

Instant Luskan!

Map and Booklet



Instant Luskan

Cesspool of the World

Introduction: A lawless port city, populated by pirates and cutthroats thinly disguised as sea traders. All attempts to civilise this slum of a town have failed. In recent years the five Ships and their High Captains have taken a more direct role in running affairs. However, more recent still, the ruined Hosttower of the Arcane began to regenerate itself until it stood like a clawed hand over the city, the Arcane Brotherhood emerging once more.

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Introduction

This is intended to be a quick introduction to Luskan for a DM in a hurry. It is designed to be consistent with canon around the 1490's and contains known locations from various supplements, together with added locations to help the DM and PCs move around the city and carry out their day to day activities. Due to the scant nature of supplements assumptions are made throughout, albeit consistent with canon.

Provided within is:

What We Know: a roundup of relatively modern information, drawing from a number of supplements.

Locations: referencing the map, this section identifies the various places of the city, consistent with the 1490's.

The Factions: a quick roundup of the various factions in the city to provide a DM's introduction.

Plot Hooks: a short list of possible plots that might take place in the city, if the DM is looking for a more extended stay and to include the city itself as the PCs' place of adventure.

What it is not: This guide is not intended to be comprehensive, long or detailed. A map is provided which is to allow a DM to create their own areas and add their own locations, streets, etc. as required by their campaign.

What We Know

The Supplements

The supplements which have been used to gain an understanding of the city are:

- Savage Frontier, p.30-31 (SF, 1358, a century old)
- Volo's Guide to the North p.111-130 (VGtN, 1366, a century old)
- Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide p.148 (FRCG, 1479, only about 15 years old)
- Storm King's Thunder p.97-98 (SKT, 1485, modern day)
- Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide p.95-98 (SCAG, 1489, modern day)

Each of these supplements has something to add, especially considering how the city has changed in recent years. The Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide being the most recent is likely our premier source, as it brings us up to date with developments, however it lacks the detail of supplements such as Volo's Guide.

Although it is most certain that the establishments of the older supplements are now long gone, they do at least give us a flavour of what to expect of this wretched place when adding our own detail and new locations.

Welcome to Luskan

Overview

Described by the FRCG as the cesspool of the world, it is a city (although with its current population of 4000, town might be more appropriate) of pirates, thieves and cutthroats. In fact, those adding to the population's numbers are not usually homemakers, but criminals on the run from more reputable settlements. Luskan was originally a settlement of Northmen, raiding the Sword Coast, although not always successfully!

It isn't always welcoming. Historically the settlement has been notoriously racist, favouring humans above all others. However, since it has

become more of a trading hub in recent years, and less of a pirate bay, this stance may have softened somewhat, especially considering the number of dwarves who trade with the city.

However a non-human in Luskan is advised to either go disguised, or at least keep a wary eye out. They are still likely to be overcharged, barred from establishments and robbed in the night, with little recourse from what authorities exist in this forsaken place. There are more than a few drow, goblins and kobolds living in the city.

Economy

Its economy (apart from crime) is mainly as the harbour and sometimes marketplace for a variety of goods in the north, shipping them down the Sword Coast and beyond.

- Dwarven metal goods (including arms and armour) from Mirabar and huge pieces of cut stone from the quarries there
- Weapons and tools from Ironmaster
- Ambergris for the perfume trade
- Timber cut from the Lurkwood
- Scrimshaw

The income is derived directly from a number of sources:

- Gate and bridge fees
- Ferry fees
- Berthing fees
- Warehouse rental
- Market stall rent
- Shipping fees
- Fish sales

It is unclear how much these various fees are, but are likely to range from a few silvers, to several gold. They are also likely to be relatively steep given that Luskan seems to have a stranglehold on trade from the northern dwarven settlements, particularly Mirabar.

After this legitimate trade, much of the settlement's income comes from fishing, as well as from piracy and raiding, with fleets of pirate ships operating from the harbour. They tend to be sole opportunists, taking what they can.

Arcane Brotherhood

Beyond being a city of outlaws, it also plays host to a cabal of backstabbing wizards, the Arcane Brotherhood. Although vanquished from the city years ago, and their tower, the Hosttower laying in rubble, it mysteriously regenerated itself in recent years, the stonework repairing itself, emerging once more on Cutlass Island. Then, wizards of the Brotherhood began to emerge and forge bonds with the city and once they had seen off a rampaging dragon, the thugs of the city began to see the worth in having the Brotherhood around.

Who Keeps Order

Might is right in Luskan. If someone tries to rob you and you run them through, no-one will particularly care.

Nominally, there are five clans or "Ships" in the city, each answering to their own "High Captain". These are clans of pirates who have now assumed some sort of authority over the city. Each of the Ships nominates a magistrate, and legal justice is meted out by their judgements.

But make no mistake, these judges are far from impartial. Those who fall foul of the law in Luskan are typically those who have fallen out of favour with the politics of the gangs.

The five Ships are simply the biggest and most well established gangs that run the city. Other gangs run areas of the city, but are less well known. Bribery and extortion rule the day in Luskan. If someone is on trial it is more than likely that a Ship wants a concession from them, such as payment of a missed bribe. As soon as the concession is made, the charges are likely dropped.

The whole city is ran in this manner. Instead of a fair taxation system, the Ships simply extort funds from various businesses, the most famous being the "harbour fees" they charge the Mirabarran traders which grow ever steeper and are charged sometimes years in advance.

Those who fail to pay find their businesses being robbed, pillaged or burnt to the ground.

This system pays for the upkeep of the harbour and the city's walled defenses.

One can only imagine that the Arcane Brotherhood are treated with a far lighter touch

than the rest of the populace, considering their ready access to magical power.

Even the city guard are drawn from the five Ships so if you call on the guard for assistance, you are inviting members of one of the largest gangs in the city into your affairs.

Last but not least, the city's initial progress from ruthless pirates to legitimate shipping and trading has been largely the work of Jarlaxle Baenre, a disguised drow, who has held sway over the five High Captains for the past hundred years. He is also the leader of the drow mercenary group, Bregan D'aerthe, who operate on his behalf.

Indeed, the High Captain of Ship Kurth is actually Beniago, a drow member of Bregan D'aerthe disguised as a human and Ship Kurth is a proxy for the drow organisation.

This has remained a secret for many years.

As such, Jarlaxle is effectively the ruler of Luskan through various representatives and deals. However, with the return of the Arcane Brotherhood, their magic would likely be more than a match for the deceptions of the drow, since they have a whole array of divination spells at their disposal.

If they did discover this secret, Jarlaxle would likely have to choose between being exposed and losing this discrete position of power, or of making concessions to the Brotherhood who would be in a strong position to impose their will.

Locations

1. Whitesails Harbour

Off limits to most citizens, this is where the Luskan navy is docked, and it is guarded quite zealously. It wouldn't be unusual to find a member of the Arcane Brotherhood helping out with guard duty here.

It is also where some of the vessels of the five Ships are kept, although these can also be found on Dragon Beach. It is unlikely to be somewhere the party visits.

At the northernmost end of this harbour is the Open Reach. This is where foreign vessels are allowed to dock. It is also outside the protection of the city walls, and is sometimes attacked by bandits.

2. Mirabar Shield

An ancient keep which was built to safely house the members of caravans from Mirabar, including the caravans and goods themselves. It says much about Luskan that its greatest trading partner has to build a keep within the city to protect its people and goods.

Although mostly human, there are also a good number of dwarves and others here from the caravans, while their goods await shipping down the coast.

In addition to caravan guards, the keep is also lightly garrisoned with humans and dwarves. The current castellan is an ancient dwarf with a long white beard called Porbe Escalot, who is surprisingly cosmopolitan.

3. The Throat

This is a carefully guarded watertower, with sheep grazing the grassy area around it.

4. One-Eyed Jax

An inn and watering hole frequented by quite a number of drow. The secret reason is that the inn is sponsored by Ship Kurth which means Jarlaxle Baenre. Ensnared on the north shore, it is relatively secure from the predations of the bandits who dwell in Rat Alley and the like.

5. North Gate

A camp of homeless and beggars has long been in residence around the North Gate. It is often the site of caravans not wanting to enter and stay in Luskan proper, and choosing the dangers of the land over the dangers of the city.

The gate tax is unknown but a reasonable estimate might be 1gp per wagon or 1sp per person.

There is also a cable ferry for those truly in a hurry, although it is just as likely to incur cost, so simply passing through Luskan and along the Upstream Span then out the Twin Teeth (South Gate) is often a better choice.

6. Upstream Span

This is the bridge proceeding from the North Gate, and is protected by the garrison of the gate.

7. Dalath's Span

This bridge is safe to cross, providing travel across the Mirar with each end being lightly guarded.

8. Harbour Cross

This bridge spans the river to and from Blood Island. Since Blood Island is the site of Luskan's city barracks it is not for general use and anyone trying to use it to simply cross the river will be directed to Dalath's Span.

9. Guard tower

Situated on Blood Island, the tower and surrounding buildings are home to an army of about 300 northmen wielding spears and axes, with some archers.

The Guard Tower itself is equipped with heavy catapults capable of hurling boulders and also balls of flame, which are particularly useful against hostile ships.

10. Hosttower of the Arcane

Home of the Arcane Brotherhood. Dozens of sinister wizards call this place their home. The tower climbs upward like a huge stone tree, branching off into various smaller towers.

The leader is known as the Archmage Arcane. The group is further divided into four quadrants, corresponding to compass points, each with its own Overwizard, eg. The Overwizard of the North.

Further information is given in the Factions section.

The Hosttower is situated on Cutlass Island, which can only be reached by the Sword Bridge, which is protected by magical wards and guardians.

11. The Sea Tower

This huge stone fortress was once the original pirate castle of Luskan, but nowadays it is occupied by lesser members of the Arcane Brotherhood.

Having survived the centuries it is now somewhat in need of repair, but the newly returned Brotherhood seem quite at home in it. They also seem to have brought various pets and creatures with them who roam the grounds and corridors.

12. Ship Kurth residence

Kurth tower, together with a number of outhouses, is the home of Ship Kurth, or at least the more favoured members of the Kurth household. As previously mentioned this is actually a branch of the drow mercenary company Bregan D'aerthe, so access is tightly guarded.

13. Dark Arch

The bridge to Closeguard Island where Kurth tower is situated is warded. It is guarded by members of Ship Kurth, as well as hidden archers with poisoned bows who watch from the tower.

14. Ruins of Ilusk

This ruined area is bisected by the Darkwalk, the path which leads from the main part of the city to Closeguard Island.

To the north of the path is the ruined remains of the original city of Ilusk, now just overgrown rubble. However, it is reputedly haunted by undead. When the Brotherhood made their return they made a point of destroying many of the undead in this area, however strange lights are still seen at night amongst the fallen towers and collapsed temples.

To the south of the path is a cleared area which is used as a burial ground for the more wealthy of the area.

15. Market

Market stalls here are under permit, and sell only local produce and essentials. A good place to get some dried fish for the road.

16. High Captain Taerl's Fortress

Home to High Captain Throa Taerl, this small keep is always bustling with people and livestock. The home of Ship Taerl is more akin to a communal village hall than a lord's manor house, and Throa is proud of her clan's close kinship.

17. High Captain Suljack's Lodge

Dagmaer Suljack is responsible for the lion's share of the piracy and raids amongst the Luskan Ships. She is as canny as she is cruel, and the lodge where she lives has shelves of maps she uses to plan her raids. She is more discerning about who lives and works in her lodge.

Living in the same compound as Ship Taerl, Dagmaer works closely with Ship Taerl, often passing work out to Suljack for a commission.

18. Rat Alley

The worst slum of one of the worst cities in Faerun. A gang of street urchins operate out of the Alley, pickpocketing merchants and running scams on visitors. Even walking through this area can be risky, staying here is only for the desperate.

A number of pirates from Dragon Beach often find lodgings here.

19. The Piers, Dragon Beach

Probably one of the most lawless and dangerous places on Faerun, it is a harbour for pirates and privateers. All manner of ships can be found here. It is also the docks for many of the seagoing vessels of the Luskan Ships.

In wartime, these vessels join the Luskan navy in fighting off any threat, but the rest of the time they are simply pirate ships put in to harbour.

20. The Cutlass

A tavern called the Cutlass has been around in this area for over a hundred years now, and has been rebuilt, and even moved building along Half Moon Street from time to time.

It is quite plainly a tavern for pirates and caters to their pleasures. Expect plenty of ale, rum, fights, deals being struck and differences being settled.

Truth is, the Cutlass can be quiet for long periods. It really depends on which ships are in harbour at the time. If rival ships are in port, then expect blood on the streets. The no weapons policy which has been half-heartedly enforced in the tavern from time to time has simply meant bodies on the streets instead.

But if calmer heads are in evidence, then the Cutlass can be quiet.

21. Temple of Red Sails

Not far from the Cutlass along Half Moon Street is the temple of Umberlee. It is renowned for its curtains and tapestries inside made from the sails of ships, some of them made by the pirates who frequent Luskan, while out on their journeys.

Mosaics of kraken, and sea storms adorn the walls and a black altar adorned with the latest offerings, often a tithe of booty gained at sea, but also often the heads of enemies.

This bloody place of worship is watched over by Adrazzavas, a scar-faced Calim **priest** of Umberlee. He is the latest caretaker of this temple over the years, and can be seen about town in his black robes. He has clearly spent his life at sea and rumour has it much of that was as a pirate.

22. Ten Oaks

The Home of High Captain Hartouchen Rethnor, a huge stone house enclosing the namesake ten oaks, although nearly half of them have since died as the fortunes of Ship Rethnor have steadily declined.

The aging Amnian captain clings on to his heritage with grim determination, but it is clearly time for younger blood, and Pespleth Rethnor is close to taking over.

Instead of continuing to pay for magic to keep the oaks alive, Hartouchen has instead had the property modified to admit sunlight and rain.

He may have saved the remaining oaks, but it is likely too late to save his captaincy.

23. Hall of Warriors

The Luskan temple of Tempus has been somewhat misunderstood by previous High Captains, with enforced worship causing its own problems. More recently, Beniago Kurth has staged various fights in the courtyard of the temple between the various Ships. Initially this was greeted with lukewarm feelings, but by staging competitions between the Ships such as wrestling, cloak and dagger, fencing and bareknuckle prize fights, with purses of gold provided by the High Captains for the winner, it has created something of a sporting atmosphere around the temple, and allowed many of the toughs to let off steam and settle differences.

The only problem has been the gambling taking place on the events, and then accusations of throwing fights has started to become a dark business.

However, the **priest** Racin, a raven-haired Illuskan swordsman has continued to sing the praises of the fighting competitions, especially since generous donations go to the temple for hosting the fights.

24. Captain's Court

Where the High Captains hold court. As previously mentioned, these ruthless individuals are a long way from lords, and pirate politics and favour often determine who is given certain privileges.

In truth, much of the debate here is settled long before a court session is ever held, with the High Captains and their proxies greasing palms, and agreeing bribes and payoffs. Anyone disrupting this system is likely to end up dead in Rat Alley.

25. Twin Teeth

Two tall towers, lined with numerous arrow slits and murder holes. The heads of those who have fallen out of favour with the city are adorned above the gates.

26. Baram's Palace

The abode of High Captain Barri Baram. His lavish walled manor house is paid for by his fleet of fishing vessels, providing an important food supply for the city. He was once an explorer and mountaineer, before signing on as crew with Ship Baram. Although his exploits are still sang of, he has since gone to seed in his life of luxury.

Although still popular with the crews of Ship Baram, he is clearly not the man he once was.

27. The Coach

After the Seven Sails inn lost its prominence decades ago, two other inns took its place, the Goodfellow and the Coach. Corbeldan, the one-eyed elven pirate, lean and mean as any northman, set his eyes on the Coach being the only inn in town, and gradually he wore down the opposition, harrassing customers in the Goodfellow, starting bar brawls, introducing rats into the parlour and other low down dirty tricks. But it worked.

Now Corbeldan runs a tight ship, and is beginning to reap the benefits of being the only inn in town (able to support a Comfortable lifestyle). Although he still suffers the prejudice of being an elf, he is respected, and makes sure tribute is sent to the High Captains for their continued favour.

28. The Needle

Large water tower on Setting Sun Street.

29. Winter Palace

A local landmark, with high white spires, this is the ancient Temple of Auril, the Frostmaiden. The northmen who worship her show their dedication by running between pillars, Auril's "kisses", in the freezing cold wearing clothes packed with ice. This even in the winter.

It is one of the few places in Faerun where she is worshipped, and if sacrifices fall off it only takes a particularly harsh winter to bring back her devoted.

Her priesthood here is lead by Adbrent the **acolyte** and Solgardt the **bard**. Adbrent was previously a ranger out in the Spine of the World,

and came to worship Auril out of respect for her domain, and often leads the “wet parades” through the streets, showing his devotion.

30. Baliver's House of Horses

Catching the North Gate trade this large enclosure is suited to hosting entire caravans. It holds stables and supplies for the horses and secure parking area for the wagons. It also has a modest inn with soup and bread for the wagoneers (able to support a Poor lifestyle).

Owned and run by Toranu, a retired **knight** out of Neverwinter. He takes in urchins and other desperate souls as workers, and tests them for honesty in the first week. If they pass they stay.

The Factions

There are a few factions within the city, but they all work fairly closely. Although there is still plenty of competition between them, they are more similar to family members than strangers.

Arcane Brotherhood

Although they have publicly stated their intent to stay out of city politics, the idea that the wishes of a powerful and ruthless cabal of wizards in the centre of the city could be ignored is clearly nonsense.

According to the SCAG, the Brotherhood is currently lead by Cashaan the Red, Archmage Arcane. The four Overwizards are:

- Zelenn the White, Overwizard of the West
- Jendrick the Blue, Overwizard of the South
- Teyva the Grey, Overwizard of the East
- Druette the Raven, Overwizard of the North

The Brotherhood once again supports the current power structure, and the various wizards join the city guard for guard duty.

As might be expected, Ship Kurth keeps the Archmage up to date with developments within the city.

Ship Kurth

An extension of Jarlaxle's Bregan D'aerthe, they run the city's docks, including the warehouses. As might be imagined in a trading port city, whoever controls this aspect of the city has the greatest income, and the greatest say over how the city is run.

The ability to refuse harbour to any ship means the ability to choke off the shipping income to any captain at will. This can even cause pirate ships to have pause for thought. If they cause too much trouble while in port, it is a safe bet that they won't be welcome next time around. But this is a delicate path to walk, who wants to make enemies of pirate captains, when your chief income is from shipping?

Other Ships

The nature of the other High Captains and their business has been amply covered in the sections detailing their abodes.

It likely needs to be re-emphasised that the relationships between the Ships is a political game of handshakes and bribes, erupting into brief flurries of betrayal and murder. Much of the violence between Ships, and between factions within each Ship, happens at sea where no evidence is left behind.

Plot Hooks

If the party are doing more than simply passing through, the DM may wish to extend the adventures available in the city. Listed below are a number of possible scenarios which can be fleshed out.

Spying for Ship Kurth

Ships Suljack and Taerl have taken up swords against each other, and Beniago Kurth cannot contain them. The dispute is over the spoils of a recent raid on a galley carrying various treasure, with Taerl claiming there was a large chest of gold on board which one of their members witnessed, which Suljack is now denying. The dispute is now costing lives and the other Ships and some pirate vessels are beginning to line up with either side.

Beniago wants the party to get to the bottom of it and resolve the dispute and will pay well.

Spying and asking around are the only ways to uncover the truth of it. A treacherous member of Ship Suljack, Redbeard Jakes, managed to hide the chest using illusions and took it for himself, and even now is trying to smuggle it out of the city so he can disguise it as income from a deal elsewhere.

This won't be an easy task as outsiders are never trusted in Luskan in any case, and in this case they are likely to be lured to a meet and killed. Especially if Redbeard gets to hear about their enquiries.

The DM will need to create NPCs for both Ships, how they relate, who is in on the deal, and what actually happened during the raid. Then the party will need to investigate very carefully at the Cutlass and with both Ships, as everyone will have their theories, some correct, some red herrings.

When someone they've spoken to turns up dead, does that mean that they were on to the truth, or just another casualty in the feud? And will the party get blamed for the death?

Caravan Raiders

Approached by members of the Mirabar Shield, they outline how caravans along the Blackford Road to Mirabar are being attacked, and they are willing to offer a bounty to stop the attacks.

This is a more straightforward adventure, and can be as simple as clearing out a goblin lair.

However, it could be slightly more involved at the DM's discretion. Eg. It could be that an owlbear (or something more to the party's power level) has taken up residence somewhere near the road and she has young to protect, and the caravans are seen as a threat. The party may discover the truth and be able to suggest that the caravans simply divert around the lair until the young are grown up.

Maybe only caravans hauling timber from Lurkwood are being attacked, and it is actually a **druid** who is arranging the attacks to try to stop the logging of the forest.

A simple premise can often hide a twisted tale.

Long Lost Spellbook

Kadropodrolinus, a young wizard approaches the party from outside the city. He has information from an old journal about a member of the Arcane

Brotherhood who lived in the Sea Tower, from the time before the current Brotherhood's tenure.

A powerful spellbook belonging to a long dead Brother lies hidden in the Sea Tower, and Kadropodrolinus is interested in obtaining it. If the Brotherhood discovers its existence they would either claim it for themselves or charge a high fee for its release, neither of which Kadropodrolinus relishes. Instead, he would rather offer the party a generous reward to obtain it for him.

How they go about this is up to them.

They could do this by deception, such as arranging a meeting with one of the wizards who lives in the Sea Tower, or obtain the services of a spy such as a servant who works there, to try to help them reach the hidden book.

Or they could treat it as a stealth mission, stealing onto the island and sneaking into the Sea Tower, but risking deadly combat if caught and henceforth being hunted by the Brotherhood, a distasteful possibility.

The DM would need to create the tower as a living environment, detailing the maps for it, which wizards live there and when, and who else goes to and from the island, such as servants or visitors such as paramours.

Then there would be the approach, either by deception past the bridges and guards or by stealth across the harbour.

Discovery would invite disaster either way.

And it may be that Kadropodrolinus is not telling them everything about the spellbook. Maybe it specialises in the summoning and binding of demons. Is it safe for this book to be in his hands?