

The Merchant War

An Adventure for Fate's Edge - Silkstrand

Adventure Overview

Title: The Merchant War
Region: Silkstrand - City of Bridges & Dyewater
Theme: Economic warfare, social manipulation, urban intrigue
Level: Seasoned (Tier II)
Length: 3-4 Sessions

1 Premise

Two powerful merchant houses in Silkstrand are engaged in an escalating economic war that's disrupting trade throughout the region. What began as competitive business practices has evolved into sabotage, assassination, and manipulation of the city's political structure. The players must navigate this conflict while pursuing their own objectives, choosing sides or finding a way to end the war before it destroys the city's economy entirely.

2 Hook

The adventure begins when the players encounter one of the following scenarios (Investigation + Notice vs DV 3 to determine truth):

- **Cargo Seizure:** Their cargo is seized at the docks due to a "regulatory dispute" between the two merchant houses, requiring them to navigate the political maze to recover their goods. (Legal/Social challenge, Sway + Command vs DV 4)
- **Botched Job:** A contact offers them a lucrative job that involves retrieving sensitive information from the rival merchant house, but the job goes wrong and they become targets. (Infiltration/Combat encounter, DV 5)
- **Witness to Violence:** They witness an assassination attempt on a prominent merchant, making them both witnesses and potential targets in the escalating conflict. (Combat/Skill challenge, DV 4)

3 Key Factions

3.1 House Valdris

House Valdris

Leader: Guildmistress Thalia Valdris

Description: Traditional merchant house controlling dye trade

Strengths: Established connections, dye monopoly, political influence

Weaknesses: Resistant to change, declining popular support

Methods: Legal maneuvering, political pressure, traditional sabotage

Symbol: Purple and silver

Position: Dominant (established authority), Desperate (losing ground)

DV for Alliance: 4 (mutual benefit), 5 (neutral), 6+ (opposed)

3.2 Crimson Sails Trading Company

Crimson Sails Trading Company

Leader: Captain-Merchant Renn Kestral

Description: Aggressive newcomer disrupting traditional trade

Strengths: Naval power, innovative practices, popular with younger merchants

Weaknesses: Limited political connections, viewed as upstarts

Methods: Economic warfare, bribery, direct action

Symbol: Crimson and gold

Position: Dominant (popular momentum), Controlled under legal pressure

DV for Alliance: 3 (shared goals), 4 (neutral), 5+ (opposed)

4 Key NPCs

4.1 Guildmistress Thalia Valdris

Guildmistress Thalia Valdris

Role: Leader of House Valdris

Age: 54

Skills: Command 4, Sway 3, Lore 3

Knowledge: Traditional trade practices, political connections, legal precedents

Motivation: Preserve established order and family legacy

Complication: Becoming increasingly desperate as Crimson Sails gains ground

Position: Controlled (established authority), Desperate (under pressure)

DV for Negotiation: 4 (mutual benefit), 5 (neutral), 6+ (opposed)

4.2 Captain-Merchant Renn Kestral

Captain-Merchant Renn Kestral

Role: Leader of Crimson Sails Trading Company

Age: 42

Skills: Command 3, Sway 4, Skirmish 2

Knowledge: Naval operations, innovative trade practices, popular sentiment

Motivation: Disrupt traditional corruption and create new opportunities

Complication: Former corsair background creates legal vulnerabilities

Position: Dominant (popular support), Controlled under political pressure

DV for Partnership: 3 (shared goals), 4 (neutral), 5+ (opposed)

4.3 Matron Esme Blackwater

Matron Esme Blackwater

Role: Nominal ruler of Silkstrand

Age: 67

Skills: Command 4, Insight 3, Sway 3

Knowledge: City governance, faction dynamics, long-term consequences

Motivation: Maintain city stability and prosperity

Complication: Limited direct power, must work through factions

Position: Dominant (legitimate authority), Controlled (dependent on factions)

DV for Audience: 4 (legitimate request), 5 (neutral), 6+ (opposition)

4.4 The Broker

The Broker

Role: Secret manipulator fueling conflict

Skills: Subterfuge 4, Sway 4, Insight 3

Knowledge: Secrets of both factions, conflict manipulation methods

Motivation: Profit from ongoing conflict through facilitation

Complication: Maintains cover while manipulating both sides

Position: Controlled (operating in shadows), Desperate if exposed

DV for Information: 5 (secrecy), 4 (proper approach), 3 (trusted ally)

5 Key Locations

5.1 Three-Queens Bridge

Three-Queens Bridge

Description: Central marketplace and faction battleground

Features: Multiple levels, vendor stalls, observation points

Conflict Zone: Business disputes escalate to violence

Challenges:

- Navigating faction tensions (Social challenge, DV 4)
- Participating in Bridge Duel Protocol (Combat/Skill, varies)
- Gathering intelligence from vendors (Sway + Insight vs DV 3)

Position: Controlled (normal), Desperate (during faction clashes)

5.2 The Dye Works

The Dye Works

Description: House Valdri's primary dye production facility

Features: Complex chemical processes, valuable trade secrets, heavy security

Security Level: High - guarded facility with restricted access

Challenges:

- Infiltrating secured areas (Stealth + Tinker vs DV 5)
- Sabotaging production processes (Tinker + Subterfuge vs DV 6)
- Gathering trade secrets (Investigation vs DV 5)

Protection Measures: Patrols, guard dogs, alarm systems

5.3 The Crimson Docks

The Crimson Docks

Description: Crimson Sails' naval base and ship maintenance hub

Features: Fast ships, naval equipment, maritime activity

Security Level: Medium - patrolled area with naval protocols

Challenges:

- Boarding ships undetected (Stealth + Survival vs DV 4)
- Interfering with ship operations (Tinker + Subterfuge vs DV 5)
- Gathering naval intelligence (Sway + Notice vs DV 3)

Naval Code: Specific conduct rules for visitors and workers

5.4 The Archivolt

The Archivolt

Description: Bureaucratic heart where contracts and disputes are settled

Features: Legal archives, advocate offices, bureaucratic procedures

Complexity: Maze of legal precedents and procedures

Challenges:

- Navigating legal bureaucracy (Lore + Sway vs DV 5)
- Winning legal cases (Command + Lore vs DV 5)
- Researching faction histories (Investigation vs DV 4)

Access Requirements: Proper documentation or influential connections

5.5 The Salt Gate Quay

The Salt Gate Quay

Description: Main import/export facility controlling trade flows

Features: Cargo handling, customs operations, strategic importance

Strategic Value: Control means control of trade routes

Challenges:

- Influencing customs operations (Sway + Command vs DV 4)
- Sabotaging cargo operations (Tinker + Subterfuge vs DV 5)
- Coordinating with dock workers (Social challenge, DV 3)

Recent Issues: "Accidents" disrupting normal operations

6 Plot Structure

6.1 Session 1: Entanglement

Opening Scene: Players encounter one of the hook scenarios. Establish the immediate effects of merchant warfare.

Key Objectives:

- Experience direct effects of economic warfare
- Meet representatives from both factions
- Learn conflict's origins and current state
- Make initial choices about faction support

Sample Encounters:

- **Regulatory Dispute:** Navigate legal maze to recover seized cargo. (Sway + Lore vs DV 4, Controlled/Standard)

- **Faction Recruitment:** Both houses attempt to recruit players. (Social encounter, DV 3-5 depending on approach)
- **Marketplace Tension:** Experience faction conflict at Three-Queens Bridge. (Social/Combat encounter, DV 4)

Session End: Players committed to one side or maintaining neutrality. Advance Merchant War Clock +1.

6.2 Session 2: Deepening Involvement

Opening Scene: Players take on more significant faction roles. Conflict escalates visibly.

Key Objectives:

- Complete missions for chosen faction (or both)
- Experience escalating consequences of war
- Discover secrets about both houses
- Face moral dilemmas about involvement

Sample Encounters:

- **Sabotage Mission:** Infiltrate rival facility to gather intelligence or cause disruption. (Stealth + Tinker vs DV 5, Desperate/Standard)
- **Legal Battle:** Represent faction in Archivolt proceedings. (Command + Lore vs DV 5, Controlled/Great)
- **Assassination Attempt:** Defend or attack key faction figure. (Combat encounter, DV 5)

Session End: Players gain significant faction influence. Advance Merchant War Clock +2, shift Reputation Tracks.

6.3 Session 3: The Breaking Point

Opening Scene: Conflict reaches crisis point threatening city stability.

Key Objectives:

- Deal with consequences of previous actions
- Make crucial decisions about conflict resolution
- Potentially face secret manipulator (The Broker)
- Determine future of Silkstrand's merchant community

Sample Encounters:

- **City-Wide Crisis:** Deal with economic disruption affecting civilians. (Leadership challenge, DV 5)
- **The Broker's Revelation:** Confront secret manipulator. (Social/Combat encounter, DV 6)
- **Final Negotiation:** Broker peace or decisive victory. (Sway + Command vs DV 6, Desperate/Great)

Session End: Major conflict resolution. Advance Merchant War Clock to culmination.

7 Key Mechanics

7.1 Merchant War Clock [8]

Advance +1: Economic sabotage successfully executed

Advance +1: Assassinations or violent incidents occur

Advance +2: Political maneuvering fails spectacularly

Advance +1: Players make choices that escalate conflict

Advance +2: Key faction leaders suffer major setbacks

Advance +1: Civilian casualties or economic disruption

When Full: Conflict reaches breaking point, city stability threatened

7.2 Reputation Tracks

House Valdris Track: Traditionalist \longleftrightarrow Rebel

Crimson Sails Track: Corrupt \longleftrightarrow Progressive

Movement: Player actions shift tracks by ± 1 per significant interaction

Effects:

- High Traditionalist/Progressive: +1 die to faction interactions
- High Rebel/Corrupt: -1 die to opposing faction interactions
- Extreme positions: Access to special missions or complete rejection

7.3 Bridge Duel Protocol

Trigger: Business disputes escalate to violence on Three-Queens Bridge

Stakes Declaration: Choose Purse (money), Permit (legal right), or Pride (reputation)

Seconds: May spend 1 Boon to "Call the Colors" (improve Position by 1 step)

Refusal Consequences: Automatic reputation damage (-1 die to social rolls with faction)

Resolution: Standard combat rules with declared stakes determining consequences

7.4 Exchange Mini-Game

Setup: Track scene-long Spread (starts at 1)

Actions: Each good call on trading floor moves Spread by ± 1

Cash Out: Gain Price Edge tag (+1 die) when buying/selling during scene

Skills Used: Sway, Notice, Insight for reading market

DV: 3 (basic trading), 4 (complex deals), 5+ (high-stakes negotiations)

8 Possible Resolutions

8.1 Faction Victory

Faction Victory

- Requirements:**
- Complete major sabotage mission against rival (Tinker + Subterfuge vs DV 6)
 - Win crucial legal case in Archivolt (Command + Lore vs DV 6)
 - Eliminate key leadership of opposing faction (Combat/Skill vs DV 5)

Procedure: Decisive action giving one faction overwhelming advantage

Costs: City's balance of power shifts dangerously, potential for future rebellion

Outcome: Winner gains control, but creates new tensions and dependencies

8.2 Negotiated Settlement

Negotiated Settlement

Discovery: Expose The Broker's manipulation and secret influence

- Requirements:**
- Gather evidence of manipulation (Investigation vs DV 5)
 - Convince both factions of mutual benefit (Sway + Command vs DV 5)
 - Gain Matron's support for intervention (Social challenge, DV 4)

Procedure: Complex three-way negotiation with city authority backing

Costs: Both houses must compromise, ongoing oversight required

Outcome: Stable business environment, mutual obligations to players

8.3 Revolutionary Change

Revolutionary Change

Approach: Overthrow old system entirely, create new governance

- Requirements:**
- Expose corruption in both houses (Investigation + Subterfuge vs DV 5)
 - Rally common merchants and workers (Command + Sway vs DV 5)
 - Install new form of governance (Political challenge, DV 6)

Procedure: Popular uprising with player leadership

Costs: Complete upheaval with uncertain future, potential for chaos

Outcome: New order with player influence, but ongoing instability

9 Rewards and Consequences

9.1 Immediate Rewards

- Bridge token for peak-hour cart crossing: +1 Position for bridge navigation
- Dye-permit chit to process "questionable" color: Legal authority for special dyes
- Warehouse seal from winning faction: Access to premium storage facilities
- Exchange pass for trading without sponsor: Independent trading privileges
- Watergate priority to skip closures: Priority access to restricted areas

9.2 Long-term Consequences

- **Faction Victory:** Permanent business relationship with winner, access to resources, but enemies in losing faction
- **Negotiated Settlement:** Reputation as stabilizing force, mutual obligations from both houses, stable trading environment
- **Revolutionary Change:** Potential leadership roles in new order, great personal power but ongoing responsibility
- **Neutral Outcome:** Maintained independence but limited faction access, potential for future recruitment by either side

10 GM Notes

10.1 Social Dynamics

Emphasize social aspects of conflict:

- Every interaction has social stakes and long-term consequences
- Reputation affects access to resources and opportunities
- Social manipulation as important as economic warfare
- Class tensions between old nobility and new merchants

10.2 Economic Realities

Make economic warfare tangible:

- Rising prices affecting ordinary citizens
- Job losses and business closures throughout city
- Disrupted supply chains creating shortages
- Economic pressure driving people to extreme measures

10.3 Moral Ambiguity

Present complex moral landscape:

- Neither faction entirely good or evil
- House Valdris: Stability vs. resistance to progress
- Crimson Sails: Innovation vs. disruption of communities
- Players face genuine moral choices with consequences

10.4 Player Agency

Provide multiple paths to influence conflict:

- Work for one side exclusively
- Play both sides against each other
- Work to end war entirely
- Create third option through revolutionary change
- Focus on personal objectives while navigating conflict

10.5 Urban Environment

Use Silkstrand's unique features:

- Bridges create vertical complexity and strategic points
- Dyeworks provide industrial hazards and valuable resources
- Waterways offer transportation and smuggling routes
- Archivolt represents bureaucratic maze and legal complexity

10.6 Story Beats

Use economic conflict for complications:

- 1 SB: Minor business disruption, small price fluctuation
- 2 SB: Key contact becomes suspicious, shipment delayed
- 3 SB: Major sabotage incident, faction leader threatened
- 4+ SB: City-wide economic crisis, faction headquarters attacked

10.7 Session-Specific Guidance

Session 1 Focus: Establish conflict dynamics and player involvement. Players should understand both factions have strengths and weaknesses.

Session 2 Focus: Deepen faction involvement and escalate consequences. Players gain significant influence but face moral complexity.

Session 3 Focus: Climactic resolution with city-wide implications. All previous elements converge in final choices about Silkstrand's future.

10.8 Alternative Endings

If players attempt unconventional solutions:

- **Information Broker Path:** Become neutral facilitator profiting from both sides
- **City Guardian Role:** Work directly for Matron to maintain balance
- **Foreign Intervention:** Invite external power to resolve conflict
- **Economic Innovation:** Create new business model transcending faction divide

10.9 Scaling for Different Tiers

Tier II (Seasoned): Standard economic and social challenges, local city scope.

Tier III (Veteran): Add regional political implications, foreign trade complications, and more powerful faction resources.

Tier IV (Paragon): Introduce international trade war consequences, faction gains patron backing, threat to entire trade network.