



Chapter 3

Canal Town and The Mud Flats

“To conceal my abhorrence of the reeking Waterman would have been an unconscionable slight to my lofty ancestors. Yet, when he casually reminded me that the canals provided a splendid station for the disposal of unwanted corpses, I found it equally difficult to conceal a sense of unease.”

— Kulluar of Octorus, *Seven Unfortunate Situations*

On First Glance

The part of the city called Canal Town surrounds the banks of the Derna from the palace to the shores of Sanreal Bay. Here the river emits its last pathetic gasp before it empties into the bay. Its once-mighty current has been diverted into a labyrinth of winding canals. In many places it has also been covered, so that it is now more a massive culvert than the mouth of a great river. A uniquely hardy and disdainful breed of working man makes his home here, next to these stinking waters.

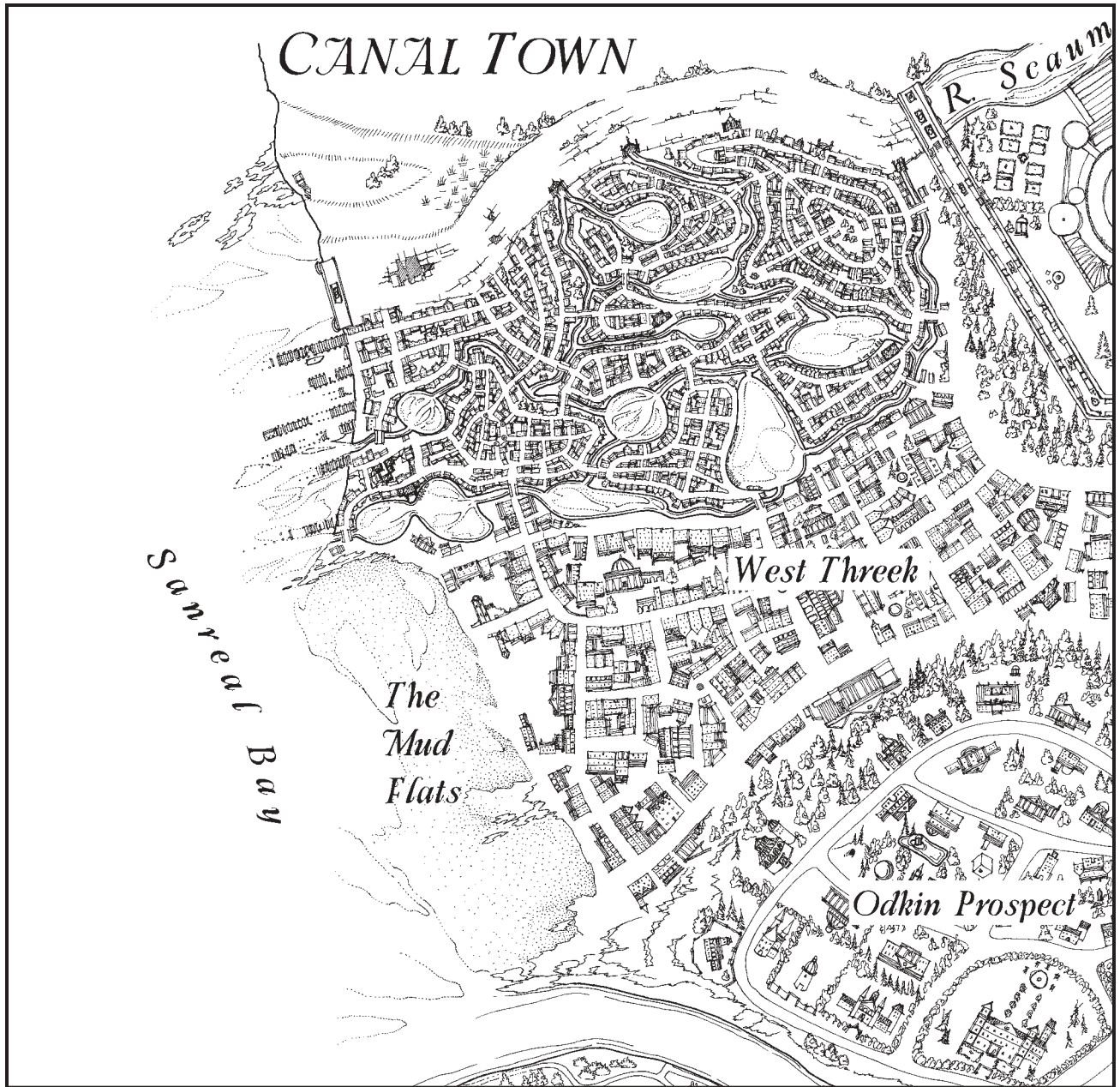
On the shores of the Sanreal, below the Derna’s mouth, lie the Mud Flats. Shorecombers, most of whom make their homes in Canal Town, diligently part the viscous sands in search of valuable items, and occasionally even find them. Note: Most residents of Kaiin avoid Canal Town as they would the plague¹. You may decide that your PC has never been here. In that case, feel free to read the material below as background information, as opposed to an account of your character’s actual experiences.

Didactic Overview

Building of the Canals

Now decrepit and decaying, the network of tunnels and canals through which the Derna makes its final, aching push towards Sanreal Bay were constructed about seventy-five years ago. The project was overseen by the ambitious minister Whimake. Proposed during a period of food shortage, the canals were supposed to serve two purposes: first, they would cover over the polluted waters of the Derna, protecting the people from its increasing stench. Second, they would permit a variety of irrigation projects, allowing otherwise idle local residents to usefully produce fresh fruits and vegetables. This measure was meant to combat a blockade placed further up the river by Sorghoy, a local warlord of the Modavna Moor, who, for a period of several years, stopped trade goods originating in northern Ascolais from reaching the city. Historians agree that the canal project gradually revealed itself to be an epic boondoggle; some even accuse Whimake of having hired Sorghoy to trump up this blockade, to justify the great building project. It is certainly known that Whimake dispensed contracts to his cronies and relatives, draining Kaiin’s treasury. When the expenditures grew so great that they ate even into the prince’s fund for the financing of festivals and orgies, Whimake fell from favor. It is said that his body lies buried beneath the limestone piling that holds up the last of the covered bridges to be erected in Canal Town.

¹ And indeed, the neighborhood offers a wide variety of infectious diseases to the less-than-rugged visitor.



The Inevitable Fall Into Sordid Decline

Neither fruits nor vegetables were ever grown here, at least not in quantities sufficient to line anyone's pockets. The soil was never good enough, and once Sorghoy fell victim to mottled pleurisy, cheap produce again flowed from the north. Canal Town slowly developed its own, new uses. Wastes from throughout the city were taken and dumped into the covered canals, far from the noses of well-heeled citizens. The

gases given off by decomposing excrement proved salubrious to certain barnacles and other shellfish, who gathered in abundance on the limestone banks and columns of the canal works. A few decades ago, some enterprising person decided to hire workers to scrape away these useless animals, replacing them with supposedly edible scallops and oysters. Unfortunately, these otherwise saleable shellfish carried a wide variety of diseases, and their sale within Kaiin was ruled



illegal by the prince. This did not long deter the oystermen. They sneaked what produce they could past the prince's harried and corruptible inspectors, and exported the rest.

Their trade continues today, but most of the activity in Canal Town is devoted to the disposal of the city's substantial volume of bodily wastes. Its lagoons and waterways also provide a useful venue for the dumping of other unpleasant items, from animal carcasses to human corpses it would be awkward to get rid of in the standard manner.



Inhabitants

The cramped stone hovels of Canal Town are much like those of the adjoining neighborhood, The Threek (p129), except for two factors: they are of slightly more recent construction, and they stink like rancid sewage. Nevertheless, the Watermen, as residents of this area call themselves, look on their Threek neighbors with utter contempt. Watermen see themselves as hardened, self-reliant, stoic, and blessed with uncommon good sense. They deride Threekmen as weak, lazy, puling, and less intelligent than the average clam. They are no more respectful of their supposed social superiors. Fine clothing, educated diction, uncallused hands... all of these are, in the eyes of the Waterman, sure signs of moral weakness and mental backwardness. A Waterman would rather go down cursing a nobleman, spitted on his lance, than shrink from him in submissive servility. This self-destructive and defiant attitude is what distinguishes him from the more typically humble and fearful resident of the Threek. It is fortunate for both Watermen and their social betters that they rarely cross paths. Watermen rarely leave the precincts of their neighborhood, convinced that the rest of the world is an out and out cesspit of flaccidity and dishonesty². Needless to say, the wealthy and influential find few reasons to venture into the neighborhood that serves as Kaiin's bowels.

It is not a simple matter to move to Canal Town. Watermen will tell you that their fathers lived here,

their father's fathers lived here, and their father's father's fathers lived here. They will live and die here, and so will their sons, and their son's sons, and so on. Outsiders receive an unwelcoming reception³. Only under extreme coercion will a Waterman sell even the direst of abodes to an outsider. Even if you do manage to buy a place here, you can expect to be harassed and beaten until you either prove yourself the equal of a Waterman in obstinacy, intolerance, and capacity for punishment, or flee the area. Although their policy is brutal, you realize that it is not entirely unwise: most poor neighborhoods are rife with criminals, who prey first of all on the ordinary people around them. Not so in Canal Town. Here, there are a multitude of bridges from which to hang thieves and extortionists, and as many broad-backed laborers willing to perform the deed.

Bowelers

No Waterman would deign to come into contact with the sewage that chokes many of the neighborhood's lagoons and canals. The duties of collecting, skimming, and aerating the city's solid waste redound to the Bowelers, a cult of penitents to whom these activities are a sacred trust. Bowelers believe that the present lamentable state of the world can be directly attributed to the crushing weight of sin accumulated over the aeons by countless generations of arrogant and prideful individuals. If the sun is to be rekindled, and the world's slow slide into utter destruction averted, people must abnegate themselves, adopting with zeal the most humiliating occupations possible. Bowelers contend fiercely with one another to wade through the most fetid skiffs of ordure, proving that their humility exceeds all others. As the death of the world grows ever more imminent, the ranks of the Bowelers swell.

These fanatics, whose humble clothes (not to mention their hair and skin) are permanently embedded with the sickening odors of the muck they sift, are treated as pariahs by the Watermen, and live separately in their own areas of Canal Town. Though their faith revolves around incessant humiliation, the Bowelers' reputation is not entirely peaceful; you've heard a number of stories about their penitents going on rampages. Sometimes they fight back against Waterman bullies. Their priestess, Fladgna (see below)

² An exception occurs when members of the Builder's Guild receive a commission to bully or intimidate someone from another neighborhood. See p28.

³ Even if you prove descent from a Waterman, you'll merely receive an array of hostile, gimlet stares: "Oh, you claim descent from old Menerdmile, who ran off from us the first chance she got. Here, the name Menerdmile has become synonymous with the phrase 'rank betrayer.'"



recently announced a revelation from Dijekom, the Screaming Prophet, to the effect that suffering imposed on them by others need not be endured⁴. Accordingly, she recently began to organize her people to fight back against their tormentors, especially the trouble-seeking members of the builders guild. Street-fights for territory have ensued, though these are conducted in an indolent manner, so that months can pass between flare-ups. Either side is more than capable of unaccountably forgetting to press an advantage or avenge an injury.

Lately you've heard of internal strife within the sect. Supposedly they've taken to setting upon one another with clubs and rocks, although the stories you've heard may have been bloodily embellished by their tellers.

Contacts

Barmen

"Persist in your condescension, and my fist will find itself drawn irresistibly towards your face."

(+Forthright -Glib)

A waterman's greatest dream is to save enough terces to one day afford to open his own tavern, where his fellows might gather, drink, and bloody one another's noses. Among the watermen, a barman fulfills the functions of priest, judge, lawyer, loan officer — and, needless to say, dispenser of stomach-burning, high-proof libations. A barman knows nearly everything that goes on in his corner of Canal Town, but is also ardently protective of his



flock. He'll be quite willing to tell you about threats to his community from outside, and to supply you with rotgut, and to help secure gainful employment for his fellow watermen. Only when you have something to hold over him will he reveal the community's painful secrets, for example the identities of its wrongdoers.

⁴ Only the cruelties the penitent inflicts on himself, or those meted out by his high priestess, aid in the revivification of the world.



Bowler

“My humility is second to none.”

(+Obfuscatory -Forthright)

The most important fact to a boweler is his standing among his fellows: he knows who among them is the most self-abnegating, and who still holds onto a scrap of pride. You may not consider this especially useful information. On the other hand, bowelers criss-cross the entire city each night, to scoop from its gutters the contents of emptied chamberpots. They are thus intimately familiar with Kaiin’s geography. Treated as invisible by a population that would sooner not meditate on the necessity of their occupation, they have occasion to witness all manner of night time activities. Your boweler contact may even give you permission to travel alongside them, to wend your way unnoticed into otherwise forbidden places. However, you can expect to be treated as one of them, expected to heft a shovel and set aside all outward signs of dignity and self-respect. Your contact may or may not try to convert you to his faith. Although it is considered a holy act to help shrive a person of his self-regard, there are now more willing bowelers than the city needs, and many cultists no longer care to increase their number of competitors through willy-nilly proselytizing.

Builder

“Few understand that a work stoppage is even more exhausting to maintain than actual labor.”

(+Forthright -Intimidating)

Among the watermen, the builders are admired for their staunchness. They cling like the most stubborn of barnacles to a thirty-year old work stoppage, first declared against the Prince Kandive’s predecessor’s predecessor. The original reasons behind the strike are unclear to you, even if you’ve asked about it repeatedly. The disrepair of Canal Town’s sheds, bridges, abutments, and canals is entirely attributable to this stoppage. The builders wait with hammers and cudgels to violently repel any attempts by outside workmen to perform repairs of even the most modest nature. The mere installation of a replacement hinge can occasion bloody violence. The prince periodically orders a feint against them, but never seems to care quite enough to expend dozens of lives to break their power once and for all.

Most builders can tell you very little about

building, let alone actually assist you in constructing something. It would be against their principles, and besides, many of them have been on strike for their entire careers, including their apprenticeships. However, they are adept at pulling down construction work performed by others. They’re experienced intimidators and leg-breakers, and are often hired as such by entrepreneurs throughout the city. Accordingly, they can tell you who is currently hiring bullies and who they’re being deployed against. You might be able to hire them as guards or professional threateners, though you should not expect them to risk life or limb on your behalf.

Most builders wear shapeless garments of rough, lined sacking, dyed blue or brown and tied off with cords at the wrists and ankles. They wear hard, flat caps reinforced with metal, which function as rudimentary helmets. The bills of these caps are often festooned with metal pins bearing the insignia of their ancestral work crews.

Comber

“This fragment can be none other than a piece of wizard’s wand from the 18th Aeon.”

(+Eloquent -Obfuscatory)

Combers are watermen who sift the wet sands of the mud flats, which lay between the twin mouths of Kaiin’s two rivers, for valuables. You will know them by their traditional cloaks of rotted sacking, dyed (and scented) with urt urine. They stoop all day, armed with the tools of their trade, the mud flange and pattie turner. At night, they complain of joint pain, drink themselves cross-eyed, and dream of the day when they will comb up an artifact so valuable that they might purchase the bar they sit in.

Combers know about the sorts of artifacts that show up on the shore. They can tell you about the doings of antiquities dealers, separating them out by degree of dishonesty. They can report any events they might have witnessed on the bay shore. They may also recall details of water traffic on the Sanreal, including the landings of smugglers in contraband⁵.

Oysterman

“No, they’re supposed to be that color.”

(+Charming -Forthright)

Oystermen, another subgroup of watermen, illegally grow and harvest shellfish in the area’s concrete-lined

⁵ Combers watch their unloadings carefully, hoping for broken crates whose contents might spill unnoticed onto the shore.



lagoons and canals. Anxious to conceal the nature of their business, they dress in like builders, although vanity leads some to decorate the bills of their caps with pearls. Because their wares are sometimes poisonous, they deal only with unscrupulous fishmongers and food exporters, to whom they may be willing to introduce you. As professional criminals, they sometimes hire builders to protect them, or suffer extortion from rivals capable of hiring larger platoons of bullies. Thus they are equipped to inform you about the wider nature of Kaiin's criminal underbelly, including the names of corrupt royal inspectors. They can also draw on their contacts to sumptuously cater your next seafood feast. Sadly, a guarantee that none of the food will poison your guests comes only at a hefty premium.



Personages

Antelo, Recalcitrant Builder

"Until our oppressor comes to heel, our cause shall not rest, nor will we stir ourselves."

You've seen the burly Antelo stride ponderously through the streets, swaddled in red velvet, his vast and hairy legs protruding from unflatteringly tight lime green leggings. Several weed-thin young men, apprentices in the builder's union he runs with iron fist, accompany him with parasols, shading his pale skin from the light of the feeble sun. His hair is dark, his eyes deep-set, and his face jowly. He speaks in an impressive bass voice, and conducts himself with an air of authority so confident that even you, for a moment, felt the urge to obey him.

Although the members of his union take pride in their bare-knuckle squalor, Antelo surrounds himself with luxurious things. You once asked one of his builders if he didn't resent Antelo's airs of superiority. The man took offense, claiming that it is only fitting that his guild boasts of a leader capable of the same opulence displayed by its the wealthy exploiters.

It goes without saying that Antelo's wealth derives from the booking fee he charges whenever his guild members take work as bullies or roughnecks. If you want to hire a gang of builders, you must go through him. He maintains the loyalty of his men by strategically distributing his wealth among them. Antelo's sense of loyalty is not known to extend to his clients: he openly warns them that he'll switch allegiances if their designated target approaches him with a higher counter-offer. Thus, the services of his bully-boys are only attractive to the confidently wealthy, or those interested in hiring only for the short term.

The only individual that gruff Antelo seems to fear is The Vlack (see below), to whom he abases himself shamelessly.

When not threading his way through the damp and twisting streets of Canal Town, Antelo can be found holding court in a tavern called the Well-Hammered Nail (see below.)

Persuade (Obfusatory) 14, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 14, Attack (Strength) 4, Defense (Parry) 6, Health 6, Magic (Curious) 2, Appraisal 3, Engineering 2,



Gambling 3, Perception 4, Scuttlebutt 6, Stewardship 6, Wealth 15, Wherewithal 6.
Resistances: none.

Bocchimile, Oyster Launderer

“Among the drovers of the northern bayshore, the acrid aftertaste you complain of is considered surpassingly desirable.”

Canal Town’s most successful dealer in black market shellfish is most likely the fresh-faced Bocchimile, who wears a tall, red felt hat over his unruly blond curls. He wears silver plates over his toenails, which protrude out through open-toed slippers of soft leather. Embroidered clamshells adorn his billowing yellow tunic.

Like any launderer of shellfish, Bocchimile pays importers of clams, oysters, lobsters and shrimp to certify that his catches, grown in the poisonous muck of the canal network, were actually harvested in healthy waters. He bribes inspectors to certify his wares. He sneaks buckets of clams and oysters through the back doors of eating establishments throughout the city.

The careers of successful oyster launderers tend to be impressive but short-lived. The more clams the launderer sells, the sooner the arrival of the inevitable day when an influential grandee, perhaps even the prince himself, eats a contaminated meal, and is stricken ill. Then a grand inquisition is launched, and the launderer must typically flee the city to elude apprehension.

Bocchimile shrugs and takes this danger in stride, even though his uncle, who preceded him into the trade, was sentenced by Prince Kandive to a fatal force-feeding of his own merchandise. Bocchimile claims to have been blessed by a princess of the twk-men, so that the punishment for his offenses will always fall on others.

Persuade (Charming) 15, Rebuff (Penetrating) 15, Attack (Finesse) 6, Defense (Intuition) 6, Health 6, Magic (Daring) 4, Appraisal 4, Athletics 4, Concealment 4, Etiquette 3, Gambling 4, Imposture 2, Perception 6, Quick Fingers 2, Scuttlebutt 4, Seduction 4, Stealth 4, Stewardship 4, Wherewithal 2.
Resistances: none.

Dolbuk, Conniving Shorecomber

“My own recollection of the incident is considerably different.”

The blandly handsome Dolbuk eschews the typical urine-marked cloak of the lifelong shorecomber, in favor of a variegated poncho, wide-brimmed straw hat, and elevated sandals, which keep his elegantly formed toes at a safe remove from the sharp rocks and tiny pinching crabs of the mud flats. You have often heard other combers curse his name; he and his frequent companion, Saish Shortshanks, have gained a reputation for separating honest scroungers out of the fruits of their back-breaking labors. According to a tale common told in shorecomber taverns, Dolbuk was once called Wallow, and served as a temple guardian, but was driven from his post after being convicted of unspecified heresy and the improper handling of a captive deodand. Whenever an opportunity for sudden wealth surfaces in Canal Town, it is said that Dolbuk is sure to appear, in search of personal advancement. If you’ve met Dolbuk, you found him quite pleasant and not at all the dark-eyed villain his detractors portray him as. However, the grinning, gravel-voiced Saish Shortshanks, who hovered at Dolbuk’s shoulder, did project the demeanor of a rather shady character. Shortshanks wore a floppy wool cap, tight striped shirt, and black leggings festooned with patches of various colors.

Persuade (Glib) 8, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 8, Attack (Cunning) 6, Defense (Misdirection) 6, Health 6, Magic (Devious) 2, Appraisal 6, Athletics 4, Concealment 4, Etiquette 3, Gambling 6, Imposture 3, Living Rough 3, Pedantry 4, Perception 4, Quick Fingers 4, Riding 2, Scuttlebutt 6, Seduction 4, Stealth 3, Stewardship 3, Wherewithal 2.

Resistances: none

Saish Shortshanks

Persuade (Intimidating) 4, Rebuff (Obtuse) 4, Attack (Strength) 10, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 8, Health 4, Athletics 4, Gambling 4, Living Rough 4, Perception 3, Quick Fingers 3, Riding 3, Scuttlebutt 3, Seamanship 3, Wherewithal 3.

Resistances: none.



Fladgna, Boweler Priestess

"You may begin your obeisance by ridding yourself of coin. Entrust me to dispose of it for you."

The slim, self-possessed Fladgna is high priestess of the Bowelers, and, as such, presents herself to the world with the utmost dignity and humility, clad in shapeless, voluminous robes mottled with various colors of dirt. Her raven hair is woven up around a tall headdress, the centerpiece of which is a crude wooden representation of Dijekom, the Screaming Prophet. Her only concession to vanity is a certain cleanliness of face and hands, and a jasmine scent that contrasts strongly with the aroma of ordure given off by her followers.

You have never seen Fladgna alone; wherever she goes, she is trailed by dozens of penitents, both long-time worshippers, identifiable by the decades worth of filth ground into the folds of their skin, and newer devotees, who have yet to fully discard their appurtenances of ease and comfort. There are now more worshippers wishing to stir sewage than sewage that needs to be stirred, and only through Fladgna's dispensation can the coveted places be assigned. You have heard long-time worshippers grumble that she

favors newcomers, who can better show their commitment to self-abnegation by throwing jewels and purses of coin at her feet. Although the worshippers did not seem to make the connection, the possibility that Fladgna follows the dictates of personal profit did not elude you. However, you have so far lacked the desire, or opportunity, or both, to make this accusation to any of her acolytes. You've seen vicious fights break out between rival factions of bowelers, and may be sensibly hesitant to arouse their anger by questioning the motives of their priestess.

You have heard rumors of Fladgna's secret sexual insatiability, but this sort of thing is said about any powerful woman of Kaiin, so the truth of such whisperings is difficult to gauge. From a distance, she seemed poised and confident, but it was hard for you to tell much about the person behind her mask of clerical dignity.

Persuade (Eloquent) 12, Rebuff (Penetrating) 10, Attack (Ferocity) 3, Defense (Intuition) 5, Health 4, Magic (Forceful) 6, Appraisal 4, Perception 8, Stewardship 4, Wherewithal 6.

Resistances: Gourmandism Ω, Pettifoggery 4.



One of Fladgna's unprepossessing but devoted followers.

Hetta the Austere, Purveyor of Abstemious Beverages

"I recoil at the suggestion."

With ramrod posture and upwards-flaring eyebrows, the tall and matronly Hetta prowls the mud flats, accompanied by her bearers Chelderamel and Blotfulatte, who stagger under the weight of large casks of sugar water and various other nearly flavorless beverages. These she sells to thirsty shorecombers, many of whom she's browbeaten into joining her temperance league. You have seen several of the leading lights of this organization head swiftly from the mud flats to the nearest tavern when sundown comes, but this fact has either escaped Hetta's attention or exists on a plane beneath her notice.

Hetta cannot stop combers from bringing their own beer or wine to the shore, but has been known to send out the enormously rotund Chelderamel or the skeletal Blotfulatte to kick over beverage containers left unattended by their owners.

Rumor has it that Hetta was once the mistress of Perrin, an archmage with ties to the Scholasticarium (see p112).



Persuade (Intimidating) 12, Rebuff (Contrary) 10, Attack (Speed) 3, Defense (Vexation) 3, Health 5, Magic (Curious) 2, Appraisal 3, Etiquette 4, Pedantry 3, Perception 4, Stewardship 4, Wherewithal 4.
Resistances: Gourmandism Ω, Rakishness 6.

Chelderamel

Persuade (Intimidating) 4, Rebuff (Obtuse) 4, Attack (Strength) 6, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 6, Health 5, Athletics 3, Perception 3, Scuttlebutt 3, Stewardship 2, Wherewithal 4.
Resistances: none.

Blotfulatte

Persuade (Intimidating) 4, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 4, Attack (Cunning) 6, Defense (Intuition) 6, Health 5, Athletics 3, Perception 3, Scuttlebutt 3, Stewardship 2, Wherewithal 4.
Resistances: none.

Miransgi, Half-Lucky Comber

“Some call me ill-starred, but I reject the characterization.”

It is not an easy thing for a shorecomber to become renowned, but this is exactly the status of Miransgi, though he would surely prefer anonymity. Miransgi is known far and wide both for his phenomenal luck in finding valuable items in the damp sands of the Sanreal mud flats, and for his equally shocking inability to profit from his discoveries. Tall, ungainly, and balding, Miransgi wears the habitual urine-soaked cloak and formless sacking of the shorecomber’s trade. He continually shakes his head as if in bewilderment at the continuing cruelty of fate, but at the same time speaks in a hopeful manner. When you sat across from him in a gloomy Canal Town feasting hall, it seemed to you that Miransgi spoke this way to convince himself that life is still worth living. He reluctantly affirmed to you that he had on separate occasions found the Glittering Scepter of Sfidher, a cauldron full of ossip wax, a purse laden with IOUN stones, the Backwards-Slicing Sword of Endecca, and the original manuscript of Qerpami’s Analects, well preserved and in the master’s own hand. He went on to confess that these items had been, respectively, swindled from him by seafaring pygmies, melted by a stray bolt of magical energy, spirited away by a sandestin, confiscated by the prince’s men, and taken from him at swordpoint by

masked bandits. He also conceded that many other less spectacular, but still valuable, items had similarly parted company with him soon after he unearthed them.

Miransgi now attracts scavenging pursuers as a rotting sturgeon does seagulls. As Miransgi stumbled up to drag himself off to his pitiful hovel, you saw dozens of eyes swivel towards him. Several men left the tavern immediately afterwards, following him just in case he was headed to the mud flats. You later heard that Miransgi now resorts to a variety of disguises before he goes combing. Otherwise he’d be trailed by a small crowd of ill-wishers, each hoping to intercept him and relieve him of his latest find.

Persuade (Forthright) 2, Rebuff (Wary) 6, Attack (Caution) 2, Defense (Dodge) 2, Health 6, Magic (Studious) 2, Appraisal 8, Gambling 2, Imposture 6, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 4, Perception 6, Stealth 4, Wherewithal 2.

Resistances: Arrogance Ω.

The Vlark, Licensed Half-Man

“Withdraw your baseless slander! The terms of my license are incontrovertible!”

If you have heard nothing of Canal Town’s other personages, you surely know the name of The Vlark, which occasions a shudder of involuntary dread second only to that provoked by Chun the Unavoidable. For something like four generations, The Vlark has prowled an exactingly-demarcated area, comprising most of Canal Town, where he devours at least six people a year. He engages in his predations with the sanction of a royal charter, granted him by one of Khandive’s predecessors, and reconfirmed by each prince thereafter. The charter represents a compromise, whereby The Vlark agrees to confine his activities to a district where it is unlikely anyone truly important will get eaten, in exchange for the prince’s promise not to try hunting it⁶.

The Vlark stands about seven feet tall, and may be seen openly strolling through Canal Town’s winding laneways, jauntily twirling an ivory-tipped malacca cane and whistling through the bony slats of gaping mouth, which resembles the baleen feeding mechanism of a whale. If you have seen The Vlark, you beheld his threadbare, felt top coat, adorned with brassy buttons and trimmed with quills of the

⁶ This seems a small sacrifice on the prince’s part, since the expeditions sent against the Vlark were devoured anyway.



southern gwelk. Aside from his monstrous mouth, his inhuman features include tiny, beady eyes, a mottled and scaly hide, and massive, flipper-like feet.

You have never seen The Vlark feed, but you have it on good authority that he grabs his victim, pulling him up to the bony baleen mouth, and sucking in great hunks of flesh. His feeding apparatus is evidently capable of exerting the force of a powerful vacuum. In mere moments, nothing is left of the victim except for bones, clothing, and any solid possessions he might have had on his person at the time⁷.

The Vlark makes himself a fixture of life in Canal Town, openly making his daily rounds, often stopping in at area taverns, or accepting invitations to dine with local families. Everyone in Canal Town, from Antelo to Fladgna, pays homage to The Vlark, flattering him and showering him with gifts, in hopes that, when his

feeding time comes, he will turn his attentions to other quarters. This gives you good reason to be wary if you ever find yourself conducting business in the area. When outsiders arrive in Canal Town, its anxious notables may conspire to direct them toward The Vlark's expectant maw.

Vengeful family members sometimes attack The Vlark, but this activates a clause of his license permitting him to devour those he kills in self-defense, without counting them against his yearly quota. Obviously no one has yet succeeded in exacting retribution from him.

Supposedly The Vlark sees himself as a respectable, even a prominent, member of the community. He takes pleasure in civilized conversation, and discourses pedantically on a variety of learned subjects. You have heard that he is quick to take offense, and may therefore be reluctant to engage him in contests of pettifoggery.

The Vlark takes temporary refuge in any one of a number of houses erected for him by interested citizens. Each is luxuriantly appointed, displaying a level of wealth most in Canal Town can only dream of. Apparently The Vlark is also semi-aquatic, and may, on occasion, be found lurking beneath the sludge of any lagoon or section of canal.

A chalkboard on the wall of the Shucked Oyster (see below) keeps track of The Vlark's quota of kills for the year. When the number reaches six, people breathe an immense sigh of relief, and throw an uninhibited party, to which The Vlark habitually invites himself as guest of honor: see Vlark Festival, below. Since The Vlark seems to be highly alert to the contours of his self-interest, it is not surprising to learn that he postpones his final kill to as close to year's-end as his appetite will allow. He thereby maintains maximum leverage over the community. But even when the Vlark Festival comes early, wise people continue to kowtow to him, not wishing to end up on the top of his menu when the new year rolls around.

Persuade (Intimidating) 15, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 12, Attack (Ferocity) $\Omega+6$, Defense (Sure-Footedness) $\Omega+8$, Health 12, Magic (Forceful) 6, Appraisal 2,

⁷ The Vlark uses no special rules to accomplish this gruesome feat; it is merely a colorful description of the automatic kill any character is allowed against a downed opponent. Until The Vlark downs his victim, combat proceeds as per usual.



Athletics 6, Etiquette 4, Gambling 4, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 8, Perception 6, Scuttlebutt 4, Stealth 6, Wherewithal 12.

Resistances: Rakishness Ω.



Places of Interest

Gulls, sea-shrikes and the occasional pelgrane circle over Canal Town, shrieking and looking for food. Its air is damp, and thick with a distinctive and heady smell, mixing the rotting odors of the sea with overwhelming sewage-stink⁸. Confusingly circuitous, hovel-lined roadways bend and twist in parallel to the neighborhood's network of decaying canals. Watermen stride proudly down these meandering streets, drunkenly reeling and on the alert for bowelers or outsiders who they might coarsely curse and mock. Weary combers trudge home, rakes and patties slung listlessly over their shoulders. Shouts and bellows of laughter burst forth from the doors and windows of the neighborhood's countless dingy taverns. Not infrequently, a drinker is forcefully ejected, tossed face-first into a gutter by a barrel-shaped barkeep. Occasionally entire groups issue forth from a bar or dining hall in order to bear witness to a fight between patrons. Canal Town is never silent, not even in the dark of night; many inhabitants drink from dusk to dawn, and drag themselves home to sleep it off only when the sun crawls fitfully up over the horizon.

Commercial Establishments

Aside from general supply stores and taverns catering to local trade, Canal Town is bereft of interesting commercial establishments. It is far from the sort of place one would treat as a shopping destination. As previously mentioned, it is every waterman's most cherished dream to open up a tavern, so these establishments spring up all the time. Most go out of business without attracting significant trade, often because the proprietor personally consumes the bulk of his own stock. Even so, a core of taverns enjoys longstanding longevity...

The Shucked Oyster (C11) is frequented mostly by

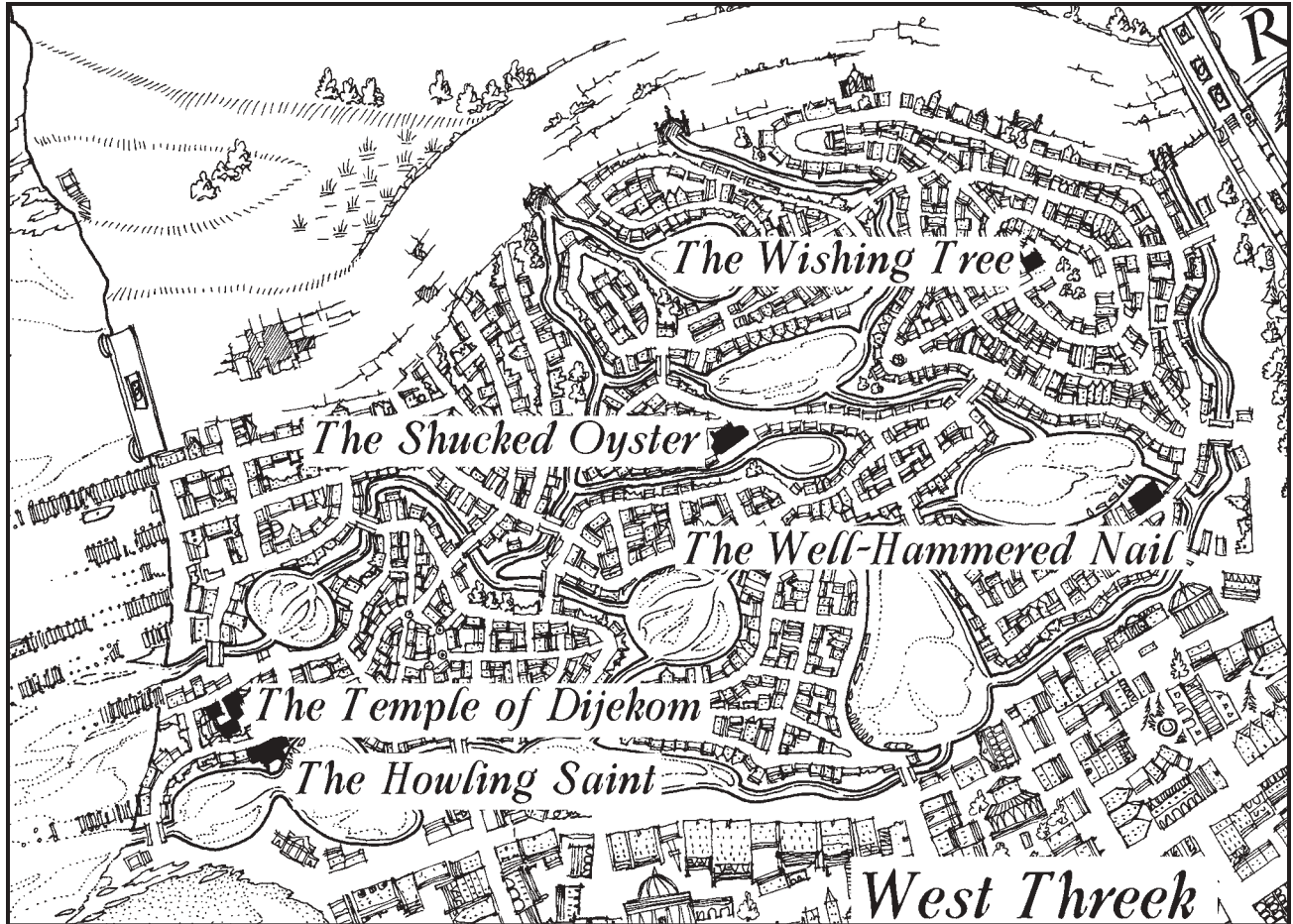
oystermen, and is known for the chalkboard measuring this year's death toll from The Vlark. The Vlark himself periodically stops in to slurp ale through his comb-like feeding structure. Sometimes he arrives to disown a particular new murder marked on the board, insisting that it was committed by another and that his quota remains unchanged. The proprietor of The Shucked Oyster is the handsome, brown-eyed Lacto, the only man who dares tease The Vlark with sly and insinuating jokes. Lacto laughs off those who accuse him of suicidal recklessness.

The Well-Hammered Nail (E11), jointly owned by Antelo (see above) and his sleepy-eyed brother Vye, provides a headquarters for the guildmaster and his cronies. Patrons often provoke fights in order to display their physical prowess to Antelo, in hopes that he will think of them the next time a client comes to him seeking bullies for hire.

The Howling Saint (B10) is unique in its refusal to serve alcoholic beverages. Stoop-shouldered bowelers sip tepidly on its menu of mildly-flavored waters, struggling to outdo each other in recounting recent acts of self-sacrifice. Its proprietress, Tracmatabli, is an intimate of Fladgna; her skin is the color of flour, and her voice rarely rises above a creaking whisper.

Superstitious drinkers avoid **The Wishing Tree** (D12), despite its bargain prices. Its customers divide into two categories, the defiantly skeptical and the acutely desperate. A ring of wooden statues, each carved with remarkable detail and realism, stands watch outside the tavern's door. Each statue depicts a seemingly normal waterman, usually with his expression frozen in an attitude of mild displeasure. Its perspiring owner, Kokursy, seems anxious to sell; if you have ever been here, you were offered the chance to acquire this establishment at an extremely low price. You've heard the rumors about the place: that it is haunted by a vexing sprite or vindictive phantom, who periodically enspells one of the casks of ale so that its contents permanently transform unfortunate imbibers into wooden statues. Kokursy denies the rumors, but if you've ever heard him do so, you've also observed the doubtful and guilty expressions on the faces of his worn-looking clientele.

⁸ Longtime inhabitants pay this no mind, but occasional visitors may be expected to make Wherewithal rolls or suffer the visible signs of nausea and revulsion. Those struck by the effect take a levy of 1 when negotiating with watermen or other hardened Canal Town denizens, who proudly mock the mincing sensibilities of outsiders.



Curiosities and Landmarks

Oyster Beds

Only an astute observer can tell a lagoon in which illegal shellfish are cultivated from one merely choked with the usual sewage. This, naturally, is the state of affairs preferred by oystermen, who have no desire to see their crops confiscated by bribe-seeking inspectors. If you're especially observant, though, you might have noticed that certain lagoons are monitored by loiterers of ostentatious casualness, who must surely serve as look-outs for their oyster-growing employers. Many of these are burly, cudgel-wielding individuals, who straighten their shoulders threateningly when they decide you're looking at them too intently.

The canals provide the city's best venue for the private disposal of corpses. Should you wish to discard inconvenient remains, it is best to do so in the middle of the night, when even the oysterers have gone to

bed. Keep a sharp eye peeled for indigents sleeping on the streets, though. They take a sharp interest in corpse disposal, because oysters and shrimp seem to thrive in lagoons where bodies decompose. Oystermen offer them fees to reveal the location of freshly-dumped carcasses. After being tipped off, the fishermen quickly seed the area with young shellfish. This means, if you find yourself in the opposite position of needing to find a corpse dumped by another, that you should concentrate your efforts on areas frequented by obvious oyster lookouts. The lagoons they watch are the most likely to contain the body you seek.

Mud Flats

The Mud Flats are a large expanse of wet, fine sand centered around the mouth of the Scaum. Depending on the time of year, the flats may be covered in up to a half inch of water from the adjoining bay. The



Artists such as Vrancastler have occasionally attempted to capture the character of Canal Town.

Sanreal has been a busy shipping hub for aeons, so interesting objects are constantly washing up on the shores, only to be buried under its soggy and ever-shifting sands. Also resident in the sands are several varieties of crab, some of whose pincers are capable of delivering a nasty nip. One variety, the fortunately rare blue-rimmed sand crab, is capable of snipping off an unwary comber's toe. During the day, the flats are alive with activity, as gulls probe the sand for crabs and worms, and combers dig through it for valuables.

Governesses and stewards of wealthy families bring their masters' children here to munch on salty dried bayweed, and to gawk happily at the bowed and red-faced shorecombers. Sharp-eyed resellers perambulate the flats, waiting for a comber to jump up and give out an exclamation of excitement. Then they coolly converge on the lucky individual to assess his catch and, if it is of interest, to dicker over it. The shorecombers complain that the resellers all collude with one another to keep prices down; resellers all curse their competitors for driving them up. Successful

bidders proceed to the market, offering their purchases to various dealers in antiquities, curiosities, and miscellaneous junk.

Rotted Wharves

By contrast, the mouth of the Derna is a treacherous locale, dominated by wharves that date back to the Old Town era. Though kept up until the builder's strike began, they are now in extremely bad repair, and are likely to collapse under anyone foolish enough to traverse them. Inexperienced smugglers sometimes attempt to use these docks while unloading contraband late at night. They generally lose their cargoes, and on occasion even their lives, as a result. Vagabonds with no better shelter sometimes try sleeping under the wharves, but rarely stay for long. More than a night or two spent snoozing on the damp sands exposes a poor wretch to various skin-eating diseases and fungal infestations. The Fringe (p41) offer better refuge to the indigent. What the area under the wharves does offer is a splendid location for



clandestine meetings. If you happen to be wandering here and see a group of people conferring under a wharf, it is best to look elsewhere and keep moving. Otherwise, you can expect to be accosted by angry toughs wondering why you're spying on them.

Temple of Dijekom (A10)

This humble building, once a mere crumbling tenement, is now the world headquarters of the Boweler's cult. Its main attraction is its courtyard, where Fladgna conducts sunrise services each morning in the fetid open air. The most fervent worship occurs when the weather is drizzly and cold. At other hours, the courtyard acts as the cult's collective bedchamber: adherents toss and turn on musty, straw-filled pallets. Deacons armed with pointed sticks patrol the snoring heap of worshippers, enforcing the invisible line of segregation separating men from women⁹. The cult's detractors insist that Fladgna's own apartments within the temple are sumptuously appointed, but the bowelers hotly deny this libel.

Events

Day of the Screaming Prophet

The 12th of Raterse is the holiest day in the boweler's calendar. Penitents flood the streets, gathering first outside their humble temple, then proceeding through Canal Town, and then towards the marketplace. They moan and grimace as if caught in the throes of some supernal agony, stripped to the waist and swatting themselves with whips and switches¹⁰. Canal Town onlookers gather to aid in the penitents' suffering by showering them with sharp stones and rotten vegetables. As the bowelers leave Canal Town and hit the processional, the prince's men invariably lie in wait for them, to charge them with horses and break their column. Most times, the vigils are successful, and the religious festival is dispersed amid shrieking chaos. Perhaps one year out of five, the worshippers withstand the vigils' sally and continue on to the marketplace, where they are greeted with jeers and groans of revulsion. When this occurs, the worshippers jig about in ecstatic glee as vendors close their stalls and shoppers flee for other precincts.

Opening of the Shin House

Throughout Kaiin, at least a dozen places claim to be the location of the final, painful, withering death of Mad King Shin. Canal Town's candidate for this distinction is the lonely, teetering structure known as Shin House. The house stretches up several stories into the air and is decorated with gargoyles and falling, scale-shaped shingles. Although no documentary evidence links the dead king to this location, it is redolent with strange magic, which is good enough proof for some. Specifically, its doors open only once a year. At any other time, it is impossible to pry loose the front doors or gain entry in any other manner. At midnight, on the ninth of Blotndming, the big brass doors swing open, admitting any who care to enter. They slam shut about a minute later, only to creak briefly open in the diffuse light of pre-dawn, allowing those who went in to stagger out.

The opening attracts several dozen adventurers and thrill-seekers each year. Allegedly, those who cross the threshold enter a strange realm where they encounter a variety of allegorical figures, who reveal great secrets to them. Accounts differ on whether these secrets are of a metaphysical or personal nature; perhaps each person is granted the revelations he seeks, or best deserves. Muddying the question is the fact that those who shakily emerge from the house suffer inevitable memory loss, and cannot describe of anything they saw or heard during their time inside. Some claim that they maintain an instinctive understanding of how they might thereafter change their lives. It is also interesting to note that everyone staggering out of the house is always missing his footwear, as well as any green or blue threads in his clothing. Those uninformed enough to enter wearing clothing entirely of blue or green exit naked.

Vlark Festival

When the Vlark officially acknowledges that it has claimed its sixth, and final, legal victim for the year, the builder's guild and shorecomber's association join together to hold a raucous street party. Celebrants drink themselves into giddy oblivion, happy that they and their loved ones have eluded The Vlark's feeding structure for yet another year. Mourners of his victims are encouraged to avoid the revelry, lest they be considered spoilsports. The Vlark himself makes an

⁹ Among the bowelers, only married couples are permitted conjugal relations, and then only in cases where both participants attest that the most frequent result is discomfort and frustration.

¹⁰ Elderly and infirm individuals are given dispensation merely to slap themselves with pats of ordure, which they carry in heavy sacks that hang from their necks.



appearance midway through the celebrations. He generally gives a speech, accepts a round of toasts, and generally acts as if the event is intended to honor his accomplishments. The truly uninhibited festivities do not commence until after he yawns, stretches, describes himself as sleepy, and waddles off to one of his many beds.



Rumors ...

- ✿ If the PCs have fallen on hard times, Bocchimile is willing to employ them as dogsbodies, carting illicit shrimps and oysters from Canal Town to various eating establishments. The PCs' predecessors in this endeavor were recently caught by a wealthy matron who blames a severe gout inflammation on contaminated shellfish. However, Bocchimile himself escaped the attention of authorities, so he is sure that no untoward attention will fall upon the PCs.
- ✿ One of your rivals (specified by your GM) has disposed of a body in the Canal Town lagoons. If you can recover it before its complete conversion to oyster food, you might be able to find a clue which could bring about your enemy's disgrace, banishment, or death.
- ✿ A merchant named Comosivamel has earned a fortune selling jewelry in the market. Now she wants her family to come and live with her in her manse near the banks of the Scaum. Alas, they are dyed-in-the-wool watermen, and act as if she dropped dead of the quivers the moment she stepped foot outside the old neighborhood. Comosivamel wants to employ a select group of trustworthy individuals to safely kidnap all fifteen members of her extended family and bear them to her manor, where, she is confident, several months of exposure to extravagant surroundings will induce them to change their minds.
- ✿ The eldest son of Lord Perzo has joined the bowlers. If he inherits the Perzo estate and holdings, he will donate all of them to the temple. Perzo would like his son to quietly vanish from the face of his earth, so that his more responsible second son might inherit and carry on the family name. Those who perform this mission must be discreet, so as not to unduly upset Lady Perzo, who suffers from a nervous disposition and is prone to the whiffles.
- ✿ The Canal Town barman Blotstrunct has been found laid out on the counter of his tavern, a six-inch blade protruding from his breastbone. His will specifies that, should his death come about as the result of foul play, the individual who accurately reveals to a magistrate the identity of the killer will inherit his establishment.
- ✿ The prince has appointed a new special magistrate, Ant Antson, to break the back of the builder's guild once and for all. You might profit by bringing about the downfall of Antson, assisting him in destroying Antelo, or by playing off both sides to ultimate advantage.
- ✿ The unfortunate Miransgi has gone missing. He was last seen in the company of the shady Dolbuk and his ne'er-do-well companion, Saish Shortshanks. They are probably holed up somewhere in the neighborhood, torturing Miransgi until he reveals the hiding place of his latest discovery. If you were to find them, perhaps you could beat them to it. You might even, if so inclined, be able to spare Miransgi some pain, or even a premature demise.
- ✿ The Vlark is indignant that he has been credited with the disappearance of an individual with whom you were passingly acquainted. You could earn his gratitude by investigating and clearing the half-man's name. A favor from The Vlark might come in handy should you ever wish to engineer a disappearance of your own.



Taglines

*Before you continue, I must warn you that
The Vlark is my boon companion.*

*By taking this from you now, I protect you from
those who would seize it by force.*

*Call me parsimonious, but I am reluctant
to become nourishment for anyone.*

Calm yourself, and hand me that muck-pole!

Cease your skulking and reveal your intentions!

*Even from a wharf-rat more dignified than yourself,
I would reject the imputation.*

*How many toes do you find here,
in the course of the average year?*

*If you allow me to examine it for an extended period, I
could perhaps come to an accurate appraisal of its value.*

*Indeed; the distinctions between yourself and a mere
flunky of The Threek are too numerous to list.*

My ignorance of your doctrines is absolute.

My own self-abasements are of an internal nature.

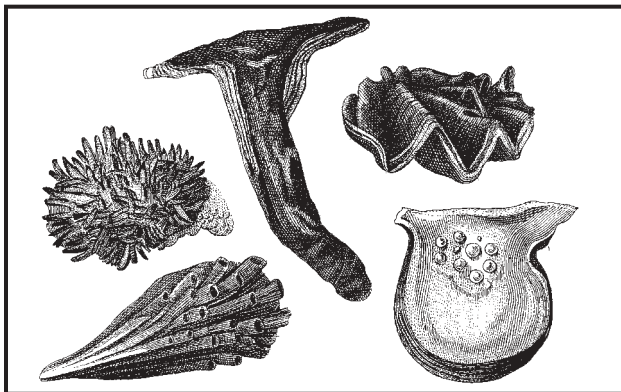
*Perhaps it would be consoling to think of it not as
misfortune, but as involuntary generosity.*

This libation is brutal, yet efficacious.

*Though I need nothing constructed for me at this time, I
can nonetheless propose a profitable use for that hammer.*

*Your customers appear to have rethought
the merit of your service.*

Your dedication is fervent.



An assortment of the shellfish sold as 'oysters' in Kaiin.

Tweaks

Air of Imminent Conversion (Persuasion)

Situation: You find yourself engaged in a negotiation with zealous followers of a religion or philosophy, one which encourages adherents to recruit others.

Description: You are adept at feigning interest in the doctrines of others, no matter how fanatical they may be. You adroitly tantalize would-be missionaries with hints of incipient conversion, without ever actually committing yourself. By doing so, you induce your negotiating partner to grant you additional concessions in hopes of ingratiating himself to you, softening you up for the final embrace of his faith.

Benefit: You gain a boon of 1 whenever engaged in a Persuasion contest against the true believer's Rebuff. If you win contest without having to reroll any Dismal Failures, the believer never detects your insincerity. When next you meet this person, you can once again pretend to be pulled towards conversion, and gain further benefits from him. However, if you lose a contest, or win while having rerolled a Dismal Failure, or if he discovers by other means that your interest is feigned, you thereafter suffer a levy of 1 on Persuasion attempts against him.

Reek of the Waterman (Imposture)

Situation: You are encountering a particular group of watermen for the first time, in their own territory.

Description: You easily assume the pugnacious attitude and weather-beaten look of the native-born waterman, even if fled the neighborhood years ago or do not even hail from Canal Town.

Benefit: Whenever you find yourself in a situation in which an outsider or former resident would be mocked or harassed, you may roll Imposture to instead inspire a waterman to treat you with back-slapping friendliness. He may oppose this attempt with his Perception. If you win the contest, you gain a boon of 1 on any immediately subsequent Persuasion



Canal Town and The Mud Flats

contests against him. When you face a group of watermen, your Imposture contest is waged against the ringleader; a win against him counts as a win against all.

“Is It By Design That You Missed This Gleaming Object?”

(Perception)

Situation: For the first time, you are about to enter a mud flat frequented by shorecombers. None of them recognize you or know you by reputation.

Description: When it comes to shorecombing, you are blessed with a dose of beginner’s luck more experienced hands may find deeply vexatious. Even though a patch of beachfront may have been carefully sifted a dozen times or more, you may stroll up to it, glance casually downwards, and spot something of value poking up out of the mud. You are then obliged to delightedly show off your find to all of the shorecombers around you, or the tweak won’t work next time. You may use this tweak only once per day, and only if you are unknown to all of the shorecombers present.

Benefit: This tweak automatically succeeds, but the type of item depends on the number of Perception points you spend. The GM decides the exact nature of the find, using this chart as a baseline.

Points Spent	Nature of Item
1	5–10 terces
2	Minor curio, worth 10–20 terces
3	Old coin or other minor antique, in poor condition, worth 20–30 terces
4	Valuable antique, worth 40–60 terces
5	Stunning antiquity, worth 100–500 terces
6	1-point magical item
8	2-point magical item
10	3-point magical item

If you wish to keep the item, you must pay Possessions points for it, as for any other item. Otherwise, you can sell it, or trade it away in exchange for a favor or service.

Unappetizing Countenance (Health)

Situation: A half-man, or other intelligent being with a taste for human flesh, has sensed your presence and is deciding whether to make you its next meal.

Description: No matter how robust you may actually be, you appear as a pitiful specimen, no doubt bristling with an array of distasteful and contagious diseases. Your skin seems loose and tough, your flesh gristly. You smell sour, like curdled milk or badly cured meat. Oddly enough, you project this unhealthy air only to individuals assessing your relative tastiness and nutritive value. This tweak does not, for example, give pause to prospective employers or frighten off potential romantic partners.

Benefit: This tweak works differently depending on whether you are the flesh-eater’s sole possible victim, or are one of a range of culinary choices. If you are the only possible meal in the area, you may contest your Health against his Perception. If you win, he declines to eat you, even if it means he’ll go hungry instead. If, on the other hand, you are just one of a number of possible repasts within his range of smell, you need merely spend 1 Health point to have him focus his attention on those others. In the unlikely event that everyone nearby has this tweak, the half-man wanders off, his stomach still rumbling.

