

# HELLFROST LAND OF FIRE

• REALM GUIDE #23 •

## AL-KORSAR CITY OF CORSAIRS

Author & Layout: Paul Wade-Williams  
Editing: Hans Bothe  
Graphic Design: Robin Elliott

### Introduction

The southern coast of Al-Shirkuh is plagued by corsairs. Some of these pirates and smugglers are independent. Most are denizens of Al-Korsar, an infamous warren of villainy and scum that lies at the edge of the known world. Here, so the stories go, murder is commonplace, citizens are ruled by tyrannical corsair captains, and possessions kept safe only by guile and threats. Al-Korsar is indeed a city of pirates, but it is far from the decadent haunt of cruel rogues storytellers make it out to be. This supplement expands on material found in *Hellfrost: Land of Fire*.

### Social Hierarchy

While the early inhabitants of Jirja, the first corsair city, turned to piracy out of necessity, those who founded Al-Korsar did so out of choice. Founded as a nation where all men were equal, the dream has turned slightly sour, for as in the other great cities true wealth rests in the hands of a few. Unlike the other cities, though, social status has nothing to do with birthright, for in Al-Korsar the lowliest born urchin can rise to rule the city. Race, gender, and religion mean nothing in Al-Korsar—here a man's worth is judged solely by his willing to work and his individual achievements.

The *de facto* ruler is the Grand Admiral. An elected official holding office for life, he has similar status to that of an emir, though his power is curbed by a council. While he is judge and jury is legal matters, and laws he wishes to bring into being must first be approved by the council. Only a foolish grand admiral goes against his advisors, for as noted above his position is only for life.

The council is made up of ten corsair captains. As with the grand admiral, they too are elected. Whereas as councilors elect the city's ruler, the common people elect the councilors. Elections are held every five years. Any corsair captain (defined as anyone who owns a vessel used for the purposes of smuggling and piracy) may stand for office. The vote is a popularity contest, and only corsairs known to the inhabitants, who have proven themselves daring and possessed of leadership qualities, and, more importantly, who have brought the city wealth, have a hope of being elected. Most are clerics or mages, but this is not a requirement for office. Once elected, they hold the title Councilor-Captain for the duration of their term.

The traditional place on the social ladder held by nobles is taken up by corsair captains.

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## RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Al-Korsar.

\* **Bartering:** Few citizens have ready access to a hoard of coins. Heroes looking to sell war booty will often need to accept trade goods if they hope to strike any kind of deal. The GM should not demand the heroes keep a detailed list of their exact trade goods. A hero who receives 100 dinars of trade goods need only record "trade goods: 100 d" on his character sheet, leaving the exact nature of the goods flexible. He may then spend the trade goods as if it were coin in most realms. For convenience, every 5 dinars of trade goods weighs 2 pounds.

\* **Languages:** Native characters must take Sand-speech as their first language.

\* **Markets:** Despite its population, local craftsmen, and a steady stream of plunder brought back by the corsairs, many goods are hard to find in the markets. For the purposes of purchasing all goods except slaves, Al-Korsar is treated as a Village. With regard slaves, treat it as a City. Prices for all goods and services are 20% higher than normal.

\* **Native Characters:** Heroes born and raised in Al-Korsar must take Boating d4+.

\* **Noble Titles:** Traditional noble titles mean nothing in Al-Korsar. Visiting aristocrats may be treated cordially if friendly to the corsairs, but they do not benefit from the Noble Edge's +2 Charisma.

Native heroes who take the Noble Edge may elect to be a corsair captain. They have +2 Charisma, but only in Al-Korsar or among other corsairs. They do not have the Rich Edge for free (though it can be taken separately). Instead, they begin play with a dhow and five common sailors.

Noble titles equivalent to Knight through to Duke all equate to Captain. A member of the council holds the title Councilor-Captain, and is equivalent to a prince. The title High Admiral is equivalent to that of a king.

As with true nobility not all captains are equal, despite all holding the same title. Low ranking captains command a single vessel and have earned little reputation. As a captain grows in popularity and notoriety through his deeds, so he might attract other captains who wish to fly under his flag. Being beholden to another captain is a choice, not a necessity—it is a rare senior captain who threatens others into joining his corsair fleet.

While the subordinate is expected to obey his commander's orders and give 10% of his earnings to his superior, he remains sole commander of his personal ship and its crew and benefits from being part of a larger organization, being able to make of his superiors contacts and intelligence network.

Through this system of alliances, a senior captain grows in power, wealth, and status. Alliances can be bro-

ken, though an unwritten code governs when one may do so. For instance, ending an alliance after capturing a rich cargo but before paying the rightful share to your superior is tantamount to treason—few senior captains will trust such a lowly cur, assuming the traitor lives long enough to seek a new alliance.

The position of *mak-shabrum* is occupied by important clerics, mages, merchants, and corsair officers who, while not captains, have sufficient wealth and connections to warrant the position. First mates and navigators are most likely to occupy this stratum.

Though largely uneducated, serving corsairs form the bulk of the *shabrum* class. It is their efforts that bring the city its wealth and allow its continued survival. Being a corsair does not mean one will be invited to high-end social functions, of course—despite the respect they are shown they are still murderers and thieves, little better than snarling dogs, and likely just as riddled with fleas.

## Education

Education is not a right in Al-Korsar, nor is it especially prized. Few citizens have the inclination to find a teacher or the wealth to pay for classes. Illiteracy is the norm among the common people and not something to be ashamed of. Despite a lack of formal schooling, children pick up bits of Al-Korsar's folklore, history, and laws, as well as religion, from older family members.

Children enjoy around eight years of childhood. After this they are expected to help their family by working. The work is rarely physically demanding, but it is menial and often dirty, with very little reward. Those looking to learn a craft or become a corsair must find a master willing to accept them as an apprentice.

Although small and poorly attended, the city boasts a basic university, the University of Al-Korsar, for those with sufficient wealth who do not wish to take up the life of a corsair.

## Religion

Al-Korsar has no religious bias. Devoted and Faithful live and work side by side with no animosity, and many corsair crews are of mixed faith.

Upuaut, Karmelos, and Tamarni, in that order, are the most popular deities. Upuaut is honored as god of ships, wind, and receives praise from every Faithful citizen, even if he is not their patron—the city's survival depends on a steady influx of goods. Despite Upuaut being the city's patron, slavery is considered an acceptable practice. Each time a new grand admiral is elected the cult makes a token appeal for it to be abolished, knowing full well the request will be denied out of hand.

Although Sirsir (see *Realm Guide #5: The Southern Oceans*) has little love for pirates, many corsairs take

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him as their patron. While these corsairs will not sink an enemy ship if it can be avoided, they are no less bloodthirsty toward those who offer any resistance.

Karmelos is traditionally the god of soldiers. Among corsairs, he is offered prayers when a ship is spotted, on the off-chance the crew will make the foolish decision to fight rather than surrender. As such, he has few dedicated worshippers.

Tamarni is worshipped by common citizens in her aspect as goddess of the home, whereas corsairs favor her aspects of luck and stealth. Many corsair vessels have a ship's cat as a symbol of luck and a practical way of ridding the ship of rats and mice.

The other deities are not ignored, but their worship is restricted to a small part of society or reserved for specific events. For instance, worship of Apsu is largely restricted to fishermen, though prayers are made to ensure the springs on which the city relies do not dry up.

Corsairs especially tend to be superstitious. Even Devoted think twice about killing a bird while at sea or whistling while facing away from the direction of the prevailing winds is an ill omen. Killing the ship's cat, even accidentally, is guaranteed to see the perpetrator keel-hauled before being fed to the sharks.

## Military

Despite being a scourge on honest merchants, Al-Korsar has never had to weather an assault. Its remote location, coupled with the many stories of its murderous inhabitants' nautical prowess, has helped keep it safe from the Caliph and Sultan. Should the two great nations ever decide to cooperate Al-Korsar may be threatened, but that day is a long way off yet.

### ARMY

Al-Korsar has no standing army, for it does not seek to conquer, nor is it interested in occupying any other part of the island on which it stands. This is not to say it is defenseless in the face of enemy attack. Defending the walls are one medium infantry, three archer, and one artillerist companies. Any corsairs in the city should it come under attack by forces that have breached its naval defenses are required by law to help defend the walls.

The grand admiral, whose corsair days are curbed by his duties to the city (but who may still have subordinate captains serving him), is protected by the Black Scarves. Five squads strong, they comprise a mix of former corsairs and city guardsmen. Regardless of his personal faith, the law requires the grand admiral to have both a cleric and mage on his bodyguard.

### NAVY

Al-Korsar has two navies. The first is the fleets and ships of the corsair captains. All told, the corsairs can mus-

ter 160 ships, with a combined manpower of some 8,000 men, equating to around 17% of the total population.

Though the numbers sound impressive, lack of cooperation between rival captains and the sheer size of the ocean limits their effectiveness. Storytellers are prone to speak of great fleets of warships and galleys mounting black sails to impress their audiences, but few corsairs can afford to maintain large ships. Though it makes for a poor tale, many corsairs actually use dhows, booms, and jalibuts to ply their larcenous trade.

Corsair ships are often at sea for months on end. In order to combat enemy naval forces and bring rogue corsairs to heel, the city maintains a fleet of six light warships and ten baghlahs. Although under the command of the grand admiral, these vessels are never used for piracy.

Regardless of their social status, all children deemed capable are required by law to enlist with the city's small navy on their 12th birthday. For two years they learn the basics of handling a boat and the rigors of life at sea. Should an enemy fleet appear on the horizon, all adults are automatically conscripted into the navy, and onto whatever corsair ships are in harbor, for the duration of the emergency. Those not chosen to serve carry on their normal business.

## Law & Order

Ask a storyteller about Al-Korsar and he will tell you that the inhabitants murder each other in their sleep, steal from each other as a matter of habit, and are generally a depraved and wicked bunch. Al-Korsar has its fair share of crime, but the situation is no worse than in other cities, at least not within the walls.

Much of the trouble is caused by corsairs back from a long sea voyage and worse the ware for drink. Brawls and knife fights are commonplace, and many citizens have learned to run for cover when they see a band of pirates staggering toward them, just to be on the safe side.

Law and order is maintained by the city watch and the corsair captains. The former comprises a meager three companies, each patrolling the city for eight hours. In the event of major unrest, their commander can summon the city guard to assist his men. Corruption is relatively rare—watchmen are well paid through taxes, ensuring wealthy corsairs captains who flout the law cannot escape justice through a bribe.

Captains keep their crews in line through threats and harsh punishments, so as not to have their reputation tarnished by a wayward crewmember and endanger any chance of social promotion. This is common knowledge among the citizens. When a corsair commits a crime against a civilian, the victim has the option of avoiding the courts (which can prove costly) and letting the pirate's captain handle the matter. Although the corsair may be the captain's trusted comrade, such trials are scrupulously fair. Where both parties are corsairs the

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captains meet in private to discuss the matter before repercussions begin. In either case, should justice not be forthcoming the crime is reported to the watch and handled accordingly.

Outside the walls law and order is a different matter. While the city owns the wharves and expects businesses to pay their taxes, it provides no law enforcement. Justice is left to the citizens to enforce by whatever means they deem appropriate. Many turn to the corsair captains.

Al-Korsar has one thieves' guild—the Black Sharks (so named for the tattoos each member sports). They are not the first thieves' guild to ply its trade in Al-Korsar. In ages past, the captains reacted aggressively against thieves who preyed on their property or the property of close friends. Brutal reprisals shattered the guilds, but another always rose to fill the void. These days, captains treat the presence of the guild as a business opportunity by offering protection to home and business owners against the privations of thieves. The Black Sharks play no part in smuggling—that aspect of criminality is controlled by the corsairs.

Hashish is illegal in Al-Korsar, unless sold through the small temple of Tamarni or one of the cult's legitimate businesses. It is readily available if one has the right contacts, though. What few citizens realize is that the cult of Tamarni is behind the smuggling—illegal hashish fetches higher prices and no tax is paid on the profits.

## Trade & Tribute

Al-Korsar lacks natural resources. Basic resources, such as clay for pottery and wood for furniture can be found inland, but there are no sources of mineral ore, and what little farmland exists is devoted to growing staple cereal crops rather than resources such as flax. With few merchants prepared to trade with the city, the citizens are dependent on the plunder brought back by the corsairs.

By law, any plunder taken on the high seas must be returned to the city. When a ship docks, merchants rush to the wharves to bid on the cargo. Any goods not sold locally may be sold where the captain desires. Thus, whereas many independent corsairs take only valuable cargoes, the pirates of Al-Korsar know there is a ready market at home for almost any goods.

Not every corsair captain is involved in piracy. With contacts among many thieves' guilds, not to mention merchant houses, some earn a decent living by smuggling goods. A small few are even semi-legitimate merchants, bending local law by selling plundered cargo likely to be little use in Al-Korsar in one of the great coastal cities and using the money to purchase legitimate goods they know will fetch a good price back home.

Food is especially welcome. The basic diet of seafood and cereals is nutritious, and can be very tasty if prepared by expert hands, but dried meat, root vegetables, and preserved fruits make a very welcome addition. Sugar

and honey fetch high prices, as do alcohol (only beer is brewed locally), tabac, and hashish.

Despite a steady stream of traffic, the average citizen is not wealthy and there are often shortages of goods that would be considered common in other cities. Al-Korsar is far from the major sea lanes and piracy, while it can be lucrative, requires a lot of luck—the ocean is vast, ships are tiny, and potential prizes sailing close to shore have no shortage of safe harbors in which to seek refuge.

Though no one openly admits to the practice, the corsairs are available for hire. Nobles or merchants who wish to strike at a rival but avoid being linked to any criminal activity can hire corsairs to attack shipping and coastal targets. Hiring is always through an intermediary.

Where the aim is merely to deprive a rival of his income through the plundering of his ships, the corsairs receive no set fee. Instead, they are entitled to 75% of any goods or slaves taken while working for their patron. In cases where the goal is destruction of vessels or property, or the theft and safe delivery of a particular cargo, the corsairs negotiate a fee.

On occasion, the grand admiral has accepted bribes from nobles and merchants wishing to have their vessels spared the corsairs' attentions. The price of this bargain is extortionate (the grand admiral must in turn bribe the captains to seek other vessels to plunder).

## COINAGE

Al-Korsar has never possessed a mint. All the coins in circulation were plundered from merchant ships at some point. As a result, there are coins from many different cities and nations, not to mention eras—some of the coins date back centuries and have changed hands many thousands of time. Once a coin becomes too thin from handling to count as legal tender it is normally sold to a jeweler, its value based on its weight in relation to a newer, less worn coin. Its fate is to be melted down along with other waste coins and formed into a small ingot from which a piece of jewelry will be manufactured.

Because of this, coins have never been given specific nicknames. Instead, they are referred to simply as “gold” (dinars) or “silver” (dirhams). While most citizens have enough hard currency to make small purchases, they must rely on bartering for larger transactions.

## LOCAL TAXES

Al-Korsar may be a city of pirates, but every citizen is still expected to pay his taxes. As a rule of thumb, a typical citizen loses 20% of his income to the city treasury and 10% in tithes.

**Corsair Tax:** Every captain is expected to pay 10% of his yearly earnings to the city to help maintain the wharves and city defenses. In return, the city offers them sanctuary and blatantly ignores any crimes committed on the high seas or in foreign lands. Corsairs who refuse to pay or commit fraud are declared to be outlaws, making them fair game for more “honest” corsairs.



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**Docking Fees:** Regardless of their size or reason for visiting, all ships are charged a flat 5 dinars per day. Wealthy captains can pay a one-off sum of 2,000 dinars to the city. This entitles them to a permanent mooring at one of the wharves and life-long exemption from further docking fees.

**Merchant Pass:** Honest merchants seeking to prosper from the needs of Al-Korsar's citizens risk losing life and cargo unless granted safe passage. For 1,000 dinars a year, a merchant can purchase papers that permit one vessel he owns safe conduct to and from Al-Korsar.

The system is open to abuse. A merchant could purchase a set of papers and yet never intend to set sail for Al-Korsar, relying on the permit and a well-rehearsed lie to protect him from pirates should he be boarded. In a bid to prevent this underhanded tactic, safe passage only applies once outside the accepted territorial waters of the Caliphate and Sultanate (as marked on every decent chart). Corsairs found to have plundered a merchant vessel carrying such papers forfeit their rights to safe harbor in the city and will be arrested should they ever return to Al-Korsar.

## DIVIDING THE SPOILS

A corsair captain is the owner and absolute commander of his ship, not an elected official, and his crew are employees, not shareholders or partners. Still, no corsair captain keeps the entirety of any plunder for himself—such an act is guaranteed to lead to mutiny. As a rule of thumb, once a captain has paid his taxes to the city he retains 20-50% of the profits for himself, places 5-20% in the ship's treasury to pay for repairs and provisions, and divides the remainder among the crew.

The value of the shares for the captain and ship depend partly on the commander's greed, but more often on the size of the vessel and its crew compliment. A baghlah, for example, requires just four crew, though more typically it would have 10 if used for piracy. The captain would retain a higher percentage for himself, there being fewer crew to divide the remaining spoils among, but keep a smaller amount back for repairs and provisions since these will be cheaper than if he owned a light warship.

## Architecture

Al-Korsar sits on a narrow spit of land and is hemmed in by walls on all sides. Built with defense in mind, the narrow streets twist and turn, rarely running straight for more than 10 yards. With ground space being a luxury, buildings are constructed with small footprints and multiple stories. Except when the sun is at its highest, they cloak the streets in deep shadows. Once the sun sets the only illumination is pale light filtering from unshuttered ground floor windows and the flickering torches carried by citizens hurrying about their nocturnal business.

While they have little to worry about when it comes to thieves, the citizens have long held that it does not pay to advertise one's wealth. While interiors are, when money permits, well appointed, exteriors are drab, giving no indication as to the social class of the occupants.

The city smells, especially in summer. Raw sewage flows through open drains, out through narrow grilles in the walls (which frequently need scraping clean) and into the harbor. Fortunately, frequent storms batter the coast, ensuring the streets are at least regularly washed and the effluence encouraged on its way.

## Major Locales

This section describes locations within the City of Corsairs visiting heroes may have reason to visit.

### CITY DISTRICTS

Al-Korsar has a population of 48,000. Of these, some 8,000 are corsairs. At any one time roughly three-quarters of the pirates will be at sea. Aside from a few hundred hunters, trappers, and hermits who roam the island's interior, the population lives inside the city walls.

**Captains' Quarter:** The central part of the city is what passes for an upper-class residential district in Al-Korsar. As the name implies, it is home to many corsair captains. Living alongside them are other members of the social elite. Prices for food and drink are 50% higher than normal, which helps keep away less savory elements of society. In the center is the Admiral's Palace.

**Merchants' Quarter:** Al-Korsar may not be a trading center, but it still has merchants. Their warehouses dominate a region near the North Docks. Unlike in many other cities, the merchants do not live in a separate district. Instead, their homes and offices are located above their warehouses.

**Wharves:** Located outside the city walls, the Wharf District is a den of cutthroats, smugglers, and thieves, and business catering to their baser needs. Low prices for alcohol, tabac, and illegal hashish (half normal price) make it a popular hangout for corsairs. Aside from taverns, inns, and eateries, there are no businesses—ship chandlers, commonly found near most wharves, are located in the city proper.

Although it is possible to circumnavigate the entire city without ever having to pass through a single gate, locals refer to the wharves as three distinct districts, simply known as the East, North, and West Docks. Where one ends and its neighbor begins depends on who you ask for directions.

### CITY LOCALES

**The Admiral's Palace:** By the standards of the emirs, the palace of Al-Korsar's ruler is a peasant's shack. A ramshackle affair, it is actually an entire row of three-story

## PLUNDERING THE SEAS

An occasional bout of piracy and finding a buyer for plundered cargo can make for a fun evening's play, but is likely to soon grow stale if that is all the heroes do week after week. If the characters want to be occasional corsairs, their activities can be handled in several ways without taking them away from other adventuring opportunities. The individual GM should choose which method best suits his style of game. In all cases the party requires a ship and crew; piracy occurs only during downtime or the occasional nautical encounter, and the captain's profits are explained entirely through the Rich or Filthy Edges.

\* **Captain Only:** Only the character who takes the Edge (most likely the captain) benefits directly. While he might choose to divide his income among his peers, he is under no obligation to do so.

\* **Money for Everyone:** Assuming the Rich character earns his money solely from piracy, the other player characters in his crew automatically earn an annual sum equal to 10% of the captain's income as their share. This isn't deducted from the captain's income—it's additional money. In game terms, the other characters get money for nothing.

\* **Group Income:** The GM can allow the party to buy a group Edge. When advancing, heroes can normally increase two skills that are below their current attribute die. Instead, each hero takes one skill and uses the second one to buy a share in the Rich or Filthy Rich Edge. Each year, every character who has bought in receives a portion of the profits. The heroes decide the exact division of shares.

\* **Resource Management:** The *Resource Management* rules can be used to represent a piratical enterprise. Unless the Resource owner (the corsair captain) has purchased the Rich or Filthy Rich Edge during play, the Resource begins with Population 1 and an annual income of 2,500 dinars.

In this case, the income is for the captain's ship, along with any 10% duty paid by subordinate captains under his authority. The Resource owner must pay his fellow player characters from the profits, though he can ignore any NPC crew (the Edge income is after routine expenses, which paying NPCs would fall under). Repairs and provisions must be paid for from the Resource treasury.

\* **Quick & Dirty:** For each whole month the heroes spend as corsairs, the GM should draw a card from the action deck. A deuce means they have been captured and imprisoned to await trial (or the GM can run the encounter on the tabletop). A black card indicates no income worth mentioning for that month. A red numbered card earns the party 500 dinars, a royal card (Jack through Ace) of any color nets them 1,000 dinars, and a Joker indicates 2,500 dinars. The captain determines how the money is split.

apartments knocked into a single structure. The inside is far grander, though arguably any pasha would boast of similar furnishings and displays of wealth.

The ground floor holds the city's sole legal court, the council meeting chamber, servants' quarters, kitchens, and storerooms. The second floor is devoted to bureaucratic offices, along with staterooms for senior ministers and the barracks of the admirals' bodyguards. The entire top floor is the admiral's personal apartments.

**Asadelik's Artillery:** While dedicated warships mount a single trebuchet for use against enemy ships, smaller vessels must make do with a ballista. Ideal against flesh and bone targets, they are little use in piercing the heavy armor of a ship. For those who have the money, help is at hand. Asadelik, a male cakali, is a talented ballista designer and manufacturer. As well as conventional artillery pieces, he can produce specialized weapons. These options can be combined.

**Armor Piercing:** Heavy Weapon (+1,500 dinars); **High Powered:** damage increased to 3d6+2 (+800 dinars); **Long Range:** range increased to 30/60/120 (+600 dinars).

**The Broken Compass:** While the corsairs owe the Brotherhood of Sinbad no special favors, they rarely trouble their ships. Similarly, while few Brothers engage in piracy for a living, it behoves them to maintain friendly relations with the corsairs—Al-Korsar makes an ideal staging post for expeditions into the deep Southern Ocean.

When in the city, most gravitate toward the Broken Compass. A lively inn serving good quality meals, the audience is frequently entertained by tales of mystery, close escapes, and fearsome beasts by visiting Brothers. If they are really fortunate, two Brothers will engage in a friendly contest, with each storyteller attempting to outdo his peer by recounting a more exciting, yet still believable, tale of personal adventure. The showing of scars or mementos forms part of the storytelling. By tradition, the loser, as determined by the audience, must buy everyone in the inn a drink.

**The Den:** Shunned by even hardened corsairs, the Den is a tavern with an almost exclusively hyaenidae clientele. The drink is cheap and strong, and meat served raw. Shows of superiority (achieved through the barring of teeth, throaty snarls, and taunting laughs) are common, and there is at least one major brawl a night. So long as the violence doesn't spill into the streets, the watch wisely turns a blind eye.

**The Empty Shell:** A favorite restaurant for those with a taste for fine food and deep pockets (only expensive meals are available), the Empty Shell specializes in shellfish. All the produce is caught that morning and cooked at the customer's table.

**The Houris' Haven:** Operated by the cult of Tamarni and located in the Captains' Quarter, the Houris' Haven is a popular tavern. Services include alcohol, prostitutes, gambling games, and legal hashish.

**The House of Fortune:** While many taverns and inns offer gambling opportunities, the House of Fortune specializes in high-stakes games (minimum wager 100 dinars, maximum 5,000 dinars). For those with money, it is



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an ideal place to make contact with corsair captains and Councilor-Captains. The tavern is operated by the cult of Tamarni. Three paladins serve to keep rowdy patrons in line and protect it from thieves. Anyone caught cheating can expect a thorough beating from the paladins before being thrown out onto the streets, where other gamblers may wish to enact further punishment. The city watch never interferes in this “cult business.”

**Kazam’s Armory:** Studying khem-hekau isn’t illegal in Al-Korsar. So long as practitioners refrain from openly committing an act of necromancy in public, the authorities quietly ignore their presence. Kazam makes a living manufacturing and selling alchemical ballista bolts. His most popular devices contain nonlethal spells such as *confusion*, *entangle*, *fatigue*, or *fear*.

**Merchants’ Podiums:** By law, corsairs and merchants buying or selling cargo must do so in the Wharf District, and then only from dedicated podiums. Taking to a stand immediately draws a crowd of locals keen to see what wares have been delivered. Within a handful of minutes the representatives of the merchant houses arrive to begin frantic bidding. As soon as they are in place pickpockets and cutpurses begin plying their trade. Once a deal is struck tax officials, backed by a squad of city guardsmen, swoop to collect the city’s share.

**Rat Alley:** Race means little if a citizen is prepared to work for a living, but sand goblins are loathe to perform hard labor or honest work. Many dwell in a narrow, filthy alley that runs through the West Docks. They survive by sifting through waste flowing through the sewer channels for dropped valuables, picking pockets, and selling information.

**The Rusty Gibbet:** Corsairs sentenced to death by the courts are beheaded. While their heads are mounted on stakes, their corpses are placed in gibbets around the docks as a warning that Al-Korsar might be a pirate haven, but there are still laws and consequences for breaking them. Denied a funeral, the grisly remains hang here until there is naught left but bones. These are unceremoniously thrown into the harbor.

The Rusty Gibbet is a cramped, smoky tavern in the East Docks. Many of the corpses that hang outside are not convicts, but patrons who caused trouble. Only the lowliest corsairs and citizens frequent it, for the quality of the food and drink matches the extremely low prices.

**Temple of Carcharas:** Few sane humans worship the ravenous shark god of the fearsome kreana. The temple is located inside a warehouse in the Merchants’ Quarter. Except when the altar (a large shark’s jaw) is set up, there is no indication of any sinister practices.

The cultists are bloodthirsty corsairs, the “high priest” the merchant who owns the warehouse. They meet regularly to consume blood (easily obtained from slaughterhouses as fishermen use it to lure sharks into their nets). On special nights they kidnap a citizen from the street and dine on his raw flesh. Though fervent in their worship, the cultists know very little about Carcharas’ true rituals or doctrine.

**Temple of Sirsir:** Moored in the North Docks, the

temple is actually a fully seaworthy jalibut. It remains tethered except at the start of the raiding season, when the winter storms have ended. At this time it sails a few miles into the ocean to bless corsair ships preparing to terrorize the high seas. The high priest, Sea Captain Abdul-Qawi, is a retired corsair captain. He has friends on the Grand Admiral’s council and, for a small donation, will write a letter of introduction.

Mariners down on their luck are offered a free hammock in the hold and a simple but filling meal of bread and barley porridge. In theory this charity, paid for from tithes, is for a maximum of three nights, after which a donation of one dirham per night is required. Unless there is high demand, the clerics never charge a sea dog in need of hospitality.

The clerics sell alchemical devices from the deity’s spell list at standard rates. For 500 dinars, the high priest will perform a special blessing on a ship. The vessel gains one single-use benny, which the captain can use on any Boating roll made while aboard the vessel. A ship may only have one such blessing at any given time.

**Wijdan’s Ship Chandler:** One of many ships’ chandlers, Wijdan has the added advantage that she has access to *mend* alchemical devices. She sells these for 200 dinars rather than the usual 300 dinars. Wijdan is neither a mage nor a cleric, and no one knows where she acquires these devices. One popular rumor is that she knows a friendly majin, though where it might live is yet another mystery.

## THE ISLAND

Al-Korsar is the name of both the city and the island on which it stands. A high plateau surrounded by rugged, almost sheer-faced mountains whose peaks rise over 6,000 feet above the coastal plains dominates the interior. A montane cloud forest covers the mountain slopes, with evergreen trees at lower altitudes and large shrubs at higher elevations. The plateau’s summit is constantly swathed in dense clouds. Hidden from sight by the cloud layer, the plateau is dominated by small trees, giant ferns, and long grass.

An outpost of the lizardmen in ages past, the plateau is dotted with ancient, vine-choked ruins. Evidence of the builders’ inhuman origins is found in faded pictograms carved into crumbling stone walls and the toppled and shattered remains of colossal statues. The latter are particularly unusual, for among the well-known lizardman forms are statues with frilled heads, multiple horns, and diamond-shaped plates running down their backs. Likely they are depictions of deities. No serious scholar has ever visited the site, and few adventurers have plundered the ruins since the age of Suleiman.

While the lizardmen have long abandoned the plateau (animated mummies and skeletons may exist in as-yet-undiscovered crypts), there are still dangers. Aside from the high humidity (+2 quarts per day), there are poisonous snakes and spiders to contend with, as well as a small velociraptor pack.

## PERSONS OF NOTE

Al-Korsar's population boasts a huge number of colorful characters. Some may prove to be allies to visiting adventurers, while others may become dire enemies. A few are detailed below.

### CAPTAIN HAJAR THE HAWK

Captain of the boom *Sea Eagle*, Hajar would be attractive were it not for her milky white eyes. Although blind since birth, Hajar is not as sightless as she makes out. Several years ago she sailed south and west into uncharted waters. After long weeks, her vessel made landfall in a jungle realm inhabited by black-skinned natives who spoke no known language and practiced unusual magic. There, a wise man tattooed an eye on each of her eyelids. When her eyes are closed, she can see as well as any man. Her constant companion is Zakwan, a Wild Card hawk. As well as being her only true friend, the bird acts as her eyes at sea, scouting high overhead for sails on the distant horizon.

### CAPTAIN SHALAMARIZ SEABORN

Undoubtedly one of the strangest corsair captains ever to sail the seas, Shalamariz is a Wild Card free lesser marid. Although willing to converse with mortals, he has repeatedly refused to explain why he chose to become a corsair. His form is that of a human male, though his skin is the color of the deep ocean and ripples like the surface of the sea being blown by a gentle wind. His hair is white sea foam that flows halfway down his back. He commands the baghlah *Stormrider*.

### FIZDI

For reasons he can't fathom, Fizdi, a sand goblin, has always been drawn to the ocean. He has served on six corsair vessels and every single one suffered terrible misfortune, though only one sank. Though keen to set sail once more, Fizdi has been branded a jinx, despite his protestations of innocence and willingness to work for free, ensuring no captain who knows his reputation will hire him.

### OMAR THE BEGGAR

A former corsair, Omar lives as a beggar. Missing his left arm and his lower left leg, and with a face that bears the scars of a vicious shark attack, Omar served aboard the *Relentless Tide*. Popular legend has it the ship sank in a storm with its cargo of gems and all hands. No one believes Omar's story that the cause of the sinking was not bad weather, but a pack of kreana accompanied by a monstrous shark. Omar is willing to guide a ship to location of the wreck, but he wants a share of the treasure and assurances he will be kept safe from kreana attacks.

## BODY LANGUAGE

The civilized inhabitants of Al-Shirkuh are prone to make use of physical gestures in everyday life. Below is a brief guide to some of the more common practices.

- \* Gesticulation is commonplace, especially when haggling. Such gestures are exaggerated, with the clutching of heads, extending or raising of arms, and showing of open palms especially prevalent.

- \* When leaving the presence of a social superior it is not uncommon to touch one's heart, mouth, and/or forehead. The gestures symbolize humility, honesty, and loyalty toward one's superior respectively.

- \* When greeting someone, it is traditional to perform a bow while placing the right palm against one's forehead or chest. The bow is a gesture of respect and should be deeper if the other person is of higher social class, while the use of the open hand indicates one is not holding a weapon.

- \* During conversations the listener may stare intently at the speaker. While foreigners may find this unnerving, it shows the listener is fully attentive. If he is looking elsewhere it indicates he is disinterested in what you have to say.

- \* Men hug each other, but only with true friends—one you trust not to literally or metaphorically stab you in the back. Kissing a member of the same gender on the cheeks is also a sign of friendship.

- \* A host showing a guest around his house, property, or even city streets will often hold his guest's elbow with his right hand. This is a sign of friendship, and again indicates the host is not holding a concealed weapon.

- \* People show they are thinking by scratching their chins. It is considered rude to continue talking until the scratching motion stops. Cakali stroke their tail to similar effect.

- \* In Rassilon, beckoning someone is done with the palm up and the hand loosely closed, save for the index finger, which is curled in and out. In Al-Shirkuh, the hand is palm down and all the fingers curled in a scratching motion.

- \* Blowing or picking one's nose, picking one's teeth, or yawning in public is considered a sign of poor manners and inattentiveness or total disinterest during conversation. Yawning while simultaneously extending one's arms diagonally upward indicates genuine tiredness, however.

- \* Belching after food indicates the host has supplied a good meal, though excessive belching leads to embarrassment on the host's behalf (as would continued verbal flattery). Flatulence, while a perfectly normal bodily function, is typically reserved for when one is alone. If one cannot contain one's wind, it is traditional to make light of the noise so as to reduce any offense to one's host.