

# Urban Developments

## A GUIDE TO CITIES AND TOWNS

### INTRODUCTION

OK - So this is not a text book. It is not a history book. The goal is not to teach you anything at all about medieval life. The goal is to help you more quickly and more intelligently create urban settings in your fantasy world.

How are we going to do that? Well, we're going to start with the basics and build up from there. In **Grain Into Gold**, we presented an economy that started with the cost of a loaf of bread and went up from there to massive ocean going cargo ships. This is going to work the same way. We'll start small and build up to the massive capital cities.

#### The Focus

The focus of this supplement is to help game masters create both a template for their villages, towns and cities as well as ideas on when to go off template and move to something specialized. We're not talking about detailing the inside of a tailor shop here; we're in the "thinking big" phase. How big is the city? Why is it there? Who's in charge? That sort of stuff. These places need to make sense in a fantasy setting. More importantly, the game master (you, we're guessing) needs to be able to use this supplement without it interfering with the actual running of the game. You're the GM. You have to do a little homework before you play. We're trying to make sure that your prep time is spent intelligently, and you actually accomplish what you need without spinning your wheels.

One of the best ways to get the results we want is to use lots of examples, especially conflicting examples. You need to remember that examples are not guidance. You should use your own ideas as much as possible. If they're your ideas, they will make sense in your head better than our ideas. This book is intended to make you think, but to make you think fast and get results.

#### Tone

Lastly, all too often this kind of stuff can be boring. We're going to be talking about water supplies and garbage disposal. Game masters do not want to sit around and read boring stuff, even if it is good for their game. In hopes of alleviating some of the boredom, we have tried to take a lighter tone. Please understand that the intent of this tone is only to try and keep a gaming supplement from turning into too much of a text book.

#### Assumptions

In many of our books, we stop here to tell you all the assumptions we've made. Typically this is kind of a prerequisite area where we basically tell you all the junk you need to have before you can make this supplement work for you. Today - not so much! We're going to try to assume that you are really starting at the beginning. If you already have some work done, you should still walk through the methodology, perhaps tweaking your previous work as you go in order to give yourself a stronger starting point.

We are going to assume that you have some idea of the game system you're going to use. This is important because we're assuming you're building a fantasy city here. Some game systems allow pretty much everyone to have some magic, while others restrict it to a far greater degree. It will also be important to understand how your rules treat the common man. If the peasants are microscopically weak and the adventurers are godly strong, it will have an impact on the world.

Speaking of adventurers: We generally assume that there are people who risk their lives going out and doing those jobs most people think are too dangerous to do. These people are adventurers. They exist, but the world does not flow around them. (It seems to because they are the only characters whose lives you track.) In our assumptions, there are more soldiers than there are adventurers.

Every once in a while an assumption may crop up. We'll let you know by marking it like this: **[ASSUMPTION]**. You have to figure out for yourself if our assumptions fit your world. Sometimes they won't, and you'll have to adjust what we're saying for your model.

## STARTING OUT

Before we actually start, we need you to realize that this book has more than one part, but they do the same thing: help you design urban settings. The first part of the book is a more narrative format where we talk through ideas and how things will tend to work. If you work better in that mode, start reading right away. But some of you are a lot more quantitative. You want things to be laid out quickly, typically in charts. If that is the way you think, then you need to skip to the **Numbers and Measures** section and work from there. We believe that most people will get the most “bang for their buck” by reading the narrative sections (so you understand why things work the way they do) and then using the charts and tables to make things happen more quickly.

Let’s get right into the narrative piece! Where do you start? Let’s start with this - You need to create an urban setting for your fantasy game world. There are various different sizes of urban developments. We’re going to use four classifications, but don’t get too hung up on what we’re calling them. We’ll break them down into smaller more descriptive pieces later.

The smallest setting is a farming community. This is usually a collection of families that have built their homes near each other for fellowship and protection. Typically, this is going to be 30-100 people. There likely will not be any form of store, but there might be a tiny church.

The other small setting is a village. Villages are typically farming communities that have grown to be large enough to have attracted a dry goods store. Likely this is 100-500 people, mostly related. Maybe there are three to six extended families. [ASSUMPTION] We’re going with the historic fact or urban legend (we aren’t really sure) that people in the medieval era typically never traveled more than 20 miles from their homes. More on this later, and you’ll see how it comes into play. Ignore the assumptions and keep in mind that a village has at least some manner of commerce. It might also act as the central hub for several farming communities.

The mid-sized urban development is a town. Towns are more than just a collection of homes, now we’ve moved into something where you can see the trades. There would be smiths and leather workers, probably have horses and oxen for sale, and likely have some manner of military or police force. At the town level, farmers grow enough surplus food to allow a percentage of the populace to follow other trades. Where we were talking about hundreds of people in a village, we’re talking about thousands of people in a town.



Cities are the top end of the scale. Here you will not only find craftsmen, but you would find a craftsmen’s guild. There will be some sort of regional government as well, along with the military power to back up that governing power. While towns frequently grow up from villages that grew up from farming communities, cities are a whole different animal. The size of your cities is going to depend on your world. The city could be 1,000,000 people.

## STEP 1 - REASON FOR EXISTING

OK - We want to jump right in, but first you have to figure out why you’re designing this community. Is it a template for the places where food is produced? Is it a trading center? Is it the capital and military headquarters for a huge empire? As with so many things we’re going to address in this book - You don’t need to know everything. If this were a business, they’d call this the 10,000’ view, meaning that this is what you can still notice if you were flying over at 10,000’. (Yeah - It’s a cliché, overused to the point of irrelevance, but it works here. Really!)

Anyway - More importantly, what do you want this for? Are you building a quick little town for the adventurers to stop in on their way to an adventure? Are you creating a farming community that needs saving? Are you building a town so when the war hits it you can have both armies rip it to shreds?

Since we’re focusing on gaming and not novel writing, the settlement has to have a purpose. If the purpose is to practice before you make the important stuff, that’s OK too.

We’re really just asking you to have an idea of what you want. Without any idea of the final outcome, you’re going to waste a ton of time. Don’t worry if you change your mind a bunch of times as we go forward, but at least pretend you have a goal.

Just a suggestion, but if you have a piece of scratch paper next to you while reading through, you can jot down some of your ideas. That way, at the end, you’ll

have a solid outline that you can flesh out as much as you need. If scratch paper isn't your style, check out our template at the back of the book.

## STEP 2 - TERRAIN AND CLIMATE

Now, let's crawl before we fly. The building blocks of a community start with the basics: food, water and shelter. Without these, you don't have a community.

If we're going to start, we need to know what we're dealing with. Step 2 is **Terrain and Climate**. What does the landscape look like? What does the weather look like? This is all a choice, because you can put anything you want any where you want. The decisions you make here are going to make or break your community. (No pressure!)

For easy use, let's pretend that you chose a temperate region where they get a little snow in winter and lots of sun in summer. It's a wide open plain or grassland, so you know with the right farming techniques, something will grow here. (We'll get into tough examples later on, but for right now we need to make things easily understood.)

Why are these things so important? Because terrain and climate control food, shelter and water. If your town is in a desert, water is going to be the most important thing you figure out. Maybe the village is at an oasis, and that is the place's reason for existing. Even with a seemingly ready source of water, clearly the oasis can't support an unlimited number of people, and the watering hole will determine the population.

Let's keep on the path of water, because it is such an important part of life. [ASSUMPTION] We expect that you are not dealing with an alien society that can survive without food and water. If your citizens survive solely on the sun's rays, then the desert works pretty darn well. For the rest of us silly water drinkers, we'll continue the water focus.

We are not telling you to figure out how many days a year it rains and what the average rainfall is, or even what the absorption rate of the local dirt is. Big picture answers here will be fine. Assuming that it rains often enough to fill streams and lakes is likely enough, but you might want to put some style into it. Maybe they get most of their rain in the spring, maybe there are even monsoons. Or is the water actually falling in the form of snow that melts to replenish the various water features. Remember that they can't drink sea water, so if you want a coastal community, they will likely be near a river delta that provides fresh drinking water. Maybe the ground won't hold the water, so everyone needs to have water barrels and cisterns to capture the rain and hold onto it.

Water is vitally important as a source of moisture for the people to drink, but it also controls their animals and their crops. If the rainfall is in anyway limited, they aren't going to be eating rice, because it won't grow. If all the water is coming from mountain springs, but rain rarely falls, the crops are going to need some irrigation.

What if the rain is too much? What if the rain floods the river every spring? Well, that might be great for the crops, but it is going to be a little tough on the village. Then again, maybe they build their houses on stilts and have canoes hidden in the rafters. That is exactly the type of thing you need to think about when you start creating your community.

OK, so for our running example, we're going to have a temperate grasslands where the rain falls often enough to water most crops, but there is a winding river in the area as well as a couple of streams and ponds. Nothing huge, the river is able to float a small boat, but we're not talking about the Danube here.

But we have not touched on terrain and its consequences. Even our seemingly innocent choice of a grassland is going to be an issue. Plains are notoriously devoid of trees. Where is the wood going to come from? Terrain is very important on other issues. Is this the kind of place where stone can easily be quarried, or is the local stone weak and porous? How about the local clay? Will it make good bricks?

Hopefully we've made ourselves obvious here. By knowing what the terrain is like, you will have a good idea of what the local shelter should be. We'll assume that even a grassland has some trees about, but if the trees are scarce, then people are less likely to make their homes out of them. The Plains Indians lived in teepees made of buffalo hides while in other regions others were building long houses from the tallest trees.

This same line of thinking goes straight into the food source. If the plains are wide open and flat, this is likely a cereal crop agricultural region. If there are lots of trees with some cleared areas being used for planting, maybe the locals have shifted to orchards or vines. We could have told you in the assumptions section that we expected you to figure out what type of foods and materials were available in a given region, but we also wanted to walk through some of this thinking.

Before you tune out, realize that this isn't that tough. You formed an idea back in Step 1. What had



you pictured? A small town surrounded by acres of golden wheat? A village acting as the hub of some massive cattle ranches? A bamboo forest? Ancient oaks formed into the base of an arboreal elven city? A series of hollowed out cave halls where dwarves had hewn out the iron?

So if you don't know what you want, where do you get ideas? Well, assuming your world is relatively Earth-like, you can look up any of a number of good biome sites on the internet. Biomes are the classifications of the various climates and terrains on Earth. It doesn't really matter how many your specific site believes there are or how they classify them, you only need the building blocks.

In Step 1, we gave you absolutely no guidance in picking an idea, and we did that for a good reason - like brainstorming we didn't want to restrict your thoughts. Now you have to use a little logic though. If your city is going to be a center of trade, then it needs to be able to support trade. That means you need transportation, either roads or a major river or a port. Putting a major trade center in the middle of the desert surrounded by nothing but sand dunes probably won't make any sense. Putting a tiny farming community at the cross roads of two major empires likely won't make any sense either. A little logic will go a long way here.

This has been a massive amount of creative brain work on your part, so we're going to push on, but we will continue to circle back to food, water and shelter as a main theme!

### STEP 3 - SIZE

Now this is probably where you thought we'd start, but that other stuff is really important. At every step of this process, you need to look back and see if some of the choices you made were the right ones. If they weren't then you need to change something.

**Size** like **Terrain and Climate** is mostly up to you. Based on what you need for right now, are you looking for a farming community, a village, a town or a city? Let's take a closer look at each one of these and then you can decide.

#### Farming Communities

Again, a farming community is probably less than 100 people with no stores. That doesn't mean that no one has anything to trade, it just means they have to go somewhere else to trade it.

So what is a farming community? The most common occurrence is a collection of farm homes.

Along with the homes, there will be barns, storage sheds, small barns or shacks, somewhere to store the food, etc. We don't want you to get the idea that a farming community would have ten houses and no other buildings. Some farming communities might be a single extended family. Perhaps three generations ago, a rugged man came and cut a farm out of the wilderness here. His sons established farms nearby as did their sons. Now you have eight homes and assorted farm buildings scattered around a central point.

Why do they stick together? Because they are family. Because this is the life they have known all their lives, and they simply do not know another way to live. Because they know they can trust their cousins not to steal from them. In case a group of bandits comes up and tries to rob one of them, they know their cousins will grab their pitchforks and anything else they have and come to their aid.

The same is true even if they aren't related. Most likely, the people of a farming community grew up in that community, or very near to it. They have known each other their whole lives. These bonds are not easy to break. It is important as a game master to remember this. While in a city, people who live in the same apartment building may not know each other, in a farming community and in a village, any outsiders will be immediately identified and treated as likely hostiles.

So how does a farming community look? Well, it is important to remember that life may begin on the farm, but it isn't jailed there. Sooner or later, someone is likely to want to go somewhere else or be visited from somewhere else. The road may be poor, but there is likely a road from the farming community to the nearest village or town.

Even without a store or a source of government right here, the road is likely the "center of town". If there was any planning done, the farming community might start out like this:



This tiny town has all the farm houses arrayed along the road. (We'd call it the "main road" but it is likely the only road.) The houses are sort of clustered, so if there's trouble at one, there's a better chance of alerting the other homes and families. There is also a stronger feeling of community when you can actually see your neighbors. If the houses were scattered all over the