

MAKING YOUR WORLD COME ALIVE

Running Background Campaigns



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LEGENDS OF THALORANTH



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A Legends of Thaloranth Free Supplement

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INTRODUCTION

The steward had been managing the farm for two seasons before the players arrived. He had seen droughts, a dispute with the neighboring estate over a shared irrigation channel, and one particularly bad autumn when the grain price collapsed and they had sold at a loss just to move the harvest before it rotted. He was not easily surprised.

He was surprised now.

"The recruiting officer," he said again, as if repeating it would make it make sense. "He came this morning. Lord Aeldric's man. Offering three times the going rate for field hands willing to commit to tournament season."

He looked at the ledger open on the table between them.

"Planting starts in six weeks."

Most Game Masters treat domains like passive income. The farm produces its 2 Wealth Points each month. The players mention it occasionally. They visit between adventures. But it never quite becomes the thing the Domain rules are built to create: a stake in the world, and a world that has a stake in them.

The problem is isolation. A farm treated as a mechanical benefit sits apart from everything else happening in the campaign. It generates income. It does not generate story.

The solution is context. Your players' farm does not exist in a vacuum. It exists in a kingdom where things are happening, large things, politically consequential things, events that reshape trade routes and labor markets and the priorities of every noble house in the Heartlands. Those events do not need to involve your players directly to affect their domain. They only need to touch it.

That is what a background campaign does. It gives the world something to be doing while your players are doing something else, and it makes the connection between those two things visible through the lens of whatever your players own and care about.

This supplement explains the technique, demonstrates it using The Grand Tournament as a worked example, and shows how it applies to every common domain type. The Grand Tournament documents a three-year arc of competitive politics, noble ambition, and Heartlands-wide economic disruption organized by season. Legacies of Valor provides the full mechanical and narrative framework for domain ownership, including specific domain types, income structures, and the Threats and Opportunities framework that integrates with what this document describes. Both are referenced throughout. What this document teaches is how to connect them, how to make a background campaign something your players feel without ever attending a tournament, fighting a border war, or involving themselves directly in the events driving it.

THE TOURNAMENT AS A PERFECT BACKGROUND

The Grand Tournament is built around three years of competitive excellence, political maneuvering, and reputation building across Thaloranth's tournament circuit. It is designed to be run as a primary campaign for groups who want to engage directly with competition and noble politics. The Seven Days Before the Grand Tournament covers the lead-up to that arc, the political maneuvering, preparation, and faction positioning that sets the stage for everything that follows.

It is also, for Game Masters running something else entirely, one of the most useful world-management tools in the LoT line.

Consider what is actually happening across those three years of tournament activity. Noble houses are competing for political advantage by recruiting promising competitors to represent their interests. That competition requires resources, premium prices for quality horses, exclusive provisioning contracts, the best equipment available from the best smiths in the kingdom. Trade routes shift as tournament locations rotate through the Heartlands: spring competitions draw merchants north toward Sovereign's Reach, summer events redirect commerce to the Emerald Coasts, autumn tournaments along The Run create surges in river trade. International delegations arrive from beyond Thaloranth's borders, bringing foreign currency, foreign priorities, and the particular

complications that follow when people with money and unfamiliar customs move through a kingdom's commercial infrastructure.

None of this requires your players to attend a single tournament. None of it requires them to care about competition. It requires only that they own something the tournament touches, and in a kingdom-wide circuit attracting noble investment, international attention, and three years of sustained economic disruption, that means almost anything.

The farm near Riversgate feels the labor shortage when noble recruiters offer premium wages to able-bodied workers. The ranch near Fordsgate feels the pressure when a master-of-horse arrives wanting to buy breeding stock at prices that seem generous until you consider what selling them means for next season. The inn on the road between any two tournament venues feels the weight of hosting people whose factions are in direct competition, and the specific difficulty of remaining neutral when neutrality is itself a political position.

The Grand Tournament provides the why behind complications your players experience through their domain. Lord Aeldric's recruiting officer did not appear at the farm because you decided to make things difficult. He appeared because noble houses across the Heartlands are doing exactly what the tournament background says they are doing, and your players' farm happens to employ the kind of workers those houses need.

That is the difference between a complication and a living world.

YOUR DOMAIN AS THE LENS

Here is the mechanism that makes this work: the domain becomes the instrument through which your players experience events they are not directly part of.

They are not tournament competitors. They are landowners trying to run a business in a kingdom where tournament politics affect everything. The tournament is background. The domain is foreground. The connection between them is the story.

Consider what Spring of Year One looks like for a farm near Riversgate.

Lord Aeldric's recruiting officer comes through and offers premium wages to any able-bodied workers willing to commit to tournament season service. The farm loses two of its best field hands six weeks before planting. The players need to decide whether to hire

replacements at inflated rates, attempt the season short-handed, or find another solution, one of the players knows a Half-Sylvani community two valleys over that might be looking for harvest work, but that relationship would need to be built, and it takes time they may not have.

A traveling merchant arrives offering triple the normal price for the entire grain harvest, contracted now, delivery in autumn. He is provisioning House Bravellan's celebration feast following the Grand Melee. The money is significant enough to change the players' plans for the season. The complication is that the villages within a half-day's ride of the farm have been relying on that grain for three generations, and the local miller, a woman named Sera Lindvane, who remembers when the players' deed of ownership was still in dispute, will have something to say about it if the harvest disappears to a noble house's celebration table.

Bandits hit the supply wagon on the road to Riversgate. The local garrison apologizes. Their best trackers have been reassigned to tournament security at the capital. The same crew has been working the road for two months, emboldened by thin patrols. The players can go after them, hire private security at rates that cut into the margin the merchant's contract was supposed to provide, or absorb the losses and hope enforcement returns after tournament season ends. The GMG's Obligation Economy chapter explains what either choice costs in terms of standing with the people who noticed which option they took.

None of this is arbitrary difficulty. The Grand Tournament's seasonal timeline explains why all of it is happening simultaneously: the same noble recruitment drive that thinned the farm's workforce also thinned the garrison patrols. The same provisioning competition that made the players' harvest valuable also emboldened the bandits who knew that wagons carrying high-value contracts were traveling undermanned roads. The events connect because they come from the same source.

The players experience the tournament through consequences. They develop opinions about it, about which noble houses are disrupting their operations, which competitors are worth rooting for because their patron house has been reasonable, which factions they want to see fail for reasons that have nothing to do with the tournament and everything to do with what those factions have cost them. They become invested in something they never chose to participate in directly.

That investment is what domain ownership is supposed to create.

MAKING IT WORK AT YOUR TABLE

The technique requires three things: knowing what is happening in the background campaign, translating those events into domain-specific complications, and presenting those complications with enough specificity that they feel like the world rather than Game Master invention.

The specificity is the critical element. “Noble houses are recruiting workers” is a background fact. “Lord Aeldric’s recruiting officer, a lean, precise man named Corwin Dast who has clearly done this before and is not interested in negotiation, arrived yesterday morning and offered Tomren and Hilda two months’ wages for six weeks of tournament service” is a scene. The first tells players something is happening. The second puts it in front of them with a face attached to it, which is how the world feels real.

Begin with a single season of *The Grand Tournament*. Read it completely before building anything. Understand what the background says is happening, not just the headline events, but the secondary effects: which noble houses are competing aggressively, what they need to compete, what that need costs the people and institutions they are drawing resources from.

Then ask three questions about your players’ domain.

What does this background development need? A noble recruitment drive needs labor, and it will pay premium rates to get it. A succession crisis needs political neutrality to remain comfortable, and domains with visible faction affiliations lose that comfort first. A border conflict needs provisions and secure routes, and any domain that sits along the relevant roads becomes relevant whether it wants to be or not.

How does that need reach the domain specifically? The answer depends on what the domain is and where it sits. A farm near a major road feels labor recruitment differently than a farm at the end of a valley with no strategic importance. An inn on the tournament circuit route becomes a political asset. A workshop whose master craftsperson has a reputation for quality becomes a recruitment target. The same background event produces different complications depending on what it touches.

What choice does this force on the players? This is the design test. A background complication that does not require a decision is flavor. A background complication that requires a decision, one with real consequences in either direction, with NPCs who remember what was chosen, is story. The merchant’s contract is only interesting if selling

the harvest to him means something is not sold to Sera Lindvane, and she is someone the players will see again.

Three questions, applied with specificity to your players' domain, and the background campaign has become something your players live with rather than something that exists in a document they have not read.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Domains become story generators when they are connection points rather than isolated mechanical benefits.

The farm is not just 2 Wealth Points per month. It is the thing that makes your players notice when tournament politics affect labor markets. It is why they have an opinion about House Aeldric that has nothing to do with the tournament. It is the reason they care about Sera Lindvane's grain situation, about Corwin Dast's return in Year Two with a more aggressive offer, about what happens when the Azure Star knights who usually patrol the road are reassigned and the bandit situation becomes serious enough that someone needs to do something about it.

The Reputation and Renown system documented in the Game Master's Guide tracks how standing accumulates through exactly these kinds of decisions: whether the players honored the local village's claim on the harvest or sold to the noble house, whether they dealt with the bandits or paid someone else to, whether they remained accessible to the community that surrounds their domain or treated it as a mechanical resource to be optimized. The background campaign generates the moments. The reputation system makes them matter beyond the session in which they occur.

This is the game domain ownership was designed to create. Not the passive collection of income, but the experience of having a stake in a world that does not stop moving because the characters are looking the other way.

BEYOND TOURNAMENTS: THE CORE TECHNIQUE

The Grand Tournament is the worked example because it is specifically designed as a source of sustained political and economic disruption that reaches every corner of the Heartlands over a defined three-year period. But the technique it demonstrates works with any background development large enough to matter and distant enough that the players do not directly control it.

A border conflict with Glacierhold affects agricultural holdings through military requisitions, refugee movements, and disrupted trade routes, even if your players never join the army and the border is three weeks' travel from their farm. A plague in the coastal cities reaches commercial domains through quarantine-disrupted supply chains, the departure of merchants who normally anchor seasonal trade, and the particular decisions that get made when institutions are afraid, even if your players never visit an affected city. A succession crisis among the nobility creates political instability that changes how tax obligations are enforced, which factions are pressing their interests aggressively, and who among the players' NPC relationships is suddenly in a precarious position, even if the players never involve themselves in court politics.

The technique is always the same. Establish what is happening in the larger world. Identify what that development needs and how those needs reach the domain specifically. Find the choice it forces on the players, give that choice a face and a consequence, and let it arrive in play as part of the world rather than as a Game Master announcement.

The background campaign provides the why. The domain provides the how. The players provide the decision. The world remembers what they chose.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER DOMAINS?

The farm demonstrates the technique, but the same background events create different complications depending on what your players own. The following examples use Spring of Year Two of The Grand Tournament, when noble house competition for talent has intensified, international delegations have arrived, and criminal organizations have grown bolder in the spaces that enforcement has abandoned.

The Ranch: A Question of Bloodlines

Your players breed quality horses near Fordsgate. They have spent two years building bloodlines they are genuinely proud of, selling mounts to local farmers and the occasional traveling merchant. The income is modest but reliable, and the reputation they are building among serious breeders matters to them more than the monthly numbers suggest.

Then House Bravellan's master-of-horse arrives.

He wants the breeding stock, not all of it, but the best of it, the animals that took two years to develop. He is willing to pay triple market rate. For a ranch at this scale, that is the entire year's profit in a single transaction.

The problem is that those horses are not inventory. They are the program. Selling them means a short-term windfall and a long-term setback measured in seasons, because the bloodlines those animals carry do not exist anywhere else. The master-of-horse is aware of this and does not particularly care. If the players refuse, he will go to their nearest competitor, and that competitor will take the money and spend the next two years catching up to where the players are now.

At the same time, two of the ranch's most experienced hands have given notice. House Thryne is recruiting grooms and stable workers for the tournament circuit at wages the ranch cannot match. Foaling season begins in eight weeks.

The Grand Tournament created all of this simultaneously. The noble houses' competitive recruitment for tournament success drives up wages across the labor market and creates premium demand for quality livestock at exactly the moment when losing key workers is most damaging. The players must decide what they are building and what they are willing to sacrifice to protect it. Neither answer is obviously correct.

The Inn: The Problem with Neutrality

Your players own The Traveler's Rest, a modest inn on the road between Riversgate and the capital. Its reputation is built on neutrality, merchants, farmers, craftspeople, anyone traveling the road is welcome, and nobody causes trouble because causing trouble at The Traveler's Rest means not being welcome at The Traveler's Rest, which is the only decent

lodging for half a day in either direction. The 5 Wealth Points per month is reliable because the reputation that generates it has been maintained carefully.

Then tournament season reshapes the road.

House Viremont's seneschal arrives first. He wants the entire second floor for the month, the noble house's tournament retinue needs lodging while moving the circuit, and The Traveler's Rest's position on the road makes it convenient. The money is excellent. The association with a major noble house would do things for the inn's reputation among a clientele that currently does not stop there.

House Thryne's representative arrives the following morning with a nearly identical offer.

These two houses are backing rival competitors. Whichever house the players accommodate, the other will interpret as a political choice. There is no neutral position available. The inn's reputation for neutrality was built on a road that did not, until now, carry partisan traffic.

The regulars are already nervous. Tournament season brings crowds, which brings thieves, which brings Azure Star patrols, which makes merchants who carry things they would prefer not to explain uncomfortable. A guild representative who usually ensures that certain shipments reach their destinations without incident has stopped by twice this week for conversations that were not quite direct enough to constitute threats.

The guests on the third floor, the ones who paid extra for privacy and meal delivery, have accents that suggest they are part of the Emerald Coasts delegation. They have been meeting with known Merchants Guild figures at hours that suggest the meetings are not casual. The players can ignore this, report it, use it, or find themselves implicated in it when someone else decides it needs to be addressed.

The Workshop: The Arms Race Nobody Asked For

Your players run a smithy in Millhaven, quality weapons and tools for local customers, a reputation for reliable work, 10 Wealth Points per month from regular orders. It is not a glamorous operation, but it is theirs, and the apprentices they are training will carry what they have built forward.

Then the tournament circuit creates a market for specialized equipment, and the market finds them.

A competitor arrives seeking custom armor built for tournament combat, lighter than battlefield standard, mobility-optimized for the specific conditions of competition. He will pay well. The work would push the workshop's techniques into territory they have not explored. Success would establish them among tournament fighters across the kingdom. Failure would ruin them in that market before they have fully entered it.

Before they have decided whether to take the commission, House Bravellan's armorer arrives to assess the workshop's capabilities. The noble house is consolidating equipment contracts with smiths who can supply consistent quality to their tournament retinue. The contract being discussed would significantly increase the workshop's monthly income. It would also require exclusivity: as House Bravellan's workshop, they would not be available to House Bravellan's rivals.

The master craftsman who trains the apprentices and handles the most demanding commissions has received a personal offer to join a competitor's traveling retinue as armorer. The wages are triple what the workshop pays. He has not decided yet, but he is thinking about it in a way that is visible to anyone who knows him.

Meanwhile, the Ironworkers Guild has sent notice that several tournament competitors are using non-guild smiths for custom work, undermining established pricing structures. The guild is investigating whether the workshop is involved in what they are calling "irregular competitive practices." The implication is clear enough without being stated: guild protection evaporates for businesses the guild decides are not operating within acceptable parameters.

The tournament created an arms race the workshop did not ask to enter. Every decision about which contracts to accept, which relationships to protect, which risks to absorb is now made in the context of a market that did not exist six months ago and may not exist the same way six months from now.

The Pattern

The same tournament background events, noble house competition, labor market disruption, factional tension, shifting trade routes, create different complications based on what your players own and what their domain touches.

Farms deal with labor shortages and provisioning contracts. Ranches face pressure on breeding stock and skilled worker recruitment. Inns become politically significant meeting grounds carrying information value they did not ask for. Workshops enter equipment markets with reputation stakes in both directions.

Trade ships, not covered here but following the same structure, face route disruption, cargo priority conflicts, and transport security challenges as tournament entourages move between venues along waterways that were not designed with competitive traffic in mind.

The background campaign provides the why, why these complications exist, why NPCs make specific demands, why the normal rules suddenly do not apply. The players' domain provides the how, how those larger forces manifest as choices with consequences for something they have built. The connection between the two is what makes the world feel like a place that exists independently of whatever the players are doing in it.

GETTING STARTED

The *Seven Days Before the Grand Tournament* and *The Grand Tournament* together document the arc in full: the political positioning and faction preparation of the lead-up, followed by three years of seasonal tournament activity with the noble house affiliations, competitors and their patrons, and the economic and political developments that accumulate across the circuit. *Legacies of Valor* provides the complete mechanical and narrative framework for domain ownership, including the specific domain types, income structures, Threats and Opportunities, and the broader Valor systems that connect domains to the campaign's larger story. If your players own or are likely to acquire a domain, both are the destination. This document is the introduction to why you want them.

Begin with a single season of *The Grand Tournament*. Read it completely before building anything. The secondary effects, what noble recruitment drives do to labor markets, what trade route shifts do to provisioning economics, what factional tensions do to the behavior of the institutions your players deal with, are where the domain complications come from. The headline events matter less than the pressure they create.

Identify the three background events from that season most likely to reach your players' domain specifically. Make them concrete. "Lord Aeldric's recruiting officer arrives, his name is Corwin Dast, he has done this before, and he is offering more than the players

can easily refuse for workers they cannot easily replace” is a scene. “Noble houses want workers” is a fact. Only the scene can be played.

Give each complication a face and a consequence. The players’ decisions in these moments should matter to specific NPCs who will remember what was chosen, not as punishment or reward, but as the world being a place that is shaped by what happens in it.

Run those three scenes. Watch how your players engage with them. Then read the next season.

The world is already in motion. The domain is the point where your players feel it.

*This supplement references *The Seven Days Before the Grand Tournament*, *The Grand Tournament*, and *Legacies of Valor*, all available as part of the *Legends of Thaloranth* product line at thaloranthpublishingllc.com. The core framework for domain ownership and the *Reputation and Renown* system are documented in the *Player’s Guide* and *Game Master’s Guide*.*

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