

# Order of the Golden Chalice

*A web enhancement by Sean K Reynolds*

The Bonds of Magic: The Faithful introduces a knightly group called the Order of the Golden Chalice. You have read a little about it in the descriptions of the paladins Tonath and Vond Cloven. Now discover more about the organization's history, goals, and tactics in this free web enhancement by the book's author.

Founded more than 300 years ago, the Order of the Golden Chalice is a group of paladins, questing knights, and noble-hearted soldiers who seek to promote and uphold the causes of good and law in the world. They have managed to survive for so long not only because they openly support benign governments, but because they avoid the rigidity and sterile concepts of good that often cause the downfall of other such groups. While their numbers have waxed and waned over the centuries, they have always maintained a force of at least four dozen and protected their first stronghold from enemy attacks. Those of the Golden Chalice walk or ride forth, seeking out evil and defending good in places where it is at risk.

## BRIEF HISTORY

The paladin Donas was an ambitious man, the son of deposed monarchs and blessed by the church that raised him after his parents' death. His goal was to restore order to his mother's lands and re-establish the knighthood that trained his father. After mustering a small army from neighboring countries to oust the necromancer-sorcerers that had taken over his homeland, Donas led several battles against horrible undead and strange unloving demons. After one particularly disastrous skirmish that left the matriarch of his church and his blood-brother slain, Donas had a moment of despair and almost lost his faith. Kneeling on the blood-soaked battlefield, he cried out at the injustice of his life. In the air above him appeared three angels clothed in raiment of stars, fire, and lightning.

These angels proclaimed themselves Urihiel, Bearer of the Four Holy Sealings; Zakafiel, Guardian of the Bright Forge; and Bakuryah, Guide of the Spark of Life. These emissaries of the gods of law and good bore a message of warning and hope for the despairing leader. They told him that his quest to restore the kingdom would never come to pass while he lived, but if he chose to train a host of knights in the ideals of the heavens, they would hold for more than 10 generations. Donas swore on his own life that he would follow the new fate offered to him. After the angels vanished he gathered the remains of his shattered army and retreated across the border to his blood-brother's lands.

Donas and his followers built a fort and sanctified it in the name of the heavens. Choosing the Golden Chalice of Purity as their emblem, over the next several decades they expanded their fort into a keep and then a castle. Acting as an independent arm of the good churches, the Order of the Golden Chalice made a name for itself slaying monsters, ousting bandits, and destroying undead wherever they were found. Word of their deeds spread, and children in the nearby lands grew up hearing tales of the good knights of the Golden Chalice.

## THE ORGANIZATION

**Headquarters:** The Castle of Donas is a grey and white stone castle built atop a small hill. This fortified holding is reputed to harbor many escape tunnels and hold storage rooms full of provisions.

**Members:** 53 paladins, 130 fighters, 420 warriors, and a handful of members of other classes, all of lawful good alignment. Approximately half of these call the Castle of Donas their home, while others live in smaller strongholds or affiliated churches, or simply wander.

**Hierarchy:** Militaristic but flexible, with each stronghold reporting to the head of the Order at the Castle of Donas but otherwise able to act fairly independently.

**Leader:** Sollayar Firehand (LG human female Ftr2/Pal13).

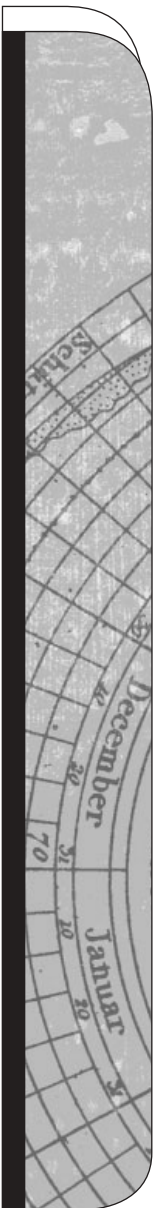
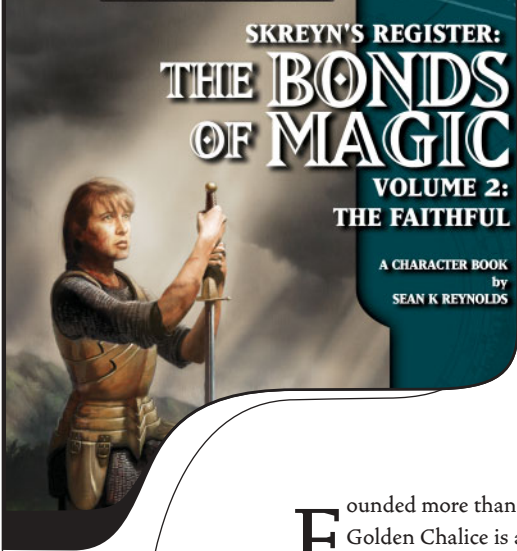
**Religion:** Any LG, NG, or LN deity, with LG deities the most common choices.

**Alignment:** LG, NG, LN

**Secrecy:** None. The Order is a very public organization, and its members go about in secret only when revealing their identities would put themselves or innocents at untoward risk.

**Symbol:** A golden chalice, sometimes decorated with four stars and wreathed in electricity. Items created by or consecrated in the name of the Order usually bear this decoration.

The Order of the Golden Chalice is a very relaxed lawful group. They have survived this long by understanding that disobeying orders sometimes proves necessary (although it is still frowned upon and requires justification afterward). They concern themselves primarily with upholding good and use the law as a tool toward that end. They believe that many



evil creatures can be redeemed, but often the cost of attempting such a redemption is too high in terms of lives lost or innocents harmed. In such cases they consider it better to put evil to the sword rather than risk it turning upon the hand offering it mercy. They encourage mercy toward mortal and intelligent creatures (such as humans) but accept that such measures are essentially hopeless where undead and fiends are concerned. Recently Vond Cloven, a tiefling paladin within their ranks, has caused them to revise their thoughts on the unredeemable nature of tieflings.

### HIERARCHY

The Order follows a military hierarchy, with its own ranks for its soldiers and officers (using the standard terminology of lieutenants, captains, and so on). Promotions are given to those who prove themselves with deeds. Class, race, gender, and level are not a concern when considering promotions; the Order accepts men and women of all civilized races, and even a few monsters have served over the centuries, such as the couatl Huitchipuli Dives-With-Fangs-Bared and the lammasu Novor the Loud Roaring.

The head of the Order is called the Fourth General of the Chalice—Urihiel, Zakafiel, and Bakuryah are considered the first three generals (this despite the fall from grace and death of Urihiel, whose mind was altered by a powerful evil magic item; see *The Bonds of Magic: The Faithful*, under Tonath's description). When it comes time to replace the head of the Order—usually at the death or retirement of the previous office holder—the senior officers meet for a week to choose a replacement.

At times the Order has awarded honorary titles or ranks to those outside the organization, such as members of affiliated churches, supportive nobles, or celestials who have aided the knights in some task. Such titles are nonhereditary and confer no actual power to make decisions within the Order.

### MOTIVATION AND GOALS

The Order wishes to root out and destroy evil without causing harm to good or disrupting too much of the ordered workings of daily life. Its members particularly relish slaying undead and demons. Forming small teams to hunt such creatures is a popular way for younger knights to make names for themselves, although such risky behavior may end in death. In addition to actively combating evil, members of the Order tend to the needy, distributing tithed money to the poor and using their limited healing resources to stem the effects of plague, bad luck, and raids by bandits or monsters. They also lend themselves out to allied churches to guard vulnerable officials, escort prized relics to and from holy sites, or hold vigils for the dead.



Unlike some of the more reckless orders of paladins in the world, the Order of the Golden Chalice teaches that patience is just as valuable as force, and that subtlety can prove as effective as direct action. They point to the ruined towers of the Swords of Light, the burned homes of the Guardians of the Holy Wood, and the orc-filled halls of the Sacred Brothers Under the Mountain as evidence of the folly of rash action in the face of evil.

### RECRUITING

The Order welcomes those interested in joining them, although they carefully scrutinize potential applicants for the taint of evil, chaos, magical influence, or undesirable or distasteful habits. Known clerics or paladins of allied churches have it easiest—they need only a short time to study the tenets of the Order, followed by a ceremony of initiation usually conducted with an officer and at least five witnesses. Others wanting to join spend more time learning about the Order, associating with members, and making up their minds as to whether the group is right for them. This process helps reduce attrition, although there is no stigma attached to leaving the organization.

When the Order's officials hear of individuals making a name for themselves in the service of law and good, they often send a member to talk to them. The representative reports back and recommends for or against recruiting these heroes. Even if a potential recruit refuses the offer, the Order tries to maintain amiable contact, not only to keep in touch with someone who promotes similar ideals, but on the off chance that the candidate may experience a change of heart or need help at a later date.

### ALLIES

The Order allies itself strongly with several lawful good, lawful neutral, and neutral good churches. Other friends include similarly aligned governments, cabals of white mages, and a secret society of good lycanthropes dedicated to holding back the advancement of the forces of darkness.

The Order also has an unusual number of aasimar in its ranks. Part of this stems from Urihiel's endorsement of the group and the role his half-celestial children played in maintaining it in the decades after Donas' death. These half-celestials had children with mortals (quite often other members of the Order), and those aasimar offspring usually joined as well. The presence of so many aasimar has drawn members of other celestial bloodlines to the Order; now the group boasts more than 30 aasimar members of various derivations. The knights try to keep accurate genealogical records to help those with celestial blood trace their lineage. An allied church of knowledge helps them magically determine the heritage of those whose bloodlines aren't recorded.

The Order's half-celestials are mostly gone, slain by great evil or called to higher service on other planes. The single surviving half-celestial, Arkhena Rhus, is now very old, growing increasingly blind, and rarely leaves her chambers in the Castle of Donas. A knight of Valkon the Sky Lord (and trained in clerical studies as well), she rode into battle with others of the Order for more than a century before age started to slow her down. She hopes to be called to the heavens soon so she may serve law and good in a new form. Until that time she remains an advisor to the group and a grandmotherly figure to its aasimar.

### ENEMIES

Predictably, the Order of the Golden Chalice has earned its share of enemies: anarchists, tyrants, evil cultists, cabals of dark mages, fiend worshippers, and corrupt necromancers. These folk hate the knights' active questing and relish the opportunity to take out their aggression on lone members of the group. Unfortunately, the Order has no spies within these organizations—its members cannot tolerate the falsity of spying for long, nor do they willingly associate with those who can. Therefore, the group must take a reactive role with these foes, attacking when they surface, then waiting for their next appearance.

### COMBAT AND TACTICS

The Order has no uniform set of skirmish tactics. Some members prefer to meet their foes up close, some would rather deal with dangerous enemies at bow range, and others enjoy riding into combat. However, the knights' training covers information on foes' common spells, as well as the general abilities and weaknesses of the demons and undead they encounter most frequently. For example, the knights know it is best to attack skeletons with blunt weapons, that demons prove resistant to fire, that mages often use spells as effective as armor, and so on.

The Order does train its members in basic military tactics, such as how to move in formation as a squadron or regiment, protocol for relaying messages, and basic signal codes.

### STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The Order is a collegial community with ties going back generations. Within the organization strong friendships have formed among members whose families have been associated with the Order for more than a hundred years. These bonds often lead to remarkable events on a battlefield, such as a handful of blood-bonded knights standing firm against overwhelming demonic forces to protect the body of their fallen friend from the fiends' touch.

The Order relies on the special powers of its many paladins to thwart certain enemy attacks. When fighting creatures with the power to cause fear (such as dragons), a paladin normally fights at the head of a squadron of nonpaladin knights, allowing her *aura of courage* to protect them. Likewise, the knights don't hesitate to attack foes that cause disease, because they know their allied paladins can clean up the monsters' mess before the effects grow too serious. Against powerful undead that prove resistant to normal weapons, common knights draw attacks to make an opening for a paladin to use *lay on hands* to blast through the undead creature.

Perhaps the Order's greatest weaknesses are these very bonds and its dedication to good. As a small army of good and/or lawful individuals, they are vulnerable to effects that specifically target those alignments. Spells such as *chaos hammer* or *unholy blight* can wreak havoc among their ranks.

### RESOURCES

In addition to sharing information on enemy groups, the Order teaches all of its spellcasting paladins the necessary prayers to prepare the *soul beacon* spell, which gives them greater power when fighting undead. Each of the organization's fortresses has an armory stocked with normal and masterwork weapons and armor. While the knights do not sell these items, they have been known to lend them to suitable bearers, sometimes for an appropriate donation or questing oath. Many of the items in the hands of young knights today were once wielded by past heroes; those allowed to carry such items consider it a great honor.

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