

Sample file



Based on the book *Vaesen* by
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A WICKED SECRET

AND OTHER MYSTERIES

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PREFACE

Mysteries are the heart of *Vaesen*. Brief and focused tales of strange encounters, delicate problems and heart-pounding horror – much like the short stories of Selma Lagerlöf, M.R. James and Edgar Allan Poe. This book contains four Mysteries from across the Mythic North letting the players face four powerful vaesen on their own lands.

In *The Silver of the Sea*, something ugly is stirring in the beautiful archipelago on Sweden's west coast. The player characters will need to travel to the god-forsaken Wrecker Isle to investigate the case of a murdered priest. Once there, they will encounter the feared herring baron and other grim-faced locals, all wary of meddling outsiders.

In *A Wicked Secret*, the player characters travel to the vast forests of the north to investigate strange sights in a remote and isolated village. Once there, they will realize that all is not what it seems and that some people want to continue their way of life the way they have always done, no matter the cost.

The Night Sow is the tale about a weird and murderous creature roaming the southern coastal town of Mölle. While investigating a string of murders and disappearances, the player characters will come to face an old evil summoned to battle the sins of modernity.

Lastly, in *The Song of the Falling Star*, the player characters will travel to Arensburg on the island of Oesel in what today is Estonia. There they will investigate the case of a missing child and discover clues that point to ancient craters and the vaesen that call these places holy.

These four mysteries can be played as one-shots or, with a little work by the Gamemaster, be strung together to form a short campaign on their own. So, go forth and discover these strange tales of vaesen and make them your own!



THE SILVER OF THE SEA

THIS MYSTERY FOR the role-playing game *Vaesen* brings the player characters to the wild and barren Swedish west coast, at the time a haven for privateers, wreckers, herring barons and other riffraff. The mystery will test the characters' deductive reasoning, social skills, and – if they are not careful – their ability to fight for their lives.

PRELUDE

This first section describes the background of the mystery and the conflicts on which it is based. There is an invitation to kick off the session, then the text proceeds to describe the journey to the fishing hamlet Fjällbacka and Wrecker Isle. The section concludes with a countdown of events which you as the Game-

master will initiate at some appropriate time during the mystery – and a catastrophe that describes what happens if the player characters do not take action or fail in their efforts. But first we will look back at the events leading up to the mystery.

BACKGROUND

Life in the Bohuslän archipelago has always been closely linked to the sea and the gifts brought up from its depths. When the herring come in, the islanders live in rich abundance – when the herring inexplicably disappear after a few decades, they descend into dire poverty and hardship.

At the beginning of the century when this game takes place, the herring were absent for many years, and a ter-

rible famine ravaged the islands outside Fjällbacka. Like many other fishermen at the time, spouses Benjamin and Abela Amundsson struggled to put food on the table for themselves and their three sons Paul, Pete, and Pace.

The Amundssons saw no other option than to resort to wrecking. The archipelago is difficult to navigate, with strong currents and treacherous shallows. Full-rigged ships often passed through there on their way to Christiania or Gothenburg. Hard to maneuver with their huge square sails, many were sunk by storms, along with their precious cargo and coffers.

At first the Amundssons only looted abandoned shipwrecks, but when one day the captain of a sunken vessel came floating in on a raft with the ship's cash box on his lap, they beat him to death and stole the money. The murder was never discovered, prompting the Amundssons to grow increasingly callous.

Between wrecking raids, the family continued to fish. One day they caught something strange in their net – a small, human-like creature. Benjamin wanted to throw the toddler back into the sea, but Abela would not let him, insisting that they should take it home with them. And so they did.

The boy from the sea, whom Abela named Zacharias, quickly grew and proved to have a God-given talent for fishing and sailing. As a child Zacharias was brought along as the family plundered shipwrecks, and with him present the raids were always very successful.

Benjamin, a bitter and jealous old man, never cared for the boy and would often beat him. But once Zacharias outgrew his father, he no longer tolerated the abuse. One day when Benjamin was about to administer another beating, the boy hit back. Hard. The fight ended with the father dead on the floor. The family did not mourn the old crank's passing; on the contrary, Abela was happy to be rid of him.

Abela took charge of the family, with Zacharias as her greatest ally. The slow-witted siblings Paul, Pete, and Pace did as they were told. With the father out of the way, Zacharias explained that he could increase the family's wealth, making them rich beyond their wildest dreams. All they had to do was offer a human sacrifice to his true mother – a mermaid – every new

moon. And they did, finding it easy to come across suitable victims thanks to their wrecking and piracy.

The result was immediate and overwhelming – not only for the Amundssons, but for the entire archipelago. The herring returned in unprecedented quantities and marked the beginning of a herring period the likes of which Bohuslän had never seen before.

Abela and Zacharias had great plans for the times ahead. With the money they stole from wrecked and passing ships they bought a decrepit old house on Wrecker Isle which had been used for train oil production during the last herring period. They renovated the place and opened an inn for fishermen and other seafarers that came during the subsequent herring rush.

The inn was an immediate success and Wrecker Isle became a hub for maritime traffic in the region. Some days the sea lane was so clogged with boats and ships that people could walk across them halfway to Fjällbacka. Soon even the passenger boats between Gothenburg and Christiania stopped at the huge, newly built docks of Wrecker Isle.

While Abela was running the inn with an iron fist – allegedly selling more than 20,000 liters of liquor a year – Zacharias dedicated himself to the herring industry. He set up the region's largest fish saltery on Wrecker Isle and had a large warehouse built next to the inn. The stench of the herring saltery spread far and wide, but most did not mind, as long as the liquor and money kept flowing. The Amundsson family had struck it rich, to say the least.

Wrecker Isle attracted all manner of dockside scum and hooligans, and the inn became known for its wild and violent nightlife. This did not sit well with everyone – particularly some members of the local church. Wrecker Isle was a thorn in the side of Vicar Carl Eric Hedqvist on the mainland.

Hedqvist, a disciple of the great evangelist Henric Shartau, visited Wrecker Isle on several occasions to put an end to the debauched lifestyle that characterized the place. His goal was to convert the herring baron, as Zacharias was now called, to an honest and decent life. Each time the vicar was thrown out, as no one on Wrecker Isle cared about what he had to say.

But inside Hedqvist blazed the flames of religious fervor, and he refused to give up.

On a late summer's night, one month before the player characters become involved in this mystery, Vicar Hedqvist once again returned to Wrecker Isle. This time he carried a pistol, wise from previous experiences on the island. He confronted Abela and Zacharias at the inn, accusing them of doing the Devil's bidding. A commotion broke out and shots were fired, resulting in the vicar being thrown out yet again.

But Zacharias had had enough. Drunk on aquavit, he came up with an idea. The next new moon was due in only two days. Originally, his plan had been to sacrifice the young waitress Justina Johansson to the mermaid. Instead, Zacharias decided to kill two birds with one stone – appeasing the mermaid while at the same time getting rid of the insufferable vicar once and for all.

With the plan laid out, Zacharias told Paul, Pete, and Pace to find the priest, who was sulking at the

docks, waiting to catch the boat home at dawn. The brothers overpowered him and dragged him into the herring warehouse, where they tied him up and put him in one of the barrels.

Two days later Zacharias, Abela, and the three brothers loaded the barrel (with the priest still inside) onto their sloop and sailed out to Deep Reef, where all sacrifices to the mermaid take place. But the sloppy brothers had failed to see that the priest still had the pistol tucked into one of his boots. As they opened the barrel, Hedqvist drew his pistol and fired. After hitting Paul in the shoulder, he found himself surrounded with only one shot left. Rather than being sacrificed to the mermaid the priest shot himself in the head.

This was a disaster for Zacharias. The mermaid had to be appeased, but she only accepted living sacrifices. There was not enough time to find a new victim before dawn. He raised an oar at Paul, the oldest and dumbest



of the brothers, and dropped him with a single blow. None of the others dared protest, and so Paul fell victim to the mermaid. They dumped the priest's body into the water as well, before returning home.

The vicar's disappearance caused concern on the mainland, especially from his adept, a young priest named Oscar Uddgren. A week later Hedqvist's corpse washed ashore at Whale Isle, where it was found by a family of sailors and brought to Fjällbacka. Even though the body was badly damaged, the cause of death was identified as a gunshot to the head at point blank range, and the case was written off as a suicide.

Uddgren was not convinced. He suspected that the herring baron on Wrecker Isle was involved, but did not know how to prove it. He needed help. During his studies in Upsala a few years prior, he came into contact with members of the Society and assisted in one of their investigations. Uddgren decided it was time to call in a favor.

CONFLICTS

The primary conflict of this mystery is the one between the young priest Oscar Uddgren and the herring baron Zacharias Amundsson. Uddgren is convinced that the herring baron and his mother are responsible for the death of his mentor, Hedqvist. He wants the player characters to help him expose the herring baron as the Devil's henchman and put a permanent end to his operation. Zacharias and Abela, on the other hand, want to stop Uddgren and the player characters, making sure that nothing disrupts the commerce on Wrecker Isle or the sacrifices to the mermaid.

The secondary conflict is linked to the primary one and also concerns Oscar Uddgren. What he does not tell the player characters is that he has another reason to distrust the Amundssons. His childhood crush Justina Johansson has taken up employment on Wrecker Isle, and Uddgren is convinced that she was brought there against her will and forced to work at the inn. This is not the case, however – life on Wrecker Isle is certainly hard, but Justina makes a decent wage and is there by choice.

INVITATION

This mystery takes place in late summer and starts with the Society receiving a letter at their castle in Upsala. The letter, which is also presented as *Handout 1A* at the end of this book and available for download on Free League's website, reads as follows:

To whom it may concern,

My name is Oscar Uddgren, priest in the fishing village of Fjällbacka. It is with a heavy heart that I write these lines. I am at wits end with my current predicament, and so I turn to you. I met with members of your exalted order during my studies in Upsala a few years ago, and now I place my hope in your particular talents and expertise.

My best friend and mentor, Vicar Carl Eric Hedqvist, is dead. His body was found a week ago, washed up on a beach in the Fjällbacka archipelago. The coroner has identified the cause of death as a self-inflicted gunshot to the head and written it off as a suicide. I refuse to accept this conclusion, certain that there is something unnatural afoot. And I know who is responsible. What I lack is proof and the means to do something about it.

I last saw Carl Eric alive one week before he was found dead. He was once again heading out to Wrecker Isle in the archipelago, to bring the word of God to the depraved seafarers frequenting the inn on the island. Wrecker Isle is a hub for maritime traffic and the site of the largest herring saltery in the archipelago. Some days the sea lane is so clogged with boats and ships that people can walk across them halfway to Fjällbacka. Wrecker Isle reeks with herring and sin, a godless stain on this Earth.

The proprietors of this den of thieves, herring baron Zacharias Amundsson and his mother Abela – whom the locals call “the Godmother” – are openly defying the teachings of our Lord and have thrown out the good vicar every time he visited Wrecker Isle.

I am convinced that the herring baron and the Godmother – along with Zacharias' feeble-minded but dangerous older brothers Paul, Pete, and Pace – are doing the Devil's bidding and are to blame for Carl Eric's untimely death. I shall go to Wrecker Isle to find proof of their guilt and face these henchmen of Satan face-to-face. I require your assistance in this perilous endeavor. If you cherish your God and wish to help His humble servant in his time of greatest need, meet me in Fjällbacka at your earliest convenience.

*With highest regards,
Oscar Uddgren*



OSCAR UDDGREN

"Begone, Satan!"

Like his mentor, Carl Eric Hedqvist, the 25-year old priest Oscar Uddgren is a disciple of the great evangelist Henric Schartau. Schartauism is a conservative and very strict Christian doctrine which, at the time of this story, is widespread in the western parts of Sweden. Uddgren is zealous in his faith and loyal to Vicar Hedqvist, and would do anything to honor and avenge his mentor.

But the young priest harbors other strong feelings as well: a fierce desire for his childhood crush Justina Johansson, whom he has never managed to get over. But Uddgren is ashamed of his romantic feelings and tells himself, as well as others, that he simply wants to save Justina from the grip of the evil herring baron.

Uddgren is a skinny but vigorous young man with short dark hair and a clean-shaven face. He always wears his black cassock.

- ◆ **Physique 4** **Precision 3**
- Logic 3** **Empathy 4**
- ◆ **AGILITY 2** **CLOSE COMBAT 1**
- RANGED COMBAT 1** **VIGILANCE 3**
- OBSERVATION 3** **INSPIRATION 4**
- ◆ **Mental Toughness 2** **Physical Toughness 2**
- ◆ **EQUIPMENT:** Pistol, cassock, crucifix

PREPARATIONS

As usual, the player characters can prepare for the journey at their headquarters and thereby gain an Advantage (see chapter 9 in the core rulebook).

Player characters who go looking for information about Wrecker Isle in Upsala will not find much, as the settlement is remote and recently established. With regards to Fjällbacka, the characters can learn the basic facts – for example that the fishing village was founded roughly 200 years ago and is now a hub for herring fishing on the West Coast. Its ups and downs have always depended on the quantities of herring available – a commodity also known as “the silver of the sea.”

THE JOURNEY

The characters have a long journey ahead of them, first by stagecoach, then by boat through Göta Canal, and another stagecoach afterwards. As usual, the player characters can gain an Advantage during the journey. After several days of arduous travel, they finally reach Fjällbacka, a small fishing village cowering under the huge mountain of Vetteberget. It is summer and the weather is sizzling hot. The new moon is almost here.

On the horizon across the shining sea, the player characters can see the rounded shapes of numerous barren, granite islands, increasingly blue the farther out one looks. Give the player characters some time to take in the scene and maybe ask around the docks. They are immediately greeted by a young man in priestly garb with an austere look on his face, seemingly unbothered by the heat and the noise around him. He introduces himself as Oscar Uddgren and thanks the player characters for coming so quickly.

He leads them onto a hired sloop whose skipper is setting off for Wrecker Isle amid a light summer breeze. The voyage takes about an hour, giving the player characters time to speak some more with Uddgren. In addition to what he mentioned in the letter, the priest can disclose the following:

- ◆ The Amundssons were once a poor fishing family. It is said that they made a living from wrecking.

The father, Benjamin, died under dubious circumstances – some say he was beaten to death by his youngest son, Zacharias.

- ✦ When the herring returned some thirty years ago, “Godmother” Abela bought Wrecker Isle and opened an inn on the island. Business has been booming ever since.
- ✦ Zacharias runs the herring saltery on the island and is commonly known as the herring baron. He is a clever man and quite popular with the ladies – unlike his three older brothers Paul, Pete, and Pace, who are all unsightly and simple-minded.
- ✦ Rumor has it that Paul has gone missing. He has not been seen at the inn for several weeks.
- ✦ Vicar Carl Eric Hedqvist was armed with a revolver during his last trip to Wrecker Isle, having had his life threatened on previous visits.
- ✦ According to the coroner, Hedqvist was killed by a gunshot to the head at point blank range, fired from his own revolver. The weapon has yet to be found.

ARRIVAL

Even from far away the player characters can tell that they are approaching Wrecker Isle. They see countless fishing boats and freighters moored far out in the sea lane, bow against stern. They hear shouting sailors and snapping sails, and smell the sour stench of herring and train oil spreading like disease in the gentle breeze.

As they come closer, the player characters first notice the yellow herring warehouse, absolutely massive for such a small island. Next to it are two other wooden buildings, also quite large, but still dwarfed by the warehouse. Uddgren points out the inn and the Amundsson family residence (see the map on page 11).

The stench and the bustle become more and more intense the closer the characters get. The large dock is extremely crowded. Sweaty fishermen and sailors are hauling barrels of herring and train oil between boats and the quay. A full-rigged ship on its way to Gothenburg is about to head out, and a swarm of smaller schooners and barges compete for the space left behind by the large vessel. Small dinghies are

used to transport people and goods between the dock and the numerous ships floating offshore.

Eventually the captain of the player characters’ little sloop finds a vacant berth, and they can climb ashore together with Uddgren. Place the map of Wrecker Isle on the gaming table. They are free to explore the island as they please, but a steady stream of people moves to and from the inn, and the priest suggests that the group head over there to get a room.

COUNTDOWN AND CATASTROPHE

The player characters’ visit to Wrecker Isle, and the investigation of the vicar’s death, will lead to reactions from the locals. Unless the player characters steer the development in a different direction, the conflict between the priest Uddgren and the herring baron will end in disaster. The following events can be used to increase the pace of the game when necessary, and to push the players toward the final confrontation:

COUNTDOWN

1. Uddgren confronts the waitress Justina at the inn. He wants her to come with him and leave this “den of sin” immediately. Justina is reluctant and asks him to calm down. Godmother Abela intervenes and tells the priest to leave. When he refuses, the Godmother asks Pete and Pace to throw him out, which they are more than happy to do. The player characters can intervene if they want. If they try to stop them by force, the brothers will defend themselves. If Pete and Pace are defeated they retreat, but will return at a later time (see paragraph 3 below).
2. Uddgren climbs atop a liquor barrel at the dock and delivers a sermon of fire and brimstone, painting the inn as “the Devil’s temple on Earth” and the herring baron as the Evil One himself. Some stay to listen. After a while the audience has had enough and people start throwing bottles at the priest, who refuses to stop. Some sailors (equal in number to the player characters) attack Uddgren and try to shut him up

SUPERNATURAL EVENTS

When Zacharias becomes aware of the player characters' presence on the island, he starts using his magic against them, to test and intimidate them – but subtly, so as not to reveal his true nature. Zacharias will escalate the use of his magic if the player characters continue their investigations. This can be handled as a countdown.

1. A player character notices something supernatural and strange. Perhaps the fish on a player character's plate comes to life and starts talking (a good time to mention the new moon). Perhaps a huge throng of crabs comes massing out of the water, the claws clattering against the rocks. The vision vanishes as quickly as it appeared. No one else sees anything unusual.
2. Several player characters suffer the same terrible nightmare. The room where they are sleeping is filled from the roof down with saltwater that reeks of rotten seaweed and algae. The characters are unable to move and must make a Fear test against Fear 1. Their mouths and noses are filled with water, and they must each make a **FORCE** test – those who fail suffer a physical condition. They wake up a moment later, and the water is gone – but they are still sputtering and choking on the dark saltwater...
3. At some point when the player characters are traveling by boat (perhaps on their way to the fishing cabin), or simply find themselves close to the water, a heavy wind springs up and rain comes pouring down. The storm comes out of nowhere – just a few moments earlier there was hardly a cloud in the sky. Great waves crash against the player characters, who must pass a **FORCE** test to avoid being swept into the water. Those who fail must make an **AGILITY** test to swim and get back on board (or ashore). Multiple **AGILITY** tests are allowed, but with each failure the character suffers a physical condition. Other player characters may help. After a few minutes the wind abates as abruptly as it started.

by throwing him into the water. The player characters can intervene if they want.

3. The herring baron has concluded that Uddgren and the player characters pose a threat to his operation and must be eliminated. Like Vicar Hedqvist, they will be sacrificed to the mermaid. The herring baron sends Pete and Pace to seize them and place them in separate herring barrels. With the player characters out of the way, Uddgren is considered harmless. If possible, the brothers will target one player character at a time. Captured characters will be loaded onto the herring baron's boat and taken to Deep Reef along with the Godmother and the brothers. You can read more about this under Confrontation.

CATASTROPHE

Uddgren has had enough. Under the cover of darkness he empties several barrels of train oil around the inn and the Amundsson residence, and sets them afire. Both buildings go up in flames, and their occupants come rushing out in panic. Among them is the herring baron himself, stumbling as he slaps at his burning pajamas. Uddgren waits outside with a drawn pistol and shoots Zacharias, who falls dead into the sea. The mermaid wreaks a terrible revenge – a great storm blows in over the archipelago, and boats, cabins, and entire fishing camps are crushed by huge tidal waves. When the storm finally subsides, the herring are gone. A new period of starvation and hardship awaits the Fjällbacka archipelago.

THE NEW MOON

When the player characters arrive on Wrecker Isle it is almost new moon, which means that the mermaid will soon require another sacrifice. You may want to mention the new moon at some point during the opening of the mystery, as a setup for later. Do not forget to have Orvar mention the new moon during his first encounter with the player characters (see *The Inn*).