

# POLITICS & FOREIGN RELATIONS

*“We have political systems like this in the Empire. We call them ‘protection rackets’.”*

- MATTHIAS VON PFEILDORF, FORMER  
IMPERIAL ENVOY TO COURONNE.



Mention Bretonnian politics to most Old Worlders and they think of knights swearing oaths of fealty, feuds between noble families stretching back generations, and the pomp and circumstance of the royal court. These are certainly important features of the realm, and it is true that peasants are excluded from all formal power.

However, that exclusion does not mean peasants actually stay completely out of politics—not by a long shot. The invisible politics of Bretonnia, the web of relations and responsibilities between Lord and peasant, are as important, tumultuous, and vicious as the showy relations between members of the nobility.

## — THE FEUDAL SYSTEM —

Noble politics take place within the feudal system, an archaic political system that was found across the Old World several centuries ago. Now, Bretonnia is the only land where it remains. The feudal system is based on oaths of loyalty between individuals and has no abstract conception of the state. Whilst Bretonnians do think of themselves as a nation on a par with the Empire, there is no legal substance to “Bretonnia” beyond “all people who ultimately owe loyalty to the King of Bretonnia and the lands that they hold.”

Peasants form the foundation of the feudal system and are required to serve and obey the nobility. They do not swear oaths, as peasants are not thought to have the honour to keep them. Instead, they are told their duties and forced to fulfil them, by violence if necessary.

### NOBILITY

The nobility are bound together by vows: the oaths

of fealty. A lesser noble makes a vow to a greater, promising military service in return for sustenance.

Nobles fall into five main classes, which are roughly equivalent to ranks. Many nobles fall into more than one of the classes; Louen Leoncoeur, for example, is both King of Bretonnia and Duke of Couronne, and his rank is determined by his higher title.

### KING

At the top is the King. The King is sovereign, which means he is not bound by the law. He can make laws as he wishes, and anything he does is legal, because he does it. If the King were corrupt, Bretonnia would face serious problems. However, Louen is a shining example of chivalry, as were most of his predecessors, and so the King’s power serves as a check on abuses by the lesser nobility, even when those abuses abide by the letter of the law.

### THE KNIGHT’S VOW

*I pledge my service and my loyalty, body and soul, to my Lord. When the clarion call is sounded, I will ride out and fight in the name of liege and Lady. Whilst I draw breath, the lands bequeathed unto me will remain untainted by evil. Honour is all. Chivalry is all. This I swear on my blood and my breath.*



## DUKES

Below the King are the Dukes. A Bretonnian Duke has royal power within his dukedom, but he is still subject to the King. That means a Duke acting within his own dukedom cannot break the law, unless he disobeys a direct order from the King himself. Unlike royal power, the power of the Dukes has been abused, most notably in Mousillon. There is no current Duke of Mousillon to avoid having someone hold such authority in such a corrupt area. All Dukes hold their land directly from the King. Louen also holds the Dukedom of Couronne from the King, and thus holds it from himself. Legally, he is two different people.

In theory, the King can create as many Dukes as he wants, though the title is meaningless without land. In practice, only the fourteen great fiefs descended from Gilles and his Companions are held to be worthy of this status.

## BARONS

Barons are nobles who hold land directly from the King but are not Dukes. They are subject to royal law and royal command but not to the laws or commands of any other noble, including the Dukes. Thus, a barony is legally independent of the dukedom

in which it is found. There are not many barons in Bretonnia. (Note that nobles who hold land from Louen in his capacity as Duke of Couronne are not Barons; only those who hold land from him in his capacity of King of Bretonnia have that status.)

## LORDS

Below the Barons are the lords, nobles who hold land from a lord other than the King. They are subject to royal law, the ducal law of the dukedom where they hold land, and the laws of their immediate lord. Even the vassals of Barons are subject to ducal law; the baronial immunity is not passed down. The lords form the overwhelming majority of the landed nobility of Bretonnia.

## KNIGHTS

The bottom rank of the nobility are the knights. Knights hold no land and often serve nobles in return for food and lodging. It is important to note that all nobles are also knights; it is

only those knights who hold no other title who are at the bottom of the scale.

### THE PEASANT'S DUTY

*Son of the soil, thou art born to labour and to serve, protected by thy betters. Thou shalt give unto thy glorious liege the taxes that he requires. Thou shalt labour all but feast days, and no more than a tenth-share shalt thou keep for kith and kin. Rejoice! For a knight of Bretonnia provides your shield.*

### TITLES OF HONOUR

Titles of honour carry legal rights of less importance than those attaching to the titles of power.

## A HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF

Two noble families who had feuded for decades arranged a marriage between the heirs of the two lines, hoping for peace. The marriage soon became famous for the tempestuous fights between the husband and wife, but it produced a son. The son is a truly noble knight, and when his parents die he will inherit both titles.

Someone, possibly the heir himself, who may even be a player character, discovers the feud has its origins in a supernatural curse. The two lords cannot live at peace with one another, which is why the marriage was so violent. If one person becomes the lord of both fiefs, he will surely be driven insane. Can the player characters lift the curse in time?

## BARONIAL ADVENTURES

Barons who hold lands far from the King often become corrupt, as there is no one in the area with legal authority over them—just the sort of people for a brave group of adventurers to deal with.

On the other side of the coin, truly famous adventurers of noble birth might be made Barons of some particularly dangerous area. This allows player characters to join the nobility without having to give up much of their freedom of action. They do have a superior who can give them orders, but the King has too much to do to interfere with them much, if at all.

## SUBINFEUDATION

One of the Dukes of Bretonnia holds a small fief from a minor noble, who in turn owes fealty to a Baron. As the liege lord of a Duke, that noble has a number of privileges at court, and the new noble has started throwing his weight around. The Duke (or one of his courtiers, if the Duke is above any corruption) tries to frame the noble for consorting with the Ruinous Powers, so he can legally deprive the lord of the fief, which would then revert to the Baron. The player characters come upon the evidence but realise that it is faked.

Clever player characters discover that the Baron is in service to Slaanesh and has been subtly pushing his vassal to cause trouble for the Duke.

### Earl

Earls are rich and powerful nobles. This title grants no extra powers, but it is a sign of recognition by the King. Many earls are also Barons, but not all.

### Marquis

A marquis is a noble responsible for a fief in an area subject to attack, often on the borders of the kingdom. A marquis is allowed to gather forces and build fortifications without seeking permission from his superiors.

### Castellan

A castellan is a noble with responsibility for a major castle, which is usually held by his feudal superior. He has full authority over the castle and its lands unless his lord is present.

### Justiciar

Justiciars are experts in the law. He has the power to enforce the laws of the noble who made him a justiciar; the King's justiciars travel the realm enforcing royal law.

### Paladin

Paladins are renowned warriors and war-leaders. This title is a pure matter of honour, though many paladins are given dangerous lands and made marquises to put their talents to good use.

## FAMILIES AND INHERITANCE

Family is very important to the nobility. First, unless all your ancestors are noble, you are not a noble. This means the nobility are careful about whom they marry. Second, fiefs are inherited. Most lords cannot simply deprive one of his vassals of his fief or refuse to accept a deceased vassal's son. The Dukes and King can do this, but very rarely do; it is one of the few things capable of uniting all a Duke's vassals against him.

A dead noble's property all goes to his eldest son. The noble cannot leave it to anyone else, and he cannot give away fiefs before he dies. As a result, the other children of the nobility must struggle to find their place in the world. Daughters try to marry heirs, whilst younger sons might try to carve out their own fiefs by strength of arms or even marry rich peasants, trading the nobility of their children for the comfort of riches. The younger children of the nobility thus make good player characters.

Noble women cannot become knights (unless they pretend to be men; see **Chapter I**). The eldest daughter of a noble with no sons does, however, inherit his fiefs. She is the lord of those fiefs, but she cannot enforce the lord's rights herself. Instead, her husband must do this on her behalf. When the lady dies, her titles pass to her eldest son, as do her husband's on his death. If the husband dies first, which is not uncommon, the eldest son takes on the husband's role as defender of his mother's rights, but he does not actually become the lord until his mother dies.