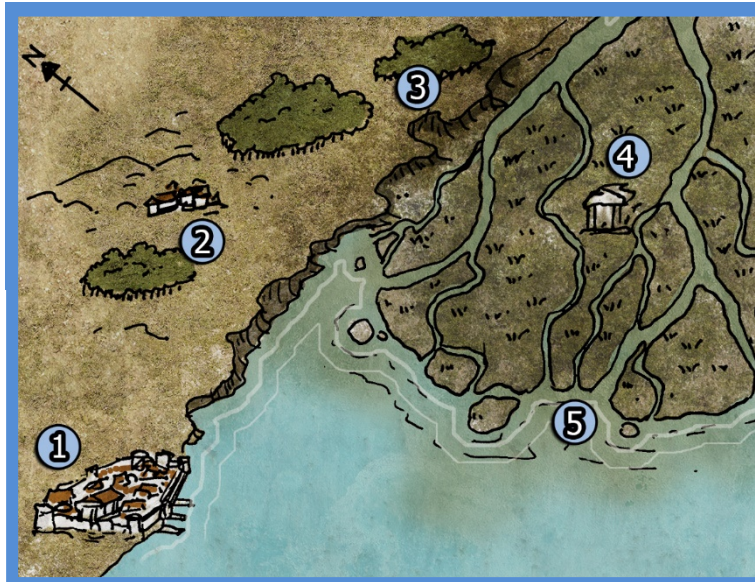




# The Lair of the Hydra

## Adventure Supplement



### The Rhyndan Delta Marshlands

1. The City of Tirine
2. Kairos's villa
3. The Lair of the Hydra
4. The Temple to the Goddess Delta
5. Wreck of *The Fire Demon*

### Inside this adventure supplement:

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## Setting description

See the previous *Heroic Maps* Patreon supplement about the *Isle of the Dead - Nekralos* (June 2020) for more details on the *Thymos* coast area.

The small walled-city of Tirine sits on one of the many promontories of the *Thymos* coast. Nominally ruled by the lustrous Queen Idola, she rarely visits the city she inherited, preferring to reside in a vast ruined palace to the south, near *Vykos*. Tirine is therefore left rather lawless and is, as a result, a little wild. A little at the mercy of the gods. With such precariousness, Tirine is not a place of great riches, but when times are good it is a city of strong ale, late nights and mirth.

Times, however, are not always good. Many coastal cities look nervously towards the sea for threats to their safety, but the *Tirinians* worry little about naval invasions or devastating storms. To the east of Tirine, the marshlands stretch for miles around the river delta, the *Rhynda* having wend boldly down from the mountains before losing its energy in the coastal plain. In these marshes the *Tirinians* fears find their form in the vicious hydra that stalks the *Rhyndan* delta. The hydra is the pet of the immortal *Pontus*, an ancient spirit of the waters. When the city-dwellers honour the god insufficiently, *Pontus* may turn his pet upon them. When he is disinterested in the *Tirinians*, the hydra stalks the marshes and causes trouble where it will.

The hydra lives on the northern edges of the marsh. The area is avoided by most locals, but willing travellers can reach the lair in the best part of a day, although stinking bog water and grasping vines make the going difficult. The moss-covered remains of ancient temples and shrines stud the marshlands, sinking into the foetid waters; evidence that this was once a prosperous region. The lair of the hydra itself once housed a famed oracle, but now the roof of the old cave lies collapsed, its statues ruined. Nearby, an old, circular shrine still holds the ear of the gods, perhaps a little hope for anyone who stumbles upon the hydra at home, where it returns for rest. A lucky adventurer may think they have caught the hydra asleep, but one head always remains awake and listening for the sounds of those struggling through the marsh.

## Variant map setting and ideas

### The Lair of the Hydra - at Night

At night, the mists seep up from the marsh and shroud the hydra's gloomy lair. Danger looms larger in the darkness, where beasts creep, splash and gurgle unseen. But a glimmer of goodness drifts in this bitter, evil place — a remnant of another time. The ghost of the oracle who once dwelt here and gave hope to many, sometimes appears. She lights the lamps around her old cave and protects those who step into the old circular shrine. She gives a little hope still.

### Desert Variant - The Scorpion's Lair

Dry and remote, there is no oasis here for desert travellers. The canyons were once decorated with temples that now stand crumbling to ruin — their gods have long since forsaken this harsh place. A hot wind blows among the pillars of rock and marble, whipping sand into the eyes. In the cave there is only fear, though nothing can be seen there that begets it. They call this cave the scorpion's lair, but who has seen a scorpion here? Perhaps it is the lair of another who calls himself the Scorpion. Perhaps he is watching from his cave. Perhaps you cannot see him.

### Cobweb variant - The Lair at Spiderwood

High in the mountains a dead forest stands bleak and cold on the craggy peaks. Deep in that dead *Spiderwood* is an old shrine to a forgotten god. In that cave shrine lurks the spider. They say it grew to be so large by feeding on lost travellers that it captures. They say it is older than the dead forest or the shrine. They say it holds a red gem in its abdomen that will make a person richer than they could ever imagine.

## Story ideas and NPCs

### Plot Hook 1

Type: Retrieve an item

Name: Plight of a Peasant

In the ramshackle Fleece and Gold tavern in the city of Tirine, the party notice a poor man noisily weeping at the bar. Dunix wails that the Rhyndan Hydra has slain his son, snatched him snail-snarfling in the swamp. “I care not for the loss of the lazy wretch,” he sniffs, “but the lad was wearing a golden belt lent to me by the god Hecyton. If I cannot return the belt to that vengeful lord, it is the end of me! But as you see, I am just a weak old fool. I cannot fetch the belt from the beast’s belly.” Could the prospect of a bit of sport cause the party to take pity on Dunix?

### Plot Hook 2

Type: Obtain a hydra’s head

Name: Bring me a head of the Rhyndan Hydra!

The party are summoned to the villa of a young nobleman. Long-limbed Kairos dumps a pouch of gold chips on to his marble table, fixes each of the party in turn with a wide-eyed stare and announces that “all this and more is yours for the taking. I ask of you only one simple task: fetch me the head of a hydra.” Kairos explains that he seeks a unique gift for his patron-lover the resplendent Queen Idola of Minkis. He is eager to present something that impresses her sense of the macabre and to outdo the gifts of ‘slime-tongued Xarien’, who has usurped him in the Queen’s affections of late. It’s a tough task, but the reward is a worthy one.

### Plot Hook 3

Type: Kill the hydra!

Name: Pythi’s Revenge

The sea spirits Pontus and Thalassa are twelve years deep into a feud. Neither immortal remembers what prompted their bitter dispute and each believes they were slighted by the other. Of late, the famed young warrior Pythi has found herself in the middle of their squabble. Favoured by Thalassa, Pythi and her retinue venture often to the marshes to hunt and always remember to honour Silver-Haired Thalassa with the blood of their kills. Here Pontus spied an opportunity to harm his rival’s favourite. The Brine-Eyed spirit raised up a mist on the marshes and caused Pythi’s followers to fall into the clutches of his beast, the Rhyndan Hydra. Now, grieving Pythi seeks a company to assist her in her quest for vengeance upon the beast and on the god who guided it. Any foolish mortals feel like taking on a god?

#### Item: *Hecyton’s Golden Belt*

Forged by the god Hecyton from the golden leaves of the Tree of Life, the belt confers a little protection from harm onto to its wearer by slowly helping them regain health. Lent for a month to Dunix in exchange for 1000 sweet tummelberries, he foolishly gave it to his son to help him recover from a twisted ankle that never really existed.

## NPCs

### Pythi, a young warrior

A determined, highly trained warrior, Pythi is well-loved in Tirine, her black locks braided with gold thread a well-known sight in the city. She has always been a favourite of the goddess Thalassa and she has always honoured her patron well, but she does not know why that divine spirit seems to have abandoned her to the cruelty of another. Alone and bereft, Pythi has set her sights on avenging her dearly loved friends, cruelly taken by the hydra under the command of the god Pontus. Without her former retinue she feels lost. The young warriors and servants who accompanied her at all times were like a family and her body aches for them. Yet she will not shed a tear — will not give a drop to that water spirit who waits to collect her unwilling libation. Instead she will spill for Pontus the blood of his hydra. Let him take *tharas* her offering. She cannot slay the beast alone, yet the Tirinians are wary of assisting her — wary of Pontus turning their wrath upon them. Thus, Pythi waits in the city for those brave enough to assist in her quest.

### Xarien and Kairos, attendees at the court of Queen Idola

The Court of Queen Idola sits in a crumbling palace in the ruins of Old Florithi. The decadence of the Queen’s furnishings mingle with the faded glory of the ancient palace and such might be said also of many of those who attend the court. Kairos is young, interesting and decorative, but he worries greatly that his graceful form won’t stand the test of time — knows his beauty is transient and he will fall from favour. Behind the confidence that his privileged background has given him, his desperation to impress is palpable.

Despite having been roundly painted as a snide, crawling sycophant by his rival Kairos, anyone meeting Xarien will find him rather admirable. Like Kairos, he is somewhat louche and certainly over-indulged, but unlike his jealous counterpart, Xarien is prepared to get his hands dirty. He too has determined that slaying the hydra would be a worthy gift for his Queen, but unlike Kairos it is something he believes he can achieve himself.

#### Useful table 1: People who can be recruited at the tavern for the quest to kill the hydra or take one of its heads

- |   |                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Caeryn of the One-Eye, a former pirate holed up in Tirine after she lost her crew in a storm. A handy swordswoman happy to take temporary employment. Jolly, fighty and drunk.        |
| 2 | Elisso of Vykos, an adventurer with an array of bloody weapons.                                                                                                                       |
| 3 | lathys the Mountain Mover, a huge tree trunk of a man. A former soldier, he is trustworthy and takes orders, but his temper makes him unpredictable.                                  |
| 4 | Myro, son of the Centaur, an arrogant chatty local who claims to have lost his father to the hydra and to wish for revenge.                                                           |
| 5 | Ker, daughter of Kanthros, a vicious underworlder who enjoys killing for money. Monsters are a favourite target, as they tend not to chat on and on while you’re trying to kill them. |
| 6 | Nikomom the Old Man, not to be confused with Nikomon the Young Man, who is himself now old. Knows the marshlands well and has had many narrow escapes from the hydra in his life.     |

## Useful tables

Useful table 2: Rumours and legends heard about the Rhyndan Hydra in The Fleece and Gold tavern

1	I heard the Hydra doesn't really exist. That it is all just a trick concocted by a mean old hermit who lives out among the ruins and wants to be left alone.
2	My grandmother always said that the flower of the carnivorous Xorbi plant that is found in the marsh has potent magical effects if you eat it. She didn't remember quite what it does though...
3	Actually, the Rhyndan Hydra died many years ago. Anyone who thinks there's a beast in the marsh is a fool. I think you'll find that the only monster out there now is the bones of a dead one.
4	These days the Hydra actually has more than five heads. It's been unsuccessfully attacked so many times over the years, fighters managing just to chop off a head or two, that its grown back loads of heads in their places! It's terrifying!
5	Some say that the Gods might still be listening at the old circular shrine in the marsh. It's surely worth making an offering.
6	A priestess told me that the ghost of the oracle that used to dwell in the cave appears there at night. The priestess said she still offers prophecy to those who seek it.
7	Y'know, fire doesn't work on the severed necks of the hydra — only acid can prevent new heads growing.
8	My father used to tell a story of five brothers cursed by the gods. As punishment for stealing the Fathergod's geese, they were fused together into the monstrosity that is the Rhyndan Hydra.

Useful table 3: Items in the belly of the Hydra

1	An acid-marked Corinthian-style helmet, with three huge tooth marks over the left eye socket.
2	A partially digested, severed hydra head.
3	A leather haversack containing four bronze statuettes depicting Queen Idola.
4	The golden belt of Hecyton, still fastened around the skeletal waist of Dunix's son.
5	A highly reflective hoplon shield, bearing the image of a medusa. The arm straps have been digested.
6	A small clockwork device, possibly some type of cosmic calendar or calculator.
7	A brass box containing a tiny map to the Isle of Nekralos
8	The skeletal remains of three harpies.
9	A small, marble statuette of a naked dancing man holding a pig.
10	A palm-sized stone, carved with dozens of tiny imaginative and colourful curses.

Useful table 4: Set dressing

1	The ground is covered in thick, waterlogged moss. Wherever no paving stones are beneath you, your foot slowly sinks to the knee with each step.
2	The bones of a long dead adventurer lie strewn in a corner. Moss covers the skull, and vines grow between the mouldering ribs. His leather pack lies sodden and rotting by his side.
3	The air is full of tiny biting insects which land on any exposed skin. They cause more irritation than pain.
4	Below the surface of the water are two 4ft fallen statues, each depicting a deity. When lifted, you find their features obscured.
5	The stink of decaying plant matter pervades the area. In places there is enough flammable gas produced by the process for little bursts of marsh fire.
6	Among the rocks the air is largely still and quiet, the silence broken by the occasional 'plop' of an unseen creature slipping into the water.
7	The columns in the old circular shrine are covered in layers of scrawled text inscribed on the white marble with charcoal.
8	The paved areas are unstable, shifting slightly and sinking a little deeper into the marsh when sustained pressure is applied.
9	A noxious mist swirls around your ankles. Any who lie too close to the ground are liable to become sleepy.
10	As you wade through areas of deeper water, unseen creatures brush your legs, often scratching and biting.

Useful table 5: Divine interventions that a god may make if you pay your respects to them at the small circular shrine.

1	Kratos, the Spirit of Might: <i>For your sacrifice to me I will convey upon you until dawn the strength of two people. Use this power wisely, mortal.</i>
2	Hecyton, of God of the Tree of Life: <i>As you have given to me, so I will give to you. When I choose, as you fight, I will heal you. I shall not let you die.</i>
3	Thalassa, the Spirit of the Waters: <i>You honour me, and so my honour will fall upon you in this fight. If you are in mortal danger, I will raise up a huge, lashing storm that will protect you and will blind your foe to your whereabouts.</i>
4	Lutta, the Goddess of Rage: <i>My fury falls into your hands as your offering fell to the stones in the shrine. Rage, rage mortal! If anyone dares to damage your body, through my spirit you will rage back at them in attack, instantly.</i>
5	Pontus, the Spirit of the Sea: <i>So, you fight in the lair of my beloved hydra? Sadness for me. But also, joy! For what better than a fight between beasts and mortals? I love to see it. And so, my favour will flounder between you and my beast as and when I choose.</i>
6	Tykhi, the Goddess of Fate and Fortune: <i>For you I have spun my wheel. For you, fortune falls favourably. As you rise in battle, know this — that all your strikes will connect with their target.</i>

# Monsters

## Hydra spawn

### Tiny aberration

No one has ever studied the life cycle of the hydra, but if they did they would discover that the hydra is capable of reproducing asexually. Small growths, after dropping from the abdomen, develop into terrifying arm-length larval creatures. With five small, snapping mouths at the end of an eel-like body, these blind creatures swarm upon anything that they sense moving through their pools. They spend a decade in this form, before undergoing a metamorphosis into a juvenile form and seeking a new place to live.

### Abilities and features

These larval creatures navigate entirely using blindsight. Detecting subtle vibrations in the water, they hunt effectively even in the complete absence of light.

Hydra spawn display the same ability for regrowth that the adult form does. If chopped into pieces, given time each chunk will sprout new mouths and a tail. The only way to ensure the spawn of a hydra stays dead is to either desiccate or burn it.

## Predatory Plant - Xorbi

### Large plant

The Xorbi is an interesting plant and one that has adapted to life in the nutrient-poor marsh. The flower produced by the Xorbi is colourful and attractive and some say it can be used in potent magic. However, it is also incredibly poisonous. Most creatures that touch it die instantly. Once the corpse has decayed at the base of the plant, providing the Xorbi with much-needed nutrients, it uses the skeleton to relocate. Growing around the bones, it staggers to a new location using the skeleton as a scaffold. It then drops the bones and prepares a new flower.

### Abilities and features

The flower of the Xorbi is very poisonous. The petals are poisonous to the touch. The pollen and scent is poisonous if breathed in. Even the surface of the bud is poisonous. This thing is *poisonous*. However, a particular bee that pollinates the Xorbi has developed a resistance to its poison and can be used to produce an antidote.

The Xorbi is sometimes encountered whilst it is moving between locations. Effectively an animated skeleton, the bony framework allows the plant to fight, the vines contracting to make the skeletal hands and claws move.

## Severed Hydra Heads

### Small Undead

Over the years many heroes have attempted to slay the Rhyndan Hydra, chopping off heads only to watch in horror as new heads grow from the stump. The severed heads were kicked away or knocked into the water, sinking into the marsh. They did not entirely perish, however. Preserved by the foetid waters, they became animated zombie heads. Unable to move from the place where they fell in the watery mud, they snap their sharp jaws at anything that passes. Their bite is still strong enough to take off a leg!

### Abilities and features

The severed heads of the Hydra remain entirely motionless until they sense something passing. They usually have their skeletal jaws open, ready to snap shut if something brushes against them.

Occasionally a limb or two would sprout from the neck of a severed head. In these instances, the zombie heads can carry out a 'death roll' when they have a grip on something, dragging their victim into the water and down into the thick mud.

## Extend your adventure

The Lair of the Hydra is a great map on which to host a boss battle, with lots of room for large monsters. As well as pairing well with the maps listed in the Isle of the Dead supplement (June 2020) — as it is part of the same setting — here are some suggestions for other maps that you can use alongside it to create your adventure.

Need a tavern for The Fleece and Gold and a walled town that opens on to a marsh? Try our Marshgate map on DrivethruRPG.

Need a villa? Try something from our modular set 'Desert City' which has lots of luxurious housing.

Other maps on DrivethruRPG set in marshes:

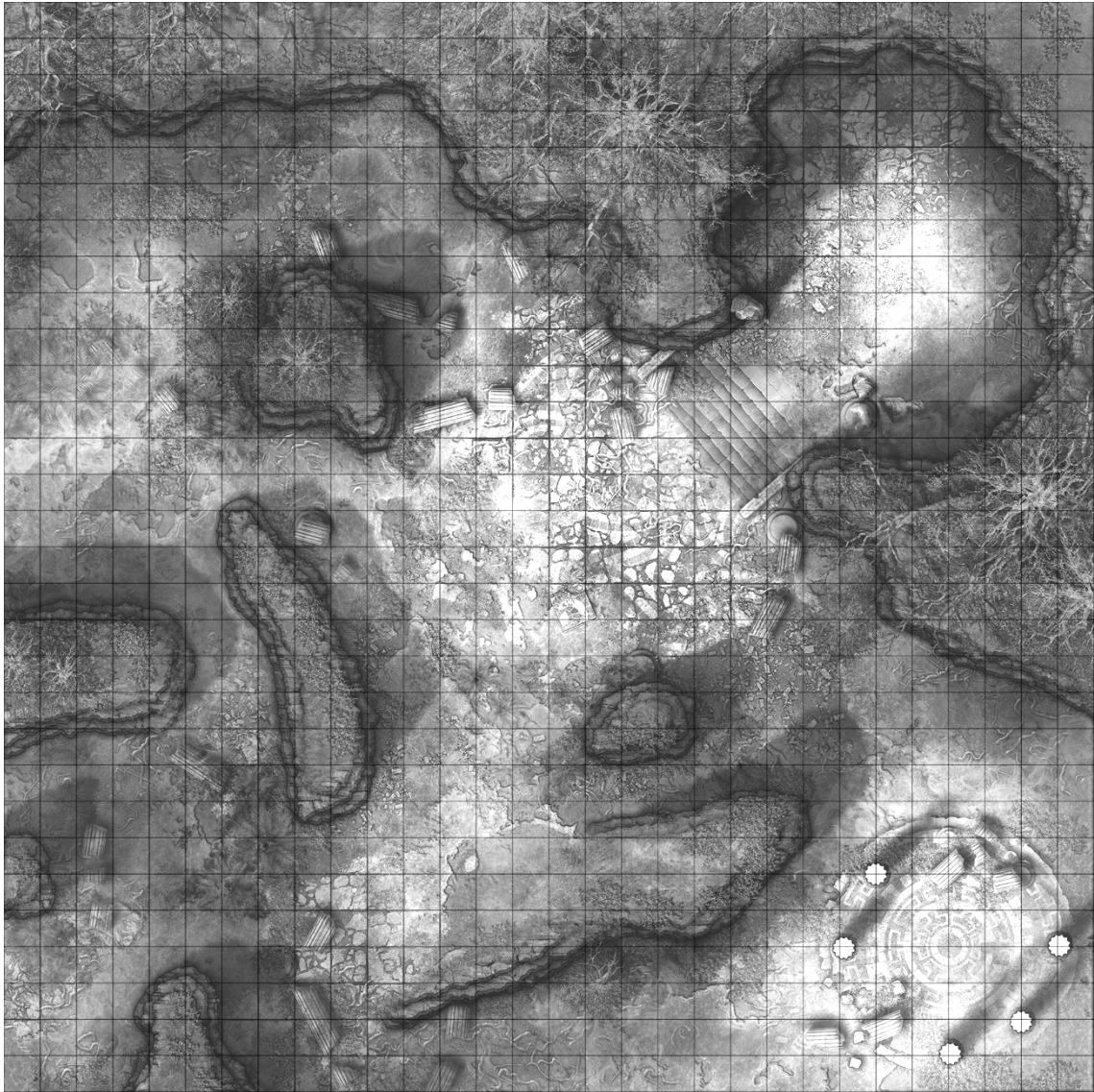
- Fenherrick Salt Marsh
- Fenherrick Monastery
- Lair of the Black Dragon
- Heart of Stone — swamp variant





# The Lair of the Hydra

## Planning Sheet



Notes