# THE BALLAD OF THE DARK MADEN

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# INTRODUCTION

Long ago, a clan of dark elves fled from the city of Menzoberranzan, core of the evil Spider Queen Lolth's rule. Though many lives were lost in the initial exodus, the large numbers of the renegade band ensured that they were more successful than any could have hoped, yet the drow that finally arrived into the surface world found themselves shunned at every turn. Just as hope was beginning to wane, a song rang out through the night, beckoning the way to the sea and to a silver ship waiting amidst the dark waves.

Many years have passed, and little knowledge remains of the strange island that the dark elves came to call home, but the wicked Lolth forgets nothing. Whether through fate, mere coincidence or perhaps divine intervention, a band of adventurers arrive at the shores of this land in the time of its greatest need.

The adventure should run for 4-5 hours and can be adjusted for characters from level 1-8.

## Setting and Style Notes

The adventure takes place in two key locations: on board a ship, and on a small island. Locations and deities of the Forgotten Realms are referenced within the adventure, though the DM may replace these as desired. At the time of the adventure, it is early autumn, and though some warmth remains during the day, it becomes chill at night.

Pay close attention to the pacing while running the adventure: at times, there are opportunities to slow down and enjoy roleplaying, but at other moments it is best to keep the action moving swiftly. If desired, implement the 5 second rule: if a character does not immediately announce their action, count down from 5. If they do not choose during this time, they miss their turn.

#### Lolth and Eilistraee

Lolth is known as the Demon Queen of Spiders. She revels in chaos and destruction, and in the wickedness of her followers. Spiders are sacred to her. Eilistraee is the goddess of the moon, and of song and dance. Within El'tara are three instruments that amplify her power and protect the island: the bell, the chimes and the wind pipes.

Lolth was once consort to Corellon Larethian of the elven pantheon. Out of this pairing were born the twins Eilistraee and Vhaeraun. Where pure Eilistraee reflected the kindness and virtue of her father, Vhaeraun was better matched to the darkness, arrogance and selfishness of his mother.

The day soon came when Lolth grew dissatisfied with her position in Corellon's shadow. She conspired to bring about his death and to frame her daughter for the act. As Eilistraee attempted to defend her father against the assault of Lolth's allies, she found, to her horror, that her arrows were veering for his heart instead. Though Eilistraee was later cleared of all guilt, she vowed never to wield a bow again.

For her betrayal, Lolth was stripped of her divinity and flung into the pits of the Abyss, along with Vhaeraun and the other deities that had sided with her. Eilistraee chose to share in this punishment, explaining that the followers of Lolth would someday need a deity to lead them from the darkness. Despite the great hardships of her punishment, and despite her powerlessness in the face of her wicked mother, Eilistraee never surrendered to evil, and continues to sing out to those who open their ears to her voice.

## Average Party Level (APL)

Encounters in this adventure can be customised based on the Average Party Level (APL) – calculated by adding up the levels of each character and dividing by party size, assuming a party of three to five characters. For larger groups, increase the APL by one for every two players above four. For smaller groups, divide by the number of players below four and round to the closest whole number. For example:

- 1 x level 3 character = APL 1
- 2 x level 3 character = APL 2
- 3-5 x level 3 characters = APL 3
- 6-7 x level 3 characters = APL 4

This adventure contains options for APL 1-8.

Be aware also that the nature of the gameplay, e.g. terrain-based limitations and difficulty of non-combat challenges, will change as players unlock powerful new abilities at higher levels. For example:

- **Levels 5-6:** clerics gain access to the ability Destroy Undead. Spellcasters gain access to spells such as fly, Leomund's tiny hut, water breathing and water walk. Fightingfocused classes gain multi-attack.
- **Levels 7-8:** spellcasters gain access to dimension door, polymorph and banishment.

#### **ADVENTURE BACKGROUND**

El'tara has remained hidden for many years, yet in recent times, the adventuring archeologist Telther discovered trading records in the ruins of an ancient community along the coast, telling of a strange community of dark elves who fled from the Underdark roughly a thousand years ago. Those dark elves worshipped Eilistraee, drow goddess of the moon and of song and dance.

Telther was intrigued by the story, and did his best to learn more, yet little information was on hand, and a purchased scrying spell produced no result: it seemed that if the island exists, there must be some sort of barrier against divination magic. Telther was able to garner the rough location of the island, but it seems that any further information must be obtained in person.

## **Adventure Hooks**

El'tara is three days' journey away from Waterdeep (or an alternate port of the DM's choosing). This story has three suggested entry points: the meeting with Telther, the departure from Waterdeep, or upon arrival into El'tara. Here are a few example hooks:

#### A CURIOUS ARCHAEOLOGIST

The party are approached by a gnome archaeologist named Telther (see adventure text), who offers a generous reward to act as guards during an expedition to El'tara.

#### A Desperate Getaway

For whatever reason, the party must immediately make themselves scarce from the city of Waterdeep. They arrange passage aboard a ship named *Mitha's Radiance*, bound for an island three days' journey away.

#### Shipwreck

The party are traveling along the Sword Coast. Their journey ends disastrously with an encounter with the wave spider (described in the adventure text).

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# All Aboard!

Narrate the departure as follows:

As the sun rises on a cool autumn day in the city of Waterdeep, *Mitha's Radiance* sets sail for the open sea. A crew of at least sixty hustles about, adjusting sails and shouting orders. You find yourselves lost amid the practiced motion. Eventually, the activity subsides as the ship settles into a comfortable wind. Many sailors find a comfortable spot to loiter and watch the City of Splendors disappear behind them.

*Mitha's Radiance* is a carrack roughly 100 feet long and 30 feet wide – excessive for such a short trip and evidence of its captain's wealth and foolishness. The ship has an AC of 16, HP of 500 and damage threshold of 15.

The first day on board passes without incident, granting the party time to interact with the crew and with one another. Refer to the sections below for descriptions of key NPCs and locations on the ship.

## THE CREW

The crew of consists of 65 sailors, a ship doctor, a cook, the captain and the first mate.

#### CAPTAIN TELTHER

Captain Telther is an intelligent but weedy gnome **noble** (INT+3, STR-1, History +5). He has a great deal of experience as an adventurer – which is to say that he is well experienced in hiding behind other adventurers. Telther speaks proudly of these sorties, with some minor embellishments of the truth, yet he is friendly enough, and treats the sailors with respect. Refer to the notes in the Introduction (see "Adventure Background") for the information he holds.



#### The Sailors

The core crew consists of 30 non-combatants (**commoners**) and 35 trained fighters (use the stats for **bandits**). They are a combination of humans, dwarves and a few halflings. The sailors have the same information as Telther, though not necessarily the same excitement. Telther has won a measure of their respect – due in part to the generous salaries he offers. The sailors are a hard-bitten bunch, but they retain a sense of humor. Characters that interact favorably with the crew may be invited to participate in gambling, wrestling matches or even music and dancing.

#### THE FIRST MATE, RAVEL

The first mate, who in practice acts as the ship's captain in Telther's stead, is a human named Ravel (**bandit captain**, MM pg. 314). Ravel speaks in a gruff tone, and frequently curses and spits. He enjoys embroidery and crocheting in the evenings, and has a young niece back in Waterdeep named Mitha, who he treasures greatly.

#### THE SHIP DOCTOR, SHELDON

A sour and pessimistic halfling named Sheldon Greensteppe (a **druid**) manages the ship's infirmary. He rarely leaves this area, instead spending his free time diligently studying his collection of botanical encyclopedias. He will promptly treat any serious injuries, but seasickness garners little sympathy beyond a barked order to chew on some ginger, and a thrown book if they continue to complain. The ship's cook alone is worthy of his affection; he treats her as a daughter though she is more than a century older than him.

#### The Ship Cook, Liviel

The ship's cook is a fussy and meticulous elf named Liviel (a **commoner**). Liviel's sharp ears can pick up the sound of a growling stomach from anywhere on the ship. She has little patience for timewasters, but has a surprising soft spot for the antisocial doctor, Sheldon. The two are old friends. Liviel knows the cantrip *produce flame* as a druid spell taught to her by Sheldon. Whenever Liviel is not in the kitchen, she can be spotted socializing with the sailors or visiting Sheldon in his hideaway at the infirmary. If anything is moved in her absence, her shriek can be heard throughout the ship.

## Ship Locations

The ship holds the following key areas:

#### QUARTERS

The ship offers a set of comfortable quarters for Telther, a slightly smaller room for Ravel (the first mate), and set of cozy cabins for each of the adventurers and for Liviel (the cook). The ship's doctor (Sheldon) sleeps in the small infirmary. The rest of the crew sleep in mats and hammocks, either in the shared sleeping quarters or on the deck if the weather is pleasant. At all times, there are at least four sailors on deck or in the crow's nests, looking out for any sign of trouble.

#### GALLEY

The ship contains a fairly advanced kitchen of gleaming, perfectly maintained surfaces and meticulously arranged utensils. Liviel spends much of her time preparing meals in here.

#### Infirmary

Sheldon can be found within the infirmary at most times of day. Other than Sheldon's study and bedroom, the infirmary contains three beds, separable by curtains, and a chest of medical supplies which is enchanted to be waterproof and resistant to physical damage (aura of abjuration magic).

#### The Hold and the Brig

Supplies are stored either in the galley or in the larger hold at the base of the ship. This area includes a smaller room that can be locked from the outside to form a makeshift brig if any passengers cause trouble.

#### Ballistae

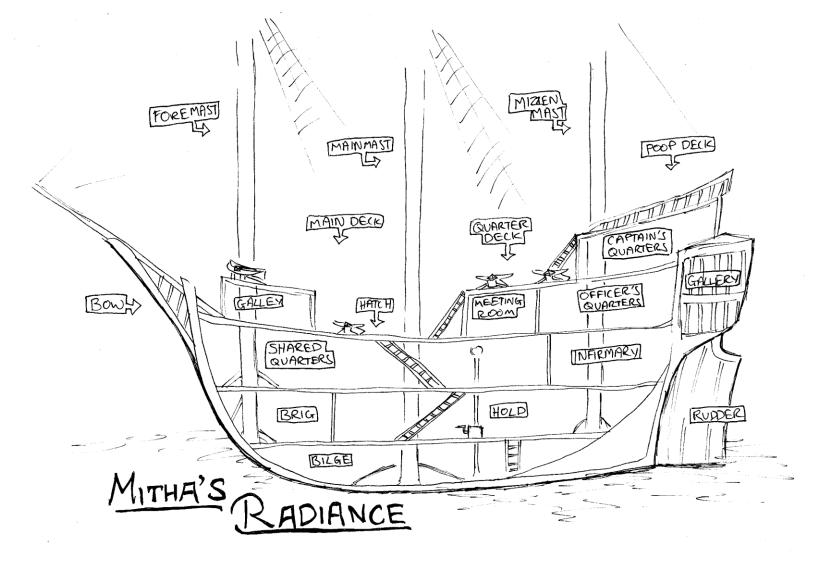
There are a total of eight ballistae along the sides of the vessel: three on the port side, three on the starboard side and two near the bow. A ballista takes either one action to fire if there are at least two people operating it, or two actions if a single person is operating it. They have a range of 120/480 feet and deal 26 (4d12) piercing damage on a hit. Treat any character who tries to fire a ballista as having proficiency in using it, and grant advantage if at least one other creature is helping. The ballistae cannot be turned more than 90 degrees from their starting positions perpendicular to the ship.

## BATTLE ON BOARD!

On the second night of their journey, the party are roused from their rest by sound from outside: sailors run madly across the deck, while the first mate, Ravel, shouts loudly and harshly in an attempt to regain order. As the party venture out from their rooms, they see the following: An enormous shape looms in the darkness, blocking out the stars. At first, you mistake it for another ship, but as you continue to gaze, you see the moonlight glinting off humongous eyes. Eight spindly legs shift through the water, propelling the creature inexorably towards you.

Refer to Appendix 1 for stats of the **wave spider** (use the same stats regardless of APL). Including its legs, this creature is roughly 400 feet in diameter and 90 feet tall, dwarfing even the ship.

Roll initiative once for the wave spider, once for the sailors and once for each player character (or use "Side Initiative" rules if preferred, per page 270 of the DMG).



At the beginning of combat, the wave spider is 240 feet away. Keep track of the distance between the spider and the ship as it changes each turn – if desired, use the tools provided in Appendix 2. Terrain actions, if any, take place on initiative count 20.

#### THE WAVE SPIDER

*Tactics:* as soon as the spider is close enough, it uses its web to try to ensnare the ship, and then begins to attack the vessel. The spider is not intelligent and cannot be reasoned with. It can however be chased away if it takes at least 300 points of damage.

#### **Optional Rule: Stagger**

If the wave spider takes more than 50 HP of damage in a single round, it moves at half speed for its next turn. If desired, apply the same rule to the ship.

#### THE SAILORS

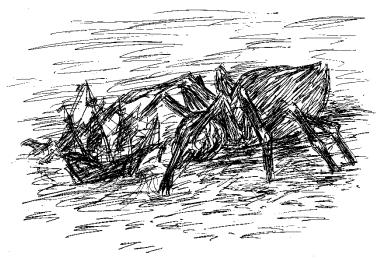
There are 65 sailors. At the beginning of the battle, 28 of these are capably moving to stations on the ship – 8 to the ballistae and 20 to the sails. Each turn, another 5 recover from their shock and move to assist with the sails. Subtract from the total based on the ability checks under "terrain".

*Tactics:* on their turn, the sailors try to move the ship out of range. Roll 1d20 for every ten sailors maneuvering the ship. Select the highest result, and add +2 for the sailor's proficiency, plus any bonuses from spells or effects created by the players (e.g. Bardic Inspiration). The spell *gust of wind* adds +5 to this total. The results are as follows:

- <10: the ship does not move.
- 10-15: the ship moves 40 ft.
- 15-20: the ship moves 80 ft.
- 20-25: the ship moves 120 ft.
- 25-30: the ship moves 160 ft.

Once the ship takes at least half of its HP in damage, half of the sailors abandon their posts to bail out water and hold the sails. The ship's speed is capped at 120 feet. Once the ship is at less than 100 HP, its maximum movement reduces to 80 feet.

If the ship manages to achieve a distance of at least 500 feet away from the spider and is not subject to any effects that slow its movement, it has successfully escaped (see "The Aftermath").



#### THE PLAYER CHARACTERS

Along with any other ideas they come up with, the following actions are available:

- Fire the ballistae. As the ship is turning away, the three ballistae on the starboard side and one of the ballistae near the bow can be fired at the spider. Eight sailors (two on each ballista) are already fumbling to load the siege weapons, but do not fire the ballistae until the second turn. The ballistae have a range of 120/480 feet and deal 26 (4d12) piercing damage on a hit.
- **Maneuver the ship.** If a player wishes to help the sailors to move the ship, have them roll a DC12 Strength (Athletics) check; on a success, roll the sailors' check with advantage.

• **Call orders:** Ravel is quietly furious if anyone interrupts him, but he knows better than to argue in such dire circumstances. With a successful DC13 Charisma (Persuasion, Deception or Intimidation), a character can command the sailors.

#### Terrain

The ship has an AC of 16, HP of 500 and damage threshold of 15. If it takes significant damage, it begins to pitch from side to side. Have all players roll a DC10 Dexterity saving throw; anyone who fails falls prone, and anyone who fails by more than 5 falls over the side of the ship, managing to catch a rope or a porthole just in time (Optionally, this requires a second Dexterity save). On their turn, they can roll a DC10 Strength (Athletics) check to climb up; on a failure, they remain clinging to the side. Roll once for the sailors and treat each point of failure as a single sailor failing their check.

Treat standard methods of mending the ship as largely ineffective except as flavor; any mending work completed in the space of six seconds is unlikely to change the fate of the ship. Use discretion if players come up with more creative methods of mending the ship.

#### **Encounter Summary**

The wave spider (Appendix 1) tries to destroy the ship. The sailors try to escape or fire the ballistae. Player characters may take any action of their choosing, including assisting sailors or firing the ballistae (range 120/480 ft, 26/4d12 damage).

To move the ship, roll 1d20 per 10 sailors plus an extra d20 for player assistance. The ship moves 40 ft. for every five feet above a result of 10, capped at 160 ft. or lower based on the ship condition. Track the distance and HP of the wave spider, condition of the ship and number of sailors on deck.

# The Aftermath

If the party manages to defeat the wave spider, award a total of 33,000 XP. For the other possible outcomes, use the "XP Thresholds by Character Level" table in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (page 82) to determine level-based XP awards, treating "shipwreck" as a hard encounter and "escape" as a deadly encounter. For example, each character in an APL3 party gains 400 XP for escaping from the spider. Narrate the outcome of each option as below:

#### **Option 1: Escape**

Use this option if the ship escapes from the spider (i.e. makes it at least 500 feet away without taking substantial damage):

With one last burst of desperation, the sailors heave at the ropes, and somehow, gloriously, the sails catch a strong wind and begin to carry the ship free from danger. The gigantic monstrosity thrashes amidst the waves, letting out a garbled roar of protest, but the ship is already moving too quickly for it to follow. For a moment everyone aboard sags with relief, before Ravel calls out harshly, "Don't let up now, you idiots!"

No rest is to be had for the rest of the night; every hand is necessary and you are quickly ordered into place. The activity subsides only with the coming of dawn, when the indomitable chef emerges from the galley with huge platters of pastries and several stern words for the overzealous captain who failed to call a breakfast break.

Shortly before midday, a shadow appears upon the horizon – a barely visible break in an otherwise endless ocean. The sun is already well on its way towards the opposite horizon by the time you approach the shore of what a relieved captain announces to be El'tara. The weary crew lay down the anchor and lower a rowing boat, allowing the crew to slowly make their way to shore. Continue to "Arrival into El'tara". There is approximately an hour left before sundown. All characters and sailors are tired, however assume that they have gotten enough snatched rest to avoid gaining a level of exhaustion.

#### **Option 2: Victory**

Use this option if the spider takes enough damage to chase it away. Continue as follows:

With one final screech of pain and confusion, the spider seems to decide that it has had enough. Its powerful limbs swipe through the water, churning the waves one last time before it dips beneath the waves. You can faintly see it swimming for the depths, leaving behind a trail of inky blood.

If any players wish to pursue the wave spider, have them describe how (e.g. use of particular spells or abilities). If desired, they can get in one last attack as the wave spider disappears.

For a moment, the crew visibly sags with relief, before Ravel's sharp voice cuts through the air: "Move on, you worthless seadogs: this ship's not going to bail itself out."

Ravel quickly arranges to have the water pumped out from the bilge, the urgent repair work completed and to move the ship away from the wave spider in case it returns. Treat this as a largely cosmetic exercise, but if player characters assist, allow them to perform minor repairs up to 5 HP each for mundane works (on a successful DC10 Dexterity check), or 20 if they use *mending* or similar spells and effects.

If the ship did not take any significant damage, it arrives at El'tara in the late afternoon as per Option 1: Escape. If it did take damage, use the following description instead: Throughout the night and into the dismal dawn, the embattled vessel creaks along the waves, beaten but not quite broken. Sailors rush around madly, patching leaks and bailing water while the shrill voice of the chef lamenting the state of the kitchen battles with the shouts of a frustrated ship doctor attempting to explain triage to the disorganized crew.

At last, as the sun is beginning to dip towards the west once more, a cry from the damaged crows' nest announces that land has been sighted ahead. With one final burst of enthusiasm, the exhausted crew rush to their stations to catch the sudden wind as it graces the sails.

The ship is almost to the island when an ominous *crack* sounds above the cheers of the sailors. The deck tips and tilts with a groan, and with a speed that shocks you, the brave vessel begins to sink.

A character that tries to swim to shore must succeed on a DC10 Strength (Athletics) check. Anyone who fails badly begins to drown, though they can be rescued by either the party members or the other crew members. Once the party makes it to shore, continue with "Arrival into El'tara".

#### **OPTION 3: SHIPWRECK**

Use this option if the ship is destroyed:

With a last furious *crack*, the proud ship is torn apart and you are flung into the roiling sea. You open your mouth to scream, only for it to fill with salt water. The waves toss you back and forth like a leaf amidst a hurricane.

In a brief moment of clarity, you emerge from the water to see rows of dark, jagged teeth, before you are blinded by a flash of light and deafened by an unearthly roar of pain. When the sound fades, another takes its place: the pure notes of a voice raised in song. You do not recognize the singer, but somehow her voice seems as familiar and comforting as a mother's lullaby. You slip into the darkness with no fear at all.

You open your eyes to find yourself lying on the coarse sand of an unknown shore. All around, you see the sprawled figures of your companions and of the sailors. Others are already moving around, calling to one another in shocked tones as if hardly believing the strange fortune of their survival. Even weedy Captain Telther seems to be well; you see his small form leaning over a semi-conscious Ravel.

At least eight crew members are missing, but remarkably, most have survived the ordeal. However, all characters gain a level of exhaustion.

# Arrival into El'tara

Steep cliffs rise around you, forming the walls of a natural harbor. Coarse sand crunches beneath you, transitioning to wild grasses and shrubs up ahead, where a stony path leads the way uphill. You can see small dwellings clustered on the cliffs and at the edges of the small beach, each with the same strange characteristic: long roofs overhang the walls, seemingly designed to keep all traces of sunlight from entering.

Use the following points to respond to player questions and actions:

- Other than the party and the sailors, the area appears abandoned.
- The beach stretches for about 200 feet in either direction. There are scattered remnants of old and rotted toys and hammocks, along with a few old fire pits. A steep incline rises from the beach towards the center of the island.

- The dwellings on the beach are empty and abandoned. If players search, they can find various personal belongings, including text written in an old form of Undercommon. A successful DC12 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that this place was most likely abandoned about half a year ago, and most likely in a hurry.
- Casting *detect magic* reveals various traces of minor abjuration and transmutation magic, covering the preservation of supplies and prevention of fires. Small quantities of preserved food can be found in each home.
- There are a few scattered skeletons along the way, but not nearly enough to match the number of dwellings.

It is a 500-foot climb to the top of the hill. On arrival, the following can be seen:

To the left and right, you spot more of the odd dwellings. The largest cluster is atop the hills to the left, where you can see what looks to be the town center, though with no movement on its streets. As you crest the hill, you see that El'tara bears the rough shape of a crescent moon curved around a smaller island at the center. The distance between mainland and the smaller island is at least 90 feet, and sheer cliffs fall from each towards the deep and unforgiving waves. Upon that island is a large and grand structure, perhaps a temple, with a magnificent bell tower rising from the center surrounded by overhanging roofs.

#### The Broken Bridge

Down below, and closer to the temple are the traces of a bridge that perhaps once spanned the gap. The high priestess of the temple (see "Izalia" below) is capable of creating a bridge with magic, but she is resting at the time of the characters' arrival. The way ahead becomes clear at night, or earlier if characters take one of the following actions:

- Make enough noise to be noticed. After 5 minutes, Izalia creates a bridge and sends a party of 5 drow (MM pg. 128) to investigate.
- **Flight/teleportation spells.** Higher level characters have access to spells such as *fly* and *dimension door* which will allow them to cross the 90-foot gap.
- **Climb.** Both cliffs are 100 feet high and the water beneath is deep with sharp currents. Creatures that make the attempt need to succeed on three checks: two DC16 Strength (Athletics) checks to see if they can safely climb up and down the cliffs, taking 35 (10d6) falling damage on each failure, along with a DC10 Strength (Athletics) check to see if they can swim across. On a failure, they begin to drown. The DC of the swimming check increases by 5 for characters wearing medium armor, or 10 for characters wearing heavy armor.

If characters turn left (heading south), they can reach the village center.

Little houses with overhanging roofs are clustered around a single central street. At the center you find a well etched with familiar runes of magical preservation, next to larger hall that perhaps acted as some form of meeting area.

The well is filled with pure spring water; spelled with an effect similar to *purify food and drink* (aura of transmutation).

#### THE MEETING HALL

The meeting hall holds trading records dated six months ago and written in Undercommon; the denizens of El'tara did not use coins, but some of the larger commercial deals were recorded in contracts. The hall also contains a gallery with fine sculptures and artworks worth a total of:

- 300 GP for APL 1-2
- 500 GP for APL 3-4
- 750 GP for APL 4-6

• 1,500 GP for APL 7+

There is a locked room to one side of the gallery which can be opened with a DC12 Dexterity or Strength check. It contains a box filled with painted silks, which illustrates scenes from the island's history including the exodus from the Underdark and the journey across the seas – a gift from those who traded with El'tara long ago. The silks are worth up to 800 GP to an appropriate buyer.

#### Houses

A DC12 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that although all houses are seemingly abandoned, there is a difference in how long since each has been disturbed. Some appear to have held guests very recently – perhaps within the past week. Most of the valuable items have been removed, but along with any common items or personal affects, characters can find the following:

- 10 lbs. of preserved food (jerky, meat confit, pickled vegetables etc.)
- A pair of sapphire earrings worth 100 GP.
- Books and notepads written in Undercommon, most of which are handwritten. These include cookbooks, gardening books and a few novels, some of higher quality than others. There are a few diaries as well, but none give any hints about the fate that befell the island, except that the final entry is dated six months ago.

#### SUNSET

The sun is setting and the party are tired from their earlier ordeal. The sailors are not particularly interested in exploring at this point, and despite Telther's earlier enthusiasm for the expedition he is deeply demoralized. Encourage the party to rest for the night.

# The First Night

If the ship has been destroyed, then all food and water was destroyed with it. Characters can use spells to create food and water, can find it by checking the homes or can forage. El'tara is strangely empty of any animal larger than a gull, but with a DC15 Wisdom (Survival) check they can discover fresh water and various mushrooms, fruits and vegetables. Roll 1d6+WIS to determine the quantity of food (in pounds).

#### Strange Music

Whoever takes the first watch notices the following (if no one takes watch, jump straight to "Zombie Attack"; none of the sailors think to wake the adventurers):

As the colors of the sunset fade and are replaced by starlight, the air grows chill. Time passes as you shiver beneath the night sky, until a sound reaches you on the wind: at the center of the island, a bell is beginning to ring. It is joined by the ring of chimes to the north and the whistle of wind pipes to the south. Each instrument on its own has a beautiful, clear tone, but as they call out together there is an unpleasant dissonant edge which grates on your ears.

If they are within view of the temple, they can see that the bell has begun to ring.

Characters with Divine Sense or similar abilities or spells can learn that the ground they are standing on is desecrated. The area within 60 ft. of the temple is consecrated. Both auras are faint where they meet, though the aura of desecration grows stronger closer to the shore and the one of consecration grows stronger near the temple.



## **Zombie Attack!**

About ten minutes after the music begins to play, undead creatures begin to emerge from the waves. They soon shamble up the hill and make for the largest group of living creatures. Depending on where the group have made camp, narrate as follows:

As the strange music continues to echo through the cold night, movement in the water catches your eye. Something silvery rises up from the waves with a burst of bubbles. Water streams down from the humanoid form until you recognize the pale hair and dark skin of a drow elf. It lifts its head to reveal sunken, dead eyes set into rotting flesh, and lets out a hoarse cry as it stumbles towards you.

Waves of undead emerge from the sea in accordance with the following table:

#### APL Encounter

- 1 2 **zombies** (MM pg. 316)
- 2 4 **zombies** (MM pg. 316)
- 3 6 **zombies** (MM pg. 316)
- 4-5 8 **zombies** (MM pg. 316) -OR- a **wight** (MM pg. 300) and 2 zombies
- 6-7 6 zombies and a wight
- 8 2 wights and 10 zombies

Treat all of these undead as unintelligent monsters incapable of understanding language, even if stated otherwise in their stat blocks. The exception is that the more powerful undead still move with the grace of trained warriors. When rolling initiative, roll for the sailors as well and use their turn to describe separate fights occurring outside of the adventurers' range. After a few rounds of confusion, Telther and the sailors all begin to flee towards the center of the island; the undead are rising from the shore.

Once the immediate battle subsides, even more undead start to appear, climbing up the cliffs and out from the beach – far more than the party can handle. However, at this point a glowing beam of light shoots out from the temple, beckoning them forward. Any characters (including NPCs) that have made it to the top of the hill see a bridge of moonlight extending across to the temple; the noise and light of the battle has attracted the attention of those within.

As soon as any character crosses over the bridge, a strange calmness washes over them. The undead attempt to chase them up until the point that they arrive on the bridge. They do not attempt to cross, instead simply waiting at the cliff edge.

# Temple of Eilistraee

The temple at the center of El'tara is the sole remaining sanctuary for the drow who have been driven away from their island. If they are alert to the characters' presence, the party are greeted near the entrance by 4 **drow** (MM pg. 128). If not, they are eventually spotted as they move in, and a pair of acolytes invite them to come and meet with the high priestess

If the three instruments are playing at this time, the sound dims as they enter. The temple is a grand and sweeping structure of fine elven architecture. Once a place of quiet contemplation, it has now been mostly converted into living areas for the villagers who escaped from the worst of the cataclysm.

The inhabitants consist of 340 noncombatants (**commoners**), 30 trained fighters/hunters (**drow**), 2 priestesses (**priest**), 10 junior acolytes (**acolyte**) and the high priestess, Izalia (see Appendix 1). All inhabitants have the **Fey Ancestry, Innate Spellcasting** and **Sunlight Sensitivity** characteristics from the **drow** stat block.

The youngest drow is 5 years old and the oldest is 741. None are old enough to remember the original escape from Menzoberranzan, though this story is taught to all young drow on the island. The El'taran society is peaceful and generous, and though the drow know the stories of their evil kin and of how they are seen by the denizens of the mainland, most will still be surprised and hurt if treated with hostility.

#### IZALIA

If players arrive during the day, Izalia is brought to join them in the main banquet hall. She is surprised to see them, but readily offers sanctuary. Izalia can provide prior warning of the undead that appear during the night and can create the bridge to allow others to cross. If they arrive during the night, the party are led towards the center of the temple where Izalia is kneeling in prayer to the goddess Eilistraee:

Your guides lead you up a long set of stairs, which open up to a wide dais beneath the night sky. The bell sings from directly above, carried on tall and deceptively slender pillars anchored into the temple. In between the pillars is a large statue of a female drow dancing with a silver sword. Her pearlescent white hair gleams and glimmers against obsidian skin.

Beneath the statue is the smaller figure of a living drow: a priestess clad in a simple white dress. As you approach, she steps gracefully to her feet and turns to face you. She raises her hand, and the sound of the bell fades away into a muted chime.

"I am Izalia, the high priestess," she says in clear and unaccented Common. "I welcome you to the Temple of the Dark Maiden."



Izalia is a powerful priestess of more than five hundred years' experience. She is calm, wise and slow to anger, though she bears a great deal of sorrow for the death of her beloved Phyrra and for the suffering that has befallen her people. She explains the following:

- El'tara is home to a community of drow who worship the goddess Eilistraee. They chose to live remotely to escape both their own kin in Menzoberranzan and the judgmental eyes of the surface races.
- Above the temple and to the north and south of the island are a set of instruments which were created by the first high priestess to protect their island from the servants of evil Lolth.
- As time went on and the spell weakened, the island was discovered. A wicked priestess named Chessala seized two of the instruments and corrupted them: on her command, the dead began to rise and devour the living, infecting them with the same curse.
- Some drow attempted to flee the island, only to find an immense spider lurking in the waves – perhaps even a manifestation of Lolth herself.
- Izalia and her closest aids including her partner, the former high priestess Phyrra – were able to defeat the wicked priestess, but her curse proved too strong to break. Phyrra was slain, and Izalia took the remaining drow and fled to the temple.
- The undead are unable to enter the temple, and as such, Izalia can offer sanctuary for the night – though little in the way of material comforts. However, her power is diminished and she mourns that she is unable to send her people to a true death.
- The instruments are guarded by shadow creatures. If these are slain, the instruments can be purified. If this task is completed, then Izalia can cast a ritual using the power of the full moon, which will cleanse the island and its surrounding areas of evil. This is the same ritual that

was once cast a thousand years ago. The full moon takes place the next day.

• If the adventures assist her, Izalia will do her best to reward them: there is some treasure left to them and she can also arrange repairs on their ship (or help build a new ship as required).

Players can safely take a long rest in the temple. They are given comfortable rooms and pleasant food and wine – the greatest hospitality the El'tarans can spare. A few of the drow also seek conversation, as they know little of the world beyond their island.

# The Instruments

The chimes are to the north of the island and the wind pipes are to the south. Refer to the map for details, and feel free to provide a print-out to players as well. Izalia can create the bridge on request; she gives the party a **sending stone** (DMG pg. 199) allowing them to contact her.

#### CHIMES

The chimes are placed in a forest to the north of the island. After an hour of walking, the party begin to see signs of spiderwebs, though a DC10 Intelligence (Nature) check reveals that these are unnatural. The chimes are found in a clearing, as follows:

As you continue onwards, the sparse webbing on the trees grows thicker and thicker, choking out the sun and plunging the area into an early dusk. Ahead, in a rounded clearing, something metallic glimmers: you can just make out the long pillars of the chimes, moving soundlessly in the breeze.

A creature is hiding in the shadows of the chimes. Have the character in the lead roll a Wisdom (Perception) check opposed by a Dexterity (Stealth) check for the creature. Choose from the below:

#### APL Encounter

- 1 giant spider\* (MM pg. 328). Increase the spider's hit points to 52 but reduce its damage to 6 (1d6 +3) piercing damage and 4 (2d4) poison damage (half on a successful save).
- 2 2 giant spiders\* with the same adjustments as above.
- 3 2 giant spiders\* per above and a swarm of spiders (MM pg. 338). The swarms dissipate if the giant spiders are defeated.
- 4 Demon spider: use the stat block of a **shadow demon** (MM pg. 64) with the *spider climb, web sense* and *web walker* characteristics of a **giant spider**.
- 5 A demon spider per above plus 2 **swarms of spiders** under its control. The swarms dissipate if the demon spider is defeated.
- 6 1 drider\* (MM pg. 120) and 2 giant wolf spiders\* (MM pg. 330).
- 7 1 drider\* and 2 giant spiders\*.
- 8 1 drow priestess of Lolth (MM pg. 129) and 2 giant wolf spiders (MM pg. 330).

All of these creatures are reskinned as shadowy abominations. They are immune to charm and other mind-affecting abilities, though the drider and priestess speak with some programmed intelligence; treat them as remnants of the dark priestess (Chessala) which, although non-living, bear a few traces of her wicked personality. Apply the following adjustments to any of the above creatures marked with an asterisk:

#### **Shadow Creature Template**

Add the following characteristics:

*Light Sensitivity.* While in bright light, the shadow creature has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

**Shadow Stealth.** While in dim light or darkness, the shadow creature can take the Hide action as a bonus action.

The curse on the chimes is tied to the shadow creature(s)' life force; once they are defeated, silvery light shines out from the chimes and purifies them. They ring softly for a moment and then fade to silence, waiting for the moon to rise.

#### WIND PIPES

The wind pipes lie on a smaller island to the south of the temple. A bridge spans the gap, however the spell that once preserved and reinforced it has frayed over time. Have everyone roll DC10 Dexterity saving throws on their way through. On a failure, they slip over the edge but catch the rope at the last minute. They can make two more checks to save themselves, or will fall into the water on a failure, taking 35 (10d6) falling damage.

The wind pipes are housed in a large structure at the top of the hill. The structure is built of stone and mud and fully blocks out the sun. The creatures inside have a similar sensitivity to light and do not follow anyone outside; characters can use this to their advantage with ranged attacks.

Regardless of the chosen stat block, the creature within takes the form of a writhing mass of darkness which grows teeth, claws or other appendages as necessary.

APL 1	Encounter
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- 1 2 **shadows** (MM pg. 269)
- 2 3 **shadows** (MM pg. 269)
- 3 A **water weird**\* (MM pg. 299) without fire resistance
- 4 A black pudding\* (MM pg. 241)
- 5 Three **mimics**\* (MM pg. 220)
- 6 An **invisible stalker**\* (MM pg. 192)
- 7 A **young black dragon**\* (MM pg. 88). Reduce AC by 2 but add resistance to slashing, piercing and bludgeoning damage and immunity to necrotic damage. Its breath weapon and bite are necrotic rather than acidic.

8 A **young black dragon**\*, adjusted as per above, and 2 **shadows**.

Apply the shadow creature template defined previously to any creatures marked with an asterisk. Once they too are defeated, the wind pipes shine and sing for a moment before fading to silence. They sound again at dusk.

## **Moonlight Ritual**

Izalia greets the party graciously and enquires as to their success. She is nearly overwhelmed when she learns that the two instruments have been purified. Izalia explains that her goddess is strongest on the night of the full moon – which is tonight. At midnight, she will attempt to restore the ancient protective magic of El'tara. She asks one last favor: during the ritual she must devote herself entirely to her prayers and cannot maintain her protective barrier. She asks that they defend her until the ritual is complete. If all goes well, she should not require more than 30 minutes. The ritual takes place in the dais that opens to the moonlight.

Protecting the temple is less about battle prowess and more about allowing players to exercise their creativity. The ritual occurs at midnight, and the party can use that time to prepare traps or other defenses. The temple contains wooden furniture, fuel and a small armory of hunting equipment and swords dedicated to Eilistraee. The party can also convince the residents of the temple to assist with preparations, or with the battle itself.

#### The Dance of the Sword Maiden

The instruments begin to play again at night, and this time in perfect harmony: the strange dissonance of the previous night is gone. At midnight, Izalia approaches the party and lets them know that she is ready to begin. The party can choose where they wish to stand at this point. If they choose to stand with Izalia, they see the following:

Izalia leads the way to the dais at the top of the temple. You are greeted with a view of the lustrous full moon, which seems huge amidst the clear, starry sky. Izalia kneels before the altar and takes in a deep breath. She raises her hands and begins to chant. Light glimmers around her fingers and collects into the shape of a longsword. She rises and begins to dance. Her movements are hypnotic, interwoven with the delicate song of the bell, the chimes and the wind pipes, and for some time it is difficult to take your eyes away. Soon enough, however, you spot movement below.

Zombies or other undead begin to climb up the cliffs. Allow players to decide what their immediate actions are as the zombies climb (e.g. setting off any traps). Describe the attacking foes using the encounter table under "The First Night" earlier in the adventure, but increase the number of foes.

Rather than tracking hit points, treat any successful attack as knocking back one or more of the undead. They either rise again or are replaced by another, but the player character has at least won some time. Use either personal judgement to determine the success of the party in holding back the hordes, or track the "pursuit level" as follows:

- On the first turn, the pursuit level is 0.
- If at least half of the party are successful in their actions (attacking zombies, triggering traps etc.), the pursuit level does not increase. If not, it increases by 1.
- If the whole party is successful in their tasks, or if at least one is wildly successful, the pursuit level decreases by 1.
- If the pursuit level hits 3, the waves of undead are close enough to attack.

## **Return of the Spider**

Unless the wave spider was fully destroyed at the beginning of the adventure, it begins to approach during the battle. Any character with a passive Perception score of at least 14, or who makes an active check, spots it slowly making its way towards El'tara. Izalia is well into the ritual at this point and notices nothing. Her eyes are closed as she sings softly and dances with her glimmering sword. She is moving so swiftly at this stage that it is dangerous to approach her (DC15 Dexterity save or take 1d8 slashing and 2d8 radiant damage).

#### The Final Push

Each turn, make sure to describe each of the following events on their initiative count:

- Results of each of the PC's actions.
- The actions of any NPCs assisting the party.
- The progress that the undead have made up the cliff.
- The progress of the ritual.
- The approach of the wave spider.

## **CONCLUSION**

The DM may either chose a dramatic moment for the ritual to conclude or can have this occur after 10 rounds of activity. The result is as follows:

Light bursts out from the center of the dais, momentarily blinding you. The undead that had begun to make their way into the temple all scatter and fall limply back into the waves.

The light continues to flow outwards, reaching for the arachnid monstrosity already reaching its gigantic arms out for El'tara. With one final glorious tone of the bell, the light strikes the creature, which lets out an earthshattering shriek and then dissipates into black smoke. At that altar, Izalia still stands with gleaming sword held high. She lowers the blade as she turns to face you, and then promptly drops it and falls to her knees.

A maiden stands between you and the high priestess, with long silver hair shining like a halo around her form. Her dark dress is dotted with jewels that shimmer like the night sky.

"L-lady Eilistraee," Izalia breathes.

Give the players time to react, and to speak if they wish. Continue as follows:

The avatar smiles at each of you, and then speaks in an echoing melodic tone. "You have done well this day, my children. The followers of Lolth have ever burned with hatred, but even the deepest darkness cannot extinguish the light of hope. May it ever illuminate your path."

Eilistraee's avatar bows, sweeping her dark skirts all around, and in a flash of moonlight, she is gone. All that remains is a gleaming silver boat, waiting at the harbor to take you home. Award XP based on the Encounter Budget table from the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, treating this as a deadly encounter for the purpose of XP. Telther will pay out his promised reward, and the drow on the island will also offer up any treasures that the party have not already taken. Finally, Eilistraee has blessed the PCs with a ship. The DM may decide whether this is gifted permanently or if it fades upon reaching land. Telther will also happily buy it. Though he was initially demoralized by the danger, as soon as it has passed he sees the events as a jolly adventure he would happily repeat. He is sure to call on the adventures again in time.

When it at last comes time to leave the island, the PCs do so with Eilistraee's blessing, and with the music of the island ringing gladly behind them.

## -The End-

# **Appendix 1: Monster Stats**

Refer to the Monster Manual for monsters marked in **bold** within the adventure text.

## WAVE SPIDER

Gargantuan monstrosity, chaotic evil

**Armor Class** 18 (natural armor) **Hit Points** 419 (27d20 + 135) **Speed** 40 ft., climb 40 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	СНА
26 (+8)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	3 (-4)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Str +15, Dex +9, Con +12, Int +3, Wis +11

Skills Athletics +15, Perception +11

**Damage Immunities** cold, fire, poison, psychic **Condition Immunities** charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 14 Languages –

Challenge 21 (33,000 XP)

*Amphibious.* The wave spider can breathe air and water.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the wave spider fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

*Siege Monster.* The wave spider deals double damage to objects and structures.

*Reel.* The wave spider can use its move action to pull a webbed object or creature 20 ft. closer to itself.

#### **A**CTIONS

*Multiattack.* The wave spider makes four claw attacks, each of which it can replace with one use of Fling.

*Claws. Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 100 ft., one target. *Hit:* 28 (3d12 + 8) piercing damage.

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +15 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 21 (3d8 + 8) piercing damage plus 8 (2d8) poison damage. If the target is a Large or smaller creature grappled by the wave spider, that creature is swallowed, and the grapple ends. While swallowed, the creature is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the wave spider and it takes 42 (12d6) acid damage at the start of each of the wave spider's turns. If the wave spider takes 30 damage or more on a single turn from a creature inside it, it must succeed on a DC23 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or regurgitate all swallowed creatures, which fall prone in a space within 10 feet of the wave spider. If the wave spider dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse using 15 feet of movement, exiting prone.

**Fling.** One Large or smaller object held or creature grappled by the wave spider is thrown up to 60 feet and knocked prone. If a thrown target strikes 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 DC18 Dexterity saving throw or take the same damage and be knocked prone.

**Web (Recharge 5-6).** Ranged Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, range 60/120 ft., one Huge or smaller object or creature. *Hit:* The object or creature is restrained by webbing. As an action, a restrained creature can make a DC15 Strength check, bursting the webbing on a success. The webbing can also be attacked and destroyed (AC15; HP 40, vulnerability to acid damage, immune to bludgeoning, fire, poison and psychic damage).

#### LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The wave spider can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The wave spider regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

**Claw** or **Fling.** The wave spider makes one claw attack or uses Fling.

**Move.** The wave spider moves up to half its movement speed (or reels a webbed creature in 10 ft.).

**Thrash (3 actions).** The wave spider thrashes at the water, creating a 40 ft. tall wave which travels for 300 ft. before crashing down. Roll a saving throw for each vehicle in its path, adding 5 per 100 hit points of the vessel, and then determine the result as follows:

*0-5:* the vessel breaks apart or capsizes immediately. Any on board are flung into the sea.

*5-10:* the vessel has a 25% chance of capsizing. If it does not capsize, use the next tier to determine the result. In addition, it loses its next move action.

*10-25:* the vessel rocks violently and takes 5 (1d10) force damage for every five points below 25. Anyone on board must make a Dexterity saving throw, falling overboard on a failure: the DC is 30 minus the result.

*25-35:* anyone on board must succeed on a DC10 Dexterity save or fall prone.

35+: no effect.

## HIGH PRIESTESS IZALIA

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral good

Armor Class 13 Hit Points 84 (13d8 + 26) Speed 30 ft.

 STR
 DEX
 CON
 INT
 WIS
 CHA

 14 (+2)
 16 (+3)
 14 (+2)
 16 (+3)
 18 (+4)
 16 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +4, Wis +7, Cha +6 Skills Insight +7, Medicine +7, Perception +7, Performance +6, Religion +6 Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17 Languages Common, Elvish, Undercommon Challenge 3 (700 XP)

*Fey Ancestry.* Izalia has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put her to sleep.

**Sunlight Sensitivity.** While in sunlight, Izalia has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

**Innate Spellcasting.** Izalia's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC14). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *dancing lights* 1/day each: *darkness, faerie fire, levitate* (self only)

**Spellcasting.** Izalia is a 10<sup>th</sup>-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following cleric spells prepared:

- Cantrips (at will): guidance, mending, resistance, sacred flame, spare the dying
- 1<sup>st</sup> Level (4 slots): command, cure wounds
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Level (3 slots): *augury, calm emotions, gentle repose, lesser restoration, spiritual weapon*
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Level (3 slots): create food and water, dispel magic, mass healing word
- 4<sup>th</sup> Level (3 slots): *divination, locate creature*
- 5<sup>th</sup> Level (2 slots): dispel evil and good, hallow

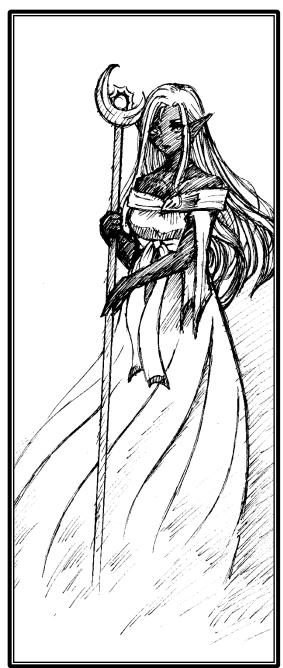
**Sword Dancer.** If Izalia casts *spiritual weapon*, she can use her bonus action to strike twice instead of once and deals an extra 8 (2d8) radiant damage on a hit.

#### **ACTIONS**

**Staff of the Moon.** Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage plus 4 (1d8) radiant damage.

#### REACTIONS

Warding Flare (4/Day). When Izalia or another creature is attacked by a creature within 30 ft. of her that she can



see, she can use her reaction to impose disadvantage on the attack roll, causing light to flare before the attacker before it hits or misses. An attacker that can't be blinded is immune to this feature.

**Dodge.** When an attacker that Izalia can see hits her with an attack, she can use her reaction to halve the attack's damage.

# **APPENDIX 2: DM TOOLS**

This section contains the following optional tools for DMs to print out and use:

- 1. Lists of NPC names for use by the DM.
- 2. Full size diagram of Mitha's Radiance to be provided to players.
- 3. Ship condition and distance trackers to be used either by the players or DM to track progress of the ship battle.

#### Human:

d6	Female	Male	Neutral	Surname
1	Lillia	Rodan	Alix	[None]
2	Sarah	Dilyan	Elden	Morwell
3	Elanor	Wake	Kendall	Smith
4	Cassandra	Derik	Sky	Tindall
5	Ruth	Rain	Lucky	Starbreeze
6	Magdalen	Calim	River	Tailor

#### Halfling:

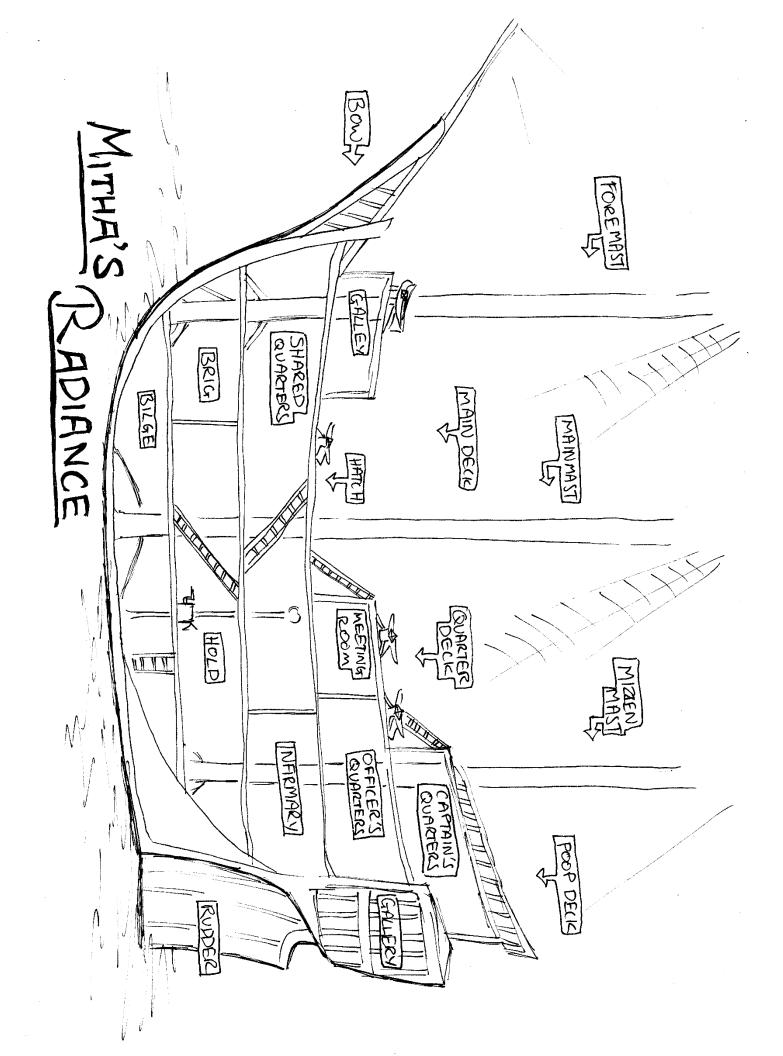
d6	Female	Male	Neutral	Surname
1	Elidrey	Peramin	Valen	Swiftfoot
2	Fenyra	Joder	Ari	Greenbottle
3	Darwyn	Ankin	Brooklyn	Thorngauge
4	Varis	Wilvon	Sydney	Redtree

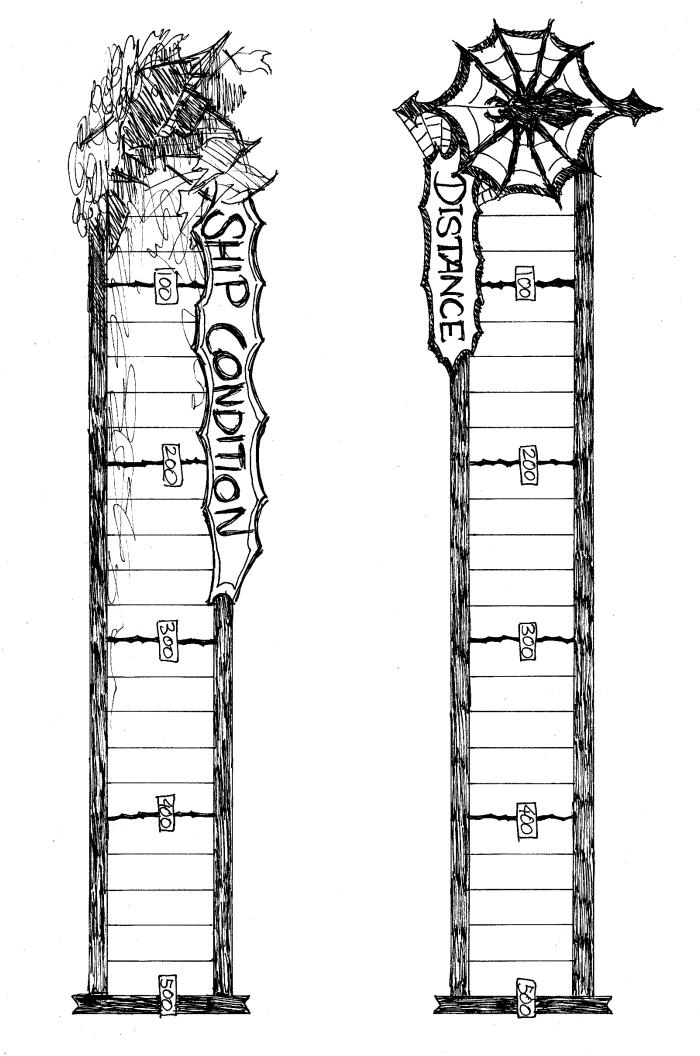
#### **Dwarf:**

d6	Female	Male	Neutral	Surname
1	Dalgari	Bulbur	Toren	Stonehelm
2	Herondi	Brundar	Dalgar	Farcalest
3	Olvia	Dwinri	Anber	Marblehold
4	Thgini	Morgrimm	Kilvar	Flamegreaves
5	Bildria	Thrond	Minos	Ungart
6	Dalnia	Ulbram	Grion	Frostanvil

**Drow:** 

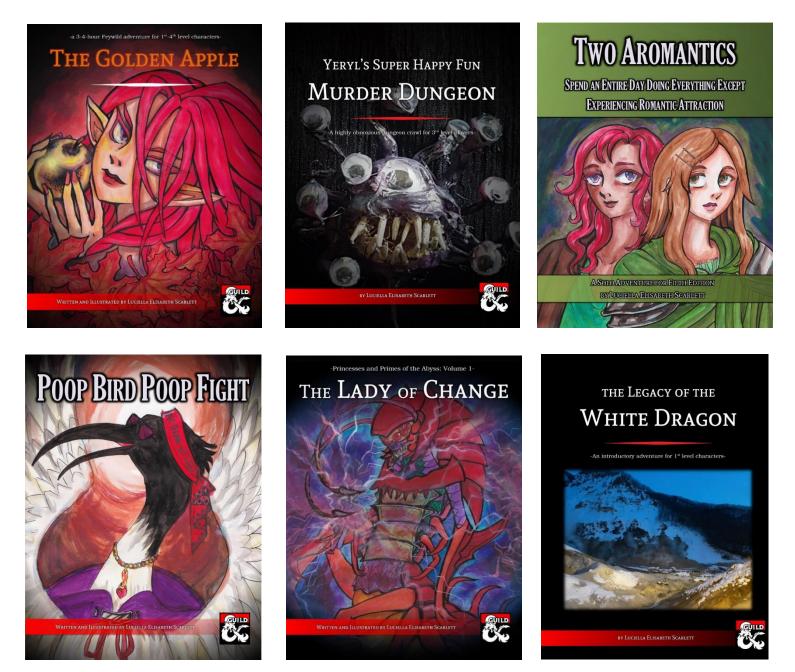
d6	Female	Male	Neutral	Surname
1	Halavin	Relonor	Nylruih	[None]
2	Ilnaren	Ryld	Ajilda	Melarn
3	Akordia	Duagloth	Ril'vir	Mizzrim
4	Sabrae	Gwylyss	Elreth	Xorlarrin
5	Tierva	Quendar	Tebryn	Faen Tlabbar
6	Zaelra	Velkyn	Zesstra	Baenre





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