

Knights of the Watch (Part 1)

And Knights of Dispatch

by Stephen Conforti

The following is based on material from the *Living Greyhawk Gazetteer* and the work of the triads of Gran March and Keoland (both past and present).

History: The Kingdom of Keoland was founded in the year 342 CY, and, by 242 CY, had expanded to its present boundaries. It entered a period of rapid expansion thereafter that was marked primarily by the peaceful annexation of new lands. One territory that was much desired was the swathe of land to the east and northeast of the Rushmoors. The Kingdom formed an order of knights, known as the Knights of the March, to secure this territory and assure easy expansion into it. In the course of this conquest, the Knights of the March adopted the teachings of the philosopher and prophet Azmarender and took a new name for their order: the Knights of the Watch.

The Knights successfully pacified the lands east and northeast of the Rushmoors, and, in 161 CY, Keoland absorbed this swathe of land, naming it the Gran March. The duke of Dorlin awarded this fief to the Knights and tasked them with guarding Keoland's northern borders. About this time, a group of knights formed a secret society within the Knights of the Watch; their concern over the ancient dangers lurking in the Rushmoors drove them to focus their attention there almost exclusively. These knights formally separated to form the Knights of the Malgari (or Darkwatch as they are commonly called) in 288 CY, during the reign of Rhola King Tavish I (the Great) of Keoland. During the reign of Rhola King Tavish II (the Blackguard) of Keoland (from 346 to 395 CY), Tavish II attached the Malgari to the Suel House Neheli in a political maneuver whose method and purpose are long lost to the sands of time. The Malgari still function in Keoland to this day (contact the Keoland triad for additional information on the Malgari), and many Knights of the Malgari maintain close ties with the Knights of the Watch (and vice versa). For example, the Margrave of Mandismoor, a renowned Knight of the Watch, is also a highly placed servant of the Malgari.

The Knights of the Watch are tasked with protecting the Sheldomar Valley from the incursions of the Baklunish of the West (including the barbaric Paynims and the more civilized "Westerlings") and other threats as they may arise. While focused in Keoland, Gran March, Bissel, and Geoff (and in Sterich, during times it has been under giant rule), the Knights draw potential members from throughout the Sheldomar Valley. The Watchers maintain castles, fortresses, strongholds, and towers along the border with Ket (in Bissel) as well as along the mountain ranges (the Barrier Peaks, Crystalmists, and Jotens) that border the Sheldomar Valley to the west (although many of these structures were lost during the giant invasions of Sterich and Geoff in 584 CY). Until recently, the headquarters of the Knights lay in Bissel (Pellak), while large strongholds were also maintained in Gran March (Hookhill) and Geoff (Hochoch). Of late, rumors indicated that the Knights were considering relocating their headquarters to Hochoch in response to events in Bissel and Geoff. Official pronouncements have since verified these rumors. The Knights also maintain chapter houses in some of the other major cities of the Sheldomar Valley (like Niole Dra and Gradsul).

The Knights of the Watch follow a near-monastic school of teachings based upon the writings of the philosopher Azmarender. Azmarender studied the tale of Trilesimain, the Simple Knight, a standard tale told by bards throughout the Sheldomar Valley. From this tale (especially a section known as the Glorious Couplets), Azmarender derived a philosophy and code of duty commonly known as the Twelve and Seven Precepts. The Twelve Precepts, detailed below, govern how a knight should behave in his daily life. Azmarender's prophetic writings are also said to have foretold the recent assassination of the King of Keoland and the thrusting of that nation into civil turmoil.

While not commonly known to the average denizen of the Sheldomar Valley, the Twelve Precepts are not secrets and can be learned by anyone interested enough in the Knights. The Seven Precepts are closely guarded secrets, detailing "life beyond the self" and giving powerful insights into the physical and spiritual world. Knights learn these Seven Precepts as they advance in the organization, so higher ranking knights know more of the precepts than lower ranking ones. The mysterious Seventh Precept, which is said to contain ancient secrets about the creation of Oerth, is known only to the head of the knighthood, the Grandiose Imperial Wyvern (currently the severely ailing and aged Hugo of Geoff (LN male human Ftr6/Knight of the Watch10)). The teachings are not connected with any one specific religion, but they fit well with the philosophies espoused by the militant followers of St. Cuthbert, Pholtus, Allitur, Mayaheine, and especially Heironeous. The Knights consider the Church of Heironeous to be one of their strongest allies.

Reflecting the mysticism that forms the foundation of their order, the Watchers adopt fanciful titles as they advance in rank in the knighthood. The lowest ranking knights are known as Vigils (such as Resolute Vigil, Indomitable Vigil, etc.); as Knights advance beyond this lowest rank, they add to this base title, adding further adjectives and later replacing the Vigil title with that of a beast (advancing through ranks of land-based and then aerial mundane beasts, followed by more fantastical ones). From this confusing (to non-Knights) system of titles comes the phrase "frightful as a Watcher's title," denoting someone who wishes to appear more powerful or grand than they truly are.

Prior to the **Greyhawk** Wars, the Knights numbered more than 6,500. War with Iuz and the forces of the giants had trimmed that number drastically; by 590 CY, the number of Knights still roaming the Sheldomar Valley was close to 2,500. The recruitment of new members is a constant and major concern for the leadership of the order, and such activities have brought the membership back to approximately 3,000 as of 595 CY.



The Watchers recognize the need to deal with the giants and orcs currently occupying Geoff (as well as the giants who have recently retaken control of Sterich). However, they view these threats as scarcely more important than the ever-present danger of the nations of the Baklunish West. This has led to a division within the order recently. The Knights now have two branches: the traditional Knights of the Watch and the new Knights of Dispatch. The Dispatchers eschew the traditional methods of battle favored by the Watchers, frequently forming scouting parties and engaging in guerilla attacks on their enemies. The Dispatchers view the evil humanoids and giants as the more important threat to be dealt with, converting the Watcher hatred of the West to a deeper hatred of the nonhumans who have killed so many Sheldomar Valley residents and destroyed so much property and land. While some Watchers despise the tactics of the Dispatchers (calling them "cowardly" and "disgraceful"), the effective leaders of both branches pledge support for each other and both recognize the same hierarchy, naming structure, and supreme leader (the Grandiose Imperial Wyvern). Both branches share the same coat of arms: a sable field with an owl displayed argent. And recent decisions by the Watchers to focus the order's efforts on reclaiming Geoff have strengthened the bond between the two branches.

Recently, the Knights have been the targets of scorn and hatred from the citizens of certain regions of the Sheldomar Valley. Although some of this unpopularity is of their own making, the Knights are blameless for much of what they are accused. Sadly, a number of unfortunate incidents of late have taken their toll on the reputation of the Knights: an entire garrison of Knights at Fortress Goarada twisted and corrupted by fell magic in the County of Linth in Keoland, Knights framed or positioned to take the fall for incidents in Geoff and Bissel, and the actions of some rogue Knights corrupted to the teachings of Hextor. Centuries of warfare with the "Westerlings" has fostered a deep distrust of most Baklunish amongst the Knights, which has carried over to their treatment of loyal Baklunish citizens on too many occasions. The righteousness of the Knights borders too closely to zealotry and has lost them many friends. The Knights are striving to clear the name of their order in these incidents. Their recent cleansing of Fortress Goarada in Linth and bringing to justice renegade Watchers in Bissel has done much to restore their standing in the eyes of the commoners of the Sheldomar once again. Their vigilant guardianship of the Sheldomar Valley against threats such as Ket, the giants, and the Scarlet Brotherhood is still the foundation of the Order.

The Knights are closely allied with the government and military of Gran March as well as the Church of Heironeous. They consider themselves formal allies of all of the nations of the Sheldomar Valley. Their greatest foes are the Baklunish West and the evil giants and humanoids of the western mountain ranges (which is greater is the subject of debate betwixt the two branches). They also see all Hextorians and members of the Scarlet Brotherhood as enemies and serious threats to the security of the Sheldomar Valley.