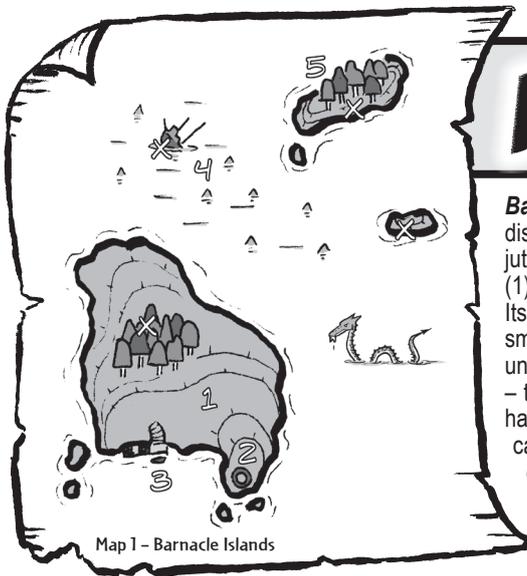


DEN OF VILLAINY!

or 'Five Go Missing' – by Antti Hulkkonen

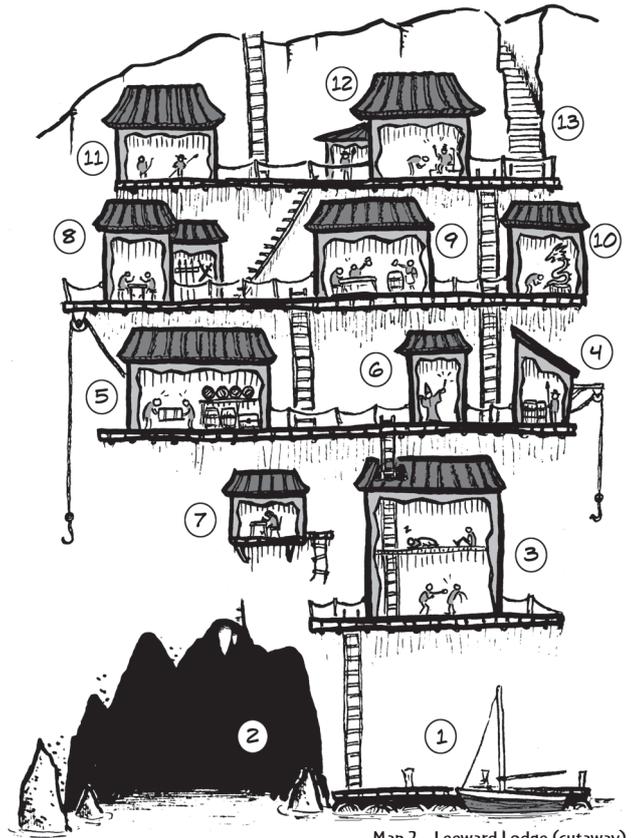
Dedicated to Milton Caniff & Enid Blyton.



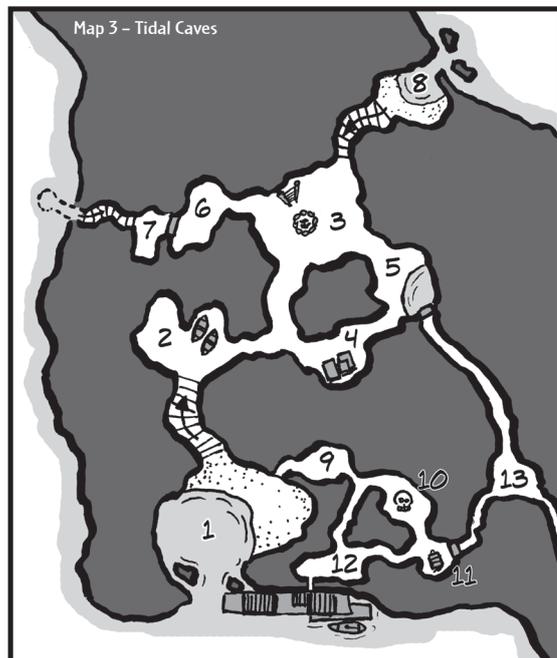
Barnacle Islands, just off the coast, have served as a haven and hideout for all sorts of disreputable types; rebels, outlaws and wreckers have operated from these barren slivers of rock jutting from the stormy waters of the Great Eastern Ocean. The largest of these, **Bootheel Rock** (1), rises sharply towards the south, and even boasts a **ruined lighthouse** (2) at its highest point. Its current inhabitants are a rugged band of smugglers who live in **Leeward Lodge**, a collection of small huts clinging precariously to the sheer southern cliff (3). It is said that they sometimes lure unsuspecting ships to the dangerous **reef** (4) between Bootheel and **Whalehump Islands** (5) – there certainly are plenty of wrecks there. It has long been the wish of mainland authorities to have these shady dealers ousted from the islands, but they know the passages, straits and tidal caves better than anyone alive, and have stashed weapons, boats and emergency **supplies** (X) everywhere. For years, port authorities have been dragging their feet regarding the smugglers, but now things seem to be changing. Maybe it was the rumours about corrupt harbour officials... or the fact that four plucky young treasure hunters (and their dog) went missing shortly after being seen perusing a map of the islands and talking about pirate gold.

Leeward Lodge – Just how the adventurers get to this fantastic shantytown is totally up to them. They may come as raiders, traders, recruits, stowaways... have them come up with a plan and let the smugglers react accordingly. Should things come to a head, note that a) the smugglers are motivated but not suicidal, b) they are experts at close-quarter fighting, either on boats or on the narrow walkways between the huts, and c) the said walkways are rickety and prone to breaking underfoot (either by design or due to shoddy workmanship). This should lead to interesting fights!

1. A floating pontoon platform where boats are moored. It rises and falls with the tide.
2. Entry into the tidal caves (see below). This area is strictly forbidden to outsiders.
3. The largest of the huts serves as the living quarters for both locals and guests.
4. The smaller warehouse is always guarded. It contains the Dragon Lady's personal goods (3 barrels of roasted *kurá* beans*, used in brewing an addictive beverage).
5. The larger warehouse contains crates of silk, barrels of wine, exotic spices etc.
6. Lo Kang the mystic lives here. He is the gang's spiritual leader and soothsayer.
7. Sabatini, an author of popular adventure novels, has taken residence in this unusually rickety (even by local standards) hut. The smugglers don't have any idea why he's here, but they don't mind him (as he's always good for a drink).
8. Wufei and Tsung, Dragon Lady's lieutenants, live here. They are locked in a struggle for primacy – which takes the form of an unending game of Fan-Tan, the winner of which will be considered 'supreme lieutenant'. The adjoining storage shed contains the gang's larger weapons – bows, spears, cutlasses and boathooks.
9. 'Drinking hall' may be a grand name for this dim hovel, but that's what it's called. Barnard, harbourmaster from a nearby port, is often here, drinking and gambling.
10. This small shrine contains a large, exquisite jade statue of a great sea serpent.
11. The lookout post is always manned. There's an ornate brass gong for signalling.
12. The Dragon Lady, leader of the smugglers, holds court here. She is generally immaculately cool and elegant, but becomes ruthless and unforgiving if slighted. She rules her gang with an iron fist, but is well respected by her minions. One of her trusted personal guards is always stationed in the adjoining guardroom.
13. Stairs to the top of the island have been carved into a narrow fissure.



Map 2 – Leeward Lodge (cutaway)



Tidal Caves – At high tide, the two entry caves (1 and 8) are under water. The smugglers have a secret entry hatch in the woods at the top (over cave 3), and an underwater tunnel leads to the chief's treasure vault (7), but they are well-guarded secrets. The gang uses the caves to store their more illicit goods... but there are secrets down there even for them.

1. The large entry cave fills with water at high tide. Carved stairs lead up to drier chambers. Unbeknown to the smugglers, behind a ledge close to the ceiling is a crawlway to cave 9. The lost hobbits were caught in the cave when the tide began to rise and discovered the tunnel by accident. It is located just above the high water mark.
2. The upper caves stay dry even at high tide. The smugglers store their boats here.
3. This large cave is the gang's common living area during a crisis. A ladder leads up top.
4. Valuable goods – currently crates of rare chemicals – are stored in this small alcove.
5. Rainwater from the top trickles into this cave. A loose boulder covers a secret tunnel.
6. This small cave is always guarded, as it leads to the Dragon Lady's treasure vault.
7. Dragon Lady's vault contains a king's ransom in gold, silver and art. The key to the rusty but sturdy door is always with her. Slimy stairs lead to an underwater exit tunnel.
8. The smaller entry cave is hidden behind large rocks. It is used only in emergencies.
9. This cave is the final resting place of four plucky young hobbits and their dog. The five snuck here following rumours of pirate gold and were attacked by ghosts. Remains of their substantial picnic lunch (sandwiches, cake and ginger beer) molder in a smashed hamper.
10. The restless souls of three pirates – Bo'sun, Spike and Stinky Bo – guard this cave.
11. Pirate captain Burr hid his treasure here 400 years ago. He did not spot the secret door.
12. The ghost of Burr's scullion has been scribbling his memoirs to the wall. A peep hole on the opposite wall opens to Sabatini's hut – and he's making a fortune on those tales!
13. The tunnels lead to the ruined lighthouse. Look out for cave-ins and giant rats!

* For more on the invigorating effects of *kurá* beans, see *Arendt's Old Peculiar*, to which this is a sequel of sorts (http://www.4shared.com/file/116475612/8113c31c/Arendts_Old_Peculiar.html)