

A synopsis of cephalid society

Underwater and Unscrupulous

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Underneath the ocean's surface, you have a lot more to fear than sharks and drowning; you also have the **cephalids** to contend with. These octopus-like beings live only near the continent of Otaria, but are still a magical and political force to be reckoned with. Unlike the **merfolk**, who practice both physical combat and magic, cephalids prefer to scheme in the background, using their mystical talents to jockey for position and power.

Merfolk have always been the dominant underwater species, and the most well known in **Magic**. However, the Apocalypse destroyed most of the Vodalian Empire, mightiest of merfolk kingdoms, giving creatures like the cephalids a chance to grow. But another developing merfolk empire still held power over the cephalids, preventing them from gaining the might **Emperor Aboshan** craved. Thanks to a well-placed betrayal by a merfolk noble named **Laquatus**, the cephalids were able to throw the merfolk, seizing rulership of the oceans surrounding Otaria.

Cephalids are masters of magic and politics, two skills that go very well together. In the emperor's courts, nobles are supposedly chosen by merit, but with a little magic, a little deceit, or both, almost anyone can rise to power. In the end, those who do control what goes on in the cephalid empire tend to be unscrupulous and understandably paranoid. Though warriors are rare, cephalids are unmatched in magical skill. This single-mindedness serves them well in government, where rank is everything.

Like merfolk, cephalids even have spells that allow them to walk on land, even if they are very clumsy in this strange form. Noble cephalids employ all sorts of sea creatures as servants and bodyguards, from trained eels and sharks to selkie (were-seals) to the few surviving merfolk from the empire that used to rule them.

To outsiders, the empire's government seems almost tranquil, but in reality, there's constant intrigue and daily battles for power behind the scenes. Only the smartest and most cunning cephalids rise to the top. Aboshan and **Llawan** are prime examples. Aboshan was once a minor noble, but thanks to a lot of bartering, scheming, and betrayals, was made emperor in a power struggle that lasted years. Unfortunately, his climb has made him suspicious of everyone (though this is not without reason) and a little crazy.

Llawan, on the other hand, always knows exactly what she's doing. Her marriage to Aboshan was a purely political move by her father. Upon their wedding, she was given her own palace in the southern reaches of the empire, and sent there prevent her from interfering with her husband. But she turned even that to her advantage, slowly building prestige and power there so she would have widespread support when she moved to overthrow Aboshan. She cares more about the welfare of the empire than

most cephalids, but this actually makes her even more dangerous, since she's able to command stronger loyalty, and gives her a convenient reason for her power grabs.

Though cephalids still very much a local power, Aboshan's obsession with extending his holdings led to his death at the **Mirari**'s hands, giving Llawan the opportunity she's been waiting and preparing for. Whether she'll retain her throne in the face of Laquatus's scheming is another question entirely. He's one of those rare outsiders with the intelligence to play in cephalid politics, and with so many cephalid nobles sitting back and watching to see whether he or Llawan wins their feud, it'll be hard indeed to determine the final victor.

The only sure thing about cephalids is this: no matter how clever and devious you think they are, they're always even smarter than that. They have the patience and knowledge to lay plots within plots, so intricate that you won't know what's coming until it's too late. To survive among the cephalids, you have to be smart as well as strong. Think you can handle them?