

JOHN WICK

# Honor Among Thieves

SERIES PITCH OF THE MONTH





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# Honor Among Thieves

—John Wick

## Nutshell

A crew of young thieves tries to survive in a City that wants to cut their throats.

## Prelude

So, the City, she's all quiet like a spider. And the only folks who be out tonight be them with knives in soft pockets what you can't see. And padding on the soles of their shoes so's you can't hear. The City, she's all quiet, but like a spider, she ain't still.

Don't get too attached to nobody. This is a bloody one, all right.

What did you call me? Watch your tongue 'round here, friend. Nobody uses that word in a place like this.

Which word? You're thick as a rope, aren't ya? I'll tell ya for free, friend.

Rogue.

Don't ever call a man in this part of the City that. Rogues are the marks who go digging down in them holes and get shot at by goblins and bitten by giant spiders and dodge poison ork blades. Bloody nonsense, says I. No. I'll stay here in the City. You know why?

Because this is where all that loot them sucker rogues dig up comes to. And why go digging down in the dirt when you can nip it from a house, friend? Them holes got ogres and trolls and traps and who knows what else. You know what houses got?

Locks and guards. That's all. I'll take me locks and guards over ogres any day.

But that ain't sayin' the City ain't got its own risks. No, no. But this is home. The City. What's its name? It ain't got a name, friend. The City sits on the edge of the River. Neither of them have a name. The City. The River. Nobody remembers and nobody cares.

Rich nobs live on the north side of the City behind a wall and guarded gates. Their streets are paved and well lit. Their homes filled with trinkets that could feed a dozen families for the rest of their lives. That isn't counting the real treasure in their vaults. This is the Upper City. And the filth from all the morning buckets travels downhill. Down into the Lower City. Down below is where the rest of us try to make a living. We get the scraps from the Uppa. We get their buckets. Down here, most of the City is half-made. Projects mostly done, but never finished. Staircases that lead to nowhere. Streets that end in walls. The whole place is a madman's maze. A City of steps and dead ends, cobbled together by those who have no choice but to live here.

The Gods live here, too. Not down in the filth but in their own corner of the City. More guards, more gates, more walls. The Gods walk among us. Slumming. Never can tell if that beggar really is what he says he is. That makes refusing them all that much more dangerous. The Gods are real, all right. You can take my word for that. I saw one kill my best friend two weeks ago. Then, me and the boys killed the bastard right back the week after. Yeah, the Gods bleed and die. Even they got to be careful which streets they walk down.

And the Guilds. Most powerful men in the City, those Guildsmen. (The wizards would disagree, but who trusts what a wizard says?) You see a man wearing one of their pins and you know to leave his pockets alone. Each with his own private army. It's a wonder the nobs let them live in their City. It's a wonder until you realize it's really the Guildsmen who let the nobs live in *their* City.

The tallest tower in the City belongs to the wizards. I don't say much about them because

you never know when they're listening. They got their Black Guard out there making sure nobody's using magic without their say-so. Scary things, them Black Guard. I can't even say if they're human or not. Jexsi and I have a bet on that. He says yes, I say no. Soon as one of us has the salt to catch one, I'll let you know.

And then there's us. The working men of the City. Honest jobs? Only an honest man takes an honest job. And we aren't exactly what you'd call honest men. But we've got our own Goddess. She watches out for us and we watch out for her. We made her a promise and she made one to us. We've got our own secrets. Our own power. All the rest of them hate each other, see? The wizards hate the nobs and the nobs hate the Guilds and the Guilds hate the priests and the priests hate the wizards . . . and none of them are willing to move an inch against the other. And that's what they got us for. We're the ones who do it all. We steal from the nobs and we steal from the Guilds and we steal from the wizards and we steal from the Gods. We steal from them all. That's what we are. We're thieves.

And let me give you something no man in this City will ever give you. I'll give you something for nothing. You ready? Here it is, my friend. We're the kings of the City. Not the nobs. Not the priests. Not the wizards and not the Guildies. Just us.

Now, buy us a whiskey. My throat hurts from all this talkin'.

What's that? Your purse is gone?

Damn thieves. They're everywhere.

## Characters

You play a crew of thieves who operate together, applying their different skills for the benefit of the group.

The City is a dangerous place and sticking together is your best hope of surviving. You'll need a group that has complimentary skills and is willing to trust each other. That second part? That's the trick.

### Roles in the Group

- **The Flashman:** A conman with the glibness and charm to make anyone believe anything he says.

- **The Pinch:** A thief who specializes in picking pockets.
- **The Grip:** Every crew needs muscle, and in the City, they call that thief a grip.
- **The Glassman:** As in, "he could climb a wall of glass." The glassman is a thief specializing in climbing, jumping, and squeezing in and out of tight places.
- **The Head:** Every crew needs one man who can think ahead, who can plan, and who can improvise when the plan goes wrong. That's the head.
- **The Quill:** Forgery is a major problem in the City and the quill is the one responsible for that. When the crew needs forged papers, they look to the quill.

### Relationships

There's an old thief proverb: "Never treat your friends like marks." A key element of the setting is trust. Do the characters trust each other? They spend their lives lying to marks (non-thieves), so why should they trust each other?

As a crew, the characters *must* trust each other. Their lives depend on it. But the lure of gold can turn any man against his friends. At least, that's what the Street says. So the question arises: is the Street right?

### Key Desires

On the surface, it may seem as if the key desire to this setting is money, but that isn't true. It's what money can *get you*. Security, stability. These are the things money provides. Money also provides pleasure and decadence, and that's important as well. Finally, money provides independence.

But another element that many overlook is *respect*. The Street will never fear you, but it can respect you, and that's about as good as a thief can hope for.

## Setting

Walkin' down River Street, it ain't even dawn yet and the City's movin'. The bakerman, he's bakin' bread. You can smell it from the pipes above his shop. The windows are thick glass—he can afford that—and if you peer through, you can watch him pointin' and shoutin' as his apprentices scurry about like

frightened mice.

And the banger boys are already movin'. You see them runnin' down the street, carryin' private letters and such. Sailors are out on the waters, haulin' in nets all full. They'll be sellin' all that in a couple o' hours.

Sun ain't even awake and the City is. But she never really sleeps, does she? We don't, neither. Only marks sleep.

Nobody knows how old the City is. Some historians claim men found it. Others say it was built with magic long forgotten. The language of those who built the City can be found carved into the oldest stones.

While it may be true that men only found the City, it is also true that they have built upon what they found. Parts of the City are newer than others. You can tell from the stones. Older stones are hard: almost impossible to chip or break. They are also cool to the touch, regardless of the season. The new stones—those added by men—do not share these qualities.

Those who have lived long enough in the City know that the streets seem to have a will of their own. No matter how men try to build the City into their own image, it corrects itself. Men build a stairway to connect two streets and a few years later, the stairway leads into a wall. A wall that was never there a year ago. This makes the City a kind of maze that changes as the years go by. You can live a decade in the same part of the City and then, overnight, everything you knew about your barrio is wrong.

The most important moment in the City's history, however, came nearly one hundred years ago when an earthquake divided it in two. The event lifted the northern half of the City almost fifty yards up and the southern half of the City an equal distance down. Many speculate on the source of the event. Some say it was a spell from the Wizards Guild gone wrong. Others call upon the old myth that the City is actually the remains of a dead god who tried to wake itself from its grave. Whatever the reason may be, the City was divided in two. The Upper City was claimed by the wealthy, leaving the Lower City to the poorer classes.

The City is surrounded by giant walls higher than current architects can build. There are three gates: Westgate, Southgate, and Eastgate. Northgate collapsed during the Catastrophe and remains impassable.

The River runs from the northwest part of the City, through the northern part of the City and down to the south where it feeds into the Sea. After the Catastrophe, it became a waterfall dropping down onto the Lower City. It found a new route, cutting through homes and streets, until it found a path toward the Sea. Men use the river for fishing and travel. Every day, you can see boats on the water. Merchants, fishermen, and those with the funds to buy their own boats.

Life in the Upper City (the Upps) is easy. Live in the Lower City (the Lows) is bloody. And the families who call themselves "the nobles of the City" keep it that way. While men have built roads twisting up the small mountain that divides the north from the south, guards make sure nobody walks into the Upper City without the right papers. The Upps have even built rope carriages to lift folks from the Lower City to the Upper City. If they have permission to enter, of course.

### **Technology**

The City's technological advances place it beyond the typical medieval fantasy setting into a world closer to the Restoration or Regency periods (late 1600s to early 1700s).

### **Firearms**

Firearms are rare, expensive, and deadly. Only Upper City merchants may build them. Possessing an unlicensed firearm is a criminal offense.

Firearms are mostly used in duels between the upper class. The lower class cannot afford the permits for firearms and rarely use them. They are too loud, offer only a single shot, and too risky. Most inhabitants of the Lower City rely on daggers.

### **Lighting**

The City has four sources of light: torches, gas lamps, oil lamps, and alchemical lights.

Gas lampposts light Lower City streets. Most homes use gas lamps as well. The gas comes from the swamp just to the southeast of the City.





The City also uses oil from whale blubber acquired by the Lower City's sailors.

In the Upper City, alchemical electricity powers lights in homes and on the streets. Alchemists discovered that placing copper wires against so-called Old Stones produced heat and an electrical charge. With this discovery, rudimentary electrical lights became available to those who could afford them.

The wires attach to the Old Stones and run along buildings, through walls, to lighting fixtures, usually wall-mounted. Floor and table lamps see little use, as they expose the notoriously fragile wires to damage.

### Plumbing

The City's sewer system is a complex system of tubes, ducts, and valves running all the way through the Upper and the Lower Cities. The Catastrophe cut off the Upper City sewer system from its counterpart. Exposed tubes in the Cliffside drop the Upper City's waste down on the Lower City. Of course, the Lower City also uses those same openings to get into the Upper City, avoiding the guards . . .

Those who can afford hot and cold running water have it. There are also public drinking fountains in the Upper City and the nicer parts of the Lower City and toilets are common.

We'll talk more about the sewers in the Undercity section, below.

### Glass

While it may not seem to be an important innovation, glass is a valuable commodity in the City. It allows for all sorts of sophisticated measuring equipment (including a watertight compass for sailors) and expensive decorations.

The chief ingredient of glass—sand—is most prevalent in the lands around the City and the glass it produces is of exceptional quality. In the Lower City, most glass is thick and full of imperfections. In the Upper City, glass is thin, colored, and treated with lead to keep it strong.

### Economy

The City's economy runs on imports to, and exports from, other city-states. Its chief export is grain, supplemented by whale oil and iron. Its primary luxury item is glass; the sand in the area produces a variety unlike any other in the Known World.

## Cats

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Just a quick aside here. There are many cats in the City. They seem to be everywhere. All kinds of breeds. Everywhere you look, there's a cat.

Nobody kicks a cat in the City. Nobody.

That's because the City's cats are intelligent, sentient, and magical. They seemingly appear and disappear at will. They can travel through dreams. They seem to see things the other races cannot. You can learn their language, but it isn't easy. There's also a rumor of a "King of the Cats," although, you know what they say about rumors.

And nobody kicks a cat. I know I said that twice. It's that important.

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A large population of indentured workers (see "Punishment", below) helps bring in the crops and mines for iron in the mountains just north of the City. Trolls infest the mines, making the latter industry difficult and often deadly. That's why the City uses prisoners as miners: they can't find anyone else to do it, regardless of the profit.

A thriving black market puts money in everyone's pockets. Because everything in the City is regulated, almost every activity, without proper paperwork, is illegal. And if you make everything that's profitable illegal, you've got a powerful black market.

## Authority

The City can appear to be a lawless place to those who do not know it. But authority is everywhere. You just have to know where to look. Know how to see it.

### The Governor

The City's chief administrator is the Governor. The position is open for election every year. Barrio aldermen vote, as do the few residents who purchase a franchise permit through the Governor or their local alderman.

The Governor's mansion is located in the Upper City behind massive walls and gates. Its occupant, Christof Berringer, now enters his tenth year in office. Before him, his brother, Ammanuel Berringer, served as Governor. And before Ammanuel, their father, Jessoph Berringer.

You get the idea.

For over three generations, the position of Governor has been held by a Berringer. And there's no reason to think there won't be a fourth.

### **Barrios and Aldermen**

The City divides into sectors called barrios, each represented by an official, male or female, called an alderman. He takes responsibility for collecting taxes, keeping the peace, and repair work—including maintenance on private residences. If a storm knocks a roof off, it's the alderman who must have it fixed. Unfortunately, there's nothing in the law that says *when* he has to have it fixed and there are so many other problems in the barrio right now . . . perhaps if you showed him a little friendship and respect, he might be able to move that repair closer to the top of the list.

If you know what I mean.

Aldermen get their positions through yearly elections. The process is filled with corruption and blood. Bribery, assault, arson, and murder run rampant, along with voter fraud. It isn't always the man with the most money who wins but the man with the most allies in the barrio. That means getting the support of the street gangs and Guilds who control the barrio.

Most aldermen have a street gang or Guild backing them up. A lucky few find sponsors from the Upper City. But without muscle, nobody gets anywhere in the City.

Aldermen are not the muscle of the law; that's the City Watch. Instead, an alderman is supposed to ensure that all the correct permits are in order in his barrio. That puts a lot of power, and coins, in his hands.

### **Permits**

Everything worth anything in the City requires a permit. You need a permit to open a business, a permit to carry weapons, a permit to carry "treacherous paraphernalia" (otherwise known as "adventuring equipment"), a permit to walk around the Upper City, a permit to transport goods, a permit for public speaking, and on and on and on. If there's any kind of money or benefit in it, you can bet the City requires a permit.

### **The City Watch**

While aldermen oversee the bureaucracy, the men of the Watch act as its official guardians, maintaining law and order within City walls.

### **A Note About Permits**

I don't have a list of permits. I don't need one. That's because the City's law gives the aldermen of the barrios the right to create permits on the spot as they see fit. If the players find they need something, they'll probably need a permit for it.

Here's why: by making everything illegal in the City, you make being a thief all that much easier . . . and profitable.

Unfortunately, most members of the City Watch come from low income families, have little education, and even less motivation to keep a sense of dignity. There's just too much money being thrown around.

Most of the Watch is on the take from Guilds and gangs. They report to the Governor, but take payments from law-breaking Aldermen to turn a blind eye. Guilds bribe them. Gangs bribe them. The money comes from every direction. Not a lot of money—most aren't smart enough to ask for more—but enough to keep them from doing much.

Of course, when the Governor's officials come looking, the Watch is on the job. About once a month, the Governor sends down some high falootin' muckity muck to check on the barrio. The Watch heads out into the Streets, makes a bunch of arrests and throws the most well-known despicables behind bars. Then, as soon as the Governor's dog is gone, the Watch lets them go. The criminals don't mind; it's part of what makes the system work.

That isn't to say that thieves shouldn't fear the Watch. They are still armed, armored, and organized. Push them the wrong way and they can come down hard. The Watch has been known to tear down an entire barrio's gangs in one night.

Sheriff Brigham Shale heads the Watch. A cruel and sadistic man the Street calls the Black Viper, he takes great pleasure in torturing criminals under his care before sending them off to prison. When asked how such a man could gain the position of City Sheriff, the Street replies, "He sold his heart to bribe the Governor."

Under the Sheriff are Captains, each in charge of a barrio. The number of Officers assigned to



his watch depends on the size of the barrio and how much he can bribe the Sheriff.

### **Bents: The Golden Eagles**

While the City Watch acts as the public law enforcement body, those who can afford hired swords look to more private solutions to security. Of course, having a private guard at your beck and call requires a permit.

The Guild of the Golden Eagle comprises the largest private guard organization. Well-armed and well-trained, its members, mostly war veterans, hire out to anyone who can afford their prices. You can recognize them from their crimson tabards marked with (what else?) golden eagles.

Barnabas Bent, a huge man with ratty black hair and only one eye, commands the Eagles. A scar runs down the side of his face into his thick beard. He ruthlessly looks after his own. The Streets call his soldiers, “bents” or “Bent’s boys.” He doesn’t seem to mind.

### **The Blackwatch**

Long ago, the Wizards’ Guild bought and paid for a law that forbids anyone without a permit to use magic within the City’s walls. That permit can only be issued by one source: the Wizards’ Guild. To enforce that law, the Guild keeps an elite cadre of guards, the Blackwatch—the City’s most feared military force.

They dress in dyed black robes and wear black masks to cover their faces. Those who have been close enough to a Black Guard (and lived) say they can hear whispers under the masks. They use weapons of black iron. They can cast spells. They can sniff out magical dweomers. Magic used against them sputters and fails.

Fast, efficient, and deadly, they whisk unauthorized spellcasters off to the Wizards’ Tower. Those the Watch can’t catch, they kill.

The rare survivors of Blackwatch custody stagger home with neither memory of what happened to them nor any ability to use magic.

### **Slavery**

Slavery is currently illegal in the City but that could change at any time. The Governor decides what is legal and criminal. At the moment he says slavery is not profitable enough. A compelling counterargument could change his mind.

### **The Prison**

The City needed a prison. For days, officials bickered and argued where the City prison should be put. No Alderman wanted the prison anywhere near their own barrio and each backed up the other in voting for the prison’s location.

Eventually, the aldermen reached a compromise. The prison would be *under* the City.

The Undercity is a labyrinth of tunnels, both new and ancient. Nobody knows who built these passageways. Scholars have a lot of guesses, but nothing more. The City’s masons spent years constructing the cells, blocking off tunnels and dealing with the unspeakable horrors that crept up from the depths. Eventually, the Prison was ready. The Governor chose a Warden and the City’s criminals were completely removed from sight.

The Prison’s Warden, Rebekka “Beckett” Solmn, is a tall woman. Of advancing years, she still maintains her pale, sharp beauty. (Her nickname comes from the Street slang for a thin knife you can hide easily up the sleeve.) Despite her family’s power and influence, she was convicted for her husband’s strangulation murder. She served ten years, but was released after a substantial bribe from her dying mother. Solmn then won the position of Warden from the Governor (there are three different stories on how she pulled that one off), replacing the man who was Warden during her incarceration. Lower City residents found him three days later, his throat cut. Some say with a long, thin knife that you can easily hide up the sleeve.

Solmn runs the Prison like a personal bank, glassing a dip from every bribe, whether for favored treatment of select prisoners, messages sent from jailed gang leaders to underlings outside, or for the smuggling of food, liquor, and tobacco. You bring in five bottles of wine, you’d better count on the Warden getting at least one of them.

## Symon Sing

Symon “Sing” Simmon, the City’s most powerful representative of the diminutive haffun people, sits behind bars in the Prison. Size notwithstanding, he presents a ruthless image. His lips contort in a constant snarl, the result of a botched pocket job as a youth. His chestnut hair has receded to an olive wreath style framing a tattoo of a horse headed dagger on the pate of his head. He carries a matching magical dagger at all times, which he plucked from the body of the man who sliced his face. Nothing within the Prison’s walls escapes his eyes or ears. Any illicit activity there needs his permission, granted with a wave of his hand. The street crews of the Dock Barrio look to Symon as a pasha, following their big brother’s orders to the letter. He controls the barrio as if he were still on the mainland. Nobody does anything unless “Symon sings.”

### Judges

When the Watch arrests a criminal, they bring him in the barrio’s jail until a judge is ready to hear the case. The accused has no right to representation and the hearings are usually quick. The Watch testifies, the judge listens and then he asks the accused if he has anything to say. Finally, the judge passes sentence.

### Crimes

Listed below are the only *official* crimes someone can commit in the City.

- **Assault:** *If a man should strike another with the intent to perform serious or grievous injury, he shall be found guilty of intentional assault upon that man and should be punished accordingly.*

The most common punishment for assault is a fine of around one to ten copper pieces (the City’s smallest coin).

- **Bribery:** *If a man should offer a City official recompense for avoiding his duty, he has committed a crime against the City and he shall be found guilty of bribery and should be punished accordingly.*

Bribing a City official is not just a crime for both parties involved. Seen as a “crime against the City itself,” bribery calls for corporal punishment, a minimum term of imprisonment as well as a fine of ten times the bribe.

- **Counterfeiting:** *If a man should make false coin or document, he has committed a crime against the City and he shall be found guilty of counterfeiting and he should be punished accordingly.*

Any “crime against the City” carries a more severe weight than crimes against the City’s inhabitants. Therefore, counterfeiting is usually punished with corporal punishment (see below) as well as imprisonment and a hefty fine of one thousand gold pieces.

- **Murder:** *If a man should take the life of another man through the use of force, accidental or intentional, he shall be found guilty of the grave crime of murder and should be punished accordingly.*

Murder is usually punished by a fine, corporal punishment, and then hanging. Certain circumstances may persuade the judge to be lenient, allowing imprisonment instead of hanging.

- **Tax Evasion:** *If a man should not pay his due that has been determined by the City’s rightfully elected officials, he has committed a crime against the City and he shall be found guilty of evading his duty and should be punished accordingly.*

Not paying the proper tax means you are cheating your neighbors: a crime against many. Therefore, it is usually punished with a public flogging, in the most public area of the barrio so all an offender’s neighbors can see that he cheated them. He must also pay a fine equal to ten times the amount of coin he cheated the City.

- **Theft:** *If a man should rob another man of property that is legally his own, he shall be found guilty of theft and punished accordingly.*

“Theft” is an umbrella term for taking property away from those who rightfully own it. Therefore, this crime includes robbery, banditry, and any other form of theft. The thief must pay a fine to the City equal to ten times the value of the stolen item as well as suffer corporal punishment and perhaps some time as a laborer or in the Prison.



- **Vandalism:** *If a man should deface or damage the City walls or buildings, he has committed a crime against the City and he shall be found guilty of vandalism and should be punished accordingly.*

Vandalism includes destroying parts of the City, painting on the City walls and buildings, and any other disfigurement of the City's architecture. It carries a fine equal to ten times the cost of repairing the damage done as well as forced labor.

#### **Punishment**

"Let the punishment fit the crime" is the only legal standard in the City. Specific crimes carry specific punishments. But the judge is always the final authority.

- **Corporal Punishment**

Most crimes call for some sort of corporal punishment. Usually, a member of the City Watch performs the duty.

Whipping is the most common punishment. Depending on the crime, a man is whipped once for every coin he owes the City, whatever its denomination. He may be flogged less if he can manage to discretely bribe the man with the whip before the flogging begins.

Dunking is another popular form of corporal punishment. The criminal gets dunked into the well a number of times equal to the coin he owes. He remains under the water for as long as the Watch feels is necessary for him to properly serve his punishment. While it is technically illegal for the Watch to murder someone by dunking, it does happen from time to time. The Watch then owes a fine equal to the dead criminal's fine.

Other forms of punishment include the rack and public stocks.

- **Fines**

For minor crimes, the first fine levied against the accused is usually a fine. If the guilty party cannot pay the fine, sterner punishment is in order.

- **Hard Labour**

Outside the City lie mines and fields that need working to maintain the City's exports. If a guilty man cannot pay for his crimes, he can be shipped out to work off his debt to the City.

- **Forced Enlistment**

Instead of serving prison time or hard labor,

a man may volunteer for the army and join the War against the other city-states. His stint in the army equals the time he would serve under forced labor or in prison.

- **Hanging**

Every barrio has a public square where hangings are performed. To limit the fee owed the hangman, officials cluster all of their outstanding hangings together.

- **Prison**

Convicts serve their terms in a prison beneath the City. See the notes on the Prison, above.

## **The Upper City**

High above the rest of the City, the nobles look down from their great mansions. The streets are all smooth and lit by lanterns. Uniformed guards walk on paths through green grass lawns carrying muskets. Tall walls and iron fences keep out undesirables. And behind the stained glass windows and great oak doors are treasures unimagined by the likes of you and me.

Until we break in later tonight, that is.

While the Lower City looks like a jumbled jigsaw puzzle of vice and filth, the Upper City is a perfectly crafted piece of art. The streets have saints' names and are well lit by gas lanterns. The windows are frames of colored glass: pure and perfect. And every lock is a masterpiece.

It is a swirling hedge maze of wide broadways and boulevards. Every house is a mansion surrounded by beautiful lawns and high walls. And every corner has a guard post.

The guards carry muskets and pistols and travel in groups. If they see you, they ask for walking papers. If they find out you don't belong there, they have the right to do whatever they want to you.

The Upper City contains the residences of the wealthiest families in the City. Every home is an ancestral holding; every family boasts a title. And while they all pretend at dignity, honor, and virtue, each family partakes in corruption, decadence, and greed.

The nobles spare no expense to make their part of the City a living paradise. Artificial lakes and gardens cover the district. And tall

towers—manned with sharpshooters—remind everyone that peace is the order of the day.

#### **The Nob Watch**

While officially part of the City Watch, Upper City guards distance themselves from their southern barrio brethren. They wear uniforms of silk rather than cotton and canvas. They eschew spears and shields for muskets and steel chest plates. Most of them can read.

They know how to work as a unit. They undergo months of training to deal with scum like you. And they get rewards when they catch criminals. They are under explicit instructions to kill if they feel threatened. If you're carrying a knife, they feel threatened. If you aren't, one of them probably has one he can put on your corpse to justify lethal force.

#### **The Darby Museum**

Wealthy nob Cecil Darby died with no family: his son was killed in the War, and he murdered his wife after catching her sleeping with the architect working on his home. He dedicated his entire fortune to turning his mansion into a museum, holding some of the City's most precious and ancient treasures. Darby expired shortly after its completion.

Guarded day and night, the Museum contains artifacts found in and below the City as well as famous treasures acquired by adventuring parties who donated their findings to the Museum.

This last category now accounts for the bulk of the Museum's collection. The Museum pays well for treasures acquired in lost tombs and dungeons and puts them on display for all to see. The Museum's sponsorship program allows donors to see the valuable objects kept off general display.

The Museum has three wings:

1. the general collection, for those who pay a silver coin to enter and peruse.
2. the members' gallery
3. offices and rooms for the preparation and preservation of recently acquired antiquities

#### **The Tombs**

From an isolated quarter of the Upper City rise the walls of its cemetery, where the high-born are buried with great treasures in standing tombs. Long before the Catastrophe, when the City stood just

below sea level, this arrangement protected the graves from flooding, which would otherwise fill the coffins with water and push them back up above the soil.

Tall walls, gates, and guards protect this part of the City from robbers. The sentinels regularly report of ghosts and specters. They also regularly find bodies on their patrols, brutalized as if in grisly rituals. Such stories keep most cowards from climbing the walls but more courageous thieves have been known to venture into the tombs. Few return, and those who do seldom speak of what they found.

#### **Bishop's Jewelry**

In the Upper City, Bishop's Jewelry maintains a legitimate storefront while running a fence under the shadow of Stapley Manor. Proprietor Lex Bishop is a middle-aged human with a trimmed beard, soft hands, and a sharp eye for detail. Lex offers pawn services to the citizens of the Upper City at reasonable rates. A shrewd business mind and unwilling to take great risks, Lex may launder pieces of jewelry with his contacts in the docks. His starting point for purchase is 40% of the actual value. A man has to make a buck doesn't he, and this piece can't be seen in the Upper City ever again . . . so do you want to risk it?

#### **The Governor's Mansion**

The Governor's residence stands on the tallest hill in the Upper City. It has been said that in the highest gable, you can look through the window and see all the way to the Sea.

For at least four generations, the same family has lived in this spacious home. The Berringers. Incestuous and treacherous, they are the most powerful family in the City.

The Mansion boasts four wings, a few dozen bedrooms, a massive library (doubtless filled with illegal books), a hedge maze (rumored to be filled with man-eating plants), and dozens of secret passages known only to the family members themselves.

#### **Shale's Rock: City Watch Headquarters**

It looks like a fort among the finery. Tall walls. Square angles. Bars and gates. There are no tapestries or dining tables. The Streets





call this place, “Shale’s Rock.”

Here, Sheriff Brigham Shale maintains his income. I mean, the general welfare of the City. Like a gang boss, the Watch bring in their bribes and pay up to the Sheriff. They offer a percentage of their “confiscated goods.”

This is also where criminals are held pending trial. They are usually held in the cellar under lock and key. The headquarters has three large cages—not individual cells. It also serves as a barracks for the guards of the Upper City, so breaking in is no small feat.

Although it happened once. A small band of thieves robbed the place clean. They broke into Shale’s safe and got away with coins and papers. They even broke a few brethren out of the cellar. The reason they got away with it was because Shale never thought anyone would have the salt to try it. He’s changed his mind since then and has improved security.

It will never happen again. At least, until someone else figures out how to do it.

### **The Lower City**

The Lower City differs sharply from its northern counterpart. Whenever you look up, you see the massive wall of stone and earth that lifted itself up from the ground, exalting the other half of the City toward the sky.

Residents of the Lower City call their barrios “the Downs,” or “the Deeps.” The two terms are also interchangeable with those who reside there.

When the City was built, it was already close to sea level. After the Catastrophe, the southern half of the City sunk deeper, filling many of its streets with water from the Southern Sea. Now, a good third of the Lower City is canals. The first floor of half the buildings in the Lower City are under water.

Mud and earth clog the sewer system, rendering it all but useless. The few clear passageways lead down to an ancient system of caverns and tunnels, opened up by the great sinking. Unspeakable horrors lurk down there, occasionally finding their way up to the City streets.

Disorganized and disorienting, the Lower City is a maze of filth, disease, and death. Parts of the Deep are better than others—the

merchant houses, for example—but living in the Downs requires a sharp knife and a sharper eye.

### **The Well (The Patron Saint of Thieves)**

In a small, narrow alleyway just under a tall window sits half of a well. It juts out from the opposite building, as if the structure had fallen, cutting it in half. The well is dry but if you look closely, you see a small bit of brown stain on the lip. Old blood, perhaps?

To reach the well, you must walk through a series of tight, cramped alleys. And this small place is sacred. You can feel the air change as you come closer. Like an electrical storm. Your breath quickens. Hairs stand on the back of your neck. Something happened here. Something violent. A sacrifice. But it is old magic. As old, perhaps, as the City itself.

A spirit lingers here. If you are quiet, you can hear her breath. You may even hear an echo of her voice. And if you are humble, and make a promise, she may even grant you a blessing.

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### **The Blessing of the Patron Saint of Thieves**

The Street Goddess that some call, “the Patron Saint of Thieves” has no name. She is too old to remember that. She does not even remember the circumstances of her death. But she died here, at the well, protecting someone. Who it was, she does not know. But she remembers his soft touch and his delicate kiss. She died to protect him. Or, did she? It is so hard to remember.

Her shrine—the well—cannot be found. You must be led there by someone who knows the way. But if you kneel and make a promise to protect your fellow thieves, she will grant you a blessing.

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### **The Orphanage**

With the murder rate the way it is, the City produces a large population of orphans. Unfortunately, most of them end up in dire circumstances. Prostitution, petty theft, and the slave trade await parentless children.

One of the largest and oldest buildings in the Lower City is the orphanage. It takes up an



entire City block. Shut down about a decade ago, its broken windows and doors attest to its abandonment. Stories of ghosts haunting the halls keep squatters away. Those who disregard the tales soon find themselves screaming and running out the front door, vowing never to return.

But what the general population of the Lower City *doesn't* know is that more than just ghosts inhabit the building. In fact, the entire basement—long thought flooded and blocked off by debris—is maintained by a cadre of children. They have organized themselves into small gangs who pick pockets, gather food, and “play ghost” when intruders come calling.

The eldest child, Molly Mags, came up with the idea. She and her brother Tolly were orphans here before the place closed down permanently. With nowhere left to go, they had to make do with what they had. The children had long since learned the orphanage’s secret passages, dating back to its pre-Catastrophe origin as a private mansion. They can move from floor to floor without ever stepping foot into its rooms and corridors. Unfortunately, Tolly was killed by a street thief who heard there was gold hidden in one of the secret passages, leaving Molly to lead the gangs herself.

Now nearly eighteen years old, Molly has blossomed into a beautiful young woman. She knows she cannot stay with the orphans forever, but she cannot simply leave them. They call her “Mommy Molly,” and she chokes up every time they do.

### **The Docks**

Just to the south of the City lies the Southern Sea. Sailors from all over the Known World come to the docks to trade the wares of other city-states. Warehouses, docks, and taverns cover the entire southern coast of the City, along with tattoo shops, brothels, cheap restaurants, and cheap rooms. More expensive taverns, brothels, and hotels cater to slumming aristocracy who come here to pick up illegal . . . I mean “discreet” goods specially ordered from across the Sea.

The Master of the Port, Tana Rubin, collects all the taxes and fees for the City. She is a small woman who has her own personal guards because she doesn’t trust the City

### **Chance Delgash**

Chance Delgash is a journeyman within the City’s Thieves’ Guild. A striking elf with gold eyes, dark green hair, and a devil-may-care attitude, he always wears a slight smile as though he knows something you don’t. Most likely, he does. Chance is a master cutpurse and flashman. He takes a daily walk through the barrio keeping an eye out for unsanctioned activity by punks. He is more likely to invite a skilled punk into the Guild than turn them over to the guards. Up and coming punks seeking an education in the fine-fingered arts see him as a role model, which loosens their tongues. Chance grins, learning something new all the time.

Watch. “Tana’s boys” keep the docks in order. They bust up drunken brawls, confiscate contraband, and otherwise maintain the peace. The City Watch still patrol the docks, but they know their place. “Mamma Tana” is in charge down here, not them. That’s not to say they don’t resent the hell out of her, but there’s little they can do about it.

The biggest problem for Mamma Tana is the slave trade. Slavery is illegal in the City . . . but not elsewhere. There’s a huge profit in smuggling slaves out of the City. Rubin does her best to put her thumb down on the slavers, but it isn’t easy. The slavers can bribe the City Watch, bribe dock workers, bribe ship captains, and just about anyone else. They can’t bribe Mamma Tana and her boys, but they can’t be everywhere at once.

### **Tusktown**

There’s a small group of barrios just north of the docks where humans seldom tread. The signs hanging above the shops are not in the common tongue. In fact, you never hear that language spoken on these streets. And the alderman in charge of these barrios is the only alderman who is not human. He’s an ork.

Welcome to Tusktown.

The orks and half-orks who live here made these three barrios their own almost a decade ago. They did it through intimidation, subtle violence, and arson.

They shoved all the human and haffun merchants out, intimidated the residents, and changed all the signs. To even navigate the place, you have to speak ork. And showing a human face on these streets is a sure fire way to get yourself killed.

Tusktown alderman Khala Shujo stands nearly seven feet tall and carries a huge cudgel wherever he goes. “*Junza*,” the ork word for “peace,” is carved into the wood. His six enforcers usually travel with him as well.

The City Watch never comes in to Tusktown. Nor has Shujo ever been formally elected. The City’s government mainly ignores Tusktown, leaving it to its own devices. As long as the orks stay within their enclave, and don’t cause any trouble for the surrounding barrios, nobody cares.

But Shujo looks to expand his territory. He aims to place orks in the City Watch, legitimizing his claim as alderman. He’s ambitious, ruthless, and more intelligent than your standard ork. That makes him all kinds of dangerous.

### The Temple District

The Lower City’s richest section is the Temple District. Located east and north of the docks, it looks like someone lifted a barrio from the Upper City and placed it here. The lanes are clean and lit by gas lamps maintained by lighterboys. In keeping with longtime Temple tradition, well-compensated guards give crime no quarter.

Here, the priests and priestesses live in communes supported by the Temples. Each Temple comprises its own barrio. Talia’s Barrio. Aelon’s Barrio. A park or a guarded flat for those who work and serve within surrounds each Temple.

Merchants pay handsome sums to the Temple to maintain shops in the barrio. Street vendors also pay the Temple for the right to sell their wares to visitors. Temples run small exclusive schools for Lower City merchants or those that can afford to send their children. They send their children in hope of moving to the Upper City or the safe life of the clergy.

## Themes

- **Honor:** At the end of a heist, when it

comes time to split the coins, there’s always one guy who needs a little more than what the crew agreed upon. Thieves rely on honor. In a profession where you spend your whole life lying, the one group you shouldn’t be lying to is your crew. Who will you betray for a better cut of the score?

- **Justice:** The City is a place where justice can be bought by the highest bidder. The poor are shoved into ghettos while the rich dance and drink in excess. Throats get cut every night and the City Watch doesn’t care. Bribes pass hands every moment of every day. The only justice in the City is justice you buy yourself.
- **Violence:** Just how much blood are you willing to spill to protect your crew? Gangs rule neighborhoods like kings and queens, willing to commit arson, robbery, and murder to protect their territory. And when it comes time to expand it . . . they’ll do more. Are you willing to beat a woman if her lover is encroaching on your turf? To burn his house down with his mother and father tied up inside? There are men and women on the Street willing to do *anything* to get what they want. Are you?
- **Respect:** gets you things money can never buy. Money leads to respect. Violence leads to respect. Keeping your word leads to respect. If the Street respects you, you’ve got it made. She will never fear you, but she will respect you.

## Tightening the Screws

- Rival crews are always looking for new territory. If your crew can’t protect its turf, someone else will come in and do it for them.
- If your crew works independently, that means a threat from the Guildmen, the criminal hierarchy that expects a cut of every job as its due tribute. Independent operators snub their noses and don’t pay the Guild. Maybe some broken fingers or toes will teach your crew proper respect.
- If the crew is part of a Guild, there’s all kinds of possibilities for trouble, especially if someone kills the Guildmaster, takes

- over his place, and starts re-assigning territories. Your crew gets the shaft while other crews get the best turf.
- Your crew scopes out a great score in the Upper City, but another crew has gotten wind of it. Now, there are two crews looking to work the same heist.
  - A nob from the Upper City hires you to rob a safe. She gives you the plans for the house, the way in and out, and the location of the secret safe. But she's also got a plan of her own. Her drunk husband—who beats her every night—will be there in the room (he falls asleep in front of the safe every night). She has the house guards hidden and ready for the crew. As soon as the crew breaks in, she'll release the house guards. Does the husband get whacked in the confusion and scuffle? If so, do you wind up as the patsies?
  - One of the City Watch approaches your crew, looking for a hand out. He has information he can pass along that includes info on other crews. Can you trust him? Is it a trap?
  - Walking through the Streets, you hear there's a bounty on your head. Who is it? Nobody knows. Why did they put out the bounty? Nobody knows. Best to find out and get it off the Streets quick.
  - The Captain of the neighborhood Watch is catching thieves and gouging out their eyes. He's got a list of names and you're on the list.
  - A new crew is buying territories. They arrive with bags of money and make the offer. Word is, the crews who don't accept end up with their throats cut and thrown in the River. They show up in your territory. The money is on the table. What do you do?

## Names

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Most characters in the City only have first names. Second names are traditionally which neighborhood you come from or your profession or some colorful epithet. Eliwood “the Rat,” Pellas “the Quick,” or Barnaby “the Butcher.” These are often shortened to Eliwood Rat, Pellas Quick, or Barnaby Butcher.

### Given Names (Men)

Acclon	Hubert
Aglove	Hugh
Ambrose	Humphrey
Amr	Kahedin
Archibald	Lambert
Balan	Leonard
Barnaby	Modron
Cador	Owen
Cardrick	Pellas
Chidiok	Peregrine
Cuthbert	Perkin
Diggory	Philip
Edmund	Piers
Eliwood	Reynold
Eustace	Ross
Francis	Rowland
Geoffrey	Walter
Gerain	William
Gerald	Abalach
Giles	Accalon

### Given Names (Women)

Alece	Lynessa
Alain	Lyonet
Aleyn	Margawse
Alis	Matilde
Amr	Nininae
Angharat	Olwyn
Blancheflour	Sebille
Branwyn	Vivien
Chelinde	
Clarine	
Elaine	
Elzbeta	
Enid	
Ettard	
Ginerva	
Graine	
Gvenour	
Helsin	
Iblis	
Jennfyr	