



Wurse

the city of
one thousand
martyrs

A setting of shadows by Mark Meredith

“In the end, all that was left was their
sins, and even those were old...”

For Morgan Ellis, who has gone too soon. You were one of the first inspirations for this project. We miss you, Morgan.

THANK YOU

To Rob Weiland, who provided the first sentence of this book and caused the wheels to turn.

To PK Sullivan, for that brilliant line.

To Daniel Perez, this book honestly wouldn't have gotten done without you. Your guidance and coaching kept me going, pushing this project forward. Your name should practically be on the cover at this point. Thank you, Daniel.

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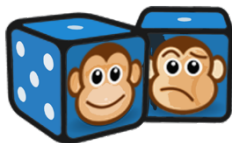
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DICE
MONKEY





Abandon All Hope

The Eldest call it **Blachach**, the Dwarves call it **Blackhold**, the Drengir call it **Shakarn** but the name is the same no matter what the language - **Curse**.

In all the realms, no place is as feared or hated as Curse. The victim of a horrible disaster in its distant past, its misfortune is now the fortune of all.

The city rests now in ruin. Mists which choke and strangle the streets hide many secrets both dark and dangerous.

Across the lands, many travel to Curse. Some for gold, some for treasure, some for redemption. Few will find it. Most will die trying.



Recommended systems for Curse: The City of One Thousand Martyrs include Torchbearer, Burning Wheel, Zweihander, Hackmaster, Dungeon World, Shadow of the Demon Lord, Dungeons & Dragons, Forged in the Dark, Warhammer Fantasy, and wargames including Frostgrave and Mordheim.



The City and Wards

The city was always a place to be avoided. A wide berth was made around it, with the simple folk leaving mere mutterings of terrible things and horrors unspoken. Even after the establishment of the Empire of the Seven Cities, it was known as a cursed place, and the name stuck.

Only within the last few decades has interest in the city grown. The city was always a home for treasure seekers and sellswords, eager to brave the horrors for a few old relics and baubles to sell. After a scholar of some note, Javantariel, traveled to the city and wrote a lengthy tale of what he saw there, interest grew dramatically. The book found its way into the hands of the Emperor, and soon massive expeditions were mounted which established the settlements outside the city.

This is as much as Javantariel was able to piece together about the city: Rumors of the ruins' existence goes back more than seven hundred years, older than the Empire by at least a few hundred years. The towers that once graced the city dwarfed the capital, and it truly was once a place of great beauty. Ancient graffiti tell of a calamity of some sort. While the wealthy grew all the more prosperous, the poor suffered. More and more of the city turned to slums as the nobility hoarded away their wealth. It lasted far longer than one would imagine possible. Fewer and fewer could survive the crippling weight of poverty. The rich turned a blind eye, focused as they were on their ceremony, their parties, their lavish balls. They cared more of their worship of old gods than those living around them.

What caused the calamity? None know. Perhaps the poor simply rose up. Perhaps they implored the powers of the Dark, calling upon Tabal'Dur, the Faulted One, to free them from oppression. Perhaps something awoke in the Undercity. Who can say? In the end, all that was left was their sins, and even those were old.

As you cross the wide plains of the Empire of the Seven Cities, travelling along the River Antizar, you enter the foothills at the base of the Palisade Peaks. Here, the skies grow grim, pelting you with fierce wind and hail before settling into a thick, murky drizzle of rain. There, in the distance, you are able to make out a shadow among the hills. It is a black stain of jagged lines, swallowing the mucky river into its walls. As you draw closer along the cracked and overrun cobblestones, you see the sputtering firelight of a settlement along its outer border.

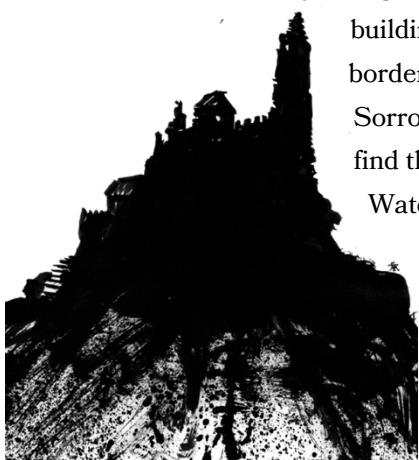
From an overhead view, the Antizar flows through the edge of the city into the central bay. Wrapped around this bay is an extensive city, ruined beyond imagining, impossibly old, a forgotten civilization killed in mystery. Two large hillocks look down on Curse with ancient buildings gloating over the ruins. To the south beyond its borders rests a forest of rot and twisting branches, a mockery of the lands of Mynn to the south.

Curse, though long since fallen into ruin, has many distinct areas, which scholars have identified as former districts of commerce, trade, life, religion, and entertainment. Here, we will explore each ward, and the locations within them.

1. Ruun's Crest

This settlement lies along the Antizar River as it flows into the city to The Bay. Here, the Builders and Preservers first arrived, carting in supplies to build up a moderately-sized settlement of a few hundred.

Looking beyond the initial appearance of a peaceful settlement, you begin to see the premature decay in both the buildings and the minds of those within. It borders the Great Wall, near the Wall of Sorrows. Those seeking legitimate work will find themselves in Ruun's Crest where the City Watch is paid handsomely for the protection of its citizens by Aleksander Ruun.



2. The Rookery

The fortified manor of Aleksander Ruun rests on the edge of Ruun's Crest. Aleck is the cousin of Sandoval Ruun, the child-emperor of the Seven Cities. His nearly unlimited funds have built him an impressive keep, with many intact treasures from Curse found within its walls. Aleksander considers himself to be the defacto mayor and governor of Curse, though few outside his simpering toadies recognize him as such. Often, late into the night, the fires burn within the manor and the sounds of uproarious parties can be heard within its walls as he invites nobility from across the Empire to revel in the excesses of the city. He is constantly hiring groups to venture into the *Fastness* on the opposite side of the city to prepare it for occupation.

3. The Wall of Sorrows

Along the western crumbling wall of the city, near *Ruun's Crest*, lies the *Wall of Sorrows*. Many people will never enter the city. Instead, they travel to the Wall of Sorrows to leave the name of someone who was killed by the city, or who was lost within and never seen again. The wall is covered in tattered parchments, some nothing more than rotten strips of parchment or decayed paper, while others are fresh and new. Some have carved the names of their loved ones into the stone itself. Any wanted posters are quickly removed by Ephaldian patrols who regularly move along both sides of the wall to keep back any creatures who may attack the pilgrims, while making sure that none desecrate the names of those who have been lost.



4. The Javelin

The Javelin serves as a central roadhouse and inn for most who come to Curse. Resting along the High Road at the center of Ruun's Crest, it is the last solace of peace in a world of madness. Here, groups will gather to discuss plans for venturing into the city under the watchful eye of Baldrige, the proprietor who was one of the first explorers in the city, but returned to the simple life after the loss of both his arm and eye to some terrors deep in the heart of Curse. Due to these injuries, patrons jokingly refer to him as "Little Ephaldin," which causes the priesthood no end of grief. The Javelin is two stories, comprised of stables, bedchambers, and multiple seating rooms. Its balcony which looks out over the street is said to be the best place to watch new travelers arrive in the small outpost.

5. Ruun's Obelisk

Sitting at the center of the town square is a large obelisk, black as night but twice as dark. The settlement built up around it, and it is one of three such obelisks that exist outside of the city itself. Rising twenty feet into the air, its surface is smoother than glass and even slightly oily to the touch, though no residue is left on the hand once pulled away. There are no markings, or if there are, they cannot be seen against its dark surface.

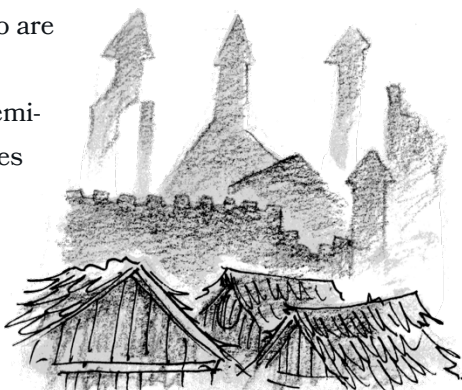
6. The Fringe

A smaller settlement on the southern end of the city, The Fringe is the place where those of low repute gather. Constructed of the ruined elements of the city proper, it is a mishmash of stone and wood, with crumbled statues making up the rough walls used to defend it against invading Curse-dwellers. The priesthood of Ephaldin ignores this part of the city, believing it a den of pure debauchery, so Sephera's healers find

their comfort here tending to the ill and wounded, away from the stern eyes of the priests.

7. Mercenaries' Row

A set of tenements within The Fringe, Mercenaries' Row is the place to go when seeking those who are willing to venture into the city for a price. This has sprung up to be a semi-official guild, so that those freelances who don't live within Mercenaries' Row are shunned by those who do, and may find a hard time getting work.



8. Dagger Tower

Dagger Tower is a tavern carved into a massive dagger. Found soon after the first adventurers began entering the city, its origin is a complete mystery. Built of a solid block of stone, it sits at a slanted angle plunged into the ground. The main entrance and common room are located in the building constructed around the dagger, while stairs have been carved into its interior for private rooms further up into it. The owner, Kural, a Dreng, may be persuaded to rent the uppermost room for sleeping quarters, but Dagger Tower is not officially an inn. The purpose of the other rooms in the tower are kept close to Kural's chest.

9. The Watchtower

While the buildings on the hills above the city rise higher, The Watchtower is the tallest structure in the city, having almost entirely survived the fall of the city. While the roof of the topmost part of the tower is long gone, and the floor has mostly disintegrated, one can climb

the long winding staircase up to the top and see across the whole city on a clear day. Sometimes signals are sent from the tower to those within the city using torches and large flags, since The Watchtower can be seen almost anywhere. While it is freely accessible, the sheer height and number of stairs is a deterrent to most.

10. The Underchamber

No one is quite sure where in The Fringe The Underchamber rests. It is said to be a meeting place various gangs and mercenary companies, away from the prying eyes of any authorities. Those who have been willing to break their silence say The Underchamber seems to be some sort of large estate, a mansion that has sunk beneath the city, and has since been built over with other structures. Its labyrinthine halls are said to even have an entrance to the Undercity, which is fiercely guarded.

11. The Blackshard

One of the obelisks that rests outside of the city proper, the Blackshard looks similar to the others found in the city, but appears to have been cleaved at an angle. A large angled piece juts up toward the sky, while its other half has slid down and buried itself halfway into the ground. Much as the others, it is so dark it seems to absorb light.

12. The Bay

Perhaps once The Bay had a name, when the city was great, but now it is known only as what it is. The Bay is treacherous, full of many large rocks, broken ships, and a constant thick fog preventing anyone but the foolhardiest of sailors from venturing within. The Drengr prefer to set up on the edge of The Bay at Fourshores, and the many docks and harbors throughout The Bay are accessed via the Drengr's karveships.

From there, they stage raiding parties into the city, carrying off all manner of treasure.

13. Fourshores

The primary home of the Drengr within Curse, Fourshores is a scattering of beachheads just outside of The Bay. There, the Drengr have built large longhouses, separated by clans, and maintaining an unsteady peace. There is no central leader in Fourshores, and few issues crop up that require an overall consensus, but those are usually resolved with ritualized combat. Many of the buildings here on Fourshores are built from the Drengr karveships that arrived with leaking hulls or ruined masts, and so were turned upside down to serve as roofs. The makeshift villages are tightly packed and busy places of trade.



14. The Docks

The docks aren't a single location, but actually stretch along the shoreline of The Bay on all sides. They are rotten and broken, with many unable to hold the weight of a single person. The docks are full of ruined ships, some sunk beneath the water, only their masts above the waterline, while others are tilted at angles. A few here and there appear fully intact, but have been unable to leave port as some of the water has receded, leaving them sitting on silt and mud. The buildings that still stand here on the shores seem to be of newer make than many of the other structures within the city, but are still in ruins.

15. The Ghost Ships

Out in The Bay on some evenings, ships will appear, glowing green, and only lasting a few moments before fading from view. When the fog is at its deepest, they can even be seen during the day. For this reason, no Drengr ships will travel through The Bay at night or during heavy fog, for fear of disrupting the angered dead.

16. Grein Rock

In the center of the bay rests an island which a group of Drengr have established as a second homestead and deployment area for exploring the city. On the shoreline they have an upturned ship as their central hall, with many tents surrounding it to make up the small settlement. A small keep, perhaps once The Bay's central lighthouse and customs station, stands prominently at the highest point, though the Drengr say it is a haunted place and forbid its disturbance.

17. The Twins

The two black stones, each on opposite sides of the mouth of the bay, reach out at an angle toward the sea, the soft earth on the beaches giving them an unstable foundation. Like the other black stone monoliths in the city, these seem so dark as to absorb light. Even on the foggiest of days, if you stand at one stone, you are always able to spot the other breaking through the mist, despite the distance.

18. Temple Hill

On a small rise lies the ruins of a massive ancient temple, though none know to whom it was dedicated. There are multiple abandoned neighborhoods around the temple, and its close proximity to the Wall of Sorrows makes it a common pilgrimage for worshipers of *All the Gods Save One*, accompanied by Ephaldian priests.

19. The Temple

No living language graces its walls or columns, and no iconography of any of the gods of Teranern or the Innanlands can be seen. The gargoyles and statuary within depict unknown creatures and monsters, and the image of a two-faced humanoid, its features worn away, stands as the central carving at the center. The temple appears unaligned to any of the known gods, though some scholars believe it is dedicated to Tabal'Dur, the Most-Hated. The roof has caved in in most parts, leaving it exposed to the elements. There is almost always a thick fog within its walls, and an unnatural chill permeates the place.

20. The Black Spear

Just outside what was once the main entrance to the Temple stands a large black monolith, this one sharper than the others. It rises up, piercing the sky as a jagged black arrowhead. Some scholars who have studied the writing in the temple say that they can feel those same symbols etched into the monolith itself.

21. Old Town

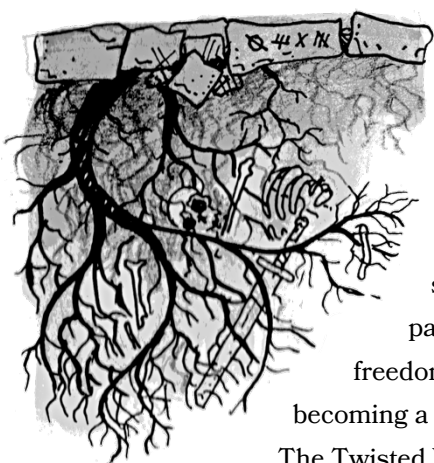
Some Preservers in the city have identified this part of the city as the oldest section, built by the earliest settlers to The Bay. Many of the buildings here, though in absolute ruin, stand five stories high. Each of the structures shows a new style with each floor, as though generations after the building was constructed, another builder would come in and simply build a new floor in a completely different architecture.

22. Twin Bridge

The bridges here are heavily patrolled and held by various gangs, fighting one another for control and extracting heavy tolls from those

crossing for the short period of time they control them. The Ephaldians turn a blind eye to much of the extortion, so long as they receive a cut.

23. Twisted Wood



The forest that encroaches on the city in the southeast corner has been corrupted by the city itself. Known as the Twisted Wood, it is easy to become lost in this winding gyre of blighted forests. With each step, the trees behind shift, obscuring your path. Its endless pathways twist and turn, allowing you

freedom of movement in some places, while becoming a thick, impassible bramble in others.

The Twisted Wood encroaches further and further into the city with each passing year, overtaking outlying buildings with trees that appear to have been there for decades with their thick roots pushing past everything else. Closer to the city the trees appear dead and lifeless, but further away, life begins to flourish, while remaining an impossibly dense wood.

24. The High Belfry

When within the city and looking out over the Twisting Wood, you can see the outline of a tall tower peeking from the forest far in the distance. No one is quite sure how far away it is, as when you venture into the forest, no matter how certain you are you've drawn near to it, when you are able to see it breaking through the treeline, it still appears just as far away. A bell rings from the tower out into the woods at random intervals, with no apparent purpose.

Those who have made it to the tower and returned claim it is a broken spire, taller than anything seen outside the Seven Cities, leaning at an impossible angle, with no door or way inside.

25. The Twisted Obelisk

Just as twisted as the forest itself is the obelisk that sits at its center. As black as any of those within the city, this one is a strange twisted shape, a sharp spiral that seems to be stabbing into the earth. The meadow around it is completely barren of all life, exactly fifty yards in every direction.

26. The Winding Ways

The twisting ways make up the eastern part of the city near the Fastness. Here, the streets are so narrow and winding they seem almost like a dungeon or maze. The buildings are closely pressed together, their stoops nearly touching each other. In many places the roofs of the buildings butt up against one another creating archways. Each of the buildings makes up a small hovel, many multiple stories high. No horses or wagons are able to traverse the Winding Ways. Though none take up a permanent residence here, as the claustrophobic nature can drive anyone to distraction. Wind whips loudly through these narrow tunnels, tugging at cloaks and hair. Finding your way back out can be incredibly tricky and finding a particular location within even harder.

27. Serpentine Square

While there are many squares that make up the conjunction of narrow streets in the Winding Ways, Serpentine Square has no less than seven roads converging into it. At its center, the broken fountain turned basin languidly festers with foul water, slick with algae. At its top,

the statue of what was once a half-human-half creature at some point, but it is so worn away, whatever it once was is completely lost.

Here in the square, the wind is completely stilled, and on many days a thick fog settles in. This square is impossible to find in the Winding Ways, and those who find it by accident don't stick around long.

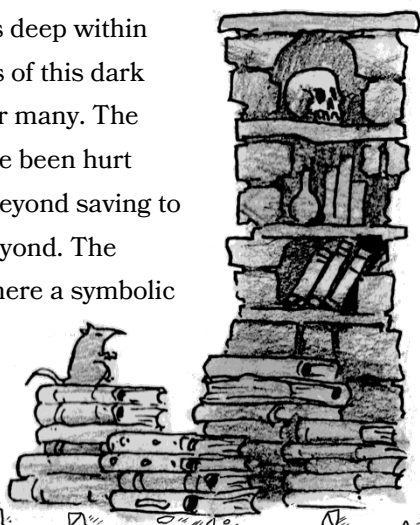
28. The Fastness

High on the eastern hill stands The Fastness, a massive fortress that once served, one can presume, the ruler of the city. Currently a complete ruin, it looms over the city at a distance, placed atop a series of hillocks, each a natural defense in case of a military attack that never came.

For years, Aleksander Ruun has been trying to rebuild The Fastness for himself as a seat of government, but the bird-like Kavran have made their roosts up in the spires, and there are some who believe that the Remnants keep their home here. Ruun believes that seizing the Fastness is the first major step in bringing Curse to heel, and has sent multiple groups of freelances and mercenaries to subjugate it. All have failed. A large black obelisk sits at the center of the keep's courtyard, exuding a dark and oppressive hum. This alone is enough to drive many back, as it fills the soul with dread.

29. The House Penumbra

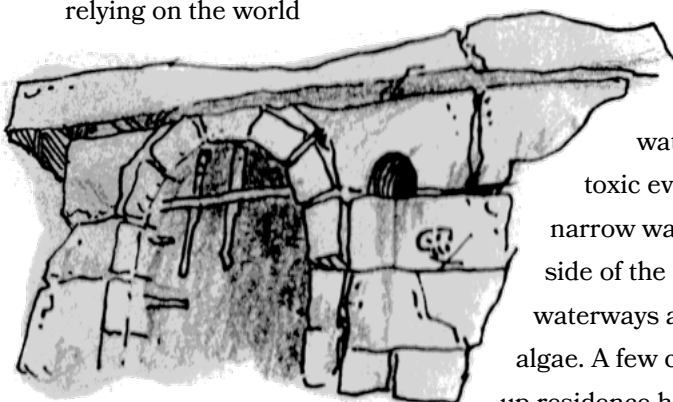
This cloister of healing and death rests deep within the city proper, surrounded by the horrors of this dark place. Yet it remains a place of comfort for many. The Spherian priesthood heal those who have been hurt within the city, and guide those who are beyond saving to their deaths and into the Eight Worlds Beyond. The building surrounds a central courtyard where a symbolic tomb to Clerel rests, and which draws



many visitors who leave dead branches and tumbleweeds at its feet in memory of the dead goddess.

30. Undercourse

Beneath the city itself lies the subterranean world of Undercourse. The intricate and labyrinthine tunnels and sewers are shockingly well-preserved in places. You can navigate through much of the city by relying on the world



below, though it is fraught with its own hazards. The water here is all highly toxic even to the skin, and narrow walkways on either side of the slowly flowing waterways are always slick with algae. A few cutthroat gangs take up residence here, and it is said

that Toanei the Wyrmwanderer travels deep within the tunnels. Rudimentary homes have been built down here for the most desperate, but it is never a settled existence.

31. Gloomstone

Deep within the tunnels is another of the black obelisks that pierce the city, though this one stands as the most unique. It juts down from the ceiling, slick with moisture from the surrounding tunnels. If one ventures up to the surface above, they will see no evidence of the stone above the city streets.

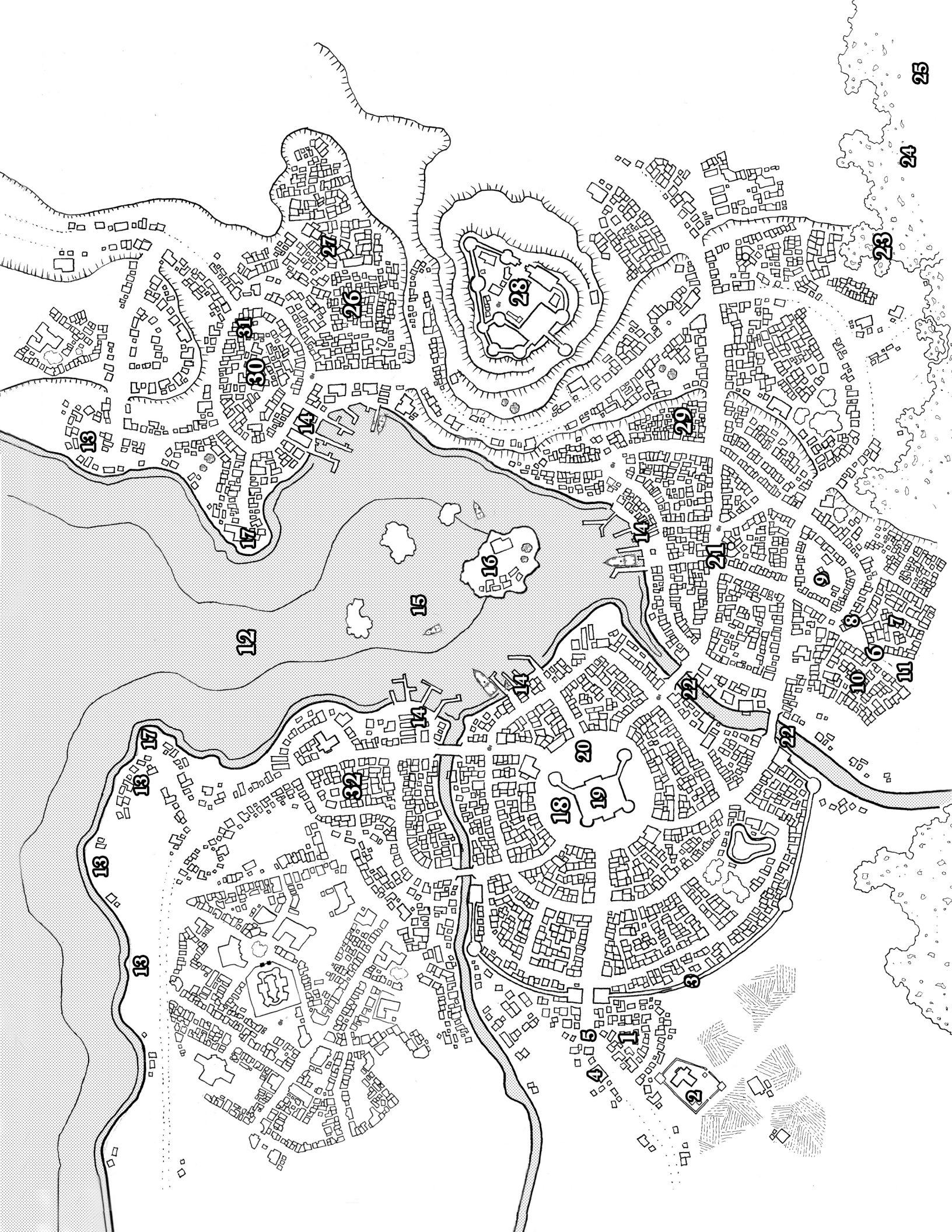
32. The Enclave

Across the city, the obelisks converge at points. It is said that in the intersection where the leylines of any three Obelisks converge, the Enclave of the Maji gather. The Enclave, then, is not a single central location, and the Ephaldians who attempt to hunt the spellweavers have extensive maps documenting possible locations of the Enclave, but have yet to find it.

On nights when the two moons grow full, the Enclave gathers to perform their dark works. Some say human sacrifices are made, others that the Ancient beings are summoned. The Maji know the inner workings of the tunnels below the city and utilize them to coordinate their ancient mysteries.



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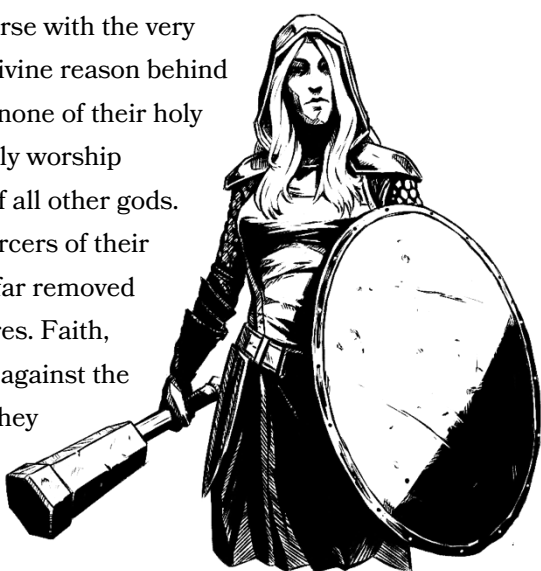


Factions in the City

The city is filled with warriors and scholars, nobles and pilgrims, all seeking something. These factions often come into conflict with one another whether in the streets of Ruun's Crest or The Fringe, or within the city itself.

Ephaldian Priesthood

The Priesthood came to Curse with the very first pilgrims, hoping to find a divine reason behind the city's fall, which appears in none of their holy texts. The Ephaldians exclusively worship Ky'Ephaldin, to the detriment of all other gods. The priesthood now act as enforcers of their own laws and faith tenements, far removed from any of their actual scriptures. Faith, for them, is a cudgel to be used against the monsters of the city and those they deem "profane."



The Church of Sephera

Sephera ushers the dead into the Eight Worlds Below. Her church acts as confessors and body fossors. The Ordo Sephera also venture into the city itself, butchering the desecrated undead and burning the bodies to prevent their rising. They often come into conflict with the Ephaldians who are disdainful of anyone who does not worship Kyr'Ephaldin exclusively.

City Watch

The City Watch has no official authority within the city. Established within a year of The Pilgrimage by a former member of the Emperor's Praetorians, the group sprung up initially to defend pilgrims within the city itself, working with the Ephaldians, they quickly expanded their duties to protecting against all monsters and lawbreakers. Being that there is no official law in Curse, the group is more of a very large gang who enforces whatever rules they have decided on that week, often with great abandon.

The Enclave

There is a whispering of a group of Maji within the city known as the Enclave. The Ephaldians say they are secretly working against their holy mission, while rumors are heard in the taverns and inns that they seek to undo the terrible disaster through powerful weaves.

Outlawed by the Ephaldian Church of the Seven Cities, many of the Maji have moved to Curse, where they can more easily blend into the society of misfits and miscreants.

Merchants

The Merchants guilds are a powerful force on the outside edges of the city. Though they don't venture into the city itself, they regularly hire freelancers to venture into the city to bring back ancient treasures for sale in the Empire, Keldara, and beyond.

The Preservers

The Preservers have taken up residence in the Lower Ward of the city, trying to rebuild the city one structure at a time. Studying the architecture closely, they have brought in stonemasons and carpenters to bring back the city's former glory. After ten years, they have restored only one city block, and are constantly on guard against Takers and thieves, as well as the horrors of the city itself. Many mercenaries take

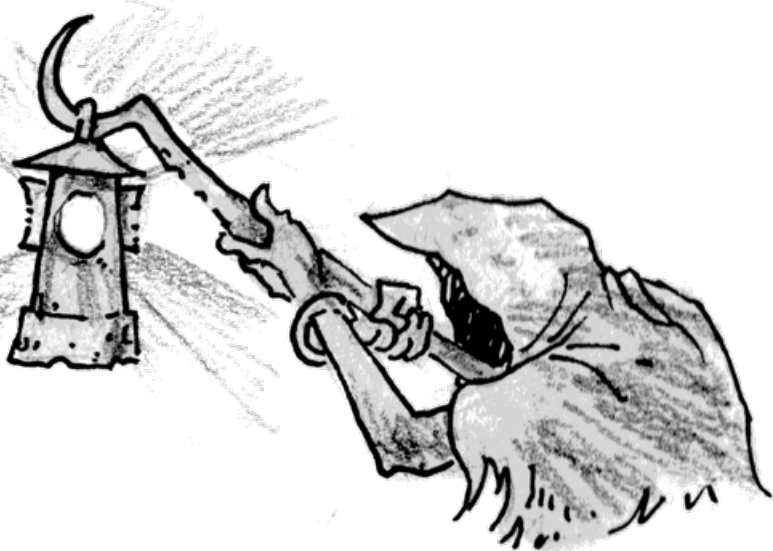
up work with them to act as guards of the block and its surrounding construction sites.

The Takers

The Takers are a band of misfits, cutthroats and thieves, stealing from the merchants, Preservers and treasure hunters. Not willing to go into the dangerous parts of the city themselves, they instead go for easy pickings, taking what they can.

The Builders Guild

Working closely with the Preservers, the Builders have come to construct the encampments outside the city, building tenements and shops for the constant influx of new travelers. All members of the Builders have had an apprenticeship in the Seven Cities, or have the same from Keldara.





Threats in the City

Within the city, those who venture within face not only the dangers of roving bands of treasure hunters, raiding parties of Drengr The creatures that dwell within the city are strange creatures unseen anywhere else in Teranern. What has kept them within the bounds of the city for so long, none may know. Some things are not meant for weak minds to see, their horrifying visages enough to drive even the bravest from the city forever.

The Devourer in Dread

The Hunger, the Creeping Chaos. It is known by many names. None know its origin or even its true form. Some say it is covered in eyes, others in the bodies and trinkets of its victims. It is said there is only one, though the Citymad say they have seen many. The keening

horror of the Devourer in Dread as

it moves through the city in

whatever way it is able, is

palpable. Some swear they have felt its

presence from a street

away and knew to

immediately depart

the area. Only those

whose minds have been shattered by its visage

can tell you what it is.

Who created it? Surely

not even Tabal'Dur,



the Heretic, could have envisioned something so wretched. Perhaps the Forebearers created it in the early days before the crafting of the world as a cosmic slag heap to clean up after themselves. Whatever is the case, none is more feared in the city than the Devourer in Dread.

Hollowed

While no one has seen a Hollowed in its natal stages, there is something within the city that infects the bodies of the dead. Within a few hours of death, small tentacles begin pushing through the skin as the Hollowed begins to awaken. Soon, the body is eaten away internally and hollowed out, until the corpse is nothing but a shell for this writhing mass of serpentine tentacles. These animate the body, carrying it from place to place.

The shambling husk will lash out at anyone it can sense through the movement of air or the tremor of cobblestones underfoot. They can move quickly as they use not only their legs, but ambulate with the tentacles bursting out across the rest of their bodies. It is advised one not make contact with the tentacles, as they have tiny sharp barbs that hook into flesh and hold on, allowing more of the tentacles to grab on. Once a target has been wrestled to the ground, the tentacles strangle the being to death, beginning the cycle anew.



The Hunter



The Hunter is a dangerous predator that stalks the city. They are always found in pairs, hunting for treasure seeking party members who fall behind the group. They have bodies that can't seem to decide whether they are canines or large felines, rippling with muscle and short fur. Unwary travelers may find themselves trapped in an alleyway, stalked from the rooftops, one Hunter serving as a distraction while the other moves in for the kill.

To protect yourself it is best to stay in groups and to move slowly if you know they are nearby. Their eyesight is quite weak, instead 'seeing' through tentacles that emerge from their face and deep within their mouths, picking up the faintest breeze of movement. The Wise say they were created through some ancient dark magic as guardians of the city. The creatures can be controlled in a way, as they are drawn to strong magics. Through directed hexes, a creature's magical aura can be just the thing to draw them in.

Kavran

From a distance, it appears as a common corvid, but once it draws close, you can hear its cackling call. They are black-winged birdlike creatures with heads that are a mockery of the human form.

Kavran are an omen of misfortune, sending any nearby



creature into terror. They do not attack, merely confuse and affright, filling those who hear its call with a deep sense of dread. Many who witness the creature soon find themselves lost or injured in the city, though many of the Maji say this is merely a self-serving prophecy as you are driven to distraction by the dread it brings.

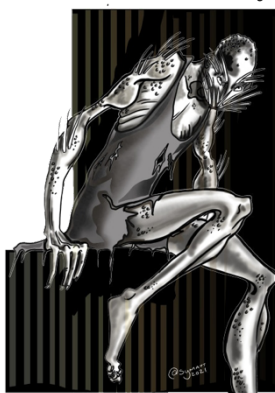
The Murk

While a fog is generally settled over Curse, The Murk is something else entirely. One can never tell with certainty The Murk has come, a *feeling* settles over them, telling them that something is terribly wrong. The mist settles in deeper and deeper, blurring out the light of the sun or moons, muting the shadows and obscuring buildings all around.

When The Murk settles into an area, travelers may find that items in their pouches or packs go missing, or they may find themselves turned around from their companions. When The Murk fades, buildings seem rearranged, alleys where there once were none. Some travelers have vanished utterly when The Murk dissipates. Does it have a sentience to it? Can one control it, or is something already controlling it? Only The Wise know.

Nettle

No-one really knows of the Nettle's origin and even less have seen one. Referred to as "The Living Decay," they can be found lurking where civilization congregates, in dark alleys and abandoned ruins. The creatures always have a damp look to them, their ragged clothing dripping with saltwater. Thin needles protrude from the body especially around their mouth-parts. These spines around the mouth are like straws, which they impale into the body of their victims. When they do so, the infection takes hold.



The body goes through a transformation as though decaying, becoming gaunt and bony. The victim craves submerging their body in saltwater. Then the spines begin to grow. Their bones turn soft and flexible, allowing them to squeeze into tight spaces.

Nettles shun bright lights and one another, so this is one of the only things keeping the Nettles from wiping out all sentient life in the city.

Remnants

The tales of the old speak of these hooded and shadowed things that walk the broken streets. While appearing as men in deep-set robes, closer inspection reveals the lack of feet or even lower garments, simply fading off into tattered nothingness. They often travel in groups, standing silently around menhirs or monuments in Curse for hours at a time. Some say they have witnessed these beings within the settlements on the outskirts, though they wear broken masks that look like the artifacts of the ancient statues that dot the city, and they appear more solid than within the city. They act with distinct purpose, but what that purpose is, perhaps only The Forsaken One knows.



Snalgast

There are some of The Wise who believe these creatures were once birds of some sort, but the twisting dark powers of the city have turned them into these monstrosities. Leathery skin, with small rough patches of wiry hair looks almost diseased. Small worm-like tentacles uselessly squirm from their chests.

Their beaks glint in the light of the two moons in a silvery shimmer. Roving in packs, these bare-skinned bipeds strut through the city, requiring extensive fortifications to be set up to keep these creatures from invading the outer settlements. Many laughingly dismiss the Snalgasts as nothing more than “vicious chickens.” Those who have encountered a pack of these creatures have found nothing but blood and death in their wake.



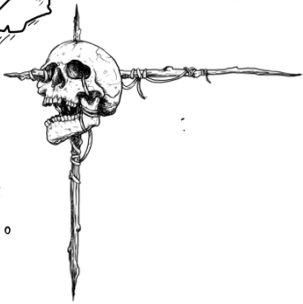
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Toanei, Wyrmwanderer

Toanei the Wyrmwanderer has been seen in the city since the first explorers dared to venture into Curse. This wingless dragon keeps to itself, slithering along the wet cobblestones. It is said by some that it keeps a lair on one of the islands in The Bay, though others believe its lair is deep in the Undercurse. Some Maji have spoken to it, but have been sworn to secrecy as to his purpose within the city.

The Wyrmwanderer can be seen crawling through ruins, digging for and carrying off old artifacts that appear to have no inherent value.





Cosmology

All The Gods Save One

The gods of Teranern once played a prominent role, but over the years, their influence has slowly waned. To truly understand the world, one must understand those who made it. The phrase “All the Gods Save One” refers to honoring each of the gods, though rejecting the powers of Tabal’Dur, the Accused.



Kyr’Ephaldin: The highest praised of the gods, it was he who led the Rebellion of Heaven against the Forebearers. He is missing an arm at the shoulder and bears a large scar across his face as a result of the war. Kyr means Highest, so when praising him, his servants are sure to use this title. He is the father of the hunt, and prefers the company of the wilds.

Andrela: Bride of Ephaldin, Andrela is the goddess of foresight and knowledge. During the Rebellion, the Forebearers took her eyes in hopes of diminishing this gift, but failed. She wears a blindfold now, the scars visible into her brows and cheeks. It is her knowledge that gives The Gift to all the Maji.

Njor: The deity of the Forge, having made the weapons of the gods for the Rebellion. Their skin shimmers obsidian, their eyes are a blazing orange of molten steel. They are keen to laugh and make toasts, boasting of great acts of heroism.

Ymra: She desires to travel the empty spaces of the world, awakening the forests and fields, and raising the bubbling brooks to life. Ymra is known as the Fairest One, and did not take up arms against the Forebearers, but healed the gods as they fell. She is spouse to Njor.

Sephera: The goddess appears as a young woman of fifteen winters, who walks in the twilight of day, and guides the dead into the realms beyond. She takes little interest in the affairs of anyone but herself.

Clerel: The Dead Goddess. Slain during the Rebellion, there are some who still worship her and believe she will be reborn. Some say Sephera visits her in the Deep Places to bring her comfort as she weeps bitterly over what her husband, Tabal'Dur has become.

Tabal'Dur: The betrayer of the gods. It was he who incited the Rebellion through deception and trickery. Tabal'Dur the Accused's name means Slave of Fire.

Before the war, his name was different, now lost. When the final battle of the Rebellion commenced, his heart was pierced by Dur's flaming spear, burying the Father's soul into his own. He was buried alongside his wife Clerel, and when he reawoke from his deep slumber, he was possessed by the spirit of Dur, Flame's Genesis. When referring to the fallen god, his



name must always be accompanied with a dark epithet: Betrayer, The Fallen, Hated Foe, etc.

Forebearers

The Three Fathers were there before the Gods, and their essence makes up all of Teranern. The Gods rebelled against them, and split their essence across the world.

Dur: The Spirit of Fire. It was he who was the first spark in the eye of Sanachamet, the Great Weaver, as she spun the world into being.

Kal: The Spirit of Air. It was he who was breathed into existence as Sanachamet, the Winding One, sighed upon seeing her creation.

Uda: The Spirit of Water. It was he who leapt from the eyes of Sanachamet, the Maiden's Thread, as she was struck by Dur and Kal in their rage. Uda joined his brethren in killing Sanachamet and burying her beneath the world, and her legs reached down to form the Eight Deep Places.



The People of Teranern

The world of Teranern is a vast and sprawling world, full of a wide variety of folk, all of whom are coming to Curse for various reasons. From the wide expanse of The Seven Cities, to the peaks of Keldara, from the forests of Mynn to the wintery fjords of the Innanlands, all come. But who they are is vital to understanding their motivations within the city.



The Seven Cities

The King is dead. Long live the king!

Piotr Ruun, The second of his name, Emperor of the Seven Cities died only six months ago, plagued by a mysterious illness. The boy-emperor, Sandoval Ruun, sits on the throne, the crown heavy on his brow.

Powerful families conspire against one another and, though no one would admit it aloud, the crown. While the Houses battle, they feel themselves threatened by The Guilds who command commerce. The church of Ephaldin is a powerful faction as well, though their ego is bruised after being pushed from the Great Council before Piotr II's death.

Something dark is brewing. While rumors persist that the Emperor was killed by treacherous means, those thoughts are uncouth in some circles, and treasonous in others. Outlying kingdoms, some of whom had recently been brought under the control of the United Empire have begun stirring in rebellion.

Beset on all sides by dangerous foes, the people look to their king, Sandoval Ruun, the last of his name.

The United Empire of the Seven Cities And the Regions Beyond (known generally as The Empire, The United Empire, or The Seven

Cities), sits nestled in a sloping valley along the Antizar River and spreads one hundred leagues in every direction beyond to the forest's edge of Mynn, the foothills of the Keldaran Mountains, and even extending to the Sleetcrowns and Palisade Peaks. Curse rests on its far eastern border.

The Empire derives its name from its first founding, when seven close villages formed an alliance and slowly grew into one another. The capital now calls itself the Seven Cities, though where one ends and another begins is now a matter of some archaeological debate.

Smaller cities and villages fill the lands around the capital which were slowly absorbed into the Empire. The Empire was once deeply religious, honoring All of the Gods Save One, though they have steadily been secularizing, much to the consternation of the priesthood of Ephaldin.

Humans are the primary people of The Seven Cities, though many dwarves have come from Haz-Matar and the dwarven lands further beyond for trade or settlement. Some Drengr have taken up a presence within the Cities themselves in small enclaves, and even the Eldest can be seen in small numbers across the lands.

The Dwarves Haz-Matar



The kingdom of the Petty King in the Palisade Peaks is home to a sprawling dwarf civilization. It extends high into the mountain range and throughout the many rolling valleys. There, the dwarves build terraced farms which each dwarf works for themselves on small parcels. Beneath the earth, great forges and deep bunkered, labyrinthine halls are home to The Deepest Ones, fierce warrior dwarves of pale skin who have never seen the sun. It is

spoken that they defend their kin in the lands above from the great Dwellers in the Dark.

The Petty King, Matar Ulf, is said to serve the Great King, who rules an even greater kingdom further to the East and whose riches are beyond compare, but no human has ventured that far, and the great borders are shut.

The Drengr of the Innanlands

Up among the frozen floating islands of the northern seas, where the sky burns in green fire, lies the Innanlands, the home of the Drengr. The Drengr wish for great eddas to be sung in their honor and are fierce warriors with a love of culture. Their halls are filled with an eclectic collection of riches from around the known world as this is seen as the highest form of glory. The dwarves know them in their own tongue as Orcs.



Their lands are a harsh place. Crops can only be grown on the southern shores, and sparsely at that, requiring frequent raids into the coasts of the Empire. Great herds of sheep wander along the fjorded cliffs, and the horses of the Drengr are legendary in their hardiness. Their great halls are only known in the empire by legends, massive structures of wood, assembled from the bones of ancient warships which the Drengr have lost the knowledge to build on that scale. They worship strange gods in the North, powerful entities to be feared.

Kylia

The farmlands of Kylia are a pastoral landscape. Once the home to a vast kingdom of the Eldest, the whole of the land has become enveloped in farmlands. Ancient ruins stretch up to the sky surrounded by a golden sea of wheat, all but ignored by the folk who till the fields.

Resting between the forests of Mynn and the mountain range of Keldara, there are wide roads cut through to allow the movement of mercenaries to travel up into the mountains without disturbing the crops. While the lands have no defenses and no formal region-wide government, the farmers have a pact to burn down the entirety of their crops should anyone invade. With them acting as the breadbasket for the whole land, this keeps them safe.

Mynn

The forest of Mynn to the south of The Empire is a sprawling



overgrown woodland, seemingly untouched by human hand. There are some who know better. The people of Mynn are renown mercenaries, expert trackers and hunters, and are able to vanish without a trace. Using hidden paths and secret ways, the people live deep within the forest,

many days' travel from its borders.

The Mynn are a superstitious folk, committing to rites they no longer know the purpose of. They say they came from an even more ancient and immense forest long ago, when the Ancients were awake in the world. When the mercenaries of Mynn are rallied, whole villages will empty as everyone takes up arms and leaves their forest enclave. There is no glory in warfare, only pride in returning home to the forest they love.

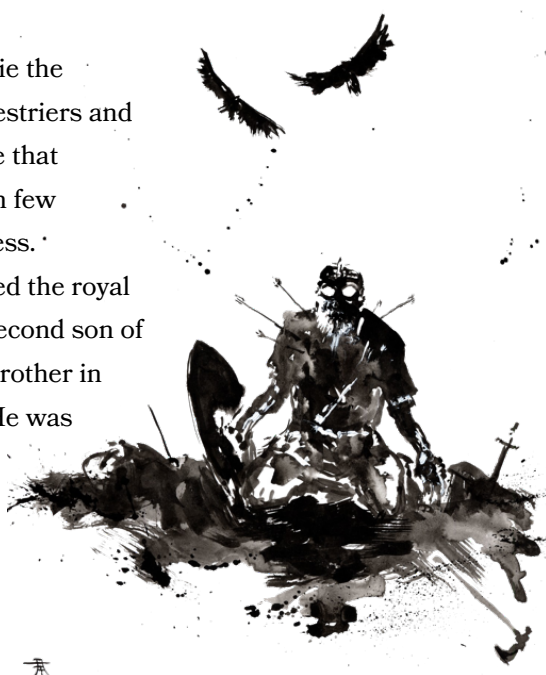
Some of the Mynn hold that the Spidergrove Woods, a small forest in Kyliia, are part of their lands, though few live there, and even then, only on the outer borders. It is a haunted place, said to contain lost souls of the Ancients and a few wayward Eldest wayfinders.

Keldara

The mountains of Keldara host an ancient Kingdom older than the Seven Cities themselves. High on snow-capped peaks, the fortresses of the Keldari knights stand, unassailable. Only by narrow and winding roads can one reach their cities, which dot the cliffs all along the mountain-range. Empires and kingdoms have come and gone in the wide plains below Keldara, but though many have tried, none have succeeded in breaching the walls of their fortresses, a point of pride among her people.

Deeper within the range lie the farming valleys where their destriers and warhorses are bred. It is there that great tourneys are held, which few outsiders are allowed to witness.

Terrible grief has shattered the royal family, as ten years ago, the second son of the king murdered his older brother in order to seize his birthright. He was banished, and the third-born son is now heir to the throne.



The Eldest Beyond

Far beyond the mountains of Keldara lies The Sea. What lives beyond, none but the Eldest know. Through the Valley of Remembrance in Keldara the Eldest come to the central lands, given passage through ancient treaties with the great houses. Known by the Drengir as Elves, the Eldest have been here since before humanity awoke on the shores, and will be here after humanity is gone. A few still live deep within the deepest forests, but most have ventured Beyond, to the lands past the Sea. Recently, as Curse has drawn more and more to it, so too have the Eldest begun their own expeditions, though what their plans are within the city, none but they know. Some rumors say they know the origins of the calamity that befell the city, and may have even caused it, back in the ancient days.



The Tomb of Tan'Dal



At the center of one of the many town squares that fill the city is a circle of standing stones, each twelve feet high. Each of these standing stones shows the engraved image of the gods on guard facing toward the mound.

Four days ago, a group of treasure hunters warded the area using a novice *maji* and began their dig.

At least, that's what they say at *Dagger's Tower*. The party hasn't been heard from since.

When the heroes venture to the mound, they find the ground upturned, shovels scattered around, and a few loose packs. There is no sign of the treasure hunters.



Approaching the stones. The air smells stale here, a slight scent of rot in the air. No animals can be heard or seen, not even the ubiquitous sound of corvids. There is a muted silence over the area, the cobblestones themselves absorbing sound. The thick fog breaks right around the six stone pillars at the center of the square, exposing them to the clouds high overhead.

1. Stones. The six stones each have ancient etchings depicting All of the Gods (Save One), their weapons raised, facing the mound.

The other sides of the stones are blank. The etchings are worn away from age.

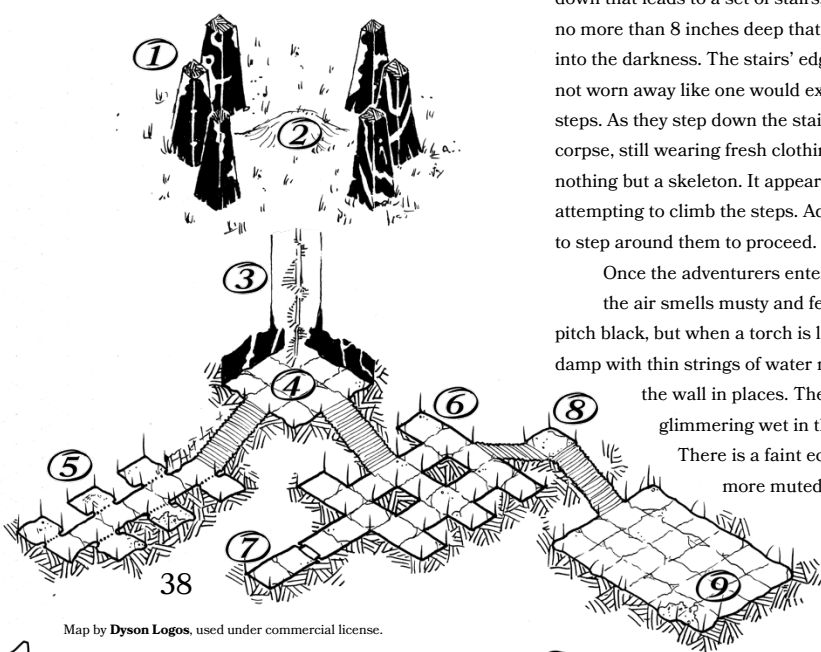
2. Mound. The earth has been recently upturned. Approaching it you can make out a human-sized hole, just large enough to squeeze into so long as you aren't heavily burdened with supplies. There are a few packs that look like they've been left behind here full of basic equipment.



3. Stairs. The hole has a short ladder down that leads to a set of stairs, very shallow, no more than 8 inches deep that spiral down into the darkness. The stairs' edges are sharp, not worn away like one would expect from old steps. As they step down the stairs, they find a corpse, still wearing fresh clothing, reduced to nothing but a skeleton. It appears that it was attempting to climb the steps. Adventurers need to step around them to proceed.

Once the adventurers enter the tomb, the air smells musty and feels cold. It is pitch black, but when a torch is lit, the walls are damp with thin strings of water running down the wall in places. The floor is black, glimmering wet in the torchlight.

There is a faint echo, though it's more muted than you



expect. You can hear a soft clattering of metal in the distance, though the layout of the tomb makes it difficult to tell exactly where it is coming from.

4. Entrance chamber. Here, just at the top of the west steps is another skeleton, reaching out toward the stairway to the surface. This chamber also has a few supply bags lying scattered about, presumably from the treasure hunters. A map rests on top of one of the bags, but only depicts this room and the two stairways. Presumably, they were planning on returning back and updating the map, but never did. You can see a soft sputtering torchlight glow coming from the west stairs.

5. Deep catacombs. As you walk down the stairs, the images depict the triumph of the All (Save One) against the Forebearers. At the bottom of the stairs, you can see the sputtered torch at the far end of the hallway lying on the floor, flickering against the black stone walls. Above each alcove is writing, seemingly written in the tongue of Ancient P'al. An image above each has a depiction of a guardian being slain by an Ephaldian Priest in ancient armor. The alcoves are empty except the far back one, which has the remains of another treasure hunter, who is pressed into the corner, apparently cowering in the moments before his death.

6. The Warding. The shape of this chamber is echoed in symbols on each wall three feet off the ground. The symbols flicker green, but with each flicker, appear to be fading. Each time the heroes turn their heads, they see a black shape move past the corner of their eye, just around the corner. There are stairs to the north, and to the south, they find a door to a small room. There is a skeleton of an adventurer here, his back pressed against the door (7). If the body is moved, the door is not latched and a **Hollowed** stumbles out into the larger room and attacks the group.

8. North stairs. Here appears to be the remains of the final adventurer. On the landing lies the body. It isn't a skeleton, but appears to have tripped on his way down the stairs, fleeing something. He broke his neck in the fall. There is a look of panic in his eyes. A strong green glow pulses from the chamber below.

9. Throne tomb of Tan'Dal. This large chamber is etched with warding runes. At the far end of the hall stands an intricate chair that looks like a throne, with iron bands binding a figure to the chair. There is a group of skeletal warriors in rusted armor and rotting half-capes gathered in a half circle around the throne. Green light emerges from their chests, wrapped around the figure.

Tan'Dal is emaciated, but as the magic swirls around him, he seems to be gaining more strength. He has intricate black tattoos across his face and chest. If the heroes try to stop the ritual, a few skeletons break off, drawing their swords to attack. If more than two skeletons must break off to stop them, the magic sputters out. If this happens, all skeletons attack. If the heroes simply stand back and let the ritual complete, Tan'Dal is restored and immediately saps the lifeforce of all who are alive in the tomb, killing them instantly.

