

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS



PUNJAR: THE TARNISHED JEWEL

BY HARLEY STROH
A GAZETTEER OF THE WICKED CITY OF PUNJAR





PUNJAR: THE TARNISHED JEWEL

GAZETTEER OF THE KNOWN REALMS

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WELCOME TO PUNJAR ...

Throughout the Known World, no city is more notorious, decadent, or deadly. A sandy collection of spiderwebbed tenements, chaotic alleys, crumbling walls, and rat-ridden bazaars – the city's crowded wards have produced some of the worst rogues and villains to ever stalk the storied thrones of the north. Blackened by fire, soiled by pestilence, and scarred by war, Punjar's history is like a grim scar drawn by the hands of the gods across its chaotic streets and specter-haunted ruins.

But Punjar is also a city of chance and wealth, where fortunes are won in a night, and lost before dawn. Where the gold-plated thrones of courtiers are born on the backs of exotic slaves, and miracles can be bought if the coin is right. Sorcerers gather in dark conclaves to exchange eldritch secrets, and the mightiest of dweomercrafters tremble at the thought of the secrets slumbering beneath the cobblestone streets and sandy bazaars.

Above all, Punjar is a city of fierce contrasts. It boasts fabulous wealth and abject poverty, packed bazaars and forgotten alleys, haunting beauty, torrid wickedness, unbridled weal, and terrible woe. This is Punjar, The

Tarnished Jewel, a city where a quick blade and a shirt of mail are a warrior's best defense; a city where assassins slip unnoticed across the sooty rooftops, and the might of magic knows no limits.

So loosen your sword, keep a hand on your coin purse, and take your first steps into Punjar's shadowy, torch-lit streets. A black mist is rolling in off the salt marsh, and the ancient city beckons...

Those wishing to explore Punjar City should read no further – not because it might spoil their enjoyment, but because cunning GMs will always use misbegotten knowledge to lead cheating players into even more deadly traps ...

For your own safety: Players, beware!

... THE TARNISHED JEWEL

Of the nine initial 4th Edition Dungeon Crawl Classics, three are set within the city of Punjar and its nearby environs. By acquainting yourself with the city, it becomes that much easier to bring the adventures to life for your Dungeon Crawl Classic campaign.



Sages have dedicated their lives to recording the sordid history and happenings of Punjar (specifically, Jeren the Elder and his torrid Glossography of the Tarnished Jewel, which need not be recounted here). This meager tome serves merely as a primer, providing the GM with the tools necessary to begin a campaign set in the decadent capital of the Southern Province. Teeming with life, Punjar's chaotic streets and golden palaces offer no end of adventure and intrigue.

There are a number of ways for GMs to use Punjar in their campaign, and GMs should feel free to bend the city to serve the needs of their campaign:

- **Sanctuary:** For all its wickedness, Punjar is a bastion of civilization amid a sea of savage wilderness. From this stronghold, the heroes can launch raids against the forces of evil, returning to regroup, lick their wounds, and plot their next adventure.
- **The Undercity:** Not all dungeons are found in the wilderness. Punjar, laced with crumbling sewers, lost catacombs, and secret passages, has more than its share of deadly crawls. Known collectively as the Undercity, these areas comprise a forgotten, invisible world that exists a mere dozen feet beneath street level. The terrifying fiends lairing within, and the secrets they conceal, are enough to drive the staunchest champion mad.
- **Honor Among Thieves:** No hero can call Punjar home for long before running afoul of its underclass. Whether the PCs challenge Punjar's nefarious crime lords directly, or serve them as enforcers, muscle, and sell-rogues, internecine warfare draw in the heroes regardless. Perhaps most intriguing of all – for scoundrels of a ambitious bent – is the chance to become crime lords themselves, carving out a chunk of the ancient city to call their own.
- **The Nether Gates:** Believed to be a simple epithet noting Punjar's odd-score gates and gatehouses, the title carries a greater meaning for those acquainted with the city's dweomered past. Eldritch gates are concealed about Punjar, mimicking obscure, esoteric sigils. Portals to other places, planes, and times, the gates and their powers are closely guarded secrets, drawing conjurers, fiends, and travelers from throughout the multiverse.
- **Heirs to the Throne:** For ambitious PCs, there is no greater challenge than the quest for the mantle of the immortal Overlord. Trayr Sains, the current Overlord, won his throne through intrigue and violence, and his reign is sure to end in the same. Are the heroes powerful enough to win the throne and tame the restless city? And more importantly, are they cunning enough to keep it?

Perhaps most important is that the PCs experience Punjar as a living city, where their actions – be they for good or ill – incur repercussions and rewards. Spurned nobles will return to defend their honor, robbed shopkeepers will hire thugs and assassins to seek their revenge, and poxy beggars (befriended months past) can prove the difference between a dead-end alley and a harrowing escape. Recurring NPCs, be they enemies or allies, are what bring a city to life, and your Punjar should be no different.

THE CITY AT A GLANCE

Punjar is ruled by Overlord Trayr Sains, the self-declared Master of Heaven and Earth and Dragon of the Lurian Sea. A despicable rogue and back-alley fighter, Sains fought his way out of the slums of the Old City, and rules Punjar with a balance of masterful diplomacy and iron-fisted cruelty. He rightly assumes that all of his underlings seek to unseat him, and plays his rivals against one another in an endless series of internecine plots, assuring that no would-be usurper can become too powerful. Like a sinister puppet master, or archduke ruling from the pits of Hell, Sains accomplishes his aims through intricate schemes woven within schemes.

Though a masterful strategist, Sains has no clear heirs, and presently there is nothing that would prevent Punjar's decent into absolute anarchy upon the Overlord's death. Many believe that Sains' lack of a successor is just another plot, a clever ploy that makes him indispensable to the people of Punjar.

Sains is advised by a council of nobles and masters of various guilds. His council table is limited to thirteen seats, each awarded according to the petitioner's tithe. This has created an endless bidding war for a seat at the Overlord's table, in which seats go for an astronomical amount, only to be lost the next month when a rival outbids the current seated lord or master. Presently there are five lords seated at council table, four guild masters, and three arch-clergy, with the last seat reserved for the Overlord himself.

The city's walls and surrounding lands are patrolled by the Janizair, a fierce warrior caste more commonly known as the Dragonne – a direct reference to their scaled, stylized armor, and fearsome ability on the battlefield. Once warrior-slaves, the Dragonne are now vested with the right of hereditary titles and lands, and are effectively above the law. Organized into loose companies, the Dragonne are feared for their highly disciplined heavy cavalry, supported by mounted archers and spearmen.

The Dragonne captains and their warriors are not permitted to make their homes within Punjar proper. Rather, all have well-defended holdings outside of the city. Ironically, it is the Dragonne that run Punjar's notorious slave market, and the former slave-warriors use slaves to work their fields.

Finally, as much as a third of Punjar's 75,000 souls live outside the city walls, working the carefully irrigated farms that defy the arid land to supply Punjar's burgeoning population. Depending on the Dragonne for their safety, most have sworn fealty to one captain or another. Should Punjar ever be attacked, those living outside the city would be the first to fall before the invaders, immediately cutting off a crucial supply line to the city, a fact that is not lost on the Overlord. Of late, Sains has been secretly encouraging rebellious Dragonne captains to strengthen their fortifications with war-worthy citadels. Once the citadels are completed, Sains' agents will reveal the captains' traitorous plots, confiscate their lands, and award them to younger, landless captains, thus inspiring a new generations of loyal Dragonne warlords.

Bereft of the abundant natural resources that bless much of the Northlands, Punjar's economy is founded upon three equally dubious industries:

- **The Black Market:** Punjar's open black market is flouted in the face of the Criestiene Empire. Ranging from simple merchants seeking to avoid Crieste's high tariffs to outright pirates and privateers, Punjar's docks welcome ships of any nation, and opportunities abound for those able to live by their wits.
- **Mining:** The city's old iron mines were sufficient for little more than the crudest iron-mongery, and most were shut down decades ago. Regular shipments of ore are delivered from inland, with higher quality ores bought by traders. Local blacksmiths are known for forging slave manacles and shackles, nails, and low-quality arms and armor. Weapons forged in Punjar are notorious for breaking, and any thug or bravo worth his salt takes pride in owning a foreign blade. Weapons dealers, for their part, do a brisk trade in counterfeit weapons "imported" from imagined, faraway lands.
- **Entertainment:** Punjar's entertainment district caters to the lusty tastes of south seas traders, pirate captains, and their thirsty mariners, as well as the debauched desires of the Punjar's slumming nobility. Coming alive at night, Punjar's numerous drinking houses and raucous dens of vice have no equal. Whether enterprising rogues looking to roll a drunken mark, or high-riding con artists out to bilk effete aristocrats, the night offers no end of chance or danger.

THE (MIS)RULE OF LAW

Ask any sage of Punjar and you will get the same answer: in Punjar, every man is his own emperor. The jibe has two meanings. First, even the Overlord, master of Punjar and the Southern Province, was once a common pickpocket. Secondly, the citizens of Punjar, from the lowest beggar to the dread master of the Slayers, are notoriously self-possessed, greedy, and aggressive.

This culture of covetousness and violence is born out of the very nature of the city. While the Dragonne reign over life and death, they are self-serving at best, and their rule extends no further than the reach of their blade (or the arc of a red fletched war arrow). With no city guard proper to watch over Punjar, it has fallen to each of the various districts and wards of the city to create their own semblance of order.

These codes vary from ward to ward, neighborhood to neighborhood – and in some parts of Old Punjar – from block to block. Depending on the temperament of the reigning boss, these codes can vary from draconian and



tyrannical, to labyrinthine and malleable, all in the span of a few blocks. Some bosses can be bought off with gold; others by service, but adventurers foolish enough to earn the enmity of the ward bosses are condemned to the Blackwell Citadel, a prison island located just off the mainland. There, the lucky ones are executed and their bodies left for the crows, but the unlucky ones are cursed to live (unnaturally) long lives, toiling in the dungeons that give the Blackwell its name.

THE WARDS

Punjar is divided into districts, more commonly known as wards. Though their boundaries may be intangible, crossing between wards is akin to crossing between worlds; the Overlord's shining palace, envy of all the North, stands with a stone's throw of Punjar's worst slums, where children starve and men sell their own kin for mere coppers.

Despite the vast divide between Punjar's wealthiest lords and merchants, and the abject poverty of its paupers, one thing is true throughout the city: Be you the Emperor or a beggar, the price of every life can be measured in coin.

SMOKE (OLD PUNJAR)

A dense rat's nest of tenements, smoking ruins, and shacks, the ward known as Smoke is home to Punjar's desperate and despairing. There is no hope in this forsaken slum, only the chance to exploit those around you. Marked on the east by the Salt Marsh Gate, and the north by Dim Lane and the Owler Docks, most of Smoke's citizenry go their entire life without ever venturing beyond its fetid borders.

Smoke is characterized by the age of its buildings. Antique stonework gargoyles and heavy stone walls, sullied by centuries of soot and grime, can be found throughout the ward, dating back to the founding of Punjar. Equally common are the tall, dilapidated workhouses and asylums, built in a failed experiment to house Punjar's poor. In equal measure are the blackened, burned out ruins, once fine structures that fell victim to fire, and now offer shelter to bitter squatters. Finally there is the seemingly endless sea of shacks, tents, and hovels. These temporary structures can spring up overnight, making navigating Smoke frustrating at best, and deadly at worst. What was an empty alley can turn into a camp of tents overnight, and many are souls that – fleeing one of the Smoke's predators – discovered a dead-end sealing what they thought was an open street.

Life in Smoke is often short and desperate. Those that do manage to survive its cruel environs do so by steeling themselves against weakness of any sort. Honor is a luxury that few can afford, civilization is a thin veneer, and kindness is always self-serving. The slightest provocation is sufficient to reduce inhabitants to their

feral nature, and those distinguishing themselves as anything else, single themselves out as prey.

Smoke is ruled by an endless throng of ambitious thugs and pretentious tyrants, each pitted against the other in an effort to garner the most might. Every pimp, extortioner, and thug imagines himself a boss, and every boss, an emperor. The greater a man's power, the crueler his license, a fact that is not lost on Smoke's youth, as they seek to outdo one another in depravity and savagery. The few ward bosses who manage to rule for an extended period of time attract scores of sycophants, resulting in a parody of a royal court, complete with foppish officials, tyrannical generals, and court fools.

The typical inhabitant of Smoke dresses in castoff rags, scavenged from the trash carts that service the Souk. The paupers seldom have more than one or two gnawed copper bits at any time, though the lucky ones with a hidden cache might squirrel away a handful of copper coins and a single silver piece. Every man, woman, or child carries a knife or dirk, the weapons ranging from improvised shivs made from flattened iron spikes, to the meticulously sharpened hook blades used to disembowel fish (known simply as "gut knives").

Inhabitants commonly bear scars from the pox, and the ravages of malnutrition ensure that most are missing teeth. Healthier inhabitants typically sport open, weeping sores, while the infirm or aged have had limbs removed to prevent the spread of infection.

Visitors must take pains to disguise themselves or be quickly picked out by the locals (even a full set of teeth is sufficient to betray an imposter). Begging urchins flock from every quarter and hovel, while shark-faced thugs begin to circle their mark. Without a show of violence (the only true power Smokers respect), PCs can expect to be dogged incessantly. Characters that are native to Smoke will be regarded with awe and fear by the urchins, and bitter envy by the thugs and toughs.

Following is a brief list of places of interest (though the term is used sparingly in the godforsaken ward):

Dim Lane

Resting in the shadow for much of the day, Dim Lane runs along the sheer cliffs that rise to the Palace of the Overlord. The narrow Lane is perpetually filthy, with trash, night soil, and worse being dumped from above, accumulating in tall, rotting piles. Urchins constantly pick through the trash, fighting dire rats (and worse) for the best scraps.

Old Thom, a crippled, gray-headed rogue with a fierce cudgel and temper to match, watches the children from his perch atop a ruined stone wall. An agent of the Beggar King, Old Thom shanghai's the quick and clever urchins into the Beggar's Society, selling particularly promising pupils to the Thieves Guild.

Some of the braver urchins have investigated the larger dire rat tunnels. If the paupers are to be believed (a stretch in itself), the tunnels bore through the piles of trash and into the cliff walls at the base of the palace. Whether or not the tales are true, the possibility of rat warrens connecting Punjar's very richest and very poorest have ignited the imaginations of the people of Smoke, and the tale is retold again and again.

Owler Docks

At the base of a series of short cliffs that mark the north boundary of Smoke are a series of makeshift docks built from scavenged planks, broken barrels, and the odd crate. Used primarily by river smugglers looking to avoid paying bribes or tariffs, the haphazard docks are washed out every spring and rebuilt by late summer. Scaling the cliffs to Smoke proper is no small task, as it requires climbing a rotting net of discarded cord, rags, rope, and catgut up the cliffs, to the wall's crenellations. Dragonne typically dismiss smugglers scaling the wall; though particularly malicious captains have been known to use climbing smugglers (and their urchin porters) as impromptu archery targets.

The Plague Gate

Located in the heart of Smoke, the Plague Gate holds watch over the farms and manors west of the great city. Serving at the Plague Gate is considered punishment, and those soldiering there represent the worst the companies have to offer.

The present master of the Plague Gate is Captain Jidair, the effeminate cousin to a prominent Dragonne Commander. Considered a fop and dandy by the grizzled warriors serving him, it is commonly agreed that Jidair was sentenced to the Plague Gate to keep him out of the way. The opposite is, in fact, the truth: Captain Jidair is the most ambitious Dragonne in recent memory, and his fearful peers sentenced him to the Plague Gate in the hopes of staying his rise to power. Weighted down by the reticent Company of the Plague Gate, the knife-thin Jidair has been forced to reconsider his plots, and is slowly replacing Plague Gate soldiers with loyal house guards. For their part, his fellow commanders know that nothing short of an assassin will stop the ambitious captain, and they quietly seek a skilled blackguard to murder Jidair.

Ratcatcher's Row

The closest approximation to a true street in all of Smoke, Ratcatcher's Row is home to most of the established businesses in the ward. The Row is home to dozens of taverns, gambling dens, pawnshops, flop houses, and the like. Few of the establishments are open during the day, with most coming alive only after dusk. At night, the Row is thronged with unemployed mercenaries, down-on-their-luck traders, thugs, pimps, and anyone looking to spend a few coins to make the night pass quickly. Pickpockets and petty thieves abound, and visitors to the ward are singled out as targets.

While all of Smoke (and indeed, nearly all of Punjar) has a rat problem, Ratcatcher's Row has an unnaturally large number of rats, giving the thoroughfare its name. Attempts to deal with the rats inevitably end in tragedy – hunting cats are deboned by hordes of vicious rodents, rat catchers return home to find their homes overrun by waves of fleas and lice, and priest-magicians are inevitably driven mad with imaginings of tiny feet running pitter-pat in the walls. Locals tell of a forgotten cistern dating back to Punjar's founding. Resting in the center of the cistern, half submerged in sewage and flotsam, is the statue of an enormous rat covered in algae and black mold. Those who claim to have seen the statue with their own eyes also aver that the tunnels feeding the cistern were home to wicked things with glinting red eyes that always managed to stay just out of sight.

The Silent Maid

At the back of the alley called the Shiv is the sign of the Silent Maid. A passable tavern and flophouse, the Maid has little to distinguish itself from the hundreds of other dives found in Smoke, were it not for its ill-famed clientele. For one reason or another, rogues of every stripe are found within the Maid, drinking and dicing away their days and nights. In all of Smoke, there is no better place to hire a villain, and woe to the Dragonne or official that dares to step foot inside the Maid.

The Silent Maid is owned and run by Finris the Blind, an aging graybeard with an uncanny ability to size up his customer, despite his disability. (Or perhaps, as some argue, Finris cannot be fooled by looks, and is able to pass judgment that much easier.) Finris owes no allegiance to any of the ward bosses, but he does permit Guild thieves to drink for free, in return for their watchful eyes. The rogues, protective of their privileges, are exceedingly simple in their justice: cheat Finris, and lose a finger; threaten the old man, and lose your life. A jar behind the bar has a collection of pickled fingers, fair warning to anyone who would bilk old Finris.

THE COMMONS (OLD CITY)

Only slightly less grim than its neighbor Smoke to the north, the ward known as the Commons is home to the bulk of Punjar's poor. The ward is characterized by newer construction contrasted against Smoke's ancient ruins. The buildings here are primarily aging beam and whitewashed stucco construction, roofed by clay tiles or broken slate.

The tenements in the Commons are all built very close together, and even open streets and alleys are built over to provide additional space in the tightly packed slum. A boon to catburglers, this density results in narrow streets that seldom see the sun. Worse, a simple house fire can wipe out entire neighborhoods (and have in the past). With ignorance born of fatalism, the new tenements are always built closer than before.

The Punjarans of the Commons are divided into two distinct classes. The first is world-weary folk, beaten down by the ward's brutal conditions. Faced with grim, short lives, and little hope of elevating their position, these folk exhibit the worst traits of human nature. Beggars abound, trash accumulates in the alleys, and sickness is endemic. Families are broken apart to serve in filthy workhouses, and corrupt ward bosses rule with iron fists.

However, for the enterprising scoundrel without principles, the Commons offer a world of opportunity. Citizens associated with the Thieves Guild make up the ward's upper caste. The Guild is always quick with a ready loan, the muscle to intimidate a competitor, or the agents to affect a timely "accident"... but these favors always come at a price.

No place in the Commons is safe from the reach of the Thieves Guild. The Guild itself, and its divisions, is far too arresting a topic to deal with here, save to note that while factious infighting does take place, the unified Guild is a thing to be feared.

Folk of the Commons typically dress in rough homespun and tired, worn castoffs from the Souk. Most Commoners carry a dagger or knife, but these are tools, and are used as weapons only in emergency. Agents of the Guild typically carry short swords or cudgels, and it is common practice to treat any man or woman in polished, silver-studded leather armor with respect and awe.

Following is a brief list of places of interest and associated personalities:

Black Hollow

Fed by a trickling waterfall of sewage and storm water, the Black Hollow is a fetid black pool abutting the northwest border of the Commons. The water here is undrinkable, staining anything it touches. The Hollow runs a few dozen yards to the south before vanishing through a rusted iron sewer grate.

Explorers scaling the cliffs to the Hollow's source discover a small cave that wends its way into darkness. Though used as a sewer, experienced cavers and dwarves will note that the cave is natural, lending credence to the possibility of a network of caverns extending beneath the city.

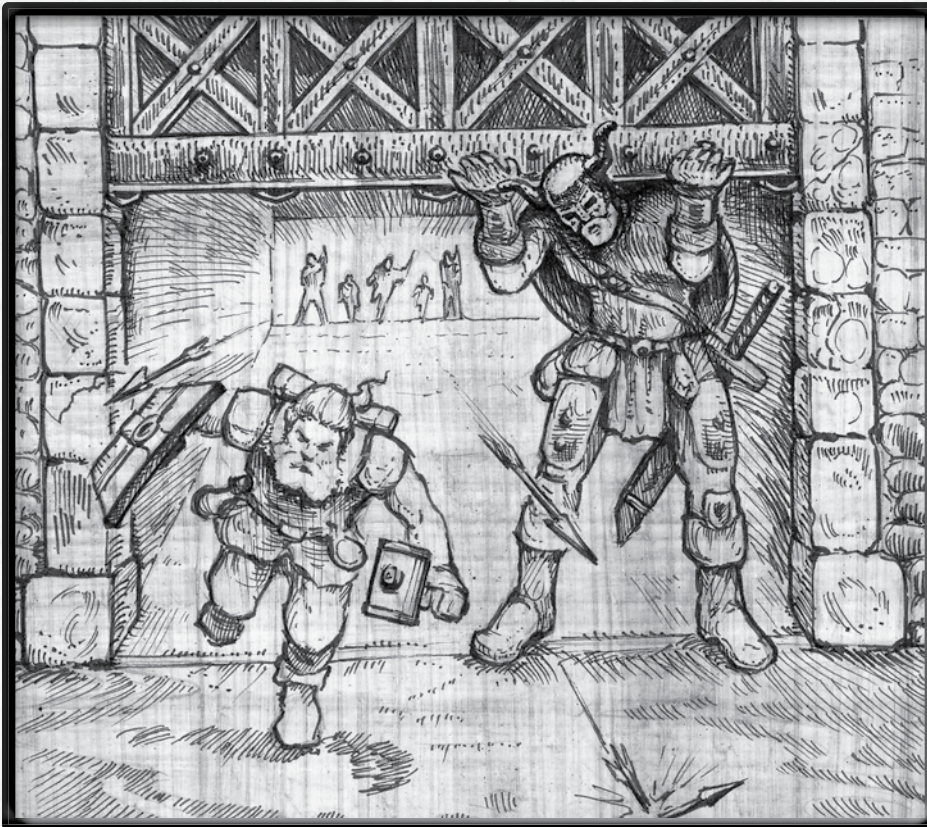
Of interest to sages and alchemists, a luminescent film floats on the surface of the water. Collecting where the current is weakest, this film is mildly flammable. Not two winters past, the Black Hollow was set aflame and burned for 4 days and nights.

The Salt Marsh Gate

Marking the eastern boundary of Smoke, and located at the end of the row of the same name, the Salt Marsh Gate opens to the high, grassy moor and fetid salt marsh. The Dragonne assigned to the Salt Marsh gate are accustomed to dealing with swamp monsters, and keep a pair of ballistae and cauldrons of boiling oil ever at the ready.

A swarthy captain by the name of Trestan keeps a strict command of the Salt Marsh Gate, ensuring that his men never slacken in their duties. The gate and portcullis are closed at dusk every day, and not drawn open until an hour after dawn. Exceptions to this rule must be approved by a Dragonne captain.

Just outside the gate is a nameless hamlet. A dozen or so families, deformed from decades of inbreeding, eke out a living here. They comb the salt marsh with their barbed spears during the day, and huddle in their mud and reed hovels after dark. These pitiful fisherfolk subsist entirely on a diet of fish and marsh onions, occasionally trading for rope, clothing, and other necessities.



The fisherfolk present a curious mystery. When a single fortnight does not pass without the city gate being assaulted by lizard folk or salt trolls, how is it possible that a village of helpless fisherfolk can exist unmolested? If the fisherfolk know the answer, no one has asked them. Sometimes, while deep in their cups, Dragonne speak of midnight bonfires on the marshy islands, and blood sacrifices to foul powers.

Soot March

Running along the western wall of the City of the Dead, Soot March is commonly frequented by nobles paying tribute to their dead ancestors. Accompanied by bodyguards, family priests, wailers, and incense bearers, these trains can stretch for a block or more.

Part and parcel to honoring the dead of Punjar is to leave a lit, blessed candle somewhere along the route to the City of the Dead. The tradition began as a ward against evil spirits, but has evolved (like most traditions in Punjar) into a demonstration of wealth. Noble families compete to place the most candles, and the result is that every windowsill, niche, and nook of the street is home to a dozen or more candles. On any given night, the street is alight with thousands of flickering candles, giving the thoroughfare its name.

It is worth noting that of the five most recent fires to ravage the Commons, three originated in the Soot March.

Squalor Court

A marketplace serving much of the Commons, Squalor Court exemplifies the faces of the Commons. During the day, merchants do a brisk trade hawking food – bread with the mold scrapped off, bruised vegetables, and yesterday's catch – and low-quality craft items.

At dusk, the Court takes on a sinister character. Smoking red lamps are hung around the perimeter, tattooed slaves raise black tents, and illegal goods fill the marketplace, along with a host of fire magicians, bawdy dancers, and bards of dubious talent. Wicked idols, foul spell components, and deadly poisons – all these and more can be had for a price in Squalor Court after dark. The black market is even sufficient to lure the nobles from High and Low Court (though they arrive masked and escorted by multiple bodyguards). It has been whispered that the Overlord himself sometimes deigns to peruse the forbidden offerings, though this has never been confirmed.

CITY OF THE DEAD

Host to the tombs and crypts of Punjar's old guard aristocracy, the City of the Dead is itself, largely dead. Due to overcrowding and the encroaching swamp, no new tombs have been built in the necropolis in over a century. Families with established mausoleums continue to use the necropolis, and with each passing year, there are fewer adherents paying respect to the dead.

The extant crypts are marvels of artistry in stone; each fashioned to offer a particular vision of the afterworld. Statues of grim angels, lithe dancers, and monsters abound, resulting in a menagerie of stone. The tombs themselves can vary from simple to extravagant. Most were constructed with precautions to foil grave robbers; false entrances, watch demons, and elaborate death traps are all commonplace.

The passage of time has not been kind to the City. The rising salt marsh has resulted in the collapse of the necropolis' southern wall, and the hungry swamp has devoured a number of tombs. As the swamp reaches further into the City, the surviving necropolis grows increasingly wilder. Thick swamp vines, black moss, and mold cover all of the crypts, and the broad, paved footpaths have been reduced to narrow tracks flanked by thorny bushes and pools of brackish water stinking of rotting flesh.

There is no end to the legends of vast fortunes hidden in the tombs, or of the fell sentries that stand watch over the silent graves. In recent years, a number of ambitious (or desperate) rogues have declared their intent to raid this tomb or that, but either the would-be grave robbers died in the attempt, or uncovered such a vast hoard that they were able to disappear from Punjar entirely. Indifferent to the stories and hushed whispers, it is a common sight to see dim balls of fire dancing between the tombs on stormy nights.

THE SOUK

Both a ward and an immense bazaar that gives the ward its name, the Souk is synonymous with Punjar. The driving force behind the city's economy, the Souk is bustling at every hour of the day and night. Sailors unload ships by the light of the moon, hoarse traders hawk their wares at every hour, and taverns are packed day and night. It is challenging not to be drawn into an adventure or plot of some sort, with rogues beckoning from dark alleys, mysterious ladies smiling from behind thin veils, and the roving merchant captains perpetually setting sail before the next bell.

The Souk is an eclectic mix of new and old, with stone block counting houses dating back to Punjar first golden age, and flimsy tent camps hastily raised the night before. Caught between the two extremes are beam and plaster buildings, ranging in two to four stories or greater in height. Though less dense than the Commons, the Souk's constant energy can make it feel more claustrophobic than its neighbor to the south.

It is said that every man, woman, and child in the Souk has a scheme to get ahead. The residents of the Souk are enterprising folk with a feverish love for life. Enjoying the risk as much as the reward, the folk of the Souk are always up for a gamble of some sort.

Going hand in hand with their love of the long odds is the unspoken – but unshakeable – assumption that debts are to be paid. Those that fail to remedy their debts, or make arrangements with moneylenders, quickly find themselves on the wrong end of a dirk. Souk regulars entertain no illusions in regards to cold, hard coin, often cheering on the thugs hired to extract delinquent “blood gold.”

Locals welcome foreigners of every sort, as evidenced by the chaotic array of dress and races filling their streets. The Souk has no tolerance for racism or bigotry of any sort; this is not born out of high-minded morality, but rather the simple dictum of good business. Dragonborn lords, demon-blooded teiflings, and conniving gnomes – all can be found in the Souk drinking, gambling, and bargaining for that last copper piece as if their lives depended on it. In the Souk, gold makes equals of all.

Following is a brief list of places that could merit the interest of adventurers:

Black Gate Bazaar

Located at the primary gate servicing the Commons, the marketplace clustered around the Black Gate can rightfully be considered a low bazaar. The traders here are less forthright than their fellows in the Souk Bazaar, their goods are of lower quality, and as a rule, the buyer best beware. The merchants are notable for their dogged persistence, relying on the volume of their voice and sheer determination to sell their wares.

Known to only select few, the Black Gate Bazaar operates under the auspices of the Thieves Guild. While very few of the merchants are thieves, there is always a contingent of rogues working the crowd, picking pockets, identifying marks for con artists, and noting wealthy newcomers. The rogues typically work in teams, with an attractive young man or woman supported by a troupe of beggars. The beggars act as distractions (even failing to pick the mark's target), obstruct pursuit, and serve as lookouts, permitting the rogue to go about his or her business. Bazaar regulars know better than to listen to the sweet words of an attractive “noble” looking for an escort, passing knowing looks among themselves as brave heroes step up to help the maiden in distress.

The Souk (Bazaar)

Found at the intersection of Guilders' Lane, Gold Street, and Copper Lane, the bazaar known as the Souk is one of the true wonders of the North. It is commonly averred that if an item can't be found in the Souk, it likely can't be bought. Any day of the year, the Souk is a deafening tumult of shouting hawkers, foreign mercenaries seeking gainful employ, rogues offering games of chance, jongleurs and minstrels, vagabonds pleading for coins, and vendors offering small beer and dubious “street meats.” Night in the Souk is somewhat subdued, as the bazaar dons on a subtly different guise,

with streetwalkers and entertainers taking the place of merchants; however, the exchanges are no less commercial in nature.

Competition for the best space is fierce among hawkers, with the oldest and most established traders dominating the square. Hardheaded upstarts expecting to get their way by force and threat are often found floating in the river. While overt violence is frowned upon, experienced traders have no end of contacts and markers to call upon in times of need. Sometimes these competitions erupt into outright street warfare, with merchants taking sides and fielding thugs and mercenaries to do their dirty work. The Overlord and his Dragonne turn a blind-eye to most of these scuffles, trusting that the most devious merchant will win, and only intervening when conflicts threaten to upset business.

Presently, a portly dwarf by the name of Hrix Ironblood is the reigning King of the Bazaar. A coin-grubbing copper-pincher, Hrix possesses a fearsome temper and legendary paranoia. Every day, he can be found meeting with sea captains and merchants, negotiating for the best goods and prices. With connections throughout the Souk, Hrix has the ability to cripple any competition, and the will to see any conflict through to its bitter conclusion.

His chief competitor is Dramas the Hawk, a keen-eyed merchant lord, late of Archbridge. Young and ambitious, the Hawk has his eyes on Hrix's cabal of traders. Dramas has turned Hrix's greed to his advantage, selling his own goods for less than their market worth, a practice the avaricious dwarf refuses to follow. Old traders are hesitant to deal with Dramas, fearing the Hrix's reprisal, but newcomers are quickly drawn to the merchant's inexpensive goods and attractive harem of hawkers.

Southwatch Garrison

Standing watch over the Great Black Marsh to the south, and the Souk to the north, the soldiers of Southwatch are notoriously corrupt. Dragonne regularly ride through the Souk, kicking aside those too slow to clear the way, and demanding a “protection tax” from merchants and sea captains alike.

Most traders have accepted this extortion as a way of life and adjust their prices accordingly. Those that attempt to take a stand against the Dragonne are summarily executed, usually with just enough ceremony to provide an example for the rest.

The Southwatch is captained by Lady Raveynos, a deadly warrior by all accounts. Ruling the Southwatch has permitted the Black Lady to indulge her cruel appetite, and every night, screams can be heard echoing from the garrison's highest tower. Criminals taken by the Southwatch Dragonne seldom live long enough to come to trial, and fear of the Black Lady only serves to reinforce her soldiers' reign over the ward.

Wharf Town

A collection of shacks and shanties built above the water, Wharf Town is the Souk's answer to Smoke, a cruel slum where the people are little better than feral animals. The inhabitants of Wharf Town subsist off the refuse discarded from the Souk Bazaar, flotsam that makes its way downriver, and by doing the jobs that other Punjarans refuse.

As its name would suggest, Wharf Town is an insular community, and visitors are actively discouraged. While Guild thieves make a practice of smuggling goods in town underneath the docks, even they have little interest in disturbing the folk that make their home above the water.

HIGH QUARTER AND LOW COURT

Situated to the east of the gleaming Palace of the Overlord, High and Low Court are home to Punjar's aristocracy. Sweeping manors, whitewashed walls, secluded gardens, and manicured groves make up the bulk of the wards, standing in stark contrast to their neighbors to the south. Life is quiet and peaceful here, save for the masked fetes and balls, befitting Punjar's oldest and wealthiest families.

Of course, in Punjar, not all is as it seems, and the Court's placid veneer only serves to hide age-old secrets and fell pacts.

The nobles of Punjar can trace their family legacies back to the founding of the city, when their ancestors were not foppish dandies, but warlords that ruled vast tracts of land with iron fists. However, over the course of history, changing economic climate forced all the noble families to slowly sell off their lands to maintain their lavish lifestyles. The rise of the Dragonne sealed the nobility's demise, and the last of their lands were awarded to the companies of slave-warriors.

Faced with their extinction, the nobles took their last resource – access to the Overlord – and quietly offered it to those that needed it the most: the Thieves Guild. A devil's pact was struck, with the various Guild factions supporting their chosen patron, and the noble families speaking and acting in their faction's interests.

This practice of patronage spread like wildfire throughout the aristocracy, so that today, every noble line maintains active ties to a faction of the Thieves Guild. The relationships to specific members of the families may vary, but the overarching affect is the same, with noble families as the puppets, and the crime factions, the puppeteers.

While the intrigues of Punjar's nobility are too complex to be detailed here, it merits noting that each family maintains a house guard composed of the finest warriors and wizards that the family can afford. Perhaps of greater

concern to would-be thieves, each of the various houses also keeps a master thief in their employ. This rogue serves two purposes: He ensures noble complicity, and he wards against other rogues that would seek to harm the Guild's investment.

Following is a partial list of the noble houses with a prominent presence in the High and Low Courts: Cainegont, Dev'sbir, Drucaul, Farod, Indragi, Ororo, Sauronan, Rituzag, and Vagimmor.

THE BLACKWELL CITADEL

The fortress known as the Blackwell looms in the mists just off the mainland, a constant reminder to all those that would dare thwart the will of the Overlord. A prison in a city of criminals, the Blackwell is home to the worst villains that Punjar has to offer.

The ocean's waves pound the walls of the Blackwell day in and day out. The citadel's stark towers bear no decoration, save the solitary red lanterns that guide merchant ships through the narrows straits. No flags or banners flap in the sea winds, and no gargoyles stare down from on high. Rather, the grim walls and stoic towers stand like giant sentries, on constant watch over their wards.

Prisoners are shipped to the Citadel on barges. Inmates have their forearms branded with special irons that mark them forever as prisoners of the Blackwell. Then each inmate is fitted with manacles and leg shackles. Suspected spellcasters are fitted with masks to restrict speech; rogues and warriors have their thumbs bound to their palms with painful iron gloves. Then the prisoners are assigned to slave gangs and sent to labor beneath the Blackwell, digging ever-deeper dungeons to make room for the growing prison population.

For those that have the misfortune of offending the Overlord, the punishment is immediate and final. Mage or warrior, priest or rogue, the punishment is the same: the subject has his tongue and thumbs removed, and is fitted with a scorched iron mask concealing his face. Rather than laboring in the company of his fellow prisoners, the offender is sentenced to solitary confinement, at the bottom of a lightless pit ranging from 60 to 100 feet in depth. Food and water are delivered to prisoners once or twice a week, but often the overseers forget about these damned souls, neglecting to return to the pits until it comes time to lower another prisoner into the hole.

Of those sentenced to incarceration, most die within the first 10 weeks. Between the prison's cruel overseers, the dangerous conditions, and competition with fellow prisoners for food and water, the dungeons exact a terrible toll. Those that do survive the harrowing experience are incredibly resilient in both body and soul – for what good it does them. Only one out of 100 prisoners lives out the first year, and no prisoner

on record has survived longer than 5 years. (Of course, this does not include the special prisoners condemned to an unlife of necromantic servitude.)

Standing watch over the Blackwell are the Gaolers, sentries distinguished by their black and crimson robes. Though seldom seen outside of the citadel, sometimes a triad is sent into the city on a specific mission – a cause for great fear and excitement to the common folk of Punjar. The ranks of the Gaolers are filled entirely by children selected from Punjar's orphanages – children without families or futures that are raised in absolute obedience and loyalty towards the Overlord. Like a guild of artisans or craftsfolk, the Gaolers are divided into strict ranks accorded by accomplishment and learning. These ranks are presumed to be initiate, apprentice, journeyman, and master, with varying degrees and titles within each ranking. And like most guilds, the rituals, signs and tokens of the ranks are held in absolute secrecy.

It is commonly accepted that the Gaolers answer to one known as Master Azdiel. Though the master was certainly once human (or perhaps Eladrin) it is unknown what wicked transformations he (she? it?) has undergone since accepting his post. Those that have seen Master Azdiel report that the master is seven feet in height, and slender as a skeleton, despite the heavy crimson robes that adorn its frame. The master is often seen carrying either an obsidian staff tipped with a pulsing ruby, or a massive greatsword, with a glowing ruby adorning its scorched black pommel.

Escape from the Blackwell is deemed impossible by the common folk of Punjar. Given that most of the citadel's prisoners toil far underground, the best chance for escape is within two days of arrival. Even then, eluding the Gaolers is no small feat, given that nearly all wear chain shirts and carry deadly crossbows beneath their simple robes. Further complicating matters are the complex and strong ocean currents that surround Blackwell island. To date, while many have attempted escape, none has survived to tell the tale.

THE DEVIL'S THUMB

Notorious throughout the Known World as a den of vice and iniquity, the Devil's Thumb is aptly named. Perched on the eastern edge of the city, it is a sharp peninsula situated within a hawk's swoop of the noble villas and east of the Souk. This jutting spur of land is known throughout Punjar as a place of dark delights, chance, risk, and ill-gotten fortunes. The ward is justly infamous for its many taverns, festhalls, gambling dens, fences, and houses of ill repute. These businesses beckon commoner and noble alike, hiding behind an illusion of cheap opulence that conceals the abject poverty pervading much of the ward. Visitors cleaving to the Thumb's main thoroughfares have little to fear apart from pickpockets and conmen, but behind the façade of wealth and exotic architecture, lie mazes of dark, twisted alleys, where danger lurk at every turn.

During the day, the Devil's Thumb could be mistaken for any of Punjar's other world-weary wards, but at night, the district comes alive with a ferocity that defies description. Painted lamps are hung across the streets between buildings, raucous laughter and rowdy drinking songs erupt from every door, exotic street magicians ply their trade, and temptation waits at every turn.

On any given night, the ward is filled by a chaotic mix of sailors on shore leave, merchant-lords accompanied by entourages of sellswords and priest-mages, rowdy mercenaries celebrating their latest victories, and common folk clutching their hard-earned silver. Nobles and their retinues are regular visitors to the ward, donning featureless cloaks and masks to conceal their identities.

The dense throngs and fanciful folk make it easy for anyone to lose himself in the crowded night. The Devil's Thumb is home to Punjar's more exotic races – teiflings and dragonborn draw no more notice here than any of other more common races – and when combined with the distinct absence of Dragonne (the ward stands outside the city's walls), the Devil's Thumb is a bastion of freedom and independence.



The wild and chaotic ward has an entire host of locales, each catering to different tastes and desires. Following is a greatly abbreviated list of places of interest:

Copse of Dead Jenys

Located just to the south of the main ward, where the peninsula runs into the mainland, the copse is a collection of dark woods and quiet, sheltered paths. The copse also stands at the junction where the Devil's Thumb meets the High Quarter, and where nobles illicitly meet their paramours of ill repute. Sadly, such dalliances between the nobility and lower class rarely end well; rather, every dawn the corpses of dead mistresses are found in the silent woods. Sometimes, the mistresses have committed suicide by poisoned blade, unable to tolerate life without their beloveds, but more often the women are murdered by their former lovers.

The Pinch

A narrow spit of land standing to the east of Sea Gate, the Pinch is the primary means for crossing between the Devil's Thumb and Northside. Dozens of boats, ranging from elaborate barges strung on heavy chains to rickety waterlogged punts, work the Pinch, ferrying Punjarans across the river. The ferrymen are a competitive lot, each declaring that his is the quickest trip across the Pinch, and it is not unusual for boatmen to scuttle their rivals' vessels or to engage in running battles of insults as they row their charges across to the Thumb.

Poison Well Court

The central plaza at the heart of the entertainment district, the Poison Well Court serves as a crossroads, where visitors to the ward sort themselves according to desire and interest. Hawkers of dubious virtue call from every alley, portal, window, and balcony, offering temptations to suit every taste.

The court takes its name from a fountain placed in the center of the plaza. Depicting a beautiful, grief stricken woman bent over a dying hero, the statuary is a reference to the legend of the Lady's Hero, in which a warlord returning from battle falls prey to a well poisoned by his lover. It is well known that the fountain bestows magical effects upon any that drink of its sparkling waters, but the effects seem to vary from person to person.

THE NEW CITY AND NORTHSIDE

The newest additions to the city of Punjar, both the New City and Northside were added in the last century in an effort to accommodate Punjar's burgeoning population. The folk of both wards are largely accomplished crafts folk and merchants, lending the wards a higher class of citizenry than their neighbors to the south.

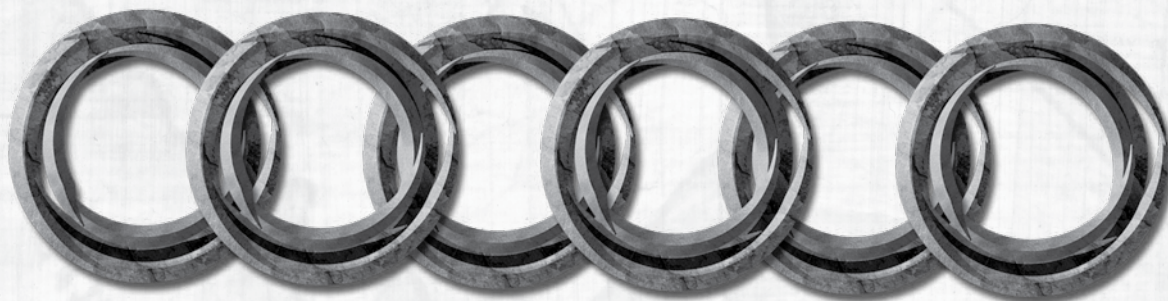
Of all of Punjar, the wards of New City and Northside can be seen as the most stable. While none would deny the Thieves Guild's presence, few citizens openly flaunt their allegiance to the rogues. Protection rackets here are quiet affairs, and some brave merchants even take it upon themselves to make a stand against the Thieves' hegemony, as examples to their fellows. In the past, these renegades would have been quashed by the Guild, but as the rising merchant class builds up more wealth (and power), the Rule of Thieves comes increasingly into question.

Bazaar of the Gods

Up from the swarming docks of the Trade Meet and past the hawkers of Fortune Street, visitors to this section of the city can find miracles, absolution, or simply something to believe in, all for a handful of copper coins.

Here, among the tent-shrines and shoddy rostrums that choke the district's central square, salvation and belief are sold as cheaply as any of the low-quality goods of Punjar. The gods, like any commodity, are merely a source of currency for the men and women devious enough to extol them in the proper manner. Beneath every pious mask is a rapacious soul vying for greater wealth—a goal ultimately achieved by ascendance into the Temple Ward beyond the Great Stairs. Only the cleverest of charlatans or those able to demonstrate the miracles of their faith ever succeed. From the desperate crowds the priests—pretenders and divine postulants alike—cull the followers needed to rise to greater status. When their numbers are sufficient, and their coffers full enough, the priests look to the Great Stairs and seek to undermine those they would supplant.

True faith in any god—whether the most benevolent deity or the vilest—is hard to find in the Bazaar of the



Gods, but within the clamoring crowd real pilgrims and clerics speak softly, offering the tenets of their gods to those who would hear them. They must contend with the masterful sleight of hand of their rivals and the tarnished miracles of magicians and charlatans.

Among the most charismatic of the Bazaar's current appellants is a half-elf calling herself Sister Malady. Claiming to be a prophet of Narrimunâth, the Lord of Disease, she has already gathered a sizable following among Punjar's infirm—at least, those strong enough to physically attend her street sermons. Sister Malady has convinced her disciples that their sicknesses are a blessing from Narrimunâth himself, a mark of the Rat God's favor. Those who succumb to its grip will be given the repose of oblivion, but those who endure have a greater reward. The half-elf, herself afflicted with incurable cackle fever, claims that if a temple is founded for Narrimunâth in Punjar, then his "faithful horde" will be cured . . . and the power to afflict others granted to them. Sister Malady's priestly powers have, for now, sufficed to contain her disciples' sicknesses from spreading to others—a necessary measure to prevent the Dragonne from disbanding her efforts.

TEMPLE WARD

Above the Great Stairs—a barrier of monetary prestige as much as one of faith—lies an immaculate terrene where real temples rise from earthly city streets as monuments to the gods. The ward is an oasis amidst the squalor of Punjar, a promenade of lush gardens that defy the arid climate of the Southern Province—said to be the work of a ghostly caretaker or perhaps the gods themselves. The temples sprawled across this spacious ward include austere monasteries, elegant pagodas, and fortified donjons. All but the most powerful temples

have changed hands (and faiths) innumerable times across the years. Some were cast into ruin and rebuilt to accommodate new gods, others merely dusted off and a different holy symbol affixed above the sanctuary.

With few exceptions, the temples are ruled by unscrupulous high priests and jealously guarded by warrior-slaves. They fought to achieve the eminence and influence of the Temple Ward and do not willingly relinquish it. The faiths that fail here are ones ill equipped to defeat lesser faiths that would tear them down... and those who fail to pay the Overlord's exorbitant tithes.

The dominant feature of the ward is the Fastness of Time, temple of Valdreth. Legends hold that it is Punjar's oldest structure, its humble stones first laid by a priest of the Unchanging One in an age when quadruped monsters still ruled the world. Religious texts found within the temple claim it will be the last to fall when the sandstorms of time erode the city into oblivion. The Fastness and its clergy seem to be the only permanent fixture amidst the turbulent sea of postulants. Patient as the god they revere, the followers of Valdreth endure the envious slander of the other temples and the scorn of the charlatans in the Bazaar. The high priest of the Fastness of Time bears the title of Senescent Speaker, and the current Speaker is believed to be the oldest human in Punjar.

For their timeworn vigil, the Overlord allows the Fastness to quarter the Temple Ward's only law enforcement: the Glass Knights, an order of paladins devoted to the Unchanging One. Longsuffering holy warriors, the Glass Knights maintain order within the ward, but do not bar anyone physical entry at the Great Stairs. The knights firmly believe that those who seek the gods, be they knaves or kings, should be given the chance to do so. Only the violent and the unstable are cast out by the Glass Knights, and they are all that prevent open conflict between the rival temples.

Temples to Myna (the Maid of Fortune), Lasheeva (Lady Dissolution), Xeluth (the Ravager), and Yvyn (the Righteous Slaughter) number among the most popular temples in this ward. House Hoshuet of the Trader's Cabal is a known patron of the Death Vault, Lasheeva's temple, and rumors often claim that the clergy of Lady Dissolution are planning to unseat the Fastness of Time as the ward's dominant temple. Others say that a clergy of Neshti, the roguish Lady of Shadows, moves unseen among the populace in quiet support of Valdreth and wields power equal to the great temples beyond the Great Stairs.



WILDERNESS ENVIRONS

In Punjar, the difference between a teeming city street and a desolate swamp is little more than a few minutes' ride on horseback. Surrounded by the constant press of tenements and people from every race and corner of the Known Realms, the folk of Punjar can be forgiven for forgetting that that civilization is a passing thing in the Grand History of the Known Realms. Sages and sovereigns aver that savagery and barbarism reflect the true nature of the so-called "civilized" races; elves, dwarves and men alike were born of chaos and violence, and shall surely be laid low by the same cruel flames.

Following is a partial list of some of the most prominent features and landmarks found beyond the city's walls, where the law of the sword and tooth reigns over the flimsy patina of civilization:

Great Black Swamp

A salt marsh of tall, grassy reeds and boggy hollows, the Great Black Swamp is home to deadly monsters of every sort. Merchants and ferrymen cannot be persuaded to cross the marsh. Those looking to be ferried into the Black Swamp must deal with the curious swamp folk that inhabit the shantytown just outside the Salt Marsh Gate. The swamp folk demand sacrifices of blood, burned over open flames, to appease their dark gods before venturing into the swamp. Regardless of their dubious theology, the sacrifices most appease something, or else the simpletons would have been devoured by the swamp creatures decades ago.

Rangers report coming across tracks and scat of all manner of fell beasts. It is known for certain that salt trolls make their home in the dark fens, with a dread brood mother lurking somewhere in the natural caves that line the swamp's southern border. Exploring these caves is doubly dangerous due to the tides that can raise the water level of the swamp by 12 feet in 8 hours or less, flooding the caves and trapping the unlucky and unwise. To date, the best information on the brood mother was brought back by Talizien Redlance, a holy warrior better known as the Mad Paladin. The sole survivor of a expedition to the swamp caves, the Mad Paladin returned, covered in bile and gore, spouting insanities about a giant troll mother lairing in flooded cavern filled with golden treasures stolen from the lost tribes of man. The Mad Paladin's stories might have been disregarded out of hand were it not for a pair of artifacts he carried with him: a golden sword of ancient design, and a blackened, eight-inch claw, wrenched from the nail of some dread beast.

It is commonly accepted that a black dragon of indeterminable age also lurks somewhere within the swamp, though the aged wyrm hasn't been sighted in over a decade. Named Salt-tongue by the common folk of Punjar, magi and sages say that the wyrm's draconic title (though not its true name) is Saacata. Moreover, the truly learned note that the reports of the drake's last

encounter bear ominous signs: specifically, the dragon's grime-encrusted scales all bore glowing sigils honoring a long-forgotten god of death. Some audacious scholars have proposed the theory that the black dragon has become, or is attempting to become, a lich, but the thought of an ancient black dragon, who is also a undead fiend of unsurpassed power, is too much to imagine.

Less epic, though far more relevant to day-to-day life in Punjar, are the tribes of ferocious lizardfolk that make their home in the reedy islands scatted about the swamp. More aggressive and violent than usual lizardfolk, this warloving breed can be recognized by the elaborate piercings used to decorate their scaly frames. Often hung with bloody trophies cut from their latest kill, these piercings are said to signify a lizardfolk's rank in its tribe. The lizardfolk are superstitious creatures, beholden to their dark shamans and their gruesome prophecies. Those who have survived a lizardfolk attack report that the assault began with a volley of arrows and javelins, followed by a hopping wave of giant frogs, with lizardfolk bringing up the rear. If the tales are to be believed, there are even primitive lizardfolk "knights" of sorts, riding atop the largest of the giant frogs, barbed lances and reed shields held at their side.

Spiderhaunt Spire

South of the city, where the fetid swamp meets the ocean, a solitary black tower stands high atop a ridge of craggy rock. Worn from centuries of ceaseless storms and tempests, it is said that the Spire is older than Punjar itself. This alone would not be worth recording (after all, the fastnesses of dwarves and elves far outstrip any city built by man) were it not for the Spire's curious construction: cut from a single block of obsidian, the 200-foot-tall tower shows no sign of chisel or hammer, or the touch of any artisan for that matter. Dwarven experts, hired to inspect the tower, were at a loss to explain how it had been crafted, and swore that they knew of nothing similar in their annals or myths.

The black Spire is smoothed to a mirror-like polish. Those standing before its perfect walls see their own reflections in the dark stone, save with a sinister aspect: the reflections, true in every other detail, show the viewers covered in musty cobwebs and swarming with small black spiders. (This unnerving sight has driven more than one viewer to stumble back in surprise, pitching off the ridge and to the rocky surf far below.)

Though few have the courage to investigate the Spire, a bit of research reveals three known means of entering the tower. The first is most obvious: a pair of keyhole portals, cast in an unknown gray metal and bound with silver studs. The portals are sealed by a series of 5 locks set at the points of a central pentagon. The mechanism of each lock is cut out of a different precious stone (sapphire, ruby, emerald, diamond and bloodstone, respectively).

The second entrance is also fairly obvious: a series of four windows circling the top of the tower, each facing one of the four compass points. The widows all stand empty of shutters or glass, though keen-eyed observers note that all four seem veiled by sheets of fine cobwebs, no matter the season or weather.

The third entrance is known only to a select few: a narrow tunnel, bored into the side of the rocky sea cliffs. Guarded simply by a silver grate, cast in the shape of an enormous, fanged spider, the tunnel seems to run directly beneath the tower, though, to date, no explorer has braved the tunnel and returned to tell the tale.

ADVENTURES IN PUNJAR

Within or without the city walls, Punjar is home to endless adventure. The towering ruins known as Spiderhaunt Spire beckon from the south, the Weeping Caves stand silent across the stinking waters, and the Great Black Marsh – home to unnamed ancient horrors – creeps ever further into the city like a living, sentient creature. All these mysteries and more await heroes brave enough to answer their call.

SELLSWORDS OF PUNJAR

Deep within the heart of Smoke, the self-declared Beggar-King reigns over a motley band of urchins, vagabonds, and ne'er-do-wells. While long has the Thieves Guild overlooked the petty crimes by non-guild thieves, of late the Beggar-King and his paupers have overstepped their bounds, robbing merchants and working extortion scams that were once the exclusive purview of the Thieves Guild.

Fearing the Guild's retaliation, the Beggar-King elected to strike first, hiring a band of thugs and killers to wage preemptive war against the thieves.

All this would amount to little more than Smoke politics as usual, save for one thing. In his ambition, the Beggar-King also sought to strike a pact with otherworldly powers. In his quest for power, the Beggar-King unearthed something far worse: a shadowstuff horror, trapped between worlds since time immemorial.

Now the Beggar-King is trapped by the very horror he sought to tame. All dreams of ruling Smoke have been forgotten in place of worshipping the shadowstuff being. Driven to the brink of madness, cruel beyond all imagining, the Beggar-King rules from within a fetid charnel, offering up blood sacrifices to the shadowstuff being. Every sacrifice brings the shadowstuff horror closer to freedom, when a new reign of terror will be unleashed upon the people of Smoke.

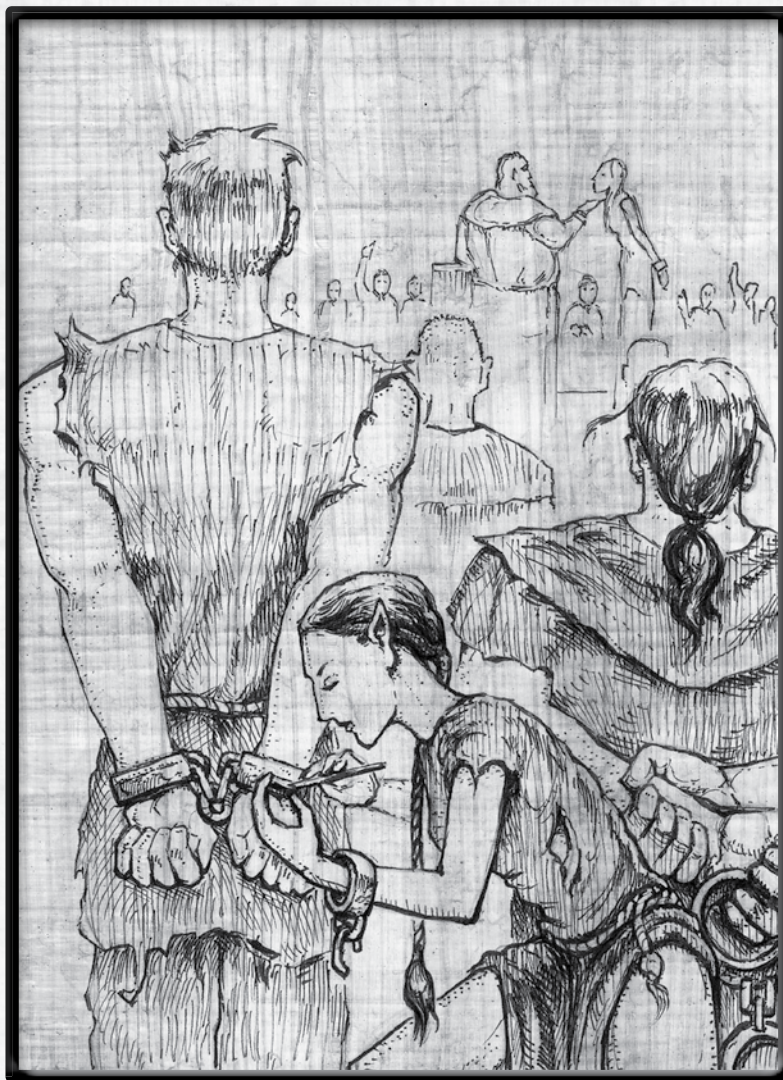
It falls to the heroes—mere sellswords—to stave off the horror lurking within the heart of the slums. Their reward will be the gratitude of the Thieves Guild, the hoards of gold and gems hidden away by the Beggar-King over the years, and the forbidden knowledge of shadowstuff magic.

REVENGE IN PUNJAR

The Dev'shir family is one of Punjar's oldest and most respected noble families. Although, in Punjar, and especially where house Dev'shir is concerned, respect is simply a euphemism for fear. The family maintains an elaborate stone house and extensive manicured grounds in the High Court ward. The estate is called Windgate due to its proximity to the gate leading to the Copse of Dead Jenys, and the distinct whistling sound that issues forth when the coastal winds buffet it. The family prides itself on its loyal servants, thirty-seven strong, and most of which trace several generations of service to the Dev'shirs.

The Dev'shir family fortune is immense, but very little these days remain in liquid funds. The majority is composed of family heirlooms, bulky antiques, or unique curios. The house grounds are cluttered with gaudy items, such as masterwork statues, ancient suits of armor gilded with precious metals, exotic tapestries, and furniture carved from rare woods. The source of the family's wealth has varied over the generations. Hadur Dev'shir, the founding father who settled in Punjar centuries past, was an avid equestrian, horse breeder, and trader. Dealing in prized steeds generated significant income, allowing the family to build many stables outside of the city to the north. With these profits, the Dev'shirs often dabbled in other ventures, with mixed results. These disparate endeavors included mining operations, foodstuff exportation, and personally funding treasure-hunting expeditions. The discovery of iron deposits to the west of Punjar seventy years ago almost spelled doom for the family. Following massive capital expenses, the deposits were exhausted in less than five years, and the family shifted its attention to less acceptable trades to fund its affluent upkeep.

These illicit dealings included slavery, occasional smuggling, and the purchase of numerous buildings in the Salt Market Road area of the Old City. These dilapidated structures were rented out to poor and desperate folk, and soon became host to all manner of shady dealings. Rumors persist that the Dev'shir are allied with the Thieves Guild, but this has never been proven. About ten years ago, the family "acquired" a salt processing plant in Wharf Town. The family turned quite a profit by processing salted fish and other meats and exporting them to distant markets. Many speculate that costs are kept low by buying bulk quantities of bycatch fish, and falsely labeling them as more desirable fare. Some even whisper that the salt processing plant is a convenient place to do away with troublesome enemies of the family.



The current family consists of Lord Abir Dev'shir, an aging, bald man with a bushy handlebar mustache. He wears comfortable, lavender billowing pants and matching oversized shirts left open to reveal a wild tangle of graying chest hair. Many large golden rings adorn his fingers and earrings dangle from his lobes. His wife is the Lady Noura Dev'shir, once a stunning, ebony-haired beauty with a commanding voice, but now a hag-like, wrinkled old woman with make-up applied with a putty knife. She too is often adorned with too much gaudy jewelry, and her presence can be detected a room away, thanks to the stench of perfume that follows her about.

The Dev'shirs have but a single heir; a son named Elam. Elam is a naïve, foppish rake of twenty-eight, with straight black hair, cold blue eyes, and a fragile, porcelain-like visage. He is skilled with a blade, and his favored rapier is always at hand. Elam prefers to make nightly forays into the Devil's Thumb. There, he frequents houses of ill repute and rowdy taverns, often getting into trouble, but not so deep that money can't smooth things over.

Recently, Elam discovered an amulet for sale at a shady pawnshop in the Souk. The amulet is a family heirloom, and was supposed to be safely tucked away in the family tomb, located in the City of the Dead section of Punjar. The haughty family prefers to avoid tangling with the local authorities, so instead has offered a substantial monetary award for adventurers willing to investigate the situation.

Will the daring heroes investigate the family tomb for clues, or pursue the lead at the pawnshop? The investigation will lead the heroes to a seedy tavern in the Devil's Thumb, and then outside the city proper to a nearby abandoned iron mine. The trail ends at an abandoned windmill overlooking the city. There the heroes discover a long-forgotten scion's plot for revenge, and must attempt to thwart her evil machinations.

THE THRONES OF PUNJAR

Three months ago, the usual business of the Devil's Thumb was rudely interrupted. A visiting merchant left his partners at a tavern late one evening and simply disappeared, leaving most of his wares unclaimed at a nearby inn. Individuals sometimes go missing (or worse) in the ward, and the place is known as a hive of murderers and miscreants of all sorts, so the disappearance initially garnered little notice. Soon thereafter, however, a group of three strong dockworkers also disappeared without a trace. In the days that followed, a dealer from the Palace of Fortuity (a local gambling house) disappeared, soon to be followed by a bartender from the Fat Stirge Ale House, and a pair of noblewomen from High Court. The large number of disappearances within such a short time, coupled with the lack of clues, caused panic among the local citizens. A pair of intrepid young wizards from Punjar's school of wizardry vowed to investigate the apparent abductions. Armed with powerful wands, they began patrolling the streets and alleys of the ward. For two weeks they had nothing to report—and then, suddenly, they too were never seen again. Anxiety in the ward bloomed into outright fear.

To make matters worse, there has been another dire development. Citizens have reported sighting a fearsome apparition in the ward's alleys. The ghostly form has approached and threatened several people, if stories are to be believed, though actually locating a citizen with firsthand experience meeting the specter is difficult. Yet the stories are widespread, and they have only fanned the flames of panic begun by the rash of disappearances. Recently, other rumors have spread; these darker tales speak of newly spawned cults and scaly beings roaming the ward.