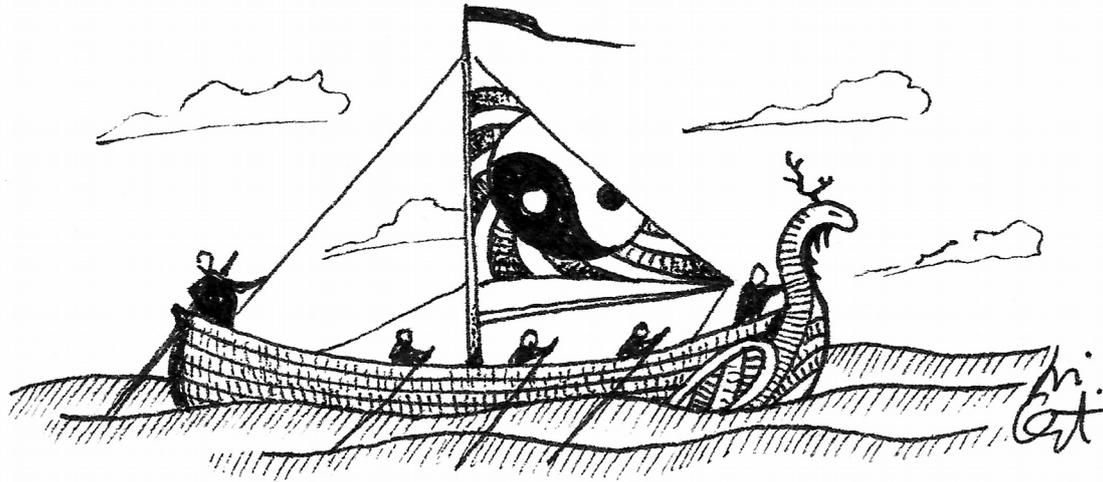


This document contains a rumour table for maritime environments and ports; each rumour can be used as a story hook for an adventure in a fantasy RPG environment.



Maritime Rumours and Story Hooks

Description: Salty seaside towns are rife with rumours and local legends - some true, some decidedly less so. The table below contains 20 such stories, which can be used as adventure hooks or simple background dressing in a fantasy campaign. Each entry contains the rumour itself along with a few possible ways to resolve the story further, but Judges and GMs should of course feel free to use the rumours in any way they see fit.

Table A: Maritime Rumours & Story Hooks	
D20	Rumour
1	<p>Rumour: "There's a cove a half day's row down south from the harbour, a hidden little place with black sand where even the sun shines eerily-like. Every week since after last Solstice body parts 'ave been washin' ashore there - only hands'n'feet mind ye, never anythin' else. Perfectly preserved too, as if even the sea don't want anythin' to do with 'em."</p> <p>Mundane: A foreign slave-galleon drops anchor for a night nearby every week or so, and dismembers rebellious slaves in a form of brutal punishment. The body parts are dumped adrift, and carried ashore by an unusually cold ocean current, explaining their condition.</p> <p>Magical: The deep, cold cove is the site of worship for a brutal sect of cultists, dedicating their rituals to an ancient terror from the deep still un-alive at the bottom of the sea. The dismembered body parts are a result of their rites, preserved so because they are part of an unholy covenant.</p>

2	<p>Rumour: <i>“Did’ja come in by the waves? Did’ja see the lights on the rocks? It’s tha souls of those lost adrift and in tha waters Itell ya! They dance as mirages and flickers, goading you to crash into the hidden reefs ashore!”</i></p> <p>Mundane: The local shoreside is plagued by a team of wreckers, who light fake signal fires during the night to lure ships into the difficult reefs and rocks just below the surface. The wreckers make a good living by their misdeeds, and will not shun away from murdering careless investigators.</p> <p>Magical: A tribe of sea sprites lives along the nearby shores. The wistful creatures seem to be made of sea foam and wispy algae, and the glittering lights are caused by their sombre dances during the night. The sprites are unaware of the trouble they are causing to the sailors.</p>
3	<p>Rumour: <i>“I’ve ‘eard tell that there’s a shop by the piers where you can git anything you like, if’n ye knows how to ask. Fast ships with black sails drop off cargo there during moonless nights, and the shipmates never drink with the rest of us.”</i></p> <p>Mundane: A very profitable smuggling ring operates in this port. They have connections to the regional thieves’ guild, and keep the local authorities silent with heavy bribes.</p> <p>Magical: The “shop” by the shoreside provides travelling arrangements for vampires, minor demons and other monstrosities. The black-sailed ships are crewed by undead sailors, and the shop front connects to a warren of tunnels below the town.</p>
4	<p>Rumour: <i>“Prithee, did you see the madman at the market today? Dressed in rags and tatters, the uncouth lout had the audacity to insult our fair town, calling us an ‘abomination’ and a ‘blight upon the shore’! Even as the guardsmen carried him off he kept screaming about a ‘retribution from the waves’ or some such nonsense.”</i></p> <p>Mundane: If inquired, the dishevelled man can easily be discovered in the town gaol, still quite unhinged and reeking of rotgut rum. Despite his mutterings of ominous nonsense an educated onlooker can easily tell that what he mostly needs is sobriety, and perhaps a new direction in life.</p> <p>Magical: Albeit deranged, the man is a true prophet of an ancient god of the sea. By the time anyone checks up on him in his cell he has disappeared, leaving behind a pile of wet rags filled with seaweed and starfishes. The town will suffer doom from the sea, lest the old rites are brought back.</p>
5	<p>Rumour: <i>“Privateers, phah! Scurvy dogs the lot of ‘em! I’ve had me livelihood ruined by the bastards! I wish the waves’d take them all! And the guard does nothing to stop them! If I didn’t know any better, I’d guess they were in league with the thieves!”</i></p> <p>Mundane: The region is indeed plagued by an uptick in piracy, and much of the booty stolen indeed ends up in the coffers of a local baron. He is a charming man, who upholds a successful facade of benevolence and propriety while simultaneously pillaging local trade routes in disguise.</p> <p>Magical: Not pirates but sea gremlins are the culprit for the port’s misfortune. The mischievous creatures live under a particularly dilapidated wharf in the harbor, and stow away on outbound vessels, causing all sorts of trouble ranging from missing cargo to dangerous shipwrecks.</p>

6	<p>Rumour: <i>“Have you seen me cousin? A lanky fellow, about yay tall? Red hair, a vacant look in ‘is eyes most times? Oh, what am I thinking, you’re new here ain’tcha... Well, mark my words: it’s no good going out in the night nowadays! Our Tom ain’t the only one gone missing in the dark!”</i></p> <p>Mundane: Due to a shortage of seamen, a local merchant fleet has resorted to shanghaiing people from the streets to fill out their crews. Should any adventurers wander out on their own after dark it is likely that they are under threat from just such a fate.</p> <p>Magical: An alluring siren has taken up the habit to sing in the harbour, sitting on a lone rock in the moonlight. Her song calls to weak willed dreamers on the shoreside, drawing them to a cold doom beneath the waves.</p>
7	<p>Rumour: <i>“Wait, you’re not local, are you? Oh thank the gods! Quickly, we need to get away from this horrid place! There’s something wrong with the locals! Can’t you see? Their eyes are too far apart, and I’m sure I saw gill-slits on the mayor’s wife! Eek!”</i></p> <p>Mundane: Yes, the townspeople look a little strange, but their mildly pelagic appearance is simply due to unfortunate inbreeding over countless generations, and the gurgling aspects of the native dialect can be traced to the imitation of the speech impediment of a well-loved local lordling.</p> <p>Magical: The port has been infiltrated by a race of fishmen, who come up from the unfathomable depths during certain times when the stars align atop the tallest steeple of the town’s temple. They interbreed with the people then, and carry the strongest off to serve as slaves in their dark cities.</p>
8	<p>Rumour: <i>“See that speck in the ‘orizon? That’s Witch Island, that is. Ye better steer clear of that unhallow’d shore, lest she look at ye with her evil eye! Curses an’ misfortune, that’s all ye’ll find o’er there.”</i></p> <p>Mundane: Years ago, a noble lady from a far away land was shipwrecked on what is known now as Witch Island. Dishevelled and destitute after her brush with death, and unable to speak the local language, she was branded a witch by the locals. She has survived through sheer grit and stubbornness, and is now quite skilled with local flora and fauna.</p> <p>Magical: A crafty hag was cast out by her coven some years ago, and took refuge on the briny crag near the port. There she plots her revenge, and delights in casting small curses and causing fear in the fishermen who sail too near to her abode.</p>
9	<p>Rumour: <i>“There’s a shipwreck not a half-day’s sailing out away from the mainland. The water’s just five fathoms deep there, ye can see it easy on a clear day. I’ve ‘eard it said that if’n ye hears the ship’s bell ring when you’re near there it spells doom on ye and ye’ll die afore the year’s end.”</i></p> <p>Mundane: While the shipwreck is real, the rumours of a bell ringing in the depths are patently false: in the right conditions, the temple bells from the port carry out quite far. But due to the legend the ship’s cargo is still intact, and its hold is full of treasure ripe for the taking.</p> <p>Magical: The sunken ship’s bell is indeed magical: sanctified by the priest of a god of duty and diligence, it keeps the souls of the vessel’s dead seamen hostage long after their death. The bell itself is of course bounty enough, but the sea-ghosts also guard the rest of the treasure hidden in the hold.</p>

10	<p>Rumour: <i>“Sail for a day up to the north along the shoreline, an’ ye’ll come to a bay with rocky cliffs all around. The fishermen avoid it, say that the fishin’s oddly good but the catch comes up all wrong some’ow. When the tide’s low ye can see a circle of standin’ stones at the center there - I bet it’s some dark old magicks that make the place so weird!”</i></p> <p>Mundane: The ruins at the bottom of the cove are not so much a circle as they are haphazardly placed rock formations. They are the ruins of an ancient settlement, and perhaps some old treasures are still hidden in the mud of the bay. Then again, perhaps not.</p> <p>Magical: The standing stones mark an ancient burial and sacrificial site of the first settlers to these lands. The skeletal forms of long dead warriors lie in wait in the mud, ready to protect the tomb-treasures interred with them.</p>
11	<p>Rumour: <i>“Every year, ‘round this time the seas hereabouts glow with unearthly lights. You might be able to catch the event, if’n you’re lucky. Some say it’s the spirits of dead sailors come to visit their kin from the great beyond, but I dunno ‘bout that.”</i></p> <p>Mundane: The yearly glowing waves are caused by bioluminescent plankton. While wholly natural, the event is cause for much celebration and superstition among the townsfolk, and travellers from all around come visit the area during this time.</p> <p>Magical: The glow is caused by the lights of underwater vessels belonging to a nomadic, subaqueous race. They pass through the region each year around the same time, and sometimes carry off unwary or adventurous locals with them to the bottom of the sea.</p>
12	<p>Rumour: <i>“I tell ye, it were a monstrous shark that ate me pappy an’ his boat! All we could find afterwards was splinters of wood, with huge teeth-marks on ‘em. Oh, ‘ow I wish that someone would gut that damn beast and bring ‘im ashore!”</i></p> <p>Mundane: A shark of unusual size has indeed taken the nearby seas as its hunting ground. The beast has scared the fishermen badly and for good reason, and the local administrators are offering a hefty reward for its head.</p> <p>Magical: A pelagic nightmare known as the sharktopus has risen from the deep to terrorize the region’s fishermen. Besides its maw of jagged, razor-sharp teeth, the creature boasts eight powerful tentacles and an inhuman malignant intelligence - any prospective hunters best beware!</p>
13	<p>Rumour: <i>“Would the good sir like to invest in a ge-nu-wine treasure map? I was fortunate enough to acquire it from an elderly pirate who spent his twilight years here in the village, but alas, mine own abilities are nary enough to lay claim to such a far away prize. But surely great adventurers like you are a different deal entirely?”</i></p> <p>Mundane: The map does indeed seem to lead to an X marking the spot, at least a few week’s sailing away from town. Whether it is accurate, real and accessible is left up to the Judge’s whims.</p> <p>Magical: The map is a convoluted trap set out by a trickster god. Anyone following its instruction is set out on a labyrinthine journey upon the waves, and their safe return to port is uncertain if not utterly impossible.</p>

14	<p>Rumour: <i>“Hey, you lot look like worldly sorts; maybe you can settle a dispute for us? My friend here claims that there’s an island roughly a day’s travel out south by southeast out of port, only I sailed in from that very direction today and there was no land there to be seen! Now tell us, an island can’t disappear into thin air can it?”</i></p> <p>Mundane: The area described is the site of an active underwater volcano, and the island periodically spotted in the region consists of buoyant volcanic rock it spews out. The rock eventually sinks or drifts away, but it would likely fetch some coin from the local craftsmen if it were to be collected.</p> <p>Magical: A giant turtle the size of an island sometimes rises to bask in the sun around the area described by the locals. Ancient by any standard, the creature has great wisdom and understanding of the mysteries beneath the waves.</p>
15	<p>Rumour: <i>“I swears I saw ‘em! Beautiful women rose up from the sea to dance and frolic next to our ship the other day, all sensuous-like! I would’ve jumped in to catch one to be me wife, only the Captain ‘eld me back. Says I can’t get married as I owe ‘im too much on account o’ me drinkin’ on the rudder, the blaggard!”</i></p> <p>Mundane: Not mermaids but an aggregation of manatees lives and frolics in the nearby waves. Only the most desperate or scurvy-addled sailors would fall for their charms, but they are a valued prey for hunters and do carry a decent price on the open market.</p> <p>Magical: A group of mermaids has indeed taken an interest in one of the nearby shipping lanes. Not malicious per say but merely curious of the ships and their crew, the ladies of the deep do pose a real danger to love-starved sailors.</p>
16	<p>Rumour: <i>“We saw the strangest thing on our way back to port. We were a few weeks out, still on open water with no land in sight, when a temple appeared! Clear as day we saw it, in the morning sun. Good thing the Cap’n is a steady fellow, he ordered us to heave away right quick!”</i></p> <p>Mundane: The temple was a trick of the light, a mirage transferred through morning mists and the sun’s rays. No structure can be found upon the waves, but perhaps there is a forgotten place of worship in one of the nearby coves?</p> <p>Magical: An ancient ziggurat built by the sea giants has risen from the deep. Covered in eldritch carvings and inhabited by horrific guardian-creatures, the treasures within are nonetheless ripe for the taking should a crew be brave enough to approach the building.</p>
17	<p>Rumour: <i>“Have ye heard tell of the Hagship? Oh, it’s a monstrous thing! A living vessel, crewed by vicious barnacle-men and able to turn the waves into a slim y glue! If’n you hear it’s slithering call upon the wind and catch a whiff of its sulphurous fumes ye must flee to port! Flee, I tell ye!”</i></p> <p>Mundane: The Hagship is a story, told to scare children and make merry of landlubbers who know little of the life of a sailor. Any adult taking it seriously will surely be ridiculed behind their back. The story grows in the telling of course, and the Hagship of myth is a truly monstrous thing.</p> <p>Magical: The Hagship is very real: a living vessel created through foul, chaotic magics and crewed by the mutated forms of those it takes. Similar to the hagfish, the ship-creature has the ability to excrete slime from its skin, stopping all but the largest ships entirely.</p>

18	<p>Rumour: <i>“Never take yer vessel to the straits in the west! There’s a monstrous whirlpool there, large enough to eat up ships! There’s no escaping the maelstrom, and many a captain has lost their boat there, braving the danger on account of the excellent fishing thereabouts.”</i></p> <p>Mundane: Tidal effects cause a periodic whirlpool in the region described by the locals. While dangerous to all but the most experienced captains, there is nothing magical about the maelstrom, and its size is often greatly exaggerated. Still, there are many shipwrecks in the area, perhaps containing more interesting rewards than the simple bounty of the sea.</p> <p>Magical: The nearby maelstrom is truly a monstrous thing, caused by a magical portal left open at the bottom of the ocean. Whether it leads to the other side of the world; an elemental plane of water, or some odd pocket dimension, is left up to the Judge.</p>
19	<p>Rumour: <i>“Any of yours looking for work? I ‘ad to let me watchman go, on account of him bein’ drunk in the crow’s nest. Claimed that he’d seen a dragon up in the clouds! Can ye imagine that, a damned dragon up around these parts! Ha! ‘E must’ve been deep in his cups, that lout!”</i></p> <p>Mundane: The dragon sighting was caused by a particularly volatile type of rotgut that recently came on the market at the port. The poisonous brew is produced locally by a secretive group of moonshiners, who have hid their still in a nearby tidal cave.</p> <p>Magical: A young dragon has made its roost on a rocky island not far from the port. It is still getting used to its hunting grounds, but the shipping lanes nearby will soon surely suffer gravely from its presence, lest the beast be driven away for good.</p>
20	<p>Rumour: <i>“Of all the beasts of the sea, the kraken is the most fearsome. Me father’s seen it, back when ‘e was a lad – an’ he has the scars to prove it! Mark my words, the recent lost ships are due to it rising again from the depths, hungry after years of slumber! Ye better stay away from the waves, lest the monster take you.</i></p> <p>Mundane: A combination of bad weather, whale sightings and perhaps an errant giant squid has led to rumours of the kraken’s awakening. While the danger is wholly imagined, it still affects the port gravely, as most captains are afraid to set out very far from shore – and those brave enough charge exorbitant prices from their passengers and patrons.</p> <p>Magical: It is time for the kraken to rise and sate its nearly endless hunger. No ship is safe, and even the fishermen face famine as the gargantuan monster either scares away or eats the fish that would be their quarry. The beast will eventually sink back into the depths, but what will be left of the town then remains to be seen.</p>