

RELIC

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BOOK I: THE RELIC TRILOGY

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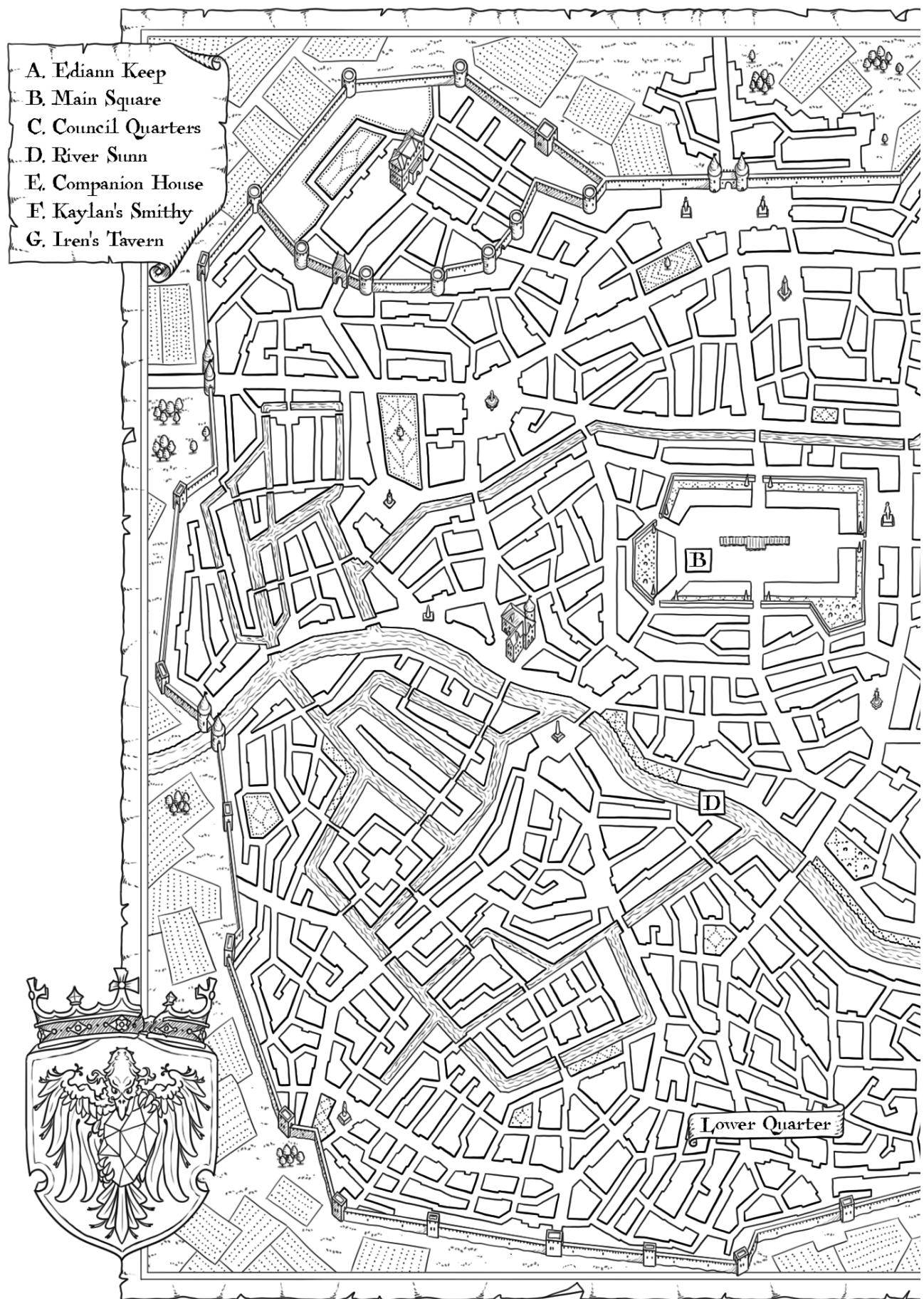
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This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is entirely coincidental.

For my family. Dream big.



The City
- OF -
EDRIAST

Noble Quarters

C

E

F

The Slip

G



Prologue

One thing above all drew people to the Announcements: curiosity. The tension strangling the crowd was palpable, but the fear and the pain were the bait. They were hooked.

The crowd was in the hundreds. Merchants, labourers, Noblemen and students; there was no segregation today. Everyone was here for the same reason, their eyes reflecting a familiar mix of apprehension and fascination. A polite rumble of applause began at the front of the crowd, rippling deeper as their Lord came into view, moving toward the centre of the wooden stage built especially for him. He wore a smile big enough to be seen by everyone there, but his energy emanated prestige and power more than anything. One simple gesture from him was enough to silence the crowd. This was fine by them, as it was easier to listen and observe the man they rarely, if ever, saw.

Their gazes fell as one, taking in the weight of the jewel around his neck, its colour made somehow more beautiful by the sun.

The Relic was the reason they were all here.

As the Lord launched into his speech, the crowd was taken in by his words for only a second before something stole their attention away: his Shadow, slinking onto the stage. Shoulders slumped and head low, the Shadow took his position slightly behind his master, melting into the dark shades around the Lord.

Eyes flicked between him and the yellow jewel around his master's neck.

The Shadow's eyes remained on the floor.

Wherever he went, a morbid curiosity followed the Shadow as closely and silently as he followed his master. How many people in the crowd had come solely to see him?

The Shadow brought a hand up to his chest, eyes clenching shut.

A mother with wide eyes watched him closely as he curled forward with apparent pain. The woman wrapped an arm around each of her children, pulling them closer to her body. They were no more than infants. They were safe. She was afraid for herself.

A wave of courteous laughter skipped across the crowd, like a pebble dancing atop water.

The Shadow sputtered blood, droplets of red decorating the wooden stage below. Attention shot to him as his hand flew to his mouth, eyes flicking toward his master. Even now, at the end, he was afraid of the man.

The Lord stopped his speech mid-sentence, but didn't turn to face his Shadow. Instead, he took a deep breath

and brought his hands together in front of his body. The picture of patience.

The Shadow fell to his knees with a violent thump that the crowd seemed to feel, many flinching at the sound of bone cracking against wood. His bloodied mouth was now on full display, but the sight of blood was nothing new to the people of Edriast.

The crowd drew back slowly, moving as one, an undeniable tide. The Shadow, the *man*, was finally succumbing to his illness, and all anybody cared about was themselves.

Apprehension silenced even the smallest murmur from the crowd – not because the Shadow was dying, but because of what it now meant for them all.