

THE SIX RIVER FREEDOMS

Frequently invoked—and occasionally trampled—the River Freedoms are the ideological backbone for common Riverfolk. Outsiders who expect to lead Riverfolk must quickly make themselves aware of the subtleties of the River Freedoms, as those who repeatedly flout a beloved freedom find themselves deposed by a mob. Indeed, the River Freedoms find their most curious interpretations in the folkways of common Riverfolk. A quick-witted wag who quotes a freedom to justify her actions can sway hearts to accept the most egregious behavior, and a misinterpretation of words can get an honest paladin driven out with malice.

Philosophers and scholars who study the political landscapes of the River Kingdoms rank the River Freedoms in order from least to most grave—after all, no one seriously believes in unfettered freedom to speak at all times. However, slavery is as serious an offense here as in Andoran, and nothing is so sacred to Riverfolk as the freedom to keep what one holds.

Say What You Will, I Live Free: The freedom to speak is not the same as freedom from consequences of speech. Outsiders, drunkards, and fools are the only ones who vocally invoke this freedom. All others respect it, and live with it accordingly.

Still, criticism of government is more common here than in other lands. Cruel despots occasionally get an earful from their subjects, and the wise ones do not harshly punish such vocal rabble. In the River Kingdoms, subjects are earned by withstanding criticism rather than suppressing it. Pride sometimes intervenes, but a long-lasting lord is one who lets tongues wag.

This freedom is especially tantalizing for bards and anyone using charm magic. No one attempts to limit a spellcaster's speech, and a silence spell is a suspicious abrogation of rights.

Oathbreakers Die: The flip side of free speech in the River Kingdoms is the gravity of oath-breaking. Petty liars are common, but in a land where tomorrow can bring a gang of mercenaries, the people in charge must know whom they can trust. Common

oaths include “I swear by the Sellen,” “May Hanspur take my sons,” and “My freedom is my bond.”

Riverfolk who undertake oaths of this nature keep them, or die trying. This attitude trickles down to business transactions, but can ironically make things more difficult—it's hard to get a Riverfolk trader to fully commit to anything. Standard contracts contain a “Gyronna clause” which voids a contract in case of unforeseen calamity. This would seem a perfect dodge for scoundrels, but associating with Gyronna is the worst omen a Riverfolk trader can invoke. No one deals with a trader who admits affliction by Gyronna, lest the association rub off.

Walk Any Road, Float Any River: This freedom implies no safety while traveling, especially from the local lord. It merely prevents lords from blocking land and water travel, or charging tolls for passing (except for non-Riverfolk). Of course, any ruler who doesn't want people on his roads can bar them without erecting a single block—threats, bribes, political pressure, or hiring “bandits” are just as effective.

However, in practice, it means no lord can take his or her people for granted. Most Riverfolk do not leave their homes for anything but essential travel, no matter who is in charge (and poor Riverfolk usually have nowhere else to go), but they might still move to a new kingdom if their lord is abusive. This escape is rarely necessary. A lord who wants a functioning kingdom knows not to treat subjects too harshly, or the best ones will disappear, leaving a half-empty kingdom behind.

Courts Are for Kings: Buried midway down the list is one that undergirds them all: law within the River Kingdoms is malleable, and the rulers of a kingdom do as they wish. In their lands, one must obey. Whether a visitor is a commoner or a neighboring king, all are subject to a lord's law within his own territory, and anyone who disobeys must be prepared for punishment or a declaration of war.

As a result, rulers seldom visit each other directly. Intermediaries do the talking, even when lords are scant miles

away. When face-to-face negotiations occur, the monarchs often take great pains to protect their own sovereignty, even going so far as to set up camp tents on shared borders, talking across a rope line hung with pennants from both kingdoms. The major exception is the yearly Outlaw Council, where the meeting hall is considered politically neutral.

Slavery is an Abomination: Nothing is so secure in the River Kingdoms as freedom for escaped slaves. Unlike Andorens, Riverfolk won't leave their homes to free slaves, but a runaway in the River Kingdoms is a slave no more.

Some estimates say that one-third of the Riverfolk alive today are escaped slaves or descendants of slaves. Riverfolk welcome thousands of escaped slaves to all kingdoms each year, to fill ranks in armies and agriculture. Escaped slaves are usually the fiercest proponents of the River Freedoms, as these conventions are the first taste of freedom in their new lives.

Because of this freedom, Hellknights of the Order of the Chain and other slave-takers cannot operate openly here, and any Andoren Eagle Knight can dispel most Riverfolk's natural distrust of strangers by showing her insignia—and get a free drink and a barn to sleep in.

Depending on the local custom, this abolition can extend to indentured servitude. Spellcasters are warned to be circumspect when summoning monsters in the River Kingdoms, lest their magic be misinterpreted.

You Have What You Hold: In contrast to many other civilizations on Golarion, this freedom draws a moral distinction between robbery and mere stealing. Taking something by force is considered acceptable, even begrudgingly praiseworthy. Burglary, on the other hand, is punishable under common law. The difference is in allowing a victim the ability to resist, the opportunity to face his or her robber, and to plan for repossession if so desired. This allows for a rough honesty, letting Riverfolk know and face their enemies.