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# VILLAGE BACKDROP: RED TALON



# THE LONELY COAST

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A Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Compatible Mini-Campaign Setting by Creighton Broadhurst

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*Huddled in a sheltered cove at the base of lofty cliffs, the tiny village of Red Talon is inaccessible by land for all but the best climbers. Its folk are insular and vague rumours lay cannibalism and devil-worship at their door—with good reason. Founded by the vicious pirate captain Hagruk Stormrider Red Talon hides a vicious, depraved cult dedicated to the unholy, cannibalistic worship of the little-known Ukre'kon'ala.*

*Adventurers often come to Red Talon—not to battle the hidden cult—but for the pirate booty said to lie in the waters just off the coast. Twenty years ago, Hagruk and his entire crew went down with his ship and now rumours of glittering treasure yet lying among the wreck of his galleon bring many to the village. Few leave...*

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Published by Raging Swan Press  
April 2015

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## CONTENTS

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Red Talon At a Glance.....	2
Notable Locations.....	4
Life in Red Talon .....	6
Did you Know?.....	7

## STAT BLOCKS BY CR

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CR		PAGE
6	Hagruk Stormrider CE ghastr fighter 5	6

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## RED TALON AT A GLANCE

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Huddled in a sheltered cove at the base of lofty cliffs, the tiny village of Red Talon is inaccessible by land for all but the best climbers. Its folk are insular and vague rumours lay cannibalism and devil-worship at their door—with good reason.

Red Talon was founded 20 years ago by the bloodthirsty orc pirate captain Hagruk Stormrider when he retired from full-time plundering; he named the fledgling community after his infamous vessel. In his prime, Hagruk Stormrider sailed to the four corners of the globe in search of booty, visiting many exotic lands during the course of his long voyages. On a remote tropical island Hagruk raided the village of a strange orc tribe, worshippers of a dark god of gluttony and greed called Ukre'kon'ala. In exchange for his life, the tribal priest promised to teach the pirate captain vile rituals honouring the deity which would bring him great power and wealth. Hagruk agreed, making the priest his first bloody sacrifice to the god as soon as he had mastered the dark rites.

With the power of Ukre'kon'ala, Hagruk and his men were invincible: they took dozens of fat prizes and their vessel's hold swelled with plunder. No one survived an attack by the *Red Talon*—the captain and his men ate the crew of the ships they took in gory feasts to honour their new god.

Eventually, Hagruk grew old and settled down in Red Talon village, but would still sail forth on occasional raids. One fateful night in a furious storm, his ship struck the reef known as Devil's Shoulder as he returned to the village. Hagruk and his crew abandoned ship as the galleon started to sink beneath the waves, but they were too slow, and their drowned bodies were washed up on the beach. But the dark power of their cannibal god saved the pirates—Ukre'kon'ala brought some of the crew back from death to unlife as ghouls; Hagruk Stormrider became a ghost.

That was ten years ago. Nowadays, adventurers come to Red Talon to search for the sunken treasure of Hagruk Stormrider and the depraved cult continues to worship vile Ukre'kon'ala; their sacrifices go to feed the ghost captain and his ghoulish shipmates.

### DEMOGRAPHICS

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**Ruler** Berrig Saltblood

**Government** Overlord

**Population** 116 (68 humans, 24 half-orcs, 11 orcs, 4 dwarves, 2 halfings, 6 ghouls, 1 ghost)

**Alignments** N, NE, CE

**Languages** Common, Orc

**Corruption** +2 **Crime** -2; **Economy** -1; **Law** -3; **Lore** +0; **Society** -3

**Qualities** Insular, Notorious

**Danger** +10; **Disadvantages** Cursed

### NOTABLE FOLK

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Most of the population are nothing more than hardworking peasants. A few, however, are of interest to adventurers:

**Algrid** (location 3; N female dwarf expert 2/warrior 1) Burly owner of Algrid's Creels and Nets, Algrid is a skilful crafter.

**Berrig Saltblood** (location 4; NE male half-orc fighter 3/rogue 3) Retired pirate captain and Red Talon's unelected mayor; Berrig is a leading member of Ukre'kon'ala's cult.

**Captain Hagruk Stormrider** (location 6; CE male ghost fighter 5) The notorious captain of the Red Talon lurks in the tunnels beneath the village church, awaiting the next sacrifice.

**Deryn Kroal** (location 1; NE male human expert 2) Creepy landlord of the Flensed Whale and loyal cultist.

**Father Connel** (location 5; CE male human cleric 5) Posing as a cleric of the sea god Serat, Father Connel is actually a priest of Ukre'kon'ala.

**Thagg Shantyman** (location 2; CN male half-orc expert 2) Crazy (and usually drunk) old lobsterman and former pirate; teller of tall tales.

### NOTABLE LOCATIONS

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Most of the village comprises peasant homes. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

1. **The Flensed Whale:** Red Talon's unwelcoming inn stands in the middle of the village; it has few guests.
2. **The Docks:** Busy during the day with fishing boats and merchant vessels arriving from Deksport and other ports.
3. **Algrid's Creels and Nets:** This shop stocks a variety of general goods, as well as lobster pots and fishing nets.
4. **Saltblood Hall:** This well-appointed house is home to Red Talon's mayor, and once belonged to Hagruk Stormrider.
5. **Village Church:** At first glance a small stone temple to the sea god Serat, the church is in reality dedicated to Ukre'kon'ala.
6. **Osuary:** Located beneath the church, this charnel house is the lair of Hagruk Stormrider and his undead crew.
7. **Cliffs:** Steep, 300-foot high white cliffs surround the village, making it hard for anyone to reach Red Talon by land.
8. **Devil's Shoulder:** This dark reef is where the galleon *Red Talon* met its doom, and acts as a magnet to treasure-seekers.

### MARKETPLACE

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**Resources & Industry** Fishing, lobsters

**Base Value** 650 gp; **Purchase Limit** 3,750 gp; **Spellcasting** 3rd; **Minor Items** 2d4; **Medium Items** 1d4; **Major Items** –

When the PCs arrive, the following items are for sale:

**Potions & Oils** *mage armour* (50 gp), *water breathing* (2; 750 gp each)

**Scroll (Divine)** *bless* (25 gp), *owl's wisdom* (150 gp)

**Weapon** +1 *underwater light crossbow* (2,370 gp)

## VILLAGE LORE

A PC making a Knowledge (geography) or Knowledge (local) may know some information about Red Talon. A successful check reveals all the information revealed by a lesser result.

**DC 10:** The isolated fishing village of Red Talon brings in some of the best lobsters along this stretch of coast.

**DC 15:** Red Talon is named after the ship captained by the village's founder, the bloodthirsty orc pirate, Hagruk Stormrider.

**DC 20:** The *Red Talon* went down when it struck a reef in sight of the village; the wreck full of pirate booty lies on the sea bottom just waiting for an intrepid soul to find.

## VILLAGERS

**Appearance** The villagers are of diverse appearance and ethnic backgrounds; mostly former pirates, they come from far and wide. Many have at least one tattoo, often several; the men are almost always bearded.

**Dress** Most villagers wear simple, practical work clothes and stout boots; bandanas and earrings are common.

**Nomenclature** *male* Bart, Kazmir, Reory, Saddok; *female* Alana, Danika, Dervla, Vita; *family* Bitterleaf, Helvett, Lazeyeye, Okeswabb.

## WHISPERS & RUMOURS

A PC can use Diplomacy to gather information about Red Talon and its surroundings. This takes 1d4 hours and requires a DC 10 check. A PC exceeding this check gains one additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10. Use the table below to determine which rumour(s) the PC learns.

D6	RUMOUR
1	Hagruk Stormrider's treasure is out there for the taking, but beware the giant octopus lurking in the <i>Red Talon's</i> wreck.
2	Serat has blessed the village again this year—the fishing has been excellent and the lobsters plentiful.
3	Deryn Kroal's daughter, Janna, has a thing for handsome adventurers.
4	Hagruk Stormrider would sail to the four corners of the globe in search of booty, and visited many exotic locales.
5*	The pirate Black-Eyed Saddok hid his chest of plunder in a cave near the top of the cliffs.
6	Algrid came to Red Talon after falling out with the pirates in the nearby town of Deksport. She's welcome here as she makes the best lobster pots and nets on the coast.

\*False rumour



## NOTABLE LOCATIONS

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### 1: THE FLENSSED WHALE

Red Talon's only inn stands in the centre of the village, across the market square from the village church. A two-storey building of wood and stone with a thatched roof, its name and gruesome painted sign depicting a whale being butchered do little to make the establishment seem appealing to new arrivals.

Inside, the oak-beamed taproom is dingy, furnished with rough wooden tables, benches and stools. The walls are hung with dusty pirate memorabilia—cutlasses, faded skull and crossbones flags, tricorne hats and the like. The bar is empty during the day but popular in the evenings with the village fishermen, making it a good place to meet some of the locals and pick up a rumour or two. The food on offer is invariably grilled fish or fish stew, although lobster is sometimes on the menu for 1 gp. Six simple rooms are available at 5 sp per night, also decorated with old nautical knick-knacks. It is likely the PCs will be the only guests.

The Flensed Whale is owned by Deryn Kroal (NE male human expert 2), a tall, middle-aged man, with thinning, oiled hair and an unsettling smile, his back curved from stooping in the low-ceilinged bar. A widower, Deryn lives here with his attractive and lascivious daughter Janna (CN female commoner 1) who is likely to latch onto any handsome male adventurers and attempt to seduce them. Deryn is a loyal member of Ukre'kon'ala's cult and the inn often serves as a source of new sacrifices for the cult. Guests may find their meals drugged with oil of taggit (DC 15 Fortitude save or fall unconscious for 1d3 hours), or a naïve young adventurer might regret his night of passion with Janna. Unconscious victims are taken to Saltblood Hall (location 4) and locked in the basement until the next new moon.

### 2: THE DOCKS

Fishermen head off early each morning from the docks in search of their daily catch, returning at the end of a long day with nets and creels filled with fresh fish and tasty lobsters. Larger merchant vessels arrive at the jetties twice a week from Deksport, Sea Bitch and other villages along the coast, bringing trade goods to sell and leaving with the fresh lobsters sold in Red Talon's market. Since the overland route from Deksport involves a nerve-wracking climb down the lofty cliffs on a narrow path, treasure-seekers looking for the lost hoard of Hagruk Stormrider often arrive by these ships too.

**Thagg Shantyman** (CN male half-orc expert 2) is a hoary old lobsterman and retired pirate. Rather too fond of the fiery grog he keeps in his silver hipflask, Thagg's drink-fuelled ramblings don't always make much sense. Nevertheless, he enjoys spinning tales and is no cultist. If befriended, Thagg may give the PCs a cryptic warning about the inn, the church, or both.

### 3: ALGRID'S CREELS & NETS

Located on the dockside, Algrid's sells good quality lobster pots (creels) and fishing nets hand crafted by the shop's owner. Algrid (N female dwarf expert 2/warrior 1) is a stocky dwarf, with a flat, broken nose and a penchant for colourful nautical slang. As well as fishing gear, the store stocks a variety of tools and general goods, and even caters for visiting treasure-seekers by offering a handful of items to assist with underwater exploration, including *potions of water breathing*. Algrid has been running her shop for a couple of years, having arrived in Red Talon from Deksport after a career-threatening row with Sakari, the influential leader of the church of Abarin (god of industry and artifice) in the town. Algrid used to make weaponry and other gear for pirate ships before switching to more peaceful items when she moved to Red Talon. The dwarf has heard tales of a strange cult in the village, but prefers to mind her own business.

### 4: SALT BLOOD HALL

This large, well-appointed stone house is the grandest building in Red Talon; its great oak doors are carved with sea serpents and galleons, and a large ship's anchor sits outside the entrance. Once the home of the village's pirate founder Hagruk Stormrider, it now serves as the mayor's residence.

**Berrig Saltblood** (NE male half-orc fighter 3/rogue 3) is a former pirate captain who declared himself mayor when the *Red Talon* sank ten years ago. Already an enthusiastic member of Ukre'kon'ala's cult, Berrig found the newly-undead Captain Stormrider a home under the church, and has made sure the hungry god and his ghoulish servants are kept satisfied with regular sacrifices, believing this safeguards the prosperity of the village. It is certainly true the fish and lobster catches have remained bountiful.

Berrig cuts an imposing figure—tall and brawny with jet-black hair, a well-groomed salt-and-pepper beard and a pair of fearsome tusks, he speaks in a deep, booming voice. He has three wives, Igga and Neeqa (both half-orcs) and Lorel (a human), and six children aged between two and nine. He can often be seen wandering around town, lord of all he surveys. Berrig takes personal responsibility for punishing those falling foul of the village's law at the flogging post in the market square. Captives due to be sacrificed to Ukre'kno'ala meet a much worse fate—Berrig keeps them locked in the basement of Saltblood Hall until the next new moon when they are taken via hidden tunnel to the ossuary beneath the village church.

## 5: VILLAGE CHURCH

The tallest building in the village, thanks to its 60-foot high bell-tower, Red Talon's stone church was built by Hargruk Stormrider with his ill-gotten gains and is purportedly dedicated to Serat, goddess of the sea, storms and voyages.

Inside, the plaster-covered walls are painted with crudely executed frescoes depicting the goddess sitting on her seashell throne beneath the waves, ships sailing on favourable winds and so on. With careful inspection (DC 20 Knowledge [religion]), the PCs notice strange elements in the frescoes, including sharks gorging on drowned sailors, and hungry, fanged mouths hidden in the waves. These secret symbols represent the true deity of the church: Ukre'kon'ala.

At the southeastern end of the church is the altar, behind is a large window with a view of the sea; its shutters are flung open to the elements during services. The tall northwest tower holds a great bell, rung seven times to call the villagers to the weekly worship of Serat, presided over by the softly-spoken, seemingly genial Father Connel (CE male human cleric [Ukre'kon'ala] 5). On the first night of the new moon, the same bell tolls just once to call the cultists of Ukre'kon'ala to their evil rites presided over by the same fellow, in reality an insane, blood-crazed cannibal. A trapdoor in the floor leads down to the ossuary where these horrid ceremonies take place.

## 6: OSSUARY

A worn staircase leads down from the church into a round stone chamber, 40 feet in diameter and dimly lit by candles, with niches in the walls filled with heaps of yellowing bones. Each recess contains a different type—one holds skulls, another femurs and so on. In the centre of the room stands a grotesque, eight-foot tall wooden idol of Ukre'kon'ala, an obese demonic god, with a huge fanged mouth, jug ears and large, half-closed eyes. The flagstones around the statue are stained with blood—

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### UKRE'KON'ALA

CE god of cannibalism, gluttony and greed

**Epithets:** The Ever-hungry Maw

**Symbol:** Fanged mouth

**Domains:** Chaos, Death, Evil, Madness, Strength

**Favoured Weapon:** Dagger

**Holy Text:** Revelations of Utu'rak the Unstable

Worshipped by orcs living on the tiny islands of the remote Coral Sea, the dark god Ukre'kon'ala is thankfully almost unknown in civilised lands. This foul deity demands living humanoid sacrifices, eaten by his worshippers in horrific, bloody rites. In exchange, it is said Ukre'kon'ala brings great power and prosperity to his faithful.

this is where the cult makes sacrifices to their dark patron deity.

Two archways exit this room: one leads to a tunnel to the basement of Saltblood Hall; the other enters a small network of foul-smelling catacombs where Hargruk Stormrider (CE male ghastr fighter 5) and his six ghoulish crew members lurk until it is time for the monthly sacrifice. They are always hungry, though, and are almost certain to make an appearance if nosy (or noisy) interlopers come down the stairs. Hargruk Stormrider has a hook for a right hand, still wears what's left of his pirate garb, and gives off an overwhelming stench of rotten meat. Some of his former crew wear eyepatches or have peg-legs. Each month, the cult's victims are brought into the ossuary and fed alive to the undead pirates while the insane villagers chant diabolical prayers of power to Ukre'kon'ala. After the ghouls have fed, each cultist scoops up some of what's left over and eat their fill.

## 7: CLIFFS

A wall of steep, white 300-foot high cliffs, composed largely of chalk, streaked with black granite rings Red Talon. These imposing cliffs present a significant obstacle to anyone seeking to approach (or leave) the village—one of the reasons Hargruk Stormrider selected the location 20 years ago. Nonetheless, a trail runs overland to the town of Deksport, but the treacherous path which zigzags up the cliffs is not for the faint-hearted. Anyone attempting the climb must make a series of progressively difficult Climb checks, ranging from DC 5 to DC 20, to reach the top. Coming down can be even harder with Acrobatics checks (DC 10 or 15) required when the path narrows. To make matters worse, wild goats live on the cliffs, feeding on the plants growing from the chalk. These temperamental animals vigorously defend their territory and are responsible for more than one villager falling to his death.

## 8: DEVIL'S SHOULDER

This dark reef, lying about a mile offshore, is where the galleon *Red Talon* met its doom ten years ago. Since then, a constant stream of adventurers and treasure-seekers have come to Red Talon with dreams of recovering Hargruk Stormrider's plunder from the wreck of the ship. Many haven't even made it out to the reef, having fallen foul of the cult of Ukre'kon'ala, but occasionally a group of well-equipped heroes arrives that the cultists decide are too dangerous to attack. None of these groups has yet succeeded in finding the wreck of the Red Talon, let alone recovering its treasure and most have not returned. A giant octopus lurks in the sunken galleon and has eaten several bands of underwater explorers. If the cephalopod can be despatched, Hargruk Stormrider's loot is there for the taking—the hoard includes gold, pearls, bejewelled art objects and *Barracuda*, the captain's +2 *seaborne cutlass*.

## LIFE IN RED TALON

The villagers keep themselves to themselves, although nearly everyone attends the weekly church service. Evenings are spent quietly at home or at the bar of the Flensed Whale.

Around two thirds of Red Talon's adult population are members of the cult of Ukre'kon'ala. Those that aren't know better than to talk openly about the cult in public. When the PCs arrive in the village, the atmosphere should feel unsettling, as the locals watch their every move, staring at the party before turning away when noticed and whispering to each other.

### TRADE & INDUSTRY

Red Talon depends on the sea for its livelihood—most of the villagers are fishermen, heading out in their boats each day in search of fish and lobsters. Some of these fish go to feed the villagers but most (and nearly all the lobsters) are sold in the twice-weekly market to visiting merchants from Deksport and other towns and villages along the coast. Vegetables are grown in allotments at the base of the cliffs, and a few of the villagers keep chickens or a goat, but most other produce and goods are brought in via the sea and traded in the marketplace.

### LAW & ORDER

Berrig Saltblood rules Red Talon with an iron fist, flogging law-breakers himself at the post in the marketplace, watched by the whole village. These brutal demonstrations of authority mean locals rarely commit crime. Half a dozen brawny ex-pirates (human or half-orc warriors 2) make up the village militia; loyal to the mayor (and the cult), they act swiftly and arrest any outsiders "causing trouble".

### EVENTS

While the PCs are in the village, one or more of the below events may occur. Choose or determine randomly:

D6	EVENT
1	The vain and pompous paladin Sidrac Pureheart arrives, looking for his missing adventuring companions, and drawing unwanted attention from Janna Kroal.
2	The <i>Sea Devil</i> , the ship of the sahuagin pirate Jar-zit, puts in at the docks. Her much-feared captain has business to discuss with Algrid.
3	The church bell rings seven times for the weekly church service to Serat. The PCs are welcome to attend. If they do so, they can join in with the rousing sea shanties in praise of the goddess. With a DC 20 Knowledge (religion) check, they notice odd phrases slipped into the words of these hymns.
4	A band of adventurers head out to Devil's Shoulder on a fishing boat at first light; they are well-equipped with <i>water breathing</i> potions, spears and nets.

5	Andrei Flatfoot plummets two hundred feet to his death from the cliffs; he'd gone up there to hunt wild goats after a drunken bet in the Flensed Whale.
6	After talking to the PCs, Thagg Shantyman goes missing. Has he ended up as the latest cult sacrifice?

### HAGRUK STORMRIDER

CR 6 (XP 2,400)

*This stooped and feral figure has a slavering tongue and a rusty hook hand. It wears a tricorn hat and filthy pirate clothes and emits a horrendous stench of death and decay.*

Male ghastrider 5

CE Medium undead

**Init** +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 feet; Perception +10, Sense Motive +5

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 10 ft.; **AC** 0; Acrobatics +10, Climb +12, Stealth +11, Swim +10

**AC** 20, touch 16, flat-footed 14; **CMD** 27 (+29 vs. disarm) (+6 Dex, +4 natural)

**Fort** +10, **Ref** +7, **Will** +9 (+11 vs. channelling)

**hp** 79 (7 HD)

**Immune** mind-affecting effects, death effects, disease, paralysis, poison, sleep effects, stunning, nonlethal damage, ability drain, energy drain, damage to physical abilities, exhaustion, fatigue, massive damage, any effect requiring a Fortitude save (unless it affects objects or is harmless)

**Space** 5 ft., stench (10 ft.); **Base Atk** +6; **CMB** +11 (+15 disarm)

**Stench (Ex)** The stink of death and corruption surrounds Hagruk; creatures within the area are sickened for 1d6+4 minutes (DC 19 Fortitude negates). A creature that successfully saves against the stench attack cannot be affected by his stench for 24 hours. This is a poison affect.

**Melee** bite +12 (1d6+5 plus ghoulish fever [DC 18 Fort] and paralysis [DC 19 Fort] 1d4+1 rds.), claw +12 (1d6+5 plus paralysis [DC 19 Fort] 1d4+1 rds.) and +1 *cruel hook hand* +13 (1d4+6)

**Atk Options** Combat Expertise (-2/+2), Greater Disarm, Improved Disarm, ghoulish fever

**Ghoulish Fever (Su)** Fort DC 18 [2 cures]; *onset* 1 day; *frequency* 1 day; *effect* 1d3 Con and 1d3 Dex damage. A humanoid who dies of ghoulish fever rises as a ghoul at the next midnight. A humanoid who becomes a ghoul retains none of the abilities it possessed in life. A slain humanoid of 4 or more Hit Dice rises as a ghoul.

**Abilities** Str 21, Dex 22, Con —, Int 15, Wis 20, Cha 23

**Feats** Ability Focus (paralysis), Combat Expertise, Greater Disarm, Improved Disarm, Sea Legs, Warren Digger, Weapon Finesse

**Skills** as above plus Intimidate +12, Knowledge (religion) +4, Profession (sailor) +13,

**Languages** Common, Orcish (Hagruk also knows a smattering of words and phrases from many of the world's languages)

**Gear** necklace of carved wooden beads from the southern seas (worth 100 gp)



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