# POLITICS OF BRELAND

## INTRIGUE AND ADVENTURE

A Sourcebook for the World of Eberron
Written by Joseph Meehan

# Politics of Breland

nything but politics!" - King Boranel

In the world of Eberron®, many campaigns will spend most of their time in the nation of Breland as players adventure through Sharn. Players who wish to venture outside of the city, covered in depth in *Sharn: City of Towers*, may wonder about the governing forces of the country in which Sharn resides. Covered lightly in *Five Nations*, the *Eberron Campaign Setting* and *Eberron Campaign Guide*, this document seeks to expand upon existing lore and provide some guidance to DMs who wish to use these politics in their games at home.

## Parliament

The Brelish Parliament is divided into two chambers. The upper chamber is named the Nobles Chamber, consisting of the landed aristocracy. The lower chamber is named the Commons Chamber and consists of representatives elected from districts. The primary business of Parliament is legislation - managing the system of taxes that fund the rest of the government. Secondarily parliament performs oversight functions when they choose to intervene in how money is spent. Breland does not have the kind of modern bureacratic state that injects itself into daily life via rules and regulations, making non-tax related bills much rarer - examples include ratifying the Treaty of Thronehold and changes to the legal code around warforged rights. For any bill to pass it must attain majority consent in each chamber.

### Demographics

The Eberron canon has a complicated history with demographics, with population density and even the size of the world changing between 3rd and 4th edition. This has important ramifications for each chamber of Parliament, which should be representative of the people and regions of the country. While the ECG establishes that the Nobles Chamber only has 27 members, this is significantly below average for a nation of Breland's size based on real world history. As such, DMs are encouraged to adjust the size of Parliament as follows: the Nobles Chamber should have 80 to 90 members, and the Commons Chamber should number in the hundreds.

## Nobles Chamber

The Nobles Chamber consists of landed lords and ladies who represent the backbone economic power of Breland. Each noble primarily derives their income from taxing natural resource extraction in their demesne - farming, mining, logging. In terms of formal land rights, all land belongs to the Crown, meaning that legally the King can grant or take away land as he pleases. Functionally, the nobles have plenty of ways of expressing their displeasure through formal and informal channels, so any monarch who goes too far may face the collective wrath of the nobility, especially in cases where the ruler is taking away land.

Fortunately for player characters, the Last War opened up significant quantities of territory for the taking. Entire towns were abandoned either due to the residents dying or simply fleeing to the urban centers for a better life. Noble lines died off when eligible heirs were slain in combat. This has led to the regrowth of some of the old Brelish forests and left castles vacant. Players who serve the crown well may find themselves granted a piece of land to call their own, with all the benefits and troubles that brings. In particular, Boranel abolished proxy voting during a spat with the Nobles Chamber in 972, meaning that player characters who are interested in playing politics will be dragged into Wroat to participate.

## Commons Chamber

The Commons Chamber is divided into districts, each containing 3 members. A district typically consists of a few small villages or an individual town. Members are elected en masse in 2 year terms, with the top three vote-getters in each district becoming representatives. The Speaker is chosen by majority ballot at the beginning of each term, although a new speaker can be found if a vote of no confidence successfully passes to remove the speakership.

Historically, the Nobles Chamber has retained more power than the Commons Chamber, partially due to the corruptibility of the Commons Chamber. While all Brelish citizens 16 and older can vote, and many enthusiastically do, there are few mechanisms for them to understand and hold their representatives accountable. The Last War provided plenty of opportunities for journalistic growth, but editors quickly learned that readers cared less about what was true than what was sensational and easy to follow. Reformers within the journalism community have been pressuring House Sivis to create some form of accreditation, but the gnomes appear to be uninterested.

## Factions

The primary and growing divide in Parliament today is the split between **royalists** and **parliamentarians**. While many might think it's the upper chamber that is dominated by royalists and the lower by parliamentarians, the reverse is true. The nobles of Breland are in a better position to advance demands and secure even more political power for themselves, rather than handing it off to the King. By contrast, the Commons Chamber senses its own weakness and many hope for more time to enact anti-corruption reforms before unbalancing the trifecta of the crown and the two chambers of parliament.

Another major split in Parliament is between those who do and don't believe in Warforged rights. While the national consensus in Breland has solidly shifted towards giving Warforged rights, how far that should go remains an active point of debate. **Nativists** point to language referring to "native-born Brelish", arguing that the lack of a proper birth for Warforged means they do not deserve the full range of legal rights and pivileges ordinary citizens receive. **Warforged rights activists** point both to the service and dedication with which Warforged fought for Breland and to the increasing quantities of evidence that Warforged have souls. Some shades of gray exist here, with some believing that warforged deserve partial rights recognition.

The issue of Droaam remains a sticky subject in the Brelish parliament. While most of Parliament sees the secession of Droaam as illegitimate, what to do about it is a hard question. **Militants** argue that, with the war no longer requiring active engagement of Breland's armies to the north and east, Breland should take care of the monstrous question and wipe them out. **Diplomacists** argue not only that it would be a foolish waste of resources, but that this misses out on a potential opportunity both economically and militarily. Many point to the success of House Tharashk's "Dragonne's Roar" in military engagements for the value of such a powerful ally, even if it does mean swallowing their pride. Militants turn this around as proof of the threat.

The final major argument in Parliament is what to do with the Cyran refugee crisis. While parliament has worked with Boranel to manage the displacement of Brelish citizens by the War, the creation of New Cyre was a unilateral action by Boranel. **Supporters** point to the plight of the Cyrans and the reality that nobody else would take them up. The **Opposition** has many reasons, most of which aren't about a meanness or coldness towards the the Cyrans, but a principled stand against executive overreach. On an even more real basis, the land granted to New Cyre was of little value, so it's hard to argue Boranel took much of anything away. As such, legislation involving New Cyre tends to be less about removing the Cyrans and more about asserting Parliament's authority - much to Prince Oargev's chagrin.

## Sample NPCs

**Owen McCoy** is the speaker of the lower chamber. Short but stout, his frizzy hair isn't as bright of a red as it used to be. A strong royalist, he is Boranel's greatest ally in parliament and has been instrumental in passing much of Boranel's agenda. He rallied support in parliament for both ratifying the Treaty of Thronehold and its promotion of rights for warforged. However, he did break with Boranel on one major issue - the creation of New Cyre. For Owen, Breland is for the Brelish people. Warforged who fought for Breland have earned their citizenship, but the large masses of Cyran refugees did not. Unable to convince Boranel otherwise, he was at least capable of ensuring that New Cyre was founded on land absolutely nobody else wanted near the Darguun border.

**Lord Ruken ir'Clarn** is the speaker of the upper chamber and one of the most influential democracy activists. Lord ir'Clarn is a plump man with straight dark hair and fair skin, his figure showing years of privileged living. Willing to pursue any means to ensure that the parliament triumphs over the monarchy, he's enlisted a number of sympathetic nobles to carry out his dirty work, including Hass ir'Tain of Sharn. Once he secures control over the military from Boranel he wishes to start a campaign to reclaim Droaam. For him, the Five Nations were made by humans, for humans, and the idea of giving monsters or constructs rights is an aberration. His support for the Cyran refugees is an extension of this, Ruken seeing the importance of caring for the people of Cyre even if they no longer have a home.

### The Mace of Parliament

*Mace, Legendary, Major*

Forged over 600 years ago, the Mace of Parliament is one of the oldest symbols of the power of parliament. Tradition holds that the speaker of the upper chamber retains possession of the *Mace*, carrying it to its designated space at the front of the room behind the Speaker's podium to begin each session of parliament.

The *Mace of Parliament* is a +1 Mace with 7 charges. While holding it, you can use an action amplify your voice to five times its volume. In addition, you can use an action and expend a charge to cast *Command*, two charges for *Zone of Truth* or *Hold Person*, or three charges for *Tongues*. The save DC for spells cast from the Mace is 15, and the mace counts for any material components for the spell.

The mace regains 1d6+1 expended charges daily at dawn. If it has no charges at the start of the day, it instead only regains a single charge.

# The Crown

Contrasting the Parliament, the Crown represents the executive authority of the state. King Boranel currently bears the crown, but his age and a lack of qualified heirs has left the future of Breland in doubt.

## The Heirs

King Boranel is widely respected and loved in Breland. Unfortunately for him, his heirs are not. None have displayed the bravery, conviction, or leadership to match Boranel, encouraging the parliamentarians that now is the time. Some might argue that this is due to Boranel's difficulties with his marriages - after the assassination of his first wife **Chaseva**, Boranel became a distant father. Despite remarrying three more times, none of his wives since have held his affections the same way.

The third son of King Boranex, Boranel came to the throne after a tragic month where both older brothers were slain on the battlefield and King Boranex took his own life in grief. Boranel has eight surviving members of his generation, with three younger brothers and four younger sisters. Each of these siblings holds prestigious places in his court, but his brother Kor has secured the position of Boranel's most trusted advisor and commander of the King's Citadel.

Boranel bore four sons with his first wife, one son and four daughters with his second, and one son and one daughter with his third. His oldest son, **Bortan**, holds the position of royal steward and has been delegated many of the financial decisions of the nation. The fourth son of Chaseva, **Aejar**, has grown distant since being mauled by Boranel's pet magebred ghost tigers and losing his left arm. He lost his daughter **Borann** on the Day of Mourning, and her body has not yet been recovered from the Field of Ruin. His youngest two children, his son **Halix** and his daughter **Borina**, have been exchanged with Kaius III's sister **Haydith** as part of a program to ensure the continued peace of the continent. Haydith has won over the Brelish court and parliament in Wroat with her charm and wit, frequently accompanying Boranel on his official business.

## Military

The Royal Army forms the majority of the Brelish military. While the majority of the rank and file have gone home to their families since the Treaty of Thronehold, the officers remain engaged and planning for the next war - whether that's a local conflict with Droaam or a full-scale resumption of hostilities.

The Royal Navy saw significantly less combat during the Last War but still retains an important purpose. While isolated from the brunt of the naval engagements in the Scion's Sound, the southwestern coast of Breland was important to protect for trading purposes, especially with the government of Riedra. The Royal Navy is furthermore tasked with controlling the waters between Sharn and Xen'drik, as any ship that doesn't make it back to Sharn is a ship who's goods are not being taxed by Breland and the Sharn port authorities. While the Sahuagin have signed a treaty not to attack ships passing through their territory, they're not the only threat that lurks beneath the waves.

More paramilitary than military, the King's Citadel takes direct orders from Boranel himself. Furthermore, while the King's Swords and Wands are not covert organizations like the King's Dark Lanterns, they still conduct missions abroad on behalf of Boranel. As such, they can make excellent allies or antagonists in any kind of adventure. Inside the borders of Breland the King's Citadel primarily serves as law enforcemnt, handling issues that the local constabulary is unable or unwilling to.

### The King's Shadows

The King's Shadows were introduced in Five Nations as a fifth branch of the King's Citadel, a revision of the ECS' four branches. Handling covert intelligence, their function isn't well distinguished from the King's Dark Lanterns. Keith Baker has suggested that the Shadows are instead a prominent division of the King's Dark Lanterns. Furthermore, Keith has suggested that the Shadows were responsible for the creation of House Tarkanan during the Last War. As of Rising from the Last War, the King's Citadel is back to only having 4 branches.

## Sample NPCs

**General Anthony ir'Clarn**, cousin to Lord Ruken ir'Clarn, leads the first army of Breland, stationed on the Cyran front. While one of the youngest Brelish generals, his face is as war-weary as any. Promoted after his predecessor died in the Mourning, he has been charged with protecting the eastern border from Mournland horrors. Deeply troubled by the abominations that spill out of the dead-gray mists, he seeks to understand the Mourning so he can guarantee nothing like it ever happens on Khorvaire again.

**Admiral Jaxson Ward** has been defending the shipping lanes to Sharn since his teen years, working his way up within the ranks all the way to his status as Admiral. His light chocolate skin shows his years of exposure to the sun on the decks of Brelish ships. In charge of Breland's second fleet, his ships keep the route from Sharn to Stormreach safe and sound. He's picked up Sahuagin over the course of many negotiations with the undersea civilization and knows more about the Thunder Sea than any other air breather. A large number of ships have been lost in the Straits of Shargon over the past centuries and Admiral Ward has standing bounties on several of the most famous wrecks.

**Captain Ellanar** leads the King's Swords. A servant of Dol Arrah, her dark skin comes from her mother who moved to Breland from Aerenal. As the leader of the King's Swords, Captain Ellanar is in charge of directing and organizing public-facing missions, whether it's breaking up Daask shipments of Dragon's Blood in Sharn or rooting out cult activity in rural Breland.

# Local Politics

Despite its political advancements towards democracy, the nation of Breland at its core remains a feudal system. Nobles are given land grants they apportion out to peasants who work the land. Nobles set the local tax rates, based on their own needs and the demands of the central government.

While law enforcement in the larger towns regularly has access to important divination magic like *Zone of Truth*, the spellcasting requirement can be hard to find in smaller villages. This either requires a spellcaster to come in from out of town, or for mundane investigative techniques.

Local business interests are rarely regulated or controlled by the state, however this does not mean they go uncontrolled. Rather, the dragonmarked houses use systems of accreditation and guild membership to control the quality and availability of goods and services. Gold Dragon Inns are a Ghallanda franchise that player characters can rely upon for safe sleeping in their travels, while blacksmiths will hang their Fabricator's Guild seal of approval from their sign. This type of accreditation creates a strong incentive for all houses to hire auditors that regularly ensure standards are maintained, for the good of the reputation of the house.

# Running Politics

As much fun as political intrigue can be in a novel or in worldbuilding, at the end of the day the reason these details matter is enriching the player experience. Politics can be used to provide color in adventure descriptions, but this doesn't require a lot of time spent on developing the politics. Where depth and consistency matters is when politics is used as the basis for an adventure or campaign.

## As an Adventure

Political adventures can be as simple as a politically motivated NPC providing a quest that advances their ends - clearing out a local goblin tribe to free up land for local farmers, as an example. Politics come into play when the PCs recognize that the goblins too have a right to the land and aren't doing anything wrong, despite the accusations of the questgiving mayor.

While it is possible to do simple good versus evil stories with political adventures, like defeating the evil vizier who's corrupting the good king, most people think political adventures should involve shades of gray. Giving the actors in a political adventure well-considered motives usually creates at least some shades of gray, even if one group is the clear "good" and the other is the clear "evil". Terrorists are evil, but developing that they're not just randomly killing people but attempting to overturn the political order gives the players a chance to understand why they're doing what they do.

Political stories generally fall into the broad category of adventures that are "person versus person", stories of competing interests, rather than say "person versus nature" or "person versus self". As such, the core of an adventure is deciding what the competing interest is. Two fundamental types of political conflicts are resource rights or a position of power and privilege. Resource rights cover a broad range of issues, from mining to agriculture, but all come down to who ought to profit from the usage of a resource.

Alternatively, fights over positions of power and privilege cover a broad array of topics, whether it's testing the extent of power of an existing position, the ascension of someone to an existing position, or the creation of a new position with new powers. Integral to this is the distinction between authority and power - Authority is the formal ability to accomplish something, while power is the actual ability to accomplish something. The tension between authority and power is core to many political stories, as political players are either trying to expand their power beyond their authority or to reclaim the power that ought to be vested in their authority.

Core to all political stories is the concept of stakeholders - who gains or loses based on the political result. The easiest stories are ones with two opposing sides to a conflict, as that allows the player characters to just pick a side. More complex political stories involve many stakeholders who may have similar but slightly different interests. Say the Children of Winter want to shut down a mine - the workers may, like the noble, want it back open, but the workers may also want to take the opportunity to negotiate for lower taxes or better working conditions. This kind of multi-faction politics can rapidly complicate what should be a simple problem, splitting up what would be a united force into factions for the player characters to unite and lead.

## As a Campaign

Political campaigns center themselves on larger conflicts, which can include fundamental conflicts over values and the broader conflicts between major political institutions.

In popular media and many fantasy settings, this usually manifests in the forms of a big war for the crown or throne. However, war as a form of political conflict only makes sense if both political forces are capable of raising roughly equivalent strength armies, or at least both believe that they can raise an army of equal or greater strength than their opponent.

For every other scenario, such as a scheming duke looking to overthrow a King, their political goals will have to be accomplished by other means. A coup involving a direct strike against the King also involves taking power by force, without relying on some big scenic battle. Alternatively, manipulating the procedures involving the transition of power can provide plenty of fodder. Strategic marriages, regencies, and "accidents" can all serve to direct the reigns of power to particular individuals in a monarchical system.

Under more democratic institutions, parliamentary intrigue and electioneering can similarly serve as forums to contest political power. Whether it's blatant crimes (theft, murder, election-rigging) or more indirect methods of exercising power, there's plenty of plots to be hatched through the competition for power. Mystery adventures can dig up dirt on political rivals, while a politician's organized crime connections can be turned into a dungeon crawl when adventurer's bust into the Boromar Clan hideout.

The primary thing to keep in mind with political campaigns is the intelligence of each of the factions. Leaders will assess and respond to changing circumstances, meaning that how player character's approach problems is very important. If the player characters always act as violent mercenaries, an ignoble baron may try to buy them off. If the party is a bunch of idealists, spreading rumors and lies may be the tactic of choice. Intelligent villains are the scariest and can maintain the challenge in the face of growing PC combat prowess.

### Reigniting the Last War

If a DM does choose to pursue the plotline of reigniting the Last War, an excellent starting question is how will the war be reignited. Breland and Karrnath have both set the seeds for a possible civil war, which could lead any of their neighbors to decide to take the opportunity to invade or simply support one side of the split in hopes of forming a durable political alliance. Aundair and Breland both have reasons they may want to invade one of their neighbors that seceded (Eldeen and Droaam respectively), creating an opportunity to "defend" the invaded country by counter-invading the initiator of hostilities. Alternatively, the blame could very easily be placed upon Darguun for attacking Breland or Valenar for attacking Karrnath. For the former a new leader would probably be necessary, while the latter would only require that Kaius decides he needs his army to blow off some steam because they're getting restless waiting for the big war to start up.

The next step is deciding what major secrets each country is hiding. In the various sourcebooks many adventure hooks relate to new magic items that could give a country a leg up whe the war started. These matter because it will contextualize how countries look at opportunities - if a country has successfully recovered an ancient Giant artifact capable of leveling armies, *that matters*.

Once you know how it starts and any important secrets countries are hiding, the initial set of alliances will serve as a blueprint for the conflict. In any kind of large war with many independent parties, alliances will resolve to two or maybe three sides in total, as nations band together out of common interest. Alliances need a few elements. First, some common interest. This doesn't need to be complicated - if they share a border, that interest could be reducing the number of fronts they're fighting on. If they don't share a border, it could be mutual recognition that they can't actively fight each other and so they may as well trade with each other. A third way for basic common interest is that they each have a mutual ally with no strong reason to fight each other, thus avoiding the risk of the mutual ally picking a different side. The second major element of an alliance is trust - while plenty of historical alliances have existed without trust (famously Germany and Russia at the start of World War II), an alliance without trust is liable to quickly collapse.

## Conclusion

As players reach higher and higher levels, they engage in conflicts of increasing scope and scale. Historically, D&D has offered two ways of accomplishing this - introducing the planes, or introducing politics. Without the constant meddling of gods and the reincarnation of souls in the outer planes, there's significantly fewer reasons to travel to the planes of Eberron. Introducing politics can pull your players deeper into the setting, forcing them to make larger decisions about what impact their characters will have on the world.