

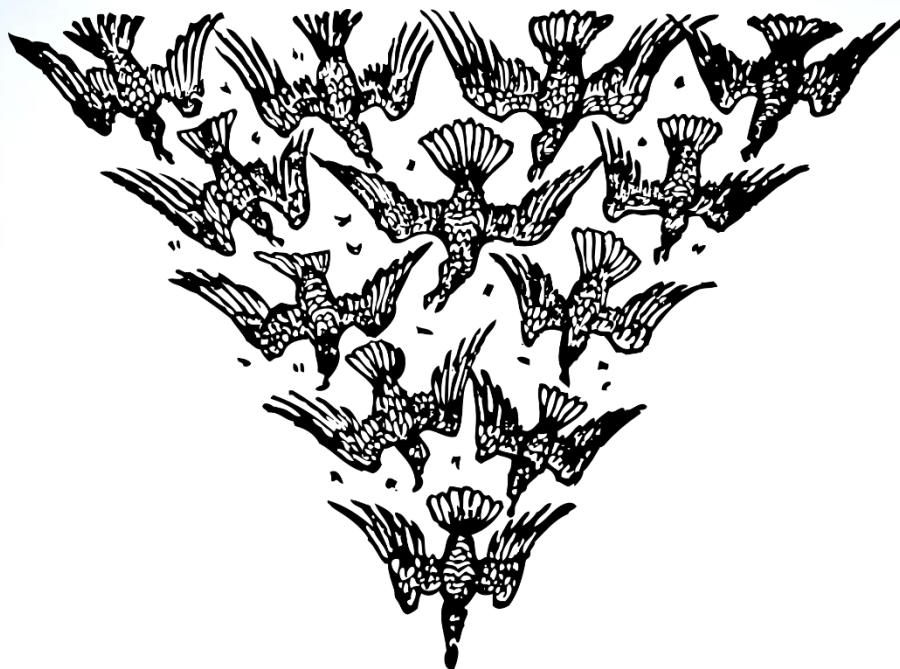
DOWN CAME A BLACK BIRD



A SALTMARSH ADVENTURE
BY STACEY ALLAN



DOWN CAME A BLACKBIRD



The skies are troubled over Saltmarsh. Long-forgotten magic spreads its wicked wings once more, and the birds are out for blood.

A Saltmarsh adventure for 1st-4th level characters.

by Stacey Allan

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OVERVIEW

Down Came a Blackbird is a Dungeons & Dragons adventure set in the Forgotten Realms. Events take place in the small fishing town of Saltmarsh, the surrounding marshlands, and the Sea of Swords, but could easily be adapted to fit any coastal fishing town in your preferred game world. For a detailed description of Saltmarsh and its residents, please refer to *Ghosts of Saltmarsh*, published by Wizards of the Coast.

This adventure is designed for **1st-4th level characters** and is optimised for **five 3rd level characters**.

BACKGROUND

Salty Maude is a mistress of ancient rituals – spells that run deep through the veins of the natural world, like sap in the roots of the oldest trees. Maude is one of a dwindling number of migratory sea hags, whose magic holds dominion over any birdlife in their territory. Having spent decades studying their peep-talk, Maude has learned how to bend the will of these creatures for her own nefarious needs. Birds are now her scouts and her army. A murmuration of starlings can sling her across the sky and seabirds flock and strike at her bidding.

Maude is infatuated with a male peryton called Kraggen who roosts in the nearby peaks of the Sword Mountains. That is, she's enamoured with the man she believes the peryton is destined to *become*. Despite their monstrous physical appearances, perytons cast human shadows. Salty Maude's bird-bone auguries prophesize that this peryton is destined to transform into a human and form a hellish union with her. Thus, she plots to hurry Kraggen's metamorphosis.

A peryton's egg is the key component for Maude's transformative ritual. Kraggen has managed to snatch one from a mating pair in the mountains to the south. Maude intends to hatch the egg and then cast a spell to transfer Kraggen's monstrous essence across to the hatchling as it matures to adulthood. Kraggen's humanoid aspect will remain, leaving him permanently altered.

The egg, however, has been stolen. Having collected it from her betrothed, Maude was flying back to her lair when she dropped it somewhere in the swamps outside Saltmarsh. When the egg slammed into the water, the splash drew the attention of some children mudlarking nearby. Elated by their rare find, the children took the egg back to Saltmarsh.

The birds have told Salty Maude that the egg is somewhere in the vicinity of the town. Now she weaves her magic over the neighbouring bird

colonies, causing outbreaks of aggression: gulls circle and swoop on fishermen in the bay and throngs of blackbirds peck and tear at people in the streets. Kraggen and the hag raid homesteads on the outskirts of town by night, slaughtering any unfortunates who dwell inside. The peryton sates himself on the hearts of his victims whilst Maude conspires with the birds for their next strike. With the egg due to hatch any day, the pair receive word that a gang of Saltmarsh urchins have it, and they connive to launch fresh assaults within the town itself.

The people of Saltmarsh are anxious and afraid; they pull their hoods down tightly and daren't look up to the skies; they board their windows and block their fireplaces at sundown. A small band of children are in grave danger, having unwittingly brought a curse to their home. This is a town in dire need of heroes!

ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

The characters arrive in Saltmarsh after the murders at the town's periphery. The bird attacks are becoming brazen and the townsfolk are starting to panic. As the characters investigate, they uncover details of the diabolical transmutation ritual and finally face off against Kraggen and Salty Maude.

The adventure is broken into four parts, most likely played out in the following order:

Part 1: Arrival at Saltmarsh. The characters encounter a boy being attacked by a flock of gulls: one of the gang of children who found the peryton egg in the swamps. The boy reveals details of the discovery, and his worries about the troubles that have followed.

Part 2: A Night in Saltmarsh. The characters visit a tavern for food and lodgings. Pinned on a noticeboard are several leads which the characters can pursue to aid them in their investigation. During the night, Maude and Kraggen strike within the town; the characters investigate the crime scene and question the town's guards for clues.

Part 3: Town Meeting. The town council gathers to discuss the recent deaths and disturbances. Here the characters receive the egg from the children just as Maude and Kraggen make a bold attack on all in attendance.

Part 4: Trail of the Hag. The characters home in on the hag's lair and cleanse the Saltmarsh skies of her curse.





Location and NPC Summary

The following NPCs and locations feature prominently in this adventure.

Saltmarsh. A small, respectable fishing town surrounded by swampland.

Salty Maude. A menacing sea hag with bird-like features. She assumes the form of a tall, frightful woman when dealing with others, including Kraggen.

Kraggen. A haughty Peryton who believes he's destined for greatness. He'll stop at nothing to ensure that Maude succeeds with her ritual. Unlike other perytons, Kraggen can talk, due to Maude's nefarious magic.

Wildak Mythkin. A jovial scholar who has a wealth of knowledge for all sorts of objects and curios. He's on a tour of the Sword Coast with his 'Relic's Roadshow' and is currently in Saltmarsh.

Hollylove Dardusk. A young woman, fledgling ranger, and town veterinarian. Normally level-headed and organized, she's quite overwhelmed with Saltmarsh's problem birds.

Brynn Seablossom. A middle-aged woman and veteran sailor. She's tough but hearty and, having undergone a bird attack at sea, holds a personal vendetta against those responsible.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Use one of the following hooks to draw the characters into the adventure.

Troubled Tidings. If you're a druid, ranger, or one attuned with nature, you hear worrying reports from a mentor or ally about the behavior of the birdlife around Saltmarsh. Perhaps you hear this news directly from birds who've flown over the town. You convince your friends that these rumors are worth investigating.

Pursuit of Knowledge. You're keen to learn more about an antique object or trinket that you own, and have heard that the wisdom of Wildak Mythkin, a prominent travelling lore-master, is immeasurable. He's touring the Sword Coast and is presently in Saltmarsh where you intend to seek him out.

A Stop for Supplies. You and your party are pursuing adventure along the Sword Coast. Travelling north from Waterdeep to Neverwinter you decide to stop for supplies at the sleepy town of Saltmarsh. Plus, you've heard on the road that their smoked fish pies are truly delicious. It's just a little detour, what could possibly go wrong?

SALTY MAUDE'S PLOT

Salty Maude is no normal sea hag and she wields old and terrible magic. Salty Maude should be a powerful and memorable enemy with unusual and unknowable magic. Familiarize yourself with the following information before beginning play.

THE HAG'S POWERS

Salty Maude is a migratory sea hag: one who isn't bound to a single place, but instead, relocates her lair to follow the migration of birds. Salty Maude can cast many archaic rituals, druidic in nature, which allow her to manipulate birdlife. She uses the following powers throughout this adventure:

Language. Maude is fluent in peep-talk, the language of birds.

The birds' curse. Maude has cast a ritual which allows her to see through the eyes of the Saltmarsh birds. She can do this whenever she's at her scrying pool in her lair (see Part 4: "Trail of the Hag"). The same ritual allows her to compel the birds to scout, swarm, and attack. As a sea hag, her magic is linked to the waves, so this power only works when the tide is coming in and peaks at high tide. The enchantment also ends if the characters destroy the scrying pool or kill the hag, or if the hag moves away from the area or chooses to end the enchantment.

Teleportation. Salty Maude can summon a murmuration of starlings to teleport her across the sky from one whirling vortex of birds to another. She can use this innate power three times per day.

Flying mount. Salty Maude's mount is a *flying rowboat* which duplicates the effects of a *broom of flying*.

Hag's Lair. The hag lairs inside the corpse of a giant whale, which she can animate once per day to dive and travel underwater, thus allowing her to follow her migratory path whenever she wishes (see Part 4: "Trail of the Hag").





PART 1: ARRIVAL AT SALTMARSH

The characters encounter a boy being attacked by a flock of gulls: one of the gang of children who found the peryton egg in the swamps. The boy reveals details of the discovery, and his worries about the troubles that have followed.

INCIDENT AT THE HARBOR

The characters have entered Saltmarsh mid-afternoon and are walking through the harbor district on their way to the town center. Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

Strolling through Saltmarsh's harbor is an assault on the senses: from the sloshing of waves against the quayside walls to the heavy smell of fish; the peal of bells on buoys in the water, stall-holders pitching their freshly-caught fare, and the constant cawing of gulls.

Saltmarsh

Saltmarsh is a small fishing town on the Sword Coast, located midway between Neverwinter and Waterdeep. Refer to *Ghosts of Saltmarsh* for detailed information on Saltmarsh and its environs.

Geography: The Sea of Swords stretches west; otherwise the town is surrounded by dense marshland. The Sword Mountains rise in the east but are usually obscured by layers of fog which hang thick over the swamps.

Governance: Saltmarsh is governed by a town council of traditionalists, who seek to preserve the old ways of the town, and loyalists, who welcome change and commercial growth.

Weather. Winter hits this part of the coast hard, with gales blowing in from the sea and icy storms rolling across the marshes from the mountains. Spring and autumn are invariably wet – there is rainfall most days. Dry spells do increase with the summer, but rain is never far away.

A GAGGLE OF GULLS

Ask each player to describe their character as they walk along the harbor. After this, the character with the highest passive (Wisdom) Perception score spots a young boy being harassed by a large herring gull. He's fishing at the end of a stone jetty and the gull has knocked his hat off.

Seconds later, the sky becomes noisy with more seabirds whirling and wheeling overhead. The boy clutches his fishing-rod and swipes at the gulls as

they begin to swoop down on him. His cries for help are muffled as the creatures engulf him.

The boy is Ham Barleywain, and he has the statistics of a **commoner**. He's being attacked by three swarms of gulls. Each swarm has the statistics of a **swarm of ravens**.

The gulls focus their attacks on Ham but retaliate against anyone who harms them or who tries to aid the boy. Though the harbor is bustling, no-one intervenes to help. Some look on in fear, but mostly the townsfolk hide or flee.

If at least two swarms of gulls are defeated, the rest of the birds disperse. Characters who succeed on a DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check know that this level of aggression isn't typical gull behavior.

Characters who cast the *speak with animals* spell hear the gulls babble a few words repeatedly: "Boy!", "Thief!" and "Egg!".

Jetty. The stone jetty is 10-feet wide and 25-feet long, jutting out into deep water.

Adjusting the Encounter

The following suggests adjustments which could be made to this encounter depending on the level of your players. These adjustments are not cumulative:

- **Very Weak:** Remove two swarms of gulls.
- **Weak:** Remove one swarm of gulls.
- **Strong:** Add one albatross. The albatross has the statistics of a **giant vulture** with the following changes: Its size is Medium, and it doesn't understand Common.
- **Very Strong:** Add one swarm of gulls and two albatrosses (see above).

HAM AND THE EGG

Ham should survive this encounter. He squeezes under a fishing crate for cover as the gulls overwhelm him. He's scratched and shaken but grateful to the characters for coming to his rescue.

He's adamant that he knows why the birds attacked him and is quick to offload his opinions (see the "Roleplaying Ham Barleywain" sidebar). Ham reveals the following information:

- Ham and his friends were looking for treasure in the swamps outside town when they found an enormous egg. They heard it splash into the water as if it fell from the sky.
- Ham doesn't have the egg; the children have been taking turns to look after it, as each wants to be in possession of it when it hatches.
- Ham thinks the egg is cursed because the birds "started acting funny" ever since they brought it into town.



- Ham washes pots at a local inn, The Snapping Line, and is on good terms with the landlady, Hanna Rist. The boy insists the characters stay there while they're in town, as they'll be sure to get free food and lodgings for coming to his rescue on the jetty.

Roleplaying Ham Barleywain

Ham is a ten-year-old peasant boy. He has blue eyes, a mass of straw-colored curls, and his plump features give him a cherubic look. His cheeks flush bright red when he's excited or agitated.

Ham is convinced that the egg is bringing bad luck to Saltmarsh. He's very worried about what his mother will say when she finds out about the whole business, as he's not supposed to go outside of town. Ham knows the rest of his group think him cowardly, as they won't let him have the egg anymore in case he tells. He hopes they'll change their minds when they find out he was attacked by gulls.

Quote: "We should never've picked up that egg. My ma's going to kill me!"

DEVELOPMENT

Ham doesn't know which of his friends currently has the egg. He offers to go looking for them to tell them about the attack. If the characters decide to seek out the other children in town themselves, they prove difficult to find as they're all actively hiding. Characters must succeed on a DC 20 group Intelligence (Investigation) check to find each child (see the "Saltmarsh Urchins" sidebar). Fipp currently has the egg but cannot be found. If the characters track down any of the others, they're informed that they are laying low but that they'll all be at a town meeting the next day.

The characters may also want to visit The Snapping Line - the inn where Ham works part-time, to learn more of the strange goings-on in Saltmarsh (see Part 2: "A Night in Saltmarsh").

The Saltmarsh Urchins

These urchin children found the egg in the swamps and are now hiding around town.

Ham Barleywain. An anxious ten-year-old boy. He lives in the harbor district with his mother, who makes fish pies for the dock workers. He's often found fishing on the jetty, and washes pots at the Snapping Line Inn.

Telmay Pelt. An independent ten-year-old girl. Her parents are flagmakers and they live near the harbor district. Telmay's mother and father are often out of town plying their trade, which means Telmay is used to looking after herself.

Yenry Downcreek. A fidgety ten-year-old boy. As the nephew of a boat maker, he's practical and good with his hands. He lives with his uncle in the harbor district.

Marni Wolfsmith. An athletic eleven-year-old girl. Her parents are trappers and so she loves being outdoors. She lives with them and several siblings on the outskirts of town.

Fipp Arroway. An eleven-year-old boy and misunderstood troublemaker, Fipp has grown up in an orphanage in the poor district. He's often found wandering the streets at night getting up to mischief.





PART 2: A NIGHT IN SALTMARSH

The characters visit a tavern for food and lodgings. Pinned on a noticeboard are several leads which the characters can pursue to aid them in their investigation. During the night, Maude and Kraggen strike within the town; the characters investigate the crime scene and question the town's guards for clues.

FINDING THE INN

The characters tread the streets of Saltmarsh, looking for The Snapping Line. The locals are clearly anxious, for they fear the coming night will bring more bird attacks. Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

As you walk the cobbled streets of Saltmarsh in the encroaching dusk, there is a growing sense of unease in the townsfolk around you. They seem keen to finish their day's business. With hoods up or hats pulled firmly down, they hasten down alleyways, into houses, and out of sight. Shutters slam over windows and bolts fasten over doors. Smoke begins to plume from chimney stacks, coiling into a darkening sky.

While in Saltmarsh, the characters may want to talk to the locals about the nervous behaviors on display. Consult the following Saltmarsh Residents and Rumors tables to guide these interactions.

SALTMARSH RESIDENTS

d6	Name	Description
1	Mooldaun Keenrock	Male dwarf blacksmith. Constantly frowning. Bolting the shutters of his business to keep out birds and looters.
2	Birgit Greendew	Female human commoner. Always stops mid-sentence to yell at her children. Embedding broken crockery into her window boxes to deter birds from landing there.
3	Tuth Casktaker	Male human commoner. Nautical tattoos. Heaving chopped logs from his woodshed to keep the hearth burning and stop birds coming down the chimney.
4	Chloris Twocloves	Female human shop-owner. Pet rat on her shoulder. Hurriedly packing up her herbs & spices market stall in a rush to get home before nightfall.
5	Zem Steelcut	Male human commoner. Elderly, with bandaged fingers. Up a ladder, trying to patch a hole in his roof so that the birds won't get into his attic.
6	Wathra Oatwind	Female halfling commoner. Elderly, wearing a monocle. Hauling a wheelbarrow of produce through her front door to stock up her larder in case the emergency continues.





Roll separately for the rumor each resident imparts to the characters. All the rumors are true:

SALTMARSH RUMORS

d8 Rumor

- 1 Bloodhawks have found their way to the skies over Saltmarsh and seem to be gathering. What's drawn them here?
- 2 Nocturnal birds have been sighted out hunting during the day. What're they looking for?
- 3 There've been a few gruesome murders outside of town. The victim's bodies were robbed of their hearts! This butchery started with the bird trouble... Surely that's no coincidence...?
- 4 Caged birds are turning on their owners. Old Nissy Grundel's canaries escaped and chased her grandchildren around the front room!
- 5 The starling murmurations have become quite strange... They muster in a cloud over the sea before converging over the town in great, billowing numbers. Whoever heard of starlings at sea?
- 6 Young Dirk Gum's milk wagon was set upon by a throng of blackbirds. The birds weren't after the milk though, they were trying to peck out poor Dirk's eyes!
- 7 Seabirds have been harassing the fishermen and dockworkers. Apparently, some unfortunate lad was tormented by a gang of gulls today!
- 8 The school was besieged by a swarm of little birds which crashed in through a window and attacked the children in their classroom! Whoever heard of sparrows, wagtails, robins, and finches flocking together like that? The school was kept closed today.

Characters may notice that victims of the recent attacks are children or adolescents - this is due to Maude now knowing that one or more Saltmarsh youths are harboring her egg.



THE SNAPPING LINE INN

The Snapping Line is built from the wooden framework of half a dozen old fishing ships. Lobster crates and frayed fishing nets are stacked around the entrance. When the characters enter the inn, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

Crossing the threshold, you smell freshly cooked seafood, baked bread, and sweet ale. Lobster motifs are daubed across the walls and bar, and a fire burns brightly in the hearth. The tavern is welcoming but serves only a scattering of customers this evening. Near the door, you spot a noticeboard with several circulars pinned to it.

Give the players the following handouts:

- **Handout 2: The Town Meeting Announcement**
- **Handout 3: The Relic's Roadshow Poster**
- **Handout 4: The Town Vet Advertisement**

Features of The Snapping Line inn

The Snapping Line is a tavern and inn near the harbor district.

Ceilings: The ceilings are 10-feet-high.

Lighting: Candles are set on the tables and lanterns are affixed to the walls. This creates bright light throughout.

Lodging. Upstairs, there are four rooms which sleep up to two people each, and a large attic room which sleeps up to six people. All the rooms are decked out like ship's cabins.

Smells and Sounds. Aromas of seafood and baked bread drift from the kitchen. There's a very low murmur of conversation, and the fire crackles and spits in the hearth.

TALKING TO THE LANDLADY

Hanna Rist is the landlady of The Snapping Line (Hanna and the tavern are both detailed in *Ghosts of Saltmarsh*). She thanks the characters for stepping up to help Ham when no one else would and offers them a free meal and lodgings.

Ham isn't working at the tavern tonight, but he did drop off a note for Hanna to pass on to his rescuers.

Give the players Handout 1: Ham's Note.

TALKING TO THE PATRONS

The characters may wish to socialize with the other patrons in the tavern. A few noteworthy people are listed below:

Jonas Commonwood. This fisherman has fish-hook piercings down both earlobes and sits sipping ale by the fireplace with a somber crew of five more peasants. They're drinking to Jonas's twin brother,





Jorge, who was found dead in his hut outside of town last night. Jonas, holding a stub of charcoal, wants to write a eulogy for his brother but he's struggling with the words. The group are wary of strangers and are surly with the characters when they approach. Characters who are respectful can find out about the eulogy and offer to help. If they can ask a few questions about Jorge's life and come up with a four-line citation, Jonas is grateful and opens to them about his brother's untimely demise.

- For more than a week before his death, Jorge claimed he saw a rowboat sailing across the sky at twilight; Jonas had put this down to hallucinations from a bad batch of blackthorn wine.
- Whoever or whatever it was that attacked Jorge had ripped out his heart.
- Jorge's hut was upturned but nothing was taken.
- Marshman Gebbo, a reclusive trapper, was also found dead outside of town two nights ago, under the same vicious circumstances.

Gebbo and Jorge are victims of the initial savage hunt for the peryton egg undertaken by Maude and Kraggen. Both men were unfortunate enough to live close to the site where the egg went missing and their dwellings were the first bloody ports of call.

Oban Glug. When this troubled peasant isn't drinking, he's wringing his cap in his hands or waving it in the air. Oban is a doomsayer, propping up the bar and drunkenly prophesizing that the end of the world is near, much to the chagrin of Hanna and the other patrons. Characters who attempt to befriend Oban must succeed on a DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check to learn some enigmatic information from him: "It is the end of times! When beasts become men and men become beasts...!" This refers to Kraggen seeking to become human, and Maude's attunement with the birds. Oban can't say what this message means for sure and passes out drunk if put under scrutiny.

Brynn Seablossom. This female human veteran sailor puffs on a long tobacco pipe, occasionally blowing smoke rings. Her face is covered in scratches from a recent bird attack. If approached by any of the characters, she can impart the following information:

- Brynn's keelboat was ambushed offshore two days ago by a swarm of seabirds.
- She was sailing close to what looked like a large mass of sargassum, with scores of gulls bobbing upon it. As she drew nearer, they launched their attack.

Somehow, she made it back to Saltmarsh.

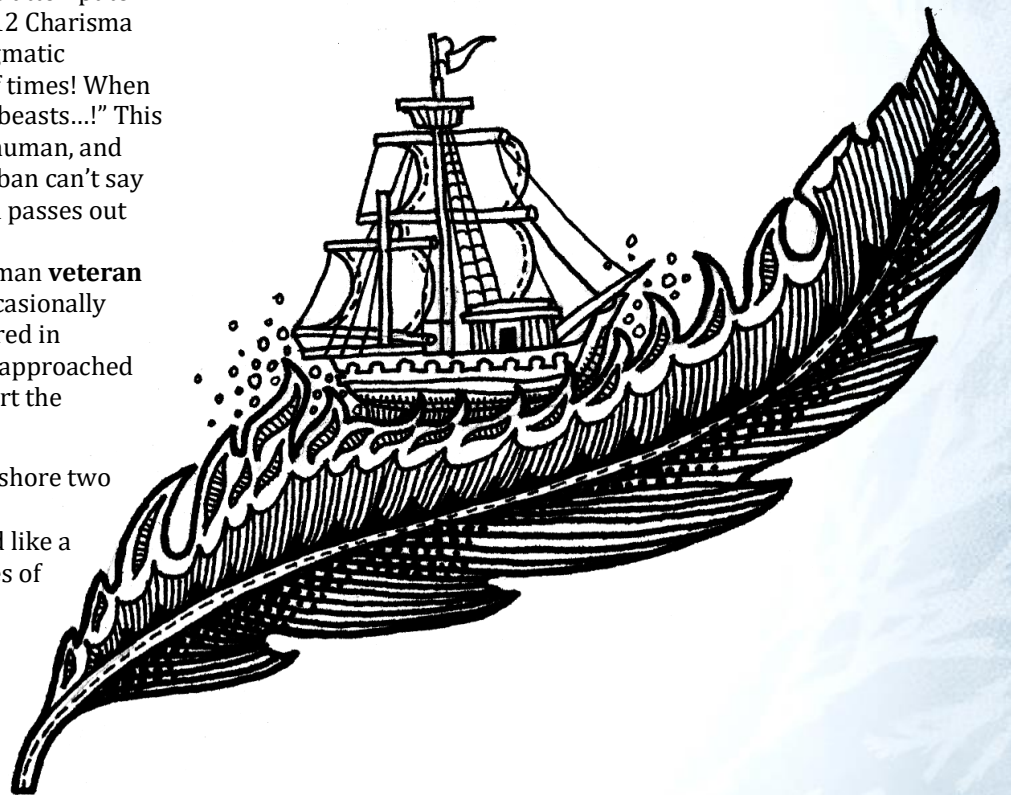
- The birds tore through her sails, so she's been landlocked awaiting their repair.
- Since arriving in town, Brynn has been down at the docks with her spyglass, monitoring the gulls. Their numbers are growing, but they seem less aggressive when the tide is out.
- Brynn is sure she's seen evidence of a whale out by the sargassum. She's witnessed the occasional fountain of air which looks like spray from a whale's blowhole. Unusually the spray has a reddish tinge.

Roleplaying Brynn Seablossom

Brynn is a middle-aged and experienced sailor, with olive skin rugged from a life lived on the open sea. She wears a black bandana and large hooped earrings. Her pipe is used as an occasional pointing aid when she's making a serious statement, but mostly she converses with it in the corner of her mouth. She's hardy, quick to laugh, and isn't easily offended.

Brynn is vexed about her skirmish at sea and, as her sails will soon be mended, can be persuaded to take the characters out in her keelboat for a cut of any reward money or loot they might find.

Quote: "It'll take more than a litter of scrawny gulls to get the better of this old bird."





BEFRIENDING BRYNN

Brynn knows where the birds are mustering at sea, and as a veteran sailor she'll know how best to navigate the sargassum. If the characters would like her help, she wants to know a bit more about her potential company.

Brynn explains that she sees bravery and trust as important aspects of any crew and would like to know something interesting about each of the characters – either a daring deed they've performed or a secret they've never told anyone before. Each character in turn can say their piece, and if Brynn is suitably impressed, she'll offer her services. Even so, Brynn's boat won't be ready until the following day.

ADDING PATRONS

Now is a good time to drop in any rumors from the Saltmarsh Rumors table that were missed beforehand. You can populate the tavern with any unused townsfolk from the Saltmarsh Residents table.

WILDAK MYTHKIN

Handout 3: The Relic's Roadshow Poster leads the characters to Wildak Mythkin, a travelling sage. He can assist the characters by identifying any items they've collected in Saltmarsh. Wildak also knows of the ancient ritual which Maude intends to cast upon Kraggen – he can rake up this knowledge if he's shown the correct clues.

If the characters were drawn to Saltmarsh by the "Pursuit of Knowledge" adventure hook, they may want to show Wildak other items they own. Use the sage however you wish here; he can convey information which could add flavor to a character's story or lead to further adventure!

Roleplaying Wildak Mythkin

Wildak Mythkin is a cheerful, elderly man with a genuine love of lore. He's stout, dark-skinned, and has a shock of frizzed grey hair. He wears long robes which are faded and frayed, and paces around his room in slippers, with a pair of half-moon spectacles perched on his nose. Nothing delights him more than to tell stories and to hear the stories of others, and he has great love for the origins of things and their history. He can become disheartened if a client cares only for an object's worth in gold, but this cloud quickly passes, and he's soon laughing as he explains another piece of wisdom to anyone who's listening.

Quote: "Think not of the coin... Think of the many hands this treasure has passed through, the stories it could tell. That is where the true value lies!"

THE RELIC'S ROADSHOW

Wildak Mythkin has a marvelous memory for lore, a skill which he puts to use by leading his caravan, the Relic's Roadshow, up and down the Sword Coast. He tours from town to town with a few assistants and a wagon-load of tomes. Patrons queue up to show him their curios and heirlooms. Signed papers from Wildak Mythkin detailing an item's origins and worth increases the likelihood of a sale at any auction house tenfold. Wildak takes a small percentage of such sales and thus he makes a modest living and can continue his learned travels.

Saltmarsh's town council is hosting the Relic's Roadshow in the council hall, and Wildak spends nearly all his time in the office assigned to him on the ground floor – meeting clientele, delving into his books, or sleeping at his desk.

A RUN IN WITH THE RIVERPUNCHES

No matter the time of day or night, when the characters seek out Wildak, they find him in a heated debate with three locals. Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

You hear raised voices as you enter a room piled high with books. A brawny middle-aged woman has a bespectacled elderly man in her clutches and is shaking him by the collar of his robes. Two more tough looking men are also present; one brandishes a hefty tome like a weapon, whilst the other looks on menacingly. Papers have been scattered from the desk to the floor and an inkwell has spilled, staining the wood.

Breaga Riverpunch, a female human **bandit captain**, and her two grown sons Elhorn and Jergar, both male human **bandits**, have brought a jeweled necklace to the loremaster for appraisal, and he's identified the gems as fake. Breaga is insisting that Wildak pens her a document to the contrary so that she can sell the necklace for a decent price. Breaga has the word 'RIVER' tattooed across her right hand, and 'PUNCH' across her left. Elhorn and Jergar both have their own names tattooed across the back of their shorn heads.

Characters can diffuse the situation if they succeed on a DC 12 group Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check. Anyone who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check can discern from the shifty demeanor of Breaga's sons that the item in





When the characters have Hollylove on side, she tells them that her practice has been overrun with problem birds for the past two days. The pets are exhibiting the same aggressive behavior as the birds in the wild. She can reveal the following information:

- She's communicated with several birds using the *speak with animals* spell and has noted her findings in her ledger. **Give the players Handout 5: Hollylove's Observations.**
- The bird's aggressive episodes do pass. Afterwards they have no recollection of any unnatural behavior, but all reveal the same, strange riddle detailed in her notes. Hollylove believes this is a cry for help.
- There's a pattern to the bird's hysteria: it only affects them at certain times of the day. On a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check, characters can link these times of day to the ebb and flow of the tide.

MIDNIGHT MURDER OF CROWS

During their first night in Saltmarsh, the characters are abruptly woken in the small hours by a commotion outside. Maude and Kraggen have attacked again, this time inside the town.

The villains have targeted the home of Telmay Pelt, one of the Saltmarsh urchins, who was spotted with the egg by Maude's birds. Luckily, Telmay was visiting her friend Marni Wolfsmith when the villains arrived, as Telmay's parents are out of town on a trip to Waterdeep. The hag and peryton turned the rooms of the house upside down in their search for the egg and killed a town guard.

When the characters arrive at the scene, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

A ghastly sight greets you as you approach the tumbledown house. A man in torn clothing is sprawled on the front steps. His torso bears an open wound and both his eyes have been plucked from their sockets. As his blood pools around the cobblestones, a murder of crows take flight from the surrounding rooftops and disappear into the night sky.





DOWN CAME A BLACK BIRD

Adjusting the Encounter

The following suggests adjustments which could be made to this encounter depending on the level of your players. These adjustments are not cumulative:

- **Very Weak:** Remove Multiattack and reduce its Fire Ray damage to 7 (2d6) fire damage. Halve the gull's hit points. It has no 3rd level spell slots.
- **Weak:** Remove Multiattack and reduce its Fire Ray damage to 7 (2d6) fire damage.
- **Strong:** Add another gull. This extra gull cannot cast spells.
- **Very Strong:** Add another gull.

TALKING TO THE GUARDS

Several guards soon arrive at the scene, clearly shaken and distraught at the sight of their colleague's mutilated body. A middle-aged guard with a large black beard approaches the characters. His face and hands are covered in scratches. This is Gordol Thorne, a **veteran** guard captain, and he can inform the characters of the following:

- Gordol and a small company of guards were out on patrol when they were assailed by scores of crows.
- The birds took off as if by some unheard signal. Whilst the guards were dealing with their injuries a passer-by informed him that they'd seen "a great circling of starlings" above a house across town, and so he came to investigate.
- The dead guard is Glif Flintman, "one of the good ones..."
- The ruined property belongs to Arnuld Pelt, his wife Herma and their daughter Telmay. Gordol knows that Arnuld and Herma are out of town, but there's no sign of their daughter...

The guards advise the characters to attend the town council meeting in the morning so they can report the incident to the community.





He pushes the wrapped egg into the hands of one of the characters and tells them of a conversation he overheard last night.

- Late last night, Fipp stumbled upon two figures debating the raid they'd just carried out on Telmay's home. He was hiding behind crates, so his view of them was limited.
- The woman was tall and ugly. He could only see the man's shadow, but his voice sounded more like a growl and he kept coughing.
- They were looking for an egg and were angry that they didn't have it.
- They seemed to be in love – the woman said, "Soon we'll be together, my beloved" and she spoke about a ritual.
- The woman told the man to look for where the seagulls gather, if he ever needed to find her, but to be wary of her "feathered friends" when the tide is in.

If the characters are stern with Fipp, he throws the egg at them and runs off. The other children scatter into the crowd. Anyone who succeeds on a DC 12 Dexterity check catches the egg. Otherwise it bounces to the ground – luckily it is made of tough stuff.

The characters now have the egg. Ideally it should hatch during the following encounter to add to the pandemonium.

Peryton's Egg

The egg is roughly 12" long and 10" wide and weighs just over 6lbs. The texture is smooth, and the coloration is light blue with silver flecks. The shell is as hard as steel – the exterior can be broken with a successful DC 30 Strength check, otherwise acid has been known to damage it.

When the characters receive the egg, it's ready to hatch. The baby peryton will bond with the first creature it sees. It needs raw meat for sustenance for the first month of its life (ideally live prey) and will fully mature by three months. Characters who succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check have some idea of how to care for the newborn beast.

THE BIRDS ATTACK

A horn sounds from the roof of the council hall as Eda Oweland steps up to her lectern. Attendees are already calling out their questions. As she begins to answer, the birds swarm and attack. Salty Maude means to punish the town of Saltmarsh and make her presence known. Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

High above, starlings flock in a vast murmuration – a billowing black cloud against the golden light of day. The birds roil overhead, throwing the town square into an unnatural gloom. Onlookers gasp as the swarm takes the shape of a giant eye sweeping over the plaza. As quickly as it materialized, the eye explodes, as hundreds of screeching starlings plummet from the sky to attack.

Appendix B contains a map of the town square.

Three swarms of starlings attack everyone present at the meeting. Each swarm has the statistics of a **swarms of ravens**. Terror sweeps across the town square as everyone tries to escape. Council members are hustled into the town hall as the guards try to fend off the onslaught.

Crowds. Due to the mass of people running in all directions, characters are unable to use the Dash action.

Cover. There are crates stacked around which the locals were sitting on for a better view of the proceedings. These can be climbed or used as cover (+2 to AC and Dexterity saving throws). They also block several exits from the square.

Balconies. Some of the buildings have wooden balconies which can be climbed onto.

KRAGGEN'S GRAND ENTRANCE

At the beginning of the second round, the **peryton** Kraggen lands on a nearby rooftop. Backlit by the morning sun, his human shadow extends before him. His roar is like nails on a chalkboard, and he beats his wings angrily before swooping down into the square. Three **blood hawks** soar overhead and divebomb the terrified crowd at Kraggen's call. Kraggen is a peryton that can speak Common.

Roleplaying Kraggen

Kraggen is narcissistic, overconfident, and utterly evil. He preens and poses and believes he is king of the perytons, soon to be king of mankind. He basks in Maude's adoration of the man that his shadow portrays. This proud beast is easily insulted, and any hint of belittlement towards him throws him into a frothy-mouthed fury.

Due to one of Maude's rituals, Kraggen has a human tongue and can speak Common. His voice is guttural and grating, and he coughs frequently when talking; a side-effect of the procedure.

Quote: "You should feel honored to be killed by me! I will enjoy feasting on your still-beating heart."



TACTICS

Each of the three swarms attacks a different area of the square: north, middle and south (areas N, M and S on the map - see "Complications", below).

Kraggen's goal is to recapture the egg and return it to Maude in her lair. He uses the surrounding rooftops and balconies to gain height advantages for his Flyby and Dive Attack powers. If unable to get to the egg, Kraggen fights to the death, as his pride won't allow him to flee.

This encounter is one of the adventure's main showdowns and should be challenging for the players. Most of the **guards** present are trying to get the councilors and other nobles to safety, though there should be plenty available to aid the players if they get into trouble. Aim for high drama, with birds shattering windows to enter buildings and Kraggen goring guards with his antlers. Careering in all directions, the birds form a blizzard; and the noise of the baying peryton, the piercing bird cries, and the shrieking townsfolk, is clamoring.

Depending on how the encounter is going, add more starling swarms or bloodhawks as you see fit. The moment Kraggen is slain, the remaining birds howl unnaturally in Maude's voice. They continue to scream like the hag as they fight on. When there is only one swarm remaining, those birds peel off into the sky, and the fight is over.

COMPLICATIONS

Each area of the town square which is under attack has its own complications to add further drama and danger to the encounter. These are depicted as C^N, C^M and C^S on the map. The peryton egg can also hatch at any time.

Northern Area: Trampled on the Steps. People charge up the steps to seek shelter in the hall. A young man has fallen on the steps and is in danger of being trampled by the surging crowd. Lifting him to his feet is an action that requires success on a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check.

Middle Area: Lost in the Crowd. An elderly woman stands disorientated in the middle of the square. Her spectacles lie broken at her feet, starlings are tugging on her headscarf, and she's calling out "Lora? Lora?!" Characters who succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check spot another woman in the crowd calling for her

grandmother. Lora is a young woman and rushes to embrace her elderly relative.

Southern Area: Stranded on a Wall. A boy is stranded on a balcony and is being harangued by starlings. The crates he used to climb up have been knocked over in the chaos of the attack. Rescuing the child requires success on a DC 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.

The Egg Hatches. Once the egg begins to hatch it takes two rounds before the baby peryton pushes its head fully through the shell. The newborn creature mewls loudly which draws the attention of Kraggen and the birds.





Adjusting the Encounter

The following suggests adjustments which could be made to this encounter depending on the level of your players. These adjustments are not cumulative:

- **Very Weak:** The **peryton** no longer has damage resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks. Halve the **peryton's** hit points. Halve the swarms of starling's hit points. Remove two **blood hawks**.
- **Weak:** The **peryton** no longer has damage resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks. Remove one **blood hawk**.
- **Strong:** Add one swarm of starlings and one **blood hawk**.
- **Very Strong:** Add four **giant vultures** that enter combat with Kraggen at the start of the second round.

AFTERMATH

When the struggle is over, hundreds of dead starlings litter the square. If Kraggen is dead, the hag's anguished cries echo into the heavens. Many townsfolk are injured and taken into the council hall for shelter and treatment. Those who have lost their lives are shrouded in blankets and carried indoors.

Eda Oweland stumbles from the town hall – she and her retinue are covered in cuts after the starlings burst through the hall's windows and assailed all inside.

Gordol Thorne of the town guard steps forward and leads the characters to the councilor. Gordol speaks up for them, praising them for their valiant efforts in battling the birds. Eda is keen to know anything the characters can tell her about the events of the past few days. She also promises to reward the characters with

200gp if they can put a swift end to the troubles.

THE GRATITUDE OF THE TOWNSFOLK

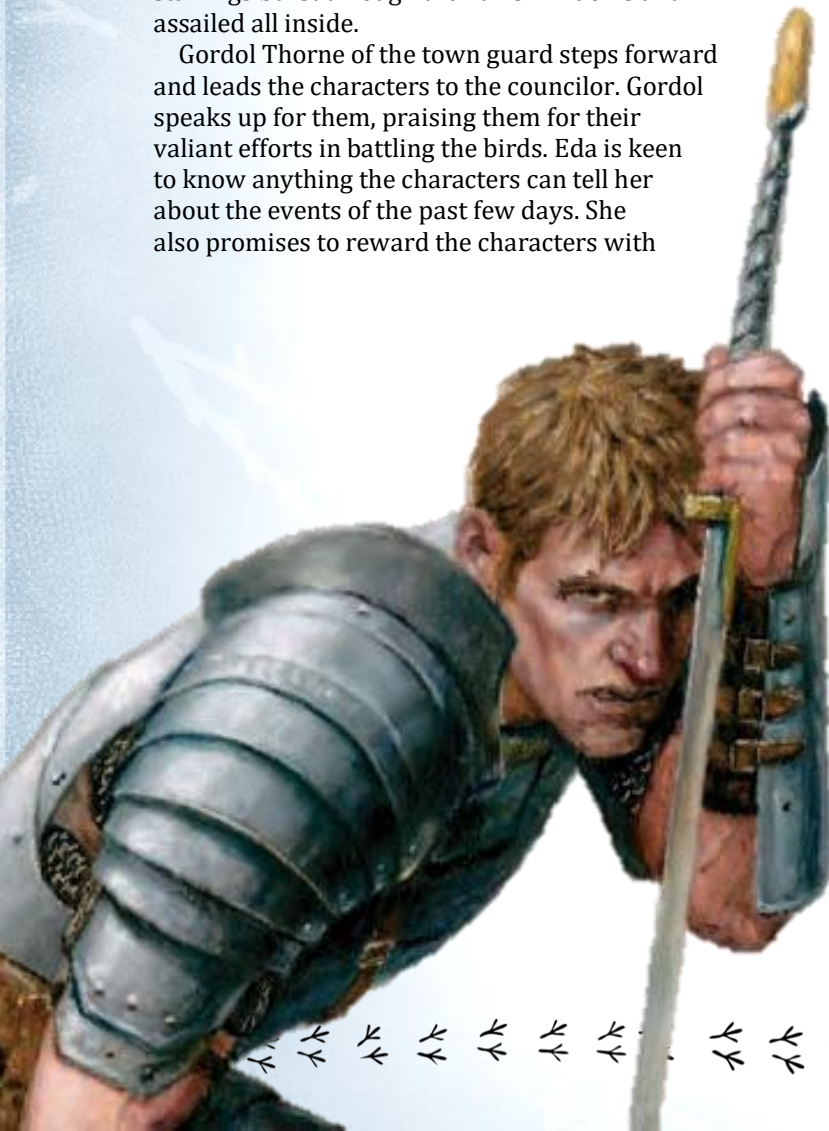
If the characters rescued any of the townsfolk during the encounter, they gain the following boons:

Trampled on the Steps. The young man rescued on the steps introduces himself as Redam Bisk, son of a wealthy merchant. He gives the characters a signet ring, which will grant them discounts when buying supplies from various traders in Saltmarsh.

Lost in the Crowd. Lora Willowgrain and her frail grandmother Arnelle, step forward to thank the characters. Lora owns a local bakery and insists that the characters stop by whenever they're in town and she'll make them up a hamper.

Arnelle holds her broken spectacles and mentions that her necklace was recently lost or stolen. If the characters have the stolen necklace from Wildak's roadshow, they can reunite it with its owner. It belonged to Arnelle's departed sister, and therefore holds great sentimental value. Arnelle asks that the characters visit her before they leave town, so she can reward them for their kindness. If they visit Arnelle, she gifts each of the characters a hand-knitted scarf.

Stranded on a Wall. A middle-aged man shakes each of the character's hands in turn. He is Strudor Casuzol, and the child they rescued from the wall is his son, Raffi. Strudor works at the local playhouse, and promises the characters their own private booth, on the house, for a future performance of their choice.





PART 4: TRAIL OF THE HAG

The characters home in on the hag's lair and cleanse the Saltmarsh skies of her curse.

THE HAG'S LAIR

Salty Maude's lair is in the fetid corpse of a giant whale. It floats, mouth agape, in a large mass of greenish-brown sargassum. Seabirds, hungry for blubber, vie for positions on its exposed upper half. Hundreds more bob around in the surrounding tangle of seaweed. The whale's open maw is the entrance to the lair. Torches are crudely staked into the walls of its throat and its gullet forms a watery tunnel into its hollowed-out torso.

The lair itself is one large room in the whale's chest cavity and here the characters find the ritual focus for the hag's bird curse (see "Area Features"). Maude animates the whale to dive underwater if things start to go bad for her.

LOCATING THE LAIR

Several clues can lead the characters to Maude's lair:

- Hollylove Dardusk can provide an eight-line riddle revealed to her by possessed birds (see Part 2: "A Night in Saltmarsh"). In addition, the characters can learn from Hollylove that the bird aggression peaks when the tide is in.
- Having sailed her vessel close to the sargassum, Brynn Seablossom knows the lair's location (see Part 2: "A Night in Saltmarsh"). She can also reveal that the seabirds appear calm when the tide is out. Further to this, she's spotted the whale intermittently belching wet air from its blowhole.
- Fipp overheard Maude and Kraggen talking. Maude said she could be found where the seabirds gather and warned of the bird hostility when the tide is in (see Part 3: "Town Meeting").

The hag's lair is at sea, so the characters need to get there by boat: something which Saltmarsh has in abundance. Ships may get stuck in the sargassum, so a smaller boat is preferable. The problem comes in finding owners willing to loan their vessels to the characters or travel with them. If they've befriended Brynn Seablossom, she can sail them there. Otherwise they may be able to convince senior councilor Eda Oweland to provide them with a vessel and, if required, a skipper.

TIMING THE TIDES

When approaching the lair at high tide, intruders are assailed by limitless swarms of angry gulls until beaten back from the lair's vicinity. At low tide the birds are resting and allow the characters to sail by

without hindrance. As their boat forges a path, the gulls flap idly out of the way; this should be an eerie experience, with an ocean of birds surrounding the characters for as far as the eye can see. If they don't know that the tides are linked to the bird behavior, decide for yourself how the gulls act as the characters advance. Bear in mind that restless birdlife is easy to spot from afar.

On route, feel free to add any seafaring encounters or challenges found in *Ghosts of Saltmarsh*.

ENTERING THE LAIR

When the characters near the lair entrance, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

The stench of rotting flesh, bird excrement, and fish carrion engulfs you. An enormous whale looms ahead; its carcass, teeming with seabirds, rises from the web of surrounding sargassum like an island. Its eye sockets are empty and gulls peck and tear at its blubber. Its open mouth is cavernous, and you can see burning torches inside, lighting the way down the tunnel of its throat.

The whale's mouth forms the entrance to a tunnel accessible only by small boats. If the characters have no such vessel, they must swim down the throat to access the lair's main chamber. The water inside is 10-feet deep, and the tunnel is 25-feet long. If forced to swim, the vessel can be anchored in the mass of sargassum. Those who opt to tether their vessel to the whale may find it dragged underwater if the creature animates!

THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

The hag's lair lies in the belly of the whale. The water here becomes shallow and sloshes against the base of the whale's tongue, where the characters can disembark and view the chamber ahead. Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

The doughy ground squelches underfoot as you step into the gaping cavern inside the whale. The whale's internal organs have been pushed aside into oozing piles and a gaggle of mangy gulls feasts on the innards. The spinal column tracks overhead and the ribs descend like rafters. A multitude of objects clutter the slimy floor or hang from fishhooks lodged into the ceiling: bird cages and bottles, bones and shells.





AREA INFORMATION

Appendix B contains a map of the hag's lair.

This area has the following important features.

Lighting. Lanterns are fastened to the whale's ribs and glow with a greenish-blue light. There are lots of gloomy corners amidst the clutter and piles of viscera.

Scrying Pool. At the back of the lair, a large open clam rests atop a driftwood altar. This is the hag's focus for her bird curse - a scrying pool which she uses to see through the eyes of the birds and control them. Its base is filled with swirling water which emanates green light. An eye has been painted in blood on the inside lid of the shell.

Closing the lid disrupts the ritual. The clam's hinge and underside have been coated in a viscous paste which has hardened, and so forcing the lid down takes an action and requires success on a DC 18 Strength check. Once closed, the clam fractures and the magic drains from it, thereby ending the curse on the Saltmarsh birds.

Flying Rowboat. Maude's mount, a flying rowboat, lies next to one of the whale's ribs. Maude uses this to escape if things go badly for her (see "Maude's Tactics"). The flying rowboat has the same powers as a *broom of flying*.

MAUDE'S TACTICS

Salty Maude prefers to hang back and use her Death Glare on any frightened characters while her sea spawn fight on the front line. She carries out hit-and-run attacks on characters who find themselves alone. As a reaction to taking damage or being targeted by a spell, Maude commands the whale to dive underwater. Shuddering to life, its rotten heart starts pulsing and the lair begins to move.

Each character must roll a d8 on the Moving Lair Hazards table at the end of each of their turns to determine how they fare as the whale lurches and turns in the sea. Meanwhile, if the encounter isn't going her way, Maude attempts to reach her flying rowboat and flee. If necessary, Maude abandons her flying rowboat and makes for the exit, in a bid to swim away instead.

Moving Lair Hazards

d8	Effect
1	The whale ascends and knocks you backwards 5 feet. You must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d3 piercing damage and be knocked prone as you stumble into a pair of shrieking gulls.
2	The whale dives and you pitch forwards 5 feet. You must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or get caught in a fishing net and fall prone.
3	The whale rolls left, causing you to slide 5 feet in that direction. You must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone by a frantic pelican sweeping into you.
4	The whale rolls right, causing you to stagger 5 feet in that direction. You must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone by a swinging bird cage.
5-8	No effect.

Adjusting the Encounter

The following suggests adjustments which could be made to this encounter depending on the level of your players. These adjustments are not cumulative:

- **Very Weak:** Halve the **sea hag's** hit points. Remove the **sea spawn**.
- **Weak:** Remove one **sea spawn**.
- **Strong:** Add two **sea spawn**.
- **Very Strong:** Add three **sea spawn**. Add one **carriion crawler** which bursts from the whale's organs when combat ensues.

DEVELOPMENT

If Salty Maude escapes and the whale was animated during the encounter, it floats lifelessly to the surface as soon as she leaves the lair. It spouts one last burst of blood and guts through its blowhole before expiring for good.

With their curse lifted, the seabirds which had amassed on the sargassum take flight, circling and cawing. If a character casts the *speak with animals* spell, they sense an overwhelming feeling of joy and relief as the birds whirl in the sky.

The lair can be searched for treasure before the characters sail back to Saltmarsh.

TREASURE

If it's still there, the characters can claim the *flying rowboat*. A barnacle-encrusted treasure chest sits on the driftwood altar. Inside the chest are:

- 6 moonstones worth 50 gp each.



- Each character also receives a trinket. Roll a d10 on the Hag's Trinkets table to determine who gets what.

d10 Trinket

-

With the hag defeated and the birds freed of their curse, the characters earn the respect and gratitude of the people of Saltmarsh and its council. However, if Maude escaped, she certainly plots her revenge on the group and could become a recurring nemesis for them in future adventures.

Lastly, the birds chirrup the heroes' deeds in their peep-talk: of how they lifted the weight of darkness from their feathers and gave them back their freedom. The birds acknowledge the characters, and in their own wild and enigmatic way, are thankful.



APPENDIX A: MONSTER AND NPC SUMMARY

Bandit

Medium humanoid (any race), any non-lawful alignment

Armor Class 12 (leather armor)

Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Actions

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) slashing damage.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80 ft./320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

Bandit Captain

Medium humanoid (any race), any non-lawful alignment

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +4, Dex +5, Wis +2

Skills Athletics +4, Deception +4

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any two languages

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Actions

Multiattack. The captain makes three melee attacks: two with its scimitar and one with its dagger. Or the captain makes two ranged attacks with its daggers.

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Reactions

Parry. The captain adds 2 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the captain must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Blood Hawk

Small beast, unaligned

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 7 (2d6)

Speed 10 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	3 (-4)	14 (+2)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +4

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages —

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Keen Sight. The hawk has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Pack Tactics. The hawk has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the hawk's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Carrion Crawler

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 51 (6d10 + 18)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	1 (-5)	12 (+1)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)



Keen Smell. The carrion crawler has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Spider Climb. The carrion crawler can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Actions

Multiattack. The carrion crawler makes two attacks: one with its tentacles and one with its bite.

Tentacles. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) poison damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. Until this poison ends, the target is paralyzed. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the poison on itself on a success.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Commoner

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 4 (1d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 0 (10 XP)

Actions

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.

Flameskull

Tiny undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 40 (9d4 + 18)

Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (-5)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)

Skills Arcana +5, Perception +2

Damage Resistances lightning, necrotic, piercing

Damage Immunities cold, fire, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Illumination. The flameskull sheds either dim light in a 15-foot radius, or bright light in a 15-foot radius and dim light for an additional 15 feet. It can switch between the options as an action.

Magic Resistance. The flameskull has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Rejuvenation. If the flameskull is destroyed, it regains all its hit points in 1 hour unless holy water is sprinkled on its remains or a *dispel magic* or *remove curse* spell is cast on them.

Spellcasting. The flameskull is a 5th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). It requires no somatic or material components to cast its spells. The flameskull has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrip (at will): *mage hand*

1st level (3 slots): *magic missile*, *shield*

2nd level (2 slots): *blur*, *flaming sphere*

3rd level (1 slot): *fireball*

Actions

Multiattack. The flameskull uses Fire Ray twice.

Fire Ray. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) fire damage.

Giant Vulture

Large beast, neutral evil

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 22 (3d10 + 6)

Speed 10 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	6 (-2)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +3

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages understands Common but can't speak

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Keen Sight and Smell. The vulture has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight or smell.

Pack Tactics. The vulture has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the vulture's





allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Multiattack. The vulture makes two attacks: one with its beak and one with its talons.
Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage.
Talons. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) slashing damage.

A giant vulture has advanced intelligence and a malevolent bent. Unlike its smaller kin, it will attack a wounded creature to hasten its end. Giant vultures have been known to haunt a thirsty, starving creature for days to enjoy its suffering.

Guard

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment
Armor Class 16 (chain shirt, shield)
Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +2
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Actions

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

Noble

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment
Armor Class 15 (breastplate)
Hit Points 9 (2d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Skills Deception +5, Insight +4, Persuasion +5
Senses passive Perception 10
Languages any two languages
Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Actions

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

Reactions

Parry. The noble adds 2 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the noble must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Peryton

Medium monstrosity, chaotic evil
Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)
Speed 20 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	9 (-1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +5
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages understands Common and Elvish but can't speak
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Dive Attack. If the peryton is flying and dives at least 30 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a melee weapon attack, the attack deals an extra 9 (2d8) damage to the target.
Flyby. The peryton doesn't provoke an opportunity attack when it flies out of an enemy's reach.
Keen Sight and Smell. The peryton has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight or smell.

Actions

Multiattack. The peryton makes one gore attack and one talon attack.
Gore. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.
Talons. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Raven

Tiny beast, unaligned
Armor Class 12
Hit Points 1 (1d4 - 1)
Speed 10 ft., fly 50 ft.



STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
2 (-4)	14 (+2)	8 (-2)	2 (-4)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Skills Perception +3

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge 0 (10 XP)

Mimicry. The raven can mimic simple sounds it has heard, such as a person whispering, a baby crying, or an animal chittering. A creature that hears the sounds can tell they are imitations with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check.

Actions

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. 1 piercing damage.

Sea Hag

Medium fey, chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 52 (7d8 + 21)

Speed 30 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Aquan, Common, Giant

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Amphibious. The hag can breathe air and water.

Horrific Appearance. Any humanoid that starts its turn within 30 feet of the hag and can see the hag's true form must make a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, with disadvantage if the hag is within line of sight, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the hag's Horrific Appearance for the next 24 hours.

Unless the target is surprised or the revelation of the hag's true form is sudden, the target can avert its eyes and avoid making the initial saving throw. Until the start of its next turn, a creature that averts its eyes has disadvantage on attack rolls against the hag.

Actions

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Death Glare. The hag targets one frightened creature she can see within 30 feet of her. If the target can see the hag, it must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw against this magic or drop to 0 hit points.

Illusory Appearance. The hag covers herself and anything she is wearing or carrying with a magical illusion that makes her look like an ugly creature of her general size and humanoid shape. The illusion ends if the hag takes a bonus action to end it or if she dies.

The changes wrought by this effect fail to hold up to physical inspection. For example, the hag could appear to have no claws, but someone touching her hand might feel the claws. Otherwise, a creature must take an action to visually inspect the illusion and succeed on a DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check to discern that the hag is disguised.

Sea Spawn

Medium humanoid, neutral evil

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)

Speed 20 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	8 (-1)	15 (+2)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages understands Aquan and Common but can't speak

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Limited Amphibiousness. The sea spawn can breathe air and water, but needs to be submerged in the sea at least once a day for 1 minute to avoid suffocating.

Actions

Multiattack. The sea spawn makes three attacks: two unarmed strikes and one with its Piscine Anatomy.

Unarmed Strike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Piscine Anatomy. The sea spawn has one or more of the following attack options, provided it has the appropriate anatomy:

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.





Poison Quills. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) poison damage and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Tentacle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 12) if it is a Medium or smaller creature. Until this grapple ends, the sea spawn can't use this tentacle on another target.

Swarm of Ravens

Medium swarm of Tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 24 (7d8 – 7)

Speed 10 ft., fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (–2)	14 (+2)	8 (–1)	3 (–4)	12 (+1)	6 (–2)

Skills Perception +5

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages —

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Keen Smell. The swarm has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny raven. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Actions

Beaks. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) piercing damage, or 3 (1d6) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.

Veteran

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 17 (splint)

Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

16 (+3) 13 (+1) 14 (+2) 10 (+0) 11 (+0) 10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +5, Perception +2

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Actions

Multiattack. The veteran makes two longsword attacks. If it has a shortsword drawn, it can also make a shortsword attack.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) piercing damage.

Vulture

Medium beast, unaligned

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 5 (1d8 + 1)

Speed 10 ft., fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (–2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	2 (–4)	12 (+1)	4 (–3)

Skills Perception +3

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge 0 (10 XP)

Keen Sight and Smell. The vulture has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight or smell.

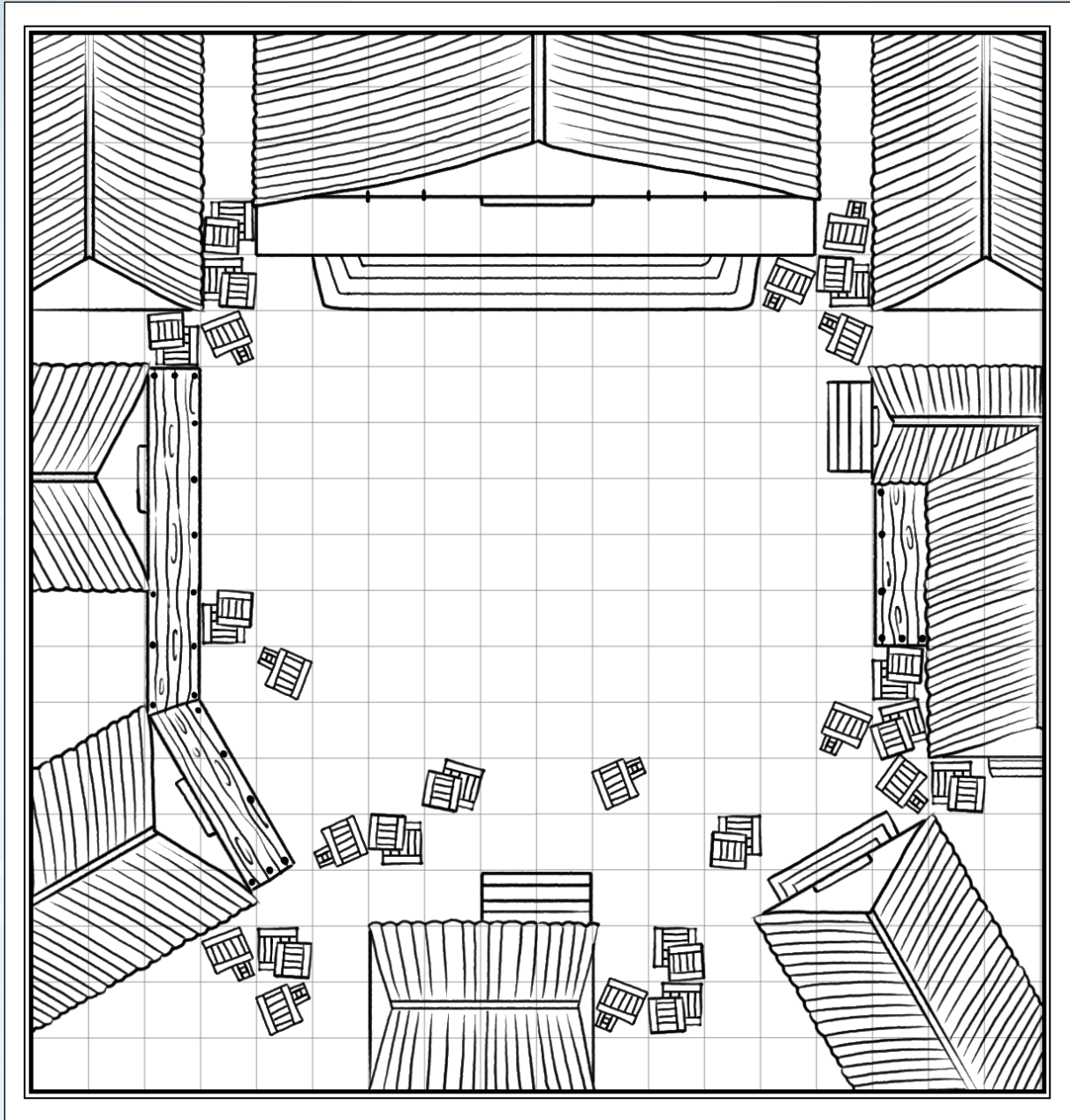
Pack Tactics. The vulture has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the vulture's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Actions

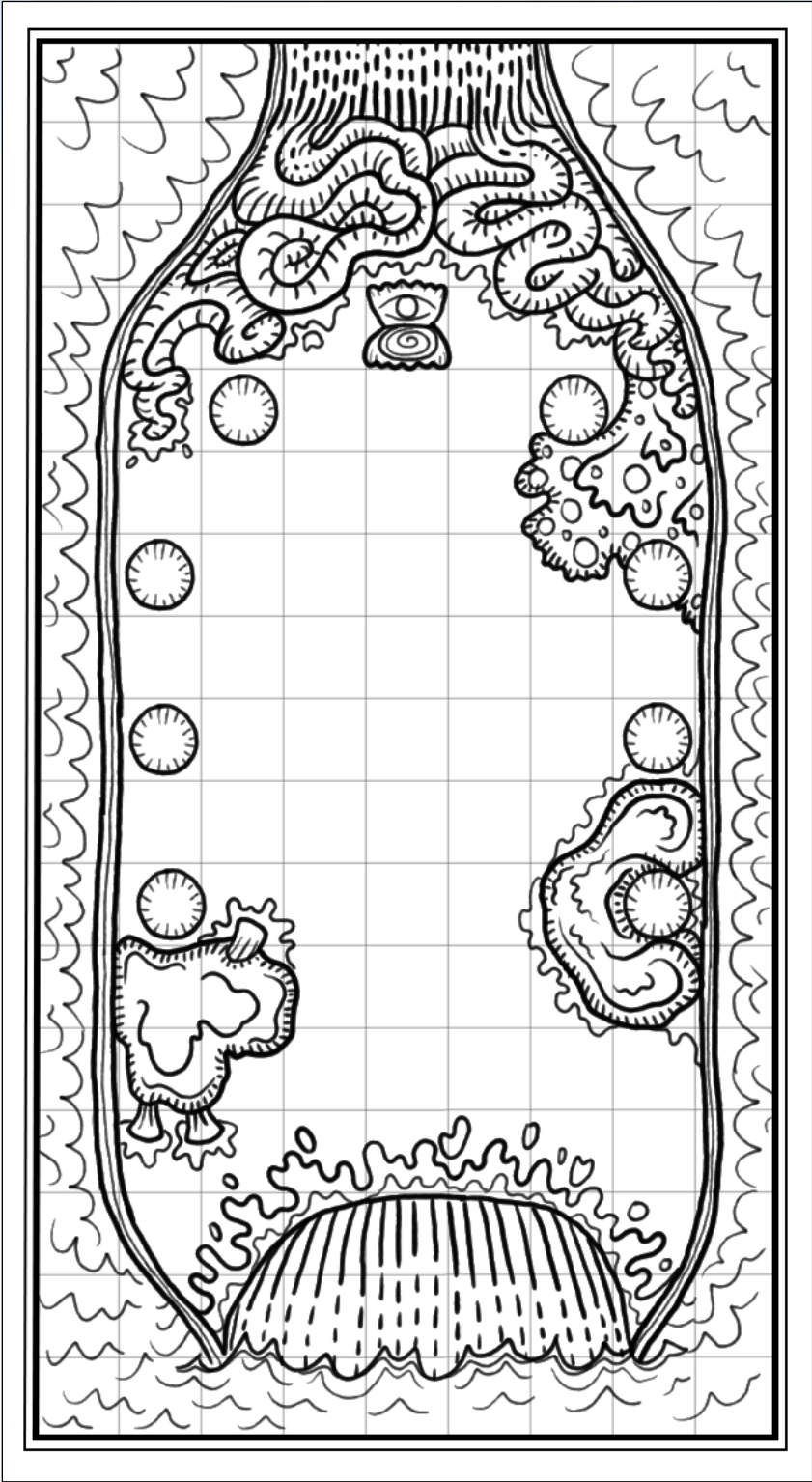
Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) piercing damage.

APPENDIX B: MAPS

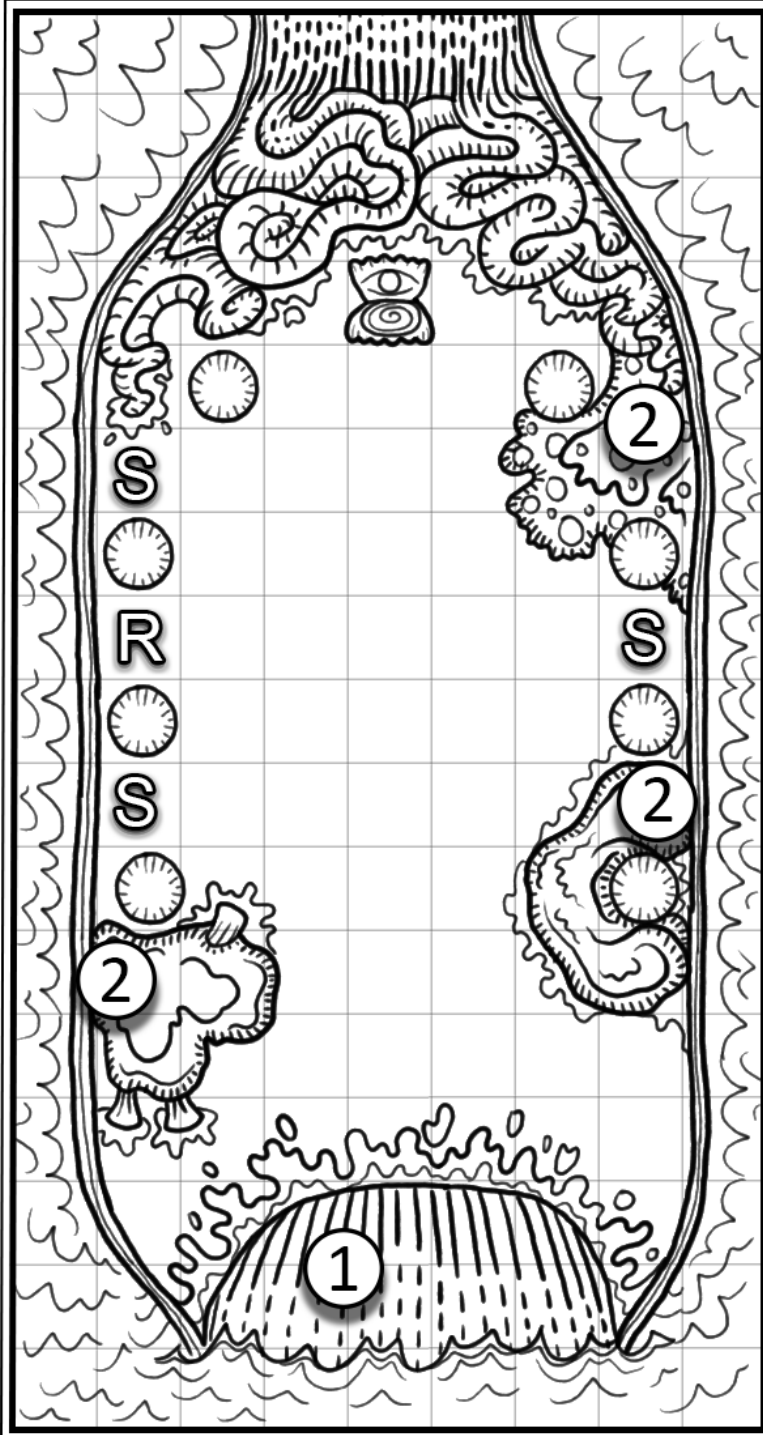
Part 3: Town Meeting (player version)



Part 4: Hag's Lair (player version)



Part 4: Hag's Lair (DM version)



Key:

 Rib pillars Scrying pool

§ Sea spawn

R Rowboat

① Tongue entrance

② Internal organs

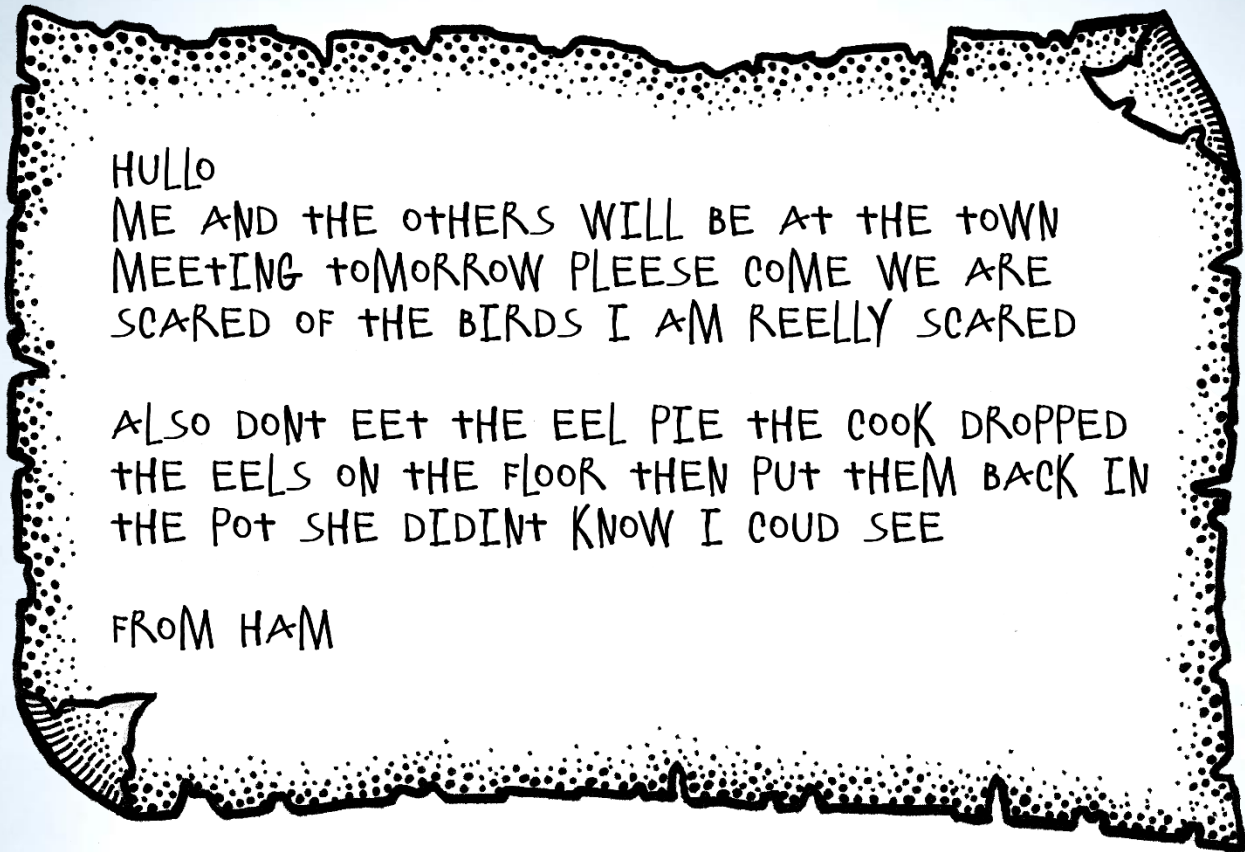
1 Square = 5ft





APPENDIX C: PLAYER HANDOUTS

Handout 1: Ham's Note



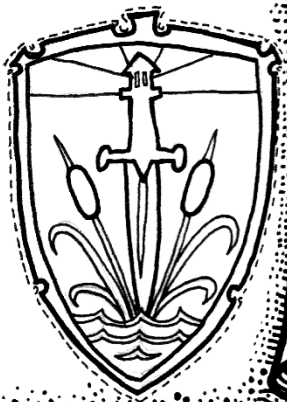


Handout 2: The Town Meeting Announcement

URGENT! TOWN MEETING
WHEN? TOMORROW AT FIRST BELLS
WHERE? TOWN SQUARE

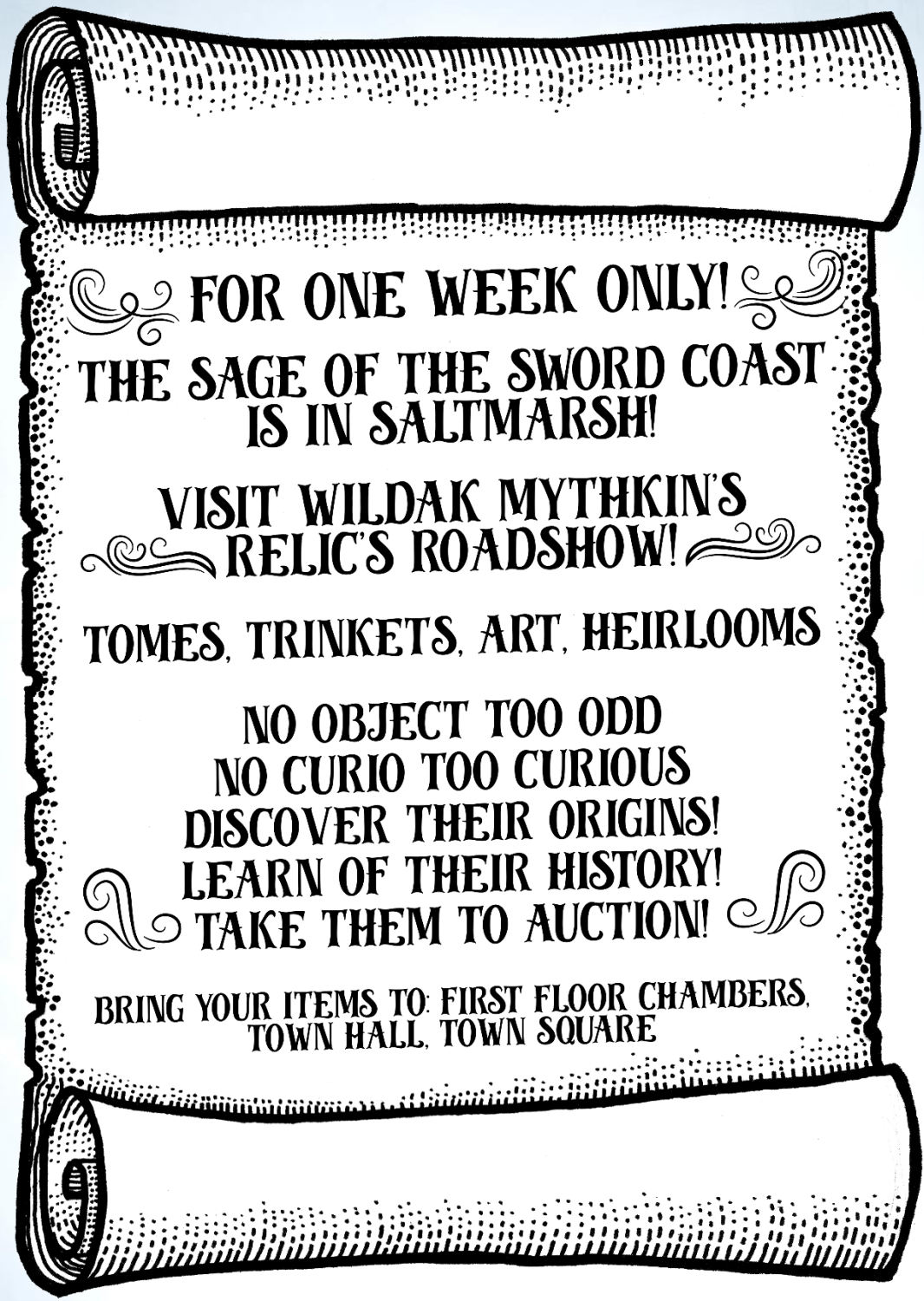
COUNCIL MEMBERS ARE TO SPEAK ON OUR TOWN'S
RECENT MURDERS AND BIRD ATTACKS.
TIME WILL BE ALLOCATED FOR QUESTIONS
AND ANSWERS.

ANYONE WHO HAS INFORMATION
REGARDING THE ABOVE CRIMES
MUST REPORT TO THE TOWN GUARD
IMMEDIATELY.





Handout 3: The Relic's Roadshow Poster



Handout 4: The Town Vet Advertisement

Local vet seeks full-time assistant to start immediately.
Must be experienced in handling birds.
Please apply in person to Hollylove Dardusk, Wellspring Lane, Saltmarsh

Handout 5: Hollylove's Observations

North of rocky whale bone isles
Seaweed lair of salt defiles
West of Saltmarsh home of boats
Dead but not dead blubber floats
Seabirds flock to widow's den
Slaves to magic, hawk through wren
Cursed by lady of the sea
Close the eye and set us free