





FACTIONS

“By what right?” the Chelish slaver demanded. He was huge, with skin an unnatural gray. Probably devil-blooded, but it didn’t matter.

“This one,” Armande said simply, holding up his sword. The blade glowed blue, sensing the slaves’ plight. Behind him, Leonila drew her weapon. The Chelaxian snickered and hefted a massive axe.

“So the Eagle Knights are thieves now?”

Armande refused to be baited.

“There are greater and lesser sins.”

“I’ll live with mine,” the slaver replied.

“That remains to be seen,” Leonila said. As one, the knights sprang for the gangplank...

Factions of the Inner Sea

While nations and major religions can command vast resources and control large swaths of land or huge numbers of people, they are not alone in competing for loyalty. In addition to church and state, many people feel influence from various other groups. These groups can vary wildly in size and purpose, from local thieves' guilds interested only in filling the pockets and bellies of their members to vast international commercial conglomerates with their own private armies.

The largest of these organizations compete with lesser (or sometimes middling) sovereign nations in wealth, power, and influence. In some cases, such as with Chelixa's Hellknights, sovereign nations go so far as to rely upon these powerful groups from time to time. In other cases, such as with the Red Mantis, even nations bow to their power.

Smaller groups, while lacking in resources, can nonetheless occasionally inspire even greater zeal from their members. Those groups that strive to grow in size, influence, or wealth frequently attract more dedicated and motivated members.

This chapter looks at five of the most influential and important groups in the Inner Sea region: the mysterious and slightly sinister Aspis Consortium, the earnest and sometimes annoying Eagle Knights of Andoran, the tough and pitiless Hellknights, the widespread and curious Pathfinders, and the deadly and distinctive Red Mantis. In addition, the rest of this section takes a look at a handful of smaller organizations that nonetheless exert enough influence to be known beyond a single city, nation, or region.

LESSER FACTIONS

The following smaller groups—organizations, cults, families, and businesses—exert some small amount of power in Avistan and Garund. Most of these groups have relatively narrow zones of influence and few are known to the common folk of the Inner Sea region.

Blackfire Adepts: When foul magic rends the veils between planes, Golarion itself burns with an insidious black flame. A mysterious cadre of outcast mystics, demonologists, and arcane explorers collectively known as the Blackfire Adepts tracks this ebon flame wherever it is found, venturing through these wounds in the multiverse to explore Outer Rift landscapes as they brush against the reality of the Material Plane. Those who return often do so changed in spirit and in body, possessing fell powers granted by or stolen from otherworldly entities. Rank-and-file adepts usually adorn themselves in red robes with fiery black trim,

while the inscrutable leaders of the group hide themselves among academics and world travelers. The adepts once enjoyed great influence as a ruling faction of Nex, but their exile in the dying days of the Age of Enthronement scattered them to the secret corners of Golarion.

Bloatmages: It's often said that magical ability runs in the blood. To bloatmages, this is no less than the literal truth. By overloading their circulatory systems and forcing them to produce as much blood as possible, these arcanists are able to achieve great leaps in magical ability. Yet such power does not come without a price. In addition to becoming morbidly swollen and obese, the bodies of bloatmages are always pushed near to their breaking point. In order to survive, these practitioners must carefully regulate their blood pressure with constant leeching. Those deprived of such methods quickly fly into an insane rage due to pressure exerted on their brains, attacking those nearby indiscriminately before bleeding to death in a gruesome spectacle.

The Coils of Ydersius: Many of Golarion's civilizations have risen, flourished, and died. Some, like ancient Thassilon or mighty Azlant, are still very much a part of modern legend, but others have fallen into utter obscurity. One such civilization was the vast and powerful empire of the serpentfolk and one of Azlant's greatest enemies. Yet Azlant prevailed over them, and so great was Azlant's victory that knowledge of the underground empire has been all but lost. However, there are some who maintain that the serpentfolk are only sleeping, waiting for someone to rediscover and awaken them into a world ill prepared for their coming. Those who seek this end are the secret members of the Coils of Ydersius, a hidden cult composed of rare spirits of the serpent reincarnated into the flesh of modern man.

The Eldritch Order of the Palatine Eye: Little is known of this mysterious order, reputedly based somewhere in the nation of Ustalav. They have long stood against the Whispering Way, but are best known for their involvement with those who brought about the defeat of the blue dragon Kazavon, Lord of Scarwall.

Free Captains: To an outside observer or a merchant whose ship has been looted or sunk, the pirates of the Shackles may seem like a disorganized scourge. Yet in truth, these pirates are bound by a complex code of, if not honor, then a mutual recognition that it's always good to have allies on the high seas. The Shackles are ruled by a council of pirate lords who call themselves the Free Captains, and as they sail the southern Arcadian Ocean, they follow their

own code of rules when it comes to who can be raided and what can be sunk—even if, to their victims, those rules at times seem capricious and arbitrary.

The Harbingers: The Harbingers were founded 60 years ago by Lord Garron, an ousted noble of Cheliox living in Absalom who found the *Book of One Thousand Whispers*. The book contains prophecies that should have been resolved during the Age of Lost Omens and mentions places and nations that simply don't exist. Lord Garron's Harbingers believe that the Age of Lost Omens is a mistake on a cosmic level. To them, every major event of the past century is compounding that mistake. The Harbingers believe that all of the book's prophecies are about the world as it should be. Lord Garron became convinced after reading the book that he could trigger the missing Age of Glory if he could only cause the conditions of just one of the prophecies from the book to occur. He died pursuing his insane goal, but his daughter, Lady Arodeth, continues his work. Her Harbingers seek out people, places, and things that might meet the terms of any of the prophecies written in the book. Of course, the drastic steps and actions the Harbingers take in their increasingly desperate attempts to right this cosmic wrong only seem to make matters worse, and as failure mounts on failure, the group drifts farther and farther from Aroden's teachings and deeper into utter madness.

Lion Blades: The Lion Blades of Taldor are a secret organization committed to protecting the interests of Taldor and the emperor. They oppose Taldor's many enemies, foreign and domestic, through a program of infiltration, assassination, and espionage. One of the major goals of the Lion Blades is keeping a rein on corruption in the empire (aside from corruption that is useful to them); another is keeping any one faction of the imperial court from becoming powerful enough to upset the status quo and topple Grand Prince Stavian III. Through its shadow schools, the Lion Blades intensively train new recruits, preparing them for the high level of initiative and latitude with which they will be vested.

Norns: The Norns are hooded fey women who travel in groups of three (known as triumvirates) throughout the Lands of the Linnorm Kings and, at times, into neighboring realms. Many sages assume a triumvirate represents one soul split into three bodies, as a trio always speaks in perfect unison and killing one drastically weakens the other two. Norn triumvirates frequently appear to lost travelers and questing adventurers. Young heroes seeking linnorms often encounter Norns who test their resolve and wisdom, rewarding an abundance of those traits with cryptic prophecies. Their prognostication seems tied to the mysterious Eldest of the First World, and even in an era where the old prophecies have failed, the omens of the Norns seem at times almost dependable. The tests of the Norns are almost always inscrutable, and most who survive

their trials do not realize until afterward—if ever—that they even faced a challenge.

Riftwardens: Legend holds that the Riftwardens, sworn enemies of the Blackfire Adepts, first came to Golarion from elsewhere in the Great Beyond, drawn to this world by their villainous enemies in a relentless effort to close planar rifts and gateways. Today, mortals and extraplanar allies alike bear the Sign of the Seeker's Spiral, and raise arms and magic against their hated foes. Riftwardens travel the Great Beyond and know some measure of its secrets, making them sought-after guides in arcane cities like Quantum, Egorian, and Absalom. Those who assume the secretive Riftwardens are pure simply because they align themselves against evil make a terrible mistake, however, for the obscure leaders of the Riftwardens surely serve otherworldly interests.

Sczarni: The Sczarni are a loosely organized association of Varisian bandits, smugglers, and thieves. Although only a small fraction of Varisians have Sczarni ties, these criminals are notorious enough that their activities are in large part the genesis behind the stereotype of Varisians as untrustworthy thieves. The Sczarni organize into tightly knit families, each of which has little to nothing in common with Sczarni bands in other locations beyond their shared skills, techniques, and pursuits. Their crimes tend to focus on thievery, scams, pickpocketing, and other forms of relatively nonviolent acts, but since these crimes often spiral out of control, violence often ensues nevertheless.

READING THE FACTION ENTRIES

The five major factions presented on the following pages each open with a short block of information following the faction's name.

Alignment: This entry lists the overall alignment of the faction and of its leaders. Variations in alignment can occur among the lower-ranking members.

Headquarters: This entry lists the name of the faction's headquarters, as well as the region where the headquarters is located.

Leader: This entry lists the name of the faction's current leader.

Prominent Members: This entry lists the names of several prominent members within the faction.

Structure: This entry provides a brief description of the way the faction is organized.

Scope: This lists whether the faction is national (active primarily in one or two nations), regional (active in the entire Inner Sea region), or global (active throughout all of Golarion). Note that a faction with a national scope might have a small number of agents active beyond its national borders but that they generally don't maintain extensive holdings beyond those borders.

Resources: This entry provides a brief list of significant resources the faction controls.

Aspis Consortium

Alignment: NE

Headquarters: Ostenso, with numerous regional headquarters

Leaders: A. X. Adrius, Jaydis Milon Malddis IV, and board of patrons

Prominent Members: Cirildimina Alasbhallas, Lord Pairo Gavhaul, Mr. Khayn, Professor Tantis Mais

Structure: Multinational corporation

Scope: Regional

Resources: Real property, other material, and liquid assets worth tens of millions of gold piece across Avistan and Garund

Nearly 200 years ago, a Chelish ship put into port at the Osirian capital of Sothis, its sails marked with the emblem of three intertwined asps. There it opened its hold to the cheap folk art and broken curios of the desert, dazzling poor craftsmen and smirking con artists with a rain of silver coins. Yet during the vessel's journey to Westcrown, a miraculous change took place. Offloaded in shining arks and pillowed cases amid a festival of anticipation, these trifles transformed into the treasures of antiquity, the heirlooms of pharaonic dynasties, mysteries with meanings lost to time, and relics ever more grand. The Osirion-obsessed nobility of the day never balked at the only fittingly grandiose prices called during the treasures' much-promoted auction. On that evening, the venture's three financiers each made modest fortunes, and the Aspis Consortium was born.

Structure and Leadership

The organization of the Aspis Consortium is structured so as to assure the organization's survival over that of any single operation or member. At its lowest tier are contractors, mercenaries, and other hired experts with no commitment or allegiance to the Consortium beyond the duties they are paid to provide. Such freelancers make up the majority of those in service to the organization; they are paid exorbitant sums upon a job's completion, but issued only loose terms dictating a task's specifics or methods—thus distancing Consortium members from any misdeeds.

Above such hired hands, true agents of the Consortium fall into three tiers, distinguished by small amulets, badges, or rings they carry. Bronze Aspis Consortium agents are skilled mercenaries, former professional soldiers, and educated members of the mercantile classes or lesser nobility picked for a particular skill set or knowledge of a given topic or region. All possess an ambition driving them to profit

and power, as well as skills exploitable by those of higher ranks. These low-tier members have little influence beyond the specific operations meted out by their superiors.

Silver agents coordinate operations and sift through intelligence gathered by their lessers. They possess a degree of autonomy to direct their underlings as they please, so long as their endeavors profit their superiors. While they rarely devise new operations or expand the Consortium's interests beyond an assigned field or territory, they typically oversee multiple underlings and often serve as local bosses and physical faces for operations in a limited region, urban quarter, or small city.

Above them, gold agents either control operations within entire regions (not necessarily confined to distinct national borders), or bend their cunning to projects upon which the syndicate places particular value. Such masterminds possess or are provided with the resources, wealth, and manpower to manipulate numerous operations over a wide area, and see a far wider picture than their underlings—some of whom might be totally unaware of their participation in broader, more nefarious dealings. Ultimately, they report only to the Consortium's board of patrons.

Mystery, misinformation, and slander surrounds the leaders of the Aspis Consortium, some rumors attributing the organization's leadership to dark cultists, alien beings, masked villains, or stranger menaces. In truth, the Aspis Consortium answers to multiple leaders, a body of eight shareholders often simply referred to as the Patrons, and the scions of two of the group's three founders: the often-absent playboy Jaydis Milon Malddis IV, and the syndicate's icy public face, A. X. Adrius. While the board and two executives supposedly share control, none can claim to know all of the Consortium's myriad dealings. This approach to organization has also allowed the group to distance itself from past scandals by publicly dismissing and condemning patrons, absolving the organization of any wrongdoing with a complex but well-rehearsed dance of public manipulation. Beneath the Consortium's leadership, several other experts hold great influence within the syndicate, notably flamboyant but deft spy mistress Cirildimina Alasbhallas, smug fleet master Lord Pairo Gavhaul, the stoic chief of headquarters security Mr. Khayn, and the obsessively focused but ingenious head of the mysterious "Conference Z" operation, Professor Tantis Mais.

The Aspis Consortium has numerous regional headquarters, along with storehouses, banking operations, and associated workhouses and businesses along the coasts of Avistan, Garund, and the Inner Sea. While the syndicate's first and oldest auction house—still the seat of much business, recruiting, and oversight—is the Vira Majestica

in Westcrown, its headquarters and the meeting place of its leaders remains at the towering, pyramid-roofed Aspis Building in Ostenso. Sizable regional offices can be found in Azir, Eleder, Magnimar, Oppara, Sedeq, Sothis, and several other busy port cities. Among other operations—both legitimate and extra-legal—the Aspis Consortium currently holds an intense interest in exploring the Mwangi Expanse, developing trade with Jalmeray and distant Vudra, recovering relics from fallen Azlant and beyond the Arcadian Ocean, and researching new opportunities and discoveries in Numeria, the Crown of the World, the Darklands, and even more exotic locales.

Goals

What began as a private trading endeavor with a canny eye for profit, a flair for theatrics, and few scruples has since transformed into the largest and most varied business venture in both Avistan and Garund. Trade and uninterrupted ties to a host of former Chelish holdings have allowed the company to flourish through war, imperial decline, and what once appeared to be the very end of the world. Although Andoran, Nidal, Sargava, Varisia, and other lands have gained independence from Chelish rule, few sought freedom from the goods and fineries of the old empire, luxuries Consortium vessels reliably made available, and for which Consortium merchants are only too pleased to charge exorbitant prices.

Public Perception

Today, most of the world views the Aspis Consortium as a wide-ranging group of merchants and non-landed nobility with a private army of agents, mercenaries, and cheap labor, regarding their black-and-white-sailed trading ships with equal measures of respect, envy, and worry. While the majority of Consortium agents are consummate mercenaries—interested only in personal profit, paying their association dues, and little else—the organization has made an undeniable name for itself as expensive but unquestionably reliable brokers in international trade and many markets' only source for numerous rare and extremely valuable commodities. This penchant for the exotic ingratiates the company with the nobility of many nations, even as its agents wander largely unimpeded with sellswords, guards, and hired experts in tow. The Consortium's mostly positive public image ensures that no matter what nation it operates in, most of its labor force and much of its mercenary support is local, recruited from among the native populace.

Yet for all their profitable opportunities and once-in-a-lifetime ventures, rumors of unscrupulous dealings, merciless practices, and bloody betrayals form an undercurrent of suspicion regarding the Aspis Consortium. While the volatile

times following the collapse of the Chelish empire enriched the group fantastically, the development of Chelixa's former holdings into nations unto themselves has decreased the need for Chelish goods while increasing the availability of such luxuries. This development has forced the Consortium to diversify its trading operations toward two objectives: discovering and being the first to exploit new wealth and new resources, and manufacturing a need for existing commodities. While such mandates might seem innocuous enough, the Aspis Consortium pursues these goals with a tenacity and ruthlessness that is notorious in many parts of the world. The moral ramifications of exploiting native populations, theft, warmongering and profiteering, and outright slaughter mean little to Consortium members—so long as these acts don't impact their greater prestige. Amid the cultured nations of the Inner Sea, all illicit dealings are conducted with a degree of surreptitiousness. Yet, as civilization gives way to barbarism, so too does the subtlety of Consortium agents wane, giving way to open violence and cruel entitlement.

ASPIS CONSORTIUM GOLD AGENT



Eagle Knights

Alignment: LG

Headquarters: Golden Aerie, Almas

Leader: General Reginald Cormoth

Prominent Members: General Andira Marusek, Marshal Helena Trellis, General Hedrik Traxxus

Structure: Military hierarchy

Scope: National

Resources: Numerous castles, citadels, and fortresses across Andoran

The Eagle Knights of Andoran are viewed by some as a shining example of the best of humanity in the face of a dark and cruel world populated by tyrants and filled with injustice. Others view them as benevolent but misguided ideological imperialists. Based within the nation of Andoran, the Eagle Knights find inspiration in its creed of common rule by the people, free mercantilism, and the respect of individual liberty. In many ways, they are best characterized as a military order devoted to the preservation and spread of Andoran's philosophical tenets.

The common impression of an Eagle Knight is of a soldier or paladin dressed in the blue-and-white regalia of the order and clad with the hallmark golden epaulets. Even the least foot soldier within the Eagle Knights' ranks stands among the best of the Andoren military, from which most of their number are initially recruited. Not all Eagle Knights are so open in their self-identification, however, nor are they all recruited from the upper tiers of the Andoren military, or even from the Andoren people.

Structure and Leadership

The order's current leader is General Reginald Cormoth, paladin of Iomedae and a sitting Executive Consul of the Andoren People's Council. Cormoth serves as the Eagle Knights' public face as well as its commander.

Officially known as the Guardian Tower of the Golden Aerie, the Eagle Knights' headquarters is a massive, seven-story column of white marble whose interior was quarried and converted into a gigantic watchtower overlooking the Andoren countryside. The column itself is ancient, and prior to its restoration 150 years ago, it was part of a sprawling, cyclopean ruin discovered and explored by Eagle Knights who carried the column back, piecemeal, as a spoil of conquest to the greater glory of Andoran. The exact location of that ruin and the circumstances behind its discovery are not entirely clear outside of the Eagle Knights' higher echelons, but following the column's restoration, the Knights erected a golden statue of Talmandor atop

it in honor of their—and Andoran's—celestial patron. Rumors persist that the column and the ruins in which it was found might be connected to an ancient center of agathion influence on Golarion, or that they might have some deeper connection to the legendary avoral himself. (Avoral agathions are detailed in *Pathfinder Bestiary 2*.)

Cormoth has held his position within the Aerie for a decade. Before that he served as a high-ranking member of the Andoren military and, most importantly, the unacknowledged operational leader of the Eagle Knights' Twilight Talons. In his present role, Cormoth serves as the hand behind the Eagle Knights' operations within Andoran and as an elite adjunct to the standard Andoren military and its foreign and covert activities, with each of these areas' operational management delegated to his three under-marshals.

Below Cormoth, General Hedrik Traxxus of the Golden Legion, General Andira Marusek of the Steel Falcons, and the publicly unnamed Marshal Helena Trellis of the Twilight Talons control the three branches of the Eagle Knights' operations. Collectively, any ranking member of the order is known as an Eagle Knight, with the member's respective branch added to his title for formal address. For instance, General Traxxus is an Eagle Knight of the Golden Legion.

Goals

Frequently operating beyond the borders of Andoran, the Eagle Knights recruit nontraditional soldiers, many of them from the diverse ranks of adventurers and others equally at ease battling enemy troops, performing diplomatic missions, or delving into crypts beneath ruined cities. Bards, rangers, and rogues find equal opportunity alongside fighters and paladins so long as they hold to the same philosophical and nationalistic beliefs. Barbarian and druid Eagle Knights are exceedingly rare. Clerics and arcane spellcasters are actively recruited into the organization's fold, bypassing the typical military origins of their fellows. Clerics of allied churches often straddle a line of loyalty, though within Andoran this is generally not problematic, as both institutions are wont to cooperate to achieve their shared goals. Wizards and sorcerers are prized for their diverse and powerful abilities. Diviners are especially valued for their abilities to plumb the future and provide detailed information that oftentimes eludes agents on the ground, even deep-cover sleepers.

Within Andoran, the Eagle Knights of the Golden Legion operate alongside the nation's military as elite adjunct units, doubling as field commanders and trainers depending on the needs of a particular area. The Golden Legion guards Andoran's borders and its interior trade routes and keeps a watchful eye on the nation's wilder regions. In the infamous

Darkmoon Vale, for example, the Diamond Regiment operates under Commander Ingrid Odeber, the woman many say General Traxxus is training to take his place.

Not simply bound to serve as defenders of Andoran proper, the Eagle Knights of the Steel Falcons act beyond their patron state's borders, spreading Andoren philosophy like armed missionaries. Although the Steel Falcons do not openly acknowledge it, their foreign activities include guerilla, shadow, and proxy warfare directed against groups threatening Andoren security and those holding hostile ideologies, particularly the slave trade. In fact, the Gray Corsairs—a fleet of unmarked ships infamous for sinking a trio of Katapeshi slave-galleons and dozens of allied pirate vessels—are crewed, supplied, and directed by the Steel Falcons. In recent years, the Steel Falcons have launched operations against inland interests of Katapesh's faceless overlords, pirates of the Shackles, and suspected mercenary proxies of the Cheliox-based Aspis Consortium. Hoping to spread their ideology to other nations, the Steel Falcons even provided a small number of military advisors to the fragile government of Nirmathas, helping to mold that nascent land in Andoran's image while keeping it free of Molthune's control. Warfare aside, the Steel Falcons have made numerous exploratory forays to exotic locations. The results of one recent attempt to reach and map the ruins of legendary Kho are still unknown.

Operating without acknowledgment of their existence, the Twilight Talons are the Eagle Knights' spies, saboteurs, deep cover agents, and—at times—assassins. Eschewing the uniforms, symbols, epaulets, and other overt regalia of their kindred Knights, the Twilight Talons utilize a covert system of hand signals and passwords to recognize one another and prevent their discovery by the same groups they seek to infiltrate. As a final identifying mark, each Twilight Talon operative is marked with a magical tattoo, invisible under ordinary circumstances but revealed by speaking a command word unique to the individual tattoo.

Known only to General Cormoth and Marshal Helena Trellis but widely speculated upon with great paranoia by their affected targets, the Twilight Talons have agents among the governments and militaries of Andoran's rivals—Cheliox, Taldor, Katapesh, the Shackles, and Nidal.

These spies only provide information, rather than risk breaking their cover to act in more immediately disruptive ways. More open action is provided by Twilight Talons who infiltrate groups without state support, such as independent slave traders and pirates, mercenary hirelings of the Aspis Consortium, and foreign, puppet extensions of the diabolist churches of Cheliox. The Twilight Talons report their findings to and pinpoint targets of opportunity for the larger forces of the Steel Falcons.

Public Perception

Despite their noble intentions and the prestigious light in which the citizens of Andoran hold them, the Eagle Knights are not always held in high regard outside their patron nation's borders. Realms such as Cheliox and Nidal are noted for being beholden to infernal powers and seeking to expand the mortal dominion of their distant masters—the collective lords of Hell and the god Zon-Kuthon, respectively. In these nations, reactions to an Eagle Knight range from cold tolerance at best to anger and eventual violence at worst. To the east, paranoid bureaucrats serving the crumbling empire of Taldor see Eagle Knights as rabble-rousers or even would-be anarchists.

The support of the Eagle Knights often comes to those who need it along with a push to adopt Andoran's social and governmental model. Even enlightened nobles who share the Eagle Knights' hatred of slavery feel a creeping worry that their own success and entrenched social power might be threatened by Andoran's waxing ideological tide. This perception is more likely than the open hostility of diabolists and slave traders to stunt and inhibit the Eagle Knights' goals in the world at large. Some suspect that the Eagle Knights are compromised by loyalties divided between Andoren nationalism and their founding philosophy as inspired by the legendary Talmandor. Perhaps such concerns are correct, and perhaps they are overinflated by the Eagle Knights' rivals, but they exist nonetheless. While the knights' crusade against slavery and the promotion of open trade between nations is supported by the merchant lords of Druma, some within the mercantile oligarchy worry about undue foreign influence from Andoran's more radical political elite arriving by way of their smiling, always well-armed missionaries.



EAGLE KNIGHT
OF THE GOLDEN LEGION

Hellknights

Alignment: LG, LN, LE (strongly skewed toward LN)

Headquarters: Varies by order

Leader: Varies by order

Prominent Members: Lictor Uro Adom, Lictor Richemar Almansor, Lictor Severs “Boneclaw” DiViri, Lictor Resarc Ountor, Lictor Rouen Stought, Vicarius Giordano Torchia, Lictor Toulon Vidoc

Structure: Multiple orders of crusading law-bringers

Scope: National (Cheliox)

Resources: Varies (individual orders’ resources vary from 12,000 gp to multiple million gp)

They are law without exceptions, justice without mercy, punishment without recourse. They are the weapons of desperate times and soldiers with the force of will to do whatever must be done. They are intimidation, relentlessness, and unwavering conviction. They are the black-gauntleted fist of absolute order. They are the Hellknights.

Goals

Grim-armored law enforcers uninterested in social goodness and exceptions to the rules, Hellknights exist to enforce and stringently maintain order. In their iron-handed exaction of law—specifically, the codes of their varied orders and that of their home country of Cheliox—Hellknights emulate the most organized and effective armies in all the planes: the legions of Hell. They are not concerned with morality. They are not concerned with methods. They are concerned with results. If people cannot be trusted to obey the law out of their own senses of civility and social righteousness, then they will be treated like beasts and taught to obey out of fear of a master’s stern hand.

Although severe, the Hellknights are not an evil group. There are certainly numerous evil members—particularly among the upper echelons of power—but the majority of members are lawful neutral, with members of all lawful alignments filling out the ranks of each order.

To strengthen their resolve, Hellknights study the methods, laws, tactics, and atrocities of Hell. They train with summoned devils until battles with mortal foes seem like welcome dalliances. Through soul-shaking horror, they seek to purge themselves of emotion, replacing it with steely discipline. Thus, Hellknights learn to make sacrifices for the greater good, obey draconian regimens of military conduct, commit to encyclopedic memorization the laws of their orders and local governing bodies, and undergo constant drills to temper both body and mind.

Structure and Leadership

All Hellknight orders have unique methods and interests.

The Order of the Chain: The backs of others are stepping-stones to power, or so believe the Hellknights of the Chain. Fugitive slaves, escaped convicts, and runaway indentured servants are their favored quarry, although freedom fighters, revolutionaries, and—on a more altruistic note—slave owners who keep their servants past a prearranged term also capture the chain-clad Hellknights’ attentions. Unlike many of its brethren, the Order of the Chain rarely executes those who offend its code, either returning its quarry to their proper bondage, reselling them as slaves, or permanently detaining them in the order’s prison-headquarters of Citadel Gheradesca on the cliffs outside Corentyn. Master of Blades Mardinus is the former slave of the order’s Osirion-born Lictor Uro Adom, and holds himself as an example of the heights one can attain through obedience to the social order.

The Order of the Gate: From its redoubt Citadel Enferac in the western Menador Mountains, the secluded Order of the Gate deals and bargains with fiends in ways that give even the other Hellknight orders reason to dread. The crimson-cloaked signifiers of the order outnumber the rank-and-file Hellknights three to one, and they claim to be granted otherworldly knowledge of egregious crimes before they are committed. While the signifiers’ infernal servants wreak their will in the world beyond, the order’s actual members turn their efforts toward gleaning knowledge from the planes and the guardianship of some vague charge. The Hellknights of the Gate have no lictor, and are instead overseen by the ever-masked Vicarius Giordano Torchia.

The Order of the God Claw: The pentomic Order of the God Claw extols variations and virtues of five lawful deities, distilling select tenets into a dogma far from any one god’s faith. Although the God Claw venerates aspects of Abadar, Asmodeus, Iomedae, Irori, and Torag, it is unclear from which of these gods it draws its power; indeed, it is possible that its own convictions grant it divine strength. Where other orders of Hellknights enforce their visions of law out of a sense of duty and grim necessity, the God Claw does so out of religious fervor and a belief that the world must forcibly be set upon a righteous path. The sharp-tongued Lictor Resarc Ountor preaches his order’s iron-shod doctrine from its fortress Citadel Dinyar at the headwaters of the River Iseld.

The Order of the Nail: The only major order with headquarters outside of Cheliox, the Order of the Nail relocated to Citadel Vraid in the Mindspin Mountains near Korvosa 26 years ago. Tenacious hunters of brigands and

crusaders against savagery, the order members' interests often parallel those of local law enforcers. Lictor Severs "Boneclaw" DiViri—so nicknamed for the distinctive gauntlet he wears to cover his fire-withered left hand—commands the order and proves markedly open to requests for his Hellknights' aid.

The Order of the Pyre: The Hellknights of the Pyre view faith as the clearest window into the darkness of the heart. Seeking out cults of imaginary gods, crude shamans, and backwater witches, the order sees heathenish belief as an impediment to civilization and an excuse for lawlessness. Hunts for practitioners of godless faiths often lead the Hellknights far from their home in Citadel Krane outside the port of Ostenso—particularly into the depths of Garund. A strict atheist, Lictor Rouen Stought eyes the strange religions of Jalmeray with particular distaste, and while wise enough not to provoke the Vudrani on their island home, her followers frequently hound travelers from the Impossible Kingdom.

The Order of the Rack: The Hellknights of the Rack contend that knowledge can wound as deeply as any blade. With this in mind, they seek out and cleanse dangerous knowledge wherever they find it. What qualifies as unlawful information varies, from the unholy texts of demonic cults, to revolutionary prints from Galt, to many of the more egalitarian philosophies of the ancient Azlanti. The order takes the rack, an example of dangerous learning, as its symbol, and often puts the rack to use to prove the danger of misguided invention. On the second Oathday of every month, Lictor Richemar Almansor hosts public burnings of confiscated texts in the shadow of Citadel Rivad near Westcrown.

The Order of the Scourge: With anonymity and no threat of consequences, everyone is destined to become a criminal. The Order of the Scourge combats the lawless tendencies within mortal hearts through ever-present watchfulness and brutal reminders that no crime goes unpunished. It employs a vast network of informants, pays significant bounties for substantiated accusations, and publicly metes out grim punishments to perpetrators. Under the perfectionist Lictor Toulon Vidoc, the Hellknights frequently travel from Citadel Demain near Egorian to patrol crime-ridden slums and annihilate criminal organizations.

HELLKNIGHT TITLES

Hellknight orders are first and foremost military organizations, and as such, they share a system of ranking individuals based on their skills, experience, and exemplary enforcement of their order's tenets.

Lictor: A general of a Hellknight order.

Vicarius: A scholarly leader of a Hellknight order.

Master/Mistress of Blades: A marshal commander of a Hellknight order, second to a lictor and equal in rank to a Paravicar.

Paravicar: A leader of a Hellknight order's signifers, equal in rank to a Master or Mistress of Blades.

Paralictor: A high-ranking Hellknight officer.

Maralictor: A mid-level Hellknight officer, similar to a lieutenant.

Signifer: A Hellknight arcane or religious spellcaster.

Hellknight: A typical soldier in a Hellknight order.

Armiger: A Hellknight in training; a squire.

Lesser Orders: Numerous lesser orders exist, although few are known outside the borders of Cheliah. For example, Egorian's Order of the Scar stalks murderers and assassins, while the Whisperwood's Order of the Pike hunts down monsters that flourish in civilized lands. These smaller orders are only slightly less feared than their better-known peers.

Public Perception

While widely feared and respected, most Hellknights join their order out of a sense of duty and a desire to be a part of something greater, seeing a world ruled by just law and free of rampaging beasts, cheating thieves, and lawless murderers as a future well worth striving toward—even at the sacrifice of some freedoms. Countries and rulers beset by criminal elements are sometimes known to invite Hellknights into their lands, leaving the business of law enforcement to an already loathed third party. Convincing them to leave once they've been welcomed sometimes proves problematic.



HELLKNIGHT
OF THE NAIL

Pathfinder Society

Alignment: N

Headquarters: Absalom

Leaders: The Decemvirate, names unknown

Prominent Members: Koriah Azmeren, Marcos Farabellus, Sheila Heidmarch, Shevala Iorae, Osprey, Eliza Petulengro, Kreighton Shaine, Ambrus Valsin, Aram Zey

Structure: Loose affiliation of like-minded explorers

Scope: Global

Resources: Lodges and small holdings in most major cities in Avistan and Garund, a network of venture-captains and agents throughout the same regions, and moderate budgets at most lodges

Many of the greatest explorers of Golarion's modern age record their victories in an ongoing series of chapbooks known as the *Pathfinder Chronicles*. The amazing, often unbelievable tales bound in these oft-traded volumes tell of lost gods and sunken continents, of creatures older than the world itself who fell from the stars in the eldest days, and the fantastic ruins they left behind. These volumes also tell the stories of people—individuals who experienced some of the very best and worst Golarion has to offer.

The authors of these tales are members of the Pathfinder Society, a loose-knit group of explorers, archaeologists, and adventurers who search the globe for lost knowledge and ancient treasures. While an honest desire to unlock history's secrets motivates some Pathfinders, the promise of material fortune and fame propels others, who seek a sort of immortality in the publications of the Society. The rewards of academic study and glory-seeking, however, are not enough for yet another type of Pathfinder, who takes up the trade out of the simple thrill for perilous adventure.

Structure and Leadership

The Pathfinder Society was founded more than 400 years ago by a consortium of adventurers and scoundrels fond of working together and regaling each other with tales of their exploits. As the group grew and became more formalized, a governing council of 10 members was formed—the original Decemvirate. With the organization's continued expansion in both popularity and wealth, the members of the Decemvirate were eventually masked for their own safety, and today the Pathfinder Society is ruled by a shadowy group of masked individuals whose identities are unknown and unheralded. Presumably, the composition of the Decemvirate has changed over the passing of centuries, but when or how the Ten recruit new members is as secretive as their true identities.

Operatives known as venture-captains coordinate teams of Pathfinder agents in their assigned regions, tipping them off to ancient legends, passing along newly discovered maps, and supporting efforts in the field. Each venture-captain oversees the activities of several different Pathfinder field agents, who in turn conduct much of the exploration and adventure that fuels the Society as a whole. Venture-captains are fairly autonomous but still answer to the Decemvirate. The ultimate goals of the Decemvirate are inscrutable, and not even the venture-captains understand the full picture of what the Pathfinder Society does with the information it collects.

The Society's chief resource is its vast organization of operatives spread throughout the Inner Sea region and beyond. Venture-captains in cities or especially remote locations usually run lodges where they conduct Pathfinder business. Typically a house or building owned by the Society, a Pathfinder lodge is completely under the administration of the local venture-captain. Agents may stay in a lodge as long as they are on legitimate Pathfinder business, but to deter freeloaders, lodges rarely offer food or extensive free services. Most venture-captains keep small stores of potions, scrolls, and mundane adventuring equipment for sale to agents. Mercenary venture-captains charge exorbitant prices for these if they believe their agents have uncovered a treasure haul. As information conduits, venture-captains also pass along letters or messages through Pathfinder channels upon agent request.

The original and greatest Pathfinder lodge is located in Absalom—this structure is known as the Grand Lodge, a massive fortress complex located in the city's Foreign Quarter. The Grand Lodge is a place of wonder and education, a bastion of knowledge designed to inspire and organize all those who live for discovery. During the day its carefully manicured lawns and monument-strewn plazas are dotted with Pathfinders trading information, and at night the sounds of stories and songs resound along stone pathways lit gently by witchlights.

The most recognizable name among the Pathfinders is legendary Durvin Gest, author of many of the best-known tales from the first several *Pathfinder Chronicles*. Yet the very nature of the Pathfinder Society ensures that the organization attracts a host of oddball characters and impassioned adventurers determined to make their mark on the face of Golarion. Many of these have become legends in their own right. Currently, a man named Ambrus Valsin serves as the steward for the Grand Lodge. He supervises all important duties within the structure and keeps a long list of relatively safe but

time-consuming jobs on file to keep rookie Pathfinders busy. Three other venture-captains—broad-shouldered Marcos Farabellus, radical arcane theorist Aram Zey, and eccentric Kreighton Shaine—serve at the Grand Lodge as the masters of swords, spells, and scrolls, respectively. The Grand Lodge’s newest venture-captain to rise to prominence is Shevala Iorae, a Varisian woman who got her start adventuring among the crumbling ruins of ancient Thassilon. Other venture-captains, like Galtan expatriate Eliza Petulengro, strangely deep-voiced Sheila Heidmarch of Magnimar, Darklands expert and scandal-prone Koriah Azmeren, and the enigmatic Chelaxian known only as Osprey, work constantly to ensure that the needs of the Pathfinder Society are well represented throughout the Inner Sea region.

Goals

The Pathfinder Society makes few demands on agents. Agents are expected to follow three primary duties: explore the mysteries of the world, report on findings uncovered in the pursuit of the first duty, and cooperate with other agents to ensure the success of the first and second duties. Unfortunately, because of the loose structure of the Society, conflicts are relatively common.

Agents are charged with writing up detailed reports of their exploits to pass on to their venture-captains, who then forward the most compelling accounts to the Grand Lodge in Absalom for consideration by the Decemvirate. Periodically, the masked leaders of the Society collect and publish the most worthy exploits in new volumes of the *Pathfinder Chronicles*, which are then distributed to Pathfinder lodges throughout the Inner Sea region.

Yet for as long as the Pathfinders have chronicled their adventures, the general public has clamored for access to these tales, as those that are published present exciting and hair-raising tales. Among scholars or competing explorers (particularly the Aspis Consortium), copies of the *Pathfinder Chronicles* are particularly valuable for their routes to treasure, secrets of magic, and other hints about how to navigate the far corners of the world. Reproductions and counterfeit copies are growing more and more common.

Public Perception

The Pathfinder Society is so loosely organized that it’s difficult to identify it as having a particular flavor or character. In most cases, venture-captains are members of their communities and participate in local customs and habits. Since venture-captains often maintain lodges, they tend to be more responsible and, as a result, less unpredictable than the average Pathfinder in their actions—although exceptions always seem eager to show otherwise.

Field agents are much more of a hodgepodge. The freedom for agents to be, do, and say anything they want is likely the organization’s most consistently distinct aspect. The liberty of agents occasionally clashes with the desires or goals of specific venture-captains, but rarely creates too deep of a rift for them to work together. The same cannot be said of most Pathfinder agents, and deep and even violent rivalries are far from unheard of among their ranks. Although the freedom to

approach their duties as they see fit is a distinct advantage on most missions that Pathfinder agents might undertake, it unfortunately appeals to a large number of individuals eager to abuse their perceived status as Pathfinders, and these bad apples have done little to promote the perception of Pathfinders as legitimate scholars and explorers.

In certain areas where information is seen as a commodity or weapon, such as Nidal, Cheliox, or Galt, Pathfinders are often greeted with suspicion. So little is known of the mysterious leaders of the Society that governments who particularly fear their citizens and rely on propaganda, misinformation, or similar exploitative tactics often see Pathfinders as threats to their control of secrecy, and a Pathfinder in such an area must take extra care to avoid attracting the wrong sort of attention. Perhaps even more disturbing are the rumors of a secret “shadow lodge” within the Society itself that seeks to take over and control its massive magical resources, but both the Decemvirate and many vocal venture-captains dismiss these unsettling rumors as utter hogwash.



PATHFINDER

Red Mantis

Alignment: LE

Headquarters: Crimson Citadel, Mediogalti


Leader: Blood Mistress Jakalyn

Prominent Members: Individuals are not noted

Structure: Religious cult/assassins' guild

Scope: Regional

Resources: City of Ilizmagorti and all industry and defenses located there, vast collection of information and ancient magic kept at Crimson Citadel, dozens of safe houses and caches scattered throughout most major cities in the Inner Sea region

ome say the Red Mantis are death cultists, others believe they are members of an ancient and incredibly secretive thieves' guild, and still others think they are fiends from some dark plane beyond our ken. The truth is, the Red Mantis are the most tenacious and efficient assassins the world has ever known. The timeline of recorded history is stained with the blood of their victims.

One rarely has to wonder if an assassination is the work of the Red Mantis; they usually kill with a sacred sawtoothed sabre, so victims often drown in their own blood before their hearts cease beating. No palace, fortress, hidden safe house, or underground cavern is secure enough to keep out the Red Mantis. A hundred years ago, they killed Duke Kotaros of Cheliox, and history is replete with tales of generals and heroes slain in their own tents by the Red Mantis the night before a key battle. Victims of the Red Mantis stay dead—no matter what.

Structure and Leadership

The Red Mantis headquarters is the Crimson Citadel, a castle hidden in the jungles of the Garundi port city of Ilizmagorti on the island of Mediogalti. While the Red Mantis power base is centered on the city of Ilizmagorti, they maintain cells and individual agents ensconced in nearly every major city, and in many small towns as well. Members of the Red Mantis have contact with many of their fellows, and they may even interact with the Vernai (the "High Killers"), a cabal of assassin lords who lead the organization and interpret the will of the Mantis God.

Although there are no strict rules preventing men from becoming Red Mantis assassins, it is exceptionally unusual for a man to achieve the rank of Vernai. While the Vernai retain their names, to anyone outside of this high echelon of killers they are known only by their titles. The only member of the organization's leadership whose name

is known beyond this strata is the Blood Mistress: the ultimate authority on the will of He Who Walks in Blood and the only person with access to the Sarzari Library (see Mediogalti in Chapter 2). The current Blood Mistress is Jakalyn. No one knows her exact age, but she is old enough that those who follow the actions of the Vernai are already speculating on who should succeed her when she joins the Mantis God in the Great Beyond.

Blood Mistress Jakalyn heads the organization, but she serves mostly as a resource for the Vernai. The council of High Killers does not have a specified number of members; any Red Mantis assassin who proves skilled, knowledgeable, and canny enough to draw the Mantis God's attention is invited to join the cabal. Traditionally there are 13 members of the Vernai, but this number is flexible—it has dipped as low as seven or risen as high as 23 in the past. Below the Vernai, the organization breaks into cells and hierarchies that change as the current assignments and needs of the order require.

Goals

As reliable as they are, even the most desperate plotters think twice before calling on the Red Mantis. One never knows what price they will ask—it varies widely based on the client and the target. They might request a handful of coins, a priceless artifact, or an unspecified favor to be redeemed at a future date. In every case, the price is nonnegotiable. Even those who get apparent bargains often end up feeling that the price cost more, either in gold or in conscience, than they originally thought.

Getting the attention of the Red Mantis is no simple task, either. There is no one sure method to contact them directly. One has to spread word in the seediest, most disreputable quarters and wait for the Red Mantis to take notice (if, indeed, they ever do). On the other hand, individuals who might be in need of the assassins' services sometimes find themselves approached by a business-like agent who presents an offer for the Red Mantis's assistance. How the Red Mantis come by this information is unknown, but they seem to have a supernatural way of knowing the name and details of anyone wronged or offended in a manner that calls for revenge.

The Red Mantis take on any assassination of any kind, save one. They do not commit regicide against a rightfully sitting monarch. It is said that this is because kings and queens, due to their divine right to rule, are the closest mortal approximations of the gods. Since the Red Mantis's own deity works for the gods as an assassin, it would be blasphemous to strike down a ruler whose rule has holy sanction. Princes, princesses, dukes, and all other royal

personages are considered viable targets, however, as are rulers of non-monarchies and any other sort of leader. The prohibition is as specific as it is sacrosanct.

Once an assignment is accepted, the Red Mantis stop at nothing to locate, isolate, and strike down their target. They have, either openly or covertly, connections in nearly every government, guild, religious order, and merchant group throughout Avistan and Garund. There is practically no piece of information so obscure or well guarded that they cannot learn it. And once the target is found, they do anything necessary to ensure his death. No decoy, magical duplicate, or sacrificial lamb fools them for long.

What's more, the Red Mantis see to it that anyone they mark for assassination not only dies, but remains dead. Through means mundane and magical, they keep track of their victims, and if by some happenstance one of them returns from the land of the dead, the Red Mantis mark the target again and pursue him with renewed vigor. Assassination is not merely a job or even an artistic endeavor as far as they are concerned. It is a holy calling, for they do not assassinate purely for monetary gain. Since the group is dedicated to the worship of the Mantis God Achaek, He Who Walks in Blood, their assassinations are more of a holy ritual or offering to their violent patron.

Unlike lesser orders of assassins, the Red Mantis do not dabble in other forms of skullduggery. In fact, they take it as a personal affront if a client even inquires about any other services. It occasionally strikes an enterprising villain that while they are performing an assassination, it would be child's play for the Red Mantis to gather information and perform other sorts of minor espionage. Anyone who actually suggests this finds his assignment turned down (if the Red Mantis haven't already accepted it). In addition, the Red Mantis never perform assassinations without being paid. It is part of their sacred bond.

Public Perception

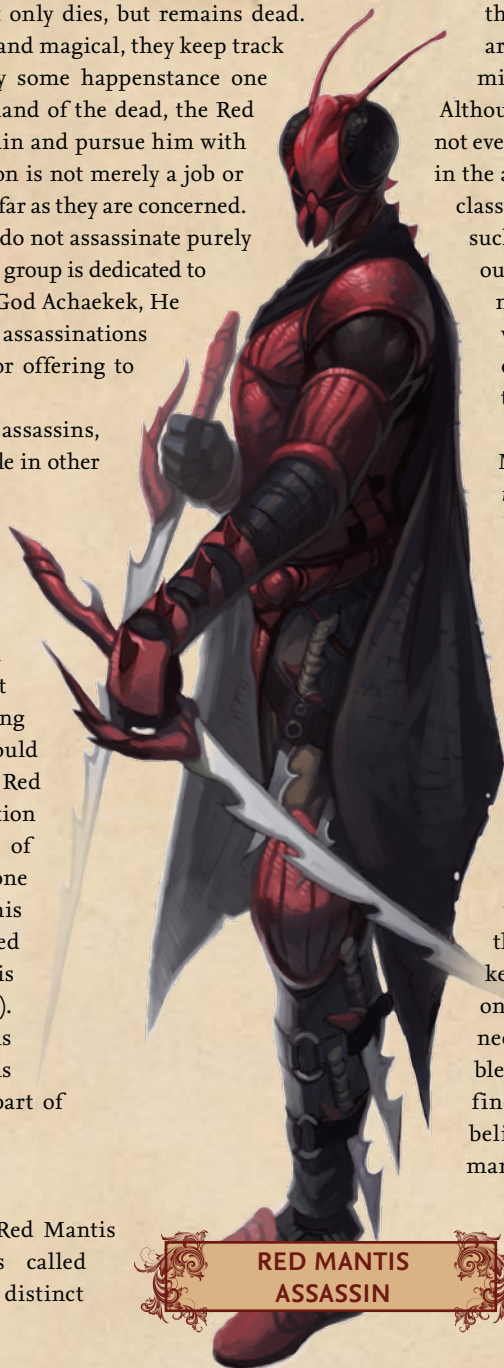
When on a job, a typical Red Mantis wields two cruel blades called sawtooth sabres, using a distinct

fighting style in which the blades are held point down so that the assassin's arms resemble the claws of a praying mantis. While the sawtooth sabre is as much a symbol of the Red Mantis as are their distinctive red and black uniforms or their insectoid helmets and masks, the Red Mantis do not particularly mind the spread of sawtooth sabre use throughout the Inner Sea region. To the Red Mantis, the wider this deadly symbol spreads, the greater the society's fame and notoriety extends. Of course, those who disrespect the sawtooth sabre by wielding it poorly in combat are often visited with the same brutal punishments as any who would dare besmirch the Red Mantis legacy.

Red Mantis agents favor mobility and finesse, and thus most Red Mantis assassins prefer leather armor over other forms of protection (although mithral armor is valued when it can be had). Although the society is a guild of killers for hire, not every member of the Red Mantis has class levels in the assassin or the Red Mantis assassin prestige classes—some are specialists in other venues, such as divine magic, arcane spellcasting, or outright warfare or unarmed combat. All members of the society are expected to worship Achaek, although levels of faith can vary from the most devout cleric down to the most pragmatic of rogues.

One signature piece of gear most Red Mantis assassins utilize is the notorious *mantis mask*. As much as they are veils to hide the assassins' identities, these insectile masks are tools of murder and death. Only the most egotistical and notorious Red Mantis eschew the use of these masks. High-ranking members of the Red Mantis are also often granted draughts of the potent *elixirs of shadewalking* so they can more swiftly infiltrate an enemy's domain undetected.

Members of the Red Mantis come from all nations and walks of life. They give up their former names and stations when they join, taking on new names that they strive to keep secret from outsiders, and keeping their old names and old identities only as convenient disguises or aliases when needed. Red Mantis assassins are adept at blending into any situation in which they find themselves and taking on completely believable roles, perfect down to the accent, mannerisms, and taste in food. They never use the same cover identity twice, so it is possible to meet the same Red Mantis operative several times and never even know it.



RED MANTIS ASSASSIN