

A Shipload of Trouble

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An adventure for Rank 4-5 characters.

A hard day's ride north of Clyster sits Whinby, a small coastal settlement of fishermen and shipwrights, nestled inside a cove with beaches stretching for miles in either direction. It enjoys a plentiful bounty of fish, and many along the coast of the Mergeld Sea come to the town to utilise their excellent shipbuilding skills as well as take advantage of the trade that passes through.

Seven years ago, the Thulish pirate Gorus the Golden sacked the town, slaying many and taking much. In many ways, Whinby is yet to recover. Its once dynamic lord, Baron Aelthlin, lost his wife Miraben in the attack and has since become a much-diminished man, old and grey, hiding behind his locked doors. His children – ambitious Simon (Rank 2 Knight), and compassionate Maedelwyn (Rank 2 Knight) – have done what they can to rebuild the town, but the scars (overgrown ruins, a field of graves facing the sea, widowed mothers) still remain.



Aelthlin is haunted by the fear that Gorus might return, though no one has seen the raider since that night. Only the baron heard the curse that Miraben placed on the pirate with her dying breath (see *The Curse*, below); he knows that this is not over. He spends freely on mercenaries and hire-swords, though most are of dubious quality. His current captain, Paulus (Rank 1 Barbarian), in particular, is a born coward; happy to take the old baron's money, but not to fight. The show of strength has at least made Whinby a popular stopping point for merchant vessels and land trade alike. Although a small town, many travellers from all over visit; for the purposes of equipment availability, it is the equivalent of a Castle.

The Storm

One night, as the town settles down for a quiet summer evening, an unexpected storm approaches from the sea. The horizon is suddenly changed from a clear sky to a black smear of cloud and rain, and the flashes of lightning are constant. The storm rushes towards the coast and takes the townsfolk by surprise; they rush to secure boats and moorings, battening down hatches, and lashing closed doors to weather the storm.



It is incredibly violent. The wind howls and the lightning roars, the rain is thick and blinding, and for a while, the denizens of Whinby are terrified that they are about to be washed away. Many gather in the only inn in the town, the Black Flagon, bar the door, and huddle around the huge firepit to nurse their ales with worry. "It's just like that night, seven years ago, when Gorus came!" they mutter. Any PC asking will get a quick rendition of the tale of the Thulish attack.

History does indeed appear to repeat itself, as a land-bound bandit, Tiriol Tidewater (Rank 4 Assassin), takes advantage of the storm to stage his own raid on Whinby. A boy bangs at the tavern door and, when let inside, gasps that Thulish raiders are stalking the streets! The townsfolk turn to Paulus for aid, but the cowardly Captain just hunches over his drink.

If the PCs brave the storm, they will soon discover that the 'raiders' are actually common brigands in makeshift Thulish disguise (Rank 1 Humans in light armour (AF 1) wielding swords and shields). When Maedelwyn arrives with a few loyal retainers, she offers the PCs five gold for every bandit they bring down, double for Tiriol. However, fighting in the storm is hard. Every combatant has a +3 to every Hit Roll made, and there is a 20% chance every round that flying debris may hit someone for 1d3 Health Points of damage.

Midway through the battle, Tiriol's forces suddenly vanish, though they still had the advantage of numbers (the GM can tailor the numbers to suit his party). If the PCs pursue them through the storm, they will discover their fate early (see below); otherwise, the dawn makes the situation clear.

The Shipwreck

The storm still rages when morning comes, but Whinby sits in a strange eye of calm. (Both the sea and land routes out of town are blocked.) Visible from town is the rocking mast of a Thulish longship, which appears to have come aground on the northern coast. A few locals brave the looming storm to investigate – even Thulish sailors deserve to be rescued – but will turn back quickly when the truth becomes clear.

The long beach is fine golden sand, the morning sea is cold, and the storm has beached a lot of debris, but the shore where the boat awaits is awash with blood that the sea has yet to clean. The fate of Tiriol's bandits is now clear: their bodies scatter the sand. They appear to have been advancing on the longship when they were cut down to a man, shot with arrows or hacked apart by axes. Anyone paying close attention will realise that there are no traces of whoever did the killing, not

even a footprint in the sand.

The Longship

On closer inspection, it is clear that this is no living ship. The wood is covered in barnacles and draped with weed. The hull is cracked, splintered, and holed, and the sails are tattered rags hanging like shrouds. Nevertheless, the ship is still afloat, as if the land itself rejects it, and each incoming wave edges it closer to Whinby itself.

When someone approaches the ship (one of the townsfolk will if the PCs do not), the true horror becomes clear. Undead raiders pour from the hulk, crashing ashore with a ragged roar. These dead men are as rotted as their ship, barnacle-studded and corrupted. They wield axes, roundshields, and black bows, and there seems to be no end to them!

GORUS THE GOLDEN		Rank 5 Undead Barbarian	
ATTACK	18	Battleaxy (d8, 6)	
DEFENCE	10	Mail Hauberk (AF 3)	
MAGICAL ATTACK	N/A	Magic Points	None
MAGICAL DEFENCE	7	Health Points	17
EVASION	6	Movement	10m (20m)
STEALTH	15	PERCEPTION	7 (Gloomsight)
CREW MEMBER (Barnacle Man)			RE 1
ATTACK	12	Axe (d8, 4)	
DEFENCE	6	Chain (AF 4) & Shield	
MAGICAL ATTACK	N/A	Magic Points	None
MAGICAL DEFENCE	3	Health Points	7
EVASION	3	Movement	10m
STEALTH	13	PERCEPTION	7 (Gloomsight)

The raiders fight without fear, heedless of their own safety. Although PCs face no more than six raiders at any one time, the supply is endless - no sooner is one cut down than their soul is dragged back to the ship, crawling out of the treasure pile in the hold one round later.

Luckily, the curse placed on the crew binds them to their ship; if they give chase they will become weak, and the farther they get from the vessel the worse they become, reducing their stats by 1 for every ten feet. If the PCs retreat one hundred feet, the undead retreat.

"It's the Dragonspit," gasps the eldest of the townsfolk in the rescue party. "That's the ship that raided Whinby seven years ago and took everything from us; gold, goods, ships, and souls. Why has the sea belched this monstrosity back out? Is it tormenting us?"

The rescue party makes for the safety of Whinby, but it's clear that when the tide turns, in seven hours, the hulk will be carried into the harbour and all its evils released once more. Once Maedelwyn hears the news, she begs the PCs to help.

The Curse

With her dying breath, Miraben cursed Goren and the Dragonspit, that they would find no safe harbour, or ever to take pleasure in the gold they had stolen. The raiders laughed and took their treasure, but they never found another port. Every time they tried to land, either bad weather or an enemy ship would find them and turn them back. After a year adrift, a storm rose and sank the ship to the bottom of the sea, but the crew endured. Now they have returned on the anniversary of their raid, desperate for an end to their torment, but driven by rage and anger to repeat the very act that led to their destruction. If the PCs cannot find a way to break the curse before the tide turns, Whinby will be sacked a second time.

Breaking The Curse

There are only two ways to break the curse. Either the stolen treasure must be removed from the Dragonspit or Baron Aelthlin must forgive Gorus for his wife's death.

Maedelwyn has known about the curse since she was a girl and can take the PCs to the baron, but years of fear and grief have twisted the old man's mind. Despite his love for the town, he cannot bring himself to lift his wife's curse. Persuading him otherwise will take a great feat of eloquence. But if Aelthlin makes it to the shore and declares the curse ended, the Dragonspit founders at last on the shore, and the crew fall to dust.

Another possibility is to return the treasure to the town. The reavers will resist an attack on the ship, bursting from the silver-pile as soon as they fall, but if the PCs are willing to take the risk, they might be able to remove the treasure after the ship reaches the harbour and the raiders storm the town. There are 50 items for encumbrance purposes, which may take multiple trips. When the final coin is removed, a terrible wind will drag the damned crew back aboard and out to sea.

It is possible to remove the treasure without a fight, if the PCs can just persuade Gorus to allow it (talking to him is a lot easier at the limit of his travel from the ship). Although the captain is as cursed as his crew, he might be made to see reason. A PC wise in Thulish lore could name the treasure weregild for the raider's crimes. If the raiders give up the gold, they board their ship a final time and vanish with the dawn.

One final option would just be to wait out the raid behind barred doors. The church, or at a pinch the Black Flagon, could be defended through the course of the terrible night, though the rest of Whinby will be devastated in the process. Come dawn, the Dragonspit retreats into the mist, but the town is in ruins. Worse is the suspicion that, in another seven years, the raiders will return again, and so on down the years until someone braver than the PCs finds a solution to the curse.

Conclusion

If the PCs find a way to break the curse, they will find themselves with a significant haul of gold, silver, and jewellery. This is the bulk of the stolen wealth of Whinby, an Average hoard of Cash, Gems/Jewellery, and Magic Items.

Maedelwyn would see the treasure returned to the people. Simon plots to use it to restore the family

fortune, and his inheritance (if you wish to play out the consequences, Captain Paulus makes a better ally for Simon than a defender of the town).

Returning the treasure will earn the PCs the undying gratitude of the town. They will be welcome in the baron's keep and in the Black Flagon, where they will not have to pay a penny for board, food, or any services any time they are in town.

Of course, the PCs don't have to give it back...

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