

THE BOOK OF

TAVERNS

VOLUME ONE



By Chris Jones



SYSTEM
NEUTRAL

THE BOOK OF TAVERNS VOLUME ONE

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THE BOOK OF TAVERNS: VOLUME ONE

By CHRIS JONES

AN ADVENTURE SUPPLEMENT FOR CHARACTERS OF ALL LEVELS DETAILING TWO DISTINCT TAVERNS!

Book of Taverns: Volume One presents two taverns, The Trireme and Vain Robert's Gibbet. Each tavern is given a full description of its layout, important NPCs, and history. The Trireme is home to lively philosophical debate and epicurean delights. In contrast, Vain Robert's Gibbet is a scurvy dockside dive bar that is home to a coven of elite seafarers who battle a growing evil from out in the depths of the sea.

A PUBLICAN'S LIFE

Werner Tonk, standing almost 7 feet tall and weighing close to 400 pounds in all that fancy, etched armor he liked to wear, filled the doorframe of The Brass Buckle. The publican looked up at the new arrival, then whipped a filthy rag from his belt and swiped at a puddle of mead on the table near him.

"Evenin', Master Tonk," he said as he tucked the filthy rag back into his belt.

Tonk nodded congenially. "Evening, Ron." He squeezed through the doorframe, armor and wood scraping against one another quite loudly. "Can I trouble ye for a pint of black?"

Before Ron could decide if he wanted the man in the pub, the big man made the decision on his own. His boots left gigantic divots in the floor as he strode across it. The publican grimaced. That would be the fifth time in as many weeks that he'd need to replace those floorboards.

Werner seemed to sense something was wrong. "Come now, Ron. Ye knows I'm good for it. Just a pint, that's all I ask. A measly little pint."

Ron hated when Werner put him on the spot like that. The other patrons in the tavern's common room, all seven of them, watched with no small degree of amusement. But Ron could not bring himself to tell the disgraced nobleman to sod off. If he'd been any other man ...

"Sure, Master Tonk. I don't see why not."

Laughing heartily, Werner clapped Ron on the shoulders. "Good on ye, Ron, good on ye!" He reached for his silk coin pouch, mumbling. "Lessee 'ere. I think I've a half sovereign. For me tab, ye ken."

The ritual was a tired one, but one to which Ron was accustomed. He waited patiently as Werner fumbled for his coin. Embarrassed, the warrior pulled out a dingy copper token.

"S'truth, Ron, I'm good for it. Ye knows I am. It's just, well, I'm having a bit o' bad luck of late."

Ron sighed, resigned to the loss he would take tonight. "I unnerstan', Master Tonk. This one's on the house, to be sure."

As he made for the barrel to pour Werner his pint, Old Smey cackled merrily from across the room. "'Ere, now, Tonk! You gonna treat us all to a round or three?"

The others laughed, and Werner replied, "Aye! Ron knows I'm good for it!"

The publican winced. He was definitely going to lose his shirt tonight.

INTRODUCTION

The tavern is a staple of fantasy literature and even more so of fantasy gaming. How many local taverns do characters visit for information or to seek the seeds of adventure? GMs often rely on the tavern to kickstart stories, using them as convenient starting points to bring itinerant characters together for the first time or even to introduce new characters to an established party. Despite its crucial role in moving a story forward, the tavern is often relegated to nothing more than background scenery.

This supplement is designed to change all that.

The Book of Taverns provides an assortment of highly detailed taverns rich in history and character. They can be used on the fly, pulled at random and inserted into a gaming session without forethought and preparation, or employed as foundations for something decidedly more permanent. Each tavern is appropriate for a range of levels.

These taverns need not be used as written. Feel free to mix and match NPCs, creatures, encounters, and maps. Some of the establishments are designed with a specific environment in mind, such as a city setting or a rustic countryside, but don't feel limited to these environments. With a few tweaks, any tavern here can be adapted to other locales.

USING THIS BOOK

Each tavern presented is divided into six sections:

Introduction: A brief overview describing the general atmosphere and theme.

Background: A detailed description of the tavern's origin and history, along with the major players associated with it. Each tavern's background contains numerous plot hooks for creating adventures.

Patrons & Possibilities: A quick glimpse at some other colorful patrons to be found inside the tavern and events surrounding them, for instances where the GM needs a shadowy figure in the corner who might have much-needed information to pass on.

Dramatis Personae: Detailed descriptions of the non-player characters (NPCs) who inhabit or own the tavern.

The Establishment: This is the largest section, describing the individual rooms in the tavern and their contents.

Goods & Services: A list of available food, drink, lodging, and any other services, as well as prices.

Adventure Seeds: This section offers ideas to create adventures in and around the tavern. Not all are necessarily related to the tavern's backstory.



THE TRIEME

Set in the quiet wooded hills just outside town, The Trireme is well known for catering to epicurean tastes and serving some of the region's finest wines. Local dreamers and would-be philosophers constitute the bulk of its clientele. On an average night, the sounds of enthusiastic debate emanate from The Trireme's common room, with the sudden outburst of raw magic from the overly zealous occasionally punctuating the discussion. Some nights, the party moves to the tavern's private drinking room; other nights, it takes over the symposium where only the most elite thinkers and drinkers are allowed to "debate" (if they have the coin to afford the tavern's most expensive wines, that is ...).

BACKGROUND

For as long as anyone can remember, The Trireme has sat on its riverside hill and provided a haven where the intellectual elite can express themselves openly. Burnt down and rebuilt seven times in the last 175 years, The Trireme has changed ownership four times and served many other uses in its extensive history.

Around 180 years ago, when the city nearby was young and the countryside still untamed, a fleet of warships returned home from war. The admiral of the fleet, Basilarch, a popular sailor but a better-loved politician, heard that in his absence his wife, Hippolyta, had died. Shocked and heartbroken, Basilarch returned to his beloved city not in victory but in mourning. Despite the adoration of a cheering populace, the laurels of victory, and a triumphant march to the city's agora, there was no joy on the hero's face.

As soon as he could, the admiral extricated himself from the celebrations and rushed to his estates outside the city to seek out his love's grave. His household servants could tell him only that she disappeared shortly after Basilarch sailed to war and that despite searching the entire nation for the past five years, no sign of her was ever found save for a bloodstained *chiton* and a pair of hair pins, both known to belong to her. In the end, she was given up for dead.

This failed to satisfy Basilarch, for hope bloomed eternal in the wily sailor's chest. He put aside his armor and left his servants to manage his estate (they had failed to protect his wife, true, but they had done a fair job maintaining and even growing his wealth while he was gone). He then set out to solve his wife's disappearance and presumed death. Basilarch searched for 10 months, asking questions, spending coin, and even hiring some outlander adventurers to assist him.

The following spring, a passing drover reported having seen a noblewoman fleeing naked and bloody through the olive groves in the hills west of town. The drover shouted and tried to stop her, but several armed men were also pursuing her. The drover hid, fearing for his life. Later that night, sheep rustlers attacked his camp and killed his two children before being driven off. Basilarch forgave the grieving drover for not intervening; after all, the gods had already punished the rough peasant's cowardice.

Using this clue about the tragic day, Basilarch tracked down the armed men, but was surprised to learn that these were no mere bandits. Indeed, they carried *hoplons* and wore *linothoraxes*, expensive shields and armor far beyond the means of common brigades. The drover remembered an image emblazoned on one of the shields, and this clue helped Basilarch identify one of the men who turned out to be loyal to Iolaos, Basilarch's chief political rival.

Armed with this knowledge, Basilarch began a new investigation. The chief questions: What did Iolaos want with Hippolyta and what happened to her in the olive grove? But Basilarch now found himself shut down at every turn. Hippolyta's tracks were long cold, and a direct approach would serve only to warn Iolaos, so the wily admiral concocted a new plan.

For two years, he lived recklessly, spending his fortune wildly, buying extravagant gifts, and living the life of the rich playboy. His fellows mocked him; surely a man his age should not be behaving thusly? Under cover of this ruse, Basilarch quietly followed the trail, met with less-than-honest citizens and foreign residents in his city and eventually learned the truth: Iolaos kidnapped Hippolyta to distract and dishonor Basilarch and to get revenge for the admiral beating him in the election to lead the expedition that took Basilarch away from home for so long.

But despite learning Iolaos' role in kidnapping Hippolyta, Basilarch did not know if his beloved wife still lived as his rival's captive.

Gathering what loyal *hoplites* he could, Basilarch silently launched his trireme, the *Paralus*, claiming he was going to raid the coasts of his city's enemies. Instead, the ship sailed out to sea and then returned under cover of darkness, slipping up a small river west of town to Iolaos' estate.

Basilarch quietly led his small band of armed men on the daring raid. His rival's household was not expecting an assault, and the guards were quickly overcome. Basilarch stormed the house in one bloody rush, slaying many of the warriors loyal to Iolaos as well as a plentitude of servants. Overcome by bloodlust, Basilarch could not restrain his hand and slew his rival before questioned the man. In the fight, a lantern was knocked over and a curtain set ablaze. Basilarch's warriors fled into the night as the fire spread through the house and into the stables, then across the courtyard and to the bow of the *Paralus*. The admiral stayed behind, frantically searching room by room, tearing open walls, and flinging aside chests and furniture, all in a vain pursuit for his wife. But Hippolyta was nowhere to be found; Iolaos killed her years ago and dumped her stone-laden body into the river. Basilarch died that night as the burning house collapsed upon him.

For years following the tragedy, the city's more romantically inclined journeyed to the hill to pay their respects to Basilarch and his wife, to the very idea of tragic love and loss. The trireme disintegrated slowly in the water in which it rested, while the only surviving piece of the estate, an ancient oak tree at the edge of the courtyard, became covered in carved poetry and reflections on the nature of love. The tree became such a popular picnic spot that a woman named Meggan of Cypress finally decided to build a small tavern that she called "Basilarch's Trireme." Some say Meggan used the tree to make the building's wall beams, which are extant in The Trireme's current incarnation. If one believes the rumors, those particular timbers somehow survived every fire that otherwise destroyed the building over the years.

The tavern has seen many owners in the years since its inception. Meggan owned it for almost a decade before one of Basilarch's indignant cousins torched the place. The archons ruled the cousin owed Meggan restitution, but she no longer wanted to maintain the tavern and sold it to him for its pre-fire value. He rebuilt it, and his family operated it for the next four generations. It burned down three more times during his tenure, twice by accident and once by arson. Each time, the tavern was rebuilt and restored to normal operation. Twice during war, prominent generals conscripted The Trireme as their headquarters. Forty-five years ago, the Xenethes family bought the tavern. During their ownership, flames destroyed it three more times. Ten years ago, they sold it to Alecko Diakos and Zofia Zavola, a then-recently-married couple looking to settle down and make a life for themselves. Since then, The Trireme has stayed free of the curse of fire that has plagued it throughout its history. Whether this string of luck lasts for Alecko and Zofia remains to be seen.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Alecko Diakos and **Zofia Zavola** currently own The Trireme. Their adopted son **Nikolas**, an orphan abandoned by his mother at the tavern eight years earlier, takes care of the stables. Finally, **Helios Pousalaki** is the resident expert on everything under the sun and the loudest dusty-robed philosopher to grace the tavern. He spends most of his time either in the private *andron* or the symposium hosting vigorous debates with friends and enemies. As one of the wealthiest and most eloquent patrons, he is unsurprisingly elected "toastmaster" most often.

ALECKO DIAKOS

Alecko comes from a long line of publicans extending as far back as his great-great-grandparents. His father and mother owned a tiny restaurant in the city's arena district until he was 14, at which time his father's gambling problem resulted in the restaurant's loss. Soon after, Alecko's mother returned to her homeland, his three older sisters became courtesans at the temple of the love goddess, and he was left homeless and penniless on the streets.

For nearly four years he wandered from job to job, following the gladiatorial circuit when he could afford travel expenses (the taverns and restaurants always boomed wherever the gladiators went), working as a cook or a serving boy until it was time to move on again. A surly foreigner named Thadeus Oak, the proprietor of a tavern in the political district, took Alecko into his employ as a runner when he was 18. Politicians eating lunch or dinner in Oak's place hired Alecko to carry messages to other important personages. After a year, he became responsible for taking orders to the wine and ale merchants on the other side of town, for procuring dry goods for the kitchen, and for watching over the place during the afternoon hours when Oak was off visiting his mistress. Life steadily improved for Alecko; at the rate he was going, he figured that he could own the place before he was 25.

All his plans changed, however, when he accidentally spilled a carafe of wine into the lap of a high-ranking legionnaire. Despite his profuse apologies and offers for remittance, the soldier punished him with conscription, as was his right. Suddenly, Alecko was serving in the city's military. Word circulated of his publican background, and he was eventually assigned to the quartermasters as a cook and a barrack's servant. During this indentured servitude, he met Zofia Zavola, the battalion's commanding officer, and fell hopelessly in love. After two years pursuing her diligently and secretly (lest the other legionnaires lop off his head for mooning over such a high-ranking officer), she eventually reciprocated his feelings. They spent many a night in silent, passionate rendezvous in her quarters or in the woods, requiting their secret love. When the time came for his discharge, Alecko was disconsolate. He asked to stay on as a career soldier but was told in no uncertain terms that he was not soldier material.

Zofia, also unwilling to forego their love, retired early from the military, accepting a complete loss of her future pension and the dishonor of quitting the army before the proper retirement age (which most soldiers never reached anyway.)

Once they quit the military, Alecko and Zofia married immediately and have lived as a happy couple ever since. They had a rough go at first, but as the years passed, they eventually made enough money to purchase The Trireme, a quaint country tavern where they intend to enjoy life and one another's company well into their twilight years.

Alecko has jet-black hair, matching eyes, and swarthy, dark skin. He laughs with great gusto. Honest in every-thing he says and does, Alecko is unwilling to tell lies or exchange empty social pleasantries for the sake of politeness. He regards the stable boy Nikolas as a son, having raised him from the time he was just a babe when his mother abandoned him in one of the guest rooms. Zofia does not regard the child in such a kind light, however, which Alecko cannot understand. Whenever he broaches the topic, she either changes the subject or leaves the room without another word.

ZOFIA ZAVOLA

Before she met Alecko, the only life Zofia ever knew was that of a soldier. Both her parents were lifelong legionnaires, and she spent her entire childhood in the barracks with the soldiers. On her 12th birthday when she came of age, she enlisted. The next 10 years were some of the hardest of her life as she endured relentless training and participated in countless battles against neighboring city-states. Yet in that time, she became a capable leader and an ideal warrior.

During her tenure as the battalion's commanding officer, she met Alecko Diakos, a likeable chap despite the patina of gravy, grease, and onion odor that perpetually clung to him. His gap-toothed smile and honest, no-nonsense demeanor turned her on. He seemed so decidedly genuine that she could not resist him. Their relationship thrived for three years. When the time came for Alecko to be released from his sentence, she was suddenly torn between the only two things in life she had ever truly loved. In the end, she realized that the military only offered her an ignoble death upon the battlefield for a cause she did not care about or (the gods forbid!) retirement due to old age. She chose the dishonor of early retirement to spend her days with Alecko and harbors no regrets. She enjoys maintaining The Trireme with him, finding comfort in the simple pleasures, experiences she never knew as a soldier. Under Alecko's tutelage, she has even become a capable cook in her own right. Still, a small part of her misses the excitement of the battlefield, and the feel of a weighted spear and shield. Occasionally, she catches herself gazing at her old gear where it hangs on the back wall of the *andron*.

Free of military regulations that she cut her hair short, Zofia now wears her gray-streaked red hair long and braided into a ponytail. Adjusting to society's typical "female" role has been difficult. Since she is very muscular, dresses do not fit her body or her personality well, so she tends toward more masculine attire such as loose-fitting robes belted at the waist or tunic and trousers. Like most people in the region, she wears sandals because the climate does not lend itself well to shoes or boots. On her left shoulder is a black tattoo of a skull pierced by a gladius, indicating the Death's Head legion, which she commanded, and its motto: "Kill Them All. The Gods Shall Know Their Own."

While the love she feels for Alecko is boundless, the same cannot be said for the boy, Nikolas. Something about him makes her exceptionally uncomfortable — namely, the fact that he is a child. Zofia utterly lacks any inkling of maternal instinct. Her interactions with Nikolas are always curt and to the point, almost as if she were dealing with a legionnaire. When he was abandoned eight years earlier, she urged Alecko to take him to one of the temple orphanages in the city, but for whatever reason he refused. She realizes now that Nikolas represents the child she and Alecko will never have, yet no matter how hard she tries, she just cannot find any emotion inside herself for the boy other than annoyance. She does not even like him, even though his personality takes after his adoptive father. This thought gives Zofia tremendous discomfort because it makes her doubt her love for Alecko.

NIKOLAS THE STABLE BOY

Nikolas' mother abandoned him as a babe in one of The Trireme's guest rooms almost eight years ago. Alecko and Zofia waited nearly a week for her to return, but she never did. Before Zofia could "dispose of" him in town at one of the numerous temple orphanages, Alecko adopted the boy and raised him like a son.

He loves both of his adopted parents, even though he believes his mother does not like him so much. Being eight, he senses this on a subconscious level rather than knowing it for a fact; as such, he constantly seeks her approval for everything he does. In Alecko's eyes, he apparently can do no wrong. Nikolas definitely takes advantage of this attitude, manipulating Alecko to get away with practically everything short of murder.

Two years ago, he finally grew large enough to work in The Trireme's stables, a job he enjoys immensely. He loves animals, and horses in particular, and decorates his room with all manner of clay statues depicting them. When he grows up, he hopes to become a ranger or cavalry soldier in the military. Oddly enough, the only time Zofia actually shows much interest in him is when he talks about these hopes.

HELIOS POUSALAKI

One cannot say anything about Helios other than he knows everything about everything. In his 60s, Helios has silvery-white hair and beard and a portly figure. He speaks with an air of great dignity, severity, and authority, as if every single word he utters is of immense importance. He typically wears either red or taupe robes trimmed with black and gold embroidery, and expensive leather sandals that exude a truly awful odor in the spring and summer when his feet sweat.

Helios spends almost every night at The Trireme engaging anyone whose ear he can bend in conversation and debate. He fancies himself as something of a professional philosopher and is always ready to take issue with every utterance he hears, no matter how ridiculous or tenuous his position may be. When deep into the wine, he finds a comfortable couch to lounge upon in the *andron*. No one lounges as well as Helios. Once a week or so, he hires out the symposium and invites those whom he thinks own the cleverest minds and sharpest wits to engage in dialogue about current events or the latest fashionably elite philosophical maxims.

Some say that Helios was once a great politician in his youth. If so, no one has yet located his marble bust in the great governing halls of the city. Others claim he is a legendary wizard living incognito, and should anyone discover his true identity, Helios will turn the unlucky snoop into a toad forevermore. Neither rumor is true, however. Helios is just a simple man who made a fortune in his youth importing foreign wines and foods.

PATRONS & POSSIBILITIES

The following table includes some interesting patrons and events to be found in The Trireme. Roll randomly or select one of the unique individuals to fill out the tavern's nightly clientele. Rumors can be sprinkled into conversations as needed.

1d6	Patron or Event
1	The Philosophers' Consortium, a gathering of often likeminded, very stuffy, and usually bald patricians, rents The Trireme for their monthly get-together. The meeting is going as usual — grandstanding, theatrics, and ranting — when one of the participants decides he's had enough the pompous, old windbags. Atticus Gorneck , a young follower who hopes one day to speak his mind, drips a few drops of a root extract into their mead. He was told the root extract will send them racing to the chamber pots. However, the liquid instead lowers their intelligence while boosting their muscles and rage. A bunch of scrawny debaters went into the room; a group of boisterous, ready-to-brawl musclebound fighters emerge.
2	Abron Chock , a young intellectual of the Eternal Scholars of Darkness and Deceit, hopes to find converts to bring into the burgeoning order. Any who join him are promised safety in what comes next. He plans to raise a demon inside the tavern this very night, a foul beast from the deepest pits to do his bidding. To that end, he has surreptitiously been drawing a chalk outline around the room, hoping no one will notice, to contain the creature when it arrives. The unsuspecting patrons will serve as his first sacrifice to the beast.
3	A traveling priest named Heronius Macomb enjoys the finest wines but pays with coins stolen from his god's tributes. The coins are perfectly fine while in the priest's possession but explode in fiery blasts 1d4 days after he uses them to pay for his vices. Who knows where these fiendish coins might end up?
4	A group of barely 3-foot-tall bipedal frogs enters the tavern bearing a palanquin upon which sits another of the green-skinned race wearing bejeweled robes. The carried frog demands the finest bottle of rum the tavern has to offer as a "tribute to the Frog God." If the "Frog God" is refused, 4 giant frogs leap through the window to back up their smaller brethren.
5	The violinist Tomasi Vitali offers to play for the crowd, but his mournful dirge brings tears to the eyes of everyone in the tavern. Once he starts playing, the lighthearted revelry of the place grinds to a halt. Morose patrons wander away, and the owner realizes he's losing his nightly take. But Vitali keeps playing because he has a mission: Send as many drunken patrons into the night where his two thief partners can rob them of their gold.
6	A grand but down-on-her luck lady sits at a table, dabbing at her eyes with a lace handkerchief. She openly weeps whenever anyone approaches her table. " Lady Andress McIvers " is a professional grifter and hopes her show of sadness will at least net her a free meal and maybe some coins for the evening. Characters might meet the lady again in a different disguise some other night. She has hundreds of stories she can choose from to pluck at the heartstrings of anyone who will listen.

THE ESTABLISHMENT

The Trireme overlooks a gentle, languidly flowing river. Standing two stories high, a rather plain khaki daub coats its walls, and ochre-colored ceramic tiles cover its roof. Two walled-in courtyards are at the front entrance, one for patrons and one for their horses, both open to the sky above and the whims of the elements. The second floor's two balconies overlook the tavern's courtyard and the stables. The Trireme's windows are all shuttered and contain neither glass nor oiled parchment. During operating hours, Alecko keeps the first-floor windows open to allow fresh air to flow into the kitchen, common room, and *andron*. Only wealthy or especially honored guests, the staff, and deliverymen use the back entrance. Along the outside back wall, behind the kitchen and stables, a tall wooden rack runs the length of the wall where empty amphorae and extra dry goods are kept. Inside, the building's walls are painted a deep red with black, white, and yellow baseboards. Candles and lamps illuminate the rooms, except for the symposium, which uses torches.

A frieze painted on the wall just above the front entrance depicts a trireme broken in half and the words "Basilarch Was Here" in the region's classical dialect. Zofia painted it one night in a moment of whimsy.

1. COURTYARD

A six-foot-high wall hides the ground floor of the courtyard from the outside, although The Trireme's second floor balcony and the stairs climbing up to it are visible just above the wall. The front door is narrow and short, set into the wall about one foot off the ground and still only then rising to a person's nose; needless to say, most people must duck their heads when entering the tavern.

White ceramic tiles cover the courtyard floor. Because this area of the tavern lacks a roof, black seams of mold caused by accumulated rainwater rim many of the tiles. Zofia spends at least one day a week scrubbing them, cursing up a storm the whole time. Alecko has placed potted plants in the corners, but they are almost always brown and on the verge of death. For whatever reason, nothing seems to grow in the courtyard.

2. ANTECHAMBER

Thin, cushioned benches line the walls of this narrow room. Guests remove their footwear here before entering the baths or parts of The Trireme other than the *kapeleion*. Pegs stick out of one wall so people may hang clothes or travel cloaks.

3. BATHS

This room contains numerous terracotta hip baths, benches, and even a small furnace for heating stones should anyone feel the urge to take a steam bath. As with the antechamber, pegs jut from one wall for clothing. Zofia's polished brass shield hangs on the opposite wall and functions as a mirror, a reminder of her days in the army.

A doorway in the north wall leads directly into The Trireme's kitchen. An opaque cotton curtain usually hangs from the upper doorjamb, giving the patrons in the bath a small amount of privacy from the nonstop flurry of activity going on in the other room.

Alecko lets it be known that anyone who mistakes the hip baths for vomitorium troughs answers to his wife and the business end of her longspear.

4. KAPELEION

This is The Trireme's heart and soul, the "common room" where everyone eats, drinks, and enjoys one another's company. Triangular three-legged and square four-legged tables and their associated stools crowd the room. Along the west wall are darkly stained wood racks as tall as the ceiling and filled to capacity with wine vessels and clay amphorae. In the northwest corner is a chest-high marble counter used by whoever is serving patrons and taking their coin. No serving girls or boys work in The Trireme, so customers must get their own wine. Behind the counter is a tiny clay oven and grill for cooking quick snacks with which the kitchen cannot be bothered. The ceiling and its support beams are darkly colored and decorated with indecipherable graffiti, epithets, and "business" propositions. Anyone caught carving the wood must buy a round for the entire house, including the private drinking rooms in the back.

While The Trireme certainly caters to the more argumentative and philosophically minded, the patrons of the *kapeleion* also come from the ranks of everyday, ordinary folk. Most of the highbrow patrons tend to isolate themselves in either the *andron* or outside in the symposium.

A sturdy strongbox rests on a narrow shelf below the countertop. It contains the day's profits and is emptied by either Alecko or Zofia when The Trireme shuts its doors for the night. Coins taken from the box are placed in a second, sturdier box hidden in the floor of the stables. The active use of magic in the common room is expressly frowned upon and is viewed as uncouth and tacky by the owners and patrons alike. A permanent variant of *detect magic* has been placed on a central ceiling support beam that runs the length of the room. It glows white-hot when anyone in the room casts magic. Those who violate the taboo against magic use must buy a round of drinks for every patron. A modification of this particular *detect magic* spell allows magic items on a person's body to remain undetected.

5. KITCHEN

This is a decently sized kitchen outfitted with practically every implement a cook could ever need for preparing dishes. Wood tables, cupboards, a small fireplace, and a grilling brazier are the main items found here, along with an uncountable number of utensils and other tools. The brazier and the fireplace release their smoke into ceramic flues that extend up through the roof of the second floor. The chimneys are disguised as columns where they pierce the balcony overlooking the stables.

6. ANDRON

This private drinking room has comfortable chairs and left-sided couches placed strategically around the room, as well as comfortable benches and a table or two. A worn bronze-tipped longsword, a legionnaire's helmet, and a matching leather-skirted commander's tunic decorate the north wall. The west wall displays a pleasing pastoral painting. Beautifully decorated vases are in the room's corners.

Patrons who use the *andron* must pay a flat fee of 10 gp per night per person, which gives them an unlimited quantity of second- and third-tier wine. If they want first-tier wine, they must pay the standard price per *trikotylos* in addition to the room fee. (For more on the wines served in The Trireme, see the **Goods and Services** section of this chapter.) Food is not included in the price. Anyone can enter the *andron* as long as he or she pays the fee and observes proper decorum.

When certain meetings are held in this room, a cloth privacy curtain is hung from the door to block the view of those in the common room. The curtain obviously does not block much sound, but then again, a meeting requiring such secrecy should perhaps be held elsewhere.

7. SYMPOSIUM

This outdoor portico has a marble floor and ceiling supported by matching columns but no walls. The roof is domed, with the inside painted with beautiful frescoes depicting mythical scenes. The view overlooking the river from the symposium is inspiring, to say the least. Unlike other areas of The Trireme, the potted plants here are vibrant and green. As with the *andron*, comfortable left-sided couches, padded chairs, and sturdy tables are spread around it, though they are much more lavish. Like the *andron*, this portion of the tavern is reserved for those who can afford to rent it.

Any party wishing to use the symposium must include a minimum of five patrons, with each person paying 20 gp for the evening. They are allowed as much wine (any tier) and food as they can consume. Regardless of how drunk they become, patrons are naturally expected to behave themselves and to never forget their manners. While arguments are inevitable with so many drunken "philosophers" all in the same room, direct verbal or physical assaults on other symposium patrons are absolutely forbidden, and assaults directed at the owners are enough to warrant a lifetime ban from the establishment. The symposium is intended as an outlet for the "intellectual elite" but if patrons feel threatened by cutting loose in it, then its purpose is defeated entirely. Of course, this all sounds quite reasonable in theory; in practice, Alecko and Zofia are hard-pressed to turn away anyone with 20 gp to burn regardless of prior unbecoming behavior.

Sometimes, one person is elected the *symposiarch*, or "toast master," of a symposium drinking party. This great honor affords one much status and prestige among the resident philosophers and drunkards. A *symposiarch*'s duties include selecting the most appropriate wines for the occasion (usually this means paying Alecko or Zofia extra for wines taken from their private reserve) and keeping the party dialogue interesting and entertaining. On a typical night, the *symposiarch* usually spends an additional 30–50 gp on top of the fee for the room. Fortunately for many people, just because one is elected *symposiarch* does not mean he or she must accept the duty. No shame comes with admitting that one is not worthy of such an honorable role.

8. SMALL STORAGE ROOM

Spare stools, empty amphorae, and other assorted knickknacks are kept here.

9. FOUNTAIN

This ornate, marble fountain is fed by the river nearby by means of a complex series of pipes and water locks located deep below The Trireme and the hill upon which it sits. The fountain is ornamental and practical, supplying the tavern with a constant supply of fresh water for the kitchen, the *kapeleion*, and the baths.

10. STABLES COURTYARD

Like the courtyard to the tavern, this area is also open to the elements and hidden behind a wall. The double gates are usually left open to allow patrons to easily come and go. When Nikolas runs out of room inside the stables, he sometimes tethers horses to hitching posts found here.

Fresh hay is delivered once a week and stacked along the east wall until it is used. Finding especially drunk patrons passed out atop or behind the bales (or in them, if collapsed from their antics) is not unusual.

11. STABLES

The stables contain five stalls capable of holding 10 riding horses or five workhorses. Halfing and gnomish riding dogs stay in the two courtyards. Six inches of dirt, musty hay, bits of leftover feed, and other detritus litter the ground. Stall walls are about 6-1/2 feet

high and thick enough to allow saddles, saddle blankets, and other gear to be hung over their upper edges. The door in the north opens into a storage room while the one in the west wall opens into a small hallway that leads to the kitchen and Nikolas' room.

A heavy, locked trapdoor is set in the ground beneath the hay. Under the trapdoor is a 10-foot-square cavity approximately 4 feet deep where the tavern's most expensive and rare wines (worth a total of 3,625 gp) are stored. A very secure strongbox found here contains the following items: 1,465 gp in coin, 206 gp in gems, 400 gp in jewelry, and a suit of Death's Head legion magical plate armor.

12. STABLES STORAGE ROOM

This storage room contains tools for maintaining the stables and includes pitchforks for throwing haybales around, brooms for sweeping, and shovels for cleaning up horse manure, as well as brushes for rubbing down the horses and iron picks for scraping dirt from their hooves and shoes.

13. NIKOLAS' QUARTERS

Nikolas lives in the smallest room in The Trireme. Located next to the stables, it is also the noisiest. The room has a small bed with a hay-stuffed mattress, a child-sized wardrobe, and a footstool. Numerous clay and wooden horses litter the floor and sit atop the wardrobe.

14. ALECKO & ZOFIA'S QUARTERS

As one ascends the stairs to the second floor, the door to the proprietors' quarters is on the left, just opposite the balcony and first-floor courtyard. The room is very spacious; in fact, it is the largest room in the tavern. It contains its own stone hearth, a very expensive double-sized bed with cotton sheets and a down-filled mattress, an equally expensive mahogany writing table, three chamber pots, and an ample wardrobe. Along the west wall is a cushioned bench where a person can sit and enjoy the view out the window. A beautifully-appointed dowry chest filled with fresh linens sits at the foot of the bed. An exotic folding screen with four panels, each one illustrating a different legendary battle, stands in one corner.

The table drawers contain 36 gp in coin; an inkstone; a writing quill and an ink bottle (worth 4 gp); 6 sheets of parchment (worth 5 sp); a bound parchment book with 45 pages filled with accounting records and notes for running the tavern; and an ancient, yellowed piece of whalebone with black scrimshaw artwork etched into it that bears a fanciful likeness of a kraken attacking a trireme (worth 125 gp).

15. NARROW GUESTROOM

This room is longer than it is wide and contains two plain beds with hay-stuffed mattresses, a wardrobe, two chamber pots, an end table, and a stool.

16. REAR GUESTROOM

This room is the larger of the two guestrooms. It has two beds, one a single and the other a double, both of average quality and with hay-stuffed mattresses. The room also contains a very large wardrobe, two end tables, four chamber pots, and two footstools. A cushioned bench is along the west wall below the window.

17. STORAGE ROOMS

These two storage rooms contain barrels and washboards for cleaning clothes and linens, extra soap stones, extra sheets for the guest rooms, brooms, and three small strongboxes with their keys in the locks (rented to customers who wish to store their valuables).

GOODS & SERVICES

The Trireme is first and foremost a drinking establishment, so the goods and services it offers primarily reflect this focus. It does offer a pretty-adequate food menu, however, and two guest rooms that may be rented, as well as a few other services.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

The following ideas can be used as seeds for adventures set in or around The Trireme:

The Legionnaire Who Loved and Lost: Before Zofia knew Alecko, her lover was a prominent commander from another battalion. Recently, he started coming to the tavern once a week to woo her, much to Alecko's chagrin. Unfortunately, Alecko can neither say nor do anything; if he offends the legionnaire in the slightest, he could find himself back in the military as a conscript or worse. Zofia has rebuffed the legionnaire's advances, but her patience is wearing thin while Alecko's jealousy continues to grow. One day, he wishes aloud that someone would rid him of this pest, and the next night the legionnaire is found dead in the river. Now under suspicion, Alecko needs help clearing his name.

Fiery Return: The spirits of Basilarch and his wife are manifesting in The Trireme, sometimes appearing in the upstairs rooms, other times materializing in the *andron* or stables. With each new appearance, increasingly larger and more dangerous fires erupt in their wake. The first time, a potted plant in the narrow guestroom's corner began smoldering; the second time, a chair leg in the *kapeleion* caught fire. Fires generally break out in other rooms, not necessarily those Basilarch and his wife haunt. Alecko fears that soon the entire tavern will burn to the ground as has happened so many times in the past. The spirits may be appeased if their remains can be found and reunited.

The Wine Thief: Alecko owns an amphora of ancient wine that is more than 1,000 years old and was owned by a legendary personage. He kept its existence secret this entire time, but now someone has found out about it. That person, a wealthy politician from the city, desperately wants the wine. Alecko is not willing to sell it, as it possesses a curious enchantment: Some who drink it become more intelligent, while others lose their memories. To sell it would be irresponsible. The politician won't take no for an answer, however, so he hires someone to steal it for him. Unlike the rest of Alecko's private reserve, the magical wine is hidden in a secret, locked chamber built into the base of the fountain at the back of the tavern. Drinking the wine might have mystical effects such as raising the intelligence of the fortunate, or lowering it for the unlucky. Enough wine is left in the amphora for 3 more cups, and it is worth approximately 12,000 gp.

Faerie Prince Found: A visiting wizard recognizes Nikolas as the heir to the throne of Faerie, that mystical otherworld from where all fey creatures originate. The boy is a changeling child — he was stolen from the Faerie Queen shortly after birth by one of her ladies-in-waiting, brought to this world, and exchanged for a mortal baby. The fate the lady-in-waiting had in store for Nikolas is unknown, as she disappeared eight years earlier and was never heard from again. The wizard hopes to claim a reward for finding the Faerie Prince, but Alecko desperately does not want that to happen. He loves Nikolas more than life itself and should he lose his son, he would be utterly devastated. On the other hand, Zofia is glad for the opportunity to finally be rid of the boy. She secretly plots with the wizard to deliver Nikolas to the queen's retinue when it arrives on midsummer night, keeping her husband in the dark about her true intentions. If she is lucky, Zofia will also claim part of the reward, which she hopes to use for building an addition onto the tavern.

THE TRIREME MENU

Wine, Third Tier

Kippy's Temple Nectar (white)	5 cp
Satyr's Delight (rose)	3 cp
Vulcan Fire (red)	2 cp

Wine, Second Tier

Delilah Hill Gold Seal (white)	4 sp
The Gorgon's Eyebite (rose)	2 sp
Vulcan Fury (red)	1 sp

Wine, First Tier

Delilah Hill Platinum Seal (white)	3 gp
Satyr's Rose (rose)	3 gp
Vulcan Rage (red)	1 gp

Wine, Private Reserve

Delilah Hill Gold Seal (22 years old)	16 gp
Delilah Hill Gold Seal (31 years old)	45 gp
Delilah Hill Platinum Seal (12 years old)	21 gp
Erinyes Ambrosia (234 years old)	100 gp
Praetorian Cellar (1,400 years old)	900 gp
Vulcan Fury (42 years old)	30 gp
Vulcan Rage (15 years old)	32 gp

Other Beverages

Goat milk	2 cp
Olive oil	5 cp

Food

Dried dates	1 cp
Fish stew	2 cp
Fruit	3 cp
Grilled fish	4 sp
Lamb tripe	5 sp
Olives	2 cp
Pecan cakes	5 cp
Pita bread	2 cp
Preserved fish	1 cp
Radish cakes	4 cp
Roasted goat hocks	2 sp
Roasted sheep legs	3 sp
Sour plums	7 cp

Other Services

Bath, per person	1 cp
Laundry, per person	1 sp
Message running	1 gp
Narrow guestroom, per night	3 sp
Rear guestroom, per night	5 sp
Stables, per horse, per night	6 sp
Strongbox rental, per night	3 cp

Wine is typically served in an increment called a *trikotylos*, which equals approximately one and a half pints (literally, "three half pints"). A carafe contains five pints of wine and costs three times as much as a *trikotylos* of the same type; a small clay amphora contains approximately 20 pints and costs six times as much as a *trikotylos* of the same type. Amphorae are painted according to the winery from which they come, so that the different types of wine and their prices are easily identifiable. Larger amphorae are used for transporting the wine and never for serving it.

Most wine contains vine and grape debris and is often strained before serving, though not always. The proprietors often adds herbs, honey, or even bits of dough to the wine, especially third-tier wine on the verge of becoming vinegar.

Wine at The Trireme is categorized by "tiers." First-tier wine is the best and most expensive, while second-tier wine is the second best and moderately priced. Third-tier wine is the cheapest and of the lowest quality.

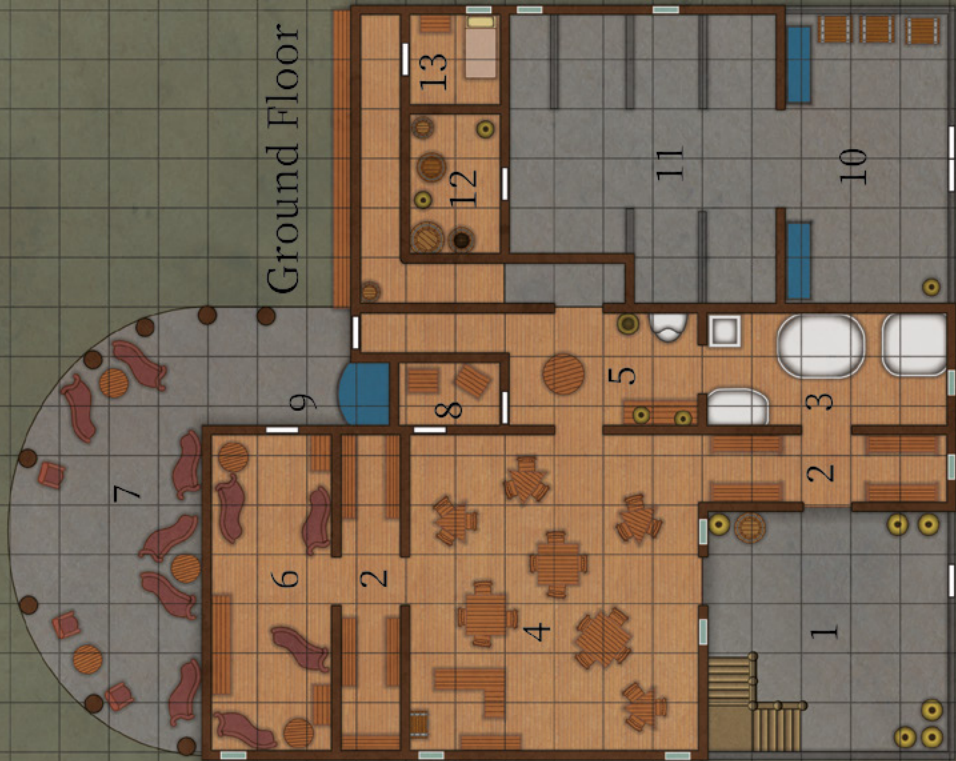
THE TRIREME

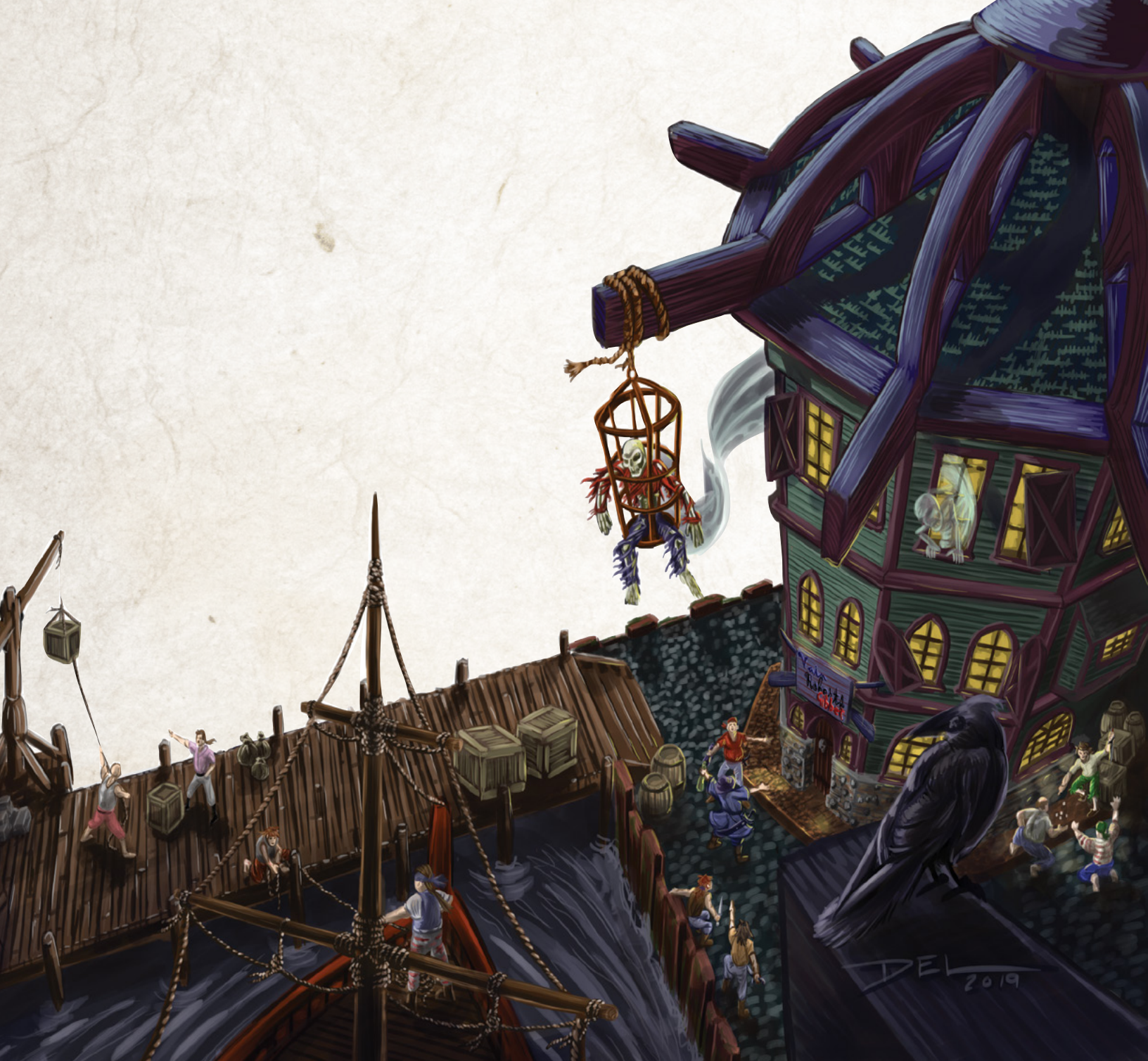
1 Square - 5 Feet

Second Floor



Ground Floor





VAIN ROBERT'S GIBBET

Most nights, one can find all manner of sailors in the dock-side pub known as Vain Robert's Gibbet, named after the pirate whose body was strung from the eponymous gibbet just outside the pub's front entrance. This is a loud, seedy establishment catering to the lowest common denominator. Those who let their guard down during their visit quickly become the predator's prey, while those who back

their words with sufficiently impressive action get begrudgingly accepted into the pub's violent, dog-eat-dog microcosm. On the surface, the Gibbet seems to be a smuggler's outlet for stolen goods and property, with its owner, Elisabeth Talbot, leading the fencing ring.

In truth, the Gibbet is actually much more than it appears: It is home to a unit of elite seafarers dedicated to eradicating a growing evil out in the ocean's farthest reaches, deep below its surface.

BACKGROUND

Fifty years before the pub was built, Vain Robert — the dread pirate of the seven seas, the scourge of common decency, and the terror of the 10 tides — was hung by his neck for crimes committed. He swung from the rope until he was good and dead. It took him two days to die, they say. He supposedly had a bull's neck, thick with tendons and muscles that were impossible to snap even under his own formidable body weight. Two days of hanging there, and he eventually asphyxiated, though not for lack of trying. The story goes that he fell asleep and inadvertently let his muscles relax. When the physicians confirmed the man indeed breathed no more, the city militia wrapped his body in iron chains and hoops, dragged him through the city streets to the docks, and strung him up from a gibbet where he dangled until the ravens picked every scrap of flesh from his bones. He was a warning to others, visible to all ships entering the harbor: Do not even consider following in Vain Robert's wake or you will suffer the same fate.

Nearly six months to the day of Vain Robert's hanging, the dock wardens arrived to cut down his bones and give them a proper burial at sea (the man may have been an extraordinary scoundrel, but he was also a child of Mother Ocean). The pirate's shade materialized out of thin air, decrying his fate and commanding that they leave his bones alone. He also vowed to get revenge, come hell or high water. The dock wardens fled. Afterward, no one had the courage to risk their immortal souls by retrieving Robert's bones.

Late at night, sailors could hear Robert's groans and his chains clanging all the way out past the harbor walls, so the stories say. On nights when the fog rose so thick that it blinded men, captains used the shade's agony to guide them into port. Some even claimed Robert's old ship, the Lady Killer, which had been scuttled after his hanging in accordance with the law, patrolled the sea beyond the harbor walls, preying on those who participated in Robert's capture with blazing ghostly catapult and harpoon. Finally, the harbormaster hired a famous cleric from a neighboring city to at last exorcise the pirate's ghost. The pirate's memory was turning the docks into a ghost town, driving away privateers and trade ships alike. Even the pirates avoided the docks. The cleric, whom the stories name Harold the Sin-Eater, wrangled with the shade over the course of two weeks before he finally banished it to hell. The grateful harbormaster took up a collection amounting to 10,000 gp and paid the man off. From that day onward, the docks were no longer haunted. Vain Robert was gone for good, it seemed.

Naturally, no one knows if any of the story is remotely true beyond the fact that the pirate was hanged and his body displayed from the gibbet. Nonetheless, the gibbet has stood for 50 years, and none among the harbormaster, the dock wardens, or the local residents have felt inclined to tear it down. Because dock space is at a premium, the lot on which the gibbet stood was eventually purchased by the grain merchant's guild. They built a tall silo to store incoming and outgoing grain, though they left the gibbet intact. A decade ago, the grain merchant's guild collapsed in the aftermath of a trade war with another city, and the silo was abandoned. Elisabeth Talbot purchased it from the man whose name appeared on the lease — for a pittance, actually — and converted it into a popular dockside pub frequented by sailors. Despite being an extremely low-class establishment, the pub offers a very good place to go for information, as someone there is always bound to be “in the know” (albeit only insofar as said information concerns the docks, trade, or the high seas).

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Vain Robert's Gibbet is owned and operated by **Elisbeth Talbot**, a capable ex-navy captain who, for all intents and appearances, runs a large fencing operation out of the pub's third floor. She also lives on the third floor along with her twin daughters **Emma** and **Erin Talbot**. She frequently lets her mysterious and deadly friends — called the **Sea Dogs** by those in the know — stay there when they need a place. Three serving maids work in the pub's common room, except during midweek when business is slow.

ELISBETH TALBOT

In her youth, Elisabeth Talbot was the proverbial “terror of the high seas.” A merchant, a privateer, and pirate, Elisabeth is a keen negotiator, a savvy diplomat, and a skillful swordswoman. Every sailor worth his salt in this region knows her name. Those who do not soon regret the oversight, for in her pub — Vain Robert's Gibbet — all manner of information can be obtained, and all manner of goods can be fenced through her copious contacts.

Standing just under 5 feet tall in her stocking feet, Elisabeth prefers to wear high-heeled, knee-high boots to give herself more stature and, by virtue, more authority. Her black hair, thick with natural curls, hangs down her back to her waist. Her eyes are brown. While not a beauty queen, she is certainly not uncomely, especially when compared to the courtesans working the common room each night (Elisabeth, at least, still has a full complement of teeth). She favors puffy silk shirts and tight, thigh-hugging pantaloons. On most nights, she is visibly unarmed, but she straps on a rapier and a couple of hand crossbows as a warning if patrons become too rowdy or obnoxious. Should a situation get utterly out of control in the pub, she feels no reticence using said weapons ... as many sailors have learned to their detriment. Gold bangles jangle around her wrists, and numerous gold hoop earrings swing from each ear. All she really needs to complete the quintessential pirate's image is an eyepatch and a peg leg. She even has a parrot — a late one nailed to the quarterdeck wall with its equally late owner's hook. Both serve as a signal to patrons, human and fowl alike, not to get fresh with the proprietor.

Elisabeth's background is typical for the town. Her father was a sailor and her mother worked in the dockside warehouses hauling cargo. She was a solid woman, stronger than the men with whom she worked, but her father liked his women husky — and bawdy. The city had never seen the likes of Helen before. Curses flew from her lips in steady, unending streams of pure vitriol capable of shaming the foulest, most unrepentant criminals into redfaced embarrassment. Tall tales of ribald derring-do, both personal and secondhand hearsay, put many a fireside bard into early retirement. To Elisabeth's father, it was a match made in heaven. He was one of those immensely large human giants who stood well over seven feet tall. Like his wife, he enjoyed the courser side of life, though he was gentle in his own way. For instance, he would never knowingly hurt another man through deed or word unless he himself was slandered or injured first. When his hackles were raised, however, the entire dock district knew better than to get in his way. It came as a tremendous shock then when Elisabeth's mother announced her pregnancy. Who would have thought those two had parenting in them? Well, they did, and Elisabeth, despite being raised a dock brat, grew into an articulate, intelligent woman.

Having spent her entire childhood on the docks, Elisabeth learned everything she could about seafaring from the sailors, the shipwrights, the carpenters, and the sail makers. On her 12th birthday, she signed on with Captain Elijah Hood, a privateer in the king's employ famous for repeatedly routing the empire's enemies and stealing their bullion. Like every other dock brat who dreamt

of someday captaining her own ship, she lied about her age and everyone knew it. No matter, Hood took her on and sent her straight to the ship's kitchen. She expected no less. Years passed, and she survived (a feat in and of itself, when the average lifespan of an apprentice shipman was two years). Not only that, she excelled, becoming a boatswain by her 18th year.

Ten more years on the high seas, and Elisabeth became the captain of the HMS Fancy Merchant, a dilapidated wreck with more battles than most ships her age. Elisabeth bought the ship and her letters of marque for next to nothing from Walter Silverhand, its aging and infirm captain. Within six months, she had the ship back in excellent condition and managed to hire a relatively capable crew. Her second-in-command was a wickedly scarred, heavily tattooed half-orc from the east named Sugo Irondirk. Where Elisabeth tempered her anger with reason, he fueled his with hatred and loathing for everyone around him. Yet he was an excellent first mate, able to keep the men in line with a glance or well-timed sneer. He served his captain well. She learned to see past his seemingly unapologetic evil exterior, finding an iron-willed, bitterly determined man who managed to find the strength to survive the genocide wrought against his people by an enemy empire. As Elisabeth grew closer to Sugo, she coaxed out a less hateful side of him. He, on the other hand, taught her the virtue of backing her words with force — not indiscriminately, but strategically. Reason rarely works with the pathologically unreasonable, and so one must often resort to calculated violence to make an impression. Together, they ran a tight ship and ruled the high seas for almost a decade, running down the enemies of the empire and defeating pirates at every turn (sometimes becoming pirates themselves). Their personalities complemented one another well, balancing the two different extremes they leaned toward. In the end, while not becoming lovers exactly, they were best friends and, to hear some tell it, soulmates despite their refusal to commit fully to a relationship.

Elisabeth became pregnant with Sugo's twin girls two months before he fell overboard and disappeared from her life. More distraught than she believed could be possible, she sold the HMS Fancy Merchant and her crew's work papers to a rival captain in the royal navy and retired to land. She bought an old grain silo — with the sole distinction of sitting on the spot where the corpse of Vain Robert was strung from a gibbet — and turned it into a pub. The girls were born, and Elisabeth told no one who their father was because in the end it never really mattered. Besides, it was no one's business.

While not entirely suited to a boring land-locked lifestyle, she has managed to get by. Fortunately, the regional governor came to her two years ago with an offer that made her life more interesting: Lead a group of ex-pirates, rangers, and rogues who informally call themselves the Sea Dogs and who are dedicated to tracking down the minions of the decidedly evil Witch-Queen of Hell Deep. She mostly coordinates the group's activities, though every occasionally she joins them on missions. She leaves her children with their grandparents, who retired to a quiet life in the aristocratic ward (much to the aristocrats' horror) using monies given to them by their daughter. As Elisabeth learns more about the Witch-Queen, an abiding sense of dread grows deeper within her, making her unusually quiet and morose.

EMMA & ERIN TALBOT

Elisabeth's twin daughters are six years old. While they share the same features, they could not possibly be more dissimilar in temperament. Emma is quiet and shy; Erin is obnoxious and needs constant attention. Of the two, Emma is more intelligent and cunning; yet because Erin is always the center of attention, she gets in trouble the most (usually as the result of Emma's pranks, some of which are incredibly clever). Both girls have lustrous black hair and eyes, taking after their mother. The rest they inherited from their father, unfortunately. They don't have his surly disposition, or at least it has not yet appeared.

THE SEA DOGS

Many years ago, the earth many months out of port rocked. Tsunamis formed, laying waste to all naval traffic in the region; the weather turned foul and black and remained so for almost a full year. No ships could get near the 1,000-square-mile area without attracting giant, mutated sea creatures that promptly capsized and swallowed the ships whole. Sailors dubbed this area the Black Sea and updated their maps with the notation, "Here be certain death."

Eventually, the Black Sea calmed. The weather returned to normal, the constant earthquakes and subsequent tsunamis ceased altogether, and the alien creatures inhabiting the region disappeared. It is widely thought that the famous privateer Jeremiah Blake led a small fleet to the eye of the storm and put its source, the Witch-Queen of Hell Deep, permanently to rest. She is stirring once again, however. Her formerly vast and glorious aquatic empire is rebuilding, reclaiming the miles-deep canyon on the ocean floor where their capital city, Martyr's Rest, was originally built. The king, fearful of the Witch-Queen's wrath and her growing might, commissioned the formation of 16 elite units of sailors, rogues, and soldiers to intercept her minions at every turn, to sabotage her efforts at expansion and rebuilding, and generally to make life very difficult for her and her people. The units are collectively known as "The Sea Dogs," its members coming from all strata of seafarer society.

The unit under Elisabeth Talbot's control is the smallest, but also the best. Because the Witch-Queen's minions are expert infiltrators, Elisabeth's Sea Dogs operate in absolute secrecy and undercover, some working as pirates, others for the royal navy, and yet others as privateers. When they get furlough, they come to the Gibbet to report to her and receive new orders. Many patrons who have obviously noticed the comings and goings to and from the third floor think the woman and her "friends" are black marketeers fencing stolen goods. Elisabeth does not dissuade such rumors, as they keep people from guessing the Dogs' true purpose. If word reaches those minions whom they are hunting (and those still unrevealed to them), then the Dogs lose their advantage in the shadow war against the Witch-Queen. In fact, Elisabeth does earn part of the unit's operating expenses by fencing goods, though truth be told she finds the practice distasteful and dishonorable. The regional governor knows of the Dogs' mission, and so lets her black-market activities go unpunished. He understands as well as she does the need for keeping their cover intact.

The members of her unit come primarily from the ranks of seafaring rangers and rogues. They tend to possess the knowledge and cunning required to wage a secret war, more so than fighters or spellcasters. Exceptions have been made in the past, and even today Elisabeth is not above making them if the candidate is worthy. Some of her men were once thought to be the worst of the worst, but her exceptional leadership and discipline has managed to keep them solidly in line and make them unquestionably loyal to her. Their fundamental nature has not changed, though, so when patrons encounter them in the pub downstairs, they get a clear berth.

This unit of Sea Dogs has two ships in its “fleet”: *The Dark Warrior* and *Queen Astrid*. Only one ship is used full-time, with the other in dry dock receiving repairs and improvements. Both ships operate under the pretense of being privateers, with letters of marque allowing them to engage the kingdom’s enemies (which is mostly true — the ships are used exclusively in the Dogs’ war against Hell Deep, though they can be used against the kingdom’s more conventional enemies should the need arise).

SERVING MAIDS

Three girls work the common room, serving ale and other alcohol and the occasional bowl of taupe-colored fish stew. They are all local, having grown up on the docks, and are not strangers to the gruff, rough demeanor most sailors exhibit. Anyone whose hand strays is prone to having it pinned to the table with a razor-sharp dagger swiftly drawn from a girl’s bodice laces. The serving maids are savvy enough to know when the sailors are just being themselves and when they are really being lecherous, so most of the banter directed at the girls is tolerated, unless it comes from outlanders, obvious land-lovers, or both.

Men, especially inebriated men, think that buying drinks for the girls will earn their favor; they could not be more wrong. Yet Elisabeth gives the girls 30% of the price of drinks bought for them as a tip. As such, the girls are more than happy to take drinks — particularly expensive liquors, not ales — from generous patrons, watering them down with tea and honey so as not to get so drunk that they cannot work (which, of course, they never tell the patrons). When business is slight, the girls often resort to heavy flirting, stroking the men’s egos to ply as many drinks from them as possible to earn greater tips.

VAIN ROBERT’S GIBBET MENU

ALE & MEAD	COST
Forecastle Pilsner	1 cp
Forecastle Stout	1 cp
Gutochek’s Blood Mead	3 cp
Pegleg’s Lusty Mermaid Pale Ale	2 cp
Smuggler’s Gold	4 cp
Other Beverages	
Five Stanzas of Lust & Beauty	2 sp
Harrington’s 10-Year Whiskey	3 sp
Harrington’s 20-Year Whiskey	9 gp
Harrington’s 30-Year Whiskey	27 gp
One-Eyed George	5 sp
Spiced apple brandy	6 cp
The Queen’s White Bloomers	1 gp
FOOD	
Fish stew	1 cp
Bread, day old	1 cp
OTHER SERVICES	
Courtesan, low-ranking	3 sp
Message running	5 sp

PATRONS & POSSIBILITIES

The following table includes some interesting patrons and events to be found in Vain Robert’s Gibbet. Roll randomly or select one of the unique individuals to fill out the nightly clientele. Rumors can be sprinkled into conversations as needed.

1d6 Patron or Event

- A warrior stumbles into the tavern, his legs failing him as he falls into table after table, spilling drinks and annoying the other patrons. If helped, he says his name is **Roysh Shaw** and claims he was attacked by a group of ruffians at the dock. He asks for help stopping them, as they stole his favorite blade. Any characters who accompany him to docks find out the truth as he pushes them into the sea — to feed the sharks that follow him as pets.
- Captain Ikas Storn**, a retired pirate, is making a farewell visit through the bars of his past before he settles down in retirement. Unfortunately, a few of the bars remember his original visit — and the speed with which he ran out on them. But just recently, Captain Storn has been rethinking his retirement, at least for a while. He’s heard rumors about a lost treasure in the sea-serpent infested Skullridge Breakwaters; he just needs enterprising crewmembers to sail with him.
- An emaciated seaman dressed in dark leathers stands in the middle of the common room and announces loudly that this property now belongs to the infamous Gray Otter! He is met with gales of laughter from the sailors. They’ve all heard tales of the Gray Otter, but he’s mostly a mythical bogeyman used to scare the wee ones. Except the old sailor is indeed the first mate on the Gray Otter’s vessel, which even now is sliding into the harbor. Soon after, hordes of skeletal pirates burst into the bar, ready to stake their claim to the place.
- The beleaguered **Captain Cor Balt** and his crew sweep into the tavern and rush the bar. They demand food and drink as quickly as possible and bustle about the place with a growing sense of unease. Many look out the windows at the harbor where the *Helene’s Grace* floats at the dock. Every ripple in the waves brings a gasp from the assembled sailors. Something is following them, and they’ll need to move on quickly. Any who might want to go with them need to make up their minds — and settle their affairs — quickly.
- An old sailor named **Elijah** sips at his whiskey but is eager to tell his story. He sailed with the famed Captain Melvilic (may he rest peacefully under the waves in the belly of the leviathan) and has many stories to share of the Razor Coast and even the Reaping Sea.
- An assassin named **Kareon Blackblade** is on the run, wrongfully blamed for the death of an Alantyr family nobleman in Bargarsport. She is a capable killer, but knows she is overmatched by the men searching for her. She is looking for protection, a thought that until now would never have been an option. But strange times make strange bedfellows, and she is willing to throw her lot in with any adventurers powerful enough to keep her alive (although she’ll dish out as good as she gets to anyone who comes after her).



THE ESTABLISHMENT

Vain Robert's Gibbet is a three-story octagonal structure, the legacy of originally being a dockside grain silo. Windows are all shuttered and hollow, kept closed during all but the summer months to keep out the wind and chill drifting in from the harbor. Its slates and floorboards are severely weathered. The gibbet out front, with its jangling chains constantly swaying in the breeze, is well maintained since it represents the establishment's claim to fame. The pub's location right on the docks makes it the ideal place for sailors to visit when they get shore leave or some spare time. The clientele is therefore appropriately unpolished.

1. GIBBET AND CHAINS

This is a tall, inverted L-shaped pole and beam with chains dangling from it. Vain Robert the Pirate was strung up here after being hanged for his crimes as a warning to all who would follow in his footsteps. The gibbet and chains were placed here originally because incoming ships could see them from the harbor mouth. Nowadays, the harbor's break walls lie farther out, and so the gibbet is no longer visible until the ships drift in closer. During the winter months when the fog rises like a thick blanket of wool, Elisbeth hangs bright orange lanterns from the gibbet to make it easier for her patrons to find the pub. The lights also keep them from accidentally falling off the docks into the cold waters below, especially when they are drunk and doing the traditional, nightly wintertide pub crawl.

2. COMMON ROOM

The entire first floor is called the common room, but it is split into two parts: the ground floor and the quarterdeck. The ground floor is very large and crowded with numerous tables (most of which are nothing more than converted barrels), stools (again, converted barrels, albeit of a smaller variety), and chairs. Embedded in the south wall is a great hearth worthy of a king's parlor — the fire blazing within does an admirable job of warming the room, especially during the icy winter months. Stewpots hang from iron rods in the hearth's corners. When she can manage it, Elisbeth hires bards and troubadours to perform, giving them the prized hearthside spots. Her patrons tend to be a very rowdy bunch, so she won't begrudge the performers any concession. While the crowd is a tough one to please, those bards with the fortitude to withstand the verbal (and occasionally physical) abuse can make good coin from Elisbeth.

The walls of the common room are decorated with trophy fish (and a few other strange sea creatures), tattered nets, a bent trident or two, whaling spears, pieces of masts taken (supposedly) from famous ships, narwhale horns, and other similar "works of art" of interest solely to seafaring folks.

3. QUARTERDECK

The quarterdeck is the elevated section of the common room and is built four feet off the floor. A railing runs the length of it, terminating at each step. At the far west end, steep stairs climb up to the second level, which is popularly known as the Crow's Nest. As with the ground floor, tables and chairs crowd the quarterdeck. A plain door set in the short, waist-high wall supporting the floor opens into a hollow space beneath it, which is used strictly for storage. Spare ale barrels and goods are kept here.

4. ALE MAGAZINE

This section of the common room contains all the ale barrels, liquor bottles, and miscellaneous bric-a-brac (such as empty stewpots, flagons, wooden bowls and spoons, and so on). To the west of the big barrels is a wobbly table on which ingredients for the stew are prepared. One serving maid always works in the ale magazine, tapping barrels, making fresh stew, and generally keeping the patrons from swiping free samples.

The pub favorite — though not by consensus as much as by availability — is a brand of ale called Forecastle that is brought in on the weekly trade ships and brewed by a former naval captain whose distinguished service to the throne brought him much fame and fortune. Both varieties of the ale — the lighter, golden pilsner and the thicker, heartier stout — are always in stock. The other drinks are only intermittently available on any given night, depending on whether the ale merchants supplying the pub received any that week from their brewers. Gutochek's Blood Mead originates from a drow recipe and is made, as its name implies, with blood (though whose blood is unknown); it has a very dense, coppery flavor. Lusty Mermaid is popular, selling out faster than the others, as it is inexpensive and very easy to drink. In fact, one patron claims it is the "brew with the taste for food," because people who drink it get really hungry afterward. Smuggler's Gold is a rich ale, more expensive than the others and well worth the price according to its aficionados. The pub also offers a nice selection of liquors, but they cost much more than the ales. As such, only the well-to-do or those trying to make an impression by showing off tend to order them. The sailors patronizing the pub usually view people who order such fancy drinks to be "hoity-toity," land-loving bluebloods — or naval officers. Of course, if the drink is intended for a beautiful lady-friend, then all is forgiven.

VAIN ROBERT'S GIBBET

GROUND FLOOR

1 Square - 5 Feet



VAIN ROBERT'S GIBBET

CROW'S NEST

1 Square - 5 Feet



5. CROW'S NEST

The “second-floor” consists of nothing more than a balcony overlooking the common room. The great hearth opens onto it, providing light and warmth. The Crow’s Nest affords some privacy since the majority of the patrons prefer the ground floor. As such, the majority of the courtesans ply their trade up here when not plying it at the nearby inns.

6. LADDER

At the northeastern end of the Crow’s Nest, this flimsy wooden ladder ascends to the third floor through a narrow trapdoor in the ceiling. Most times, the ladder is raised, and the trapdoor shut to prevent access to the third floor. The average patron is categorically not welcome up there, so those who get the idea in their heads to climb the ladder find themselves tossed over the railing by those patrons in the know.

7. POKER DOGS’ QUARTERS

This open space used to serve as spare storage, but in recent years it has been converted into a gambling den affectionately called the Poker Dogs’ Quarters. Two octagonal poker tables and their chairs are placed here. On most nights, pipe-smoking gamblers, all close friends of Elisabeth Talbot, occupy at least one of the tables. Uninvited guests who poke their heads up through the trapdoor in the floor get a swift kick and a stern warning: “Piss off and die, and we bloody well mean it, you sodding stupid bastard!” or something similar. The wide shuttered window in the northeastern wall also has a pulley, a winch, and three stories’ worth of thick rope, all of which are used for hauling furniture and other goods up from outside.

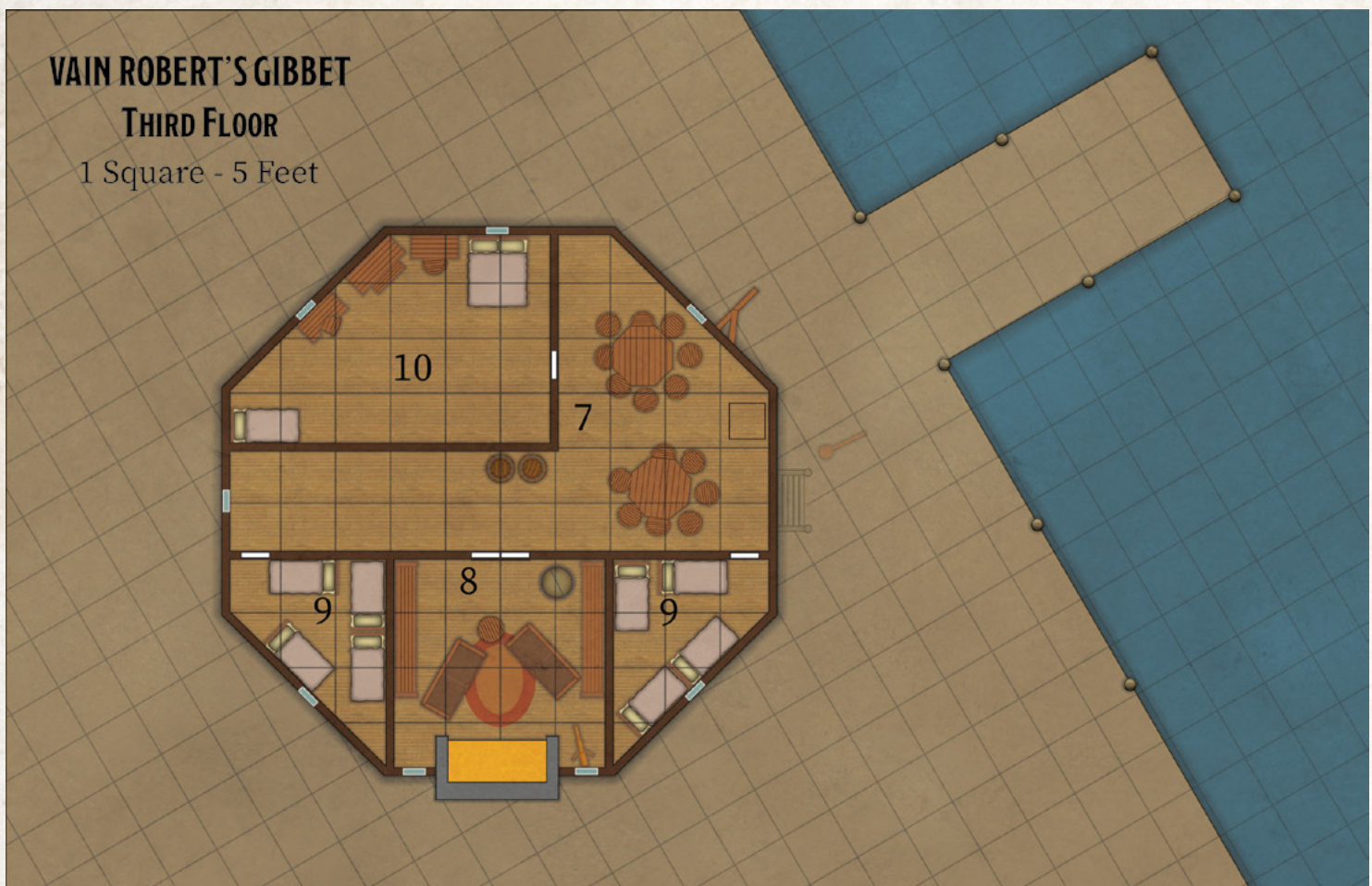
8. HEARTH ROOM

This is a very comfortable room. Expensive embroidered rugs cover the floors. Fancy tapestries adorn its walls. The furniture is very opulent, made from exotic hardwoods, stained leathers riveted with polished brass tacks, and generously cushioned. Tall bookshelves stand on the east and west sides of the room, while a great hearth occupies the southern wall. Books, scrolls, maps, brass compasses, an ancient telescope, and a globe displaying the known world may be found here.

Elisbeth uses the room as a private study and a meeting place when her Sea Dogs are in port. An ornate locked chest (which can be picked with thieves’ tools and a DC 13 Dexterity check) sits next to the hearth, containing 6,000 gp, 735 gp in jewelry, 120 gp in gems, a tarnished silver hook, a pearl-handled adamantite dagger, and 12 sheaves of encoded correspondence from the regional governor. Decoding these reveals the truth about Elisabeth and the Sea Dogs, and reveals details about their most recent covert operations.

9. SEA DOGS’ QUARTERS

These two rooms are empty except for four pairs of bunks beds, their associated linens, and chamber pots. The Sea Dogs use these rooms for their quarters when they are in port. Otherwise, they typically remain empty unless a close, trusted friend of Elisabeth’s comes for a visit.



10. TALBOT'S QUARTERS

Elisbeth Talbot and her twin daughters reside here. Like the Hearth Room, it is very well appointed. She sleeps in a comfortable double bed, while her girls share a nice pair of bunk beds. A wardrobe contains all their clothes. On one side of it is a very ornate, gold-trimmed mahogany writing desk and chair, while on the other side is a dressing table and silver mirror. Toys are scattered all over the floor, which is covered in a wall-to-wall rug custom tailored for the room. The relics from Elisbeth's days as captain of the HMS Fancy Merchant hang from the walls: a high-quality rapier, two dwarven handaxes, an elven stiletto, and her captain's hat and coat, the latter decorated with insignias of rank and medals for valor, courage, and conduct.

A lockbox beneath the bed contains 48 letters written on fine parchment with black and gold ink and scented with expensive cologne. The last letter is dated two months ago. In addition, the chest also contains an elegant gold medallion and chain worth 82 gp, emblazoned with the royal seal on one side and her family crest on the other.

GOODS & SERVICES

Vain Robert's Gibbet is a pub and nothing more. It serves ale, mead, and other liquors but really is not equipped for serving food or hiring out rooms. If patrons want something other than the pub's meager comestible fare, then they can go outside and purchase it from the vendors and hawkers roaming the docks. Elisbeth allows some courtesans to work in the pub, collecting 70% of their take in exchange for use of the Crow's Nest and a warm place from which to work (walking the docks during most seasons can be very uncomfortable — and dangerous — to say the least). Higher-class courtesans would not be caught dead in the establishment, so patrons must go out and find them.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

The following ideas can be used as seeds for adventures set in or around Vain Robert's Gibbet:

The Witch-Queen's Wrath: One night while the adventurers are in the Gibbet, someone reports hearing muffled thumps coming from the third floor. Elisbeth and her "friends" have been gone for the past week, with only three remaining behind to watch over the tavern (her children were sent to their grandparents' house across town). Upon investigating, the trapdoor entrance leading to the third floor is sealed with magic and the men stationed upstairs unresponsive. Should anyone manage to get in (perhaps through a window from the roof), they find a minion of the Witch-Queen named Razorfin Jackspike performing a horrid ritual of sacrifice on the last surviving Sea Dog. The priest intends to summon doppelgangers to replace the men. The other two Sea Dogs have already been eviscerated by the proto-doppelgangers clawing their way from the men's chest cavities as the adventurers arrive. Can they put a stop to Jackspike or will they become victims of his infernal magic?

The Reaping Spirit: The latest shipment of Gutochek's Blood Mead arrives infected with a nefarious fungus known as reaper moss. Everyone in the pub who drinks the mead risks death. The victims are not an everyday ordinary sort of dead, however. Rather, their corpses slip into a kind of ice-cold torpor and their spirits become disassociated from them. In essence, they become ghosts. In the incorporeal world the ghosts now inhabit, the shade of Vain Robert still exists and still craves vengeance. Once he discovers the new ghosts, he stops at nothing to eradicate them, feeding on their souls (subsequently killing them for good) in order to gain more spiritual might. When Vain Robert feeds on at least five souls, he manifests in the corporeal world and causes untold havoc. Reaper ghosts (those created by the reaper moss) are bound to the area immediately within 300 yards in all directions of the pub.

Murder in the Air: The harbormaster comes to the tavern to confer with Elisbeth Talbot about the fencing of smuggled goods. Ten dock wardens — burly, bull-necked young men eager for a fight — accompany him. During his conversation with Elisbeth in the Crow's Nest, a bolt of blue flame materializes out of thin air and strikes the man dead. The chief dock warden, Gregor Zurdanov, orders the pub's doors sealed. No one may leave until he and his nine thugs find the murderer. If this means cracking a few heads in the process, then they are more than happy to do so. Their primary suspects are Elisbeth and her friends. In truth, Gregor hired a sorcerer named Jarlene Frostkell to kill the harbormaster that night so he could pin the crime on Elisbeth, whom he absolutely detests, and inherit the job. He wants more than anything to shut down her operation and hang her cold, dead corpse from the gibbet outside.

Taking out the Vermin: Wererats have built a nest in the storage space below the pub's Quarterdeck. Late at night, when the pub is empty and locked up tight, they come out to steal food (such as it is) and drink. Elisbeth has neither the time nor the energy to deal with the vermin, so she hires the adventurers to take care of them, through hook or crook, bribery, force, she does not care. She just wants them gone. None of her Sea Dogs are in port; otherwise, she would assign them to the relatively simple task. Making an enemy of the wererats could conceivably be very bad for business if their society in the city is fairly well developed and cohesive. Killing those living under the Gibbet could inadvertently start a small war.

APPENDIX: RUMORS

Need a few extra rumors to sprinkle into tavern conversations? The following rumors are good for any tavern the characters visit. Use them to spark new adventures, tailor them to fit your ongoing adventure, or simply offer them up as red herrings.

d20	Rumor
1	"You look an awful lot like someone who owes me gold."
2	"I saw someone disappear down that well on the south side of town. Went right over the stone rim and vanished. I looked for them, but not even a ripple in the water that I could see."
3	"I seen the man runnin' on the rooftops. He jumped ... and then just kept going into the sky over the trees. He's a demon, I tell ya!"
4	"The barman waters down the wines here. And puts vinegar in the drinks of those who stiff him one too many times."
5	"Thar's a bounty hunter in town lookin' for someone looks just like you."
6	"You go out ta the woods under that full moon, and you'll see that tower just appear. I was out there with mah dogs and they ran right into the dark. I lost my wineskin, too!"
7	"I hear tell of a monster livin' under the old Tamerkel Bridge down on the water. Keep away from that ol' bridge if ya wants to keep on livin'"
8	"Thieves are working the room tonight. I think one just took your gold."
9	"It's the wrens during the day going crazy. And the bats at night. You can see them flying in wide gyres over the cemetery."
10	"The Marstel family farm burned down last full moon. And the Gillluts farm on the moon before that. We all better watch out in three days."
11	"Someone keeps lookin' in the windows round town. You can just see the eyes. Like burning gold, they are, and wide. They just stare and stare until you blink and then they're gone."
12	"There's a secret altar in the church's basement. That greedy holy man don't want you to know about it, but I seen it with my own eyes. It's black rock and bleeds when it gets dark."
13	"You see the symbols carved into the trees? That cult we got rid of years ago is back, I tell you."
14	"Cold is coming, I can feel it in my bones. Gonna be a bad one. Cold so bad your spit'll freeze on your lips."
15	"You hear those howls? Those ain't wolves. Somethin' else is walkin' the hills tonight."
16	"I just came for the music, my friends. I just can't get enough of it. Makes me want to dance!"
17	"If you pay for the round, I'll tell you what you need to know. And a few things you won't want to hear."
18	"I seen the little people dancing down in the mushrooms the other day. But I swear, I thought they had that missing girl with them. And then I woke up. Don't remember fallin' asleep in the woods, though."
19	"Me and Beryllic saw the Gray Man walking up the hill through the ruined mausoleums. He was going slow, so me and Beryllic took off running. Only ... Beryllic never made it home."
20	"Someone's putting up those posters for that circus, but no one ever sees them."



THE BOOK OF **Taverns** VOLUME ONE

Your heroes are going to be stopping at a tavern sometime, right? All adventurers need a drink every once in a while, and with this book it's not hard to turn a pint of the local ale into a memorable gaming experience! Book of Taverns One gives you a choice of two exciting places to stay the night, find adventure, and (let's face it) probably burn the place down. Both of these taverns offer NPCs for the characters to interact with (or slay), a diverting history, and convenient descriptions, as well as adventure hooks that will be so irresistible to the greedy characters that the clerics and paladins will have no choice but to tag along like always.

The Trireme is a quiet tavern just outside of town, dedicated to philosophical debates, epicurean delights, and a private drinking room. Local philosophers are welcomed here as long as they can pay their tab, and visitors to the tavern can expect to be embroiled in some lively debate as to the nature of the world and the soul. Try the pecan cakes, but save some money for the extensive wine list. Or burn the place down - it's always an option.

Vain Robert's Gibbet is a scurvy dive bar on the docks. Those passing by usually speed their steps, for only the lowest class of sailors stop in for a drink here. The tavern keeper doesn't mind at all, since Vain Robert's Gibbet is only the front for a coven of elite seafarers who battle a growing evil out in the depths of the sea...

