

# THE PEARLSONG CODEX: POLITICAL SYSTEMS IN THE PEARLSONG REFOUNDING



**SPOILER WARNING:** The following contains key spoilers for the story that unfolds through all four books of the Pearlsong Refounding tetralogy. To avoid these, you might prefer to hold off reading this until after you have finished reading the series.

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In the centuries following the tragic aftermath of Gideon’s Fall, soundens throughout the Inherited Lands grew increasingly insular and distrustful of outsiders. This reactive stance was initially fueled by the sudden devastation inflicted through the Fall itself—environmental disasters, government collapse, and the permanent loss of nearly a third of the nation, which included more than two-thirds of its arable land. Rifts of suspicions and distrust widened even further as the other races one by one began to cut off contact with humankind and disappear. Most gave little or no explanation as to why they were leaving, or where they were going, leaving voids of ignorance quickly filled with conspiratorial theories replete with evil forces at work within the other soundens. By the time the Book of *Dei’lo* went missing, many had already lost faith in the Tongue, and as the Sojourns of the New Age repeatedly failed to retrieve the sacred tome, genuine belief in the Language of Power faded even more, until by the time of the latter Sojourns, many believed the sojourners were mad souls chasing after legends that were never real. When the last of the Old Lords faded away, the abandonment of Wordhaven followed soon after, until, in time, its very existence slipped from the annals of history and into the pages of legend.

This left a power vacuum that Avaddon, the Mel'eshi of Strength, rose up to fill. He found in Palor Wordwielder the consummate puppet, or so he believed—a pawn through whom he could fully enact his plan to claim the seat of ultimate authority and power that the Pearl once held. Under Avaddon's tutelage, Palor attempted to reunite the soundens, first by positive propaganda—a promised return to the Endless Age!—then, later, when that failed, by means of threats and displays of force.

A few example of these, and the traumas they inflicted:

When Palor moved to take the soundens by force—having already absorbed his native Aris, and renaming it after himself—Songwill was the first to rise up in active resistance, and entreated both Edonaras and Calmeron to follow their example. Edonaras immediately agreed, and linked arms for a time with Songwill's example in refusing Palor's rule. But the horse folk were not so blessed as the singers of Songwill to live in the Scolding Wind Hills, and lacked the Wind's protection. Palor utterly destroyed Edonaras as a result, and the Dunerun Hope was created as a lasting legacy of its destruction.

Calmeron, likewise, initially agreed to follow Songwill and Edonaras in a unified resistance against Palor, but when the elders of Calmeron saw what happened to Edonaras, they turned their back on Songwill and made peace with Palor, who then occupied their sounden without a single drop of blood spilled. This is the origin of the rift between Songwill and Calmeron, and the reason for the enmity between their people that remains to this day.

The sounden of Silvibor was also lost because of a Word spoken over it by Palor Wordwielder, but this was not because Silvibor refused Palor's rule. On the contrary, the sounden had submitted willingly, but later refused to pay the exorbitant tribute he demanded for the construction of the Wall. In punishment for this refusal, Palor spoke a Word that cursed the people of that sounden to forever long for their desires but never be able to attain them—just as their refusal to pay was “preventing” him from attaining his dream of building the Wall. As is *Sa'lei's* tendency, the Word eventually infected the entire forest, and, while held back by the blessed waters of the Whey River, even now its curse continues its slow encroachment into the Hinterlands, a fact unbeknownst to most of the Kolventu.

By the end, Palor's rule was rooted in terror, and while the soundens were arguably "held together" under his reign, their union was never genuine, and by the time he died the people and their leaders were more than ready to revert to their parochial ways, having been so deeply traumatized by Palor's despotism and his obvious madness.

After his death, then, when the Council Lords took over, they faced a nation in shambles. Initially their intentions, though certainly mixed and not without avarice, were largely benevolent. They meant to establish a less totalitarian, more open system of government that relied not on force and terror, but on mutual self interest, an echo of the ancient cooperative system established under the Pearl. But this new system soon gave way to the same corruption that had taken hold in Palor through the perversive influence of *Sa'lei*.

At the time of Palor's death, he had shared none of his knowledge of *Sa'lei* with any of his Council. But after his passing, the new Lords of the Inherited Lands discovered his notes, which were extensive, and began to study them in earnest. They quickly grew fluent—in part because of the detailed nature of Palor's notes, which included pronunciation guides, and extensive explanations of the three foundational laws of the Tongue, but also because the spirit of Avaddon himself aided them in their work, whispering to the lords in their sleep in an effort to help them learn the Words more quickly.

This approach was new to Avaddon, and far more subtle than the approach he used with Palor himself. Avaddon had taught Palor directly—spirit to soul—but ultimately, Avaddon's plan for Palor had failed because Palor fell into madness before the plan could be fully enacted. The dark Mel'eshi realized too late that the intensity of his connection to Palor had, in effect, destroyed the man's mind. So, with the Council Lords, Avaddon adopted a lighter touch, allowing Palor's own notes do the bulk of the work, and augmenting it only as needed through dreams and whispers as the lords slept. As a result, the Council Lords never realized they were being coopted into darkness. This remained Avaddon's approach with the Council Lords from that point forward, preferring to remain in the shadows, using his direct touch only lightly when

circumstances demanded it—that is, of course, until Stevron Achelli came on the scene, when he once again reverted to a more direct form of interaction.

After the first generation of Council Lords, the transference of the language from one Lord to the next became wholly oral—again, with subtle assistance from Avaddon himself. This was due to the fact that Palor’s extensive notes rotted to dust within a few years. All forms of written *Sa’lei*, whether inked on parchment, etched on stone, or even branded on flesh, will rot away within a few years, due entirely to the corrupting nature of the Tongue. The lords have never found a way to counter this, despite their extensive attempts to do so over the first few centuries of their rule. In present day, however, this is no longer a concern, and most lords actually consider it an advantage, as it helps preserve their standing as exclusive masters of the Tongue. The fact that *Sa’lei* cannot be preserved in writing removed all attempts to write it at all, thus making it very difficult to steal or learn without the direct tutelage of a Council Lord. But while the concentration of *Sa’lei* within the Council Lords has protected their position as unrivaled sources of power within the world, it has also limited their potential for expanding their influence not only beyond the borders of the Inherited Lands, but even within some corners of the Lands itself.

For these reasons and a few others explained below, the government system of the Council Lords, which is more than 600 years old at the time of Gideon Dawning’s arrival, has never in all those centuries reached the height of power to which it aspires. It has never, for example, fully united the soundens under its rule, despite relentless attempts to do so. Communal identity within the Inherited Lands remains largely feudal, based on the soundens and their unique cultural identities. Phallenar has managed to assimilate Morguen, but all the other soundens have been stubbornly resistant to the lure of identifying with Phallenar culturally. This is largely due to vastly divergent values between the various groups, as well as the vast gaps in wealth between them. Additionally, the “religion” of Phallenar, if one could call it that, which is a kind of *Sa’lei*-based humanism, has been leveraged largely as a weapon of oppression in the soundens to keep them underfoot, and as such is hardly attractive to soundenors, despite the prospect of the power it promises to those who wield the Tongue. This is why very few soundenors ever join the Guardian Horde willingly.

Those who are conscripted often prove unwilling or incapable of learning the Words of Death, and as a result are relegated to low-level roles, or even to the mines.

Similarly, the Council Lords' plans to expand their influence to the fertile lands east across the sea have been mired in political stalemate for generations. The reason for this is evident to all but the Council Lords themselves: *Sa'lei*. The Dark Tongue, the singular power base of the Council system, is rotten to its core, and has for generations had a rotting effect on all who handle it. The continual infighting and distrust among the lords over the years, not to mention the disastrous effects of inbreeding, have taken a steady toll on the integrity and potency of Council rule. Because of the corrosive effects of *Sa'lei*, the power of Phallenar has been slowly rotting from the inside since the day the Council took power.

The growing desert around Phallenar is symbolic of this. The Council Lords' failure to stop the spread of the Barrens, their failure to reclaim lands cursed by *Sa'lei* within the Barrens, and, more recently, the barrenness of the Council Lords themselves all point to an empire that is breathing its last breaths.

But that does not mean it is weak. On the contrary, it is the injured and cornered wild animal that is often the most dangerous. That is the state of Council rule when we first encounter them in the story. But as is so often the case with despots, the lords do not see their own corruption, nor do they see their own demise coming. Only Balaam worries for the future of Council rule. He believes that if they cannot truly master *Sa'lei*, all their lands will eventually fall to the Barrens' taint. This is partly why he breaks Council law by training Stevron in *Sa'lei* from his early youth, so as to produce a High Lord genuinely fluent in *Sa'lei* as a native speaker. Stevron shares Balaam's concerns about the Barrens, but also sees the destruction of the Council itself (both the individual lords and the bureaucracies they've created) as an essential step in securing the longevity of *Sa'lei* rule.

The decline of empire is rarely immediate. The systems of rule and governance break little by little until they reach a tipping point, then the entire edifice collapses all at once. The Council Lord's empire does not shatter completely until the end of the final book. But signs of its demise began long before the events of the story, and the hastening of its inevitable collapse can be seen by any reader who is paying attention.

This fall is very much the result of the long sickness of *Sa'lei* that has infected the Lands since the escape of Avaddon from Castel Morstal. It's the darkness within the Council that causes the Council to collapse. Its final confrontation with the power of the Pearl and of *Dei'lo* serves only as the final nudge that triggers its destruction.

## The Ruling Orders

What follows below, then, are descriptions of the structures of authority that rule the Inherited Lands when Gideon Dawning arrives. The ruling structure supporting the oligarchy of the Council Lords is built on four pillars, called Orders. They are:

**The Order of Information:** More commonly called, simply, the *Ser'jalen*. These are spies and assassins (referred to colloquially as “ears” and “daggers,” respectively)—both those who serve the Order directly, and those employed privately by specific Council Lords. In addition, there are also messengers—low-level *ser'jalen* (or so the *ser'jalen* claim) who serve “on loan” within the Order of Service.

In general, *ser'jalen* may or may not be taught the Words of *Sa'lei*, and may or may not be corded to a particular lord, depending on their function or expertise:

- **Daggers:** Specialized assassins, trained in ways of killing without the Words, and sometimes with. (Their eyes vary from clear to heavily clouded, depending on their level of training and use of *Sa'lei*.) Some serve the Order of Information directly, but many more serve individual Council Lords. Also, while it is officially forbidden for underlords to employ daggers, many still do. If caught, however, underlords can face severe punishment or even death, if the infraction is serious enough.

- **Ears:** Spies. Some know the Words, some don't. Some serve the Order, but most serve under the authority of individual lords and underlords. Anyone, anywhere could be a trained ear: an arbiter, a loreman (or anyone else in a Roamer band), a merchant, a sojourner, an “emissary” from another sounden. No one knows how many there are. But they are everywhere.

- **Messengers:** Couriers from the Order of Information employed to convey messages and other information via Worded teleportation across the Lands. While

messengers have to master the Word of Teleportation, the Order of Information claims they are typically low-level *ser'jalen* who know nothing more of *Sa'lei* than that. This is largely believed, reinforced by the fact that almost all messengers have clear eyes. (Unless someone speaks the Words continuously, their eyes typically will not turn clouded simply from knowing only a Word or two of the Dark Tongue. However, a person's eyes may develop a mild smokey swirl once they master a hundred Words or so. Eyes will eventually turn permanently smokey if one speaks the Tongue coherently over a handful of years.) The truth, however, is that most messengers are fully-trained ears, and the messenger-based system of communication, which is widely entrenched not only in the government but also in commerce, and among the elite, is one of the key tools the Order of Information utilizes to gather intelligence.

Aside from messengers, which are largely regarded as servants, *ser'jalen* are generally feared nearly as much as *mon'jalen*, since people never know whether one might be an assassin or a spy, for whom they work, or how much *Sa'lei* they might or might not know. The Master of Information is tasked with overseeing the *Sa'lei* training for all *ser'jalen* under his or her authority.

There is no official *ser'jalen* uniform, although messengers wear an official pin to identify themselves.

**The Order of Service:** These are non-Worded diplomats and public relations officers, judges (called arbiters), as well as high-level leaders who directly serve the Council Lords. Their official roles include:

- **Advocates:** Low-level officials who “make the wheels turn”—that is, pencil pushers and people pushers—as well as higher-level consultants and advisors who help the Council Lords and other highborn and high-level officials manage their roles and public perception. The head of all advocates is called the Advocate General, and reports to the Master of Service.

- **Arbiters** (in soundens): Experts in Council Law who pass judgment on crimes and other disturbances not worthy of the Council Lords' direct attention. Those assigned to soundens are officially called Council Arbiters, but are somewhat derisively referred to as VOCs by the soundenors (a shorthand acronym for "Voice of the Council," as well as a reference to a dim-witted wooly grazing beast called a vox). As arbiters are not taught the Words, they rely on messengers (each sounden arbiter has one assigned to them) to travel back and forth to the Axis to convey information and receive directives. Arbiters almost never live in their assigned soundens long term, as most hate living among the soundenors (the feeling is quite mutual), and much prefer the comforts of home in Phallenar or Morguen. They generally go out to their assigned sounden a few times a year, traveling by mount with their messenger and a guardian escort, and stay for several weeks before returning home. Their task while there is to a) act as VOC for any edicts from the Axis, b) resolve any local disputes or crimes via their own judgment (this includes passing sentences, which can include death), and c) root out and eliminate any dissension or rebellion within the sounden. Arbiters sent to the soundens (as opposed to those with positions in Morguen or Phallenar) are generally of lower rank within the Order, or else are being punished for something they've done to offend someone of higher rank or standing.

- **Arbiters** (in Phallenar and Morguen): Experts in Council Law who pass judgement on crimes and other disturbances not worthy of the Council Lords' direct attention. These arbiters serve as the lower levels of the court system, essentially serving as the Voice of the Council in lesser matters of justice or crime. As arbiters are never taught the Words, they administer their edicts via guardians assigned to their courts (which are called Inquisitions). They are often corrupt and take bribes to sway decisions in favor of one supplicant or another. The Council Lords care little for this rampant corruption, unless in rare cases it negatively impacts their own reputations within the public eye. Cases that do impact the Council negatively, when discovered by the *ser'jalen*, are reported to the Council, and are generally dealt with quickly, usually with great fanfare, by one or more of the Council Lords, who most often "exile the arbiter to the outer soundens" (often a

euphemism for execution), and denounce whatever injustice had been administered by that arbiter's hands. The corruption is systemic and entrenched, and further entangles the government bureaucracy in the evil of the Council itself. The highest ranking arbiter is called the Arbiter General, and reports to the Master of Service.

- **Magori:** High-level officials working within the Axis. These are roughly equivalent to cabinet members or heads of major departments within the government. For example, specific Magori hold titles such as the Master of Coin, the Master of Service, and the Master of Information (a *ser'jalen* who is almost always highly trained in *Sa'lei*), and the Firstsworn (who is often treated as the first among equals within the Magori ranks). When the Magori officially gather (which isn't often at all), it is called the Minor Council. This only happens in the most dire of situations, however, as such a gathering is often perceived by the Council Lords as an act of defiance or even rebellion against their authority. With the exception of the Firstsworn and the Master of Information, no Magori are ever taught the Words, for fear of them using *Sa'lei* in a power play against the Council Lords.

The Order of Service is responsible for communication to and governance of all the soundens, though their approach differs greatly depending on where they are operating. Generally speaking, while the Order of Service *enlists* the citizens of Phallenar and Morguen, they *force* the people of the soundens. This is because, although the people of the outer soundens are considered citizens, they bear this title as a formality only. They are more accurately called subjects.

Also, while each sounden is assigned an arbiter, those with the least to offer Phallenar by way of resources are more typically ignored and therefore, ironically, allowed the greatest independence and freedom. For example, aside from its stoneworkers (which Phallenar and Morguen hold in high regard), Agatharon has little to offer the Axis by way of resources, and so is given more freedom than other soundens to do as they please.

Of course, Songwill, which has refused Council rule from the beginning, likewise refuses to allow arbiters on its ground and gives no tribute to Phallenar.

Less free are those soundens that have resources to be exploited and don't have the advantage of being located in the Scolding Wind Hills:

Kharce, for its medicines,

Chara, for its crops,

Makroth, for its metals and ores,

Valoran, for its teachers, scholars, and entertainers, and

Calmeron, for its *bian'ar* breads.

**The Order of Coin:** Those who track the funds of the Axis, and are tasked with collecting tributes and taxes from all the soundens and their citizens. Generally, three of the Council Lords are jointly tasked to oversee this, and the Master of Coin has authority (under Council guidance) to enlist the Order of Peace to collect the tributes and taxes every year during the harvest seasons. Officials within this Order are called Coiners.

**The Order of Peace:** The military generals, majors, captains, and their Guardian Horde. All of these are generally referred to as guardians. Guardians also serve as the local police force (called vigils). Most, but not all, guardians have been trained in at least some Words of *Sa'lei*. Those who have can always be identified by the garrote they wear around their necks, which is called an honorband. Guardians who have been assigned to a particular lord are called *jalen*, and are usually trained in more advanced Words of *Sa'lei*. *Mon'jalen* are *jalen* who are given the most advanced training in *Sa'lei*, as well as other advanced forms of combat, and (crucially) have been corded to one particular Council Lord. Some of these serve as generals of the Guardian Horde (such *mon'jalen* are always corded to the current High Lord), but the rest serve directly under the Council Lords. While lords may each have a thousand or more *jalen* assigned to them, a single lord may have no more than one hundred *mon'jalen* corded to them at any given time. The one hundred *mon'jalen* limit is set by Council Law to prevent any Council Lord from accumulating too much individual power. The head of the Order is the Firstsworn, so named because he or she is corded to each of the Council Lords. The Firstsworn commands all the guardian forces with the exception of

the *mon'jalen* corded to specific Council Lords, who answer exclusively to their lord alone. The Firstsworn is also tasked with teaching *Sa'lei* to the ranks of guardians and *jalen*. *Mon'jalen* corded to a particular lord may likewise be taught by the Firstsworn, or by the lord him- or herself.

### **Tools of Persuasion and Control**

Control over the population is exerted in a number of ways through the Orders and the Council itself. The most obvious tool for control is terror, but this is a costly and exhaustive means of enforcement. It requires constant pressure and the never-ending expenditure of resources. What works better long term is to reward compliance with either the absence of oppression (i.e. do as you're told and you'll be largely left alone), or with the presence of goods and services that would not be available otherwise (i.e. do as we ask and you will be richly rewarded). In general, the Council Lords and their Orders employ the first strategy with the outer soundens and lower classes, and the second strategy with the elites and merchants of Phallenar and Morguen.

Of course, when it comes to the elite class—those who have been born to power, or have been given power as representatives of those born to it—there is a fair bit more give and take at play. Consider, by way of example from earth's history, an ancient King of England and his House of Lords. The King needs the lords to willingly submit to his rule. He needs to make it worth their while to do so, and accomplishes this most often through the offering of gifts, titles, and other favors. Within the Inherited Lands, the equivalent of England's House of Lords are those in the ruling bloodline families (and their more distant relations). Farther down the pecking order but still within the higher social ranks are the bureaucratic elite, the *mon'jalen* military generals, the Mentors Guild (who over time have gained greater influence than the other guilds on account of their access to the ruling caste), and the Merchant Guild, on account of their access to wealth. Generally, these factions are kept happy by means of bribes and favors, the luxury of security, the privileges of status, and the consistent elevation of the “state religion”—that is, by offering special perks and privileges to those outspoken

“true believers” who promote the power and enlightenment of *Sa’lei* and the divine right of the Council Lords to rule.

While all these factions wield influence, by far the greatest power players in Phallenar are the Council Lords themselves, especially as they are so prone to hoarding power on account of their distrust of their lessers and of one another. Keeping power concentrated within the Council, while less efficient, ensures each lord’s own security and legacy.

That said, even under the most oppressive regimes, there are always a few exceptions who challenge the system—defiant nobles who push against power for reasons of conscience or a desire for revenge or, most often, out of greed for personal gain. But in such cases, the Council quickly shifts to its first control strategy—terror—and through various means of both torture and extortion, silences resistance. In rare cases where an example must be made, Compulsion of Body may be used as punishment or to force compliant behavior among the elite. But this is avoided where a simple quiet assassination will suffice.

As for the lower classes in Phallenar and Morguen, and those who live in the outer soundens, violence is typically the Council’s first choice when it senses the need to enforce its control. Often, however, this proves unnecessary, as the threat of violence is all that is actually needed. Most people just want to be left alone to live their lives. If the Council Lords offers to leave them alone, and provides them basic protection from outside threats, while at the same time demanding they bow the knee to Council rule and pay their taxes on time, most people will go along with it—so long as it makes little difference to their daily life.

And...therein lies the key to the Remnant’s rise and stubborn resilience in the Lands: because even as Gideon first enters the story, we find the Council’s guardians upending the peace of daily life in one of the soundens. The Council Lords’ lust for control, made ever more compulsive by the dark influence of *Sa’lei*, has continually seduced them toward exerting more and more direct control over the soundens, which in turn has spurred the people more and more toward revolt.

## **Other Systems of Influence in the Lands**

In addition to the Four Orders, there exist other structures of power within or adjacent to the government that, while less potent than the Council or the Orders themselves, nevertheless wield significant influence over the governance, commerce, and culture of the Inherited Lands. Here is a brief description of each:

**The Underlords:** The biological children of the Council Lords, whose lives and training are tightly controlled by the Council Lords through a wide assortment of agents. Underlords are largely raised by surrogates, spending relatively little time with their parents even from a very young age. While they are kept from learning any *Sa'lei* until they are raised to the Council (for fear of any of them attempting a coup), their training in state craft and in general education begins as soon as they can talk. They spend their early lives surrounded by nurses, guardians, and mentors. In spite of the sequestered nature of their existence, the underlords quickly learn the advantages of building their own clandestine networks of spies long before they are raised to the Council. Through these networks, underlords can exert influence in many ways profitable to them, including enlisting *jalen* into their service, building alliances with merchants or mentors or other high-level officials, influencing public opinion about themselves or others they wish to promote or defame; and even, sometimes, hastening the death of a parent to speed their own rise to power.

**The Mentors Guild:** Responsible not only for the training of the underlords but also diplomats, military and government officials, and even merchants as well, as it serves the Council. Unlike most orders within the government, the Mentors Guild is largely built on a meritocracy. Anyone from any class may be tested for entry into the Mentors Guild, much the same way that anyone in medieval times could become a priest or a monk. Mentors rise based on merit for the most part, although there is still some favoritism when it comes to positions of particular influence. Laudin Sky was actually an exception to this, as he was born into the home of low level scribes in Valoran sounden, But through Laudin's extraordinary intelligence and savvy with regard to politics, he rose to the rank of Mentor Superior within the Axis. The role

not only provided oversight of the education of the underlords, but of all education everywhere in the Inherited Lands. It was a position of significant influence, and often involved direct interaction with the Council Lords. His sister Seanna (later called Seer) was likewise a brilliant mentor, but less savvy in the gameplay of elite society, and as a result did not rise as far.

**The Merchants Guild:** A congress of business leaders from each of the various commercial interests in the Lands, with particular emphasis on those within Phallenar and Morguen. Major industries are represented, and the goal is to broker partnerships when and where it makes sense to benefit the increased wealth of all the merchants. The Merchants Guild is seen as a necessary evil by the Council Lords, who regularly place *ser'jalen* within their ranks to monitor their activity. The Council Lords need the merchants to grow the economy (and thus make the lords richer in the process), but they hate sharing power or influence with such lower-class folk. The head of the guild is called the Merchant Superior, and deals mostly with the Master of Coin, but on rare occasion addresses the Council Lords directly.

**The Archivists Guild:** Historians and record keepers, as well as seekers of science and knowledge. They lack much political power, preferring to keep to themselves and their work. Those from their ranks who do seek influence generally transfer to the Mentors Guild. In fact, mentors and archivists often work closely together, and archivists often serve as teachers within the Mentors Guild schools. As a rule, however, archivists shun the spotlight, and rarely if ever seek notoriety, except among their fellows.

Those who live in soundens other than Valoran are most commonly hired on as historical recorders for the sounden, keeping track of birth records, bondings, deaths and the like.

Regarding their reclusive nature, there is one curious exception to this: A small percentage of archivists are selected to go through the training in the Artisan Guild to become Loremens, so that they might be sent off to the soundens, and to the Roamers, and even to Phallenar and Morguen, ostensibly to entertain, but secretly to

record the histories unfolding in those places. Periodically, these loremen archivists return to Valoran and store all their newfound histories in the guild archives.

The head of the guild is called the Archivist Superior.

**The Artisans Guild:** Actors, storytellers, poets, singers, dancers—collectively called “Loremen”—as well as painters, weavers, and carvers. Sculptors are not included within this guild, as they are exclusively trained in Agatharon, where there is stone and expertise in working it. Similarly, some singers chose to learn their art in Songwill, but these are largely more religiously minded. Nearly all the rest of artisan training is based out of Valoran. The head of the guild is called the Artisan Superior, or sometimes the Loreman Superior. They are a popular guild in all circles of society, and as such, carry a great deal of influence over the Lands, particularly in the form of the songs or dramas or other artistic creations they produce. It’s not uncommon for artists from the guild to be labeled subversive, and some of these are killed or exiled, but the Council tolerates many of them because of their popularity with the people, and the way they distract the populace from their sufferings under Council rule. Both the Remnant and the *Ser’jalen* employ Artisans to their own ends whenever they can, typically by enlisting them as spies (ears) in their service. Loremen who travel with Roamer bands are particularly sought after by the Remnant, as they can easily sow seeds of rebellion through their “news” and songs and performances in ways that can be more readily missed by the ears of the Council Lords. Of course, many Roamer Chieftans are also in the employ of the Order of Information, so it is always a perilous situation for Remnant spies in that context.

**The Scribes Guild:** These serve largely as servants to the archivists, artisans, and mentors. Scribes can write quite beautifully, and they often know how to do so in many languages. Even so, they are used primarily as functionaries in society, providing service to others wherever such a function is called for—contracts, edicts, laws, historical documents, training guides, even private letters (for the elite). The head of the guild is called the Scribe Superior, and rarely has any function outside of the guild. Some scribes have secretly preserved the knowledge of the High Tongue,

and have diligently sought to protect the black scrolls written in this language, even at the risk of their own lives.

**The Healers Guild:** A professional fraternity for those adept in the healing arts. While medical knowledge is limited in the Lands, it is not completely absent, and those who choose to join this guild can typically enjoy a life of meaningful and productive service, as well as decent, if not wealthy, compensation for their work. The guild takes a cut of all fees, and healers are required to regularly report on their work and research to the Healer Superior, who lives in the Axis and sees to the health of the Council Lords and the highborn families. Healers can be male or female (no cultural preference is imposed), but all healers wear a kind of habit (not unlike the mentors' shift) to make them easily-identifiable. They also bear a brand on the palm of their left hand that identifies them as Guild-approved.

**The Roamers:** Within the Inherited Lands, the Roamers have historically been viewed in a negative light, somewhat like those in our world might view conmen or scammers. They are soundenors who long ago not only abandoned their Trust, but their soundens as well, and now leverage their skills and knowledge to make themselves rich rather than serve the soundens from which they came. Even so, the soundens allow them within their borders and even profit from their services as a kind of grey or black market. When the Council Lords came to power, they saw the Roamers for what they really were—the ground-level communication network for the Lands—so they took them all into their employ, providing them financing and occasionally protection in exchange for giving the lords control over what news and information was shared (and what was withheld) across the Lands. This arrangement has continued all the way into the present. Roamers who break this agreement and are found out are immediately slain, thus promoting cooperation. In addition, the Order of Information regularly plants *ser'jalen* within the Roamer bands to further promote that cooperation. Nevertheless, the Roamers and their chieftains (who are both male and female) have developed numerous ways of their own to work both sides of the information power struggle to their own advantage. They will often kiss

the ring of the Council while selling their secrets behind their backs—and they’ll do the same to the soundens. A few of the Roamer bands, however, are true rebels, and serve directly under the leadership of the Remnant.

Despite their generally poor reputation, the Roamers actually serve a vital role within the Inherited Lands, providing a great stabilizing force in economics. After the collapse of the Sounden Trusts and the cooperative system they supported, the Roamers replaced all that, becoming the primary mechanism for moving goods from one part of the Lands to another. This is not a perfect system, however, and thus some soundens opt to supplement the Roamer visits with “sounden to sounden” trade agreements of their own, while other soundens reject this notion as being too dependent on outsiders and prefer to create self-sustaining economies. As a result, some soundens are wealthier than others, some are more independent than others, and some are more morally rigid than others, all depending on their collective choices around trade and the viability of self-sufficiency based on their geography, resources, and skill sets.

As an example, Calmeron sounden’s remote location makes it arduous for Roamers to reach, so they don’t come there as often as they do to other soundens. In addition, while Calmeron will sell its special *bian’ar* breads, the sounden elders have refused to reveal their breadmaking secrets to the Roamers, which in turn has made the trading relationship tense. Also, both the Roamers and the Council Lords have long suspected the sounden withholds some of the most powerful types of bread it can create, and so the Council has often sent arbiters and spies, and even attack forces of *jalen* to try to pry the truth from them. None of them have ever uncovered anything. For all these reasons, Calmeron chose to become more self-sufficient. They have done this primarily by gaining new skills in hunting and all forms of animal husbandry, allowing them to make their living off the rich wildlife of the canopy of the Watch, and the wild lands to the south.

Compare this with Makroth, which, while also remote, suffers horribly under the heel of Phallenar’s boot on account of the abundant metals in their mines. Under continual pressure from the Council to produce and process the ores that Phallenar’s industry demands, the people of Makroth have had no time nor opportunity to

develop the same sort of self sufficiency as Calmeron enjoys. Thus, the Makroth economy is heavily dependent on the Roamer bands to provide many goods they can acquire in no other way.

**The Society of the Remnant:** Woven in and through all of these diverse guilds, orders, and communities is The Remnant, with its network of allies within the soundens, and agents within Phallenar and Morguen. Officially named “The Society of the Remnant,” it has expanded and morphed over its lifetime into an extensive underground network of communication and resistance against the Council Lords’ rule. The Remnant was founded on the belief that *Dei’lo* is real, and recoverable, and that both the Book of *Dei’lo* and the ancient home of the Pearl, Wordhaven, still exist.



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