



# SAVING FACE

## *An Adventure for Expert Characters*

The tiny fishing village of Rock Rump has only one claim to fame: its juicy and flavorful fried clams. This settlement near the Teeth is not much frequented, but those visitors who come always try the local fare. The annual Clam Fest is the highlight of the year, an opportunity for the village's enterprising clammers to make impressive profits. But recently the Demon Lord's shadow touched the clam beds, unleashing a terrible infestation that threatens the entire coast.

*Saving Face* is an adventure for a group of expert characters. They might have come to Rock Rump to sample the famous clams, provide security during the Clam Fest, or commissioned by a local noble to investigate strange happenings. Perhaps they were forced ashore to make repairs to their vessel, or stopped in the village on their way to other business in the Teeth. Whatever the reason, they arrive as the infestation is starting to take hold. As they investigate the situation, they learn more about the village's history—and how a living nightmare might save the village from a fate worse than death.

To make the most of this adventure, you should have a copy of the *Demon Lord's Companion*.

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## BACKGROUND

Before humans began harvesting the bounty of the clam beds along this stretch of coast centuries ago, the jotun reaped its rewards. The fishing village of Rock Rump was built upon the site of an older jotun settlement, the original inhabitants driven out by the Empire long ago. Its name still reflects that ancient history, being a loose translation of the phrase “where the god of stones fell.”

According to local legend, two Old Gods once wrestled here for lordship over the area: one of the rocky land and one of the sea. The struggle went on for seven days and seven nights, until finally the god of the land was thrown down. He landed heavily on his backside, and the imprint formed a deep hollow that the victorious sea god’s waves quickly filled, which made a good harbor. The sea god—Oceanus—still has a few followers in the village to this day.

The human settlement’s name was originally “Rocky Bottom,” but the cruder appellation became a local joke that eventually stuck. The harbor is small, deep, and well protected, making it attractive for both fishing boats and ocean-going vessels. But the real treasure of Rock Rump is the nearby expanse of shoreline, along which grow the large, juicy “giantneck” clams that have made the village famous.

The clam beds cover several square miles of tideland, exposed only for a couple of hours each day when the ebb is at its lowest. Tides here are high and come in swiftly, so harvesting the clams is a perilous task. Getting caught when the tide turns is often a deathtrap. But the risk is well worth it, as the clams fetch a high price from connoisseurs.

In addition to the dangerous tides, the locals take particular care to avoid the seasonal red tides that accompany algae blooms in the summer months. They do not harvest clams during this time, which allows the mollusk population to recover and spawn. Recently, though, a new phenomenon has occurred, which the locals have deemed “the Golden Tide.” About a week ago, the sea became a rich yellow color and has only recently returned to its former hue. Afterward, the fishers were hesitant to catch or consume the local seafood, but one fearless soul took the plunge. Gnarly Peg did not fall ill and proclaimed the clams to be even more delicious and plump than ever. Followers of the sea god proclaimed the Golden Tide to be a blessing. A rush ensued to gather the bounty—and that’s when the trouble began.

Unbeknownst to the locals, the phenomenon was anything but a blessing. The Demon Lord’s shadow has begun to spread into the depths offshore. The taint manifested as an eruption on the sea floor, from which spilled a sulfurous plume. Strange, twisted life forms began to proliferate around the vent, while

its corruption flowed with the currents to the clam beds near Rock Rump—what the villagers called the Golden Tide. The evil influence mutated harmless marine symbiotes dwelling in the clams’ guts, so that they became the larval forms of a new species of demonic parasite.

Now, the famous clams are the vector for a fearsome invasion, and it will quickly spread unless the demonic corruption can be cleansed and the parasite eliminated.

### THE FACE-TAKER

A longstanding local story tells of the Face-Taker that comes in the night and steals the faces of sleepers. This bogeyman is widely considered a tale to scare children, but like most such stories, it has a basis in fact. A rare species of harvester called a **flesh tailor** has haunted the region for ages, collecting the skin of victims’ faces for its own mysterious purposes. It stalks and hunts the inhabitants of several fishing villages along this stretch of coast, moving from one to the next in a slow circuit so that attacks can be years apart in a given locale.

Unfortunate villagers are left missing a bit of skin, the tip of the nose, or a patch of scalp. Suspicious folk say it is the Face-Taker, but others point out that such injuries are common results of scrapes against barnacle-encrusted hulls or falls on slick sea rocks. The victims themselves rarely speak of what happened for fear of being labeled as crazy.

Every once in a while, a faceless corpse is found floating in the sea or discarded in the wilderness, fueling the rumors even more. The authorities are quick to discredit such stories, claiming the injuries result from rats or fish nibbling on the victim’s flesh. Still, no one can adequately explain why only the faces are missing.

### THE CLAM FEST

This annual event happens early in the fall, after the summer red tides have ended and the clams are known to be safe. More than just a harvest festival, it is also the remnant of an ancient ceremony in honor of the local sea god. Few folk remember the origins of the tradition, but it is a custom during the week preceding the harvest to abstain from eating clams. Seafood is hard to come by during this time, although the less orthodox might still find a way to get some.

Several fried-clam stands are set up along the road to the village during the clam festival, and the vendors compete fiercely for business. Slander, threats, and even property damage flare up during the brief season. This year, the Golden Tide promises the juiciest, plumpest clams ever, and excitement has reached a fever pitch.



### ROCK RUMP

This tiny fishing village is a little way south of Landfall, within sight of the forbidding islands of the Teeth. You can, however, place Rock Rump anywhere on an appropriate area of the coast, as suits the needs of your campaign. The inhabitants need not even be human.

## THE VILE VENT

About 20 miles offshore, in a deep part of the channels that surround and separate the islands of the Teeth, lies the source of the Golden Tide. The boundary with the Void has grown thin in this area, where foul energies bubble through into the world. In the black depths, a fissure has opened on the ocean floor, spewing a sulfurous corruption into the water. This area counts as a Void shoal (*Demon Lord's Companion*, page 44). Ordinary life in the area has mutated into horrible forms: misshapen, bloated tubeworms; cannibal crabs; octopi almost as big as krakens; and monstrous sharks.

In addition to the changes wrought around the vent, the vile eruption is spreading through the ocean currents. The waters have so far diffused the threat in most places, but a quirk of the current allowed a concentrated stream of the corruption to infect this part of the coastline, especially the clam beds near Rock Rump. The sulfurous sediment spewed from the fissure is what gives the Golden Tide its color and name.

## THE INFESTATION

The larvae of the mutated parasites lie nearly dormant inside the guts of infected clams, drawing just enough nourishment to slowly grow in their torpid state. (If more than one infests a given clam, they fuse into a single organism.) When consumed by a living creature of flesh and blood, the larva awakens. Although it is destroyed through prolonged exposure to acid or high heat, the short cooking time for the village's signature fried clams is not enough to kill this horror.

The larva is not swallowed with the rest of the food but flattens itself into a thin layer against the palate of the ingesting creature. While that creature sleeps, the parasite grows rapidly, extruding from the mouth to form a caul that spreads over the host's face as well as the tongue, lips, and interior of the mouth, but leaving the teeth uncovered. This membrane conforms to the host's facial features while the parasite begins to consume the flesh beneath.

Once fully established, the parasite completely replaces the victim's face. From then on, it feasts on whatever is ingested by the host. Specialized glands secrete a digestive fluid that breaks down food in the mouth, allowing the intruder to absorb much of its nourishment. The infected creature, as a result, grows thin and weak—but not quite enough to die of starvation.

While it is established in this way, the parasite exudes a specialized toxin that kills other larvae ingested by the host. As well, it continually lays eggs (fertilizing itself in the process) that pass through the host's digestive tract to be eventually expelled.

Rock Rump does not have anything resembling a sewer system. The inhabitants typically dump their waste into the streets or a small creek running past the village, where it eventually enters the sea. As a result, excrement tends to accumulate in the clam beds, nourishing the creatures there. (The locals even call this "returning the favor.") The parasites' eggs then enter the clams through the tainted muck. However, they can also be passed from a host to another potential victim by contact with saliva or other bodily fluids, or by handling or eating food touched by an infected person.

**Symptoms:** To an outside observer, an infected person might appear much the same as before. During the period of the parasite's growth, the victim loses some control of their facial muscles. They have trouble with emotional expressions, either taking on a slack-jawed look or reacting inappropriately to an emotional situation. Their speech is somewhat slurred, as the parasite coating the lips and tongue has not yet gained complete mastery, and they have a tendency to drool a bit. The victim's face might also feel numb. These symptoms are easily mistaken for drunkenness, or the influence of some other mind-altering substance. Thus, a victim can become irrevocably infected with no one the wiser—not even themselves.

However, any facial hair is subsumed by the parasitic growth and is dissolved along with the skin, producing an odd, lumpy appearance while the infestation settles in. As well, the parasite's flesh has a rubbery, dull pink appearance that might pass for light-colored skin from a distance but is obviously different on a darker complexion.

It is possible to tear free the parasite before it is fully involved. However, doing so deals 1d3 damage to the infected creature and leaves its face dreadfully scarred. The extent of the scarring depends on how long the parasite was attached; if only for an hour or two, the face appears to have sustained second-degree burns, but closer to full investment, very little skin remains and the underlying musculature and ligaments show some hardening.



Once it is fully ensconced, though, removing the parasite by force is impossible without killing the victim: its tendrils have infiltrated the muscles and bone, leading to terrible trauma if removed. As well, in its last throes, the parasite floods its victim with the toxin that eliminates competition, sending it into fatal convulsions.

## FACE-EATER PARASITE

**Transmission** A living creature of flesh and blood becomes exposed to the parasite by consuming its larval form or by having its skin come into contact with the parasite's eggs. The exposed creature must get a success on a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane or become infected, suffering the stage 1 effects of the disease.

**Cure** Any effect that removes the diseased affliction will expel the parasite as long as the infected creature has not yet reached the final stage of the disease. As well, the immature parasite is stunned and removed by the application of "chaw" (see "Curing the Afflicted").

**Stage 0** The parasite is stunned or killed. If the infestation was at stage 1, the larva detaches from the mouth and passes into the digestive system, where it is destroyed. At stage 2 or higher (but not at the final stage), the parasite drops from the face, dealing 1d3 damage from acid.

**Stage 1** The infected creature becomes diseased as the parasitic larva attaches itself to the palate of the creature.

**Stage 2** The larva metamorphoses into its immature, or instar, form and begins to consume the internal lining of the infected creature's mouth, growing over the face to consume the lips and skin. The infected creature loses some feeling in the face and has difficulty with facial expressions, making attack or challenge rolls in social situations with 1 bane.

**Stage 3** As stage 2, and the infected creature makes attack or challenge rolls in social situations with 1 additional bane. The face becomes numb and the creature drools.

**Stage 4** The parasite matures and completely replaces the infected creature's face. The creature permanently becomes a **face-eater host** (see below).

**Recovery** Each time the infected creature completes a rest, it must make a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane.

- **20 or more:** The disease moves down one stage (minimum stage 1 unless cured).
- **Success:** No change.
- **Failure:** The disease moves up one stage.
- **0 or less:** The disease moves up two stages (maximum stage 4).

Apply the following template to any living, breathing creature of flesh and blood that has its face replaced by the parasite.

## FACE-EATER HOST INCREASE DIFFICULTY BY 2 STEPS

**Health** -5; **Insanity** —; **Corruption** 1d3 -1

**Strength** -2, **Agility** -2

**Immune** gaining Insanity

**Death Spray** When the host becomes incapacitated, or if any attempt is made to remove the parasite, it releases a burst of eggs and vile secretions into a 3-yard long cone originating from a point the host can reach. The host takes damage equal to its Health and is killed instantly. Each living creature of flesh and blood in the area must make an Agility challenge roll with 1 bane. On a failure, the creature takes 1d6 damage and becomes exposed to the face-eater parasite.

## GETTING STARTED

The adventure begins when the characters arrive in Rock Rump just before the beginning of the Clam Fest. The clam harvest has been ongoing for several

days, but so far only a very few of the villagers have begun to show signs of infestation. However, poor hygiene might also threaten other villagers who have not yet come into contact with the tainted bivalves.

The Clam Fest is set to begin four days after the characters arrive in the village. The local noble who controls access to the clam beds is worried about the strange events of the last few days and has asked for help in discovering the cause. Lady Eiðella Haraldsdóttir might have hired the group to investigate, or contact them once they begin to uncover the truth.

Once the characters catch on to the infestation, they will likely want to stop the harvest. They will also need to find a way to free the infected of their terrible fate and might even want to cleanse the tainted beds so that future harvests no longer pose a threat. The townsfolk might not believe their story, especially since the infected victims look much as they did before. The biggest vendors might not want to endanger their profitable festival on the say-so of some scruffy out-of-towners, and the more devout among the townsfolk will certainly object to blasphemous outside interference in their local observances.

### HOSTILE CLAMMERS

Rock Rump is home to several families whose livelihood depends entirely on the clam trade. Of these, three control much of the harvesting rights: the Albergs, the Dree, and the MacPhails. They have cemented this control by bribing, extorting, or threatening smaller groups who draw the earliest digging times. Two other families, the Gummers and the Ardilar, own almost all of the food stalls that sell the prized clams. They squeeze out smaller vendors by viciously undercutting their prices and setting up in the most-traveled areas.

The characters might incur the wrath of these powerful families. If combat breaks out, treat the clammers as **commoners**, with one **bandit** leader (no longbow) per group of five or so. Larger groups can be treated as **mobs** of commoners.

## TRAVELING TO ROCK RUMP

The village lies at the end of a well-maintained dirt road about two days' walk from Landfall. Travel along this road is normally quite safe, since Lady Eiðella sets her personal guard to keep the piece. A small tollgate near the Haraldsdóttir estate is staffed by two of her household guard (**mercenaries**) to collect the 5 bits per leg she charges for road maintenance.

Since the demonic eruption offshore, though, strange new threats harass travelers on the road. These are beyond the ability of the guards to deal with, but Lady Eiðella is quite impressed by anyone



who can eliminate the monstrous creatures, waiving the toll for the heroes, as well as becoming an important contact in the area.

If the characters approach by sea, the harbor of Rock Rump is about two days' sail along the coast south of Landfall.

## TRAVEL TABLE

d6	Event
1	A patrol of two household guards (as <b>mercenaries</b> ) warns the characters of strange happenings and foul creatures in the area. If the group is at sea, they encounter some suspicious fishers (as <b>commoners</b> ) instead.
2-3	The group is attacked by <b>1-2 flocks of soiled seagulls</b> (land or sea) or <b>1-2 jet squids</b> (sea only).
4	A faceless humanoid corpse floats at the edge of the shore. The skin appears to have been surgically removed.
5	The group spots a large shorebird or a sea otter that has no feathers or fur on its head. The creature is alive but seems weak and confused.
6	A viscous yellow streak stains the waters offshore. Any character who touches or swims in it must get a success on a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane or gain 1 Corruption.

## FLOCK OF SOILED SEAGULLS

DIFFICULTY 25

### Size 2 animal (swarm)

**Perception** 12 (+2)

**Defense** 13, **Health** 30; **Insanity** —; **Corruption** —

**Strength** 8 (–2), **Agility** 13 (+3), **Intellect** 5 (–5), **Will** 8 (–2)

**Speed** 10; flier

**Immune** gaining Insanity; charmed, dazed, deafened, frightened, grabbed, immobilized, prone, slowed, stunned

**Multitude** A swarm takes half damage from effects that use an attack roll and double damage from effects that require it to make a challenge roll.

**Revulsion** Creatures that are not swarms are impaired while they remain in the swarm's space or within 1 yard of it.

### ATTACK OPTIONS

**Soiled Talons** (melee) +3 with 1 boon (1d6, or 1d3 if the swarm is injured, plus Spreading the Disease) and the target must get a success on a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane or become diseased for 1 minute.

**Spreading the Disease** A creature must get a success on a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane or become diseased for 1 minute.

### SPECIAL ATTACKS

**Spatter** The flock sprays corrupted guano into an area below its space. Each creature in the area must make an Agility challenge roll with 1 bane. It takes 2d6 damage and becomes impaired until the end of its next turn on a failure, or just takes half the damage on a success. If it is already impaired this way, it also becomes diseased for 1 minute.

Once the flock uses Spatter, it cannot use it again for 1 minute.

### END OF THE ROUND

**Swarming Animals** Each creature that isn't a swarm and that is in the swarm's space or within 1 yard of it must make an Agility challenge roll. On a failure, the creature takes 1d6 damage and becomes slowed for 1 round.

## JET SQUID

DIFFICULTY 25

### Size 1 frightening animal

**Perception** 12 (+2)

**Defense** 14, **Health** 25; **Insanity** —; **Corruption** —

**Strength** 15 (+5), **Agility** 13 (+3), **Intellect** 8 (–2), **Will** 10 (+0)

**Speed** 10; swimmer

**Immune** gaining Insanity; frightened

### ATTACK OPTIONS

**Beak** (melee, only against a grabbed target) +5 plus 1 boon (2d6 + 2).

**Hooked Tentacle** (melee, reach +2) +5 plus 1 boon (1d6 + 2) plus Ripping Grab on attack roll 20+

### SPECIAL ATTACKS

**Ripping Grab** The target is grabbed. If it is already grabbed this way, it takes 1d6 + 2 extra damage.

### SPECIAL ACTIONS

**Ink Jet** The squid expels ink into a 5-yard cone originating from a point it can reach. Each creature in the area must make an Agility challenge roll or become blinded until the end of its next turn.

**Leap** The squid uses an action, or a triggered action on its turn, to hurl itself through the air, splashing down up to 6 yards away. Any creature grabbed by it is carried with it.





## ARRIVAL

When the characters first arrive in Rock Rump, they see one or more food stalls along the road to town in various stages of construction. These are currently not staffed, although colorful bunting has been set up on some, with gaudy pictures of stylized dancing and singing clams. Crudely lettered signs claim each proprietor's offerings to be the "Best Clams Around."

The only place at present where a meal can be purchased is the tiny tavern, The South Wind, near the fishing docks. The place is marked by a wooden placard showing a set of large pink buttocks that swings in the constant wind. It's a quiet place most of the time, but is the center of social life during the annual Clam Fest.

The proprietor is an uncharacteristically grumpy halfling named Drusus, who is not interested in competing with the operators of the fried-clam stands. All year round, he serves up his specialty, a seafood stew. This concoction, simmered for hours over a low fire, is renewed with whatever is in season—including clams, when they are available. Fortunately for all who consume it, the long cooking time of this stew destroys the demonic larvae.

However, Drusus employs a young human assistant with a taste for clams. Long Bob Dree is a gangly, pallid teenager whose family is one of the largest harvesters of the clam beds. They benefited from drawing the earliest digging times and wasted no time gathering all they could. They are keeping the harvest alive in cold seawater until the start of the festival, but Bob sneaked in and stole handfuls of the giantnecks the previous day. He built a campfire on an isolated stretch of beach and gorged himself on the stolen bounty, passing out afterward. While Bob slept, the parasite became active and has now begun to replace his face. He is currently at stage 2 of the infection.

Anyone interacting socially with Long Bob, or even just observing nearby, can readily notice that he is behaving strangely. His face seems oddly round and soft on his otherwise skinny body. His expression sometimes stretches into a wide rictus of a grin, even if the topic of conversation is not especially humorous. Other times, the entire face goes slack and expressionless even in the midst of animated discourse. Occasionally a bit of spittle escapes his lips. A character who is observing from a distance can notice the odd behavior with a success on a Perception challenge roll with 1 bane.

Long Bob's indiscretion threatens more than just himself, though. He helps serve food at the tavern, and hand washing is not rigorously observed by the staff. As a result, anyone who consumes a meal when Bob is on duty will be exposed to the parasite and could become infected.

## GNARLY PEG

This wrinkled, nut-brown human of indeterminate age and gender has been part of the village's social life for as long as anyone can remember. Thought to be a retired clam digger, Peg lost a foot long ago to an infection and sports a prosthetic of polished, knobby driftwood. The odd villager now spends most days sitting on a stump near the fishing docks, carving intricate scrimshaw for sale and chewing prodigious amounts of a foul-smelling substance known only as "chaw." No one knows what's in the disgusting stuff, although tobacco and seaweed seem to be the major ingredients. At night, Peg haunts the village's small tavern, staring into the fire and nursing a mug of ale between refills of chaw.

Gnarly Peg is happy to gossip with anyone who seems interested, though following the thread of such conversation is challenging. The villager breaks off into mumbles in the middle of sentences and behaves as if someone else is present, then returns to the middle of some other topic. Peg sometimes stops for a moment, looks around, and then stares straight into the eyes of an interlocutor while barking "Watch yer face!" Then the mumbling, disjointed conversation begins again.

Gnarly Peg is also an initiate of the Old Faith and one of the last followers of the overthrown stone god. Having no reverence for the sea god, the odd villager cares not a bit for the prohibition on clams. Peg was the one who braved the clam beds after the Golden Tide and frequently mentions how much better they are now (whether asked or not). The villager has shown no signs of the parasitic infestation, apparently possessing a natural immunity. In fact, Peg's mouth proved impossible for the juvenile organisms to inhabit, due to the prodigious consumption of chaw. Peg has woken up to find glistening smears on the pillow the last few days, but assumes this is just from drooling.

## A LOCAL TERROR

Gnarly Peg is also the most vocal when it comes to tales of the "Face-Taker" in Rock Rump. The villager's odd looks are accentuated by a large area of scarring on the neck, stretching up the side of the head to where only a nub of flesh remains of what was once a delicate, shell-like ear. The other ear is undamaged and stands out against the weathered-looking skin of Peg's face.

Peg tells anyone who asks (and plenty who don't) about the "monster in the night" who crept into the bedroom when Peg was just a child. The Face-Taker was cloaked and hooded, covered with stinking bandages. With a swipe of its sharp talons, the



creature stripped the ear from Peg's head, tearing off a long strip of skin, then vanished into the shadows as the screams attracted a lantern-bearing parent. Peg is certain the rest of the face would have followed had the monster not been interrupted.

## STRANGE HAPPENINGS

While the characters stay in the village, they might observe some odd events that reinforce the sense that something is wrong in Rock Rump.

- A young couple embrace and kiss in the tavern. One of them shrinks back in horror and exclaims: "What's wrong? Your lips are like kissing sea slugs. Don't you love me anymore?"
- A fisher greets another villager with a slap on the back. "Ho, Alf! Finally decided to hack off the old face fungus, eh?" The other's expression grows puzzled as he raises a hand to touch his oddly soft, lumpy cheeks.

## INFECTED GUARD

Unbeknownst to Lady Eiddella Haraldsdóttir, one of her guards is a vector for the infestation. The Dree family bribed Andulla Morfrey to look the other way while they collected more than their allotment of clams, offering her a bucketful of the harvest in payment. Andulla, a brown-skinned human with a shock of red hair, has no interest in the ancient worship. She happily consumed the clams and has now been completely taken over by the parasite.

Andulla decides to drop by the tavern after her shift ends on the day the group arrives in town. Her face is a mass of blotchy, scar-colored skin that contrasts with the dark complexion of her arms and hands. If asked, she blames it on an attack by strange birds whose excrement burned her.

While in the tavern, Andulla gets into a brawl with some members of one of the other digger families. They are certain the guard has been taking Dree bribes and want to either force her to admit it or get her to allow them the same consideration. She acquits herself well in the fight, even drunk and outnumbered, laying out several of the assailants. However, a lucky blow finally overcomes her. As she falls unconscious, the embedded parasite self-destructs in a burst of poisonous gore, destroying what's left of Andulla's face and spraying eggs onto the surrounding attackers. If the characters become involved, or just get too close, one or more of them might also be caught in the blast.

## THE FACE-TAKER STRIKES!

Long Bob's round, soft face is an irresistible target for the local harvester, which has been scouting out the village for suitable parts. It makes its move on the

night after the characters arrive, creeping into the youth's bedroom at the inn and slicing through his skin with its razor-sharp talons.

A screech of pain and terror wakes the inn's residents, including any characters who are staying there. Bob runs from his room, clawing at the ruins of his face and screaming about the monster that stole it. However, an even more disturbing sight greets those who arrive on the scene. Where the young man's face should be, instead of the bare muscle and bone that one would expect, there is a half-melted-looking expanse of skin, shriveling away from the skull in places.

The parasite was partway through dissolving Bob's real face before it was snatched away by the harvester. The harvester's attack is a blessing in disguise, since Bob would otherwise have been completely infected by the parasite.

Interrogating the lad is not likely to produce much that is intelligible, especially since his lips have been dissolved by the parasite. If he can be calmed down, or someone uses mind-reading magic on him, Bob might remember that he had a night filled with strange dreams. He might also describe a sense of being unable to move, a kind of sleep paralysis induced by the parasite's toxins while it infiltrated its host. Bob might explain it away as indigestion from his clandestine clam feed the night before.

Should anyone ask him about his furtive feast, Bob describes the Golden Tide and the remarkable clam harvest, at least as much as he knows from his digger family. The characters might decide to talk to Bob's relatives; if they do, they will learn that the others have not yet partaken of the clams. The Dree family are quite upset to hear the youth ate up some of their potential profit, and they resist any suggestion that their harvest is tainted. Without solid evidence, they accuse the characters of working for a rival to interfere with their sales.

## AN INTERESTING DISCOVERY

Meanwhile, the flesh tailor made its way back to its lair (an old shipwreck a few miles up the coast) with the prized swath of flesh. On examining its booty, the creature realized that it had not collected ordinary skin. Torn away from the living body it was infesting, in its death throes the parasite released quantities of the secretion that softens the underlying flesh for consumption. This fluid, collecting at the bottom of the specialized jar used to hold the harvests, had an unexpected preservative effect on the other flesh samples.

The parasite itself did not survive, but the harvester is now very interested in collecting more specimens to extract the precious substance. Normally a shy creature, venturing out only rarely when a new piece was needed, the Face-Taker has now determined it



needs to scout out the village more carefully to learn where it can collect more of this strange flesh.

The characters might seek out the flesh tailor after the attack or intercept it while stalking another victim. They might also stumble across its lair while collecting the dwarfsbeard seaweed that is an essential ingredient of Peg's "chaw" (see "Curing the Afflicted" below).

**Floating Horror:** The face-taker is quite selective in its harvests, and even after collecting a specimen might end up throwing it away. Along the rocky shore near its lair drifts a **ghastly chorus** that has been animated from such discarded facial scraps. Rather than a deliberate creation of necromancers, this vile undead being was formed by the influence of the nearby demonic pollution. Its many moaning faces float on the tides like dreadful seafoam.

## FLESH TAILOR

DIFFICULTY 50

### Size 1 horrifying harvester

**Perception** 13 (+3); shadowsight  
**Defense** 15, **Health** 50; **Insanity** —; **Corruption** 1d3  
**Strength** 13 (+3), **Agility** 15 (+5), **Intellect** 10 (+0), **Will** 13 (+3)  
**Speed** 12  
**Immune** gaining Insanity

### ATTACK OPTIONS

**Talons** +5 with 2 boons (2d6 plus Flay on attack roll 20+)

**Flay** A living creature of flesh and blood takes 1d6 extra damage and becomes impaired for 1 round. If the target is already impaired, it instead takes 1d6 extra damage.

### SPECIAL ACTIONS

**Change Face** When a living creature of flesh and blood becomes incapacitated from an attack made by the flesh tailor, the harvester can use a triggered action to steal its face. The triggering creature dies and each creature that is not a harvester that can see the flesh tailor must get a success on a Will challenge roll or gain 1 Insanity.

**Skittering Dance** The flesh tailor uses an action or a triggered action on its turn to move up to its Speed. This movement does not trigger free attacks.

If the characters defeat the flesh tailor or explore its lair, they can discover the jar containing the preserved parasite among the other dreadful tools of the harvester's trade. Removed from the victim's face, the thing looks something like a twisted starfish with long filaments extending from its "limbs." Scraps of Bob's facial skin are still stuck to the underside in places. Anyone looking at the ghastly thing must get a success on an Intellect challenge roll with 1 bane or gain 1 Insanity.

## A WORRIED NOBLE

Lady Eiðella Haraldsdóttir is a self-appointed noblewoman of minor rank. As her name makes clear, she claims jotun heritage, reinforced by her powerful build, ice-blue eyes, slightly bluish skin, and hair so pale it is almost white.

Lady Eiðella's ancestors came to this stretch of coast two centuries ago and claimed a tract of land overlooking the harbor, upon which was an ancient

but perfectly serviceable road built by the jotun. The road to the harbor connects the Haraldsdóttir land to Rock Rump as well as to the coastal road that runs by a few miles away. In return for the use of the road, the noble family has claimed an annual tax from the villagers, who pay it without complaint, since the road brings commerce and opportunity not available before—without it, the Clam Fest could never be more than a strictly local event. Lady Eiðella also collects a toll from travelers to cover maintenance of the road, typically 5 bits per leg (plus 1 cp per wheel).



Lady Eiðella enjoys considerable wealth, at least by local standards. Her estate's sheep flocks are the largest in the area. As well, her family's property borders the famed clam beds. In order to avoid overharvesting this valuable resource, she has declared control over access, allowing the harvest to proceed only under close supervision, and only at approved times.

Each year, the clamming season opens with a ceremony of prayer to the bounty of the sea god, in which lots are drawn for harvesting rights.





Lady Eiddella herself oversees the lottery, and each participant pays a license fee to her. The holder of a given lot has exclusive access to that section of the clam beds for the specified time, and the allocation of rights is set up such that a given section is not overharvested. At any given time, three lot-holders are able to gather clams.

Competition is fierce for these rights, and the most aggressive clammers employ intrigue, bribery, and even strong-arm tactics to maneuver for the earliest and best times. Now, with the rich harvest of the Golden Tide, the struggle has become even more intense. Lady Eiddella has assigned two of her household guards (**mercenaries**) to watch over the clam beds in alternating shifts during the ebb tides. Assisting them are two sets of two shore wardens (**patrollers**) drawn from the local population.

If the group approaches Lady Eiddella with their suspicions, she expresses concern. She does not understand why the peasants want to dig up and eat filthy things that live in the muck, but she is content to let them do so as long as she gets her percentage. The potential loss of income would be a serious blow to her livelihood. If the characters were able to slay or drive off the tainted creatures threatening the road, she is even more inclined to assist them.

Lady Eiddella has six household guards in total and can assign them to blockade the clam beds. If more resistance is offered than they can handle, she can use her family's influence to call on the services of up to four additional troops from the nearby city (**mercenaries**). However, those reinforcements will take at least two days to arrive and will not stay longer than three days without payment (1 ss per person per day).

## CURING THE AFFLICTED

Since the parasite was created by the Demon Lord's influence, mundane healing techniques are not enough to remove it safely from a creature that has been infested. Once it has completely seized control, removal is no longer possible without the most potent magic.

A creature can be rid of the parasite through magic that removes the diseased affliction before it is fully invested, such as the *brew remedy* spell from the Alchemy tradition (see *Demon Lord's Companion*, page 34), *cure* or *greater cure* spells from the Life tradition, and *speed healing* from the Transformation tradition. Similar magic can expel the larva before it begins its investment.

A character can try to target the parasite with a damage-dealing spell before it is fully invested. Any damage is sufficient to kill the parasite, but the infected creature still takes damage as it sloughs from the face. However, the caster must make an additional challenge roll using the appropriate attribute with 1 bane; on a failure, the infected creature also takes half the damage.

The *remove curse* spell from the Protection tradition (see *Terrible Beauty*, page 22) instantly expels the larva or causes the partially invested parasite to drop from the infected creature's face. It can also eradicate the parasite from a host that has been completely infected, although it does nothing to restore the victim's ravaged face and mouth. Only powerful magic, such as the *regeneration* or *total healing* spells from the Alteration and Life traditions, respectively, can effect such restoration.

## POTENT CHAW

Gnarly Peg has never been seen without a cheek bulging with the foul substance known only as "chaw." It is not just chewing tobacco, although that is a major component. Peg claims the habit is good for the health, and so far the claim is hard to dispute. The odd villager has resisted all infestation by the parasite, despite having consumed quantities of the infested clams. The recipe is a secret, but the group can convince Peg to help produce more if shown that it is a defense against infestation.





Creating chaw is much the same as brewing a potion. It requires an appropriate skill set, such as an apothecary or brewer, or knowledge of the Alchemy tradition (see *Demon Lord's Companion*). One pound of this substance is sufficient to dose up to 32 humanoids of Size 1 or smaller. The needed components are as follows:

- ½ pound chewing tobacco
- ¼ pound dwarfsbeard seaweed (this is harvested only from a rocky headland several miles from the village, where the Golden Tide has not yet encroached)
- A handful of berries from the seafoam plant, a local herb (they are slightly toxic and can cause stomach cramps and diarrhea in those not inured to their effects)
- Several wintergreen leaves
- A tot of rum
- A dash of guano from seabird nesting rocks ("for texture," says Peg)

The mixture is kneaded into a doughy ball with a tough, glutinous texture. It tastes about as good as you'd imagine. Chewing a dose of chaw for at least 4 hours renders a creature immune to the parasite's infestation for the next 24 hours (the stunned larva passes into the digestive system and is destroyed). It is also possible to dose living clams with this mixture. When an infected mollusk consumes the substance, any larvae within its gut are stunned and expelled from its body, where they quickly die. However, it absorbs the nasty flavor and becomes virtually inedible for several weeks thereafter, so this is not a satisfactory approach in the eyes of the vendors.

Enterprising characters might decide to treat the clam beds. Doing so would require prodigious quantities of chaw, though (at least 200 pounds of chewing tobacco, for a start), and only temporarily halts the infestation. The only way to permanently stop the threat is to stop the Golden Tide itself.

## PURIFYING THE INFESTATION

Characters with access to powerful magic of the Celestial or Death traditions might be able to destroy corrupted areas of the clam beds, or purify some of the affected mollusks. Again, though, such measures are only temporary since the next swell of the Golden Tide will mutate more of the endemic symbiotes.

- **Celestial:** The *radiation* spell destroys the parasitic larvae while leaving the clams intact, though dying. (They are safe if harvested and consumed right away.). Destructive blasts of light are a less subtle but effective method of sterilization.
- **Death:** The *death fog* spell will kill everything, clams and parasites alike, and is most effective at low tide while the beds are exposed. However, the clams are buried in the muck and will require at least 3 rounds of continuous exposure to thoroughly treat them.

Players might come up with other creative ways to deal with the infestation through magic. Any reasonable idea should be encouraged.

## CONCLUSION

Whatever means the characters come up with to stop the infestation, their efforts will only be temporary so long as the Golden Tide continues to flow. The only way to stop the phenomenon for good is to seal the fissure between worlds at the heart of the Void shoal. The quest to do this can form the basis for one or more master-level adventures.