



Sacred Barge of the Cat God

'They say that the cats on that place look after the old and the poor, but I tell you what I heard. These two fellows, used to work at Serene Lil's, got drunk one night and thought it would be funny to cut the traces on the cat barge and let the kitties drift out to sea. Well, the next morning they were found, in a locked room, dead from the scratches of a thousand claws. And then two days later the cat barge was back in Thievestown as if it had never been away. Those cats give me the creeps.'

- Dashakra Vlotin, overheard in The Catfish.

Background

No-one knows where the Cat Barge came from. Some say that it was started by a kindly, but lonely, old lady who began to take in stray cats. When she died, the cats seemed to continue her work, and to repay the favour by visiting the old, the infirm and the lonely. The Cat Temple works by symbiosis – grateful petitioners bring food for the cats, and the cats look after them in return. Although the cats are ordinary animals the barge acts as a mystical nexus that gives them insight and intelligence.

The Temple

The Cat Barge is moored within the ever-changing tangle of water craft that is Thievestown in Llaza. It is about 100 feet long and 8 feet wide, and the upper deck is typically covered with cats of all shapes and sizes. The central portion of the barge is covered, and steps lead down from the stern and bow decks. Inside the cabin is one large open space, again filled with cats. In the centre stands a simple statuette of a cat, made from black jade with emerald eyes that catch the light from the tiny portholes. The cats of the barge seem to carefully watch anyone who enters (with the studied nonchalance of a cat), and visitors often find the sensation of hundreds of eyes following them to be un-nerving.

Dealing with the Temple

Local folk either ignore the cat barge or bring small offerings of food. The cats send one or more of their number to provide company to the needy, but sometimes they encounter those in difficulties requiring more than a friendly meow. This is when the cats seek out adventurers.

The cats are not able to communicate, so they either seek those who are able to speak with animals or they attempt to herd their 'hirelings' into the right

course of action by leading them to scenes that they wish them to see (think the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come).

A drop-in visit to the Cat Barge results in little more than cool observation by the cats, but if the visitors seem to be powerful heroes then the cats note them for future use. The cats are better disposed towards magicians with cat familiars, assuming the familiar is well-treated. Despite their feline appearance, tlaxu are not accorded any particular respect by the cats of the temple.

The cats offer the Blessing of the Cat God as reward, although this information cannot be imparted without some means of communicating with animals. In fact, the cats prefer not to offer a reward up front since they have more respect for those who would help others for its own sake. The exact nature of the Blessing is up to the gamesmaster but it is typically the gift of a bonus feat such as Alertness, Agile or Stealthy. This bonus feat is a supernatural ability and does not count as a feat that the character would normally gain through increasing levels.

The idol is worth 2500gp intact. The emerald eyes can be sold separately for 800gp each and the idol for 100gp. Anyone who attempts to take the idol, however, is attacked by the cats of the temple. If the thief survives this, he is also struck by the Curse of the Cat God, which is a *curse* effect at caster level 20th that bestows a -4 penalty to all Balance, Climb, Hide, Jump and Move Silently checks. Furthermore the thief earns the enmity of cats and will often find himself attacked by masses of them as long as he is in urban areas (use swarm statistics below). If the thief has a cat familiar it leaves him in disgust, incurring the usual experience point penalties. All effects last until recompense is made. Atonement can be achieved by returning the idol and performing a task for the Cat God (who will *not* bestow a blessing in this case!). Selling or giving away the idol does not only not lift the curse but also imposes it on the new owner.

Using the Temple

The Sacred Barge of the Cat God is found in Llaza in the World of Conclave, but could be found in any city with a waterfront. It could also be used in an Egyptian-themed setting as a temple of Bast.

Receiving the stolen cat idol (and the curse) from an associate is one way that the gamesmaster can introduce the Cat Barge to the player characters in a dramatic, if heavy-handed fashion. This works well for characters who move in criminal circles and are less likely to help the Cat God out of altruistic motives.

If the characters, on the other hand, have a reputation for charity and heroism the cats may seek them out with a job offer. This inevitably entails helping the poor or old (or both) against oppressive forces. The cats make for a quirkily different employer. Depending on the gamesmaster's tastes they can be played as eerie or cute.

Denizens of the Temple

There are about 100-200 cats on the Sacred Barge and they never seem to be the same each time except for one large tortoiseshell tom with a notch in his ear. Although the cats are normal Animals, in the presence of the idol they count as Magical Beasts and have the power to read thoughts. If angered they attack *en masse* and their numbers seem to magically grow to 900 cats. Even if all the cats on the barge are slain, their numbers are replenished the next day, led by the tortoiseshell tom.

Cat Swarm (3). CR 3. Tiny Magical Beast; HD 6d8; hp 27; Init +2; Spd 30ft; AC 14 (+2 Size, +2 Dex) touch 14, flat-footed 12; BAB/Grp +0/-12; Atk Swarm (2d6); SQ Distraction, half damage from slashing and piercing, low-light vision, scent, spell-like abilities, swarm traits; AL N; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1; **Abilities** Str 3, Con 10, Dex 15, Int 3, Wis 12, Cha 7 **Skills and Feats:** Balance +10, Climb +6, Hide +14, Jump +10, Listen +3, Move Silently +6, Spot +3; Weapon Finesse

Distraction (Ex): A creature that begins its turn in a space occupied by the swarm must make a Fortitude save (DC 13) or be nauseated for 1 round. DC is Constitution-based.

Spell-like abilities: (Sp) At will: *Detect thoughts* (DC 13) Caster level 20th. Save DC is Wisdom-based.