

I love this city, I really do, but it's not called "Snakes Den" for nothing. Justice and law get lost in the constant battle to survive on these streets and I get to watch it evolve from my window every day.

I remember one muddy, spring day an older man set up his cart just outside my house. He was selling small trinkets and charms. Sweet old fellow. Late evening, when most of the market was closed down and the carts were packing up, a young woman stopped to look at his merchandise. I saw it happen from my window. While the merchant was distracted a young boy approached from the opposite direction and robbed him. I'm not sure why I remember it so clearly; I'd seen this dozens of times.

Afterwards the merchant realized he'd been robbed. He called for the local guard but no one answered. The next day I noticed a guard speaking with the merchant. I left my home for a while and when I returned the old man was lying dead under his cart. He'd been stabbed and the rest of his stock had been taken. A few days later I saw that same guard wearing a small pin in his hat that I'd seen on the old man's cart.

Why didn't I speak out, raise the alarm, and point out the crime that had obviously taken place? Let's be honest - in a den of snakes, the mouse that draws attention is the first to become lunch.

--Excerpt from an anonymous interview from the Grayson's Grey Rangers material "Can we Turn Camden towards signing the Grey Ranger Charter?"

CAMDEN, THE "SNAKES DEN"

The City of Camden is a mix of political relationships, loose morals, and greed. The residents in power will do anything to hold onto that power. Those without it strive hard to just make ends meet. The Houses that rule the city get along only to ensure their own survival. The City of Camden has chosen to stand apart from the Southern Kingdoms by refusing to accept the Grey Ranger Charter. This puts them at odds with many communities but has opened up a whole world of profitable opportunities that are not normally available. Many traders bring cargo from shady areas to sell their goods here to then be moved further into the Southern Kingdoms. This freedom also means the city is on its own when attacked by pirates or raiders coming in from coastal waters. The

City of Camden has so far been able to withstand the test of time. Since its founding in the early 2000's it has been attacked, burned, and rebuilt several times. No matter what differences or trust issues may exist among the Houses and people of Camden - threaten them, and they will defend themselves.

Location: The southern coast of the Wildlands, between the cities of Haven, Venture, and Shan

Affiliation: Independent city within the Wildlands. Camden has refused to accept the Grey Ranger Charter and stands on its own.

Population: Approximately 10,000 people. The seasonal trade from harvest, fishing, and livestock herding can wildly affect the city's population.

Racial Mix: The large majority of citizens are human with some dwarves and goblinish, and a small mix of the other races. It's rare to encounter Korindians or aevakar even passing through the city.

Economy: Camden is well off; the established fishing waters and crossroads provide excellent trade opportunities. The sprawling landscape gives plenty of room for agriculture and industry to help feed economic growth.

Strength: Camden is a bit of a mixed bag when it comes to security and military forces. There is a standing city watch, staffed and funded by the ruling Houses. They are tasked with keeping order and protecting the city from outside assault. However most folks inside the city see them as corrupt as the Houses who run the government. Mixed in with this is the private mercenary company of the Jagged Daggers, who are occasionally mistaken for thugs and bandits rather than a protecting force.

Leadership: The city is ruled by a council of seven ruling Houses. Six of the Houses drive a major industry and region of the city, while the seventh represents the people of the city and is an elected position. In the council, this seat is only important as a tiebreaker and that usually comes down to race on who can bribe or intimidate their way to a win. For most of the Houses a council seat is looked at as a leadership role in the House, though it's not always the case.

HOUSE OF THE BROKEN WHEEL

Council Seat: The Longstrider

Current Holder: Mariana Browns (female human) has proven she can handle herself. While many may not agree with her secretive ways, in the past year she's bested the last three challengers for her position.

Broken Wheel controls most messengers and teamsters in and around the city. They control the mail service and distribution throughout the city. It goes without saying that they control a large force of spies gathering additional information on nearly everyone and everything that goes on in the city.

Founded by the Falin Longstrider in the early days of Camden, the Broken Wheel has always used a long distance foot race to determine its leadership. This doesn't mean there hasn't been plenty of double dealing and backstabbing along the way. Falin found this out himself when his nephew was tricked into a race for the House and bested by a young human who arranged for several "accidents" to take place during the race.

The Broken Wheel hosts yearly sporting events for the locals in a variety of formats. Publicly it is to boost morale and bring in more trade but secretly they're scouting new talent for a variety of roles within the House.

HOUSE OF THE STORM CROW

Council Seat: The Thunder

Current Holder: Andarian Eridorn (male eldakar) came into power nearly 10 years ago. He has been a wise adviser to anyone who seeks his council and recently has been meeting secretly with members from Black Hammer.

The House of the Storm Crow controls the alchemical and sorcery based schools, shops and industry in the area. When Galius Storm Crow first came to Camden he saw an opportunity to expand his own influence. Little did he know that his influence would outlive him. It's too bad he never had children to keep his riches in a family. Now many who join the ranks of the House are enlisted and tested to the point of near death before they are granted real power within the House.

The Position of the Thunder is one coveted by everyone yet protected by powerful sorcerers. There is a line of succession and advancement that is rarely questioned other than to make sure outright murder was not involved. The oldest and wisest of the order are also the shrewdest at staying alive.

Storm Crow always works against the Black Hammer's interests, trying to prove they can provide for the city in better ways. They've even built large factories to mass produce alchemical compounds to make daily life easier. Taking full advantage of these facilities, they've also become a major manufacturer of floaters and other drugs in area.

HOUSE OF THE BLEEDING TREE

Council Seat: The Scythe

Current Holder: Malar Urku (male goblin) is known as one of the cruelest and most vile goblins to walk the streets of Camden. He's always the first to seek revenge through bloodshed, and has used his guards as fodder on more than one occasion.

This agricultural House helps keep the city fed. The Bleeding Tree manages the farms in the surrounding area and ensures they're profitable.

Guarded by a pair of ogres the size of small houses the Scythe is rarely seen with dirt on his hands - though blood is pretty common. The position of Scythe has been handed down for generations between a triad of three goblinish families. Most anyone in power within the House belongs to one of the three families and they rarely allow in anyone from the outside.

While the Scythe may represent the House in the council, he does so at the whim of the matriarch and true ruler of the House, Shurula Urku.

The House is named from the violent nature of punishments in the early days of the house. A large white tree that still growing in the front yard of the manor house was use for public punishments. Those who disobeyed the will of the House were tied to it and lashed. So many were punished in this way that the bark of this tree has turned red from their blood.

The Bleeding Tree works well with most of the other Houses. After all, each of them depend on the Bleeding Tree in some form. From shipping product and supplies in and out of the city, to growing components for the other industries, the Bleeding Tree enjoy a rich life within Camden.

HOUSE OF THE JAGGED DAGGER

Council Seat: The Sliver

Current Holder: Jet Shadowclaw (female brinchie) once accepted a leadership challenge from a dwarf, and drank him under the table. That's one of many rumors propagated and she's even been known to boast of herself. Which ones are true is anyone's guess.

The Jagged Dagger is a military organization and prides itself on quick decisive action. Working closely with the city watch to provide troops when the watch can't handle a situation. They often hire themselves out across the region and have been seen throughout the southern kingdoms. It's not uncommon to see members of the Jagged Dagger providing security for each of the other Houses during important public missions.

Originally founded by a Nazatiran named Leticio Palacee, the Jagged Daggers were more about stealth and assassination than armed forces. Over the years they found that they could not stay hidden and still operate as such a large force of the city.

Years After Leticio's death the group was taken over by a Malakaran, who established the code of conduct and trial by combat to determine the leadership of the group. The role of the Sliver was established from these rules, which still stand today. Jet Shadowclaw has held the position for nearly ten years.

HOUSE OF THE CRIMSON SEA

Council Seat: The Shark

Current Holder: Illrass Niss'Ka (male dregordian) is calm and collected - mostly. He has worked hard over the years to control the rage, but once someone pushes him, very little is left in his wake.

The Crimson Sea controls the Trade Wharf and all the major warehouses located there. They act as harbor master and dock hands for most trade vessels that stop in this bustling port city.

The Shark is the nickname of a fisherman who found himself working to coordinate some of the first large vessels who stopped at the docks in Camden.

The records of his real name were lost to fires in the warehouses of the wharf over the years. The title was adopted about a hundred years ago to represent the council seat for the Crimson Sea. The Martrusch family from the Malakar Dominion founded the House and established the structure of the wharf. About 50 years ago, the eldest son of the Martruschs lost all deeds and titles to the wharf and warehouses through gambling with the Niss'Ka family. Since then the eldest offspring hold the seat of the Shark and oversee day to day business.

The Crimson Sea are quick to make deals with the other Houses. Sharing the warehouse space and charging a premium for extra security. Any shipments coming in and out of the wharf are searched, extra fees are tacked on for illicit cargo, especially if it's traveling aboard one of the many vessels the Crimson Sea owns and operates.

