

The Queen's Halls

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The Queens Halls is the name of a large building, a hall of knowledge and bardic lore, build in the park district of the city of New Keep.

The halls are build in the shape of a lyre. The center building, symbolic for the 'strings' of the lyre, has three floors, which hold a community service hall, the New Keep tax offices, a library containing all one can find on the history and magic in the former Great Kingdom, and several meeting and conference rooms.

History

The halls were originally build in 434, by Lord Merinius of the House of Darmen, who rules as a baron over the area known as Pelor's Sands (now the county of Pelsand), and the towns of Adder's Haven and Dunn.

He resided in Pelor's Hold, which was also known as Crystal Castle due to the sparkling glass tower that was it's main feature. Merinius was a lover of bard's, particularly their poems and epic songs, but sadly he was not very talented himself. In fact, he was totally lacking in any musical skills whatsoever. Despite this, he was popular, and well appreciated as a patron to the arts.

To express his love for tales and music, Merinius had the Bard's Halls build, to the north of his castle. It had a hall for performances, rooms for lectures and practices, and a large library, which was quickly put to use by the College of Conerescent Lore, a bard guild that searches for historic and magical texts. No bard's guild had exclusive claim on the grounds, but the College grew more quickly than the others, and when Merinius passed away, and Sunndi entered the Iron League, the other bards left the halls in the hands of the College and moved away from the border to Pitchfield, where they created their own halls, devoted primarily to music and song.

The halls did not stay quiet long. Representatives of the priesthoods of Lirr and Lydia came to confer with the College. Both these groups had profited from the College's Lore (in fact, some where even members), and with the other bard's gone, they saw it their duty to ensure that knowledge was preserved.

They moved in several months later. It was an odd union to see these two priesthoods and a bard guild share one hall, and there must have been some conflict in the first years, mostly on what knowledge was to be kept hidden from the populace. Unlike other places, this conflict did not cumulate into separation (as happened with The Talespinners League, see "Song & Silence" for details). The Great Kingdom's repeated attempts to conquer Sunndi made it clear that knowledge could not flow freely now, and the priesthood of Lydia came with a compromise - it would not press for any information to be made known that they themselves had no knowledge of.

The Lydian's were given responsibility for the public Library on the first floor, the college maintained the library with more precious lore on the second floor, and the priests of Lirr, got their own, secret and inaccessible room on the third, intended to place dark and dangerous lore out of reach of evil forces. And so the college continues, seemingly unburdened by the wars, though people noted that there were often strangers that would visit and go, and some say the Halls knew all that transpired within the borders of the southern reaches of the Great Kingdom - and quiet a lot beyond.

With the change of the command came a change in function for the Halls, and the priesthoods renamed them the Queen's Halls (after a statue of a stately woman that dominated the community service hall¹). In the first half of the 6th century, the halls gained the support of the priests of Boccob, who offered some of their own resources in exchange for free access to the Halls' magic lore.

¹ The statue has been claimed by various sources to represent Lirr, Lydia, or Johydee. While the latter is unlikely as nobody knows how she looked like, those people who know of the priesthoods presence assume the title of the Halls refers to her. It's still a misnomer, as Johydee was queen nor empress, but a high priestess. But misinformation is a trait of the priesthood and it is thus likely they were the ones who made it up.

In 578 General Reynard, under the orders of Herzog Chelor, invaded Sunndi' s north. One part of the army, under the charge of commander Edric Stoan of the church of Hextor, had been send south along the westerns lopes of the Hollow Highlands, to hold off aid from Idee. The forces were overmatched by the armies of Idee, but cut off by dwarves from the Iron Hills in the north, they were pressed eastwards. Forced deeper into the highlands, they met surprisingly little resistance, and managed to take part of the Adder Pass, invading the county of Pelsand in a series of brutal strikes that burned most of Adder' s Haven to the ground.

Due to a carefully set up defence, and Sunndi's preoccupation of its armies at the northern borders, Stoan managed to hold on to some of this area and keep Pelor' s Hold.

He ordered the disgruntled dwarves of North Hill to construct a defensive wall and a second keep². He also took the Halls, commanded it refitted so his own staff could use the building for administration of the taxes that were levied on the people of west Pelsand, most of which as used to entice Mergadin and his clan to continue their work on the walls.

What few realized was that quite a number of the people that manned the Halls were affiliated with the Iron League, and were in fact spying for its states. Some of the supposed priests of Boccob (and almost the entire congregation of Lirr) were actually holy men and women of the Oeridian goddess Johydee. Naming themselves the Veil of the Sun, they were sworn to protect their people - the Oeridans, mostly - from the evil deprivations of its tyrannical rulers.

When Ahlissa took Pelsand and started the construction of a wall and keep, the Queen' s Halls gathered the information it could, making sure that their allies would receive the information and be able to resist the invaders.

This still proved rather difficult - and at times, it may be said that the society valued its secrecy more than the safety of the League - but it did mean that Sunndi was able to hold off a full invasion for some time, and actually gained back some terrain, though Adder' s Haven (now renamed New Keep) stayed in the enemy' s hands for almost five years.

In early 580, a small group of heroes attempted to rally the people of New Keep to take up arms against the oppressor, but this rebellion was quickly put down. The heroes, amongst which were Perrina Waslyn and Alderon Musz, members of the Queen' s Halls, were executed in the market square.

After the execution, Stoan had the Halls searched. A secret room on the third floor was revealed, but no incriminating evidence was found there. Most incriminating lore – as well as most magical texts – had long since been safely spirited away by the Veil. By the time the forces finally searched the Halls and found the secret rooms, they were already gone. Finding nothing implicating the priests' involvement, the Halls were allowed to continue their business.

In late 583, while Ossoon's army were fighting the remnants of the Glorioles army from the north, the Halls aided an elite strike force of baron Donner to circumvent the wall, using a weak point in the defenses left by Mergadin, and led them through a secret tunnel that led from the Halls to Pelor' s Hold. The coup was successful, but at a great loss: the Ahlissan forces destroyed Pelor' s Hold, and a magical blast shattered the crystal tower, killing many people, among which was Donner's wife.

The Ahlissa forces were routed, Stoan fled southwards to Stalward, and the New Keep was safely in hands of Sunndi - for now.

Organisation

Officially, the Queen' s Halls are currently maintained by the College of Concescent Lore, and the priesthoods of Lydia and Lirr, with occasional - mostly material or financial - support from the priesthood of Boccob. Not commonly known, but no longer a secret, is that the Halls also hold clergy of Johydee.

² finishing a project started years earlier by former baron Donner (now in exile). Donner ordered the walls and second keep constructed approximately seven years earlier, but the defenses were left unfinished when Eotyn Mergadrin, the head of the dwarven clan that build the wall, demanded more gold – and was refused. The half-finished walls set up for defense ironically aided Stoan in maintaining the claimed region.

Some of these priests actually pose under the flag of another faith, most often Lirr or Boccob. It seems the gods of these faiths have some agreement with Johydee, as there has not been any cases of retribution against this deception.

To the people of New Keep, it is no secret that not all the members of the Halls are what they seem - but it is hard to determine who is a simple gatherer of lore, or who serves as a secret agent for the Iron League. Most feel the distinction is only a formal one, anyway. Most members of the Halls may know of the underground movement, and even guess at its members, but they do not forward their suspicions. Even the Lydian's do not reveal what they know or suspect.

Goals

The Halls, as well as the network, are a Neutral good organization whose primary goal is to collect information and knowledge, and use this knowledge to the benefit of the people.

Exactly what benefits the people is an eternal discussion. The Lydian's often push to make all knowledge public, claiming educating the populace will make them strong.

The network likes to keep information to itself, utilizing it at the right time, spreading it only to those parties they like to see benefit, or who would be able to take appropriate action.

Not surprisingly, few Lydians make it into the network.³

The network's main aim is the protection of the people of Sunndi, regardless of race or ethnic background (though most in the network are suspicious of the Suel, due to the Scarlet Brotherhood's presence in the area).

In a broader sense, this extends to the members of the Iron League. The network hopes that cooperation will lead to prosperity and peace.

Interestingly, the network is not opposed to the idea of a reunited kingdom, and in favor of opening up trade with the North. However, neither Ahlissa nor the northern Kingdom is completely trusted, and their heads of state are despised for their lust for power and willingness to sacrifice their people for their own gain.

For now, the aim is the liberation of Onwall, the decimation of the Scarlet Brotherhood, and the revival of the Iron League.

Members of the Halls

It is not too hard to join the Queen's Halls college. In all respects, it behaves just as any college. (Those who join the Queen's Halls need to meet the requirements of the College of Concescent Lore, (from "Song & Silence"), and are thereafter considered a member of that college).

Requirements

In order to join the Queen's Halls, a member must:

- Have either an indifferent or favored status with the Halls.
- Be literate, and have at least two of the following:
 - o Bardic Lore ability
 - o Knowledge(history), 4 ranks
 - o Knowledge(geography) , 4 ranks
 - o Knowledge (religion) or Knowledge(arcana), 4 ranks

Initial Costs

- Be presented to the halls with a recommendation from a current member. Recommendations can be obtained by expending one influence point (with either the Queen's Halls or the Veil of the Sun) or one favor with a member of this organization. A character can also 'buy' himself in, by donating works of art or literature with a minimum value (actual, not street value) of 300gp (note that this does not include the annual fee to be paid). An

³ For rules for joining the network see the Veil of the Sun meta-org document.

alternative way to donate 'literature' if for the player to submit three in character reports on three separate events (scenarios) to the Sunndi triad (madfox@planet.nl).

- To proof ones mastery, skills or abilities are determined through an initial examination, tailored to test the prospective members' knowledge, so as to determine their usefulness to the Halls. The examination takes one week and costs costs 1 TU.

Note that this examination is less strict than the original, formal examination that is used by the College of Concescent Lore, and that the examination is paid for by the Halls.

Permanent Costs

- A member must donate a yearly fee, of the amount of 300 gp, to be paid at the start of each year of membership, with the year starting on the day one becomes a member. Payments can be made in advance. In stead of paying in coin, a member can instead pay by donating works of art, literature, or scrolls with a value equal to or in excess of 300 gp per year. The value in this case is the actual value of the works (not the street value). It is not possible to pay for more than one year in this way (so a 500 gp scroll only pays for one year). Alternately, a member can expend one influence points with the Halls or the Veil, or one favor with one of its members, to pay for one year of membership.
- A member must spend 4 TU' s a year on academic research, library work, and teaching to the benefit of the halls.

Benefits

- The member has a +1 competence bonus on Diplomacy rolls with members of the Halls
- The member gains access to the library at the second floor of the Halls, during daylight hours (for access after dark one needs a special pass).
The library is vast and can significantly aid a character when he searches for information regarding the history of the Great Kingdom and the Iron League, but also arcane matters and bardic lore.
Use of the library requires some time (at least one hour), but the character gains a +2 competence bonus to either their Bardic Lore ability, or the appropriate Knowledge skill (the bonus increases to +3 if the lore looked for relates to the history of the Iron League). If the member does not have an appropriate skill for the situation, she can make an Intelligence check (with no bonuses) to find the information she seeks.
- Access to the following non-magical items:
 - o Tome & Blood: *arcane lab, arcane library, disappearing ink, familiar carrier (all), portable writing desk, reading lamp, scroll organizer*
 - o Song & Silence: *waterproofing*
- Access to the following spells:
 - o Tome & Blood: *Corpse Candle, Energy Buffer, Enhance Familiar, Familiar Pocket, Filter, Fortify Familiar, Indifference, Imbue Familiar with Spell Ability, Mass Resist Elements, Mass Darkvision, Otiluke's Dispelling Screen, Otiluke's Greater Dispelling Screen*
- Members may take advantage of training sessions and workshops in the Halls, which allows them to take ONE of the following feats, from the Class guide books:
 - o DMG: *Improved Familiar*
 - o Tome & Blood: *Arcane Defense, Arcane Preparation, Cooperative Spell, Extra Slot, Extra Spell, Innate Spell, Sanctum Spell, Spell Specialization*
 - o Song & Silence: *Obscure Lore*

The first feat on this list is free, each additional feat from this list costs 1 TU.
- Members may also take advantage of the Halls' classes on the metamagic, which allows them to take ONE of the following feats, from the Class guide books:
 - o Tome & Blood: *Chain Spell, Delay Spell, Energy Admixture, Energy Substitution, Repeat Spell, Sculpt Spell, Split Ray, Twin Spell*
 - o Defenders of the Faith: *Reach Spell, Sacred Spell*

The first feat on this list is free, each additional feat from this list costs 1 TU.
- The Halls also provide means for members to learn the way of the following prestige classes :

- *DMG: Mystic Theurge*
Only divine casters who worship Lirr, Lydia, or Boccob can take this prestige class, as these are the only religions for which divine expertise is present.
- *Tome & Blood: Mage of the Arcane Order*
In order to join this secluded group of mages, you need to pay an additional initiation fee of 750gp, which is used to pay for a focus to access the spellpool.
Calling and returning spells from the spellpool should be done at the table, during the game. A mage is assumed to have a balanced credit (no spellpool debt) when the game starts, as it is assumed that she resolves her debt between adventures. The character should keep track of he spellpool points during the game. If a scenario lasts multiple rounds, the debt is not automatically resolved between rounds.
The mage cannot build up credit prior to the game.
Spells called can be either from the Players handbook, or from the list of spells to which the character gained access by being a member of the Halls (see above). Other spells can not be called (even if the character has access to them by other means).
If a mage looses membership of the Halls, he looses access to the spellpool, and cannot advance in level in the Mage of the Arcane Order prestige class.
- *Song & Silence: Royal Explorer*
To join, you need to file a report to the Triad, concerning the exploration of a site during a scenario played with the character, as well as donate an item found on the explored site (an item found on the AR of that scenario). The site explored need be abandoned or in a remote locale.

In the case of the *Mage of the Arcane Order* and *Royal Explorer* prestige classes, the halls take the place of the orders these classes are normally required to join.

- Besides these prestige classes the following core prestige class is also very appropriate:
 - *DMG: Loremaster*