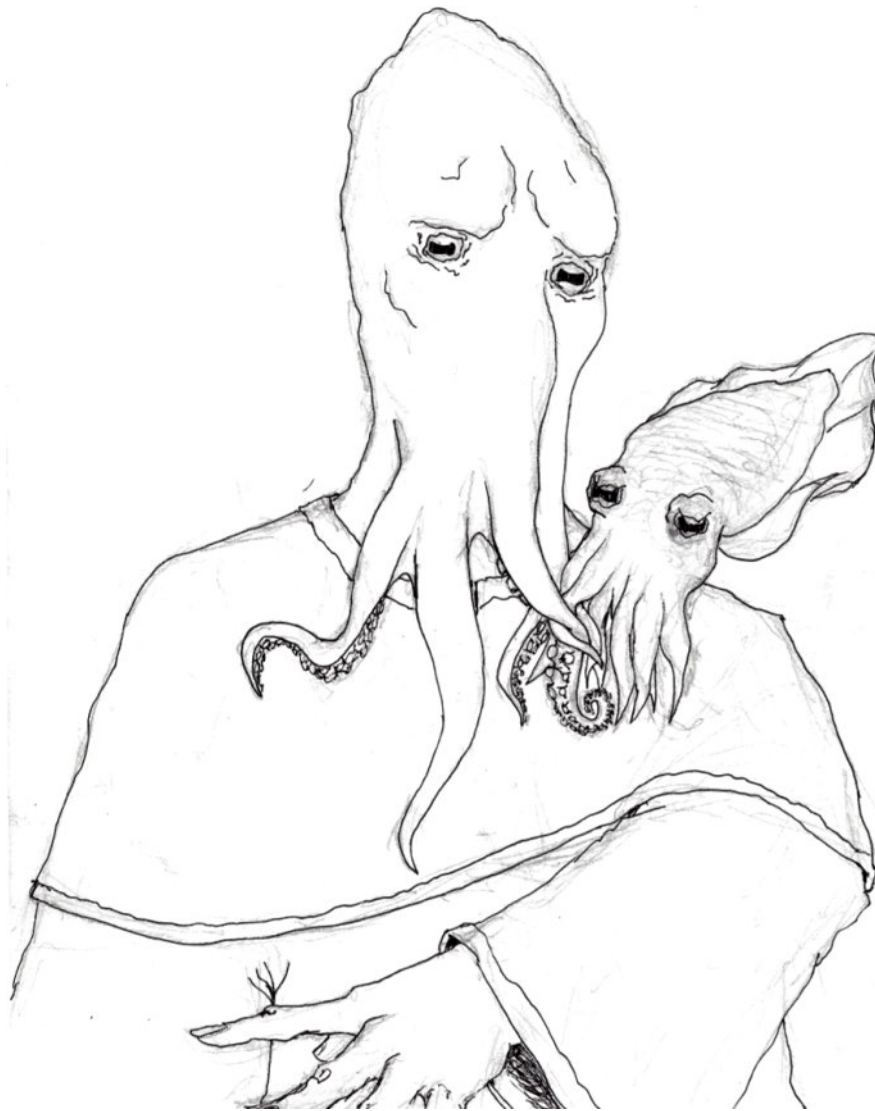
Shornosth uses her psionic abilities to vibrate the pipes from within during the choir's performances, playing the organ herself as their accompanist. She leaves the dark secrecy of its innards rarely, and only to hunt the brains of dragons when she needs especial inspiration. Her priests keep a constant supply of captured Peregrine or mortal humanoids on hand for use in her creative process. When she begins a new composition, the brain of one such unfortunate is removed from their body and placed upon the keys of the organ to be worked upon by her tendrils and suckers as they sneak slowly out from the organ's crevices. Shornosth imprints her music psychically within the brain, sculpting and molding the neural pathways that are already there into something that can be read by her priests and translated into music.

The brain is kept alive during this process, and when the composition is finished it is whisked away to be stored in a jar somewhere in the Church's musical library. Copies are made by the priests onto other mortal brains, and when the time comes to perform the composition they are removed from their jars so that the illithid choir may read from them as one would sheet music. This seems contrary, perhaps, to the Church's doctrine of Disintegration -

and indeed it is. However, Shornosth chooses to take on this sacrifice for her congregation, as not only would it be impossible to affect the naturalness in them at all were it not part of her music, but her music would be incomplete. And her music is all that she cares about.

Shornosth's Secret: She is not a first-generation astral kraken. Indeed, she was once the favored illithid child of Zhurnaasa, the mother of the Inversionists. Zhurnaasa fused her daughter with the body of a fabled elven bard, perhaps explaining her penchant for music. Shornosth eventually rebelled against her mother on philosophical grounds, and completed the transcendence of her illithid form in secret a century before she founded the Church of Scree.





K'zz P'kahnz: This skilled illithid conductor is also the Church of Scree's virtuoso soloist and serves as a cherished mentor to its less-experienced priests. K'zz's performances are legendary and mysterious, mostly because all those who have heard the entirety of one of his solos have rapidly mutated into impossible contortions of flailing limbs and kaleidoscopic self-reflection, too wholly strange to communicate their experience.

Most of the time, K'zz restrains himself to serving as the Church's senior conductor, leading rehearsals and concerts with vigorous enthusiasm and a minute understanding of the inner workings of his kraken mother's compositions. His concerts draw starstruck aberrations from all eddies of the Stellar Abyss, and although they are still chilling and eerie at a cellular level, they do not usually

transmogrify the audience into utter unrecognizability. When not occupied with his own musical projects, K'zz coaches his younger siblings in the arts of psychic singing and conducting. Adored and esteemed by almost all in the Church for his impeccable skill and gentle guidance, he is a prize among illithids that most aberrations would give their lives to protect.

K'zz's Secret: K'zz is very close to completing his emancipation from his mortal host and ascending into the form of an astral kraken. It's unclear how Shornosth, his mother, will take this, but K'zz has taken plenty of precautions to ensure that when the time comes, she will understand his intent is merely to advance his own abominableness, never to usurp her position.

Up-and-Comers of the Church of Scree

Yggogosibbo: Freshly molded from her mother's suckers onto the body of a merfolk maid, Yggogosibbo has yet to quite master her psionic abilities or, indeed, even simple telepathy. Still, she is a quick learner, and devours the brains of those brought to her with sublime voracity both for their sustenance and for the knowledge she gains in consuming them. As an acolyte of Scree, her meals are carefully curated by the senior priests, the brain matter psychically impressed with the foundational tenets of the Church and the basic principles of its musical theory.

Yggogosibbo will remain in their care for the first year of her new life or until she learns to sing, if that comes first - and it seems it might, for she has already begun to issue the most blissfully unnerving shrieks and wails. That is

not to say that she is restricted to the Cathedral, however; even as infants, mind flayers are difficult to kill, and the priests know she is safe enough to explore and hunt nearby. Besides, they sense in Yggogosibbo a natural irony and nihilism matured far beyond her few months of life, and intuit that she is more capable than she seems despite the late development of her psychic abilities.

Yggogosibbo's Secret: She receives telepathy perfectly well; she simply doesn't respond. Yggogosibbo understands almost all of what goes on around her, and hears the psychic murmurs of many illithids who think themselves secluded elsewhere in the Cathedral. When she does choose to communicate, she will do so with knowledge and cunning none expected of her.

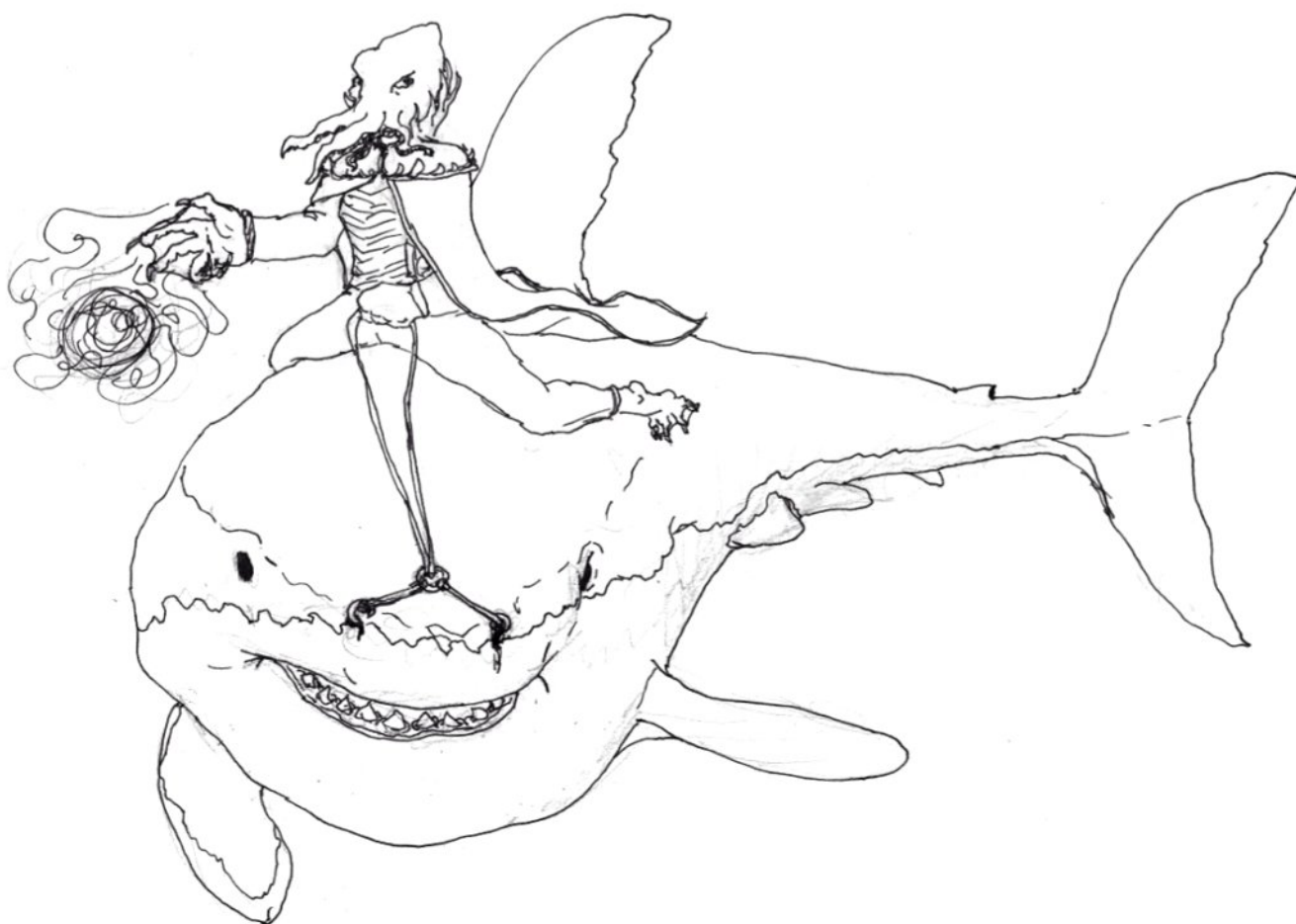


Zo'phlak: Lodged in the body of a sahuagin priest, Zo'phlak retains much of her host's fondness for sharks, choosing to ride a dominated great white rather than the bat-orcas most illithids in the astral sea take as mounts. She also harbors a keen taste for sea elfen brains above all others, and will go to great lengths to hunt them down if she scents a sea elf in her vicinity. Zo'phlak took to the priesthood of Scree naturally, moving from one ordinance to another with ease, and is respected by her siblings as a solid member of the Church.

Still young, her singing is not quite as eerie as it could be, but she continues to hone her skills

through study, practice, and the habitual consumption of psychically consecrated brain matter. Aside from her musical duties, Zo'phlak serves the Church as its pseudo-metal smith, purifying the mingled ores retrieved from cold seeps and forging them into robes, sceptres, and batons for use by her fellow priests. She also handles the constant repairs required by the splintering Cathedral, ensuring that it unfolds ever on in anomaly.

Zo'phlak's Secret: Sometimes, Zo'phlak's hunger gets the best of her and she sneaks into the Cathedral's cerebral pantry to munch on a few brains outside of mealtimes.



Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh

Thirteen city-states comprise the aboleth nation of Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh, an astral empire spanning the far stars. Its citizens consider themselves pioneers to this new multiverse, a place they are destined to inherit in the names of the gods of the Far Realm. Like any pioneers, their aims are to pacify, exploit, and expand across the multiverse, enlightening the indigenous peoples with their culture along the way. Singing patriotic praises of their nation's exceptionalism, generosity, and independence, the aboleth of Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh engender spoilage, slavery, and genocide wherever their tentacles touch. Beneath the privileged, egalitarian aboleth elite, illithids and beholders make up a minority middle class, made to feel lucky to possess any rights or property in an aboleth-dominated society, while looking down on the natural humanoids the aboleth enslave with impunity. In the name of civilization and the Far Realm, Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh's tentacles industrialize the astral plane's resources, excoriate the minds and bodies of its natives, and pat themselves on the back for it all the while.

League of Lawns

Aboleth in the astral plane prefer to make their homes inside the stalks and leaves of giant astral seagrass. As such, in their language cities are known as 'lawns.' Each of the thirteen lawns that currently make up Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh uses a different cultivar of giant seagrass, and each believes that theirs is objectively the most aesthetically pleasing. They take meticulous care of their homes, fertilizing the partner fungus with the corpses of their slaves and viciously expunging any pest or disease with noxious chemical drenches.

Personal preferences aside, every lawn is an aboleth utopia, replete with slaves to massage the muscles beneath slimy, scaled skin, hoisting platters of noisome bacterial ooze for their masters to munch on, the columnal corridors plotched with eerie etched art and alcoves in which aboleth recline to

contemplate the progress of their hellish crusade. Not that their lives are all luxury; every aboleth has their duty, whether it be slaughtering the herds of void eaters as they're brought in, breeding horrendous sentient monstrosities of war and labor, or tending to the gardens of confectionery organs that erupt from the vivisected bodies of slaves ailing of experimental treatments for aboleth diseases. Most, however, commute out past the lawn's limits and the suburban illithid shanty towns to mine pseudo-metals, herd the void eaters that make up most of an astral aboleth's diet, and scrap with mind flayers over control of precious cold seeps.

An Abominable Congress

Each lawn is ruled by a Star Warden. Always a particularly cunning and strong aboleth, they oversee their lawn's operations and direct its colonial initiatives. A Warden's authority over their lawn is inviolate, save for where it interferes with the nation's larger pursuits. Together, the Wardens of all thirteen lawns make up the Constellation, the supreme governing body of Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh. The Constellation is a meeting of equals, but first among them is the Aster, a Warden chosen by their fellows to break ties and mediate debate. Under their guidance, the Constellation coordinates national endeavors, such as wars and interplanar exploitation, and uses the power of their stars to subtly shape the tide of history to aboleth advantage in the astral plane and beyond.

Similarly to the portfolios of the gods, each star grants its Warden dominion over a different shade of alterity. These range from mutation to subversion to acausality, and the Wardens can twitch them to their will throughout the multiverse. Unique among Star Wardens, membership in the Constellation - and control of the stellar power that comes with it - is an elected privilege. According to the fickle ebb and flow of the stars, elections are called every few hundred years, and a Warden may be voted out of power by their aboleth constituents in favor of some canny upstart. This rarely occurs in reality, as the

Wardens maintain iron-finned control over their lawns - but it is always possible.

This Colonialism Smells Fishy

Much of Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh's prosperity can be attributed to their colonialist foreign policy. Especially avaricious and ambitious aboleth, identified as a threat to the powers that be in their lawn, are dispatched to the site of a likely colony in the astral sea or a non-divine plane. Once there, they use their psionic abilities to dominate the natives and begin the systematic exploitation of whatever resources the site may happen to possess. Under their cruel and frustrated goad, mind-controlled humanoids are forced to destroy their own homes and erect monocultural plantations where their fields and forests once lay, to tear apart their sacred temples in order to extract the precious metals that lie beneath, and to labor restless in cramped factories until their fingers show bone and their eyes oblivion.

The fruits of their labor are shipped back to the Stellar Abyss to fuel the lavish aberrant lifestyle of the lawns. The aboleth overseers of especially profitable colonies might even gain the opportunity to return home for brief spells, as well as the honor of having other aboleth placed under their command as the colony grows in its spoilage. These colonies are inevitably liberated from aboleth control, whether by slave revolt or heroic rescue, but to the nation at large it matters little - the raw materials and wealth they drained from them are still theirs, and humanoids never suspect that the fish have a grander plan.

It's an Ichthys, Teuthid

Early in its history, the Church of Scree clashed with the aboleth of Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh. The priests considered the aboleth's expansionism to be contrary to the tenet of Disintegration, in that they sought to cultivate aberration in naturalness across the multiverse rather than separate the natural from the aberrant. The aboleth resented this, along with the fact that they were not permitted to join the priesthood and learn the uncanny canon. Eventually there was a schism

within the Church itself, likely fomented by aboleth machinations. A small sect of illithid priests split off to join the aboleth nation, bringing with them a precious stolen cargo of the Church's compositions. With time, this offshoot grew into a mature church of its own within Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh, welcoming both aboleth and mind flayers into its priesthood. The Ichthys church, as they are known, uses a simple fish symbol as their sigil and has almost identical beliefs and practices as the Teuthid - their name for the main denomination - save that they are pro-expansion and have worse music.

Although their services are limited to the citizens of Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh, Ichthys priests serve much the same function as their sisters in the Teuthid church; they heal, exhort, transmogrify, and comfort with their songs. They also have the dubious duty of helming the nation's slave breeding and indoctrination programs. Incoming slaves are passed through the chapels as the priests sing, irradiating their minds with madness and prepping them for life in aboleth clutches.

The children of these slaves - the produce of the priests' calculated breeding program - are left in the church's tentacles far longer. They are raised in Ichthys cloisters and chapels from birth, eerie aberrant hymns their first words, punished when they show the slightest flash of normalcy, taught obedience and adoration for their masters in the cradle. Bathed constantly in eldritch harmonies, they grow up with the unsettling and strange steeped into their bones, never to know their parents, their language, or their culture.

Luminaries of Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh

Shk'b Dhu: Shk'b is the current Aster of the Constellation and rules Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh with a cunning and deceitful vision. He rose to power in the lawn of Nu-Mantia, one of the nation's newest and most viciously colonial cities. Weirdly successful despite being widely regarded as an idiot and a coward for most of his career, Shk'b played his fellow Wardens for fools, bamboozling them with outlandish theories, schemes, and his abject cowardice until they decided to elect him Aster simply for his sublime manipulability. After his election, however, he revealed his true cunning, unveiling a slew of blackmail, hostages, and arcane kill switches

designed to keep his fellow members on the Constellation in line. Rather than make them despise him, this transformed their contempt into wondering respect, and Shk'b became an instant legend. Now phenomenally popular, Shk'b leads Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh ever onward in the great abolethian dream.

Shk'b Dhu's Secret: Shk'b's cowardice was not actually an act. He merely developed a knack for using it to his best advantage, and took the handy excuse to discredit it as a facade when he was elected Aster. In truth, he has since come a long way in mastering his fears, but when it comes to a direct fight - well, he's still likely to run and hide.



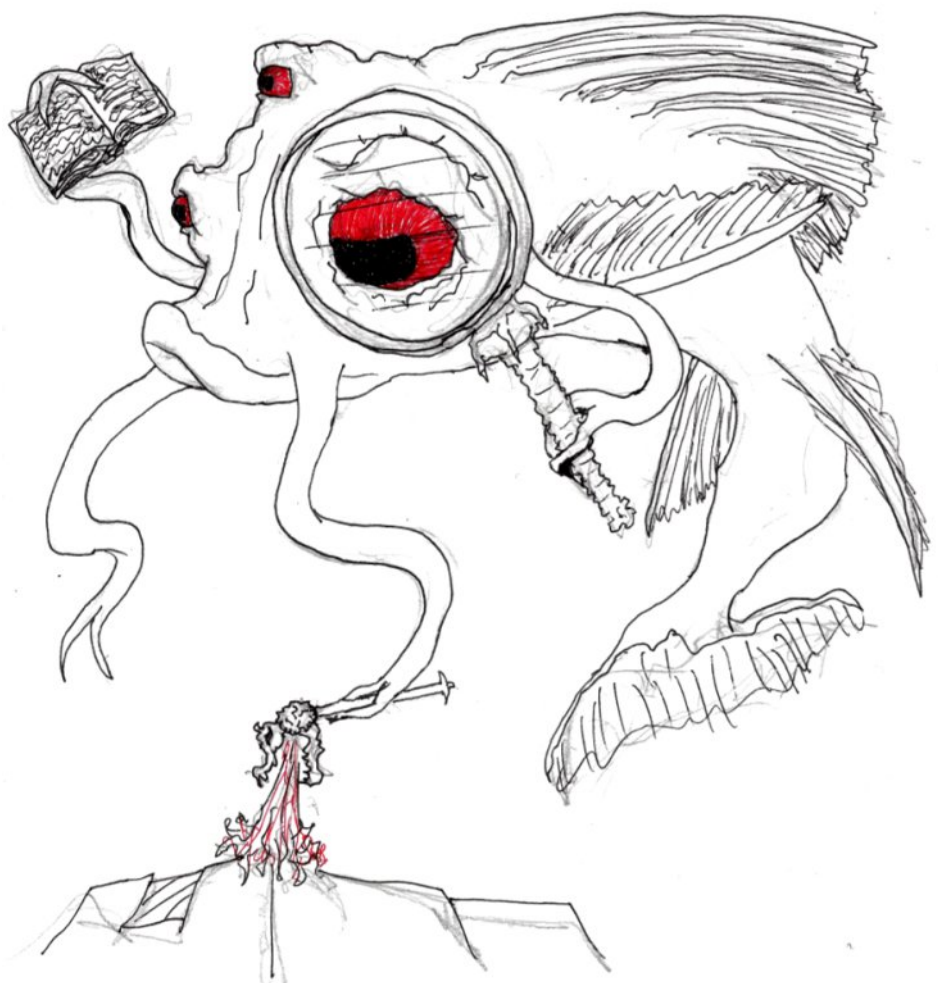
Vlh'mai: Vlh'mai has been a Warden for over seven centuries, and she has long since perfected the management of her lawn - Zhn'k'ses - into a smoothly oiled machine, mostly operated by her experienced lackeys. This leaves her free to devote her energies to her own pursuits and the Constellation's directives. Considered one of Shk'b's inner-circle of Wardens, Vlh'mai has the honor of managing Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh's defense against the Githyanki.

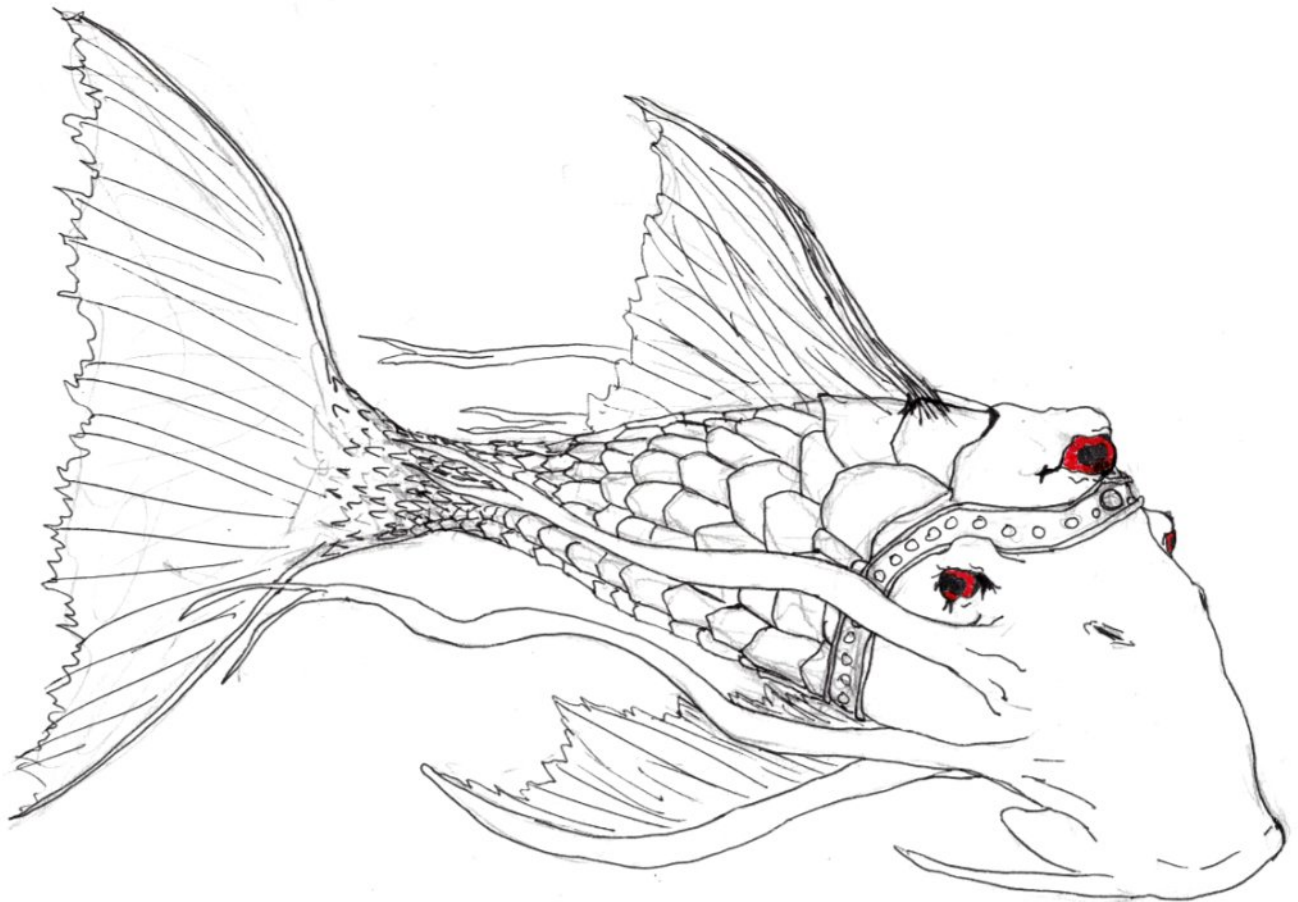
Working in tandem with Df'ph'neae, who handles the direct military aspects of the resistance, Vlh'mai heads the research division, studying the tactics, weapons, physiology, and magic of the Githyanki and other natural creatures in order to develop strategies and technologies to overcome them. It was she that designed the prototype of aboleth shipsuits (see Appendix B), which have since come to be invaluable in their nation's defense against the constant Githyanki assaults. Quite aside from the motivation of patriotic duty, Vlh'mai finds herself fascinated by the minds and lore of natural creatures, and harbors a bit of an addiction for natural flesh and the knowledge that comes with it.

Vlh'mai's Secret: Vlh'mai shares something of a mutual fascination with Asher, the Githyanki Fleet Admiral (see Chapter Five). She has, in fact, been Asher's 'guest' at the Gallery on five separate occasions, although by protocol she allowed herself to be 'captured' each time. The two share conversation, debate, and occasional psychic spars, until Vlh'mai must return to her duties and

'escapes.' During her first such departure, Vlh'mai regretfully consumed her erstwhile friend, absorbing most of her memories - only to find, years later, that Asher had somehow reincarnated and held no ill will toward her.

Since then, it has become their habit for Vlh'mai to eat Asher on each of her escapes, understanding her a little bit more each time as she re-digests her mind, and for a reincarnated Asher to extend Vlh'mai an invitation to her own kidnapping when she's ready for another vacation with her friend. Theirs is a unique intimacy - and one that would spell their doom were either to be found out.





Df'ph'neae: N'aeuh'nz'nz'nchye is the oldest and largest of the aboleth lawns in the Stellar Abyss. As such, it bears much of the burden in defending Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh from outside threats. Df'ph'neae, the lawn's Warden, captains these efforts as the head of the United Aboleth Defense Force, a decentralized military comprised of aboleth, mind flayers, beholders, and slaves donated from each lawn for the protection of all.

Clad in her uncanny shipsuit, Df'ph'neae patrols the Stellar Abyss with a crew of slaves aboard her back and a cadre of armored aboleth at her side, the scourge of living and undead Githyanki alike. Df'ph'neae rules her lawn from a distance, communicating via spell

and telepathy with her underlings. Driven, relentless, and innovative, with an eery ability to scrape together a defense from the most unlikely of assets, Df'ph'neae is a match for the best of Vlaakith's generals and keeps the Githyanki fleet ever on their toes.

Df'ph'neae's Secret: Above all else, Df'ph'neae hates the company of fellow aboleth. This is why she spends so much time away from N'aeuh'nz'nz'nchye, roaming the abyss for battles. It's not so much that she hates aboleth themselves, but rather that they irritate her in large groups. The small clusters she takes with her on patrol are manageable, as are meetings with the rest of the Constellation.

Up-and-Comers of Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh

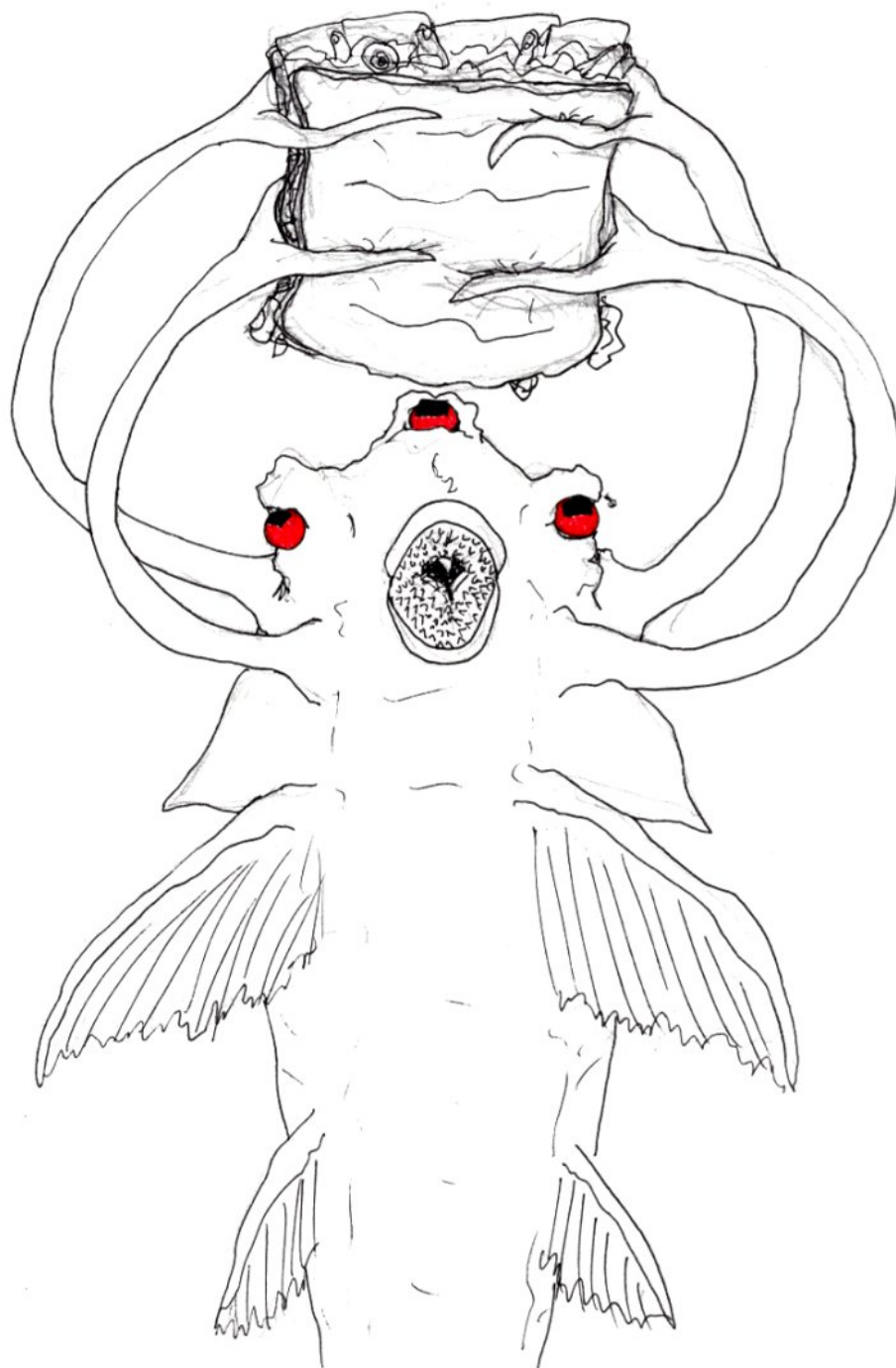
Throd: This aboleth is a prodigy of a politician in her lawn, Zch'ch'ch'nnn'ee, shooting to recognition, authority, and responsibility with incredible ease. Recently retired from the United Aboleth Defense Force, Throd leverages her military experience and service to Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh to undercut the lawn's current Warden, K'nannin'monah'mu, an aboleth so used to power he has become unsuited to it, trite and stale and always in the background in his own oppressive endeavors.

In contrast, Throd inveigles her way into almost all of the lawn's initiatives, assuming leadership through sheer force of personality at colony after struggling colony, entangling her own tentacles in every dirty deed. Profits have doubled in the last year alone under her skilled purview, and Zch'ch'ch'nnn'ee enjoys a flush of slaves and resources like never before. Paired with Throd's vivid imaginative gift for painting cruel utopias in the minds of her dazzled supporters, she is both practical and

inspiring as a leader. K'nannin'monah'mu has had little choice but to elevate her to one official position after another. With her ambitious cruelty and his covetous insecurity matched against each other, it seems inevitable that one or the other must die.

Throd's Secret: Throd's rise to power is littered with the corpses of the aboleth she swam through to get to where she is now. Of course, such things are hardly out of the ordinary or even frowned upon in Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh, but the same cannot be said for conspiring with slaves. Throd has an extensive network of connections among the slaves of her lawn, which she has used repeatedly to learn the movements, habits, and weaknesses of her rivals before killing them herself. More damning, she has occasionally bribed slaves with freedom in return for murdering an aboleth she wanted dead - and presumably delivered on her promise, for the slaves remain eager to do her bidding.





Shagg'ee: Shagg'ee is the youngest offspring of Zummz'll't'ti, the Warden of Hnnn'drr'n'undo. Spoiled and lazy, Shagg'ee would love to do nothing more than taunt his slaves as they scrape mounds of bacterial ooze into his mouth and scrub algae from his scales. Unfortunately for him, Zummz'll't'ti has recognized that she made some mistakes in raising him, and has gifted him as an apprentice to Throd, in the neighboring lawn, in order to whip the indolence out of him. Under Throd's demanding tutelage, Shagg'ee reluctantly manages a startup cult based near a good deity's plane in the astral sea,

swimming sluggishly down from his cozy chambers in the Stellar Abyss to halfheartedly mutate and mangle the minds of his mortal victims.

Shagg'ee's Secret: A hired devil handles most of the oppression and corruption Shagg'ee has been tasked with. The aboleth merely checks in every few weeks in order to have something to report to Throd, spending the rest of his time squirreled away in an astral mote nearby with a cadre of dominated Peregrines to take care of him and his peculiar culinary preferences.

Ghost Gangs

The freedom fighters of the astral sea, gangs of void ghosts band together to combat the various heavenly oppressors of Peregrines: devils, demons, gyrovagues, neglectful deities, Githyanki pirates, and any others who threaten the hard-bitten lives of Peregrines. Based out of the deepest currents and most secluded eddies of the astral plane, ghost gangs commandeer astral vessels in which to patrol Peregrine settlements, using their spectral abilities and resistances to battle slavers, pirates, and abominations. They also gather up the void ghosts of recently passed Peregrines and either add them to their crews or whisk them away to secret colonies of ghosts and, purportedly, Peregrines. Without their rescue, these lost spirits would likely fall prey to devils or evil magic users seeking to use the power of their souls; void ghosts get even less protection from the good deities than do Peregrines. Most ghost gangs are led by or include one or more void vampires, whose spectral drain ability is a fearsome threat to spiritual beings.

Phantom Bloc

To the rest of the astral sea, ghost gangs are a mystery. Countless stories tell of lost ships arising from the depths, crewed by spectres, but few know that there is truth to the tales. They value secrecy as one of their primary strengths, and avoid making unnecessary contact of any kind. They say nothing to those they rescue, unless it be liberated ghosts to add to their numbers - and those bring no stories back to the plane's taverns. They pilot their ships almost exclusively in the Stellar Abyss to maintain their secrecy, descending to the Pelagic Zone and Supernal Above only to make a rescue. Every gang is different, with unique attitudes and alignments, but a significant majority take any opportunity to pick off solitary Celestials for their void vampires to drain - perhaps discriminately, based on the deity it serves, but perhaps not.

Possessive Protection

As part of their guardianship of the astral plane's innocents, void ghosts possess some of

their charges. This allows them to keep in constant touch with the ebb and flow of Peregrine life, with their needs and struggles, and to respond instantly if something threatens the settlement. If the threat is minor, the ghost might be able to do away with it themselves. If it is more serious - such as a scavenging Githyanki supply skiff - the ghost simply abandons their host's body and uses their spectral speed to report to a void ghost crew, whether in the Stellar Abyss or more nearby. That ship and its crew can then hunt down whatever or whoever dared to harass innocents on the ghost gangs' watch.

Regardless of threats, these spying ghosts report back to the captain of their gang every few months to keep them updated on the goings-on of their settlement. The host is left in full control of their faculties at all times, and usually have no idea that they harbor a spectral spectator behind their eyes. Most settlements in the astral plane have at least one undercover ghost in their midst, and large cities might have as many as 100 at any given time. If the Ghost Gangs were ever to truly unify, they would have a comprehensive spy network to rival that of the Union of Objects' curious coinage.

Spectral Shipwrights

Most of the ghost ships used by the Gangs were salvaged from wreckage found floating on the astral currents or sucked down to the Stellar Abyss by a doldrum. Those crews with working vessels trawl the seas for salvageable ships and parts, taking them up for their own use or ferrying them back to the Gangs' meeting grounds in the Abyss to be hammered into something useful. Consequently, their ships are a precarious mishmash of styles from every shipbuilding culture in the plane - and some from outside it, as well. Captains typically focus on adding to their ship's arsenal rather than its propulsion, because void ghosts make especially talented miracle workers; a spectral crew can easily propel their vessel at top speeds. They also don't need to worry much about their vessel's structural integrity, as ghosts, and their ships are often a picture of

dilapidation, their sails hanging in tatters, the deck and hull pocked with splintered holes, barnacles, and lichenous encrustations.

Rest in Pieces

Untiring, eternal, and incorporeal, a ghost ship is the stuff of nightmares for gyrovagues, Githyanki, and pirates of every stripe. They stalk their prey, floating noiselessly through the astral waters, striking with uncanny accuracy and abruptness at those who have left wanton destruction in their wake. Githyanki have earned their especial hatred for their entitled piracy and extortion, and any Githyanki captain of merit knows to expect an ambush by ghosts eventually. They skirmish perpetually across the seas, the ghosts capitalizing on their immunity to most weapons to slip onto the Githyanki deck and possess crewmembers, pinning comrades onto each others' blades. Luckily for the Githyanki, their silver swords are especially effective against ghosts, and the gangs have yet to make a true impact on the naval nation's rapacity. They have, however, struck terror into the hearts of independent pirates everywhere, and a crew of potential villains thinks thrice before striking out for a life of looting and larceny.

My Neighbor's Yard

The ghost gangs are far from a unified force. Perhaps because mortal loyalties, prejudices, and grudges tend to take precedence over shared undeath, the gangs struggle even to tolerate each other's presence. The ghosts within a single crew might be a tight-knit bundle of joy and kinship, but they rarely extend that to other crews, barely managing to tolerate each other enough to swap supplies and share harbors. Even that is restricted to just a single site in the entire astral sea; the Yard, a ghost/Peregrine port and shanty town in the Stellar Abyss, hidden inside a massive hollow mote.

The Yard serves as most crews' home port, the sanctuary they return to after scrapping with Githyanki frigates or petty pirates. Protected from the psychic pressure of the Far Realm and hidden from aberrant discovery by

powerful magical wards, the Yard gives them a place to recover from the psychic torments of the outside, repair their ships, swap salvage, and drop off Peregrines rescued from the Stellar Abyss until they can be run down to the lower layers of the plane. No captain or group of captains claims the Yard as their own; it is run anarchically, fueled on necessity and shared struggle. Should a captain seek to unite the ghost gangs into a force that could effectively police the entire astral plane effectively, the Yard would be at the center of their efforts.

Luminaries of the Ghost Gangs

Maeshah: Maeshah is the ghost of a merfolk child. As captain of her own crew of void ghosts for the last fifty years, however, she has long since outgrown her childhood in death, maturing into a formidable personality and a deadly foe. Still dressed in the spectral version of the fluttering, ribbonny raiment she wore as a Peregrine, Maeshah needs no weapon but her chill touch and her voracious hunger for spiritual essence to slay fiend, Githyanki, or aberration.

Her crew is made up of other spectral children she has collected from the astral sea through the years, but she is the only one so far to master the ability to drain essence from spiritual beings and become a void vampire. With the information passed on to her by her spies possessing living Peregrines, Maeshah sets patient traps for those who have spread chaos and destruction through the astral

plane, veiling her vessel always just out of sight behind some vegetation or outcropping - only to sail silently forward just in time to cut off her victims when they least expect slaughter to descend upon them. The deck and hold of Maeshah's rickety ship are littered with cribs and perambulators of all kinds, dusty and decaying. When a fight grows particularly tough, Maeshah will rise above the fray and sing, of all things, a lullaby - summoning with it a tsunami of infant souls swelling from their tiny shipside beds to overwhelm her enemies with their raw torment.

Maeshah's Secret: Maeshah's parents are still alive as Peregrines, somewhere in the astral plane. Although she did not reincarnate with them after her mortal death, she was able to locate them once she became a void ghost. She visits them periodically, but never lets them know she is there.





Rorin Runebrew: Rorin lived out her afterlife as a merchant, peddling scrap and salvage across the plane under the Merfolk and Merrow banner. One of the many slain by Githyanki pirates when she refused to surrender her wares to the Supply Corps, Rorin clings to her grudge against them with dwarven stubbornness, focusing all her spectral energies on ending Githyanki oppression in the astral sea.

Still decorated with the hundred cuts it took to kill her, Rorin and her ragtag bunch of Githyating ghosts stalk the Supply Corps wherever they sail, pouncing when they can and picking off scouts one by one when their forces aren't great enough to assault the pirates directly. Above all, Rorin hunts for the captain that

killed her, a Githyanki woman known as Almah. With her relentless tenacity and deadly void vampire abilities, Rorin has slain nearly a hundred Githyanki knights through the decades. She keeps their silver swords as trophies, dangling from the hull of her ship like windchimes. Needless to say, Rorin is especially hated by the Githyanki, and a permanent search and destroy order hangs over her head - quite literally, as she has captured the actual document and keeps it fluttering at mast as her flag.

Rorin's Secret: On occasion, Rorin has passed along intel on Githyanki movements to aberrant entities, leading to more than a few Githyanki massacres.

Up-and-Comers of the Ghost Gangs

Sally Sue: In life, Sally Sue was a human paladin in a time of peace and prosperity that had little need of her heroism. In the afterlife, she found herself barred from the plane of her god by cruel chance. She killed herself, denied the last shred of hope that she might find purpose and usefulness and an outlet for heroism in the direct service of her deity - only to find that, as a spirit in the astral sea, she would gain everything she had ever wanted. Wielding her ghostly greatsword in tandem with her deep, booming laugh, she courses

over the psychic tides in pursuit of lowlives and pirates, devils and demons, cultists and monsters. Currently serving as second mate aboard Rorin Runebrew's vessel, she knows it's merely a matter of time before she masters her ghostly abilities and becomes captain of her own crew.

Sally Sue's Secret: When the time comes, Sally Sue means to unite the ghost gangs into a single unified militia capable of protecting the entirety of the astral sea against anything that threatens the afterlives of its inhabitants.





Shuv: The ghost of a pre-teen orc child, Shuv never really wanted to spend her ghostly existence as a guerilla, but she had little choice; Maeshah's crew is practically the only place a ghost child can find protection and companionship in the astral plane. Shuv would far rather have settled down in a nice abandoned house with a garden on some obscure little mote to haunt as a good ghost should, but the threat of soul hunters - wizards, devils, liches, etc. - was too great, and she found herself driven to the ghost gangs.

Instead of harmlessly rattling old toys and creaking floorboards in the night, Shuv instead uses her toy sword - grown far more deadly in

death - to slit the throats of Githyanki pirates and gruesomely grinning devils. She never wavers in a scrap, but most skirmishes see her running into Maeshah's arms for a good spectral hug when the fighting has finished. Her captain considers her one of her deadliest sailors, but she just thinks of herself as a lost little girl.

Shuv's Secret: Shuv has been contemplating ending her spiritual existence. Whether by flying into a star, giving herself up to a liche, or in some other way she isn't sure, but she dreams of an end.

FACTION PERSPECTIVES

This section outlines brief descriptions for the perspective of each of this chapter's factions toward the others. This acts as a framework for inter-faction politics or conflict in your campaign, as well as for interaction with NPCs if your players happen to join one of the above organizations (as unlikely as that may be with this chapter's factions).

The Inversionists

The Inversionists are despised by all aberrant factions because they abduct and experiment on aberrations just as often as they do natural creatures. Likewise, the Bubs hold an especial grudge against them for daring to snub their services - and for being able to get away with it. Zhurnaasa's power as a Star Warden is more than sufficient to protect her children and their laboratory; unlike Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh, their numbers are too small and their expeditions too few to overextend her ability to ward them. Anyone in the Stellar Abyss would happily expunge the Inversionists from existence if it could be done easily, but none have the means or motivation to make it worth the considerable effort necessary to kill a Star Warden.

For their part, the Inversionists do their best to snatch unaffiliated monstrosities rather than Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh's citizens or Bighead's Bubs, but the Church of Scree counts all aberrations among their congregation, not just those who can claim membership in an organization. The priests have long-since issued a permanent denouncement against the Inversionists, inviting any who are able to destroy them wherever the opportunity presents itself. Needless to say, the Inversionists keep to themselves.

Humongous Bighead's Bubs

Nobody but the Church really likes the Bubs, but they're a fact of life in the Abyss, and

resentment is tempered by grudging respect. Humongous Bighead has been around long enough to know most of her clients personally, including the Wardens of Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh. They may not be happy about her, but they understand the need for the service she provides and know that she can be worked with.

The Church of Scree, on the other hand, practically considers the Bubs its personal military order. Humongous Bighead has been a devout disciple of the Church for most of her life, and her followers are strongly encouraged to take up the faith. The Church enjoys a constant pool of Bubs in the cathedral's congregation, practicing their chants and hymns - and doubling as guards. Bighead will give the Church anything they ask for, free of charge, and routinely sends her Bubs as guards for the Church's priests on their errands throughout the plane. The Bubs proudly host a chapel in Bighead's lair, where everyone present is expected to attend service - and sing - or end up with their brains as the priests' delicacy for the day.

The Church of Scree

The Church is the one common ground among aberrations that means anything. Their healing, comfort, and transmogrifications are universally valued, and none would dare assault the Church or offer its priests anything except welcome. The Church regards all aberrations as its flock, even the Inversionists - although they must be purged for the good of others - and welcomes anyone of monstrous visage to join their services and songs. They are especially fond of the Bubs, and consider the thugs to be little more than the Church's military arm. Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh and its offshoot Ichthys faith are held in less esteem.

The Church is displeased with the aboleth defiance and does not officially recognize the Ichthys church as a legitimate branch of Scree. In practice, however, they have chosen to lay aside differences and continue administering to the citizens of Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh as they may - avoiding Ichthys priests wherever

possible. For the aboleth's part, they are loathe to bring open conflict against the Church again, as unpopular as it made them with the rest of the Stellar Abyss when the Ichthys and Teuthid branches schismed. There's also a lingering sense of inferiority and teenage rebellion in the Ichthys church; they're not really sure of their legitimacy themselves.

Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh

The aboleth nation is a great big bully. Because they are larger and more organized than any other group in the Stellar Abyss, they are able to throw their weight around and get what they want when they want it. They push illithid cults out of control of cold seeps, stars, and reincarnation nexuses with impunity, although illithids are so sneaky and quick to reproduce that there are always more cults to contend with. Even the Bubs don't have the strength to stop Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh if they really want something, although the Constellation has long chosen to work with Bighead rather than tear themselves apart and anger the Church of Scree in waging an all-out war against the gang. Most others hate Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh for its entitlement and expansionism, infuriated at their disenfranchisement as it pushes them out of their ancient lairs with its inevitable engorgement, but they lack the ability to do anything about it.

Ghost Gangs

As splintered and contentious as they are, the ghost gangs are little more than a nuisance to most in the Stellar Abyss. Sure, they occasionally snatch some reincarnated Peregrines from the tentacles of Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh or an illithid cult, but the gangs' focus is far more on the lower layers of the astral sea, where they are more able to make a difference. Aberrants are simply too strong in the abyss for the gangs to contend with on a large scale, unless they were to unite and organize. Until that happens, the aberrations will continue to pay little attention to the ghosts' antics. The gangs despise all the creatures of the Far Realm for slaying and enslaving Peregrines, of course, but they also

need them to keep the Stellar Abyss dangerous enough to prevent their biggest enemy from rooting them out for good: the Githyanki.

Appendix A

CREATURES

This appendix contains statistics for certain creatures found in the astral plane. Stat blocks are arranged alphabetically.

Aasimon

Large celestial, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 105 (14d8 + 42)

Speed swim 20 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| 18 (+4) | 8 (-2) | 16 (+3) | 9 (-1) | 17 (+3) | 16 (+3) |

Saving Throws Wis +6, Cha +6

Skills Perception +6

Damage Resistances radiant, necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons

Senses truesight 60 ft., blind beyond that range

Languages telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Gullible. The aasimon has disadvantage on Persuasion checks, and will tend to believe anything it is told.

Magic Resistance. The aasimon has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Innate Spellcasting. The aasimon's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 16). The aasimon can cast the following spells, requiring no components:

At will: *skywrite*, *warding wind*, *detect evil and good*

1/day each: *control weather*

Actions

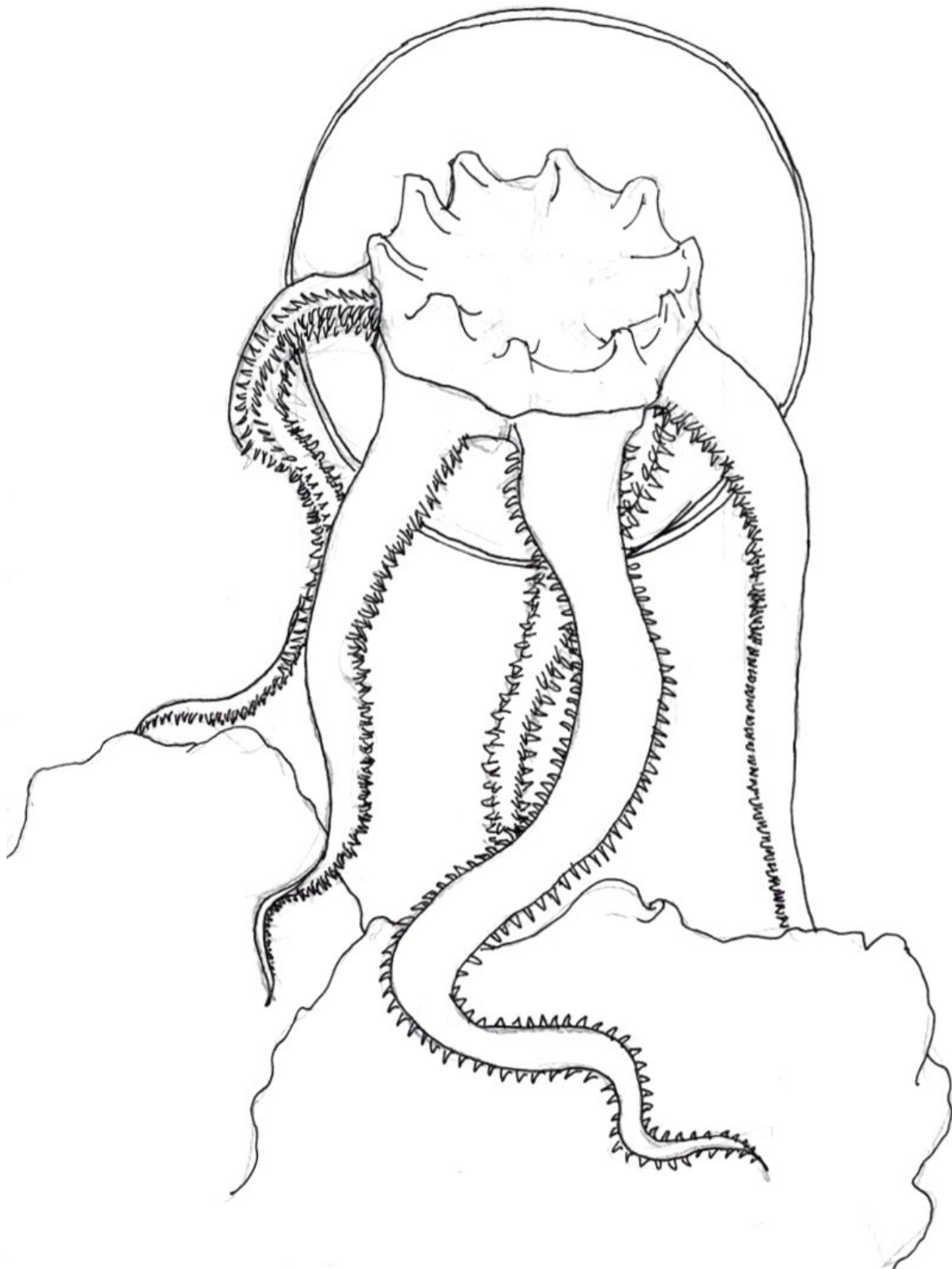
Radiant grasp. *Melee weapon attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d6 + 4) radiant damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 15). For each of its turns that the target ends grappled by the aasimon, they take 11 (2d6 + 4) radiant damage. The aasimon can grapple a total of 10 targets at a time.

Actions

Necrotic grasp. *Melee weapon attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d6 + 4) necrotic damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 15). For each of its turns that the target ends grappled by the aasimon, they take 11 (2d6 + 4) necrotic damage. The aasimon can grapple a total of 10 targets at a time.

Description

Aasimon are the raw form of celestial being taken by the gods and shaped into the divine servitors mortals know as angels. Before being reshaped by a god, an aasimon takes the form of a giant brittle star, with manifold arms pulsing with both radiant and necrotic energies. Aasimon are not actually interested in much beyond talking with and observing other creatures, particularly creatures with high Wisdom, and will almost never initiate a fight.



Archelon

Huge beast, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 171 (18d12 + 54)

Speed 20 ft., swim 40 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 22 (+6) | 10 (+0) | 17 (+3) | 4 (-3) | 11 (+0) | 6 (-2) |

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages --

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Hold Breath. The archelon can hold its breath for one hour.

Actions

Snap. *Melee weapon attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit:* 30 (5d8 + 6) piercing damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 17). Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained and the archelon cannot bite another target.

Claw. *Melee weapon attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., up to 3 targets. *Hit:* 22 (3d10 + 6) slashing damage.

Swallow. *Melee weapon attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one grappled target. *Hit:* 20 (3d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage, and the target is swallowed and grapple ends. A swallowed creature is blinded and restrained, has total cover against all effects from outside the archelon, and takes 14 (4d6) acid damage at the start of each of the archelon's turns. If the archelon takes 20 or more damage on a single turn from a creature inside it, it must succeed on a DC 25 Constitution saving throw or regurgitate all swallowed creatures, which are thrown prone in a space within 10 feet of the archelon. If the archelon dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained and can escape from the creature by using fifteen feet of movement.

Withdraw. The archelon withdraws its head and limbs into its shell. While withdrawn, the archelon's AC becomes 20 and it gains resistance to all types of damage except Psychic and Necrotic. The archelon cannot attack while withdrawn.

Description

An archelon is a prehistoric giant snapping turtle with a leathery shell. With bony plates and powerful jaws, archelons can snap their prey in half in a single bit, while using their sharp claws to hold them in place or slash through their muscles.

Astral Kraken

Gargantuan aberration, lawful evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 525 (50d20)

Speed 10 ft., swim 60 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 22 (+6) | 16 (+3) | 10 (+0) | 25 (+7) | 17 (+3) | 24 (+7) |

Saving Throws Dex +11, Int +15, Wis +11, Cha +15

Skills Arcana +15, Deception +15, Insight +11, Perception +11, Persuasion +6, Intimidation +15, Stealth +11

Condition Immunities poisoned, paralyzed, frightened

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 21

Languages understands Abyssal, Celestial, Infernal, and Primordial but can't speak, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 25 (75,000 XP)

Hold Breath. While out of water or the astral sea, the astral kraken can hold its breath for 1 hour.

Cryptic Coloration. While stationary underwater or in the astral sea, the astral kraken automatically succeeds on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made by creatures who have not seen it in the last hour. While moving, or against those who have seen it in the last hour, it has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

Compressible. The astral kraken is capable of fitting through any space a Medium creature could occupy. While compressed in a space smaller than its size category, the astral kraken makes attack rolls and saving throws at disadvantage and loses 20 ft. of speed for each size category smaller than Gargantuan.

Water Breathing. The astral kraken can only breathe underwater or in the astral sea.

Magic Resistance. The astral kraken has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Innate Spellcasting (Psionics). The astral kraken's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 23). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components:

At will: *detect thoughts, levitate, suggestion, telekinesis*

2/day each: *dominate monster, plane shift, teleport*

1/day each: *demiplane, forbiddance, mass suggestion*

Actions

Multiattack. The astral kraken makes three arm attacks, each of which it can replace with one use of Fling, Crush, or Skull Drill.

Arm Attack. *Melee weapon attack:* +20 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 50 (8d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 18). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained. The astral kraken has eight arms, each of which can grapple one target.

Fling. One Large or smaller object held or creature grappled by the astral kraken is thrown up to 60

feet in a random direction and knocked prone. If a thrown target hits a solid surface, the target takes 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage for every 10 feet it was thrown. If the target is thrown at another creature, that creature must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or take the same damage and be knocked prone.

Crush. One Large or smaller object held or creature grappled by the astral kraken is squeezed by the creature's arm, dealing 50 (8d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage. Alternatively, the astral kraken may choose to grapple Huge or larger objects or creatures with up to 8 of its arms, dealing 50 (8d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage per arm.

Skull drill. *Melee weapon attack:* +20 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature grappled by the astral kraken. *Hit:* the target takes 72 (12d12) piercing damage. If this damage reduces the target to 0 hit points, the astral kraken kills the target by drilling through its skull and extracting its brain. *Miss:* the target takes 36 (6d12) acid damage.

Mind blast (recharge 5-6): The astral kraken magically emits psychic energy in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 23 Intelligence saving throw or take 40 (6d10 + 7) psychic damage and be stunned for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Legendary Actions

The astral kraken can take 3 legendary actions from the options below. It may only use one legendary action at a time, and only at the end of another creature's turn. An astral kraken regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Arm Attack, Fling, or Crush. The astral kraken makes one arm attack, or uses fling or crush once.

Sucker Seal (Costs 2 Actions). The astral kraken attempts to seal its sucker around the head of one grappled Large or smaller humanoid, Dexterity saving throw DC 20. If the creature fails its save, its head is encased by the astral kraken's sucker and it is blinded and restrained (escape DC 18). Nerve tissue immediately begins growing out of the sucker, through the creature's skull, and into its brain. If the creature fails to escape this effect within 3 turns, it falls unconscious and cannot escape without outside intervention. If the creature is held by this effect for an entire week, it is transformed into a mind flayer and released from the kraken's arm. If the kraken dies, the creature regains consciousness and may continue trying to escape, but will begin suffocating after 5 minutes.

Ink Cloud (Costs 3 Actions). The astral kraken releases a 60-foot cloud of black ink, heavily obscuring everything within that region. The ink cloud spreads around corners and can be dispersed by a strong current. The astral kraken has advantage on attack rolls against creatures inside the ink cloud. The ink cloud disappears at the end of the astral kraken's next turn if it has not been dispersed.

Description

Astral krakens are giant psychic octopods. They prefer to ambush their prey, hiding themselves with their mutable skin until the time is right to dart out of concealment and immobilize their victims in their eight suckered arms. An astral kraken's arms are powerful enough to crush ships to kindling in their embrace, while its psionic abilities incapacitate those aboard. Intelligent and calculated, if a fight goes poorly an astral kraken will attempt to flee. Releasing its ink cloud to confuse its enemies, the astral kraken will attempt to use *plane shift*, *teleport*, *demiplane* or its movement to escape.

Baleen Bat-whale

Huge beast, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 81 (6d12 + 42)

Speed 10 ft., fly 60 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 20 (+5) | 6 (-2) | 24 (+7) | 10 (+0) | 15 (+2) | 8 (-1) |

Senses blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages bat

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Echolocation. The bat-whale loses its blindsight while deafened.

Long Listener. The bat-whale can communicate with other bat-whales within one mile and has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks involving hearing.

Actions

Wing slap. *Melee weapon attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., up to 5 targets within 10 feet in front of the bat-whale. *Hit:* 23 (5d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage and the target is knocked prone.

Description

Baleen bat-whales are peaceful filter-feeders that roam the astral sea, feeding on insects and star dust with their baleen. Never aggressive on their own, a bat-whale will attack only if assaulted by a predator.

Bat-orca

Huge beast, unaligned

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 63 (6d12 + 24)

Speed 10 ft., fly 60 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 18 (+4) | 10 (+0) | 19 (+4) | 10 (+0) | 14 (+2) | 8 (-1) |

Senses blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages bat

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Echolocation. The bat-whale loses its blindsight while deafened.

Long Listener. The bat-whale can communicate with other bat-whales within one mile and has advantage on Wisdom (perception) checks that involve hearing.

Actions

Wing slap. *Melee weapon attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., up to 5 targets within 10 feet in front of the bat-whale. *Hit:* 22 (5d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage and the target is knocked prone.

Bite. *Melee weapon attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 26 (5d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Description

The bat-orca is the baleen bat-whale's aggressive cousin. Evolved from mortal bats brought to the astral plane but gigantic where they were tiny, the bat-orca is a formidable predator. Although they are solitary hunters, they roost in huge colonies on the underside of astral motes, and are intelligent enough to coordinate against anything that threatens the colony as a whole. Bat-orcas make highly loyal and intelligent mounts, although they are most often used as such by the mind flayers of the Stellar Abyss.

Dakosaur

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 85 (10d12 + 20)

Speed 20 ft., swim 40 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 18 (+4) | 20 (+5) | 15 (+2) | 4 (-3) | 14 (+2) | 10 (+0) |

Skills Stealth +7

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages --

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Hold breath. The dakosaur can hold its breath for 30 minutes.

Actions

Multiattack. The dakosaur makes three attacks: one slam and two bites.

Bite. *Melee weapon attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (4d8 + 5) piercing damage.

Slam. *Melee weapon attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage and the target is stunned until the end of their next turn. *Miss:* half damage.

Description

The dakosaur is a prehistoric marine reptile with vicious teeth and a long, powerful body covered in thick leathery hide. Capable of swimming at high speeds and maneuvering agilely in the water, the dakosaur harrasses its prey by whacking it with the side of its body, disorienting it enough to be an easy mark against the reptile's hungry bite.

Megalodon

Gargantuan beast, unaligned

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 264 (16d20 + 96)

Speed swim 60 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 25 (+7) | 11 (+0) | 23 (+6) | 4 (-3) | 12 (+1) | 7 (-2) |

Skills Perception +5

Senses blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages --

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Terrifying Teeth. Every creature within 120 ft. that can see the megalodon must succeed on a DC 25 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for one minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success. A creature that succeeds on its saving throw is immune to this effect for the next hour.

Water breathing. Megalodon can only breathe water.

Actions

Bite. *Melee weapon attack:* +15 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 46 (6d12 + 7) piercing damage and the target takes 15 damage at the end of each of their next three turns. The target may end this damage early by succeeding on a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check, or by being healed for any amount. Another creature may perform the Wisdom (Medicine) check for a target suffering from this effect.

Description

Megalodon is an enormous shark, sleek and refined in its assured killing potential. With its gargantuan jaws, sharp teeth, and keen sense of smell and electroreception, megalodon is a predator to make even dragons its prey.

Mirrored Behir

Huge monstrosity, neutral evil

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)

Hit Points 210 (20d12 + 80)

Speed swim 20 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| 25 (+7) | 13 (+2) | 18 (+4) | 7 (-2) | 10 (+0) | 12 (+1) |

Skills Perception +6

Damage Immunities lightning

Senses darkvision 90 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Draconic, Abyssal

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Reflective Hide. The mirrored behir has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects. As well, any time a spell or other magical effect is cast against the mirrored behir, roll a d6. On a 1 or 2, the spell proceeds normally. On a 3 or 4, the mirrored behir is completely unaffected. On a 5 or 6, the spell is reflected back at the caster as though it originated from the mirrored behir.

Actions

Jagged Hide. *Melee weapon attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d10 + 7) bludgeoning damage plus 18 (2d10 + 7) slashing damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Multiattack. See Monster Manual p. 25.

Bite. See Monster Manual p. 25.

Constrict. See Monster Manual p. 25.

Lightning breath (recharge 5-6). See Monster Manual p. 25.

Swallow. See Monster Manual p. 25.

Description

These behirs have become encrusted with thaumaturgic glass, granting them a natural armor that can reflect spells and other magical effects. Found only in the Stellar Abyss, mirrored behirs use their natural resistance to magic to hunt illithids and beholders.

Mosasaur

Gargantuan beast, unaligned

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 333 (18d20 + 144)

Speed 10 ft., swim 60 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| 26 (+8) | 18 (+4) | 26 (+8) | 4 (-3) | 15 (+2) | 13 (+1) |

Saving Throws Str +14, Dex +10, Con +14

Skills Perception +18

Damage Resistances cold, bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Senses blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages --

Challenge 18 (20,000 XP)

Hold breath. The mosasaur can hold its breath for one hour.

Actions

Multiattack. The mosasaur makes three attacks: two bites and one tail sweep.

Bite. *Melee weapon attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 35 (6d8 + 8) piercing damage. If the mosasaur chooses, the target is also grappled and restrained (escape DC 18). While grappling a target, the mosasaur cannot bite another, but it does automatically succeed on additional bite attacks on the grappled target.

Tail Sweep. *Melee weapon attack:* +14 to hit, reach 15 ft. up to 3 targets in a 5 ft. radius. *Hit:* 22 (4d6 + 8) bludgeoning damage and the targets are knocked prone.

Shake Prey. The mosasaur shakes its head vigorously, attempting to snap the spine of the prey immobilized in its mouth. When it uses this ability, a creature grappled by the mosasaur's bite attack must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or take 40 (7d8 + 8) bludgeoning damage and be stunned until the end of their next turn. On a successful save, the creature is stunned but takes no damage.

Description

Ancient, humongous, and voracious, the mosasaur is an extinct marine reptile that hunted the oceans of the mortal world for aeons. In death, it continues to hunt, roaming the astral waves in search of prey fit to satisfy its appetite.

Titanoboa

Huge beast, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 189 (18d12 + 72)

Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 22 (+6) | 20 (+5) | 18 (+4) | 4 (-3) | 12 (+1) | 10 (+0) |

Skills Stealth +9

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages --

Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Actions

Strike. *Melee weapon attack:* +10 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 44 (7d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 15), and stunned until the end of its next turn. The titanoboa can only grapple one creature at a time, but may strike while grappled.

Constrict. The titanoboa squeezes one stunned grappled creature in its coils. The creature must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or take 61 (10d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage. On a successful save, the creature takes half damage.

Swallow. *Melee weapon attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (3d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage, and the target is swallowed by the titanoboa. While swallowed, the creature is blinded and deafened and has complete cover against all attacks and effects from outside the titanoboa. While within the titanoboa, the creature takes 33 (6d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage and 21 (6d6) acid damage at the end of each of the titanoboa's turns. The titanoboa dies if it takes more than 60 total damage from a creature inside it. If this happens, swallowed creatures spill out of the titanoboa through the wounds they have inflicted and fall prone within 5 ft.

Description

A giant snake of forgotten times, the titanoboa surprises its prey from its hiding places in vegetation or murky waters and crushes their bones slowly in its massive coils.

Quahog

Huge aberration, good

Armor Class 25 (natural armor)

Hit Points 174 (12d12 + 96)

Speed 0 ft. (swim 10 ft.)

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 8 (-1) | 4 (-3) | 26 (+8) | 4 (-3) | 28 (+9) | 20 (+5) |

Condition Immunities poisoned, prone, stunned, unconscious, incapacitated, frightened, deafened, fatigued, blinded

Damage Resistances radiant, necrotic, bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Damage Immunities psychic, poison

Senses blind

Languages telepathy 500 ft.

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Magic Resistance. The quahog has advantage on all saving throws made against spells and other magic effects.

Innate Spellcasting (Psionics). The quahog's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 19). It can cast the following spells with no components:

At will: *suggestion, teleport, dominate person*

2/day: *mass suggestion, plane shift (self only), dominate monster*

1/day: *primordial ward*

Peaceful Aura. A creature within 30 ft. of the quahog must succeed on a DC 25 Wisdom saving throw in order to take any hostile action unless compelled to do so by the quahog itself.

Actions

Detach. The quahog unmoors itself from its byssal anchor. It gains a swim speed of 10 ft.

Entrench. The quahog anchors itself to a solid surface via its byssal threads. It loses its swim speed.

Description

The quahog is a colossal psychic clam that feeds on the siphoned individuality of entire populations of humanoids. Completely sessile for most of its life, the quahog relies on its formidable shell and innate spellcasting to defend itself against threats; it cannot attack on its own.

Void Eater

Medium monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 55 (10d8 + 10)

Speed 40 ft., swim 20 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 13 (+1) | 12 (+1) | 13 (+1) | 4 (-3) | 13 (+1) | 6 (-2) |

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages --

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Magic Scent. The void eater can sense magic items up to 500 ft. away and track them to their exact location.

Spell-Sticky. Any magical item that strikes the void eater becomes telekinetically stuck to the creature's shell. The void eater may move these items at any time with its legs or mouthparts, but any other creature must succeed on a DC 20 Strength check in order to free a magical object from this effect. This effect ends when the void eater is killed.

Actions

Bite. *Melee weapon attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage and 4 (1d6 + 1) acid damage.

Antennae. The void eater telekinetically manipulates a magical item within 5 ft. of it. If the object is being worn or carried, the user can make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw to prevent this effect. Manipulated items are typically levitated directly to the void eater's mouth and consumed.

Description

This bulbous creature has a nacreous shell, iridescent feelers, and is perpetually covered in grimy bits of astral crud. Native to the Stellar Abyss, the void eater spends its life eating star dust, astral crud, and magical items.

Appendix B

SHIPS

This appendix contains statistics for pre-made astral vessels.

Scavenger's Dinghy

| | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Design: Dinghy | Mass: 50 kg |
| Material: Pine | Passengers: 4 |
| Damage Threshold: 15 | Crew upkeep: 2 gp/week |
| AC: 13 | Hp: 25 |
| Crew: 1 | Size: Medium |
| Resist: L, A | Tonnage: 0.2 tons |
| Immune: Ps, C | Stopping distance: 2 ft. |
| Vulnerable: F, N | Acceleration: 5 ft./rnd |
| Speed: 20 ft., 2 mph | Acrobatics: +15 |
| Turn radius: 9 ft. | Value: 150 gp |

Description

The dinghy's statistics can serve as those of your generic rowboat or very small sailing vessel. Assume that most Huge and larger ships in the astral sea carry one or more dinghies strapped to their hulls, although doing so is not nearly so critical as it is in the mortal world.

Scavenger's Caravel

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Design: Caravel | Mass: 22,400 kg |
| Material: Elm | Passengers: 20 |
| Damage Threshold: 15 | Crew upkeep: 16 gp/week |
| AC: 13 | Hp: 75 |
| Crew: 8 | Size: Huge |
| Resist: L, A | Tonnage: 100 tons |
| Immune: Ps, C | Stopping distance: 22 ft. |
| Vulnerable: F, N | Acceleration: 15 ft./rnd |
| Speed: 58 ft./6 mph | Acrobatics: +5 |
| Turn radius: 30 ft. | Value: 5,250 gp |
| Arms: Cannon, 2 | Misc. Trawling net, Iron strongbox |

Description

The caravel is a mid-sized vessel with fair maneuverability and a respectable cargo hold. A caravel of this type could be used by almost anyone in the astral plane, although it is commonly used by traders and scavengers, and most vessels encountered on the open astral sea will be similar to the caravel presented here. It also serves as a good starting point for your players' personal ship, to be customized and perhaps discarded for a mistico or corvette once they reach higher levels.

Actions

Fire cannon. The ship's cannons fire round shot or chain shot once. *Ranged weapon attack:* 600/2,400 ft.+6 to hit, one target, once every five minutes. *Hit:* 8d10 bludgeoning damage.

Scavenger's Mistico

| | |
|---|---|
| Design: Mistico | Mass: 74,000 kg |
| Material: Oak | Passengers: 45 |
| Damage Threshold: 20 | Crew upkeep: 30 gp/week |
| AC: 13 | Hp: 225 |
| Crew: 15 | Size: Huge |
| Resist: L, A | Tonnage: 500 tons |
| Immune: Ps, C | Stopping distance: 74 ft. |
| Vulnerable: F, N | Acceleration: 22 ft/rnd |
| Speed: 90 ft./ 9 mph | Acrobatics: +0 |
| Turn radius: 45 ft. | Value: 22,000 gp |
| Arms: Mounted net gun, 2; mounted harpoon cannon | Misc. Trawling net, 4; iron strongbox, 2 |

Actions

Fire harpoon cannon. The ship's harpoons fires one shot each. *Ranged weapon attack:* 60/100 ft. +Dex mod to hit, one target, once per round. *Hit:* 2d10 piercing damage, and the target is impaled on the harpoon. They are unable to move beyond the harpoon's rope length. They can escape by cutting the rope, or by breaking it or removing the harpoon with a successful DC 20 Strength check.

Fire net gun. The ship fires a net of 25-ft. radius at a target or group of targets. *Ranged weapon attack:* 50 ft., +6 to hit, 1 huge/ 2 large/ 6 med./12 small creatures in 25 ft. radius. *Hit:* Targets are immobilized. They must make a successful DC 20 Strength check to escape or spend 5 rounds cutting their way out of the net.

Description

The mistico is a more serious version of the trader's caravel. With a bigger hold, more sails for greater speed, and more space for passengers, the mistico is a favorite among serious merchants and Merfolk and Merrow's big-time scavvers. It could also be used as a ferry or tourists' cruiser between astral motes, and most commercial fishers in the astral plane use ships very similar to the scavenger's mistico.

Leader's Shuttle

Design: Corvette

Mass: 127,000 kg

Material: Mahogany

Passengers: 20

Damage Threshold: 20

Crew upkeep: 40 gp/week

AC: 15

Hp: 320

Crew: 20

Size: Huge

Resist: L, A

Tonnage: 80 tons

Immune: Ps, C

Stopping distance: 127 ft.

Vulnerable: F, N

Acceleration: 10 ft./rnd

Speed: 40 ft./4 mph (400 ft/40 mph)

Acrobatics: +0

Turn radius: 36 ft. (1 ft.)

Value: 2.6 mill. gp

Arms: Ballista, 4

Misc. Plentiful pantry, Deck garden, Library, Steel vault, Chapel cabin

Spell Instillations: Sanctuary, Invisibility

Actions

Fire ballista. The ship's ballista fires one bolt. *Ranged weapon attack:* 120/480 ft. +6 to hit, one target, once every three rounds. *Hit:* 3d10 piercing damage.

Dissociate. The ship and its crew enter an astral projected state. The ship's speed becomes 400 ft./40 mph (calculated assuming the average Charisma score of its crew and inhabitants is close to 10), and its turn radius becomes 1 ft. The ship may remain in this state indefinitely; see Chapter Three. When the ship leaves this dissociated state, the physical form of it and its passengers are instantly transported to the last location of its astral projection.

Description

The Leader's Shuttle is the archetype of a small, lavish vessel designed to get a high-ranking official from one location in the astral sea to another as quickly and safely as possible. Because it is a dissociative craft, its defenses are more for ceremonial purposes than actually rebuffing attack; it relies on its swift speed while in astral form to simply avoid threats rather than engage with them. However, since its owner may not maintain a domicile in all of its ports, the ship is outfitted with a luxurious array of amenities, including an enchanted pantry capable of infinitely generating food to the owner's exact specifications. In the event that the shuttle's astral cord is cut while en route, the ship possesses the *sanctuary* and *invisibility* instillations to help it evade its attackers and reach a berth safe enough to project away. This ship could be the personal pleasure cruiser of any mind-bogglingly powerful official; a decadent merchant, an astral queen, or even Vlaakith CLVII herself.

Default crew: 20 honor guards
20 passengers

Githyanki Corvette

| | |
|---|---|
| Design: Corvette | Mass: 110,000 kg |
| Material: Oak | Passengers: 20 |
| Damage Threshold: 20 | Crew upkeep: 40 gp/week |
| AC: 18 | Hp: 300 |
| Crew: 20 | Size: Huge |
| Resist: L, A | Tonnage: 80 tons |
| Immune: Ps, C | Stopping distance: 110 ft. |
| Vulnerable: F, N | Acceleration: 42 ft./rnd |
| Speed: 170 ft./17 mph | Acrobatics: +5 |
| Turn radius: 22 ft. | Value: 101,800 gp |
| Arms: Cannon, 2; Mounted eyestalk; Ballista | Misc. Githyanki dynamic map, automatic orienter, teleportation circle |
| Spell Instillations: Pass without trace | |

Actions

Fire cannon. The ship's cannons fire round shot or chain shot once. *Ranged weapon attack:* 600/2,400 ft. +6 to hit, one target, once every five minutes. *Hit:* 8d10 bludgeoning damage.

Fire ballista. The ship's ballista fires one bolt. *Ranged weapon attack:* 120/480 ft. +6 to hit, one target, once every three rounds. *Hit:* 3d10 piercing damage.

Paralyzing ray. The targeted creature must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Description

Githyanki corvette-class warships are the workhorses of the Githyanki pirate fleet, making up the bulk of the vessels that comb the undefended settlements of the Supernal Above and Pelagic Zone for treasure and supplies. If your players encounter Githyanki pirates, they will most likely be sailing one of these ships. Githyanki corvettes typically sail the astral plane alone, using their dynamic map to follow a seasonal path between astral settlements, allowing each to recover just enough to possess enough food or supplies to be worth looting again.

Using their *pass without trace* spell instillation, corvettes lurk just out of sight behind astral motes, mats of celestial sargassum, or giant astral seagrass, waiting for the most opportune moment to swoop in and knock out the settlement's defenses. Because they do rely on these settlements for food and supplies, Githyanki pirates typically do not damage the village itself, and will only kill a few individuals to cow the rest - and then only if they offer resistance. At times, they will take problem villagers captive, to act as slaves to the Githyanki themselves or to be sold to demons, devils, or evil wizards for their star dust and souls. They prefer to use their paralyzing ray to incapacitate any defenses momentarily, allowing them to disarm and arrest those who would fight back. Once the villagers have loaded the corvette's hold with whatever valuables they possess, the Githyanki vanish into the astral sea, leaving their victims to rebuild as best they can.

Default crew: 22 Githyanki sailors

5 Githyanki warriors (Monster Manual, p.160)

1 Githyanki knight (Monster Manual, p. 160)

Abyssal crew: 22 Githyanki zombies

5 Githyanki skeletons

1 Githyanki death knight

The Githyanki corvette can also easily be converted into a generic warship by changing the crew to members of a different race and removing the miscellaneous upgrades and spell instillation.

Githyanki Substellar

Design: Substellar, war

Mass: 1,570,000 kg

Material: Steel

Passengers: 3

Damage Threshold: 50

Crew upkeep: 70 gp/week

AC: 20

Hp: 3,600

Crew: 22

Size: Huge

Resist: L, A

Tonnage: 80 tons

Immune: Ps, C

Stopping distance: 1,570 ft.

Vulnerable: F, N

Acceleration: 62 ft./round

Speed: 250 ft./25 mph

Acrobatics: +15

Turn radius: 1 ft.

Value: 5.8 mill. gp

Arms: Harpoon cannon, 2; mounted
eyestalk, 4; spittle sprayer

Misc. Githyanki dynamic map,
automatic orienter,
teleportation circle, flask
of destruction

Spell Instillations: Forbiddance (aberrations), Blur,
Arcane eye

Actions

Fire cannon. The ship's cannons fire round shot or chain shot once. *Ranged weapon attack:* 600/2,400 ft. +6 to hit, one target, once every five minutes. *Hit:* 8d10 bludgeoning damage.

Fire harpoon cannon. The ship's harpoons fire one shot each. *Ranged weapon attack:* 60/100 ft. +Dex mod to hit, one target, once per round. *Hit:* 2d10 piercing damage, and the target is impaled on the harpoon. They are unable to move beyond the harpoon's rope length. They can escape by cutting the rope, by breaking it, or by removing the harpoon with a successful DC 20 Strength check.

Paralyzing ray. The targeted creature must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Disintegration ray. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 45 (10d8) force damage. If this damage reduces the creature to 0 hit points, its body becomes a pile of fine gray dust. If the target is a Large or smaller non magical object or creation of magical force, it is disintegrated without a saving throw. If the target is a Huge or larger object or creation of magical force, this ray disintegrates a 10-foot cube of it. Target must be within 120 ft.

Petrification ray. The targeted creature within 120 ft. must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature begins to turn to stone and is restrained. It must repeat the saving throw at the end of its next turn. On a success, the effect ends. On a failure, the creature is petrified until freed by *greater restoration* or other magic.

Death ray. The targeted creature within 120 ft. must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 55 (10d10) necrotic damage. The target dies if the ray reduces it to 0 hit points.

Spray acid. Targets inside the 20 ft. cone of acid must make a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw or take 8d8 acid damage. *Miss:* half damage.

Description

Githyanki substellars are those vessels used on the rare occasion that a cadre of living Githyanki need to accompany one of their undead strikes against an aberrant stronghold, or a living Githyanki general needs to be delivered to one of their undead strongholds in the Stellar Abyss. Githyanki substellars are designed to protect their inhabitants against the psychic pressure of the Abyss, and are completely sealed against the outside, with entrances protected by airlocks capable of pumping out aberrant energies.

It's very dangerous for any living Githyanki to sail in the Abyss, but a substellar provides the pinnacle of offensive and defensive power. Its *arcane eye* alerts the captain to any approaching aberrations, while its steel hull is strong enough to repel all but the most powerful attacks - even the disintegration rays of beholders are not strong enough to penetrate the spell-instilled hull. The *blur* instillation allows the ship to move stealthily through the abyss' warped waves, while *forbiddance* prevents mind flayer or aboleth spellcasters from teleporting aboard and damages any aberrations that come into contact with the hull. If the substellar is detected by a mind flayer clipper or fluyt, its unsurpassed speed and maneuverability usually allow it to flee before the illithid ship is able to bring its armaments within range and puncture the substellar's hull, exposing the crew to the sudden psychic pressure of the abyss.

A wise captain fears everything non-Githyanki they encounter in the abyss, but one of the few enemies that truly pose a threat to an undamaged substellar is the astral kraken. With their incredible camouflage ability, krakens are able to avoid detection by the ship's *arcane eye* and pull off a successful ambush, latching onto the ship as it sails past their hiding spot. The kraken's arms may not be powerful enough to crush the ship outright, but they are strong enough to open the airlock doors and expose the crew, and their salivary papilla can drill through the hull if given enough time. Finally, the kraken's acid exploits the vulnerability of the vessel's steel hull. Even if the crew is able to repel the kraken's assault, the acid may corrode the hull and leave them exposed to Far Realm effects.

Unless on missions of assault against aberrant strongholds, Githyanki substellars that are forced into combat will typically try to use their heaviest firepower to kill their attacker as quickly as possible. Failing that, they will try to use their paralyzing and petrification rays to incapacitate their enemies, allowing them to escape. If this fails and the hull is breached, whatever crew survives with their minds intact will attempt to detonate the ship's flask of destruction, incinerating the vessel and its attackers instantly if they are successful. If the ship is carrying important officials, artifacts, information, or prisoners, they will be evacuated using the teleportation circle as soon as it becomes clear the ship will not be able to make an escape.

Default crew: 12 Githyanki sailors

10 Githyanki warriors (Monster Manual, p. 160)

2 Githyanki knights (Monster Manual, p. 160)

1 Githyanki conjurer

Githyanki Galleon

| | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Design: Galleon | Mass: 906,500 kg |
| Material: Oak | Passengers: 25 |
| Damage Threshold: 20 | Crew upkeep: 460 gp/week |
| AC: 18 | Hp: 1,500 |
| Crew: 200 | Size: Gargantuan |
| Resist: L, A | Tonnage: 2,500 tons |
| Immune: Ps, C | Stopping distance: 900 ft. |
| Vulnerable: F, N | Acceleration: 56 ft./round |
| Speed: 190 ft./19 mph | Acrobatics: +0 |
| Turn radius: 70 ft. | Value: 5.8 mill. gp |
| Misc. Githyanki dynamic map, automatic orienter, teleportation circle, steel vault | |
| Arms: Cannon, 20; Ballista, 10; Mounted eyestalk, 2; Ram; Harpoon cannon, 3; Elemental expectorator, earth (2), fire (2) | |

Spell Instillations: Forbiddance (aberrations), Control winds

Actions

Fire cannon. The ship's cannons fire round shot or chain shot once. *Ranged weapon attack:* 600/2,400 ft. +6 to hit, one target, once every five minutes. *Hit:* 8d10 bludgeoning damage.

Fire harpoon cannon. The ship's harpoons fire one shot each. *Ranged weapon attack:* 60/100 ft. +Dex mod to hit, one target, once per round. *Hit:* 2d10 piercing damage, and the target is impaled on the harpoon. They are unable to move beyond the harpoon's rope length. They can escape by cutting the rope, or by removing the harpoon with a successful DC 20 Strength check.

Paralyzing ray. The targeted creature must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Fire ballista. The ship's ballista fires one bolt. *Ranged weapon attack:* 120/480 ft. +6 to hit, one target, once every three rounds. *Hit:* 3d10 piercing damage.

Ram. The ship attempts to ram another vessel or creature. *Melee attack:* point blank, +8 to hit, one target. *Hit:* 8d10 bludgeoning damage.

Flame blast. The ship's flame elemental expectorators expel a 15 ft. cone of fire each. Once per round. Targets inside the cone must make a successful DC 20 Dexterity saving throw or take 5d10 fire damage. *Miss:* half damage.

Boulder blast. The ship's earth elemental expectorators fire a single 1-ton boulder each. *Ranged weapon attack:* 20/50 ft., +5 to hit. *Hit:* 8d10 bludgeoning damage.

Description

Outside of the Stellar Abyss, Githyanki galleons are rare. They are used primarily to guard the Githyanki citadel of Tu'narath, or the rare few permanent fortresses the Githyanki maintain elsewhere in the astral plane. Inside the Stellar Abyss, Githyanki galleons are the most common ships used by undead Githyanki crews on their crusades against aberrations. Their entire purpose is to slay as many aberrant creatures as possible, and they and their crews will continue to fulfill that purpose until the ship begins to literally fall apart. The abyss is littered with the drifting corpses of Githyanki galleons that have long since passed their usefulness.

Default crew: 200 Githyanki sailors

20 Githyanki warriors (Monster Manual, p. 160)

3 Githyanki knights (Monster Manual, p. 160)

1 Githyanki conjurer

Abyssal crew: 200 Githyanki zombies

20 Githyanki skeletons

3 Githyanki death knights

1 Githyanki lich

The Githyanki galleon can also easily be converted into a generic warship by changing the crew to members of a different race and removing the dynamic map, automatic orienter, teleportation circle, and spell instillations.

Githyanki Windjammer

| | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Design: Windjammer | Mass: 1,110,000 kg |
| Material: Oak | Passengers: 100 |
| Damage Threshold: 20 | Crew upkeep: 760 gp/week |
| AC: 18 | Hp: 1,875 |
| Crew: 250 | Size: Colossal |
| Resist: L, A | Tonnage: 7,000 tons |
| Immune: Ps, C | Stopping distance: 1,100 ft. |
| Vulnerable: N | Acceleration: 45 ft./round |
| Speed: 220 ft./22 mph | Acrobatics: +0 |
| Turn radius: 90 ft. | Value: 83.6 mill. gp |
| Misc. Githyanki dynamic map, automatic orienter, teleportation circle, steel vault, Library | |
| Arms: Cannon, 25; Ballista, 10; Mounted eyestalk, 2; Ram; Spittle sprayer, 2; Elemental expectorator, earth (2), fire (2); Web valve | |
| Spell Instillations: Forbiddance (aberrations), Control winds, Control weather, Absorb elements (F) | |

Actions

Fire cannon. The ship's cannons fire round shot or chain shot once. *Ranged weapon attack:* 600/2,400 ft. +6 to hit, one target, once every five minutes. *Hit:* 8d10 bludgeoning damage.

Spew web. Web sprays from the ship's valves in 20 ft. cones. Every creature inside the cone must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be immobilized. *Miss:* the target is slowed. As an action, the restrained target can make a DC 12 Strength check, bursting the webbing on a success. The webbing can also be attacked and destroyed (AC 10; hp 5; vulnerability to fire damage; immunity to bludgeoning, poison, and psychic damage).

Fear ray. The targeted creature must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Fire ballista. The ship's ballistas fire one bolt. *Ranged weapon attack:* 120/480 ft. +6 to hit, one target, once every three rounds. *Hit:* 3d10 piercing damage.

Ram. The ship attempts to ram another vessel or creature. *Melee attack:* point blank, +8 to hit, one target. *Hit:* 8d10 bludgeoning damage.

Flame blast. The ship's flame elemental expectorators expel a 15 ft. cone of fire each. Once per round. Targets inside the cone must make a successful DC 20 Dexterity saving throw or take 5d10 fire damage. *Miss:* half damage.

Boulder blast. The ship's earth elemental expectorators fire a single 1-ton boulder each. *Ranged weapon attack:* 20/50 ft., +5 to hit. *Hit:* 8d10 bludgeoning damage.

Spray acid. Acid sprays from a spigot mounted on the ship's deck in a 20 ft. cone. Creatures inside this cone must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 8d8 acid damage. *Miss:* half damage.

Description

Windjammers are the flagships of the Githyanki navy. Because of their exceptional power and extreme cost to create, there are only five in existence - two patrolling the astral seas around Tu'narath, and the other three laying waste to aberrations of all kinds in the Stellar Abyss, crewed entirely by undead Githyanki. On the rare occasion that one of the Windjammers in the upper astral sea embarks upon a mission away from Tu'narath, its captain uses the ship's control weather and control winds enchantments to wreath the vessel in a raging tempest. While the ship itself sails in peace at the eye of the storm, it is concealed by the tumult and borne forth by ferocious winds. Those few that witness the coming of such a ship of storms rarely live to tell the tale. Still, legends abound throughout the astral sea of an enormous vessel heralded by lightning and thunder, whose appearance from between the clouds foretells death and destruction. Few, if any, know that it is a Githyanki windjammer behind these stories.

Default crew: 250 Githyanki sailors

50 Githyanki warriors (Monster Manual, p. 160)

20 Githyanki knights (Monster Manual, p. 160)

5 Githyanki conjurers

Abyssal crew: 250 Githyanki zombies

50 Githyanki skeletons

20 Githyanki death knights

5 Githyanki liches

The Githyanki windjammer can also easily be converted into a generic warship by changing the crew to members of a different race and removing the dynamic map, automatic orienter, teleportation circle, and spell instillations.

Githyanki Mistico

| | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Design: Mistico | Mass: 4,500 kg |
| Material: Spruce | Passengers: 45 |
| Damage Threshold: 10 | Crew upkeep: 30 gp/week |
| AC: 13 | Hp: 150 |
| Crew: 15 | Size: Huge |
| Resist: L, A | Tonnage: 700 tons |
| Immune: Ps, C | Stopping distance: 4.5 ft. |
| Vulnerable: F, N | Acceleration: 25 ft./round |
| Speed: 100 ft./10 mph | Acrobatics: +10 |
| Turn radius: 20 ft. | Value: 42, 500 gp |
| Misc. Githyanki dynamic map; Portable cargo holes, 4; Smuggling compartments; Iron strongbox, 4; Automatic orienter | |
| Arms: Harpoon cannon, 3 | |

Actions

Fire harpoon cannon. The ship's harpoons fire one shot each. *Ranged weapon attack:* 60/100 ft. +Dex mod to hit, one target, once per round. *Hit:* 2d10 piercing damage, and the target is impaled on the harpoon. They are unable to move beyond the harpoon's rope length. They can escape by cutting the rope, or by removing the harpoon with a successful DC 20 Strength check.

Description

Githyanki are banned from many civilized trade centers due to their habitual piracy, but a few smuggler ports or evil-aligned settlements care little for what the Githyanki have done to others, or what the origins of the goods their merchants bring might be. Most of the goods their raiders loot from settlements and travelers in the astral sea end up being used by the Githyanki themselves, but there are always things they cannot use, or have in excess. Those goods end up in the holds of Githyanki misticos, which peddle them in a thousand ports across the astral plane and return the profits to Tu'narath. Misticos are strictly non-combatants, and rely on their relative speed and maneuverability to protect them. The harpoon cannons they do possess will only be fired in self-defense, to scare away attacking predators or easily-intimidated non-Githyanki pirates. For the most part, the Githyanki reputation protects them against humanoid assault. Misticos rarely stray from their safe, established routes, but periodically meet up with a larger Githyanki ship to take on goods, supplies, and to pass along profits. A Githyanki mistico may seem vulnerable, but one never knows when a Githyanki corvette is lurking above one's line of sight, armed to the boom and eager to shed blood.

Default crew: 15 Githyanki sailors
1 Githyanki warrior

The Githyanki mistico can also easily be converted into a generic tradeship by changing the crew to members of a different race and removing the dynamic map, automatic orienter, teleportation circle, and spell instillations.

Illithid Clipper

| | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Design: Clipper | Mass: 71,400 kg |
| Material: Muntegra | Passengers: 10 |
| Damage Threshold: 30 | Crew upkeep: N/A |
| AC: 20 | Hp: 1,000 |
| Crew: 12 | Size: Huge |
| Resist: L, A | Tonnage: 200 tons |
| Immune: Ps, C, N | Stopping distance: 70 ft. |
| Vulnerable: F | Acceleration: 25 ft./round |
| Speed: 90 ft./90 mph | Acrobatics: +15 |
| Turn radius: 10 ft. | Value: 301, 130 gp |
| Arms: Harpoon cannon; mounted net gun | |

Spell Instillations: Blur

Actions

Fire harpoon cannon. The ship's harpoons fire one shot each. *Ranged weapon attack:* 60/100 ft. +Dex mod to hit, one target, once per round. *Hit:* 2d10 piercing damage, and the target is impaled on the harpoon. They are unable to move beyond the harpoon's rope length. They can escape by cutting the rope, or by removing the harpoon with a successful DC 20 Strength check.

Fire net gun. The ship fires a net of 25-ft. radius at a target or group of targets. Ranged attack, 50 ft., +6 to hit, 1 huge/ 2 large/ 6 med./12 small creatures in 25 ft. radius. *Hit:* Targets are immobilized. They must make a successful DC 20 Strength check to escape or spend 5 rounds cutting their way out of the net.

Description

Mind flayers usually travel in small numbers, making the relatively small illithid clipper the most typical vessel one might encounter. Crewed entirely by dominated humanoid slaves, most clippers only harbor one or two actual mind flayers - although they are capable of carrying quite a few, if necessary. Clippers are generally used to capture Peregrines from reincarnation nexuses in the Stellar Abyss or the shallower layers of the astral sea and return them to the mind flayers' lair for consumption or enslavement.

Default crew: 12 humanoid slaves
2 mind flayers

Illithid Fluyt

Design: Fluyt

Mass: 572,000 kg

Material: Muntegra

Passengers: 40

Damage Threshold: 30

Crew upkeep: N/A

AC: 20

Hp: 3,000

Crew: 80

Size: Gargantuan

Resist: L, A

Tonnage: 3,000 tons

Immune: Ps, C, N

Stopping distance: 572 ft.

Vulnerable: F

Acceleration: 20 ft./round

Speed: 98 ft./10 mph

Acrobatics: +0

Turn radius: 86 ft.

Value: 3,306,060 gp

Arms: Mounted eyestalk, 2; Spittle sprayer; Elemental expectorator, earth

Misc. Teleportation circle, Library (canned brains), Stasis box

Spell Instillations: Blur

Actions

Slowing ray. The targeted creature within 120 ft. must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the target's speed is halved for one minute. In addition, the creature can't take reactions, and it can either take an action or a bonus action on its turn, not both. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. This effect may be used on vessels.

Sleep ray. The targeted creature within 120 ft. must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or fall asleep and remain unconscious for one minute. The target awakens if it takes damage or another creature takes an action to wake it. This ray has no effect on constructs and undead.

Boulder blast. The ship's earth elemental expectorators fire a single 1-ton boulder each. *Ranged weapon attack:* 20/50 ft., +5 to hit. *Hit:* 8d10 bludgeoning damage.

Spray acid. Acid sprays from a spigot mounted on the ship's deck in a 20 ft. cone. Creatures inside this cone must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 8d8 acid damage. *Miss:* half damage.

Description

Illithid fluyts are mobile mind flayer cities where cult-less mind flayers congregate. Bereft or banished, these independents live out their lives on the decks of ships such as this one, collecting slaves, skirmishing with Githyanki, and avoiding the cults in which they originated. Although formidable in themselves, most fluyts try their best to avoid notice by the more powerful factions in the Stellar Abyss, as they can hardly compete with the resources of full cults or Great Gu'g'lyeh Mg'lyeh. Fluyts use their slowing and sleep rays to incapacitate and capture small vessels in the lower layers of the astral sea, abducting their crew as food and labor. Their spittle sprayers are targeted mostly at the undead Githyanki of the abyss, as are their earthen elemental expectorators.

Default crew: 80 humanoid slaves
15-20 mind flayers

Abolethian Shipsuit

| | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Design: N/A | Mass: 238,000 kg |
| Material: Muntegra | Passengers: 5 |
| Damage Threshold: 30 | Crew upkeep: N/A |
| AC: 20 | Hp: 3,000 |
| Crew: 20 | Size: Huge |
| Resist: L | Tonnage: 80 tons |
| Immune: Ps, C,N | Stopping distance: 238 ft. |
| Vulnerable: F | Acceleration: 20 ft./round |
| Speed: 100 ft./10 mph | Acrobatics: +0 |
| Turn radius: 36 ft. | Value: 3,771,050 gp |
| Arms: Mounted eyestalk, 3; Ram; Ballista, 4; Web valve, 2 | |
| Misc. Arcane eye, Darkness | |
| Spell Instillations: Blur | |

Actions

Telekinetic ray. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or the aboleth moves it up to 30 feet in any direction. It is restrained by the ray's telekinetic grip until the start of the aboleth's next turn or until the aboleth is incapacitated. Target must be within 120 ft. If the target is an object weighing 300 pounds or less that isn't being worn or carried, it is moved up to 30 feet in any direction. The aboleth can also exert fine control on objects with this ray, such as manipulating a simple tool or opening a door or a container.

Disintegration ray. The target within 120 ft. must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 45 (10d8) force damage. If this damage reduces the creature to 0 hit points, its body becomes a pile of fine grey dust. If the target is a Large or smaller nonmagical object or creation of magical force, it is disintegrated if it fails the saving throw. If the target is a Huge or larger object or creation of magical force, this ray disintegrates a 10-foot cube of it if it fails the saving throw.

Ram. The ship attempts to ram another vessel or creature. *Melee attack:* point blank, +8 to hit, one target. *Hit:* 8d10 bludgeoning damage.

Fire ballista. The ship's ballista fires one bolt. *Ranged weapon attack:* 120/480 ft. +6 to hit, one target, once every three rounds. *Hit:* 3d10 piercing damage.

Spray web. Targets inside the 20 ft. cone must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be immobilized inside sticky web. As an action, the restrained creature can make a DC 11 Strength check, escaping from the webbing on a success. The effect ends if the webbing is destroyed. The webbing has AC 10, 5 hit points, resistance to bludgeoning damage, and immunity to poison and psychic damage.

Description

Aboleth have little need for ships. Their chattel and servants, however, are not gigantic psychic fish capable of swimming through the astral plane with ease. In order to easily bring along their entourage wherever they may swim, aboleth have developed the shipsuit: a segmented pseudo-metal exoskeleton designed to encase an aboleth pilot entirely while hosting their slaves and servants on the decks they bear. A shipsuit mimics the aboleth body form, with semi-rigid fins and

tails that flex with the natural swimming motions of the aboleth inside. Cabins, decks, and a limited cargo hold add bulk to the dorsal side of the shipsuit.

The pilot enters through the hull, which unfolds like a great jaw to accept its aboleth. While inside, the aboleth cannot attack with its tentacles, but it can use them to control the mounted beholder eyestalks protruding from the shipsuit's bow. Using the telekinetic eyestalk, the encased aboleth is able to manipulate whatever parts of the outside world it would normally engage with its tentacles, while the shipsuit's *arcane eye* instillation ensures that the aboleth is able to easily look in any direction, and the disintegration ray makes a formidable weapon. The bow is plated with extra pseudo-metal armor for ramming other vessels, and the aboleth can invoke a field of darkness at any time to hide their passage or plunge their enemies into chaos. Typically crewed by the aboleth's kuo-toa slaves, ballista and web valves mounted on the decks supplement the aboleth's psychic abilities and magical armaments.

Default crew: 20 kuo-toa
1 aboleth

