

SMUGGLER'S COVE



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THE HIDDEN BAY

READ ALOUD

The salty sea breeze hits your face as the jagged cliffs part, revealing a hidden cove glowing under the moonlight. Wooden docks zig-zag across the dark waters, leading to a sprawling cave network lit by flickering lanterns. The unmistakable scent of roasted fish, gunpowder, and spilled ale wafts over the water, mingling with the cries of seagulls and the chaotic shouting of merchants negotiating in half a dozen languages.

The Smuggler's Cove serves as the primary black market for the Iron Coast. Free from the prying eyes of the Harbourwatch or the Northreach Guard, merchants here deal in illicit potions, stolen heirlooms, and dangerous magical artifacts. Over the past decade, the cove has grown from a humble hideout into a fully functioning, subterranean city. Ships of all shapes and sizes—from massive dwarven ironclads to sleek elven schooners—dock side-by-side in a precarious truce, bound only by the pursuit of unregulated coin.



PORT SECURITY

GM NOTES

The cove is guarded by the "Salt-Tooth" syndicate. Any obvious display of law enforcement insignias, paladin holy symbols (unless heavily disguised), or attempts to cast divination magic openly will immediately shift their disposition to hostile.

The guards here are tough, sea-worn veterans. They are heavily armed with enchanted cutlasses and flintlock pistols imported from the distant gnome-holds of Karrenwell. Unlike standard city guards, the syndicate enforcers operate on bribes and sheer intimidation. They do not care about petty theft or brawls—they only care about maintaining the integrity of the market and ensuring the syndicate gets its undisputed cut.

SKILL CHECK

DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion or Deception) to convince the dockwarden to let you pass without paying the exorbitant 50 gp "docking tax." A failure results in the warden demanding a 100 gp tax, plus the temporary confiscation of a magical item as collateral.

THE BLACK MARKET LABYRINTH

The market itself is a labyrinth of stalls, tents, and overturned long-boats set up inside the dry caverns. Parrots squawk from rafters, and the air smells strongly of exotic spices, gunpowder, and stale ale. Vendors loudly hawk their wares, which range from the mundane (smuggled silks and untaxed tobacco) to the utterly bizarre (bottled dreams, singing teeth, and captured clockworks). It is practically impossible to find a specific item without either pure luck or the assistance of a hired guide, who will inevitably skim a percentage off any purchase made by the party.

THE SYNDICATE HIERARCHY

The Salt-Tooth syndicate is broken into three distinct factions, each controlling a different aspect of the cove's operations. The fragile peace between these factions is the only thing preventing the cove from descending into an absolute bloodbath.



KEY FACTIONS

1. **The Powder Kegs:** Specialists in explosives, dwarven firearms, and structural sabotage. They control the armories and the heavy artillery defending the bay entrance.
2. **The Whisperers:** Information brokers dealing in secrets, blackmail, and assassinations. They control the flow of rumors and manage the various spies implanted in the mainland cities.
3. **The Wave-Riders:** Navigators and ship captains who smuggle the goods out to sea. This faction contains the highest concentration of spellcasters, employing seawitches and storm-priests to manipulate weather patterns.

MARKET RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

D8	ENCOUNTER	DISPOSITION / THREAT LEVEL
1	A merchant selling a "genuine" magic sword that actually screams loudly when drawn.	Friendly (Scam) / Low
2	Two rival captains engaged in a brutal knife fight over a perceived slight.	Hostile / Medium
3	A deep-folk spy gathering intelligence on a planned reef-raider attack.	Neutral / Social
4	A shipment of highly unstable alchemical potions detonating sequentially.	Hazard / High
5	A chained, angry griffon breaking loose from its handlers and rampaging through the stalls.	Deadly
6	The Pirate King making an official, heavily armed inspection of the docks.	Social / Tense
7	An illusionist shifting the appearance of stolen art pieces.	Social / Deceptive
8	A press-gang attempting to forcefully recruit the party onto a galleon.	Hostile / High

THE SMUGGLERS' CODE

Despite the inherent chaos of the underground market, a strict code of conduct exists to prevent total anarchy. Known simply as "The Code," it dictates that there is to be absolutely no blood spilled inside the primary cavern network. Violators of this rule are not simply arrested;

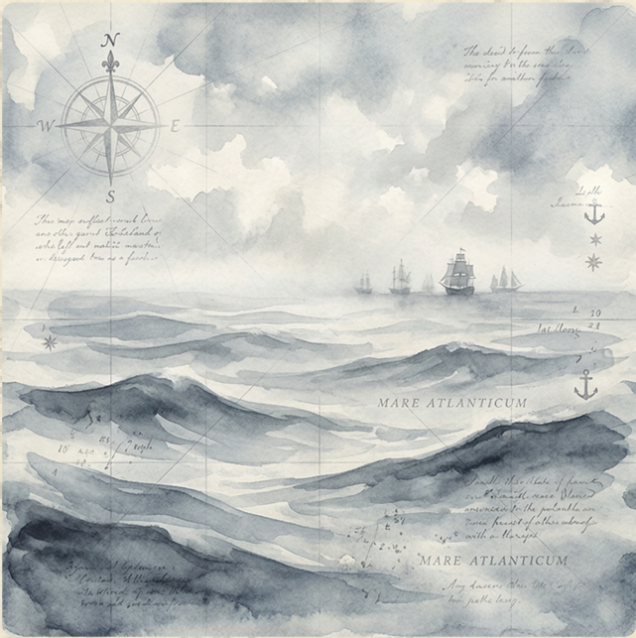
they are stripped of their wealth and chained to the outer reef at low tide to face the wrath of the reef-raider tribes. Furthermore, all deals struck within the cove act as binding verbal contracts. The Whisperers employ magically bound notaries who record significant transactions. Attempting to back out of a deal once hands are shaken is considered a grave offense, often resulting in the offending party losing their ship, their crew, or their actual life.

THE DROWNED REACHES

Beyond the safety of the cove's heavily enforced docks lie the treacherous waters known as the Drowned Reaches. The Razor Reefs—jagged, underwater formations intentionally cultivated by the syndicate's druids—are designed to tear the hulls out of pursuing Royal Navy galleons. The reefs are seeded with aggressive coral that grows exponentially when exposed to the blood of fallen sailors.

GM NOTES

Navigating the reefs requires a specialized pilot who intimately understands the terrifying, erratic currents generated by the nearby elemental rift. Even then, ships must move at a painfully slow crawl, leaving them highly vulnerable to opportunistic attacks from the deep.



Lying just past the Razor Reefs is a massive nautical graveyard known locally as the Drowned Armada. Over three centuries ago, a massive imperial battlefleet attempted to invade the cove, entirely underestimating the syndicate's alliance with a local kraken. The entire invasion force was pulled into the abyssal depths in a matter of minutes.

Today, the broken spines of these majestic galleons form an eerie, rotating labyrinth beneath the waves. Local smugglers often use the air pockets trapped within the upturned hulls as secret meeting places to exchange highly illegal artifacts, completely out of sight of the Pirate King's tax collectors. However, these impromptu bases are frequently occupied by the restless, waterlogged undead crewmen of the original armada, who still believe the invasion is actively ongoing and will violently repel any intruders who do not bear the imperial crest.

THE HIDDEN VAULT

Deep within the cavern network, past the market and the raucous taverns, lies the syndicate's true prize: The Vault of the Leviathan. This massive, reinforced adamantine vault contains a sizable portion of the Iron Coast's stolen liquid wealth, held in trust by the Pirate King.

SKILL CHECK

DC 25 **Thieves' Tools** to pick the intricate dwarven locks. Failure triggers an alarm spell audible for miles. Alternatively, three silver keys held simultaneously by the three faction leaders can open the vault without risk.

VAULT GUARDIAN

READ ALOUD

As the heavy stone doors grind open, the air inside drops to freezing temperatures instantly. The sound of shifting bones and scraping metal echoes from the impenetrable darkness. A massive, skeletal monstrosity rises from the piles of gold coins and jewels, its eye sockets burning with blinding blue, ethereal flames. Its armor is comprised of the welded, shattered hulls of sunken warships.

SKELETAL JUGGERNAUT

Huge undead, unaligned

Armor Class: 16 (armor scraps and ship plating)
Hit Points: 142 (15d12 + 45) **Speed:** 40 ft.



STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	3 (-4)	8 (-1)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws: Str +9, Con +7 **Damage Vulnerabilities:** bludgeoning
Damage Immunities: poison **Condition Immunities:** exhaustion, poisoned
Senses: darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 9 **Languages:** understands the languages its constituent parts knew in life but can't speak

Falling Apart. If the juggernaut takes damage, it must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, a chunk of bone falls off, instantly spawning an independent Skeleton minion that acts on the juggernaut's initiative.

Ship-Breaker. The juggernaut was assembled from hulls and remembers how they come apart. Its attacks against objects, vehicles and structures score a critical hit on a roll of 18 or higher.

Multiattack. The juggernaut makes two bone blade attacks.

Bone Blade. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (4d8 + 6) slashing damage.

Defeating the guardian will alert the entire cove, meaning the party will have extremely limited time to gather their spoils and secure an escape vessel before the entire syndicate descends upon them. If the players defeat the guardian quickly and loot the vault effectively, they will find the accumulated wealth of years of smuggling operations on the Iron Coast.

TREASURE

The Leviathan's Hoard

- *Cape of the Vanishing Debtor*
- *Bottomless Kit-Bag*
- 18,500 gp in assorted, untraceable stolen coinage (primarily ancient electrum and platinum pieces).
- Several crates containing pristine trade goods (silk, spices, adamantine ore) worth an additional 5,000 gp if fenced properly.
- A heavily encrypted nautical map detailing the syndicate's primary shipping routes, safehouses, and corrupted officials for the next three months.