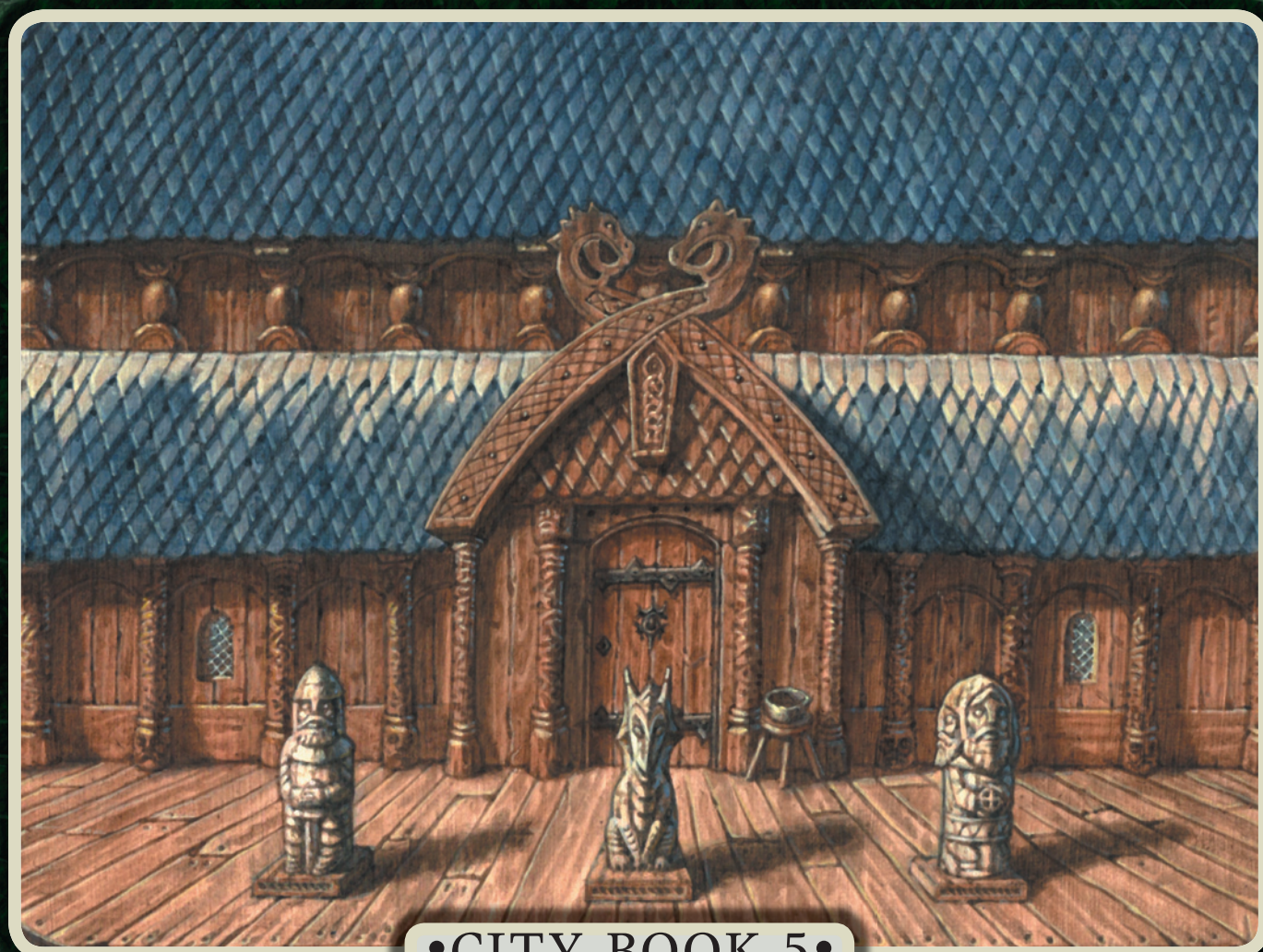


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PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

# HELLFROST

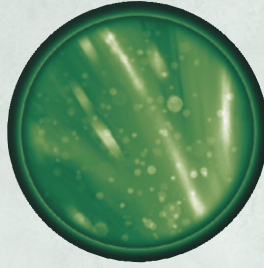
• FREETOWN CITY OF CRIME •



• CITY BOOK 5 •







# CITY BOOK 5

## CITIES OF CRIME

BY PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

EDITOR: HANS BOTHE

COVER & GRAPHIC DESIGN: ROBIN ELLIOTT

COVER & INTERIOR ILLUSTRATION: JUSTIN DAVID RUSSELL

CARTOGRAPHY: ROBIN ELLIOTT

TYPESETTING: PAUL WADE-WILLIAMS



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# FREETOWN



## HISTORY

Freetown is not the first settlement to stand at the mouth of the river. That dubious honor was held by a small Anari trading post. If history is to be believed, it was founded around -379. As the Anari spread ever eastward, the small settlement was fortified and strengthened, rapidly expanding into a town. Old maps label it only as Mouthburgh (literally “The fortified place at the mouth of the river”). Clearly this is a convenient description of what it was, rather than a true place name.

Before Midmark was (mostly) pacified and turned into a border protectorate, the native Saxa saw the threat posed by the docks—deep within their territory was an enemy harbor through which ships could land troops. In -264, the Saxa attempted to sack the settlement. Had the Anari not already foreseen this eventuality and dispatched reinforcements from what is now Drakeport, the port may well have fallen. Scholars are mostly agreed that its loss would have had little effect on history. At most, it would have delayed the invasion by a year or two.

By -95, continued Saxa belligerence, coupled with extended supply lines and better prospects elsewhere, saw the Anari give up their claim on Midmark. Troops were withdrawn and settlements abandoned. All save one, that is.

Although the Anari and Saxa were sworn enemies, Midmark saw the sense in maintaining trading relations. In -89, the Anari signed an agreement with Midmark—the port would remain under Anari governance but no warships would be permitted into its harbor. In return, Midmark would have access to Anari ports along the southern coast as far as what is now the Magocracy.

Read any official account of the Blizzard War and two things will become apparent. First, the frontline never moved much further south than northern Midmark. The force the Hellfrost army sent southeast was tiny, for its purpose was merely to protect the flank of the main as-

sault, which was driving southwest through the lands of the Anari Empire. What fighting occurred was mainly skirmishes and probing raids. Second, the original settlement on whose crumbling bones Freetown now stands was utterly destroyed during that conflict.

While the meager land forces of the Hellfrost horde were indeed “stopped” at Midmark, in -12 a flight of Hellfrost dragons deliberately broke away from the front-line to attack what had become a relatively obscure Anari trading post. Quite why the dragons went to the effort of eradicating the settlement has perplexed scholars and storytellers to the modern age. Arguably the port could have been used to reinforce Midmark. However, the Anari had no real presence in the region and it is clear from their actions elsewhere that the Hellfrost army was not intending to fully assault Midmark anytime soon.

Regardless of the reason, the trading town was obliterated and the survivors scattered. It remained abandoned for around three centuries. Although it had long recovered from the effects of the War and the later Saxa Rebellion, Midmark wasted no time or resources in rebuilding the city. Many claimed the city was haunted by the souls of those killed in the War. More likely is that the foundation of Aith gave Midmark a more convenient harbor. (The Saxa are also unskilled at working in stone.)

The first settlers to return were pirates seeking a safe harbor and somewhere to call home. Located far from the seat of power, Midmark ignored their presence until it was too late to cleanse the land of their blight.

Since its rebirth Freetown, as it soon became known, has been cleared of rubble and rebuilt. A pale imitation of its former size, it is now an independent city.

## LORD BLACKHAND

The man known only as Lord Blackhand has ruled over Freetown for nearly 30 years, yet he remains a mystery not only to the folk of Rassilon as a whole, but to even his



## RULES OF THE REALM

The following setting rules apply in Freetown.

\* **Center of Trade:** Virtually anything short of relics can be purchased in Freetown. Special availability goods can be purchased outside the usual places, but cost double. Items with a City availability cost just 25% of normal. Heroes selling goods in Freetown have +2 to their Streetwise rolls to find a buyer.

\* **Den of Thieves:** All citizens have Stealth d4. This represents not only their ability to avoid danger, but also their habit of picking pockets (almost a subconscious act).

\* **Native Language:** Characters born in Freetown must take Trader as their first language.

\* **Unsanitary:** Freetown is not the cleanest city. Each morning they spend here, characters must make a Vigor roll or develop stomach problems. This leaves them Fatigued and seriously inconvenienced for the remainder of the day. After contiguous seven days, the hero's system has learned to cope and no more Vigor rolls need be made. At least not until he returns after spending more than four days away.

\* **Vile Inhabitants:** Assume the average unsavory inhabitant of Freetown has -2 Charisma.

closest advisors. He rarely makes public appearances or gives audiences, and when he does he is always masked behind an ornate silver mask or wrapped in a black, voluminous cloak. Next to nothing is known of his past, yet small clues have allowed gossips and rumormongers to devise a wealth of stories.

Blackhand is not his given name—that much is hard fact. The name is a nickname based on his physical appearance, for it is said his hands are withered and black, as if subjected to some great fire. Some claim his entire body is scarred in the same manner, hence the lord's preference for remaining concealed. Yet whether or not his hands are truly burnt remains open to conjecture.

While the denizens of the desert realm of Al-Shirkuh, who sometimes call here to sell drugs, are brown skinned, they occasionally bring slaves whose skin is as black as midnight. Some insist Blackhand is merely a slave from unknown southern lands who somehow made his way to Rassilon and prospered.

One tale, quickly quashed when the rumormonger was found strangled in his bed, his neck crushed by some immense force, records how a merchant from Al-Shirkuh had the honor of meeting Blackhand and came away as pale as snow, mumbling only two words “Hekata” and “mumma.” Desert merchants have proven very reluctant to discuss either term, quickly changing the conversation to something more appealing.

Stories that Blackhand is a wizard are rife yet groundless. It is certainly true he has a great fascination of relics, but given that any ruler worth his salt has a similar desire

to possess powerful artifacts that is hardly conclusive. He has never invoked a spell in front of witnesses. Some argue that he might (others insist “must”) be a cleric of Nauthiz since he rules over a town full of thieves. Others hint at him serving Hothar (he runs the city with an iron grip, after all) or Vali (since he does nothing to stamp out the rampant corruption). Again, talk is cheap and evidence is lacking.

Although everyone calls Blackhand “his” lordship, there is no direct evidence he is a man. He is of thin frame and wears baggy clothing, which were he a woman might conceal small breasts. Blackhand smells, so it is said, of exotic spices and incense—wearing perfume or scent is not considered a male trait anywhere in Rassilon. His voice is strong and deep, almost hollow, yet it has a singsong quality. While he is conversant in many languages, rarely requiring a translator even when dealing with foreign emissaries, his lordship has an indefinable accent, as if none of the languages he speaks are actually his native tongue.

## SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Thirty years ago a cabal of crime lords known as the Nine Captains controlled Freetown. Each represented a powerful faction or family. Promotion came through assassination or political maneuvering rather than waiting for a vacancy.

Then Lord Blackhand came to Freetown. In the course of a week he had assumed total command of the port, murdering the Nine Captains by his own hand (or so the story goes) and installing the Black Watch as his enforcers. The families and factions of the deceased rulers were given a stark choice—swear unconditional loyalty to Blackhand or meet a similar fate. Given the state of the bodies, which were said to have been horribly mangled to such a degree that identification was possible only through tattoos, scars, and their gold rings of office, they chose wisely. Lord Blackhand now rules as an absolute autocrat, neither taking nor asking for counsel.

Although seriously weakened, the families and factions of the Nine Captains remain powerful players in Freetown's politics, though they are careful not to involve their lord in their power plays. They still control much of the trade and crime, and while they can hardly be said to be upper class, they are the nearest the city-port has to offer. Regardless of their actual financial status, they consider themselves the “old families,” and expect to be treated with due respect.

Craftsmen, merchants, clerics, wizards, and anyone else with a decent level of income are next down the social ladder. Then come those who work for other people, such as soldiery, laborers, and apprentices. Finally there are the beggars, those whose income relies on the charity of others. With charity in short supply in Freetown, only citizens unable to find other forms of work take to the streets and beg.



## GOVERNMENT

Freetown is large enough that the ruler might install a council or set of officials to oversee daily matters, thus freeing himself of the burden. Although rivals, the Nine Captains at least played their part in keeping the city running (by which we mean illegal trade flowing and their profits growing).

Lord Blackhand is an autocrat, and a hands-on one at that. Nothing to do with city life occurs without his blessing, or indeed his knowledge. Blackhand does have agents that deal with the populace on his behalf, and they speak with his authority, but they have no powers to create new laws—they are merely his hands, eyes, ears, and mouth.

## LAW AND ORDER

Freetown may be full of criminals, but it is not lawless. Far from it, in fact, for Lord Blackhand rules with a rod of iron. While citizens are free to rob and murder each other, this is not an open invitation for anarchy. First, visiting merchants are largely off-limits—Blackhand wishes to encourage trade, not scare away customers. Second, being caught in the act is still a punishable crime.

Since many citizens are in some way connected to the Nine Captains, theft and murder can lead to reprisals. No one wants a gang war, especially since that may encourage Blackhand to crack down harder. Thus, despite Freetown's unsavory reputation, theft and murder are not as prevalent as skalds may claim.

## COURTS

Those expecting to receive any form of justice in a city of thieves and murderers are going to be sorely disappointed. Anyone accused of a crime by a member of the Black Watch or a reliable witness is thrown into jail, whereupon they are promptly forgotten. Unless the "criminal" was caught in the act of committing a crime, his friends and relatives may pay a fine to secure his release. Those who are not freed perish from disease, malnutrition, disease, old age, or murder.

The guards don't keep any records—every prisoner is identified only by his cell number. This means anyone who wants to free a friend by paying a bribe has to pay a bribe to learn what cell they are in first. Each month on Raestdaeg, Blackhand draws a single token from a cask. Whoever happens to be in that cell at the time is dragged into the streets and publicly executed as a warning to others. The corpse is then placed in a gibbet on one of the bridges and left to rot.

## THIEVES' GUILD

Freetown's independent thieves' guild (the Restless Hand) operates quite openly, claiming the temple of

Nauthiz as its headquarters. Wary of Blackhand, what the guild says and what it does are two totally different things. The true headquarters is in the basement of a run-down tavern, the Luckless Beggar.

As well as committing acts of theft, the guild operates gambling houses in Freetown as legitimate businesses. Most games are actually honest, the odds being stacked in their favor by the laws of probabilities. The guild is accustomed to harassment from the Black Watch, and maintains a slush fund for bribing officials. Of the many prisoners in the jail, the only guild members are those who offended the guildmaster in some way.

Officially the Lord Thief is Liaze Shadow-Thief. She took her nickname after convincing gullible citizens she was such a good thief she could steal a person's shadow (it was a moneymaking scam done using magic). Like much in Freetown, her position is an illusion. The true guildmaster is Maugis the Thin, a corpulent gentleman who passes himself off as an honest merchant. He remains hidden partly to avoid Lord Blackhand, and partly because promotion in the guild comes at the point of a dagger more often than not.

## EDUCATION

Ask any Freetowner where the school is located and one will be met with howls of laughter. Whatever their social status, citizens are responsible for educating their own children in whatever manner they see fit.

Those with wealth have the option of hiring private tutors or sending their children to other cities. The former is expensive, for educators charge a small fortune to live and work in the dangerous city. The latter means the child is away from his family, making him more of a target for assassins.

Among the poor, education is very limited. Most can speak Trader (the official language) and a smattering of Sandspeech, but few can read or write with any degree of competency. A lucky few find apprenticeships with master craftsmen or join the cults. For most, though, a life of thieving begins almost as soon as they are old enough to walk.

## RELIGION

So long as temples, shrines, and congregations pay their dues and do not preach against his laws or rule, Lord Blackhand allows the open worship of any deity (including the demon princes) in Freetown. The most popular by number of worshippers, are Nauthiz, Neorthe, Freo, Thunor, and Tiw.

Nauthiz is openly honored here, for thievery is not illegal and gambling is a popular pastime. Such is his acceptance that the city boasts a temple, one of a small few not concealed from public scrutiny. Whereas in many



## ATMOSPHERE

Although Freetown's population is similar in size to that of not-too-distant Aith, the town feels far more claustrophobic. Hemmed in between the cliffs that mark the end of the Lesser Crystalflow, the city is a maze of narrow, dirty alleys, drab two-story buildings (ground space is limited), and crowded streets.

Like most ports one feels both welcome and alien because of the number of foreign visitors present, but here there is an air of constant menace. Eyes peer furtively from behind drapes; strangers in the street flick their eyes to money purses and weapons, sizing up possible rewards in relation to the danger of robbing an armed man; rich citizens go nowhere without gruff bodyguards; polite smiles and hellos from shopkeepers and fellow pedestrians are replaced by mumbled threats and curses, or hard stares; and corpses hang at every street corner as a reminder that the laws are absolute.

The crowds press relentlessly as they bustle about their business. The streets are covered in filth while rats scurry unmolested through open sewers and across the lice-ridden, disease-ravaged, and crippled beggars that line the walkways in throngs. The dogs are mangy, the cats feral, and the children prone to picking pockets.

Inns and taverns are frequently the scenes of ugly brawls. Strangers are greeted with silence while the patrons decide whether to rob or murder them or just let them have a drink and something to eat. Most establishments serve only poor quality food and drink, and anyone sleeping in an inn will share his bed with more lice and fleas than he is accustomed to.

realms clerics of the thief god find it hard to avoid sins or the long arm of the law, in a den of thieves they ply their trade and appease their god with great ease. Traditionally, the high priest, who takes the title Lord Thief, was one of the Nine Captains. While the temple has no real say in the running of the town any more, it remains a powerful faction.

Much of Freetown's illegal trade comes in via ship, more than a few of its citizens are pirates, and fishing is a way of living. Hence, Neorthe, god of the sea, is regularly worshipped. Since Thunor commands the weather, even on the open ocean, he too receives plentiful worship. Unlike in Saxa nations, his lesser aspect of opposing tyranny and slavery receives little worship, and what few adherents that part of the cult has lurk out of sight for fear of stirring Blackhand's ire. Freo is similarly placated. While the god of travel has little jurisdiction over the weather, it never hurts to offer him prayers for a safe and speedy voyage.

With only 300 soldiers present, Tiw may seem an odd choice as a major god at first. Since the port boasts many

pirates and is surrounded by Midmark, a hostile nation as far as Blackhand is concerned, Tiw has many adherents.

Slavery is openly practiced in Freetown. A small band of Haptsönir (see *Matters of Faith*) cultists operates here. Since they are opposed to Blackhand's laws, they must worship and act in secrecy. Rooting them out has proven extremely difficult, even in a port where information is easy to gather.

What strikes many outsiders as odd is that Vali does not seem to receive public support. While the cult is not forbidden from opening a public temple, the cult has never liked attention. Cultists work behind the scenes as elsewhere, though in truth there is little need for them to work that hard—the citizens of Freetown are quite open to corruption without their sly nudging. While the fame-cultists prefer richer targets, the cult of Haratt, god of rats (see *Matters of Faith*), has adherents—Freetown, a port and a filthy city, is beset with vermin.

The cults of Hothar and Sigel also have worshippers, though they are very few in number. Both are opposed to the open corruption and rampant thievery, but to open a temple and preach against the moral decay would invite not only scorn but also violent attacks, and likely raise the ire of Blackhand. Thus, they must work in the shadows to appease their god.

Var has no official presence here, despite Freetown relying on trade (albeit illegal). Any temple to the god of trade would quickly become a target for thieves or heavily embroiled in black market activities. While the cult is not opposed to criminal ventures, it has no wish to be stained with a poor reputation for actively seeking such markets.

The cult of Niht has a powerful presence in the city and is permitted to operate openly. Naturally, the clerics prefer to keep their activities as secret as the location of their temple so as not to offend the goddess.

Few other deities receive much worship. Cannibalism does occur in the poorest parts of the city, but worship of Dargar is extremely rare; Eira's teachings of peace and mercy fall on deaf ears, and there are no farms requiring tending by Eostre. The Norns are barely acknowledged—every citizen knows he is going to die at some point, so he might as well enjoy what life he has rather than worry about when, and how, it will end.

## FESTIVALS

Freetown has no official public holidays—even Raestdaeg and Sangdaeg are normal working days. The cults are entitled to host whatever celebrations and festivals they like, so long as their taxes are up to date and their activities do not directly harm the city.

## MILITARY

Lord Blackhand is served by the Black Watch, a force of 300 heavily armed soldiers loyal only to him. After a



series of very short and very brutal actions, the private militias were disarmed and disbanded.

The Watch is divided into three distinct groups. At the top is the Elite Guard, a force of 10 men who form his lordship's personal guard. The faceplates of their full helms resemble grinning skulls (as do their shield bosses), and black ermine fur cloaks, a mark of their office, hang from their shoulders.

Beneath them are the Palace Guards. Sixty strong, they are responsible for guarding the jail and the palace proper. They are divided into three companies of 20 men. One company is on watch at all times, the second on standby, and the third sleeping or resting.

Finally, there are the 230 Black Watch proper, the thugs who patrol the streets and brutally enforce the law. The Watch is divided into ten companies of 23 men (20 soldiers, two sergeants, and one captain). During the day and evening three companies are on street patrol. At night, four companies hit the streets looking for troublemakers to quell.

The Watch is well equipped, but they receive low wages. They are allowed to make money through bribes, but within certain limits. The Black Watch has the right to accuse anyone of a crime, for instance. Often the accused has done nothing wrong, and a small bribe may suffice to rectify the "mistaken identity." The Watch is careful not to abuse this privilege too much, for Blackhand executes guardsmen who routinely accept bribes, considering them too untrustworthy. They are also wary about mistreating members of the old families. This isn't out of any respect—it is because Blackhand doesn't want to give them an excuse to revolt against his authority (similarly, he can't just eradicate the families because it may stir the people against him).

Whereas the original port was fortified, Freetown has no walls to protect it. The cliffs prevent armies from attacking by land, and the Lesser Crystalflow, which divides the town in half, is seeded with sharp stakes to prevent invaders reaching the third bridge. The only open approach is the harbor, and that is protected by small towers outfitted with ballistae and catapults.

## MILITIA

Modern Freetown has never had a true city militia, nor is it likely to ever have one. Neither the Nine Captains nor Lord Blackhand saw arming the general population and treating them to fight as a particularly wise move. That isn't to say there were no armed citizens roaming the streets.

Before Lord Blackhand seized power, Freetown had no standing army. Every thief lord, slaver, merchant, and whoever else could afford it, kept a personal bodyguard to watch over their person and property. Turf wars wracked the city as the crime lords pitted their forces against each other for dominance.

Should Freetown ever be attacked, it is likely that most of the population would flee like rats leaving a sinking ship rather than defend their homes.

## PRIVATE FORCES

Since disbanding the various militias, Blackhand has implemented strict laws governing private forces. While citizens may retain bodyguards and watchmen, no family may keep more than 10 armed servants. To do otherwise is to be summoned before Lord Blackhand, a fate few desire more than once. Note that carrying a dagger does not count as being armed.

## ● TRADE & TRIBUTE ●

Freetown legally imports very little—most goods in the market are the result of piracy. The port's true mercantile value is as a center of smuggling operations. With only a few safe harbors on this stretch of coast and only two capable of handling large cargos, merchants who want to avoid paying the import and export duties at Drakeport or Aith see berthing at Freetown as a necessary evil. Freetown also acts as a trade center for illegal goods, offering a place where merchants can buy and sell cargos prohibited elsewhere.

Freetown faces two immediate issues based on its geographic location. First, with the merchants of the Free Emirate States lacking a readily accessible trading port in eastern Rassilon, the city might yet become a legitimate center of trade. In order for this to work, Freetown would have to build better ties with Midmark, construct a trade road network, and curb the thievery, violence, and trafficking that makes it a pariah state. Lord Blackhand might be prepared to take this step, but his people might need persuading the move is in their best interests.

Second, Midmark is heavily reliant on the Crystalflow Confederacy for trade. The kingdom may decide to alter the balance and power by transforming itself into a major mercantile realm. All it would need to do is seize Freetown and its deep-water harbor. This would not be a simple matter, but with its new navy at Aith it could effectively besiege Freetown on land and water.

Living in Freetown isn't free—Lord Blackhand demands taxes from the citizens. Since people either don't bother to declare their income or would lie, there is no income tax based on annual earnings.

**Entrance Tax:** Any person entering Freetown must produce a travel pass. These can be purchased from any watch station or the harbormaster's office. Prices vary by the length of duration the permit is valid. A day pass costs 1 gs. A week-long permit costs 6 gs, a monthly permit costs 20 gs, and a year's entry runs at 240 gs. The Black Watch frequently charges more, pocketing any extra payment. The harbormaster is actually honest.

Any person may be asked to produce his travel permit or proof of citizenship (see below) by the Watch. Failure to produce the necessary paperwork results in imprisonment (unless a swift bribe is paid), while stubborn refusal to comply results in a severe beating before a trip to the jail.



Debates rage as to why the need for travel passes was introduced. Those with suspicious minds argue the Nine Captains introduced them as a means of learning who was entering their city. Most, though, say it was just another means of robbing visitors of their money.

**Citizenship Tax:** All citizens with a permanent residence in the city must pay 10 gs per year. In return they are awarded a token declaring them to be citizens of Freetown. This exempts them from the entrance tax. Citizenship tokens can be purchased illegally for 50 gs. Being caught with a forgery results in a trip to the jail.

**Property Tax:** Citizens pay 10% of the value of their home, including all furnishings, each year. Business premises pay 5%. As a result of this policy, most citizens have just a single well-furnished room, leaving the remainder of their home looking very bare.

**Trade Tax:** All imports, exports, and goods passing through the city are taxed at 0.5% of their value. Given the low tax rate, few merchants bother to try and conceal their cargos' true value.

**Temple Tax:** All temples are required to pay a flat fee of 500 gs per annum, while shrines are charged 200 gs. In order to pay the tax, most temples and shrines charge attendees 1 ss per visit. The temple of Nauthiz has a special agreement with Lord Blackhand. Each year, in a public ceremony, the Lord Thief and one of his lordship's chosen servants play dice on the temple steps. If the Lord Thief wins, the temple tax is waived (and the servant thrown in jail). If the servant wins, the fee is doubled.

## ARCHITECTURE

Freetown was rebuilt from the rubble of the original Anari city. The modern city displays a total lack of civic planning, having evolved slowly from the debris as the population grew and expanded outward.

When ground space became short the citizens built upward, adding second stories to their homes and shops. Lack of masonry skill meant the early settlers used any blocks they had at hand, resulting in ramshackle abodes with uneven, sloping walls. In the case of two-story dwellings, the top half is rarely mortared to the ground floor—only the weight of stones prevents the top part falling off into the street. Fortunately for passers-by, buildings with more stories are cemented together. This came about only 65 years ago, though, after a minor earth tremor toppled part of the city.

Whereas the Old Town, the part on the banks of the river, has changed little since it was erected, New Town, the part further up the cliffs, is continually evolving. Much of its evolution is unseen, though.

Peering up the cliff, one sees narrow houses seemingly perched on thin outcrops. Without further investigation, it appears as if the inhabitants have even less living space than the scum who inhabit the Old Town. Like the power and influence the old families claim to possess,

New Town is largely a facade. The front of the dwellings appears like a well-crafted house, but much of the living space extends deep into the cliff. When the rich wish to expand their homes, they simply hire miners and masons and dig deeper.

Rough cut steps, which become slick when it rains and downright deadly when icy, ascend the cliff in a crisscross pattern. Most citizens of New Town prefer to remain at home except when absolutely necessary, sending servants to make the treacherous climb to buy provisions and other goods.

## THE SUN

Although the city is as lively by night as well as day, Freetowners still base their working day on the rising and setting of Sigel's Hearth. Below are the local sunrise and sunset times and the hours of daylight for the first day of each month.

Month	Sunrise	Sunset	Daylight
Snaermonan	0706	1700	9h 54m
Frostmonan	0659	1726	10h 27m
Eostremonan	0632	1753	11h 21m
Plohmonan	0556	1815	12h 19m
Sowanmonan	0519	1837	13h 18m
Werremonan	0453	1859	14h 6m
Scerranmonan	0447	1914	14h 27m
Hegmonan	0458	1913	14h 15m
Haerfestmonan	0518	1851	13h 33m
Falmonan	0538	1815	12h 37m
Huntianmonan	0559	1736	11h 37m
Fogmonan	0623	1703	10h 40m
Wulfmonan	0649	1649	10h 0m

## MAJOR LOCALES

Freetown is an isolated harbor-town. It makes no claim to any territory beyond its municipal boundary. Since it has no land on which to grow crops, raise animals, or harvest natural resources, Freetown is dependent on trade for almost everything it requires.

### 1. THE BLACK PALACE

Home to Lord Blackhand and the city jail, the Black Palace (named after the color of its stone) stands on a small island reachable only by boat. While the imposing exterior looks drab, the interior is lavishly decorated—Blackhand does not scrimp on indulging himself. Statues, tapestries, and carvings from many cultures and ages adorn the walls or stand on marble plinths. While no one has ever seen a library, most citizens who have met Blackhand agree he must have one—he speaks of past matters as if he had witnessed them first hand, and is versed in many areas of lore.



Freetown has a total population of 7,987, yet only 7,600 are registered as citizens according to its last census (taken each year when new citizenship tokens are purchased). The missing citizens are prisoners, slowly rotting in body and mind in the dank jail.

For all his wickedness, Blackhand respects the special protection placed on heralds and the laws of hospitality. Citizens who rob, yet alone attack, an official herald from another realm can expect to be hunted down and made an example of. The last person to flout the law was dragged through the filthy streets behind horses until the sinews holding his arms together snapped. What remained of him was then dismembered and fed to stray dogs. The few guests Blackhand entertains are never housed at the palace, though. Instead, they are assigned rooms in one of the many inns. The laws of hospitality have a lot of leeway in them, and the quality varies depending on how Blackhand sees the herald's master.

## 2. THE BLACK BARRACKS

While the Elite Guard and Palace Guard have relatively comfortable quarters in the palace, the Black Watch must make do with a simple barrack block on the northern shore. Each soldier receives a wooden cot, a straw mattress, and a coarse blanket. The meals are equally basic—gruel, cheese, boiled meat, and hard bread. Any luxuries a guard wants, including decent meals, must come from his own pocket—one reason why the guards are quick to take bribes. The barrack block also contains a rudimentary kitchen, a mess hall, and an armory.

## 3. ORC WARD

Freetown takes its role as a free city where all are welcome very literally. Although only rare visitors, orc war galleys sometimes dock here to sell cargoes and slaves or make repairs and take on fresh provisions. The average denizen of Freetown would cut your throat in an instant if he thought he had something to gain, but that doesn't mean he shows any tolerance toward orcs.

To prevent violence, all orcs are required to stay in the Orc Ward, a collection of low-quality buildings on the very edge of town, at all times. Basic entertainment is provided through a tavern.

Known as the Orc Pit locally, the tavern sells rough alcohol and meat even a starving stray dog would hesitate to consume. Known across the city as Eglaf Half-Orc after his ugly visage, the owner is a tough customer, more than holding his own in a brawl against the larger orcs. He also speaks fluent Orcish.

Eglaf is actually a Midmark spy. A veteran of the siege of Ostersund until an arrow to the leg ended his career as a warrior, Eglaf uncovers information about when the orc galleys are leaving and their proposed routes, which he then sends back to Jarl Togsvig in Aith via powerful *voice on the wind* charms. The jarl can do little to combat the orc pirates—his warships are needed to supply Ostersund and protect the town. Still, he can warn merchants

if galleys are likely to cross their path, thus potentially saving their lives and cargoes.

## 4. SHIPYARD

Freetown's shipwrights have always done a good trade in boat repairs—not surprising once you realize most of the damage is caused by them! Ships are sabotaged while in harbor, forcing the owners to make costly repairs before they can leave. More legitimately, they can build ships surprisingly fast—assume one week per point of base Toughness (not including armor).

## 5. THE CATTLE MARKET

Slavery remains legal in Freetown, but citizens have long referred to the slave market by a more conventional name (albeit one that reveals the low value they put on slaves as people).

Anyone can sell a slave, but all transactions must take place at the Cattle Market. The captives on offer are primarily from Rassilon, but there are a healthy number of residents of Al-Shirkuh. On rare occasions, black-skinned slaves from more distant lands and oriental subjects of the Jade Empire are found shackled. Many are unfortunate mariners captured by pirates, but a goodly number come from visiting slavers.

While awaiting sale, slaves are kept in cages, allowing potential buyers to examine them before deciding on whether to hand over hard coin. Slaves are sold as auction lots. The prices in the sidebar on page 11 are typical values. The actual sale price may be anywhere from 20% lower to 100% higher, depending on demand and the condition of the slave.

The cult of Thunor turns a blind eye to activities in the Cattle Market—the god of winds proscribes clerics from owning slaves, but allowing the trade is not a sin. The associated cult of Haptösnir, however, has freed numerous slaves over the years, but has never managed to stop the trade completely.

## 6. THE CABIN

Located near the north dock, this large inn was once the meeting place of the Nine Captains. Back then it was known as the Captains' Cabin. The owner, Milon ap-Haylon, wisely removed the prefix so as to avoid upsetting Lord Blackhand. Offering relatively clean sleeping furs and adequate food, the cabin mainly caters to wealthier clients. Many of the clientele are the sorts of people Blackhand wants to do business with, so thievery is less common than in other inns.

Two of the patrons, a dour couple claiming to be merchants looking to avoid Midmark's taxation policies, are actually clerics of Scaetha. Eulogist Ernaut ap-Begon and Divine Slayer Cuthhelm Edmundsunu have a suspicion Lord Blackhand might be the missing liche, Angtharinax. His withered hands, reluctance to reveal his features, and interest in relics, not to mention his sudden arrival



30 years ago and unknown background, are all too coincidental to be ignored. They are currently seeking evidence to prove their claims, but must tread with extreme caution to avoid arousing suspicion.

## 7. THE RUSTY ANCHOR

Located two buildings east of the Cabin, the Rusty Anchor is its poorer cousin. Catering to the needs of common sailors, it offers basic accommodation in flea-infested rooms and barely palatable meals for a few silver scields a night. About the only thing going for the inn is that it always has a good fire in the main hearth.

Heroes won't be able to find a berth or work on a boat here (that must be done in the Cabin), but they will be able to learn what ships are leaving soon and where they are heading with minimal effort. In place of a Streetwise roll, a hero may spend 2 gs buying drinks to learn such information.

## 8. THE FLOATING TEMPLE

One of the few all-wooden structures in Freetown, the current temple of Neorthe is actually a dozen ships lashed together in the harbor.

A long wooden building similar in appearance to a Saxa longhouse dominates the center of the floating temple. It contains a large worship hall, quarters for the clerics, a kitchen and mess hall, the treasury, and an armory. Images of Freo, Thunor, and Tiw carved from whale teeth stand outside the temple.

The floating temple is only part of a larger temple complex, though that is based on shore. The temple owns two wharves and a number of buildings. The latter serve as flophouses for down on their luck mariners, captains seeking somewhere safe to sleep while in town, hiring halls for crews after employment, and the like. A strong wooden fence separates the temple complex from the rest of the docks.

When services are due the vast temple is sailed in between the two wharves. Citizens board the ship via one wharf, pay their respects to the statue of Neorthe and their 1 ss temple tax, and exit onto the other wharf. Once the queue has filtered through, a cleric gives a sermon to the throng massed on the temple wharf. Those who don't fancy standing outside with the unwashed masses or in the cold or rain may pay 2 gs to worship in the main worship hall.

The current high priest is Master Navigator Gui Roughskin. He is named after the sharkskin cloak and hat he wears in all weathers. Local folklore is he physically wrestled with the shark, killing it by ripping out its eyes.

## 9. SNIPS & SNACKS

This combination barbers and pie shop is run by a husband and wife team. Customers invariably order a meat pie from Isabelle (a plump Anari) before getting

their hair and beard trimmed or wounds stitched by her husband, Fikri, a skilled barber-surgeon who hails from Sirhan, City of Stars, in the Free Emirate States of Al-Shirkuh. By the time her husband has finished his work a hot pie is ready to take away.

Cleanliness isn't a common trait in Freetown, at least not among the lower classes. The clientele for haircuts consists of wealthier citizens and visitors from Al-Shirkuh. Poorer denizens come here to have their wounds tended and for the pies, which are cheap and very tasty.

## 10. THE BLACK SWAN

The largest tavern in Freetown, and there are many such places, the Black Swan is renowned across the southern Hearthlands as the place to go if you need a "special" cargo. Cargoes of narcotics, special slaves, and just about anything else a buyer may want can be found for sale here. Unfortunately, outsiders (those not recognized by the management) are about as welcome as an arsonist in a hay barn, and physical violence is often the warmest greeting a stranger will receive.

For a den of smugglers and criminals, the staff is surprisingly honest. Every major family and important person with a larcenous bent in the city uses their services at some point or another, and it does not do to make enemies of such people. Never sure of when a person is acting on behalf of a powerful client, they never knowingly cheat customers.

## 11. THE LAST REPOSE

Death is common in Freetown, though rarely does its shadow fall on great numbers of citizens at any one time. Most corpses are disposed of in the sea. The Last Repose, located on the docks, is considered part of the temple of Neorthe, though there is a small shrine to Scaetha in the grounds.

Whereas robbing a living person is part of daily life, stealing from a corpse is risky business. By law, any personal possessions on a corpse found within the city limits belong to Lord Blackhand. These are auctioned off in the Last Repose and the proceeds sent to the treasury.

## 12. THE PASHA'S PALACE

Spices often flow into Freetown, but the precious cargo is quickly sold on for huge profits. As a result, even the palatable food in Freetown is notoriously bland, save that is at the Pasha's Palace (and Hot Wings; see #23). Owned by Faisal ibn-Mahmoud, this restaurant serves the native spice-laden cuisine of Al-Shirkuh. Meals aren't cheap (double normal prices), but they are certainly flavorsome. Those who can't afford to eat here are fond of saying the spices cover the flavor of the meat, which comes from a source best left to the imagination.

Faisal never talks to patrons. This is not rudeness—it is simply that he has no tongue. According to word on the streets, he cut out his own tongue soon after arriv-



ing as a sign to Lord Blackhand. No one is 100% sure what sign he was showing, but there are knowing nods whenever someone mentions the tale of the merchant from Al-Shirkuh and the strangled gossip.

The dusky-skinned proprietor is not all he claims to be. Faisal is a member of the Brotherhood of Assassins, an elite band of murderers-for-hire who worship the scorpion god Chactinax. Oddly, he does not ply his trade in Freetown. Assassins whose mission requires them to visit Freetown are instructed to visit the Pasha's Palace before anywhere else, where Faisal always has a spare room ready for use. He introduces his guests as cousins from his homeland, the Free Emirate States.

### 13. THE CORSAIRS' RETURN

The corsair fleets that once plagued the coast of the Free Emirate States may have been disbanded, but piracy remains a way of life for some. With no safe harbor in western Al-Shirkuh, a new breed of corsairs has settled in Freetown. The Corsairs' Return is a tavern frequented by the villainous sea dogs.

The pale faces of Freetown's native population are a rarity here, partly because they stand out from the crowd and partly because very few of them speak fluent Sandspeech, the *lingua franca* of the tavern's regular patrons. Aside from the unusual language and clothing of its patrons, there is little to mark this as a haunt for foreigners—the food, drink, and decor is all thoroughly northern and thoroughly average.

### 14. HIGH-CLASS TAILOR

Unlike in other cities, people don't tend to look twice at those wearing their armor in Freetown. That said, there are times when one must dress in more conventional clothing, such as when visiting a dignitary. Unless one has made no enemies in Freetown or is prepared to suffer the pain of a dagger between the ribs, those with money head to the shop of Peri (short for Perrwinkle), an engro tailor.

A master of his craft, Peri knows how to conceal leather protection into conventional clothes without visibly increasing their bulk. Even being patted down by a suspicious bodyguard searching for concealed weapons will not reveal the armor. This addition doubles the cost of formal and tailored clothing, but grants +1 Armor to the torso. The weight of the clothing increases to 2 lbs.

### 15. PINPRICKS

It is said that only fools and dead men go unarmed in Freetown. History has proven this to be true many times over. Whether one is enjoying the company of a lady of pleasure or dining with an old friend, one always carries a dagger on one's person. More importantly, one keeps it ready to use in an instant.

Pinpricks sells daggers and throwing knives, all made on the premises. As well as standard weapons, the shop

## THE PRICE OF SLAVERY

True slavery, as opposed to indentured servitude, is illegal in much of Rassilon. Indeed, most citizens find the thought of slavery abhorrent. Still, there are still realms where the trade is alive and well, such as Blackstone Barony and Freetown.

While it is unlikely many player characters will desire to own a slave, typical prices for basic slaves are included for completeness. All prices are in gold scields.

Naturally, any slave with an Edge from the *Land of Fire* setting must hail from Al-Shirkuh, which makes them exotic and thus more expensive. Ignore the Edge if you don't own the relevant book.

\* **Courtesan/Bed Wife:** *Base:* 500; *Edges:* Hourri\* (+300; see *Land of Fire*); *Other:* +150 per point of positive Charisma.

\* **Domestic Servant:** *Base:* 200; *Skills:* If the slave has a relevant Knowledge (Craft) skill, such as cooking, add +25 per die.

\* **Educated:** *Base:* 1,000; *Skills:* +100 per die in Knowledge skills except Craft; *Edges:* Investigator (+75), Lorekeeper or Sage (+100; see *Land of Fire*), Scholar (+200).

\* **Entertainer:** *Base:* 500; *Edges:* Acrobat (+150), Contortionist (+150; see *Realm Guide #22: The Kingdoms of the Sphinxes*), Master Storyteller (+50), Legendary Storyteller (+50), Storyteller (+200; see *Land of Fire*).

\* **Laborer:** *Base:* 200; *Edges:* Brawny (+200); *Other:* +100 per die of Strength over d6, +50 per die of Vigor over d6.

\* **Scribe:** *Base:* 75; *Languages:* +100 per language after the first; *Special:* Scribes cannot be Illiterate.

sells better quality blades for murderers with discerning tastes or specific needs. Prices below are in addition to the basic cost of a dagger or throwing knife. These options can be combined where applicable.

*Balanced:* +1 to Throwing (throwing knives only; +100 gs); *Poison Well:* the hilt has a space for a single dose of poison. When used to attack, a hidden switch can be depressed as a free action, forcing the poison along the blade's channel and into the wound (daggers only; +25 gs); *Razor Sharp:* weapon inflicts Str+d4+1 damage (+75 gs); *Thin but Strong:* AP 1 (+100 gs); *Weighted:* Range 4/8/16 (throwing knives only; +50 gs).

### 16. FREETOWN MINE

This small, unassuming hut is actually the entrance to Freetown Mine. The miners are freelancers, paid by the amount of usable minerals they excavate. Unfortunately, there are few rich veins running through the cliffs, and thus most earn a pittance for their back-breaking labor.

The mine is owned by Fricor ap-Forqueret. The en-



trance to the mine was unearthed during the rebuilding of Freetown. Fricor's family, believing the dark tunnel was a former mine, paid a fortune for exclusive mineral rights. Almost 90 years later and they have just about scraped back their investment.

Work has recently come to a grinding halt in one part of the mine. Clearing a long tunnel of debris, the miners discovered worked a network of passageways. Fixed into the wall were a number of rusty iron doors, albeit ones without locks or handles. The miners had planned to simply mine around them to look for spoils, but a series of unexplained deaths has led them to believe the tunnels are haunted. Fricor, who wants his miners back at work as soon as possible (and whatever is behind the doors), is hoping to hire adventurers to investigate the tunnels and doors. He offers no payment up front—instead, hirelings will receive 15% of whatever loot they discover.

## 17. SECURITY FIRST

Few citizens in Freetown have much wealth, but those who do have no desire for it to fall into the hands of thieves. While the city has several locksmiths of varying skill and honesty, the rich hire the cult of Lasemed, minor deity of locks and traps (see *Matters of Faith*), which runs this business. In recent years the cult has branched out. As well as providing excellent locks and protective *glyphs* and testing existing security systems, it also hires out the five paladins of Forseti, minor deity of catching thieves (see *Matters of Faith*), in its employ.

The thieves' guild isn't best pleased with the Thieftakers' presence, but the guildmaster has decreed that no member shall attempt to murder them directly or through hired agents—the guild has no wish to see the paladins turn from a passive obstacle into active thief hunters. The thieves have actually purchased several locks for training purposes.

## 18. THE REED YARD

Head further upriver, into the flatlands, and the Lesser Crystalflow becomes a morass of small islands and dense reed beds. An obstacle to river traffic, the reeds are about the only resource Freetown claims (and that is disputed with Midmarkers living along the banks). Cut reeds are hauled back to the city on punts and left here to dry naturally. Much of the harvest is destined to line the floors of Freetown's buildings, while a lesser amount is crafted into baskets, mats, poor quality paper, and cheap quills.

Business has been poor lately thanks to a spate of arson attacks. Reeds are hardly big business, and the cutters work as a cooperative to ensure the best prices. While it could be hijinks gotten out of control, the workers are convinced the attacks are deliberate and intended to drive them out of business.

The reed cutters know of a few ruins in the marsh. For a few silver scields, they are prepared to transport adventurers upriver.

## 19. BEGGARS' GUILD

The beggars of Freetown do not have a true guild, but every building needs a name. The riverside structure is as rundown and close to collapse as its occupants. Owned by Guthren the Fair, the self-titled Beggar King, it is a place of sanctuary for any beggar who can meet his price—everything they earn begging and scavenging on the streets. In return, they receive shelter, food, drink, and security. The latter only applies to those actually on the property—the “guild” never seeks reprisals against those who harm or kill its members elsewhere.

While his minions eat broth of dubious origin, slurp ale little fit for dogs, and huddle under blankets in drafty rooms, Guthren's apartments are lavishly appointed. Beggars occasionally bring him interesting gossip, but he is not an information broker—he merely exploits the needs of the desperate to save having to find a real job.

People with enough money can hire the beggars, through Guthren, to listen out for specific information or rumors. For 50 gs, the characters can add +1 to Streetwise rolls for the next week. For 150 gs, either the week-long bonus increases to +2 or the +1 bonus lasts for an entire month (32 days).

## 20. TOADWATCH BRIDGE

The bufomi dwelling in the marshes upriver might occasionally attack reed cutters, but they lack the leadership and strength to bother the city. As a further deterrent, reed cutters (see #18) are paid one gold scield for each bufomi corpse they bring back. Their flayed skin and severed heads are then hung over the side of the bridge as a warning to others of their ilk to stay well clear of Freetown. In theory, the flesh is used to feed the reed cutters' dogs. Rumors are circulating that the meat is actually being sold to taverns and street vendors.

## 21. THE SCROLL IN THE WALL

The interior walls of this tavern are dotted with hundreds of niches. In each one is a scroll. When and why the tavern became a depository of forgotten lore has long been forgotten, but every owner has retained the unusual feature.

The current owner, Elias the Learned, a burly ex-sailor with a gift for languages and a thirst for knowledge, allows patrons to browse the scrolls, but only if they purchase drinks every hour. A small mug of beer costs 5 gs. A patron who gifts Elias a scroll of lore is entitled 20 hours free browsing.

Investigation rolls here have a -2 penalty. This is due to two key factors. First, there is no order to the scrolls—each sits wherever the last browser placed it. This disorderly filing system makes it very hard to track down information with any haste. Second, the scrolls cover dozens of topics, come from different cultures, and were penned untold centuries ago—the odds of finding a single scroll with all the information one seeks are slim.



## 22. GEM EXCHANGE

Many merchants visiting Freetown prefer to buy and sell cargoes for gems—they are lighter and much easier to conceal than a chest of coins. Unfortunately, few establishments take gems as currency. Whether one is looking to buy or sell a gem, those in the know visit the shop of Angrim Redbeard, a surly frost dwarf who always complains about the “excessive heat” in Freetown.

Angrim has a knack for appraising gemstones with astonishing accuracy and for offering a fair price. He needs to eat, of course, so he charges 10% on all exchanges.

Stored in the shop are 30,000 gs in coins and an equal amount in gemstones—a fortune that would shame the hoards of many elder dragons. The gems vary in price from 100 to 5,000 gs. Aside from a number of metal chests protected by extremely complex locks (–4 to Lockpicking rolls), Angrim apparently has no special protective measures in place to prevent robbery. A retired thief and now a leading fence for the thieves’ guild, his premises is watched day and night by apprentice thieves. Should they spot anything untoward, they are quick to summon reinforcements.

What even the guild does not know is that the two weather-beaten statues that stand inside the main door are actually stone golems, purchased at great expense from the golem warehouse (#28). During the day they remain silent and still, although Angrim can give them orders if he so chooses. Once the shop is shut up for the night, they patrol the interior. Their standing orders are quite simple—kill anyone except Angrim they find inside the building.

## 23. HOT WINGS

Freetown has a range of eateries selling food of varying quality. One of the better places is Hot Wings. Owned by Burcan ap-Lanval and his wife Armide, the shop sells freshly cooked birds. Through his contacts in the resident community of ex-patriots from Al-Shirkuh, he purchases a variety of hot and flavorful spices.

Among the many dishes on the menu are Spicy Sparrow, Hot Hawk, Chili Chicken, and Piquant Pigeon. The exact blend he uses to coat each type of bird is a closely guarded secret. The spices, while adding flavor, also conceal the age of the meat—the birds may be freshly cooked, but they are rarely freshly killed and plucked.

The pair is always after edible birds. Reed cutters can earn 1 ss per five birds they snare, with more paid for rare species. Burcan makes no secret that he pays for any type of flying creature. He would dearly love a dragon or wyvern to add to the menu, but so far has been unable to persuade anyone to hunt such creatures. For dragons, he would happily pay 50 gs plus a further 100 gs per point of Size above zero. A wyvern would sell for 50 gs. He is only interested in the flesh—he doesn’t care about the scales, claws, teeth, or bones. The freshness of the carcass isn’t an issue, so long as the meat is not totally rancid or crawling with maggots.

## 24. THE RATS’ NEST

Located in a large, low-ceilinged chamber within the “sewers” reachable only means of a narrow flight of steps from street level, the Rats’ Nest is a low-end tavern. The proprietor, Gurth Six-Fingers, breeds giant rats in a nearby section of tunnel, feeding them on whatever meat he can acquire. There is a distinct lack of stray cats and dogs in the vicinity and the occasional beggar unwilling to pay for lodging at the guild (see #19) has gone missing.

Each Marketdaeg, rowdy patrons crowd around a pit in the center of the drinking room to gamble on the outcome of deadly fights in which ferocious dogs are matched against the equally ferocious rats. A patron prepared to take on a giant rat using only his bare hands (no magic) can win big (50 gs, which is a lot by local standards), assuming he survives.

## 25. RAT STICK TAVERN

You can’t take a step in Freetown without seeing a rat, but Rat Alley (the name of the filthy street that runs along the northern face of the tavern) has an especially large population. Patronized by the dregs of society, the tavern takes its name from its most popular dish—roasted rat on a stick. The “delicacy” is also depicted on the tavern’s faded sign. A cast-iron stomach is essential, for the vermin are rarely cooked properly and the chef’s personal hygiene would shame many marsh trolls.

Clerics of Haratt are forbidden from harming rats, but nothing in their sacred vows prevents them from allowing others to harm the vermin. Few citizens realize this difference. Ignorance suits the cult perfectly, for it operates out of a secret room in the tavern’s cellar.

The wooden altar is carved to resemble a giant rat squatting on its rear legs. Its mouth is open, ready to receive sacrifices of cats and ratted dogs. The statue’s eyes are high-quality, perfectly cut purple alestones (see *Rassilon Expansion 2*), each with a value of 500 gs.

The cult has no actual need to remain secret. Old habits are hard to break, though, and the clerics would rather not give paladins of Eira, Eostre, or Sigel an open invitation to raid their temple.

## 26. THE RAVEN’S NEST

Proudly proclaimed as the highest tavern in Freetown, the Raven’s Nest is located on the slopes of the southern cliffs. Its prices are as high as its location, something that serves to keep out the poor. Here wealthier citizens can sit and enjoy moderately good beer and wine, acceptable food, and passable entertainment without being troubled by beggars.

Capable of catering for just 30 customers at a time, booking is essential. Unless one is a regular, has tipped very well in the past, or is prepared to spend at least 30 gs on bribes, it takes 1d4 weeks for a table to become available. Even then, there is a strict dress code—no armor or weapons (daggers excepted) are permitted.



## 27. FIGUREHEAD CARVER

While one can purchase a custom vessel from the shipyard, they always come with plain prows. No amount of money can persuade the shipwrights to do otherwise. With little else to differentiate them, it is the figurehead that makes each ship unique. For those who want their ship to stand out, a trip to this carpenter's workshop is called for.

Run by Frithulaed Cynemundsdohtor and her three sons, the workshop can turn out any form of prow design in a week. Sea dragon heads are especially popular, but the carpenters can produce any design a ship owner or captain can envisage. A standard figurehead costs 50 gs and an elaborate design 150 gs. The most exquisite designs cost a minimum of 200 gs.

These works of beauty have the same benefit as a Norn charm, save that the benny can only be spent on Boating rolls made for the vessel to which the figurehead is attached. For each additional 200 gs (to a maximum of 800 gs), an additional benny is gained. This special bonus cannot be added to existing figureheads, nor can the bennies be recharged once spent.

## 28. GOLEM WAREHOUSE

The Golem Ban Decree of 345 IR made the creation of, and research into creating, golems a capital offense. It did not, however, make ownership of golems illegal. That said, the destruction causes by the rampaging golems lives on in folklore and the memory of some long-lived species, and few traffic with such willful and unpredictable creatures. There are those, though, who find a golem especially useful. For instance, they make ideal guardians for the rich and powerful, in whose homes they can be passed off as common statues.

Oswald Aelbald sells golems. Some are survivors of the Golem Rebellion. Most, though, are products of the mages of Al-Shirkuh. Prices for a Rassilon model start at 10,000 gs. Those from the heat-seared desert cost double their usual amount (see *Land of Fire*).

In order to avoid being lynched for keeping dangerous creatures on the premises, or persecuted by paladins of the Norns for simply dealing with them, Oswald claims to sell unusual statues. Those he keeps on display are all made of stone or wood, and are of standard anthropomorphic design. More unusual specimens are kept under lock and key behind a secret door in his workshop.

Over 20 different types of golems are detailed in the *Creature Guide Compendium*. Exactly which ones Oswald may have in stock is left for the GM to determine.

## 29. THE WORD

The interior of this small establishment contains only a table and a number of comfortable chairs. The proprietor, a man known only as the Mouth, buys nothing and sells only one thing—information—and it does not come cheap. The price varies depending on the interest of the buyer and what the Mouth thinks the information

is worth. Potential customers without at least 200 gs in their pockets will be sorely disappointed.

The Mouth has eyes and ears everywhere—little that transpires in Freetown escapes his attention. While those with secret plans might wish the Mouth dead, no one has ever raised a hand or uttered a threat against him—to silence him would rob them of information concerning their rivals' schemes.

## 30. THE GIBBET

In the same way that committing murder is only a crime if you are caught in the act, so paying for someone to be murdered is only punishable if you are overheard arranging the death. The law specifically states "overheard," a term that has led to a loophole, the exploitation of which Lord Blackhand has done nothing to close. Patrons looking to arrange a murder simply take a seat, write a note briefly describing the target, and leave it on the table in front of them. Interested assassins then make their interest known by buying the patron a drink and taking a seat at his table. All communication is done in writing.

Most of the tavern's regular patrons are murderers-for-hire. Few are actual trained killers—they are just violent thugs prepared to take the risk of getting caught in return for a suitable fee. If one is lucky, a cleric of Niht will take an interest, for the Gibbet serves as one of their headquarters in Freetown. (Like the other dark cults, they have no wish to broadcast their presence too loudly, for not everyone in Freetown is prepared to turn a blind eye to their activities.)

Fees start at 25 gs (life is cheap in Freetown), but rise rapidly depending on the nature of the target and his likely protection. No assassin is prepared to take on Lord Blackhand, no matter how much money is handed over—not even the cult of Niht is that stupid.

## 31. DEAD MEN BRIDGE

In addition to having one prisoner executed each year, Lord Blackhand periodically has perpetrators put to death as a warning to others. Displaying unusual mercy, he at least allows them the luxury of death before placing their corpse in the gibbets strung up along the bridge.

Corpses are left here until they rot and drop through into the rivers, giving the bridge a unique and unforgettable aroma. Locals frequently refer to it as Hela's Garden. Scavenging from the dead is referred to as "plucking Hela's flowers."

## 32. THE SUN SQUARE

Anyone passing through this large square is sure to encounter Sun Priest Lanval Goldmane. Except when participating in festivals, the elderly priest comes here each dawn to preach against the wickedness of Freetown and its sinful inhabitants. Only at dusk does his tirade end. Much of his attention is directed at the cult of Nau-thiz, whose temple borders the square. For their part,



the cult politely ignores him. Indeed, they have made it clear that anyone physically harming the cleric will be hunted down. This is not out of any pity for his rants, which fall largely on deaf ears, but to avoid the cult of Sigel descending on the city in revenge for an assault on one of its clerics.

Lanval means well, but Freetown is what it is, and few would see it change. He suffers verbal abuse and pelting with rotten fruit (and sometimes filth from the streets) without pausing in his sermons or casting an accusatory glance or finger at his persecutors.

The square is not named for Lanval's continued presence—the stone used to pave it was originally yellow in color. It is now stained with decades of encrusted filth.

### 33. THE HALL OF PLENTY

Nauthiz's temple stands on the south bank of the Lesser Crystalflow. Aside from its size, the outside is nondescript, boasting no wealth or religious iconography. Even here, where thieving is a part of daily life, the cult prefers to keep a modest profile. Within are the main worship hall, whose statue depicts Nauthiz in his traditional guise, living quarters and facilities for the clerics, a licensed gambling hall, a small portion of the cult treasury, barracks for apprentice thieves, and a thief training facility known as the "Death Room."

Rumors are that the truly destitute and needy can play the ultimate gambling game. In a secret room is a free-spinning wheel carved with cash sums and methods of death. If the wheel stops with a cash sum indicated, the guild pays up immediately. If it lands on death, however, the gambler has run out of luck, for Nauthiz will not be cheated. No fee is charged to play the game, but a citizen can only ever spin the wheel once in his life.

### 34. FIRE WATCH

Freetown's buildings may be constructed from stone, but fire is always a problem in a crowded city. A general hue-and-cry goes up whenever there is a major fire, but by the time people have rushed to the river or wells to collect water it is often too late to save the property.

In keeping with the city's fondness for free enterprise, a group of locals have set themselves up as the fire watch. Ready to roll day or night is a large wagon on which are kept barrels of water and buckets.

The fire watch works in one of two ways. First, it sells insurance. For a few gold scields a month, insured building owners can sleep safely, knowing the firemen consider them a priority in case of fire. Second, it turns up at major fires at uninsured premises and demands money to assist in putting out the flames. Given that business can be slow, the watch is not beyond starting a fire.

The firemen have a small number of *elemental protection (fire)* potions at their disposal. They reserve these for wealthy clients who want valuable possessions rescued from conflagrations. The use of these expensive potions is not covered by insurance policies.

### 35. SOUP KITCHEN

Run by three clerics of Eira, the soup kitchen hands out tasty soup and freshly baked bread to the city's beggars each day. The clerics treat beggars' recent injuries (rat and dog bites are common) for free, but charge other citizens. They keep no alchemical devices in stock, but can manufacture a variety of herbal brews from their supply of dried herbs. Forever short-staffed, the clerics pay those prepared to help them in their duties with the promise of healing in the future.

### 36. MINERS' EMPORIUM

Those looking to take up work as a miner, whether in Freetown or elsewhere, are advised to visit this store. The owner, Mauguis ap-Joudain, sells picks, shovels, candles, wicker baskets, and other assorted equipment that a miner might find useful. The goods are of poor to average quality, but cost only 50% of normal.

Mauguis makes a good living, but little of his income comes from mining supplies. A member of the thieves' guild, Mauguis also sells a different type of pick—lockpicks. A master craftsman in his own right, he sells both standard lockpicks and individual custom-made lockpicks. The latter are cunningly wrought and grant a +1 bonus to Lockpicking rolls. They are also very delicate and break on a Lockpicking roll of natural 1 (regardless of Wild Die). Each custom pick costs 20 gs.

Many Freetowners know of Mauguis' secondary trade and can point potential customers there. While he sells to anyone with money, the majority of his customers are actually thieves from the guild—it is not a charity, and members are expected to supply their own equipment. All guild members are taught a code phrase, which is to be spoken while shopping for lockpicks. Customers who fail to give the correct code and reported to the guild, which has no love for freelance operatives plying their trade in its territory.

### 37. THE SHADOW MARKET

Virtually nothing is illegal in Freetown, but that doesn't mean one wants to be seen purchasing certain substances or visiting certain establishments. Most of the important citizens and their associates are watched by their rivals, and being seen purchasing poison tends to set alarm bells ringing. Even in Freetown, purchasing offensive alchemical devices tends to make the Black Watch curious. When one desires a physical object but cannot buy it openly, one visits the shadow market.

By day, the market is a quiet square, no different from any other in Freetown. At night, it is populated by a host of cloaked figures. The only illumination is a dim lantern in the center of the market and it produces just enough light to see the shadowy figures seated around the periphery. Buyers are expected to wear hooded cloaks as well—secrecy is the market's watchword.

Since buyers don't wish to be identified publicly, the









## FREETOWN

1. The Black Palace	19. Beggars' Guild	37. The Shadow Market
2. Black Barracks	20. Toadwatch Bridge	38. The Living Shield
3. Ore Ward	21. The Scroll in the Wall	39. Orphanage
4. Shipyard	22. Gem Exchange	40. Rat Catchers' Guild
5. The Cattle Market	23. Hot Wings	41. Flying Axe Tavern
6. The Cabin	24. Rat's Nest	42. Wilbur's Weed
7. The Rusty Anchor	25. Rat Stick Tavern	43. The Poisoned Chalice
8. The Floating Temple	26. The Raven's Nest	44. The Ropewalk
9. Snips and Snacks	27. Figurehead Carver	45. The Black Tower
10. The Black Swan	28. Solum Warehouse	46. The Crane's Lair
11. The Last Repose	29. The Word	47. The Dragon
12. The Pasha's Palace	30. The Gibbet	48. The Broken Nose
13. The Corsairs' Return	31. Dead Men Bridge	49. Salvage Company
14. High Class Tailor	32. The Sun Square	50. The Fish House
15. Pinpricks	33. The Hall of Plenty	51. Raedvig's
16. Freetown Mine	34. Fire Watch	52. Menagerie
17. Security First	35. Soup Kitchen	53. Messengers' Guild
18. The Reed Yard	36. Miners' Emporium	54. Clanging Bridge



## MIDMARK AND FREETOWN

Midmark, whose lands completely surround Freetown, has long considered the city a den of thieves, pirates, and smugglers. Few would deny they have a very valid viewpoint, and yet Midmark has never once attempted to reclaim the city or drive out its larcenous inhabitants. There are several reasons for this.

First, for all its evils, Freetown is actually a trading city. Merchants unwilling to visit Drakeport, either out of fear of orc pirates or because of the higher import duties, stop at Freetown. Cargo is then transported either to Aith or, more commonly, overland. This ultimately benefits Midmark's merchants.

Second, nobles with land around Freetown find it convenient to have a port where anything can be purchased right on their doorstep. As an independent city, those plotting against Cwene Saereid can seek refuge here should their schemes be uncovered.

Third, by allowing Freetown to remain, Midmark at least knows where the pirates are harbored. Shatter their city and drive them away, and they would only take up a new home somewhere else. At least where they are Midmark can keep an eye on them.

price of anonymity is high. On average, prices are double that of purchasing a similar item openly through a shop.

The Black Watch never patrols here, nor in neighboring streets—hefty bribes ensure that the anonymity of both buyers and sellers is respected.

### 38. THE LIVING SHIELD

The casual violence of Freetown has spawned a lucrative and growing industry—providing bodyguards. The Living Shield is not the only hiring hall catering to those who feel they need protection, but it is regarded as providing the best guards.

For 5 gs a day, one can hire a seasoned bodyguard with the Shieldwall Edge. For 10 gs a day, the hired help also has the Bodyguard Edge (see *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion 2*). For 20 gs a day, one can gain the services of a cleric of Kvara, the minor deity of bodyguards (see *Matters of Faith*). Patrons are responsible for paying their bodyguards' food and lodgings while they are in their employ.

The proprietor, Xavier Three-Eyes, is always after new bodyguards for short-term contracts. Visiting heroes can earn half the rates above by hiring on to protect one of Freetown's rich and influential citizens.

### 39. ORPHANAGE

Children can be a blessing, but they can also be a burden, especially to the poor. Across the continent, unwanted children may be abandoned in the wilds to fend for themselves, sold to slavers, deposited at a temple or

orphanage, or even murdered. In Freetown of old, the favored method was to sell children into slavery.

Dismayed at this barbaric practice, the cult of Eira opened an orphanage. It was both a noble deed and costly mistake—no sooner had it opened than it was inundated with children. Poorly funded, the clerics rely on donations and selling their services as healers to feed and clothe the waifs and strays.

With all the best will in the world, the clerics know they cannot hope to care for every child thrown their way. In order to raise additional funds, children with the right talents may be sold to master craftsmen as apprentices or even to the thieves' guild. The latter may lead them into a life of crime, but the guild does look after its own.

### 40. RAT CATCHERS' GUILD

Freetown's filthy two-legged population is vastly outnumbered by its filthy rat population. Save for catching their next meal, guild members have long given up on hunting rats in the streets—no one pays them for that service and it's a never-ending battle. Instead, they hire their poisons, slings, and vicious terriers to rich citizens who want their houses cleared of vermin and warehouse owners. As unscrupulous as any other citizen, the guild has been known to seed buildings with rats deliberately in order to receive money for then removing them.

The guild has no official ties to the cult of Veth, goddess of vermin catching (see *Matters of Faith*) and has no animosity toward the cult of Haratt. In fact, the latter is good for business, as they encourage the rat population to expand.

### 41. FLYING AXE TAVERN

Popular with Freetown's Saxa inhabitants, the Flying Axe is a busy and noisy tavern on the outskirts of town. It takes its name from the patrons' favorite tavern game—axe throwing.

Standing in the main drinking hall is a large, heavily notched wooden board with a hole in the middle. For 5 ss, customers receive three throwing axes to chuck at the board. The target is one of the barmaids, chosen at random, who sticks her head through the hole.

Traditionally, the thrower aims to cut three braids of the woman's hair. Given the regularity with which the game is played, few barmaids grow their hair long. Instead, strands of rope are used to simulate the braids.

Anyone who cuts all three strands receives free drinks for the rest of the night. The ropes count as Small targets (–2) but throwers may aim. A critical failure means an axe has grazed the barmaid's flesh, drawing blood. The thrower then has two choices—he may quickly hand over 5 gs as “weregild” or get beaten up by the drunken patrons.

### 42. WILBUR'S WEED

Wilbur, a portly engro of good cheer and yellow-stained teeth, sells pipes and pipeleaf. Much of his leaf



supply is stolen, enabling him to sell pouches for a mere 10 gs. For those short of funds but in need of a fix, he even sells single pipe measures for 2 gs.

Wilbur is also Freetown's leading source of hashish, a narcotic smuggled in from Al-Shirkuh by his contacts. Hashish is sold in single doses costing 5 gs. Wilbur's stock is very valuable. Rather than pay for expensive locks and traps and hire guards, he pays a monthly stipend, a mixture of money and drugs, to the thieves' guild for them to leave him alone. In return, they protect him from freelance thieves and opportunists.

#### 43. THE POISONED CHALICE

Several organizations secretly operate in Freetown. This herbalist shop is a front for the Reliquary. With Lord Blackhand known to be interested in obtaining relics and the port accessible to merchants from the largely unknown realm of Al-Shirkuh, the Reliquary prudently decided to open a permanent office.

The operation is run by Geriant ap-Thibaud, an Arcanologist. Assisting him are three Reliquae, all of whom are also trained herbalists. Two of the Reliquae have managed to infiltrate the thieves' guild. This has greatly enhanced the organization's information gathering capabilities.

#### 44. THE ROPEWALK

Virtually all of the rope sold in the city is manufactured in this long building. Making rope is hard, manual work, and working conditions are tough. Fire is a frequent problem due to flammable hemp dust igniting. This is actually the sixth building of its type to stand on the site in the past 45 years.

As well as conventional rope for everyday use and limited budgets, the ropewalk also produces high-quality rope. This costs 20 gs per 10 yards, but can support 450 pounds without straining.

#### 45. THE BLACK TOWER

Rising from the ground like a twisted, fire-blackened skeletal finger, this slender tower is barely acknowledged by Freetowners. Those that cast a glance at its dark form are quick to whisper a prayer to whatever deity might care to listen and then hurry on their way. Save for youngsters dared by their peers, or drunks who forget where they are, few venture close to the structure after dark.

According to legend, the tower was once occupied by a monster. Most tales say it was a magician of dark power, but sometimes a demon is thrown into the mix. Whatever the truth, the cult of Scaetha, Sigel, or Eira, depending on who you ask, sealed the fiend inside and prevented its escape through powerful wards and mystic signs. No date is even given for this, but everyone agrees it was a long time ago.

Visitors to Freetown often suggest the story is just that, and that the tower is empty. Freetowners know different, for they have witnessed a shadowy form on the upper-

most balcony at night, and many a local has felt a sudden fear grip his heart or witnessed a cloud of darkness materializing outside the black stone walls. The tower is also home to many bats, creatures long associated with the darker powers.

The story is both true and false. A demonist did once occupy the tower, but he was slain long ago. For the last 43 years it has been home to Silas ap-Girard, a Lorekeeper with an interest in the darker side of arcane studies. On learning of the abandoned tower, he secretly began researching its history. Discovering a secret way inside, he promptly claimed it as his home.

Disliking company, he sits here night after night reading about demons and undead, and studying the holy books of the cult of Hela. He is not a worshipper of the dark goddess—he merely finds the forbidden topic fascinating. Judicious use of alchemical *fear* and *obscure* devices ensure the locals stay away.

Silas needs to eat, of course. Content to let the rumors about the tower continue, he uses a tunnel from his basement that emerges in an abandoned house to come and go at his leisure. Posing as a visiting sage, he buys research material whenever it becomes available. He has recently started purchasing books on *khem-hekau*, the necromantic magical art of Al-Shirkuh.

Characters who seek to sell books on the darker side of magic are told of Silas' existence, although no one knows where to find him. All they can suggest is to put word out on the street and let the reclusive sage find them. Silas comes from a wealthy family and pays good money for interesting books and scrolls. His small, focused collection counts as a personal library.

*Admission:* Private. No one else knows the library even exists.

*Specialties:* Demons, the Demongate Wars, the cult of Hela, undead.

*Investigation Rolls:* +1 for specialties only. No Investigation rolls outside the specialties can be conducted here.

#### 46. THE CRONE'S LAIR

A small tavern in a side alley near the docks, the Crone's Lair is home to a "priestess of the Norns" reputed to have amazing powers to divine the future. Such is her reputed power that she rarely sees customers, and favors only those with important roles in life. In return for unraveling a client's thread of life and seeing what lies ahead, she demands only that the client tells her a secret hidden even from the Norns.

The priestess is a fake, though she is highly skilled at cold reading psychology. She "divines" likely futures based on her client's occupation and ambitions, all of which she slowly wheedles out of him during her divination. She is actually an agent of Lord Blackhand.

#### 47. THE DRAGON

A 50' high wooden pole, carved to resemble a headless storm dragon with folded wings, rises up out of the



ground near the wharves. A shrine to Thunor, it marks the extent of the god's physical presence in Freetown. Atop the pole flutters a colossal windsock shaped like the storm dragon's head.

Engraved into the stone around the pole's base is Freo's holy symbol, which serves as the god of travel's sole shrine. The four points of the sigil are aligned to the cardinal points. Combined with the windsock, it provides mariners with a clear indication of the wind strength and direction.

Clerics of the two deities run a nearby market stall, from where they sell blessings and cults-made alchemical devices. The stall is open only for an hour either side of the high tides.

## 48. THE BROKEN NOSE

Quiet during the day, the Broken Nose tavern is packed once the sun sets. Much of the main barroom is marked off by a low wooden fence, an arena for the nightly bare knuckle prize fights.

Any patron prepared to stump up 5 gs can challenge one of the inn's fighters at odds calculated by the innkeeper. Every fight is the subject of heavy wagering. Anyone prepared to try for big money can challenge Pounder, an ogre bought as a slave several years ago. Pounder has Fighting d10 and the Brawler and Bruiser Edges. The odds on beating Pounder are rarely lower than 20-to-1.

## 49. FREETOWN SALVAGE COMPANY

Storms, pirates, and accidents have all sent countless ships and their crews to Neorthe's watery realm. In some cases, cargo floats, allowing it to be reclaimed. In others, it sinks to the ocean floor, along with the crew. Merchants looking to recover precious cargoes or private citizens who merely want to loot a sunken vessel can hire the Freetown Salvage Company.

Comprised of six members, all of whom are excellent swimmers and mariners, the company uses *environmental protection (water)* alchemical devices to descend into the dark, watery depths in search of treasure. Their fees are steep—patrons must reimburse them the retail cost of each alchemical device used and pay 10% of any salvage recovered.

The company also listens to mariners' tales of shipwrecks. Goods they recover without a patron are brought back to the city and sold. Anyone who reports the location of a shipwreck to the company is given 5% of the profits from their operation as a reward.

Much of their work is in relatively shallow water—storms batter ships onto rocks, inexperienced mariners rip out their hulls on submerged reefs, and pirates have to come close to shore in search of prey. Kept busy, they are always interested in hiring freelance operatives. Would-be salvagers must have Vigor and Swimming d8, whether or not they can cast *environmental protection (water)* or have access to their own alchemical devices—spells and potions do not last indefinitely.

## 50. THE FISH HOUSE

Fish is commonly eaten in Freetown. The local species aren't particularly flavorsome, but at least they are more likely to be fresh than other meat on sale. This business sells salted, pickled, and smoked fish, both by the barrel as part of ships' provisions and in small packets that serve as trail rations.

It is also involved in smuggling. For a small fee, items can be hidden in the barrels—something few customs officials in other lands bother to check properly due to the smell. For a larger fee, a barrel with a false bottom can be arranged to smuggle people out of Freetown under the eyes of their enemies.

The cost for the latter service depends on how desperate the escapee is and exactly from whom he is running. Escaping the reach of Lord Blackhand requires a *lot* of money, and even then the workers may decide it is better to hand the person over rather than risk being found out and punished.

## 51. RAEDVIG'S

A Saxa skald, Raedvig doesn't advertise his abode or services. Publicly he is an entertainer, traveling the taverns and inns to make a living. In truth he is a very wealthy man, for his true patrons are the old families. While murder is a valuable tool in Freetown, too much of it upsets the lord and risks retaliation. There are other ways to effectively kill a man, though.

Such is Raedvig's gift for satire and his widespread popularity with the masses that he can tarnish a reputation beyond repair or make a man a laughing stock. Such methods are rarely permanent, but they serve their purpose in Freetown's intrigues. Raedvig charges 500 gs a time, but his methods are effective—anyone ridiculed by him suffers  $-4$  Charisma. Each month the penalty is reduced one point. When it reaches zero, the satire has worn off and the reputation restored. Raedvig's satire does not work against a person still under the effects of a previous ridiculing.

## 52. MENAGERIE

The sign over the door of this former warehouse proudly proclaims it to be the Freetown Menagerie and Cabinet of Curiosities. For a mere 1 ss, sightseers can gaze on all manner of stuffed beasts, many of which are unique specimens.

The taxidermic collection is not only moth-eaten, but a large percentage of the display is fraudulent. The supposed "unique creatures" are simply different species of animals sewn together, albeit with remarkable skill. Examples include a deer with wolves' feet, an eagle with a cat's head, and a rabbit with antlers. There are a few genuine specimens, such as a lizardman, an orc, and a marsh troll, but they are in terrible condition.

The owner, Tancred ap-Lucas, a rich eccentric, knows he needs not only new specimens, but also genuine ones



if he is to turn his business into a popular attraction. With that in mind, he is prepared to pay handsomely for monster carcasses, so long as the hide, teeth, and claws are intact. Obviously, this gives any potential hunters the problem of how to kill the beasts without ruining them for display purposes.

### 53. THE MESSENGERS' GUILD

The local messengers' guild keeps only a handful of *voice on the wind* devices in store due to the risk of theft. Instead, it makes extensive use of carrier pigeons. Messages are written in special code and sent to Aith, where the guild maintains a small office. These are then sent on via alchemical devices to distant recipients. The guild also offers more traditional couriers, both overland and maritime.

### 54. THE CLANGING BRIDGE

Upriver of here, the Lesser Crystalflow is dotted with sharp stakes designed to pierce the hull of vessels. As

an added defense, lengths of heavy chain hang from the seaward side of the bridge. Although too heavy for the wind to move, they move and sway with the tide, producing the noise for which the bridge is named.

## BENEATH THE CITY

Freetown has miles and miles of what the locals refer to as "sewers" beneath its streets and the ruined area beyond the modern boundary. Strangely, the water in the channels is only rainwater, seeping in through the rocks above. (Much of the city's waste flows or is dumped straight into the river.)

The "sewers" are frequently used by thieves as a means of moving around the city unseen, but they are not its only denizens. Many of the bodies buried at sea are never claimed by Neorthe. The cult of Hela is dragging the bodies from the water and storing them in the "sewers." Slowly but surely they are amassing a sizeable army. When the Liche-Priest rises again, they hope to have enough undead to capture Freetown, giving them a stronghold on the edge of the southern Marklands.

## TAVERNS & INNS

Taverns and inns are commonplace across much of civilized Rassilon. The quality of the establishment varies from terrible (frequented by the poorest locals) to excellent (the reserve of the wealthy). Quality affects not only the service one can expect, but also the nature of patrons. One would rarely search for an honest merchant in anything below an average quality establishment, for instance. Below are prices for standard services. Whether or not every establishment offers the full range is for the GM to determine. GMs may also mix and match entries. For example, an inn may have poor rooms but good meals and drinking.

Quality	Common	Private	Bath	Breakfast	Dinner	Supper	Drinking	Stabling
Terrible	1 ss	3 ss	1 ss	1 ss	3 ss	2 ss	2 ss	1 ss
Poor	3 ss	7 ss	3 ss	2 ss	5 ss	3 ss	5 ss	3 ss
Average	5 ss	2	7 ss	5 ss	2	5 ss	2	5 ss*
Good	1	4	2	1	5	1	4	2*
Excellent	n/a	8	4	5	20+	5	10	6*

**Rooms:** Bedrooms are not available in taverns. Inns have just two types of room—common and private. A common room may be a dedicated communal bedroom, usually sleeping up to eight, or simply the floor of the drinking hall. Private rooms sleep one or two people. The cost is per person, not per room. Bedroom fireplaces are usually found in higher quality inns. Lower quality bedrooms are small and have just straw pallets and coarse blankets, both covered in fleas or lice. Private rooms in high-quality inns are much cleaner and larger, contain a lockable chest for valuables and a table and chairs, and usually have sleeping furs for added warmth. Baths cost extra. Whether the water is cold or hot, shared by multiple bathers or freshly poured and scented with herbs, depends on the quality of the establishment.

**Meals:** Breakfast typically includes porridge (or gruel), bread, and cheese. Better class establishments may include meat and fruit. Supper is a light meal (and can be ordered at any time) consisting of broth or soup, bread, cheese, and meat. Fruit and vegetables are reserved for higher class places. Dinner is a large meal. The better the establishment, the better quality the food and the greater the quantity. Often dinner comprises multiple dishes.

**Drinking:** This is the average cost for a single person's convivial night's drinking. At the lower end, drinks are watered down. Higher end drinks include mead, wine, and even spirits.

**Stabling:** The cost for stabling one mule or horse. Pygmy mammoths cost a minimum of five times as much. Entries marked "\*" includes a rub down by a groom and a nosebag of oats (or equivalent).







# THIEVES' GUILDS



## INTRODUCTION

A thief is someone who steals another person's property. What separates the true thief from common criminals is that his preferred method is stealth rather than violence. Thus, muggers, bandits, and other ne'er-dowells of similar ilk are not counted as true thieves.

This chapter takes a look at thieves' guilds. It is important to note that there is no such thing as a standard thieves' guild. Some are informal bands of like-minded individuals who gather together only infrequently; others have memberships in the dozens or hundreds and a strict hierarchy. Some ply their larcenous trade only against the rich; others see anyone with as much as a silver scield to their name as targets of opportunity.

Although thieves use the term guild, they are not an officially recognized organization in the same manner as those of merchants or craftsmen. It would be an unusual town or city where the thieves' guild holds any public authority. Rather, they are a shadowy and secretive power; organizations whose existence is commonly known but whose dens and individuals are unknown to the denizens of their home city at large.

## BUILDINGS

Legitimate organizations, such as true guilds and cults, typically operate from a single locale. While citizens often think the same of thieves' guilds, this is rarely the truth. As the old saying goes, don't stick all your fingers in a dog's mouth. Even in small settlements, thieves maintain multiple hideouts as a precaution against raids by watchmen and paladins of Hothar, Nauthiz, and Sigel. Any use of the word guildhouse below refers to the thieves' network of buildings.

Thieves prefer to congregate in lower class areas. Not

only are these more crowded and labyrinthine, allowing thieves to give the slip to anyone tailing them, but the rogues also attract little attention from the residents. No matter how spread out the buildings, they are usually joined together by some means. Sewers and other tunnels are much preferred, but in a row of buildings the guild may have routes running through attics or across roofs.

Gaining entrance to a guildhouse is rarely as simple as it might seem. Windows are barred and obvious entrances are trapped. Traps are rarely intended to kill intruders, though they might maim or incapacitate them. Most sound an alarm, thus alerting the occupants to approaching danger. Many obvious doors are in fact false, leading only to a small, totally enclosed room. The true entrances are always hidden, being either below ground, in a neighboring building, or through a concealed portal.

Not that one can usually approach a guildhouse unnoticed—apprentices serve as sentries, concealing themselves in crowds outside the building or in deep shadows. Inside, there are often one or more armed apprentices performing a similar role.

Corridors and rooms are often littered with obstacles. This is not poor housekeeping, but an added means of security. Should the guildhouse be raided, lanterns and torches are hastily extinguished. Having memorized the location of obstacles and the route through the warren of rooms and tunnels, the thieves can escape through bolt holes while the intruders fumble around in the dark and bash into obstacles.

Unlike craftsmen or merchants, thieves don't just visit their guildhouse to receive orders, socialize, or attend meetings—it is their home. Every guild thus has accommodation for its members, as well as a kitchen and dining hall. Whether the guild is located in a large city or a small town, living space follows a similar setup. Apprentices are packed into communal quarters. As one climbs the ranks, so living conditions improve. Thieves and guild thieves live as many as four to a room, and master thieves usually in pairs. Only when one reaches the rank of thief lord can one expect to receive a room to oneself.



The quality of accommodation depends on how hard one works rather than rank. Apprentices, for instance, receive an itchy woolen blanket, a pillow, and a straw pallet. If they want a bed or warm furs, they must pay for them out of their earnings. Of course, they must also be prepared to protect their possessions against the privations of their peers. The rooms of high-ranking individuals can be death traps for unwary junior thieves looking to rob their superiors, full of cunningly concealed traps.

Every guild has a vault, a place where its accumulated wealth is stored. Often accessible only from the rooms of the guildmaster, the vault is protected by the most complex locks the guild can afford and a variety of traps. Many guilds have a second, smaller vault. Treasures returned by thieves are stored here until they are evaluated.

## MEMBERSHIP

The world is made up of haves and have-nots. While most have-nots are prepared to work for a living, even if that employment is begging for alms, a small number want an easy path to riches. Conversely, haves generally require additional wealth, but there are always a handful who want adventure and excitement. For either type, the thieves' guild offers hope.

Unfortunately, joining the thieves' guild can be a tricky process. They rarely advertise vacancies openly, one can hardly walk off the street into their headquarters, and most do not take adults unless they are already trained in the larcenist's arts. Unless one is related to a member, all one can do is put the word out on the street and wait to be contacted. For many, the wait never ends.

Despite not being an official guild, thieves copy their mundane counterparts. Members must swear a holy oath, usually in the name of Nauthiz, to obey the orders of their superiors and never betray the guild. A member must also pay dues on all profits from jobs not given him by the guild. Each guild sets its own payment levels, with the amount usually in the range of 10% to 25%.

In return, the thief has access to guild facilities and staff. While he must supply his own tools of the trade, specialist items, such as alchemical devices, can be purchased at 50% discount from guild auxiliaries.

## NON-GUILD THIEVES

Thieves' guilds tend to be very protective of their territory and thus take a dim view of freelance operatives. Thanks to their many contacts, the guild usually becomes aware a freelance thief is operating in their city within 48 hours. This can be extended, even nullified, through careful planning and the use of disguises.

Once his presence is noticed, the freelancer receive a visit from the guildmasters' representatives. In some cases, he is politely but firmly invited to a meeting with the guild. In others, attendance is assured by bludgeoning him unconscious.

He is led blindfolded to one of the guild's lesser safe houses, a building it can afford to lose if the guest somehow recognizes his surroundings. There he meets with a senior member of the guild, one who has a simple offer—join us or suffer the consequences.

Membership is a straightforward enough process. The freelancer signs a contract that lists his rank within the guild (usually a common thief unless he has a prior reputation for excellent thievery skills) and his duties.

Refusal is typically met with a warning—leave town immediately or suffer the consequences. The exact nature of the consequences varies from guild to guild. Options include hiring assassins to ensure the freelancer never works again, reporting him to the city watch, and dealing out a severe beating.

Note that nothing prevents a thief from belonging to multiple guilds. He may still only take the Guild Thief Edge once, though.

## RANKS

All thieves have a rank. Guilds with a loose hierarchical structure commonly employ them to denote skill, rather than position. In a well-organized guild, they indicate both levels of skill and superiority.

### APPRENTICE

As with master craftsmen, thieves' guilds prefer to hire young children as apprentices. Training is neither quick nor cheap, and by hiring children the guild ensures its members have a long working life ahead of them—a life that will see them repay the guild's investment many times over.

For as much as three years, apprentices learn the basic skills required of every thief—how to scale walls, how to pick locks, cut purses, and disarm traps, and how to avoid being caught. During the first year, they remain in the guild building. Only once they have reached a basic proficiency are they permitted to take part in guild operations, and then only as observers gaining on the job experience with a trained thief.

**Typical Member:** Apprentices lack the Thief Edge and typically have the core thief skills at d4 (for new recruits) or d6 (more experienced recruits nearing the end of their training).

### THIEF

Also known as journeymen, thieves at this level have passed their apprenticeship and can now operate as a solo operative. They form the bulk of any guild.

Experienced thieves who join an existing guild typically begin at this rank, regardless of their prowess—appointing them straight to a higher rank tends to cause friction with existing members. Once he has earned the guild's full trust, he may be awarded a title more in keeping with his talents.

**Typical Member:** Members of this rank must have the Thief Edge.



## GUILD THIEF

Not every thief is a member of a guild, and not every guild member has this title. This title is awarded to thieves who have proven their loyalty and who have built up a good network of contacts in his home city.

Guild thieves have authority over those of lower rank, but wield no true power—their authority is a mark of respect from lesser thieves to those who have proven themselves over many years of loyal service.

Guild thieves pay an additional 10% of their larcenist income to the guild. In return, they receive direct access to training facilities and fences (the latter enabling them to negotiate their own sales), and are given the location of one or more safe houses throughout the city. They are also more likely to be given the best guild jobs.

**Typical Member:** Must have the Guild Thief Edge.

## MASTER THIEF

Any guild thief renowned for his larcenous abilities is called a master thief. As with guild thieves, the position is honorary rather than one invested with true authority.

**Typical Member:** Has the Guild Thief, Master Thief (see sidebar), and Thief Edges, Climbing d8, Lockpicking d10, and Stealth d10. Such individuals are usually Wild Cards, as having a Wild Die for all their traits makes them a cut above the rest.

## THIEF LORD

Serving as lieutenants to the guildmaster, thieves who reach this rank wield true power within the guild. Mere talent is not enough to warrant this title. Instead, they are appointed directly by the guildmaster for their talents, loyalty, cunning, and planning abilities. Even the largest guilds boast no more than a dozen thief lords. The exact role of a lieutenant varies from guild to guild.

Some guilds divide their territory into districts. When such occurs, each district is overseen by a thief lord. He has full authority over all aspects of guild operations within his territory.

Other guilds assign thief lords a specific task. For instance, one may be in charge of the protection rackets, another oversees the training of apprentices, a third is in charge of all burglaries, a fourth governs the guild's network of contacts and informers, and so on.

In all cases they act as middlemen between the guildmaster and the lower echelons, passing on orders and assigning thieves to specific jobs.

Lieutenants rarely engage in field work themselves—they are too valuable to risk capture. In guilds with defined districts, the thief lord receives 25% of any money handed over to the guild by his operatives. This ensures those who work hardest on behalf of the guild receive the most money. It also promotes competition between the thief lords, none of whom want to be seen as slacking less they get demoted. In guilds where thief lords have specialist roles, 25% of a thief's fees are divided equally between all the lieutenants.

**Typical Member:** A minimum of d10 in the three core thief skills and Agility, plus the Guild Thief, Master Thief, and Thief Edges. As important guild members, they are usually Wild Cards.

## GUILDMASTER

The kingpin at the heart of every thieves' guild is its guildmaster. How the guildmaster is appointed is down to personal preference within each guild. Some allow the boss to appoint a successor, though this carries the risk of him receiving a dagger in the back as soon as his heir is nominated. Others favor a democratic process, with the new leader being chosen by majority vote. At least one guild requires its members to list their wealth, with the richest receiving the title of guildmaster when a vacancy arises.

Such decisions are not always final. Numerous guilds have been wracked by bitter turf wars as thief lords battle for supremacy following the death of a guildmaster. In most cases a victor emerges. Sometimes, though, the war descends into a stalemate from which rival guilds are formed.

It is important to note that the guildmaster rarely takes an active hand in planning operations (and he never ventures out into the field to sully his hands). Such typically only occurs for very special jobs or when the guild has no thief lords.

As the top dog with full knowledge of the guild's activities, operatives, contacts, and buildings, the guildmaster must protect his identity. This is especially true if he also holds an important position in normal society—nothing prevents a guildmaster being a noble, powerful merchant, or even a cleric or city councilor. Some guildmasters prefer to maintain strict security, dealing with even their lieutenants from behind a mask and using a code name rather than a real name. Others entrust their identity to their thief lords.

Whatever his status, the guildmaster is protected at all times by bodyguards. They are entrusted to safeguard him not only from capture by the authorities, but from betrayal within the guild ranks—there is no honor among thieves. Every guildmaster has at least one bodyguard who is unknown to anyone but him. Often they appear to be an ordinary lackey, but secretly they are well-versed in combat.

Rarely will the master deal with the lower ranks directly. Whatever his identity, remaining aloof from the rank-and-file and acting through thief lords gives the guildmaster an air of mystery. On the rare times he deigns to address his minions personally, he is protected by bodyguards.

Being a talented thief is not a strict requirement for becoming a guildmaster. Rather, he needs to be a master of diplomacy and treachery, and possess excellent organizational skills. Regardless of the size of the guild, the boss must exude an air of power both to outsiders and to his underlings—to do otherwise threatens not only his life, but the very existence of the guild. A “cross me and you will suffer” mentality is essential. He must never be afraid to punish those who fail him, but equally he



should not descend into tyranny and injustice. This is especially true with regard the common people.

A guildmaster who robs the rich and protects the poor quickly finds he, and therefore his guild, has many friends outside his organization, while the authorities trying to hunt down and exterminate his organization are met with a wall of silence from the grateful populace. Conversely, one who merrily orders raids against the poorest in society will find his guild despised, with people ready to reveal any useful information that may harm it for a small reward.

One thing the guildmaster quickly develops is a personal fortune. Half of all money paid to the guild goes directly into his personal coffers (the rest is divided among the thief lords or placed in communal coffers to pay for specialists, bribes, and such like).

## AUXILIARY STAFF

To many, the term “thieves’ guild” conjures up images of cloaked figures planning mischief. While there is an element of this, a strong guild requires more than just thieves if it is to prosper. Aiding every guild are a number of auxiliaries, members whose talents lie outside of stealing.

## CRAFTSMEN

A thief might be able to break into a peasant’s hut with his bare hands, but only a select few can pick a lock with a piece of bent wire or disarm a trap without a set of tools. While the guild needs a regular source of lockpicks and other specialist gear, it has frequent need for weapons, armor, poisons, locks (so apprentices can practice), rope, alchemical devices, and such like.

When it comes to supplies, guilds have several options open to them. First, they can steal them. This is fine for common items, such as rope and hammers, but not possible for specialized tools, such as lockpicks. It is also very risky for alchemical devices—those who make them are, obviously, spellcasters, and are rarely defenseless.

Second, they can pay a craftsman a stipend to manufacture goods on the side. The stipend is usually generous enough to cover any loss of revenue for legitimate trade. Thieves looking to purchase goods from a part-time supplier are given a code phrase to use.

Third, the guild can hire a permanent craftsman in return for a regular wage. Whereas part-time employees maintain a legitimate business, full-time craftsmen operate from a guild building.

No thief expects a handout from the guild. Unless they are participating in a guild job, thieves below the rank of thief lord must pay for goods and services. Assuming the guild has access to the appropriate craft, a thief pays half of the usual price. For instance, a thief who wants a *potion of boost Stealth* would pay just 50 gs if the guild had a regular supplier. The guild looks poorly at thieves who use guild resources to supply friends outside the organization and ever more poorly on cads who then resell the items at higher prices.

## FENCES

Stolen goods are worthless until they are sold on. The task of turning goods into gold falls to the fence. Very rarely are fences members of the thieves’ guild. More commonly they are legitimate businessmen prepared to earn extra money by handling stolen goods.

Thieves’ native to a town or city do not have to make a Streetwise roll to find a buyer of their wares. Instead, they automatically receive 25% from the local fence. A raise on a Persuasion earns them 50% instead.

Fences get rid of stolen goods by one of two means. First, they might sell the item locally. This often involves them disguising the object, such as by removing distinguishing marks, artificially aging it, or even breaking it into smaller parts and selling them separately. The stolen wares are then sold to market stalls, shops, or contacts who collect such items. In the former two cases, there is a risk the victim might recognize his wares being offered for sale.

The second method is to ship the goods to a fellow fence in another town or city. This method is much preferred for unique items that are hard to disguise, when the item’s theft attracts a lot of unwanted attention, or where the native market would fetch a higher price. Shipping goods far and wide increases the time before the guild gets it cut and lowers their return.

## INFORMATION GATHERERS

Knowledge is essential to every guild operation. Without it, thieves have no idea who to rob. Aiding the guild is a network of spies, informants, and contacts.

Spies are members of the guild, though rarely are they thieves. Inserted into legitimate businesses, they are the guild’s primary source of intelligence. Although expensive to run, the guild much prefers their services over that of outsiders, for it can (as much as is possible in an organization with inherent trust issues) guarantee their intelligence is accurate.

Informants are outsiders who supply information in return for cold, hard coin. Beggars and prostitutes often act as the guild’s eyes and ears on the street, but large guilds can afford to pay contacts in merchant companies, rich households, and even noble courts.

Anyone can supply information to the guild, but doing so without an existing contact can be time-consuming. In order to protect itself, the guild hides behind layers of contacts and informants. Most citizens know where guild operatives are rumored to hang out, and the best they can do is voice their desire to sell information and wait. It might pass through dozens of mouths, but word will reach the guild eventually. Before it acts, the guild must take the time to ensure the informant is genuine—rash action has led many a thief into a trap. Only when it is fully satisfied will it make direct contact with the new informant.

The relationship between contacts and the guild is one of mutual back scratching rather than a business arrangement. In return for supplying goods or information, the contact expects to be able to call on the guild to do him a small favor in the future.



## INSTRUCTORS

Recruiting and training new blood is essential if the guild is to continue existing. A thief lord may oversee the apprentices' training regime, but he cannot hope to deal with every aspect personally, especially the practical side. Aiding or replacing him are one or more instructors, retired thieves who aid the guild by passing on their talents to the next generation.

Few able-bodied thieves ever become instructors—they are better suited plying their trade on the streets. Instructors are thus either elderly or maimed in some manner that precludes them from working in a conventional role.

## TRAINING

Tools alone are not enough to make one a thief. In order to be successful, a thief must undergo arduous training. All thieves' guilds offer training. A small guild might have only a single room devoted to this purpose, its furnishings being replaced as necessary to suit the type of training. A large organization may have one room for each larcenous skill.

Locks are the commonest obstacle for any thief. The lockpicking room contains a variety of chests and doors fitted with locks of varying complexity. Thieves are judged not only on their ability to bypass the mechanism, but also on the time it takes them—spending long minutes crouched before a door tends to attract unwanted attention.

Traps detecting and removal usually occurs in a complex of rooms or tunnels seeded with traps of varying lethality. To succeed, a thief need only pass from one end to the other without being ensnared, tripped, poisoned, crushed, impaled, or otherwise hampered, or tipping an audible alarm.

Climbing and jumping are essential skills for gaining entrance and escaping from guards. Training rooms are filled with high and low obstacles, climbing frames, and balance beams.

Stealth can be practiced almost anywhere. Typically, an instructor stands at one end of a room facing away from the thief and the apprentice at the other. All the thief need do is creep up and touch the instructor on the back. Of course, nothing is ever that easy. In order to provide the thief with a challenge, floors might have creaking boards (their location moved regularly to prevent memorization) or be scattered with gravel or eggshells that crunch under foot.

While a lone thief might engage in picking pockets or cutting purses, it is best performed as part of a team. One thief distracts the target, another performs the criminal act, and a third is on hand to receive and secure the stolen goods as quickly and discretely as possible. Apprentices must try to retrieve objects from their tutor's person. Failure results in a swift whack with a stick.

Skills such as disguise application, herbalism, and appraisal of goods are usually the preserve of auxiliary staff, and thus are rarely taught to thieves.

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

The *Hellfrost Player's Guide* greatly simplifies the equipment a thief needs to ply his larcenous trade. There are plenty of useful extraneous items, such as rope and grappling hook for scaling buildings, a satchel for storing stolen loot, and a crowbar for jimmying doors and windows, but the only essential item he requires is a set of lockpicks.

The term thief is much like the word craftsman—it describes the basics of the trade but encompasses a wide variety of skilled occupations. No one would expect a carpenter and blacksmith to use the same tools, and the same is true with different aspects of thievery.

In place of just lockpicks, thieves can purchase a complete set of specialist tools. Each set has a specific focus and game mechanics. Whether a GM wishes to add an extra layer of complexity to his campaign by including multiple toolkits is, of course, his choice.

Entries with a Special Availability are typically available only from a thieves' guild. The cost of the kits is the "thief's rate." That is, it is already down by 50%. In the event a non-guild thief can find a seller, he must pay double this value (before any other modifiers are added).

### BURGLARY KIT

Breaking and entering is a thief's bread and butter. Most times, the burglar attempts a stealthy intrusion, delicately picking at locks to gain access to places he is not welcome. Other times, or when that fails, he must resort to jimmying doors or painstakingly cutting keys from scratch. This toolkit replaces the standard lockpick set from the *Hellfrost Player's Guide*.

This kit contains short and long lockpicks, wax for creating key impressions, a set of blanks for making keys, small files for cutting keys or rasping away locks, a set of wood and masonry chisels, a small hammer, a bradawl, a clawed nail extractor, a set of boot spikes, a small flask of oil (for oiling locks and hinges), and a crowbar.

*Weight:* 9 lbs; *Cost:* 70 gs; *Availability:* S

*Notes:* The boot spikes use the standard rules, as presented in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide*. Attempts to pick locks without this kit suffer a -2 penalty.

### CUTPURSE KIT

Cutting purse strings and picking pockets may be at the lower end of the scale of larcenous activities, but they are specialized skills that require specialist equipment. Regardless of his preferred method of working, even the best lock or trap specialist may have occasion to lift a key or seal from an unsuspecting victim.

Contained in this kit are a bag with a false bottom to conceal small stolen objects, various hooked wires for lifting things from pockets and pouches, and a razor sharp blade for cutting pouches and pockets.



## FINGERSPEAK

Fingerspeak is an artificial sign language created by thieves to aid them in their work. It takes two distinct forms. First, there are signs designed to be used when there is illumination. Second, information can be passed on by touching a fellow thief in shrouded darkness.

Neither is especially complex—it certainly cannot be used to hold a long conversation, nor discuss matters outside of its limited vocabulary. Instead, it is used to pass on simple instructions or warnings without being intrusive. Basic directions, warnings about certain types of defenses—such as dogs, sentient beings, and traps—and simple instructions like wait, follow me, and run are all it can convey.

### ERRATA

Although Fingerspeak has no written form, thieves do make use of written symbols to pass on information to comrades. Since all thieves learn their local dialect, it can be regarded as a written form of Fingerspeak for the purposes of learning languages. Inscribed or daubed onto buildings, the signs convey basic information, such as “Good pickings,” “Robbed recently,” “Guard dogs present,” and so on. One common sign is that of guild protection. With the occupant having paid the guild protection money, any thief who robs his property can expect to be punished for his transgression.

*Weight:* 2 lbs; *Cost:* 20 gs; *Availability:* S

*Notes:* Attempting to pick pockets without this kit incurs a –2 to Stealth rolls.

## INTRUSION & EVASION KIT

Stealth is always a thief’s best option for breaking into a location. All being well, it is also his best route of escape. Things can go wrong, however, and a wise thief always plans for a rapid flight in the event his unwelcome presence is detected.

This kit contains a pot lampblack for darkening the face and hands, thick woolen over socks to muffle sound from boots, a small bag of marbles, a small bag of caltrops, and a small bag of tacks.

*Weight:* 3 lbs; *Cost:* 20 gs; *Availability:* T

*Notes:* Applying lampblack to the hands and face takes an action and grants +1 to Stealth rolls to remain unseen. Walking round the streets already blacked up will attract unwanted attention from the local watch! Donning the socks takes a similar time and grants +1 to Stealth rolls to avoid being heard.

There are enough caltrops, tacks, and marbles for one use each. In a foot Chase, one set can be dropped per round as a free action before Action Cards are dealt.

Regardless of type, each set gives opponents tailing the thief a –2 penalty to their Agility roll for the purpose of determining Action Cards, but only in the round the devices are dropped.

In standard play, each set scattered on the floor fills a Small Burst Template. The template must be placed touching the thief, but can be laid in any direction. Laying the devices is an action, but requires no die roll. Any creature passing through the template must make an Agility roll or be Shaken due to barbs piercing his feet or slipping and falling.

Replacing a set of caltrops, marbles, or tacks costs 8 gs and can be done in most settlements.

## TRAP DETECTION & REMOVAL KIT

Traps come in many forms. Some are designed to kill. Others are intended to maim or hold an intruder. Some are merely alarms for alerting guards to a thief’s presence. Irrespective of their purpose, a thief needs the right tools for detecting and disarming them.

The toolkit contains a small hand drill with interchangeable bits, wooden pegs for jamming machinery, a small hammer, wood and masonry chisels, hooked probes, a mirror on a long stick, lubricating oil, pliers, a bradawl, a listening horn for detecting the tick of machinery, ball of twine (200 feet), and a powerful lodestone.

*Weight:* 7 lbs; *Cost:* 40 gs; *Availability:* S

*Notes:* Without this kit, Notice rolls to detect traps and Lockpicking rolls to disarm them suffer a –2 penalty.

## ARMOR, APPAREL, & WEAPONS

When his presence is discovered, a wise thief turns tail and flees rather than drawing a weapon and preparing to engage his opponents. Of course, this doesn’t mean the thief should neglect weapons and armor.

Most thieves favor leather armor. Not only is it lighter than metal armor, it rarely attracts attention when worn around town. Although the *Savage Worlds* rules do not penalize Stealth rolls for wearing metal armor unless one is encumbered, a certain amount of common sense must be applied. Chain armor is not only heavy, it bulks out the thief. Thus, he will find it harder to slip through narrow gaps. Metal armor, even with padding underneath, is liable to rattle, and it also glints in the light. Leather armor can also creak, but it is far less noisy. One can also assume that a good thief will have made his armor suppler over time. In place of metal buckles, a thief fastens his leather armor with leather straps, wooden buttons, and simple knots.

Experienced thieves might wear a cloak to or from a job to conceal themselves, but remove it before breaking and entering. Not only can a cloak catch on things, it can be grabbed by an opponent. To conceal one’s face, it is wise to don a cloth or leather mask once out of sight of passersby.

Thieves tend to favor small weapons, such as daggers, throwing knives, and short swords. Not only are they light, they are less likely to snag on objects or become entangled in clothing. They can also be easily concealed.



## ● DAILY OPERATIONS ●

A guild thief has two types of work open to him. The first is private jobs. So long as it does not endanger the guild, thieves are largely free to act as they want. There may be restrictions in place, such as not robbing any building that pays protection or avoiding bringing down the authorities by plundering the local lord's manse, but every thief is made aware of these early on in his career. As noted earlier, the thief must pay 25% of his earnings from private work straight to the guild.

The second type of work is a guild operation. In this instance, the thief is given a specific task by his superiors. He may be commanded to act solo or be part of a team. Such missions are rarer than one might think—the guild usually performs such tasks only as favors to contacts or when something very special is stolen to order. In such cases, the guild takes 50% of the profits, with the other 50% divided between all thieves involved. Guild jobs earn a thief less money, but he can also call upon the guild to supply any additional equipment for free.

Contrary to popular belief, thieves do not spend every night committing crimes. For every job he performs, a thief typically spends at least 24 hours planning his entry and escape and gathering intelligence—no thief wants to run into unexpected magical wards or snarling guard dogs. Of course, a guild with lots of members is usually engaged in activity every night.

A thief must first scope out the land around his chosen target. The location of areas of deep shadows, the patterns of patrols, the type of surfaces present, and so on must all be noted. Then he must gather intelligence on the interior of the building. What sort of locks does it have? Can access be gained from an unseen position? Are there servants, dogs, guards, or traps? Where does the owner keep his valuables? Such information can be hard to acquire without a test break-in or paying bribes to servants.

Of course, every thief is expected to earn his keep. This means there is a fine line between resources spent planning a job (and time is a resource) and the potential reward. Whether it is better to act hastily and risk capture or offend one's superiors by being overcautious and returning very little to the coffers is a decision every thief must make at some time in his career.

## CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

Everyone knows thieves steal, but that is not the only criminal activity in which they regularly engage. It is important to note that few guilds engage in violent crime—there is no skill in that, and violence tends to breed more violence.

A common and profitable enterprise is to charge businesses and rich householders protection money, a practice known as racketeering. Those who pay up can sleep safely knowing that they won't awake to find their

valuables stolen. Those who refuse may find their property repeatedly targeted, or even burnt to the ground, and their clients or servants robbed. It is a rare guild that breaks this bond—to do so deters other clients from paying up, gives the guild a bad name (or rather a worse name than it already has), and means an easy source of income is lost.

Guilds that don't control the local black market always have a hand in it. They can arrange for goods to be smuggled into or out of the city, and arrange for delivery of proscribed goods. In the latter case, the guild profits by charging much higher rates. Guilds can also fence items a client wishes to dispose of through non-standard channels.

Although it is not a tangible resource, information is valuable. Citizens with secrets to hide may prefer to pay hush money to a guild that has unearthed their secret and is threatening to make that knowledge public.

Forgery and counterfeiting are specialized crimes, ones performed by auxiliary staff rather than common thieves. In the former instance, the guild may sell licenses (such as for carrying weapons or as proof of payment of customs fees), produce pardons for criminals, or even forge letters of introduction from important persons. Forgery also includes the manufacture of duplicate seals.

Counterfeiting includes the creation of fake coins and other physical goods. For instance, if there is a renowned tailor in the city, the guild may produce copies of his clothes. These are then sold on the black market at reduced rates compared to the originals.

As much as they disdain violence as a means to an end, guilds are not above kidnapping. In some cases they do so to collect ransom money. Regardless of their views about violence, guilds frequently issue threats that any attempt to rescue the victim will meet with their death or dismemberment. In others, they are paid by clients to make a rival disappear, either temporarily or permanently.

Slavery is on the decline, but there are still realms in which it is either legal or carries on beneath the authorities' noses. A guild may have a direct hand in acquiring slaves (through kidnapping) or simply smuggle slaves through their territory on behalf of others.

It is worth noting that not every guild engages in every sort of crime. Some guilds limit themselves to one or two areas, while others are prepared to whatever it takes to swell their coffers.

## ● LAW & ORDER ●

Thieves may flout the laws of the land, but every guild has its own rules and regulations.

The most important of these is "never betray the guild." Any thief who rats out his companions can expect swift and lethal justice. Unless he holds an important position in the guild, a thief arrested by the authorities is unlikely to receive much help. If the thief escapes before he can be interrogated, he might be welcomed back, but he will be kept at arm's length for a while and not invited to par-



## THIEF EDGES

Below are a number of Edges well-suited for thieves. Appropriate Edges from the *Hellfrost Player's Guide*, *Rassilon Expansion*, and *Rassilon Expansion 2* are included for completeness.

### CONTORTIONIST (PROFESSIONAL)

**Requirements:** Novice, Agility d8+

The character may have a slight build, be naturally supple, or possess double-jointed limbs. However he does it, he is adept at squeezing through small gaps and contorting his limbs in ways that make others wince.

The hero has +1 to make, maintain, and escape grapples. He gains a +2 bonus to slip out of bonds (when such is allowed), including *entangle*. When trying to navigate tight squeezes (see *Hellfrost Expansion 2*) he treats his effective Size as one level lower.

### FAST AND SILENT (COMBAT)

**Requirements:** Seasoned, Agility d8+, Stealth d8+

The character is both fast and silent on his feet, a deadly combination.

When moving stealthily, the adventurer suffers no penalties to Stealth rolls for running. Outside of combat, each Stealth roll covers moving up to five times the character's Pace plus his full running die.

### GUILD THIEF\* (PROFESSIONAL)

**Requirements:** Novice, Thief, must know Fingerspeak

The various thieves' guilds range from informal groups with a handful of members to strict hierarchical societies with hundreds of thieves. In return for a cut of their profits, typically 10%, the thief has access to a safehouse, fence, and training facilities. A Guild Thief gets +2 to Streetwise rolls within his home town, which he must specify when he takes this Edge. Extensive training and frequent practice give the thief a d8 Wild Die with Climbing, Lockpicking, or Stealth (the latter in an urban environment only). The hero picks one skill when he takes this Edge and cannot change it later.

### IMPROVISER (PROFESSIONAL)

**Requirements:** Veteran, Agility d8+, Smarts d8+

The character has learned how to improvise the tools of his trade from whatever he has to hand. So long as he has something he can use to fashion a tool, the character ignores the penalties for not having a thieves' toolkit or lockpicks.

take in guild sanctioned work. Only when his superiors are sure he has not been turned can he resume his full duties. Alternately, his superiors may decide to take no chances and expel him from the guild immediately.

Most guilds have the sense to keep their full operations secret from junior members. A lowly thief obviously knows the location of the rooms he inhabits, and maybe where one or two training rooms can be found, but he is likely ignorant of other buildings or rooms. As a prudent measure, the location of traps and guard stations are routinely changed as soon as the guild becomes aware one of its members has been arrested.

As the old saying goes, there is no honor among thieves. A thief who robs a comrade will not be hauled before his superiors if caught. Instead, justice is meted out by the victim as he feels necessary to send a message to others not to touch his belongings.

## RELIGION

For obvious reasons, most thieves hold Nauthiz, the Thief Lord, as their patron deity. Since laity are not punished for transgressions, mundane thieves are under no compulsion to steal a certain amount during a specific period of time. That said, most thieves believe that on death Nauthiz will welcome them only if they have stolen sufficient wealth to buy passage into the Afterlife.

The cult of Nauthiz has long maintained that how much a thief steals is irrelevant. Instead, Nauthiz judges them by how much of their booty they donate to his cult. While this reeks of extortion, a practice many thieves are familiar with, few are prepared to risk eternal damnation over a handful of gold scields. The cult argues that since Nauthiz is the ultimate guildmaster, it is merely a version of the percentage thieves must pay to their guild.

Although he is the patron of thieves, Nauthiz is not the only deity to whom larcenists offer prayers. Niht is the mistress of concealment and stealth, and it is a foolish thief who fails to whisper a quick prayer to her or Tvíblindi, the minor god of concealment and her son by Nauthiz (see *Matters of Faith*).

The cult of Lasesmed, minor deity of locks and traps (see *Matter of Faith*) prohibits its clergy from engaging in criminal enterprises, but that doesn't mean the deity is ignored by thieves. As the inventor of locks and traps, it cannot hurt to ask his help when faced with a particularly complex lock or trap. This is not as odd as it might seem. Nauthiz and Lasesmed have a long and friendly rivalry, with the god of thieves performing a vital service—whenever he picks a lock or disarms a trap, Lasesmed learns from his mistakes and makes a better one. In general, thieves' guilds and the god's small cult maintain a similar relationship.

Auðun (see *Matter of Faith*) is another favorite of thieves, though rarely do they take him as patron. Although far more concerned with the accumulation of riches through legitimate means, he is the patron of wealth in all its forms. A prayer to him might lead the thief to rich pickings.



The names of other lesser deities (see Matters of Faith for their cults) may be invoked in specific circumstances. Bragi, god of information gathering, and Vör, deity of caution, become popular when planning raids. Pleads to Haptsonir may be uttered by an incarcerated thief. A thief questioned by the authorities may ask Thrimör, god of lies, to shape his words.

## ARE TEMPLES OF NAUTHIZ ALSO THIEVES' GUILDS?

Ask most citizens and the answer is a resounding yes. The truth is more complex. It is certainly true that the cult is heavily involved in crime—most thieves honor Nauthiz, his clerics serve him through their work as thieves, and priests may be found serving as guildmasters. In many cases, though, the temple is merely another aspect of a guild, a room or building catering to the spiritual needs of its members and the clergy ranked among the ordinary thieves. That is, it is part of the guild, but not the heart of the guild.

This is not to say a temple of Nauthiz is never a thieves' guild in its own right. The higher ranks of such a guild would be dominated by clerics, effectively making it a theocratic larcenous organization.

In rare instances, the thieves' guild and cult operate independently of each other. Depending on the circumstances, they may divide their hometown into districts, allowing them to ply their trade without animosity. In others, the two organizations are competitors. The latter tends to occur when the guild favors Niht or a lesser deity rather than Nauthiz.

## EMBLEM

Thieves' guild is a generic term used to describe every group of thieves. All guilds have a specific name, one used by members and outsiders alike. That is not to say "thieves' guild" is never used. An outsider looking to contact the organization might not know a local guild's name, and thus he would use the generic term.

Since shouting out that one is a thief is hardly subtle, guilds also have a specific emblem. Some wear a specific item or color, innocuous enough if one knows its hidden meaning. For instance, a red bandana, a ring on a specific finger, or a dagger at a certain angle. Others favor tattoos or face painting, though these are a dead giveaway if the authorities know of them.

## ADVANCEMENTS

Odds are that as a thief you've taken the Thief Edge during character generation. What options are available as you progress through your larcenist career, though?

In terms of attributes, raise your Agility as often as possible. This enables you to increase your Lockpicking and Stealth, not to mention combat skills, at a better rate. Indeed, your core thief skills should be raised to maximum at the earliest opportunity.

Guild Thief (see sidebar opposite), while not essential, is strongly recommended. Not only does it boost the Wild Die of one of your core skills, it gives you a Streetwise bonus in your guilds' hometown and access to better facilities. When you reach the appropriate rank, you should become a Master Thief (see p. 32).

In terms of combat, you are unlikely to be a tank—light armor and weapons are the thieves' stock armaments. Rather than missile weapons, you might wish to consider throwing daggers—they are much easier to conceal. Edges such as Master of Knives (see sidebar) and Mighty Throw will prove invaluable. Since you'll be staying out of melee, your enemies are going to have to use ranged weapons against you. Invest in Dodge for avoiding their attacks, as well as traps you've accidentally triggered.

In the event you are involved in melee, Edges like Lurker and Steal Away (both on p. 32) provide you with a way to benefit from your high Stealth.

For those who don't mind getting into the thick of things, and given that you'll have a high Agility, Ambidextrous and Two-Fisted increase your attacking potential without requiring you to have high Fighting. Quick Draw can also be handy for those instances when you're unprepared to fight. For those with decent Fighting, consider taking Florentine.

Speed is your friend, not only for escaping attackers, but also in avoiding being caught. The obvious Edge is Fleet-Footed. A companion Edge is Fast and Silent (see sidebar). While doesn't increase your Pace any further, it allows you to remain stealthy when running.

Going higher up in the initiative order gives you the option of running away (discretion is the better part of valor) before your enemies can attack or, for those with a love of combat, landing the first blow. This is achieved either through Level Headed (and later Improved Level Headed) or Quick.

You'll notice the above text includes a lot of Edges, and only touches on a few of the Edges presented in the sidebars. Which ones you take and in what order is a matter of personal choice, as is the rate by which you advance your Traits.

Larcenous clerics of Nauthiz have added needs. Faith is a core skill, but it is tied to Spirit rather than Agility, giving you a choice of attribute you can advance each time you reach a new Rank. A cleric also requires miracles. In theory, a cleric can get away with just *boost/lower trait* (which focuses on improving his core thievery skills) and one other Novice miracle. Either *altered senses* or *wandering senses* are great choices, though *lock/unlock* is not to be sniffed at. A cleric who wants more miracles will, of course, have to cut back on the number of other Edges he takes. Finally, the cleric must invest in Gambling, a useful skill for earning a little extra money. Unfortunately, since it is not a core skill for thieves, it another area where the cleric must spend advances his mundane counterparts need not.



**LURKER (COMBAT)**

**Requirements:** Novice, Agility d8+, Stealth d6+  
The character is adept at using any available cover and concealment to bolster his defenses. When the hero uses the Full Defense maneuver, he may use his Stealth die in place of his Fighting die to calculate his Parry.

**MASTER OF KNIVES (COMBAT)**

**Requirements:** Novice, Fighting d8+, Throwing d8+  
The character has learned to throw a dagger with deadly accuracy and at increased range. The hero increases the range of a throwing dagger by his Rank (Novice being 1, Seasoned 2, and so on). So at Seasoned, for instance, his knife has Range 5/10/20. In addition, throwing knives in the hands of the master inflict Str+d6 damage at Short range.

**MASTER THIEF (PROFESSIONAL)**

**Requirements:** Veteran, Thief, Climbing d8+, Lockpicking d8+, Stealth d10+  
The thief is a master of his craft. When the character spends a Benny to reroll a Climbing, Lockpicking, or Stealth roll (the latter in an urban environment only), his Benny is returned if the roll is a raise.

**STEAL AWAY (COMBAT)**

**Requirements:** Seasoned, Agility d8+, Stealth d6+  
The hero uses distraction and cover to slip away from his foes. The character may make a single Stealth roll as a free action to avoid attacks when Withdrawing from Close Combat. He suffers a -1 penalty for each adjacent foe. Failure means foes may attack as normal as the adventurer withdraws.

**WALL RUNNER (COMBAT)**

**Requirements:** Seasoned, Agility d8+, Strength d8+, Vigor d8+  
The character has learned to run up vertical walls, but only for a short distance. The hero can walk up and along vertical walls, even perfectly smooth ones. While moving along or up a wall he moves as half his normal Pace. He can run as well, but his running die is also halved. If at the end of his movement the hero has not secured a suitable handhold (such as a deep crack or horizontal flagpole) or reached a suitable platform (such as a ledge or balcony) he automatically falls. Falling damage is calculated as normal.

**LAND OF FIRE ADDITION**

Whereas Rassilon has lost most of its ancient magical arts, the desert realms of Al-Shirkuh are awash with different forms of arcane practices. From the summoning of jinn to dabbling with infernal spirits and manipulating solid matter to drawing power from the movement of the stars, there seems to be an endless array of magical traditions. Little surprise, then, that the sorcerers of those dusty nations have created a magical arcane background focused on thievery.

As Freetown is a crossroads between the cultures of the frozen north and burning south, heroes from Rassilon may come across magicians with strange arts. Alternately, heroes from Al-Shirkuh may begin their northern adventures there.

**ARCANE LARCENY**

**Requirements:** Novice, Agility d6+  
**Arcane Skill:** Arcane Larceny (Smarts)  
**Starting Powers:** 3

**Powers:** *Altered senses, beast friend, boost/lower trait* (Climbing, Lockpicking, and Stealth only), *bridge, detect/conceal, dispel, growth/sbrink, invisibility, leaping, light, lock/unlock, silence, speed, telekinesis, wall walker, wandering senses.*

Among his many teachings, Suleiman taught that magic was a tool through which Devoted could attain Oneness. Even in his lifetime, though, there were magicians who succumbed to earthly temptations and used their art for self-gain. One fragmentary text, the *Tale of the Fallen Star*, speaks of how a sand goblin disciple of Suleiman created this art so that he might acquire great wealth. Although not considered heretical, the text, likely written long after the prophet's death, is considered an early example of anti-sand goblin propaganda.

In truth, the art is ancient, and existed long before Suleiman's time. As with any art, the purpose to which it is applied is the magician's choice. Although ideal for thievery, it can also be used for legitimate means, such as scouting, or by a ruler's official information gatherers (also known as spies).

**Casting:** In order to cast his spells, the magician must have both hands free.

**Trappings:** Most spells have no discernible trapping, so as not to alert others to the mage's presence. The following spells may have a darkness trapping: *growth/sbrink, leaping, speed, and wall walker.*

**Special:** Cast by an arcane larcenist, *telekinesis* can be used to pick locks or disarm traps at a distance. When used in this manner, the mage's skill is equal to the lowest of his Lockpicking or arcane skill. The thief still requires the relevant tools, though, or his skill roll suffers accordingly. When using the spell in this manner, the magician manipulates his hands as if physically handling his tools. Thus, he must have both hands free.



## A DEN OF SCUM AND VILLAINY

A canker. A blight. A plague. A city of thieves and murderers. Freetown has been called many names and they are well-deserved. Home to countless pirates, smugglers, murderers, and worse, Freetown is ruled by the tyrannical Lord Blackhand. Within its winding streets visitors can find anything they desire, so long as they have the funds to pay for it. But be wary, for the vile inhabitants would slit a man's throat without hesitation for a handful of coins.

Inside you will find:

- \* Information concerning the city's history, social hierarchy, government, military, religion, and more. Gamemasters can weave this information into their adventures, while native player characters can use it to enhance their heroes.
- \* A full color, double page map of the settlement.
- \* Dozens of unique locales that can serve as places to visit or spend money, or as the focus for an adventure.
- \* Detailed information on thieves' guilds, offering a wealth of new ideas for roguish player characters.

This book is designed for GMs and players.

*The Hellfrost City Books* are guide books that expand upon the information detailed in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* and *Hellfrost Atlas*. They are written for the epic Hellfrost setting, which is designed for use with the award-winning *Savage Worlds RPG*.



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