

# WHO ARE THE NORDVIK?

## 9TH CENTURY NORSE & RUS CULTURE ANALOGUE

The Nordvik are analogous to real world Norse culture of the Viking age, spanning a wide range of geography, up to and including Iceland, Finland, Denmark, and even parts of Russia. We encourage you to bring real world stories and cultural elements into play, we also want to remind you that this is a fantasy world, and there are some core differences. Furthermore, gatekeeping, especially around issues like “That’s not how it really was...” have no place in the world of Dammerung.



### CLIMATE & LANDSCAPE

The green-black water of the Stahlfjord is girdled by high cliffs and stony beaches. The land is temperate, with great old forests and bands of hills. In the Bannerlands farmland is plentiful along the many wide valleys, as it also is along the Thryden coast. The Myrskogur forest dominates the central Nordelans, a home of Jotunar, Kraalings and ghosts. Across the landscape of the north are scattered ruins and barrows of a bygone age, ill-fabled for housing vengeful dead. The nordelans is surrounded to the north and east by high snow-capped mountain ranges beyond which lies Jotunheim and a endless sprawl of white, frozen plains and icy mountains. Beyond Thor's Gate, the narrow mouth of the Stahlfjord, a great archipelago of frost-rimed volcanic islands winds far out into the western ocean. Few beasts but seals, bears and seabirds dwell here, but many steaming islands stay untouched by snow even in the long and bitter winters.

### HISTORY

They say the Nordvik arrived in the Nordelans by sailing there in a great fleet of ships many generations ago out of the west. Whether that is true or not the ruins of ages of settlement and migration lie all over the North. Currently the Bannerlands contains the richest and most powerful jarldoms but the sagas and ruins seem to imply that the area around Baldraborg and west was once in ascendance. The Nordvik have always raided, sailing their ships throughout the Stahlfjord and down the Whale Road, pillaging each other and terrorizing the Midlans coast. Every few generations a counter-invasion from the Midlans, to the south, would storm for a while before being thrown back. A century ago a major crusade led by the Order of the Sun conquered a vast swath of land in Suth Thryden and since the influx and pressure from the Crownlands has only grown.

### POLITICS & SOCIAL RANKS

The Nordvik are not a unified people. A Konig is a King or Queen who rules over several settlements and a large territory. Overseeing a settlement is a hereditary ruler called a Jarl who may owe fealty to a Konig or, just as likely, be the independent ruler of their own small area. Large scale raids or battles are fought by Konigs and Jarls allying together to present a larger force. The rich Bannerlands are divided between a half dozen Konig's with a web of rivalries and alliances. The Konigs and Jarls of both the Bannerlands and the Sea Kingdoms raid, manipulate and support their shifting allies amongst the Freeholds. Personal verbal pledges and oaths are how treaties are signed or alliances struck.

### NOBILITY

**KONIG / KONIGA:** King / Queen, Famous ruler of several settlements and a large swath of territory.

**EARL:** War leader of a Kingdom, often also a ruler of a settlement.

**JARL:** Ruler of a settlement, independent or sworn to a Konig.

**THEGN:** Landowning warrior who has been adopted into a Jarl's family.

### COMMON

**HERSIR:** Mann-at-arms, sworn to a noble family.

**DRENGR:** Veteran warrior, proven and respected.

**KARL:** Landowner.

**BOND:** Renter, living on another's land or in their household.

**THRALL:** Serf, bound to service by oaths, force or necessity.

## SETTLEMENTS

The central feature of a Nordvik settlement is the concept of the Hold. Whether a massive great hall or fortress, a town or a lonely, fortified farm or fishing community Nordvik call their homes Holds. Most settlements are built spread out, without curtain walls or stockades (unless vulnerable to a local enemy) but always feature some form of fortified place to retreat to. This holdfast serves as a redoubt as well as a store house and manor for the ruler of the settlement. Nordvik tend to build with wooden timbers, only rarely outside of the Sea Kingdoms do they raise structures of stone as these are difficult to heat in the long winter nights. The holds of the Bannerfolk are by far the largest, sitting high atop hills or along the coast with farmlands stretching out all around them. The free-holds tend to be small and fortified as they are in wild lands or close to enemies of the Nordvik peoples. In the Sea Kingdoms fishing villages and longhouses cling to the grey rocks beneath a tower or fort of stone and driftwood.

## RELIGION & BELIEFS

The Nordvik worship, sometimes by other names than we know, the Aesir and Vanir of Norse Mythology. They raise steep roofed temples of carved wood, runestones and hewn blot-poles bearing grimacing figures and gods. Hjalborg has the great temple of Guthreim, honoring all the gods with gilded statues of oak and ash. Many holds claim favor from one or more gods, honoring them in shrines and local feasts. In the Sea Kingdoms, where life is harsh and the god's favor is capricious, the ancient bloody custom of sacrificing captives and criminals is much more widely practiced than in the east. Some even whisper of Jotun worship in the far flung freeholds near the Myrskogur and distant settlements of the bleak, north-western islands.

## HOLIDAYS

**ÖESTAR (SPRING THAW)** A feast that honors fertility and the rebirth of the world. Flowers and ribbons are used to decorate hair and beards. Often a ritual battle between "Winter" and "Summer" is staged, an occasion used by many to prove their skill.

**BLÓT (SEASONAL, OFTEN MIDSUMMER AND HARVEST)**

A honoring of spirits and gods with blood sacrifices to ensure good harvests, and fortune in trade and warfare. Markets spring up around a Blót festival selling all manner of goods and sacrifices. Blót, or 'sacrifice,' may be made in honor of spirits (Disiirablót) or gods (Vottablót, Freyablót, Kolirblót, etc).

**YJULLE (WINTER FEAST)** A merry feast that often lasts many days. Decorations and drinking. Rulers give gifts to those sworn to them. The dead and their memories are honored.

## TRADITIONS

**Guest Gifts-** It is customary for visiting Jarls and others of high rank to offer a gift to the honored host who has opened hearth and home. Failing to do so is a grave insult. High ranking visitors who do not bring a gift are seen by the Nordvik as unspeakably rude

**Weapon Etiquette-** Naked steel placed upon a feast table is a challenge to Nordvik warriors. Do not do so unless you are prepared to fight

**Settling a Hold-** When founding a new settlement it is customary to offer a rune log to the gods as a blessing for the new living space. A log is carved or painted with runes and ritually burned. Failing to do so will visit disaster upon the new settlement

**Sharing Drinking Vessels-** Sharing a single cup is a romantic gesture. Offering to share a cup or drinking horn with someone is a romantic overture

**Sharing Mead-** Sharing a drink with others (separate cups) signals friendship. It is customary for hosts to offer all visitors a drink of mead. Once a visitor has taken a drink from a host they are considered a Guest.

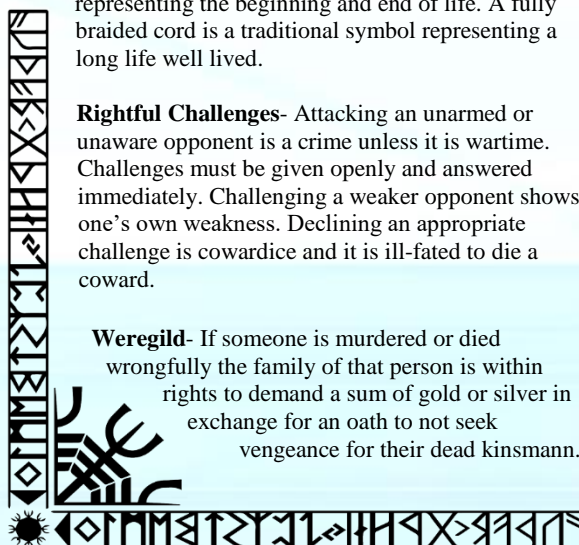
**Guest Right-** Nordvik take Guest Rites very seriously. Killing a welcomed Guest of your hearth, household or settlement who has accepted a drink from you will visit death and grave misfortune upon all future generations of your household. To do so is verboten and those who break this custom will draw the ire of the gods

**Drink for the Dead-** When remembering or honoring the souls of the dead it is customary to offer them a cup of mead at the feast table and then spill it on the ground with a prayer. Drinking from a cup of mead offered to the dead could anger their spirit

**Birth and Death Knots-** When a child is born a traditional gift for the parents is a pair of knots on a three-strand cord. A two knots on a cord is a Nordvik traditional symbol representing the beginning and end of life. A fully braided cord is a traditional symbol representing a long life well lived.

**Rightful Challenges-** Attacking an unarmed or unaware opponent is a crime unless it is wartime. Challenges must be given openly and answered immediately. Challenging a weaker opponent shows one's own weakness. Declining an appropriate challenge is cowardice and it is ill-fated to die a coward.

**Weregild-** If someone is murdered or died wrongfully the family of that person is within rights to demand a sum of gold or silver in exchange for an oath to not seek vengeance for their dead kinsmann.





## SUPERSTITIONS

**Power in Names-** Do not ever speak your true, birth name to the faerfolk or spirits of the dead.

**Reflections-** When divining through a mirror or a still pool of water one must cover one's face lest the spirits you call upon come to know your visage and visit disaster upon you. Likewise it is bad luck to eat or drink with your reflection cast in a mirror.

**Empty Cups-** An empty cup or bowl placed face down on a feast table portends famine and disaster

**Soothesaying-** When divining with entrails the heart will tell you of desires, the lungs will tell you what is on the wind, the intestines, throat and stomach will tell you of the past, the liver will tell you of blood and the kidneys will tell you of fear

**Magic Circles-** Beware, for breaking a magic circle is a very ill omen indeed! It is said that when the great world serpent releases its tail the world will end. Because of this, before a magic circle is broken a sacrifice must be made. If a sacrifice is not made then one may be taken by the gods. Breaking a magic circle without a sacrifice is said to draw the ire of the gods upon you and to hasten the coming of the end of the world

**Entertaining the Dead-** The brave souls of Nordvik past carouse ever on in the mead halls of the afterlife. If you leave a board game on a table at night sometimes spirits are said to play a game together in the darkness. If you sit with a game board alone at night then it is said that a spirit may join you to play. If you offer an extra cup of mead then the spirits of the dead may join you to drink. If you sing a song in the darkness then the souls of the dead may join in

**Sacrifice Before Voyages-** EVERY sea voyage requires a bodily sacrifice from each sailor. Failing to spill one's own blood or to spit upon solid ground just before sailing guarantees that any who cast off will find themselves doomed to wander the oceans eternally and never find shore. Those who greatly fear their souls becoming lost at sea may even go so far as leaving a piece of themselves behind on land (a lock of hair, a vial of blood or even more)

**Hairbraiding-** Braids are believed to tether or trap souls. Braids can be incorporated into hair, or painted symbols or they can be represented by weaving or knitting. Symbolically unbraiding throngs of leather, twine, rope, yarn or hair or even unraveling cloth or tapestries is said to free the souls of the dead. Inversely, braiding and weaving is said to have some connection to the creation of Draugr. Braiding your hair is said to help keep your soul in your body during battle

**Red Dawn-** If the dawn is red it is said to be an ill omen portending storms on the sea. Sailing on a day with a red dawn is risky and invites disaster

**Depths-** When you look into the water those who have been lost to the sea look back up at you. If you gaze too long into the depths you may hear them calling to you. Do not listen to their whispers for you may soon find yourself lost as well

**The Black Stone-** Giving a black stone to someone will curse them and misfortune will find them for as long as it is with them. If they should fall into the sea while carrying it they will sink into the depths and never return

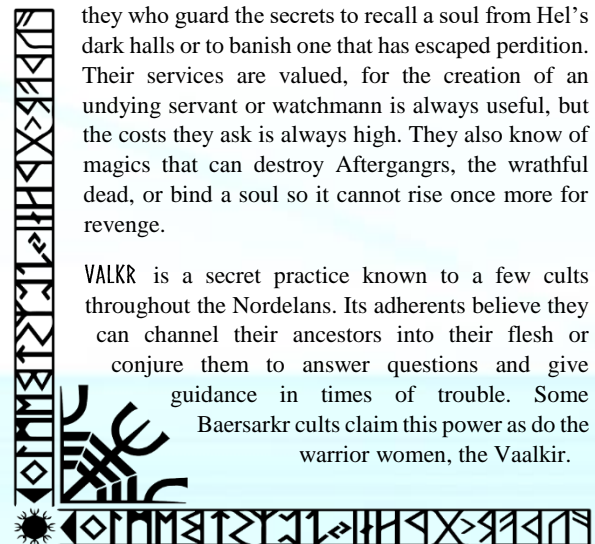
## MAGIC

The Nordvik have a deep connection with mystic practices and superstitions. Most observe dozens of small rituals throughout their day and readily seek out a Wokacrafter to obtain charms and talismans for fortune and protection. Many priests know Woka or Herbalism and pass the results off as the gods favor, for surely they would not work without the god's blessing. There are three notable mystic arts practiced amongst the Nordvik: Galdr rune magic, Valdr necromancy and Valkr spirit possession.

**Galdr** is the most widespread, taught master to apprentice there is little homogeneity amongst the Runeweavers. Galdrir, as they are also called, bind power into bind runes, Runar. When these are scribed in ash, blood or ink on an appropriate surface they cause miraculous effects to occur. Galdr rune magic mostly enhances or protects the recipient and its practitioners are welcome and valued everywhere in the Nordelans.

**Valdr** is the dark magic taught by Vött the Valfader, the dead god Odhinn, to the Valdaermenn of Valborg. It is they who guard the secrets to recall a soul from Hel's dark halls or to banish one that has escaped perdition. Their services are valued, for the creation of an undying servant or watchmann is always useful, but the costs they ask is always high. They also know of magics that can destroy Aftergangrs, the wrathful dead, or bind a soul so it cannot rise once more for revenge.

**Valkr** is a secret practice known to a few cults throughout the Nordelans. Its adherents believe they can channel their ancestors into their flesh or conjure them to answer questions and give guidance in times of trouble. Some Baersarkr cults claim this power as do the warrior women, the Vaalkir.



# NORDVIK SUBCULTURES

## AVAILABLE FACTIONS

There are two major Nordvik factions in play in the world of Dammerung. Players should choose one or the other, especially if they are entering into play with a large group of friends. While there are two other factions, the Valnir and Freeholdr; they are intended to be outsiders and or disparate groups of poorly armed landowners, merely eking by. Playing one of these is a solitary experience, so choose wisely.



## THE BANNERFOLK

The Bannerfolk hail from the coast of the Jarlsfjord and the Bannerlands. The lands of the Bannerfolk are the most bountiful of the Nordelans and great towns and halls have risen over the past few centuries. The Bannerlands was claimed, and is now held, by the might of the Bannerfolk hosts- each serving it's own King or Jarl. The Bannerfolk are proud of their culture: their ships are long, their halls great and their temples grand. The hosts of the Bannerlands are feared by Crownlander and Jotun alike. When the Bannerfolk raid their fleets are massive, calling upon the alliance of many independent Jarls and rulers, and they plunder for treasure and glory. Trade flows through the Bannerlands from the four corners of the world and it's people have, for now, the abundance needed to thrive in art and culture.

### SUGGESTED ROLEPLAY:

- ❖ **Bannerfolk value honesty and personal honor highly.**
- ❖ **Skill in warfare and craftsmanship is prized.**
- ❖ **Loyalty to your Jarl and your hold is paramount and should be rewarded.**
- ❖ **Sea Wolves are brutish and uncultured cousins.**

### FAMOUS BANNERFOLK:

King Heremund of Veidrgad, Queen Theowyth, King Thorolf of Hjalborg, King Sigurd Lonirsson, Queen Brethild of Sufhulby. Jarl Halvdan Sigrunsson, Wulfhere Skalsson.

## BANNERFOLK SETTLEMENTS

**Hjalborg**- a large town sprawling on a hill capped with the great hall, Hjallenholm and the high temple, Guthreim. Hjalborg is the seat of the strongest and richest of the Nordvik kingdoms.

**Veidrgad**- a large farming town ruled by King Heremund and Queen Theowyth. Veidrgad is a hub of trade and cultural exchange between the cultures. It was once the domain of the defeated King Edeomar.

**Sufhulby**- A small town famous for the quality of its shipwrights, Sufhulby is located on the Jarlsfjord.

**Lodrgad**- A small town with an impressive wooden tower fort on the cliffs above, Lodrgad is a safe harbor for ships bound for trade or raiding.

**Helleborg**- A fortified village on the great plains of Vigrid it is a bastion against the hordes of Jotunheim and boasts as the birth or death place of many celebrated heroes.

**Kartig**- A large fishing village, Kartig holds a great feast every harvest-time and is home to a trio of seers, the Jeruns, who take students from the hopefuls who attend that feast.

**Norsege**- A small port on a rocky island of the Stahlfjord, Norsege is one of the few safe harbors for ships caught in the storms that sweep through the Stahlfjord.

**Skalholm**- High in the shoulders of the Giant's Backbone this village has a barrow reserved for berzerkers who find a good death in battle. Visiting Valdaermenn often select Draugr from amongst the interred.

**Devinkir**- A village famous for its stout horses located near the edge of the Cernlands it shares some customs and thewiorship of the Three.

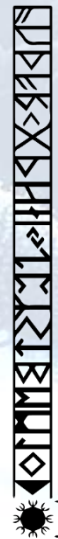
**Altegard**- is a fortress on the edge of the Nordelans seized a century ago by the Order of the Sun. It is from here that the Crownlanders launch raids into the Bannerlands. The fortress has been expanded over the last forty years and now its walls and keep of stone are the mightiest bastion in the northlands. The Nordvik people that live it's shadow are subjugated, with any who resist conversion and servitude being driven from their homes.



## THE SEA WOLVES

The Nordvik of the Sea Kingdoms live a harsh life on the rocky western coasts and isles along the Whale Road. The Sea Wolves, as they are called by the mainlanders, eke out an existence by fishing and raiding. Their lives and culture is tied to the dark, angry seas that surround their home. They are extremely superstitious, for life on the edge makes for an equally fearful and fearless people. Their religious practices harken back to the darker days of an earlier era with blot and human sacrifices much more frequent than others. The petty rulers of the scattered Sea Kingdoms strive and infight over the precious little arable land of their bleak home, lending a certain pragmatism to any sense of honor. The raiders of the Sea Kingdoms range farther than any others, striking terror into they who spot their sails darkening the horizons. Little is left of settlement not strong enough to drive off a Sea Wolf raid but ashes and misery- as the Sea Wolves strip everything of value, particularly foodstuffs and materials necessary for shoring up their scant natural resources.

### SUGGESTED ROLEPLAY:



- ❖ Sea Wolves are ruthless raiders and cunning combatants, but song-craft is also commonly appreciated.
- ❖ Life is short, win glory and a name for yourself before your death.
- ❖ Loyalty to your kin is above all. Toss Kin-Slayers into the sea!
- ❖ Bannerfolk have grown soft in their comforts.

### FAMOUS SEAWOLVES:



Jarl Siv Yjormundottir, King Haakon the Reaver, Queen Kalla Storm-Eye, Blind Hvitsig the Seer

## SEA KINGDOM SETTLEMENTS

**Salreyar-** The many villages that cling to the coast of the largest island squabble with each other, mostly over the scant forests that lie on the interior. Salreyar holds most of the population of the Sea Kingdoms and is the home of the world's best whalers and most feared raiders. The shadow of the smoking Mount Muspelr looms dormant at the center of the island.

**Kalreyar-** The island chain of Kaltreyar is home to small fishing villages that cling to the warmed rock. In a hall high on a sea spire the seer Hvitsig the Blind is said to be able to tell one's past and future. In Kalreyar each man or woman is the ruler of their own tiny island.

**Upsreyar-** small and isolated villages cling to the frosted shores of Upsreyar, surviving off of the seals that abound there. It is said that the long winter nights under the godfire inspires dreams and the people of Upsreyar are regarded as touched and strange.

**The Salstone Fortress of Malpordi-** stands at the southern cliffs of Salreyar above the Black Shoals. It is here that the Sea Wolves anchor their ships before raiding the southern coasts. Built of black basalt the steaming fort is warmed by geysers and pools that surge out of its foundation.

**Hyflin-** A fortified town that was once the stopping point of all Nordvik raiders bound southwards. It is assaulted each season by Crownlanders led by the Order of the Fist. Hyflin is resupplied by the Sea Wolves, a charnel house of slaughter and a proving ground for any warrior brave enough to fight there.

**The Lost Expedition-** Ten years ago Knut Kafrik, a famous explorer returned from across the western ocean claiming to have found islands in the middle of the sea. Gathering a fleet of ten ships and hundreds of hopeful colonists they set out to settle his discovery. None have ever returned.

## THE FREEHOLDR

The Free-Holds are scattered across the Nordelans, remnants of the migration ages ago by the Nordvik peoples. Old kingdoms, now in ruin, or new colonies in previously abandoned reaches of the Nordelans make up the Free-Holds. They are as varied as the regions they are settled in but one the are all still Nordvik. In the southern coast of the Stahlfjord many Free-Holds have fallen to a recent Crownlander invasion or converted to Juvenism to survive. In the north, along the great barrowlands and dales edging the Myrskogur the Freeholders fortify their farms against the shadowy threat of Kraaling and Troll raids. Independent, enduring, humble- the Freeholdr are far poorer than their eastern and western kin, victims of a hard life on the edge of the wilds and vulnerable to the depredations of their enemies. Many now seek protection from outsiders to save their homes as the world goes grey.

### SUGGESTED ROLEPLAY:

- ❖ **Freeholdr's value honesty in life and purpose as the chief virtue.**
- ❖ **Protect your family and home with your life.**
- ❖ **Heavy armor and other expensive equipment are rare and generally owned by only a few wealthy landowners.**
- ❖ **No matter what never surrender your home.**

### FAMOUS FREEHOLDR:

King Bulfrham of Baldraborg, Ingvild Tulsdottir of the Vaalkir, Frigbal the Master Veither



## FREEHOLDR SETTLEMENTS

**Baldraborg-** Large river mill on the Ironflow river, famous for its forges and woodworking. It provides much of the timber used throughout the Nordelans, cut in the edges of the Myrskogur and floated down to the towns mills.

**Skogegad-** a fortified lumberjack village at the edges of the great forest. Frigbal, greatest of hunters, has his home here leading bands of skilled rangers into the dark woods to patrol for Kraalings and Jotunar.

**Dansetr-** After a half centruy of proud defiance the people of Dansetr were finally defeated in battle by the Order of the Sun, it's people converted by force and their rulers and priests executed. Dansetr is now a growing port for Crownlanders sailing across the Stahlfjord to settle the wilds between Axfjord and Vadfjord.

**Thrydegad-** Seeing the fate of Dansetr the people of Thrydegad willingly converted to the Juvite religion and the King took Crownlanders into his council. In this way the port city of Thrydegad was spared and grows richer with each passing year. Those unwilling to convert were forced into exile.

**Fennsege-** Built on a hill overlooking a vast valley of barrows, Fennsege is a village with a cult enclave of Vaalkir. Only the Vaalkir dare enter the haunted barrows and only then on the feast day of Yjulle when the village mystikers perform rituals to honor and pacify the dead.

**Myrfjord-** A safe harbor port where the cut timber of Baldraborg is plucked from the river and loaded on ships for trade. Myrfjord is also famous for its fishing fleet.

**Axfjord-** a small fort perches high on the cliffs of Axfjord. The family that lives there accepts no visitors dropping stones on any boats that brave the waters below.

**Vadfjord-** a small village, Gebresaet, of Crownlanders grows here in the shadows of the hills of Vadfjord, a hopeful colony of refugees.



## THE VALNIR

The Valnir are the strange people that dwell along the Frost Peaks and serve the Masters of Valborg, the Valdaermenn. Death is not seen as the end to the Valnir, indeed all who die owe at least another year of service to the hold. The silent dead of the Valnir till fields and stand guard while the living focus on their tradeskills. Once a year has passed the last act a dead Valnir does is dig their own grave in barrow fields surrounding Valborg, lying in rest until their people have need of them once more. It is whispered that Valborg will. When the End comes, raise all the dead and lead them as an army to the final battles. Across the Nordelans criminals are sent to Valborg for execution as tribute and price for the future services of the Valdaermenn. Suggested Roleplay:

- ❖ **Valnir serve in death as they do in life, resting only when duty is done.**
- ❖ **The secrets of Vott should never be shared with the unworthy.**
- ❖ **Dress in dark and ashen colors, a tribute to Vott the Deathless.**

### FAMOUS VALNIR:

Master Frekolir the Wan, Sigvald the Undying, Ulla of the Circle, Saegrimr the Valravn

## VALNIR SETTLEMENTS

**Valborg-** a unique hold that lives under the pall of the dark magics wrought therein. Barrows give way to fields, fields to a stockade covered in grisly trophies. In the center of the gloomy town stands a massive temple of Vött the Valfader, the aspect of Odhinn on his throne in the Underworld. A great ash tree, used for hangings and executions is dwarfed by a tall wooden spire from which issues eerie lights and strange colored smokes.

