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# SECRET SOCIETIES

aka All About ~~Secret Societies~~ in Fantasy



# FLETNERN WIKI

## INTRODUCTION

Secret Societies - Another theme that got pushed forward due to input from our patrons. We continue to try and serve these up in the order that you're asking, because it does matter to us - What you want does matter! And truthfully, the best way for you to let us know what your priorities are is to join us via Patreon. More on that at the end of the book.

So what are we planning to go on and on about? Secrets? No, not really. Just because there is a secret doesn't mean there's a secret society. Cults? No - There just don't seem to be any cults big enough to fit the bill, though we'll probably throw an example or two in somewhere.

What we're going after this month is the secret societies - those global or otherwise huge organizations that manage to keep their goals and activities secret from the general public. Some may be known to exist, but their reach and their ultimate objectives are still secret. You may want to put on your tin foil hat for this one, because you never know which organizations may be real, but be hiding under the guise of being fictional!



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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 category of "Global Groups" in case you are more comfortable using the wiki instead of this edition.

As this is the World Walker edition, there are some important portions of these wiki entries that have been left out, from both here and from the wiki online. That's because as much as we want everyone to learn as much as they can about Fletnern, there are some things that need to be kept only to the game masters. This is even more true with this edition. If the secrets of the secret societies were out in the open, then they wouldn't be secrets anymore! So the only way to get all those juicy details is to get the GM's edition. Sorry if this feels like a trick to get you into our Patreon group, but if you think about it, there are things that need to be kept out of the players' hands.

### Conspiracy of the Dragons

### Legend

This legend claims that the god of the good dragons and the goddess of the evil dragons were at one time lovers. They then waged battle through their followers for centuries, but a century or so ago, they came to an understanding. It seemed clear that the only thing capable of consistently defeating a dragon was another dragon. Therefore, if the two opposing sides simply agreed to a truce, each set of dragons could go about



taking over vast portions of the planet or in fact the multi-verse.

Despite their incredible superiority, when a dragon is found near a city or palace, the leaders of the settlements will seek powerful adventurers to destroy the fearsome beast. Without retreating to breed a new generation of warriors (something very difficult due to the logistics of feeding an army of dragons), a different tactic had to be taken. Rather than use their physical or magical powers, the dragons would use their financial and intellectual powers. Trading their treasure hoards for businesses and loans, the dragons began to own and run some of the most profitable businesses in the world.

True to their nature, the different types of dragons leaned towards different types of businesses. The evil dragons began as loan sharks, and moved in to take over vast criminal empires. The good dragons were more likely to own trading cartels that moved goods across the globe, while opening magic schools and fostering good religions. The end result is that most organized crime and most organized trade is owned and run by a network of dragons.

This is not that uncommon an event (in fantasy role-playing) - dragons secretly controlling vast empires. The true conspiracy comes in where the good dragons and the evil dragons, through their gods, have agreed to stay out of each other's way. There might be some minor skirmishes, but no major, direct conflicts are allowed. In this way, it is assumed that eventually the dragons will control all wealth on the planet and possibly the multi-verse.

Some of the rumors/aspects of this conspiracy include:

- The god of good dragons and the goddess of evil dragons are mating to produce an unstoppable breed of dragons. Sometimes, the good dragon is tricked into breeding with the evil one.
- The reason you never see good dragons swooping in to protect humanity from evil dragons is that they are in cahoots. That is why adventurers always need to save the day.
- Lesser dragons always run from mightier dragons, not because they are scared, but because they are told to.
- The eldest dragons are so brilliant that they can do all of this and still remain hidden.
- Some of the younger dragons have not been let in on the scheme, and therefore will work against it. This is simply because they have not been taken into confidence by the older dragons yet.
- Sometimes there is an army of dragons either being trained or hatched to take over the world.

## Coven of Jurganflos, The

## Legend

The Coven of Jurganflos is a rumored group of witches who hold the secret to everlasting life and youth. In order to maintain their eternal youth, they must drink potions brewed by their more junior members. After slaving away most of their lives, they are allowed access to the potions and their youth is regained. Should they miss a regularly scheduled potion, they would revert to their true age and likely die.



The coven is a Ponzi scheme, in that the younger witches cannot brew enough potions for all of the older "immortal" witches. This means that despite promises, not all of the junior witches will be allowed access to the potions - some are simply worked to death.

Once their youth has been restored, the young witch goes out to live her life to the fullest. So, once achieving the rank of "Sister" within the coven, these witches will live immortal lives of hedonism and debauchery. Most are skilled alchemists, but many are also mages of some talent. This allows them to live their restored lives as society dolls and sometimes the trophy wives of the wealthy. Eventually, they will flee these lives in order to retain the secret of their eternal youth.

The coven contains mostly Rhoric women as it was originally founded by Rhorics. The coven utilizes Tanta Bosh, Xadras and rarely Maril women, but never men. While there are no restrictions put on how they live their lives, they are forbidden to get pregnant, as love of a child could convince a Sister to not walk away from her life when it would become obvious that she was immortal and thus risk their secrets.

The Coven is the stuff of stories and legends and not to be believed. The idea of immortal witches living such glamorous lives is the stuff of school girls' tales. If such a coven existed, it would have been found and looted by armies seeking to take everything they had. Instead, the Coven is used as an excuse by powerful men

who have killed their trophy wives or simply had them run away from him.

### **Fletnern's Signers**

### **Group**

Fletnern's Signers is a global association of cartographers dedicated to honest and accurate mapping of the world. The belief is that at one time, rulers encouraged their cartographers to make two sets of maps, one for the ruler and one to deceive everyone else. Members of Fletnern's Signers agree to only craft accurate maps, no matter who they are for. They also strive to perfect the tools of their trade, including the inks, pens and skins. One of their sayings is, "Cartographers are the forgers of the world," thus the name "Signers". Some take this a bit far, but most of the members are confident professionals. The symbol of Fletnern's Signers is a green and blue symbol, similar to the yin yang symbol we know.

### **The Mystic Order of the Magi**

### **Group**

The Mystic Order of the Magi is an association of wizards. They believe themselves to be better than all other spell casters. In an effort to further distance themselves from other mages and spell casters, this group of wizards had formed the order and begun teaching new wizards. The Magi, as they wish to be known, are attempting to create a "book" of spells that only the Magi will know. In Rimmim, where the Magi were formed, there are clubs that are only open to Magi. The symbol of the Magi is a peacock with a rainbow colored tail (each feather is a different color in the order of the rainbow). The colors are intended to represent the different schools of magic.



### **Order of the Draconian Relics**

### **Group**

The Order of the Draconic Relics is a rumored group of dragon slayers and a fringe sect of the Jemmistake religions. The story says they worship Jhenjeffery the Dragonslayer and seek a "Final Solution" to the problem of dragons in the world. Not content to simply kill the dragons they encounter, they seek a means of wiping out all dragons in the world in one action.

The Order gets its name from the fact that they own the largest collection of dragon bones and skeletons in the world. They study dragon corpses in hopes of finding their Final Solution. However, they "know" of the huge dragon conspiracies in the world and know that the dragons have agents everywhere, seeking out the members of the Order to kill them.

### **Phoenix Family**

### **Legend**

There is a legend of a family that at one time (2,000 years ago) ruled the area that is now controlled by the city-state of Chulme. Known as the Phoenix Family, these were the king priests of the region. But their civilization was weakening as their river weakened. To avoid fading into irrelevance, they sent out diplomats and envoys. They made treaties with other cultures and typically married one of their own into their royal lines to cement these treaties. In this manner, the Phoenix Family now "controls" every royal line on Fletnern.

This is obviously nonsense, but it is the type of rumor that can grow. To the commoners, the nobles are always intermarrying, so shouldn't they all be interrelated by now? This legend has just enough truth (that the various royal families probably do have some distant relationships) and just enough fear (all the royals are really one family) to continue to be told amongst commoners and those cultures that do not have hereditary rulers.

### **The Piedspont**

### **Group**

The city state of Helatia is ruled by a Senate. What is commonly forgotten, though not technically a secret, is that there is a second, smaller body within the Senate, the Piedspont.

The Piedspont is the much smaller body having only eight seats. To vote for the members of the Piedspont, a person must own at least 100 acres of land. The name "piedspont" roughly translates to a gathering of land owners, though here the gathering is intended to mean something like a county fair.

Each body of the Senate has their own responsibilities. The Senate is a debating body where the chambers are open to the public. The larger Senate is responsible for passing laws, handling crime, and the overall operations of the city and city-state. The



Piedspont is responsible for the budget and the purse strings of the city-state. They set all tariffs and other taxes as well as establish the budgetary funds for the Senate and their various departments. This gives them great power as they can divert funds away from areas the Senate has approved and thereby stifle the Senate's intentions.

The Piedspont was designed centuries ago as a means for the land owners to retain control of the city, and it has been effective throughout the history of Helatia. This city, proud of their "democracy", is in fact ruled by a tiny council of eight members who must be wealthy land owners and are chosen only by wealthy land owners. In fact, should the Piedspont decide to, they have the authority to dissolve the Senate and demand new elections. Even further, the Piedspont's meetings are not open to the public and there is no debate allowed in the chamber. Five (of eight) votes are required for any measure to pass, but most votes are 8-0 due to previous discussions and deals.

In many ways, the Piedspont is an archaic body. Established to prevent the uneducated "rabble" from ever taking control of the city, it remains a means by which the wealthy can retain their stranglehold on the city-state. Just as in modern times, very few citizens know who is on the Finance Committee within their legislatures and therefore have very little idea of who is making the money decisions, very few people in Helatia have any idea of who is on the Piedspont or what they are truly capable of doing.

## Rimmim

## City

There is but one city on Sambrek Island, Rimmim. World famous for the use of magic in everyday life, Rimmim houses the world's most knowledgeable research mages. Enchantments can be seen on every street, and magical flight is so common that businesses cater to these soaring customers.

In Rimmim, and indeed throughout Sambrek Island, laborers are all magical creations. Zombies and skeletons work the plantations, while golems and colossuses build the dikes that hold back the ocean. Everyone is considered to be a spell caster of some sort, and those without an art are considered sub-citizens.

Monetary wealth and magical might determine political power in Rimmim. Many of the upper crust assume noble titles to show their station. Living among impossibly tall and slender towers, imagination is chic, and style is king.

## The Sisterhood of Sheltering

## Group

The Sisterhood of Sheltering is an organization of astrologers (most, but not all, of which are women). The Sisterhood is devoted to appropriately identifying and defending against major disasters that are imminent. Their chief concern is wrath of the fallen god Escremertus. The Sisterhood tells of the legend of Escremertus in this fashion: In the ages before civilizations, the gods defeated an evil god known as Escremertus. Before his fall, Escremertus had used his power over celestial objects to call down stars from the skies and use them as weapons against the other gods and their followers. In an effort to defeat this awesome enemy, the other gods banded together across previous lines of conflict. Together, they managed to form their own celestial object, one that Escremertus would not be able to control. They then guided this shooting star into Escremertus' palace, and it struck him as it passed. The star performed exactly as it had been intended. When it struck Escremertus, it prevented his escape and then flew off into the heavens. The gods were pleased and felt that their troubles were over.

The Sisterhood has since discovered that while Escremertus was unable to control the godly shooting star that has been his prison, he was able to control other objects in the skies. By guiding other objects into striking his prison star, he has managed to guide it back towards Fletnern where he plans to exact his revenge on the gods and their followers. This is the terrible future that they seek to prepare people for.

In an effort to warn people, the Sisterhood has spent generations attempting to read the stars and predict Escremertus' movements. Since he cannot directly control his prison, his movements are more chaotic, and difficult to predict. Due to their inabilities at fully

predicting his return, they have gathered up various pieces of his former weapons and shaped them into talismans. These talismans will trick Escremertus and any celestial weapons he seeks to use into believing that they have already attacked the person or home protected by the talisman and therefore leave it alone. Thus, the only chance anyone stands of not being killed when Escremertus returns is to wear one of these talismans. To further complicate things, when Escremertus does return, the gods will be far too busy fighting him to worry about their mortal followers.



### Siggeduir Caballeros

### Group

The Siggeduir Caballeros are an ancient company of noble “partisans” who were active in the Sousseze Empire. When the capital was destroyed (about 500 years ago), these cavalry soldiers were not involved in the major battles, but were instead protecting large portions of the empire. Thus they were not decimated, but remained a strong military unit.

Though the reason is unknown, this military unit did not shift to Caratok as it became the new seat of Sousseze power, but instead stayed in the far eastern and southern reaches of the Soussen lands, areas that were very dangerous then and now. They have maintained a few castles and other fortresses and continued to live separately from the current Sousseze culture.

The Siggeduir Caballeros still control large farms in their regions and act very much like feudal knights protecting their lands and people. Not much is known about their culture as they intentionally isolate themselves from outsiders.

## THE SOUNDING BOARD

The Sounding Board is the name of Board Enterprises’ weekly blog. We gather the latest and most appropriate blog postings here so they can relate to this month’s theme, but they are available online by clicking this link.

### How to Choose Your Enemies

When you need to create an organization, especially an organization that will function as a “permanent enemy”, start with just a general concept. Pick something that appeals to you, because you don’t want to use something over and over if you hate it. (One shot organizations can be things that don’t appeal to you, but nothing with longevity.) The big concept should be easy enough: a military, a school, a guild, a cult, a tribe, a cartel, whatever. Now, what are the divisions within that organization, and what are the divisions within the divisions. The bigger the organization, the more divisions there will be.

Example: A modern military might have an air force, an army, a navy with or without marines, and a coast guard. Within each of these groups are units which have component units within them, down to the squad level. A fantasy military might separate the army from the cavalry from the militia. The army might have archers and footmen, while the cavalry has heavy horse and patrollers (skirmishers).

Try to keep it real. A terrorist organization that can field hundreds of planes and tanks would not be allowed to exist within the boundaries of a major country, unless the country was supporting that terrorist organization. A



cartel that ran sixty ships and forty caravans would likely be the most powerful economic organization in the world. They would not operate in secret. Of course, these are just games, but you don't want your players to completely check their brains at the door.

How is the group of player characters going to butt heads with the organization? This is where you can plan strategy. Let's go to an example: The organization is a slave cartel, standard fantasy enemy. But the leader of the slave cartel is a dragon who secretly runs the organization through intermediaries. (The dragon is also crazy, which adds flavor later.) She (the dragon) is a mage and has been teaching a group of treacherous dark elves some of her ancient magics. This cadre forms her personal bodyguard, though in the right circumstances they would happily betray her. So much for the headquarters.

The organization has two distinct limbs, plus ancillary organizations. The one side of the cartel is the slavers selling slaves in markets where slavery is acceptable. This is actually a fairly legitimate business, though they do rely on powerful bounty hunters/slave catchers. This organization is mainly made up of warrior types, though few of them are straight melee types - more range and non-lethal types. The other side of the organization is made up of pirates that raid the coastlines, burning villages and capturing peasants as slaves. These pirates are more frequently rogue types. They rely on their fearsome reputations and the fact that no one really knows that their raids are cover for capturing slaves.

OK - does this make sense? An organization that actively sells slaves being supplied by a "brother" organization that captures slaves illegally overseen by a dragon ready to take action against anyone messing with her subsidiaries. Seems believable in a fantasy setting. You also have humans (the pirates), just about any race (the slavers), dark elves and a dragon. Seemingly a good mix. If the pirates capture someone, and a party needs to rescue them, they will have to fight the pirates and force them to tell who they gave the slave to. Then the party goes and fights the slavers, only to find that the dragon is either coming after them for revenge or the dragon chose to take that slave as her own. That should be at least three good solid missions, all from one organization. Later on, after the party defeats the dragon, any dark elf mages that escaped might be able to rebuild the organization, allowing the party to go after them again.

It might be cool to have the new head of the organization known as "the dragon" because she skinned the last head and now uses her hide as armor. That way as the party begins to investigate, they will think the head of the organization is the same dragon (or a child or something) and will be unprepared to fight a powerful dark elf mage.

An organization does not need to be made of completely different entities as described in this example, but different can make things more exciting. If all members of an organization are exactly the same, things can get dull quickly, and the players can come up with ways to defeat them more quickly. Sometimes a little bit of different can be all that's necessary. Let's take an evil snake cult example, another standard in fantasy games. In one town, the cult is completely underground, both literally and figuratively. They operate in secret and meet in secret. The party will need to investigate to find them and then attack. In the next town, the cult is seen as a perfectly normal religion and they meet openly, but keep their sinister side hidden. Here, the party knows where the enemy is, but they cannot outright attack for fear of coming under fire from the legitimate factions in the town. In the third town, the snake cult controls the town, so the characters will be outlaws if they are detected. Now the characters need to operate as the secret organization in hopes of getting past the snake cult guards. In each of these cases, the snake cult operatives will likely be very similar, but their public presence is completely different, making for three distinctive missions.

This is after all the main reason to use an organization - to link missions. If the missions are linked, you only need to motivate the characters once, plus it adds a sense of continuity to the campaign. Hopefully it will help you as well, because if the organization makes sense to you, you will have an easier time of developing it.



### **It's Bigger Than You (Parties)**

Nearly every FRPG game organizes the players / player characters into parties - groups of adventurers that

work together, typically each bringing different abilities. This is a standard “trope” of RPGs.

There are a huge number of role-playing plots that can be used if you put the party into something bigger than the party. The main one that jumps out at me is the traitor. How many really cool movies have you seen where the true action of the movie was about finding the traitor within an organization? But if you try to do that with just the party, then you force the players to work against each other. I have never seen that work out. So if you want to have a traitor hunt, but the party won't work, what do you do? You make it bigger than the party.

By having the party work within a bigger organization, you can activate a traitor while still keeping the party together and working as a team. This can be



great for a murder mystery plot. If you make one of the PCs the bad guy (even if he has good reasons) you will never get the trust back within the party. Worse yet, you may never get the trust back with that entire group of players (friends). They may claim to be adults and be able to work through it, but you can never fully separate player knowledge from character knowledge.

But what organizations? It can be simple: an adventurers' guild, a school or university, an army unit, or a secret society. Secret societies make the perfect choices for stuff like this because they are secret. It's tougher for another member of the adventurers' guild to “betray” the guild, because there really isn't anything there. With a secret society, there are almost always rivals. This gives something meaty to betray.

Why push this line? Because with a secret society, it is worthwhile to make up enough NPCs that could be traitors to the organization. I like this as a first mission within the organization - You guys are not the traitors because you weren't here / members when the first bad thing happened. Therefore, we need you to find out who the traitor is. Then when they succeed - they know everybody who is in the secret organization and those NPCs you wrote up are still of value to the campaign (other than the traitor who is likely dead).

That plan / plot works, but then the players don't get the emotional hit of actually being betrayed, because they haven't worked with these people before. You know how to do that? You roll it up like this, first mission and all. The party finds and exposes the traitor. But they don't realize that the traitor they found was the underling. The boss traitor is still active in the organization, and it will take a whole bunch more missions before they are able to realize that the mole is still active and then go find that one. Now, they can run through the same group of NPCs but this time hopefully find the boss - someone who has been their “friend” for months.

There are countless traitor scenarios as well as others that require the party to have friends that are not PCs but instead NPCs. If the PCs' whole world is the party, then there is so much that gets left behind. By making it bigger than them, you give yourself so many more plots to work with.

### **When it Really is that Dangerous**

Adventurers typically fear nothing. They strongly believe that their armor and healing spells will prevent them from dying every time. Or maybe it is that they trust their GM not to kill them off, not to put them up against something that they really cannot handle. That needs to end!

But what if you really can't kill them? What if playing by the rules means that you cannot kill the PCs unless you unleash some massive dragon on them or a full out army of super ninjas? What if your game rules really have made the party the most powerful folks in the world? How do you give them pause?

You threaten their family and friends. If the party is the most powerful people in the world, then they must have some ties to others. Even if they started the campaign as orphans, they will have developed contacts and friends along the way. Who have they done missions for? Who have they saved? Who supplied them with weapons, spells, healing, shelter? Who do they care about?

Hopefully if you bring back a young “princess” that they saved earlier in their careers and put her in danger again, they are going to have an appropriate reaction. If their first question after hearing, “Help me, you're my



only hope” is “How much?”, well then your players and their characters are evil sociopaths and you should flee the room and the building. (No, really, get them help!) But normal people will feel a sense of attachment, even if it is “We saved this girl once before and no one is going to undo the safety we gave her.”

Hopefully in the playing of the campaign, the party has built up contacts, at least the bartender at their favorite bar. If you as GM really haven't fleshed out their activities outside of combat, you can fake it. You can tell them that the person coming to them for help is their favorite bartender or waiter or blacksmith. Better yet, if you know who trains them - Well, that's an instant “family” for the PCs.

But who is the enemy? This is where the secret societies as permanent enemies become so valuable. If Joe the Evil Wizard threatens your family and friends, the party will go kill him. If the Evil Family Who Has Been Here Since the Dawn of Civilization threatens someone, the party will never be able to be everywhere at once. They cannot defend mom, Bob the Bartender, Milli the maid, Mayor William, and the little sister all at the same time. And the secret group has multiple assassins, able to strike without warning.

But why? Why do you need to threaten the party's friends? I think there are two really good (mission and role-play driving) reasons. Role-play first: What happens when telling your significant other about a secret society puts them in harm's way? If the secret society is going to try to kill everyone who knows about them, then telling a loved one about them puts them directly in harm's way. So now you have to lie to that loved one, at least by omission. That is the kind of thing that destroys relationships, and yet you would be doing it for their own good. That's real drama!

But for missions: If the super secret group threatens friends and demands that the heroes do something for them, then the super secret group can force the party to do missions for them. If you're going to do this, use this as an opportunity to let the party learn more about the super secret group. There must be something about them that isn't all horrible evil / destroy the world, right? Very few groups are able to survive to become real threats if the mission is as boring as greed. The heroes may not agree that killing every poor person in the world is going to make the world a better place, but at least they would know that the “evil” group is hoping to wipe out poverty, famine and even plague; they're just doing it through a horrific means.

Making the party question why they are doing missions or if they should do them at all is a real turning point for a gaming group. This is role-playing - what they claimed they were doing. It forces them to truly consider what their character is all about. Even if you think your players are only there for the slaughter of monsters, this

type of event can really hook them on their characters and on your game!



### **How to Retcon without Looking Like You're Retconning**

I started The World of Fletnern when I was brand new to gaming. In those days you pretty much either played Greyhawk or you made up your own world, and we usually made up our own worlds (except for those guys who insisted they could GM Middle Earth - that never worked).

So I had no idea what I was doing. I had adventuring parties fighting wars in my mid to late teens without the slightest idea of why anyone would ever retreat from battle. It was grand! It was exciting! It was memorable! But it made no sense!

As I became more mature and more experienced with both running campaigns and world building, I started to question numerous ideas I had used earlier. I didn't want to scrap the world I'd put so much time into, but there were things I just couldn't explain away. So I did explain them away - I retconned.

Before I get into how I did it, I do want to set a level playing field. Some of you might have different definitions of retconning. The internet definition is: to retrospectively revise an aspect of a fictional work, typically by introducing a new piece of information that imposes a different interpretation on previously described events. What I mean is: pretending you knew something back then that you just put in today.

And what was the best tool I ever had for retconning? Secret societies. Yep - when in doubt - blame it on the Illuminati. Why? Because the secret societies are really powerful, so they could influence events. They're really secretive, so they could do it without other people knowing what they did. And they have motives that are never really understood, so even if it seems a bit out of character for them, it might have a deeper meaning that has not yet been discovered.

My best example is this: The Battle at Rhum. During the Conquering War, the city-state of Garnock (think Roman Legion) attacked the city of Rhum (think fantasy era Hamburg). There was no reason the Latvich army of Garnock should have lost, but they did. In reality, they did because the player characters were on the side of Rhum and they were throwing fireballs and fighting “level 0” soldiers, and things like that - stupid rules that allowed a tiny number of PCs to decimate huge numbers of soldiers.

So now that I’m older and wiser, I needed to explain all of that away. I don’t play that game anymore, so I no longer need to worry about those same stupid rules, no matter what version they happen to be on. And here’s how I did it. First, the mundane - The Latvich army really had been split into four. One quarter remained at home guarding their home city; one quarter had taken the city of Nanerette, one quarter was occupying the recently taken city of Parnania, and only the remaining quarter was at Rhum.

The army of Rhum was made up mainly of ex-adventurers. This has always been part of their history. So these ex-adventurers were far better guerrilla fighters than the legionaries. I like to equate it to the American minute men firing Kentucky long rifles from sniper posts and picking off officers instead of standing in long lines and musketry away at each other. Plus, there were supposed to have been allies there that I never really accounted for when I was a kid, so numbers could be jacked up reasonably.

But what I really think makes the difference is having one of the secret societies upset that one of their rivals was profiting off the war machine built by the Lats. Now, even just the hint of a secret society being involved can give question to what people thought they knew. What did they do, this secret society?

Well, honestly, I wanted to credit them for poisoning the Lat officers, either giving them dysentery or poisoning them to look like they had dysentery. Admittedly, this came during a discussion of whether the French knights really lost to English longbowmen, or whether dysentery was the real issue that brought down armies. The fact that the Lats had been in the field for months made it entirely possible. Did a secret society get involved or was it natural? The world may never know.

### **What Does your (Fantasy) World War Mean to Me?**

Quite often, adventuring parties wind up saving the world from major threats. They might stop a demon army invasion or close a portal trying to suck the entire world into some hellish dimension. Quite often, these heroic efforts go without ever being noticed by the commoners of the lands that were just saved, but the lack of “fame” goes beyond that.

Let’s assume that a major war is raging in your world. Four countries have formed two sides, and they are all mixed up in a massive war. To the people of those regions, everything is horrible and topsy-turvy. They don’t know if they will survive the war and if they do survive the war will there still be enough food and farmland left to sustain themselves? It’s bad!

But go a couple of countries over. They don’t care. They aren’t noticing the war, because they’ve never been more than 20 miles away from home, and there are no battles within 20 miles of their house. Maybe after the war, they will learn that food is scarce in that region and they might be able to make a few extra coins taking advantage of the shortage and selling their wares to the right merchants. But they still won’t really “notice” the war.



Not until bedraggled soldiers begin marching past their homes and villages will they fully realize that something really is or more likely did go on. So what might cause this? Well, one side probably lost and one side won. Were the losers able to retain their lands? Not likely. So the soldiers now need to find somewhere to live. This was the common theme throughout the later parts of the Roman Empire. Some barbarian horde would attack its neighbors and defeat them. Those neighbors then needed to go somewhere in order to live, and being battle veterans (at least now they are) they attacked their neighbors in hopes of taking their lands. And the dominoes fall. So maybe they aren’t bedraggled soldiers, but instead raiding and war parties.

Now, the local commoners need to know about the war, because now they’re in it. Those raiders aren’t just orcs out for a stroll, they are a people terrified of starving to death and willing to take what they need from others. To the newly attacked, they are an evil horde of barbarians, but more truthful they are battle ready refugees.

The point is that no matter how big and important the war may seem to the people in it, it likely doesn’t matter to the average farmer who isn’t in it. But it should, because there are always consequences. The bigger the action, and war is a pretty big action, the bigger the consequences. The ripples will spread out

from the center of contact until they've touched a lot more people.

If as a world builder and game master, you are assuming that a defeated army "vanishes" because it was defeated, you are missing major opportunities, and being unrealistic. That defeated army may be vastly smaller than it was before, but some pockets of it still exist. Do they become raiders as we've laid out? Do they become mercenaries? Do they form into a tiny rebel alliance looking to overthrow their oppressors and regain their homeland? Well, that's up to you, but they really don't vanish.

### Two Birds - One Blog

The two birds - common FRPG plot points of: secret societies and alchemy turning lead into gold

I am not a big fan of the way secret societies are depicted. The Illuminati are huge and powerful, why? Too often because their foreign. The real group was pathetic. The Masons hid billions of dollars of treasure where even they couldn't find it? Why not use that money to try and be the Illuminati. The Seven Sisters - now them I could sort of get behind, but I've spent my life in the corporate culture and I am probably biased.

So what did I do for my world when I felt it needed this sort of shadowy super power? I created the "Gold Guild". I was trying to justify why the ratio of copper to silver to gold was always 100:10:1. Shouldn't a gold rush change that? Or a slow down in silver mining. Or a war using copper or bronze weaponry? So why is that ratio so solid throughout time? Or is it?

I created the Gold Guild. Sort of like what most people think of DeBeers, the Gold Guild is a consortium of the largest gold producers in the world, where they control the world markets for gold through the supply chain. This means they have an enormous stockpile of gold, but they only let out a trickle in order to keep the value of it much higher than it would normally be. Why are they so powerful? Because they have been the wealthiest "families" in the world for more than 1,000 years. Oh, and they are sitting on a pile of gold that they could flood the markets with, thus destroying the world economy. Because some of my play testers will read this, I need to keep the details close to the vest on these guys, but they are able to control politics on two continents, at least for the last centuries. (Actually some historically significant events are attributed to these guys going back around 3,000 years, but they were only getting started back then.)

Why can't fantasy alchemists turn lead into gold? Well, I assume they can. Though I haven't put stats around it yet, I have assumed for a while that a skilled alchemist could turn small amounts of base metals into small amounts of gold. The main issue being that he could probably make more money by making and selling healing

potions than he would making gold, so why bother? But here's where the Gold Guild comes in. They have agents placed throughout the world. If an alchemist starts "printing his own money", the Gold Guild will send agents who will assassinate the alchemist and take all of his research away. Yes, they are a global secret society and have the money and power to monitor just about every town/city with a population >100,000 folks. Even if the alchemist is hiding in a little town, eventually they will find out. Those agents are actually supposed to be listening for new gold strikes, prospectors coming in with stories of new mines or new gold fields. The Gold Guild steps in before the gold rush starts by buying out the prospector (or causing him to have an accident). There is a materiality issue here. The Gold Guild wouldn't step in if an alchemist was producing gold he needed for some experiment and was only churning out a pound a month. As long as he kept it really small, he would likely be unimportant to them.

So what did I do here? I created an active global secret society that controls the world economy and profits from it. These guys can be fantastic enemies to any adventuring party, permanent enemies who keep melding back into the shadows and showing new, formerly unknown, segments of their organization. I justified the stagnation of the world markets in precious metals. Probably didn't really, but there is a kernel of truth here which is most often enough for that willful suspension of disbelief. And I justified why the most important goal of the alchemists of Earth never seems to be an issue for FRPG alchemists. I love it when a plan comes together!





## LIFESTYLES OF THE MAGICAL AND MUNDANE

It is impossible to describe an “average” day in the life of a member of a secret society, since each organization is different. There are some similarities though. For members, the secret society is secret, which means it cannot take too much of your time or it will become less secret. So for most people, life just goes on. This means that adventurers can be members of a secret society and still go out adventuring, sometimes.

You don’t talk about your secrets, unless you are with other members of the society. Therefore, you rarely talk about your secrets. It takes a special personality to hold secrets in. For many, this secrecy is a burden, something sapping their strength all the time. For others, it is a hidden glow they keep just to themselves. They have secrets. They have power. But others don’t know about it. This means the secret society member has a power others not only don’t have but cannot have and cannot take away. This leads to some not so pleasant personality traits.

In order to hold in these secrets, the society members need to believe themselves to be above the average “joe”. After all, they are the ones who exclusively have this knowledge; no one else. Delusions of grandeur may be too far a call on this, but they do have elevated views of themselves.

So let’s think of the top three societies. The Gold Guild members, even the minor ones, know that they control the global economy. They are typically well-disciplined, but they understand that the world economy is a fragile thing that only stabilizes because of them. So they tend to mistrust the financial “leaders”, while

questioning the value of everything. Still, they are arrogant and confident in their unlimited power.

The Phoenix Family is more conceited than arrogant. Their “power” comes from their bloodline. This is unquestionably something that you cannot have and cannot take away from one of them. The Family is a tradition. Very few members are informed of what they truly are unless they are raised in the Family. This allows them to hold onto their secrets and traditions as they are trained from birth. But they are far less disciplined than their rivals.

The Knights of the Divine Mission are most commonly brought into the secrets later in life, but like the Gold Guild, they are disciplined. The Knights are perhaps the most public of all the top societies, so their secrets might be easier to keep, as not all of them are truly secrets. They are also the most ambitious of the societies since they have not yet accomplished what they are hoping to. This also has them on the lookout for new members and, unlike the others, they might be inclined to bring others into the fold when they probably shouldn’t.

While the Gold Guild members may work and the Phoenix Family may lay around, it is only the Knights who are actively training to get better. As they continue their mission to dominate the world, they continue to train, to recruit, and to prepare for whatever may come.

Each society should be considered separately. The means by which they keep their secrets and the secrets that they need to keep will continually vary, but the secrets and the paranoia that typically goes with it, are in many ways the same.



# NEWS OF FLETNERN

## Timeline of Some of the Incidents Attributed to Secret Societies

- ~285HR: Founding of Chuhlme (Phoenix Family involved, but not directing)
- 310 HR: Great Temple of Nevyev built (not directed by Phoenix Family)
- 785HR: Great Temple rededicated to Uilsilar (Phoenix Family)
- 1062-1088HR: Gold Mountain Skirmishes - Orcish groups war with Rinnear dwarves (Gold Guild)
- ~1085HR: Rinnear dwarves begin to move north to Rock Cove (Gold Guild)
- ~100P: Souezze Empire invades Boundless Jungle, leading to the end of the empire (Phoenix Family)
- 429P-434P: Dwarven Civil War (Gold Guild)
- 626P: Start of the Conquering War (Phoenix Family)
- 626P: Army of Garnock repelled at Rhum (Phoenix Family / Gold Guild)
- 645P: Lord Stephan wins his first election as Mayor of Rhum (and goes on to win re-election in 650P and 655P) (Knights of the Divine Quest)
- 649P: Darren Baldoheir Stermdehck elected Prince General of Myork (Knights of the Divine Quest)
- 652P: Construction begun on the Citadel of Baderuic (Knights of the Divine Quest)

### The Anglic Tower of Scaret

During the Conquering War, the city-state of Myork sent troops to Scaret to reinforce the troops there. As is usual for Myork, these troops were heavy cavalry. The standard troops of Scaret are long bow wielding wardens, so these troops were never going to be getting along. The cavalry forces were riding about the region, as a show of force. Throughout this period, the Bortens felt better for having the Anglic troops here.

When the war was over, the cavalry stayed. Not only did they stay, but due to problems with the Bortens they needed their own space. They purchased land from a local lord and became vassals. This allowed them the ability to bear weapons. It took the brilliant builders of Myork just under five years to craft a full fortress for the Anglic cavalry troop.

This fortress is known as the Anglic Tower in Scaret. It has been decades that the cavalry troops have been based here and continue to roam the countryside. What the Bortens of Scaret don't know (or perhaps don't believe) is that these patrols have consistently found Latvich troops in Borten territory. The Angles have not helped the situation by constantly referring to the Latvich

troops as "death squads". While not wrong, it is certainly a sensational way of describing them.

Once the cavalry was no longer finding Latvich troops in Borten territories, the cavalry started to range southward to seek out goblin raiders. The Angles had no idea where the borders were, and they didn't care. They saw any attack on orcish or goblin warriors as acceptable. They avoided attacking villages or other obvious permanent dwellings, but they considered less durable shelters (like tents or teepees) as raider bases.

It cannot be too surprising that the orcs and goblins saw these cavalry attacks as a declaration of war. They moved their own cavalry into the region, but with small units over a broad acreage, the two sides never found each other. Frustrated, Emperor Baratock of the Wembic Nation issued a proclamation demanding that the Angles leave the fortress and the continent.

After decades of having the cavalry within their borders, the local Bortens were starting to get frustrated with the Angles as well. They felt the Angles were "lording it over" them, and they may have been right. The Anglic knights were noble born and expected more than the common militia men of Scaret. The knights were also career military men as opposed to the wardens who had other full time jobs.

With cultural strain coming from the population and military threats from the Wembic Empire, the government of Scaret was forced to get rid of the Anglic knights. Through a careful negotiation, the two cities came together and decided the Angles would give the tower to the city of Scaret and withdraw from the continent, at least publicly. Tensions have lessened, but not been completely resolved.

The Tower is the symbol of the unrest between the Bortens and the Angles. Throughout the city, there had been brass plaques memorializing those knights who had been lost fighting back the Latvich raiders. These were often stolen or vandalized. Only the ones located within the tower remain. While the fortress was being built, the city of Myork also promised 16 balistaes to Scaret. These were not delivered immediately, which seemed to strain their relations as well.

In the current time (shortly after the turnover of the tower), both sides remain upset. The compromise of handing over the tower upset the Angles who feel they were once again disrespected after providing safety and security for the people of Scaret. The people of Scaret feel that the knights of Myork were attempting to subjugate them by causing them to become reliant on the knights. In this instance, the knights are right and the people of Scaret are wrong.

The Anglic forces did pull out, most of them returning to Myork, though a few have stayed behind as "guests" of various Borten lords. This leaves Scaret defended solely by her wardens. The goblins of the Hill

Country see this as a clear opportunity. No longer concerned about retribution from the heavy cavalry, they have begun to raid the Borten villages. While the Borten nobles may have been upset when the Anglic cavalry ran roughshod over their crops, they are now defended by wardens who will not cross into another lord's lands and are therefore unwilling to pursue any raiders.

Although it has not yet come out, some years in the future it will be known that while the Angles were patrolling the Borten lands, they were also working to craft a peace treaty with Garnock (specifically the Steel Plume faction). This treaty was driven by the Knights of the Divine Quest. They were working for the opening of the gates of Garnock and encouraging trade between Garnock and Scaret. They were also looking for an ally against the Wembic Nation who would never join the Knights in their global quest. Had the Knights been more successful in the early stages, they would not have built the tower. It was to be a further threat of the Angles being a permanent menace on the border.

The Knights were also attempting to form a treaty with Dalavar, specifically to prevent slavers from raiding the Quassim Islands. These negotiations broke down quickly. First, the government in Dalavar is weak. Plus the slaving runs bring too much money to the Dharvic Princes. Both of these treaty attempts would be considered scandalous when/if it gets out.

Elightel 6, 653: The Wembic Empire sends a proclamation to the Anglic commander at the Tower. Copies are sent to most of the major rulers in the Central and Southern Plains. The unstated math is that there are less than 500 Angles and more than a million Wembics. (See below)

Shade 30, 654: Word on the streets of Scaret is that problems with Myork would lead to huge economic problems in Scaret. Word from outside the city is that people are sick of the knights and want their autonomy back.

Endnal 13, 654: Rumor coming out of Scaret and the Borten towns to the south: Wembic agents have begun to advise Bortens that it is their best interests to poison the horses and knights in the Anglic fortress. They need to do this before a Wembic army comes north.

Catamib 12, 654 The government of Scaret announces that it will begin taking over the fortress from the Anglic knights. A Bortish commander will be announced within a month.

Sky 18, 654 Commander Fein McBreggur takes command of the Anglic Fortress. A big show is made of the Anglies getting back on ships and sailing back to Myork.

This proclamation is a copy of the notice sent to the commander of the Anglic fort outside of the city of Scaret. Copies were provided to other important political figures as a "courtesy". The original was written in the Borten language, but the copies were written in their local languages.

**A PROCLAMATION  
FROM  
KING BARATOCK  
MONARCH OF THE WEMBIC NATION  
PRINCE OF THE ORCISH TRIBES**

*To the commander of the Anglic fort outside of the city of Scaret:*

*Be forewarned. The Wembic Nation has been watching you, and we are aware of your aggressive actions. We will not endure your presence on our border.*

*Your racist propaganda has reached our ears, and it shows your ignorance. It is true that the Anglic troops are outfitted with armor and an abundance of weapons, but they do not have the heart of Wembic troops. We are fighting for our homes, not across a sea for some fool's quest at genocide. We are willing to fight and die for our ideals and our countrymen.*

*As the absolute ruler of the Wembic Nation, I will send a dozen of my brave soldiers to the eternal battlefields for every cowardly knight you have hiding atop your armored horses. Your small force has no hope of victory, no hope of comfort, no hope of survival.*

*I hereby give the fortress built by the Anglies to the people of Scaret. Should the Angles continue to occupy this fortification, I will send troops to slaughter them. I will not tolerate this affront to the Bortens and this constant threat on my border.*

*You have been warned. I expect you leave the continent and never return.*

## Cross Purposes

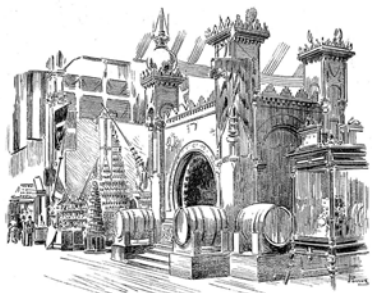
The Phoenix Family had economic interests in the Conquering War and actively encouraged Garnock to begin taking other cities. They were heavily behind Garnock, including supplying them with weaponry, negotiating on their behalf with other powers on Drentae, and manipulating rivals with the Garnock government. The Phoenixes also helped them to draft an extensive plan for what they would do with these additional lands once they had taken them.

But Garnock failed to take more than Parnania and Nanerette. Despite this, some of the plans made by Garnock are being executed today. Though very few would understand their origin, some of these works, including additional grist mills in the Central Plains and cheese factories farther north, are coming to fruition. But why? Two reasons:

First, the Phoenix Family was able to place some of their members in charge of various small land holdings after the war. If the rightful heirs had been killed or run off, the Family was able to maneuver some of their people into the proper places. They then made funds available to these members in order to allow them to build additional facilities.

Second, the Knights of the Divine Quest have not been idle in these areas either. Though typically operating in the Rhoric regions, the Knights have sponsored industrial efforts for some of their members. These have typically followed the same principles that were seen in the Garnock plans, including cheese factories and other industrializations.

When the Knights of the Divine Quest were originally established, several of the key members were also members of the Phoenix Family. While the Family's influence has waned over the years, it is not entirely gone. So the points that the Family made into the Garnock plan have now influenced both societies. Further, many of these plans were just good sense. Whether it is the Knights, the Family, or some other group or government eyeing military conquest, the troops need to be fed. Feeding troops on bread and cheese is far easier than feeding them on carrots and beans. So the move towards agricultural goods that are easier to turn into military rations and/or ship across long distances is of value to both organizations.



## WHAT'S MISSING

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

**Fletnern Wiki:** As we mentioned, all the **GM Only** entries have been deleted. This really is to keep any players from learning too much and spooling the surprises they should get while playing in the world of Fletnern.

**How to Play a - Secret Society:** What's it like to hold in all those secrets for so long? It starts to affect your personality, and usually not in a good way.

**How to GM a - Secret Society:** There are some classic conspiracies involving secret societies, and we're giving you some examples. Uncharacteristically, we're also comparing them to the modern day rumors and legends, so we're walking through how it can work in multiple genres of RPGs.

**By the Numbers:** One of the biggest secrets in the world has to do with the Gold-Silver-Copper Conundrum. Without sounding too much like your economics professor, we walk through how this ratio can be maintained in your game world and what the consequences are. There are always consequences!

**Monsters & Other Menaces:** This is the heart and soul of this edition, a list of some of the most powerful secret societies in Fletnern, what they have accomplished, what they hope to accomplish, and how they plan to go about it. As we usually do - This isn't just a list of organizations you can use in your game but examples of how to construct secret societies no matter what their motivating force is or the source of their power. In other words, it is a horde of ideas for you to use as is or to inspire you to develop your own.

**Campaign Starter Kit - In Too Deep:** What happens when you start messing around with secret societies, even when you don't know that you are? Here's a way for your players to find out.

**Church Bells:** One of the major secret societies in Fletnern is based in religion and dealings with the gods. So here's some history of those gods and religions.

**A Funny Thing Happened:** Some ideas on how to include the standard tropes, but also how to turn them on their heads.

**Pull Back the Curtain:** More about creating your own secret societies for use in your game and world.

**Y? Y? Y!:** Why your world can benefit from including secret societies, and why the major ones we detail in this edition have become the world powers that they are.

## IN CONCLUSION

So, we get that this isn't what it's all about, but we had fun with this edition! Most of our play-testers were learning things they didn't know before, and the conversations were really great. This really is a fun topic, and can lead in so many different directions. The only hard part is keeping them straight and not forgetting any.

We haven't exactly hidden the elephant in the room this edition, but we haven't faced it head on: What's true? Just because a lot of people are absolutely convinced that something is true, doesn't mean it is. Maybe you want to leave the Gold Guild rumors exactly as they are, but they are all false. Wow, that puts an incredible spin on the whole thing, and would be a blast to play. You know there will be comment out there claiming to be the Gold Guild - how much more fun would it be if it were just a scam? Or the comment thought it was a scam and it is real? See, so many different directions!

As a GM, you almost have to choose one of these and make it fake, if for no other reason than to keep your players honest. They might get a hold of this book and have inside knowledge they shouldn't have, so changing something puts them off part of that advantage. Or they might just need to learn that the things you tell them as their GM are not necessarily true, and they need a little more of an investigative spirit (aka cynical mind).

So honestly, we hope you have had and will have as much fun with this as we did!

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Why? Well, first, you'll get the full edition of this book; that's the GM's Edition, and not just the World Walker edition. But if you want to help us along and sponsor us at \$1, then you'll get the World Walker edition emailed to you at the end of every month, instead of having to go out and find it mid-month when it becomes available to the general public. The GM's edition is usually double or triple the length of the World Walker edition, but that might not be what you're looking for.

Far more important to us, you'll become part of this community we're so interested in: a community of role-players, game masters and world builders, sharing ideas, and sharing our hobby - for many of us, our passion.

You'll be able to participate in polls and other ways to let us know what you're thinking. We thought Secret Societies would be interesting, but a low priority. You folks told us differently, and we changed things around. That's what we really want out of this! Publishing material in a "black box" and trying to fully understand what you folks want simply by sales data has not been fun and honestly has not been as successful as we had hoped we could be. But this feels right, and we want you to be a part of it!