

PHARAOH'S FORTUNE

AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTERS OF 3RD TO 5TH LEVEL



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PHARAOH'S FORTUNE IS A FIFTH EDITION adventure for three to six characters of 3rd to 5th level, optimized for a party of four 4th-level characters. In the treacherous waters of the Harpy's Teeth, a recently wrecked ship holds both promise and peril. Its cargo of treasure, including the cursed *Nyxara's Gift*, has drawn the attention of Moira Saltooth, a cunning sea hag. Can the adventurers uncover the source of the curse and claim the treasure before Moira harnesses its dark power? This adventure takes place in the world of Cartosia, but the names of people and places can be changed to fit this adventure into a variety of campaign settings with access to a dangerous shoreline.

BACKGROUND

The merchant vessel *Pharaoh's Fortune* set sail from the sun-baked ports of Akhenset, its hold brimming with artifacts plundered from newly discovered desert tombs. Captain Lohza Huy had struck a bargain with the Antiquities Guild of Akhenset where in exchange for a share of the profits, the guild had provided the location of an untouched tomb said to contain treasures of immense magical power.

Among the recovered treasures was *Nyxara's Gift*, a fist-sized obsidian scarab inlaid with gold and precious gems. Unknown to Lohza and her crew, the Gift carried an insidious curse, placed upon it by ancient priests to safeguard their queen's eternal rest. As the *Pharaoh's Fortune* sailed farther from Akhenset, the curse began to take hold.

At first, the effects were subtle. The ship's navigator found his calculations slightly off, the cook's meals spoiled faster than usual, and the lookout's keen eyes missed signs of an approaching storm. As weeks passed, these minor inconveniences escalated into dangerous mishaps. Ropes frayed and snapped at critical moments, the ship's compass spun wildly, leading them off course, and crew members succumbed to bouts of paranoia and infighting.

The curse reached its peak as the *Pharaoh's Fortune* approached the treacherous waters of the Harpy's Teeth, a stretch of jagged rocks infamous for shipwrecks. Captain Lohza, her judgment clouded by the curse, ignored the warnings of her first mate and steered the ship directly into the domain of a harpy nest. The harpies, drawn by the ship's approach and the magical aura of its cargo, descended upon the vessel in a frenzy of talons and screams.

In the ensuing chaos, the ship crashed against the imposing sea arch of the Harpy's Teeth. The harpies made quick work of the disoriented crew, leaving the *Pharaoh's Fortune* a broken, blood-stained wreck. Yet the cursed cargo remained, its malevolent energy seeping into the surrounding waters.

It was this dark power that drew the attention of Moira Saltooth, a sea hag whose lair lay in the depths nearby. Sensing the potent magic amidst the wreckage, Moira swam to investigate. Upon boarding the ship, she immediately

recognized the telltale signs of a powerful curse. Greed and caution warred within her as she surveyed the wealth of magical items strewn about the wreck.

For the past week, Moira has made the *Pharaoh's Fortune* her temporary home, meticulously examining each artifact in an attempt to identify the source of the curse. She believes that if she can isolate and understand the cursed object, she might harness its power to extend her influence along the coast. However, wary of triggering the curse's full wrath upon herself, Moira has refrained from removing any items from the ship until she can determine which one carries the malevolent enchantment.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

There are numerous reasons the party may be compelled to investigate the wreck of the *Pharaoh's Fortune*. A few of these reasons are outlined below:

The Collector's Commission. A wealthy antiquities collector named Valerian Frost has learned of the *Pharaoh's Fortune's* fate through his network of informants. He approaches the party with a lucrative offer: retrieve *Nyxara's Gift*, which he believes to be among the ship's cargo. Valerian offers the party 2,000 gp for the artifact, plus an additional 500 gp for any other notable items they recover. He neglects to mention the rumors of a curse, either out of ignorance or deliberately.

A Survivor's Plea. Mira Cisturo, the sole survivor of the *Pharaoh's Fortune*, has made her way to a nearby port. Haunted by guilt and desperate to clear her name of any wrongdoing in the ship's demise, she seeks brave adventurers to recover the captain's logbook from the wreck. Mira believes the logbook will prove that supernatural forces were at play in the disaster. She offers the party her life savings of 100 gp and a magical trinket she managed to save from the wreck.

Coastal Calamities. Strange occurrences have been plaguing the nearby coastline since the *Pharaoh's Fortune* wrecked. Fish are found dead on beaches, storms arise with unnatural swiftness, and sailors report eerie whispers carried on the wind. The local authorities task the party with investigating the source of these disturbances, offering a reward of 500 gp if they can put an end to the supernatural phenomena.

THE WRECK OF THE FORTUNE

The wreck of the *Pharaoh's Fortune* lies partially submerged against a great sea arch in the treacherous waters of the Harpy's Teeth. Unless otherwise stated, the ship's features are described as follows:

Decks and Interiors. The main deck of the ship is exposed to the elements and slants at a precarious angle. Below deck,

MAIN DECK



the ship's interior is a maze of tilted corridors and partially flooded chambers. Ceilings in the lower decks are 8 feet high, while the captain's quarters and other upper deck areas have 10-foot ceilings. All surfaces on the ship are slick with seawater and algae. Any area not submerged is considered difficult terrain. Characters attempting to climb or balance on the angled decks or rigging must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or fall prone (or fall into the water if near the edge of the ship).

Unstable Structure. After its violent crash and days of exposure to the elements, the ship's structure is highly unstable. Loud noises or significant impacts may cause parts of the ship to shift or collapse. Any thunderous spell or effect that deals more than 20 damage to the ship's structure has a 25% chance of causing a localized collapse, dealing 2d10 bludgeoning damage to all creatures in a 10-foot radius and potentially blocking passages or creating new openings. Light. During the day, areas of the ship exposed to the sky are brightly lit. Interior spaces and the sea floor around the wreck are in dim light during the day and darkness at night, unless otherwise specified.

Doors. Most doors aboard the ship are made of sturdy oak, reinforced with iron bands. However, the crash and subsequent water damage have taken their toll. Many doors are swollen in their frames, requiring a successful DC 15 Strength check to force open. Some have been torn from

their hinges entirely, while others hang askew, creaking ominously with the ship's movements. Moira has barricaded several doors with debris to control access to certain areas of the ship.

Depths. The water around the ship ranges from 5 to 30 feet deep, depending on the location and tide. Characters may need to swim to access certain areas of the wreck or to move between the ship and the shore.

The following areas are keyed to the provided map of the *Pharaoh's Fortune*:

I. SEA ARCH

A massive natural arch of weather-worn stone looms over the wreckage, its shadow dancing across the waves. The shattered hull of the *Pharaoh's Fortune* lies wedged against the base of the arch, its broken mast sprawled across the rocks like a fallen giant. Tattered sails flutter in the salty breeze, and the constant crash of waves against the stone creates an eerie, rhythmic ambience. Winged figures circle above, their harsh cries barely audible over the roar of the sea.

Unless the party approaches from the water, this area serves as the primary approach to the shipwreck. The sea arch rises about 60 feet above the water at its highest point. The water around the arch is rough and ranges from 10 to 30 feet deep,

depending on the tide. Characters can attempt to climb the sea arch with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. The wet, salt-encrusted stone is slippery, and failed checks might result in falls into the choppy waters below.

Broken Mast. The ship's main has snapped and now leans precariously against the sea arch, creating a potential, if dangerous, bridge between the deck of the ship and the top of the arch. Characters can attempt to climb the mast with a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check. On a failed check, the character slips but can catch themselves unless they fail by 5 or more, in which case they fall to the deck below. The mast creaks ominously with each attempt; if two or more Medium or larger creatures are on the mast simultaneously, there's a 50% chance it will break entirely, plunging everyone on it into the water.

Encounter: Bloodthirsty Harpies. Four **harpies**, some of the very same who lured the ship into the rocks, are perched upon the top of the arch. They patrol the area regularly, searching for easy prey among those who might investigate the wreck, immediately attacking any humanoids that they notice. They know better, however, than to trifle with Moira. If bested in combat and subject to questioning, they may reveal the sea hag's presence in the wreck to the party. The harpies attempt to flee once half their number has been depleted.

2. BEACH

A narrow strip of sand stretches beneath the looming hull of the ship, littered with debris from the wreck. The beach is eerily still, save for the gentle lapping of waves against the shore. Scores of dead fish lie scattered across the sand, their glassy eyes staring lifelessly at the sky. Near the water's edge, the crumpled form of a human body lies face-down in the wet sand.

Characters who investigate the carcasses of the fish or the human body and make a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Medicine) or DC 14 Wisdom (Nature) check can determine their bodies seem unnaturally desiccated, as if the very life essence was drawn out of them. The body belongs to one of the Pharaoh's Fortune's crew members. A character who makes a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a waterproof satchel half-buried in the sand near the corpse. It contains 15 gp and an unfinished personal letter, from the crew member to their family, suggesting a series of misfortunes and hinting at the growing unease aboard the ship during its final voyage.

3. BOW

The forward section of the *Pharaoh's Fortune* has violently separated from the main body of the ship, creating a small island of splintered wood and twisted metal. This fragment of the bow lists heavily to one side, partially submerged. The ship's figurehead, a once-proud sphinx, now stares forlornly into the waters below.

A hatch near the middle of the deck is locked, and can be opened with a DC 10 Dexterity check using thieves' tools to reveal a ladder descending to area 8 below.

Treasure: Figurehead Gems. Set into the eye sockets of the sphinx are two small rubies. They can be pried free with an appropriate tool and a successful DC 15 Strength check. They are worth 25 gp each.

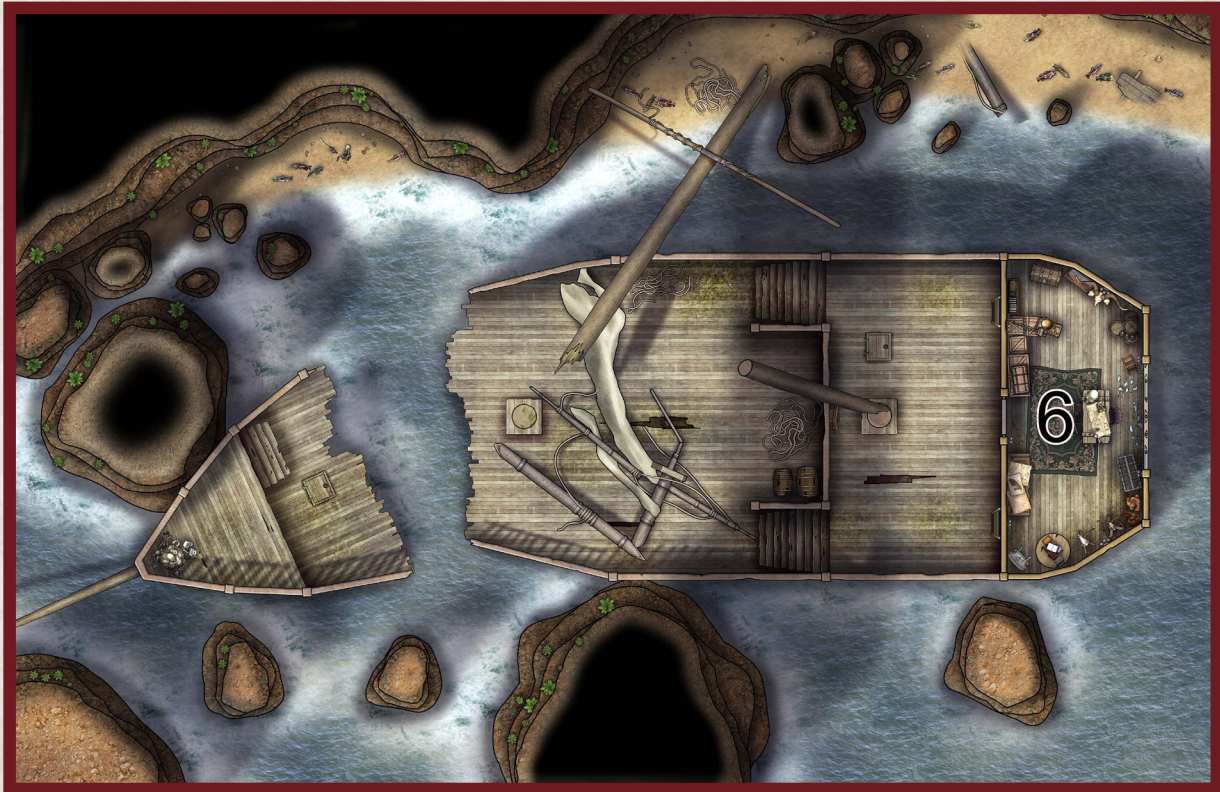
4. QUARTERDECK

The raised quarterdeck of the ship tilts at a precarious angle, its planks warped and splintered. Dominating the scene is the massive, decomposing carcass of a whale, grotesquely draped across the deck. The stench of decay hangs heavy in the air, mingling with the salty sea breeze. Beneath the whale's bulk, glimpses of the shattered helm can be seen.

The deck slopes at a 20-degree angle, its structural integrity further compromised by the whale's weight. Moira placed the rotting carcass here as both a deterrent to curious explorers and a source of nourishment for her undead minions that currently lurk below. Its presence is both a physical and olfactory obstacle. Characters must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw upon entering the area or become overwhelmed by the stench, suffering disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks for 5 minutes. A character who inspects the carcass and makes a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Medicine) or DC 14 Wisdom (Nature) check notices unusual puncture wounds and decay patterns inconsistent with natural causes or typical predation.



CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS



Unstable Deck. The added weight of the whale has made the quarterdeck dangerously unstable—characters with a passive Perception of 15 or higher notice this precarity. When a Medium-sized creature or larger is present on the deck, there's a 10% chance at the start of each round that a 10-foot section of the deck collapses. Any creature in that area must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or fall 15 feet into area 6 below, taking 2d6 bludgeoning damage and landing prone.

5. MAIN DECK

The main deck stretches before you, a tableau of nautical devastation. Splintered wood and frayed ropes litter the salt-crusted planks, which are slippery with algae and encrusted with barnacles. They slope precariously towards the water's edge.

The deck is slick with seawater and a film of algae. Characters moving across the main deck at more than half their speed must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or fall prone. Near the base of the broken mast, characters who make a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notice deep gouges in the wood, along with dark stains that might be blood and a single feather. Here, the captain and a few crew members did their best to resist the harpies before being murdered. A hatch near the

quarterdeck can be opened to reveal a ladder descending to area 9 below.

6. CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS

The once-opulent captain's quarters now lie in disarray. A large, ornate rug dominates the center of the room, its intricate patterns now stained. A grand desk sits askew, strewn with waterlogged maps and charts. Several animal skulls, painted with eerie, swirling patterns, are placed at strategic points around the room. A shattered lantern hangs precariously from the ceiling, swaying with the ship's movements.

A character who inspects the skulls and makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (History) check can recognize them as historical artifacts typically found in the region known in the present-day as Ankhenset.

Nadgar's Ghost. The spirit of Nadgar, the ship's first mate who was killed during the harpy attack, haunts these quarters. He appears as a translucent figure with flowing hair that seems to move in an unfelt breeze. A deep gash across his throat speaks to his violent end. Nadgar is aware of all the present happenings on the ship, though he believes he is still alive. His engagement with the party is frantic as he pleads with them for help in dealing with this throat wound. To interact meaningfully with Nadgar, the party must first

help him realize that he is dead. This can be accomplished through a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, showing him his reflection, or an attempt to turn undead by a cleric or paladin, which snaps him out of his mania. Once calmed, Nadgar can provide the following information to the party:

- Treasure that the crew acquired in Ankhenset is cursed; the ship was struck with a series of misfortunes after setting sail to return home.
- Their journey ended when their captain, after refusing to heed several warnings, steered them towards Harpy's Teeth. The ship ran against the rocks and the crew stood no chance against the harpies.
- A sea hag lingers in and around the wreck. She seems to be fascinated by their cursed cargo kept in the hold below.
- Undead members of his crewmates lurk below deck.

If the party makes a Charisma (Persuasion) check that fails by 5 or more, Nadgar becomes enraged and attacks the party. He uses **ghost** statistics, and fights until he is destroyed.

Captain's Logbook. Tucked inside a drawer of the desk in this room is the well-preserved captain's logbook, detailing the crew's growing unease during the voyage.

7. FLOODED CHAMBERS

The lower decks of the *Pharaoh's Fortune* have been claimed by the sea. Murky water, about chest-deep on an average human, fills these chambers. Broken beams, waterlogged crates, and other debris float or protrude from the water's surface. The air is thick with the smell of brine and decay. Faint light filters through cracks in the hull and ceiling, casting eerie, shifting patterns on the water's surface.

Several areas of the ship's lower decks have been largely submerged. The flooding has turned these once-separate rooms into a maze-like area of partially submerged corridors and chambers.

Hazard: Underwater Debris. Submerged debris, broken ship structures, and sharp edges lurk beneath the water's surface. Any character moving at more than half speed through the water must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or suffer 1d4 slashing damage from hidden hazards.

Encounter: Quipper Swarms. Two **swarms of quippers** have made these flooded chambers their new hunting ground. They are initially hidden in the murky water, but will attack if they sense movement or smell blood in the water. Characters with a passive Perception of 14 or higher might notice small, darting shadows in the water before the quippers attack. The quippers can be distracted enough to lose interest in the characters if at least one pound of meat is thrown into the water for them to feast on.

8. CREWS' QUARTERS

Two adjacent chambers, once home to the ship's crew, now stand as a grim testament to the Pharaoh's Fortune's fate. The doors to both rooms hang open, creaking softly with the ship's movement. Inside, tattered hammocks sway in the stale air, while personal effects lie scattered across the tilted floor. A simple desk stands in each room, their contents spilled and water-damaged. The air is thick with the musty smell of decay and abandonment.

These two rooms served as living quarters for the ship's crew. Now they house a more sinister presence. Belongings strewn about include half-written letters, small trinkets, and basic tools.

Encounter: Reanimated Crew. Three **ghouls**, the reanimated remains of unfortunate crew members, lurk in these quarters. They shuffle between the two rooms, drawn by faint memories of their former lives. The ghouls attack any living creatures that enter, driven by an insatiable hunger. They are bolstered by the statue present in area 9. At the bottom of each round during combat, a thread of purple magic flows from the statue to any ghouls above 0 hit points, healing them for 10 hit points. They fight until they are destroyed.

9. HALLWAY

A dimly lit corridor stretches horizontally before you, its wooden planks creaking ominously underfoot. Water has seeped through the walls, leaving dark stains and a pervasive dampness. At the far north end, dominating the space, stands an imposing statue. The figure, carved from bronze, depicts a regal woman with the head of a jackal clutching what appears to be an ankh and a scepter.

This hallway serves as the final approach to the cargo hold. The air here feels heavy and oppressive, as if the very atmosphere is imbued with ancient magic. A casting of detect magic reveals an aura of necromantic magic emanating from the statue. It stands about eight feet tall, and represents an ancient goddess associated with death and the afterlife. The statue's presence bolsters the strength of undead creatures, with the mechanical effect of restoring lost hit points as described in area 8.

10. CARGO HOLD

The door to this room is closed. When the characters enter, read aloud:

The vast cargo hold of the *Pharaoh's Fortune* is a treasure hunter's dream and nightmare combined. Crates, chests, and loose artifacts are scattered throughout, many having broken free during the shipwreck. The air is thick with the scent of brine, mixed with exotic spices and musty papyrus. Eerie, bioluminescent algae cling to the walls, casting an otherworldly glow across the chamber. At the

BELOW DECK



far end, a hunched figure meticulously examines items, muttering incantations.

This chamber serves as both the ship's main cargo hold and Moire Saltooth's current workshop. The sea hag is so engrossed in her work that she may not immediately notice the party's entrance. She's systematically examining each item and ritualistically casting *identify*, trying to locate the source of the curse. She seeks to harness its power and expand its area of influence, bolstering her territory and luring more ships to their doom with the ultimate aim of building an undead army from the sailors who would perish in the nearby waters. If alerted to the party's presence, Moira's reaction depends on how they approach. If threatened, she snarls and prepares to defend herself. If approached cautiously, she eyes them warily but may be willing to talk. Moira isn't exactly looking for a fight, and will explain her situation if given the chance:

- She sensed the powerful curse and wants to harness its power.
- She's hesitant to remove items from the ship until she knows which one is responsible for the curse.
- She believes she might be able to control the curse once she identifies its source.

Characters who make a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check can be confident that whatever Moira's plans for

for the curse are, they aren't going to be benevolent, and that the hag likely has regional interests. Moira may make the specifics of her plans bare if the party makes a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Moira's first offer to the party is simply that they leave her be with the treasure; neither party has to interfere with the other. Alternatively, if Moira senses the party might be capable of helping, she offers them the equivalent of a 1000 gp share of non-cursed treasure items for their help in casting *identify* on various items in the hoard to locate the source of the curse. If a party member makes a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check to negotiate, Moira can additionally offer a permanent +2 bonus to any single Skill for each party member in exchange for their help, delivered upon location of the cursed item. As even every single piece of gold in the hoard is magical, this is a laborious process that could take several days.

Moira uses the *sea hag* stat block with the following changes:

- She has proficiency in Arcana and can cast *identify* (as a ritual) at will.
- She has 80 hit points.
- **Multiattack.** Moira makes two claw attacks.

Nyxara's Gift. This obsidian scarab is inlaid with gold and gems, radiating a palpable aura of malevolence. It rests at the bottom of one of the chests in this room, beneath a pile of

lesser treasures. Its effects include (but may not be limited to, at GM discretion):

- Any creatures that touch it must make a successful DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be afflicted with short-term madness.
- It imposes disadvantage on all Wisdom checks and saving throws to any creatures within 100 feet of it.
- It inflicts a -3 malus on all ability checks to any creatures within 100 feet of it.

Treasure: Akhenset Hoard. The hold contains a variety of valuable items, including:

- A cumulative 5,000 gp worth of various coins
- 3d6 art objects worth 250 gp each
- 2d4 minor magic items (GM's choice)

All of the treasure carries residual magical energy, leftover from the tomb from which it was recovered. This magic has no practical effects.

BREAKING THE CURSE

Lifting the curse from *Nyxara's Gift*, if the party chooses to do so, should not be a simple task and will likely demand further adventure, at GM discretion. Several possibilities exist for doing so, however. A powerful cleric or paladin might attempt to perform an elaborate ritual of purification, requiring rare components from the tombs of Akhenset. Alternatively, returning the artifact to its original resting place could appease the ancient spirits, though navigating across the sea, and then through the perilous desert and long-forgotten traps of the tomb would pose significant challenges. Another option involves seeking out the descendants of the priests who cast the original curse; their bloodline might hold the key to unraveling the magic. More dangerously, powerful entities like archfey or demon lords might have the ability to break the curse, but dealing with such beings often comes at a great price. Instead of breaking the curse, the party may choose instead to hide or seal away the item to prevent it from being accessed again, such as by tossing it down a chasm, burying it in the middle of the woods, or similar.

AFTERMATH

Resolution of the adventure can unfold in various ways, each with its own consequences for the characters and the surrounding region.

Should the party successfully identify and neutralize *Nyxara's Gift*, breaking its curse, the malevolent influence over the area begins to wane. The unnatural storms subside, marine life slowly returns to the waters around the Harpy's Teeth, and the restless spirits of the crew find peace. Local authorities might reward the party for resolving the supernatural disturbances, and their reputation as curse-breakers could lead to future opportunities.

If the characters choose to ally with Moira Saltooth and help her harness the curse's power, the consequences could be far-reaching. Moira's influence along the coast grows, leading to an increase in shipwrecks and supernatural

occurrences. The party may find themselves entangled in the sea hag's schemes, potentially setting up future conflicts or uneasy alliances.

In the event that the party decides to claim *Nyxara's Gift* for themselves, they become the new bearers of its curse. This could serve as a hook for future adventures as they seek ways to control or remove the curse, all while dealing with its detrimental effects and possibly attracting the attention of other powerful entities interested in the artifact.

If Moira is defeated but the curse remains unbroken, the *Pharaoh's Fortune* continues to be a source of danger and intrigue. Other treasure hunters or nefarious creatures might be drawn to the wreck, potentially causing further problems for nearby coastal settlements.



REFERENCES

This work includes material taken from the System Reference Document 5.1 (“SRD 5.1”) by Wizards of the Coast LLC and available at <https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/systems-reference-document>. The SRD 5.1 is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>.

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