

The Sea-Devil's Debutante

Adventure Overview

The reclusive Strangtham clan is throwing a grand celebration in honor of young Clarisse Strangtham, who has announced her eligibility to wed. Many sordid things are whispered about the family, not the least of which is their connection with abhorrent sea-things said to stalk the dark waters of the bay. Strangtham 'palace' is actually a barge carved from buoyant, volcanic stone, moored to an ancient jetty older than the harbor itself.

Many of the local gentry are planning to attend the party, despite the family's reputation. The Strangthams are known to possess a seemingly endless hoard of gold jewelry. And Clarisse Strangtham is rumored to be an exotic beauty! Gladiatorial combats are scheduled, with young nobles--or their champions--vying to be among the first considered for her hand.

What the general population doesn't know is the Strangthams have been interbreeding with a nearby colony of Deep Dwellers for several generations. The alluring young woman occasionally glimpsed about town is not the real Clarisse Strangtham. That honor belongs to an aberrant Deep Dweller/human hybrid who has reached maturity and desires a mate. And by the Dark Depths, she's going to get one!

Only the best for Clarisse . . .

Involving the PCs

The adventure is set in a coastal town close to an underwater settlement of Deep Dwellers. The town is prosperous enough to have several families of noble blood, a shipyard, and a host of specialized professions (e.g., a local alchemist, gladiators, and perhaps a sorcerer or two).

The GM can 'hook' PCs into attending the Strangtham's celebration by using their careers. For example, a PC with the Noble background would likely receive a direct invitation, or a Mercenary could be employed as a bodyguard for a prominent party-goer, a Minstrel paid to perform, a Gladiator hired to fight for nobility during the contests, etc.

The 'default' hook has one (or several) PCs approached by the Martense family, landbound neighbors of the Strangthams and wealthy nobles in their own right. The head of the Martense clan expresses concern about his youngest son, **Galandreau**, who is smitten with Clarisse and has vowed to fight in the celebration's contests. The elder Martense believes (quite rightly) that his son is in danger. He wants the PCs to chaperone Galandreau discretely during the party, protecting him from any threats.

Galandreau, Smitten Suitor

Attributes	Combat Abilities
Strength 0	Brawl 0
Agility 1	Melee 1
Mind 0	Missile 0
Appeal 1	Defense 1
Careers	Lifeblood: 8 (NPC)
Noble 1	Protection: d3-1 (very light armor)
Minstrel 1	Weapons: rapier, d6

Galandreau Martense stands 5' 11", with a shock of thick black hair. He dresses in fine clothes, including a short cape and thigh-high boots, but fancies himself a serious romantic rather than a fop.

The elder Martense offers to pay a generous sum for his son's safe return from the party. He can also furnish the PCs with as many official invitations they need (the invitations take the form of large white shells with gold inlay of the Strangtham family crest).

The Approach

The sun has just set beyond the harbor's seawall. As if on cue, a clammy fog begins rolling in. Any PC with rank 0 or higher in Sorcerer, or rank 1 or higher in Priest, will sense something unnerving about the fog (it has, in fact, been summoned by a Deep Dweller magician to provide 'cover' for the night's events).

A procession of guests is already headed out on the narrow (10' wide) jetty that stretches for a quarter mile into the bay. After a brief hike, the PCs catch sight of the barge's outline in the mist. The 'palace' is three-tiered and the size of a manor house. A half-dozen armed and armored men stand next to the gangplank, checking guests for invitations before allowing them onto the barge.

These are **Hybrid Warriors** wearing ceremonial 'lobster shell' armor that hides most of their features (the armor provides d6+1 protection, but incurs a -2 penalty to agility and drops defense to 0). They carry fancy tridents and pole-arms done in sea-motif (d6+1 damage base, but -1 to hit). Their presence is mainly to impress and look intimidating; if actual fighting breaks out, two groups of 10 hybrids come streaming from the barracks on the barge's first tier, armed more sensibly.

Hybrid Warrior

Attributes	Combat Abilities:
Strength 1	Attack with weapon +1, damage by type
Agility 0	Defense: 0
Mind 0	Protection: d3 (harness + 'scallop' shield)
	Lifeblood: 3 (classed as rabble)
	Weapons: spear, d6+1, barbed nets, d2+entangle, javelins, d3, or knife d3+1

These are human men tainted with Deep Dweller blood, causing them to experience a slow but inexorable transformation. At a cursory glance they seem normal, but a closer look reveals certain disquieting details: webbed fingers and toes, faintly translucent skin, hairless pates, protruding eyes, etc. The hybrids are fanatically loyal to the Strangtham clan.

PCs without invitations are not allowed across the gangplank. This presents an opportunity for creative role-playing (e.g. attempting to cajole, intimidate, distract, or bribe the guards, or perhaps trying to steal an invitation from an NPC). High Appeal could come in handy! PCs hired to perform or provide other services during the party will have a pass (a small ochre shell) that allows them through.

Stress to the PCs beforehand that they will be attending a social function. The guards allow them to enter with "gentleman's" weapons (rapiers, one-handed swords, daggers), but not other adventuring gear like axes, shields, 'great' sized, or missile weapons. Same goes for armor heavier than Light. However, the guards aren't going to actually search anyone, so concealed weapons and/or armor is possible. Gladiators or those looking to fight in the contests will be issued appropriate gear later.

The Palace-Barge

PCs stepping across the gangplank will be offered flutes of pale green wine, ladled from a giant clam shell. The wine has been 'fortified' with additional alcohol content (like Port), so keep track of how much is imbibed. Intoxicated PCs should take a penalty die on actions requiring fine control or judgment. On the other hand, *not* drinking on such an occasion is considered rude!

The barge itself is a giant rectangle, surrounded by a colonnaded deck. The first tier houses the grand ballroom, grand dining room, lamprey pit (for ritual fighting--see **The Contests**), guard barracks, servant's quarters, workshops, and kitchens. The second tier holds guest rooms, private dining hall, libraries, conservatory, weapon practice rooms, and aquariums. The heavily-patrolled third tier has the family temple, family quarters, reliquary, treasure room, and chambers for magical summoning. Movement between levels is difficult, because of the half-dozen hybrid guards posted at each set of stairs. Unless explicitly invited by the Strangtham family, guests are expected to stay on the first tier.

PCs arrive just in time for the buffet in the grand dining room. Main features include pickled sea-cucumbers, bright orange roe, tureens of sea-turtle soup, steamed lamprey, lobster tails, and cuttlefish skewered whole. Everything is served on solid gold plates with gold cutlery. Noticeably absent is any dish involving octopus. Requests for such will be met by evil looks from staff.

At least a hundred guests wander from dining room to ballroom to out on deck. Minstrels and dancers work the crowd. The overall mood is expectant.

A sudden hush breaks out: Clarisse Strangtham is making her rounds!

The 'faux' Clarisse appears for her initial inspection of would-be suitors. She is quite a sight, dressed in a diaphanous gown and wearing a diadem of fine golden links. Like most Strangthams, her skin is pale and blue-tinged, which makes for a stunning contrast with her flame-red hair. Galandreau nearly faints when she passes by.

Finished with her inspection, Clarisse announces that the contests will be starting shortly.

At this point, the GM can improvise a series of social encounters. PCs might want to pump the crowd for more information about the mysterious Strangtham family, or the layout of the palace-barge (the Carousing boon will be useful here). Other possibilities include:

--A noblewoman gets flirtatious with one of the PCs, until her drunk husband decides to intervene.

--A professional thief tries to pickpocket a PC. Alternatively, the PC notices the thief pickpocketing someone else.

--A gladiator issues a formal challenge.

--Vrina Strangtham, matriarch of the family, chats idly with a PC whom she feels is virile-looking (strength of 2 or higher, or the Attractive boon).

Vrina Strangtham, Clan Matriarch

Attributes	Combat Abilities	Lifeblood: 12
Strength 0	Brawl 0	Fate Points: 1
Agility 1	Melee 2	Villain Points: 5
Mind 1	Missile 0	Protection: None
Appeal 1	Defense 1	Weapons: Blade of the Sea Kings, d6
		(see Appendix One: Strangtham Heirlooms)
Boons	Careers	
Great Wealth	Noble 3	
Aberrant Physiology (Hard to Kill)	Priestess 1	

A handsome woman who appears to be in her mid-40's, Vrina is actually a century old Deep Dweller/human hybrid. Completely hairless, she wears of wig of curled red locks. At her waist is belted a pearl-studded rapier forged from a strange, gray-green metal.

--A PC gets a chill feeling down his neck, and looks up to see **Tsentsallach**, the Strangtham family magician, staring at him.

Tsentsallach, Unsettling Sorcerer

Attributes	Combat Abilities	Lifeblood: 12
Strength 0	Brawl 0	Arcane Power: 14
Agility 1	Melee 0	Villain Points: 5
Mind 2	Missile 0	Protection: None
Appeal -1	Defense 3	Weapons: dagger, d3, spells (see Appendix Two: Magic)
Boons/Flaws	Careers	
Unsettling	Noble 0	
Aberrant Physiology (Hard to Kill)	Scholar 0	
Power of the Void	Alchemist 1	
	Sorcerer 2	

Tsentsallach is unusually tall (7') and appears as a grayish, warty-skinned man of indeterminate age. His eyes have a distinct yellow tint with black pupils, and his mouth is toothless (his tongue is actually a lamprey-like disc he uses to suck vital fluids from his live food, though he never reveals this in public).

--A strange figure, wearing a mask and hooded robe with the Strangtham crest, stumbles among the party-goers, making awkward conversation in an oddly sibilant voice. Other Strangthams show up and usher him away. (This is **"Cousin" Esterlus**).

"Cousin" Esterlus, Tragic Figure

Attributes	Combat Abilities	Lifeblood: 15
Strength 3	Brawl 2	Protection: d6 (coarse, scaly skin)
Agility -1	Melee 0	Weapons: fists, d2+3, or bite d6+2
Mind 1	Missile 0	
Appeal -1	Defense 1	

Boons/Flaws	Careers
Ugly and Brutish	Noble 1
Aberrant Physiology (Hard to Kill)	Scholar 2
Lumbering	
Combat Paralysis	

A horribly mutated Deep Dweller/human hybrid, Esterlus has the head of an albino moray eel, including a second set of razor-sharp incisors. Despite his appearance, he is actually a pacifistic creature.

The Contests

Next, the party-goers crowd into a circular room ringed with ascending seats. In the center is a stone platform covered with sand, surrounded by a shallow (5' by 5' deep) pool filled with wriggling shapes. This is the Lamprey Pit. Several brave young nobles, and several gladiators representing less-than-brave-young nobles, are slated to fight it out in a series of pairings. One or more PCs might also be competing, either for themselves or in lieu of someone else.

Contestants wear only harness (d3-1 protection), and use padded staves (d6-1 damage), cesti (d3 damage), and barbed nets (d2 + entangle or trip). The actual intent is not to kill an opponent, just knock him out or into the water (contestants taken to 0 or lower LB can be considered unconscious).

Typical Contestant

Attributes	Combat Abilities
Strength 1 or 2	Brawl 0
Agility 1 or 2	Melee 1
Mind 0	Missile 0
Appeal 0	Defense 0
Careers Noble 1 or Gladiator 1	Lifeblood: 9 or 10 (NPC 8+Strength) Protection: d3-1 (very light armor) Weapons: as above

Depending on their careers, the contestants are either privileged nobles or battle-hardened gladiators. Both types have received martial training.

Assume a solid blow (rolling full damage or a '12' attack result) has a chance to knock a contestant into the pool, with either a tricky Strength or Agility check to avoid. The barbed nets are somewhat awkward (-1 to hit), but on a successful attack roll can bind a limb or trip an opponent, incurring penalties. Only an attack roll of '12' will completely entangle an opponent with a net.

Contestants who fall into the pool will be immediately attacked by lampreys—1d6 of the slimy horrors will attach per round, draining 1 point of LB every two rounds thereafter. Luckily, spectators will try to pull anyone out of the pit as quickly as possible. A rank 2 physician waits on the sidelines with bandages and jars of zinc to treat the wounded.

Galandreau will win his bout after nearly having his jaw broken. He and three other champions receive staves of polished driftwood. These are badges allowing the lucky winners into the final ceremony of choosing with Clarisse.

The GM can engineer further martial contests if he wishes. Knife-throwing and flashy displays of swordsmanship (on objects, not people) are favorites with the local nobility.

Things Get Weird

The night wears on. The fog enveloping the bay grows thicker. With the contests over, many older guests decide to leave, but the more jaded party-goers remain behind. Casks of violet wine are brought out. This vintage is even stronger than the previous, and has been drugged. PCs who imbibe can make a Hard strength roll to avoid its effects. Otherwise, the character will find himself pleasantly addled (-1 to Agility and Mind) for the remainder of the night. NPCs drinking the violet wine become lethargic.

Anyone walking on deck will hear loud splashes coming from the surrounding water. Eerie, blue-green lights can be glimpsed far below the surface.

The Deep Dwellers are having their own celebration nearby. Emboldened, several groups approach the barge looking to steal over the side and snatch unwary humans for their own unspeakable purposes.

PCs on the deck or in the open ballroom automatically hear a shrill scream. Those elsewhere need to make an unmodified Mind roll to notice. The scream is coming from the southernmost area of the deck. PCs investigating will discover a group of Deep Dwellers (1.5 x number of PCs, round up) menacing a lone woman. The Strangtham family guards are nowhere in sight. Without intervention, the woman will be pulled overboard the next round.

Deep Dweller

Attributes Strength 2 Agility -1 (1 while underwater) Mind 0

Combat Abilities Attack with 2 claws +0 (+2 underwater), d3+2, or with spear +0 (+2 underwater), d6+2 Defense: 0 (1 underwater) Protection: d6-1 (scaly hide) Lifeblood: 7

These creatures are slimy, stooped, and have the heads and staring eyes of fish. An unpleasant smell always accompanies them. They move clumsily out of the water, but like true amphibians, can survive for long periods of time on land. The Deep Dwellers' alien minds are driven by strong compulsions, including the desire to mate with humans.

Note that while these creatures are technically allied with the Strangtham family, they are not supposed to show themselves on the barge and are therefore 'rogue.' Strangtham retainers (hybrid warriors) will not interfere if the PCs fight these creatures.

Shortly after this encounter, a modestly-veiled Clarisse, bedecked from head to toe in gold jewelry, descends from the upper levels of the barge and asks the four suitors (including Galandreau) to accompany her to the family temple, where the final choosing of a groom will take place. PCs can tag along after the suitors as well. Clarisse leads the procession up two flights of stairs, to the temple antechamber on the barge's third level. At this point, only the suitors can accompany her into the temple beyond, where several veiled attendants wait. Six hybrid warriors bar the way for everyone else. After the suitors enter the temple, a pair of heavy doors shut behind them.

Incense is lit. Weird, atonal music vibrates from some unseen source. Tsentsallach, "Cousin" Esterlus, and Vrina Strangtham appear in ceremonial robes. After a few moments of deliberation, Clarisse makes her choice--Galandreau. The other suitors are dismissed from the temple. Tsentsallach mentions a 'holy ritual' and gives the lucky suitor a special potion to drink. The potion is an alchemical preparation that causes hallucinations and uncontrollable priapism. Once drunk, the faux Clarisse makes herself scarce, and the real Clarisse Strangtham is wheeled out in her custom water-tank. At the sight of her new groom, her snake-like lower body coils and quivers with unrestrained lust . . .

Clarisse Strangtham, Nightmare Bride

Attributes	Combat Abilities
Strength 3	Attack with 2 tentacles +0, (+2 underwater), d3+3 constriction damage
Agility -1 (1 while underwater)	Defense: 0
Mind 1	Protection: d6-1 (scaly hide)
	Lifeblood: 13

Clarisse has been 'blessed' in her transformation of Deep Dweller/human hybrid with a lower body of sinuous tentacles. These are banded black, gold, and red like a coral snake's. Her human torso is emaciated, and she already has the staring eyes of a Deep Dweller. Clarisse can swim in water, but can only flop about clumsily on land. Because of this, she is confined to a wheeled tank of bronze plates, filled with foulsmelling brine. Clarisse can only attack with her tentacles if an opponent is within 5' of the tank.

Of course, the PCs probably won't see any of this, being in the temple's antechamber. Galandreau will have time for an ear-splitting scream just before Clarisse takes him in her coils.

PCs in the ante-chamber will have to fight their way through the six hybrids to get into the temple. After one round of general ruckus, a Deep Dweller on the temple side will bar the double doors. PCs have to make a Demanding (-6) strength roll to break through, though they can total all their strength modifiers together if they rush the door as one. A Mighty or Legendary success with a heavy bladed weapon will also shear through the door in one round.

An individual unfortunate enough to be grabbed by Clarisse takes d3+3 constriction damage per round, until crushed.

Once inside the temple, PCs have a fight on their hands! Vrina Strangtham and her **Deep Dweller Champions** (# equal to the PCs) rush to attack. Tsentsallach will spend the first round

striking a nearby gong. The deep reverberations summon reinforcements (and then some) from far out to sea. After the first round, Tsentsallach casts spells.

Deep Dweller Champion

Attributes Strength 2 Agility 0 (2 underwater) Mind 0 Combat Abilities Attack with 2 claws +1 (+3 underwater), d3+2, or weapon +1 (+3 underwater), damage by type Defense: 0 Lifeblood: 10 Protection: d6 (scaly hide + harness) or d6+1 (scaly hide + harness + 'scallop' shield) Weapons: great spear d6+4, or trident, d6+2

These are simply elite versions of Deep Dwellers. One in four will have the career Priest 1 and 1 Fate Point.

The battle should be tough, but Cousin Esterlus only fights in self-defense, and Clarisse can't leave the confines of her tank. She *can* try to constrict anyone who gets within 5' of her, however. Neither Tsentsallach or Vrina will fight to the death, and try to escape (there is a secret door behind one of the temple alcoves) if their LB is brought below 5.

If the fight goes *too* easy, have another group of six hybrid warriors come barreling up the stairs and try to force their way into the temple.

Victorious PCs will notice an abundance of gold statuettes, precious gems, and strange, possibly valuable objects (see Appendix One: **Strangtham Heirlooms**) lying within easy grabbing distance. After helping themselves to the loot, the whole barge lurches suddenly, as if something big nearby has displaced a lot of water.

Soon, the barge will be squirming with Deep Dwellers summoned by Tsentsallach. If the PCs don't get the clue to escape, or try to search the rest of the barge *a la* dungeon-crawl, have them fight ever-increasing numbers of fish-men until they leave. Once on deck, they will see an enormous, misshapen silhouette through the fog, closing in on the barge (this is **Nyubb-Gulghh**, a giant Deep Dweller). Hopefully, the sight will spur them towards the jetty . . .

Depending what shape they're in, the GM might want PCs to have a running battle as they race down the jetty towards shore, with Deep Dwellers heaving themselves up over the side. Once the PCs reach land, they're safe.

Aftermath

The Martense family will gratefully pay the PCs if they can return Galandreau physically intact (his mental state is another issue). Bringing back his dead body will also net some money from the grief-stricken parents. Any other party-goers saved during the mad escape might also have family willing to part with coin for the PCs troubles.

The next morning, a number of wealthy party-goers fail to return home. Charges are leveled against the Strangtham family (what's left of them). However, town officials seem loathe to try to bring any of the clan to justice.

If 'mob mentality' prevails and any Strangthams are killed, then later that night an enormous wave appears above the sea-wall, swallowing it and flooding the harbor, along with a good-sized section of town.

From that point on, the fish harvest will be sparse.

Appendix One: Strangtham Heirlooms

Most of these items can be found scattered throughout the barge's third level, though the most likely areas are the family temple and treasure room. It isn't recommended the GM hand out *all* the heirlooms as treasure.

The Blade of the Sea Kings

This 2' rapier has flawless black pearls encrusted along the grip and quillons, making it worth a fortune. The steel has been forged from a strange, gray-green alloy with great tensile strength. Anyone using the blade gains a bonus die in combat. Additionally, damage rolls ignore one point of an opponent's armor (if any).

Vrina's son Vasik Strangtham bears a like-named sword of similar appearance and properties.

Book of the Black Depths

This is a heavy tome bound in verdigris bronze with fish motif. The weird glyphs inside are written in the language of the Deep Dwellers. Anyone able to translate will discover the book details the finer points of sea magic, and contains d3+1 spells, including at least one rank 3 summoning spell (for potential spells, see **Appendix Two: Magic**).

Anyone with the sorcerer background who reads the entire tome can add 1 to his or her rank. However, the PC will also have to acquire a new flaw (even if this only raises the PC's rank from 0 to 1).

Sea Mail

This is a hauberk of what appears to be fine silver scales. The mail confers protection of Medium Armor (d6-1), with no agility or defense penalties. Additionally, the armor can be worn while swimming with no detrimental effects.

Philtre of Unyielding Love

This is an alchemical preparation of Tsentallach's that causes priapism for several painful hours. It comes in a bottle of a spun glass and gold.

Gill-Wine

This magical wine is light blue in color and stored in a stone jar carved with Deep Dweller glyphs. When a sufficient quantity is drunk, the imbiber grows several slit-like gills on both sides of his neck (causing a penalty die in social interactions if not hidden). The gills allow breathing underwater, and further enchantments in the wine protect the user from immense pressure. These effects last for one day.

The Pearl of the World

A perfect 2" pearl, with a slightly greenish cast. The surface feels slick and clammy to the touch. It appears to be priceless, but carries a terrible curse. Any non-heroic NPC who sees the pearl will be subject to overwhelming greed. They will not pay a fair price for it, but instead attempt to steal, cheat, or otherwise force the owner into handing it over, likely resulting in bloodshed. The pearl can be given up by its owner at any time.

Appendix Two: Magic

The following are several "sea-themed" magic spells, known by Tsentsallach, Deep Dweller sorcerers, and contained in the **Book of the Black Depths**.

First Magnitude

Spines

A basic damage spell. The caster hurls a handful of stingray and rockfish quills, coated with mild poison. Requires Line of Sight and Obvious Technique. Cost is 3 Arcane Power and Difficulty is Tricky (-1). Damage is equal to d6+ the caster's Mind Attribute.

Obscuring Fog

A heavy fog obscures up to a room-size area in 1 round. Visibility is reduced to 2', except for the caster who sees normally. Requires Obvious Technique. Cost is 4 Arcane Power and Difficulty is Moderate (0).

Chill of the Depths

One target is overcome by a wave of chilling force. Requires Line of Sight and Obvious Technique. Cost is 3 Arcane Power. Difficulty is Tricky (-1) and the target's Mind is also a modifier. If successful, the target takes a penalty die to all physical attempts and can only make defensive actions the first round. These effects wear off after the target is able to warm himself (with fire, blankets, alcohol, etc).

Scale-Skin

As per the Barbarians of Lemuria, Legendary Edition rulebook, pg. 52. The scales are fish-like in appearance and the physical requirement is a piece of shark skin.

Summon Beast

As per the Barbarians of Lemuria, Legendary Edition rulebook, pg. 52, but the beast in question must be aquatic.

Lesser Sigil of El-Shurath

The caster traces a glowing pattern in the air that wards Deep Dwellers and their ilk (including hybrids) from approaching. Requires Obvious Technique and Special Knowledge. Cost is 3 Arcane Power and Difficulty is Moderate (0). Warded creatures can *still* try to approach, but must pass a Moderate Mind check with the caster's Mind and ranks in Sorcerer as modifiers, and will automatically sustain d6 damage whether or not they succeed.

Second Magnitude

Freezing Fog

Summons a rolling fog that obscures vision as per **Obscuring Fog**, but over a much larger area (e.g. an entire harbor, a fortress, etc.). At the caster's whim the vapors become ice-cold and do d3 damage *per round* to any warm-blooded creatures who do not have access to heavy furs, fire, or other means to stave off cold. Requires Casting Time and Ritual Sacrifice, with the additional requirement that the targeted area must be near a large body of water. Cost is 7 Arcane Power and Difficulty is Hard (-2)

Sea-Lungs

Transforms one target into a water-breather. If on land, the target begins drowning the next round. Requires Rare Ingredients and Casting Time. Cost is 8 Arcane Power. Difficulty is Hard (-2), modified by the target's Mind.

Summon Mighty Beast

As per the Barbarians of Lemuria, Legendary Edition rulebook, pg. 52, but the Mighty Beast in question is a giant Deep Dweller, like **Nyubb-Gulghh**.

Third Magnitude

Aquatic Armageddon

This causes the sea-level in a given area to rise several feet, completely flooding a coastal named city and overrunning it with enormous, malignant Cephalopods that devour anyone hapless enough to come within reach of their tentacles. Requires Ritual Sacrifice and the Stars ARE Right. Cost is 13 Arcane Power. Difficulty is Demanding (-6).

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