



En Route II: By Land or By Sea

Now available!

The sequel to our fan-favorite short adventure anthology is finally here! On the road to your next adventure, take the time to visit one of these exciting encounters featuring dark magic, dirty tricks, and supernatural bunnies. Plus: the sequel to Keith Baker's bovine horror tale "Hellcow."

To get your copy of "En Route II: By Land or By Sea," visit your local retailer. Print out this sheet and take it with you for ordering purposes.

Stock Number: AG3222 : ISBN: 1-58978-037-X

112 pages : Perfect-bound

Price: \$19.95



www.atlas-games.com

Atlas Games
PO Box 131233
Roseville, MN 55113
info@atlas-games.com

This free preview is published under the terms of the Open Game License (below). That text marked with a dragon icon is hereby designated as Open Game Content, as is the Open Game License itself. Other text, illustrations and design elements in this book may not be reproduced without the publisher's express permission.

"d20 System" and the "d20 System" logo are Trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast and are used according to the terms of the d20 System Trademark License. A copy of this license can be found at www.wizards.com. Dungeons & Dragons® and Wizards of the Coast® are Registered Trademarks of Wizards of the Coast, used with permission.

Penumbra is a trademark of Trident, Inc. d/b/a Atlas Games. Atlas Games and "Charting New Realms of Imagination" are trademarks of John Nephew, used under license. The Atlas Games logo is a trademark of John Nephew and Trident, Inc. d/b/a Atlas Games.

Copyright © 2003 Trident, Inc. d/b/a Atlas Games.

OPEN GAME LICENSE VERSION 1.0A

The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

1. Definitions: (a) "Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b) "Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, license, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d) "Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, equipment, magical or supernatural abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the Open Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement.

2. The License: This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must

affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.

3. Offer and Acceptance: By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.

4. Grant and Consideration: In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.

5. Representation of Authority to Contribute: If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License.

6. Notice of License Copyright: You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content You Distribute.

7. Use of Product Identity: You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.

8. Identification: If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content.

9. Updating the License: Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any autho-

rized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.

10. Copy of this License: You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.

11. Use of Contributor Credits: You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.

12. Inability to Comply: If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.

13. Termination: This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.

14. Reformation: If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.

15. COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Open Game License v 1.0a Copyright 2001, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

D20 System Rules & Content Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc.; Authors Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, based on original material by Dave Arneson and E. Gary Gygax.

"Blood Vessel," an excerpt from En Route II: By Land or By Sea, Copyright 2003, Trident, Inc. d/b/a Atlas Games; Author Keith Baker.

Requires the use of the Dungeons & Dragons® Player's Handbook, Third Edition, published by Wizards of the Coast.®



Blood Vessel

BY KEITH BAKER • ILLUSTRATED BY GREY THORNBERRY

Encounter Level: 2

Setting: At sea

Summary: The party encounters a ship that is a duplicate of their own vessel. This mystery ship is actually an enormous mimic, crewed by immature doppelgangers that are honing their shapechanging skills.

Background

"There's a vessel dead ahead, captain," the lookout called. Curious, Sera pulled out her spyglass and peered through it. What she saw sent a shiver down her spine. She grabbed Krogar's arm. "Look at that ship," she said in a quavering voice.

Krogar complied, and grunted. "What? So it's the same make as our vessel." Sera shook her head. "Look again. The sails, the flags ... it is our vessel. And there on the foredeck ... I swear I saw myself standing next to you!"

Krogar cursed and brought up the spyglass for a second look.

Doppelgangers are infamous creatures — sinister shapeshifters who use their supernatural powers to infiltrate humanoid society, or sell their skills as spies and assassins. But where do they come from? How does a doppelganger learn the art of deception? This encounter offers one possible explanation. On an ocean voyage, the party encounters a ship that is a mirror image of their own, complete with an identical crew. The people on the mirror ship are just as confused as the player characters ...

or so it seems. In truth, the crew are young doppelgangers (called doppelkinder) trying to learn the basic skills they need to survive on their own. And the ship itself is a biological organism — a floating nursery known as a blood vessel.

There are scholars who believe that the doppelganger and the mimic are different stages in the lifecycle of a single creature — a shapeshifter might begin life as a mobile humanoid, but eventually settle down and lose the ability to assume the form of humanoid creatures. While most mimics are the size of large chests, these sages claim that a mimic could eventually grow to such a tremendous size that it could assume the form of a building. In point of fact, these vast creatures prefer to disguise themselves as ships; on the open seas, it is easier to avoid unwanted contact with humanoids. These enormous mimics are called blood vessels.

Blood vessels are living nests; they spawn doppelkinder from their own mass, provide physical shelter for their children, and guide these half-grown doppelgangers as they master their natural talents. Using its telepathic abilities, a blood vessel will locate groups of humanoids and scan their thoughts, seeking opportunities to challenge its children. A blood vessel helps its doppelkinder prepare for an encounter, and provides them with telepathic advice throughout any sort of confrontation. A blood vessel will only reveal its true nature if its children are seriously threatened; in such an event, the seemingly inanimate structure flows into life, striking out with pseudopods or swatting at its enemy with its masts.

Doppelkinder, then, are immature, inexperienced doppelgangers. A doppelkinder possesses the ability to change its shape, but it still needs to master the finer points of subterfuge and disguise. It fights in the same manner as a full-grown doppelganger, but it is physically weaker and its flesh is not as tough as that of an adult. Typically, doppelkinder will travel in groups, seeking safety in numbers as they hone their skills; they are either accompanied by an experienced doppelganger, or remain in the presence of a blood vessel. A doppelkinder troupe may assume the form of a merchant caravan, a traveling circus, a band of actors, or even a military patrol. They attempt to avoid conflict, instead using encounters with humanoids as opportunities to practice the art of subterfuge.

A Familiar Sight

This encounter can occur any time that the party is traveling at sea. They may have booked passage on a large ship, or they may be sailing in a vessel of their own. The lookout spots a ship on the horizon, headed directly for the party's vessel. As the ship closes, observers will notice a few odd things about the approaching vessel.



The precise range at which characters can observe the vessel will vary depending on whether they are using spyglasses or observing with the naked eye.



EN ROUTE II: BY LAND OR BY SEA

Regardless, when the ship is close enough to be seen, a successful Spot check (DC 10) will reveal that it is an exact duplicate of the party's ship. If an observer makes the roll by 5 points, he notices that there are the same number of people on the deck of the strange vessel as there are on the character's ship; and if he makes the roll by 10 points, he is able to see that the people on deck are exact duplicates of the crew of the party's vessel, and that they are almost perfectly mimicking the actions of the crew.

If all of the characters fail the Spot check, this information will become apparent as the strange vessel draws closer; the Spot check is only required to notice these details while the ship is still far away.

The duplicate ship is headed directly towards the party's boat. As it gets closer, the PCs see their counterparts on the other ship watching them with a mixture of curiosity and trepidation. The crew of the party's ship may ask the adventurers how to handle this strange situation — but the mirror ship shows no signs of hostility. Instead, as the ship closes the duplicate crew signals a desire to talk, using semaphore, a flag of truce, or another form of naval communication common to the region. If the party chooses to attack the approaching ship, refer to the statistics later in this encounter. If the PCs choose to ignore it, the mirror ship will follow and overtake them; the blood vessel has fins beneath the waterline that supplement its sails. As soon as the vessels are close enough, the doppelkinder counterpart of the most charismatic member of the party will call out from the deck of the duplicate ship: "Who are you? Where did you come from?"

Talk to the Mirror

The goal of the doppelkinder is to get the party to stop and talk with them. They have no hostile intentions; they are practicing imperson-

ation, and want to see how long they can maintain their rather unlikely disguise. They will feign complete astonishment; they seem to be as puzzled about the situation as the player characters.

The spokesman for the doppelkinder (again, choose the counterpart of the PC most likely to assume such a role) asks the party to set anchor until they can sort things out; he is willing to continue the conversation by shouting, but suggests that the parties meet on smaller boats between the two main ships, or that they send a group over to the PCs' ship. They will not allow anyone to come aboard their ship; the blood vessel looks good from a distance, but like a mimic, its disguise cannot hold up to a close physical examination. The doppelkinder send the duplicates of the party as their representatives; they are more than willing to leave all weapons and armor on their vessel, and will ask the player characters to do the same.

When the two groups eventually come face to face, the doppelkinder leader introduces his comrades and explains the nature of their journey. As it turns out, the doppelkinder claim to be traveling to the same destination as the player characters, and for exactly the same reason!



The blood vessel acquired information about the goals of the party as it approached their ship, using its Mind Probe ability (see its stats below). Throughout the encounter, it will continue to read the thoughts of party members; it relays any important information to the doppelkinder using its telepathic abilities.

If the PCs reveal that they are traveling to the same destination, the doppelkinder act highly suspicious. "But you were traveling in the wrong direction," the leader says. "Who are you really? Is this some sort of trap?"

The goal of this encounter is to make the players question what's actually going on. The dop-

pelkinder have no interest in getting aboard the party's ship. They are willing to lay down their weapons to talk. They seem to know all about the reason the party is traveling. Has the party slipped into some alternate reality? Is this some sort of temporal echo? Or is it some sort of elaborate prank?



There are a number of skill checks that could be relevant in this conversation:

- A successful Intuit Direction check (DC 15) allows a character to determine that her ship is headed in the correct direction to reach their destination. The doppelkinder will claim that the party's maps make no sense. "What are you talking about? The Gap of Gales is to the west, straight towards the setting sun. You're heading for Grayhaven ... we just came from there after overthrowing Baron Thorkk." Of course, the doppelkinder do not have maps to back up their stories — although the blood vessel might be able to secrete false maps from its own mass.
- Each party member should make a Spot check to penetrate the disguises of the doppelkinder. The difficulty is 35, increased to 39 if the doppelkinder is reading the thoughts of the character. However, a character gets a +6 to +8 circumstance bonus to her roll based on her familiarity with her fellow adventurers, and a +10 circumstance bonus to penetrate the disguise of the doppelkinder that has assumed her form. If a PC makes the Spot check, she notices some sort of inconsistency. The cleric's holy symbol is the wrong color. The barbarian has too many teeth on his necklace. The dwarf's front tooth is made of silver instead of gold. The bard is humming — but she *never* hums! This will give the party material for further investigation, but will not immediately reveal what's going on.
- The doppelkinder use Bluff on a regular basis. Whenever a doppelkinder makes a particularly extreme claim, PCs can oppose it with Sense Motive checks. If a character made his initial Spot check and noticed something odd, he gets a +4 circumstance bonus to his Sense Motive checks.
- After a minute of conversation, a character can make a Sense Motive check (DC 25). If successful, the character realizes that the doppelkinder are, basically, lacking any motives. (The conversation is driven by information the doppelkinder are picking up through Detect Thoughts and Mind Probe; they don't actually care about the topic of conversation.) The PC gets the sense that they are actors reading lines from a script.
- The doppelkinder have little experience dealing with real humans. A successful Intimidate check (DC 19) will unnerve the speaker; he'll say that he doesn't know what the party is up to, but he has no intention of being caught in a trap. With that, the doppelkinder will attempt to retreat to their vessel.
- *Detect thoughts* is relatively ineffective against the doppelkinder. They themselves are scanning the minds of the party, and are trained to keep their surface thoughts on topic. *Discern lies* and *zone of truth* will work normally, but if the doppelkinder become aware of the spell (via Detect Thoughts) they will do their best to speak literal truth — though careful questioning prevents this sort of prevarication. *Mind probe*

EN ROUTE II: BY LAND OR BY SEA

or *true seeing* are both fully effective. Other divination spells may reveal holes in a doppelkinder's disguise; spells that detect alignment will reveal the neutral nature of the doppelkinder as opposed to the actual alignments of the party members, for instance.

- Finally, the doppelkinder don't actually possess any of the equipment owned by the PCs. They can create facsimiles of these items, but their "magic items" will not possess powers or auras; so *detect magic* or *identify* will give the game away.

New Creature: Blood Vessel

CR 10; SZ G (aberration); HP 20d8+140 (190 hp); Init +0; Spd 10 ft., swim 60 ft.; AC 17 (–4 size, +11 natural); Atk melee +27/+22/+17 (2d8+18, slam), or ranged +15/+10/+5 (2d8, natural arbalest); Face 20 ft. x 50 ft.; Reach 15 ft.; SA Engulf, Mind Probe; SQ Body Weaponry, Darkvision 60 ft., Image Bank, Immunities, Shapeshift, Telepathy; AL N; SV Fort +13, Ref +6, Will +16; Str 35, Dex 10, Con 25, Int 15, Wis 14, Cha 14

Skills: Disguise +25, Listen +14, Sense Motive +12, Spot +17

Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Iron Will, Skill Focus (Disguise), Spell Focus (Divination)

Aberration: Aberrations have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet.

Body Weaponry (Ex): A blood vessel can form weapons from its body. Its basic attack is to lash out with a powerful pseudopod, which can strike with sufficient force to shatter the hull of a ship. If it is close to its target, it can disguise this attack as a battering ram or similar weapon. It can also form an arbalest-like weapon to attack its targets at range. This attack has a range increment of 160 feet, but because it is using its own body as ammunition the vessel loses 1 hit point for

every shot it fires. While the vessel can make three attacks per round, it must concentrate entirely on ranged attacks or melee, and so cannot mix the two.

If a blood vessel strikes another ship, the target must make a Fortitude save (DC 12) to avoid a breach. A breached ship will begin to sink. The length of time it will take for the crippled vessel to sink is determined by the size of the ship: a galley or warship will last one hour, a sailing ship or longship will last for thirty minutes, a keelboat will last twenty minutes, and a rowboat will only last for five minutes. Each successive breach will cut the remaining time in half. Crewmen can temporarily mend a breach with a Profession (sailor) check (DC 20), but this will only stop the clock from running; if the ship is breached again, the damage will pick up where it left off. The ideal solution is the *make whole* spell, which will repair all damage and restore the ship to its original condition.

Engulf (Ex): It's possible that a character will voluntarily wander inside a blood vessel — going below decks on a ship, or inside one that has taken the form of a house. This is an extremely dangerous place to be, should the vessel decide to shift its internal geometry and

The doppelkinder draw out the encounter for as long as possible. They will want to compare past adventures with the party, using Detect Thoughts and Mind Probe to pick up information about the party's exploits and work it into their own stories. This is an opportunity to suggest alternate directions that party could take in the future

— “Well, we just returned the jade elephant to princess Sharina. What? How could you not realize it belonged to her?” These stories could be perfectly valid, based on deductions that the blood vessel has made after analyzing the thoughts of the adventurers, or they could be unwise suggestions

New Creature: Blood Vessel (Continued)

crush the people inside. Shifting form on this scale takes time; if a character within the vessel can make a Reflex save (DC 15), he gets one full action to try to get out of the vessel. Once the crushing starts, victims trapped within will take 2d8+12 points of damage every round. A victim trapped inside must make a successful grapple check to take any action. If the check is made, the character can move one foot for every point he made the check by, literally clawing his way out of the depths of the vessel. It takes the vessel a full action to begin to crush those within it, but after the attack has been initiated it does not take any effort to maintain.

Image Bank (Su): If a blood vessel successfully probes a humanoid mind, it may take a standard action to record a perfect image of the target's appearance and mannerisms. Using a second standard action, it may transmit a stored image to any willing doppelganger or doppelkinder within 1000 feet. The target immediately adjusts to the new form, using the Disguise skill of the blood vessel instead of its own. At any time, a vessel can store two images for every point of Intelligence it possesses.

Immunities (Ex): Blood vessels are immune to sleep and charm effects, and to any form of acid damage.

Mind Probe (Su): A blood vessel possesses powerful psychic abilities and is aware of all minds in its immediate vicinity. It can sense the presence of intelligent creatures as if using the spell *detect thoughts*; if it focuses on a single mind, it can duplicate the effects of *mind probe*. Both effects are treated as if cast by a 20th level psion (save DC 16), and have a range of 1000 feet.

Shapeshift (Ex): A blood vessel can alter its external appearance to that of any object of gargantuan size — a boat, a house, or a stone wall, for example. A blood vessel can only alter the texture of its body to a limited degree, and someone who examines it closely can notice this irregularity by making a Spot or Search check opposed by the vessel's Disguise skill. While it cannot duplicate the shapes of living creatures, a blood vessel can extrude fins for speedy aquatic movement. It is less mobile on land; it can create wheels or stubby legs, but it generally oozes along like a slug.

Telepathy (Su): Blood vessels can telepathically communicate with any creature within 1000 feet that has a language.

EN ROUTE II: BY LAND OR BY SEA

designed to get the party in even more trouble if they follow up on them.

The doppelkinder expect to be exposed; they are still learning their trade, and the challenge is to see how far they can push things. If the party confronts them with proof of the deception, or the doppelkinder detect a dangerous level of hostility, the leader of the delegation will smile at his counterpart. “Well, it was fun while it lasted,” he says. Then, as one, the doppelkinder spring into action.



The doppelkinder have no interest in risking their lives; they wish to escape unharmed. They dive into the water, assuming the forms of sea elves as they fall; now

possessing gills, they swim down into the depths in order to lose the party. The blood vessel will begin to move away at high speed; a successful Spot check (DC 16) reveals the presence of a vast fluke beneath the waterline, powering the motion of the ship. If the PCs give chase or engage the blood vessel with spells or ranged weaponry, it will twist in an impossible fluid manner and dive, disappearing into the depths of the water.

When the doppelkinder transform as they leap into the water, they assume their natural forms for a split second. So while the party may not understand the motives of these creatures, they will realize that they

New Creature: Doppelkinder (18)

CR 2; SZ M (shapechanger); HP 2d8 (9 hp); Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (+1 Dex, +3 natural); Atk melee +1/+1 (1d4, slam), or melee +1 (by weapon); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Detect Thoughts; SQ Alter Self, Darkvision 60 ft., Immunities; AL N; SV Fort +3, Ref +4, Will +4; Str 11, Dex 12, Con 11, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 12

Skills: Bluff +9, Disguise +9, Listen +5, Sense Motive +5, Spot +5

Feats: Dodge

Alter Self (Su): As a standard action, a doppelkinder can assume the shape of any Small or Medium-sized humanoid. This ability works like *alter self* cast by a 15th-level sorcerer, but the doppelkinder can remain in a new form indefinitely.

Detect Thoughts (Su): A doppelkinder can continuously detect thoughts. This is identical to the spell of the same name, as if cast by a

15th-level sorcerer (save DC 13), although the range is limited to 30 feet. It can suppress or resume this ability as a free action.

Immunities (Ex): A doppelkinder is immune to sleep and charm effects.

Shapechanger: Shapechangers have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet.

Skills: A doppelkinder receives a +4 racial bonus to Bluff and Disguise. When using Alter Self, a doppelganger receives a +10 circumstance bonus to Disguise checks. If it can detect the thoughts of an opponent, it receives an additional +4 circumstance bonus to Bluff and Disguise checks.

Equipment: Armor and weaponry as possessed by the character the doppelkinder is impersonating

were dealing with some form of doppelganger.

It is possible that the adventurers will manage to engage the doppelkinder before they can reach the water, or even board the blood vessel itself; statistics for these creatures are provided on page 10. The blood vessel contains another twelve doppelkinder in addition to those disguised as party members. These doppelkinder disguise themselves as other members of the ship's crew; if the party's vessel has a smaller crew, the additional doppelkinder simply hide below decks.

Loose Ends

This encounter is more of a distraction than anything else. The doppelkinder are not looking for a fight, and there is little to be gained from battling them. But the experience may prepare the party for a more important encounter with doppelgangers in the future. Perhaps the party will encounter a land-based

blood vessel — an artificial inn that a group of doppelgangers are using as a base of operations, for example. Or maybe the adventurers will cross paths with a doppelganger later in a campaign, only to discover that the doppelganger was one of the doppelkinder they encountered at sea. A doppelganger with a sense of humor might lend the party a hand, mentioning “the valuable lessons you taught me.”

On the other hand, if the party killed any of the doppelkinder, a cadre of doppelgangers might track them down in search of vengeance. If the blood vessel itself was destroyed, related doppelgangers would go to great lengths to avenge the fallen elder. Party members could be framed for heinous crimes. Friends or allies might be killed and replaced, turning against the party at the worst possible time. Lovers could be seduced by impossibly perfect paramours. For a vessel-slayer, death is too quick; punishment will be slow and painful, as the doppelgangers slowly strip everything away from their victim.

