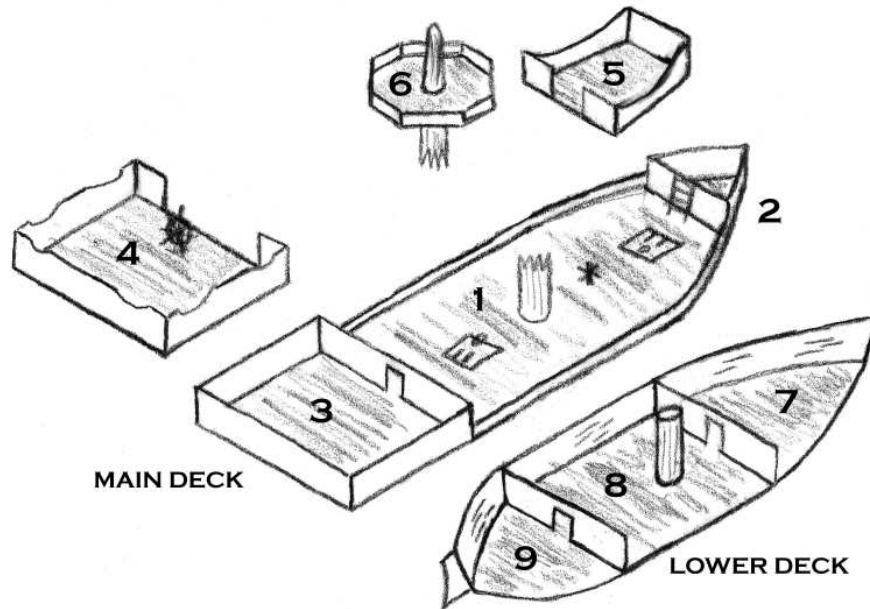


SECRET OF THE PALE REAVER

A ghost ship could contain priceless treasures, or perhaps just certain death



Hooks:

- The PCs hear rumors or find manuscripts about a ghost ship that appears every 150 years, and that it carries a very real statuette that is worth millions of gold pieces
- The PCs are hired by an eccentric collector to retrieve the idol aboard the ship
- The PCs are travelling somewhere by ship, and the night watchman spots a strange vessel drifting in the water.

Background:

Very near the beginning of time, long before man or even dwarves were created, the elves tried to create a god in their own image. The attempt backfired horribly; the result of their experimentation was a malformed mass of evil and chaos and darkness that threatened to devour the universe. Just in time, however, a group of elven wizards managed to permanently imprison the god-thing's essence in a statuette. This was the best the elves could do – they could not destroy the god-ish being they had created, so they settled on imprisoning it.

25 millennia passed, and rumor of the powerful statuette made its way to the ears of a warlord, who aimed to harness the statue's power for his own ends. He sent five ships in search of this idol - four were unsuccessful, but one never returned.

The fifth ship, The Pale Reaver, did indeed find the statuette, but its influence corrupted the crew and drove them insane before it could be delivered to the warlord. Such was the horror aboard that ship and such is the power of the statue that the ship and its crew are now doomed to sail for eternity as a ghost ship.

Every 150 years, the full moon passes through the exact center of a circular constellation of stars known as "The Well of Darkness." This phenomenon is known to astrologers as "The Eye of Darkness" because the constellation, with the moon in the middle, resembles an unblinking eye. Many legends speak of horrific and strange things that appear on this rare night. It so happens that one of these things is the

appearance of the Pale Reaver; it is able to pass, for a short time, into the world.

The ghost ship appears, anchored off the coast of a deserted island, when the moon enters the center of the constellation, and disappears again when the moon leaves the circle of the constellation.

General Mechanics:

- The ship appears for 2 hours. PCs still aboard the boat when it disappears again become permanent members of the crew.
- Any character that dies aboard the ship permanently becomes stuck on the ship.
- Optionally, a DM can use the Despair Deck; a player should receive a card whenever a character encounters something horrific or weird. Use only the Madness and Fear cards.
- Optionally, a DM can track all PC rolls and damage taken. Not knowing success, failure, or hit points remaining adds a sense of tension to the delve.
- The DM should use discretion as to when the Corrupting Presence aura should be used, but it suggested that it only be used if the characters manage to remove the idol from the ship.

Area 1: Main deck

Odd symbols are perfectly burned into the deck. No one knows what they are or what they mean. The only sounds the characters hear are the gentle lapping of water and the creak of the boat. Light and warmth emanate from the closed door of the captain's cabin (Area 3). There are also two hatches in the deck. The fore hatch leads below to Area 7, and the aft hatch leads below to Area 8.

Area 2: Forecastle Cabin

When the party opens the door to the forecastle cabin, they find a dozen dead men hanging from the rafters. One of the characters (and only one) sees one of the dead men's eyes snap open, and begin to flail about. The rope turns into a tentacle and releases him. The once dead man will shamble towards the character and attack. If the character hits the dead man, the body will suddenly appear back where it began - hanging limply from the rafters.

Special: Illusory combat (monster always misses)

Area 3: Captain's Cabin

If characters approach the closed door, they smell meat cooking, and hear soft music playing. Upon entering, they see the captain sitting at a table with several others, enjoying dinner. Looking up, he invites the characters in to have dinner. The table is set with food. There is also a map spread out in the middle of the table. The captain and his crew are discussing the map, which seems to indicate the location of buried treasure. If the characters mention the idol, for just a moment a dark look briefly crosses the captain's face, the room grows cold, and the music fades. Then, everything returns as it was, and the captain dismisses the idol as a myth. He continues to encourage the characters to eat and drink. Characters who eat any food or drink from the table see a different scene - mummified bodies covered in cobwebs sitting around a table full of slimy, moldy food, and a dusty treasure map. The stench of rotting fills the air. Black oily tentacles are wrapped around the mummified body's necks, moving them about like puppets.

Special: Treasure (Treasure map)

Area 4: Sterncastle Deck

A man stands behind the wheel of the ship with his arms at his side. He is not steering, and blankly stares straight ahead, completely unresponsive. Behind him, an old woman sits in a rocking chair, knitting something. Upon closer inspection, she is knitting a hangman's noose.

Area 5: Forecastle deck

There is nothing visible on this deck. However, the first character to set foot on the deck collapses for several minutes. While unconscious, the character sees a vision: *Naked elves with runes painted all over their bodies are dancing around a fire. One of the elves throws something into the fire. The fire turns black, and an oily, tentacled mass bursts violently out of it. It reaches out a fat tentacle, and strangles one of the ritualists. The remaining elves run in horror.*

Area 6: Crow's nest:

A character climbing to the crow's nest will notice that their origin ship seems to be sailing away. The distance depends upon the length of time they've been on the ship; the longer they've been there, the further away their home ship seems. This is an optical illusion (as well as a hint that time on the ship is limited) and only visible from the crow's nest.

Area 7: Ship Stores

Crates of supplies and sacks of grain are stacked in this forward hold. If characters spend time searching the crates, shadows will play across the walls, and they will see people in their peripheral vision. If characters pursue one of these phantoms, they will come across a young cabin boy crying in a corner. His neck is raw and bleeding, and his eye sockets are empty. Between his sobs, all the characters will be able to make out is "We found it, oh how I wish we had never found it..."

Area 8: Sleeping Quarters

Hammocks hang from the rafters of this cabin. None are occupied. There are several footlockers that contain moth-eaten clothing and a few rusty sabers. The characters hear whispering that beckons them into Area 9: Rear Hold.

Area 9: Rear Hold

When the characters enter, the air feels close and musty. It's hard to breathe. The only thing in this area is the idol; it sits atop a rough hewn stone pedestal. It is made of ebony, and depicts a thin elf kneeling with his face in his hands. Any creature that comes within 2 of the idol is subject to the Choking Tentacles attack, below. When hit, the characters see the idol transform into an oily mass of thick black tentacles (as in Area 5); it reaches out one of its tentacles, and grabs the character around the neck. The elven wizards who made the idol insured that there is no way to destroy the idol; doing so would release the imprisoned god-thing.

Choking Tentacles

Aura 2

Any creature entering or starting its turn in the aura takes ongoing 15/30/60 damage (by tier), and is immobilized.

Special: This aura can be shut off for one round daily when the idol is the subject of an attack with the divine and radiant keywords, or with a Standard Action Difficult DC Religion check. The creature that shuts the aura off is automatically the subject of the aura in the next round, even if that creature is not within 2.

Corrupting Presence

Aura 20

Any creature entering or starting its turn in the aura is compelled to one of the following states of mind (DM discretion):

- Madness
- Murderous Envy
- Malice
- Rage

Special: This aura is not always in effect. The idol can use the aura at will.

Special: Any creature that dies within the Corrupting Presence is cursed to wander for eternity as a ghost, and cannot be raised.