

# RIVER'S REVENGE

AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTERS OF 5TH TO 7TH LEVEL





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**R**IVER'S REVENGE IS A FIFTH EDITION adventure for three to six characters of 5th to 7th level, optimized for a party of four 6th-level characters. In the untamed Meander Marshes, a merchant's ambitions clash with a lizardfolk tribe's violent search for a new home.

As the riverboat Maebelle sets sail, laden with passengers and goods, the party must defend it against determined attackers led by the mysterious shaman Ssskex. Can the party protect the ship and its occupants while navigating the treacherous waters of frontier politics? This adventure takes place in Cartosia, but the names of people and places can be changed to place this adventure in any river or marsh environment across a variety of campaign settings.

## BACKGROUND

For centuries, the Serpent's Tail River has wound its way through the untamed wilds of the Meander Marshes, its waters largely navigated only by small fishing vessels and the occasional explorer's raft. However, the past decade has seen a surge of interest in this remote region, as rumors of rich mineral deposits and fertile lands have drawn the attention of ambitious merchants and settlers.

Among these opportunists is Lysander Navarchos, a shrewd trader whose network of contacts and deep coffers have allowed him to establish a foothold in the burgeoning river trade. A year ago, Lysander launched the Maebelle, a sturdy riverboat designed to ferry passengers and goods between the fledgling settlements of Riverhaven and Fort Terminus. The Maebelle's regular routes have been instrumental in fostering growth and commerce along the Serpent's Tail, cementing Lysander's reputation as a cornerstone of the region's economic development.

Lysander's ambitions, however, stretch far beyond simple ferry services. He envisions a chain of trading posts dotting the riverbanks, transforming the Meander Marshes into a bustling trade route under his control. His plans seemed well on their way to fruition until the arrival of an unexpected rival.

Ssskex, a powerful lizardfolk shaman, leads a nomadic tribe in search of new hunting grounds and a place to call home. Driven from their previous territories by other warring tribes, Ssskex sees the sparsely populated banks of the Serpent's Tail as an ideal location for his people to settle and thrive.

Tensions between Lysander's operations and Ssskex's tribe came to a head two months ago when a band of lizardfolk warriors ambushed the Maebelle mid-journey. They plundered its cargo holds and left the vessel badly damaged, a clear message that the river's bounty was no longer free for the taking. Lysander, his pride wounded and his profits threatened, has spent considerable resources repairing and fortifying the Maebelle.

Now, as Lysander prepares to resume the Maebelle's routes and push forward with his expansion plans, he seeks to hire capable mercenaries to safeguard his interests. The merchant knows that Ssskex and his tribe are unlikely to back down without a fight, and he's determined to secure his claim on the river's future, whatever the cost.

## GETTING THE QUEST

Word spreads through the frontier towns of the Meander Marshes that Lysander Navarchos, the prominent merchant and owner of the riverboat Maebelle, seeks capable individuals for a potentially dangerous voyage. The party receives this information either through local contacts or a direct invitation from one of Lysander's associates.

Upon arriving at the designated meeting place—a bustling riverside warehouse in Riverhaven—the party is escorted to the merchant's private office. They find the proud and determined Lysander (LN he/him human noble) seated behind a grand desk, his weathered hands clasped before him. Beside him stands Captain Bevan (CG he/him human thug), a grizzled sailor with a gummy grin and stinking breath.

Lysander, with occasional gruff interjections from Captain Bevan, outlines the situation:

- The Maebelle is set to embark on a round trip between Riverhaven and Fort Terminus, carrying valuable cargo and influential passengers.
- Two months ago, the boat was attacked by lizardfolk, resulting in significant damage and loss of goods. Lysander fears another attack is imminent.
- The party's primary duty will be to protect the Maebelle, its cargo, and its passengers from any threats, particularly the lizardfolk.
- Lysander offers each party member 200 gold pieces for the journey, with a bonus of 100 gold pieces each if they successfully repel any lizardfolk attacks.
- Captain Bevan interjects that the lizardfolk are led by a capable shaman or similar spellcaster, who seems to be able to control water to a limited extent.

Lysander emphasizes the importance of minimal damage to the Maebelle and maintaining the passengers' comfort. He hints at future opportunities for those who prove their worth on this voyage.

A perceptive character might notice Lysander's unease with a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check. If pressed with a successful DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check, Lysander admits his expansion plans for the river trade, expressing concern that the emergent lizardfolk could jeopardize his entire operation.



The party can negotiate an additional 50 gold pieces each with a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check, citing the apparent danger of the mission.

Expected questions from the party might include:

- Details about the previous attack (12 lizardfolk in total, along with their pets, as well as what many believe to be water spirits summoned by their shaman)
- The route and duration of the journey (5 days each way, with a 2-day stopover in Fort Terminus)
- Known information about the lizardfolk and their capabilities (limited beyond the details of the previous attack, though Lysander can explain that the lizardfolk were not documented via prior scouting of the area by members of his expedition parties)
- Defensive capabilities of the Maebelle (Nonexistent, hence the importance of the party's presence)

Lysander concludes by stressing the urgency of the situation—the Maebelle is set to depart at dawn the following day.

## THE MAEBELLE

The Maebelle is a sturdy riverboat designed to navigate the sometimes treacherous waters of the Serpent's Tail River. Its paddle wheels and shallow draft allow it to manoeuvre through the twisting channels and occasional rapids of the Meander Marshes. Unless otherwise stated, the Maebelle's features are described as follows:

**Decks and Walls.** The boat consists of four levels: the lower deck (engine room and cargo hold), the main deck (dining area and crew quarters), the upper deck (passenger cabins), and the top deck (helm and open-air seating). Walls are constructed of sturdy oak planks, while the decks are made of treated pine.

**Ceilings.** Ceilings throughout the interior of the boat are 8 feet high, except in the engine room where they reach 10 feet to accommodate the machinery.

**Doors.** Interior doors are made of light wood and have simple latches. They have AC 13 and 27 hit points. They are unlocked.

**Windows.** Most rooms have at least one porthole or window, allowing natural light during the day. These can be opened for ventilation but are too small for Medium-sized creatures to pass through.

**Light.** During the day, most areas of the boat are well-lit by natural light. At night, oil lamps in wall sconces provide dim light throughout the interior. The top deck remains dark at night to aid navigation.

**Noise.** The constant churn of the paddle wheels and the hum of the engine create a persistent background noise throughout the boat.

The following areas are keyed to the provided map of the Maebelle:

**1. Cargo Hold.** Located on the lower deck, this space stores goods for trade and passengers' larger luggage items. Crates and barrels are securely lashed down to prevent shifting during the journey. A character who makes a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) notices a strongbox inconspicuously tucked behind some other containers, as if hidden deliberately. The box belongs to Lysander, who is delivering it as a gift to a business contact in Fort Terminus. It is locked, and can be opened with a successful DC 10 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. It contains various gems totalling 100 gp in value.

**2. Fuel Storage.** A secure area where firewood and other fuel for the engine is stored. The air here is thick with the scent of wood and coal. A small workbench in the corner holds tools for maintaining the engine.

**3. Toilets.** Facilities for the crew on the lower deck. These are basic but functional, with a porthole providing ventilation.

**4. Dry Store.** A storage area primarily for non-perishable food items. Shelves line the walls, stocked with preserved goods. A character with proficiency in cook's utensils can find enough ingredients here to prepare a special meal, potentially earning favor with the crew or passengers.

**5. Engine.** The heart of the boat, housing the steam engine that powers the paddle wheels. It's hot, noisy, and typically off-limits to passengers. The chief engineer can be found here, always willing to chat about the intricacies of riverboat mechanics to interested parties.





**6. Lifeboats.** Small boats secured to the sides of the boat for emergencies. Each can hold up to six medium-sized creatures. A successful DC 10 (Intelligence) Investigation check reveals that one of the lifeboats has a small leak that should be repaired.

**7. Dining Room & Bar.** A large room on the main deck serving as both a dining hall and social space for passengers. The bar stocks a variety of local spirits, including a potent Meander Marsh moonshine. In the evenings, crew members sometimes organize games of chance here.

**8. Kitchen.** Connected to the dining area, where meals are prepared for passengers and crew. The boat's cook is always on the lookout for fresh ingredients that passengers might have brought aboard.

**9. Toilets.** Facilities for passengers on the main deck. These are slightly more comfortable than the crew facilities.

**10. Crew's Cabins.** Small cabins housing the boat's crew members. Each cabin contains bunk beds and small lockers for personal belongings. Some crew members have decorated their bunks with trinkets from their travels.

**11. Crew Bathroom.** Shared bathroom facilities for the crew. A small porthole here offers a unique view of the river's surface rushing by.

**12. Toilets.** Additional facilities for passengers on the upper deck. These are the most well-appointed restrooms on the boat.

**13. Guest Bathrooms.** Shared bathroom facilities for guests on the upper deck. A shelf here holds complimentary soaps made with local herbs.

**14. Guest Cabins.** Multiple small but comfortable cabins for passengers on the upper deck. Each is furnished with a bed, a small desk, and a porthole. In one cabin, beneath a loose floorboard, lies a hidden stash of 50 gold pieces wrapped in a handkerchief embroidered with the initials "L.N." A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check allows a character to notice the slightly raised floorboard.

**15. Guest Lounge & Lookout.** A comfortable seating area with the best upriver view, popular among passengers during poor weather. A shelf here holds a collection of books about the Meander Marshes and its folklore.

**16. Top Deck.** An open-air space featuring seating areas for passengers to enjoy the view. A spyglass is mounted here, allowing passengers to get a closer look at the passing scenery or wildlife.

**17. Guest Lounge.** An indoor lounge area on the top deck where guests can relax and socialize. A worn chess set sits on one of the tables, supposedly brought aboard by a master player years ago.

**18. Helm.** Located at the front of the top deck, this raised platform houses the ship's wheel and navigation equipment. Maps of the river are pinned to a nearby board, marked with notations about dangerous areas and points of interest.

## LIFE ABOARD THE MAEBELLE

The journey aboard the Maebelle offers several opportunities for roleplaying and character interaction before the action of the lizardfolk attack unfolds. GMs should gauge their players' interest in this aspect of the adventure. For groups that enjoy deep roleplaying and character development, the voyage can be a highlight, filled with socialization, relationships, and small discoveries. For those eager to get to the combat, GMs can summarize the journey briefly, perhaps focusing on one or two key interactions or skill challenges before moving to the attack.

The Maebelle typically carries between 20 to 30 passengers, along with a crew of 8. The passengers are a diverse mix of frontier settlers, merchants, and the occasional adventurer or scholar drawn to the promise of the Meander Marshes. Most are humans, but representatives of other races are not uncommon. The atmosphere among the passengers is generally convivial, with a shared sense of excitement about the journey and the opportunities that await in Fort Terminus.

The crew, under the stern leadership of Captain Bevan, is a well-oiled machine. They're professionals who take pride in their work, but also enjoy interacting with passengers during their off-hours. Many have colorful stories to share about





## ENGINE ROOM



## DINING ROOM





## CABINS



## HELM





life on the river and the changes they've seen in the Meander Marshes over the years.

### KEY NPCs

The following section details the prominent NPCs aboard the Maebelle:

**Lysander Navarchos** (N he/him human **noble**): The owner of the Maebelle and a prominent merchant. Lysander is a middle-aged man with salt-and-pepper hair and a neatly trimmed beard. He's charismatic and ambitious, always looking for new opportunities to expand his trade empire. Lysander spends much of the journey in his private cabin or the guest lounge, where he's happy to regale interested parties with tales of his business acumen or discuss potential ventures.

A character who engages Lysander in conversation and succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check realizes that despite his bravado, Lysander deeply values stability and long-term prosperity over short-term gains. He sees the river trade as a way to bring civilization and economic growth to the Meander Marshes, benefiting all who live there. This insight could be crucial in potential negotiations with the lizardfolk, as appealing to mutual long-term benefits might sway Lysander more than promises of immediate profit or threats of violence. Characters who use this knowledge in later negotiations with Lysander have advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks to convince him to consider peaceful solutions or compromises with the lizardfolk (see page 9).

**Captain Bevan** (N he/him human **thug**): A grizzled sailor with a perpetual scowl and a peg leg. Bevan runs a tight ship and doesn't tolerate nonsense from crew or passengers. Despite his gruff exterior, he has a dry sense of humor and a wealth of knowledge about river navigation. He can often be found at the helm, and is willing to share insights about the river's dangers with respectful inquirers.

**Valessia Thornwhistle** (CG she/her half-elf **scout**): The Maebelle's lookout and an expert on the local flora and fauna. Valessia has keen eyes and an encyclopedic knowledge of the Meander Marshes. She's always excited to point out interesting sights or wildlife to passengers. Valessia is concerned about the impact of increased river traffic on the local ecosystem and might share these worries with sympathetic ears.

**Garrick Steamwright** (N he/him dwarf **commoner**): The chief engineer responsible for keeping the Maebelle's steam engine running smoothly. Garrick is passionate about his work and always covered in grease and soot. He's happy to explain the intricacies of the engine to interested passengers, perhaps even allowing them to assist with minor maintenance tasks.

**Mallennius Moonmist** (NG she/her human **priest**): A passenger and priestess of a nature deity, traveling to Fort Terminus to establish a new shrine. Mallennius is serene

and thoughtful, often found on the top deck in quiet meditation. She's deeply curious about the spiritual beliefs of the lizardfolk and might engage the party in philosophical discussions about the balance between progress and nature.

**Pergovan Bullgorn** (CN he/him human **scout**): A charming rogue posing as a simple merchant. In reality, Pergovan is a spy for a rival trading company, seeking to sabotage Lysander's expansion plans. He's always eager to engage in conversation, probing for information while appearing harmless. A perceptive character might notice his keen interest in Lysander's activities.

## SHIPBOARD ACTIVITIES

The following section details a few activities the party may engage in during the journey.

**Evening Gambling.** A high-stakes card game is organized in the dining room. Characters can participate by betting up to 25 gp. Each participating character makes three Charisma (Deception) or Intelligence (Investigation) checks against the NPCs (DC 13). Winning two or more contests results in doubling their bet; winning all three triples it. Losing two or more loses the bet.

**Impromptu Concert.** A passenger organizes an evening of entertainment. Characters can participate by making a DC 13 Charisma (Performance) check. On a success, they impress the audience, gaining advantage on all Charisma checks with passengers and crew for the next 24 hours. A character who rolls 18 or higher is offered a lucrative performance opportunity in Fort Terminus.

**Mysterious Illness.** A passenger falls ill with strange symptoms. Characters can attempt to help with a DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check. Success stabilizes the patient; two successes identify a herbal remedy sufficient to cure them. If cured, the grateful patient gifts the party a potion of greater healing.'

**River Fishing Competition.** The crew organizes a fishing contest. Characters can participate using their own fishing gear or borrowing from the crew. Each participant makes three DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) checks, representing different fishing spots or techniques. The number of successes determines their catch:

- 1 success: Small fish, worth 1d4 gp if sold in Fort Terminus
- 2 successes: Decent catch, worth 2d6 gp
- 3 successes: Impressive haul, worth 3d8 gp and earns the admiration of the crew.

A natural 20 on any roll catches a rare river specimen, worth 5d10 gp to a collector or scholar in Fort Terminus.

## THE ASSAULT

After three days of relatively peaceful travel, the Maebelle enters a particularly narrow and winding section of the Serpent's Tail River. The dense vegetation of the Meander



Marshes presses close to the riverbanks, creating an atmosphere of claustrophobia and unease. It's here, as the sun begins to set, that Ssskex and his lizardfolk tribe launch their assault on the riverboat. Ssskex and his tribe generally look to avoid killing as reasonable, and instead prefer to incapacitate the boat's defenders before looting and scuppering it.

As the attack unfolds, each wave of enemies emerges from the water approximately 30 feet from the Maebelle. However, a vigilant lookout can spot the approaching threat earlier. Any character actively on watch can make a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. On a success, they spot the incoming attackers when they are 60 feet away, giving the defenders some valuable time to prepare and potentially use ranged attacks or spells before the lizardfolk can close the distance.

The attack comes in three waves, with each wave arriving 4 rounds after the start of the previous wave, giving the defenders precious little time to regroup between assaults, if any at all.

**First Wave: Infiltrators.** The first sign of trouble comes as sharp-eyed lizardfolk scouts slice through the water's surface, their movements barely disturbing the river's flow. These advance forces aim to board the Maebelle quietly, neutralizing key defenders before the main assault can begin.

**Composition:**

- 4 **lizardfolk**
- 1 **giant constrictor snake** (trained by the lizardfolk)

**Tactics:** The lizardfolk scouts attempt to climb aboard the lower deck from either the port or the starboard side. They move with surprising agility, using grappling hooks fashioned from bone and sinew to scale the ship's hull. Meanwhile, the giant constrictor snake, its massive form barely visible beneath the water's surface, targets any defenders near the railings. The serpent attempts to grapple and restrain its prey, potentially dragging unfortunate victims into the river.

The scouts prioritize stealth over aggression, aiming to converge as a unit against any solitary defenders, seeking to eliminate as many as possible without raising an alarm. If detected early, they might attempt to retreat and join the following waves, potentially altering the tactics of subsequent attacks.

**Wave Two: Marauders.** As the initial scouts engage the defenders, a larger force of lizardfolk warriors launches a more direct assault. The water churns as this second wave approaches, their numbers and ferocity aimed at overwhelming the Maebelle's defenders through sheer force.

**Composition:**

- 6 **lizardfolk**
- 2 lizardfolk **druids**
- 1 giant **crocodile**

**Tactics:** The marauders split into two groups, their movements coordinated and purposeful. One group attempts to board from the bow, while the other targets the stern, creating a two-pronged assault that threatens to divide the party's efforts. These warriors are more heavily armed than the scouts, brandishing crude but effective weaponry crafted from bone, stone, and scavenged metal.

Perhaps most alarmingly, the giant crocodile surfaces near the Maebelle's side, its massive jaws snapping at the paddle wheels. The beast attempts to damage the ship's propulsion or steering, potentially leaving it stranded in hostile waters. The crocodile retreats down-river if it takes at least 30 points of damage. Defenders must divide their attention between repelling boarders and protecting the ship's vital components. Each paddle wheel has AC 15 and 50 hit points. If reduced to 0 hit points, a paddle wheel becomes too damaged to function and must be repaired, requiring three days of work using supplies from the boat's cargo hold.

**Wave Three: Sskex's Elite.** The final wave brings Ssskex himself into the fray, along with his most trusted and powerful warriors. The water seems to part before them as they approach, a testament to Ssskex's control over the river itself.

**Composition:**

- Ssskex (detailed on page 9)
- 2 lizardfolk **berserkers**
- 1 **water elemental** (summoned by Ssskex)

**Tactics:** Ssskex and his elite warriors target the strongest defenders or any party members who have proven particularly troublesome in the earlier waves, focusing their attacks on one party member at a time, as applicable. The water elemental, a massive, churning vortex of river water, attempts to bash through the boat's hull if left unattended by the party, threatening to flood its lower deck. This presents a dire threat to the ship's integrity, potentially sinking it if not dealt with quickly. A 1x1 section of the hull has AC 15 and 20 hit points.

**NPC Aid**

During the assault, most passengers and non-essential crew members retreat to the safety of their cabins or the interior rooms of the Maebelle. Captain Bevan remains at the helm, focusing on steering the boat to advantageous positions and only engaging in direct combat if absolutely necessary. Mallennius, priestess, provides crucial support by casting healing spells on wounded defenders, prioritizing the party members. The remaining crew members assist with supporting tasks such as helping passengers to safety or attempting to repair any damage to the boat. Other named NPCs are considered non-combatants unless directly threatened, though they may assist with specific non-combat tasks if persuaded by the players.

**SSSKEX, SHAMAN OF THE RAGING RAPIDS**

Ssskex is a formidable lizardfolk shaman, his scales shimmering with an unnatural blue hue. He wields both martial prowess and powerful elemental magic, believing



himself to be chosen by the river spirits to lead his people to a new home.

Ssskex uses the stats for a **gladiator** with the following changes:

- He can cast *poison spray* (unlimited), *entangle*, *faerie fire*, *hold person*, and *stoneskin* (each 1/day).
- Once per day, he can use a bonus action to cast *control water*.

### MOTIVATIONS AND NEGOTIATION

Ssskex is driven by a fierce desire to secure a safe haven for his tribe. Expelled from their ancestral lands by rival tribes, he sees the sparsely populated banks of the Serpent's Tail as an ideal new home. However, he's not unreasonable and can be negotiated with under the right circumstances.

If the party manages to significantly turn the tide of battle or if they capture Ssskex, there may be an opportunity for negotiation on behalf of Lysander. Ssskex is proud but not foolish. He seeks a new home for his people and believes the river is theirs to take, but he can be reasoned with if offered a compelling alternative.

During negotiations, consider the following factors:

- Ssskex's primary concern is the safety and prosperity of his tribe
- He respects strength and clever tactics, and may be more willing to negotiate with those who have proven themselves in battle
- Appeals to mutual benefit or long-term stability are more likely to sway him than threats or short-term promises

Successful negotiations might involve:

- Convincing Lysander to allow the lizardfolk to settle a specific section of the riverbank in exchange for safe passage of his boats
- Proposing a mutually beneficial arrangement where the lizardfolk serve as river guides and protectors for Lysander's trade operations
- Offering to help the lizardfolk find a suitable alternative territory away from the main river trade routes

To resolve negotiations, use a series of opposed Charisma (Persuasion) checks between the party and Ssskex. Set the DC based on how amenable Ssskex is to the proposed solutions (typically DC 15). The party can gain advantage on these checks by:

- Demonstrating respect for lizardfolk customs (learned through a successful DC 14 Intelligence (History) check)
- Offering concrete, immediate benefits to the tribe
- Appealing to Ssskex's spiritual beliefs (with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Religion) check to understand river spirit worship)

The negotiation is successful if the party manages four successful checks before five failures. A failed negotiation means either Ssskex and his tribe retreat back into the river, or, if discussions are particularly inflammatory, combat breaks out again. Remember to apply advantage to checks if the party successfully gleaned insight into Lysander's true motivations earlier in the adventure and can leverage this information in their proposals.

### AFTERMATH

If the party successfully repels the lizardfolk attack without negotiation, Lysander's river trade flourishes unchallenged, but the desperate lizardfolk may resort to more frequent attacks on smaller vessels or settlements, especially if Ssskex escaped. A negotiated peace between Lysander and Ssskex could lead to a tentative coexistence, with the lizardfolk gaining sanctioned territory while trade routes remain secure. Partial success, where the Maebelle survives but is damaged, might postpone Lysander's expansion plans, opening opportunities for rivals or giving the lizardfolk time to entrench their position.

Regardless of the outcome, the party's actions will have lasting repercussions on the region. Their reputation among river settlements will be affected, potentially influencing future interactions. The success or failure of Lysander's venture will shape the economic and political landscape of the Meander Marshes, potentially attracting interest from larger entities and setting the stage for future conflicts or alliances in this frontier region.





## REFERENCES

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

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