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Politics In 7th Sea

by Eric Steiger

(*Note:* This article reveals several details about the upcoming *Montaigne Revolution* sourcebook. Players may wish to wait until the sourcebook's release before reading it.)

Introduction

"In l'Empereur's court, a sharp sword can only get you so much. A sharp tongue, however, can make you famous, wealthy...or dead."

One of the most overlooked aspects of Théan society is courtly life. While nobles often interact with player characters, as patrons, villains, or plot points, the difficulty in creating a politically-based adventure can turn away a lot of players and GMs. We're going to take a look at some of the problems with politics and courtier-based gaming, and how to solve them. We're also going to look at each of the individual Théan courts in-depth, so as to help develop a feel and flavor of each nation's political life. Hopefully, by the end, you'll feel more comfortable integrating Théah's courts and politics into your game.

As long as people have been governing each other, there have been intertwined political and social circles in the government. All over the world, there are histories of courts and courtiers – from Ricardian England, to feudal Japan. Even today, politicians must integrate themselves into certain social circles in order to examine, earn, and exert influence alongside their peers. Seventeenth-century Théah is in the height of her courtly era, as nations are becoming stronger than ever before, with powerful men and women at their heads. As these men and women direct the growth and progress of their countries, they must establish a center of operations from which to issue rulings and edicts. At the simplest level, these centers of operations are their courts.

However, courts have become far more than merely the homes of rulers. Naturally, these rulers need advisors, functionaries, and subordinates, each of whom has his or her own specialized advisors, functionaries, and most importantly, agenda. It is these intertwining agendas that form the lifeblood of courtly life, as politicians constantly strive for political or social power, and the ears of those more powerful than they. After all, if you know to whom the king listens when he makes his decisions, you know whom you need to influence.

Oftentimes, it seems like the workings in court are far removed from the real goings-on of a nation, and this is sometimes the case. However, while a nation's heart may be its people, its brain lies within its ruler. The ruler of a Théan nation determines where to send food, ships, money, or soldiers. With a carefully (or poorly) placed word, a ruler can send his nation to war, or create peace. A ruler's word is law, and inviolate. She determines her nation's allies, and enemies. When a nation's king or queen decides to visit the countryside, the areas visited can be forever changed by his or her presence – bolstered by a royal interest in the region's well-being, or devastated from paying for royal appetites.

In a politically-based game, the themes can differ greatly by nation. The court of Gaius Ilya in Ussura is considered very provincial and backwater by the rest of Théah, as the Ussuran ruler has little tolerance for polite lies and intrigues. In contrast, l'Empereur's court in Montaigne thrives on political machinations, appearances, and social etiquette. However, one thing they both have in common is that neither one has any room for a misstep. Angering either l'Empereur or the Gaius is a good way to a quick death. There are, however, a few constant themes that reach to every court in Théah.

Presence is a key aspect of any dealing in court. If you are sloppy, ill-kempt, and poorly mannered when dealing with a superior, you will not be treated with the same respect as a courtier who has every thread in place, looks his superiors in the eye, and has impeccable presence and manners. Respect must be earned in the courts of Théah, and presence goes a long way towards that end.

Subtlety is equally important in a courtly setting. What is spoken at court is often not nearly as significant as what is

not spoken. While one of the unspoken rules of court is against saying any lie that can be traced back to you, the courtier's greatest weapon is the half-truth. If a courtier can deflect an inquiry into his business without giving a clue as to his intent, he can carry it out unchallenged. Furthermore, when you don't know who to trust (and in a proper court setting, you *never* know who to trust), a properly placed (or omitted) word can speak (or lie) volumes.

Intrigue should also be a major factor in a court-based game. Nothing should ever be straightforward, or easy. The villain you see is only the face for a half-dozen behind the scenes, and the plot you barely managed to foil was only a ruse. Whenever you think you know what's really going on, you've only uncovered one layer of a plot. Everybody in a court is trying to influence everybody else, and anything is a tool towards that end.

Individual Nations

Each of Théah's nations has, by necessity, one or many centers of government. While most nations have a centralized authority, housed in a large city, not all do. Vodacce is a collection of autonomous island city-states, with holdings on the mainland, and while the Vestenmannavnjar (theoretically) have a High King, in his absence, there is little leadership beyond petty nobility. The Brotherhood of the Coast, in contrast, has no ruling class whatsoever; as Théah's first true democracy, every member of the Brotherhood has an equal part in the decision-making process for the nation.



Avalon

For a very long time, Avalon was the second most unwanted post any Théan diplomat could have. The island was considered backwater, provincial, and utterly irrelevant to events on the mainland. The Avalon "court" was, as one Vodacce ambassador wrote, "a foul-smelling barn peopled by farmers, who think that a flock of sheep and a stone cottage make them nobility." In the Avalons' defense, they had very little reason to make efforts to impress foreigners; as little say as Avalon had in mainland politics, the mainland had even less influence over Avalon. This situation was perfectly fine with the Avalon populace, who were content to be left alone by the rest of Théah.

During the Montaigne occupation of Avalon (see *Avalon* sourcebook for more details), the importance of courts grew. However, the clash between Montaigne and Avalon values sparked a great deal of conflict in the political arena. Avalon pragmatism did not blend well with the Montaigne focus on style, to the extent of several duels being fought over perceived insults, which were in fact nothing more than blunt Avalon honesty. During the occupation, the Montaigne attempted to superimpose their values over the Avalon, forcing conversion to the Vaticine church and outlawing Cymric. However, the heart of Avalon could not be crushed, and they did learn a very valuable lesson from the Montaigne – the importance of central government.

Before the invasion, Avalon was ruled by King Eiliodd's dynasty, but the High King was more a figurehead than a functional governor. Individual nobles were responsible for paying tithes to their king, but as long as the land was at peace, they were left to manage themselves. From region to region, there was very little consistency in taxes, laws, or law enforcement. When the Montaigne invaded, all of that changed.

When King Athrwys spoke his prophetic words, "Avalon must be united, or we shall surely fall," he knew the importance of central government, but it took an outside invasion to educate the rest of his nation. The Montaigne established a very strong beauracrcy in Avalon, creating a very clear chain of command, beginning with the King, going all the way down to individual nobles. Each lord knew who answered to him, and to whom he answered. The king created the law of the land, and the nobles carried it out. While the peasantry suffered, they suffered equally. The distinction to be noted here is that the local lords now needed to attend the king, or a policy might be enacted which could weaken their position. Thus marked the beginning of the Avalon courts.

It is greatly ironic that the greatest gift Montaigne gave to Avalon caused their eventual downfall. Without a central court to plot from, or the experience garnered from years of dealing with the Montaigne, the Avalon nobles could never have conspired against King Charles. The resulting Statement of Rights cemented the existence of an Avalon court, as the nobles became involved in the dealings of national government, and keeping the king's power in check.

As matters stand now, the Avalon courts revolve around two major power structures: Parliament and Queen Elaine. A noble wishing to have long-term influence over Avalon law would concern himself primarily with power in Parliament, as Elaine's ear is difficult to catch and even more difficult to keep. However, if results are needed quickly and drastically, an audience with Her Majesty is one's only option. Parliament regularly takes months before a bill is passed, and occasionally as long as years. Queen Elaine, on the other hand, rarely waits on issues that concern her, and a petitioner will likely have an answer, one way or another, upon departure.

Queen Elaine keeps very little counsel, and the advice she does take comes from the most powerful people in Avalon, people such as Derwyddon, Bors MacAllister, and James MacDuff. It should come as no surprise that Elaine's advisors are as willful as she is, and do not take kindly to manipulation. Intrigue in Avalon, therefore, is centered less upon the formation of policy than its execution. Elaine is a very busy woman, and she delegates a great deal of authority onto functionaries, trusting them to accomplish the tasks she sets them, and rarely checking their work. Members or committees in Parliament handle many of the countless mundane tasks necessary to the

smooth running of a country, and these people are far more vulnerable to manipulation than Elaine herself.

Elaine runs a very practical government, straightforward and with little room for Théatrics or posturing. Compared to most others, Avalon politicians are blunt and forthright. A plan either is or is not in Avalon's best interests, and if it is not, then it has no business being pursued. Queen Elaine, who has very little tolerance for posturing, handles all disputes.

One cannot mention the Avalon court (or, for that matter, any other aspect of Avalon) without at least touching upon the Sidhe. It is known that the Sidhe courts, in some way, mirror the Avalon one, but how and why, or even which came first, is a mystery. The manner in which the Sidhe impact Elaine's court is the focus on deeds. The Sidhe affinity for legendary stories has greatly influenced the Avalon court. While in many other nations, one's fifteen minutes of fame usually end with little impact, a hero in Avalon, because of the Glamour associated with them, can accomplish great political feats.

The reverse of this tendency holds true, as well. While a great deal of Queen Elaine's power stems from the Glamour around her, the Glamour is, at least in part, generated by the power she wields. The love of the people can create very real power in Avalon's heroes, and this power can be both gained, and used, politically.

A political campaign dealing with Avalon should be about deeds over words, and the power of heroes. Avalon politics are realistic, pragmatic issues, and an Avalon game should reflect this practicality. While the Avalon court is a fantastic, beautiful place, it is an ethereal beauty, not a constructed one.



Castille

The key to politics in Castille is tension. Things in Sandoval's court are grim and unstable, and everybody knows it. Something has to give. In any political scenario in Castille, there is going to be somebody on each side, if only to prevent their opponent from having an advantage. While similar to the Vodacce situation in this respect, there is none of the scheming, layers of plotting, or sly maneuvering that dominates Vodacce politics in Castille. There is only intense, angry rivalry, with an unsure, confused child caught in the middle.

King Sandoval's lack of confidence and authority has permeated the entire nation of Castille, so that a proud, honorable nation is now powerless to stop itself from being consumed, both from within and without. "As the King, so is the Country," and Castille is no exception. While the vitality that is the birthright of the Castillian people is still present, in recent years it has been overshadowed by fear and doubt. Castille has always looked for strength in the twin pillars of the Church and the King. Now, however, the Church has become corrupted from within, an instrument of pain and terror, and the King is a boy, kept as a figurehead because he cannot be deposed. And so, the people must look elsewhere for their courage.

One of those to whom the people are looking is El Vago, a source of much of the remaining national pride. El Vago has done what the Church could not, and that is to earn the love of the common man. While ostensibly, the Church has no social prejudices, the reality is that the working men and women of Castille have seen little of the benefits from the Church's work, and with the rise of the Inquisition, they are seeing much of its uglier side. Furthermore, El Vago represents a strong, just authority figure, which Castille is currently greatly lacking in. King Sandoval is, as far as most people can see, a puppet with no real power.

The underlying theme to any Castillian political situation must be tension. Tension between King Sandoval and the Council of Reason. Tension between Don Andrés Aldana and Cardinal Verdugo. Tension between the Council of Reason and the secular government (if you're getting the impression that the Council is causing a lot of this tension, you're right). There is a very, very precarious balance in Castille right now, and while everybody is aware that it cannot last, nobody wants to be the one who upsets it.

One of the major conflicts in Castillian politics at the moment is over King Sandoval. Most people see two sides to this battle: Cardinal Verdugo and Don Andrés Aldana. What they do not see is the third participant, King Salvador Bejarano de Sandoval himself. Often, not even King Sandoval realizes he is a participant in his country's future; he is too worried about the present. Both Verdugo and Aldana know that Sandoval's brother is never returning to lead Castille (Verdugo because he had the man deposed; Aldana because he has been in contact with him), but Sandoval insists he is just holding the place temporarily. It is why he is not eager to be named *Rex Castillum*.

The minor Castillian courts do not work well as settings for an entire campaign, because the nature of Castillian politics removes much of the epic nature of 7th Sea from them. When it is impossible to push any major changes through the upper bureaucracy, then characters will either become frustrated (rightfully so), or get buried in minutiae.

Instead, a proper political setting for a Castillian campaign would be the royal court itself, deep in the heart of Castillian national politics. The Council of Reason is constantly trying to establish ways to permanently neutralize King Sandoval, Verdugo and Aldana are each trying to influence him towards their own ends, and Sandoval is

merely trying to keep his people alive, as best as a sixteen-year-old boy knows how. There is a great deal of opportunity for mischief in Vaticine City right now, and where there is an opportunity for mischief, there is a necessity for heroes.

Most Castillian campaigns deal with maintaining the status quo, either against Montaigne or elements of the Church. A political campaign should be no different. Castille is a political powder keg. Nearly anything is capable of setting it off – the Montaigne war, the Inquisition, Aldana (even good men can make mistakes), Verdugo, the Council, or even Sandoval himself.



Eisen

Eisen is a very interesting political arena at the moment, because Eisen is politics at its best. Eisen is a nation whose politics are not pretty, not couched in appealing language, not vague and esoteric. Eisen politics are gritty, real, and important. Eisen politics are about who eats, who fights, and who dies. Eisen's politics, like everything else about her, are about strength.

In Eisen, the way you get what you want is by having the strength to take it. Not necessarily strength of arms, or military strength, but strength nonetheless. Strength of mind, strength of character, strength of will. Eisen is a harsh nation, and a leader who cannot show strength will soon have no followers. In a battle, Eisen soldiers expect their leaders to be strong enough to do what is necessary, regardless of the cost. When is an Eisen not in battle? For an Eisen, life is war, and politics are no different.

Eisen politics are straightforward. Eisen, as a general rule, don't have a lot of patience for manipulation and politicking. When an Eisen leader wants something, he had better have a good reason for it, because if somebody else has it, there is probably going to be a war involved. While among other nations, this might breed resentment, in Eisen, war is a matter of daily life. More than in any other country in Théah, Eisen take war very impersonally. They understand that, often, two opposing forces will need the same thing. When this happens, war is inevitable. Because of this mindset, Eisen are far less reluctant to go to war than other people, and far more eager to end a war once it has been won or lost.

One cannot discuss politics in Eisen without discussing the nobility, and one cannot discuss Eisen nobility without discussing Dracheneisen. Dracheneisen is what gives a noble his claim, and it is one of the most common sources for politics in the nation. Each Eisenfürst's most carefully guarded secret is the location of their Dracheneisen mine, and much of their politics goes into keeping it secure, or in some cases, the illusion of security. An Eisen noble who loses his Dracheneisen has lost his nobility. Thus, one of the most sought-after methods of defeating a rival is by neutralizing his Dracheneisen. More than one Eisen noble has woken up to find his armor or weapon gone, along with his privilege.

A political campaign in Eisen should be about real things: food, war, equipment, and power. Eisen have neither time nor inclination to quibble about "propriety", "courtesy", or "etiquette." In Eisen, what people from other nations would take as threats, they take as fact. Eisen never aim to intimidate, they state facts. If an Eisen is in a position of power, they make it known to those over whom they have power. If they are not, they have no business implying otherwise. In an Eisen political campaign, war should always be a factor. No Eisen wants war, but no Eisen will shrink from it, either.



Vendel

(While the Vendel and the Vestenmannavnjar are often grouped together, their systems of government could not be less similar, and so they will be separately referred to here.)

Vendel is a plutocracy, literally ruled by the citizens with the most money. It is almost ironic that Vendel, often considered selfish and materialistic, has the most democratic and humanistic national government on Théah. Anybody can achieve power in Vendel, regardless of birth, if they make enough money. In a way, this system makes Vendel more egalitarian than anyone else on Théah, save the Brotherhood of the Coast. The problems arise once certain parties reach a "financial event horizon," in which the fortunes of the very rich are growing faster than an industrious entrepreneur can hope to compete with. Thus, they are assured of maintaining their positions of power, and Vendel becomes as stagnant as any other nation. While they have not reached this point yet, the Guild Chairs are rapidly approaching it.

Politics in Vendel can be summarized with two questions: "What do you want," and "What can you pay for it?" While, in a way, most politics fall within these groupings, in Vendel they are still at their most basic. Any problem in Vendel can be solved by the proper application of money in the right place. In a way, the corruption in Vendel politics cancels itself out, because everybody is bought. The only question is who the buyer is, and what they've

paid.

Vendel politics run like a corporation: everybody's mind is always on the bottom line. If a task costs more than it yields, it does not get done. The League is always looking to make a profit, and profit is the only real deciding factor for it. If, in the process, a few peasants suffer some discomfort (like relocation), well, that's business. Also like a business, the League prizes efficiency. If a League Seat or lower functionary is slowing down the government, steps (not necessarily pleasant ones) will be taken to correct the problem. This is partly why the League Chairs have so much influence – if anybody below them tries to protest a popular motion, they are seen as reducing efficiency, and looked down upon.

The League Chairs, by virtue of their permanency, have the most security to dictate policy. Since they cannot be disposed of, it is difficult to exert pressure upon a Chair. Thus, most of the real politics in Vendel take place among the Seats, which are significantly more expendable. Fighting for proxies, for individual votes, and for positions on committee is extremely common, and extremely dirty. Most self-respecting Vendel do not condone murder, but blackmail, bribery, and threats are all quite common. However, they always, with no exceptions, keep the politicking internal. A bad image is bad for business. As far as the rest of Théah is concerned, Vendel is a model of clean, honorable forward-thinking.

A political campaign in Vendel should be all about the Guilders. Who has them, who is receiving them, and why? As some Vendel are discovering, paper money leads to paper trails; merchants are keeping more exact accounts, and there's money to be made in tracking some of these accounts...or in hiding them. In a Vendel-based setting, much of the old standbys don't work. Villains are not interested in taking over the world; they're just trying to make a buck. However, the pursuit of money can be just as deadly and ruthless as the pursuit of other forms of power, or more so. Vendel politics should be more cerebral and businesslike than other nations'. While other nations thrive on diplomacy and heartfelt orations, the League's eyes are always on the bottom line.



Vestenmannavnjar

The politics of the Vesten are, like much of the rest of their culture, remnants of an age of glory. With the current lack of a High King, and the Vendel oppression, the Vesten have no government beyond the local level, making politics a minimal exercise. The Vesten lack of government is tied strongly to their lack of influence over matters in the greater Théah. Because they have no voice in the rest of the world, there is little impetus to unite. However, because they are so many disjointed voices with no central authority, the rest of the world has no reason to listen. Thus, a bitter circle is formed, leading to powerlessness among the Vesten.

However, while they may not have as much influence over global concerns as their Vendel cousins, the Vesten are still a proud people, with proud traditions. One of these is the mead hall, where feasts take place. While feasts may not seem like major political arenas, it is there that the *jarls* (and previously the High King) issue edicts and take audience. Since time immemorial, petitioners have taken their cases before their lords at feasts, and very little has changed.

Jarls still hold nearly all the power among the Vesten, and their enforcement of that power is absolute (based mostly upon their Heavy Weapon skill). Thus, Vesten politics is still, quite literally, medieval. Only *jarls* have any chance of contesting the will of another *jarl*, and the results of these contests are usually quite bloody. Any kind of politicking or compromise is most often either the precursor or ending to a war. The other castes of Vesten society have even less political influence. Most of the *carls* are now Vendel, and the few remaining became either *thralls* or *jarls*. Since one of the prerequisites to politics is power, and *thralls* have none, they have no influence either.

The most devastating loss to the Vesten political system is the High King. Without a High King, any national unity the Vestenmannavnjar had has been washed away. As far as most of the Vesten are concerned, the lack of a King means that Grumfather has abandoned them. Furthermore, it was the High King who gave the Vesten a sense of national identity, making them all Vestenmannavnjar instead of the different tribes. It was this unity that allowed them to reach and ally with Avalon, and eventually reach the prosperity that formed the Vendel.

The truly interesting politics of the Vesten will take place once Gjaeving Asbornsson makes himself public. At that point, every *jarl* will be forced to make a choice: accept Asbornsson as High King, and submit to the rule of a sovereign who does not want to lead, or deny his claim, and face the wrath of the Grumfather. Either option could irreversibly split the Vesten, and lead to a final downfall.

A political campaign among the Vesten is a very tricky proposition, mostly due to a lack of any cohesion. The Vesten have very little power to go around right now, and so there is little cause for politics. Truly ambitious Heroes could endorse one of the *jarls*, or be High King Asbjornsson's personal retinue, attempting to unite the Vesten with the power of their words and deeds. Vesten politics are all about reputation – if everybody believes you are strong enough to lead, then you are. If they do not, then you are not.



Ussura

The Ussuran court is a frightening proposition. The Gaius is chosen seemingly at random, the Knias are nearly all tyrants, and the Boyars are universally paranoid (with, at times, good reason). Matushka rules everything in Ussura with an iron fist, indomitable will, and incomprehensible plan. Is it any wonder, then, that foreigners tread lightly in the Ussuran courts? There are several courts in Ussura, and all of them can be alien and deadly to an outsider who does not know his way. If Gaius Ilya is willing to throw his own Boyars to the dogs, how reluctant would he be to do worse to meddling outsiders?

Each Ussuran court is held differently, and each will be examined in its own place, but there are some similarities that bind them all together. Each Knias is the final word in their own province, and expects their words to be law. None has much patience for disloyalty or vacillation. Each Knias is willful and intolerant. Each is, in some way, bound to Ussura and Matushka. And each Knias is ruthless. None of these traits are accidents; Matushka chooses her functionaries, and Ussura is too harsh a land for the weak to rule.

Gallenia is one of the more stable provinces in Ussura, partially because its ruler is herself. Tamara Breslau Fyodnava v'Riasanova neither desires to become a god, nor is insane, nor is being manipulated or replaced by her countrymen. She is, in fact, the only Knias who is fully in charge of her faculties. More provincial than any other province, Gallenia has very little political impact upon the rest of Théah, or even the rest of Ussura. Most Gallenians wish merely to continue with their pastoral lives, and Knias Tamara respects them. Her court is made interesting by one important twist of fate: nobody can lie in it. Tamara has the ultimate proof against intrigue or manipulation, because all she need do is ask someone if they are plotting. Thus, politics in Gallenia run very straightforward. If someone wants something, they ask Knias Tamara, and she tells them. If somebody conspires against Knias Tamara, she finds out, and they die unpleasantly. Just because she is a Hero does not mean she is nice about it.

Molhyna is not a pleasant place to be at the moment. Knias Vladimir Goroduk Drakov v'Pietrov is a very, very unstable individual, and the majority of Molhyna's government comes from his advisor, Parigorii Kalenikov (more information in the *Ussura Nation* book). Pietrov is a very dangerous city in which to be. Politics in Kalenikov's Molhyna consist mostly of making sure one does not do anything to get oneself killed. If Kalenikov even suspects you to be encroaching upon his reign, or of attempting to contact Knias Vladimir, you will end up dying very unpleasantly. As it stands, the only politically active member of the Molhynan royal family is, of course, Koschei. The eternal meddler, Koschei is a perfect *Theus ex Machina*. He has not done anything about the situation with the v'Pietrov because he does not care...yet. However, being Koschei, he may tomorrow, or next year, or never.

Rurik is a hotbed of political intrigue at the moment. Between Knias Aleksii v'Novgorov's conspiring with the Montaigne and his secret ambitions (see pg. 113 of the *Ussura Nation* book for more info), Rurik is just brimming with politics. Knias Aleksii is treading a dangerous path; he is committing high treason against the Gaius, and all Ilya is waiting for is proof. Once the Gaius has incontrovertible evidence that Aleksii allowed Montegue to penetrate as far into Ussura as he did, he will see the Knias executed. Until then, however, Aleksii knows that Ilya can only wait and seethe. Politics in Rurik are a dangerous business, as much as any in Ussura, because of the stakes involved. If Aleksii succeeds in his ambitions to replace Matushka, all of Théah will feel the effects. If Ilya waits much longer, it will be too late to stop him. However, with war on their doorstep, the citizens of Rurik have been none too eager to see a replacement in their leadership. This precarious balance is waiting for a good nudge, and with so much to lose, all bets are off.

Politics in Somojez are, in a word, a mess. Knias "Borin" (see pg. 116 of the *Ussura* sourcebook for information on his current situation) has learned something the Vendel would never believe: money cannot solve all one's problems. He has no idea what he is doing, and is frightened that at any moment, he will make a major error and doom the entirety of Somojez. As it stands, "Borin" is not making as big a mess of things as he believes. Through his mercantile experience, Somojez has prospered, and life has not been horrible. Even after Montegue's invasion, "Borin" still hasn't handled things too badly. He has been smart enough to let more knowledgeable people handle his Province's defense, and (more intelligently than some rulers) sticks primarily to what he knows. If "Borin" ever puts his whole heart and soul into leading Somojez, he could potentially be the greatest Knias they ever have. The Knias's court is one of the most cosmopolitan in Ussura, second only to the Gaius's. "Borin" mainly uses the foreign presence to conduct trade.

Politics, like everything else in Veche, are bleak. Only Montaigne has the honor of having a more insane ruler. Luckily, during his sane moments, Knias Staver made some wise choices of advisors. They are capable of running the province for months at a time, and often do. As a result of the weak influence of the Knias, Veche is one of the most susceptible provinces to outside intervention, as wily politicians are capable of affecting the judgments of Staver's functionaries. Much of the political turmoil in Veche stems from worries about what the future might bring, as all indications are that a superstitious and irrational boy will succeed Knias Staver.

Finally there is, of course, the court of Gaius Ilya in Pavtlow, and the Knias Douma. In many ways, the Ussuran ruler's court is much like the Avalon one. Both are distrustful of outsiders, with little interest in the workings outside of their own borders. Both care very little for external appearances, focusing far more on the substance of a person or idea than the style. And both have extremely strong rulers who have had to prove themselves to, and butt heads with, the provincial leaders beneath them.

However, the similarities end there. While neither Ilya nor Elaine takes kindly to meddling, the Gaius's response is far more lethal. Furthermore, while the Avalon ruler has advisors and consultants she can trust, Ilya has learned very harshly that he can rely on nobody around him. Elaine went out of her way to place power in the Avalon parliament; Ilya is constantly battling the Knias Douma for control over Ussura.

A campaign in the Gaius's court should be like Ussura itself: brutal, deadly, and mysterious. Courtiers in Ussura have to watch their step at every turn, because angering Ilya is an unhealthy move, and its difficult to tell what angers Ilya these days. On the other hand, the five Knias are doing their best to maintain sovereignty over their provinces, and the Gaius is encroaching upon them. Unlike much of the rest of Théah, there is not "right" side in this conflict; there is only power, and who has it. The best way to handle a heroic campaign in Ilya's court is to deal with external threats, that are capable of hurting several of the Knias, and helping none. Knias Tamara's brother, Knias Staver's Crescent "Allies," and the Kalenikov situation in Molhyna are just some of the threats to Ussura at the moment. And while Montaigne has finally left, their legacy is still strong, in ravaged homes and refugees. Somebody will need to organize the rebuilding.



Vodacce

Vodacce is one of the most difficult nations of which to discuss the politics, because there is already an entire book detailing Vodacce politics. Everything in Vodacce is politics, and so sorting them out from the rest of Vodacce life is a monumental task. If a Vodacce is not scheming, it is because he or she is not breathing. It is nearly every Vodacce's goal in life to improve their station, to earn power and leave a lasting legacy on the world. Vodacce study politics in its purest form: the pursuit of power. Because of the complexity and extent of the Vodacce political arena, it is easiest to examine it island by island.

Bernoulli's politics are the most honest in Vodacce, but it would be more accurate to say they are the least dishonest. Despite his piety, Gespucci Bernoulli has no illusions about the nature of his peers. He is a shrewd negotiator and politician, and his dealings (detailed in *Vodacce*, pg. 110) are as complex and underhanded as any other Merchant Prince. As he grows older, Bernoulli cares less about gaining wealth than he does about using it, and characters can use that to their advantage, as long as their interests align with his. Bernoulli is far too canny to fall for any false pretence. On the other hand, Bernoulli is willing to pay exorbitant amounts of money to get things done, and much of what he wants done is heroic. A political campaign with Gespucci Bernoulli will most often have him sponsoring the Heroes' in their endeavors.

Caligari is most likely to be one of the Heroes' nemeses, both in and out of the political arena. While his main goal is the acquisition of Synchron artifacts, not all of his acquiring is done through piracy. Caligari has agents nearly everywhere, and if it comes to his attention that a rival (read: anybody) has an item he wants, he will do whatever it takes to acquire it. However, once his island sinks, all bets are off. As he loses his power base, Caligari will do anything and everything he can in order to maintain influence; all of the information he has been hiding, the threats he has implied, the artifacts he has secreted, will be used indiscriminately. The most dangerous man is the one with nothing to lose, and Caligari is becoming that. If the Heroes choose to battle Caligari politically, they must be prepared for anything – blackmail, assassination, and all of the Synchron power that Caligari has been amassing for nearly a century.

Donello Falisci is currently almost a nonentity in Vodacce politics, because all indications are that he just does not care. Falisci is considered "hands-off" by the other princes because of his wine; nobody wants to risk being cut off. However, it is not accurate to say that Falisci cares nothing for power. He already has all the power he wants, and as long as people need him, he is content to leave things as they are. The only time Falisci gets involved in politics is if something happens to upset the status quo, like another Prince being killed, and the power struggle to fill in the ensuing vacuum.

Alberto Lucani is a prime example of the darker side of Vodacce politics. He is a victim of the Great Game, and knows it. He can refuse to play it, at the cost of his power, or play it, at the cost of his daughters and his soul. However, he does not have very much time left to worry about it. Three days before the revolution begins in Montaigne, Lucani is assassinated, leaving no heir. Politically, this creates a nightmare, not because of his land, but because of his daughters. Four Sorté-talented, unmarried girls who have suddenly become orphans. Every Prince left alive in Vodacce will be devoting whatever resources they are not tying up with survival towards getting them.

Alcide Mondavi, despite being one of the apparently least politically active Princes, is destined to change Vodacce forever. While he has no public court, he is planning one of the greatest political coups Vodacce will ever see. Even though only one assassination attempt succeeded, he only need the one. His alliance with Erich Sieger of Eisen is a masterpiece, the finest example of attacking an enemy's weakness. While every Prince is sure that his masterpiece will be political, he instead strikes them militarily, where Vodacce have traditionally been weak. Mondavi's politics are cunning, ruthless, and calculated. He cares nothing for the Cardinals' threat of excommunication, but knows that if the Church renounces him, his people will revolt.

Marco Vestini's court is very similar to Bernoulli's. The drive that is his birthright as a Vodacce, he has channeled

into piety and the pursuit of justice. Both men represent the best in their nation, using power justly and wisely. However, while Bernoulli has been somewhat tempered by age, Vestini is still full of energy. His political aspirations mainly revolve around maintaining the status quo, and it is only because he sees no better alternative that he accepts part of Caligari's territory, once the island sinks.

Finally, there is Giovanni Villanova. To list all of Villanova's political machinations and aspirations would take a book in itself. The GM can have Villanova's hand in any and all plots he likes, without fear of contradicting printed material. Chances are, if there is a plot, plan, society, or intrigue going on in Théah, Villanova knows about it and is involved. Villanova maintains a court, but it is not a court any Hero would choose to attend. Villanova's "court" is his legion of spies and agents, each carrying out his will. Villanova does not practice politics. He doesn't need any more practice.

Vodacce, more than any nation save Montaigne, is suffering the most upheaval from the events surrounding the Revolution. The sinking of Caligari Island upset the balance of power in Vodacce; Mondavi's coup topples it completely. By the end of the Revolution, one Prince is dead, and one powerless (politically, anyway). Every Prince remaining is going to have to reallocate resources and change plans to accommodate the new setup. But being Vodacce, they're used to it. The only question is, how will they use this situation to come out on top?



The Brotherhood of the Coast

While the Brotherhood is not a nation, per se, their politics are of such importance that they should be included. The Brotherhood has no social delineation, no castes, no rulers, and no second-class citizens. They are a true democracy, bound together by oath and a common self-interest. And they have flourished because of it. It is for this reason that the rest of Théah has such a close eye upon the Brotherhood, because while the nobility see it as their doom, the downtrodden see their salvation.

Politics in the Brotherhood are more straightforward than anywhere else in Théah. On La Bucca, if a person wishes to bring forward a motion, he brings it up at the quarterly meeting in Shantytown (on the first day of every third month. It is at the second and fourth of these meetings that governors are elected). The attending population of La Bucca then votes. If the issue is too pressing to wait for a meeting, the petitioner(s) can take it before the governor, who is allowed to take any reasonable action necessary to resolve it. However, if the issue involves more than five people, the governor is required to call an emergency vote to resolve it, with the relevant parties ineligible to vote. In cases where there is no time to vote, the governor has emergency powers (similar to those of a ship's captain, as detailed in the Charter in *Pirate Nations*). So far, the system has worked quite well, but it has yet to withstand any issues of real importance.

In reality, it is rare if more than half the island's population attends the quarterly meetings, because unless they are bringing forward a motion, most of the buccaneers just don't care. They have better things to do than dicker around in a town meeting, and most quarrels are resolved with a brawl or a drink, rather than a town meeting. In the rare cases where individuals have actual grievances, the governor is usually intelligent enough to settle them. With such an egalitarian political system, that has worked well so far, is it any wonder that the eyes of the revolutionaries are all turning to La Bucca?



Montaigne

A revolution is politics at its most visible, when every single citizen of a society takes a direct hand in the government. Documenting the full effects of the upcoming Revolution is impossible, because they have yet to play themselves out. Instead, we will look at each of the stages of the Revolution, and the political situations during them. This way, you can get a look at how to integrate the politics of the Revolution into your own game.

Before Septimus 24, 1668: During the reign of l'Empereur, politics are all centered on the courtiers. Nobles have administrators to handle all of the mundane work of running Montaigne, and the country is suffering for it. The courtiers are far more interested in fashion, parties, repartee, and l'Empereur's whim than they are with feeding their citizens or running their wars. More than in any other nation, the interests of the courtiers are far removed from real life. This does not mean, however, that they are not as vicious or deadly. A loss of prestige can mean lack of support when an enemy comes calling, and a witty remark can cut an opponent's friends out from under them. At this point, politics should almost be like a game. The courtiers make decisions, and move their pawns, but the results are immaterial. While blackmail and bribery are common tools, physical threats are considered *gauche*. After all, anybody can fire a pistol. It takes a master to humiliate an enemy.

Between Septimus 24 and Octavus 17: Chaos. Politics are the worst kind of rabble-rousing and "mobocracy." Anybody who is even linked to the nobility is attacked and executed, usually without trial. Anyone with a gift for demagoguery can find followers, as long as they can satisfy bloodlust (which is not very difficult). The Rilasciare begins to establish leadership over the mob, not by curbing the mayhem, but by directing it. Rioting and looting are

daily events, and innocents suffer. Because of the riots, there are food shortages, and the worsening of the living conditions spreads disease. Furthermore, the administrators who used to handle such crises are fleeing for their lives, or already dead. With each publication of the Imperial Daughters' trials and execution, the mob worsens. It is a very, very bad time to be a noble.

Between Octavus 17 and Nonus 5: The formation of the National Convention and the Council of Eight. As people begin to establish stability, the importance of politics becomes increasingly apparent. Calm heads are needed to temper the mob's rage. Those who showed good leadership (i.e., Heroes) during the riots are going to be remembered. It is a new political arena for Montaigne, as untried politicians, in an untried system, deal with previously unknown issues. Finally, after realizing the shortage of qualified political administrators, the Council decides to offer amnesty to nobles who are willing to work for them. There are many opportunities for Heroes to shine here, calming down fervor, negotiating nobles' returns, making moving speeches for the Convention and Council.

Between Nonus 5 and Sextus 15, 1669: The closest approach to stability yet. The Convention is forced to deal with several important issues, such as recover from a wartime economy and increasing royalist support (in part due to the political inexperience of the Convention and Council). As a result, the reins of power tighten in order to prevent a coup. Characters who are involved with the Convention are forced to walk a delicate tightrope between fanaticism and disloyalty, with the line moving steadily towards fanaticism. Again, however, the opportunities exist for political Heroes to make a difference, as assassination attempts become everyday occurrences and everybody flings heated rhetoric. At several points, Convention meetings are in danger of breaking into fistfights.

After Sextus 15, 1669: All bets are off...



How do I use this stuff in my game?

There is no easy answer to this question, but let's start with whether you should. Are your characters interested in a political scenario, or even a full political campaign? If they prefer sinking galleons or hunting artifacts to intrigue and diplomacy, then it would be best to keep the politics sporadic, if you use them. Use the "other 100 points" from the GM's Guide as a guideline to how thickly you should lay on the politics, and get feedback from your players.

If you do wish to make your game more political, here are a few guidelines.

1. Show the players the results of their actions. While most "adventure-type" game sessions involve a set of linear goals with easily visible results, a political game usually ends up far subtler. While subtlety is not necessarily a bad thing, too much of it will cause your players to think they are not making a difference. If they score points on a rival in a verbal battle at court, make sure the rival is defeated in an appropriately dramatic fashion, stalking off to plot revenge, or challenging his tormentor to a duel on the spot.

In a similar vein, if the heroes have just saved poor, defenseless peasants from a Machiavellian politician's ruthless schemes, show them. Part of the drama of the Revolution is the realization that politics *matters* in Théah in a way that nobody realized before. A swordsman may be able to kill five brutes at once, but Arnaud du Charouse, with a properly timed speech, can have cities razed.

2. Make sure that nothing is as it seems. Everybody has an agenda, and it usually doesn't coincide with the Heroes'. Their allies have ulterior motives, and their enemies have unseen allies. The Heroes know they can trust each other, but that's it. In a post-Revolution setting, this principle becomes even more important. The Council of Eight learns very quickly that if you are not with them, you are against them. Even if the Heroes make no enemies, if they have power and no allies (or weak ones), they become a target.

For Heroes, learning who to trust, or convincing someone that they can be trusted, can be an adventure in itself. Potential allies can require Heroes to perform enormously difficult deeds to prove themselves. Alternatively, getting evidence that an ally is trustworthy can be an equally difficult task. In both cases, however, the effort is worthwhile. Trustworthy allies are the most valuable commodity a politician can have, and the rarest.

3. Just because it's political doesn't mean it's boring. Oftentimes, GMs are reluctant to delve into political games because of the tedium associated with most politics. However, they often forget that some of the most memorable moments in history are political. The death of Julius Caesar, the signings of the U.S. Declaration of Independence and Constitution, the duel between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr, and Franklin Roosevelt's declaration of war after Pearl Harbor are just a few of the dramatic political moments history has witnessed. A 7th Sea game should have these moments *every day*.

Whether it's finally signing the arrest warrant for a lifelong nemesis, after months of planning and politicking, or giving a passionate speech to pardon a wrongly-accused and condemned criminal, 7th Sea politics are dramatic. They are just as much a part of the battle of Hero and Villain as the Swordsman swinging from the chandelier in the nick of time.



The Politician skill (Civil)

While courtiers may think themselves to be the masters of politics, they are all-too often more knowledgeable about fashion than about the proper use of power. A politician knows about power. How to gain it, how to use it, and how to recognize it in others. A master of politics can tell what people want with a minimum of information, and knows how to get it. If not, he knows who to go to for it.

Also, as the Montaigne Revolution progresses further, and Théah recoils from the impact, more and more courtiers will be forced to wake up to the needs of the people. As they do so, Théah's aristocracy will need to learn increasingly more about the realities of government, and less about social graces. The age of the Courtier is ending. The age of the Politician has just begun.

Basic Knacks

Politics: For a Courtier, politics is just another idle distraction in a life of luxury. A true statesman or stateswoman understands how laws, society, and power interact to form the lifeblood of civilization. To understand politics is to understand humanity; our desires, our fears, and our lives. You know how to get a law made, or revoked. You can tell by title what kind of power an official has.

Diplomacy: You know the fine art of getting people to agree with you. For a politician, who lives by his word, this Knack is invaluable. You can make angry men see reason, and twist reasonable men around your finger. With enough time to convince them, you could sell snow to the Vesten.

Sincerity: You have turned lying into an art form. People are amazed at your honesty while you lie through your teeth. More than that, however, is that people want to believe you. Nobody ever doubts that you mean what you say, even if you couldn't care less.

Oratory: You know how to speak eloquently and formally. Oratory is an invaluable political tool, because it allows you to make speeches and carry on debate (the strength of an argument is based upon Politics, but the eloquence comes from Oratory).

Advanced Knacks

Demagoguery: Rabble-rousing. Demagoguery allows you to incite the mob's passion into a white-hot fury, and focus it upon the enemies of the people. You know what the mob wants, and how to give it to them. Demagoguery is different from Sincerity or Oratory in that it is almost purely emotional. The mob cares little for the words you use, and the use of Demagoguery is highly instinctual. You must get a feel for them, as a living, breathing organism.

Intrigue: You are adept at picking up the plots and schemes of those around you. The truly skilled at Intrigue can walk into a room, and within minutes understand the network of schemes, and how each person relates to them. The most practical use of the Intrigue Knack is with the Courtly Intrigue rules (found on pgs. 87-92 of the *Montaigne* sourcebook).

To use the Intrigue Knack, you must study the two characters for an appropriate amount of time (GM's discretion). Then, make a Wits + Intrigue check, with a TN equal to 10 + one-fifth the target's Reputation (ignoring negative). If successful, you can learn one of the following: The target's Like or Dislike towards or from the other person, the other person's Usefulness to the target, or the strength (but NOT nature) of one of either person's Favors or Blackmails towards the other person.

If you are not using the Courtly Intrigue rules, then the use of Intrigue is free-form, and like everything else, ultimately up to the GM.

