



ARCANIS



THE WORLD OF SHATTERED EMPIRES



THE KNIGHTLY ORDER
OF THE PHOENIX



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THE KNIGHTLY ORDER OF THE PHOENIX



HISTORY

Like many of the more prestigious Orders of the Crown, the Knightly Order of the Phoenix was once a legion during the period of time when Milandesea was still a province of the Coryani Empire. However, unlike many of its sister orders, the history of the Order of the Phoenix predates the Coryani Empire itself.

The Axunite Invasion

What may be one of the earliest mentions of a member of this order is found in the records of Telpentas val'Tensen, whose fragmented treatise, *The Coming of the Fortress Builders: The Auxunite Invasion of Milandesea*, is regarded as the most authoritative text on that period. In it, Telpentas relates how after the spark of rebellion was ignited by the val'Tensen in the ancient city of Treslau, it spread like wild fire throughout the valleys of Milandesea.

Of the liberation of Tralia, one story is repeated from village to village, of how a Phoenix Warrior stormed the inner citadel and confronted one of the Auxunite priest-kings in his inner sanctum. Fighting alongside his bonded mastiff,

this knight was slain by the priest-king, decapitated by a mad swing from the Auxunite's mighty blade. But before the head of the man hit the stone-flagged floor, his mastiff leapt and clamped its iron jaws upon the Auxunite's sword arm. In an instant, the mastiff immolated and the decapitated warrior rose from its ashes, once again whole. Tearing the weapon that slew him from the charred arm of the shocked Auxunite, the Phoenix Warrior drove the blade through the priest-king's black heart.

The First Crusade of Light

The next probable mention of this order comes from the diary of a val'Assanté who followed the First Emperor during the First Crusade of Light. This account, though only bits and pieces of it survive in the modern age, is extraordinary in the fact that this unnamed val'Assanté fought alongside the First Emperor from the beginnings of the Crusade in the small town of Coryan, to its bitter-sweet end at the Battle of Hope's End.

In one passage it describes the death of "*Tremane, an honorable and brave warrior and his odd demon-dog*" at the battle of Treslandia (one of the ancient names of Treslau). In a later passage in which he is describing the final battle

at Hope's End, he mentions a val'Holryn huscarl named Tremane battling to get to the First Emperor's side when the treachery of the infernals is revealed. Could this be the same man, raised from the ashes of his "demon-dog" or a mere coincidence?

The Children's Crusade

During the time that the lands of Milandir were still considered part of the Coryani Empire, the order was formally inducted into the Roster of the Valorous as the Legion of the Rising Phoenix. While not considered as prestigious as those reformed Imperium of Man legions, it was the actions of their High General, Palic val'Holryn, that would launch the legion into fame and notoriety.

Palic val'Holryn had stepped down from that leadership position to take the val'Holryn ancestral senatorial seat upon the passing of his father. It must have been Larissa's Smile that placed him that position, for no sooner had he donned his senatorial toga that the Coryani-Ymandragore War, also known as the Children's Crusade broke out.

Up to that point, the Sorcerer-King of Ymandragore had free reign to 'harvest' any of those who possessed the Gift within the territory of the Empire. That changed dramatically when a Harvester entered the Imperial Palace and demanded the newborn twins of the Empress Shar val'Assanté.

Her refusal led to a swift and brutal Ymandragoran response in the form of a large invasion force landing and sacking the port city of Celantos. Within weeks, the Ymandragoran troops were slicing through all of the Coryani defenses and were heading straight for Grand Coryan itself.

With the capital in a complete panic and the Empress despairing that her children were to be taken and raised by an immortal inhuman monster, a clear and steady voice broke through the cacophony. "*Your Majesty,*" said Senator Palic val'Holryn in his usual confidant and booming voice, "*give me command of the legions and the Ymandrakes shall be swept from our lands.*"

Whether heartened by the calm and confidence of the senator from the backwaters of her Empire or perhaps in sheer desperation, Empress Shar bestowed upon Palic val'Holryn the Golden Laurel of the Defender of the Empire and quite possibly saved the entirety of her nation.

In short order, the newly elevated Defender of the Empire pulled troops from the distant corners of the empire and amassed over a score of legions and a comparable number of auxilia to counter the Ymandrake invasion. So successful was the counter-attack that the Ymandragoran forces were pushed all the way back to Celantos, where the anchored Black Fleet awaited to carry them home. Yet the sight that normally welcomed liberating heroes instead brought stinging tears to the eyes of the most hardened veteran –

such were the atrocities that formed the charnel house that remained of Celantos.

In a rare moment of rage, Palic val'Holryn swiftly gathered the core of his personal legion, the Legion of the Rising Phoenix, and sent back word to the Empress that such actions cannot stand. He, along with some five hundred of his elite legionnaires, were taking the fight to the Isle of Tears itself. "*I wish to see what color blood the Lord of Ymandragore bleeds!*"

The last sight of those brave five hundred men saw was the raising of their beloved standard as they sailed off to the Isle of Ymandragore aboard a commandeered ship of the Black Fleet. They were never seen or heard from again.

The loss of their legion standard was a blow to the honor of the legionnaires of the Rising Phoenix. Though their general was hailed as the savior of the Empire, the legion's morale was never again the same and their postings to ever less glorious tours of duty finally served to break their esprit-de-corps.

The Secession of Milandir

It was not until the Second Coryani-Khitani War that the Legion of the Rising Phoenix's actions were once again worthy of historical note. It was during this devastating war, in which the Khitani actually came within sight of the white walls of Grand Coryan itself, that the Coryani Empire shattered, some say irrevocably.

As the Mad Emperor, Quron val'Dellenov, endeavored to stave off the destruction of his empire, the rogue province of Canceri broke off its imperial shackles and declared itself an independent state. Always a poor province balanced on the edge of starvation, the province of Canceri relied heavily on the bounty of the province of Balantica. That food source no longer available to them, the rulers of the newly formed Theocracy of Canceri decided to take what was needed from their much richer neighbor to the south, the province of Milandesea. Again and again, the governors of the province pleaded with the Emperor to let some of their legions return to defend the border and rebuff the depravations of the Canceri marauders; but their words fell upon deaf, or at the least, unsympathetic ones.

Having suffered a brutal attack upon the town of Ashvan and the surrounding lands by an undead legion known as the Legion of the Black Sun, Governor Jovan val'Holryn extolled all the legions that had been raised in the beleaguered province to return, in this their time of desperate need.

Leading the exodus from the Khitani front was the Legion of the Rising Phoenix. When word arrived, the High General of the legion, one Stephanus val'Holryn, announced that the "true sons" of Tralia shall return. Though only at half-strength due to a bloody mutiny within its ranks, the legion was at the forefront of the entire campaign.

In short order, the legions of the now independent Kingdom of Milandir routed the Canceri bandits. The turning point in the campaign came at Kielmun, when the Legion of the Rising Phoenix greeted the Legion of the Black Sun with such ferocity and tenacity that even those undead legionnaires knew fear.

Upon the stabilization of the kingdom, many of the legions that answered the call to come to their people's aid were reorganized and granted a royal charter remaking them into knightly orders, and thus the Legion of the Rising Phoenix became the Knightly Order of the Phoenix and remaining so to this day.

The Modern Era

As befits a knightly order, the Order of the Phoenix has a distinguished history in the wars and skirmishes of Milandir. During the Heretic War, the order was led by the famous and charismatic Aeorin val'Holryn who, before his mysterious disappearance, managed to lay siege to ancient Ventaka.

The order also saw combat during the Moratavian invasion by Coryani legions led by Menisis val'Tensen but were unable to repel his masterful attack. Most recently it fought during the Fifth Crusade of Light where in an act mirroring their legendary act during the Battle at Hope's End, knights of the order managed to rescue King Osric from sure death at the claws of an Arch-Demonius at the Battle at Hell Maw's Pass.

During the Sixth Crusade, the order was ordered to patrol the Milandir-Canceri border against any Cancere incursions trying to take advantage of the Crown's occupation with the matters in the east. Never-the-less, elements of this prestigious knightly order were seen in and around the Hinterlands and the former God's Wall, doing their duty to protect their king and country as they have done for centuries.

ORGANIZATION

The Order of the Phoenix is not beholden to any one temple or deity. Since its founding as a legion, it protected the interests of the Mother Church of Coryan as a byproduct of its service to the val'Holryn family. With the schism that created the Orthodox Milandric Church, it now defends that holy institution's interests of the as it pursues its usual duties.

Hierarchy

The Order of the Phoenix, like many of the Crown's other fighting orders, follows a hierarchical command structure as shown below:

Sovereign of the Order

The ultimate head of the order is chosen from the ranks of the grandmasters below. For centuries, this person has been the Duke of Tralia and as such is solely beholden to the King (or Queen) of Milandir.

As all members of the ruling val'Holryn line of Tralia are also members of this order, by acclaim if not by training, it is tradition that when the Duke or Duchess of Tralia passes away, the next in line to become Duke is automatically elevated through the ranks to become Sovereign of the Order. Among the newly crowned Duke's many other duties, is ensuring that the order is suitably funded and staffed. While the sovereign has the power to overturn any orders from his subordinates, he usually leaves the disposition and command of the knights to the grandmasters, unless a crisis is in the offing.

The current Sovereign of the Order is Duke Konrad val'Holryn who took over the rank and duties upon the passing of his father, Duke Victor val'Holryn.

Grandmasters of the Order

Consisting of six in number, the grandmasters are normally elevated from those of the ducal line, but if that is not possible, then at least from within the val'Holryn family.

The grandmasters are stationed strategically throughout the kingdom and handle the day to day administrative matters that are necessary for an organization of this size.

Grandmasters are normally chosen from knights that have grown too old or are injured in such a way as to preclude active duty. Being able to ascend to this rank allows, at least some of these knights, to continue to serve their order and their family.

Knights of the Phoenix

Chosen from the ranks of the aspirants below, the Knights of the Phoenix have been recognized for their bravery, prowess, and loyalty to the order. They are the backbone of the order and are considered some of the most elite and deadly warriors in the entire kingdom.

Normally, the order is considered fully manned when one hundred such knights are equipped and trained. It is at this rank that the *Ceremony of Binding* occurs, as an aspirant is not truly considered a Knight of the Order until he has bonded with a mastiff.

It is a rare and awe-inspiring occasion to see all one hundred knights, outfitted in full regalia, charging across the field. For the most part, knights work either independently, going to where they are most needed or in small groups.

Training never ends for the knight, for here the masters those new fighting maneuvers he was taught as an aspirant and is shown new and even more closely guarded tricks of the order.

Aspirant of the Order

Aspirants of the Order are all knights of the kingdom, be they noble born or those knighted on the field of battle. They are usually invited from the ranks of squires that served a Knight of the Order since they were young boys and girls. However, the elevation of a commoner to the rank of knight due to valor on the battlefield has occurred rarely, but frequently enough, to fill the breast of the Men-at-Arms who follow the knights into battle to fight with abandon in the hopes of being counted among those rare few.

A knight of the Crown may also be invited to be an aspirant, though those who have formally joined another order are unlikely to be invited into the Order of the Phoenix. As the saying goes, *“A man who will leave his master’s house for a more comfortable bed in another’s, knows not the meaning of loyalty.”*

Aspirants receive rigorous training and are taught some of the fighting maneuvers unique to the order. Binding with a mastiff is a sacred rite reserved for full-fledged Knights of the Order, and as such aspirants are not permitted that honor unless selected to join the ranks of the knighthood.

Aspirants are given a horse, if they do not already own one, and are trained to fight from horseback singly or in formation.

Squires

Squires are young boys and girls of noble birth who are given over to the order in the hopes of one day taking their place among the ranks of the noblest of fighting orders.

Squires usually begin their training at the age of 8 to 10 and are responsible for the care of one knight’s horse, mastiff, and equipment. The hundred or so squires also divide the work of seeing to the aspirant’s needs.

Squires who are proven to be dedicated to the order and show those qualities most admired by these knights – bravery, loyalty, and duty – will be invited to join the order as aspirants, space permitting. So prestigious is the Order of the Phoenix that even those that are not accepted as aspirants readily find sponsors and offers of knighthood from noble houses.

Men-At-Arms

The order also enjoys the support of approximately five hundred men-at-arms. Drawn from the lands of Tralia, these warriors are usually not of noble birth.

These warriors train alongside of the aspirants and knights of the order, but only during the height of summer as it the time that fields need the least tending. They receive training on par with an exceptionally well-drilled canton, but nothing beyond that. As with all such conscripts, they are expected to arm and armor themselves. In return, the Duke rewards them with a stipend that they receive at the end of the battle months, just before harvest.

The Order’s Estates

The order enjoys two estates, housing in the Duke’s Castle in Tralia, as well as numerous chapter houses throughout the kingdom.

Toulin

The order was awarded the keep at Toulin by a grateful and newly-crowned King Willem after the order proved instrumental in the victorious campaign against the Ying warlord Ni’Hu. Along with the keep, the order received a grant of the surrounding area, which includes several small villages and the town of Nanderwal. The taxes generated from the mined raw materials helps subsidize much of the keep’s upkeep costs. Unfortunately, being so close to the Blighted Mire, the crops of the area are barely enough to meet the needs of the people who live in the area.



Toulin Keep is the main training grounds for the order as well as where most aspirants are billeted when they are on duty. The knights and aspirants stationed here are tasked with patrolling the Milandir-Canceri border, usually defending against undead incursions, whether as the advent of an invasion, a raiding party, or the mindless meandering of the living dead.

Drakenfast

A heated point of contention between the normally austere val'Mordane and the Kingdom of Milandir is the humiliating loss of Drakenfast Keep during the initial days of the Heretic War.

The keep was in the hands of a Nerothian Fighting Order known as the Order of the Barbed Lance. Considered a holy site by the Nerothians, the sepulchers deep below the fortress are said to hold one of the oldest val'Mordane families to have been revived by Neroth's Gift. The patriarch of the family, Drakenvul val'Mordane was said to have witnessed the glory of the Imperium of Man, as well as its inglorious fall.

Ever since the secession of Canceri and Milandir from the Coryani Empire, the Order of the Barbed Lance and the Order of the Phoenix have been implacable enemies, with each encounter between the two being bloody affairs without either side asking for or giving quarter.

Under the leadership of Aeorin val'Holryn, the eldest son of the Duke Victor val'Holryn, the order attempted a coup so brazen, that its aim could only have been the complete humiliation of the Order of the Barbed Lance. At the spearpoint to Milandir's counterattack in the opening days of the Heretic War, Aeorin led a small group of knights, aspirants and men-at-arms and snuck into Drakenfast Keep. There, they waited until the main host of the Knights of the Order of the Phoenix took the field, knowing that their bitter enemy would react in kind.

As the two sides skirmished on the fields before the keep, Aeorin's forces killed or captured all those who remained within, including the leader of the order who watched the battle from the ramparts. Unexpectedly, the Knights of the Barbed Lance heard the horn sounding retreat from the battlements where their leader watched. Hastily, the Nerothian knights raced their mounts to the gated maw that led to their fortress, but were surprised to see the drawbridge drawn and the portcullis down.

Trapped between the anvil that was their haven denied and the hammer of the now-laughing Knights of the Phoenix, the Nerothian knights were smashed, with barely a score managing to escape the trap.

Claiming the Drakenfast Keep as theirs by right of the spoils of war, the Milandisian knights celebrated upon the dark nectar of Nerothian brandy while cementing each and every entryway into the underground sepulchers below.

To this day, the keep remains in the hands of the Order of the Phoenix, despite numerous assaults by the val'Mordane survivors of the attack and their subsequent replacements. Though only half a day's ride north from Ashvan, those knights stationed in the former Cancerese keep consider it one of the most harrowing and dangerous assignments possible. Most unnerving of all is the continuous scratching of ancient Drakenvul and his kin, forever trying to escape their tomb.

Chapter Houses

Throughout the different cities and major towns of Milandir, the order maintains a handful of modest chapter houses for traveling knights and aspirants. These chapter houses are small, one to three bedroom, buildings where a knight, and if room is available, his companions, can expect a safe place to rest and a warm meal or two. Though theoretically there is no charge for staying in a chapter house, most members of the order offer three to five crowns per person per night for upkeep expenses.

Most, if not all, chapter houses can be found by an identifying *burning feather* emblem carved onto the bottom right of the main door jam. Why a prestigious knightly order would need to use methods more rightly associated with a secret society is unknown.

THE BONDED MASTIFF

Ever by his master's side, the mastiff of a knight of the Phoenix distinguishes him from any other knightly order and further surrounds them with an aura of mysticism and mystery.

The mastiff has been a staple of this order since the first time the Warriors of the Phoenix were mentioned in record history. Many rumors surround the nature of this extraordinarily loyal beast. Some say that at the time of the ritual that binds the mastiff to its knight, the sorcery employed reaches into the Cauldron and pulls the soul of a former Knight of the Phoenix, binding it to the dog. Others say that they are normal in every way until the day of the ritual when they are endowed with human-like, or even demonic, intelligence. As with all rumors, a tiny bit of truth exists in all of them.

The Breed of Mastiff

The mastiff used by the order is an ancient breed, raised in the kennels of the Woodszif family of Tralia. This small but loyal vassal family of the val'Holryn have bred this particular kind of mastiff since there have been val'Holryn it seems.

From a young age, the mastiff is raised to be familiar and comfortable around men, horses, and the sound of battle. Being a large and robust breed, they seem impervious to accidental cuts and bruises from any mock skirmishers.

One of the largest, if not the largest, variety of dogs known, the Tralian Mastiff has a coat ranging from a light brown to a shiny black. Males of the breed are normally 36" to 40" at the shoulder, while females are slightly smaller reaching 30" to 33" at the shoulder. Fully grown, the males can weigh as much as 250 to 275 lbs., while the females between 175 to 200 lbs. Exceptionally large animals, upwards of 36" tall and 325 lbs. are rare but not unheard of.

The Binding Ceremony

Exactly who devised the ceremony is a closely guarded secret of the order. What is known is that only certain members of the order have the ability and training to perform the ritual.

As befitting such a secret rite, the details of the Ceremony of Binding is known only to those members of the order who have attained the rank of Knight of the Phoenix. Guarding this secret with one's life is a core tenant of the order's oath of knighthood.

The Ceremony of Binding is a sorcerous ritual that unites the knight with the mastiff on many levels. The ritual creates a link between the mastiff and the knight allowing them to telepathically communicate with one another, even if the knight is not an awakened val. The level of communication is not exactly a conversation, for while the knight is able to tell the mastiff to perform complex commands, the best the mastiff can do is communicate its understanding empathically, in essence, the knight gets a sense of what the mastiff is feeling, such as confidence, anger, pain, surprise, etc.

Normally a dog, no matter how intelligent, could never comprehend, let alone carry out, the complex commands that a mastiff of the order appears to be able to do. For example, a knight might instruct the mastiff to *"sneak along the wall and behind the high priestess and her sacrifice. Wait until I am charging at her, then attack at the same time I do."*

The mastiff's ability to understand and complete such tasks is directly due to the effects of the ritual. As the ceremony is being enacted, a spirit or essence is summoned and commanded to meld with the mastiff. As a side effect of this process, the mastiff's fur darkens considerably and a green glow emits from its eyes. The dog also gains an unnaturally long life, as the beast will not die of natural causes so long as its master lives.

Beyond the uncanny mental connection between knight and mastiff, the most amazing result of the ceremony is the effect that gave the order its name. Should the knight, at any time, be struck dead, the mastiff will immolate and the knight will rise from its ashes. The knight will have all their memories and skills intact and is resurrected at the same age as they were when struck down. Alas they are bereft of any and all belongings, which lay where they their corpse fell. This is a true rebirth as the knight is healthy, with any injuries sustained and any natural ill-effects, such as poison being nullified. The knight will not even bear old scars. Unfortunately, any sorcerous effects, such as a curse, survive the resurrection of the knight. The same miraculous effect does not occur when the beast dies. A dead mastiff is a dead mastiff.

One last caveat of this unique ritual of binding: the ritual can only be performed once, meaning that once a knight's mastiff is slain, or he rises from its ashes, he may never again be bonded to another mastiff. Many such knights become morose and speak of emptiness within them, an absence of a constant feeling of love and loyalty that once filled their minds.

The Loyalty of the Mastiff

If a dog is indeed a man's best friend, then the bond between a knight and his mastiff is that of the closest of siblings. The beast has complete trust in his master, going so far as protecting him at the cost of his own life, with the same being said of the knight. The connection between the two continues to grow, until after years of being bonded, some knights say that they no longer have to give his companion conscious commands; instead the mastiff merely knows what is needed of it and performs it to the best of its ability.

ASSOCIATION WITH THE VAL'HOLRYN FAMILY

The words val'Holryn and the Order of the Phoenix are, more often than not, said in the same breath. The histories of the two have been intertwined since the first recorded mention of either.

The val'Holryn was long considered to be a minor val family until their actions during the session of the province of Milandesea from the Coryani Empire. Due to the governor of Tralia's order to recall troops from the front and send some to defend the beleaguered val'Ossan troops, the val'Holryn family was granted a duchy that encompassed the former area under the governor's control. Eventually the king elevated Governor val'Holryn to Duke of the Duchy of Tralia.

One of the first acts of the newly minted duke was to petition and gain permission from the Crown to convert the Legion of the Phoenix to the Knightly Order of the Phoenix. Since that time, the order has been closely identified with the val'Holryn family and have been the personal guards and guardians of the val'Holryn family.

The title of Sovereign of the Order, the titular head of the order has always been held by the current Duke of Tralia. In fact, it should be noted that every knight who has risen to the rank of grandmaster of has been a member of the val'Holryn ducal lineage.

The most infamous of these sovereigns was the (presumed) late Simon val'Holryn, grandfather of the current Duke Konrad val'Holryn. It is said that Duke Simon was equal parts military genius and sorcerous devil, but the people loved him and history has recorded that he reigned justly and with a sense of ironic humor. Earlier in his youth, Simon was inducted into the order and was eventually raised to the rank of Knight of the Order, with all the privileges and duties thereof, including his own bonded mastiff.

When he succeeded his father as duke, Simon was elevated from knight to grandmaster and then quickly to Sovereign of the Order. Years passed uneventfully for the duchy, until one night when the good Duke disappeared without a trace; the only witness to his abduction being a habitual drunk who claimed to have looked up and seen, "*the Duke being carried off by two winged demons!*"

The Duchess val'Holryn, a woman very much in love with her husband, was driven slowly insane over the years as Simon's bonded mastiff did not immolate that night or any other night thereafter. As the weeks turned into months and then years, the aging duchess became obsessed with the well-being of that dog, knowing that as long as the mastiff remained alive, so too did Simon val'Holryn.

It is ironic that the now elderly mastiff has outlived the duchess and most of Simon's children as well. Yet there it lays to this day, its jet black coat, now turned gray, patiently awaiting the return of its master.

THE ORDER'S CODE

The Order of the Phoenix extolls all the common knightly values, as set down in the Milandisian Code of Honor. Loyalty, Honor, and Brotherhood being the key ideals that the order has taken as their ethos.

Like the other fighting orders of the Crown, knights must never attack an unarmed foe and shall offer a chance to surrender to those who lay at their mercy. Additionally, knights of the order shall not knowingly attack non-combatants, be they men, women, or children, though an exception is made for those who are tainted beyond hope or the risen dead (intelligent or otherwise).

The Oath of a Knight of the Phoenix

Upon being accepted into the ranks as a full-fledged Knight of the Phoenix, a pledge must be taken by the former aspirant before they may take up the mantle of knight. This pledge is usually administered by the current Sovereign of the Order, ostensibly the Duke of Tralia. The pledge is administered within the largest ballroom of the Duke's castle after a lavish reception is thrown. It is not unheard of for many of the highest ranks of royalty to attend; even the reigning king or queen, but even these dignitaries are not allowed to witness the swearing in of the new knights.

I do hereby give my oath:

That within my bosom

All who call me friend

Shall find succor.

That at the point of my sword

Those who strike at me

Shall taste Defeat.

That within my heart

Shall reside my vow

*To defend Crown and Country
 From all those that would despoil Her.
 And I hereby pledge my sword arm to defend
 The hand that feeds me
 For like my loyal mastiff
 Whose secret shall never be ripped from me,
 I know where my true loyalty lies.
 With a hand on my pommel and my eye upon all
 I do hereby swear!*

SECRETS OF THE ORDER

Much like other ancient secret societies, the Order of the Phoenix has its old secrets and hidden agendas. Below are two of the most protected secrets of the order.

The Secret Ceremony of Binding

Known only to a handful of knights and the grandmasters of the Order, the Ceremony of Binding is, at its core, a Sarishan ritual. How this sorcerous binding rite came to be connected with the order is something of a mystery.

Some speculate that it must have occurred during the Golden Age that mankind enjoyed during the Imperium of Man, when the different Gods were worshipped under one unified clergy. Others speak of those val'Holryn born with the val'Mehan bloodline abilities infiltrating the Sarishan Sorcerer-Priest clerisy and stealing volumes of rites and rituals from beneath their noses.

Whatever the true origin of the ritual, the truth of the matter is that only a val'Holryn born with the bloodline abilities of the val'Mehan family is able to enact the Ceremony.

The other great controversy is what the ritual does to the dog to elevate its intelligence.

Some speculate that some sort of demon is bound to the great dog or perhaps the spirit of a former member of the order. In fact, the binding ritual plucks an other-worldly entity and binds it to the body and spirit of the mastiff. Is this entity an infernal? Scholars within the order, for the most part, agree that it is not. The proof seems to be found in the fact that no ritual that detects an infernal or wards that prevent the passage of such seem to detect or hinder the mastiff in any way.

The true nature of these entities is a complete mystery and the knowledge of their identity, if it was ever truly known, was lost in the mists of time. The only clue that remains is found within a passage within the ritual itself; a sentence that is translated as, *"True to our Pact, another of your children is needed..."* What pact did the ancient members of this order make or is this agreement something that was negotiated by the earliest members of the val'Holryn family?

The Secret Purpose of the Order of the Phoenix

Known only to those who enjoy the status of grandmaster, and thus only to a val'Holryn of the ducal line, is the true purpose of the order. Since its inception the order was created to do only one thing: protect the val'Holryn family from any and all threats.

While the order has acted nobly and selflessly in protecting the Kingdom of Milandir, and the Coryani Empire before the Kingdom's founding, should the Crown turn against the val'Holryn family the order's duty is clear. Surprisingly enough, the order's true loyalty is laid bare within its own oath:

"And I hereby pledge my sword arm to defend; The hand that feeds me; For like my loyal mastiff; I know where my true loyalty lies."

The hand that feeds it is an obvious reference to the val'Holryn family, the noble family that sponsors and ensures that the order has enough men, arms, and any other materials needed to perform its duties. The last line of knowing where their true loyalty lies refers to what the order will do if faced with a situation where it must choose between Crown and the val'Holryn.



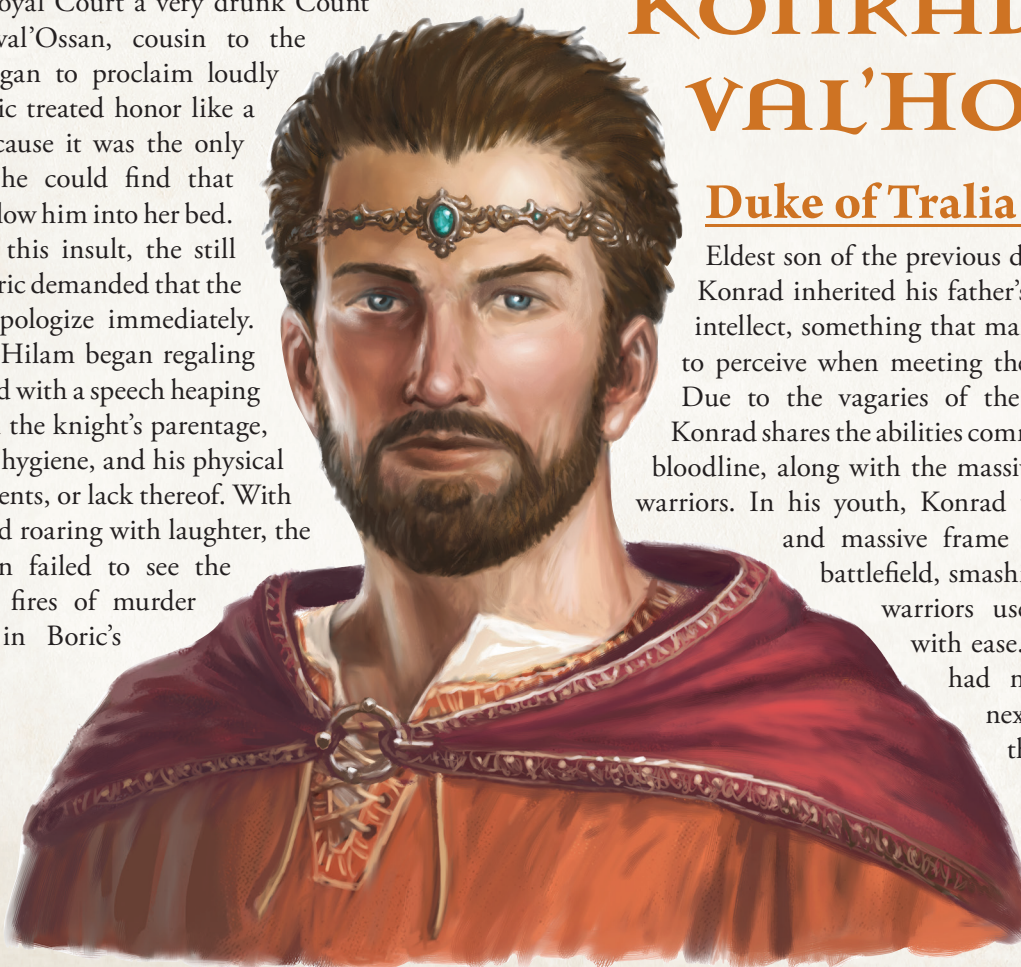
DRAMATIS PERSONA

SIR BORIC VAL'HOLRYN

Knight-Commander of Drakenfast

A distant relation of Duke Konrad, Sir Boric followed family tradition and joined the Order of the Phoenix, as his fathers before him. Sir Boric can proudly trace his lineage back to when the order was a legion of Coryan and his distant ancestor was lost with Palic val'Holryn in the ill-advised invasion of Ymandragore. Though this pedigree did not ensure Boric a position within the order, he dedicated many years to training to become one of the most skilled swordsmen in the realm. Boric also embraced honor and duty like a lover, never allowing a single word to besmirch either.

This fierce devotion led to a tragic turning point in his life, when attending a feast in Naeraanth with members of the Royal Court a very drunk Count Hilam val'Ossan, cousin to the king, began to proclaim loudly that Boric treated honor like a lover because it was the only woman he could find that would allow him into her bed. Hearing this insult, the still sober Boric demanded that the Count apologize immediately. Instead, Hilam began regaling the crowd with a speech heaping insult on the knight's parentage, abilities, hygiene, and his physical endowments, or lack thereof. With the crowd roaring with laughter, the nobleman failed to see the seething fires of murder blazing in Boric's eyes.



Hilam finished his speech by tossing his cup of wine full in the target of his ridicule's face. Knocking the goblet away with a backhand, Sir Boric challenged the Count to a duel to satisfy his honor. Hilam laughed and returned to table, saying that he would sooner wrestle a pig than duel a lowborn. At that Boric grabbed a handful of his tormentor's hair and, pulling him onto the floor, he pummeled the Count until his fists were raw. Hilam was so severely beaten that he lost most of his teeth and the ability to see out of his right eye.

Normally such an offense would lead to the attacker's execution, but many testified to the Count's actions. That, along with Boric being a val'Holryn, saved him from the gallows. He did not escape punishment all together, however. He was quickly transferred to Drakenfast Keep and made its knight-commander. After three years stationed here, Boric sometimes wishes for the hangman's noose. The incessant scraping of the undead attempting to claw their way out of their prison beneath his feet, as well as the strange happenings that occur within the keep have strained his otherwise iron nerves.

KONRAD VAL'HOLRYN

Duke of Tralia

Eldest son of the previous duke, Victor val'Holryn, Konrad inherited his father's good nature and keen intellect, something that many of his opponents fail to perceive when meeting the towering young man. Due to the vagaries of the val'Holryn bloodline, Konrad shares the abilities common with the val'Viridan bloodline, along with the massive build of one of their warriors. In his youth, Konrad used his greater height and massive frame to great effect on the battlefield, smashing through the skeletal warriors used by the Nerothians with ease. His numerous victories had many calling him the next Aeorin val'Holryn, the great general who led Milandir to victory in the Heretic Wars until his disappearance during the siege of Ventaka.

Many of the knightly orders sought to recruit him into their fellowship, but his father forbid Konrad joining any but the Order of the Phoenix. Victor explained that his duty as his heir was to one day lead the order, as he did. Yet Konrad was hesitant. He knew of the hound his grandfather was bonded to remained in its kennel, tended to like a living memorial, in the hopes of signaling Simon val'Holryn's return or death. He saw his elderly grandmother slowly driven mad by worry and dying still anticipating her husband's miraculous resurrection from the mastiff's ashes. He remembered looking into the aging dog's eyes and seeing reflected an intelligence bordering on human sentience, conveying the thought, *"Someday you'll be mine, boy. Just like all those that came before you."* That feeling terrified Konrad as a boy and even as an adult, the thought of bonding with a mastiff leaves him shaken.

Yet as a dutiful son, Konrad trained with the knights of the order, even going so far as practicing with a mastiff, yet always finding some excuse as to not undergo the bonding ceremony. Luckily for the heir of the ducal seat, he lived in a time of almost constant warfare, from skirmishes with the Cancerese across the border, to the Fifth Crusade of Light against the infernal incursion in the north. With the death of his father in that war, he used the pretext of helming the ship of state during his transition to duke, as well as his duties in the royal court, as a way of postponing his duties to the order. For their part, the leadership of the order is perplexed and frustrated by Konrad's seemingly off handed dismissal. The order must have their grandmaster and are considering using any means necessary to convince, or force if need be, Konrad into undergoing the bonding ceremony and assuming his place as the head of the order.

LADY LEONA DARTEN

Knight-Commander of Toulin

Like many others, Leona began her life in the order as a squire. Her father, a knight-commander of the town of Lyst in Tralia, was able to use whatever influence and favor he accumulated throughout his many years of faithful service to the duke to have Leona squire for Sir Bernhardt val'Holryn. Sir Bernhardt, a boisterous man whose love of battle and wine was only exceeded by his waistline, was at first resistant to having a waif attend him, but Leona's dedication and skill at wedging him into his armor allayed his fears. In time, he grew fond of the waif, as he called her, and came to see her as the daughter he never had.

When the time came, Sir Bernhardt sponsored her and she was accepted as a knight aspirant of the order. Her parents' hearts swelled with pride when she was knighted by Duke Victor and she became Lady Leona. With an eye towards becoming a fully vested knight of the order, Leona trained and worked harder than any other knight, earning her the respect of some and the resentment of others, who believed their name alone earned them a position as a phoenix knight. Sadly, Leona's skill at courtly politics was sorely lacking. Naively believing that hard work and dedication would lead to the recognition she deserved, she failed to see the machinations of those whispering in the ears of certain highly ranked knights who saw her as an upstart that had risen above her station. To Leona's disbelief, she was passed over for consideration as an inductee. At first dismayed, Leona refused to be disheartened and redoubled her efforts, looking for a chance to distinguish herself in a manner that even her detractors could not dispute. That chance came when the infernals invaded from the north and the Fifth Crusade of Light erupted.

Though involved in many of the battles against the infernal horde, Leona's moment came during a battle against a devils led by the Arch-Demonius Hazdectyl the Day-Eater. A days ride out from Censure, an entourage carrying a delegation to Milandir, including the future queen Marixa val'Haupt, was returning from tense negotiations when it was beset by the infernals. Sent to escort them was King Osric, along with Duke Victor val'Holryn and a number of Phoenix Knights, including Leona. During the horrific battle that saw Duke Victor killed, reborn, and slain again, Leona single-handedly defended Marixa val'Haupt from a dozen of the foul attackers single-handedly. When the battle was over, not only had the order lost its grandmaster, but over a score of its knights as well. With the no less a personage than the King of Milandir commending her, Leona's political enemies within the order were silenced and she was inducted as a full member of the order.

Now in her early fifties, the Lady Leona is one of the most prominent Phoenix Knights, and the Knight-Commander of Toulin, ensuring that the latest aspirants are properly trained and taught to embrace the creed of the order.

CODEx OF HEROES

NEW BACKGROUNDS

Being Knighted, the Knight Errant

Heroes may sometimes find themselves invited to join a knighthood as a reward for some great service or as the unwitting beneficiary of a political move in some complex game which they are not privy. You gain the title of Knight Errant and may switch your current background feature for the Aspirant Knight or Knight Errant Background feature below. This represents leaving your old life behind and beginning a new one. You may still use your previous background feature but doing so may bring your honor into question, depending upon the background feature.

Aspirant Knight

You have risen through the ranks and have distinguished yourself as one of the best warriors of your nation. While some knights do not feel the need to seek admittance into a knightly order, preferring solitude and freedom from superiors, others prefer the brotherhood and resources that such orders offer.

However, many such orders require further training and education to craft a truly elite warrior. Such orders require that a knight enter as an Aspirant Knight of the Order. These warriors are still considered knights, but may not be able to access the full powers and privileges of that order.

Once an aspirant has shown that they embody those virtues extolled by the order, usually courage, duty, and fealty, they are elevated to full membership as a knight of that order.

Nationality: Kingdom of Milandir

Races: Human, val (ss'ressen are allowed entry to a specific order that consists solely of their egg clutch)

Social Class: High Class

Minimum Age: 16

Skill Proficiencies: Animal Handling, Athletics

Tool Proficiencies: Vehicles (land)

Weapon Proficiencies: Choose either longsword, mace, or lance.

Languages: Milandisian

Literacy: You are literate.

Equipment: A signet ring with your family's coat of arms and a tabard with your knightly order's coat of arms. You possess a set fine of clothes, a set of traveler's cloths, and a purse containing 25 gp. If you are a noble val, you also gain an adorned flintlock pistol and 10 shots of blast powder.

Class Restrictions: You cannot begin play as a fury or shaman. If later in your career you take levels in any class or gain a feature which grants you primal magic, you must replace your background feature with another as you will be stripped of your knighthood by the first Milandisian noble you come across who becomes aware of your "spiritual awakening".

Feature: Knightly Esteem

As long as you remain in good standing as a knight you can expect consideration from the nobility of the Kingdom of Milandir. This may allow you to secure an audience with nobles, ask for small favors, call upon the local constabulary, or gain access to local politicians. As a knight you are also expected to serve the Crown, may be called upon to assist nobles in times of need, and are expected to always act in the best interests of the Kingdom of Milandir. Among the common people of Milandir you are treated with respect and often admiration as many see you as a protector. When in Milandir you find local nobility and government officials will always welcome you and offer you a roof over your head and a helping of food granting you a modest lifestyle. This can come from chapter houses, local establishments, or local nobility friendly to your order.

Aspirant Knight Personality Traits (d6)

- 1 You are the eternal optimist, always finding the good in people or situations.
- 2 When in conversation, you refer to yourself in the third person.
- 3 Words are cheap. You value actions over sentiment.
- 4 You prefer to confront problems head-on, rather than employ complex plans.
- 5 You are unflinching in the face of danger.
- 6 You started as a wide eyed, naïve person, but you've seen too much corruption and cruelty in the world. Now, you expect the worst in everyone.

Aspirant Knight Ideals (d6)

- 1 **Bold:** I will dare anything if doing so is just and righteous.
- 2 **Justice:** No one is above the law. Even the high-born must pay for their crimes.
- 3 **Merciful:** I will take under my protection anyone that has surrendered and laid down their arms.
- 4 **Generosity:** Whether I have more than I need or not enough, I will share what I possess with those in need.
- 5 **Noble:** I have always strong moral compass and will not compromise my beliefs.
- 6 **Piety:** I have complete faith in the Gods and in their mortal instruments, the priesthood.

Aspirant Knight Bonds (d6)

- 1 You have taken responsibility for the protection of the family of a fellow knight.
- 2 A noble family has heaped injustice after injustice upon your family. Now that you are a knight, you'll make them answer for their crimes.
- 3 A rival knightly order has been decimated by an unknown force. Now your order has been ordered to avenge their deaths.
- 4 A noble of the house of your patron has fallen madly in love with you, but you love another or do not feel the same way. This person goes out of their way to manipulate your orders to ensure that you are safe and near them or if spurned, will try to destroy your social standing.
- 5 A village you've protected and come to care (and they you) are accused of the vilest heresy.
- 6 After defeating another knight in single combat, you discover that he led a group of warriors that are now seeking to avenge his death.

Aspirant Knight Flaws (d6)

- 1 It should be apparent to all how superior I am to them in most, if not all, ways.
- 2 I fear dying, for I do not believe I will be judged worthy of entering the Paradise of the Gods.
- 3 I have taken on the identity of another knight I killed to hide from my past.
- 4 I became a knight to enjoy the benefits of a noble title, not for any true noble purpose.
- 5 I would rather eat, drink, and be merry than put myself in danger against some creature for people I don't know or care about.
- 6 I see the shades of everyone I have ever slain following me.

Milandisian Knight's Code

Milandisian knights attempt to live up to a set of ideals commonly referred to as knightly values. You may replace your ideal with one or more of these knightly ideals.

Faith: Show exceptional piety to the Milandric Orthodox Church and your favored patron deity.

Charity: Actively give to the poor and assist the needy.

Justice: Actively enforce the law of Milandir, and live by those rules even when beyond its borders.

Sagacity: Offer wise council to your allies.

Prudence & Diligence: Approach all situations with forethought and caution, following through with all endeavors.

Resolution & Truth: You must always speak the truth and keep your word - even when doing so puts you in peril - for your word is your bond.

Hope & Liberty: Be an example for all and give hope to those you can't.

Temperance & Valor: You must restrain your baser instincts and keep yourself pure through action and prayer.

Variant: Former Squire of a Knightly Order

You have faithfully squired for an standing member of a knightly order or a knight errant, serving with honor and diligently following your master's commands. When not tending to your master's needs, you helped at the kennels, learning how to care for the order's animals, whether they be horses, or the Order of the Phoenix's unique breed of mastiff. Having proven your dedication, bravery, and skill-at-arms, you were released from your duties and knighted. You have an open invitation to join the order once you have broadened your experience and training in the outside world.

Races: Human, val

Social Class: Commoner or High Class, although rare common class children have been accepted to squire for the order

Minimum Age: 15

Equipment: You possess a set of traveler's clothes, and a purse containing 25 gp, a letter of recommendation/introduction. If you are a noble val, you also gain an adorned flintlock pistol and 10 shots of blast powder.

Class Restrictions: You cannot begin play as a fury or shaman. If later in your career you take levels in any class or gain a feature which grants you primal magic, you must replace your background feature with another as you will be stripped of your knighthood by the first Milandisian noble you come across who becomes aware of your "spiritual awakening".

Feature: Courtly Ins-and-Outs

Besides learning how to shoe horses, polish armor, and sharpen weapons, you were also taken along when your master attended court to attend to his needs. Invisible to the those in power and those craving it, you've learned the current gossip pertaining to the nobility of the kingdom, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of other knights, something your master has been able to use to his advantage. This background also qualifies you for entrance into any Milandisian knightly order. If you ever choose to join a knightly order (though a sub-class or through an in-game event) replace this background feature with the Knightly Esteem feature of the Knight Errant variant background.

Variant: Knight Errant

In the first century after Milandir seceded from the Coryani Empire, the knight errant only existed as a character in popular fiction, be it epic poem or songs. These tales reinforced the nobility of the Milandisian heart and cast the unpopular Coryani and Cancerese as villains. The oldest body of tales originate from the val'Tensen lands of Moratavia, where the stories served to salve the conflict in their souls from splitting their family in twain and moored their morality to the undeniable nobility of the nation they helped create. They tell of heroic deeds against impossible odds overcome by the stalwart val'Tensen (or other Moratavian) knight through sacrifice, courage, and the pureness of their hearts.

So popular were these epic poems and songs that, generations later, they were still being retold, but were now believed to tell of historical events rather than fanciful fables. These tales so inspired the young nobility of Milandir that they began foregoing entry into specific knightly orders to instead travel across the Known Lands, righting wrongs and seeking glory for themselves and their kingdom. Many of these bold knights died far from home, without their names ever immortalized in song. Others rose to prominence, their deeds spreading their fame until, upon their return to their homeland, they were petitioned by competing knightly orders for their entry into their company.

Races: Human, s'sressen, and val

Social Class: High Class (or Commoner in the case of s'sressen as they do not have a social class hierarchy.)

Equipment: A signet ring with your family's coat of arms and a tabard with your personal coat of arms. You possess a set of traveler's cloths, and a purse containing 25 gp. If you are a noble val, you also gain an adorned flintlock pistol and 10 shots of blast powder.

Feature: Knightly Regard

As long as you remain in good standing as a knight you can expect consideration from the nobility of the kingdom of Milandir. This may allow you to secure an audience with nobles, ask for small favors, call upon the local constabulary, or gain access to local politicians. As a knight you are also expected to serve the Crown, may be called upon to assist nobles in times of need, and are expected to always act in the best interests of the kingdom of Milandir. Among the common people of Milandir you are treated as an uncommon hero; a knight of the common man. They will treat you with respect and admiration as many see you as a protector. When in Milandir you find that the common folk are always more than willing to offer you a plate of food and a roof over your head, which grants you a modest lifestyle. If you ever choose to join a knightly order (through a sub-class or an in-game event) replace this background feature with the Knightly Esteem feature of the Aspirant Knight background.

When Weep the Dandelions

The most famous of these romantic epics, *When Weep the Dandelions*, recounts the tale of a young val'Tensen, who after being knighted by the king of Milandir promptly falls in love with his niece, the Lady Lunete val'Ossan. Though she returns his affections, he must prove himself before being allowed to court her. As he leaves to garner honor and glory, she grants him a personal keepsake, a dandelion in a locket. What then follows is a long litany of adventures of battling foul creatures, trickster gnomes, avaricious dwarves, and a corrupt Coryani val'Assanté official and the legionnaires at her disposal.

After years as a knight errant, he returns to Milandir to discover that his love Lunete, was taken by a Sarishan Sorcerer and whisked away to his demesne in the Nerothian lands of foul Canceri. After battling hordes of undead, summoned infernals, and the crazed Sarishan, the knight errant finds Lunette dead in her cell. Stricken with overwhelming grief, he carries her back to the king of Milandir, who grants him a single kiss. So pure and noble was the knight's love, that he brought Lunette back from the Beltine's Grey Fields, but at the cost of his own life.

Upon reviving and seeing her love dead at her side, Lunete undertakes her own quest to the land of the dead, whereupon she finds the young knight moments before the Judgement of Nier proclaims his fate. She pleads with the stoic guardian, recounting the deeds of bravery and sacrifices made by the knight in the name of love, even going so far as to offer to exchange her life for his, and moves the fabled impassive Valinor to shed a tear. In an unprecedented judgment, the knight is granted leave to reclaim his life, whereupon the two lovers wed with the blessings of the king.

The tale ends with the two moving to Moratavia, where they beget a long line of noble rulers of the Duchy, including the current Duke of Moratavia.

NEW FIGHTER ARCHETYPE

Knight of the Order of the Phoenix

Race Restrictions

Dark-kin, kio, and ss'essen cannot join the Knightly Order of the Phoenix.

Bonded Companion

At 3rd level, upon taking your oath to serve the order, you form a mystical bond with one of the order's mastiff. Your bounded hound gains all the benefits of your Animal Companion ability. You can have only one such animal companion at a time. (For example, if you later become a Ranger, Master of the Hounds you do not gain an additional hound.)

If your hound is ever slain or you rise from its ashes, you cannot forge a new bond with another mastiff. Most knight's who've lost their companion become morose and sullen.

Animal Companion

The mastiff gains a variety of benefits while it is bonded to you. The mastiff obeys your commands as best it can. It rolls for initiative like any other creature, but you determine its action, decisions, attitudes, and so on. If you are incapacitated or absent, the mastiff acts on its own and will move to protect you or pull you out of harm's way if possible. The mastiff adds your proficiency bonus to its Armor Class, Attack rolls, saving throws, and damage rolls.

Unless already proficient, your mastiff gains proficiency with Perception and Survival and with all saving throws. For each level you gain after 3rd, your mastiff gains an additional hit die increasing their maximum hit point by half the hit die + 1 + their constitution modifier. (A mastiff with a d8 hit die would have their maximum hit points increased by 5 + their constitution modifier for each hit die they gained).

Whenever you gain the Ability Score Improvement class feature, your mastiff's abilities also improve. Your mastiff can increase one ability score of your choice by 2, or it can increase two ability scores of your choice by 1. As normal, your mastiff can't increase an ability score above 20 using this feature.

Telepathic Bond: Both you and your mastiff share a permanent telepathic bond allowing you to silently convey complex commands and messages instantly to a *range of 100 feet*. Additionally, due to this bond your mastiff gains advantage on all saving throws against being charmed or frightened when within range of this ability.

Terrifying Howl: As an action you may have your mastiff unleash a *terrifying howl* as a reaction, forcing all unfriendly creatures within 30 feet to make a Wisdom saving throw or become *frightened* until the end of your next turn. This howl is very loud and can be heard up to 200 feet away. Your mastiff regains the ability to do so after completing a short rest.

We Fight as One

Upon reaching 10th level any time you use your second wind or action surge class feature your mastiff instantly gains the same benefits, even when it's not its turn.

From the Ashes

When you reach 15th level, if you are killed in any way, your mastiff instantly bursts into flames and you rise from your hound's ashes, bereft of all clothing and equipment but fully healed of all damage. Although returning from the dead heals you of all poisons and diseases, it will not end any hexes or curses cast upon you before your untimely death.

Crushing Bite

Upon reaching 18th level, any time you roll a 20 on your mastiff's attack roll its target suffers an additional 4d6 piercing damage and must make a Constitution saving throw or suffer disadvantage on all attacks until the end of its next turn.

NEW FEATS

Cants of the Phoenix

You have been trained by the order to cast a small number of useful cants, including one jealously guarded by the val'Mordane that was discovered by the Order during their takeover of Drakenfast Keep. This cant has allowed the Knights of the Phoenix to avoid roaming undead as they patrol deep into Cancerese territory.

Prerequisite: Knight of Order of the Phoenix fighter archetype.

- You gain proficiency in Religion. If you are already proficient with Religion, you add double your proficiency bonus to ability checks you make with Religion.
- You learn the one cantrip of your choice from the cleric spell list.
- You learn to cast the spell *veil over dead eyes* and any one other spell from the cleric spell list. Once either of these spells are cast you must finish a long rest before you can cast either spell again.
- Wisdom is your spellcasting ability for the spells you gain from this feat.
- You are now a divine spellcaster dedicated to the Pantheon of Man and must abide by all restrictions and requirements of that Arcanum.

NEW COMBAT SCHOOL

Phoenix's Wings

A combat style taught exclusively by the Order of the Phoenix, this style trains both mastiff and master to fight as one. The style also teaches the knight techniques and maneuvers that are applicable when fighting alone. The style's signature move, a maneuver unique to the Order of the Phoenix, takes advantage of a cleverly designed quick release built into their shields. The knight, while utilizing the shield to parry a blow, feints and releases the shield tossing it into his opponent's field of vision, giving the knight a chance to drive his blade home.

Requirements: Order of the Phoenix fighter archetype

Weapons: Longsword, mace, warhammer

Physical Training: When you first join this combat school your Wisdom or Strength score increases by 1, to a maximum of 20.

Maneuver and Technique DC: 8 + your Strength modifier + your proficiency bonus.

Journeyman

Blade High, Beast Low (Maneuver): When you successfully attack a creature with a melee weapon attack, you may spend 1 resolve die to have your mastiff attack the same creature as a reaction.

Reactive Strike (Technique): When a creature within 5 feet of you makes an attack against one of your allies, they provoke an opportunity attack from you.

Distracting Strike (Technique): When you successfully strike an opponent with an opportunity attack they may not take reactions until the beginning of their next turn.

Master

Improved Resolve: Your resolve die increases to d8.

Shield Faint (Maneuver, Unique): At the beginning of your turn, when taking the attack action, you may spend 1 resolve die and forgo the benefits of your shield until the beginning of your next turn. If you choose to do so roll your resolve die and add its result to all attack and damage rolls until the end of your turn.

Shield Defense (Technique): You can add your shield's AC bonus to your Dexterity saving throws. Additionally, when you succeed on a Dexterity saving throw against an effect that would deal half damage with a successful save, as a reaction you can reduce the damage to 0.

Deadly Strike (Technique): When you take the Attack action, you may choose not to apply your proficiency bonus to your attack roll. If your attack hits, you deal additional damage equal to double your proficiency bonus. This damage is of the same type as your weapon.

NEW SPELLS

Veil Over Dead Eyes

1st-level necromancy

Secret Spell: val'Mordane, Knights of the Order of the Phoenix

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self (and bonded mastiff if member of the Order of the Phoenix)

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, 1 hour

As long as this spell is active you (and in the case of the Order of the Phoenix, your bonded mastiff) are considered invisible to undead. Any undead that might see you may attempt a wisdom saving throw to see through your veil. If the undead fails this saving throw it may not make another attempt as long as this spell remains active. However, if the undead succeeds this saving throw the spell instantly ends.

If you (or your companion) take the attack action, this spell instantly ends. If you (and your companion) are standing perfectly still, taking no actions, undead suffer disadvantage on their attempt to see you, but gain a new saving throw if you move or take any action.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, you extend the spell's duration by 1 hour for every spell level over the 1st.

GM's Note: val'Mordane characters may learn the spell *veil over dead eyes* as a cleric of Neroth, holy champion of Neroth, or eldritch sorcerer spell.

APPENDIX

Knight of the Phoenix

Medium human

Armor Class 18 (half-plate armor, shield)

Hit Points 52 (8d8+16)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +5, Intimidation +2

Senses passive Perception 11

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Solemn Rite of the Phoenix. The Knight of the Phoenix has a permanent telepathic bond with their bonded Phoenix Mastiff, allowing them to silently issue commands up to 100 feet away. If the Knight of the Phoenix is ever killed, if still alive their Phoenix Mastiff will sacrifice itself to bring the Knight of the Phoenix back to full health, removing all status effects, curses, and diseases.

Kiss of the Phoenix. As an action a Knight of the Phoenix can restore 2d10+8 hit points to a single friendly creature within 30 feet. If this ability is used, their Phoenix Mastiff companion gains the unconscious condition for 1 minute.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Knight makes two weapon melee attacks or two ranged attacks with thrown weapons or one attack with their heavy crossbow.

Longsword. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage.

Hand Axe. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. and range 20/60 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Heavy Crossbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d12 + 1) piercing damage.

Mastiff

Medium beast

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 5 (1d8+1)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +3

Senses passive Perception 13

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Keen Hearing and Smell. The mastiff has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

ACTIONS

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: (1d6 + 1) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 11 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

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