

SEABORN SENTINEL

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Sample file

TENTH TIDES
-28th day of Sumbrok-

The smooth, twisting shell of the underwater crustacean spiraled outward, increasing in size as it went. Nothing moved within the confines of the shell. Perhaps it was empty, or perhaps the creature within feared discovery, sensing some threat or movement nearby. Silt crabs were, after all, odd creatures. They usually lived in the watery depths, thriving around sea kelp beds or decaying coral reefs. But there was no such habitation here, only a single silt crab shell surrounded by blue waters that deepened gradually into blackness. A lone figure moved gracefully through the beryl brine, intent on the shell. His blue-scaled skin blended perfectly with the water around him. His hand reached down to the shell, plucking it from the sand gently. Grains of sand fell through the webbed fingers of the

figure's hands like sands through an hourglass counting down time. The alônn brought the shell close to his face, inspecting it; it seemed empty, yet not. The last grain slowly tumbled from his hand; as it did so, the shell moved. The particle fell, not to the sandy floor, but upon a floor of bloated fish corpses. The alônn gasped as the entire area in which he floated transformed before his eyes into a charnel visage of death.

A twinge of pain drew his attention to the shell in his hand. It now seemed to pulse with life. He tried to drop it, but it clung to him. The water around him grew bitterly cold. He looked down at his hand as his once beautiful blue scales turned pale white.

The shell pulsed like a beating heart, and dark fissures raced across its surface, growing larger with every beat. The alônn tugged violently at it, vainly trying to remove it. The deep blue of the water slowly turned red around him, drawing towards the pulsing shell. The acrid stench of old blood filled his gills, choking him. The moment the blood touched the shell, everything became utterly silent. The alônn's heart raced and his senses screamed, though the area around him remained as calm as the eye of a hurricane. He looked to his hand to discover that a single claw had extended from the shell and pierced his palm. As he tried to remove the pincer, a dark, viscous liquid exploded violently out of it, enveloping his face in blackness.

Kal awoke in a frantic rush, a scream gurgling from his lips. A voice, faintly sounding in the distant trails of his nightmare, whispered a simple warning, *"It is coming."* The alônn druid looked instantly to his hand, where a single drop of blood formed from a pinprick in his palm. There was no shell, and his scales had their customary blue hue to them. He ran his arm across his brow, the image of the exploding shell fresh in his mind. Perhaps the creature within wanted out.

SEVENTH TIDES -1st day of Layfani-

D'yorn found a comfortable perch upon the rim of the great rift. This was his assigned region of the immense ocean, his responsibility. When the council had first "promoted" him to this remote area, the young alônn scout had been insulted. After all, he felt that someone with his combat skills and talent for observation should be serving in the Deep Harbor, not

patrolling the outermost rim.

When he had spoken to Kal Strongsurge, a somewhat eclectic alônn - and the head of his druidic order - D'yorn had conveyed his unrest at his assignment. Kal gently reminded him of the level of importance that came with the patrolling of the outer shoals. He had personally passed over several other officers in order to place D'yorn there so that his talents could be best used.

The fact that Kal had also assigned D'yorn to the rim because of his quick temper that had stirred up more than a little trouble among their kindred was not mentioned. There had been no good reason to be completely frank. In any case, the proffered explanation pleased D'yorn, who now took great pride in his position as a first line of defense not only for the Deep Harbor but for the Three-Cities themselves.

Although D'yorn understood well the importance of his station, he had been out here, patrolling alone, for longer than he cared to think - with no activity to show for it. So, to make up for his lack of action, he at least had found plenty of time to investigate some of the ancient and mysterious shipwrecks that were nestled in their final resting places deep below the waves. Here and there, he found a few interesting trinkets, but nothing of value and sadly, very little that could be classified as "exciting."

Most of his dour race would never have disturbed these ghostly ruins, but D'yorn was ever curious about the world around him. A trait reserved for the young, his fascination with the vibrant life that made the ships home was something that his elders never quite appreciated. He often tried to communicate with the many sea creatures using the mysterious methods his kindred had developed, which Kal had taught him. One day, he hoped to develop his abilities to match that of other, greater alônn who could not only communicate with, but could control and guide the marine life, both flora and fauna. Even the inorganic water itself was a servant of the most powerful druids among his people.

D'yorn entered an area of the outer shoals, near a large sea trench, and what he saw there troubled him. Once teeming with life, this forest of coral and kelp was now strangely a place of silent death. Coral, which once colored the oceanic shelf with their bright and vibrant colors, had paled to a sickly white pallor while the kelp forests had turned a dead, mottled-brown. Those creatures that were not anchored down had fled to places unknown. The overall effect transformed this once-resplendent marine canyon into a vast, vacant, ghastly hall.

D'yorn lifted his head. As water filtered through his gills, he sought out any unusual odors that could have warned away the sea life in this area. A strange smell caught his attention. Almost startled, he cocked his head and drew the odor in, almost savoring it. Like nothing he had ever experienced, it was neither rotten nor sweet. Swimming through the ever-silent, shifting currents, he tracked the smell, following it to what he hoped would be its source. After some time, he reached a dark abyss that in all his travels he had never approached.

He peered down into the gloomy chasm and saw a ship that, in its dying plummet to the bottom, had crashed into the deep crevice. The water there was cloudy, almost opaque, making it nearly impossible to see through. Though he had patrolled these waters many times, he had never encountered this wreck before. Curiosity getting the better of him, the young alonn stretched his webbed hands out and dove from his perch on the trench's rim, slowly spiraling downwards towards the mysterious wreck. As he descended, the water changed, becoming much colder and murkier, until he could barely see more than a few feet ahead of him. What had been merely a clouded gloom many feet above had below become an eerily obscuring soup. Undaunted, he plunged deeper.

Suddenly, the murky water swirled before an undertow of icy-cold water, revealing the ship's shattered bow. His heart raced as he neared the unfamiliar hulk. Mere feet away, the muddy silt curtains parted enough for him to make out the ship's bowsprit and the tattered, rotting remnants of one of the jib sails looming above him. He passed down the side of the vessel, cautiously inspecting its ruined hull, until he reached its stern. There, in ornate brass lettering covered in verdigris and barnacle growths, he found the ship's name: *Black Saber*.

D'yorn's blood ran cold as he stared at the ominous plaque. In childhood, he had heard the many stories about the mysterious vessel; he'd learned a great deal of its evil presence. Belonging to a crazed archmage, the ship had set sail from Crown half a century earlier, carrying a strange relic of unimaginable evil. For unknown reasons, the ship, its crew, and the wicked cargo sank. Some said the relic thirsted for the crews' souls and so drowned them, while others believed the crew purposefully scuttled the ship to destroy the relic, while still others spoke of a blood-drenched mutiny. Yet, all the stories agreed that the crew and their chaotic master could still be heard, murmuring and moaning, in the waters surrounding the doomed ship, their tortured souls seeking other ships and passengers to

feed the evil relic's hunger.

It was a ghost story told to young alônn as a warning against swimming into unknown waters - else the *Black Saber* might draw them in and swallow their souls. A mildly frightening story when told at the communal table, it was something else entirely now, looming before him in silent menace. For a moment, D'yorn floated at the stern, his eyes riveted to the plaque, his body rigid in fear. All the terrible images he had conjured in his mind as a child flooded his mind, paralyzing him. Would his soul now be consumed by the terrible evil inside? Yet, he seemed powerless to resist the dark lure of the unknown.

Suddenly, movement within the hulk, followed by a long, hollow creaking, jarred him, sending him into motion. In one fluid movement, the alônn scout flexed his muscles, and like a coiled spring released, he rocketed straight up and away from the evil wreck. His legs pumped harder than ever before, and he clawed with his arms for the safer waters above. He dared not look back, fearing the terrible monster he knew would certainly devour him.

He furiously broke the water's surface, bursting out into the night air for a moment before crashing back into the ocean. He frantically scanned about, desperate to discern just how far out of his patrol area he had wandered, but everything was as it should be. His position was right; he had not left his zone. He knew the area well and certainly would never have missed the wreck of the *Black Saber* in his earlier patrols. Something dreadful had happened, punctuated by the appearance of the grisly ship and its wicked cargo. He glanced fearfully down through the seemingly safe expanse of water between him and the ship.

"It should not be there," he protested aloud to himself.

And he was right, he knew it. However it had arrived, its menace was undeniable. Worse, he knew somehow that the relic within was awakening, its macabre will stretching forth. And of all his kindred, he alone knew where it was.

Pleased that he was still alive, and certain the self-conjured monster from his mind was not chasing him, D'yorn rested at the surface for a while, treading water. He closed the gill slits that ran diagonally across his neck and breathed in the cool night air through the small openings above his mouth. The alônn were by nature water breathers, but they were also capable of breathing air for short periods of time. They preferred to remain under the waves, but they would occasionally come to the surface to interact with the air-breathing races above. Few of his kin actually relished their time away from their watery home, and

many of the insular race had never left it.

Somewhat smaller than humans, the blue-scaled skin and other unusual features of the alōnn made them very easy to spot on land. A small dorsal fin ran from the back of their skulls, down their spines, usually terminating at their lower backs; this fin aided in navigation through their aquatic natural habitat and occasionally varied in size and coloration. Their gills were narrow, shark-like slits that ran diagonally across their necks and were easily closed whenever they ventured above water. A long, spine-like fin, covered by a transparent membrane, could be seen on the back of their forearms, running from the wrist to the elbow. These “forearm fins” could be fanned at will, and they added speed and maneuverability while swimming. Many alōnn also adorned these fins with intricate squid-ink tattoos, accented by blotches of phosphorescent blood from deep-sea fishes, which could then be flashed as a sign of identification.

D'yorn steadied himself as he bobbed gently on the surface of the water while he played the experience in his mind. Of all his kindred, he had found the *Black Saber*! That he found it was enough to confirm Kal's trust in him and his vigilance. Yet, his excitement was tempered by the hard reality of the wreck. It was nowhere near where legend placed it, and it definitely should not have been this close to the harbor. He had not imagined the terror, the bitter cold, or the sense of evil that emanated from within its terrible hold. The ship was here below the surface, below him, and it was real.

He suddenly realized he had to inform Kal of his discovery, had to warn of the awakening evil now stirring beneath the waves so close to Crown. As D'yorn reached for a simple coral necklace that hung around his neck, a glint of light on the dark horizon caught his attention. He squinted as he strained to better see the faint light.

‘A ship, perhaps?’ the scout thought.

Odd for this time of season and not near one of the common trade routes, for this ship came from the north! His mind racing, he fingered the necklace, noticing he had but a single section of corral left. He peered again down into the dark brine below and then to the light on the horizon. A choice was set clearly before him: he could use the necklace now to warn Kal of his discovery, or he could save it and await the approaching light.

He sighed, allowing his excitement to cool. The call of duty was louder than his rash urge to abandon his post. The *Black Saber* would have to wait; besides it was a shipwreck, it wasn't going anywhere any time soon – he hoped. There would be plenty of time for him