

# The Old Man of the Sea

God of the rolling deck and the hungry sea  
Take from the weak and the stupid what you can use yourself

*When the first fisher sailed his little coracle away from the shore to catch fish for her tribe, there was the Old Man. When the first desperately baling crew struggled to stop their little boat sinking, there was the Old Man. When the first fisherman raised an oar against a man from another boat over the right to fish the best waters, there was the Old Man.*

*The Smithies and the Soldier-boys will tell you that their God was there first, but it's a lie. Before there were forges, before there were soldiers, there were sailors, and as long as there have been sailors, there's been the Old Man. They don't like it, they don't like him, they surely don't like us, but they can't forget that we were there first, that their gutless, heartless, spiritless faith stands on a foundation not of stone, but of salt water and blood. They'll never forgive us for it, and we raise two fingers to them as we sail out of their land-bound grasp.*

*Some wonder why the Old Man makes things so hard for us, but they don't understand. When the rain lashes against us it makes us as tough as the wood under our feet. When the waves rock the ship from side to side we learn surefootedness, ready to roll with the punches and come back fighting. When a crewmate is lost to the depths, the rest of us realise that we're just part of the crew, and it will live on after we're gone. These things show us the way a crew operates if they follow the Old Man's ways. Everyone picks the captain, everyone gets part of the prize, everyone takes a share of the work and the risk.*

*We all do things differently. When my lads catch a fat merchantman, we throw about one coin in twelve overboard. There's a couple crews I know carry a barrel of beer with them every trip out and if the weather turns they pour most of it overboard and toast the God with the rest. I hear of another ship that kills one in ten of the crew that surrenders, but that's a bit bloody mental for my liking. I know a little cove not far from Philip Island where there's a madman lives swears that if you bring the best bit of the haul to him he can send it to the Old Man for you. I don't judge, but I know that when we win, when we survive, we remember that the Old Man doesn't like to be ignored or forgotten.*

The Old Man of the Sea is a very old name indeed. Some would tell you that it is an aspect of the Smith, but everyone who knows the Old Man knows that he ain't no aspect of anyone else. He is Himself, and a heartless bastard he is too. He turns a bunch of men and women into a crew by throwing the dangers of the ocean at them making them work together to survive, or all drown together.

Seagoing life breeds hardiness and loyalty, and these are the primary virtues that a devotee of the Old Man can have. Any serious sailor can tell a tale of a time when he might have died if not for his fellows, and where a moment later he returned the favour to one of his own rescuers. A ship is as much a community as any village or town, where every man has to rely on every other to play their part for the good of the whole vessel.

The Old Man can be fickle and His devotees try to appease him as much as worship him. Superstition is rife among any crew that worships the Old Man. The life of a sailor is not what you might call "civilised" in the traditional sense of the word, and it is rare that a ship will have a fully-fledged priest, trained in all the ceremonies of faith. Many crews who follow

the Old Man split the role of priest between several crewmembers, with different men and women performing different roles.

There are two places where faith in the Old Man is especially strong. It should come as no surprise that the heart of the faith is in the Free Islands, where curmudgeonly and sinister Dega Shipbreaker tends the oldest and most powerful temple dedicated to the Old Man. It is also well known among Merisusi raiders, although the faith has been waning in popularity for the last few centuries, replaced by a more orthodox faith in the Smith. It is also comparatively well known in Malathia, both among the captains of their unscrupulous privateers and the lowlanders who live along the coasts.

The faith is not restricted to pirates, despite what its detractors might suggest. While it is certainly not encouraged among among civilised navies or merchantmen, it is a popular "underground" faith with the common seamen. Otherwise honest fishermen in many lands pray to the Old Man, practicing their traditions just as their ancestors did in the time before the Renian Empire came to prominence.

Nor is it the faith unknown on land. In coastal areas where folk rely on the sea for their livelihood, or in places like the Free Islands, where the sea is constantly visible and a more than occasional threat, men and women who've never set foot on a boat make offerings of food or drink to the Old Man when the weather turns bad, or when a loved one is late returning to shore. Faith in the Old Man gives such communities strength, and binds them together, as much as it binds the pirate crews and reaver ships that are his more usual followers.

One thing worth mentioning is more than almost any other faith, the devotees of the Old Man of the Sea know that there are monsters in the depths, and

that many of them seem to be servants of the God. Whether they're ancient leviathans coated in nitre and barnacles, massive sharks or fish, or less identifiable creatures they sometimes fight alongside the most favoured of the God. There's even talk that for a truly devout follower the Old Man will send one of his crews to fight with them, dreadful creatures that look for all the world like they are the souls of drowned sailors given bloated white seaweed draped flesh for one last battle alongside the strongest crew. The use of such monsters is one reason that some devotees dismiss the Old Man and his eidolons as being Fallen - a vicious slander sure to gain the ire of any devotee who hears it.

## What the Old Man wants

**The company is greater than any crewman, strive to increase its strength**

You are part of the crew - however you want to define the term. It's made up of lads and lasses who have to work together against the elements and, often as not, against the crews of other ships. What makes one of the crew strong strengthens you all. What makes one of the crew weak weakens you all. Bear that in mind.

**Threats against the crew must be faced and eliminated.**

When something holes you hull, you bale and you patch and you work your arses off until the hole is patched or the ship sinks. When a fire breaks out, you put it out or the ship sinks. When the Revenue turns up on the horizon, you trim your sails and go hell-for-leather or you fight like cornered rats or you all get hung and then some other bastard gets your ship. A man who closes his eyes and pretends that nothing is wrong is called a "slave" or a "corpse."

**The Old Man wants the strongest crews conquer the weakest.**

There's a limited number of fish in the sea, and a limited number of fat merchantmen out there to plunder. Do the maths.

**Take what you can get and use it yourself**

The weak and the stupid squander what they've got and never really work out how lucky they are. It is your duty to take their stuff away from them and use it yourself. Be clear though, it's not enough to just take their stuff. There's no point hoarding it. When you steal gold bullion, you fence it as fast as you can and you split it with your mates. Sure you can piss your share up against the back wall of a tavern, but you want to make sure you blow some of that cash on a new sword, or a new gun, or a new suit of armour, or new canvas to replace the sails. Otherwise you're just a waster, and you deserve to have someone else come along and take it all away from you.

**It's always best when they are so terrified of you that they throw themselves to the sharks**  
Terror is a weapon like any other. Refusing to accept this is like trying to fight an angry octopus while falling down drunk. The wisest devotees know how to wield fear so that they don't even need to draw their swords. It cut's both ways though; the Old Man will do His damndest to make you wet yourself, and if you flinch in the face of Him He will gut you.

*"Don't call me a Smithy or a Soldier-boy. Don't talk to me about Mountains. I'd rather fight alongside you than a Weaverite or a Paladin, sure, but that don't make us the same. I serve the Old Man, and he laughs at your land-grubber names, farmer-boy."*