

# Dead Simple - Supplement 7 - The Big City!

## Introduction

Few things scare a new GM more than the thought of creating a City. In a dungeon there's just a few monsters and rooms to worry about, but a city could have thousands.

In fact creating a city is actually pretty easy. It's all a matter of thinking like a film director. All he needs to make you think your hero is in a city are Sets (usually 2 dimensional building fronts), some props and some extras - and ... action!

## First steps in designing a City

So what does a medieval city have that players are interested in:

1. A Tavern/Inn to stay in.
2. A Marketplace with merchants to whom they can sell their loot and buy stuff from.
3. A Patron to send them off on their next adventure.
4. Maybe a Temple or two.

So here's the Dead Simple guide to how to construct an entire city in twenty minutes.

First think of a name for your city.

Then write one line descriptions of the following:

1. A City Gate and its guards.
2. A street leading from the gate.
3. The types of buildings.
4. A Market Square at the end of the street.
5. An Inn on the square.
6. The Landlord of the Inn.
7. Some market stalls or shops around the square.
8. Maybe a small temple if you're feeling brave.
9. The weather.

So here we go:

Our city is going to be called 'Aldford'.

1. Two stone towers frame a narrow gate with a rusty portcullis, guarded by three elderly watchmen in leather tunics and pot helmets.
2. Aldgate street winds upwards from the gate, its steep cobbles slick with waste water overflowing the stone channel down its centre.
3. The wooden buildings are tall and narrow with three floors and steep pitched slated roofs.
4. The Aldmarket is a small square with a gallows in the middle, surrounded by stalls busily selling a range of fruit, vegetables, dried meat and sausages.
5. The Golden Gibbet Inn has seen better days, but still boasts a large and busy taproom and several reasonably priced rooms.
6. A tough drunkard, Pegleg Jones is a former boxer who used his winnings to buy the inn.
7. Tucked in amongst the food stalls is an armorer, a sword smith and an Apothecary selling potions and lotions.
8. The Chapel of Saint Ethelberkh is a brightly painted stone building that supports a number of monks and fat Abbot called Father Gerhard.
9. The weather is cool and bright, though it is obvious there has been some heavy rain.

If you want to go a little further then describe the following:

1. The ruler of the City.
2. The nature of the City Guard.
3. The make-up of the citizenry (rich and poor, human and non-human etc.).

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## Developing your city

Only when the players want to explore the City rather than just rest up there and reprovision do you need to go any further. Here are some common details of medieval cities to help you flesh it out further:

1. A city will have 2-4 gates. Each will have a main road leading towards the centre.
2. It may have more than one marketplace.
3. Most did not have sewers, the filth was just thrown into the street or into a midden in the garden.
4. City walls were poorly maintained unless there was a war on.
5. There were often plenty of open spaces inside the walls, and the locals used these to grow food, keep pigs and chickens and bury their dead.
6. Temples would be of better quality than the surrounding houses.
7. Many buildings had narrow alleys leading between them, and small enclosed yards.
8. The city's ruler would live in a fortified palace or castle.
9. Many of the city's elite - nobles and merchants - would have fortified houses as well, and professional bodyguards.
10. At night cities were dark places. Only Inns and Taverns were well lit.
11. Strange folk, such as non-humans, would often have their own area, where they would reside close to each other for protection.
12. City authorities often raised money by charging tolls on gates, bridges, markets or strangers.
13. The City Guard were usually retired soldiers, competent at roughing up civilians, but in no hurry to die against more dangerous foes. They were not a police force and did not investigate crimes beyond the 'who hit who first?' level.
14. Most crimes taken to the Ruler ended in a fine or a very short, unpleasant and permanent sentence. Cities did not generally have prisons.

## Mapping your City

This is actually quite easy and very like the simple dungeon mapping method we described in Supplement 2A.

Get a piece of plain paper and draw thick lines for streets, thin lines for alleys and squares or circles for the various plazas and market squares. Don't make any of them very regular or too straight. Medieval cities tended to grow organically.

Number various locations you want to remember and keep a key to them or even write it on your map.

Another easy way is to use Google and download an actual map of a medieval city. Just rename things to suit yourself.

The key to your players enjoyment of your city is in your descriptions not the map.

## Organizations

Most cities have many organizations that may help or hinder the adventurers. For example:

1. The Guilds. Every craft and profession in a medieval city had a Guild. This was like a union and just as ambitious. All Guild competed with each other and this competition could get very nasty.
2. Secret Societies frequently form in cities. These could be religious cults, demonic

cabals, magical covens or just a gang of self-interested nobles or merchants. They are secret because if the Ruler found out he'd have them all hanged, or worse.

3. The infamous Thieves' Guild. This could be well-organized like the Mafia or more like a loose brotherhood of contacts. It could be very business-like providing goods a services you can't get in public, or a vicious network of murderers and brigands.
4. The Temples. Where there is more than one God in a City then each temple will be vying to be the most powerful.
5. Noble Houses are a staple of any medieval fantasy city. These are the families of the rulers of the city. They are full of ambitious lordlings, jealousy, greed and the desire for vengeance on other houses.

## Plots & Schemes

Cities are basically like big dungeons. There will be bosses and minions in every walk of life. Most people in a city will go along to get along, but a few are power-hungry and ambitious.

These are the sort of people whom will hire adventurers to advance their ambitions and ruin those of their rivals.

Often the adventurers will not initially know anything about why they are being employed, or perhaps even by whom, just that the money is good. They may quickly find that the work is illegal or immoral, or perhaps both. Then it is up to them to decide what to do about it.

Another approach is that as there is no organized police force in a medieval city they are approached to investigate a robbery, kidnapping or murder by the victims. This could place them at odds with some very unpleasant people.

When planning such an adventure begin by noting down all the important aspects of the crime. Then decide what evidence these would leave and whether this evidence is easy, difficult or hard to uncover and interpret. Add a couple of red herrings to make it a little bit more difficult.

If the investigation begins to do well then have the criminals try and deter them with threats or attacks.

Eventually you will need to have a set-piece battle at the end. This will be between the adventurers and the evil perpetrators of the crime they have been set to investigate. Create a memorable setting for this, perhaps a disused graveyard at midnight, a large chamber in the sewers or an abandoned temple.

If you can't think of a plot then consider the plot of a thriller book or movie you enjoyed. Change the names, the locations and a few of the twists and hey presto – a dead simple masterpiece.

## Buying and Selling in the City

Just about anything the adventurers could wish for can be found in a city, for the right price.

Although a city will generally be cheaper than a village like Grobblot, every trader, shopkeeper and merchant will charge what they think that they can get away with. Haggling will be the usual method of establishing a price. This is where the adventurers' Persuasion skills will come in handy. There will also be more people able to handle the adventurers loot and give a better price for it than they could get in Grobblot. If they are not careful though there are also people who would like to steal their loot as well.