

# Masterwork Maps: The Skull & Dagger Tavern

## 25mm Floor Plans

I arrived in the coastal city of Visira in the second week of spring. My timing was intentional, for while the “city of sorrows” is unpleasant at best, summers are nearly incapacitating for those unaccustomed to the sweltering heat and humidity. A revolting stench of refuse, blood, and sweat permeates the city. The vile clergy of the God of Disease and Famine are the spiritual - if not absolute - rulers here, and I am certain that they revel in this sickening display of their deity’s influence.

Music and ruckus of taverns along the docks tempted me, but I remained focused and passed through the gate known as Gallows Arch. Leaving the busy waterfront behind, I entered the ward of Huckster Sprawl and made my way through the noisy throng of street hawkers. The wide processional of Slaves’ March cuts through the northeast corner of the Sprawl, stretching from Gallows’ Arch to Bone Gate, which opens into the ward known as Arena’s Hold. The bones mortared into the gate walls were silent testament to the origin of its name, and it was this landmark that heralded my first destination in Visira: The Skull and Dagger Tavern.

The Skull and Dagger is a two-story building constructed, as is the case with most of its neighbors, of baked adobe clay brick. A copper sign hangs above its stout wooden door and displays the painting of a skull pierced by a dagger. Though old, the tavern’s walls were apparently thickened when the second story was added, and it appears more structurally sound than many of the adjacent buildings. While its proximity to Bone Gate is a prime location, the tavern has poor business. I had previously heard that a repulsive smell rather like rotten eggs saturates the building, and that the owner simply does not care. The Skull and Dagger caters to a smattering of customers who do not mind the stench, and barely makes enough profit to pay its taxes.

I can attest without overstatement that the acrid stink from within brought tears to my eyes as I pulled opened the tavern door. An old, one-eyed ogre named Pitch sits cross-legged on a pile of filthy furs just inside the door and I believe its presence helps the tavern’s business as much as the smell. A trap door to the cellar is beneath the furs, but is hidden from casual observation. The ogre appears rather docile as it quietly licks honey from a clay pot, but I am certain it would not be easily swayed from its post.

I chose an empty table, the top of which looked

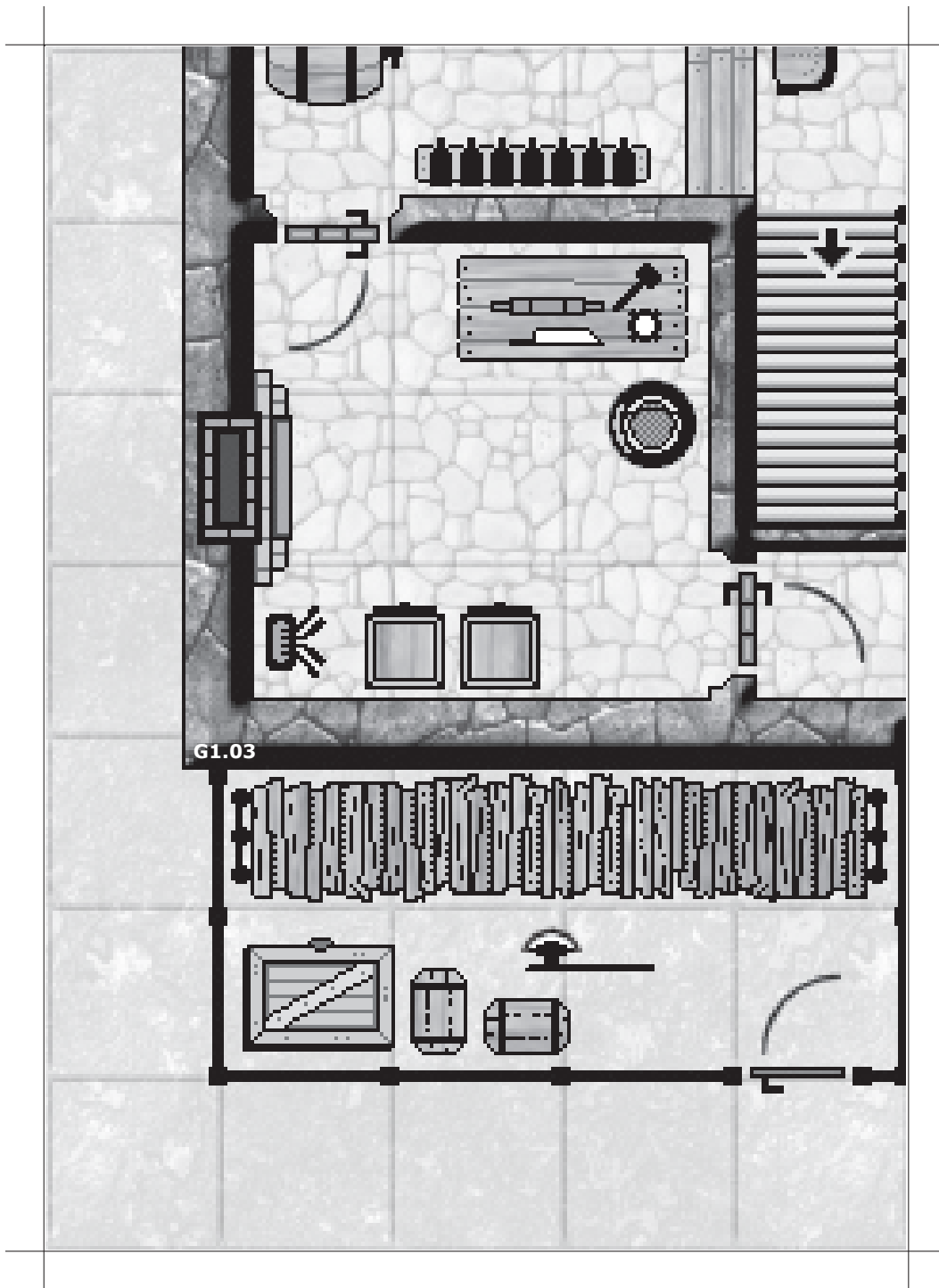
suspiciously like an old crate, and surveyed the tavern interior. Ignoring the formality of my actually requesting a drink, an ugly goblin with a sour disposition presented me with an overpriced leather mug of dark, bitterly strong ale. The creature appeared otherwise harmless and a bit skittish, so I paid the inflated price and shooed the little fellow away. Moments later he returned unbidden with a platter of half-shelled oysters. The peppery red sauce ladled onto the uncooked mussels should have warned me. I shan’t try those again...

The windows spaced about the common room were too small for a man to crawl through - likely a precaution against thievery. They were covered by parchment oiled to translucency with animal fat, but sunlight barely shone through the layer of soot that coated them. The low ceiling was similarly blackened, with thick rafters that would probably graze the ogre’s head if it stood to its full height. A great hearth lay dormant on one wall, and the main source of lighting emanated from human, humanoid, and dwarf skulls - all with daggers thrust through them - that had been fashioned into oil lamps and affixed to wall brackets. While I did not investigate them closely, I suspect they also contain a sulfurous mixture responsible for the hideous odor.

I noted stairs leading upward at the rear of the building. The second story contained several rooms for rent - which I heard were far less smelly than the common room. As the Skull and Dagger offers little in the way of hot food, street hawkers can usually rent the rooms for a few coppers a day.

A tall, muscled man behind the bar matched the description of Frond Arnhild, the owner. A former gladiatorial slave, the back of his shaved head displays an ownership brand and a tattoo mark of freedom encircling it. He is gruff, sullen, and dangerous, and his past and present were my reasons for being here.

Pirates and brigands sell their captives in the city as slaves. Men are usually sold as laborers or arena fodder, while women become house servants or prostitutes. Frond buys a slave every fortnight or so, as food for the ogre. In reality, Frond is a member of a secretive group called the Cabal that works within Visira to help free as many of these slaves as possible. Those who would become Pitch’s meal are instead taken through the cellar and into the old sewer, and hidden until they can be smuggled from the “city of sorrows”.



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