

# THE UNDERGROFT

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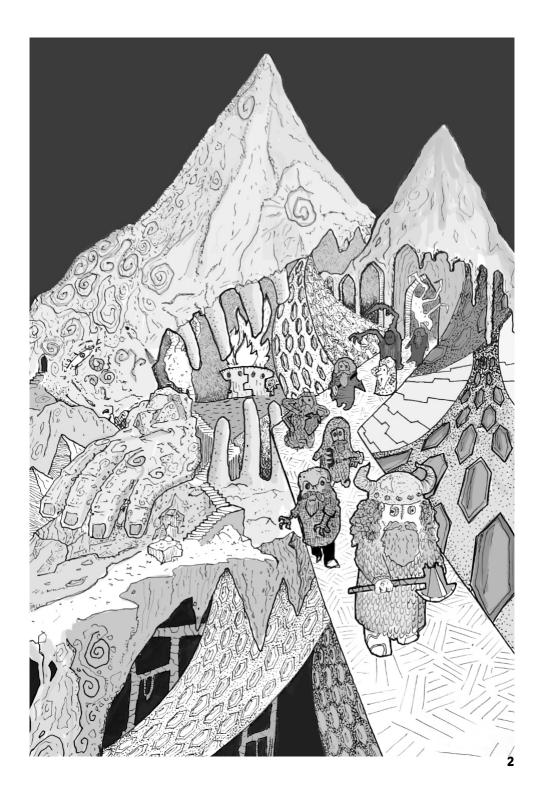
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#### The Mountain That is a Man and Also God

Half-buried, lying sideways, slightly askew, See his heavy face, the whorls upon his skin. Unmoving, silent, but not sleeping, not yet dead, His chest still heaves, lids scrape on stony eyes. Thousands scuttle underneath his skin, hastily, purposefully, Deathly thin machine-men with liquid ivory eyes. Insectile metal limbs terminating in power tools, Bodies as utilitarian as their spun-copper brains. They exist in strict regimented hierarchy, ever smaller, more specialized fractal branches. Closest to the delicate gold foil, ever thumping, inner heart, The priests congregate around sacred everblue flames. Further out, by the writhing silken organs, The machinists keep their workshops, smokey and dark. Most removed in the recesses of the outstretched limbs, The drones dwell in sharp hexagonal cells awaiting orders. They await the shrill horns of the demanding machinists, Who need new components to melt and bend and shape. They anxiously emerge from betwixt nail and flesh, Blinding, scalding sunlight glinting off of their shiny shells. They walk among man, gnome, and elf, seeking their prize, Donning halfling flesh and hefty wigs, saying they are dwarves.



## The Legacy of Vazimak the Thanaturge

Before the current age, of history and nations and culture, wizards ruled the world. And wizards, of course, fight like cats in a bag.

What records we have describe an age of brutal arcane strongmen, each seizing as much of the world as they could keep with their might and cunning, until they were ground underfoot in turn by someone wilier, younger, more puissant. Men will tell you that a coalition of warriors smashed the rule of wizards by force of arms. Elves will tell you that they seeded the secrets of movable type and with it reading and the democratisation of arcane power subtly but utterly eroded their power from below. (But elves will tell you anything.)

What we know is that thousands - thousands of thousands - of painfully, single-handedly developed spells are lost to us, locked in the pre-spellbook technology of the mnemocrypt: an externalised memory palace, a physical object encoding dense layers of information in a personally unique way. Asmocaris Dream-Eater wove a tapestry of human hairs, its whorls and knotwork hiding one hundred and twenty-six spells, only the barest handful of which have been decoded by modern sages. CzÅ Bitter-Words-Like-Wasps, elven cursesmith, planted a seven-hectare formal garden of poisonous herbs, in which certain spells could only be read in certain seasons; her darker, most insidious works were forever destroyed when her kinfolk slew her, razed the garden and salted the earth.



The mnemocrypt of Vazimak the Thanaturge is a sphere of black metal, the size of a man's head. Whoever tries to carry it, it is always the exact weight to feel bearable to them at first, rapidly burdensome, then miserably heavy. It is etched with fractally fine, sinuous geometries of razor-slender lines. Every single spell whose secrets are hidden therein, no matter how dreadful, is Level 1. Such were the ways of the wizard-tyrants of yore. The first spell which can be deciphered from it is Apophenic Fugue.

Apophenic Fugue is relatively easy: a few determined hours of study by any spellcaster should reveal its patterns. It is, of course, a trap.

Apophenic Fugue Casting: 1 action, no components Range: self Duration: 1 hour The caster's mind is put into an altered state of consciousness. Everywhere they look, they see patterns, connections in things. Ciphers become transparent to them, codes melt before their intellect, riddles are trivial.

This is the state of mind you need to pierce the paranoid enigma of an ancient wizard's mnemocrypt. Every time you cast this spell, you gain one point of Apophenia. Every time you subsequently encounter a problem that this spell might help solve, you must make a Wisdom saving throw, with a penalty equal to your Apophenia score; the cold, clear rush of seeing the hidden meanings of the world is addictive. When your Apophenia score exceeds your Intelligence, the spell takes permanent effect on you. You see patterns in everything now: the flight of birds, the names of inns, numbers, names, colours...is that man following you? Is it the same man that was following you in the last city? He has different coloured hair. Black now, blond then. Blond the city before, when he wore a different face again. If you keep watching for him, you can decipher the message hidden in the sequence of hair colours....

With the use of Apophenic Fugue, it will take 1+1d4 hours to decipher the following spells:

Dreadful Osseous Vitality Casting: 1 minute, no components Range: touch Duration: instant Other necromancers, pissant dabblers, create skeleton servants by invigorating meatless anatomies. Vazimak, however, perfected the art of awakening bones still trapped in living flesh, whose first, bloody act is to birth themselves by violently tearing free. The target must succeed a Constitution saving throw to assert dominance over their rebellious skeleton.

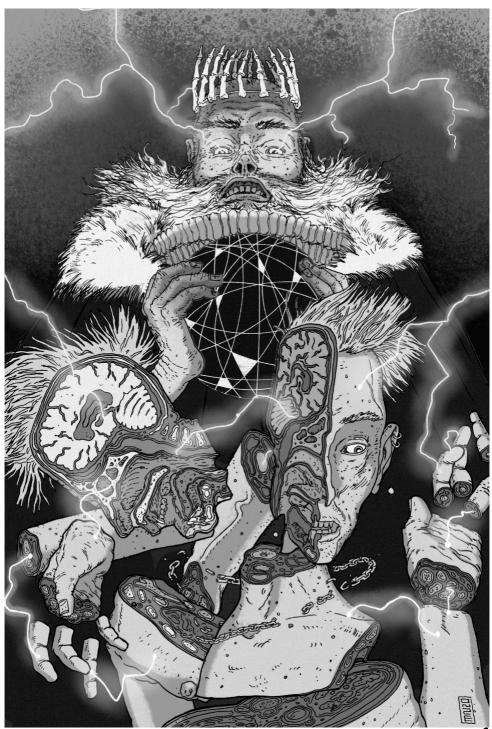
Viscous Inversion Casting: 1 action Range: 30' Duration: instant Targets one visible person within range; their flesh becomes stretchy and rubbery. If they pass a Constitution save, this merely immobilises them, collapses them into a puddle on the floor, prevents them holding onto anything, oozes them out of loose-fitting clothing, hats, and so on. If they fail, however, it also disjoints every one of their bones and turns them inside-out through their mouth. This is non-lethal, although it is horribly painful, and keeping such an unfortunate individual alive for any length of time will prove difficult. Either way, their flesh will return to a normal consistency after one minute.

Continued use of Apophenic Fugue will reveal, after another 3+1d4 hours of study:

Messless Vivisection Casting: 10 minutes, silver athame, ritual herbs Range: 30' Duration: until ended A number of visible creatures within range (up to caster level + 1) are divided arbitrarily into parts, at the wizard's whim, as if sliced. The "cut" surfaces are sealed with opaque sheets of magical force; the creatures continue to live and act as if intact. The wizard can end the spell at any time. Any "cut" surfaces in proximity when the spell ends will seamlessly join; any isolated parts, without a suitable surface to attach to, suffer the natural consequences of being suddenly severed. Should the resulting organisms not be reassembled in their original configuration, additional magics may be required to keep them alive.

Budlo Casting: 6 hour ritual, bonfire of profaned wood, one humanoid effigy crafted from sticks, straw, and clothing Range: touch Duration: instant This spell intercepts a human soul as it hurtles along the theopneumic channels between the world and underworld, draging it into the world, and installs it within a humanoid effigy. A crude and ugly adaption of golemic technique, this does exactly nothing to empower the budlo with movement, speech, or obedience; it does, however, qualify as human for the purposes of human sacrifice. Perhaps not as satisfying, but sufficient if it's all that's available.

Another 6+1d4 hours of Apophenic Fugue unlocks more:



KILLING FIELDS Casting: 1 action, 1 human sacrifice Range: 0 Duration: 1 minute All small vegetation growing within half a mile of the caster - grass, ferns, brambles, flowers and vines - lunges for the nearest creature, transforming into a black metal weapon - knives, scythes, razored chains. The earth bristles with bloodthirsty instruments, and their crop of victims.

KILLING WORDS Casting: 1 action, 1 human heart and 1 human tongue, both from murder victims - not the same one Range: self Duration: 10 minutes The caster's mouth becomes a conduit for raw magic and murderous intent: all they can utter is verbs of violence, in a god-voice of death and pain and wrath. Every such verb they utter is instantly, magically enacted upon the body of the nearest person they can see. This tends to be a last resort: the strain on the caster's throat will leave them voiceless for several days.

The next 6+1d4 hours reveals more of Vazimak's secrets:

Bone Grenado Casting: 1 action, pinch of gunpowder Range: 60' Duration: instant One skeleton within range explodes into bone shrapnel, dealing 1d4 damage to everyone within 15' of it. (If it was within a living thing at the time, the skeleton's owner gets a Constitution save to avoid sudden, grisly death.) Any other necromantically-raised skeletons caught within the explosion will also explode, in a chain reaction, which will continue to spread for as long as there are eligible unexploded skeletons near enough.

Pull of the Grave Casting: 10 minutes, century-old femur, two pints of fresh human blood Range: 0 Duration: instant Every person other than the caster - dead or alive - touching open ground within half a mile of the caster, is dragged beneath the suddenly-churning soil and left entombed, six feet deep.

It's unknown how many spells the sphere conceals in total; by this point, anyone studying it tends to be too secretive and paranoid to share any further details they tease out. Several are known to have further pursued the study of Vazimak's mnemocrypt; they tend to drop out of sight, and if they ever resurface, they do so necromantically puissant, devoid of whatever scruples they began with, and extremely mad.

Mnemocrypts are, at the simplest level, encrypted spellbooks. They can't usually be deciphered with Read Magic - or necessarily "read" at all, perhaps needing to be touched, smelled, or dreamed about - and require extended study. Each one is unique, an extension of its creator and expression of their personality, and needs an equally unique approach to deciphering it. Usually physical artifacts of some kind, but anything that can somehow encode information can be a mnemocrypt: architecture, tattoos, text...nor are they limited to wizards. A bard could hide his magical repertoire within a web of metaphors in an epic poem. They are products of war - designed to resist decryption, both passively and actively.

Booby-trap enchantments within them will attempt to repel, mislead or destroy the unwary - either subtly (like Vazilak's Legacy), by affecting their mind, or less so - hostile polymorphs, fireballs, planar banishments, disintegrations.... Even when they do give up their secrets, it is often a trickle, ciphers nested within ciphers, spells doled out through successive breakthroughs, as with Vazimak's.

As in-game items, mnemocrypts can scale in importance from delayed-gratification random treasure for spellcasters, all the way up to campaign-focal. Either way, each one is an opportunity to provide a window into the campaign world - its history, its personalities, the cultures that produced them, and their idiosyncratic magics



## **Dwarfen Trinkets and Artifacts** (d100)

- 1. Pocket statue carved in the likeness of your lover
- 2. An unusual rock, consisting of an unlikely combination of minerals. Makes other dwarfs laugh but the joke is impossible to translate
- 3. Brass rimmed half-moon spectacles
- 4. Mummified ear used as a beard ornament
- 5. A steel lunch box containing d3 cucumber and pickle sandwiches
- 6. A lock of your mothers beard
- 7. Bass relied postcard-sized stone tablet depicting you and your 2d6 children in formal poses (6s explode)
- 8. Hidden pouch of jewels. You never admit to having them. (worth 3d6x100gp)
- 9. Sculptor's hammer and chisel
- 10. Crab fishing line and hooks
- 11. Gnomish clockwork chicken. Can walk around aimlessly and "eat" small pebbles if you throw them to it.

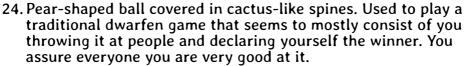
12. A tun of mushroom beer. Toxic to non-dwarfs (arguably toxic to dwarfs as well)

A kitten that follows you everywhere and nests in your beard

- 14. A brass lantern. What looks like glass panels are actually finely worked sheets of topaz. Worthless but you love to bring it up in conversation.
- 15. A bar of hagfish soap
- 16. 50ft of decorative rope
- 17. Traditional dwarfen medicine box. Contents look like various coloured rocks of salt. It is in fact variously coloured rocks of salt.



- 18. A book of favours owed and accrued
- 19. A stack of aesthetically pleasing printed papers you claim are used instead of coins in your homeland
- 20. Small pet cave tortoise you keep in your pocket
- 21. A folding measuring stick
- 22. Pouch full of d6 religious figurines. Poseable
- 23. Box of personal grooming equipment. Soaps combs perfumes. No scissors.



- 25. 3d6 tubes of oil paint and d3 brushes
- 26. Polished bronze hand mirror
- 27. Copper water canteen. Makes whatever is stored in it taste very dwarfen/awful.
- 28. Commemorative plate from a coronation
- 29. Decorative lantern made from a huge beetle
- 30. Pet salamander
- 31. A jelly mold in the shape of a crown
- 32. A set of 1d6 card-sized oil paintings of famous dwarfs
- 33. A ring in the shape of a crown. Or a tiny crown
- 34. A dwarfen novel. Mainly lists of things
- 35. A well trained terrier
- 36. Your journal. Large, leather-bound, full of lists of things you have seen and done with no commentary
- 37. What looks like a nest of copper and steel wires is in fact a dwarfen map of the region
- 38. Whisky from your hometown.



- 39. Moleskin socks
- 40. Dwarfen recipe book. Hopelessly salty
- 41. Jar of mushroom sauce. Impossibly delicious
- 42. Single rhodium earring. Priceless
- 43. Finely made stone abacus
- 44. Your childhood rattle. Made from an unusually hard eggshell on a steel rod. Full of peridots
- 45. Lock of elfen hair
- 46. Chromium nose ring
- 47. Tattoo of your hereditary ruler's state mandated portrait
- 48. A carved stone manticore playing piece
- 49. Potted fern, which is your prized possession
- 50. Large doughnut shaped magnet
- 51. Gold rings at every finger joint. Very valuable but to sell them would bring great shame to your family

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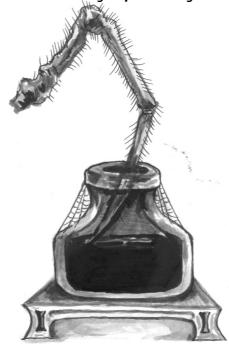
- 52. Cape made of plates of iridescent chitin
- 53. Brass eating utensils
- 54. Travel version of the dwarfen board games "Carry the King"
- 55. Wax pouch full of dried and seasoned mushrooms
- 56. Coiled metal measure
- 57. Copper mallet
- 58. Decorative geometric tattoos covering your body
- 59. Thick bronze necklace, welded on. Cannot be removed without the proper tools
- 60. Exceedingly fluffy woollen blanket in your clans pattern
- 61. A book of poetry by a famous dwarf poet on the topic of fraternal love



- 62. Collection of coach ticket stubs
- 63. Box of white crayons
- 64. Sealed tin can of of pickled plums
- 65. Half eaten bundt cake
- 66.8 pairs of woollen socks in 8 striking colours and patterns
- 67. Pocket full of pickled eggs
- 68.3 pairs of steel knitting needles and 2d6 balls of wool
- 69. A handkerchief roughly the size of a tablecloth
- 70. Hand operated drill
- 71. Pair of leather mittens
- 72. Asbestos apron
- 73. Iron helmet with a single off centre horn
- 74. Pot of beard oil, smells like mangos
- 75. Hair wax, extra strong
- 76. Tattoo needles and a supply of black ink
- 77. Beard net made of chromed steel links
- 78. Shark leather headband
- 79. Finely made bolt cutters
- 80. A reel of copper wire
- 81. Collection of poetry on the topic of selfless labour in service to the state
- 82. Stone figurine with tiny, metal, accurate armour
- 83. Tattoo of your mother's face somewhere prominent on your body
- 84. A silver flute, you don't know how to play
- 85. An obo, which you can play finely
- 86. Elaborately carved wooden tobacco pipe with a huge bowl



- 87. Cast iron puzzle cube, unsolved
- 88. Collections of engravings depicting dwarfs in various stages of grief
- 89. An abstract oil painting of the sky at night, rolled up in a tube
- 90. Carved stone pocket novelty, well worn
- 91. Large felt sun hat
- 92. Collapsible wheelbarrow
- 93. Orcish carved bone nose ring
- 94. Playing cards for the dwarfen game of "Castiron". Well worn
- 95. Finely made travel cauldron
- 96. Tin hair ornament in the shape of a stylised human face
- 97. Book of erotic dwarf poetry
- 98. d100 candles in a wooden carrying case. Contains twice as many matches
- 99. Journal containing a list of everything you have eaten in the last d6x10 years. No commentary
- 100. Dip pen made from a large spiders leg



#### **GALLOWSPORT**

The Gallowsport is a dark and unforgiving harbour area; poverty, squalor, and organised crime are prevalent but somewhat contrasted by the eccentricities brought in from distant shores.

## Overall Features Sights, Sounds, Smells

Brown, black, and gray; damp and dirty; insincere laughter and insidious chatting; smell of rotting fish, salt, and crime; ruffians and cut-throats of all types going about their businesses.

#### **Buildings**

Paved streets, wet docks, and dirty alleys; smoke-filled taverns, smelly fisherman stands, and unmanned guard posts; boarded-up windows, rusty gutters, and simple brick walls stained with vomit and blood.

#### **Activity**

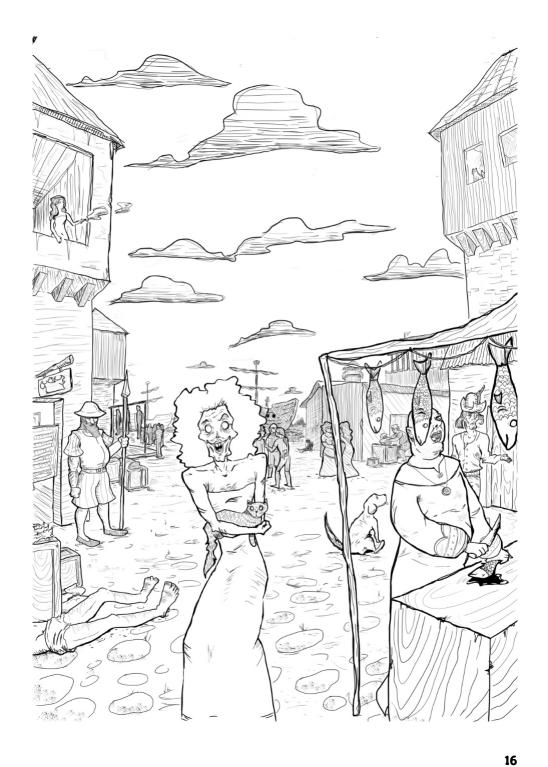
Day: Fishermen selling fish, oysters, and sharks; drunkards waking up with terrible hangover; ships coming in from exotic lands, bringing colour and liveliness.

Night: Petty criminals, rollicking youngsters, and toothless strumpets; smugglers, hitmen, and pirates stalking in the night; an ambience of decay, anguish, and violence.

#### Curios From Dark Seas and Distant Shores (d12)

- 1 A bone mask resembling the skull of an ape. Primates become submissive to the wearer, unless they are bigger or heavier; then they become obsessed with usurping their leadership.
- 2 A compass that points towards salvation. Many religious groups seek this item; some want to destroy it, for apparently salvation, in some form, is available to even the most sinful and wicked.

- 3 A jewellery box engraved with Atlantean runes for eye and metamorphosis and wealth. Eyeballs placed inside transform into gems of matching colour overnight.
- 4 A bag of rare seaweed. Supposedly bestows a rich harvest if scattered over a field.
- 5 A scarf knitted with yarn obtained from the supernal flock of Marwella the Little Death. Supposedly, Marwella cut herself while knitting, and it is her divine blood that gives the scarf its reddish hues.
- 6 A shabby but still usable pickaxe made from dwarven metal; capable of striking ale when used against sufficiently large and aged rocks.
- 7 A stiletto used in thirteen successful royal assassinations over the globe.
- 8 A handful of gold coins taken from the tomb of Pharaoh Neferbai. Those who touch any of this burial gold are cursed with potent magic: no food would sate their hunger and no drink would quench their thirst on this earth.
- 9 Green, mint-flavoured pills taken from a curious metal ship sunk near the shores of Endádne the Mirrored City. If a single pill is taken, the person grows a new set of teeth in a matter of minutes coupled with immense pain.
- 10 A dart and a vial of poison obtained from the lush jungles of South Zanbara. If injected into the blood stream of a person, it renders them blind for a week. A blind person, on the other hand, regains their vision for the same duration.
- 11 A pair of scissors that are capable of cutting through the aetheric thread destiny is woven from, essentially freeing one from their fate. It comes with a price, though, as the universe doesn't care much for those without a purpose.
- 12 A captain's hat that bestows its wearer with immeasurable naval knowledge, unmatched boldness, and complete inability to set foot on land.



#### Encounters (d12)

- 1 One-Eye Jack, a colourful drunkard well-known around Gallowsport, vomits all over one of the characters. A true gentleman at heart, he offers his own rum-soaked rags as replacement for the ruined garments.
- 2 A bunch of thugs are looking for a man who stole something valuable from Zentar the Bastard, a half-blooded elf and petty gangster.
- 3 Ormót Blueskin, a corpulent merchant appears along with eleven eunuchs to shut down and punish a couple fishermen who haven't paid tribute on time.
- 4 Half a dozen ruffians armed with knives and morning stars approach the characters. Their tattoos indicate they are members of the Nocturnal Brotherhood.
- 5 Danton is desperately trying to convince his fellow fishermen not to approach the Teeth of Gazda, for the reef is home to a terrible sea monster that recently killed everyone on his boat save for him.
- 6 Two beggars are fighting each other over a handful of coins and a piece of lard. Drunkards and sailors are standing idly by; one of them kicks a knife smeared with dirt near them and cries at the top of his voice, "Three silver shillings says the one with the beard dies!".
- 7 William Seamew, a feared pirate has just returned from sea; he and his crew want to spend their hard-earned doubloons in revelry. They buy drinks for everyone around, challenge people to games of chance, and involve them in other amusing activities.
- 8 A man in a dirty trenchcoat approaches the characters. He introduces himself as Barefoot Bill and tells them an important person sends their regards. If baited, he leads them to an alley, where Bill's associates (a bunch of hobos with rabies) ambush them with shinbone clubs.

- 9 A couple of ugly whores and their "garde-de-dame" stands at the entrance of an alley.
- 10 Seven thugs are extorting teeth from a couple of travellers in an alley. They intend to sell the easy loot to the Tooth Fairy.
- 11 A duel is about to start between two swordsmen, Tom Slayer and Hunchback Finn. The swordfight is just a sham, though; while they fight, their associates empty the pockets of the crowd.
- 12 Children play in a dirty alley, poking a dead man with a stick.

#### Rumours (d10)

- 1 The abandoned lighthouse over on a nearby isle holds cursed treasure. Entry is forbidden, but no one dares stand guard there because of the overpopulation of aggressive giant crabs.
- 2 Maximillian, a haughty nobleman, is challenging Captain Vandreous to a duel to the death. Apparently, the captain had seduced the noble's young wife, and now he's seeking refuge someplace hidden.
- 3 If you throw a platinum coin in the Old Well precisely at 1:23am, your fate takes a polar change noticeable within a day's time.
- 4 The apparition of a young girl in her wedding dress is sometimes seen near the docks, weeping, waiting for her lover to return to shore. Some say he fell overboard in a storm; others claim he was sold by slavers to a pasha in the Land of a Thousand Oases.
- 5 When someone aboard a ship has strange dreams and intense nightmares about the darkness of the night sky, fear of heights, the unmistakable sound of a thousand leathery bat-wings flapping, being kidnapped, and so forth, it heralds the coming of creatures from beyond the firmament. The nightskinned, gaunt figures appear from nowhere on the next night, attacking men that appear to be the weakest and most isolated, grabbing them, and flying away.

- 6 There's a secret brothel in an abandoned building that only opens once every new moon. There the sickest and most wicked people with gold in their pockets have relations with animated corpses.
- 7 There is an abominable thaumaturgist known as the Tooth Fairy. She collects fangs, teeth, and similar pieces of denticulation as focus items for her wicked magics. One could get a considerable sum of money for selling a royal tooth to the Fairy.
- 8 A member of royalty disguised as a commoner is seeking safe passage out of the city.
- 9 There is a cove nearby that smugglers use to hide their goods before returning to port; the water is very shallow, and they say the smugglers usually keep a couple people on watch duty there. Their allegiance must not be unwavering, though, for sure.

10 - There's an old lady who lives in an old house in the district. They say she can speak with the dead. Her price is a bag of gold and a dozen dead mice.



#### Ships (d8)

- 1 The Devil's Killer is a snekke manned by 24 oarsmen. It is commanded by Eymundr Hallkellsson, a fierce Viking warrior, sworn enemy of everything evil and unnatural (by his unreasonably twisted standards).
- 2 The Sol's Blade is a large galley manned by a hundred rowers. Captain Kossax is a feared magus, known for his pyromania and violent temper.
- 3 The Red Night is an old knarr whose crew has been cursed with a rare form of transformative magic: each night they become sharkman hybrids with an unquenchable hunger for human flesh.
- 4 The Venus is an infamous pleasure cruise. Its figurehead is a whore, and the mast is decorated with male genitalia.
- 5 The Blue Orchid is a ship from the faraway land of Vedas. Emissaries recently arrived here to conduct diplomatic missions in the name of Raja Sahib.
- 6 The Radiant Challenger is a ship owned by the Holy Inquisition; they go from port to port to purge the unclean, take their dirty valuables, and rid the world of evil. Or so they claim.
- 7 The Arctic Pride is a caravel captained by Erwin the Bold, an explorer who has seen more ports than some houses. He seeks the famed Philosopher's Stone to gain longevity beyond mortal comprehension.
- 8 The Nightingale is an onyx black ship always lingering in the docks, deserted and left to crumble. Some say if commandeered, it leads to a nightmarish twin-realm, the City of Night.

#### Landmarks and Interesting Places

#### Cock and Bull

A tavern frequented by travellers of all sorts, where the alcoholic beverages are as cheap as the women. Members of law enforcement have never set foot in the building, which is connected to all sorts of secret tunnels pirates and smugglers are allowed to use for a small cut.

#### Floating Bazaar

A part of the harbour where merchants (the lowest and most down-to-earth sort) sell their goods on small boats floating on the water.

#### The Cat Lady

Margaret is a well-known old lady in the harbour area, always walking around with a dead cat in her arms. Travellers often visit her humble home for she has magic that allows her to use a dead cat's body to trap a ghost and communicate with the dead. What she doesn't tell her customers is that the spirits cannot leave the cat's body anymore, and because she's not a bad person, she keeps them semi-alive in her basement. Her payment is part gold, part mice.

#### The Sly Minstrel

A cheap tavern known for its drunken singing contests. It is run by a cunning woman named Karla, the only prisoner who has managed to escape Lord Dominik's infamous dungeon.

#### The Old Well

An out-of-the-way landmark dating back to the city's oldest times. Most famous of its decorations is a grotesque statuette of a child with beady eyes, a crow-like beak, and small feathered wings spouting from its back. Dark pacts and nefarious deals are made frequently here.





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