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VILLAGE BACKDROP: COLDWATER



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VILLAGE BACKDROP: COLDWATER

Widely thought of as a haven for smugglers and other miscreants, rumours swirl as thickly about Coldwater as the persistent sea fogs that sometimes blanket the place for days at a time. Set at the head of a muddy cliff top path, Coldwater is an isolated, dismal place. Its folk are sullen, ugly people and even the village's ruler hates the place. For all that, Coldwater can be a place of opportunity and adventure. Sometimes, pirates drop anchor off the coast to deal with the local smugglers while rumours of a sunken stair and a nearby cove of ill aspect bring a steady stream of adventurers to the village.

Village Backdrop: Coldwater is designed for use with the 5th edition of the world's most popular roleplaying game.

CREDITS

Design: Creighton Broadhurst

Development: Creighton Broadhurst

Art: William McAusland and Matt Morrow. Some artwork copyright William McAusland, used with permission.

Cartography: Tommi Salama

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gatekeeper@ragingswan.com

COLDWATER AT A GLANCE

An isolated place, perched upon an inhospitable coast at the head of a muddy coastal path, Coldwater is not an easy, or pleasant, place to visit. The village huddles at the mouth of a steep-sided valley leading down to the sea. Here, the seabed quickly drops away and the waters are deep, dark and cold.

Widely thought of as a haven for smugglers and other miscreants, rumours swirl as thickly about the village as the persistent sea fogs that sometimes blanket the place for days at a time. Other rumours—whispered in taprooms up and down the coast—speak of darker things: of unwholesome practises carried out in worship of some ancient, depraved power, of travellers going missing near the village and of an ancient set of steps buried at the base of nearby cliffs and revealed only at particularly low tides.

Whatever the truth, Coldwater's folk are sullen, distrustful of outsiders and some are said to suffer from horrible deformities. Even the village's ruler—the aged Elina Vuolle—hates the place and leaves its folk to fend for themselves. Two families dominate day-to-day life: the Eerolas and the Purhos. Trapped in a low-grade, but vicious, family feud the two families subtly work against one another and use the other villagers as their pawns.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Ruler Elina Vuolle
Government Overlord
Population 188 (109 humans, 59 deformed humans, 18 half-orcs, 1 gnome, 1 half-elf)
Alignments CN, N, NE
Languages Common, Orc
Resources & Industry Smuggling, fishing

NOTABLE FOLK

Most of the population are nothing more than hardworking peasants. A few, however, are of interest to adventurers:

Armas Hujanen (location 5; LE male half-elf wizard [transmuter] 5) Armas has come to Coldwater to study the high incidence of deformity in the populace.
Atro Purho (location 8; N male deformed human **spy**) Young and dynamic, Atro has an implacable hatred for the Eerolas blaming them for his own ill fortunes.
Elina Vuolle (location 1; LN female human **mage**) Elina hates Coldwater (and her lot).
Sauli Eerola (location 4; NE male **veteran**) Patriarch of the Eerola family, Sauli once served as a soldier but now runs the family “shipping” business.
Uzlen Itkonen (location 3; N female half-orc **tribal warrior**) Uzlen runs the local shipbuilding business and tries to stay out of the Eerola's and Purho's feuding as much as possible.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Most of Coldwater comprises peasant homes. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

1. **Vuolle Manor:** Perched on the side of the valley, Vuolle Manor overlooks the village. Its battlemented walls give spectacular views of the surrounds.
2. **Waterside:** The harbour is the busiest—and smelliest—place in the village. Here, a gallimaufry of fishing vessels and small merchant craft jostle for berths.
3. **Itkonen's:** Here, Uzlen Itkonen builds and repairs fishing vessels and small merchant craft. The dockyard is always busy.
4. **Sauli's Home:** Here dwells the patriarch of the Eerola family.
5. **Crooked House:** This partially sunken building is the home of Armas Hujanen. Part of the cellar's foundations has collapsed, giving the house its name.
6. **Chapel of the Mistress:** Dedicated to Serat (the uncaring Mistress of Storms) this small chapel is one of the most substantial buildings in the village. On misty nights its bells toll endlessly to guide home those still out on the water.
7. **The Stoopd Man:** Coldwater's only inn and tavern, the Stoopd Man is a bastion of cheap alcohol, surly service and draughty, flea-infested accommodation.
8. **Atro's Home:** Atro Purho dwells in this large, ramshackle building. Extensive cellars intersect with a sea cave; here much of the Purho's clandestine business is conducted.
9. **Devil's Cove:** Strange goings on and several disappearances conspire to keep the populace away from this nearby cove.
10. **The Sunken Stair:** Only exposed at particularly low tides, these stairs lead to a chamber containing a seemingly unopenable pair of stone doors.

DEFORMED VILLAGERS

Deformed creatures have been horribly altered by their proximity to a place of power dedicated to the demon lord of deformity, Dagon. These blasphemous aberrations often worship that fell power, and become deformed as a result, but creatures can also unknowingly become deformed.

Deformed creatures are gain both deformities that can affect their physical or mental attributes. For example, a creature could become stronger, but more dim-witted, or could gain the ability to see in the dark (but be dazzled in bright sunlight and so on).

Affected individuals also suffer cosmetic deformities that mark them as different from their normal kin. These could include thick hair growth over much of its body, a swelling of the limbs, uncontrollable drool and so on.

VILLAGE LORE

A PC may know something about Coldwater, its history and surrounds. A PC making a DC 10 Intelligence check knows one or more pieces of information from the list below. A successful check gains all the information revealed by a lesser check.

DC 10: Coldwater is a dump—the place is a dismal cesspit of the worst sort. The people are sullen and tremendously ugly; there is no reason to go there.

DC 15: The folk of Coldwater are of the worst moral fibre. Many are smugglers and rumours of an evil cult based in the village refuse to die.

DC 20: A nearby cove has a strange feature buried in its cliffs—a sunken staircase that only becomes visible at particularly low tides.

VILLAGERS

Appearance Dark of hair and pale of skin, many of the villagers appear to be unwell in a general, non-descript way. Some are horribly disfigured.

Dress Villagers wear loose, ill-fitting woollen or leather clothes suited to their trade.

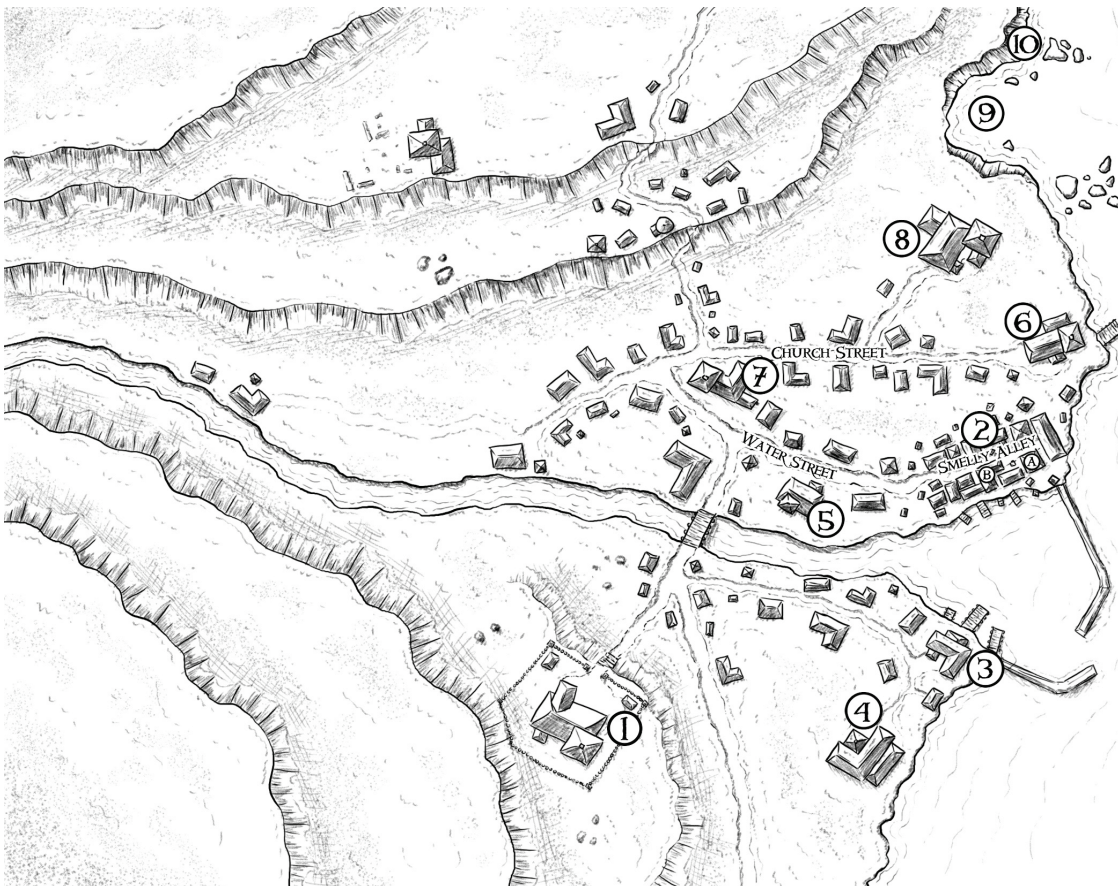
Nomenclature *male* Arvo, Ilari, Kaarlo, Valto, Viljo; *female* Aila, Eeva, Helmi, Pia, Ulla; *family* Eerola, Itkonen, Purho, Varala.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

While in Coldwater, a PC may hear one or more rumours. A PC making a DC 10 Charisma check learns one rumour from the table below. A PC exceeding this check learns an additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10.

D6	RUMOUR
1	Unguessable things lurk in the waters of Devil Cove. Strange figures have been seen moving in the mists and people have gone missing there.
2*	Armas Hujanen is digging in his cellar for something best left buried. He dug so deep, his house almost collapsed!
3	The Eerola and the Purho hate each other; the two families have been implacable foes for generations.
4	Elina Vuolle has nothing but disdain for Coldwater and its folk. She's tried to sell it—and her title—several times.
5	A mysterious set of stairs pierces the cliffs of Devil Cove; they are only accessible at particularly low tides.
6*	Many of the Purho are horribly disfigured; they take a perverse pleasure in their appearance and often drown healthy babies born into the family.

*False rumour



NOTABLE LOCATIONS

1: VUOLLE MANOR

Overlooking the village proper, this looming edifice is part home and part redoubt. Built long ago by Einar Vuolle—a black-hearted, vicious man—the so-called manor house is heavily fortified. Extensive cellars provide access to certain hidden sea caves and it was here Einar carried out his sinister trade—for as well as a sideline in piracy and smuggling, Einar dabbled in slavery and human trafficking.

Over the years, Einar's line has dwindled. Now, along with her servants and a handful of guards only the aged Elina Vuolle (LN female human **mage**) dwells here. The wife of Jaska Vuolle, who disappeared nine years ago and is now presumed dead, Elina married into the family at an early age. She hates life in Coldwater and has tried to sell her home and title several times. However, few people with the necessary funds actually want to live in Coldwater, and one trip around the village has put off all potential buyers thus far.

The Vuolle's fortunes have waned since Jaska disappeared. Elina yet possesses her husband's *flame tongue longsword*—a family relic—and a *staff of fire* of unknown provenance recovered from the manor's deep cellars. She has no attachment to the sword, but would prefer to keep the staff unless selling it means she can escape Coldwater for good.

2: WATERSIDE

The mercantile heart of the village, the harbour is always busy. Here, fishing boats jostle for position on the docks alongside merchantmen hailing from distant ports and other small craft of less obvious purpose and intent.

A small line of shops stands hard upon the docks along the aptly named Smelly Alley. Here one can find fresh or salted fish, nautical supplies and so on. Several businesses also have rowboats and suchlike for hire (1 gp/day)—and can even provide a brawny rower for the right price (2 sp/day).

- **Holg's Locker (2A):** This small shop abuts a large warehouse. Holg (NE male human rogue 3) is an old, foul-tempered man but he has a keen mind for business and has done well for himself—at least as well as anyone who has not yet left Coldwater—and his warehouse is bursting with goods (many of dubious origin). Holg keeps meticulous records of what he has in stock. No one is allowed to browse the teetering stacks of his warehouse, but he can often find what a customer seeks—given a day or two.
- **Addabar's (2B):** This small shop is home to the apothecary Addabar Erklen (NG male gnome bard 2) a gregarious, but slightly eccentric apothecary who settled in Coldwater after a serious misunderstanding involving an accidental poisoning in

nearby Languard. Addabar thinks there is something seriously wrong in the village, but is not brave enough to investigate; he suspects an evil cult is at work, and that they lair in Devil's Cove.

3: ITKONEN'S

The largest legitimate business in the village, this shipwright remains steadily busy. Repairing and maintaining the many watercraft the village relies on for both its legitimate and illegitimate trades forms a large part of Itkonen's trade. However, the shipyard is also often engaged in some larger project—perhaps for a merchant or privateer desirous of certain modifications to his vessel.

Owned by Uzlen Itkonen (N female half-orc **tribal warrior**), a hardworking, hard drinking middle-aged half-orc, the shipyard comprises its own private dockyard along with associated warehouses, offices and so on. The half-orc herself is somewhat of a local talking point. She has lived in the village for almost 20 years, and is widely assumed to have been a pirate before settling down. At any given time, she employs a small staff of between 4-8 skilled shipwrights (N human **commoner**) depending on the amount of work she has on. Uzlen normally has several small rowboats for sale (50 gp) or hire (1 gp/day).

4: SAULI'S HOME

This two-storey home is of much finer quality than its nearby brethren for the Eerola are a wealthy family, at least in relation to their neighbours. This large family has thrived over recent generations as the strange deformities afflicting their rival smugglers—the Purho—have become more pronounced. Led by the middle-aged Sauli Eerola (NE male human **veteran**), the family now also run operations in several nearby ports.

Sauli dreams of one day buying Coldwater and elevating himself to the nobility. His feud with the Purho, however, acts as a constant drain on his resources and this goal yet remains elusively beyond his reach.

5: CROOKED HOUSE

This house has a strange, slanted look to it, and the wing nearest the docks appears to have partially sunk into the ground. Two years ago, Armas Hujanen (LE male half-elf wizard [transmuter] 5) moved to Coldwater and purchased the house. Roughly six months later, the northern part of the building sunk several feet overnight causing great cracks in the masonry and hasty repairs to the shingled roof. The villagers now dub the place the "Crooked House" and rumours continue to swirl about the cause of the house's sudden partial collapse and the purpose of its mysterious resident.

6: CHAPEL OF THE MISTRESS

The only church in Coldwater, the Chapel of the Mistress is dedicated to Serat, Mistress of Storms (CN goddess of seas, storms and voyages). Staffed by but two clerics, Aune Laitnen (CN female human **priest**) and Irja Outila (CN female human **acolyte**), services here are well attended. The folk of Coldwater are superstitious and devout; unsurprisingly given that most of their livelihoods revolve around the sea. Burials take place at sea and so there is no graveyard at the chapel. However, it does have its own dock, where the clergy's sacred sloop is moored. A high bell tower—the tallest structure in the village—serves as an excellent lookout and storm watching post. When fog shrouds the village, the bells ring continuously until all the faithful out on the water have returned safely to port.

7: THE STOOPED MAN

Marked by a faded sign depicting a stooped cloaked figure carrying a heavy sack, the Stoopd Man is Coldwater's only tavern. The taproom is shadowy and smoky. All manner of nautical decorations—lobster pots, old harpoons, stuffed fish and so on—cover the walls. Old fishing nets hang from the ceiling's wooden beams. The whole place smells of smoke, cheap beer and sweat.

- **Food & Drink** meal (typically fish soup with bread, rolled seaweed stuffed with beans or spiced fish with parsnip and onion) 6 sp, ale 4 cp, wine (pitcher) 2 sp.
- **Accommodation** A standard room costs 1 sp a night. The room is draughty, probably has no lock on the door and is sparsely furnished.

Run by the middle-aged Arvo Eerola (N male **guard**) the Stoopd Man is always busy when the village's fishing vessels return to port. Many of his patrons pay their bills with the fruits of their labours, and thus he greatly values customers with actual coin.

SERAT

CN goddess of the sea, storms and voyages

Epithets: Mistress of Storms, the Uncaring

Symbol: A cresting wave

Favoured Weapon: Trident

Domain: Nature, Tempest

Holy Text: Book of Tides

Additional Notes: As wild and unpredictable as the sea, sailors, merchants and pirates alike placate Serat with glittering gifts to guarantee a safe voyage. Some believe Serat to be the physical embodiment of the sea while others believe she dwells in a glittering, crystal city far beneath the waves. During services, offerings are cast into the sea. Her priests are often shipwrights, navigators or sea captains.

At night, the Stoopd Man is busy for the simple reason there is nothing else to do in Coldwater (excepts smuggling) once darkness falls except staying at home to stare at one's hearth.

8: ATRO'S HOME

Perched dangerously closely to Devils' Cove this large, ramshackle house is the centre of the Purho's power. Atro Purho (N male deformed human **spy**) lives here with his wife Elena Purho (NE female deformed human **guard**) and their three daughters (CN female deformed human **commoner**).

Atro keeps a pack of five vicious dogs (N advanced deformed dog) to ensure his privacy and the dogs run wild throughout the home's fenced grounds. The house's cellars link Atro's home to a nearby sea cave in which the family store the goods they are either smuggling or storing for other unscrupulous individuals. At any one time, there are four or five of Atro's minions in the cellar guarding, cataloguing or packing his goods.

9: DEVIL'S COVE

Although relatively close to the village, Devil's Cove is shunned by the populace. Rumours of strange goings on and sinister figures in the mist serve to keep away all but the bravest (or maddest) explorers. Some who explore the cove do not return.

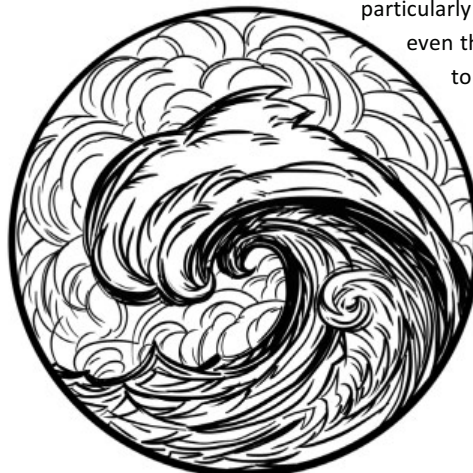
Devil's Cove is a barren place; a rocky, flotsam-strewn beach runs right up to lofty, precipitous and wind-blasted cliffs. No path runs down from the cliff tops to the beach far below. Most people who arrive in the cove do so by boat.

A pair of deformed **giant spiders** dwell in a cave buried deep in the cliffs; a narrow fissure in the rock links the cave to the surface.

10: THE SUNKEN STAIR

Although the stair's general location is well known among Coldwater's populace, few have ever seen them. Set in the wind-blasted headland of Devil's Cove they are only accessible during

particularly low tides—and even then, the tide returns to flood the stairs within an hour; thus, explorers must be quick.



LIFE IN COLDWATER

Life in Coldwater is dismal. The village's remote location and the physical deformities of many of its residents do not make it a happy place. Laughter or song is rarely heard within its bounds. Surprisingly, despite persistent rumours to the contrary, no cult of sinister intent operates in the village.

TRADE & INDUSTRY

Both Coldwater's legitimate and illegitimate businesses are focused on the water. Fishing accounts for much of its mercantile business; merchantmen call weekly to exchange barrels of salted fish for meat, flour and other staples. Coldwater's remote location also makes it a perfect smuggler's haven. Here, unscrupulous merchants (and the occasional pirate) unload their goods on moonless or fog-shrouded nights for sale on Ashlar's black market.

LAW & ORDER

Technically, Elina Vuolle rules Coldwater, but in practise as long as her interests are not interfered with she leaves the villagers much to themselves. Thus, the burden of law and order nominally falls upon the shoulders of Sauli Eerola and Atro Purho. Their competing interests make for some lively arguments between the two when agreeing suitable punishments for wrongdoers.

EVENTS

While the PCs are in Coldwater, one or more of the below events may occur. Choose or determine randomly:

D6	EVENT
1	A fistfight between members of the Eerola and Purho families breaks out in the street; bystanders stay well out of it; nothing more than a few broken bones results.
2	A thick mist rolls in from the sea. It could burn off by midday (50% chance), last all day (30% chance) or linger for 1d3 days (20% chance).
3	Armas Hujanen tries to hire a deformed villager to come to his home so he can examine him more closely. The villager refuses—violently and loudly.
4	A drunken villager loudly proclaims his plans to explore Devil's Cove. Several of his friends try to talk him out of it, but he is adamant. He subsequently goes missing.
5	A merchantman drops anchor. She carries several sealed crates marked for delivery to Armas Hujanen.
6	An adventuring group comes to explore the Sunken Stairs. The tides are not right and they soon leave.



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