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LANGUARD LOCATIONS: UNDER THE CITY





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LANGUARD LOCATIONS: UNDER THE CITY

Storied Languard—the capital of Ashlar and its greatest city—stands hard against Hard Bay’s turbulent, stormy waters. To the north lies the Mottled Spire’s brooding spray-drenched mass, the curse-haunted ruins of Greystone and Gloamhold’s doom-wreathed halls. Ashlar’s greatest—indeed only—city, Languard is a noisy, dirty place. Here, amid broad, muddy streets teeming with life and shadow-mantled, danger-filled alleyways there is little beneath the sun that cannot be had somewhere—for a price.

Languard Locations: Under the City presents nine additional locations designed for use with City Backdrop: Languard. While the locales within are designed with Languard in mind, they are easily convertible for use in your campaign.

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SYSTEM NEUTRAL EDITION

Welcome to this Raging Swan Press System Neutral Edition Village Backdrop. Herein you’ll find evocative, inspiring text designed to help you—the busy GM—run better, quicker and easier games.

This book is compatible with most fantasy roleplaying games. It’s impossible to create a truly system neutral book, though, and some generic game terms—wizard, fighter, human, elf and so on—lurk within. These generic terms are easily modified to the GM’s system of choice.

One special note about the NPCs in this supplement. While some are wizards, fighters, clerics and so on, others are simply normal folk. Because different game systems handle normal folk differently we’ve made no attempt to note their “class” leaving them simply as “female human” and so on.

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UNDER THE CITY

Proud Languard, capital city of Ashlar, overlooks Hard Bay. Sprawled across both banks of the Svart, in regard to its undercity, Languard is a city of contrasts.

To the north, lies High City named both for the august status of its residents and because it is set upon a high bluff overlooking both Hard Bay and the rest of the city. A confused jumble of natural caves honeycombs the bluffs. When the original settlers discovered this network, they employed them for a variety of uses, including as a nascent sewer network. Over the centuries work has—sporadically—continued to enlarge and improve the network. Now, High City is well served by an extensive sewer network. This is just one of the many reasons why High City is a desirable place to live.

Across the Svart, it is a different story.

To the south lies the rest of the city—bustling Low City, the cramped Shambles, malodourous Fishshambles and slowly sinking Wrecks. The lower part of the city has no formal sewer network. No natural cave system of note runs under this portion of Languard and successive dukes have concluded that building a sewer network for the rest of the city was far too expensive. Thus, here the residents must carry their waste to the river or pay others to dispose of it. Consequently, the southern portion of the city is a much dirtier, unhealthier place than High City.

HIGH CITY'S SEWER

High City's sewers predominantly run through a series of natural caves and caverns. In many places, these passageways have been worked to improve the flow of waste south to the Svart. Short sections of narrow, constructed tunnels link the various houses and buildings above to the sewer's main arteries.

Access to the sewers is tightly controlled as the tunnels link—indirectly—to many of the city's most important buildings.

Several subterranean streams and rivers draining from the surrounding area intersect with the sewers, and their waterflow help to keep the sewers “moving”.

DARK WARDENS

The duke maintains a small force of 40 or so individuals charged with maintaining and patrolling the sewers. Unsurprisingly, dwarves are well represented among this force as are half-orcs. Separate to the city watch, the Dark Wardens report directly to Chancellor Marja Pasanen (location H1). The duke pays for the Dark Wardens by levying an extra tax on High City's residents. This is not a popular tax—some call it the Shit Tax.

UNDER THE CITY LOCATIONS

Locations under the city are denoted by a dotted border and start with the letter corresponding to the part of the city under which they lie. For example, W11: Smuggler's Crux lies under the Wrecks.

H15 The Screaming Halls: If the rumours are to be believed, Languard's only lunatic asylum—and the tunnels beneath wherein the worst, most hopeless patients are kept—is a place best avoided.

H16 Shrine of the Underfolk: The only shrine in Languard dedicated to the dwarven gods.

H17 The Low Shard: Set around a shard of strange, unidentifiable rock of unknown origin this large chamber is a popular meeting place both for merchants and courting couples.

H18 The Dark Market: The gloom of this subterranean markets conceals many esoteric, hard-to-find items including dwarven crafted weapons, strange drugs and more.

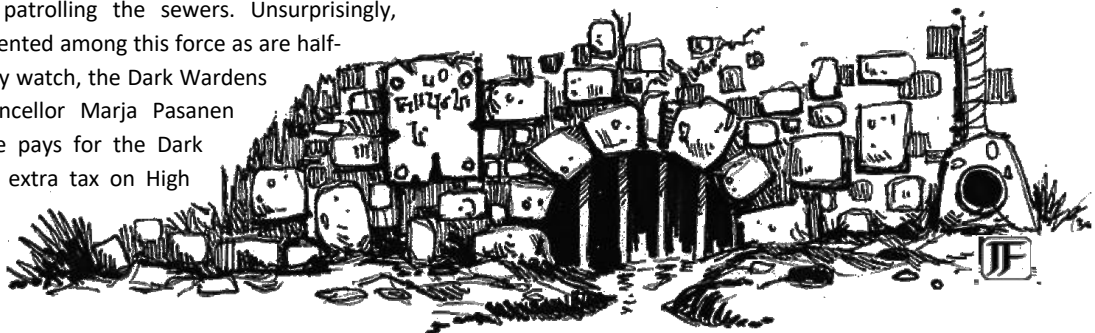
H19 Tunnel of Shades: This mostly forgotten, partially flooded tunnel runs under the Svart. Smugglers of the foulest sort lurk therein.

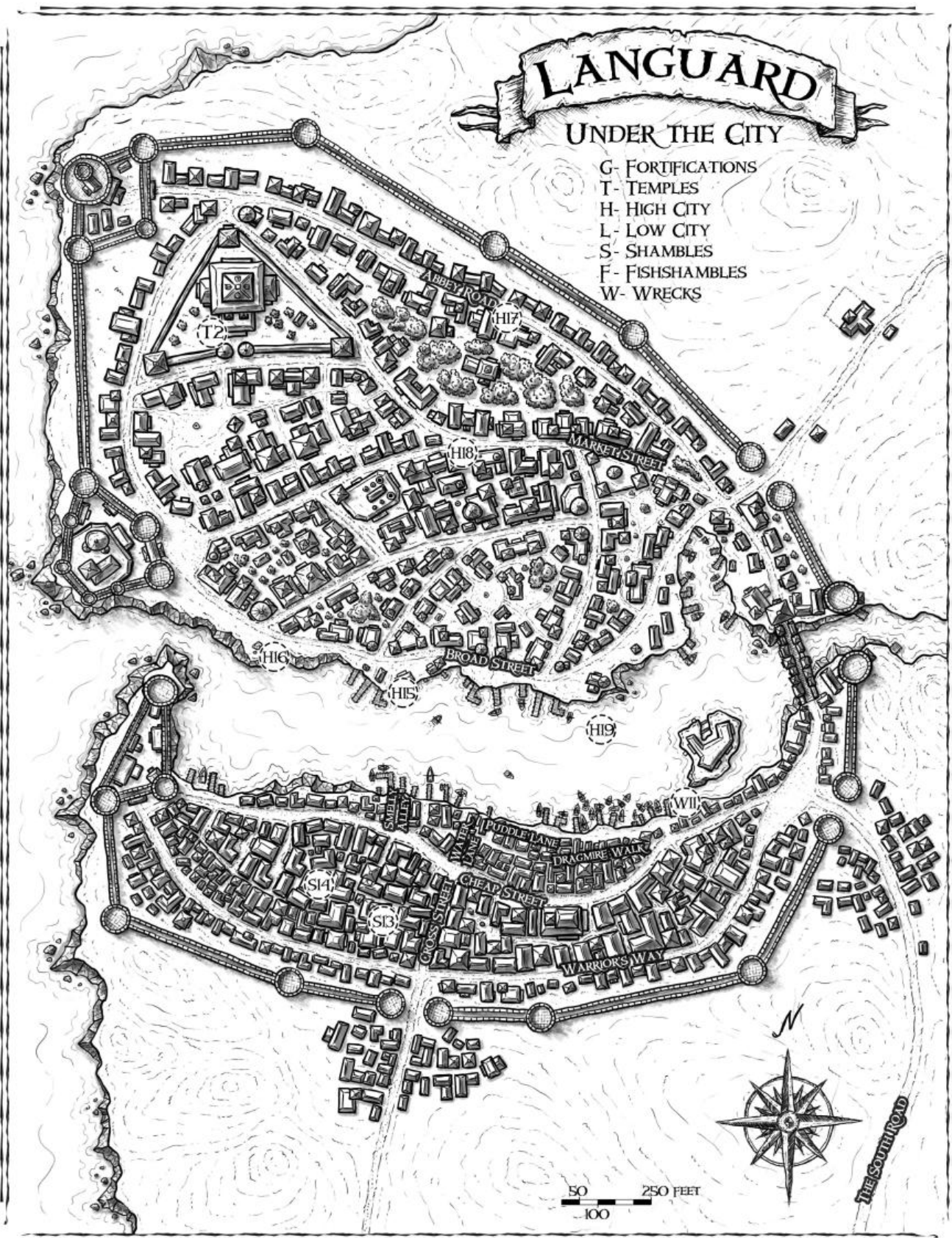
S13 Saren the Ear: This reviled information-gatherer is rumoured to be undead, but actually “merely” suffers from a horrible skin-rotting disease.

S14 The Maze: Home to the Shadow Masks, the Maze is a confusing mishmash of wood-lined tunnels connecting a multitude of cellars and cisterns.

T2 The Languard Catacombs: Herein, under the Father's Hall, lie the countless remains of the faithful in eternal rest.

W11 Smuggler's Crux: Hidden beneath the Wrecks, this baffling collection of ever-changing sodden tunnels is home to a small group of misfits and outcasts dedicated to battling the followers of Father Dagon lurking among the depraved Takolen.





H15: THE SCREAMING HALLS

Riddling the ground beneath a grand house of fine aspect, the so-called Screaming Halls are Languard's insane asylum. The Screaming Halls is not its real name, but its proper moniker—the House of the Clouded Mind—is only used by those who have consigned a friend or family member to its care. The Screaming Halls gets its somewhat disturbing name from the faint screaming sometime audible on the stretch of the Svart running passed the grand house, and few willingly pass into its care.

As the Screaming Hall's proprietor—Sauli Itkonen—tells visitors, the mind is a strange thing. Both endlessly resilient and easily broken, it is a mystery to even the greatest, most accomplished healers and sages. That is why Languard needs the Screaming Halls. This is the argument that has persuaded Languard's great and good to overlook the rumours swirling about the halls. In truth, Languard does seem to suffer from more madness and mental illness than other places in Ashlar; the Screaming Halls are seen as a humane solution to the problem.

As with so many things in the world, however, the Screaming Halls is an imperfect solution. Sometimes, families dump their ill relatives at the Screaming Halls and then—after a short while—stop paying their bills. Other times, they understate the scale of their relative's madness and Sauli is forced to take regrettable steps to ensure the safety of his staff and other patients.

The aboveground portion of the House of the Healing Hand are actually quite pleasant. The rooms are airy, there are communal areas for the residents and attentive staff see to their charges' needs. Below ground, conditions are altogether much worse. Rooms are cramped, and few patients are ever allowed out of their locked communal chambers.

NOTABLE FOLK

- **Sauli Itkonen** (N middle-aged male human) is a well-meaning, but easily duped, man who genuinely wants the best for his "guests". A jolly fat man, Sauli rarely visits the lower halls now—confining his efforts to the wealthiest guests occupying the above-ground portions of the complex.
- **Aila Eskola** (NE female half-orc thief 2) is Sauli's right-hand. A consummate actor, she is utterly without compassion, and only here to cream off as much revenue as possible. She happily takes money to ensure a patient's increased comfort, but rarely passes on the benefits of the enhanced payments.

HOOKS

- Sauli Itkonen is a charlatan. He projects an image of kindness, but in reality, is a dark-hearted man. Takolen ancestry lurks somewhere far back in his family's past.
- Sometimes strange, terrible experiments are wrought upon the Screaming Hall's inmates. Few patients who disappear into its depths are ever seen again.

H16: SHRINE OF THE UNDERFOLK

Buried in the cliffs of High City this dwarven shrine is set deep in a network of natural caves.

Main Level: Low natural tunnels lead a short distance into the rock from street level before entering a finely crafted temple of stone lit from above by natural light from a shaft in the ceiling. Intricate statues of the dwarven pantheon stand vigil around the walls of the hexagonal chamber of polished granite and marble comprising the shrine's centrepiece. Five alcoves contain the beautifully intricate statues of the dwarven gods and a small altar. At the top of the room on thrones of gold leafed stone sit Duregal and Varla the father and mother of the dwarven race, with a heavily cloaked dwarf—Grondinn the Wanderer—kneeling before them on the dais. Varla smiles happily while resting an affectionate hand on her husband's hand and looking at the young dwarves at play around the base of the thrones.

Around the alcoves to the right are Thaun the Forgemaster at work at his anvil and watching over him is Dalrak Grimtooth whose thunderaxe—a racial weapon wielded by the dwarves of fallen Vongyth—Thaun is repairing. Dalrak's face is set in a perpetual scowl.

In the left alcoves stands Vorng Grimm the Trickster laughing happily at Khanoss the Miser as gold spills from his outstretched hands. The last god depicted is better known as Khanoss the Black, he has turned his back on the rest of the gods and clutches a bulging sack of coins to his chest.

Upper Level: A hidden stone door leads up a spiralling set of stairs to a small domicile above the shrine where the Shrine Keeper, Beryl Stonehammer, lives. A small pressure plate at the entrance alerts her when people come to the shrine and she usually meets them as they enter the shrine's central area.

NOTABLE FOLK

- **Beryl Stonehammer** (LG female dwarf cleric 5) is a small dwarven woman. She devoutly tends to the shrine and welcomes visitors with a bright and cheery smile. Her striking dark green and gold eyes and amiable personality conceal the fact she is not very clever, something she is aware of and does her best to hide. Young for a temple warden she has surprised many older dwarves with her knowledge of the pantheon and her unwavering faith. She is adept with her namesake's stone-headed warhammer and usually yells "Break toes!" as she strikes at enemies' feet.

HOOKS

- During her spare time, Beryl seeks someone to show her how to write in Common and to help her explore the city above.
- Recently the entrance to the shrine has been marred by vandalism wrought by a local gang; Beryl wants this dealt with and asks any dwarves among the PCs for help.

H17: THE LOW SHARD

Set in the centre of a large cavern, this huge spear of dark rock is embedded deep into the rocky bottom of a natural pool. The Shard is of some kind of unnatural rock. The original builders of the sewers tried to break down the Shard, but it proved to be impervious to all their attempts. Now the cavern in which it stands is a popular meeting spot for people to discuss business or catch up with friends. At night, it is a popular place for courting well-to-do couples to visit.

A stone gate wards access to the Shard, and visitors must pay the Gatekeeper to enter the cool tunnel beyond. Two hundred steps lead down a long, lantern-lit winding natural stone passageway to the chamber holding the Shard.

Anduin's Tower: Built above the arching stone gate to the tunnels this squat stone tower is home to Anduin and his collection of stray cats. Untidy and infested with fleas and a growing number of kittens, the tower is slowly falling into disrepair.

The Pool and the Shard: Here people meet and chat in the chamber's many alcoves. A walkway of planks and railings surround the Shard resting just above the bubbling surface of the dark green water wherein the flickering light of the many lanterns is reflected.

The shard resists all magical effects and any tools striking it, sometimes with extremely unexpected results such as shocks of electricity or a low humming vibration that goes on for days giving visitors a constant headache. Due to these annoying irritations experimentation on the Low Shard is now outlawed.

TARIFF

- **Admission** 1 sp.

NOTABLE FOLK

- **Shardkeeper Alduin** (NG old male human magic-user 3) is a bent-backed old man who is commonly seen at the Shard wandering around and inspecting its surface with a thick lensed magnifying glass. Originally tasked with divining its purpose and origin Alduin is now little more than a caretaker of the cavern.
- **Gatekeeper Gandin Volaire** (NE male human thief 2) poses as a barely literate buffoon. This clever thief works as a lamplighter in the cavern and collects the admission fees, half of which he pockets himself unknown to Anduin. He lives in a small room beside the gates.

HOOKS

- A local merchant needs a guard as he discusses a business deal with an unscrupulous trader from out of town.
- Many merchants have complained of a pick-pocket targeting their meetings at the Shard and have begun to look for other places to conduct business.

H18: THE DARK MARKET

The light from countless red and green lamps struggle to penetrate the dark of this rambling, incense-filled tent city filling a cavern below High City. Narrow paths wander aimlessly between stalls of exotic goods from far off lands and a freak-show of entertainers and shopkeepers call out to passers-by offering goods and services not available in the city above.

Main Floor: Tents of red and black embellished with bright signs declaring the rare goods inside comprise most of the market. Exotic incense burns at the head of each of the narrow alley in intricately crafted clay pots shaped like marvellous fantastical creatures. It is from these pots the alleys get their name.

The Way of the Dragon: Here, the stalls deal exclusively in herbs, spices and dried goods from far off lands. Several illegal forms of pipe-weed are available but only to trusted buyers or those with excessive amounts of coin.

The Way of the Lion: The traders here deal in exotic weapons and armour; this narrow alley is always popular with nobles, bravados and adventurers.

The Way of the Eagle: This circular alley in the centre of the market surrounds a huge, multi-roomed tent bounded by smaller stalls. Inside the tents, exotic silks and satins from faraway lands are sold at exorbitant prices alongside pure white lace of linen and silk. Some of the wares even have gold and silver threads woven into their design.

The Harpies' Nest: Tucked away in the back corner of the market this drinking establishment provides food and drink to market goers and a welcome break from the market's hubbub. Set aside from the rest of the market behind brightly covered wagons, beautiful women in diaphanous silks and half-naked men sing from a raised stage, entertaining customers and drawing in people from all over the cavern.

NOTABLE FOLK

- **Fazar Al'Shera** (N male human) is a small swarthy man. He runs the Harpies' Nest and employs many women to wander the market selling his spiced drinks and food.
- **Maeve Dranagar** (N female dwarf fighter 2) sells weapons and armour crafted in Don Galir's subterranean forges. Her stall is the only grey tent in the market and is one of the most popular on the Way of the Lion. Here, she also repairs and sharpens damaged weapons and armour.
- **The Dark Guard** is an elite group of 20 or so mercenaries who patrol the market for thieves and scoundrels. They have a reputation for brutality and are the subject of disdainful discussion among Languard's elite.



H19: TUNNEL OF SHADES

Centuries ago, to stave off a series of riots sparked by a terrible harvest and resultant wide-spread hunger and unemployment, Duchess Aelliah Nenonen II decided to build a tunnel under the Svart. She reasoned the project would provide both a second useful link between the city's two halves and widespread employment for years to come which in turn would quell the populace's riotous proclivities.

The project was a disaster. Although, the duchess engaged a small cadre of master dwarven miners and masons to lead the project, the ground on the southern side was not suitable for deep tunnelling and the human miner's efforts were lacklustre. Drunkenness, discontent among the workers and accidents marred the project's early stages. After four years of stop-start construction, the project was abandoned after a final near-catastrophic flood drowned over two-score miners.

But that doesn't mean the tunnel is abandoned. Much of the tunnel under the river is only partially flooded and can be navigated by shallow-bottomed skiff, raft or swimming. Additionally, several raised side tunnels—originally built as refuges for the miners and storage areas—radiating out from the main thoroughfare remain dry and unflooded.

On the north side, the tunnel entrance is hidden within and under a large waterside warehouse controlled by Einar Teuvo, a the seemingly wealthy and upstanding merchant. Einar is anything but and has contacts with the human (and inhuman) pirates of Deksport (a pirate city lying to the west). He numbers orcs and goblins among his servants, although they lurk in the tunnel and rarely, if ever, walk Languard's streets,

NOTABLE FOLK

- **Einar Teuvo** (LE male human fighter 3/magic-user 3) is wealthy, self-centred and utterly ruthless. One of Languard's wealthiest commoners he presents a reputable front but is anything but respectable. Happy to deal in anything—stolen goods, drugs or even slaves—he is the pirates main contact in Languard.
- **Thokk** (CE male giant orc fighter 5) is Einar's chief enforcer. A savage, but surprisingly cunning, warrior Thokk oversees the goblins and orcs working in the Tunnel of Shades.

HOOKS

- The flooded Tunnel of Shades is haunted by the spirits of all the miners who died during its excavation. To venture into its depths is to invite death.
- The tunnel was a folly brought on by the arrogance of the Nenonen's. Many died because of their hubris.
- Sometimes rowboats are seen at the dead of night in the waters near a certain waterside warehouse in High City.

S13: SAREN THE EAR

Located at the end of a dead-end alley an iron grate set low into a wall reveals the sunken home of Saren, a mysterious ragged lady who is a broker of information. A large plate lies next to a brass bell with a sign saying, "Bring meat and ring the bell."

Saren is an unlucky soul afflicted with a rotting disease from an early age. Many years ago, she decided to retreat below the city and ply her trade gathering and selling information. Content with working for meat or gold, and stealing whatever she can, she spends most of her time underground.

Saren's Home: Saren shies away from daylight, hiding behind a thick black curtain set back from the grate. If she is attacked, she flees through a small tunnel into one of her many bolt holes where she plots her revenge.

For Sale: Over the years, Saren has amassed a wealth of information about the city and Gloamhold and is willing to sell this information for the right price. In addition, to what she knows she can be employed to gather information. Her services include:

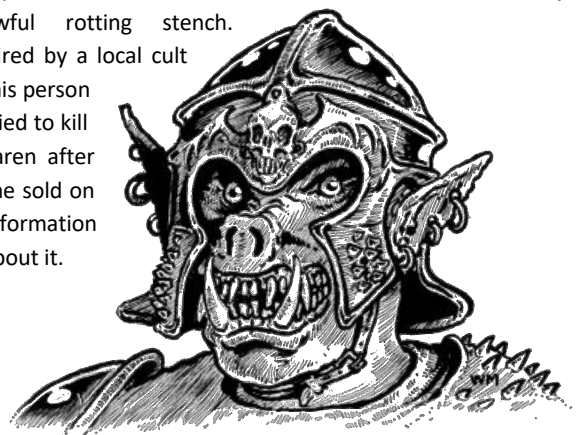
- **Information on a Specific Person:** 5 gp and 2 days wait.
- **Information on a Specific Place:** 5 gp and 3 days wait.
- **Information on a Specific Item:** 20 gp and 2 days wait.
- **Rumours:** From 5 sp to 5 gp depending on the social status of the person or persons involved.

NOTABLE FOLK

Saren (N female human thief 3) was cursed at a young age with a horrible skin-rotting disease. She now hides below the city trading information and gathering secrets. Only 26 years old the remnants of her once beauty yet remain among the weeping sores and boils covering her body. A putrid stench surrounds her. Her raspy voice and stench are all most people know of her. Rumours about her being a ghoul or some other undead creature are false, but she plays up to the fear these rumours elicit—she's found it useful in negotiations.

HOOKS

- A person was found dead in their basement surrounded by an awful rotting stench. Hired by a local cult this person tried to kill Saren after she sold on information about it.



S14: THE MAZE

Hidden beneath a confused jumble of ramshackle, crumbling tenements, warehouses and shops, the Maze is the Shadow Mask's main base of operations in Languard. Here, a score of feet below the surface, in a bizarre network of wood-lined passageways linking cellars and cisterns is plotted most of the organised larceny plaguing the city.

The Watch are aware the Shadow Masks have a hideout below the Shambles but have not yet ferreted out its location. Most of the buildings above the Maze are in Shadow Mask hands and a sophisticated network of spies and informant watch the alleyways and streets for signs of the Watch. The infrequent patrols wandering the area are inevitably distracted—by a nearby barroom brawl, minor riot or other matter requiring their immediate attention—and thus the Maze remains hidden.

Guild members use hidden trapdoors, concealed doors and so on to come and go. The Maze boasts storerooms, training facilities, barracks and more. Some thieves live in the Maze permanently. Others—notably the guild's leadership—dwell elsewhere fearing that eventually the Watch will uncover the Maze's location. Few outsiders ever visit the Maze, and those that do are blindfolded and thoroughly disorientated before being brought into its tenebrous depths.

NOTABLE FOLK

- **Ulla Rintala** (N middle-aged female human thief 4) oversees the Maze and is one of Taneli Laitnen's most trusted lieutenants. In the Maze, her word is law and few low-ranking rogues dare to test her judgements.
- **Riku** (CE male half-orc) is in charge of expanding and repairing the Maze. Always filthy, Riku is renowned for his foul temper as well as his tunnelling skill. He's not well-liked but is a vital part of the operation.
- **Elmo Varala** (CN young male human thief 1) is a tearaway, and always getting into trouble. For some reason, he gets away with far more mischief than he should, and resentment among his peers is slowly building. If he doesn't soon mend his ways, he may end up with a knife in his back.

HOOKS

- Some folk in the part of the Shambles closest to the river have reported strange sounds coming from beneath their cellars. Is this the Shadow Mask's expanding their domain or the sinister work of some other party?
- Last week, a stretch of alleyway caved in badly damaging a nearby building. Almost immediately, a "nobleman" arrived on the scene and purchased the building from the stunned owners with a bag of gold. His workmen quickly filled in the hole and the building's original inhabitants have not been seen since.

T2: THE LANGUARD CATACOMBS

Since the earliest days of the city's founding, worship of The Father has been preeminent among its populace. And since the city's earliest days the problem of what to do with Languard's dead has demanded an answer. Thus was born—or more accurately dug—the Languard Catacombs—a vast underground warren honeycombing the rock beneath the Father's Hall.

Excavated about a central shaft fully forty-foot wide and 80 feet deep, the catacombs are a rambling, warren of passages, burial tombs, niches, storerooms, chapels and more. Few alive today know the catacombs' true extent and every couple of years or so rumours circulate about the city of mourners—and sometimes even priests—disappearing in its depths.

Like the city above, the catacombs are a divided, class-riven place. Commoners are interred in deep communal vaults while the wealthy rest in ostentatious family crypts. The nearer an individual's resting place is to the cathedral above, the greater the status and honour of the family. Some of the burial vaults dug for the city's commoners are now exceedingly deep.

NOTABLE FOLK

Few folk spend much time in the catacombs. However, the place does have a small staff.

- **Elren Vonmalk** (LN middle-aged female dwarf fighter 2) is the granddaughter of Garbere Vonmalk—the dwarf miner and mason responsible for the necropolis' original construction.
- **Raisa Lieno** (LN male half-orc cleric 3) is the custodian of the dead. Except Elren Vonmalk, he is the best acquainted with the necropolis' twisted layout. Taciturn and uneasy among the living, he is not a popular fellow with the cathedral's clergy.

HOOKS

- Yesterday a small burial party descended into the catacombs and have not yet returned. The PCs hear of the disappearances when they visit the cathedral (in search of healing or some other favour). The clergy ask them to investigate the disappearance in exchange for the favour they desire.
- Elren Vonmalk is overseeing the catacomb's expansion when miners break into a hitherto unknown cave system. The PCs are asked to investigate.
- Atro Keto visited the catacombs and discovered his family's remains have disappeared. Rumours have long circulated of some priests taking bribes to make space for the recently deceased in the upper catacombs by moving the long-dead. Is this proof of such practise or is something fouler going on?
- Rumours have long circulated among the credulous of strange grey-skinned humans dwelling among the bones and dust of the catacombs. Just yesterday Elmeri Auvienien claims to have seen one of them while laying his elderly aunt to rest!

WII: SMUGGLERS' CRUX

Beneath the Wrecks lurks a slurry of half-sunken canals, soughs and crawl-holes made of barrels, said to skulk below every property overlooking the Svart. The apex of these drowning, unpredictable and transient subterranean ways is a partially sunken vessel known as the Crux, itself an otherwise unremarkable wreck moored on a dock full of rot.

The tunnels are confusing, they have lurking air-pockets in hidden sparse side-vents and wells. A whole sub-clan of subterranean rangers and rogues have made a dark home here. In one corner a spartan mouldering dungeon settlement lurks just above the inky salt waters, and though barely 20 souls call it home, it has a whispered name—Sanctum.

The hosts of the flotsam village of Sanctum fight an ongoing battle against the things that call everything beneath the Wrecks their home, but particularly the insidious machinations and attacks of the cult of Dagon and their revolting allies who often lurk here. These free-spirited rogues are made up of orphans, street waifs and the abandoned. Led by the caring but uncompromising Slither, herself once a cruelly treated orphan blinded in an accident long ago, the little settlement does all it can to remain hidden, and hopefully safe, providing sanctuary and hidden passages for its folk.

NOTABLE FOLK

- **Slither aka Lilly Ki-Dore** (CN female human ranger 3) is sightless and pale (and rumoured by her enemies to give birth to worms). Slither is an all-too living spirit said to guide travellers lost in the Crux. This is close to the truth; Slither protects her own and may save kin trapped below—for a price.

HOOKS

- The PCs are asked to rid one remote corner of the Crux from a monstrous abomination whose growth threatens the very fabric of the tunnels themselves. The PCs are hired because so far the creature and its followers have proved beyond the powers of those who dwell below. Sadly, the PCs cannot be allowed to take the secret of the Crux away with them.
- A local whispers stories of the Crux, saying it is home to Dagon-worshipping cultists. It must be cleansed, they add, but who would help the people of the Wrecks? Of course, the lie is told by a cultist eager to use naïve strangers to her own ends.



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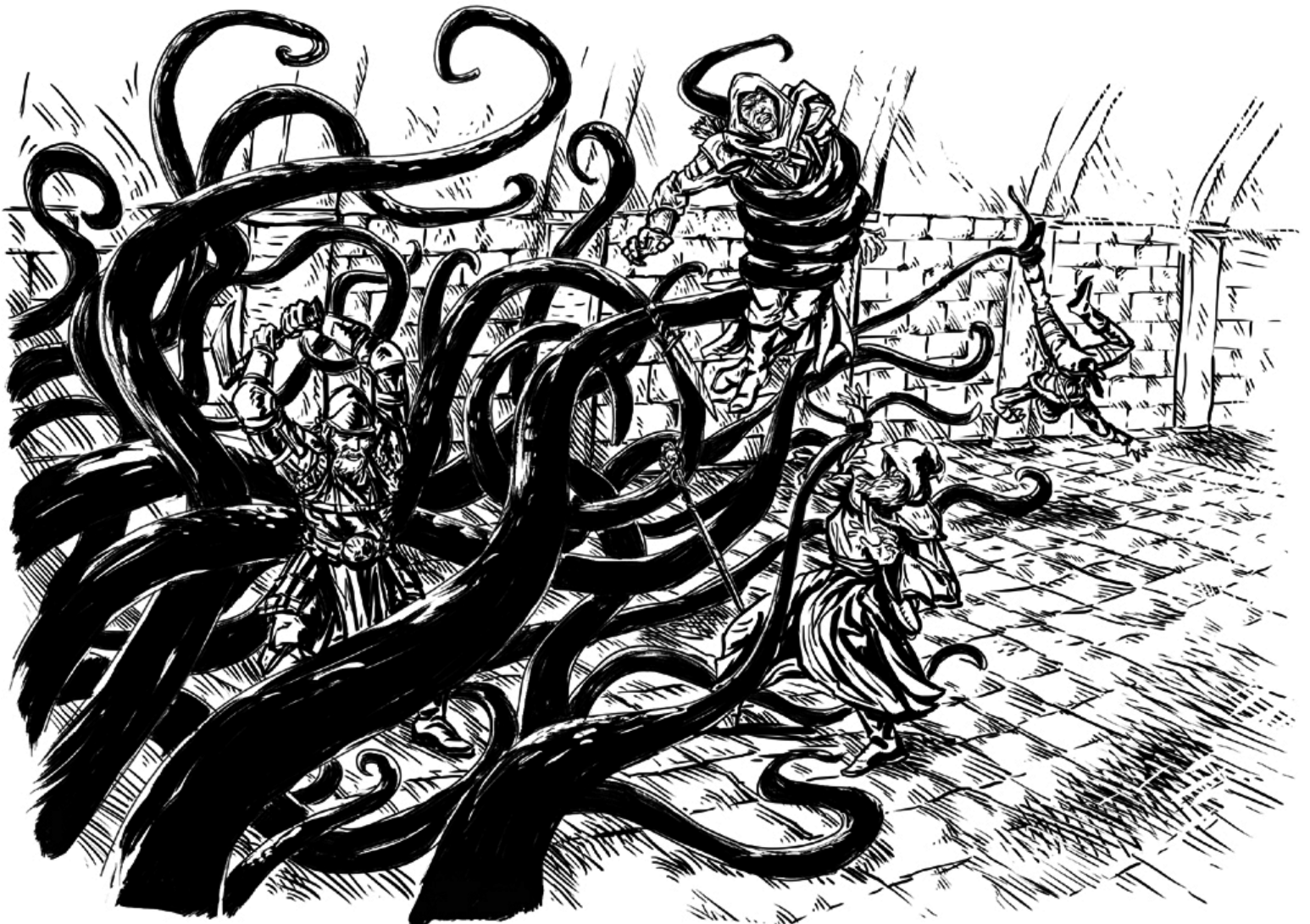
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