

THE SEABORN

A SUPPLEMENT FOR THE ELDRITCH LIVE ACTION ROLEPLAYING GAME

The ELDRITCH Live Action Roleplaying game is a lovingly crafted work of fiction created by John Kozar, Faye Ferguson, and Spencer McGhin, with additional input from, and content created by Megan Durham, Jessica Sills, Thomas Marshbanks, Galen Hall, and Joe Meyer. Special thanks to Lehanna Allen, Carl Holzbog, and anyone else who ever listened to us prattle on about the project. Thanks to everyone who helped to make this strange dream a reality.

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All art by William Weird and Mel De Carvalho.

Art direction by Spencer McGhin and John Kozar.

WELCOME ABOARD ...

The Three Seas are among the most rugged, dangerous, and wild landscapes in Arnesse. It is here, among the waves, that the Seaborn make their homes. Unbound by the laws of Kings, they are a people who live at the whim of the tides and go where the currents take them. Forever doomed to be outsiders, their culture has grown up outside the structures and civility of more established society. To many, they are little more than brigands of the sea, uncouth rogues who take what they want from whomever is unfortunate enough to cross their path. From their secretive and hidden freeports the fleets of the High Armada have remained a constant and deadly threat to those who travel the Three Seas. But just beneath the surface lie a proud people who are inheritors of an ancient and dark legacy; Princes of a drowned empire who yearn to return to the time when they sat in a place of honor among their peers. In years past, the Seaborn had all but disappeared from the courts of Arnesse; largely forgotten by the powers of the Kingdom. Recently, the ships of Seaborn captains have been sighted in the ports of towns throughout the Arnesse, not as raiders, but as visitors. Speculation has spread across the Kingdom as to the Seaborn's intentions and what it could mean for the delicate balance of power in the Kingdom. To date, the Seaborn have been careful to not reveal their hand or plans to anyone. They remain a wild card in the great game and a sharp thorn in the side of many who see their fickle and unpredictable nature as a possible threat.

USING THIS GUIDE

The player supplements for Eldritch are intended to provide detail information beyond that which is known to the general player population. All information in this guide is to be taken as in-play information, known by you and others in your corresponding faction. You may over the course of Eldritch events, discover new information that corresponds to your faction, however you will be able to share this information as you wish.

MAJOR FIGURES OF THE SEABORN

Giles Bannon II

His Majesty, Giles Bannon II, King of the Ardan, Lord Sovereign of the Seven Protectorates and Defender of the Vale

Few figures in Arnesse are as reviled among the Seaborn as the King. Giles Bannon II was not particularly of a concern to the Seaborn until he passed his morality laws a few years ago.

A King is to be reviled, but a King with a conscience is even worse. In addition, he granted land to House Blayne when he married the daughter of the Lord Paragon, Frederick Blayne. This alone outraged many Seaborn as they saw it as an affront to their status as a Great House. They felt if any land should be given, it should be given to them. Since Giles' coronation, the Seaborn have worked hard to defy him and all his laws; they have actually become a substantial thorn in the side of the King. He has dispatched his Lord Admiral to deal with this threat, but to date, Lord Ambrose Corveaux has not been able to end the scourge. The Seaborn don't think much of Giles' faith, or of the rumors that he may legitimize the Aurorym as the religion of the Kingdom. They do respect that Giles II is a fighting man as well as his prowess in battle, but this does little to assuage the outrage that he has yet to grant them land.

Aline Bannon

Her Majesty, Aline Bannon, Queen of the Ardan, Queen of Flowers

Queen Aline Bannon, to many Seaborn, is the ultimate prize. Beautiful and wealthy, she would fetch a ransom large enough to buy a whole fleet of ships. They don't particularly care for her alleged good works or how kind she is to people. She is a token to most of them, which could be taken from the King in order to force him to respond to their demands. It is said that there is a thousand gold dragon bounty for the crew that can capture Queen Aline and return her, unharmed, to a freeport.

Lord Paragon Tybold Rourke

Captain of the Sea Wraith

He is the Lord Paragon, Tybold Rourke, and captain of the Sea Wraith, the flagship of the Rourke's High Armada. Though among his peers he is laughably referred to as the "Lord of the Fish." Were he to possess the pride of his youth, he might still find the anger that once dwelled within him, rearing its head at the very thought. But no more. He is a man defeated in his years. His fleet has become becalmed while the Rourkes continue to feed off the scraps of the kingdom. But perhaps there is one last spark within him and it would just take the right amount of friction to set it off. He still has his fleets and the captains to lead them. Many among the ranks of the Seaborn long for the day that the Captain of the Sea Wraith will take up arms and lead his people once again.

Lady Eleanor Stormsail

Captain of the Phantom Juggernaut

Eleanor Stormsail is a brash, skilled, and industrious woman, equally as good at loading a cannon as she is bending planks around the long side of a hull. Her long blonde hair she keeps tied up in a blood-red kerchief, whose long tails rest lazily

upon her stout shoulders. Her looks are plain, though she dresses in a manner many find outlandish. She takes to sea wearing a large, wide brimmed hat, accented by a long blue feather, while her red coat stretches nearly to her feet which are covered in brown high boots that reach nearly to her thighs. She has inherited a long legacy from the Rourke shipbuilders of old. These days she spends more time overseeing her band of shipwrights working upon the docks than setting out on the long voyages like her other captains.

Lord Alain Grimtyde

Captain of the Tyrant's Woe

Captain of the Tyrant's Woe, Alain Grimtyde is a man in the prime of his life; sunburnt, lithe, and bearded, his spirit all the fierce abandon and irreverence of the sea. He has held command of the legendary vessel for going on fifteen years after inheriting the title from his father, Lord Barnabus Grimtyde. For even in his youth, one could see that he was of Grimtyde blood; fearless, free, and a presence of character that demanded respect. He is said to possess an air of arrogance, that he puts on a show for all of those in his company, but those who know him simply say it is confidence in the face of those who truly know not who they are. True to his ship's namesake, he cares little for the ways of the landed lords and yet relishes the chance to have them aboard his ship for the verbal sparring and tactical conversation. It is said those whose company he prefers are not subject to the coastal raids for which he and the Grimtyde family are known for.

Lord Jonas Blackwater

Captain of the Nevertide

Captain of the Nevertide, Lord Jonas Blackwater is truly among the most reviled of the captains of Rourke and perhaps the most hated man on the Three Seas. This reputation has earned him respect born of fear, and an almost complete contempt from his fellow captains and landed nobles. Yet this is not a fear of his cruelty, his guile, or his wrath. It is a fear born of uncertainty; of distrust. He is a man who makes alliances and deals as quickly as he breaks them. Which is to say, quickly. He is often to say that his greatest strength is the weakness of others. If nothing else, he is indeed canny, pressing his advantage, and deceiving those thought to be in his trust when it suits him. He and his crew will take anything not tied down, and have even been known to raid the small, poor fishing villages that skirt the edges of the kingdom. Other captains say he is predictably unpredictable; that he would drown his whole crew if he would be the better for it.

Lady Jane Swallowsong

Captain of the Albatross Doom

What is there to say about Lady Jane Swallowsong, captain of the Albatross Doom, that has perhaps not been said by the denizens of Skullport, or her undoubtedly envious fellow captains. For as clever, dashing, cruel, or handsome they think they are, she is ten-fold the more canny, brave, and beautiful. Her crew of "Swallows" follow her with a zeal and admiration exceeded only by the unyielding pride of duty she secretly harbors for them. Theirs is an honorable crew, captained by a good and honorable woman. Yet though she may affect an air that suggests high civility, she is as fierce a captain as they come. In combat, she is oft first to board, brandishing her signature, golden-hilted rapier, as her long, leather coat billows and twirls in the wind with every parry and flourish. While Captain Blackwater may set upon fishing villages however, the Lady Jane Swallowsong sets her sights upon the glittering prizes of the Cirque and the merchants of the kingdom. The Albatross Doom has always been helmed by a woman, handed down mother to daughter. They contend that theirs is a line unsullied; one that can be traced back to the Nine Maelstroms themselves. Though one is likely to get a different answer every time they ask, Lady Swallowsong seems every bit the Maelstrom descendant she claims to be.

Lord Germaine Tempest

Captain of the Halcyon Fury

Captain Germaine Tempest is what one might refer to as a whimsical fellow and is perhaps the more learned among his fellow captains in the High Armada. Some say that were he not such a canny seaman and captain, he would have made the perfect magister. And even the oldest among his crew can't say for certain just how it was the Lord of Tempest came to captain the ship. For many a year, it was in fact, his brother Davin Tempest who held command, until one day, Davin was gone. In his place, Germaine. He stands just short of seven feet tall, his face covered in a bushy beard, set below eyes of deep, sea green that squint thoughtfully as he takes a slow drag on his long, narrow pipe. Tied loosely around his neck is his prized blue scarf, which he is said to never be seen without. He is a soft-spoken man; not someone one would ever assume to command the crew of a ship and yet his singular gift is perhaps his ability to inspire a sense of curious wonder and insatiable adventure within all around him. For among the many charts, logs, and seafaring instruments found scattered upon his cabin table are age-worn maps and records that he claims point to long-lost caches of hidden treasure.

Lord Edmund Undine

Captain of the Scourge of the Depths

Ever the bane of the other captains, the Lord Edmund Undine is as true a villain as there ever was, often turning his guns upon the lords and ladies of the High Armada when it suits

him to do so. Or seemingly out of boredom. He is a man not quite past the prime of his years yet looks to be much older. A life of hard drink and the decadent vices of the south have turned him into a shriveled, hard thing. He has held the captain's chair for nigh twenty years, taking it in unanimous vote from a crew whose favor he once held. Some deem the captains of the Scourge cursed, given to lives of ruin despite any promise of a future to the contrary. Among the other lords and ladies of Rourke, he is mockingly referred to as the "Undying Lord," given his sallow appearance and his knack for staying alive despite an utter disregard for his well-being.

Lord Harbad Leviathan

Captain of the Kraken's Maw

The captain of the Kraken's Maw, Lord Harbad Leviathan is a large man. A mosaic of runic tattoos cascades down the right half of his face and down into his tunic. His hair is collected upon the top of his head and falls to the middle of his back in one large braid. Hard brown eyes squint in the hot ocean sun, above cheeks covered in close, coarse brown stubble. Some say he is a cursed man; that he has invited the destiny which it is said all the captains of the Kraken's Maw inherit. The line of Leviathan is as mystical in its origins as its legendary namesake. That the sea always beckons them home as it called to the Maelstroms those hundreds of years ago. He has become the avatar of destruction in the High Armada; a monster of the sea made flesh on land. When the moon is at its precipice, he can be seen standing high upon the bow, his head cocked, as though listening to ghostly voices that float upon the wind. Is it the Kraken that whispers its secrets, guiding him to new oceans and far ports whereupon can be wrought its terrible will? Those who value their sanity and their lives tremble at even the whisper of the Kraken's Maw, for like its namesake, it spares few who ever live to see it.

Lady Drusilla Fairweather

Captain of the Far Abyss

The Lady Captain Drusilla Fairweather is a miserly woman, but it was not always so. In fact, nothing turns out for a captain of the Far Abyss quite as they expect or finishes the way it begins. One way or another they all start out upon a path of conquest and glory at sea yet end up relegated to a life of mediocrity, cursed to never join their fellow captains in battle or smuggle ill-gotten gains across the sea. Or at least that's how they view it. Thus, is the plight of one Captain Drusilla Fairweather, as good a fisherwoman as there ever was, though cursed with the fiery heart of a Rourke raider. While every captain well knows the legacy of the Far Abyss, none ever deign to believe themselves destined to repeat it. The Captain Drusilla Fairweather started out her career like many, eager to take her first prize at sea, basking in the glow

of her crew's admiration. Though it was not to be so. Failures, like frightful storms upon the sea, came one after the other. She persisted however, her will unfaltering, always bent on the next plunder. Years of blunders and misfortune finally demanded that she either cede her position or come up with another way to sate her crew's desire to seek out even a modest living. She finally relented, trading her pistols for fishnets, seeking a different kind of prize among the waves.

Lord Olivar Dreadwind

Captain of the Ghost of the Deep

The Lord Captain Olivar Dreadwind is a superstitious man, given to bouts of ritual and paranoia especially concerning matters of the sea. He considers it a haunted place; the largest of any grave yard full of angry souls just waiting to climb aboard his ship and seek revenge on the living. And if not the dead, then some terrible tentacled thing that waits just below the surface to swallow his ship whole. Perhaps it would not be so, were he to stop engrossing himself in the spectral legends of haunted ships that are said to materialize from nothing, or the wild tales of sailors who swear they have seen phantom towers beckoning them towards a jagged doom. One would think him unfit for his position, but indeed, none are more foolhardily courageous in their pursuits. It isn't that Captain Dreadwind hopes to evade such things, but quite to the contrary, he does all he can to seek them out. There are those who say he has a death wish, and they might just be right.

HISTORY

The following section details that common historical information known to the Seaborn. While there is certainly more history to the faction, it will need to be discovered via the proper in-game channels.

The Seaborn are poor record-keepers on their best days. With low literacy rates and even poorer methods of storing or retaining records, most history is kept via oral tradition, ship's log, or stories. Many of these tales are kept or told by a ship's Maelstrom, who in quite a few cases has become something of a keeper of lore, tales, and secrets. This has led to the Seaborn becoming a people of tales, stories, and legends rather than keepers of records or lineages. Still, there are seminal events that all Seaborn remember, though it often is a challenge to find any two who can agree on the exact details.

THE GREAT DROWNING

All Seaborn know the legend of Argos. In the days before the Great War it was their home, a shining island amid waters as blue as the sky on a clear, sunny day. Now Argos is a place

cursed, its once proud towers and castle now lie flooded and empty, haunted by the ghosts of ages past. What caused the sinking of Argos is a source of much speculation and wild tavern tales. Some say House Rourke angered the Gods themselves, who sank the island beneath the waves as a lesson to mortals who dared to defy them. Still others insist a great Sea Witch rose from the waves and claimed the island as her own, cursing the shining isle to be drug into the icy depths.

Known only as the Drowned Isle throughout most of Arnesse, it is a place surrounded by bloated wooden hulls, drifting and rotten, and decaying sails on jagged masts that protrude from the water like the sharpened spikes in a moat surrounding some dreaded keep. Indeed, the sea reclaimed much of the land, leaving naught but a few towers of the Rourke's ancestral castle exposed above the waves as though they were barnacle encrusted gravestones floating amidst a field of blue.

It has, over the years, become the temporary refuge of bands of degenerate crews, seeking sanctuary from the long reach of the king's justice. Of them that return, they are soon to fill portside taverns with ghastly tales of shadow haunted halls and stories of a terrible, roiling black fog that rolls in under the light of the full moon, consuming all that it engulfs. Whether the tales are to be believed, none willingly travel to the Drowned Isle. The histories of the Rourke island home speak of attempts at its reclamation, though none have met with success. The Maelstroms of old were all said to have tried at one time or another. All failed or died in their trying.

THE FLEETS DIVIDED

The talespinners of speak of a time when a division began to fester and grow amid the ranks of the Seaborn. Many have speculated as to the nature of why this happened. Some say that it was an old argument over the direction of the house. Others say it was over a lover's quarrel. Still others say it was about a great treasure that none of the captains could decide how to split, so it was hidden and then lost to time. Whatever the true cause, the fleets of the High Armada were scattered and each of the captains began to develop their own plans and goals. Several factions began to grow, but the two that were strongest were led by House Rourke, based out of Scyld in the north and a coalition, led by the Blackwaters of Blackwatch Bay in the southeast. Over the years, various captains of the High Armada have aligned with these factions as was convenient, but the lines of allegiances have blurred over the years, with some ships choose to be allied to neither group. The one thing that many of the other houses of Arnesse rely upon is that the Seaborn are rarely ever united behind a cause.

THE AGE OF KINGS

The Seaborn are sometimes referred to as "Phantoms", for so few records exist that document their participation in one event or another. This has led to many of Arnesse's more established powers judging them as a people of very little worth. But the truth is very different. Throughout the time when Bannon Kings struggled for supremacy and came to dominate the Realm of Arnesse, the Seaborn have always played a quiet but important role in affairs of the Kingdom.

When Giles Bannon I rose to the throne in 727, the Kingdom surged with newfound wealth and prosperity as the King focused on several social changes that brought unprecedented growth. With that growth came the raiders that wanted to plunder it and Giles I's reign was marked by a crackdown on thievery, particularly piracy and smuggling of stolen or illegal goods. Though the crackdown failed to stop the illegal behavior, it did much to isolate and villainize the Seaborn as a people. As a result, the Seaborn and House Rourke simply vanished from civilized society in Arnesse during the reign of Giles I. Though they were still regarded as a great house and held the title of Paragon, their seat in Highcourt sat empty and their voice was rarely, if ever, heard in the halls or rulership.

Late in his reign Giles I slipped deeper into melancholy and madness, and by 749 the Kingdom inched towards civil war. His son, Giles the Younger, had risen a rebellion against his father in the lands of House Hale. The tales were that Giles I had turned to witchcraft after marrying a woman from House Innis, Lady Maeve, and then making her with child. Not a few rumors were that elements of House Rourke also backed the would-be usurper. This was supported by the report that Rourke ships were seen transporting supplies for Giles the Younger's army into Serpent's Bay and up the Living River.

The battle between father and son was decided on land, at Lanton, where Giles the Younger won a decisive victory over his father. Both King Giles I and his wife, Queen Maeve were burned alive at the stake and Giles the Younger was crowned Giles Bannon II. The Seaborn's involvement in the ascension of King Giles II to the throne is shrouded in mystery, but tales abound of Seaborn brigands being involved in the murder of King Giles I's infant son, Reynard, and of several treasure galleys laden with spoils from House Hale's sack of the Sovereignlands going missing several days out of Highcourt.

THE PRESENT

The Seaborn remain a people apart. Their self-imposed exile has created within them a culture that is almost entirely different than the landed courts of more 'civilized' society. Most residents of Arnesse have never met a Seaborn, and

from the tales that are told of them, most don't want to. At best they are spoken of as mercenaries who serve the highest bidder but more often raiders and pirates who serve no master and take what they wish from those they victimize.

Giles II sees himself as a moral King and while for different reasons than his father, has sought to bring many of the most lawless Seaborn to justice. This has consistently made them a target and to live as a Seaborn, one is always sleeping with one eye open or a upon the horizon searching for the sails of an enemy. Some have found it odd that, to date, no one has truly been able to stamp out the threat of the Seaborn or their culture in Arnesse. Rumors abound that the most powerful of Arnesse, including the Bannons, have a vested interest in the Seaborn and Rourke remaining a real threat, if for no other reason than to employ them as a weapon against their rivals.

As King Giles II has expanded his reign and embraced the Aurorym faith, his decisions have had little impact on the Seaborn. Most of them are largely irrelevant politically. The benefit of that status is that the decisions of Kings rarely affect them, but at the cost of potentially controlling one's own destiny. But the Seaborn have never been one to try to control the winds of Fate. They are masters of letting those winds blow them where they will and then making the best of where they land. But times are changing in Arnesse and the new King challenges the old ways, threatening to turn the whole Kingdom on end in the name of his faith. There are some among the Seaborn who feel that even they cannot weather that kind of storm without taking some precautions.

Of late, reports have been drifting in of more and more Seaborn ships being seen in ports throughout the Kingdom. What they are doing there and why, is not clear. If rumors are to be believed, these are exploratory missions and the Seaborn and the nobles of House Rourke may be seeking to formally interact with the outside world. If this is true, their entrance into the current political climate could risk upsetting the delicate balance that exists, especially if they reclaim their rightful place as a Great House in the Kingdom of Arnesse.

THE HIGH ARMADA

A LORD WITH NO ARMY

The Lord Paragon Tybold Rourke commands no army save the fleets of his High Armada, which none doubt are the singular most powerful naval force in the kingdom. House Rourke has few actual troops and any armies that exist are made up of some combination of hired mercenary companies and crews that lack the military discipline and skill of their

counterparts. The freeports are held by small garrisons of crew members and the occasional knight who has fallen out of favor with their order or to whom no house has granted their support.

THE SHIPS OF THE ARMADA

The Rourkes have no high houses of their own. Instead they have their High Armada. Nine ships that have been of their fleet for hundreds of years. They are the flagships, captained by those deemed as fit for command. Though it is not uncommon for a Lord Captain to keep their son or daughter in line for their post, it is the crew that most often decides who is destined for the helm. This arrangement is unique among the other titled nobility of the realm in that the captains of the High Armada are granted their lordships without a land to rule. Lords and Ladies in perhaps name only. This has done nothing to bolster their favor among the nobility of the kingdom, only serving to further the cultural distance between them and their counterparts. In all ways House Rourke and its captains have become near pariahs in the realm. Even their nobility is scarcely granted respect deserving of their titles.

The stories of the ships of the High Armada are rooted in the folklore surrounding the Maelstrom associated with each; those fierce daughters of the sea that were said to be the first captains of each ship and whose spirits are said to drive the destinies of those who pilot them. These oral traditions are stories handed down from captain to captain and from sailor to sailor from a time before the Great War, when magic filled the very air and was used for good or ill by those who wielded it. At one time or another all were raiders and thieves, taking what was they considered due recompense. Some have changed course, though if for the better, only time will tell.

THE PHANTOM JUGGERNAUT

Captain: Lady Captain Eleanor Stormsail
Colors: A white whale on a field of navy blue

Historically, the captains of the Phantom Juggernaut have been shipbuilders, producing the finest vessels on the water. The Juggernaut itself is the largest warship in the High Armada with the capacity to house up to sixty Richter-built cannons and three hundred sailors. It has always been the deciding factor in every naval battle it has been a part of.

THE TYRANT'S WOE

Captain: Lord Captain Alain Grimtyde

All Rourke captains treasure freedom and have not known the life of landed nobility for hundreds of years. But the captains

of the Tyrant's Woe are famously averse to the ways of traditional lords and ladies. Their histories are filled with deeds that seem to have little more motivation than to undermine their counterparts. Relieving a vessel of its goods and coin is a means of survival to be sure yet the Tyrant's Woe always seems to be at the center of any scheme whose aim is mayhem and mischief. One captain is said to have posed as an escort for the wife of a Bannon nobleman, only to have dropped her off in Skullport, a city famous for its Street of Silk; a strip of road where any man or woman might find pleasure. Another tale tells of the infamous Lord Captain Yarrick Grimtyde who gunned down a whole Grand Bank escort. Lord Yarrick's crew pulled every piece of gold from the hulls, only to return it to the front door of the Grand Bank converted entirely to coppers, the crates covered in pig shit.

THE NEVERTIDE

Captain: Lord Captain Jonas Blackwater

The Nevertide; a fitting name for a ship whose captains are infamous for their treachery. Like a tide that follows no pattern, the only certainty about this ship is that chaos both precedes and follows it. It is the war machine of the Rourke fleet with the captains and crews to match. Armed with fifty guns and a massive ramming spike, the Nevertide often sails the vanguard in any battle upon the sea. Its captains and crews have always been a curious lot, a bit brooding, and uneasy when on land for any stretch of time. Some say the ship is guided by the ghost of Calypsa, still searching for her dead children, and any captain at the helm eventually becomes a thrall to her will, listening as she whispers ghostly demands.

THE ALBATROSS DOOM

Captain: Lady Captain Jane Swallowsong

Captained by a woman for as long as any can remember, the Albatross Doom is distinguished amongst the High Armada as being the most diplomatic of vessels. It is one of the few Rourke ships which can enter the Corveaux and Innis ports in eastern Arnesse. This bit of good will has come at the high cost of the loyalty of many of its fellow captains, who consider it an affront to the grand Rourke tradition of eschewing the nobility and all its foolish pomp. The captains of the Albatross have, for better or worse, done their best to maintain what little good standing the Rourkes ever had in the kingdom. This has proven difficult through the ages as they have had to constantly reconcile any damage done by the fleet. The slightest inkling of progress is often largely diminished by some coastal raid or grievous slight. They consider theirs a worthy cause, for if the Rourkes are never

again to come together, then perhaps a new home can be made among those who were once considered to be rivals.

THE HALCYON FURY

Captain: Lord Captain Germaine Tempest

The legacy of the Halcyon Fury is one of perpetual wandering. Though the captain and crew may for a time endeavor to ply the old Rourke trade, they are eventually drawn back to the hunt. For hidden among some cargo or captain's desk is another piece of a puzzle whose final picture is still unknown. Every clue only seems to lead to yet another, and another, though with each, the crew always seems to locate a cache of supplies or amount of gold that sees them to their next destination. Though exciting it may sound, a life at sea simply wandering from place to place can take its toll on even the highest morale. This can result in crews who sail under Tempest colors having higher attrition than other fleets.

SCOURGE OF THE DEPTHS

Captain: Lord Captain Edmund Undine

The Scourge is a fearsome vessel, often turning the tide of a battle... when it shows up. And even the other captains of the High Armada are wary when it does. Throughout time, the commanders of this vessel have never truly allied themselves with anyone. When they do make promises of loyalty, every other captain knows better than to trust their word. Their allegiance isn't particularly sought after though, for the Scourge of the Depths has always relied on insidious and inhumane ways of earning a living. Slavery was a common trade for the Scourge for many years after the Great War, though they no longer engage in such practices. In recent years, the Scourge has been known for its especially violent raids on remote villages and its captains who care little for lives of others that they effect with their violent actions.

THE KRAKEN'S MAW

Captain: Lord Captain Harbad Leviathan

The descendant captains of the Kraken's Maw carried on a tradition of the mystical and the unknown. They are expert beast hunters of the sea, utilizing guns, harpoons, and large nets to capture their prey. Their Maelstroms use the animal parts in strange, unique rituals, which the sailors believe to be magic, though magic has long been extinguished. These rituals are believed to make the next sea hunt successful. The captains and the maelstroms of the Maw claim that the sea speak to them, whispering its wishes into their ears. This

decides when and where the Kraken's Maw sails, and often its path is seemingly random and erratic as it traverses Arnesse.

THE FAR ABYSS

Captain: Lady Captain Drusilla Fairweather

Though the patron Maelstrom of the Far Abyss was famous for her treachery and raiding prowess, her legacy was not to continue for the future captains of the vessel. Many believe that a witch among the Richters placed a curse upon the ship after the Fairweather's treacherous actions against their Primehammer of House Richter so long ago. And a terrible curse it remains, for the captains of the Far Abyss know the yearning for glory, and yet are confined to lives of normality due to endless misfortunes. This isn't to say that the ship is destitute; its crew always finds success in trading, fishing, or some other mundane source of income. But if any captain makes attempts at a life of true adventure, they are doomed to encounter such calamity that they must return to calmer seas.

GHOST OF THE DEEP

Captain: Lord Captain Olivar Dreadwind

The captains of the Ghost of the Deep know no peace, for theirs is a search for the next challenge, the next adventure, the next victory. Quick to battle, the Ghost has always maintained a crew of the fiercest naval fighters. Entrenched in some fool's errand, the charismatic captains of the vessel command the loyalty of their crew, who follow them with an almost religious zeal, caught up in the idea of a glorious victory. The obsession of the current captain, Lord Olivar Dreadwind, is one of a brilliant battle against a giant sea monster. That, or retaking the legendary island of Argos. It is told that he will sooner find a mythical kraken than convince the Seaborn captains to follow him to their deaths at Argos.

TRADITIONS OF THE SEABORN

THE BOUNTY OF THE SEA

Beyond any colors a ship may fly, a perhaps more loathsome portent is the game of marks. The tradition holds that any crew is only worth its marks; the number of prizes it's taken at sea. These often take the form of crude, white skulls painted along the side of their hull, or red stripes strewn about their ship's colors. Many crews even adopt the custom of following the name of their ship with how many marks they've got, like the crew of the "Harrow of Seven Marks," or the "Indigo Queen of Ten Marks," and is sometimes used to assuage arguments of superiority or as a primitive means to

settle a dispute. Conversely, it is crews that are known to be seasoned sailors but claim no marks that are given the widest berth. They are the crews of the Armada whose legacy is pillage, plunder, and death. It does well enough to utter their name, that is if the crewman is not known by reputation already.

THE CODE

The Rourkes and the fleets of their High Armada have traditionally eschewed the laws of the land; Bannon's laws, yet are not altogether without their own kind of order. The Argosian Canon is what might be referred to as the law of the sea. After the fracturing of the fleet following the Great War, the captains of the High Armada scattered across the oceans while some went on to discover and establish their hidden coastal freeports. Nevertheless, they were a house divided, holding to no laws but their own, least of all those of the tyrannical kings of Bannon. Having no true land of their own, they grasped on to power only through carving out vast swaths of sea, all the while fighting amongst themselves to maintain their middling territories. The years and ages that followed demanded they reconcile these petty territorial disputes, lest they be swallowed by the sea while their old enemies prosper on land. And so, it was they came together in Scyld to enact the Argosian Canon. The captains of the High Armada took their seats and over the course of what some recount as a week of tempestuous debate, and no small amount of physical violence, settled upon ten laws to which every member of every crew would be measured and judged. They would hold until such a time as Argos could be reclaimed, restoring the Rourke seat of power and once again unify the fleets. For many, this was tantamount to forever.

The Argosian Canon

Article I.

All captains of the fleets of Rourke and of the High Armada shall have the right to parley; that is, the right to call a temporary truce in times of conflict to discuss the resolution of a dispute.

Article II.

A crew shall obey their captain in all respects until such a time that they are relieved of the position by vote.

Article III.

Should multiple captains lay claim to a prize it shall be apportioned based on the number of marks upon their vessel, those ships of the High Armada given the largest of these.

Article IV.

Them that first spots the sail shall have preference over the first item to be allotted to their portion.

Article V.

None of the crew shall usurp or attempt to conceal any article that is taken from a prize. If any should be found unfaithful to this code they shall be cast out from the crew.

Article VI.

Each of the crew has equal vote in the affairs of the moment and to all shares of provisions, lest inadequate supply should require otherwise.

Article VII.

To desert one's quarters or ship in times of battle is punishable by death.

Article VIII.

To keep all pistols and blades clean and fit for engagement.

Article IX.

None among the crew shall be found guilty of cowardice in times of engagement.

Article X.

The crews of the High Armada shall keep their vessels clean and in working order until such a time as they are decommissioned from service.

BY WORTH ALONE

Despite their reputation as a lot of underhanded, conniving, treacherous freebooters, the Rourkes and their High Armada practice a kind of democracy that has no precedent anywhere else in the kingdom. Though unlanded, a captain of the High Armada is still deemed a lord or lady in the eyes of the realm, yet is only made so through the vote of their crew. Neither inheritance nor fortune does a captain make. A ship is only as good as its crew, and a crew only as good as its lord captain. And all the better that their perceivably uncivilized methods fly in the face of a kingdom they despise. Better a chosen ruler than one that is weak, ineffectual, or worse, a despot.

BY THE COPPERS

A tradition that started out of spite, the Rourkes are known to pay for what they need in copper dragons. Indeed, a snub to the noble gold dragon, the practice is said to have started when King Richard I enacted the first widespread collection of taxes in the kingdom in the years following the Great War. This method of payment is also grounded in the proliferation of the commonfolk among the Rourke's crews, copper being the most common denomination among the lower classes.

THE NINE MAELSTROMS

There was a time, long ago, when magic held sway over the world, and over it, all those who lived upon the Vale. Of these was Rourke Blacktyde, a legendary figure from the world's forgotten past. Nine daughters had he, nine daughters of the sea; the Nine Maelstroms. As fierce as a typhoon and as the waves which break tall and dark in all the seas of the world. And they were Rayna, Unna, Ronna, Cilda, Calypsa, Tya, Silla, Kara, and Ana. During the Great War, they captained the nine warships of the Rourke High Armada, leaving only fiery destruction in their wake. But theirs is a legacy cursed.

And so, the tale is told...

Generations ago, there was a Rourke that sat on a throne made of stone in a grand castle. Don't scoff and don't mock. The Rourkes did not always ride the waves. At this time, they were great Kings on the island of Argos, ruling from a city of the same name. From their throne above the waves, they directed fleets and reigned over the three seas with justice, law and order.

The lords of Rourke were well known for their justice and their wealth, and the lords of the mainland were jealous, but there was another who knew an even greater jealousy. Eena, the Sea Witch whose island home floated at the end of the world, wanted it for her own. She despised the order that they enforced upon the people of the sea. Eena began to plot and plan, and she began to scheme and collude. One winter, during the high storms that make it dangerous to sail between the islands, Eena came for Argos.

As the wind and rain howled and the shutters battered upon the walls of the castle, Eena worked her spells on the land. Argos began to swell with water. The earth became as a putrescent mud and all at once the city and many of its denizens slid into the nighted depths of the harbor waters.

And then all was silence. The storm stopped its howling. The earth stopped rumbling. It was as if the whole island held its

breath. Then dogs began to howl, children began to wail, and Argos erupted with the sounds of the injured and the maimed.

With an insidious flourish of her arms, Eena summoned a thick and suffocating fog from the sea. As the cloud rolled up the shore into the ruined city, it brought with it an unearthly quiet. Cries and howls cut off as though by a knife. From the mist came writhing, slimy abominations. All were terrible in their form, as though the will of some mad god of the sea made flesh; a hideous construction of worm and man. These things all moved at Eena's urging, crawling with a dreadful inevitability. When they reached the city, the sound of screams once again permeated the malodorous fog that sat heavy over the city.

When the city was empty of the living, Eena and the creatures climbed slowly up the stairs to the castle, each step soggy and squelching. The sea lord sat upon his throne glaring at the Sea Witch. With one foul spell, the body of the lord on the stone chair shriveled to a gray husk, until naught was left but a skeleton and a crown.

She took up his mantle and set it upon her own head and she took up the Orb of the Sea, and claimed its authority, and with those things she made herself Queen of the Three Seas. Between every stone and every piece of timber did flow a brackish, primordial slime that slowly filled the throne room.

Since that day, she and the terrible abominations from the bottom of the sea have held the island. Ever after the nine daughters of Rourke tried, and failed to retake the sunken island of Argos. One day, a captain brave and true will drive out the Sea Witch and reclaim the land whereupon sat the Rourkes on a throne hewn of stone.

Aboard each ship of the High Armada a Maelstrom still stands. And though she may not be the captain or even the first mate, she is given a place of high honor among the crew. For she is the manifestation of this legend; its keeper. Her blood is the sea, her breath the ocean wind, her voice the very song of the siren. Some are even venerated as though they were goddesses of the sea and are said to bring luck and good fortune to a voyage. Though they claim no true blood of the original nine daughters of the sea, a Maelstrom is often chosen based upon those qualities that one might seek in a captain; fatally brave, desperately persuasive, and beautifully furious.

LEGENDS OF THE SEA

THE BLACKTYDE

“Taken by the Blacktyde!”

This adage is common to the crews of the High Armada and is used when one of their own is lost to the sea. The legend goes that though their bodies may sink to the sands below, their spirits join the ghostly crew of the Blacktyde. Such is the spectral ship that is doomed to forever wander the seas until such a time as it can once again make port in Argos. Superstition is not something lost on the sea faring folk, many claiming to have seen the translucent ship materialize out of the very mists. Variations of the tale cast the ship as a ghostly savior in times of need, bringing with them otherworldly winds, while others contend that they are fired upon with cannonballs that make neither sound nor smoke, yet melt through the hull as though they were balls of white hot flame.

A TREASURE WORTH MORE THAN GOLD

The inner conflicts of the captains of the High Armada rival even those of the eight great houses themselves. To this day, hundreds of years after the fracturing of the fleets, none seem to trust the other and any deal struck is always done so with suspicion and the assumption that one side is playing the other false. But this was not always the case. The sea swallowed Argos, leaving the Rourkes without a piece of land to call their own. Unwelcome among the landed lords, they set out across the sea in search of a new home. It is said that over the course of this voyage, they found a map that pointed to such a place. Though who found it exactly, and where this place was is the very cause of the past and current strife among the captains. Whoever it was and wherever it was, the map once again became lost, each accusing the other of squandering it away in some gambling house or hiding it away on a remote island beach. They were all convinced of each other's nefarious motivations, that possessing the map would buy the owner's ultimate command over the fleet. Though an old slight it may be, this lost map to their new home has fueled a distance, a mistrust, a schism between the captains of Rourke that has been far more destructive than any cannon or army.

THE FOG

This chilling tale is often spun to terrify those who live along sea coasts throughout Arnesse. Once there lived a Captain by the name of Edmund Blake, who was known to be as ruthless as any who sailed the Three Seas. Besides great wealth in his travels, he also acquired a rather nasty case of leprosy and in time, became horribly disfigured by the disease. As the illness progressed, Blake increasingly only took crew who were afflicted with terrible diseases, in particular, leprosy. When he became too sick to continue his work, Captain Blake planned to take his hard-won spoils and retire to the island of Asylum Rock in Breakwater Bay. But those whom he had robbed

from had other plans. A coalition of Bannon nobles, joined by other prominent families, hired mercenary ships to hunt down and kill Blake. They cornered his ship, the *Revenge*, near Skull Island when it was at anchor, set upon him in the night and defeated them almost without a fight. Blake and his entire crew were hung as traitors from the rigging of the *Revenge* and the nobles took Blake's gold and claimed it for their own.

Since, then, tales have been told of a great, murky fog that sometimes rolls in along the coasts of Arnesse, enclosing towns and ships in its murky miasma. Eyewitnesses have said that the *Revenge* sails amid those mists, crewed by doomed revenants and led by the rotting husk of Captain Edmund Blake himself. This cursed crew is said to sometimes come ashore, supposedly looking for the gold that was stolen from them and hunting the descendants of those nobles who were responsible for their murders. When these murderous ghosts make landfall, tales say they cut a bloody path across the countryside until dawn, when they, along with the fog that accompanied them, disappear back into the sea once again.

DARK WATERS

Amid the warm, blue waters of Tythion Bay, are many islands and inlets that are popular haunts for the Seaborn and others who make their home on the Three Seas. A tale that is well known to travelers in Tythion Bay is that of the Dark Waters. This region of the sea, supposedly located near the island of Stormhaven, is said to be cursed. Ships that go there often have claimed to see strange lights below the surface, great geysers of water that erupt from the ocean, and sea monsters that threaten to devour them. Ships are also known to have disappeared entirely in this area, entering the region only to be never seen again. Several ships have also been found adrift on the ocean, unharmed but devoid of any crew. Even more haunting is that many of these ships look as though the crew simply vanished amid their everyday tasks. Almost all who make their living on the sea claim to know the origin of these vanishings and the strange supernatural occurrences in these waters. The tales range from an ancient city that lurks beneath the waves, to a magical vortex that connects the Dark Waters to other realms. One thing is certain is that many captains give this region of the sea a wide berth, choosing instead to travel north of Stormhaven and through the Teeth of Tythos, a path that is fraught with peril due to hidden rocks and the presence of pirates who seek to catch ships in tight confines. Not a few have accused the Seaborn of deliberately spreading stories about the Dark Waters in the hopes of driving more ships into Teeth of Tythos, and thus into the hands of their own raiders.

THE LIGHTHOUSE AT THE END OF THE SEA

The Tale of the Lighthouse at the End of the Sea is one

often associated with Argos, though every seafaring port of the kingdom is wont to have its own version of the tale.

*Names are forgotten to time though deeds remain.
Therefore, deeds transcend time, existing together in the
past, present, and futures of our reality. They are the
dreams of a place; ripples of emotion that in their doing,
radiate ever outward like a stone cast into still waters.*

*The lanterns were swinging wildly in the heavy winds
that cascaded over the deck of the small cog, threatening
to extinguish the life from the candles burning timidly
inside. Men were shouting incoherently as the rain began
to fall in heavy sheets. The cog creaked and groaned,
sounding as though it were some great wooden giant very
displeased with circumstances at present. Wave after
wave pounded the hull, unseen in the starless, overcast of
the storm filled sky. There was naught to do but hope;
hope that whatever awaited ahead was only more of the
terrible black ocean and not some unseen reef or
primordial monstrosity that waited soundlessly beneath
the surface to pull you under.*

*The captain of the ship granted himself the small luxury
of retreating below deck for the briefest of moments.
There, in a small cabin sat his beautiful bride, her face
the contorted manifestation of apprehension and fear.
The captain took her soft hands in his, kindly and slowly.
He kissed her on her forehead, looked assuredly into her
eyes, and left quickly from the cabin.*

*But their hope was in vain that night. The dismal,
rending sound of splintering wood was followed by the
shouts of a terrified, desperate crew. The captain
watched as the ocean swallowed the ship. And then all
was black.*

*The sun beat down on the backs of his eyelids. The
captain awoke to find himself laid prone upon a rocky
beach, the small waves of the shore lapping up and
around his soaked leather boots. He sat up and took in
his surroundings, suddenly stricken by the grim
recollection of the previous night's events. His shouts
were only met with the lulling sounds of the beach, the
gentle waves upon the shore a mocking reply to the
monstrous creatures that had overtaken his ship. Alone
though he was, behind him rose a single, wind-blown
stone tower. From its height, he would certainly be able
to see any others who had washed upon the shore; he
would certainly find his wife. The heavy wooden door
gave way with a rusty screech as the hinges tore away
from their rotted frame. He ascended the winding steps*

madly, up and up until finally he stepped out onto a small wooden platform whereupon sat a large, iron brazier. Large cuts of charred, blackened wood still lined its wide bowl, though he had never known there to be any such beacon this far out to sea. For many days and nights, he searched the entirety of the small island for any who might have survived; he searched for his wife. In the

morning, the captain would collect driftwood from the beach and with it, fill the old brazier at the top of the tower, igniting it in hopes that any might see it; that she might see it. It was not until what little supplies he had ran out that he threw himself from the top of the tower, preferring a quick death to one of painful starvation.

And thus, the tale is told. On nights when the lanterns swing wildly in the heavy winds that cascade over the deck and the rain falls in heavy sheets, the captain is said to light the brazier with the driftwood he collects from the beach. But this is a foul thing; an ill omen. For to follow the ghastly flame at the top of the lone tower is to meet your end upon the rocks that are the watery tomb of the lost captain who still searches for his drowned bride

SEA SHANTIES

In a culture with few who can read and even fewer who keep track of history, the oral tradition many Seaborn choose to keep is via songs. These often short, rhyming tunes are usually upbeat in tone but can be quite dark and grim when one listens to the actual lyrics. There are dozens, maybe even hundreds, of these shanties throughout the Seaborn fleets and most are intended to be sung while extremely intoxicated.

Rourke's Revenge

*The truth of the tale is known by few,
Save Harlan Rourke and his stalwart crew.
A game of chance he dared to lose,
For the love of one he hardly knew.*

*A Maelstrom was she, brave and true,
The pride of good ole' Grimtyde's crew.
When he lost, his sword he drew,
Called his men to run them through!*

*Swing'em high from the mast
Raise a glass to days past,
For we won't come back till the mornin'.
Swing'em high from the mast
We'll fight to the last,
And then our women be mournin'.*

*A shot rang out and found its mark,
Pierced the fair ole' Maelstrom's heart.
Grimtyde's gun had done its part,
The coward fled into the dark.*

*Rourke cried out and cursed his name,
Called to his ships and many they came.
Swore a pact to see him slain,
Called his men and all exclaimed!*

*Swing'em high from the mast
Raise a glass to days past,
For we won't come back till the mornin'.
Swing'em high from the mast
We'll fight to the last,
And then our women be mournin'.*

*The battle joined upon the sea,
Four fleets set sail against Rourke's three.
The cannons sang with deadly glee,
All ships did pay the Butcher's fee.*

*Just as victory looked denied,
The Sea Wraith charged and turned the tide.
Rourke upon the bow defied,
Called his men and all replied.*

*Swing'em high from the mast
Raise a glass to days past,
For we won't come back till the mornin'.
Swing'em high from the mast
We'll fight to the last,
And then our women be mournin'.*

*The Sea Wraith sank beneath the waves,
Damned her crew to watery graves.
Grimtyde fled and tried to hide,
But vengeance would not be denied.*

*For when the Wraith was found at last,
The Grimtyde traitors hung in her masts.
Those men swore they heard a tune,
Still heard at sea by light of moon.*

*Swing'em high from the mast
Raise a glass to days past,
For we won't come back till the mornin'.
Swing'em high from the mast
We'll fight to the last,
And then our women be mournin'.
We'll fight to the last,
And then our women be mournin'.*

INDUSTRY OF THE SEABORN

The Seaborn fleets have been a near unchallenged presence on the seas of Arnesse for hundreds of years; nomads on a desert of deep blue. Some deal in cargo of the concealed sort, others are shipwrights, rolling out large cogs and galleys into the coastal waters from seaside quays, and then there are those who have taken to the more modest trade of harvesting the fish from the oceans. But all at one time or another produced nothing, only taking what they saw as theirs from a kingdom who left them exiled to the waves. But there would always be a need for those who would do what others would not; operate apart from and outside of the laws of the land that had no rightful place upon the waters. The landed lords don't see fit to grant them a place among the realm, and yet do not deign it beneath their station to employ them when the task demands a discretion that could only be purchased with gold.

The secrets of the realm hold their own value, however. Were they able to hold them in their hand, House Rourke's coffers might be fit to match those of the Grand Bank. Or at least they could buy a place among those for whom the Seaborn hold a bitter disdain. Yet this currency is not without its market. It has allowed the Seaborn to maintain a formidable position given the amount of leverage it's provided in bargaining with the landed lords and ladies of Arnesse. This tactic has also been the undoing of many a captain as well, stoking the ire of a nobility who do not like to have their secret evils staring back at them; threatening to see them undone with a whisper.

THE FREEPORTS OF ARNESSE

SCYLD

Far to the north and west, where the Dusklands meet the frozen north is a small port city. On most any map you might find, it would appear to be just another of its kind; small and unassuming, merely an economically strategic settlement providing access to the sea. Yet were you to take the North Road as far to the north as it goes, you would find yourself, for better or worse, in the Rourke freeport of Scyld. Despite its somewhat spurious reputation as nothing more than a city thriving upon the dubious trades of its inhabitants, Scyld has long been the port of call for many an honest trader and merchant. While no secret that the freeport is a den of smugglers and raiders, they have found their business is best conducted behind a veil of legitimacy. Likewise, those that seek to earn their dragons within the confines of the law have found this admittedly tenuous partnership not without its benefits. For even those who come to barter and deal in back rooms need places to stay, a hot meal, and a change of

clothes. And perhaps even a trinket or two for their trip home.

Scyld was once a major trade port in the west, moving Richter steel and firearms and Hale timber north and south throughout the kingdom. During the instability of the Great War, Rourke moved to capture the port city, converting it into a refuge where they could smuggle their ill-gotten gains away from the prying eyes of the landed lords and ladies of the kingdom. Many claim that it was this singular move which secured their position there, as they were able to procure crates of abandoned Richter pistols and cannons locked away in deserted warehouses. These now lie in wait upon the fortified city walls, armed and ready to defend against any who would dare encroach by land or sea. Despite its dubious reputation, Scyld has become something of an economic anomaly. Traders from all over Arnesse flock here throughout the year to garner exotic wares from across the world and rare items they would not otherwise be able to find in the other trade hubs of the kingdom. A merchant is free to move their goods as they please, protected not only by the far-reaching influence of the Cirque, but that too of the captains of House Rourke, whom hold absolute control over commerce there.

SKULLPORT

Odd bells weave a contoured, tremolo-laden melody over the backdrop of a sleepy, out of tune organ, pouring out from an upper floor onto the passersby walking the streets below. The road underfoot segues in and out of the reddish stone of the Ornish deserts and boot-sucking mud. Gunfire rings out just up the street, but out of sight. Women and men alike hang out of second story balconies flashing their fleshy wares, while merchants from every part of the kingdom beckon you to enter their stalls and shops, though what you might find once there is likely best left a curiosity unsated. The air is dry and permeated by the smells of rampant squalor and musty incense; the sounds of wicked laughter and violence. Overhead is the endless sky of the Numian desert, whose black curtain is perforated by the light of stars, blinking and innumerable. Behind you, just beyond the piers of the quay, are the two large bonfires that mark the eyes of the famed skull gate. This is the city between the cliffs; the city that watches from behind the eyes of the skull. This is Skullport.

True to its namesake, those who know how to find this hidden cove-city are greeted by the colossal edifice of a sneering skull that marks the gateway to the freeport. Rounding a treacherously narrow bend, the skull gate sits nestled between two cliffs, making passage by sea into the city by any other means impossible. Or passage out, for that matter. In times of peace the mouth is open, allowing even the largest of warships and merchant cogs to pass through the macabre gate

and dock among its many piers. When necessary, the giant stone jaw can also be closed by way of a massive iron chain, barring passage to the small city and revealing many small cannon platforms stowed within the hollowed-out teeth.

Skullport is truly a city in name only. When one steps foot upon the quay amidst the remarkable hustle and bustle of the workers and traders, one could almost forget they were in Arnesse at all. It is a maze of hovels and shops, all built in and around an old stone fort whose garrison is now only remembered by the sands that do their best to reclaim the city with every passing day. If there ever was a method in its planning or construction, likely it was swept away with the morning winds that blow in and out of the rickety shutters and broken windows that line the narrow, mud and cobblestone streets. Though its governance has changed hands more than a few times since its founding, the Lady Drusilla Fairweather and her crew hold absolute dominion over the place and have turned it into a prosperous port of illicit activity and illegal trading that would stoke the envy of the wealthiest noble.

UNDERTOW

*We sail tonight for Undertow
Don't fall asleep or under go
They're all as mad as magisters
Toadstool seats and clever slurs
Let marrow bone and cleaver choose
While making feet for children's shoes
Fill your pockets up with earth
Get yourself a dragon's worth*

*We sail tonight for Undertow
Where blind men drink with faerie folk
Through the alleys, out the door
The captain is the merchant's whore
Every rope the hangman's noose
The thief of kings will cut you loose
Fill your pockets up with earth
Get yourself a dragon's worth*

Little is known of Undertow and not a few in Arnesse have speculated that this freeport does not even truly exist at all and is merely a tall tale made up by Seaborn crews to make themselves appear more mysterious. What little is known of Undertow has been acquired through the drunken litanies of sailors and the whispered tales of innkeepers as they divulge their hidden rumors to those who remain in the late hours of the night. The approach to Undertow is said to be perilous. Whether by magic or some other unearthly means, the shrouded freeport is said to lie behind a winding maze of rocks and powerful undercurrents that bring certain doom upon them that dare brave its watery gauntlet without the

proper map. Of which there are but few. It is said that those granted entrance to the captain's stronghold are provided explicit verbal instructions by messenger before making the journey.

The rumored origins of Undertow date back to the time of the Great War when it is said those who now call themselves Innis built a secret haven among the coastal cliffs of the Everfrost, just beyond their northern border, as a refuge for those escaping the Bannon-Richter occupation of their homeland. The story takes wild twists and turns from here, some claiming that their old sorcerers carved out the place with magics, while others say they employed the labor of giants in the task. Whatever it was, it is now a Rourke freeport and domain of the Lady Jane Swallowsong, captain of the Albatross Doom. If the stories are to be believed, it is a place of singular beauty, where waves of sapphire-blue break upon powdery, white sands and the waters are always warm, despite its northern clime. Like other freeports, the people there are free in their own way, making their way upon their mettle. It is said that the new has been built up around the old, Innis structures; where high, rope-strung balconies and bridges wind among the trees, just above the streets below, connecting homes and structures wrought of old wreckage.

BLACKWATCH BAY

Blackwatch bay is what has become of a motley mix of Rourke crews, Tarkathi locals, and the descendants of Innis refugees from the last years of the Great War. It sits far to the southeast, hidden among a rocky desert beach of Tarkath. Though none can say what it may have been, the freeport is surrounded by low, sandstone walls that stretch far into the wastes before crumbling to rubble. Those who have made their homes here have reported their cellar walls caving in to reveal long tunnels that wind and break off into all directions.

But the years have not been kind. A history outside the laws of the kingdom and the relative lack of oversight by the Aragonian nobility have left Blackwatch Bay a ruinous, dead thing. What held the promise of a cultural melting pot has turned into a cordoned off backwater where each keeps to their own streets, maintaining a semblance of order in the way that best suits them. The freeport is divided into three quarters, each inhabited by those whose roots date back to its founding. Ironically, all have intermarried at one point or another and none can claim that they are of any pure line of Tarkath, the Thornwood, or of the Rourke's Drowned Isle. The Twilight Quay and its warehouses are held by the dismal Lord Captain Jonas Blackwater and his crew. Ships make port here day and night among rotting piers and bawdy, debauched taverns. A woman of Innis blood many call the "Green Lady" holds the Driftwood, a bleak construction of small wooden

houses and myriad buildings inhabited by those who claim descent from an ancient line of nobility. Rumors that she is in fact of Tarkathi birth have had little consequence on her influence and power in the freeport. Lastly is the Crimson Quarter, named so for its candles that shine through the blood-red, Tarkathi glass made of the red sands of the waste.

HOUSE & GUILD RELATIONSHIPS

The following details how the Seaborn generally feel about factions in Arnesse. This information is to be taken as in-play by you and other members of this faction.

HOUSE CORVEAUX

To most of the Seaborn, House Corveaux is full of pompous, fat nobles who play pretend and lick the boots of House Bannon. Philosophically, the law-abiding, chivalrous people of the Midlands could not be more opposite the Seaborn, a people who have spent most of their lives railing against the very structures which have come to define a Midlander's very existence. The tournaments the Corveaux hold, in the name of glory and honor, are just acts that don't hold a candle to the real battles and struggles that the Seaborn face every day on the Seas. Midlanders claim to stand up for chivalry, justice, and freedom, and yet they turn a blind eye to the injustices of House Bannon and only help others when it makes them look like morally upright citizenry to the rest of the Kingdom.

House Corveaux controls the breadbasket of Arnesse and produces far more food than their people need. They also refuse to trade with most of the Seaborn and House Rourke. So, instead of suffering in starvation, the Rourkes take what they need by raiding the rich eastern coast of the Midlands. The Corveaux do their best to stop them, but their naval efforts are laughable compared to hardened Seaborn sailors.

HOUSE INNIS

The Seaborn have a complicated and long history with House Innis and the people of the Northern Marches. In the distant past, it was said that these two peoples often aided each other in great causes and shared a common kinship despite one's love of the land and the other of the sea. But time has brought ruin to the House of Innis and the scars of history and the abuse suffered beneath the yoke of crueler masters has turned their people dark and reclusive. As the Woodfolk retreated into their forests, alliances were forgotten and were replaced by rivalries and raids. The old ways have been lost by many and most Woodfolk today only know the Seaborn as raiders and brigands who attack their coastal cities for the rich bounty

their land provides. The Woodfolk have little in the way of a navy to fend off those attacks but their woodwards make the raiders pay a high cost for their booty when they come ashore.

It is not all rivalry and anger, though. The Seaborn are as varied as they are wild, and some captains trade peacefully with the Innis High House of Gleanna in the city of Alford. The coastal city has fantastic ale houses; they are so talked about by the captains of the Seaborn that are allowed to visit them, that the shunned Rourkes have even considered ceasing their Innis raids just so they may visit these fabled taverns.

HOUSE HALE

Seaborn ships rarely go so far north as to interact with the people of the Everfrost. The warmer, gentler, southern seas offer much more promising prospects of travel. What little interaction they have with the Hale is largely indifferent. They do have some common traits that make room for a kind of kinship; both maintain a martial, raiding culture, where the people take what they need from those who are weak. On a lighter note, both societies have a special place for carousing. Life is often difficult for the people of these two cultures, so a good tavern and a hearty drink are welcome sights. Most of the Seaborn are still hard pressed to grant a Hale the title of anything more than as a dog of Bannon. The Rourkes certainly do their fair share of underhanded work for nobles in Arnesse, but not with blind loyalty and certainly not without being paid unreasonable amounts of dragons. The blind loyalty Northmen afford the King and his lords is abhorrent.

HOUSE ARAGON

House Aragon and the Tarkathi have a strong relationship with the Seaborn. That is, as strong as a relationship with a divided house can be. The Seaborn captains who spend most of their time on the southern side of the continent have a solid affiliation with the Aragons. Those Seaborn who are known to hail from the west and Scyld have a stronger affiliation for House Richter and are generally considered unwelcome in Tarkath due to their allegiances. The Seaborn who associate with the Lords of the South have found they have a natural, symbiotic relationship. Over the years and into the present, the Seaborn have found consistent customers in Tarkath both for legal and illegal goods. The Aragons are always in need of basic supplies to feed their resource-starved realm and they are willing to exchange exotic and fine goods for them. In addition, the Aragons are not squeamish about purchasing goods that come from questionable sources as they have even less love for the King, his laws, and the Bannons than the Seaborn do. These are both peoples who are used to living on the outskirts of 'acceptable' and 'civil' society and they have

found that their relationship offsets many inconveniences they might incur for residing in such a position in the Kingdom.

HOUSE BLAYNE

The Seaborn in general don't think much of House Blayne and the Hearthfolk who live in their lands. Save for a single port in River's End, there are few coastlines in the Hearthlands and the Seaborn just don't interact with the Hearthfolk often. They are also aware that the Blaynes seek legitimacy, and even if they may be considered by many to be outcasts and brigands, the line of House Rourke is legitimate and ancient. These Houses do have a bit in common in that they both have long histories of being disruptive forces in the Kingdom, but they have gone about this in different ways. This has led them to make difference allegiances as House Blayne has found itself in a strong alliance with House Bannon and the King.

The one exception to the Seaborn's relationship with House Blayne is House Botley, who makes it a point to attack any Seaborn ship on sight. The High House was once a Knight House to the Corveaux about twelve years ago, before the Troth was gifted to the Blayne and became the Hearthlands. Then, House Botley was the Corveaux's main naval fleet and was a force to be reckoned with on the coast of the Midlands. The Botleys haven't let go of their rivalry with the Rourkes, despite House Blayne making frequent demands that they cease their antagonization of the great house. In addition, the Lady Paragon of the Hearthlands, Paloma Blayne has been making loud accusations that the Seaborn kidnapped and murdered her son, Tadeo Blayne, the apparent heir of House Blayne, in Scyld. While the Seaborn have largely ignored both of these situations, but as they associate more with the realm, they may become of more pressing concern to them.

HOUSE BANNON

There are few forces that the Seaborn dislike more than those of the King and his House, the Bannon. The King and House Bannon have regularly denounced and declared illegal the crimes of piracy and raiding that the Seaborn captains have committed on the high seas. There are frequent bounties for Rourke captains and no Rourke is welcome in the Grand Court. The Seaborn generally despise the Bannons for their treatment of them. There is also a deep resentment that the King and the monarchy have not granted the Rourkes a protectorate of their own, like they did for House Blayne. While many Seaborn enjoy the freedom and their lives on the open sea, there are quite a few who long to call a place home. They blame the Bannons for not giving them land and forcing them to raid and pillage just to survive. Scurrilous rumors

persist that some Seaborn captains are willing to be bought for gold dragons and do dirty work for House Bannon and the King. If these captains are found out, they are largely derided and outcast by their own people, but it has been speculated that they are doing this to gain blackmail on their hated rivals.

HOUSE RICHTER

The Seaborn have a longest standing relationship with House Richter, for better or worse. In fact, they owe their current martial supremacy to the seizing of the port city of Scyld, which was once a bustling Richter trade hub. But this marriage of sea and iron has proven, at times, tumultuous. The freedom-loving Seaborn often come into conflict with the rigid and inflexible Dusklenders, who often refuse to back down from a position, no matter how perilous. But when Richter steel combines with Rourke cunning, they create a potent and formidable alliance. Unfortunately, this alliance has only stoked the fires of conflict within the Seaborn ranks, threatening to make the fracture between them even deeper. There are those who seek to broaden the foundation of their freeport empires on Richter stone and steel, while others hold on to the dream of the Drowned Isle, believing they should be reliant upon no power but their own to regain their greatness.

Rumors speak of a bitter past between Richter and Rourke that even go beyond whatever current political struggles the two houses may be involved in. Histories tell of a time when a Richter took a Rourke for a bride, yet she was different than all the others. Some say she was of the sea and in taking her from her home, she wrought foul deeds upon House Richter. To this day, there are those who say any love between a Richter and a Rourke is cursed to only misery and betrayal.

THE APOTHECA

Most Seaborn don't think much of a band of learned scholars who spend their time buried in books and lore. Similarly, the Apotheca sees little value in business relationships with House Rourke. They tend to live in unpleasant circumstances on the water and in shanty towns, far from civilized quarters and libraries. It is not common for any Sea Lord to have a Magister in their regular employ, but they also recognize that the Bonesmen have their uses. And given that the Apotheca tend to over-charge Seaborn for their services, it is not at all uncommon for the them to simply take what they like and when they need the services of Magister, they will kidnap one. This forces the Apotheca to pay high ransoms to get the magister back. Even then, it is not uncommon for the magister to not be returned alive. Of late, the guild has taken to paying ransoms less and less and hoping that this will discourage

House Rourke from the practice. All magisters are always warned to beware associating too closely with the Seaborn.

THE FAYNE MOIRAI

The Seaborn have a somewhat conflicted relationship with the Fayne Moirai. The culture of the Seaborn is steeped in superstition and mysticism, so it was not difficult for them to recognize value in the oracular abilities of the sisters. In the earlier days of the order, the captains of Rourke tried many times to appropriate the sisters, holding them captive amongst their crews as plunder from their raids, captivated by their claims of foresight and preternatural strength. Or at least by the notion that they could garner a handsome ransom. It was not long before they realized that the sisters were no easy prey; that if a Fayne desired to lead you astray, you would never realize it until it was too late. Their relationship eventually became established upon more legitimate grounds, the Seaborn finally acquiescing to payment as per their terms.

For those Fayne Moirai who have found a home on the sea, they have found what is perhaps an experience completely unique to that of any other sister of their order. The Darkwater Cabal of the Fayne Moirai enjoy a level of veneration among the Seaborn that borders the deference a vassal might show their lord. Ever the superstitious lot, the captains of Rourke have always looked to the omens of the sea as their guides. The flight path of a gull, the ebb and flow of the tides, or even the way the sun glimmers off the sea – perhaps they have always looked for a hand not that is not their own to guide their destinies. Before any excursion out to sea, the sisters of the Fayne are often seen upon the bow of their ship, their diaphanous robes billowing in the warm winds of the coast. Like the captains of old, they read the portents of the sea, deciding if today will be the day to set out upon the waves.

THE HEXEN

The Seaborn do not think much of the Hexen and indeed many of them do not even know that the order exists. One might find this strange given the large number of stories that exist among the Seaborn about ghosts and other creatures of the night. But the Seaborn have come to accept, perhaps as a part of their rather grim natures, these entities as a part of their lives and their culture. As a result, it is more likely that a Seaborn lives with the threat of the supernatural and does what they can to not run afoul of it, than to seek a hunter to rid them of the danger. This is partly why the Seaborn are so superstitious. They believe that by performing certain actions that they can ward away these bad spirits from their lives. In reality, the Seaborn fall victim to supernatural powers as

much as anyone and their refusal to seek out the aid of Hexen in all but the direst of situations is often to their detriment.

THE CIRQUE

Beyond any illicit activities that might see them thrown in the dungeons, the Cirque represents the largest current threat to the Seaborn and there is no love lost between these two factions. They have made it harder and harder to maintain trade contracts and deals, legitimate or no, as the Cirque expands its foothold over the sea. While an open war on the trade giant would be a poor move, this has not stopped the Seaborn captains from hitting the Cirque where it hurts most – their trade cogs. Sure a few can go missing due to the errant storm or run aground on a reef, but how long will it be before the Cirque chooses to pull its levers of influence? There is a game of cat and mouse where each side tests the other and sees just how far they can push the envelope before their rival pushes back. The Seaborn have always done the dirty work and keep their mouths shut. In that way, these two factions share a good bit in common as the Cirque is no stranger to the same lifestyle. But as with most rogue's galleries, the Seaborn can find little in common with Cirque save their love of gold. With rumors of conflict within the ranks of the Cirque on the rise and the Seaborn becoming more active, it is unclear how this rivalry will play out and if it could escalate into open war.

THE AURORYM

With their high-minded morality and general religious overtones, it is safe to say that the Aurorym faith has found few sympathetic ears among the Seaborn. It certainly is not for lack of effort, however, as many missionaries have come aboard Seaborn ships and visited freeports in the hopes of spreading their message to the far corners of Arnesse. Simply said, the strongest appeal in the Aurorym faith is in those cultures which find themselves oppressed from above and beset on all sides by enemies. The Seaborn, often unfettered by feudal laws and lords, often do not see the appeal in the rigid structure and restrictions of the Aurorym. All too often, those of the Aurorym faith find themselves on the receiving end of ridicule from the Seaborn and while they are not often hostile to the faithful, most are not welcomed. That isn't to say that the Seaborn have completely rejected the idea of religion. It is said that once, the Sea Lords were incredibly faithful and devout to the Gods, but their destruction at the hands of men deeply embittered them about any kind of organized faith. There is said to be a faction among the Seaborn, allegedly led by a minor noble, Captain Jonas Walker, who has embraced the Aurorym faith and is actively working to spread the beliefs among the Seaborn. His ship, the *Dawnbringer*, can be identified by its burnt orange sails.

PLAYING A SEABORN

To be a Seaborn is to be apart; the other. While they may seem an unorganized lot, they are if nothing else, united in their general disdain for what their land-locked brethren refer to as civilization. Order, law, the kingdom. To them, these are all just another name for the yoke. The dangers of a life on the sea offer at least some grim predictability when faced with a lord's arbitrary judgement. Some part of them knows they need this yoke, this order, this civilization as bad as it needs them. There is always room to be made for the seedy underbelly of society; always a place at the long table for those capable of doing the things others might deign beneath their station. Those things to which it is always better to turn a blind eye. But a life spent doing the dirty work of a kingdom is bound to take its toll. Underneath the slimy veneer is a noble house who has gone overlooked; denied, secretly helping others who have done very little to return the favor.

Seaborn culture revolves around the concepts of freedom and fate. Cast your cares to the wind and whatever will come will come. The Seaborn are natural risk-takers, who often fully embrace the concept of chance. As a result, the love to gamble and make wagers. One of the Seaborn's greatest strengths is their unpredictability, but that same strength often leads to ruin as 'lady luck' turns on them and a horrific run of misfortune comes upon them. Tales of the Seaborn are littered with laced with heroic successes and terrible tragedies. Few in the world value their freedom more than the Seaborn. They do not wish to be tied down to laws, governmental structures, or even rigid ideals. This leads many of them to reject many of the concepts that are well established in the Kingdom such as holidays, religion, and even marriage. This leads many of the Seaborn to lives outside the law and often runs them afoul of those who seek to enforce it. Despite this unruly reputation, the crews of the Seaborn can be surprisingly ordered and even obedient. The Argosian Canon is something few will dare to cross, but it takes a strong hand to run a Seaborn crew, for to show weakness or cowardice is to involve revolt and mutiny.

The Seaborn are a surprisingly insular and very superstitious lot. On a whole they are not well educated and the ability to read or be learned is not a quality that is often prized among their number. They are prone to tell and believe tall tales or rumors of monsters and mysticism and many crews have odd practices that they feel they must perform to secure the safety of the ship. The Three Seas can be a terrifying and unknown place and long periods spent upon it can have strange effects on the minds of those who travel them. Seaborn are often given to flights of fancy and claim to have visions or have seen things that others have not. Among their own number

these tales are often believed, but among other groups, some see them as the ravings of a madman. As a culture they are surprisingly grim, accustomed to the fact that the sea can be a very dangerous place and that death can come at any time. This is why ghosts and other spirits feature so prominently in their stories and legends. Like most rogue's galleries, they tend to squabble and fight amongst each other, even unto the death. However, when the Seaborn are threatened from outside, there are few factions who will unite behind a cause faster. And woe betide those who's ire they earn, for the Seaborn do not play fair and always claim what is theirs.