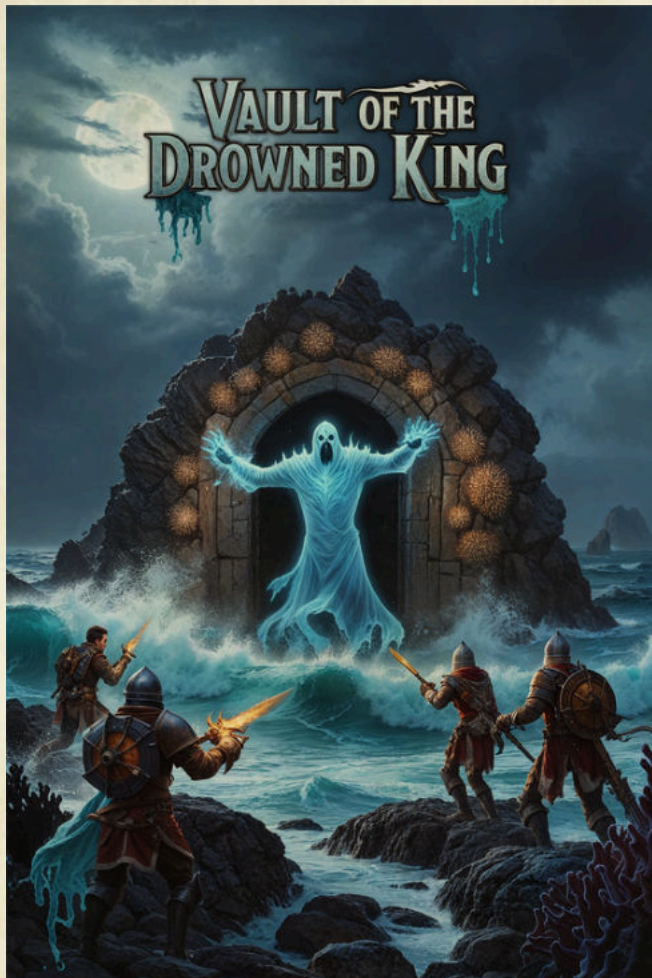


VAULT OF THE DROWNED KING



CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

Title: Vault of the Drowned King

Theme/Genre: Nautical Fantasy, Mystery, and Ancient Curse

Tone: Dark and suspenseful with moments of adventure and discovery

Target Level: Level 5-6

Expected Duration: 2 hours

Player Focus Preferences:

- Combat: Medium
- Roleplay: High
- Exploration: High

BACKSTORY AND SETTING

WORLD OVERVIEW

In the maritime kingdom of Talavar, the seas hold treasures, dangers, and secrets long forgotten. Ancient empires once ruled the waves, their kings and queens wielding immense power through their connection to the ocean. Now, shattered ruins and ghostly legends are all that remain of those glorious days.

LOCAL SETTING

The one-shot takes place in the Stormsong Isles, a scattered archipelago north of the Talavar mainland. Hidden among the jagged rocks and relentless waves lies the fabled Vault of the Drowned King—a crypt that purportedly holds untold riches, but also a deadly curse. Shipwrecks, sea caves, and coral-covered ruins dominate the isles, all shrouded in mist and mystery.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Drowned King, once a mortal emperor of the lost Atlassian Empire, sought godhood by merging his soul with the ocean itself. His ritual failed, sinking his empire beneath the waves and binding his soul to an ancient artifact called the **Heart of the Abyss**. It is said the Heart is sealed away in his underwater tomb, guarded by restless spirits.

IMPORTANT NPCs

1. **Captain Ysolda “Stormhand” Valrick** (Quest Giver): A brash and seasoned pirate captain who seeks to use the Heart of the Abyss to claim dominion over the seas. She acts as the party’s employer, though her motives are morally ambiguous.
2. **Eada Fenwater** (Local Historian): A bookish, overly cautious scholar who fills the party in on the legends of the Drowned King and his curse.
3. **Marok, the Watcher**: The spectral guardian of the Vault. Marok was once the king’s most loyal general and is now tasked with defending the crypt against intruders.

PLOT HOOK

OPENING SCENE

The party finds themselves aboard Captain Ysolda’s weathered ship, *The Tempest’s Wake*, as it drifts just offshore of the Stormsong Isles. Thick fog clings to the water, and the sound of mournful wails is carried by the ocean breeze. Ysolda slams a map on the table before the party and growls, “You’re here because you’re the best. That cursed vault is somewhere on that island, and I want what’s inside. Stick with me, and you’ll be swimming in gold by sundown. Cross me, and you’ll join the fish like the fools who came before us.”

COMPELLING EVENT

Ysolda mentions that she recently lost two crewmates to haunting sounds and deadly traps within the Stormsong Isles. A ghostly figure has been seen walking along the water’s edge at night, pointing toward the mist.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

Enter the Vault of the Drowned King, recover the Heart of the Abyss, and survive both the supernatural guardians and the curse.

KEY LOCATIONS

LOCATION 1: SHIPWRECK COVE (STARTING AREA)

Atmosphere: A rocky shoreline cluttered with the remains of wrecked ships, their splintered hulls encrusted with barnacles. The tide laps against the timbers, whispering eerie echoes.

NPCs:

- *Ysolda* gives the party their final brief before heading inland.
- Survivors from an earlier wreck beg the party to leave, claiming the place is doomed.

Encounters:

- Two **Drowned Ghosts** rise from the seaweed-covered sands, wailing to protect the sacred isle. (See custom creature stat block below.)
- Clues to the Vault's location are hidden among the debris: a rusted compass, scraps of Atlassian carvings, and fragments of strange metal tools pointing further inland.

LOCATION 2: THE SINGING GROTTA (INTERMEDIATE AREA)

Atmosphere: A cavern marked by strange acoustics where the crashing waves outside harmonize with haunting melodies that emanate from deep within the rock. The sound is beautiful but disorienting.

Challenge:

- A magical puzzle: Four stone pillars surround an eldritch pool in the cavern's center. Carved onto each pillar is a stanza from an ancient Atlassian hymn, written in Old Aquan. The players must decipher the song using skill checks (Arcana, Religion, or Performance). Singing or humming the correct melody manipulates the flow of water, revealing a staircase that leads deeper into the vault.
- Failure causes the pool to morph into a **Water Elemental**, which attacks.

Exploration:

- Murals in the grotto show the Atlassian Empire's downfall and hint at the Vault's curse.

LOCATION 3: VAULT OF THE DROWNED KING (FINAL AREA)

Atmosphere: A massive underwater cathedral filled with ghostly blue light. Clusters of glowing coral climb

the walls, and spectral forms float in the water above. At the center of the chamber lies the king's sarcophagus, with the **Heart of the Abyss** pulsing in its grasp. A swirling vortex surrounds the artifact, hinting at its power.

Challenge:

- The players face **Marok, the Watcher** (custom spectral knight) guarding the artifact. He warns the party to turn back, stating they will unleash the Drowned King's wrath.
- Combat begins if they refuse, and the Heart radiates chaotic magical effects throughout (e.g., random wild magic surges, flooding chambers).
- During combat, waves of **Drowned Ghosts** attack periodically.

ENCOUNTERS AND CHALLENGES

COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

1. **Drowned Ghosts (Shipwreck Cove):**

Use Ghost stats with some modifications: Drown (grapple and suffocation mechanic) and ocean-themes visuals.

2. **Water Elemental (Singing Grotto):**

As per the Monster Manual.

3. **Marok, the Watcher (Vault):**

- **HP:** 120, **AC:** 17
- *Spectral Blade* (melee) and *Tide Crush* (AoE knockback).
- Special ability: "*Call of the Ocean*" periodically summons spectral reinforcements.

ROLEPLAY ENCOUNTERS

- Convince the survivors at Shipwreck Cove to provide additional clues.
- Interact with Marok, who is tragic and broken, giving the party a chance to negotiate.

PUZZLE/TRAP

The Singing Grotto hymn puzzle requires creativity and perception. Incorrect attempts summon a hostile Water Elemental.

CLIMAX AND RESOLUTION

FINAL CHALLENGE

Players must decide what to do with the **Heart of the Abyss**. Destroying it requires a challenging skill roll or magical ritual and risks unleashing a devastating curse. Taking it empowers the wielder but spreads the Drowned King's corruption. Leaving it intact ensures the King's influence lingers but avoids immediate peril.

STAKES OF SUCCESS OR FAILURE

- **Success:** The sea begins to calm, survivors are rescued, and the Drowned King's power is diminished.
- **Failure:** The artifact curses the party or is claimed by Captain Ysolda, causing chaos across the seas.

NARRATIVE CONCLUSION

Depending on their choice, the players leave the Vault with (or without) the Heart. The sea begins whispering the party's names—are they legends or villains?

REWARDS

- **Gold & Loot:** 500 GP worth of treasure, coral-encrusted relics, gems.
- **Magical Items:**
 - **Triton's Amulet:** Grants the wearer water breathing and swim speed.
 - **Spectral Blade:** Magical weapon dealing radiant/necrotic damage.
- **Story Rewards:** Favor with Ysolda or local port authorities (depending on their choices).

SUPPORTING DETAILS

Stat Blocks: Provided for Drowned Ghosts, Marok, and any custom items.

Maps: Include a basic island map, grotto layout, and vault schematic.

Handouts: Fragments of Atlassian carvings, Ysolda's map, a hymn sheet for the grotto puzzle.

Atmospheric Music:

- *Shipwreck Cove:* "The Ocean's Mysteries" (ambient waves, eerie vocals)
- *Singing Grotto:* "Depths of the Abyss" (haunting lullabies with water sounds)
- *Vault:* "The Sunken Cathedral" (ethereal choir with deep bass undertones).

FLEXIBLE OUTCOMES

- If players abandon Ysolda, the treasure hunt becomes a race against her to the Vault.
- If they try to take the Heart for themselves, Ysolda might turn on them for betrayal.
- If they destroy the Heart, the ocean's curse is lifted but displaces the Atlassian spirits.

POST-GAME WRAP-UP

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- What were your favorite and least favorite moments?
- Did you feel the balance between combat, roleplay, and exploration was satisfying?
- Would you continue this storyline or follow these characters further?

EPILOGUE OPTIONS

- The Heart's lingering effects could draw the party into deeper intrigue.
- Captain Ysolda's growing power or revenge plans make her a recurring antagonist.

This document provides a detailed and immersive framework for running the "Vault of the Drowned King" one-shot adventure. Players are encouraged to engage with the content dynamically, leveraging their skills in combat, exploration, and roleplay to navigate the perils of the Stormsong Isles.