

- Chapter Five -

Noble Houses

Of utmost importance to the noble character is his noble house. This is the term given to his family and organization, and represents lineage, title, and lordship over the common folk. Not every noble comes from or establishes a noble house. These vagabond lords are often seen as irresponsible and remain something of a joke among other nobles, as they tend to shirk their lordly responsibilities. Those who do lead a noble house reap great benefits just as they accumulate dangerous adversaries, making nobility a duty that balances advantages with potential difficulties. This chapter discusses the mechanics of building up a noble house using the concept of a house strength rating to represent the power and prestige the noble has earned.

Establishment

Establishing a noble house requires the Noble House feat from **Chapter Two: Supplemental Rules**, illustrating the character's achievement of a leadership position. Once the character has taken this feat, he begins cultivating the members of his own noble house. Each follower he gains, each cohort traveling with him, and the servants and professionals he hires to do his work become a part of that noble house. As the noble progresses in level, his house grows in power and prestige. Once a house has been established, it remains until the noble disbands it or dies.

Taking Over

Occasionally, a noble will take over an existing house from another character. This can happen by way of inheritance or coup, either of which can change the existing organization significantly. Other nobles might view the change of leadership as something to be exploited, and the house often loses some of its strength and resources. Alternately, if a tyrant or usurper has been overthrown, the new noble leader might improve the reputation of the entire organization and draw more followers. When leadership of a noble house changes hands, the GM has two options. She may leave the house strength rating (discussed below) intact and assimilate the new leader's retinue into the house. Or she may alter the house strength rating to reflect the new

leader's influence and simply replace the house's existing members with the new leader's followers. Both the situation that brought about the change and the character's level of power should affect the GM's decision.

Leading a Noble House

Leading a noble house isn't the same as leading a party. Noble houses are usually much larger and can be a focal point for political power. The management of a house is directly related to its continued success. Neglecting the duties of a noble can mean discontent or betrayal from within, a loss of followers, and a dramatic drop in prestige and influence when doing business with other nobles. If members of the house see their leader as a disinterested or heedless nobleman, they will be much more likely to sell information to his enemies, steal from the treasury, or be lackluster in their day-to-day efforts. Guards might be more susceptible to bribes, letting assassins sneak into the manor, or allowing thieves to make off with valuables. The noble becomes responsible for the lives and livelihoods of all his followers and is praised for good leadership as well as derided for failure.

The Treasury & Material Aid

One aspect of a noble character class that differs greatly from the average classes is the concept of the house treasury. The treasury is the stored wealth of the noble house brought in not only by the actions of the noble himself, but also by the hard work and diligence of his followers. This treasury is the monetary lifeblood of the entire organization. As a stockpile of money and valuables, the treasury is the noble's equivalent of a dragon's hoard and can be just as sternly protected.

A certain percentage of the income made by each member of the noble house is taxed in order to fund the workings of the house. As a noble gains and loses members of his retinue, the GM should add up the ranks each member has in any Profession skills and keep a running total. At the end of each week, the GM



makes a single Profession check using this total as the skill modifier. The GM then takes that total and halves it, placing the new amount in the house treasury. The other half of the money is used for paying the wages of followers, expenses of the house, and so forth.

The noble must be careful not to drain the treasury for his own purposes. His money supply is not endless, and he'll face a large number of demands on this money, including hosting. Of course, nobles may take out loans or sell off treasure in order to augment their treasury's holdings just like any other character, but a situation where the treasury is nearly empty can be seen as a sign of poor planning and weakness by one's enemies. After all, if a noble can't afford to pay his guards, they are not likely to continue working at maximum efficiency.

It is important to note that the GM should use a healthy amount of discretion when allowing the use of this ability. Enhancing the noble's lifestyle is the primary purpose. Extravagant parties thrown to collect gossip about the royal family, a revealing designer dress to distract the guards, or sponsoring the tour of a minstrel who wrote a bawdy poem about the character's greatest adversary are but a few examples. By no means should the material aid ability become a never-ending source of scrolls, healing potions, equipment, and supplies for the party, and the GM should adhere to the monetary limitations in the game with respect to the noble's wealth. She should use her best judgment when encouraging her players' creativity without sacrificing the challenges she has in store for them.

Taking Care of Followers

More than just a reward for reaching higher levels, the followers of a character should be treated as any other NPC in the campaign. If the character has a noble house, however, the followers become a responsibility that the noble should treat as seriously as his responsibility to the adventuring party.

A noble is obligated to keep his followers safe and healthy. Even the noble who commands an army must do all he can to ensure that his followers are cared for, protected, and content. His duties may include leading the defense of his manor against an invading force, paying for healers to come and cure a plague, holding a funeral service for a follower killed in battle, or overseeing the training of new recruits. Whatever his duties may be to his followers, they should not be overlooked when making adventuring plans.

House Strength Rating

The key to gauging the power and influence of a given noble house lies in the house strength rating. This number can be compared with that of any other noble house to determine which has more power and influence. Noble houses with forceful leaders, vast resources, numerous contacts and connections, and great political power have a higher house strength rating number, while new or declining houses have a lower number.

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Table 5-1: Noble House Strength Rating

Rating	Added Effects	Rating	Added Effects	Rating	Added Effects	Rating	Added Effects
1	-	11	-	21	-	31	-
2	-	12	Skill Focus	22	Majordomo	32	Bonus Feat
3	-	13	-	23	-	33	-
4	-	14	Manor	24	Land	34	Estate
5	Minor Title	15	Middling Title	25	Major Title	35	High Title
6	-	16	-	26	-	36	-
7	-	17	-	27	-	37	-
8	Influence +1	18	Influence +2	28	Influence +3	38	Influence +4
9	-	19	-	29	-	39	-
10	Adversary (x1)	20	Adversary (x2)	30	Adversary (x3)	40+	Adversary (x4)

The house strength rating is a function of its leader's character level; it is intended to reflect the idea that as a noble gains experience and tends to his noble house, the house will grow in strength and solidarity along with him. Characters who establish a noble house early in their careers and put in the time and effort needed to secure a strong foundation are quicker to build their house up to ruling status. Other characters who begin generating a house late in their careers do not have the advantage of such a head start, and sometimes find it harder to fully incorporate the noble's lifestyle and responsibilities into their own routine.

The house strength rating not only provides a concrete statistic measuring how powerful the noble house is, but also grants certain special abilities to all members of the house. These bonuses are balanced by certain burdens of power, like the accumulation of enemies, and they reflect both the perks and downfalls of being a member of a politically prominent organization.

Increasing Strength Rating

The primary way that a noble house grows in power is through the experience of its leader. The house strength rating always starts at 1, except when the leader is taking over an existing organization. Any time the leader gains a level in the noble class, his house strength rating increases by 2. Anytime the leader gains a level in a non-noble class, the house strength rating increases by 1. This represents the character's devotion to leadership and maintaining the house, while still allowing the organizations of other character types to grow along with their leader. Additionally, the GM may reward diligent players at her discretion by granting them a single-point increase for particularly crafty political maneuvers, recruiting a large crop of followers, or achieving a goal that earns the respect of a large group of people. Conversely, the GM may wish to deny an increase in this rating, or

even apply a reduction, for a particularly negligent noble who fails to care for his followers.

Noble House Effects

The following effects are the result of increases in house strength rating. When the house strength rating reaches a number as described on the table above, certain effects are applied to its leader and the members of that organization. Listed below are the effects granted by a house strength rating.

Minor Title

The leader of the organization is granted a low-level title that is appropriate to his station in the campaign. This title is placed before the character's name when being addressed by others as a sign of respect. Examples of such titles are: Baron/Baroness, Bishop, Lieutenant, Lord/Lady, Viceroy, Viscount/Viscountess.

Influence

At certain rating levels, a noble house's prestige can grant benefits to its members when they invoke the house name. Being a member of a prominent house carries with it a certain degree of weight and credibility. Each time the house strength rating reaches a level where there is an influence effect, the listed bonus is applied to any influence checks made by members of a noble house, including the house's leader.

Adversary

One of the chief perils of having a powerful noble house is that there will always be those who are envious of or threatened by that power. Just as growth can draw allies to a noble's cause, it can likewise draw enemies who would seek to undermine and destroy a noble house. Each time the noble's house strength rating reaches a level with the