

# Masters of War and Destiny



The concept of the Klingon House is central to their society. It provides an identity, a sense of pride, a direction, and a place in history. A Klingon obtains self worth and personal honor from the House they serve. A warrior is nothing without his House—he has no one to sing his songs, no one to fight alongside, no place in society. Every deed he does reflects upon his House, every honor the House wins rebounds on him. Finally, the House serves a political function. Much as fiefdoms did on ancient Earth, each administers and defends their own territories. Without the power and organization of these great powers the Empire would fall into anarchy, dishonor, and weakness.

## Social Rankings

Klingon society resembles that of Earth's ancient, Northern European medieval culture. Those born into a ruling family—either a great or minor House—hold more status than that

of a commoner. Unlike class systems on other worlds, however, the ability to fight and a willingness to die provides the keys to upward mobility. The commoner who proves himself capable in war could join a House's army, then through bravery and skill go on to found his own House—as General Martok proves. A coward or scoundrel, however, will find himself tumbling down the social ladder. The worst receive discommendation—banishment by society.

Klingons society generally recognizes four social classes:

**Ha'Dibah:** At the bottom of the social order, these are the inhabitants of planets conquered by the Empire. They are expected to serve and support the Empire, by paying taxes and supplying goods and services. Unlike the Romulans, Klingons allow their subjects to keep their own culture, traditions, and political systems, so long as they don't cause trouble. They find it easier to leave the existing social order in place, but make it accountable to Klingon authority. Although not considered property, *Ha'Dibah* have no standing in Klingon society. They must obtain permission to move from their local lord or regional governor. They may not own weapons, nor serve in the military. They may not bring grievances against a Klingon, and crimes against Klingons are punished severely. Their lands can be seized without compensation, nor do they enjoy protections against unreasonable search and seizure. *Ha'Dibah* who behave, however, have little to fear, and can even gain a measure of prominence. They can not, however, climb the Klingon social ladder. This term means, literally, “dog, cur, inferior person,” and Klingons consider it a grave insult.

**vumwl':** These are the accountants, weapon-smiths, nursemaids, and thousands of other second-rate professions needed to keep society functioning. Generally, these Klingons were refused induction into a House's army, because they lacked the mettle, though many simply chose to follow in the family business. Without belonging to a House, they have little opportunity to fight, and thus earn fame or respect. They have no songs to sing nor deeds to celebrate. They are still Klingons, however, and expected to act with honor. They have the right to protect their good name, and can seek redress under Kahless' code. They enjoy freedom of move-

ment, as well as protection under Klingon law—they may bring complaints against other Klingons, no matter their rank, and officials must have reason to enter a Klingon home. Their property may be seized, but with just cause and due process.

**Suvwl':** Those who intend to walk the warrior's path seek admission in the military of a particular House. This rank is not hereditary, though kinship with a loyal warrior counts in the applicant's favor. Thousands, sometimes millions, of Klingons seek to enlist in a House and claim association with it. Without being formally adopted, however, warriors do not enjoy the same power or privileges as the nobility; they are not truly “of the House.” They serve as retainers, forming much of the household. In return, membership gives warriors something to belong to, and a greater purpose. They fight in the House's name, and therefore have many chances to gain honor. When they die, their spirits journey to *Sto-Vo-Kor*, and the House celebrates their deeds at *Ty'gokor*. Legally, a warrior's word carries more weight in disputes, and they receive preferential treatment.

**chuQun:** These are the nobility, and the only true members of the House. They make up a small percentage of those who live and fight under a particular lord's standard. Standing at the top of the social order, they receive their authority by virtue of the lands they control and the army at their command. Presumed to be the most honorable, the nobility enjoys the most power and privileges in society. Much of this chapter is devoted to the rights and responsibilities of the Houses, and their lords.

## What is a House?

The concept of a House (from the Klingon word *tuq*, also translated as “tribe”) finds its origins in ancient history, when families merged together for mutual protection from raiders. As society evolved and grew so did the Houses. Powerful families subsumed weaker ones, becoming small kingdoms unto themselves. Thus the great Houses grew to become political as well as familial groupings, centers of power within Klingon society second only to the Emperor himself (and later, the High Council).

The Houses divide the Empire's territory between themselves. They rule directly over their lands—ranging from small planetary regions to

entire planets, or, in the case of the most powerful, several planets—with absolute authority. Little more than a federation of petty fiefdoms, bound together for mutual benefit, the Empire resembles one of Earth's ancient feudal societies more than a modern, 24th century state. The Klingons tried a centralized government under the High Command during the 23rd century, and ended up disillusioned and disaffected. The traditional ways were found to be better.

Most Houses maintain their own military forces and training facilities, arsenals, and even shipyards. Successful Houses earn the devotion of their retainers through their great deeds. The more successful a House appears—winning battles and controlling vast tracts of land—the more warriors want to join. Few Klingons want to seek their destiny with a weak House. For more information on this important aspect of House politics, see “Chapter Four: The Empire's Hammer.”

Every warrior of virtue and honor serves his *house* with undying devotion, willing to draw his sword and lay down his life at a moment's notice for the greater glory of House. Even the lowliest servant hopes that through glorious battle and famous victories he might share in the glory and attain some measure of honor for himself. Those who serve well hope their lord might formally adopt him into the family proper.

## Great and Lesser Houses

Klingons do not distinguish between lesser and greater Houses in name or title, addressing both as *tuq*. The difference lies in the size of their holdings and the might of their armies. Simply put, the stronger a House's army, the more land it can seize and hold, and thus, the larger it becomes. In this “*norgh eat norgh*” environment, a House's status, and fortunes, depend on its ability to dominate.

Great Houses control much of the Empire's wealth through their military might, and get to decide its fate. Like the primitive chieftains of a war council, some two dozen of the strongest Houses claim membership to the High Council. Other, lesser, Houses have far less influence, lacking the manpower to snatch it. They circle the edges of the pack, squabbling over the leavings, looking for new prizes for the taking. They seek out new worlds to conquer, or look to absorb still weaker Houses. For survival, minor Houses often seek out alliances with Great Houses. Often, a powerful enemy casting a greedy eye over a House's territory can be bought off with an alliance. Alternately, the right Great House ally can scare off potential invaders. For their

part, the Great Houses gather the lesser *tuq* about them as gob flies to a *targ*, for use as pawns.

The relationship between Great Houses and their weaker brethren can become cutthroat and complex. Weaker houses look for protection, advantage, and the chance for greater honor by fighting behind the banner of a Great House. Victory swells the ranks of a minor House as much as a Great House. And every morsel of territory adds to a House's holdings. At the same time, these minor Houses look for signs of weakness, ready to pounce on a Great House ally and supplant it. The Great Houses use the lesser in turn, as pieces in the great game of politics and warfare; these they use to bolster their own armies, and they make excellent surrogates. Often, these alliances capitalize on existing rivalries; Klingons understand clearly the old Human saying “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

Since the number of seats on the High Council is limited, many Houses receive no representation and wield no influence. Perhaps the most dangerous House is the one who deserves to sit on the High Council, but doesn't. Powerful and disenfranchised, these Houses represent the greatest threat to sitting High Council members. The political maneuvering surrounding these potential upstarts can become furious. Their desire fueled by the promise of wealth and power should the challenger succeed in its bid to oust a sitting Great House, other Houses flock to the rival's standard. One day's enemy can become the next day's ally in the near-constant search for the “right” alliance. Some “lesser” Houses remain content to keep a low profile, influencing Council members by holding the threat of an overthrow over the sitting members' heads. Usually, however, if a House has the strength to make a move it will. Klingons never shrink from an opportunity to fight a stronger opponent.

At the opposite end of the political spectrum lie the newest and weakest Houses. Usually established when the High Council rewards a brave warrior with the honor of establishing his own House, these Houses rule over a few kilometers of land, perhaps with only one Bird-of-Prey in its fleet. Thousands of these Houses exist, and most don't survive for long. Most *joH* of this sort treat the title as an honorific, and continue to loyally serve their original House. Yet even the newly ennobled lord earns the right to field his own army and rule over whatever lands he can seize, perhaps one day succeeding in the long climb towards the High Council.





## HOUSE LEADERSHIP

The eldest dominant male leads each House. Klingons believe might makes right, and as a result their society is constructed around the strongest warriors. While positions of power are earned by force of arms, the position of *joH* is hereditary. When a lord dies in battle, or completes the *Hegh'bat*, leadership passes down to his eldest living son. This by no means ensures succession. Far from being discouraged, fights between brothers over the right to rule ensure the strongest leader assumes the title. Only a son may inherit the title of *joH*, all others must fight for the privilege.

There are no old warriors. When a ruler's strength begins to fade he faces an inevitable challenge from one of his relatives. This ensures that the strongest and most cunning warriors rise to positions of power, but are removed when they lose their edge. A rightful challenger can only make the claim when he believes the current *joH* no longer has the strength and intelligence to lead, or if the lord behaves dishonorably. For a Klingon ruler there is no greater honor than to die in battle against a worthy foe, especially if he is your own son.

Tradition allows warriors not "of the blood" to duel for the position. Klingons consider this right and proper, not disloyal; if the *joH* were behaving appropriately, he wouldn't have been challenged in the first place. Should a simple *Suvwl'* kill his master in a fair duel, he assumes the title. He undergoes the *brek'tal*, and he and his family ascend to *chuQun*, thus supplanting the family of the now-dead *joH*. The new lord can expect challenges from the male relatives of the slain *joH*, eager to restore their position. Although fair duels cannot, under the Code of Kahless, be contested, envious relatives look for any excuse to issue a challenge. This period of a new lord's reign, known as the "time of knives," can either strengthen the new *joH* or speed his soul to *Sto-Vo-Kor*. To ensure their position, some banish the previous ruling family from the House altogether or arrange a political marriage.

Klingon Houses tend to take their names from their current leader. A name change typically occurs with a change in *joH*, especially if he assumes power under especially auspicious circumstances. The now infamous Duras renamed his House rather than preserving his father's name—the House of Ja'rod—after killing him in a duel. Some prefer to memorialize the name of a famous *joH* by preserving it as the House name, as with the House of Chang. Klingons make a study of heredity and lineage to keep track of all the changes.

Although Klingon law discourages women from heading a House, they have great say over a House's affairs. The Mistress of the House, the lord's wife, manages finances, oversees marriages, and administers discipline with an iron fist. Alternatively, should a *joH* die accidentally, without leaving a male heir, custom grants consideration to his wife with the approval of the High Council. Should she marry, however, her husband assumes all rights and privileges.

## KLINGON NOBILITY

Klingons employ a simple system of noble titles, foregoing the counts, dukes, and barons of other cultures. Every House has but one lord. His various brothers, uncles, nephews, and children hold no formal titles, though they receive preferential treatment. They get the best training, com-

mand the best ships, live in the best Klingon style, and lead in the greatest battles. Thus they perpetuate their standing in society, by ensuring the finest opportunities for themselves.

Klingons believe that blood runs true. The greater the deeds in a noble's lineage, the more exalted he appears in the eyes of Klingons. Those of a proud lineage, such as the House of Kang, are presumed to share the fine breeding of their forefathers. Even Duras, son of Ja'rod, proves this true; he followed in his father's footsteps by betraying the Empire to the Romulans. Thus members of oldest families often look down upon the newer, less well pedigreed warriors who rise to power within the Empire. They believe one Klingon's achievements cannot measure up to the honor of a hundred generations. They say these upstarts have "thin blood," a grave insult when uttered face-to-face. Remember, no amount of genealogy can ennoble a coward or weakling.

Some warriors and *vumwl'* look back fondly on the Empire's totalitarian past—before the Great Houses regained power after the Praxis explosion. (See "Chapter Two: The Lessons of History," page 31). Back then, any Klingon could be elected to the High Council, with no need of noble or blood connections. Martok's rise to the post of Chancellor gives many of them hope, because of his "common" background. Having climbed so far and so fast, Martok represents every warrior's dream and every noble's nightmare. Many on both sides predict change to the social order.

## HOUSE AUTHORITY

The High Council sits at the top of the political order, but they hold little authority over the fiefs of individual Houses. Every *joH* maintains absolute control over his lands and military might. While the Chancellor typically dictates foreign policy and matters affecting the entire Empire, the High Council does not interfere with what is considered an internal House matter. Indeed, if a matter warrants their attention, something is very wrong.

In general, Klingon lords do not concern themselves with the day-to-day lives of their subjects. Noble warriors have little time to spend thinking about farm reports. Produce the amount of food, materials, or weapons required and the *joH* pays little mind. The lord maintains order in his territory. He makes the laws by which his subjects live—establishing everything from tax rates to criminal punishments. Citizens of the *Suy'va* district, for example, make an annual payment of three *targs* to the House of Kozak, while on Drovos, the House of Kang requires all businesses be closed on the anniversary of the local lord's Rite of Ascension.



House authority ends where the Empire begins. The Chancellor, backed by the High Council, would not sit still for another House of Duras. A House who attacks the Federation, for example, violates the Empire's treaty, and would be dealt with sternly. With their limited power over the Houses, the High Council must bring crude strength to bear—the threat of attack, confiscation, or discommendation. The combined force of just a few Great Houses is enough to bring most Houses to heel. Because of the challenge to House authority, the Council uses the measure sparingly. Finally, the Council serves as arbiter when Houses come into conflict, but even then its power is limited. For more information on the High Council, see page 45.

## HOUSE RESOURCES

In order for a warrior to fight he needs a sword in his hand, food in his belly, and somewhere to rest, train, and celebrate when victory comes.