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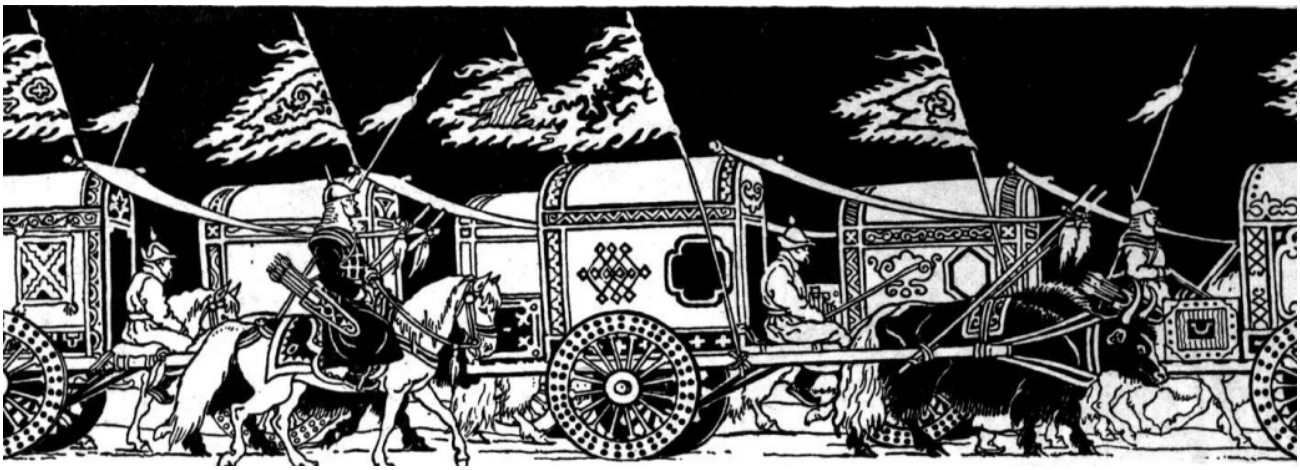
Build Your Fantasy World in

Small Bites

The Merchant Wars of Forsbury

aka All About Caravans & Cartage



INTRODUCTION

If you're new to Small Bites - Welcome! We're glad you're here!

This month's edition really feels like it needs to be two separate books, and maybe it should have been. It is all about the merchant cartels of Forsbury, some of the most aggressive and ambitious traders and salesmen in the world. These folks have really changed the course of commerce on the continent of Drentae. Not only are they moving goods efficiently, but they've begun to threaten the economic power of the largest city in the world, Brinston.

We're going to get into what merchants do and how they operate, but we're also going to be giving you the low down on what a Forsbury Merchant War is all about. Yep, this is a real war where people fight and die, not just trying to price each other out of competition. There is tons of work ("missions") for those adventuring types!

But let's get into it! If you were expecting some sort of dull economics lecture - you are in the wrong place!



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GLOSSARY

Here at Board Enterprises, we like to put the glossary out in the front. Otherwise we figure that you don't really know what we're talking about until we get to the end, and that doesn't work. So since we're using words we've made up as well as using existing words in what might be an unfamiliar manner, let's level the playing field:

Caravan: A caravan is an organized, commercial venture intending to bring goods to a different location where they will be worth more money. It could use wagons, porters or pack animals, or a combination of any of these. The important distinction is that it is intending to trade.

Caravaneer: A caravaneer is any person who works for a caravan by going along with the caravan. These people are distinctive in the amount of time they spend on the road and away from their homes. The two most common caravaneers are caravan guards and teamsters.

Caravan Guard: A caravan guard is a person who's main responsibility is to protect a caravan from attack. While they may fulfill other responsibilities, this is their main job.

Teamster: A teamster is a person who's responsibility is to move a wagon by driving animal(s). The teamster is responsible for both the wagon and the team, including getting them fed and watered and prevent any accidents on the road or while at rest. While a teamster may also defend his own life or his responsibilities during attack, this is not his main role.

Wagon Train: A wagon train is a long line of wagons travelling together. Typically five or more wagons would be necessary for it to be called a train. Wagon trains can be used to accomplish a number of tasks, such as being part of a caravan, moving colonists to a new home, or delivering goods.

Peddler: A peddler is an individual or small group of traders who travel from place to place selling their wares. Peddlers could be single product merchants or traveling dry goods stores. They are known for being able to visit far smaller towns and villages than any large operation could afford to do.

FLETNERN WIKI

All of these posts are already out on the wiki and you can refer to them there. We have gathered them here, because we think they are valuable in a group, and they all pertain to our theme for the month. All of them are also tagged as being in the categories of "MW647" and "Forsbury" in case you are more comfortable using the wiki instead of this edition.

The timelines of Fletnern will be discussed later, but it will be important to note that the wiki entries you see here pertain to the people and organizations as they exist in 647P. Later editions of Small Bites may present these same subjects in later years (most likely 655P) and they will be different.

Cartels of Forsbury, The **Group**

The Cartels of Forsbury are the various merchant organizations holding the majority of the economic power in the city and barony of Forsbury. While which cartels are at the top or even how the various cartels are perceived to change with each generation, there is some stability to the organizations and how big they can get.

In 647P, the cartels were generally classified as being "the greater powers" or "the lesser powers". Anything under a lesser power would most commonly be thought of as a "peddler house". The threshold here seems to be the number of caravans that a cartel runs, but unlike most definitions of a caravan, in Forsbury, caravans are assumed to be twenty wagons or more. So a house running a single ten wagon caravan would be considered a "peddler" by the extreme measures of Forsbury.

Greater vs. lesser powers are more difficult to measure and there is certainly some manner of subjective judgement here. Greater powers are expected to not only run several (typically three or more) caravans, but also have broad holdings within the city of Forsbury. These holdings would include warehouses, stores, inns, and of course some manner of manor house. In 647P, there were seven cartels seen as "greater" and twenty seen as "lesser".

In Forsbury, any large commercial organization is referred to as a cartel, because most of them are. However, there are some merchant houses in the city, cartels owned by a specific family, with different rules of profit sharing. This is a technical point and few people in Forsbury care.

Cattle Barons **Group**

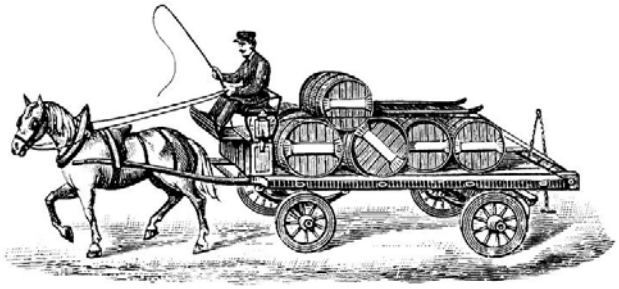
The Cattle Barons are a group of barons within the Council of Baronies who primarily make their living off the huge herds of cattle they own. They typically form a voting block within the Council because they are motivated by many of the same things.

The Cattle Barons are powerful nobles within a relatively powerful Council. Not only are they typically wealthier than their peers, but they are typically able to accomplish this while keeping their taxes lower, and thus their populations higher. Most are also members of the Highell Family, though these ties may be weakening over time. Most Cattle Barons have actually worked as cowboys or other ranching jobs (in their youths) and are therefore far rougher and tougher than one would expect of a group of noblemen.

Council of Baronies **Region**

Centrally located on the continent of Drentae, twenty-eight baronies have joined together to form the Council of Baronies. Bordered by Parnania on the north, Garnock on the south, and Nanerette on the west, the Council is in many ways the hub of the continent's politics.

The Council is similar to a federation. Each of the barons is monarch of his own barony, but they decide "foreign policy" issues together. Also, while it is most



common for the eldest son to succeed his father, the Council must ratify an heir, and in several situations has taken baronies away from families they felt would be a problem for the Council as a whole. Certainly these situations have sometimes been political power grabs from other families, but they have more often been used to remove barons who were not up to the task of ruling a portion of the federation.

Much time has been spent debating this issue of heirs and why the member baronies would allow it to occur. In addition to weeding out bad barons (those who would be too weak or perhaps too violent), it has also served to prevent the type of rebellions that sometimes plague monarchies. The common occurrences of brothers creating civil wars in order to take what they feel is rightfully theirs either due to some obscure law or perhaps due to the questionable fatherhood of the older brother have been removed. Similarly, if someone were to find the long lost grandson of some long dead baron - even if the long lost grandson turned out to in fact have the strongest ancestral claim to the throne, it doesn't matter, because the Council specifically put the baron

into his throne. There is no hope of appealing the decision.

As the center of the continent, the Council of Baronies is an important trading partner for any who wish to take advantage of land travel. Forsbury is well known as the trading hub of the continent, though it likely does not move as much cargo as the shipping ports of Brinston, Helatia or Scaret. While each land is its own, the trade agreements between them are so open that cargo can be moved easily throughout the region, while tariffs are still collected for goods coming in from the outside. These tariffs are usually low enough that smuggling is not a major issue.

Individually, each barony posts a relatively minor military force, but by banding together, they have been able to field considerable armies. Additionally, they are still allied with Parnania to the north even though they served as the major logistical support for the Latvich army of Garnock when it moved through the baronies on its way to attack Parnania and Nanerete.



Davvissen, LadyCaitlin

Caitlin Davvissen **Individual**

Caitlin Davvissen was born to a noble Tandish family outside of Purity. Very early in her life, her father, a skilled translator, moved the family to Helatia, and later to Forsbury. Caitlin's mother passed away when she was 10 years old, and her father was overcome with grief. For her protection, he placed Caitlin in a boarding school, prepaying the next five years. Unfortunately, when those five years were up, Caitlin found herself alone in Forsbury. Her father had become a drunk and moved away.

Alone in a major city in her teens, Caitlin promptly fell in with the wrong crowd. She dated and associated with various burglars and thieves, learning from them when she could. Not convinced that she would spend her life as a common criminal, Caitlin fell in with a group of bounty hunters and mercenaries who began doing odd jobs for some of the merchant cartels in Forsbury.

Learning, earning and surviving, Caitlin and her partner Almahihec (Al) eventually led a team of trouble shooters that began to gain notoriety throughout Forsbury and beyond. While Caitlin had learned knife fighting from her various beaus, she soon transitioned to a much larger sword, eventually becoming known as the deadliest swordswoman alive. Al was a master spell singer. This time was extremely important to the woman Caitlin would become, because as she travelled the world she made many important friendships with military leaders.

In 650P, the team discovered a way to hunt the woolly elephants of the northern tundra, and the Davvissen Cartel was founded on this ivory trade. Al led the hunts, while Caitlin handled the business end of the cartel. Caitlin was underestimated frequently. Her economic rivals believed her to be some barbarian sell sword, and not the daughter of a linguist trained at the best charm school in Forsbury.

Around 651P, Caitlin caught the eye of Baron Edward Forsbury. The two were a good match. She dragged him out of his self-imposed seclusion within the castle, and he opened new opportunities to her and her growing business. Edward and Caitlin were married in a massive festival/celebration in the summer of 653P. Leaders from across the globe attended the wedding, many coming to Forsbury for the first time. In many ways, the wedding of Caitlin and Edward put Forsbury on the map, and likely in the crosshairs of some rivals.

After the wedding, Caitlin's official name with title is the Lady Caitlin Davvissen, Baroness of Forsbury. Being of noble birth, she is not identified by her married name of Highell.

A much longer description of Caitlin Davvissen can be found in The Royalty.

Dawinstrovstat Merchant House **Group**

Despite the name, the Dawinstrovstat Merchant House is run as a cartel with specified shares of ownership.

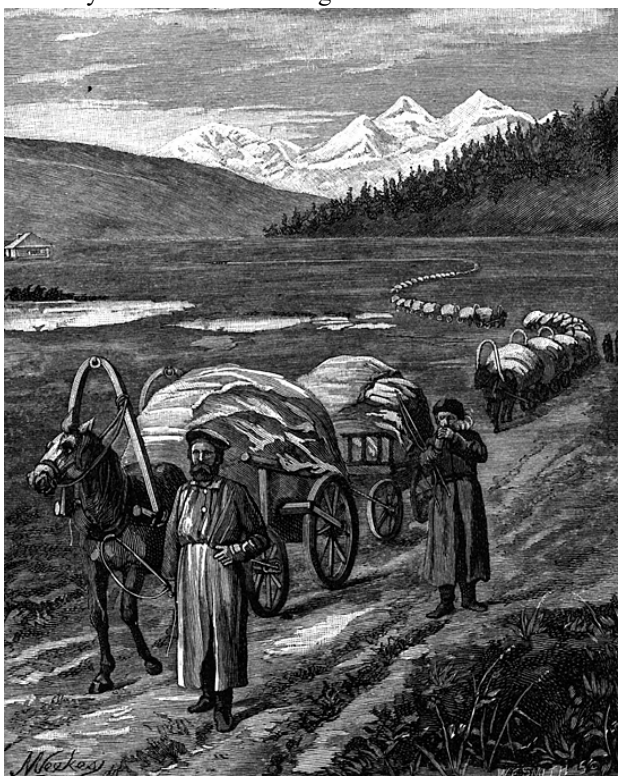
What is known in 647 as the Dawinstrovstat Cartel is a hybrid of two merchant families. The namesake Dawinstrovstat Family originated in the Central Plains and has been running a cartel out of Forsbury for generations. They originated as a noble family within the city-state of Parnania with lands and flocks of wool bearing animals. They were known for maintaining large "sweat shops" filled with slaves who were spinning and weaving the various fabrics. With this less than stellar reputation, they had decided to base themselves in Forsbury where they were less known for their manufacturing practices and where such practices were not judged as harshly. Their wool fabrics business still resides in the eastern regions of the Parnanian city-state.

The current head of the cartel is descended from an arranged marriage with the Troxiwha Family based in Helatia. The Troxiwhas had a shipping business with three ships, but hard times forced them to go looking for quick coins. The joined family businesses were the

result. It took a generation, but the families began intermingling and relations improved nicely.

Recently, the Helatia segment of the business began to seem smaller and smaller. Only one ship is currently bringing silks and spices in from across the ocean. Meanwhile the Forsbury branch of the business and family continued to grow, though silk remains their most profitable product.

Roginar Dawinstrovstat is the current head of the family. Unlike other cartels where shares are divided according to the person's value to the organization, Dawinstrovstat shares can be inherited, and Roginar has assembled nearly 47% of them within his immediate family. Roginar runs the business with his wife Hueluela and his son Burndit. The couple's other two children are currently in Brinston attending schools.



Forsbury (barony) Region

Long ago seen as an inconsequential spot of pasture land, the barony of Forsbury has been shaping life in the Central Plains for the last two centuries.

Still a pasture land and the home to many herds of beef cattle, Forsbury has also become the crossroads of the land trade throughout the continent, as well as one of the wealthiest lands anywhere (per capita). Many claim it was the cattle drives themselves that started the Forsbury caravans. Whatever the reason, it now seems that a caravan isn't of worth if it doesn't pass through the city of Forsbury.

Forsbury is the largest of the Council of Baronies by acreage. Most of that space is open prairie and grasslands, though as is true everywhere, small towns and villages do dot the land. With its size and central location, Forsbury has always held more than its fair share of political clout on the Council.

The Highell Family currently controls Forsbury through Baron Edward Highell-Forsbury. He maintains a large standing army, much larger than most of his peers. This is often considered necessary because of all the caravans that pass through - the extra troops act as a policing force to control the rowdy caravaneers. Forsbury shares a northern border with Wyndaum, a southern border with Droskavich, an eastern border with Riverford and Glynnglen, and a western border with Pimyson and Neyward. At the barony's southwestern corner is Baron Edward's uncle's lands of Honsdeck, another barony rich in beef cattle.

Forsbury (city) City

Forsbury is the often overlooked depot city in the center of the Central Plains. Having diplomatically negotiated its way through several issues (including the Conquering War), Forsbury has simply grown while many of its peers, even allies, floundered over the last couple of generations. Forsbury grows in population and wealth as Parnania struggles and Nanerette seems to sink into a stopover port instead of a destination.

Forsbury dominates land trade on the continent. Friend to all, with low or non-existent tariffs, Forsbury merchant cartels bring every imaginable good into the city on their wagon trains. Additionally, Forsbury is the king of the "cattle baronies" with enormous herds wandering the open plains. No major droughts have affected the barony in recent history, allowing for fabulous profits for the Baron himself and his family members.

Forsbury is the economic leader of the Council of Baronies, an extended alliance of monarchies. The Baron is autocratic, but remains extremely business friendly.

As with the other trade cities, Forsbury is extremely cosmopolitan. Humans of every ethnic diversity live and work in the city, though the local Velesans dominate, both in the city and especially in the rural areas. Other races are there, but typically not in large numbers. Notably, orcs, centaurs and other races that may not be welcome elsewhere are not only welcomed, but allowed every freedom given others.

To hopefully reduce confusion: Forsbury is a city within the barony of Forsbury. The Barony Forsbury is within the Council of Barons. The Baron of Forsbury is Mikeahl Edward Highell-Forsbury, a member of the Highell family.

Guilderlae Trading Cartel **Group**

The Guilderlae cartel began in Nanerette as a financial services firm. They had numerous bookkeepers and hired out their services to the businesses of Nanerette. As their business grew, they began lending money to their clients. Less a bank and more a loan sharking business, they made big profits with relatively little risk.

Eventually the cartel shifted its attention and headquarters to Forsbury. With them came the bookkeepers and the thugs they used to collect on bad debts. Though a major portion of their business was still the lending of money, they also began to act as merchants, typically trading things they had seized from their customers for unpaid debts.

Since the death of his brother in 644P, Uri (Urihunnel) Guilderlae has been the sole manager of the cartel, along with his wife Pillene. Uri is known to be a liar and a cheat and few people want to do business with him, but he is a skilled blackmailer and has managed to collect dirt on most of the people in town. If anything, Pillene is more ruthless, though in less obvious ways. She is a master manipulator and has been able to deflect rivals into fighting each other instead of her cartel.

The Guilderlaes will deal in any merchandise, but the cartel owns several precious metal mines (mainly silver). They collect and smelt the silver as the main product of the house, but this lucrative business allows them to engage in various other markets in order to continually increase their wealth. In 647P, Uri is a recluse and a miser. He is fully focused on maintaining what he has and preventing anyone from gaining an advantage over him.

Highell Family **Group**

In 460P, the Highell noble family met with their peers and began working on the structure of what is today known as the Council of Baronies. Between their own lands (what is now known as the baronies of Trompska, Collater, Riverford, and Oosterbeak) and the barony of Forsbury, which was controlled by their brother-in-law, the Highells were able to exert the most political clout on the process, and that initial set-up has served the family well ever since.

The Highells are typically cattle barons, and they are the best example of the stereo-type. Though noble through their family lines, they have a rougher style than most nobles. This comes from their occupation as cowboys. All Highell boys are expected to work for a few summers on one of the active cattle ranches during their teen-aged years. While this serves to toughen them up, it also serves to bond them with their cousins and help hold the family together.

The Highell family crest shows a falcon crowned by the sun. Their motto is, “The hunters watch the world.” Though both of these refer to the family’s history as hunters and falconers, they have put the falconry aside to a large degree. Hunting remains a passion of most of the family members, but they hunt from horseback with crossbows today, and typically far bigger game than possible with falcons.

In 655P, the Highell Family controls 7 of the 28 baronies within the council.

Highell, Mikeahl Edward

Baron Edward Forsbury **Individual**

The Baron of Forsbury’s official name with titles is Mikeahl Edward Highell, Baron of Forsbury, but he has never liked the name Mikeahl and has never used it. Edward was raised as a Cattle Baron, spending time both in his father’s castle and on various family owned ranches in the Central Plains region. When he was 28, his father began to weaken from disease and abdicated his throne to Edward. His father only held on for a scant few months before dying. To make matters worse, Edward’s mother Ninaletta died less than three years after his taking his throne.

Edward was bred and trained to take control of both the Barony of Forsbury and the expansive cattle herds his father had owned, and he has done a strong job in both cases. His massive wealth and position made him a target of every gold digger and gold digging mother on the continent, and this experience caused him to retreat from formal society. Though he was by no means a recluse, he avoided all but the most important social events, preferring to spend time with close friends and cousins, either in the castle or on extended hunting trips.

His courtship of Caitlin Davvissen changed that in 651P, and he assumed his role as the head of Forsbury’s society. This is an indication of how successful he has been, as he is able to function in his social roles, his role as a monarch, and his role as a business man, though admittedly, he is more of a jack-of-all-trades - master of none.

Edward is a tall, dark and handsome man. He stands about six foot. Though he has the Velesan height of the Highell Family, he more resembles the darker hair and features of his mother’s Marilick heritage.

A much longer description of the Baron of Forsbury can be found in The Royalty.

Masterhill Merchant House **Group**

Despite the name, the Masterhill Merchant House is run as a cartel with specified “lots” of ownership.

The Masterhill cartel was begun by Dreggor Masterhill, but is now run by his sons Yemour and Herlol. Dreggor literally worked himself to death and his sons were only 22 and 19 when they inherited the business their father had built. Being the least of the greater powers at that time, the other cartels in Forsbury

immediately began plotting to take everything they possibly could from the two "children".

Things did not go that way. The two brothers spread the reach of the cartel to the seas and then beyond, moving farther and broader than their father would have ever dreamed. Within fifteen years of their father's death, the two brothers were running the undisputed top of the greater powers.

Yemour is the older of the brothers and is leader of the cartel. Serious and dour, he is a business man with a brilliant mind and elephant's will. Herlol is the younger and more social of the two. Herlol has charisma and the personality that allows him to befriend nearly anyone. With the "genius" in the headquarters and the "face man" moving throughout the city, these two are a powerhouse pair.



Polnoska Merchant House Group

The Polnoska Merchant House is in fact a merchant house, but they are a merchant house that runs several caravans, each of which is set up as a cartel.

The Polnoska house is the oldest merchant house in Forsbury. They were minor, landed nobles when the Highell family took over the barony. Instead of working against the incoming ruler, they sat down and negotiated. They were able to receive preferential treatment for their honesty and willingness to come to the table. It is believed they are the only noble family from that time (~125 years ago) that still holds political clout.

The Polnoska Merchant House is run by Leonard (Lenny) Polnoska. A bear of a man, Lenny appears to be a teamster instead of a merchant. The only son of an only son, Lenny was the last hope for the continuing family, but he has certainly made up for past problems. Lenny's first wife died 22 years ago. During their 19 year marriage, they were blessed with 8 children, who are now around 30 to 40 years old. These children make up the innermost core of Lenny's advisors. Lenny remarried 16 years ago, and this marriage has produced 6 children, ages 15 to 4. Lenny and his wife Maita are not sure if they have stopped having children. With Lenny at 57 years old and Maita at 35, more children are possible. Surprisingly, this extended family is on very good terms with one another. Even though Lex, Lenny's oldest, is a few years older than his stepmother, no animosity exists.

The Polnoska House specializes in meats. They own several pig farms and slaughter houses. Their most enduring products are the sausages made at various locations and smoked or cured for transport. Polnoska sausages are well known throughout the continent and considered reliably good food in any region. With caravans going east to Scaret, north to Rhum and Snobist, and travelling extensively throughout the Council, the Polnoskas are catering to broad groups of sausage lovers.

Sausages and slaughter houses are not the whole story. The Polnoskas also sell beer (both Bortish and Rhoric), wines, pottery, and a truly vast assortment of food stuffs. They also deal in building materials including lumber, stone and marble. Though most people think of Polnoska sausages, they do also sell livestock, mainly swine, poultry and sheep. The caravans that transport these animals across the continent are amongst the slowest and least desirable for obvious reasons. The Polnoska House also deals in animal goods though to a smaller extent. Wool and hides of various grades can be found on their wagons as can the medicinal parts.

Seridown Cartel Group

The Seridown "cartel" is family merchant house specializing in textiles and some building materials. Originally founded in the hills north of Scaret, the family sent their chief merchants to Forsbury to be able to trade with far more people.

Currently, Arthur Seridown and his wife Bettessa (Betty) are in charge of the merchant house. During Arthur's grandfather's time, the cotton growers within the family seceded from the business and the house has been purchasing their cotton goods from other growers who were at one time rivals to the family. The wool producers have stayed more loyal.

The Seridown House is one of the weaker greater powers, but they still control a huge share of the textile trade in this part of the world. Further, their caravans running back and forth from Forsbury to Scaret will carry whatever valuable goods they have room for. The organization has far more warehouses than they truly need and thus are willing to store products that might be more valuable to them later than they are now.

THE SOUNDING BOARD

Bulking up your History

So let me tell you how I've been wasting my spare time. I say wasting, because I don't think it will ever result in publishable material, however, I truly believe that by knowing my world better, I will better be able to develop plots and sub-plots that will factor into both my active campaigns and could serve at least as background for Fletnern and Fletnern based material.



Much of what I have worked on over the last twenty years is centered around the Barony and City of Forsbury. The current list of merchant cartels in Forsbury shows 25, though some of them might not truly reach the definition of "cartel" as it is used in Forsbury. In any case, this is a different list than the one I used when we first started basing adventures and campaigns out of Forsbury. Why? Because things change. A stagnant game world is, well, stagnant, dull, boring, keep going with the negativity.

So the thought occurred to me - If things have change in the last 7-10 years of game world time, how much they have changed over the last 70-100 years of game time? In a lot of cases, I had a decent idea of how the cartel started, but had never fleshed out the people and events surrounding these data points. So that's what I'm doing - I am bulking up the history of Forsbury in order to better lay out how things were over the last generations.

Why? Is this as I just said - all about knowing my world better? Well yes and no. What I am really looking to do is to fill out my already excessive cast of characters. Phase one of you seeing this extensive list is to check out Royalty which will give you a 10,000' view of the nobility. What I am talking about now is basically the same type of thing for the merchants. Is that why? Because I want to be able to publish 100 Merchants? No. Mainly the reason I want to do this is because I want to figure out who the losers were. I know which cartels closed their doors over the last six years of game time. If I knew which cartels closed their doors over the last 60 years of game time, I would have a fantastic list of families that had been beaten or cheated out of their fortunes. I would have lists of disgruntled folks looking at the cartels, caravans and warehouses of Forsbury and burning with a desire for revenge. And many of these people would still have some things of value that just might make it worth someone else's time to carry out their vindictive ideas. That's what I need - passionate losers bent on revenge, or maybe just survival.

It's not as tough to do as you think. Step one: flesh out the cartels that are in existence: when did they start, how did they start, who started them. Step two: create or flesh out the families that link the cartel founders to the current cartel big wigs. Step three: Once I know when cartels started, it should be obvious that they would not have been able to start if they were not filling a hole in the consumer demands, so figure out who did it before them and why they aren't doing it any more. For instance, Freddy Frumpt runs slaves in and out of Forsbury, very profitably I might add. But he's a first generation slaver. Admittedly he is sort of a branch of his father's business in Garnock, but he has certainly expanded his revenues in Forsbury. Someone must have been running slaves before he came to town. Who, and why aren't they in business any more. A big part of Freddy's rise was the hits the Dawinstrovstat cartel took during and after the Merchant War of 647. Now they moved Dharvic slaves, while Freddy is moving slaves out of Garnock. So did the racial make-up of slaves in Forsbury change over the last few years?

But I don't want to forget the history of the world and how it fits into this. During periods of war, were the weapons merchants scoring record profits? Could they maintain those once the wars ended? If one city-state took over another's region, would that have caused a collapse of the merchants who were dealing with the now occupied region? If there had been a drought in one part of the world, could a merchant have risen to supply them, and then what happened after their own crops started coming back strongly?

I get it - I am probably the role-player most fascinated by trade and economics in the world. But knowing who has the money and how they got it, knowing who is angry, but probably has a sizeable piggy bank, and knowing how fortunes have changed over the years tells me where the money is. Remember the famous saying, "Follow the money". If you think mercenaries and

adventurers don't follow the money, then you're not paying attention to your player characters.

Risk Takers

I am not a risk taker. It's just part of my personality make-up. I don't do anything without having a Plan B, and I never risk more than I can afford to lose. If you study business, you will likely read in management books various theories on whether or not risk is essential or foolish. Let me tell you my bias, and how I worked it into my world.

The city of Forsbury is known for being a "depot town". That means that it is at a crossroads and as caravans come in, they drop off loads into the warehouses, pick up other loads and head back out. This is not a manufacturing center; it is a trade center. So it makes sense that the town is primarily controlled by the biggest merchants in the city. (There is a Baron who intentionally keeps his army strong and his taxes low in order to keep these merchants here, but who exactly is "in charge" is often questionable.)

Now, when I started the campaign in Forsbury, figuring that being surrounded by money and trade but not really manufacturing - this would be a great place for mercenaries, I established the merchant houses. There are about 30, but only the top eight or so really mattered. Some of them were long established, but most of the time that I was writing up the history of the houses, similar themes kept coming out. Why? Because I have studied business. The really successful folks are those who take risks and work their tails off.

For example - The Masterhills. The father of the current brother team running the cartel was a teamster who knew he could do it better. He loaded up his wagons and ran them at top speed from the river (where fish were cheap) to Forsbury where they weren't, and he was able to do it fast enough to sell "fresh" fish. Then he loaded up his wagons with more rock than was safe for them to carry and ran that faster than he should down roads that weren't good enough. Guess what - he undersold the competition. By the time his wagons fell apart from the stress and problems, he was rich enough to start doing things right.

But his sons, they were raised rich. They knew what to do to maintain it, and admittedly, they had enough initiative to go out and take more business from their competition, but by and large, they were playing defense. That was until Caitlin came along. A professional mercenary, sell sword, adventurer or assassin, depending on who you asked, she had spent her life risking, well, her life. Risking money was no big thing to her. She put together several expeditions to the arctic to hunt the mammoths (hey - it's high fantasy) for their ivory. She brought back so much ivory that she altered the world market on it, though not until she too had become rich.

How does this affect your game worlds? Well, on Fletnern, the old money tries to play it safe. They bribe and control the governments to make it more difficult for other people to get into business. If they hire adventurers, it is more likely that they are doing it to attack a rival or try to destroy something that someone else has built. The young money guys - They are out there risking new ideas. They are exploring new regions looking for wealth they can take or trade for. They are running into lost cities and tribes that no one even knew were out there. Both of these can be employers for your player characters, but the missions are going to be completely different.

Grain Into Gold versus Coins of the Road (or why fantasy trade goods are really tough to figure out)

I've touched on this before, but due to a recent review of Grain Into Gold I thought I might address in more detail why GIG doesn't have a full blown trade goods system: Grain Into Gold was always intended to be the "micro-economics" book. Those of us who had to take Econ in college probably took both micro- and macro-, and each of the books was probably 200-300 pages. I still don't believe in economics. It's like sociology to me. It's not that it doesn't exist, but it sure as hell isn't a science. Two professions where you can be wrong all the time and still keep your job: weathermen and economists. Oh, and every government job, but that's a rant for another day.

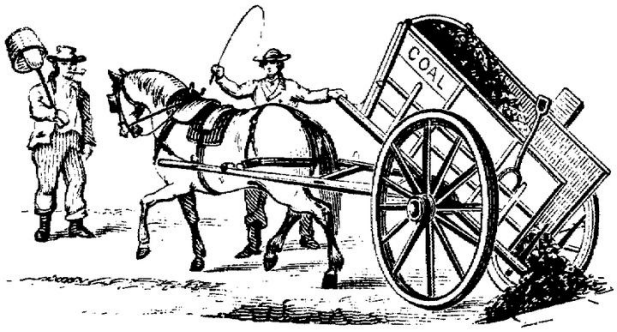
So Grain Into Gold specifically and intentionally does not discuss supply and demand. OK, but why no macro-economics? We've been working on Coins of the Road off and on since finishing GIG back in 2006. Coins of the Road was always intended to be the companion piece to GIG. Coins of the Road would discuss barrels of whale oil, instead of pints, and discuss getting it from one place to another. Sounds simple, huh? Yeah, try and do it.

First, you need to figure out what something costs at its source. Well, GIG did a lot of that, but there would be more needed. Ignoring that crucial and most important part, let's think about the rest of it. A barrel of whale oil isn't just the oil, it's the barrel. You need to figure the cost of that. And you need to figure out the logistics of the barrel. How wide is it, both at the rim and in the middle? How tall is it? How much does it weigh? We said how much does it cost, right?

OK, so how many of those barrels can you fit on a wagon? Well that probably depends on the size of the wagon. And while you're at it - are these 50gal barrels? 30 gallon? 25? 10? What sizes are those? What if you use a crate instead of a barrel? Don't try to tell me that a fantasy era economy has an established barrel size that is consistent from culture to culture, because that would be BS! OK, so figure out all the barrels. (I actually have

that done) Figure out all the wagons (I have a really good start on this). Now you're ready to travel.

But how do you travel? A reviewer pointed out years ago that I neglected to discuss river transport and how river transport was vitally important throughout European and American history. He was right! But I originally built the economy for Fletnern, which only has a few trade rivers, since it never had an Ice Age. (Don't argue with me on that right now, I'm too exhausted to start another fight.) But Coins of the Road would need river travel, land travel and sea travel. OK, land and sea - now you have to figure out the ships instead of the wagons.



But land travel is easy, right? Not so fast my young friend. There are wagons, there are pack animals, and there are porters. There are also push carts. Is the wagon pulled by an ox? a mule? a team of horses? How many horses? and what does that do to the speed of said wagon? And how do you write this so that it's still generic even though a lot of games have established speeds of travel? Let's assume that you figure out how much a wagon can hold, how many animals it will take to pull that weight, and how fast it will go. Done? Nope! How much does it cost to feed those animals? How fast can they really go if you expect them to pasture at the end of the day vs being fed feed?

That's just the logistics of engines and containers. We haven't even started on the political impacts of trade. Taxes and tolls? Bandits and how does the risk of bandits affect what the merchant wants as a profit (risk management)? How good are the roads? Should you consider camels going across the desert?

But I haven't even touched on the real issue when trying to determine trade in a FRPG: It's fantasy!! At what point does a golem horse make sense? What about pegasi pulled wagons, or maybe blimps? Does every merchant ship have a wizard who can summon up the winds to fill the sails or is it that just some of them? Do dragons act like bandits or like warlords?

But wait! There's more! Everything from can you legally fly over a city's walls to can you teleport into their cities should be considered. Is teleporting a legitimate form of transport? Can you use carnivorous beasts of burden? What is illegal and what is smuggling? and if you think that's easy, we still have to discuss the additional trade goods that would come from a fantasy environment. Is the selling of dragons slavery? Are there races who trade in human flesh as they would beef jerky? Is it illegal to be undead? Slavery in general? What about zombie slaves? and to top it all off - What about brand names? Do you just talk about "wine" or do you start thinking through which wineries have the best wines? Is beer worth carting around the continent? What about the best beers?

OK - so this is huge! Hopefully you can see why Coins of the Road is only partially completed. It's not dead! but we don't have an expected release date either.

Urban Adventures

If you have not game mastered urban adventures before, they tend to be far different than running a dungeon crawl. For one thing, it is a lot harder to keep the party of characters together. Quite often, they all have different priorities and tend to wander off to pursue them. This is most likely because they feel safe; they feel they can wander off without fear of being killed within the city limits.

Especially in a campaign where battle can occur in the streets and alleys, having members of the party in different parts of the city can not only be confusing and difficult to administer, it can be downright dangerous. But these choices need to be those of the players and the player characters. If they insist on living dangerously, it is your job as the GM to punish them for it, possibly even killing them because of it.

One of the main benefits of a dungeon style adventure is that the GM can determine many of the parameters surrounding a fight. The dungeon is mapped; the ceilings can be pre-determined; line of sight angles can only come in so many variations. This is not true of an urban adventure. Fights can break out in intersections or parks, and line of sight can be affected by everything from buildings to trees to moving horse drawn coaches. This adds to the complexity for the game master. You and the players have to have a prearranged agreement that you know more about the staging than you can describe and they simply have to go with it. Any player who argues about there not being a clearly defined map that he can place his figure on needs to be counseled after the game session that he's being a jerk and needs to knock it off.

One of the best things that urban adventures can bring is the concept of overlapping time lines. It is likely that several different things are all going on at the same time in the same town. The main "mission" could be rivalries between merchant houses, while at the same time some thieves are feuding over a magical weapon they have stolen from its rightful owner. The point is that even substantial clues and activities might not belong to your mission, but instead to someone else's.



Urban missions are great for not having that "end boss" (aka the big, nasty, evil guy at the end). There are multiple factions in a city. Some will oppose the party, while others may be possible allies. With so many moving parts, the adventurers should be a little confused. They should never be 100% certain of whom they can trust, and that will keep the suspense high.

Further, not everything should be spelled out for them up front. They will need to find clues, talk to people and learn as they go. Obviously not everything they learn will be accurate, but again, more suspense and more fun. This need for investigation may be new to some of your players who have never been challenged like this in a role-playing game. Hopefully they will find it more exciting due to the newness and challenge. As GM, you should also expect that characters who had pre-defined roles in more combat intensive missions may find themselves in completely different roles here. Warning - A big, dumb fighter is not all that useful, until combat breaks out, if it does at all.

This is just a warning; we do not want to discourage you from running urban adventures. As you and your players mature, the idea of hundreds of underground complexes filled with monsters becomes too much for the willful suspension of disbelief. When that happens, you will find yourself working on the urban missions and avoiding the crawls.

What's Money?

This is a nearly painful post for me to write. Why? Because I know what money is. It is those small pieces of paper with dead presidents on it. It is gold, silver and sometimes copper (though I refer to pennies as litter). It is jewels, jewelry and sometimes watches (if they aren't plastic or rubber). So what's the point? Well, I think I already hit it.

Who are you asking the question? To modern folks, money is paper currency and electronic signals. To fantasy folks, it is precious metals and jewels. While we will recognize and appreciate their money, they would think us complete morons for chasing our money. There is no possible way a fantasy person could see the value in paper currency.

But it doesn't stop there. I was reminded of a rather interesting point recently. The Zulus saw cattle as wealth. Imagine the culture shock of a Zulu trying to talk to a British soldier or diplomat: How many cattle do you have? None. Oh, so you're poor. No, I have a very nice home in London. But no cattle. No, no cows. Are you married? Yes, and I have two sons. How will you marry off your sons when you have no cattle with which to pay the brides' fathers? I don't need any. So you're broke, a bum, a guy who will marry off his sons to the ugliest, most barren women in the city of London because you have no cattle with which to buy wives for them.

OK, I'll stop that, but this seriously had to be culture shock, and it's just one example. There is an action movie I really enjoy due to its campiness where the hero says, "These are desert people. They value water, not gold." OK, they probably valued both, but there is a point in there. If water and food are really rare, you'll pay anything for them.

This is the point of trade! If I have food and you have silver, let's trade. If I have silk and you have emeralds, let's trade. The point is to move goods from where they are cheap to where they are valuable.

To make this worthwhile for the gold farmers - here's an unexpected consequence to this cultural / role-playing concept: A lot of games allow holy spell casters to cast summon water spells (or whatever you call it). Imagine this: You show up in a desert. The desert raiders are willing to barter with you, and you set up your tents at one of their oases. Then they see your cleric cast a bring water spell and you all drink it. The desert raiders will now do whatever is necessary to buy or steal that cleric from you. They will kill the entire rest of the party in order to get that cleric. You have to see it from their perspective: What would your characters do if they found an elf who actually pooped out diamonds? Would they not kill everyone else allied with that elf and take him/her hostage? From their perspective, it is basically the same thing (but without the pooping).

Let's reverse this: The party is trading with folks they know to be less than legit, and find they have a "slave" kept alone in a cave. These guys have lots of slaves for sale, but this one is obviously different, and she's not for sale. Maybe they figure out that she is a cleric with summon water. It usually doesn't take much for a party of adventurers (aka murder hobos), to kill a band of desert raiders, especially if they can explain it away by saying they were bandits and therefore deserved to die.

Want to make it more than a simple combat? How about this: They are crossing a desert, and the only way across is to be led from oasis to oasis by someone who knows exactly where he's going. Along the way your guide leads you to one of his family's main bases, where you find the slave cleric girl. Now what? If you fight the raiders, even if you win, you lose your guide and may not survive the desert (even with a girl who can summon water). If you leave her in the hands of these "savages", you are condemning her to a horrible fate (at least you imagine it as such). Especially if you're playing a game with alignments, you are in a bad spot!

It's fun to mess with the players' minds, and even more fun if you can mess with the characters' minds at the same time!

An afterword: What if the slave cleric girl is treated like a goddess? She's still a slave, when she is treated better than any "free" woman in the camp. Does it change things?

Importance of Calendar

How's the calendar work for your game world? Do you keep it pretty accurately? No? Is that because you just can't be bothered? Yeah, that's going to bite you in the ass.

There are a bunch of reasons for keeping a calendar, and I might be too harsh about keeping it accurately. But what's the point? If you don't keep a calendar, then you cannot say when things are or will be happening. Let's start with the easy and move to the important.

Keeping a calendar, you as the GM can keep track of how long it takes to get from place to place and back again. This matters for a bunch of reasons. The player characters should probably have some manner of responsibilities in their home town. Maybe they aren't paying rent, but they will need to pay for storage, or stable fees, or something to maintain their lives back home. A calendar helps you keep the records fairly.

Most of my PCs at some point start to breed their own horses (or dogs, or dragon steeds, or pegasi, etc.). The calendar helps determine how long the animal will be pregnant and how long it will take for it to grow up. If the mare is the PC's main steed, then while she's getting ready to give birth or nursing, she's out of the action. But this isn't the only "training" you need a calendar for. If you are following your rules, you likely have to track the number of days your PCs are training in order to use their experience.

My world of Fletnern frequently has things going on that the players / player characters are not involved in. There could be a war going on somewhere else or perhaps there is an upcoming wedding. Knowing how long the party has been traveling or just out adventuring is needed in order to keep the two story lines in sync.

Do you know what happens when you don't do this? An army can cross a continent and back in the same amount of time it takes a raven to fly from one major fortress to the capital city, and that's absurd. How absurd? Well, even casual watchers of that huge sword and sorcery show have noticed how stupid it is that armies are moving faster than ships are moving faster than ravens. No, I actually started writing this blog post long before this season of the show started, but pointing out obvious plot holes is not something you want happening in your own game.

But in Fletnern it's not just those really important things. There are harvest festivals in fall, the Feast of Brakin in winter, rainy seasons in spring, and rodeos in summer. So you need to know what season it is at least. One role-playing tip: I remember Thieves World (before it got out of control). There was a big thing when the ships carrying the blood oranges came to town and the blood orange season only lasted a couple of weeks. It was a really cool touch that I am remembering here nearly 40 years later.

One more gold farming reason - If it is late summer or early fall, then the wheat, corn or hay is going to be high - high enough to hide in. If it is spring, then the fields are recently plowed and will show footprints very easily and there will be no cover. Winter - Is it snowing? Same tracking issues. Winter also means needed to bundle up. If a prisoner escapes in winter, his first requirement is going to be shelter and heat. In summer, he might be more interested in escaping the area and then worrying about food and water.

One other side to calendars is that they can be the motive of the mission. There are those places where you need to be in a certain spot at a certain time in order to see something important - maybe a keyhole or simply lining up the sun at a temple for the summer or winter solstice. Or (and these are my favorites) you need to go and get something and return with it before something happens. I do believe that when the party knows there is a time limit on what they're doing, it changes the way they play. A party that stops frequently and let's their spell casters rest is going to be far more aggressive if they know that spending an extra five hours resting could mean that they arrive too late to save the princess.

The last but really not least point is this: Because I have been using my world of Fletnern for decades now, I often want to (sometimes need to) go back and try to figure out what I set up the last time. OK, maybe I don't have to, but I can use what I already created without reinventing the wheel. Trying to keep track of how things are going or went or even figure out how long this party has been adventuring together - this stuff matters!

Calendars are easier when you're just starting off! It isn't until you're running multiple campaigns in the same world at the same time that things start to get tricky. So while it is easy - keep the calendar. You'll be glad you did.

LIFESTYLES OF THE MAGICAL AND MUNDANE

The Caravaneer

A caravaneer lives an odd life that few others can fully understand. While his nomadic ways seem to match what many other people might be doing, these nomads travel while their wives and families stay home. That makes the caravaneer a stranger in his own home.

A caravaneer's wife is referred to as a caravan widow. The short (often only three days) time that the caravaneer has at home is most commonly referred to as the "honeymoon". An enormous number of jokes are made about how these work, because while she may love him, "he doesn't even know where the soup ladle is". These jokes too often assume that the caravan widows are horrible tyrants who hate their men, even when this isn't true. It is simply a matter of having too many cooks in the kitchen. The wife has a way of doing things, as does the husband. The two just naturally clash with each other when he is home.

When a caravaneer rolls back into Forsbury with his caravan, the entire crew is expected to unload the caravan into various warehouses. Since most caravans continually go back and forth along the same route(s), they are not taking product to its final destination, but simply storing it in Forsbury until the other caravan comes into town to pick it up. So the arrival day is filled with work. The day after is "family day". This is the day the caravaneers are paid their wages. Pay day is family day because the caravan widows don't trust their husbands. There are far too many stories of the husband getting drunk and losing his money to pick pockets or gambling, so the women march their husbands down to the caravan's pay master and collect his pay themselves.

The caravan widow is going to need to make this money last for a month, without opening herself up to robbery, especially once her husband leaves town. Because of this, the residential areas of Forsbury have shops that cater to this irregular style of pay. Most of the grocery stores will hold money on account for their regular customers. In many cases, the grocers will allow the mothers to run over a bit when they know the husband is on his way home, putting the family into debt to the grocer. This typically works out, because the grocer gets his debt paid back on family day as well as taking some extra money "on account".

One of the saddest sides to this is that caravaneers don't always come home. They might have gotten sick in some foreign place, or been robbed/killed, or simply choose not to return to their families. This causes these caravan widows to become actual widows. There are no life insurance policies nor union benefits either. These women typically need to find a new man to marry in hopes of supporting themselves and their children. The churches will help for a bit, but it is extremely difficult to live off the charity of churches for any length of time.

The caravan widows have all sorts of ways to make extra money while their men are away. Some will open their homes to borders, because few caravaneers want to sleep under a wagon when they can instead have a real bed. The common practice here is to have her eldest son run back to the caravan master and tell him that this worker of his is staying at her house for the night. This allows the caravan masters to find their men should they oversleep or something, but more importantly, it allows the caravan master to warn the woman should he believe that this particular caravaneer shouldn't be alone with her in her home. This typically works as the boarder knows that his boss knows where he is. If he causes trouble for her, he's going to hear it from his boss, which might scare him more than the local constables.

Another way to stretch the budget and get a good meal is to be a dinner companion. This is most common with the younger women - those who might not yet have young children who need to be watched. Obviously, it also works well for the more attractive ones. The offer here is only for companionship for the length of the meal. A traveler will pick a companion from the women at the restaurant that night, and then he will pay for her meal and typically tip her. This is not prostitution, though there are a small number of establishments and women who will allow that to happen. The dinner companion gets a free meal, and often takes home some leftovers. Those women not chosen will often be fed something from the kitchen, though not a full meal. For the travelling gentleman, he is able to have a polite conversation with a reasonably attractive woman and it only costs him the price of her meal. Eating alone is no fun, and this system seems to work.

Back to the caravaneer himself. The day before the caravan rolls out, he shows up for work and loads the wagon(s). This is typically in a different warehouse than where he unloaded the wagon. Once loaded and ready, he's free to return to his family. Then he's expected to be at the wagon at dawn and getting his team and rig into line. Most caravans are efficient enough to be pulling out of town within 40-45 minutes of dawn rising.

Life on the road is monotonous. The miles drag on. The oxen and the wagon wheels kick up dust off the roads. And the view never changes - it's just the back of the wagon in front of you. For some this would be torture, but for most caravaneers, this is perfect. It's almost as though they were sleeping away their days and getting paid for it.

Most caravans employ outriders. These guards travel much faster than the slow moving wagons and are able to scout out any issues ahead of the caravan. Even just stopping a caravan can be difficult, as each teamster

needs to get the signal and then control his team, so anything that gives them fair warning of what's ahead is valuable. Outriders are just scouts. They will bring information back to the caravan master who will make decisions like whether or not to stop or change roads.

Most caravans will travel with a chuck wagon as well. This allows the caravan master to purchase fresh foods, or at least "standard" food ingredients instead of stocking up on preserved foods that typically cost far more. Every master will run his schedules differently, but for a caravan travelling the standard three legs, meals are typically at dawn, after the second leg and after the caravan has finished its third leg and set up their camp for the night. While every caravaneer will insist that the chuck wagon food is awful, it is typically at least as good as what can be found in the roadside taverns. One important difference is that chuck wagon food is going to be a lot of the same thing day after day. The food will be the cheapest, filling food the master can get, so variety is rare.

Caravaneers seldom bring any sort of tent with them - there typically isn't enough room on the wagons for it. So if the ground is dry, they will commonly sleep under the wagons to keep the rain or dew off of them. If the wagon is covered, they will try to sleep on top of the cargo but beneath the cover, but every caravaneer knows that the cargo is more important to the bosses than he is. They can almost always sleep on their driving benches, but this is considered the worst choice, mainly because they have already spent the entire day on the bench, and a change of pace is seen as a requirement.

Camp life when the caravan stops continues the "same old same old". Most places the caravan will stop will have a "green". Most commonly the green is across the road from the actual village in order to keep the caravaneers separated, but close enough to shop. The greens will have a well or some manner of running water, as well as troughs for the draft animals. As the caravan pulls into town, they are commonly greeted by every peddler and farm wife in the village, all looking to sell them something to make their road life a bit better. Think of a modern truck stop, and you'll have an idea of what these villagers are selling.

Sounds boring, and it is. But, that's why they get paid to do it. Most caravaneers are not members of the cartel, but are instead simply employees. In the larger caravans, there will be supervisor teamsters who are expected to keep their section of the wagon train in line and moving. They are the go-to guys should something abnormal happen. These are usually assigned when the caravan master could never be expected to handle the volume of issues that might arise. Supervisor teamsters are often minimally members of the cartel, having only a single unit, but still participating in the profits.

NEWS OF FLETNERN

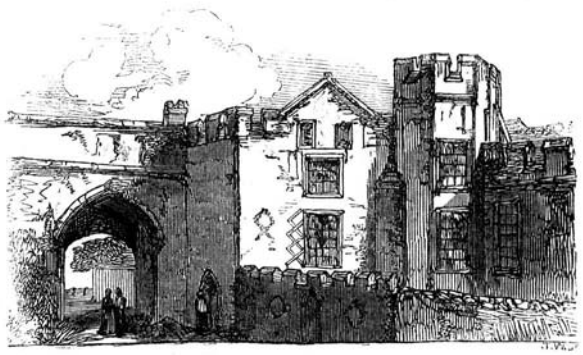
If you are using Fletnern as a game world, the time has come to decide what year it is! The current campaigns we know of that are running in Fletnern are primarily concerned with 650-655P (the 650th year of the Age of Peace). However, this merchant war happens in the year 647P. Further, there is a bigger merchant war in 655P (which we will cover in a later edition). So what year do you want it to be?

Does it matter? Of course it does! But in order to show you both why it matters and how we got here, we need to go back in time - to the Conquering War. We talked a lot about the Conquering War in our edition on Organized Crime because it took place in Garnock, and Garnock instigated and lost the Conquering War. But Forsbury wasn't in the Conquering War. Yes, it still matters.

Technically the Conquering War started in 616P with the Sacking of Villai, but most assume it started in 626P with the siege of Parnania. Wait - Let's go back a little farther than 626P:

In the late summer of 625P, Garnock sent emissaries to the baronies of Droskavich, Forsbury and Wyndaum. Garnock was planning to attack Parnania the following spring and needed to negotiate safe passage for their troops. Garnock did not fear the Council of Baronies, but felt that trying to conquer a decentralized region like the Council would involve far too many small battles and take far too much time. Coupled with the anticipated partisans who would spring up, it just wasn't worth doing. So they secured both their travel and a good portion of their supplies by signing alliances with these three baronies guaranteeing safe passage and numerous food supplies. By buying off the three baronies that were "in the way" on their way to Parnania, they averted several serious issues in their arrival at their target.

But the rest of the Council was upset with these three baronies effectively making an alliance with Garnock. Alone, they did not have the authority (votes) to do this, though the typical sour grapes were more due



to the fact that these three would "get rich" off the sales to Garnock, while the other baronies would suffer. The three promised to share the wealth by buying goods from them and selling them to Garnock. This calmed many of the loudest complainers. Most people of the region were surprised that the Velesan barons were siding with the Latvich military against the Velesans in Parnania, but when faced with "get rich or die", they quickly chose "get rich".

So why was this important? Well, the Council is Velesan (primarily) and Parnania is Velesan (primarily). So when Garnock knocked down the gates of Parnania and started to sack the city, the refugees had to run someplace. At first, they fled to the west, many going as far as the Headwater Hills. During the occupation of Parnania by Latvich and orcish troops, even more refugees fled the city-state, now feeling a bit safer in fleeing south to the Council and especially to Forsbury.

Why Forsbury? Well, Forsbury had always been a trade hub. Riverford was also a trade hub, but Riverford had a fair number of Lats living in its larger towns. This encouraged the refugees to keep going until they were in Forsbury where they could find work in the newly opened shops or on the various caravans crisscrossing the continent.



So in 625P when the negotiations with Garnock began, the city of Forsbury had a population of 17,000 while Parnania had a population closer to 80,000. Since then, Forsbury has nearly doubled in size, with an estimated population in 652P of 32,000. The Forsbury population is always difficult to estimate because so many of the adult males work on the caravans. With these men "missing" from their homes, only estimates can be made of the populations. Part of the reason is that if asked, their wives may lie about who lives there. So many of the people in Forsbury are recently arrived that they rarely trust the government. Whether they are refugees from Parnania, dwarves from the Rocchairian Nation who distrust any monarch, or simply foreigners who came to Forsbury for work, but don't speak Velesan well, they are hesitant to admit that the man of the house lives there, in case he does something wrong or hesitant to admit that the man of the house isn't home for fear that someone might attempt to rob them thinking them an easy target. Perhaps in years to come if the population calms a bit, they might be more willing to share the truth.

Populations: (just for the city)

625P	17,000
647P	27,000
652P	32,000

So that is why we had to get into the whole issue of the Conquering War. Despite Forsbury not being in it, the war changed the course of Forsbury. An even further consequence was that the merchants who were active in 625P-626P were getting rich moving cargos from throughout the Council into Forsbury to be sold to the Latvich supply officers. There had always been a large number of merchants in the city, but this easy war profiteering allowed them even bigger profits.

616P	Garnock and allies sack Villai
626P	Garnock takes Parnania
626P	Garnock accepts the surrender of Nanerette
626P	Garnock fails to take Rhum
629P	Garnock abandons Nanerette
638P	Steel Plume takes control of the Generals' Conclave in a bloodless, political "battle"
640P	The gates of Garnock are closed and locked preventing any unauthorized trade
653P	Garnock's orcish allies begin to abandon Parnania and return to the Wembic Empire

The conflict described in the CSK is known as the Merchant War of 647, because it began in 647P. The Forsbury merchant wars need to be designated in this fashion because they come every 8 to 10 years. If they were not designated by the year, it would be too difficult to keep track of which one(s) were being discussed.

Are these merchant wars dangerous? Absolutely! If no one is killed in battle, then it is not considered a merchant war, but only a disagreement. But does this make Forsbury a dangerous place to live? Not really. The object of these wars is typically to weaken an opponent in order to steal his suppliers and/or customers. Killing civilians is never the object. Though some non-combatants may wind up dead, they are most commonly killed because they were with a reasonable target when he was assassinated.

One of the reasons that the people of Forsbury were so quick to believe that the garuh had kidnapped Kerissa Seridown was this general taboo against attacking non-combatants. Had the entire Seridown family been slaughtered and Kerissa with them, then it would have made sense to the people of Forsbury - the entire family being wiped out is the type of thing that merchants did to each other. But singling out a young girl? That isn't done. Further, with no ransom, it did not seem to have any trade motive.

THE GOOD LIFE

Slang & Superstition

We covered the actual glossary of terms up front, but here are some not so "official" terms that are often used in Forsbury. Some of them have been used and described elsewhere, so we'll mention them here but gloss over them.

A "caravan widow" is the wife of a caravan worker. Since about 60% of the workers in Forsbury leave town on caravans, they leave a large number of wives behind. Seeing as it is not uncommon for these workers to spend more than 90% of their time out of town, these women spend a lot of time alone. They have to learn to cope without their husbands, even if they have children. They also have a tendency to band together and help each other, whether it is through the various cartels or with the Temple of Laenta. Caravan widows are the largest group of people that will be in the city of Forsbury at any time. This can cause some odd cultural dynamics.

A "dinner companion" is simply a woman who eats dinner with man at a restaurant. Due to the large number of visitors to Forsbury, several restaurants have followed Traders' Destination restaurant in having dinner companions on hand to keep these men company. For the most part these women are platonic companions who keep a gentleman company for a dinner in exchange for his paying for her meal. Rarely, prostitutes will use this as a method of acquiring clients, giving the system an undeserved bad reputation.

"Family day" is the Forsbury term for a caravaneer's pay day, typically the day after the caravan rolled into town. It comes from the caravaneer's wife showing up to "help" him collect his pay, often with all of the children in tow. While this is often used as a negative term suggesting that caravaneers cannot be trusted, many of the wives / mothers see this as teaching their children that the money the family lives on comes from their fathers being away and working hard.

A "wagon bar" is a tavern located very close to one of the greens and is intended to serve the caravaneers. Wagon bars were originally wagons with several barrels of beer served off the back/side. This style of serving drinks has faded over the years. Too often, the patrons would get rowdy and overturn the wagons in their rush to get more beer. When the wagons stopped visiting the greens and the caravaneers had to go across the street to the tavern, they continued to refer to them as wagon bars. Most residents of Forsbury avoid wagon bars. Foreign caravaneers typically want to have a lot of fun without any regard for the damage they cause. This makes these bars more rowdy than fun.

WHAT'S MISSING

This is the "World Walker" version of this edition. Therefore it is not the complete version, but more of the slimmed down version. So the question could be - What's missing? Here is a summary of what you'd see if you got the Game Masters' version of the book:

Wet Behind the Ears: A solid caravaneer player character to begin your next campaign with.
How to Play a - Caravaneer: It's not just the character stats you need but the role-playing aspects as well. This will give you ideas and strategies about how to best use the caravaneer.
How to GM a ... Urban Campaign: Urban missions are not the norm for some GMs, so here are some more tips on how to run the missions. They can't just slash your way through the civilians or the police, but here's what you can do.
The Enlistment Report: Forsbury is a "super-power" in the region. Why?
News of Fletnern: You see some of the News here, but the GM version has a full discussion of "the speed of news". If news is important, exactly how fast does it spread?
Gold, Silver and WHAT!?!: Whether it is barrels or draft animals, we've got the price list for you here.
$ilver Sense: This is about merchants, so it seems like we need to walk through Mark Up & Risk.
Campaign Starter Kit: Well, we may have buried this article, but we did call it The Merchant Wars of Forsbury. We owe it to you to describe one of those wars, including getting the PCs caught up in the beginning of it.
Monsters & Other Menaces: This CSK opens with encounters with the garuh, a race of dog men. Here are the details.
Small Towns and City Neighborhoods: We changed directions with this one. This month, we show you a strip map of Forsbury, actually, we show you two.
Tavern Talk: A discussion of the Forsbury greens and the wagon bars near them.
Optional Rules: A huge part of this edition is setting up the rules on how fast caravans and other travelers can move across the continent. Here is everything you need. Not only do we explain the whole thing, but we put in two pages of charts.
A Funny Thing Happened ... Four mini-adventures or encounters that can be used with the CSK or on their own.
Pull Back the Curtain: Why do things cost what they do? We give you some of the formulas that were used to establish the prices in Grain Into Gold and everything since.

Y? Y? Y!: The city of Forsbury isn't really mapped out. But why? Well, not only do we explain why, but we show you how we short-cut the whole mapping of the city.

The full Game Master version of this edition is 51 pages of content. That is considerably more than what you're seeing here.

Do you know how to get the Game Masters' version instead of this World Walker edition? Well, use the links below to head out to our Patreon site and become a patron. Check it out because there's a ton of stuff that we're doing, and we want you to be involved.



In Conclusion

We don't want our In Conclusion section to become our excuse spot, but here we go anyway. Once again, this subject was way too big for one edition. Forsbury is one of our most developed cities, so more about Forsbury will be showing up in later editions. This will help flesh out the city / setting. Trade at this level is huge and nuanced. Pretending we could legitimately cover world trade in a fantasy environment in less than 300 pages would simply be a lie. Know how we know that? Because one of our historic "text books" on medieval trade is about 320, and they don't have dragons, pegasi or teleportation.

So clearly, more to come on all of this. We haven't started to discuss how magic impacts any of this, not magical transports, nor magical products. We will get there. We never thought that 40 pages a month would be limiting.

But there is more here already! Please check out the "choose your own adventure" we've started on the Fletnern wiki: click here to go to the first page. Now you have to be patient and understanding on this! Not only is this our first crack at a choose your own adventure, but we're trying to do it alongside the Small Bites editions. Right now you can play through as Pyotr from Wet Behind the Ears. The adventure is based on the CSK - Merchant War 647 presented here, but shouldn't give away too much of the plot that your players couldn't "play" online and then still actually play the CSK. Please check it out, but more importantly, please give us some constructive feedback!

As always, if you like what you see, we want to know. If you don't like what you see, we want to know that too. If you don't see what you like - tell us that too! Really! we listen, we pay attention, we want to give you what you want and need, but we can only do that if you keep communicating with us!!

And something specific: We've been looking at writing up both the 647 merchant war and the 655 merchant war - which is actually Brinston merchants against Forsbury merchants. Would this be something you would be interested in? It would be an expansive campaign, including notes on Forsbury, Brinston, the areas between them, mercenary bands, a calendar of activities (because there will be way too much stuff going on), plus more. Let us know at contact info here.



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