

FORT LEMON BRANCH

The name is misleading. Fort Lemon is a trading post and Territorial Authority garrison on the eastern-most edge of Faithful territory. It is the first settlement of any kind past the mountains. Anyone traveling from Back East invariably passes through Fort Lemon, but the place itself usually has no Faithful to speak of. There is no Branch. William Lemon, who founded the outpost, is a mountain man whose tenure predates the coming of the Faithful by many years. He owns all the land surrounding Fort Lemon, and he generally despises the Faithful. The Territorial Authority recognized the strategic importance of old Lemon's trading post and established their eastern garrison here. It is a tiny settlement, but it is a hostile place for the Faithful, and full of sin.

SOMETHING'S WRONG

For the past few years the Prophets and Ancients of the Faith, for a variety of reasons not relevant here, have encouraged Faithful Back East to make their way west in great numbers, in great haste, and with the least expense. To accomplish this, the emigrants build handcarts, formed "companies" that followed Branch structure, and walked 1200 miles to Bridal Falls City.

Those that left in early spring did well, making better time than teams of oxen. Their arrival was cause for celebration. The last Company to leave – in July – had a different fate. Confident that the King of Life would shield them from the onset of winter, the Company organized and led by Abel Watson plunged into the mountains ill-prepared, and was stranded. The Prophets and Ancients of the Faith grew concerned and dispatched a rescue expedition, which was supplemented by expert guides from Fort Lemon.

The rescue expedition could be played out, providing a number of excellent conflicts and an earlier point of attack. Can they make it through the drifts in time? Can they rally the starving Faithful? Can they get to the safety of Fort Lemon before another deadly blizzard hits? Can they work as a team with T.A. scouts and coarse mountain men? If you go this route, you can resolve Bradshaw Hudspeth's issues and establish the leadership of Sister Sharon.

The conditions faced by the Watson Company were dreadful – starvation, exhaustion, and hypothermia all took their toll. A quarter of the Company died, and many were narrowly saved. Frostbite took appendages indiscriminately. The survivors arrived at Fort Lemon in deep winter, and it is clear to their rescuers that they will not be moving again until spring. To William Lemon's great displeasure, the Watson Company survivors have formed a temporary Branch within the walls of his trading post. Men on horseback – the Dogs, in particular – are free to travel to and from Fort Lemon, although it is not without risk.

PRIDE

Abel Watson died in the disaster and his brother-in-law, Asher Crosby, took over. Brother Asher made some bad decisions that many people feel made the situation worse. Whether this is true or not is debatable – they were in a terrible mess and he did the best he could, which he freely admits was not that great. There are lots of Watson Company survivors who resent him, and about half feel that he should step down as Steward.

During the disaster, Sister Sharon Burns lost her husband and effectively took his role for the duration, caring for her two young boys and helping lead the Company. She is a strong-willed and highly competent woman who is credited with saving many lives. She kept a cool head and made hard decisions when Steward Asher would not. She is widely loved and respected. So respected, in fact, that a cult has formed with her at the head – a breakaway Branch with her as Steward.

Bradshaw Hudspeth is a wealthy man who managed to pack along plenty of food for himself and his family. He shared it, when pressured by Sister Sharon, but did so late and grudgingly. It is possible that others starved to death while his family was eating well. It is also possible that his was simply better prepared than other families for a gruelling journey.

Samuel Lutz had run out of food by the time the Company was stranded. He forced his pregnant wife Hannah to secretly cook and eat human flesh so that they might both survive.

INJUSTICE

Steward Asher cannot fulfill his role – he is not respected and his edicts are roundly ignored by half the branch. He is held in contempt by all who lost a loved one in the disaster. The community is divided in half.

Sister Sharon likes her new-found masculine role and is not eager to put it down. When some discussed making her the new Steward, she supported the idea. Now she is the sorceress of a cult, but doesn't even know it.

People went hungry because of Brother Bradshaw's greed; maybe even died.

Brother Samuel and Sister Hannah had to choose between death and sin, and chose sin.

SINS

Deceit, worldliness, and violence: The Lutz family has a big secret they are keeping from everybody. Sister Hannah is consorting with unbelievers. Brother Samuel is beating his wife.

Deceit and disunity: Brother Bradshaw hoarded his food until called out by Sister Sharon. Sister Joyelle is consumed with vanity.

Disunity: Sister Sharon and her supporters conspire to replace the Steward, and breed dissent.

Worldliness: All the members of the Watson Company are guilty of this – they have few resources and are mentally, physically, and spiritually spent. While they recover at Fort Lemon, they are at the mercy of unbelievers, and cannot avoid being exposed to sin and vulgarity at every turn.

Faithlessness: Some members of the Company, particularly those who lost family and gravitate toward Sister Sharon's leadership, are questioning the core tenets of the Faith, sometimes openly. Why did the King of Life not aid them? Why the suffering and death?

DEMONIC ATTACKS

The demons are having a field day. They like where Sister Sharon is heading, and they like the divisions within the community, and they love cannibals.

They are making sure that every decision the Steward makes turns out badly. He ordered two families to leave the home of an unbeliever; the freezing barn they were sent to caught fire. He bought some food from William Lemon; it sickened the entire Branch. Conversely, Sister Sharon can do no wrong. The T.A. officers get along with her and aid her however they can, and she has but to ask and old Lemon bends to her will.

They are driving Sister Hannah mad with guilt and shame by sending her dreams of her sinful acts every night. She has taken to drinking to blunt the images and secretly hopes to destroy her unborn baby, which is near term. Her husband, furious and ashamed by her worldly ways, savagely beats her with no demonic help at all.

Brother Bradshaw suddenly has a golden touch. He has parleyed his remaining possessions into comfort and security for his family, while others live in squalor.

FALSE DOCTRINE

Sister Sharon and her supporters believe that A WOMAN CAN BE A BRANCH STEWARD.

CORRUPT WORSHIP

Sharon and her followers have taken to worshipping on their own. The community is effectively divided in half. Since theirs is not a sanctioned branch, Brother Asher isn't sure he can prevent this, and in fact does nothing.

FALSE PRIESTHOOD

The cult is led by Sister Sharon, who has 50 or so followers. Her aide-de-camp is Peter Anderson, who lost his mother in the disaster. Their relationship is platonic but his wife, Tamar, is intensely jealous. Brother Peter is the outspoken public face of the Stewardship revolt.

SORCERY

The cult is served by a trio of demons who manifest as officers in the Territorial Authority cavalry. They attend Sister Sharon's corrupt services and do her bidding, and can walk among and interact freely with unbelievers. No one can remember them or place their faces, and they are not attached to the garrison, but everyone will react as if their presence is perfectly normal. These are lethal enforcers who are eager to start a conflict with the true Steward.

HATE AND MURDER

Brother Bradshaw and his wife Joyelle hate Sister Sharon.

Hannah Lutz hates her husband and unborn child.

No murder yet, but there is plenty just around the corner. One of the Lutzes will kill the other. Somebody will kill Brother Bradshaw in revenge. And then either the Steward or Sister Sharon will be next. After that, it will be a holy war in the icebound fort.

WHAT DO THE TOWNSPEOPLE WANT FROM THE DOGS?

The Steward wants to be a better man. He believes the revolt against his authority is entirely his fault and he is ashamed of himself. Since his “Branch” has not been solemnized by the Prophets and Ancients of the Faith, and is essentially temporary, Asher does not know how much authority he really has. He has no idea Sister Sharon has formed a cult - he likes Sharon and can't imagine her consorting with demons. He wants the Dogs to tell him what to do.

Sharon Burns is caught up in her rapidly-growing cult. She sees it is a natural progression, and that she is the rightful Steward. She is canny enough to recognize that Dogs may not approve of this – yet. She wants time to organize and recruit, and is happy to represent Brother Peter as the “dissenting Steward”. She wants the Dogs to abandon the Steward.

Peter Anderson, Sister Sharon’s right-hand man, wants her to be recognized as Steward. Although content to play the part for visitors, he is eager to extoll her virtues and praise her wisdom. He can’t help it. He wants the Dogs to approve of Sister Sharon’s leadership.

Tamar Anderson wants Sister Sharon returned to her role as widow and mother. She wants her husband to stop paying attention to Sister Sharon. She wants the Dogs to make this happen.

Bradshaw Hudspeth wants Sister Sharon ruined and the Steward returned to a place of respect. He also wants to be forgiven for his evil deeds, which continue even as he thinks this. He wants the Dogs to provide absolution.

Joyelle Hudspeth wants her husband’s success and wealth to be recognized, and she wants to be known as the most fashionable lady at Fort Lemon. She also hates Sister Sharon. She wants the Dogs to admire her, and she wants them to show Sister Sharon her place.

Samuel Lutz does not want his secret to be known. He wants the Dogs to make his wife to stop drinking with rough soldiers and trappers.

Hannah Lutz wants the dreams to stop. She wants her baby, which she imagines to be composed of the human meat she butchered and ate, to die. She will give birth while the Dogs are in Fort Lemon, one way or another. She wants the Dogs to forgive her, and she emphatically does not want them to name her baby.

William Lemon wants the Faithful out of his trading post, and he wants them to pay their mounting bills. He wants the Dogs to settle the accounts.

Major Mitchell Jeffries wants to ensure that the injured and sick are properly cared for, in his garrison lazarette if necessary. Beyond that, he wants to maintain order and keep the opportunities for mayhem to a minimum. He does not care one whit about Dogs, unless they start killing people. Then they are murderers, and he will track them down like diseased animals. The three demonic

cavalry officers will ride with him. He wants the Dogs to stay out of his way, and stay out of trouble.

WHAT DO THE DEMONS WANT?

If the demons have their way, the cult will subsume the entire branch after a series of murders and disappearances. It will travel into the land of the Faithful at first thaw and spread their heresy far and wide.

WHAT DO THE DEMONS WANT THE DOGS TO DO?

Recognize that the Steward is incompetent and accede to the will of the majority, who will agree to install Peter Anderson as the new Steward. He will, in turn, allow Sister Sharon to run the Branch.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE DOGS DIDN'T COME?

The Watson company will tear itself apart. Every Faithful in Fort Lemon will be dead, insane, excommunicated, or in prison by spring thaw.

WHO'S WHO

Asher Crosby, Steward and widower

Sharon Burns, outspoken leader

Her two young boys, Ethan and Zedekiah

Her demons, Captain Tom Blue, 1st Lt. Hans Gerlach-Saye, and 2nd Lt. James Braxton

Peter Anderson, Sister Burns' aide-de-camp

Tamar, his jealous wife

Bradshaw Hudspeth, rich man

Joyelle, his vain wife

Their three children, Lucius, Seth, and Deborah

Samuel Lutz, cannibal

Hannah, his pregnant wife

William Lemon, grizzled old mountain man. Unbeliever.

Major Mitchell Jeffries, T.A. garrison commander

THE DEAD

Abel Watson, original leader and Steward of the Watson Company

William Burns, husband of Sister Sharon, dinner of the Lutz's

Edna Anderson, mother of Brother Peter

LINKS

<http://www.handcart.com/>

<http://www.handcartpageant.com/index.shtml>