Curabel: Player Guide

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# Licensing


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# Basic Design Notes

## Quick Summary of Campaign Design Goals

1. Sandbox-type game
2. Distant “enemy” – no imperative to deal with larger issues
3. Tropical island setting (Caribbean, Pacific archipelagos)
4. No big continents nearby
5. Lots of ruins in jungles (ancient technology)

## Main Idea for Campaign

Centuries ago, colonists from a distant land settled on a chain of islands in the tropics. Using their empire’s might, they enslaved the native peoples and exploited the area’s natural resources. Over time, the empire also began using the islands as a penal work colony. Eventually, these prisoners formed an alliance with some native groups and a disaffected imperial naval commander. They declared independence, drove out the imperial loyalists, and defeated the armada sent to quell the rebellion in a legendary sea battle.

# Purpose of this Document

This document contains excerpts from my longer campaign setting description in an attempt to present the information that would be “common knowledge” to the inhabitants of Curabel. While none of this information is strictly necessary to participate in the campaign, a passing familiarity may help players make better informed decisions during their adventures. Please note that this is not an exhaustive document, but only a high-level and generalized survey.

# Key Campaign Locations

## Isles of Curabel

Curabel is the imperial name for a chain of islands in the tropics of a world called Meidia. While the imperials were driven out centuries ago, the isles split into city-states following independence and no new human or elven name for the entire chain was adopted. In imperial common, the name meant “Beautiful Islands” (Cura = islands; bel = beauty). The native dwarves called the islands Weland’Khel (Water Fortress; Khel = fortress, Weland = water) and ruled the islands up until a few centuries before the arrival of the imperials – leaving behind many ruined cities and strongholds. Native humans adopted first the dwarven then imperial names.

Most of the islands in Curabel are covered in tropical rain forests, although there is also a chain of mountain peaks running north-south through the islands. On some of the largest islands, like Curmidden, Curanost, Curasur, and Crescent Isle, open land has been reclaimed from the jungles and is cultivated by civilized races to supplement their mostly seafood diet.

While most of the smaller islands are uninhabited, all but a handful of the larger islands have several layers of civilization both modern and ancient. First, there are the current cities and towns of Curabel. These include the larger city-states as well as innumerable fishing villages. Next, there are the abandoned imperial outposts from the colonial era, many of which were erected in remote areas after the rebellion started. Some of these were never completely cleaned out and many have been taken over by monsters and wild creatures. Finally, there are the ancient ruins of the dwarven empire, which range from the thoroughly looted and well-explored to the untouched and mysterious (the exact state often depending on proximity to later settlements).

### Curmidden

The “Middle Island” was the administrative seat of the colonial government. After the rebellion, it became the seat of power for the strongest human city-state (Midmark – founded by the disaffected naval commander who led the rebel forces against the imperial armada). Called Midland now, this island still has the largest port and naval base in the isles. Elves call this island Valmor (Tree Grave; Val = tree, mor = death) in reference to the many ship masts swarming the harbors, while the dwarves call it Xen’Khel (Far Fortress) since it was once their northernmost settlement. This isle is home to a fleet of merchant ships that facilitate trade throughout Curabel.

Midmark proper is a large city, often called the City of Gulls, on the island’s main bay. While it may be mid-sized in comparison to some mainland imperial harbors, it is by far the largest urban center in Curabel and boasts a plethora of shops and other adventurer amenities. The city is divided into several districts, although businesses related to sea-faring can be found in all but the most upscale areas.

In addition to Midmark, the dwarven fortress of Xenilum’Khel (“Second Farthest Fortress”) is located in a mountain called Ramithil on the western side of the large bay. It is new and relatively small relative to the great dwarven khels of Curasur; it is also very friendly with Midmark and travel/trade between the settlements is brisk. Further inland there is an older, abandoned dwarven fortress called Xen’Khel (“Far Fortress”) that has been picked over extensively by adventurous humans from Midmark and inquisitive dwarves from Xenilum’Khel. It is widely believed that the dwarves built their new fortress for more convenient access to the water and trade, but some voices whisper of dark secrets locked in ancient halls beneath Xen’Khel that have never been penetrated by post-imperial explorers.

### Curasur

The “South Island” is the stronghold of the dwarves.[[1]](#footnote-1) Originally known as Zur’Khel (Home Fortress), this is the ancestral home of all dwarves in Curabel and the seat of an empire that had ruled most of the isles up until a few centuries before the imperials arrived (the collapse of that empire is a mystery). Slavery and ill-treatment have soured the dwarves on outsiders in general. Elves call this island Silverhome (Mithrihal). This isle supplies metals and precious stones throughout Curabel.

### Curanost

The “North Island,” originally designated a penal colony for elves, has now been adopted as the elven homeland in Curabel and rechristened Valhal (Wood home).[[2]](#footnote-2) These elves are friendly with humans – especially descendants of the imperial colonists – but human forgetfulness of history sometimes strains that relationship. This isle supplies the great trees for ship masts throughout Curabel.

Vallande is the only city-state on Curanost – indeed, it is the only city of any size at all on the island. The city is notable for its lumber yards, sizable harbor, and plentiful parks.

### Other Notable Islands

#### Curabel

This island is where imperials first landed. Now called Watcher’s Island, though no permanent settlement has existed here is more than a century.

#### Serpent’s Tooth

This island is one of the most inhospitable of the islands, although ancient ruins still draw adventurers. There is one permanent settlement on the island’s western coast called “Poison Spit” that serves as the launching point for most expeditions into the interior. Most residents of this town are native humans who have been fishing the waters here since the ancient dwarven empire, although each failed expedition tends to add a few survivors to the local population.

#### Crescent Isle

This is the breadbasket of the islands and home to the second-largest human city-state, Feldmark. Compared to Midmark on Curmidden, Feldmark is a small town with a modest harbor. There is not the same strict division between districts and modest residences can be found side-by-side with industrial and civic buildings.

#### Agmar’s Folly

This island was a thriving rival to Midland and Crescent Isle until all the settlers disappeared under mysterious circumstances several decades ago. It is now avoided by all but the most desperate scavengers and pirates.

#### Lonely Isle

This is a blasted and desolate island is often subject to geological instability.

# Basic Cosmology

1. Meidia has a single sun that travels east to west. Curabel’s days and nights are roughly equal year-round given its proximity to the equator.
2. Meidia has two moons:
	1. Imperial: Cinthal, Cinmar (Shadow-son and Shadow-daughter)
	2. Dwarven: Fathil, Fatha (Dark hunter and Dark huntress)
	3. Elven: Mithilun, Cithilun (Silver-lady and Dark-lady)
3. Currents and winds run east to west; since Midland straddles the equator, currents break to the north on islands north of that island and south to the south (on the eastward side) and flow around the top and then back either south or north (on the westward side)
4. Storms are frequent but generally mild in this equatorial region

# Races

## Humans

The human “homeland” is in central Curabel and is populated by a mixture of dark-skinned natives and lighter-skinned descendants of colonists. Midland is home to the largest city-state, Midmark, and is also the seat of Curabel’s naval power. Feldmark, on Crescent Isle, is the second-largest city-state and the chief producer of food not taken from the sea.

## Elves

No elves are native to Curabel – they all descend from penal colony settlers (‘enemies of the empire’). Although found throughout Curabel, they have taken Curanost (Valhal) as their adopted home. Given their history, they are relentless foes of imperial agents and remain vigilant against new incursions from the east even as the humans slowly forget the colonial period. There are a number of elder elves who had firsthand experience with the empire before the rebellion.

## Dwarves

The dwarves are descended from the rulers of the oldest civilization in Curabel – ruins from their empire dot almost every island south of Midland. In the present day, the dwarves mostly keep to themselves on the island of Curasur (Zur’Khel, or Home Fortress) as a reaction to their ill-treatment during the colonial occupation. The few dwarves that buck this isolationist tendency become either traveling merchants or adventurers. Many dwarves on the high councils of the various Khels remember the occupation personally and still remain suspicious of humans descended from colonists and elves.

## Gnomes/Halflings

These races are not native to Curabel and never settled the islands in any great numbers. While all halflings were penal colony settlers, a number of gnomes came willingly to serve as imperial colonists. As with the humans, though, all avowed loyalists were driven from Curabel during the rebellion.

## Half-elves

Half-elves are very common in Curabel given the historical friendship between the elves and human imperial colonists. In the past, many leaders in the Marks were half-elven, although this has become less common in recent generations.

# Eco-Structure

* Curabel has a predominantly tropical ecology. Exceptions to this are the mountainous regions on some islands and the more settled/cultivated areas on Curanost, Midland, and Crescent Island.
* Food: Seafood figures large in most diets, with the addition of some grains, vegetables, and fruits (especially for those who regularly trade with Crescent Isle). There is very little meat and only some dairy available.

# Trade

* Midmark/Midland serves as the mercantile hub of Curabel both because of its geographical situation and their enormous fleet of ships and general skill with ship-building and sailing. They produce little, beyond their ships and seafood, but move everything else around for the other states.
* Feldmark are the growers, providing the most diverse food-stuff (including almost all meat and dairy products). They have recently begun dabbling in doing their own shipping, although they still rely heavily on Midmark to transport their goods.
* Elves provide wood products – especially larger trees for masts – and some food-stuff. They are also renowned for their carpentry and practical art (e.g., pottery, woven goods). They rely almost exclusively on Midmark to move their wares.
* Dwarves specialize in the production of metals, precious stones, and stonework, along with all related products. While dwarves do ship a good bit of their material on their own, the majority is transported by the merchant fleet of Midmark.

# Magic

* Magic is rare and therefore feared by most commoners, although wizards tend to be tolerated much more than those who use “blood magic” (like psionics). Elves are also wary of mages, but have a tradition of cautious respect. Indeed, the only organized mage’s college is on Curanost in the elven capital of Vallande.
* Non-elven mages – excepting those who find their way to Vallande – learn from a master in an apprenticeship. A typical master will have two to three pupils of varying age and skill.
* Officially, there is no blood magic/psionics in Curabel since the imperial mages were driven from the islands. All spells require book learning and, outside of the learned and long-lived, memory of blood mages is hazy at best.
* Modern dwarves tend to distrust magic. However, evidence from their empire’s ruins show that at the height of their civilization they were home to many great arcane masters. Some of the greatest technological marvels recovered from their ruins combine fine-tuned machinery with magical power.

# Deities and Religion

## Basic Summary

* Curabel’s peoples tend to take a relaxed approach to formal worship, although there is a robust pantheon combining colonial and native gods.
* Besides their deities, elves also revere the natural world – including the sea. Dwarves, on the other hand, practice an informal type of ancestor worship alongside their more formal belief system.
* All dwarves in Curabel venerate Xen’Teler (The Far-Seer) as creator of the island chain – and the entire world of Meidia. They say that the islands formed when drops of molten ore fell from Xen’Teler’s celestial forge into the ocean.
* Humans descended from the colonial settlers (along with some elves) venerate Baldric Evenkeel, the martyred naval commander who led them to victory against the imperial armada. Legends say that he ascended to godhood during the final engagement with imperial forces.
* Generally, none of the gods are active in Meidia – this leads to the existence of multiple churches with very different beliefs worshipping the same deity. The source of the power behind divine spells is a mystery.

## Main Churches of Curabel

### Short Listing of Churches & Deities

1. The Ark (Baldric Evenkeel)
2. Brothers of the World Forge (Xen’Teler)
3. The Sons & Daughters of Merendur (Merendur)
4. The Watchers (Baldric Evenkeel)
5. Acolytes of the Deep (Lysander)
6. Wardens of the Rock (Xen’Teler)
7. Followers of the Shadow (Marakin)
8. The Initiates (Vas’Kindrak)

### Quick Summaries of Churches

#### The Ark

The Ark worships Baldric Evenkeel and is the largest organized religion among humans in Curabel. They believe that Baldric died to save the isles and was rewarded with immortality for this selfless act. This church is especially popular among colonial descendants and the church is centered on Midland and plays a large role there in civil affairs (although that role is largely advisory). They run several charities and a school system for the poor.

#### Brothers of the World Forge

This is the largest dwarven sect and the official state religion of the chief stronghold of Curasur (Zurnost’Khel). They worship Xen’Teler as a creator who made Curabel as a gift for the dwarves to cultivate and share with like-minded races and creatures. They have a very strong presence on the dwarven high council and also act as lore-keepers (both history and tradecraft).

#### Verdant Fellowship

A loose organization that worships Silvanus, lord of nature, and other related elven deities. Followers seek to protect natural beauty and wildlife, with different branches viewing the spread of civilization as either part of the great design or a threat to it. There is no central hierarchy in this church, though the leaders of the oldest conclaves on Curanost are deferred to by other worshippers. Clergy often serve as caretakers for parks in elven settlements and are as likely to be druids as clerics. Also, while the majority of this church is elven in heritage, a sizable contingent of humans – especially natives of Curabel – adhere to this creed.

#### Sons & Daughters of Merendur

Merendur combines aspects of the imperial god of the oceans and a native deity with similar attributes. He is worshipped by many who rely on the sea for their livelihood – even those who officially belong to the Ark (see above). Merendur is viewed as a stern but fair god who cares for mortals while demanding respect. This church is decentralized, though the main church on Midland has some authority by tradition. While few elves or dwarves officially belong to this church, they often show their respects when visiting Merendur’s shrines and temples.

#### The Watchers

A small order of Baldric worshippers who believe they have a sacred trust to guard against a return of the imperials. Almost all Watchers also belong to the Ark.

#### Acolytes of the Deep

This is a small sect that worships Lysander, another sea deity who originated on the isles of Curabel. Unlike Merendur, though, Lysander embodies the fickle and violent nature of the ocean. The acolytes’ church has no public presence, although pirates and scavengers sometimes openly venerate this god.

#### Wardens of the Rock

Similar to the Watchers, this order within the Brothers of the World Forge church feels it has a mission to protect Curabel – and specifically the dwarven khels – from invaders.

#### Followers of the Shadow

Marakin is the imperial god of darkness and deceit. This church combines his worship with that of the native goddess Mara, queen of death (they picture the deity as a two-faced being mixing aspects of both genders). The church is reviled by most and keeps its places of worship and membership a secret.

#### The Initiates

A church for those who honor knowledge above all else – like Vas’Kindrak, the legendary elven mage they see as an avatar of intellect instead of a true god. A very informal group, the only public temple to Vas’Kindrak is on the grounds of the mage’s college in Vallande (though smaller shrines are common enough throughout the isles – especially in places where Foctha, a native god of wisdom, is/was venerated or gnomes settled).

## Minor Religions

Other religions include a pantheon of minor deities worshipped by the human natives of Curabel under a variety of names (Bocca and Niamah, for instance, who are similar in background to Zeus and Hera). Many small shrines and the occasional recluse or wise man/woman honor these local gods.

In addition to this minor deities, see the earlier notes about ancestor worship among the dwarves and the veneration of nature among elves (the latter also being popular with the small Halfling population of the isles).

# Technology Level

Current technology in Curabel is standard D&D with a couple of minor exceptions: first, the shipwrights in Midland have advanced to mid-Renaissance sophistication and – in collaboration with dwarven metallurgists – have even begun experimenting with cannons (large land-based artillery would be impossible to use in the jungles and this has slowed progress in the study of such weapons); second, the ancient dwarven empire had sophisticated machines. Some of the dwarven technology can still be found in relatively good condition – though rarely working – in the abandoned ruins spread throughout the southern isles.

# Languages

## Elves

Elves share a single tongue, Amlethe (Good Word). It has changed a bit from their imperial days, although they would have no trouble understanding elves from the mainland.

## Dwarves

All dwarves speak Zur’Liale (Home Tongue), although many great houses, factions, and guilds have developed their own codes and secret languages. Modern and ancient Zur’Liale are significantly different and only those with special training can decipher texts and runes found in the abandoned dwarven fortresses.

## Humans

Imperial common and the language of the native humans of Curabel have mixed, creating a blend of formal and informal expressions/speech. There is still a vestigial trace of the early division between these two groups among those who differentiate between “high” and “low” common (although a native imperial would laugh at the notion that “high common” was any more proper even if they would be able to understand it easier). The schools run by the Ark in Midmark have been especially strong in their defense of “high common” against low expressions, making it possible now to distinguish between the speech of Midlanders and other humans.

## Other Races

The minor races have adopted human common in most areas and only know their racial languages if they’ve been specially educated. Of course, those living on Curanost or Curasur are more likely to know Amlethe or Zur’Liale respectively (the same is true for humans).

# Currency

There are two main currencies in Curabel – Midland’s Caravels (stamped with a ship’s image) and the dwarven marks (stamped with an image of the world forge). The majority of Curabel, including elves, has adopted the Caravel system outside of Curasur.

Ancient treasures commonly contain Imperial Crowns (stamped as you would expect) and dwarven Zur’chone (Home Coin; stamped with a distinctive clockwork design).

## Conversion Chart

1 Gold Caravel = ¾ Gold Mark = 1½ Gold Crowns = ½ Gold Zur’chone

Other coins have the same conversion rate (silver and bronze are common; only imperial currency regularly came in platinum, which is rare on the islands).

# Key Symbols in Curabel

## Humans

1. Ship with sails: This is found on many crests for political parties, business groups, and families.
2. Hand of Warning: This is found on buildings associated with the Watchers and many older documents and buildings in Midland.
3. Waves: This is a ubiquitous symbol throughout the isles.
4. Anchor: Another very common symbol.

## Dwarves

1. Anvil: This image of the world forge is found in many political and religious symbols.
2. Three peaks: This image symbolizes the oldest stronghold on Curasur (Zurnost’Khel) and is common on the crests of political alliances, guilds, and families that originated there.
3. Crossed swords over anvil: This is a symbol commonly used by the Wardens of the Rock.

## Elves

1. Blossoming Tree: The symbol of Silvanus and common in political and religious art.
2. Stylized waves (Japanese-style): This is a common theme in newer artwork.
3. Crescent moon: Another religious symbol associated with Silvanus (more specifically, his consort, Ariabena).

## Empire

1. Red Dragon in flight: This is the official symbol of the empire and the emperor’s family.
2. Red Crescent on a black field: Official badge for imperially sanctioned privateers and the imperial navy proper (often hard to distinguish outside of major expeditions).

# Nations of Curabel

## Summary of Nations

### Humans

#### Midmark

Midmark is located on Midland/Curamidden. It is ruled by a council elected by landowners (a rare privilege given the scarcity of suitable land).

#### Feldmark

Feldmark is located on Crescent Isle. It is ruled by a council that is elected by all freemen and women (i.e., everyone except indentured servants and prisoners of the state).

#### United Council of the Marks

This is a council made up of representatives from Midmark, Feldmark, and several other minor city-states (i.e., Northmark, Southmark, and Rivermark). The group meets once a year on Midland to handle trade/inter-state issues.

### Dwarves

#### Zurnost’Khel

Zurnost’Khel is the chief stronghold of dwarves on Curasur/Curabel. It is situated under three huge peaks on the island’s western side – Rithel, Aranthel, and Glornthil. Zurnost’Khel is ruled by a hereditary king and council of nobles.

#### Zurilum’Khel

Zurilum’Khel is a smaller stronghold on Curasur. It is located on the eastern side of the island under a mountain called Enthil.

#### Xenilum’Khel

Xenilum’Khel is a stronghold on Midland and the furthest north of any dwarven city-state. Although located nearby to it, the city’s founders did not build Xenilum’Khel on the location of the original dwarven fortress on the island that dates back to the pre-imperial dwarven dynasty. There is much speculation on why this choice was made.

### Elves

#### Woodhaven/Vallande

Vallande, the chief elven city on Curanost, is also the closest thing to a formal elven nation in Curabel. It is home to the elven elder council, which is made up of wise men and women from throughout the isles (each elven settlement can elect a member in the way they deem best).

## National Attributes

### Laws

#### The Marks

The law code has been designed to facilitate trade/commerce.

#### The Khels

The law code has been designed to protect the interests of the top families even at the expense of trade and innovation.

#### Vallande

The law code has been designed to promote individual liberty except when it comes into conflict with the common good.

## Customs & Holidays

### The Marks

The Marks have monthly minor holidays/festivals and one major event - the Great Fair on Midland coinciding with the yearly meeting of the United Council of the Marks that occurs during the spring (sometime equivalent to May).

### The Khels

The Khels celebrate few holidays outside of a week-long celebration in the fall (equivalent to October) called the “Festival of the Forge” (Zur’Alanthin). This celebration involves much drinking and a relaxation of social strictures – culminating in the Fool’s Court event. In addition, each Khel has a handful of unique holidays to celebrate key figures in their history and the date of their founding.

### Vallande

Vallande celebrates several key holidays based on important dates in the natural cycle (i.e., solstices and equinoxes). There are also a great number of floating/impromptu holidays in the spring season – much to the annoyance of merchants from places like Midmark.

## Major Economic Powers

### Ironwood Trading Company

This outfit supplies the wood for masts and ships to Midmark from Vallande. It is controlled by an important Midmark family with some elven partners.

### Silver Throne Company

This is the most successful dwarven trade company. It specializes in the sale of metals, precious stones, stone, armor, and weapons to outsiders (especially humans in the Marks).

### Hull & Sheaf

This is a well-established trading company specializing in general goods, including seafood and food from Crescent Isle. Despite their focus, the company’s headquarters is on Midmark.

### The Merchant League of the Crescent

This is an upstart trading outfit seeking to cut-out the Midmark middlemen in the shipment of food from Crescent Isle to the other parts of Curabel. It has met with some limited success, although Hull & Sheaf is still the primary distribution partner of Crescent Isle farmers.

### The Tinkerer’s Guild

This is a small group specializing in technical research, both original and based on ancient dwarven designs. They have been known to fund regular expeditions to ruins from the dwarven empire – as well as the abandoned imperial outposts in rare circumstances.

## Attitudes towards Magic

### The Marks

Commoners in the Marks only grudgingly accept wizards and divine spell casters (with occasional lapses into outright hostility). There is even deeper suspicion/hostility toward any hint of “blood magic” (psionics), even if there is some doubt about the existence of these powers. In other words, they accept the “absent-minded professor” or “book-worm” types to a certain extent but fear anyone who seems imbued with magic by nature or who is preternaturally gifted.

### The Khels

Dwarves distrust magic outside of divine spell-casting and item enchantments. In their suspicions, they do not differentiate between wizard-types and blood mage-types.

### Vallande

The elves are accepting of all magic users to some extent – although they are wary when confronted with blood mage-types (especially the eldest, who remember imperial subjugation firsthand). Their openness is both a consequence of and a reason for the mage’s college in Vallande.

1. Note: Curasur technically refers to several of the southernmost islands (hence the plural construction). However, in common usage, the name refers to the largest of these islands. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Note: Curanost technically refers to several of the northernmost islands (hence the plural construction used). However, in common usage, the name refers to the largest of the north islands. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)