

Skies of Glass Micro Setting

Introduction

The micro setting of a role-playing game defines the people, places, and things that are unique to a limited area and not exerting any significant effect on the broader setting. For our sample setting, we chose a small trade town in Tennessee. This town uses the template we designed for our micro setting, though we left out a few sections that won't make sense until later in the series. Those sections will likely be released after the appropriate shows. For more information on developing the micro setting for a new game, download episode 33 of Fear the Boot.

I. Sample Micro-Setting

Linden, Tennessee

People came and went from Linden everyday. At times Red swore it had no permanent residents, though his own business, situated at the far edge of town, likely contributed to this. Nonetheless, he was accustomed to seeing all manner of folk pass through here, and he had learned how to read them all.

"A Harrington brake system will work just fine for a large truck," he said, giving his customer sufficient space to peer beneath the vehicle.

"No, this won't work." The young man straightened up, brushing the dust off his hands. "It must be a Blackwell model 17b or nothing at all."

"I don't know any truck that needs a 17b. What model are you repairing?" He already knew the answer, but he was curious whether the visitor would confess it.

"That's not your concern. I have the gold on me. Now, do you have the part or not?"

"No. I'm sorry, but I don't."

"That's too bad." The stranger took his hat from the place he'd hung it on a dilapidated tractor. He scanned the junkyard to see if anyone else had come along and noticed him there. Then with nothing more than a nod, he snatched up his rifle and took his leave.

Red glanced at the Blackwell 17b laying on the ground only a few yards away beneath a dirty blanket, disassembled, but otherwise in excellent condition. He was glad the man hadn't recognized it. The braking system had only one use: it was a specialty item, designed for a 30 ton assault vehicle, and no one would worry about making it stop unless they'd found a way to make it move and shoot.

The old man tucked his hands in his grease-lined pockets and shuffled across his junkyard. He'd best go see the Mayor and let him know, preferably before his wife returned.

I. At a Glance

Linden sits atop lush, wooded hills along the western shore of the Buffalo River. The area has warm, humid weather, with sufficient rainfall to support dense vegetation.

The town has a population of about 1,000 people, though it is frequently visited by nearby farmers or traveling merchants. Shops, homes, and workshops line its roads, the mix of modern and archaic buildings (some dating back to the 19th century) giving the town an eclectic look. The citizens of Linden take great pride in their city, and it is well maintained.

While Linden was of little significance before the nuclear war, its importance has grown quite a bit since. If you're looking for raucous nightlife and seedy deals, this town is not for you. However, if you're looking for honest work and a market for trading supplies, you'll find what you need in Linden. And not only is it a stable township and center of local commerce, but it's also home to one of the most impressive collections of working vehicles in the state.

II. History

Being such a small town, Linden was never targeted by nuclear warheads. As news of the worldwide attacks unfolded, most people stuck to the nearest media outlet or fled home to tend to their loved ones. Once the majority of broadcast stations had gone offline, people started trickling into town, hoping to talk

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to neighbors and learn what might come next. By nightfall, the town square was packed with people, and to Linden's credit, they remained peaceful.

The town's Mayor, Frederick Black, had spent the evening trying to get information from state and federal agencies. Realizing they had all either collapsed or focused their efforts on larger cities, he knew Linden was on its own. The citizens would need direction to make it through this tragedy, so he hastily prepared an action plan, and around 8:00pm he emerged from city hall and addressed the people gathered in the town square. He called on them to return to their homes, share their material resources with those in need, and do what they could to keep vital services operating. The people complied, and this gave Mayor Black time to build a detailed vision for the town's future.

The only way to keep the town from collapsing was to keep the people fed and busy. Anyone that had important skills such as medicine, farming, or handiwork was put to work. Those lacking such skills were assigned to aid them and learn from them.

Though the town remained peaceful for a while, the hardship of the new life and lingering emotional shock of the nuclear war started to crack its unity. Refugees from less fortunate towns also began squatting in and around the city, putting a great strain on its resources.

On June 18th, 2109, a riot engulfed the city, leaving eleven people dead and many buildings in the northwest of town burnt to the ground. Mayor Black raised the alarm, beckoning all able-bodied and willing citizens to defend their homes. The mustered citizens were brutal in putting down the riot, but they were also quite effective. Those responsible for the riot were executed and the rank-and-file participants were driven away.

While the affair lasted less than a day, its effects still linger on. The citizen militia became the de facto method for protecting the town from large threats, and the near unconditional support for the mayoral office was solidified as a way of life. When Frederick Black died from cancer in 2123, he was buried in a choice plot outside of town, honored like a passing king, his grave marked by a stone plaque that enumerated his contributions to the city.

Another mayor, Kevin Black, nephew of Frederick, was elected thereafter. In the tradition of the first Mayor Black, he too remained in office for life. He dedicated his time in office to continuing the work of his uncle. Farms and workshops were expanded, and a formalized system of schooling was created to pass on both general education and specialized knowledge of critical trades. Kevin also opened talks with the Tennessee Guard -- a military organization created from the Tennessee National Guard -- regarding security, trade laws, and other matters of state-wide interest. Kevin died in 2152 and was buried alongside his uncle.

The third post-bomb Mayor of Linden was Lewis Steinmann. Being a harsh and humorless man, he lacked the diplomatic tact of the previous Mayors. He demanded greater output from the town's industries, passed burdensome laws, and irritated the town's most respected members. He survived only until October 2153 when he fell dead during an inspection of the streets. Doctors declared the cause of death to be heart failure, but there was no shortage of conspiracy theories that called it an assassination.

Mike Townsend was elected as the fourth mayor. He was an excellent manager and affable man, though also debatably insane. His eccentricities would have cost him the election, however, his opponent was the renowned scavenger-cum-mechanic, Red Cohen, who was generally understood to be disinterested in the office, likely put into the race by his wife, Loretta. Even more damaging was Loretta's prominent role in the most credible conspiracy theories surrounding Mayor Steinmann's death.

Mayor Townsend is still serving as the leader of Linden today. He has reduced and reorganized the law books, striking down the vast majority of his predecessor's edicts and simplifying older laws. These moves have won him a great deal of love from the community. He has also created a formalized treaty with the Tennessee Guard, granting them permission to monitor trade in the town and protect his mayoral competitor, Red Cohen, whose so-called junkyard is considered one of the best treasure troves of pre-bomb machines in the state.

Despite his many intelligent moves, he's made no attempts to hide his odd behavior which annoys Loretta Cohen and occasionally wins her an ally in her effort to remove the Mayor from office. Tensions between the two are generally kept quiet from outsiders, but they're an inescapable part of life in the city.

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III. Culture

The citizens of Linden are predominantly Caucasian, though several families of African descent live within the town. Unless a traveler from a distant place is passing through, you will hear no language other than English. Most citizens are at least marginally Christian, Protestants outnumbering Catholics roughly five-to-one.

Dress is typical for an American city, though agrarian and frontier influences are visible in the rugged fabrics and functional designs. Most would prefer overalls and woolen coats to finer fashions, the latter typically appearing only on Sunday mornings or special occasions.

Views on sensitive subjects such as race and religion vary from person-to-person. However, since the threats of a post-bomb world are never far from anyone's mind, most are willing to live peacefully with their neighbors in the interest of mutual survival.

The citizens of Linden value stability and simplicity. They prefer the status quo to adventurous ideas, the safety of home to wandering outside of town. They have no interest in meddling in outside affairs and do not take kindly to outsiders meddling in their own. They may be a bit slow to trust the intentions of travelers that pass through the town, but will always show them courtesy and hospitality.

IV. Governance

Linden is governed by a Mayor who is the sole authority and lawmaker for the entire town, though he will often defer decisions to other citizens when his workload is too great or the decision is out of his expertise. Examples of such deferment include the current Mayor's appointing of a Sheriff for town law enforcement and his reliance on Minister Barrows for matters of diplomacy.

The Mayor is elected on the second Sunday of every year. There is no term limit on the Mayor's office, so if he can survive the frequent elections, he could serve indefinitely. The elections are conducted in the court square with every adult resident voting by a show of hands.

As with most things, the residents of Linden keep their government simple. There are no layers of bureaucracy, no complicated legal codes, and trials are decided by respected elders of the town.

V. Economy

Linden enjoys easy access to multiple rivers, a lush landscape, and constant visitation from merchant caravans. Local trades include farming, fishing, and logging. The town itself is primarily geared toward retailing the goods made in the surrounding lands, though it also has skilled artisans employed in workshops for woodworking, leather tanning, tailoring, and blacksmithing.

Since Linden sees so many travelers, the town is an excellent place to obtain luxury goods such as Linden Ale, a wide assortment of candies, and formal clothing. Some of these goods are brought in from other places, but most are made locally.

One can readily obtain mechanical devices here as well, mostly from the graveyard of machines accumulated by Red Cohen. It is not uncommon for people to travel great distances in search of an unusual part, salvageable machine, or even just Red's know-how.

VI. Noteworthy Places

Courthouse - The courthouse is a red brick building, trimmed with white stone, constructed in the early 20th century. Its simple, rectangular architecture is reminiscent of many schoolhouses and government buildings constructed during that age. The public is allowed on the lower levels, which include an art gallery, courtroom, and library. The top two levels are the abode of the Mayor, the office having been moved there from the old city hall decades ago. There are no true judges in Linden, so disputes are typically overhead by the Mayor or a well respected citizen he appoints to stand in his place.

Court Square - Also called the town square, court square is the plaza located in front of the historic courthouse, roughly in the middle of town. It is a common attraction for those passing through, and it is not uncommon to see locals or outsiders pausing to rest here. A handful of shops and food carts have sprung up around the square to take advantage of this traffic. The square is also a common gathering

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place for town meetings or celebrations, and is always decorated by the townsfolk to reflect the current holiday or season.

Linden Methodist Church - The church is a brick building with a white, gabled roof and wooden doors. It is not the only religious establishment in the town, but it is the most popular, giving it great significance in local life. Sunday services are usually full to standing room only, and numerous people will visit the church throughout the week, seeking the religious advice or prayerful support of the resident Minister.

Red's Junkyard - The name of Red's business establishment is a bit of a misnomer. His large, fenced property and wooden workshop are home to some of the most valuable salvage in the state. The land near his house is lined with old vehicles, farm equipment, generators, and the like. Most are ruined beyond use, though many still have useable parts, and a few are in working order. Both Red and his collection are so valuable they have become something of a security concern to the town which has established a permanent guard to protect him from thieves, raiders, and spies from other cities.

Sparks House - Though the original Sparks House -- an early 19th century home -- burnt down in the mid 21st century, a replica was built on a scenic bluff over the Buffalo River, just north of town. Despite being made with modern materials and techniques, the builders were careful to maintain the appearance of the original, down to the stone foundation, brick chimney, and white-washed walls. The new Sparks House features a restaurant, candy shop, and guest rooms, making it a popular stop-over location for those traveling through the town by foot or boating down the river. The establishment is owned and operated as a collective effort by quite a few Linden residents.

VII. Noteworthy People

Jack Bailey - Sheriff - Jack is a bear of a man, with thick brown hair and matching beard, broad shoulders, and a towering frame. Despite his size, he moves quietly about town with a gentle smile on his face. He doesn't speak much, and when he does, his voice is soft. Fortunately, Jack's job doesn't require him to say very much since the townsfolk respect him such that they rarely argue with him, and disrespectful outsiders are generally intimidated by his size. He typically dresses in flannel shirts, thick pants, and heavy boots, earning him the nickname of "lumberjack" amongst the children. He lives in a house not far from the city hall with his wife, Margo, and two teenage sons, Alan and Mark. Jack is a humble man, God-fearing man who regularly attends the local Methodist church.

Timothy Barrows - minister of Linden Methodist Church - The Minister is a short, bald man with glasses that aren't quite the right prescription. Though physically awkward he is well learned and keeps a modest library of books inside the church. He never sought the position, but Timothy Barrows plays a role in town politics equally important to his role in the church. He is universally regarded as a wise, compassionate man, and is therefore the lone individual in town that can work as a peacemaker between almost any disputing persons. For example, it is by his urging alone that Loretta Cohen has kept her rivalry with the Mayor to angry chats instead of more open, divisive protests.

Loretta Cohen - Red Cohen's wife; competitor to the Mayor - While Loretta is wife to the famous Red Cohen, she is also important in her own right. She's in her 60s, but still possesses the energy and wit of a woman half her age. Loretta is capable of playing many roles, being a loving grandmother, resourceful homemaker, and political firebrand, all with equal passion. While she is graceful and compassionate in most situations, Loretta's busybody inclinations can sometimes get the best of her, leading her to meddle in ways that do more harm than good. Her most important spat at present is her hostility toward the town's presiding Mayor. Feeling her own husband is the city's most significant resident -- and being rather disturbed by Linden being led by a "madman" -- she works tirelessly to sway the residents to oppose Townsend or vote him out of office. She has been largely unsuccessful, but her silver tongue has swayed a growing minority to her side. It is also rumored that Loretta has a darker side, perhaps being willing to stoop to questionable means to reach what she believes to be noble ends. The most noteworthy example of these rumors is that she had some hand in poisoning the previous Mayor. Loretta insists these are just the whisperings of unscrupulous gossips, and her otherwise impeccable character gives some credence to this claim.

Red Cohen - owner of Red's Junkyard - Red is a gangly man with white hair, a scraggly beard, and deep-set eyes. He walks with a slight limp and his gaze frequently wanders. He has had an interest in machines from a very young age and collected them in an empty lot behind his parents' house, teaching himself how to build and repair them all. Though he lacked sufficient materials to restore most of his collection to working order, his knowledge became encyclopedic and his collection can be readily harvested for its parts. People travel from great distances to buy material from him or seek his aid in resurrecting an old relic. Unlike his wife, Loretta, Red has little interest in town politics, preferring a quiet life, tinkering in his junkyard.

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"Mad Mike" Townsend - town Mayor - Roughly 50 years old, with salt-and-pepper hair, lavish suits, a black cane, and a thick beard, there is an air of distinction about Mike. He is frequently seen strutting about town, greeting its citizens with a broad smile and "how do you do" as he surveys his domain. The Mayor is intelligent, diplomatic, and well spoken, addressing friend and adversary alike in flowery speech that seems about 200 years out of date. Despite his charisma, he is regarded as eccentric -- perhaps insane -- by those that know him best. He keeps an immutable daily schedule, which includes such oddities as consuming only the inside of three biscuits for breakfast, insisting the husks be burned in the same fire that cooked them, petting his three dogs in alphabetical order, and kissing only his wife's left cheek. Regarding town politics, he is well aware of Loretta Cohen's ambitions to replace him, though he pays her little heed and recognizes that her husband, Red, is both uninterested in the position and a city treasure to be jealously guarded. Most Linden residents consider "Mad Mike" an exceptional leader or at least a charming and harmless man, though a growing minority would prefer to see him replaced by a more sane individual.

VIII. Noteworthy Organizations

The Tennessee Guard - The Guard, founded from the ashes of the Tennessee National Guard, serves as an extra-governmental security force throughout the state. By agreement of the Mayor, they have posted 22 riflemen in the town. While the Mayor may occasionally call upon them for assistance in maintaining order, their primary purpose is to protect Red's motor cache. The currently stay in an old store front, converted into a barracks, located a mere hundred feet from Red's home.

Linden Militia - The town maintains a loosely organized militia to provide its primary defense and law enforcement. Jack Bailey is the only member on active duty, but any able-bodied male is considered to be on permanent call for militia duty, and they are expected to report within minutes should Jack or the Mayor choose to call them up. While the townsfolk are fiercely loyal to Linden and its leadership, they lack the organization, discipline, and consistent armament of a property military.