

Hazards of the High Seas



An ocean voyage doesn't have to be a boring trip from port to port!

While the water may seem placid and serene, many dangers lurk both above and below the surface. Some of these hazards are perfectly mundane in nature, such as storms and diseases.

Writing
Editing

Jeff Gomez
Felipe Real

Others, like pirates and mutiny, introduce a bit of chaos for a voyage gone wrong. Still others, such as eldritch ruins or acid fog, bring mysterious or arcane peril to the open sea.

Use the following items to generate an exciting ocean voyage!

- 1. *Abandoned Lighthouse.*** Who built this strange lighthouse, warning others of rocks beneath the waves? The style does not fit any modern civilization. This is a lighthouse from ages past, kept sturdy (but no longer functional) by the design of a long-forgotten architect. While the insides have been plundered of anything valuable, they still make for an interesting glimpse into days long past. And perhaps a hidden map leads to buried treasure somewhere nearby.
- 2. *Acid Fog.*** Acid fog is a natural hazard from the decomposing of large magical creatures. It hangs low and deadly across the waves, sometimes for miles in each direction. Acid fog melts the skin and lungs of anybody exposed to it, but even those who take shelter in a ship's hull gain only temporary reprieve. The fog eats quickly through sails and takes its time through the timber. Once it makes its way through, it feasts on all within until the vessel falls completely apart.
- 3. *Dangerous Survivor.*** A lone sailor clings to a scrap of wood or spit of rock. If invited onboard, he is hesitant to tell his tale. This is a powerful sorcerer, tapping into dangerous energies and cavorting with demons. It was his recklessness that destroyed his previous vessel. If confronted, the sorcerer may lash out again—or perhaps he will only become wracked with guilt. Either way, is such a risk really worth one man's life, particularly if he treats it so carelessly?
- 4. *Giant Shark (Megalodon).*** What can a shark do against a ship? Little, unless it is a dire shark. Dire sharks, or megalodons, can put some smaller boats to shame. If the water is chummed with corpses, or the ship is leaking manure from livestock, then a megalodon may decide something tasty hides inside the crunchy wood. A dire shark can tear a ship piece by piece with fangs the size of swords. With thick armor, megalodons are nearly impossible to kill, but they can be driven off if heavily injured. Just be careful that the blood from such an encounter does not attract other sharks.
- 5. *Disease.*** Ships long at sea inevitable suffer from diseases. Poor food, little sleep, and too much sun weigh on anyone's system. Scurvy is a common problem, borne of an improper diet, but rats on board can also carry influenza or the plague. The only question is, can the doctor head off the sickness before it ravages the crew? If not, then the ship may become devoid of life, drifting empty until it is discovered or eventually comes to rest.
- 6. *Eldritch Ruins.*** These are strange waters. Grey spires protrude from the mirrored ocean. Hallucinogenic vapors bubble from the depths. Waves lap at faceless statues. Here, the top of some otherworldly city breaks the waves in what seems like the open ocean. Have these ruins always been here? Or have they recently emerged? And if one takes a stairway down into the flooded catacombs—into the black maw and dripping salt—what will one find?
- 7. *Floating Village.*** This massive barge is made from the hulks of derelict ships, rotting rope, and hacked together driftwood. Yet despite the vessel's appearance, the many inhabitants seem happy enough. These pioneering individuals have made a home for themselves on this floating village, complete with civic structures and stores of fish. They are eager to trade and have the bounty of the sea to offer. But beware! Those who live on the sea have different customs than those who live on land.
- 8. *Flotsam.*** The crew happens upon the remains of another ship. Something terrible happened here—corpses bob among the broken timbers. Is the wood scorched, or riddled with arrows? Are there floating treasures to be recovered? Do massive severed tentacles float among the dead? And are any left alive to tell the tale?
- 9. *Ghost Ship.*** An ethereal ship sails these waters, their captain still fighting the storm that tore him limb from limb. The ghostly vessel appears on stormy nights, sails tattered and its bow broken. The crew sing shanties with every swell they crest.



Despite its undead nature, the ship and its crew are not truly evil—they are merely unfortunate victims of an angry sea.

- 10. *Kraken*.** It's hard to imagine fantasy on the high seas without a wriggling, multi-armed, ship-consuming kraken. These beasts populate every sailor's nightmares. There is little a ship can do if attacked by a kraken. Timber does not last long under the crushing strain of tentacles. But a valiant struggle can be had, and kraken are less than meticulous in picking off survivors.
- 11. *Merfolk Raiders*.** Pirates are bad enough, but **merfolk** pirates are worse still. These devious privateers swim underneath ships and drill holes, then collect the loot when it sinks into their domain. A ship may not even know that it is under attack until it is too late. If a ship has no underwater defenses, then it has little chance against these aquatic raiders.
- 12. *Migrating Whales*.** Sometimes, the open sea is interrupted by beauty. A large pod of whales passes by on their standard migrating course. They are harmless, graceful, and stunning in their size. The sight of waterspouts and breaching leviathan silences even the oldest sailor with awe. Here, at least, is a moment of peace in a dangerous voyage.

- 13. *Mutiny*.** The crew has had enough. Either by mutual assurance or led by a charismatic discontent, the crew decides to take matters into their own hands. Mutinies usually follow a string of (apparently) bad decisions by the captain. They grow like rot until they overtake the vessel. Once a mutiny has taken place, the structure of the ship is irreparably damaged. Mutiny follows bloody mutiny, and each leader has less authority than the last. Often, only the reinstatement of the original captain can quell the tide or betrayal—and even then there is hell to pay.



Open Game Content | The game rule information in this article is designated Open Game Content. All other material in this article, including maps and illustrations (including illustrations in the public domain), in-character and out-of-character narrative and descriptive text, character and place names, trade dress, “EN Publishing,” “EN World,” “ENsider,” EN Publishing product and article titles, and EN World and EN Publishing logos, are designated Product Identity.

- 14. Pirates.** Freebooters and marauders, **pirates** are the bandits of the open ocean. Through violence, they take the work of others and sell it in black markets and similar dens of sin. Some pirates abide by pseudo-honorable codes. Others follow no rules. In either case, pirates are prevalent in rich waters and a force to be feared. Luckily, pirates are considered criminals by every nation and creed. While they may attack any ship, they can expect no safe harbor wherever they turn.
- 15. Reefs.** Reefs are colorful and vibrant, but surprisingly sharp. The gnarled coral rips through ships' hulls like so much parchment, and waterlogged sailors tear themselves to pieces on the rough rock. At least then they have something pretty to look at before the sharks get to them. Coral and fish of all shapes and colors can dazzle onlookers, even if the reef is better enjoyed from the safety of a ship.
- 16. Reef Spider.** There are many strange creatures that feed off the maritime commerce of nations. Among these is the feared reef spider. As large as a horse, this white spider spins a floating web a mile wide to ensnare passing ships. Once tangled in the sticky substance, the reef spider climbs aboard and feasts. Over time, the web, or "floating reef," accumulates the derelict hulls of a dozen vessels. Aboard each of them, there are skeletons, treasure, and often hundreds of spider eggs just waiting to hatch.
- 17. Shrinking Enemy Ship.** The ship stumbles across one of their enemy's vessels sinking beneath the waves. Is this a blessing? Or a curse? Floundering sailors beg for help. Without interference, these men and women will surely drown. But taking them on board could be not only foolish but highly dangerous.
- 18. Slavers.** Slavers are a scourge to the open waters. They are despised even among pirates for the loot they carry. Slavers seek to capture other ships and carry the sailors into slavery. Their fighting men are sometimes slaves themselves, so it may be possible to turn the tide of battle with the promises of freedom.
- 19. Storms.** Storms can appear even during the dry season in normally placid waters. A storm in the wrong moment can wreck an invasion fleet or transform a naval victory into a rout. To survive a storm, a crew must be able to respond to any threat as soon as it appears—patching, bailing, and adjusting sails as the situation merits. A crew that tires before the storm does will find a new home in the ocean's depths.
- 20. Stowaway.** Sometimes, the biggest dangers of the sea come from land. A stowaway reveals himself, either intentionally or by accident. Perhaps the ragged creature is a desperado seeking asylum. Or maybe he's a threat, eager to take over the ship or foment a mutiny.

