

In brief

Hollin is ruled by a private company, the Anhalt Charter Company, similar to how India was ruled by the British East India Company. The Company's Board is Hollin's political arena, whereas the Company's Bureaus are the apolitical administration that keeps the Company, the city, and the navy running.

The Bureaus and Director

The Company's Bureaus, including the Merchant Fleet, Admiralty, Treasury, and others, operate the company's business and govern Hollin. The Bureaus report to a Director who ensures that they execute the Company's shareholders' decisions. The bureaus include an army of administrators and workers, from the Director and admirals down to the sailors and longshoremen crowding Hollin's streets.

The Great Council and Board

The Company's actions are decided by the vote of its Great Council, which are its shareholders, who each receive one vote for each share they own. These include simple small investors like many of Hollin's shopkeepers, but they also include major stakeholders like Hollin's great trading houses. One of the biggest stakeholders is still the government of the city-state Naumkaeg, which took a major stake in the Company when it originally granted its charter. The Council's meetings are open to the public.

However, the Company's political heart is not the Great Council, but the Board. The Board is an informal cabinet where the Company's major shareholders can negotiate away from the dissonance in the Council. The Board chooses its own changing membership, typically bringing in factions that might be large enough to challenge the Board in Council votes.

The Bureaus are ultimately responsible to the Great Council. But in practice the Board and Bureaus direct the Company, submitting their plans to the Council for a simple yes or no vote. Similarly, the Director serves at the will of the Council, but is nominated by the Board, and the Council has always approved the Board's nominees.

Although the Board is a political body, its meetings include a key figure from the Bureaus - the Secretary of the Admiralty - as a voting member. And, the Board has always accepted the Director as its own Chairman, making the Director a doubly powerful position. The Director and Secretary of the Admiralty are usually mutual supporters on the Board because the Secretary owes his Bureau post to the Director.

The Keeper, Representative, Advocate, and Master of Revels

Besides the Chairman, the Board also includes other, more curious positions.

The first is the Keeper of the Lion's Mouth. The Lion's Mouth is a secure mail slot in the side of the Great Council building, where anyone can leave anonymous denunciations of their fellow citizens. The Keeper of the Lion's Mouth has the only key to the mouth, and the Keeper can report the denunciations to the Board, or instead discard them, as he or she sees fit.

The second curious position is the Representative of the Security Service. The Representative can act on denunciations the Keeper reports or not, as he or she chooses. The Security Service is not considered a Company Bureau, so the Representative is not responsible to the Director or anyone else.

The third is the Advocate. The Advocate can call for the Board to try anyone - no rationale needed - with the results decided by the Board members present. Two acquittal votes from Board members are needed for an innocent verdict, else the defendant is guilty. Guilty defendants are turned over to the Security Service, and the Representative of the Security Service will carry out the Board's decision.

(If you've read this far, yes, denunciations and trials are basically from the board game Kremlin.)

The last is the Master of Revels who, despite the name, regulates entertainment in the city. The Master has some sensible responsibilities, like shutting down crowded theatres when there's an epidemic in the city, or fighting the gambling associated with underground bare-knuckle boxing. But over the years different Masters have also used the post to impose their own morals, to shut down bawdy houses for instance. Think of these more self-righteous Masters as the city council that outlaws dancing in Footloose.

The Chairman has the power to vacate and/or appoint the Keeper, Advocate, and Master of the Revels positions as he/she chooses, at the end of a meeting. The Representative of the Security Service is chosen by the Security Service.