



# SERPENT'S SKULL

## PLAYER'S GUIDE



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# Serpent's Skull

Sargava is a land on the verge, simultaneously pushing on the edge of the map of the Inner Sea and facing an uncertain political future. The nigh impassable jungles of the Mwangi Expanse and the permanent hurricane known as the Eye of Abendego isolate Sargava from the rest of Garund, and its closest neighbors are only nominally nations themselves. The former Chelish colony also stands at the threshold of a new future free from colonial rule, making all things possible. Yet the citizens of Sargava were not the first to attempt to carve civilization out of the wild region—since the dawn of history, humanity has strived to form great kingdoms amid the dangers of the Mwangi Expanse. Crumbled ruins are all that remain of these vanished empires, and even their names have been forgotten by history. Some scholars even whisper that lost ruins of the ancient Azlanti empire may be found in the unexplored jungles, but these crackpot theories are dismissed by more reputable sages. But whatever their origins, these ruins may provide incredible wealth and power to those who rediscover them. This dangerous land and the wilderness beyond serve as the setting of the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path.

This guide seeks to aid players preparing to take part in the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path, to arm them with spoiler-free details and rules elements useful in the forthcoming challenges, and to help create backgrounds that easily mesh with the campaign. Along with advice for players of every race and character class in the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game*—including those in the newly released *Advanced Player's Guide*—details on Sargava, the country in closest proximity to the campaign's events, and of the *Jenivere*, the ship conveying the PCs to adventure, should help ground players in the circumstances and events of this new Adventure Path. Those looking for even more details and options for exotic adventures should take a look at *Pathfinder Player's Companion: Sargava*.

## SARGAVA OVERVIEW

Founded over 500 years ago by Prince Haliad I as part of Cheliox's expansionist Everwar, Sargava stood as the jewel of the empire for centuries. But when Aroden died, the empire was thrown into chaos, and Sargava's ruler backed the wrong house in the Chelish Civil War. House Thrune took control of Cheliox and sent a flotilla of warships to retake the colony that had supported their enemy in the bloody conflict. Grand Custodian Baron Grallus anticipated the onslaught, however, and made a fateful alliance with the Free Captains of the Shackles. Swooping out of Desperation Bay to pounce on the unsuspecting Chelish Navy, the pirates' superior fleet swiftly ended the threat to their southern neighbor, and extracted a mighty price from Sargava for their efforts. To this day, vast portions of Sargava's wealth flow into the Free Captains' coffers for past assistance and assurance of continued naval protection.

Financially weakened by the Free Captains' high demands and cut off from many of their former trade partners to the north, Sargava faces an even larger threat from within. The native Mwangi people, inspired by the teachings of a mysterious, undead child-god in the nearby city-state of Mzali, move ever closer to open rebellion to free themselves from colonial rule. While Cheliox no longer has an official stake in Sargava's government, the colonial Sargavan minority maintains control of the vastly larger native population. But the natives know that they have the resources of the entire Mwangi Expanse at their backs, and that Grand Custodian Baron Utilinus's government is in a poor position to quell a rebellion.

## SERPENT'S SKULL PCs

Your band of characters begins the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path as passengers on a cargo ship called the *Jenivere*, headed south to Sargava. The voyage promises not only to bring your characters together as you face adversity, but also to set you on a path into the very heart of one of Golarion's most feared regions in search of wealth, fame, and ancient secrets. PCs in the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path are not limited to origins in Sargava itself. In fact, characters in this campaign may be from just about anywhere. Countless motivations draw the daring, curious, and downright foolhardy to Sargava with the hope of attaining personal fame and fortune, and your PCs likely boast a variety of backgrounds and decidedly different reasons for traveling to Sargava's capital city.

The *Serpent's Skull Player's Guide* is intended to provide characters with a reason to be on the *Jenivere*, whether they are from a distant part of the Inner Sea journeying to a new land or natives of Sargava returning home. The following suggestions provide basic information on potential PC origins, but focus on motivations to bring characters of all races and classes to Sargava. Use this guide as a starting point to give your PCs a reason to be aboard the fateful voyage that launches the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path.

The following pages outline qualities of typical members of all seven core races, all 11 core classes, and the six classes found in the *Advanced Player's Guide*. Characters of all alignments, religions, and homelands can play a vital role in this campaign, and the following suggestions should serve to spark a concept or background for your PC. You'll also find several new traits specific to the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path to better customize your characters and link them to the campaign's setting and plot.

## RACES

While Sargava is primarily a human land—its population consisting of mainly Mwangi natives and Chelioxian-descended colonials—members of all races have reason to travel aboard the *Jenivere*, seeking fame, fortune, or





in some cases, anonymity and escape. All of Golarion's core races exist in Sargava and members of any could be natives returning home from journeys abroad. Likewise, members of all races have numerous motivations to travel to the region from distant homelands throughout the Inner Sea and Golarion at large. Regardless of your PC's race, the passage south will set him on a straight course for adventure.

## DWARVES

Although dwarves are not typically found at sea, even the least nautical among them must travel via ship to distant lands for trade or diplomatic reasons; whether they're coming from Janderhoff in Varisia, the Five Kings Mountains, or the parched dunes of Osirion, the *Jenivere* provides the perfect opportunity for ambitious dwarves to reach Sargava. Many hope to capture some of the wealth of the notorious Deeptreasure Mining Company, who retrieve tons of gems and precious metals from beneath the Bandu Hills, bringing inordinate riches to those involved in the operation, and most dwarves traveling to or from Sargava have some connection to this lucrative enterprise. Less entrepreneurial dwarves share a racial affinity for stone with their mining brethren, and might travel to Sargava with plans to explore the many ancient ruins that pepper the wilderness of the Mwangi Expanse.

## ELVES

Elves as a race are relatively insular, preferring their own company to mixed settlements, though they may be found in small numbers in nearly every community throughout Golarion. Those elves raised apart from their own kind—known collectively as the Forlorn—are prone to travel and exploration and are likely to have secret and personal reasons for a nautical journey to Sargava. Elves' long lifespans provide them a unique perspective on history, and they often have a strong interest in all things ancient; elves from any part of Golarion might find the mysteries of the Mwangi Expanse inspiration enough to leave their homeland. Elves native to Sargava and the Mwangi Expanse are generally members of the widespread Ekujae people, which consists of numerous clans and tribes of wild elves, who are considered primitive by their kin in Kyonin and other "civilized" lands. Frequently captured and sold into slavery, Ekujae live throughout the Inner Sea and once freed from bondage, generally return to their native Garund.

## GNOMES

Golarion's wily gnomes are ever at risk of the dreaded Bleaching and constantly fight against its deadly effects by engaging in new and exciting experiences. What

## Land ho!

While many of the background hooks described below involve seafaring and nautical adventuring, the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path takes place on land, amid treacherous jungles, ruined cities, and vast underground vaults. Players who create PCs optimized for adventures at sea will be disappointed; use these suggestions to get PCs on the *Jenivere*, but don't expect them to stay there. If you want to play a "fish-out-of-water" character, thrown into adventures where his sea legs won't help him, consider making your PC a member of the *Jenivere*'s crew, but keep in mind that aquatic animal companions or skills such as Profession (sailor) won't benefit him for most of the Adventure Path.

better way to inject interest into a gnome's life than the exploration of ancient ruins and immersion in the varied cultures of the Mwangi Expanse's dense jungles? Wondrous foreign ports and eccentric seafarers may lead some gnomes to a life of destinationless nautical travel—including passage on the *Jenivere*. Particularly adventurous gnomes might even serve as a member of the ship's crew, trusting that passengers will provide enough variety to keep them young and colorful through their careers at sea. Rumors of ancient Mwangi ruins housing a spriggan community draw gnomes curious about their wild brethren to Sargava, and have led to a number of deep jungle expeditions; none of these have greatly unraveled the mystery.

## HALF-ELVES

Half-elves often find sedentary lives unfulfilling and are generally overcome by wanderlust in late adolescence or early adulthood. Whether searching for an absent parent whose disappearance caused them trouble in their youth or seeking to fulfill the auspicious destiny of their human or elven ancestry, travel to distant corners of the world and immersion in unfamiliar cultures inspire many half-elves' wanderings. Those journeying to Sargava may be exiled offspring of an embarrassing tryst amid the Inner Sea's nobility or might plan to search the Mwangi jungles for an Ekujae relative. Half-elves who have suffered especially heinous prejudice against their mixed heritage might dedicate themselves to the Sargavan natives' cause against the oppression of their former Chelish rulers. Regardless of their reasons, half-elves are no strangers to adventure, and the lost colony of Sargava provides endless promise to anyone seeking danger and excitement.





# Serpent's Skull

## Additional Reading for Players

Players interested in further immersing themselves in the world of Golarion and adding campaign specific details that might aid them over the course of the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path, might investigate the following Pathfinder Player's Guides.

**Adventurer's Armory:** Filled with new and exotic equipment and options for all manner of weapon users, players seeking to better or more appropriately arm themselves for their adventures should look herein.

**Cheliax:** Although not the setting of this campaign, players might board the *Jenivere* in any one of several Chelish ports. Players interested in making their characters natives of one of these cities can find plenty of details and new character options within.

**Sargava:** With the PCs's destination being this country's capital, players might want to familiarize themselves with this region and the variety of exotic options it presents.

## HALF-ORCS

Outcasts in most of the civilized lands of the Inner Sea, half-orcs often travel to the ends of the map to escape persecution, prejudice, and their shameful origins. Indigenous orc tribes are rare in Garund, so most half-orcs in Sargava are travelers from other lands. Those half-orcs native to Sargava are usually descended from such foreign half-orc colonists, though many claim native Mwangi parents. Among the demon-worshipping Bekyar common south of Desperation Bay in particular, human mothers see giving birth to a half-orc child as a blessing from Lamashtu, the Mother of Monsters. These bestial children are raised to be mighty warlords and slavers, but it is not uncommon for half-orcs bred in such a way to reject their parents' expectations and leave their homeland to forge their own identities free from demonic influence. A half-orc of this origin may be on the *Jenivere* returning home to right past wrongs or teach a better way to her people.

## HALFLINGS

As in most human lands, halflings often call the metropolitan cities and remote settlements of Sargava home, living quietly in the shadows of the region's human population. A large number of halfling slaves were brought to the savage land when their Chelish masters colonized the region and have remained ever since. When

Sargava gained its independence from Cheliax in 4643 AR, many of these slaves were freed either by decree or circumstance. These freed slaves began their own lives in Sargava's bustling capital of Eleder, often working on the harbor's extensive docks and shipyards. Escaped halfling slaves from current-day Cheliax and countless other lands may travel to Sargava in the hope of starting a new life in a land where both halflings and native humans alike live under the recent memory of subservience and embrace a potential future of liberty. Halflings' hardiness, easy-going natures, small size, and nimbleness make them ideal sailors, and the crew of the *Jenivere* may contain one or more of the small seamen.

## HUMANS

Sargava is an undeniably human land. Since time immemorial, Mwangi tribesmen have lived in the region. Bonuwat seafarers are the most likely to have traveled to the greater reaches of the world and are thus most easily placed aboard vessels like the *Jenivere*. The second most prominent sub-ethnicity among Sargava's Mwangi natives are the ubiquitous Zenj, who exist in nearly every village or city from the Barrier Wall Mountains to the Screaming Jungle. The demon-worshipping Bekyar live almost solely in and south of Sargava, but they comprise only a small minority of the region's overall Mwangi population. Other than indigenous Mwangi inhabitants, the most frequently encountered humans in Sargava are colonials whose ancestors may have lived in the region since 4138 AR, many of whom consider themselves as native to the land as the Mwangi. The draw of the Mwangi Expanse's countless treasures and myriad mysteries bring members of all ethnicities to Eleder, however, and all human cultures might have reason to travel there aboard ships like the *Jenivere*.

## CLASSES

While Sargava and the Mwangi Expanse play host to some classes more easily than others, members of all types have reason to journey to the region on the *Jenivere*. Be they natives to the land returning home from travels abroad or foreigners venturing into uncharted territory for the first time, characters of any class can play an important role in the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path. The following suggestions should provide context for both native and foreign PCs of all classes, but members of each may find additional reasons to travel to Sargava based on their particular origins.

## ALCHEMISTS

Often self-involved and aloof, alchemists are generally more concerned with their inventive extracts and newest formulae than with the world around them. That





said, some alchemists belong to a local guild or arcane school—many of which exist in most major cities in the Inner Sea region. These organizations frequently send their members and apprentices to distant lands to collect rare reagents or explore unknown regional techniques. Sargava, isolated as it is from most of the Inner Sea by the Eye of Abendego, is the perfect destination for such an academic. Alchemists are sometimes misunderstood by society at large, and seen as strange, dangerous, even mad—often not completely inaccurate assessments—and might travel aboard the *Jenivere* seeking a fresh start in far-off Sargava. Native Sargavans may have traveled to distant lands to gather allies for an expedition into the Mwangi Expanse in search of ancient alchemical formulae among the region's countless lost tribes.

**Recommendations:** Traversing the wilderness and exploring dangerous ancient ruins play a major role in the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path, so skills like Disable Device, Knowledge (arcana), Knowledge (nature), Spellcraft, Survival, and Use Magic Device will see significant use. Additionally, characters will find themselves far from civilization for much of the campaign and having such versatile crafters in the party could prove helpful.

## BARBARIANS

Wild and reckless barbarians seem a natural fit for the untamed reaches of the Mwangi Expanse, and many warriors native to the region are more berserkers than trained fighters. Even races generally considered cultured—such as elves—have barbaric tribes in the Mwangi Expanse and Sargava. Sargava's position on the edge of civilization attracts many brawlers who find life in other lands difficult, and dockside taverns and brothels teem with unruly warriors from as far away as the Lands of the Linnorm Kings, the Realm of the Mammoth Lords, and Varisia; countless vessels bring such travellers to Eleder's harbor on a daily basis and the *Jenivere* could easily be among them.

**Recommendations:** Wilderness exploration plays a major role in the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path, so skills like Acrobatics, Climb, Handle Animal, Perception, Survival, and Swim will be used quite often. The talents of an accomplished combatant, especially one capable of sensing traps and with experience in the wilds, also won't go untested.

## BARDS

Ever collecting lost lore and captivating tales of high adventure, bards are frequently drawn to the ancient lands of the Mwangi Expanse. Eleder, with its impressive docks and shipyards, makes an ideal destination for traveling bards from across Golarion, who often find

the lawless and unscrupulous ports of Bloodcove or the Shackles more trouble than they're worth. The ongoing struggle between Sargava's colonials and Mwangi natives has raised the demand for political agents, and bards increasingly serve both causes as diplomats, mediators, spies, and inspirational orators. Native bards often specialize in the tribal chants and rhythmic drum-calling of the Mwangi people, in whose oral traditions they feature prominently. The thrumming beat of their ancestral drums resonates through the dense foliage and expansive savannas of the nation, maintaining an air of mystery about the drummers that still unsettles visitors to this day.

**Recommendations:** Diplomatic interactions between native tribes, nations, and other factions play a significant role in the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path. Skills like Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, and Sense Motive should be helpful quite often. All Knowledge skills will be useful at points during the campaign, but those having to do with the wilderness, esoteric religions, and the history and elusive secrets of the Mwangi Expanse will be most useful (typically arcana, geography, history, local, nature, and religion). Not a few of the region's inhabitants, such as giant vermin or enormous carnivorous plants, are immune to mind-affecting magic. The versatile bard makes sure to have options available to deal with such threats when exploring the Mwangi Expanse.

## CAVALIERS

Many cavaliers find Sargava a nation much in need of their talents. Battlefield marshals increasingly travel to Eleder aspiring to manage troops against the growing native unrest in Kalabuto or to secure Sargava's border with Mzali. Native Mwangi cavaliers may have traveled to other parts of the Inner Sea to receive training by their order and are now returning to their homeland to put their skills into practice. Cavaliers in the region typically ride horses, though the farther east one travels, the more likely one is to encounter strange jungle animals employed as mounts. Depending on the cavalier's chosen order, he might be sent or volunteer to travel to Sargava to represent any established ruler, noble, or religion.

**Recommendations:** Cavaliers of all orders will find themselves useful in the campaign. The mandates of the order of the cockatrice and order of the dragon especially suit the upcoming adventures' themes with their desires for fortune and glory, whether for themselves or companions. The close quarters of the jungle and dungeon exploration can make employing a mount challenging at times, so cavaliers might want to either devise creative tactics to utilize their steeds or focus on other aspects of their class.





# SERPENT'S SKULL

## CLERICS

Priests of all faiths travel the world on vessels much like the *Jenivere*, and can justifiably be mere passengers on the voyage. Those most likely to travel to Sargava might be clerics of Abadar, hoping to quell rebellion and maintain order in Kalabuto, or faithful of Cayden Cailean hoping to help the natives reclaim their homeland or prevent bloodshed. Members of the Bonuwat tribes often venerate a deity known as Shimye-Magalla, a janiform amalgam of Gozreh and Desna, though worship of these two gods as separate deities is more common in the region overall. Nethys has a large following among the jungle tribes, which find the Mwangi Expanse's many ancient ruins sources of immense and mysterious power. Less common, though nevertheless present, the Bekyar people worship a number of malicious demon lords including Angazhan, Lamashtu, and Pazuzu; cultists from across Golarion may be drawn to the region in search of like-minded people, or demon hunters and holy warriors may travel here to hunt down and eradicate these evil sects.

**Recommendations:** Gozreh has a strong presence in the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path, with the faith's focus on wilderness and magical mysteries promising to serve worshippers well over the course of the campaign. Clerics of Desna will be rewarded for the long journey, while those who venerate Shelyn may find their goddess represented in unusual ways in parts of the Mwangi Expanse. And Pharasma, being one of the oldest deities, has traditions that date back for many thousands of years, and rumors of ancient secrets of the faith being hidden in lost ruins are common. Ultimately all of the deities listed in the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook* make excellent choices for clerics to worship, though you should check with your GM before choosing a god from beyond Golarion's core deities.

## DRUIDS

Sargava serves as an active gateway to the jungles of the Mwangi Expanse, and few locations on Golarion attract druids in large numbers like the wild and untamed lands at the heart of Garund. Whether hoping to explore the region, harness its primeval powers, or guide civilization into the dense wilderness, druids often pass through Eleder and, more often than not, Kalabuto farther inland. Among the native population, many tribes employ shamanistic druids as spiritual leaders, and apprentice druids might have ties to one of Sargava's many Mwangi peoples. Druids are likely to be aboard the *Jenivere* as passengers, en route to Sargava or the Mwangi Expanse beyond with more personal motivations.

**Recommendations:** A wide variety of exotic creatures make logical choices for druids operating in the the Mwangi Expanse: ape, bird, boar, cat (big or small), crocodile, dinosaur, dog, horse, pony, and snake

(constrictor or viper). From the *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary*, the following additional choices are logical: dire bat, dire rat, elephant, giant frog, hyena, monitor lizard, and any of the specific dinosaurs listed. Players might also want to check with their GMs to see if any creatures in *Pathfinder Adventure Path's* monthly bestiaries might make appropriate companions.

## FIGHTERS

Few classes are as well suited for the dangerous and violent lands of Sargava and the Mwangi Expanse as the dedicated and highly-trained fighter. Often hired to escort vulnerable explorers, scholars, and merchants through the imposing jungles, fighters travel with nearly every group on the roads or waterways of the region. In the more civilized areas around Eleder and Kalabuto, mercenaries from across Golarion may be hired to fight for either side of the ongoing conflict between the natives and colonists. Fighters born and raised in the region may be returning home on the *Jenivere* after a campaign—failed or successful—in the nations of the north.

**Recommendations:** All manner of weapons and armor exist in the Mwangi Expanse, but legends speak of certain types of powerful magic weapons being hidden in the region's ancient ruins. Fighters might want to avoid dedicating themselves to the use of heavy armor—or pursue ways of increasing their mobility in such armaments—as the heat and other challenges of the jungle can make such gear unwieldy, or even dangerous, to wear.

## INQUISITORS

Inquisitors of all faiths have good reason to make the long journey to Sargava. Zealous agents of lawful deities such as Abadar, Asmodeus, and Iomedae may endeavor to preserve order amid rising animosity among Sargava's inhabitants. Freedom-loving inquisitors, such as those venerating Cayden Cailean, Desna, or Milani, may travel to Sargava to end the influence of the Sargavan colonials once and for all. The faithful of Nethys or Norgorber might plan to explore the Mwangi Expanse for long-lost secrets, either to uncover eldritch magic or to keep history's powerful mysteries hidden from the world. Other inquisitors might be returning home from another nation in the Inner Sea with a prisoner in tow, or hunting down a particularly elusive quarry believed to be hiding in Sargava or the Mwangi Expanse. An inquisitor of any faith may set her determined gaze on Sargava's shores for any of these reasons, or because of the simple, unceasing belief that her deity wills her to the exotic city for an as yet unknown purpose.

**Recommendations:** Any of the deities listed in the cleric description make excellent choices for inquisitors to serve over the course of the Serpent's Skull Adventure





Path. Judgements aimed at defending an inquisitor from the hazards common to the jungle, especially poison and disease, can prove especially useful. While inquisitors of any walk can surely find suitable motivation and quarries to inspire them through the campaign, those willing to quest for treasure, secrets, or ancient relics will find endless reasons to venture into the jungles' depths.

## MONKS

Garund's western coast is not typically a region known for its monk inhabitants, but there are a number of reasons one might travel to the region from Vudra, Tian Xia, or somewhere in the Inner Sea region. Among the native peoples of the Mwangi interior, there are many cultures which forego armor and manufactured weapons, preferring the increased mobility and spontaneity unarmed combat allows as they face unsuspected threats in the dangerous land; a Mwangi monk may lack fangs and talons, but his natural weapons are no less effective than those of the jungle's most ferocious beasts.

**Recommendations:** While monks are not particularly common in Sargava, a monk's self-sufficiency will prove quite helpful in the campaign. Speed and flexibility will also serve monk characters well in a land of unpredictable challenges, both living and environmental. Focusing on ways to cripple creatures that rely more on natural weapons than on manufactured tools will serve monks well.

## ORACLES

The gods don't generally intervene in the everyday events of nations or mortals, but their influence sometimes manifests in the form of enigmatic oracles—divine conduits of mysterious origin and purpose. For those rare individuals blessed and cursed with preternatural powers, the ancient, inscrutable jungles of the Mwangi Expanse are an attractive destination. Some oracles, ostracized from their homes by superstitious locals, make their way south on the Arcadian Ocean to the port of Eleder, where the Mwangi Expanse is only a short journey inland. There, many hope to find answers to pervasive questions regarding their very existence. Sargavan or Mwangi natives may likewise travel throughout the Inner Sea seeking their own answers and assurances amid the most reputable and prestigious universities and temples from Quantum to Korvosa. Whether successful or not in these quests to understand themselves, such oracles often return home to seek a peaceful life in their homelands.

**Recommendations:** Oracles of all mysteries will find themselves useful in the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path, but oracles of battle, bones, life, lore, nature, and stone will find the strongest ties to the themes and events of the campaign. Of all an oracle's curses, the clouded vision and tongues options might eventually prove most beneficial.

## PALADINS

Holy warriors may travel to Sargava for any number of reasons. Paladins focused on maintaining order see the growing unrest in Sargava as needing their attention, and Iomedaeans, Abadaran, and Erastilian paladins flock to Eleder and Kalabuto to face the threat of open rebellion from the native Mwangi inhabitants. On the other hand, paladins may pity the natives' plight and work to right the injustices committed by colonial oppressors. Additionally, the Hellknight Order of the Coil maintains a base near Eleder, setting their sights on eliminating the spread of what they see as disease and savagery as relics from the past flow out of the Mwangi to the civilized world. Paladins with ambitions of rising in the ranks of this small order may travel to Sargava in the hope of discovering lost cities to seal their secrets deep in the jungle. Paladins native to Sargava and the Mwangi Expanse may be sailing home on the *Jenivere* after a tour in the Mendevian Crusades, the orc-wars of Lastwall, or other holy missions throughout the Inner Sea. The quest to liberate lost relics from the jungle depths also leads many paladins to explore the Mwangi Expanse, attracting those hopeful of discovering treasures to better the lives and further the goals of their brethren.

**Recommendations:** Abadar or Iomedae make fine divine patrons for paladins, as their presence and influence are strong in Sargava. But in the depths of the wilderness such crusaders shouldn't expect significant support from their churches. Also, a paladin's mount can often prove troublesome in the claustrophobic jungle tangles and shadowy ruins common to the upcoming adventures—making the ability to summon and dismiss such a companion at will most beneficial. Yet for all the challenges a paladin might face, the class's resistance to many afflictions and ability to heal disease, poison, and other maladies commonly employed by denizens of the jungle make a paladin a most welcome addition to any band of explorers.

## RANGERS

The jungles of the Mwangi Expanse call silently to explorers from across the Inner Sea to discover and tame them. Rangers often act as guides for scholars, archaeologists, or other parties venturing into the dark heart of the region. Some see it as their duty to protect the world from the strange and monstrous denizens of the deep jungle, and are adept at killing the foul creatures and malignant peoples that threaten the inhabitants of Sargava and the Mwangi Expanse itself. Other rangers see the region as prime hunting grounds to obtain a record-setting trophy and travel from across Golarion to traverse the vast swaths of the Expanse's wilderness in search of rare big game,





# SERPENT'S SKULL

including dinosaurs, giant apes, and monsters only spoken of in legend.

**Recommendations:** The ability to track well is particularly valuable in the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path, and a variety of exotic animals might make for fine companions. The following favored enemy selection make excellent choices for rangers in the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path: aberration, animal, humanoid (charauka or human), magical beast, plant, outsider (chaotic or evil), undead, and especially monstrous humanoid. Particularly useful favored terrain choices include jungle, underground, and urban.

## ROGUES

The treasures of Sargava's jungles were instrumental in the nation's rise to power under Chelish colonial rule, as settlers flocked to the ancient ruins south of Desperation Bay hoping to tap the land's rich resources. The same treasures continue to attract tomb-robbers and fate-tempters from across Golarion, despite the nation's increased isolation from the northern realms. Ambitious pirates and thieves take inspiration from the Free Captains of the Shackles, whose coffers have overflowed with tribute from Sargava's government in exchange for decades of protection. Whether from Riddleport, the River Kingdoms, or Ilizmagorti, many enterprising rogues make their way to the dangerous region to muscle their own living off the weak and needy. Endless and ever more embellished tales of fantastic and impossible treasures hidden in lost jungle ruins also tempt countless treasure hunters to venture into the heart of Garund, risking their lives for wealth beyond imagination.

**Recommendations:** The Serpent's Skull Adventure Path includes many traps and extensive underground exploration, as well as hazards, ambushes, and social situations where rogues can excel. A rogue talented at stealth and scouting, particularly in wilderness areas and ancient ruins, should do well. While Disable Device, Perception, and Stealth prove endlessly useful, rogues with a knack for Appraise, Diplomacy, Knowledge skills, Linguistics, and other more physical skills will be well equipped to face the campaign's challenges.

## SORCERERS

Ever exploring the far corners of the world in search of ways to test their mysterious powers, sorcerers often find that the Mwangi Expanse provides many such opportunities. Destined bloodline sorcerers frequently feel drawn to the ancient ruins of the region, as if their full potential can be realized only by tapping into the powers of the past. Similarly, arcane bloodline sorcerers find the ruins of lost empires a rich source of magical power, and often delve into the wild to uncover answers to ageless enigmas. Natives

of the region often belong to the abyssal, serpentine, or verdant bloodlines, the result of millennia of either demon worship or the influence of the fecund jungle and its creatures on the inhabitants of the land. In rare cases, explorers who have never exhibited signs of innate arcane abilities manifest long-dormant powers when exposed to the strange and unknowable reaches of the deep jungle, and some youths journey recklessly into the wild hoping to unlock some as yet unrealized potential.

**Recommendations:** Although all bloodlines can prove useful in the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path, the aberrant, abyssal, arcane, and destined bloodlines fit best thematically. Sorcerers might also want to explore their options beyond combat spells when choosing their spell lists, as versatile utility spells and magic well suited to wilderness exploration, like *comprehend languages*, *endure elements*, and *unseen servant* can prove most beneficial.

## SUMMONERS

Summoners share much the same drive to uncover ancient mysteries and long-hidden secrets as bards, sorcerers, and wizards, and few locations on Golarion hold as much potential for discovery as the jungles of Sargava and the Mwangi Expanse. Summoners can often feel the almost palpable power of extraplanar creatures throughout the region, especially in areas where the worship of ancient powers and practice of strange magic still survives. The Mwangi Expanse's most remote ruins seem to hold strong connections to otherworldly purposes now lost to time and decay, and many summoners have dedicated their lives to tapping into this enigmatic and sometimes overpowering potential. Strong superstitions surround summoners of Mwangi origin, and many find that calling an eidolon results in their exile from their tribe. Most ostracized summoners travel the Inner Sea looking for acceptance or new sources of power, but in nearly every case they feel the eventual draw to return home.

**Recommendations:** Wilderness exploration and delves into ruins of long-lost civilizations are prominent during the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path. Skills such as Craft, Handle Animal, Knowledge (all types), Linguistics, and Use Magic Device will prove helpful throughout the campaign. Summoners who call upon eidolons with the ability to climb, fly, or swim should be of particular use during the campaign.

## WITCHES

Generally feared and misunderstood, many witches live reclusive lives on the edges of civilization; few locations within a reasonable distance of the Inner Sea are as remote and attractive to an outcast witch as Sargava, where the native Mwangi inhabitants are more open to their mysterious





magics and aloof way of life. In small Mwangi settlements, witches serve as sages and healers, and many travel to the lands of the north to study in their youth before settling down in one village as the local mystic. Some witches neither settle down nor plan to, instead traveling about Golarion, seeking greater knowledge and a better understanding of the enigmatic powers that guide them. The jungles of the Mwangi Expanse offer elusive answers for the inquisitive, and the powerful forces that call the jungle home prove an irresistible lure to many a curious witch.

**Recommendations:** When choosing their class abilities, witches have a variety of options, several of which might prove exceptionally helpful during the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path. All terrestrial familiar choices on the witch familiar list work in the context of the campaign, as will the animals, elements, endurance, and transformation patrons. Skills such as Craft, Knowledge (arcana, history, and nature), Spellcraft, and Use Magic Device should be useful during the campaign.

## WIZARDS

Many wizard colleges encourage exploration or study in far-off lands, and Sargava—being one of only a few gateways to the Mwangi Expanse—is a natural choice for arcane scholars the world over. Whether from the Arcanamirium of Absalom, Korvosa's Acadamae, or the Occularium in Manaket, apprentice wizards frequently sail to Eleder in the hope of discovering long lost secrets in the jungles to the east. Untold civilizations have risen and fallen in the heart of the Mwangi Expanse, leaving behind secrets and magical lore few adventurous spellcasters can resist the draw to discover. Even if foreigners don't plan to delve into the jungles themselves, the rich tapestry of arcane forms practiced among the varied populations of Eleder and Kalabuto are enough to draw wizards from around the globe, and the *Jenivere* is a perfect means of getting to Sargava's shores.

**Recommendations:** See the Bard recommendations for good Knowledge skill choices. All of the arcane schools should be equally useful throughout the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path, with the possible exception of enchanters, who may be periodically frustrated at the number of creatures like giant vermin or plants who are immune to mind-affecting magic.

While any sort of bonded object is possible in the campaign, wizards who opt instead to take on a familiar might wish to choose creatures that make sense for the region in which the Adventure Path takes place. Logical choices for familiars based on the region's climate include all of the basic familiars from the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*. Good choices of improved familiars (again, based on the themes of the campaign) include celestial or fiendish animals, dire rats, mephits, and pseudodragons.

## SERPENT'S SKULL CAMPAIGN TRAITS

Character traits are essentially half-feats that help customize a PC's background and tie her to the themes and events of a particular adventure. Each character should begin play with two traits, one of which may be selected from the Serpent's Skull campaign traits below. For general traits, see the *Advanced Player's Guide* or the *Character Traits Web Enhancement*, a free pdf download available at [paizo.com/traits](http://paizo.com/traits). Additionally, most Pathfinder Companion supplements contain racial, regional, and faith traits unique to Golarion and suitable for use by many new PCs.

## CAMPAIGN TRAITS

Campaign traits are tailored to a specific Adventure Path and give your character a built-in reason to begin the first adventure in a new campaign. Campaign traits assume a lot more about your character's backstory than do normal traits, but they are meant to help serve as inspiration for a player working to create a detailed and interesting history for her character. You have a certain amount of leeway in adjusting a campaign trait's expected backstory once you've selected which trait is right for you; just be sure to get your GM's approval before you run with a modified history.

All of the following traits revolve around characters with a reason to travel to Sargava on the *Jenivere*, a trading vessel whose fateful journey south through the Arcadian Ocean launches the Serpent's Skull Adventure Path. You can take a look at these traits to get a general, spoiler-free idea of the types of foes and challenges your character might encounter over the course of the Adventure Path. Knowing that there are going to be elements of jungle exploration, the discovery of ruined lost cities, secret alliances, ancient magic, and the like should help you build a character that fits more organically into the campaign you're about to join. Each trait also suggests options for the port in which your character might have boarded the *Jenivere*, though with the exception of the various "boarded in" traits, players shouldn't feel like they have to match a trait with a specific port.

**Boarded in Cheliox:** While you aren't necessarily a native of Cheliox, you boarded the *Jenivere* at one of that country's port cities. As the people of Cheliox generally know the Mwangi Expanse as a near legendary land home to strange beasts and exotic treasures, your views of the region have a distinctly romantic tinge, and the desire for fame, wealth, and adventure likely motivate your travels. You begin the campaign with a detailed map of the Mwangi Expanse (this grants +2 competence bonus on all Knowledge [geography] checks made regarding this region) and 200 gp worth of mundane equipment to aid your exploration of the jungle.

**Boarded in Mediogalti:** Your travels have brought you to the *Jenivere* through the dangerous port of Ilizmagorti,





# Serpent's Skull

home to both pirates and assassins. Perhaps you're fleeing a price on your head, perhaps you've jumped ship from another vessel, or perhaps you're merely looking for a new start in a land where the dangers make themselves more obvious. Your familiarity with subtle slayings and toxins grants you a +2 trait bonus on all saves against poison. In addition, you can pick one type of poison listed below to be immune to, having undergone a long and painful process of building up an immunity to its effects: blue whinnis, giant wasp poison, medium spider venom, small centipede poison, or spider vine poison (a poison derived from a toxic plant native to the Mwangi Expanse).

**Boarded in the Mwangi Expanse:** You boarded the *Jenivere* in the Mwangi Expanse, where you've lived or recently traveled through. You harbor no illusions regarding the deadliness of the jungles, the creatures that inhabit it, or the peoples that make their home therein. You gain Polyglot as a bonus language and receive a +1 trait bonus on all Knowledge (nature) checks regarding the jungle.

**Boarded in the Shackles:** Your last home was in the Shackles, a dangerous land of pirates and treachery, but also of fantastic opportunity. A life of weal and woe on the sea and amid the pirate controlled lands has toughened you to a variety of hardships. Pick one of the three categories of saving throws—you gain a +1 trait bonus on all saving throws of that type.

**Boarded in Varisia:** Traveling from lands far to the north, you likely have little experience with the jungle, its denizens, or its strange forces. Just as the lands of Garund are wild and exotic to you, so are you to them. This unusualness manifests in one of two ways. Choose to gain either a +2 trait bonus on all Bluff checks made against inhabitants of the jungle, or treat your spells with the mind-affecting descriptor as being +1 caster level higher when cast against creatures and natives of the jungle.

**Colonial:** You come from a long line of Sargavan colonists, stretching back to Cheliox's original expansion into the land during the Everwar. While your people's control of Sargava wanes every day, and Eleder has functioned independently from Cheliox since House Thrune brought diabolism to the political forefront, you nevertheless maintain a hardy Chelish constitution and natural sense of survival. What took you away from home is up to you, but you return to the land of your birth on the *Jenivere* in the hope of putting Sargava back on the map. You gain a +1 trait bonus on Knowledge (local) checks relating to Sargavan settlements and politics and a +1 trait bonus on saving throws against disease.

Characters with this trait are Sargavan natives and might be returning via any city, but especially from the Chelish ports of Kintargo, Pezzack, or Corentyn.

**Get the Cargo Through:** Sea trade is never safe, even on the highly trafficked waters of the Inner Sea, but the

way to Eleder is more perilous still. The ever-present hurricane known as the Eye of Abendego blows hundreds of ships each year off course, into jagged rocks, or directly to the sea floor. Pirates operating out of the Shackles Isles wait on the other side to take cargo from ships lucky enough to traverse or bypass the storm. Your job is to ensure a precious cargo aboard the *Jenivere* arrives safely in Eleder—what form this cargo takes and the nature of your relationship to it are up to you and your GM. Your character's history as a merchant or mercenary has earned her a respectable living, and you begin the campaign with an additional 300 gp in starting wealth.

Characters with this trait likely boarded in Magnimar, Corentyn, Ilizmagorti, Port Peril, or Bloodcove.

***Jenivere* Crew:** This trip to Eleder is just one of many in a long career as a sailor aboard the *Jenivere* and other cargo vessels. Whether you joined the crew with the hope of one day captaining your own ship, as the means of paying your way to a foreign port with sweat and blood, or as a slave or indentured servant, you now call the ship home. Pick one of the following skills: Acrobatics, Climb, Knowledge (nature), Knowledge (geography), Swim, or Survival. You gain a +1 trait bonus on that skill, and that skill is always treated as a class skill for you.

Characters with this trait have likely been on the *Jenivere* since it departed Magnimar.

**Mwangi Scholar:** The Mwangi Expanse is one of the richest regions in all of Golarion, and also one of the most mysterious. Despite its history of countless years and its fostering of nameless empires, very little is known of the Mwangi Expanse by outsiders or even natives of the primeval, jungle-covered land. You have long studied the region and its lore, and count yourself among a small handful of genuine experts throughout the Inner Sea. The *Jenivere* promises to take you to the very subject of your fascination, and you eagerly await firsthand investigation of the deep jungles and cyclopean ruins of Garund's interior. You gain Polyglot as a bonus language and receive a +1 trait bonus on all Knowledge (history) checks regarding the Mwangi Expanse.

Characters with this trait likely boarded the *Jenivere* in Ilizmagorti or one of the cities of the Shackles or the Mwangi Expanse.

**Stowaway:** Not all passengers on seafaring vessels are legal or even known to the captain and crew, and the *Jenivere* is no exception. Whether too poor to book legal passage on the ship or fearing discovery by customs officials in your home port, you or an ally stowed away on the ship in secret. This may mean that the crew doesn't know you're on board, or perhaps they do now but didn't when the ship set sail. You gain a +1 trait bonus on Stealth checks and Survival checks to find food.

Characters with this trait might have boarded the *Jenivere* at any port, but especially in the cities of the Shackles.





## TRAVELING ABOARD THE JENIVERE

The Serpent's Skull Adventure Path begins with the PCs all aboard the same vessel, the *Jenivere*, a ship making the journey from Magnimar to Eleder. After days or weeks of time aboard the comfortable vessel (see the Journey of the *Jenivere* sidebar to determine how long) all the PCs know at least the following about their ship and shipmates.

The *Jenivere* is a large merchant ship, a Wyvern-class vessel commonly used by the Inner Sea nations for trade, exploration, and even war, valued for its combination of seaworthiness and capacity for carrying numerous passengers. Wyvern-class ships have made the dangerous journey to Azlant, Arcadia, and even around the southern tip of Garund, but the *Jenivere* and her crew run less perilous voyages. For the past several years, Captain Alizandru Kovack has made the western run between Magnimar to the north and Eleder to the south and then back with few complications, despite the fact that his route carries him through waters controlled by the piratical Free Captains of the Shackles, brushes with the eternal winds of the Eye of Abendego, and into periodic conflicts with the Nidalese navy. Although Captain Kovack's crew appreciate this record, the baseless fear that the *Jenivere* has robbed luck's coffers one too many times lies heavy on the hearts of many.

While the *Jenivere* is a merchant ship, primarily concerned with delivering goods to and from Sargava, she's traditionally kept several compartments open to take on paying passengers. This trip is no exception. At the start of the campaign, the PCs probably number among these passengers, along with six other travelers aboard the vessel. As the characters have spent some time aboard the *Jenivere*, they have at least passing familiarity with these others making the passage to Sargava, and a few notable members of the *Jenivere*'s crew.

**Aerys Mavato:** This severe half-elven woman boarded in Port Peril, where she immediately got into a scrape with a crude sailor. She spends most of her time in her bunk, seeming to purposefully avoid fraternizing with the ship's other passengers.

**Alizandru Kovack:** A Chelish man whose family has made the Magnimar to Eleder run for generations, Captain Kovack is pleasant enough with his passengers, but a strict disciplinarian when dealing with his crew.

**Alton Devers:** The *Jenivere*'s first mate is friendly with both passengers and crew, but he sometimes seems to chafe under the strong discipline of Captain Kovack.

**Gelik Aberwhinge:** A sharply dressed gnome from Magnimar, Gelik spends much of his time writing in the ships' common areas, and takes every opportunity to tell long-winded stories, boast of past journeys, or quip about anything in his field of view.

### Journey of the Jenivere

The *Jenivere* makes numerous stops on its nearly 4-month journey from Magnimar in Varisia to Eleder in Sargava. It has thus far taken the following course and is nearing its final destination. This itinerary should help characters determine where they boarded the *Jenivere*, potentially influencing their backgrounds or character traits.

Port of Call	Days in Port
Magnimar, Varisia	Departed
Kintargo, Cheliah	2
Pezzack, Cheliah	3
Corentyn, Cheliah	7
Ilizmagorti, Mediogalti Island	2
Olo, The Shackles	7
Quent, The Shackles	2
Port Peril, The Shackles	3
Bloodcove, Mwangi Expanse	4
Senghor, Mwangi Expanse	3
<b>Days at Sea</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Total Journey</b>	<b>104</b>

**Ieana:** A bookish Varisian scholar who tends to keep to herself, Ieana is traveling to Sargava to explore the ancient ruins there. Rumors aboard the ship alternately suggest that she's the *Jenivere*'s owner, a Chelish agent, or Captain Kovack's secret lover. Ieana keeps mostly to herself, and grows more intent on her studies with each mile the ship travels closer to Eleder.

**Ishirou:** A scruffy human of Tian heritage, Ishirou boarded at Bloodcove and waits to reach Sargava with a quiet eagerness. Aloof but not rude, he gives the impression of one who has had a hard life but find himself currently without direction.

**Jask Derindi:** A prisoner loaded aboard in Corentyn, Captain Kovack sees to this taciturn human's needs with curt courtesy, but insists he be left alone, sequestered in the ship's brig.

**Rambar Terillo:** A taciturn man from Senghor, Ship's Cook Terillo has served in that capacity aboard several ships, though apparently not on account of his culinary skills, which seem to be limited to watery soups.

**Sasha Nevah:** This red-haired human boarded the *Jenivere* in Ilizmagorti. Since leaving Mediogalti Island, the woman's somber demeanor has gradually faded, revealing a boisterous and optimistic personality. None have yet questioned her about her missing left pinky finger.





# SERPENT'S SKULL

## PLAYER'S GUIDE

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