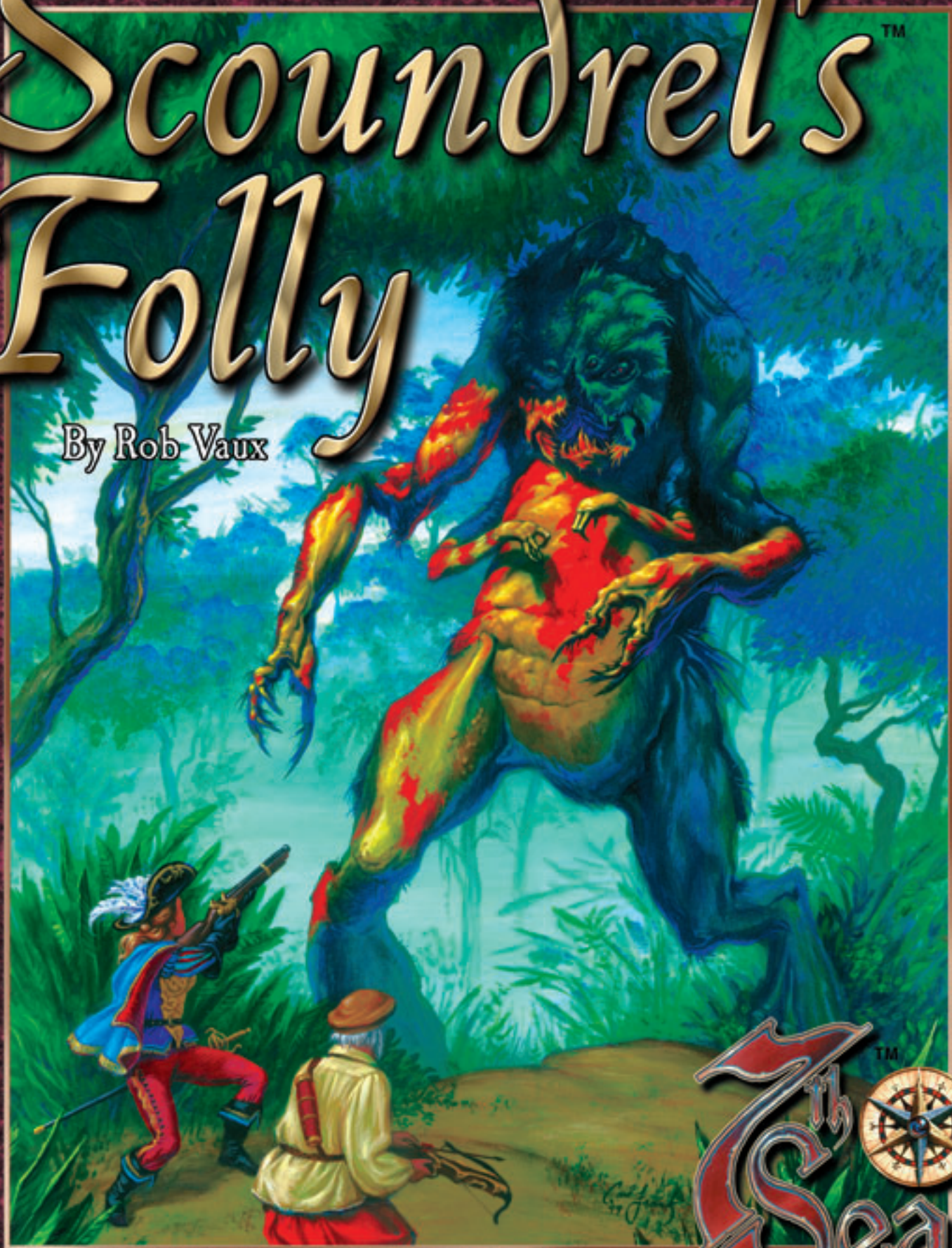


Scoundrel's FollyTM

By Rob Vaux



The Erebus Cross: Part Two

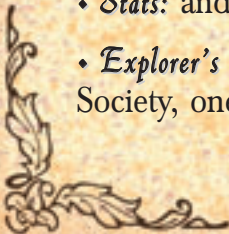
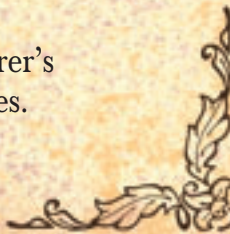


7th Sea™

*Tyger tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night...*

In the heart of the western seas lies an island like no other. There, the idle rich of Théah's mightiest nation hunt the most fearsome monsters the world has ever seen amid the overgrown jungle trees. But while they play their dangerous games, someone lurks in the shadows. Someone who knows the island's *true* powers and plans to seize them for himself. Can your Heroes stop him in time?

Scoundrel's Folly is the second in the *Erebus Cross* series of adventures for the *7th Sea* role-playing game. From the hidden halls of Eisen's nobility to swashbuckling adventure on the high seas, it spans the length of an entire world in an epic quest to stop a madman's schemes. *Scoundrel's Folly* includes:

- *A Complete Adventure*: self-contained yet compatible with other chapters in the *Erebus Cross* series.
 - *Stats*: and descriptions for major NPCs.
 - *Explorer's Secrets*: Continuing coverage of the Explorer's Society, one of Théah's most intriguing secret societies.
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Scoundrel's Folly

The Erebus Cross: Part Two

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The Erebus Cross Part Two: Scoundrel's Folly

Introduction

A sinister Villain plots to unleash terrible powers and only your Heroes can stop him! From the secret fortresses of Eisen's nobility to the deadly perils of the High Seas they must journey across Théah to thwart his terrible plans. Along the way, they'll face scurvy pirates, decadent noblemen and the terrible creatures which lurk beneath the waves. Do they have the courage to succeed?

Welcome to *Scoundrel's Folly*, the second part of the Erebus Cross trilogy for the *7th Sea* role-playing game. The trilogy is intended to give players and Game Masters an overview of Théah: her countries, her citizens, and the supernatural creatures which lurk in her shadows. By the time it is completed, the Heroes will have changed the fate of nations, and uncovered an artifact as old as time itself.

Like its precursor, *The Lady's Favor*, *Scoundrel's Folly* is broken into three sections. The first (the one you're reading now) introduces the adventure, gives a basic overview of the drama, and lists instructions for running it. The second contains the adventure itself, the set "hard points" which define the story, and the variable encounters the GM can use as he or she sees fit (see "The Structure," below). The final holds the stats and descriptions for the various NPCs they will encounter, including their new friend Coleson and the sinister Villain Malveck. GMs can refer to them during the adventure to properly convey their motives and personality.

The Structure

Scoundrel's Folly doesn't run the way typical adventures do. That is, it doesn't follow a set progression of encounters which lead from the beginning of the story to the end. At the same time, however it isn't so free-form that the GM will have to organize everything just to have a workable product. In truth, it lies somewhere in the middle. When we first discussed the Erebus Cross series, we talked a lot about story rigidity. We didn't want to force the Heroes to follow a set path where one event inexorably follows upon another. On the other hand, we need to have some structure, or else it wouldn't be an adventure at all; it'd be a sourcebook. The story would therefore need to be flexible without compromising the coherency of the plot.

In addition, we didn't want the module limited in terms of the characters' experience level. A group of advanced, highly skilled Heroes should be able to participate in *Scoundrel's Folly* as much as a group of beginning characters and vice versa. That meant that the threats and encounters would need to be tailored to fit different characters: those early in a campaign as well as late. First-timers should have some exciting adventures without getting their characters killed, while older, experienced players should be able to have the same adventures without feeling bored out of their skulls.

That's a tricky balance to maintain. Eventually, we settled on a solution that landed somewhere in the middle of all of these elements. A basic structure of the adventure is provided, listing several "hard point" events that will need to occur if the players are to reach their goals (for example, at some point in their journey, they will need access to a ship; it's impossible to reach the island otherwise). But the exact placement of those hard points, and the way the characters will reach them, depends upon the course they wish to take. In addition, we've offered the GM a large group of optional events and encounters from which to choose. They're not necessary

to run the adventure, but they enhance the value of the drama and can make the experience more enjoyable. Unlike “random” encounters, most of these are firmly connected to the overall story-line; they’re just not as vital as the hard points are. The GM is free to place them wherever he or she feels is appropriate, or ignore them depending upon his or her whims.

To incorporate characters of different powers and experience, we’ve assigned a point value to each encounter; the higher the value, the more dangerous it is and the better suited it is to powerful characters. GMs can leave out the difficult ones if they feel they are too challenging, or ignore the easy ones if they think them a waste of time. As long as the hard points are eventually reached, the GM can use the remainder of the book in any manner that fits his or her campaign.

This sort of format requires a little effort on the part of the GM. You need to read through this book carefully, and determine beforehand which encounters would best suit your characters. You need to decide how much they can handle, and what they’ll find most exciting and stimulating. And you need to be prepared to roll with the punches, to take a different direction if the characters do something unexpected. But with a little preparation, that shouldn’t be too difficult. The format is intended to help you gain the most enjoyment out of *Scoundrel's Folly*, and to help tailor the adventure to fit your unique campaign.



Basic Outline of the Story

The first part of *The Erebus Cross*, *The Lady's Favor*, sent the Heroes on a desperate mission to reach the Montaigne General Montegue campaigning in Ussura. Using a Syrneth compass given to them by Montegue's wife, they tracked the general across three countries, battling monsters and the relentless pursuit of the king's Musketeers, who believed they plotted treason. Along the way, they met an Avalon explorer, Reginald Coleson, who shed some light on their strange compass. He asked if he could examine it — and a companion compass held by Montegue — at the castle of his patron, Stefan Heilgrund.

Arriving in Ussura, the Heroes deliver the message to Montegue, who thanks them profusely for the risks they took on his behalf. As they speak with him, however, his Syrneth compass vanishes in a burst of Porté magic and one of the Heroes is struck with a vision — the compass has been stolen by a fiendish villain somewhere in the western isles. They're now faced with the prospect of stopping him. The adventure begins in Ussura, in the camp of General Montegue. Their compass now points unerringly west, directing the Heroes to its companion piece in the hands of this mysterious man.

Unbeknownst to the Heroes, that man — Lucius Malveck — has a carefully prepared scheme in which they figure prominently. He plans to kidnap a large number of Montaigne nobility who are staying on an island named L'Il du Bête (Isle of the Beast). A sort of private game preserve, L'Il du Bête hosts hunters and sportsmen from the cream of Montaigne society. All manner of monsters and creatures are transported to the island by Porté magic, then set loose in the jungles to be hunted at leisure by bored nobility looking for a challenge. This variant of the Most Dangerous Game has been in effect for decades. Now Malveck wants to crash the party.

To do that, he needs the power of two Syrneth compasses. The guests at L'Il du Bête stay at a series of

converted Syrneth buildings, arrogantly appropriated by the Montaigne for their own use. With the compasses, Malveck can control the entrances and exits to the buildings, sealing them in and removing the wards that protect the residents from the monsters. He can then demand any ransom he wishes in return for their safety.

Through cunning and guile, he was able to blood the first compass – the one belonging to General Montegue – and keep it blooded until he needed it. The second compass proved more difficult, however. It lay in the hands of Montegue’s wife, the Lady Dominique Montaigne, who was protected by her Fate Witch Anna. While the chaos of the Montaigne invasion gave him ample opportunity to infiltrate Montegue’s tent, Dominique’s quiet, isolated lifestyle and vigilant Vodacce servant left him no chance to get close to what he needed.

Until the Heroes entered the scene.

Dominique gave the Heroes her compass in order to track Montegue. While Malveck still could not blood the compass, he could use their good intentions to bring the compass to him. So he waited until they had reached Montegue, then – while they watched unbelievably – used Porté to yank the compass out of his hands. To keep the bait hooked, he sent a series of visions to one of the Heroes, showing the “horrible things” he intended to do with the captured artifact. They would then doubtless set out to stop him – using the second compass to track the first. They will bring it to him without a fuss, and when they arrive on l’Il du Bête to “stop” him, he will simply take it from them and complete his plans.

Luckily, the Heroes will have a long trip to figure out his scheme. And with a little planning, they’ll probably have some good friends to help them. Malveck’s scheme has been carefully planned, but he’s deeply underestimated the Heroes, and therein lies the key to stopping him.

Adventure Outline

In *The Lady’s Favor*, the Heroes journeyed from Montaigne to Ussura to deliver a vital message to General Montegue. *Scoundrel’s Folly* begins with them still in Montegue’s camp, somewhere in western Ussura. The second compass has vanished and one of the Heroes is haunted by periodic visions of the Villain holding it.

Point One

The Heroes travel from Ussura to Northern Eisen and the court of Eisenfürst Stefan Heilgrund. There, they become involved in the schemes and intrigues of Théah’s nobility, as well as reuniting with their friend Reginald Coleson. Coleson agrees to help them find the missing compass, and believes he knows some men who may be able to help.

Point Two

The Heroes journey across the waters to the Avalon city of Carleon, where they meet a representative of the infamous Sea Dogs. The Dogs are planning an attack on a Vendel merchant ship, but would be willing to take on an Explorer’s commission if the Heroes help them. During the raid, the Heroes meet the captain willing to ferry them out to the compass’s far-flung location: the legendary Berek. Coleson departs on another lead while the Heroes journey with Berek towards the Syrneth islands in the western seas.

Point Three

After a lengthy sea trip fraught with peril, the Heroes’ ship arrives at l’Il du Bête, only to find a flotilla of Montaigne vessels ringing the island. Apparently, the nobility’s private game reserve requires military resources in order to remain unmolested by outsiders. The Heroes must break the blockade if they wish to reach the island.

Point Four

Arriving on the island, the Heroes must dodge Montaigne hunters and enraged monsters to find Malveck's camp. During their confrontation, they learn some chilling facts about the lead Coleson followed. After disposing of the Villain and thwarting his plans, they return to Berek's ship and make their escape. But the terrible secret of the Syrnych artifacts is now known, and Coleson is walking right into the thick of it. Will they go after their friend, or leave him to the dictates of fate?

The Adventure

Like the other installments of *the Erebus Cross*, the adventure is divided into two sections. The first contains the "Hard Points," describing events in the story which the Heroes must participate in in order to succeed. The second contains variable encounters, which the GM can insert where he or she pleases or simply ignore, depending upon the dictates of the plot.

Hard Points

There are four Hard Points in the adventure: the opening scene in Heilgrund's castle, the raid with the Sea Dogs in Vendel, the Montaigne blockade on L'Il du Bête, and the final confrontation with Malveck. These four events must take place for the story to remain coherent and for the Heroes to succeed at their task. How they deal with each will determine the course of the entire adventure.

Point One: The Court of the Baron

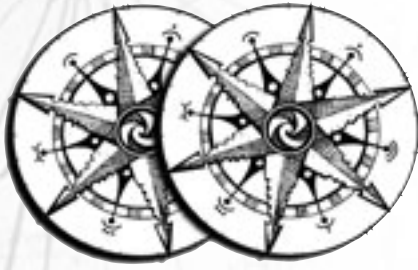
The Heroes begin the game in western Ussura, in the middle of the Montaigne army. The message they delivered has convinced General Montegue that the Ussuran campaign is futile, and he has decided to return home. His soldiers greet the news with joy and enthusiasm, for the campaign has been hard on them (see *The Lady's Favor* for details). As they begin to pack their

"What if I haven't played *The Lady's Favor*?"

If the Heroes haven't played *The Lady's Favor*, you can still use this adventure with very little fuss. They simply need some other means of obtaining the compass than Dominique Montaigne. Perhaps they inherited it from a relative. Perhaps it was sent to them by a well-meaning friend exploring the western isles. Whatever the case, they receive it and soon begin having visions of Malveck preparing to work his "horrors" on L'Il du Bête. In order to stop the visions, they'll have to stop Malveck. Soliciting advice on the matter or checking to see if any Syrnych experts might know about the compass produces a name: Reginald Coleson. He's currently staying at the palace of Stefan Heilgrund in northern Eisen and can be reached there; if contacted, he will be more than happy to look at the device — provided they bring it to him in Eisen. Begin with Chapter One as soon as they reach the castle.

tents and stow their arms, the snowy weather clears, and sunlight breaks through the grey clouds. A positive sign.

The Heroes, however, have more on their minds. As they bid their farewells to Montegue, they see a Porté hole open up before him and a hand reach out, snatching his Syrnych compass before his eyes. At the same time, the Hero holding the companion compass receives a powerful vision: surrounded by a wild jungle somewhere on the western isles, the sounds of exotic birds and dangerous beasts can be heard in the distance, while the scent of blood and earth assaults her senses. A sinister-looking man stands in a wide clearing, surrounded by strange stone and metal outcroppings. He's dressed in sweat-stained explorer's gear and has a look of unparalleled cruelty on his face. A large box stands in front of him, with an indentation that matches the



compass exactly. In one hand he holds Montegue's compass, and his feverish eyes turn towards the character with malicious intent. A single thought flashes through the Hero's mind, carrying a strong sense of danger with it: *He's going to open the box.* As the vision ends, the Heroes' compass points unerringly west-southwest — guiding them to its stolen companion.

The party should feel the need to pursue the compass before this unknown Villain makes use of it. The visions continue each night, haunting the dreams of the Heroes and occasionally appearing in daytime fits. The visions will not debilitate them in any way, but become more and more urgent as time goes by. Getting rid of the compass would solve the problem, but whomever they give it to suffers similar visions and quickly returns it to them, claiming it is cursed. The only ways to stop the visions completely are to discard the compass permanently (throwing it into the sea or abandoning it in the woods), or to find Malveck and prevent him from sending them.

If the prospect of stopping a fiendish Villain's schemes isn't enough to send the Heroes off, remind them that Reginald Coleson has promised a

substantial reward for both compasses as a set (see *The Lady's Favor*, pg. 17), and that returning them to the Explorers' Society would curry favor among its members as well.

In any case, the first logical step would be to contact Reginald and ask for his assistance. Eager parties may want to set out immediately for the island, counting on the compass to lead the way. However, Heilgrund's castle lies roughly along the path of the needle, near the city of Freiburg. They could easily contact Coleson without losing any time, and the resources of Heilgrund may come in tremendously handy.

The castle where Coleson is staying sits on the Rotstrom river in the eastern section of Heilgrund province in Eisen. It should not be difficult getting there from Ussura. General Montegue authorizes them to requisition any supplies they need (within reason) from the army's stores, and provides them with a signed letter of passage

The Compasses

The twin compasses play an important part in the adventure, for they are old and fairly powerful artifacts. They originally appeared on L'Il du Bête, where they served as keys for the ancient Synchron creatures which dwelt there. Used together, the compasses can open and close any lock or door on the island, and control the various wards and barriers that the original owners left. Malveck plans to use them to hold the Montaigne nobility hostage on their own island.

Bound in brass and in the shape of an aether compass, the twin artifacts must work in tandem to work most of the Synchron devices on the island. Strange inscriptions are carved into their bottom, forming symbols in an unknown language. In addition to their turn-key functions, each compass points unerringly to its mate, the needles turning to direct the holder in the right direction. Most Théans who have come across them in the past have used them specifically for tracking or other locating purposes, unaware that they served any other function. Dominique Montaigne gave the Heroes (and her husband Montegue) the compass with just such a purpose in mind.

allowing them to move through any Montaigne checkpoint unmolested. If they can wait a day or two, the army can move with them, providing an escort across the mountains.

In any case, the party should have no problems heading west into Eisen. The weather is sunny and the normally impenetrable passes in the Drachenbergen mountains have miraculously cleared. (This is the work of Ussura's guardian spirit, Matushka; angered at the Montaigne invasions, Ussura's "Little Grandmother" sent wave after punishing wave of foul weather against them. The Heroes' message has turned the army back, and Matushka wishes to show her gratitude by keeping the weather clear. See *The Lady's Favor* for more information.) If the GM wishes to throw a few encounters at them — wolves, marauding bandits or the like — feel free, but it should by and large be clear sailing to Heilgrund's estate.

After crossing the mountains into Eisen, the geography changes considerably. Heilgrund's province suffered during the War of the Cross, and the landscape has yet to recover. The trees here have been blackened with war, and will not bloom again for many years. Mud chokes the roads, and ruined houses dot the path for miles in either direction. It rains almost constantly, a dull drizzle that obscures visibility past a mile or so. Here and there, signs of recovery appear: a few plowed fields, a village undergoing repairs, an occasional patrol of Heilgrund's men (who will not bother the Heroes). But by and large, the land still groans from the injuries it received.

Heilgrundstat

Stefan Heilgrund's castle is a black, brooding affair, lurking on the south shore of the Rotstrom like a fairy-tale troll. His primary estate is actually located in Gottkirchen; he comes here to get away from the bustle of the city... and to pursue some of the darker aspects of his ambition.

The Visions

Malveck is sending the visions to the characters, using his stolen compass and another Syrneath artifact he discovered on L'Il du Bête. The artifact was originally used to convey messages between the compass holders; Malveck learned its purpose and has been using it to lure the Heroes onward. It appears as a reflecting pool, surrounded by Syrneath stones. The "waters" of the pool are actually polished metal, clear as silver and hard as diamond. By turning a trigger with one of the compasses, the operator can "speak" to whomever is in possession of the companion compass, appearing in a vision of fire and light.

The metal of the pool cannot be harmed by any means currently available. Only Malveck knows of its existence. It was not intended for human use, however, being designed for the alien though patterns of the Syrneath race. Prolonged use of the device may drive an unprotected human insane. Malveck is unaware of this drawback, and intends to keep sending visions until the Heroes arrive. He's toying with madness each time he activates the key.

Heilgrund intends to rule Eisen someday, uniting it under his absolute rule. He knows that he lacks the resources to take it by force, so he's turned to alternative methods of persuasion. He's developed a keen interest in the occult and also in the artifacts of the ancients, believing that they hold the key to untold power. To that end, he has contributed generously to the Explorers' Society and other archaeologists, hoping that they will discover the spell or gadget he needs to forge his country anew. He cares little about historical knowledge or preserving artifacts; all he wants is power.

Reginald Coleson has worked under Heilgrund for quite some time. He recognizes the man's ambition, but also

knows that Heilgrund has bountiful resources, and opted to make the most of them. His patron provides workshops for study, releases funds for expeditions west, and ensures that the discovered artifacts find their way to museums and other “proper” locations. All he asks for in return are a few of the choice finds, which vanish from his estate. Coleson and the Society believe it a fair trade – although they take steps to ensure certain discoveries never reach Heilgrundstat. It’s better for everyone that Stefan never learns of them.

The road to the castle improves as the Heroes approach, gradually turning from mud to crushed gravel to neatly paved cobblestones. No villages or other dwellings can be seen, however, just an occasional military checkpoint. Checkpoints typically contain five to ten *sölden*, on the lookout for refugees or other trash. They won’t give the

Heroes a hard time unless the players go out of their way to make trouble. As well-equipped and self-assured as they are, the Heroes don’t constitute the sort of threat the *sölden* are looking for. If they explain why they are here, and mention Coleson’s name, a few of them will escort them to the castle (ostensibly so they won’t get lost, actually to make sure they don’t cause any mischief on the way and to escort them out of Heilgrund if Stefan doesn’t like them).

The castle’s iron portcullis squeaks open at their approach, sliding on hinges that look far too delicate to support their bulky frame. Canny Heroes may notice the telltale signs of *dracheneisen* upon the lattice; apparently, Stefan uses more than just steel to keep his house safe.

At the opening of the gates, a small potbellied man appears to greet them. He’s dressed in traditional Eisen





Scoundrel's Folly

servant's garb, his short hair hidden beneath an enormous wig. He curtly introduces himself as "the Eisenfürst's social secretary", and asks what business the Heroes have here. If there are any Eisen in the party, he will direct his comments to them; otherwise, he speaks to the best-dressed and least bedraggled member of the party.

This is Ernst Grümbel, Stefan's butler and social coordinator. He's short-tempered and a little blunt, as many Eisen tend to be. He's not normally prepared to admit guests – the Eisenfürst already has a complement of visiting dignitaries, and he wants to keep the numbers down lest someone go poking into the experiments in the basement. When the Heroes mention Coleson's name, they earn a dirty look before Grümbel disappears back into the depths of the castle. A few minutes later, he emerges with the Avalon explorer in tow.

Coleson looks surprised and happy to see the Heroes, and greets them all with claps on the back. He explains to Grümbel how they helped him reach the river, and their various adventures along the way. Grümbel looks unimpressed. (If you haven't run *The Lady's Favor*, then he hasn't met them before, and will be more polite and stand-offish until they produce the compass. At the sight of the artifact, his eyes will light up, and if they allow him to study it, they'll have a new best friend). When the initial enthusiasm dies down, he asks what he can do to help, and casually inquires after "those wonderful compasses" they had. When he learns of the missing piece, he promises to do all he can to help, and would even be willing to charter a boat for them if they can wait a few days.

Role-play the exchange for as long as you wish, using the character descriptions in Chapter Three to play Coleson and Grümbel. Coleson convinces the butler to allow the Heroes to stay, and escorts them inside to meet his sponsor. The castle interior is dark and breezy, lit by torches in the corridors and lamps in most of the living

areas. Expensive tapestries and paintings decorate the walls, while rugs from the Crescent Empire and other exotic locales cover the cold stone floors. The tapestries depict heroic conquests of Eisen's distant past, depicting Eisen heroes like St. Gregor in all their glory. A martial theme runs through all the artwork.

Stefan lurks in the main hall, filling out troop depositions and attending to other matters of state. He's a short, tired-looking young man, dressed in black that matches his surroundings. He jerks up as Coleson interrupts his thoughts, and he glares at the Heroes through sharp, irritated eyes. He sighs as introductions begin and makes only the barest show of politeness towards the party. His patience looks put-upon by their very presence.

At word of the compass, however, his attitude changes. His head perks up and a light appears in his eyes that didn't exist before. He begins asking excited questions about where they found it, what powers it may have, etc. If they mention the visions, he will become *very* interested and ask what they have done to retrieve the second compass. He gives his blessing to let Coleson examine the artifacts, and asks if they need any funds to retrieve its mate. He will reward them handsomely if they can turn both over to him, and he asks that copies be made for him of any new information they find on the objects. Of course, Coleson must accompany them on any expedition he funds, "to ensure my interests are looked after."

Coleson will need several days to examine the compass, perform some metallurgy tests, and translate the writing on the back. He'll take the compass down to a lower level of the castle, off limits. Interested Heroes may assist him in his endeavors, provided they remain in his presence at all times. The others are invited to remain as Stefan's guests as long as they wish, or until the expedition has been prepared.

Castle Intrigue

Other dignitaries are staying at the castle as well as the Heroes: nobles and foreign diplomats interested in doing business in Heilgrund province. As much as Stefan would like to do so, he can't get away from the duties of state and must play host, even at his "hidden" summer estate. Those here have been instructed to avoid certain areas of the castle: the lower levels and anywhere barred by a locked door. Heilgrund stresses the need for privacy and "secrets of the state," and most of his guests obey the edict out of courtesy to their host. Those who didn't have all quietly vanished, their personal effects returned to their next of kin.

While Heilgrund's fortress lacks the beauty of other noble estates, and Stefan is hardly an inviting host, the castle still sees plenty of activity. Heilgrund's province is too important to ignore, and as much as Stefan would like to focus on reunification, day-to-day matters still demand his attention. The locked doors and forbidden areas foster a "haunted" image that many nobles find irresistibly romantic. Currently, there are some twenty nobles staying at the castle. Most spend their days reading, playing parlor games or engaging in subtle diplomatic maneuvering. Every night, a feast is held in the main hall, and all guests are expected to attend. Following the meals comes a dance and reception, where all of the serious politics take place. Treaties are agreed upon, alliances forged, and enemies made in the delicate verbal *tét-a-tét*.

Heroes may wish to participate in these games as representatives of their governments, wealthy nobles looking to make some friends, or just busy-bodies hoping to stir the hornet's nest a bit. This is a golden opportunity for GMs to push forward any of their own unique plotlines. Perhaps a Hero has a Nemesis who appears as Stefan's guest, or an old flame with a new political agenda. Courtier Heroes wishing to serve their country's interests could foster talks with a foreign power here. There are a few *söden* leaders here, willing to hire their

units out to just causes. If the heroes want to pursue a particular agenda through interaction with the nobility, be sure to provide them with a fulcrum, be it a diplomat, *noblesse petit*, or angry sea captain.

If you don't have any specific plot thread, but you still want to put the players through the political gauntlet, not to worry. Space prevents us from detailing all of the nobles at Stefan's court, but a brief summary of the most interesting ones follow. In addition to their name and nation of origin, we've included a few words on their personality and an agenda they may be pursuing. With a little fleshing out, they can make suitable foils for your Heroes to debate with.

- Antonio Naticelli: a Vodacce merchant, corpulent and neatly dressed. He's here to find an in-road into the Vendel's economic stranglehold on the area, and hoping to wrangle a trade negotiation with Stefan.
- Greta Jannsen: a petite, blonde Vendel guildsman, whose innocent face hides a ruthless manipulator. She's come to sabotage Antonio's talks, and increase the Vendel's grip on trade in the area.
- Sophia de la Cruz: A dusky Castillian noblewoman, beautiful and enigmatic. She has come to Eisen looking for steel to defend her country with. Anyone who can supply her with weapons or mercenaries will have a new ally within Castille.
- Cesar Marceau. A high-ranking Montaigne admiral, and one of the rare competent officers in his country's navy. Naturally, he's been relegated to diplomatic duty rather than being put to sea where he might do some good. He's seeking permission to send Montaigne patrol boats down the Rotstrom, but needs the consent of every Eisenfürst along the river. Stefan is his first stop.
- Leni Kendelburg. A *söden* captain, leading a small mercenary band. She's a tall, sinewy woman with long dark hair and an imposing stare. She's come to Heilgrundstat in search of employment, and also to



follow up a bloodfeud with members of Fauner Pösen's envoy. She's looking for an excuse to start a duel with them (demonstrating her combat prowess and evening the score in one fell swoop).

- Friedrich von Stahl. An envoy from Freiburg, hard-edged and no-nonsense. He maintains a semi-permanent position with Stefan, ferrying communication between Heilgrund and Nicklaus Trague. He watches the other nobles very closely, and tries to stay neutral in their conflicts.

- Monique and Margarite Bouvier. A pair of Montaigne girls, 17 and 19 respectively. Beautiful and flighty, they flirt and giggle a lot, for this is the first time they've been away from their homes. They're ostensibly looking for a permanent position of some sort, but are still reveling in their newfound freedom. They are entranced by the notion of a haunted house, and are easy seduction material.

- Henry "Hotspur" Clayborne. An Avalon noble, exiled from his homeland for some enigmatic reason. In actuality, an assassin sent to murder Admiral Marceau for Queen Elaine (you may pick another guest if you like). A thin, quiet man who keeps to himself, but whose hand falls to his sword with eerie casualness.

- Fergus MacAllister. A Clan leader from the Highland Marches, a member of the high council. A wild-looking black-haired man with a flowing beard and a kilt in his family's tartan. He's negotiating mining rights in the name of King MacDuff.

- Johann Koenig and Georg Hapsund. An envoy from Fauner Pösen, discussing mutual defense treaties with Stefan. Two career politicians, haughty and presumptuous, dressed in armor more ceremonial than effective. They squabble with Kendelburg and von Stahl on a regular basis, highlighting the divisions which still run through Eisen.

The political games can continue for as long as you wish, or until the proceedings become tiresome.

Studying the Compass

While plots and intrigues go on above, Reginald Coleson and any Heroes who wish to join him retire to the basement, where they can examine the artifact unmolested. The path to Coleson's laboratory leads down through a series of dank, winding stairs, blocked at several points by locked doors and gates (Coleson has the keys). A long passageway waits at the end. Numerous corridors and doorways branch off from the main path, yawning into darkness. Coleson admonishes the Heroes not to go down any of them. "Wouldn't want you getting lost," he quips nervously. If anyone asks about the faint moans or mysterious clanking noises coming from their depths, he simply shrugs. "The wind, I'm told."

Finally, a door opens into Coleson's laboratory, a fairly tidy affair enclosed within a large antechamber. Artifacts of all varieties clutter several mahogany tables, ranging from broken tablets to long and intricate scrolls formed from what appears to be solid gold. A few keys are scattered here and there, along with other tools serving some unknown purpose. All have been carefully labeled with paper markers, and notarized in a haphazard stack of papers along one wall.

Numerous books and folders lie balanced against the far wall, containing information on past expeditions, experiment notes, and theories as to the origin and purpose of countless Synchron artifacts. A small chemistry set stands on a table along the near wall, used for metallurgy tests and other experiments. A small cot full of thrashed sheets lies in a corner of the room, with a washbasin and shaving kit beside it; Coleson often sleeps here while in the throes of his studies.

Studying the compass in depth should take at least three days. Every twelve hours of examination, Coleson (and any involved Heroes) may make a Wits TN 20 Roll to



learn one of the following facts. Heroes assisting him can make rolls as well, which may cut the time needed to examine the device.

- The metal used to create the compass forms a high-alloy compound: very unusual, even for the Syrnych. It's only been found on a few key islands, mostly claimed by the Montaigne government. Coleson has been on most of them, and never seen anything this intricate. The only island in the chain he has not been able to set foot on is L'Il du Bête: the Island of the Beast (see discussion, below).

- The inscriptions in the bottom are instructions in Syrnych, detailing several powers besides the tracking ability. Coleson can roughly translate them, although the Syrnych language has only begun to be understood. The powers include opening and closing doors, raising wards along lay lines and "igniting the Soul's Mirror," whatever that means. The instructions are very complex (the symbols are quite tiny), but incomplete; presumably, the companion compass has the remainder.

- The artifact has an internal power source of some sort: a form of energy lying dormant. Coleson could crack the compass open and access the sources, but that would almost certainly destroy the artifact's usefulness. In addition, the energy might be unleashed with tampering, causing considerable damage. The power source may have something to do with the artifact's additional abilities. They may be able to access it if they can determine precisely how these abilities work.

- If the other three aspects of the compass have been discovered, a fourth successful roll produces a startling find. The inscriptions form a complex pattern beneath the literal translation, a pattern matching the positions of the stars in the sky. A constellation known at the Erebus Cross forms the centerpiece. The surrounding text (matching positions of other stars) suggests that the Cross is an arrow, pointing somewhere. Where exactly, it does not say.

Role-play out these discoveries between Coleson and the Heroes if you wish; have Coleson make an excited claim while peering at a metal sample, or slip one of the players the information their Hero discovers and allow him or her to expound upon in. This section of the adventure should be more than simply rolling dice and receiving clues.

Coleson believes that the compasses originated on L'Il du Bête, and that the mysterious man in the vision may be there now. If none of the heroes realizes it, he'll suggest that the visions may be a lure, designed to bring him the second compass. "He probably needs both artifacts to work whatever mischief he has in mind, and he wants you lot to bring it to him." Unfortunately, he could still inflict considerable harm with the compass he has, and they won't be able to find him without using its tracking abilities; L'Il du Bête is too large and dangerous to track him unassisted. Like it or not, if they want to stop him, they may have to take the compass right into his hands.

As for the island itself, Montaigne Heroes may have heard stories about it, and Coleson will fill them in if they haven't. It's essentially a private game reserve, where Montaigne nobles transport all manner of monsters and savage beasts through *Porté* magic. (Most go mad from the teleportation process; the rest are cunning enough to hate their captors for imprisoning them). Once loose on the island, they become targets for Montaigne hunters, who pay extravagant amounts of money for the privilege of stalking such dangerous prey. Coleson speaks of the island with open disgust.

"Bloody disgrace, it is. There could be countless artifacts on that island, worth Theus knows how much in historical data alone. From what little we know, there are some significant ruins dotted across the interior. But all those bloody mirror-kissers see is a private park, a place to hold some barbaric hunt against poor dumb brutes who don't know any better. The Montaigne would

destroy the world if they thought it would entertain them.”



On the other hand, powerful secrets may be hidden beneath this savage entertainment, and a Villain looking to operate in secrecy could find few locales as remote or inaccessible. Whatever this sinister fellow intends, he's chosen a nasty site to plan it in.

Busybodies

Some foolish Heroes may want to risk the Eisenfürsten's wrath and go poking around where they shouldn't. The branching corridors on the way to Coleson's lab may prove too tempting to resist, and the wraith-like moans could mean a prisoner, trapped and in need of rescue. In any case, some or all of them may ignore their host's request by checking out the forbidden areas of the castle.

There's no layout for Heilgrundstadt here; the structure is vast and contains a great number of features that have no connection to the adventure. If the Heroes decide to go exploring, play it by ear and use your best judgement; it's hard to get lost in the castle, and they should be able to find their way to anyplace interesting they wish to go.

Depending upon where they go, they could discover any number of hidden secrets. All of the forbidden areas have a marker of some sort: a locked door or closed portcullis that blocks the way. No one ever goes through these barriers, and they resist most efforts to batter down (Brawn check TN 25, which creates a lot of noise and will bring squads of söden swooping down on them). Creative use of *Porté* could be used to bypass them silently,

however (say, by blooding a coin and sliding it under the doorway), and clever Heroes may come up with alternate means of entry.

Beyond the doors lie all manner of secrets Stefan doesn't want known. In the upper stories of the castle, the locked doors hold fairly mundane secrets: troop strength, policy plans, and other matters of state. While sensitive and quite valuable in the right hands, these papers and treatises are no different from those of any other head of state. The other upper stories contain Stefan's private rooms, and nothing more scandalous than a mistress or two.

The scary stuff is in the basement, down all those passageways that Coleson brushed aside. Stefan truly intends to rule a reunited Eisen, and believes that occult powers are the only way to do so. Some of the locked antechambers contain laboratories similar to Coleson's, with *Syrneth* objects and the means of unlocking their secrets. Others contain shelves and shelves of books: texts that would make the Inquisition squeal with terror. Researches into the nature of noble magic. Pacts with dark spirits and Unseelie courtiers. Even veiled references to summoning the powers of Legion. No avenue, however horrific, remains unexplored; potential power seems the only criterion for inclusion.

The most hideous locations contain biological experiments upon human and animal test subjects: attempts to increase physical prowess, mental powers and the like. These wretched, abominable creatures live in small cages while being subjected to chemical experiments, magical spells and other horrors. Here, a mutated rat has grown a crude set of wings. There, an oxen bears the teeth of an enraged siren. Stefan has yet to move to living human subjects (the test cases have all been cadavers thus far), but if he ever believes that the benefits of live experiments will outweigh the cost to his soul, he will plunge forward without hesitation.

It's up to the GM to decide if the Heroes are discovered in any of these areas. Usually, no one passes the locked doors — just Stefan and the small handful of scientists he employs. If the Heroes are cautious and take reasonable steps to keep from being heard, they should be able to get in and out without too much difficulty. What they do with the knowledge they've discovered is up to them. On the other hand, those who blunder around, crashing through the gates or making other noises, can expect a prompt visit from Stefan's guards.

The söden have instructions to kill all interlopers and dump them in the river, where the sucking mud on the bottom will dispose of the corpses. There are almost seventy on patrol in the castle, with another two hundred patrolling the nearby roads. Send as many as you wish against the party: four plus one for each Hero is a good default number. Stats can be found in the *Characters* section.

The Heroes may use whatever means available to escape from the castle, but it won't be easy. The main gates will be shut and the other guests sequestered as "bandits" have infiltrated the castle. Access to the outside walls has been blockaded and more and more guards are joining the chase. Let the Heroes run where they like, keeping the söden in hot pursuit. When you feel you've milked the chase as far as it can go, present them with a window overlooking the river, or an old sewer entrance to the opposite shore. A quick dive or smelly crawl later, and they'll be free of the castle — and wanted criminals in Heilgrund's territory thereafter (Stefan will doctor up a charge of espionage).

When they've escaped and presumably crossed the river to another province, they'll have time to get their bearings. After several hours, they'll catch sight of a lone figure, running after them from the direction of the castle. It's Coleson, who barely escaped with his own life following the Heroes' escapades. He'll be furious with them for losing his coveted position in Heilgrundstat. In

his mind, they've betrayed his trust, and while he can't fault them for recoiling from Stefan's dark experiments, he doesn't have the faith in them he once did. He'll continue to help them hunt down the missing artifact, but a coldness will settle over their relationship with him. As an ally, he remains unchanged; as a friend, they may have lost him forever.

Point Two: Wooden Ships and Iron Men

Armed with additional knowledge about the compass, and a sense of their foes probable purpose, the party can now make plans to journey to L'Il du Bête. If they weren't caught in a forbidden section of the castle, they'll have Stefan Heilgrund's financial support to help them. Otherwise, they'll have to depend on their wits and Reginald Coleson's contacts to get what they need.

Obviously, in order to reach the island, they'll need a ship and a crew to pilot it. The Heroes might have a ship of their own, or know someone who does, but locating them expediently may prove a problem. The sea around the island is treacherous and full of all manner of monstrosities. Few captains may be willing to lead such a voyage, and few crews willing to undertake it.

Coleson, however, believes he knows someone who would. He'll have to get in touch with the Society, whose nearest charterhouse is in the free city of Freiburg. From there, he can determine where the gentleman he has in mind is located, and whether he's free to help them in their quest. He has his own ship, however, and in the right circumstances would be more than happy to sail them to L'Il du Bête.

The trip to Freiburg can be as exciting or uneventful as the GM wishes. If the Heroes are still in Stefan's good graces, he'll provide an escort for them, which should deflect any trouble along the way. Otherwise, they'll need to depend upon their own abilities to see them through. GMs can throw one of the random encounters at them if

Alternate Routes

The Heroes may have their own ideas for getting to L'Il du Bête. Pirate characters, for example, may have their own ships and crews to guide them. Members of the Montaigne nobility could access the island simply by expressing a desire to hunt there. Allow them to pursue these options if they wish, and use their own methods to reach their goal. Simply adjust the particulars of the rest of the adventure to fit whatever scheme they have in mind: swap Berek and the Sea Dogs with the Heroes' ship, exchange the gauntlet run at L'Il du Bête with a pirate attack, or whatever else you feel is appropriate. The only hard and fast rule is that they eventually reach the island and confront Malveck. Everything else may be adjusted according to the party's wishes and your own plans for an exciting adventure.

they wish, or create their own as they see fit. It should take approximately 4-5 days to reach Freiburg.

The free city is a wild, boisterous place with the air of an outlaw bordertown to it. Eisenfürst Nicklas Trague rules his city from the *Wachtturm* (Watchtower), a huge ramshackle structure rising up from Freiburg's center. Beneath it lies an open pit of merchants, traders, pirates and sōden: selling, arguing and occasionally brawling. Armed men are everywhere, most serving as private bodyguards. Stefan's guards leave them at the Freiburg gates, so they'll need to fend for themselves. Strangely enough, they'll have no problems once they pass the gates: theft is nonexistent and no violence beyond a few scuffles seems evident. Since the city has no police force, and the swirling chaos never abates, the sensation can be disconcerting.

Coleson quickly maneuvers through the crowded thoroughfare, checking occasionally to make sure the Heroes are still behind him. His footsteps lead to a

strange-looking house, surrounded on all sides by merchant stalls. A sign on the door reads "Closed: by Appointment Only." Coleson asks the Heroes if they wouldn't mind waiting outside for a moment. "The woman here's a bit of a stickler for Society rules," he explains sheepishly. Hero members of the Explorers' Society may accompany him within.

The rooms within are fastidiously neat and tidy, with only a few pieces of furniture and a framed map as decoration. The house's cleanliness belies its occupant: a harried-looking Montaigne woman wearing men's trousers beneath her frock and hair pinned up in a makeshift bun. She's scribbling furiously in a diary of some sort, recording measurements from a map that appears to have been drawn on the top of a barrel. At the sound of visitors, she angrily demands the Explorer's greeting without looking up. A cocked pistol lies between her trousered knees.

The lady is Madeline du Bisset, a slightly eccentric noblewoman charged with handling Explorer business in Freiburg. Her frenetic demeanor matches well with the city she calls home, and she can be surprisingly effective in the right circumstances. Her social skills, however, leave much to be desired. Assuming Coleson or one of the Heroes gives the proper countersign, she will allow them entrance, but continue to scribble as they speak to her. Coleson will introduce her to the Heroes and explain the situation to her (a Hero may do so if he or she wishes), but she won't appear particularly interested. "And what do you need from me?" is all she'll say.

"I need to know where Berek is," Coleson replies. "And if he's not too busy sinking Castillians to do the Society a favor."

At Berek's name, her pen stops, and she looks up. "Give me a minute." Pulling herself to her feet, she walks slowly towards a nearby back room, rolling up her sleeves as she does so. The Heroes can see the twisted red marks of *Porté* magic running up her arms.

Several minutes later, she emerges. "Berek's in drydock at Carleon. He should be there for the next week or so. Do you need a ship, or shall I just transport you there and rupture my spleen while I'm at it?" Coleson assures her that "the usual methods" will suffice.

"Good," she replies, and fixes her eyes on the rest of the party. "In that case, I have a little errand for you — payment for making me get up." She produces a wooden box in her red-stained hands, carved with images of Vestenmannavnjar design. The box is locked with a strange rune: *Villskap* ("Fury"), which any Vesten sorcerer knows.

"One of our colleagues found this in the northern wastes of Vendel. The Carleon charterhouse wishes to examine it, and I don't feel like taking it myself. You can take it there for me." The last sentence is less a question than a statement.

Assuming the Heroes agree (there's no catch to her request; she simply doesn't want to take it herself), she'll hold the box out for them to see. She twists the top slightly, edging it off of its hinges, and as she does so, the rune begins to rumble ominously. Sparks of electricity fly from its face, and the entire room fills with unseen power. The box shudders slightly in her hands.

"Don't ever do this," she admonishes, before refitting the top (quieting the phenomenon) and handing the box over. The Heroes have been warned.

Finding a ship to Carleon shouldn't be difficult. The Avalon capital is a hub of commerce between Freiburg and the rest of the world, and trawlers travel back and forth all the time. The Heroes can book passage on one within the hour, and be in Avalon within the week. You may place random sea encounters along the voyage if you wish (they should take place after the ship has

What's in the Box?

The Explorer's Society unearthed Madeline du Bisset's box at a site in northern Vendel. They lacked the magic to open the box and so sent it on, hoping to find somebody in the organization with Lærdom. They believe it holds some fabulous Synchron artifact which the ancient Vesten did not wish found. In truth, it doesn't hold any Synchron objects at all, but rather a cursed rune, inscribed upon a stone which brings horrible death upon all who read it.

The rune was created by an insane Skjæren of the highest power, who wished to bring an eternity of snow and ice upon the world. His fellow clansmen rose up and slew him before he had completed his task. They could not destroy his runes, so they sealed them up in boxes and cast them into the sea. They hoped that no one would ever find them. It took seven centuries, but the Explorer's Society finally did.

The rune inside is so powerful that it affects those who *read* it, not just those inscribed with it. Anyone who opens the box reads the rune and thus incurs its curse. Thereafter, they undergo a slow process of freezing: their arteries harden, their body temperature lowers and their skin becomes cold to the touch. They shiver and shake constantly, and require constant warming, even on the hottest days. Every week, they take 1k1 damage from freezing; with every fourth roll, the damage is permanent. Eventually, they freeze to death, their bodies transformed into a living block of ice. A Fate Witch or other powerful sorcerer may be able to lift the curse, but it takes a great deal of power, and they will probably demand something substantial in return, the equivalent of a life debt). Use your own discretion to decide how or why this curse may be undone.

For information on the *Villskap* rune (the one on the lock), see the *7th Sea Player's Guide*, pp. 212. It causes 8k5 damage to anyone who opens the box. Of course, none of this affects the Heroes in any way... unless they get curious en route to Carleon and try to open the box.

crewed the Rotstrom and entered open sea), or simply skip ahead to Carleon.

Some of the players may be curious about Berek, and why he might want to help them. The notorious captain of the Sea Dogs is known for his privateering, and his ruthless persecution of Avalon's enemies, not philanthropic aid to a society of bookworms. If they mention it to Coleson, he just smiles. "We've done the man favors on occasion, and he owes us. But even if we didn't, I think he'd help us." He won't say any more than that.

Freiburg's near-anarchy stands in stark contrast to the pleasant, well-ordered streets of Carleon. The Avalon capital stands on the cusp of a renaissance, as its country vaults into a position of world-leadership. Hope and optimism shine on every face, and the tree-lined avenues have an almost magical beauty to them. Unlike the decadent excesses of Charouse, no corruption lurks in the shadows. Even the jennies seem brighter somehow.

The party won't have to travel far to find Berek once their ship docks. The waterfront teems with activity, and barely-concealed Sea Dog sloops lie amid the deep-sea schooners and fishing boats at regular intervals. The Heroes disembark near the Avalon shipyards, where new vessels are built and old ones repaired in the name of the Queen's Navy.

Finding Berek isn't a problem; he's ensconced in luxurious quarters near the dry dock where his vessel, the *Black dawn*, is undergoing repairs (he rammed a Castillian ship with it during his last raid, and barely managed to limp it back to shore). The trouble is getting in to see him; numerous evil-looking sailors lounge near his quarters: Sea Dogs charged with protecting their leader. As the Heroes approach, they will find themselves accosted by a sizeable group of sailors, who want to know who they are and what their business is with Berek. Montaigne or Castillian Heroes will receive particularly intimidating looks.

The Dogs don't want anyone bothering their leader without good cause. Flashing Explorer's credentials — or better, being a member of the Avalon government — produces some results. Otherwise, it will take a smooth tongue and perhaps a few well-timed blows to make the sailors see reason. The Sea Dogs cheerfully brawl with anyone who wishes it, with no hard feelings on either side (a Hero who knocks one of the Dogs out will be granted access to Berek on the spot). If the Heroes escalate the conflict, however, they may find themselves in big trouble. The dock crawls with Sea Dogs, and they take lethal attack on their mates *very* seriously. The best option is to explain their case clearly and succinctly; if they can speak with enough aplomb, they'll be admitted after a hurried talk amongst the Dogs and a check-in with Berek.

The Avalon captain is a tall man with long blond hair and a winning smile. He's pacing up and down his study like a caged animal when the party arrives, however. Berek is going out of his skull in drydock; his ship's in rough shape and it will be sometime before it's seaworthy again. Meantime, Sea Dog activity has been at an all time low, as few suitable targets have presented themselves of late. All of which has been enough to drive the captain stir crazy; the Queen is busy with matters of state, so he can't even go to the capital and leer at her these days.

Allow the Heroes to present their case however they wish. Berek will be interested, but play coy with them during the conversation (use the character description in Chapter Three to role-play him). He'll ask pointed questions about their goal: why they want to go to L'Il du Bête, why they need him to do it, what risks they intend to take, etc. The Heroes need to argue strongly for his involvement; Coleson will dangle the favors he owes the Society as a last resort, but doesn't wish to use them if he doesn't have to. Stefan may be willing to compensate the Dogs, but it takes quite a bit; an agreement will require another trip back to Heilgrundstat to tell the Iron Prince just how much he's spending. If someone mentions the

Scoundrel's Folly

Montaigne navy, however, Berek's eyes will light up, which canny Heroes may spot (Wits, TN 15). Most Avalons hate the Montaigne anyway, but Berek holds a special contempt for their sailors. The idea of breaking a Montaigne blockade sets his mouth watering and although he plays it cool, he's eager to make a run at it. If the players can make the trip sound like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make the Montaigne navy look ridiculous, he'll agree to help them no matter what they do.

Delivery and a Clue

While the Heroes speak to Berek, Coleson will deliver the box to his charterhouse. Some of the Heroes may accompany him if they wish (or even go in his stead, if

they're members of the Society). The Carleon charter house — the “capital” of the Explorers' Society — is a gorgeous building, newly furnished and sumptuously appointed. The Society seal hangs above the main entryway, and the building's purpose is publicly proclaimed. Explorers in Avalon have little to fear from the populace, and the society's founder, Cameron MacCormick, has become something of a hero to the locals.

Inside, the Heroes are led to a small sitting room, while the box is properly catalogued and a statement of delivery drawn up for it. As they sit, Coleson (and/or any of the Heroes with him) makes a remarkable discovery. A picture stands framed on the wall opposite their seat. The sketch portrays a ruin on the Vodacce mainland,



intermingled with encroaching forest. A wide swath of mosaic tile — stretching for acres by the look of it — depicts a series of Syrnych symbols in a complex and seemingly random pattern. However, a Wits roll, TN 10, reveals something extraordinary to the Hero (Coleson automatically notices): the pattern precisely matches the one on the bottom of the compass.

Coleson is fascinated, and believes it to be an important clue in their struggle to understand the compass's power. These ruins obviously have some connection to the artifacts, and he immediately requests permission to travel to the depicted ruins and study them further. To his surprise, the Society officials turn him down. The ruins

are “off limits,” they insist, and banned for some reason they refuse to elaborate on.

Coleson, however, cannot be deterred that easily. As soon as he leaves the charterhouse, he decides to investigate on his own, and immediately begins searching for a ship to Vodacce. He admonishes the Heroes to go on without him, saying that he can handle “an Explorer’s blockade” without any assistance. “This villain you’re facing will require all your resources. Don’t waste them helping me.” If they can stop Malveck, however, he asks that they return to Carleon and wait for him, so that they can compare any information they find.

Setting Sail

The *Black dawn* isn’t operable, so Berek will commandeer one of his subordinate’s vessels for the trip. He selects the *Hurricane*, a two-masted sloop with a crew of about forty. It sports ten cannons on either side, and has enough speed to outrun the larger military frigates. Normally, he doesn’t presume to commandeer his lieutenants’ vessels, but this is a special case: there are Montaigne to humiliate, after all. He drafts a quick letter to the Queen explaining his actions, then prepares to sail without waiting for a reply.

Since this isn’t strictly a Sea Dog mission, Berek calls for volunteers to crew the vessel. The sailors (mostly Avalon and Castillian) share their captain’s sense of glee, and undertake preparations with an uncanny cheerfulness. Their energy speeds things along rapidly, and by dawn, the ship is ready to sail. The Heroes receive hammocks belowdecks with the rest of the crew, sometimes swapping beds with an off-shift sailor for sharing a string of dried beef. The other Sea Dogs gather to cheer their leader as the *Hurricane* swings out of the harbor. Coleson waves at the Heroes from the docks before boarding his own vessel for Numa. Once in the open sea, the ship turns west, towards the savage islands and the uncivilized wilderness on the edge of the world.



Scoundrel's Folly

Throughout the voyage, the compass continues to point unerringly west-southwest: directly towards L'Il du Bête.

Point Three: High Seas Gauntlet

Most of the adventure is intended to take place between Points Two and Three on the sea voyage from Avalon to L'Il du Bête. As the *Hurricane* (or whatever other ship your Heroes have appropriated) makes its way across the ocean, it encounters all manner of creatures and threats. The bulk of the random encounters below occur during this period, and the GM should select as many of them as he or she feels comfortable running. The atmosphere here should be one of an epic sea journey, like *The Odyssey* or C.S. Lewis's *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*: fraught with danger and wondrous peril.

Throughout the voyage, the visions of Malveck increase in fever and intensity. The sense of urgency beneath them becomes more pronounced the closer they get to their goal, until they're finally convinced that an impending apocalypse awaits. Malveck can work the Syrneth mirror marvelously, and the connection grows as the Heroes get closer to his location.

The compass leads them unerringly to L'Il du Bête, a large tropical island some seven hundred miles from the coast of Castille. The island is tall and mountainous, covered with lush green jungle and peaks of pale stone. Here and there, the golden spires of buildings rise above the treetops, but these markers are sparse and limited solely to the coastline. Ten Montaigne frigates surround the island, watching the seas for signs of approach. They serve both to ferry rich hunters back and forth and to keep out unwanted visitors (mostly ships from the Explorer's society). Any sailor or naval Hero — indeed, anyone associated with the workings of national governments — should be disgusted at the grotesque waste of resources the ships represent. To keep ten fighting ships from real duty in order to protect a noble's game... it boggles the mind. But waste of resources or not,

the Heroes' boat must break through it if they wish to get to the island.

The *Hurricane* crew posts a constant watch in the crow's nest for the island, and spots the Montaigne ships long before the Montaigne spot them. Players in their own vessels might not be as prudent, and run directly into the gauntlet before recognizing them. (Use your best judgment here; if they say they are taking precautions, allow them to spot the Montaigne first. Otherwise, let them fight a running gun battle and try to slip through from there.) When the ships are spotted, Berek backs off slowly lest they notice the *Hurricane*, and calls for a



council to decide how to proceed. He, his mates, and the Heroes meet in his cabin to discuss their options.

Allow the players to look at the map of L'Île du Bête, noting the positions of the Montaigne ships. Each ship is within sight of two others, allowing the entire gauntlet to be alerted if trouble arises. The *Hurricane* has speed on its side as well as Berek's masterful tactics, but will be hard pressed to take out ten ships. They need to get close enough to get the party onto the island, hold off the armada until they've dispatched Malveck, and stay in the area long enough for them to return.

Thankfully, the Montaigne sloops are fairly old, and staffed by only moderately competent individuals (the admirals aren't so inane as to assign their best to this babysitting mission). With a good plan, and some luck, they might be able to pull this off. Again, the players should be encouraged to come up with a scheme on their own. You can (through Berek) point out any holes or shortcomings in their ideas, and let them adjust as they see fit. If they're completely baffled, have Berek suggest his own solutions. Some possibilities (which the players might come up with on their own) include:

- **Commandeering a Montaigne ship.** The Montaigne won't react if they don't know that anything is wrong; if the Heroes can take over one of their ships without alerting any of the others, they'll have a secure base of operations to launch an excursion to the Isle. Berek can leave a skeleton crew on the *Hurricane* and take the bulk of the men as raiding party. If they approach under cover of night, they can board a ship and hold the crew hostage until the mission is completed. The Heroes can then move back and forth from the island at will. There are four lifeboats on the *Hurricane*, each capable of carrying about ten men. These can be used to approach the Montaigne unseen.

The specifics of such a plan are up to the Heroes. It takes a contested roll of Finesse+Piloting versus the Montaigne watchman's Wits + Ambush (he has a Wits of 2, and no

ambush skill) to approach the ship successfully. Failure indicates they have been spotted and the alarm is raised. Once on board, they'll need to move quickly in order to secure the crew; two-thirds of the men are in hammocks, but they can be raised quickly. When they become aware that the ship is under attack, they will try to raise the alarm by shooting off primitive flares, or otherwise alerting the other ships. The Heroes must stop them from doing so, either by locating the flares, or preventing anyone from firing them. One or two sailors might have *Porté* magic as well (GM's discretion); they must be silenced before they can complete any transportation spells.

The other difficulty will be escaping once the mission is complete. The Montaigne sailors won't waste time alerting the others once they are freed, and rowboats can't outrun their frigates. Leave it to the party to solve this dilemma when the time comes; have Berek mention it to them if they don't anticipate it on their own.

- **Slipping past.** A less complicated version of the above scenario, this involves simply slipping past the blockade in a rowboat under cover of night, then slipping back after the mission is complete. There's very little action or swashbuckling in this scenario, but it might appeal to pragmatic players who just want to get through. It takes a contested roll as above between the rowboat navigator and the Montaigne watchman, adjusted for darkness and other effects (consider the watchman to have an Ambush 1 in this instance). Failure indicates trouble; the boat can probably reach shore safely (GM's discretion), but the Montaigne will be alerted to their presence, and send patrols into the jungle after them. Getting back will be doubly difficult in these circumstances, although clever planning or the use of *Porté* may circumvent it.

- **Powering Through.** Forget the sneaking around, let's blow something up! The approach appeals to those who like straightforward solutions, or for anyone itching

to run a full blood-and-guts sea battle. There's nothing stopping the *Hurricane* from charging a frigate guns blazing, or from moving to deposit the Heroes on the island without regard for the Montaigne gauntlet. Berek's ship is much quicker than the frigates, and has enough cannons to make things difficult for anyone trying to sink it. They could blast their way through the blockade, hold off the Montaigne while the Heroes row to shore, then retreat and wait for a prearranged signal to come pick them up (repeating the process). Use common sense to



dictate the terms of combat; it will take time for all the Montaigne frigates to engage the *Hurricane*, and Berek will use his ship's speed to its full advantage. If things get too ugly, he'll simply retreat, outrunning any opposition. Use the ship and crew stats in the Character Section, and the naval Combat rules in the *7th Sea GM's Guide* (pp. 180-182) to run the fight.

• **Bait and Switch/Decoy.** The *Hurricane* can affect the above scenarios by evening the odds a little bit. By showing signs of distress and flying a mayday flag, the crew may be able to lure a ship or two out to "assist" them — and then capture or sink it before any others can arrive. While they do this, the Heroes can sneak ashore, commandeer another boat or do whatever else it takes to break the blockade. Berek's men have used the decoy tactic before with great success, and while it can't get the Heroes ashore on its own, it can make such a task much easier.

Stats for the frigates and their crews are located in the Character section. Consult them for any confrontation that ensues. Berek and his men will not go ashore under any circumstances; fighting the Montaigne is one thing,

but fighting the beasts on that island is tantamount to suicide.

Once the characters are ashore, they have the option of approaching one of the Montaignes' manor houses, or proceeding directly after Malveck. If they wish to poke around the Montaigne for awhile, go to Encounter 3 in Changing Elements section, below. Otherwise, proceed to Point Four.

Point Four: Jungle Confrontation

Once on L'Île du Bête, the Heroes will have to use the compass to track Malveck to his lair. The island is massive and there are no roads or man-made landmarks to guide their way. Tropical vegetation festoons every corner of the island, ranging from palm trees on the shoreline to creeper vines and mammoth ferns in the interior. The air is quite humid and the cries of birds can be heard almost constantly. A white mist shrouds the interior, limiting visibility to a few hundred yards. Every now and then, a monstrous bellow cuts the air, the sound of *something* enraged. As the Heroes move through the forest, they come across vast paths of crushed vegetation, marking the passage of huge and unseen things. A pair of mountain peaks tower above them, carved by the wind out of stark white rock. The vegetation continues up the sides of the southernmost peak, nearly to the top. The northern mountain is bare.

Six Syrneath buildings line the outside of the island, each exactly sixty degrees from the other. Their original purpose remains unknown; the Montaigne use them as marshaling grounds, where hunters stay in preparation for their trek. The gigantic structures have a series of Syrneath boundaries around them, in the form of short metal posts. The posts generate a field which keeps the monsters at bay, giving the hunters a safe area to rest, refresh themselves, and prepare for the hunt. (More on these buildings can be found in random encounter 8, "Chateau de Bête," below.) Since no control mechanisms have ever been discovered for the posts, the Montaigne

believe that they will always remain active. Lucius Malveck is about to teach them otherwise.

As the Heroes push through the jungle, there's a chance that they'll run into one of island's monstrous inhabitants, crashing madly through the underbrush, or a Montaigne hunting party out stalking them. Roll a die once to determine if they encounter anything: on a 1-3, they do. How they react to the creature is up to them; most can be heard from some distance off, due to their maddened condition. If the Heroes wander about instead of following the compass, you may want to roll for encounters more than once. Alternately, if you feel they've had enough, you can forego the encounters and limit the monsters to a few far-off rumblings or ominous shapes in the misty distance.

Almost any creature in the Bestiary may be found here, from tigers and bears to colossal, unnatural behemoths. Most tend to be ruin monsters of one sort or another; a few of these were intelligent enough to keep their eyes closed during their transport. They are among the most cunning and deadly creatures on the island; they choose their targets carefully and attack only when conditions are favorable. Almost every monster on the island is huge: man-sized or larger. If the Heroes encounter one, roll 3 dice, add the results, and consult the chart below to determine the creature's type and overall nature. Stats can be found in the *7th Sea GM's Guide*, or detailed below:

Roll Creature Type

- 3-4 Giant Asprey (Man-sized. Brawn/Resolve: 4, Bite: 4k2, all other stats as per basic book)
- 5-6 Bear (Brawn/Resolve +1)
- 7 Lion (Brawn/Resolve +1)
- 8 Tiger (Brawn/Resolve +1)

9-11 Giant Ghoul (Henchman, twenty feet high. Brawn 5, Finesse 1, Resolve 4, Wits 1 Panache 1. Attack roll: 4k2 claws and bite. damage roll 3k2, Skills as normal Ghoul)

12-15 Griffon (Brawn/Resolve +1)

16-19 Montaigne hunting party (3-5 hunters and their servants [Brutes]). The Hunters are stalking a beast, following a trail, or crouching in the bushes while. They will assume the Heroes are another band of hunters, and angrily wave them off. "This is our kill!" they hiss in Montaigne. They don't attack unless threatened, however, and won't antagonize their Heroes unnecessarily.)

20-30 Ruin Monsters: Most ruin monsters appear on the islands once occupied by the Syrneath, but specimens can be found anywhere from the far western seas to the Cathay border. They range broadly in appearance and abilities; creation charts can be found on page 159 of the *7th Sea GM's Guide*. Use the stats to help shape the creature's appearance, and let your imagination run wild.

Those captured for L'Il du Bête are among the largest and most fearsome: increase their Brawn and Resolve scores to 5. If the "Quick-witted" result appears, the monsters was intelligent enough to keep its eyes closed during the Porté trip to the island. Rather than thrash about madly, it watches its prey from a distance, using the terrain to its advantage and choosing the most opportune moment to strike. Such monsters often wait until their targets have attacked other beasts, then leap when both sides are spent.

The compass leads the Heroes directly to a wide clearing in the middle of the island, one which matches the visions exactly. Short grass and a few bushes are the only visible vegetation, unlike the lush and sometimes impenetrable growth elsewhere on the island. The grass seems well-tended, almost like a garden, and lacks the bent and trampled marks of any monster's passage. Stone and metal outcroppings rise in a complicated pattern around

The Operator's Manual for L'Il du Bête

The Syrneath island in the Frothing sea where the Montaigne carry out their brutal sport didn't start out as a haven for monsters. Indeed, there were no creatures on it at all, which is why the Syrneath used it the way they did. It housed many of their scientific experiments, serving to harness and control various aethereal powers that humanity has only begun to discover. They kept it far away from their civilization in order to contain any "accidents" and to ensure secrecy from their enemies (who those enemies might have been is another question entirely...). But that was all millennia ago. The Montaigne discovered the island some one hundred years ago while searching for an alternate route to Cathay. The trinkets and artifacts they discovered were interesting, but the true Syrneath powers remained hidden from them. So, in typical Montaigne fashion, they ignored the island's true value and turned it into their own private game reserve.

Today, the island's operators scour the globe for all manner of fearsome monsters. Most they find on other western islands; some on isolated corners of the continent. The only criteria is that they be large and man-eating. Once a beast is located, they use *Porté* to transport it to the island, where it can be stalked and hunted by Montaigne nobility. Hundreds of monsters have been transported in this fashion, creating a grotesque ecology of predator devouring predator. To make matters worse, no one told the beasts to close their eyes during the *Porté* transportation. Most are driven mad by the experience, and spend their lives on L'Il du Bête in unimaginable anguish. They tend to blindly attack anything they see, and combine their normal cunning with violent outbursts of anger and pain. This makes them easy to track, but very dangerous to kill, which has enhanced the island's reputation amongst the Montaigne nobility.

Very few people know about L'Il du Bête: only those members of the noblesse interested in hunting, and in challenges for their own sake. Unlike the Eisen Monster Hunters, who do what they do out of an obligation to rid the world of evil, Montaigne hunters usually act out of boredom and a need to fill their empty lives. L'Il du Bête is the perfect place to indulge their appetite for danger in a safe environment. Entry onto the island requires the right connections and a stunning amount of capital; only the wealthiest can afford it. When someone wishes to partake of a hunt, they need to make contact with huntmaster Martin de Huet and arrange for a time. They are then sailed to the island and lodged at one of the six Syrneath manor houses. By day they hunt; by night they are entertained with a variety of extravagant feasts and performers. They may bring their own weapons, or have guns provided for them if they wish. Each hunter is allowed to claim one kill per trip; taxidermists are available to stuff and mount any trophies. Most hunters find one beast per trip more than enough. Possessions and personal effects are returned to the next of kin in the event of any unfortunate occurrences. One in ten hunters never leaves the island alive. Nevertheless, the place is staggeringly popular among the right circles and in Montaigne, one is never a "true" hunter until a successful trip to L'Il du Bête. In addition to the amusement it provides, the isle has become a considerable source of income for Montaigne. The monumental cost of entry goes directly to the government's coffers, to be spent however Emperor Leon sees fit.

More on L'Il du Bête and its master Martin de Huet will appear in the upcoming Montaigne sourcebook.

the place. In the middle lies a strange-looking pond or spring. The surface is bright and utterly still, more like polished silver than water. To the Heroes' eyes, it seems out of place here — it never appeared in any of the visions. Standing at the side of the pool is Lucius Malveck, dressed in the dirty explorer's clothes they've come to expect. The other compass is in his hand.

The stones and outcropping form a ward between Lucius and the Heroes. They can't cross the barrier, shoot into it, or otherwise harm Lucius in any way; not yet, at least. He smiles as he sees them and bows low in mock respect.

"Welcome my friends, welcome. I see you've managed to avoid our *noblesse* friends quite admirably, and for that I applaud you. Please allow me to introduce myself..."

Carry on the conversation as normal, using Malveck's character description to play out the Villain. He will smilingly answer any questions the Heroes have; now that they're here, he believes his scheme to be foolproof. He'll explain the Syrneath pool and how he used it to send them impending visions of doom in order to lure them here. When they ask about the box in the vision, or how he intends to get the compass from them, he'll laugh.

"There is no box, I'm sorry to say. No magic talisman or unspeakable power to unleash. That was a fabrication, I'm sorry to say: part of the lure I used to bring you here. While I don't have the box, however, I do have *this*..."

He points his compass at the party and manipulates it in a complicated manner. As he does so, the Heroes' compass flies towards it, drawn by irresistible magnetic impulses. Heroes holding onto it find themselves bouncing off the invisible wards, while the compass flies right through. Its underside attaches to the underside of Malveck's compass, the etchings lining up perfectly in sync with each other. Laughing maniacally, Malveck twists the joined compasses together. A low rumbling can be felt beneath the island as ancient machinery hums to

life and powers which have stood for millennia slowly deactivate.

"I thank you, my friends, for bringing me this," Malveck laughs. "I never could have succeeded without it. I've just activated the controls that affect this island. Right now, those Montaigne hunters and servants have been locked into their manor houses. The doors and windows are closed and the protective wards have dropped. The monsters will soon be sniffing around their doors, looking for a tasty snack. They're trapped... and only I can get them out!"

He's correct. All across the island, each of the manor houses has sealed shut, locking in hunters, servants and other guests. Outside, the beasts are no longer kept out by the protective wards; within minutes, the more cunning ones come sniffing, sensing a drop in the power which has kept them at bay up until now. They cannot get in, at least not without battering down stone Syrneath doors, but neither can the trapped nobility get out without some serious help.

Again, allow the Heroes to bark back whatever witticisms they wish at him. He now intends to hold the nobility for ransom, forcing their families to pay extravagant amounts to get them free. He doesn't have any further beef with the Heroes, however. They've brought him what he wants, and while he had no problems using them in this manner, he bears them no active ill will. He'll explain that as far as he's concerned, there's nothing between them, and that they are free to leave if they wish. If they remain belligerent, he'll smile and ask them how hard it was to break through the Montaigne blockade. "These people are selfish, cruel, and spoiled to their core. Do you really care what happens to them? Let me ransom them off; it's no more than they deserve."

While his point is well-taken, prideful players will want to settle his hash on general principles, and good-hearted ones won't want to leave so many people helpless and in danger — even if they are Montaigne. In addition, who

Scoundrel's Folly

knows what further mischief he might commit with the Syrneth artifacts? While they might agree that the *noblesse* hunters deserve their fate, they can't in good conscience allow him to proceed.

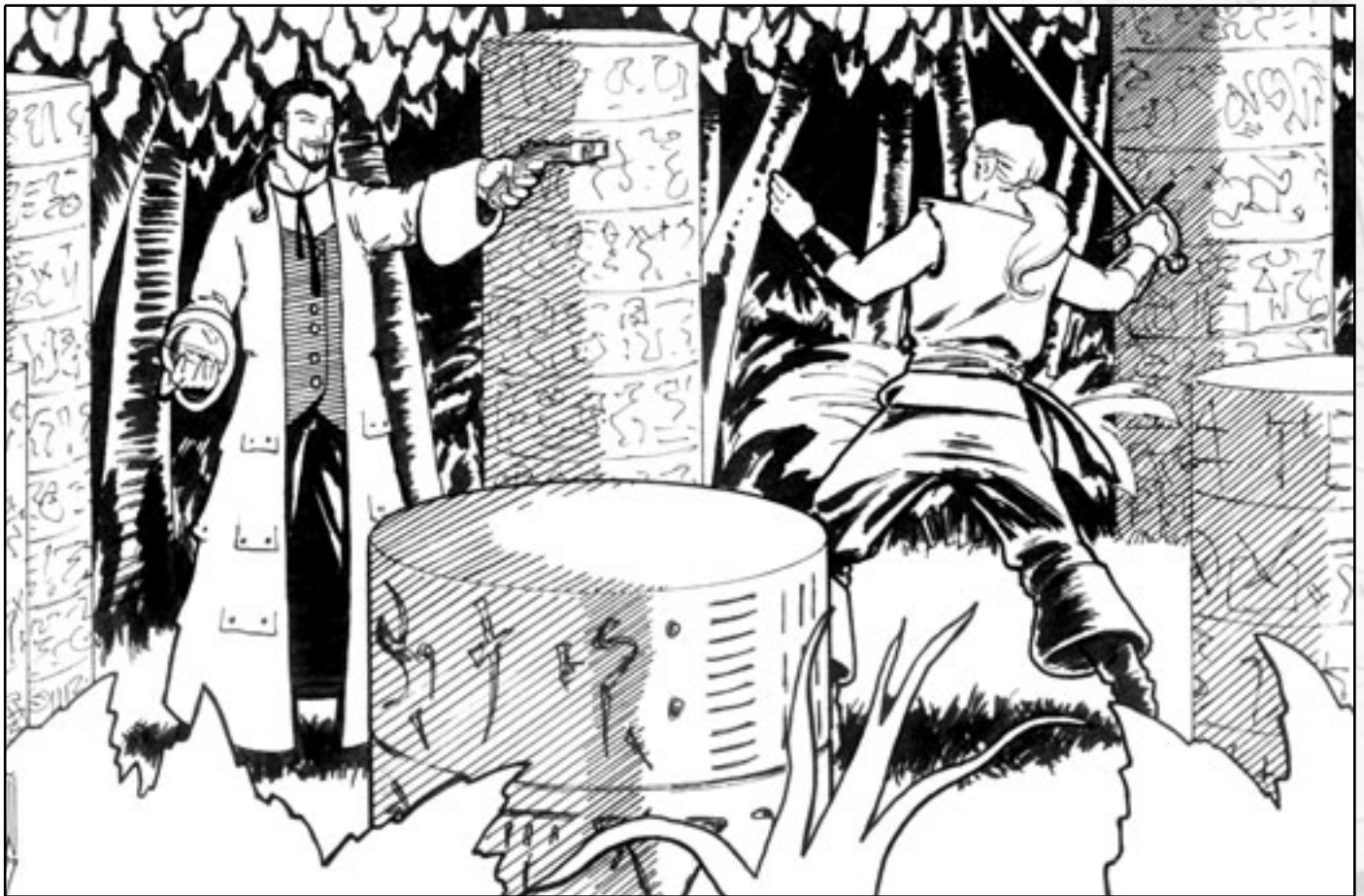
Malveck is confident, however, that the Heroes cannot stop him, even if they wish. After all, they're outside in the harsh jungle, while he's safe behind the island's wards...

Wards which he brought down when he activated the compasses.

For all his careful planning, Malveck overlooked one simple fact: his protection from the Heroes depends on the same fields which protect the Montaigne manor houses. When he dropped the wards, he also dropped his only protection from the Heroes. The instant he activated

the compass, they were free to leap across the clearing and throttle the life out of him. Allow the players to figure this little irony out for themselves; Malveck doesn't realize that he's no longer protected, and wouldn't let on even if he did. If the players don't bother to test the wards, let them come up with whatever scheme they wish, or even slump off in defeat if they can't come up with anything. A lack of ingenuity is even more unforgivable than a lack of common sense.

Assuming the Heroes can get at Malveck, he shouldn't prove much of a problem. He's a competent swordsman and knows the jungle like the back of his hand, but he is alone, and can't stand up to four or five stalwart Heroes. If he realizes the danger, he will try to flee, or disconnect the compasses and restore the wards. If captured, he will



plead for his life, promising them great powers and untold secrets if they only let him go.

“I’ve only just begun to unlock the mysteries of this place. The Syrnych held powers that we could only dream of: powers that could make us lords of the earth! The Syrnych could change the position of the stars, shape the heavens to match their whims!”

Hopefully, the Heroes will pummel the cur unconscious at this point.

Once the compasses are detached from each other, the wards around the manor houses are reestablished and the Montaigne hunters freed. (They may have to deal with several enthusiastic monsters now within the wards’ field, but that’s what they came for, after all...) With Malveck captured, the two compasses can be returned to Stefan for a considerable reward – or given to the Society who will be equally grateful (and less abusive of their powers). They may even wish to keep the artifacts for themselves, using them as locators or unraveling the secret to their power.

If they capture Malveck, they may be at a loss as to what to do with him. The easiest solution is to turn him over to the Montaigne, although they won’t be particularly grateful (who’s to say they didn’t help the little weasel lock them in?) and may even give the Heroes grief for trespassing on their property. The Sea Dogs can take him back to Avalon, but they don’t like prisoners, and would rather maroon him or worse than haul him all the way back across the ocean. Killing him crosses some lines, but certainly solves the problem quickly. No matter what solution they settle on, Malveck is not likely to forget them. Even interred on some remote island or shackled in a Montaigne prison somewhere, he remains dangerous. If he ever escaped, he’d come looking for vengeance – and with his knowledge of the Syrne can make an imposing foe indeed.

The Pool

Having successfully dealt with Malveck, the Heroes may want to examine the pool with which he sent those terrible visions. A description of the pool can be found in the “Visions” box on page 9. Two indentations along its side appear to match the compasses perfectly. Malveck noticed this, but was able to send visions using his compass in either lock. He assumed he would have the chance to discover any new powers once he had both artifacts.

When both compasses are inserted and turned, the pool releases its secret: a “file” of sorts, locked by the artifacts for millennia. The metal surface glimmers and vanishes, replaced by a silent image of strange experiments run by an unseen intelligence on L’Il du Bête. This is more than just an image, however; it conveys knowledge and understanding directly into the viewers minds. Those who watch the image immediately grasp what its creators wish them to know, as well as conspicuously hiding what they don’t wish them to see. But as stated before, the process was intended for Syrnych minds, not humans; those who view the images receive a splitting headache which takes several hours to fade. Prolonged exposure leads to madness and eventually death.

Malveck wasn’t kidding when he said the Syrnych could move the stars themselves. The experiments they ran on L’Il du Bête produced an artifact: a great engine capable of harnessing huge amounts of energy from the skies for some unknown purpose. The image in the pool overviews the construction of that artifact and the rudimentary principles involved in its conception. It appeared that the island didn’t have the land mass to support such a machine, so the (still unseen) builders constructed it elsewhere – in a remote location upon the Vodacce mainland. The same location Coleson is currently journeying to.

In order to ensure that the machine was never used improperly, the builders sealed it beneath an elaborate

security system, which could only be opened twice a year. The stars must be in the proper position, and the moon must be new, with no light to conceal the heavens. Then, using the compasses, the great locks could be opened granting access to the machine's controls. As a final note, the stars themselves provide a map to the site of the machine. The constellation Erebus Cross – a grouping that, like Orion in our own sky, remains visible year-round – points to the location. Judging the distance of the stars in relation to Théah and the changing position of the Erebus Cross in the sky, one can calculate the precise location of the site. You simply need to know where in the sky it will be during the two nights the site can be accessed, and plot the location from there. Anyone skilled in astronomy or cartography can do it.

The image ends, leaving the Heroes with a vivid impression of the stars' positioning and a strange sense of violation. Even now, Coleson is making his way to the ruins, unaware of the danger they pose. The Explorers' Society knows *something* (any Heroes who were with Coleson when he found the sketch in Carleon can attest to this), but what exactly is unclear.

If none of the characters has a cartography skill, one of the Sea Dogs can plot the course for them. As expected, it points to somewhere in southern Vodacce. Where exactly, and what importance that position holds, cannot be determined until the next new moon. If the Heroes wish to solve the mystery, they have some thirty days to get to Vodacce.

Coleson's fate and the terrible purpose of the Vodacce ruins will be revealed in the final module of the *Erebus Cross* trilogy, *The Arrow of Heaven*.

Escape and Experience

Getting off the island depends on how the Heroes got on; hopefully, they arranged something before breaking through the blockade. Once back on board ship, the *Hurricane* sets sail for Avalon, leaving L'Il du Bête behind

for good. Berek can drop the Heroes off at almost any western port they like, although he'd like to avoid Castille if he can. If the Heroes have their own boat, or otherwise got to the island without the Sea Dogs, they can proceed as they see fit.

For successfully reaching the island, each Hero receives 2 experience points. For stopping Malveck and regaining the twin compasses, the receive 2 more experience apiece. Triggering the image in the pool earns a single experience point. They may receive other, more tangible rewards for delivering the compasses to Heilgrund, saving a Sea Dog from any of the threats along the way, etc. The exact nature of these rewards depends upon the particular circumstances and the GM's discretion.

Changing Elements

The following encounters are designed to be placed in between the four hard points of the adventure. They aren't necessary to the overall plot, but provide plenty of excitement and intrigue as the party makes its way across Théah. All of them are at least peripherally connected to the main plot, either directly through the characters' movements or indirectly as distractions from their mission. NPCs they've met elsewhere (such as the crew of the *Hurricane* or the denizens of L'Il du Bête) often pop up in these encounters. We've provided suggestions as to where they may be inserted, but their ultimate placement is up to the GM. You may use as many or few of them as you desire, and center them anywhere deemed appropriate. Certain encounters may require some adjusting, depending on where you finally put them.

In addition, we've assigned a difficulty level to each encounter, based on how difficult the encounter is. A particularly deadly threat will have a high point value, indicating that inexperienced characters might have a tough time with it. A less threatening encounter will have a lower point value, suggesting that powerful characters

may want to skip it. Again, which ones you use is entirely up to you.

All of the seaborne encounters (3-7) assume that the Heroes travel with Jeremiah Berek and his crew aboard the *Hurricane*. If they have made different arrangements, or you wish to place the encounter on the brief trip between Freiburg and Carleon, adjust the specifics accordingly.

1. *Porté Nightmare*

As mentioned in “The Court of the Baron” on page 7, Stefan Heilgrund has numerous dark secrets hidden in his remote castle. Some are fairly benign, such as the Syrneth experiments Coleson has been running. Others have more sinister overtones, including a dreaded ghost mirror transported across hundreds of miles to his estate. If the Heroes go exploring through areas of Heilgrundstat where they’re not supposed to be, they might run into it.

A brief description of mirror ghosts can be found in the *7th Sea GMs Guide* on page 157, and more will appear in the upcoming Montaigne sourcebook. Heilgrund bought the mirror from a destitute Montaigne *noblesse*, and had it brought here so he could study it further. It stands in a darkened corridor on one of the castle’s upper stories, locked behind a pair of doors on either end. Only Stefan and his appointed “experts” have the keys; no one else is allowed in.

If the party goes poking about Heilgrundstat, they may come upon one of the locked doors. *Porté* magic doesn’t work here, unlike elsewhere in the castle. The strange condition may prompt curious Heroes to search for a cause – although they’ll have to find some other way through the door.

A wide, black corridor stretches beyond it, festooned with cobwebs and reeking of age. A pair of mirrors stand in the corridor’s dead center, one on each wall. Within the right hand mirror lurks the pale, phantom form of a man, dressed in a flowing white shroud. His empty eyes

speak of horror and madness, and his gaunt face is filled with a timeless dread. As the Heroes watch, however, something unexpected happens. The ghost’s handless stumps touch the inside glass of the mirror’s surface, and they can hear a soft thudding noise.

Mirror ghosts normally have little power to harm, trapped as they are in hellish limbo. (The second mirror keeps it imprisoned, reflecting its form back at it and preventing it from moving. The Heroes cannot move the mirrors without ripping out the wall – something bound to bring the guards running.) Stefan, however, has been working to free this one in hopes of learning from it. He’s come too close for his own good: while he can’t break the ghost out, he’s given it the power to bring other people *in*.

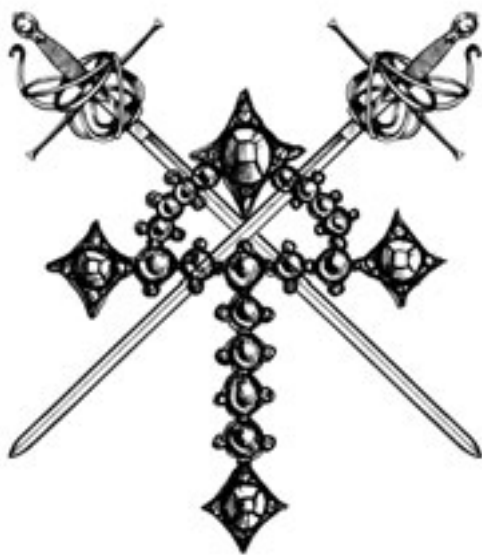
The ghost continues to tap against the glass, pleading through its hollow eyes for the heroes to help it. In truth, it wants one of them to reach through so it can pull him or her into its prison. It won’t be any closer to freedom, but at least it will have a companion to while away eternity with.

Any character foolish enough to approach the glass feels the grim pathos of the trapped being. The mirror surface parts if touched, rippling like water and causing the ghost within to distort. The material beneath feels oily and grasping, like the tentacles of some hideous sea creature. Objects thrown into it disappear: ropes snake inexorably into the darkness, swords are yanked from their owners’ hands, etc. The instant more than a finger or two passes through the glass, the ghost grabs the character and *pulls*. It has tremendous strength within its realm: the equivalent of a Brawn of 5. If the Hero isn’t steeled, he or she needs to make an opposing Brawn roll to stay standing. Failure indicates he’s been dragged off his feet, and will vanish into the mirror the next round. It’s up to his companions to pull him free. A contested Brawn roll is required to pull the Hero free, and the entire party should be encouraged to help. If it loses its prey, the ghost will

continue to tap piteously at the mirror as they flee. Due to its altered nature, breaking the mirror is impossible.

Any Heroes pulled into the mirror disappear, only to reappear within the opposing mirror as pale and ghostly as their assailant. They are now mirror ghosts themselves, trapped within the nether realm for all eternity. Normally, they would have no way to free themselves, although GMs may want to devise an adventure where their companions search for a way to rescue them. Such an adventure should be long and difficult, possibly forming the basis of a mini-campaign.

If one of the Heroes becomes a mirror ghost, Stefan will doubtless learn of the party's nosiness. While understandably upset, he's also fascinated at the possibilities such a transformation provides. He'll allow the Heroes to remain in his palace, and even fund their expedition to L'I du Bête if they wish. In return, they must swear on their most sacred oath to tell no one what they have seen in Heilgrundstadt, and when their trip to the isle is complete, they must return to the castle and assist him in learning how to open the mirror ghost's prison. Since they'll doubtless be eager to help free their companion, such conditions should be easy to agree upon.



If you wish, you may include other encounters such as this in Heilgrundstadt — perhaps one of his biological experiments gone wrong, or a book of faerie lore with a mind of its own. Use your imagination and keep Stefan's personality in mind when designing them. He's searching for powers to help him reunite Eisen, and the artifacts in his possession all reflect that.

Point Value: Medium

2. *The Inquisition*

These fearsome “protectors” of the Vaticine church are rare outside of Castille, but have appeared in greater numbers in Eisen following the Thirty Years' War. A band of them has learned of the Heroes' Syrneth compass, and resolved to confiscate it as blasphemy. If the Heroes won't hand it over willingly... stronger measures must be used. They track the heretics to Freiburg, where the lax law enforcement will make their job easier.

At some point before arriving at the Explorer's safehouse, as the party winds its way through the crowded Freiburg streets, a pair of men appear in front of them. They wear the scarlet robes of the Vaticine Inquisition beneath ordinary brown cloaks and have fanatics' smiles on their faces.

“Heretics!” the leader calls in Eisen. “You have held truck with infernal forces and carry the weapons of Legion on your persons. The Church of the Prophets, chosen by Theus Himself, demands that you turn them over immediately, on pain of your immortal souls.”

At this point, the party becomes aware of a large group of men amid the crowd, slowly surrounding them. They wear Eisen armor emblazoned with the Vaticine Cross.

If the Heroes play dumb or ask what they mean, the Inquisitor smiles.

“Your ‘compass,’ infidels. The work of the so-called Syrneth. You're taking it to your precious Society, to be

catalogued and counted with the rest of their unholy rot. Church doctrine states that I should torture you for possessing such an artifact, but we're reasonable men. Hand over the compass – and any other Legion's tools you have – and I'll allow you on your way."

Presumably, the Heroes aren't thick enough to give him the artifact (if they are, they deserve to have the adventure end ignominiously right here). There's one Inquisition thug for each Hero, plus four more for good measure. By the time combat ensues, they've pretty well flanked the party; the Heroes will have to fight their way out if they want to escape. The street clears of innocent bystanders quickly, and none of the locals wish to get involved (standard operating procedure in Freiburg). Numerous barrels, ropes and merchant's stalls are scattered about the wide street, and the Heroes can use whatever they wish to help defend themselves. Coleson will do what he can, although he's not combat-trained.

Use the *sölden* stats in the back of the book for the Inquisition thugs. The Inquisitors will not fight, and flee if things turn against their thugs. If the heroes pursue, they will vanish into the crowd, removing their robes if necessary to hide amid the teeming humanity. While no stats are provided for them, they won't forget the Heroes – or forgive their heretical association with the Society.

More information on the Inquisition can be found in the *7th Sea* core rulebooks.

Point Value: Medium

3. Sirens

The cannibalistic horrors known as sirens have developed numerous deceptions to lure sailors to their deaths. Most experienced seamen have learned to recognize them, and the crew of the *Hurricane* is no exception. They'd just as soon gut a siren as look at one, and take a skeptical (at best) approach to any "drowning women" they come across. Unfortunately, the *Hurricane* passes through the domain of a particularly clever shoal of sirens, who have





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some disturbingly innovative ideas about getting prey into the water.

The *Hurricane* is flying along at full sail when the deck suddenly lurches wildly beneath the crew's feet. Below deck, the caulked wood on the far side of the keel buckles, sprouting leaks in several places. Berek shouts something about hitting a reef of some sort, and orders the ship to halt while the carpenter conducts repairs.

The sirens caused the leak, dragging a huge rock from the bottom and puncturing the hull with it. While it wasn't enough to scuttle the ship, it was enough to stop it, which is all they need. When someone approaches to repair the breach, they'll reach through it and pull him through the hull – widening the hole and granting easy access to their meal.

Several minutes after the carpenter and his assistant go below, the ship lurches again, and now begins listing to the side. As it does so, the air fill with a strangely pleasant keening, like the pleasure of some alien air sprite. Sailor Heroes will instantly recognize it as it sends shudders of fear through their spines. Three sirens then surface approximately 50 yards off the port bow, carrying the carpenter with them. Their keening continues as they tear the man apart, rending great chunks of flesh from his body. Berek snarls, and draws his pistol.

"We have to repair the leak or they'll claim us all!"

There are eight sirens in the shoal, led by a matron of considerable cunning. Statistics and further descriptions of the creatures can be found in the *7th Sea GM's Guide*, pg. 161. The matron has a Wits rank of 5.

The hole in the boat is rapidly flooding the lower decks, and will sink the ship if not properly caulked. There's plenty of wood and hammers, along with tar and other sealing agents (as a ship of war, the *Hurricane* must be ready to repair battle damage quickly). But with sea water now flooding in, it will take strength and time to stop the damage.

Sissy Heroes can stay up top and fire potshots at the sirens with the rest of the crew. (The sirens dodge and weave away from the bullets, but can't do anything to the shooters – yet.) Heroes with guts can go below and stop the leak. It takes twelve rounds from when they reach the hole for the ship to be flooded beyond repair (if that occurs, the crew will break out the lifeboat and scull towards the nearest land). If the Heroes lack the skills to seal the breach, another sailor can do it, but he'll need someone to watch his back lest he suffer the carpenter's fate. Other sailors can accompany the party below if you want some cannon fodder, but be sure to punish any player whose Hero hides in the back while the Sea Dogs take all the risk.

The flooding bulkhead is filled to knee-height with water, which rises visibly each round. As they make their way towards the leak, a siren eels her way through the hole into the bulkhead, followed quickly by a second. They'll grapple with any targets they can, trying to drag them out into the sea and devour them at leisure. Because of the rising water, the sirens ignore their land-based penalties. Anyone not sealing the breach can fight them while their comrades work. (If two sirens isn't enough of a challenge, add a third or fourth.)

It takes Three Finesse + Carpentry or Shipwright checks at TN 20 to seal the leak with bracing wood and tar. Because of the water rushing in, each check must be accompanied by a TN 15 Strength check. Failure indicates that the sealer has slipped and must start all over again. Two characters working together can reduce the Finesse checks to TN 15. Sealing the leak eliminates the danger from the sirens, but the *Hurricane* cannot move forward until they shore up the patch permanently, and pump out all the water. It takes several more days to complete repairs (no further rolls need be made).



The sirens flee once the ship is out of danger, but lurk in the area, and may make another effort to sink it if they can (GM's discretion). Berek posts watches around the clock to see if they return, and the Heroes may have to spend one or two terrifying nights trying to spot the hungry predators beneath the sheen of moon-lit waters.

Point Value: Medium-High

4. *Leviathan*

Thankfully, not all ocean denizens have such hostile intentions. Some have other targets to unleash their wrath upon. The *Hurricane* passes one en route to the island, and must decide whether to leave its victims to their fate... or rescue them and risk its wrath.

One sunny midafternoon, the crow's nest spots another sail on the horizon — the first ship they've seen since leaving Avalon. As they draw closer, experienced seamen recognize the flag on its mast — the image of a bone harpoon, flown by whaling vessels. The ship, a Vendel schooner named *Grenseløs Velstand* ("Unbound Wealth"), has been pursuing a pod of sperm whales in search of their valuable oil. They flash friendly signs to the *Hurricane*, then blithely ignore them, intent upon their prey. Numerous spouts and clouds blow into the air nearby.

Berek acts surprised to see a whaling ship out this far, for whalers are quite rare on Théah. While whale oil, bones, and other body parts fetch a high price on the market, the risks of acquiring them far outweigh the financial incentive. Barely one in ten whaling vessels returns intact from a voyage. The Heroes are about to learn why.

The *Hurricane's* course takes it closer to the *Velstand* and the Heroes can watch as they lower a trio of small boats and speed off after the spouts. The tiny figures on board dart and jab at the water, using pointed harpoons to strike at the unseen whales. The boats swarm around a particular area, the sailors on board bursting with activity. A red-black spout erupts from between the ships and the

water around them churns with blood. Apparently, the crew has done its work well, and brought down a good-sized catch.

Then it hits.

From a distance, it looks as if a large reef — more like a small island, actually — rises out of the water in front of one of the boats. One minute, the boat wheels and swerves, intent on destroying the injured whale. The next, it's just... gone, vanished beneath the ocean waves.

"Leviathan," Berek mutters. "They're dead men."

The other two ships break off their attack and begin sculling madly back towards the *Velstand*. They cross about half the distances before a great wave rises behind them. The slower boat upends beneath the irresistible force, sending men spilling into the sea. The second fares less well. The beast raises its hoary head above the water displaying a breathtaking rack of tusks and horns. It opens its vast maw wide and draws in a huge breath. The boat (and surrounding water) swirls into the void like a paper toy in a rain, breaking men and oar alike against its harsh jaws. The leviathan closes its mouth and continues on towards the main ship as if nothing had happened.

The *Velstand* turns and tries to raise its sails. A distress flag goes up, and its crew begins waving frantically at the *Hurricane*, hoping to gain its attention. The leviathan, however, has built up too much speed. It crashes into the hull with a mighty bellow, sending wood and splinters flying in all directions. The main mast cracks like lightning and topples over into the sea, taking several hapless sailors with it.

The beast backs up and rams the ship a second time, causing even more damage. The crew vainly tries to lower lifeboats or fire weapons at their attacker, but to no avail. Again and again, the leviathan strikes the ship with its great bulk; within moments, its entire starboard side is crushed.

Heroes viewing the carnage get a good look at the leviathan for the first time here. It's huge, three times the size of any whale they've seen. While it matches the body shape and basic features of its smaller cousins, its head is horrifying to behold. It carries a great rack of horns above its huge mouth, augmented with tusks like an elephant's and great rending teeth like a killer whale's. Its saucer-sized eyes gleam with intelligence and as the *Velstand* slowly sinks around it, it howls at the open sky, a mournful bellowing both furious and sad. The sound will haunt the Heroes' sleep for weeks to come.

Berek wants to get clear of the area as quickly as possible, but the Heroes may want to save the foundering sailors. The upended boat sent a dozen men into the water, and a few sailors can be seen splashing near the rapidly sinking boat. If they aren't rescued, they'll doubtless perish. The leviathan quickly reduces the *Velstand* to floating wreckage, then vanishes beneath the waves. If they move quickly, they might be able to save the survivors.

Berek, however, has no intention of putting the *Hurricane* at risk. "The whalers knew the risks when they signed on, and I won't send my ship to the bottom. The leviathan will sink us as easily as it sank them." The Heroes can make whatever arguments they want, or even threaten to go out in a lifeboat by themselves and rescue who they can. If they mean to attempt a rescue no matter what, Berek will grudgingly go along. Let role-playing determine his final decision.

There are a dozen Vendel sailors floundering in the water, along with pieces of wreckage spread over a wide area. The dying whale floats nearby, splashing in agony and turning the sea crimson in all directions. As the Heroes begin to fish the hapless whalers out of the water, their eyes are drawn to the gruesome sight, and Berek (if present) wonders aloud how long the sharks will take to arrive.

With the Hurricane assisting, all twelve Vendel can be brought on board before any more predators arrive. If the Heroes go out in rowboats, however, they'll have to move quickly to beat the sharks, who appear in frenzied schools as the whale's blood spreads. If two characters are rowing, it takes a Brawn check from both of them at TN 30 in order to reach them all. For every five points they fail, one whaler falls to the predators (if one rolls a 17 and another rolls a 25, for example, three Vendel sailors die). For each additional rower (including those in different boats), the TN for all checks falls by five (Four rowers in two boats must make Brawn checks at TN 20 to rescue them all). The sharks do not threaten anyone in the boats, but their feast (upon whale and sailor alike) is gruesome to behold. If combat ensues, use the Siren statistics in the 7th Sea GM's Guide, pg. 161.

If any of the Heroes look deeply into the water, they catch sight of the leviathan, lurking below the sharks and the blood. Its immense bulk dwarfs everything in the area, and it seems to be carefully observing the proceedings before rejoining the whale pod. Its huge eye meets the Hero's, reflecting intelligence and immense cunning in its depths. They're able to rescue the Vendel only because *it allows them to*, and it wants them to understand that. When the sharks have finished devouring the injured whale, it turns and disappears beneath the dark fathoms.

(Particularly cruel GMs might have the leviathan attack the *Hurricane* – but we don't recommend it. Berek's ship has almost no chance against such a beast; an attack would surely sink it and end the Heroes' quest in one fell swoop.)

The surviving Vendel are grateful for the rescue, and cheerfully assist the crew in their duties for the remainder of the voyage. They've collectively decided to change careers as soon as they reach port.

Point Value: Low, unless you want them to take on the leviathan, in which case it's Very High Indeed.

5. Faerie Storm

The Goodly Folke of Avalon aren't limited to the forests and valleys. Some appear on the oceans as well, enchanting and horrifying sea-borne travelers in equal amounts. Those who survive rarely report such incidents, believing it bad luck to insult the Sidhe further. The Heroes' ship is about to encounter one.

Storm clouds gather on the horizon early one evening, hiding the sunset beneath an ominous black. At sight of the oncoming weather, Berek makes orders to secure the ship: stowing the sails, dropping anchor, and getting all possible supplies below. As the clouds approach, however, it becomes apparent that this is no ordinary storm. Lightning flashes in strange colors – red, gold violet – and an alien singing can be heard amid the thunder. Huge shapes begin appearing within the mist: weird fish, boats, and mischievous faces, all formed from the blackened cloud cover. It seems to move directly towards the boat, like a cat approaching a mouse. Berek nervously orders his men to arm themselves. (If asked, he claims he's never seen anything like this before; none of the sailors have, including the Heroes.)

The phenomenon is a faerie storm, a sort of pleasure/fishing trip by some of the wilder elements of the Sidhe court. They've spotted the *Hurricane* and decided to let it play with them. While not actively malevolent, the storm can be exceedingly deadly when they want to – especially to those oh-so fragile humans.

The storm engulfs the ship like a wave. One instant, the sea is calm and the setting sun clearly visible. The next they are plunged into a frothing torrent. The wind shrieks above their heads, but no noise can be heard. Lightning strikes in plethora of bright colors, leaving a ghostly glow that spreads across the water in bright arcs before disappearing. The sea has churned into a white froth, lit into ghostly shapes by the flashing light. In the clouds above, brightly-lit forms zip from cover to cover, like children chasing each other in an inhumanly fast game.

They streak from one horizon to the other, only to fly back and repeat the process again.

Then the ships arrive: a ghostly fleet of gossamer steel, piloted by impossibly angular crews. The sidhe on board wear pirate regalia and sing strange warbling tunes in their inhuman voices. The boats look so delicate that an errant splash might send them to the bottom, yet they ride the waves with ridiculous ease. The churning waters which rock the *Hurricane* back and forth like a toy don't affect them at all.

The sidhe crews drop nets over their sides, formed of cobwebs and aetherial thread. The nets drag behind the ships, vanishing beneath the sea. Lightning occasionally strikes one, producing a capering figure that dances across the net's strands. After a time, the crew hauls their catch back into the boat – bodies of drowned sailors, left on the bottom for all time. Their souls scream silently as they become tangled in the net, and the faerie crews haul them on board like so much fish. Once on deck, the crew surrounds their catch for some unknown but unsettling purpose.

Occasionally, two ships tangle their nets, seeking the same catch for their own. The crews leap upon each other in a ghostly mockery of boarding actions – sparring with cutlasses of pure light, firing cannons of cloud, and slicing each other apart in a ballet-like combat. The crews bleed a translucent, sap-like material and keen like banshees when struck. Their inhuman singing never stops as they fight.

All of this passes before the unbelieving eyes of the *Hurricane's* crew like a dream. The wind buffets the sailors, and the rocking sea causes more than one to lose his footing, but they stand transfixed at the sight of the faerie fleet, ignoring the dangers of the storm in order to gaze upon the sidhe.

The problem comes when one of the sidhe crews mistakes the *Hurricane* for another catch. They slide up alongside

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the Heroes' ship and cast nets onto the deck. It takes a Finesse TN 15 check to avoid the net; otherwise, the character is held fast. Despite the gossamer-thin quality of the threads, the net holds any bound within it completely. The sidhe will then attempt to drag their "catch" back to their vessel, treating the captured sailors like the ghostly dead they've dredged up from the bottom. Cold (unforged) iron blades can cut them free; Berek has a pair (knives), and there may be one or two more among the crew. Porté magic, *dracheneisen* metal, or even powerful Glamour might work as well (GM's discretion). Fortunately, the *Hurricane's* cannon shells qualify as cold iron, and can inflict damage on the faerie ship. Berek orders the crew to open fire as soon as the nets drop on deck.



When the sidhe crew realizes that their "catch" is fighting back, they leap across to do battle — one sidhe for each freed crew member, including the heroes. The faeries cannot be harmed by normal weapons, although they react when struck as if taking damage. The Heroes may not be able to kill them, but if they fight well enough, they may succeed in driving them back. The Sidhe will not approach anyone wielding cold iron, fleeing if necessary. Combat is strange and silent; it almost seems to take place in slow motion, like a fever dream. Those

struck by faerie cutlasses feel a piercing cold in their hearts, and take damage as normal. If "killed," however, they do not truly die, but fall into a catatonia that lasts for several days. When they awaken, they appear... different somehow. Touched. They have recurring dreams of life in a frozen springtime, and of feasts with beings as beautiful as they are terrible. They permanently gain the equivalent of the Arcana "Inattentive," reflecting their preoccupation with the dreams. They also, however, gain the effects of the Arcana "Intuitive," reflecting the strange insight delivered by the realm of Eternal Spring. Neither of these changes should dramatically alter the Heroes' personalities; they're still essentially the same character they were, and players shouldn't feel forced to take on new unwanted traits. But the Sidhe change everyone they come into contact with, and the Heroes should reflect that experience. The new abilities represent growth, not change.

While hand-to-hand combat takes place on deck, Berek's cannons quickly convince the faeries to move on. Every time they strike the opposing ship, the Sidhe scream in agony, feeling the shells through every fiber of their being. (Despite their agony, however, none of them seems to take any physical damage.) After six rounds of pounding, they abandon the ship, leaving the *Hurricane* to its fate and continuing on through the storm. Those still caught in the nets go with them, and are never seen again.

The storm continues for some four hours, although none of the sidhe bother the crew after the altercation. It leaves as suddenly as it appeared, pushing away from the *Hurricane* at the precise stroke of midnight. The Heroes can watch the storm clouds retreat over the horizon, taking the alien lights and singing with it. The sea stills to mirror-calmness, and the starry sky is unblemished by a single cloud. The weather remains peacefully calm for the rest of the night.

Point Value: High

6. *Vestenmannavnjar Raiders*

This encounter is quieter than the others, intended more as color than any life-threatening obstacle. About halfway en route to L'Il du Bête, Berek must make a detour to restock the ship's water supply. In so doing, they have an opportunity to meet some of the most fearsome pirates in all of Théah. And in the next installment of *The Erebus Cross*, they'll learn that the meeting wasn't entirely by accident.

With water supplies running low, the *Hurricane* alters course, turning northwest off the compass's course. They spot land some thirty-six hours later: a low, rocky island far from any established shipping lanes. As they grow closer, a ship appears, anchored off the eastern shore. Unlike the modern sloops and schooners in Carleon, this ship is old: a flat longboat sporting a single mast and shields along the sides.

"Vesten raiders," Berek says conversationally. "I didn't know there were any out this far."

The island has served as a haven for pirates and buccaneers for years. The Castillian raiders who first discovered it found an underground spring in a hidden cave: the only redeemable element on an otherwise barren rock. They wisely decided to hide the spring, so that only they could use it. In the years which followed, "legitimate" explorers landed on the island, but couldn't find the entrance to the cave. They abandoned it as worthless; most didn't even bother to mark it on their maps, and it was forgotten by most seagoers within a few decades.

Meanwhile, word of the spring's existence slowly spread among Théah's buccaneer bands. As long as it remained hidden, they could use it as a waystation, allowing them to strike farther out to sea than anyone could anticipate. While never formally named, it soon earned a place on every pirate's map, and while the great navies still know nothing of its existence, there isn't a pirate in the western seas who doesn't thank Theus for it. The Heroes, of

course, are expected to keep quiet about its existence. If Berek doesn't believe them capable, he may exact an oath or other such promise in return for allowing them to see it. (Few could find it without consulting a map, but he doesn't like to take chances.)

The *Hurricane* raises a flag of truce, and Berek rows over to speak to the Vesten raiders. He comes back with an odd smile on his face.

"There's only a few on board. The bulk are down in the cave, performing some ritual or another. We can go down, but we'll have to be quiet."

He strongly recommends that any Vendel Heroes skip the trip; the Vesten won't take their presence well. Val Mokka would pay dearly to know about this place, and the Hero's very presence constitutes a danger to the *Hurricane's* safety. Berek will prudently suggest that the Vendel remain on board and below decks. If he isn't with the party, they're on their own.

The island has almost no features besides a barren harbor and a few rocky beaches. There's no path to speak of and only a few patches of lichen growing on the uppermost rocks. A few sea gulls nest here and there, but nothing else moves. Berek leads them inland, through a winding series of outcroppings to a crack alongside a large rock. Unless you looked at it very carefully, the crack would appear to be nothing more than the rock's shadow.

Beyond the crack lies a wide chamber, shaped by countless centuries of dripping water. A spring bubbles in the center of the chamber, forming a pool of cold, clear water. Graffiti of all varieties has been chiseled into the cave's walls, ranging from personal symbols to epitaphs and vows of revenge against long-dead enemies.

In one corner of the room, a fire has been lit, and about a dozen Vesten have gathered around it. They dress like wild barbarians: leather jerkins, rough linen shirts, and long beards tied into intricate knots. Three women among the crowd sport intricate tattoos on their cheeks,

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and several others have runes seared into the flesh of their forearms. They sit motionless and chant, a high guttural sound that speaks of windswept wastes and the edge of the world.

In the center of the group, beside the fire, stands a Vesten holy man, a *skjæren* preparing to exercise his craft. A branding iron sits amid the hot coals, ingrained with the mystic rune *Villskap*. The priest's guttural chant rises to meet the crowd's and he casts forth a handful of runestones to the cave floor. Reading the inscriptions, he motions for one of the Vesten to step forward, his chant never diminishing. The Vesten steps forward and kneels before the sorcerer, uttering a prayer to his ancestors as he does so. The crowd throws up their hands and prays with him as the skjaeren pulls the iron from the fire. He places the white-hot tip against the Vesten's cheek,

searing the rune into his flesh. He does not scream or even flinch as a smell like roasting pig fills the room. When the iron pulls away, the rune remains inscribed, sparking with jolts of mystic energy. A wild cheer goes up from the crowd.

The Vesten seem strangely unbothered by the visitors, although this is a very private ceremony, and not intended to be viewed by outsiders. As long as they remain quiet and gather their water in peace, the raiders will not trouble them. (If, however, the Heroes try and interrupt the ceremony, or bring a Vendel into the cave, things are apt to get hostile very quickly.) As they leave the cave with their supplies, the sorcerer calls after them, raising his voice above the continued chants.

"Secrets are to be kept! And the dead remember."



Anyone looking back notices that the skjaeren has only one eye.

Once back on board the *Hurricane*, Berek admonishes them to forget what they've seen. "I don't know what was going on in there, but they wouldn't have let us see it unless they had a specific purpose in mind." Whatever that purpose is, Berek wants no part of it. With restocked water supplies, he raises sail and leaves the island behind as quickly as he can.

When they return to port, the Heroes will hear of a daring raid against a Vendel ship by a group of Vesten matching the one they saw. The Vesten sent over thirty sailors to the bottom, and were led by a young man who threw lightning from his hands.

More on this band and its connection to the Heroes will appear in Part Three of *The Erebus Cross*.

Point Value: Low

7. Island Castaway

This encounter is intended to add a potential new storyline for the GM to explore. It has little bearing on the current adventure (beyond another colorful incident on the trip to L'Il du Bête) but could develop into an entirely new plot for a future adventure if the GM wishes.

While the islands of the western seas support mostly transient populations — explorers on a dig, for example, or the occasional pirate band — a few lonely souls make their homes here permanently. These hermits, often shipwrecked or marooned by their mates, eke out half-mad lives on distant cays, spending decades without seeing another human being.

Some ten years ago, a Castillian cutter went down in the area the *Hurricane* now travels through, with a wealthy Don aboard. His family assumed him lost at sea and divided his *rancho* between them. Now, the *Hurricane* discovers what may be a survivor of the wreck. But is he the lost Don? Or merely an impersonator?

The *Hurricane* spots a small raft off the port bow, paddling madly towards them. It appears to be a crude raft, lashed together from wood and other materials. There are no charted islands in the area, and no land can be spotted; such a crudely-made vessel shouldn't be out this far.

As it draws closer, more details can be made out — ghastly, disturbing details. The "other materials" comprising the raft appear to be human corpses: bloated from the sea water and lashed to the wood. Drowned eyes stare blankly upward, while bird-pecked flesh leaks dark-stained sea water from rotting pores. The pilot propels forward with a piece of plank, counting on the tide to steer him in the right direction. His hair flies from his head in unwieldy tangles, and the guts of raw fish and seagulls — his sustenance for the last three days — stain his beard. A huge cloud of gulls follows in the boat's wake.

"Help!" the man cries in Castillian. "For pity's sake help me!" He waves frantically, trying to draw the *Hurricane's* attention.

Once brought on board (abandoning the raft to the gulls), the Heroes can get a good look at him. He appears as a well-worn man of thirty-five, with streaks of grey in his matted black hair. His clothes are tattered rags, and his skin has been scorched by years in the sun. He wears a golden amulet around his neck, which has weathered the elements far better than the rest of his ensemble. A successful History TN 15 (TN 10 if the Hero is Castillian or familiar with Castillian nobility) identifies it as the sigil of the Basqualles, a prominent noble family from eastern Castille. The eldest son, Romero, disappeared on a sea voyage some ten years ago. The castaway seems to remember the Basqualles, although he can't remember if he was a member of the family or not.

He explains his story in a frantic vent of semi-coherence. Apparently, he had been shipwrecked on a nearby island for some time — long enough to lapse into permanent

amnesia. He had given up all hope of rescue until a sail appeared on the horizon: a Castilian sail. He caught its attention by lighting a signal fire, and his heart leapt when the vessel turned towards him. After ten years he was finally going to be rescued! His hopes turned to ashes, however, when the ship struck a nearby reef and sank: all aboard were drowned. As he watched the ship go down, the agony of dashed hopes and the guilt and luring the ship onto the reef in the first place was too much for him. He blacked out, and apparently ran amok on his atoll prison.

When he came to, he felt — quite strongly — that he couldn't live on the island a moment longer. Gathering wood from the wreckage, he began to build a crude raft to sail away. When the wood ran out (most of the ship was on the bottom), he used the only other material available: the drowned bodies of the ship's crew. He's been paddling for almost four days now, surviving on gulls and the occasional speared fish. He had all but given up hope when he spotted the *Hurricane*, which has now — finally — rescued him.

It's now up to the party to decide what to do with him. Obviously, Berek will return him to civilization, where he can find his way back to his family. His amnesia remains, however, and he's not sure whether he's truly Romero Basqualle or not. He's also more than a little deranged. As the voyage continues, he talks to the sun, barks orders to seagulls and occasionally dresses himself in fishing nets. He's not actively harmful, however, and the crew works round him with little break in their routine. Some even come to see him as the ship's new mascot, saying he brings good luck to the voyage. This behavior doesn't change once he returns to Théah.

Despite his condition, his family is ecstatic to see him again, and will reward the party handsomely for his return (they're willing to overlook the notorious Berek's role in rescuing him). It's up to the GM to decide if he's truly Romero, or just a mad sailor who's been *told* he's

Romero. Either way, he rules the Basqualle *ranch* like the addled madman that he is: appointing burros as advisors, calling for “sky-clad” holidays where everyone parades around in the nude, and falling madly in love with a local orange tree. While his bizarre behavior prompts the rise of scandalous rumors, it's generally dismissed as the eccentricities of nobility, and he is allowed to govern in peace.

The party may feel responsible for the situation and wish to assist poor Romero at some time in the future — which can form the basis of some wonderful adventures. Mad nobles can be the Heroes' best friend and worst enemy at the same time. If he's not truly Romero, then he may be killed if the truth comes out (eccentricity's only acceptable in true nobility). The Heroes may have to keep his secret for him, prevent his (human) advisors from abusing their positions, or any other calamity the GM wishes to inflict upon them. It's up to you and your players to follow up (or ignore) this plot thread as you please.

Point Value: Low

8. *L'Chateau du Bête*

If the Heroes come to L'Il du Bête through “legitimate” means (i.e. they have a Montaigne noble in their number who wishes to play The Most Dangerous Game) or run into the Montaigne following Malveck's capture, they'll arrive at one of the converted Syrneth buildings. These towering, cathedral-like structures serve as a combination feasting hall, dormitory and supply center for the island, housing visiting hunters and permanent staff alike.

Six “chateaus” appear on the island, matching the six points of the aether compass. Each is identical in form and structure, right down to the smallest stone. Some 10-50 Montaigne can be found in these buildings at any time. Of them, perhaps one-sixth are *noblesse* hunters here to try their hand at the island's prey. Each hunter has an entourage of three or four servants (the minimum

permitted in such beastly conditions) charged with their care. The rest are cooks, acrobats, pack bearers and quartermasters, permanently assigned to the island for the convenience of its guests.

Each building contains one large room, a huge vaulting affair held by flying buttresses and carefully positioned pillars. Whatever purpose they originally served, the Montaigne have long since adapted them to their own use. The central area of the chamber serves as a dining hall, with large chairs, wide tables and the finest silverware imported from the mainland. Firepits have been built nearby and hung lanterns light the entire scene. Here, the hunters spend their evenings reading, playing cards, and dining on a wide variety of foods. The cuisine is limited by the isolated locale, but the cooks make the best of what they have; besides, “roughing it” is part of the fun.

Servants quarters, storage facilities and a makeshift kitchen occupy one end, accessible by one of two stone doorways (so the *noblesse* aren’t bothered by their comings and goings). Each building has exactly two doors, all of uniform shape and size. No one has yet determined how to seal them (although Malveck has), but the island’s tropical nature prevents the openings from causing too much discomfort. The servants bed down in hammocks stacked alongside the hanging meats and kitchen implements. The hunters have private sleeping and dressing areas along the building’s inside walls, separated from each other by a series of elaborate screens. The Montaigne have imported four-poster beds for their guests, and the toilet facilities, while crude by Montaigne standards, are quite decadent for such an uncivilized locale.

A series of stone and metal outcroppings surround each structure, providing the mystical wards that protect them from the island’s monstrous inhabitants. The wards around the houses are one-way; that is, those inside the wards can exit, but those outside cannot enter (this



applies to the wards around Malveck’s clearing as well). A certain type of Syrneth jewelry – stored by the Master of the Hunt and given to arriving guests for the duration of their stay – allows one to pass the wards at will. All of the island’s permanent servants have one, as does Malveck.

The chateaus bustle with activity at all hours of the day: cooks preparing meals, hunters preparing weapons, idle servants preparing to be yelled at. Their reaction to the party depends on how the party approaches them. If they’re “official” hunters, they’ll be welcomed by Master of the Hunt Martin de Huet and invited to participate in whatever festivities are underway. If not, they’ll be greeted with suspicion and possibly detained: gunfire from the flotilla means that trouble is afoot, and the hunters will act to disarm or kill any “interlopers” they find (stats for the hunters can be found in “Jungle Confrontation,” above). If rescued from Malveck, the *noblesse* will be coolly grateful, using polite manners to hide their anger at being humiliated so. The servants, however, will be properly thankful, as will the cooks and performers. Unless the Heroes are invited guests, they will not be permitted to spend the night in any chateau.

If the Montaigne capture the Heroes, they will become the subjects of a true “Most Dangerous Game.” De Huet strips them of their weapons and equipment and sets them loose in the jungle. Two hours later, hunters who choose may begin stalking them as they would any other prey. The bodies will be disposed of when the hunt is complete. Unfortunate Heroes in this situation may find an unlikely ally in Malveck, who can protect them through his Syrneth knowledge. The exact details of this depend on the circumstances, and are left to the GM.

Point Value: Low-Medium

Characters

Lucius Malveck

Brawn 4, Finesse 5, Wits 4, Resolve 3, Panache 4

Reputation: -33

Arcana: Megalomaniacal

Background: Vendetta (4, Nobles in general)

Advantages: Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castille

Porté (Adept): Attunement 2, Bring 4, Blooding 4,

Pocket 4, Walk 5

Courtier: Dancing 2, Etiquette 4, Fashion 3, Oratory 3,

Politics 5, Scheming 4, Sincerity 3

Criminal: Gambling 2, Quack 1, Shadowing 4, Stealth 4,

Lockpicking 3, Pickpocket 4, Scrounging 4

Hunter: Stealth 4, Survival 5, Tracking 3, Ambush 3

Scholar: History 3, Mathematics 2, Philosophy 3,

Research 4, Occult 4

Servant: Etiquette 4, Fashion 3, Menial Tasks 3,

Unobtrusive 4, Hagglng 2

Athlete: Climbing 3, Footwork 4, Sprinting 3, Throwing

2, Leaping 3

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 3, Reload (Firearms) 3



Malveck always hated the rich. Growing up in Montaigne, it was easy to look with contempt upon the privileged class. They dined in opulence while children starved in the streets. They played political games while nations rose and fell. They wallowed in self-importance while the nation howled beneath their boots. He, in particular, had good reason to hate them. As the illegitimate child of a high-ranking *noblesse* and a disgraced Porté Master, he was theoretically entitled to all that wealth and privilege, but his father refused to acknowledge him. He grew up as a servant, waiting on the hated aristocracy hand and foot.

He wasn't entirely helpless, however. His parent's blood had given him Porté magic which he honed through practice and his mother's lessons on the subject. He learned the art of political machination, and discovered how to make the *noblesse* destroy his enemies for him. And he learned about the Syrneth magic, about the strange technology of the western isles. With technology such as that at his command, he could take revenge for the long years of humiliation.

He got his opportunity on a trip to *L'Il du Bête* many years ago, accompanying a *noblesse* hunter on a ridiculous search for empty glory. When his master's target ate him alive, Malveck hid, and escaped into the bush. Since then, he's turned the island into his new home, using Porté to travel to the mainland when he needed to and depending upon filched supplies from the chateaus to sustain him. (Because of the constant ebb and flow of hunters, the few people who saw him just assumed he was a new servant.) He learned how to avoid the island's monsters and came to know the island like the back of his hand — a forgotten beast waiting to strike.

He also studied the Syrneth ruins, something the self-absorbed hunters never found time for. In time, he learned some of their secrets, including basic operation of the reflecting pool and the means to control the protective wards scattered across the islands. He lacked

the compass-artifacts he needed to properly harness their power, but if he could find them, he could hold the entire island hostage — or abandon them to the monsters. After years of searching, he found the first compass in the hands of General Montegue.

As these shallow plans of revenge formed in his mind, the pond began hinting at other things; secrets of the island's operation, powers he could scarcely dream of. If he could unlock the right doors, ask the right questions... he could control the universe itself. Egged on by these visions, his plans slowly grew in scope. Kidnapping the Montaigne would be the first step, and could give him the funds he needed to move further. But when he had exacted his revenge... he would make Théah itself tremble.

Unfortunately, he hasn't thought this second part out very well. Or the first, for that matter. The pool's alien technology has begun to warp his mind, and he's slowly going mad from the visions it sends. Contacting the Heroes has accelerated the process, and he now teeters on the brink of insanity. His delusions have prevented him from realizing several flaws in his plans, flaws which may prove his undoing before things go too far.

Malveck is intended as a fledgling Villain, the sort who might become a serious threat if he has time to mature. The combination of intelligence, madness, and resentment for his fellow man could turn him into the greatest threat Théah has ever seen. The Heroes encounter him in the earliest stage of his development, and have a chance to stop him before he becomes too dangerous.

Image

A small, weaselly Montaigne with a sharp black beard, Malveck has the unmistakable air of malevolence about him. Years of jungle living have hardened his muscles into tight cords, and he's compensated for his size with cat-like dexterity. He dresses in well-used explorer's clothes and has a tendency to snicker when he speaks (a

side-effect of the encroaching madness). He hides things well beneath his oily smile, and can set people at ease if he so wishes. Beneath it all, he's slowly losing grip on reality. His facade of control seems ready to crumble at any time, although his burning desire for revenge has kept it up for years. Time will tell when and how his insanity finally claims him.

Reginald Coleson

Brawn 2, Finesse 2, Resolve 3, Wits 4, Panache 2

Reputation: 20

Advantages: Keen Senses, Explorers' Society, University, Linguist, Montaigne (R/W), Castille (R/W), Théan (R/W), Avalon (R/W), Vendel (R/W)

Arcana: Focused

Sailor: Balance 2, Climbing 3, Knotwork 1, Rigging 1, Navigation 2, Cartography 3

Scholar: History 4, Math 2, Philosophy 3, Research 5, Law 2, Natural Philosophy 2, Occult 3

Courtier: Dancing 1, Etiquette 1, Fashion 1, Oratory 2, Mooch 4, Sincerity 2

Athlete: Climbing 3, Footwork 3, Sprinting 2, Throwing 1, Break Fall 2, Leaping 3, Swimming 2

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 2, Reload (Firearms) 1

Coleson was always more at home in the woods than the cities, always felt more comfortable with stones than people. When he was young, he eagerly searched out faerie circles, abandoned houses, and the crumbling ruins of the Old Empire near his Avalon home. Ruins were a mystery to him, one he couldn't wait to solve. Who lived in these places? What use did their lives serve? Why did they leave these things behind? His gentry parents quietly encouraged his curiosity in the hopes that it would bloom into something more practical. It never did, but it succeeded in attracting the attention of the Explorers' Society, who knew recruitment when they saw it. By the time Reggie graduated from school, he was already a high-standing member of the Society.

When his parents died, he spent most of his inheritance funding expeditions to the western isles. The ruins there enthralled him as none on Avalon ever could, and he led countless expeditions into their terrible jungles. The dangers never slowed him for an instant, and he proved more daring and courageous with each expedition. When his personal fortunes ran out, he came to depend entirely on the Society for support; he had no home anymore, just the ruins he visited and the occasional Explorer's safehouse for the few times he returned to civilization. To the Society, he was worth every penny. He had a nose for sniffing out artifacts and an insightful way of examining them that opened unheard-of vistas of thought. He had become one of the society's most prized assets.

Today, he continues his work as best he can, leading ships full of Explorers to the farthest edges of the world. His efforts continue to produce fruitful results, and he continues to deliver all manner of strange and unusual artifacts into the Society's hands. Before the Heroes met him, he had just completed a major expedition that produced a staggering number of finds. With their help, he managed to transport them to Heilgrundstadt. He's currently examining them very closely, in the hopes of unraveling their secrets.

Image

Reggie is the epitome of the rumpled scientist: friendly, enthusiastic, and a little bewildered. His long brown hair is tied in a pigtail, and a thick mustache shadows his smiling mouth. He has a pair of glasses which he wears for close examinations. His clothes are exceedingly practical, used more for tramping across far-away islands than socializing in drawing rooms. He never thinks to change them when he returns to the continent. The secretive nature of the Society has taught him a few things about the world, and he keeps his guard up when dealing with those outside of the Explorers' Society. But those who earn his trust find him friendly, affable, and willing to talk about almost anything. He has a knowledge of

seamanship and most "gentlemanly" pursuits, although he rarely uses them. His favorite topics, of course, are the mysteries of the past — and potential ways to unravel them.

Stefan Heilgrund

No stats are provided for Stefan; he should not be tested or threatened during this adventure.

Coleson's Eisenfürst sponsor is a bundle of interesting contradictions, creating a powerful but ultimately tragic package. He wishes to rule a strong, united Eisen, for he believes that only he is noble and just enough to do so. However, in his desire, he has dabbled in infernal forces, and toyed with powers that could destroy the world. While he has nothing but good intentions, his willingness to follow any avenue to power may damn his soul forever.

The Heroes have an opportunity early on to get into Heilgrund's good graces, and he may be willing to fund their trip to L'Il du Bête if they play their cards right. Coleson's excitement about the Heroes' compasses has intrigued him, and he wants to know if he can use their



powers. He sees the Heroes as a means to that end, and will support them in their endeavor as long as he believes that they'll bring him any artifacts they find. If he learns of the Vodacce ruins and the awesome forces at work there, he'll spare no expense to find them. Prudent characters might wish to keep this information from him, however; some things don't belong in the hands of ambitious Eisenfürsten.

Image

Stefan is a short, well-groomed Eisen with short brown hair and bright blue eyes. He dresses in fashionable black clothing and wears a cross of the church on a pendent around his neck (more out of political necessity than any real faith). He chooses his words very carefully and never reveals his true emotions. Observant characters may notice that his eyes light up at the mention of sorcery or the Syrneath, indicating how passionately devoted he is to those topics.

Berek

Brawn 2, Finesse 4, Wits 5, Resolve 3, Panache 5

Reputation: 144

Arcana: Creative

Advantages: Avalon (R/W), Castille, Montaigne, Vendel, Indomitable Will, Noble, Swordsman's Guild

Courtier: Dancing 3, Etiquette 4, Fashion 3, Oratory 5.

Diplomacy 4, Politics 3, Scheming 4, Sincerity 5

Sailor: Balance 3, Climbing 4, Knotwork 1, Rigging 1

Scholar: History 4, Mathematics 2, Philosophy 3,

Research 3, Law 2, Occult 2

Athlete: Climbing 4, Footwork 4, Sprinting 2, Throwing

2, Leaping 4, Rolling 4, Swimming 3, Swinging 4

Captain: Strategy 5, Tactics 4, Ambush 4, Incitation 4, Leadership 5

Donovan (Master): Bind (Buckler) 5, Disarm (Fencing)

5, Riposte (Fencing) 5, Exploit Weakness (Donovan) 5

Buckler: Parry (Buckler) 5, Attack (Buckler) 4

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 5, Parry (Fencing) 3

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 4, Reload (Firearms) 3

Jeremiah Berek is along on the mission as a lark, a chance to relieve the boredom of his current circumstances. With his ship in drydock and privateering opportunities at a minimum, he's looking for any opportunity for a little adventure. The Heroes' quest provides one, and also gives him a chance to slip out from under the official red tape.

Berek has never been entirely comfortable with his position in the Avalon government. While being the leader of an immense navy of privateers gives him countless opportunities, it carries an aura of responsibility with it that has never sat well with him. He hates sitting in meetings, listening to admirals advise him on the strengths of this nation or the weaknesses of that. A trip to L'Il du Bête is a chance to "play hooky" for him, to get out and commit some plain old-fashioned mayhem without worrying about the consequences. Considering that the Montaigne are the targets, he doesn't think Queen Elaine will mind.

The privateer has numerous connections to the Explorers' Society, and owes them a significant favor. Once, during a raiding trip to Castille, he was trapped in a port town and would have been arrested were it not for the intervention of the local Explorer's charterhouse. Since then, he's been willing to help them out in any way he can, provided it doesn't interfere with his principle



duties. Sea Dogs will often ferry Explorers to distant isles, and can be counted on to smuggle artifacts across national boundaries. In return, they sometimes hide wanted Sea Dogs in their charterhouses, or even arrange for jailbreaks on occasion. This isn't strictly a partnership; more like a useful exchange of resources that both sides have benefited from.

Image

Berek's blond hair falls just above his shoulders and his blue eyes can be both charming and piercing. While originally a landed nobleman, he has taken to the sailor's life well, using his energy and enthusiasm to make up for his lack of experience. He dresses very casually while on board, often going barefoot like the other sailors. Only his scarlet coat marks him as any different from his men. The Heroes have given him an opportunity to commit considerable mayhem, and he clearly enjoys every minute he's with them. He laughs a lot and makes charming jokes, even in the most dire situations.

For more information on Berek, consult page 118 of the *7th Sea Game Master's Guide*.

Ernst Grümbel

Brawn 2, Finesse 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Panache 2

Reputation: 25

Arcana: Perceptive

Advantages: Keen Senses, Eisen (R/W), Montaigne (R/W)

Courtier: Dancing 3, Etiquette 5, Fashion 3, Oratory 2,

Diplomacy 3, Lip Reading 4, Politics 3, Sincerity 4

Scholar: History 4, mathematics 3, Philosophy 2,

Research 3, Law 4, Theology 2

Servant: Etiquette 5, Fashion 3, Menial Tasks 5,

Unobtrusive 5, Accounting 4, Drive Carriage 3,

Haggling 3, Seneschal 4, Valet 4

Streetwise: Socializing 3, Street Navigation 3, Shopping 4

Pugilism: Attack (Pugilism) 3, Footwork 2, Jab 2

Rider: Ride 3, Mounting 2

Stefan Heilgrund's butler and social secretary hails from a long line of Eisen servants. The War of the Cross tore his family apart, as his father died defending the castle where he served. His mother used what little clout the family name still had to land a position as a washerwoman in Gottkirchen. Ernst grew up as a page and butler, spared the worst ravages of the war by remaining sequestered within rich men's houses. He served a number of minor Barons with distinction, and stayed alive and prosperous by doing his job and not asking questions. In time, he became renowned for his skills, and earned a reputation as one of the best manservants in Eisen. When Stefan Heilgrund came to power at the end of the war, he summoned the best manservant in Eisen to serve as his personal assistant.

Since then, Ernst has done his job well. He never asks impertinent questions (a necessity with Stefan) and ensures that his lord is properly cared for. Like many Eisen, he is blunt and plodding, concerned solely with the task at hand. He expects respect from those he deals with, and in exchange, performs his duties to perfection. Unlike many servant, he never gossips and won't reveal anything he sees unless it threatens his lord. Stefan has found him reliable in every way, and plans to reward him with a barony when he finally reunites the country.

Image

Ernst is a small potbellied man with short-cropped hair and a broad flat face. He dresses in traditional Eisen servant's garb, his hair hidden beneath an enormous wig. He speaks curtly and to the point, and rarely lets emotion show. His organizational skills are legendary, and he never grows flustered or upset by unforeseen changes in plan. Beneath the impassive facade, he remembers everything he sees.

Minor Characters

Martin de Huet, Master of the Hunt

Brawn 2, Finesse 4, Wits 3, Resolve 3, Panache 3
 Reputation: -30
 Arcana: Cruel
 Advantages: Noble, Montaigne (R/W), Castille
 Courtier: Dancing 3, Etiquette 4, Fashion 4, Oratory 5, Sincerity 5
 Scholar: History 3, Mathematics 2, Philosophy 2, Research 2, Law 3
 Hunter: Skinning 3, Stealth 5, Survival 4, Tracking 5, Trail Signs 4, Ambush 5
 Athlete: Climbing 3, Footwork 4, Sprinting 4, Throwing 2, Side step 3
 Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 5, Reload (Firearms) 5

The second son of a prosperous rural *noblesse*, Martin grew up with hunting, from stags to pheasants to marauding wolves. He loved the sport with all his heart: a savage ballet of stalker and prey which linked both sides in an eternal circle. It also proved an adequate outlet for his severe sociopathology, providing structure and goals to a child bereft of conscience. When his elder brother inherited the estate, he remained, holding the grandest and most dangerous hunts he could think of. He imported tigers from the Crescent Empire, setting them loose on the estate to be stalked at leisure. He brought in bears from Ussura, maddened them with pain, and brought them down alone. Several times, he gained permission from the courts to hunt convicted criminals, who were promised their freedom if they could escape him. None did.

He heard about *L'Il du Bête* in his 21st year, and took his first hunt there within two months. Over the next decade, he became one of the island's most prolific and successful clients. He stalked and killed over a dozen monstrosities, each more terrifying than the last. When the previous

Master of the Hunt died, he was the only conceivable successor.

Today, at 46, he oversees operations on *L'Il du Bête* like a veteran general. While his hunting days are past, he often participates in the capture and transportation of the prey, and still ventures out as an observer sometimes. He has become a consummate charmer as well, and regales his guests with thrilling stories of hunts gone by. Most find him an enchanting host... unless they notice the dead pits of his eyes.

De Huet is tall and thin with a polished grey mustache and scrubbed pink skin. He wears formal clothes befitting the Master of the Hunt, and takes care to stay charming and warm at all times. Underneath, he has the soul of a dead man, devoid of conscience or even the barest sense of right and wrong. Hunting makes him feel alive, and he sees nothing wrong with pursuing that happiness. So what if people have to die sometimes to fulfill it? It's what he was born to do.

Captain Gerald Étalon du Toille

Brawn 2, Finesse 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Panache 3
 Reputation 10
 Arcana: Arrogant
 Advantages: Commission (Captain), Academy, Montaigne (R/W), Avalon (AQ), Castille (AQ)
 Courtier: Dancing 3, Etiquette 3, Fashion 4, Oratory 3, Politics 3
 Sailor: Balance 3, Climbing 3, Knotwork 2, Rigging 1, Navigation 2, Pilot 2
 Scholar: History 4, Mathematics 3, Philosophy 2, Research 2, Theology 2
 Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 2, Parry (Fencing) 2
 Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 2, Reload (Firearms) 1

Étalon du Toille commands the Montaigne flotilla assigned to guard *L'Il du Bête*. Like most naval officers from his country, he's incompetent. Appointed through his father's political connections, well-educated but

Scoundrel's Folly

unimaginative, he represents everything wrong with the Montaigne military. While he has received adequate schooling and knows his way around a boat, he lacks any trace of tactical instinct and has never seen combat in his life. His current position affords him plenty of accolades, but few real challenges. Naturally, he's no match for Berek.

Étalon wears an elaborate uniform, the latest in Montaigne fashion (official navy regalia changes with each new season). A wide yellow sash cuts across his buckled waistcoat, festooned with medals of all varieties. His crested captain's hat sports a ridge of sky-blue plumes, and his faintly upturned nose reeks of elitism. He sneers orders at underlings, and treats civilians like infants. While his manners are impeccable, he has a way of irritating people as only Montaigne nobility can. He can keep his head in a crisis and bark orders with absolute authority – traits which allowed him to advance as far as he has. Unfortunately, the orders he barks are rarely effective, and he responds to adversity by simply shouting louder. While not strictly a Villain (he's not malevolent enough), the Heroes should hate him at first sight.

"Romero Basqualle"

Brawn 3, Finesse 2, Wits 3, Resolve 4, Panache 2

Reputation 14

Background: Amnesia

Advantages: Noble, Castille (R/W), Montaigne (AQ)

Courtier: Dancing 2, Etiquette 2, Fashion 3, Oratory 2

Hunter: Fishing 3, Skinning 3, Stealth 3, Survival 4,

Tracking 3, Ambush 4

Sailor: Balance 3, CLimbing 4, Knotwork 3, Rigging 1, swimming 3

Athlete: Climbing 4, Footwork 3, Sprinting 4, Throwing 2, Swinging 2

Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 3, Attack (Improvised Weapon) 3

The insane castaway rescued in encounter 7 may or may not be a lost Castillian nobleman, depending upon the GM's desires. His appearance and pertinent background information appear under that encounter. If he's truly Romero, he carries himself with as much dignity as his condition allows. If not, he carries himself with a parodic exaggeration of expected noble behavior. Given his mental unbalance, it's often hard to tell the difference. His statistic never change, regardless of who he is.

Sölden

Threat Rating 3

Usual Weapons: Varies (Medium)

TN to be hit: 20

Attack +1, Footwork -1

Note: It takes two hits for a Sölden Brute to be Knocked Out.

The Sölden are the guards patrolling Stefan Heilgrund's castle and territory: noble warriors all. They dress in finely crafted armor marked with Stefan's crest, and carry a variety of weapons. All are loyal to Stefan unto death.

Montaigne Sailors

Threat Rating 1

Usual Weapons: Rapiers (Medium)

TN to be hit: 10

The sailors manning the ships in the *L'Il du Bête* blockade aren't the finest Montaigne has to offer, which explains their current assignment (babysitting rich hunters doesn't require extreme competence). Their substandard statistics reflect this.

Sea Dogs

Henchmen

TN to be hit: 15

Brawn 3, Finesse 3, Wits 2, Resolve 2, Panache 2

Attack Roll: 4k3

Damage: 4k2 (Knives and belaying pins)

Skills: Climbing 3, Leaping 2, Swinging 3, Throwing 2

Berek's crew on the *Hurricane* come from the scurviest dives in Théah, have the scruples of starving weasels, and number among the best seamen in the world. They've volunteered for this mission, which means they're all fairly motivated, and they relish the dubious joys of a sailor's life. They like to laugh and crack off-color jokes. If the Heroes get into the spirit, they'll prove admirable companions (although a tad base). Otherwise, they'll keep to themselves, ignoring or even ostracizing their passengers.

Vesten Raiders

Henchmen

TN to be hit: 25

Brawn 3, Finesse 3, Wits 2, Resolve 3, Panache 2

Attack Roll: 6k3

Damage: 6k2 (Heavy Weapons)

Skills: Balance 2, Footwork 4, Sprinting 3, Attack (Heavy Weapon) 2

The primitive raiders of Vestenmannavnjar are described in random encounter #6. They won't attack unless the players really botch things, but we've included their stats just in case.

The Hurricane

Brawn 3, Finesse 7, Resolve 3, Wits 6, Panache 5

Montaigne Ships

Brawn 4, Finesse 3, Resolve 4, Wits 3, Panache 2

If you wish to run a pirate attack somewhere on the voyage, use the Sea Dog stats for the enemy crew, and the *Hurricane* stats for the enemy ship.

The Explorers' Society

Who's Who

Headmaster Vincent Bernvadore

Bernvadore is the fifth son of a Montaigne aristocrat. His parents passed away when he was 15, and he received the *chaffe finch* from his eldest brother at the age of 17, turning him out of the familial home. He spent a little over three years as one of the numerous hangers-on in the various courts of Montaigne. At the age of 20, he took up with a visiting Vendel woman.

Bernvadore hoped that the woman would be wealthy enough to sustain him for a time. Instead, she turned out to be an Explorer, and he found himself accompanying her on a very risky expedition into the tunnels beneath the Vodacce islands. After nearly drowning, almost being killed in a cave-in and narrowly avoiding death at the hands of irate Vodacce, Bernvadore decided that there could be no other life for him. He returned with the woman to the Explorers' Society chapter house in Vendel.

Having joined the Society, Bernvadore promptly put the assets that had kept him afloat at the Montaigne courts (his charm, quick thinking and penchant for improvisation, combined with an absolute irreverence in the face of danger) to new use. He rose through the ranks of the Explorer Society rapidly. He participated in and then led digs through Eisen, the Vodacce hills, and the edge of the Crescent Empire. Although he denies that he ever crossed that border, Bernvadore was missing for seven days during that expedition and his fellows had given him up as lost before he came wandering out of the hills without any explanation.

In 1656, at the age of 39, Bernvadore was elected Headmaster of the Explorers' Society. He now resides at the Avalon headquarters where he presides over the



Head Council and continues his studies. Bernvadore's duties, rather than his age, have kept him out of the field in recent years. The Headmaster still seems younger than his age and more than capable of rooting through Syrneth ruins. He makes up for being tied to the Avalon House by spending great lengths of time with younger members of the Society. In fact, one of his closest pupils, Etienne Deneuve, recently scandalized her family (as much as a Montaigne family can be scandalized) by wangling her dowry fund and spending it to found the first Explorer Society chapter house in Montaigne.

Bernvadore is widely supported in the society. His charm and wit, combined with his genuine fervor for exploration, make him a hard man to dislike. What's more, his early life as a Montaigne courtier makes him uniquely suited to deal diplomatically both with other nations, and perhaps more importantly, with the church.

Head Scholar - Figuero Calleras

Calleras is a handsome man in his middle thirties. His face has a perpetual look of resigned good humor, and his voice is quiet and calm. Most people who spend time in his company find it soothing, "...like sitting near a brook on a warm afternoon," as one of his students once expressed.

Calleras has held his position of Head Scholar for four years. Before that he cataloged the library of the Castillian Chapter House of the Explorers' Society and spent several years in the field, working with three separate dig teams in locations across mainland Théah and in the Thalussian islands.

As the second son of a noble family, Calleras grew up with the privileges of schooling and time. He attended Castillian universities, studying primarily Math, History and Languages. At the age of twenty, he joined the Vaticine church as a priest. At the monastery Calleras used his knowledge of languages to translate ancient tomes of the church. While studying a set of relics recovered from mainland Vodacce, the young monk came across something that altered his life's course.

A carved bronze scroll case was mixed in with a number of other artifacts: ancient crosses, parchment scrolls, and bits of jewelry. It was Calleras's practice to make detailed drawings of these kinds of finds and to compare them to references in existing religious texts in case one of these finds was a historically significant relic. While examining the scroll case, Calleras realized that the carvings on the outside were not random ornamentation, but a language with repeated characters and a consistent structure. For weeks he tried to decipher the new writing he had found and find a way to open the case.

After almost two months of tinkering, he deciphered a pattern in the characters that, when depressed in the appropriate order, caused the case to spring open at both ends. When they did, a substance like fine soot spilled out, pouring onto the floor and clouding into the air. As



Head Field Scholar - Cristenne Elise d'Asourne

d'Asourne is the daughter of Montaigne peasants. She had four older sisters, all of whom died before the age of 17, and a younger brother who was killed in the war with Castille only a few months ago.

All her life, d'Asourne was brought up to believe that the Emperor was a god. But as she grew older, she began to doubt. For a time the young woman embraced the teachings of the Vaticine church which taught that the nobility ruled with the power of evil. But eventually the corruption of the church became too obvious for the girl to deny. At the age of 19, having refused marriage four times, she left her home to make her fortune some other way.

Wanting nothing further to do with the Emperor, d'Asourne crossed the channel to Avalon where she worked odd jobs as a barmaid, seamstress and livestock handler. She took work for a time at the MacCormick

he inhaled the strange dust, Calleras was overcome by a sense of disorientation and alien, violent visions that shook him to the core.

His brother monks found him unconscious on the floor of his cell, and it was five days before he woke. To this day, he claims that he cannot explain what happened to him, except to say that in those five days he seemed to live five thousand lifetimes of fear and pain and love. Only a few weeks later, he left the monastery to take a pilgrimage across the land and try to understand what had happened. Instead, he found the Explorers' Society and other people who searched with the same fervor he himself possessed. He never returned to the monastery.

Since that time, Calleras is still troubled by strange dreams and occasionally succumbs to vision fits. The unpredictability of these seizures is the primary reason he left the field.



House as a groundskeeper. While working there, she was taken aback by the passion she found in the students and explorers who visited the Society's main chapter house. It wasn't long before the determined girl had gone from gardening for the Society to studying with them.

d'Asourne's ambition and determination have carried her quickly upward in the Society's ranks. She's held her elected position for only a year, but she excels at the work. Her general irreverence for all things traditional allows her a freedom in developing newer, more effective ways to run dig sites.

Aloud, d'Asourne supports the Society's overall goals. But deep down, she hopes to find something in the ruins of ancient Syrne that will let her prove once and for all that the Emperor of Montaigne is a charlatan, not a god-king. On the day that she can do that, d'Asourne has vowed that she'll return to Montaigne and show her family and all of the families like them that there's no reason to lay down their lives for the luxury of others.

Head Shieldman - Staver Mikochov

Staver Mikochov was a member of the Ussuran Gaius's personal guard, his *stelets*, before a betrayal caused him to be exiled from his native country. Mikochov's father, one of the Gaius's boyars, resented that his only son should serve a man he considered his enemy. When the stelets sent a message that Staver should join them for an important duty escorting a visiting diplomat back through the Drachenbergen mountains, Staver's father hid the message.

He thought that by making his son miss his duty, he would fall out of the Gaius's favor and return his attentions and loyalties toward home. But as the other stelets were crossing the mountains, they were attacked by a band of foreign men. The stelets fought them off, but not before the Avalon diplomat was fatally shot. When the Gaius found out what had happened, and that one of his guards had not been present, he was furious. In order



to make amends to the Queen of Avalon for the death of her diplomat, he offered the life of his servant. The Queen declined to have Staver killed, but the Gaius, never one to tolerate disappointment or betrayal, banished him from the land of Grandmother Winter.

Staver wandered for several months in the Drachenbergen mountains, reluctant to be further from his home than was necessary. One day, after months of solitude, he heard human voices nearby, raised in fear. He hurried toward the sound and came across a large pit. Hearing the voices from within, Staver leaped into the pit without hesitation. He found three explorers, a woman and two men, fighting with a creature that until then Staver would only have believed existed in fireside stories. The thing was like an Ussuran white cat, but its maw was too wide, and filled with black teeth, and its body was twisted like a child's broken toy. The thing

hissed and prepared to lunge at the two standing humans. One of the men already lay on the ground.

In all of the months that Staver had wandered the mountains, he had been unable to put on his Wolf self. He was convinced that when he left Ussura, Matushka had taken that from him. But now, armed only with a broad walking stick, and knowing that the people before him would die without his help, he sent a silent prayer to Matushka and tried one more time to change.

Just as the white beast prepared to lunge at them, the Explorers heard a furious snarl as another beast, this one a great gray wolf, leapt onto the cat. Their bodies writhed and their snarling filled the small cave, and then the smell of blood was suddenly overpowering and the animals lay still.

At first, they were unsure who had won. Then, slowly, the wolf disengaged itself from the mangled cat. But the thing that had saved them was only partly a wolf. As they watched, a young man with snarled dark hair and bright green eyes climbed to his feet. From that day forward, Staver Mikochov has considered the Explorers' Society his new family. He's convinced that his successful transformation was a sign that these people were worth protection. His deep sense of loyalty and his instinct to protect make him an ideal shield man. And his last several years with the Society have taught him a great deal about the workings of the world. He now controls the security of the Explorer Society both abroad and at home.

He still feels the constant call of his homeland as only someone truly tied to Matushka can, but he consoles himself with the camaraderie of his new family.



Artifact Researcher - Franco Vesefe

There are no finer craftsmen in all the world than those in the employ of Prince Vestini of Vodacce, and there is no more skilled family of music box makers than the family of Vesefe. In Vodacce, surnames belong only to nobility and those they grant them to. The Vesefes earned their name four decades ago when one of them fashioned a jeweled wooden box that produced a tinkling tune so sweet it was the only thing that would lull the Princess Vestini to sleep. As a reward, her husband granted them a name. After all, with the Princess recovered from her insomnia, the Prince was free to visit his mistress with impunity.

Franco Vesefe grew up with his family's love for music and craft. By the time he was 15, he had crafted a masterpiece, a device made all of glass, cut and colored in translucent, gossamer hues. When the impression in the top was filled with water, it trickled down through a series of precise fluted openings and struck the crystal chimes within, creating a melody. The device still stands in the home of the current Prince Vestini.

Some believed that the miraculous instrument was the culmination of a career and would never be duplicated. Others speculated on the great works yet to come from the talented artisan. Tragedy cut short the debate. On Vesefe's 16th birthday, only months after unveiling his glass symphony, he accepted a duel from the son of a master metalsmith. They fought over a girl. During the fight, Vesefe went into the canal, striking his head on the rocky side. When he didn't emerge, his opponent dove in after him and pulled him out, but the damage had already been done. Whether it was the blow to his head, or the near drowning, Vesefe lost all hearing in his left ear.

Although the injury wouldn't have been serious to most, it was devastating to Vesefe. Unable to hear the finer notes and minute sounds, he was useless to his family's trade. Unwilling to be an object of pity, the young man



left his family's home and traveled to the other Vodacce islands doing odd work. His craftsmanship and grasp of mechanics was still exceptional, and he supported himself making silent boxes and statues empty of sound. Eventually, he settled on the island of Caligari where he found a job with the local woodworker and supported himself crafting ladies' jewel boxes.

One day as he was walking along the docks, he heard a crystalline music, piercing in its beauty. He didn't hear it in his dead ear, or in his good one. Instead, it seemed to sing straight to his soul. When he followed the source of the song, he found two men, one a well-dressed Vodacce, and the other apparently from Avalon, haggling at the edge of the dock. They were bickering over the price of a small round box carved out of pure white bone. The two men argued loudly, seemingly completely unaware of the song that Vesefe heard. As he watched, the Avalon man, dressed in a long canvas coat, drew a small sack

from one of his many pockets and handed it to the other man. The Vodacce tucked the pouch in his own vest and, with a quick look about, handed the box to the other man. Vesefe recognized him then as the son of Prince Caligari.

The Prince headed back down the docks at a brisk pace, and the Avalon man signaled a nearby gondola. Unable to let the music he heard get away from him, Vesefe hurried toward the man. He asked who he was and what the device was, and the surprised man replied that he was a representative of the Explorers' Society and that the box was an artifact he was taking to the head chapter house. Vesefe asked him how the device made such miraculous music, and the Explorer looked blank. He heard nothing from the box. Intrigued, he asked if Vesefe would accompany him, and the young Vodacce agreed immediately.

Vesefe stayed to help the Explorer Society study the strange Syrne box, discovering that some could hear it and others could not, but not finding any reason why. He continued to work for them for the next sixteen years. Vesefe fell in love with the vast array of artifacts and mechanisms recovered by the Society, and has been studying them ever since. His intuitive tinkerer's ability has helped him tremendously, and his fascination with the Syrne artifacts is endless. Perhaps one day he'll find what lets him hear the Syrne music as if it were a part of his heart. And perhaps he'll be able to duplicate the effect. Even now, other members sometimes come upon him standing perfectly still, holding the bone box and listening with a look of wistful joy on his face.

Head of Sea Exploration - Brenden Stafford

The Explorers' Society's head shipwright and master of all things nautical is forty-seven years old. This wouldn't be remarkable if he didn't look like a young man of twenty-five. Fair skinned and blue eyed, Stafford is a favorite with the ladies, at least those whose fathers don't know his real age. Most of Stafford's fellows say that he



has Sidhe blood in him. Stafford himself flatly denies this and professes that he's simply aging gracefully.

Born in a small fishing town on the east shore of Avalon, Stafford has been around boats since his birth. His familiarity with their workings is unparalleled in the Society. Most of his contemporaries know that he spent his boyhood on fishing boats. Some know that he later hired out as a sailor on a Vendel merchant ship. Only those closest to him know that for several years before Elaine came to the throne, Stafford captained his own ship as a pirate on the Frothing Sea, striking at Montaigne vessels.

Stafford has been with the Explorers Society for a little over nine years, and has held his current position for five. Under his watch, the Society's fleet has grown from fewer than half a dozen seaworthy vessels to almost twenty. He personally examines all of the vessels at least once every two years, and regularly reviews crew and supply rosters

to make certain that each crew is properly equipped. Stafford has a reputation for treating his ships like children. He's also known to always come through with whatever one of his children needs, whether it's the newest compass from Vendel or out of season lemons for the crew. No one presses the issue of how Stafford accomplishes his occasional little miracles.

He's soft spoken most of the time, but when it comes to protecting his boats and their crews Stafford's voice snaps like a whip. When a captain of the Society swore he was determined to sail, oncoming storm or not, and the Ship Master be damned, Stafford both relieved him of duty and threw him overboard. Furious as a mad boar, he told the defunct captain that if he was in such a hurry to reach his destination, he could swim because there was no way he would ever set foot on one of Stafford's ships again. Although every sailor in the Explorers' Society lives a bit in fear of the mild looking Ship Master, they also know that he'll take care of them like no one else, and for that each one of them loves him a little.

Head of Finances - Merin Zumer

A sparse small woman with fierce eyes, Merin Zumer controls all funds of the Explorers Society. She was seneschal for Stefan Heilgrund for seven years. Her husband, a general in the Eisen army, was killed two years before the war's end. When peace came, Merin declared that her duty was done and she wouldn't spend the rest of her life looking at the graveyard that her country had become.

A close cousin of Merin's was residing in Avalon and been a member of the Society for several years. He invited her to come and stay with him until she decided what to do next. With the massive migration out of Eisen, a place to go was like gold.

Merin arrived in Avalon and promptly began to seek employment of some kind, unwilling to live on anyone's charity. She quickly acquired a thriving business handling

books for several local businesses. Six months later, she met Vincent Bernvadore at a Society dinner, and the two got along famously. Bernvadore with his usual charm convinced Merin that her abilities were wasted on merchants. He also convinced her that she ought to join the Society and let him support her for the position of Head of Finances. As the post had been empty for some months and was not in great demand, it was soon hers.

Merin is the only member of the Explorer's Council not to have risen through the standard ranks of the Society. She's still learning the details of Society business, but she's fascinated by what she's discovering. Her years of running a barony's finances during a war have prepared her to put the Society's resources in order, and under her guidance, they've thrived. Among other things, she's arranged for Society ships to move supplies for the Vendel at times in exchange for their financial and sometimes political support in certain areas. She's even

entered into an informal alliance with Berek and the Sea Dogs, something few would believe possible.

Merin does not yet know the details of the Society's annual voyages 'to look for new lands.' These expeditions actually sail in search of the 7th Sea. None of the four voyages that have gone out so far have returned, and in a few months it will be time for another to leave. Already, the astute Eisen woman has begun to suspect that something is amiss with the (fictitious) records that they've supposedly returned. Bernvadore knows that he'll have to tell Merin the truth soon, but he's not yet certain how she'll react to the news. He hopes that after years of helping to run a land at war, his newest council member will understand that some sacrifices are necessary. However, he's heard her rail against the futility of lost causes enough to be concerned that she may deem the expeditions as a waste. Soon, he knows he'll have to take the chance.



Chief Diplomat - Justice Sommer

Avalon born and Vendel raised, Sommer is the Explorers' Society's Chief Diplomat. Although not a part of the Head Council, he's privy to many of their sessions. Sommer is responsible for making whatever arrangements are necessary for the Society to investigate a particular site. He speaks Montaigne, Avalon, Vendel, Eisen, Castillian and Vodacce fluently. He knows a smattering of Ussuran and, reluctantly, the tongue of the Vestenmannavnjar. Sommer is the main reason that the Society has been allowed to investigate at all in the caverns of Eisen.

Sommer relies on his detailed grasp of different cultures, and the diplomatic and persuasion skills he learned living with the Vendel to get what he wants. He's versatile however, and isn't above a bit of blackmail or the occasional under-the-table bargain to get what he's after. Some of the 'friends' he works through would not normally be on good terms with the Society (Signore Villanova, for instance). However the Vodacce Prince,

like Sommer, knows that in a pinch, strange bedfellows are better than sleeping alone.



Chapter Houses

Carleon, Avalon

The Avalon House is the Explorers Society's original headquarters, founded by Cameron MacCormick in 1598. The building is MacCormick's family estate. MacCormick never had children of his own, and so deeded the entire estate to the society. A hired seneschal and core staff run the business of the estate, including management of local tenant farms, upkeep of the grounds, and other duties which would normally fall to the Master of the Estate. This provides the Society with its initial income and continues to this day to supplement their other revenue.

MacCormick's Place, as the Explorers generally refer to it, is a large estate house with a central body and two wings. The center of the building includes living and meeting quarters for the head council as well as rooms for diplomatic meetings. The east wing houses the library – arguably the greatest in Théah regarding the Syrne and Théan history – the primary research rooms and laboratories, and most of the classrooms for the students. The west wing includes housing for Society members, both permanent and guests, and also provides space for classes. In general, larger lectures are held in the east, while more intimate gatherings and discussions take place in the west.

The exterior of the house is all stone. The interior is a mix of stone and dark wood. The front door is heavy oak, more than a foot thick, and is inscribed with the coat of arms of the MacCormick family. The house has stood for more than five centuries and was built to withstand an attack, so that there are no windows on the first two stories. The building stands four stories high with a tower at the end of each wing. Rooms on the third and fourth floor are more popular with the Society members who live there since they have light through the narrow windows. Unfortunately, it requires a healthy climb to reach them.

Freiburg, Eisen

The Freiburg House was established only a year and a half ago, shortly after the end of the War of the Cross. The House was relocated from Tannen, where it was founded in 1599 by Gern Luftwitz. The Luftwitz House was the second oldest of the Society, but after the war, it was deemed wise by the House's leaders to relocate to a more secure area. Also, Freiburg's convenient location gives them easy access to trade, and to their own boats.

After its founding, the original Eisen house received support from the Luftwitz family for several decades. But during the war, resources were slim, and the Luftwitz family could no longer afford to support an

extracurricular organization. Most of the family's possessions were either seized or destroyed in the war.

The new house in Freiburg possesses the books, artifacts and students that resided in the Tannen location, but the Head of House has changed. Madeline du Bisset, a nonsense noblewoman from Montaigne, runs the place with strict efficiency. The building itself is a good-sized house (although much smaller than the Avalon location) in the midst of a merchant district. It takes care not to advertise its true purpose; Freiburg crawls with thieves who would love to get their hands on a priceless Syrneath artifact or two. Some scholars have complained that the constant noise makes study difficult, but the readily accessible supplies and resources more than makes up for that to most.

Although there are permanent residents at the Freiburg House, most of its occupants are tenants, passing through on the way to other sites. The Freiburg location is the primary trade House for the explorers. Almost everything and everyone to do with the Society makes its way through here at one time or another.

Kirk, Vendel

Darius Olaf opened the chapter house here in 1600. The building has been renovated on four separate occasions. It began as a two story family home with four bedrooms upstairs and a library, study and cooking area below. Not long after, an extension was added along one side with twelve additional sleeping chambers and two large meeting rooms. This accommodated a wider number of guests and the Society began to grow. Almost a decade later, a second extension, a long wing with rooms down either side, was added. One side of the wing is built almost entirely of glass. The other is stone, with no windows. Darius Olaf had come across a cache of artifacts which seemed to respond to light and he felt that the wing was necessary in order to study this new type of artifact. Unfortunately, no other light-sensitive objects

were ever found. Currently a portion of the lit rooms functions as an indoor garden.

Darius Olaf disappeared on a dig in 1627. He had farsightedly stated in his will that if he was ever more than three months late returning from a voyage, his daughter should receive full power of his estate until his return. If he had not returned after two years, she would inherit whether or not proof of his death was readily available. Jenna Olaf shared some of her father's interest in archaeology, but not his drive. She seldom went out on digs, but was thrilled to have new company and by the constant sources of interest they provided. With this in mind, Jenna made the final renovation to the House. She built another story on the entire building, bringing the whole structure to three stories and thirty sleeping chambers. She expanded the kitchen and hired chefs from Montaigne and Avalon as well as the current Vendel cook. She created an arboretum and central courtyard including elaborate statues mimicking those of the old republic as well as carvings found in Syrneath sites. And she had water from one of the native hot springs re-channelled to provide pools of warm water for relaxing in the center of the arboretum.

In short, Jenna Olaf created an explorer's resort.

The Vendel House is a favorite location for conferences. It is also the foremost site for artifact research. Its labs boast the newest equipment, and Jenna Olaf, now an elderly dowager, can almost always be counted on to provide funding for additional equipment.

Altamira, Castille

Alejandro Diega opened his house to the Society late in the summer of 1603, shortly after the death of his father. Alejandro's family had long been staunch supporters of the Vaticine church, and had known its favor. Diega, one of the founders of the Discoverer's Society, was torn between his loyalties to his church and to his friend

MacCormick and their investigations. In the end, Diega decided that what neither one knew wouldn't hurt them.

Diega's house became a secret haven for Explorers, and has remained so to this day. Diega acquired special permission from the church to go on digs of his own, supposedly in search of holy relics from the Prophets' times. In reality, he passed on any Syrne artifacts he found to the Society, and any items from the Prophets' ages to the church. Diega never told his friend MacCormick that some of his finds went to church universities, and he certainly never told the church about his work with the Explorers. In the end, both benefited greatly from his work.

Diega's son and his grandson have carried on his work. Now more than ever, with the Inquisition at the height of its power, the House's purpose is secret. However, the proximity of the Castille House to the nation's universities and their great libraries is a temptation for most Explorer scholars. The current Diega uses his position in the church and the government to help interested Explorers gain access to this incomparable resource.

The House is a spacious building set on a sprawling estate. The Diegas keep cattle and other livestock as well as farming the land. Most of the house is exactly what you would expect from a Castillian nobleman. But if anyone comes to the servant's entrance on the west side, and asks to see the owner's fine collection of tapestries, the servants have instructions to take them to a particular chamber in the center of the house, where the door is always closed. Diega appears shortly thereafter.

The chamber is filled with tapestries from the time when the Crescents lived side by side with the Castillians, before the third prophet cast them out. The room is a tribute to the Diega family's other secret; far enough back there's Crescent blood in their line.

Charouse, Montaigne

Etienne Deneuve opened the newest of the Explorer Society Chapter Houses in Charouse less than two years ago in 1666. Etienne is the younger of two sisters. Her sibling Phoebe is a respectable (by Montaigne standards) diplomat, working in the service of *l'Empereur* Leon. In contrast, Etienne has drifted from one interest to another, until landing with the Explorers Society while visiting in Avalon. Enamored with the whole romantic idea of exploration, Etienne returned home to Montaigne, and used her dowry to found a new Chapter House. She purchased a large building in central Charouse from a penniless nobleman.

Thus far, Etienne's House consists largely of herself and three young gentlemen. The four of them make regular journeys into the strange Syrne ruins underneath the city, making erratic notes and scribbled drawings of what they find there. Their methods are somewhat slipshod, but their enthusiasm is unparalleled. At present, although all four of them have suites of rooms in the house, they spend almost all of their time in the central ballroom. The walls are lined with artifacts and scribbled notes tied to them, or laid on the floor nearby. Their journals and books are stacked along the spiraling stairway at the north end of the room. Most of the house's furniture was sold before they bought the building, but they've pulled several chaise longues into the central room for beds and couches, and as often as not bathe in its central fountain.

Other explorers have visited the House on occasion, drawn by its proximity to the Charouse ruins, but they seldom stay very long, often claiming to be driven off by the sheer disorganization of the whole effort. One visiting scholar reported that the experience had been like camping indoors. Still Etienne is always happy to welcome new visitors, or for that matter, members. She has fabulous food and fine wine delivered regularly, and has inquired of Headmaster Bernvadore as to whether he would like to hold the next annual Explorer's Council there.

The Explorer Society isn't wildly popular with *l'Empereur* Leon, but so far he has made no objection to Etienne's activities. Some speculate that this is because the attractive young noblewoman is good friends with one of the Emperor's daughters. Others have wryly guessed that in fact Etienne is a "good friend" of the Empereur.

Revenue

The Explorers' Society receives income from a variety of sources. To begin with, when Cameron MacCormick, the Society's founder, passed away, he willed his estate and all of its proceeds to the Society. The MacCormick estate includes extensive property holdings as well as a number of tenant farms and some cottage industry.

Wealthy patrons make up a large portion of the Society's income. Some do so for the privilege of going along on expeditions. Others simply want their names associated with what they perceive to be a noble or famous cause. In addition, many of the Society's members are well off enough to contribute sizable contributions.

Lastly, the Society will, under specific circumstances, sell artifacts. Invariably these objects have been fully cataloged and thoroughly documented. They are never one of a kind. Although the same nobles that purchase these objects at an astronomical price could probably hire diggers to conduct their own searches for less money, there are advantages to buying them from the Society. For one thing, it leaves one's conscience clearer if that happens to be an issue. Also, there is a higher prestige from doing so. Artifacts from the Explorers Society are sold with a copy of all of the pertinent data regarding the find, including scholars' notes, history, and so forth. This makes for wonderful conversation for bored nobles.



Ways to Identify Members

Most members of the Explorer Society are open about their affiliation, wearing the Society's symbol of the compass as either a pin or a brooch. However, in case there's a reason for secrecy, the members have developed methods of identification and private communication. Certain innocent-sounding words and phrases are fraught with hidden meaning.

"How has the weather been?" = Is it safe to talk here?

"...storm coming..." = Not safe/we should leave

"...delivering a gift..." = Transporting artifacts

"...under the weather..." = I need information

"...was generous..." = I have information

"...portrait..." = map

"...a good place to dine..." = safe house

"...guest house..." = charter house

"...Cameron..." = The Explorers' Society

"...interesting news..." = a new dig

"Nannie" = North, "Sister" = South, "Aunt" = East,

"Cousin" = West

"Constance" = Castille, "Marie" = Montaigne, "Ava" = Avalon, "Veronica" = Vodacce, "Esther" = Eisen, "Vivienne" = Vendel, "Ursula" = Ussura, "Claudia" = Off-Continent

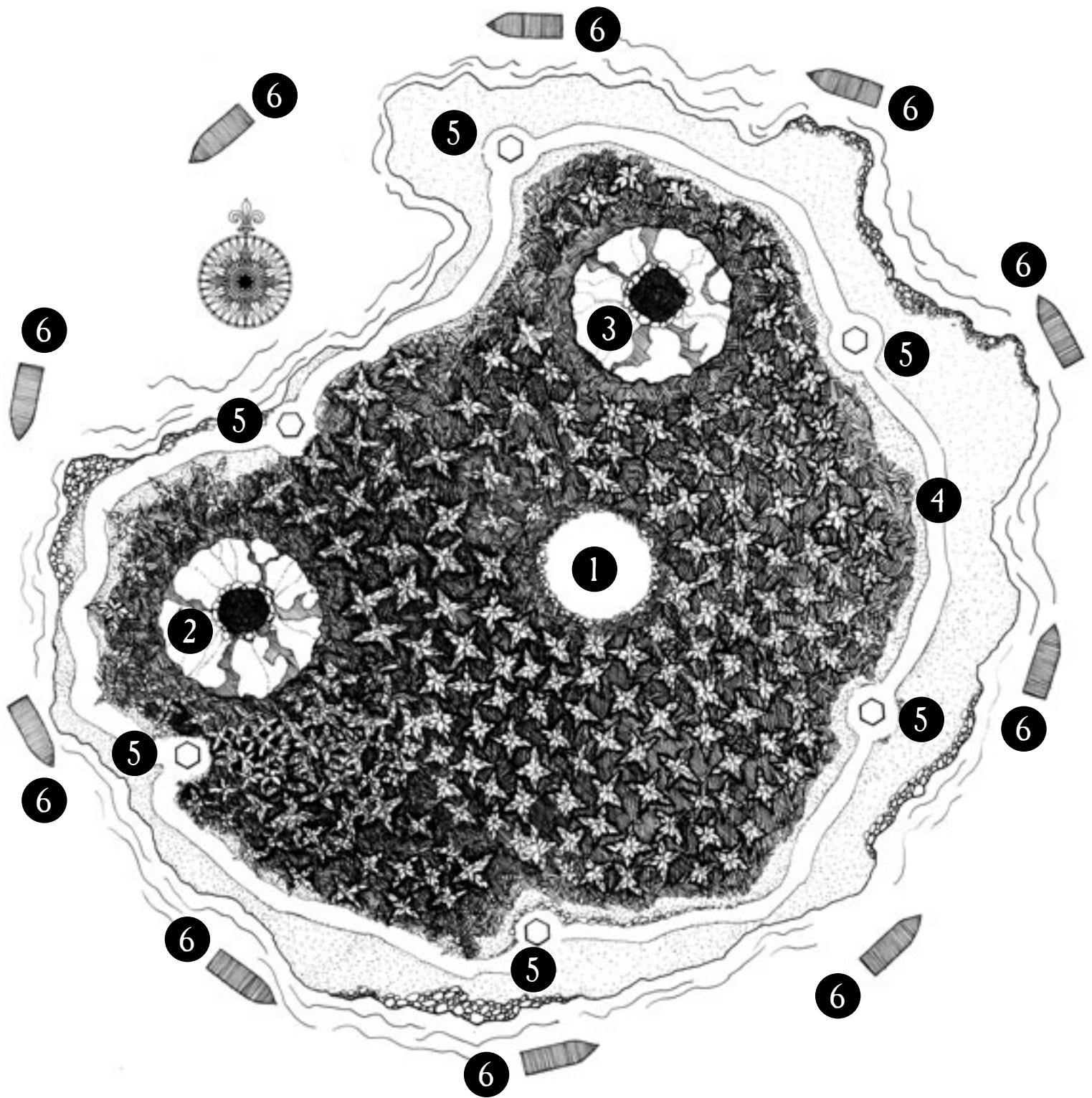
Examples

"I've had interesting news from sister Veronica" = There's a new dig in Southern Vodacce

"Aren't you a friend of Cameron's?" = Are you a member of the Explorers' Society?

"I'm planning to stay awhile at Ava's guest house." = I'm staying at the Avalon charter house.

L'Ill du Bête



Map Key

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 1. Malveck's clearing | 4. Connecting road |
| 2. Mont Fumée (Mt. Smoke) | 5. Syrnych buildings/marshalling grounds |
| 3. Mont Cendre (Mt. Ash) | 6. Montaigne ships |