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Land Ownership

In theory land can be bought and sold by any subject of the Kingdom, but in practise almost all land is owned by only three groups-

the crown, the nobles and the churches. Only a small amount of land is in the hands of free peasants or the inhabitants of towns. Most people are tenants of one of the three great landowning groups, and pay rents on farms or pasturelands.

Law & Justice

All sentient creatures that choose to live under the King's Peace are subject to the King's Law, which is split up into three categories, Crimes Treasonous, Crimes Grievous and Crimes Petty. Crimes Treasonous are those activities deemed maleficent to the kingdom, such as dealing with foreign powers to hand over fortresses, attempts on the King's person and the like. They are very rarely invoked. Crimes grievous are such things as murder, rape, major theft or banditry. Crimes petty are minor larceny, common assault, weapons violations and the like.

The nobility once had power of judgement over their subjects, but in the last century the Crown has gained almost total control over the legal process. All major centres have one or more magistrates, who reside over the royal courts. In addition, travelling junior magistrates move about the villages and lesser settlements on a regular circuit, passing judgements on local crimes petty. All crimes grievous must be tried before the senior magistrates of the nearest centre. Travelling magistrates typically arrive in any given locale every four to six weeks. They are accompanied by a small squad of guards, to provide security on the road. Transport to town of those accused of crimes grievous is a responsibility of the local sheriff, who is expected to send them on as soon as possible. Some Lords have not accepted the royal control of the judiciary easily, and attempt to interfere in the judgement of crimes petty, passing sentence themselves before the arrival of the travelling magistrates. This practise is especially prevalent in Thestria.

Crimes treasonous are a special case. Commoners accused of such deeds are tried by the local magistrate, as with a crime grievous. Accused of Knightly or higher rank are always tried at Court, before the King himself. Defendants of any crime can hire professional advocates to plead their case, but the bulk of the poor usually make do with the service of a minor priest from the Churches of the Mother or of the Valiant Warrior. The prosecution is carried out, in rural areas, by the local sheriff or his deputy, or by the constable of a town. Trials of nobles must be prosecuted by an individual of at least equal rank.

Those accused of certain crimes grievous, and all crimes treasonous, can choose to accept trial by combat (the so-called manduel). However, since this trial is with the King's Champion, very few have ever taken up the option.

Penalties extend from small fines and time in the stocks (for the least crimes petty) up to the death penalty (for certain crimes grievous and all crimes treasonous). Each magistrate is given a wide discretion for imposed penalties. Some gain reputations as hanging judges, while others are habitually lenient. The crown appoints all the magistrates and sheriffs, the last from a list compiled by local

notables, especially any influential in the area, but town councils appoint their own constables. It is quite common practice for local magistrates and sheriffs to be knights, or relatives of local lords, occasionally the lords themselves. Sheriffs and constables create their own assistants and deputies, the quality of which can vary enormously.

See also

Constable, Magistrate, Sheriff

Literacy

The bulk of the human population is at best semi-literate. Generally speaking, only the more well-off have the money and the leisure time to indulge in formal education, although many hard working village priests strive to enable all the local children to at least know how to write their names. Some secular schools have been founded in the larger cities, and there is even a university in Shalgreth, but most of these are attended by the children of the wealthy and the nobility. Several churches have also founded schools, dedicated to educating the clergy. Most of the latter, and some of the former, have scholarships available for worthy members of the lower classes who cannot avoid the tuition fees.

The result of all this is that most clerics, all wizards, most members of noble and rich merchant families and a few lucky others are able to read and write to any extent. Most others, including the bulk of the peasantry and urban poor, cannot.

Thestria is much the same, since the great imperial school system fell into permanent disrepair following the Orcwar. Though of course the language used here is Castrovian, many members of the younger generations are also fluent in Montese. The Voors are almost universally illiterate.

Lord

Minor, non-titled but hereditary nobility are termed Lords. They have the same rights as knights, but are not necessarily martially skilled. They are called Lord (Surname) by others. They possess estates of varying size, but never approaching the extent of those of the Great Lords. The revenues of these estates suffice all but the most extravagant lord, but still many seek position and office under crown or magnate. Like knights, Lords cannot raise armies under their own authority. Lords have limited influence in their local area, but generally no national status. Quite frequently cadet branches of the greater noble houses hold lesser lordships due to intermarriage.

Because newly-created noble titles do not necessarily come with lands or income, there are many lords that are completely dependent upon the Crown for support. They are called "Pillar Lords" by their landed counterparts, since they seem to hang around court doing nothing useful, like so many pillars.

Lord Admiral

The most junior of the great Offices of State. The Lord Admiral is responsible for the upkeep and construction of the Royal Navy and the leadership of it in times of war.

Lord Chamberlain

The fourth of the Offices of State. The Lord Chamberlain manages the royal household and the maintenance of the royal demesne.

Lord Chancellor

The senior of the great Offices of State. The Lord Chancellor attends to those aspects of the running of the Kingdom which the monarch does not wish to attend to personally.

Lord Lieutenant

Lord Treasurer

The second of the great Offices of State. The Lord Treasurer is responsible for the collection and distribution of the Royal Revenues, including Taxation.

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