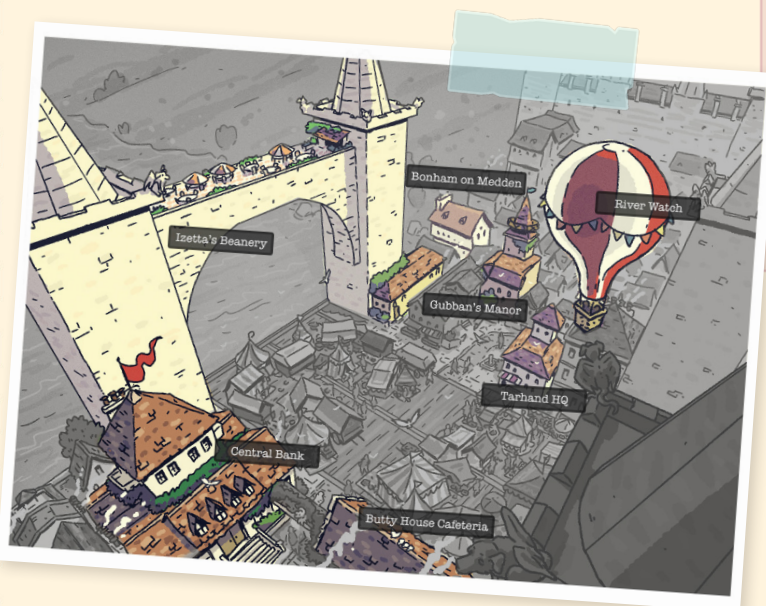


Izetta's Beanery and No Man's Bazaar

The Drawbridge

A perhaps underappreciated aspect of Meddenfirth is that it features a fully functional drawbridge to allow for the passage of very occasional river vessels. The Medden River is infrequently traversed by watercraft, due overwhelmingly to its position straddling two warfronts. However, enterprising merchants, daring explorers, and military scouts sometimes use the river for transport, and when they do, Meddenfirth will reluctantly raise its impressive mechanical drawbridge.

This bridge, like much of Meddenfirth, is both commercially and tactically significant. Passage through the Medden River carries with it a hefty toll that discourages all but the wealthiest river travelers. Additionally, ADMIN has time and time again simply refused to allow certain ships passage regardless of their ability to pay. In most instances, these rejected ships are small fleets of navy vessels intent on bringing the war directly to the nearby banks of the river. Although the livery companies may want to stay neutral in the Long War, they are also fully comfortable putting their foot down when the war comes to their doorstep.



No Man's Bazaar

In typical Meddenfirth fashion, however, no part of the bridge goes to waste. While it is impossible for Meddenfirth builders to construct permanent dwellings on the moveable decks of the drawbridge, the city has zoned this particular section of the bridge for the open-air market known as No Man's Bazaar. The often chilly and rainy weather in Meddenfirth makes outdoor marketplaces a bit uncomfortable for both proprietors and consumers, but the advantages of the tightly packed vendors more

than makes up for this climate mismatch. Those with a license to peddle their wares present their stock from compact stalls, constructed specifically for No Man's Bazaar. When the bridge is about to rise for a passing ship, the merchants quickly wheel or carry off their market booths, and the various foreign spendthrifts take a short sojourn in a local eatery.

No Man's Bazaar is one of Meddenfirth's great draws for foreigners. In addition to the pure novelty of having a world's worth of souvenirs at your fingertips *on a bridge*, there are also many goods that one is likely to only find in Meddenfirth. Overwhelmingly, these are goods which require components and manufacturing techniques from both neighboring nations. A Eoltherian graska flask made from Thennidane silver would simply never be made in either nation under normal circumstances, but the exchange of raw materials and manufacturing talent that occurs on Meddenfirth makes such a luxury item possible.

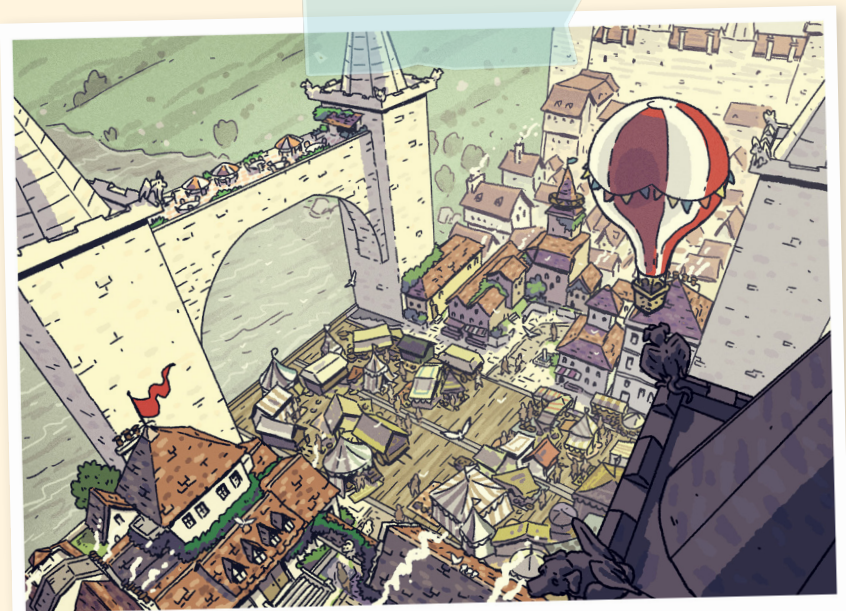
Meddenfirth residents rarely shop in the Bazaar proper. The goods are well-made (as opposed to the cheap knick-knacks one might find in other tourist destinations), but the prices are high, and most daily consumer needs can be purchased in less ostentatious establishments: small mom-and-pop grocers, livery endorsed wholesalers, or tax-free back-alley vendors.

GM Note: As a rule, players should be able to find just about anything they might be seeking at No Man's Bazaar, with the notable exception of weaponry. Even the shadiest of merchants wouldn't dare peddle illicit arms in wanton disregard of ADMIN mandates. Adventurers should be prepared to pay a premium on anything they do find; the fees associated with running a stall in the market combined with the tax markup and high demand keep Meddenfirth prices far above what they would be in one of the nations.

GMs should generally accommodate player requests for merchandise, but a smattering of potential goods for sale is provided below.



1. While swimming is strictly prohibited in the Medden River, it's not forbidden elsewhere in the two nations, and **marmottail swimsuits** are currently all the rage, particularly in the frigid Southern lakes of Thenniden. Luckily for the merchants of Meddenfirth, these strange aquatic mammals are only found in the Medden River, so the bridge has a total monopoly on these warm fur wetsuits that keep swimmers warm without restricting their aquatic movement.
2. Thennidane airships rely on fuel. Eoltherian mining equipment relies on fuel. Even Meddenfirth's drawbridge relies on fuel. Fuel is, regrettably, the lifeblood of all major economies in these realms. During periodic international shortages, Meddenfirth merchants make a killing by selling **recycled fuel** recovered in the Un-Forge. This recycled fuel is just as good as newly harvested pure fuel, though it takes an order of magnitude more manpower and ingenuity to extract, and its price reflects this labor intensive procedure.
3. Graska is an acquired taste, and most Eoltherians acquire it... "incorrectly." This distilled liquor has an herbaceous aroma that completely masks its incredibly astringent afterbite, but only when properly preserved. Unless you're a particularly wealthy Eoltherian, you've probably only ever had spoiled graska, which loses its unique notes almost immediately after bottling *unless* it's preserved in Thennidane silver. As such a **graska flask** is a particular luxury that allows Meddenfirth visitors to appreciate all of the rich complexities of this otherwise unapproachable liquor.
4. The **King Butty** was once a delicacy, a snack-time favorite from the "river district" (a term for the more-or-less unregulated pre-war banks of the Medden). While many extoll the King Butty to no end, the truth of the matter is that it is ultimately just a sandwich: pickled klingerfische on a Thennidane bun baked with Eoltherian spices. Don't be quick to dismiss the King Butty, though. They'll last weeks in a pack with no noticeable decline in flavor or texture, and just a single bite can restore a weakened constitution. Some have claimed that a King Butty is better than any proper antidote in fighting off the venoms from various lizards of the Eastern deserts.
5. A **harpoon gun** is a tricky weapon. This awkwardly constructed firearm may be the signature weapon of the Most Humble Company of Fishermen and Sentinels, but its combat abilities are severely limited in non-fishing contexts. Its most obvious shortcoming is that after just one shot, you have to either "reel in" your target, or snap the line and affix a new projectile to the barrel. Of course, you could choose to fire the gun without attaching a fishing line, but this is considered an "unauthorized" use on Meddenfirth. If you *are* able to strike a target, they're going to have difficulty getting away, unless they can free themselves of the girthy barb.
6. Symbols matter, especially when they're emblazoned on a masterfully forged steel shield. The **Emblem of the Balance Keepers** is *theoretically* a functionless heraldic escutcheon, but in practice, it's a powerful combat-ready shield that should help anyone with adequate martial skills stay safe while in Meddenfirth. While the peacekeeping forces of the bridge are loath to provide anyone with arms or armor of any sort, the massive fees they tack on sales of the Emblem more than make up for the increased fortitude of Meddenfirth visitors. For the wealthy adventurer who wants to maintain some form of defensive superiority in town, consider the purchase of an Emblem to be a minor tax on personal protection.
7. Morévie the Many Toed was a guru from far-off lands who paraded as a sort of "holy man-about-town" in Meddenfirth, part celebrity, part religious leader, part life coach. As his name suggests, his greatest claim to divinity was simply his multitude of toes (likely a birth defect resulting from the polluted waters of his home). When he died last year, followers quickly set about preserving **Morévie's toes** as religious relics... and promptly selling them to any would-be believers. Despite Morévie's dubious assertions, these toes *do indeed* allow true believers to potently channel divine magic.
8. You would have to be a total buffoon, of course, to buy the **keys to the Dawnbound Glider**, right? The Dawnbound Glider, once the airship of famed Thennidane navigator Raynham Salisbury, was downed in a freak storm over a decade ago, and now stands as a stark reminder that the glory days of Thennidane exploration are behind them. Theoretically, with a bit more than a new coat of paint, the Dawnbound Glider *is* still airworthy. If you can find an able mechanic and a vast sum of replacement parts, you'll be masters of the sky in no time.



Izetta's Beanery

The fuel-powered mechanisms that manipulate the drawbridge are built directly into the arch-shaped café Izetta's Beanery that functions as a sort of “meta-bridge,” allowing foot traffic to cross Meddenfirth even when the drawbridge is upright. Of course, this also means that scores of visitors are funneled through the café whether they planned to stop for a drink or not. The mechanisms themselves are manned by engineers from the Most Humble Company of Builders and Artisans, though they must receive an okay from a presiding Balance Keeper before raising the bridge for any purpose.

The Beanery itself is many things: a drawbridge operation station, a coffeehouse, and (most surprisingly) a well-guarded and incredibly well staffed meeting place for foreign diplomats. When negotiations are taking place between Thenniden and Eoltheria—or any other interested parties, for that matter—they will invariably take place in the Beanery's inner chambers. Endless coffee, tea, liquor, fish, and diverse regional delicacies are provided, and potential moderators are always on call to provide mediating support. To even become a barista at the Beanery, one must demonstrate a shocking degree of political savvy and pass a thorough background check. The stakes are quite frankly too high to have anyone but the most studied and neutral overseers serving coffee to whichever celebrated dignitary might pass through on a given day.

Izetta

The city-wide celebrity Izetta is the owner and proprietor of her eponymous café, a scholar from a far-off land who relocated when she failed to get tenure at her University (studying Gods know what). Now, despite her credentials, she has changed careers entirely. Turning her back on academia was the best thing that ever happened to her, and she feels lucky every day that she gets to meet such fascinating and esteemed guests at her wildly successful coffeehouse.



Or at least... that's the story she wants folks to spread. In truth, she never failed to get tenure, and this successful business venture of hers is merely a part of a decades-long research project. She wants to see just how successful she can be by subtly steering international politics as a lone entrepreneur. Some of her early insights into the intersection of commerce and foreign relations have been published under a pseudonym, but a potential forthcoming magnum opus documenting the hitherto untold secrets of the war negotiations could turn the entire conflict on its head.

Izetta plays the cool and quirky barista part expertly, but that is ultimately a ruse. Her aloofness is intentionally disarming, and it has allowed her to get shockingly close to the backroom dealings that may start or end many additional wars to come. All of this in the name of research.

Peace Talks

Lord Hiram Pandy and Colonel Gabriella Burki, delegates from the two neighboring nations, are in town to discuss a potential ceasefire at Izetta's Beanery. Izetta has attempted to keep this meeting secret so as to avoid security concerns, but word has regrettably made its way out into the streets. As such, the entire affair will be closely guarded in a secretly selected room somewhere in the Beanery.

Lord Hiram Pandy

Lord Pandy is a Thennidane dignitary here to discuss a potential ceasefire with Eoltheria. Hiram is a human noble—a distant cousin to the king—and is desperate to prove his value to the kingdom. Though his official expertise is purely bureaucratic in nature, he has been elevated beyond his capabilities due purely to nepotism. He seeks many concessions from the Eoltherian envoy, but the truth is he'll accept just about any offer so long as he can return to his kingdom a “successful negotiator.”



Though he cannot prove it, he suspects that his efforts in diplomacy have thus far been hamstrung due to a curse by some Eoltherian magi, a curse that Hiram is almost certainly imagining. Lord Pandy has endured every psychosomatic symptom imaginable, and as the peace talks approach, he is quickly reaching his wits end. Regardless of the supposed curse's authenticity, it has shaken his confidence and will likely be a point of contention when negotiating with the Eoltherian envoy.

Colonel Gabriella Burki

Unlike her Thennidane counterpart, Colonel Gabriella Burki is a battle-hardened officer. She's a colonel for the Eoltherian forces, and her home near the border has been endlessly ravaged by the Long War and the ensuing famine. Gabriella demands concessions, and will not agree to a truce with anything short of the complete withdrawal of Thennidane troops from their territory and an assurance of an exchange of technological knowhow and humanitarian aid.

For Colonel Burki, this matter is personal. She comes from a family of miners, many of whom lost their work and some their lives when Thennidane forces annexed the hillside in which they had established their operations. Subsequently, her entire family joined the war cause due in part to lingering resentment for the Western forces, and partially because their entire way of life had been taken from them. Unbeknownst to many of her Eoltherian peers (and presumably everyone in Meddenfirth), her ascendancy in the armed forces is the direct result of her innate magical abilities, which have aided her both on and off the battlefield.



Plot Hook: Peace Talk Disruptions

Completely independently of each other, the Tarhands and The Most Humble Company of Balance Keepers seek to disrupt the peace talks by any means necessary.

For the Tarhands, it's a simple matter of ensuring they have a continued way to profit from the war. For the Balance Keepers, it's a bit more complicated. They believe that the best way to remain profitable and relevant is to make sure the war never ends. With the Medden at peace, it would suddenly become a lot more difficult to tax everyone along the one independent bridge in the river. Perhaps an East-West alliance would facilitate the construction of additional bridges... and these bridges might start undercutting the Balance Keepers' tolls.

The Tarhands will likely stoop to violence to interrupt the negotiations, while the Balance Keepers may take a more cunning approach. If the party seeks to allow peace talks to continue (or perhaps influence the negotiations), they will first have to contend with the two antagonistic forces that threaten the meeting. Alternatively, they may attempt to side with either of the confounding factions to prevent this imminent truce as well as potentially sabotage future peace talks.

Regardless of what the party chooses to do, they will inevitably make some enemies and some allies. Staying out of the conflict is always an option, but even the factions who aren't planning to blatantly disrupt the talks will want to have a say one way or the other:

1. The Most Humble Company of Fishermen and Sentinels as well as the Repurposers would love for the war to end. Thennidane war machines are the single greatest polluters of the Medden River, and anything that would make it easier to fish or produce potable water would be preferable for these generally pacifist Companies.
2. The King's Hounds are hoping for the war to continue, or at least for Lord Pandy to make significant gains in the negotiations. So long as there is conflict in the region, the King's Hounds can profit. If there is a ceasefire, the worst case scenario would be one in which Thennidane gives up some of its mining territory to the East, as this would potentially impoverish many of the King's Hounds wealthier financiers.
3. The Underfed simply want an end to the war. Though they would like for the Eoltherians to gain some ground in the negotiations (a declassification of agricultural blueprints could save the lives of thousands), an end to Thennidane aggression would at least ease some immediate suffering.
4. The Most Humble Company of Builders and Artisans would prefer a temporary ceasefire. Constant combat is bad for business, but an ongoing tepid relationship keeps Meddenfirth in prime position to sell goods which would otherwise be unobtainable in either nation.

Any factions that trust the party adequately will task the adventurers with furthering their goals. A party that has made friends with many organizations may find themselves in a no-win situation. This is the nature of war.

This plot hook is intentionally grand and open-ended. A particularly violent party may choose to simply assassinate one or both of the diplomats, or perhaps foil the plots of the agitators who would disrupt the peace talks. Clever pacifists may convince the diplomats to meet in a secret location to avoid interference. Persuasive politickers may even attempt to smooth-talk their way into participating in the negotiations. The most satisfying outcome for this plot hook is one that gives the players agency in how they go about helping or hindering the peace talks.

Regardless of what method is chosen, obstacles should be presented at every turn: both Izzeta's guards and the two agitating forces should be well armed and dangerous in combat. The Beanery should be thoroughly difficult to navigate, and stealth options must be possible but challenging. Violence need not be the only way to resolve the conflict: a clever deception, a credible threat, or even a bit of nonviolent mayhem may advance any given party's goals.

However the players choose to engage with this scenario, the ramifications should be both dramatic and far-reaching. A ceasefire could meaningfully improve the lives of both civilians and soldiers on either side of the river, but would also impact the economy and power balance in Meddenfirth. If either side makes too many concessions, there might be unrest at home. Conversely, if peace talks dissolve without resolution, tensions could swiftly elevate, leading to a sudden escalation of violence.

There is no outcome that will please everyone. For every gang, company, or government that is satisfied with the party's aid, there will be another that has sworn a new enemy. Don't let the party ever forget that their actions have consequences.

