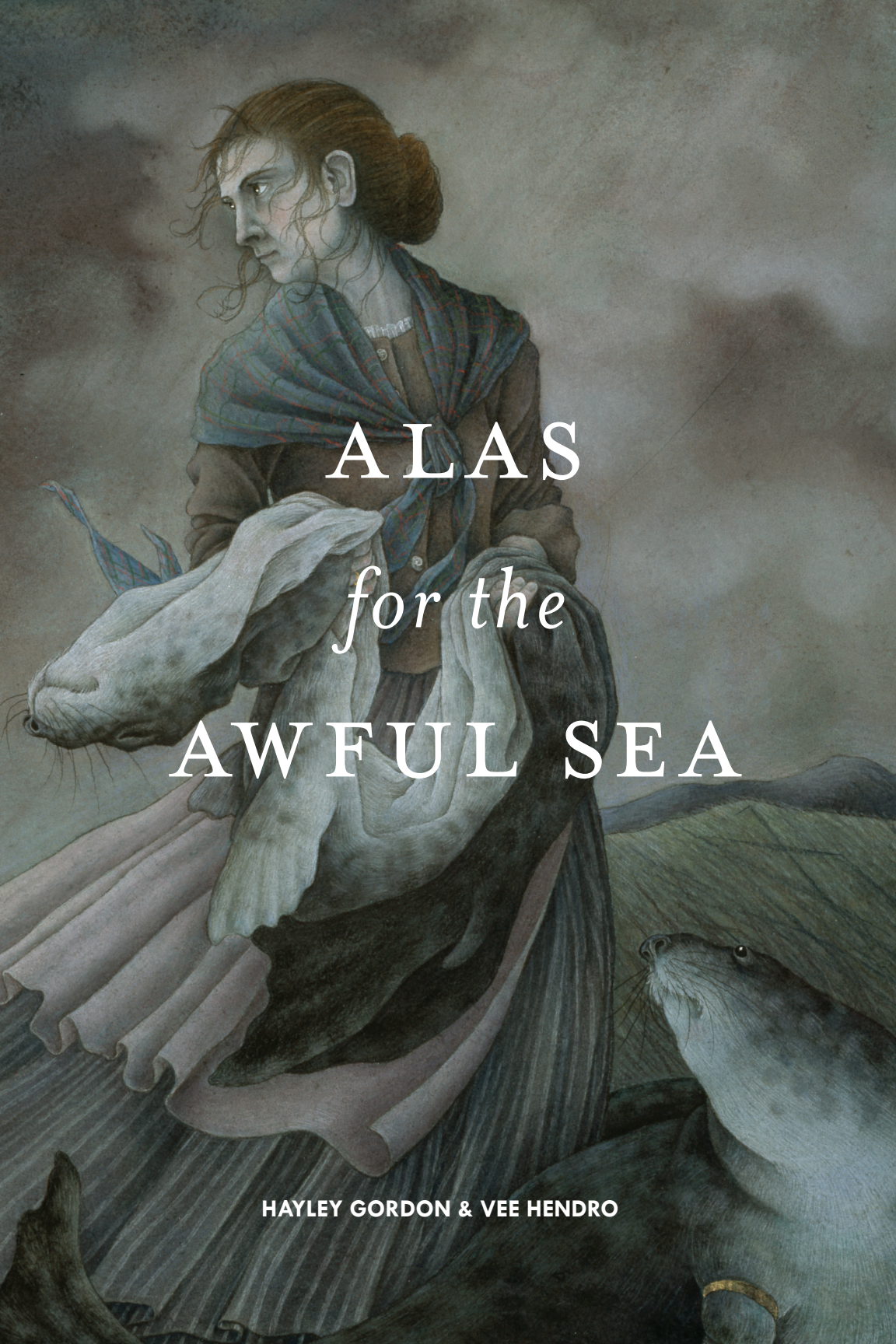




ALAS
for the
AWFUL SEA

HAYLEY GORDON & VEE HENDRO

Alas for the Awful Sea is a story-focused tabletop roleplaying game about a ship's crew navigating the remote British Isles. There, they face a world consumed with suspicion, sadness, and desperation.

Struggles for power have deadly consequences; mysterious disappearances plague the region; and those who seem human may not all be so. Amidst all this, the sea sends forth strange messages.

Will you be the one to listen?



Alas for the Awful Sea

'A story is told eye to eye, mind to mind, heart to heart.'

— Scottish Proverb

HAYLEY **GORDON**

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Storybrewers Roleplaying

www.storybrewersroleplaying.com

For our families, and everyone who loves a good story.

Alas for the Awful Sea

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Fifth day.

Rain ain't stopped since we got here. Well, I say 'got here'... swept into port in a storm-smashed pile of hulking wood that used to be our ship. Damn it all.

Folks here are a little strange. Must be something in the mist rolling off from the crags. We're sailors, we seen a lot of things we can't hope to explain. But something's rotten here, I smell it, more even than the dead fish we found sinking down into Neptune's gut. Sure, I'll go looking for answers.

But I ain't gonna like what I find.

WELCOME TO *Alas for the Awful Sea*, a tabletop roleplaying game of myth, mystery and crime set in the 19th century. In this game, the players take on the role of a ship's crew, navigating the remote British Isles. There, they face a world consumed by suspicion, sadness and desperation. Struggles for power have deadly consequences; mysteries and murders plague the region; and those who seem human may not all be so. Amidst all this, the sea sends forth strange messages. Who will listen, and what will they hear?

Suspense, seafaring and the supernatural all feature in *Alas for the Awful Sea*. But they're not what this game is about. We created this game to tell grim stories about the complexities of the human heart. *Alas for the Awful Sea* is about why people hate, and what they fear. It is about desperation and the havoc it wreaks. In this world, there are no easy decisions. Friends come at a bitter cost, and even defeating enemies can have terrible consequences.

Alas is a game recommended for 3 to 5 players and a single Game Master (GM). In this game, each player will create and play a member of a ship's crew.

In *Alas for the Awful Sea*, story takes primacy over everything else. The needs, desires, and feelings of the player characters drive the action, and transform the narrative. The role of the GM is to bring into being an emotional and immersive world for the players to interact with. For this reason, *Alas* is not an easy game to run. It requires the GM to invent, evoke and describe in response to the actions of the player characters. But to help you, we've designed *Alas* to prepare and equip you to create a compelling and story focused experience.

There's a lot to read. We've filled the pages of this book with inspiration, examples, and GM tools to make running the game the best experience possible. If you are an experienced GM, and you're familiar with the *Apocalypse World* system, feel free to pick and choose which sections you'd like to look at. But if you're new to this kind of roleplaying system do not fear – this book has everything you need to understand and apply it.

WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK?

PART ONE: THE RULES

This part introduces the setting of *Alas*, and explains how to play the game, and create characters.

PART TWO: THE GM

This part contains an explanation of the GM's role and guiding principles, as well as what to do during the first session. It also guides GMs through creating their own material within the world of *Alas*.

This section also contains ideas and inspiration you can use to add depth and drama to play, or as a basis for your own prep. Chapter 14 explores folklore, myth, and common superstitions. Chapter 15 contains historical information about everyday living, sweeping events, rituals and festivals.

PART THREE: ALAS FOR THE AWFUL SEA

This part contains a pre-written adventure, set in the decaying rural town of Greymoor. This adventure centres on poverty, politics, and loss. It takes around 4 sessions to play.

Part One
THE RULES







One INTRO

LIKE ALL TABLETOP ROLEPLAYING GAMES, PLAYING *Alas for the Awful Sea* is about getting together in a group and telling a story. As the GM, you play an important part in creating and facilitating that story, expanding its scope as players find new and significant ways to interact with the fictional world around them.

As the GM, you will first guide the players through choosing a role aboard the ship and picking a descriptor. You will then take your players through their **FIRST SESSION** (p. 91), where they will create characters, establish bonds, and begin their adventure.

Once players have created their characters, the game begins. During play, player characters will interact with the fictional world around them, and are bound to come into conflict with it. When the stakes are high, characters will use **MOVES** (p. 17) against each other, non-player characters, or the environment, to try to get what they want. Succeed or fail, there will be consequences that change the game irreversibly.

There are a few other important mechanics needed to run the game smoothly, so we'll try and explain things as best we can. But the most important thing is to do what's right for your players, and serve the story they are creating. If in doubt, don't let rules get in the way!

BEFORE YOU PLAY

As you prepare to play the the game, there are a few things we would recommend you do before you run *Alas for the Awful Sea*.

READ THIS BOOK

As GM, you'll be in charge of applying the rules, and helping others to apply them. You don't need to know every nuance, but your grip on the rules should be firm enough that you're able to easily explain them to others.

GET INSIDE THE HEADSPACE OF THE GAME

To create a player experience that is both responsive and consistent, you will need to get inside the headspace of the world of *Alas*, its inhabitants, its mysteries and its locations. How you choose to do this is up to you. Some GMs like to create notes or use index cards to organise information. Others simply read everything through and follow their gut.

You'll find plenty of thematic material in this book to help you bring the world of *Alas* to life. Especially in the chapters on **SETTING** (p. 5), **FOLKLORE** (p. 117) and **HISTORY** (p. 153).

PREPARE THE FOLLOWING

- ☞ Printed copies of all the **CHARACTER SHEETS**.
- ☞ Printed copies of all the **DESCRIPTORS**.
- ☞ Printed copies of the **BASIC MOVES SHEET** for each player and yourself.
- ☞ A printed copy of the **GM SHEET**.
- ☞ Printed **TOWN SHEETS** for any towns that have been created.
- ☞ Two **D6** per player.
- ☞ Mood music (optional!)

Copies of all play materials can be found on our website.



Two SETTING

ALAS FOR THE AWFUL SEA DRAWS its themes, tone and setting from the remote British Isles in the early 19th century. This chapter explores the elements of this time and place that we view as central to the kind of stories *Alas* is built to tell. Feel free to supplement this section with your own historical knowledge and interests.

Alas for the Awful Sea is a game set in the past, but it's not confined by the realities of history. It uses historical places, points of view, and politics as a way of exploring ideas and examining motivations.

When you play this game, we encourage you not to be constrained by historical reality. Instead, tell stories that interest and inspire you, and don't be afraid to include a diverse range of issues and cast of characters.

This chapter is not intended to be a compendium of 19th century history. Rather, it identifies the key problems and pressures that are core to the conflicts explored in this game. As a result, this chapter is organized by theme rather than time period or event. The aim is to give you an understanding of what it's like to live in the world that is at the heart of *Alas for the Awful Sea*. You'll find more specific information on the historical period of the game in a later chapter (p. 153).

PEOPLE HERE ARE POOR

"Two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings, as if inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by different breeding ... and are not governed by the same laws ... the rich and the poor."

— Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil*, 1845

The people here don't have much. They barely have a roof over their heads, and potatoes and fish for their tables. They know it won't change. It's always been like this. And in the last few years, it's only been getting worse. Steady work is harder and harder to come by. The lucky ones own their share of a boat, and fish their living from the sea. For the rest of them, options are few. Break the law, or spend their time hopelessly farming the tiny patch of dirt they have left.

Still, here they don't complain of how hard things get. It's just their way of life. Part of being strong. Most here would rather starve than ask for a fish they didn't catch.

Of course, there are a few rich folk. But they're outsiders. More often than not, they're from somewhere else passing through. And when rich folk are from here, they're either far out of reach above the people, or have the village under an iron thumb. Even so, no matter what they do, they'll never understand the rest of us.

HISTORICAL NOTE

During the early 19th century, almost 50% of Britain's population lived in poverty, barely meeting the income needed for subsistence. Of these, close to 10% could not even afford basic necessities. For the rest, life hung in a precarious balance. A good week's work and they could afford to feed their families and heat their houses. But if work was not to be found, then neither were the necessities of life. And to make things worse, the rural unemployment rate was rising rapidly.

Rural housing in the first half of the 19th century was a mix of poor quality decaying older houses, badly built new dwellings, and a small smattering of decent stone or brick cottages for the more well off. Houses were small, cold, and wet, and the worst of them had mud walls, earth floors and decaying thatch roofs. Many rural parents brought up eight or more children in a tiny two room cottage. In fact, marriage was often delayed due to the difficulty of starting a new household.

PEOPLE HERE HAVE NO SAY

People here get no say. No say in who makes the laws, and what they decide. No say in who takes their rent, how much they want, and when. No say in who runs the town, and who tells them how to live. Most of the people here don't much care. Life goes on much the same no matter what those in power say. But a new desire is swelling. A craving to be heard. Or, if they can't be heard, to make themselves impossible to ignore.

HISTORICAL NOTE

In the first half of the 19th century, the working class had no political say. They were at the mercy of members of parliament and local government figures elected by someone else. Prior to 1832, only land owners could vote. In 1832 voting qualifications were lowered so the upper middle class could participate. The franchise was not extended to the working class until the 1880s.

Rural populations were also at the mercy of landlords. Due to overcrowding and fluctuating commodity prices, farming land was precious. Property owners could demand a steep rent from their tenants, and evict them if they refused to comply. Or even if they did.

TIMES ARE CHANGING FOR THE WORSE

The people here don't have much work. Men or women. It used to be they could make their living, tilling land, making shoes, weaving cloth. Now, those jobs are done by machines. Shoes and clothes are spat out from the city, brought to the villages on the cheap. It's not long now till everyone looks the same.

Farming's no better. Most of the workers that used to do the threshing were sacked. They replaced them with big clockwork monsters, which do the job of ten men. Some of those who lost their jobs tried to tear the machines to pieces. It didn't help. Most of them are in Australia now. You can't stop change with fire and riots.

The people here that can't find work are leaving. Leaving the villages, and towns, for the big cities. And leaving long-held traditions behind to rot from neglect.

HISTORICAL NOTE

Industrialisation progressed rapidly in the first half of the 19th century. Machines reduced the need for manual labour, and the wages of workers began to plummet. With starvation already so close, this was a major threat to many families. In rural areas, it was common for both men and women to work. Since women's labour was cheaper than men's, they sometimes found work where men couldn't, which led to anger and resentment.

In the early 19th century, many workers who were replaced or impoverished rose up to violently destroy the machines they hated. From textile weavers, to agricultural labourers, conflict erupted throughout the British Isles. It did little good however, and by the mid-19th century local rural industry had collapsed completely. Village craftsmen and many local labourers were out of work, leading to even greater levels of poverty and unemployment.

Faced with no other choice, many workers who lost their jobs left the villages their families had lived in for hundreds of years and moved to the cities in search of work. In 1801, only 20% of Britain's population lived in cities or large towns. By 1881 it was 60%.

THOSE WHO CAN FISH, FISH

For most of the people here, the sea is the only thing that hasn't changed. She has her moods. There are days when she is angry, and those at sea barely make it back, tossed within an inch of their life. Then other days the water is smooth and clear and the fish almost seem to jump out of it. For the fisherfolk, everything they have is by the grace of the sea. Their homes, their traditions and their wisdom. They even marry just to keep boats in the family. That's the way it's always been for them. That's the way it always will be.

HISTORICAL NOTE

Of the rural working class in the 19th century British Isles, fishermen were better off than most. A strong fishing tradition already existed in many coastal villages. As farmers were evicted from their land or plagued by famine, and rural craftsmen and labourers became unemployed, those with the means to buy a boat turned to fishing as a way of feeding their families. The result was that many of the rural working class relied on fish for everything. Fish fed their families, could be traded for other goods, and many even used fish to pay their rent.

The style of fishing in these areas was restricted by money, culture, and tradition. Unable to afford better fishing equipment, catches were smaller, but so was the impact on the marine environment. Herring, mackerel, salmon, cod, haddock, hake, flatfish, crabs and lobsters were all common catches on different parts of the coast.

Family was an integral part of fishing. Boats would be owned and crewed by groups of relatives, and the crew would split a share of the catch. Traditionally, men went to sea, while women dug for bait, and cleaned, scaled and sold the fish. It was common among fisherfolk to marry cousins, or at least within their clan. The reason for this was at least partly due to the need to keep boat ownership in the family.

THOSE WHO CAN'T, GO OUTSIDE THE LAW

The rich make the laws and the people here have no say. It's no wonder most don't consider themselves bound to obey them. People here can't see any sense in the rules – the only thing that makes sense to them is to do what's needed to put food on the table. To them, tax is just a word, an excuse to steal, to take

bread out of a man's mouth. Here, they have no qualms selling people the good things in life. Whiskey, tea, tobacco, rum. They call it the free trade. And there's few in any village that would say a word against it.

Well it's easy for the fishermen and the smugglers who don't need the wealthy to survive. But most of the people here do. What can you do when the rich folk you depend on are intent on taking away your jobs, your wages, your belongings and your rights? Do you act like an ox in the plough, marching forward to till their earth no matter how you're treated? The people here don't. They rise up to show those in charge their anger. They fight to take back what belongs to them. Any way they have to.

HISTORICAL NOTE

SMUGGLING: During the 18th century, costly British wars abroad caused the UK government to place high levels of taxation on the importation of luxury goods, including alcohol. By the turn of the 19th century, taxes on some goods had reached 70% of their initial cost. However, taxes were not well enforced, relying on a piecemeal and antiquated custom house system. The result? A blossoming smuggling trade which spread rampantly across the British Isles.

Remote villages along the coast of the British Isles proved the perfect location for the importation of illegal alcohol. Grinding poverty dominated these villages, with wages pitifully low and unemployment rampant. Faced with the alternative of starvation, almost every person in these villages was involved or complicit in the smuggling. This smuggling, euphemistically termed "the free trade," brought work and money to labourers, who were paid decent wages to transport the goods to rich buyers inland. One night's work smuggling could pay the same as four days in the fields. The free trade was so important to these rural communities that when contraband was seized, there were numerous instances of villages uniting and taking up arms to reclaim it.

RIOTS AND REBELLIONS: After the Napoleonic war, Britain entered a period of depression. On top of this, industrialisation and demobilisation led to mass unemployment and rapidly dropping wages. As a result, the 19th century British Isles were ripe with riots and rebellions. Luddites rose up to destroy the textile machines that put them out of work, and a decade later agricultural labourers would do the same. In Wales, a drop in the wages of coal miners led to the Merthyr and Newport risings. And, as wages continued to fall, the

Plug Plot riots of 1842 brought nearly half a million workers head to head with their employers, the police, and eventually the army. These were only some of the violent riots and rebellions that were quashed during the early 19th century. Many of those involved were put on trial, and imprisoned, transported or hung.

PEOPLE HERE ARE SET IN THEIR WAYS

People here root their lives in tradition. They need it to survive. The health of their clan, and their village, hangs in a delicate balance. Each person here must do their part, the role that's been set for them by the generations before. Not for themselves. For everyone. It's hard to reject your duty and follow your dreams or your heart when your family needs you.

Every village on this coast believes a different thing. A different take on Christ, different preachers, different teachings. Different superstitions and different rituals. But they have one thing in common. They believe it, down to their deepest bones. They won't listen to anybody who tells them different. A word of advice. Keep your ways to yourself, and don't go telling them they're wrong, or there'll be nobody with a friendly word for you.

HISTORICAL NOTE

With starvation a constant threat, and communities and families built around the cycle of agriculture or fishing, and for the purpose of survival, it's little wonder that most members of rural villages were quite closed minded. While there were strong regional differences in religion, beliefs, household structure, and daily routine, where communities were able they continued the way of life they were familiar with. This meant a strong pressure to conform and a lifelong struggle for those who did not.

Though in most areas, both men and women needed to work, the role each gender played was usually clearly defined. There was no concept of same-sex relationships, and sodomy remained a hanging offence until 1861. There was little racial or religious diversity in most villages. Outsiders were usually bearers of unwanted change, and generally unwelcome.



Three CHARACTERS

IN ALAS FOR THE AWFUL SEA, each player will take the role of a crew member aboard a ship, navigating the remote British Isles. They will pick from one of 10 different **CHARACTER ROLES**: The Captain, the Boatswain, the Mercenary, the Merchant, the Old Sea Dog, the Scholar, the Strider, the Surgeon, the Cook or the Stowaway. They will also choose one of six different **DESCRIPTORS**: the Lover, the Kinsman, the Believer, the Outcast, the Creature, or the Confidant.

Together, a player's role and their descriptor will be used to create the character they will play in the game. No use for idle hands on a ship - there can only be one of each character role and descriptor per game.

Though *Alas* is set in the past, don't let the setting prevent players from creating a diverse cast of characters. Players are encouraged to create characters that span across different races, genders, sexual orientations, and religions.

Examples of such individuals as crew members, although uncommon, can be drawn from the history of the period itself. Mary Patten, for example, took command of a clipper in the 1850s when the Captain fell ill. Many more women disguised themselves as men to have careers at sea. Chinese residents, leaving their homeland to work as coolies, often found work aboard ships.

It is up to you and your group as to whether you would like to explore the consequences of that diversity in game, or make it an unspoken part of the world you are playing in.

CHARACTER SHEETS

Character sheets consist of all the core character information that players need to create their crew member. You can find a printable version online.

NAME AND APPEARANCE

Players can choose a name from the list or select their own. They can then choose their appearance by circling one item from each category.

BONDS

BONDS are the relationships that exist between the characters. Players will fill out two or three bonds with the name of another player's character at the end of character creation, or create their own.

As players interact in the world of *Alas*, bonds may change. At the end of each session, every player has the option to remove one bond they think is no longer true or important, and create a new one. The new bond can either be one already existing on their character sheet, or an entirely new relationship based on what has happened during the game so far.

Players can also choose to create their new bond with a non-player character. If the bond involves reciprocal feelings or shared experiences, the GM must give permission first.

Once a player has established a bond with a non-player character, it is up to the GM to make that non-player appear (or reappear) in the story, and complicate the life of the player character.

WHEN A PLAYER HAS A BOND WITH A NON-PLAYER CHARACTER,

- ✦ they gain a +1 to any roll needed to make a move against that non-player character (e.g. to intimidate, manipulate, act with force, etc).

EXAMPLE

After events on board the ship, the Old Sea Dog Tristan no longer believes that the Mercenary Selina is too impulsive. Tristan's player crosses this bond off their character sheet. Underneath the bonds section of their own character sheet, Tristan's player adds a new connection to Selina based on their shared experiences: "Selina saved my life. I owe her a debt."

STATS

Stats are **DIE ROLL MODIFIERS** that reflect the characters' capabilities and experience. Each attribute has several possible aspects, and it's up to the players how they want to transform their characters' strengths or deficiencies into characterization.

- ✦ **BRAINS:** Intelligence, wisdom and wit.
- ✦ **BRAWN:** Physical and emotional strength, toughness and forcefulness.
- ✦ **BEAUTY:** Good looks, charisma, and powers of persuasion.
- ✦ **BALANCE:** Level headedness, staying cool and keeping your wits under pressure.
- ✦ **BEYOND:** How in touch the character is with things beyond the ordinary, including myth and the supernatural, as well as the moods and feelings of the sea itself.

SPECIAL MOVE

Each character has a special move that only they may use, which reflects their unique skills and background. We'll talk more about moves on page 17.

HARM AND HEALING

The health of player characters is represented by a windrose.

Injury is measured in points of **HARM** which correspond with the segments of the windrose. To mark a point of **HARM**, players will shade in a section of the windrose. We explain more about harm and healing on page 77.

EQUIPMENT

All player characters have gear, detailed in the equipment section. Some items have a specific mechanical effect (such as **WEAPONS**), while others are only for narrative use. See page 67 for an explanation of **EQUIPMENT**.

DESCRIPTORS

DESCRIPTORS add an extra element to a player's character that helps define who they are, and what they value. They also add additional special moves that players can use during the game.

Every descriptor sheet is filled out differently. Most descriptor sheets contain instructions to help guide you through this process.

For a full explanation of the individual descriptors, see page 54.

Four MOVES

A **MOVE** IS AN ACTION A **PLAYER** character takes that has a specific outcome, determined by rolling two six-sided dice (2D6). There are three types of moves, **BASIC MOVES** which all the players have access to, **SPECIAL MOVES** which can only be used by specific player characters, and **CUSTOM MOVES** which are discussed later (p. 102). Special moves will appear on a player's character sheet, or descriptor sheet. The basic moves are:

- ☞ **ACTING UNDER PRESSURE**
- ☞ **INTIMIDATE ANOTHER**
- ☞ **ACT WITH FORCE**
- ☞ **MANIPULATE ANOTHER**

- ☞ **READ A SITUATION**
- ☞ **READ ANOTHER'S THOUGHTS**
- ☞ **SENSE WHAT'S BEYOND**
- ☞ **HELP OR HINDER**

STRUCTURE OF A MOVE

Every move consists of the same four parts:

ACTING UNDER PRESSURE

When you act under pressure, try to hide the truth, or endure a force against you,
ROLL+BALANCE.

ON A 10+: You do it.

ON A 7-9: You falter, buckle or break. The GM can offer you a worse outcome, a hard bargain, or an ugly choice.

ON A MISS: The GM makes things worse.

✂ NAME OF THE MOVE

✂ CRITERIA TRIGGERING THE MOVE: in this case, acting under pressure, trying to hide the truth or enduring a force. These criteria should be interpreted loosely to allow for greatest flexibility.

✂ STAT TO ROLL: in *Alas*, players will always roll two six-sided dice (2D6), and will then add the specified stat to the roll.

✂ CONSEQUENCES OF THE MOVE: the outcome of a move will be different depending on the number rolled by the players. A 7+ is considered a **SUCCESS**, although a roll from 7-9 may have unwanted consequences. A 6 or below is considered a **MISS**. This is a failure, and gives you, the GM, a chance to make things worse for your players. We'll give you some tips on how to do that in the GM section (p. 89).

WHO INITIATES MOVES?

In *Alas for the Awful Sea*, players do not initiate moves. Players merely describe what their characters are doing, and it is for you as the GM to identify when that constitutes a move, and ask the player to roll. If a player tells you they are initiating a move, ask them instead to describe what their character is doing. Not only will this aid the roleplaying experience, you may discover that the player is actually using a different move, or is not using a move at all.

EXAMPLE

PLAYER: *I want to seize the chest by acting with force.*

GM: *What is your character doing? Describe it for me?*

PLAYER: *I draw myself up to my full height, and with a savage glare I grit through my teeth, “Give up the chest, or you’ll soon be giving up much more than that.”*

GM: *Okay, that sounds like you’re actually trying to intimidate her. Roll to intimidate another.*

It can be useful to remind players that their characters can try to **READ A SITUATION** or **ANOTHER’S THOUGHTS**, and they can also attempt to **SENSE WHAT’S BEYOND**, by opening their mind to the supernatural or to the mood and feelings of the sea. However, players must still describe how their character performs these moves. For example, a character wishing to **SENSE THE BEYOND** may wade into the ocean at midnight and stand there, until they feel the seaweed wrap around their legs and are at one with the sea itself.

WHEN IS A MOVE INITIATED? _____

Most things characters try to do in the world of *Alas* will not require the use of a move, or the rolling of dice. Moves will only be initiated when:

- ✂ The criteria initiating the move are met, and;
- ✂ The action is one the character could succeed or fail at, and;
- ✂ There is something at stake in the outcome.

If the success or failure of the character does not really matter, then a move should not be initiated. Similarly, if the character has time to continue repeating the task without penalty until they succeed, then no move should be used.

EXAMPLE 1

PLAYER: *I want to get him to show me where it’s hidden.*

GM: *Okay, what are you going to say to him?*

PLAYER: *“This town’s in deep trouble. We all have to work together to try and fix it.”*

GM: *Sounds to me like you are trying to manipulate him, **ROLL+BEAUTY**.*

PLAYER: *Eight.*

GM: *Okay great. Well, you’re promising him that you’re going to work together with him to fix the town. But he doesn’t really believe you. He’s going to need some concrete assurance first. What are you going to do?*

EXAMPLE 2

PLAYER: *I think she's lying.*

GM: *Well if you want you can try to read her thoughts and see.*

PLAYER: *Okay.*

GM: *How are you going to get a read on her?*

PLAYER: *As she's talking to me, some part of me has just zoned out and I'm looking for those familiar tells – nervous hands, lack of eye contact, that kind of thing.*

GM: *Great, ROLL+BRAINS.*

PLAYER: *Eight.*

GM: *Okay, that means you can use your close observation of her behaviour to figure out the answer to one of the questions listed.*

THE BASIC MOVES

There are 8 basic moves in *Alas for the Awful Sea*. Some moves have obvious triggering criteria, while others have criteria with a more ambiguous application. Remember, there is no need to use a move if a character cannot realistically fail.

Understanding and applying the basic moves is the most complex part of *Alas*. To help you during your game, we've created a basic moves reference sheet for you and your players to refer to (you can download it online). If you need more detail about how a move is applied, you can always turn back to this section of the book.

ACTING UNDER PRESSURE

When you act under pressure, try to hide the truth, or endure a force against you, **ROLL+BALANCE**.

ON A 10+: You do it.

ON A 7-9: You falter, buckle or break. The GM can offer you a worse outcome, a hard bargain, or an ugly choice.

ON A MISS: The GM makes things worse.

Acting under pressure, or enduring a force can cover a wide variety of circumstances. The pressure or force could be time pressure, social pressure, physical pressure, or force or pressure of another kind. If a player's action seems significant enough to require a die roll, but you're not sure which move has been triggered, **ACTING UNDER PRESSURE** is likely the best move to pick.

Feel free to take inspiration from our section on how the GM can make things worse (p. 89) when crafting a worse outcome, hard bargain, or ugly choice that isn't quite as bad as a failure.

EXAMPLES

Quickly fixing a delicate piece of machinery, running across deck during a storm, reciting a difficult ballad perfectly in front of a large crowd, hiding or running away from an enemy.

INTIMIDATE ANOTHER

When you try to intimidate another, **ROLL+BRAWN**.

ON A 10+: They choose: cave in and do what you want, or endure the consequences of your threat.

ON A 7-9: They choose one of the following that is within their ability:

- ✂ Get out of your way, for now.
- ✂ Give you something they think you want.
- ✂ Tell you what you want to know, or what you want to hear.

ON A MISS: The GM makes things worse.

EXAMPLES

PLAYER: *"Give me the information, or I'll bash your face in!"*

PLAYER: *"That's against the law! Keep that up, and I'll call the police!"*

THE SCOPE OF INTIMIDATION

Not all acts of intimidation involve the threat of violence. Some threats, such as “I’ll call the police”, rely on non-violent actions that nevertheless strike fear into the heart of the character who is intimidated. Even when threats of this type are used, brawn is still the appropriate stat to add to a player’s intimidate roll. This is because the brawn stat encompasses not just physical strength, but also aggressiveness, willpower, and strength of presence. Brains may help you think of how to intimidate, but it won’t affect whether your threat actually succeeds in scaring its target.

ACT WITH FORCE

When you act with force to fight another, or to seize or secure your hold on something, **ROLL+BRAWN**.

ON A 10+: Choose 3

ON A 7-9: Choose 2

- ☞ You take a definite hold of it, or of the situation.
- ☞ You suffer little harm (GM note: -1 to harm suffered).
- ☞ You inflict terrible harm (GM note: +2 to harm inflicted).
- ☞ You impress, dismay, or frighten your enemy.

ON A MISS: The GM makes things worse.

TAKING HOLD OF THE SITUATION

What does it mean to take a definite hold of the situation? The answer depends on the circumstances. Generally, it means the player is in a position of power, confidence, or control. As a GM, you should let a player know, or establish with a player, what taking a hold of the situation consists of before they pick which options they would like.

ACT WITH FORCE is the move used in *Alas* when physical violence or a physical contest occurs. It is used only when a player is trying to resolve a conflict with another character **USING A PHYSICAL ACT**. This occurs in two main contexts:

- ✂ Where a character is trying to grab something using force. This could be something held by another character, or something which characters are competing to grasp first.
- ✂ Where any kind of combat takes place.

GRABBING WITH FORCE

In this case, the player must choose “take a definite hold of it” in order to take a definite hold of the object they are trying to grab.

When a character is trying to grab an object, they will suffer points of harm inflicted upon them by anyone trying to stop that character seizing the object. These points of harm can be reduced by the “take little harm” option, and by armour if appropriate. Characters seizing an object will not inflict harm unless they select the “inflict terrible harm” option above.

EXAMPLE

PLAYER: *I want to grab the box from the guard.*

GM: *Roll to act with force.*

PLAYER: *8. I choose to take definite hold of it, and also to suffer little harm.*

GM: *(The guard would have dealt 2 harm with his rapier, but I subtract one because you chose to take little harm) ... Okay, you successfully manage to grab the box out of his hands. As he sees you grab it, he tries to dig his rapier into your back, but you dodge out of the way. He just slices the side of your leg, take 1 harm.*

COMBAT

In combat, individual characters do not get “turns.” Instead both non-player character actions and player character actions are resolved through use of the **ACT WITH FORCE** move. There are four kinds of combat that could be covered by this move, as explained below.

ONE AGAINST ONE

A single player against a single enemy. In this case:

- ✂ The non-player character will always deal point/s of harm to the player character using the move. This harm will then be reduced by armour, and the “take little harm” option if selected.
- ✂ On a success only (7+): The player character will deal point/s of harm to

the non-player character. This harm will then be increased by the “inflict terrible harm” option if selected. Other options chosen by the player will take narrative effect.

Note: In the case of two player characters attacking each other, it is best to have each roll to act with force, and then unify the results into one narrative description.

ONE AGAINST MANY

A single player against multiple enemies. In this case:

- ☞ The non-player characters will always deal points of harm to the player character using the move. The amount of harm should reflect the fact that there are several enemies able to inflict multiple injuries on the player character. This harm will then be reduced by armour, and the “take little harm” option if selected. In the world of *Alas*, this is a dangerous situation for a character to be in.
- ☞ On a success only (7+): The player character will deal points of harm to the non-player characters. This harm will then be increased by the “inflict terrible harm” option if selected. This harm may be split over several non-player characters, at the will of the player. Other options chosen by the player will take narrative effect.

EXAMPLE

GM: *The mob of hired thugs move towards you menacingly, intent on robbing you.*

PLAYER: *I eyeball them confidently, and start punching at them.*

GM: *Alright, ROLL+BRAWN to act with force.*

PLAYER: *8. I choose to impress, dismay, or frighten my enemy, and inflict terrible harm.*

GM: *(Punching with fists usually inflicts 1 harm. Adding 2 harm will be 3 total.*

These guys can take 2 harm each before they go down. There's a mob of them, so even with fists I reckon they'll deal about 3 harm to the player character) ... Okay, you start swinging like a maniac, putting incredible force and power into every blow.

Bam, bam, one guy goes down unconscious, another gets hit on the side of the head and reels back. As you move to strike, you feel fists connect with your gut and the side of your face. Take 3 harm, minus 1 for your armour, so 2 harm all up. As one of their gang falls, the thugs pause for a moment. Their leader, a hulking man with a giant brown beard, turns to look at you, sizing you up. They seem to have forgotten

about robbing you. “Hey,” says the leader, “you’ve got a bit of swing in you. Any chance you want a job?”

MANY AGAINST MANY

If several characters are fighting several other characters, it’s up to you as GM whether:

- ❖ Players should each roll separate act with force moves. This is recommended for large battles where player characters are fighting their own groups of enemies within the conflict; or
- ❖ One player should roll to act with force. Other players can use the help action to aid them. This is recommended where many player characters are attacking the same enemies in unison. In this case, the player rolling to act with force will take points of harm as normal. Points of harm can be inflicted on aiding players who roll a 6 or below as appropriate (see **HELP OR HINDER**, p. 31).

MANY AGAINST ONE

Many player characters against one non-player character. Unless they are fighting a very deadly enemy, the player characters automatically succeed. There is no need to use a move, or roll dice.

If the enemy is very tough and deadly, use the many against many rules.



MANIPULATE ANOTHER

When you try to manipulate another, tell them what you want and **ROLL+BEAUTY**.

If that person is a non-player character, they ask you to promise something first. If you make that promise:

ON A 10+: It works. Whether you keep the promise later is up to you.

ON A 7-9: They change the terms to suit themselves, or demand concrete assurance first.

ON A MISS: The GM makes things worse.

If that person is a player character:

ON A 10+: Both

ON A 7-9: Choose 1

- ☞ If they do it, they get +1 to their next roll.
- ☞ If they refuse, they are **ACTING UNDER PRESSURE**.

ON A MISS: The GM makes things worse.

In the world of *Alas*, ordinary people are cynical. They are not easily persuaded or manipulated to do things, unless something is in it for them. Player characters will have to promise others desired goods, services, or favours to get them onside. This promise could range from the concrete (money, goods, etc.), to the abstract (“I’ll always look out for you”, “we’ll work together to save this town”).

When assurance is demanded, however, it must always be concrete. Abstract promises will not be enough, but a promise to take a specific action might be (see the example below).

Do not use this move in a circumstance where the other person would not need to be manipulated in order to agree e.g. haggling prices down with a vendor, hiring workers to tow a ship, or deciding to do something together that is obviously in both characters’ interests.

EXAMPLE

PLAYER: *I want to get him to show me where it's hidden.*

GM: *Okay, what are you going to do?*

PLAYER: *I look him square in the eye and say "this town's in deep trouble. We all have to work together to try and fix it."*

GM: *That sounds to me like you are trying to manipulate him. **ROLL+BEAUTY.***

PLAYER: *Eight.*

GM: *Great. Well, you're promising him that you're going to work together with him to fix the town. But he doesn't really believe you. He's going to need some concrete assurance first. What are you going to offer him?*

PLAYER: *I tell him "you've seen people breaking out in fights in the street, children getting hurt, we're going to stop this."*

GM: *That's not concrete assurance. He still doesn't believe you.*

PLAYER: *Okay. I tell him "starting tonight, me and my crew will send a night watch around the streets, to help keep people safe."*

GM: *Great! That's enough to convince him, and he looks actually a little hopeful, like "yeah, we can fix this town." He leads you to the hiding place.*

READ A SITUATION

When you read a charged situation, **ROLL+BRAINS.**

ON A SUCCESS, you can ask the GM questions. Whenever you act on one of the GM's answers, take a +1 to any move required to do so.

ON A 10+: Ask 3

ON A 7-9: Ask 2

- ✦ Who or what is most vulnerable to me?
- ✦ Who or what is the biggest threat?
- ✦ What should I be on the lookout for?
- ✦ Who is in control here?
- ✦ What here is not what it seems?
- ✦ What is my best way in, way out, or way past?

ON A MISS: The GM makes things worse.

A **CHARGED SITUATION** is one which is dangerous or potentially dangerous, physically, mentally, or socially. The enemy in these questions can refer to a literal enemy, but it could also refer to any obstacle that the player characters are trying to overcome, for example the sea itself.

EXAMPLE

GM: *The storm is whipping up, and all hands are on deck.*

PLAYER: *I survey the storm and the ship to try and see how bad the situation is.*

GM: *That sounds like you're reading a situation. ROLL+BRAINS.*

PLAYER: *Eight. Okay, I ask two. Who or what is my biggest threat?*

GM: *The wind is definitely the biggest threat. If you don't pull the sails down, it could capsize the ship.*

PLAYER: *What should I be on the lookout for?*

GM: *You know that there should be coast very close to here. There might be a calm inlet you could sail your ship into.*

READ ANOTHER'S THOUGHTS _____

When you read the thoughts of another in a charged interaction, **ROLL+BRAINS**.

ON A SUCCESS, you can ask the player of the character you are talking to (or the GM in case of a non-player character) questions any time during the course of your interaction. They must respond truthfully.

ON A 10+: Ask 3

ON A 7-9: Ask 1

- ✂ Is this character telling the truth?
- ✂ What does this character need most?
- ✂ What does this character intend to do?
- ✂ What does this character wish I'd do?
- ✂ How can I get your character to _____?

ON A MISS: The GM makes things worse.

A **CHARGED INTERACTION** is one which is dangerous or potentially dangerous, physically, mentally, or socially. This definition should be interpreted widely. The questions above need not be asked immediately, but can be asked at any point during the conversation. They cannot however be saved for a later conversation.

EXAMPLE

PLAYER: *I think she's lying.*

GM: *Well if you want you can try to read her thoughts and see.*

PLAYER: *Okay.*

GM: *How are you going to get a read on her?*

PLAYER: *As she's talking to me, some part of me has just zoned out and I'm looking for those familiar tells – nervous hands, lack of eye contact, that kind of thing.*

GM: *Great, ROLL+BRAINS.*

PLAYER: *Ten.*

GM: *Okay, that means you can use your close observation of her behaviour to figure out the answer to three of the questions listed. Remember, you don't have to ask them now. You can ask the questions at any time during this conversation.*

PLAYER: *Well, obviously I'm going to ask "are you lying?"*

GM: *As you watch her body language signals very closely, you notice occasional twitches that don't look quite right. You're pretty sure that some of this is the truth, but some of this is completely made up.*

..... (further conversation)

PLAYER: *What does your character wish I'd do?*

GM: *It's clear she's trying to shift the suspicion onto George. What she wants is for you to investigate him publicly. You know such an investigation would definitely besmirch his reputation.*

SENSE WHAT'S BEYOND

When you wish to sense what's beyond, **ROLL+BEYOND** and connect with the supernatural at work in the world.

ON A SUCCESS, the GM will tell you something new and interesting about the current situation. If there is nothing more for you to know, the GM will tell you that without you needing to roll.

ON A 10+: You receive visions and truths.

ON A 7-9: You receive fragments and mysteries.

ON A MISS: The GM makes things worse.

The act of sensing what is beyond is an attempt to read the supernatural and spiritual forces at work in the world in search of answers. It means opening your mind to an unpredictable reality you don't know well. Answers may also be unpredictable or murky.

Sometimes, player characters will want to **SENSE WHAT'S BEYOND** about a situation where there is nothing more to find or intuit. In this case, either:

- ❖ Do not make the player roll. Instead, simply tell them that they try to open their mind but nothing relevant seems to come to them; or
- ❖ Let them roll, and give them an impression that doesn't relate to their current question. Indicate that they feel that they are seeing something other than what they asked for. It's up to you whether you also let them know there was nothing more to intuit about the situation they were investigating.

EXAMPLE

PLAYER: *The currents are really weird here, right? I want to try to open my mind to the sea, and find out what it is feeling or thinking that might have made it act so strangely. I close my eyes, and submerge my head in the ice cold water, listening.*

GM: *Great, ROLL+BEYOND.*

PLAYER: *Eight.*

GM: *Okay, so for a moment you feel you can't breathe. Then you just get this vision of golden strands drifting through the water. And you don't know what they are, just strands. Then finally, a wave of deep sadness washes over you.*

HELP OR HINDER

When you wish to help or hinder a character who is making a roll, **ROLL+BONDS**.

ON A 10+: They take +2 or -2.

ON A 7-9: They take +1 or -1.

ON A MISS: The GM makes things worse.

When a player **ROLL+BONDS**, this means they add +1 to the roll for every bond on their character sheet between themselves, and the player they are trying to help or hinder.

Characters should be physically present in the same place and practically able to help or hinder before this move can be used.

On a success, it is up to the player helping or hindering whether the character making the roll takes a + or -. Modifiers for helping do not stack, and if multiple players help, only the highest modifier will be applied. The same goes for hindering.

EXAMPLE

JOHANN: *I try to clear everyone out of the area. "Get out of here, all of you, or I'll make you leave."*

SALLY: *I'll help by making whistling signals, and hand gestures, looking threatening.*

GM: *Okay, it sounds like Johann you're intimidating them, and Sally, you are helping. So roll for those moves.*

JOHANN: *Six.*

SALLY: *Nine.*

GM: *Great. So Sally, you want to give Johann +1?*

SALLY: *Yes.*

GM: *So Johann, your total is seven. Lucky!*



Five ROLES AND DESCRIPTORS

WHILE THOUSANDS OF STORIES CAN BE told about the 19th century British Isles, this story is one of a ship's crew, embarking on journeys that will challenge and change them – from the respectable Captain, all the way to the unexpected Stowaway. But player characters are more than just their job at sea. Each player will also select a **DESCRIPTOR**, to give their character unique relationships, abilities, and difficulties. This chapter outlines ten character roles and six descriptors, along with additional details about their equipment and special moves.



THE CAPTAIN

It is a truth known throughout the ages that the Captain always goes down with the ship. Usually this means physically, but in the rare instances you don't sink, your reputation and finances will. This ship is your life, your livelihood and your home. As for the crew, you've come to view them as an odd combination of family, and human workhorses in need of firm, but skilled, handling.

NOTES ON THE CAPTAIN

There is no need for a player to choose the Captain role. If there is no Captain amongst the player characters, then include a Captain as a non-player character. A non-player Captain should generally be too busy trying to run the ship to take much stock of what the player characters are doing.

We have sometimes found that players are reluctant to pick the Captain, as they are worried about having to give orders. You can let players know that the Captain need not always give orders (though of course they can), and other characters need not wait for the Captain's commands in order to take action. It may even be that the Captain is not the one in charge – for example, if the ship is chartered by the Merchant or another character, and the Captain merely keeps it running.

The Captain's special move, **MY REPUTATION PRECEDES ME**, is used to create an instant connection with an important person. Important in the context of this move refers to status, position, wealth or influence, rather than important for completing a task or mission. Encourage the Captain to use this move whenever they meet someone who fits the bill.

The Captain has money to splash around, and they shouldn't hesitate to use it. Their likely earnings would be ten times more than the Old Sea Dog, and more than thirty times the income of a local fisherman or labourer. They also command more status than the other character roles, especially in poor rural communities. A Captain in full regalia is an impressive sight.



THE BOATSWAIN

The daily work holding this ship together doesn't just get done by itself. It gets done because you make the lazy idlers you grudgingly call your crew do it. You see it like this: the Captain is like God – rarely present and issuing vague commands. This makes you like the king – in control of everything that happens in your domain. The best part of your week is when you get to decide who is on chamber pot duty.

NOTES ON THE BOATSWAIN

The Boatswain position on a ship is similar to a combination of a quartermaster and a first mate. They are in charge of keeping the ship running, and giving the ordinary sailors orders on a day to day basis. During character creation, the Boatswain may want to name and describe some of the sailors they command. Perhaps their most favourite, and the most insubordinate.

When the Boatswain uses the move **YOUR CREW**, they are trying to impose their will on the ordinary seamen of whom they are in charge. This move does not affect the other player characters.



THE MERCENARY

Some men save lives professionally, others end lives professionally, and you cannot see a difference in value between them. What you can see though, is that not one of the sea whelps aboard this ship knows their way around a revolver. It looks like the vessel's military safety is entirely in your hands – which is exactly how you like it. After all, there is a reason you charge premium rates. A sharp, deadly reason.

NOTES ON THE MERCENARY

The Mercenary is very good at killing. If a player picks the Mercenary, your game is likely to become more violent. With the Mercenary's custom weapons, they are the only character that has access to deadly items that deal more than 2 harm. They can take down almost anyone in a single **ACT WITH FORCE** move. Invite them to use this power, but don't hesitate to ram home the costs of the violence they have wrought.

The Mercenary's custom move, **A TRUE PROFESSIONAL**, always and only triggers when the Mercenary chooses to inflict terrible harm during a roll to **ACT WITH FORCE**.



THE MERCHANT

You cannot be sure if money makes the world go round, but it certainly makes you go round the world. From the spice drenched East, to the fertile New World, and back to the gloomy shores of Scotland, you've travelled as far as the map is marked to do the deals that need be done. In the process you've overcome seasickness, become an expert on numerous commodities, and piled up a pleasant stash of gold which you take special care to keep from the grasp of any errant sailors.

NOTES ON THE MERCHANT

The Merchant thrives on negotiation, and making the best out of situations. During character creation, the Merchant should decide what they trade, how they are trading it, and their approximate level of wealth. They can decide the content of their box of goods at any time, as long as it is consistent with these details.

When using the **PERKS OF BUSINESS**, the trade of barter can refer to the trade of goods or services. It does not apply when there is nothing more at play than persuasion.



THE OLD SEA DOG

Many a year ago, before you were a sailor... actually, you're not really sure what you did before you left for the sea. You were barely past a child when you served aboard your first ship. Now, having seen hundreds of storms, and survived only by the sea's good grace, you are a wealth of knowledge and superstition. What you've seen from vessels' decks many men would not think real. You've stared at the sea so long you can read its very moods and emotions – and you're fairly sure it is staring back.

NOTES ON THE OLD SEA DOG

The Old Sea Dog has been so long at sea, they remember little else. Their special move, **THE SEA SPEAKS**, provides information in a similar way to sensing the beyond, but gives the Old Sea Dog the ability to ask specific questions. **THE SEA SPEAKS** can only be used on an object, not to read a situation.



THE SCHOLAR

Knowledge is the thing you seek, and there's just not enough of it where you're from. Since the famous voyages of the renaissance – Columbus, Magellan, Cortes – you've realized that this world has much more to offer than men have documented. Those you admire most are not those who stumbled by ship into new lands, but those aboard who had the skill, wisdom, and knowledge to know what they were seeing. Taking to sea, you knew, was a way to advance human learning (and your own position) that no other opportunity could match.

NOTES ON THE SCHOLAR

The Scholar enjoys a superior education and different world perspective to nearly all those around them. During character creation, the Scholar should decide what they study, and what kind of success (or embarrassment) they have enjoyed so far. They can decide the contents of their research book at any time, as long it is consistent with these details.

The Scholar's special move, **OUTSMART**, can be used either to outsmart someone during a conversation, or to enact a broader plan aimed at outwitting them.



THE STRIDER

Every man aboard this ship has to eat, and it's painfully clear none of the dry store is what an ordinary man would call "food." That's where you come in. Whether it lives in the sea, beach, forest or mountain you know how to find it, how to kill it, and how to eat it. But you're more than that. You're also an expert navigator, an even better tracker, and ingeniously resourceful no matter what you have on hand.

NOTES ON THE STRIDER

The Strider is a versatile and capable survivalist. Their move **INNATE COMPASS** makes them an ideal navigator. When the Strider uses **INNATE COMPASS**, and succeeds at a 10+, they know how to find the location they searched for, and may choose to travel there if they wish. If they do so, time passes during the journey, but the 10+ ensures they do not get lost, and make it to their destination without trouble. At least, until they arrive. If the location is very far away, events may happen during the journey, but the navigation is always sound.



THE SURGEON

Not every man could saw the limb off a gangrenous sailor subdued with only half a bottle of rum, but that happens to be one of your key talents. Sore, scab, flu or itch, you combat them all by poultice or scalpel. Moreover, and much to your own surprise, most of the people you treat even seem to get better. You wouldn't say you're fond of helping people, but you do like the smug feeling of having saved most of the crew's lives.

NOTES ON THE SURGEON

Every character role is capable of inflicting injuries, but the Surgeon is the only one who can heal them. The Surgeon's special move, **A SURGEON'S WORK**, allows them to heal one segment of harm. However, in an age where medical treatment was far behind that of today, such an intervention could have unintended results.

The move **A SURGEON'S WORK** requires a bit of explaining.

On a success, a wounded player will heal their highest numbered segment of harm. If the wounded person is a non-player character, they heal to a point where they will functionally recover after a few days rest.

On a 7-9, after the harm is healed, the Surgeon immediately rolls to **ACT UNDER PRESSURE**. Resolve this as usual. On a 10+, everything goes smoothly. On a 9 or below, there is a complication with the procedure. When determining the results of the complication, the GM cannot choose to give the wounded person further harm. The Surgeon has done their job, for better or for worse.

On a miss, the wounded person does not heal any harm. Instead they fall into a state of hallucination. If the wounded person is a player, they will immediately roll to **SENSE THE BEYOND**. If they succeed, the GM will give them clues about something happening in the world around them, preferably something of which they are not yet aware. If they fail, the GM will make things worse, as usual. If the wounded person is a non-player character, they will fall into a state of hallucination, and wake sometime later, still ill, describing vivid and horrible dreams.



THE COOK

The stomach is the way to a sailor's heart. And more importantly, you know it's also the way to their loyalty, their coin, and their secrets. You didn't pick this job by accident. Nor did your culinary passion inspire you to choose a life as a ship's cook. You're in this role for the sheer power it provides. Sure, when you're two days from land, you're at the bottom of the heap. But after two months, sailors are tripping over themselves to do your bidding. And if one objects? Let's just say there'll be nice surprise waiting for them in tonight's dinner.

NOTES ON THE COOK

The Cook's special move, **A HANDSOME FEAST**, gives them the ability to affect a large number of people at the same time. However, if the move goes askew, it can have the complete opposite result to that intended.

A HANDSOME FEAST can affect both player and non-player characters. When the feast affects player characters, it is for each player to describe how the consequences of the chosen results manifest. For non-player characters, this is in the hands of the GM.



THE STOWAWAY

You've got no idea where you're going, and even less where you'll end up – but you don't care. Wherever it is, it has got to be better than the hellhole you came from. You're leaving, and your only regret is that you didn't do it sooner. It's time to make your own way in this world. To live your life the way you choose. And nothing, not hell or high water, will ever, ever, make you go back.

NOTES ON THE STOWAWAY

The mystery of the Stowaway's background, as well as their uncertain status on board the ship, makes them an interesting role to play. The player who picks the role of the Stowaway does not need to reveal their character's background immediately, but they should have a good idea of where they came from, and why. They should also describe the nature of the keepsake which they carry.

The Stowaway's special move, **NEVER BE FOUND**, helps them get away with less than pleasant acts without being noticed. Among other things, dirty your hands refers to anytime the Stowaway would be acting outside the law, against social convention, or in a way that is repulsive or disgusting to others.

The move **NEVER BE FOUND** only governs whether or not the Stowaway will be found out. It does not determine the success of any extra actions needed to perform the act itself. For example, if the Stowaway was trying to sneak into the docks and observe the people inside, a success would ensure they could complete the entire act unseen. However, if the Stowaway needed to sneak into the docks and intimidate a sailor, **NEVER BE FOUND** would apply only to the traceability of the act. The Stowaway would still need to use the move **INTIMIDATE ANOTHER** to determine whether or not they manage to intimidate the sailor.

DESCRIPTORS

Descriptors are an important part of a character's past, and their identity. Each descriptor provides unique bonds, traits, or abilities that players have access to, in addition to those on their character sheet.

THE LOVER

The Lover draws strength and courage from the deep connection they feel for another. They fixate on one person, around whom their world revolves. They can, however, change the object of their attentions, an act that can get them into considerable trouble.

The Lover's special move, **MAKE A SACRIFICE FOR LOVE**, requires them to sacrifice something precious. This need not be an object. It can be a relationship, an opportunity, or even their own flesh and blood. However, it has to be something which is important or valuable to their character.

TEST IF YOUR LOVE IS TRUE is a once per session move with the power to change the relationship between the Lover and their paramour. If the Lover misses their roll, the object of their affections holds a hurtful secret in their heart. This secret does not have to be a lack of affection for the Lover – it can be anything the player character would find painful. If the Lover's true love is another player character, it is up to that character's player to control how the results of the move manifest. If the Lover's true love is a non-player character, this responsibility falls on the GM.

THE KINSMAN

In in the 19th century, a person's kin (their extended familial network) was vital in securing a home, a job, and even survival. The Kinsman draws on family reputation, knowledge and tradition to make their way in the world.

During character creation, the kinsman has an opportunity to define the nature of the family that supports them, by answering the questions on their sheet. As part of this process, they must pick one of their stats to associate with their kin – balance, brains, brawn, beauty, or beyond. They will add this stat to their roll when they use their move **OUR KIN'S WAY**.

When the Kinsman rolls a miss on their move **OUR KIN'S WAY**, they repeat the mistakes of their forbearers. Either the player or the GM can determine how this takes place, but it should be significant and damaging.

I KNOW YOUR KIN can be used by the Kinsman whenever they have a loose or approximate knowledge of a person's extended family or relatives. For example, if they confirm that Patrick is one of the O'Neils that live on the northern tip of Lewis, or the O'Neils who trade wool, or the O'Neils who started the local riots, etc.

THE BELIEVER

The Believer is all about using the power of their religion to direct and influence how others behave. Religion was an incredibly important part of 19th century life, and as a result, the Believer holds a lot of social power.

SPIRITUAL FIRE determines the reaction of an entire group, crowd, or mob to a show of faith by the Believer. It does not affect player characters.

RIGHTEOUS CENSURE is used to target individuals in a public setting. This move can affect both player and non-player characters. On a 10+, when a non-player character chooses to heed the Believer's words in silence, they are accepting the words and authority of the Believer.

THE CONFIDANT

The Confidant is a social chameleon, who seeks out the secrets of others, and uses them for their own ends. The Confidant tracks the secrets they have learned, and can spend them, 1 to 1, to take one of a number of actions.

The Confidant can use their move **INSIDE KNOWLEDGE** to discover the secrets of both player and non-player characters. To approach another in intimacy, the Confidant must approach in a context of genuine trust, frankness, or affection. Merely being alone with someone is not sufficient to trigger this move.

EXAMPLES:

- ✂ **TRUST:** The two characters have worked together to secure a big deal previously.
- ✂ **FRANKNESS:** The Confidant approaches another claiming to know details of their impending death, and succeeds at **INTIMIDATING ANOTHER**.
- ✂ **AFFECTION:** The Confidant and the other character are family, old friends, lovers, or soon-to-be lovers.

For the move **SINCERE GRATITUDE**, personal cost refers to anything the Confidant would view as taxing or effortful. This could include giving up precious time, a substantial amount of money, a relationship, etc.

Anything that the Confidant would not feel the lack of, such as a small amount of money, is not personal cost for the purpose of this move.

THE OUTCAST

The Outcast has committed an act or made a choice for which society cannot forgive them. They carry with them evidence of this decision, that makes it difficult to hide their past from the world around them.

The Outcast's move **THE PUBLIC EYE**, gives them the choice of hiding their sin, or embracing it. The outcome of this move describes the results of an entire gathering or event. Respectable company or good honest folk will describe most groups of people, but excludes those such as a band of thieves, a drunken gang, or a heretical church, who are clearly not respectable.

THE CREATURE

The Outcast may feel like an outsider, but the Creature is actually inhuman. They come from another place, and hide a different form beneath a human veneer. Using **YOUR TRUE FORM**, the Creature can take on their true form at will, to aid them. But, as always, this carries with it the risk of discovery and exposure.

When the Creature takes on their true form to overcome danger or surprise an enemy, this triggers the move **THIS IS WHO I AM**. Those who see the Creature take on their true form do not forget. However, the Creature may take precautions, such as disappearing out of sight before changing form, in order to prevent discovery.

Six ADVANCEMENT

PEOPLE DON'T STAY THE SAME. THEY grow and change over time. In *Alas for the Awful Sea*, every character changes, or “advances”, in a way that is unique to them. Players may pick the same advancement option, but no two advancements will ever be the same.

In *Alas for the Awful Sea*, players do not earn XP. Instead they advance when they have completed a story arc, and have a new tale to tell. The tale system reflects the way people change in real life – they gain new knowledge, abilities, and connections as a result of their experiences.

Player characters advance when they have a new and interesting tale to tell. This should happen around every second session. It could occur when a character has:

- ❖ Solved a tough problem or mystery.
- ❖ Performed a considerable or life changing favour for another.
- ❖ Wreaked total and complete revenge on a long term enemy.
- ❖ Discovered something new and wondrous, and returned to tell the tale; or
- ❖ Accomplished anything which is both important and time consuming.

Often, players will have shared in-game experiences, and advance their characters at the same time. This isn't a problem, as every player character's advancement will have a unique result.

HOW TO ADVANCE

Advancing is a straightforward process, but can require a little creativity on behalf of the players. It's best done at the end of a session, or the beginning of the next.

Advancement has three steps:

- ❖ The player writes the summary of the tale that led to their advancement in the first empty tale section. This tale should be told from the perspective of their character. It is their unique story of how events took place, and need not match that of any other player.
- ❖ The player carries out the mandatory advancement option listed under that tale.
- ❖ For tales 1 – 4 only: The player picks one other advancement option from the list. When an option is picked from the list, tick the box beside it. You cannot choose that option again. However, mandatory advancements listed under a tale will still be performed as normal.

Advancement Sheet »

TALE 1

☐ Create a 12+ effect for a basic move.



TALE 2

☐ Create a familiarity.



TALE 3

☐ Add two extra bonds.



TALE 4

☐ Create a 12+ effect for a basic move.



AND PICK ANY ONE OF THE BELOW AFTER EACH TALE IS COMPLETED:

- ☐ Create a connection.
- ☐ Create a connection.

- ☐ Create a custom move.
- ☐ Create a custom move.
- ☐ Create a 12+ effect for a basic move.

- ☐ Create a familiarity.
- ☐ Rearrange your stats to reflect how you've changed (max +3, min -3).

☐ Change descriptors during the next session. Take nothing from your old descriptor. Work with the GM to make this transition make narrative sense.

TALE 5

Either:

- ☐ Surrender your character to the GM, to become a non-player character. Then, create a new character and join the crew as your old character's:
 - o Family member
 - o Trade contact
 - o Rival, or
- ☐ Pick another relationship that suits the story so far
- ☐ In the next session, something must happen to cause your position on the ship to change. Take the title of another role, and replace your custom move with theirs. Keep everything else. Use the new advancement track on the back on your new character sheet to take further advancements, in addition to those existing. You may choose to surrender your character to the GM at any time.

CONNECTIONS MOVE

When you seek out an established connection to aid you, **ROLL**. Add a +1 if you've been good to them so far. Add a further +1 if you're in the town they live.

- ON A SUCCESS:** The person you found will help you in any way they can.
- ON A 7-9:** You owe them a favour, possibly a few. Expect them to call it in soon.
- ON A MISS:** They will still help you, but the GM will choose one.
 - They make mistakes
 - The favour they require is bigger than you thought
 - Their actions make them a target for your enemies
 - They publically disapprove of your request

CARRYING OUT AN ADVANCEMENT

When a player advances, they will more often than not be responsible for creating a new ability or connection for their character. Players will need to work together with the GM to make sure the ability they create is appropriate. It could help to think about how a character's most recent tale has helped them grow, and what abilities, skills, or knowledge they learned from the experience. Below you'll find the advancement options.

CREATE A 12+ EFFECT FOR A BASIC MOVE

This advancement allows players to create a special effect for a basic move that will occur whenever the result of the move is 12 or higher. The player may pick which basic move they would like this to apply to. This effect can either:

- ☞ Take the 10+ result and make it better. In this case, when a 12+ is rolled, this effect will occur instead of the 10+ effect.
- ☞ Provide an additional effect, outcome, or piece of knowledge that wasn't available before. In this case, the 12+ effect will occur as well as the 10+ effect, and should start with "also."

EXAMPLES

Making the Basic Move Better (*Instead* effects):

- ☞ **ACT UNDER PRESSURE:** You do it so well, you leave an impression on those watching. You say what.
- ☞ **INTIMIDATE ANOTHER:** They do what you want, and they don't dare question it.
- ☞ **SENSE THE BEYOND:** You receive a vision of what is to come.

Adding an Additional Outcome (*Also* effects):

- ☞ **ANY:** Also, you see something wondrous, significant, or useful.
- ☞ **ACT WITH FORCE:** Also, your allies gain a critical opportunity or advantage.
- ☞ **MANIPULATE ANOTHER:** Also, they enlist a friend to help.
- ☞ **INTIMIDATE ANOTHER:** Also, they're so scared of you, they won't give you trouble in the future.
- ☞ **READ THE SITUATION** or **READ A PERSON:** Also, ask a question that's not on the list.

CREATE A FAMILIARITY

During the course of play, characters will be exposed to particular locations, creatures, activities or tasks. A **FAMILIARITY** reflects the increase in knowledge or skill a character has gained as a result of this exposure.

When a player makes a move in a situation where their **FAMILIARITIES** would help them, they add an additional +1 to their roll. For example, a player familiar with the city of Porth would add their familiarity when navigating through the area, or looking for a person or place within the city. They would not add their familiarity to **SENSE THE BEYOND** in Porth, or **ACT WITH FORCE** unless knowledge of the city would clearly help them to do so. Familiarities can stack, where appropriate.

A **FAMILIARITY** must be specific enough to have meaning and reflect a character's unique experiences, but broad enough that it can be applied in more than one situation. For example, seafaring is too broad, and dropping anchor is too specific. Astral navigation may form a good in-between. Likewise, the supernatural is too broad and the Lochness monster is too specific. In that case, sea monsters may form a good middle ground.

Familiarities must reflect a character's experiences during the game so far.

EXAMPLES:

- ☞ Storms
- ☞ Selkies, Faeries, or Banshees
- ☞ The Greymoor Area
- ☞ Underwater Breathing
- ☞ Smuggling Methods

ADD TWO EXTRA BONDS

The player creates two additional bonds with other player characters, or important non-player characters. These provide the same benefits as all other bonds. The bonds should reflect the player character's perception of the other character so far.

CREATE A CONNECTION

This advancement allows a player to create a contact they can call on for help or information on an ongoing basis.

To carry out this advancement option, create an extended family member or friend, professional contact, or former romantic interest. Describe what they're like, and where they live.

CONNECTION MOVE

The player will now have access to the following move:

When you seek out an established connection to aid you, **ROLL**. Add a +1 if you've been good to them so far. Add a further +1 if you're in the town they live.

ON A SUCCESS, the person you found will help you in any way they can. On a 7-9, you owe them a favour, possibly a few. Expect them to call it in soon.

ON A MISS, they will still help you, but the GM will choose one.

- ✂ They make mistakes.
- ✂ The favour they require is bigger than you thought.
- ✂ Their actions make them a target for your enemies.
- ✂ They publically disapprove of your request.

CREATE A CUSTOM MOVE

This advancement option allows a player to create an entirely new and original move for their character, based on their character's personality, actions, and abilities. Players should consider what their character does particularly well or often, or what their character finds most important. This is usually good groundwork for a move.

Players should work with GMs to create the move. The move can follow any of the formats you have seen on the character sheets, descriptors, or in the basic moves. For the sake of simplicity however, players may wish to follow one of the following two patterns:

PATTERN 1

When you do something specific **ROLL+STAT**.

ON A SUCCESS: Great result.

ON A 7-9, also choose one:

- ✂ Negative side effect.
- ✂ Negative side effect.
- ✂ Negative side effect.

ON A MISS: The GM makes things worse.

For example, when you seek to quell violence or end a protest, **ROLL+BALANCE**.

ON A SUCCESS: Your words are heeded, and peace is restored.

ON A 7-9, also choose one:

- ✂ The peace is temporary. They'll be at each other's throats tomorrow.
- ✂ The peace is fragile. One wrong move could restart the fight.
- ✂ Those involved view you as weak, cowardly, or a brown noser.

ON A MISS: The GM makes things worse.

PATTERN 2

When you do something specific **ROLL+STAT**.

ON A 10+: Choose 3

ON A 7-9: Choose 2

- ✂ Good result.
- ✂ Good result.
- ✂ Good result.
- ✂ Bad result does not occur.

ON A MISS: The GM makes things worse.

EXAMPLE

When you are faced with something frighteningly unfamiliar or otherworldly,
ROLL + BALANCE.

ON A 10+: Choose 3

ON A 7-9: Choose 2

- ☞ You can tell how it communicates.
- ☞ You know what it wants.
- ☞ You can see its weakness.
- ☞ You don't buckle, freeze, or run.

ON A MISS: The GM makes things worse.

REARRANGE YOUR STATS

This allows a player to reallocate their stats to reflect how their character's abilities and personality has altered. A player's total number of stat points will not change. A player can allocate their stats in any way they please, as long as:

- ☞ No stat is greater than +3.
- ☞ No stat is less than -3.
- ☞ The total of all stats combined is +3.

CHANGE DESCRIPTOR

The player selects a new descriptor. They may not pick a descriptor that is already in play. The player does not use this descriptor straight away. During the next session, or few sessions, the player and GM must work together towards introducing events to transition from one descriptor to another.

For example, to transition to the Believer, a character might be sworn into a holy order. To transition to the Creature, the character might find out they are not as human as they thought.

Once the transitional events have taken place, the player discards their old descriptor, fills out their new descriptor, and uses it henceforth.

SURRENDER YOUR CHARACTER TO THE GM ---

When a player surrenders a character to the GM, their fictional circumstances do not change. However, instead of being controlled by the player, they are now a non-player character, controlled by the GM based on that character's behaviour in the game so far. This character will now take a backseat in the game to make way for the new character the player has created. This new character joins the crew through their connections with the player's old character.

When creating a new character, players must choose a role and descriptor that are not currently in play.

CHANGE CHARACTER ROLE ---

If players select this advancement option, they must choose a role that is not currently in play. Similar to changing descriptors, the player and GM must work together to transition the character from one role to another.





Seven EQUIPMENT

ALL PLAYER CHARACTERS HAVE GEAR, DETAILED in the equipment section of their character sheet. Most items have mechanical effects (such as weapons), while others are only for narrative use.

Equipment on a character sheet may be followed by an item **ATTRIBUTE** in brackets which indicates further information about the item. When players pick up new items during play, the GM should decide on the item's attributes and let the players know.

ITEM ATTRIBUTES

Here is an explanation of the attributes used in *Alas*:

X HARM	The base harm of this weapon is x.
HAND	This weapon can only be used in melee combat.
CLOSE	This is a ranged weapon, but it only reaches a close area. If the target is too far away to hear the wielder shout, they are out of range.
FAR	This is a ranged weapon that can only be shot properly from a distance. If the target is close enough to hear the wielder shout, they are too close for this weapon to be effective. Maximum range is the GM's call.
VERSATILE	This is a ranged weapon that can be used from a close or far distance.
LOUD	This item makes a loud noise that can be heard from far away.
SILENCED	This item is fitted with a silencer. The ballistic crack of the bullet flying through the air can still be heard - however the act of firing makes no noise and those present will find it hard to hear where the shot came from.
VALUABLE	This item is more expensive than usual, for example because it is ornate or antique.
X ARMOR	When worn, this item provides x armour against appropriate harm.

For example, an antique hunting rifle might appear in a character's equipment list as follows: Hunting Rifle (2 harm, far, valuable).

NOTE ON RANGE

If a person wishes to use a weapon outside the range allowed, and has a very good reason as to why it should work, they may do so but they are **ACTING UNDER PRESSURE** (p. 20). They should roll for this move before any other.

CREATING ITEMS

Mechanically, items in *Alas for the Awful Sea* aren't that different from each other. Most of an item's uniqueness comes from its description and the story behind it.

To create equipment for player use, follow these steps:

- ✂ Decide what the item is. For example, a rusted fish hook, or a handful of glistening African beads.
- ✂ Decide what the equipment is used for, if anything. If the item is a weapon, also see creating weapons below.
- ✂ Decide if the item is expensive, or intended for trade. If so, add the valuable tag.
- ✂ Decide if the item requires any custom attributes.

Most attributes should be handled within the fiction of the game. Sometimes however, an item will have a significant attribute that it is vital to detail. When this occurs, you can create a custom item attribute. It's up to you to define what that attribute means and how it affects the game, e.g. The Insignia of the King (Valuable, Recognizable), The Devil's Sword (Hand, Harm 3, Cursed).

CREATING WEAPONS

If the item you are creating is a weapon, you will need to make some extra decisions.

- ✂ Decide how deadly the weapon is, and determine its harm value:
 - Non-firearms have a base harm of 1.
 - Firearms have a base harm of 2. This is enough to kill most humans.
 - If the item is deadly, add an additional +1 harm.
- ✂ Decide what distance the weapon is used from (hand, close, or far), and add the appropriate tag. If it can be used effectively from close and far then add the versatile tag instead.
- ✂ Decide if the weapon makes a loud noise when used, or if it is silenced. Add the loud or silenced tag accordingly.



Eight MONEY AND PURCHASE

MONEY IS VERY IMPORTANT IN THE world of *Alas*. It lies at the heart of class, status, respectability, and survival. Those with more money have more power, more education, more opportunity, and even more years of life.

For player characters, money is central in straddling the line between respectability and influence, and destitution. However, open displays of wealth in poverty stricken towns may lead to mistrust, theft, and even reprisal.

In *Alas for the Awful Sea*, individual amounts of money do not need to be accounted for. Monetary transactions are handled by asking one single question – “can the character afford this?”

If the answer is yes, they can purchase it. If the answer is no, they will need to do a bit of sweet talking, swap something of value for it, or owe someone a favour. The exception to this rule is large purchases such as a ship, or hiring a skilled crew member. For these, GMs may use the **BIG PURCHASE** move (p. 75), or make up their own conditions.

To work out if a character can afford something that is not a big purchase, use this two-step process:

1. APPROXIMATE THE WORTH OF THE ITEM

Use the pricing list on page 74 to help you. If the item you want is not on the list, then compare the approximate value of that item with one on the list. For example, you may decide an axe is worth the same amount as a shovel and determine purchasability accordingly.

2. COMPARE THIS TO THE CHARACTER'S WEALTH

Put the character in one of the following four categories, based on the character's background and events during the game:

- ☞ If the character is **DESTITUTE**: They can only afford cheap items, and not too many at that.
- ☞ If the character is of **AVERAGE WEALTH**, for a sailor: They can easily afford cheap items and a medium item here and there.
- ☞ If the character is **WELL OFF**: They can afford medium items, and an expensive item here and there.
- ☞ If the character becomes **RICH**: Can they call on their money right now? If not, treat them as if they are well off. If they can, what are they doing in the remote British Isles? None of the player characters begin the game **RICH** and this level of wealth should remain very difficult to achieve.

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR PAY

The wealth and pay of the characters in the crew depends on their individual backgrounds and reasons for being aboard. A Scholar who has commissioned the ship for a journey of exploration for example, would likely be far richer than the Captain, while an unknown Scholar who begged their way aboard may be almost penniless.

However, it can be useful to know the pay grade of different roles in a standard crew. For a standard character, check the list below to determine their wealth.

THE CAPTAIN	Well off.
THE BOATSWAIN	Well off.
THE MERCENARY	Average.
THE OLD SEA DOG	Destitute to average.
THE STRIDER	Average.
THE SURGEON	Average to well off, dependent on skill.
THE COOK	Average.
THE STOWAWAY	Dependent on background and circumstances, probably destitute.
THE SCHOLAR	Dependent on background.
THE MERCHANT	Dependent on background, probably well off.

WAGES, PRICES, AND PURCHASE

How much did a loaf of bread cost in 1830? The costs of items in a different time period can be difficult to guess. Below is a cost list for items and services the characters may need during the game. If you need to work out the cost of another item, you can estimate the price based on those below.

These items are priced as at the 1830s, and indexed against the pay of an ordinary sailor, with cheap items being less than $\frac{1}{3}$ of the day's pay, medium items less than a day's pay, and expensive items more than a day's pay.

ITEM	EXPENSIVENESS	ESTIMATED COST
A loaf of bread	Cheap	3 pennies
A candle, tallow	Cheap	2 pennies
A candle, wax	Cheap	10 pennies
A whole salt cod	Cheap	8 pennies
Overnight stay at the inn, remote/low cost city	Cheap	24 pennies a room
Overnight stay at the inn, other city	Medium	36 pennies a room
A spade or shovel	Medium	42 pennies
A good knife	Expensive	60 pennies
An oil lamp	Expensive	75 pennies
A revolver	Expensive	252 pennies
A new suit	Very expensive	660 pennies
Day's Pay, Labourer	Cheap	20 pennies
Day's Pay, Sailor	Medium	50 pennies

NOTE ON DENOMINATIONS: At this time, there are 12 pennies in a shilling, and 20 shillings or 240 pennies in a pound.

PRICE FLUCTUATIONS

The prices listed above are standard costing. However, in rural communities, particular items which are **SCARCE** or hard to get a hold of may move up in price one bracket, from cheap to medium or medium to expensive. A character purchasing a **SCARCE** item may raise eyebrows. They are clearly not from around here, and apparently have money to burn.

It is also possible that the player characters will live through a **SHORTAGE**. When there is a shortage of an item, its price increases to expensive. It becomes hard to find, and some persuasion may be necessary before purchase is possible. Purchasing such an item will put a character at risk of theft, and expose them to the outrage of those unable to buy.

BIG PURCHASES

When a character wants to make a large purchase such as a new ship, or a new addition to their crew, you may choose to resolve this by having that character make the **BIG PURCHASE** move below.

When you make a big purchase that costs far more than you have on hand, **ROLL**. Add a +1 if the buyer thinks you are trustworthy, wealthy, or influential.

ON A SUCCESS, you'll get it, eventually.

ON A 10+: Choose 2

ON A 7-9: Choose 3

- ☞ You'll need to get cold, hard evidence you have all the cash.
- ☞ You'll be dirt poor afterwards.
- ☞ It's going to take a long time to organize.
- ☞ It has a problem, flaw or defect not apparent until after purchase.

ON A MISS: You'll still get what you're after, but it won't be what you've hoped for. Choose 2 of the above. When it finally arrives, the GM also picks one:

- ☞ It turns out to be worthless.
- ☞ It's haunted, cursed, or brings inexplicable bad luck.
- ☞ It's unpopular, offensive and controversial.



Nine HARM AND HEALING

INJURY IN *Alas* IS MEASURED IN points of **HARM** which correspond with the segments of the windrose present on each player's character sheet. To mark a point of harm, players will shade in a section of the windrose. Players should start at the top, and shade the windrose in a clockwise order, starting with the segment numbered 1.

To represent the state of a player character's health, **HARM** will hold a different significance depending on how much of the windrose has been shaded:

- ☘ Harm that is only in **SEGMENT 1** will heal itself naturally over time. As GM, you should indicate to the player that their harm has healed after some time has elapsed in game, as appropriate.
- ☘ Harm in **SEGMENT 2** will get neither worse nor better without medical treatment.
- ☘ Harm in **SEGMENT 3** will get worse without attention.
- ☘ When **SEGMENT 4** is shaded, the character is dead.



GIVING HARM TO PLAYERS

THE GENERAL APPROACH

As a GM, it can sometimes be difficult to work out how many points of harm to give to players to represent a particular injury. The general approach is that harm in *Alas* is realistic. This means if a character is shot in the head, they will die. Such a character should be given the full 4 points of harm.

The flipside of a realistic approach to harm is that a character should be far less likely to be shot in the head in *Alas* than in many other roleplaying games. For a non-player character to inflict such an injury they must have a gun, a willingness to break the law and commit murder, and a very good reason to shoot.

The best way to determine how many points of harm a character should be given is to think about the consequences of a particular injury. For example, if a character is shot in the gut and bleeding out, they will die without attention – this means they should be given 3 points of harm. If a character gets food poisoning, the injury is likely to get better by itself – this means they should be given 1 point of harm.

ARMOUR

Some characters in *Alas* have equipment such as the **CAPTAIN'S REGALIA** which acts as **ARMOUR**. Armour allows players to subtract points from harm taken but only in a situation where such armour would help to soften the blow.

EXAMPLE

Imagine a character wearing the Captain's Regalia (1 armour) was punched in the chest, and fell off a cliff into the water.

As a GM, you might decide this punch would inflict 1 point of harm. However, the 1 armour from the Captain's Regalia will absorb 1 point of harm. $1 - 1 = 0$, so the character won't take any harm from the punch.

What about falling off the cliff and into the water? You might decide the fall would inflict 2 points of harm. In this case, the character's Captain's Regalia won't help, as it clearly could not prevent a person suffering injury if they fell off a height and into the water. If the armour would not be helpful, do not subtract it from the harm. So, it would be $2 - 0 = 2$, and the character will take 2 points of harm for the fall.

WEAPONS

All player characters in *Alas* start with a weapon. The amount of harm indicated by that weapon is the base harm it inflicts when it is used. If a character has no weapon or chooses not to use one, their fists will generally inflict 1 point of harm. It is unlikely player characters will inflict harm on another player character, or a non-player character without using a **MOVE**, but it is possible.

MOVES

There are specific moves in *Alas* which will call for certain amounts of harm to be inflicted at certain times. There are discussed in the **MOVES** section (p. 17). Remember, the principles we've outlined here about weapons, armour, and non-player characters, still apply when facilitating moves.

HARM TO NPCs AND THE FORCE OF THE LAW —————

Most non-player characters in *Alas* do not have armour, and can each **TAKE ONLY TWO HARM**. If 1 point of harm is inflicted on a non-player character they will be seriously injured, and if 2 points of harm are inflicted they will die. However, some characters in the game are tougher than others. Where appropriate, you may decide to increase the harm threshold of non-player characters to 3.

For example, Mac the Dagger is an accomplished bar brawler, and is harder to take down than an average villager. You may decide Mac the Dagger can endure 3 harm before death.

Killing or attempting to kill a non-player character should have serious in-game consequences, especially if it is not in self-defence. A bystander who observes such an action will report the killing or murder attempt to the authorities.

WHAT ABOUT HEALING? —————

When harm reaches the second segment, a character will require medical attention in order to get better. This medical attention can come either from **THE SURGEON'S SPECIAL MOVE** if they are in play, or if not, a non-player character with medical knowledge who lives nearby.

Healing always comes with a risk. If the Surgeon is the one administering treatment, the risk is rolling the dice and using a move. If the players have to turn to a non-player character, that villager or person (or supernatural being) will ask a significant favour or monetary payment in return for the medical services they provide.

Part Two
THE GM



Ten RUNNING THE GAME

HOW TO USE THIS PART

WE'VE COVERED EVERYTHING THE PLAYERS NEED to know in Part One. This part is for the GM. It exists to help you bring the world of *Alas* to life, and tell the stories that the game is designed to tell.

This chapter contains the **GM PRINCIPLES** - guidelines that will help you capture the tone and theme of *Alas*, while keeping the game focused on the players. It also contains suggestions for ways to make things worse when players fail a roll.

In the chapters which follow, we'll outline the best way to start a game of *Alas*. Then, we'll talk about how you, as the GM, can create new horizons for your players to explore. We'll explain how to create towns for your players to interact with (p. 103), and how to build story currents (p. 99), toolkits of narrative ideas that will help you drive the action forward. These will help you to create and progress narratives in a natural way, while steering clear of prewritten plots or railroading.

To make running the game easier, we've created a GM sheet for you to print, where you can keep track of important people, places, and events. This sheet can be found online, along with all other play materials.

GM PRINCIPLES

These principles will help you capture the tone and theme of *Alas*, a desperate and conflicted world where choices are tough, and morality murky. They apply equally whether you are running a game, creating towns and currents, or are using a pre-written adventure.

When you're facilitating the story as GM, the central principles are:

- ✂ Own the tone
- ✂ Ask lots of questions
- ✂ Put the players at the centre of the conflict
- ✂ Make the world react
- ✂ Go where the players lead
- ✂ Make changes between sessions

OWN THE TONE

As GM, you have a strong influence on table atmosphere. *Alas* is a fairly serious game and it helps if you keep that tone at the table. A bit of banter is fine, of course, but too much comedy will cause the game to lose much of its interest and impact.

ASK LOTS OF QUESTIONS

Always be asking. Ask the players what their characters are thinking, feeling, and doing. Ask what their characters think about the other characters and their actions. This will add depth and significance to character behaviour. It also makes great material to draw on when the GM makes things worse.

PUT THE PLAYERS AT THE CENTRE OF THE CONFLICT

The players' characters are the focal point of *Alas*. Where there is a tough decision to be made, an opportunity to be seized, or a mystery to solve, the player characters should be there, at the centre of the story, with different groups of people pushing them to make a decision and depending on them for survival. They may act like protagonists, or their actions may make them villains. Either way, they are the focus of the story, and it's your job to make sure everybody wants a piece of them.

MAKE THE WORLD REACT

Give the world of *Alas* and its inhabitants memory and personality. Make sure the story, and the non-player characters, react to the actions the players have taken so far. Make the world and its people react differently to different player characters, depending on how they act and who they are. When situations are especially tense, non-player characters may even react to the actions of player characters before they've met them!

GO WHERE THE PLAYERS LEAD

Follow player interests, stories, and ideas. If the players want to do something, you should generally say yes – but feel free to offer them a hard bargain, or make things worse as a consequence.

Don't plan plots or decide how things end ahead of time. The material you create during prep is a resource at your disposal, which you can use to create trouble for the players. Remain flexible and don't feel the need to bring players back to a set storyline. Play to find out what will happen next, not to reach what will happen next. This means that at times you will need to change your prep on the fly, or throw it out the window and let the story go somewhere much more interesting. This includes the core adventure in this book, and any other adventures you may have.

MAKE CHANGES BETWEEN SESSIONS

Think about the events and interactions that took place last session, and what consequences these could have during the next. Who hates the characters, and what will they do about it? Who likes them? What tensions have worsened? Who is worried about what the characters will do next, and will take action to stop them? You may wish to brainstorm a list of possible ways the players' actions in the last session could come back to help them, or hurt them.

THE GRIM WORLD OF ALAS

When you're creating the grim world of *Alas*, its problems, and its inhabitants, the central principles are:

- ✂ Give players roots and connections
- ✂ Seek out tough decisions and hard choices
- ✂ Give everything a price, even friendship
- ✂ Create shades of grey, avoid good and evil
- ✂ Use folklore and myth to reflect conflict and theme
- ✂ Make violence count
- ✂ Put history in its place

GIVE PLAYERS ROOTS AND CONNECTIONS

Ask the players where their characters are from, and who they know. If you're playing multiple sessions, bring those places and people into the game to create complications and attachments. Don't feel limited to the connections established in the first session. Reach out to players to establish new roots and connections as you introduce new places and non-player characters into a story. Relatives, old friends, and rivals provide a great source of narrative material.

Once you've called on players to establish roots and connections in the world around them, bring these into the story often. This will increase player investment and make the game more interesting.

SEEK OUT TOUGH DECISIONS AND HARD CHOICES —

Make the players pick sides, make judgment calls, and be responsible for unleashing change upon the world. Failed moves provide an ideal chance to put player characters in a hard spot and make them choose. Don't worry if players disagree or make different choices – this means you've found a great dilemma to explore, and the rules of *Alas for the Awful Sea* are well equipped to handle player conflicts.

Just as it is important to make players choose, it is also vital that they feel strongly the consequences of their decisions. Those that disagree with the player characters, or are hurt by their actions, will make themselves known, and provide great material for a failed move, or even an entirely new current.

GIVE EVERYTHING A PRICE, EVEN FRIENDSHIP —

Those who live in the world of *Alas for the Awful Sea* depend on a network of family, friends, and favours for survival. By connecting with others, the player characters become part of this network. Their connections will lean on them for help, and return the favour if they can. Equally, the player's associations, along with their actions, will define how they are seen by the world around them. By making friends they are taking sides, and this should cause them problems.

CREATE SHADES OF GREY, AVOID GOOD AND EVIL —

Tough decisions and the complexity of the human heart sit at the root of *Alas for the Awful Sea*. To bring this idea to life at the table, you'll need to avoid creating "good guys" and "bad guys." Every important non-player character, or group of characters, should have both good and bad in their actions. Take the core adventure of *Alas*. Eileen, the gang boss, is ruthless at getting what she wants, and to those in her way. However her smuggling ring puts food on most of the tables in Greymoor. The Provost is trying to stop her reign of terror, but he doesn't always act in the best interest of the townspeople. (Besides, he has his own problems).

It's fine to break this rule for folktale and mythical creatures, so long as they do not take centre stage. After all, Kelpies waiting to drown humans in the water are unlikely to be sympathetic. Even then you may think of an interesting twist that would make killing Kelpies problematic or regrettable.

USE FOLKLORE AND MYTH

TO REFLECT CONFLICT AND THEME

Folklore and myth are integral to the setting and tone of *Alas for the Awful Sea*. However, creatures, places and mysteries are not just isles to explore and threats to fight. The mythical and mystical elements of *Alas* work best when they also contribute to, or help reflect, the conflicts taking place in the game.

This can be done in two ways. First, folklore may be a tool that acts as a catalyst for a conflict between player and non-player characters. For example, which characters will hunt the giant seals offshore, and which will not. Second, folklore may be the cause of the conflict itself, such as the vengeance of a spirit whose rites and rituals have been forgotten. Either way, the supernatural is most interesting when it ties into the themes and conflicts the game explores.

MAKE VIOLENCE COUNT

In *Alas for the Awful Sea*, every life is important, and death is a tragic occurrence. Despite this, violence continues to occur as hatred, fear and desperation, or passion, belief and self-sacrifice drive people to act in extreme ways. Violence is not a glorious act of heroism. Rather it is a symptom of the ills that plague the setting. Combat can and will break out during play. But it should never be meaningless, funny, or taken lightly.

PUT HISTORY IN ITS PLACE

As we mentioned, *Alas* is set in the early 19th century. Exactly how faithful to the period you would like to be is up to you. If you are a lover of history, feel free to research the setting further, and create a rich world of history for your players to explore. However, precise historical accuracy is not necessary to enjoy *Alas*. While it is important to avoid clear anachronisms (such as the use of electricity or running water in a rural town), it is best not to overly limit players based on specific period restrictions. Think about whether the particular historical truth is important to either flavour or story. If not, it's best to let it go to ensure the game continues to flow well.

THE GM MAKES THINGS WORSE

All of the basic moves, and some special moves, call for the GM to make things worse in case of a failure. When you make things worse, feel free to use whatever ideas fit best with the story, and be as creative as you like. Here are some options you can use during the game to make things harder for the players:

COMPLICATE THE MOMENT

- ❧ Create the opposite reaction to that intended or even turn the move back on them. Example: if a player fails to read a non-player character, maybe that non-player character gets a read on the player's character.
- ❧ Let them succeed at the move, but make the consequences unfavourable.
- ❧ Make them promise, or give them a tough deal. The players aren't getting out of this situation without doing some serious favours.
- ❧ Split the party. Don't be afraid of splitting the party. It can give each character time to shine.
- ❧ Trap them. One or all of the player characters become trapped by enemies or the environment. An enemy may also kidnap or capture a character.
- ❧ Introduce an extra complication into this encounter. Example: the player characters spot one of their enemy's thugs outside the window – they had been listening in to everything the characters were saying.

CHANGE RELATIONSHIPS

- ❧ Make an enemy of a friend or a neutral party.
- ❧ Make it public. If the characters are trying to keep their actions quiet and covert, make sure everybody knows about it.
- ❧ Shatter the faith a character has put in the players. Anyone who believed in the competence, honesty, or ideals of the player characters changes their mind.
- ❧ Create rumours and tarnish their reputation.

MAKE THE FUTURE HARDER

- ❧ Tax their resources.
- ❧ Deal out harm.
- ❧ Introduce a complication from another **CURRENT**.
- ❧ Introduce an off-screen complication. Start an event in the character's absence. Example: A man with blood running down his face out of breath dashes into the room – "Quick! There's some kind of riot!"



Eleven

FIRST SESSION

WHEN YOU'RE READY TO RUN A game of *Alas*, begin with the instructions contained in "Starting the First Session", on page 93. When you've finished this section, each player should have a basic idea of what kind of person their character is, and how they relate to the other members of the ship's crew. From here, you can choose whether to flesh out characters and relationships further, or thrust the characters straight into a difficult situation.

If you're planning to play several sessions of *Alas*, you might choose to spend this first session focusing on the characters. If you're only playing one or two sessions, it's best to get straight into the action.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CHARACTERS

Since the player characters are the central focus of *Alas*, you may choose to spend a session learning more about their beliefs, relationships, and problems.

If you choose to do this, you could spend the remainder of the initial session following the characters' life at sea. Or, you could choose to take the player characters to a place they have been before. Call on the players to define what the town is like, and say who their characters know there.

During this session, throw a few simple threats, old enemies, and future problems their way. Use the Setting, History and Folklore chapters to help you. However, this session is mainly about the player characters. Don't forget to ask lots of questions!

DIVE INTO THE ACTION

By your second session of *Alas*, it will be time to get to the meat of the game. Before you can do this, you will need to do a little prep, to arm yourself with the tools for an engaging session. You will need to do one (or more) of the following options:

CREATE A TOWN (PAGE 103)

Places in general, and villages in particular, are very important in *Alas for the Awful Sea*. Prepare a **TOWN** using the guidelines, and you should have enough in your narrative tool box for at least one session. From there, you can create currents taking place in your **TOWN**, to add to the drama.

CREATE A CURRENT (PAGE 99)

Once you've created a **TOWN**, you may also choose to create one or more **CURRENTS**, using the steps provided. A **CURRENT** is a set of connected and interwoven problems and situations, exploring one central conflict. Preparing a **CURRENT** will give you the groundwork to create troubles for the characters that will take more than one session to resolve.

PREPARE THE CORE ADVENTURE (PAGE 173)

You can choose to embark into the world of *Alas* by running the adventure contained in this book. You'll find instructions in Part Three on how to run the adventure, and what preparation is required. You can then transition from this adventure onto your own prep, or another adventure of your choice.

STARTING THE FIRST SESSION

In *Alas*, character creation is an important process that should be done as a group. During this process, players will establish **BONDS** and create a shared history. As GM you should guide your players through the steps below to create characters, and lay the groundwork for the game.

GIVE AN OVERVIEW OF PERIOD, SETTING AND TONE

As we mentioned earlier, *Alas for the Awful Sea* is a game about poverty, power, desperation and loss. It exists to tell grim stories about emotion, relationships, and the complexities of the human heart. During play you will tell other kinds of stories as well, and that's a good thing. However, at its core *Alas* is a serious game about the struggles of being human. It is important that your players understand the kind of stories this game excels at telling before they begin to play.

It helps to explain that *Alas* is largely a realistic setting – if you get shot in the head you will die. If you shoot someone in the head, the force of the law will descend upon you and you may well be hanged for murder.

Alas is also a world where folklore comes to life. It could be useful to discuss how folklore affects the world, and settle on the appropriate level of the fantastical and supernatural for your group. By default, the world of *Alas* is one where mystical forces are close at hand, but fantastic creatures and happenings remain rare.

CHOOSE ROLES AND DESCRIPTORS

Remember, there can only be one of each character role and descriptor in the group. Let each player read through the available character sheets and descriptors, and choose one of each that appeals to them. It may be helpful to briefly explain the special moves associated with a particular character.

FILL OUT THE CHARACTER SHEETS AND DESCRIPTORS

Explain how to fill out the character sheets and descriptors. Then, give the players some time to go through the materials, and circle the option in each section that appeals to them most. Let them know not to fill out the bonds section just yet, as these will be completed together at a later stage.

Don't let the setting stifle your desire for diversity. Feel free to have your cast as racially and gender diverse as you like, especially if it better represents your group of players.

INTRODUCE THE CHARACTERS ---

Go around the table, and give each player a chance to describe their character. Then, ask them lots of questions! Ask questions which dip into a character's history, motivations, and beliefs.

Good questions for this game include:

- ✂ How did you come to be aboard this ship? Why?
- ✂ How long have you been on the ship for?
- ✂ How did you come to be <character role>?
(e.g. how did you come to be a Surgeon?)
- ✂ Who did you leave behind? Why?
- ✂ If you're not sure what to ask, "why?" is always a great question.

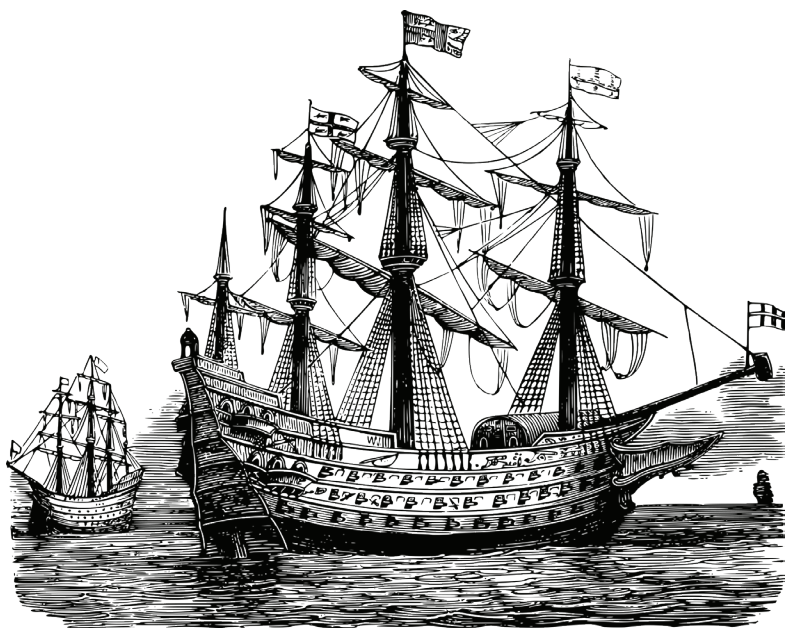
CREATE BONDS ---

Ask the players to create 2-3 bonds, by writing the name of another character in a blank space in their bonds section, and on their descriptor sheet as indicated. At this stage, players should have no more than one bond with each other player character on their character sheet. However, they may have additional bonds as a result of their descriptor.

If a player believes that none of the bonds on their character sheet describe their relationship with another character, they may invent their own. Players should check with each other that both are happy with the bonds they have chosen.

If any important non-player characters have been established, players may also fill out or create a bond for one such character. This is especially important in games with three players or less.

When they are finished, go around the table and see what the players have come up with. Make sure to ask "why", or "how did that come to happen?" or "tell us more about that incident."



CREATE THE SHIP

Ask the Captain to name their ship. If there's no Captain, ask the players which character is in charge. Ask the player of that character to name the ship.

Next, ask each player to create a distinctive feature of the ship. For example, a ship may have a hidden smuggling compartment, a lavish kitchen, or be transporting a cargo of live cows.

For historical information about ships, see page 154.

EXPLAIN THE RULES

Explain any important rules that you might have missed out during the character creation process, such as what moves are, and how they work. At this stage, there's no need to explain all the moves in detail – you can do that as they arise in play.



Twelve EXPANDING HORIZONS

THE WORLD OF ALAS FOR THE AWFUL SEA is full of mysteries to discover, threats to face, and struggles to overcome. As the GM, you will need to create the forces that act against the player characters, and the world, to create oppression, suffering and loss. Then, once you've brought these forces into the story, it's time to hand over control to the players, to find out what choices they make, where they go, and what happens.

This chapter will explain how to quickly create non-player characters. Then, it will go into detail about how to create thematic story toolkits for use in your game. The two main tools you will be using to create drama are **TOWNS** and **CURRENTS**. **TOWNS** are exactly that – villages, rife with conflict that characters will visit. **CURRENTS** are sets of connected and interwoven problems and situations, exploring one central conflict. These story currents can be used to create trouble for the player characters no matter where they are.

CREATING NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Creating non-player characters is straightforward. You can create characters during prep or on the fly as the story unfolds. If you create a character during the game and they turn out to be important, you can always flesh out who they are further between sessions. You can keep track of non-player characters as needed on your GM or town sheet.

To create a non-player character, you'll need to answer five questions about them:

WHAT IS THEIR NAME? If you're stuck, pick one from a character sheet that wasn't used.

HOW DO THEY LOOK? Pick one or two traits to describe them. Are they old or young, weathered or suave, hearty or sick?

WHO DO THEY SIDE WITH? Where do this character's loyalties lie? Who do they love and who do they hate? Who will they fight for and who will they never trust? This can change over time.

WHAT DO THEY WANT FROM THE PLAYERS? Maybe they want allies, or maybe customers. Maybe they want the players to butt out of the town's business, or maybe they want answers that only the players have. Again, this will also change over time.

HOW TOUGH ARE THEY? Non-player characters aren't as tough as the players. Most are seriously injured if they suffer one harm. Two harm is enough to kill them. Some non-player characters have spent their life in scrapes or battles and have grown tougher. These characters can survive one extra harm. Decide if this character is tough or not, and if so, why.

That's all the basic details you need. Extra details can be added between sessions.

Once you've created a non-player character, involve them in the players' troubles going forward. Have them turn up later asking for help, demanding repentance, or seeking answers. Don't be afraid to give different players unique relationships with the same non-player character. For example, Patrick, a non-player character, has sworn revenge on the Captain Lilly, because she injured his father. But Patrick treasures any advice given to him by the Merchant Elizabeth, who has impressed him with the power of money.

CREATING STORY CURRENTS

When you GM *Alas for the Awful Sea*, you won't create plots, with defined trajectories or endings. Instead, you will create story **CURRENTS**.

As mentioned, a **CURRENT** is a set of connected and interwoven problems and situations, exploring one central conflict. Currents are an alternative to fixed or linear storylines. They provide flexibility while also allowing you to use your prep as a building block for a thematic and compelling narrative. We recommend creating several currents before play, and letting your players' actions and interests determine which ones you explore.

Think of a current as a toolkit. It contains useful threats, places, and people connected by a central theme, but not a set story. During play, you can call on these ideas flexibly if and when needed, while still following the interests and actions of the players. As always, play to find out what happens, and use your currents to help you drive the action.

At the heart of every current are two things. Firstly, an **INSPIRATION**. This is the idea, question, person, folktale or event whose story you're burning to tell. Secondly, a **CONFLICT**. An important part of the game is the clash between different ideologies and desires. A **CONFLICT** determines the particular struggle a current will explore. Conflicts are explored in more detail on page 109.

To create a current, follow these steps:

- ✂ Find an inspiration
- ✂ Create or choose a **CONFLICT**
- ✂ Create material
- ✂ Create relationships to other **CURRENTS**
- ✂ Ask questions
- ✂ Organize and expand
- ✂ Create custom moves (optional)

FIND AN INSPIRATION

Your inspiration is the core of the flavour and atmosphere of your current. You'll know it when you find it. It's the niggling thought that keeps popping into the back of your mind. The vision, moment, creature or question that fascinates, challenges, or excites you. If you're on the hunt, take a read through our chapters on folklore and history, and find something that stands out to you.

CREATE OR CHOOSE A CONFLICT

The heart of *Alas for the Awful Sea* is the clash between ideologies, interests and desires, and the effect this has on people. When you create a new current for your game, you will pick a conflict to be at its core. A **CONFLICT** is comprised of two opposing ideas that will force players to make choices as the game unfolds. For example, violence vs. oppression poses the question to the players – should we take up arms, shed the blood of those who oppress us, and risk our own? Or should we allow inequality or exploitation to continue?

Conflicts do not exist so that good can triumph over evil, or right over wrong. Rather they force players to make harsh choices, and tough decisions.

Conflicts are explored fully on page 109. When you create a current, you can either choose a conflict from the core thematic conflicts of *Alas* detailed on page 111, or follow the steps on page 113 to create your own.

CREATE MATERIAL

It's time to start brainstorming, using your inspiration and conflict as a focal point, and a source of ideas. In this step, you create the narrative storehouse you will draw on to weave story and atmosphere, and make things worse when a move is failed. There's no wrong answers so write down everything – you never know when it will provide the perfect idea for a crucial narrative moment. Here are some things to think about:

PEOPLE: Who are they? What is unique about them? What do they desire? What do they want from the player characters, or to do to the player characters? You can use the section above on creating non-player characters to help you.

PLACES: Where is this? What defining features does it have? Who is it important to and why? What kind of things happen here?

CREATURES: What, or who are they? What defining features do they have? What do they desire? What do they want from, or to do to, the player characters?

PROBLEMS OR MOMENTS: Who or what is at the centre of this? What do they want? What are the stakes? What will happen if the player characters don't do anything to address this?

WHY MIGHT THE PLAYER CHARACTERS CARE: How might this connect with the player characters? Does it threaten what they hold dear, provide a new opportunity, offend their beliefs or something else entirely?

SENSES, DESCRIPTIONS, BURNING IMAGES: Fragments of flavour to capture the imagination and create atmosphere.

CREATE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CURRENTS ---

Creating complex and interlocking currents adds narrative depth and widens the scope of the stories you tell at the table. Think about how the events of the current you are creating may tie in, connect with, or overlap with other currents you've created, or events that have happened in your game in the past. Are there any people or places that reappear? Events important to both? Will the people and places in one current be affected by the actions of the players in another? Involving established non-player characters often works well, as it gives the players investment from the outset. If no connections come to mind, don't be afraid to create these on the fly during play.

ASK QUESTIONS ---

What questions and mysteries burn most strongly? Write some of them down, but make sure not to answer them yet. These may connect to the player characters, or other ideas you have generated. For example:

- ☞ Will Seamus, the Mercenary, find his father? Will he accept him if he does?
- ☞ Can the village survive without the fish?
- ☞ What dwells within the carefully sealed cargo hold of the ship?
- ☞ Who will take over the smuggling ring next?

These questions above create interesting focal points to explore within the mass of raw material that makes up your story current. When you play, you can play to find out the answers!

ORGANIZE AND EXPAND

Organize your notes into a format that will be useful for you to call upon as you GM. At this point you can go back and flesh out anything from the material creation stage that you feel needs more attention. Remember, the point is not to create prefabricated, orchestrated scenarios for the players to run into, but rather to add atmosphere and depth, and think about what kind of tough choices might arise for the players. You don't have to know everything – in fact, you shouldn't!

(OPTIONAL) CREATE CUSTOM MOVES

One of the best parts of the *Apocalypse World* system is the ability to create custom moves that add a unique storytelling dimension to a situation. You may wish to create a custom move to reflect a special experience at the centre of your adventure. To create a custom move, you'll need to think of the following:

- ✂ Name of the move
- ✂ Triggering criteria
- ✂ Stat to roll
- ✂ Success consequence/s
- ✂ Failure consequence. The default is that the GM makes things worse.

EXAMPLE

ISLE OF LOST THINGS

When you look hard for what you're missing on the Isle of Lost Things, **ROLL+BEYOND**.

ON A SUCCESS, you find it.

ON A 7-9: Also choose 1

- ✂ It's in desperate need of repair.
- ✂ It's not the way you remember.
- ✂ It now belongs to another.

ON A MISS: The GM makes things worse.

NAME OF THE MOVE

TRIGGERING
CRITERIA

STAT TO ROLL

SUCCESS
CONSEQUENCES

FAILURE
CONSEQUENCES

CREATING TOWNS

Location is a vitally important part of *Alas for the Awful Sea*. Without places to go, plagued by loss and ravaged by poverty, full of conflicts and desires, there isn't much for the players to engage with.

Creating a town is similar to creating a current, but with a broader brush. You can create a town on the fly during the game, but you might find a bit of prep helps to make your town more complex and interesting. You don't need to know everything about a town, but getting an understanding of the underlying conflicts and tensions it faces allows you to construct a richer player experience. Other details can be added as needed as the game goes on.

When you use a town you have created during play, don't forget to ask players who they know there, and give them connections and relationships within the town. You may even form connections by introducing non-player characters you created, and asking which crew member knows that character, and why.

Print out the town sheet, and use this to create your own town, and keep track of details during the game.

To create a town, follow these steps:

- ✂ Create or choose a conflict
- ✂ Decide on industry, geography, and size
- ✂ Identify groups, factions or movements at work in the town
- ✂ Create key non-player characters, and outline their desires
- ✂ Create moments, connections, and situations as needed
- ✂ Ask questions
- ✂ Create custom moves (optional)

CREATE OR CHOOSE A CONFLICT

We've already explained the central role of conflicts within the world of *Alas*. Conflicts do not just underlie story currents, they also form the background tensions in towns themselves.

The kinds of conflict you pick for a town will form the basis for decisions such as the town's industry, geography, and size. For example, if the conflict you have chosen is work vs. independence, the town could be an isolated rural village, where recent enclosure of common lands has forced small tenant farmers into

working in farm labour. If the conflict is discrimination vs. vulnerability, the town could be a mid-sized regional area, dealing with a flood of strange and starving emigrants after famine or war. You can use the history chapter on page 153 to help with these decisions.

You may want to define some details about the conflict that’s taking place, in the conflict description section of your sheet. From here, you should have a good idea about how to approach the other questions that define your town.

INDUSTRY, GEOGRAPHY, AND SIZE _____

Industry, geography, and size can inform much of a town’s character, and the player characters’ relationships to it.

INDUSTRY

Most towns the crew encounter will have farming or fishing industries, or both. However, along with this, other industries may be important to the struggles taking place in the town. Pick one to three of the following options to form the dominant industries:

- | | |
|---------|-----------------------------------|
| Farming | Fishing |
| Whaling | Sealing |
| Trading | Manufacturing (textiles or other) |
| Mining | Forestry |

GEOGRAPHY

A town’s location and level of isolation dramatically affects its prosperity, openness, culture and traditions.

Pick one of these options:

- Island – Distant
- Island – Close
- Coastal
- Inland

SIZE AND POPULATION

Outside of London, the biggest cities in the UK in the early 19th century contained 50,000 – 80,000 people. Generally speaking, *Alas* does not shine a spotlight on events at these larger locations, but rather the smaller villages and towns that dotted the British Isles.

- Small (<500 people)
- Medium (<2000 people)
- Large (<5000 people)

GROUPS, FACTIONS AND MOVEMENTS

What groups of people (or creatures) sit on either side of the conflict that plagues the town? And what might they want from the player characters?

Outline in broad terms the groups, factions, or movements that exist within the town, and what they desire. Decide who is in power, who has power in other ways, and who is powerless. Aim to create two or three groups upfront – you can always add more once events in the town have started unfolding.

The groups you create should play an important role in the conflict you have chosen or created for your town. You don't need to go into too much detail, as you can breathe life into these groups during play.

EXAMPLES

THE FISHERFOLK

Desires:

- Preserve the old ways being eroded by the big time fishers.
- Keep the balance, and preserve the waters for the future.
- Do whatever it takes to keep food on their table as the fish market floods.

Power:

- Powerless. But dangerous if they band together.

Players:

- Test their understanding of the old ways, and of nature.
- Wreak a desperate vengeance upon them, as with all outsiders who continue the dangerous path of overfishing.

THE SMUGGLERS

Desires:

- Get meddling authority figures out of the way, or make them sweet.
- Make sure the local population are the fall guys if anything goes wrong.

Power:

- Powerful in their own way.

Players:

- Seek to use the players characters for their dirty work.
- Cast them into disrepute to throw off heat.

KEY NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Now you know what forces are at work in the town, you will need to create a small number of non-player characters that represent, embody, and act for these forces.

Create one or two non-player characters for each group, using the guidelines for creating non-player characters on page 98. If you create two characters, differences in their viewpoints and desires will help add more nuances to the conflict.

Once you have done this, you may decide to create some additional characters who are an important influence on the town. It can be useful to create the most powerful person in the town, for example the local governor, landlord, or minister. If there are other characters who are seething with resentment, or hankering for change, they might also be worth exploring.

MOMENTS, CONNECTIONS, AND SITUATIONS

When you are creating your town, particular moments that might occur, or situations that the player characters might find themselves in could jump into your head. Write these down as you think of them. You may find these useful ideas to draw on during play. Don't go out of your way to generate these however. Your town should be painted with a broad brush stroke, and leave room for currents to operate.

If you see any connections between the ideas you have generated for your town, and those of any other current or non-player characters, jot those relationships down, and let them inform the concerns of your town's inhabitants.

ASK QUESTIONS

Just as your currents have questions and mysteries, so will your towns. Write burning and interesting questions down to answer during play.

These may connect to the player characters, or revolve around the town's future.

(OPTIONAL) CREATE CUSTOM MOVES

You may wish to create custom moves for your town, to create unique experiences when interacting with or visiting particular groups, people or locations. These are created in the same manner explained in the currents section above.

TOWN NAME: Dunmire

CONFLICT: Exploitation of Nature vs Crime

Description of conflict:

It's time to face the truth. The small time fishing going on in this back water town can't feed everyone forever. Barely feeds everyone now. That's why we have to turn to other methods if we want to keep food on the table. I'd do anything before I'd see my children stare at an empty plate.

INDUSTRY: (Choose 1 to 3) Farming, Fishing, Whaling, Sealing, Trading, Manufacturing (textiles or other), Mining.

GEOGRAPHY: Island – Distant, Island - Close, Coastal, Inland.

SIZE: Small (<500 people), Medium (<2000 people), Large (<5000 people).

GROUP 1: The Trawlers

Desires:

- Get the best this place has to offer then move on
- Quell resistance with money

Power:

- Backed by authority figures

What do they want from the players?

- Seek to use the player characters to keep themselves safe from trouble
- Focus attention on the player characters while they continue business as usual

Key NPCs: Leah Worthing

- Young, pleasant, wealthy and cares little for anyone in Dunmire.
- Desires to send the players on a task that can never be completed, to avoid paying them
- Aims to avoid them as much as possible once the task has been set

GROUP 2: The Smugglers

Desires:

- Get meddling authorities out of the way, or make 'em sweet
- Make sure the local population are the fall guys if anything goes wrong

Power:

- Powerful in their own way

What do they want from the players?

- Seek to use the players characters for their dirty work
- Cast them into disrepute to throw off heat
- Desires to manoeuvre the players so they will attract as much attention as possible, to take heat off smugglers

Key NPCs: Samantha Tearly

- Former soldier, ejected from the army when they found she was a woman. Wears her scars with pride.
- Does most of the heavy lifting in the smuggling ring. Has nothing but contempt for authority.
- Loathes Leah Worthing & has little sympathy for the fisherfolk.

GROUP 3: The Fisherfolk

Desires:

- Preserve the old ways
- Keep the balance, and preserve waters for the future
- Do whatever it takes to keep food on their table.

Power:

- Powerless. But dangerous if they band together.

What do they want from the players?

- Test the players' understanding of the old ways, and of nature
- Wreak a desperate vengeance upon them, as with all outsiders who continue the dangerous path of overfishing

Key NPCs: Shamus O'Larry

- Weathered old man. His slightest movements have the weight of authority with locals.
- Been in this town a long time.
- Aims to increase the conflict between the smugglers and the trawlers in the hope both will self-destruct. Will call on the Beyond for assistance.

TOWN NAME:

Dunmire

QUESTIONS / NOTES

- What is the true cost of the trawling? What vengeance will it wreak?
- Will the smugglers and the trawlers work together, or tear each other down?
- When fish flood the local market, how will the fisherfolk react?
- What forces will Shamus call on when the fisherfolk become desperate? What will be the price?

Important NPCs: Henry Worthing

- Father of Leah Worthing.
- Fairly well off

Important NPCs: Collin Millar.

A sour faced nineteen year old taking care of 5 younger siblings. Thinks Samantha is weak and believes the Smugglers should demand a cut from the trawlers

CUSTOM MOVES

When you look for work or "business" connections on the shady side of the docks, roll. Add +1 if a local has agreed to help.

On a success: find the kind of person you're looking for.

On a 10+: Choose 3.

On a 7+: Choose 2.

- The job pays well
- The job won't turn someone powerful against you
- The job won't require you to exploit those with little
- The job won't expose you to rebuke or humiliation

On a miss: you find a con artist, the law, or someone from a past you wish to forget

Important NPCs:

Important NPCs:

Thirteen CONFLICTS

A CONFLICT IS AN IDEOLOGICAL BATTLE BETWEEN forces, which has very real consequences. It is the struggle between two courses of action that can divide families, towns, and even an entire nation.

At the core of every conflict is a hard decision. Should we take the landlord's coin for a week of hard labour under the watchful foreman, or should we keep our independence and starve? Should we help others in desperation, or shut them out to protect ourselves? Should I show who I really am, and risk my family's ostracization by the town, or should I hide my true self to save them?

For those who live in the world of *Alas*, there are no easy answers. That is why conflicts sit at the core of any towns and currents you create.

CONFLICTS

When two ideologies or paths of action are in conflict, such as Crime vs. Starvation, this means the two sides are mutually exclusive, and pitted against each other. If we wish to put food on the table, we must turn to crime. If we don't wish to turn to crime, we can't put food on the table.

This chapter outlines the key thematic conflicts that underpin *Alas*, and contains examples of these conflicts that could be triggered in your game. The chapter then goes on to explain how to create conflicts of your own.

TRIGGERS

Every conflict has a trigger. A trigger is an event, need, or problem that causes the conflict to escalate, and take centre stage. It's what makes people take action rather than simply dwell on their problems.

For the conflict Crime vs. Starvation, the trigger could be a ruined harvest, causing a scarcity of wheat, which makes rent, tithes, and the cost of food almost impossible to pay without going outside of the law.

USING CONFLICTS IN YOUR GAME

Within any town or current, there are likely to be groups which sit happily on either side of the divide. The Smugglers in the earlier example have no regrets in turning to crime to make money. The Fisherfolk would rather starve than take paid work on one of the hated trawlers. These groups will be pitted against each other, and it's not going to be pretty. They embody the external part of the conflict.

However, there will inevitably be those who are torn between the two worlds. Harry wants work badly, but could not bear to see his father's face if he takes up with the trawlers. These characters are important too. They embody the internal part of the conflict. The player characters might have their reasons to side with an existing group, or they too may be internally conflicted.

KEY THEMATIC CONFLICTS

There are certain thematic conflicts that are key to the historical setting and period of *Alas*. These conflicts stand out from the source material as central concerns facing those in the rural British Isles in the 19th century. How you choose to interpret these conflicts is up to you. You will find many of these themes connect strongly to the folklore and history mentioned elsewhere in this book.

A town or a current could have at its heart any one of the conflicts below. You can also use the conflict creation rules on page 113 to combine these conflicts with new ones, and create a new angle on a central theme. If you choose a conflict from the list below, you may either use the listed triggers or create your own.

THEME: SUBSISTENCE

When you are starving, desperate, and destitute, how far will you go to put food on your family's table? What will you hurt, steal or sacrifice? What will you treasure, protect, and preserve?

CONFLICTS:

- ☒ Crime vs. Starvation
- ☒ Violence vs. Starvation
- ☒ Exploitation of Nature vs. Starvation
- ☒ Exploitation of Nature vs. Crime

TRIGGER IDEAS:

- ☒ A scarcity pushes needs to the extreme
- ☒ A new, destructive way is found to harvest the bounties of nature
- ☒ An easy target is revealed
- ☒ The strongest take, and give to whom they choose
- ☒ A chance arrives to make quick gains, but at a cost

THEME: POWER

There are those that make the rules and those who follow them. What sacrifices will you make to free yourself from the yoke of another? Or are you better off giving in and taking what you can from the system?

CONFLICTS:

- ✘ Violence vs. Oppression
- ✘ Work vs. Independence
- ✘ Vengeance vs. Acceptance

TRIGGER IDEAS:

- ✘ Those in charge change their agenda or outlook
- ✘ Those in charge ask something simple that offends our ways
- ✘ Those in charge want to take from us something precious
- ✘ Those in charge offer us what we need most, at a cost
- ✘ Our violence attracts attention and reprisals
- ✘ We need the labour of others to survive

THEME: THREAT OF THE UNKNOWN

What you do not know and do not understand could take everything away from you. Family and tradition has made you strong. How much should you open yourself to people and things that are different, and what will you do when you need them to survive?

CONFLICTS:

- ✘ The Needs of Man vs. The Needs of Nature
- ✘ The Needs of Man vs. The Needs of the Beyond
- ✘ Discrimination vs. Vulnerability
- ✘ Self-Protection vs. Tolerance

TRIGGER IDEAS:

- ✘ The unfamiliar threatens change
- ✘ The unfamiliar we rely on stops giving us what we need
- ✘ The unfamiliar offers a bargain we do not understand
- ✘ A group we cannot tell apart brings us sometimes violence, sometimes hope
- ✘ A group reviles what we cherish, or cherishes what we revile
- ✘ We need the help of those we do not know to survive

THEME: INDIVIDUALITY

There is a way things are, a way they have always been. A web of relationships, obligations, protection and affection. But you want something different, or perhaps you are something different. The true desires of your heart would break those of everyone that surrounds you.

CONFLICTS:

- ⚔ Family vs. Desires
- ⚔ Social Order vs. Desires
- ⚔ Social Norms vs. Identity

TRIGGER IDEAS:

- ⚔ Our love is forbidden, or will cause destruction
- ⚔ Our true selves are forbidden, or will cause destruction
- ⚔ We will sacrifice everything to avenge what was done to us
- ⚔ We will sacrifice everything to make them change
- ⚔ Those we love need us, but we need something else
- ⚔ To get something precious, we must fit in

CREATING CONFLICTS

As you develop towns and currents for use in this game, you may also want to create your own conflicts. To create a conflict, you must create or pick two forces, and place them in opposition. You'll find a table to choose from on page 116. Once you have created your conflict, think of triggers that will bring it to life within your game.

When you create a conflict, you'll need to make sure it is balanced. We explain how to balance conflicts in the section below.

EXAMPLE:

SAFETY vs. JUSTICE

Possible triggers:

- We were wronged, and now we seek revenge. But if we do, those we love will be put at risk of reprisal.
- We were wronged, and seek the recompense that is owed to us by the law. But to get it, our family must make a dangerous journey.

CREATING BALANCED CONFLICTS

One of the key functions of conflicts in *Alas* is to force player characters to make difficult choices. To produce interesting choices and tough decisions, you will need to create conflicts that are balanced.

A **CONFLICT** is balanced when it is between two forces or concepts that are equally desirable, or undesirable. A desirable force is good for those who benefit from it, such as love and protection. By contrast, an undesirable force is bad for those who endure it, such as oppression or starvation.

Some concepts will always have a clear positive or negative connotation, for example, hope and oppression. Others, however, will depend on how you choose to represent them within the game. These include nature, tradition, faith, and industrial progress. When you are using a force like this, you will need to decide whether it is desirable or undesirable for those who are affected by it. This is so you can balance it with another desirable, or undesirable force, and make sure there is no obvious “good” or “bad” side for the characters to choose.

EXAMPLES

- ✂ Two desirable forces: Safety vs. Justice
- ✂ Two undesirable forces: Violence vs. Oppression

AMBIGUOUS CONFLICTS

If you can't decide whether a concept is desirable or undesirable, it's probably masking the true conflict you are seeking to explore. In this case ask:

- ✂ What is good about this?
- ✂ What good thing does this prevent?

The answer to these two questions is your conflict.

EXAMPLE – TRADITION

- ✂ What is good about **TRADITION**? It preserves our **CULTURE**.
- ✂ What good thing does **TRADITION** prevent? It prevents us thinking of new ideas and **INNOVATING**.

So, the true conflict is **CULTURE vs. INNOVATION**.

COMPLEX OR MULTI-FACETED CONFLICTS

If you would strongly like to explore a desirable force against an undesirable one, or you would like to create a more complex and thematic conflict, you can combine two conflicts into a single clash. This allows you to balance conflicts that were previously unbalanced or create further depth.

FOR EXAMPLE: To explore Honour vs. Oppression (positive vs. negative), and Love vs. Vengeance (positive vs. negative), combine the two together so that a desirable and an undesirable force sits on either side of the conflict. This would create the conflict Honour & Vengeance vs. Love & Oppression, or Honour & Oppression vs. Love & Vengeance.

You can combine balanced or unbalanced conflicts, as long as the final conflict created is ultimately a balanced one.

When you combine conflicts, you will be making choices about which combination of forces is most interesting to explore. For example, when combining Hope vs. Safety with Change vs. Tradition, you could create either Hope & Change vs. Safety & Tradition, or Safety & Change vs. Hope & Tradition. The first one is somewhat stereotypical, and does not add much more than the conflicts in isolation. The second creates some very interesting narrative possibilities.



CONFLICT TABLES

If you want to create an original conflict and are looking for ideas, you can use the lists below for inspiration. They are loosely grouped according to whether they are generally considered desirable or undesirable forces.

DESIRABLE	UNDESIRABLE	OTHER
safety	crime	nature
subsistence	exploitation of nature	the beyond
culture	disrespect for traditions	progress
peace	disrespect for beliefs	faith
renewal	vengeance	obedience
respecting the past	revenge	family
respecting nature	oppression	work
innovation	discrimination	community
justice	the social order	industry
honour	violence	law & order
mercy	vulnerability	tradition
tolerance	weakness	
open-mindedness	decay	
civil rights	starvation	
equality	poverty	
love		
hope		
plenty		
dreams & aspirations		
self-fulfillment		

Fourteen FOLKLORE

“Every Island has its own tale.”

THIS CHAPTER FORMS A COMPENDIUM OF tales, myths, and legends that may come to life in your game of *Alas for the Awful Sea*. The content of this chapter is inspired by the folklore of the UK in general, and the Scottish Hebrides in particular. It is divided into three sections, to reflect three major themes that extend across this folklore.

In this chapter, you will also find some guidance on how to use folklore in *Alas*, as well as specific GM suggestions for the folk and fantastical that can be used to add complications to the story, or to make things worse when a roll fails.

USING MYTH, FOLKLORE, AND FANTASY IN THE WORLD OF ALAS

You'll remember that *Alas for the Awful Sea* exists to tell grim stories about the complexities of the human heart. It is about why people hate, and what they fear. It is about desperation and the havoc it wreaks.

The mythical and mystical in *Alas* works best when it reflects and intensifies these core ideas. Folklore has the power to highlight and heighten the struggles between characters, towns, and the environment. Using fantasy for this purpose will add interest, intrigue, and emotion to your players' experiences.

The key to using folklore in this way is to view superstition and the supernatural through the lens of the conflicts you have chosen as the basis for your currents and towns. For example, if you've chosen the conflict Discrimination vs. Vulnerability, your game might include refugee kelpies disguised in human form. On one hand, they're in need of help. On the other hand, they are dangerous, and their true intentions are unknown.

This chapter also contains GM suggestions which provide ideas for how the fantastical could complicate your game and raise the stakes in ways more interesting than a straightforward violent conflict.

BY DESIGN ALAS IS A "LOW FANTASY" SETTING ———

It is up to you and your players to determine how fantastical elements will be used in your game of *Alas for the Awful Sea*. By design, *Alas* is a low fantasy setting. It focuses on relationships, power struggles, and poverty more than exploration or adventure. Fantasy in *Alas* tends to simmer below the surface, emerging only in mysterious ways or climactic moments. The focus is on how the fantastical affects the mundane, rather than on the players' interactions with it.

However, if you and your players decide you would like to, you can ramp up the prevalence of fantastical creatures and events in your game. There's nothing wrong with doing so, just make sure you keep the game's core focus in mind.

If you're not sure which path to take, opt for a low fantasy setting. You can always introduce more fantastical elements as the game progresses.

GM SUGGESTIONS FOR FOLKLORE

In our folktale research, we found that folk and fantastical creatures acted in certain ways, and performed certain narrative functions, regardless of their exact species.

Below are some suggestions that will help you use folktale elements to create narrative complications, or to make things worse when a roll fails. They originate from the four main roles fantastical creatures play in traditional stories: the threat, the fortune teller, the judge or the scapegoat.

THE THREAT

- ☞ Steal what is most valuable.
- ☞ Capture loved things, and hold them for bargain.
- ☞ Lure or delight into a trap.
- ☞ Instil strange compulsions or longings.

THE FORTUNE TELLER

- ☞ Foretell a death or horrific event.
- ☞ Reveal hidden truths or secrets about the present or future.
- ☞ Give a seemingly useless gift, with hidden power.
- ☞ Create magical connections and bind the fate of things together.
- ☞ Appear mysteriously to provide what a character wants most, but demand a high price later.

THE JUDGE

- ☞ Appear in a hidden form, then reveal their true nature at the most unexpected moment.
- ☞ Demand observance or tribute.
- ☞ Test a character's hospitality, honour, or industriousness and dole out rewards or horrors.
- ☞ Wreak vengeance for a character's lack of observance or exploitation of nature.
- ☞ Seek a player character's help or aid, despite the creature's fear, hatred, or condescension of them, or humans in general.

THE SCAPEGOAT

The fantastical creature is the scapegoat or convenient cover for one of the following:

- ☞ A hidden smuggling ring.
- ☞ An illegitimate pregnancy and a missing child.
- ☞ A family breakup and domestic violence (see *they always leave* on page 151).
- ☞ A murder, for passion or power.

THE NATURAL WORLD

The wind, the waves, the rains and the fields. Everything we need, nature cusps in her hands, leaving us at her whim. Some days are peace, clear skies and fish bouncing from the blue clear waters. Others, it's like Mother Nature taps her staff and all the world around us explodes in tumult.

VICTORIA'S TALE

"Have you ever seen a whirlpool, so big, so strong, and so mighty, that even a two masted sloop couldn't sail her way out of it? Of course not. Few there are, that have seen such a thing and survived. But I have. Let me tell you.

It was a calm day at sea. Or so we thought. Then it was from nowhere, she appeared. A strange current, pulling us off course. All of a sudden, the water was spinning, faster, stronger, more powerful than I would have ever thought it could be. We were caught in a whirlpool, aye, one that came as if from nowhere. And slowly, we were being pulled down to sink in its belly.

Well, we tried cutting across to sail out of it. Big and swift we were, with the wind behind us, it should have been an easy thing. But something kept us glued to the path, pulling us down, down. The crew were near a panic, when all of a sudden the cabin boy says – and I near thought him mad for it – "do you see something below the waves? It looks like arms! Ghostly arms." And I looked me down, and it did too, rightly. And from the depth it was, sudden like, I seemed to hear the voice of a woman, calling out. It was then I remembered a story I'd heard. One I had dismissed as mere fancy.

Was not too long ago now, a woman named Victoria fell in love with a handsome young fellow from a nearby village. The two were always seen



together, and before long, they had thoughts of marriage. But before the knot could be tied, the young man had to leave. Work on a ship he found, and a better offer scarce was likely.

Well of course he promised to stay faithful, to return quick as he could, that the two may marry. And Victoria, she gave this man a ring. Of the whitest silver it was, like the colour of white water in the crashing tides. A token, she said, of their faithfulness, that he must wear until their marriage.

So the young man left for sea. And every day, it was a sight queer, Victoria stood on the sea shore, watching. They say she was watching for her lover's ship, waiting for it to return. Such a love-struck lass never there was before or since.

One day, Victoria received a letter from her sailor. His ship would soon be passing close by. "Take a boat", read the letter, "to the isle where we spent our time in love together. By the rock we used to sit, there shall we meet."

On the day arranged, the weather was ill. A sick stormy blackness crept over the sky. But despite such an omen, Victoria could not resist the call of her lover. And so she rowed her small boat to the island as fast as she could, and ran to the rock where their happy days had been spent. But when she arrived, he was not there. Instead, a silver ring, white and glinting in the light that seeped through the storm clouds. And a note. "Take back your ring. I am yours no more."

And as the storm began to rage, and the wind whipped around her, so too raged her heart. She stood at the isle's cliffs, and with a mighty roar, flung the ring from their top into the sea. But the moment the ring left her fingers, she regretted her actions. She would not let her lover go so easily. She was not so simply cast off as a ring. Without a thought, she jumped from the cliff, into the sea. As she hit the deep water, her fingers curled once more around the ring, as she sank deep, deep into the ocean. And even as the light of the surface slipped away from her, her only thought was to find the man who had betrayed her, and make him wear her ring once again.

Aye, there are many versions of the story. Some say it was Victoria gone to sea, the young man left behind to pine. Others that he gave the ring to another, and Victoria recognized it upon their finger, and tore it clean off. One thing all who have heard it know. When you find yourself caught in a whirlpool that no

fine sailing can release you from, that's nothing but Victoria, pulling you down to the depths in the search of her unfaithful lover. Aye, and when the ghostly arms come to embrace you, few are the ships that can escape.

So how did I come to survive? Well, as I looked upon the white and clutching arms, and heard the wail from the water, I thought to myself, "how came Victoria to search here?" And I remembered one more part of the tale. That it is unfaithful lovers who draw Victoria to a ship. Aye, a vessel with an unfaithful lover pulls the girl, frantic at the thought it might then be her own. And once she finds the unfaithful, and wraps herself around them in the inky depths of the ocean, well, she'll leave the rest of us be.

On our ship, there were a man, Hallard by name. We knew him to be married – yet at every stop we made, he had another in his bed. Hallard was on deck, staring at the sea, wide eyed and terrified. And I thought, will this Victoria make a murderer of me? Or will I be going down to the icy depths? But as it was, neither was the choice I made. For the ship jerked and tilted in the spinning water, and the boom swung round and knocked Hallard overboard. And soon as it was done, the current stopped. And the ship stilled and rocked in the waves, peaceful as a babe rocking in a cradle. That was the last I seen of Victoria. And by the Lord, I hope never to see her again."

GM NOTES

As sailors and fishermen sail through strong tides, a whirlpool can suddenly develop, as if out of nowhere – luring small crafts, or even large vessels into its grasp, and even to their doom. This tale explains the reason why whirlpools appear, and suck men down into the watery depths of the sea.

A crew may encounter Victoria as they sail through open water. If they do, feel free to handle the encounter as you think best. Use the custom moves below to aid and guide you. As with any move, these are initiated by character actions, and it is the players, not the GM, that roll to resolve them.

You may also choose to change the story in any way you like to suit your game. For example, you may wish to switch the gender of Victoria, or her lover, or to have the story take place at a particular isle the characters know well. You may even decide to have the characters meet Victoria's former lover, then encounter her some time later. An alternative to this is changing the natural phenomena that Victoria embodies – she could be an electric storm, a whirlwind, or something else entirely.

As GM, you will make the choice as to how “otherworldly” Victoria is. She may just be a large whirlpool that behaves in strange way. Or, as in the story above, the crew may see her white and writhing arms, and hear her voice. You may choose to take this even further, having her ghostly form appear from the water, and even communicate with the crew. The choice is up to you, and how much of the supernatural you would like to include your game.

CUSTOM MOVES FOR VICTORIA'S TALE

When you seek to appease Victoria, **ROLL + BEAUTY**:

ON A SUCCESS, she hears your words.

ON A 10+: Choose 2

ON A 7-9: Choose 1

- ✦ She doesn't demand the full sacrifice.
- ✦ She doesn't harm the ship.
- ✦ She doesn't leave you lost in strange lands.

ON A MISS: She hungers for more. The GM makes things worse.

When you sacrifice someone unfaithful:

You may appease Victoria as if you have rolled a 10+, and a full sacrifice has already been demanded and paid.

When you try to overcome Victoria with force, **ROLL + BRAWN**:

ON A 10+: Choose 3

ON A 7-9: Choose 2

- ✦ You expose a vulnerability.
- ✦ You discover her target.
- ✦ She lashes out, exhausting her energy.
- ✦ She releases something she had swallowed, unharmed.

ON A MISS: She redoubles her effort. Force is no longer an option.

NOTES ON THE MOVES

Victoria always has one target she perceives as unfaithful, and is intent on swallowing. If she consumes that person, the whirlpool disappears. A player may discover who this target is by choosing the “you discover her target” option, if they try to overcome Victoria with force. It may also be revealed another way, for example by **READING A SITUATION**.

If Victoria releases something she had swallowed, unharmed, this could be an object or a person.

WIND, WAVES, AND WATERS

A sailor once told me, grumble not too loud of the winds lest they hear your complaining. Don't whistle their way either, lest they think you're calling them, or trying to chase them off. Sensitive are the winds, temperamental too, and vengeful as anything. Just like people. If they're angry at you they'll blow a good gale your way and let it out. But if they decide to give you the silent treatment, that's the worst. You'll find yourself becalmed and stuck at sea.

A good wind, a wind of fortune, brings luck, speed, and safety. An ill wind blows nobody any good, on the ocean or on land. If the wind blows too ill best not to land at all, but return home from where you came. Should you suspect an unnatural storm is brewing, anoint yourselves with holy water. At worst you go down to Neptune's gut anointed with God's sacrament.

Some days you need a well fated wind more than others. On a certain island there is a wind chipped chapel to St Columba. In it, is a stone turned unnatural blue. Wash the stone, and a good wind is sent at once. If the saint does not grant you this then either you have done unspeakable wrong, or the heavens have you marked for an ill fate indeed.

If a man should drown at sea, do not retrieve his body. It is the rightful property of the ocean, and the ocean does not abide thieves well.

When you try to control, capture or conjure a wind, **ROLL + BRAINS**:

ON A 10+: Choose 3

ON A 7-9: Choose 2

- ☞ It carries you quicker than expected.
- ☞ It takes you by the path of safety and plenty.
- ☞ It does not demand a boon, sacrifice or ritual, or hold a grudge for being so used.
- ☞ It does not detour you through where its whims desire.

ON A MISS: The wind blows with a rotting sick stench, blows you into the mouth of strife, or does not blow at all.

THE WEATHER

From the first of winter to the first of summer, that is the Cailleach's domain. Never a more foul tempered old crone was known. She has no compunctions drowning the world beneath a sea of ice and leaving us to suffer. It is said that when her walking staff hits the ground it freezes in a sheen of ice in but a single instant.

As her reign comes to an end she turns even more sour. Throws a right tantrum, gale after gale, storm after her storm, desperate to hold on for even one more day. But she never wins.

Even in summer we are not rid of her. On those unlucky enough to attract her ire she brings unending storms. They call her Old Wife of Thunder then, Hag of the Storm, and she does it so well you'd scarce remember she did anything else. If lightning would strike your ship, you know the Cailleach has a personal gripe with you and yours.

PLANTS AND THEIR MEANINGS

Since the time of our ancient ancestors we've known that plants have uses. The young laugh at our perseverance with the old ways. But when they need the aid of a charm, or protection from the lurking evils, they believe in the power of nature sure enough.

There is a herb, flower, or tree bark for almost any charm or ward you could imagine. Ask the old, they will remember the way.

Of all the plants that surround us, there are few more powerful than Rowan and Hawthorne. There are also few more opposite in nature. Rowan protects us against the dark forces. Its power stems from its berries, red being the best colour for fighting evil. We also use Rowan when we need to divine the truth. Hawthorne, on the other hand, is best shunned, and never to be invited inside the house. For when it enters, it brings with it a clinging kind of ill fortune, which affixes itself to one inside.

Every grandmother with a lovesick youngling draws upon the power of Mothen, the bog violet. The old lady makes a ring of it, and places it within the mouth of the youngster, saying such old words as have been said for generations. After that, the first person to taste the youngling's kiss shall find themselves enthralled completely. To those lovestruck by such an end, the plant Mothen shall always offer protection.

LONGING, LOSS AND THE FUTURE

Today is good. Today is sunshine, the smell of fresh fish, the touch of warm arms against flesh. Wish such joys for all your days. Things can only change for the worse.

THE ISLE OF LOST THINGS

"You've heard the rumours of me I suppose? That I disappeared for ten long years and then returned, not a day older than when I left... Well, I do not wish to leave you with delusions, so I will tell you. Those rumours are nothing but true.

I lost my mother to the sea when I was but twelve. My mother was a naturalist, foremost in her field. My father, a ship's surgeon. We were journeying to an

uncharted isle close to the Horn, when the weather turned foul. My mother had sighted a rare bird, and planted her feet firmly on deck despite the rain. I stood beside her, clutching the railing and heaving my guts into the water. A wave rose up as the ship rocked, and took her from me before my eyes. In a single second she was over the rails and into the ocean. That was the last I ever saw of her. Until this day I have dreams of her under the water, struggling as she was dragged down by her cloak into the soggy depths.

Lord knows why I did it, but not too many years hence I became a ship's surgeon myself. An amateur naturalist, I quickly became restless, moving from vessel to vessel in a quest to go further, explore more. I was working aboard a merchant vessel, when we happened to stop at a port in my hometown. There I came into possession of a most precious item. My mother's journals, she had sent back to our home for safe keeping. As I read through them I began to grow sick to the stomach.

When I boarded the ship the next day, I found myself reeling with emotion. Contemplating my feelings, I barely noticed that strange currents had forced our ship to change course.

Almost a full day of sailing later there was word from the crow's nest. We had drawn in sight of an island. Well, we had expected nothing but open sea for some days hence. Nevertheless we decided to stop in case there was good trading to be had. Three of us went ashore in the skiff as a fine mist descended over the isle. Inland, the mist became too dense for us to continue, and we camped the night under a thick and unnatural fog.

When I awoke in the morning, I was plain by myself. I looked for signs as to the movements of the others, but could find nothing. Traces of the stale fog remained in the air, beginning slowly to thin with the morning. I began to grow hungry, and so I ventured further, cautiously, into the isle. I recall that morning thinking how quickly I would find my crew members, and return then to our ship. How wrong I was. It was to be ten days before I returned to the isle's shore. Outside the isle's confines, these ten days were none other than ten long years."

GM NOTES

When things are dropped, thrown, or abandoned into the sea, they do not simply disappear. Instead, they are collected by the Keeper of Lost Things,

who dwells at the bottom of the ocean. Of all that is lost, that which is most valuable is taken by the Keeper to the Isle of Lost Things. Its value is not known by its worth in gold or jewels, for those that dwell on the sea floor care little for such things. Its value is judged by how much it is missed.

It is said that one who is searching or yearning for something lost at sea will be pulled towards the Isle of Lost Things. If they do not keep their longing in check, they may find themselves arrived there without any logical explanation. The water is not rough there, nor are the rocky outcrops hard to climb. But once arrived, a person risks being so lost in the past they forget their future. They may find themselves stuck on the isle, they themselves becoming something lost at sea that has been forgotten.

WANDERING THE ISLE

"Many and strange were the things I found on that isle. All cried out to me, but none would I take. For it was plain, even to a mere ship's surgeon such as myself, that this isle was not a regular work of nature, but a strange creation of a being I could not fathom."

There are many strange objects on the Isle of Lost Things that characters can encounter. You may wish to use those described below or invent your own. You can even include an object that ties in with current events in the narrative of your game.

THE HILLS OF MEMORY

"As I wandered through the island, I became aware of a strange and pungent smell that hung in the air all around me. It was an unpleasant smell, wood rot mixed with rust, compounded with the stench of the dried out salt, like a skiff left too long at sea without cleaning, then pulled up on the banks for overhaul."

"When my eyes came upon its source, I was astonished to see what lay ahead of me. Before me was what looked like small discoloured hills. But on closer inspection it was revealed to my eyes, these were not hills at all, but in fact, giant piles of keepsakes, heaped one atop another, coated with slime and kelp from the sea. Thousands of locketts, rusted rings and charms, rotting books and paintings, and endless sea-chewed letters. So much sentiment, love, and desire, as lost as the men and women who felt it."

The Hills of Memory are an expanse of sentimental gifts, subsequently lost at sea. The gifts are wet and slimy as if they have been recently removed from the water.

Characters may find themselves drawn to objects that are familiar to them or to those they have loved, such as a dead parent, long lost sibling, or past lover.

THE HARP

“Though its make was wondrous and its sound beautiful, the macabre topic of its incessant singing soon persuaded me to leave it behind.”

The harp is made from the breastbone of a man. It will allow others to play it. However, when it is set down, it plays and sings alone, with a melancholy voice. It sings only one song, a sorrowful tale of the cruel murder of the man whose breastbone it is fashioned from.

The song tells of a young man, engaged to a woman far above his station. The two were deeply in love. However, his brother was envious of the arrangement, and pushed him into the sea when the two were out fishing, claiming it was an accident of the weather. As was the custom in the area, the brother and the widow married, while the man watched in sadness from the bottom of the ocean. The song ends with a call for those listening to find the sinful brother, and bring him to justice.

The custom of marrying your brother’s widow is an unusual one, and can point the players to a particular town, if they are interested in pursuing this cause.

THE BROKEN SWORD

“Though I had no acquaintance with the dark eyed man who glared at me through the sword’s shattered steel, he felt but familiar. I shuddered as a thought crossed my mind without reason. Soon, he and I were to meet. Or was it meet again?”

The blade of this sword has been deliberately smashed in half. The wood of the sword’s hilt has largely rotted away, but both pieces of the blade glint pristinely in the light.

When its two parts are combined, those who touch the sword will see reflected in its gleaming surface their lifelong enemy. This is the greatest of their enemies – past, present or future. The viewer may know the person they see, or they may be unacquainted, their enmity to arise at a time still distant. The viewer can see their enemy engaged in whatever task they are currently undertaking. Parts of the scenery behind their enemy are also visible, which may give the viewer a clue as to where their nemesis is located.

THE CHILDREN OF THE ISLE

"Perhaps the strangest thing I found upon the isle was a young child. No more than eight they seemed to me, yet dressed curiously in the garb of those who lived two hundred years before."

From time to time on the isle, one will encounter a child whose parents have drowned at sea. These children were often swept onto the isle in the same storm that drowned their parents, carried across the water by their intense longing for their mother and father. Though the children say they have been on the island but one year at most, it is clear from their dress many are from times long gone. They do not realize it, but outside the isle hundreds of years have passed since their parents' death.

Most have found somewhere to live on the isle, many in distorted child sized structures from their era, erected through their imagination and the isle's desire to accommodate them.

The children go to visit their parents at the Cathedral (see below).

THE CATHEDRAL

"The child told me she often visited her parents upon the isle, and entreated me to join her, to which I agreed. I had thought they perhaps would know the best way to exit the isle, and return, as I had been unable to do, to the shoreline."

When we arrived at the place her parents lived however, I was astonished to see none other than my childhood home. There was no mistaking it. The blue rocking chair nodded gently in the wind, and the crooked chimney was alive with smoke. This could only, I thought, be some kind of witchcraft. To dangle in front of me that which I craved above all else, the peace and warmth of my youth. But the child bounded in without a single thought. My desires were too strong, and so I followed.

Inside, the house looked just as I remembered it. Warmth billowed from the fireplace, and the smell of thick and salty soup hung in the air. And at the desk, craned over her books. My mother. My heart leapt. Could she have been here all along, saved from the dreadful storm that swallowed her? Yet I knew, underneath my hope, this happening was an unnatural one.

My mother looked almost as surprised to see me as I her. Her face softened into a smile and she called my name, the name no one had called me since I was twelve years old. She opened her arms and ran towards me. But as we embraced and my arms wrapped around her, I felt a sickening truth in my heart. For her skin was wet and slimy like the sea. And as I drew close I smelt that same familiar smell of decay, rot and seawater. And I knew then that she was dead, and it was but my own longing that drew her body into animation.

When I had been met with this realization, my childhood home disappeared before my eyes, and I saw the place for what it really was. The building in which I dwelled was a vast cathedral, stained glass windows tinting the inside an unearthly red. And in the cathedral, an endless graveyard. Thousands and thousands of graves neatly lined along the building's floor as far as the eye could see."

The Cathedral is home to those who died at sea, but remain desperately longed for by others. Those who view the Cathedral without understanding its true nature see the home of the one they long for. Inside, they are met by the person they miss, and can converse with them as long as they want. They can leave and return also. But touch and smell may reveal that person is dead, drowned at sea. It is the longing of the visitor that causes their dead body to become animated with the life that person remembers.

When a person faces their loss, they can see the location for what it really is. A giant cathedral, filled with graves.



LEAVING THE ISLE

"Once I had beheld the shock of that sight, my mind realized the truth it had refused to admit. My mother lived in this world no longer. The comfort and warmth I craved was something I must create for myself. With this acknowledgement, I suddenly found myself overwhelmed with desire to leave the island. I left the Cathedral, and walked with purpose, my feet guiding me confidently though I knew not the way. Though I had wandered lost for ten days, in but two hours I was returned to the shore. Though I found her well damaged by the weather (and I could not understand how, in such a short time), the skiff we had rowed in was still there. And so, I rowed myself out to sea, and after two days was rescued by a passing sloop."

CUSTOM MOVE FOR THE ISLE OF LOST THINGS

When you look hard for what you're missing on the Isle of Lost Things, **ROLL**:

ON A SUCCESS: You find it.

ON A 7-9: Also choose 1:

- ☒ It's in desperate need of repair.
- ☒ It's not the way you remember.
- ☒ It now belongs to another.

ON A MISS: The GM makes things worse.

AUGURY

There are no accidents when life is routine. Chance or unexpected encounters are omens, if only we know how to read them. There is a saying for every sign, we must respect them.

Even our own bodies understand our fate. Our flesh may crawl, tingle, or cause us to cry out with pain to send us some kind of warning. We may find ourselves with strange appetites or drawn to unusual places. Our dreams will offer us glimpses of the truth if we can remember them.

Our grandfathers told the future by reading the marks on the shoulder blades of slaughtered animals. When a sheep or pig was killed the bone was boiled until all the meat was off it. When examined by those skilled it is said they

could tell of things that would happen, or whom the fates had picked for something significant. Such an art is rare today, and is the province of the old, few among the young would still believe it.

When you devote time and effort to finding the true meaning behind an omen or sign, **ROLL + BEYOND**:

ON A SUCCESS: You understand fragments of what is to come. The GM will answer the questions below with less than 5 words.

ON A 10+: Ask 2.

ON A 7-9: Ask 1.

- ✂ What circumstances will I find myself in?
- ✂ Who or what should I be afraid of?
- ✂ Who or what will aid or guide me?
- ✂ Who or what should I be on the lookout for?
- ✂ Who or what is not what it seems?

ON A MISS: Something bad is on its way. If only you knew what.

PORTENTS OF DEATH

We know death, he is of our ilk. A fisherman in the waters of sorrow and woe, fishing for the souls of the living. As enough time passes, he is sure to catch us all.

The soul of every human must leave their flesh on one day or another. Few come to the moment of their death without knowing it to be so. Portents of death and doom lie everywhere, not warnings but merely announcements of impending fate. From a wounded doe that stares at you with human eyes, to a red tint in the dawn that only you can see, the signs of destruction are there to all with the wisdom to see them for what they are.

THE WASHER WOMAN

Walking by the stream in the moonlight, you may see her. To some she is young, beautiful, dressed in green and embroidered finery. Others see her old and hunched, wrinkled skin and gnarled hands. She is busy – she washes the bloodstained linen of one who is soon to die. You may recognize it, if it comes

from a bed you know well. If you approach her right, she may tell you her purpose. Once you know whose linen she washes you have a choice. Offer your best bargain for her to abate. Or leave with the satisfied knowledge of your enemy's passing.

BANSHEE

At each of our funerals, you will find a keening woman. One whose wailing laments echo the sadness of death, and our grief for those passed. Well, there are keening women among the ghosts and spirits too. They know well of our deaths before they come to pass. And so they appear, lamenting, to mourn deaths before they happen. Pale, spectral women with long disheveled hair, mournful countenance, and unearthly wails so severe they can shatter glass.

When a banshee wails, many hear. But we do not always know who is destined to pass. Some families and clans swear to have a banshee of their very own that haunts the generations. They recognize it by sight, and when they hear its shrill laments they know it can only be one of their own blood who will soon turn deathly cold.

From time to time, a banshee may keen for a death prematurely. In this case, its wails are a warning against a path that would lead to no other end than destruction.

THE BLACK DOG

At the crossroads, we do not know which direction our life will take. Our paths can easily change without notice, and we can step over the narrow divide into the next life. At such a place it is no surprise to see the hulking figure of the Black Shuck, gleaming teeth and shaggy midnight fur, howling at the night.

The Black Shuck is the harbinger of death. He chases our souls into the afterlife. To those that do wrong, the Shuck hunts them into the ground until they can no longer run, he herds them into the gates of hell. The devil in such a likeness, the Shuck leaves the devil's fingerprints in his wake. Scorch marks that resemble scorched ground after a strike of lightning.

If you hear the howl of the Black Shuck, run for shelter. It barks three times only, with a great pause between each. Those that hear the third howl are overcome with terror.

If you find yourself near the beast, cover your eyes. Those who look upon the Shuck when its eyes glow a ghostly red will die within a year. If, however, its eyes are glowing green you are not the one it chases. Thank your lucky stars and disappear.

There was rumour of a Black Shuck that lurked the crossroads two hours from our village. For some time, many were scared to travel that way, and took the long road round to market. But, when a group of our young men came back up from Portree, they did not fear, and walked straight through the crossroads. There they found that there was no Black Shuck at all, but a group of smugglers who spread the rumour to keep the locals from use of the parts where they stored their goods.

THE DEAD

The dead are still with us. Some are at peace, their consciousness washing through the streams and rivers, trickling into the lakes, even as they float in heaven. Others exist in tumultuous anguish, prowling this earth for repentance or revenge.

Ghosts? Some believe in them. But the dead need not take such forms to talk to us. They come in dreams, showing us their demands. To dream of one who is dead is a sign they are not at rest, but require something of us. Then, they also talk to us in the trees, the winds, the sea itself. An angry storm, a river current, a tree bending in warning. The dead are speaking with the only mouths they have.

Where a life is ended by foul play, the body may remain undecayed until it is touched, a gift by the departed to the living to help find the murderer.

LONGING

TWIN SOULS

It is said that if two people are born in exactly the same second, so that their souls enter their bodies at exactly the same time, then the two souls will become linked.

When twin souls are linked in such a way, their fates become intertwined. If one suffers, then the other may feel unspeakably miserable for no reason. Or if one delights then the other may feel a rush of jubilation without cause. And, if one were to die, the other would surely pass away within days.

Most times, two twin souls live and pass without ever having known of each other. But sometimes, where one is to die an unjust or early death, the other, their own fate on the line, feels a strong and immediate compulsion. They are pulled, over land or seas, to the other. And when they come face to face with their twin soul, they know immediately they are connected, though they do not understand it.

Then, they must do what they can to save the life of the twin soul, or watch as both their days come to an end.

THE BIRD OF LONELINESS

To those that give in to loneliness there is a saying that the bird of loneliness comes to perch within their heart. I saw this once happen to my Auntie right after my Uncle died. The bird fed off the raw and tender flesh of her heart until it grew fearsome big, a ravenous albatross. After that, there was no more talking to my Auntie. She acted like a woman possessed, and muttered words with no sense at all.



HAPPENINGS UNNATURAL

The sea and the lakes surround us, the secret hills and valleys and glens. We cannot see into their depths and view the truth of them. But those creatures that lurk within them look aplenty upon our lives on land. They come out when they have need for us, whatever their reasons. They may prey upon us, trick us, eat us, bargain with us, or even love us in their own way. No matter their intention, it is wisdom to avoid such creatures. Though they may assume a human form or speak with words we can understand they remain beasts we cannot fathom.

THE SHIP

PRELUDE

In 1783, a merchant ship carrying over 200 slaves to the Americas disappeared without a trace.

In the years that followed, ships carrying slaves began disappearing around the Atlantic. Sometimes, the bodies of slavers were found adrift on jolly boats, gruesomely murdered. All those found had been branded with the mark of a slave trading company well known in the Atlantic - the very brand that had been used upon the slaves which disappeared.

1823, A CAPTAIN'S PRIVATE JOURNAL:

"Though the ship we sighted had been behaving strangely, none was more surprised than me to find there was no crew to be seen anywhere on its deck. Cautiously, I ordered the men to pull aside her. I was weary of a trap, such that pirates sometimes spring, but the strange ship had no cannons, and if she really was abandoned her salvage would make us a considerable fortune.

So it was I boarded with the first mate and two other men, counselling the others to keep close watch lest we should encounter danger. The moment my foot put down upon the deck, I felt a sense of unease. My mind could not help but hearken back to the dreams I had last night without explanation, dreams of a ship burning on the water, and men crying out in the midst of destruction. Yet I could see nothing on the ship to alarm me.

It became quickly clear to me this ship had been a trader, holding slaves. The instruments of such a disgusting cargo were plain before me, as irons and manacles lay on deck, and many more in the hold, which reeked with a stench worse than any I had beheld before.

The Captain's quarters however, were more decadent than those I had before seen, and put my own humble room to shame. Silver candlesticks adorned the room, and on the wall was an elaborately framed painting of a ship's captain delivering a cargo of slaves. Upon the dining table, on ornate silver plates, lay to my astonishment, a half-eaten meal. It was not rotting and maggot infested as one might expect, but looked as good as if the food had been cooked this morning.

My observations and disturbed feelings made me very unsure of what action to take regarding the ship. She was far too large for us to tow, and I did not have the appetite to sail her myself. After deliberation, I sent the crew back upon my ship. I walked into the Captain's quarters intent on taking all that was valuable within. In the end, I took only two pairs of silver candlesticks, being unwilling to disturb the meal or search the cabin further by myself."

GM NOTES

The Ship is a merchant vessel of 18th century make. Below her deck, a stark contrast exists between the dismal, reeking, hold where the slaves were kept, and the grandeur of the Captain's quarters.

The Ship is perfectly preserved, unchanged since 1783. Visible around the ship is half eaten food which has not yet begun to rot. Players will also find property marked with the crest of the Atlantic Trading Company.

The Captain's logs detail the ship's journey from Africa towards the Americas. The Captain notes that his cargo seemed more intent on freedom than usual. He was not worried on this point however, as his crew were armed and the slaves were not. The last page of the log is no entry at all, but merely a full page illustration of the Atlantic Trading Company crest.

The Ship has access to the dreams of any who board it, until time and distance cause its influence to fade. It uses these dreams to visually communicate its desires.



THE CURSE

“That night, I dreamed myself aboard that ship. The ship was engulfed in fire, and I was screaming out as it burned upon the water. As I myself was turned to ash I suddenly realised it was I who had started the fire, and architected my own fate.

In the morning, I found myself completely lacking in appetite, and took no food or drink. I also noticed a strange red mark had began to develop on my arm, but thought nothing of it. The other crew members who had boarded the ship with me described themselves afflicted with similar nightmares to my own. However in their dreams, though the ship burned to ashes, they were not themselves upon the deck to be engulfed in flame. Why I was the unlucky one in this fate I could not say.

It was but few days later that the red mark beneath my skin began to spread and take on a particular shape. It was the shape of the very symbol I had seen upon the Captain’s log. It often hurt during my strange dreams at night, and I woke from my nightmares screaming and clutching at the mark. Such signs assured me I was now a doomed man though I knew not in what form my destruction would come forth.”

Anyone who takes from the Ship, or otherwise profits from the actions of its former owners, will incur its wrath and become cursed.

The curse could have some or all of the following symptoms:

- ✘ A brand, which slowly develops under the skin, that mirrors the Atlantic Trading Company crest.
- ✘ Constant awareness of the Ship’s location at sea.
- ✘ Inability to tolerate ordinary food and drink. In its place, a tremendous craving for sea water.
- ✘ Any part of the body that is cut off will immediately harden into splintered wood.
- ✘ Endless nightmares and a pervasive feeling of doom or death.



THE VISIONS

“One night, I had a vision of myself turning the course of my ship, and steering it in a particular direction, to what end I cannot say. I awoke assuming it was but one of my accustomed nightmares, and took to deck to set the direction of sail for the day. However, when I attempted to announce a course other than what the dream directed, I felt at once a burning in the mark on my arm, so painful and severe, it caused me to writhe onto the ground in pain and pass out. When I awoke, I assured my crew of my good health, and reluctantly directed the helmsman to take the course I had envisioned in my sleep. My crew were much surprised, but the pain did not return.

As we sailed, I then spent some time in contemplation about this new situation I found myself to be in. The pain in my arm was by far too severe to resist the compulsions of my dreams. I found myself a kind of slave, to what devilish force I could not fathom.”

Those who are afflicted with the Ship’s curse may receive visions or dreams, in which they see themselves executing the will of the Ship. If they act contrary to these visions, their brand heats up with intense and unbearable burning pain.

More than anything, the Ship desires its own destruction, an end to its wretched existence and sentience. However, that is not its only intention. It also aims to take revenge on slave traders and their ilk, as well as any who would profit from their actions, and free any slaves in captivity. It may also have other, more furtive desires.

OVERCOMING THE CURSE ---

“It was then that an idea came to me. The risk of the idea was substantial, but if it were to work it would prove the only solution to my dilemma. I found the ship’s surgeon and came to him with a proposition that confused him greatly. However, I offered him a substantial sum, so he performed the service I sought.

A few hours later I awoke without an arm, and the sickest of feelings in my gut. Tonight was the night shown me in my dream to burn the slaver’s ship. Without the brand to blind me with pain, would the demon ship retain its control over me? I waited as the sun set, prepared for the worst. As the night wore on, I fell into a feverish sweat as the pain from the stump in my arm

consumed my body. But it was a natural pain nevertheless, baring no semblance to the burning sensation of the brand. At last, exhausted, I collapsed into a deep and fitful sleep.

When in the morning I awoke, I ordered our ship to change course to the location I knew the demon ship to be at sail. But a few days later, we saw her. Those sickening sails I had seen but every night in my nightmares. As we grew closer I began to shudder and shake involuntarily, and my nerves almost gave out. Nevertheless, that night, alone, I took a skiff and rowed (with some difficulty due to my single arm), the short distance to her fearful hull. Therein I boarded, taking with me the silver candle sticks I had pillaged. Inside the Captain's quarters everything was the same as that very day I had entered. That same half eaten meal sat upon the table. How unnatural it seemed to me now, that had seemed merely as an abandoned meal on my first visit. I placed the candlesticks back as I had left them, and went back on deck.

As I stood a compulsion came over me. Perhaps this was the moment. I should douse the deck in oil and set it and myself alight, to burn – as in the dream I had seen a hundred times inside my mind, so faithfully repeated as to seem my destiny. I took a barrel of oil from the store, and poured it across the deck's surface. Thereupon I sat and smoked my pipe, and sipped upon seawater. I was in contemplation for some time, drenched in seal oil, finding myself strangely unwilling to leave. Finally, I lit a match, ready to do the deed. As I lit it however, the difficulty of lighting with one arm caused me to drop the thing, and it fell harmlessly into the sea water I had been drinking. Seeing this was my last match, I returned to the skiff, and after a laborious journey, climbed back upon my own ship and went to sleep.”

Many ways may exist to overcome the Ship's curse. Cursed players are likely to think of innovative ideas during play. However, here are some possibilities:

- ☞ Burning or otherwise destroying the Ship.
- ☞ Physically removing the brand, as in the story above.
- ☞ Returning any stolen items to the ship.
- ☞ Buying their freedom, by striking a bargain with the Ship in the character's dreams, to do, find, or retrieve something in order to secure release.
- ☞ The curse does not go away but remains permanently, becoming part of that character's life (see the custom moves section).

CUSTOM MOVES

When you aim to discover the Ship's secrets, or channel its power for your own uses approach it in your dreams. Prepare for a restless night and **ROLL + BEYOND**:

ON A SUCCESS: Choose 1.

ON A 10+: The outcome will have an obvious use, or grant you future power.

- ☞ Slip into the Ship's psyche unnoticed and discover something important.
- ☞ Say what you want and negotiate a bargain.
- ☞ Open yourself up to the Ship's influence and become cursed in return for a share of its power. Take a move from the creature descriptor for as long as you remain cursed.

ON A MISS: It finds you, and enters your psyche instead.

NOTE: If you choose to become cursed and take the creature move “others like me”, you will call on the ship for aid.

When you are resolved to do the Ship's bidding, it will help you in mysterious ways.

Take +1 to all rolls required to pursue the Ship's goals.
Take -1 to all rolls made when sidetracked with a distraction.
If you are cursed, suffer 1 harm if you go too long without acting in pursuit.

If you decide to weather the curse permanently, take the creature descriptor, fill it out, and use it in addition to your original descriptor. Then, reduce your brains, brawn, balance, or beauty by 1, to show the harsh affect the curse has had on you. Feel free to elaborate on the symptoms of the curse, with GM consent – from this point onwards it's under your narrative control.

THINGS FROM THE WATER

EACH UISGE (PRONOUNCED ACH- OUSHKA)

One time, we returned to a loch where I had left a few odd sheep to graze. Instead of the sheep however, we saw nothing but a pile of the beast's entrails strewn by the lake's banks. Just then, a creature emerged from the water. At first, it appeared a prize horse, with a coat of spotless white. As it stepped out of the loch however, I could see that its feet were not hooves, but webbed talons. And I knew that this must be the Each Uisge, the deadly water horse, that had made short work of my sheep for an early dinner.

I had known the Each Uisge from the tales. More often than not, it appears as an unbridled horse at the bank of some loch. Those who ride upon it stick to its back, and with its victim unable to escape, the Each Uisge plunges straight into the water, drowning then devouring its prey. It is nothing but meat that these creatures crave, and they will go to many lengths to get it.

The Each Uisge are also known to appear in human form, as handsome men. They could not be known from you or me, except by the water weeds or sand and mud stuck within their hair. It is not a hard job then to lure some youngster to bathe with them in the water.

It is said the Each Uisge make good work horses if you can catch them. They can be lured and tricked by the smell of roasting meat. But caution is warned, because if the horse is given any chance of freedom it will find a victim and take to the water with supernatural strength. I had no desire to take such risks, and left the sheep unavenged without repayment.

RONAN / SELKIES

The Selkies are said to live as seals in the sea, but shed their skin to become human on land. As seals they are larger than most. It is rumoured they live with their kind in grand and beautiful cities underwater, built from coral and tangle.

If you take a Selkie's seal skin they can live among humans just as you or I. But every fibre of their being craves return to the ocean and their home. No matter what connections they make on land, a Selkie who reclaims their skin is sure to return to their ilk in the water, leaving friends, family, and possessions behind.

THE TEINE MOR (THE BIG FIRE)

Out in the water we've seen it, the guiding light that leads ships to their doom. A burning light on the water, the big fire, like a shining beacon. Once we saw a burning light in the depths of night, some distance off shore, like a stranded ship signalling for help. We took a boat out to the waters we'd seen it in, careful to avoid the jutting rock beds nearby. But when we arrived there was nothing at all but a dim red mist. In the morning we found that a ship nearby had been wrecked on those self-same rocks. A survivor had said they thought it the beam of a lighthouse guiding the ship to safety.

No one knows what is the cause of it. Some say it is a man's spirit doomed to wander the earth between heaven and hell. Others say it's one of the Faerie folk playing deadly tricks. I have my own theory, that it's the devil himself.

FAERIES

There is not a child in the whole of this country that does not know of the faerie folk. We have all beheld their strange works, be they odd markings and patterns in the glens, perplexed animals, or dancing lights in the eve. Many claim even to have laid eyes on their brilliant form. Faeries do what they will and act in manners beyond our comprehension. Their ways cannot be captured in one set of tales, but pieced together from many human experiences that muddle together like a stew cooked with no mind to a recipe.

If you hear of faerie magic you must be thinking wisely. Use all your canny to find the truth. For it is full the case that faeries do many strange things. Yet also people have a habit of blaming bad fortunes upon the faerie folk, and even using tales of their presence to disguise their own misdeeds.

THE FAERIE FEAST

In these lean times moments of feast and plenty are rare indeed. To good honest folk wasteful displays of splendour will sicken the stomach. But there will always be those with the appetite to bite off more than they can chew. It is these on whom the faeries prey.

On the eve of Beltare, first of summer and Halloween, first of winter, the faeries feast. In these parts, there can be no mistaking. If you hear the sounds of music and laughter, smell roasting meat and sweet deserts, if you peek

around the door and observe laden tables and full glasses, then you have stumbled upon a faerie feast. They will offer you food, drink, until you cannot help but sway. And when you begin to sway, dancing, music, in jigs and reels that never seem to end, it is then they have you for their own.

I caution you, do not let their food pass your lips, nor, heaven forbid, thank them for their kindness. For it is only as the faeries spirit you from this world into their own, you will see the situation clearly. The feast is but an illusion. The food that seemed so succulent is refuse and waste, the pleasures empty and false. And should they throw you back into the squalor you came from, you may meet as worse a fate. For some return to find they have revelled for fifty long years, and all they knew and loved gone and dead. Such is the lot of those who do nothing but indulge.

THE ONE DAY DOG

Ordinary dogs have a hatred for faeries, and will know them by smell and bark them out. That is why their kind have their own dogs, the Cthu Sithe, to lead the faerie hunt. A faerie who wishes to aid one of us, for reasons we will undoubtedly never know, may gift us one of these Cthu Sithe. Such a dog does work for but one day. For years it is a burden, lounging around, eating more than its fill, and refusing to obey commands. But when the day comes it is to be of use, it will save us from a terrible, horrific, fate.

CHANGELINGS

Faeries covet the best and most radiant among us. They take small bright children from their crib back to the Faerie lands. For what purpose we cannot say. When a child is snatched, an old faerie takes their shape and resides in the human world in their place. This faerie is called a changeling. That is why a parent may find their precocious child withers into a dull and useless mound of flesh.

Parents know their children best. Many can tell a changeling through instinct alone, a powerful intuition that the creature before them is a stranger, and their child is gone. However, tales speak of other ways to know the change is made. As changelings are old, they are slow of mind and dull, and may not respond as other children do. They are often found with physical deformities born of imperfect shape-shifting, such as large teeth, wrinkled brows, and expressions of contempt. It is further said they eat with the appetite of a grown adult and have a strange fascination for egg-shells.

Once a changeling has been found out, a parent must have a sound stomach and do what is necessary to change them back. For the only way to see their true child returned is to drive the changeling out. Sometimes threats and unending cruelties will be enough. Other times only fear of body can suffice, and the faerie creature must be beaten, branded, or half drowned.

CHIME HOURS AND THEIR CHILDREN

On the darkest days in the graven moments of midnight there are hours where strange spirits stir and unknowable forces in the world around us awaken. These are the chime hours, the odd and in-between times when things beyond our imagining occur but in a flickering instant.

Children are prone to being born whenever they will it, and from year to year it will so happen that a child is born in such an hour. Children born at such a time will be forever touched by it. Chime children, as they are called, they can see much that is hidden to others, yet it does not scare them. Some, I have heard, see ghosts or spirits. Others see strange auras surrounding ordinary folk. By them it is said they can know if a person is lying, or if their hour of death is close. There are those that have seen stranger things they say, but such chime children never tell.

BABES IN THE WOODS

Like everyone one of us, no matter how lean times are, children need to eat. For most of us, the blood that ties us to our young causes us to put food upon their plate before our own, to give them every last morsel that we have. But sometimes we lose hope, and we can't help wishing that the mouths we feed were someone else's problem.

From time to time, we find babes abandoned in the forest. Abandoned by their mothers, when born out of wedlock. Abandoned by their fathers when they're the sixth child born and there's barely enough to feed the five before them. Rarely, we find older children also. Try as we might to revive them, most die of exposure or the cold, even in our care. Those that live grow up something strange.

The village over from us found two such children nearby in strange circumstances. They stumbled out of the woods, hungry, exhausted, and nearly dead. They were a sight to behold. Their skin was a pale green color, and they spoke a language

none of the townsfolk had heard before. Much later, when they'd learned our language, the girl explained they had come from a green land where the sun never shone, and all light was like twilight. The village doctor thought them refugees from some strife in Ireland. The rest thought they had died in the forest, and then had somehow been spat back out into the world of the living. After all, the girl's description sounded much like a grave of leaves.

ONE OF THE FAMILY

The creatures I have spoken of are strangers to us. We cannot know their thoughts, their desires, the meaning behind their actions. Yet, they often appear to us in a guise we feel we understand. When such things take place, we may take these beings into our homes and into our hearts. Yet however pure we believe their feelings to be, such an act can only spell disaster. For eventually alien compulsions will rule those we have come to trust, and leave you as they left me, with nothing but sorrow and ruin.

BARROW LOVERS

For reasons we do not know, some of the faerie folk are known to take humans as lovers, and even in marriage. They fixate on those who shine with a special brilliance, those who have talent or charisma. Barrow lovers inflame, inspire, and ignite those they choose, filling their days with passion and creativity. However, when the flame burns brighter, the wick will not last. Most with such lovers have vivid, shining lives, yet burn out long before their time. For many, this is what they desire. A whirlwind of brilliance instead of a long, tedious sigh.

THEY ALWAYS LEAVE

If you take a strange creature into your life, know it is not for the run of it. Though daily life with them may seem settled as any, they will one day return to the ilk they came from.

There are tales of families who have adopted baby selkies, faerie, even water horse, when they have been found in need. Well, they grow up well enough. But one day they come to understand who they truly are, and return to the ways of their biology. They will leave for the water or the faerie fields. And when they do, as you watch them disappear with their kind, it will be as watching them breathe, and move, and live for the very first time. There was a man who raised an Each Uisge from infancy, as a human. When it found

out what it were, not only did it join the water horse, but it took on feasting on human flesh just as its brethren.

As for marriage, it is true that if you take a selkie's seal skin, they must remain in human form. And they make good wives or husbands, for a time. But you will see them staring at the ocean like their heart and their hopes are transfixed. When they find their skin, they leave. Without a trace, without a warning, without a word. Hope that they leave your children on land. Mine did not.



Fifteen HISTORY

THIS CHAPTER CONTAINS HISTORICAL EVENTS, ISSUES, and details you can use to create drama or invoke atmosphere in your game of *Alas for the Awful Sea*. It does not aim to be a comprehensive history of 19th century Britain. Rather it is selective, highlighting the habits and happenings that are most relevant to the theme and setting of the game. This chapter is here to inspire you, not to constrain you, so take from it what you need and leave the rest for later.

The content of this chapter is divided into two parts. The first section contains practical information about everyday life. Use it to create a rich picture of life aboard a ship or in a rural town.

The second section explores the broad changes, upheavals and reforms that took place in 19th century Britain. Use it to generate ideas for currents, towns or conflicts.

One way to use this chapter to inspire your prep is to think about the effects these events could have had on people, groups and towns. What kind of conflicts, deals, sacrifices and struggles could they have created? And how does this tie in with the player characters, and any parts of the world you have already established? Answering these questions will help you to use this information to provide fuel for your own game.

HOW TURBULENT THE YEARS

I have seen, in my time, a great many things happen, and a great many things change. I suppose that is the claim of every soul my age, staring down at his pint of beer with a sense of nausea at how fast the decades have passed him by. But in my case, it's true.

The things I have seen, my grandmother could not dream of, even in her strangest most fitful sleep. She knew only horse and cart. I have seen steam powered machines speed on rails across the country. She was too poor to light a candle. I have seen giant factories, lit clear as day by invisible gas.

But more amazing still are the things I have seen men do. I have seen one man evict a thousand from their homes, and burn the houses to ashes as they left. I have seen more than half a million, from miners to millers, put down their tools and refuse to work. So forgive me for thinking the things I've seen are worth your attention. And permit me to tell you their stories.

PART 1 – THE EVERYDAY

SHIPS

I've been on a good many ships in my time. During the war, I, like many others, found myself serving aboard a naval vessel. She were a 44 gun frigate, with a crew all up of some 450 men. At that time a ship of that size was only good for three things – moving heavy cargo, moving a great many people to the colonies, or more than likely, for the war. Thankful I was when the war

ended some three years later. Life at sea was not for me, I found myself at times a panic to be surrounded such vast blue waves – I knew, should I fall into them, I could not swim, and would but wait helplessly as I sunk to the depths below.

When the war ended in 1815, our ship was half-way to the Americas. Our ship docked for extensive repairs and I took my leave of it. To get home I earned my way on a small merchant ship; a two masted schooner crewed by just one dozen men. She had picked up hemp, tobacco and cotton from Virginia, and I tried my hardest not think about what she had dropped there. On a good day, the ship made 12 knots, a fair speed faster than the frigate, which could manage but 8. Eventually, she sailed to Dublin.

From there, I bought my passage below decks on the first ship headed to Glasgow. A small a sloop it was, a sealer, and though every breath I drew in the two day journey aboard stunk to high heaven I was so glad to be heading back to Scotland I cared nothing of it. I took a cart north, and after four long years I was finally home.

In 1838, I heard the first steamship made that very crossing. Only 8 knots she could do, but it was 8 knots whether wind or calm. Such a ship cost much to run in those early years, and passage on such was a sort of luxury holiday for those whose wealth I could only imagine.

LIFE ABOARD

When I were aboard the frigate, my first concern and that of most of the crew, was our meals. The Captain, bless his soul, would allow us a full ninety minutes for dinner if we were not on watch. We ate salt meat, hard biscuit, sauerkraut, and there was strong drink a plenty to boot. Meat with every meal was something pleasant to me, even if it was salted. On the farm we ate it but once a week. There were times we stopped off for extra supplies wherever we could – ports, bays, even islands – that was the best, fresh provisions for more than a week.

Our Captain and those who served him were sticklers for cleanliness. I've never seen a deck so many times scrubbed, and our clothes washed and washed again, beyond, so I'd say, point and purpose. Such was his vigour, that relieving oneself on deck was the third worst of offences, after only falling asleep on duty, and refusing to obey orders. This no man would do for fear his

rum ration would be ceased. Such a level of cleanliness found no place in the merchant ship I later sailed upon, and I was something well suspicious of the origin and keeping of the food.

A seaman's labour was not altogether different to the nature of work on the farm. Most of the tasks given to the landsmen such as myself simply involved heavy lifting. It were the more skilled crew, the "topmen" who laboured above the deck, that did the work with sails and such. Though the ship was in good condition, we still repaired and pumped water from her belly every day, to make sure she remained so. On top of that, we all would help with the watch, taking shifts of four hours at a time throughout the night. We didn't see much battle but when we did I found myself dragging the heavy cannon ammunition to the cannons for fire. It was all over so quickly, fortunately we remained afloat and relatively unharmed.

I can't say on which ship my sleeping conditions were the worst. On the frigate, I was pressed in close with so many other men I could barely move my face for hitting a man's foot. On the merchant ship we were carrying so much sugar and cotton I had to sleep atop the stuff. Had we one more bale we could not have kept afloat. On the sealer, it were the same, but I slept atop seal blubber, an experience I hope never to repeat. Not only that, but since I weren't one of the ship's crew, but a passenger putting down my pennies for steerage, they gave me food but made me cook it myself! A hard task indeed when you have but little.

I must say I heard reports since that made me well glad to be off the sea. For as the war ended and the century has worn on I have heard that many merchants do not bother to tend to their ships on which they do not sail, and such vessels have become floating death traps. Not only that, these merchants insist on loading her with far too much cargo, under which strain she can barely float. There are a great many occasions of poor seamen signing on for a voyage out of desperation without first having viewed the ship, only to see it and then refuse to go aboard. The law sends such men to twelve weeks hard labour. Better that than near certain death at sea. In the 1850s a prison warden once told me that three-quarters of all his prisoners were such seamen, who preferred to lose a few months of freedom than their life.

LIGHTING

For those of us who labour under a watchful foreman or relentless landlord, the night is our time. In the night, we meet, we prowl, and we laugh. My nights were a time for hidden kisses behind bushes, for making love unseen. Later, they were a time for swearing secret oaths, for making plans, and cursing the landlord away from wealthy ears. When our lives demanded it, my nights were also a time to wreck, smash, and paint our name in the ruins. The night conceals all, and that is why the night belongs to those like me.

In the years I've lived, those wide city streets that were once dark and dangerous have become well lit and policed. Not so my village. For us, from sundown to sun up the best lighting to be offered is a full and brilliant moon. Notched trees and reflective objects reveal the secret paths we created for those like us who haunt the night.

Still, there are a great many reasons a family needs to see their hands, fingers, and faces in their house after dark. And let me tell you, that's far easier done today than it was in my childhood.

Like everything in this life, lighting your house is a matter of money.

CANDLES

When I was a young man, candles used to come in two main forms. Tallow candles were made of animal fat. When they burnt, they stank like singed lard, and we had to tend to them constantly. They barely made enough light to be worthwhile. To light our house decent with such candles cost close to 18 pennies a week. Such a feat was out of the reach of the poorest among us, who counted their wages at only some 90 pennies a week. For the carpenter or blacksmith however, this was the best way.

Far better than tallow candles were those made from beeswax. Wax candles smell almost pleasant, and burn with a brighter light than tallow ever could. However, they cost something awful. To light a house of a middling gentleman with only beeswax candles would cost him 92 pennies a week. One could hire a maid for such a fee. Even for those of the middling sort this cost was expensive, and it were well known they used to burn beeswax candles in company, and tallow candles else.

BETTER CANDLES

In 1823, they invented a far more pleasing candle. It was still made of tallow, but the quality was greatly improved, and the price far less. So, the cost of tallow candles dropped and they burned brighter, lasted longer, and stunk only a little. A small mercy for me and mine, as our weekly cost for candles dropped to only 12 pennies a week and we saved the 6.

RUSHLIGHTS

When those hard times came and you couldn't afford to light a candle, there were always rushlights. We dipped rushes in animal fat, and then set them alight. It smells almost sickening, the worst, and provides little more light than a match. But what other option did we have? Such lights burn out in a mere twenty minutes.

OIL LAMPS

A workshop, or the study of a gentleman might contain an oil lamp. The lamp is preferred to the candle, for it burns far longer. The use of a lamp depends on the kind of oil poured into it. The best is whale oil, which lasts some twelve hours, and burns as bright as two wax candles. But the cost is hard to endure. Seal oil is the next best option, and fish oil burns barely better than a tallow candle.

The best lighting for a study or place of learning was an Argand Lamp. I had once the opportunity to inspect this lamp inside a public office. It uses a hollow, upright wick, mounted inside a cylindrical glass chimney. It is not portable, but as I saw it provided a great source of light to those who could afford it, being as bright as seven or eight tallow candles.

GAS LAMPS

Nowadays, the brightest light to be found comes from a gas lamp. In our little village, there is no such thing. But in the big cities, such as Liverpool and London, these lamps light the streets so bright you would half think it were day. Gas is now to be found in factories also. There can be no reason behind it, other than our employers attempting to extend our working hours, and squeeze out of us every ounce of labour they can.

LIGHTING ON SHIPS

In my time at sea, we lit our ships by oil lamp or candle. Lamp was the preferred choice aboard the frigate, whereas the merchant ship for the most part burned but tallow. That sloop I believe did use some forty candles a month. We did of course look to light below decks with the moon itself (the moon, said the Captain of the merchant ship, is free). Both ships had broad portals, through which the light could travel even at night.

THE FORCE OF THE LAW

When I was growing up, there was no constabulary. Back then every local village had its own second rate watchman, who was no more than a brave farmer. At that time, the big towns and cities were right scary after nightfall. They were growing ever bigger, which meant more things to steal, and more poor people to steal them. In Glasgow things got so bad for the rich that a merchant took it upon himself to start the Glasgow police. These police wore long blue coats, and had nothing but a truncheon, a lantern, and a rattle. With only that for protection, I would not have wanted to be one of their number. From there, more big cities started constabularies. Despite this, it took some forty years till these measures reached the countryside. In 1840, I saw the first two constables swaggering around my village. At that time, they had 200 constables in the whole county, which spanned some 1346 square miles. How two of them ever found their way to my little village, I'll be dammed if I know.

I do remember there was one police officer in Carlisle said to grant most some pause. His name was John Kent, and I swear hand on my heart he was none other than a black police officer. Black Kent they called him up Carlisle way, a name mothers used to scare their unruly children back into line. He was a quiet man, but big and mighty too. There was one time Black Kent caught two coiners, conmen who were out for a quick pound. He ran the first one down and handcuffed the man to the fire grate of his own house. He then left his pistol with his wife and ran down the street to catch the other! Poor Kent was sacked in 1844, and until this day I never heard of another black man wearing the blue coat.

Now back when I was a child, almost every offence was a hanging offence, especially if there were money or property at the heart of it. Poaching, stealing sheep or cattle, stealing clothes off the line. All the things we used to do to get by, all hanging offences. That's why we were so good at not being caught.

You always knew when they were going to hang someone before the judge even said it. It was the “black cap” they wore for the occasion. No more than a plain simple square of black fabric. But its meaning, death. In 1822, they hanged a man just for shoplifting. They say that when the judge came out with the black cap on his head, the poor boy nearly died right then just from the sight of it.

In 1835, they hung two men for making love. The men met in secret, in a rundown apartment in the city. But their landlord got suspicious, peered in through the cracks in the window shutters, stared in from the keyhole. Saw two naked men having a good time of it, and God knows why, he chose to tell the law. Three months later both men were dead, and there was nothing their wives could do about it. Right before these men hung, the crown issued a royal prerogative, commuting the death sentence of every man in that prison fated to hang. The burglars, the arsonists, the robbers, and the murderers. All had their sentences changed from death to transportation. Everyone, except the two men caught making love.

Even back then, only one in five men sentenced to hang actually did so. Otherwise, death was just another word for the colonies. Nowadays, they made this practice official. It's only murderers and traitors who still hang. After all, why kill a man and waste his labour when he could toil for free in sunny Australia?

Another practice gone since my childhood was that of putting men in the pillory. They'd take the offender to the crossroads, and put them up on some platform, so every man, woman and child passing by could look upon them. Then, their head and hands were put through a wooden board, which was closed shut. We all took to this kind of punishment with heart, and would curse the poor soul in the pillory, spit at them, and throw things. I remember a man who killed his neighbour's dog. His neighbour took the dog's remains and smeared them all over him. They don't use the pillory any more. They shut the guilty up in gaol, and no one sees what happens to them there.

FESTIVALS AND TRADITIONS

Even in the poorest and most destitute of towns, there are special days that call for the people to bring out what little splendour they have. For some, festival means celebration, dancing, and a carefree evening. For those like

myself, festival means tradition, worship, and solemnity, to secure good luck and safety for the years ahead. No matter the reason for observance, there is not one in the village who does not take part.

SAINING

To sain a thing is to lay upon it a blessing, protection, or consecration. Such rites are one of the few ways we have to protect what we hold dear. A proper saining most often involves the sprinkling of holy water, and the smoke of burning juniper, accompanied by solemn and significant words or poetry.

The most important day to sain is Hogmancy, the first of the New Year. On this day, we celebrate by saining our house, and should we have the luck to possess such, our livestock. For such a saining, one must first get the magic water from a dead and living ford. Such a river ford is one found at a crossroad, passed over by the living and the spirits of the dead both. Once we collect this water, we both drink it, and sprinkle it around the house. We then seal our home tight, and burn juniper inside it, letting the smoke sain all that within. When that has been done, we burst open the doors, letting in the fresh air of the New Year. There can be no feeling more hopeful. The saining of livestock follows a similar process.

Saining on occasion also proves a cure for the body's illness, especially that caused by the evil eye, or dark forces.

IMBLOC (SAINT BRIGID'S DAY)

On the day of Imbloc, we give praise, thanks, and worship to the fair Saint Brigid. Saint Brigid is what we call her now, though we know her to be far older than that. She is the goddess Brigid who dwelled on these isles long before the churches came.

On this day, the girls weave Brigid crosses from picked reeds. We then make a figure of Saint Brigid, her likeness as a doll. In her chest we place a white shell or crystal, the reul-iuil Bride, the guiding star of Brigid. From there, we take turns to receive her into our house, that we might have her blessing. She comes by procession, accompanied by singing girls dressed all in white. When she arrives, we make a bed for her to lie upon, and give her good food and drink. We then ask her blessing before she leaves our home and is escorted to the next. Imbloc is also the best day for divination. Every man wants to know his future.

BURNING THE CAILLEACH

Nothing is more wearisome for the soul than the dark cold of winter. It is the Cailleach who owns the white snow, and governs the months of bitter cold. When the cold of winter comes, we carve her face in the best possible likeness upon a log, the face of an old and bitter woman. We then place that log upon the fire, hoping that the bright burning might convince the Cailleach to banish the cold, dark, hardships of the winters past, and provide hope for that to follow.

WASSAILING

There are two types of Wassailing, of which I will tell you about now. Both take their name from the Wassail, the hot and spicy mulled cider which blesses our village in the winter time. In England's west, where the best of apples are grown, such a beverage is beyond compare.

The first kind of Wassailing is an old custom of our people. It is a day when labourers, farmhands, and such folk visit upon the wealthier households with their families. There they offer a drink from the Wassail bowl in return for gifts. As a child I remember this to be a custom both charming and pleasant. A rare chance for folk to mix. More and more nowadays however, the young lads turn rowdy and give the Wassail a bad name. They enter the houses of those important people in our village, and demand food or gifts with a threatening presence. Should they be refused, they spit vile curses, and on occasion turn to vandalism. Such is the anger of a generation filled with hopelessness towards those who hold power over them.

The second kind of Wassailing comes from the cider-making regions. There, they drink and sing to the health of the trees that they may better thrive. First, a procession is formed, led by the Wassail King or Queen. When they arrive at an orchard, the crowd lift their new monarch up into the tree's branches, to place toast soaked in Wassail as a gift to the tree spirits. There, the King or Queen says the proper incantations, thanking the trees for their gifts, and giving them greater vigour for the year ahead. At the end of the incantations, the villagers show their support by banging pots and pans as loud as they can for some minutes. After a time they quieten down, and then head to the next orchard to continue the blessing.

THE BURNING OF THE CLAIVE

In most parts of the world, there is but one New Year on January's first. For those like me however, who burn the claive, the New Year comes twice. One time on the first, the second on the eleventh – the first of the old calendar. It is in this second celebration we carry out a rite that dates back longer than any know.

First we make the claive. We fill a wood barrel with tar and staves, then put it upon a pole. Next, the claive is set on fire, and paraded through all the village. Finally, it makes its way to the site of the altar, the origin of which is ancient and beyond memory. There, we leave the claive until it ceases to burn. Once it is nothing but ash, we rush in, fast as we can, and grab the coals which still are live. These are the lucky coals, that will bring good fortune until the claive burns next. We take these with all haste back to our homes, and there we start the first fire of the year. Such is the power of these coals that when I were away at sea, my family still sent me a pocketful, so I did not miss the charm.

PART 2 – MAJOR EVENTS

THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Though I am a simple man of labour, I have always been politically minded. Well, I certainly lived at the right time for it. But now I sit here and I think. In seventy odd years, we have not come much further than we were.

I was hopeful back in the 1830s. We wanted to change the system. The law at that time required that in order for a man to vote, he needed land of his own, his from the centre of the earth up to the heavens that sit above us. Freehold. Well, that was a hard thing to have. In Scotland, there were only 4,500 men who could cast their vote in the whole county, out of 2.6 million. Even for them, the vote wasn't exactly what you call fair. You see they had these boroughs that voted two MPs a piece. "Rotten Boroughs" they called them. They called them that, because less than 100 men in them could vote. There was one borough in the far south, elected two MPs, with only seven voting men. And out of those seven, five of them related. With those numbers, well it was more a habit than a free election. So, from the lowest of us workers scraping a few shillings in the muck of some coal mine, to a professional gentlemen helping the rich for a hefty fee, all of us agreed something ought to be done about it.

And so it were. In 1832 parliament passed the Reform Act. The Act gave everyone the right to vote. Well, everyone that parliament cared about. The law stretched the electorate from the wealthiest 3% to the wealthiest 6%. And of course, that didn't include any of me or mine. None of my uncles, or cousins. Of my friends and workmates, none. I ask you, what was the point of that?

It didn't take long for us to realize that the vote wasn't worth much anyway. Back then, men placed their votes by open ballot. The whole borough would gather round. All the landlords and rich farmers, all the workers and tradesmen. All the doctors and the lawyers, all the carpenters and fishermen. Every person who could vote, and who couldn't, crammed themselves into the little hall where voting took place. And the two hundred men or so who could vote would get them in a line. And each would go up to the clerk and the clerk would duly record their name and say to them "and who do you vote for this day?" And the man would say. Who. Would say, in front of the richest folk in the county, in front of those that employed him, those that set his rent, those who bought his wares, would say who he was voting for. And the crowd would cheer or boo accordingly. How are you going to vote your true mind in a place like that?

Just as bad as all that was the bribery. There was one borough, but a few years after the Act, lost their right to vote altogether. The reason? Half of them that voted there had taken bribes. Not a man stays honest when it's money they seek.

After they passed the Act, and the vote was no more fair, we were mad as hell. So me and mine, we got together to begin a political mission. To seek equality among men, no matter how much land they had. They called us Chartists, it was our charter we were known for. We had six points of reform. Each was aimed at the freedom to vote or stand for election without considerations of property or wealth. A true and secret ballot to give us a government to represent the people.

Back then, there was no part of our lives not influenced by our philosophy. We brought our thinking to our worship of God Almighty himself. And knowing it was in his plan to make us all born equal, just as death makes us so, we cast out the common hymns sung by the preacher our landlord had chosen, and sung those instead in line with His true intention. Hymns that ask He help the lowest and most unfortunate among us. Hymns that He smite down evildoers, and those who would use us poorly for no gain but their own. Hymns of the equal worth of all men.

In 1842 we thought we had the numbers. We sent a petition to parliament. It spelt our charter in the clearest form words could know. Three million men – honest, industrious working men, who cared for their kingdom and country, took up the pen and signed their name. We had their hopes for a more noble Britain on our shoulders. So, parliament voted to decide on whether to hear the words of our petition. Whether to listen to the six requests their vast subjects would ask of them. And they voted, “nay.”

WORK

As conventional wisdom goes, we ought only to want for two things. The labour of the body to earn us coin, and the labour of the soul to earn us Christendom. But folks can't give their labour for honest wages the way they used to. In my life, I've seen farmhand contracts shorten from a year, to a month, and even a week. And I've never seen wages climb but once. Over the years, we have seen the food on the plates of our husbands, wives, and children grow less, and less. Who could stand such a sight and not feel the anger welling in their chest? Until one day, we made our anger known.

It were the weavers that started it. In just eight years between 1800 and 1808, those poor men and women had their pay cut right in half. In 1812 they went to the court. The court made an order for the wages to be put back right, but the fat, rich, men they worked for – well, they refused to pay. Now what can a weaver who has nothing do in such a situation? They can take away the only thing those fat, rich, men need them for. Their labour. Over 60,000 weavers stopped their working, put down their tools, and went home. From there, things got a little out of hand. By the end of the week some of the strikes had blown up into riots. They called it the Radical War. So, the government called in the militia. The “war” was over fast as a steam train after that.

In the wake of all that sound and noise made by the government, we were timid for some twenty years. But things just kept getting worse. You see, they made these machines for the farms. How can I describe them? Giant whirring contraptions. You put the wheat in one end, and it comes out the other, threshed. Have you ever heard anything like it? All of us were speechless. One man could now do the work of ten, or more. No wonder work were harder and harder to come by. And wages were dropping fast. In 1812, a man could expect 12 good shillings for a week's labour. By 1830, we were getting but 8. And the price of rent and food kept on climbing.

So it was that year, 1830, we made our feelings clearly known. Letters, from one Captain Swing, found themselves arriving. Addressed, to the landlord, to the rich tenant farmer, to the courts, and to the clergy. Higher wages, lower tithes. Captain Swing, that's a bit of a joke you see. But it's also a bit of a threat. The swing is the stick of the flail we use when threshing. And when they paid no mind to the words of our letters, it took the stick to show them we were serious. Us, and others like us, all around the country took it into their own hands to improve their situation. We yelled our demands in the streets, but that wasn't enough. In the dead of night, we set fire to those hated threshing machines, the tithe barns, and the ricks. We tore down workhouses, and we set cattle free. Day after day, village after village, all over the isles. We kept going, even when more than two thousand of us were arrested. Even when more than two hundred were sentenced to death, and more than twenty were hung. We kept going until finally, finally, those rich tenant farmers agreed to raise our wages. So we stopped.

Well, that were the very definition of a hollow victory. Took less than two years for the landlords, and the rich tenant farmers, to go back on their word. By 1834, wages were lower than they'd ever been. Not just for us farmers, but for all of us who toiled our days away for the general wealth of some other individual. Everywhere, we who did the backbreaking labour that drove our country forward, got almost nothing. And that's when the risings started.

First was Merthyr. Almost ten thousand workers marched under a red flag, a violent climax to the years of simmering unrest from low wages and poor living. The coal miners led the way. They fought back armed forces with the might of their anger. They took the city of Merthyr for four days. In the end, the army brought in hundreds of soldiers. Even then, it was only the difference of opinions and fracture in the riot's council that allowed these men to be defeated. Eight years later, it happened again. This time in Newport. Ten thousand men, armed with homemade weapons, marched on Newport with a mind to find and free those that had been imprisoned for our cause. All they found was arrest, or a bullet.

After that we gave up marching in force, like some false army bringing doom upon a town. But wages kept falling. In the 1840s, the whole of the country was cast into depression. Our pay dropped again, by twenty five percent. So we returned to that idea, of taking away the thing that they needed from us most. But this time we did it better. And so it was that miners, millers,

factory hands, weavers, labourers and loggers, anyone who worked a hard job for a poor wage. Simply stopped. Britain round, we were half a million strong. And at first it was going well. Until after some months, food was low. And so started the strike breakers. Down in Preston, the workers and the scabs came to blows. The army stepped in. The workers and their families – men, women, boys, girls – they put up some fuss. So the soldiers took their guns, and they opened fire. Four died that day. Many more wounded. Bernard McNama, a boy just fresh to manhood at tender 17, was shot in his belly, and my sister saw his bowels spill out over the cobble stones.

September that year was a lean, cold month. There was nothing to eat. We went back to work. We never got our wage increase. At least we stopped the cuts.

HOME

Home for me when I was a child was just one room with a warm fireplace. Still, it was home. And just as much home for farmers, which was most of us back then, was our croft. Our small strip of land, but some few acres, for which we paid the landlord handsomely. It was where we grew our food and we spent our days.

It was half my childhood I spent in such a place, my family's pride. It was but half, before came the clearances. Thousands of Highlanders, forced to leave their homes with nothing, their lovingly sown crops still in the ground. My family was one of them.

It was the sheep that did it. The Earls, the Dukes, the Barons. The ones whose faces we never saw but whose land we rented. Well one day, instead of us, they wanted sheep. So they told us to get off our land and leave. Of course we didn't want to go. Go where? To what? And what about our crops we spent the year on sowing? My Ma and Pa sat in our house, thinking maybe, just maybe, if they sat and they refused to move, the Earl would have to give the whole thing up. But they didn't.

When the day came we were to leave, they had scores of men with them. Don't know where they came from. City dwellers maybe, maybe up from England. It didn't take them long to rip us from our houses. And to make sure we didn't go back, they burned them down the minute they had us out the door. I remember that day. There was a cloud of smoke hanging over the whole

countryside. They said you could even see it far out to sea. At night, such a scary sight. Hundreds of houses burning like the end of days had come until there was nothing left but ash. And my family, with no clue what to do, and nowhere to go. In the end, like so many others, we found a small rocky patch of land near the coast where rent was cheap. Here we couldn't grow enough food for our family, so we worked our extra hours on the landlord's fields that we may just get by.

Still, that was nothing compared to what happened to the Irish.

THE GREAT HUNGER

Well, I've been to Ireland but once and I count myself a lucky fellow not to be one among their number. But I've known a great many Irish – every Scot does. They came here in the tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands maybe even it was, during the famine. Only they don't like to call it a famine. "How can it be called a famine", they say, "when there was so much food? Only trouble was, almost half the country couldn't afford to buy it." So, they call it the Great Hunger, an Gorta Mor in their own language.

The absent landlord was a scourge upon the Irish people. Most of the so-called "Irish nobility" visited their estate but once. And when they came, they saw not a beautiful land filled with honest working folk. They saw but a pile of money they wished to grow ever larger. So, they tried to squeeze out of it every penny they could, no matter who suffered. All the green and fertile land was saved to graze their cows for the slaughter, whose meat they shipped straight off to merry old England. In the poor soil that was left, the only thing a family could grow enough to feed themselves was potatoes. That is why, one in every three Irish were dependent on potatoes to live. In 1844 the blight hit, and the potato crop was halved. After the rent and the tithes were paid, nothing was left for a family to eat. Problem was you see, there was food all around them. But it wasn't theirs. There were thousands of Englanders who'd pay twice the price for it. So why should they sell it to the poor starving workers? No, instead they shipped it all, under the careful eye of the British redcoats, across the border to England while the farmers could do nothing but watch. Well that was bad alright. But things only got worse.

See in 1847 good old England passed the Poor Law Amendment Act. Irish property must support the Irish poor they said. So now, landlords were

responsible for paying rates to support the poor for every tenant whose yearly rent was four pounds or less. And if your land was crowded with poor tenants, well that was going to cut deep into your bottom line. So, if you're a landlord, what do you do? You get rid of them. One by one, half a million Irish farmers found themselves asked to leave. When they wouldn't go, landlords bribed them to leave with a handful of change. And, when they still wouldn't go, the landlords called in the army and the constabulary, and made them leave.

Our good minister read me a letter he had received on the matter some years later and it made me shudder in anger and disgust. He wrote as such:

"The horrid scenes I then witnessed, I must remember all my life long. The wailing of women – the screams, the terror, the consternation of children – the speechless agony of honest industrious men – wrung tears of grief from all who saw them.

I saw officers and men of a large police force, who were obliged to attend on the occasion, cry like children at beholding the cruel sufferings of the very people whom they would be obliged to butcher had they offered the least resistance. The landed proprietors in a circle all around – and for many miles in every direction – warned their tenantry, with threats of their direct vengeance, against the humanity of extending to any of them the hospitality of a single night's shelter... and in little more than three years, nearly a fourth of them lay quietly in their graves."

— Thomas Nulty 1847.

Almost a million Irish died from the famine and the disease it brought. More than that left their homes, their farms, and even their families, left everything they knew for a chance to earn even a shilling someplace else. Them coming here and wanting a taste of what's ours... How can you blame them?

Part Three

Alas for the

Awful Sea







Sixteen

ALAS FOR THE AWFUL SEA

THIS PART CONTAINS THE CORE ADVENTURE of *Alas for the Awful Sea*. It is best run over the course of multiple sessions, but exactly how long it takes will depend on your group. There is a lot of material in this adventure for you to use. However, this content is not intended to be used prescriptively. Don't feel constrained by what is written on the page, or the order in which the encounters appear. Use what we have provided as a guide and feel free to take the story in your own direction.

If you're running this adventure, we recommend you read it from beginning to end first. Most of the encounters in this story have no set order. When and how they occur depends on the actions of the players. Reading the adventure will help you understand how the pieces of the story fit together.

ENCOUNTER OVERVIEW

The encounters in this adventure do not proceed in order. Chapter 17 consists of the establishing encounters which roughly occur in sequence. After this, it is for you as GM to select which encounters should occur next based on the players' actions in the game so far.

Similarly, there is no set end or resolution to this adventure. Players act in unexpected ways, and can drive the story to innumerable different endings. When you realise things are coming to a head, tie the forces facing the players together in a way that makes sense, for one final confrontation. After that, it's up to you whether you end the game or create new places and problems for the players to explore.

CHAPTER 17: ESTABLISHING ENCOUNTERS

Chapter 17 contains the establishing encounters. These encounters set the scene, and get the players involved and invested in the struggles of Greymoor. They play out in sequence more or less, though players may decide to pursue things in a different order. If your players do something unexpected in this section, follow where they lead, and bring them back to these encounters when they are ready.

The game begins when the player characters arrive on a damaged ship in a torrential storm. From this point onwards, the establishing encounters begin to draw the players deeper into the world of *Alas* through interactions with other residents of Greymoor.

Chapter 17 lays the narrative framework for Chapters 18, 19 and 20.

CHAPTER 18, CHAPTER 19: STORYLINE ENCOUNTERS —

Chapter 18 and Chapter 19 contain encounters related to two separate storylines. These encounters need not occur in any particular order, but should be dictated by the interests and choices of the players. In fact, encounters from Chapters 18, 19 and 20 are likely to mix together to create one multifaceted narrative.

In Chapter 18, the characters investigate the recent disappearance of the Provost's wife.

In Chapter 19, the characters try to determine what happened to a ship full of sealers that vanished at sea two years ago.

CHAPTER 20: TOWN CONFLICT ENCOUNTERS ———

The encounters in Chapter 20 aren't related to a discreet storyline like those in Chapter 18 and Chapter 19. Instead, they detail the savage consequences of Greymoor's internal conflict. Tension continues to mount between the leader of the town's smuggling ring and the Provost's men who are committed to ending illegal trade. As unemployment in the town is high, and smuggling is the only way many have to earn a day's pay, the impasse has created deep-rooted hatred and a thirst for revenge.

These encounters are designed to involve the player characters in the town's conflict. However, they will continue to unfold even if the players do nothing, as the situation escalates over time. The players may try to deescalate the feud, make things worse, or actively help one side or the other. No matter their choices, they will be affected by the encounters in this section.

The encounters in Chapter 20 function best when interspersed between those from Chapter 18 and Chapter 19. This will give the players the feeling of the situation worsening over time. However, if the characters wish to actively pursue a particular issue, of course, let them.

WHEN TO USE ENCOUNTERS —————

The key to selecting which encounters to use is to listen to your players. Follow their interests and emotions. Focus on what the player characters do, and think – how would the non-player characters in this adventure react? How does this action change the story?

If an encounter does not fit logically into your adventure, or seems pointless or irrelevant, do not use it. You will need to improvise and remain flexible. Town conflict encounters in Chapter 20 can always be used to bridge the gap between events. You should also feel free to create encounters of your own. We want our story to become your story. So feel free to alter, add, or radically reinvent. Do what serves the adventure best.

DO I HAVE TO USE THESE ENCOUNTERS AS WRITTEN?

No, you absolutely do not need to use encounters as written. In fact, we would recommend against it! Feel free to use all, some, or none of what we've included in each encounter. You might even find that a piece of dialogue or an idea from one encounter is useful in another. It's really important you make the adventure your own, and run it in your own style.

CREATING CONNECTIONS

When you run this adventure, consider creating pre-existing connections between the players and non-player characters in the town. A crew member who is secretly a smuggler may have had dealings with the town's smuggling ring before. Similarly, the Mercenary may have encountered the Provost back in his military days, or the Kinsman may have relatives who disappeared with the sealing ship two years ago. Work with the player characters' personalities, character roles, and descriptors to form appropriate connections and heighten the stakes in your game.

Seventeen GREYMOOR

PRELUDE: A CRUEL STORM

This story begins with a storm. The player characters are aboard a ship pelted by endless waves and threatening to sink.

Read aloud as much of this text as you want:

"You've been at sea long enough to know that this is no ordinary storm. This is the storm that comes once in a sailor's life, that they tell about in every inn house, every tavern, every day for the rest of their lives. This storm is a milestone...or a tombstone.

The rain hits you so hard it seems to fall with personal vengeance. The ship is rocking like a wooden boat in a five year old's hands. You are tossed well beyond nausea and perhaps even into terror. Lightning cracks through the sky, an ill omen that this storm is far from over."

SHIPS AND SAILORS

In the 19th century, ships differed vastly in size and style of build.

Larger ships were generally used as cargo transports and military vessels, while small-time merchants, sealers, and privateers preferred faster, more agile models.

The player characters in *Alas* sail a two-masted schooner. Faster and more maneuverable, these ships could be manned by a crew of just over one dozen.

The ship is afloat, but it's taking on water fast. It will need urgent repairs within the next few hours if it is to survive the night. Let the players know they're going to need as much help as they can get – preferably skilled. Most of the crew will need to remain on board bailing water until the temporary repairs are completed.

The ship's in no fit state to inhabit, and once she's stable the crew will have to camp out on the beach under whatever shelter nature may provide.

Ask each character in turn what they are doing during the storm. Perhaps give each a danger to respond to. Play out a mini-scene, as long or short as you would like.

Appearing in the distance is the town of **GREYMOOR**. The crew can see it drawing nearer during the storm. After a struggle, the players manage to find a calm bay near the town, and relief from the deadly waves. As they draw nearer to the shore and anchor, they can see the figures of two men running down the crags to wave at them from the beach.

The ship is afloat, but it's taking on water fast.

GREETINGS FROM THE COAST PATROL

RONNY

Young, lanky, red-headed member of the coast patrol. Burns with outrage at the patrol's treatment by the town. His mother owns the town inn, the Gentle Tempest.

WILL

Grim, quiet and sensible. Member of the coast patrol. Husband of Katherine, and father of five.

The two men on the beach are **RONNY** and **WILL**, members of the coast patrol (see p. 180). Ronny is a lanky red headed boy in his early twenties. Will is shorter, older, and quieter. Before Ronny will help the players, he asks them whether they have any alcohol on board. If they do, Ronny informs them that any spirits taken on land must be declared to the coast patrol and attract a tax of 50 percent of their value. Will is not so insistent, as the storm rages, and the wind batters his face.

The torrential rain continues as they make their way into Greymoor, where the town's inhabitants are huddled inside their houses.

THE TOWN OF GREYMOOR

Greymoor is a poor rural town, home to less than a thousand people, who make most of the little money they have from fishing. It is not so much decaying, as in a perpetual state of decay which never gets better or worse. Most of the buildings in the town are old and run down. Almost nothing looks expensive or official.

THE TOWN'S CHARACTER ———

HARD TIMES

In truth, Greymoor has fallen on hard times. Fishing has been poor recently, and most of the townsfolk live in a state of poverty. A lot of Greymoor's inhabitants are unemployed. Out of work men loiter in the streets or outside houses - drinking, smoking, and doing little else. They glare at the players because they do not like strangers.

People in the town are extremely poor. They will respond well to kindness from the players, but detest being patronized. They will revile any acts they view as stamping on their independence or implying their inferiority. However, a round of drinks in the tavern or some sweets for the children will be well appreciated. During the game, feel free to create additional Greymoor villagers as needed.

POSSIBLE INTERACTIONS

If conversation does start, the townsfolk will want to know what the player characters are doing here, and the purpose of their voyage. They will try to determine how much money the players have, and how best to get some of it.

If the local lads spot a weak looking player, they might challenge him to a midnight prizefight with a heavy wager - goading him into participating with a cocktail of insults and compliments. Or, the older townsfolk may try to cheat the players out of their money in a local gambling game. Greymoor's fishermen may also try to sell their fish to the players and their crew at the highest possible price.

GEOGRAPHY AND LOCATION

Greymoor is a fictional town, located on a desolate section of coast on the British Isles. While the town has no real world equivalent, it is most closely based on the Hebrides, a remote archipelago just off the coast of Scotland.

The Hebrides is known for its rugged and inhospitable landscape, coastal fishing villages, and strong folklore and traditions. Places in the Hebrides were used as smuggling depots to land and store rum, gin, and Irish whiskey before they were taken by ship to the mainland.

WORK AND PAY

The job of a sailor, while dangerous, paid better than most. The average crewman aboard the player's ship would have earned close to 50 pennies per day. As senior members of the crew, most of the player characters would earn even more.

By contrast, Greymoor's residents, should they have the fortune to take in a good day's catch or to be employed, would earn closer to 20 pennies per day.

For more on wealth and pay, see page 71.

AN AIR OF TENSION

There is an air of tension between most of the townsfolk and those individuals working for the coast patrol. Residents glare pointedly at the patrolmen, and refuse to talk to them. Sometimes, they'll even spit after them as they pass. Players who side with the coast patrol will receive the same treatment. Generally, the victims of this enmity don't react, though it's clear the harassment gets under their skin.

ENTRY INTO TOWN

As the players enter town with Ronny and Will in the plummeting rain, they see no signs of life. Only grey weathered houses, cracked and dull, doors and windows barred against the torrential storm. Thunder cracks and a handful of shingles split from a roof, splintering on the ground inches from the players.

As the two members of the coast patrol lead the characters through Greymoor, a shout comes from behind them – *"you dogs!"*

Four angry townsfolk stand behind the patrolmen. They are holding stones and heavy shingles that have fallen off the houses in the rain, and start to hurl them at Ronny and Will. A rock hits Ronny on the side of the head, and he begins to bleed, the blood mingling with the rain to stain his white shirt a bloody crimson. The townsfolk don't intend to be caught, and will turn and flee when things get serious.

"I'll kill them!" Ronny is raving mad. As members of the coast patrol, Ronny and Will are regular targets of the town's hatred. They have grown used to the constant harassment (see p. 215), but this kind of outright violence has never happened before.

The **COAST PATROL** is a small, paid force of townspeople working to prevent the alcohol smuggling that has become the town's lifeblood. The patrol acts under the directions of the Provost's son, **DANIEL**.

Will and Ronny identify two of the rock throwers as thugs in the employ of

“that fucked up lady”, who heads up the town’s smuggling ring (see p. 217). Ronny believes she may have put them up to this, Will thinks it is not her style. In fact, she did not. The townsfolk were just expressing their anger over the recent confiscation of an important alcohol shipment (see p. 215). Without the shipment they have no money in their pockets or food on their tables.

When things calm down, Will offers to lead the characters to the town’s shipwright. As the torrential rain continues, Ronny heads off to his mother’s inn, the **GENTLE TEMPEST** (see p. 183), to get his head patched up. The Inn has a room available, if the player characters need somewhere to stay.

THE SHIPWRIGHT

There is only one shipwright in the town. His name is **BARTHOLOMEW**, *“but folks call him Shart Bart on account of his height.”*

Bart is a broad faced, steady man with an odd sort of weathered calm about him. *“What do you want?”* he grunts through a half open door.

“You came in through that storm? I’m surprised you’ve still got anything that floats. Let me have a look at her then.”

Bart will agree to head down to the ship despite the torrential rain, dragging a few other townsfolk with him to help with emergency repairs. Once the urgent repairs are finished, he goes off to bed, promising to return the next day and take a proper look at the damage.

FIXING THE SHIP

When Bart returns to the ship the next day, he takes his time, looking it up and down to check what is in need of repair. He informs the crew that there is damage to the hull, and the keelson is in bad shape. It’s going to take him at least a week or two to fix. It’s not going to be cheap either.

BART

Greymoor’s only shipwright. Skilled, careful and private. His wrinkled face has been beaten by fifty years of weather. Brother of the “Boss Lady” Eileen, and the uncle of her daughter Amy.

DO I NEED TO READ THIS DIALOGUE OUT LOUD?

No, you certainly don’t! Feel free to use all, some, or none of this dialogue. We’ve left dialogue in this adventure so you can see how different characters view the world around them. It’s not intended to be read aloud word for word.

CONVERSATIONS

When character dialogue is included in this adventure, it will often be accompanied by that character's answers to further questions that the players may ask. If they ask these questions, you can adapt these answers or create your own, in line with the conversation so far.

The information in these answers can also be given to the players at any appropriate time during their discussion with a character.

Questions that player characters may ask are indicated in bold.

Questions that player characters may ask are indicated in bold.

"She lives straight south, out of the village. Follow the worn path down to the cliffs. It's not far to go. But listen you all. Don't you dare tell anyone it came from me. Or you can forget about me fixing your ship."

Why can't you take it yourself? / Why can't we tell anyone?

"My sister wouldn't look too kindly on it. But that's my business. Anyhow, you think I can carry all of that myself?"

What's your sister's problem?

"Acht, it's nawt my story to tell. I don't like to get involved. But here I am getting involved just the same." He sighs. "All I want to do is to make an honest living. Didn't use to be so bloody hard."

Bart's niece, AMY, lives with her son half a day's walk from Greymoor. See page 188 for the details of the encounter with Amy.

"Yeah, I'll fix it for you," he says, "even give you a good rate. If you'll do me one wee favour. See, it's the kind of favour best suited to strangers, and we don't get too many strangers around here."

What's this favour then?

"My niece Amy lives a bit of a way outside of town, by the lower crags. Lovely girl. Pretty. Stubborn as anything though. Just like her mother. I need the lot of you to bring her a few things. Just a few bits and pieces. That I have for her. And also... you know. Have a wee chat. See how she's doing. Friendly kind of things."

Bart shows the players the load. It's not just a few things. It's a sizeable pile. A few months' worth of food, mostly dry store. Other things,

THE GENTLE TEMPEST

The town's inn is somewhat satirically named the Gentle Tempest. It is tended by **RUBY**, an old lady tough and salty as the sea itself, who the locals say “don't much like nobody.” She won't give the player characters anything for free, and likely will give them the stink eye until they buy something.

If Ronny speaks well of the player characters, Ruby will be a bit more friendly – but she'll still make the players pay full price.

“You came here by ship? Through that storm? I'll not believe it! Bet you sailed in on half the ship you sailed out with, am I right?” (she thinks this is hilarious) I've a room if your pile of timber proves a little too drafty. Just the one mind, my other room is taken... two rooms full at once, that would be a first!”

In this encounter, Ruby will give the player characters one of several leads that will draw them into the story:

- ☞ Lead 1 – The Police Inspector
- ☞ Lead 2 – Poisoned Fish
- ☞ Lead 3 – Where is He?

Use the lead that matches best with the actions and questions of the players. Usually, it will be easiest to start with Lead 1 (The Police Inspector). But if, for example, the players ask for something to eat, Lead 2 (Poisoned Fish) will fit perfectly.

LEAD 1 – THE POLICE INSPECTOR

Ruby asks the characters to recount the story of how Ronny was injured, and grills them for information. Once the story is over, she turns to

RUBY

Owner of the Gentle Tempest. Tough, salty, loud, and in everyone's business. Mother of Ronny. Her husband disappeared at sea two years ago (see page 188).

PRICES OF GOODS

The costs of items in a different time period can be difficult to guess. If you want more information about prices, and what different characters can afford to buy, see page 74.

CONSTABLE GREGORY

Police Constable Gregory is a city dweller from **PORTH**. He came up to Greymoor because of the importance of the person who had disappeared – the Provost's wife herself (**ADA**). Gregory has been here four days, and turned up nothing useful – especially nothing as useful as a body, which is the one thing he most wants to turn up. He plans to leave the next day if he doesn't find anything.

Gregory is a serious individual, and a cocktail of tiredness and failure has made him a touch morose.

THE PROVOST (TRISTAN)

Unelected town mayor, and former army officer. Greying, formal, charismatic and recently, sad. Tries his best for the town, when he can. His wife Ada has been missing for over a month.

POLICE AND POLICING

At the time of *Alas*, the police were just beginning to form into the modern force we know today. In rural boroughs such as Greymoor however, police forces were not formed until the mid-19th century, decades after this adventure takes place. The larger nearby fictional town of Porth would have had an official force of constables to keep law and order. This force would not extend to Greymoor, which would have had to rely on local informal arrangements. As part of his duties, a local Provost would hire townfolk to patrol the town at night. Criminals would not be sentenced in Greymoor, as there was no judicial authority, but instead transported to Porth.

Greymoor's Provost has recently hired a group of coast patrolmen. These coast patrolmen also act as night watchmen, and intervene if necessary to keep law and order during the day. However, as the patrol command little respect it is difficult for them to police the town effectively.

For more about the town's Provost, and his role, see page 194 and page 195.

a figure in a police issue raincoat hunched over by the other side of the inn. *"Isn't this the very thing you should be putting an end to while you're here, Constable?"*

The figure, **POLICE CONSTABLE GREGORY**, barely looks up from his drink. *"You know I'm here to do one job only. I'm sure your Provost can take care of local affairs."*

Ruby replies, *"Not too likely that. Couldn't even take care of his own wife, could he?"*

What happened to the Provost's wife?

Ruby is pleased to have the chance to gossip. *"Oooh, you wouldn't know, she disappeared, near one month back. Anyway, no mystery in my books. Lady offed herself. Just you wait till her body turns up, and she's slit her own throat."* (she makes a throat slitting gesture).

She yells over at the police constable. *"Hear that son, yer wasting yer time! Should be keeping my boy safe instead."* He shrugs.

Why do you think she killed herself?

"Bit of a sad character that lady. Anyway, why don't you ask my lovely guest over there? He'll tell you."

Here is a compendium of what Gregory knows, and may share. He may know other things as appropriate.

☛ As far as anyone knows she wandered off one day to the sea shore, and never came back.

☛ Her husband seems worried enough – but Lord knows he has enough on his hands – seems he's having a bit of trouble with the townfolk.

- ☞ She weren't seen by a soul – see, she had no friends really here. No one even talked much to her. Well, that's to do with the trouble I was mentioning earlier. Not too sure what all that's about.
- ☞ Children don't seem to much like their mother – especially the older one, the boy. Told me she had ended it. Girl didn't think so. As much as yelled it at me. (softly) Crazy bloody family.
- ☞ Word in the town is she offed herself.
- ☞ Weird thing is, if she jumped off the crags into the sea, where is the body? She'd have to be out a fair way to stop it floating back to shore.
- ☞ Anyway, certainly I'm leaving here tomorrow. I'm only wasting my time. And frankly I have more important things to do back in Porth than chase up some suicidal woman here.

LEAD 2 – POISONED FISH

Ruby says: *“I suppose you'll be wanting some food then. All there is here to eat is fish. And not too much of that now either. If this problem goes on any longer we're all going to end up eating each other.”*

What kind of problem?

“Some of the fish we've been catching lately, don't bear eating that's for sure. Making people sick, all over the village. Some have said it's been making people sad too. What kind of sense that makes I don't know – seems to me they're sad because they're sick, and they should quit their whining. Anyhow, haven't been able to fish near there for more than three weeks now.”

Near there?

“Aye, seems all the bad fish been coming from more or less one place. Pity that's where we get most of our catch. Odd currents there too lately, so I've heard. You can ask the fishermen, they'll tell you all about it. Right whiners they are.”

This lead will take the players to explore Ada's story, see Chapter 18.

LEAD 3 – WHERE IS HE?

Ruby says: *“Did you know I was born in the highlands? Would have stayed there too if it wasn't for my man. And now it's just me anyhow.”*

What happened to your man?

"It's that awful sea. Takes what it likes, and don't give a thing back. Over two good year ago now, ship of our finest fishermen went out to hunt some seals. Not a soul returned. That's the way it goes, I guess. Left me alone with my useless son Ronny." (See Chapter 19 for more information about the disappeared sealing ship).

A LOCAL ENCOUNTER – LYDIA

LYDIA

A young woman who lives on the outskirts of town, and rarely visits. She has brought her newly born son into Greymoor with her for the first time. Her husband is a sea dweller.

This encounter can occur at any time, but is best off taking place within the first session of the adventure to help establish the player characters' relationship with the town.

While wandering through the town, the player characters hear the heated sounds of an argument in the distance. At first they can't make out what exactly is being said, but above the din rises the voice of a woman: *"Don't you touch my children! Don't you touch them!"*

A rowdy crowd of townspeople have formed a circle around a woman and her children, trapping them inside. The woman's name is **LYDIA**, and she looks as if she hasn't slept in days. In her arms is a baby boy, a newborn. He is only two weeks old and still bright pink and so, so small. Clutching her petticoats is a two year old girl.

A beefy man in the crowd speaks (**TOBY**). *"Look at those kids. Them's not human. Who can know what they are?"*

Toby is right. Lydia's children aren't human. Their hair has a blueish tint, like seawater had leached into it. Their eyes are impossibly wide, and their skin is almost translucent.

"Kill 'em I say," growls Toby, *"kill 'em both."* Murmurs of approval echo through the crowd. The little girl starts to cry.

THE CROWD'S REACTION

The mob is made up of individual people with different opinions, but right now most agree with Toby. He, and others who side with him, might defend

his position with words like this:

"Who are you anyway? Stay out of Greymoor business."

"We can't let such unnatural things live here. It's a bad omen for all of us. Strange creatures from the sea killed too many of our ancestors. They want nothing but to prey on us, drag our dead carcasses down to their rotten underwater homes – a feast."

"I'll bet they attract others just like them."

"If the girl didn't want this to happen, she should have thought before she fucked one of those vile sea things."

As things escalate, they might get their hands on the children. From there, things could get nasty.

LYDIA

Lydia's husband is far from human. If she feels you have helped her, and earned her gratitude, she will thank you earnestly and present you with a chipped ceramic cup.

She will tell you: *"If ever you are in need of help or assistance, fill this cup three times with the water of the sea, and three times empty it. Then my family and I will find you, and render you what help we can. For now, I think it's best we leave the town for a time, until we find ourselves forgotten."*

THE CHIPPED CUP

When the cup is filled three times with the water of the sea, and three times emptied, Lydia's husband will arrive to aid the players. His skin and hair are deep blue, and his eyes a glowing gold. His hands and feet are webbed, and around his neck is a band of shimmering white coral. He thanks the crew for the help they gave his wife and children. He is a fast, strong swimmer who can breathe underwater, and he knows the sea in this area intimately. He will do what he can for the players, and then disappear. After the cup has been used this way once, it cracks in half.

PAST THE WORN PATH AND DOWN TO THE CLIFFS

The trail to Amy's home is an odd mix of scenic and depressing.

A SMALL HOME

AMY

Kind, self-reliant, and malnourished.

Lives with her son Benny some hours from town. Her lover, Alec, disappeared two years ago at sea. Daughter of Eileen.

BENNY

Small and precocious boy, only son of Amy. Has a very strong bond with his mother.

Amy's home is barely a hovel, but at least it isn't too hard to find as no buildings surround it for miles. Anyone who knocks on the door tempers their blows for fear it might cave in.

A young woman answers the door, thin, gaunt and white. She looks surprised enough to see human faces, let alone the load the player characters are carrying. A tiny boy, just over two years old, peeks out from around her petticoats. "*Vis'tors!*" he shouts.

"Yes Benny, visitors. Isn't this a surprise?"

Amy happily welcomes the player characters inside. The house is just one room, furnished with two broken chairs, a cracked table, and an old mattress laid neatly in the corner. A pot and a makeshift fireplace take up the other side of the room, though a sack of potatoes is the only thing the player characters can see that could be cooked in it.

Amy puts the pot on for tea, and takes the player characters out to the back of the house, which dips down to a narrow stretch of beach, and then the roaring sea. A colony of seals sun themselves on the rocks, paying little attention to the presence of humans. Benny plays by the side of the water as Amy talks.

AMY'S STORY

ALEC

Generous, regretful and protective. Amy's lover and Benny's father, trapped in the body of a seal.

Amy will tell as much, or as little of her story as is appropriate.

A bit more than two years ago, Amy's lover, and Benny's father, ALEC, mysteriously disappeared,

along with the crew and ship of a sealing expedition. Neither the ship's wreck, nor the bodies of any of those on board have ever been located.

"The day Alec disappeared, I begged him not to go. The sea was... there was something angry about it. We could all feel it. Standing there on the edge of the crags with the salt water whipping up in our faces. Don't go. That's what I said. But he had to. There was a fortune to be made."

The expedition set out to hunt a colony of large seals which had settled offshore for the first time.

"Seals, huge as you'd seen them, largest pelts. They were going to kill the lot of them. The pelts would be worth more than the whole village. All our problems would be over. I said... I said to him... I'd rather hold your hand than all the gold of the king. But he went. And he didn't come back."

BENNY IS BORN

Amy's mother, EILEEN, is one of the most important people in the village, and one of the richest. Amy's father passed away some years ago. After Alec's disappearance, Eileen found out Amy was pregnant with Alec's baby out of wedlock. Amy's condition was the cause of scandal and shock around the town. Eileen threw Amy out of her house, and implicitly threatened to bring her wrath down upon anyone who dared to defend, or to be kind to, Amy. The town, and Amy herself, accepted this result. After all, Amy had brought shame to Eileen and tarnished their family's reputation.

"My mother and I... well, we don't speak. I don't much speak to anyone really. Benny and I are happy enough by ourselves."

"Thank you all so much for your help. You be careful though. My mother, she wouldn't like you coming here. But, you're only strangers to our town. You're not to know these things."

THE SEAL

At some point during the player characters' time at the hovel, Amy pops inside to make more tea, leaving the players outside watching Benny. Or perhaps Benny plays with one of the crew. Either way, whilst Benny is by the water, a seal emerges from the sea. The seal is far larger than those that can be seen sunning themselves around it, and one of its fins is marked with a distinctive rust coloured stripe. The seal heads straight for Benny, and begins to play with him. The boy giggles.

If Amy is called or comes back in, she is unsurprised to see the seal, but pulls her son firmly onto solid ground. The seal comes up to shore to play with Benny almost every day. Amy is sure it is the same seal, because of the mark on its fin.

If she likes the players, she'll share something with them. *"Do you believe the ones who are gone...stay on this earth to take care of us, protect us? My Alec. He's watching out for me. That seal. I feel, I know – that's the spirit of my Alec. Every day Benny grows a little bigger. And I tell it. Look at your son. Isn't he beautiful? – Tell me, am I a fool for thinking such things?"*

The seal itself is intelligent, and will respond as best it can to anything the players do or say. However, it won't go out of its way to prove to the players it is intelligent. Anyone who looks in its eyes will see there a strange depth of emotion out of place in a sea creature. Sweet joy and sorrow mixed into one.

The seal is actually Amy's lover **ALEC**, trapped in the mammal's body.

MAC THE DAGGER

As the players leave the house, sun sinking on the horizon, they realize they are being followed – and whoever is following them doesn't much care if they know it.

MAC THE DAGGER

Mean, vulgar, loyal, and raring for a fight. Favorite thug of the boss lady Eileen.

His name is **MAC THE DAGGER**, and he works for the boss lady (**EILEEN**). He looks like the kind of man who could never scrub up clean enough for Sunday church even if attended by a choir of laundry maids.

"Who the hell are you?" he asks, when one side finally decides to quit the charade and have it out. *"Whaddu want with the girl? If any of you was thinking about laying a hand on her, I will twist your neck right off your head."*

"Town don't like strangers," he growls, and then spits for emphasis. *"Why donchu keep your own business to yourselves, and keep yourselves out of other's business? Cos if you don't.... Well maybe we make it so you did drown in that storm. If you get what I'm saying with what I'm saying."*

Mac the Dagger is raring for a fight, and will take on anyone who has a go at him. His classic move is to challenge people individually to barehanded combat and then produce a dagger from his sleeve if he is losing. If he continues to lose, he will scarper and go and complain to Eileen (This could lead to page 217).

Eighteen ADA

SICK IN THE STOMACH, SAD IN THE EYES

The seafood caught in the South Bay has been making people sick for about the last month. It has also made those who ate it oddly sad.

OLD TOM knows more information – and he’s happy enough to share it, if you’ll provide him with a little tobacco for his pipe. Wrinkled and beaten as the ocean’s waves, he knew there was something wrong with the fish almost as soon as he looked at them, but no one else believed him until people started getting sick. *“Expression didn’t look right.”*

The poisoned fish are a serious issue – the fishing spot was the best one in the area. *“But if you can trace this sickness, back to the ripples and currents, well I’d say we might have a chance to do something about it.”*

Old Tom can tell the players that the fish seem concentrated in the area towards the eastern section of where they usually fish. There have been some odd currents there lately as well, unpredictable and dangerous for the less experienced fishermen.

He’ll offer the players a free poisoned fish to take a look – after all, what is he going to do with it?

INSPECTING THE FISH

Characters who investigate the fish discover that there is nothing physically wrong with it. Whatever is causing the sickness, it is not a matter of biology. It is a taint, stemming from the very sea itself.

A THOROUGH INVESTIGATION

This section contains the replies of various townspeople, when asked by the players about the disappearance of the Provost’s wife, **ADA**.

RUMOURS ABOUT THE TOWN

This section contains knowledge, opinions, and rumours about Ada and her family that could be held by anyone within the town. The townspeople are more than happy to share if they are asked, but are likely to insert their own commentary and opinions into their answers.

Naturally, the players will not find out all this information, but feel free to insert tidbits as appropriate.

A TIME BEFORE GREYMOOR

- ❖ The Provost and his family are from inland to the east. They’ve been here about five years now.
- ❖ The wife is from a wealthy family, but the rumour is that the Provost was born poor. At any rate, he was certainly rich by the time they married.

- ✂ The Provost served in the army for eight years, with great distinction. He nearly died more than once. After that he was offered a commission, and a political position. It was at that point he asked Ada's father for her hand in marriage. What father could say no?
- ✂ The Provost maintains it was his mad love for Ada that drove him to join the army in the hopes of making something of himself. But that might just be a romantic story.
- ✂ There's a rumour she never wanted to marry him, but she had to do what her father told her.
- ✂ *"I feel most sorry for the children. She never seemed to care much for them. Oh yes, two children, a boy and a girl. The boy is eighteen, the girl mustn't be much younger."*

ADA'S LOVER, JAMES

- ✂ When the Provost's family first came to Greymoor, his wife seemed quiet and sad, and didn't talk much to anyone. Then after James, it was all different.
- ✂ She was in love with him, at least everyone thought so.
- ✂ *"I once saw them walking the crags together. Laughing, smiling, carrying on. Now I don't wish to say there was any impropriety, but goodness me, a married woman doing such a thing."*
- ✂ During that time she used to greet people around the village, and she was always singing to herself.
- ✂ When James disappeared with the sealing ship two years ago, she couldn't hide her tears.
- ✂ *"After that, I don't think I've ever seen her smile."*

BUT DID SHE KILL HERSELF?

The general consensus, although not universal, is that she did.

- ✂ *"There was not a person in the whole world for that woman. Ever since the Provost started this business with the patrol, well of course no one in Greymoor would say more than a word to her. The children don't like her much, at least that's what I heard. As for the Provost himself... well, he smiles at her, but I've never seen her smile back."*

❖ *“There cannae be any doubt she did. I’ve never seen a woman so sad. I saw her that very day she disappeared walking along the shore with the blankest look on her face. It’s not much more of a step just to walk into the water.”*

There are a few who think otherwise, although this belief isn’t founded so much in fact...

❖ *“She’s always been sad. When she first came here, I said to myself, that woman is sad for life. So why would she kill herself now?”*

❖ *“She’s far too proper to go doing something to herself like that. And her children! Well I know they’ve not always gotten along, but to leave them like that, that’s something else.”*

THE PROVOST’S FAMILY

WHAT IS A PROVOST?

The position of Provost has held different significance at different points in history. At the time *Alas* takes place, the role of Provost is similar to that of a town mayor. The Provost was the head of the parish council, the lowest level of governing body in the UK. In isolated villages such as Greymoor, the Provost would act as a kind of semi-elected governor, in charge of running the village and making local laws.

Their powers would likely include the licensing of alehouses, the construction and maintenance of public buildings, and the levy of local taxes. The Provost would also convene town meetings, and perform ceremonial functions when required.

The Provost’s house is on a grand hill, looking down over the town. From a distance it’s imposing, but upon closer inspection it’s clearly in need of repair. Flakes of white paint are peeling off the façade, and the railings along the stair’s edge are a rusted brown.

The door to the Provost’s house is answered by their long time aging servant **MARTHA**, who the family brought with them to Greymoor. Just as well they did, as they’ve been having trouble finding reliable hired help, especially since the establishment of the coast patrol (see page 215).

The Provost himself, **TRISTAN**, will ask the crew why they think they can succeed where the police constable failed. If he is convinced, then he will be happy to assist the party however he can. He is aware that the popular opinion in the town is that Ada killed herself.

The Provost has two children – **DANIEL** (18) and **EMMA** (16). The players would have heard about the family from the townsfolk, or the children may be mentioned by Tristan himself.

TRISTAN

Tristan is an earnest and charismatic man in his late forties. He often wears his military uniform – the red coat of an English soldier, lined with brass buttons and styled with an officer’s sash. A peppering of grey struggles for dominance in his clean cut hair.

His manner is unusually unpolished for a man of his elevated position. He seems quite upset about his wife’s disappearance. He is also upset about the rift between his family and the village (see page 214). He will answer the player’s questions with appropriate responses based on the information below:

- ❧ *“I love Ada as much as any man could love a woman. Since I met her, that love has been my life, the very whole of it. Once you have loved like that, you never get your old skin back.”*
- ❧ *“I don’t know at all what happened to her. The last time I saw her, she was leaving the house for a walk. She often took walks. It was nothing unusual.”* (In fact he left some time later to find her, and caught up with her along the crags).
- ❧ *“All I want is for her to come back to me, to reappear. That’s why I decided to talk to you today. I thought maybe... you could help.”*



WAS TRISTAN ELECTED?

It is most likely that Tristan was elected, however the election itself would have had little significance. There were no uniform requirements for parish elections, and the majority of Greymoor would not have voted. Moreover, the position of Provost was unpaid. Given Tristan’s military connections and relative wealth, it is unlikely anybody else in Greymoor would have been willing and able to stand for election against him.

- ❖ *"Did she kill herself? I wish I could say I'm sure she didn't. But I can't. In those last few weeks before she disappeared, she...the rift, between us and the village. It was hard on her, on all of us. And me, so busy at work, on a mission, I didn't even stop to... I can only blame myself for what happened. Whatever happened, I can only blame myself."*
- ❖ *"Yes I was in the army. The most awful years of my life it was. Left with honour though. That's how I got where I am today."*
- ❖ *"Truth be told, I did it all for her. Would you believe I was but a poor lad once? Ah, while I was enlisted: she was there in my mind, shining like a beacon through every splatter of mud and blood that I trudged through."*
- ❖ *"Did I know about this James fellow? Of course I did. Who didn't? At least he made her happy. I don't think much else ever did."*

THE PROVOST IS LYING

It is possible, although unlikely, that the player characters may find out from this first meeting that the Provost is responsible for the death of his wife. This could occur through use of the move **READ ANOTHER'S THOUGHTS**.

While it is best not to deliberately reveal this information, if you are called upon by a move to reveal it, you must do so. However, if the player characters do learn of the Provost's actions, this is by no means problematic. The player characters have no proof, and are strangers to the town, unlikely to be believed by its inhabitants. Making such an accusation out of the blue is asking for trouble – and you should make sure that trouble is quick to appear.

DANIEL

DANIEL

Eighteen. Intense, serious, and self-righteous. There is a zealotry in him you can only imagine must have belonged to the Provost in his youth.

He thinks himself well above the uneducated townspeople.

The Provost's son, **DANIEL** is in charge of running the coast patrol day to day, and his personal obsessiveness and passionate hard work has led to some recent successes, of which he is very proud (see page 215).

Daniel is not too keen on chatting to you, but does it to please his father. He will answer the player character's questions with appropriate responses based on the information below:

- ☞ *"Yes, she killed herself. I don't doubt it. I'm only surprised she didn't do it sooner."*
- ☞ *"It makes me so angry. That she chose to abandon everything like that. To just leave us. I can't stand it. She's always had a sad streak; it's only gotten worse over the years."*
- ☞ *"Last few months, she mainly ignored everyone around her, except sometimes Emma."*
- ☞ *"Never any warmth from her, my whole life, she's never shown one ounce of love. Might as well not be my mother."*
- ☞ *"The townspeople wouldn't say a word to her. She hated that. Can't see why, they aren't exactly great conversation."*
- ☞ *"Yeah, I know about her and that young idiot. Can't have felt too much for him. Not sure she had feelings. Did father know about it? He must of, he's not stupid. But I think he took it on the chin. That's the kind of man he is."*
- ☞ *"Father always does what is right. Yes, he has his moments. But doesn't everyone?"*

EMMA

EMMA is not too keen on chatting to you, but does so out of a desperate hope it might somehow help. She is visibly upset by the situation and subject, and the players must be delicate in the way they conduct their questioning, or they risk her clamming up. She will answer questions with appropriate responses based on the information below:

EMMA

Sixteen, serious, and smart. The family's constant relocation and current isolation have made her introverted, and she prefers to have her face buried in a book.

- ☞ *"Mother never would have killed herself. She didn't think like that. She thought it was her place in life to suffer. She never would have tried to escape from it."*
- ☞ *"Though she didn't show it, I think – I know – she loved Daniel and I very much."*
- ☞ *"Yes, I know about James. It isn't surprising."*
- ☞ *"She never cared much for Dad. Growing up it was obvious; she never tried to hide it. She used to sit at the window of the house like some sort of caged bird. It used to drive Daniel mad."*
- ☞ *"When father found out about James...well that was only a few months ago... Father has always been sort of jealous, well protective I suppose. Previous places we've been. I'm sure he just meant the best for mother but..."*
- ☞ *"I suppose he does get angry sometimes. But he doesn't mean anything by it. He always tries to make it up to her. Though she'll never let him..."*





AT NIGHT THE MOST HAUNTING OF SOUNDS

ATMOSPHERIC MUSIC

You may wish to play vocal music or a recording at this point suggestive of the voice of the woman. We recommend the song *Port na b Pucaí* by Meav.

Just near the fishing hut towards the South Bay. It is that very part of the sea which the townsfolk point out as the origin of the poison fish. At night, the most haunting of sounds. The voice of a woman. But its volume, its direction impossible. Deep out into the dark sea. Do you follow?

The water is pitch black, dreadful. But in the distance hovering above its heaving body, is a flickering light. From the shore, it's impossible to tell what it is, but as the moon passes behind a cloud, it glows bright and cold. There are a few fishing boats moored or pulled to shore, the players could easily "borrow" one.

ON THE WATER

The crew can't see much in the black, dark, water but the flickering light ahead acts as a beacon to guide their boat. As they sail further towards the light, the current begins to act strangely. It is almost as if the current itself is trying to divert them away from the very point they are heading for.

As the player characters grow closer, the light starts to look almost humanoid. As they find the cracks in the current and eke their way forward towards it, they can see the light in its form entirely. It is a woman of rare and uncommon beauty. In truth, she looks too young to be the Provost's wife, but otherwise she matches the description the players have heard. At the very least, they recognize her by the look of deep and disturbed sadness inside her ghostly eyes. She does not talk, but sings, and perhaps begins to weep.

At this point, the characters face two problems:

- ☞ The song the woman sings has become one of the saddest ever heard. A grown man would want to cry for it having reached their ears. Some player characters may become too sad to press on.
- ☞ The current has become very aggressive. It is pushing back against the crew, and their small fishing boat is rocking threateningly. Going forward is becoming harder and harder. Eventually, the boat can go no further forward.

When the GM makes things worse during this section of play it could include the boat leaking, a person falling overboard, or one of the player characters being too disheartened to continue.

The sea itself is sad here. If a character dives, or falls into it, you may choose to have them use this custom move:

When you fall into the sorrowful sea, **ROLL + BEYOND**:

ON A 10+: You feel the sadness surround you. But it is not your sadness, it is the sadness of the sea, and the sadness of the woman. Ask her one question of your choice. The GM will answer it truthfully.

ON A 7-9: The sadness seeps into you. Choose 1:

- ✂ Struggle, and regain control. Take harm as you gulp water.
- ✂ Give in to the sadness, and let yourself sink. Ask the woman one question of your choice. The GM will answer it truthfully.

ON A MISS: You are paralyzed with sadness. Take harm, as you sink down, into the water. Your heart remembers its saddest day. What was it?

Unless the player characters manage to miraculously get their ship through the current, a player who wishes to go all the way to the woman will have to swim. Once they break through the intense current, they suddenly find themselves in an area of perfect calm. There are no sea creatures here at all, just pure, transparent, and impossibly calm water.

Just beneath the surface is the body of the Provost's wife. You would expect it to be rotten – after all, it has been weeks in the sea. But it is preserved so perfectly as if she has been sleeping or swimming, her red hair wafting gently in the calm water.

If the players pull the body back onto their boat, the area loses the calm it had before, and the boat is pulled and ballooned. But those atop the water see the woman made of light. She flies up into the sky, and evaporates with an audible laugh of happiness.

The back of Ada's neck has visible bruising in the shape of finger marks. Close inspection reveals that a person forced her head down from above. Pinned to her dress is a rusting metal object. Players may be able to recognise it as a military identification badge.

RESCUED BY SEALS

At the GM's discretion, and if the need arises (e.g. the boat sinks), the players may be rescued from the water by giant seals. These are the very seals that used to be men (see page 208). If talked to, they will show they are intelligent and understand English.

THERE IS ONE WHO SAW

FINDING THE ONE WHO SAW

KATHERINE

Nervous, sensitive and living in fear. Wife of Will, mother of five. Witnessed the murder of the Provost's wife.

There could be a number of ways that the players find the woman who witnessed the murder. It could be that an image is planted in their mind by the sea itself, either as a result of a near drowning experience (perhaps during the night encounter), or of **SENSING**

THE BEYOND. It could also be that the players find a distinctive handkerchief (hand-woven) on the beach near the location of the poisonous fish. Or it may be that someone in the town leaves an anonymous lead for the players (most likely one of the smugglers).

Either way, it leads the players to **KATHERINE**.

KATHERINE'S HOUSE

Katherine sits at the loom near two dark eyed teenage girls. She is not expecting visitors. Her husband, Will, is a member of the coast patrol. On her door is installed a new tumbler lock which she fastens tightly at night.

She is reluctant to let the crew in without some goading, but is even more reluctant to make a scene or discuss matters in public. After the nature of the player characters' inquiry becomes clear, she sends the reluctant girls into the back room, and sits you down with some dismay.

Katherine is unlikely to tell the player characters anything unless they promise to keep the information safe, or otherwise persuade her.

“Please sir, mam, I don’t know nothing about that kind of thing alright? I’ve five children to feed. My husband’s only just got himself a job, and lord knows that’s creating more than enough trouble. I’ve no wish to add more to it.”

“A’right, I’ll tell you – but God forbid these words ever leave my lips outside these walls.”

KATHERINE’S STORY

“That day, I’d gone down to bring Will a wee bite for lunch at his work. It wasn’t raining – fair unusual for that to be the case – so I headed back along the bay front. And then I look out. And I see the Provost and his wife in the distance, and I think isn’t it nice them taking a stroll together because they never did take strolls together. Thinking back though, it almost looked like she was trying to walk away from him.

Then I saw them, they stopped and they looked like they were shouting at each other, well it was the Provost shouting mostly. I could hear his voice, but couldn’t hear much what he was saying. And I didn’t want to go no closer then you know, because they were having a wee moment, well one of those kind of moments that husbands and wives have. But before I know it...

He had her hand, and he was dragging her, and they went into the water. And he was shouting and then he, then he...pushed her... He pushed her...underneath the waves...

And I thought, well I don’t know what’s going on, but she’s sure to put her head up soon, she’s sure to. And there was a moment, but it seemed like forever this moment. And then she didn’t. She was just under. Under the water.

And the Provost, he just stood there. For a long time. I think he was crying. I couldn’t see, but I think he was.

The whole time you know, I didn’t think it was happening. Because she could have struggled though. Not let him drag her in. Or lift, just lift her head out of the water to breathe – to take a breath. But she didn’t. She just let him do it. She just let herself drown.”

KATHERINE’S PLEA

Before Katherine lets the players leave, she stops them with the following plea.

“Wait, please. If you tell anyone, the Provost he hangs. And that’s the end. Of my

husband's job. And the jobs of the others, that work with him. Please, you don't know how hard it is. With five children. There's no work, we can barely fish. We need this, not just us, other families, they need this too. Please."

CONFRONTING THE PROVOST

If the townsfolk see proof that the Provost murdered his wife, they will take action. Depending on the tensions between the Provost and the town, it could mean anything from summoning the police from Porth, to marching on the Provost's residence.

RETURNING TO THE PROVOST'S HOUSE —————

If the player characters return to the Provost's house to confront him, the reaction they garner will depend on the strength of the evidence they amass.

If the evidence against Tristan is very strong he may try to bargain with the players in private. Emma may well be listening from behind the door.

The Provost could mount the following arguments:

- ✂ It wasn't really he fault. They were having an argument. A fight. He didn't expect her to let herself drown. What kind of woman would just let herself drown like that?
- ✂ If the police get involved he will be hanged for murder.
- ✂ The town is in a period of instability, and he is worried that a riot might occur if he is gone.
- ✂ He is a single father and he worries about leaving this life with his children here alone in this period of instability.
- ✂ His death would help no one.
- ✂ He will do whatever you think needs to be done to make this right without hesitation. In return he asks for mercy.

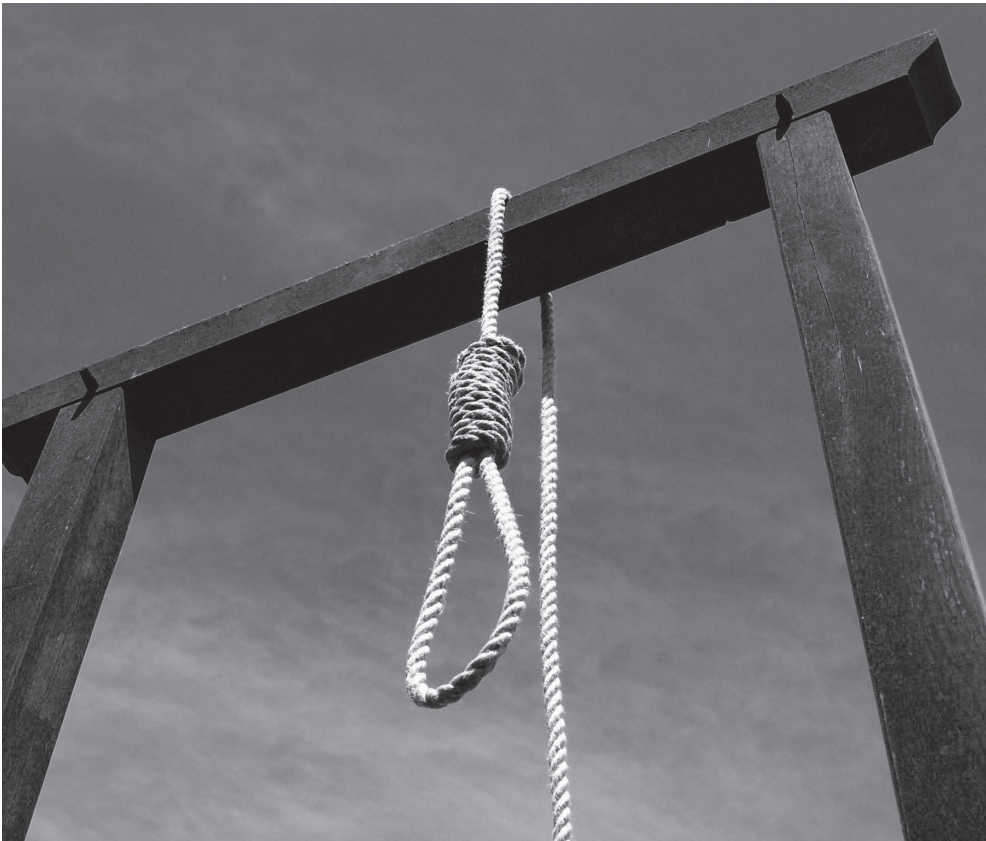
Unless the Provost will prefer to die than to do what the player characters suggest, he will agree to do, and follow up on, whatever they require of him. If they attempt to blackmail the Provost he may pay up, but demand they return the military badge. He may also choose to inform the police of the player characters' intentions and try to turn the law against them. He is, after all, an influential individual.

If Emma heard what happened, she may later sneak out of her house alone and go to beg the players for clemency.

IF THE POLICE ARRIVE

If the Provost is arrested, he will be taken to Porth for trial. The player characters will later find out (probably just before they depart) that he has been hanged.

Emma will go down to Porth to be with her father, but Daniel will remain in Greymoor. Daniel has none of the gravitas or charisma of his father, and is not well liked in the town. With the Provost gone, the situation with the smugglers will become even more unstable (see page 223). The townsfolk might storm the Provost's house in an attempt to retrieve the alcohol, or vandalize it and make threatening noises by night. Daniel may be killed or injured in this process.





Nineteen

A SEALING

SHIP LOST

SEARCHING FOR THE SEALS

IF THE PLAYER CHARACTERS ARE SEARCHING for giant seals, most of the townspeople will know that they are often seen congregating near one particular set of crags. Otherwise, if the players are searching or exploring the crags, this encounter could occur by accident.

WHEN TO USE THIS

You can use this encounter at a point in the game where the player characters are travelling through the coast line, either in order to lighten the tone or widen the scope of the game.

It is useful to do this before the situation in the village gets too intense, so players will have more choice of which story line to pursue.

beach, they will be able to see three speckled black shining seal skins, much larger than most seal pelts. The pelts are around the size of the seal that played with Benny at Amy's House (see page 189). The skins seem to have been opened up, but surprisingly, there is nothing inside them. Their insides resemble their outsides, black and shiny. No blood or guts are visible.

Player characters can hear the sound of splashing, yelling and conversation from around the bushes. The voices are male and sound upper class and well educated. The players may hear some of the following comments:

- ☘ *"The sun feels so much better like this don't you think?"*
- ☘ *"I agree there are some advantages, but I always feel rather disabled in this form. Like I had forgotten how to swim."*
- ☘ *"It's a fine vacation but I wouldn't want to live in it."*
- ☘ *"It is a rather brutish and unsophisticated form."*

THE NAKED TRUTH

Around the bushes, bathing in the water and sunbaking on the beach, are three completely naked men. The men are perfect Anglo-Saxon specimens – each is blonde haired, with washed out pale blue eyes, and well-built rippling muscles. Their skin is so white it looks almost as if they have never seen sunlight. There is no sign of clothing anywhere.

If the men catch sight of the players, they look a little sheepish and embarrassed, but make no attempt to cover their glorious bodies.

As the player characters walk along the crags, they eventually reach a point where the cliffs level down into a small beach area. It's a fairly secluded kind of beach, obscured by a slew of scraggly bushes clustered along its length.

HUMAN, BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT

Sticking out through the bushes is something black and a bit shiny. If player characters crouch down and look through the bushes to the other side, or they walk around onto the

The men are creatures known as Ronan or Selkies, giant seals that can unzip their seal skins and take human form. Their seal skins have been stashed under the bushes. They won't admit to this however, unless they are threatened or convinced by the players. They will instead pretend to be fishermen.

They are resistant to any suggestion that they don clothing: *"Now don't go spoiling our fun, old boy. It's our only day off."*

DON'T TOUCH MY SKIN

If the player characters handle the seal skins, the men begin to get very nervous: *"Think you better put those down, old boy. Very delicate. Wouldn't want them damaged."*

If the player characters attempt to take the seal skins, the Ronan will do everything in their power to stop them. As a last resort, if physical force fails, they will try pleading with players. *"Wait! Please don't take those. We need them to return home."*

ALRIGHT, WE ARE SEALS

"Our true form is not that of men. We live under the water. We call ourselves Ronan, but you would know our kind as seals."

"We are the greater seals, who live civilized lives of culture in our kingdom under the waves. Our kind has created many great artworks, constructed great wonders, and perform many good deeds under the sea. Do not confuse us with our brethren, the lesser seals, who have not capacity for reason or sensibility."

What happened to the ship of seal hunters who disappeared?

"You refer to the ship of murderers that slaughtered our kind without mercy two years ago? We apprehended their ship, and took them down to our kingdom, to judge them for their crimes against us. Some among us wanted them dead, but our Queen in her great wisdom said "do not do unto others the wrong they would do to you." And so we did not kill them. Instead, we put them inside the skins of our fallen brethren. Then we sealed those skins with the blood of the dead. Now, the sailors on that ship live among us as seals."

Can this condition be reversed?

"Perhaps the Queen has some way to undo it. But why she should be inclined to elude me."

Where is your kingdom?

"If you could look deep under the water you would find it with ease. But you cannot, so it does not matter."

Where is the ship?

"It sunk down off the coast, a half hours swim from here, near the crab shaped rock. There were many human things inside it, but none of artistic worth or significance so we left them there."

The characters will recall sailing past the crab shaped rock before the storm took hold of their ship.

As well as this, any of the transformed sealers will be able to lead the players to either the ship, or the underwater kingdom.

SHIPWRECK

The sealing ship is rotting and overgrown with sea grass and moss. The wreck of the ship leaves few clues as to what could have happened. There are no human remains upon the ship. It looks like they hadn't caught anything yet, as there are no seal remains either. Rusting sealing equipment is scattered around the deck.

The hold to the lower part of the ship is shut closed with barnacles. If the players manage to open it, and swim down into the ship's belly, they will find a large and intact store of gin and rum. It looks like the smugglers weren't losing an opportunity to get a bit of business done, even as the Provost thought he had found an effective alternative to the trafficking (see page 214).

THE GREAT AND WONDROUS CITY

Once deep under water, the Ronan city is visible from miles around, as it emits a steady green glow. However, to get from the crags to the city centre takes almost a full day.

A WAY DOWN

To get to the Ronan city, the players will either need Ronan seal skins, or some other way of swimming deep underwater.

Here are some potential ways the skins could be obtained:

- ☞ Take the seal skins of the Ronan.
- ☞ Hold at least one of the skins hostage, and send the Ronan to retrieve others.
- ☞ Diplomatically set up a meeting with the Queen, and she will provide a means for the players to get to the city.
- ☞ Make the skins out of regular seal skins, using the beyond.
- ☞ Lay a successful trap for other Ronan who come to bathe on the shore, and take their skins.

THE CITY

At first, the player characters see a faint green light. As they go onward, the light grows brighter and brighter until the glens and bays and forests of the sea kingdom arise before their eyes.

When the player characters look, they see a township of foam-white houses on the edge of a great sea-forest. The buildings and pathways are lined with banks of sea-moss, green as grass but far more beautiful and glowing steadily. In the kingdom, crowds of Ronan swim to and fro. Mothers are nursing pups, young seals play games, and the sound of music flows forth from the gold and brown sea forest.

If they have taken on the form of seals, the player characters will be able to understand the Ronan's speech. Otherwise, it will sound like the regular barking of seals unless the Ronan translate the speech with their magic.

THE PALACE

In the centre of the sea kingdom is a great foam-white palace. The palace is thatched with red tangle, and glowing coral illuminates its many windows. Its giant door is made of heavy green stone.

No guards stand at the entrance. A local explains that there is no need. The Queen is so greatly respected that none among the Ronan would do her harm. As the player characters approach the doors they open as smoothly as a summer wave moves across a river mouth.

Her Royal Highness, the Queen of the Ronan, is named **QUEEN RHIANNON**. She is the smallest of the great seals that the player characters have seen, and

yet one of the most magnificent. Her skin is coloured a golden reddish hue that sets her apart from the blacks and greys of the others.

Queen Rhiannon believes that the sealers have committed a great wrong, and should now spend their life as seals. However she is open to another arrangement if it means that men and seals may live in mutual respect and harmony. The Queen will ask for an indication that the town won't just go back to seal hunting, it is for the player characters to suggest what that indication will be.

If force is used the whole of the Ronan colony will try to capture the players. They may well end their days as seals.

Twenty THE SMUGGLERS

THE SCENARIOS IN THIS SECTION OF the game may occur in any order, and can be used by the GM whenever appropriate, or according to player interest.

GREYMOOR, OH HOW SHE SUFFERS

A BRIEF HISTORY

Tristan arrived in Greymoor close to five years ago, and was elected Provost shortly after. He quickly realized the town's fishing activities were not enough to sustain its populace. It was smuggling, not fishing, that put bread on the table.

ALCOHOL SMUGGLING

During the 18th century, costly British wars abroad caused the UK government to place high levels of taxation on the importation of luxury goods, including alcohol. By the turn of the 19th century, taxes on some goods had reached 70% of their initial cost. However, taxes were not well enforced, relying on a piecemeal and antiquated custom house system. The result? A blossoming smuggling trade which spread rampantly across the British Isles.

Remote villages along the coast of the British Isles proved the perfect location for the importation of illegal alcohol. Grinding poverty dominated these villages, with wages pitifully low, and unemployment rampant. Faced with the alternative of starvation, almost every person in these villages was involved or complicit in the smuggling. This smuggling, euphemistically termed “the free trade,” brought work and money to labourers, who were paid decent wages to transport the goods to rich buyers inland. The smuggling trade was so important to these rural communities, that when contraband was seized, there were numerous instances of villages uniting and taking up arms to reclaim it.

Relations between the Provost and the smuggling ring soon became icy, but tenable. It was clear Tristan was not trying to dismantle the smuggling ring, but nor was he “cooperative,” as the previous Provost had been.

As Provost, it was part of Tristan’s mandate to prevent smuggling and ensure custom taxes were paid in full. Rather than try to bring the force of the law down upon the town, the Provost decided a wiser idea would be to create an alternative source of income that could reduce its dependence on smuggling. A crackdown on the town would only worsen the poverty of those within it, and lead to ever more desperate acts.

Noticing a colony of giant seals that lived close to Greymoor, the Provost saw that great profits could be made from sealing. Many in the town were against the suggestion, claiming the work was dangerous and sickening. Nevertheless, Tristan pushed ahead with the idea, and after a lengthy period of preparation, one of the town’s largest fishing vessels was refurbished for sealing.

It was this ship that disappeared on its maiden voyage two years ago and was never located.

After the sealing ship disappeared, the town turned cold towards the Provost, and smuggling in Greymoor continued to increase. With smugglers becoming increasingly brazen, Tristan reluctantly realized he would have to take steps to stem the illegal flow of goods. Eventually, he gave in to the adamant arguments of his son Daniel, and allowed him to establish the coast patrol.

THE COAST PATROL

The **COAST PATROL** employs a mere fourteen men, with Daniel a fifteenth at their helm. These are men for whom the need for gainful employment outstripped their loyalty to, and fear of, the town. Some are embarrassed at their decision to turn informer, others such as Ronny are indignant the town does not respect them. Most are loyal to their fellow patrolmen, but a few are weak links that will buckle to threats or promises of money.

Coast patrol members wander the coast in pairs keeping watch for any ships or boats that appear in the night. They know the area well, and know which spots would be safe enough for a ship to wait in the pitch black while goods are rowed into shore and unloaded. However, the coast is vast and the number of patrolmen small. Daniel is concerned mainly with stretches of coast they cannot cover, while the rest of the patrolmen are much more concerned about being surprised and murdered if they stumble too openly upon smugglers at the wrong time.

AS FOR THE PRESENT, IT IS EVEN WORSE THAN THE PAST

Six weeks ago, the coast patrol, through an odd combination of Daniel's vigilance and sheer accident, succeeded in intercepting a very large shipment of illegal alcohol. Like other shipments, many of the townsfolk were relying on this sizable delivery to create work, and without it have no money and nothing to eat until the next one. Additionally, many of the smugglers' more affluent customers down the coast prepay monthly, and are expecting a delivery. The townsfolk want this shipment back urgently, especially the leader of the smuggling ring, a tiny grey haired lady named **EILEEN**.

Many of the enforcers in the coast patrol had no real wish to actually apprehend the shipment, but were forced to by the blatant circumstances of its discovery. Very little attention had actually gone into disguising the alcohol, which was merely stacked in large unmarked barrels at an obscure point along the coast for collection.

Currently, this shipment is stored in the basement under the house of the Provost, as there was simply nowhere else safe enough to store it. The Provost is deciding what to do about it.

In the meantime, the coast patrol has been expanded from ten to fourteen, and can be seen regularly along the coast, as Daniel believes that if the next shipment can be captured, the smugglers will fall on their knees. The player characters' own ship may even be searched.



TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER

AN INVITATION

There are a number of events that may trigger Eileen to invite the player characters into her abode for a meeting. Here are some examples:

- ✂ The crew impress someone in her employ.
- ✂ The crew do something to offend her.
She sends a couple of thugs to teach the players a lesson, but instead the player characters teach them a lesson.
- ✂ The crew ask to speak to her, and after observing their behaviour for some time she accepts.
- ✂ The crew have information she really wants.
- ✂ The crew start to become politically influential.
- ✂ The crew otherwise make a name for themselves and come to her attention.

EILEEN

Grey haired, ruthless, and canny. An expert at exploiting others, she knows a good deal when she sees it. Head of the town's smuggling ring. Mother of Amy.

EILEEN

The 'boss lady' is a tiny grey haired woman named Eileen, with an almost incomprehensible accent. She is surrounded at all times by a slew of thugs, both male and female, with various levels of efficacy. Thugs are very cheap in Greymoor due to the low employment rate, so she's always a little overstaffed – and there's always someone watching the player characters. Any actions they take in town, unless explicitly performed in secret, Eileen already knows about.

Eileen lives in the largest, nicest house in the town. The view of the grand, gaudy porch is blocked by her hired thugs.

Eileen is happy to treat the players to a cup of tea in her nice drawing room, if they agree to submit to a weapon search and leave any firearms in a basket by the door. The décor is strikingly out of place. The heavy mahogany furniture was clearly made somewhere very far away, and shipped to Greymoor at great expense and difficulty. Baby blue drapes line the windows.

CONVERSATION WITH EILEEN

Eileen might bring up some of the following topics:

HER DAUGHTER, AMY

"What are you lot up to with my good for nothing daughter? If any of you consider getting yourselves into romantics with her, I'll kill you. That's no metaphor so you know."

THE SMUGGLING RING

Eileen will sound out the crew's opinions about smuggling and the situation within the town. She is trying to determine if they are on her side, and maybe even amenable to doing a little work for her.

"See, we've been doing things here a while in a certain way. And this way makes everyone happy, and everyone is happy with us doing things this way. And then, all of a sudden there's a new person come along – and we're just not seeing eye to eye, you see, despite all our efforts, that are... what do you call it? Gracious – and before you know it they're off doing things a different way and that way it's just not the way we do things. You unnerstand?"

She will try and canvas several individuals in the group (e.g. *"what about you chubby, what do you think?"*).

If the player characters say what she wants to hear...

"I see you all are right-thinking kind of people and I like people who think rightly. And the people I like, like being liked by me, if you unnerstand what I'm saying."

Eileen will ask the crew to do a little something for her in return for a little something. There are two possibilities as to what she might ask. The first task is to retrieve the cargo on the sunken sealing ship. The second is to find some evidence with which to frame Daniel or the Provost with Ada's murder.

If the players fulfill one task, she may give them the other. She may also give them a third task, to retrieve the confiscated alcohol shipment from the Provost (see page 223).

If the characters say just what she doesn't want to hear...

Eileen will suggest that the player characters had better not be too public about these views.

“Now me, I’m an understanding woman, and I understand that people see things in different ways. But not everyone is as understanding as me and they might not understand our understanding – so I’d be careful what you go saying out in the open because there may be some folks not too keen on the things that I’m hearing you saying – and I wouldn’t want anything to happen to you. You get my meaning?”

Depending on the response, this conversation may be followed up by a more visceral “message” soon after (see page 222).

TASK 1: TWENTY THOUSAND LEAGUES UNDER ———

Eileen has a large stake in the location and retrieval of the cargo that sunk to the bottom of the ocean with the sealers two years ago. This is because the cargo was largely illicit alcohol. It was loaded into the sealing ship prior to its departure without the knowledge of most on board, and was to be secretly offloaded ashore during the ship’s journey. With the most recent shipment confiscated, now would be a very good time for Eileen to recover the lost goods.

“Now, might you lot have heard of a sealing ship that disappeared from here ‘bout two years back? I had a wee few people have a look out for that ship, but no luck. Isn’t that just life?”

You see, a few little things of mine were on that ship. A lot of my things actually. And I’d rather like them back. I’m willing to pay a fine price for it too. On certain conditions. The location itself won’t be so useful to me. No, I’ll pay for a full location and delivery service. That means past those annoying dogs patrolling the shoreline, and safely into my cellar.”

The truth is, the coast patrol has been watching Eileen and her thugs closely, and she doesn’t think she or the townsfolk would be able to sneak anything past them at present. Besides, better these strangers bear the risk, and she reaps the benefit.

TASK 2: OUT OF SIGHT BUT NOT OUT OF MIND ———

This should only be used if the player characters have expended at least a little effort trying to find Ada. *“What do you all figure happened to that woman that disappeared? Offed herself, you think?”*

If the player characters suggest it might be the Provost:

Eileen is very happy with this suggestion: *“the Provost aye? Aght, I knew he was a good for nothing rotten bastard. Sadly not everyone in this town was agreed with me on this matter...but this may change a fair few opinions.”*

If the player characters suggest anything else, Eileen will make a counter suggestion.

“What about that Provost’s son? He’s a suspicious character, always getting worked up about things all the time. Know he didn’t like his ma much, not sure why – what child in their right mind doesn’t like their mother? Sounds unnatural to me.”

Eileen will make the player characters an offer depending on their answer to her questions.

“Why don’t you collect me some good evidence on (the Provost / the Provost’s son)? Get me something I can use, a tear jerking sort of story or a hidden little something. I’ll see it’s handed over to the proper authorities, and that justice is done swiftly, oh yes, very swiftly.”

There’ll be a little something in it for you lot too, don’t you worry, and I promise you’ll find it more than fair compensation.”

ANOTHER JOB OFFER ———

The Provost’s son, Daniel, might decide to offer the players a reward for the obtainment of any liquor he can confiscate, especially any liquor connected to certain individuals, especially any liquor connected to a certain female grey haired individual.

Eileen won’t like you accepting this offer, unless she has decided you are clearly trying to double cross him.

MY WAY IS A CRUEL WAY

In the midst of the night (or some other time), pounding can be heard on a door near the inn (or some other place). It's **MAC THE DAGGER**, the players' best friend from earlier (unless they killed him, in which case it's someone else.)

The men Eileen sent aren't trying to be quiet. They want everyone to know what they are doing.

"Hey Jackson, why don't you come out and talk to us. Hey Jackson, you don't want to talk to your old friends, huh?"

The innkeeper, Ruby, is up and dressed and is downstairs listening to the sounds in a sort of dismay.

What's going on?

"There's a family living next door. Father, Clive Jackson, used to do some work for the boss lady. One day he decided he didn't want to be involved in that no longer. On account of his new son what's just been born. He's been ignoring her since then. Oh my Lord, it weren't wise of him. Not to end it, and especially not like that."

What are they going to do him?

"Can't say, but it's not going to be pretty. See if he's alive tomorrow. Nothing the Provost or the police can do 'bout it either."

Here is what the players hear from next door, unless they decide to intervene:

✂ Banging and bashing from next door.

"Come on out Jackson, we just wanna say a few words to you. Unless you want us to come in there and say a few words to your whole family."

✂ Jackson's wife, Lilly, comes out of the house, being sure to close the door behind her (or maybe she just opens it a bit, keeping it secure.)

Lilly: *"What do you boys want?"*

Mac: *"Ain't our business with you lady, our business with Clive."*

Lilly: *"Why don't you boys just go home? Leave us alone."*

Mac: *"Sorry missus can't just let the dogs you feed run off now can you?"*

✂ Lilly: *"We'll call the Provost."*

Mac: *"Missus why don't you just open the door?"*

- ✘ This is their ultimatum. There is a silence. She won't open the door. They just shoulder her out of the way and start hacking at it.
- ✘ Once they get in, they make a show of picking up the little boy. Jackson's not dumb enough to start pleading with them (or maybe he is), but he's not going to run either.
- ✘ Eventually they kick him until he's bleeding and broken.
- ✘ He dies of a concussion the next day.

THE TOWNSFOLK REACT

Not everyone around town is happy about what happened, but they don't want to make it known publicly.

They're happy to let it be known anonymously however, and they do so in the form of graffiti around town, and also deliberately going out of their way to help Amy, or anyone else Eileen is trying to target. (They are not interested in helping the Provost or his family however).

PAINT THE INN RED

WARNING SIGNS

One morning, the front of the Gentle Tempest has been completely trashed. It's going to take time and money to repair. In red paint reads "*We find a Provost rat, we burn the rat's nest.*" (They may be talking about Ronny, or depending on the actions the player characters have taken, this may well be referring to them).

Mother and son are fuming, but they are also afraid. Ruby asks the players if they think there is any truth in it. If the player characters convince her she should be worried, she tries to talk Ronny into resigning his job, fixing up the inn, and moving on. She doubts the Provost will be any source of protection.

Ronny is furious. He is sure that it is one of Eileen's employees who did this (in fact he is right.). His first inclination is to round up the coast patrol, and give as many of Eileen's thugs a beating as he can reasonably manage before he is outnumbered. He might also consider appealing to Daniel to do something – "*you cannae just let them treat us like this, like we got no damn laws in this town.*"

Daniel might decide to arrest one of Eileen's thugs to set an example. However he is unlikely to be able to contain them long without retaliation.

THE INN ON FIRE

That's what happens when you meddle in Eileen's business. If the players are staying at the inn, this might happen while they are sleeping. If it happens in their absence, they lose some of their belongings in the fire.

If Ronny is already angry, this is likely to make him murderous. Others won't follow him however, if they are afraid.

If it doesn't end in violence, repercussions for the burning of the inn are likely to be similar to those mentioned in *Townsfolk React* on the previous page.

GET IT BACK OR ELSE

If Eileen has no other source of alcohol, she needs to obtain the shipment currently stored in the Provost's cellar. If she trusts the player characters, and they've proved themselves capable, she might send them to retrieve it. Eileen will leave it to the player characters to decide whether they would like to pursue persuasion, subterfuge, or force. If she likes their plan, she'll let them know they are welcome to borrow some of her hired muscle, and that if need be she can spur the angry townsfolk to action.

The shipment is too large for the player characters to carry out themselves in one trip. It is contained in barrels which are very heavy. A single barrel could be lifted by one strong person for a short distance.

THE MOB

If the crew decide to assist Eileen in retrieving the alcohol from the Provost, they may choose to incite the townsfolk into action. Alternatively, if the player characters refuse to be involved, circumstances may dictate that Eileen decides to reclaim the shipment regardless. And persuasion and subterfuge aren't really her style.

A large mob marches to the Provost's house to demand the shipment of alcohol be returned. If the Provost does not consent they storm his house, looting and

smashing on the way. Daniel may try and stop them, in which case he is likely to sustain serious injury. This is especially so since he is not well liked, and he may become the target of a direct attack.

A strong anti-Eileen presence may try to dissuade the attackers, and convince them they are putting themselves at risk for Eileen's benefit only. They are unlikely to be successful without the crew's help.

CONCLUSION & FURTHER ADVENTURE

You've reached the end of the encounters in *Alas for the Awful Sea*. However, even though our story is done, your adventure doesn't have to be over. From here, you can take the players through one of the free adventures available on our website, or in the *Wind and the Waves* adventure book. Alternatively, you can use **PART 2** to create your own towns and currents, and continue the drama with ideas of your own. Bon Voyage!



THANK YOU

'We are a silent mob, standing on the windswept headland staring to the foggy horizon, waiting for the first to move or talk or fall... And break the spell that binds us. Be free now, the chains that shackle your tongues are fallen to the mud. Let yourselves cry with joy, raise your voices above the wind howl and rejoice.'

- Allan Prewett, in a comment on the Kickstarter

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