

City Description:

Avaloft is a small, temperate country made up of 10 divided counties: Neerchimbach Skerry, Norswell and Yeisfair are the northernmost; Maywrex and Oustrin on the east and west coasts; Surswell and the duelling Bays of Urdis and Aedeen control the southern coast; the tiny Isle of Doggit off the tip of the Bay of Urdis; and finally Balleborough, the only landlocked county in the centre of the country. The government of Avaloft underwent a political schism years ago over freshwater transport to the inland regions, and though this has since been settled, the divide remains and the 10 counties of Avaloft act very much as nation states.

Balleborough is a county of whalers. Whales, unlike the seaside cetaceans we're used to, are colossal ephemera that appear in the sky and drift over the city silently and unannounced. Mature whales coming in from the south seas spawn in the desert dunes in the Bay of Aedeen and southern Maywrex, but are born incorporeal. As they skygrate toward Balleborough they put on mass very quickly and, by some as yet unknown means, their crossing through the natural gas fields into Balleborough affords them corporeality. If not successfully hunted by one of the many Balleborough City whaling vessels, they turn south for the Bay of Urdis and finally back out to sea, after which their life history up to maturation is unknown. Their bones are a structural boon, and their meat, fat, and spermaceti are major exports of Balleborough. Hunttable whales are seemingly endemic to only Balleborough (and to a degree, the Bay of Urdis, although they frequently fly much too high to harpoon), and as a result competitor ships occasionally sail through the sky over the borders in an attempt to steal the bounty.

Guilds:

There are a few eclectic guilds in Balleborough City, made up of two groups: The Face Guilds and the Backalley Guilds.

The Face Guilds:

The Whaling Guild (Whaling), The Black Kettle Club (Mudskipper Breeders), The Ferryman's Guild (Gondoliers), the Guild of Kinectricians (Powering the city), The Guards' Guild (Guarding the City), Guild of the Medics, Apiarists and Sericulturists (Medicine and bee and moth breeding), Vichyssoimelliers' Guild (Keeping the Stock Market in check). (TBC)

The Backalley Guilds:

The Decent Regency and Aristocracy Guild (Performers), The Premonitory Press (Press), The Piracy Guild (Thieves, monarchy abolitionists, and bootleggers), the Guild of Noses (Perfumer). (TBC)

Races in the City:

Humans: Common, capable of and involved in all manner of work.

Orcs: Common, capable of and involved in all manner of work, particularly favoured in areas of construction, shipping and whaling.

Elves: Somewhat less commonplace than humans and orcs, tend to come in from neighbouring regions. Meteorological divination, as well as magical and alchemical research (Noseship) is common.

Dwarves: Similarly common as elves, very much relegated to Kintecricianship and associated smithing. Some female dwarves are partial to Ferrymanship, as well as maintenance on whaling ships.

Warforged: Rare, as a decade ago there were none, but their development by the Kinectricians led to something of a boom in the last decade. Clockwork powered and capable of recharge on the rotation pylons. Involved in all kind of work.

Gnomes, halflings, tieflings and other more exotic races are not unheard of in the capital, though few if not none set up homes - instead travelling in for tourism or trade.

The Whaling Guild is the primary driver of Balleborough's economy: providing whalefall by hunting pods as they float away from the city and harpooning and netting a whale which is then suspended between a pair of flying ships. The catch is brought back to Balleborough and taken to a processing hangar, where the whale is cleaned and butchered. The waste viscera, and there is much of it, flows out of the hangars into the canals that run through the city (though, for decency's sake, this is reserved for rainy days). Much of the meat, fat, oils, bones and teeth are used and sold within the city. However, as Balleborough is the only county that sees corporeal whale visits, surplus products can be sold at high markup to neighbouring counties, owing to Balleborough's rapid economic expansion.

The Black Kettle Club is made up of the city's elite, skipper breeding population, who participate in mudskipper shows, fairs, races and competitions (exclusively during torrential rains for obvious reasons). The recently defaced statue in the city plaza is that of Hatchling Cough (pronounced "Koh"), the mudskipper who, when his owner died in the town hall, waited outside until he himself died. This was, unsurprisingly, not a long wait for a large breed mudskipper - perishing around 2 hours after his owner from dehydration.

The Ferryman's Guild is somewhat of a misnomer, as it contains not a single man. To traverse the many canals that cut through the city to bring fresh water to the whale processors and take the grime out to sea, the Ferrymen can take you across the water, up or down stream or street, for always no more and no less than two gold pieces, regardless of journey length or party size - although tips are welcome. When one becomes a ferryman, either through extensive training or lineage, they lose their surname and any titles, being known as only "Sharon". It is, therefore, extremely difficult to ask a Ferryman on a date - asking around for Sharon will get you nowhere. In recent years, the Ferrymen have participated in regular strikes - particularly on days when the visceral tide is high after whalefall - as poor pay and working conditions come to a head with the haughtiness of the BKC who frequent their service.

The Guild of Kinectricians are, simply put, an odd bunch, and nobody quite understands their craft, nor how their creations function. Within the last few decades, the 3 major geysers in Balleborough - Bertie, Bosh, and Old Faceful in the town hall - began venting far more frequently, with Old Faceful venting almost each hour. Not only did this seem to coincide with a boom in whale numbers, but it was noted

that the geysers could now support an almost uninterrupted mote of strong blue-green flame. A band of people wondered if they might harness this eruptive power and somehow, through some means, turn it into a different kind of power. Huge chimineas were erected standing over the geysers with complex brass flutes directing flame toward boiling crucibles and steaming canisters - resulting in the continuous rotation of an enormous wheel mounted on the side of each smokestack. These, in addition to encouraging the flow of the visceral canals, drive other wheels, driving the rotation of long metal bars that crisscross around under the city and up into various establishments. By attaching magical crystals to rotational pylons, townsfolk can create sustained light and remove the need for lamp lighting or oil. Luckily for the whaleoil merchants, gears and cogs need even more grease than the lamps ever did.

The beat in Balleborough belong to the Guards' Guild: one of the few guilds that, to an outsider, seem consistently unable to effectively conduct their work. This is not to say that they are lazy – though, when the shoe fits... - but that most crime never actually happens in the city, per se. Petty theft, the odd civilian stabbing, sure – but why on earth should a hardened criminal wish to launder money or push Morpheum above ground? For this reason, the city struck a bargain with the anonymous masses: keep nefarious dealings below the streets and not in them, that way everyone wins. Once the ripples emanating from the act are felt on the surface, though, the Guards' Guild are duty-bound to tackle the problem, no matter the altitude.

When one who is wounded, poisoned, close-to-death, or all of the above and-then-some finds themselves in Balleborough City, they can expect only the best care at the behest of the Guild of Medics, Apiarists and Sericulturists. This eclectic group of entomologists pride themselves on the usage of natural, but effective, therapies to cure all ailments and maladies. The Gas Field Honeybee (*Apis ballebriensis*) produces a slightly heady honey, abundant in natural opioids and useful for putting patients under during surgery. And, when it comes to gauze and suture thread, the elusive Hot-Host Silkmoth (*Bombyx exigua*) is raised for its naturally sterile, rather large cocoons. This silkmoth is interesting for its similarity to honeybees in terms of hierarchy, though the queens can reign for centuries. However, queen larvae can only mature in the saline environment behind humanoid eyes – and thus, we discuss your payment...

The Stock Market never sleeps. Day and night, ticker tapes flow with rising and falling charts: MASDAQ, Madame Soupçon's Ale and Quail bisque, is up 8.2%! However, there are two sides to Stock Trading: investment and sale of product. A while after its creation, certain unscrupulous traders with a little money to burn realised they could trade next-to-anything, have a man on the inside invest everything he had, and the flock would follow suit. Keep the cash, escape to the Isle of Doggit or somewhere else and relax with your millions! For this reason, the Vichyssoimelliers' Guild was formed: experts in soups, consommés and stews come round periodically and unannounced, judge the fare on offer, and any "juggers" (term for one who creates false stock by collecting canal runoff) are weeded from the assembled collective, whilst also giving an indication which Stocks are worth investing in. A Vichyssoimellier is almost always of a sorcerous background, capable of sustaining "The Quintet": 5 instances of Mage Hand used to silently rate each Stock on each key flavour profile (whale, fat, salt, grease, and overall liquidity). Although it seems highly specific, the Vichyssoimelliers' Guild is also an umbrella collective for the many areas of commerce in Balleborough City, as frequently large businesses invest a percentage of their profits into the Stock Market as liquid assets (ha ha).

The Backalley Guilds:

The Decent Regency and Aristocracy Guild, like the Ferryman, is a misnomer, as there is no such thing. DRAG are playwrights, performers and self-expressionists, often conducting elaborate theatrical performances and burlesque shows poking fun at the upper crust and the feuding royal families in the Bays of Urdis and Aereen. One who forms an alliance with (or better yet, becomes a member of) DRAG is sure to always have a Disguise Kit to hand should they need it. Many of the town's guards are wise to the DRAG's tricks, as some of even the non-magical performers possess the ability to... Disguise themselves, if you get the drift. As such, access to restricted regions in Balleborough often involves a harsh pat down, and the incorporeal hat is a dead giveaway. Many of the city's Ferryman are also DRAG members, truly lending credence to the name.

The Premonitory Press are responsible for writing the Balleborough Times, the daily newspaper. This may sound innocuous enough, but before its official formation, the only people with the capacity to hold a quill and replicate so many copies of the same writings were the Wizards, Warlocks and others magically-inclined. Of all the creeds in the city, you could not pick a more hermetic and insular bunch than the city Press – it is for this reason that it has taken its place amongst the Backalley Guilds: the papers are frequently so incorrect in their predictions and sorcerous forecasts that they in fact predict the near-perfect polar opposite of each of the days goings-on. It is for this reason that knowing your antonyms is important while reading the day's paper.

The only Guild born outside of Balleborough, the Piracy Guild have three main objectives: legal thievery (whereby “legal” means “doing it so quick and under cover of night with heavy armaments so as to not be caught or challenged”), the abolition of the remaining monarchies of Avaloft (“remaining” referring to those in the duelling Bays of Urdis and Aedeon), and having a bloody good time whilst doing so (“being drunk pretty much of the time”). The Piracy Guild have many superstitions, particularly about what lies in the heavens and beyond, how to maintain a good ship and, of particular note, a lot of things about birds. Vultures are revered, seen as akin to the physical embodiment of a god, whilst albatrosses are the antithesis, seen as a kind of totemic omen of a voyage doomed to failure. Many Pirates take it as a personal offence when cityfolk refer to the Stone-bellied Gull (*Chroicocephalus aculus*) – the only known waterfowl to stay far from coastlines, due to its crippling thalassophobia – as a “seagull”, and place this misclassification alongside the foulest curse words imaginable. Pirates operate in secrecy in the city, often planning attacks on the battlements in the Bays or preparing for heists on, frequently, the Royal Aedeon wine cellars, which extend across several postcodes.

The Guild of Noses take in the otherwise disposed-of ambergris from the Whale processors and generate dense and heavy fragrances and perfumes. Situated in the north-western quarter of the city, it was never necessarily frowned upon to be a Nose, but the reputation of their neighbours led to them being associated with ill-repute. The alchemical results of the Noses luckily coincide with the high viscera tide from whale processing, and so the town is often coated in a dense fog of balsam or orange blossom as grime is flushed through the streets. Perhaps it is worth mentioning how compliant and suggestible one feels on the morning of the visceral flow, as the sumptuous smells coat the air? Ah, it's probably not worth worrying about.

Act One – The Morpheum Circuit:

It is the autumnal equinox, and following the desecration of the statue of Hatchy Cough the city is on a razor's edge. The Black Kettle Club is out for blood, thinking it to be another of the DRAGs assaults on their status. Bertie and Bosh have begun to match the output of Old Faceful, and as a result many more ship hull bladders can be filled – increasing whale catch, as well as ushering forth a new era with Balleborough City as a tourist hotspot. The Kinectricians have been working overtime on the deployment of their new invention to try to clean the River Darlen, the scrubbers: shoals of mechanised clay fish containing tiny Prestidigitation scrolls, which the Press Guild have been feverishly writing to keep up with demand. Increases in whaling has led to the visceral canals being in a permanent red tide for the past 9 days, and the Noses have been outputting a new fragrance every day. Several of the Ferryman have been declared missing persons, with three Sharons listed this week alone on the board at city hall: dwarven, red beard, 70; human, black hair, 41; dwarven, clean shaven, 64. The party responsible for the three accompanying drawings of a Calico cat, a mechanised horse, and a silvered beer mug with the inscription "Beste Friende" is, of course, the Press Guild."

Day 1:

Our adventurers meet in the city square to take in this recitation of the mayor's speech, and to be assigned group work queued in front of one of the town guards (and perhaps a few caught unawares that this is what they've accidentally done). Group VII, City Guard Bechamel says, is to look for the final entry on the missing persons list, noting that the City Guard tried to pry some information from Sharon's sister, Julianne Avariss, but she was most uncooperative. Perhaps Group VII, as civilians, maybe be able to get some information from her as to her sister's whereabouts?

<Players may ask around for Julianne Avariss/go direct to tavern.>

Julianne is a younger, rather thin dwarf, with only a small amount of well-sculpted stubble growing in. She wears leather armour with larger-than-usual gaps at the jointed regions which are filled in with black cloth. Additionally, she exhibits a subdued, white lace ruff around her neck. Players who roll for history on this will know it to be the token piece of apparel for DRAG members. Upon persuading, intimidating, or buying Julianne a drink, she will reveal that she believes her sister may have been involved in Morpheum, though she doesn't know why. Players who roll for medicine on this will know that Morpheum is an illegal drug that allows users to shapechange for extended periods, with prolonged use irreversibly damaging the user and causing them to become a were-animal. However, on rare occasions, usage leads to the user becoming a malformed, bloody creature known as an Amalgam (for battle purposes it's a Gibbering Moulder with speed = 40ft) that is known to stalk sewers and caves. If asked where she thinks Sharon is, Julianne does not know, but suggests following the Morpheum trail. If pressed about its origin, whereabouts, or what she does/where she works, she will mention that some of the actors take Morpheum for shows under very strict instruction not to overdo it and take frequent rest away from the stuff. The DRAG is where the players must go next in order to locate the next lead.

The players may know where the DRAG is already through a history check and compatible background or ask the concierge (Rodney) at the hotel. Outside the DRAG, posters coat the walls, advertising this evening's production of "A Dramatic Re-enactment of the Tragic Tale of Hatchy Cough", a play taken from the back-catalogue in an attempt to repair relations with The Black Kettle Club. In the DRAG, the group will see members preparing for the 11 o'clock number: an operatic piece in which a 3-person,

pantomime-horse-style costume of a glittering mudskipper is writhing around on the floor, as a singer dressed as the sun casts a spotlight onto the dying fish. The piece fades out as the players enter, and as the spotlight fades, a dove flies down the aisle toward the stage and rests on a perch. The man dressed as the sun is called Sunny, but has a heavy cough from smoking and a melancholic disposition. The three women in the fish costume are Esmerelda, Caroline and Gwyneth. When any of them are asked about Morpheum, they will invite the players to “ask Marv”: the dove. An insight check on the dove will reveal that it breathes heavily, as though it is human. When asked about Morpheum, the dove will flutter down from the perch and walk slowly across the stage and behind the curtain, which the players should follow. They will see the bird flutter over a changing curtain, and Marv will ask them to wait whilst he dresses. There is a large bag of seeds on the dressing table. Marv will come out from behind the curtain, a very short and round man in a waistcoat that looks far too tight. He will explain that he uses Morpheum for only this show, which is held once a year in Hatchy Cough’s honour, and whilst he has no ill-effects, he has an unshakeable craving for birdseed, which he informs the players is quite fattening. When questioned on the origin of his Morpheum, he will explain that the theatre gets several vials in every year, but he doesn’t know the exact source – though he will lead the players to the storeroom where the vials are kept and check the expenses folder. A sleight of hand check >14 will net the player a free vial of Morpheum, but after this (win or lose) Marv will turn to face the players and explain that it comes from the whale processing hangar #2, which is now bolted up for the evening but open most days during sunlight hours.

Leaving the theatre, the players see a crowd forming outside the stage door the way they have come, forcing them to go the other way further up the alley and round the long way. As they turn through the Backalleys, they see very few people about as it is much later and many people are waiting for the show.

Encounter – Amalgam:

A manhole cover turns ever so slightly in the alley (passive perception > 11) and either upon inspection or player fleeing, bursts open to unleash an Amalgam upon the players. **Fight.** Loot: As the creature flows outwards like bread dough, 15 gp can be found caught up in the sinews, as well as a single Walloping Sling Bullet caught in one of its bones, a memento of a previous battle.

At this point, the theatre performance is in full swing (10:30 ish) and the queue to enter is gone – players may wish to enter to witness the performance, gaining an inspiration point, and/or head straight back to the Parallel Elephants Hotel.

“A Dramatic Re-enactment of the Tragic Tale of Hatchy Cough”:

The players hang back from the aisles and seating in the loggia by the main entrance. The 11 o’clock number plays, and an extract may be told:

Hatchy Cough: “In the heat, my skin is drying,

And in the sky the seagulls flying,

Circle round my parched complexion,

A dive in morbid insurrection.

I am not dead yet, so I say,

But gulls, from fish, will not away,
A beak and gill make strong connection,
This fated path, not misdirection.
But where oh where could master be?
As I wait here on stone-tiled sea,
This surely is some Lord's decree,
Just oh so sad it must be me."

The pantomime fish crumples down to the floor, and with the silent hush of a trapdoor closing behind the performers, a cable pulls the fabric off the floor, whipping it up into the faux sky. The audience burst into applause as the sun steps down from the raised podium onto the stage. The odd piece of fruit or balled up shawl is thrown at this character, but they seem unfazed as though this happens every year. Sunny flies down the aisle and onto his perch as practiced.

Back at the Parallel Elephants:

The Parallel Elephants is a large, old building with a hanging wooden sign out front. The sign bears a pale blue elephant carrying a howdah on its back, standing in a shallow puddle with a reflection of the same underneath. Inside, some of the players may already have rooms, in which case these will be adjoining and the management will make arrangements to unbolt them. It's rather dim inside, with a large open plan atrium on the ground floor with a circular open kitchen/bar to the far wing, and raised balconies around the perimeter on the second floor joining 18 rooms. The concierge, Timothy Madris, is a human in his late 40s with cropped hair and cheap but smart clothing. He is a nervous character, but happy to help players with any info they need. He is relatively scared of life outside the hotel, and as such, has little to no information about Morpheum. He also believes almost everything he reads in the papers, which doesn't help his disposition.

3 female Dwarvern Kinectricians (Retul, Motus and Meck) are staying in a room, having travelled from the Bay of Aedeen for a few days to help repair part of the rotational matrix under the town square that links the geysers, which is almost always under the most stress. The Bay of Aedeen, they will tell the players who enquire, gets on well with Balleborough, who sell the Aedeen much of the output of the natural gas vents downhill of Balleborough City, which they are returning with as payment to expand a floating pier off the southern coast of their hometown.

Also of note in the bar, is a very young elf with skin rendered almost featureless through a combination of serums and makeup. Their clothing is a full length robe that flows into a headdress, pushed back over the hairline so they might enjoy their drink, but when allowed to drape over the face, has a small slit so as to only render the nose visible, which will be demonstrated in a show of modesty should the players approach them. They will reveal that they are drinking, but not staying here, in residence in one of the Nasal Schools at the Nose. They do not drink in the tavern, as it is much too grimy and the smells are an assault to their refined palate. If asked about the Noses, they will remain unwaveringly adamant that even City outsiders are well aware of them: it is simply not possible to not know about the Noses.

The barman will call last orders at midnight, and the staff will recommend heading to bed if they wish not to encounter any more Amalgams, as they tend to prowl at night when the red tide is high. The rooms are lined with dark green, shiny tiling in the upper 2/3rds and almost black wood lining on the lower 1/3rd of the walls. On these walls, frosted glass lighting shaped like shells cover gently whirring crystals that slowly rotate and give off a soft, blue-green light, making the room feel fresh and almost spa-like. Diffusers filled with a Nose-brand essential oil coat the night-time air with seagrass and camphor make sleeping seem very inviting. The bedding, some players may know, is sourced from amongst the finest clothiers in Lower Balleborough: the Double Alpaca Company. This company raises herds of low-altitude alpacas below the cliffs, and clockwork alpacas just outside the city higher up – the wool is shorn, taken, and then fed to the clockwork alpacas, who process it in their body cavity and their internal workings utilise the stored elastic energy in the disordered wool, knitting order into the wool and excreting delicately woven blankets: animals like this are known as ‘loominants’. Players are free to spend their evening how they wish.

Players awake at 6:30 to a small bell ringing by the door, and the lights fading on as they come to rotate again. Timothy will ask if he is permitted to enter, and come in with two platters: the first holding the day’s newspaper as is standard, and the second with a jug of water, a pot of tea, and the breakfast menu. He will set these down on the central table, and before he leaves, will inform the players that the mayor has paid for a week’s stay, and (permitted they were spoken to and got on well), as their day’s act of goodwill to Chauntea, the group of three dwarven ladies paid for an extra night’s stay bringing their total to 8 days. He will also mention that the Premonitory Press predict sunshine this afternoon, so it is worth taking an umbrella. Also, he will conclude, today’s scent is lemongrass and tea tree, courtesy of The Nose.

As Tim leaves and the players wake up, they hear a gentle chiming coming from a crystal on the bedside table closest to the door as it gently revolves in its cradle. When inspected (History/Investigation) it will be revealed to be a rototelecomnigramophone: the latest in automated Message magic technology – a bluish crystal grown around a metal pellet that contains an absolutely miniscule Scroll of Message.

Upon the players’ touch, the crystal will hover just above its cradle and read: “This is an automated message from: FRONT DESK, stop. We hope you are having a pleasant morning, stop. When you are ready to order breakfast, please use the rototelecomnigramophone to do so, by tapping, saying “KITCHEN” and then recounting your order, finishing by saying “STOP”, stop. To connect to other rooms, or dial outside services, say “SWITCHBOARD” where an operator will happily direct your call, stop. We are also delighted to inform you that a “handsfree approach” is now possible, whereby you may activate your device by simply saying “OK rototelecomnigramophone” aloud, stop. To hear this message again, just say “MANUAL”, stop. Message ends.” After this message, the gem will cease rotating and drop back into the cradle with a heavy clunk.

Breakfast will be brought up by Tim a few moments after the group submit their order, and will be accurate with some slight inaccuracies if anything particularly weird was requested.

Day 2:

The players’ main goal today is to locate processing hangar #2. Of additional interest is that the Vichyssoimelliers’ Guild is at the Stock market today, so the central market region of town is bustling.