

BOROUGH BOUND PRESENTS

ANCORA BAY

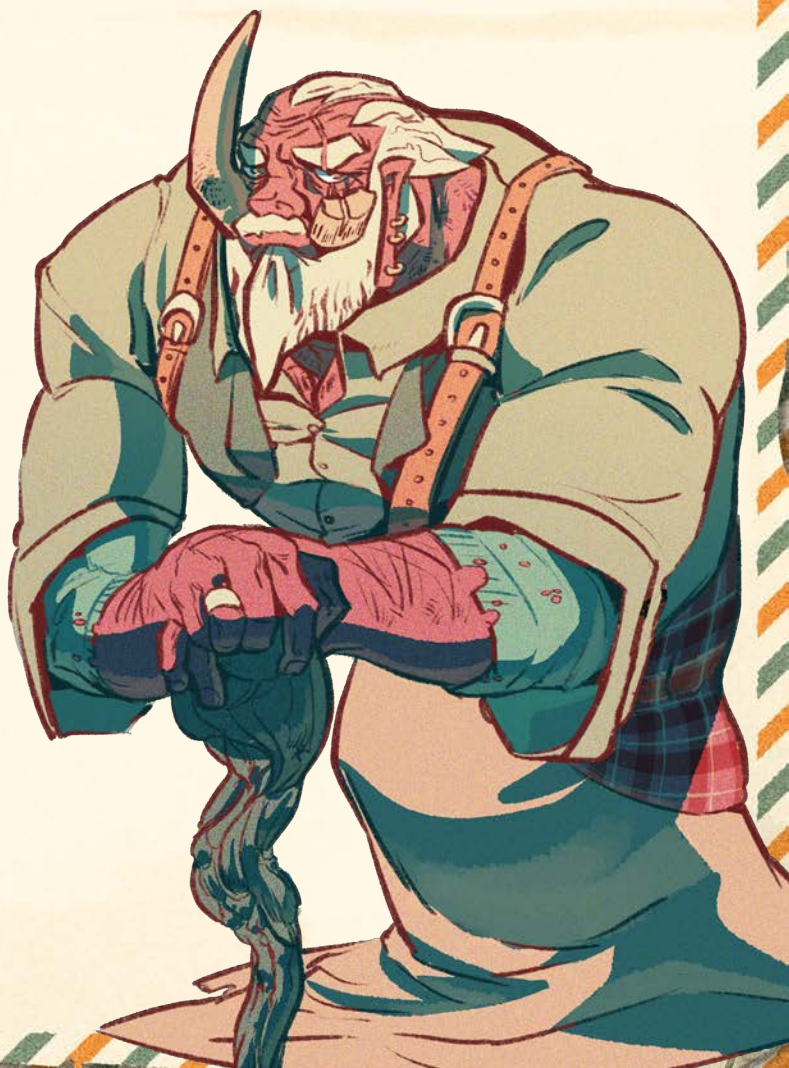


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Ancora Bay



*The First Metropolis of the
NEW World!*

THE SINKING MOUNTAIN TOP PORT

Ancora Bay, the “tropical paradise,” wasn’t always sitting perilously at sea level. It was once a small village on a misty hill—an afterthought in the great Transom Empire. Halflings hunted small beasts and lived in harmony with the land around them. Bitter winters gave way to temperate summers, and year to year, little changed. The halflings prayed to the Old Gods, and few outsiders ever visited their nameless village among the distant peaks.

That was 80 years, a fallen empire, and an environmental catastrophe ago. Now Ancora Bay is a port town, a hub for trade and piracy, a safe haven for all who choose to live under the twin rule of bigoted business tycoons and vicious military occupiers. In Ancora Bay, you will find the lecherous, the pious, the despotic, and the rebellious. Most of all, what you will find is ordered chaos: in the wake of an apocalyptic cataclysm that swept away half the world, the people of Ancora Bay persist, the remnants of a world now mostly forgotten.

Powerful forces are at play in this post-apocalyptic port. The military coalition that rules the bay has been co-opted by a superpowered dark elf with unclear goals. A ragtag group of freedom fighters is attempting to chip away at the stranglehold the orcs and goblins have on the city. The Ancoran business leaders

Hey Commander,

Still working on that list of “strategic assets.” I guess the flooding means we might need to reprioritize the docks eh? Those slums are sure getting... slummier. And what with the “halfling situation,” I gotta imagine we’re mostly pulling out of the village? I know that whole scenario is on a “need to know” basis. I guess Qiliria’s got her plans, and our job is just to keep up with her.

Luckily those new Barbs—er, “elite guard force”—are helping us at least keep the market and the palace safe. Now we just gotta figure out how those damn pirates keep sneaking in. Might be time to start ramping up some “tactical detentions.” I’ll leave that up to you, Commander.

-Captain Grug Grug G’Dug

who privately endorse the port's military occupation continue to enrich themselves and inexplicably win the hearts of the people. All the while, an upsurge in flooding is raising fears that Ancora Bay, too, might someday be swept under the ocean waves.

The city is sprawling, diverse, and teetering on a knife's edge. The indigenous halfling population is quickly disappearing, a platoon of super soldiers patrols the city streets, and mysterious dark magics are becoming more and more commonplace. Echoes of the destroyed empire linger, and some fear that the Old Gods have become angry and vengeful toward the dying world.

And yet, despite all of the bubbling tension, many in Ancora Bay live happy lives. A lively music scene keeps the citizens entertained, and hyper-optimized trade routes with the other remaining bastions of civilization keep the residents well-stocked with exotic foods and luxuries. If you haven't yet lost your home to a climate catastrophe, run afoul of the Corian oppressors, or accidentally joined a dangerous cult, there's a good chance that your satisfaction with life in Ancora Bay is at an all-time high... for now.

THE TRANSOM EMPIRE AND THE CALAMITY

Until 80 years ago, most of the known world of Roksunay—the realm in which a dimensional adventurer would find Ancora Bay—consisted of vast rolling plains, a far cry from the sparsely dotted islands that comprise most of the world today. The Roksunay of yore was almost entirely ruled by the Transom Empire, a great dynasty of elves. By wielding powerful magic, they solved many of society's great problems; famine, disease, and war were unheard of within their borders. It would be unfair to call the Transom Empire utopian, as many people were excluded from the glorious benefits of the Transom magic, but those who assimilated into the empire lived lives of bounty, and few of their needs went unaddressed.

The Transom Empire took centuries to build, and their unusual magic took equally long to perfect. A string of great elven kings led most of the world into prosperity, and though there were holdouts who refused to be absorbed into the Empire, at its peak, the total sum of its reach covered most of the world. And though it took hundreds and hundreds of years to feel as though they had conquered the known realm, in an instant, it was gone.

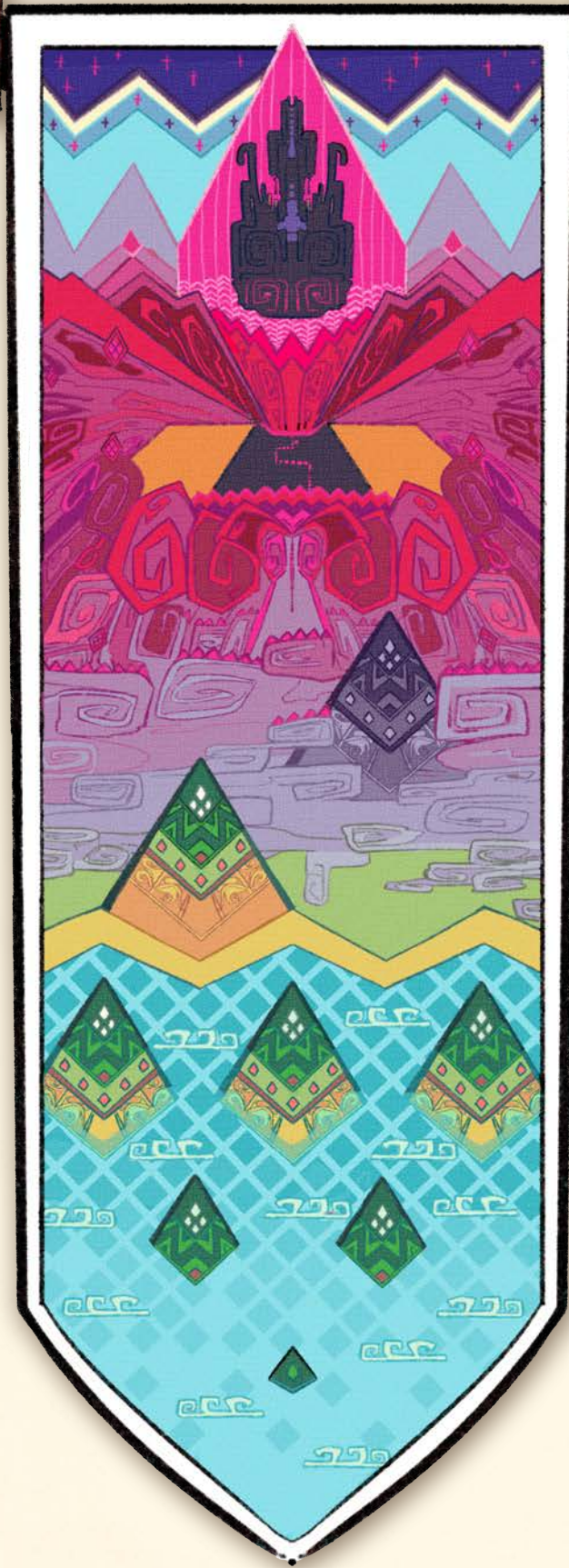


In an event known only as the Calamity, a great comet struck Mt. Keltrak, a volcano sitting near the center of the Transom Empire. The volcano burst, spewing lava into the air across hundreds of miles. Left in its wake was a massive cavity dozens of miles in diameter.¹ Millions died in an instant, vaporized by the shockwave of the impact or incinerated by the molten rock that seared the atmosphere. Those that survived the initial destruction had to contend with rapid apocalyptic climate shifts.

The seat of Transom power to the north became a frozen wasteland, mountains in the southwest crumbled, and most importantly: sea levels rose *drastically*. Entire continents were underwater in a matter of days. Though it's hard to determine an exact figure, estimates typically suggest that the oceans rose somewhere between 200 and 500 feet in the first few weeks alone. And while there were indeed torrential rains, there simply wasn't enough precipitation to explain this unfathomable effect. Whatever was left of the Transom Empire now sits at the bottom of a world-spanning ocean. Only those who were able to find high ground were able to survive, and even then, many of Roksunay's mountains simply collapsed into the sea.

The world of today bears almost no similarities to pre-Calamity Roksunay. The sprawling terrestrial elven kingdom has been replaced with a single great sea, peppered with islands. Almost all Transom elves were lost in the Calamity, and with them their magical insights. Gone are the days of easily cured diseases, bountiful harvests, and undisputed military dominance. The immense destruction and loss of life were paralleled with a crippling dearth of technological know-how. Libraries, laboratories, and arcane dynamos now sit inert under hundreds of feet of salt water.

In the immediate aftermath, survivors struggled to rebuild society in any way they could. Wars and famine were generational realities. Even once civilization began to stabilize, the far-reaching impacts of a post-Calamity world were still felt. In exploring Ancora Bay, adventurers will come face to face with those who lived through the "end of days." They will meet those who have strange theories about the cause of the Calamity, and those who would seek to lay ruin to Roksunay again. Many are happy with the world in which they now find themselves, but just decades ago, strife was omnipresent.



¹ Surviving geologists disagree as to whether this basin is a caldera left by the eruption of the volcano, or merely a crater from the impact of the comet. A comprehensive geological understanding of the Calamity has eluded Roksunay's greatest minds. They simply do not have the necessary magical or scientific references required to understand the interstellar mechanisms at play.

THE PEOPLES OF ANCORA BAY

As the single largest city in Roksunay, Ancora Bay's very existence is in defiance of its weather-torn world. Against all odds, a mere eight decades after the Calamity, Ancora Bay is a bustling city of almost 20,000 residents. Whereas most communities in Roksunay consist of homogenous populations living in similar locales to their pre-Calamity homes (the Hardu dwarves in their mines, the Leukotheans on the seafloor, and woodland elves in the vernal hilltops), Ancora Bay's non-indigenous communities far outnumber the halflings that called the peak home. While not exhaustive, the following list will outline some of the cultures an adventurer will encounter while traveling through this metropolitan port town.

MARKITANS

Humans from the surrounding lowlands that once sat at the foot of Ancora pre-Calamity make up a plurality of residents. These Markitans (named for the continent they once called their home) were distant vassals of the Transom Empire, far poorer than the elven citizens, but still reaping the societal benefits afforded them by the magical advancements of their lords. Many of these humans were far enough from Mt. Keltrak during the Calamity that they were able to seek higher ground as sea levels rose, and many flocked to what is now Ancora Bay. Most of the wealthiest Ancorans are of Markitan descent, and most are devotees to Eulesabella (described below). As they make up the largest portion of Ancora Bay's population, they are often guilty of xenophobia toward non-humans, or even humans from different pre-Calamity civilizations. These racial tensions have allowed the wealthiest in Ancora Bay to leverage their prejudice for political gain.

Markitans are typically fair-skinned with wavy brown hair. They must be careful in the tropical sun of post-Calamity Ancora Bay lest they burn. 80 years has not been enough time for them to adapt to such a drastic change in climate.

d8	Male	Female	Surnames
1	Benjamin	Charlotte	Booker
2	Charles	Elizabeth	Cunningham
3	Clarence	Frances	Duncan
4	Jack	Grace	Gibson
5	Peter	Mabel	Marshall
6	Richard	Mary	Rannock
7	Thomas	Priscilla	Shaw
8	William	Violet	Teller

CORIANS

Members of the "monstrous" races (primarily orcs and goblins) that attempted to assimilate into Transom life were subjugated. Those that rebelled were crushed by overwhelming military might. Orcs and goblins had few options for survival under the xenophobic rule of the elven Empire. Many fled to narrow peaks in the southeast where they lived largely nomadic lifestyles. Of course, living on mountaintops meant that most of these outcasts were spared in the aftermath of the Calamity. As the world began to take shape anew, the various clans united under a single banner. They learned to build great warships and commandeer the seas. They adopted the name "Corians," a bastardization of "Ancora," with the express purpose of one day conquering the quickly growing city-state.

They succeeded. Partially. The Corians are the *de facto* rulers of Ancora Bay. After a bloody and ruthless war that consisted primarily of repeated massacres of Ancora citizens, the people of Ancora Bay proposed a treaty: The Ancora Compromise. Under this agreement, the Corians would become the official armed forces of the city. They were granted a massive share of real estate within Ancora Bay and a huge degree of political autonomy. In exchange, they no longer slaughter, enslave, or rob Markitan civilians... at least under official orders.

Distrust and unease toward the Corians are omnipresent. They were granted sweeping jurisdiction over Ancora Bay as a way to end an onslaught of death and destruction, and most residents feel that the Corians do not deserve to be equal partners in the quest to rebuild Roksunay. In truth, much of this animosity is warranted. To this day, the Corian occupation of Ancora Bay, though *legally sanctioned*, is a violent affair. Corians have become much like the oppressors they once detested, favoring brutal and selective justice over a truly free and flourishing society.

That said, much of Ancora Bay's antagonism toward the Corians is rooted in centuries-old prejudice. After all, wars amongst all peoples of Roksunay were frequent and brutal in the years following the Calamity. It just so happens that Corians look quite different and they *won*. If the Markitans were calling the shots, it seems overwhelmingly likely that they would treat the Corians with just as much distrust.

Corians display significant biological diversity. Some goblins are no more than 3' tall, whereas orcs tower over most humans and weigh upwards of 300 pounds. Hobgoblins act as military commanders, and the apelike rungals traverse the city rooftops with ease. Though not all Corians serve in the Corian Fleet, more than half have some direct involvement with the armed forces. Nearly all Corians revere Dee'pak as their primary deity.



GM NOTE: While you are likely familiar with goblins, orcs, and hobgoblins, rungals are a species unique to Roksunay. These simian goblinoids have many of the most striking traits of various primates: the long prehensile tails of lemurs, bold face flanges of orangutans, and the vicious fangs of baboons. They are particularly well-suited to the jungle terrain of the less developed portions of Ancora Bay, as well as to the rigging needs of Corian ships.

The Corians of Ancora Bay descend from various clans in the Fierce Atoll of the southeastern seas. Despite that, most have forsaken their clan names for the sake of Corian unity. Those who adopted their clan name as a sort of surname typically do so if they choose to more thoroughly integrate into non-Corian society where surnames are more common.

d8	Male	Female	Clan Names
1	Akat	Ashtan	Bragramm'an
2	Chogg'ul	Boshatt	Dha
3	Dink	Eshtonh	G'Dug
4	Grahmtuk	Mekullsh	Garuuk Ahm
5	Kalkrot	Rashboh	Karkuu
6	Pahjuu	Shohsht	Styhj
7	Ruhr	Toshkan	Tryndohk
8	Zog	Yuhrhh	Uhhh Tektanah

HILL HALFLINGS

Though they are the only group indigenous to Ancora Bay, the hill halflings are far outnumbered by many of the other racial and cultural groups. This initially had more to do with low halfling birth rates than it did with any form of subjugation, though this has changed in recent weeks. The small population of their hilltop has remained relatively stable for centuries, changing very little after the Calamity. While a few halflings live in the city proper, most live in a small village on the outskirts of town. Despite living in relative peace and isolation from their new neighbors, expanded development within the city is quickly encroaching on the edges of their unnamed village.²

Hill halflings live in unity with the land. They are primarily hunter-gatherers, but will cultivate crops when they can be sure that the seeds they are using won't interfere with the local ecosystem. This has proven difficult over the past eight decades as the natural environment has been anything but stable with the rapidly shifting climate. Whereas the halflings once lived in high-elevation temperate forests, they now live in a dense rainforest. Though this environmental shift has occurred gradually in the 80 since the Calamity, the hill halflings have been forced to dramatically adjust to the changing climate in a way that was never expected of previous generations. They've had to adapt to an entirely new set of flora and fauna, and the threats of a thickly-wooded jungle tend to be far greater than that of a sparse pine forest.

The hill halflings are the only group in Ancora Bay that have wholeheartedly rejected worship of the New Gods. They cling to the old faiths, practicing what most residents would consider "pagan" rituals in their rapidly changing jungle homes. Though halfling life is hardly free from scarcity, they are able to maintain a healthy work / leisure balance thanks to bountiful harvests that can be found in the overgrown jungles. This leaves them with plenty of time to devote to crafts, religious practices, and leisure time.

d8	Male	Female	Clan Names
1	Chanco	Banon	Bluehill
2	Colby	Brie	Fogwind
3	Cotswold	Branza	Glenseed
4	Humbold	Crowdie	Handberry
5	Korall	Kalari	Mistknown
6	Lor	Lappi	Oldwood
7	Stilton	Oka	Wisebough
8	Tybo	Orda	Youngbranch

² The halflings of Roksunay never give names to their settlements. They have always viewed this toponymic quirk as a way to respect the land they called their home; to name it would be to claim some form of dominance or ownership. Though a rather clunky turn of phrase, their home settlement is most often referred to as "Ancora Bay's Halfling Village" in official documents, though halflings usually sidestep this awkward nomenclature by simply avoiding sentence structures that would necessitate it.

OTHER PEOPLES

Collectively, the Markitans, Corians, and hill halflings make up roughly four in five Ancoran residents. The remaining one-fifth of the population at any given time is exceedingly diverse, drawn to Ancora Bay as a beacon of economic freedom, cultural significance, or simply safety in numbers.

AL IBRANI - The Markitans are not the only subgroup of humans in Roksunay. The Al Ibrani once lived to the east of Ancora Bay, and now live on vast desert islands that rose up from the seafloor during the Calamity. Though still free from Corian rule, it seems inevitable that the Corians will someday stretch their grasp to the Al Ibrani as well.

HIBOUROC - The owl-like hibouroc live far in the southeastern karsts known to outsiders as the Deep Fangs. Though they are doggedly independent, many have taken on the role of Roksunay's messengers, flying long distances to deliver mail across the disparate islands of the now flooded world.

LEUKOTHEANS - Proud deep-sea creatures, the Leukotheans weren't just spared by the Calamity, but have unambiguously benefited from the rising sea

levels. The Leukotheans now control the ocean basin where Mt. Keltrak once stood. Though they are generally dismissive of land-dwellers, they do occasionally requisition arms from Ancora Bay smithies.

NEW EMYNORANS - Woodland elves were oppressed and subjugated under Transom rule. For the simple crime of refusing the call to urbanism, they were considered anathema. They retreated deep into the woods away from the watchful eyes of the empire. Many were spared during the Calamity, and with their new independence have built a creative utopia adjacent to a lake filled with a magically nutritious liquor. New Emynorans are frequent trade partners with Ancora Bay, though they are even more xenophobic than the Markitans.

SHIMA KAME - These bipedal turtles are hatched to the west of Ancora Bay but tend to be nomadic explorers, well-suited to Roksunay's oceanic landscape. Many have taken up the mantle of exploring the seafloor and trying to recover the secrets lost in the Calamity. Despite their relatively small numbers, almost every shima kame finds their way into Ancora Bay at least once or twice during their roughly 50-year lifespans.

Gibson,

Them neighbours are at it AGAIN. This is the third time this year they've remade their bloody home.

The hammering never ends. Day and night, day and night.

Their house is way up on stilts now. And you know there's moss monsters roaming below. I hear them sucking on the drainpipes at night.

I gotta leave Ancora before the whole bay is under the sea and it's just his home towering over the waves.

I'm on the next ship out of here, mark my words.

Mark



Gibson

Varsanspear

Varsan-Beneath-t'Sea

VR-19-14



THE NEW GODS

In the aftermath of the Calamity, faith in the extant pantheon of Transom deities was largely abandoned. It is difficult for even the most devout believers to watch their entire world drown without questioning their belief system. Though pockets of believers (notably the hill halflings) still pray to the Old Gods, most in Roksunay now pray to between one and three deities they view as either “newly divine” or simply newly worthy of worship. While belief in these three deities is not mutually exclusive, most will either give primacy to one of the trio or outright deny the existence of the other two.

For each of these three faiths, divine miracles are *demonstrably real*. Devout followers of each God have been able to dispense divine magic either through sheer force of will or through the beneficence of their chosen deity.

GM NOTE: Regardless of any other ongoing metaphysical mysteries that pervade life in Ancora Bay and Roksunay at large, adventurers should be aware that the Gods of Roksunay (both the New and the Old) *verifiably exist*, that they are *opinionated*, and their divine judgments have *ramifications*. Whether or not this means specifically that the Calamity is the direct result of divine intervention remains up to you as GM, but if the context allows or requires it, it is acceptable for the Gods to either meaningfully react to the actions of the party, or even directly communicate with them.

EULESABELLA, GODDESS OF MERRIMENT, FLOWERS, AND LIQUOR

In the anarcho-primitive societies that emerged after the end of the Transom Empire, there was a renewed sense that the most important part of life wasn't actually mere freedom from hardship. This freedom could disappear in an instant, and in its wake, a much more tenuous existence can arise. In the difficult times that followed the Empire's collapse, people took solace in what few joys remained: the beautifully flourishing wildlife sprouting from the volcanic ash, the company of loved ones who survived the apocalypse, and the omnipresent bottles of liquor that floated up out of cellars to the surface of the ocean as the sea level rose.

The early days of the new world were rough for any who lived through the Calamity. Merely building shelter on climate-ravaged mountaintops became a top priority. Vengeful, nuanced Gods embodying suddenly foreign concepts such as “the forge” or “abstinence” no longer seemed relevant. Instead, praise was heaped upon Eulesabella, a deity who embodied the universal joys of partying, drunkenness, and colorful flora.

Eulesabella has few complicated tenets. She demands no penitence, no harsh judgment, and no strict tradition. Instead, followers of Eulesabella adhere to hedonistic ideals: drink and be merry, engage in the pleasures of the flesh, self-medicate your way through hardship, and dance until the sun rises. It is easy to see how She quickly amassed such a huge following in the wake of such destruction.

DEE'PAK, GOD OF TREACHERY AND THE SEA

Though heralded as a "New God" by the ex-vassals of the Transom Empire, Dee'pak has been the primary deity of the Corian races for centuries. Even when "the seas" made up a tiny portion of the total area of Roksunay, goblin clerics sought Dee'pak's guidance for navigation, orcish warriors called on Dee'pak's strength in battle, and rungal hunters asked for Dee'pak's guile to aid their ambushes.

Dee'pak is the God of murder, disease, and secrets. He embodies many of the terrible realities of a lawless world, facets of life that were much less relevant under Transom rule. It is easy to see why the Corians have worshipped the deep sea deity for eons, but what is stranger is the growing devotion that He has garnered from humans and other non-Corian races. While some have taken to praying to Dee'pak for the values He espouses, many simply do it as a precaution; any afterlife over which Dee'pak presides is not one that they would hope to suffer. They beseech Him to merely forget about them as lowly mortals, and allow their souls to be pulled into a kinder heaven.

Worship of Dee'pak involves copious prayer and penitence. Services are crowded, loud, and anguished. Exalted priests share bizarre and unsettling readings in front of moaning masses who beg alternately for power and for mercy. Though not all creatures who worship Dee'pak are wicked or deeply immoral, those to whom Dee'pak grants divine power tend to be the most brutal and conniving devotees in the Corian Fleet.

ASTRAL FATHER, GOD OF STONE, FIRE, AND REBIRTH

The Calamity was the end of the Transom Empire, but it was also the beginning of a new world. Many of those who survived the initial impact were folks already living on the outskirts: dissidents, outcasts, and those who simply chose to reject the dominant order. A significant portion of these people and their descendents actually prefer the second chance they've been given. Roksunay is refreshed, full of change and opportunity, and though the future is uncertain, the power to shape it has returned to the hands of the once disenfranchised.

Those who value revolution and growth over consistency and stagnation are drawn to the teachings of the Astral Father, a (perhaps) needlessly poetic name for the comet that many now revere as a God. They view Him (Her? It?) as a being of divine providence. Followers call themselves Gatherers, and they endow the comet with mortal traits: the Astral Father is bold, chaotic, and fair.

Needless to say, the worship of a violent space rock that killed most sentient creatures worldwide and destroyed millenia of research and culture is looked down upon by many Ancorans. The Gatherers are still a fringe cult, a bizarre mishmash of heterodox thinkers, underprivileged urchins who need something to cling to, and strange necromantic practitioners who may or may not have ulterior motives.

COMMERCE

Though Ancora Bay may have complicated political, religious, and social tensions, it is nevertheless primarily a place of commerce. The various populations of Roksunay have finally rebuilt society to a level where trade can flourish amidst the relative safety of the Corian-dominated high seas. Spices from Al Ibra, lumber from New Emynora, jewelry from the Hardu Mines, and liquor from the Bronze Coast all flow through Ancora Bay. Whether those goods are destined for Ancoran manufacturing plants, for far-off bazaars, or the hands of Ancora Bay residents, they must first enter through Ancora's docks.

THE ABANDONED MARKET

The city streets are always abuzz with activity, but one corner of Ancora Bay that sees far less traffic than it once did is the open-air market adjacent to the docks. Previously the site of stalls from merchants both local and from afar, the market now sits empty. Not long ago, this was the *de facto* center of Ancoran life, where people from all over the world would gather to discuss current events, barter endlessly, and peruse exotic goods from every corner of the flooded world. Now, the market is closed. Why?

The short answer is climate change and profit maximization. Though the seas had long been stable, in recent years they've begun sporadically roiling, flooding the low-lying sections of Ancora Bay. These violent tides made an outdoor bazaar intermittently unfeasible. No matter how enticing the deals are, it was essentially impossible to ask citizens or visitors to trudge through knee-deep salt water to buy a new tunic, bracelet, or quiver of arrows.

GM NOTE: The newly unpredictable tides in Roksunay will be a recurring theme across the city. The constant flooding will force folks out of their homes, and will put pressure on the already cramped hillside of Ancora Bay. The causes and ramifications of this climate change are explored in greater detail in later chapters.

Seizing on this opportunity, Markitan business leaders began rapidly constructing an indoor facility to function as the new hub of trade in the city. Instead of a *laissez-faire* approach to stall ownership, the owners of the new marketplace demand hefty fees for a license to purvey goods. It is, however, multiple stories tall, allowing for comfortable sale of goods even during the sporadic floods. Furthermore, the Corians (working in league with the powerful commercial magnates), have started strictly policing the old abandoned market, fining or jailing anyone who attempts to sell goods there, even during calm seas. The free market days of Ancora Bay seem gone for good.

DENIA'S GALLERIA

This was the Consortium's answer to the flooded market: a cheaply built, overheated, pay-to-play shopping center. Denia's Galleria rents out space to whichever merchants can afford stalls. Unsurprisingly, rooms on the upper floors are drastically more expensive as they are relatively safe from flooding. The ground floor is reserved for what few halflings can afford space at all or for visiting merchants who don't know any better. Despite the name of this mall, there is no "Denia." Consortium planners simply believed that the name sounded both generic and nonthreatening, a weirdly devious marketing ploy to give the Galleria a sense of personality, when its true purpose is to function as a means of extracting a greater percentage of everyday merchants' sales and hoard it in the coffers of Ancora's wealthiest Markitans.

Despite its shortcomings, the Galleria still boasts an impressive array of goods, including both Ancora-made novelties as well as luxuries and trinkets from any other civilization with access to safe trade routes. The following list presents a few of the merchants with stalls an adventurer might visit during a trip to the Galleria:

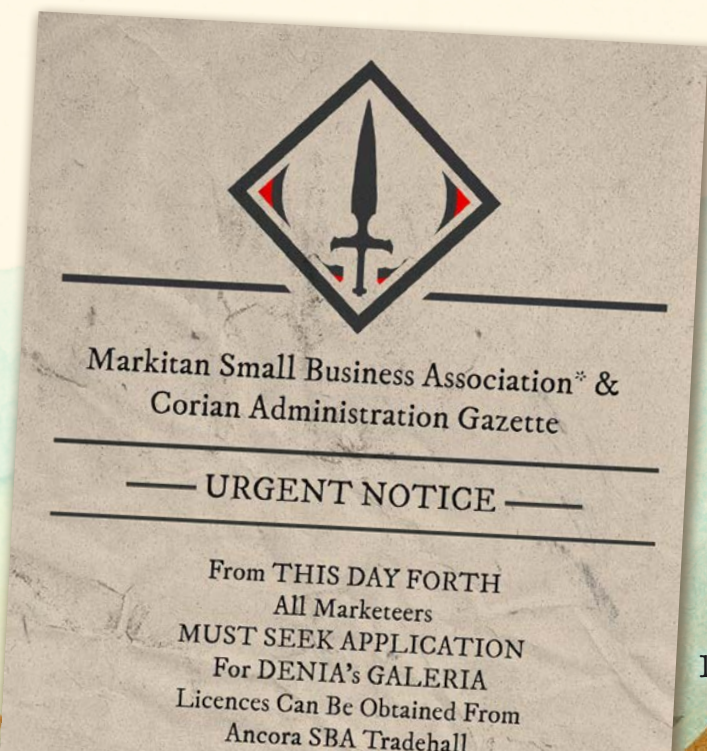
CAMFORTH HACKENSPACK: Though hardly the best bowyer or fletcher in Ancora Bay (that honor would belong to any number of superior halfling craftsmen), Camforth (he/him) is the one who has been able to most successfully establish himself as a commercial staple in town. Camforth is a bitter, balding, unmarried, middle-aged Markitan man, and he has channeled his self-loathing into his business. He'll undercut any of his competitors, flooding the market with bows and arrows that are cheaply made and cheaply sold.

SADIE FORTISSIMO: Daughter of the self-obsessed Sebastian Fortissimo—a member of the absurdly wealthy and powerful Consortium—Sadie (she/her) owns and manages Spice Crescendo, the premier vendor of exotic seeds, herbs, and other flavorings from around Roksunay. Sadie has taken advantage of her father's lucrative connections to the Corian Fleet

to ensure that just about every military ship in their armada will transport at least a barrel or two of spices into Ancora Bay whenever they dock at a distant port. This ensures that the logistics of importing spices are both straightforward and inexpensive. Sadie takes after her father, and is dismissive toward any visitors to her store with non-uman blood, despite the fact that her entire business relies on the shipping and spice cultivation prowess of overwhelmingly non-Markitan workers.

REGINALD STITT: Reginald (he/him) owns and operates The Cauldron, purveyors of all things magical and liquid. Potions, poisons, and alchemical ingredients can all be found in this well-protected stall on the top floor of the Galleria. Reginald (or Reggie, as he prefers to be called) is exceedingly tight-lipped when asked about the origins of his goods. Some believe that casual Reggie is secretly a gifted alchemist himself, while others suspect that he has ties to powerful dark mages among the Gatherers. Whatever the case, Reggie is easy-going, friendly, and a genuinely helpful store clerk who maintains positive relationships with all of his clientele.

HJARFORD BRATTLECOMB: Despite the many dwarven-made goods that can be found in Ancora Bay, Hjarford (he/him) is one of very few dwarves who has abandoned the mines that the rest of his kin call their home. Hjarford grew tired of the limited creative outlets for his interests; he simply was not interested in stone, in metal, or in gems. Instead, Hjarford is an avid leatherworker, creating glorious hats, belts, gloves, and other accessories. His work ranges from the purely stylish to the maximally practical. Even the hill halflings consider Hjarford's gloves the optimal choice for their hunters. Hjarford is lonely; he chose his profession and his passion over his family and friends. If only he knew the degree to which his new community in Ancora Bay appreciates him.





GILLY LEAFHOLLOW AND THE DISAPPEARING HALFLINGS

One of many ordinary Ancora Bay citizens who fell victim to the change in Ancora Bay's marketplace laws, Gilly Leafhollow (she/her) no longer has much to lose. Unlike other halflings in her village, Gilly made her best effort to at least partially assimilate into Ancora Bay life. She sold the animal skins that she tanned to leather workers such as Hjarford Brattlecomb, and would always bring some game to the market to sell to curious Ancora Bay residents. With the help of her son Rister and husband Fengruv, she made decent money in the market which she used to supplement the village's stockpiles with any products they could not create themselves: potent medicines, metal tools and weaponry, and parchment that was normally incredibly labor-intensive to produce on their own.

Gilly lived a fulfilling life, caring for her family and living off the land, but still benefiting from the comforts afforded by the urban center that was so close to her home. Though some of her fellow halflings derided her as "common cityfolk," they would never complain when the curatives she purchased helped their children pass a nasty cold.

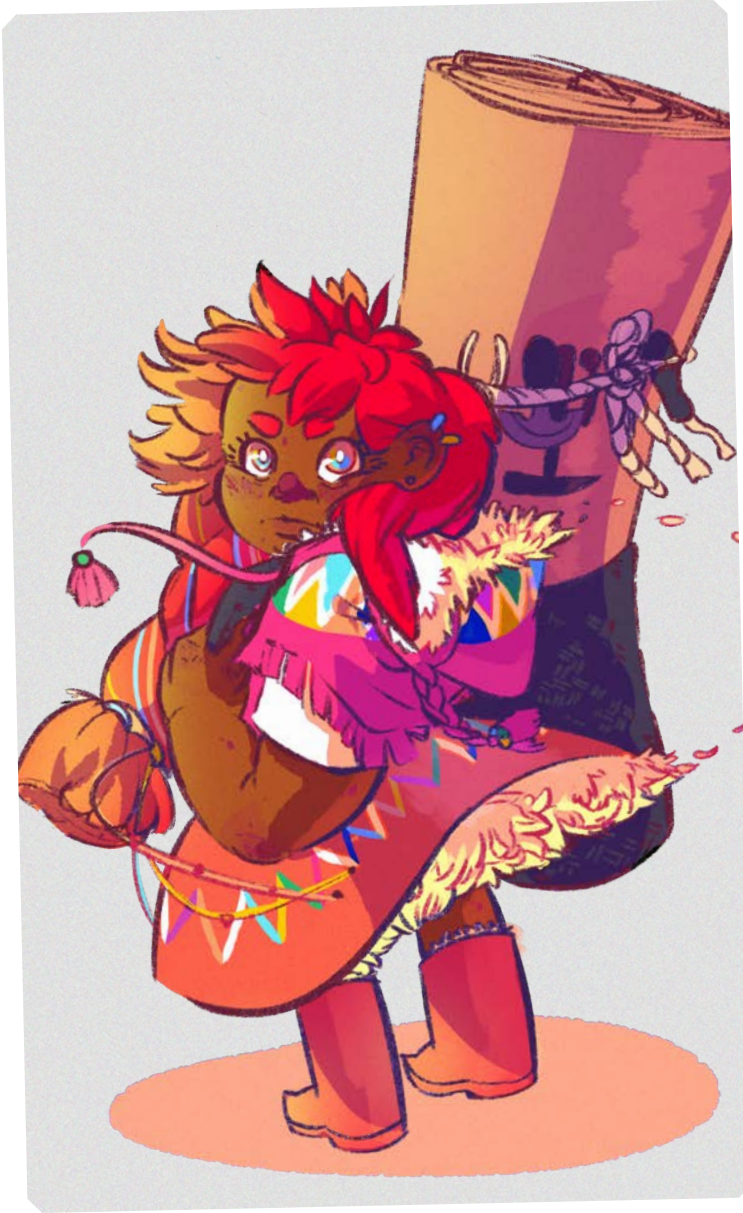
Then suddenly, the rug was pulled out from Gilly. With no marketplace in which to sell her wares, she had no income and no way to purchase what few goods her community desperately needed. Next, her son Rister tried to sell some hides illegally and was arrested, due in no small part to the strategic over-policing of halflings attempting to assimilate into Ancora Bay society. That was six months ago, and she hasn't seen him since. There was no trial, nor any record of his arrest. He might be held in the Corian jail in town, or he may have been shipped off to Gods know where. Finally, one day Gilly woke up to see that her husband was nowhere to be found. Though he was not the first halfling to disappear from their village, he was the one that finally got people talking.

The truth was that at least half-a-dozen other villagers had gone missing in the preceding weeks. Disappeared without a trace. Some vanished while out on a hunt, some while venturing in town, and others while sleeping. All of the villagers wanted to find their lost brethren and put a stop to the disappearances, but with no leads, most simply continued to go about their lives.

Gilly, though, was different. She was all alone, trying to care for a village that was quickly collapsing in front of her. While the rest of her kin wallowed in despair, Gilly committed to more aggressive action. She started looking for answers. She reached out to the local pirates (*The Splintered*, Roksunay's pirate union, is

explored in great detail in later chapters), the Gatherers, and the Corians. She started hanging around Denia's Galleria, spying on Ancora Bay's wealthy, and keeping tabs on boats coming in and out of port. To those who don't know her story, she likely appears insane, but if you lost your son, your husband, and your livelihood in the span of a few weeks, you would inevitably resort to drastic measures as well.

Whether she knows it or not, Gilly now has a target on her back. She has been asking too many questions and barking up too many trees. Even if most of her avenues of investigation are dead ends, the fact that she's snooping into the lives and activities of powerful people will not go unpunished.



INVESTIGATING THE DISAPPEARANCES

Any adventurers in Ancora Bay are likely to be sympathetic to the plight of the halflings. The villagers in the hills seem to be truly free from blame. They simply wanted to continue living their lives the way they always had, in harmony with their environment, and free from outside influence. Instead, they now find themselves adapting to a brand new ecosystem, encroached on by expanding urbanism, and quickly losing their population to mysterious (presumed) kidnappings. If the adventurers choose to attempt to unravel this thread, it will likely lead them to all corners of Ancora Bay.

There *are* folks throughout the city that know more, and also those who would willingly lead the party astray. Deciding who to trust and how best to help the halflings without putting them in further danger will be a constant challenge for the party.

Luckily, the party is likely to learn of the disappearances soon after entering the city. Any tavernkeep will certainly share the rumors they've heard, and if the party is conspicuous enough, Gilly Leafhollow is likely to confront the party directly, peppering *them* with questions about what they may or may not know. If they seem trustworthy enough, Gilly—endlessly brazen—will quickly enlist them in her search for answers and for justice. She has nothing to offer but whatever information she is able to gather alongside them.

GM NOTE: This narrative hook and that of Qiliria Tallrene (described below) are useful throughlines to help structure a party's time in Ancora Bay. A "definitive" answer to why and how the halflings are being abducted does exist and will be explored in later chapters. It is useful to dangle this plot thread in front of the party soon after they arrive in town as a way to motivate their exploration of the city. Clearly, there are events beyond the party's understanding occurring seemingly in plain sight. Unraveling this mystery, uncovering the secrets of the Transom Empire, and securing a more stable peace for Ancora Bay will likely become the ultimate goal of any vaguely moral group of would-be heroes traveling to the bustling port.

QILIRIA TALLRENE

Ever since the orcish and goblinoid clans banded together to form the Corians, they have operated by one principle: the strong dominate the weak. Though this may seem brutish or short-sighted, it has been a boon to Corian decision-making. In lieu of protracted debates, elections, or legal disputes, conflicts are resolved through battle. Corian warlords take control of battalions by besting their commanding officer in one-on-one combat. The strongest rise to the top, make decisions for all Corians, and lead the Fleet into ever greater control of the Markitan Archipelago.

There is, however, a quirk to this "might makes right" philosophy. *Technically speaking*, there's no explicit doctrine designed to curb outside influence. One particularly strong combatant could theoretically rise up through the Corian ranks and wrest control of large swaths of Corian command. It is unlikely they'd survive, and even if they did, they would have to fend off constant challenges from those beneath them. It would take an incredibly powerful outsider, someone with much to gain and little to lose, someone free from fear, born in darkness, conniving and barbaric in equal measure.

Enter Qiliria Tallrene.

Qiliria (she/her) is a dark elf, the maligned and reviled subterranean counterpart to the Transom elves. Though rumors abound, little is known definitively of her origins or motive. All that is known is that she wields incredible magic power, inexplicably possesses a deep knowledge of Corian customs and practices, and was quickly able to ascend the ranks of Corian military leadership. She now commands the full Corian Fleet, promising them glory, conquest, and mastery of the seas.... so long as they aid her in the process.

Though the Corians are a decidedly naval people, Qiliria eschews ship travel in lieu of arcane flight. Those unlucky few who have seen her in motion describe her appearance as "blurry," somehow "glowing in shades of black," and "nauseatingly unsettling to witness." Some describe witnessing a jetblack specter in a moonlit sky or a disturbingly vibrating figure blinking menacingly in and out of the city streets. Her face resists view; to merely behold her features is to try to make sense of a jumbled jigsaw puzzle, a disorienting abyss of foul visual static. Whatever magic she possesses is mysterious, otherworldly, and apparently threatening enough to evoke fear in the hearts of the toughest Corian warriors.



In addition to flight, Qiliria's known abilities include

1. Clairvoyance (Corians tells tales of Qiliria predicting every move a fighter will make before a duel)
2. Teleportation (Though it seems she prefers to travel via supersonic flight, she has been seen disappearing in one place and appearing somewhere else at impossible intervals)
3. Mind control (Soldiers have stabbed their brethren, eaten feces, and committed other repugnant acts after simply locking their gaze with Qiliria's)
4. Shapeshifting (Ancora Bay residents have claimed to see bats and tarantulas that display the same unsettlingly blurry illusory appearance that is believed to be unique to Qiliria)

Complicating any reports concerning Qiliria are the ways in which the conflicting details of her mythos have become a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is unambiguously true that a dark elf whose name is "Qiliria Tallrene" now commands the Corian Fleet. Just about every other detail is more or less unconfirmed. Some claims have more evidence than others (e.g. the preponderance of reports mentioning the strange aura emanating from her visage), but trying to understand the threat she poses, her potential aims, or exactly what her leadership means for the future of Ancora Bay remains tricky.

GM NOTE: Qiliria is a villain you can use to motivate an entire campaign. She is meant to be a monumental villain, a being with complicated motives, a complicated origin, a strange network of allies, and a variety of confounding abilities. That said, she is also entirely optional in the context of GMing Ancora Bay. While many plot hooks described throughout the Ancora Bay borough guides will reference her influence, little will necessitate the presence of a high-level dark elf villain as the sole motivation. If Ancora Bay is inserted into other settings, you may find it useful to give an existing villain an outsized influence on the Corian Fleet as a stand-in for Qiliria's leadership.

PLOT HOOK: IDENTIFY AND FOIL QILIRIA'S PLAN

Though the specifics are unclear, it is obvious to all that Qiliria hasn't simply commandeered the Corian Fleet on a lark. She wants *something*, and the Corians are going to help her get it. The common wisdom in town is that she is a power-hungry tyrant, a would-be dictator who plans to harness the collective might of the Corians to rule over the ashes of the old world.

GM NOTE: While this is indeed a possibility, there is plenty of evidence the party can easily unravel that would suggest that such a simple scheme is unlikely.

First of all, dark elves hate the sun. The light burns their skin and renders them lethargic and ineffective. Though Qiliria seems perplexingly immune to this effect, dominating the world seems as though it would hardly be worth it for Qiliria if her kin could not join her aboveground. Secondly, Qiliria has yet to even truly conquer Ancora Bay. It would be trivially easy with the combined might of the Fleet—for that matter, she might be able to take charge by herself—and yet she has yet to establish any sort of direct control of the city-state. Altogether, she seems barely interested in the day-to-day goings-on of Ancora Bay. Thirdly, if Qiliria had wanted to rule over Roksunay, it would have been far easier to leverage her incredible abilities for a world domination scheme decades ago. By all accounts, this elf is at least 200 years old, and would have had a much easier time taking control of the disorganized seas in the early days of post-Calamity Roksunay.

How Qiliria plans to use the Corian Fleet remains an unanswered question to all, including the Corians. Though any individual officer would never admit it, there is an embarrassing lack of comprehension amongst the Corian ranks as to why Qiliria chose to ascend their military ladder. Though there need not necessarily be a nefarious goal, Qiliria's unexpected gambit has raised eyebrows, and as she has yet to make efforts to improve life in Ancora Bay, it seems likely that her presence is going to make it much, much harder for a great many people.

Determining Qiliria's goals and thwarting them will likely be one of the primary aims of any party of adventurers traveling through Ancora Bay. Three factors will render this goal particularly difficult to accomplish:

1. Qiliria is rarely physically present in Ancora Bay. Where she spends her time is unknown, but she is frequently seen jetting off into the evening sky.
2. Qiliria is secretive. She is incredibly tight-lipped even with officers working in close concert with her.
3. Qiliria is *powerful*. If one were to somehow pin her down, it would still be nigh impossible to defeat her in combat.

Any adventurers aiming to thwart Qiliria's plan will have to first address each of these complications.

The full details of Qiliria's origins, powers, and complicated plans are enumerated in the accompanying document *Qiliria Tallrene and the Secret History of Roksunay*. In short, Qiliria possesses a powerful artifact known as the **Neverlight Amulet** that grants her profound power. It was the tricky task of finding this amulet that delayed her goals until the past few weeks. With this amulet, Qiliria isn't *technically* invincible, but she is exceedingly deadly and resilient. Deactivating this amulet will require adventurers to first discover its history, and then eliminate the source of its powers: four titans wandering Roksunay who have been sapped of a portion of their strength which now feeds the amulet. Either defeating the titans or severing the magical link that feeds the amulet should suffice.

Qiliria aims to use the cult-like Gatherers to summon another comet. Instead of causing a *merely* destructive shockwave and climate catastrophe, she hopes to puncture a hole between Roksunay and The Dee'p, the dark and chaotic realm of Dee'pak. When Roksunay is bathed in shadow and madness, the dark elves can retake the surface and rule Roksunay as its rightful lords.

For most adventurers, the twin keys to defeating Qiliria will be fact-finding and strategic alliances. Half of the difficulty of confronting this imposing threat

is simply unraveling her schemes, and though no one but she knows the full plan, individual Corian commanders, Gatherer higher-ups, and seemingly irrelevant Ancorans may offer useful insights. Alliances will help deal with Qiliria's armies. Even the most powerful party of adventurers will be unable to stop Qiliria if she sics the entirety of the Corian Fleet on them. Confronting Qiliria necessarily means gathering a force capable of confronting the Corians as well.

Ultimately, going from first hearing of Qiliria to fully discovering her schemes, and eventually defeating her may take quite a long time. One trip to Ancora Bay may not reveal everything a party needs to know in order to disempower the Queen of the Dark Elves and the Admiral of the Corian Fleet. She is a monumental danger, an existential threat to all who live in Roksunay. There are those in Ancora Bay who might aid the party in their quest to stop her, but there are just as many who will stand behind Qiliria to the bitter end. It is up to the adventurers to decide how they can amass a tactical advantage before finally confronting the dark witch.

For a particularly daunting task, or for longer running campaigns that require additional wrinkles to complicate the task of stopping Qiliria, consider introducing any of the following additional challenges.

1. Qiliria has knowingly inflicted herself with **vampirism** in order to lengthen her already impressive lifespan as well as improve her combat resilience.
2. Either (d4): 1) the Hardu dwarves, 2) the Al Ibrani, 3) the hibouroc, or 4) a hitherto unknown surviving faction of Transom elves have **pledged themselves** to Qiliria's cause, expanding the scope and strength of her allies considerably.
3. A wide variety of technomagical contraptions are currently being constructed in an underground workshop powered by a **massive arcane dynamo**. Her army will be unstoppable unless this generator is first destroyed.
4. Qiliria's **pet dragon** has just recently reached adulthood and is waiting for Qiliria's signal to emerge from its subterranean lair.
5. Dee'pak is directly lending aid to Qiliria's cause, and has puppeted the four massive titans that roam Roksunay. These newly **zombified titans** are advancing on Ancora Bay.
6. The death of Qiliria's former lover has inspired a **throng of bachelors** to fight for her attention. They will do anything to win Qiliria's heart and a seat on the throne of the new world.



PART II: THE CONSERVATORY AND THE CONSORTIUM

A CONFLUENCE OF CULTURE

In the days of Transom rule, there was little room for the folk traditions of Roksunay's diverse peoples. Though the woodland elves, the Leukotheans, the Al Ibrani, and all of the other cultures of the world had their own rich musical conventions, the Transom way was to emphasize assimilation above all else. Whether in the city streets, the musical academies, or the courts of the various royals, Transom culture was monolithic and rejected outside influence.

Folk traditions, however, are sticky. It is not so easy to eliminate the idiosyncrasies of the indigenous musics of the world. Though they may have never shared the spotlight under Transom rule, bold practitioners kept these customs alive, honing their crafts in secret, refining their art on homemade instruments and passing their techniques down to younger generations.

In a post-Calamity Roksunay, there are no governmental limits on free expression. Without these limitations on what art is considered "acceptable," there has been an explosion of innovation. As cultures collide in cosmopolitan Ancora Bay, new hybrid musical forms have flourished, joining together the epic ballads of hibouroc vocal traditions, the abstract aquasonic Leukothean sound paintings, irregularly-metered Markitan dance structures, and so on. The streets

of Ancora Bay are constantly rapturously abuzz with new sounds from all the world over. Marketplaces hum with hurdy-gurdy drones and lively improvisations. Corian sergeants infuse their functional war drum patterns with unconventional elven-inspired ostinati to keep soldiers on their toes throughout training.

The fusion of soundscapes that permeate the Bay are an omnipresent reminder that the end of the Transom Empire was equally a birth of a new world free from cultural hegemony. There are those, however, who would seek to codify and stratify the "legitimate" means of musical expression.

THE ANCORA CONSERVATORY

Though most Transom elves died after the comet struck 80 years ago, their cultural imperialism lingered in the shadows of the new world. Many practitioners of Transom classical music—or *estille wyn* as it was known in high Transom—still consider the harmonies, rhythms, and forms of the former regime to be demonstrably superior to the various "lowbrow" traditions of the extant vassal cultures.

This is a view shared in particular by many members of Ancora Bay's Markitan elite who see the refined elegance of Transom music as an ideal to strive toward, a roadmap for a more perfect artistic hierarchy under which they can structure a new Roksunay global culture.

With this in mind, a number of wealthier Ancora Bay residents endowed the Ancora Conservatory to instruct in the ways of *estille wyn* and advance the mission of popularizing the form anew throughout Roksunay.

Aristocratic families send their children to learn the viol, the harpsichord, and the Transom *neleyathryl*, a duophonic ceramic wind instrument. Virtuoso performers give clinics open to the public and command a pretty penny for private events. At all times of day, harsh tutors hold their students to impossible standards, aiming to suss out the would-be phenoms from the casual enthusiasts. The Conservatory is a place of outstanding musicianship, but it is also a tool of the wealthy to place the music of a now dead empire on a pedestal above the regional forms that proliferate the rest of the city.

DRAYVIN DELFAR: There is a certain breed of technical mastery that is particularly valued in *estille wyn* musicians: a degree of rhythmic perfection that those more accustomed to folk traditions would consider robotic in its inflexibility. Drayvin Delfar (he/him) is a performer who excels in this strict interpretation of the Transom repertoire. Drayvin is one of few gnomes in Ancora Bay, and though he can barely reach the upper frets, his primary instrument is the theorbo, a bass instrument in the lute family. Although the theorbo is rarely the first choice for soloists, Drayvin has popularized the instrument as its most prominent artist. Unlike many former childhood prodigies, Drayvin has been able to maintain a steady career well into adulthood. He now leads a new generation of young performers through the gauntlet of tireless practice and an exhausting concert schedule.

ENAKIAN THYSALL'N: One of few surviving Transom elves, Enakian (they/them) is the conductor of the Ancora Ensemble, a chamber group comprising the Conservatory's finest performers. Everyone in town including Enakian is abundantly aware that they are not the greatest conductor in Ancora Bay, nor a particularly skilled educator or public persona. They are, however, a true Transom elf, a supposed descendent of the royal family. This was hugely important to the wealthy board of trustees who have endowed Enakian's position. The Consortium believes that Enakian's elven heritage grants them a degree of legitimacy that no other resident of Ancora Bay could match. Enakian is painfully aware of their own musical shortcomings and is prone to frustrated outbursts directed at their mocking peers.



IGNATIUS “IGGY” FORTISSIMO

Son of Sebastian and brother of Sadie, Ignatius (he/him) is the black sheep of the exceedingly wealthy and powerful Fortissimo family. Once a multi-instrumentalist child prodigy at the Conservatory, Ignatius—or Iggy as most of his friends call him—caved under the pressure. The stress from his family, from his instructors, and from his overambitious peers (including Drayvin) was simply too much. He did not want to spend his life preoccupied with “scales” and “counterpoint” and “punctuality.” He wanted to jam.

Thus, Iggy fled Ancora Bay, leaving behind his familial wealth, his promising career, and all of the stress of the Conservatory. He bought one-way passage to the Bronze Coast where he spent nearly three decades hanging with other social castaways. He surfed, drank rum, partied in shoddy cabanas, and generally lived a carefree life. However, he never ceased honing his craft. No longer shackled to the chains of centuries-old performance practice, Iggy could finally begin genuinely expressing himself through his music.

Unfortunately, an outbreak of mankis fever (an insect-borne virus that the laidback Bronze Coast residents have no means to combat) has forced Ignatius to return home after all these years. The Ancora Bay he has returned to is quite different from the one he left behind: Corian rule has changed the city, and the xenophobia of his family seems to have only intensified. Luckily, the thriving music scene outside of the Conservatory has welcomed Iggy with open arms. He lives a humble life busking with buddies on busy street corners and lending an ear to any transient who seems to need a friend.¹

¹ Despite spending much of his time a stone's throw from his father and sister, Iggy does not speak with his family, nor do they speak with him.



He is middle-aged, he drinks too much, and Gods know he has a few regrets about how he has lived his life, but ultimately Iggy is a happy man. More importantly to a party of adventurers, Iggy always has his ear to the ground. Like many independent musicians, he is a magnet for gossip. If he befriends the party, he may share any of the following details that might help the party on their quest:

1. Before leaving the Bronze Coast, Iggy began to notice **dozens and dozens of Corian warships sailing into the eastern seas**. With his buddy's spyglass, he was able to confirm that these warships were carrying not only Corians, but also throngs of halflings as well as a number of figures hooded in Gatherer robes.
2. At least once a week, Iggy has caught sight of halfling prostitute Lola Minsk entering the home of Consortium board member Samuel Garvey. It seems likely that **Lola would have a good amount of dirt** on the notoriously corrupt business leader.
3. According to Iggy's pal Gikgok, there has been quite a bit more **traffic in the graveyard** as of late. Though Gikgok has been afraid to watch too closely, it seems one mausoleum is particularly popular with folks entering and exiting all day long.
4. Iggy got a good look at Qiliria soon after she arrived in Ancora Bay. While meeting with Commander Danglip of the Corian Fleet, **Qiliria removed her necklace**, which made the strange illusory effect that normally blurs her appearance briefly dissipate.

THE ANCORA COMPROMISE

The violence in Ancora Bay after the Calamity didn't *technically* end with a surrender. The Corians were handily defeating the accumulated forces that the Ancorans tried to assemble. The loose alliance of forces in the archipelago were no match for the sheer naval power of the Corians, but the people of Ancora Bay devised a strategy that they hoped would allow them to keep their home while still ending the war.

The allied forces penned the terms for a permanent ceasefire, terms that were perhaps overly deferential to the Corians. Per the truce, the Corians would become the military leaders of the Bay, and though it made no reference to an "orc-led government," it did strictly prohibit humans from establishing a formal government in the city. The Corians would be granted full autonomy over the surrounding seas, ownership over the massive new citadel constructed in the southwest corner of town, and broad jurisdiction over policing the city.

Though many on both sides objected to the compromise (Markitans believed it would lead to a ruthless occupation, whereas many Corians would have preferred to rid the city of humans altogether), the two forces ultimately agreed to the terms. This arrangement is known as the Ancora Compromise, and a number of unintended consequences have resonated throughout the Bay for decades.

First and foremost, the Corians quickly realized that military authority over the Bay does not translate one-to-one with total control. Commerce is still king in Ancora Bay, and so long as trade is controlled by Markitan-owned companies, the humans will be able to exercise quite a bit of influence.



Secondly, the humans notably *underestimated* the degree to which the Corians would quell their imperial fervor after mastering the seas around Ancora Bay. Put simply: other civilizations are generally either too difficult or too inconsequential to conquer. One day, it seems likely the Corians will extend into Al Ibra, Shima Isle, or perhaps all the way to New Emynora. In the meantime, it is far more pragmatic to slowly grow their forces while confidently maintaining control of Ancora Bay and its surroundings.

Thirdly, neither the humans nor the Corians were prepared for some of the changes that have befallen Ancora Bay since the truce was enacted. Intermittent flooding is now putting pressure on real estate development, religious conflict is causing tensions within both Markitan and Corian populations, and the sudden ascension of Qiliria has put everyone on edge. Although the peace enshrined by the Ancora Compromise persists, there are many unknowns as Ancora Bay enters its ninth decade.

THE CONSORTIUM

Iggy's father Sebastian Fortissimo is a member of the Consortium, a board of eight wealthy Ancora Bay residents who exert incredible political and commercial influence on the city. He and his seven partners are all fabulously rich Markitan humans, and each seeks exactly one goal: profit.

In the aftermath of the Ancora Compromise, there were widespread fears that monstrous rule would lead to rapidly diminishing trade as various economic partners started shipping goods through other ports. More worryingly, some feared that the Corians would begin expropriating goods and seizing control of companies. In response, a number of already wealthy businessmen founded the Consortium, a "union" that pledged to protect humans' rights while the city experienced economic strains with the transition.

The plan was simple:

1. Encourage merchants and artisans to join the Consortium, and charge them modest dues
2. Use the newly pooled resources to influence Corian policies: fund ships to encourage them to protect trade routes, offer them a cut of imports in exchange for prime real estate, etc...
3. Gradually amass greater and greater fortunes, consolidate any industries possible, raise the fees required to belong to the Consortium, and use Corian windfalls to squeeze smaller businesses out of the market

The plan was an overwhelming success and allowed the richest Ancora Bay humans to exponentially grow their wealth during the occupation. More money is now hoarded by the eight board members of the Consortium than by than by the bottom four-fifths of Ancora Bay. With so much income, they are able to simply pay the Corians whatever they want to make sure that their will is enacted in the port, and that they never suffer the actual consequences of a military occupation.

This may seem implausible. If the Consortium is so wealthy but also so small, why haven't the other Ancora Bay residents done anything about it? After all, the Consortium *isn't* the government, and such wild corruption could easily be punished with a bit of old-fashioned mob violence. And yet, the Consortium remains as popular as ever!

There is one simple trick that has helped the Consortium to remain in the good graces of—at the very least—Ancora Bay's Markitan population: racist populism. The Consortium is publicly hostile against any orcs, goblins, and other "monstrous" races. They frame their actions as specifically *pro-human*, encouraging non-Corian commerce as a means to thrive in spite of the brutes who rule from the military bases. They label those who stand in opposition to the Consortium "Corian sympathizers."

In turn, the Corians don't bat an eye. It is abundantly clear to them that the popularity of the Consortium is a boon to their occupation. The people of Ancora Bay view the Consortium as a league of pro-human business leaders that are fighting back at the occupation through economic superiority. This viewpoint merely placates the impotent masses. Meanwhile, the Consortium continues to pump funding and resources into the Corian Fleet, and the Corians in return help the Consortium to further consolidate their wealth. Mutualism at its finest.

Some recognize the hypocrisy at play, of course. While the Consortium does not openly publicize their collaboration with the Corians, it remains an open secret. Yet, the dissonance between Consortium talking points and their actions is lost on many. Young artisans and entrepreneurs see the success of the economic elite as aspirational and strive to attain their level of wealth and influence, oblivious to the fact that the game is rigged against them.

GM NOTE: Each individual member of the Consortium has only a minor role in the narrative of Ancora Bay as described in these documents. You may prefer to swap them out for any bigoted kleptocrat that better serves your narrative.



THE CURRENT BOARD

1. **SAMUEL GARVEY (HE/HIM):** Makes money from military contracting investments. The face of the Consortium (described in detail below).
2. **SEBASTIAN FORTISSIMO (HE/HIM):** A spice trader and cultural imperialist. Holds business contacts all the world over with nary a true friend among them.
3. **CONSTANCE BILLIHAN (SHE/HER):** Maintains a monopoly on Ancora Bay shipwrights. Shrewd, nasty, and nearly 80 years old. Fueled only by spite.
4. **TIMOTHY GARTHENT (HE/HIM):** The youngest member of the board, a real estate prospector who made a killing when floods forced the city's wealthy higher in the hills.
5. **EVA CAWLEY (SHE/HER):** Hordes a fortune with unknown origins, though presumably criminal in nature. A raging alcoholic known for violent outbursts and loose lips. An imminent PR nightmare for the Consortium.
6. **JULES CHEYNE (HE/HIM):** Works in "logistics," optimizing trade strategies and offering inventory solutions. Jules is a simple man, and it's possible even he himself doesn't understand what this work entails.
7. **FLINTZ AUERBACH (HE/HIM):** Imports meat from what few islands are able to sustain scalable chicken, pig, and cattle farms. Tight-lipped and distrustful of his colleagues.
8. **DALE LINGER (HE/HIM):** Manages hospitality for the island, owning virtually every inn and roughly half of the taverns and other eateries. Prides himself on his elven blood, though which of his great-great-grandparents was Transom is anyone's guess.

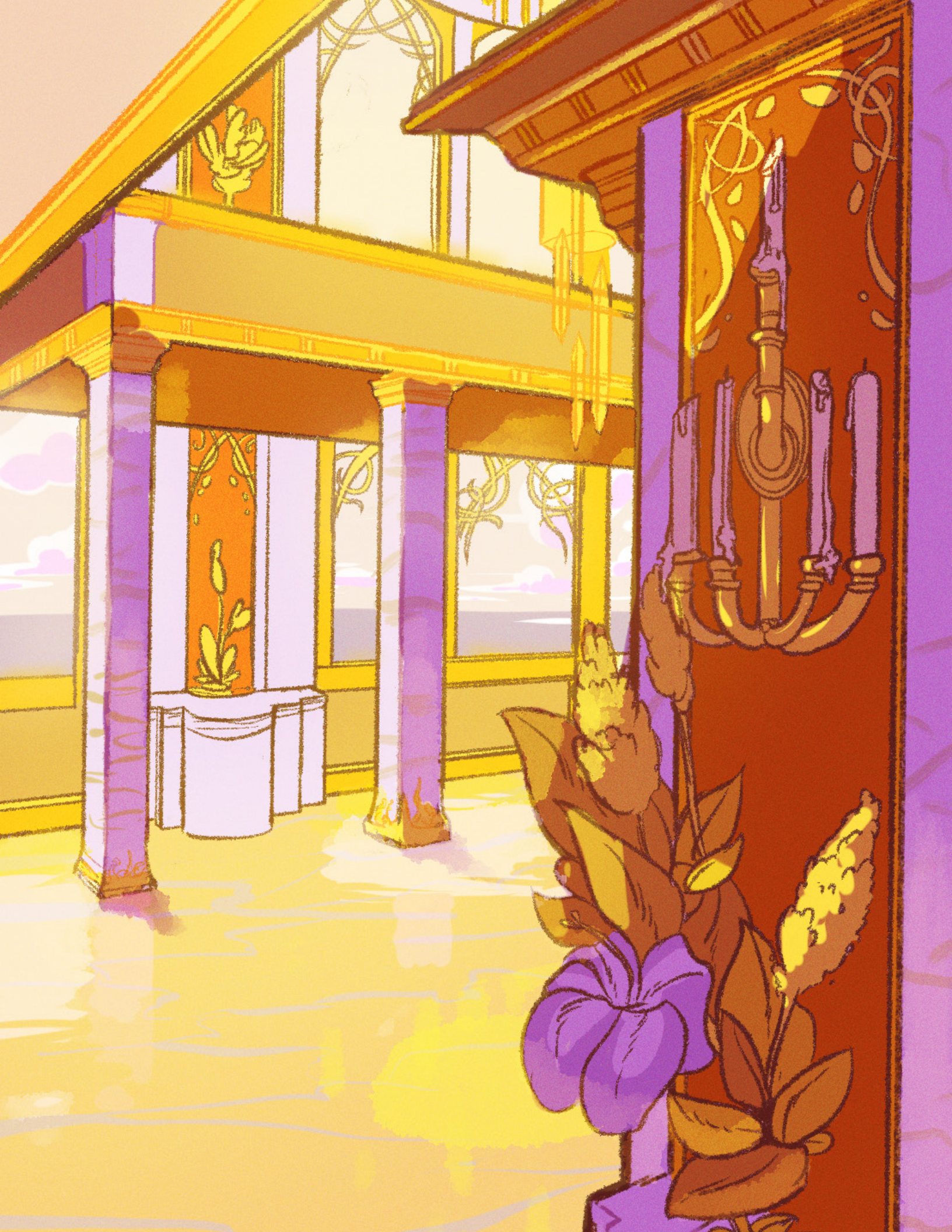
SAMUEL GARVEY

Although the eight leaders of the Consortium do not explicitly exist on a hierarchy, Samuel Garvey (he/him) is their public face. Unlike his associates, he is barely even a businessman in any practical sense; he inherited piles of gold from his family's business—a scavenging company that recovered and sold Transom goods using exploited shima kame labor. Now he merely "oversees" the wealth, which grows exponentially without his intervention thanks to some lucrative investments: namely a small handful of companies that sell arms to the Corians.

Samuel is a fear mongering rat, a snide hypocrite who stokes racial tensions in public forums to generate support for his business partners, riles up animosity toward the Corians, and profits from the weapon sales in the process. He is also a master of manipulation, as evidenced by the Markitans' unwavering support for their greedy corporate overlords. Much of his day-to-day schedule consists of various PR engagements. He visits local businesses to make sure they support the Consortium, he extols the virtues of human ingenuity while simultaneously glorifying the lost arts and sciences of long-dead elves, and most importantly he is always rubbing elbows with the upper echelons of the Corian Fleet. Though he describes orcs, goblins, and rungals in repugnant terms, painting them as subhuman filth, he seems to have no qualms making social calls whenever possible. He takes great pains to make sure his frequent communication with the various military leaders of the town aren't widely known, but there are only so many times he can visit the Corian Headquarters without raising eyebrows.

Make no mistake: Samuel Garvey *does* consider orcs, goblins, and the rest inferior beings. Yet he also takes great pleasure in surrounding himself with warlords, tyrants, and bullies. So long as he is never subjected to their violent world, he is happy to engage with military leaders who share his simplistic view of the world. Despite the racial tensions, the Corians agree that the strong have a moral imperative to dominate the weak.

Of course, the Corians are playing Samuel like a fiddle. They understand the game that's being played. Samuel likes feeling like a tough guy, and they're happy to let him roleplay as a gangster while accepting his bribes hand over fist. Everyone in this equation comes out a winner, except the Ancora Bay residents who are victims of the delusion that anyone in power cares about them.



THE PEOPLE'S PALACE

There is something particularly repugnant about the Consortium referring to their headquarters as “the People’s Palace.” On one hand, the people *did* pay for it in lost wages, Consortium dues, and monopoly pricing. But the palace is not public. The people reap no benefit from it aside from, perhaps, the joy of seeing it flooded in with seawater during the occasional violent tides. It is an ostentatious display of wealth that is supposed to serve as a rebellious exhibition of human ingenuity and strength. Instead, it comes across to outsiders as garish, needless grandstanding by corporate elites who have nothing left to spend on. Even the Consortium’s staunchest advocates may view it as little more than an embarrassing billboard advertising the board’s tacky aesthetic sensibilities.

The People’s Palace has dual purposes: as a social club for the Consortium and their aristocratic friends, as well as a place to conduct business free from the prying eyes of the plebeians. It features not one but two banquet halls, a gallery of salvaged Transom art (as well as numerous convincing fakes), and guest chambers for visiting magnates or sotted board members unable to walk home. Deals are conducted over drinks, and Corian “diplomats” (i.e. whichever admiral drew the short straw on a given day) promise various protections in exchange for tribute.

The People’s Palace is guarded diligently by platoons of the Corians’ elite warriors known simply as The Barbs (described in greater detail in a later chapter). In addition to the opulent wealth held within the palace, there are undoubtedly copious documents proving beyond the shadow of a doubt that the Consortium is as hypocritical as many fear. To gain access to one of their soirées, a party of adventurers would have to either be exceedingly stealthy, create elaborate disguises, or perhaps most unlikely, *truly* befriend one of the board members.

On any given day, the Consortium will be hosting any number of events, from strictly business to strictly pleasure or somewhere in between. The following list should serve as inspiration for creating your own Consortium galas, summits, and bacchanals.

1. Commander Danglip of the Corian Fleet is meeting with Samuel Garvey to **request a massive supply of iron ore**. It appears the Corian smithies have concocted a terrible new weapon that requires a huge amount of resources.
2. The Consortium is hosting a performance and post-recital lecture with Drayvin Delfar and his ensemble... or that’s what they’re telling people. In reality, **Drayvin is going to be kidnapped** and sold to the Hakim of Al Ibra who desires a new court musician.
3. Thanks to record profits this year, Samuel Garvey has paid for **an evening of debauchery** with every Ancora Bay prostitute he was able to find. A few (that is: two) Consortium members are wholly uninterested in engaging with these escorts and are instead conspiring about how to keep news of their revelry

from getting out into the public.

4. It’s all hands on deck for the Consortium. The **Leukotheans have sworn to lay siege** to the city in an effort to quell the perceived “Corian expansionary agenda.” The Consortium now must decide whether to back the invading Leukotheans or stand behind the city’s occupiers.
5. Eulesabella priestess **Alina Fewbador is providing blessings** to each member of the Consortium in exchange for a sizable donation. If the members of the Consortium are unable to notice any discernible effects of the blessing in the days to come, they will likely pursue legal action against the church.
6. Much to their dismay, the Consortium is hosting a **visit from Qiliria Tallrene**. She will be deciding their fate; it is unclear whether she will view the Consortium as useful potential allies or an impediment to her rule.

PLOT HOOK: TAKE DOWN THE CONSORTIUM

The only people who benefit from the Consortium are the board members themselves. If the Consortium were dissolved, competition would once again render Ancora markets fairer and more efficient. Resistance to the military occupation would become feasible, and the political and economic power held by everyday residents would increase drastically. Life in Ancora Bay is made demonstrably worse by the existence of the Consortium, and eliminating their stranglehold over the city would be a blessing.

That said, “eliminating the Consortium” is no easy feat. In addition to the board’s surprising public popularity, they also have powerful allies, elite security detail, and a rather gauche but undeniably well-guarded palace. Though players should feel free to approach this task however they like, here are six potential routes for removing the Consortium as a powerful influence in Ancora Bay. The following table presents those options, as well as potential obstacles.

Removing the influence of the Consortium will be a boon to Ancora Bay, but it will come with some major hurdles and growing pains. Simply eliminating these eight oligarchs will have an overwhelmingly negative impact on the economy in the short run, as their various business ventures make up a large percentage of total income for the city. Furthermore, any power vacuum will create the opportunity for bad agents to take control of the city. It’s romantic to imagine a version of Ancora Bay ruled by the Splintered—the primary pirate outfit in the region—but pirates are neither great legislators nor city planners.

Whatever the party does, they should be aware that the positive effects of an Ancora Bay rid of its parasitic aristocrats might take some time to develop.

d6	How to take down the Consortium	Obstacles
1	<p>VIOLENCE: The board members are mortal and have few minimal combat abilities. If the party wishes to end their control over the city, the party could simply execute them.</p>	<p>a. The Consortium is well guarded. The elite Barbs are tasked with protecting them (one of the perks of paying off the Corians), and merely getting to them all before getting arrested would be a challenge.</p> <p>b. Though the board comprises eight individuals, there are other wealthy magnates in Ancora Bay. The current board could simply be succeeded by a new group of corporate oligarchs.</p>
2	<p>PUBLIC OPINION: The people have more power than they think, and if enough Ancorans turn against the Consortium, they could boycott their goods, vandalize their property, and shun them out of public life.</p>	<p>a. Despite their awful traits, the Consortium is currently quite popular. Turning the tide on public opinion will require a major leak. The party would need to secure and distribute irrefutable proof of grievous misdeeds.</p> <p>b. Altering perception takes time, and as soon as the party begins to make waves, the Consortium and their allies will try to put a stop to the daring adventurers.</p>
3	<p>DIPLOMACY: The Consortium is wealthy, but their true power comes from the way they are able to influence the Corians. Undermining this symbiotic relationship could drastically reduce Consortium power.</p>	<p>a. The Corians and the Consortium are both quite happy with their current arrangement. To poke a hole in this relationship, the adventurers will have to find a way to make the <i>quid pro quo</i> seem less alluring.</p> <p>b. To even get their foot in the door, the party will have to be incredibly bold. The Corians aren't exactly opening up their doors to any random travelers who seek an audience.</p>
4	<p>BLACKMAIL / INTIMIDATION: The Consortium is guilty of heinous crimes both legal and moral: corruption, exploitation, fraud, infidelity, etc. While they tend to be blasé about these infractions, a particularly egregious offense could be used against them.</p>	<p>a. First and foremost: the Consortium sees themselves as above the law. Threatening them with evidence of their crimes might not sway them as it would a normal citizen.</p> <p>b. Intimidation tactics might be met with an equal response. Unless the adventurers are truly blameless themselves, they might soon be facing a public tarring they were not expecting.</p>
5	<p>DISTRACTION: The influence of a squad of corporate leaders might be irrelevant given a large enough outside threat. Reframing the public narrative from "how can they help us" to "look at what's really important" might chip away at the Consortium's legitimacy.</p>	<p>a. The two largest threats to Ancora Bay are the increased rates of flooding, and whatever it is Qiliria is attempting. These are both threats that the Consortium might be able to argue fall under their purview (e.g. building new real estate or swaying the Corians).</p> <p>b. Ultimately, most sufficient distractions will be temporary. Even a foreign war that takes some attention away from the Consortium won't last forever.</p>
6	<p>REGIME CHANGE: The Consortium is powerful because the Corians allow them to be. If someone else were in charge, they might take a different tack with the monopolists.</p>	<p>a. Defeating the Corians and replacing their military government is no easy task. How do you destroy an army? Who do you replace them with? What happens to the Corians who get left behind? Staging a city-wide coup to undermine eight aristocrats might not be the strategic master stroke that the party thinks it is.</p> <p>b. No matter what happens, the Consortium already starts with a massive commercial advantage. What is to stop them from entering into a new pernicious collaborative relationship with the replacement government?</p>



PART III: THE SINKING SLUMS

RISING TIDES

Life in Ancora Bay has drastically changed due to the destructive impacts of the changing climate. Flooding and extreme weather events were rare in the past few decades; the atmosphere of Roksunay had finally reached a new equilibrium that was roughly as stable as it had been during the days of the Transom Empire. While tropical storms occasionally struck Ancora Bay, torrential weather was infrequent and manageable. Nevertheless, the era of calm seas and skies above are coming to end. At first it was barely perceptible, but now there is ample evidence that the average sea level is inching upward year after year. As Roksunay's sea levels rise, so too does the frequency and intensity of floods. A storm might fill low-lying pockets of the city with knee-deep ocean water for up to a week at a time.

Prior to these shifts, there were no particularly undesirable quarters within the city. While some homes might offer stunning views or might lie closer to graveyards and industry, there was a relative uniformity to the property values across the bay. The shifting climate has completely undermined the homogeneity of the city. Parts of town most likely to flood are now home to the city's underclass. There is a near 1:1 correlation tying property value to elevation, and the new "Sinking Slums" in Ancora Bay—the section of the bay that sits almost exactly at Sea Level—is now underwater at least

10 or so days per month. Some homes have already crumbled into the sea, and multistory structures in the slums are rare sanctuaries in the rapidly devolving shanty town.

Regardless, hundreds of people still call the Sinking Slums home. The finite footprint of developable land in the Bay means that even those with resources might not be able to simply relocate. Furthermore, many residents of the slums cannot afford less hostile lodgings, especially as the Consortium manipulates housing prices to force "undesirables" out of the market altogether.

Though it is decidedly unsustainable, it seems like the misery of life in the Sinking Slums is here to stay. Once glorious seaside homes are now dilapidated and moldy, home to squatters or renters paying merely to have a roof over their heads. Houseboats are becoming more common, especially those that sit on filthy city streets until incoming flood waters lift them up off the ground with the rising tides. Society still functions in the slums. People live, work, and adapt. Some community members have proposed building flood walls or regrading the slums to sit 10 or 20 feet higher. The issue, unsurprisingly, is the absence of political and economic power behind these proposals. It is guaranteed that the slums will continue to suffer until drastic actions are taken, yet no one with any power seems particularly interested in devoting the labor or capital required to mitigate the impacts of flooding.



PINK QUARTER FURNICULAR
OPENS ITS DOORS! CITIZENS OVER
80 RIDE FREE!*

Come use the fabulous new Pink Quarter Funicular! Ride up out of the slums on a smooth track. Fueled by bonafide Transom-engineered transferred magic. The power of the waves gently pulls you up the hillside. Rise above the tides. Take the Pink Quarter Funicular today!



*Only applicable for races with an average lifespan below 80

TRANSFERENCE MAGIC

While most in Ancora Bay presume that the rising sea level is the result of inexplicable environmental ramifications from the Calamity, others suspect there is something more arcane and convoluted at play. There are powerful magical forces in Roksunay, and it's always wise to consider the ways in which divine champions or expert spellcasters might be manipulating reality from behind the scenes.

The Transom elves were masters of a school of arcana known as "transference magic." The underlying power and logic behind this particular discipline is that far greater magical effects are achievable if the universe remains in a careful equilibrium. For example, many spellcasters can create a small fire, but a wielder of transference magic might be able to create a greater conflagration, so long as they either "transfer" that fire from somewhere else, or perhaps offset it by inducing a sudden freeze in some far-off land. A dragon can be banished, but only if some other mythic creature is brought into the world. Wheat can be summoned out of thin air, but some distant silo now sits empty.

Many Transom magi were experts in inducing impressive transference effects, but few were as adept at carefully balancing the counteractions. Powering a foundry was a trivial matter, but if you asked a forge mage from whence their fires originated, they'd be hard pressed to find an answer. The most studied transference mages could wield powerful magic with a keen eye for consequence, making sure to inflict the least harm, or even to use both the action and the counteraction for beneficial effects (e.g. strengthening a Transom army by sapping power from an invading force). The majority of wizards and sorcerers capable of manipulating this chaotic magic, however, were not so delicate or practiced. So long as the desired effect was produced, the consequences were largely seen as

an afterthought. Though dire ramifications occurred frequently, it was difficult to identify with particularity a direct line of casualty. Rarely if ever did Transom mages face consequences for uncontrolled counteractions.

The one persistent truth about transference magic is that it often yields unexpected outcomes. Slaying a beast with transference magic might cause another beast to be born, to be summoned, or even to be resurrected. Alternatively, it might cause a random civilian to die as though there's some unbreakable beast / man ratio that must be cosmically maintained. Transference magic is simply a means of inducing effects. Almost any spell that can be performed via transference may also be conducted with other forms of spellcasting. Transference was seen as a shortcut, a more efficient way to elicit great impacts at an Empire-wide scale.

There is no prevailing theory as to how *exactly* transference magic might be impacting sea levels. Maybe a surviving Transom elf is trying to reclaim a city at the bottom of the ocean, and is draining a corner of the seas, thereby heightening the water level everywhere else. Perhaps instead a geomancer is creating their own mountaintop to call home, and the slowly rising peak is causing the landmass on which Ancora Bay sits to gradually diminish. The people of Ancora Bay know that ancient rituals conducted by transference wizards cause drastic, wide-ranging effects, and some strange spell might be inducing the current climate crisis.

GM NOTE: There is no single "canonical" cause for the rising sea levels, so the degree to which you choose to weave the origins of climate change into your narrative is totally up to you. It is totally acceptable to just say "no one knows why the water is rising," but if you'd rather provide a concrete justification, feel free to get creative! Perhaps it is as one of the theories presented above (e.g. some wizard is draining water elsewhere, and this is causing water to rise elsewhere). The accompanying document Qiliria Tallrene and the Secret History of Roksunay explains how the initial flooding of Roksunay was caused by a portal that connects this world to the Plane of Water. Consider introducing a catalyst on the Plane of Water (a powerful genie? an elemental leviathan?) as a motivation for the party to begin plane-hopping.

Alternatively, the rising sea levels may have nothing to do with transference magic, with Qiliria, or any other of the overarching themes of Roksunay. Maybe the frigid glaciers across Northern Roksunay are melting, or maybe the seas themselves are animate and attempting to reclaim the world from the nasty humans.



BIGLUG DUKRUK

Biglug (he/him) is an anomaly in more ways than one. He is an orc with no ties to the Corian military. He married a human and outlived her, an exceedingly rare occurrence for orcs who rarely live past 40. He lives in the slums, but has friends amongst all tiers of Ancora Bay life: from members of the Consortium down to the lowliest of street beggars.

Biglug is something of a philanthropist, though he has no great fortune of his own. Instead, Biglug effects change through influence. He uses his friendships to encourage donations, to convince developers to build in the slums, and to ease the suffering of Ancora Bay's downtrodden by any means possible. He volunteers at the food pantry and he regularly hosts the unhoused in his own humble dwelling to keep them off the streets.

Biglug is just about as saintly a figure as you are likely to find in Ancora Bay. What could motivate such overwhelmingly selfless actions?

Penance.

16 years ago, Biglug made a deal with Triles Moundfoot, leader of the Ancora Gatherers and a powerful spellcaster. Biglug's wife Gertrude was dying from a seemingly incurable illness, and wanting to prolong their time together, Biglug offered up their first born son to Triles in exchange for three more years with his wife. Through dark magic, Triles imbued Gertrude with health and vigor. True to his word, Triles was able to give Biglug and Gertrude three happy years together, and when Gertrude finally passed away, Triles took their son Zigash as payment.

Biglug doesn't regret making that deal, but he feels immense guilt nonetheless. He has been a widower for 13 years and has been forbidden from seeing his child since that day. He can't change the past, but he will do whatever he can with his remaining years to help the people of Ancora Bay.

THE GATHERERS

It is easy to see why the allure of a second chance is so enticing to many in the Sinking Slums. The Calamity birthed a new Roksunay, one in which many of those who lived under the heel of the Transom elves became the new masters of the world. And yet, there are still so many living in this young version of the archipelago that remain unserved by the changes wrought through the comet's destruction. A re-renaissance could finally create the unpredictable shifts and opportunities that would allow the street urchins, occultists, and non-conformists of Ancora Bay—and across Roksunay—to find a world more befitting them. This is what motivates the Gatherers.

The beliefs of the Gatherers are numerous. Not all Gatherers wish for a *literal* return of the Comet. They can do the math. If ~90% of all sentient life was snuffed out by the first Calamity, a second would likely kill them off. Some Gatherers follow the scripture a little more closely: they believe they and *only* they will be saved in the catastrophic fires that will cleanse Roksunay of sin. Praise the Astral Father and allow yourself to be judged in His fiery afterbirth.

As with all religions, the extremists represent a very small percentage of believers. Most Gatherers are casual devotees. They attend services and engage in a bit of door-to-door proselytizing. The majority of folks drawn to the teachings of the Astral Father are lost souls with goodness in their hearts who primarily seek company and otherworldly reassurances. For them, the Gatherers provide community, the occasional warm meal, and a roof over their heads during trying times.

THE ORPHANS

The morality of the Gatherers becomes a bit dicier when you examine their “humanitarian” wing. The Ancora Bay branch of the Gatherers notably takes in a great number of orphans. Children in the city with no family often wind up in the care of the Astral Toddlers (the not-at-all tongue-in-cheek nomenclature for Gatherer priests). They are raised to be devout followers of the comet and are often given priority when it comes time to ordain new clerics of the faith. There is a direct orphan-to-Astral Toddler pipeline that takes many off the street but also (allegedly) indoctrinates the children it seeks to protect.

Despite Ancora Bay’s flaws, it should not be so overrun with parentless children. There are no violent wars killing soldiers, nor famines or diseases destroying families. Independent investigations seem unable to even identify the orphans within the Gatherers ranks... It is an ongoing question of *where* the Gatherers find these children.

In truth, there are many origins for the Gatherers’ orphans: unrecognized out-of-wedlock children of the Astral Toddlers, the offspring of Corian prisoners, and children that were bequeathed to Gatherers in exchange for great divine gifts. There are many Astral Toddlers who have demonstrated seemingly God-given abilities: the power to manipulate weather, cure infertility, and evoke great and sudden bursts of flame. Some Astral Toddlers have even claimed to directly influence life and death itself. As such, many in Ancora Bay seek out the aid of the Comet-loving spellcasters, and in exchange the Gatherers typically ask for just one thing: a child.

ZIGASH

Though most of the orphans raised in the care of the Gatherers grow up to be devout believers in the dogma of the Astral Toddlers, Biglug’s half-orc son Zigash (he/him) has become increasingly skeptical of the credo he has been fed. Now approaching 18 years of age, Zigash (who knows nothing of his parentage and does not bear the clan name of his father) has secretly begun penning an alternative interpretation of the gospel of the Astral Father. He knows that many of the parental figures in his life have nefarious aims, but he also sees value in many of the core beliefs of the Gatherers.

His new doctrine is free from what he considers to be the “corrupting influence” of the Astral Toddlers. In contrast to the largely violent and fatalistic views espoused by the leaders of his religion, his beliefs concern twisting destiny toward the good and the righteous. It begins with one simple mantra:

Chaos is fair. Change is inevitable.
Choice is freedom.

For now, Zigash works in secret. He cannot be emancipated from the care of the Gatherers for another few months. When he does, he suspects his previous guardians will become his bitter enemies.



THE PYROCLASTS

Many paths are available to Ancora Bay orphans who come of age among the Gatherers. Many go directly into studies of divinity to become clergymen of the Gatherers. Others take on more managerial roles within the larger organization. A scant few leave the faith altogether. Those who manifest particularly niche skill sets, however, are given a unique task within the faith’s hierarchy: eliminate heresy.

The Pyroclasts are a *supposedly* covert force of strongmen, detectives, and seers who find enemies of the faith and convince them to change their tune. In most instances, this means tracking down runaways and dragging them back to the orphanage kicking and screaming. Some tasks are a bit more involved and quite a bit bloodier. Those who attempt to cast aspersions on the Astral Toddlers are often “dealt with” or disappear under mysterious circumstances. Those who wield political power both in Ancora Bay and abroad may expect a visit from the Pyroclasts if they choose to use their influence to undermine the Gatherers. Lately, these agents have taken on an additional task: abducting halflings.

CEDRA FOGHAR

Though the Pyroclasts are fundamentally a guerilla force, their most successful and enthusiastic agent is Cedra Foghar (she/her). Cedra is a doblin, the child of a dwarf and a goblin, two species that can only rarely conceive together. Though she wasn’t the strongest, the most pious, or the most likeable, she quickly rose through the ranks of the Pyroclasts to command her own squad of brutes and strongmen.

Cedra need not wield violence to achieve her aims. If you’ve been openly critical of the Gatherers, you already know the worst possible outcome is a visit from Cedra. Her arrival does *not* mean you’re in immediate danger, but that extreme pain is in your future if you do not change your ways. She commands the most dangerous agents in the Gatherers’ employ, and she makes it abundantly clear that she will be accompanied by some of her commandos on a subsequent visit.



THE ANCORA GATHERER BRANCH

It may seem unassuming, but the Gatherer Branch in the Slums hides quite a few impressive secrets. Most Gatherer real estate in the Slums is dedicated to the orphanage and the Hall of Rebirth—their primary place of worship—but within their headquarters, adventurers may be surprised to find some particularly bizarre spaces.

1. The Gatherers function through an abundance of bureaucracy, oversight, and paperwork. That all starts at the **reception desk**. Receptionist Marsha Gubrose is a secretarial phenom. In addition to her meticulous organization, she has a near-photographic memory, and easily identifies repeat visitors. This may seem a trivial detail to note about the Gatherers, but quite a bit of their strength comes from their exacting record-keeping. If you know exactly who your friends and enemies are, who's paid a visit to your branch, and who potential converts might be, it's much easier to manage your public image while growing your ranks.
2. Much of Astral Toddler Triles Moundfoot's time is spent in his **necromantic lab**. While other practitioners of the dark arts feel comfortable working out in the open (there's no law against these practices, after all), Triles must keep up appearances. Everyone *knows* he has particular powers that he happily exchanges for new converts, but practicing in public is another story altogether. Plus, if anyone saw the way he really performed his magic, they might feel a lot less comfortable with having such a strange mage in their city.
3. Though they're mostly left to their own devices, the Pyroclasts maintain a small **armory and briefing room** in the branch. When Triles has particular demands of the Pyroclasts (e.g., finding halflings, eliminating heretics, or recovering runaways), he will summon a squad to this office to outfit them with the tools or intel they need.

4. Only after proceeding through a false door, past a guard, and down a hatch would any adventurer discover the **channeling space**. This small, dark room is sparsely furnished: just a chair, a table, and a polished obsidian sphere. Through this sphere, the Astral Toddlers are able to communicate directly with Qiliria Tallrene. She, of course, needs no magic sphere in order to respond. She simply speaks into her amulet and the response emanates from the sphere itself. Therefore, anyone with access to the channelling space and adequate knowledge of how it works has a direct line to Qiliria.

TRILES MOUNDFOOT

If you asked the average Ancora Bay resident to name the most influential people in town, few would put Triles in the top 20. This would be a mistake. Triles (he/him) leads the Ancora Bay Gatherers, makes Faustian bargains with the city's elites, and maintains a close communicé with Qiliria. He wields immense power over the Sinking Slums. Through his necromantic dealings, he is also able to exert influence over the city's elites. Triles is a devout man, a child of the Astral Father, bestowing his gifts in whatever means he sees fit. He raises scores of orphans, leads religious ceremonies, and spearheads the Gatherers' aims. He is also a duplicitous liar whose true allegiances and aims are difficult to discern.

Secretly, Triles has such profound arcane strength because his stores of divinity overflow with the blessings of two Gods. In addition to championing the chaotic rebirthing magic of the Astral Father, Triles is also a secret practitioner of Dee'pak's black magic. When a wealthy Ancoran beseeches Triles to help their sickly child, he manipulates twin Godly energies to reinvigorate the ailing youth. Nobody knows of his dual allegiance. Gods know it would undermine his pro-Gatherer aims if folks found out he's courting opposing deities. Nonetheless, the potent healing rituals that Triles is able to conduct are only possible thanks to the dual divinities he wields.

The Gatherers have summoned a comet before, and Triles believes they will do it again. When Qiliria inevitably succeeds in her quest to merge Roksunay and The Dee'p, Triles will invoke his divine blessings to claim a place amongst the new world's elites. He is happy to play the part of Qiliria's puppet if it means he can use his followers to usher in a new age of destruction in which he is a lord of the ashes.

Despite his grand vision and eldritch gifts, Triles sees himself as a father. He views the Gatherer orphans as his great accomplishment, the fruits of his necromantic labor. He cares deeply about raising the children of Ancora Bay as the ultimate father figure, transcending blood and memory. When the world is born anew, he knows that it will be his children who inherit Roksunay.

PLOT HOOK: SURVIVE THE PYROCLAST ASSAULT

If the party of adventurers so much as badmouths the Gatherers in any public forum, it is quite possible that word will get back to the Gatherer Branch. Given how noteworthy and influential the party will likely be (or soon become), there is no chance that the Gatherers will allow this slander to stand. The party should expect a visit from the elite Gatherer covert force.

Typically low-level “infractions” (e.g. sharing moderately damaging information about the Gatherers) will necessitate a threatening visit from Cedra Foghar. She will inform the party of what they may have in store if they choose not to retract their libelous vilification. Even the least astute of adventurers will recognize that this is a credible threat; Cedra means business, and next time she shows up, she’ll be bringing backup.

The Pyroclasts do not allow run-of-the-mill hirelings into their ranks. Even their most brutish agents have a unique fighting style, temperament, and history with the Gatherers. There are no “anonymous” henchmen in the Pyroclasts. Every squad is hand-selected on a per-mission basis, with ranks fine-tuned to match the threats they expect to face. As such, even well-rounded adventurers may find that the Pyroclasts sent to dispatch them may be eerily suited to poke holes in their defenses. Whenever possible, the Pyroclasts *prioritize* making things personal. If a particular agent was previously spurned by a given adventurer, that guarantees they will be a member of the strike force sent to take the party out.

A smattering of Pyroclast agents are provided below:

1. **MILLICENT ABERNATH (SHE/HER):** A middle-aged Markitan warrior who zealously fuels her deadly mace strikes with astral-infused fury. Millicent is not mute, but she rarely speaks. She also refuses to engage in stealthy attacks. She wants enemies of the Gatherers to tremble as they hear her approaching.
2. **EEKEE KEEK REEKEE (HE/HIM):** An hibouroc (owl-person) wizard who is quite comfortable with dispensing imperfect spells with potentially catastrophic results. Eekee was a horrible hibouroc courier who frequently stole the mail he was hired to deliver. After pocketing a grimoire of potent spells, he joined the Pyroclasts as a way to find excuses to blast foes with destructive magic.
3. **RINGUS MAGRON (HE/HIM):** A Hardu dwarf barbarian who runs head first into his problems... *literally*. Though Ringus will happily swing his

adamantine warhammer if necessary, he prefers to bash through armor, walls, and skulls with his seemingly impervious cranium. Ringus absolutely has brain damage.

4. **MERCEDA VAKAPO (SHE/HER):** An Al Ibrani real estate developer with a penchant for silent assassinations. When Ringus or one of the other brutes is dispatched to attack head on, Merceda will weasel her way through back alleys, servants quarters, and other liminal spaces for a stealthy kill.
5. **ZUGHAT KRIFE (HE/HIM):** An orcish priest whose sermons are laced with enchanting magic. If Zughat tells you to come out with your hands up, you’ll likely do it even if you don’t think you want to. If he tells you to fall on your sword, you just might end up doing that as well.
6. **ELISA LITEEZ (SHE/HER):** A grizzled Markitan ex-sellsword who spent her younger years commanding the seas on Corian warships. Elisa can control the weather to devastating effect, just like the Astral Father did eight decades ago. With the right tactics, Elisa can eliminate a target with a single well-placed hailstone.
7. **ARABO (HE/HIM):** A rungal sea captain with his own crew of agnostic sailors and pirates to aid in assaults. Arabo is as devout as they come, but he feels no need to proselytize to his crew. They’re happy to fight alongside Arabo so long as he keeps them well fed and stocked with booze.
8. **TRILES MOUNDFOOT (HE/HIM):** The leader of the Ancora Bay Gatherers, champion of Dee’pak and the Astral Father, father of orphans, and agent of Qiliria. Though not technically a Pyroclast, Triles will occasionally see to matters personally. If he decides he wants the party dead, they should run.

In almost all circumstances, the party should expect to be attacked when they feel least prepared. Ancora Bay is the territory of the Pyroclasts, and unless the adventurers decide to leave town altogether, the Pyroclasts will find an opportunity to strike that will be overwhelmingly advantageous for the guerilla squad: when the adventurers are defenseless, separated, or intoxicated.

The party might also choose to seek out the Pyroclasts. It will not be difficult to discover that most Pyroclasts live in the Slums, away from the prying eyes of Corians peacekeepers who would prefer that no religious assassinations occur in their town. Unfortunately, eliminating one Pyroclast may invoke the ire of the entire force. Unless the party feels confident that they can remove all Gatherer threats in quick succession, any wise confidant would recommend against this course of action.

1000 GP

ONE THOUSAND GOLD

REWARD!

OR, IN PROPORTION OF
FOR THE APPREHENSION OF THREE
MEMBERS OF THE NOTORIOUS
PYROCLASTS
FOR THE NEFARIOUS CRIMES OF
SUBVERSION! BATTERY! MURDER!



Eekee Keek Reekee
- Hibouroc
- Wizard



Ringus Magron
- Dwarf
- Barbarian



Merceda Vakapo
- Human
- Real Estate Agent



If apprehended, notify
Corian High Command



PART IV: PROFLIGATE CEMETERY AND THE SPLINTERED

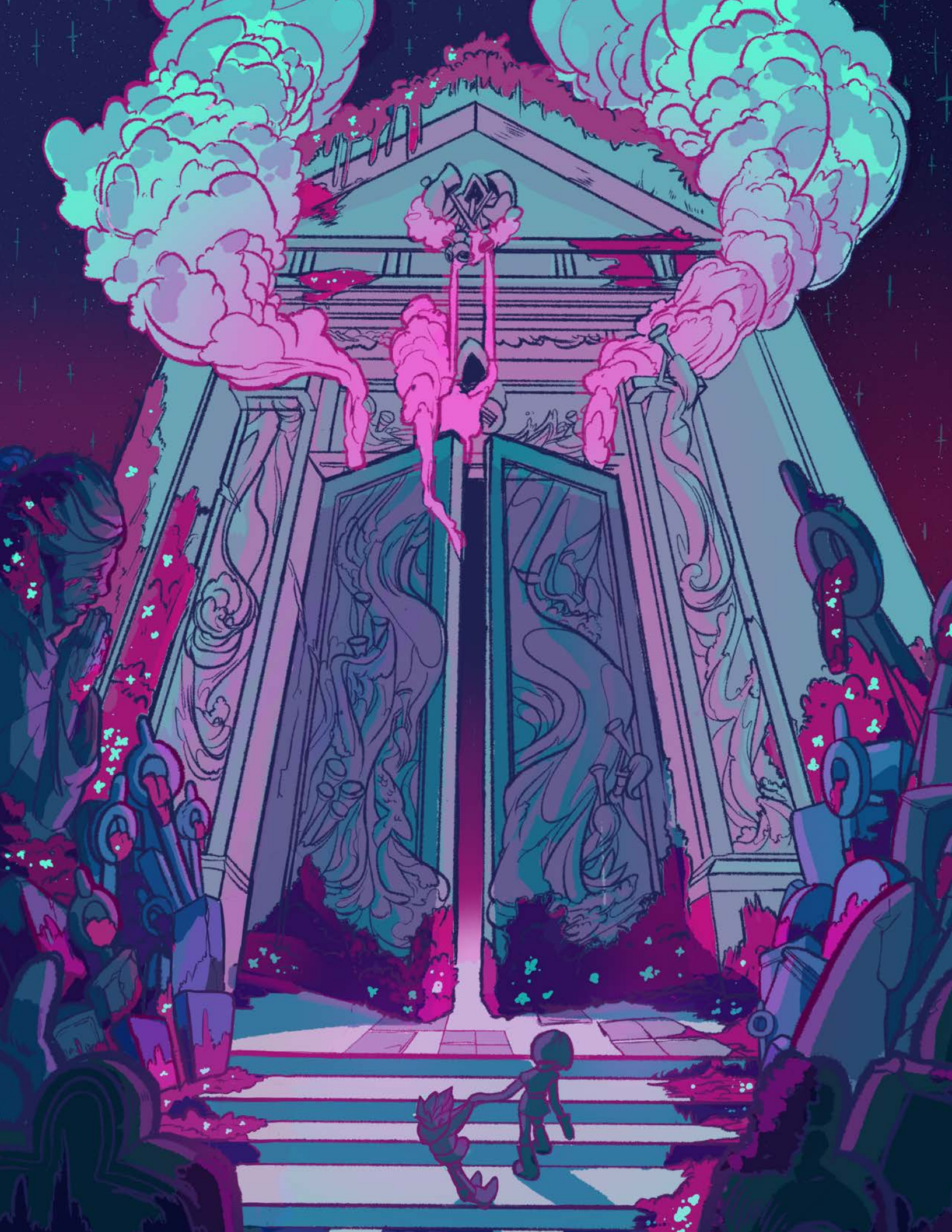
THE PRICE OF LAND

Even before the sea level began rising anew, habitable land was a limited resource in the Markitan Archipelago. The people who survived the Calamity had to cling to what few mountain peaks and mesas rose above the newly flooded world, and as that population expanded, land itself became one of the world's most treasured assets. Now, that effect is magnified tenfold. With Roksunay's worsening climate woes, proper real estate management is both a top priority and a massive hurdle for governments worldwide.

PROFLIGATE CEMETERY

For this reason, Ancora Bay's sizable cemetery is considered an irresponsible luxury by both the Corians and some eco-minded residents. Complicating matters, the cemetery is one of few halfling constructions that exist in the human-dominated parts of town. This same cemetery was used by hill halflings for centuries before the Calamity. Now it's a flashpoint in city politics. Generally, the Corians and humans stay out of halfling affairs so long as the halflings primarily keep to their village. In recent years, however, nearly every group in Ancora Bay sees the cemetery differently.

1. The Corians consider the cemetery a massive waste of space and couldn't care less about disrupting halfling burial practices. Though they haven't begun to actively tear down the cemetery or build over it, they have "officially" named the graveyard "Profligate Cemetery" as a way to subtly shift perception of the space. Per halfling tradition, that land had no name until the Corians provided its pejorative title.
2. The hill halflings would, of course, prefer that no one disrupt the cemetery. This is *their* cemetery, and proper burials are an important part of their faith. They also believe that the bodies of their ancestors—which are crucially buried without a coffin—renourish the soil. Although the halflings oppose any changes to the cemetery, they are nonetheless powerless to do much about it.
3. Most Markitans view the cemetery as an imprudent use of the bay's limited space, but also respect hill halfling religious practices. The majority of Markitans practice burial at sea like the Corians, but certain wealthy Markitans prefer to build luxurious mausoleums as a way to put their stamp on the world even beyond this realm.
 - a. Unsurprisingly, the Consortium would love to see Profligate Cemetery stay right where it is, as each of them plan to have ornate tombs built for themselves and their families.



4. Followers of all three major religions practice various types of burial at sea, but practitioners are split between wanting to rid the city of the eyesore and respecting the hill halflings' practices.
5. Biglug and many advocates for Ancora Bay's underclass seek some sort of hybrid solution. Rezoning the cemetery would mean many in the Sinking Slums might be able to escape the lowest lying parts of town. These advocates hope that the volunteers for the city could team up with halfling religious leaders to respectfully exhume any remains they find and then reinter the bodies perhaps deeper in Ancora Bay's uninhabitable jungles.

The racial politics of Profligate Cemetery make any discussions fraught. Anyone who advocates for rezoning the district gets labeled a racist or profiteer, but the alternative is living in a city that's continuously flooded and overcrowded. The construction of new homes on the cemetery land could ease quite a bit of suffering.

GIKGOK

When visiting Profligate Cemetery, visitors are likely to spy Gikgok (he/him), a fledgling necromancer who claims to enjoy working in the cemetery purely for the aesthetics. Gikgok is quite simply an ineffective necromancer. He is one of very few spellcasters to be discharged from the Corian Fleet. Typically, the Corian armed forces employ any mages they can. Even marginally potent spellcasters are immensely useful during chaotic battles, and the handful of evokers in the Fleet are devastating additions rounding out the more traditional ranks.

Gikgok, however, was a touch too incompetent. He is surprisingly adept at *reanimating* corpses, skeletons, and other body parts—which were (he claims!) provided to him by the Corian quartermaster—but *controlling* these animate dead was a skill he never mastered. Gikgok's failure to command an army of writhing arms led to one of the Corians' strangest military blunders: a half-dozen privates died from accidental strangling when scores of necrotic hands attacked the very troops Gikgok intended to protect.

Now Gikgok alternates between drinking his troubles away and attempting to wow the Corians with feats of necromancy so impressive that they have no choice but to reenlist him. Every evening, he hauls sacks of flesh and bone (usually corpses of various jungle creatures that he buys from halfling hunters) to the cemetery to practice his magic. Though he is improving, it is not unusual to see him running for his life from a shambling undead jungle hog.

In many ways, Gikgok is the antithesis of the commonly imagined necromancer. He is not brooding nor maniacal. He is cheery, diligent, and overly apologetic. He wants nothing more than to serve in the great army of his people, and he's training day and night to make that a reality. Whether he can prove himself remains to be seen.

JULIET SPENCER'S MAUSOLEUM

For the first six decades of Ancora Bay's post-Calamity existence, non-halfling residents wouldn't dare inter any of their dead in Profligate Cemetery, then known just as "the halfling graveyard." It wasn't until the death of Juliet Spencer that that began to change. Juliet was one of the founding members of the Consortium, a shrewd businesswoman who also spearheaded the establishment of the Conservatory as Ancora Bay's premier institution of "serious" musical study. Juliet considered herself a vanguard of culture, a fashion-forward public figure who set trends in the bay. When she died, her will stipulated that she be entombed in a grand mausoleum in the cemetery. At the time, it was unheard of for Markitans to preserve their bodies in any way. Juliet, always the trendsetter, decided that she wanted something grander. Unsurprisingly, this inspired other wealthy Markitans to build minor tombs throughout the cemetery.

In more ways than one, Juliet's mausoleum remains unique. It is still the largest and most opulent of the Markitan tombs, and rumors abound of the mausoleum's supposed "haunting." Sounds can be heard emanating from the mausoleum at all times of day, including loud bangs, yells, and splashes. Occasionally, smoke billows out from its front entryway. More bizarrely, an overwhelming stench of liquor is unmistakable to anyone walking near the entrance. Juliet left behind no family and few genuinely enjoyed her company (although many attempted to win her favor). As such, almost everyone in town is either too afraid or too disinterested to investigate.

There are many versions of this ghost story, but the most common suggests that the halflings cursed Juliet for her intrusion on their hallowed burial site. Now her restless spirit endlessly tries to free her decaying body from the tomb. The noises heard are all hers, the smoke is from the halfling fire spirits that vex her, and the stench is from the twisted, corrupted corpse that now lies in the mausoleum.

Needless to say, this is purely the result of childhood imaginations. Juliet's will wasn't even honored. Her ashes were thrown in the sea, and her mausoleum is merely decorative.

However, the noises, the smoke, the stench... those are all real.

SPLINTERED HOLLOW

Underneath Juliet Spencer's Mausoleum, a narrow tunnel leads into a sea cave, a minor cavity that has grown over the past 80 years thanks to erosion from the flood. The cavity is nearly invisible to the naked eye from the coast; an extremely narrow inlet on Ancora Bay's cliffside is obscured by dense jungle foliage. With only two entrances—a secret passage in a supposedly haunted tomb and a camouflaged cave mouth—it would be nearly impossible to stumble on this cavernous space without knowing about it first. This is what makes it so valuable to the Splintered, Roksunay's most established independent sailing outfit.

The Splintered have equipped the Hollow with a small dock just big enough for a few dinghies. When sailors choose to enter the Hollow by sea, they'll typically anchor a larger vessel well off the coast and then paddle directly into the narrow inlet. Once inside, they'll find a trading post, a series of hooks on which to hang their hammocks, and—most importantly—a bar. These basic but crucial amenities are built into the prow of a long sunken vessel, now exhumed from the ocean floor and erected upright.

The Hollow fulfills a few simple purposes for the Splintered. First and foremost, it allows captains to restock their vessels and fence plundered goods without drawing the eyes of the Corian port guards. A Splintered ship can simply lay anchor near to the Hollow, send out a dinghy with a chest of goods, and return to their ship with rations, charcoal, new sails, and rope.

Secondly, the Hollow makes recruitment *quite* a bit easier. Expansion was severely hampered for years due to the fact that the Splintered lacked a sufficient presence in the most populous city in the archipelago. Now, Splintered sailors can walk the streets of Ancora Bay and shepherd fresh blood to the Hollow where they'll be stationed until they can crew a ship.

Finally, the Hollow is a foothold. It is a very small way for the Splintered to feel as though they've laid some claim to the epicenter of Roksunay culture and commerce. Merely maintaining this outpost is a point of pride for the decentralized pirate crew.

The Hollow is decidedly not a pirate's paradise. It's a moist cave filled with spiders and bats and shoddy accommodations. It is just as susceptible to flooding as the lowlands topside. Were it not for the plentiful alcohol, it is unlikely that even the lowliest of sailors would bother to spend any time within. It is, however, a potentially massive strategic asset in the long-term goals of the Splintered. If they are ever to have a meaningful effect on Ancora Bay, it will begin in this dank cave.



WHO ARE THE SPLINTERED?

While many dismiss the Splintered as pirates, brigands, and libertines, they prefer to think of themselves as freedom fighters. Yes, they rob ships. Yes, they often resort to violence. And also, yes, they are drunks. That said, they have a strict code: whenever possible, target the Corians first. No harming children. Welcome any new recruits with open arms, regardless of their past. Pursue freedom, not wealth.

The Splintered only recently started using the Hollow as a minor base of operations in the archipelago. Before that, it was too dangerous to operate so close to the Corian Fleet. However, it seems as though life in Ancora Bay is now complicated enough that a true pirate uprising might be possible. With the increasing flooding, the tensions with halflings, and whatever is happening with this Qiliria character, many Splintered see this as the best opportunity they will have to strike the Corians where it hurts and potentially remove them from power altogether.

There is no official “Splintered Headquarters,” but their largest base of operations is a decrepit Transom fortress on an island north of Ancora Bay that they call “Splintered Citadel.” Though little more than a larger version of the Hollow (e.g. three-in-one trading post, bar, and place to sleep), they have planned for years to expand the Citadel into either a truly independent pirate city, a quasi-military fort, or a governmental capitol building. Progress has stalled because of differing opinions on what the purpose of the Splintered should be in the long-term. Are they a ragtag group of outcasts who just want to live outside of Corian rule? Are they a rebel army fighting for freedom from tyranny? Or are they the founders of a fledgling state unto themselves? The various captains of the Splintered can't agree, and so, for now, the Splintered are an aimless organization; a hodgepodge assemblage of misfit crews sailing the flooded remnants of Roksunay in search of a better life.

MARISOL SUTTON

Officially speaking, Splintered Hollow has no permanent staff. More specifically, the Hollow has no official staff whatsoever. The joint captains of the Splintered wanted the Hollow to function on an honor system: if you need booze or supplies, leave some gold behind and take what you need. This system collapsed immediately, as the first captain to visit the Hollow emptied both stockpiles. When it became clear that this was not a sustainable way to manage the Hollow, Marisol Sutton (she/her) took it upon herself to act as the base's quartermaster, bartender, janitor, and longshoreman.

After a lifetime of piracy with the Splintered, Marisol was ready to settle down. She had performed

just about every role in a crew: boatswain, deckhand, carpenter, cook, first mate, and even surgeon. After years of working in the male-dominated pirate fleet, she finally became captain of her ship. Marisol was a fine captain, equal parts principled and bold. Her crew found riches, and many of her previous sailors have gone on to become notable captains and first mates in their own right.

Marisol's career came to a swift end after committing one of the few unforgivable sins of the Roksunay seas: she slew an hibouroc messenger. The owl-like hibouroc are staunchly independent. They don't take sides in the ongoing struggles between the Corians and the rest of Roksunay. What they do provide, though, is an invaluable service to sailors of all stripes: cheap, fast, long-distance communication. This mission is sacrosanct, and any sailor who interferes with a delivery is guilty of one of the sea's highest crimes.

Why Marisol slew an hibouroc messenger is an open question. Some say it was to protect her crew, some say it was to keep the courier from delivering important news to a Corian commander, and others say it was an honest mistake. Her crew at the time—for whatever reason—swore never to tell the full story. What is known is that another hibouroc witnessed the murder, and now the entire people want her dead. The Splintered eventually pardoned her, but it is a stain on her storied career.

When the opportunity to leave the seas and hide in a cave for the rest of her life presented itself, Marisol took it without question. She's a bitter woman filled with regret, but she's happy to be working in some capacity with the Splintered, the family that forgave her.

BAXTER AND THE JEWEL OF AL IBRA

Sailors choosing to rest and restock at Splintered Hollow rarely stay for more than an evening: just long enough to requisition some supplies, grab a drink, and load up their ship to head back out to sea. However, a certain Baxter Merton and the crew of his ship *The Jewel of Al Ibra* have a fortnight scheduled for their current stay. They clearly have plans in town, despite the fact that Splintered captains are discouraged from engaging in any forms of piracy or other Splintered activity in Ancora Bay proper until a formal strategy for Bay operations is established. It would be highly unusual for a Splintered captain to have a scheme within the confines of the Bay.

Baxter and his crew have never been ordinary pirates though. Perhaps the first oddity an adventurer might notice about Baxter's specific breed of piracy is that his ship is not the standard sloop used by most Splintered captains. *The Jewel of Al Ibra* is a casino boat. Though it has a mast and sail, its main means of propulsion is a trans-

ference-powered paddle wheel. Topping out at around 20 knots, *The Jewel of Al Ibra* is no faster than the sloops helmed by his peers, but with its arcane propulsion, it requires a far smaller minimum crew to pilot. Baxter claims to have won the ship in a bet, but it is difficult to imagine a plausible scenario in which a *casino boat* transfers hands based on a game of chance.

Baxter and his crew seem to be spending a surprising amount of time in the city itself. These odd pirates have a goal in the city, and any adventurer who sees them walking the streets of the Bay more than once might pick up on the fact that they aren't just here for leisure. Even if the party doesn't happen to stumble on Splintered Hollow—after all, how would they?—they're likely to encounter this curious band of troublemakers at some point.

CAPTAIN BAXTER MERTON: Baxter (he/him) is dripping with enthusiasm. Every person he meets becomes for a brief moment the most interesting person Baxter has ever met. He approaches life with a degree of zeal one is unlikely to see from anyone other than preachers, drug addicts, and con artists. In fact, many might suspect that one or more of those labels might apply to Baxter, and they might be right. Far from the most capable captain in the Splintered Fleet, Baxter makes up for his uneven qualifications with an infectious gusto and unpredictable naval tactics. Corian commanders cannot contend with a captain as manic and wily as Baxter. He treats his crew like family, he treats his ship like the love of his life, and though his true aims may be difficult to ascertain, he's clearly in the business of piracy for more than just plundering.

Baxter is a half-elf, though he conceals his elven features behind a scraggly beard and long wavy hair. His youthful appearance disarms his foes; though he looks young, naive, and inexperienced, he has 40 years of sailing experience. He's a virtuoso with a rapier, and he can deftly pilot *The Jewel of Al Ibra* (a notably un-maneuvrable vessel) into battle, no matter the weather.

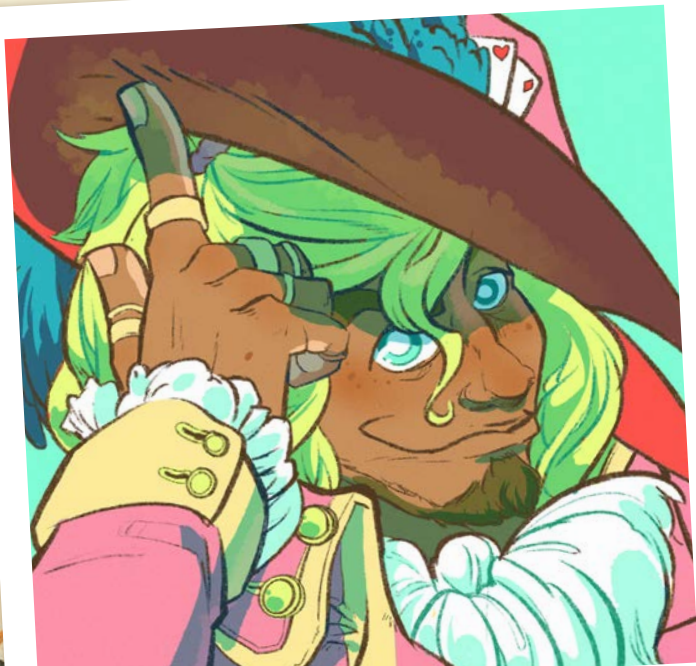
FIRST MATE GREASEKNUCKLE: A half-orc hailing from Ancora Bay, Greaseknuckle (she/her) deserted the Corian Fleet the first time she came toe-to-toe with Baxter. At the age of 13, Greaseknuckle was certain that whatever life she could live aboard the janky casino boat approaching her warship would be far superior to whatever life she'd have amongst the Corians. Baxter took her in and raised her to be an exceptional sailor. Greaseknuckle stands head and shoulders above her crewmates, taller and stronger than most full orcs. Needless to say, Baxter knows he made a smart gamble by taking in the young Corian. Gods know Greaseknuckle has saved Baxter's hide time and time again over their less-than-illustrious history. While captains of boarded vessels frequently underestimate Baxter, no one underestimates Greaseknuckle. She is exactly as tough as she looks.

Greaseknuckle lost an eye while dueling her old commanding officer. She killed the man whose ship she used to crew. Now she fights for the Splintered, and she knows she will die for the Splintered.

QUARTERMASTER PLOQWAT: "Quartermaster" is a bit of a reductive way to describe Ploqwat's (they/them) role on *The Jewel*. Given the small crew of this vessel, Ploqwat has to wear many hats: chef, surgeon, and—perhaps most notably—chaplain. A devout champion of Eulesabella, Ploqwat regularly offers "services" in the form of rowdy drinking games and impromptu jigs. Though usually quiet and diligent, they become a totally different person the moment they deem it necessary to lighten the mood.

Ploqwat is one of very few shima kame in the Splintered. Though these nomadic turtlefolk tend to travel Roksunay solo, Ploqwat has found that the teachings of Eulesabella encourage communal revelry and an active role in fighting oppression. The crew is happy to have them on the ship; in addition to their religious duties, they have an incredible innate navigational sense, the ability to hold their breath for up to an hour, and a surprisingly dense armored shell which has come in handy on more than a few occasions.

BOATSWAIN ADRESTYN PHORCYATH: Another defector, Adrestyn (he/him) ran away from his responsibilities with the Leukothean Vanguard after his hubris led to the death of his brother and the rest of his platoon. Now he lives in hiding from his deepsea brethren, who most likely have no idea he survived the attack. Once an elite soldier of the Leukothean armed forces, Adrestyn is now a lowly boatswain, tending to hull repairs and maintaining *The Jewel's* arcane engine. His incredible underwater abilities do come into play occasionally, especially when he gets the chance to swim up to a vessel undetected and saw a hole in its hull, a move that Baxter now calls "the Leukothean Gambit."



Adrestyn is stoic, in contrast to the rest of his jovial and enthusiastic crew. He keeps to himself, tends to his duties, and though he typically thinks that *he alone* knows best, he strictly follows Captain Baxter's orders. Despite his typically calm demeanor, those who cross him will quickly discover Adrestyn's fiery temper.

BARRELMAN NUD and **GUNNER DUN**: When other captains refer to Baxter's crew as "a bit nontraditional," they're usually referring to Nud (he/him) and Dun (he/him), twin kobolds who are a few eggs short of a dozen. Baxter met these two on shore leave in the Bronze Coast and inexplicably took them in. It's quite possible Nud and Dun had no understanding of what Baxter was actually doing because it's overwhelmingly likely that all three of them were blackout drunk when their initial meeting occurred. Regardless, Nud and Dun are now permanent fixtures in every incarnation of Baxter's crew, for better or for worse.

As far as their immediate responsibilities go, they are perfectly adequate: Nud has at least above-average eyesight, and Dun can man *The Jewel's* cannons largely by himself. Beyond that, however, Nud and Dun are not terribly well equipped. In battle, they trip over each other and forget who's who. When Baxter calls for "Nud," they often both belt out "aye aye, sir!" Nonetheless, they get the job done, and an extra element of unpredictability fits in well with Baxter's intentionally erratic tactics.

During leisure hours, Nud and Dun spend most of their time playing "Flippy Coin," a drinking game with simple rules:

1. Flip a coin
2. See if it lands
3. If it lands, all parties take a drink
4. Repeat



PLOT HOOK: JOIN OR RECRUIT THE SPLINTERED

In a city dominated by an occupying military and a cabal of capitalist oligarchs, there's a good chance that any party of adventurers is going to be drawn to the Splintered. There is quite a bit of overlap between the aims of these freedom loving rebels and the average crew of fledgling heroes. If the party hopes to befriend, aid, or recruit the Splintered, they're in luck! Baxter and his crew are far from surreptitious, and the players will have plenty of opportunities to either meet them or piece together clues about Splintered Hollow. When in doubt, consider consulting the table below for ideas on how to insert the Splintered into an Ancora Bay campaign:

1. Marisol is constantly trekking back and forth from the Hollow to the city by way of the passageway in Juliet's Mausoleum. Although she takes great pains to move stealthily under cover of darkness, there's always a chance that the party will spot her while she's **exiting the "haunted tomb."**
2. When he isn't drowning his sorrow in rum, Gikgok spends much of his time in Profligate Cemetery. Despite the many training hours spent running away from clumsily-animated limbs, **Gikgok has certainly seen small squads of pirates** entering and exiting Juliet's Mausoleum. He won't give this information freely, but if the party could grant him an audience with some Corian higher-ups, or perhaps replenish his corpse pile...
3. Ploqwat rarely gets the opportunity to bask in Eulesabella's inebriating embrace with other devout followers. As such, they're likely to seek out the company of other revelers at one of the Common Carnivals, city-wide parties hosted by the church. If

the party comes across Ploqwat and **befriends the pious turtle pirate**, he may just spill enough details about his crew or The Hollow that the party will be able to find the Splintered themselves.

4. The crew isn't wasting their time in Ancora Bay. Although they *have* been spending an unhealthy amount of time drinking and chatting with Marisol at the bar in the Hollow, they're also gathering intel in town. A particularly perceptive party might notice the peculiar **inebriated sextet of sailors taking careful notes** while wandering the city streets.
5. This Splintered crew has been brazen stepping foot onto occupied soil. Baxter himself has hassled scores of Corian ships over the years and is decidedly a wanted man. If the party has cozied up to the occupiers, it is probable that the **Corians already know of Baxter's arrival** to Ancora Bay and may task the party with doing something about it.
6. Depending on the actions of the party in Ancora Bay and the level of notoriety they've achieved, it's entirely possible that **Baxter might seek them out** specifically. Appropriately heroic, rebellious, or chaotic adventurers might make a name for themselves as potential Splintered recruits. If all else fails, Baxter may simply approach the party and invite them to consider a stint on the high seas.

Regardless of how the party learns of Splintered activity in the Bay, if the party wants to join up with Baxter, request a favor from the Splintered, or hitch a ride on *The Jewel of Al Ibra*, they will first need to demonstrate competence and commitment. The broader pirate organization has a lenient recruitment process that generally takes all comers, but Baxter's crew is tight-knit and intentionally small in numbers.





In order to prove themselves, the party will have to aid Baxter with his current Ancora Bay operations. Baxter is bold and undeterred by the tense situation in Ancora Bay. He views this as the perfect time to commit grand acts of piracy in Roksunay's largest and most heavily fortified city. If the party wants to impress Baxter and his crew, they'll have no choice but to accompany the ragtag ensemble on a misguided operation. The following list provides a number of scenarios for Baxter and the adventurers to team up.

1. **OPERATION SOIRÉE SWIPE:** Each member of the Consortium has their own large estate, but the People's Palace contains far and away the highest concentration of valuables in Ancora Bay. However, it is tightly patrolled by the Barbs, the Corian's elite guard force. The only way to get access to the goods within is to receive a proper invitation to one of their bacchanalian soirées... or to pose as someone who does.

Baxter and his crew obviously wouldn't fit in as guests of a Consortium party, but they could masquerade as the help. While the crew of *The Jewel of Al Ibra* dons catering uniforms in the Palace's servants quarters, it'll be up to the party of adventurers to gain access to the gala proper. Then, it's simply a matter of nabbing any riches they can find, handing it off to Baxter and co., and making a clean exit.

2. **OPERATION HALFLING EXTRACTION:** Gilly Leafhollow's son Rister is, unbeknownst to Gilly, a Splintered collaborator. He had been aiding the crew with supply drops before being detained by the Corians. Baxter never leaves a man behind, and he's sure as hell not going to let an innocent halfling endure undue punishment for the simple crimes of a) selling goods in a condemned marketplace, and b) aiding and abetting piracy.

Baxter believes that Rister is being held in a secret jail cell at the top of the Corian Headquarters. He and his crew would never be able to fight their way through the massive fortress and break Rister out unscathed, but he *can* create an epic distraction while the party of adventurers does the dirty work. Baxter's plan is to sail directly toward Ancora Bay's port while Dun ignites various explosives. Ideally, the guards will think the ship is malfunctioning and not opening fire, but either way, it should provide the necessary cover for the party to enter the Headquarters with reduced opposition.

GM NOTE: A full map of the Headquarters and an in-depth look at the Corian defenses are provided in the next chapter.

3. **OPERATION COALITION INTERFERENCE PROPOSITION:** Increasingly, Corian vessels have been employing Gatherer storm priests to aid in navigation and weather manipulation. This alliance has granted the Corians a maritime advantage that has hampered Splintered activities. Baxter is sick of Splintered ships always having unfavorable winds, and he wants to poach these powerful storm priests for himself.

This is likely to begin as a purely social engagement. Baxter and the party will have to speak with Gatherer higher-ups (namely Triles and his secretary Marsha) and convince them to stop outfitting Corian ships with divinely enchanted personnel. However, Baxter is blissfully unaware that the Corians and the Gatherers are much more structurally enmeshed than he previously believed. As soon as Baxter and the party tries to pitch the Gatherers, they are likely to face a violent combination of Corians and Pyroclasts who would prefer that those meddling in their nefarious collaboration are permanently silenced.

4. **OPERATION PREEMPTIVE SCUPPER:** Baxter frequently encounters Corian warships in the open ocean, where they typically foil his piratical aims with superior firepower. These same warships are docked in large numbers at Ancora Bay's docks, though these docked vessels maintain mere skeleton crews while at harbor. It's risky, but a well-executed attack on these ships might take them by surprise, and sinking the ships here in Ancora Bay would severely hamper Corian activities in proximal waters.

It won't be easy, but some combination of stealth, explosives, underwater operations (see "the Leukothean Gambit" above), and good old-fashioned arson might allow for a small ensemble of rebels to do serious damage to the Corian Fleet. If Baxter and his crew approach by sea, the party could approach portside and hopefully escape into the shadows after the damage is done.

If the party successfully assists in one of these missions, Baxter will be forever indebted to them. Should the party seek to join Baxter on *The Jewel of the Al Ibra*, they will be more than welcome. Alternatively, Baxter may be willing to exchange a favor for a favor. If the ragtag pirate crew can assist the party in any way, they'll happily do so. At the very least, Baxter will offer to provide safe passage for the party if they wish to tag along on *The Jewel's* next voyage.



PART V: CORIAN HEADQUARTERS

THE FORFEITED CITADEL

During the most tumultuous period in Ancora Bay's history, Corian raiding parties were a constant threat to the quickly growing city. To help weather the onslaught, the Markitans constructed a massive fortress to which they could retreat during an attack. This fortress, however, was only briefly used as a defensive structure for the Bay's human population. The Ancora Compromise put an end to the war, but also immediately transferred control of the citadel to the Corians. Still a significant portion of Ancora Bay's total area, this fortress serves as the headquarters for all Corian operations within the city. Featuring a barracks, a training yard, medical facilities, offices, a prison, and a watchtower, this colossal structure is easily the Corians' single most strategic asset across Roksunay.

If a Markitan uprising were to ever take place, this fortress would be the populace's largest obstacle. Solid stone walls, a battery of ballistae, scores of soldiers, and massive stockpiles of rations and supplies could keep the fortress protected against a siege for weeks on end. Most Markitans don't even know the extent of the fortifications, nor what military capabilities the Headquarters contains. This, if anything, only further serves to elevate the significance of the fortress in the minds of Ancora Bay's citizens. For all they know, there could be a dragon in the fortress.

Here's what the average civilian would know about the Corian Headquarters:

1. Rotating guards are always stationed at the fortress's lone ground-floor entrance (1a), as well as on its third-story balconies (3d) and roof (4b, 4c, 4d).
2. Whenever the commanding officer of the fortress needs the city's standing army to be on high alert, a Corian soldier will light a pyre atop the fortress's watchtower (5a) and blow into the mighty horn in its belfry (4a).
3. A comically massive orc sits at the desk of the structure's front office (1b).
4. Prisoners are sometimes—though not always!—brought to the Headquarters. The jail cells (3a) on the upper floors are visible from the halfling village.
5. Corian soldiers will often boast of the fortress's self-sufficiency. Though these soldiers are forbidden from giving specifics, most Ancora Bay residents take this to mean that there is a food source within the fortress.

The party of adventurers is unlikely to learn much beyond this unless they either a) decide to team up with the Corians, b) attempt to lay siege to the fortress, c) stealthily infiltrate the fortress, or d) allow themselves to be arrested and brought directly to the HQ's jail cells.

Any of these are possibilities depending on the party, and so a detailed description of the fortress, its denizens, and its secrets follows.

GM NOTE: At the end of this document, a plot hook is provided that may entice the party to make their way through the fortress. Regardless of whether the party ever actually decides to enter the Corian Headquarters, this chapter provides new Corian NPCs, expanded lore, and a variety of tools and tricks that the Corians might use against the party.

1A. COURTYARD

Landscape architecture is not an art form that the Corians prioritize. The courtyard leading to their Headquarters is thus appropriately sparse. The purpose of this courtyard, inasmuch as a courtyard needs a purpose, is to funnel would-be attackers into a narrow corridor into which archers can fire. Though the Corian archers have never needed to unleash a volley of arrows against an invading force, the mere threat of this strike is enough to discourage potential invaders.

The more common usage of the courtyard is as a meeting place. The complexity of Corian bureaucracy has ballooned significantly since they overtook Ancora Bay. Thus, when a visiting officer wishes to speak with someone stationed in the fortress, they will typically meet in the courtyard, as opposed to meticulously signing in for a chat that could just as easily occur out in the open.

Civilians are technically not barred from the courtyard, though loiterers will be swiftly escorted off-premises. Visitors who enter the courtyard will be expected to make their way to the front office (1b), or else leave altogether.

In addition to officers conducting impromptu meetings, soldiers taking a break from training, and various support staff entering and exiting the courtyard, a pair of Barbs are always stationed at the front entrance to the courtyard.

1B. FRONT OFFICE

With the unending complexity of overseeing Ancora Bay's defenses, the Corians have also dramatically increased the amount of red tape associated with day-to-day operations. Visitors will get their first taste of this heightened bureaucracy in the front office. Receptionist / sentry Egnog Angfour will require a number of signatures, pat-downs, and legalese assurances before any visitor will be allowed to progress further into the Headquarters.

Civilians who arrive at Egnog's desk for any purpose are overwhelmingly turned away. Put simply: very few visitors are allowed in the Corian Headquarters. Unless Commander Danglip has pre-authorized their entry, there are few reasons why a visitor may be granted entry. The few exceptions include:

1. The visitor is a member of a Corian platoon from outside Ancora Bay.
2. The visitor is an envoy of either Qiliria Tallrene, Triles Moundfoot, or the Consortium.
3. The visitor comes bearing a sizable tribute, which they wish to deliver to Commander Danglip in person.

Even after being granted greater access to the Headquarters, visitors will be accompanied by a Corian soldier at all times while within the fortress and will be expected to sign copious documents prior to entering, and potentially again when making their way into higher-security zones. In most cases, a visitor will be stripped of their weapons, unless they belong to another Corian company.

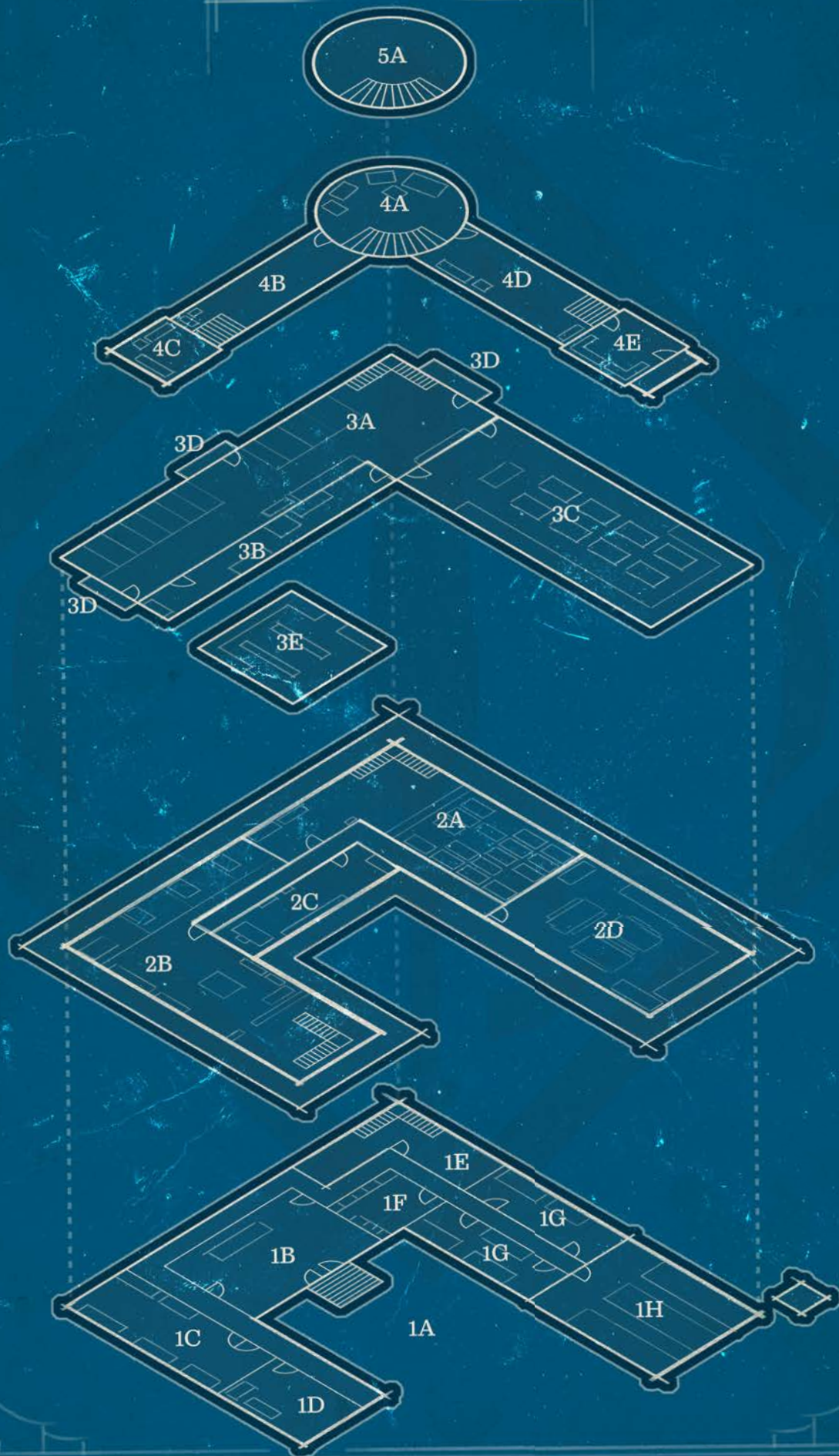
EGGNOG ANGFOUR

Most visitors to the Corian Headquarters are surprised to find Egnog Angfour (he/him), the outrageously ripped orcish secretary, behind the tiny reception desk. This towering figure can barely fit his thighs under the wooden desk at which he is stationed. While Egnog is a stickler for contractual details, it's plain to see that his purpose at this desk goes beyond the clerical needs of a receptionist.

Egnog is a deterrent. If a threat to the Corians is able to make their way through the courtyard, they will still have to contend with Egnog before progressing deeper into the fortress. Thankfully, Egnog has nearly limitless patience, a godsend for a secretary / security guard. His zen outlook allows him to handle most would-be intruders with an unparalleled level of cool-headedness. When a visitor is resistant to his demands that they leave the premises, Egnog typically is able to simply pick them up and physically remove them from the space, though this is rarely needed. Egnog's polite requests are seldom contested, both due to his kind and calm demeanor, as well as his imposing stature.

Adventurers hoping to get past Egnog will have a tricky time doing so. In all likelihood, they will be denied entry to the Headquarters based solely on their lack of credentials. From there, they have to decide whether they are going to press the issue, make a run for it, or proceed with violence. Egnog is a fearsome foe, and though he would rather not hurt anyone—anyone!—he will dispatch most enemies of the Corians with his lightning-quick fists alone.

CORIAN HQ



Eggnog is unsettlingly agile for his size. Those trying to outrun him are unlikely to succeed, and a rapid throat chop from Eggnog will render many intruders catatonic.

Eggnog is not, however, fully in agreement with the Corian approach to the occupation of the Bay. He would much rather assimilate peacefully into society and laments the frequent shows of violence that his brethren use to quell dissent among the population. It is possible that a particularly convincing party of adventurers may be able to convince Eggnog to look the other way as they make their way into the fortress.

1C. SOLDIERS' QUARTERS

Immediately beyond Eggnog's reception desk, the adventurers will find the first barracks. Rows of beds sized for creatures ranging from 3 to 8 feet tall are arranged neatly. Corian soldiers stationed within the Headquarters itself are generally of a higher rank than those billeted in the surrounding barracks. Though the quarters are fairly stark, soldiers stationed within have few complaints. Maintaining watch of the Headquarters is considered a cushy job by Corian standards; the mere fact that the fortress is perceived as impenetrable means that the soldiers have little work to do as far as discouraging intruders. The majority of soldiers sleeping in this barracks are either archers garrisoned around the fortress or Barbs who patrol the perimeter of the Headquarters.

Most civilians assume that a much greater percentage of the Headquarters' floor plan is dedicated to merely housing soldiers. In truth, the number of Corians needed to maintain the on-site security force is surprisingly low.

Within the soldiers' quarters, adventurers are likely to find little of value, aside from the personal effects of the sentries, as well as a small number of reserve weapons and pieces of armor.

ZEPHO, THE BLANK COMMANDO: Zepho (he/him) is a unique soldier in the Corian Fleet. Instead of serving with a squad of similar commandos, he acts as a solo mercenary, slaying high-priority targets unseen. Anyone who takes a look at Zepho might be surprised by this. He appears ungainly by orcish standards. Nonetheless, he's been able to uncover a number of Transom relics that he uses to his advantage during his assassinations: a gem that grants him limited invisibility, cases full of explosive crossbow bolts, a grappling hook, and Gods know how many other magical doodads. Zepho is particularly fond of slaying Leukotheans, and he wears a tunic made of the skin of slain sea-dwellers as a sort of disturbing trophy.

1D. STOREROOMS

Preparedness is the cornerstone of the Corian strategy in Ancora Bay. Ideally, the Corians aim to someday conquer the rest of the seas, but for the time being, all they need to do is withstand what now seems like an inevitable Markitan uprising. With proper stores of food, raw materials, and ammunition, hundreds of Corians could potentially weather a longstanding siege in their urban fortress. As such, the storerooms are the most strategically significant part of the Headquarters.

Notably, most of the storerooms need not be dedicated to food storage. As described below, the mushroom farms in the Myconiary (1h) provide an incredible amount of calories per square foot of mushroom plots. This, in turn, reduces the need to store food and leaves plenty of storage space for stockpiling weapons, armor, charcoal, arrows and bolts, and anything else that the Corians might need to withstand a civilian revolt.

The storerooms are not guarded, but various soldiers and other fortress staff regularly pass through them to retrieve or deposit supplies. When an adventurer passes through the storerooms, roll a d6. On a roll of 1, an entire squad of soldiers is getting outfitted. On a 2, a single soldier is retrieving a weapon. On a 3 or 4, one staff member (a chef, groundskeeper, or quartermaster) is in the storerooms. On a 5 or 6, the storerooms are currently empty.

1E. TRAINING ROOM

While much of Corian training—troop movements, exercises, sparring, and other drills—occurs in the yard outside the Headquarters, any training that requires a degree of secrecy occurs indoors, away from prying eyes. Magical experimentation, elite dueling, and the never-ending cycle of grunts challenging their superiors for promotions occur in the interior training room.

If the adventurers are able to advance through the front office (1b), their next big hurdle will follow soon after. Any time the party passes through the training room, there is a roughly 50% chance that the room will be currently in use by at least a dozen random soldiers. The placement of this training room is no accident. The officers on the upper floors and the support staff on the other side of the training room rely on the presence of random soldiers "patrolling" this large space to guarantee protection from potential intruders.



1F. GARDEROBE

The Corians have many flaws, but they are not wasteful. All Corians are encouraged to use the first-floor garderobe and to carry their excrement to the Myconiary (1h) to be used as fertilizer.

1G. STAFF QUARTERS

Only about half of the Corians stationed at the fortress are soldiers. Most Corian outposts throughout Roksunay are far less bureaucratic, but the Ancora Bay force has need of a more diverse staff that includes dedicated chefs, maintenance workers, wardens, secretaries, janitors, farmers, and workers fulfilling every other non-combatant role. This staff sleeps in quarters fairly similar to the soldiers' quarters (1c), though they are far more likely to have petty cash in their various footlockers and other storage containers.

1H. MYCONIARY

The secret weapon of the Corian Headquarters is the cavernous space they've dug out in the southeast corner of their base, overflowing with calorie-dense mushrooms that can theoretically sustain the Corians for weeks at a time with no outside influxes of fish or vegetable crops. The mushrooms grown within the Corian Headquarters typically augment food stores on outgoing ships, but can also be used to keep the fortress entirely self-sufficient. Perhaps surprisingly, the very existence of the Myconiary is one of the best-kept secrets of the Corian Headquarters. The Corians frequently claim that the Headquarters is self-sufficient, and many citizens, without understanding how that could possibly be true, assume that the occupiers are using a more bizarre magical means of feeding their soldiers and staff.

The Myconiary extends far beyond the originally intended footprint of the headquarters, and it may or may not threaten the structural integrity of nearby buildings whose foundations are only a few feet thick. This cave system is also a potential entry point for particularly daring adventurers who may opt to tunnel

into the fortress from a neighboring basement.

Soldiers rarely enter the Myconiary, apart from brief visits to drop off their stool for fertilizer. Typically, there are a few farmers tending to the fungi at any given time. Notably, there are no windows in the Myconiary, and it is only ever dimly lit by the faint bioluminescent glow of a few of the odder mushroom varieties.

2A. THE BODY ROOM

Qiliria's opening offer to the Corians was quite the grand gesture: an entire platoon of undead soldiers to help round out their ranks. Qiliria knew that securing the aid of the Corians would be crucial to her goals. Thus far, she has been successful in keeping potential opponents and thwarters of her grand schemes off her trail. She was able to quickly woo the Corians with this large gift: dozens of zombies, skeletons, and other undead fighters. Qiliria walked these soldiers across the bottom of the sea, up through the jungles of the south end of the Bay, and straight into the Headquarters under cover of darkness. Now, this undead army waits in a room that the Corians jokingly refer to as "the body room." Here they stand eerily silent, awaiting orders from Commander Danglip.

Fortunately for any adventurer who stumbles on this room, the undead are completely inert. They will exert enough bodily function to remain upright and alert, but nothing more. If a single knight were to walk into this room and methodically chop the head off of each and every undead soldier, they would put up no resistance. If, however, Commander Danglip were to order the army to stop the adventurers at all costs... that would be quite a different story altogether.

2B. MEDICAL WING

While most armies aim to minimize the potential for injury during training and routine guard duty, the Corians instead opt to simply address the inevitable injuries as quickly as possible. The ultra-violent nature of life in the Corian army, which involves frequent brutal duels to settle disputes and cement hierarchies, leads

to an endless series of debilitating injuries to nearly every member of the Fleet, from the newest of recruits to the most senior officers. As such, the medical wing is nearly always operating at full capacity.

On one hand, this means that the Corians have learned to be incredibly efficient with their medical care, quickly able to determine whether an injury requires amputation or a simple tourniquet. Turnover is quick in the medical wing, and though the surgeons tend to opt for the most straightforward—and often painful—procedures, deaths are surprisingly rare if a soldier is able to survive long enough to make it to the medical wing.

On the other hand, the constant lack of vacancies in hospital beds means that any large Corian accident (for example, a party of adventurers setting off an explosion in the harbor, or slicing through a squadron's worth of guards) will quickly test the limits of the Corian medical workers.

2C. COMMANDER DANGLIP'S OFFICE

“Well-appointed” would not be the first term used to describe the office of Commander Danglip. Despite being second-in-command, behind only Qiliria Tallrene herself, Commander Danglip maintains a fairly spartan office. A desk, an atlas, a small shrine to Dee'pak, an armor stand, and a strangely luxurious array of ointments are all that Danglip keeps in his office. Perhaps more surprising: Commander Danglip spends the bulk of every day *and* every night in his office. He rarely steps out into the world and prefers to delegate commands to his officers.

Commander Danglip's office is not locked. If someone wishes to speak with him, they may. Adventurers without a map of the Headquarters may wind up in this office by mistake, an error they will only briefly rue. Danglip is a formidable foe, and he will relish the opportunity to dispatch intruders himself.

COMMANDER DANGLIP

No one questions Commander Danglip's (he/him) devotion to the Corian cause. He has already died for it once. Slain in battle against the Leukothean Vanguard, Danglip's soul departed to The Dee'p, the realm of his God Dee'pak. After three years of darkness and delirium, Danglip was returned to the land of the living through the necromantic magic of Triles Moundfoot, under direct orders from Qiliria. The dark elf had heard tales of Danglip's mastery of naval tactics and decided that he alone was worthy to serve beneath her. With great arcane difficulty, Triles was able to return Danglip to life, a hobgoblin zombie in steel plate.

It was no frivolous demand of Qiliria to revive a dead commander to aid in her war effort. She specifically wanted someone who knew The Dee'p intimately, someone who had seen the dark realm, and someone who had a wider perspective than the largely short-sighted Corian soldiers. She wanted someone who knew how to be patient, to wait for an opening, and to strike with purpose. No hot-headed orc could fill this position. It had to be someone who had seen the other side and knew the stakes of war.

Commander Danglip is no ruthless warlord. He is calm and collected. He recognizes the strengths of the Corian Fleet, and also the incompatibility of their way of life with what he considers the quaint Markitan existence. Through brutal adversity comes strength. Through conquest comes excellence. The short lifespan of orcs and rungals encourages bold action. The era of elves ended, and with their demise, so too ended the limits on Corian domination. Commander Danglip knows that only through total Corian ascendancy can his people rise above the persecution of the other races of Roksunay.



If anything, Commander Danglip is rational to a fault. Whereas other Corians might be more rash and volatile, Danglip carefully considers all tactical options. He is happy to keep the Fleet in a defensive position until Qiliria achieves her goals. He knows that there is no need to wage an all-out war when extraplanar conquest is so close at hand. All he needs to do is protect Qiliria, protect the Gatherers, and prepare his Fleet for the birth of the new world.

Though Commander Danglip trusts in Qiliria's plan, he is also potentially open to persuasion from outside influence. He is sworn to his orcish and goblinoid brethren above all else, but he is also uniquely flexible amongst Corian higher-ups. If the party is able to convince him that the best chance for Corian prosperity lies in Markitan alliances and not Qiliria, they may be able to sway him. Danglip, however, revels in the glory of battle, and will happily attack the party on sight if he believes they stand in the way of Corian glory. If he finds himself outmatched, however, he will call for backup or attempt to escape. He is proud, but he is also realistic. He will not allow himself to be defeated in the name of honor alone.

2D. MESS HALL

Orcs, hobgoblins, and rungals eat *a lot*. Goblins don't eat much in terms of total caloric intake, but they have to consume at least a small amount of food almost every hour to keep up with their rapid metabolism. The mess hall is decidedly not where all food is consumed. Many Corians prefer to keep handfuls of dried fish, fungal mass, and kelp in the folds of their armor, to be consumed between drills, while on guard duty, or any time their sergeant isn't looking. Regardless, the mess hall is the hub of social life in the Corian Headquarters. Whenever a grunt considers overtaking his immediate superior, word first starts to spread in the mess hall. Many impromptu tussles begin in the mess hall, a facet of military base living that no one makes any effort to quell. Violence is an inevitability even when stationed in the headquarters of Corian bureaucracy.

Even if the party is visiting the Corian Headquarters with the blessings of Commander Danglip, they should expect to be accosted, spat on, and endlessly insulted when making their way through the mess hall.

3A. JAIL

Executions were initially the most common way to punish those the Corians believed to be in defiance of their occupation. The Consortium, however, used their sway to discourage this barbaric practice. Though the individual members of the board cared little for the fate of common rabble-rousers, they came to believe that these public executions might lead to civil

unrest, a popular uprising, and a general shakeup of the commercial order of the Bay. This would be bad for business, and so the Consortium stepped in. They threatened to withhold tribute unless the Corians began to deal with criminals in a manner deemed more humane.

Now, the Corians are far more likely to imprison known agitators who fail to change their ways after being thoroughly intimidated. They are brought to the third floor of the fortress, typically jailed without a trial or any formal process other than meticulous record-keeping. These prisoners are rarely treated with the level of respect that the Consortium requests, but when a business leader comes to visit the prison, the wardens will put on a proper show to convince the capitalist oligarchs that all is running smoothly.

GM NOTE: Players who choose to investigate the halfling disappearances may jump to conclusions and head straight to the jail to try to find the displaced halflings. It is important to note that they are *not* being held in the Corian prison. Most kidnapped halflings are taken to the docks. Once there, their fingers are chopped off and sent to Triles to be used as ingredients in his necromantic magic. The halflings are then shipped east to aid Qiliria and the Gatherers in their comet summoning ritual. The notable exception to this is Gilly Leafhollow's son Rister, who is being held in the prison as bait to lure the Splintered out of hiding. This plot point is described in greater detail below.

Importantly: jumping to conclusions here would be a dire mistake. The halflings are not here, and a daring rescue plan that requires the adventures to fight their way through the citadel will inevitably end in failure.

While most of the fortress relies on purely mundane means of defense, the jail is home to one particularly noteworthy arcane protection. A nearly invisible sigil is etched into the floor in front of the cell reserved for the jail's most egregious offenders. This protective ward was placed by one of the few gifted sorceresses in the Corian employ and was designed to trigger if anyone but the fortress wardens steps foot on the ensigiled stonework.

In practice, this means that if the prisoner in question is able to slip out of their cage, or if an intruder attempts to break them out, they will inevitably trip the ward. Doing so will be disastrous for their escape attempt. Tripping the ward will automatically teleport The Urchin to their location.

THE URCHIN

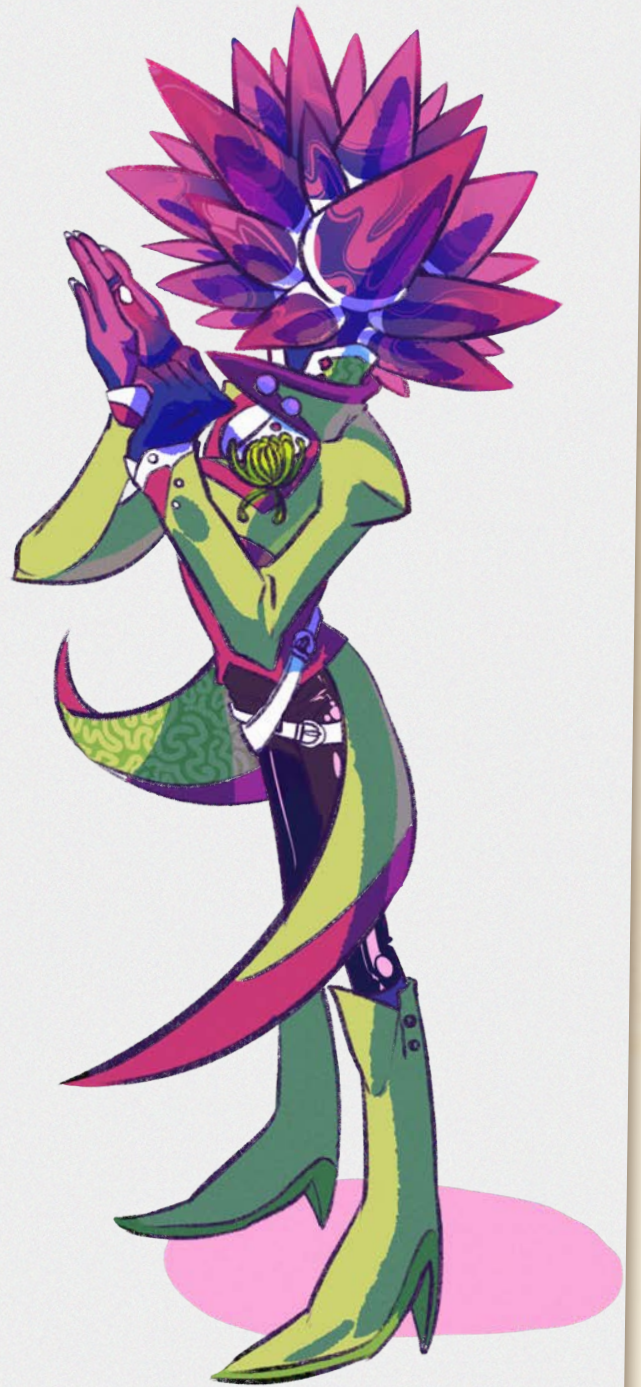
Not all who worship Dee'pak are—or were—members of the Corian races. While pre-Calamity worship of the dark God was exceedingly rare for humans, elves, and the like, it wasn't entirely unheard of. One such believer was a wood elf named Escaveer Babu (he/him), a wise psychic warrior who stood in defiance of the Transom subjugation of his people. Much like the orcs and goblinoids, the Emynoran woodland elves resisted assimilation into the Transom Empire, and were therefore treated intermittently with violence, enslavement, and exile.

To fight back against the unstoppable armies of the Transom Empire, Escaveer sought greater power through the forbidden divinity of Dee'pak. As his connection to the sea God grew, his physical form began to change. Dee'pak had a great disdain for the wood elves, and so reshaped Escaveer into a creature more fitting of a champion of The Dee'p: an unsettling creature with the body of an elf, slimy purple skin, and a spherical spiked head devoid of facial features. Though he has no eyes or mouth, he senses the world around him with psychic magic and communicates telepathically.

Through his psychic abilities and the divine blessings of Dee'pak, Escaveer became more powerful than ever, but was banished from his woodland home. He could not hide his unholy affinity and was left to wander Roksunay alone. He survived the Calamity, assumed a new identity, and sometime during the intervening 80 years, joined the Corian army as a diabolical weapon.

Now, The Urchin fights as one of Qiliria's right-hand soldiers. On a secret island to the east of Ancora Bay, he is training a new platoon of psionic commandos to help secure Roksunay in the aftermath of the new comet that Qiliria and the Gatherers will soon summon. He bides his time, waiting for The Dee'p and the earthly realm to finally be merged. He is also a sworn protector of the Corian Fleet, and will dutifully defend the fortress should an intruder trip the arcane sigil designed to summon his aid.

The Urchin is a powerful combatant, with both telepathic and telekinetic abilities. When not casting psionic spells, he swings his longsword with graceful flourishes that perceptive adventurers might recognize as distinctively elven. Though his grotesque figure belies his woodland heritage, there is still a proud Emynoran freedom fighter lurking under his spiky shell.



3B. REC ROOM

Corian soldiers are people. Though the Consortium prefers for the Markitan populace to think of the orcs and goblinoids as sub-human, there is little that separates the two peoples other than their physical characteristics and their cultures. While Corian soldiers are expected to remain serious and alert while within the fortress, they are still given breaks in the rec room.

Leisure time in the Corian Headquarters is not too dissimilar from leisure time on any other military base. Soldiers play cards and other games of chance. Musicians strum away on shoddy communal lutes and

are accompanied by haphazard thigh drumming from orcs without proper musical training. Most of all, plenty of Corians use this time to simply read, snack, and gossip with their fellow soldiers. Regardless of the deeply nefarious aims of Qiliria and the Corian higher-ups, most soldiers have little knowledge of the broader context of the Fleet's actions. Being a soldier in a well-fortified base mostly consists of just waiting around, and the rec room gives these soldiers a chance to find a bit of joy in that waiting.

3C. PRISONER MESS HALL

Initially, the Corians funneled all prisoners down into the primary mess hall (2d) for meals. The support staff quickly determined that this was not a sustainable strategy after prisoners repeatedly ended up brutally injured. Now, those imprisoned in the fortress take their meals in their own sordid mess hall adjacent to their cells. They're fed a diet quite similar to that of the soldiers, though lacking much of the protein.

Unfortunately, the humans and halflings that make up the vast majority of the prison population do not get the nutrients they need from the mushroom-heavy diet. Orcs and goblinoids are able to metabolize the fungus and extract the vitamins they need from mushrooms grown in the Myconiarium (1h), but humans who spend too long in the Corian prison will often experience bouts of what the prisoners have begun to call "cave gut." This debilitating illness leaves prisoners weakened and nauseated for up to a month. In extreme cases, humans and halflings have been known to hallucinate terrible visions while babbling incomprehensible gibberish. This usually subsides after the wardens temporarily augment their diets with fruits and fish, but at least 10% of prisoners held in the Corian Headquarters for more than a year will experience a fatal bout of cave gut.

3D. SENTRY BALCONIES

One of the primary purposes of the Corian Headquarters is to act as a watchtower. While Ancora Bay is hardly a surveillance state, the occupational strategy has prioritized vigilance and "preemptive imprisonment" for suspected dissidents. A crucial piece of this strategy is to keep careful watch of those in the immediate vicinity of the fortress. The last thing the Corian Fleet would want is a local rebellion creating the opportunity needed for a large-scale prison break.

If Qiliria ever sees fit to betray the Corians, the Ancora Bay troops will have to be on high alert for whatever bizarre magic forces she may levy against the city. She has already marched a battalion of undead across the ocean floor and into the city once. Should Qiliria take up arms against the Corians, the first step to surviving her assault would be proper surveillance.

Archers and crossbowmen stand watch over the

city streets 24/7. In addition to acting as deterrents against potential attackers or intruders, they are also expected to keep notes concerning any suspicious civilian activity. This meticulous note-taking is yet another example of the ever-increasing bureaucratization of the Ancora-based Corians.

3E. MEDICAL STOREROOM

There is a constant concern amongst Corian medics that overconfident soldiers will attempt to treat their own injuries. Common recruits are provided no medical training whatsoever, but many try in vain to apply shoddy tourniquets, healing salves, or field amputations, even when injured *in the vicinity of the Headquarters*. As such, the medical supplies for the base have been moved to a dedicated tower which is only accessible via the medical wing (2b). Though a wise move for the Corians, it seems to have done little to limit the frequency of amateur field surgery among their ranks.

Adventurers who make their way to the medical storeroom will be able to pilfer a wide array of tonics, elixirs, and a nearly unfathomable cache of moonshine. They should be careful, however, because Corian surgeons are quite proficient at dismembering both ailing patients in need of amputations as well as pesky intruders.

4A. WARHORN BELFRY

When the Corians seized power from the Markitans, one of their first actions was to ceremonially tear down the colossal bell in their fortress and send it plummeting to the ground. It still sits there to this day, a reminder that, despite the equivocating language of the Ancora Compromise, the Corians were the ones who toppled the Markitan defense.

In place of the bell, the Corians installed a deep and bassy warhorn in the belfry. Orcish and goblinoid soldiers were already quite used to interpreting horn calls as a means of receiving tactical orders: a single upward leap signaled "charge," a low drone meant "stand your ground," etc. Installing this massive warhorn in the fortress meant that one horncaller could deliver tactical instructions to Ancora Bay's entire standing army, all from the relative protection of their fortified headquarters.





ZOTHUUN TSCHK: Corian officers are always trained alongside a dedicated horncaller to ensure that the pair can learn to think and command in tandem. On the battlefield or at sea, it is crucial for a horncaller to be able to intuit their leader's strategies to facilitate concise commands. Zothuun's (she/her) military career ended abruptly when her officer, Commander Danglip, was killed. And then just as quickly, she was reinstated, this time as Ancora Bay's lead horncaller. This rung has an unmatched lung capacity, allowing her to masterfully perform clear and concise horn gestures for all in the Bay to follow. What's more, her prehensile tail and natural penchant for climbing allow her to rapidly ascend the wall of the tower whenever she's called upon to command the combined forces of the Bay.

4B, 4C, 4D. ROOFTOP

Due to the comparatively limited storage space within the base, many loose supplies end up scattered across the infrequently used rooftop. Typically, these are durable goods that were requisitioned but never properly catalogued, thus leaving them in a sort of bureaucratic limbo. Instead of discarding or properly documenting their arrival, staff members may end up stowing these goods away on the rooftop. This means that the sentries who patrol the top of the base are always well-stocked, though that assumes the sentries are able to keep track of what's stored and where. It also means that a box of explosives, a barrel of liquor, or 100 feet of rope wouldn't be missed if some adventurers were to sneakily snag them.

4E. BALLISTA WORKSHOP AND STORAGE

For a pair of siege weapons that are almost never used, the two ballistae on the watchtower are frequently on the fritz. Rope jams, faulty mechanisms, or rotting wood are surprisingly regular frustrations. Thus, the officers in charge of guarding the base decided it was worth dedicating an entire room of the base to repairing and augmenting the ballistae, as well as storing their expensive bolts.

Adventurers who make their way to the workshop will find a breadth of Corian engineering within. Metalworking, fletching, and ropemaking equipment is freely available to anyone daring enough to sneak inside.

5A. WATCHTOWER

On the roof of the Headquarters, a sextet of engineers mans two ballistae in times of crisis. Less a deterrent and more a last resort, these powerful weapons are theoretically used to counter siege weapons that might be wheeled up the streets of Ancora Bay. In practice, however, they've only ever been used to puncture holes

in ships approaching the harbor. Originally constructed to oppose Corian raiding parties, they've lain all but unused since the transfer of the fortress from Markitan hands to the occupiers. Nevertheless, ballista operators are permanently stationed in Headquarters and may be called upon to throw bolts at advancing ships, armies, or siege weapons.

Between these ballistae is the Alert Pyre, a large pile of wood and fuel, ready at all times to be ignited, signaling—jointly with the warhorn—that the city is either under attack or that all soldiers throughout the city need to be on high alert for some other threat.

PLOT HOOK: FREE THE HALFLING DISSIDENT

Rister Leafhollow, son of Gilly, was arrested by a Corian patrol for allegedly attempting to sell animal hides in the off-limits flooded market. Of course, this is only half the story. The real reason Rister was arrested was that he is a known Splintered collaborator. Knowing that Baxter and his crew will come out of hiding eventually to try to rescue Rister, the Corians have kept the rebellious halfling in the prison (3a) as bait for the meddlesome but honorable pirates.

GM NOTE: While this plot hook was written with the intention of drawing out the Splintered, you can quite easily reframe it as a means to draw out the adventurers if they've made a large enough name for themselves in Ancora Bay. Simply place someone the adventurers particularly care about in the jail and wait for the party to attempt to free them. Little else about the quest needs to change: all that's needed is for the party to be lured to the top floors of the Headquarters so that they can be dealt with.

Now that the Corians have received word that a crew of Splintered has been seen in Ancora Bay, they've decided to lay the trap. They briefly placed Rister in a different cell, one with a window facing the halfling village, such that they can be sure one of his kin would be able to spy him with their "keen eyes." The Corians hope that word will get around to Baxter, and that he and his crew will try to free the young halfling.

The party may end up hearing this information from Baxter himself, from Rister's mother Gilly, or from Rister's best friend Normo, who would be most likely to spot Rister from a distance. Whoever informs the party of Rister's whereabouts will also plead with them to rescue the poor boy.

Though saving the halfling is of course a trap, it may not actually be a *trap for the party*. However, no one is going to let the adventurers simply waltz right

up to the upper floors. The party will have to use a different approach: stealth, deception, violence, magic, and acrobatics are all on the table, though each involves considerable challenges and risks. Crucially, the party is unlikely to know much about the interior layout of the Headquarters before beginning their infiltration. They'll be aware that there are some stationed soldiers and that there's a jail on the third floor. They'll also certainly know about anything visible from the outside (the sentry balconies, ballistae, and warhorn in particular). However, the rest of the fortress will be a black box, forcing the adventurers to either carefully gather reconnaissance or improvise as they go.

Any number of strategies might be useful for making their way up to the third floor without simply fighting their way through the entire fortress. They could impersonate a member of the Consortium, allow themselves to get arrested, travel by rope from a nearby rooftop, teleport, fly, or even simply choose to ally themselves with the Corians. What matters is not the method, but the consequences.

Crucially, it will be nearly impossible to extract Rister without triggering the summoning sigil outside of Rister's cell. *Even if they can sneak their way up to the prison, even if they can steal a key, and even if they have a plan to get Rister out of the prison alive, they will almost certainly have to step on the floor near the gate, thereby triggering the teleportation spell that will bring The Urchin directly to them.* As soon as he arrives, the party will have but a split second to decide whether to fight, run, or try to stop the guard that will invariably run to light the Alert Pyre.

Though the Corians will be dismayed to have not caught Baxter and his associates, they will be relieved to have discovered a new crew of dissidents. Most Corian guards will attempt to simply slay the intruders, but they need not resort to violence. If the party allows themselves to be captured instead of killed, the Corians may find they have many uses for the party. Perhaps Commander Danglip needs a new crew of independent mercenaries, or maybe The Urchin is seeking out new psionic recruits.

If you want to add an extra incentive or an extra complication, consider consulting the two tables below.

Ultimately, it will be exceedingly difficult to rescue Rister without making at least a couple mistakes along the way. Maybe the party is forced to kill some innocent support staff to maintain their cover, or maybe they trip an alarm, forcing the city into lockdown. It is quite possible that the party escapes, but that Rister is killed in the crossfire. It is overwhelmingly likely that any activity within the fortress will brand the party as agitators, and will result in the Corians wanting the party dead.

If, however, they do succeed in freeing Rister, he will likely have many useful secrets to share with the party. At the very least, Rister will have overheard that:

1. The Corians and Pyroclasts are rounding up halflings, removing their fingers, and shipping them east.
2. Despite working with Qiliria, most Corians are terrified of her.
3. Commander Danglip is undead and crucial to Qiliria's military strategy.
4. Rister was only ever in the jail to be used as bait.

It's quite possible that Rister knows quite a bit more than that. Regardless, Gilly and Baxter will both be tremendously relieved that Rister escaped safe and sound. The party will be able to call on either the Splintered or the halflings for any favors they may need.

d6	Side Objectives
1	The Leukothean Vanguard has put a bounty on Zepho's head. If the party can slay him and bring his tunic to a Vanguard outpost, they'll be paid generously.
2	Halfling courtesan Lola Minsk believes her father is also being held in the Corian prison (3a). She's willing to share any secrets she's gained during her time as a sought-after prostitute if the party will allow her to accompany them on their mission.
3	Biglug Dukruk, advocate for the slums, knows about the fungus being grown in the Myconiary (1h). He wants the adventurers to recover some of the spores so that he can propagate some mushrooms in the slums.
4	The sorceress who created the arcane sigil that summons The Urchin is almost certainly within the fortress. If the players can find her, they may be able to compel her to teach them her ways.
5	The warhorn, the Alert Pyre, and the watchtower ballistae are massive impediments to any attempt at freeing Ancora Bay from Corian rule. If the players can destroy any of this equipment, it may help their schemes down the line.
6	If the players want to stop Qiliria, the single most effective action they can take would be to remove Danglip. They can either re-kill the undead hobgoblin or convince him to step aside as Commander of the Corian Fleet.



d6 Complications

- 1 Qiliria is currently meeting with Commander Danglip. If the party decides to enter his office (2c), they will end up face-to-face with the greatest threat in all of Roksunay.
- 2 Completely unrelated to the actions of the adventurers, Zothuun is forced to blow the warhorn while the party is within the fortress. Now the entire Fleet is on high alert. If the party hasn't learned how to decipher different warhorn calls, they may be blindsided by the subsequent Corian tactics.
- 3 The mushrooms in the Myconiary (1h) are in their sporing phase, releasing large quantities of fine particles into the fortress. While the Corians are immune to the effects, humans, elves, halings, and other adventurers may suffer from vivid hallucinations.
- 4 A fire in the mess hall (2d) has filled the second floor with smoke, and forced many of the support staff into the body room (2a). While this may serve as a useful distraction, it also means the adventurers must contend with the smoke and chaos as they make their way through the Headquarters.
- 5 Failed necromancer Gikgok has decided that today is the day he's going to impress the Corians. He has snuck into the body room (2a) and is making a great effort to command the various zombies and skeletons within. He is, unsurprisingly, failing miserably, and now uncontrolled undead creatures are terrorizing the fortress.
- 6 A brigade of Pyroclasts has been stalking the party, and will use their intrusion into the fortress as their excuse to attack the adventurers.



PART VI: THE RENFORTH AND THE BLACK PIT

A DISTRICT FOR ALL COMERS

Adjacent to the Corian Headquarters, adventurers will find many of the homes of Corian officers as well as of Markitans who do business with the Corians—notably shipwrights and armorers who receive the bulk of their revenue from Corian contracts. Despite the proximity to a heavily fortified military base, the neighboring quarter of the city contains many of the wealthier residents and businesses within Ancora Bay. Those who harbor more ill-will toward the Corians might prefer to live further east in the Pink Quarter, but anybody else is likely to be enamored with the beautiful hilltop views of the bay to the north and the calming sounds of jungle to the south.

Fine homes, artisan workshops, and a merry-go-round of merchants and tourists are a constant reality in the western hills. By day, the city is abuzz with traders striking deals and hauling cargo. By night, the air is filled with howling monkeys, croaking bullfrogs, and the strange murmurings of Dee'pak's priests. Courtesans, drunk Corians on leave, and wealthy foreigners dot the city streets at all time, a reminder that despite the occupation, Ancora Bay is still as cosmopolitan a city as exists in Roksunay.

THE RENFORTH

Though hardly the most popular bar in Ancora Bay, The Renforth's peculiar mixture of clientele provides a unique window into Ancora Bay culture. Wealthier patrons typically choose to head to the upscale Ylmellion Lounge for spiced cocktails, and dock workers overwhelmingly prefer The Hog and Grog in the Slums. The Renforth, however, occupies a strange middle ground in terms of pricing and culture. Owner and bartender Jamira del Sapienz (she/her) has aspirations of transforming The Renforth into a swanky, luxury establishment on par with the Ylmellion Lounge; little does she know, she's found a unique sweet-spot in the Ancora Bay market. The Renforth attracts diverse patrons who shy away from the rough and tumble alehouses in the slums and would prefer to avoid paying laughably inflated prices at the higher-end establishments.

The Renforth offers adventurers a variety of amenities, and parties are likely to glean quite a bit from the multifaceted bar-goers they meet within. In addition to bountiful food and drink, parties can affordably rent rooms in The Renforth, so long as they don't mind the noise from adjoining rooms.¹

¹ Jamira attracts much of her wealthier clientele by offering discounts to escorts renting rooms on the upper floor.

More importantly, though, The Renforth provides a convenient way for adventurers to get the pulse of the city. Corian soldiers, luxury craftworkers, prostitutes, aspiring socialites, drug dealers, gamblers, tourists, and anyone else who exists somewhere between ultra-rich and destitute might frequent The Renforth.

When populating The Renforth with patrons, feel free to roll as many times as needed on the table below:

GM NOTE: With few exceptions, you can introduce any Ancora Bay NPC to the party by simply placing them in The Renforth. Gikgok the goblin, Baxter the pirate, or Gilly the desperate mother may all find their way to Renforth. For this reason, it might be useful to think of the Renforth as a last-ditch remedy in case your players aren't drawn to the critical locations where you were *hoping* they'd meet a crucial NPC for your narrative.

d10	Renforth Patron	Bio
1	CHRIKA (he/him)	A rungal soldier who has quickly risen through the ranks of the Corians Fleet. He's feeling cocky after a successful duel with a superior, and he's looking to celebrate by fighting a stranger. Perceptive adventurers will recognize that Chrika is both a) extremely strong and b) itching to cause trouble by his wide and swollen cheek glands.
2	MAYMOUTH OOLABADIA (she/her)	A Markitan dealer of opakee, an illicit stimulant made from seeds found deep in Ancora's jungles. She will speak with the party in wildly incomprehensibly slang. Unless the adventurers have previously spent time with spirited narcotic enthusiasts, they will likely not understand anything Maymouth says. Maymouth has connections to many of Ancora Bay's non-Splintered criminal outfits.
3	KREANNE TELIENE (she/her)	An Al Ibrani expatriate looking to find friends in Ancora Bay. Kreanne has found a fulfilling career for herself crafting custom greaves and pauldrons for Corian officers. She has few material needs, but she has yet to make connections in Ancora Bay outside the Guild of Blacksmiths. Particularly manipulative parties may take advantage of this lonely expat to learn some secrets about the Corian officers who hire her services.
4	JUGGA K'LUN (he/him)	An orcish civilian with a penchant for drunken storytelling. Anyone in Jugga's vicinity after he's had ten or more drinks (i.e. a regular night by sunset or so) will invariably find themselves regaled with tales of distant cavernous origins, great dragons, flying jellyfish, spats with the dark elves, and all sorts of other dubious claims about the supposed history of Roksunay's orc population.
5	MINITT FAETHER (she/her)	An elegant, and startlingly gorgeous young Markitan woman. Minitt is one of the most successful escorts who frequents The Renforth. Her secret? She never lets on that she charges for sexual favors until after the fact. If one of her "clients" fails to understand the scenario in which they find themselves, Minitt's enforcer will make sure they pay up regardless.
6	CHALMERS DEL SAPIENZ (he/him)	Jamira's 8-year-old son. Chalmers is quite precocious for his age, and while he's mostly tasked with bussing tables, he'll strike up a conversation with anyone in The Renforth who might have something interesting to say. Visitors are frequently impressed with Chalmers's advanced vocabulary, though many are at least mildly dismayed that he seems to be spending his formative years amongst prostitutes and gamblers.

d10	Renforth Patron	Bio
7	BENSON DAVIS (he/him)	<p>The city's least successful chankla player. Benson comes to The Renforth nearly every day to play game after game of chankla, a sort of backgammon / Go hybrid played on stacked game boards. Benson is deeply in debt to the other chankla players who frequent The Renforth, and because of that, he is incredibly susceptible to bribes. It's possible Benson may have already accepted a bribe to try to injure or slander the party as soon as they arrive.</p>
8	THITCH (she/her)	<p>This shima kame stands in stark defiance of the stereotypes about her kind, for better or for worse. She's one of very few turtlefolk in Ancora Bay that one would describe as "louche." Everything about her appearance would seem to scream "I'm a shady character!", from her belt full of knives, to her dark and ratty hood. And yet, those who decide to take a seat with Thitch will find she's an altogether friendly, lovely, and generous bar patron. That said... sometimes looks aren't <i>that</i> deceiving. Thitch is, afterall, Ancora Bay's foremost poisoner, and she will sell her deadly concoctions at a sharp discount to anyone who treats her with kindness.</p>
9	TAKITAKEEREEE'TI (he/him)	<p>An hibouroc messenger who regularly makes the rounds back and forth between Ancora Bay and Al Ibra, Roksunay's two closest trading partners. Takitakeereee'ti spends alternating nights sleeping in the two cities, and whenever he's in Ancora Bay, he heads to The Renforth as his drinking hole of choice. If you want the most up to date news from Al Ibra, Takitakeereee'ti is the man to talk to. He usually just has one drink and then jabbbers with his friends until it's time to turn in, so don't expect to turn this courier into a party animal.</p>
10	ALEX ABERDEE (he/him)	<p>Arguably the most despicable man in Ancora Bay. A handsome Markitan man in his mid-twenties, Alex has engaged in all manner of heinous crimes in his short adult life. His wantonly immoral behavior has never gone punished, thanks to his in-depth familiarity with Corian law, as well as the influence of his aunt: Consortium member Constance Billihan. Alex's newest scheme is to lure destitute halflings to his home, kidnap them, and then sell those same halflings to the Gatherers for their own machinations. Alex feels no remorse, and seems hell-bent on one-upping himself with increasingly appalling offenses.</p>



LOLA MINSK

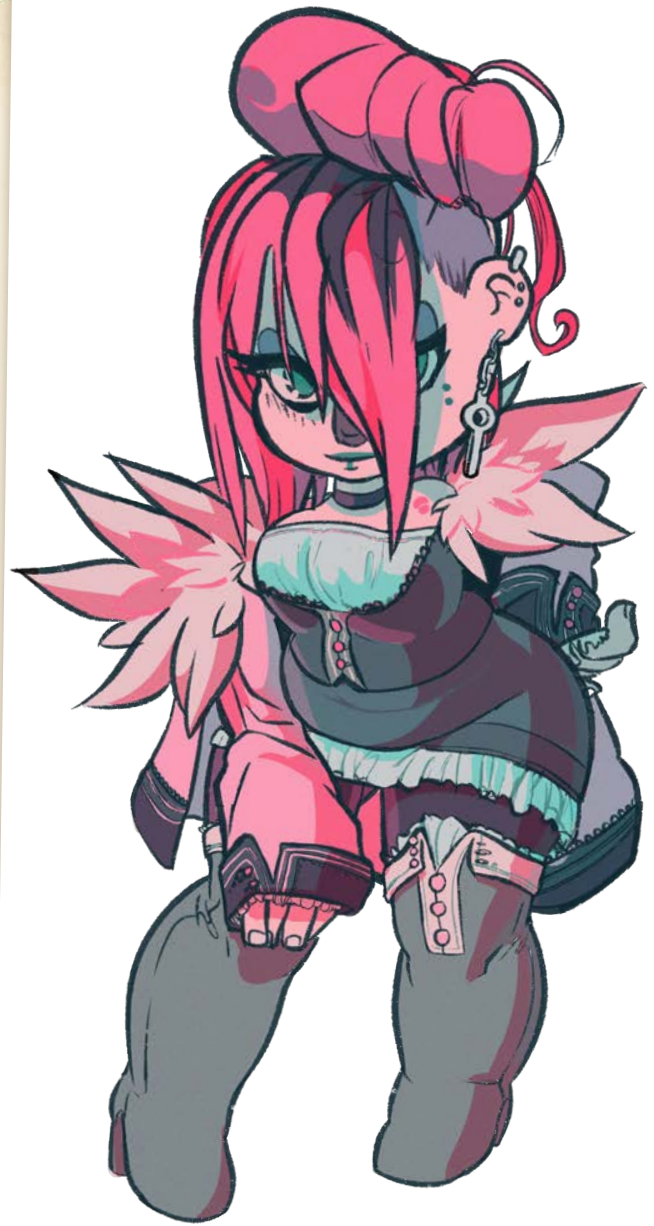
You'd be best not to underestimate halfling courtesan Lola Minsk (she/her). Lola—a pseudonym, unsurprisingly—typically works out of The Renforth, where she is close with many of the regulars. Despite the dangerous nature of her work, she has little need for additional protection because a) The Renforth is filled with Lola's friends who would proudly stand up to any unruly client of hers, and b) Lola is one tough halfling herself. While she learned to hunt as a child, she has since learned Corian martial arts from her associate Niz Dee'bo (she/her), a former Corian operative who left the Fleet for a more lucrative career in prostitution.

Renforth owner Jamira always keeps a room open for Lola. Their friendship is strong, and their business synergy even stronger: Lola convinces her clients to purchase and down copious expensive cocktails at The Renforth before they proceed up to Lola's room. In turn, Lola pays nothing for her permanent "residency" at the inn. Jamira believes that the high status of many of Lola's clients also helps to raise the reputation of the bar. Though Consortium leader Samuel Garvey typically requests that Lola accompany him to his manor, he will occasionally join Lola at The Renforth.

Perhaps more than any other halfling, Lola has ingratiated herself with the people of Ancora Bay and rarely returns to her home village in the hilltop to the southeast. Those who become close with Lola, however, will learn that this is not for a lack of loyalty to her kin. Lola cares deeply for her family and friends back at the halfling village, but she knows that it serves her aims much better to not be seen around them. Lola is an information broker. She uses her intimate connections with both Ancora Bay's elites as well as its criminal underbelly to gather any relevant intelligence on threats to halfling life in the Bay. She is a frequent collaborator with the Splintered, a drinking buddy of Ignatius Fortissimo, and an ally to Bigluk Dukruk. Most relevantly, Lola has been aiding Gilly Leafhollow throughout the recent halfling disappearances.

Depending on how much time has passed since the adventurers arrived in Ancora Bay, Lola has either

1. found out that halflings are disappearing, but little more.
2. deduced that the Pyrcolasts are abducting the halflings and bringing them to the docks.
3. trailed a rungal operative to the facility where halflings are getting their fingers removed.
4. put together that the halfling fingers are necromantic ritual reagents, and that the halflings are then being shipped east aboard Corian ships.



However, Lola is unlikely to share the breadth of her knowledge with the party, unless they share some valuable information as well. Lola is particularly keen to learn more about Qiliria, about Triles and his secrets, or about what happened to her friend Rister. If the adventurers have yet to gather adequate intel to share with Lola, she may instead give them a small task to complete before she'll divulge what she knows about the halfling disappearances. Some potential requests Lola may present are provided below.

1. Lola's longtime friend Marison Sutton of the Splintered has been more depressed as of late. Lola is positive that this is the result of Marisol revisiting her past traumas and getting trapped in cycles of guilt. Since Lola needs to be careful not to be seen entering Splintered Hollow, she requests that the party **bring Marisol to The Renforth** so that Lola can console the remorseful ex-captain.

2. Now that Lola has heard a rumor about Alex Aberdee's recent misdeeds, she wants the party to try to corroborate this hearsay. If the party can either save one of his victims, or **discover concrete evidence of Alex's kidnappings**, Lola would be in the party's debt.
3. Public dissent is the single greatest weapon against Corian tyranny. Lola wants the party to engage in a **graffiti campaign** throughout Ancora Bay, spreading the word about the halfling disappearances, Consortium corruption, or the depravity of paving over Profligate Cemetery. If they could decorate the fallen bell next to the Corian Headquarters, Lola would be particularly impressed.
4. Perhaps as a disgusting demonstration of power, Samuel Garvey has stolen Lola Minsk's ceremonial earring, a sacred rite for halflings who have entered into adulthood. Lola has looked all over for it when visiting Samuel's home, so she suspects he may have taken it to the People's Palace. The earring has no particular monetary value, a fact that makes Lola feel even more deeply violated by this cruelty. She doesn't care how the party does it, but she needs them to **return her stolen earring**.

CABBADON THE RECLUSE

One of the benefits The Renforth affords visitors is the assumption of privacy for those who want it. Gods know Lola, Jugga, and Chalmers will make a point of saying hi to folks looking for a friend, but they'll also respect visitors who prefer to be alone. Cabbadon the Recluse (he/him), however, is a curious case. He spends most afternoons and evenings in The Renforth, sitting quietly at a chankla table toward the back wall. Those who wish to challenge Cabbadon need simply sit across from him and commit to an opening move. Cabbadon is eerily quiet, and for most, the only words they'll hear from his lips are "I win."

Like a few of the other shady characters in The Renforth, Cabbadon wears a hood to shroud his face. For added effect, Cabbadon also dons a peculiar wooden mask. While new challengers assume this mask is simply to conceal his face when making a daring play, the truth is far stranger.

Cabbadon has the soul of a 400-year-old elf, but his mind occupies the body of a deceased Markitan man. Prior to the Calamity, Cabbadon was a Transom sorcerer, a skilled practitioner of transference magic and a friend of the king. When he became aware of the potential risks inherent with Qiliria and the Gatherers' rituals (as outlined in the accompanying document Qiliria Tallrene and the Secret History of Roksunay), he began work on a most audacious spell: a transference ward that would trigger in case of his sudden death, immediately transmitting his soul to (hopefully!) a suitable new vessel.

Sure enough, the Calamity destroyed his home and snuffed him out in an instant, but his spell worked! His mind and soul were transferred to a new body: that of a recently-deceased Markitan man just east of the hill that would later become Ancora Bay. Cabbadon had hoped that somehow his spell would transfer his soul into the body of a newborn, into a comatose figure, or that it would simply pluck away a body from someone currently living. He understood the dubious morality of such a spell, but he also hoped that the ward would never be triggered in the first place. He hadn't considered that his slipshod ritual would place his consciousness into a decaying corpse.

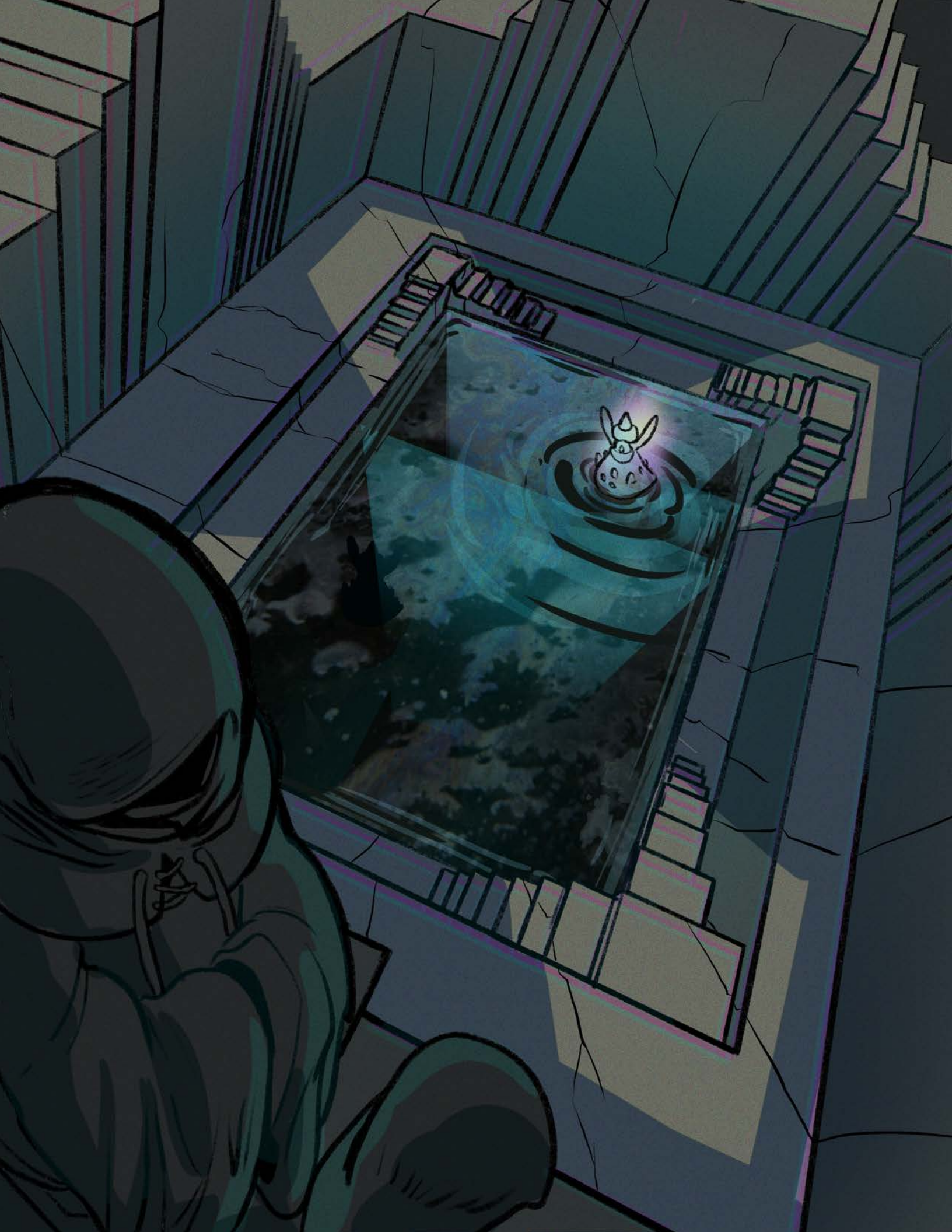
Nonetheless, Cabbadon persisted. He dragged his newly zombified frame up the hill and away from the surging floods. As one of the first non-halfling colonizers of Ancora Bay, he had to constantly keep his identity a secret. He couldn't imagine the human settlers would take kindly to a zombie neighbor, whether technically Transom or not. He swore off magic, lamenting the catastrophic results it had wrought by way of the Calamity. He donned his mask and vowed to never doff it in public.

Cabbadon suspects that there are at least a few dozen other transferred Transom consciousnesses dotted around Roksunay. He's already met another: a shima kame archaeologist named Nortle (he/him). Nonetheless, Cabbadon has no intentions of revealing his true nature anytime soon and is content to while away his days playing chankla against unsuspecting visitors in The Renforth.

THE BLACK PIT

Whereas Eulesabella's shrines and temples are scattered throughout Ancora Bay, followers of Dee'pak all congregate in one solitary location: The Black Pit. This onyx-lined stepwell reaches deep into the upper hills, with nary an organ, an altar, or a single pew to interrupt its perfectly bizarre geometry. At its nadir, a rungal preacher stands knee-deep in ink-black water, agonizingly sharing cryptic orations about treachery, disease, crustaceans, death, the sea, moral relativism, divine secrets, and all of the other hallmarks of Dee'pak's teachings.

The Black Pit is always open... in fact, it contains no doors and no walls. It is simply a tiered cavity that carves into the otherwise cheery and well-developed western hills of Ancora Bay. Those who seek to pray, repent, or simply share in communal grief can descend the steps of the Black Pit whenever they feel the need arise.



Services are not mandatory for Corians, but many soldiers and support staff alike consider themselves to be Dee'p Bound (a catch-all term for followers of Dee'pak). The Black Pit's proximity to the Corian Headquarters is no accident. While Markitans constantly push the city further into the unwelcoming jungles to the south of the city, the Corians instead occasionally consider a large public works project to make the Black Pit deeper, and to give it an even more prominent footprint. This is not the result of religious zealotry or poor city planning; they simply believe that devout and penitent citizens are easier to rule.

THE BARBS

Despite their military dominance over Ancora Bay, the Corian Fleet has been stretched increasingly thin over the past few years. First it was simply an issue of population: increasing Markitan life expectancies combined with large waves of immigration led to a rapidly growing city that began to outpace the scope of the armed forces. This has been exacerbated in recent months by the deployments requested by Qiliria to fortify her position and haul halflings and Gatherers east. With rising tension from flooding in the slums and the widening income inequality, the Corian Fleet was on the verge of losing control of the city.

The Corians have overcome this growing need for a capable guard presence in a surprisingly short period of time. A new army of supersoldiers now roam the city streets. These "Barbs"—so named for their spiked tails and thorny horns—are orcish soldiers who have undergone intense and traumatic eldritch mutations. Orcs who choose to embrace Dee'pak's harsh transformation are baptised in the sable waters at the base of the Black Pit. Thereafter, these brave soldiers experience troubling visions, painful growths, and rapid (though temporary) mental deterioration.

Many orcs who elect to undergo transformation do not survive the process. Certain orcs simply cannot withstand the extreme bodily changes associated with the dark baptism. Post-mortem investigations have yet to reveal the exact nature of the deaths, but Corian medical workers have found that the skulls of those who succumb to the transformation are often filled with inky black abscesses.

Orcs who survive the process are granted the "rank" of Barb. Though not technically an official position within the Fleet's hierarchy, Commander Danglip has authorized any orc with this designation to act with an impressive amount of authority while patrolling the city. Due to their impressive size, thick armored skin, and heightened senses, Barbs make for an incredibly adept and flexible police force.

One bizarre side effect of the transformation, however, is a sudden loss of mental faculties while at sea, likely a result of Dee'pak's maddening influence.



As such, Barbs are unsuited for any assignments that require them to leave the Bay. For the time being, these powerful and imposing soldiers have no exciting responsibilities beyond protecting key strategic assets and detaining dissidents.

FRINJIK: Daughter of Zepho, the Blank Commander, Frinjik (she/her) was always worried that she would be given preferential treatment in the Fleet due to the high profile of her threatening father. As such, she trained twice as hard as her peers. After receiving orders that she'd be stationed in Ancora Bay, she immediately went to Sambuuk to accept Dee'pak's blessing. After withstanding the transformation, she is now one of the most elite guards in the Fleet. Nevertheless, she is still perpetually compensating, embarrassed that her peers might mistakenly believe she was promoted due to nepotism. An overcompensating Barb is one dangerous weapon.

SAMBUUK

Not all Corians with important roles in Ancora Bay life are directly tied to the Corian Fleet. Though many Markitans seem to doubt this simple fact, Sambuuk (she/her) is nevertheless fully independent. She takes no orders from Qiliria, nor Commander Danglip, nor anyone else in the chain of command. Sambuuk is a preacher and a prophet, not a soldier.

That said, this rungal priestess is certainly a Corian asset. In addition to her role in engendering a spirit of fear and penitence in the populace, she is also the reason that the Corian Fleet is able to produce the Barbs, Ancora Bay's elite guard force. It is her strange divine influence that triggers the rapid mutagenic transformations that remold orcs into the powerful creatures on which the Corian Fleet relies for protecting the streets of Ancora Bay.

This is, to Sambuuk, unrelated to Corian activities. She is not sure how she is able to engender such profound physical change in orcs; she simply knows that she is channeling the strange blessings of her lord Dee'pak. To grace an orc with divine transfiguration is not an act of military strategy, but of religious necessity. Those who undergo Dee'pak's transformation are brought closer into His eldritch fold. To accept His dark embrace is to receive an ounce of shadowy divinity, a morsel of the maddening wonder of The Dee'p itself.

Sambuuk laments that she cannot experience this metamorphosis herself, though she is blessed in other ways. Most notably, Sambuuk has felt no need to sleep in many years. She is—in a very literal sense—*tireless*. With her limitless energy and fervor, Sambuuk has preached from the depths of this onyx amphitheater nearly every hour of the past two years. She eats only the putrid shellfish that lives in the bit of festering liquid from which she sermonizes. These mutated clams and crayfish would be toxic to anyone else, but Sambuuk feasts on them in a quasi-erotic trance.

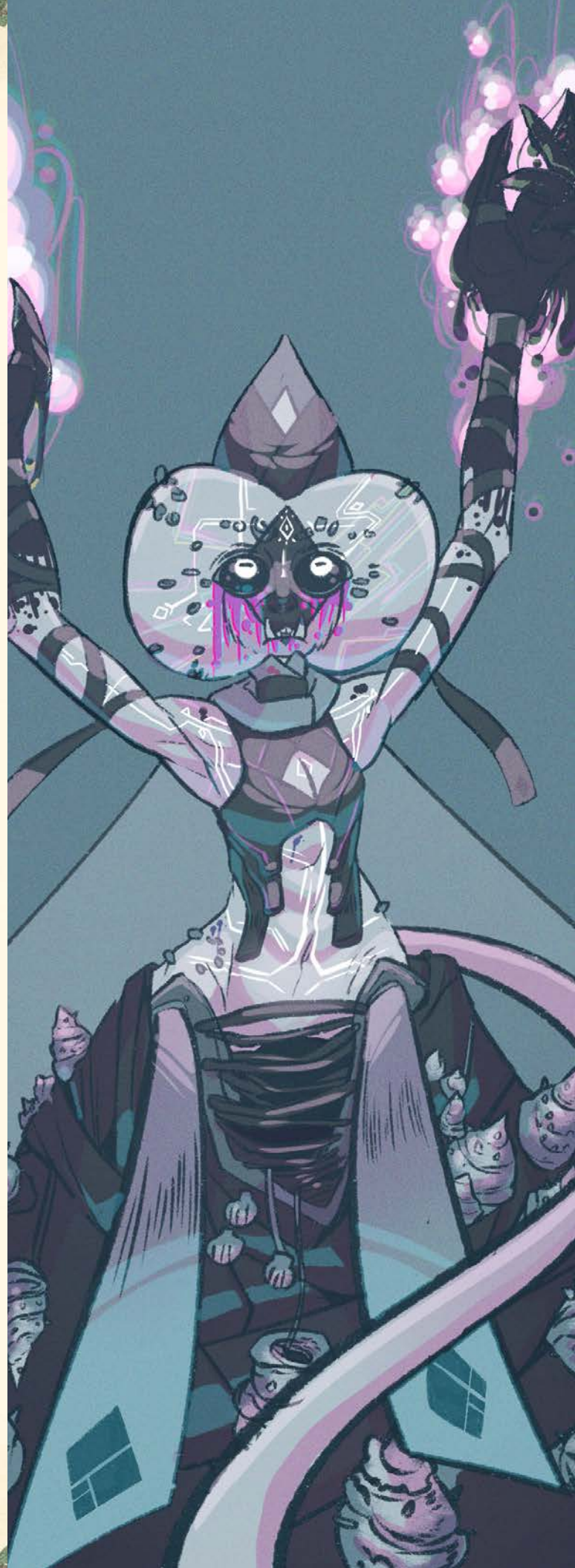
Even those who do not pray to Dee'pak recognize that Sambuuk is a phenom, a true zealot, an uncompromising conduit of her dark lord. To other Dee'p Bound, Sambuuk is a source of faith. Her nonstop sermons inspire devotion from anyone even casually interested in Dee'pak's teachings.

PLOT HOOK: SABOTAGE THE BARBS

Rebellious activity of any nature within Corian jurisdiction in the Bay will always be stymied by the Barbs. These hulking guards will prevent adventurers from breaking into the People's Palace, they'll hamper attempts to infiltrate the Corian Headquarters, and they just might spot the adventurers sneaking into Splintered Hollow if the party isn't careful. Even if the Barbs aren't specifically standing in the way of the party's goals, it is undeniable that these unchecked "peacekeepers" are guilty of heinous crimes against the people of Ancora Bay.

Though the Corians often argue that the Barbs have helped to reduce crime throughout the city, opponents of the guards will suggest that the Barbs merely antagonize criminals and dissidents, all the while making the risk of insurrection or civil unrest *more* likely.

There are roughly 100 Barbs scattered throughout Ancora Bay, and while it seems incredibly unlikely that the Corians would *ever* choose to take them off the streets, the adventurers might be able to do something about them nonetheless. After all, *every* Barb was created the same way: they began to transform after receiving a dark blessing from Sambuuk. Interfering with this process would do nothing to curtail the jurisdiction of existing Barbs, but it could limit the Corians' ability to place new supersoldiers on the streets.



GET THE BARBS

OFF OUR STREETS

OVER-POLICING OUR HALFWING NEIGHBORS
UNNECESSARY VIOLENCE
BLATANT FABRICATION OF EVIDENCE

GUARDS THAT CAN BE
BRIBED
AREN'T GUARDS OF THE
PEOPLE,
THEY'RE GUARDS OF THE
WEALTHY!

Creating new Barbs requires a) Sambuuk's divine powers, and b) the Dee'p-infused water at the base of the Black Pit. Thus, sabotaging the Barbs will require the party either to prevent Sambuuk from performing her rituals or to neutralize the holy waters.

ELIMINATE SAMBUUK

The source of all the Barbs is Sambuuk, the rungal priestess whose overflowing divinity induces the orcish mutations. The math for many adventurers will be simple: get rid of Sambuuk, get rid of the Barbs. This task is not quite as easy as it sounds. First and foremost, Sambuuk is always preaching, and there are always at least a few Ancora Bay residents attending her perpetual sermons. Getting to her shouldn't be difficult, but escaping without being confronted will be nigh impossible. What's more, Sambuuk is clearly the beneficiary of Dee'pak's strange and unknowable magics. Though she seemingly just orates, baptizes, and munches shellfish, it is possible that she has a far greater font of abyssal power than she lets on.

If the adventurers wish to remove Sambuuk by other means (kidnapping, intimidating, magical trickery), they will still have to either do so unseen, or confront any witnesses as well. Corian soldiers may spend a half-hour or so at the Black Pit whenever they have a free moment,² so there will rarely be an opportunity for the adventurers to simply run down to the bottom of the well, grab Sambuuk, and run off with her.

Adventurers who wish to act creatively might try to instead prompt the people of Ancora Bay to oust Sambuuk themselves. Shifting public opinion against Sambuuk could result in a popular uprising. Alternatively, if the residents were to discover an even more impressive prophet, they may demand that this priest replace Sambuuk as the foremost preacher of the Black Pit.

Finally, one option is for the party to rile up the anti-Barb movement to a boiling point. Though the party of adventurers may have a hard time eliminating Sambuuk without incurring the wrath of the Corians, a critical mass of angry Ancora Bay protesters could storm the Black Pit and forcefully remove the dark priestess from its depths.

UNHALLOW THE WATERS

Sambuuk performs the baptisms, but the fetid water at the base of the Black Pit is also a necessary component to trigger the Dee'p-fueled transformations. Congregants are forbidden from touching the holy liquid, but if the adventurers can discover a means of clandestinely corrupting the baptismal waters, they may be able to prevent the creation of additional Barbs.

The nature of this water is a mystery to all, potentially even Sambuuk. However, there are talented alchemists in Ancora Bay who may be able to study the liquid

and uncover its arcane secrets. Regginald Stitt (aka Reggie), owner of The Cauldron, could call in a favor from one of his associates, or he might be able to take a look himself. Shima kame poisoner Thitch may also be able to ascertain the nature of the liquid. Depending on what the alchemical experts discover, there may be a purely material means of rendering the waters inert: perhaps dropping some gull feet, hibiscus petals, or coral polyps into the pool.

An unorthodox solution may actually be to *rehallow* the waters in the name of another deity. If the players recruit Alinda Fewbador (described in the next chapter), one of the halfling elders, or an equivalently divine channeler, they may be able to essentially "override" Dee'pak's influence on the waters. Claiming the reservoir in the name of Eulesabella or even an Old God might enrage the local Dee'p Bound, but it would certainly hamstring efforts to generate new Barbs.

AFTERMATH

Undermining this arcane mutation ritual would be a massive victory for Ancora Bay freedom fighters, but the immediate effects may not be as dramatic as the adventurers hope. After all, there are still 100 of these supercharged orcs roaming the city, bullying residents, and kidnapping halflings. If a civil uprising were to spark immediately after Sambuuk were killed, the surviving Barbs would still be an incredibly significant obstacle to the resistance.

GM NOTE: If this seems like an unfulfilling quest resolution, you can instead declare that killing Sambuuk or unhallowing the waters will undo the orcish transformations. Maybe without Sambuuk's ongoing sermons, Dee'pak forsakes the Barbs and revokes his transfigurative blessings. Consider hand-waving the exact theological mechanics of the reversion, as there is unlikely to be a satisfying explanation for the sudden de-evolution. This is a less subtle conclusion to the questline, but if your players are itching to defeat the Barbs altogether, it certainly beats the alternative "kill 100 supersoldiers" combat slog.

Despite the minimal short term effects, sabotaging the Barbs has immense weight for the long-term trajectory of the Corian control of the Bay, as well as the morale of any revolutionaries. The fight for Ancora Bay is not going to end anytime soon, even if Qiliria is defeated and the halflings are returned home. Eliminating the constant stream of newly formed aggressive and unstoppable warriors on the streets of Ancora Bay can only be construed as a massive strategic victory for anti-Corian forces in the Bay.

² Roksunay goblins are innately nocturnal. Many have nonetheless adapted their sleep cycle to the needs of the military schedule. Regardless, the varied schedules of Corian citizens of the Bay make predicting attendance at the Black Pit difficult.



PART VII: THE PINK QUARTER

BUILD HIGHER AND DON'T LOOK DOWN

The richest denizens of Ancora Bay live high up in its Pink Quarter, which stands on the highest hilltop not overgrown with jungle foliage. Beautiful homes fill the hillside, complete with luxurious balconies, ornate rooflines, and broad stained glass windows. Markitan contractors are ceaselessly erecting new manors, demolishing once great villas and building new homes directly on top of the wreckage of the old. In this way, the city gradually rises even higher than the surface of the hilltop, extending up onto the remains of now paved-over manors.

Followers of Eulesabella flock to the Pink Quarter to revel in the Common Carnivals thrown by the church's high priestess. The church—which features no traditional prayers or sermons but plenty of dancing, drinking, and debauchery—is the focal point of the quarter, if not all of Ancora Bay. Its peak stands even taller than that of the Corian Headquarters' watchtower, though this is partially due to the increased elevation on which it stands.

To the east, new construction abuts the edge of the halfling village. Though Markitan businessmen and Corian soldiers have yet to forcefully relocate halfling homes, a spat over property rights seems all but inevitable.

Meanwhile, beneath the beautiful homes, malevolent mosswretches scour the remnants of now destroyed manors. Perhaps animated by the same extraplanar magic that influences the floods, these organic brutes are beginning to threaten the safety of those topside as well.

As with much of Ancora Bay, the Pink Quarter represents many contradictions: rich tycoons live in palatial estates, looking down at the Slums beneath them. Beautiful homes and churches sit immediately above crumbling wreckages and environmental beasts. A society that cannot stop expanding threatens the livelihoods of a people that simply want to maintain their way of life.

THE EXPANDING CITY

Ancora Bay's luxury Pink Quarter is constantly growing upward and outward. With limited total area for the richest Markitans to inhabit, the current plan for the ever-increasing need for high-value real estate is to squeeze as much luxury into as small a footprint as possible. The manors get as close to the edge of the halfling village without *technically* encroaching on their always-in-contention native land rights. A vocal community of activists within Ancora Bay have successfully lobbied the city to put limits on just how far the city can stretch into the jungle. These decrees stand... for now. Markitan construction companies stand at the ready to move ever closer into the sought-after "Halfling Hills," an insensitive marketing title for the district that Consortium



member Timothy Garthent believes will one day be home to Ancora Bay's ultra-wealthy.

Simultaneously, bumbling Consortium member Jules Cheyne has leveraged some business arrangements with the Corians to coax their military engineers into constantly regrading the city streets higher and higher, creating new opportunities to construct ever-grander manors on the skeletons of prior homes. The end result is a section of town that awkwardly towers over both the lower parts of Ancora Bay's hillside as well as adjacent sections of town.

There is, of course, one remaining frontier to explore; the Markitan real estate developers *could* push the city farther into the jungle to the south. For now, however, the risks of attack by strange rainforest beasts is a bigger impediment than simply repeatedly raising the city up on top of itself. There may come a day where the jungles burn to make way for an insatiable machine of luxury excess, but for now, there are protections to ensure that the thick tropical woods and the many resources they provide stay relatively free from new construction. This assurance, much like that of the halfling land rights, seems invariably impermanent.

It is perhaps no surprise that the constant construction and regrading has been an extraordinary nuisance for the wealthy residents of the Pink Quarter. In fact, many of them might be much more comfortable in the lower hills to the west, where the loudest noises they'd have to face would be Sambuuk's eldritch proclamations. As it stands, many wealthy Markitans have opted to repeatedly reconstruct their homes simply to keep up with the regrading. They can afford to do so, and moving elsewhere might come across as a tacit admission that perhaps they weren't *quite* as wealthy as they originally implied. There is an irony to the discomfort and inconvenience of paying heaps of gold to live in a district that's comparatively miserable to inhabit. Nevertheless, the symbols of excess are an important language for the Consortium and their affluent associates.

GEMMA SANDWATCH: Frustrated doesn't even begin to describe Gemma (she/her), Markitan wife of textile bigwig Eliza Sandwatch (she/her). After falling in love with Eliza, Gemma received numerous assurances that she would never need to work again; she could simply pursue her creative hobbies while being doted on by her wealthy partner. Nonetheless, Gemma's life has become a nonstop game of catch-up. As soon as she finishes redecorating their Pink Quarter home, she gets informed that the district is being elevated yet again, and she'll have to oversee the construction of an *additional* layer of her already teetering home. Understandably, Gemma is beginning to question whether a life of luxury and excess is worth the constant headache.

THE AZALEA SPIRE

There are no codified rules for what constitutes a proper place of worship for Eulesabella. Many interpret her loosely collected teachings as implying that *anything* is an appropriate church for her revelers: a shrine, a humble meeting place, a tavern, a cathedral, or anything in between. The Azalea Spire gives the impression of being the most traditional of grand churches to the Goddess. After all, its great steeple and ornate architecture evoke the rococo designs of the most elaborate Transom-built temples of yore. Regularly bedecked in floral arrangements and permanent dyes, the Azalea Spire is the perfect symbol of the joyous hedonism that Eulesabella's followers espouse.

Nevertheless, nothing about the Azalea Spire would come across as "typical church fare" to someone unfamiliar with the faith. Inside of the spacious nave, there are no pews. Though the walls are made of a coral and limestone aggregate, the floors are smoothly varnished teak, ideal for the regular dance parties that serve as the church's primary form of worship. In lieu of sermons, there are potlucks. In lieu of confessions, there are drinking games. In lieu of baptisms, hymns, silent prayer, penitence, and study, there are copious parties.

Eulesabella's followers refer to themselves simply as "revelers." They do consider themselves to be members of a congregation, and although those who revel at certain churches may have strongly held alcoholic preferences (e.g., rum versus tequila), there are otherwise no rival sects. It should come as no surprise that Eulesabella's good word has spread quickly in the aftermath of the Calamity. After all, the faith's adherents can easily pitch the religion to potential new believers. Usually saying "come and check out one service; I'll bring some rum" is all it takes.

The realm of Eulesabella is known as the Flower Path, the antithesis to the dark and maddening underworld that followers of the sea God call The Dee'p. The Flower Path is an endless lattice of floral tunnels that weave through all of Roksunay and the other planes of existence. These rainbow shafts are home to uncountable pleasure crafts on which nymphs, angels, and the souls of Eulesabella's departed followers engage in eternal bacchanals. These celestial party boats travel the planes, providing revelers with a taste of all of the joys the universe can offer.

STREET RAISING PLANS

Ε.Υ



ALINA FEWBADOR

Eulesabella's arch-reveler Alina Fewbador (she/her) is far from a typical priestess. Despite being theoretically the most significant of the trio of religious leaders in the city (alongside Triles Moundfoot and Sambuuk), this Markitan clergyperson is no divine spellcaster, military asset, or devious schemer. She is closer to an overworked party planner than what most residents would consider a spiritual leader. The primary responsibility of higher-ups in Eulesabella's faith is to facilitate so-called Common Carnivals, faith-sanctioned gatherings for any and all revelers. The spiritual underpinnings of these events is the notion that celebration and merriment should be frequent occurrences around which revelers structure their lives. If the goal of existence is to experience the joys of the physical world, then incessant partying is akin to godliness.

Alina takes this responsibility incredibly seriously. Though she is a famously heavy partier, her work hours are spent seeking funding, striking deals with florists, brewers, and bards, and painstakingly coordinating Common Carnivals all over the city. Some have said that Alina is two people: a workaholic by day who

views it as her God-given responsibility to organize the most enjoyable festivals possible, and a drunken buffoon enjoying the fruits of her labor by night.

There is more truth to this notion than most realize. Alina is stricken with a disease similar to lycanthropy. In her younger years, she had a brief but explosive tryst with one of Eulesabella's nymphs who snuck off into Ancora Bay from the Flower Path. Their love affair left Alina permanently changed, now inflicted with a magical addiction to bacchanalian excess. Her love was transient, but the spark left a mental scar, an arcane side effect of sharing a bed with one of Eulesabella's nymphs.

Though her disease bears no physical symptoms, her psyche becomes enraptured with thoughts of dancing, music, and pleasures of the flesh roughly once every five days. Alina therefore plans her Carnivals around her cyclical transformations. She knows that so long as the rest of the city is rapturously drunk and merry, her own mania will be less obvious. Make no mistake: Alina is a true devotee of the Goddess of merriment, but her obsessive commitment to party planning is strongly influenced by her desire to conceal her nymphal affliction. Though she lives in a small manse behind the Azalea Spire, she rarely spends time there.

COMMON CARNIVALS

Every five days, there is a new Common Carnival, a large party in the streets of Ancora Bay. Though these most often occur in the Pink Quarter, they will be planned sporadically for other locations throughout the city. Common Carnivals are always themed, and revelers who choose to not engage with the theme are seen as less devout.¹

Carnival themes are as various as the people of Ancora Bay, and a smattering of potential options are provided below.

1. **Transom Night:** Held in the streets outside of the Ancora Conservatory, Transom Night invites revelers to dress in period-appropriate elven wear, and—if possible—speaking in high Transom. Conservatory musicians perform estille wyn, traditional Transom music. Despite the aspirations to a “high-class affair,” Transom Night is often among the drunkest Carnival themes, as revelers drink to transcend the boredom of the rigid contrapuntal music.

¹ There is an inherent irony in judging partygoers for not having fun in the right way. Many followers of Eulesabella believe that there is no wrong way to revel, but others believe that commitment to a theme is an important gesture of devotion.



2. **Gin and Djinn:** During this not-so-mildly appropriate Carnival in the Pink District, revelers are asked to dress in fine Al Ibrani clothing, evoking the depictions of various genies from Al Ibrani folklore. Alina is always able to find incredible musicians to perform dance music from the island to the east, but these musicians are often embarrassed to dress as caricatures of their kin. Revelers tend to get excessively drunk due to the high potency of Ancora Bay gin.
3. **Alina's Oyster Fest:** Alina is not just an incredible planner, but also an incredible host. During her yearly Oyster Fest, Alina plays the role of party planner, emcee, and chef. She spends all night steaming and frying oysters for any reveler who attends. As a gesture of goodwill, this Carnival takes place in the Sinking Slums. The wealthier attendants tend to get even drunker than normal at Oyster Fests, presumably as a means of overcoming the stench of the damp lower city.

Yes, Commander Danglip, I understand the Festival of Flames is in bad taste. I think you should understand better than most that this is strategic on my part. We *want* to attract the Gatherers to our events. Better that they revel in our midst than perform their secret rituals out of sight.

-Alina Fewbador

4. **Festival of Flame:** Once yearly, on the anniversary of the Calamity, Alina hosts a bonfire to—perhaps tactlessly—commemorate the tragic disaster. This bonfire is accompanied by rapturous music from as many performers as Alina can employ, each of whom is encouraged to play as loudly and ecstatically as possible. Inspired by the bright flames, the thrilling music, and the emotional resonance of the occasion, the Festival of Flame is typically an unusually drunken affair.
5. **Starry Night:** Alina has many gifts, but none of them supernatural. She is no soothsayer nor fortune teller. She cannot predict when the stars will be out. She can, however, arrange for the Corians to set off a bunch of explosive munitions over the roof of the Headquarters once or twice a year. This bright and terrifying display is accompanied by one of Alina's signature cocktails, a drink she calls the Rum Bright. This potent potable is responsible for many a drunk reveler wandering too close to the Corian Headquarters before being forcefully escorted away by vigilant (and sober) Barbs.
6. **Flower Ball:** The gold-standard of Common Carnivals. Alina used to limit the Flower Ball to once

a year, but it became so popular that now roughly one out of four Carnivals follows this theme. The rules are simple: incorporate as many flowers as possible into your outfit. Put them in your hair, your dress, and accessorize in any zany ways you can. Flower Balls are also associated with new romance. Unmarried Ancora Bay residents head to Flower Balls in the hopes of meeting a potential mate... either for life or just for the evening. The stress and excitement of this calculated meet cute often leads to—of course—excessive drunkenness.

THE UNDERGROUND

When Corian and Markitan contractors raise the city streets to accommodate new construction, they completely ignore previous buildings that sit below the new developments. Homes are demolished and supports put in place, but there is no formal recycling process. The torn down homes act as a foundation for new layers of manors, and then this process repeats. The end result is a tiered subterranean basement spread across the underside of the Pink Quarter.

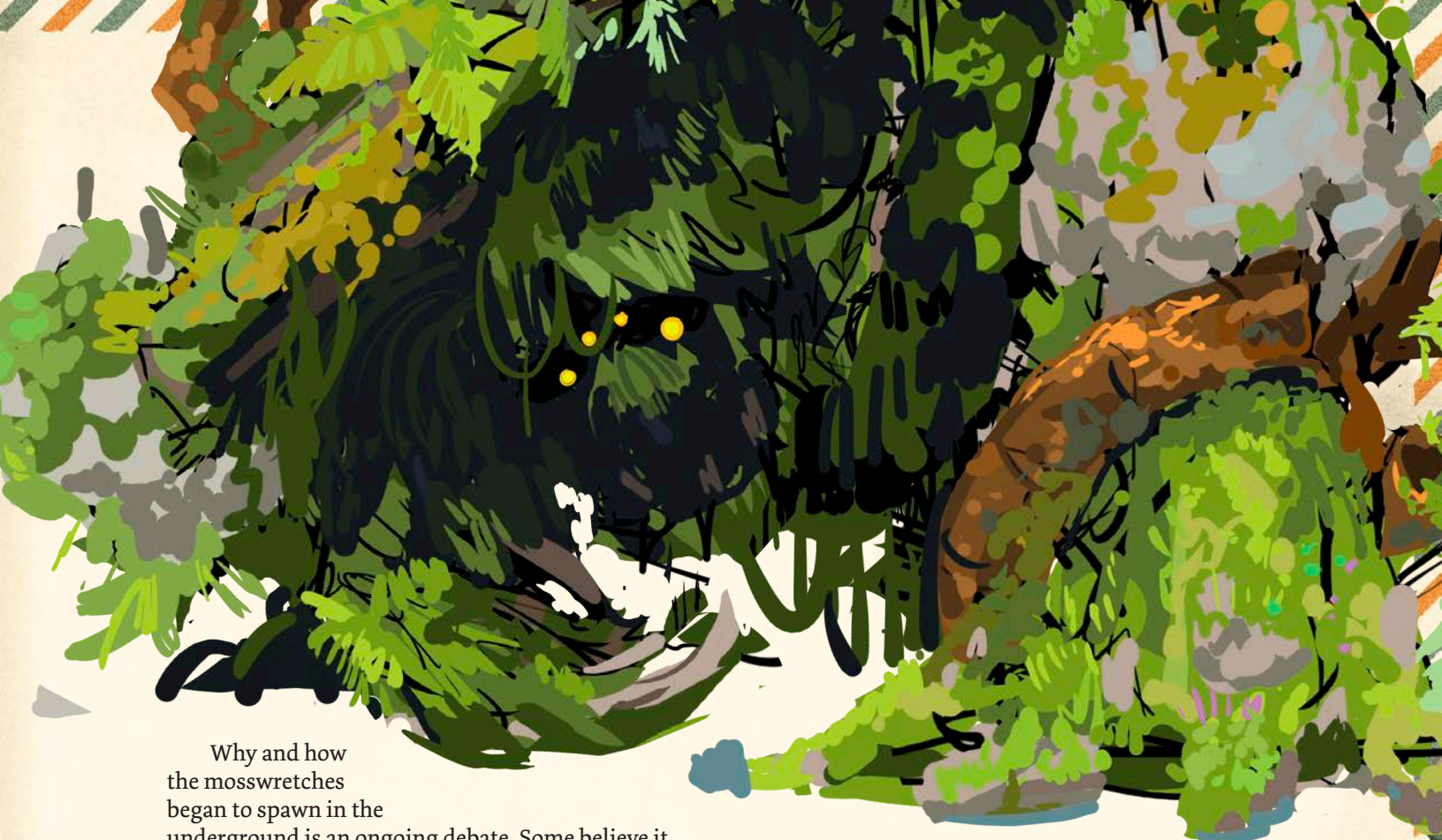
Once grand manors now crumble under the compression of the constantly rising city. However, these decaying estates never get filled in. Pockets of light make their way into the damp passageways, and the humid tunnels provide the perfect ecosystem for strange life to flourish.

The Pink Quarter's underground is considered a dangerous blight by some and an underutilized real-estate opportunity by others. Everyone from the Consortium to the Corians to the anti-poverty activists have considered mapping out and renovating these subterranean passageways. After all, space in Ancora Bay is necessarily limited, and a more thoughtful use of the crumbling underbelly might be perfect for military barracks, affordable housing, or even performance venues. The dark crevices beneath the city streets are ripe with opportunity, but for now they lie damp and desolate.

MOSSWRETCHES

In addition to bats, frogs, and wild dogs, this underbelly is also home to a dangerous species of animated flora known as mosswretches. These lumbering plant beasts seem to have evolved in total isolation; no intrepid adventurers in Ancora Bay have ever reported seeing similar creatures elsewhere in their travels. After growing to 5 or more feet in length, they will slink over to the abandoned furniture in the undercroft, subsume it, and then incorporate the materials into a sort of makeshift skeleton. These skeletal frames give the creatures incredible leverage and grip. An unsuspecting spelunker is unlikely to survive a thwack from a mosswretch's assimilated table leg.





Why and how the mosswretches began to spawn in the underground is an ongoing debate. Some believe it may have to do with alchemical waste discarded by the Corians, others think it's a divine punishment for encroaching on halfling lands, and yet others suspect that the emergence of the mosswretches is tied to the same magic that causes Ancora Bay to flood.

FIELD NOTES | DR. NORTLE, PROFESSOR OF ZOOARCHAEOLOGY AT VARSANSPEAR UNIVERSITY | *AN INVESTIGATION OF THE ANCORA BAY MOSSWRETCH*

I've never seen anything like it. Even in flooded Transom labs, animated flesh may still grasp out at me while I plumb the depths, but nothing has ever been quite so aggressive. The sudden nashing (of teeth? of bone? of wooden sinews?) was unsettling and the herky-jerky movement frightening, but the alacrity with which they lashed out... It shook me to my core. If not for my Rod of Violent Transference, they would have taken me out for sure. But how specifically they would have done it still puzzles me. Perhaps constricting my neck? Thrashing me against the wall until my shell cracked? Filling my throat with poisonous spores? From what little I saw, they could have snuffed out my life in any number of ways. I thank the Old Gods and the New that I was spared. There is no kindness in the souls of those mosswretches. Only eldritch hate.

Though the beasts rarely venture from their subterranean dens—a portion of the city now referred to as Mosshome by those in the know—various efforts to explore, salvage, and ultimately reclaim the labyrinthine underground have been hampered by the aggressive brutes. As much as real estate mogul Timothy Garthent would like to rent out scores of duplexes to desperate renters in the Bay, there won't be any new homes being built in the underground until the mosswretches can be dealt with.

PLOT HOOK: CONFRONT THE MOSSHEART

The mosswretches are a dangerous threat. Their numbers are growing each year, and the likelihood that they will someday escape into the Pink Quarter or the rest of Ancora Bay proper keeps increasing. Already, some wealthy residents who have yet to relinquish the tiered basements in their homes have had to take drastic action to keep the mosswretches from climbing into the upper floors of their domiciles: reinforced walls, incendiary weapons, and even arcane wards have been deployed simply to contain the fiends that lurk just below the affluent neighborhood.

There are, however, those that would rather keep the mosswretches around. Some would seek to harness their power, while others would rather leave them

to their devices. A select few brave researchers would attempt to study the creatures if given the chance. The creatures are, after all, the only known example of animate plants who have attained a limited degree of awareness and self-preservation without the intentional magical guidance of a wizard.² Although Ancora Bay is home to few who practice the druidic arts, those who have visited the Pink Quarter are innately drawn to the mosswretches as a source of inspiration and wonder.

Once the party of adventurers has attained an adequate degree of notoriety in the city, any number of competing forces may petition them to find a solution to the mosswretch dilemma. If multiple interested parties make requests of the adventurers, the heroes may be placed in a difficult scenario where they must decide to aid one faction to the detriment of another. A smattering of potential factions and their desires are provided below.

Regardless of who petitions the party, they will inform the adventurers of accounts of the “mossheart” that has reportedly been seen by various street urchins, urban explorers, and real estate prospectors. Supposedly, deep in the lowest tiers of the undercroft, a great mass of writhing, pulsing plant matter thrums with biotic energy. Many suspect that this mossheart is the key to understanding the mosswretches. If the adventurers can find it and survive to tell the tale, they may be able to control the fate of the floral beasts once and for all.

If the adventurers take on the task, they will first have to descend deep into the Pink Quarter’s underground. While exploring the mazes of crumbling manors and reinforced streets, they will contend with the vicious creatures. In this instance, stealth *may* just work. The creatures have no sight, relying instead on vibrations to sense their surroundings. A sufficiently silent *or* noisy party might be able to evade detection. However, when engaged, the mosswretches are fierce combatants, far quicker than they appear. With their caustic spores and manically swinging limbs, surviving even just one of these beasts may prove to be an insurmountable challenge.

If the crew eventually finds the mossheart, they may be surprised to discover just how sentient the organism is. It will communicate telepathically, attempting to suss out whether flattery, intimidation, or cryptic riddles will be the most effective means of convincing the adventurers to leave. The mossheart is alive, it is conscious, and it wants nothing more than to be left alone. It has no memory of how it came to be, nor does it seek such answers. It has no intentions of world domination, but it is controlling the rest of the mosswretches. In this way, the mossheart functions as the singular hive mind for the entire colony of creatures. Any time a Markitan has been threatened by a mosswretch, it was only the mossheart trying to protect itself.

After encountering the mossheart, the adventurers will have a difficult decision to make. If they attack the mossheart, it will summon all of the mosswretches to attempt to stop them. Slaying the mossheart *will* deanimate the violent creatures, but doing so will be no easy feat.

Alternatively, the adventurers can attempt to take the mossheart with them. If they remove the glob of moist biomass from the walls of the undercroft, they can potentially study it or sell it to the highest bidder. If the mossheart believes that resistance is futile, it may choose not to put up a fight.

Finally, the adventurers can try to reason with the mossheart. If the party truly believes that pacifism is the best option, the hive mind may be convinced to pull its colony down into the deepest layers of the underground where they won’t bother anyone. Theoretically, Markitans could even move into the lower city and live in peace with the mosswretches. The hive mind is smart and flexible, but more than anything: it is scared. If the adventurers are able to calm it down, it may be open to a wide range of suggestions.

As with many of the problems plaguing Ancora Bay, there is no optimal solution. The adventurers will have to decide for themselves what fate they want for the city and for the creatures that live below.

² It was rare, though not unheard of, for Transom mages to transfer the minds of creatures into trees, fungi, and other plants before the Calamity. Animate shrubbery with the intelligence of rats were sought-after topiary in the yards of Ylmellion’s wealthy.

d6	Interested Party	Desire
1	The residents of the Pink Quarter	More than anything, those who live in the Pink Quarter wish to rid the city of the mosswretches. These overgrown monstrosities threaten to overtake the district if left unchecked. They'll pay generously to anyone who can wipe them out. There may be a parcel of land in it for any heroes who succeed.
2	The Corians	The Corians would love to leverage the mosswretches for their combat capabilities. Even if controlling the beasts proves to be exceptionally difficult, the Corians are willing to experiment. If the adventurers can help the Corians to harness the power of the mosswretches, the party may be forgiven for past crimes or quickly elevated through the ranks of the Fleet.
3	Timothy Garthent	The economics of the situation in the Pink Quarter have shifted very gradually over the past few years. Now that available land has become so scarce, real estate mogul Timothy Garthent would love to rent out space in the district's undercroft. He doesn't care what the party does so long as he can develop new homes. If the party grants this wish, they'll gain an audience with the Consortium, and likely a favor or two as well.
4	The Halflings	The halflings are uncharacteristically split on how to handle the mosswretch situation. On one hand, they like to live in harmony with their ecosystem. On the other... the mosswretches seem to be arcane abominations. No matter what the party does, some halflings are likely to be upset.
5	The Splintered	The furthest extent of Mosshome stretches surprisingly close to the edge of the subterranean Myconiary in the basement of the Corian Headquarters. If the party of adventurers could tunnel just a <i>bit</i> farther, they could potentially unleash a swarm of mosswretches into the unsuspecting military base. Doing so could dramatically increase the odds that the party is able to pull off Operation Halfling Extraction.
6	The Gatherers	Surprisingly, Triles Moundfoot and the rest of the Astral Toddlers believe the mosswretches should either be left alone or introduced into the rest of Ancora Bay. Perhaps it is their "chaos is king" mentality or maybe their belief that all creatures deserve a chance. It is also possible that they simply want to sow discord throughout the city. If the adventurers want to impress the Gatherers or seek forgiveness from a squadron of pursuing Pyroclasts, they may want to leave the mosswretches alone.



PART VIII: HALFLING VILLAGE

ANCORA BAY'S FIRST RESIDENTS

Far up in the highest hills of Ancora Bay, a community of halflings live relatively detached from the urban metropolis sprawling out beneath them. Elders practice the old faiths, hunters journey out into the dangerous jungle, and children grow up similarly to how they would have centuries ago. Despite the comparatively rapid change in their ecosystem as well as the encroaching city at their feet, the halflings have been able to preserve much of their way of life. None of them would argue that their home is the same as it was before the floods, but they are able to maintain much of their independence... for now.

When the first Markitan refugees fleeing Calamity floods arrived on the mountaintop on which Ancora Bay sits, they mistakenly believed the name of this village to be *Efrinol Noi Alo*. In truth, this phrase roughly translates to “where we live” in the halflings’ native tongue. The hill halflings do not believe in naming their village. When possible, they attempt to revere their natural landscape as much as possible, and they avoid imposing their language onto the environment whenever they can. Even their names for the animals they encounter are largely onomatopoeic, mimicking (awkwardly at times) the sounds most associated with each creature.

Though the day-to-day experiences of most halflings has been stable for a few decades or more, that is starting to change. In addition to the constant threat of new construction choking out the village, the recent disappearances of many of the adults in the village has shocked the native population. The roughly three hundred halflings who live in the villages and surrounding jungle are both terrified of who or what might be snatching up their kin, and all are afraid of what this might mean for the future of their community. Some are calling for war, some for defense, and some for a deeper retreat into the thick jungle.

A few dozen halflings have already gone missing, a nontrivial percentage of their total population. Their absences have led to both emotional trauma as well as tricky logistical hurdles; so far, all of the missing halflings have been adults in their prime working years. The demographics of the village have already shifted noticeably. There are barely enough adults to provide for the children and elders. The situation is tenuously sustainable, but a few more missing adults might throw the village over a tipping point into starvation and disarray.

Nonetheless, the village persists. Typically, halfling children are not considered full adults until their mid-twenties, but now elders are expediting the administration of their rites of adulthood. Young halflings are joining their parents in preparation, ready to do whatever is deemed wisest. The question remains though: how can the hill halflings protect their home and kin?

NORMO YEWSRING

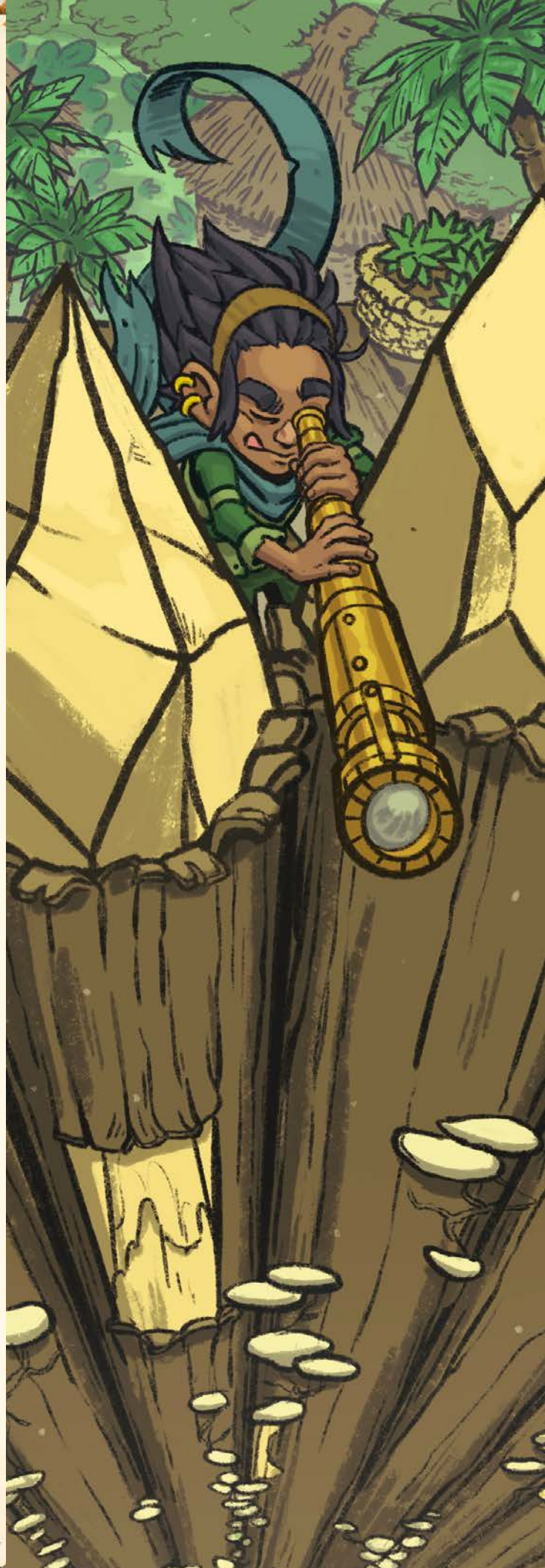
Though barely 19 years of age, Normo (he/him) received his ceremonial ear piercings—signs of adulthood in halfling culture—the day after Gilly Leafhollow’s husband went missing. Normo is, in many ways, a nontraditional hill halfling. He has participated in many successful hunts, learned to fish in the stream that runs through his village, and helps out his parents with tending to crops. Unlike his kin, however, he has never been satisfied with the tools of his ancestors. Sure, the bows and spears that his people have used for centuries were adequate when the halflings lived on a temperate hilltop far from outsiders. Now, though, the halflings must contend with threats of urbanization, of the militaristic Corians, and of the far greater dangers the rainforest presents. Bows and spears are fine, but Normo believes that a new era demands new creations.

For now, the halflings are not sure who or what is taking their people, but Normo suspects the threats must lie in the city below. As such, he’s enlisted the other youngsters in the village to help him build a palisade protecting their bayside village entrance from would-be attackers. Convincing the elders to allow such construction was no easy feat. Fences and walls are antithetical to hill halfling culture; they would prefer never to block off the outside world. The halflings do not have the luxury of embracing all of their cultural values, though. They must act to stay the tide.

Along the backside of this palisade, Normo has erected scaffolding and walkways so that the stout halflings can fight back against a potential siege of their village. Though Normo told the elders that this was purely for reconnaissance of the city below, he knows that these defenses will be invaluable should the worst ever come to pass.

Despite the diverse threats that the halflings face, Normo has been ceaselessly brave and enthusiastic. His newfound responsibilities excite him greatly, and though he worries about his missing friends—particularly his best friend Rister—he knows that giving in to anxiety would doom the village. Normo greets each day with a smile, and if you get him talking about his inventions, he will talk your ear off.

Normo only just received his rites of adulthood, but he has been contributing contraptions to his village for years now. Initial reception of these inventions tend to be mixed, but many have found their way into everyday life in the village. Adventurers who make their way up into the hilltop are likely to notice dozens of Normo’s clever creations littered throughout the town. A smattering of the tools Normo has built are provided below:



d8 Tool

- 1** **SNAPNUTS** - chestnuts that violently erupt when thrown
- 2** **MERCY TIP** - curved speartip that kills animals quickly and painlessly; they've never been tested in combat
- 3** **RIVER WINCH** - hydro-powered mechanism to quickly raise and lower a section of the palisade
- 4** **RIVER STRIPPER** - hydro-powered mechanism to quickly remove the skin from fish or small game
- 5** **NORMO'S TRICK** - bow with a quick-release string, meant to dazzle or snap at predators or assailants that get too close
- 6** **RATTLE STEPS** - hollowed out logs filled with volatile pebbles; loudly rattles when stepped on
- 7** **ELKYBARA STIRRUPS** - allows mounted halflings to fire their bows more easily while riding
- 8** **SEA GLASS SPYGLASS** - rudimentary handheld telescope with which to peer into the city; particularly useful for spying on the Corian Headquarters

KEELY GOODFERN

Another young halfling, Keely (she/her) has been shouldering a great responsibility since long before she took on her rites of adulthood. Though she would never admit it, Keely is the most skilled hunter in the village. She has a deep connection to the woods, exemplified by her instinctive mastery of druidic magicks. Despite bigoted Markitan aspersions that all halflings are “witches and charlatans,” very few of hilltop denizens have any capacity with spellcasting whatsoever. Keely, however, is deeply in tune with the energy of the jungle, and uses her innate magic to aid on hunts, calling on the woods to help her track and corner even the most difficult prey.

Keely is mute, a condition that is fairly common among hill halflings. Some elders have decried mute denizens as having been judged by the Gods, but the younger generation has a much more progressive understanding. Muteness seems to appear only in certain family lineages, not due to any curse delivered from on high. Regardless of the cause, Keely has never been terribly bothered by her condition. She is quite capable of communicating with hand gestures and writing.

Perhaps it is Keely's familiarity with signing that led her to master the use of soil runes, an idiosyncratic form of druidic power that only the most magically attuned halflings can employ. When Keely wants to ascertain the location of a jungle hog, she does not speak the words of a spell, but rather etches a sigil into the mud. Doing so “instructs” the jungles to provide her the information she seeks: the winds blow, the leaves bristle, and the birds chirp knowingly, giving Keely the intel she needs.

Though Keely is a brave and powerful hunter, she has not once stepped foot into the city below the village. She has heard tales of what Gilly and the others have seen, but has no desire to interact with people that have so thoroughly rejected the beauty of the natural world.

ELKYBARA

Getting through the thickly-wooded jungles on the southern half of Ancora Bay is no easy feat, so the halflings rely on the aid of their elkybara. These majestic steeds aren't terribly nimble, but they're able to either quickly nibble away underbrush that would otherwise slow movement or else knock it away with their powerful horns. Their dense hides are also nigh impervious to thorns, poisonous plant oils, and bites from many of the peskier rainforest critters. Many visitors to Ancora Bay are also surprised that elkybara are able to leap quite high despite their weight-to-leg-length ratio.



Elkybara have been the primary mounts and beasts of burden for the halflings for centuries, and they've been curiously well-equipped to adapt to the changing climate. Many elders believe it is only the blessings of their God Nirutsuka that has allowed successive generations of elkybara to grow thinner coats of hair and harder paws to help them acclimate to the jungles they now inhabit.

In recent years, some Markitans have taken to raising elkybara and riding them through the city streets. Though most halflings instinctively view the strangers' treatment of the animals as cruel—how dare they take these majestic creatures out of the jungle!—the elkybara seem content, and most are well-cared for. In a city the size of Ancora Bay, it helps to have agile transportation to weave through the winding streets. With time, most halflings have accepted the hypocrisy of hoping to maintain a monopoly on the fauna of their hilltop.

DANRY SHYFOOT: Short even for a halfling, Danry (he/him) is barely able to see over the counter of the Meeting House (another rough translation; halflings typically don't give names to buildings). Danry is the closest the village has to a tavernkeep. He spends most days preparing communal meals for the villagers, cooking the game and vegetables into wonderfully aromatic stews that can be smelled as far as away as the Pink Quarter. Few rumors spread in the halfling village but if anyone is going to be privy to the goings-on atop Ancora Bay, it'll be Danry.

VINRIC FELLSHARD: Gilly's brother Vinric (he/him) is a stellar hunter, but an even better teacher. He has a particular fondness for educating youngsters, and he prefers to use his time instructing them in the ways of the bow, how to be light of foot, and when to go in for the kill. Vinric taught Normo, Keely, Rister, and many of the other young halflings who now have an outsized authority within the village. Notably, Vinric is one of the only halflings to have *seen* one of the alleged kidnappers—perhaps his hunter instincts helped him to stay vigilant through the night. Hours after turning in for the evening, he spied a nearly-silent rungal peering in his window. After quickly launching a dagger at the plain-clothes Corian, Vinric gave chase, but to no avail. The Corian scoundrel escaped into the night. Now Vinric sleeps with two daggers next to his bedsack, certain that the bastards will be back for him.

THE OLD GODS

Some Markitans giggle at the fact that the independent halflings up in their secluded hilltop still pray to the Gods of the Transom Empire, the Gods of a great kingdom that they chose to never join. This notion is pure folly; after all, the elves discovered the so-called Old Gods from halfling teachings.

While the Markitans, the Al Ibrani, and the hibouroc only learned of the divine triple trinity from Transom missionaries, many peoples of Roksunay worshipped the Old Gods even before the elves. In fact, the elven versions of the Old Gods had always confused the halflings. The “wise” elves misunderstood the fundamental lessons and values that these Gods represented.

The nine Gods of the halfling pantheon are divided into three bodies: the Gods of Excess, the Gods of Moderation, and the Gods of Abstinence. While different cultures throughout Roksunay favored individual Gods or individual trinities, the halflings believe in revering and learning from each in their own terms. The war God Nod may not be obviously pertinent to halfling culture, but the halflings find wisdom in the parables of the foolishness of seeking glory through strength.

OLLA PURESAND: The eldest of the elders, approaching the start of her third century, Olla (she/her) is the *de facto* spiritual leader for the village. She lived through the Transom war with the giants, the dark elf insurrections, and the Calamity. She has lived just long enough to learn some of the important lessons life can teach, but not long enough to discover that everyone else will soon forget those same lessons. She remains hopeful and encouraged that the younger halflings seem much better equipped to confront the brave new world than she had been. She knows she will soon be joining Nirutsuka on Their celestial peak, and she has faith her village will prosper when she is gone.

Alright boss, you're not gonna believe it, but we've got another realm believing in these same nine gods, even using the same names for 'em and everything. I know we abide by the whole “different universe, not different reality” mentality, but there's gotta be something to this, right? Like, it can't just be pure coincidence that so many of these random cultures pray to these same nine weirdos. I'll file it away for now, but I think we really ought to follow up on this with the Department of Chance and Loops.

~ LIMINA Wayfinder Nanni Ya-Faen



TRINITY OF EXCESS

Name	Domain	Depiction
Wynken	Industry, the Forge, and Creation	A shirtless, bearded blacksmith with flaming hair in front of a celestial forge
Blynka	Storms and the Wild	A feral, naked, old woman scouring the wilderness
Nod	Glory, Expansion, and War	A towering suit of armor wielding dual spears standing at the vanguard of a great military

TRIO OF MODERATION

Name	Domain	Depiction
Arkus	Light and Shadow	A hooded figure with a deck of cards, bathed in shadow
Vela	Truth and Lies	A stern magister in an endless court
Thaella	Past and Future	A woman unstuck in time, sitting at a well

TRIO OF ABSTINENCE

Name	Domain	Depiction
Foss	Inaction, Silence, and Rest	A featureless humanoid in a field of cubes
Früggund	Winter, Entropy, and the Void	A snowy moose in an endless abyss
Nirutsuka	Calm, Tranquility, and Nature	A robed figure with a drop of a water for a head, atop a peaceful mountain

DAMP RICKY AND THE ROATS

It cannot be overstated just how dramatically the ecosystem in which the halflings live has changed since the Calamity. Many species died out altogether, and many others adapted unexpected mutations to better thrive in the new climate. Stranger still, some creatures that had never been seen before now call Ancora Bay's rainforest their home. Tropical predators, colorful songbirds, and venomous vermin had never been known in the temperate hills of yore, and even Markitan researchers have trouble identifying where these species may have originated pre-Calamity.

The consensus among both the halflings and the city-dwellers is that whatever magic wrought the floods also birthed new creatures into existence. Maybe they are perversions of previous species transformed by astral magic, or maybe they've clawed their way into Roksunay the same way that turbulent oceans emerged from the depths.

The peskiest of these creatures are the roats: intelligent bipedal amphibians that live deep amidst the ferns and vines of the island's most overgrown tangles. These clever frogfolk cover themselves in leaves and

mud to hide from the halflings, slowly approaching hunters in the wild when they think they can kill one without getting hurt. They are smart enough to wear camouflage, wield simple weapons, and tactically flank a halfling, but sources differ as to how intelligent these creatures truly are. Some believe the roats to be mere hunters with no culture or conceptualization of the self. Vinric, however, swears he has spoken to one: an eloquent fellow who called himself "Damp Ricky."

Needless to say, Vinric was mocked. Even his pupils—Rister, Normo, and the rest—ridiculed him for his goofy story. The roats were no different than the hogs and panthers... maybe a bit cleverer, but not capable of intelligible speech. Plus, the roats are *dangerous*, and the last thing the halflings needed was to empathize with one.

Importantly, the roats serve a purpose for the halflings. So long as the halflings occasionally thin their numbers, the Corians and the Consortium have more reason to leave the halflings alone. If the village were demolished tomorrow, some Markitans fear that the city would be overrun with roats in a matter of weeks. Better to let the halflings keep some autonomy and protect the city below from the strange frogfolk.

GM NOTE: The roats may be *one element* too many for your Ancora Bay adventures. Especially if your adventurers only make it up to the halfling village after a few sessions, it might not be worth including them in the narrative. Their *purpose* is to raise questions. If the halflings could extinguish the roats, would they? It would eliminate a creature from their ecosystem, and it might mean the Corians would have no reason to let them keep their village. What constitutes “sentient” as far as the halflings are concerned? Are the roats smart enough to be respected? Or are they mere beasts? Where did the roats come from? Are the threats of climate change simply too much for the halflings to bear? Again: these questions are intended to provoke challenging decisions for your players, but if the philosophical implications of “do frog people have souls?” doesn’t fit into your narrative, just exclude them.

Alternatively, play them for laughs! Amidst the pulpy intrigue of Ancora Bay’s web of intertwining narratives, a goofy subplot of devious frogfolk might be a good way to add some levity. At least one GM (the writer of this note, to be specific) used the roats purely for comic relief. Damp Ricky was a real guy. It was extremely goofy.

PLOT HOOK: PROTECT THE HALFLING VILLAGE

Normo is right to be wary of outsiders. Just about every group of people in Ancora Bay represent a potential threat to the halfling way of life. The Corians and Markitans want their land, Triles and the Gatherers want them to aid in their rituals, Qiliria wants their fingers, and the roats want to eat them. It is a never-ending challenge for indigenous people to maintain their homes, their heritage, and their values. Those in power will always try to relegate indigenous peoples to the footnotes of history.

The climax of any adventure in Ancora Bay is likely to result in an attack on the people who first settled the mountaintop. The halfling village is an anachronism that imperialist, capitalist, colonial forces are unlikely to let stand. One way or the other, it seems overwhelmingly likely that an armed conflict will break out in the village. Consider the following list of potential threats to the village.

1. If the party of adventurers is both wanted by the Corians and friendly with the halflings, the Corian army may march troops up to the village in an **attempt to coax the party out of hiding**.
2. Should the halflings ever fully wipe out the roats, that may be all of the convincing that the Consortium needs to **authorize further development of the village**. Real estate mogul Timothy Garthent would have no trouble bribing some Corian mercenaries to clear out the village.
3. Despite the ridicule that Vinric received for his tales of the **intelligent roats**, it is quite possible that they are more intelligent than they are letting on. If they ever get tired of the constant violent squabbles with individual halflings, they may endeavor to wipe out the village for good.
4. Presently, Qiliria has instructed the Corians to handle the kidnappings. Gatherer leader Triles Moundfoot may decide to take matters into his own hands, however. After all, he is the one who requires halfling fingers for his necromantic magic. Should he be so daring, Triles could **lead a squad of pyroclasts** into the village in an effort to harvest as many fingers as he can.
5. The mossheart that lives in the underground of the Pink Quarter feels as though it is constantly under threat of being exterminated. It is, however, quite intelligent. If it learns of the peaceful hilltop that the rest of the city mostly ignores, it may **deploy its mosswretches** into the village in a desperate attempt to relocate.
6. Either unsatisfied with the incompetence of her underlings or simply impatient with the sluggishness of their results, **Qiliria Tallrene herself might decide to pay a visit** to the village. She needs the halflings for their fingers and for their participation in her unholy rituals. Summoning a second comet to Roksunay will require the collective willpower of many creatures, and the devout hill halflings make for perfect additions to her ritual-casting army.

The halflings are master hunters, and they are well suited to their terrain. Astride their elkybara with bows in hand, they are a force to be reckoned with. They are, however, wholly unaccustomed to fighting intelligent foes, and their already meager adult population has thinned. The halflings will need help if they hope to repel an attack.

AFTERMATH

No matter who attacks the village, this is likely a point of no return for the halflings. If the occupying Corians decide to lay siege to the village, the villagers cannot simply defend themselves once and assume that's the last time they will have to confront the violence of the city below. An unprecedented shift in the halfling way of life is almost certain to follow... unless the attackers are met with an equally extreme response.

Short of wiping out the antagonizers (e.g. forcing the Corians off the island, killing Qiliria and ending her schemes, eradicating the roats), the threats to the village will not end. What does that mean for the halflings in the long run? In most circumstances, the halflings will either have to make peace with the ever-encroaching urbanization or relocate. There *are* undeveloped islands throughout the Markitan Archipelago. It may be more realistic for the halflings to cede their ancestral land on the island to the uncompromising colonizers. Alternatively, they may be forced to join the rest of the denizens of their shared island and move into the expanding city below. It is *not* what they want, but in the face of the insatiable capitalist machine, it may be the best they can hope for.

In the wake of the attack, the adventurers will have a choice to make. Do they want to take up the halfling's fight to the bitter end? Ensuring the village's long-term protection might require a legal battle with the Consortium, a war with the Corians, or an extermination of the roats. The adventurers will have to weigh their priorities and consider the risks.

The halflings do not expect the party of adventurers to lend their aid indefinitely. The younger members of the village in particular are already plotting a wide range of contingencies. An exodus is on the table, but so too is a more aggressive defense of their land. The halflings will begrudgingly accept any assistance the party of adventurers provide, but they are also making plans to take matters into their own hands in the event of a sustained onslaught.

Regardless of the long-term ramifications, any aid the halflings receive from the party will be returned in kind. Normo may be able to provide the adventurers with some of his newest contraptions, and if the party needs assistance for their Ancora-based operations, they can count on the halflings for help. The adventurers will continue their quest with blessings from the elders, and if they'd rather traverse the streets of Ancora Bay atop elkybara, the halflings will happily provide some steeds for the party to ride.

GM NOTE: This is not a happy ending for the halflings, but it is an unpleasant reality of many real world civilizations faced with scarce resources. As the flood waters rise and the surrounding population grows, do the halflings have a winning strategy?

The answer to that question could be yes! Perhaps the party takes up the mantle of fighting on behalf of the village. They could petition the Consortium to place further protections for ensuring halfling sovereignty, or they could even attempt to defeat the Corians for good. Perhaps they could enlist the help of the Splintered to serve as protectors of the village.

That said, the narrative purpose of the halfling village is to encourage your players to grapple with the realities of colonialism, especially in the face of climate change. If you don't want your campaigns to get so heavy, that's fine! Avoid this plotline or find a way to give the halflings a more hopeful conclusion. It is important, however, to consider what would happen in a real-world scenario. Would the commercial oligarchs and the military in the city below allow the halflings to live in peace?

