

An Abbreviated History of The City of Sørholde, Capital City of the Island Country Dundel



Excerpted from
**Folk And Where To Find Them,
A Halfling's Journey in a Tall World**
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Unlike us modest folk, dwarves are very rarely humble. They are blatherskites during battle, braggarts when victorious, and notorious humblebrags when hosting visitors to their splendid halls. The dwarvish tongue does not have an accurate word for humility.

Dwarven generosity is an oxymoron. Dwarves simply are not generous. Hard workers, loyal subjects, fierce fighters and brave adventurers...absolutely! But share they do not. There is an old joke about copper wire being invented when two long-bearded brothers couldn't agree which owned a fallen copper piece. Ironically, they do not see this story as humorous and regularly use it as an example of dwarven ingenuity. Some dwarves do seem to actually believe in their own generous spirit, but then boorishly boast about their own generosity while serving guests the meagerest portions of their table scraps. In my younger years I nearly starved to death while attending a dwarven wedding feast.

Perhaps this explains the confusion of outsiders when they learn of the monumental edifice and commune that is the city of Sørholde. While it is arguably the single greatest construction and engineering achievement of the Kynwal, the dwarves of the Northern lands, it remains something of a secret. Perhaps this is due to some abysmal turn of events that led to its creation; some unspeakable embarrassment? An entire city and community born of shame and attrition? Perhaps someday we will know the answer.

Before I explore the enigma that is the dwarven stewardship of the city on the Northern Dundel coast, we need to consider the city of Sørholde itself.

Sørholde is an expansive walled city on the northern coast of the dry island country known as Dundel. Home to a few more than 4,000 occupants, it was constructed for exactly 11,468 residents. This number includes the battalion of Dwarven Marines (yes, those are a thing, and they are as nasty and dangerous as you would imagine) permanently stationed in the city. The number 11,468 is important, but we will come back to that shortly.

Even though the construction of Sørholde was completed almost 600 years ago, all of the original buildings appear to be as pristine as the day they were finished. Enchantments and constant maintenance by dwarven artisans and masons are a daily commission of the local governor. Large freshwater fountains are scattered throughout the city to supply a constant and plentiful source of clean, clear water. Ancient fresh springs bubble up from the rocky depths to feed an endless maze of troughs that run along the rooftops. The water from the troughs generate enough power to provide indoor plumbing and enable life via the amazing network of complex, coiling rooftop gardens that provide ample fresh food for the community. Each day, the bounty of the gardens are subsidized gratis by the fishmongers' plentiful catch plucked from the seas surrounding Dundel.

If there is a good place to be penniless, Sørholde is it.

The walls protecting the city on the landward side are set deep into the Dundel bedrock. They rise as high as 40' in every direction, with the exception of the harbor cliffside with its magically protected waters. More than 20' thick at their base, the walls have narrow passageways built into them that provide easy access to all areas of defense. In addition to being heavily runed with powerful magic to protect the city from extreme weather, the walls are well fortified to defend the city against attack. While it is hot in Dundel year-round, the withering heat is the only weather extreme in Sørholde. Massive sandstorms blowing from the South diminish or change direction when they reach the



city walls, leaving only the slightest, glorious breeze in the city. Ocean storms that swallow ships whole and look like they might crush the city to dust as they approach from the North merely result in a cooling breeze and possibly a refreshing rain shower. Rain is all too sparse in this strange city.

The construction of Sørholde came at an enormous cost to the Kynwal. The city took over 20 years of continuous labor to complete. Month after month, the Kynwal sent massive ships laden with materials, tools, laborers, and the occasional wizard to erect the massive city. As soon as each of these ships was unladen, it returned to the North expeditiously to parcel yet more cargo bound for Dundel. The masons and miners labored day and night, yet the cost did not seem to bother King Rudaken. His mind was firmly set on this course and his royal edict was clear:

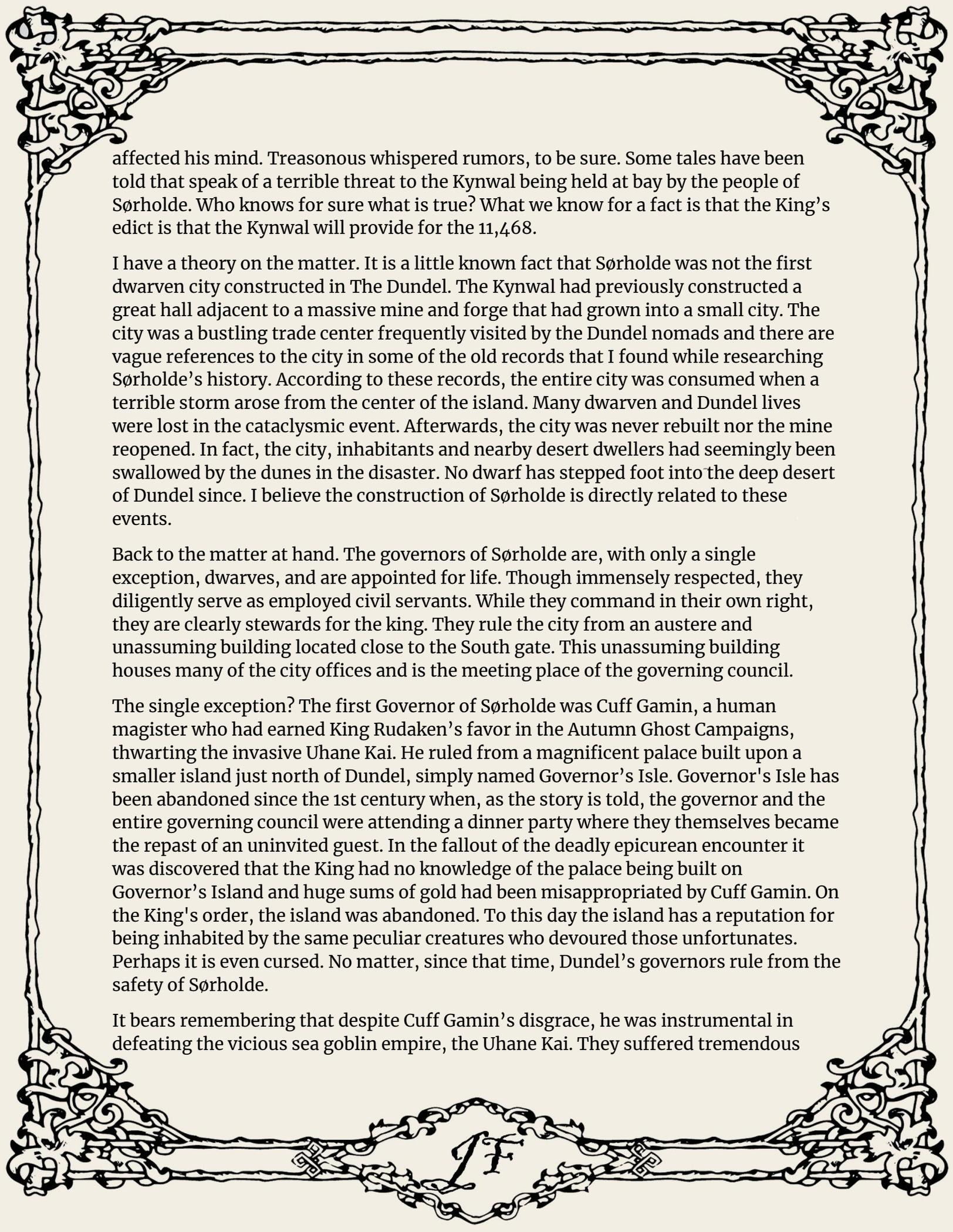
“Construct a walled city for 11,468 residents. Arrange for each resident to be sheltered, fed and supplied with clean water.”

On the surface this may seem fairly straightforward but it is actually a very startling royal proclamation, as there is no “until” in the command. Unless overridden by the king, this provision for the city's residents will continue forever.



Why build a massive city and provide free housing and rations for 11,468 residents, you ask? This seems overly generous for any nation, especially a nation of dwarves with their coin-pinching reputation. And why for such a large population when a mere third of that number currently reside in Sørholde? King Rudaken, though usually a thoughtful and intelligent ruler, has always been mercurial when pressed about his rulings on the matter. One must be cautious about questioning the king and his royal dictum.

I cannot explain the king's reasoning. There are whispered rumors that say King Rudaken might have been replaced by an imposter, or perhaps some magic has



affected his mind. Treasonous whispered rumors, to be sure. Some tales have been told that speak of a terrible threat to the Kynwal being held at bay by the people of Sørholde. Who knows for sure what is true? What we know for a fact is that the King's edict is that the Kynwal will provide for the 11,468.

I have a theory on the matter. It is a little known fact that Sørholde was not the first dwarven city constructed in The Dundel. The Kynwal had previously constructed a great hall adjacent to a massive mine and forge that had grown into a small city. The city was a bustling trade center frequently visited by the Dundel nomads and there are vague references to the city in some of the old records that I found while researching Sørholde's history. According to these records, the entire city was consumed when a terrible storm arose from the center of the island. Many dwarven and Dundel lives were lost in the cataclysmic event. Afterwards, the city was never rebuilt nor the mine reopened. In fact, the city, inhabitants and nearby desert dwellers had seemingly been swallowed by the dunes in the disaster. No dwarf has stepped foot into the deep desert of Dundel since. I believe the construction of Sørholde is directly related to these events.

Back to the matter at hand. The governors of Sørholde are, with only a single exception, dwarves, and are appointed for life. Though immensely respected, they diligently serve as employed civil servants. While they command in their own right, they are clearly stewards for the king. They rule the city from an austere and unassuming building located close to the South gate. This unassuming building houses many of the city offices and is the meeting place of the governing council.

The single exception? The first Governor of Sørholde was Cuff Gamin, a human magister who had earned King Rudaken's favor in the Autumn Ghost Campaigns, thwarting the invasive Uhane Kai. He ruled from a magnificent palace built upon a smaller island just north of Dundel, simply named Governor's Isle. Governor's Isle has been abandoned since the 1st century when, as the story is told, the governor and the entire governing council were attending a dinner party where they themselves became the repast of an uninvited guest. In the fallout of the deadly epicurean encounter it was discovered that the King had no knowledge of the palace being built on Governor's Island and huge sums of gold had been misappropriated by Cuff Gamin. On the King's order, the island was abandoned. To this day the island has a reputation for being inhabited by the same peculiar creatures who devoured those unfortunates. Perhaps it is even cursed. No matter, since that time, Dundel's governors rule from the safety of Sørholde.

It bears remembering that despite Cuff Gamin's disgrace, he was instrumental in defeating the vicious sea goblin empire, the Uhane Kai. They suffered tremendous

losses including the decimation of their undersea cities and have never recovered. Since the Autumn Ghost Campaigns the Uhane Kai have nested in small nomadic groups along the coastal waters of Dundel and beyond.

A point of order, if you are confused on the matter: the island country is named Dundel. It has always been so. The earliest known explorers found an indigenous populace that referred to itself as The Dundel. The natives, who appear to be normal tall folk (human), also referred to the land as Dundel. Even their deity is named Dundel.

These resilient people are fearsome in their devotion to their goddess. Her faithful bow on bended knees and call out reverently to her in prayer:

“Holy goddess Dundel, parent of all nature, She who generates all and Who alone offers Herself as guardian of Dundel. Goddess of the heavens, the sea, and desert. She who deals out the sustenance of life and for that, Goddess Dundel, we vow eternal faithfulness.”

This is how they address their goddess.

On the surface, one might conclude the indigenous people are simple folk although they get along surprisingly well. They are nomads and do not live in the city of Sørholde. Their goats are fat and provide plentiful milk and cheese, even though vegetation on Dundel is sparse. Their children are healthy and grow to be strong. They



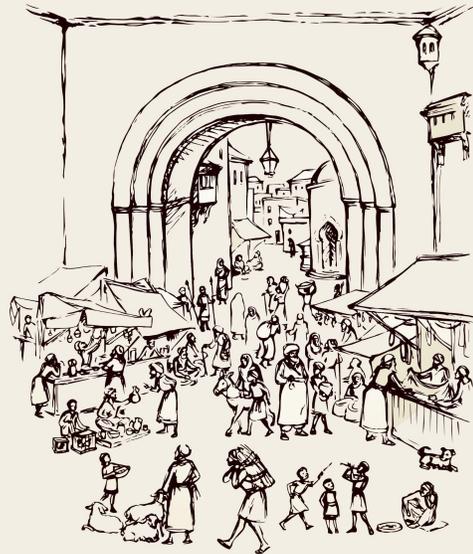
have an uncanny ability to find their way in a constantly changing desert where a carpenter’s piece of sanding cloth could be viewed as an accurate map. They are keen traders and shrewd negotiators. It is impossible to cross the interior of the island without a Dundel guide. They are not simple folk and should not be underestimated.

But I have digressed. Let us finish discussing Sørholde. Sørholde's laws are simple:

1. No dwarf will venture past the South gate of the city. The land South of the city is off limits to all dwarves.
2. The Dundel people will always be allowed into the city and will be welcome for trade. Their clerics will be allowed to proselytize as they have been commanded by their goddess, unhindered.
3. No person shall be cast out of the city without benefit of a fair trial. If any person is found guilty of murder or other heinous crime, they may be sent into the desert, cast out to sea, or executed, as the Governor's council dictates.

In addition to her battalion of Dwarven Marines, the city has a sitting council that assists the Governor in day to day matters. The council members also work as administrators and have staff to assist in making sure the city is kept. One of the council seats is always a Dundel native; likely the only Dundel to live inside the city walls. There is a city guard, mostly made up of humans and folk who have relocated to the island country. In the populace, few Elven folk are to be found, but they are not so uncommon as to be considered rare.

Like every city there are tradesmen, fishermen, tavern keepers and street sweepers. The residents live here, raise their families, and dream of a better life for their children, as parents are ought to do. From a distance, even with her pristine buildings and majestic walls, Sørholde appears to be a paradise on the edge of the desert. But I believe a dark undercurrent runs just below the bustling surface. Each morning as I watched the sun rise and sipped my cup of tea, I had the distinct feeling that something wicked was grudgingly awaiting the next nightfall when it might have its turn.



I was relieved when my time in Sørholde was done and I departed for the safety of the Northern lands.

JF