

# CONAN<sup>®</sup>

RETURN TO THE ROAD OF KINGS



SECOND EDITION



# CONAN®

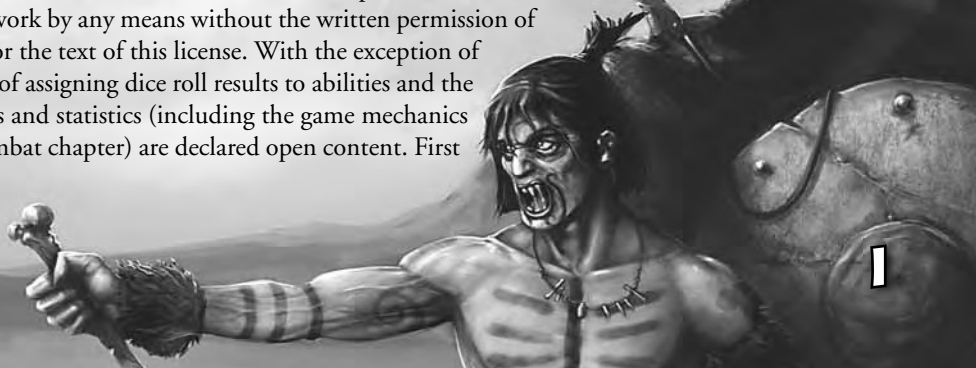
## RETURN TO THE ROAD OF KINGS

SECOND EDITION

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# Amazon

## The Kingdom of Women

Amazon is a vast area of the Black Kingdoms and lies south of Stygia and Darfar. It is bordered to the west by the Southern Desert and defined in the east by the River Styx. To the south, Amazon extends into the equatorial rainforest. At the end of the Hyborian age, thousands of Amazon slaves will be brought out of the Black Kingdoms by the Hyrkanians.

The Amazons are a tall black race, more robust than graceful. Their skin is dark and they have black, kinky hair. The Amazon culture is organised as a nation constantly at war. The female warriors train by hunting and fighting. Husbands and lovers are captured, not wooed.

### MATRIARCHAL CULTURE

Amazon is host to a matriarchal and aggressive culture where the women are the valorous warriors and the smallish men are suppressed in near-slavery, quite the reverse of the rest of the Black Kingdoms. The culture originated with an ancient queen who assembled an army of female infantry and cavalry and attacked the villages she came across, subduing the men and recruiting the strongest of the women until she had consolidated a suitably sized region. The Amazons continue to be ruled by a queen instead of a king. The queen does not marry nor does she maintain a lengthy relationship with any one man lest a king arise and rule the Amazon people. The queen does have sons and daughters and her eldest daughter is the heir to the Ivory Throne of the Amazons. The queen enters into temporary sexual alliances for political gain at times, usually killing her lovers after a few intimate encounters.

### A PROVINCIAL LIFE

The village is the centre of life in Amazon. An Amazonian village is called a *livata* (plural *mavata*). A *livata* is home to one to two hundred people and moves every decade or so to ensure healthy soil for the crops. Any placement of villages or cities on the accompanying map are approximations only because of these movements. On the savannahs, the movements of the *mavata* are even more frequent as the plains Amazons have a nomadic lifestyle. The governor of a *livata* is called a *mkulunta*. The plural of *mkulunta* is *akulunta*. The land

around a *livata* is communal and is used to grow crops and pasture the livestock. The harvest is divided equally among the people of the *livata* by the administrators of the farms, although the *mkulunta* receives an honorary cut before the general division among the population begins. In addition to the premium accorded to the *mkulunta* of the *livata*, a certain amount is also set aside for the *mbanza*, or provincial capitals.

Beyond the *mavata* are the *mawena* (singular *liwena*), which are basically provinces. A *liwena* is a collection of *mavata*. The *liwena* is administered by an *mwena* (plural *awena*) who lives in an *mbanza*, or provincial capital. An *mbanza* is the equivalent of an Amazon town, home to between one and five thousand people. An *mbanza* does not move like a *livata* does. It is supported by taxes and tribute from the *mavata* in the *liwena*.

The *mawena* are administered by the queen at Gamburu, the closest thing to a city in Amazon, as well as its capital.

### AMAZONIAN CLOTHING

Amazonian clothing is made out of cloth, fur or leather, like most of the clothing found in the Black Kingdoms. Amazonian clothing is known for its distinctive red leather, which is made using a scarce red dye sacred to the Amazons. Leather garments are typically fringed and often have patterns stamped into them. Common patterns include animal pictures, meanders and spirals. Cloth is typically embroidered and dyed black, red, yellow or indigo most of the time – although other colours are used when available. Leopard skins are commonly worn by the Amazons.

When not at war or raiding, the Amazons who live on the savannahs and veldts wear cloth tunics and knee-high boots. The boots are made of either cloth or leather and have tough leather or wooden soles. The Amazons of the rainforests, when not fighting, go nude, wearing naught but an embroidered panel over







their groin or a type of short kilt wrapped around their hips, depending on their wealth and status. Wealthier or higher ranking Amazons wear kilts or panels made of animal fur. During ceremonies, Amazons throughout the region wear outer skirts of beaded strings. These may be worn over a cloth skirt, if desired. They may also wear boots similar to those found on the savannas of Amazon, Men dress similarly to women.

In addition to clothing, the Amazons also sport tattoos, cosmetics and jewellery. Henna is applied on fingers and toes and Stygian kohl is used on the eyelids. Red, yellow or white paint may be used to create patterns on the cheeks and forehead. As far as jewellery goes, earrings, bracelets, anklets and necklaces are most common. Headdresses of fur, feathers and gemstones are also worn.

Slaves are not permitted to wear clothing of any kind. Clothing is only accorded to those who are free.

The Amazons keep their hair in a variety of styles. Most of the Amazon warrior-women of the savannas wear their hair in dreadlocks. Those of the jungles wear their kinky hair in a bush or shave it short. As they age, both types tend to wear their hair in frightful masses of disarray. The *gedra* never cut their hair, considering it to be the source of their shamanic powers. As a result, the hair of the *gedra* tends to be long and matted.

## SEX ROLES IN AMAZON

Women are the hunters, warriors and rulers of Amazon, a reversal of the sex roles typically found in the Black Kingdoms. To avoid pregnancies while learning the arts of war, young Amazons are expected to maintain their virginity until they kill their first male in battle. Those who fail in this are enslaved and possibly sold to the Ghanatas, Kushites or Stygians. Once a woman has killed a man, the woman has sexual freedom in all ways, including having male visitors when her husband is absent. Once a woman has killed a man, she may visit the *akualek* for herbal contraceptives. She must bring proof of the kill on the first visit, either in the form of physical proof or a witness. Amazon women are permitted female lovers at any time.

Other women have more specialised roles. Some are in charge of trading caravans and others work as master

craftsmen, supervising the work of men. Others become priestesses or oracles, or become powerful administrators whose duties preclude them from being part of an army. These roles are handed down from mother to daughter. The community as a whole supports these individuals with portions of their hunt or war-loot.

Male Amazons remain at the home. They do not fight and must obey their wives in all things. They are not considered free citizens and may not take a role in deciding anything about the community but they are allowed to wear clothing, unlike slaves. Fathers are expected to care for any children but all children belong to their mothers. Mothers teach the girls how to hunt and how to fight and the fathers teach the boys how to tend the home.

## LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Marriage is not allowed until an Amazon woman has killed a man in a face-to-face fight. Husbands and lovers are acquired in war and in raids. Amazons have little concept of love in a marriage. Marriage is for status and for child-bearing so it rarely occurs before a girl is 10 years old. If an Amazon can afford more than one husband, she may marry as many as she likes. A divorce is simple – the woman takes her bed (or even the entire home) to her mother's house. Any children remain the possessions of the mother but the father still bears the burden of primary care. Divorces are usually accompanied by joyous parties for the woman held by her family and friends.

## ARMS AND ARMOUR

Most Amazons maintain a bronze short sword, a double-headed bronze battle axe (called a labrys), a bronze-headed throwing spear and a hunting bow. Trading or stealing iron or steel weapons is a sign of strength among the Amazons who lack the industry to make such weapons themselves. Also, unlike much of the southern Black Kingdoms, the bow is an honoured weapon among the Amazons. For armour, most Amazons use leather breastplates with bronze squares tied to them and bronze studded leather straps worn in the manner of a kilt. Amazons use crescent-shaped shields.

## AMAZONIAN HOUSES

Homes and furnishings belong to the women. Simple, grass-roofed houses are common. Amazon houses are extremely primitive except in Gamburu.



## SLAVERY

Amazons purchase slaves from the Ghanatas. They occasionally sell slaves back to the Ghanatas, to the Stygians and to various Black Kingdom nations. Slaves are required to go about their duties naked. The Amazons enslave men they capture in war (they typically kill any that resist capture too strongly – the strong-willed rarely make good slaves). They also enslave women who are disruptive to their communities because of their acts or omissions. Those Amazons deemed too strong-willed to serve in Amazon are sold to others as a form of exile.

## HORSES

The Amazons maintain cavalry units, especially on the savannas. Even in the jungles, the Amazons use horses to some degree. Amazons use the same slim horses found among the Kushites (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game* for statistics of the Kushite horse). Many Amazons prefer to hunt from horseback.

## SOCIAL STANDING

Amazon has a stratified, hierarchal society with social classes. The *imusa* are the upper class of elite warriors and nobles. The *imusa* are in charge of defence, raiding and trade. The *imusa* usually dress in a more splendid fashion than their inferiors, having better access to diamonds, gold and fine pelts. Below these warrior women are the *imbad*, the herders and vassal warriors. They are usually vassals to the *imusa* and are in charge of livestock. Beneath the *imbad* are the *inhedin*, who are the crafters and smiths. Below the *inhedin* are the men, who are basic labourers and childcare providers. At the bottom of the social ladder are the slaves.

## SOCIAL MOBILITY

Social mobility is theoretically fluid in Amazon if one is a woman. Titles and incomes are granted by the queen for three year terms, subject to renewal. However, any warrior who excels can leave the ranks of the *imbad* and join the *imusa*. The local *mkulunta* or *mwena*, in addition to the queen, has the power to grant a woman the rank of *imusa*, giving her a handful of *imbad* as vassals, charge of a trade caravan or the duty to carry out a certain number of raids per year. The newly raised *imusa* may be placed as a counsellor or advisor to the *mkulunta* or *mwena*.

In practice, the nobility tend to protect their own and usually reappoint the incumbent without much debate or question. Only in cases where the

people publicly and *en masse* apply to have a noble removed does this happen – and even then there is no guarantee. Although each noble is subject to review, corruption is rampant and so long as the noble shows up at the appropriate time with a suitable amount of tribute, the reappointment goes on without delay. Being raised to an *imusa* is also prone to corruption, cronyism and other arbitrary means of decision.

There is no social mobility for the men to speak of and little social mobility for slaves. If a slave girl proves to be a capable craftsperson or warrior, there is some small chance she can ascend to one of the lesser ranks of vassals but this happens so infrequently it barely warrants mentioning.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

The Amazons cultivate grain and vegetables in small subsistence gardens around the villages. The jungles are known for flooding, so agriculture therein is light at best. Orchards provide hazelnuts, almonds, apricots, dates and figs for consumption or trade. Amazon is also a source of cinnamon, rosemary, myrtle, coriander and certain peppers. A trade in cloth from the south is regarded as especially lucrative in Amazon. The trade with Stygia for Stygian amulets is robust and Amazon trades slaves with the Ghanatas, Kush and Stygia.

Myrtle is used to create an interesting perfume, which is traded heavily in Zembabwei, Stygia, Turan, Iranistan and Vendhya but the most sought after commodities of Amazon are diamonds and gold. The Amazons keep the locations of their mines and other sources a strict secret.

## BARTER AND MONEY

The Amazons use 'quills' as a measure of money. A quill is a bird feather from one of the larger birds filled with a minute amount of gold dust. Most trade, however, is handled through basic barter. Usually only those from Gamburu or a large *mbanza* (provincial capital) use quills.

Long-horn cattle are native to the area and are the measure of wealth in Amazon, believed to be more stable than currency. Foreign goods are valued here more than gold or anything produced by the Amazon itself. Fine cloth, ornaments and other artefacts of foreign manufacture are coveted by the poor and hoarded





by the wealthy. The poor generally have hard lives, forced to work for the wealthy for little gain. During the growing season, the slaves tend the fields of grain and the flocks of cattle. After the harvest, the slaves are forced to dig for the precious metals desired by foreign nations. Panning, digging out open pits and even sinking mine shafts are part and parcel of the labour of the slave and the nobles have full claim to any gold found.

## TAXES AND TOLLS

The *awena* pay tribute to Gamburu and, in turn, exact tribute from the *mavata* in their *liwena*. The queen and the *awena* also exact special levies and tolls as the need arises. Trade tolls are common throughout Amazon and a caravan passing through several *mavata* or *mbanza* may have to pay many tolls as they make their way through the country to Gambaru.

## THE MILITARY OF AMAZON

The Amazons are highly regarded among the Black Kingdoms as courageous and cunning warriors. They are known to be swift in battle and completely unafraid of engaging in combat. Technically, in the event of war, every woman can be called for military service, although rarely does an area move its entire population into war. Often a sorceress accompanies an army to cast spells to terrify their foes. Men are usually called to carry baggage and supplies for the army.

The most common strategy used by the Amazons when faced with a potentially superior foe is to retreat (or even appear to flee), then turn and fight. If a fight is not going well for the Amazons, they will scatter in as many directions as possible, then circle back

to surround the enemy and renew the fight. The Amazons prefer to fight from a position of advantage and when the advantage is lost, they disband and appear to flee – only to return with restored vigour and hopefully with a new advantage.

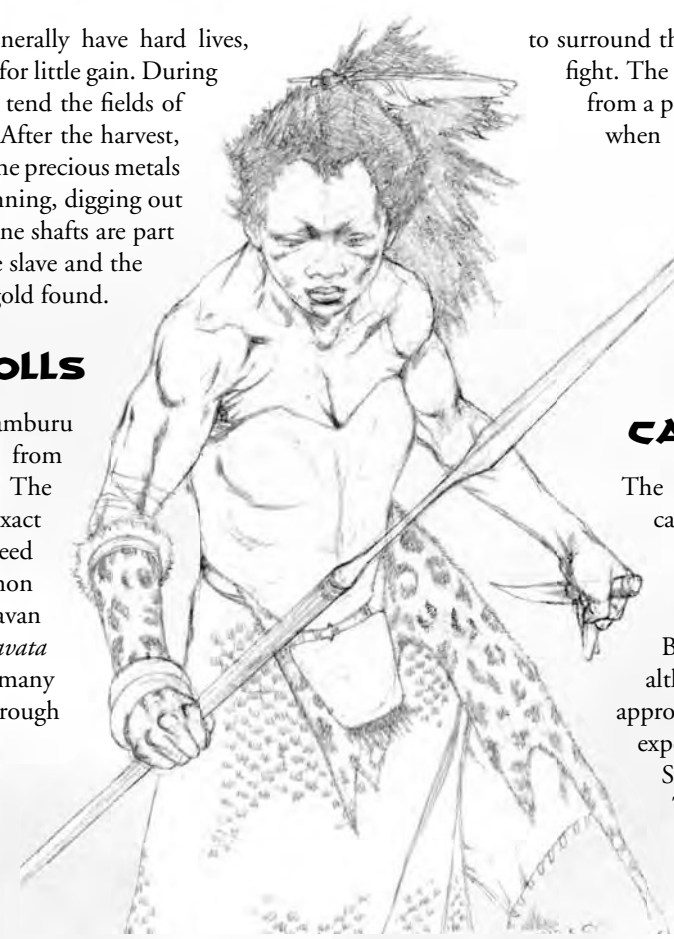
## CAVALRY

The Amazons maintain a cavalry of mounted archers and swordswomen. They are accorded to be great archers by Black Kingdom natives, although they do not approach the level of mounted expertise the Hyrkians or Shemites have developed. They ride the light Kushite horse for its agility. The cavalry is usually composed of vassal warriors.

## HEAVY INFANTRY

In a departure from typical Hyborian thinking, the heavy infantry is drawn from the *imusa*. Any member of the heavy infantry is supported by revenue from the province she protects. Gamburu supports 20,000 heavy infantry according to some reports and the major provinces also maintain armies in a similar, albeit smaller, manner. Only the provincial rulers and the queen can afford to maintain ranks of *imusa* heavy infantry.

In addition to the infantry, the queen and the provincial governors maintain personal armies of career soldier-women who remain virginal (or at least chaste); they must take an Allegiance toward chastity. These are elite soldiers and are usually treated as second only to their mistresses.





## WEAPONS

As mentioned before, Amazons generally use bronze weapons, especially short swords, scimitars and battle-axes. The Amazons consider swords to be symbolic of men, so they fight with swords in their inferior hands (the left in most cases). An axe is considered to be symbolic of women, so the axe is brought to battle in the superior hand (the right in most cases). The Amazons prefer a distinct form of battle axe known as the labrys, which is seen as symbolic of female empowerment.

## ENTERTAINMENT AND DIVERSIONS

### WRESTLING

Wrestling is a popular pastime for Amazon girls. At festivals the wrestling occurs amid thunderous drumbeats and frenzied dances around the wrestlers. Wrestlers are tethered to one another to prevent them from moving apart.

### DANCE

Amazons are well known for their dances; they have a dance for virtually any occasion. For example, they have a war dance involving the overhead clashing of axes or spears against shields amid thunderous drumming and alternating clapping from the observers. During this dance, half of the observers clap starting on the first beat and every other beat thereafter and the other half, clapping louder than the first, clap on the second beat and every other beat thereafter. The Amazons dance barefooted over the bared blades of swords arranged in a five-pointed star on the ground. They always hold their heads high and never look at their feet or at the swords.

Dances are done in circles or spirals to imitate the movements of the heavens or to represent the cycles of the seasons or life.

The *gedra* oracles are famed for their trance-inducing and story-telling dances. They also dance amid alternating clapping. The *gedra* oracles chant as they dance. After the greeting, an oracle begins with her head covered with a veil to symbolise ignorance and darkness. The veil is removed as she dances. Most of the *gedra* dance is conveyed through small hand movements which send magic out to the observers or bring it back toward the dancer. The *gedra* oracle flicks her hands first to each of the four directions; she then flicks her hands toward the four elements, moving her hands upward to send power to the heavens,

downward to send power to the earth, outward to send power to the winds and downward in a flowing motion to send magic to the waters. She will also flick her hands backward to send power to the past, to the side to give power to the present and toward the front to give power to the future. Hand flicks from or toward certain body parts have symbolic meanings the observers understand and a story can be told through these hand flicks. Head swaying, which sends the dancer's braids flying, is added to give emphasis when needed. All a *gedra's* movements are sharp and precisely defined. Foot movement, if any, tends to be flat.

## RELIGION IN AMAZON

Many of Amazon's religions are dominated by superstitions and magic. Shamanistic beliefs co-exist with ancestor worship and the worship of local gods and demons. Many of the religious beliefs in Amazon are consistent with the rest of the Black Kingdoms as described in *Faith and Fervour*, especially in regards to the need for community to achieve power, safety, protection and life. The information here is supplemental to that volume.

## BASIC COSMOLOGY

There is no real cosmology or even a fixed theology among the Amazons. They have religious events and ceremonies and myths but these are not based on specific theologies. Amazons accept new myths as readily as Aquilonians might accept a new story told by a friend about his day. Amazons do not look for coherence in their religious experiences or in their myths. In this system of ever-changing beliefs, there are no religious heresies and no heretics.

A few basics tend to exist, however. The Amazons believe that their ancestors can influence them. They believe in a spirit world and that all things possess spirits. Amazon religion is ultimately animist. However, the Amazon who denies these things is not branded a rebel or even chastised. Her views are as welcome as any others.

## ANCESTOR VENERATION

The main aspects of ancestor veneration are more fully discussed in *Faith and Fervour*. Essentially, ancestor veneration ensures community continuity.



## HUMAN SACRIFICE

Amazons practice human sacrifice, especially in respect to worshipping their goddess and the ancestor spirits. They sacrifice both babies and adults, although usually they only sacrifice males. Only in extremely urgent or powerful rituals will a female be sacrificed.

Infant sacrifice involves throwing the baby into a large mortar and pounding the baby to death for the purpose of war magic. Adult sacrifice involves draining the victim of blood. The blood is drained from the right side of the body for war and violence and from the left for more peaceful applications of magic. A sacrifice in the name of war involves decapitating the victim with a sword.

## FUNERAL PRACTICES

The Amazons bury their female dead beneath pillars of stone. To the Amazons, stone is 'dead.' There is nothing living about rock to their minds, so when an Amazon dies she is said to have turned to stone. The height of the stone monument represents the valour and honour of the deceased. A man might be fortunate to have a small rock placed over his grave while queens are buried beneath massive monoliths. Funerary priestesses set up circles of standing stones to honour the dead.

## MDETIS, THE GODDESS OF AMAZON

The goddess of Amazon, Mdetis, is portrayed in sculpture as a beautifully shaped female head with thick, curling, wild hair, swollen eyes, fangs and an out-hanging tongue to give her beauty a fearsome aspect. She represents the mysteries of female genitalia, female wisdom and female cruelty. Her prolonged gaze can kill, just as prolonged exposure to the sun kills – and staring her in the eyes overlong blinds, again representative of staring at the sun. Seeing her face can also kill, for whomever gazes upon her face will see her own death as she looks upon the future. On Mdetis's back are four great wings so she can sail through the air and command the heavens. These wings also serve as fins because she also brings life to the water. Her body is covered in fish-scales but the exact form of her body depends on her aspect. Snakes are usually wrapped around her arms and/or entangled in her hair, that they may whisper ancient advice in her ears as she holds them overhead.

Mdetis is a war goddess in one aspect, so she is depicted as having the body of a horse in that aspect, much like a centaur. As a war goddess Mdetis is an expert archer and she drinks the blood of men.

Like the Stygian sun-gods, Mdetis rides across the sky in a solar chariot pulled by horses. She rides in a boat during the night. Her nightly boat ride takes her through the underworld; she is also a death goddess with the body of a bee. In this aspect she represents the inevitability of death and her gaze turns people to stone – the only part of the natural world that seems 'dead' to the Amazons. During Mdetis's trips through the underworld, her sister, Sipyrene, rises as the moon.

Further, Mdetis commands the beasts of the Earth and empowers them to kill demons. In this aspect she is depicted as having a lion's body. She kills in this form so that life may continue.

Mdetis is a goddess of healing as well, for she heats the thermal springs, giving them the power to heal. In this aspect she is given a cobra's body or she wears a snake as a belt. She is also a fertility goddess and in this aspect is given a fish tail; in Amazonian symbolism, fish represent unborn souls. She has alchemical powers to prevent pregnancy as well. Mdetis is a seer and can see the future death of anyone she looks upon; those who look upon her unveiled face see their own deaths.

Mdetis's blood is powerful. Blood from her right side kills but blood from her left side can heal and even restore life to the dead. In all depictions of the Amazon goddess, if she is looking to the right, she is shown as angry but if she is looking to the left she is peaceful in mien. Artwork that depicts her healing aspect show people drinking the blood from her left side. In artwork dedicated to war, she is shown as giving her warriors blood from her right, giving them the power to deal death to their enemies. If Mdetis's blood from her right side drips onto the ground, foul demons spring up but the blood on the left gives rise to helpful animals or guardian spirits.

Mdetis lives on a sacred island enclosed in willows. She only allows the bravest of the brave to see her home.

**Requirements of Worship:** Obey priestesses of the goddess; sacrifice at least one human male to the goddess per year.

**Benefits of Worship:** Spells.

**Requirements for Ordained Priesthood:** Must know *shamanic ecstasy* (see *Faith and Fervour*) and have the Steely Gaze feat and the Ritual Sacrifice feat;



must sacrifice at least one human male per month to the goddess; must be female.

**Benefits of Ordained Priesthood:** Standard, plus sorcery teaching is available (any style except Oriental Magic).

**Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests:** There is no recognised form of 'disloyalty' as worship is mostly individual and does not have a fixed theology.

## GEDRA (ORACLES)

Amazon sorceresses devoted to the Amazon goddess and focused on divination and communication become *gedra*, or oracles. They are quite primitive priestesses. They wear black or indigo robes and silver *yoni* emblems as necklaces. They never cut their hair, which they consider the source of their powers. *Gedra* are powerful story-tellers and are capable of telling their tales by moving only their hands and forearms, combining dance with story. Shamanic, ecstatic dancing is done bare-breasted. Without much use for astrology, the *gedra* use a shamanic trance to cast their divination spells (see *shamanic ecstasy* in *Faith and Fervour*). These women use a combination of incense, dance and drumming to enter their ecstatic trances. Amazons seeking the advice of a *gedra* begin the session by sharing a large bowl of milk and alcohol with the oracle. The oracle begins drumming under the burning of incense, dancing in a frenzy until she achieves her trance. She then speaks or sings her prophecies, the words of the goddess meant for the person or persons with her. *Gedra* are expected to have many lovers, both male and female, as sexual experience is considered enlightening.

## AKUALEK (WITCH-DOCTORS)

The witch-doctors of Amazon wear the skins of snakes and use snakes as fetish items because they represent immortality as well as the cycles of life, death and rebirth. Crocodiles are also powerful totems and fetishes for *akualek* magic as well. *Akualek* also function as war-priestesses, so they dress as frighteningly as possible. Most of them manage to look alluring yet repellent at the same time. They are highly sensual in their movements but manage a simultaneous disturbing grotesqueness in their mannerisms. In all ways, they try to emulate their goddess. In casting magic, they prefer spells that use the evil eye. Like the *gedra*, the *akualek* do not cut their hair; they wear long dreadlocks. *Akualek* must prove their mastery of power by walking across burning coals in bare feet without injury. *Akualek* are powerful herbalists and use herbs to create contraceptives and medicines. The war spells found in *The Free Companies* are appropriate for *akualek* priestesses, as they are

often called upon to accompany Amazon troops to ensure their goddess' good will. *Akualek* priestesses typically fight with a labrys and rarely use a sword, feeling the labrys is more indicative of feminine power.

## SORCERY IN AMAZON

Sorcery in Amazon is often handled through dance and hand flicks. To offer a blessing, a sorcerer flicks her hands from her stomach, then from her heart and then from her head; a curse is handled in the opposite manner, flicking from a person toward her own stomach, heart and head, symbolically taking power from that person into herself.

Sorceresses who worship Mdetis tend to focus on spells that use the evil eye and take feats such as Steely Gaze, Improved Evil Eye and Improved Sorcerous Sight (see *The Scrolls of Skelos* for these last two).

An Amazon necromancer's ultimate test is in summoning or commanding the most dead thing of all: stone. Necromancers who can summon an earth elemental are considered to have nearly godlike power and none will stand against them.

Amazon summoners often form *demonic pacts* with Ishiti (see *Stygia – Serpent of the South*), various gorgons (see *Shem – Gateway to the South*) or other demons that resemble or claim to serve their goddess. Some claim that a *greater demonic pact* can be established with Mdetis herself, that she is simply an extremely powerful gorgon.

## AMAZON GOVERNMENT

Amazon is split into various provinces, sub provinces and basic village territories. At the head of this complex chain of division is the Queen of the Amazons. Currently, Amazon is ruled by Queen Nzinga. Her rule is law but she must always be cognisant of the will of the people, for if they lose faith in her she loses her position. She appoints the nobles who rule the provinces and she has the power to remove any of them from office but generally politics keep her from exercising that right as often as she might like.

The villages offer tribute and taxes to the sub provinces who in turn







pay tribute and taxes to the provinces, who then pay tribute and taxes to the Queen. All rulers are expected to appear annually before the Queen and give an account of their realms and their actions.

The hierarchal structure is nearly feudal in design. Those higher up are responsible for the safety and well-being of those beneath them. All report to their superior for continued power and, ultimately, to the queen. The Queen of Amazon rules her province and commands at least six *mwena*. The six *mwena* command several *nwena*, or rulers of sub provinces.

## AMAZON LAW

Amazon does not have a codified law system. Law is a matter of tradition and might. When a leader looks at crime, tradition comes first, bolstered by an overall need to maintain community cohesiveness. A leader will always look at the emotional climate around her. As with most of the Black Kingdoms, stability of the community is paramount, so nothing is simply black-and-white in nature; everything is a shade of grey. Traditionally, women are not permitted to allow themselves to be dominated by men. Treason or disloyalty are also crimes, unless such is the will of the community (allowing a community to overthrow and replace its leaders without legal consequence). Punishments include death and exile, as well as fines, work punishments and enslavement. Leaders who become sickly are expected to step down because the health of the land is linked to the health of the leaders.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF AMAZON

Amazon is a largely tropical nation. The north, especially the north-west, suffers the hot, dusty and dry winds from the desert region. The south is buried in the equatorial rain forest. The rest of the nation is open savannah and forested savannah. Forest covers 78% of the land, with the densest and most diverse forests in the south. Much of the land is subject to flooding from the rivers during the height of the rainy season. The rivers are numerous but most are small and difficult to navigate because of shallow waters. Most rivers are somewhat navigable between the months of *Kashipu* and *Cyongo*.

**Ogham Lake** – The river system in the Ogham Mawena sports a deep lake, the deepest in Amazon. In addition to crocodiles, the lake is said to harbour some kind of monster.

**River Styx** – The Styx forms the eastern border of Amazon.

**Ubangu River** – Forming the southern border of Amazon, the Ubangu river is massive and shrouded in both jungles and dark myths.

**Usanga River** – The Usanga River is the fastest moving river in Amazon and much of it is white-water rapids.

**Uthermde River** – The Uthermde River passes near the capital and is noted for its crocodiles and hippopotami.

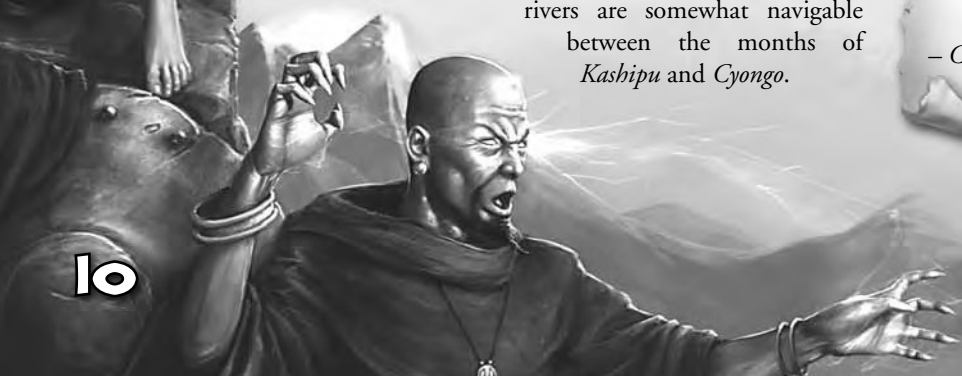
**Gamburu** – Gamburu is the province of the capital.

## IMPORTANT AMAZONIAN CITIES

**Gamburu** – The capital of Amazon is Gamburu. Gamburu was built in ancient times by an extinct culture and its site was appropriated by the Amazons, who built on top of the ruins and mimicked the old style as best they could. It is surrounded by a low wall of uncemented stone blocks that rise to twice the height of a man. There are four gates in the circular wall; each gate is flanked by guard towers with archer slits and machicolations.

Some of the stones were ordinary fieldstone, crudely chipped to fit. Others were finely dressed ashlars, but worn as if by great age. ...the houses inside the city showed a similar mixture. Most of the buildings were of one or two stories, with roofs of thatch. The lower story was in most cases made largely of the old, well-carved stones, while the upper was composed more of newer and cruder masonry. Here and there a bit of sculpture, such as a frowning, demonic face, appeared on the surface of one of the worn old stones; but it was as often as not mounted in its all sideways or upside down.

– *Conan the Buccaneer*



- ❖ **The Bazaar:** Gamburu has a bazaar where merchandise is spread under awnings. The bazaar connects to a broad avenue that leads to a central plaza.
- ❖ **The Central Plaza:** The plaza is 'a bowshot across' and is fronted on one side by the royal palace. In the centre of the plaza is a shallow pit a hundred feet in diameter. Its rim is cut into the earth in a series of concentric steps to create seating all the way to the arena floor. In the centre of the pit is sand and a peculiar clump of kulamtu trees surrounded by human bones.
- ❖ **The Royal Palace:** The royal palace is an imposing but well-worn structure of dull-red sandstone. On either side of the gate to the palace are a pair of massive red sandstone statues but they are so worn no one knows what they once represented.

## MAWENA (PROVINCES)

There are no hard and fast boundaries for the provinces. This often creates conflict but maps and other modern conventions are impractical or unknown in Amazon during the Hyborian age. Thus, boundaries are not clearly defined. Some of the major provinces are discussed below. The Games Master is encouraged to create his own provinces and to re-arrange these as suits his needs. The *mawena* are not static. Sizes and locations may change through wars and deceit.

**Mbemba** – The largest province of Amazon, Mbemba provides much of the defence against aggressions by Keshan.

**Nsunde** – Nsunde is the second largest district of Amazon.

**Mpembu** – North of the capital, Mpembu is a small province but important in regards to trade with the Ghanatas.

**Mpanga** – Mpanga is a mid-sized *mawena*.

**Nkusi** – Nkusi is a small province to the east of the capital.

**Sayu** – Sayu is a complicated province split up into several sub provinces.

## FIENDS AND MONSTERS OF AMAZON

Gorillas, forest elephants, hippopotami, lions, crocodiles, leopards, rhinos, snakes, scorpions, tarantulas, ants and mosquitoes are all part of the fauna of Amazon.

In addition to these mundane threats, several uncanny creatures can also be found in Amazon, a few of which are detailed here.

### GIACHAS

Large Monstrous Humanoid

**Climate/Terrain:** Warm jungles

**Organisation:** Solitary, gang (2–5), band (6–9 plus 35% non-combatants), hunting/raiding party (6–9), or tribe (21–30 plus 35% non-combatants)

**Initiative:** +4

**Senses:** Listen +4, Spot +7, low-light vision

**Languages:** Giachas

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**Dodge Defence:** 18; 22 vs. ranged

**Parry Defence:** 29

**Hit Points:** 102 (12 HD); **DR** 2

**Saves:** Fort +12, Ref +4, Will +5

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**Speed:** 40 ft.

**Space:** 10 ft.; **Reach:** 10 ft.

**Melee:** Large spear +19/+14/+9 (2d8+7, ×3 critical, AP 9)

**Base Atk** +12; **Grp** +23

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**Abilities:** Str 25, Dex 11, Con 18, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 6

**Feats:** Cleave, Fighting-Madness, Improved Sunder, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (large spear)

**Skills:** Climb +7, Craft (any mundane) +7, Jump +7, Listen +4, Spot +7, Survival +6

**Possessions:** Large spear, large shield

**Advancement:** By character class (probably barbarian)

The Giachas are jungle-dwelling giants who eat the flesh of men. The Giachas scar their lips and cheeks with hot irons. The Amazons believe their homeland is at the source of the Styx. They continually war with the Amazons for their territory. They usually attack from the south-east, so the Mbemba and Mbomau most often take the brunt of their attacks. Some of the northern Amazon provinces consider Giachas to be mythical, used by the Mbemba and Mbomau as excuses for various failings. The Sayu believe the Giachas are simply a tall black cannibal tribe (not unlike the Darfari) and that the Mbemba and Mbomau simply exaggerate their size to make their wars with them sound more spectacular. The Games Master can use the statistics here to create a type of monster giant or simply use tall Southern Black Kingdom Tribesmen as desired.





## COMBAT

In a Fighting-Madness and using Power Attack, Giachas giants have the following statistics:

**Hit Points:** +24 (126 total)  
**Melee Attack:** Large spear +9/+4/-1 (2d8+21, ×3 critical, AP 11)  
**Base Atk** +14; **Grp** +25

They may not hit often this way but when they do, they usually kill most of their foes. This is particularly deadly in combination with the Cleave feat.

## KULAMTU TREE

Large Plant  
**Climate/Terrain:** Warm jungles  
**Organisation:** Patch (3–10) or colony (11–30)  
**Initiative:** –3  
**Senses:** Listen –4, Spot –4, low-light vision

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**Dodge Defence:** 6  
**Hit Points:** 38 (4 HD); **DR** 2  
**Saves:** Fort +4, Ref –3, Will –3

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**Speed:** 0 ft.  
**Space:** 10 ft.; **Reach:** 5 ft.  
**Melee:** Frond touch +5 (1d4 acid) or 4 × frond touch +3 (1d4 acid)  
**Base Atk** +3; **Grp** +10  
**Special Attacks:** Improved grab, swallow whole

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**Abilities:** Str 16, Dex 2, Con 20, Int –, Wis 2, Cha 18  
**Special Qualities:** Plant traits  
**Advancement:** 5–6 HD (Large)

The kulamtu trees of Amazon superficially resemble 10-foot tall, one foot thick banana trees with their spongy, fibrous appearance but with round, mouth-like orifices at their tops. Below the mouth of a kulamtu tree, a circle of six-foot leaves grows. The leaves are thick and covered with hair-like projections. These leaves are mobile.

The tree feeds on flesh by grasping sleeping, weak or bound victims, picking them up and placing them in the mouth. The digestive acids inside the tree dissolve the flesh and the tree regurgitates the bones later. The projections on the leaves feel like a hornet's sting on the flesh and the tree can use

up to four fronds to grapple a person. One frond may cover the face to keep the victim from breathing. The leaves also secrete an acid, leaving itching, red spots where they touch flesh. The tree's roots are thin and close to the surface so it can be knocked loose if enough strength is applied to it. The tree is not especially fast, so it usually only tackles wounded or weakened prey. The trees feel pain and will halt attacks if seriously injured.

In the wild, kulamtu trees are sometimes found growing among lotus plants, competing with the lotus for the prey that falls victim to the lotus' miasma.

## COMBAT

The tree targets helpless or weak prey by attacking with its mobile fronds.

**Improved Grab:** If the creature hits with a melee attack, it deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. Improved grab works only against Medium-size or smaller opponents. Each successful grapple check the creature makes during successive rounds automatically deals 1d4 points of corrosive sap damage. When a creature gets a hold after an improved grab attack, it pulls the opponent into its space. This act does not provoke attacks of opportunity. The creature is not considered grappled while it holds the opponent, so it still threatens adjacent squares and retains its Dexterity bonus. If it grabs an opponent with at least three limbs and can lift the opponent's weight, it can put the victim in its mouth after two rounds of lifting.

**Swallow Whole:** If a creature with this special attack begins its turn with an opponent held in its mouth (see Improved Grab), it can attempt a new grapple check (as though attempting to pin the opponent). If it succeeds, it swallows its prey and the opponent takes corrosive sap damage of 1d12 points. The victim must be Medium-size or smaller. A swallowed creature is considered to be grappled (and takes 1d12 points of corrosive sap damage per round), while the creature that does the swallowing is not. A swallowed creature is held so tight all it can do is try to escape the grapple. If the swallowed creature escapes the grapple, success puts it back in the attacker's mouth, where it may be swallowed again.

**Plant Traits:** Plants are immune to all mind-affecting effects and any poison or paralysis effect not specifically designed to affect them. They are not subject to critical hits or death by massive damage.







# Aquilonia

## The Proudest Kingdom of the World

The proudest kingdom of the world was Aquilonia, reigning supreme in the dreaming west.

– *The Nemedian Chronicles*

Aquilonia is the most advanced and powerful of the Hyborian kingdoms. Its people are proud and comparatively well-off. In Conan's time, Aquilonia most closely resembles Medieval France in culture and ecology. The political situation is rife with intrigue, murder and horror and could easily be the setting for untold campaigns. Aquilonia's barons and counts maintain ancient feuds from generation to generation and those along the frontiers fight Picts, Cimmerians, Nemedians, Ophireans and each other.

Aquilonia's people are varied and interesting. Overall, Aquilonians have long heads and are a tall, rangy race. City dwellers tend to be portly in rich Aquilonia and relatively few suffer from hunger. Their military forces rely mostly on cavalry units commanded by heavily armed knights, although pikemen and spearman from Gunderland and archers from the Bossonian Marches are also prized.

More information about Aquilonia can be found in *Aquilonia – Flower of the West*. An overview is provided here.

## HONOUR

Aquilonians tend to have a civilised code of honour (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game*), although alternative codes of honour are also found. Honour is a real concept for the Aquilonians, one that impacts their reputations, moral identities and self-perception. This honour extends to family and friends. Impugned honour results in duels or other forms of redress. The aristocracy consider their honour to hold them above the rabble; honour to them is as real as a castle but vastly more important, for a damaged castle can be more easily repaired than damaged honour. Indeed, acts that otherwise would be

considered criminal can be excused if they are committed as a matter of honour. Honour is especially important on the borders of Aquilonia where law enforcement is minimal and the people enforce their own laws.

## ALLEGIANCE

Aquilonia is built upon the concept of allegiance toward others. The entire feudal system depends upon allegiance, the reciprocal ties between individuals and between families. Allegiances are considered more binding than law. An honourable character will declare at least one allegiance. Characters with unknown or no allegiances are not trusted in Aquilonia.

## AQUILONIAN CLOTHING

Most people in Aquilonia wear woollen outer clothing and undergarments made of linen. Most merely wear simple tunics with hose and soft leather boots. The wealthy all across Aquilonia dress well, preferring brighter colours, better materials and longer lengths than styles worn by the peasants. Elaborate silken jupons, close-fitting jackets, gilt-braided skirts and jagged sleeves are typical outfits worn in the courts of Aquilonia. Hair is usually curled and scented, bound with cloth-of-silver or cloth-of-gold bands. Plumed caps adorn the heads of most of the male aristocrats. Most nobles wear swords, though many of them are merely ceremonial weapons. Aquilonian fashion for men often includes a moustache. Despite these similarities, clothing styles vary from region to region in Aquilonia.

In Tauran and the central baronies and counties, women wear woollen hose fastened to a belt to cover their legs. A cote, a long-sleeved, low-waisted, long-skirted dress, is added over the hose. A short-sleeved surcoat is worn over the cote and a cloak is fastened over one shoulder. Wealthy women wear





wimples, scarves worn over the head and gorgets, scarves that cover the neck. Men in the central regions wear hose and pleated jackets.

In Gunderland and Bossonia, women wear short, sleeveless slips called pelicons, as undergarments. Long-sleeved, ankle-length chainises are worn over the pelicons. Shorter-skirted kirtles with long, flaring sleeves are worn over the chainises. Cloaks or capes are often worn fastened at the throat. Women's hair is worn braided, although unmarried women and girls may wear their hair down. Men wear tunics with surcoats. Gunderland men wear their hair long, usually held back in a pony-tail.

In Poitain, the undergarment for women is a low-necked, long-sleeved chemise. Over the chemise is worn a short-sleeved corset that displays the chemise. A houppelande, a voluminous dress with long, flaring sleeves, is worn by wealthier women. Waistlines are worn high in Poitain. In poor weather, mantles are worn, fastened by a strap across the collarbone. The women also wear elaborate headwear, often tall steeple caps with gauzy veils. Men wear hose and skirted jackets. The longer the skirt, the wealthier the man.

In the Westermarck, virtually all clothing is homemade. Frontiersmen and women often fashion garments from soft animal-hides: buckskin boots laced halfway to the knee, leathern breeks, deerskin shirts and jackets, fur or straw hats. Wealthier frontier Aquilonians might trade with the Bossonians for linen or silk cloth from the central provinces and dress in more traditional, Aquilonian fashions, though few borderers are concerned about fashion and decoration.

## SEX ROLES IN AQUILONIA

In Aquilonia, women, whether noble or peasant, hold a difficult position in society. Often assigned such tasks as cooking, baking bread, sewing, weaving and spinning, Aquilonian women are considered less important than men. Women outnumber men in Aquilonia so it is not unheard of for some Aquilonian women to hold occupations typically reserved for men. Many learn a trade from a father or husband and simply carry on the man's work when he dies. Women tend to have an easier time in rural settings.

Urban Aquilonian women tend to be more pigeonholed, as many guilds will not admit women save via their husbands. As

a result, establishing oneself as a professional single woman is difficult and many young women who move to the cities and fail to find domestic situations turn to prostitution.

Women are under the control of their fathers until they marry. Although peasants have more free choice in marriage because their dowries are either small or non-existent, aristocratic women are subject to arranged marriages. Their lands and potential children are too important to noble families to be given away indiscriminately. Unlike women in many of the Hyborian age nations, the aristocratic women of Aquilonia are more than just appendages, more than just objects of exchange or vessels for reproduction. Landholding women have a number of rights and can exercise power rather liberally. A common marital gift to a noble woman is feudal property and such a woman can control and oversee her own property. Wealthy women can inherit property and become fully vested feudal lords. They can settle disputes over vassals, castles and other property. Women can even field armies, leading them into battle.

## LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Young girls in Aquilonia are brought up to expect to be married. Only noble girls of means and wealth can afford to remain single, usually by devoting themselves to Mitra. The need to marry well has promoted an industry of marriage-brokers and match-makers throughout Aquilonia. Romantic love plays very little role in Aquilonian marriages – marriages are far too political and economic to leave such things to mere attraction and choice. Marriages, except among the poor, are almost always arranged by parents to ensure the prosperity of their children. The family of the bride is responsible for providing a dowry, which is usually a portion of land, a fief or a manor (or more). Peasant dowries can also include money or livestock if land is not available. The truly poor marry without dowries and often manage to marry for love. A groom is also expected to provide a dower, which often consists of land as well. Marriage serves as a form of wealth redistribution in Aquilonia, which in turn puts more pressure on wealthy girls to marry well than peasant girls.

## PROPERTY

Land and property are sources of wealth and social prestige. The feudal lords of Aquilonia are key players in politics and economy because they own land. These lords often seek to increase their holdings and their power. In Aquilonia, property acquisition is accomplished through the relationship between the lord and vassal over benefices such as land, mills, ovens, tanneries, mines, quarries, rivers



and forests or any combination thereof. This can include ownership or simply be a bestowment of administration.

## SOCIAL STANDING

There are four distinct social orders in Aquilonia, each with its own unspoken rules and hidden habits. These four orders are the labourers, the townsmen, the aristocracy and the clergy. These orders are social and political in nature, not economic, for status and position are not determined by money. Feudalism is a political structure, not an economic structure.

**Labourer:** Labourers work the land for their necessities. They work not only to survive but to support those who do not labour, such as the clergy and the aristocracy. There are four categories of labourer in the Hyborian kingdoms: the peasant, the serf, the yeoman and the cottager.

**Peasant:** A peasant is a free man who lives in a village or more rural setting and owns his own land or, at most, owes rent on his land. Most peasants are farmers, although some are craftsmen. Peasants only owe a lord labour obligations during harvest time.

**Serf:** A serf is a man who lives in a village or more rural setting but, unlike the peasant, has had his freedom restricted by a feudal lord, owing labour duties. Most serfs are farmers but, like peasants, may also be craftsmen. A serf is not a slave because no one owns him. He is, however, tied to a plot of land owned by someone else. A serf cannot leave the land he is tied to without his feudal lord's permission.

**Yeoman:** Yeomen are freeholders who own no land or owe a feudal duty. Many of these people live in a village but are not of the village, considered outsiders or dependents instead of full members of the community. Peasants who lose their lands or come to the village landless are yeomen. Many make their way as hired hands, moving from one village to another; others are permanently employed as manorial labourers. Journeymen (a step above an apprentice craftsman) are in this category.

**Cottager:** Cottagers are persons who own no land but at least own or rent a residence. Essentially, a cottager is someone who accepts a building to live in, even if it is little more than a shed and moves in with his family. He works on the land owned by the wealthier peasant or the feudal lord in return for being allowed to live in a residence. Cottagers live on the fringes of society and are often looked down upon by peasants and even serfs.

**Free Townsfolk and Burghers:** Free townsfolk are often considered labourers by the aristocracy even though they do not labour for the aristocracy or the clergy. They labour for themselves. Town life is distinct from country life, despite their interdependency on each other.

**Aristocracy:** The aristocracy contains a large and fluid social range. The ranks of the aristocracy are extremely dynamic because the fortunes of war and marriage bring families up and cast them down quickly. There are four categories of aristocracy in the Hyborian kingdoms: royalty, the peerage, the gentry and the knights.

**Royalty:** Hyborian royalty are the ruling families of the Hyborian kingdoms.

**Peerage:** Hyborian peers are not only political rulers but also hold the military in their hands and have their own social affairs. This social order has an amazing amount of material security and political power; Hyborian peers usually spend their time in efforts to keep their station and improve it.

**Gentry:** The lowest station of the lesser nobility is the gentry. Members of the gentry are knights who hold land and exercise feudal rights.

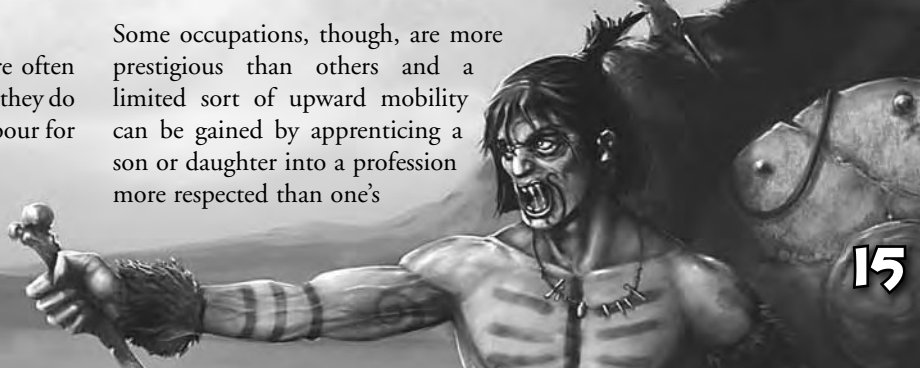
**Knight:** The military arm of Hyborian nations is comprised of those landless knights and soldiers raised by the various feudal lords as part of their obligations to the barons, counts and kings.

Far below the status of the nobility and the military, beneath even the station of the commoners, the slaves of Aquilonia toil. In *The Phoenix on the Sword*, Thoth-Amon, the greatest sorcerer in the world, lives as a slave in Aquilonia. The cult of Asura in Aquilonia keep slaves; slaves routinely pilot cult members' boats of the dead down the Khorotas river. The people of Gunderland, however, keep no slaves and find even the mere idea of slavery distasteful.

## SOCIAL MOBILITY

There is little social mobility in Aquilonia save via marriage. No matter how well one behaves, no matter how much one accomplishes, no matter how much wealth one accumulates, one cannot be elevated in status because of those things. Misbehaviour short of criminal also does not decrease one's social standing. Downward movement is certainly easier than upward movement. For example, if a noble takes a job, he is disqualified from the nobility, for the aristocracy does not labour for a living. Also, criminal action could cause one to be outcast from society, leaving a character without legal protection.

Some occupations, though, are more prestigious than others and a limited sort of upward mobility can be gained by apprenticing a son or daughter into a profession more respected than one's







own. The only sure ways to move upward in Aquilonian society are via marriage, to be granted noble status for extraordinary service to a feudal lord or, as in the case of Conan the Cimmerian, to take a place in society with your own bare hands and on your own terms.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

Most Aquilonian trade is relatively local. As farms and manors expand, more and more villages find they have a relative advantage in the production of a few goods and in trading for other goods. Most Aquilonian merchants and peddlers travel from village to village selling goods. In the large towns and cities, trade is dominated by the craft and merchant guilds. Guildsmen tend to band together for mutual trade protection. They work together to bar or restrict trade in whatever merchandise is protected by the guild, forcing merchants and traders in foreign goods to pay a stipend or fee for the right to sell their goods in the city. The tariff is then split between all the relevant merchants and a portion is given to the feudal lord or city for the right to charge the tariff.

The manor is the economic unit of life in Aquilonia. A manor consists of a manor house and one or more associated villages and acres of land numbering in the thousands. Fully a third of the land is devoted to supporting the noble fief-holder and his retinue. The serfs and peasants who work the land are usually required to spend half their time working the portions set aside for the nobility but have the rest of the time to work their own lands or to work on special projects, such as building bridges or roads, as required by the local lord.

## THE MILITARY OF AQUILONIA

The local lords maintain their own military and can be ordered by the king to fight. These military men, knights and chevaliers, become their own class of citizenry by Conan's time. Often these fighting men have names for their units; the imperial troops are known as the Black Legion and the king's personal protective knights are known as the Black Dragons. The soldiers of Aquilonia include both a powerful cavalry and an impressive infantry. Aquilonia appears to be unique in the world in its recognition of the importance of a trained

infantry. Most of the infantry are Gundermen, who excel at the spear and poleaxe and Bossonian archers, who are without equal in the Hyborian age for bowmanship. In time of national war, King Conan can command hosts in excess of 50,000 troops, as he did in *The Hour of the Dragon*. Troops in Aquilonia are often signalled via the oliphant, an ornate ivory instrument that a skilled performer can use to imitate everything from the roar of a lion or elephant to the sound of a gentle breeze.

## RELIGION IN AQUILONIA

During King Conan's reign, religious tolerance is mandated; however, as a Hyborian nation, the pre-eminent deity is Mitra. The old Hyborian god Bori is still respected and, in some areas, worshipped still. Aquilonia also has a branch of the cult of Asura operating within its borders. Prior to *The Hour of the Dragon* the cult operated in secret but it may be more open afterwards.

### MITRA

The Aquilonians worship Mitra, the 'universal god of the Hyborians.' The Aquilonians are fervent in their devotion to Mitra and the Mitran priests completely dominate religious life in Aquilonia despite King Conan's refusal to persecute foreign religions. Mitra is regarded as the one true god, standing in the universe with no pantheon nor even a consort to support his cosmic reign. He does command a heavenly host, however. The saints also stand with him, as evidenced by the exclamation from a Poitanian when Conan, thought dead, stood revealed in *The Hour of the Dragon*: 'Saints of heaven!' The religion practices religious intolerance in order to better achieve secular power.

The religion of Mitra is one of forgiveness and peace. It is a religion of civilisation and pacification. It is taught that the wonders of the Hyborian world are the direct result of Mitra's power. Societal problems in Ophir, Corinthia, Brythunia and Koth are depicted as the harvest reaped by those who are neglectful of Mitra's seeds and who allow other religions to share their land. Priests of Mitra are taught many things in addition to theology and philosophy. Many learn practical aspects of their culture, such as smithy work, carpentry, stonework, mining, smelting, minting, marriage brokering, mercantilism and diplomacy.

The philosophy of Mitra's religion is that Mitra is the Truth and serpents (such as Set and Asura) represent Deceit. The religion attempts to overcome fear of death, so it offers a



form of afterlife as part of its belief system. The religion of Mitra has a heaven and a hell. Mitra's followers are suspicious and intolerant of other cults, although certain cults raise their ire more than others. Most hated above all cults are the cults of Set and his entire pantheon of 'apish gods that squat on the shadowy altars of dim temples in the dark land of Stygia'. Next on Mitra's list of devils are the Pictish gods.

In addition to its intolerance toward foreign religions, the Mitran religion frowns upon ostentatious religious displays. Mitra's temples are awesomely plain, yet stately, artistic and beautiful despite the lack of ornate symbols and massive, sweeping structural forms so prevalent in most Hyborian Age temples. The altar is a symbolic gesture at best, for followers of the Mitran religion do not sacrifice humans nor animals to their omnipresent deity. A single dignified statue is likewise permitted but is not worshipped. Any statues of Mitra are considered attempts by the faithful to visualise Mitra in an idealised form, for his true form is unknowable.

Much more information about this religion can be found in *Faith and Fervour*, including initiation rites, religious symbols, taboos and mysteries.

## BORI

Despite the oppressiveness of the Mitran religion, a few small cults exist in Aquilonia. The Cult of Bori is one of these. The Gundermen originally worshipped Bori, a primitive god from their early polytheistic Hyborian origins and small cults dedicated to that ancient god still exist, for the Gundermen will return to worshipping this ancient god after Aquilonia falls. The practice of sorcery is considered unmanly among the Cults of Bori, so it is practiced by women called *seidkona*, who wear blue cloaks and black wool hoods trimmed with white cat fur. The cult is primarily animist and prayers to the spirit world constitute the majority of actual practice. Drunkenness is seen as a sign of Bori's favour, for he has seen fit to allow spirits to possess the drunk person.

## ASURA

The Vendhyan god, Asura, has a small following in Aquilonia, although few, if any, native Aquilonians worship this feared deity. Fire, serpents and water are their major religious symbols of Asura's religion. The Asuran dead are disposed of by sending them down the Khorotas River on a black boat piloted by a slave. For the Asurans, evil is relative and nothing is inherently evil. The

religion champions equality and condemns treacherous violence. Followers are tolerant of other religions and preach vigilance, especially for Acheronian activity.

Mitra and the other gods of Aquilonia are discussed in far more detail in *Faith and Fervour*.

## AQUILONIAN GOVERNMENT

Aquilonia represents the pinnacle of Hyborian age societies, a realm of enlightenment and prosperity. Even so, its forms of government and its treatment of the various economic classes of people fall back on ancient Hyborian traditions. Aquilonia has a feudal government. It is ruled by a king, who divides the land and the responsibilities of the kingdom among various barons and counts, who then subdivide their properties and responsibilities further. The reigning monarch of Aquilonia is currently King Conan.

Aquilonia is an impressively large kingdom and is larger than its king can effectively rule. The king can not prevent local powers from rising except by sending valuable troops to quell them. The king also does not have enough soldiers to enforce his will everywhere. Thus the nations are left with fragmented governments comprised by local counts and barons who perform civil and military functions in the name of the king for an equally fragmented kingdom subdivided into numerous fiefs and sub-fiefs.

The area of each Hyborian kingdom is broken up into smaller territories, or provinces. These in turn are broken up into even smaller pieces. Often the boundaries are not well defined nor do the various lands ruled by a count or baron need to be contiguous. This is extremely evident in the frontiers, where the Westermarck, which considers itself to be part of Aquilonia, is separated from the rest of the nation by Gunderland, which does not consider itself to be part of Aquilonia despite an agreement to the contrary. The divisions tend to undermine the sovereignty of the king and lead to inefficient government by the counts, barons and those subordinate to the upper nobility.

The counts and barons hold noble titles and fiefs when the king grants them official power. The granting of these fiefs is done through patents or contracts wherein





nobles swear fealty to the king and the king grants them all rights pertaining to the land proffered as fief. The fief includes both private property and a noble title. These noble titles are inherited through the male line, although the king may remove a title at his pleasure. The eldest son or the husband of an eldest daughter almost always inherits the noble title. The actual property of the fief, however, can be divided among the lord's heirs however he sees fit. If a dispute over inheritance occurs, especially in a case where a nobleman produces no heir, the king may intercede and name an heir.

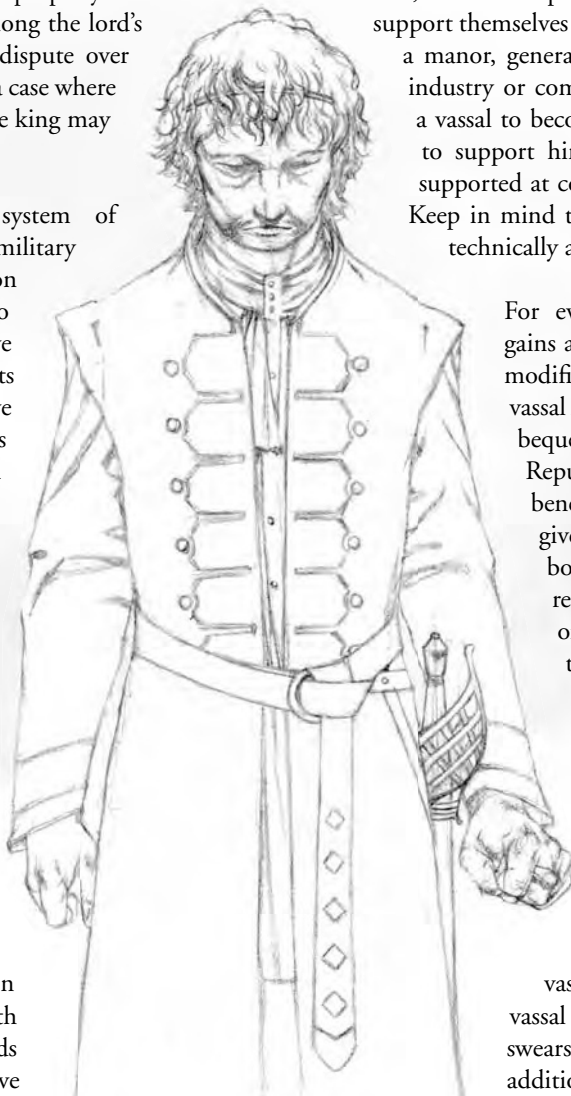
The whole point of this system of government is the obligation of military service to a lord. The whole reason a lord parcels out his land is to obtain warriors he does not have to support. The vassal supports those troops. Vassals who have vassals suddenly find themselves with knights they can send to their lord. Most vassals in Aquilonia pay their military obligation in coin – called scutage – allowing the lord to purchase more professional soldiers – mercenaries. A lord may accept or refuse this payment in coin but most accept it unless the military action requires a vassal's specific talents. A vassal is also expected to provide counsel to his lord. He is obliged to appear when summoned; a vassal who ignores a summons risks losing his fief. The obligation of counsel cannot be bought with scutage. Hyborian feudal lords require their vassals to serve time in their courts as advisors.

Further, most feudal lords require their vassals to gather their own vassals and listen to their opinions.

In return for military obligations and counsel, a lord is obligated to perform certain duties for his vassals. First, a lord must keep

good faith with his vassals and not act in a manner which would injure their honour, life or property. Second, a lord must offer protection to his vassals. The lord must come to the aid of his vassals if they are unjustly attacked. Third, a lord must offer his vassals legal protection by vouching for them and offering counsel and wealth if necessary.

Fourth, a lord must provide his vassals with a means to support themselves – he usually provides them with a manor, generally encompassing a basic farm, industry or combination of both. This entitles a vassal to become a lord himself if the means to support himself is land. A vassal who is supported at court is called a bachelor knight. Keep in mind that the vassal of a vassal is not technically a vassal to the original lord.



For every vassal a lord creates, he gains a +2 to his Reputation and a +1 modifier to his Leadership score. If a vassal has a higher Reputation than the bequeathing lord, the lord gains +4 Reputation instead of +2. Gaining a benefice, royal charter or land grant gives the receiving character a +1 bonus to Reputation. Almost all receipts of manors or other forms of benefice require the character to give an oath of allegiance.

The easiest way to acquire land and property in a Hyborian kingdom is to swear fealty to a lord in exchange for the land. After centuries of this practice, the Hyborian kingdoms have created an environment where many vassals have multiple lords. If a vassal needs more land, he simply swears fealty to another lord in addition to all previous lords. This is simple enough in theory but what happens when two lords go to war and

both call upon the vassal for aid? To avoid situations where the vassal must be forced to choose between his lords or simply ignore both lords, the Hyborian kingdoms have created a hierarchy of lordship called liegeancy, wherein one lord is the acknowledged liege lord and beneath him are simply lords. In essence, allegiances are given orders of precedence.





If a vassal or lord fails his obligation, there are three remedies available. One is a public declaration of loss of faith. This declaration tells society that there has been a failure in performance, resulting in a -10 penalty to Reputation to the accused. The accused may publicly explain his actions (resolved through a Diplomacy check). If successful, his Reputation is restored and the accuser accrues a -5 penalty to his Reputation. If unsuccessful, the accused must make immediate reparations to restore his reputation. If this method fails to resolve the situation, the second remedy is available. Combat is the next step in resolving such a failure. If military action is not favoured, there is a third solution for those whose vassals are the problem (this third option does not exist if it is the lord who fails to oblige his vassal). All lords have the social right of entertainment, by which a lord may visit his vassal's manor. When a lord travels, his entire entourage travels with him, including family, advisors, staff, servants, guards, huntsmen, courtiers and sycophants. The vassal must provide room and board for everyone. By forcing the vassal to host the lord indefinitely, a lord can financially make his point.

Vassalage is a contract between two people and it ends when one of the persons dies. Although inheritance is a guaranteed right in some Hyborian kingdoms, such as Nemedra, it is not guaranteed in Aquilonia. If inheritance is not guaranteed, the heir of a vassal who wishes to become a new vassal to the lord must pay relief to that lord in addition to swearing allegiance. Relief is equal to one year's income of the fief in question, which may include many manors. If an heir is not of age, a lord may claim wardship and pay the relief payment to hold the fief as his own until the heir comes of age, swears allegiance to the liege lord and claims the land. If a vassal dies without heirs or is unable to pay the relief, the fief escheats, or returns, to the liege lord. If the heir is female, the liege lord has the right to determine who the female vassal marries if she pays the relief to retain control of the fief. If she wishes to choose her own husband she must pay twice the relief for that right. If she wishes to remain unmarried, yet be a vassal, she has to pay three to five times the relief, as well as prove she can live up to the obligations of a vassal as well as a man. If she cannot afford the high relief, she will be forced to marry whomever the liege lord chooses for her.

Unfortunately, the political and military structure of Aquilonia tends to maintain only the illusion of unity beneath the king. The counts and barons frequently can and do ignore the edicts and commands of the king. Although the king rules all of Aquilonia in theory, the true practice of power there shows that the king rules Tarantia and its surrounding manors only. Many times in Aquilonia's history have provinces taken

themselves outside of Aquilonia and had to be 'reacquired' by the king's force of arms. Aquilonia's borders swell and shrink depending on the relative strength of the various kings. King Conan is a strong king, yet even he has his problems with the various provinces, nobles, peoples and manors across his great kingdom. The wars between the nobles, which once were many, are now few. King Conan intercedes as much as he can with barbaric ferocity.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF AQUILONIA

Aquilonia is a beautiful temperate land which has been slowly conquered by Hyborian civilisation since the fall of Acheron some 3,000 years ago. The combination of a pleasant climate with rich and fertile land has promoted agriculture for centuries. Agriculture has transformed much of the arable land into precious fields of wheat, barley and other vegetables. Forests also abound, although most of the eastern woodlands are reserved for the nobility and are protected by wardens who keep out rogues and dangerous animals. The vast western forests are still wild, filled with panthers, apes, bears, wolves and, if one goes far enough west, Picts. The most notable geographic features are the rivers.

**Alimane River** – The Alimane is a river marking the border between Aquilonia and Zingara. It was too shallow in places to allow much, if any, navigable river trade. In *The Hour of the Dragon*, Conan can walk his horse across the river. A caravan trail follows along the banks of the Alimane. The caravan trail crosses the road to the Khorotas at the village of Pedassa. The Ford of Nogara is a common route for trade from the Saxula Pass to cross the Alimane. A road passes from here to Culario, the capital of Poitain.

**Bitaxa River** – The Bitaxa is a turbulent tributary of the Alimane, flowing over the Imirian Escarpment into the Brocellian Forest below.

**Black River** – This river is the frontier border of Aquilonia and the site of many battles with the savage Picts. The river has a swift current, yet is quite deep and rather wide, carrying a large volume of water. The river's source is somewhere in the mountains of northern Pictland. It flows southward along the border of the Bossonian Marches, then along





the frontier border of Westernmarck. Eventually it curves to the West as it flows into Zingara on its course to the open sea. The Zingaran capital of Kordava sits at its mouth.

**Brocellian Forest** – The Brocellian forest lies between the southern Poitain cities and the Imirian Escarpment. The peasants believe that supernatural beings lurk in these woods. The nobles of Poitain encourage these beliefs, as the superstition preserves the woods for their hunting pleasures. A road runs through the forest toward the Imirian Escarpment where the Bitaxa River carves out the Giant's Notch, a large gorge through the escarpment that the road follows. It takes a day to cross the width of the forest from the edge to the escarpment. Satyrs are rumoured to live in this dark forest but Trocero and his barons do not encounter them while hunting in the forest.

**Fury River** – This river, which flows south-west past Sicas, eventually joins the Khorotas River.

**Goralian Hills** – These hills are in north-western Aquilonia above the Shirki River. These hills have served as the site of several Aquilonian kings' last stands. Amid the crags and tortuous peaks of these hills hides the Valley of Lions, a fan-shaped valley with steep hills that cannot be easily climbed on either side. It is here that Valerius is betrayed and killed during the events of *The Hour of the Dragon*.

**Imirian Escarpment** – This escarpment lies in Poitain. It is passable through the Giant's Notch, where the Bixta River cuts through it. The Imirian Plateau is above it.

**Khorotas River** – This is a major river of Aquilonia. It is navigable in its middle reaches and flows within a mile of Tarantia. Once in Poitain and its mountains, the river falls in a series of picturesque falls, cascades and rapids. The Tybor and the Alimane merge with it and flow to the Western Ocean at Messantia in Argos. The Road of Kings crosses the Khorotas near its confluence with the Tybor.

Fishermen and merchant boats are the usual craft seen on the river but occasionally a slender, black craft bearing one of the dead of Asura floats down the river. The road crosses the road to the Alimane at the village of Pedassa.

**Mount Golamira** – This is the Mount of Eternal Time, called 'black-hearted' in Aquilonia. The legendary

prophet Epimetreus' body was laid to rest here 1,500 years ago in a magically protected tomb. He sends forth his spirit in dreams when Aquilonia is in dire need.

**Ossar River** – This is a swift flowing river that eventually joins with the Fury at the wicked city of Sicas. Its source is somewhere in the hills around Tarantia.

**Shirki River** – The Shirki river is an important waterway through Aquilonia, although it is largely not navigable. It is swift and turbulent from its source in the mountains of Cimmeria all the way past Tanasul, although the rocks at Tanasul are high enough to afford a crossing into Gunderland most of the time. Another crossing exists at Galparan, although it is less certain than the Tanasul crossing. The lower reaches of the Shirki can be crossed by ferries. Rapids and cascades typify this river through the Tauran.

**Thunder River** – This is another important river for Aquilonia and is a border against Pictland. It was named the Thunder River for its long stretches of white-water rapids in northern Zingara and southern Bossonia.

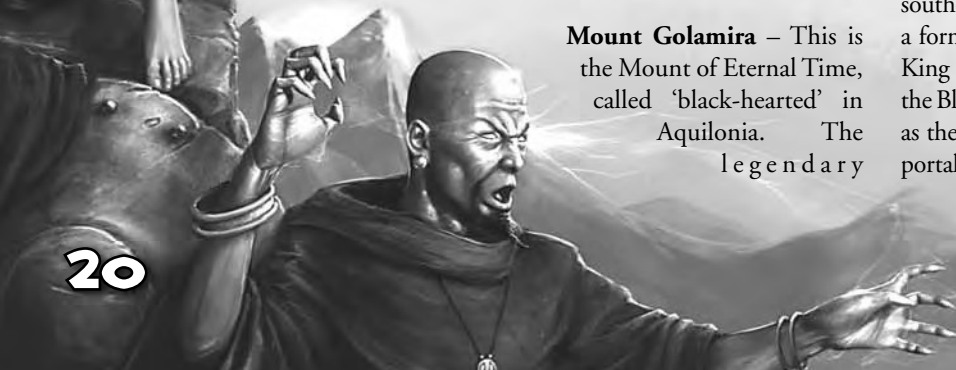
**Tybor River** – The Tybor river is described by Howard in *The Scarlet Citadel* as a placid river marking the border between Aquilonia and Ophir. There is no bridge at Shamar crossing the river, so it must be both deep and wide, allowing for river traffic.

**Valley of Lions** – The Valley of Lions is a fan-shaped valley in the Goralian hills in north-western Aquilonia. See the entry on the Goralian Hills for more details.

**Valley of Valkia** – This valley, with attendant river, lies in eastern Aquilonia about ten miles from Nemedi's border. Mountains lie to the west of it. This is the site of the great battle lost by Conan's army in the beginning of *The Hour of the Dragon*.

## IMPORTANT AQUILONIAN CITIES

**Tarantia** – Tarantia is the capital of Aquilonia, the 'most princely city of the world's West.' This great walled city stands regally on a plain not far from the Khorotas River in south-eastern Aquilonia on the Road of Kings. This city is a formidable centre of commerce as well as the home of the King of Aquilonia, Conan. The troops based here are called the Black Legion and the king's personal bodyguard are known as the Black Dragons. The gates are guarded by great bronze portals. The wealthy travel about town in chariots. Tarantia's population exceeds 80,000 most of the time.



❖ **The Citadel:** The king's palace with its blue and golden towers is surrounded by thick walls and battlements. Gunderland pikemen and Bossonian archers protect the walls. The walls are penetrated via a barbican. Passing through that gatehouse leads one to a drawbridge, then to the inner barbican where an iron portcullis and massive double doors defend the outer ward. This outer ward houses the servant's quarters, stables, wells, forges, groves, fields and other castle support. An interior wall surrounds the keep, where Conan and his family live. A gate allows access to the inner ward where the more direct castle support can be found, such as the kitchens and bakeries, the private gardens and the royal stables. The keep itself is the strongest portion of the entire royal citadel.

❖ **The Iron Tower:** 'The grim Iron Tower stood apart from the citadel, amid a maze of narrow streets and crowding houses where the meaner structures, appropriating a space from which the more fastidious shrank, had invaded a portion of the city ordinarily alien to them. The Tower was in reality a castle, an ancient, formidable pile of heavy stone and black iron, which had itself served as the citadel in an earlier, ruder century' (Robert E. Howard, *The Hour of the Dragon*). The infamous Iron Tower is used now to execute Aquilonia's political enemies, although a thousand years or more ago it was the primary castle of the Hyborian king who originally ruled these lands. The interior of the Tower is as forbidding and gloomy as the exterior.

**Corialan** – Corialan is a small, vibrant city on the route between Tarantia and Corinthia.

**Culario** – Culario is the capital of Poitain. It is located in the south. The streets are narrow and the flags of Poitain fly proudly from the battlements. The city holds elections for its mayor. It has a population of 15,223.

**Fort Tuscelan** – Fort Tuscelan is a fort on the east bank of the Black River and is charged with protecting Conajohara from the Picts. It fails and is destroyed by the Picts.

**Galparan** – Galparan is a city on the furious Shirki river and is the site of a risky crossing. It has a population of 10,512.

**Miran** – Miran is a small town a day and a half north of an Aquilonian military outpost. The small town lies south-east of Tamaros on a road toward Nemedi. At the military outpost to the south that road forks, with one fork heading into Nemedi and the other heading into Tarantia. Thus, Miran and the outpost usually have fairly current news of happenings at the capital.

**Samalara** – Samalara is a military outpost in central Aquilonia two days ride from Poitain. Prior to the events of *The Silent Enemy*, Samalara was completely manned by Gundermen.

**Sicas** – This small city (population 10,402) between Tarantia and Shamar was once known as the City of Silver before the ore played out. Now it is a rather wicked Aquilonian city lorded over by a King's Reeve. Most of the royal officials stationed there earn their wealthy life-styles by accepting bribes of almost any sort.

**Shamar** – Shamar is an ancient city, possibly older than Atlantis itself. It is a walled city built on the Tybor River's banks and the river itself supplies the water for its moat. The southern walls are against the river and have ballistae mounted on them. The city is governed by a duke and its most famous export is its wines. It is a strategic and powerful city which has been attacked many times. Ophir has laid siege to it at least three times. Nemedi has attempted to capture it twice. Even Aquilonia attacked it once during a rebellion. Its duke maintains a large militia force that exceeds 2,500 soldiers, having grown since the time of *The Scarlet Citadel*. Shamar is one of the largest cities in Aquilonia and has a population exceeding 42,000.

**Tamaros** – Tamaros is the 'child of Tamar'. It is described as a good-sized town with taverns, inns and gambling houses. It is located near the borders of the Border Kingdom, Nemedi and Gunderland but is in Aquilonia proper. It is considered a northern gateway to Tarantia from the eastern front, so there is a military outpost at the town. Two roads lead from Tamaros toward Nemedi. One is straight; the other heads south-east through a town called Miran.

**Tanasul** – Tanasul is a fortified town in northern Aquilonia. It sits on a reef of rocks, a natural bridge, on the turbulent Shirki River. It guards one of the only fordable places on that powerful river. The other ford lies at Galparan, north of Tanasul. During periods of flooding, this ford is as impassable as the rest of the river. Tanasul has a population of 4,989. This is a strategic place during Conan's war against Tarascus and Xaltotun and events here reveal to Xaltotun's allies that the Acheronian is not invincible.

**Vanandi** – Vanandi is a south-western outpost of Aquilonia.







**Velitrium** – Velitrium is the market centre of the Westermarck province of Conajohara. It is the site of a great battle between Aquilonia (led by Conan) and the Picts. It is the only settlement left in Conajohara with a population of 985.

**Castria** – Castria is a barony of Aquilonia. It is one of the central provinces. Conan offers it as a reward to the Zingaran Murzio, one of Conan's spies. It is governed by Baron Murzio in campaigns set after the events of *Conan of Aquilonia*.

## AQUILONIAN PROVINCES

There are approximately 54 baronies, counties and principalities in Aquilonia. Few of these have been named but below is a list of several of the better known ones. The capitals of most of these places bear the name of the region. The capital of Albiona county, for example, is the city of Albiona.

**Couthan** – A county of Aquilonia. It is located in the heart of Aquilonia. During Conan's reign this province is governed by Baron Monargo.

**Gunderland** – Gunderland is a northern province between the Aquilonian heartland and Cimmeria. Gunderland was once a separate kingdom but chose to become an Aquilonian vassal to avoid capture as a subject people. Despite the concessions afforded to Aquilonia, the people of Gunderland view themselves as relatively independent. After the fall of Aquilonia, Gunderland again becomes its own sovereign state. The people here are tawny-haired and grey-eyed. They keep no slaves and have interbred with other racial types only minimally, thus remaining the purest of the Hyborian blood-lines.

**Albiona** – Albiona is a county in Aquilonia. Its ruling family is kin to the Theringo fief-holders of Ophir. Marala, Countess Albiona, was once Queen of Ophir but now lives in exile in Aquilonia.

**Amilius** – Amilius is a barony of Aquilonia. It is located in northern Aquilonia. It is ruled by Tiberias until he is brought down by Valerius. Tiberias later avenges himself against Valerius toward the end of *The Hour of the Dragon*.

✪ **Raman** – Raman is a barony of Aquilonia located along the border of northern Gunderland. Many border wars are fought here. The old Baron of Raman is named Ulric; he fights against Conan in the civil war. He is a grey-haired warrior, a veteran of those border wars with the wild Cimmerians and peoples of the Border Kingdom.

**Attalus** – The barony of Attalus is located in the southeast of Aquilonia. In *The Phoenix on the Sword*, its baron is a fat noble named Dion who claims royal blood from Numedides' dynasty. Baron Dion is killed by Thoth-Amon. In *The Hour of the Dragon*, Attalus is ruled by Pallentides.

**Pellia** – Although most of Aquilonia is ruled by either counts or barons this province is, at one time, governed by a prince claiming a royal blood-line, presumably the same thousand year old blood line that produced Numedides. Prince Arpello of Pellia has imperial designs and is the strongest prince of the central regions. In *The Scarlet Citadel* Conan refers to the prince of Pellia as a butcher. Conan throws Prince Arpello off the palace walls to fall a hundred and fifty feet before smashing into the streets. Pellia is now governed by a baron placed by King Conan.

**Bossonia** – Bossonia is also called the Bossonian Marches and is a frontier province between the Aquilonian heartland, the Pictish Wilderness and the Cimmerians. Recent expansion westward has placed the Westermarck between the Marches and the Picts but the Bossonians are still Aquilonia's primary defence against Pictish assault. The rustic Bossonians are matchless warriors, frontiersmen of formidable skill who serve as the premier soldiers of Aquilonia's expansionist armies. People in Bossonia live behind walled forts and villages where they can defend themselves against barbarian assaults, be they Cimmerian or Pictish. The Bossonians are well known as archers and hunters, although the Bossonians also practice subsistence farming.

**Cantrium** – Cantrium is of the central baronies of Aquilonia ruled by Baron Maloric.

**Poitain** – Poitain, ruled by Count Trocero of Culario, is the southernmost county of Aquilonia and is Conan's most loyal province. Less than two decades ago Trocero himself led the Poitainians against Tarantia and many Aquilonians remember the devastation Poitain is capable of causing if they should rise up again. Poitain's landscape is of rolling plains and picturesque meadows. Crops of wheat, roses and palms are common. Orchards of oranges are also known. The heraldic emblem of Poitain is a golden leopard. The people here are dark and long-haired, except for some of the peasantry along the Bossonian border, who resemble the Bossonians. These are hardy folk, bred to war from a lifetime of protecting their wealth





from greedy neighbours. There also exist remnants of an aboriginal race in the more primitive parts of the county. The Saxula Pass through the Rabirian Mountains provides access to Argos.

- ❖ **Imirus** – This demesne is located in northern Poitain. It is governed by the fat Baron Guilaime during the reign of Conan, who took it over from Baron Roaldo. Baron Guilaime is brave and supports the king.
- ❖ **Ronda** – Ronda is a barony in northern Poitain. Baron Ammian is its governor. This province is primarily a farming area.
- ❖ **Armavir** – Armavir is a barony of Aquilonia. It is located in the north of Poitain. It has a fat baron named Justin and is another farming province.

**The Tauran** - This province in the north-west of Aquilonia is a land of 'open groves and sun-dappled meadows' dotted with forests. Although they do not live in a border province, the people of the Tauran feel they are as important to the defence of Aquilonia as any of the frontier provinces. They consider themselves superior woodsmen but the Bossonians view the Tauranians as 'ox-eyed yokels' who mean well but ultimately lack in serious woodcraft. The Tauran is famed for its hunting and the deer and panther native to this region are favoured targets. This is a civilised realm, yet the posturing of its people as some

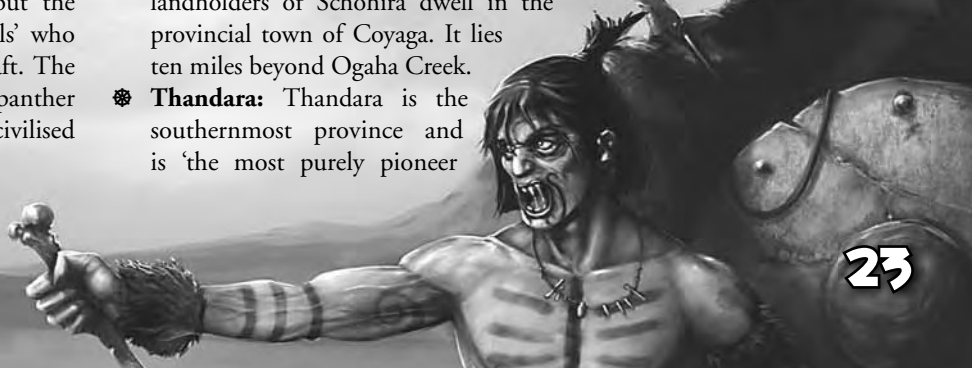
sort of frontiersmen gives a rustic flavour that is quite charming. Homes in this province are thatched cottages with glazed windows. The economy is agricultural, based on the province's extensive fruit groves and the herding of domesticated farm animals in its beautiful pastures.

**Thune** – Thune is a county of Aquilonia. In *The Phoenix on the Sword* Count Ascalante of Thune leads the Rebel Four in an unsuccessful assassination attempt against King Conan.

**Torh** – Torh is a barony of Aquilonia. The overlord of Conawaga, Baron Brocas, governs here during the civil war that leads to Conan becoming king. Baron Brocas supports King Numedides.

**Westermarck** – The Westermarck is a region east of the Thunder River between the Pictish Wilderness and the Bossonian Marches. The Westermarck was established by the order of King Vilerus. This important frontier supplies troops to provide a buffer between the Picts and Aquilonia's heartlands. It contains the following fiefs:

- ❖ **Oriskonie:** Oriskonie is the northernmost province and is ruled by a royal patent under the jurisdiction of a baron of the western marches. This is the least populated province of Westermarck. This province, during the civil war that put Conan in power, supports Conan, driving out the baron-appointed governor and savagely fighting those loyal to King Numedides.
- ❖ **Conawaga:** Located between Oriskonie and Schohira, Conawaga is ruled by a royal patent under the jurisdiction of a baron of the western marches. Conawaga is the largest, richest and most thickly settled province of the Westermarck. This is the only province where landed gentry have settled in any substantial numbers. Baron Brocas of Torh rules Conawaga during the rebellion and forces the province to support Numedides. Scandaga is the capital of Conawaga.
- ❖ **Schohira:** Schohira is the smallest province. It lies just north of Thandara and is ruled by a royal patent under the jurisdiction of a baron of the western marches. This barony also supports Conan during the civil war. It is governed by Baron Thasperas. The landholders of Schohira dwell in the provincial town of Coyaga. It lies ten miles beyond Ogaha Creek.
- ❖ **Thandara:** Thandara is the southernmost province and is 'the most purely pioneer





province'. This province is ruled by an elected military commander. Originally, this province was a fortress by the name of Thandara on Warhorse River. Built on the order of Aquilonia's king and manned by royal troops, it found itself swamped with settlers when Conajohara fell to the Picts (in Howard's *Beyond the Black River*). These settlers held their land, according to Howard, by force of arms and never received or asked for a royal patent. Despite their seeming independence, the military commander elected by these settlers from among themselves required approval by the king. The king did not send troops to Thandara; instead the people built their own forts and manned them themselves, forming companies called Rangers for military defence. This province is extremely loyal to King Conan, being one of the first to support the barbarian usurper. The Little Wilderness lies to the immediate north and the closest Pict tribes are the Panther, the Alligator and the Otter. During the civil war that puts Conan on the throne, Thandara is governed by Brant Drago's son and a council of captives.

❖ **Conajohara** – This was once a northern Westermarck province, a 'narrow wedge thrust into the untamed wilderness'. The land north and south of Conajohara was impassable marsh; Fort Tuscelan was built to protect its western border. Its capital, Velitrium, was on the Thunder River. Conajohara was lost during a Pictish uprising and is no longer a part of Aquilonia's Westermarck.

## AQUILONIAN HISTORY

Aquilonia was founded some 3,000 years ago by some ancient Hyborian tribe. Extremely little is known about this shrouded time. The area where Aquilonia stands now was once part of Acheron. Bossonia and Gunderland were settled by Hyborians during the time of Acheron, driving the Picts to the west. From these early Hyborians Acheron raided for slaves and sacrifices. Acheron used the Gunderland Hyborians as a barrier against the Cimmerians just as the Bossonians were a bastion against the Picts. Sandwiched between Acheron and Cimmeria, the Bossonians were forced to keep their Hyborian blood pure. Thus the nations stood for two millennia.

Although even less is known about the fall of Acheron, according to Xaltotun the fall was precipitated by the theft of the Heart of Ahriman, which was used by a feathered

barbarian shaman to defeat the priests of Set. After the fall, the Hyborian tribes founded Aquilonia and Nemedias on Acheron's ruins.

From its original capital of Tamar, Aquilonia expanded violently, eventually extending to Gunderland, Poitain, Nemedias and the non-Hyborian realm of Bossonia. Nearly a thousand years after its founding, Aquilonia absorbed Gunderland and Bossonia and divided its territories up as fiefs for Aquilonian barons.

A religious upheaval shook the Hyborian kingdoms some four or five centuries later and Mitra became the dominant god. The Hyborian lands were again menaced by Set and his priests. For a period that lasted longer than the lifetimes of three normal humans, Epemitreus the Sage battled Set and his priests, driving them at last back to Stygia. This successful war brought about the religious revolution that placed Mitra supreme among the Hyborian cultures. The priests of Mitra were unrelenting in rooting out Set's temples and, later, in driving out nearly any foreign religion.

Epeus the sword-wielder king of Aquilonia appeared six hundred years later. Epeus battled the Nemedians when King Bragorus of that realm invaded. Sometime during the next four centuries the capital of Aquilonia was moved to the religious centre of Tarantia during a period of intense fighting with the kingdom of Poitain.

Poitain was eventually brought into the Aquilonian fold, although it is not told whether they were subjugated or diplomatically adjoined. Regardless, even in Conan's time some five hundred years later, the people of Poitain barely regarded themselves as Aquilonian.

The acquisition of Poitain spelled a basic end to turmoil in the Aquilonian interior. War, though still prevalent on the frontiers, became largely unknown to the peasantry of the central provinces. Through peace, Aquilonia grew prosperous and rich. Poitain occasionally rose up and fought for independence when a weak king ruled Aquilonia but strong kings would soon reacquire the kingdom and peace would again steal across the heartland of Aquilonia. Revolutions among the nobles occasionally boiled up and the crown changed hands many times across the royal families but generally peace in the heartlands was the norm.

Early in Conan's life, Aquilonia tried to push its northern boundaries further into Cimmeria. This attempt at colonisation failed in one of the bloodiest battles in recent Aquilonian history. The Cimmerian tribes did what was thought to be impossible. They united and fought back.





During most of Conan's adventuring life, King Vilerus ruled Aquilonia. King Vilerus had dreams of imperial conquest, desiring to rule by might and fear. Not learning from history, Vilerus declared the Pictish lands around the Thunder and Black Rivers to be a new Aquilonian province, the Westermarck, believing the disjointed and discordant Picts would never unite to stand against this colonisation effort. Shortly after he divided the new Pictish land up among some of his favoured vassals, Vilerus died and was replaced by his nephew, Numedides, who continued where Vilerus left off and pushed even further. This effort also failed when the Picts fought back as an allied force under the wizard Zogar Sag. The grim assault on Fort Tuscelan in Conajohara by the Picts left only one survivor. Even though Conan, a mercenary at the time, was able to lead Aquilonia into stopping the Pictish Invasion, the Aquilonians lost the new province of Conajohara.

King Numedides was not a strong king. Eight years after the events of *Beyond the Black River*, Aquilonia was embroiled in a bitter civil war, a war from which Conan rose to wrest the Aquilonian throne from the Hyborian scions that traditionally ruled. For reasons undisclosed by Robert E. Howard, Conan stormed Tarantia, strangled King Numedides on the steps of Aquilonia's throne and took the crown of the greatest of the Hyborian kingdoms for himself.

The events of *The Phoenix on the Sword* took place a year or so later. A plot to kill King Conan had arisen and might have succeeded if not for the magic of Thoth-Amon, whose summoned demon killed the leader of the rebels before he could score a deadly blow to the wounded king and the intervention of the sage Epimitreus, whose magic sigil saved Conan from the same monster. Later, the events in *The Scarlet Citadel* unfolded and Conan was embroiled in a fight for his life against the plans of the kings of Ophir and Koth. Yet another pretender to the throne was slain and Conan reigned peacefully for two more years, ruling with a firm but tolerant hand.

## ADVENTURE/ CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Although Conan is a strong despot, his rule is not without contention. The commoners are loyal to him, for he has lightened their taxes and protects them from the excesses of their lords. The frontier lands, especially the Westermarck and Poitain, are also devoted to Conan. It was they who supported Conan during the civil war. However, many of the older provinces of Aquilonia are not as pleased. Conan has reduced their tax revenues

and curtailed their ways in regard to the treatment of the common people. Conan, to these barons, is a savage usurper who must be brought down. Campaigns of imperial intrigue as these barons fight not only amongst themselves for power but also against King Conan would make for impressive campaigns or story backdrops. Many of these nobles know that Nemedica might commit troops to help support a royal coup and a restoration of the old dynasty.

Robert E. Howard indicates in a letter that King Conan likely fought wars of aggression and expanded Aquilonia. An exciting campaign could easily be set against this backdrop of violence. Characters might be soldiers in the Aquilonian army fighting in foreign lands or they could be pitted against the mighty forces of Aquilonia, trying desperately to defend their homelands against the invaders.

Aquilonia's royal maps reveal nearly 700 castles dotting the landscape. Most still see active use but some 180 fortifications have been ruined or long abandoned, either by war, famine or supernatural intervention. This refers only to Hyborian structures. Acheronian ruins also can be found around the countryside. Entire campaigns could easily be built around the investigations of these haunted piles of ancient stone and timber.

The Thunder River is a geographical anomaly in the Hyborian Age. The river does not have a source in any mountain range and the terrain around it is utterly flat, so its existence cannot be justified according to some scholars. Some claim its source is magical – and the Picts are the only ones who might really know. An adventure to discover the true source of this river might provide some thrills.

It is known that Acheron once stood where Aquilonia stands now but the location of Python, the capital of Acheron, is unknown. Some believe its ruins lie beneath modern Tarantia. Others believe its purple towers lie buried elsewhere, either in Aquilonia or Nemedica. Perhaps clues lie in ancient Shamar. A fascinating campaign could be woven around the search for those ancient ruins reared by the giant-kings of pre-human history.





# Argos

## The Maritime Kingdom

Argos is one of the Hyborian kingdoms that rose out of the ashes of Acheron when it fell three thousand years ago. Situated on a coastline with natural sea-ports, the people of Argos have become master sailors, crafty pirates and powerful merchants. Argos is a smaller nation with a population of just over seven million people. Short and stocky, the Argosseans share traits with Zingarans and Shemites, whom the original Hyborian inhabitants have spent centuries marrying and breeding with.

Argos is an interesting land for a Hyborian kingdom. It is wonderfully varied. The sea-ports, especially Messentia, are cosmopolitan and liberal. In contrast, the inland provinces of Argos are peopled with more traditional, conservative farmers, craftsmen and labourers. The roads of Argos, lined with trees, fields and villages, are generally peaceful and the inland folk are friendly toward strangers. Nearly every village has an inn for travellers, most of whom are making their way to Messantia or one of the other port cities or toward Zingara, Ophir or Aquilonia laden with trade-goods.

With its command of the sea and the trade routes, Argos has become a wealthy kingdom. It is wealthy enough to be able to raise armies for war or to hire assassins, spies and diplomats for its own brand of intrigue and subterfuge involving the other kingdoms.

### HONOUR AND REPUTATION

Argosseans do not believe in judging themselves; they always look to others to determine the opinion they should hold about themselves. Thus reputation is important to the Argosseans and most hold – or pretend to hold – a civilised code of honour (see *Conan*

*the Roleplaying Game*). Further, the Argosseans make sure others see them upholding the code. When there are no witnesses, Argosseans do not feel compelled to hold to the code at all.

### ALLEGIANCE

In rural and inland areas of Argos, Allegiance (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game*) is a necessity of life. The feudal framework of the government demands it; anyone who has not declared an allegiance is automatically suspect, for that person has no protector, no one to vouch for him. Written contracts are not typically used away from the coastal cities, so only oaths taken before one's peers are considered valuable or believable. A person without an Allegiance has either not taken any oaths or his word is so suspect that no one wants his oath.

### CLEANLINESS AND ILLNESS

A characteristic of Argossean medicinal theory is cleanliness. Virtually all Argossean cities have thermal baths, both public and private, for this reason. Most Argossean healers recommend cleanliness, as well as a moderation in diet and wine. They believe that overdoing amorous activities, reading by candlelight and overindulging in wine are some of the best ways to get sick. Argossean doctors and healers believe there are four basic temperaments: the jovial, the amorous, the choleric and the phlegmatic. Depending on which temperament is seen as too strong, the doctors prescribe treatments to bring the four into balance. These treatments are usually based on diet. If a person is deemed choleric, it means he had too much fire in his body, so he may be prescribed cool foods, such as fish. Essentially, Argossean medical theory is that behaviour can lead to illness or wellness.

Sickness is caused by three things according to the Argosseans. The first cause of illness is the body's natural degeneration as a person ages. The second cause is natural

predisposition to illness; the Argosseans have noticed that a son with a certain illness often has a father and a grandfather and so on with the same illness. The third cause of illness is immoderate behaviour and lifestyle excesses; certain sins against Mitra can cause certain illnesses. The body reflects the state of one's health, according to Argossean healers, who are trained to read the body as a text. An unhealthy body represents an imbalance of some sort that can be read through signs outside the body, such as on the skin or from excreted fluids. Few trained healers of the clergy or noble orders perform surgeries as it is considered labour and not suitable for them. Educated labourers, such as barbers, can and will perform minor surgeries, including the removal of rotted teeth, amputations and cataract surgery. Argossean surgeons are considered public servants, not doctors and they have a low social status.

## FOOD AND COOKING

For both the rich and the poor, fish is a staple of food in Argos, as are grains, vegetables and various meats. The most common food in Argos, available almost anywhere, is called a 'tile.' It consists of a piece of fried fish in a pocket of flatbread. A relish of olives and peppers is a common garnish for this dish.

## GLADIATORS

Argos is famed for its gladiatorial games. Slaves and prisoners are forced to serve as gladiators and fight other slaves or animals. Condemned men do not even get the opportunity to fight – they are simply slaughtered by butchers or fed to savage animals. The site of countless atrocities, exhibitions in the arena serve as rituals to express man's otherwise repressed savagery. Landowners, lords and barons use gladiatorial bouts to settle land disputes; instead of going to war with a neighbouring lord for land, they host a game between them to settle the dispute. While this saves the peasants from the ravages of war it does require a steady stream of slaves. Argos is a heavy slave-trader just to supply the wealthy and the noble with enough gladiator slaves to please them.

## MEDICINE

Herbal remedies are the most common form of medicine available to Argosseans. Healers specify the type and amount of food and exercise to be combined with a herbal remedy to heal an illness. Occasionally blood-letting, amputations or the setting of bones are needed in conjunction with medicine and diet. Some examples include laying pounded henbane and hemlock on pained limbs, using herbal potions to cure

jaundice, chewing laurel leaves, swallowing the juice and laying the leaves on the navel to cure stomach disorders. Medicine is usually supplied by local herbalists or trained apothecaries. Laudanum and willow bark are used as anaesthetics.

## SLAVES

Argos is a slaver nation. Most slaves in Argos can be divided into three categories: labour, pleasure and sport. Argosseans prefer women and children as slaves. Argossean cities were built with slave labour. Enslaved women and children (male or female) find themselves prostituted if they are not chosen for labour roles. A slave who fails in the first two slave categories can expect to find himself in the third, gripping a short knife and facing a hungry lion while the roar of the arena crowd pounds in his ears.

## ARGOSSEAN CLOTHING

Most Argosseans dress in linen, cotton or light wool in deference to the warm climate and they tend to prefer white or muted colours. The style for Argossean men is a type of robe that is knotted in the front with a cape slung over the shoulders. The cape is wide and, if one can afford it, heavily embroidered. The cape is called a *tebenna*.

Argossean women wear long tunics that hang to their feet. These tunics are usually made of a light material, pleated and decorated along the edges. A mantle or shawl of heavier material is worn over the tunic and is usually colourful.

High sandals, ankle boots and shoes with upward curving toes are the most common footwear. People in the coastal cities usually leave their heads uncovered but the country folk and the interior townspeople often wear hats. The most common hat is woollen but the styles vary greatly from social class to social class. The woollen hat comes in a variety of styles, including a cap worn by nobles, a conical type hat, a pointed hood and, for the farmers, a wide-brimmed hat.

The very wealthy, especially those of the city, are easy to spot, as they tend to dress far more splendidly than common folk. They adorn themselves in velvet, brocade and silk at all times of the year, staving off the summer heat with ice imported from the north and







an army of servants vigorously wielding fans. The wealthy also wear jewellery. Argossean jewellery is unsurpassed in its exquisiteness. The Argosseans have perfected the technique of fixing hundreds of gold granules on jewellery. Earrings, necklaces and bracelets are common.

Men's hair is usually worn short (beards and moustaches are optional). Women wear their hair long, at least shoulder length and they knot or interlace their hair behind the shoulders if it is long enough.

## **CLOTHING IN THE COASTAL CITIES**

Though the clothing of common Argosseans is generally simple and cycles through a small number of minor style changes, the clothing of the wealthy is another story. Fashions can change dramatically almost overnight, particularly among the ladies of the merchant houses in the coastal cities. This is the bread and butter of the city's clothiers and they actively prey on this habit. It only takes the right clothier or a house lady to see a Vendhyan woman in a brightly patterned sari or a Khitan woman in a tightly fitted silk dress before every woman of every merchant house begins wearing something similar. More information can be found in *Messantia – City of Riches*.

## **SEX ROLES IN ARGOS**

Peasant girls begin work with their mothers when they are about eight years of age, performing such tasks as sewing, cleaning and tending livestock. During harvest time the peasant girls join their brothers or husbands in the fields. Girls of the merchant or craftsmen classes are often apprenticed out when they are eight. Usually these girls are apprenticed to other women but it is not uncommon to apprentice a girl to a man. These girls learn their master or mistress' trade until they earn the right to perform on their own or find husbands. Girls of the noble classes are often fostered out to other wealthy homes and estates to learn sewing, embroidery, manners, music and other leisure skills. Regardless of class, all of these activities revolve around one single goal – marriage.

Women are under the control of their fathers until they marry. Although peasants have more free choice in marriages because their dowries are either small or non-existent, aristocratic women are subject to arranged marriages.

Their lands and potential children are too important to noble families to be given away indiscriminately.

The women of Argos tend to be somewhat docile and subservient; nevertheless, when the men are away at war, women are expected to protect home and hearth. Women do not serve in the Argossean military. They can, however, serve as gladiators if they renounce their freedom, social status and citizenship, although King Milo is uncomfortable with this.

## **SOCIAL STANDING**

Argos stratifies its society along wealth lines. At the top of society is the king and his royal family, including cousins, uncles and other extended family members. Beneath the king are the nobles of the merchant houses and the interior fiefs. Beneath the nobles are the wealthy merchants and ship captains. Free men living in the cities or working on the ships are below the merchants and captains. Labourers, including peasants, serfs and cottagers, are among the lowest of the classes; the slaves are the lowest stratum of Argossean society. Despite the stratification of its society along the lines of wealth, Argos remains fairly stable. Gladiators are among the lowest ranks but they have the opportunity to mingle with the upper classes.

## **SOCIAL MOBILITY**

There is little social mobility in Argos save via marriage or the accumulation of wealth. No matter how well one behaves, no matter how much one accomplishes, one cannot be elevated in status because of mere accomplishments or behaviour. Misbehaviour short of criminal also does not decrease one's social standing, although criminal action could cause one to be outcast from society, leaving a character without legal protection. Downward movement is certainly easier than upward movement.

Nobility is never just bestowed upon characters. Achieving nobility is always a gradual climb. To be established as a noble, a character must prove three generations of wealth and/or social service, called the 'three fathers' rule. It does not matter if a man's family had been noble in the past – any interruption of the three generations is all it takes to deprive a person of noble status.

For persons who lose their social status (characters who lose their fortunes in lawsuits or to hurricanes, pirates or other disaster) or even fringe nobles who do not have a lot of wealth and no trade, their remaining career options are few. They could join the ranks of the Guardians or another army, teach or become a gladiator. Each has





its downside. Those who join the military must submit to a strict disciplinary system and would likely never see home again. Those who teach must be literate and willing to win students and fight for their fees. Those who become gladiators forever lose their citizenship and must face death on a routine basis but they are fed well, treated well and have the opportunity to win money or die trying. Since few gladiator contests are fought to the death under King Milo, this is usually the most financially secure way to go for many bankrupt citizens.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

The merchant houses view economics as a zero sum game in which a gain by one party is a loss by another. They see no possibility of economics being used to maximise the common good because any policy that benefits one group must by definition harm the other. Argos' economy is also based around bullionism; the houses feel that the wealth and power of a House or even a nation is measured by how much gold and silver the nation possesses. Argosseans believe that each nation must export more than it imports though the houses impose a strict ban on the export of gold or silver, favouring instead the export of mass raw materials. Argos and its merchant houses have a goal of maximising production with no concern for consumption or the economic oppression of labourers and farmers, who live at subsistence levels. After all, argue the houses, extra money, free time and education for the lower classes leads to laziness and the moral decline of the nation.

Argos' position as a trading hub means that nearly anything is available for purchase somewhere within the coastal cities. Most of the items listed in *Conan the Roleplaying Game* are easily purchased in shops throughout Messantia and the other cities, though some of the more esoteric weapons and armour may require

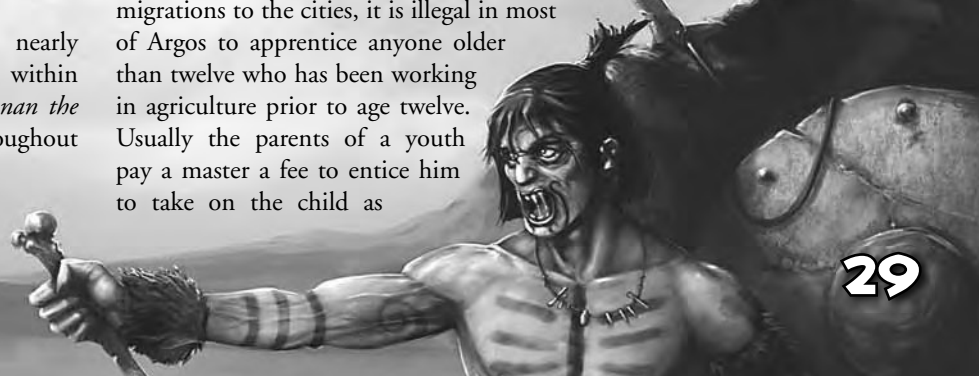
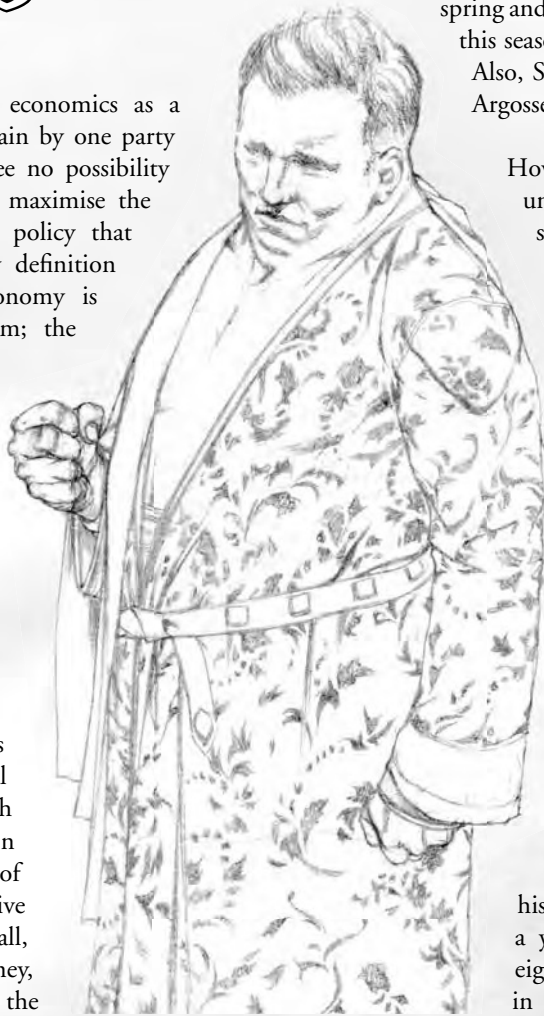
some tenacious searching. The interior towns usually only sell items of need to the surrounding communities, so weapons are hard to find and expensive once one leaves the coasts of Argos.

The merchants employ merchant ships, usually coasters, cogs and other small and intermediate craft to transport goods far cheaper and far safer than those same goods can be sent overland, piracy notwithstanding. The trading vessels are not equipped for extended sea voyages and usually move within sight of shore. Argos' economy is extremely dependent upon a trading season that starts in late spring and ends in the early autumn. It is during this season that fair weather can be expected. Also, Stygian ports are temporarily open to Argossean trading ships during this season.

However, merchant galleys are not uncommon. These larger and more seaworthy craft, including galleons, carracks and caravels, can embark on longer voyages and operate in nearly any sort of weather. Most of these craft, however, have limited cargo space, so their use is usually limited to compact or especially valuable goods. These larger craft are primarily used as war-ships or, of course, by pirates.

Throughout Argos, the basic economic assumption is that everyone is employed by the time they are fourteen or fifteen. Becoming an expert is difficult, as is entering any select inner circle of a group or cult.

A craftsman begins his life as an apprentice, a youth of about seven or eight years old who works in exchange for food, clothing, shelter and an education. To prevent mass migrations to the cities, it is illegal in most of Argos to apprentice anyone older than twelve who has been working in agriculture prior to age twelve. Usually the parents of a youth pay a master a fee to entice him to take on the child as





an apprentice. An apprentice is not paid money in any circumstance and this position lasts for about five to nine years. During his apprenticeship he is not permitted to marry, as the master would then be required to feed and house additional people without due compensation. Some girls negotiate the ability to marry provided some sort of forfeit payment is made to their master or mistress. Also, trips to taverns, brothels and inns are often regulated or banned as well.

Once the master has given his approval of the apprentice's overall work and skill level, the apprentice leaves the home of his master and goes out into the world as a hired hand, carrying a letter of recommendation from his apprentice master. He is called a journeyman because he journeys from town to town, working for master after master to learn different techniques. A journeyman is allowed to work for any master he wants and is paid with wages for his labours. He also collects letters of recommendations from all the masters he works with. Only a journeyman or master may use his Profession skill or Craft skill to earn an income. This stage of a journeyman's career as a craftsman lasts around seven years.

In order to rise above the status of journeyman to master, the journeyman must choose a specific town to settle in and then produce a masterpiece. This masterpiece must be created on his own time with his own materials and tools, both of which are difficult to procure on a journeyman's modest wages. This is further made more difficult to accomplish as most journeymen work for various masters six or more days per week from sunrise to nightfall and most Argossean cities forbid craftsmen to work after nightfall because unwatched artificial light is a fire hazard. In addition to the need to craft an unqualified masterpiece to rise to the rank of master, a journeyman must also prove he has accumulated wealth and reputation. Once a journeyman has produced his masterpiece and has proved his social worth, he is granted the rank of master and accorded the privileges of that class.

A master is a full citizen of a town. As such, he is also expected to be a respectable member of that town, which usually implies that he be a family man. This often means he has to find a wife, which is enough of a hurdle sometimes to keep some men as an eternal journeyman, forever working for other masters. Masters are allowed to establish their own workshops, hire journeymen

and train apprentices. Masters usually build three-storey homes. Their workshop is on the ground floor. The master and his family live on the middle floor. Journeymen live on the top floor. Apprentices are often given beds in the attic. Masters are also given a say in rules, regulations and other matters pertaining to the guild. Most guilds have a restriction on how many masters can operate in an areay, so some journeymen are denied the position for economic reasons until an opening is present.

Along with the social and economic benefits associated with the rank of master, there come responsibilities. Craftsmen must perform public duties, such as patrolling their district, donate time, work and effort for the King and his projects, donate time and work to the Temples as needed and provide dowries for poorer craftsmen's daughters. The masters look after sick and elderly guildsmen if necessary, investigate sabotage, provide for the families of dead craftsmen in perpetuity (or until the family leaves Argos or otherwise becomes capable of providing for themselves) as well as two other important duties: the protection of the secrets of their craft and the assurance of their craft guild's quality in the area.

## THE MILITARY OF ARGOS

Although the merchant houses fight among themselves often enough, they do recognise the need for mutual defence. Each house spends a small portion of its wealth to fund the Guardians, mercenary protectors of Argos' borders in times of peace. These mercenaries, chosen from the population by lot to serve for a term of several years, owe no loyalty, in theory, to any one House but rather to Argos itself.

Argossean lords use conscripts, peasants or serfs forced to serve as military units instead of performing their customary work obligations. These conscripts are usually untrained (or minimally trained) and easily demoralised. Argos as a nation, when it needs to raise an army, simply recruits mercenaries instead of training its own infantries. Argos mostly uses Shemites for its mercenaries, although some units are mercenary Gundermen. The country's bulging coffers enable it to hire large numbers of mercenaries to supplement its armed forces or simply to fight a battle without the involvement of any Argossean military.

While the Argossean military is most famed for its indomitable navy, King Milo can also field an army that all but the mightiest of nations fear. Argos is a feudal land, and Milo must call upon his nobles to



provide troops in time of war, swelling the standing army's ranks to tens of thousands. All Argossean coastal freemen are required to receive some level of military training and, provided they have no dependants and are not business owners, to spend two years as soldiers or sailors.

## THE NAVY

While the standing army of Argos is small, the country maintains a huge navy, which is constantly in operation. Ships ply the Argossean seas up and down the coast, endlessly patrolling the water to guard against hostile pirates and nations and provide assistance to any trading ship that needs it. Though the Argossean army can be a formidable foe, it is the nation's sailors that truly terrify its enemies. While the army is mostly composed of conscripts and militia, many sailors make the navy their career. Adept at fighting on the deck of a ship or the sand of a beach, they are rigorously, even mercilessly, trained in ship-boarding and small-unit combat.

## THE GUARDIANS

Argos maintains a relatively small standing army known as the Argossean Guardians. This army is funded through levees from the feudal barons to help patrol Argos' borders, while guardianship of each city usually falls to regular soldiers. All told, there are some 700 to 800 active soldiers in and around Messantia at any given time and the other coastal cities boast similar numbers. The merchant houses are required to give some portion of their wealth to the support of the Guardians, for defence of Argos is a concern to all.

## RELIGION IN ARGOS

Argos is a Hyborian kingdom and Argosseans worship Mitra primarily. However, Argos is a trading nation and people from many nations go there, live there, work there and worship there. This has bred a certain amount of tolerance for foreign gods, particularly Shemite and Kothic gods. Bel, especially, is held in regard by many Argossean freebooters and fences.

## MITRA

Mitra is regarded as the one true god to those that worship him in Argos. He is a commander of a heavenly host, standing in the universe with no pantheon nor even a consort to support his cosmic reign. Unlike Aquilonians, however, Mitra's urban Argossean followers are apt to

tolerate other cults, although the worship of Set is still viewed with extreme suspicion and anger. Rural Argosseans are more intolerant of foreign religions.

Argossean priests carry the Litus, which is a crooked staff used to trace signs in the sky or on the ground to make ritual divisions. The Litus seems to be unique among Argossean priests; even those who are not Mitran often use it. Many scholars believe it has origins in pre-Mitran times and that Argossean Mitraism simply adopted the symbol when the religion was taken up by the Argosseans.

For the most part, worship of Mitra is as described on page 16 and in *Faith and Fervour*. The biggest difference between Argossean worship and typical Hyborian worship of Mitra is that women are allowed to learn the first two inner mysteries of the cult, whereas the other Hyborian nations do not allow women to learn any of the inner mysteries. See *Faith and Fervour* for more details on the mysteries of the Mitraic Cult.

## BEL

Another god found in Argos, particularly among the privateers, freebooters and fences, is Bel, a god of thieves imported from the Shemite pantheon. Bel is described as both lusty and clever, as befitting a god of thieves. Bel is one of the most travelled of Shemite gods. Worshipped in Zamora, Brythunia and elsewhere in addition to Shem, Bel is the god of thieves, patron of Shumir and Arenjun in Zamora. He is often depicted as an eagle carrying a forked bolt of lightning, hinting that he can steal the powers of the heavens if he so desires, including the powers of the other gods. Bel's worship does not involve animal or human sacrifice.

Bel's priests hold a certain prestige among the thieves and pirates of Argos. Each priest of Bel has at least two levels in soldier or pirate to prove he has served the state for a time before taking a religious life. In order to serve society, each member of the priesthood must have at least lived as one with the society.

Bel's priests teach that humanity was created to serve the gods, to do the labour not befitting them. They teach that the gods revealed to humanity all the skills and abilities they have and use and that mortals have no ability, skill or chance of survival without







the gods. All change comes about by divine revelation or inspiration, not from humanity's perspiration. Bel gives men the skill to sneak and steal.

Bel's priesthood knows enough to manipulate and control society on their own, using divination, tradition and ritual to gain their own ends. Bel's priests heavily preach belief in divination and in demons. Many priests use this belief to forward their own agendas because only priests are taught the precise rituals to influence gods and demons – thus the priests can easily influence their followers.

Priests of Bel are also healers of the sick. The *Asu* healers prepare herbal remedies and set broken bones. They keep their herbal recipes a complete secret. They maintain maximum ranks in Craft (herbalism) and usually take Skill Focus (craft (herbalism)) as a feat. *Ashipu* healers are exorcists who use incantations to drive demons (diseases) away from a patient, often driving the demon into swine, sheep or statues, which are then destroyed. Knowledge (religion) and Knowledge (arcane) is important for them. The *Ashipu* healers learn Counterspells and, for those who can find the spells on their own, Summoning although they never, as part of the official temple teachings, form a demonic pact with a demon. *Baru* healers are diviners who can determine what sin or violation caused the creation of the demon that brought about an illness. *Baru* healers use animal or human organs to read the intent of the gods. The *baru* healers also develop occult arts and ritualistic formulas to ward off demons and to influence the gods whose decisions determine human fate. The *baru* healers learn the divination sorcery style as well as the counterspells style.

Priests of Bel never learn necromancy, which is believed to be the worst and most vile abuse of sorcerous power. Priests of Bel also never enter into demonic pacts. Even the priests of Bel believe in right behaviour to some degree, for their role is to uphold the society that gives them power. They believe that by having positive intercourse with demons and by raising the dead they will curse not only themselves but the Argossean society that supports them and gives them their high station.

Most Priests of Bel take ranks in Bluff, Craft (alchemy), Craft (herbalism), Gather Information, Intimidate, Knowledge (arcana), Knowledge (local), Knowledge (nobility), Knowledge (religion), Sense Motive and Sleight-of-Hand in order to better manipulate people. The priests rarely use true sorcery except for their own needs. Why cast a real spell and expend one's own power when a bit of smoke and mirrors will accomplish the same result?

## GITA

Gita is an obscure spider goddess worshipped deep in the backwoods and among the treacherous hills of Argos. The spider is a female force in this cult. Her priestesses believe in the superiority of noble blood and some engage in breeding programs to produce strong, pliable slaves. The cult praises cunning, patience, skill and industry. Art and beauty are also emphasised. Gita is the Great Weaver, the Creator of Life, spinning the world and all of its people from her own substance – and all people are attached to Gita (and, by extension, each other) through these threads. Mitrans see Gita as a demon, a foul weaver of lies and deception.

This is also a mystery religion, so its adherents take ranks in Knowledge (mystery: Gita). Every three ranks in Knowledge (mystery: Gita) indoctrinates a character into the next of the religion's inner circles.

**First Mystery:** The character is permitted access to the 'benefits of worship' for Gita.

**Second Mystery:** The character learns cunning and resourcefulness. The character gains a +2 bonus to all Bluff and Sense Motive skill checks.

**Third Mystery:** The character learns that power comes with sacrifice. A character who knows the third mystery of Gita learns a ritual to increase their power: by meditating for eight hours, sacrificing a human being as food for the spider goddess and expending 25 XP (or a fate point), the character's bonuses to Bluff and Sense Motive increase to +4 and the character gains a +10 bonus to Disguise for 24 hours.

**Fourth Mystery:** The character can use a Fate Point to gain a +20 bonus any Bluff check made to convince a non-worshipper of Gita that an outrageous lie is the truth.

**Requirements of Worship:** Submit to the will of the priests and priestesses without question.

**Benefits of Worship:** Spells (divination).

**Requirements for Ordained Priesthood:** Must sacrifice at least one victim per year to Gita and must know the second Mystery of Gita (6 ranks in Knowledge (mystery: Gita))



**Benefits of Ordained Priesthood:** Spells (Nature Magic, Divination, Curses, Hypnotism); when the Advanced Spell class feature is gained, a priest of Gita can instead gain the ability to transform into a giant spider as per the *shapeshifter* spell once per day.

**Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests:** Tied naked to a stake and sacrificed to mounds of poisonous insects and spiders.

## ARGOSSEAN GOVERNMENT

Argos is ruled by King Milo (see the 'Who is King?' box). It is a feudal kingdom and the land of Argos is split into different fiefs, counties and baronies. These provinces are ruled by counts or barons. Most of the wealth is held in the hands of the merchant houses and these houses hold much of the power as well. Most of Argos' barons and counts come from these houses. Beneath the king, the counts, the barons and the houses are the military officers; as ship captains and generals of armies, these individuals also hold status in Argos. At the bottom of the social ladder in Argos are the slaves. The strongest and most spirited slaves fight as gladiators for the pleasure of the Argosseans. Occasionally slaves can win their freedom if their skills and prowess are spectacular. Argos raids for slaves along the coasts of Kush and the Black Kingdoms. Kushites are not the only slaves in Argos; people from other races also serve as personal slaves of important merchants. In *The Hour of the Dragon* Publio has a Shemite bodyguard named Gebel who serves him as a slave. Despite the stratification of its society along the lines of wealth, Argos remains fairly stable.

Argos is more politically stable than most of the Hyborian realms. Aquilonia seems to be constantly rebelling and fighting, with provinces ceding and being reacquired. Robert E. Howard describes Messantia as being without walls and utilising the sea for defence. This indicates that Messantia does not fear military action from neighbouring provinces and fiefs – its only fear is of a naval assault.

### WHO IS KING?

If the campaign is set after the events of de Camp's *Black Sphinx of Nebthu*, then prince Ariostro, Milo's second son, is king. In *Black Sphinx of Nebthu*, Zingaran forces kill Milo and his elder son and capture the western provinces of Argos.

Presumably if a foreign army reaches Messantia via an overland route, then Argos is already effectively conquered. The fighting between the various houses, nobles and lords is largely economic and political and rarely involves military action.

The various fief-holders beneath King Milo administer their own estates and exercise their own justice. Most of them mint their own money, levy whatever taxes and tolls they want and field armies. Although each has pledged fealty to King Milo, these individual lords are supreme within their territory.

Argos has much to defend. In addition to its trade routes and wealthy merchants, the land itself is valuable. Much of the forests of Argos are used for timber to build ships, as well as to grow fruits and nuts in well-tended orchards. Its large forests provide an economic advantage that Argos puts to good use. Argos is fortunate in other ways as well.

Argos has a prime location. Not only does the wide Tybor river channel a lot of trade from the interior Hyborian nations into Messantia but it has a central location on the coasts of the charted continent, allowing it to dominate trade – the Barachan pirates, who tend not to prey upon Argossean vessels, easily intercept trade moving toward Argos' ancient rival, Zingara. From its central location, Argos trades not only with Shem and Zingara but also with Stygia and, to a lesser degree, with the Black Coast.

Messantia and the other ports in Argos are rather lax about laws. They make their money from sea trade and illegitimate trade is profitable. Argos turns a blind eye to most acts of piracy. The Barachan pirates, mostly Argosseans anyway, have a safe harbour in Messantia so the Barachans leave most Argossean shipping alone. However, Black Corsairs and any that associate with them are summarily hung if caught by the Hyborians. The Corsairs burn and destroy anything they do not want, taking anything they do want without remorse or care. They do not, in general, trade. The Corsairs and their activities are not appreciated by the Argosseans; they rather fear the Black Corsairs, including the legends of Amra, the bloodiest and most horrible of the Corsairs ever to sail the ocean. Conan (Amra himself) does manage to find a fence in Messantia, but that is an exceeding rare exception. Few merchants will risk their necks to fence goods from the Black Corsairs, for the laws are not lax in that regard.



Killing town guards is also illegal, as is refusing to testify in court. The courts favour the rich in suits against merchants. In Howard's *The Queen of the Black Coast*, Conan is nearly thrown into a dungeon for contempt of court when he refuses to betray a friend. It is in escaping the wrath of the courts that Conan meets with Tito, an Argossean merchant en route to the Black Kingdoms on the other side of Stygia.

Speaking of Stygia, it is important to note that Argos and Stygia wax and wane in their relations as each would be the rulers of the sea-lanes. Largely this is a cold war, a maintenance of a status quo among the two kings of the sea. Battles are usually small-scale and profitable, comprised of various acts of piracy, hijacking, smuggling and poaching. The Conan stories only mention one major battle between Argos and Stygia. In *Drums of Tombalku*, Argos and Koth invade Stygia and the Argossean fleet decimates the Stygian one. Argos apparently was not ready to conquer the entire nation so it pulled back, afraid Stygia might divert much of its Kushite trade overland in retaliation if Argos completely crushed Stygian sea power.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF ARGOS

The coast of Argos has many harbours. Although most of them are not used for commercial reasons, they do serve as convenient hiding places for pirates and merchants hiding from pirates. The countryside of Argos is largely wooded, although large farms and orchards line the fertile Khorotas valley. Outside the valley and away from the coasts, the countryside slowly starts to resemble Shem, shifting from woodlands to rolling, bare hills. Towns and villages become rarer and further apart toward Shem and are more dependant on wells for water than on rains or rivers. On the other side of the Khorotas river, the landscape grows more and more wooded, eventually merging into the ghoulish forests of Zingara.

The roads that interconnect all the various sea-ports run through knife-edged ravines and other convenient places of ambush for inland raiders.

**Alimane River** – The Alimane has many fords so it is not navigable for most of its reaches, although trade routes lie alongside the river. One such ford is the Nogara which

lies near the Saxula Pass of the Rabirian Mountains. It is one of three fords that lead from Argos to Aquilonia.

**Aron** – Aron is an eastern province of rolling, bare hills. It is lightly populated and is most noted for its artesian wells, which are wells of the necessary depth to produce water without the need for pumping. Aron is not a particularly fertile land.

**Astar River** – The Astar is an Argosian tributary of the Khorotas River. There is a ford in Hypsonia that crosses the river. The river forms a border between Hypsonia and the Plain of Pallos and flows to the south of the Rabirian Mountains.

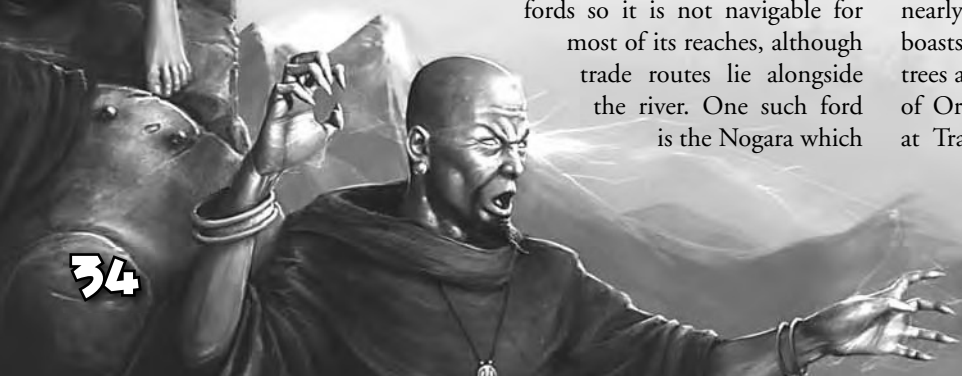
**City of the Ghouls** – This city is somewhere deep within the primeval forests near the Zingaran border. The ghouls of the border country make their homes here, ranging out by night to capture and devour unwary travellers. The City of the Ghouls is detailed further in *Ruins of Hyboria*.

**Didymian Hills** – The Didymian Hills lie between Messantia and the Plain of Pallos. The area is famous for its olive production and its dairy products. Shepherds keep large herds of sheep and goats in these low-lying hills. Fiefs and manors in this area are sought-after by lords.

**Hypsonia** – Hypsonia is a province in central Argos. The Astar River passes along the border of this province, separating it from the Plain of Pallos.

**Khorotas River** – This is Argos' major river, running through Poitain and Ophir and emptying into the sea at Messantia. Although it cannot be navigated by large vessels because of the cataracts it passes through in Poitain, some goods can be moved along it once it is joined by the Tybor. Goods being transported to Messantia from the caravan route through Ophir are placed onto barges at the Tybor-Khorotas junction. The region around the Khorotas river is Argos' most fertile area; its annual flooding brings soil from beautiful Poitain and its mountains.

**Orabono and Orinolo** – East of Messantia, several miles offshore of the Argossean/Shemite border, lie a pair of islands known to Argosseans as Orabono and Orinolo. The western island of Orabono is its brother's opposite in nearly every way. Certainly the prize of the two, Orabono boasts a wide harbour on its northern shore, plentiful fruit trees and grasslands. Certainly the most important feature of Orabono is the Argossean naval base and settlement at Trabatis. Logging camps and farmlands grow more



prevalent outside the city as the merchant houses begin to exploit this virgin territory. What crops and timber are not needed in Trabatis itself are exported elsewhere, generally back to Messantia. On the shallow waters off the beach lies an enormous oyster bed, which is mined for pearls. The waters here are as shark-infested as all others around the island, however, making the work extremely dangerous. Any slave who works the pearl beds for four months is freed. There are still occasional problems with crocodiles and poisonous snakes. The forests of Orabono are home to enormous bears, boars, leopards and sabre-toothed cats as well as several colonies of giant spiders on the southern coast. More information about this island can be found in *Messantia – City of Riches*.

Orinolo is very nearly inaccessible. It is ringed on the south, west and north by great crumbling cliffs, which offer no sanctuary or harbour to a ship. A ship attempting to drop anchor near one of these shores would likely be pulled toward the island and dashed against the rocks by the treacherous tides that swirl among the cliffs. Should someone manage to reach the cliffs without falling prey to any of the perils at their base, he would find the climb all but impossible. The very stone seems rotten with the sea's erosion and firm handholds are difficult to find. For the purposes of a Climb check, these cliffs count as a slippery surface (due to their propensity for crumbling) and impose a -5 penalty on all checks. The cliffs ascend from the water to a height of anywhere between 50 and 80 feet.

On the eastern side of the island the sea slowly gives way to land in a thick, fetid swamp haunted by saltwater crocodiles, poisonous snakes, spiders the size of a man's head and worse. Ships certainly cannot reach the island by traversing the swamp. Even a small boat will run aground or become lodged on the submerged trunk of a rotten tree. Anyone attempting to reach the interior of the island by passing through the swamp will need to use both a boat and his feet to make it, as some areas are impassable to a man on foot, while others cannot accommodate a boat of any kind. Once the land finally becomes solid, it marches uphill through treacherous terrain in a series of broken, rocky steps and cliffs. More information about this island can be found in *Messantia – City of Riches*.

**Plain of Maru** – This is a flat plain of grasses around the city of Athos. The plain is located in north-eastern Argos.

**Plain of Pallos** – This fertile plain lies at the foot of the Rabirian Mountains.

**Rabirian Mountains** – This mountain range in northern Argos forms a border between Argos and Zingara. It is also the location of the Cave of Zimgas, where a being known as a 'watcher' lives. These serrated peaks have forested crests and are broken by the Saxula pass, 'a deep cleft in the central ridge, as if made by a blow from an axe in the hands of an angry god'. The pass is near the Alimane river. The foothills of the Rabirian mountains are rocky and are the home of several villages. These mountains are full of precious ores and are extensively mined.

**Thunder River** – This is another important river for Argos and is a point of contention with Zingara, who covets it so it can have a port at its mouth. It is named the Thunder River for the long stretches of white-water rapids in northern Zingara and southern Bossonia. The port city of Napolitos sits at its mouth.

## IMPORTANT ARGOSSEAN CITIES

Sixteen cities glitter along the beautiful coast of Argos and these cities have an average population of around 11,800. Messantia, in contrast, is a metropolis with over 35,000 inhabitants. Most of the inland residents live in towns and villages. Approximately 85 towns (average population 5,000) and 9,000 villages (average population 700 people) can be found throughout the wooded kingdom. More information on most of these cities can be found in either *Messantia – City of Riches* or *Argos and Zingara*.

**Messantia** – Messantia is the capital city of Argos and is Argos' richest sea-port. It lies at the mouth of the Khorotas River and has no walls, relying on the sea and its navy to protect it. The city serves as a trading center as well as a shipyard for much of the world. The city's laws are designed to protect the rich and those employed by the city (such as city guards) and those laws are often overlooked in regards to sea-rovers, especially the Barachan pirates. The city has an estimated population of 35,400 which fluctuates during the year. Its population reaches its peak during the trading season. Here also resides King Milo of Argos and his court. Messantia is also an anchoring end of the Road of Kings and the beginning of many caravan routes into the interior nations. The main road to Tarantia first winds through the Argossean kingdom,







then moves along the eastern border of Poitain. Another route to Tarantia goes northwest into the ghoulish forests of Zingara, then along the Zingaran shore of the Alimane. More details and a large map of Messantia is available in *Messantia – City of Riches*.

**Athos** –Athos is an upland Argoscean city located on the plains of Meru whose citizens are ‘fat, richly-garbed, and cruel as fiends.’ It is a decadent city where pleasure is foremost on the minds of its citizens. Athos was once ruled by a queen and is still resplendent in its fabulous wealth. The turrets and towers of the city are made of ivory and many of its domes are gilded. Its population wears jewels from Khitai and its streets are perfumed with oils from Vendhya to provide visual and olfactory pleasures to those that wander the city. It has enslaved its sister city across the river, Zotoz. The people worship the goddess Gita, an insect goddess. Red Sonja slew Queen Sortilej, a priestess of Gita; likely another ruler was appointed by King Milo from the same merchant house. Every year Athos sponsors a sporting event called the

Games of Gita. During the time of Queen Sortilej these games were fixed, however the games are now fair. Athos has a population typically exceeding 10,000. Athos is described in more detail in *Argos and Zingara*.

**Bezforda** – Bezforda is a manor near a tangled forest where rumours claim a unicorn lives. Decades-old tales tell of a red-haired devil-woman who lives with the unicorn. The manor has 227 acres (173 acres are arable) and a single hamlet. For industry, the Bezforda manor has three beehives, herds of livestock (including oxen, horses, cows, pigs, capons, sheep and geese), a gristmill, a millpond, a small slate quarry (yielding about a thousand tons of slate annually), cash crop farms (flax, hemp and lumber) and staple crop farms.

**Eidoran** – Eidoran is a ruin on a plateau in the mountains of eastern Argos. During Stygia’s reign over the lands of Argos, the city was built as a city where sorcerers could learn and summon demons from Hell. The first followers of Mitra bound the demons in stone and laid waste to the city. The followers of Mitra guard the ruins so that sorcerers cannot arrive here and unbind the demons. The demons litter the city as statues of pink stone. Columns and stark temples cover the plateau.



**Napolitos** – Napolitos is a powerful city situated at the mouth of the Thunder River. It has a massive population exceeding 17,000 and is a growing trade city, a fact that infuriates Argos' rival, Zingara. At one time Koth attempted an invasion of Argos using this harbour as its main thrust. Napolitos is a chaotic city that grows in a haphazard fashion as different conquerors add to it. It mixes Acheronian, Hyborian, Shemite and Zingaran influences in its architecture and art. It is easy to get lost in Napolitos. For more detail and a map see *Argos and Zingara*.

**Skranos** – Skranos is a fortress in the Rabirian mountains. It is built of concentric squares with thick walls. A herd of mammoths is maintained in the center. The fortress-city is home to some 300 warriors.

**Trabatis** – Founded 20 years ago, the settlement of Trabatis on Orabono is the clearest sign of Argosesean supremacy on these two islands. King Milo ordered the construction of the settlement and its shipyards as a base for his mighty navy, from which his ships could easily patrol Argos' eastern waters and protect the Argosesean claim on the Brothers. Trabatis is covered in more detail in *Argos and Zingara* and *Messantia – City of Riches*.

**Venzia** – Venzia is a seaport that has canals. The avarice of its merchants puts gods of greed to shame. Red Sonja was once attacked en route to this city. She was riding there from Zingara, so this attack was likely near the border of that nation. Venzia has a population exceeding 13,000. Venzia is covered in more detail in *Argos and Zingara*.

**Zotoz** – Zotoz is a city of the uplands of Argos. It lies on a small river across from the city of Athos. The impoverished population of Zotoz are subject to the city of Athos. The people of Zotoz are physically stronger than their masters but, due to their long struggles in abject poverty, are weak in spirit.

## REGIONAL HISTORY

History tells us that a race of pre-human Giant-Kings founded a kingdom that eventually came to be called Stygia after the Lemurians conquered it. That kingdom built Khemi as a trading center. Expanding outward, those early tall, white-skinned merchants built a trading outpost on the mouth of the Khorotas river. These early frontiersmen spread out along the Khorotas river valley building new cities. They enslaved the barbarous indigenous populations. This was the founding of Acheron.

Thus it was that 3,000 years ago Argos was part of Acheron, as claimed in *The Hour of the Dragon*.

When Acheron fell, the lands known now as Argos were claimed by the invading Hyborians. The Sons of Shem and the Hyborians fought for the lands but ultimately the Hyborians swept down from Poitain and won. Argos was the last of the pieces of Acheron to reorganise into a Hyborian nation, following Nemedias and Aquilonia. Argos' location on the ocean was its source of wealth and power and it became the maritime capital of the Hyborian Age, renowned for its ships and sailors.

Argos is at peace with Aquilonia, having helped Conan gain the throne from Numedides; however, Argos did not always enjoy a peace with the great lion of the Hyborian Age. King Vilerus III, who ruled before Numedides, invaded Argos and took a section of land around the juncture of the Alimane with the Khorotas River from King Milo.

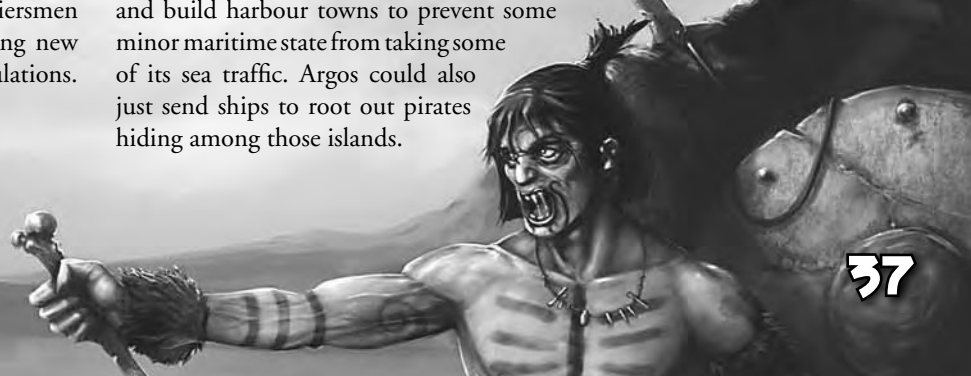
At some time during the reign of Conan in Aquilonia, King Ariostro replaces King Milo as King of Argos. The Games Master should feel free to present this transition of power however and whenever he wishes.

## ADVENTURE/ CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Rumours tell of baby crocodiles, once beloved pets, that have been discarded into the sewers of Messantia where they grow and breed. Thus there are blind, albino crocodiles, raised on a diet of filth and excrement, that live beneath the city. The truth may be even stranger – a race of crocodile-men may live beneath Messantia.

Argos may entreat Aquilonia for a joint thrust against Stygia. Since Aquilonia now pulls the strings of Koth and Ophir, the king of Argos feels he may be able to pull off a coup in that dark land. Argos will offer the fleet if Aquilonia will put up the land troops. Characters could be the diplomats sent to Aquilonia to try to convince King Conan of this action or they could number among the troops.

All sorts of islands exist along the coasts of Argos, Zingara, Shem and the Black Coast. Argos could try to colonise some of them and build harbour towns to prevent some minor maritime state from taking some of its sea traffic. Argos could also just send ships to root out pirates hiding among those islands.





# Atlaia

## The Lost Empire

*Tales of the Black Kingdom* Atlaia is a nation within the Southern Black Kingdoms. It is dominated by lush jungles, nameless and dark, in the southwest and veldts and savannas in the north and the southeast. The warriors of Atlaia are tall and rangy. Their culture is tribal. *Tales of the Black Kingdom* describes the Atlaians as giants among the fierce tribes of the southern Black Kingdoms.

### FAMILY AND REPUTATION

Family is an important concept in Atlaia; most Atlaians will have an Allegiance toward their family (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game* for rules on Allegiance). For an Atlaian, family is more than just parents and siblings. Family includes cousins, aunts, uncles and in-laws. If a dispute erupts within a family, a panel of family members is formed to resolve the issue. Atlaians prefer to build consensus than to strike out on their own. Respect for family continues even after death. Atlaian clans engage in ancestor worship and often maintain small shrines dedicated to their ancestors. This is especially true of their *oloibon* (witch-doctors or shamans) who believe their ancestors guide their healing arts. An Atlaian who denounces his ancestors is believed to become cursed.

### RESPECT AND AGE

An Atlaian respects wisdom and wisdom is not related to strength but to age. Old women possess more power to sway people than imposing warriors bristling with bloodied weapons. In Atlaia a younger person, even if only by a year or so, will nearly always defer to an older person.

### INITIATIONS AND AGE GROUPS

Atlaian clans tend to organise themselves into age categories. A new age group comes about every five or so years. When one advances, everyone in his age category advances with him. Annual birthdays are not remembered or marked – physical development and emotional maturity are indicators of age, not actual years lived. Members of an age category tend to have shared experiences and close bonds. Each age group has its own traditions, rituals and stories. There are twelve major clans in Atlaia and some variation exists between the clans in regard to these initiations. Major variations are noted in the text. Additional variations can be added by individual Games Masters as desired.

### THE TWELVE CLANS OF ATLAIA

The tribes are said to be the stewards of an empire so ancient they cannot even name it. They are divided into twelve major clans. These clans are the Adja, Chama, Jubar, Kimambi, Lupembe, Mwezi, Mzikima, N'Goga, Nyama, Thulaban, Yaraba and Zambah. The clans are further subdivided into smaller tribes and family units but the overall clan marks their cultural identity. Atlaians do not call themselves Atlaians – they identify themselves by their major clan affiliations.

### THE ADJA

The Adja are more curious than violent, offering little more than mild suspicion to most strangers. They are known for their uncanny ability to fish, their superb aptitude to craft canoes and their impressive inclination to hunt hippopotami. The Adja herd cattle and spend most of their time protecting their herds and finding land to graze their herds.

Only those who own more than four hundred head of cattle wear clothing. The clothing of choice is an

earth-toned wrap, decorated with beads and tassels. The more cattle one owns, the better the beadwork becomes and the colours of the tassels change. A chief with over a thousand head of cattle will have red tassels on his wrap to indicate his power.

There is a traditional king over the Adja, although he wields little power. He is a descendant of an ancient line of Atlaian kings. The title is retained against the day the empire is restored.

## THE CHAMA

Atlaia's Chama are the wealthiest of the twelve clans. The Chama live around a great volcano said to be the home of evil spirits. Those who climb that mountain either never return or come back deformed. It is a volcanic land and is highly fertile. The Chama's homeland receives a lot of rainfall but the temperature is not as hot as the veldts and plains on the other side of the Ogun Mountains. The Chama have learned how to take advantage of that fertility to grow bananas, yams, beans and coffee, which they trade extensively with Zembabwei and Iranistan. Their crops are grown on the terraced slopes of the mountains. They use cow dung to fertilise the fields and have an amazing system of irrigation, tapping water found in deep mountain gorges for their villages and fields. Off the mountains, vast forests of ebony stretch across the Chama homeland.

The Chama are not a cohesive tribe. Intertribal wars and cattle raids are common. Chama rulers try to dominate other Chama rulers and exact tribute from smaller clans, tribes and communities in the area. Most trade done between different Chama communities is handled through Kimambi middle-men.

## THE JUBAR

The Jubar live to the west of the Ogun Mountains in a highly forested region of central Atlaia. The Jubar are typically reserved around strangers, cautious in dealing with the unknown. The Jubar have particularly low standards of hygiene (approaching those of the Darfari). They tattoo circular patterns around their eyes, giving them a distinctive look. They are somewhat nomadic, moving about as determined by the needs of their cattle. They trade extensively with the Lupembe but tend to fight and war with neighbouring tribes.

The Jubar are considered to be the best of the Atlaian clans at rain-making, although they also practice divination. Most Jubar sorcerers practise the Weather Witching sorcery style from *Pirate Isles*.

Fierce warriors, the Jubar are typically at war with the M'goga and Yaraba. Young men must prove themselves fierce by killing at least one enemy before being considered a warrior. This enemy must be a non-Jubar tribesman or a dangerous animal. The Jubar do not like to grow grain so they trade cattle for grain with the Mzikima. This economic relationship with the Mzikima makes most Jubar welcome in an Mzikima community and vice versa.

## THE KIMAMBI

The Kimambi are traders and can be found throughout Atlaia, although their actual homeland is in the dry south-eastern corner of Atlaia. They often function as middle-men in tribal trade interactions. Many Kimambi, for example, hire as mercenary warriors and negotiators to accompany the semi-annual cattle drive from Lupembeland to Jubarland.

A difficulty now arising for the Kimambi concerns the Zambah. Refugees from Zambahland are moving into Kimambiland, fleeing the war machine of the Nyama. While many Zambah find welcome as craftsmen among the Kimambi, creating masks and other wares for trade and sale, others do not have as much to offer.

## THE LUPEMBE

The Lupembe are renowned sorcerers, witches and witchdoctors. There are three known sorcerous societies among the Lupembe and these societies stage sorcerous dancing competitions to display and prove their powers. One society can make animals obey their orders and they routinely dance with pythons, hyenas, porcupines and other wild animals to confirm their mastery. Another society is infamous for taking on the forms of lions, hyenas and so on at night. The third society is renowned for flying on the backs of wild animals through the nights. All three are healing societies and the entire clan are thought to be snake-charmers. Virtually all their dances involve live snakes; they drape the snakes around their nude bodies as living, writhing costumes. Their skill with snakes makes them a popular target for Stygian slave raiding.

Many nearby tribes trade cattle to the Lupembe for meat or the right to hunt on their territory. The N'Goga are their most frequent trading partners because of their dry lands. Another







source of trade involves the exchange of cattle for weather. Lupembe sorcerers, despite efforts, cannot control the weather but believe the Jubar rainmakers can do so. Cattle drives into Jubarland in exchange for rain-making are semi-annual occurrences.

## THE MWEZI

There are approximately 150 tribes of Mwezi in south-western Atlaia. The Mwezi are slightly shorter than the average Atlaian, having interbred heavily with tribes located deeper in the continental rainforests. They are the keepers of the Olu-Igbo Rainforest and the surrounding grasslands. The Mwezi are hunters, not herdsman, and they use poison in their hunts. They are adept herbalists and know virtually every poison to be found in their lands. Those who hunt elephants are awarded especially high status, giving them a +1 bonus to Reputation per elephant. They prefer to use slow-acting poisons when hunting.

Although (as with other Atlaians) cattle is important, the Mwezi do not tend their own cattle. They use slaves or hire 'professionals' from other tribes (usually the Kimambi) to herd and tend to their cattle. The slave trade is important to the Mwezi and one major trade route passes through the centre of Mweziland. The Mwezi also trade ivory; their merchants can be found as far north as Turan and as far east as Vendhya. They raid neighbouring tribes to the south for most of their slaves.

## THE MZIKIMA

The Mzikima are a musical clan with more than 200 recognised communities, known for their elaborately musical rituals and for the remarkable craftsmanship of their instruments. The Mzikima are typically regarded to be the most moral of the Atlaian tribes by outsiders – most of them have a Barbaric Code of Honour (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game*). The Mzikima believe evil and immoral persons do not become guardian spirits, appear in dreams or have their names passed on to descendents; instead, the immoral are consigned to oblivion for eternity. The Mzikima are uncomfortable in clothing, except when ritually dancing, so they rarely wear anything.

Day or night, music can be heard in a Mzikima village. Virtually every and any event in a Mzikima's life finds its way into music. Music is played to console people, to

praise people, to heal people, to cleanse people, to combat people, to welcome people and to court people. It is played during parties, work, divinations, competitions and for a thousand other reasons. Drums, *nyatiti* and singing are popular. Each Mzikima village or community has its own style of music because the people shape their music to their ways of life and life patterns. As with other Atlaian tribes, dancing is also important and Mzikima dances are particularly elegant and charming.

Marriage is especially important to the Mzikima. It is almost unheard of to be unmarried. Those who remain unmarried for long after eligibility are shunned by the village and considered immoral.

As far as sorcery goes, most Mzikima *oloibons* are not truly sorcerous. Those who are sorcerous tend to practice divination and rain-making magic. As with most Atlaian *oloibons*, herbalism, healing and advice are their primary functions. They prefer to trade grain with the Jubar people in exchange for rainmaking.

The Mzikima are more agricultural than most of the tribes in the region. They are skilled at growing grain but they need cattle as much as any other Atlaian tribe. They usually trade grain for their cattle. They typically war with the Yarabu, whom they fear and hate.

## THE N'GOGA

The N'Goga live in one of the driest sections of Atlaia, a land with little rainfall. Some attribute this to their war with the Jubar; others say the land has always thirsted for more water. The N'Goga are pastoralists, living from hunting and gathering; the communities are almost nomadic in the frequency of their movements. Their herds tend to be small, making them among the poorest of the Atlaians. The N'Goga people tend to be perceived as rude by 'civilised' people and are considered to be among the most insolent and cowardly of slaves. In truth, they are highly inquisitive and, although they look fierce from their harsh way of life, are fairly neighbourly toward strangers (although they are cautious around some tribes, such as the Jubar and the Yaraba). Most N'Goga have a Barbaric Code of Honour and will immediately see to the physical needs of peaceful strangers and will accompany strangers on journeys to see them safely through N'Gogaland.

Although they have chiefs and tribal leaders the same as other Atlaians, they are dominated by their *oloibons* and witch-doctors. The tribal leaders collect taxes and tribute on food and water, the scarcest resources in N'Gogaland. The witch-doctors control the rain, community



fertility, protection magic, healing and the most reliable sources of water. While the witch-doctors have an awesome amount of power over the tribes, they are also not allowed to leave N'Gogaland and are put to death if they do so. If a witch-doctor leaves, then who will bring the rain and protect the communities? Since the communities fear the answer to that question, the witch-doctors are simply forbidden to leave. This injunction is so deeply ingrained that if a witch-doctor were to leave N'Gogaland (even against his will), he would become obsessed with returning (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game* for more on the Rule of Obsession).

The N'Goga trade extensively with Mwezi, allowing them to hunt elephants in N'Gogaland in exchange for cattle and other goods. An elephant hunt in N'Gogaland will often include hunters from both tribes. If the hunting party is all N'Goga, the ivory is retained for later trade with the Mwezi. The N'Goga are highly suspicious of Yaraba, afraid the Yaraba come to N'Gogaland merely to steal cattle. They also distrust the Jubar, believing Jubar sorcerers steal their rain. Most Nyama in their land are travelling to and from the ancient ruins, so the N'Goga just leave them alone if possible.

The N'Goga tend to be defensive fighters and rarely undertake wars of aggression, even against the traitorous Jubar and the hated Yaraba. Occasionally a group of N'Goga may raid the cattle of another but they use arms mostly to defend their own small herds.

The N'Goga have little or no interest in the ancient ruins found in their homeland. They know the sites are holy to the Nyama people, so they just let the ruins alone



so as to not offend any visiting Nyama and start a war. They will readily lead outsiders to the ruins, however. If there is no evidence of any Nyama at the site, a N'Goga guide or wanderer might even explore a ruin should the mood move him to do so.

## THE NYAMA

The Nyama are renowned for two main reasons: firstly, they control most of the iron ore found in the Ogun Mountains and secondly, they are the most aggressive, disciplined and war-like of the Atlaians. They are typically master forgers of iron and forge most of the iron for the spear-heads in Atlaia. Even nearby Zimbabwe imports iron from the Nyama (usually through Kimambi intermediaries, though). Most of Nyama's business, however, comes from the Chama, who use Nyaman iron to arm their armies for intertribal raids and wars.

Nyama are the most arrogant and confident of the Atlaian tribes. Especially among the lowland Nyama, war is glory and life. War is what every male Nyama lives for. The highland Nyama are more focused upon digging iron

out of the Ogun Mountains but war and combat still stir their blood as well. The Nyama are by far the most militarily disciplined of the Atlaian tribes. Every adult male is a warrior. The Nyama consider themselves the true heirs of the ancient Atlaian empire. Their culture is more unified than any other Atlaian clan or tribe and the Nyama have a strong sense of victorious identity. Other races avoid taking Nyama slaves – they are simply too aggressive and proud.

Unlike the other Atlaian tribes, the Nyama have a centralised government focused on rebuilding an ancient empire. The king of the Nyama is slowly pushing his growing empire





southward, conquering Zambah homesteads and villages, holding them by brute force. The Nyama are not assimilating the Zambah, just crushing them underfoot. The king's will is the sole authority among the Nyama. The king maintains a strong force of warriors so well-trained they may almost be considered professional soldiers (barbarian/soldier and barbarian/borderer multi-classes would represent these forces well). Every male Nyama child, after circumcision, is sent to the capital, Itinga, to be trained by these impressive warriors in the arts of war. Villages in Nyamaland are governed by an elder chief.

Most of the work is done by female slaves, unfortunates captured in war and given to important men. Status is attained in Nyama society by having a large number of slave women to do one's work. Some have as many as twenty women. If slave women are not available, a man's wife or wives has to do the hard work. The Nyama believe in themselves and their strength of arms so strongly that *oloibons* have a much reduced role in Nyama society compared to the other Atlaian societies. They still speak to the spirit world and the orisha on behalf of the people but they are not socially powerful per se. Nyama witchdoctors are more likely to attempt to command the spirits than negotiate with them.

The Nyama consider the ancient ruins of the old empire to be theirs to guard and honour. They are holy sites to the Nyama, who regard any trespass of these sites as an offence. Even discussing entering one of these ruins by an outsider is considered sacrilege and taboo. Many communities will kill foreigners who show too much interest in the mouldering ruins of Atlaia.

## THE THULABAN

The Thulaban are a dwindling people, preyed upon in the north by the Chama, in the west and south by the fierce Nyama and in the east by the Zembabwan Mazwei tribes. Descended from the Mazwei of Zembabwei, the Thulaban are far more colourful and wear more jewellery than their ancestors. They wear colourful wraps and wide beaded disks around their necks. Red is a preferred colour because it symbolises power. Thulaban boys prove their manhood and bravery by scarring themselves with heated spear blades and hot brands. An unscarred man of any race is presumed to be

a coward by the Thulaban. Like other Atlaian tribes, the Thulaban have dances for virtually any given event in life but they almost never use instruments, even drums. Most of their dances involve jumps and leaps and they enjoy contests based on their leaping skills, especially high jumps from a standing position.

The lands of the Thulaban are almost entirely rainforest and are probably the most fertile lands in all of Atlaia, rivalled only by the lands of the Chama. The Thulaban attribute the lushness of their land to an abundance of water spirits and water orisha living there. Water is a symbol of healing and health to the Thulaban and they see any land lacking in water (such as N'Gogaland and parts of Adjaland) as being unhealthy. Anything originating from water, such as water plants or fish, are seen as magical and are used in healing or harming.

The Thulaban are farmers. They retain herds of cattle but do not move the herds around in a semi-nomadic fashion. They are more interested in growing things. The Thulaban avoid the ancient ruins that dot the landscape of their homeland, considering them haunted and evil, yet they consider themselves protectors of the ruins and will often violently fend off any who try to disturb the peace of these crumbling sites.

## THE YARABA

The Yaraba are hostile toward outsiders, often having to defend their territories from Zembabwei. The Yaraba are the northernmost clan in Atlaia. The Yaraba are often at war with the Adja, their southern neighbours. The Yaraba believe all the cattle of the world belongs to them, so they have no problem retrieving their cattle from other tribes. This is not considered raiding or stealing to the Yaraba, just claiming of something that already belongs to them. The Yaraba warrior groups always choose one of their number to lead each age group of warrior. This leader is given the title of warlord.

Like the Thulaban, the Yaraba also dress in wraps, preferring the colour red to the exclusion of other colours, although blue is fairly popular as well. In addition, all Yaraba wear large hoop earrings. The wealthier a Yaraba becomes, the more red can be found in his clothing and jewellery. Almost all Yaraba males have one front tooth removed to help them produce a piercing whistle which helps them control their cattle.



Most of Yarabaland is grassland with some forested regions. The Yaraba are a semi-nomadic people who move their homes and villages from time to time to follow their cattle. Once the cattle have grazed a land clear, they move to greener pastures.

## THE ZAMBAAH

The Zambah people live in the southern part of Atlaia. They are known for their facial scarring, their intricate and beautiful wood carvings and their nightly masked dances that are performed to powerful syncopated drum-beats. They are also reckoned fierce warriors; they have successfully defied becoming a source of slaves for generations. Slavers familiar with the area avoid Zambahland, considering it unprofitable if not deadly.

Unlike most of the Atlaian tribes, the Zambah are matrilineal and husbands move into the homes and villages of their wives. They also vary from most of the Atlaians because they ritually scar, decorate and tattoo their faces and bodies in delicate and strange patterns. A child cannot be considered an adult without some form of facial art.

Art and craftsmanship is important to the Zambah. They work with ebony and most of their works are created from a single piece of wood. They can create nearly any design asked of them, even complex designs involving groups of people, animals and/or orisha. Their masks are famed throughout the Black Kingdoms and are noted as being especially potent (see *Faith & Fervour* for rules regarding *oloibon's* masks; they can create masks for others if the others give them a magical link to attach to the mask). Their ebony clubs are also in high demand because they do not break easily.

The Zambah, especially the *oloibons*, are skilled dancers. Stilt dancing is one form of dance practiced by the Zambah, as is masked dancing to ward off evil. The Zambah often create ebony body masks, which may be either male or female in form, to accompany their face masks. During dances, the Zambah vibrate their bodies while moving to the beat of the omnipresent drums. Male dancers usually wear grass skirts that include bells or clacking bones that make noise while the body vibrates in a frenzied manner. While the masked men dance furiously in the centre, lines of nude unmarried women surround them, moving only their heads, shoulders and arms in a slow, almost erotic dance. Both male and female dancers have their bodies oiled for the dances to highlight their muscle-tone and body scarring.

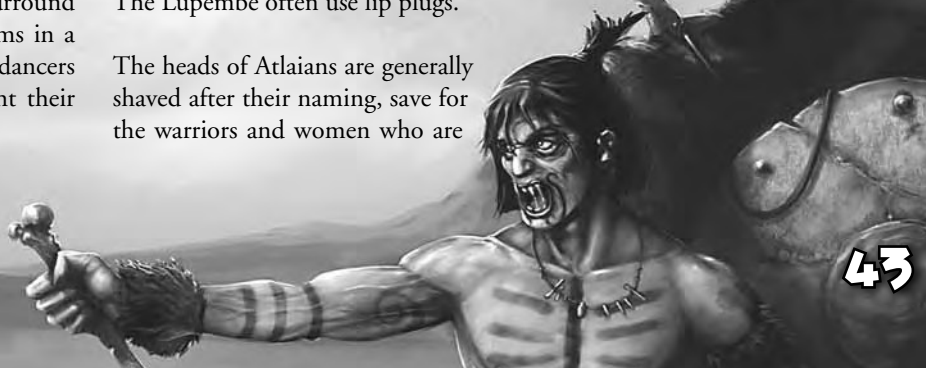
## ATLAIAN CLOTHING, HAIRSTYLES AND ORNAMENTATION

Like most southern Black Kingdom tribesmen, many Atlaians often go naked, although some of the tribes, such as the Adja, the Thulaban and the Yaraba, wear wraps or loincloths. The Jubar generally only wear clothes during ceremonial occasions. On these occasions, they wear beaded shifts tied at the neck and draped over one shoulder with long beaded leather fringes falling in the back to swing loosely over the behind during dances. The Mzikima wear grass skirts, beaded necklaces and beaded belts during ceremonies and dances; men of some wealth wear animal skins from the shoulder or about the waist. Married women throughout Atlaia wear something blue. Unmarried girls do not wear blue. Headdresses of ostrich plumes and eagle feathers are common throughout Atlaia.

Atlaians enjoy jewellery, adorning themselves with rings of ivory or precious metal in their noses, ears or lips. Beaded jewellery is also popular and is worn around the neck, wrists, ankles and even through the ears (which are often elongated due to the weight of the jewellery). Elongated ears are attractive throughout Atlaia, so many tribesmen put plugs in their ears to increase the size of their earlobes. Vendhyan beads are much desired and sought after in trade. Jubar women often wear numerous brass arm-bands. Popular among the *entito* are medicinal anklets created by the *oloibons* and/or elder women. These anklets prevent pregnancy.

Body ornamentation goes much further than mere jewellery. Many tribes and clans in Atlaia ornament their bodies more directly, through tattooing or scarification. Most Atlaians consider burn scars to be beautiful, so they press hot metal to their upper arms, thighs and chest to create patterns of burnt scar tissue. The Jubar tattoo circular patterns around the eyes, giving them a distinctive racoon-like look. The Thulaban people are especially given to scarring, believing an unscarred man is a coward. The Zambah are the most artistic with their scars and tattoos. The Lupembe often use lip plugs.

The heads of Atlaians are generally shaved after their naming, save for the warriors and women who are







unable to become pregnant. The warriors of Atlaia wear their hair long, braided and coloured with red ochre. Once a warrior becomes a junior elder, his head is shaved again in the initiation ceremony.

## SEX ROLES IN ATLAIA

Throughout Atlaia, the man is the master of home and family. This is especially true among the Nyama and is markedly less so among the Zambah. Men have certain roles and women have certain roles, regardless of the tribe. The lion is especially symbolic of power for the Atlaians and they live as the lions do – just as the lioness hunts for the lion, the woman does work for the man. Men traditionally build the walls around the family homestead but all other building is done by the women and children. The man owns everything his wife or wives bring to the family. The wife is expected to be a font of wisdom and the man is expected to listen to his wife. Women are expected to have children; childless adult women are ridiculed by all. In regards to family life, fathers are the disciplinarians and mothers are the friends and confidants for their children. Ultimately, it boils down to this: the men do the heavy but occasional chores and the women do all the mundane, daily, repetitive, routine work.

## PROPERTY

Atlaians own a considerable amount of property compared to many other Black Kingdom tribesmen. Women traditionally own their jewellery and clothing and the men own everything else, including their wives and children.

## LAND

Land may not be bought and sold – land belongs to the people. Among the Nyama, however, all the land belongs to the king but the people have free use of that land, though they may not buy or sell it. If a land dispute occurs, the elders typically settle the matter. If that fails, then war usually ends the matter one way or another.

## ANIMAL HERDS

Atlaians are primarily herdsman, keeping herds of cattle, goats and sheep. These herds are a measure of wealth and status and are vitally important to any family. Every part of an animal, even its dung, has

a purpose and use among the Atlaians. If an animal part does not have a practical use, it has a ritual use that was defined in generations past.

## ATLAIAN HOUSES

Husbands typically live apart from their wives and children, so the Atlaians live in homesteads – a collection of houses surrounded by a circular enclosure. Cattle, goats and sheep are kept in the centre of the enclosure. The enclosure is made from thorny bushes woven to create a thick fence.

The Atlaians in the north and southeast live in thatch and reed huts for the most part, built on top of an adobe foundation sunk into the earth to keep the temperature down in the burning heat of the summers. The homes are loaf-shaped.

## ATLAIAN WEAPONS

Atlaians prefer spears around six feet long, with a large metal head on one end and a sharpened stake at the other. The spear is the most valuable possession of an Atlaian warrior. Junior warriors have spears with pale wooden handles. Senior warriors have ebony handles on their spears.

Atlaian warriors also use a type of machete; it is typically a flat- or round-ended short sword, often wider at the end than at the handle. Usually only senior warriors carry this kind of sword.

Atlaians also carry ebony or hardwood war clubs, carved with a bend and a ball on the business end. Axes are similar to the war clubs but have a metal blade extending out from the ball of the club. Bows and arrows are used for hunting.

## SLAVES

Many of the Atlaian clans and homesteads keep slaves. The Nyama are perhaps best known for using slave labour. Slavery is just part of life in the Black Kingdoms. Slaves are taken by violence for labour. However, a slave in Atlaia is more of an indentured servant than a piece of property. Slaves in Atlaia may own and accumulate property. They can work on their own. They can even climb the social ladder and be granted chiefdoms. Some communities sell unwanted members of their community to other tribes as slaves; this is usually seen as more profitable than using the death penalty for certain crimes. Other slaves are captured during war or raids. Although most of Atlaia's clans take and sell slaves, the Nyama and Mwezi are most renowned for doing so. Some slaves are volunteers, choosing



slavery for a period of time to work off a debt. Children of slaves are usually free and considered part of the clan they live with.

Most slaves are used as porters and domestic servants. Agriculture is not highly developed in Atlaia so few slaves are used for mass agricultural purposes. Slaves typically live and eat with their owners. In some regions slaves can be given as part of a bride price.

## SOCIAL STANDING

To achieve any form of status in Atlaian culture, a person must be of age and own cattle. The person must also have been appropriately initiated out of childhood (most Atlaian women will just laugh if they see an uncircumcised male and will have nothing to do with him, which is not good for his social standing). The more cattle one owns, the higher one's status becomes. Every hundred head of cattle acquired, either through raiding, trading or marrying off daughters, gives the acquirer a +1 bonus to Reputation. Ultimately, it is age that wins out in terms of social standing. An old woman is socially more powerful than a young warrior with a lot of cows.

Minor improvements in social standing can be accomplished by hunting a lion with a spear, thus earning a lion-mane headdress, marrying well, having hundreds of cattle and accomplishing great deeds.

## THE SPIRITUAL KING OF ATLAIA

*Tales of the Black Kingdoms* describes an awkward annual ritual among the twelve clans of Atlaia. When the summer begins, the elders choose a representative to travel to the Pyramid of Olorun. The chosen of the clan is given the title of 'Prince' if he is not already one (the Adja, for example, have retained a 'royal' bloodline). Once at the Pyramid, each representative is given a jewelled crown by the spiritual 'king' of Atlaia. The twelve crowns are taken back to their clans (and to their king if the clan retains someone with that title). For the rest of the summer, the *nfumu wa ngokos* (diviners and seers) tell the 'prince' which ruins to lead a group of warriors to so ritual combat with another 'prince' may be held. The winner takes the loser's jewelled crown. At the end of the summer, the 'prince' with all twelve crowns returns to the Pyramid of Olorun and returns the crowns to the ritual leaders of the Baolorun cult. The leader of the cult then makes this 'prince' the new spiritual 'king' of all Atlaia until the onset of the next summer. The 'king's' clan is considered favoured

for the duration of his 'reign.' The Nyama particularly despise this ritual, yet are the most bloodthirsty in fighting for the goal.

## VILLAGES

Atlaian villages are collections of homesteads governed by the senior elders. A homestead is a collection of huts that house the head of the household, his wives, his children and other relatives all within a wall of woven thorns surrounding the huts and the household herd of animals. Several of these homesteads together form a village.

## THE MANYATTA

At least one additional homestead is built in the village to house the warriors called the *manyatta* (in some cases there are two or three to hold the different classes of warrior). A *manyatta* has 49 houses built by the mothers of the warriors in a large circular encampment. Each house of a *manyatta* has a bed for the warrior and a bed or beds for his women. Warriors always shout out a short chant when they enter or leave the *manyatta*. Meat may not be eaten within a *manyatta* because women are not allowed to see warriors eat meat.

## NYUMBA YA MASAMVA

Most villages also have a special homestead for their *oloibon*, who is essentially a shaman. This homestead is called the *nyumba ya masamva*. The compound is surrounded by a dense fence created by spurge hedges, which are cultivated for their healing properties (although if introduced into the eyes, spurge is said to be so painful that men have clawed out their eyes rather than experience it). The homestead includes different areas for healing. An *iduku* (a house made completely of thatch) is built for consultation with patients. Another house is built for divination, one for herbal storage and another for the creation of remedies and *samba* (see Unusual Items). Another house is built for the spirits of the *oloibon*'s ancestors.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

The Atlaian ultimately depend upon their animal herds for their economy. Although trade is conducted for cattle, produce,





crafted items and slaves, it ultimately falls on the animal herds to support the clans, communities and homesteads. Price is not negotiated with money but through a barter system where items are typically compared to animals to decide worth. Cattle function as money: they are a medium of exchange, a store of wealth and a measure of value.

Other than herding and raiding, most occupations are handled by women, considered by the men to be too routine and everyday to interest them. Potters, for example, are almost always women. Women tend to be the farmers and gardeners, the seamstresses and water bearers. Crafts involving wood carving, such as mask-making or instrument-making, are usually handled by men, as is blacksmithing and weapon-making. Blacksmiths are known as *balongo* and are considered almost as powerful as traditional witch-doctors, for they control fire. Indeed, many *balongo* in Atlaia are sorcerers.

## THE ATLAIAN MILITARY

The Atlaians either resolve conflict through consensus or through war. Both are ordinary, commonplace events. War is typically the favoured way to acquire labour and cattle. To wage war, the Atlaian communities need warriors. Each and every Atlaian male who has undergone circumcision at 10 to 14 years old is a warrior until about age 30 when he becomes an elder. These warriors protect the communities, undertake cattle raids, retrieve stolen cattle and acquire slaves or other resources. Atlaian warriors are fierce and fearless and are known to rise into violent fits when provoked to great emotion – a state known as *emboshona* (otherwise known as Fighting-Madness in *Conan the Roleplaying Game*).

Atlaian warriors jog in a tight formation wearing their headdresses of lion mane and carrying their giraffe hide covered shields and honed spears. The strongest warriors jog in the centre and the fastest warriors on the wings. Atlaians are utterly ruthless in all-out war, killing anyone who is in the way without remorse. Even though the bow is used in hunting it is rarely used in warfare except by the Mwezi, who poison their arrows. Even the Mwezi prefer to use the spear in war, using bows only against those who flee. Fleeing warriors are considered prey to be hunted like animals. In the end, strength of numbers, unrelenting bravery and ferocious kills win the day for Atlaian military units.

Typically an Atlaian warrior will cut open the bodies of anyone he slays in a battle to make sure the ghosts of the dead do not possess him. Outsiders who witness this ritual often accuse the Atlaians of being cruel and mutilating the dead.

## SORCERY IN ATLAIA

Most witchdoctors and healers in Atlaia are non-sorcerous but some actually do have power. All pretend to have power and all prefer to use non-magical means to accomplish their aims whenever possible. Using real magic requires real sacrifice and risks upsetting the spirit world, so most use herbal potions and alchemical tricks and preserve their true sorcerous powers for real emergencies. Rituals play a large part in daily Atlaian life. Most Atlaians have at least one rank in Perform (ritual) – they are taught basic home rites to keep the spirits placated. Most of the rituals are honorific or ceremonial, not magical, and are intended to solve immediate difficulties in life. Although the people of Atlaia believe something supernatural is happening during the rituals, nothing really is.

### NGEMI WA MBULA (RAINMAKERS)

*Ngemi wa mbula* are *oloibon* who are consulted about rain. They know rain rituals, speak with rain-spirits and can summon weather, in addition to basic healing and herbalism skills. The Jubar people produce particularly powerful *ngemi wa mbula*. Rainmakers may also learn the following spell:

### WEATHER WITCHING ADVANCED SPELL - KUJILA MBULA (SUMMON RAIN)

**PP Cost:** 25

**Components:** V, S, F

**Casting Time:** One hour

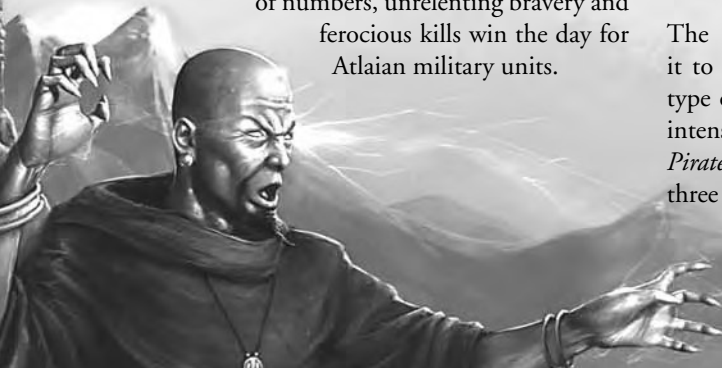
**Area:** Two mile-radius circle, centred on caster

**Duration:** 4d12 hours

**Saving Throw:** None

**Prerequisites:** *Knot wind*

The *ngemi wa mbula* changes the weather and causes it to rain within an hour of the spell's completion. The type of rain is typical for the season or just slightly more intense. *Ngemi wa mbula* who can cast *bottle storms* (see *Pirate Isles*) and *summon elemental* can combine the three spells to capture this rain in a fetish and send the



### PERFORMED MAGIC

An Atlaian sorcerer who also has levels in barbarian may take the performed magic class feature in lieu of trap sense. This gives a bonus to Perform (dance) checks, Perform (ritual) checks and to magic attack rolls equal to what the sorcerer's trap sense would otherwise be (+1 at 3<sup>rd</sup> level, with a further +1 per three additional levels).

fetish to a foreign land via the elemental, who unleashes the rain at the destination. In this way, a powerful *ngemi wa mbula* can summon rain even in distant locations. If this spell is cast during a rain storm, it either ends the rain for the duration or magnifies it, whichever the caster desires.

### NFUMU WA NGOKO (DIVINERS)

*Nfumu wa ngoko* are *oloibon* who are consulted about the future because they are skilled at reading chicken entrails to divine such matters. These specialists do not need to know the date and hour of a character's birth to cast *astrological prediction*; all they need is a live chicken to sacrifice.

### OLOIBON WA MANGA (SPIRITUALISTS)

*Oloibon wa manga* are *oloibon* who are consulted about spirit possession. They are skilled at dealing with the spirit world, binding demons and warding from demonic influences.

### WANGA (WITCHES, NECROMANCERS AND EVIL SORCERERS)

*Wanga* are evil sorcerers. Many are reputed to be cannibals who will come to a person's door, ask him to follow them and, if that person does so, kill and eat him. Other stories claim that those who willingly follow a *wanga* become the *wanga's* apprentice. *Wanga* hold their rituals and dances at the graves of the recently dead. Typically, they dig up and reanimate the corpse so they can kill it again and eat whatever portions of it they do not take for their vile magic. *Wanga* are also known to reanimate corpses so they can obtain a powerful fetish

known as an *Ndondocha* or an undead familiar known as an *Mkovu*. *Wanga* are also known to use baboons as servants and familiars.

### IRIMU (THE CORRUPTED)

Those who traffic with demons or otherwise visibly suffer from Corruption are referred to as *irimu* in Atlaia. While most Atlaians believe that breaking a taboo can cause Corruption, this is not actually true. Regardless, those who suffer from Corruption in Atlaia most commonly turn to cannibalism and grow a mouth in the back of their head. While all forms of Corruption noted in *Conan the Roleplaying Game* can certainly happen in Atlaia, the cannibal *irimu* with the vile mouth behind its head is more common than the other forms. *Irimu* are not considered human in the eyes of Atlaians but if atonement or purification can reverse the visible effect of Corruption, they are seen to have regained their humanity.

### RELIGION IN ATLAIA

Many of the Atlaian clan's religions are dominated by superstitions and magic. Shamanistic beliefs co-exist with ancestor worship and the worship of local gods and demons. Many of the religious beliefs of the Atlaian clans are consistent with the rest of the Black Kingdoms, as seen in *Faith and Fervour*, especially in regards to the need for community to achieve power, safety, protection and life. The information here is supplemental to that volume.

### BASIC COSMOLOGY

As with the Amazons, there is no real cosmology or even a fixed theology among the Atlaian clans. They have religious events, ceremonies and myths but these are not fixed theologies. A few basics tend to exist, however. The Atlaians believe their ancestors can influence them today. They believe in a spirit world and that all things possess spirits. Atlaian religion is ultimately animist.

### FUNERALS AND MOURNING

When an Atlaian dies, the village ensures his journey to the ancestors is handled safely and makes sure each member of the community comes to terms with the loss. To accomplish both of these objectives, a funeral ritual is observed. The





beginning of the ritual is the period of mourning, called *mtanga*. *Mtanga* lasts for three days, during which a cow is slaughtered and a feast held in honour of the recently deceased. The entire village participates in the *mtanga*. During the feast, which is held on the third day, the village talks about the dead person, focusing on the positive aspects of his life (those who were evil or offered nothing positive to the community are rarely given a *mtanga*). When the feast is over, the dead is buried according to the ancient rituals. In this manner, the village comes to grips with the death and the dead person's spirit is sent safely to the afterlife to continue in the community of ancestors. The spirit also continues in his living community, for now he can be found in dreams and, if a descendent is given his name, may live again.

The dead are buried in sacred groves where the trees are never cut down or allowed to burn. Even in the grasslands, scrubs and veldts, one will find standing groves where the trees grow tall and the dead are buried with only some pots and a bow to mark the graves. It is believed ghosts and spirits hold revels in these groves at night, for their drums can be heard but no one can be seen.

## MOSIMA

Mosima is the land where ghosts and spirits dwell, a dark village deep in the bowels of the earth. It can be reached by the living through caves or deep holes in the earth. Other gateways can be found in deep mountain pools. The spirits are typically homesick and wish they could return home. If they are remembered by the living, they have happier afterlives and are allowed herds of eternal cattle. The cattle start to die off when the spirits are forgotten by their descendants.

## ANCESTOR VENERATION

The main aspects of ancestor veneration are more fully discussed in *Faith and Fervour*. Essentially, ancestor veneration ensures community continuity. Family members are remembered through offerings of cow dung and beer. The cow dung represents the wealth of the family and the wealth of the ancestor. Ancestors are believed to influence the living, bringing good or ill depending on their mood.

If continually honoured, the ancestors bring prosperity and good fortune. If a family is lax in its honouring of the past, then ill occurs.

Sometimes,

if a life-threatening illness happens to a child, the child might be renamed after a potentially offended ancestor (as determined by a diviner).

## ATLAIAN GOVERNMENT

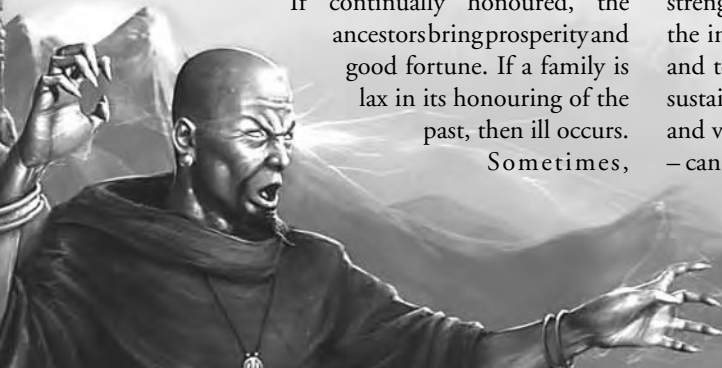
Atlaia is not a nation proper unified under a ruler but simply a wilderness area occupied by a cultural group, such as Cimmeria or the Pictish wilderness. There is no centralised authority. The tribes are autonomous but interconnected through intertribal trade and shared cultural values.

The Atlaian have clan elders who handle both the spiritual and political needs of the clan. The Nyama actually have a savage king who receives tribute in return for success and prosperity. The clans who use elders for government expect the elders to bring success and prosperity in the same way. Elders, kings, chiefs or headmen (depending on the community) have the right to expel witches and other undesirables. The need to maintain a large population to protect and feed the community keeps the leaders from abusing the right of expulsion. Rule is usually by consensus, so group pressure is how control of the society is maintained. The clan elders usually sit under a designated tree to discuss matters. Elder women sit in an outer circle around the men. They do not speak directly to the council but will speak to male relatives who relay any of the women's comments or problems to the council. Female elders often sit on their own councils and bring any matters discussed there to the men for their consideration later.

In times of great need, especially when the cooperation of more than one community is needed, a headman or chief is selected by the elders to lead the people. Some tribes, notably the Adja, maintain a royal bloodline which began in ancient times, although they rarely wield any actual power. An exception is the Nyama clan, who retain imperial ambitions and are governed by a royal king and subservient chiefs.

## THE NYAMA CHIEFS OF ATLAIA

The Nyama, unlike the other clans of Atlaia, have a central king. He considers himself the King of Atlaia and it is but a matter of time before Atlaia becomes unified under the strength of the Nyama – or so the Nyama claim. Likewise, the individual villages are led by an elder chief. The king, and to the same degree the tribal chiefs, sustain power by sustaining the health and vigour of the nation. If the health and vigour of the nation fall, the king – or the lesser chiefs – can be dethroned and replaced by another member of the royal family. The king and the chiefs of the



individual tribes are advised by the *banang'oma*, members of the royal family. Chiefs and kings in Nyama also make sure they have a healer and a blacksmith among their advisors to show they are in communication with the spirit world. The healer represents the health of the nation and the blacksmith represents the prosperity of the nation. If the chief does not have the blessings of the ancestors and the fire-spirits, he cannot remain in power.

Just as the other clans have initiations into elderhood, so to do the Nyama have initiations into chieftainhood and kingship. Generally, a chief is one of the sons of the daughters of the previous chief. Birth order does not matter. The *banang'oma* make the choice when the current ruler dies. They never announce the choice beforehand, so new chiefs are not groomed for the position.

## ATLAIAN LAW

Atlaian law is informal at best. Intra-tribal conflicts are often handled with singing or chanting contests in front of the tribe, with each person putting his side of the story into the performance. Intertribal conflicts are a bit more complex, however, and usually involve war.

Within the community, if a contest will not suffice, the elders of a tribe can hear a case and use whatever form of punishment seems appropriate to them, including fines (usually involving cattle), penance, enslavement, beatings, death and, the worst punishment of all, exile. Atlaians never cripple someone as a punishment, as that is an affront to the person's spirit. It is better to kill the person than to maim him. For most cases, two male witnesses or three to five female witnesses are sufficient to prove a point or case. One female witness is sufficient in cases of adultery and the victim alone is sufficient as a witness in case of rape. Bribery is fairly common.

In Nyama, community chiefs and headmen are authorised to hear lesser cases but cases of treason are typically sent to the capital to be heard by the king. As in other Atlaian areas, bribery of the headmen in Nyama lands is also fairly common.

Generally in cases of murder, the rule is a life for a life. If a man kills another, the clan who suffers the loss is permitted to kill the murderer (or if the murderer cannot be found, his kinsman). This rule fails somewhat if a man kills someone of his own clan and cannot be found – is the family of the murdered person to take the life of another of their family? Thus, the killing of one's own kin is regarded as particularly horrible.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF ATLAIA

**Ebony trees,** trees with hard and black wood so dense they are unable to float in water, grow in abundance throughout Atlaia, especially in the lands of the Chama.

**Lake Malagarasi:** Lake Malagarasi is an extremely deep lake, with depths reaching more than 4,800 feet in some places (it averages about 1,500 feet deep). It is located in the south east, in the Olu-Igbo rainforest.

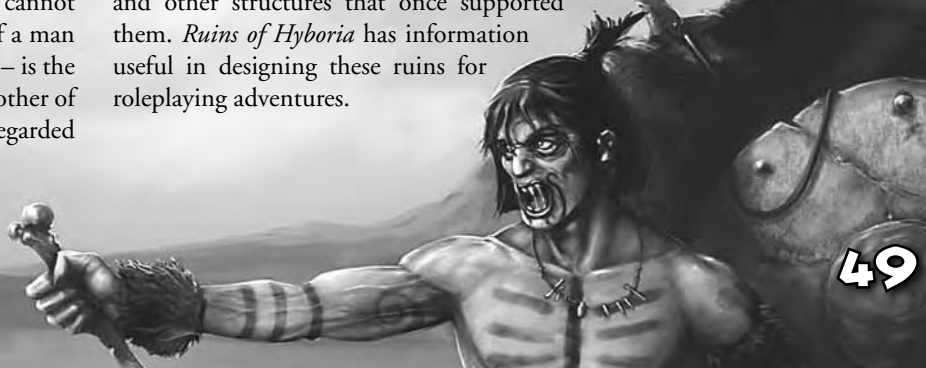
**Lake Mugasha:** Lake Mugasha is the largest lake in the Black Kingdoms, located on a plateau in the north-western part of Atlaia. It has more than three thousand islands and is as deep as 300 feet in some areas.

**Ogun Mountains:** The Ogun Mountains are a great range bisecting Atlaia from north to south. The mountains are rich in iron ore and around twenty of the mountains are volcanic.

**Olu-Igbo Rainforest:** The Olu-Igbo rainforest lies in the south-western part of Atlaia. It is considered a haunted place by everyone but the Mwezi, who call it home. Lake monsters, prehistoric throwbacks and other dangers lurk within this jungle, which extends far beyond the borders of even the Mwezi. Strange are the stories of the Mwezi who travel deeper into this jungle than the elders advise.

**Capital and Major Cities:** No Atlaian cities are mentioned in the stories; most Atlaian peoples live in primitive villages. The only city approaching the level of a capital is the capital of the Nyama people, who live in what amounts to a city built upon one of the strange ruins. The Nyaman king lives in this city, which is named Itinga.

**Ruins:** Dotting the Atlaian landscape are numerous ruins of ancient cities. Most of these ancient ruins are extremely weathered and few structures more than a single storey in height remain standing. The exceptions are the great temples, massive ziggurats standing as high as 300 feet. The temples are surrounded by a ruined complex of sub-temples, schools and other structures that once supported them. *Ruins of Hyboria* has information useful in designing these ruins for roleplaying adventures.





# The Black Coast and Southern Black Kingdoms

The Black Coast lies along the Western Ocean. Talking drums, tom-toms that beat out coded messages, can often be heard during the nights as the tribes communicate with each other. The kingdoms south of Kush, Darfar, Keshan and Punt are dominated by lush jungles, nameless and dark.

Most of the dark warriors of the Southern Kingdoms are tall and rangy. These Southern Blacks are tribal in nature, resembling the great African tribes like the Zulus and Bantu. Others, the ones living in the darkest and deepest of the jungles, are somewhat shorter than most humans and are more akin to the various pygmy tribes of the Congo regions. Because of the dangers of the jungles, the tribesmen of the densest jungles walk with a stooped gait, keeping their centre of gravity low. Most southern tribesmen are not great climbers but those of the deep jungle are often exceptions to this rule in case they have to scurry up a tree to escape a predator. The cannibal Borana tribe from *Conan and the Treasure of Python* is an example of one of these jungle tribes.

## HONOUR

As Conan pointed out in *The Vale of Lost Women*, 'What would be blackest treachery in another land, is wisdom here.' The people populating the southern Black Kingdoms are not known for their honour. Hospitality is only owed to persons of the same clan. A pledge is only binding if given to one of the same clan or tribe.

## ALLEGIANCE

Most southern Black Kingdom tribesmen have a primary allegiance to their tribal king. This is followed by an allegiance to a secondary chief, such as a war chief. The third allegiance is to their clan chief or to their father.

## DANCING AND SINGING

Dancing is a vital part of the life of a southern Black Kingdom tribesman. Every event in the life of a person or clan can be symbolised within a dance formation or movement. The southern Black Kingdom tribesmen have hunting dances, war dances, tidal movement dances (along the coast) and coming of age dances, among others. Some movements are fiery, others are undulating, others are snakelike and still others are complex and challenging. Southern Black Tribesmen are also quick to sing on almost any occasion.

## THE LANGUAGE OF BEADS

Beaded crafts among the Black Coast natives and the southern Black Kingdom tribesmen have their own symbolic language wherein every colour and every shape of bead has a meaning. The women can create beaded crafts that contain messages about emotions, wealth and environment. Many young girls create beaded crafts to send messages to those they love. A pattern of beads in a necklace may tell a loved one how strongly a girl feels and another set of beads in her headdress may warn of how afraid she is of a neighbouring tribe. These beads can convey reprimands and they can convey encouragement.

## TRIBAL CUSTOMS

The southern Black Tribesmen tend to be distant with strangers, although they are hospitable. They are easily excitable and enthusiastic. The southern Black Kingdom tribesman always walks toward his death with enthusiasm. He knows death is unavoidable and will either inflict it or suffer it.

When a southern Black Kingdom tribesman hands someone something, the object must be held in the right hand only. The palm of the left hand supports the right forearm to assure the other person there are no concealed weapons. If southern Black Tribesmen walking



in opposite directions encounter each other and neither means the other harm, they will pass on the left to show the other their weapons.

Southern Black Tribesmen greet each other with a handshake, then clasp their thumbs and then shake hands again. In all cases, excessive eye contact is avoided. Too much eye contact is considered confrontational or an outright challenge.

It is traditional that men are treated as superior among the Black Kingdoms. Food is served to the men first, according to their social standing, then, after the men have eaten, food is served to the women, then to the male children, then to the female children. Wives will always walk behind their husbands. When sitting down, the southern Black Kingdom tribesmen do not sit on the dirt; they sit on a piece of hide or on a shield. Even sitting is done in a certain manner. Men sit on the right of a hut with those of the highest social standing in the rear and those of the lowest in the front.

Beer is brewed by the women every other day and refusing beer is an insult to the brewer. After drinking beer, rubbing the stomach is a compliment to the brewer.

Despite the dangers of their lifestyle, the barbarians of the deep jungles exhibit a carefree attitude, as though the dangers do not ever trouble them. Regardless of this attitude, their minds are alert and focused. A jungle barbarian can go from laughing to utter silence in a heartbeat, freezing as soon as danger is sensed. These barbarians never rush into a confrontation and prefer to avoid danger. They always consider a situation from all sides before acting but when they do act, they do it with certainty and conviction.

## SOUTHERN BLACK KINGDOM CLOTHING

### MEN

The dark warriors of the Southern Kingdoms wear white plumes in their hair but rarely bother with armour. They often go naked but may be adorned with rings of ivory or precious metal in their noses, ears or lips. A typical outfit for a southern black kingdom tribesman includes an ox-hide shield, sandals, a front apron (*isiNene*), a rear apron (*iBeshu*), ox-hair (or cow tail) leggings and armlets to make the body look more massive (called *amaShoba*), six bracelets and a feathered headdress based around a padded tube of fur (*umQhele*).

The *amaShoba* are worn on the upper arms and just beneath the knees. The *isiNene*, or front apron, covers the male genitals and is made of coin-sized patches of skin, monkey-tails or leather sewn together. The *iBeshu*, or rear apron, is made from calf skin and monkey-tails and is worn knee-length by younger men and ankle-length by elders (the combination of the *isiNene* and *iBeshu* is called an *umuTsha*). Married men wear a headband called an *isiCoco*. Noted warriors may sport an *inGxotha*, which is a heavy, brass arm-band given by the king for impressive bravery in battle (+4 bonus to Reputation if awarded one of these). The king may also reward brave warriors with an *isiQu*, a necklace made of interlocking wooden beads in the shape of vertebrae (+1 bonus to Reputation if awarded one of these). Some particularly brave warriors may sport several *iziQu*.

Many warriors wear headdresses (*imiQhele*) with ear guards (*amaBheqe*) made of monkey-skin to ensure they do not hear the pleas of doomed enemies. Unmarried warriors wear foot-long black feathers tied to porcupine quills mixed in with longer ostrich feathers on their *umQhele*. Higher ranking warriors include a blue feather in the front of their *umQhele*, or one on either side. Extremely high ranking warriors include green or greenish-black feathers along with crimson and metallic purple feathers in their headdresses.

Men are not permitted to wear even a piece of leopard skin until they have killed at least ten enemies in battle. Often the first leopard skin worn by a warrior, if he is married, is a leopard skin headband. Later, as his deeds become more impressive, he might add leopard skins to his *isiNene* or *iBeshu*. Only a king would wear a *kaross* or *inJoba* of leopard skin. A *kaross* is an elaborate cloak of animal fur. An *inJoba* is a long animal skin worn at the hips; many are made of monkey-tails.

Low-ranking warriors have all-black or predominantly black shields. As a warrior rises in prestige (and level), he is allowed more and more white on his shield. High level barbarians of great renown are usually called *Sidlodlo Sekhandla*, the pride of the people, and are permitted pure white ox-hide shields.

### WOMEN

The women dress lightly, often wearing just a wisp of silk twisted about their hips. Others wear







nothing more than a short grass skirt. Single maidens do not cover their breasts. They often embellish their skirts with beads.

A girl who is engaged wears more beads and covers her breasts. A married woman covers her entire body. She wears an *isiDwaba*, which is a thick, pleated cowhide skirt softened by hand and treated with animal fat and charcoal. A younger bride may decorate her *isiDwaba* with beads but older matrons will usually just wear it plain. Over this skirt, a woman may wear a beaded or a cloth skirt. She may wear a top heavily decorated with beads; the beads communicate a message only her husband will understand.

Women also wear *isiCholo*, a wide hat made of grass, cotton, straw and beads that is sewn into the hair. The *isiCholo* lasts a few months before needing to be remade. Some are an impressive three feet in diameter but most are not so grand.

## PYGMY CLOTHING

Clothing is not worn among the pygmy tribes of the deep jungle while in their natural environment. At best, they may wear a loincloth when travelling to a village or town to trade. Although they may not wear clothes, they are not unornamented. The savages of the dense jungles wear facial ornaments that startle those who have never encountered them before. These ornaments include but are not limited to large plugs in earlobes or lips, bones inserted in various parts of the face or extensive scarification of the face. These denote status within the tribe. Children are not decorated or ornamented until they come of age.

## SEX ROLES IN THE SOUTHERN BLACK KINGDOMS

### MEN

Men are in charge of hunting, war, taking care of visitors, making decisions, owning the hut and all of the family property (including the herds). They can make binding agreements. Men also carve tools out of wood in their free time.

### WOMEN

Women in the southern Black Kingdoms are subservient to men in almost all respects. Women do virtually all of the work, including collecting wood from the forest, cooking food for the family, fetching water, taking care of the children, tending fields, making tools and pots, brewing beer, taking care of the elderly and infirm and so on. If chores take the women away from the village, such as collecting wood often does, the women travel in small groups for company and protection. Women may not make binding agreements, own huts or other property or attend to visitors on their own. Women who have cattle do not technically own the cattle; they keep the cattle in trust for their sons to inherit.

### CHILDREN

Children are raised by their mothers and are taught to respect their elders. They are not allowed to speak unless spoken to. There is usually a considerable emotional distance between a father and his children.

Boys grow up looking after the family's herds. They leave home early each morning. They return later for milking the cows and a meal, then they take the herd back out again in the afternoon. The boys often engage in stick fighting as they prepare to enter the *amaButbo* (regiments). When boys turn 15, their fathers give them their first spears and charge them with carrying their elder brothers' equipment to and from the military kraals.

Girls learn how to carry water with small gourds as their first chore. Mothers braid supports into their daughters' hair to help the young girls learn to carry the gourds on their heads. Girls are then taught how to plant and harvest. By the time a girl is eleven, she has her own hoe, can build a fire, can watch small children and can cook.

While there is little bond between a father and his children, brothers and sisters often have close, strong bonds.

### LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Southern Black Kingdom tribesmen are not terribly forgiving of pre-marital sex and are definitely not forgiving of premarital children. Young people practice *uku-hlobonga*, which is non-penetrative sex. If penetration happens, the young man must pay the girl's father a cow. If a pregnancy results the girl is ostracised and the boy or man bears the bulk of the blame.



Men typically marry late in life, serving as warriors for many years first. Few adventurers will be married. Women usually marry young. Men are not allowed to marry until all of their sisters are married. Marriages are typically arranged between two different kraals as a method of peace-keeping, although sometimes love prevails and two people may decide to marry regardless of any arrangements by the chief. If two people decide to marry, the man proposes. A woman will give a young man who has successfully proposed to her a set of betrothal beads as proof of her acceptance. The prospective groom must now pay the bride-price, which is usually around eleven head of cattle. Should there be a problem with the bride later, the bride's father may have to pay back all or some of the cattle.

Southern Black Kingdom tribesmen practice polygamy. The first wife usually helps her husband find additional wives, as each additional wife lessens her overall workload and increases her husband's social standing. Also, if the man can afford more than one wife, he becomes known as wealthy. Each wife is given her own hut and fields. The first wife holds the most power in the household and her hut is closest to her husband's mother's hut (the grandmother is a figure of power in any kraal).

## SOCIAL STANDING

Social standing in the southern Black Kingdoms is determined mostly through a system of age grades. Within an age grade, standing is determined by military decorations and possibly even marital status. The age grades are listed here. Note that age is more important here than level. A particularly active warrior might be in the *Izimpohlo* age group and be 12<sup>th</sup> level. He would be highly decorated and would outrank most others in his age group. He would probably command the regiment.

*Udibi* are porters. Some enter into this age grade as early as age six, but most are 8–12 years old; They serve their fathers and older brothers as servants on military campaigns. They herd cattle behind the regiments and carry supplies, rations, extra weapons, shields and sleeping goods.

*AmaButu* are herders and labourers. These are young men who have not served in war. They are allowed to live in military kraals as servants. They are usually in the 8 to 14 year range.

*iNkwebane* are cadets. They spend their time training and stick fighting; they are given full black shields. They are typically in the 11 to 18 year old range. At this point, a character might be considered 1<sup>st</sup> level.

An *iNsizwa* is a young warrior, usually in the 14–24 year old range. *iNsizwa* are initiated from the cadet age group when new regiments are needed. On average, they are 3<sup>rd</sup> level. Their shields may have some white on them but not much.

*Izimpohlo* are experienced warriors. They are typically around 23–28 years old. They are usually around 5<sup>th</sup> level. *uMpakati* are veteran warriors; they are often around the age of 32. Their shields are mostly white. They are often around 7<sup>th</sup> level.

*iMhlope* are junior elders. They are usually married. Junior elders are around the age of 40. Their shields are often entirely white. They are often around 9<sup>th</sup> level. At this point, unless the characters are called to advise a chief or king, they settle down in a kraal and raise a family. Most adventuring stops.

*iKhehla* are senior elders. Few survive to reach this age group. Some are around 10<sup>th</sup> level, but most are still 9<sup>th</sup> level, as their experience-earning years are far behind them.

## SOCIAL MOBILITY

Social mobility in the southern Black Kingdoms is mostly a waiting game. When a person's age grade is promoted, the person gets promoted along with the others in his age grade. Initiation ceremonies into the next age grade take place every few years. Marriage is also a sign of social status. More militaristic kingdoms forbid marriage until the king allows an entire age group to get married – resulting often in a mass marriage ceremony as a group of warriors retire and become elders. Less militaristic kingdoms allow married warriors and marriages occur whenever desired or as the chief of each individual kraal dictates.

## THE KRAAL

Southern Black Kingdom tribesmen live in kraals, which are two concentric palisades built out of thorn trunks on slight slopes. The inner circle is for the cattle; calves often are placed in a smaller enclosure within the inner circle. The huts of the southern Black Kingdom tribesmen are built between the inner and outer palisades. The main entrance is at the lower end of the mild slope the kraal is built upon. The kraal is built on a slope so rainwater cleans out the kraal and enemies





have to fight uphill. Somewhere in most kraals is a pile of stones called *isiVivane*, which are signs of respect for local nature spirits.

Some huts are small and built on poles. These huts are storage units or are used as watchtowers. One is usually located near the main entrance and if, for example, the main entrance faces due south, other watchtower huts would be positioned in the northwest and the northeast.

Opposite the main entrance is the largest hut. This hut belongs to the chief's mother, who holds a lot of power in the family. To the right of the chief's mother's hut is the chief's hut. To the left of the chief's mother's hut is the hut of the chief's primary wife. Next to the chief's hut is the second wife's hut. Next to the primary wife's hut is the third wife's hut. The pattern continues should the chief have more than three wives. Other huts are built for any others who might live in the kraal, such as sons who get married the chief's younger brothers and their families.

A hut for unmarried girls is built to the left of the main entrance. Another hut for the unmarried boys is built to the right of the main entrance. The eldest sons are expected to keep an eye on the entrance at all times of the day or night. They decide if visitors are rejected, made to wait or ushered in immediately, usually according to instructions. The visitors allowed into the kraal then listen as the escorting son sings the praises of the chief. The son watches the reactions of the visitors closely. In this way the oldest sons come to know those who visit their father and learn how various visitors are treated in preparation for the time when the eldest son becomes the chief.

Kraals are moved every twenty years because the community's slash-and-burn agriculture methods deplete the soil.

## HUTS

Southern Black Kingdom tribesmen live in beehive huts built according to traditional patterns. Men use a collection of sticks to make a circle on the ground around a central tree trunk. Women braid split reeds and grass, using them as material for thatching the hut. Doors are always low so enemies must stoop before entering. Floors are made of a thick mixture of dung

and termite mound. This mixture dries rock hard and can be polished to a mirror-like finish. A raised hearth of the same material is built near the central column. Smoke from the hearth passes through the thatch, which keeps the hut fumigated. The hut is warm in the winter and cool in the summer.

## PYGMY HOMES

The pygmy tribes of the central jungle regions do not build kraals or huts. They make their homes from wood and leaves or from sun-baked mud bricks.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

The tribes of the Black Coast have constant dealings with Stygian and other foreign merchants; these dealings often take the form of raiding and piracy but some peaceful contact occurs. The people along the Black Coast have access to Hyborian weapons but these are expensive and there is little training available in their proper use. Coastal ships from Stygia, Shem, Argos and Zingara ply these waters, trading regularly with the tribes. Stygia is the primary trader here and often attempts to block other traffic.

Cattle are the measure of wealth in the southern Black Kingdoms. Men are likely to pay more attention to their herds than they do their wives.

## THE MILITARY OF THE SOUTHERN BLACK KINGDOMS

Power in these lands is equated with military prowess or strategic innovation. The primary weapon of these tribesmen is the spear. A club is usually carried as a backup weapon. Traditional combat entails charging the enemy with an ox-hide shield, locking that shield with an enemy shield or weapon, moving the enemy's weapon or shield aside with the shield, then stabbing the enemy in the ribs or stomach with a stabbing spear held in the hand behind the shield. Ranged weapons include the throwing spear rather than a bow and arrow, which is regarded as the weapon of a coward because it does not allow an opponent a chance at combat, honour and glory. Any southern black kingdom native seen using a bow and arrow suffers a -2 penalty to Reputation among his fellows. This does not apply to Southern Islanders.



Ritualistic displays of aggression are often used to intimidate an opponent rather than provoke an all out war, since most tribes are too small to survive if they sustain heavy casualties. Further, dancing is an important part of daily black kingdom life and is part of military training.

The regiments are known as the *amaButho*. They are commanded by *inDuna*. The *inDuna* are military commanders. Their actual rank in relation to other *inDuna* depends on their age group and the amount of personal decoration they have earned for bravery in battle.

The military of the deep jungle regions are even less developed. Their most common weapon is a poisoned dart sent spinning from a blow gun. They usually attack from ambush and wait until their prey succumbs to their poisons before revealing themselves.

## RELIGION IN THE SOUTHERN BLACK KINGDOMS

For more information on both the Inquices of the Black Coast and the gods of the interior southern Black Kingdoms, see *Faith and Fervour*. A brief overview will be provided here.

## RELIGION ALONG THE BLACK COAST

Along the Black Coast, the natives practice a black religion centred around frightening spirits known as Inquice or Loa or Baka (depending on the specific tribe). These spirits are considered minor deities for the most part and they run the range of human characteristics, emotions and traits. Rituals are performed in secret languages known only to the priests. Central to the religion is the belief in the efficacy of sacrifices. This religion also has ancestral worship aspects as well.

Priests and sorcerers along the Black Coast are called *Nganga*. Most of them focus on spells and feats that require Magical Links. Fetishes and drums play a large role in the activities of the *Nganga*; see *Faith and Fervour* for rules and text concerning Black Coast fetishes and drums. Also see *Faith and Fervour* for the White Darkness spell, an important spell in the religion of the Black Coast. Witch-finders of the Black Coast dress in feathers, bells and snake-skins.

## RELIGION AMONG THE SOUTHERN BLACK KINGDOMS

Most southern Black Kingdom tribesmen believe in an uncaring creator god who is the Source of All Things. This source is often called *Nkulu* but the name may vary from tribe to tribe. In interacting with this Source, the tribesmen must appeal to the spirit world (*Unkulunkulu*) through their ancestors, the *AmaDlozi*. The *AmaDlozi* can only be reached through Divination. The *AmaDlozi* must be remembered and praised constantly lest they feel they have been forgotten, at which point they make their presence known through problems and ill fortune.

Further, the southern Black Kingdoms hold an animist view of the world. Spirits exist within animals, forests, caves and objects. These spirits may have names, such as *Jhil* or *Ajuju*. Most kraals and villages have a pile of stones called *isiVivane* to show the local spirits respect. This pile of stones is created when tribesmen pick up stones with their left feet, take them into their right hands and place them in the pile before starting off for a journey. Lightning is considered extremely holy, a direct instrument of the spirits. No one may use a tree struck by lightning, eat an animal killed by lightning or mourn a person killed by lightning. The spirits have decreed their death or destruction and no one will gainsay the spirits' right in that regard. The struck thing had obviously incurred the wrath of the spirits and so deserved its fate.

Wizards and sorcerers in the Southern Kingdoms are known as shamans, *isangoma* (female) or *inyanga* (male). The *isangoma* tend to be spiritualists who commune with the spirits of the ancestors. The *inyanga* are herbalist shamans, wise in the magic of flora and fauna. The shamans are usually witch-finders or priests of dark gods such as *Jhil* and *Ajuju*. Sorcery is condemned throughout the southern Black Kingdoms unless one is an *isangoma* or *inyanga*. Anyone found to be a sorcerer outside of his religion is tortured and killed. More information can be found in *Faith and Fervour*.

## TRIBAL GOVERNMENT

The title of chief or king applies to anyone from a village headman to a god-like king of many clans. Often a Black Kingdom chief is the warrior with the





largest resources and armies. In most cases, a hereditary chief holds a ritualised position, a mere expression of symbolic authority. The symbolism is important, however and his authority is sanctioned by the tribes because he is regarded as a living pledge of divine favour for the clan. The hereditary chief is the focus of innumerable rituals. The title rarely passes from one chief to his chosen heir except by the death of the chief. A council of elders chooses a new chief from among all of the chief's male children, thus most new chiefs have at least one level of barbarian under their belt. The hereditary clan chief is responsible for the ritual success of the clan.

The head of a southern black tribe is the *iNkosi*. He is regarded by his people as a father figure and is the source of their wealth, the spiritual symbol of their tribe and the man who determines the fate of his people. For a warrior to die in the service of the *iNkosi* is the height of glory. A potential *iNkosi* must first prove himself as a warrior before he is acknowledged as the heir to the throne of his people. The *iNkosi* is advised by a council of headmen, clan elders required to live at the *iNkosi's* kraal for a while as advisors. High ranking soldiers (*isiKhulu*) are also part of this council.

Beneath the *iNkosi* are the chiefs, the heads of households or kraals. A chief settles all disputes. Any dispute he cannot settle is settled by the tribal *iNkosi*. If a chief fails the *iNkosi*, he and all of his subjects are put to death. A chief who is perceived as weak, cowardly or stupid would likely be killed by his own offspring to avoid his making a mistake that would cause the entire clan to be slain. If a family is too big for one kraal, the eldest chief is chosen as *umNumzani*, or headman. These headmen usually live at the kraal of the *iNkosi*.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF THE BLACK COAST AND KINGDOMS

The Black Coast is primarily jungle; further within, the region is mostly wilderness and is largely unexplored. Jungles, steppes, forests and more await those who pass the beaches and head into the dark heart of the Black Kingdoms.

**Afu** – Afu is a river south of Kush.

**Coast of Bones** – The Coast of Bones, as described by John Maddox Roberts, is a shoreline of jagged, white rocks six days south of the Zarkheba River. The cannibal Borana people live near this coast.

**Great Savannah** – The Great Savannah lies south of the jungles in the centre of the southern Black Kingdoms.

**Green River** – The Green River is a sluggish river of the Black Coast that disgorges vast amounts of green scum into the Western Ocean off the Coast of Bones. The water is laden with jungle diseases. Fresh water can be found an hour upstream where fresh clean water trickles in from some hills. The river is home to crocodiles and hippopotami. Three days inland one comes to the Giant's Fall, a beautiful waterfall from an escarpment.

**Mountains of Jukala** – The Mountains of Jukala are a range of mountains and volcanoes south of Keshan. The snow covered peaks and glaciers provide runoff that flows into the Styx. Hot springs and other evidence of volcanic activity are common. According to Leonard Carpenter, the rare silver lotus grows on the slopes of these mountains.

**Vale of Lost Women** – The vale of lost women is a broad valley in the south that is thick with white blossoms and towering trees with waving fronds. The blacks speak of this area with fear. The brown-skinned race that lived here before the Bakalabs sent their young women here, where they were turned into white flowers to escape the ravishing blacks. The natives will not go here. The slopes of the valley are so gentle that one is likely to arrive at the bottom of the valley without even realising it.

**Watambi River** – The Watambi River is the first major watercourse south of the Zarkheba River. This river is also home to the Dragon-Riders, a legendary tribe who ride the river standing on the backs of crocodiles.

**Zarkheba River** – The Zarkheba is a poisonous river that empties into the ocean. It is a river of Death. Its banks are jungle-shrouded walls of mystery. Up the river at some distance is a city of giant towers and incredible walls. There are no crocodiles, birds or four legged beasts of any kind inhabiting the river or its environs; only venomous reptiles. The ruins of the City of the Winged Ones can be found along it (see *Ruins of Hyboria* for details on the City of the Winged Ones).

**Zikamba River** – The Zikamba lies on the Black Coast directly east of the Nameless Isle. It is a small, sluggish river whose banks are thickly grown with tall, slender palms and heavy underbrush.



## IMPORTANT BLACK KINGDOM VILLAGES AND TRIBES

**Abombi** – Abombi is a town on the Black Coast that is raided by Bêlit and Amra (Conan). According to Roy Thomas, Abombi is built on the ruins of an elder race's city.

**Bakalah** – The Bakalah are a savage tribe which live just south of Kush's borders. They often raid Kushite raiders, raiding them in turn after they raid Stygia. Near to them are the Bamulas, another warlike tribe of the region just south of Kush. Tools and implements are made of bamboo, stone, ivory, gold or bronze. They eat smoked meat, roasted yams, mealies and bread. They drink a type of beer. Their villages, which are protected by bomas, are collections of thatched huts hung with mats made of bamboo. They use elephant-tusk horns as well as drums in their ceremonies and magic, punctuated by hideous chants and frenzied dancing. Their victims, if not sacrificed for their shamans, are fed to wild animals.

**Bamula** – The Bamula are a warrior tribe south of Kush and near the land of the Bakalah. For about a year, Conan was their war-chief.

**Fashoda** – The Fashoda are a savannah-dwelling tribe who base their lives and religion around cattle. They live within the Great Savannah south of the jungles. They are a fairly uniform people, indicating they marry and breed within their own tribe. The higher the social status, the more clothing and the fewer ornaments are worn. Fish are abominations to the Fashoda and are never eaten.

**Jihiji** – The Jihiji are another tribe south of Kush, probably near both the Bamula and the Bakalah. They hold a truce with the Bakalah and are a strong people. The Bakalah alone are not enough to fight them.

**Kchaka** – The Kchaka are a southern black kingdom tribe near Zembabwei. The Zembabwans are related to this tribe.

**Kulalo** – Kulalo is the royal village on the Black Coast where Juma is king of several united tribes in the region and is approaching the size of a real kingdom. It is near the northern edge of Amazon, although several small tribes lie between Kulalo land and Amazon. The people of Kulalo think it an honour to 'loan' out their women to friendly foreigners, although the men expect a gift afterwards. The women wear only a few beads and bangles for clothing in the hot jungles here. The men wield stabbing spears (assegai) and leopard-skin loin cloths and plumed headdresses. They worship Damballah, a creator god.

**Kungado** – The Kungada are a tribe of the southern Black Kingdoms east of Bamula territory.

**Matubis** – Matubis is a large village north of the Watambi tribe. Matubis is a coastal village and carries on a significant amount of sea trade.

**Suba** – Suba is a tribe off the Black Coast. Sakumbe of Suba was a fat corsair who sailed with Bêlit and Amra (Conan) and the Suba as a whole are friendly to the Black Corsairs. Bêlit is said to have lived for a while with the Suba. The Suba worship Ajujo the Dark One.

**Wadai** – This is a tribe that wears their hair closely cropped to their heads. Many of them are sold into slavery and a few work in Zamboula. They live in the jungles to the southwest of Zembabwei.

**Watambi** – The Watambi, located south of Matubis, are a tribe of the Black Coast. They live around the Watambi River. They gave Bêlit ivory in tribute in exchange for their lives.

**Zumba** – The Zumba are a tribe living on the Great Savannah, which occurs before one reaches the mountains. They farm and raise cattle. The Zumba and the Fashoda raid each other's cattle herds.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

A family member of one of the characters may have been captured by savage tribesmen and transported south of Kush, either for ransom or as a slave to the war-chiefs or as a sacrifice to some bestial god. The adventurers must travel to the Black Kingdoms, dive into the lush jungles and hope they can make it through to the dark kingdom rumoured to hold their beloved kin hostage.

A savage chief of one of the tribes has offered a ransom for the return of his son, stolen by raiders and sold into slavery somewhere in the northern Hyborian realms. The characters must steal away the slave and return him to his kingdom, fighting past hostile tribes who would also like to have their hands on the son of a rival king.



# Border Kingdom

## The Haunted Land

The Border Kingdom is a mysterious kingdom about which Robert E. Howard says little other than it is a Hyborian nation. Virtually everything known about the Border Kingdom comes from later authors, such as L. Sprague de Camp, John Maddox Roberts, Roy Thomas, Richard A. Knaak and others. These writers have established that the Border Kingdom is the home of exiled nobles and rebel heirs of the greater Hyborian kingdoms. The Border Kingdom serves as a safeguard between Brythunia and Nemedica and the savage tribes of the north.

Criminals of all sorts find refuge here and have hidden here for generations. Many of these have raised decadent families alone in the wild, creating in-bred hamlets and villages that eventually deteriorate into something less than human. Of course, the humans with their own vices are sometimes worse than the sub-humanoids.

Few inhabitants of the Border Kingdom are friendly. Most are paranoid. Outsiders are usually threats, so most are killed and looted quickly to minimise the potential danger a stranger brings. Out in the wild, a horse means more for survival than companions. Without a horse, the odds of surviving travel through this forbidding land are remote.

Some inhabitants eschew the relative safety of the settlements, preferring the freedom of the roads. Some are merely bounty hunters but others are wandering tribes of gypsy-like clans.

### BORDER KINGDOM CLOTHING

People in the Border Kingdom dress in whatever clothes they have brought with them or in whatever clothes they can trade, buy or steal from the

caravans. Typically they dress similarly to the natives of whichever kingdom is closest to their homes. Most garments are worn until faded and tattered to uselessness. Inhabitants of the Border Kingdom have more to worry about than clothing.

Most characters who live for any length of time in the Border Kingdom take a few ranks in Craft (clothing) or marry someone with such skills so they can make decent repairs on their clothing or make replacement clothes using crude, local materials. Simple frontier clothes (Craft DC 5) wear out in a day of rough wear. Typical border clothing (Craft DC 10) wears out in a week of hard wear. High-quality clothing (Craft DC 15) lasts nearly a month. Superior clothing (Craft DC 20) can last up to three months with only the most minor of repairs. The Games Master may adjust Craft DCs depending on circumstances and materials at hand.

### TRADE AND ECONOMY

While much of the land is inhospitable and fit only for raising goats or sheep, some areas permit subsistence farming. Most of the larger towns exist on the trade routes, where robber barons earn a living extorting revenue from the traders that pass through in exchange for safe passage, although some desperate barons will loot the caravans regardless of any promises made. The merchants put up with this because the extortion and bribery is still less than the tariffs and taxes of Nemedica.

Nemedica, of course, resents the lost revenue and raids the Border Kingdom in the self-serving belief that the robber-barons owe Nemedica for the avoided tariffs and taxes. Caravans caught using the Border Kingdom routes by the Nemedians are usually treated harshly, as are the barons themselves should they find themselves in Nemedian hands.

Youths in the villages and itinerate homes across the Border Kingdom flock to the towns for romance and excitement, creating a bustling environment in most of the



towns. Although most of these towns are dirt poor, they do sport pubs and other forms of public entertainment for the caravans.

Other than the caravans, people in the Border Kingdom tend to remain close to home for most if not all of their lives. Going out too far is dangerous. Kidnapping and slavery are common. The countryside seems to be largely inhabited by sub-humanoid demons, such as the Yemli in the Haunted Lands, the Beast-Men of the Great Swamp and the degenerates that live around Eridu.

Many of the weapons in the Border Kingdom qualify as primitive weapons, often made out of inferior metals due to the lack of natural ore mines and the difficulty in procuring quality ores and metals in trade. The Border Kingdom is, unfortunately, always going to have an unfavourable trade balance because they have little to offer the surrounding nations. Some ore is mined out of the Cimmerian mountains but the Cimmerians take their toll on those who intrude within those depressing peaks. Quality weapons cost as much as 1d4+1 times more than they would in Nemedi.

Virtually everything offered for sale in the Border Kingdom is made locally or stolen. There are few stores for shopping. Most people are fairly self-reliant and do not shop for goods. They are more likely to trade with their neighbours or rob a caravan than go shopping. As in the Westermarck, the Border Kingdom mostly operates on the barter system. They have no centralised government to mint coins and the value of a coin is directly proportional to the amount of metal in it. There are a handful of trading post stores along the main caravan routes, although these are uncommon. For non-weapon items (other than alcohol), roll a 1d6 and add that amount in silver pieces to the standard price of the item to find its price at one of the trading post stores.

A Border Kingdom trading post store contains such goods as blankets of varying quality, coarse woollen cloths, cotton, linens, thread, lines, twine, common hardware, cutlery, kettles of brass and copper, tin goods, blacksmith goods and iron-work, hats, boots, hose, beads, needles, awls, ribbon, jewellery and vermilion. Poor-quality arms and some light armour are also carried. Tobacco, Aquilonian brandy, Kyros or Ghaza wine, Nemedian ale, salt, tea, brown sugar, flour, spices, salted pork, dried meat and candles are also common goods found in the post store. Meat has to be salted or dried for storage. Dried meat is the more common due to the high cost of salt. Corn mush and pea soup is common fare for those staying at the post and eating out of its kitchens.

## RELIGION IN THE BORDER KINGDOM

Although the Border Kingdom is Hyborian, it is home to many strange religions and ideas. Some of the entities worshipped in the Border Kingdom include:

### BORI

The hero-god of the Hyborians before the arrival of Mitra is still worshipped in certain parts of the Border Kingdom, especially those parts with Gundermen and Hyperborean residents. Some exiled Hyborians take up Bori worship as an act of defiance against the religion of whatever kingdom exiled them into the Border Kingdom. More information on Bori worship can be found in *Faith and Fervour*.

### MITRA

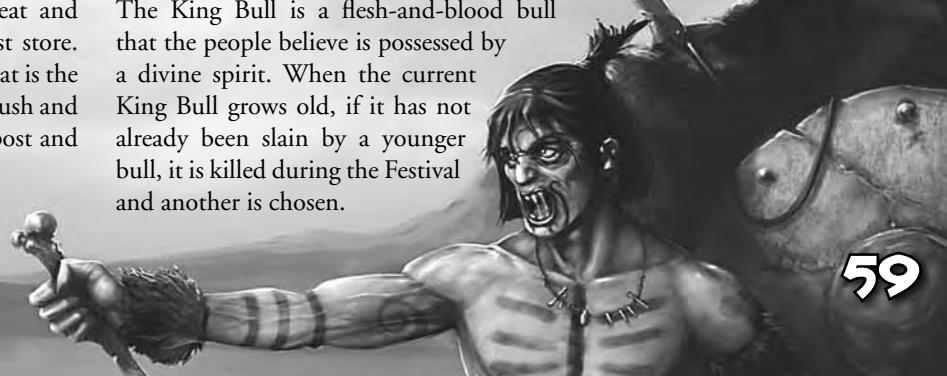
The Border Kingdom is a Hyborian nation and largely worships Mitra, the 'universal god of the Hyborians.' Mitra is regarded as the one true god by those who worship him, the commander of the heavenly host and the saints. His followers are suspicious and intolerant of other cults, although the cult does not have the power in the Border Kingdom to do much about the various cults and religions that persist in the secret places of the baronies and provinces. Information on the Mitran cult can be found on page 16 and in *Faith and Fervour*.

### YMIR

The frost giant Ymir is also worshipped, especially in the areas bordering on Asgard. Ymir and his religion is detailed in *Faith and Fervour*.

### KING BULL

The people of western Border Kingdom pay homage to King Bull and hold a festival in his honour every autumn. Anyone may attend this festival in peace but a certain ritual is performed on the second night of the festival by nude highborn women and any man who witnesses this ritual is summarily executed. The King Bull is a flesh-and-blood bull that the people believe is possessed by a divine spirit. When the current King Bull grows old, if it has not already been slain by a younger bull, it is killed during the Festival and another is chosen.







## BORDER KINGDOM GOVERNMENT

The government of the Border Kingdom is difficult to categorise. Robert E. Howard calls it a Hyborian *kingdom* but the later writers usually characterise the Border Kingdom as a land without a unifying king, ruled by barons who do as they like. These barons are often exiled or rogue nobles from the other Hyborian nations and bring with them the customs and habits of their own lands. Games Masters will have to decide for themselves whether the Border Kingdom has a king or not. If so, it probably has a feudal government system.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF THE BORDER KINGDOM

The Border Kingdom is a wasteland of moors and, toward the edges, sparse forests. The land is rocky and unwelcoming. Stories tell of areas blasted by historic meteorites and of areas haunted by cannibal natives degenerated from inbred groups of lost renegades. The climate is wet and cold with 'incessant rain'.

**Eiglophian Mountains** – The Eiglophian Mountains are an incredible mountain range that separates Vanaheim, Asgard and Hyperborea from the southern kingdoms. Passes through this impressive range of rock and ice are usually blocked during the winter by weather conditions but otherwise afford traffic between the frozen north and the warm south. A small portion of this cold range passes through the northern reaches of the Border Kingdom. A tribe of Hyperboreans called the Verunians live in these mountains, fighting off attacks from degenerate cannibal creatures that also live in the higher peaks of the range. The highest and most formidable mountain in this black range is an ancient volcano with four extinct craters and black escarpments of obsidian and ancient lava.

### **Snow Devil Glacier (The River of Death Ice)**

– This is a titanic Eiglophian glacier that flows along the borders of Hyperborea, the Border Kingdom and Asgard. It is also known as the River of Death Ice. It can easily be seen from the top



of a nameless pass that leads southward into the Border Kingdom from Asgard. This pass moves along the fringes of this glacier and is dangerous because of hidden crevasses, thin snow bridges and sudden avalanches. Small, gnarled trees litter the rocky slopes of the pass, living on the water and soil brought by the glacier. This glacier is a place of fear among the people who live in the north, even among those who have likely never seen it. Of course, it is not uncommon for entire parties of men to perish on the dangerous glacier. The glacier is home to the vampire ice worm of the north, variously called the remora or *yakhmar*, as well as tribes of hairy humanoids who are a few steps back on the evolutionary ladder.

**Great Salt Marsh** – This dreary basin may be the remnant of a great inland sea created by the Cataclysm. Few venture into the actual marsh, preferring instead the treacherous outskirts. The edges of the marsh are swamps and bogs of 'cold, black water and scrubby patches of bracken cut by meandering streamlets and dotted by hummocks of dry grass'. The area is dominated by hazes and fogs generated by the bogs and swamps. The area is largely treeless and many of the hummocks are not sound. The gloomy land is thick with swooping bats, wild dogs, croaking frogs and dangerous vipers. Degenerate beast-men live among the swamps and bogs, descended from generations of run-



away slaves and escaped criminals. If a traveller continues moving northeast through here, he will encounter rising hills and Skull Gate, the entrance into Hyperborea.

**Haunted Land** – The Haunted Land is a vast, desolate wasteland populated by the Yemli, twisted, crimson-eyed degenerates feared by all in the north. This wasteland is dominated by tall spires of rock, flat land and a bleak aspect. The bones of the Yemli's victims litter the landscape.

**Skull Gate** – At the north-east end of the Border Kingdom, this curious monument marks the entrance into Hyperborea. Massive knolls define the border and a pass cuts through the ramparts. Set within one of the huge hills is a massive, human-like skull. In actuality it is the skull of a mammoth. Without its tusks the skull looks strangely like the skull of a giant. Across the brow of the skull are painted, in Hyperborean, the words, 'The gate of Hyperborea is the Gate of Death to those who come hither without leave.' Beyond is a rocky plain broken by stark, crumbling hills. The pass is a link between the Eiglophian Mountains and the Graaskal Mountains.

**Ymir's Pass** – Ymir's Pass is a rocky valley through the craggy mountains between Cimmeria and the Border Kingdom. Although the hill-bred Cimmerians have no real need of the pass, those passing on horseback or in wagons must make use of the pass or find a way around the mountains by heading south. The fortress of Atzel lies across the Border Kingdom side of the pass. It is built from cliff to cliff, allowing the baron there to collect tribute from caravans and travellers.

## CITIES AND PROVINCES IN THE BORDER KINGDOM

Although the Border Kingdom appears virtually uninhabited, it is not as barren as first it appears. Well-worn foot trails criss-cross the nation, although a traveller may not ever see those who tread upon those trails. Small villages and hamlets can also be found, as well as the castles of the 'barons', those hardy villains who gained their barony not from the contract of a king but from a force of arms and their ability to dominate the lands and those that live off those lands. There are approximately 910 villages averaging 500 people each in the Border Kingdom. Nine or ten larger towns are known to exist. Trade routes exist, run by merchants seeking to avoid heavy Nemedian taxes and tariffs. The robber barons and trade towns of the

Border Kingdom have their own tolls but most merchants find them lighter and easier to bear than the Nemedians and their weighty demands.

**Atzel** – Atzel is the kingdom of a robber baron of the same name. Located north of Cragfell in the west of the Border Kingdom, Atzel's fortress lies in Ymir's Pass in the Border Kingdom. The fort is built of stone yet without the benefit of mortar. The walls of the fort stretch across the entire valley entrance of Ymir's Pass. Although Conan killed the robber baron, like as not another has taken up the fortress and continues the raiding and ruling of that forested land. Atzel has a population of 2,346.

**Belglat** – Belglat is a busy town in the Border Kingdom. It is walled and is an interesting place to find romance, excitement and the lure of easy wealth. It is a trade town on the caravan route through the Border Kingdom. It has a population of 4,658.

**Cella** – Cella is a village near Cimmeria that hosts annual games every summer, a series of sports that test physical strength and skill. Cella has a population of 684, although it swells to thrice that size during the annual games.

**Cragfell** – Cragfell is a western Border Kingdom province characterised by helmets with bull's horns and shields decorated with the head of a bull. Its people are horsemen armoured in cuirasses of mail or scale. The people of Cragfell are fair-haired and blue-eyed, cousins to the Gundermen. They carry a standard decorated with a bull's skull and bull tails. The people of Cragfell have names similar to the Gundermen, such as Aelfrith, a chieftainess of Cragfell. Cragfell is a village built on a crag, surrounded by a crude wall of piled stones. The road up the low mountain circles Cragfell so that travellers must keep their unshielded sides toward the wall, where the blue-eyed guards watch with bows and spears. At the center of the fort is a long, elaborately decorated timber hall. Cragfell is a wooded land where pigs are raised and crops are grown and where even the commoners have at least a spear, if not a hunting bow, handy. The boys often work as servants in the keep for the cavalry and even the women can be warriors and leaders here. The people of Cragfell have adopted several Nordheimer practices, such as steam saunas. Each autumn they celebrate the Great Festival where the King Bull, their most sacred symbol, is honoured. This festival





is a peaceful gathering where any may attend, regardless of race or creed. Cragfell lies to the south of Atzel. The main villages of Cragfell have a population of over 4,000.

**D'eim** – This is a large town dedicated to Mitra. At one time, a tower was built here, supposedly dedicated to Mitra but actually dedicated to Set. With the aid of Conan, the townspeople pulled the tower down and buried many of Set's demons and secrets in the rubble. D'eim sits on a plain in the foothills near Cimmeria and has a population in excess of 6,000.

**Eridu** – Eridu is a city in the eastern portion of the foothills of the Border Kingdom just beyond the mountain ranges of south-eastern Cimmeria. Eridu is not in the Haunted Lands and is to the west of the Great Salt Marsh. Yet another sub-human race dwells in the rocky badlands of this region that are not Yemli nor Beast-Man; this race is controlled by the men of Eridu. The city itself is located in a surprisingly fertile, steep-walled valley around a central lake. In the center of the lake is an island. Eridu was once a city in Brythunia.

Defeated many generations past, its people fled into the Border Kingdom with their most sacred relic, a great golden rune gong. They encountered the sub-humanoids of the area and enslaved them. The city was ruled by a cruel high priest of Moloq but Conan's arrival changed this. The people of this city had cut out the tongues of their sub-humanoid slaves, so the older generation of sub-humanoids are silent. Their children, however, are not. The city is now ruled by Queen Naluna.

**Haraldon** – Haraldon is a small village with a keep located in the western corner of the Border Kingdom. The village is thatch-roofed and the bronze-doored keep is ancient. The ruler of Haraldon uses a red fox as a device on breastplates, banners and shields. Haraldon is ruled by a merchant named Haral who was run out of Nemedra for being too wealthy and too ambitious, desiring a noble girl for his wife.

**Lucerthan** – Surrounded by sparse forests, Lucerthan is a village located in a mountainous region of the Border Kingdom. These forests are dangerous and bleak; criminals and renegades hide here. The people of Lucerthan are superstitious and do not tolerate wizards. Castle Lon can be found in these woods, an evil place where a wizard devoted to the demoness Ishiti (see page 201) once lived. Lucerthan has a population of 314.

**Phalkar** – Phalkar is the westernmost province of the Border Kingdom. It was once ruled by an overlord named Thormond and his wife Chrykala. Themus Herklar, a general of Phalkar's armies, hired a trio of sorcerers to overthrow Thormond and make him regent of Phalkar. One of the sorcerers hid the daughter of Thormond and the other two created a human being named Unos and overthrew Themus, placing Unos on the throne. Conan killed Unos and restored the daughter of Thormond and Chrykala to the throne.

✦ **Alkarion** – Alkarion is the capital of Phalkar. It is ruled by Stefanya, the daughter of Thormond and Chrykala. Stefanya was placed on the throne by Conan and would support him and any of his causes if the need arose. Alkarion has a population exceeding 18,000 people.

**Ramuda** – Ramuda is a lively trading town. The town is ruled by a baron but a provincial governor is nominally his superior. A former baron was a scholar and had a stolen magical tome of dark enchantments: poisons, love potions and at least one spell to summon a demon. The townspeople killed the baron but the tome may still be around.



**Ravengard** – Ravengard is a barony of the Border Kingdom. Baron Torkal Moh sends forth armed men to force ‘tribute’ from wayfarers and caravans passing through his barony. A common punishment in Ravengard is to tie criminals to four stakes in the hot sun. Ravengard is infested with rats which come out to eat the condemned men while they lie screaming. One road leads to the castle of Ravengard and the walls are at least 18 feet tall. The courtyard of Ravengard sports a horrible garden of twisted plants that eat flesh and a deep pool.

**Sfanol** – This is a village like many others in the Border Kingdom. Sfanol sits on a caravan route between Brythunia and Aquilonia, hoping to serve the merchants who travel those otherwise desolate routes to avoid paying Nemedian tolls. Conan passes through this village en route to the province of Phalkar. He rescues a woman about to be burned at the stake for witchcraft. Sfanol has a tavern named ‘The Tavern of the Ringing Bell.’ The village has a population around 550.

**Syterna** – This is a market town located near the Cimmerian border. It is ruled by a baron who often rides out in the town to find girls to spend the evening with. Syterna has a population of nearly 4,000.

**Tarsus** – For years Tarsus had never known war or famine and revelled in peace and prosperity; then the king died, leaving his daughter Narcia in a power struggle with the more popular Castrica. The city was soon left without king, queen, princess or wizard, so Conan and his mercenaries looted it sometime in the years between *The Queen of the Black Coast* and *Black Colossus*. A castle once stood high in the hills outside of Tarsus, the last refuge of the king in the event of a revolution but now a gaping hole marks the spot. The location is considered cursed and haunted by the people of Tarsus. Tarsus has a population of nearly 20,000.

**Ursonia** – Ursonia is a small town about a day and a half ride from the Aquilonian border and a day and a half to the east of Zarac’s territory.

**Zarac** – Zarac is a foul, barbarous place between Haraldon and the nearest border to the south. Zarac is about three days ride from Aquilonia and about eight hours ride to the south of Haraldon. It was founded by Karothius, an exiled brigand. He was poisoned by his mistress, Selenia, who ruled for five weeks before being killed in her bed by the Brythunian half-breed Alto, her lover. It was later ruled by a former military officer named Geris, whose scarred head was shaved save for a mane down the centre. Geris often scarred himself. He had no honour

and would gleefully commit atrocities for fun. Geris, however, was recently replaced by a villain named Loth who wants to expand his holdings into Aquilonia. Zarac is a fairly large city.

## LOCAL HISTORY

Extremely little is recorded about the history of the Border Kingdom. It has not had a stable government nor an unbroken history since before the Cataclysm. Some reasoned guesses about the history of the Border Kingdom can be made, however. When the first Hyborian nation of Hyperborea rose and began conquering, uprooted tribes were pushed out of their way, often toward the south. As the Hyborians pushed southward themselves they surely passed through the lands now known as the Border Kingdom. These lands were inhospitable enough to encourage more southward expansion, leading the Hyborians to swarm over the walls of ancient Acheron.

Even as the violent age wore on, people did not choose to live in the Border Kingdom alone. It was a place for refugees from the wars that took place as the Hyborian kingdoms formed. It may even be that the Border Kingdom, at one time, was a unified feudal society bound by oath to one king. History does not tell us. The country may have simply formed in the fragmented manner that exists today or it may have been broken asunder by civil strife.

## LOCAL CREATURES

### BEAST-MEN

Medium Humanoid

**Climate/Terrain:** The Great Salt Marsh and the surrounding bogs

**Organisation:** Solitary, patrol (2–4), or horde (5–20)

**Initiative:** +0

**Senses:** Listen +1, Spot +2

**Languages:** Beast-Man

**Dodge Defence:** 12

**Parry Defence:** 12

**Hit Points:** 6 (1 HD); DR 1

**Saves:** Fort +4, Ref +4, Will –1

**Speed:** 30 ft.

**Melee:** Club +3 (1d8+2, AP 3) or claw +3 (1d3+2)

**Base Atk +1; Grp +3**

**Special Attacks:** Improved grab







**Abilities:** Str 15, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 7, Wis 12, Cha 8  
**Feats:** Alertness  
**Skills:** Hide +2, Move Silently +2, Spot +2, Survival +2  
**Possessions:** Club  
**Advancement:** By character class (probably barbarian)

These are wild, feral natives that live in the swamps and fens around the Great Salt Marsh. They live on crayfish, wild dogs, bats, frogs and any human prey they can find. They wield the most primitive of weapons. Their eyes glitter with a feral light and their hands have long fingernails that serve as primitive talons. They fight in hordes whenever possible.

The beast men are the result of centuries of inbreeding among escaped criminals hiding in the moors. They have degenerated to the point that they are barely even human anymore. They have, over the centuries, developed a taste for human flesh. They are also cannibal and do not leave their dead when they leave the scene of an ambush.

**Improved Grab:** If a beastman hits with a claw attack it deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. Beast men cannot use this ability to grapple anything larger than themselves.

## HALF-MEN OF ERIDU

Medium Monstrous Humanoid  
**Climate/Terrain:** Eridu and the surrounding crags  
**Organisation:** Solitary, patrol (2–4), or horde (5–20)  
**Initiative:** +0  
**Senses:** Listen +1, Spot +2, darkvision 60 ft  
**Languages:** Half-Man Tongue

**Dodge Defence:** 11  
**Hit Points:** 11 (2 HD); DR 1  
**Saves:** Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +0

**Speed:** 30 ft.  
**Melee:** 2 claws +3 (1d4+2) and bite +1 (1d6+1)  
**Base Atk +1; Grp +3**  
**Special Attacks:** Improved grab

**Abilities:** Str 15, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 9, Wis 10, Cha 8  
**Special Qualities:** Darkvision 60 ft  
**Feats:** Multiattack  
**Skills:** Listen +1, Spot +2, Survival +2  
**Advancement:** By character class (probably barbarian)

'Crom's Bones! Does nothing but monstrosities inhabit this accursed country?'

The mute attackers – clawing, biting, some falling before his swinging sword – make no answer... One demi-man falls – another takes its place. The process is repeated until even Conan is brought down by sheer weight of hairy numbers and, using viny thongs to bind him, show that, however they may appear, these creatures are more man than beast.

– *The Voice of Molog*

The half-men of Eridu, also called the 'not-men' by the people of Eridu, are another race of humanity that has, over time, slid down the evolutionary scale. They lived for long years out of the sight of men until the people of Eridu discovered them and enslaved them. Their tongues were cut out and they were forced to serve as front-line troops as well as servants. In previous times they were a matriarchal society and are now once again but this time they willingly serve a human queen named Naluna, a white-haired beauty with Brythunian blood.

The half-men of Eridu are covered with coarse brown or black hair, except on the palms of their hands and feet and on their faces. Their faces are bestial and not totally unlike monkeys', with pronounced snouts and long, dagger-like teeth that are displayed in ghastly grins. They are lithe and muscular, with long humanoid arms and legs tipped with chilling claws.

The older generation of half-men are mute but Naluna and her consort Hobb of Anuphar have not continued the practice of cutting out their tongues, so the younger generation speak a language of their own and may speak a smattering of some Hyborian tongue or other.

The half-men of Eridu fight with tooth and nail, trying to overwhelm their foes with sheer numbers, surrounding and grappling their enemies.

**Improved Grab:** If a half-man of Eridu hits with a claw attack it deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. Half-men cannot use this ability to grapple anything larger than themselves.

**Darkvision:** The half-men of Eridu can see perfectly in even pitch blackness to a range of 60 feet.



## YEMLI

Medium Monstrous Humanoid

**Climate/Terrain:** The Haunted Lands

**Organisation:** Solitary, patrol (2–4), or horde (5–20)

**Initiative:** +0

**Senses:** Listen +1, Spot +2, darkvision 60 ft, scent

**Languages:** Half-Man Tongue

**Dodge Defence:** 20

**Hit Points:** 28 (5 HD); **DR** 2

**Saves:** Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +2

**Speed:** 30 ft.

**Melee:** 2 claws +9 (1d4+4) and bite +7 (1d6+2)

**Base Atk** +5; **Grp** +9

**Special Attacks:** Improved grab

**Abilities:** Str 19, Dex 17, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 8

**Special Qualities:** Darkvision 60 ft, scent

**Feats:** Multiattack, Track

**Skills:** Climb +8, Hide +7, Spot +5, Survival +5

**Advancement:** By character class (probably barbarian)

Living in the borderland are a race of crimson-eyed, green-furred ‘demons’ called the Yemli. They track their prey until enough of them have gathered to insure a victory. They fight with tooth and nail, trying to overwhelm their foes with sheer numbers, surrounding and grappling their enemies. They eat anything that passes through the Haunted Lands, including humans, horses and rodents.

The Yemli may be some form of degenerate human or the remnants of some alien summoned and left behind by a sorcerer long dead. Perhaps they are a variant of the grey apes that live in the northern mountains around the Vilayet or Zamora. Regardless of their shrouded origins, they are humanoid in form and climb among the crags and rocks of the Haunted Lands, hiding in pits and on cliffs, waiting to ambush prey. They have green or grey fur, red eyes, short, spindly legs and long, gangly arms. Occasionally they are magically forced to serve Border Kingdom wizards.

**Improved Grab:** If a yemli hits with a claw attack it deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. Yemli cannot use this ability to grapple anything larger than themselves.

**Darkvision:** Yemli can see perfectly in even pitch blackness to a range of 60 feet.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

The inhabitants of the Border Kingdom have been building castles, often mere piles of stone or palisades of wood, for centuries. Many are long abandoned, their families long since given over to violence or insanity and many still stand, especially among the gnarled crags of the more mountainous regions. Does the nearest keep provide shelter against the coming storm or is it the home of an insane baron?

The Border Kingdom, with its inbred, degenerate families of criminals, is the perfect setting for something Lovecraftian. Although all of the Hyborian Age kingdoms excel in the potential for horror, the Border Kingdom is strange and twisted in a manner few other places can equal. The desolate landscape is not as barren of life as one might think and bizarre, frightening things haunt the moors and scraggly forests. One could wander into a den of Zamoran kidnappers hiding out with their victim, waiting for ransom. One might next encounter sub-humanoid remnants of some immoral family that has lived in the same hovel for the past forty generations. Robber barons and insane lords rule here and their laws are without constraint.

Cannibalism, necrophilia and demon-worship seem to abound in the Border Kingdom. Other journeys through the Border Kingdom might be completely devoid of encounters save the bleak landscapes.

Edgar Allan Poe might also be a good source of adventure ideas for the Border Kingdom. *The Fall of the House of Usher* would be almost perfect for an adventure plot, for example.

When dark Acheron fell, it could easily be that Acheronian families and renegades hid from the savage barbarians in the fens and moors of the Border Kingdom. Remnants or relics of those Acheronians could still be there, tall and white-skinned with glittering, feral eyes, worshipping ancient gods and demons, possessing treasure troves of terrifying tomes while practicing malignant magic from malodorous manuals.





# Brythunia

## The Pastoral Kingdom

The Brythunians are Hyborian, complete with blondetresses and pale skin, although their blood has been intermingled with the Zamorians and with ancient Acheronians who fled the downfall of their corrupt empire. Apparently there were no aboriginal inhabitants of the region when the first Hyborians pushed southward.

Allegiance and honour are both important concepts in Brythunia, especially among the nobility but Brythunians are not as hung up on them as the Nemedians or Aquilonians. They are more accustomed to seeing unattached persons in their nations, especially in the form of Zamorians, Hyrkanians and Corinthians, than some of the bigger Hyborian kingdoms. Nobility is not based on fiefdoms or allegiances, although allegiances often play a part in Brythunian politics.

### BRYTHUNIAN CLOTHING

Brythunian clothing is Nemedian in style for the most part, sometimes with Zamorian and/or Turanian influences among the wealthy. Over-long sleeves are commonly seen trailing on the ground, often with pockets in them. Turanian caftans are popular among the nobles, although the Brythunians usually line them with fur, especially in the north. Unmarried women do not wear hats or caps; putting a hat or cap on a bride is part of the wedding ceremony.

Peasants are forbidden to dress in the fashions of the nobility or to emulate such fashions in any way. Peasants typically dress in simple versions of outdated fashions.

Typically, each peasant has a coat of wool or sheepskin in addition to a daily outfit and, if he is well-enough off, a set of nicer clothes for festivals. The men

dress in linen shirts, woollen pants, a fur hat and a coat. The women dress in one-piece pullover gowns along with a decorative corset, jacket and an outer

gown or two. If married, the women wear a hat or cap of some sort. For both sexes, much of the clothing is lined with fur.

### LOVE AND MARRIAGE

When a household has a young girl of marriageable age, the parents hang a wreath outside their door to indicate this. If a man wishes to be married, he consults a wise woman or a respected male elder, who then performs as a marriage broker for the man. The elder finds a household that is interested in the man. Once a household has indicated interest, the intermediary ensures the courting and wedding go forward easily and appropriately.

### SOCIAL STANDING

Brythunia has nobles and gentry but the concept is different there than in Nemedica or Aquilonia. About 10% of the population belong to the 'noble' class of people. They perform the same functions as their counterparts in the larger Hyborian nations but they are not tied to the land nor are they members of the class because they owe feudal obligations. They can be rich or poor but they are not given traditional noble titles. Instead, Brythunian titles are job descriptions, such as Castellan for the keeper of a castle or King's Sheriff for an important constable. Members of this class refer to themselves as lord or lady. They are organised according to clan and fight together as a regiment and using the same battle-cry. Noble clans are permitted a single vote to confirm a king or to make local decisions, making Allegiances important in controlling the voting. The vote is cast by the clan ealdorman, the head of the clan.

Peasants are divided into three classes. The first class are the peasants who own their own land. The second class are tenants who pay money to either a noble or a land-owning peasant for the rights to the land. The third class are tenants who pay with labour for the right to use a land-owner's land.



## SOCIAL MOBILITY

Brythunia has a more fluid social system than most Hyborian nations. If a noble gives a person a titled occupation, that person is considered to be part of the noble class. If a peasant can acquire the means to buy land or pay rent using money instead of labour, that peasant moves up the social ladder.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

Brythunia is a pastoral kingdom of calloused herders, sun-bronzed farmers and wilderness-wise hunters. Vineyards and orchards are plentiful and the rulers of the land prosper. The nation receives a lot of rainfall or snowfall in the north and during the winters. Brythunia has a short growing season because of the savage winters but its people, attuned to nature and its whims, are able to work around that. Wheat, barley, millet, rye, peas, broad beans, lentils, apples, pears and similar foods are grown throughout Brythunia. Pigs and cattle are vital to the economy, as are sheep, horses, dogs and goats. Brythunians often hunt for food, especially hare, fox and elk.

In addition to agricultural products from the fertile farms of Brythunia, the nation has one other important export: slaves. The women of Brythunia tend to be blonde and beautiful, endowed with sprightly spirits that make them favoured slaves of the rich and powerful of other nations. Rumours and jokes portray the blond Brythunian women as being especially eager and willing for sex play. Nobles are not permitted to marry commoners, so Brythunian nobles who desire a common woman will typically purchase the woman from her husband or father to be a concubine.

The government of Brythunia is also said to have a secret mine of gold and other precious metals hidden in the north near the Kezankian Mountains. It is said to be operated by slave labour and impossible to escape.

## THE MILITARY OF BRYTHUNIA

In war, Brythunia is like most Hyborian nations in that cavalry plays a major role. Battles are fought in a similar manner. First, the armies exchange volleys of arrows. Second, the pikemen clash until the front ranks of at least one army breaks. Third, the knights in their great armour crash through on their massive horses and decide the battle. This method of fighting leaves Brythunia in the same straits as all the Hyborian nations save Aquilonia: it

has no trained infantry to speak of. Infantry is thought of as mere spear-fodder and not an honourable profession. The rabble recruited quickly in times of war to serve as foot soldiers are given minimal training and are easily broken and demoralised. Thus, Brythunian city-states hire mercenaries to serve as trained infantry soldiers.

Mail shirts under thick leather breastplates are commonly worn as armour in Brythunia. Most soldiers are equipped with a bow and arrow, a spear or pike, a sword, a pick and an axe. Those in the service of a noble's retinue are trained to fight from horseback, wearing mail hauberks, breastplates and fur-trimmed great helms. The cavalry units fight with heavy lances, large shields and greatswords.

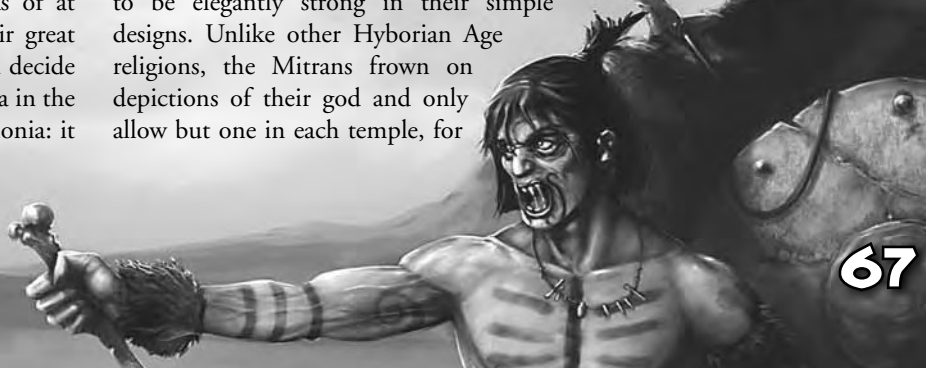
Robert E. Howard records that Turan often raids Corinthia and Nemedea, riding through Brythunia with ease. This implies that Brythunia does not have a strong army nor any unity at all. Likely the Brythunians are terrified of Hyrkanians and the wild horsemen who sweep through, burning, looting and taking slaves.

## RELIGION IN BRYTHUNIA

Brythunians tend to regard rattles as having magical significance, especially when used during funerals. Thus, Brythunians who practice necromancy often have a rattle as part of their sorcerous paraphernalia. Other than in the Mitran religion, human sacrifice is common and is often done via sacrificial pits or drowning in bogs or lakes. Another hold-over from more ancient religions is the Brythunian practice of feeding the dead at the spring and autumn equinoxes by leaving food or holding picnics in cemeteries.

## MITRA

Brythunia is a Hyborian nation. As such, the people primarily worship Mitra. He is regarded as the one true god and is followed by a legion of saints and a celestial host of angelic beings. The religion of Mitra has a heaven and a hell and is suspicious and intolerant of other cults, especially in the rural villages and towns. Mitran temples are minimally decorated, yet they still manage to be elegantly strong in their simple designs. Unlike other Hyborian Age religions, the Mitrans frown on depictions of their god and only allow but one in each temple, for







Mitra's true form is unknowable and awesome and the idea that a man or woman might be able to capture his divinity is blasphemy. Mitra is discussed in greater detail on page 16 and in *Faith and Fervour*.

## **BORI**

Bori is still worshipped in some backwoods areas of Brythunia but this is uncommon at best. Bori is a primitive warrior god from early polytheistic Hyborian origins. Bori requires some sort of blood sacrifice in his worship. Bori is detailed in *Faith and Fervour*.

## **WICCANA**

Other areas in Brythunia worship Wiccana, a goddess mentioned in several Conan stories. She seems to have only priestesses who are essentially witches and does not appear to have a major following. Likely she is a nature goddess. Many of the Brythunian witches burned by the Mitrans for demon-worship are probably priestesses of Wiccana. Her worship is detailed more fully in *Hyboria's Finest* and *Faith and Fervour*.

## **ANCIENT GODS OF THE ELEMENTS**

The hillmen of the Kezenkian Mountains worship their own ancient gods that seem to be aligned with the four elements. This religion is mentioned in *Conan the Magnificent*.

## **AMALIAS PLUVIUS**

In addition to the barbaric hillmen, some of the civilised provinces of Brythunia have their own gods. Amalias, proclaimed by the temples of Sargossa to be the chief god of the Brythunians, is worshipped in that province in place of and in complete defiance of Mitra. The proclamation of divine supremacy is spurious at best, wishful thinking on the part of the Sargossans. The religion was one with many statues and ornate temples. It is a superstitious religion and many things are considered omens by the worshippers. The worship of Amalias is detailed more fully in *Hyboria's Finest* and *Faith and Fervour*.

## **THE SUDDAH OBLATES**

One can find the town-sized Temple of Suddah Oblates, called 'The Temple That

Will Not Fall', in the mountains of northern Brythunia. Women are not allowed inside this temple. Other gods include Targol, who fought the Demon Lords, including Yog; his is a dead religion, for the Yoggites slaughtered and sacrificed all the priests of Targol several centuries past. This religion's worship is detailed more fully in *Hyboria's Finest* and *Faith and Fervour*.

## **TOLOMETH**

In addition to variant religions, pockets of demon-worship can be found in Brythunia. Tolometh, a black god of the abyss, is one demon worshipped by scholars seeking dark magic in Brythunia. The high priests of Tolometh excel at curses. There is a little known, little used shrine to Tolometh in the city of Potrebria, as well as a magical amulet burst asunder and spread across the Hyborian landscape. Tolometh's worship is detailed more fully in *Hyboria's Finest* and *Faith and Fervour*.

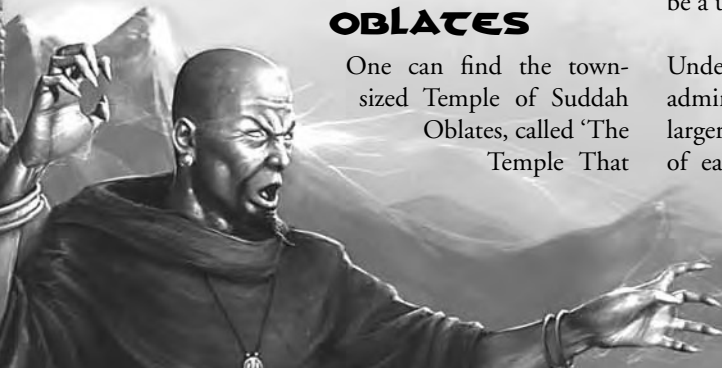
## **OTHER RELIGIONS**

Near the Zamorian border, many Brythunians worship the Zamoran gods. These Brythunians are careful not to be found out by the Mitrans, who deem that anything worshipped by the fiendish Zamorans must be a demon.

## **BRYTHUNIAN GOVERNMENT**

While Aquilonia and Nemedra seem to have the feudal system down pat, Brythunia's government is less certain. Brythunia emerges as a kingdom without a sense of itself, a kingdom without a supreme feudal king or, rather, a kingdom with far too many 'supreme' kings. Each city-state or province seems to fancy its capital as *the* capital of Brythunia and each king styles himself the King of Brythunia. Brythunia has its Gryphon Thrones, Ebon Thrones and several others to be sure. Games Masters can use the information in this paragraph or they can assign a king of their own creation. Another option is to use an old Saxon system of government wherein several ealdormen, equal in power during peace, rule Brythunia but cast lots for leadership in times of war. This latter system seems the most appropriate for Brythunia if it is to be a unified nation.

Under a reigning king or a group of ealdormen, the administrators of provinces are called palatines. The larger towns are ruled by the palatines or even groups of ealdormen. Smaller towns are run by burgomasters



and elders. Aristocracy is based upon land ownership, and land in the fertile river valleys of the central and southern regions is considered particularly valuable. Nobility is not a matter of royal patents or the granting of fiefs, as it is in Aquilonia and Nemedra. Not all nobles own land, although the most powerful nobles always own land. This system creates much smaller provinces, counties and minor kingdoms than is common in Aquilonia or Nemedra.

The system of law in Brythunia is broken and disparate with little unity. In western Brythunia, slow impalement is the preferred method of execution. Other places send criminals to work in secret mines in lieu of execution. Otherwise, punishment is meted out by the person who owns the land a crime occurred on. Accused criminals usually do not have any opportunity for appeal unless the landowner 'victim' owes some sort of fealty to a higher lord (unlikely in Brythunia).

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF BRYTHUNIA

Robert E. Howard says little about Brythunia. Virtually everything in this section comes from alternative sources. Southern Brythunia is largely forested but the northern reaches are considerably less so. Eastern Brythunia boasts a few swamps, many of which are reputed to be haunted. Eastern Brythunia is also rather mountainous and hilly, contrasting with the western plains. Many rivers bisect the interior of Brythunia, creating a very fertile, pastoral landscape.

**Danibos River** – Danibos is a river. It flows south and west from Hyperborea. The city of Sargossa sits on its banks.

**Death Mask Mountains** – The Death Mask Mountains can be found in central Brythunia. The range has four high peaks and contains a hidden valley. Dire wolves make their home in these mountains.

**Demon's Tooth Mountain** – Demon's Tooth Mountain is a single mountain found in Brythunia, reputed to be the home of a sorcerer of dark power.

**Graskaal Mountains** – These cold mountains form a harsh barrier against Hyperborea and are where Conan once found a sword in the crypt of a giant-king. These jagged mountains are cold and icy for much of the year. A frozen river runs eastward along the length of these mountains, which are wild, dark and gloomy even in the

summer months. Pines and spruce and of great granite cliffs tower into the cold, icy sky. Numerous passes break through these mountains, especially in the northeast.

**Karpash Mountains** – This long and rugged range of mountains forms the south-eastern border between Brythunia and Zamora. These mountains are known for volcanic activity and have pockets of gold and other rare ores. The mountains vary greatly in their composition and types of stone. Some areas are quite low and weathered; others rise up as monolithic monsters determined to stop all comers. Innasfaln is a village at the mouth of one of the few passes through this range, a pass called 'The Path of the Serpent' for its winding, treacherous trail. Another notable mountain in the range is Broken Gray Mountain, which is said to house a crypt containing the Horn of Dagoth. A day's ride northwest of that mountain is Crater Lake. Another cave in this range is said to be the lair of a fire-drake. (Statistics for the fire-drake can be found in *Shadizar – City of Wickedness*.) The Yezud pass cuts through these mountains between Brythunia and Zamora, leading toward Yezud.

**Kezankian Mountains** – These mountains form a natural barrier between Brythunia and Turan. Many things lurk in these mountains, including ape-men and villages of hill people. The hill people of the Kezankians are notoriously hostile toward strangers. The range was created during the lesser cataclysm and is younger than some of the other mountain ranges in the known world. Ape-men dwell in the northern reaches of the Kezankians. Many passes breach this harsh wall of granite into the north-eastern portion of Brythunia.

**Lema Plains** – This is a plains region in north-western Brythunia. It is composed primarily of prairies and ranges of open field. It lies to the south of the Great Salt Marsh of the Border Kingdom.

**Phalander** – Although this was once a town of southern Brythunia under the jurisdiction of Sargossa, it is now a volcanic ruin.

**Sacred Grove of Wiccana** – The Sacred Grove of Wiccana is located near the Zamoran border and is an ancient grove of oak trees sacred to the worshippers of Wiccana.

**Swamp of Souls** – The Swamp of Souls is a desolate swamp. It is in north-eastern Brythunia, four days' ride from Bougankad.





**Yellow River** – This river runs along the western border of Brythunia until it forks in the southwest corner. Many historic battlegrounds lie on either side of the river, the sites of wars and skirmishes with Nemedra. This river flows to the north.

## IMPORTANT BRYTHUNIAN CITIES AND SITES

Brythunia boasts almost 26,000 small villages or hamlets and over 280 towns and cities of varying sizes. Only the largest Brythunian cities have walls. Most of the towns and villages, built against copses of coniferous trees or on mountainous crags, tend to be open to make entry easier for the farmers and herdsman. Fortified settlements tend to be built on hilltops, islands, peninsulas in the midst of lakes, rivers or swamps for better defence, especially against marauding Hyrkanian, Zamorian or Nemedian cavalry. If the Brythunians decide to fortify a town or area in a field or other flat land, they will divert a river to flood the plain and turn it marshy and soft to hamper potential enemies. Fortifications are usually wooden; stacks of wooden boxes filled with earth or rocks are often used. Water is essential to the lifestyle of the Brythunians, either to water crops or herds, so a strong river or babbling brook is always near a Brythunian village or town. Most Brythunian towns have a public bath or sauna for the men.

Robert E. Howard does not name a capital for the nation and various subsequent authors each have named different cities as the capital. The Games Master is free to follow suit and invent his own capital and king. He can presume that the capital varies as wars or politics dictate or he can presume that Brythunia is merely a confederacy of loose-knit city-states without a true king. All of these city-states come from apocryphal sources.

**Berthalia** – Berthalia has winding and narrow streets crowded with merchants. The city's biggest attraction is its bazaar, which is described as 'well-stocked.' It is governed by a weak and cowardly king who wears a horned crown. The city itself lies about six leagues from a particularly large mountain in the nearest range. It has a population of more than eight thousand people.

**Charnina** – Charnina is a northern Brythunian city-state. The city itself is built around a feudal castle. Once the city state was ruled by King Brian but that king was killed in a war with Hyperborea. After Brian's death, the city-state fell into anarchy and two local lords, Pollus and Ludox, fought for the kingdom. Pollus was killed by his sorceress, Zuchan of Khitai, leaving a nearly levelled city in the hands of Lord Ludox. The city has since been rebuilt. The city has a wall around it and is supported by several village fiefs. Charnina has a population of nearly ten thousand people.

**Innasfaln** – Innasfaln is a city in the Karpash mountains, reputed to have the smoothest ale in Brythunia and beautiful blonde Brythunian women who apparently live up to their reputation. The city lies on one of the few passes through the Karpash mountains. It is a small trading village of crude wattle-and-daub huts and a few stone, mud and pebble buildings. It has a population of approximately 500.

**Kelbaza** – Kelbaza is a Brythunian city-state. Located on the Lema Plains in the north, this walled city has a notorious thieves' quarter and a well-known tavern known as 'The Sword and Sky,' where the lawless can gather upon the roof to fence items and tell tall tales. The roof is loaded down with stolen statues too heavy to carry off. Kelbaza's gate is closed at night. Kelbaza's ruler, Queen Thrine, sits on an ebon throne in the palace and is beloved by the people for her even-handedness. A mystical necklace of power is the holy symbol of her dynasty. Her brother, Throll, was king before her but was slain by her cousin, a sorcerer. The city itself has a population of almost 12,000.

**Leng** – Leng is a walled town in the hills of eastern Brythunia. Its walls are made of rough stone and are in disrepair. Even the gates into the town are fallen and gone. Most of the buildings are also built low to protect them from the winds but the warehouses of the rich and wealthy tower four or five stories high. The town is largely lawless, used by bandits and vagabonds en route to other more prosperous places. The peasants here are herdsmen and wear tunics of hairy hides. The buildings are colourless and dreary but the city is polyglot and is host to a wide array of peoples and nationalities. Slavers use the town as a stopping point on the road to Zamora and the deserters of armies find a place of peace here. Conan calls the place a 'ghost town come to life'. It is an apt description. The city is large enough to support a population of over 6,000 but it currently houses only a few more than 2,000.



**Pirogia** – Pirogia is a large walled city in the southeast of Brythunia. It is the capital of a large city-state broken up into smaller baronies. Built on the ruins of an older city, Pirogia is a favourite place for Zamorans to fence stolen goods or just relax among blond Brythunian women. A tavern known as The Pommel can be found in its seedier district and the Inn of the Golden Lion, which is located in a merchant quarter, is known for its beautiful dancers. The poorer buildings in the city are made of mud-brick and have crude roofs of wood smeared with pitch. The centre of the city comprises the deserted ruins of the older city. The ruins have been declared off-limits and the Pirogian guard chase away those who would trespass. This ancient centre is regarded with some superstition among the Brythunians. Eldran, the King of Pirogia considers himself the King of Brythunia and hopes to unify the city-states into a true kingdom. This metropolis holds 51,700 people within its boundaries.

**Potrebia** – This is a southern Brythunian city-state. It boasts a shrine to Tolometh, a black god of the abyss. Potrebia boasts a population of approximately 10,000.

**Sargossa** – Once ruled by King Typhas, Sargossa is a walled city in the northern portion of central Brythunia, capital of another powerful city-state. The metropolis is replete with seedy dives, brothels and criminals. Anyone the guard does not like is likely to find himself working in the hidden gold mines of the Karpash Mountains for the King of Sargossa. Prisoners in Sargossa are drugged with white lotus dust, a drug that blinds and paralyzes, to keep them docile. The Danibos river waters Sargossa and creates lush, fertile terrain. The population is around 49,000.

**Shihar** – Shihar is a frontier town in north-eastern Brythunia. The region is forested and is in sight of the great Kezankian Mountains. The town is protected by a wooden palisade of sharpened logs and the homes are also built out of logs.

**Sodgrum** – This is a small village of central Brythunia that supports Sargossa as a fief. It has a population of 678 people.

**Urbander** – The seat of one of the northernmost baronies in western Brythunia, Urbander is a provincial capital. It is strongly fortified to repel the attacks of the Border Kingdom robber-barons. It is a prosperous city, rich with trade and spoils from the Border Kingdom. Urbander hosts a powerful cavalry and is home to almost 16,000 people.

**Yarvash** – Yarvash is a town in Brythunia with a temple to Amalias. This town is part of Sargossa's province. Yarvash supports a population of nearly 7,000.

## LOCAL HISTORY

The land that is now Brythunia was largely uninhabited during the Acheronian era. Most of the trade routes between Zamora pass through Corinthia to Acheron, leaving much of Brythunia unexplored except by a few itinerants and hermits.

When the Hyborians moved southward, they first settled in the corridor between Acheron and Zamora, an area that included modern Brythunia.

When Acheron fell, it is likely that tall, white-skinned refugees from that venomous nation began to trickle into Brythunia to hide. Later, when the Æsir attacked Hyperborea, Brythunia again became a home for refugees but this time Hyborian. These Hyborians continued to sweep southward and eventually started trading with and, later, interbreeding with the Zamorans and Nemedians.

For a time, King Typhas of Sargossa managed to gain support from the other provinces. After he was killed, Brythunia was briefly ruled by Queen Tamsin. After her death, the kingdom again fell back to its loose confederacy. King Eldran is likely the strongest king now.

## LOCAL CREATURES

### DIRE SWORD-TOOTHED LEOPARD

Large Animal

**Climate/Terrain:** Brythunian mountains

**Organisation:** Solitary or pair

**Initiative:** +14

**Senses:** Listen +1, Spot +7, low-light vision, scent

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**Dodge Defence:** 17

**Hit Points:** 120 (16 HD); DR 7

**Saves:** Fort +13, Ref +14, Will +11

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**Speed:** 40 ft.

**Space:** 10 ft.; **Reach:** 5 ft.

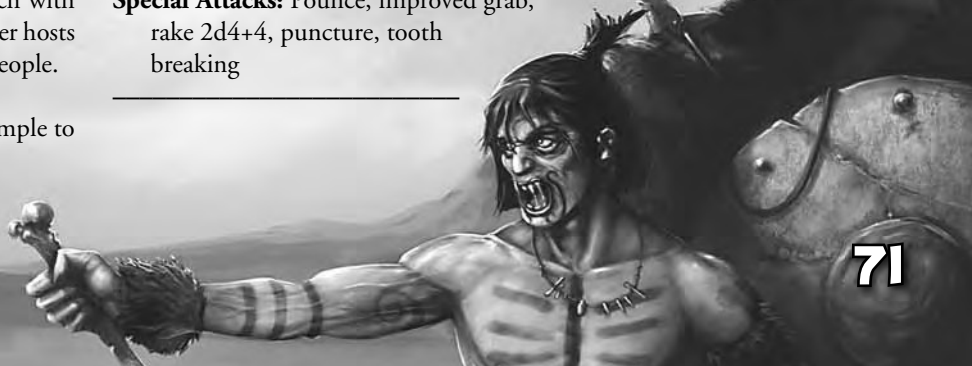
**Melee:** 2 claws +20 (2d4+8), bite +14

(2d6+4+puncture, AP 12)

**Base Atk** +12; **Grp** +24

**Special Attacks:** Pounce, improved grab, rake 2d4+4, puncture, tooth breaking

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**Abilities:** Str 26, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 10

**Special Qualities:** Low-light vision, scent

**Feats:** Alertness, Improved Natural Attack (claw), Improve Natural Attack (bite), Run, Stealthy, Weapon Focus (claw)

**Skills:** Hide +7, Jump +14, Listen +6, Move Silently +11, Spot +7, Swim +10

**Advancement:** 17–32 HD (Large); 33–48 HD (Huge)

A gigantic mountain cat – gray-speckled on silver, with hunched, massive shoulders that made it taller and broader than the elk itself – tore hungrily at the prey's slack body, which it must have caught up in its monstrous jaws and dragged to the spot in a few mighty bounds of its pantherish frame. The bulbous feline head, with its tufted ears, arching eyebrow ridges, gory whiskers, and red-slaving, underslung jaw, bristled with devilish menace. Every feature was vastly oversized, and all centred on a pair of fangs as long and evilly curved as the blades of Zamorian tulwars. The great animal used its huge feline teeth methodically, scissoring away slabs of glistening flesh from the elk's haunches and spilling forth entrails in quivering heaps.

– *Conan the Savage*

Sword-toothed leopards resemble huge panthers or other big cats in form but have silvered, speckled fur. These creatures have a feral, prehistoric look with extremely powerful forequarters, though even their hindquarters are more powerful than those of a lion. This makes them very strong but their bulk makes them slower than most big cats and contributes to their quick and savage hunting style. Their most distinctive feature, though, is the pair of vast teeth that give them their name – huge curved fangs, bigger than daggers and capable of inflicting the most devastating injuries. Though these fangs are enormously powerful weapons, they are far more brittle than smaller fangs and older sword-toothed leopards often have one or both of their great teeth broken off.

## COMBAT

Sword-toothed leopards prefer to stalk their prey, then drop

from a hidden position atop a tree or rock and slay their victims within instants. They use their sword-sharp teeth to puncture a large victim such as an elephant or bull (see below), then retreat until their victim bleeds to death. This allows them to avoid the risk of injury, since although they are tough they must eat a fair amount to survive and any serious wound may impede their hunting ability to such a degree that they starve to death. In open combat with a determined and well-armed foe, the sword-toothed leopard will consider fleeing, particularly if it is injured.

**Pounce:** If a sword-toothed leopard charges in the first round of combat it may make a full attack (plus two rake attacks) at the end of its movement.

**Puncture:** A sword-toothed leopard's bite attack which scores a critical hit on an opponent is considered to have punctured a major blood vessel. The victim will lose one hit point per round (in blood loss) until the wound is healed by either the Heal skill (DC 15) or some sorcerous means.

**Tooth Breaking:** A sword-toothed leopard whose bite attack does maximum damage on a critical hit (that is, a roll of 16 on 2d8 on a critical hit) loses one of its large canine teeth. The tooth sticks in the wound, doing an additional 1d6 damage but the sword-toothed leopard's bite damage drops to 2d6+4 and it can no longer puncture its opponents (see above). It is possible for the second canine to break off if maximum damage is done a second time (12 on 2d6), in which case the leopard's bite damage drops to 2d4+4

**Improved Grab:** To use this ability, the sword-toothed leopard must hit with a claw or bite attack. If it gets a hold, it can rake.

**Rake:** A sword-toothed leopard that gets a hold can make two rake attacks (+20 melee) with its hind legs for 2d8+3 damage each. If the sword-toothed leopard pounces on an opponent, it can also rake.

**Skills:** Sword-toothed leopards receive a +6 racial bonus to Balance, Hide and Move Silently checks. In areas of tall grass or heavy undergrowth, the Hide bonus improves to +8.

## STICH

Large Animal

**Climate/Terrain:** Brythunian/Zamoran mountains

**Organisation:** Solitary

**Initiative:** +6

**Senses:** Listen +10, Spot +10, low-light vision, scent

**Dodge Defence:** 16

**Hit Points:** 34 (4 HD); DR 7

**Saves:** Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +2

**Speed:** 60 ft.



**Space:** 10 ft.; **Reach:** 5 ft.

**Melee:** Talons +6 (2d6+4, AP 8) and 2 foreclaws +1 (1d3+2) and bite +1 (2d4+2)

**Base Atk** +3; **Grp** +11

**Special Attacks:** Pounce, poison spit

**Abilities:** Str 19, Dex 15, Con 19, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 10

**Special Qualities:** Low-light vision, scent

**Feats:** Run, Track

**Skills:** Hide +8, Jump +26, Listen +10, Spot +10, Survival +10

**Advancement:** 5–8 HD (Large)

From behind the largest of the boulders emerged something unlike anything Conan had ever seen. Tall it was, at least his own height, and it had two arms and two legs. This beast, however, had never seen the inside of a human womb. It was some form of reptile, scaled and grayish-green, and it dragged a tail as thick as Conan's thigh where it joined the body, tapering to a point thinner than a man's fingertip. It had the face of a lizard, slits for nostrils, and yellow eyes, with fleshy, oddly puckered lips. It looked as if it meant to whistle with those lips. On top of its bony head was the compartmented plate that rattled as it moved, much as the thing had been on the serpent's tail. It had short arms, with three claws each. It seemed to smile, and in so doing, revealed pointed teeth the size and shape of a child's dagger.

— *Conan the Defiant*

A stith is a powerful dinosaur that lives in the mountains of northern Brythunia. It will attack armed men, even in large numbers. It is extremely fast and it has a deadly spit attack. It springs as it attacks, bounding like a kangaroo or a raptor in its deadly charge. Its venomous spittle glows emerald green, is highly acidic and carries diseases that are deadly to man. They are solitary and territorial.

## COMBAT

A stith uses a combination of speed, grasping forearms, large teeth and hind legs with ripping talons. It hunts by running at prey, leaping and ripping with its rear talons as it claws and bites. The talons count as one attack.

**Poison Spit:** A stith can spit glowing, emerald green poison by making a ranged touch attack.

The spit has a range of 10 feet and does 2d8 points of acid damage (Reflex save DC 14 for half damage). This damage can be stopped by armour as normal but in this case apply the damage directly to the hit points of the armour instead. (Leather and softer armours usually have 5 or fewer hit points. Metal armour has 10–15 depending on construction.) The save is Dexterity based.

**Pounce:** If a stith charges, it can make a full attack.

**Skills:** A stith has a +8 racial bonus on Hide, Jump, Listen, Spot and Survival checks.

## ADVENTURE/ CAMPAIGN HOOKS

A Black Stone has been unearthed, a sinister monolith that broods over the Graaskal Mountains. Rumoured to be of Atlantean origin, many dark legends cluster about it. The Books of Skelos mention this Stone as one of the keys (a phrase often used in the books and one of the obscurities of the work) and hints at the curious sights to be seen around the monolith on the summer solstice.

Legends tell of ancient animals that roam the forests of southern Brythunia, animals that supposedly can live forever, save by steel. They are large, dire animals. Somewhere in that region is a desolate castle where a wizard once dwelt with his tomes of mystic lore. That ancient library, although much of it has been destroyed, may still exist.

There might be pocket cultures of ancient Acheronians existing in the backwoods of Brythunia, inbreeding to keep their blood-lines pure and delving into dark secrets to rebuild Acheron of old.

One of the kings of Brythunia may declare himself *the* King of Brythunia, demanding tribute from the other kingdoms. Characters might be hired to enforce this king's position or to bring him down.

The surrounding nations consider Brythunia to be a laughable kingdom and often send in invading armies. Sometimes these invasions are intended as conquests or slave raids but as often as not they are considered mere training exercises for troops so they can be prepared for 'real' missions.



# Cimmeria

## Land of Darkness and Night

A gloomier land never was – all of hills, darkly wooded, under skies nearly always gray, with winds moaning drearily down the valleys.

– *The Phoenix on the Sword*

Although Conan is Cimmeria's greatest son, Robert E. Howard did not actually write any tales set in Cimmeria itself. However, Conan dropped a lot of hints about his native culture. Cimmeria is a bleak nation of forested hills and towering mountains. Rank upon rank upon rank of dark hills rise and fall in all directions, forested with strange, dusky trees that give the land a frightening, menacing appearance even by day. Its appearance at night would terrify a civilised man to the brink of sanity. Rain clouds hover perennially over the moody terrain, bringing stinging rain, slick sleet and freezing snow. Its depressing forests are home to a million or so dark-haired, despondent savages. Descended from ancient Atlanteans, the fierce savages of this oppressive realm are grim survivors in a realm that kills softer men.

Tall and powerful are the Cimmerians and their eyes sparkle blue or grey beneath their dark manes. Cimmerians are regarded as among the most fierce and savage peoples in the world and many in the far south regard them as semi-mythical. The Aquilonians used to despise them, considering them rude villagers of small consequence. The battle of Venarium proved the Aquilonians wrong, for the Cimmerians united against a common foe and slew every Aquilonian man in the fort, leaving no survivors save a Gunderman named Gaeric and an Aquilonian girl named Tamera, the daughter of Metrius, the commander of Venarium.

Gaeric the Gunderman is now the Count of Raman, a county of Gunderland.

The songs of the Cimmerians tend to be sombre dirges inspired by their dark moods and the grey lands surrounding them. Cimmerians do not hope that the gods will help them nor do they ask for aid from any source, divine or mortal. They are a practical people of tradition, custom and honour. Cimmerians are solemn folk and do not boast of victories, which would be considered prideful and rude, and an invitation to be forced to prove themselves. Unlike the Vanir and Æsir, the Cimmerians do not feast in a loud, boisterous fashion and they do not engage in 'friendly' brawls when drunk. If a Cimmerian fights, that Cimmerian kills.

## A WARRIOR CULTURE

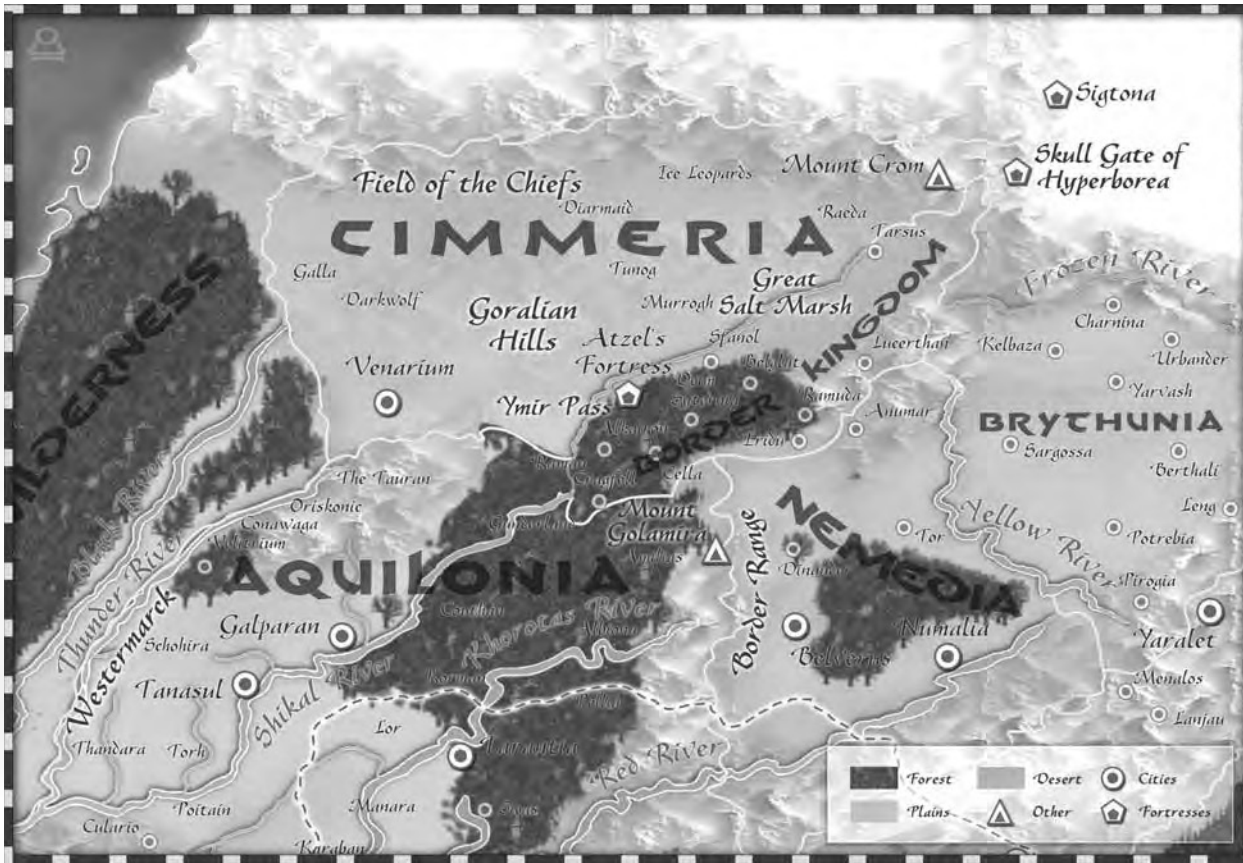
Primarily hunters and gatherers, the Cimmerians are also raiders and plunderers, striking south into the Hyborean nations, west into the lands of the Picts, east into the Border Kingdom and even north into the frosty realms of the Æsir and Vanir. Cimmerians also raid amongst themselves, fighting blood-feuds and stealing cattle or wives. Battle for the Cimmerians is a way of life and the mark of manhood. The Cimmerians scream out a strange, ululating battle-cry when a battle is joined, an eerie sound that strikes fear into the soft hearts of Cimmerian enemies.

The Cimmerians do not practice refined sword-play as do the sword masters of Zingara or the martial artists of far-off Khitai but battle with well-earned experience bought in blood on numerous battlefields where survival is not so much a matter of technical skill as it is intense spirit and indomitable will. Even the children do not pick up sticks to pretend at fighting. Fighting is a serious business among the Cimmerians. One does not make an enemy of a Cimmerian unless one is willing to fight for one's life.

That attitude makes Cimmerians polite to one another, although they lose none of their blunt directness in that courtesy. 'Civilized men are more discourteous than savages because they know they can be impolite without having their skulls split, as a general thing.' Impoliteness is an invitation to a quick fight to the death among the Cimmerians. Of course, few Cimmerians fear death.







Although Cimmerians will happily plunder those they kill in battle, they are not petty thieves and none make their living in Cimmeria stealing from the clans, especially their own. Such thievery is considered cowardly and dishonest. If a Cimmerian cannot win what he wants by fighting for it, then the Cimmerian solemnly goes without.

Cimmerians do not respect weakness or civilised softness and that which they do not respect they would just as soon kill as leave alone. Even Cimmerian women display this savage strength, fighting alongside the men in battle.

## SOLEMN DEVOTION TO THE CLAN

The tribe or clan is the most important aspect of life in Cimmeria. Except for the outcasts or those who leave Cimmeria, most Cimmerians owe allegiance to their clan, taking their clan as their highest Allegiance (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game*). Belonging to a clan gives a Cimmerian a traditional set of enemies and allies. For example, Conan, as a member of the Snowhawk (or Canach) Clan treats Picts as racial enemies. A Cimmerian clan on the other side of Cimmeria may never have seen a Pict, so

that clan may have, say, Hyperboreans as racial enemies. Likewise, Conan's clan considers the Murrogh clan as an enemy, and vice versa.

Any dispute between two Cimmerians automatically involves the kin of those Cimmerians, so kin often watch out to make sure their relatives do not do anything controversial or unwarranted. Few Cimmerians travel outside the areas controlled by their clans except in groups to make raids or trades because, once outside their territories, no law protects them. Simply put, no kin, no protection. Kin are expected to stand with one another against all threats, physical or legal.

The Cimmerians put a high value on conformity; non-conformists are a threat to everyone in the clan. Anyone who betrays his clan is hated and cast out. A Cimmerian clan will never re-admit a treacherous Cimmerian. A Cimmerian cast out from his clan is considered kinless and is often called headless, for that Cimmerian is as good as dead. Only a man of exceptional







strength and prowess can survive in Cimmeria without kin – only a man such as Conan. Those who successfully go it alone are regarded with fear and awe by most Cimmerians.

## HONOUR AND REPUTATION

Few Cimmerians respect unearned authority. Cimmerians respect honour and prowess. Reputation for the Cimmerians is a mixture of courage, honesty, integrity, loyalty and physical ability, the traits most prized by the Cimmerians. They treat those who are honourable and skilled with respect. Cimmerians do not have social rankings beyond that simple attitude. Be a man chief or herdsman, it does not matter. Cimmerians are not taught to fear and respect kings and chiefs because of their titles.

## DEBT OF HONOUR

The Cimmerians are cognisant of debts. If one does something for a Cimmerian, the Cimmerian feels obligated to do something in exchange at some point in the future. This debt is something the Cimmerian will not forget. If he cannot fulfil the debt to the original person (due to death, perhaps), then he can do something for the person's kin. Chieftains will often give gifts to their followers to ensure this debt of honour. If a man accepts a gift from a Cimmerian chieftain and eats at his board, then he cannot honourably refuse to fight at that Cimmerian's side.

## BLOOD FEUDS

The Cimmerians believe in the right of revenge. In a way, revenge can be seen as a debt of honour, just a violent one. A Cimmerian and his clan will defend any slight against their honour. Indeed, these slights must be met and avenged or the clan is seen as weak. To kill someone as an act of vengeance is not a crime in Cimmeria but if the murder is not seen as justified by the dead man's clan, they also have the right to retaliate. This vengeance does not have to be spent upon the person who wronged the Cimmerian; it may also be enacted upon his kin with equal validity.

If the vengeance is seen as just, the matter ends there; otherwise, it escalates into blood feuds that can last generations.

## THE BLOODY SPEAR

Customs other than solemn devotion to clan, honour and reputation can be found in Cimmeria. Usually the Cimmerians keep to their own clans and do not assemble en masse. The Aquilonians once believed the Cimmerians could not and would not unify but history has shown the error of that belief. If troubled by foreign invaders to such a degree that one clan alone cannot stay the tide, the Cimmerians send out the Bloody Spear. This custom is not enacted lightly. It was the Bloody Spear that summoned the clans against Venarium and it was the Bloody Spear that again summoned them to unify against the demons of Ben Morgh in *Conan the Valorous*. This custom temporarily ends all blood-feuds until the threat is ended. Often the blood-feuds rise again immediately after the fall of the joint enemy.

## CIMMERIAN CLOTHING

Cimmerians make their clothing out of linen or wool. Cimmerian men wear *léines* with *braecci* (trousers) or *trews*. A *léine* is a saffron-coloured linen shirt that hangs to below the knee on men and to the ankle on women. If worn with trousers or trews, the *léine* hangs to mid-thigh. Trews are woollen trousers worn tight on the legs with buttons on the back from the ankles to mid-calf. Cimmerians usually wear belts to hold up their *braecci* or *trews* and around the *léine*. Personal items are carried in a pouch depending from the belt. Shoes or boots are worn as well as a mantle. Cimmerians also wear woollen *inars*, jackets with a type of pleated skirt.

Women wear tunics for the upper body as well as one-piece, full-length dresses with sleeves. They also wear peplums, which are tubular-type dresses without sleeves. Skirts are worn around the waist, as are belts. The belts hold pouches for personal items. Shoes and cloaks complete the outfit.

Hair is worn long by both sexes. Cimmerians also wear a rectangular cloak made of wool called a mantle. The longer the mantle, the more affluent the Cimmerian is among his people. Most mantles are edged with a fringe.

## SEX ROLES IN CIMMERIA

Cimmeria is a land where the men are the primary force; however, women are respected and treated with far more freedom than women in Hyborian lands. While women are expected to take care of the home and the children, a strong-willed Cimmerian woman can easily break this pattern and become a respected warrior or



even rise to become clan chieftain. An unknown female warrior or chieftain is likely to be treated with disdain when encountering other Cimmerians but those whose Reputations are well known are likely to be regarded with almost superstitious awe and given more respect than males in their position might earn. The fame of these rare female leaders spreads so quickly through tales that, at the Games Master's discretion, a female leader might earn twice the Reputation points for an action than a male would earn.

## SOCIAL STANDING

Families and tribes are the basic political units in Cimmeria. A tribe is comprised of several clans, or families. Each clan has its own clan chief. A tribe is ruled by a tribal chief. Each clan has its warrior elites and the chieftains are usually drawn from these. The most fit warrior is most often the one chosen, not the one closest in descent. Cimmerians also have a class of oracles and skilled craftsmen who make weapons and jewellery. Conan's father is from this class. All others in Cimmeria are farmers, fishermen, hunters, trappers and minor craftsmen.

Technically speaking, the order of precedence, from top to bottom, is as follows: tribal chieftain, clan chieftain, warrior elite, oracle, craftsman, blind bard, commoner (farmers, trappers and fishermen).

## SOCIAL MOBILITY

Movement in and out of Cimmerian social classes is fairly easy as the classes are for the most part based on ability, not birth. Cimmerians are not inclined toward nationhood and rarely does a 'high-king' rise to unite the tribes. Ultimately, however, social standing is a matter of respect and honour. One is not born a chieftain or king; these are honours earned and bestowed by others – and may be removed by the will of the people. People in Cimmeria are judged on their characters, not their lineage and/or pedigrees. Conan, for example, is a craftsman by lineage but would have been put into the warrior elite as soon as he began showing his extreme aptitude for battle.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

Cimmeria is a land of subsistence, peopled for the most part by hunters and gatherers. They raid for what they cannot produce themselves and are not given toward international trade. For this reason, no trade caravans from the civilised lands make their way into Cimmeria. Cimmerians do practise internal trade, often for timber, tin, iron and copper. Wealth is measured in cattle.

A Cimmerian also does not keep slaves or sell his people into slavery. He sees slaves as weak, else they would not be slaves. For this reason Cimmerians do not make good slaves, so slavers avoid Cimmeria. An adult Cimmerian would rather die trying to escape slavery than just meekly submit.

## THE WARRIORS OF CIMMERIA

Weaponsmithing is a craft plied with much devotion in Cimmeria. The sword is by far the preferred weapon of the Cimmerians. They craft their own broadswords and plunder them from other cultures as well. The spear is a close second in preference, used by those who can not afford or plunder a sword. Cimmerians do not favour the bow; when Cimmerians fight, it is face to face as warriors, not standing at a distance in safety. However, they do use bows for hunting. Weapons are valued and often decorated in beautiful designs, such as animals or knot-work patterns. Cimmerians do not go unarmed after childhood and usually wield spears, daggers and heavy, straight swords.

Some Cimmerians form bands of brothers to perfect their fighting skills. This is a primitive form of secret society. These bands of brothers do not replace the need for clan and kindred; usually a Cimmerian's band of brothers occupies the second of his three Allegiances.

Most Cimmerians go unarmoured but some clans use round shields in battle. Armour is often considered to be cowardly, although some of the more practical Cimmerians have been known to ignore that attitude.

## RELIGION IN CIMMERIA

### CROM

Cimmerians believe in a rather dark pantheon of gods, all of whom are ruled by Crom and are of his race; these gods and their religious practices are discussed in more detail in *Faith and Fervour*. As an overview, Crom is seen as a dire god, as gloomy and dangerous as the Cimmerians themselves. The Cimmerians do not pray to Crom, nor do they worship him or any of his kind. Crom and his race of gods despise weaklings who call on them for aid and would likely make the





situation worse for the petitioner. The Cimmerians value individuality and self-worth; their gods expect them to take care of life themselves. Indeed, Crom only takes pride in a Cimmerian if that Cimmerian never calls upon him for aid in his life. Cimmerians are supposed to take what they want from life, not ask a god for blessings, wealth, health or anything else.

## THE AFTERLIFE

After death, Cimmerians believe their spirits travel to a grey realm, misty and icy, where they forever wander in cheerless gloom. Still, the Cimmerians do not fear death and gladly meet it with steel in hand and a war cry on their lips.

## ORACLES

Priests of other lands tend to be sorcerers, using maleficent magic in the name of whatever god they worship. The Cimmerians have no priests, sorcerers, shamans or witches. Those who traffic with the power of the gods, even through prayer, are weaklings in their eyes. The Cimmerians do not make sacrifices to Crom or any other deity and see those that do as either touched in the head or simply weak. The Cimmerians are superstitious, not wanting to try the gods. They do have oracles however, as befitting their superstitious nature. These oracles can read the doom evident in a flight of birds or in the entrails of an animal. Just about any aspect of nature is endowed with spiritual significance that can be read by those who are wise.

## LESSER GODS

The other gods of the Cimmerians are just as grim and indifferent as Crom himself. The Cimmerians believe in their existence but they do not worship them. They are just as anything else – there, but what use is worshipping them? One may as well pray to a tree or a statue as pray to a god. Cimmerians will often use the name of a god in a curse but never in a prayer or even in a so-called ‘half-prayer.’ Just as with Crom, these gods and goddesses are considered to be bleak and dire entities and are not worshipped. They exist only to give the Cimmerians something else to be depressed about.

- ❖ **Badb** is a war goddess who often appears in the shape of a crow. Badb favours the Cimmerians with the gift of battle fury at birth just as Crom grants the Cimmerians the might and will to slay their enemies.
- ❖ **Lir**, the father of **Mannanan Mac Lir**, is the god of the sea in its primal, elemental form, which is a little strange as Cimmeria is a land-locked nation without access to the ocean. Perhaps in their history, the Cimmerian lands included part of Pictland (which would also account for some of the Cimmerian hatred of that dusky race). Lir’s son governs the weather as well as the sea.
- ❖ **Macha** is a goddess of war but she also is in charge of fertility, helping to fill the land with warring Cimmerians.
- ❖ **The Morrigan** seems to be the favoured war goddess of Cimmeria. The Cimmerians do not seem bothered that most of their gods and goddesses govern warfare and strife.
- ❖ **Nemain** is yet another war goddess but is also the patron of sacred springs and wells. In battle she is known as ‘the venomous.’

## CIMMERIAN GOVERNMENT

Cimmerians are self-governed on a clan or tribal level. Their government consists of a chieftain who is placed in power by consensus of the people who will follow him. A Cimmerian chieftain must have (or be perceived as having) courage, honesty, integrity, loyalty and physical prowess. A loss in any of these areas and the chieftain is likely to be abandoned and a new chieftain followed. The health of the clan is identified with the health of the chieftain, so if he is wounded or sickly, he is expected to stand down. Often there is an aspect of hereditary titles but this is not preordained. The clan chiefs are not dictators and are required to at least listen to the respected members of the clan before setting the clan on a course of action. Most often, the decisions of a chieftain accurately reflect the will of the people, else he risks being deposed or even outcast.

Disputes are handled via kin. If a dispute is brought before a chieftain for judgement, that chieftain usually makes the entire family of the wrong-doer responsible for any fines, compensation or other punishment.



## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF CIMMERIA

The country claimed by and roved over by his clan lay in the northwest of Cimmeria, but Conan was of mixed blood, although a pure-bred Cimmerian. His grandfather was a member of a southern tribe who had fled from his people because of a blood-feud and after long wanderings, eventually taken refuge with the people of the north.

– Robert E. Howard, *Letter to P.S. Miller*

Cimmeria is a dark, heavily wooded land of hills and shadowed valleys. Snowy run-off from the Eiglophians and dark clouds that bring near-constant, stinging rain turn the land into a dismal, damp country that bears little comfort for visitor or native alike.

Games Masters should attempt to create the sense of dismal gloom extant in the land of Cimmeria, capturing some of the terrible depression and lingering melancholy Howard hinted at. This is a gloomy land; its people are depressed and sombre to an unhealthy degree. Conan is an exception, which is why he flees the land, desperately seeking an escape, diving into a life of violence in the hopes of finding something worth living for. To Howard, Cimmeria is a brooding land whose black memories would drive Conan to drink himself to forgetfulness.

**The Black Mountains** – The Black Mountains are a range of mountains in south-western Cimmeria. They form a natural border with Pictland. The source of the Black River can be found in these mountains.

**The Breaknecks** – This is a rough land between the Broken Leg Lands and the lower Eiglophian Mountains. This area is full of canyons, thin forests and jutting escarpments. There are passes into the Eiglophian and through to Vanaheim in this area.

**Broken Leg Lands** – The Broken Leg Lands are in north-western Cimmeria, just south of the Breaknecks and the Eiglophian Mountains. This area contains some of the most treacherous ground in all of Cimmeria – a high plateau country cut apart by narrow canyons and sharp-edged bluffs falling hundreds of feet into piles of boulders and white-water rapids.

**Eiglophian Mountains** – The Eiglophian Mountains form the border between Cimmeria and Nordheim. This is a mighty mountain range of ice and snow characterised by dangerous and difficult passes. Deadly glaciers abound, awesome rivers of ice and death.

❖ **Ben Morgh, The Mountain of Crom** – Ben Morgh is the holiest place in Cimmeria, a fascinating wall of precipices and sheer cliffs as well as the tallest mountain of Cimmeria. Ben Morgh is believed to be the home of Crom, from whence he sends forth fearsome fates and dire deaths. Ben Morgh is also simply called Mount Crom. It is in north-eastern Cimmeria.

❖ **Field of the Dead** – The chiefs of the clans are buried at the base of Ben Morgh in a place called the Field of the Dead.

❖ **Conall Valley** – Conall Valley is the home of the Gaud, Taur and Cruaidh Clans in Cimmeria. The mountains that create the valley are called the Teeth. The northern end of the valley is the Pass of Blood, which leads into Asgard. The Pass of Noose leads into Snowy River country.

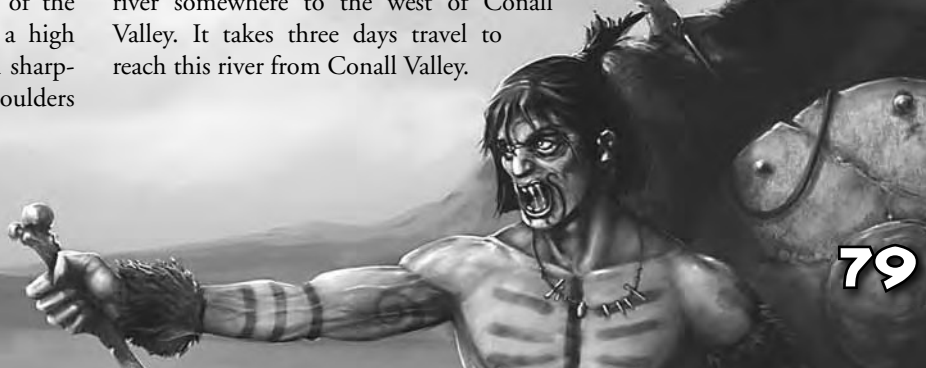
❖ **Pass of Blood** – This is a pass through the Eiglophians into Asgard at one end of Conall Valley.

**Field of the Chiefs** – This field in north-eastern Cimmeria is where clans gather. It is dotted with ancient Atlantean stone structures, including the Standing Stone, a central shaft of mossy black rock. No clan claims this land of eerie, carved stones with a certain weird geometry depicted on them.

**Hoath Plateau** – This plateau is where the Field of the Chiefs is located; its eastern end is steppes. It lies north and west of Frost Swamp. It lies east of the Black Mountains.

**Murrogh Forest** – Murrogh is a forested land to the south of Conall Valley. It is an immense tangle of trees and undergrowth. It has wide streams, a few rivers and many ponds. It has quiet glades and sudden ridges. There are marshes with quicksand and other dangers lurking in these woods.

**Snowy River** – Snowy River is a Cimmerian river somewhere to the west of Conall Valley. It takes three days travel to reach this river from Conall Valley.







**Ymir's Pass** – Ymir's Pass is a rocky pass into Cimmeria from the Border Kingdom. It is guarded by the fortress of Atzel.

## IMPORTANT CIMMERIAN CLANS

Cimmerians do not build cities and many of the clans are semi-nomadic, following the herds and moving about according to the season. Villages are primitive, usually with a common lodge house. Often the village chieftain and his family have a few rooms at one end of the common village lodge.

**Snowhawk (Canach, Conarch)** – This is the Cimmerian clan Conan belongs to. This clan is located in the north-western corner of Cimmeria among the harsh terrain in the Broken Leg lands. The Snowhawk clan observes various rituals and customs. One ritual is the ritual of manhood, performed when a warrior reaches his fifteenth year. The Cimmerian youth is sent out mid-winter armed only with a sword and wearing a bearskin for warmth to survive in the wild for a day and night.

The region this clan dwells in is misty and drizzly. One is hardly ever out of earshot from the sound of falling water, for the combination of plentiful rains and rocky crags creates many waterfalls and springs. The people tend to have sharp features. Conan's clan fights a blood-feud against the Nachta clan. This clan averages around three to four hundred members when all gathered together. The chieftain of the clan is addressed as Canach, or Canach of Canach.

**Callaugh** – Clan Callaugh lives in the southern reaches of the Broken Leg Lands. The village of Callaugh is important to the defence of the southern approaches of Canach lands. The village is situated in Callaugh Glen.

**Cruaidh** – They live in the northern reaches of Cimmeria near the Pass of Blood. They are the largest clan in the Valley of Conall, living on a wide vale on the western side of the northern end. A gentle river, Cottonmouth Creek, cuts through the vale.

**Darkwolf** – This is another clan that fought against the Aquilonians at Venarium.

Their most famous warrior was Shawan, and his death at Venarium was a great loss to the mighty Darkwolf.

**Galla** – This clan of Cimmerians is regarded even by other Cimmerians as being particularly primitive and savage. With their hair tied into topknots and their bodies tattooed with intricate knot-work designs, they present a fearsome appearance. They ornament themselves with bone amulets and necklaces and bear wooden shields. Their favoured weapon is a knotted club instead of a sword. Their kilts are made of wolf-skin and they do not bother with boots or sandals.

**Gorram** – The Gorram live in or around Murrough Forest in a small village.

**Hoath** – The Hoath Clan dwell on a plateau somewhere along the eastern slopes of the Black Mountains in south-western Cimmeria. They scar their cheeks.

**Ice Leopards** – This is another tribe of Cimmerians that took part in the siege of Venarium. Fenrik was one of the best warriors of this clan and was sent as a delegate to discuss the possible war against Venarium. This tribe wanders far to do battle with foreigners and has fought Picts, Vanir and Hyperboreans. Fenrik died in the battle against the Aquilonians but he accounted well for himself before he fell.

**Morgach** – Morgach is another clan living in the Broken Leg Lands. They are apparently iron workers.

**Murrough** – This southern Cimmerian tribe has had a feud with Conan's clan (Snowhawks or Canach) for at least five generations and prey upon the people of the border kingdom. They are brown-eyed and square-jawed. Entering Cimmeria through Gunderland and the Goralian Hills means passing through Murrough territory. They often raid into the Border Kingdom and Gunderland.

**Raeda** – This is another clan of Cimmerian savages. This clan has long noses and braided hair. Their greatest warrior was a barbarian named Chamta who was killed fighting a scaly menace from Ben Morgh.

**Tunog** – This Cimmerian tribe paints their faces blue in war and have high foreheads. They wear wolf-skin loincloths instead of kilts.



## LOCAL HISTORY

Prior to the Cataclysm, Atlantis created colonies on the mainland. When Atlantis sank beneath the cold waves and the world died, the Continental Atlantean colonies escaped the destruction. They were besieged by apes and ape-men and the Atlanteans had to fight hard for survival. The secret to steel and metallurgy was lost to them; however, they became skilled stone-masons, retaining still their artistic heritage.

The Atlanteans encountered the brutal Picts and the long fight with this overpowering force demolished the Atlanteans. The few survivors were forced to become as savage as their foes. For five hundred years the two races continued to fight, instead of learning to advance their civilisations. The Picts had the advantage, for they were numerous and led by powerful kings, while the Atlanteans were separated into disparate clans. Slowly, inexorably, the two cultures destroyed each other. Then, a lesser cataclysm further threw the two races backwards down the path of evolution.

A thousand years after the lesser cataclysm, the descendants of the Atlanteans were little more than ape-men. Their people no longer had the capability for language and did not know even the rudiments of fire or tools. They dwelled in the northwest, where the hills were forested and probably extended their range all the way to the ocean. The Picts fared better, however, and still retained their name and a basic language. They dwelt in the southwest.

After another five centuries the Atlanteans had at last progressed. Completely unaware of their heritage, their history lost to them, the ape-men were slowly becoming men again. Another thousand years found the descendants of Atlantis creating a primitive society. Over the next five hundred years, this race of man came to call themselves Cimmerians. They started advancing quickly after they made contact with the Acheronians and, later, the Hyborians. The Cimmerians regained the art of steel and developed most of their culture. The Picts had already pushed them from the sea into the region north of Aquilonia.

The next era of five hundred years introduced the Cimmerians to the Vanir and the Æsir, who swept down from the north, claiming the lands above the Eiglophians. Through all these eras, despite the clashes against the Picts, the Hyperboreans, the Nordheimr, the Acheronians and other races, the Cimmerians kept their bloodlines pure, intermarrying only amongst their own tribes.

## CREATURES OF CIMMERIA

### REMORA (SNOW-DEVIL, YAKHMAR, FROST WORM)

Huge Magical Beast (cold)

**Climate/Terrain:** Cold plains, Snow-Devil Glacier (Eiglophian Mountains)

**Organisation:** Solitary

**Initiative:** +10

**Senses:** Listen +5, Spot +5, low-light vision, darkvision 60 ft

**Dodge Defence:** 19

**Hit Points:** 147 (14 HD); **DR** 10

**Saves:** Fort +14, Ref +10, Will +6

**Speed:** 30 ft., burrow 10 ft.

**Space:** 15 ft.; **Reach:** 10 ft.

**Melee:** Bite +21 (2d8+12 plus 1d8 cold)

**Base Atk** +14; **Grp** +30

**Special Attacks:** Trill, cold, breath weapon

**Magic Atk:** +7

**Abilities:** Str 26, Dex 13, Con 20, Int 2, Wis 11, Cha 11

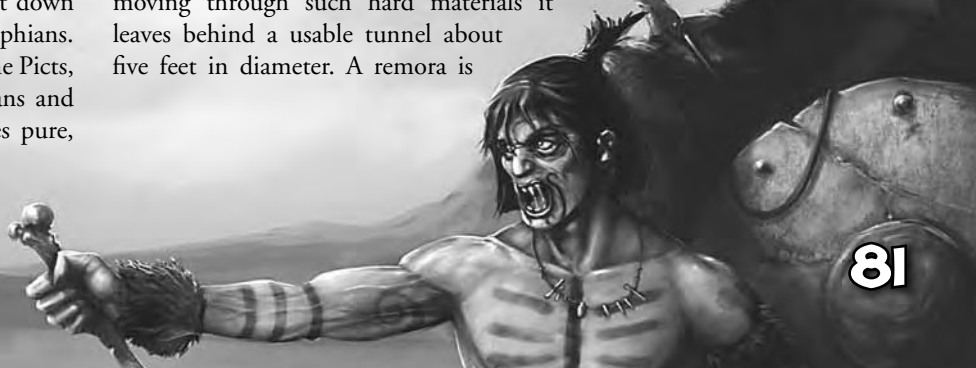
**Special Qualities:** Darkvision 60 ft., death throes, immunity to cold, low-light vision, vulnerability to fire

**Feats:** Alertness, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Iron Will, Weapon Focus (bite)

**Skills:** Hide +3, Listen +5, Spot +5

**Advancement:** 15–21 HD (Huge); 22–42 HD (Gargantuan)

The remora is the vampiric worm of the ice-lands, an almost forgotten whisper of horror in Cimmerian myth. A remora has glowing green eyes, a worm-like gelid body and a featureless eel-like head with a jawless, round opening for a mouth. Inside the mouth is a raspy, many-toothed tongue. The remora's body is covered with thick, white fur. It cannot burrow through stone but it can manage ice and frozen earth. When moving through such hard materials it leaves behind a usable tunnel about five feet in diameter. A remora is





about 40 feet long, five feet in diameter and weighs about 8,000 pounds. The remora has no soul or mind – just a remorseless hunger. It is a nocturnal hunter.

The creature is known as a remora to the Cimmerians, a snow-devil to the northern races and a *yakhmar* to the Hyperboreans. Certain mystical texts claim these creatures are native to another world (such as Ganymede). The remora's blood resembles liquid oxygen and its interior may well be frozen. Anything that comes into contact with its blood may become brittle enough to shatter.

## COMBAT

A remora's standard attack is to approach slowly and begin its thin, hellish piping, which entrances its victim and brings it safely to the remora. Failing that, remoras may hide under the snow and ice until they hear movement above them, then attack from below and surprise prey.

**Cold:** A remora generates cold so intense that anything touching its body takes 8d6 points of cold damage. The damage is almost identical to a burn. Anything killed by the remora is frozen solid. Anyone approaching within 60 feet of the remora takes one point of cold damage per round as ice forms on his body. Creatures striking a remora with natural attacks or unarmed attacks are subject to this damage. Striking the remora with a weapon reduces the damage to 1d8. The intense cold causes opponents to take an extra 1d8 points of cold damage every time the creature succeeds on a bite attack. This cold can weaken weapons; any weapon that strikes a remora must make a DC 18 Fortitude save to avoid destruction. The save DC is Constitution-based.

**Darkvision:** A remora can see perfectly in even pitch blackness to a range of 60 feet.

**Death Throes:** If a remora is killed and its interior is exposed to sufficient heat, there is a combustion reaction that results in an explosion that deals 12d6 points of combined fire and cold damage and 8d6 points of piercing damage to everything within 100 feet (DC 22 Reflex half). The save DC is Constitution-based.

**Trill:** The remora can sound a trilling, ululating song which has an overpowering narcotic effect.

This sonic mind-affecting compulsion affects all creatures other than other remoras within a 100-foot radius. A victim must make a Will saving throw (set by the remora's magic attack bonus) or be unable to take any actions other than move toward the remora for as long as the remora trills plus 1d4 rounds afterwards. Any character who fails his save will move inexorably toward the remora. However, if attacked or violently shaken (a full-round action), a victim is allowed another saving throw. Once a creature has resisted or broken the effect of the remora's trill, it cannot be affected again by that same remora for 24 hours.

**Vulnerability to Fire:** Heated weapons (at least red-hot) reduce the remora's damage resistance to 2. Anything heated to red- or white-hot that manages to reach the interior of the remora causes it to explode in its death throes (see left). Further, the remora takes half again as much (+50%) damage as normal from fire, regardless of whether a saving throw is allowed or the save is a success or failure.

**Skills:** A remora, due to its coloration and its affinity for burying itself in the snow, has a +10 racial bonus on Hide checks in its native environment.

## ADVENTURE/ CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Howard wrote no tales set in this foreboding land of craggy mountains, dark forests and dreary winds, preferring perhaps to leave it semi-mythical. The Games Master may want to encourage this sense of mystery and likewise not set any of his own campaigns in this savage land. Cimmeria is a terrible land and is apt to foster nightmares, gloomy memories and deep depressions.

Although Aquilonia never again tried to colonise Cimmeria during Conan's lifetime after the battle of Venarium, other nations may well have tried. The Vanir often raid into Cimmeria for slaves, as do the Hyperboreans. Perhaps the characters are members of these raiders, moving quickly and quietly into the moody realm of Cimmeria to capture slaves, or maybe they are intent on stopping a raid. Perhaps the characters rouse the Cimmerians to again put aside their blood-feuds and unite against a common foe when Vanir decide they want Cimmerian lands for their own.





# Corinthia

## The Land of Mountainous City-States

'When I served with the mercenaries of Corinthia, we swilled and wrenched all night and fought all day – aye, blood ran down the channels of our swords.'

– *Black Colossus*

Corinthia is the Hyborian Age equivalent to Italy, complete with internal rivalries and espionage. It is an ancient kingdom that co-existed with Acheron. It is highly developed with an established aristocracy and a powerful priesthood.

Corinthians are no longer pure-blooded Hyborians. Centuries of intermingling with Zamorians, Stygians and other trade races have darkened their skin, although they still remain stout and tend toward tawny hair.

### ALLEGIANCE

Corinthia is not a feudal society, so allegiances do not have the same weight as they do in Aquilonia or Nemedra. Allegiances tend to be with political groups, secret societies, friends and city-states. Corinthia is noted for shifting allegiances fairly easily and quickly. Corinthians are not as formal with their allegiances as the people of the northern Hyborian nations.

### CORINTHIAN CLOTHING

Corinthians dress in loose clothing, especially tunics, peplos and chitons. The clothing of the Corinthians resembles drapery.

Tunics are worn by both sexes and are worn with a belt. A Corinthian tunic is essentially a piece of drapery tied over the left shoulder. In cooler weather, a chlamys – a bordered cape pinned or tied at the right shoulder – might be added.

A peplos is a tubular, body-length tunic worn primarily by Corinthian women. The peplos is

folded inside out from the top down, so the top of the tube is at the waist. The fold is pinned at the shoulders and the whole thing gathered at the waist. It gives the appearance of being two pieces of clothing because of the way it drapes.

A chiton is worn by both men and women and consists of two pieces of drapery that are belted either under the breast, around the waist or both. The wealthy include hoods with their ornate chitons. For outdoor travel, a wide cloak or himation is added to the outfit.

A himation is a heavier cloth than a chiton and serves as a cloak; it is similar to a toga. It can also be worn alone, serving as both chiton and cloak.

Corinthian soldiers dress in whatever they can afford; often they wear a chlamys and little else, for the chlamys can be used as a light shield in combat. The knights wear heavy armour and the pikemen wear less.

Corinthians tend to wear sandals in warm weather and leather boots in cooler weather. Jewellery and cosmetics are worn by the women. Powdered lead is a common cosmetic, used to give the women a pale, ivory-skinned complexion.

### SEX ROLES IN CORINTHIA

Corinthian men support their families either by working or through commercial ventures. Women are expected to manage the household and oversee the slaves. Even poor families have slaves who do the cooking and cleaning and care for the children.

### HOUSES

Corinthian houses are fairly simple. A house is usually built around a small courtyard and contains bedrooms, store





rooms, guest areas and a kitchen. Male visitors are not supposed to be in rooms that the household women or children frequent so they are entertained in special guest areas. Most houses contain a nuclear family only and rarely include extended family members. Houses are lit by oil lamps and are heated with charcoal braziers. Furnishings include simple chairs, tables, chests and beds made from wood. The furnishings are rarely ornate.

## SOCIAL STANDING

Social standing in Corinthia, like in most Hyborean nations, centres around land-ownership. However, only a native-born, land-owning Corinthian male is considered a citizen and only citizens have legal protections and rights. Essentially, there are five social classes for males. A woman belongs to the social class of her husband or father. Children belong to their father's class until they are on their own.

The top rung of the social ladder is made up of the nobles. Corinthian nobles are landowners with large estates. They are expected to serve as the city-state's cavalry (much like the nobles in Aquilonia or Nemedra are expected to serve as knights). They are considered a warrior aristocracy because they often have to defend their soil.

Below the nobles are the farmers, who run the farms outside the actual cities. Their estates are not as large as those of the nobles and some work for the nobles. Almost every land-owner falls into this category by default. If needed for military service, they usually lead infantry units. Wealthy merchants belong to this class, although if they do not actually own land, some traditionalist Corinthians will always consider them as belonging to the class of craftsmen. Unfortunately, the wealthy merchants often have more wealth than some of the farmers and have more political influence, blurring the class lines and frustrating the traditionalists.

On the third rung of the social ladder are the urban craftsmen. They can be levied for three years of infantry service. Most Corinthian merchants are considered to be in this class, especially if they do not own land.

Another social class are the foreigners (including those from other city-states). Freed slaves automatically belong to this social class. This class is expected to engage in trade of some sort and are not allowed to own land.

The lowest social class are the slaves, who have no power or status. They can own property and have a family but may not engage in politics. It is illegal to beat or kill slaves in most of the city-states.

## SOCIAL MOBILITY

Corinthians can change social classes easily by earning or losing wealth. Social standing is rarely established by birth. If the son of a noble takes up pottery, that son is an urban craftsman. If a farmer buys enough land to own an estate worthy of a noble, he is considered noble. However, only a native-born Corinthian is given legal protection and the right to appeal to the king. This would include the son of a Kushite slave born on Corinthian soil; since the child was born in Corinthia, he is considered native-born regardless of his true ethnicity.

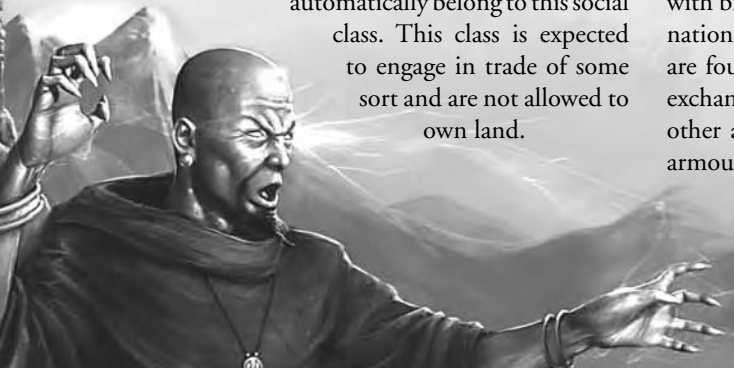
## TRADE AND ECONOMY

Trade drives the economy of Corinthia. The Road of Kings is an important economic highway and is probably the single most unifying factor in Corinthia. This dependence upon trade indicates that mining is not important in Corinthia. Either the mountains of Corinthia are barren of ore or they are too dangerous to fully explore. The latter is more likely. Mining does occur in Corinthia but is rarely profitable enough to supplant international trade as the major economic force.

Slavery is alive and well in Corinthia. Even poor households usually own a slave or two. In addition to privately-owned slaves, Corinthia has public slaves owned by the city-state. These slaves usually live independently and are trained for specialised jobs, such as spotting counterfeit coins, serving at temples, tax collecting and other tasks. The Zamorans sell captured women from Brythunia and other Hyborean nations and the Kothians sell Corinthian slaves from the south.

## THE MILITARY OF CORINTHIA

Corinthian warriors are an uproarious lot, drinking all night and fighting all day. They fight with straight blades with blood grooves. Corinthia is like most of the Hyborean nations in that cavalry plays a major role in war. Battles are fought in a similar manner. The armies converge and exchange missile-fire, then the pikemen rush toward each other and try to break through each other's ranks so the armoured and mounted knights can crush the enemy and cause them to flee before their might.



This method of fighting leaves Corinthia in the same straits as all the Hyborian nations save Aquilonia: long on archers and knights but short on trained infantry. Infantry is thought of as mere spear-fodder and is not considered an honourable profession. The rabble recruited quickly in times of war to serve as foot soldiers are given minimal training and are easily broken and demoralised. Thus, Corinthian city-states hire mercenaries to serve as trained infantry soldiers.

The Corinthian Infantry are commoners levied for three year terms of duty, so most of these soldiers have at least one level in Commoner. They use light lances as spears. They are armed with swords, heavy mail hauberks, breastplates and steel helms. They are also equipped with large shields. Those who do not return to their common lives after their tours of duty are completed join the ranks of the hoplites, the elite infantry force of the Corinthian city-states.

The Corinthian Cavalry are professional soldiers fighting under green and gold flags and heraldic devices. They are hard-bitten soldiers who do not put up with cowardice or foolishness. They ride heavily armoured horses, intent on riding through any opposition. They use light lances, heavy mail hauberks and breastplates as well as straight-edged swords.

## RELIGION IN CORINTHIA

The Corinthians worship Mitra, the 'universal god of the Hyborians'. The Corinthians, close to Zamora and Koth, are a bit more tolerant of other religions than Aquilonia but the Mitrans themselves remain zealous in their devotion to Mitra. He is regarded as the one true god, a god of light commanding a celestial army and a host of saints. Mitra either condemns souls to Hell or raises them in Heaven. Intolerant piety exemplifies this religion of supposed goodness. The Mitrans prize stately and almost plain architecture, preferring the awesomeness of Mitra over the sweeping, symbolic architecture of the temples to the other gods. It is a point of pride with the Mitrans that their temples as well as their god are different and, to their eyes, superior to the others. The Mitrans do not worship statues and do not sacrifice humans or animals to Mitra. More information on Mitra and his worship can be found in *Faith and Fervour*.

## ANU AND OTHERS

Anu is another god worshipped in Corinthia. Anu is a Shemitish god, a sky-god symbolised as a

bull that controls the weather. He is a creator god as well, having fashioned the world and humanity from his own thoughts. He is worshipped with curious rites in front of obscene brass idols that often involve the sacrifice of bulls and cattle. He is a fearsome deity and not to be petitioned lightly. He does not like to be bothered with day-to-day concerns and his attention is often wrathful. His worship is meant to appease him, not to demand things from him. More information on the worship of Anu can be found in *Faith and Fervour* and *Shem – Gateway to the South*.

The presence of Anu in Corinthia indicates that other Kothian or Shemite gods might also be worshipped there. Zamorian gods might also be worshipped close to the Zamorian border.

## CORINTHIAN GOVERNMENT

Corinthia is ruled by a king who commands *imperial* legions, yet opposing political factions are rampant in the city. Corinthians are ruled by bodies of politicians and a king reigns supreme over that senatorial council.

The Corinthian senate, composed of delegates from each of the city-states, does not pass law. That is the power of the king. The senate does, however, control much of foreign affairs and internal political arenas, as well as advise the king, which is its primary purpose.

As in many kingdoms, murder is illegal in Corinthia unless sanctioned by the king or in defence of self and home. Slavery is perfectly legal.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF CORINTHIA

Corinthia is a triangle of land south of Brythunia, west of Zamora, east of Ophir and north of Koth. Its landscape is mostly dominated by the Karpash mountains, which run along its south-eastern, southern and south-western borders. A portion of the southern 'point' of Corinthia is desert where the city-states of Kamalla and Zahmahn are located.





The northern reaches of Corinthia are agricultural plains and rolling hills. Through here passes the Road of Kings, where most of the larger cities and towns lie. The west is dominated by forests that rise on jagged mountainous ridges until the Karpash Mountains rise above the tree-line, separating Corinthia from Ophir.

Robert E. Howard did not set any stories explicitly in Corinthia, so the information here comes from alternative sources.

**Bloddolk Forest** – The Bloddolk Forest is a reputedly haunted forest northwest of Mornstadinos. The forest is home to carnivorous trees, bizarre plants and unseen denizens that dance just out of sight. Most of the inhabitants are not deadly, merely curious; however, it is better not to rile them. Bloddolk is a dense wood and travel through it is difficult. A wide, deep river with only two or three fordable spots also moves through the area.

**Dodligia Plain** – The Dodligia Plain, north of the Bloddolk forest, is huge, flat and bare save for the occasional butte and a few rocky ridges. An odd peak sits alone on the plain, a mountain without a range. The mountain, called Castle Slott, is honeycombed with tunnels and rooms, although much of it is collapsed and destroyed.

**River Corinthia** – This river runs through the eastern part of Corinthia. It is a wide, easy-flowing river the source of which lies in the Karpash Mountains.

**River Olympos** – River Olympos feeds at least three city states in western Corinthia.

**Sea of Gray Despair** – This ‘sea’ was once the site of a great city during the years Acheron, Zamora and Stygia ruled and Corinthia was a fertile trading ground between the powers. The great city reared here was both powerful and rich until a barbaric enemy from the lowlands, possibly another wave of Hyborians, razed the city and ruined the surrounding land with salt. Ultimately a great curse was laid on the ground. Over the centuries the land has recovered somewhat, although it is still a bleak wasteland. This wasteland is in the central regions of Corinthia and men fear and avoid it. Werewolves haunt this foul plain.

**Karpash Mountains** – The Karpash Mountains are an extensive range of mountains that

extend from Zamora to Ophir. From the Corinthian side, the approach to the Karpash is one of many forested ridges that slowly build up to becoming the rocky Karpash range. Several passes between Corinthia and Zamora are named in the apocryphal texts, such as Donar Pass, Haraan Pass and the Haunted Pass.

**Haunted Pass** – High in the Karpash Mountains on the north fork of the Corinthian Road, the Haunted Pass between Corinthia and Zamora is noted for the eerie sounds the winds make there. A haunted lake, Spokesjo, lies at the top of the pass where undines live.

**Mount Turio** – This ice-capped mountain was once the tallest peak in the Karpash range between Zamora and Corinthia; however, it turned out to be volcanic and the mountain exploded ten million years ago, blasting the top half of the mountain into volcanic ash. Time healed the wounds and an icy, deep crater lake filled with Sargasso weed remained. A recent re-eruption destroyed the lake.

**Western Pass** – With a reputation for being peculiar, this little used pass through the Karpash Mountains crosses from Corinthia to Ophir. A stark, square keep constructed of stone and manned by Corinthians watches the pass. A ghostly, ancient ruin, a temple to the demon Kthantos, haunts this lonely site.



## IMPORTANT CORINTHIAN CITIES

Most of the larger cities are built along the Road of Kings where the economy is the strongest. Nearly 100 towns, seventeen cities and one metropolis lurk along that stretch of road, housing over 734,000 of Corinthia's seven million residents. Away from the Road and along tributaries of the Road and various rivers, the towns grow smaller and smaller, giving way to nearly ten thousand different villages, hamlets and isolated farms and homes. Over 250 castles and forts have been built and remain standing, with some dating as far back as Acheronian times. Almost 35 percent of those forts are now abandoned, lost due to changes in trade flow, conquest, monsters or even magic.

The cities of Corinthia use the fertile soil around them to great advantage. Most of the ground is used for crops or herds of animals, not for villas or noble estates. Most cities in Corinthia tend to be sprawling affairs, with little or no central planning, just haphazard construction when more space is needed. Poorer sections of town are not paved and are quite filthy. Corinthian buildings usually have window ledges that run continuously around the outside of the building. Conan mentions sewers while under the house of Nabonidus, so the wealthier districts of the towns have some form of sewer system. Most Corinthian city-states are built near or on rivers.

Robert E. Howard does not mention a Corinthian capital city in any of his stories. Indeed, unless one counts the nameless city of *Rogues in the House*, Howard does not even describe a Corinthian city. All of the cities listed below come from alternative sources.

**Anuphar** – Lying strategically upon the Road of Kings, Anuphar is another prosperous city-state in Corinthia. It lies upon the Road of Kings and is the home of Hobb, a companion of Conan around the time of *Black Colossus*. It has over 10,000 residents.

**Athros** – This is an extremely powerful city-state that once had dreams of empire under King Zhenkri, called the Lion of Corinthia. That king was slain by Conan. Still powerful and militant, this city controls a large section of meadowland in central Corinthia. It lies southeast of Polopponi and several leagues to the east of Sea of Gray Despair. It has a population of around 12,400.

**Athun** – Athun is a Corinthian city-state. Athun is a rival to Sarta.

**Atilleos** – According to Roy Thomas, this Corinthian city-state borders rival Menalos. It is not far from the ruins of Lanjau. It has a population of 5,500

**Ezar Bar Q'um** – Ezar Bar Q'um vies for power over neighbouring Khumar Rhun. It is located in a mountainous region.

**Kamalla** – Kamalla is a small city in the desert of south-eastern Corinthia. It is a walled city that was once visited by slug-like sorcerers from another dimension. 7,800 people reside there.

**Karphur** – Karphur is situated on the border between Corinthia and Ophir, half of the city in each nation. It is a trading city that claims independence from both nations. Both men and women comprise the Karphur Guard. The city-state also controls a silver mine on the Corinthian side and divides the silver equally between both nations and the city-state. Its people are a blend of Corinthian and Ophirean and have an arresting look. The city shows both Corinthian and Ophirean influences in its architecture. The tallest building is a tower with two points.

**Khumar Rhun** – Khumar Rhun, located high in the mountains, battles primarily with its rival city-state, Ezar Bar Q'um. The spired city, accessed via an arched stone bridge over a deep cleft in the mountains, boasts of a labyrinth. Ishtar is the primary religion here.

**Lanjau** – Lanjau is an ancient Corinthian city that is now in ruins. It was guarded by a giant lizard-dragon before it was destroyed in a great earthquake and spouts of flame. It has a rumoured treasure horde that is guarded by giant mummies. It lies near the city of Atilleos but is located on no map.

**Lonika** – This is a city-state of the fertile meadowlands in central Corinthia. It lies southwest of Polopponi but was razed by King Zhenkri of Athros. The only recorded survivor was Princess Kassa, who lived there as a hostage of good faith. She has since returned to her father, the king of Polopponi.

**Menalos** – Menalos is another Corinthian city-state and is a rival of bordering Atilleos. Much of its army died of the purple plague in Lanjau. Their armies still refuse to enter that forbidding ruin to this day. It has a small population of 5,400.







**Mornstadinus** – Mornstadinus is a city-state in eastern Corinthia. Its narrow cobbled streets are a confusing morass of alleys, dead ends and by-ways. Stables are built next to grand temples next to open air markets. One of the inns in the city is known as the Milk of Wolves Inn. Once destroyed by a tornado, it has since been rebuilt. Another inn is the Smoking Cat Inn. The guards of this city are corrupt and easily bribed and the merchants are willing to haggle. The citizens call Mornstadinus ‘The Jewel of Corinthia.’ It is a walled city with squat buildings. Some small industries work here. The buildings, even the small mansions of the wealthy, are made of adobe and stone. It has some 11,000 residents.

**Naplonia** – Naplonia is a western Corinthian city-state. The estate of Baron Strakkus, an elder statesman of Corinthia, lies here. Baron Strakkus is apparently a sorcerer who guards a gate to another dimension – his home dimension. The gateway collapsed into rubble after Conan and Red Sonja escaped from Strakkus’ clutches. It has about 4,000 residents.

**Nywenth La** – This Corinthian city-state lies in the southern portion of Corinthia and is a sheep-raising community. There is a nearby lake hemmed in by mountains. The king of Nywenth La once promised his daughter Gywnella to the king of Berthalia in Brythunia to seal a trading alliance. Apparently Nywenth La does not lie on the Road of Kings and needs such trading alliances to increase its sheep-herding economy. Gywnella eventually ran off with her Corinthian lover. Nywenth La has 3,560 residents.

**Polopponi** – Polopponi is a marvellous city-state in the meadowlands of central Corinthia. It was built upon a tor along the Road of Kings, towering and majestic over the surrounding plain. This city-state exchanged royal children as hostages with the city-state Lonika at one time. The walls of this glittering city are decorated with fantastic designs. It is ruled by King Kerbogha and his blind daughter, Kassa. The city is prosperous because the king made a bargain with a demon, a deal that eventually cost him his son. Polopponi has a 40,800 residents.

**Sonos** – Sonos has several stone-and-wood buildings and straw-covered dirt streets. The straw is replaced every couple of days. The homes are round buildings with thatched roofs, except

for the smithy and the meeting house, which have high roofs with wooden shingles. The meeting house is made of stone and mortar and has slit windows; it is a place of refuge in case of attack. Soldiers in Sonos wear breastplates and wield spears.

**Tebes** – This walled city has arched roofs of green copper. Statues dominate the steps of most public buildings. Every hill and rise is accentuated with architecture. Streets are built along the lay of the land, so they appear haphazard and unnecessarily labyrinthine. One disreputable location in the city is called the Waste, which is where things and people can be hidden from view or disposed of. It is similar to the thieves’ quarters found in many Zamorian cities. The establishments have at least two guards and there are plenty of bodies just lying about. Most people in Tebes will not discuss the place. Tebes also has an extensive sewer system and a network of ancient catacombs. The city is built over a branch of River Olympos.

**Vesci** – Vesci is a town of western Corinthia. Usually omitted from maps, its economy is virtually bankrupt, a forgotten village that now has turned decadent and villainous. Crime and sin abound. The worst of the criminals can be found in a tavern called ‘The Rat’s Nest.’ A sorcerer obsessed with eyes once lived far outside the city but was later hung for an inconvenience done to the Captain of the Guard. Despite its poverty, Vesci still has enough land to provide serfdoms for several barons.

**Zahmahn** – Zahmahn lies in Corinthia on the main pass between Koth and Corinthia. The city-state is ruled by Queen Yaila, a former slave until Conan made her a queen. Her husband is Lord Godrik. The city was founded by a Kothian exile named Zahmahn. After the Kothian’s death, only queens have ruled the city-state. Conan once battled a tentacled *thing* here he suspected may have once been human. The city has tall towers and minarets. Zahmahn has a population of 13,000.

## CORINTHIAN HISTORY

Corinthia was a kingdom even during the time of Acheron, although it was distinct from that vile realm of purpled towers and nefarious necromancies. Orastes of Nemediia tells Xaltotun that Corinthia regained its independence after the fall of Acheron. This implies that Corinthia was at one time an independent state that came under the thumb of Acheron.



The older kingdoms of Ophir, Corinthia, and western Koth, which had been subject to the kings of Acheron, regained their independence with the fall of the empire.

– *The Hour of the Dragon*

Zamora and Acheron existed at the same time and traded with each other. This trade took them through the mountainous regions where Corinthia was formed, probably by Acheronians and Zamorians interested in protecting trade routes from barbarian raiders, or even from Stygian raiders from the south, which shared coterminous borders with Acheron. When the Hyborians raided from the north, pushed by successive waves of northern barbarians, they could not invade the stronger Acheron or Zamora, so they settled in the wild expanse between and south of the two dark nations.

These early Hyborian states never amounted to anything more than city-states because they were continually supplanted by new waves of Hyborians from the north, overrunning and destroying what was built only to build again. The last wave of Hyborians to enter the region were a tribe calling themselves the Corinthi, probably led by a King named Corinth. To the north of them were the Nemedi and north of the Nemedi were the Aquiloni. The Corinthi, who subjugated earlier Hyborian tribes and mingled with the Zamorians, eventually fought the Stygians and helped push them back out of the mountains and fields of Corinthia. For a short time Corinthia was an independent state but later fell under the dominion of the Acheronians.

Fortresses were built along the trade routes between Zamora and Acheron and became the city states of Corinthia. Eventually, through prolonged contact with Acheron, Stygia and Zamora, the Hyborians became stronger, stealing their technology but avoiding their decadence. Eventually, the Hyborians rose against Acheron and overran it. That Zamora stood strong indicates that either Zamora was militarily stronger than Acheron or Stygia, or that they helped the Hybori.

All was not so well for Corinthia, however. Its city-states depended upon trade for their economy. When Acheron fell, so to did the trade. What was independence if the people starved? Concerned with their own economy and internal

problems, Corinthia gained little when the Hybori carved up Acheron. The Corinthians knew that trade had to flow, so they started building the Road of Kings, connecting it to pre-existing roads. The city-states, which often collected tolls and other tribute from earlier Zamoran-Acheron trade, agreed to reduce or eliminate such barriers in order to encourage traders moving from the east and south into the growing kingdoms of Aquilonia, Argos and Nemedi to use a route through Corinthia.

Once trade was restored, Corinthia settled into its new role and, to this day, still maintains the Road of Kings. Corinthia remains dependent upon the trade of the Hyborian world for its economy.

## CREATURES OF CORINTHIA

Corinthia seems to be haunted by more than its share of were-beasts. Mammoths wander the hills and cleft valleys of Corinthia. Hill panthers, condors and carnivorous trees are also relatively common there. Some lakes are haunted by water spirits called undines.

## ADVENTURE/ CAMPAIGN HOOKS

The Mitrans have tired of the cult of Anu and have decided to burn the temples and kill the priests as criminals and sorcerers.

The crags and valleys of Corinthia hide tribes of aboriginal ape-humanoids as well as Acheronian ruins. Characters can try to find these ruins in search of ancient treasures.

During a joust at one of the major Corinthian cities along the Road of Kings, a stranger wearing the armour of Khitai enlists. He lasts nearly the entire tourney, downing several foes before he himself falls. He does not rise and when they lift the flaring great helm with face mask, onlookers find an empty suit of armour. This entity has returned for the past five years, each time with the same result. It is nearing time for the annual joust again...





# Darfari

## The Cannibals of the South

Darfari is one of the northernmost of the Black Kingdoms, located just south of eastern Stygia. The Darfari are herdsmen and farmers, living in the swamps of the east and the savannas of the west. The Darfari do not occupy the dragon-haunted forest belt. The Darfari are also notorious cannibals. During the rainy season, they move to semi-permanent villages of thatch to grow millet, sorghum and other grains. During the dry season, they take their cattle to the savannas and fields for grazing.

In racial make-up, the Darfari are closer to the southern blacks than they are to the Kushites. The Darfari are deeply dark skinned, tall and lithely muscled with extremely kinky and coarse hair. They have short, broad and nearly straight noses. As a race, the Darfari strongly dislike facial hair, so it is usually plucked out. Their chest and forearms are quite hairy. Probably their most distinctive characteristic is their filed teeth. Both sexes file their front teeth (the incisors and canines) to fine points, which is seen as attractive throughout Darfar. They tend to walk with a slouching gait. The women of the Darfar tribes typically have almond-shaped eyes.

The Darfari are quick to take offence and are fiery in temperament. They are utterly indifferent to human life, which makes them dreaded by neighbouring tribes. The Darfari are ferocious and treat prisoners badly, often allowing them to starve if they are not eaten. The Darfari are also rather indolent, preferring to avoid work if possible. The men would much rather sit in the main hut of their village (the palaver house) and make thatch or fishing lines. They will laugh at even the slightest hint of humour despite their warlike, vengeful nature. The savage Darfari are regarded as thieves and murderers, without a hint of basic trustworthiness. Still, they are considered valuable as slaves.

Most adventurers are likely to encounter Darfari as slaves in Shem, Turan or Hyrkania.

The Darfari speak a guttural language. Strangers in Darfar greet each other by grasping one another's upper arms, then, after a slight pause, clasping each other's wrists. Friends greet each other by embracing.

### DARFARI CLOTHING, HAIRSTYLES AND ORNAMENTATION

It was a gigantic black man, naked but for a loin cloth. One hand still grasped a knotty-headed bludgeon. The fellow's kinky wool was built up into hornlike spindles with twigs and dried mud. This barbaric coiffure had given the head its misshapen appearance in the starlight. Provided with a clue to the riddle, Conan pushed back the thick red lips and grunted as he stared down at teeth filed to points... the man on the floor was a cannibal slave from Darfar.

— *Shadows in Zamboula*

The Darfari wear few clothes. Adult males usually go naked except maybe for some beads around their necks or their wrists. In some civilised regions they may wear loin-cloths. They may also adorn their noses, ears or lips with rings of ivory or precious metals. Adult women are usually nude in the villages but may wear goatskin skirts or plantain girdles with long, dried grass hanging from them when travelling outside the villages. Children of both sexes go naked. The chief of a tribe wears a leopard skin cloak to signify his standing. Modesty is a civilised concept quite beyond the ken of the Darfari.

Grooming is important to the Darfari; the men mould their hair into grotesque shapes with twigs and dried mud, sometimes over a wooden base. Darfari men remove facial



hair through plucking; both males and females find facial hair disgusting. Some tribes stain their hair red with cow urine. Darfari women wear their hair long in most tribes but a few tribes prefer their women to shave their hair except for a long top-knot; the women of these tribes also shave their eyebrows.

In addition to shaping the hair, some Darfari tribes practice techniques of cranial binding on infants in order to shape their skulls into elongated or even heart-shaped forms. Cranial binding does not affect intelligence (there is no modifier to the Intelligence score) but it can give the tribesman a sufficiently weird appearance to an outsider.

Darfari enjoy ornamenting themselves with jewellery. Brass or ivory anklets and bracelets are especially welcome with women in Darfar; they even put them on infants. Women also enjoy wearing numerous rings (although these do not signify status or marriage) on their fingers and/or toes. Brass wire is another sought after ornamentation; it is worn wrapped around the forearm from wrist to elbow. Men, women and children all enjoy wearing necklaces. The necklaces are made from plaited grasses with beads, small animal hoofs, teeth, small skulls, beans, elephant tail bristles or tusks depending from them.

The Darfari, like many other Black Kingdom natives, use body paint for ritual and decorative purposes. Red or blue paints are the most common, although white is worn by witch-doctors. Typical patterns include arrow-heads, bands, dots or handprints. Red body paint is made from the bark of certain trees and dark blue body paint is made from tree fungus. The body is covered in dust or mud when a person is in mourning.

Tattooing is also common and uses a mixture of ashes with the blue pigment from tree fungi.

## SEX ROLES IN DARFAR

The sex roles in Darfar are clearly defined, especially in regards to the division of labour. Men hunt and herd and women cook. Boys are taught to fish, herd and hunt while girls are taught to cook, make pottery, weave baskets and mats and care for the children. Men till the fields but the women plant the crops. Women and children sleep in the houses while men sleep in the cattle pens to watch over the family wealth. Only men are permitted to be blacksmiths because of the 'magic' involved. Men herd cattle and the boys practice by herding sheep and goats. Males and females bathe together in the rivers and pools without regard to modesty.

## LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Prior to marriage, Darfari girls do as they please in sexual terms; virginity, chastity and virtue are not held in any sort of esteem. It would be uncommon to find a maiden much past puberty in any given tribe.

The Darfari see polygamy as an ideal situation but in practise most men only have one wife because of the 'bride price' payment and the lack of possessions most Darfari males have. Darfari are required to marry outside their clan. Grooms pay a 'bride price' to the bride's family, which creates an alliance between the two clans. If a woman's husband dies, her husband's brother is expected to marry the woman (without the need for a further 'bride price' payment) in order to provide support for the widow and any children. If a Darfari warrior has more than one wife, all the children are raised together as members of the same family. The various wives typically cooperate but each wife is ultimately responsible for her own children.

Adultery is common in Darfar and one of the chief reasons for raids and warfare between the villages and tribes. Wives are loaned to all guests.

## PROPERTY

Darfari own few material possessions. Men usually have a few weapons and the family may own a house, a dug-out canoe, tools, pottery and woven goods. Most homes have a block of iron for an anvil and many tribesmen have some basic blacksmithing skills. Some who have been lucky in trade may have iron or brass cooking pots instead of the native clay pots. Virtually all Darfari property is filthy. Pots are simply rinsed out after use, not scrubbed. The Darfari are, however, notably greedy for possessions and can usually be talked into many endeavours in exchange for goods.

## DARFARI HOUSES

The Darfari live in bee-hive huts or cave dwellings. The bee-hive huts are made with mud walls and have conical roofs of thatch. These houses are well built and the walls can last up to 20 years. The thatch roofs rarely last longer than two or three years, even with constant maintenance. There are no windows. The door is usually just a huge strip of bark leaned against the doorway at night. Over the doorway of each house hangs a bundle of skulls, a fetish given as







a gift to a family by the witch-doctor to protect the house and family. Often other grisly fetishes hang around the house from the roof, usually skulls of men, women and children, with the spines still attached. Some are fully-fleshed heads, their bloated tongues distended, their spines dangling beneath them with bits of gore still attached; these are more potent fetishes paid for with many oxen or goats to the witch-doctor.

The houses have dirt floors that are beaten down hard. Beds are side-by-side long poles supported by forked branches. Usually two beds are found on either side of a house with a fire pit in the centre, beneath a hole in the ceiling. Stools, bowls, gourds, baskets, hanging shelves, boards and other implements can be found throughout a house. Hooked tree branches depending from grass ropes hold food and weapons. Bones and skulls hang from the roof as macabre wind chimes. Along the back wall is the aforementioned reliquary containing the bones of the father of the oldest Darfari male living in the house.

The women and children live in the houses, while most of the men sleep in the cattle pens to protect the only wealth they have, although the houses are otherwise used by the entire family. The cattle pens are larger than the houses and have mud roofs.

Darfari tribes in and around swamplands live in permanent villages that are built on high ground. They use irrigation to water the crops. During the dry season, the swamp Darfari move down into temporary villages closer to the waters (March through September). Temporary houses are made from bark, tree limbs and thatch instead of mud but are otherwise identical to the permanent houses.

## DARFARI WEAPONS

The Darfari prefer bludgeons as weapons as they feel that beating their enemies to death retains the flavour of the meat far better than slicing it open and letting the blood spill upon the earth. The Darfari also use bows and arrows for hunting birds. Spears are also commonly used weapons, especially when they are not killing for food. Fishing nets are also commonly found among the Darfari.

## VILLAGES

Darfari villages are built along trails, the houses built end to end along both

sides of a trail. Each family has a house. At the end of the village is the palaver house. Behind the houses are the cattle pens. A stockade is usually placed at the opposite end of the village and the palaver house may have its own stockade. Some towns may have a stockade around the entire village.

The palaver house is the centre of the village, where the headman holds his meetings. The men, when not hunting or working, like to sit in the palaver house and gossip, perhaps working on fishing nets or batches of thatch. Visitors are usually housed in the palaver house. A guest visiting a village is expected to go to the palaver house first and greet the headman of the village by dropping to one knee. Guests are always served food by the village women. If the guest has a host, the host is expected to share his wives with the guest; otherwise, the headman shares his wives. Prisoners are usually kept chained in the palaver hut. The palaver house is decorated with skulls and spines, especially around the door. The bones of the founder of the village (if he is dead) are also hung in the palaver house so his spirit may continue to protect and lead the village.

Walking through a Darfari village can be a disconcerting experience for an outsider. Quantities of human and animal intestines can usually be found strung out to dry on sticks throughout the town; human bones can be found in fire pits and decapitated heads and skulls hang above all the doors.

## SOCIAL STANDING

To achieve any form of status in Darfari culture, a person must be seen as generous and a good provider for the tribe. He must be a good hunter and have wives and children. Giving generously boosts one's Reputation score by +1 or +2, although this bonus can usually only be gained once per quarter. The Darfari do not use dress or costume to signify status beyond a leopard skin worn by the tribal chief or headman. Indeed, the older a man is the dirtier and more ragged his clothing, regardless of his status and Reputation.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

The Darfari are hunter-gatherers and their grasslands and jungles are filled with ferocious game and fertile soil. Stegosaur-like dragons, wild cats, snakes and birds live in the southern jungles and swamplands. The hot grasslands in the north host elephants, giraffes and cheetahs. The Darfari also harvest ivory from the elephants in the western reaches, or perhaps they poach elephants from Kush. In addition, the Darfari herd goats, sheep and



cattle. Cattle are the root of Darfari economics, their source of wealth. Darfari have some sense of money, using iron arrowheads in bundles as a measure of value. A single iron arrowhead (or an equivalent amount of iron) is called a *beki*. A bundle of ten *beki* is an *ntet*. A dowry is typically something valued at ten *ntet* or a hundred *beki*.

Women are their primary trading commodity. Goats are also traded with some frequency, considered by most Darfari to be only slightly less value than women. Cloth is the third most commonly trade good. Salt is highly sought after in trade. Millet and tobacco are also deemed trade goods. Further, the Darfari trade in the dead. Unless the dead is a chief, the Darfari will trade their deceased with neighbouring tribes, for they do not eat their own clan-members. Chiefs and other important persons are buried.

## THE DARFARI MILITARY

The Darfari enjoy feuding. The military strength of the Darfari consists of all able-bodied adult males. There is no formal military organisation or training in Darfar and thus no real soldiers; all experience in handling weapons is gained through games of skill, the hunt and actual fighting. Darfari men spend their entire boyhoods on the veldt tending cattle or in the darkest of jungles hunting prey and they become tough and strong as a result.

A headman is assigned to lead raiding parties. The headman is tasked with carrying a war fetish created by the shaman. While one party attacks a village at night, others wait in the forest, grasses or swamps (usually around the existing paths used by the villagers) around the village to catch anyone who runs from the raid.

A raid is typically carried out by sending two men from the war party into a town. The two men steal into town, knock on the door of a hut and claim to be travellers in need of food and/or shelter. Once the door is opened, they attack everyone inside – loudly in order to awaken the village, who then chase after the two murderers. The two men run toward the waiting tribesmen with the whole town in pursuit. The waiting Darfari tribesmen ambush the villagers as they chase the two down the paths. Unless the feud is particularly bitter, usually the fight breaks off after the fall of a handful of warriors. The fallen are dragged off to be devoured and any prisoners are taken to be tortured and/or eaten later, often at the celebratory dance following the raid.

Darfari women are non-militant and usually quite unable to fight. The Darfari enjoy attacking women because they deem the act completely safe. Other

war parties attack women at their work or at the rivers when they are gathering water. If this happens during the course of a war, whole towns may suffer famine because the women will not leave their huts to find food or water for fear of being killed.

The Darfari are afraid of witches and know that blood is a fetish (magical link), so they are careful not to let anyone but a friend approach them if they are bleeding.

## ENTERTAINMENT AND DIVERSIONS

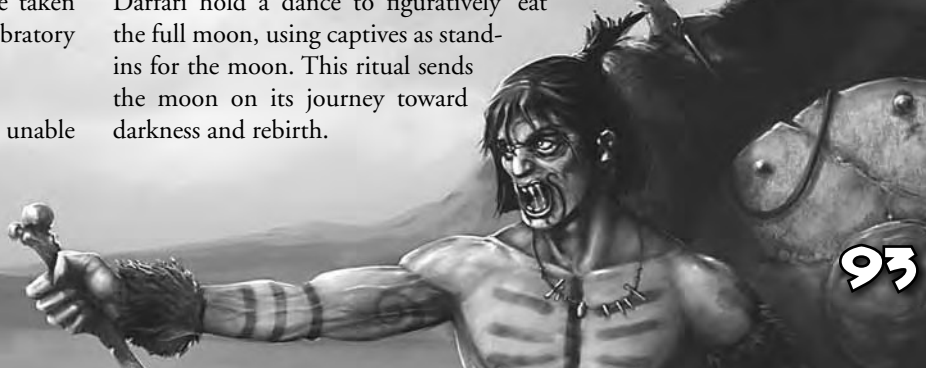
Social activities are important to the Darfari as they are for most cultures.

### GOSSIP

The favourite pastime of the Darfari is gossip. The women talk while working and the men sit in the palaver hut and talk while working on fishing nets or thatch. The men will work happily if they can do it in the palaver hut so they can talk but will usually make women do anything difficult that requires real labour. Strangers come to the palaver hut and speak with the headmen and the men gathered there. The men dislike being away from the palaver hut in case something important needs to be discussed – such as a raid or war. If possible, when something needs to be done away from the hut, the Darfari will wait until everyone needs to leave.

### DANCING

The Darfari love to dance. Like most Black Kingdom tribesmen, the Darfari use almost any excuse to dance. They always hold a dance at the time of the new moon. When dancing, the Darfari wear long armlets of grasses and anklets of shells. Their rapid dance movements are obscene yet graceful. Drums keep a constant time while torches flicker around the dancers. Usually a dance begins at the onset of darkness and continues until dawn. One important dance is the famed ‘moon-dance.’ Each month when the moon is full, the Darfari hold a dance to figuratively ‘eat’ the full moon, using captives as stand-ins for the moon. This ritual sends the moon on its journey toward darkness and rebirth.





**FISHING**

The Darfari love to fish using fishing nets, hooks and traps. They go out into the rivers and swamps in dugout canoes. Usually a woman or child handles the steering and one man chants a song for the rowers. Fetishes designed to bring luck to the trip and safety for the tribesmen hang on the canoe, including skulls and other bones. Women and children look for fish in the mud along the banks.

**ART**

A chanting rose to the night, vibrating with savage exultation.

– *The Man-Eaters of Zamboula*

The Darfari enjoy poetry and song. They have different songs and chants for different activities. The Darfari have work songs, celebratory songs, cultural songs, ritual songs, war songs, historical songs and flattering songs for ancestors, spirits and friends. The most interesting use of song is in a ritual competition to resolve legal issues. Darfari characters involved in legal proceedings come before a chief or leader and make opposed Perform (song) or Perform (chant) checks. Drumming usually accompanies most ritual chants and songs. The Darfari also create wooden reliquaries to honour their ancestors. Other forms of art, such as decorative art on pottery or weavings are typically non-religious to avoid offending a spirit or god with a mortal depiction. Often such art revolves around the depiction of human heads or skulls. The thrones of the chief and his weapons are also heavily decorated.

**HEALTH AND MEDICINE**

Medicine in Darfar is extremely primitive. Illness is not considered to be a failing of the body but the result of ‘witches’ in the body. The more severe the illness, the more ‘witches’ are within the body. Essentially, each symptom is the result of a separate ‘witch,’ so a person with five symptoms is said to have five ‘witches’ within. Most healing is done through a combination of sympathetic magic and herbalism. Even a basic Heal check is made with magic words, fetishes and herbs.

**DIET**

The Darfari eat three meals per day and can often be found snacking on tubers and nuts between meals. Meals may be taken in their houses or the men may decide to eat in the palaver house. Women may serve the men in the palaver house but never eat within it.

At birth, each Darfari is assigned a taboo food that he is thereafter forbidden to eat; the taboo varies from individual to individual and is divined by the witch-doctor when the child is brought to him by his parents. Beyond this restriction, the Darfari will eat nearly anything, preferring meat. They eat tubers, nuts, sweet potatoes, crushed gourd seeds, bananas, snails, plantains, millet, fish and virtually any animal meat (including human) they can find, including small rodents and snakes. Blood from a slaughtered animal or person is collected in bowls and cooked with oil. The Darfari smoke and sun-dry some of their meats to take on journeys and for snacks. All cooking is done by women in the tribes. Stews are common. Most food is highly seasoned with hot peppers. The Darfari primarily drink water, although if they can get rum, coffee or tea, they feel their status is elevated.

A person’s taboo food may only be eaten when he is given permission by the witch-doctor, for taboo foods are considered extremely potent magically. A witch-doctor may chew his own taboo food while casting certain powerful spells to increase his magic potential.

The Darfari are most noted for their cannibalism. The Darfari eat other food as well – it is doubtful they look among themselves for food, for example. They live in a blistering land dense with an amazing variety of potential food sources. The primary food of the Darfari is millet. Their basic dish is a heavy porridge made from spiced millet. Milk is usually consumed alongside meals. Cooking is usually done outside in fire pits.

Cannibalism is not just an example of perverted dietary preferences among the Darfari; their ghastly cult demands such gruesome fare. The eating of people is a matter of ritual and symbolism. They do not eat just any old carcass. They do not eat their own relations but may sell their dead relations in exchange for the dead relations of the others. They also do not typically keep slaves or prisoners and fatten them up for later consumption. They do not eat the sick – their bodies are simply thrown into the forest.

The cannibalism of the Darfar is ritualistic and grisly, part of their daily life as proscribed by their vile religion. In Zamboula the Darfari practise their cannibalism at night only but it is likely that in their homeland the





## RELIGION IN DARFAR

### BASIC COSMOLOGY



Darfari are shameless in their cannibalism and practise it even in the light of day. They keep few slaves themselves, eating any prisoners they might take in war, although they probably buy slaves from the southern kingdoms and eat them as well. Probably their chiefs receive the choicest portions. The skulls of their victims decorate poles outside their huts and the hands and feet decorate trees outside their villages.

The Darfari believe that the flesh of a human tastes better if that human has been frightened and forced to run in order to try to escape, so they will usually try to arrange a chase instead of just killing someone if possible. When the victim is caught, he is made to sit on the ground with his feet under his thighs. His hands are placed in front of him. The Darfari then bind the victim so that he is completely immobilised. In this posture he is lifted and placed in a pit lined with red hot stones that were heated by the women while the men bound the victim. The victim, still alive if all has gone well, is then covered with leaves and earth in the cooking pit to be roasted alive.

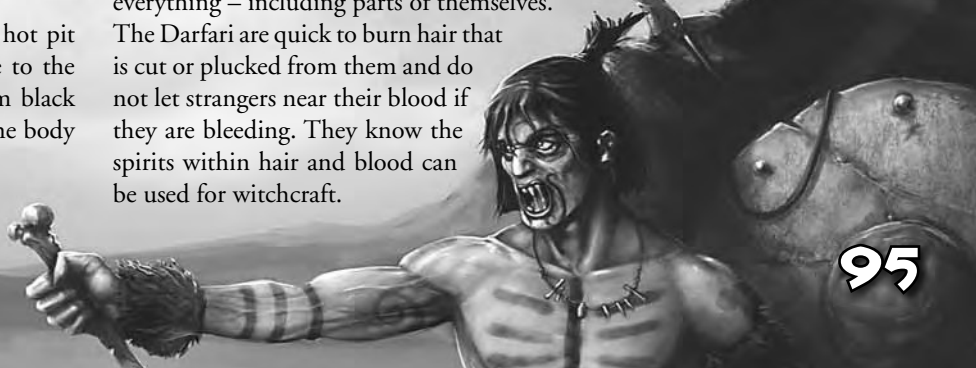
After the victim is cooked, he is taken out of the hot pit and to the palaver hut to be offered as a sacrifice to the black gods of Darfar. Some tribes paint the victim black at this point. Once the ceremonies are complete, the body is removed from the palaver hut, cut up and distributed to the tribe.

The basic cosmology for the Darfari is one of continual strife between the physical world and the spiritual world. There is a bleak religion of primitive animism. Everything is possessed of spirits and spirits are everywhere. The point of Darfari religion is the placation and entreaty of these spirits on behalf of the person or tribe. Many applications of a character's skills give a Darfari character cause to exhort a spirit in charge of an activity; for example, before attempting a Heal check on someone, the Darfari will give a short plea or offering to a spirit in charge of health, or attempt to bargain with a disease spirit to leave. Before moving stealthily through a field of grass, a Darfari may request the spirit of the field to give him quiet passage or pray for a noisy spirit to leave him. Any Darfari who does not do this may suffer a -1 penalty to the check he is about to make (this does not apply to any check deemed to be routine or that does not have consequences for failure). The penalty reflects the strength of his belief in the spirit world.

Everything is an omen or sign and anything the Darfari sees as dominant or great obviously has a powerful spirit in need of placation. The Darfari who passes an especially large or ominous tree or rocky outcrop will leave some offering, even if it is but a small pile of stones or a bit of food, before moving on. This belief is so strong that any Darfari who knowingly does not do this will suffer a -1d6 penalty to all rolls he makes thereafter until he feels he has atoned for the slight. The Darfari believe that spirits who feel ignored will attack with disease and misfortune.

The Darfari religion is tribal, so they do not try to explain their religion nor do they try to convert others. One is either raised with the tribe to believe in this religion or one is not – and is therefore forever an outsider. Overall, the religion is designed to reinforce the need for community among the Darfari, to strengthen the tribal ties.

The Darfari believe spirits abide within everything – including parts of themselves. The Darfari are quick to burn hair that is cut or plucked from them and do not let strangers near their blood if they are bleeding. They know the spirits within hair and blood can be used for witchcraft.







The moon is a particularly powerful spirit. During each full moon, the tribes gather to symbolically spear and eat the moon, using captives as convenient (and tasty) stand-ins for the distant spirit. The moon then gives up its cosmic secrets and tells the tribes when fishing will be good, when planting should begin and what the weather will be like. The Milky Way is another powerful spirit, one that keeps time and seasons.

## PROXIMITY

Proximity is a potent concept in Darfar. Everything is a part of everything else and is close spiritually if not spatially. Rituals return the Darfari to the sacred times of their ancestors because the past is close to the present, which is also close to the future. Things that are distant from their origin are seen to be weaker, so a son is weaker than the father and a tribesman away from his tribe is weaker than a tribesman with his tribe. The dead are closer to the Source of All Things than the living, so spirits are more powerful than mortals.

## PRAYER WORDS

Words and language are powerful forces in Darfar, so each Darfari is given a secret, magical word by a witch doctor. This magical word is uttered as a prayer by that individual Darfari.

## AFTERLIFE

After a person dies, the Darfari believe his soul is free to animate any animal it desires. Alternatively, it can join the spirit world and thereafter be one of the spirits plaguing or helping mankind. A Darfari will often keep the skull of someone he has killed as a fetish. The Darfari will pray to the skull by saying the skull's name; they believe any request made upon a spirit in his living name will be honoured by the spirit. Many Darfari take the Dabbler feat because they believe in the power of skulls and use them as the focus for their sorcerous spells. Games Masters may also simply grant a Darfari character who performs this charm an appropriate bonus to a skill check or simply cause a desired event to occur (the Darfari may ask a spirit for a chance to meet a beautiful woman or for good fishing conditions), especially if it works in favour of the adventure's plot.

## THE POWER OF DREAMS

The Darfari believe their souls undertake journeys during sleep and that dreams are the experiences of the soul during those strange trips.

## ANCESTOR WORSHIP

Although not to the degree a Khitan worships his ancestors, the Darfari cult worship their ancestors as well. Darfari ancestor worship is limited to worshipping their deceased fathers. When a man's father dies, the paternal skull (along with other bones) is placed in a reliquary, which is a wooden box with a guardian figure attached to it. The skull is thought to possess the full power of the dead person and these boxes are treated with reverence. A Darfari may ask it for advice, sacrifice small animals (usually chickens) to it for favour and generally worship it. The skull of a man's father is considered to be an extremely powerful source of magic. The women worship the skulls of their mothers.

The guardian figures attached to the reliquaries are carved in an almost obscene manner, with the sex organs of the figure incredibly apparent and greatly exaggerated.

## RITUAL SACRIFICE

Ritual sacrifice among the Darfari takes a grisly form. A sacrifice is decapitated and its vertebrae removed from its corpse – still attached to the head. The genitals are removed and the rest of the body is dismembered and used for fetishes and magical charms.

## GODS OF DARFAR

The Zuagirs believe the Darfari worship Yog, Lord of the Empty Abodes, with fiery rites that always end with the consumption of human flesh. Yog, however, is a Shemite or Turanian god of the deserts who burns his victims through the blasting desert sun. Chances are the Darfari do not actually worship Yog outside of Zamboula, if, in truth, they even worship Yog there. Although the Darfari of Zamboula swear by Set, their masters are the Set worshippers.

The Darfari do not worship any one particular god but observe a nature religion based on many disgusting gods and numerous dark spirits of nature – animal and jungle spirits that empower the world with magic and life. Witchcraft, sorcery and juju are mainstays of their religious experience, although most of their magic is directed toward spirits to bring needed weather, to encourage a good harvest or to bring about success in war. Darfari magic is not usually directed against terrestrial foes. The spear and club are usually far more reliable against flesh and blood than magic.

The Darfari do have gods, though they do not worship any one more or less than any other. Any spirit or god that is ignored is likely to visit a host of ills upon the people. Their creator god, the Source of All Things, is named Anyambi and other shadowy gods include Nzame (who created people), Mabere (reptile god) and Nkwa (personification of destiny). Much like Cimmerian gods, the Darfari gods are indifferent to the sufferings of man but they insist on being honoured lest they send doom to those who do not honour them.

## THE DARFARI WITCH-DOCTOR (NGANGA)

The Darfari witch-doctor, or *Nganga*, is a herbalist and sorcerer. He can quickly be identified when at work by the white chalk paint covering his body. Witch-doctors generally do not direct their magic at terrestrial foes but instead at the spirits to bring about desired effects, such as success at war or good weather. Spells are entreaties for the spirits to act on the Darfari's behalf. For example, a Darfari witch-doctor would not cast *ill-fortune* at a foe; instead, he would ask the spirits to visit revenge upon the foe. The end result is identical but the Darfari has not usurped the right of the spirits to do their job. Those who cast spells directly on people are known as witches and are killed on sight (this is, of course, a totally subjective opinion, as the end result is technically the same).

The witch-doctor is also responsible for giving each member of the tribe his magic word, which that person uses as a prayer or charm throughout his life. Witch doctors perform post mortems on anyone who dies by means other than violence. Death by natural causes is an unknown idea to the Darfari. The witch-doctor will cut open anyone who dies of disease or old age and search among the bloody organs for evidence of witchcraft, which is always found. The witch-doctor will cut away the 'evidence' and hold it aloft, declaring how many witches cursed the victim and caused the victim's untimely death.

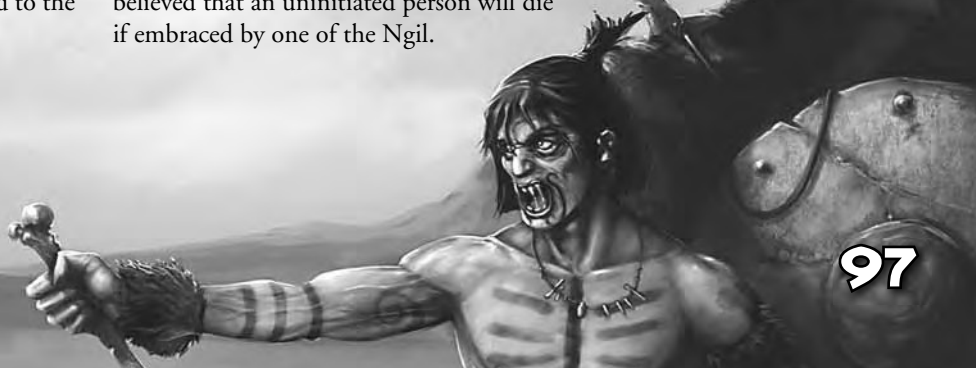
The witch-doctor also creates charms and fetishes. A fetish is anything a person believes is connected to its previous owner – a magical link (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game* for the game mechanics concerning a magical link). It can include animal or human teeth, hair, fingernails or anything owned by a person. It can also include things linked to the spirit world such as metals and herbs.

## THE HARD WOMAN (EMUNEGA ANE ALERK)

One type of magical woman in the world of the Darfari is the *emunega ane alerk*, a hard woman. There are two criteria to be a hard woman. First, the woman must consistently fail at a given task she is trained to do, though not necessarily at *all* tasks. Perhaps the woman fails to perform one of their chores – even though she knows how to do it – for at least one entire day. Essentially the woman has a streak of bad luck in one arena. The second criterion is that the woman must then pass that bad luck to a man with whom she had sex. If the man also cannot perform the same activity in the days (or days) following their encounter, then the woman is an *emunega ane alerk*. She is sent by the witch-doctor into the wilderness to find a certain type of hardwood that only the hard woman can find. When she returns with the fetish, the witch-doctor keeps the wood for his magic and the woman is honoured. She may return to normal or may remain an *emunega ane alerk*, depending on her luck and her continued ability to pass her poor luck on to men who have sex with her. An *emunega ane alerk* will usually ornament her nose with porcupine quills to show that she holds or has held this status. An *emunega ane alerk* may become an acolyte to a witch-doctor if she chooses to wear nose ornaments.

## NGIL CULT

The Ngil is a secret society among the Darfari. *Ngil* means 'gorilla.' By taking ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Ngil), meeting certain other requirements and undergoing the initiation rituals one can move through the ranks of this cult. The masters of the Ngil wear elongated white masks. These masks are painted white to represent the colour of the dead. Like witch-doctors, working Ngil cultists wipe white chalk all over their bodies. The Ngil are given special respect by the tribes and they may move freely among all tribes as they are considered to be powerful in the combat of sorcery and demons. A Ngil Master is usually summoned by a tribe in such serious sorcerous trouble that the tribe's witch doctor is ineffective (or already dead). The Ngil master always arrives at night, surrounded by acolytes bearing torches. It is believed that an uninitiated person will die if embraced by one of the Ngil.





The Ngil must keep several taboos, called *bityi*. The Ngil are not permitted to be witches, nor can the Ngil eat fish with a woman. They must keep their fetish bones hidden from non-initiates. They may not burn wasted food or spit into fire. They may not kick over rotten wood or the stumps of trees. It is believed that the violation of these things will cause the death of the Ngil member – either directly or through the failure of his spells. Women may not join the Ngil cult.

**Bemvon:** This is the initiate level of the cult. To qualify for initiation, the applicant must find a master who will agree to serve as his master. He must give the master a magical link to himself (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game* for rules on magical links). At this point, the character is an acolyte for purposes of scholar backgrounds. He is initiated in a grisly ceremony and may thereafter take levels in scholar. He may also take ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Ngil), as taught to him by his master. The Bemvon earns a +1 bonus to Reputation. He must carry torches for higher ranking members and begin to learn the art of crafting masks. The initiation is traumatic enough to qualify the new *bemvon* to learn the *Shamanic Ecstasy* spell (see *Faith and Fervour*) as an advanced or bonus spell, even if he does not learn the Divination sorcery style. He loses any clan affiliation he had. While this serves to weaken the *bemvon* in some respects, the initiation ritual gives him spiritual proximity to his master.

**Acolyte:** The acolyte is a *bemvon* who has undergone another ghastly initiation. To qualify for this ranking, he must have at least six ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Ngil), six ranks in Perform (Ngil dancing), kept all the *bityi*, served as a *bemvon* for at least two years and undergone the arduous initiation (which requires no less than three successful Fortitude saves DC 18 – failure leads to death, mutilation or maiming). The acolyte earns a +1 bonus to his Magical Attack score. He may begin to learn Curses, Counterspells, Hypnotism and/or Summoning styles. The acolyte may also command *bemvons* if his master desires. He is also taught how to craft Ngil fetish bones; he can only have one set, however. He is also taught to construct a fetish-wand (see *Faith and Fervour*) for himself. The Ngil acolyte earns a +1 bonus to Reputation.

**Witchman:** The witchman is an acolyte who has undergone another ghastly initiation. To qualify for this ranking, he must have at

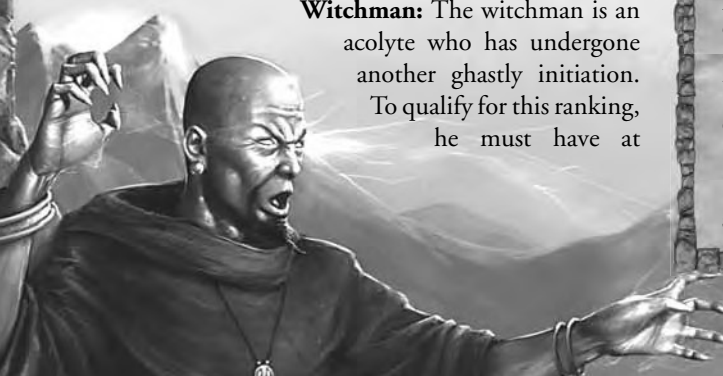
least nine ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Ngil), nine ranks in Perform (Ngil dancing), kept all the *bityi*, served as an acolyte for at least two years, created a fetish wand and a set of fetish bones and undergone the arduous initiation (which requires no less than seven successful Fortitude saves DC 18 – failure leads to death, mutilation or maiming). The Ngil witchman is taught to create his mask, a shaman's mask (see *Faith and Fervour*). The witchman is expected to learn the Summonings style if he has not already done so. (If he has not already learned *demonic pact*, he may learn *master-words and signs* – having this status supersedes the normal prerequisites for the spell.) As a bonus spell or advanced spell, the Ngil witchman can learn the *incantation of Amalric's witchman*, even if he does not know the Counterspells sorcery style. A Ngil witchman may have and use up to two sets of Ngil fetish bones. A Ngil witchman gains a +2 bonus to Reputation upon attaining this rank.

**Master:** The Ngil Master is feared and respected throughout Darfar and the surrounding Black Kingdoms. He is known to be able to control and defeat the strongest of evil spirits and the most powerful of witches. To qualify for this ranking, a character must have at least 12 ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Ngil), be able to cast Summoning style spells, have been a Ngil witchman for at least two years, have crafted a shaman's mask and have undergone an initiation. The master may learn and cast *doom of the doll* (from *Scrolls of Skelos*) even if his Magical Attack Bonus is less than +7 so long as the other prerequisites are met. The master may craft a powerful Totem Mask (Craft DC 30, giving him a +2 bonus to Magic Attack, +2 bonus to Perform (ritual) and a –2 penalty to Spot). The master may have and use up to three sets of Ngil fetish bones. A Ngil master earns a +3 bonus to his Reputation upon attaining this rank.

### NGIL FETISH BONES

These bones 'contain' a feat (usually a Skill Focus feat but any feat can be 'stored') which can be used once for the expenditure of two Power Points. The feat comes from the spirit abiding in the bones. The crafting of the bones involves rituals that obligate the spirit to perform the requested power in return for Power Points. What the spirit does with Power Points is anybody's guess. After use, the bones are inert for seven days. Ngil fetish bones only function for the Ngil cultist who created them.

*Cost:* 2,2500sp. *Requirements:* Craft (boneworking) six ranks (DC 18 to craft)



## DARFARI GOVERNMENT

Like the Pictish wilderness, Darfar is not a nation proper unified under a ruler but simply a wilderness area occupied by a cultural group. There is no centralised authority. The tribes are autonomous but interconnected through intertribal trade and shared cultural values.

The Darfari have clan leaders who handle both the spiritual and political needs of the clan. The chief always has at least one large, carved mask which supposedly allows him to communicate with the village ancestors (Games Masters can use the rules for Craft (mask) presented in *Faith and Fervour* if desired). The clan leader is also expected to know the clan rituals and so should have ranks in Perform (ritual); he is the focus of most of the clan's rituals. The clan leader is an arbitrator when necessary and chooses the headmen that lead raids on other villages. The clan leader is a ritualised symbol of authority, not a dictator. He is considered a living pledge of divine favour. The clan chief may levy a tribute from any family who wants to permanently live in his village.

In addition to the clan chief, most Darfari villages have a headman or war chief (in some cases, they may be the same person). War chiefs often levy tribute from nearby villages in return for not attacking them.

Darfari law is informal at best. Intra-tribal conflicts are often handled with singing or chanting contests in front of the tribe, with each person putting his side of the story into the performance. Intertribal conflicts are a bit more complex, however.

The typical solution for intertribal problems follows this pattern: One villager commits a crime or offence against a member of another clan or village. The wronged Darfari travels to a third-party village and kills the first animal or woman he sees. When the owner of the animal or woman comes out, outraged and demanding to know why the Darfari killed his property, the Darfari says that he has been wronged. He identifies the village and the name of the person who wronged him and tells the third-party that the burden is now on him to correct the wrong. The third-party Darfari then travels with the wronged Darfari to the village of the original offender and finds the offender. The third party Darfari demands payment for the loss of his animal or woman.

At this point, all parties go to the main street of the village and tell their sides of the story and talk it out before all

of the village. They attempt to come to an agreement on how much will be paid to the wronged parties (the offender must offer goods to the original wronged Darfari and to the third-party Darfari if he is deemed by the village to be guilty). If an agreement is not reached, then both of the wronged villages will raid the offending village until satisfied – which could easily escalate into a never-ending feud.

The reason for the involvement of the third party is to increase the cost of bad behaviour and, thus, discourage criminal acts.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF DARFAR

Darfari is one of the northernmost of the Black Kingdoms, located just south of eastern Stygia. The River Styx cuts through Darfar and feeds the massive swamp in eastern Darfar. Darfar is largely grassland in the north-west. A hill-range separates the grasslands from the southern forests, a dense belt about thirty to thirty-five miles deep. Beyond the forest, to the west, lie open savannas.

**Capital and Major Cities:** No Darfari cities are mentioned in the stories; likely the Darfari live in primitive villages. However, a major ruin, the lost city of Xuchotl, can be found in the forest belt of Darfar. Xuchotl is described in more detail in *Ruins of Hyboria*.

**Important Locations:** Western Darfar is the location of one of the most impenetrable barrier swamps of the Hyborian age. This swamp is composed of open water in some places, submerged vegetation in others, floating fringe vegetation in still others and includes large sections of seasonally inundated woodlands, grasslands and scrublands. Crocodiles and hippopotami also make their home in the swamp.

## OTHER TRIBES IN THE AREA

**Kwanyi** – The Kwanyi dwell in the mountains west of Xuchotl, near the Lake of Death and Thunder Mountain.







# Ghulistan

## Mountain Men

Ghulistan is a mountainous area between Vendhya and Turan, a buffer that actually protects Vendhya from Turan. The Ghulistani and the other hillmen are too fast and too savage for the Turanian, Hyrkanian or Vendhyan armies to flush out and destroy. In a sense, the haunted hills of the Himelians are the ultimate peace-keepers, maintaining distance between the three powerful kingdoms of Turan, Hyrkania and Vendhya. Vendhya has the worst of it. With few natural ports along its ocean borders to the east, west and south and the largest mountains in the world on the northern border, Vendhya trades only with difficulty with the other nations of the world.

Northern Ghulistan is peopled by urban populations. A number of small tribes inhabit the colossal hills and mountains of the south. These southern inhabitants of the Himelians are divided into many different tribes and clans of tall, hairy hill-men who are both strong and fierce. These hill-tribes have their own barbaric code of honour, disdainful of civilised behaviours, making fun of the weak and foolish. Above all, they seem to hate traitors despite being bandits themselves. Like the Hyrkanians they prize horses and like the Vendhyans they prize customs and traditions. Like both, they fear mesmerism and sorcery. They are a fatalistic, superstitious lot but are easily enthused, especially at the prospect of slaughter and loot. They are of the east and bound by long traditions and ancient ideas. The survivalist hillmen have adapted well to their surroundings.

The Himelian Mountains are separated into different regions. The southern portion of the range, which faces Vendhya, is called Ghulistan. The south-western portion of Ghulistan is called Afghulistan.

### HONOUR

The Ghulistani have their own barbaric code of honour that teaches bravery, steadfastness, persistence

and hospitality. The hillmen tribes believe strongly in this code, nearly to the point of fanaticism. Every action they take either enhances or weakens their honour and the honour of their clan. Hospitality toward their guests extends even to the protection of those guests. The hillmen will also offer refuge to a fugitive of another tribe or nation if he makes a sincere offer of peace.

Hillmen will defend their property, land and women as well as their honour. The right of revenge is also granted by their code of honour. There is no concept of 'turning the other cheek' here. Any slight against a hillman's honour must be met and avenged. This right of revenge is called the blood-feud. To kill someone in an act of justified revenge is not a crime, nor is it dishonourable to the avenger or to the kin of either party. Unfortunately, one side often disagrees as to whether a killing was justifiable or not and this results in a vicious cycle of revenge and death that goes on for generation after generation – a true blood feud.

Another aspect of the Ghulistani honour system allows for a ceremonial, humble admission of guilt when a wrong has been committed; this admission usually requires forgiveness from the wronged party. This avoids the blood feud in most cases; however, if the wronged party does not forgive *he* becomes the transgressor and may be feuded against.

### GHULISTANI CLOTHING

The men of the Himelian tribes tend to be hairy and ragged. On their heads sit wide turbans. Their curly hair is long and they are bearded. Their faces are cragged and wizened from the harsh Himelian winds. They are tall and boast broad, hairy shoulders. The men wear sturdy sheep- or yak-skin tunics, belted cloaks and soft leather boots. When traversing the higher slopes they wear huge fur greatcoats with sleeves long enough to envelop cold hands. They gird themselves with Bakhariot belts that hold their ivory-and-gold hilted tulwars. They squat or sit cross-legged in the Eastern fashion when resting and are superb guerrilla fighters. They fight with javelins, stones, arrows, yard-long knives, scimitars or tulwars. They have no taboos against wearing armour and may well have



captured Turanian or Kshatriyan armours available to them. The tribesmen are also aware of the superior bows made by the Hyrkanians and those weapons are especially prized among the hillmen.

The women of the Himelian culture dress in embroidered vests, wide-sleeved shirts and baggy, wide trousers. Some tribes prefer long dresses in bright patterns over their leggings. Women wear sandals to protect their feet from the razor-like crags of the mountains. Young girls go without head coverings but mature women cover their heads with long coloured headscarves. The colour of a headscarf depends on the tribe a woman belongs to. The scarves are usually tied around the head with a long trail hanging down the back. A prominent amount of white along with the tribal colour in a headscarf indicates that a woman is married. Ghulistani women do the cooking and household chores and are expected to perform these duties no matter what. Failure leads to a whipping. The women tend to be slim, practical people and many are characterised as 'she-wolves.' They have no taboos against public nudity and in the summer often dispense with the shirt and even the vest.

## HOUSES

Ghulistani dirt-floor homes are fairly large and are made of uncut rocks cemented with mud. They have rock and mud roofs that are supported by heavy beams. Each roof has a trap-door and a ladder leading up. The huts do not have large windows, just small loopholes. The hill-men sleep on beds of leaves covered with sheepskin. An iron grid laid over blocks of stone provides a crude kitchen. Clusters of these rock and mud huts are built on relatively level areas in the mountains to create villages. The hillmen keep dogs as pets, using them to hunt with and guard the villages. The villages themselves usually include fortifications, if not primitive strongholds.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

In the south, the hill tribes raid for their sustenance. They raid the Vendhyans. They raid the Turanians. They raid each other. Other than a bit of subsistence farming and herding, their economy is primarily one of banditry.

## THE MILITARY OF GHULISTAN

The hill tribes of Ghulistan do not have an organised army. Instead, each village mounts its own fighting and raiding force. Their primary interest is raiding

one another. Occasionally someone will come along, organise them into a good size horde and send them out into Vendhya to gather gold and women.

The Ghulistani are brave, steadfast, persistent and hospitable. They are also fearsomely violent. They are guerrilla fighters of noted ferocity. Ghulistani prefer stealth and raids to open combat. Ghulistani warriors are among the most dangerous and barbaric combatants around.

The Ghulistani of the cities have probably organised themselves into some form of military; this is likely to be Iranistani or Hyrkanian in format and technique.

## RELIGION IN GHULISTAN

It is most likely that the hillmen subscribe to shamanistic beliefs, considering that their lifestyle is so entirely dominated by the ecology around them. However, the influence of Vendhyan religion has probably created a more complex and elaborate form of shamanism than would be found in Hyrkania. With such irreverent places as Yimsha and Raktavashi, where black magic and diabolism are practiced, shamanism in the Himelians probably centres around the destruction of evil spirits and spiritual battles with demons and sorcerers. These battles are grave indeed and the shaman does not enter such a combat unafraid; in a battle with a sorcerer either the sorcerer or the shaman dies. Fortunately, the hillmen believe a shaman can be killed three times before ordinary death can take his soul.

Hillmen cosmology is layered, with the earth at the base and the rest of the cosmos held up by the Himelian Mountains. The realm of the dead can be visited by travelling underground; the ways are protected by narrow passages to crush the weak and, of course, demons and monsters. The dead and any shamans travelling there to do battle must fight grim battles against cannibals, wild animals, devils and ordeals beyond the naming.

Hillmen shamans are highly charismatic figures, as they must be. The success or failure of any rite depends totally on the shaman's ability to maintain the mood and atmosphere necessary for belief in his abilities. His performance must transcend normal reality and bring the tribesmen with him in total belief of the new reality promised and shown by the shaman.





Additional religions may exist in the area. Grey apes lurk in the hills, so cults of Hanuman may exist, as might other animalistic religions. Hillmen may also have picked up Vendhyan beliefs, worshipping Asura and the Vendhyan pantheon. Unlike most of the peoples of the Hyborian Age, the hillmen of the Himelians do not seem to use their gods' names as curses. Perhaps this is a barbaric taboo of theirs. Perhaps they have no gods, or perhaps their gods have no names.

## GHULISTANI GOVERNMENT

The central government of Ghulistan can be found in the capital of Khorbhul. The king of Ghulistan rules here but the tribes rarely acknowledge his rule. The northern clans and urban dwellers follow him. In areas occupied by Turan, the King of Turan is followed.

There are hundreds of tribes in the southern mountains, each following charismatic warriors called *hetmen*. These leaders rule by might; as barbarians, the hillmen have no compunction about killing an ineffective, traitorous or weak leader. Unlike the civilised people to the south, they do not teach that their kings are holy, divine or special in any way, so the chiefs must defend their right to rule by force of arms. These leaders settle intertribal disputes in an arbitrary fashion. Disputes between tribes are settled via war and feuding. Tribes probably raid each other for wives, as well, to prevent too much in-breeding among the close-knit clans. Open conflict is rare. The hillmen are guerrillas and fight as such – they commit stealthy assassinations by night and quick raids under cover of darkness in explosive bursts of violence.

The southern tribes of Ghulistan, Afghulistan and other Himelian ethnic groups are generally governed by groups of elders called Jirga. *Hetmen* are the war chiefs of the tribes. A tribe is divided into Khels (clans), which are divided into Pllarina. A Pllarina is a group of multiple Kahols (extended families). It is a complex system and Himelian tribesmen may see themselves as belonging to various parts of these groups depending on the situation.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF GHULISTAN

Ghulistan lies in the western Himelian Mountains. In the north-eastern part of Ghulistan is the famed Zhaibar Pass. To the west of that pass the Himelians separate into two distinct ranges. The Turanian-controlled cities of Secunderam and Bhalkhan are to the north of the upper range. Hirut lies to the west of the upper range. Two passes cut through the northern range. The shorter Amir Jehun Pass cuts through the range in the west between Secunderam and Afghulistan, which is a low-land region between the two ranges. The longer, more easterly pass is the Shalazah pass.

The hills are dominated by one major geographic form – the Himelian Mountains. These mountains define the life of the hillmen and their sphere of influence. Only the hillmen know all the paths and features of these twisting, hulking mountains and vast, engulfing escarpments. The Zhaibar Pass is the most famous route through the mountains, although others such as the Shamla Pass and the Amir Jehun Pass exist. Snow makes most of these passes impossible to travel in the winter months, although the summer brings caravan travel from Hyrkania to Vendhya.

**Himelian Mountains** – This is an impressive mountain range north of Vendhya. The mountains are cold and high. An important pass through the mountains is the Zhaibar Pass, which is on the road from Peshkhauri into Hyrkania beneath the watchful mountain Yimsha and through the valley of Gurashah. This range is inhabited by fierce tribesmen. Trails criss-cross the mountains except in the virtually impassable centre but mostly these are thin, dangerous paths that few civilised men would even dare to cross without an army, largely because of the tribesmen. Most of the passes are suitable for horse-travel. The icy upper mountains of the mighty Himelians are avoided even by the hillmen, for they are certain death.

**Gurashah Valley** – This river valley runs through the northern reaches of the Himelian foothills. Two main passes between Vendhya and Hyrkania run through this valley: Amir Jehun Pass through Afghulistan and the longer Shalazah Pass.

**Jhumda River** – This river flows south-west through Vendhya from the Himelian Mountains. The river lies between Ayodhya and the Ghulistan border. Several tributaries feed into it. One such tributary, leading from the Himelians, flows through Femesh Valley.



**Mount Raktavashi** – Mount Raktavashi is in Kirghiz country, although the hillmen in the region fight over it. The Kirghiz live in a stronghold known as the Forbidden City. The Kirghiz worship Raktavashi, the son of Erlik, Chief of the Seven Princes of Death. The servants of Raktavashi, which are horrible ghouls, haunt the lower slopes of this bleak mountain. They repeat, parrot-like, the last words of their victims. The stronghold itself is divided into castes and the ruling castes are the shaven-headed, Khitan-featured monks who commune with unheard-of spirits, contemplate black mysteries of the hidden cosmos and read vile tomes of arcana. Kirghiz guards are huge brutes with shaven pates but for a long top-knot. Legends say the stronghold was reared by a demon-worshipping cult driven from a far-off homeland. The city's economy is based on herding and has a small bazaar where fruits brought in from other lands are bought and sold.

**Mount Yimsha** – Mount Yimsha is the home of the Black Seers, practitioners of the worst sorts of black magic who seldom interfere in the lives of mortal men. The mountain home of the sorcerers is in an uninhabited region of the Himelians to the north-west of the hillmen's territories. The hillmen fear the Seers and avoid the mountain; they consider it to be cursed and unholy and will not build their villages near it or even within sight of it. When the Black Seers travel, they move as if a crimson cloud or tornado effect enfolds them, creating the effect known as 'Yimsha's carpet,' which sends witnessing hillmen running for cover. The top of Yimsha is permanently snow-encrusted and the slopes of the mountain are too much for horses. Just above the snow-line is the greater keep, a fantastic castle built by magic on the icy slopes, cut from the very stone of the mountain. Below that is a stone tower, the lesser keep, where the acolytes of the Black Seers keep watch and practice their sorceries. A four hundred foot wide, five hundred foot deep chasm of death exists between the two keeps, filled with a deadly gas which can only be safely traversed by following a difficult-to-see thread of gold ore highlighting a safe path. This chasm encircles the mountain completely. Beyond it is a broad stair cut out of a green, jade-like substance.

**Zhaibar Pass** – The Zhaibar Pass is a thirty-three mile long pass through the Himelian Mountains. At its thinnest point the pass is only 18 feet wide and it is 415 feet wide at its widest point. The pass is walled by precipitous cliffs that tower up to a thousand feet in height. Countless invasions have poured through this important pass, including the invasions that brought about the present kingdom of Vendhya. Great caravans of camels and horses move through this pass, bringing goods from Hyrkania, Khitai and Turan to Vendhya.

## IMPORTANT GHULISTANI CITIES

Ghulistan includes both city-dwellers and hillmen. The city-dwellers are bound by the king in Khorbul – until they are occupied by Turan.

**Bhalkhan** – Bhalkhan is one of the chief cities of Ghulistan and is occupied by Turanian forces by the time of *People of the Black Circle*. It is one of the most fertile of the Ghulistani cities. A fortress complete with a wall and moat is built on a hill overlooking the city.

**Hirut** – Hirut is one of the chief cities of Ghulistan and is occupied by Turanian forces by the time of *People of the Black Circle*. After the occupation by Turan, Hirut becomes part of the Khurusun satrapy and is known as the Pearl of Khurusun. Several strategically important roads lead through Hirut. It is built near a fast-moving river called the Hidarut. The valley around Hirut is fertile.

**Khorbhul** – Khorbhul is the capital of Ghulistan. At the time of *People of the Black Circle*, Khorbhul is free of Turanian occupation.

**Secunderam** – Secunderam is a Ghulistani city on the edge of the Hyrkanian steppe near the Himelians; Secunderam is occupied by Turanians and is part of the Khurusun satrapy. The military governor here derives troops from Khurusun, as well as gold to pay his armies for protecting the borders against Himelian hillmen, Vendhyans and Hyrkadians. Secunderam is important for trade with and between Turan, Vendhya, the Golden Kingdoms and Khitai. It is possibly the oldest city in Ghulistan.

## IMPORTANT GHULISTANI TRIBES

There are hundreds of Himelian tribes, each more like wolves than people. The Games Master can invent his own tribes or use some of the ones that have been named or have appeared in various Conan stories.

**Afghuli** – This is the tribe of hillmen over which Conan was once chief. They dominate Afghulistan. One of their largest villages is named Ghor.







They are extremely hostile toward traitors and can work themselves into a violent frenzy even in an argument. The tribe is large enough to have more than seven headmen. Conan once led this group of hillmen in his attempts to unify all the tribes so he could plunder Vendhya. Tales are still told of Conan of Ghor in Afghulistan.

**Dagozai** – The Dagozai hunt with arrows and often patrol the long Shalizah Pass between Vendhya and Gurashah.

**Galzai** – This tribe lives north of the Wazuli tribes.

**Irakzai** – The Irakzai are another tribe that haunts the Himelians along the lower Zhaibar Pass. They are greedy and considered to be jackals by the other tribes. This is one of the more mercenary tribes, willing to be bought for gold. They usually avoid the crags of the Himelians because they have many enemies there. They prefer to fight with light hunting bows but are adept with the tulwar for close combat.

**Khirghiz** – These hillmen dwell around Mount Raktavashi and protect the stronghold there. They worship the children of Erlik.

**Khurakzai** – The Khurakzai are another tribe of hillmen living in the region near Afghulistan.

**Uzbek** – The Uzbek are a small tribe that lives in the southern reaches of Afghulistan. They are not known for keeping captives.

**Wazuli** – The Wazuli, a nocturnal tribe, live around the river valley of Khurum but hunt all over the range, especially around the Zhaibar Pass. The Wazuli are further divided by village; for example, there are Khurum Wazuli and Jugra Wazuli. They reside to the east of Afghulistan. They are silent in movement and attack by ambush, launching javelins or rocks before rushing in with their yard-long knives. They are hospitable to their allies, merciless against their enemies. Like many hillmen, they have a distinct ‘what’s in it for us?’ attitude. The Conan game rules give further statistics for Wazuli characters.

**Zhaibari** – The Zhaibari are a tribe of hillmen that live in the region around the Zhaibar Pass. They are allied with Vendhya and often serve

as scouts for the caravans moving through the passes. Their traditional blood-enemies are the Wazuli.

## GHULISTANI HISTORY

The Himelian tribesmen probably descend from intelligent aborigines that developed after the Cataclysm, remnants of ancient peoples trapped in the rising mountains and forced to adapt to their new surroundings, becoming more and more savage with each successive in-bred generation. Later, new blood may have come to them from the Lemurian incursions that founded Vendhya. Some scholars speculate that the original tribesmen may have been called the Ghuli, giving rise to the name of the region.

## ADVENTURE/ CAMPAIGN HOOKS

There is no end to the possible adventures that could occur in the dark Himelian mountains, where possible death lurks around every imposing crag and treacherous turn. Mountains where sorcerers lurk in secret conclaves can be found here and rumours of long forgotten treasures from pre-Cataclysmic times abound.

Considering the small, close-knit clans of hillmen, it is not too hard to imagine a degenerate, in-bred clan existing in a Lovecraftian scenario of bizarre horror. A lost group of luckless adventurers, barely alive after being hunted by one of the larger clans, stumbles upon this clan where hospitality is feigned and where horrors far worse than the mere torture and death proffered by the other hillmen waits for them.

Given the name of the land, Ghulistan, the possible name of the original tribe that dwelt there, the Ghulis, and Turanian legends of monstrous ghouls, it is not hard to speculate that the original inhabitants were possibly cannibals. Perhaps later encounters with Hyrkanians, Lemurians and Vendhyans ended this practice among the hillmen but perhaps there are remote hillmen who still practice the eating of men.

The hillmen seem willing to cooperate in dire situations; they ally themselves with Vendhyan Kshatriyas at one point in the Howard story, *The People of the Black Circle*. Conan himself believed they could be united into a sizable force. An entire campaign could easily be woven about adventurers’ efforts to unite these tribes and, of course, Vendhyan and Turanian attempts to stop them. Likewise the adventurers could be among the Vendhyans or Turanians trying to stop the unification.



# Hyperborea

## Bleak Plains and Broken Hills

The ancient kingdom of Hyperborea is more aloof than the others, yet there is alien blood in plenty in its veins from the capture of foreign women – Hyrkanians, Æsir, and Zamorians.

– *The Hyborian Age*

Hyperborea is a cold, windy land to the east of Asgard with a population approaching perhaps two million souls. The Hyperboreans are noted slavers. They are tall and gaunt, with pale eyes and hair despite the foreign blood in many of them. They ride and herd horses; these horses are likely shaggy ponies. At one time, they built homes out of horsehide; however, by the time of Conan the Hyperboreans live in cities. Hyperboreans know how to move through the pine forests and survive in the wild for days. Many Hyperboreans go on extended wilderness forays, even going so far as to visit other countries.

### SLAVERS

Hyperboreans are a cruel people, given to torture to create fear in others. They are extremely tall and rugged but centuries of oppression by their overlords has made them a people that are not strong in character or personal, inner strength. Still, they are physically strong, malicious and aggressive. Given their height and alien appearance and their reputation for cruelty, most people prefer to give wandering Hyperboreans a wide berth.

### SORCERERS AND WITCHMEN

Those that practice sorcery, and there are many in this grim land, are known as Witchmen. They rule from many of the bleak fortresses that squat horribly on the tops of cleared knolls and wooded ridges. They serve sorcerous queens and kings, dressing solemnly

in black with white, faceless masks. The Witchmen use wooden rods with rounded, platinum ball-tips as mystical weapons that can shoot pain through their victims with the merest touch without leaving a tell-tale mark. Many of the Witchmen worship a death-goddess and often choose a powerful sorceress as her living incarnation. The Witchmen are also known as the White Hand, which is their symbol. The White Hand is a weird cult of pale wizard-assassins that holds power in Hyperborea through the terror of their horrible arts. They kill without leaving a mark and fight only with their strange, platinum-tipped rods. Those who serve in the White Hand undergo strange mortifications of body, mind and will. They are considered the deadliest fighters in the world, immune to fear and pain. In addition to the death goddess, they worship a whole host of devil-gods and avatars. All members of the White Hand are subject to The Rule of the Master (see the *Conan the Roleplaying Game* for details). The White Hand of Hyperborea as a prestige class is covered in more detail in the *Conan Compendium*.

Hyperborean scholars emphasise Prestidigitation, Nature Magic, Summonings, Weather Witching (see *Pirate Isles*) and Immortality (see *The Scrolls of Skelos*) in their sorcery style selections. They summon great air elementals to defend their nation, swat at mortals from a distance, alter the nature of humanity and live forever. Many also learn Divination and Necromancy, able to see the past just by holding a skull. Many Hyperborean scholars have the Permanent Sorcery feat (from *The Scrolls of Skelos*).

### COMMON ACCESS TO LAND

Hyperborea's early economy was based on herding and rye agriculture. Great swaths of dark pine were burnt to clear land. As the Hyperborean chiefs





built their stone keeps, they found they lacked the means to really patrol the areas they controlled. The commoners who herded their animals could not identify borders nor did they care too. Thus rose an idea of common access. Everyone in Hyperborea is allowed to wander the forests of the land at will, regardless of the ownership of the land in question.

## HYPERBOREAN CLOTHING

A Hyperborean woman usually wears a horn-shaped cap, a long laced bodice, a hip-length jacket and a broadstriped cloth skirt. Aprons are worn as well, as are warm cloaks for outdoor travel. Girls wear silk or linen headbands instead of hats. Noble girls wear thin tiaras or more elaborate headbands. A Hyperborean man wears a simple shirt, long trousers, a jacket or coat, a hat or cap, and often a scarf about his neck during the long, cold winters. The men usually wield broadswords or axes. Stone weapons still see use in the backwoods, isolated areas of an already isolated nation.



## SOCIAL STANDING

Hyperborean nobles live in great stone castles, aloof and distant from the serfs who live beneath them in stone-walled villages. Most Hyperborean nobles dabble in magic or multi-class into scholars. They tend to be languid and bored, slow of speech and lacking in strength of character.

The culture does not support the social mechanisms for true knights. Few Hyperborean nobles have the drive to learn to fight as soldiers for an army. That is the purview of the lesser Hyperboreans. However, some of the border nobles have learned to fight nomad

invaders and do call themselves knights. They wear mail shirts under scale hauberks with helmets stolen from Æsir, Cimmerian, Hyborian or Hyrkanian invaders. They carry lances into battle while crouching behind teardrop shields and use Æsir broadswords when their lances break.

Hyperborea is not a populous kingdom, despite its large size. The warmer climes to the south were inviting to the original clans and most pushed on southward. Those that remained were a stubborn breed that loved the ridged hills and dark forests. The small population is often not enough to do the necessary work for the various lords in their stone citadels, so the Hyperboreans use slave labour extensively and are harsh taskmasters. The use of slaves in Hyperborea eventually gave way to the lords of that kingdom treating all people, even Hyperborean serfs, as slaves of a sort.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

The gaunt Hyperboreans still hunt wild animals, herd domesticated animals, gather meager berries and pick pale mushrooms to supplement their sparse gardens of grains and vegetables. Their culture, although prosperous at first, became introverted, shunning most outside trade contact, so the Hyperboreans have minimal industry. Still, the Hyperboreans are skilled at woodcraft and stonework.

## THE MILITARY OF HYPERBOREA

Hyperborean soldiers are massive men who carry great swords and fight to keep the grim nobles and languid scholars safe in their stone keeps and granite castles. Many soldiers leave Hyperborea to become mercenaries in foreign armies. They are slow of speech but are not necessarily dim or foolish. Some are little more than gaunt brutes but others are keen and sharp, always alert, ready for someone to assume they are as slow of movement, reaction and thought as they are of speech. They often wear scale hauberks and fight with techniques similar to the Æsir.



## RELIGION IN HYPERBOREA

Most Hyperboreans still worship the old Hyborian god-hero Bori. Isolated and aloof, these Hyborians missed the religious revolution that enveloped the rest of the Hyborian kingdoms and converted them to Mitra worship. Likely the worship of Bori is some form of ancestor worship. Still a primitive culture, at least by Hyborian standards, the Hyperboreans probably still worship their ancestors rather than some more complex, ritualised religion. *Faith and Fervour* has more information on the worship of Bori. Over time, and through contact from their slaves, the Hyperboreans may have added some foreign deities to Bori's pantheon, such as Ymir from Nordheim or the sky-gods of the Hyrkanians.

Hyperboreans also pray to spirits that inhabit the natural world surrounding them, such as individual trees, the rivers, the ridged mountains or even the forests as a whole. Possibly imported from Hyrkanian slaves, shamanism likely also exists as a means of interceding between the people and the spirit realms of nature. Shamanism usually co-exists with blacksmithing, so the town blacksmith may be considered vested with near-magical powers in strongly shamanistic areas.

L. Sprague de Camp introduced the idea of a death goddess among the Witchmen of Hyperborea, a goddess that is incarnated in mortal form, usually an ancient crone or a sorceress. Likely this religion is one of blood sacrifices and vile rites, judging from the character of Louhi in *The Witch of the Mists*. Only the Witchmen worship this dark goddess. More information about the sorcerer-gods can be found in *Faith and Fervour*.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF HYPERBOREA

The landscape of Hyperborea varies considerably. Close to the Border Kingdom, Hyperborea takes on a sinister, mist-shrouded aspect of mires and wastelands. Further north, Hyperborea is a land of dark pines and rolling ridges that eventually give way to sub-arctic tundra and arctic wildernesses. Hyperborea borders the Eiglophian mountains and the Snow Devil glacier, details for which can be found on page 60.

**Skull Gate** – At the north-east end of the Border Kingdom, this curious monument marks the entrance into

Hyperborea. Massive knolls define the border and a pass cuts through the ramparts. Set within one of the huge hills is a massive, human-like skull. In actuality it is the skull of a mammoth. Without its tusks the skull looks strangely like the skull of a giant. Across the brow of the skull are painted, in Hyperborean, the words, 'The gate of Hyperborea is the Gate of Death to those who come hither without leave.' Beyond Skull Gate is a rocky plain broken by stark, crumbling hills. The pass is a link between the Eiglophian Mountains and the Graaskal Mountains.

**Graaskal Mountains** – This range separates Brythunia from southern Hyperborea. These cold mountains are where Conan once found a sword in the crypt of a giant-king. These jagged mountains are cold and icy for much of the year and a frozen river runs eastward along the length of these mountains. This is wild country of pines and spruces and of great granite cliffs that tower into the cold, icy sky. It is dark and gloomy even in the summer months. Numerous passes break through these mountains, especially in the northeast.

## IMPORTANT HYPERBOREAN SITES

Robert E. Howard does not name any of the fortresses, cities, towns or places in Hyperborea in any of his stories, although his first draft of *Phoenix on the Sword* claims the Hyperboreans are civilised and live in cities. Thus, there are Hyperborean cities. The places named below, however, are not cities but castles.

**Haloga** – Haloga is a foreboding Hyperborean fortress in the middle of a bowl-shaped valley. The fortress is made of cyclopean stones with but a few windows and several arrow slits. The massive masonry is fitted and smoothed down so it is virtually impossible to climb. The rocks are as smooth as glass and are fitted so well together that hand and toe holds are nonexistent. The lowest arrow slits are about 18–20 feet off the ground. The interior, with its wooden floors and support beams, is sparse and cold. The people here wear dark clothing with a red mark and are ruled by Queen Vammatar the Cruel. Conan served as a slave here for a short while in his youth.

**Pohiola** – Pohiola is a grim stone fortress in Hyperborea, ruled by the witch Louhi. The keep is







basically a huge hall with a roof so high it can barely be perceived through the shadows cast by the torches. Several crenulated, squat turrets flank the hall itself. Aside from a few crude wooden items, it is almost not furnished at all. The portcullis is made of iron and the gate is made from some black wood with iron nails marking out a darksome rune. The piled stone walls of the keep are twenty paces thick. Prisoners can be kept manacled to the wall in the main hall or kept in deep, dry wells sunk into the floors of the vast hall. Depending on whether or not the Games Master sets his campaign before or after *The Witch of the Mists*, this pile may or may not be ruled by Louhi and her Witchmen. Conan and his Aquilonians burned the keep down at the end of that story but it could have been rebuilt.

**Sigtona** – Sigtona is a legendary keep, spoken of in horrible tales told around fires in cold Asgard. The queen of Sigtona is rumoured to exist on human blood. Sigtona is the first keep one encounters on the road from the Border Kingdom to Pohiola.

## HYPERBOREAN HISTORY

During the Great Cataclysm that broke the world, the great chief Bori took his tribes north. After thousands of years Bori is still remembered in the north, as a god to a people calling themselves Hyborians. The Hyborians, northmen with tawny hair and grey eyes, have developed a culture that is warlike yet artful. The early Hyborians were warrior-poets and hunters, although some of the southern tribes were already raising cattle.

Starting with hunters and fishers, the Hyborians started drifting southward conquering native clans and isolated aborigines and over time intermarrying with their conquered foes. Pure blooded Hyborians followed, wave after wave, each of them slowly conquering or intermingling with the prior waves and building homes out of horse-hide that could easily be moved. Still, hunting and fishing were the primary economy and most of life's needs could be found in the dark evergreens of Hyperborea's ridges.

Suddenly there arose on the plains a castle, the first of the new age. It was a stone dwelling piled high for the defence of the horsemen. This was a turning point in history and was the founding of

Hyperborea. The Hyperboreans gave up their nomadic lifestyle and began to cultivate fields, burning forests to clear land. Eventually, the stone dwelling Hyperboreans took to conquest and domination, spreading their castles far and wide and driving refugees and fleeing tribes even further south as they burned more forests to create fields for cultivation and for grazing cattle and horses. As the horses and cattle grazed, larger open spaces were created, as well as labyrinthine paths through the pine forests. Small boys, too young to do other work, shepherded the cattle. Eventually the Hyperboreans started fencing in their cattle and horses behind low walls of piled rocks to keep them from harming precious crops of rye as well as protect them against predators and raiders.

A thousand or more years later, purer, northern Hyborian tribes that had been driven south by the rise of the Nordheimer, conquered Hyperborea. The new rulers of the realm retained the name, however. Over the next thousand years, the new Hyperborea resisted the continued waves of northern Hyborians as the latter were driven out of the north by the Nordheimer. They Hyperboreans began making a name for themselves as slavers. They had brutal clashes with the Hyrkanians as they swept out of the east on their horses, beating their kettledrums.

Thus Hyperborea, the first of the Hyborian kingdoms, stands aloof and unknown in the far north, fighting wars or raiding for slaves in the lands of the Nordheimer, the Cimmerians, the Brythunians and the Hyrkanians.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

The Witchmen of Hyperborea have been stealing blond children from the homes of the wealthy and well-bred for some breeding scheme they have come up with. It is up to the characters to stop them.

The characters could be contracted to hunt down mammoths for some army or menagerie.

Hyperboreans often send bands of slavers into Cimmeria and Asgard. Characters could join one of these bands or fight against them. Perhaps the Hyperboreans send slavers south into Brythunia or Zamora.





# Hyrkania

## The Riders of the Steppe

...Hyrkania whose riders wore steel and silk and gold.

– *The Nemedian Chronicles*

There are two types of Hyrkanian. The primary cultural type is dark, tall and slender but a squat, slant-eyed type is becoming more common due to an admixture with stunted but intelligent aborigines in the mountains east of the Vilayet which the Hyrkanians encountered as they migrated west from the coast.

Hyrkanians are nomadic horsemen, cruel and ruthless, whose violent rampages across the steppe are still spoken of in frightened voices as if the brutal conquests happened but yesterday and not years or decades or centuries before. The area called Hyrkania by Robert E. Howard lies to the east of the Vilayet and ranges from tundra, taiga forest, steppe, prairie and even desert. Hyrkania extends from the Vilayet to the Eastern Ocean. The Hyrkanians conquer all that they see, swarming over the terrain in overwhelming numbers on fleet horses.

### BORN TO THE SADDLE

Hyrkanians are born to the saddle, learning to ride before they learn to walk. Hyrkanians almost always travel with three or four horses per warrior and they never stop to change horses; switching mounts is done on the run with the Hyrkanian simply gathering up his gear, including his saddle, and vaulting onto another steed. Their stirrups are designed for adroit manoeuvres, being disk shaped to provide a solid platform. Horses are a measure of power and wealth among the Hyrkanians and all of them have names. Horse races, hunting and archery contests are popular pastimes. Hyrkanians rarely walk more than twenty paces unless the need is great. A Hyrkanian who needs to be somewhere rides his horse.

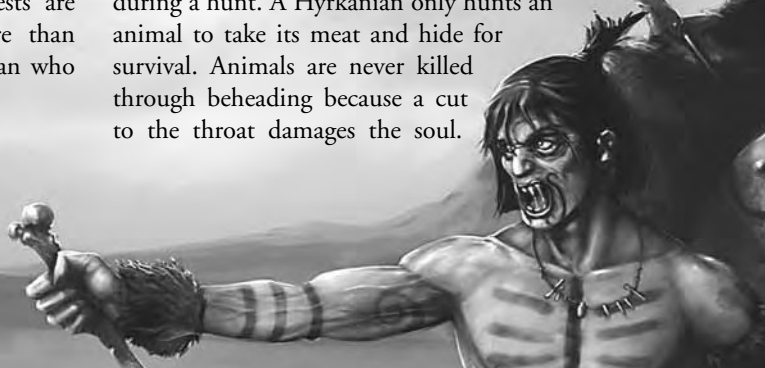
### HONOUR

**Survival:** All Hyrkanians are taught survival skills, such as the rudiments of using dry dung for fuel (because there is little wood to burn in the steppe), how to cook, how to sew and even how to make and use a bow and arrow. An honourable Hyrkanian will know how to survive and will have these skills so as to not be a burden to the tribe.

**Code of Honour:** Part of survival among the nomads is good behaviour – at least toward fellow tribesmen. All Hyrkanians are taught to be hard-working, honest and skilled. Most Hyrkanians take the barbaric code of honour (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game* for definitions of codes of honour and their benefits).

**Respect for Reputation:** Hyrkanians keep close watch on their reputations. A Hyrkanian would rather die with a good reputation than live with a ruined reputation. A Hyrkanian will typically fight if his reputation is challenged – although he is not stupid about it. If the person who challenges a Hyrkanian's reputation is someone other Hyrkanians do not take seriously, he likewise does not take the challenge seriously. He may also wait for the opportune moment to avenge his reputation if an immediate attack is not possible. Hyrkanians are typically careful with other people's reputations as well. Most Hyrkanians would define a well-led life as one lived in such a way that everyone knows the Hyrkanian's name and legend throughout the lands.

**Respect for the Hunt:** Hyrkanians have a strong animistic belief in the spirituality of all things. This belief system teaches Hyrkanians to respect all animals, even those killed during a hunt. A Hyrkanian only hunts an animal to take its meat and hide for survival. Animals are never killed through beheading because a cut to the throat damages the soul.





The head, throat, lungs and heart are always removed as one piece to avoid damaging the soul residing within. Bears are holy, so after a bear is eaten, the skull is placed on a pole or high platform in the wilderness.

**Respect for Fellow Hunters:** If a hunter has killed his prey and meets another hunter, the second hunter has a right to a portion of the kill if the first hunter has not yet cut up the meat.

**Respect for Home:** Hyrkanians will never lean against the support column of a *ger* for fear of bad fortune or natural disaster. For the same reason, a Hyrkanian will never whistle inside a *ger*. Some Hyrkanians will carry those two superstitions to any house or structure. It is a grievous sin to urinate inside of a *ger*; the penalty for such an action is death. One never steps *on* a threshold but instead steps *over* it. Stepping on the threshold of a chief or khan is punishable by the death penalty. Hyrkanians also have a strict order of seating. The master of the *ger* sits in the centre near the fire. The seat of honour is next to the master of the house; this seat is always given to a guest. The woman (or women) of the *ger* sits behind the master and to the right with her children. It is considered bad luck to walk counter-clockwise in a home.

**Respect for Milk, Food and Water:** An honourable Hyrkanian will not spill milk because milk (and milk products such as yogurt) is holy. Intentionally pouring milk or milk products onto the ground results in an instant death sentence for the transgressor. Hyrkanians are careful with food; it is a horrible sin to take food into one's mouth and then spit it back out because of an inability or unwillingness to swallow it. Anyone who does so is killed. It is against Hyrkanian law to throw waste into water, including streams, rivers or lakes.

**Respect for Fire:** An honourable Hyrkanian will not put water or trash into a fire out of respect for fire, which is sacred to a Hyrkanian. Also, a Hyrkanian will never pass a weapon through flames (such as using a dagger to spear meat from a kettle over the fire) believing this action might symbolically behead the flames and rob them of their power. A Hyrkanian will not cut meat near a fire for the same reason – it steals the power from the flames.

**Respect for the Everlasting Sky:** The Everlasting Sky, the Father Heaven, is the primary spirit of the world and



must always be honoured. There are many little rituals the Hyrkanians observe to honour the Everlasting Sky. Players are encouraged to come up with a few of their own to customise their own characters' unique tribal heritage. One ritual is the *tsatsab*, which is performed whenever a new bottle of liquor is opened. The first pouring of the bottle is into a small container, which is then taken outside and flicked three times in each of the four directions to honour the Everlasting Sky, the Mother Earth and the ancestors. Women keep their kitchens and cooking utensils clean as an honour to the Everlasting Sky.

**Fear of Lightning:** Hyrkanians are afraid of lightning. During thunderstorms, a Hyrkanian will ask all strangers in his *ger* to leave, then will wrap up in black felt and hide from the storm. If a Hyrkanian is killed by lightning, his relatives and those living with him must pass through a death ritual; however, the dead Hyrkanian's possessions – including the home – are considered forever unclean and will not be touched ever again.

**Hygiene:** Hyrkanians do not wash dishes or clothes. Instead of washing their dishes, they rinse serving bowls with the boiling broth from the kettle and then pour the broth back into the kettle. Washing dishes wastes both water and food. Hyrkanians also do not wash their clothes out of fear of the gods. The act of hanging clothes out to dry causes thunderstorms. Hyrkanians will even beat people who wash their clothes and take the clothes away from them because people who would use clothing to anger the gods and bring down the lightning do not deserve clothing.



**Arrogant Toward Foreigners:** Hyrkanians are notably haughty in their dealings with foreigners, no matter what their status might be; for example, they will not show deference to a foreign noble. A Hyrkanian who would not think about lying to his lord has no problem lying to a foreigner. Although they rarely commit murder among themselves, killing a foreigner is of no consequence to Hyrkanians. Hyrkanians will gladly feed fellow nomads and share all they have but they are fiercely greedy and violently stingy toward foreigners, unwilling to share a thing.

## HYRKANIAN CLOTHING

**Hats:** Hyrkanians like hats; they wear turbans, head-dresses or high fur hats. This is true of both men and women in Hyrkania. Most hats and helmets are decorated with fur. Sable and silver fox are especially prized by the nomads. In the summer, the hats are often made from colourful fabrics. Hat styles vary from conical hats, top hats, plush hats, hats with turned up rims and many others. Most caps have two red ribbons hanging from the crown.

**Silk Undershirt:** All Hyrkanians wear long and loose silk undershirts beneath whatever armour or clothing they might also wear. Silk is impervious to arrows and the shirt is pushed into the wound with the arrow. The shirt can then be carefully pulled out, pulling out the arrow as well, resulting in a smaller wound. This tightly woven silk shirt provides +2 damage reduction when the wearer is attacked by arrows. This silk also keeps poisons from easily entering the bloodstream, giving the wearer a +2 circumstance bonus to any saving throw against poison that has to pass through the silk.

**Outer Clothing:** In addition to hats and silk undershirts, Hyrkanians wear sheepskins, wide-sleeved tunics, sashes and loose-fitting trousers. The women are veiled, especially around strangers. In more conservative circles, usually the upper classes, the women favour the khalat, a long costume that conceals the entire body. Most Hyrkanians in the Far East wear dels. A del is a dress belted or sashed at the waist. For a man, the del might be long or short but women always wear their dels long. In the summer, a del is made of cotton or silk and in the winter a del is lined with fur. Dels do not have pockets so implements for eating or cutting are carried on the belt. Many dels, especially in the winter, have appliqués, colourful felt shapes sewn onto the material. Stylised horses are common shapes.

**Jewellery:** Both men and women are fond of jewellery, especially wide bracelets of gold and bronze and necklaces of precious metals.

**Price of Clothing:** Clothing is always made in the home out of material stolen or given in tribute or trade – there is no Hyrkanian ‘store’ or ‘market’ for the well-to-do Hyrkanian to shop at, thus there are no price tables offered. Hyrkanian characters simply have Hyrkanian clothing unless the Games Master or player needs the character outfitted differently.

## EQUIPMENT OF HYRKANIAN WARRIORS

Blue or brown tunics are worn over the silk undergarments. Blue tunics are trimmed in red around the edges during warm weather and trimmed (and lined) in fur in the winter. Brown tunics are trimmed in light blue around the edges, except in the winter, when the tunics are trimmed and lined in fur. To protect their feet from the cold, Hyrkanians wear socks made of felt. Thick heel-less boots of leather cover the felt socks. Iron plates resembling fish scales are sewn into the boots. All Hyrkanians wear caps or helmets. The upper part of a helmet is usually metal, with ear flaps and a leather piece to cover the neck. The helmets are usually trimmed in fur, the type of fur designating the rank of the wearer. Mere warriors trim their helms in dog or goat fur while officers use more exotic furs, such as wolf, fox, sable, man-ape, tiger or whatever else is available. The rest of a Hyrkanian’s outfit depends on his function in the army.

**Spearhead Units:** Heavy cavalry who are part of a spearhead unit wear mail coats underneath a cuirass. This cuirass is made either of urine-hardened ox-hide scales covered in leather or iron scales covered in leather. The scales are lacquered in fish-glue. In the winter, a coat of fur or sheepskin is worn over the armour. Instead of a cone-shaped leather cap, the spearhead units wear iron helms; in the winter they cover the helms with fur caps with earflaps. For close combat arms, the spearhead units carry scimitars, maces or war-axes. They have daggers sheathed on the inside of their left forearms. They also carry twelve-foot lances that have a hook below the blade. Horsehair pennants usually depend from the lances.

**Light Cavalry:** The rest of the Hyrkanian war machine wear either coats of lacquered leather strips and leather helmets or quilted versions of the standard tunics and traditional caps. The lacquered leather armour is lacquered with fish glue to make it harder to penetrate with weapons. The lacquer also keeps the







armour from rotting in humid weather. These lightly armoured warriors carry scimitars, two or three javelins, daggers sheathed on the inside of their left forearms and their mighty bows. The soldiers are also armed with round wicker and leather shields.

**Horses:** Hyrkanians usually armour their horses with lacquered leather barding. Each rider has from one to five reserve horses. The horses carry waterproof saddlebags that can be used as floatation devices when crossing rivers. The horses also carry several quivers each.

## SEX ROLES IN HYRKANIA

Hyrkanian women, although few ever achieve fame, have a powerful role in Hyrkanian politics and economy. Each member of a nomad tribe must contribute to the whole, so the Hyrkanians do not subjugate their women, believing this would damage the whole. Culturally speaking, the Hyrkanians respect women and view them as founts of wisdom. Hyrkanians believe a man who does not listen to his woman to be unmanly and immature. One of a woman's roles in Hyrkania is to be a guide for her man in practical matters. Women can inherit property and can assume the head of a family when their husbands die. Widowed women are allowed to remarry as they wish and their children are treated as the children of the new husband.

Like the men, Hyrkanian women are deadeye archers and accomplished equestrians; women are trained in military techniques just as men are. Although not necessarily members of the Hyrkanian cavalry, women follow the warriors to put the wounded to death and collect arrows for re-use. The strongest and most capable of women fight alongside the men as equal members of the war machine. A woman who fights with the men is given high honour and is in no way treated as non-feminine. Hyrkanian women are also noted for using highly vulgar or offensive language in a playful way. Hyrkanian women are practical people and are almost cold-blooded when it comes to death, setting an unsettling example of mercilessness.

Red Sonja, a Hyrkanian, is not an unlikely character.

Hyrkanian women are not pampered and can fight, although they are expected to remain loyal and follow whoever wins them in combat.

Women are also valued by the nomads because they make virtually everything in the tribe, including clothing and weapons. They work

alongside the men, loading camels or pack horses, driving carts and repairing anything broken or torn. Women also make sure their husbands' equipment is ready at all times, including fully stocked saddlebags (filled with dried milk curds, qumiz and millet) so the warrior can travel for days without having to take away from his military goal to find food.

As a warning to any would-be lotharios in Hyrkania, Hyrkanian women are notably chaste.

## LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Most Hyrkanian first marriages are arranged by the tribal shaman when the intended couple are children. Hyrkanian marriages do not involve the subordination of women to men so all aspects of the pairing are considered equally important by the shaman. Hyrkanian men like to marry older woman because more mature women have more wisdom, although the shaman may or may not take this into account.

An arranged marriage has its own customs that mimic an abduction. The father of the bride prepares a feast and the bride runs away to relatives. The father then goes to the groom and gives him permission to find and take his daughter no matter where she may be hiding. The groom and his friends engage in a mock search and find the hiding bride. With mock force, the groom takes the bride to his tent or *ger* and the tribe begins the feast in joyous celebration. The bride and groom are led around in a horse-drawn cart and they are given their dowry-gifts, which include slaves, horses, cattle, sheep, clothing and furniture for their new household.

Hyrkanian men may have as many wives as they can keep. Abduction is another way to accomplish a marriage. A Hyrkanian can abduct his bride (or groom) and, if successful, the abducted person must acknowledge the new situation. This custom of abducting brides from other tribes leads to intertribal wars on the steppe.

## SOCIAL STANDING

Nomadic culture is divided into commoners and nobles, a fluid system of caste. Anyone may be recognised as noble upon displaying skill in organising a tribal government or simple proving himself a capable leader. Thus, Hyrkanian nomads can multi-class into the noble class much easier than other peoples. Taking the Leadership feat is usually enough. A would-be Hyrkanian leader must be able to defend his authority, though. Chiefs and leaders who do not defend their authority are soon dead.



Most Hyrkanian tribes permit titles to be inherited but no Hyrkanian nomad ever believes a title guarantees leadership. The Hyrkanian nomads will not follow a leader, regardless of title or heritage, if that leader is not worthy of respect. Likewise, taking the Leadership feat does not guarantee a Player Character any Hyrkanian followers.

A Hyrkanian noble must display courage, wisdom, generosity and luck in order to lead. Keep in mind that courage does not equal stupidity. Retreat is not a cowardly manoeuvre for the nomad. Wisdom encompasses more than simply the Wisdom ability score and includes factors such as high ranks in Sense Motive, Spot and other Wisdom-based skills. A leader is expected to ensure that no member of the tribe starves unless everyone in the tribe is starving. If a leader proves to be an idiot, a coward, a miser or seriously unlucky, then that leader will be exiled, if not killed. Nomads simply do not respect weak or dishonourable leaders. If a Player Character loses his code of honour, he also loses all Hyrkanian followers.

The overall social structure of Hyrkania is a clan structure. Clans are divided into sub-clans, or families. Sometimes, several clans might merge into a small nation – which is what happened with the Turanians. Successful warlords are notorious for gathering clans into small, mobile nations that sweep out of Hyrkanian, conquering all before them.

## SOCIAL MOBILITY

Social mobility is simple in Hyrkanian society and is based on merit. If a Hyrkanian proves worthy, that Hyrkanian climbs the social ladder. No one can gainsay his right to do so if he has earned it.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

Hyrkanians are described as shrewd merchants and traders. The Hyrkanian economy is fairly self-sufficient and easily sustainable. Most trade is conducted by the women because the men prefer to focus on hunting or warfare. The economy of Hyrkania is based on livestock breeding, especially camels, cattle, oxen, goats, sheep and horses.

Most traders in Hyrkania are actually Khitan. Most Hyrkanians have a practised disdain for money, material comforts and luxuries. Hyrkanian nobles, however, often run up huge debts to the Khitans and have to press their own commoners for more animals and taxes to pay off those debts. Hyrkanians will rarely trade until the traders have walked between a pair of bonfires for purification.

## TAXES

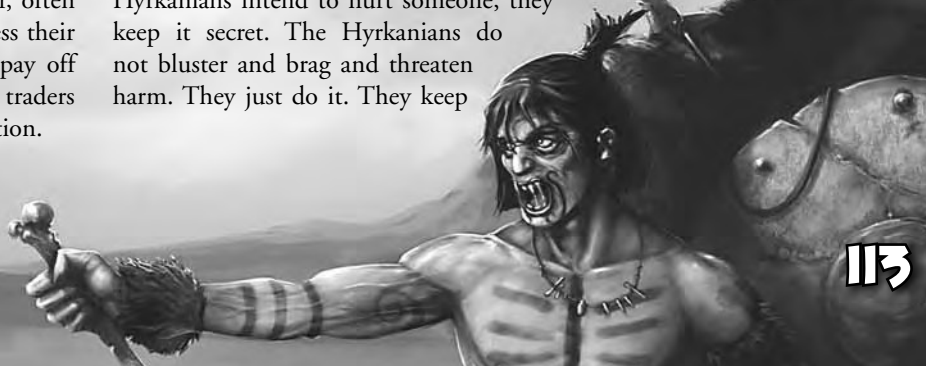
Hyrkanian khans exact taxes from any cities under their domination. These taxes vary from khan to khan, from city to city. Nomads are by nature mobile. Trade works best among sedentary people. The sedentary cities managed by the Hyrkanian khans conduct trade and the goods are passed along to the tribes via taxation and the offering of tribute. Those who pay their taxes or offer tribute are spared. Those who do not pay are put to the sword down to the last person.

## THE MILITARY OF HYRKANIA

To discuss the Hyrkanian military is to discuss the Hyrkanian people. Their culture is a martial one. Their entire lives can be seen as a series of military lessons from their first horse ride to their last. Everything a Hyrkanian learns in regards to survival transfers with almost no adaptation to warfare: hunting, tracking, riding and herding. Any Hyrkanian of either sex who can ride is a soldier for the Hyrkanian military as far as the khans are concerned – there are no Hyrkanian civilians.

The Hyrkanians, masters of the double-curved bow, dominate the Vilayet in both military and economic might. With swift warriors mounted on sturdy steppe horses the Hyrkanians defend their trade cities, their trade caravans and their trade routes. In battle, the Hyrkanians do not strive for honour or glory – they strive to win and conquer. Hyrkanians do not fight for vague notions of glory or knightly honour, they fight because they want whatever it is that the enemy has, or they fight to avenge something the enemy has done.

Hyrkanians may not seem disciplined but to the contrary, they are. Mistakes mean death or worse. If a khan orders a town or caravan spared and a Hyrkanian commander sacks the town or raids the caravan anyway, that commander is forced to serve as a regular soldier in his own former army – and the general never comes back alive from the next combat. The number one tactic used by the Hyrkanians is a simple one: if the Hyrkanians intend to hurt someone, they keep it secret. The Hyrkanians do not bluster and brag and threaten harm. They just do it. They keep





their plans secret so their enemies cannot create a viable defence. They do not presage their initial assaults with warnings like civilised nations do.

In battle, the Hyrkanians form virtual swarms of violent rage, sending thousands of riders to war. In *Shadows in the Moonlight* the Hyrkanians sent 15,000 cavalymen against Conan's 5,000 *kozaki*. These deadly riders are trailed by an enormous herd of spare mounts and, in major battles involving scores of thousands, are preceded by thousands of enemy civilians, driven forward by the riders as a vast human shield. Villages faced with the prospect of coming under the sword often surrender, which is fine by the Hyrkanians, who will accept tribute and loot, drawing taxes and additional troops from the surrendered villages. Those that do not surrender are burned and destroyed without mercy.

To say the Hyrkanians are superb with their archery is like saying Cimmerians are hardy folk. Hyrkanians are especially adept at firing their bows from the backs of running horses. Horsemen in training are given an arrow each and required to encircle a herd of game and kill with that one arrow. Hyrkanian cavalry have no equal in battle. A typical Hyrkanian warrior carries his double-curved bow of wood, sinew and horn and up to three quivers of arrows as well as a lance and an array of melee weaponry for close-in work.

Hyrkanian generals tend to be audacious and bold. They know their troops can be depended upon to fight without fear. The generals are quite cunning and are not against trying new tactics. The Hyrkanians usually begin battles with archery, filling the air with as many arrows as possible. If the enemy charges, the Hyrkanians light dung fires to create smoke and the archers melt away on their horses to be replaced by Hyrkanian cavalry with long lances and sharp sabres who hide within the smoke to surprise the oncoming knights. Kettledrums are also used to create a fearsome din that echoes above the hoof-beats of the onrushing hordes.

Hyrkanians have a disciplined cavalry that is divided up in squads of ten, troops of fifty, companies of a hundred and divisions of 10,000. Commanders, or *kagan*, are those who have proven themselves in war, not tribal chiefs. A squad-leader is called a 10-commander or a commander-of-10. Other commanders of larger numbers follow similar naming schemes. Commanders signal with flags during the day and lanterns at night.

## RELIGION IN HYRKANIA

The Hyrkanians are not particularly passionate in their religious beliefs. Religion is a minor matter in the lives of the Hyrkanians and is mostly something they take for granted and give little thought. Their uncaring attitude toward religion leaves them fairly tolerant about varied belief systems; generally speaking, Hyrkanians do not bother to indulge themselves in the religious persecution of others.

## BASIC COSMOLOGY

The Hyrkanians believe everything in the universe is interdependent and interconnected, circles within circles, built upon fundamental processes that appear in every aspect of the universe, large and small, visible and invisible. Everything is part of the universe, which is comprised of an infinite series of micro-universes. Thus, an open and wise mind can observe smaller facets of the universe in order to arrive at greater truths. If the universe is comprised of interconnected microcosms that work according to the same principles of the greater universe, then observation of one microcosm or phenomenon informs the observer about the rest of the microcosms. This leads the wise man to a fundamental truth: a person is a micro-version of the universe, wherein all parts are also interdependent and interconnected. Therefore, if a wise man understands himself, that man understands everything in the universe. 'Know thyself' is the ultimate truth of Hyrkanian religion.

The Hyrkanians believe all things have a dominant spirit, especially things that have long been in the possession of living things. There are greater and lesser spirits just as there are greater and lesser people or horses. Each spirit has its own jurisdiction, an object, person, process or area in its charge. Other spirits have other spirits in their jurisdiction, just as a khan might have a tribe under his protection and guidance. This ultimately culminates in one ultimate spirit or force from which everything comes. The Hyrkanians do not attempt to give this force any human traits or foibles. This force is simply an all-pervading reality. Unlike monotheistic religions, this force does not command people or demand anything from people, since people are just as much a part of it as rivers, mountains, stars or the sky. Through this force everything and everyone is connected and in its place. There are spirits of the upper worlds and spirits of the lower worlds and spirits of this world.

This belief in spirits is the reason Hyrkanians do not till the soil and have never developed an agrarian culture. They believe that digging into the soil and growing



plants with the sole intention of harvesting them are attacks on nature. Attacking nature is a sure way to anger the spirits and bring down horrid luck upon themselves and the tribe.

The Hyrkanians observe that the entire world around them serves a purpose, so they also believe the same is true of themselves – giving them a belief in personal destiny or fate, a purpose to exist in the universe. They also believe that destiny is created by the person, every single moment of every single day. Hyrkanians believe in destiny but not as the Shemites believe. Destiny is not something handed to them by gods but something self-created, for are not the Hyrkanians spirits themselves and part of the ultimate reality? By taking responsibility for their own destinies, the Hyrkanians develop an intense faith in their own personal power. By cooperating with the spirits around them, they grow more powerful still, for a spirit ally will aid a friend just as a physical ally will. So long as a Hyrkanian's actions are in harmony with the greater forces around that Hyrkanian, the harmonies will extend throughout eternity and that Hyrkanian's actions will effectively be endorsed by all the heavens.

## THE POWER OF SPIRIT

The Hyrkanians believe that spiritual connections are stronger than biological connections. For example, a man who swears a certain oath to his chief is considered more bound to his chief than if he were his chief's biological brother. As another example, a man who marries a woman with children from another man considers the children to be his, believing there is a pre-existing spiritual bond that brought the children to him. Hyrkanians also believe that blood-ties are brought about primarily because of the same spiritual ties. This belief is a precursor to the more codified Karmic beliefs of later civilisations.

## A MULTIPLICITY OF SOULS

The physical body requires more than one soul to animate it. Humans have at least three souls (shamans, for example, have four) and animals have at least two souls. The three souls of humans are the *suld*, the *ami* and the *suns*. Shamans also have an *utha* soul. The *ami* and *suns* souls oscillate together around the spinal column in the pattern of a sine wave, speeding up as a person gets excited, whereas the *suld* soul rests atop the spinal column at the crown of the head.

## THE POWER OF WORDS

The Hyrkanians believe words that are said with conviction create reality. Melodies and songs carry

words of power and the drum is the primary instrument of power. Hyrkanians believe in astral projection and have similar ideas about out-of-body experiences where battles with hostile spirits occur. Leaving one's body is a dangerous occupation, for certain powerful objects can trap souls. The northern Hyrkanians believe the 'man in the moon' is a shaman who flew too close to the moon and became ensnared by it. The moon is analogous to the Land of the Dead for most of these Hyrkanians.

## FIRE IS SACRED

Fire is a purifying force for the Hyrkanians and is sacred to the point that anyone who can control fire (such as a smith) is seen to have magical powers. Hyrkanians believe it is rude to stamp out a fire, put rubbish in it or douse it with water. A Hyrkanian may make a small sacrifice to the spirit world by throwing a piece of grease on a fire. The resulting spurt of intense flame and sound after the sacrifice reveals the resulting happiness of the spirit.

In the shamanistic society of the northern Hyrkanians, the blacksmith is considered more powerful than the shaman, for though the shaman can speak with spirits, the blacksmith commands fire and is protected by fire. Often, the blacksmith is the older brother of the shaman. Still, the shaman is the more charismatic and must be, for he must be able to sway his tribe with the power of his performances to have any effect, using props and symbols as necessary.

## SACRIFICES TO THE GODS

Hyrkanians make live sacrifices through the pole-offering. Living horses, humans or game are suspended from poles and dedicated to the gods. A ritual sacrifice is made after a man's marriage as well. In the first spring after marrying, a man must sacrifice a light-coloured horse to the gods. The sacrifice is made in a birch thicket. The horse is treated with full respect. A red ribbon is tied to its mane and no woman may mount it. Women are not allowed to be present at the sacrifice. Women may eat the meat afterwards but only unmarried girls may partake of the feast at the sacrificial location after the ceremony is concluded. A married woman may not come within sixty feet of where the ceremony took place.

When any animal is killed for a sacrifice, the head, throat, lungs and heart are always







removed as one piece to avoid damaging the soul residing within. Collectively, the head, throat, lungs and heart are called the *zuld* and are believed to be the home of the *ami* and *suns* souls of the animal. After any sacrifice, the *zuld* and the animal's hide are hung on poles.

## ANIMALS ARE SACRED

Animals, because they have *ami* and *suns* souls, reincarnate and have personalities. Animals may reincarnate as humans and vice versa, so animals are not seen as inferior to humans in any way. If a human behaves in an animal-like manner, it is obvious to a Hyrkanian that the person was an animal in a prior life and if an animal betrays an almost human-like canniness, the observing Hyrkanian will know the animal was once a person. Animals are also believed to have language and even psychic abilities. The tiger, the snow leopard and the bear are the most powerful animals the Hyrkanians know; these animals are often revered as honoured ancestors. Many tribes and clans take certain animals as their tribal totems or symbols. Eagles, bulls, reindeer, wolves, tigers, snow leopards and bears are among the most common totemic symbols. Other animals are unlikely to be 'real.' Snakes, foxes, spiders, pheasant and porcupines are believed to be soul-travelling shamans, so they are never hunted or eaten. Shamans call upon animal spirits for guidance and teaching.

## THE NATURE OF DEATH

Hyrkanians do not distinguish much between animate and inanimate, or even between living and dead, beyond physical differences. Spiritually, there is no difference – the difference is only in physical state. A dead man is still spiritually present, just as a tree is spiritually present. Thus Hyrkanians have little fear of death. Hyrkanians also believe in reincarnation. If a spirit wants to take physical form as a person, it becomes born as a person. No one speaks a dead man's name for three generations out of fear of the still living consciousness of the dead, for he probably will not have reincarnated yet. Hyrkanians believe they will live in a similar but different world than this after death, a world where their lifestyle remains essentially unchanged.

## BURIALS

Funeral ceremonies are ritual attempts to reconcile the *suld* soul of the deceased with the local

*gazriin ezen* spirits. Since the *suld* soul tends to occupy things in nature, the *gazriin ezen* spirits often take offence, so the ritual diplomatically handles the situation.

## IDOLS

The Hyrkanians make doll-like idols out of felt, stone and/or wood to represent the images of their household spirits; these idols are called *ongons*. As houses for ancestor spirits, these idols are set up on the sides of the tent-doors or other places of honour. Hyrkanians always offer these idols the first milk from their flocks. They are routinely given offerings of alcohol, blood or fat as well. Other than temporary *ongons* made to hold disease or demons, the idols are passed down from generation to generation. Destroying an *ongon* tends to anger the ancestor spirit whose home it is.

## SHRINES

The sites of Hyrkanian worship are cairns of stones with single vertical poles sticking out of the centres where prayers and sacrifices are performed. These piles of rock are known as *ovoo*s. Sacrifices include leaving food or gifts to the spirits of the *ovoo* and may be as simple as adding another stone to the pile. A Hyrkanian visiting an *ovoo* (or even just passing by one) will circle it three times in a clockwise direction when leaving an offering in order to receive luck from the *ovoo* spirits. The circling is symbolic of joining the cosmic procession of the stars and sun. Adding stones to the cairn is said to improve the spirit's overall power.

Each clan makes *ovoo*s in their own peculiar way, often using them to mark the outer limits of a clan's territory. A person knowledgeable in *ovoo*s may use them to determine whose land he is entering in the same manner that a noble might read another's heraldry.

In addition to *ovoo*s, the Hyrkanians have prayer trees. A prayer tree is a shrine to nature spirits and becomes such after a shaman performs a certain ceremony around the tree to clean the nature spirits of the area of the after-effects of violence. Prayer trees are said to promote harmony and calm in those who pass by or live in their vicinity.

## GODS OF HYRKANIA

Hyrkanians do not worship gods as most men in the Hyborian age do. Hyrkanians worship the nature spirits of the world around them. They worship lakes, rivers, mountains, forests and, as the most powerful of nature



spirits, the Everlasting Sky. Some greater spirits are given names, such as Erlik Khan, who is a greater spirit who the khan of the lower worlds.

**The Everlasting Sky (Tngre Etseg):** The Everlasting Sky, Father Heaven, is both timeless and endless. The Everlasting Sky is not seen as a person but simply as the blue sky. He has two children, Erlik and Ulgen. All Hyrkian rituals begin with an invocation of the Everlasting Sky, the Mother Earth and the ancestors. The Everlasting Sky is everywhere and sees everything, so he assigns fate based on the behaviour of his worshippers. Spells designed to influence the weather are always directly addressed to The Everlasting Sky. Mountains are emblems of his power.

**Mother Earth (Gazar Itugan):** Like the Everlasting Sky, the Mother Earth is not visualised as a person. Trees are emblems of her power. She is prayed to for fertility.

**Erlik Khan:** Erlik is the khan of the lower worlds and his is the power to command the *suns* souls who reach his realm. He is an evil spirit, the brother of Ulgen Khan. Erlik is a son of the Everlasting Sky. His colour is yellow and he is death personified. He has a strong sense of irony and humour. Although humans are supposed to reincarnate as humans, he often likes to force *suns* souls who have been particularly evil to reincarnate as monkeys. Erlik sends those of particularly vile natures to Ela Guren, the region of the lower worlds where souls are annihilated. Erlik created the eagle and disease. His holy direction is to the east.

**Ulgen Khan:** Ulgen is the khan of the upper worlds and his is the power to command the upper spirits. He is a good spirit, the brother of Erlik Khan. He is the creator of man and animals. His holy direction is to the west.

**Usan Khan:** Usan is the lord of water and his is the power to command the water spirits. His holy direction is to the south.

**Tatai Khan:** Tatai is the lord of violent weather and his is the power to command the weather spirits. He can summon tornados and lightning. His holy direction is to the north.

**Umai:** Umai is the daughter of Mother Earth and is the spirit of the womb. She is charged with power over *ami* souls, granting them to newborns. She sends spirit-horses to find a desired *ami* soul and bring it to the womb. If a sorcerer steals an *ami* soul to animate a dead thing, the child for whom the *ami* soul was intended will be stillborn. Umai is prayed to when fertility is desired.

**Golomto:** Golomto is the daughter of Mother Earth and is the spirit of fire. She is summoned by flint and iron. She is a patron of blacksmiths. She is prayed to when matters of purity are of concern.

**Spirits of Nature and Sky:** There are more spirits in the world than can be discussed in a volume of this size. Some spirits are so powerful a shaman cannot master them, yet others are so easy to control that a novice has but to speak and they listen. Listed here are some of the more well-known spirits. The Games Master is free to create new ones for his campaigns.

☛ **Chotgor:** These are *suns* spirits of the deceased that have become lost and cannot find their way to Erlik Khan's dark realm – or find their way out of that bleak underworld due to accident or anger. These spirits bring with them death, disease and insanity.

☛ **Kut:** *Kut* spirits are similar to *chotgor* spirits but were never incarnate, just troublesome.

☛ **Ozoor:** *Ozoor* spirits are the *suld* souls of deceased persons that roam freely through the wilderness and the natural world. Sometimes they pick a natural place to reside, such as a rock, tree or cave. They are relatively neutral to man but can be angered or pleased.

☛ **Ongon:** *Ongon* spirits are *suld* souls of deceased persons that reside in dolls and figures of the same name. They are helper spirits.

☛ **Utha:** A shaman's *suld* soul sometimes becomes a spirit who hangs about shamans of the same lineage, becoming a fourth soul. Some shamans classify the *utha* as a special type of *ongon* spirit; others give it its own category.

☛ **Burhan:** *Burhan* spirits are demons that cause illness and disease. *Burhan* spirits are extremely powerful, much more powerful than *chotgor* or *kut* spirits. Shamans cannot usually master *burhan* spirits but require helper spirits if control is needed. Most of the time shamans simply plead with a *burhan* to leave a person alone. Otherwise, the shaman must battle the *burhan* spirit and force it into the form of an *ongon* spirit, which leaves the spirit weak and more easily handled.

☛ **Gazriin Ezen:** The *gazriin ezen* spirits are the masters of nature, the spirits of the places on the earth. They are the spirits and voices of mountains, lakes, trees, rocks, buildings and settlements. They sometimes come into conflict with ancestor spirits who want to inhabit the natural things that belong to the *gazriin ezen*.





## HYRKANIAN GOVERNMENT

The Hyrkanians are ruled by khans, who come either from the ranks of the Ba'atut, a class of Hyrkanians who are given noble title because of their accomplishments, or from the Noyan, the class of Hyrkanians who have risen to command armies because of their accomplishments. The khan commands the Nökud, who comprise the elite warriors of Hyrkania. In most respects, Hyrkanian government is based around typical tribal patterns. Khans are chosen because the gods and spirits have favoured them above all others. Generally, their leaders are chosen through combat. When a khan dies, all who wish to take his place (often the sons and daughters of the deceased khan) come together and fight it out. The winner is the one chosen by the Everlasting Sky as his favourite.

Beneath the khans are the kagan, who are military leaders and generals. The kagan are generally autonomous so long as they follow the overall dictates of the khan above them. The kagan often hire administrators who help them run their territories.

The khans make decisions through councils and consensus but their ultimate decisions are considered law. A khan's counsellors include the kagan, various trusted advisors and shamans.

Laws among the steppe people are not written down; law comes from the khan or from custom. In subjugated cities, some laws may be written down from previous eras but the ruling Hyrkanians rarely bother to learn or obey them. Minor transgressions bring about the death penalty. Major transgressions cause the transgressor to be exiled, a fate worse than death. Some laws and traditions that are punishable by death include beating animals, especially horses and dogs, throwing waste into water or fire (including urinating into water or fire), adultery, sodomy, sorcery, spying, intentional lying, giving food or clothing to a captive without permission from the captor, not retrieving equipment dropped by a warrior in front of him in a battle, not returning escaped slaves or captives, not offering food to a guest and being unfair or greedy. Intervening in a quarrel as a third party is also penalised by death. Treason is punishable by exile.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF HYRKANIA

The Hyrkanian steppe is dry, cold, grassland, rolling along in smooth, low hills. There is not much humidity in the air because steppe is located away from the ocean and close to mountain barriers. The soil is poor and thin, supporting only grasses. Virtually no trees can be found on the steppe. The steppe has warm summers and really cold winters. The northern steppe sees a lot of snow and small amounts of rain. The Hyrkanian steppes experience long droughts and violent winds. These summer droughts combine with the heat, the browning dry grasses and just about any source of ignition to create dangerous, quick spreading prairie fires.

Along the western edge of Hyrkania is the eastern shore of the Vilayet Sea. It is bound in the east by Khitai, in the south by the Talakma Mountains and in the north by cold tundras, vast pine forests and frozen wastelands.

**Blasted Lands** – The Blasted Lands lie in the northern steppe to the east of the mountains of the grey apes and the city of Vidara. This land is dying because of sorcery.

**Cape of Furies** – The Cape of Furies is a promontory of the east coast of the Vilayet. It is near the Aetolian Isles.

**Deadlands** – The Deadlands are on the Hyrkanian coast of the Vilayet sea. They are located three days sail north of the Aetolian Isles. The water of the Deadlands is black and foul.

**Kara-Korum** – The Desert of Black Sands, the Kara Korum, is an area where 'devil winds', great blasts of heat that wash over the area around the graceful city of Wan Tengri, are common.

**Lake Ho** – Lake Ho is a large lake noted for its armoured crayfish. Wan Tengri is built upon its shores. The lands around the lake are controlled by the Oriental Wan clan.

**Loulan Plateau** – The Loulan Plateau is a Hyrkanian rocky desert and steppe-land in the east, although some portions are sandy. The Hyrkanians here have strong Khitan bloodlines and tell stories of the 'desert man of forbidden Pathenia,' a man-like ape that dwells in the snow-covered mountains, a veritable abominable snowman. The plateau is also home to jerboas, small mammals that burrow in the thin soil. Summers are hot and winters are frigid. The Loulan Plateau is essentially a cold desert; frost can be seen on the dunes, especially in the frigid winters. This plateau is described as lost and bleak.



**Meru** – The kingdom of Meru lies in a great bowl-shaped valley of jungle between the peaks of the Talakma mountains and the mighty Himelians. The valley also has a huge inland lake or sea named *Sumero Tso*. Called the Cup of Gods, Meru is home to stocky, brown, lazy, fatalistic people. The only garment for the Meruvians, both male and female, is a short skirt. The priests shave their heads; their religion is shamanistic and they believe in reincarnation. Their chief god is Yama, the king of demons. They make slaves out of captives, usually Hyrkanians or the occasional Himelian hillman. The capital of Meru is Shamballah and is ruled by a god-king. Shamballah is a city of rose-red stone amid paddies and fields between the jungle and *Sumero Tso*. The gates to the city are of green bronze and cast in the shape of a skull. The architecture is ornate and sculpted. Gigantic faces hewn from red stone glare down from walls and towers. Meruvian mythology is one of many-armed gods and demons. Carvings in the form of human skulls are omnipresent. Even the people wear human skull-shaped ornaments hung on golden chains about their necks. There are seven cities around *Sumero Tso*. The other six are: Shondakor, Thogara, Auzakia, Issedon, Paliana and Throana. The cities are deemed sacred. To avoid the dangers of the jungle, the Meruvians trade via ships that ply the *Sumero Tso*, pulled by galley slaves at the oars.

**Pathenia** – Pathenia is a frigid mountainous region somewhere north of the Loulan Plateau and either north of Hyrkania or in northern Hyrkania. Pathenia is described as ‘forbidden’ but it is never indicated why. Perhaps it is the country of origin for the stunted, squat, slant-eyed and intelligent aborigines that intermix with the westward moving Hyrkanians. Those who dwell in Pathenia worship Erlik.

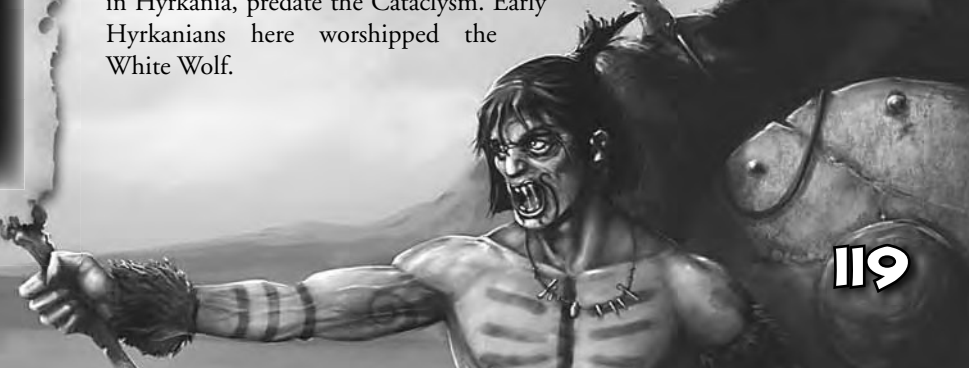
**Steppe of Famine** – This is a deadly steppe land northwest of Sogaria.

**Talakma Mountains** – The Talakma Mountains comprise an arid range that breaks off from the Himelians to merge with them after arcing to the east, forming an effective border between Hyrkania and Meru. The Talakma Mountains are bitterly cold and fiercely wind-swept. Hard frost forms nightly, although actual snowfall is rare. The soil is salty, keeping all but the hardiest of plants from living here. The rough conditions are impossible for most animals to endure for long and only the toughest find homes here. Snow leopards, wolves, yaks and brown bears live here in small numbers, as do other mountain breeds of animals. A few lakes exist but most are dry. Virtually no one chooses to live among the heights of these dire mountains, although the foothills are home to some hillmen and their herds of sheep and goats. A hill race in lacquered armour lined with gold and gems called the Azweri live in these mountains, capturing slaves for the Meruvians. They fight with scimitars, spears and clubs. The Azweri are yellow skinned and slant-eyed. Another tribe who live in the Talakma foothills of Kusan are the Jaga, a tribe of headhunters.

**Wuhuan Desert** – This desert is in eastern Hyrkania, north of the Himelians and the Talakma Mountains. The Wuhuan is an incredibly vast wasteland, arid and sandy. In *The Return of Conan*, it takes Conan twenty-five days to cross this horrible land. It is populated by small bands of nomads.

**Zaporozhets River** – The Zaporozhets River is a shallow river in Hyrkania.

**Zarfhaana Steppes** – These steppes, deep in Hyrkania, predate the Cataclysm. Early Hyrkanians here worshipped the White Wolf.





## IMPORTANT HYRKANIAN CITIES

Other than areas in Turan, Howard does not name Hyrkanian cities nor does he describe them. Being nomads, the Hyrkanians of the central regions probably do not actually build cities. They create camps and temporary villages, maintaining great herds of horses. Other people, such as the Turanians, build cities in Hyrkania along the caravan routes, however. Other Hyrkanians build cities along the eastern coasts and along the coast of the Vilayet.

**Bukhrosha** – Bukhrosha is a huge trading city with a population that verges on 18,000 permanent residents. It is called the city of incense and spices, which are their commercial specialties. Bukhrosha lies along the eastern coast of Hyrkania and is among their most major cities. It is part of the cultural centre of the original Hyrkanians before they began their westward drift.

**Khoraf** – Khoraf is a port city of Hyrkania where the slavers bring the fairest women of the South. It is often a target of the Vilayet pirates. It is located on the eastern coast of the Vilayet. This city lies south of Rhamdan and is connected to that city by a Turanian road, allowing the two cities to help each other out in times of military crisis. If Khoraf is harried by pirates, any slaves or goods needing to be shipped to Aghrapur by the Aghrapuri buyers travel up this road. Likewise, if Rhamdan is besieged by sea, their goods travel down this road to be shipped from Khoraf. Many ships from Khawarizm patrol these waters to protect the shipping but they tend to concentrate more on Rhamdan, although the ships often stop here to allow the soldiers time to dally with the slave-girls.

**Lakmashi** – Lakmashi of the Silver Gates is another trading city on the caravan route from Turan to Khitai that includes Sogaria and Bukhrosha. Precious ore mined from the mountains of the south is brought here and goldsmiths from Hyrkania, Turan and Vendhya labour to turn it into works of art. Lakmashi has a population of 15,000, many of whom are slaves driven by the smiths to smelt and purify the ore. Lakmashi was part of the original Hyrkanian cultural centre before they began their westward drift.

**Makkalet** – Makkalet was once the chief trading rival of Aghrapur. Makkalet lay on the eastern shore of the Vilayet

across from the Isle of Iron Statues. It was one of the richest cities of the east. The city defended itself primarily by flaming arrows and flaming ammunition flung from massive siege engines. A beautiful, carved and immense brooding temple to Tarim once stood here. Even the steps of the main wharf of the city are crafted from marble. The city was originally governed by King Eannatum and Queen Melissandra. Its famed serpent walls repelled Khitan hordes and Vendhyan raiders but fell, in the end, to the ravaging Hyrkanian troops of Turan led by Prince Yezdigerd. Queen Melissandra survived the siege and bore Eannatum's child. Perhaps her child will return and rebuild this once impressive city that glittered on the shores of the Vilayet like a jewel in the sun.

**Malikta** – Malikta is yet another trading city along the road from Turan to Khitai, the same string of roads that includes Sogaria and Lakmashi of the Silver Gates. It lies on or near the eastern coast of Hyrkania. Malikta is famed for its accomplished jewellers and even the poor here wear gems and diadems. This is a smaller city with a population that rarely exceeds 9,000 and drops to nearly 6,000 when the trade routes slow down. It was part of the cultural centre of the original Hyrkanians before they began their westward drift.

**Onagrul** – Onagrul is a secret stronghold of the Vilayet pirates on the eastern shore of that sea, probably in the northern reaches where few Turanian galleys are likely to find it.

**Pah-Dishah** – Pah-Dishah is located some three weeks ride to the east of Makkalet. The city is ruled by King Ghannif, the father of Queen Melissandra of Makkalet. Red Sonja, a Hyrkanian, once led Pah-Dishah soldiers to defend Makkalet. Pah-Dishah is a vast city with a large population of 32,000 residents.

**Rhamdan** – Rhamdan, north of Khoraf where the great caravan road ends, is another port that is often targeted by pirates. The ships of Turan tend to sail Rhamdan's waters often to protect the shipping that carries goods from the far east to Aghrapur and other western ports. A caravan road connects Khoraf and Rhamdan, allowing the two cities to lend each other military support and goods to move from one city to another if besieged or harried by pirate activity. This city lies across the Vilayet from Aghrapur to facilitate the transport of goods so that caravans can avoid the swamps and pitfalls of trying to go around the Vilayet.

**Razadan** – Razadan was burnt to the ground by Yezdigerd during his wars of conquest for his father Yildiz. The city is

the twin of Dimmorz, another city besieged by Yezdigerd. Shaven-headed Hyrkanians in this region worshipped a stone idol. The idol's body was kept at Razadan, the head at Dimmorz. Together the head and body made for a powerful living statue if commanded by one who held a certain amulet. Amulet, head and body are now somewhere in Aghrapur.

**Sogaria** – North of the Turanian border, Sogaria lies in a fertile valley in the western part of the steppes. Great gongs sound at night to signal the closing of the gates. Outside the city are pens and common fields for the mounts and animals of the caravans. A little closer to the city are the camping grounds of the caravans. Once night falls only those with lead seals marked by a magistrate are permitted to enter but most of the guards can be bribed. Described as a lordly city, Sogaria takes Khitan silks and colours them with Vendhyan dyes to be traded in the west. The towers of the public buildings are crafted out of white marble and the homes of the wealthy are equally grand. Few here are destitute. Hanging gardens fill the roofs and balconies of the city and flowers grow in quantity. The streets here are paved and sculpted fountains spray water at most intersections. Sogaria is allied with Turan and can send to Bukhrosha for reinforcements if needed. Sogaria has a population of 26,000. North of Sogaria, on the banks of a stream, is the fort of Khulm.

**Sythia** – Sythia is a city-state of the frigid lands in the north and borders on eastern Hyperborea. A sorceress queen rules Sythia and there is a horrible Pit of Lost Souls in the citadel. The path to the citadel is lined with sticks mounted with skulls.

**Vidara** – Vidara is a Corinthian city in the foothills of Hyrkania. The city is walled and lies between the Turanian province of Dimmorz and the Hyrkanian province of Balkhana. It is a peaceful community of expatriates governed by a head councillor. A great, rounded and eerie structure sits in the city of herdsmen and farmers. The people do not go into this grand temple, which is called the House of the Cursed. Tunnels run from beneath the House where the Cursed, Corinthians who have a rotting disease, live. The city was built by someone other than the Corinthians, who found it abandoned.

**Wan Tengri** – Wan Tengri is a city peopled by an Oriental race. The city is noted for its high, graceful towers. It lies on Lake Ho and is in the centre of the Desert of Black Sands. It is ruled by a sorceress of the Wan clan. It is dominated by a great fiery tower, from whence come the devil winds that protect the city.

**Zhamakand** – Zhamakand is a city located in southern Hyrkania in the foothills of the Colchian Mountains. It is ruled by Shaibar Khan, who conquered the city in search of a legendary treasure. The city is built with Turanian/Iranistani style architecture.

## IMPORTANT HYRKANIAN TRIBES

One of the largest nomadic tribes on the steppe is the Kuagir. Princess Zosara of Turan, the daughter of King Yildiz, married the Great Khan Kujula of the Kuagir and bore him an heir. The Great Khan does not know it, but Zosara's son is Conan's.

A nomad tribe to be found in the far northeast of Hyrkania is the Wigur, a short, bandy-legged race with dark skin and braided black hair. The favoured class for the Wigur is barbarian and they dress in furs and skins, painting their faces in stripes and circles. They are a shamanistic people. Their shamans can conjure up visions with their drumming and incense.

A nomadic tribe in the deserts of the south are the Juhanna, the fiercest desert nomads around the region surrounding the well of Harith, lands claimed in name by Turan. The Juhanna are honourable and fair foes. They do not like for women to speak boldly as men do; however, they incongruously seem to respect Ishtar.

In the steppe country to the northeast of Brythunia dwell a tribe of savage females who tolerate no men among them. Male children are killed. At the age of 15, girls are taken into the northern hills and left on their own for a year. The survivors are brought back to become full members of the tribe. These women are known as the tribe of warrior-sisters.

The Ashkuz horde is made up of the Budini tribe (the worst drunkards under the Everlasting Sky), the Geruls (who wear green facial tattoos and may be cannibal) and the Arpad tribe (noted horse-archers; the Blue Stag clan is part of this tribe). The Ashkuz horde bury their dead in a secret necropolis called the City of Mounds located two days' hard riding northwest of Sogaria.





## HYRKANIAN HISTORY

The history of Hyrkania and its peoples begins with the history of the Lemurians and, of course, the Cataclysm which sank their islands. The Lemurians lucky enough to escape the devastation of their homes were promptly enslaved by the mysterious non-Thurian civilisation dwelling on the east coast of Thuria. For thousands of years the Lemurians were beaten down and oppressed by their enslavers until they finally rose up and destroyed their masters in a savage massacre. By that time, the Lemurians were little more than beasts.

The kingdom of Khitai developed and traded with the new masters of coasts to the north, which resulted in their rise from the level of beasts and savages. As they pulled themselves out of their bestial nature toward becoming a new people, they adopted a new name: Hyrkanian. They moved slowly and inexorably westward, where the Hyborians were beginning their own ascent toward domination. Even as the remnants of their former masters conquered the pre-human giant-kings and founded Stygia, the Hyrkanian culture, aided by contact with Khitai, developed their own unique way of life. Finding themselves on the steppe, the Hyrkanians mastered the horse.

Empowered by their historic victory over their former masters, the Hyrkanians developed a warrior culture that expanded by conquest. Aboriginal peoples were either absorbed or utterly destroyed by the Hyrkanians, depending on their willingness to submit and pay tribute. At some point, probably around the area now known as Pathenia, the Hyrkanians began mixing with squat aborigines, creating a second racial type of Hyrkanian.

Eventually the Hyrkanians reached the Vilayet Sea. News of their coming no doubt filled the Hyborian tribes with no small amount of fear, as Hyperborea had likely been besieged with fleeing aborigine tribes of the north telling of the fierceness of this ravaging horde of pillaging horsemen.

To the south swarmed an extremely powerful tribe of Hyrkanians and swiftly they swung northward around the Vilayet and founded Turan. Other Hyrkanians swarmed around the north end of the Vilayet and collided

with the Hyperboreans in horribly violent clashes against their eastern outposts. The Hyperboreans managed to stem the rampaging tide of the Hyrkanians and continues to do so. Turan is still their greatest kingdom and the Hyrkanians continue their westward push, promising to bathe the west in red blood and brilliant fire as they trample the stone walls of the Hyborians.

## HYRKANIAN CREATURES

The Hyrkanian horses thrive on the steppe, as do the goats, sheep and cattle which the Hyrkanians herd. Other plains creatures include elephants, dire wolves, mammoths and various kinds of small game. A lot of the animals that live in Steppe are grazing animals, such as rabbits, mice and antelopes. Most of the herbivorous animals on the steppes form herds or dig burrows. The great grey apes can be found in the mountainous regions, including the ape man of Pathenia.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

The Hyrkanians might sponsor days-long marathon horse races across treacherous steppes and deserts; the adventurers might stumble across or participate in one of these. They may be in the way of victory, hired to stop certain of the racers from finishing or perhaps racers themselves.

Many Hyrkanians resent the Turanians and their expansionist policies. These Hyrkanians, who also despise the Turanian gods Erlik and Tarim, want a return to their old shamanistic ways. A charismatic Hyrkanian has risen up and gathered up several tribes of Hyrkanians to attack Turan. Characters might get swept up in this war on one side or another or may well be caught in the middle.

Characters could be sent to find the elusive ape man of Pathenia, a beast similar to the Yeti or the abominable snow man.

Any number of adventures could be devised around the Hyrkanians attacking Hyperborean, Brythunian, Shemite, Kothian or Khorajan cities. Perhaps a war between the Hyrkanians and the Zuagirs, with the *kozaks* caught in the middle, would be interesting.





# Iranistan

## Land of Gaudy Silks and Spired Helmets

Iranistan is only mentioned briefly in one of the Conan stories written exclusively by Robert E. Howard. The kingdom does not appear on the map created by Robert E. Howard but other artists, scholars and writers have found a place for it to the west of Vendhya and south of Turan, below the Colchian Mountains. Since Robert E. Howard says nothing about Iranistan other than that Kerim Shah originated from there, the information that follows draws extensively from the works of other Conan authors.

The people of Iranistan are described as being black haired and broad in the shoulder. They have a dark complexion and dark eyes. The people of Iranistan are of the same root stock as those of Ghulistan; they are likely a relatively hairy race. Various tribes of Iranistani vary slightly in description. Although the Iranistani population is composed of many distinct tribal units, much of their way of life is essentially the same.

### ATTRACTION IS A VIRTUE

Love of art is one common element among the Iranistani. Virtually everything the Iranistani make is attractive. Even the most common items, such as bags to carry produce to the bazaars, are embroidered and decorated. Even the animals are dressed in woven finery. Fine calligraphy and visual arts are displayed in the beautiful trimmings that adorn the buildings. The Iranistani respect both the arts and artists. Poetry and story-telling are time honoured traditions among the Iranistani.

### FAMILY IMPORTANCE

Beyond art, the vital importance of family is another common element found in the Iranistani culture. Families are extremely close-knit and a tribe is simply several branches of a single family led by a tribal chief whose word is law. Villages are built around the family unit. These are self-sufficient groups that follow a headman, usually the oldest male in the village, who in turn follows the tribal chief. In the larger cities, the headman is a wealthy landowner who is called a khan. The nomads call their headmen sheiks.

### HONOUR

Iranistani tribes have their own codes of honour that is similar across the entire nation, a code that teaches family honour, pride and hospitality. Family is more important than the individual. Family defines the individual. Personal honour is also family honour and vice versa. First and foremost is an Iranistani's immediate family. He is most loyal to his immediate family members, followed by other kin, remote clan members and the king. Pride is another word for personal honour for the Iranistani. Honour and pride define respect for oneself. Insults must be paid for, no matter how great or small. A man refers to an insult as 'something undesirable in my beard'.

### HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is also important to the Iranistani. Generosity is honourable, so food and drink must be given to anyone who comes to them in peace. All guests must be protected; the Iranistani take responsibility for all who are in their homes. Their honour depends on this. This is often called the bond of salt, or eating a man's salt. Once a person is a guest in an Iranistani's home, that person is safe.

### FATALISM

The Iranistani people, regardless of tribal affiliation, tend to be fatalistic, willing to follow whatever fate they believe their god, Asura, has given them. Fate is important to the Iranistani and they believe the gods command their destinies, both as individuals and as a nation. They do not get depressed at the idea of certain doom; they merely accept it.







## IRANISTANI CLOTHING TRADE AND ECONOMY

Iranistani males wear baggy silk or cotton pantaloons and long shirts or striped robes that hang nearly to the knees. These are belted at the waist with wide sashes and accompanied by embroidered vests. The sashes hold weapons and often bristle with multiple knives. Most adult males are heavily bearded. Many wear turbans with a long strip hanging down the back or large sheep-skin caps. Others, particularly the nomads, wear kaffiyehs, striped to identify their tribes. Many of the soldiers wear turbans wrapped around their spired steel caps. The women also wear baggy silken trousers and vests. Veils may also be worn but are not required. Jewellery is worn by many of the women. Armlets, bracelets, necklaces, tiaras, headbands and thin gold or platinum belts are common adornments. Women's hair is kept long and held in pony-tails by jewelled bands. Everything they wear is embellished and decorated. Iranistani men and women both wear soft shoes with upward-pointing toes. Everything the Iranistani wear, from the basest of clothing to armour and weaponry, is ornate and decorated.

Iranistan's major products include hand-woven rugs, embroidered clothing, silks, wool, cotton, nuts and fruits, wines, opium, hashish, various oils (petroleum and olive), coal, copper, talc, barites, sulphur, lead, zinc, iron ore, salt, slaves and precious and semiprecious stones. As a crossroads of trade between the Black Kingdoms, Turan, Stygia, the Golden Kingdoms, Ghulistan, Vendhya and Khitai, Iranistan has grown wealthy. Turan hungers after this trade and recently captured Zamboula in order to control (and profit from) trade coming from Iranistan headed to the West.

## THE MILITARY OF IRANISTAN

Iranistan does not have the central organisation required to sustain a national army. The king cannot always levy troops from his chiefs, while the chiefs do not have sufficient resources to manage more than a handful of troops. However, like the city-states of Corinthia, the tribes do work together for their mutual protection. They can raise a poorly coordinated army consisting mostly of nomads and raiders with a small backbone of professional soldiers drawn from the city garrisons. In battle, the Iranistani are brutal, hewing at a fallen foe until little of the remains are recognisable. The Iranistani are apt to use crossbows or javelins instead of bows and are not well regarded as marksmen.

The only professional soldiers of Iranistan are the King's Slingers. They knock enemies off their horses with slingstones so the demounted troops can be run over by the tribal cavalry units conscripted from the various nomad or hillman tribes of Iranistan. The King's Slingers are identified by the embroidery on their clothing and headdresses, which are worn over armour and helms. These professional troops fight with slings and scimitars. Their armour is typically mail hauberks and steel caps. Most have ranks in Ride but they are not cavalry and do not ride their horses into combat.

Other soldiers come from the tribes. They fight from horseback with bow and scimitar. In battle, each is expected to use bow, scimitar and horse to the utmost. Tribal soldiers wear leather jerkins and steel caps. Like the King's Slingers, the Iranistani soldiers identify their units through the embroidery on their clothing and headdresses, which are worn over armour and helms. The peacock in its pride is a common design among the Iranistani soldiery.



## IRANISTANI RELIGION

The northern Iranistani primarily worship the Vendhyan god Asura. This religion, born of enormously complex rituals derived from four great Vendhyan books, celebrates a cosmic order and a belief in cause and effect that extends beyond the physical realm in such a way that failure to perform the proper ceremonies or keep sworn oaths would result in a disturbance of the cosmic order. As a result of this sense of cosmic order and justice, Iranistani believe in a heaven, a hell and the judgment of souls.

Asura is the chief god of Iranistan and was imported from Vendhya as Iranistan struggled toward civilisation. The Asuran religion, with its strong belief in cause and effect, embraces an idea of fate, fate that becomes a grim duty. To the Iranistani, there is no fate but the fate Asura gives. Man has little say in the matter. The Iranistani have flavoured their worship of Asura with their own culture and their innate fatalism steers Iranistani scholars away from attempting to divine the future. As a result divinatory magic styles are not taught to Iranistani worshippers or priests in northern Iranistan. The southern Iranistani follow a variety of more shamanistic, primitive faiths and are not bound by this restriction.

Fire is an important tool for the Iranistani shaman/scholar, who lives in the hot climate of that shrouded kingdom. He tends to be restless and energetic, passionate and enthusiastic. He is hard to pin down and often gets carried away. He is usually a blacksmith and takes ranks in Craft (blacksmith).

## IRANISTANI GOVERNMENT

The government of Iranistan is nominally feudal. The king of Iranistan is theoretically supported by the tribal chiefs but this rarely proves to be the case in reality. The tribal lords, if they disagree with the king, simply leave the court and ignore him. If the king wants to enforce his will, he has to send his army out of Anshan to do it by force of arms. The Iranistani will not run from such a fight, for their code of honour prohibits such a thing. They are honour bound to protect what is theirs, be it land, women or personal honour. Royal disputes are settled in this way. Often the royal troops return with the offending chief's head or with the chief himself, who may then be hung in an iron cage for the birds to slay. However, the king does make decisions for the nation as a whole and protects the various chiefs who are in his good graces from outside invasions. He rarely intercedes on any one side in the case of an internal blood feud. Iranistani code permits wars of revenge.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF IRANISTAN

**Colchian Mountains** – The Colchians mark the border between Iranistan and Turan. Drujistan and the Gorge of Ghosts lie in the southern reaches of the mountains. Passes such as the Kasmar Pass allow for trade between Iranistan and Turan. This range collects moisture and feeds the Iranistan River.

**Iranistan River** – This river is the main watercourse of Iranistan. It drains into the ocean.

**Mountains of Gold** – These mountains form Iranistan's southern border. The Iranistani mine gold and other precious ores from these peaks, as well as pan gold from the rivers and run-offs. Iranistan often runs into conflict with Zembabwei over the rights to the mountains and the gold.

## IMPORTANT IRANISTAN CITIES AND TRIBAL LANDS

Villages in Iranistan are comprised of mud-brick houses (although the wealthy might have stone-walled homes) surrounded by a low wall. Nomads in Iranistan use tents instead of houses. The village economy is agricultural, based on whatever a village specialises in, such as grapes and wines, wheat and barley, or various nuts or teas. The men of the village work the fields and the women perform the household duties. Older children herd the animals, a form of wealth for the Iranistani, or help the men in the fields. The civilised villagers and the barbaric nomads have a symbiotic existence. The villagers allow the nomads' herds of goats and sheep to graze their fields after harvest and again before planting, because the animals' droppings help to fertilise the ground. The nomads purchase supplies from the villagers and the villagers buy wool, milk and slaves from the nomads.

**Anshan** – Anshan is the glittering capital of Iranistan and the Anshan tribal lands. Anshan is situated on the Anshan River on a tall mound. Anshan is the chief economic and cultural center of Iranistan, where the king of Iranistan rules. The city produces textiles and



wood products. Anshan was founded by traders who used the location to transfer goods from Vendhyan, Kosalan and the Black Kingdom caravans to Turan-bound caravans. The location proved prosperous and soon satellite villages sprung up, growing almonds, junipers, pistachios, grapes, wheat and barley. This spired city and its surrounding villages boast a population of over 166,660 Iranistani ruled by a powerful king. Kobad Shah was the ruler during the period described by *The Flame Knife* and could easily raise a heavily armoured infantry army in excess of 10,000, a pitifully small number compared to his stronger ancestors. Thus, Kobad Shah used mercenaries to bolster his army, especially kozaki or Hyrkanian cavalry. Kobad Shah's son, Arshak Shah, now rules Anshan. This proud city is distinctly civilised and holds to a civilised code of honour as befitting its cultivated culture. The uncouth nomads and outlying Iranistani tribes live by a much more barbarous code of honour.

**Bajkari** – The Bajkari are a nomad tribe of Iranistani allied with the Kaklani. They wear distinctively striped kaffiyehs. They are familiar with the coastlines of Iranistan and usually range to the east of the Kaklani. They travel with crossbowmen and most of them know how to swim.

**Drujistan** – Drujistan is the name given to the southern portion of the Ilbars Mountains, a haunted place where few could live. It lies beyond a deep canyon called the Gorge of Ghosts. Drujistan is a 'forbidding array of black crags and frowning cliffs, a wild, haglike chaos of broken black rock.' Drujistan is a day's ride south of the Kushafi country. The city of Yanaidar hides in its mountains.

**Ghaza** – Ghaza specialises in vineyards and wine, competing with Kyros, a city in Shem. It is located between the Iranistani River and the volcanic mountains of the west.

**Green Water** – Green Water is a caravan town a day's ride southeast of the Iranistan River. It is built around a large oasis and is a major caravan town leading into the Kharamun Desert. Green Water has a fine bazaar and many taverns. The town is surrounded by low, ruined walls and the oasis is surrounded by orchards. Green Water is built in a square pattern, with a large open plaza at its centre to serve as a marketplace and seat of government. A spectacular fountain can be found in the centre of the plaza.

**Kaklan** – The Kaklani tribes live in the southern

lands of Iranistan near the shore. Their robes and sashes are yellow with red stripes. They have a long-standing blood feud against the Zariri tribe. They number around 6,700. They are considered to be a very barbaric people who practice shamanism.

**Kasfir** – Kasfir is an Iranistani city with a well-known slave market. Only the most beautiful of slaves are sold here and the slave market pays a premium for such slaves to sell. Kasfir raiders and traders travel as far as Brythunia, Vendhya and Kush to gain the prettiest slaves. They will pay fathers for their daughters or steal them if the fathers will not sell them. Many Iranistani and Turanian harem-girls come from the flesh market of Kasfir. Kasfir has a population of more than 8,000 people.

**Kushaf** – Three days away from Anshan, Kushaf is the tribal land of the Kushafi in the Ilbars Mountains. Howard's original tale indicates that the chief commanded three hundred swordsmen. If one swordsman out of twenty people can be called into service for a quick army and if one out of a hundred is a permanent soldier, then this tribe has about 5,000 members among its various familial villages. Their villages are about a day's journey northward from Drujistan.

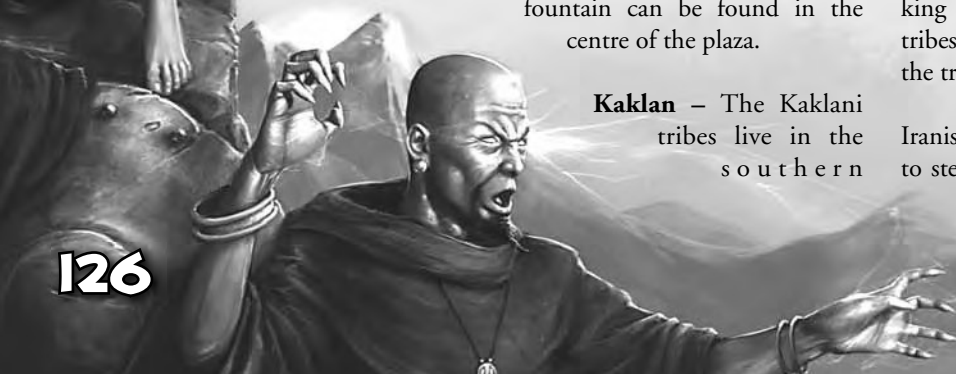
**Zariri** – The Zariri are an Iranistan tribe described by Sean A. Moore who hate the Kaklani with a passion that can only exist in the confines of a generational blood-feud. They are a nomadic tribe led by a sheik named Jaral. This tribe boasts of more than 3,000 members among its wandering people. They live in tents, primarily, and move from north to south and back again throughout the year. They are not as strong in battle as they would like and often hire foreign mercenaries to bolster their numbers when they feel the need to go to war.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Trading conflicts could provide interesting stories in Iranistan.

The various tribal holdings of the Iranistani are not always friendly toward the king and his dictates. The Iranistani king could send the characters to battle these wayward tribes or perhaps the characters are in a position to defend the troublesome tribe from the king.

Iranistan may decide to send a raiding party to Zamboula to steal goods from a particular caravan or as cover for a kidnapping.





# Keshan

## Barbaric Kingdom in the Eastern Hinterlands

Keshan was a barbaric kingdom lying in the eastern hinterlands of Kush where the broad grasslands merge with the forests that roll up from the south. The people were a mixed race, a dusky nobility ruling a population that was largely pure negro. The rulers – princes and high priests – claimed descent from a white race which, in a mythical age, had ruled a kingdom whose capital city was Alkmeenon. Conflicting legends sought to explain the reason for that race's eventual downfall, and the abandonment of the city by the survivors. Equally nebulous were the tales of the Teeth of Gwahlur, the treasure of Alkmeenon. But these misty legends had been enough to bring Conan to Keshan, over vast distances of plain, river-laced jungle, and mountains.

– *Jewels of Gwahlur*

Keshan is another of the northern Black Kingdoms, ruler of trade along a stretch of the Styx and lord of several smaller, tributary regions. Located to the east of the Styx, south of Amazon and Darfar and west of Punt, Keshan is a land of vast grassland prairies that merge to the south with great, humid forests. The people of semi-mythical Keshan are not friendly with unattached strangers.

The common Keshani are a tall, dark people. Those of the ruling class are lighter skinned. Both use the northern Black Kingdom tribesmen (Kushite) racial template described in *Conan the Roleplaying Game*; only their skin tones are different. They are horsemen and cattle-herders by nature and are not particularly suited for travelling among mountains and jungles. Indeed, the jungles to the southwest are forbidden to them.

Like the Kushites and the southern Black Kingdom tribesmen, the Keshani are an enthusiastic and excitable

people given to wearing their emotions proudly. For the most part, if a Keshani feels an emotion, he displays that emotion, even if the emotion is inappropriate to the situation. Keshani are quick to take offence, even to mild or accidental slights. These offences usually lead to a fight as violence is the first choice for resolution of a dispute. The Keshani way is to fight then make peace; such is social acceptance earned among the Keshani. As with many primitive cultures, the blood feud is a way of life in Keshan.

The Keshani are also great singers and are apt to break into song when bored. They will often sing to their favourite cows or bulls. They greet the dawn with song.

The number one cause of disputes among the Keshani is the same as anywhere else: the distribution of scarce resources. In the case of the common Keshani, this means most fights are over pasture control, water access and cattle ownership. In the case of Keshani nobles and priests, this means international trade routes – and cattle ownership.

### KESHANI CLOTHING

The black Keshani men wear little save plumed headdresses, animal-hide loin cloths and rings of ivory or precious metal in their noses, ears or lips. The women wear sandals and short skirts held up by thin girdles; just as often, they dispense with the skirts and just wear the girdles. The priests wear leopard skin tunics.

The rulers, lighter-skinned people descended from an unknown white race, dress similarly but with wealthier materials. The wealthy women, for example, add gold breast-plates, skirts of silk and jewelled girdles.







## SEX ROLES IN KESHAN

Sex roles in Keshan are similar to sex roles found throughout the Black Kingdoms. Men do the hunting and herding and women do the domestic labour and farming.

## LOVE AND MARRIAGE

When the eldest son of a family reaches marriageable age, he is allotted some cattle which he may use to 'purchase' a bride. A typical bride-price in Keshan is forty head of cattle. The next oldest son must wait until the family herd is back to its earlier numeric strength before he is allowed to wed. This exchange of cattle is usually handled in stages, with the full forty finally being delivered when the marriage is considered binding, or 'tied.' A marriage is not considered final until the bride is pregnant with the couple's third child. Thus, fertility in women is tied to the profitability of a family, for an infertile woman will never be fully married – and, thus, worth the full bride price.

When the bridegroom arrives with the first delivery of cattle (the exact number of head is determined through negotiation and/or combat but will almost always be considerably less than the full allotment of forty head), he takes up residence with the bride's family until the first child is born. After the first child is weaned, the bride and groom return to the husband's village, sending back another allotment of cattle. They usually build their own hut near the place the groom was raised. With each additional child, more cattle is sent to the bride's family. With the third pregnancy, the final delivery of cattle is made, the marriage is considered finally 'tied' and the woman is considered thereafter a member of the husband's clan. Divorce is possible but subject to some financial difficulties. If a man divorces his wife he receives nothing from the wife's family unless the divorce happens prior to the third child – then a portion of the bride-price must be returned. If the woman divorces the man, her family must return the full forty head of cattle, which may well earn the divorcing woman the enmity of her own clan, as well as that of the clan she is leaving.

An interesting facet to Keshani marriage is that when a woman marries a Keshani man, she essentially marries his entire age-group. Any married member of her husband's age-group in his clan is allowed to sleep

with her – and her husband may sleep with any of their brides. Children always belong to the husband of the pregnant woman, however. Sexual jealousy is unknown among the Keshani. Some Keshani enjoy allowing their guests a night with one of their wives.

## POLYGAMY

Keshani may marry as often as they wish and as often as they can afford to do so. Additional wives are usually given their own homesteads and the husband will travel from homestead to homestead. Polygamy is a sign of wealth. Most wives strive to have six children, so a man with many wives will have a lot of children. Girls provide labour around the homesteads and, when they are of marriageable age, cattle income. Boys watch their father's herds and eventually start their own families in nearby homesteads. If the father dies, the man's wives become the responsibility of one of the man's brothers.

## THE GHOST MARRIAGE

Another tradition among the Keshani is that of the 'ghost marriage.' The Keshani are patrilineal and for a man to die unmarried and without children means his line is finished forever and his ghost will be forever unhappy with no one to remember him. His ghost will strive to be remembered by the remainder of his clan and cause problems. Thus, the Keshani will arrange to buy a bride for his ghost. Since any member of the ghost's age set may sleep with his bride, she will become pregnant. Any children are considered the children of the husband, so in this manner, a 'ghost' may have descendants to remember him as an ancestor.

## SOCIAL STANDING

As with most of the Black Kingdoms, social standing in Keshan is a matter of age. The Keshani are organised socially into age-groups. Age groups are usually established every few years or so by way of a mass initiation. Young boys who have not undergone initiation are taught how to herd and care for the various animals, from the small animals on up to the valuable cattle.

When a boy reaches the age of 13, or comes within two years of that age, he asks his father (or someone in their father's age group) to be initiated. This request is almost always granted. The boys who are to be initiated leave their homes and paint their bodies white. They are taken into the wilderness by a member of an older age group and, for three months, are taught how to become warriors. At



the completion of this training, the boys shave their heads and undergo a circumcision ritual. At this point, the boys have entered into an age-group and bonded with the boys who underwent the rituals with them. All future rituals will be shared by the same group. This group, for now, are warriors. They defend the clan's territories and their families' herds and may be gathered by the king to form an army. They also raid their neighbours' cattle to increase their families' holdings. Those with access to Kushite horses will learn to ride.

Four years after their circumcisions, the entire age-group is gathered again to enter into a camp together for another initiation. They are allowed to grow their hair and spend around three years learning to hunt wild animals so they can protect the herds. When this training is complete, the youths, usually around 20 years old, are allowed to marry and own their own herds. Once married, they are allowed to sleep with the wives of anyone in their group.

Beyond the age groups, the only ways for a common Keshani to increase his prestige are to own a greater quantity and better quality cattle than his neighbour or to have more wives and children than his neighbour. These issues are still important among the ruling classes but so is having a lucrative trade route pass through their territory.

## SOCIAL MOBILITY

Unlike Kush and other Black Kingdoms with mixed races, the relations between the lighter-skinned rulers and the dark blacks are fairly harmonious. Blacks can rise in station, as evidenced by the black priests that served under Keshia's ruling high priest. The ruling class treat those stationed beneath them fairly and will intermarry with them. Social mobility is accomplished by aging, marriage and the acquisition of cattle.

## PROPERTY

### HUTS

The black people of Keshan dwell in bee-hive huts of thatch with circular mud walls. These houses are used most during the rainy season (May through September). Grain is dried on scaffolds. In the dry season, men usually sleep with the cattle in shelters made from grasses. They move with the animals, following the grass as the water recedes on the meadows. Surrounding the villages and the cattle are dried cow dung fires, the smoke of which drives off insects. The ash from the fires also functions as an insect repellent, so animals and people are often powdered in it.

## LIVESTOCK

Livestock is the measure of wealth and prosperity among the Keshani. Many Keshani own song bullocks, castrated bulls with shaped and decorated horns. These animals are well treated by the Keshani. The Keshani who own song bullocks groom them and sing songs to them as well, treating them as though they were close personal friends.

Cattle are the life and passion of the Keshani commoner. The cattle are owned in common by Keshani families. The men herd the animals and the women milk them. Cattle are the source of most Keshani conflicts and the resolution of most of the conflicts in the form of fines.

In addition to cattle, the Keshani keep sheep, goats and dogs. Sheep and goats are used as money in most places throughout Keshan.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

The Keshani are horsemen and cattle-herders. Keshan trades with its tributary regions, as well as with Zembabwei, Darfar, and Amazon. It is possible that some slight trade with Stygia or Shem exists, although most northern countries consider Keshan to be a mythical nation. Punt's hostility toward Zembabwei has made trade with that nation problematic. Most trade with Keshan involves cattle, sheep and goats. Since cattle are considered communal to the family, anything purchased with cattle is communal property thereafter. So if a family buys an Akbitanan scimitar with a cow, that scimitar belongs to the family as a whole. Sheep and goats are individually owned, so are more readily used for trading than cattle.

During the rainy season, the crops are usually planted. Crops include sorghum, nuts and sesame. Sorghum is the staple cereal crop. After harvest, the people spend their time repairing their houses and brewing beer. Harvest is usually done by October and the dry season has begun by then as well. By November, the men move away from the villages as the cattle seek water and new grasses to graze. As the waters recede, fishing becomes more prominent because the fish become trapped in pools on the meadows, easy to catch by hand or spear.





April is a time of hunger for the Keshani, who are reduced to fishing along the rivers, eating wild fruits and finishing the last of their grain stores. The heat is withering by this time of year. In a good year, the rains come in May. In a dry year, the rains do not fall until June.

## THE MILITARY OF KESHAN

All Keshani males are raised to be warriors. The traditional weapons of the Keshani include finely honed and crafted iron-tipped spears and the fearsome iron *kolbeta*, which is basically a sharpened and bladed iron club not unlike a hockey stick in configuration (damage as a battle axe). The Keshani do not fight with bows and arrows, believing that if one is brave enough to kill, then one must be brave enough to push the weapon into his enemy with his own hands. To kill from a distance is a coward's way.

In war, women wait along the sidelines to help the wounded and collect the spears.

## RELIGION IN KESHAN

Keshan maintains an order of ordained priests instead of traditional shamans. This order of priests is a remnant from the culture that descended from ancient Alkmeenon. This priesthood is often corrupt but many of them honestly believe in their grim gods.

The priests have deified the unnamed white race that founded Alkmeenon, with Yelaya at the height of that hierarchy because of the physical 'evidence' of her divinity. Her body does not decay and the priests record hearing her voice as a true oracle. This deification may account for the lack of hostility between aboriginal black and the mixed-race rulers – they have the blood of gods in them.

The deification of Yelaya indicates some form of ancestor worship consistent with some forms of primitive shamanism. Rituals were probably performed to harmonise relations between one's ancestors and the dark jungle gods, smoothing the way for the ancestors to be safe and to bring about prosperity

to the family. The high priest's job is to ensure the welfare of Keshan as a whole with his ritualistic magic. The sacrifice of cattle via spear thrusts is believed to put the people in communion with the ancestors. Few Keshani rituals are complete without the sacrifice of a cow, bull or ram.

Many other disgusting and bestial gods are acknowledged and worshipped by the people of Keshan along with Yelaya; at one point in Howard's story, the Keshani priests worship at the foot of toad-like, repulsive idol. Gwahlur is one of those dark jungle gods worshipped by the Keshani, a king of darkness that was thrown down by the other darkly powerful gods. Gwahlur's glowing teeth were given unto men for safe-keeping.

Priests wear leopard skin tunics and are honoured for their morality and spirituality. They may offer sanctuary to anyone and no Keshani will violate that protection, even if in a blood feud. The priests also have the power to end blood feuds by negotiating cattle prices.

Keshani religious beliefs include the idea that their ancestors can influence the living and that the ghosts of the murdered will haunt their murderers. When a Keshani kills another man, it is believed part of the dead man's spirit attaches itself to the killer. A Keshani will neither eat nor drink until he has been spiritually cleansed by a leopard-skin wearing priest after he has killed another man. Keshani will rarely attack women or children and will only kill one in self-defence; if he kills a woman, he has to pay her price to the husband or father, which is usually around forty head of cattle. That is a steep price to kill someone, so few Keshani attack women.

## KESHAN'S GOVERNMENT

Keshan is ruled by dusky-skinned nobles who claim descent from the people of ancient Alkmeenon, an older and more advanced civilisation. The head of these nobles is the King of Keshan. Law is determined by the nobility and priests. If a matter is deemed too grave for the priests, the Oracle of Alkmeenon is consulted.



## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF KESHAN

Keshan is a hot, tropical land. It is filled with hills and its central region is mountainous, with steep escarpments. In the south, the land is hot jungle. The land is mostly grassland. To the east lies Punt and Zembabwei. To the west is the River Styx. A large underground river flows from Punt toward the Styx.

**Boroko Marshlands** – The Boroko Marshlands is a swampy region in northeast Keshan. It is peopled by the mud-men of Boroko, who wear masks of dried mud.

**Grand Gorge of the River Styx** – The Grand Gorge of the River Styx is a canyon complex, impassable in the north due to cataracts and whirlpools. The canyons are noted for ragged spires of multiple colours, sheer cliffs and deep ravines.

## IMPORTANT CITIES IN KESHAN

Most of Keshan's 'cities' are nothing more than tribal villages built around herds of cattle. The only real city is Keshia.

**Keshia** – Keshia is the capital of Keshan. The royal city is nothing more than a swarm of thatched huts crowded around a mud wall that encloses a palace of stone, mud and bamboo. It has a population of 6,549 people. Storytellers in the market squares love to tell tales of the treasures to be found in legendary Alkmeenon, jewels not to be duplicated in the world: rubies, emeralds, diamonds, a throne made entirely of gold and the loot of an ancient world. Keshia trades with Shem via an overland route. The Keshans like dancing-girls from the north and the Shemites are only too happy to provide them.

**Alkmeenon** – Alkmeenon is the ruined city of the ancient founders that houses the legendary treasure known as the Teeth of Gwahlur. The Oracle of Alkmeenon, Princess Yelaya, is said to make pronouncements and divinations here. Princess Yelaya was the last ruler of Alkmeenon and,

when she died, her youthful and beautiful body did not decay. Her spirit is the supposed oracle. Priests of old went to her to learn wisdom but the custom has died off since one priest tried to steal the Teeth and brought doom upon himself. The priest Gorulga reinstated the tradition. The city is located in the south-western corner of the kingdom amid uninhabited jungle that is taboo to common men. The royal palace of Alkmeenon is surrounded by great cliffs, a vast natural amphitheatre three or four miles in diameter, with a couple of secret passes that only the priests of Keshia know. One of the secret passes is on the south side of the valley where is a broad pool at the base of the cliffs. Under the surface of the water is a cave mouth that enters the inner city of Alkmeenon. The city itself lies outside the cliffs, swallowed by the jungle. Jungle has also claimed the inner palaces and lotus trees that grow among the south wall of the cliffs near the avenue that leads to the palace. An unhealthy underground river of frigid, black water passes beneath the palace and the Teeth of Gwahlur, the wealth of an epoch, have fallen into that darksome, cold river.

## KESHANI HISTORY

Keshani history is shrouded by the mists of time. The dusky-skinned ruling class claim descent from a mythical white race that ruled from Alkmeenon. The Conan saga is silent about the identity of this mythical white race; they could be of Iranistani stock, they could be Khari or Stygian, they could be a remnant race that survived the Cataclysm or they could be a race unrecorded by the extant history.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

For those involved in mercenary campaigns, war between Keshan and Punt would make for an exciting extended campaign. Perhaps Zembabwei could get involved on one side or the other. The characters may have to work as diplomats to sway the Zembabwan kings to support their chosen side. It is known that the Zembabwans want the Teeth of Gwahlur.







# Khauran

In the first place, Khauran is a kingdom of no great size, one of the many principalities which at one time formed the eastern part of the empire of Koth, and which later regained the independence which was theirs at a still earlier age. This part of the world is made up of these tiny realms, diminutive in comparison with the great kingdoms of the West, or the great sultanates of the farther East, but important in their control of the caravan routes and in the wealth concentrated in them.

— *A Witch Shall Be Born*

Khauran is one of many small principalities that won independence from Koth. Robert E. Howard names but a couple of these tiny realms. Khauran, like many of these little states, controls portions of the trade routes into Koth and derives much of its wealth from those caravans. Its domination over the trade routes keeps Koth from reacquiring the kingdom as part of its empire. Too much turbulence in that land might well be bad for business. Still, Khauran fears usurpation by Koth or Shem, as it is a small kingdom without much of a military presence.

Khauran is a civilised kingdom, one that does not like scandal among its rulers, nor does it appreciate wild debauches, despite its state religion. The Khaurani believe in marriage and its sanctity and expect its rulers to act in a regal manner. Intoxication is also frowned upon.

## KHAURANI CLOTHING

Male Khaurani wear hose and shirts; otherwise the Khaurani dress in a manner consistent with Koth, although individual fads and fashions occasionally rise. Beards are popular in Khauran.

The women wear their hair piled high, often wrapped around cones or other head-gear to give the illusion of volume. The wealthy weave pearls and jewellery into their hair as well. Earrings of pearls or gems are also common and the women lacquer their eyelashes to make them glisten and appear longer. Necklaces are often worn around their necks. The women wrap bandeaus of silk around their upper bodies. They wear heavy girdles that support their silken skirts. The skirts are worn long and voluminous, slit up the sides to reveal flashes of leg. Their sandals are upturned at the toe and sport lifted heels.

## SOCIAL STANDING

The ruling class of Khauran are warlike and valorous Hyborians. The aboriginal common people are not warlike at all. Only Hyborians are permitted the possession of arms, so the commoners are wholly dependant upon the city and its soldiers for protection.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

Many caravan routes pass through Khauran. One such caravan route has the ominous name of the 'deadman's journey.' This route passes through the southern deserts





and around the bend in the River Styx into the Black Kingdoms. It is a deadly route, passing through several hostile territories. Slaves from Zimbabwe and Punt are the primary goods traded on that route. Another trade route runs to Shadizar.

Although trade is important, Khauran's 'horn of plenty' comes from its abundant crops of fruit and grain. Although Khauran does not have great plantations like Zingara or stock farms like the mightier Hyborian nations, the tiny fields and vineyards of Khauran produce three or four crops per year. The common villagers of Khauran, of mixed aboriginal stock, are agriculturalists.

## **KHAURANI RELIGION**

Despite the ruling caste's Hyborian heritage, Khauran's primary religion is centred around the fearsome goddess Ishtar, the daughter of Anu, instead of Mitra. Ishtar is worshipped as the Queen of Heaven and a goddess of sexuality, fertility and war. She is usually depicted as having wings and is symbolised by the lion. She is a Shemite goddess, said to have been birthed full-grown from a stone cracked open by a bolt of green lightning on the site where Asgalun now stands.

Ishtar's shrines and temples are exotic, lavish and ornate, in the fashion of the East, with bright colourful decorations. Still, the religion is western, probably descended from frenetic Ashtoreth and Derketo-style worship rites, which are restrained somewhat but still exotic and sensual enough to be attractive to worshippers. Although Ishtar does not ask for human sacrifices, animal sacrifices are often part of her fertility rituals. Her temples include ivory idols and she is believed to inhabit those idols. The sensuous idols are cared for by the priests and priestesses. They often dress and paint the idols daily depending on the ritual needs of the day or season.

As a fertility goddess, Ishtar's followers believe the heavens fertilise the earth by way of rain, the sky god's seed. Her rites are conducted as languid orgies in which cosmic congress is ensured by mortal enactments of the union of the gods. A priestess is believed to embody Ishtar during certain sensual rituals and bestow her favours on her followers to ensure prosperity and fertility. Sacred prostitutes probably aid in the rituals. The priests of Ishtar represent her sons and lovers and also aid in the rituals; if a woman is thought to be infertile, the priests attempt to impregnate her to give her a divinely-blessed child. If the various rituals of Ishtar are not followed, the worshippers fear that crops will wither and the urge to mate by man or beast will dwindle away.

As the Queen of Heaven, Ishtar rules the cosmos and the stars, for these things govern human behaviour. The Zodiac is her girdle and divination is an important aspect of her religion, practiced in the courts of Khauran. Magic, often in the forms of charms or celestial horoscopes, is also worked by her priests and priestesses. Law, in lands watched over by Ishtar, is a form of magic and the breaking of laws is tantamount to sacrilege. Thus the priests and priestesses of Ishtar work with the kings and queens of Khauran, training people to follow the law as a religious duty.

The religion believes in an afterlife. Hell is hot and guarded by seven gates and legions of demons. The damned there are tormented.

## **GOVERNMENT OF KHAURAN**

Khauran is ruled by the Ashkaurian dynasty, a matriarchal line of nobility. Currently it is ruled by Queen Taramis, who is growing old and wise. She is a well-regarded ruler, almost worshipped by the Khaurani. She is 'famed for her virtue, justice, and tranquillity.' Taramis is the daughter of Queen Ialamis. The queen dresses conservatively, so that only her face, palms and fingers are unhidden by the shimmering satin and yielding velvet of multiple skirts and royal robes. This dynasty is cursed, both with promises of a succession of evil witches and through the brevity of life for those who choose to be consorts to the queens.

## **MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF KHAURAN**

The countryside of Khauran is varied. Most of it is meadows, fields and vineyards. Cattle is the primary herd-animal. A river separates the grasslands from the desert. In the grasslands to the north and west, villages dot the landscape. Across the river, to the south and east, Khauran is sandy desert, eventually giving way to the deserts of Shem and the Hyrkansians, where the Zuagirs of Shem and other tribesmen hold sway. Khauran is a fertile land on the north and west side of the river and its crops yield at least three harvests a year. The rich farmlands of Khauran are pleasant and the people are generally happy, apt to wave at passing caravans as they go about their work.





**The Oasis of Akrel** – The oasis of Akrel, located in the deserts east of Khauran and west of Turan, is where Conan hides Khaurani rebels during the events of *A Witch Shall Be Born*. The story does not say clearly whether the oasis lies to the east of the city of Khauran, yet still within the borders of the principality of Khauran, or if it lies east of the entire kingdom in the deserts fought over by the Shemites, the Turanians and the Zuagirs.

**The Khaurani River** – The Khaurani River, which divides the nation, is a fork of what becomes the Zaporoska River to the Turanians. What the Khaurani name the river is never given, so for ease of use, the fork is named here the Khaurani River.

## IMPORTANT KHAURANI CITIES

There is but one city of any size in Khauran and it shares the name of the kingdom. Outside of that city, there are villages, hamlets and individual farms and homes. The city-dwellers are of Hyborian descent but the villagers and peasants of the land are not. They descend from native tribes that lived in the area before the Hyborians conquered it. In addition to the Hyborian Khaurani and the aboriginal peasants who till the soil of the fields and vineyards, nomad tribes such as the Ekinari live in the deserts beneath the river in the southwest.

**Khauran** – The city of Khauran is the only city of size in the entire kingdom. It is a walled city of gleaming towers and marbled palaces. A gorgeous temple to Ishtar is on the main square across from the palace. Inns and taverns abound, catering to the caravan traffic that is the city's lifeblood.

## KHAURANI HISTORY

Khauran was once part of Shem and was populated by an indigenous people of uncertain origin. During the age of Acheron, as Koth was forming out of individual principalities, Khauran was formed. It existed for many decades as an individual nation but eventually was absorbed by Koth. Later, probably after the fall of Acheron, the principality again fought for its freedom and won it.

In order to gain assurance of continued independence and prosperity, one of the early queens of Khauran mated with a demon. The demonic blood still runs through the veins of the royal family and once per century twins are born, one with a crescent birth mark on her bosom, the other without. The crescent-marked child is named Salome, after the first witch of Khauran and is usually slain. The demon is apparently a jealous godling, for those who marry the queens of Khauran seem to lead short lives thereafter.

## CREATURES OF KHAURAN

Jackals, desert wolves and vultures are common animals for this area. The land is fairly settled and patrolled, which keeps most of the larger, more dangerous animals out.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

A certain statue of Ishtar, renowned for its healing properties, has been sent to Stygia to help a member of the ruling caste there recover from an illness. The caravan carrying the statue may have been captured by Zuagirs or Shemites and the adventurers are charged with recovering it. The adventurers could be the ones transporting the statue to Stygia, or they may be returning it to Khauran. Perhaps the adventurers are hired to steal the statue away from the caravan, either by enemies of the ill Stygian or by devotees of Ishtar who want the statue for their own temple in Koth.

During the reign of Salome, several decades gone, many Khaurani were sold to Turanian slavers. Perhaps a few have managed to gain their freedom and now seek to return to their home. Perhaps they wish vengeance against Taramis, not realising it was her sister Salome who was the one responsible for their slavery.



# Khitai

## Land of the Ancients

Khitai in the Far East is little known to the Hyborians yet is probably the most important and famous kingdom of that region. Robert E. Howard continually refers to it as shrouded in jungles. To most Hyborians, this is an alien land with unfathomable people. Even the Turanians find them unnervingly inscrutable. The people in general are called 'kindly' by Yag-Kosha but the few who leave Khitai to wander the West are rarely described so generously.

Khitai is an insular kingdom; few ever leave it. The common people are taught that the *cheng-li*, the white people who live outside the Great Wall, are cannibals. Their first reaction to such people is likely to be fear. The ones who do leave are scholars and sorcerers. That they are yellow-skinned worshippers of bizarre gods and demons is not to be doubted, however. Their eyes have a typical Oriental look and their hair is dark. The priests have their heads shaven. The knowledge and traditions of these people are esoteric and ancient. They have a taste for spectacle and tradition. The Khitan people are also noted for being extremely knowledgeable and wise, well-versed in ancient lore and folk-tales.

The Khitans live in bamboo huts with flaring, shingled roofs.

### JADE AND ART

Nobles wear ceremonial articles and personal ornaments of exquisite craftsmanship, usually in designs such as coiled dragons, trumpeting elephants, charging tigers and crouching bears. Jade is especially valuable to the Khitans. It is, to them, the essence of heaven and Earth combined. Almost all items used in Khitan rituals are made from jade. It is more valuable than gold. If the Emperor sends a noble or scholar on a royal mission or duty, he often gives the noble or scholar a certain jade tablet to prove that he doing divinely charged work.

Nobles often inscribe orders to their officials on bronze bowls. Great military or diplomatic conquests are likewise commemorated in bronze.

### KHITAN CLOTHING

The people dress in long, high-necked silk jackets and embroidered trousers. The women fix their hair in complicated coifs. Swords are forbidden to the common people, so they have learned to fight bare-handed in amazing flurries of violence, using esoteric techniques handed down through familial lines. The nobles dress similarly but their dress is made out of more elaborate materials. Silk and cotton are common materials for clothing.

### SOCIAL STANDING

Khitai has a long-standing and rich tradition in nobility and class hierarchy. At the top of the hierarchy is the emperor, called the *Huangdi*, who is backed by seven counsellors. Some believe the Emperor is but a figurehead and the seven counsellors make the decisions. The seven counsellors are three *huang* (god-kings) and four *di* (sage-kings). The emperor title is passed from father to son, although not necessarily to the oldest son. Also, Khitan politics allow for changes in dynasty so emperors can also be replaced by successful rebel leaders. Generally, royal or official titles from one dynasty are not carried over to the next dynasty. Otherwise, titles are hereditary for up to 26 generations.

Beneath the emperor are the nobles, or *Zhubou*. The nobles are ranked as follows: *gong* (prince); *mingong* or *kung* (duke); *hou* (marquis); *peh* (earl); *bo* (count); *tszi* (viscount); and *nan* (baron). If a noble actually governs a place, the place name is also in his title. The eldest son of a consort inherits the title from his father, retaining the same rank. Other sons of consorts, as well as from concubines and mistresses, are given titles one rank lower than their fathers. These nobles rarely have a place name in their titles. Dukes are required to render assistance to the emperor in an emergency. Many of these titles are granted





for military merits, not blood-line merits. Thus it is easier for a Khitan to multi-class into noble than it is for most peoples. Nobles practice horsemanship and military skills by hunting. Like most Khitans, the nobles delight in ritual. The elite of Khitan society loves music, especially bells and chimes. The people honour familial relationships above all, using family to maintain social status distinctions.

Beneath the nobles are the gentry, the *Oing*. These are often court officials assigned to the nobles, generals (*qingche duwei*), commanders (*qi duwei*), officers (*yunqiwei*) and knights (*enqiwei*). The lesser sons of barons are also in this rank. Any member of the nobility or gentry can be called *gongzi*.

Ranking beneath the gentry are the gentlemen. The gentlemen, or *Daifu*, are often sages or physicians. Scholars with the Noble Blood feat are usually of this rank. Also, the lesser sons of the gentry are of this rank. Court officials assigned to the gentry are also members of this rank. Members of the *Daifu* may also be merchants and servants. Khitan caravans trade with Kusan, Turan, Stygia, Meru, Vendhya and Iranistan. Their caravans are loaded with jade, cloth-of-gold, silk, lotus blossoms, domesticated jungle animals, gold, silver, spices, charms, amulets, porcelain figures and vases and many other works of Oriental art. These caravans and a few exiled Khitans are Khitai's only contact with the West.

Below the gentlemen are the yeomen, or *Shi*, who are minor court officials assigned to the gentlemen, as well as the lesser sons of gentlemen. Often this rank is awarded to commoners who perform valorous deeds for the emperor or the kings. The *Shi* are farmers and craftsmen directed by the nobility. The farmers work land owned by the nobles and must give up a ninth of their produce to the government. The craftsmen make weapons, tools and clothing as directed by the nobility.

Any female member of the nobility, save for the wives of the emperor or kings (who are called queens), may be called princess or *gongzhu*. She may also incorporate any place name she is associated with into her title. Even women can become generals in Khitan culture. The spouse of a princess, unless he has a title of his own, is given the noble title of *fuma*.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

Khitan caravans trade with Kusan, Turan, Stygia, Meru, Vendhya and Iranistan. Their caravans are loaded with jade, cloth-of-gold, silk, lotus blossoms, domesticated jungle animals, gold, silver, spices, charms, amulets, porcelain figures and vases and many other works of Oriental art. These caravans and a few exiled Khitans are Khitai's only contact with the West. Khitan steel is weak, so quality steel may be something the Khitans seek in trade. Evidence also exists that Khitai is a powerful maritime nation and has visited the Unknown West.

## THE MILITARY OF KHITAI

Khitan kings often find it necessary to go to war. When not fighting wars, Khitai's mighty armies either sit on the border to await a Hyrkanian attack or patrol the interior of the nation, collecting taxes and suppressing anyone rebelling against the God Emperor. Khitai arranges its troops in regular and predictable arrangements determined more by tradition than anything else. Infantry and archers are arranged in formations consisting of three 100-man companies, one each to the left, right and centre.

Archers are barely trained conscripts from the peasant class (so many have one or more ranks of commoner) who are forbidden to see their families for four years. Archers are equipped with bows and arrows, as well as infantry knives and broadswords. Bows are made of cattle sinew and horn and are the height of a man. The feathered, wood-shaft arrows are half the size of the bow. They are tipped with stone, bone, antler, shell or bronze. Archers wear light armour. They use their bows until the opponent closes. Then they sling their wicker shields from their backs and continue the fight with their knives and swords. Their shields are useless after five rounds of combat.

Infantrymen are unarmoured and wear high-necked, padded jackets and embroidered trousers. Infantry men are equipped with small bronze knives, sharpening stones, yard-long wood-hafted bronze halberds or spears and leather or wicker shields backed with silk on wooden frames, usually decorated with a tiger motif. Their shields are useless after five rounds of combat. Almost all soldiers have a few levels in commoner. Characters playing a Khitan infantryman should realise that their characters will not be trained to become experts at their weapons. They are fodder and little else.





The Khitan cavalry is also poorly equipped and trained but numerous. They use broadswords and large shields in battle and wear high-collared, embroidered coats with raw silk padding and steel caps. They lose three soldiers for every nomad slain in a typical battle. These characters spend skill points on Ride and Handle Animal, as well as Mounted Combat. They are at a supreme disadvantage against the Hyrkanians because they do not practise mounted archery. They attempt to make up for this disadvantage through sheer weight of numbers.

The most fortunate of Khitan soldiers are the engineers, soldier-scholars who use remarkable war machines in combat. Most of these are even skilled alchemists. They are trained to fight with staves and fire weapons. They wear high-collared red coats with black embroidery and peaked black caps.

Chariots are used in companies comprised of five squadrons. Each chariot squadron has five chariots. The chariots are used as transportation and archery platforms and rarely have any real presence on battlefields. Usually they are seen as honour guards or in parades. Charioteers have small bronze knives, sharpening stones, yard-long wood-hafted bronze halberds and leather or wicker shields on wooden frames, usually decorated with a tiger motif. Charioteers wear slightly heavier armour than archers and infantrymen and wear light helmets secured with elaborate bows.

Commanders and other officers wear intricate, lacquered armour, complete with tassels and flaring helmets secured with complicated bows. This armour design has an exotic, sinister look to Westerners. The armies of Khitai use colourful flags to indicate the locations of units. Unit commanders have similar flags attached to their armour, jutting up over their helmets. Individual soldiers do not wear distinguishing identification.

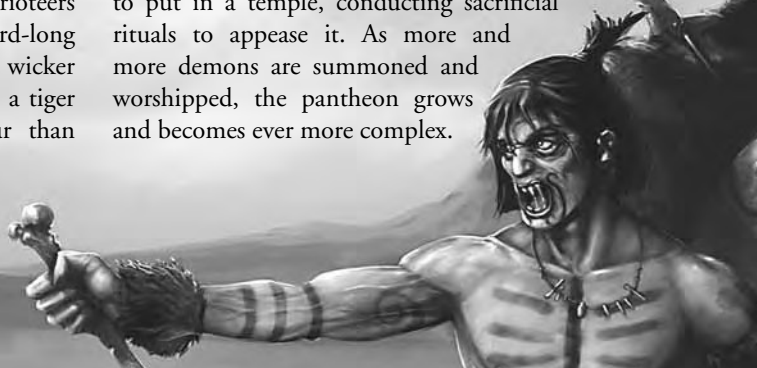
Other soldiers, not members of the military, are persons trained to defend the temples via hand-to-hand combat. Some form cults of assassins trained in stealth and the martial arts. They take unarmed fighting feats, Stealthy and similar feats. Since only nobility or members of the military may wield weapons, these soldiers must learn to fight without swords.

## KHITAN RELIGION

The Khitans hold to many strange beliefs and bizarre superstitions. One example is the legend that death must answer any question put to her by a man with courage enough to grasp and hold her. Khitan temples serve as sorcerous schools, teaching knowledge of all sorts. The emphasis on music in Khitan temples suggests some form of shamanism. The worship of Yogah of Yag also indicates that the Khitans like to worship beings they feel are real.

The Khitans believe the universe has three interconnected divisions: the heavens, the earth and the underworld. Each person has two souls: one soul is forever linked to his descendants and the other goes into the underworld after death to continue life. Much of Khitan worship revolves around ancestor veneration, spirit and demon worship and blood sacrifices. Khitans believe that any serious request of the gods, spirits or demons must be accompanied by blood. Also, music plays a large role in their sorcerous religious rites.

The sorcerers of Khitai probably summon to the earth their dark gods so that they can be worshipped in person. In many of the stories, cities founded by easterners have dark gods living in nameless pits. Salome, in *A Witch Shall Be Born*, is educated in Khitai and when she takes over Khauran conjures up Thaug to put in a temple, conducting sacrificial rituals to appease it. As more and more demons are summoned and worshipped, the pantheon grows and becomes ever more complex.





The Khitan pantheon, rumoured to host more than nine thousand gods, is mysterious to the lands of the West. Doubtless even the strange, shaven headed priests of Paikang who talk to faceless demons in the lost jungles know the names of all nine thousand gods, so only a few are discussed below. Those seeking more information about Khitan religion can find it in *Faith and Fervour*.

**Cheng-Ho** – Cheng Ho is the moon-goddess of Khitai.

**Yogah** – Yogah is a strange, elephant-headed star-being from green-breasted Yag who dreams in the great blue vastness of Space. His memory is worshipped still as a god in Khitai. He is probably a god of magic and sorcerous knowledge.

**Yun** – Yun is the main god worshipped in the jungle temples. Shaven headed priests conduct his ceremonies using the music of chimes and bells.

## KHITAN TOMBS

Tombs in Khitai are built below ground with walls and floors of rammed earth. The tombs are often huge, measuring around 60 feet long, 50 feet wide and 40 feet deep. At the bottom of this shaft a small pit is made with ledges of pounded earth. An eight foot tall wooden chamber is built to house the coffin. The Khitan kings are buried with hundreds of bronze artefacts, jades, bone objects, ivory carvings, pottery and cowry shells. The artefacts include mirrors, ceremonial vessels, bells and weapons. Men, women, children and dogs are sacrificed for the benefit of the tombs' occupants and buried with them. Their bodies litter the walkway to the tomb. They are sacrificed by beheading in a gruesome ritual. The skulls are not placed with the bodies. Instead they are stacked in the centre of the tomb facing the wooden chamber

## KHITAN GOVERNMENT

Khitai is ruled by a God-Emperor as part of a dynasty. The last known dynasty is the Yah Dynasty. The Games Master should decide if Yah Chieng was the last of his dynasty or if it continued after his death in *Return of Conan*. The governmental system in Khitai is similar to that of the Hyborian nations in that it is feudal but instead of being built around the manor the city-state is the basic political unit in Khitai. Khitai is a land of volatile politics and the God-Emperor can rarely control

his powerful *Gongs*, who swear Allegiance to the God-Emperor and are required to follow his edicts and support the emperor with an army if desired. The *Gongs*, usually ministers or generals of high merit, often own the largest tracts of land, which they divide into smaller units for families who are loyal to the *Gongs*. These families become *Hóu*. The *Hóu* divide the land further among families loyal to them, calling them *Bó* and so on. Each of these noble families can pass their titles to their heirs, making them all hereditary titles once earned. The taxes flow upwards until they reach the God-Emperor, who is then expected to use the money to build walls around the cities, construct roads and dams and maintain an army. Khitai's economy is based on slavery, silk and bronze.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF KHITAI

Robert E. Howard always refers to Khitai as being tangled amid dark jungles; therefore, Khitai must be located in a tropical or subtropical region. *Return of Conan* gives further details on Khitai. The west is dominated by desert and steppe. This gives way to stagnant swamps, vast bogs and dank marshes. The tall reeds become bamboo forests which then give way to tangled jungles. These jungles, which hide innumerable ruins, become rolling plains peopled by saffron-skinned herdsmen. This land is bisected by the Great Wall of Khitai. More grassy plains give way again to humid jungles. These jungles, however, are not as trackless as the previous ones. Paths cut by human hand can often be found in them. It takes an average of eight days to cross this thick jungle to Paikang.

**Kusan** – The Oriental kingdom of Kusan lies to the east of Khitai. Kusan is a satellite kingdom to Khitai. It is friendly to Turan and has a trade agreement with that nation. Its capital city goes by the same name. King Shu is the ruler of Kusan.

**Mountains of Night** – This range of mountains can be found in western Khitai.

## IMPORTANT KHITAN CITIES

Khitai is a huge land with many cities and villages. Most, like Shoulun, are too small to describe in any detail. Many villages and towns are centres of commerce and industry where intricate art and ornaments are created. Others are religious centres where only priests dwell.



**Cho-Hien** – Cho-Hien is a Khitain city-state on the border with Kusan.

**Cho-Yang** – According to Roy Thomas, Cho-Yang is the chief port-city of Khitai. The Tower of Heaven, a tall, thin structure, dominates the city. It can be seen from a distance out to sea.

**Hiong-Nu** – Hiong-Nu is a northern Khitan city-state. It was sacked at one time by the Hyrkanians.

**Kathai** – Kathai is a city-state of western Khitai. Kathai is rich in jade. The dome of its palace is inlaid with ivory.

**Paikang** – Purple-towered Paikang is the fairest of all Khitan cities. Hosts of glittering warriors shield it from the warlike ambitions of its neighbours, Shu-chen and Ruo-gen. Built in the midst of ‘vine-festooned jungles of bamboo,’ the city is ancient and fabulous. Every year, the Yah clan hold a festival in Paikang in honour of their conquest of the city. This festival is called the Dance of the Lions. The God-Emperor of Khitai rules from here.

**Ruo-gen** – Ruo-gen is a Khitain province located to the south of Paikang.

**Shaulun** – Shaulun is a town to the west of Paikang.

**Shu-Chen** – Shu-Chen is a Khitain rival to Paikang. It is located to the north of Paikang.

**Umi-No-Mae** – Umi-No-Mae is the only port city east of Rou-gen.

**Yag-yu** – Yag-yu is a province in southern Khitai. Its people are noted warriors.

## KINGDOMS TO THE SOUTH

**Kambuja** – Kambuja lies to the south of Khitai amid a steaming jungle. Its capital is Angkhor and, prior to the events of *The Witch in the Mists* is ruled by Pra-Eun, the Lord of the Scarlet Circle, a sacred god king. Pra-Eun has amber skin and snake-like eyes. Whether these physical characteristics are part of his sorcerous corruption or standard traits for his people is unknown. Games Masters must make that decision. Perhaps the Kambujans are descended from remnants of the snake-people that King Kull conquered in pre-Cataclysmic times. Pra-Eun was killed by Euric the Huntsman, an Aquilonian who arrived with Prospero in the nick of time to help

King Conan. Presumably, if the campaign is set after the events of *The Witch of the Mists*, someone else has taken the throne of Kambuja.

**Swamps of the Dead** – The Swamps of the Dead are low-lying, tropical swamps where the grey lotus grows. The area is prone to earthquakes, flooding and volcanic activity.

## KHITAN HISTORY

Yogah of Yag, who is also called Yag-kosha, who is himself older than man can reckon, calls the yellow-skinned race inhabiting Khitai’s lost jungles ‘ancient.’ What is ancient to a race that is virtually immortal and has lived here since the age of dinosaurs? This race must have been one of the first to rise up in the far-flung past.

Some of the Lemurian slaves who rose up against the forebears of the Stygians travelled south, while others went north. Those who went north became the Hyrkanians and knew nothing of their history. Those who went south, on the other hand, encountered the Old Kosalans who boasted of Lemurian descent. The Old Kosalans reminded the Lemurians who they were and re-educated them in the old ways, awakening their love of jade and demon-worship.

## KHITAN CREATURES

Waterfowl, tigers, marsh buffalo, giant snakes, komodo dragons and many other fantastic animals can be found in Khitai. Its jungles are teeming with life and strange monsters, carnivorous plants and vicious predators are an ever-present danger.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

The Yah Clan, put into power by Yah Chieng the Terrible, may want vengeance against King Conan for the slaying of their king. Characters may catch wind of this plot and may be in a position to help or hinder the Khitans on their mission of death.

Some sorcerers like to enslave the demons that lurk in the temples of vine-shrouded Khitai and may send characters to capture them or to scout them out.

Khitai is the location of many types of rare lotus plants. Characters may be sent to find them.





# Khoraja

## A Kothic Piece of Shem

In terms of culture, Khoraja is very similar to Koth and is a mixture of Shemite, Hyborean and Eastern ideas and ethics. Long traditions guide its laws and its people are proud to be an independent nation.

### SOCIAL STANDING

In most respects, Khorajan nobility is the same as Kothic nobility. Khorajans are guided by tradition and are proud of their independence from both Koth and Shem. Their hair tends to be curled and scented. Pointed moustaches are the fashion for the males. They wear pointed, satin shoes and gold-broidered velvet cote-hardies. Their manners are slightly affected. Khorajan nobles do not care much for barbarians or mercenaries despite their reliance on mercenaries for national defence.

Most of the underclasses in Khoraja are of Shemitic origin. The vast majority of them function as traders or service providers for traders (caravansaries and such).

### TRADE AND ECONOMY

Khoraja derives its wealth from the caravan route that passes through the Shamla Pass. Caravans from Zamboula pass through this route, as do others from some of the Shemite city-states. Khoraja does not tax its citizens; it earns its revenues from trade levies placed on the caravans, which can reach as high as 10%. Some industry does exist, such as coin minting, pottery-making and glass-blowing but most of the economy revolves around trade.

### THE MILITARY OF KHORAJA

The kingdom is feudal in design, with counts in charge of various areas of Khoraja.

Khorajan nobles are few in number but they are knights in high

Kothic fashion. When a knight marches to war, he wears a lady's token on his helmet or sword-belt. He is armoured in plate and a visored helm with colourful plumes and is as skilled and powerful as a Poitanian knight. Nobles are the nation's heavy cavalry and are usually reserved for the final charge in a battle. Each knight carries a heavy lance, a large shield and a broadsword.

The most esteemed post a non-knight Khorajan soldier can earn is to the palace guard. The palace guard are known to be a drinking, fun-loving, heavy-handed lot. These elite soldiers can suppress restless citizens with only a minimum of deaths. They wear ornately lacquered breastplates, steel caps and arming swords and they carry bardiches. Their crest is a yellow field divided by the emblem of a towered wall with three dots beneath. Their job is to spot trouble and troublemakers, then suppress them.

Beneath the palace guard in status are the spearmen of Khoraja. The ruined, penniless sons of lesser nobility comprise this group, who perform as infantry and march to support the more honourable knights. Wielding war spears and daggers, these skilled Hyborean troops wear quilted jerkins and steel caps.

The Zaheemi hillmen (treat as a Shemite variant, except all terrain bonuses apply to hills and mountains, favoured classes are nomad and barbarian and pirate is the only prohibited class) make up the light cavalry of Khoraja. They ride rangy steeds and use the Shemite bow to good advantage. They are lean and hawk-faced and wear peaked, spired steel caps and chain-mail under their kaftans. Members of the Zaheemi clan have an allegiance to the Zaheemi and to Khoraja. They are charged to guard the Shamla Pass for Khoraja.

In times of war, Khoraja spends much of its treasury on mercenaries due to its weakness and small number of loyal nationalist troops. Khoraja has occasional conflicts with Shem, Koth and Turan over control of the pass through the Kothian Escarpment.

## RELIGION IN KHORAJA

The Khorajan religious environment is identical to Koth's (see page 144). Khoraja is fairly tolerant of religious beliefs (so long as they do not involve demon-worship), as befits one of the gateways between East and West. Khoraja has little tolerance for sorcerers, however. The Khorajans revile sorcery unless it is associated with one of the temples, so Khorajan sorcerers hide their talents for fear of execution.

## KHORAJAN GOVERNMENT

Khoraja is an independent realm but is often pushed around by Koth, who wishes to control this little slice of Shem. However, since King Conan has placed a puppet king on the throne of Koth, the pressure on Khoraja has lessened considerably. The kingdom is ruled by a hereditary monarchy. The current king is Khossus, who is more absorbed in pageantry and protocol than in actually ruling. At night, King Khossus is fond of lotus wine and foreign dancing girls. Most affairs of state are left to courtly sycophants and dilettantes. The king's sister, Yasmela, who once ruled as Queen-Regent during a period when her brother was kidnapped by Ophir, has no official power anymore but still practices her feminine wiles on her brother and some of the more powerful courtiers to try to keep her hand in Khoraja's politics.

## IMPORTANT KHORAJAN CITIES

**Khanyria** – Khanyria is a walled town in Khoraja with a population that barely exceeds 2,000. The walls are described as towering and the buildings are domed. Khanyria is the home of Pelias the Sorcerer, the scholar who helped Conan against Tsotha-lanti. Pelias dwells in a yellow tower amid an expanse of gardens and lawns in the northern end of the city. Pelias does not bother with walls. His tower is yellow because the outside of it is plastered with gold coins. He likes his drink and other fleshly pleasures and often indulges these obsessions. The streets of Khanyria are narrow but cobbled. The city guard do not stop strangers during the day without good reason but it is against their custom to leave their doors open at night. It is a peaceful city where East and West meet to barter and trade.

**Khoraja** – As is common in the small city states, the capital city of the realm also bears the name of the realm. Khoraja is the capital of Khoraja. It has temples to Ishtar and other Shemite gods and still has a nearly

forgotten shrine to Mitra. The palace is surrounded by gardens on all sides but one, which opens onto the street. The streets are lit by cressets placed at regular intervals. The city is described as cavernous. It has a population of approximately 30,000.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF KHORAJA

**Kothian Escarpment** – The southern border of Khoraja is the distinct Kothian Escarpment, which separates the deserts of the Zuagirs from the fertile lands of Khoraja. This escarpment is pierced by the Shamla Pass, which is important to Khoraja because a main caravan route passes through it from the Hyborian kingdoms to the lands of the East and South. It is from the traffic of this route that Khoraja derives its wealth and its very existence. The Shamla Pass also protects Khoraja from Koth, for if Khoraja stops the caravans coming through the pass, much of the Hyborian world's trade would come to a standstill until trade started flowing through Zamora or the city states of Shem, bypassing Koth entirely.

## KHORAJAN HISTORY

Khoraja is dominated by the Shamla Pass and is one of the key strategic points for control of the trade routes. The Pass was originally dominated by the Zaeheemi hillmen, who were akin to the Shemite nomads. Shem settled the area and built the original town of Khoraja, taking control of the pass away from the Zaeheemi. Koth desperately desired control of that pass and invaded the area many times. Eventually Kothian adventurers took over the area to control the trade route through Shamla Pass. These adventurers, however, had a rebellious mindset and eventually declared their independence, which exists to this day.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

King Khossus wants to sell his sister off in marriage to a Shemite king for a trade treaty. He may hire the characters to escort her to her new husband. Conan might send troops to whisk her away from such a fate and the characters will have to fend them off. Other kings, Kothian or Shemite, may try to kidnap her to force Khoraja to do their bidding.



# Koth

## Queen of the Overland Trade Routes

To the south the Hyborians have founded the kingdom of Koth, on the borders of those pastoral countries known as the Lands of Shem...

— *The Hyborian Age*

Koth is one of the oldest Hyborian kingdoms, a vast meadowland north of Shem alongside Corinthia and Ophir. Kothians tend to be olive- or dark-skinned. Ruled by warring princes and barons, the Kothian culture is a strange brew of Shemite, Stygian, Acheronian and Hyborian ideas and ways. Currently, Koth is vassal to Aquilonia.

### ALLEGIANCE

Although not as intensely feudal as Aquilonia or Nemedra, Koth does maintain itself through oaths of loyalty and allegiance. The Kothic Oath of Allegiance usually involves bringing women's clothing and an arrow to the ceremony. Those swearing allegiance break the arrow and swear that their own weapons will be broken should their vow be broken; then the clothing is shown and those swearing allegiance promise that should they break their oath they will forever work at women's tasks. These oaths are considered personal and are not transferable, meaning that if one party to the oath should die, the oath must be renewed by that party's heirs to be considered binding.

### KOTHIC CLOTHING

City dwelling Kothians dress well, often wearing different sorts of aprons over their clothes depending on their trade.

The women wear brightly coloured and embroidered dresses and shifts.

The olive-skinned Kothic nobility wear velvet pantaloons and silk shirts of foreign manufacture, embroidered dresses of bright colours and embossed armour of artistic craftsmanship. The noblemen of Koth prefer pointed moustaches as well as perfumed and curled hair.

### SEX ROLES IN KOTH

Women do most of the cooking and growing while men tend to focus on caring for the animals. Otherwise, men and women of a class are treated fairly equally. Women tend to speak their minds freely in Koth to their peers.

### SOCIAL STANDING

Koth is essentially feudal and has an agrarian, manorial culture. Like most of the Hyborian nations, the nobles hold the top rung of the social ladder, commanding power and land. The vast majority of nobles are related to the king by blood or marriage. The king assigns Koth's most vital areas to members of his own family. Rebellious by nature, the nobles of Koth respect independence. Even their women speak their minds well.

Koth also includes a class of free peasants who live on the manors in exchange for payment or labour. The free peasants can leave their property to their sons if the lord of the manor approves.

Beneath the free peasants are the artisans and craftsmen who also live on manors in a similar manner to the peasants; however, an artisan cannot leave his property to his sons. Upon death, his property (along with all obligations) is sold if the lord of the manor approves of the buyer. The income from the sale goes to the lord of the manor.

At the bottom of the social ladder are the slaves, who live severe lives. Kothic masters have the power of life and death over their slaves. Slaves have absolutely no rights and no protections in Koth.



## TRADE AND ECONOMY

Koth's economy is founded on agriculture and manorialism. Wheat and barley are their primary crops and honey is a major part of their diet. In addition, cattle, water-buffalo and sheep make up most of the livestock. Mining also plays a part in Koth's economy. Copper, lead, silver and iron mines are the property of the crown and administered by favoured nobles.

Part of Koth's economy is based on slavery. Kothic slavers trade all over the world for slaves. Some Kothians believe they are so skilled at kidnapping that they travel to Zamora to vie for that trade with the natives there. Another portion of Koth's economy is based on the herding of long-horned cattle. Koth is also a major producer of iron. However, the bulk of Koth's economy is based on international commerce and/or war – if special resources are needed in Koth, Koth's first impulse is to attack the owner of said resources.

## THE MILITARY OF KOTH

Koth's military is primarily dark-faced knights and cavalry, although they are supported by spearmen and mercenary troops, usually Shemitish archers. The Kothian troops wear livery embossed with the golden helmet of Koth. Most sport beards, often in the ringleted fashion of the neighbouring Shemites.

The Royal Cavalry contains the greatest warriors in Koth. They have the best training, the heaviest weapons and the most sophisticated logistical support available. Their members are justifiably proud of their reputation as some of the most skilled knights in existence. Of course, the Poitanians disagree with this assessment but the distance separating the two elite forces means that they may never get a chance to settle their differences. Each member of the Royal Cavalry wears plate armour and a great helm with coloured plumes. They carry heavy lances, broadswords and large shields into battle.

The quintessential Kothian infantryman is the spearman. Giants dressed in mail brigandine and steel caps, these soldiers support the knights. In addition to their war spears, they carry arming swords as back up weapons. The introduction of the pikeman in Koth has elevated the veteran spearman units to an almost elite status in traditional circles.

Some Kothian soldiers become pikemen. Structurally the equivalent of Aquilonia's men-at-arms, the Kothian pikemen are a relatively new organisation in the ancient Kothian army. They are slowly replacing the giant spearmen, who once







dominated the battlefield. This transition has not come without some tension. Older military men are less willing to fight with the new pikemen, leaving them with young untried leaders or mercenary captains. Koth cannot yet afford to equip its pikemen with heavy armour. Instead, they must make do with leather jerkins and steel caps. In addition to their pikes they carry arming swords as back up weapons.

Kothian cavalry, called knights, present the model of military organisation for most of the region. Any mounted warrior in arms is generally called a knight in Koth, regardless of blood line. Noble knights are part of the royal cavalry. Extremely well equipped, the knights spend the majority of their time in professional training. Knights are trained for seven years before they are unleashed in combat. The expense of fielding a single knight is enormous; fortunately, the impact of a massed charge more than makes up for it. Kothian knights wear plate armour topped with visored helms. They carry large shields, heavy lances and arming swords into combat.

Koth also maintains a cavalry of light horse skirmishers called *spahis*. They are often sent in to scout out areas and to ravage a countryside before the bulk of the army arrives.

## RELIGION IN KOTH

Kothians worship the gods of Shem and religion there is centred around the fearsome goddess Ishtar, the daughter of Anu, the Kothian people having abandoned Mitra approximately 900 years before Conan's time. When Koth was founded by the Hyborians, they probably worshiped Bori but when the great religious revolution came, Koth was swept up in its fervour and converted to Mitraism. However, the conversion was not as strong in Koth as elsewhere and the Kothians fell away, preferring the unrestrained and orgiastic practices of the Shemites to the stately processions of the Mitrans. The Kothians tend to represent male deities with high pointed hats, curled-toe boots and short robes. Female deities wear square hats and long, pleated dresses.

As the Queen of Heaven, Ishtar rules the cosmos and the stars, for these things govern human behaviour. The Zodiac is her girdle and divination is an important aspect of her religion. Magic,

often in the forms of charms or celestial horoscopes, is also worked by her priests and priestesses. Laws, in lands watched over by Ishtar, are a form of magic and the breaking of laws is tantamount to sacrilege. Thus the priests and priestesses of Ishtar work with the kings and queens of Koth, training people to follow the law as a religious duty. More about Ishtar can be found in *Faith and Fervour*.

The Harangi Hillmen and the other hillmen of the Kothic Escarpment tend to be shamanistic. One shaman is said to have plucked out his eye and given it a full ritual burial so that it could continually gaze upon the spirit world.

## KOTHIC GOVERNMENT

In many ways, Koth is more dominated by its king than other Hyborian nations, probably because of Stygian and Acheronian influences; however, the king is hardly considered an irresistible force, as many of his aristocrats are highly rebellious. Still, the King of Koth is more despotic than either the Aquilonian or Nemedian kings. Beneath the king serves a council of nobles. Otherwise, the government of Koth is similar to that of Aquilonia (see page 17).

For most of Conan's career, the tyrant king of Koth was Strabonus, a man who was as 'penurious of his knights as of his coins'. Strabonus crushed his people with heavy taxes and ponderous levies. However, three years ago, Conan crushed his skull at the battle of Shamar, as detailed in *The Scarlet Citadel*. During Conan's life, Koth is constantly in various states of rebellion, with princes and barons fighting against the tyrant for the throne. After the tyrant is slain, the rebellions and civil wars grow even more intense. For a time Strabonus' nephew Gorald is the king of Koth, but eventually a noble knight named Balardus becomes king, swearing allegiance to Conan as a vassal king. Khorshemish remains the capital of Koth. Many of the nobles reject Balardus as king for making Koth vassal to Aquilonia. The nobles of Koth are still rebelling or refusing to renew the oaths they swore under Gorald to Balardus.

Koth has a collection of nearly 200 written laws passed down through the ages. The tendency in these laws is toward more and more humane punishments but capital punishment is still mandated for rape, a slave's disobedience, crop destruction and sorcery.



## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF KOTH

Koth is the southernmost Hyborian kingdom. It is bordered to the south by a mass of sheer and barren hills which form an escarpment between southern Koth and the northern edge of Shem. These steep hills have but a few passes. The Shamla Pass in Khoraja is one. A single pass goes into Corinthia through the Karpash Mountains to the north at Zahmahn. Another pass is near Eruk, in Shem. At least two passes go through the mountains into Ophir.

Koth is landlocked, so it has no ports. It is a fertile land, however. Western Koth is sub-humid prairie, meadowlands, forests, orchards and farms. It is described by Robert E. Howard as a land of blue lakes and rivers.

The roads in Koth tend to meander and rarely run in a straight line, often finding the most inconvenient of paths over hills and into deep gorges. Most of these roads are ancient and were built to pass close to eldritch sites or religious shrines, not so much for the mere movement of caravan traffic. Travel through Koth thus takes longer than many expect.

**Festering Swamp** – The Festering Swamp can be found in western Koth, near the Argossean-Kothian border to the west of some wooded hills and Suthad. The swamp is the source of many foul diseases.

**Khorgas River** – The Khorgas River lies in a narrow, shallow valley that winds through farms and pasture land. Steep hills dotted with the homes of serfs on their farms and the occasional keep of one of the lesser nobles of Koth line the valley. The river is slow and shallow, easily fordable along most of its length, although at least one section near Khoraja is broken by cascades and deep pools. The closer to Khoraja the river winds, the more the valley hills become mountainous and the river becomes a mere brook. A square military tower sits on the mountains over the valley at the border to Khoraja.

**Kothian Hills** – The Kothian hills form the mountainous barrier between Koth and Shem. These hills are said to be unbroken for a thousand miles past the Shamla Pass in Khoraja. The hills form a sheer escarpment.

**Lake of Salts** – A salt lake lies surrounded by cacti and other thorny plants in the central barren region of Koth. The lake is quite large, several leagues long. The Islands of Pearl lie in the midst of the salt lake, though few know of them.

**Mount Khrosha** – The Kothian escarpment, the low range of hills separating Koth from Shem, rises to even greater heights around the great volcano Khrosha. Iron forged in this hellish fire-pit has no equal for hardness. Plumes of smoke regularly rise from the unholy fires seething within the cauldron of this angry volcano.

**Mountains of Fire** – The Mountains of Fire are the volcanoes along the Kothian Escarpment. Mount Khrosha is among them. They are part of the Kothian Hills.

**Zamanas Mesa** – This mesa is reputed to be haunted, a 'bad place.' It is located along the Kothian Escarpment between Khoraja and Khauran. It is a triangular mesa, with one side merging into the lofty razor-backed ridge of the Kothian escarpment. It is surrounded by canyons. The only real approach to it is a steep, natural causeway along the mountain ridge on one of the corners. Two unequal prominences of stone outcroppings lie in the center of the mesa. The Harangi hillmen dwell in villages of plaster-stoned walls and conical roofs near this mesa.

## IMPORTANT KOTHIAN CITIES

Kothian cities are interesting because they have completely asymmetrical ground plans. A typical architectural form used by the Kothians is the porticoed entrance hall approached with a stairway flanked by pillars or statues of threatening monsters. Another Kothian design is the double-gateway with a corbelled arch, friezes and either pillars or statues of beasts flanking either side.

**Daramish** – Daramish is a small backwater city at the base of low mountains in eastern Koth. The women here dress extremely conservatively, with veils and full robes and cloaks.

**El-Shah-Maddoc** – El-Shah-Maddoc was a walled city in Koth with a population of 12,300 people. It was built in the meadows regions. It was conquered by King Irham of Syreb for control of the trade in the region. It was later utterly destroyed in a magical blast.

**Khorshemish** – Khorshemish, 'the Queen of the South' is a walled city of tall spires built on the crest of a sheer hill. The wall





has mighty gates between huge towers. The city is said to be a city of wonders, from the gold-chased gates to the palace itself. The streets are white and broad, surrounded by minareted mosques, shops, temples, mansions and markets. The spires are overshadowed somewhat by the grim scarlet citadel that overlooks the city from a central hill too sheer to climb. King Khossus V built this city on the ruins of an older city after Acheron fell, over three thousand years ago. The first palace of Khossus V was built on the location of the Scarlet Citadel but he abandoned it and built another in the suburbs; only one narrow street, paved with marble and protected by iron gates, leads up to the Scarlet Citadel. Finally, Khossus V moved the capital of Koth to a city in eastern Koth. King Akkutho I decided to rebuild the Khorshemish palace many years later as a fortress. The sorcerer Tsotha-lanti later built the Scarlet Citadel with that fortress as its foundation. The king's current palaces are set behind tall walls in broad gardens, which are filled with fruit trees and beautiful blossoms complete with artificial streams and silvery fountains. 44,000 residents live in Khorshemish. A forest lies to the east of the city.

**Korveka** – Korveka is a barony of Koth against the borders of Khauran. Most in Khauran feel Korveka should be a part of Khauran. Korveka's main produce is melons.

**Meshken** – Meshkan is a boisterously happy little town thirty miles west of Khoraja. It has plenty of loud taverns and a colourful night life. A half-day ride further leads one to the king of this province in Castle Vhalcken.

**Suthad** – Suthad is located high on a hill amid fertile lands. Suthad was founded by the Stygians prior to the fall of Acheron and its architecture still reflects the ancient forms.

**Syreb** – Syreb is a Kothian city-state in the meadows of Koth. It is known for its famous warrior, the Gladiator Jahib-Re, who served Prince Irham long, long years ago. Jahib was retired and served Irham as a councilor, his glory days long behind him, until he was killed by a demon. King Irham is a foolish king. He attacked and conquered El-Shah-Maddoc at one point, then rebelled against King Strabonus.

**Tantusium** – Tantusium is a Kothian city-state. The main gate is imposing, flanked by two stout round towers. The gates themselves are metal-studded wooden valves. There are no defensive works overhanging the gates themselves. A stone bulwark, however, is built to block the swinging motion of a

battering ram, forcing caravan traffic under the towers. When its prince decides to war, the city relies on free companions, companies of mercenaries, to fight for it. Inside the gate is a plaza of inns, shops and merchant stalls. The streets are winding but are cobbled in most places, although some of the streets are made of steps as the city is built on a hill. The citadel inside is hidden behind a façade of tall buildings, making it hard to see from the streets.

## KOTHIC HISTORY

During the of Age of Acheron, when that great nation shared borders with Stygia, the Hyborians came. Stygia controlled the lands now called Corinthia, Koth and Shem. When the Hyborians poured through the lands that would become Brythunia in a later age, they were stopped in Corinthia and held there for some years. Waves of Hyborians continued to push southward and Stygia allowed the Hyborians to settle in the lands of Koth, Ophir and Corinthia as vassal provinces. Contact with the elder races of Acheron, Zamora and Stygia proved beneficial to the Hyborians, who made giant leaps in their cultural advancement.

Eventually, the Hyborians, possibly with aid from Acheron and Zamora, pushed the Stygians out of those meadows and mountains back through Shem and, with the help of the Sons of Shem, behind Kuthchemes, which was sacked. Koth became the overlords of Shem after these bloody battles. In unrecorded events, the new nations of Koth, Corinthia and Ophir became vassals of Acheron. Perhaps the Hyborians attacked Acheron and were repelled. Perhaps Acheron merely threw its weight around. In any case, western Koth became subject to the kings of Acheron.

Three decades later the Kothians, under King Khossus V, betrayed their masters and aided the other Hyborian tribes in bringing down the great kingdom of Acheron. That ancient kingdom was divided up and Koth regained its independence.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Khauran might host a campaign to capture the barony of Korveka from Koth. The characters could be hired to defend Korveka or to raze it.

Even though Koth is now a vassal to Aquilonia, the long Kothian tradition of rebelling against the king is still alive and well. Rebel kings still hire mercenary armies to fling at the true king.



# Kush

Giant black men squatted in the doorways of their thatched huts, or lolled on the ground in their shade. Black women went up and down the streets with water-gourds or baskets of food on their heads. Children played or fought in the dust, laughing or squalling shrilly. In the squares the black folk chattered and bargained over plantains, beer and hammered brass ornaments. Smiths crouched over tiny charcoal fires, laboriously beating out spear blades. The hot sun beat down on all, the sweat, mirth, anger, nakedness and squalor of the black people.

— *Snout in the Dark*

Although most of the northern realms call all the Black Kingdoms either Kush or Cush (Robert E. Howard spelled the nation both ways), Kush is the name of one of many nations struggling to rise above the others in the southern realms. Situated just below Stygia on the shoreline, Kush is the Black Kingdom most often visited by Stygians, Shemites and the Hyborians.

## TWO PEOPLES, ONE NATION

Kush is separated into two peoples, the Gallah and the Chaga. The Gallah are the original inhabitants of Kush and are by far the most numerous. The minority Chaga are the ruling caste, descended from conquering Stygian adventurers. The Gallah people are described by Robert E. Howard as being ebon giants; they are taller than standard Kushites and dark brown in colour. The Chaga are even taller than their subjects and lighter in colour, although they are darker than their dusky Stygian ancestors. The Chagas and the Gallahs live in a state of constant tension that seems always on the brink of snapping into open conflict.

Since Kush is not a theocracy, the Chaga probably left Stygia because of the oppressive theocracy. The priests of Set do not rule here, although Set is the primary god of the Chaga. The Chaga keep the aspects of their native Stygian culture that they like, such as their love for hunting and political manoeuvring but discard elements they dislike, such as free-roaming giant serpents, an oppressive priesthood and an endless array of ceremonies and rules.

## WARLIKE

The Gallah Kushites are typically hunter-gatherers and are warlike and expansionistic. They live in villages of white clay, mud and grasses. They hold the aged in high honour, using their wisdom in counsel. Most are not nomadic – they do not need to move with the seasons because the climate is always hot. Their lives revolve around the game animals they hunt. The stalking and spearing of prey is their daily focus. They often provide mercenary services and serve as caravan or safari guards. They revere the passage of seasons, the night sky and other astronomical bodies. The Gallah Kushites are prone to see omens everywhere and acknowledge the smallest coincidence as evidence of a spirit's will. Men may have more than one wife.

## ROBUST AND STRAIGHTFORWARD

Gallah Kushites are a robust and happy people despite their minimal resources. They are straight-forward and do not suffer from remorse. Most refuse to take life too seriously, although they tend to become sullen and moody if they cannot hunt, which is their pride and joy. They do not moderate themselves. If they feel an emotion, they express it, even if the situation is inappropriate. Look to a Kushite to laugh when others are coming to grief, to sing when the urge takes them and to flare up in instant anger when frustrated.





These savannah barbarians are well versed in the use of the spear, hiding, moving quietly and surviving in a hot realm of grasses and scrub. The spear is the favourite weapon of the Kushite barbarian, although those enslaved by other cultures are often given other weapons to wield. Many Kushites learn to ride, both nude and bare-back. Kushites are savage in combat.

## KUSHITE CLOTHING

The Chaga men dress in *djebbehs* and/or silken cloaks. The women usually wear little more than silken skirts. Some may wear jewelled breastplates. For the Gallah, clothing is minimal. The Kushite horsemen described in *Black Colossus* ride stark naked. Loin-cloths are also likely. Women are often nude, or wear a wisp of silk wrapped around their hips. Some tribes dress their women in leather or rope belts on which depend several leather or rope strips that hang to just above the knee. Some urban Kushites dress in *djebbehs*.

## SOCIAL STANDING

Nobles in Kush are of Chaga descent. They are tall, dark people. They are not as dark as their Kushite subjects but are darker than their Stygian ancestors. The Chaga love to hunt and they love to dive into politics. They do not care much for priests, however. They worship Set but they will not be ruled by priests as their ancestors in Stygia were. They have Stygian names for the most part, although a few have adopted Stygian-Gallah mixed names. Hunting is a favoured pastime. They dress in short silk skirts and little else, although the women sometimes cover their breasts with jewel-encrusted gold plates. Jewels are a sign of wealth in Kush, so the nobles display as many as possible. The nobles are proud of their ability to ride the slim Kushite horses.

Status for the Gallah is often determined by how many white slaves a warrior has, although always he is technically subservient to the Chaga.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

The Chaga accrue fabulous wealth by controlling the movement of trade goods through the kingdom. In exchange for Stygian grain, Shumballa sends ivory, incense, hides, carnelian,

gold and slaves north to Stygia. Kush and Stygia carry on a crude form of trade in slaves, although neither pays the other for the merchandise. Instead, they just raid each other for their slaves. The Kushites raid Stygia, even as far as Kheshatta, for white or dusky-skinned slaves and the Stygians repay in kind, raiding Kush to acquire human chattel for slavery or sacrifice. Kush also raids inland tribes for slaves to be sold along the coasts to Argossean, Zingaran and Shemite traders.

The blacksmiths of Kush make iron heads for spears and lances, garnering themselves a reputation of bordering on magical. They steep their art in mystery and guard their secrets of turning raw iron ore into durable metal tools. Blacksmiths become the shamans or work closely with them.

## THE MILITARY OF KUSH

The armies of Kush revolve around spearmen and swift cavalry. They are some of the most dangerous spearmen ever. Armour is disdained. Kush is simply too hot for armour and the horses are too small to support heavy armour.

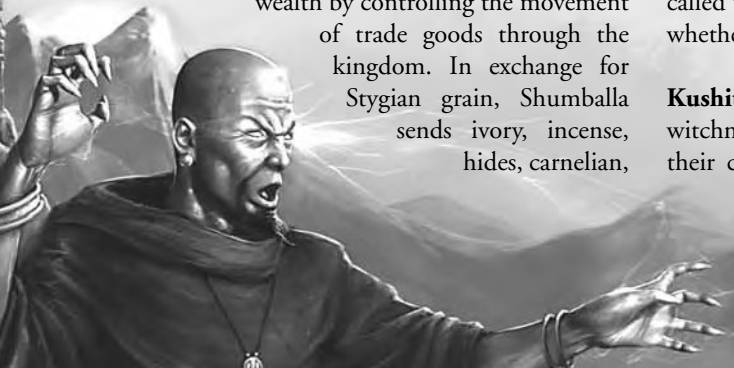
The Chaga prefer to fight with war spears or bows. Those who use swords prefer scimitars, khopeshes and other curved blades. They normally do not wear armour.

## RELIGION IN KUSH

The ruling class of Kush worship Set, while the common masses of Gallah worship Jullah in opposition to Set. The Chaga have modified their Set worship somewhat over the centuries from the original Stygian ceremonies, mixing in doses of witchcraft, shamanism and Gallah superstition.

In addition to Set and Jullah, particularly along the shores and the border of Stygia, the Kushites have adopted Shemite Derketo as Derketa, Queen of the Dead. She is probably a type of Earth Mother figure, a goddess of fertility as well as of death, symbolising the circular nature of life. She is probably represented as the mate of whatever god each tribe holds supreme. The Gallah of Punt probably represent her as the mate of Jullah. Worship of Derketa, Queen of the Dead, probably involves orgiastic rites done before squat golden idols. Human sacrifice is likely also part of her ceremonies, possibly using the poisoned fruit called the Apples of Derketa. The juice of those fruit kills, whether by ingestion or external application.

**Kushite Witch-Finder:** The Kushite witch-doctors, witchmen or witch-finders are particularly famed for their counter-magic abilities. Their duties are to protect



the tribe from rival witches, predict the future and curse tribal enemies, in approximately that order of importance. Most favour feathers, bones and animal skins as their outfits, in classical shamanic style. Often they also sport long, wild dreadlocks.

The Kushite tradition of scholarship is in many respects far more open-minded than that of the more supposedly civilised nations. They are happy enough to share their knowledge with others, even those from distant lands. Likewise their sorcerers rarely exert undue influence over their acolytes – though a senior witchman can be a harsh taskmaster, he is genuinely concerned for the welfare of his acolyte and desires to train him to be an asset to the tribe.

## GOVERNMENT OF KUSH

The government is similar to Stygian government, save that nobles rule instead of priests. According to an untitled synopsis by Robert E. Howard, Kush is ruled by a mad, degenerate king. He is slothful and dissipated. He is easily controlled. The Gallahs strongly resent Chaga rule. The crown of Kush passes along matriarchal lines – the queen mother selects among her children the one most fit to rule. If that king should die, the crown passes to a brother (or sister). It only passes from father to son when there are no siblings left. If there are no siblings or children, the nobles select a ruler. The nobles of Shumballa command wealth in the name of the king.

## KING ARRAKKAMANI

The king of Kush, King Arrakkamani, is a much disrespected king. He is cruel to the Gallahs and his sister dominates him utterly, ruling Kush through him. He is afraid of conflict and dissent, making him tolerate situations instead of engaging in active problem-solving. He is willing to do things for others because he wants to be liked; he errs on the side of kindness in almost any situation, unless it involves the Gallah, because he fears he will lose the support of the Chaga if he is kind to the Gallah people. He has almost no willpower to say 'no' to someone he wants to be his friend – Tananda uses that to her advantage. He does tend to make people around him feel wanted. His answer to aggression is not to solve the underlying problem, but to put the aggressive person to death. He is lazy in many matters, not wanting to seem too forward or eager about any activity. He is putty in the hands of most women, especially beautiful or exotic women. He received his crown after his brother was poisoned by Tananda because he could not be controlled.

## TANANDA

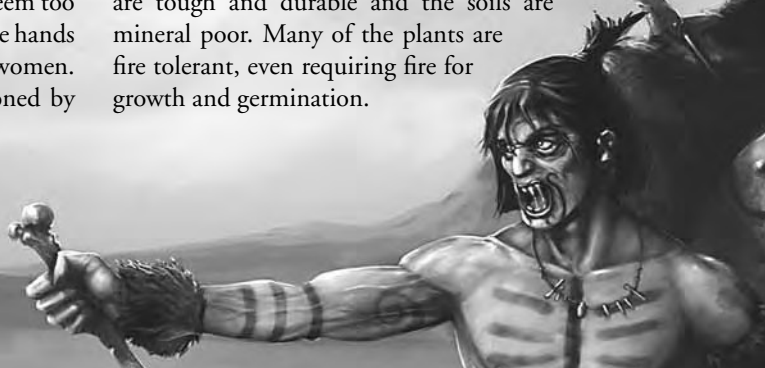
Tananda is the sister of the King of Kush but is the true power behind the throne. As with most Kushites, nudity does not bother her one way or the other. She is brutal in her commands and may well order any who displease her slain. She is not concerned with social poise, appearing cool, aloof, callous and blunt. She wants results and she rewards those who achieve results. She often initiates change and is bored with routine work. She becomes sulky if she is restrained in any way and this sulkiness can explode into belligerence if she is kept restrained too long. She judges others by her own standards. Tananda loves to hunt and is notoriously aggressive in all that she does. She thinks and reacts quickly in minor matters but explores all possible solutions before making a decision in a major matter. Her decisions are usually sound but somewhat lacking in consideration of the interpersonal relationships involved. She has dusky skin and regular features. Her hair is a thick black mass confined by a gold fillet. She wears a silk skirt girdled at the waist and gold jewel-encrusted plates over her breasts. She is mildly paranoid and does not trust anyone.

## THE PRIESTS OF SET

The priests of Set and the rival priests of Jullah vie for power in Shumballa. The priests of Set do not have as much power in Shumballa as they have in Stygia. This was established long ago when a king of Kush was ordered by the priests to kill himself for some shame but the king had the priests executed instead. Thereafter, the priests merely advise the monarchy and never try to order them about.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF KUSH

Western Kush is composed of savannas, open and vast, where the black tribes graze their cattle. Elephants, rhinoceros, wildebeests, zebras, giraffes and hundreds of other game animals live on these savannas. The savannas have both a wet and a dry season and the temperatures remain high throughout the year. Widely spaced trees are tough and durable and the soils are mineral poor. Many of the plants are fire tolerant, even requiring fire for growth and germination.





**Blood Isles** – The Blood Isles are a string of islands off the coast of Kush. The southernmost island is the closest to the mainland. Anyone running between the Blood Isles and the mainland runs the risk of piracy for the islanders know little else.

**River of Snakes** – The River of Snakes is the river that runs past Shumballa down to Zabehla.

## IMPORTANT KUSHITE TRIBES

Different tribes rule the wilds of Kush. The Mandingo live along the coast in a long string of trading villages (see page 206 for more information on the Mandingo). These tribes pay tribute to the Chaga of El Shebbeh, the inner city of Shumballa.

**Kordafan** – Kordafan is a grasslands kingdom to the east of Kush and the west of Tombalku. The Kordafan people are intensely black, with narrow heads, aquiline features and kinky hair. The hair is often trimmed into fantastic patterns and crests.

**Lua** – The Lua are a peaceful, coastal Kushite people. They are known as mariners. They dwell just north of the coastal Mandingo people.

## IMPORTANT KUSHITE CITIES AND RUINS

**Black Citadel** – The Black Citadel is a ruin on the plains of Kush. It is located at the centre of a vast circle of death, wherein nothing healthy grows. It is a complex combination of pillars, terraces and battlements. It has a chaotic lack of order about it and viewing it subtly twists the viewer's mind to see strange angles and obscure spaces. This unnamed citadel is the home of a hundred-headed monstrosity made up of the vital forces of thousands of dead beings, all randomly coalesced out of the ether.

**Shumballa** – Shumballa is the capital of Kush, a city founded by Stygian adventurers. It was carved out by sword, cunning and sorcery. It is built next to a narrow river on a grassy plain in Kush. The city contains a thickly walled inner city named El Shebbeh, where the Chaga live

and rule and an outer city called Punt (not to be confused with the nation of Punt discussed on page 170) where the Gallahs dwell in subjugation. The streets of Punt are filthy and chaotic; it is a veritable shanty-town. In contrast, El Shebbeh is a clean, organised, civilised city. The two sections of the city are connected through the great wall via enormous bronze gates. This city has a population of almost 13,000 people, not including the white slaves preferred by the wealthy.

Shumballa was founded by Stygians and controlled by a viceroy. The loyalty of local tribes was ensured by forcing the children of chieftains to serve as pages in the court at Luxur. Officials, priests, military personnel, merchants and artisans settled the city and brought Set and his cult with them. Eventually Stygian control faltered and Kush became self-governing. The Stygian elite, now known as the Chaga, retain control.

**Zabehla** – Zabehla is a harbour city on the coast of Kush. Caravans take shipped goods to Shumballa from here and goods from Shumballa and other parts of Kush to be traded find their way here to be shipped. The caravan trails from here even extend as far as Sukhmet in Stygia. Zabehla has a population of nearly 9,000 people. The adventures in *Tales of the Black Kingdoms* begin in Zabehla.

## CREATURES OF KUSH

Kush is home to a thin, hardy breed of horse, as well as rangy cattle. Any sort of African animal can be found in the various terrains of Kush and the Black Kingdoms. Lions, crocodiles, panthers, cheetahs, snakes of all types, boars, giraffes, gazelles, hyenas, jackals, spiders, vultures and thousands upon thousands of other species live here. The savannahs, forests and deserts of the Black Kingdoms absolutely teem with life.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

In the Kushite city of Shumballa, the people of Punt, tired of labouring for the richness of the Chaga, may rise up in revolt, especially if a group of hardy adventurers lead them. Perhaps the adventurers work for the Chaga rulers of Shumballa and must put down the uprising of the Gallah by killing their leaders and shamans.

Someone has diverted the trade traffic from the caravan trails of Kush, which, in turn, diverts wealth from the ruling Chaga in Shumballa. Perhaps the characters are responsible. Perhaps the Chaga turn to their oracles, who tell them to turn to the adventurers to solve the mystery.



# Nemedia

## The Dragon Throne

The last glints of the sun shone on the golden banner of Nemedias with the scarlet dragon, unfurled in the breeze above the pavilion of King Tarascus on an eminence near the eastern cliffs.

— *The Hour of the Dragon*

Nemedia is the second great kingdom of the Hyborians, technologically and economically superior to the other Hyborian nations save Aquilonia. Nemedias culture is similar to Aquilonias, although the Nemedians emphasise feudal bonds more and personal freedoms less. Still, Nemedias is well regarded for scholastic and intellectual freedom for the greatest historians, the most famous philosophers and the pinnacle of powerful orators in the West are Nemedians. Nemedias population exceeds twenty million people. Recent tax collector statistics show Nemedias has 25,723 villages, 243 towns and 45 full-fledged cities.

Nemedia is an ancient kingdom, proud of its cultured sophistication and civilised traditions. Although settled by the Hyborians, three thousand years ago this was the land of Acheron and traces of Acheronian blood flow through many of the veins of Nemedian Hyborians. The hills of Nemedias still hold groups of people who boast of their Acheronian descent.

Concepts of Allegiance and Honour in Nemedias are the same as in Aquilonia (see page 13).

### COURTES OF JUSTICE

Nemedia has a civilised court system that is complex in its attempts to be just. The courts in the cities are called Courts of Justice, where sit judges appointed by the ruling nobles. A higher court exists in Belverus with judges appointed by the king. This higher court hears larger cases of national jurisdiction. The Courts of Justice maintain Inquisitional Councils to investigate crimes and carry out the duties of prosecution. The police,

in turn, serve the Inquisitional Councils and are virtually all-powerful in their duties. Few Nemedians would dare to resist a member of the police. They are well known for beating and torturing commoners to gain confessions if necessary. One gouged out a girls eye in court because she would not incriminate her lover.

The courts are harsh, though they try to make the punishments fit the crimes and make restitutions as fair as possible. Also, the courts will attempt to exonerate the innocent if the guilty can be found. Unfortunately, if the guilty cannot be found, sometimes the innocent must suffer so that at least the illusion of justice is served. Those who cannot pay their debts may find themselves sold into slavery, along with their families if the debt is high enough, to raise the revenues necessary to pay creditors. Debt slaves are branded on the shoulder, preventing them from ever again entering free society. The law is explicit in other ways as well. The murder of a commoner sends the killer to the mines; intentionally causing the death of a tradesman sends the assassin to the gallows and the slaying of a rich man calls for burning at the stake. Attempted theft merits ten years of hard labour at the mines. The Nemedians are civilised enough to submit to the police and the courts and their cruelties are accepted as necessary.

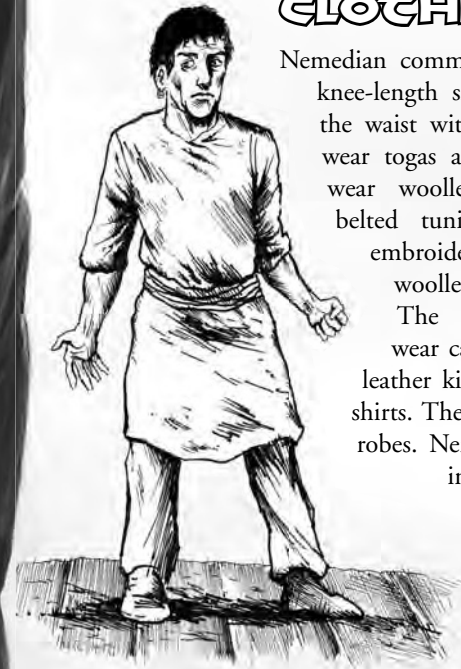
### VEILED MEANINGS

As a civilised nation, Nemedian citizens guild their words in honeyed phrases, veiling their meanings to preserve a sense of respectability and etiquette. Those who do not conform to conservative Nemedians' sense of good manners are disliked and may be treated with varying levels of hostility (dependent perhaps on the Charisma of the offending party and the importance of the offended party). People who ask questions too directly are not likely to find the answers they seek. The challenge in Nemedias is to properly present oneself, to show that co-operation is returned in kind yet



without openly saying so. Gather Information DCs for barbaric characters will be much higher in Nemedias than for civilised characters.

## NEMEDIAN CLOTHING



Nemedian commoners wear coarse, knee-length shirts corded about the waist with rope. Merchants wear togas and robes. Servants wear woollen clothing: long belted tunics for the men, embroidered blouses and woollen skirts for the girls.

The nobility typically wear cavalry boots, fur or leather kilts and pleated silk shirts. The priests wear silken robes. Nemedians take pride in their culture and never dress outside of their station.

nobility and only nobles may become knights, who offer protection to all Nemedian citizens regardless of rank. Chains of command, processional order and heraldry are all second nature to the cultured Nemedians. Above all is a reverence for noble blood and royal prerogative. It is unlikely the Nemedians would ever sponsor a royal coup as the Aquilonians did when Conan led the revolt against Numedides. Such a thing would be uncivilised. When Tarascus desired the throne of King Numa, the king and his sons had to die naturally so his ascension would be unopposed. The Nemedians who resurrected Xaltotun in the Hour of the Dragon did not want to see Nemedias torn apart by strife. This respect for noble blood is, in part, the reason the Nemedians so strongly object to King Conan's reign in Aquilonia.

Beneath the commoners and the serfs, who are still free, are the slaves. Laws prohibit the harsh treatment of slaves; after all, Nemedias is not Zingara, where slaves in the field are beaten with whips. Nemedias recognises that a well-treated slave is less likely to rise up in revolt. Rebellions by slaves are not uncommon during the Hyborian Age but few uprisings are recorded in Nemedias, where many slaves would refuse freedom if it were offered to them. Who would feed and shelter them if they were freed? Nay, Nemedias is a civilised land and the people of that land know their place in the feudal hierarchy. There is a measure of safety in the stability of Nemedias's social structures.

## SOCIAL STANDING

Although Nemedias does not have castes in the sense that Vendhya does, the citizens do have a sense of class and status. Nemedias is strict in its feudal hierarchies and each citizen knows his place on that complex schedule of servants and masters, duties and privileges. Citizens are constantly, although largely subconsciously, aware of rank and station. Artisans, for example, are beneath the wealthy merchants and traders.

Nobles, who are descended from noble blood-lines, are on the highest tiers of society. Noble status is required for most offices of state. Only those of noble lineage may serve on the Courts of Justice.

The heads of the Inquisitional Councils are also of noble birth. High-ranking military positions are also reserved for the

## SOCIAL MOBILITY

Nemedias is a land of scholarship and education, offering a means of social movement. Although noble sponsorship is necessary to gain any kind of Imperial grant, noble blood in and of itself is not a requirement. The study of history is a special favourite among the Nemedian scholars, as the famous Nemedian Chronicles testify. Other fields of inquiry include theology, science, cartography and arcanology. Of course, sometimes these scholars find themselves moving down sorcerous paths, as Orastes did in *The Hour of the Dragon*. The most outstanding scholars are employed by the Dragon Throne to produce their works for the crown, to be stored for posterity.

Another way to change station in Nemedias is, of course, through marriage, although it is rare for people of different classes to really get to know each other. Also, most noble marriages are arranged. Typically a comely Nemedian girl has more hope of a higher marriage than a man. Still, marriage brokers find themselves busy.

## THE MILITARY OF NEMEDIA

Nemedia maintains a powerful army composed of its noble knights and heavy cavalry. Infantry are considered fodder for archers; it is not an honourable field of military service. Most of the infantry are commoners that are given minimal training. They are easily demoralised in combat.

The Nemedian army favours a standard formation for Hyborian hosts. The centre, which is made up of heavily armoured knights, is the strongest section. The wings are composed of lesser cavalry units, largely composed of Adventurers (see below) that are supported by infantry conscripts and arbalesters. The wings move in advance of the centre. The arbalesters unleash their deadly bolts and the trained infantry quickly move in afterward. The cavalry units move in next, followed by the knights on their massive horses.

## ADVENTURERS

The famous Adventurers of Nemedia are not landed knights but not quite mercenaries either. These fighting men have pledged fealty to the king of Nemedia in exchange for the right to battle honourably and to wander the land. They fight with greatswords and dress in mail hauberks. They do not concern themselves with gaudy displays or the best armour in the latest styles as do the lordly knights. The Adventurers are grim warriors, more concerned about the serviceability of their accoutrements than the fashion of their armour. This is the class that non-nobles who wish to fight for the glory of Nemedia but lack the wealth and bloodlines to claim a knighthood aspire to.

## RELIGION IN NEMEDIA

Despite the rigid control the feudal system has in Nemedia, with its strict laws and intense law enforcement, Nemedia is far more tolerant of alternative religions than Aquilonia. Likely this is because of Nemedia's scholastic nature and the crown's endorsement of philosophical thought. Thus, in Nemedia, a wide range of religious beliefs can be found across the length and breadth of the nation.

## MITRA

Nemedia is a Hyborian nation that honours that most universal of Hyborian gods, Mitra. The priests of Mitra are instructed in many things, for the teachings and works of

Mitra have brought about the power and splendour of the Hyborian kingdoms. Arus, the Nemedian priest of Mitra from Howard's *The Hyborian Age*, for example, understands the basics of mining, smelting and working iron ore. More information about Mitra can be found on page 16 and in *Faith and Fervour*.

## IBIS

Ibis is an ancient foe of Set and likely originated as a reaction to the oppressive cult of Set within the culture of the giant-kings that introduced Set to the proto-Stygians. The religion may even have originated in Acheron, explaining perhaps its continued existence in Nemedia. Ibis is a small cult; it has all but died out. Still, they are well thought-of in Nemedia as foes against evil and Set, although the Mitran religion remains distrustful of them. Kalanthes is well known in Nemedia. More information can be found in *Faith and Fervour* and *Stygia – Serpent of the South*.

## SKEPTICS

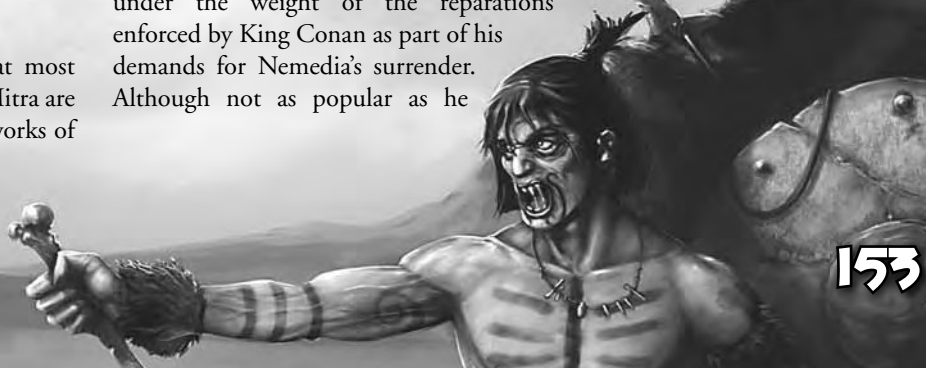
The Sceptics are another order of religious thought in Nemedia. They claim that there are no gods but those that man names and chooses to believe in.

## OTHER GODS

Shemite gods are also worshipped here. The sexual aspect of Ishtar's faith makes it an attractive religion for this otherwise reserved population. Even votaries of Set can be found in darksome temples within the borders of tolerant Nemedia.

## NEMEDIAN GOVERNMENT

Nemedia maintains a strong feudal government, much like that found in Aquilonia (see page 17). It is ruled by King Tarascus. He attacks Aquilonia in Robert E. Howard's *The Hour of the Dragon* and is defeated. The ransom King Conan sets for Tarascus is the slave girl Zenobia. Nemedia still founders under the weight of the reparations enforced by King Conan as part of his demands for Nemedian's surrender. Although not as popular as he





once was, Tarascus still holds the throne of Nemedi. As king, Tarascus divides up the land and the responsibilities of the kingdom among various barons and counts, who then subdivide their properties and responsibilities into smaller and smaller fiefs.

The counts and barons perform civil and military functions in their assigned fiefs in the name of the king. These aristocrats swear fealty to the king and, in return, gain his official permission, called a patent, to govern areas of his kingdom. This gives the aristocrat all rights pertaining to the fief but he is expected to pay tribute to the king and raise armies for the king in times of national war. The baronies and counties of Nemedi are large, usually thousands of acres and are often too large for the top aristocrats to rule efficiently, so they further divide their granted fiefs among lesser nobles who swear fealty to the baron or count in return for power. Unfortunately, the boundaries of these fiefs are not always absolutely defined and conflicts over rights and duties sometimes turn into armed warfare.

A fief granted by the king and the lesser sub-divisions of that fief include both private property and a noble title. The private property includes a manor house or even a castle and one or more cities, towns and associated villages. A third of the land supports the noble and his retinue and the serfs are expected to spend at least half their time working the noble's lands and crops. The serfs, in turn, can expect the noble's protection in the form of his knights and soldiers. The noble title, once granted, can be passed on through bloodlines. These noble titles are inherited through the male line, although the king may remove a title at his pleasure. The eldest son or husband of an eldest daughter almost always inherits the noble title. The actual property of the fief, however, can be divided among the lord's heirs however he may see fit. If a dispute over inheritance occurs, especially in a case where a nobleman has produced no heir, a higher ranking noble in the chain of fiefs and sub-fiefs may intercede and name an heir, following complex rules of chivalry.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF NEMEDIA

Nemedi is a fertile land. Low mountains and hills form a border with Aquilonia with only a few passes. Great grasslands lie to the immediate east of those mountains, where few farms and villages exist for fear of the Aquilonians, who raid those lands. The mountains are highly wooded. To the east flows a great river that forms the border with Brythunia. To the north are the barren lands of the Border Kingdom; a Great Salt Marsh forms the northern border. To the south rise the hills of Ophir. The various low mountain ranges sport an assortment of mines. Copper, gold and silver are all mined, usually by slave labour.

Several provinces, baronies and duchies separate the lands into governable pieces. Baronies such as Tor, Vastia and Dinander can be found.

**Darkwood Forests** – This pine forest extends along the east of Nemedi. Few people travel the faint trails through this shadowed forest. Wildlife abounds within, especially wolves and bears. Bandits also make lairs in the shade of the tall pines here. The forest is home to brooding stone castles and stalking werewolves hungry for prey. Rumours persist of satyrs, vampires and ogres.

**Urlaub River** – The Urlaub is one of many rivers in Nemedi that provide the ancient land with fertility. Edram Castle can be found on its shores within the province of Dinander. It is a snaky river with lush green fields on either side. A triple-arched stone bridge crosses the river at Edram Castle, giving the fief holder a stranglehold on traffic through this area via taxation or tolls. Out beyond the rich fields, the terrain gives way to lightly forested foothills. The river is not fordable along most of its length. Edram Castle oversees the tax collection of Varakiel.

**Varakiel Marshes** – The Varakiel marshes in northeastern Nemedi are desolate wetland filled with snakes, cats and bears. The edges of the swamp give way to tilled fields and villages. This fertile region is simply called the Varakiel and is subject to the fief-holder of Edram Castle, who is in turn subject to the baron of Dinander.

**Yellow River** – This river runs along the western border of Brythunia until it forks in the southwest corner. Many historic battlegrounds lie on either side of the river, the sites of wars and skirmishes with Nemedi. This river flows to the north and empties into the Great Salt Marsh of the Border Kingdom.

## IMPORTANT NEMEDIAN CITIES

The cities of Nemedias tend to be the capitals of the baronies and counties. Systems of villages, towns and hamlets support the cities. Not many stories take place in Nemedias, so not all of the baronies are known. There are approximately 45 baronies and counties in Nemedias, each corresponding to the 45 cities. A few of the better known cities are described below.

**Belverus** – Belverus is the capital of Nemedias. It is a walled city surrounded by rich meadowlands, gardens, orchards, vineyards and pleasure villas. Slaves with pikes keep casual watch over the villas and gardens at night. The fountain of Thrallos stands a mile out from the city in a ring of oak trees. Belverus has a population of 55,707 people.

**Dinander** – Dinander is a walled Nemedian city, the capital of a barony. It lies to the north of Belverus. It oversees the Urlaub fief, as well as Edram Castle. Verakiel is part of this fiefdom in the east. A portion of Verakiel is uninhabited swamp; another portion is an uncultivated area that once was a battlefield and is now avoided. The city of Dinander has a population of 8,558.

**Hanumar** – Hanumar is a city in northern Nemedias. It does not lie on a direct road to Aquilonia and is the home of Kalanthes, a priest of Ibis. Hanumar is a fair sized city with a population of 11,762.

**Numalia** – Numalia, on the Road of Kings, is the second largest city of Nemedias, a Hyborian Age metropolis, boasting a population of 45,379 residents among its gleaming spires. Numalia also lies on the southern caravan route, a well-travelled road through Ophir, Koth and Khoraja. The police here are identified by their scarlet tunics and they carry short stabbing-swords and bills. Lord Ostorio Bragorus is the Governor of Numalia. One of the roads of Numalia is called the Palian Way. The wealthy of Numalia live in villas and usually travel by chariot. This city is featured in the Robert E. Howard story, *The God in the Bowl*.

**Tor** – Tor is a barony of Nemedias and the name of the capital city of the barony. Baron Amalric of Tor helps resurrect Xaltotun in Howard's *The Hour of the Dragon*. Amalric of Tor sponsored Orastes in his scholarly pursuits that led to that dark resurrection. Tor is a powerful, walled city with a population of 19,776 people.

## NEMEDIAN HISTORY

Nemedias is a three thousand year old kingdom with roots that lie in the destruction of ancient Acheron. Among the last of the Hyborian tribes that swept southward were the Aquiloni and Nemedi tribes. The Aquiloni and the Nemedi attacked Acheron after their feathered shaman stole the Heart of Ahriman and defeated Xaltotun's sorceries. Acheron was put to the sword and Python was sacked.

The Hyborians divided up the land and the Nemedi settled in the eastern end of Acheron's holdings. Most scholars believe Nemedias was the first nation to form over the ashes of Acheron. Many of Acheron's strongest holdings were in this land and many of their books and records survived. Nemedias rapidly became a centre for learning and the Hyborians made vast strides in their culture here, quickly achieving 'civilisation' and an atmosphere of sophistication. Laws were developed and set down by the early kings. These laws are still adhered to today.

History was deemed of value and the Nemedian kings sponsored historians to reconstruct as much of history as they could, to write down what happened in the world. These historians were sent out to all nations of the world to learn their histories and record them as the Nemedian Chronicles. Nemedias was likely the dominant Hyborian kingdom early in its history, until Aquilonia superseded it when it managed to acquire Poitain, Bossonia and Gunderland.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Built on the ruins of ancient Valusia and once a part of the sorcerous kingdom of Acheron, Nemedias has many hidden ruins that might contain fearful horrors. Python, the ancient capital of Acheron, is a lost city; its treasures have lain unrevealed for centuries. Modern Hyborian scholars believe that the City of the Purple Towers lies in north-eastern Nemedias in the wilds near the Border Kingdom.







# Nordheim

## Asgard and Vanenheim

'Tall and fair and blue-eyed. Their god is Ymir, the frost giant, and each tribe has its own king. They are wayward and fierce. They fight all day and drink ale and roar their wild songs all night.'

– *The Phoenix on the Sword*

Asgard is the eastern part of Nordheim. The Æsir are a numerous people but Asgard is not a unified kingdom serving one supreme king. Essentially the Æsir are a village-based people who are bound only by a common way of life. Vanenheim comprises the western part of Nordheim. The Vanir are also a numerous people but they are not as numerous as their foes, the Æsir. Like Asgard, Vanenheim is not a unified kingdom serving one supreme king but has a more locally-orientated power structure.

The Nordheimir are fierce warriors, proud and honourable. With white hot enthusiasm they pursue life, facing death fearlessly with a song on their lips. They are giant men who value honour, loyalty and reputation above all things, for their land is harsh. Even the women are strong, running households while the men war with each other across the icy plains and mountains.

### APPEARANCE AND ESTEEM

Ferocity and courage are not the only measure of manhood among the Nordheimir. Self-esteem is also valued and to some degree self-esteem revolves around appearance.

Using combs made from antlers, the Nordheimir groom themselves daily, braiding their hair, moustaches and beards. Many carry small tools to clean their fingernails and ears. The Nordheimir bathe at least once a week and use saunas for health.

### NORÐHEIMIR CLOTHING

Nordheimir men wear trousers, tunics, coats and cloaks, usually made from hide, leather, worsted wool or linen. Most wool is dyed red, blue, brown or yellow, although some is not dyed at all if its natural colour is pleasing.

### SOCIAL STATUS

In addition to grooming, self-esteem includes a measure of status. Status among the Nordheimir is achieved through combat prowess or wealth. The display of wealth gives a Nordheimir status. Their clothes and armour have coins sewn onto them. Coins are also hung on chains and worn as jewellery, displayed with arrogant pride. Jewellery is equally prized by Nordheimir men as by the women. Precious metals are often melted down and recast as wearable items, such as bracelets or armlets.

A king is a chieftain who has consolidated more than one tribe or clan under his rule. A chieftain is the head of a tribe or clan and usually owns around 18 farms. The chieftain has the social responsibility of enforcing the laws of Nordheimir society. A chieftain is expected to be generous in all things and to protect the honour of the clan against outsiders. The chieftain must be a good leader, a powerful warrior, an excellent speaker and an inspiration to his men. He is required to attend every Thing or Althing lest he lose his position. The Hirðmaðr are those who have sworn Allegiance to the king or chieftain and fight by his side. The Jarls are the upper class, the wealthiest of Nordheimir. Below them are the commoners: landowners and land-workers. Commoners are of three categories:

- ❖ **Leiding:** A leiding is a man who rents or leases his land to another in return for payment in food. A leiding is usually a wealthy land-owner or farmer and his tenant can be anyone from a former slave to a chieftain. He is a free man with all the rights and duties of such in Nordheimir society.





- ❁ **Hauldr:** A hauldr is a true free man with full rights and duties in Nordheimir society. The hauldr owns his own land and has a hereditary right to that land; his family has owned the land for at least six generations. Most people in Nordheimir society belong to this class of people.
- ❁ **Løysing:** A løysing is a slave who has been set free by his owner because of hard work or exceptional service. He is usually still dependent upon and owes duties to his former owner. The children of løysing parents are free. Members of this class often participate in raids and military excursions in order to supplement their wealth. The only right they lack is a hereditary right to land.

Beneath the commoners are the thralls. Thralls are slaves; thralls are not protected by the law but are treated as property. Killing a slave is not murder, so the killer need only replace the slave if it was owned by someone else. Children born of slaves are the property of their mothers' owners. Slaves work hard and the only thing they are allowed to own are knives. Slaves are captured during raids into Pictland, Asgard, Nordheim, Cimmeria, the Border Kingdom and Hyperborea. Other Nordheimir might become slaves if they find themselves unable to pay the mulct (fine) imposed by the Althing or Thing or unable to provide for themselves and/or their families.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

The Æsir used precious metals, usually silver, in trade. They pay for goods with coin or an appropriate weight in silver cut off from their jewellery. The Æsir rarely carry purses or sacks of coin because of the noise. It is easier and quieter to recast coins as a bracelet and then just slice off pieces as needed. The Æsir also engage in barter for trade goods. Of course, their preferred manner of acquiring necessities is to raid a rival for them.

The frigid northlands are not suited for agriculture and the Nordheimir do not practice anything beyond bare subsistence farming. The Æsir do not herd great herds of animals either. They hunt for their livelihood as befits a warrior race. Their wasteland realm is not as barren of life as one might suppose at first glance. The frozen mountains and icy plains support bear, mammoths, moose, reindeer and similar beasts of the wild. Wild fruits and berries supplement the Æsir diet. Dependent upon wildlife, Æsir villages, built using whatever materials are close at hand or can be readily raided, are usually erected near known animal trails and water. In the centre of these villages stand the largest and longest of the many buildings. This great hall is the home of the local king.

## THE MILITARY OF NORDHEIM

War is an essential component in the lives of the Nordheimir. War is their economy. War is their social setting. War is their religion. War measures courage. War measures honour. War measures manhood. This being the case, weapons are of prime importance to the Nordheimir. Their favoured weapons are the broadsword and the axe. Hunting and war spears are also commonly seen. Weapons are so important to the Nordheimir that they are almost always highly ornamented, etched with exotic designs or runic characters. The Nordheimir tend to prefer dragons or birds of prey in the complex ornamentation of their weapons. In addition, they also etch stylised nature designs into their armour, clothing and tools. The Nordheimir often wear leather helmets reinforced with pieces of metal, including a piece of iron or steel over the nose. These helms are often decorated, in addition to mere design-work, with horns to symbolise fierce power. Mail shirts and large shields are standard. The common shields seen among the Nordheimir are made of wood and covered in leather hide or bearskin. A round metal hump is placed in the centre of the outer face of each shield to protect the hand holding the shield.

## NORDHEIMIR RELIGION

The Nordheimir worship Ymir the Frost Giant King. Dread Ymir rules icy Valhalla, a realm of long halls, snowy glaciers and eternal drinking, wenching and fighting. The dead dwell there. Ymir represents the Earth to the Nordheimir and both the Vanir and the Æsir spring from Ymir. Battle for the Nordheimir is not only the basis of their economy and social life, it is also the basis of their religious life, for Ymir is worshipped by doing battle all day, then eating, drinking and singing all night. Indeed, even those activities have religious merit, for ale is the drink of bold Ymir and, as such, is sacred and consumed in large quantities. It is said among the Nordheimir that it is possible to come into direct contact with Ymir by drinking yourself unconscious. Thus, inebriation is a religious obligation as well as a social activity.

It is likely that there are regional gods in Nordheim as well, considering the Nordheimir and their life-style. They have no unified government to enforce anything. If there are





such local gods among the Nordheimir, the Conan saga does not mention them. Any local gods are subordinate to Ymir, in any case.

Life in Nordheim is meant to be embraced with savage enthusiasm and death is to be met in the same manner. The Nordheimir believe in an afterlife and the afterlife often mirrors how one lives life and meets one's doom. For the common folk, the afterlife is dull and dreary, a life spent gathering and serving the warriors. For valiant warriors, however, the afterlife is filled with fighting and feasting in the snowy plains and halls of Valhalla.

Among the Nordheimir, who are each fiercely independent, even religion is viewed as a personal matter.

They have no time or interest in priests to interpret Ymir for them.

Each man is his own intermediary to Ymir. The Nordheimir keep no temples to Ymir but they acknowledge many sacred outdoor sites, such as mountains, islands, fields, rocks and groves. Three times per year the Nordheimir hold ceremonies to placate Ymir, asking for victory in war and raiding, making sacrifices of animals and humans, feasting on steaming food hot from the fires, drinking ale in fantastic quantities and singing lustful songs celebrating their wars and heroes. These ceremonies, which occur in the spring, mid-summer and autumn, last for days and are loud, brutal affairs that reflect the every day lives of these people.

The Nordheimir do have shamans and oracles but they have more political and medical functions than religious ones. Male shamans are called *Godi* or *Godar* (Vanir or Æsir names, respectively). Female shamans are called *völva*. More information on Nordheimir shamanism can be found in *Faith & Fervour*.

## NORDHEIMIR GOVERNMENT

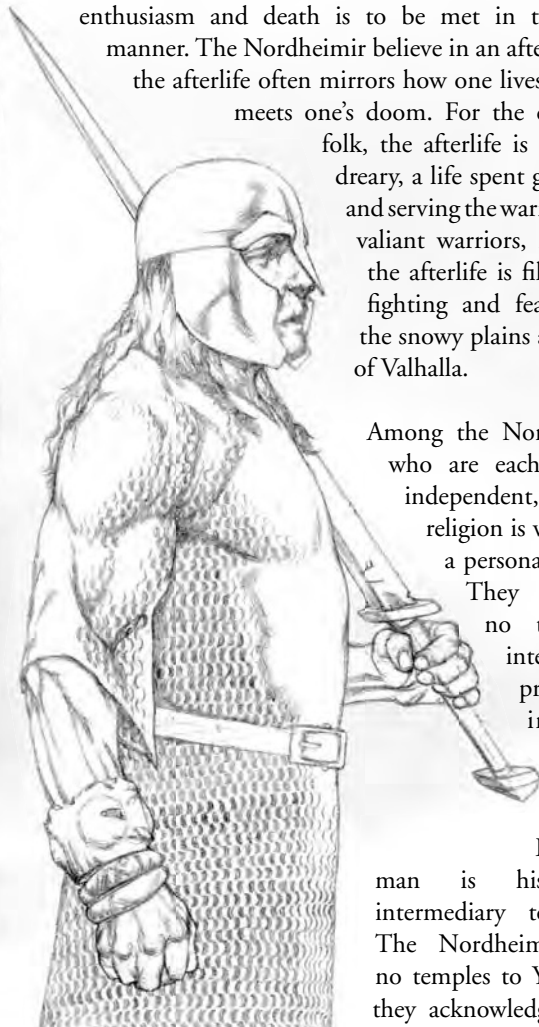
The Nordheimir villages are ruled by kings, who can be any warrior able to maintain a following, as chosen during the Thing (Vanir) or Althing (Æsir), which is the democratic body that deals with legislative or social issues. Any Nordheimir free man is a member of the Thing (or Althing) and can have his say and cast his vote. The Nordheimir see the Althing or Thing as a social setting for war, the arena in which most social combats are fought.

The Æsir and Vanir have many kings, for each village is like a kingdom unto itself. A king, to the Nordheimir, is any local warrior who can maintain a following, using both income and honour to hold on to that following. The king always leads his warriors into battle, which means that most Æsir kings die young but with barbaric honour and pride.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF NORDHEIM

The Nordheimir live among frozen tundra, frozen mountains and icy plains. Nordheim is a bleak and sombre land. Thin taiga swamps cover the southern borders but the vast majority of the nation is snow-covered tundra and icy mountainous crags. In Vanaheim, most Vanir live along the coast, where the living conditions are less severe. Here or along the border with Cimmeria they hunt marine mammals in kayaks. In Asgard, the Æsir live mostly in the southern reaches. Two of the defining pieces of geography in Nordheim are the Eiglophian mountains and the Snow Devil Glacier. More details about them can be found on page 60.

**Blue Mountains** – This range of rocky and frozen mountains forms the border between Asgard and Vanaheim. The mountains tower over ice plains and appear blue in the distance. It is said that Ymir walks abroad in these cold mountains.





## MAJOR CITIES OF ASGARÐ

The Æsir and Vanir do not build cities. There are an uncounted number of villages and towns, however. None are named in the Saga.

## NORÐHEIMIR HISTORY

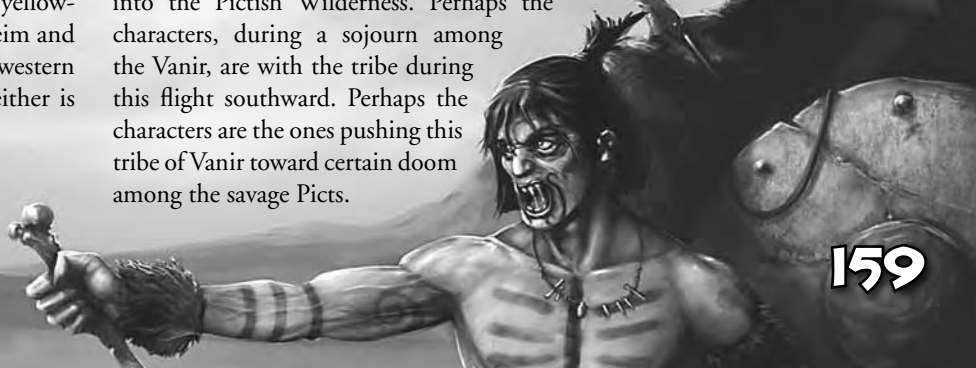
After the Cataclysm destroyed the civilisations of the world, humanity again began its fight for dominance. A primitive people, only slightly more evolved than the Neanderthal, travelled north and fought the snow-apes. They drove these monsters north of the arctic circle to perish and occupied the cold northern lands as conquerors. Over the next several thousand years these snow-apes managed to evolve into gigantic blonde arctic savages and pushed back south. A thousand years later, they finally pushed the Hyborians south and established Nordheim. These barbarians split into two major groups based primarily on hair-colour. Those with red hair went west of the Blue Mountains and those with yellow hair went to the east of that range. The yellow-haired Æsir settled in the inland portion of Nordheim and called it Asgard. The red-haired Vanir settled in the western portion of Nordheim and called it Vanaheim. Neither is Hyborian and their bloodlines remain pure.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

The frost giant's daughter could reappear. Perhaps she took a friend of the characters and the characters head to Vanaheim to seek her out to avenge their friend.

During Conan's age, even though the Vanir live along a coast, the long-prowed longships of the historical Vikings have not been invented yet. Perhaps the first of these ships now appear and hordes of blood-thirsty Vanir swarm along the Pictish Coast to invade Zingara or the Barachan Islands.

Although the Vanir also share a border with the Pictish Wilderness, there were few raids between the two cultures. The warm woods likely make the Vanir skittish and the Picts do not care much for the frozen tundra of the north. However, Cimmeric, Hyperborean or Æsir raids could force a tribe or two south into the Pictish Wilderness. Perhaps the characters, during a sojourn among the Vanir, are with the tribe during this flight southward. Perhaps the characters are the ones pushing this tribe of Vanir toward certain doom among the savage Picts.







# Ophir

## The Kingdom of Gold

'I will take you to the Stygian borders. The Stygians will send you home to Ophir.'

She stared up at him as if she had not heard aright. 'Home?' she repeated mechanically. 'Home? Ophir? My people? Cities, towers, peace, my home?'

– *The Vale of Lost Women*

Ophir, a vassal to mighty Aquilonia, is a Hyborian kingdom that lays 'like a tapering wedge between the border of Aquilonia and the vast southern kingdom of Koth.' It is one of the smaller Hyborian realms. Robert E. Howard says little of Ophir directly, not even naming a capital city. Some facts are known, however. Ophir's knights wear gold-gilt armours and Ophir's queen once offered a roomful of gold as a reward for the return of a stolen ring. It follows that Ophir is a wealthy nation of much gold. Ophir also co-existed with Acheron and for part of its reign was either a part of Acheron or paid tribute to it as a vassal kingdom. This makes the kingdom extremely old, older than Aquilonia, Argos or Nemedra.

Ophir has concepts of Allegiance and Honour similar to those in Aquilonia (see page 13 for a full description).

### SURLY

The country folk of Ophir tend to be a silent, surly lot, particularly in times of unrest. They do not trust outsiders and are unlikely to answer any questions that cannot be handled with a grunt or a monosyllabic reply. Foreigners will likely face stiff DC penalties when attempting to Gather Information from the Ophireans.

### SCIENCE

Ophir has a reputation for science. In Ianthe, climbing claws have been invented that aid in the ascension of walls. Livia, from Howard's *The Vale of Lost Women*, claims to come from the House of Chelkus, who are scientists and noblemen of Ophir.

### OPHIREAN CLOTHING

Merchants in Ophir like to wear voluminous hooded robes; these robes help to cozen the customers. Servants wear distinctive smocks, their quality dependent upon the rank of the person the wearer serves.

### SOCIAL STANDING

Ophirean social classes are similar in almost all respects to those in Aquilonia. See page 15 for full descriptions.

### TRADE AND ECONOMY

The economy of Ophir is based on manorial agriculture and mining. Gold ore and mineral deposits are mined out of the eastern mountains. Still, the kingdom is hardly the wealthiest and most prosperous of Hyborian realms. The Ophireans desire and need treaties and trading agreements with other nations, for there are many trading routes that do not pass through little Ophir. The nobles sell their children into slavery for money and nobles hold other nobles ransom to raise funding. The treacherous Ophireans will usually side with the ones that offer the most advantage, either in coin or in trading agreements. Diplomacy is a well-regarded art among the Ophireans and Ophir's kings and nobles are usually superb diplomats.

### RELIGION IN OPHIR

Ophir is a Hyborian kingdom and primarily worships Mitra. However, Ophireans have much contact with Kothians and Shemites, so the worship of Ishtar has filtered into the kingdom. Overall, Ophir is more religiously tolerant



than many Hyborian kingdoms. More information about the religion of Mitra and its Mysteries can be found in *Faith and Fervour*.

## OPHIREAN GOVERNMENT

Ophir is a feudal kingdom, as many Hyborian kingdoms are. It is not as unified as Nemedias and is more fractious than Aquilonia. Ophir is governed by a fragmented aristocratic class of local powers, counts and barons, who perform civil and military functions in the name of the king for an equally fragmented kingdom that is subdivided into numerous fiefs and sub-fiefs. In most ways, Ophir's structure of government is identical to Aquilonia's (see page 17 for a fuller description).

The kings of Ophir seem to be of a treacherous sort. King Moranthes II, a weak, effeminate ruler who relied upon his strongest barons for support, double-crossed the ruler of Khoraja and captured him, holding for ransom and threatening to sell him to Koth. He also captured his own wife, Queen Marala, for lewd behaviour among his courtiers during an absence. He also sold his daughter, Olivia, into slavery for refusing to marry a prince of Koth. Moranthes' successor, King Amalrus, betrayed Ophir's ally, Aquilonia and sided with Koth against that great nation, capturing King Conan and sending troops into Conan's realm. He was also a weak king, for his brother fought for his right to the crown. The current king of Ophir, Ludovic, is an Aquilonian vassal-king, subject to King Conan.

The noblemen of Ophir tend to be just as treacherous and greedy as its kings. Baron Rigello, cousin to King Moranthes II, once burned ten villages of his fief when drought prevented folk from delivering their quota of crops. Noblemen are armed with slender swords and dress in silks and gold decorated in gleaming jewels. The knights of Ophir wear mail gilt with gold and sport plumed helms. Their tabards and clothing bear a star-shaped emblem.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF OPHIR

Ophir is a hilly land of forests and plains in the west and is quite mountainous in the east toward Corinthia. It is a fertile land and is crossed by rivers and streams. The people raise grain and herd animals.

**Plain of Shamu** – This is a meadowland of Ophir, where Conan lost five thousand Aquilonian troops against the combined forces of traitorous Ophir and stingy Koth. It lies south of the Tybor river.

**Red River** – The Red River is a tributary of the Khorotas. Ianthe sits on its shores.

**Tybor River** – The Tybor forms a border between Aquilonia and Ophir. It is a placid river, deep and wide, with much traffic. It is usually crossed by ferry at Shamar, an Aquilonian city.

## IMPORTANT OPHIREAN CITIES

**Frosol** – Frosol is a county of Ophir with an impressive six towns in its fief. Its capital boasts more than 12,000 citizens.

**Ianthe** – Ianthe is the capital of Ophir. Straddling the Red River, Ianthe is a city of domes and towers ornamented with metal. Houses are roofed with red tiles and the taller ones can be seen over the city walls. The palace of Ianthe is built upon the ruins of the original citadel. A tavern called the Wild Boar can be found within the palace. Ianthe has a population of 21,600. Eight towns owe direct fealty to the King of Ophir; this supports the city.

**Lodier** – Lodier is the name of an Ophirean barony. Four towns are in its domain. Its capital city is the home of nearly 11,000 Ophireans.

**Mecanta** – Mecanta is the name of an Ophirean county. Mecanta is known for its use of guerrilla-style arbalesters and powerful counts. Its capital has a population of nearly 15,000. Five towns are under the dominion of its count, in addition to the city.

**Terson** – Terson is the name of an Ophirean barony. More than 10,000 people reside in its collective manors and villages. Four towns labour in the gold mines of this fief.

**Theringo** – Theringo is the name of an Ophirean county and castle. Built on a plain, it was the location of the Battle of the Hundred and One Swords two hundred





years ago. Queen Marala came from this line of fief-holders. The old castle is in ruins. Four towns still owe fealty to the count of Theringo, though there is no longer any capital city.

**Vendishan** – Vendishan is a county or barony of Ophir. Vendishan, the capital of the region, has a population of 12,339. Four towns owe allegiance to the ruler of Vendishan.

## OPHIREAN HISTORY

During the rise of Acheron, when that great nation shared borders with Stygia, the Hyborians began streaming out of the north in violent and savage hordes. Stygia, at that time, controlled the lands now called Corinthia, Koth and Shem. When the Hyborians poured through the lands that would become Brythunia, they were stopped in Corinthia and held there for some years. Waves of Hyborians continued to push southward and Stygia allowed them to settle in the lands of Koth and Corinthia as vassal provinces. Contact with the elder races of Acheron, Zamora and Stygia proved beneficial to the Hyborians, who made giant leaps in their cultural advancement. Still more waves of Hyborians pushed them into the previously unexplored regions of Ophir, where gold and diamonds were discovered.

Eventually the Hyborians, possibly with aid from Acheron and Zamora, pushed the Stygians out of those meadows and mountains back through Shem and, with the help of the Sons of Shem, pushed them back behind Kuthchemes, which was sacked. Koth became the overlords of Shem after these bloody battles. In events unrecorded, the new nations of Koth, Corinthia and Ophir then became vassals of Acheron. Perhaps the Hyborians attacked Acheron and were repelled. Perhaps Acheron merely threw its weight around. In any case, Ophir became subject to the kings of Acheron and great trains of gold, jewels and slaves poured into their masters' kingdom.

Three decades later the Hyborian tribes brought down the great kingdom of Acheron and Ophir regained its independence. Ophir established an unsteady feudal society as the original Hyborian inhabitants lorded it over newcomers and any remaining aboriginals they could find.

Two hundred years ago, Count Alarkar tried to provide a stable government for Ophir by forcing the nobles and the king to sign a charter. The charter would have delineated the rights and duties of all subjects of the kingdom. The attempt failed due to treachery.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

King Ludovic, vassal-king to Aquilonia's King Conan, is having difficulty consolidating his reign. The brother of the deposed king Amalrus still has a tight hold on the east, claiming a blood-right to the throne. Many Ophirean barons, chafing under the reparations demanded by King Conan for the damage they wrought upon Aquilonia in the war detailed in Howard's *The Scarlet Citadel*, support the rebel prince, either in secret or in outright rebellion.

A traveller has related that merchants in Lodier mention the phrase 'Iä! Xuthalla!' in nearly every conversation; however, when questioned, no one recalls using the phrase. The nobles have become restless at this recent news, fearing the rise of some ancient Lemurian evil.



# Pictish Wilderness

## Land of Dark Forests and Painted Devils

Beyond the river the primitive still reigned in shadowy forests, brush-thatched huts where hung the grinning skulls of men, and mud-walled enclosures where fires flickered and drums rumbled, and spears were whetted in the hands of dark, silent men with tangled black hair and the eyes of serpents. Those eyes often glared through the bushes at the fort across the river. Once dark-skinned men had built their huts where that fort stood, yes, and their huts had risen where now stood the fields and log cabins of fair-haired settlers, back beyond Velitrium, that raw, turbulent frontier town on the banks of Thunder River, to the shores of that other river that bounds the Eussonian Marches. Traders had come, and priests of Mitra who walked with bare feet and empty hands, and died horribly, most of them; but soldiers had followed, and men with axes in their hands and women and children in ox-drawn wains. Back to Thunder River, the aborigines had been pushed, with slaughter and massacre. But the dark-skinned people did not forget that once Conajohara had been theirs.

— *Beyond the Black River*

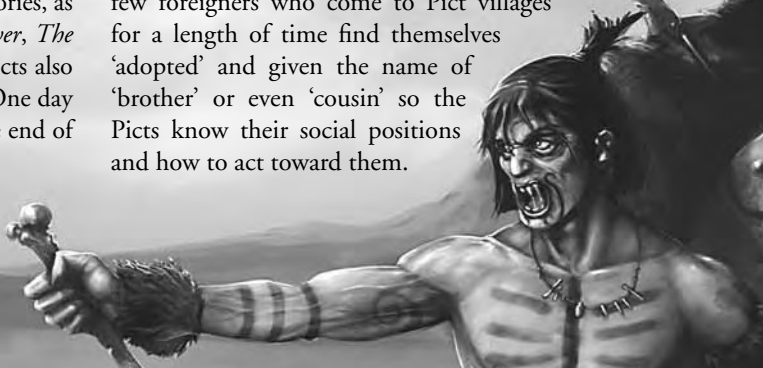
The Picts are a warlike race of barbarians, strong and shadowy, the fiercest of all the savage races. Robert E. Howard had a fascination for the real-life Picts, the Caledonians of Scotland. By combining the information he had on the real Picts and sprinkling in facts and fancy about the Native Americans, Howard was able to weave a fantastic saga of the fictionalised savages that had such an inexorable grasp on his imagination. Picts can be found in his Kull stories, as well as the three Conan stories *Beyond the Black River*, *The Black Stranger* and *Wolves Beyond the Border*. The Picts also figure prominently in his essay, *The Hyborian Age*. One day the Picts will destroy Aquilonia and bring about the end of the Hyborian Age. Far more information about the Picts can be found in *Across the Thunder River*.

The Picts are a short, broad swarthy-skinned folk. They are a white-skinned race but the civilised folk never refer to them as such. Their homes are decorated with the grisly skulls of enemies. They live in caves and tree shelters, as well as villages of mud-and-wattle huts. The villages are surrounded by a stockade. Every aspect of their lives is dominated by an awareness of their lush environment. Every rite, ceremony and superstition emphasises a respect for the environment. Their art expresses this connection with nature and portrays the plants, animals and people in their region. Art usually focuses on their tribe's chosen totem animal. The Picts paint distinctive designs on their faces and bodies that identify their tribe and their purpose – hunting or war.

### TRIBAL CULTURE

The Picts have a Stone Age culture, one of the most primitive of the Hyborian Age. They live in small tribes and hunt in their game-rich woodland wilderness, tracking with exceptional skill. These tribes are built around clans named for their totem animals. Identity is deep-seated and complete. These clans often believe they are descendants of these animal spirits or that their totem animals assisted a common ancestor in some way.

Each tribe lives in its own distinct region with its own traditions and rituals. These clans do not generally cooperate and usually war with one another. A clan is simply a group of related families. To the Pict, family and kinship is key to the stability of the tribe and defines each individual Pict's rights and obligations toward others. Familial relationships define how Picts act toward one another. Those few foreigners who come to Pict villages for a length of time find themselves 'adopted' and given the name of 'brother' or even 'cousin' so the Picts know their social positions and how to act toward them.

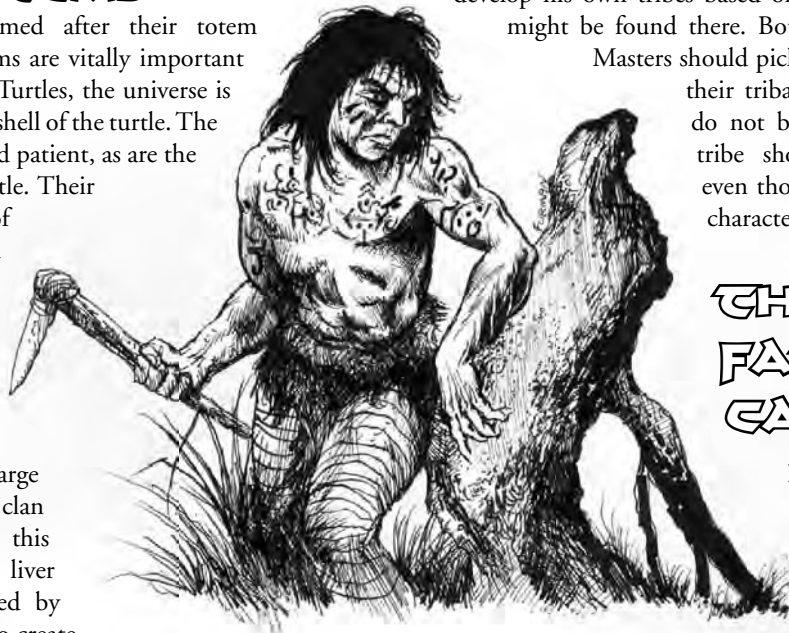






**TRIBAL TOTEMS**

The tribes are named after their totem animals. These totems are vitally important to the clans. To the Turtles, the universe is encompassed by the shell of the turtle. The turtle is enduring and patient, as are the clansmen of the Turtle. Their jewellery is made of tortoiseshell, which has an amazing lustre and translucency when polished. The Alligators' totem animal is a ferocious hunter, able to take down large prey. The Alligator clan sees themselves in this light. The alligator's liver and entrails are used by the tribe's shamans to create powerful magic. The Hawks and Eagles are among the most predatory of the clans; their totems symbolise warriors and hunters. The Wildcats are perfectly adapted killing engines, lithe and silent like their totem animal. The Wolf clan attacks in packs, often driving their victims over long distances while making sporadic attacks designed to exhaust their chosen foe. The raven, who taught the early Picts how to survive, is seen as a messenger or prophet from the spirit world. Each clan's totem animal serves as a spirit guide, especially to the shaman.



develop his own tribes based on various animals that might be found there. Both players and Games Masters should pick skills to complement their tribal totems so that Picts do not become 'generic.' Each tribe should play differently, even though they share certain characteristics.

**THE FACE OF CAPTIVES**

Picts do not make slaves of people, foreigners or rival tribesmen. They use their women to perform their

drudgery and chores, thus to their minds they have no need of slaves. Instead, their captives are sacrificed to the spirits and their gruesome gods or traded to other tribes in return for their captives. Some Pictish tribes burn their captives alive. Others put the knife to them. Still others feed them to animals or carnivorous plants. Torture is commonplace, as this pleases the spirits, who are vengeful.

**CLANS AND SKILLS**

Different clans emphasise different skills, although all Picts tend to master most of the useful hunting skills as best they can. Those of the Turtle clan emphasise endurance, crafts, traps and listening. The Alligators emphasise hiding skills for their ambush tactics and many take ranks in Bluff. The Hawks and Eagles tend to be fantastic at Spot skills. It is hard to hide from them. The Wildcats are strongest at moving silently and sneaking up on their prey. The Wolf clan specialise in tracking skills, such as Search and Survival. Ravens concentrate on the Survival skill and pluck out the eyes of their captives to ensure against escape. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of tribes living in the Pictish Wilderness. The Games Master is encouraged to

**VENGEANCE**

The sense of vengeance among the Picts is intense. Blood-feuds are also common and result in generation-spanning wars between enemy tribes.

**LIGUREANS**

Other humans also dwell in the Pictish Wilderness. The Ligureans, another white but non-Hyborian race, live in the forest and war with the Picts. They are tall and fair, although their origin is unknown. Perhaps they are the remnants of an aboriginal race supplanted by the Hyborians and driven into the wilderness who they took up the lifestyle of the Picts in order to survive.

**TALKING DRUMS**

The Picts have developed a method of communicating over long distances using drums. Called talking drums, these instruments echo for miles, raising fear in the





hearts of the Hyborians who hear them. The Picts are expert at these drums and they know the effect the drums create in the non-Pict.

## THE MILITARY OF PICTLAND

### PICTISH CLOTHING

Picts wear buckskin, which is usually dyed black. Men wear a breech cloth and leggings, donning a long-sleeved shirt in cooler weather. Seamless moccasins serve as shoes. Pictish women wear buckskin dresses, skirts or loin-clouts, as well as soft moccasins. Some women wear nothing more than a buckskin apron and body paint.

The Picts use different styles of body paint, depending on what they are up to. Hunting paint is common. If a Pict who is not in war paint is killed, that action is subject to retribution by the slain member's tribe.

### TRADE AND ECONOMY

The Picts consider trade to be a test of friendship and alliance. They do not view trade as the Hyborians or other civilised peoples do. To the Picts, trade is a way of honouring other people. Essentially the Picts view trade as an exchange of gifts, not as some sort of barter. This attitude allows Zingaran and Hyborian traders to take advantage of Picts who do not understand bartering.

The coastal Picts and those tribes in the far south trade with the Zingarans. The Zingarans ply their ships up and down the Pictish coast, bargaining with the painted men of the wild. They trade hides, copper ore, gold dust, whales' teeth and walrus tusks for weapons, ornaments and wine. Among the ornaments the Picts seek are ostrich plumes. They do not trade slaves; the Picts do not sell themselves or each other into slavery. They are too individualistic and prideful to do anything of the sort. However, they do trade captives. Pirates also prey upon Pictish shores to steal Pictish women and children to sell as slaves in other parts of the world. Picts also raid into Zingara to steal tin from the mountains and grain from the fields.

The Picts also trade among themselves, not to attain goods they do not have but to secure alliances and learn news. Trading is a diplomatic affair of mutual gift giving. Skins, tobacco, dried meat, captives and other goods are traded. If the gifts are accepted, a shaky alliance and a temporary peace results between the tribes of the giver and the receiver. If the gifts are not accepted, the tribes become enemies and go to war.

The Picts have secret societies devoted to war. This is what being a Pictish soldier is all about. He is part of a military society devoted to combat-at-arms. Soldiers still need to be productive members of society, so feats such as Track and skills such as Survival should be taken by these characters.

The Picts have several weapons of choice and these vary little among the various tribes. Some Pict tribes have specialists to produce various tribal weapons but most Pict warriors take pride in creating their own. These weapons include the bow and arrow, the club and the primitive hatchet.

A Pict's bow is made out of hardwood and is as tall as its crafter, if not taller. Thick in the handle for a sure grip and tapered for an easier draw, these bows are quite deadly. The bowstrings are made from animal sinew that has been chewed and twisted. Nearly every Pict is taught as a child how to make arrows and most warriors decorate the shafts with distinctive markings. This identifies the owner and allows the craftsman to retrieve the arrows. The heads of the arrows are made out of flint, quartz, obsidian, bone, antler or copper. Picts usually begin their fights from a distance by firing their bows to wound foes, then, after the Picts exhaust their ammunition, they close in to fight with their other weapons.

Picts fight with a war club in one hand and a primitive hatchet in the other. These weapons tend to be little more than shafts of wood with heavy round stones or chiselled stone blades attached to them with sinew. Some tribes decorate their war clubs to feature hideous faces on the business ends. Tribes that trade extensively with the Zingarans or Aquilonians may have more advanced hatchets made of metal. Regardless of the material used to make them, these weapons are used to kill or stun opponents. The Picts are also skilled at hurling their weapons with pinpoint accuracy and some attain unbelievable distances with thrown weapons.

In addition to bows, clubs and hatchets, Picts with high reputations choose to use or carry spears and javelins. Only the most honoured of





warriors use these distinctive and often highly decorated tools of war and status. Stabbing spears with broad blades are the most common of these distinctive weapons. Most often these feathered weapons are carried only as symbols of power and distinction and are not actually used. To be given a spear by a chief is a high honour among the Picts, garnering them a +1 bonus to reputation. Making, taking or using a spear when one's status does not warrant it is considered arrogant and foolish and Picts who do so take a -1 penalty to their reputations. Also, many Picts have learned the value of using nets to bring down armoured opponents and their mounts. Picts along the coast use larger spears called harpoons to bring down the great whales that swim along the shores.

## RELIGION IN THE PICTISH WILDERNESS

Thousands of years of prowling darkly fantastic forests and reeking black swamps create a rather sinister outlook on the gods and the spirit world. The Picts believe that their bodies in the after-life resemble their bodies at death if they are not killed in war, so if a body is left for the vultures or mutilated, the Picts believe the dead will suffer greatly in the afterlife. There is no worse insult to a Pict or his tribe than allowing a fallen Pict to be mutilated – it is akin to telling him he will suffer eternal torment, and that he deserves it.

Shamanism is the primary Pictish religion, although it is hard to speak of Pictish 'religion,' as being similar to the Western religions that exist alongside secular, daily life. The Picts' ideas of spirituality, superstition and rites are inextricably intertwined with their day-to-day lives in such a manner that separation is impossible. Religious life and secular life are one and the same; both are utterly dominated by the menacing environment in which the Pict thrive. The most minor and trivial of daily activities involve a deep spirituality. Mystical power resides in every thing and in every action. Every Pict must pay heed to the baleful spirits that infuse all things. To ensure a proper understanding of the threatening environment around them, a class of Pict evolved to speak to the dreadful spirits and harness the mystical powers of all things. These are the shamans.

## SHAMANS

The shamans of the clans wield terrible magical powers and often have more influence than the clan chiefs. The shamans are the centre of the nasty and horrible religious and ritual traditions of the Picts. Picts understand good and evil as indications of whether obligations to the malicious spirits are being met, The shamans control this aspect of life. They are mediums who act as intermediaries between this world and the hateful spirit world. If a Pict is 'evil' and does not meet the obligations of the spirit world and the ubiquitous environment, he may find hunting sparse, for darksome spirits control the quantity and quality of game animals. Intense rhythmic drumming induces a ritual trance when the hunters require the shaman's help, allowing the shaman's soul to enter the spirit world to find the source of the difficulty in hunting. The shaman then tells the Pict what will appease the cruel spirits and cause them to release the animals they have hidden away. To not meet the responsibilities required by the spirits is a sign of disrespect and destroys the balance and harmony of the environment. The nightmarish environment and the hateful spirits are bound together as one, the source of life for all, the source of identity for the tribe and the source of strength for the individual Pict.

Costume and performance are inextricably linked to a shaman's success. Shamans may act like animals, dress as animals and possibly even transform into animals. Feathers hold mystical significance to the shaman and his followers. Masks are also common to enhance the mood or as magical foci. The ability to change form to fight spirits is also crucial to the shaman, either in reality or via a convincing performance, for he must be a trickster to outwit the harmful spirits that plague the Picts. Drums are another vital part of the Pictish shaman ritual. Drums are holy to the Picts, who liken the sound of drums to the heartbeats of the spirits. With such emphasis on performance, for shaman magic must be shown and displayed to the tribe, Charisma is a vital characteristic for the successful shaman. He must hold the attention of the tribe and convince them they are powerful enough to command the spirits that infuse their wild land.

Shamans are skilled at the use of herbal medicines and plants for rituals and spellcasting. Still, healing is not their primary focus. In the world of the Pict, catching game is far more important for the clan than healing, so most of the shaman's magic is directed toward bringing about prosperous hunts. Family and clan are still at the heart of Pictish society and the shaman exists as a community servant, not as some private sorcerer delving deep into his own personal needs and goals.





The magic of the Pictish shamans is bloody and grim. Their altars are crude affairs, charred with fire and stained with blood. Accompanied by thundering drums, the shaman dances grotesquely as captives are sacrificed to the dire gods and vile spirits. Blood makes the shaman's magic mighty. He burns captives alive in these gruesome ceremonies after capturing and torturing them. These ceremonies revolve around the hunt and the cycle of life and are held for births, rites of passage and deaths. The Picts believe in a dark afterlife. After death, their souls will enter the spirit world and haunt the black Mountains of the Dead in the uplands of the Dark Land.

## SINISTER GODS

In addition to the spirits that infuse everything, the Picts also have their own sinister nature gods that oversee the cosmos. Jhebbal Sag, a pre-Cataclysmic god of darkness and primordial fear, is an ancient nature god that was once worshipped by all living things, man and animal alike. Both animals and man have largely forgotten him but a few still remember. Those who do remember are considered to be family, for they are brothers. The Pict who remembers treat animals and foreigners who remember as though they were literal brothers, for family and clan is important to the Pict. Jhebbal Sag has many children, each a god over a certain type of animal.

## GULLAH

One of these malevolent Pictish gods is Gullah, 'The Hairy One Who Lives In The Moon.' He is a gorilla god and the Picts consider the bull apes of their wilderness to be his totem animals. His altars are black with eternal flames set upon them. To summon Gullah and begin the process of destroying an enemy, a shaman paints a skull black and casts it into Gullah's fire. Upon entering a trance, the shaman then can speak to the ghosts and spirits. Gullah, as a moon deity, probably also serves as a guardian of the spirit world. He mirrors the vices of humanity, for though he is of the animal kingdom his anthropoid appearance mimics man's. Likely he is credited by the Picts as the inventor of time and, as a moon god, has a fertility aspect.

## JHIL THE RAVEN

Another son of Jhebbal Sag is Jhil the Raven, a bloodthirsty trickster deity. His children are the ravens, crows and certain fiendish spirits and he is likely the patron of the Raven clan of Picts. He commands dark spirits and is associated with mortality. Jhil taught the Picts how to survive in the wilderness and how to honour Jhebbal Sag according to his myth cycle. Jhil has an insatiable

craving for food, blood and sex. He is also a messenger for Jhebbal Sag and the spirit world. Endowed with the gift of prophecy, he empowers mortals to use dice to reveal his messages, giving man a method of augury. His worship is a gory ceremony, for he demands that prisoners be flayed alive on his altar.

The Picts worship the old gods who sleep in the outer abysses but are not dead. With the help of sacrifices and magic, these old gods sometimes awaken...

## PICTISH GOVERNMENT

The tribes are led by the chiefs, speakers and councils. A Pictish chief is not a dictator. There are many kinds of chiefs among the Picts and each village likely has several chiefs. There are civil chiefs, achievement chiefs, hereditary chiefs and speakers. The civil chiefs, chosen for their age and wisdom, govern the villages by administering justice, organising celebrations, receiving guests, allocating hunting and fishing lands and serving diplomatic functions. These chiefs could not afford to be tyrannical or incompetent, for they would lose their followers to other villages. In addition to the chosen civil chiefs, there are ranks of achieved chiefs. Almost all Picts are born as commoners in low-ranking families but by performing great deeds some Picts attain the status of chief. Great warriors of renown may become war chiefs. Speakers of incredible oratory skill may be granted chief status. Hunters who have distinguished themselves may be named hunting chiefs. Those chieftainships granted due to achievements are non-hereditary and earn the Pict a +1 bonus to his reputation score. Picts may earn more than one chief title. Hereditary chiefs, whose titles are passed down to them from maternal lines, have no voting power, though they are given a small measure of additional respect due to their heritage. A Pict with a hereditary title is granted a +1 bonus to his reputation if he does not prove himself a fool. Hereditary chiefs control community property and are expected to provide dogs and canoes to hunting or war parties. They are also responsible for village reserves during times of bad weather.

Speakers are chosen for their intelligence and diplomatic gifts to announce decisions for councils and chiefs. Speakers have impressive memories and are walking archives of decisions and history. The women of a village, as a collective, have a speaker as do the warriors. The speakers, along with the chiefs and the village







elders of both sexes, who also have a voice in government by virtue of their age, meet in council to make decisions. This council is responsible for local policies and decisions.

The pattern of village government extends outward toward the tribe as a whole and great civil chiefs may be elected to govern more than one village in multi-village gatherings. Powerful war-chiefs may gather warriors from several villages to go on large expeditions. Extremely powerful chiefs, such as the upper Wolf chiefs, who band multiple tribes into a semblance of coherent unity, often take the paramount chief prestige class presented in *Across the Thunder River*. These paramount chiefs rule over the other chiefs as sort of elected emperors, although they must still satisfy the people with their savage rule. Each of these more powerful, more influential paramount chiefs has equally powerful and influential councils and speakers to advise him and keep the people satisfied.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF PICCLAND

The Pictish Wilderness is a verdant forest, an expanse of dire swamps and lushly vegetated woodland. It is hilly and almost jungle-like in its vitality and fertility. To the east dwell the Hawks, Ravens, Wildcats, Turtles, Panther, Alligator and Otter tribes. The Hawks, Ravens, Wildcats and Turtles are to the northeast and the Panther, Alligator and Otter dwell more to the south. All live along the Thunder River. To the west is the great confederacy of the Wolves. The Eagles live to the west of the Wolves along the shores of the ocean.

The land is vitally important to the Picts and is essential to their identity. The Picts deal with the realities of their woodland realm every moment. No matter where or when they are, the Picts are aware of their environment. They mimic animal calls to attract prey within the range of their weapons. They make use of natural lighting and foliage to hide within mere feet of prey. The environment provides the materials they use to live and craft homes, weapons, clothing and food. The Picts who live along the shores of the ocean are not sea-farers.

They comb the beaches for walrus and whale carcasses thrown up by the waves and fish along the shores. They do not venture far out into the wild, blue ocean.

**Black River** – The Black River is the frontier border of Aquilonia and the site of many battles with the savage Picts. The river has a swift current, yet is quite deep and rather wide, carrying a large volume of water. The river's source is somewhere in the Black Mountains of northern Pictland. It flows southward along the border of the Bossonian Marches, then along the frontier border of Westermarck. Eventually it curves to the West as it flows into Zingara on its course to the open sea. The Zingaran capital of Kordava sits at its mouth.

**Thunder River** – The Thunder River is another important Aquilonian river and is a border against Pictland. It is named the Thunder River for its long stretches of white-water rapids in northern Zingara and southern Bossonia.

## IMPORTANT PICCLAND SITES

**Ghost Swamp** – Ghost Swamp is a place where the Picts hold parleys. It lies to the south and west of Tullien's Creek in the Westermarck of Aquilonia.

**Korvela Bay** – Korvela Bay is a coastal colony that was established by the exiled Zingaran Count Valenso de Korzetta. A wooden fort-castle was built here by the Count's servants and destroyed nearly a year later by the Picts.

## HISTORY OF THE PICTISH WILDERNESS

The Picts were a barbaric race even in the dim, legendary age before the Cataclysm. They lived on the western ocean on a chain of islands. When the great Cataclysm rocked the foundations of everything, the Pictish islands were thrust up, forming mountains in a new continent. The Picts were annihilated, save for a single colony in the south of Valusia. For the next millennium the Picts reverted back to stone-age savagery. They hunted remnant groups of Atlanteans in the ruins of Valusia.

Even through the Cataclysm the Picts retained a sense of identity and remained in one area but the lesser cataclysm destroyed this and the Pictish clans were scattered. The term 'Pict' was no longer a term of racial identity but just a word used to distinguish them from the animals, for they no longer had contact with any other human beings. The Atlantean survivors who were formerly the enemies of the Picts fell even further, regressing and degenerating into apishness.





Thus they stayed until the coming of the Hyborians from the north. The Hyborians found the Picts still at a stone-age level, having had no contact with the Acheronians nor the people of the Zingg Valley. The Picts were driven into the forests of the west, a region of wilderness that stretched from the border of Vanaheim in the north to Zingara in the south. To the west the region was bounded by the ocean and to the east, the Bossonian Marches hemmed it in.

In recent history, in an expansion effort initiated by King Vilerus and continued by King Numedides, Aquilonia made an ill-fated attempt to colonise part of the Pictish Wilderness. The Picts refused to submit meekly and unleashed their fury, destroying the Aquilonians' fort in a war reminiscent of Aquilonia's colonisation attempt in Cimmeria.

## CREATURES IN THE PICTISH WILDERNESS

Boars, elks, panthers, sabre-tooths, snakes, bears, wolves, stegosaur dragons and all sorts of strange monsters and animals lurk in the forests of Pictland. Among the strangest are the chaken and the swamp devils.

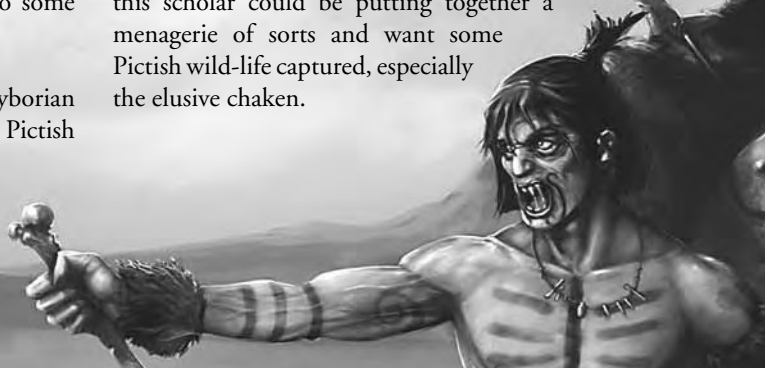


## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Characters on a sea voyage have had little luck and it finally ran out when their ship splintered on the shores of Pictland. The characters must now decide between building a fort on the shore and hoping for an unlikely rescue or plunging into certain death by trying to cross Pictland into some more civilised realm.

A Nemedian scholar is putting together a Hyborian bestiary and wants reports of sub-humanoids in the Pictish Wilderness confirmed. He is putting together

a safari into that wild land, heedless of the dangers and is convinced the Picts are simply primitive men running around naked and fearful of civilised man. Alternatively, this scholar could be putting together a menagerie of sorts and want some Pictish wild-life captured, especially the elusive chaken.





# Punt

## Land of Gold

Punt is an eastern Black Kingdom south of the Turanian desert, east of Keshan and west of Zembabwei and Iranistan. Punt is typically hostile toward its neighbours, especially Keshan and Zembabwei. As a result, Punt is relatively narrow-minded and limited in its ability to conduct extensive international trade.

Punt is a tribal land filled with savages and chieftains who answer to a king. Puntish characters use the Northern Black Kingdom tribesman (Kushite) race when building characters.

### PUNTISH CLOTHING

The people of Punt wear short robes with cowls. The spearmen wear ostrich-plumed headdresses, hold rhinoceros-hide shields and wield feather-tufted spears. The priests wear purple robes with cowls.

### SOCIAL STANDING

Social standing in Punt is determined by who controls wealthy resources, such as cattle, gold, myrrh and other trade goods. Further, being regarded as a skilled orator or poet adds to one's social standing. Every five ranks in an oratory skill (Diplomacy, Perform (oratory) and so on) give the character a +1 Reputation in Punt once the character has publicly used the skill. Social standing is also clan based. Certain clans are considered to be socially superior to other clans. Most people in Punt are herdsman or work with trade goods (collecting frankincense or myrrh, hunting elephants for ivory, panning for gold with wicker baskets and so on).

One special classification of the people are the Mesnitu, who are a secret society of blacksmiths and weaponsmiths. They control the power of fire and are considered in touch with powerful spirits, giving life to the metal.

### TRADE AND ECONOMY

Punt's economy is based on the gold trade, for they supposedly sieve from the mountain streams great nuggets of gold, some the size of goose eggs. The Puntish people also hunt and manage some subsistence farming on the hot plains. As with most of the Black Kingdoms, cattle herds are the embodiment of wealth.

Punt is also a land of incense and myrrh. These are traded with other nations, along with cinnamon, cloves, ivory, ebony, gum and exotic animal skins such as panther, monkey, dog, ape, cheetah and giraffe. There is a small amount of iron ore in the nation and that is largely controlled by the Mesnitu secret society.

Much of Punt's trade is with Stygia, especially the gold, myrrh and frankincense goods. Stygia sends massive caravans every few years to make extensive trades with Punt, so the trade is not constant.

### THE MILITARY OF PUNT

Puntish warriors excel at the spear and wield it with savage efficiency. Their fighting is not based on form and structure; they fight to slay and to slay quickly.

### RELIGION IN PUNT

The people of Punt worship an ivory goddess. Robert E. Howard does not name this enigmatic goddess but L. Sprague de Camp gave her a name: Nebethet. She is primarily worshipped in a shrine-temple located in an uninhabited place not far from Kassali, the royal city of Punt. The temple, which was built before the arrival of the Gallahs, is a round, domed marble building in the shape of a skull. The statue is made out of a single piece of ivory. More information about the Ivory Goddess can be found in *Faith and Fervour*.

There is also a fair amount of demon-worship in Punt. One example of this is the hyena-demon Jamankh. Jamankh represents dark wisdom, greed and sexual deformity. He preys upon corruption and vileness. More information about Jamankh and his cult, including a new spell, can be found in *Faith and Fervour*.

In addition to the Ivory Goddess and various demons, the people of Punt also engage in ancestor worship, much like in the rest of the Black Kingdoms. Further, their religion is animist, wherein spirits can be found throughout all of existence. Information about typical Black Kingdoms ancestor veneration and animist practices can be found in *Faith and Fervour*.

Priests in Punt portray themselves as messengers of the gods or spirits, for the gods speak only to the priests by way of oracular statues. The clergy of Punt has so much power from being the mouthpieces of the gods that they can even command the kings to commit suicide and those commands will be obeyed.

## PUNTISH GOVERNMENT

Punt is ruled by King Lalibeha. The king is a stout man with greying, woolly hair. He wears a crown made of sheets of gold hammered into the form of a hawk with its wings spread out. He is known to be canny and cautious, not given to rash decisions. He is aided by his counsellor, the High Priest Zaramba. The chiefs of Punt often consult the oracle of the Ivory Goddess before making any grave decisions.

Capital punishment is practised in Punt; traitors are fed to crocodiles. Other punishments include drawing out a person's bowels inch by inch while he is still alive and staking a person over an ant-hill.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF PUNT

Punt is a land of low mountains, lush forests, wind-swept grasslands and hot savannahs. The north and central regions are mostly mountainous grasslands with spots of forest. Eventually the grasslands give way to the savannahs and deserts of the north. In the south, Punt is much flatter and is mostly savannah.

**Kalok Narok:** In the south is a huge alkaline desert lake where the Puntish people throw their dead.

A few small volcanic islands, which are usually spewing steam or smoke, can be found on the lake. The surface rivers empty into the lake, while the lake itself empties into a subterranean river that flows beneath southern Keshan and the ruins of Alkmeenon. The lake environs are deadly. The arid heat itself is a danger but the lake changes temperature more slowly than the land, causing strong winds and/or violent storms throughout the area. In addition to the weather, the lake is dangerous because it is home to massive Stygian crocodiles (see *Stygia – Serpent of the South*), scorpions and deadly vipers.

## IMPORTANT PUNTISH CITIES

**Kassali** – Kassali is the royal city of Punt. In its centre rise the gold- and crystal-encrusted towers of the sun-dried mud palace of King Lalibeha and the painted temple to the ivory goddess. The city is built on a great, grassy hill. At the far end of the grassy plain around twinkling Kassali is the shrine-temple to the ivory goddess.

## PUNTISH HISTORY

Punt was established by adventurous Gallahs of Kush after they discovered the wealth of gold in its mountain streams. They named the nation after their home, the outer-city of Shumballa.

## LOCAL CREATURES

Punt is home to many African-style animals, such as elephants, giraffes, monkeys, apes, crocodiles, scorpions and snakes

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

For those involved in mercenary campaigns, war between Keshan and Punt would make for an exciting extended campaign. Perhaps Zembabwei could get involved on one side or the other. The characters may have to work as diplomats to sway the Zembabwan kings to support their chosen side.

Stygia could hire Player Characters to accompany a Stygian trading expedition to Punt, which could create problems with Keshan or Zembabwei.





# Shem

## The Pastoral Lands

Soon the character of the coastline changed. No longer they sailed past steep cliffs with blue hills marching behind them. Now the shore was the edge of broad meadowlands which barely rose above the water's edge and swept away into the hazy distance. Here were few harbors and fewer ports, but the green plain was dotted with the cities of the Shemites; green sea, lapping the rim of the green plains, and the zikkurats of the cities gleaming whitely in the sun, some small in the distance.

Through the grazing-lands moved the herds of cattle and squat, broad riders with cylindrical helmets and curled blue-black beards, with bows in their hands. This was the shore of the lands of Shem, where there was no law save as each city-state could enforce on its own. Far to the eastward, Conan knew, the meadowlands gave way to the desert, where there were no cities and the nomadic tribes roamed unhindered.

— *The Hour of the Dragon*

Shem is a non-Hyborian land of decadent despots in the west and fierce nomads in the east. This influential nation of over fifteen million people is a powerful commercial engine, drawing in wealth through overland trade via the well-travelled caravan routes that criss-cross the arid deserts and pastoral meadowlands. Trade is the life of Shem and the debauched city-states seem to specialise in their manufacture of goods, living off the unending camel trains. The luxuriant kingdoms are constantly at war with each other, each

trying to steal domination of various trade routes, trying to destroy competition in search of ever elusive monopolies in some good or another.

These trading kingdoms are the homes of the meadow Shemites, who are generally of medium height with hook noses, dark eyes and blue-black hair. Some families have Stygian blood, however and these people are gigantic, broadly and strongly built, with the same sort of facial features as the shorter Shemites. The wealthy urban Shemites wear loose, floor-length robes with sleeves. The robes are usually embroidered and may be made of dyed fabric and trimmed with cloth-of-gold. The poor wear simple sashed or belted tunics that are about knee-length.

Roaming in their white-robed hordes, nomadic Shemites dwell in the eastern deserts. They raid their western cousins constantly, burning with a fierce hatred for their civilised kin. Many consider the cities, towns and villages of Shem to be little more than store houses for things the nomads want. Among the desert nomads, the most notorious, largest and most widely travelled tribe are the Zuagir. These determined riders of the hot sands range from Zamboula to Zamora, fighting savage battles along the eastern edges of the Hyborian nations. They survive through terrorism and plundering civilised lands. Other tribes include the Azilis.

## TALES AND LIES

Rich or poor, Shemites are renowned as unrepentant liars and tellers of tall tales. Treasures, riches and beautiful things cause the hearts and souls of the Shemites to soar. They live to accumulate wealth and beauty, surrounding themselves with jewellery and lovely slaves. Some are content to gather their wealth via trade and mercantilism, although many Shemites have roving minds and are willing to travel to find riches and slaves far from home. Most adventuring and wandering meadow Shemites are either merciless mercenaries or Pelishtim scholars.

## HONOUR AND ALLEGIANCE

**Code of Honour:** Meadow Shemites and Pelishtim often hold to a civilised code of honour (see rules in *Conan the Roleplaying Game*) or, in the case of the *asshuri*, perhaps the mercenary code of honour. Many of the Meadow Shemites and Pelishtim, however, do not follow codes of honour.

The nomad tribes almost always follow the barbaric code of honour (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game*). Eastern Shemites are not controlled by fear or guilt. Nomadic Shemites are more worried about shame. To shame one's family, clan, tribe or nation is the most dreaded thing the Shemite nomads can imagine. The opposite of shame is honour, so all Shemite characters should follow the barbaric code of honour. Note that breaking the law is not necessarily shameful or even evil. Being caught in a shameful act is far worse than being caught simply breaking the law. There are three basic values of a Shemite tribe: shame, honour and revenge. Many clans will attempt to cover up shame but if it is found out the clan must opt for vengeance. The values of the nomad tribes are vested in this code of honour; those who do not observe it may find themselves stripped of their a'gals or, worse, thrown out of their tribes, a sentence of almost certain death. Honour and shame can provide many adventure hooks. Some aspects of nomadic honour include the certain traditions of clan, hospitality and vengeance.

**Clan:** The centre of nomadic Shemite society is the clan. A clan is a collection of families. Each family has its own tent. A number of clans create a tribe. The Zuagir tribe, for example, is comprised of several clans flung throughout the desert. The tribe as a whole rarely gathers. People living in the same clan are considered to be family, of the same blood and are usually automatically treated as honourable allies. Clans are led by sheikhs. Sheikhs adjudicate matters of conflict, shame, honour and revenge. Clan councils determine the distribution of water and the use of water resources. All men in a clan are considered equal, although the elders are accorded extra respect because of their experience. A Shemite nomad is expected to have total loyalty for the tribe and to uphold the survival of the tribe. Shemite characters who observe a code of honour should always have an Allegiance to their immediate family first and foremost, followed by an Allegiance to their clan (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game* for rules concerning Allegiances).

**Hospitality:** The hospitality of Shemite nomads is legendary. Strangers are often met with displays of courtesy and respect. Those who betray or insult the nomads, however, are treated as dishonourable (note that actually *asking* for hospitality is insulting to a nomad). Those who trespass against the nomads are not easily forgiven or forgotten. The nomads are also expected to be generous to guests, giving up their last meal if necessary. Shemite nomads hold one thing above all else – water. They never waste water and the sharing of water is a sure sign of friendship and trust. Once a stranger is considered a guest, that stranger is under the protection of the host and is, for purposes of the barbaric code of honour, treated as an honourable ally. Shemite characters who observe a code of honour should always have an Allegiance toward the category of people known as guests.

**Revenge:** The concept of vengeance is important to the nomads. It provides them with a social check against transgressions. As a rule they are not as discourteous as their civilised western brethren because of the threat of having their skulls split in a blood feud. Blood feuds are common among the nomads; their honour demands such things. When someone insults or dishonours another, the insulted family may justifiably kill the offender. The family of the slain man may disagree about the justification of the killing and feel insulted themselves and so kill a member of the other family, which, in turn, is insulted again and so on. Any Shemite nomad who observes a code of honour is bound to spill the blood of those who insult him. This often escalates into full-scale tribal wars which require a third party to settle by naming a blood price to be paid by one or the other party. The fear of retribution by friends and relatives causes individual nomads to refrain from rudeness and avoid engaging in passionate quarrels.

**Patronage:** The nomads also have a system of guardianship known as patronage. The rules of vengeance can often work against the weak, who may not be able to enact their right of revenge. The weak, then, must resort to the strong for protection. Thus, weaker warriors plead to sheiks and other powerful men for patronage. If a sheik or other powerful warrior grants patronage to someone weaker than himself, the sheik is honour-bound to fulfil his pledge. Any slights against his man become slights against the patron. Thus, the nomads are polite and honourable toward the weak, lest their patrons enact revenge.





## SHEMITE CLOTHING

The standard dress for a nomad man is a white, girdled *khilat*, a robe with full open sleeves, linen, cotton or silken breeches and a flowing head-dress that falls to the shoulders and is banded about the temples with a triple circlet of braided camel-hair called a *kafieh*. The amount of embroidery on the *khilat* or *kafieh* indicates the relative position and wealth of the wearer. Cloaks are made of camel hair. Shemites also wear turbans wrapped around spired helmets. The women wear *chadors*, or full-body robes that include hoods and veils. More information about Shemite clothing can be found in *Shem – Gateway to the South*.

## SEX ROLES IN SHEM

**Meadow Shemites:** Women have important rights in Shem, although they are hardly treated as equal. Women are considered part of the fruits of war, a sexual reward for the soldiers who fight so gallantly; women must be considered less than men for this to be so. Women are free to engage in trade and business and may own property. However, if married, a woman must guard against seeming free with other men or making fun of her husband to avoid divorce. A woman can choose which son gets her inheritance. Virtually any woman is vulnerable to sexual slavery, for any woman can be captured in war or sold by her husband or father to pay off debts. The vulnerability of women to be captured in war as concubine slaves makes women in Shem dependent upon the armed might of the city-state for their protection.

In general, a woman's place in Meadow Shemite society is in the home. Her duty is to bear children, keep the home in order and obey her spouse. Information about marriage in Shem can be found in *Shem – Gateway to the South*.

**Nomadic Shemites:** Among the nomad tribes, women play a central role and are full partners in the household. They help to build and dismantle tents, care for the flocks, raise any crops, perform any needed weaving and make or repair clothing. Most women do chores during the day, such as milking animals, caring for young children, spinning wool, weaving cloth, tending flocks, cooking, drawing water and mending tents and clothing. Women can marry more than once and are not secluded for the most part. Information about marriage in Shem

can be found in *Shem – Gateway to the South*. The advice of women is sought in clan councils and many are authors of clan poetry.

Women of the nomad tribes enjoy more freedom and power than Meadow Shemite women. They are protected by a strict code of honour held by the men. They can move about freely and can talk to men without fear or shame. Some rare few who show the aptitude can even become raiders and warriors. Women of the nomad tribes are also vulnerable to sexual slavery. Any woman taken in a raid becomes the legal property of the victor – and becoming property is the same as becoming a slave.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

The coastline of Shem has few natural harbours, making the overland routes extremely important. Those lush city-states that do control harbours have additional power but also need to defend their power more often from jealous rivals. The Pelishtim hold the best and most powerful harbours. Their constant need to defend their sea trade and overland trails have turned them into noted warriors. However, the avarice of the Pelishtim also has its consequences. Few ships even want to put into Shemite harbours because there is scant profit in trading with the sons of Shem.

The nomads have a redistributive economy that is handled by the *sheiks* and councils. Those in need are cared for and given what they need. Wealth is held in the form of jewellery, wives and livestock. Nomads do not own land. The primary standard of trade is the camel, probably the most valuable form of property a nomad will ever own. Nomads often sell slaves to the city-states in return for weaponry, grain, camels and other items difficult to manufacture in a nomadic culture and lifestyle.

Shem is a powerful commercial engine, drawing in wealth through overland trade via the well-travelled caravan routes that criss-cross the arid deserts and pastoral meadowlands. Trade is the life of Shem and the debauched city-states seem to specialise in their manufacture of goods, living off of the unending camel trains. The elite of Shemite society control the surplus of the society, which allows them to control the specialists, thus sustaining their own power in the city-state. The elite have little actual need of the surplus but they do need to maintain their social standing and reputation. By redistributing the goods as needed for their society, they maintain both standing and reputation. However, there is still surplus. This surplus is sold and controlled by supply and demand concerns. Loans are one of the keystones to

trade in Shem. Caravans require substantial backing in the form of supplies, animals, guards and, of course, cargo. Loans are often made in the form of silver, the standard of exchange in Shem. The temples finance most of these transactions although wealthy merchants can also do so.

Meadow Shemite merchants are known as the *dam-gar*. Some are employees of the temples, hired as specialists to negotiate trade for the priests. Others are entrepreneurial in nature and engage in the buying and selling surplus for their own enrichment. They work in the *karum* of a given city-state, the 'harbour' where trade is handled. In addition to handling trade, the *dam-gar* also handle loans, sometimes as state-appointed officials and sometimes on their own. Dealing in trade and finance is risky in Shem. In times of recession, a temple can legally declare all debts cancelled, thus ruining many creditor *dam-gar*.

Common tools for trade in Shem are clay tokens. They come in various shapes and assorted sizes, each representing different objects. A cone shape may represent a goat, for example. If a Shemite merchant were sending six goats to someone, he would put six cone-shaped clay tokens into a clay ball. When the goats arrived at the destination, the deliverer would give the customer the clay ball as well as the goats. The customer merely has to break open the clay ball and count the tokens to make sure the number of goats sent is the same as the number of goats that arrived. Some merchants in Asgalun merely press the tokens on the outside of the clay balls instead of sealing them within.

The nomads come into the cities to trade during the summer months when it is too hot to move around too much. They sell livestock, slaves, woven textiles, curd cheese and wool. They purchase rice, wheat, fruit, weapons, trinkets and finery. More information on this can be found in *Shem – Gateway to the South*.

## SLAVERS

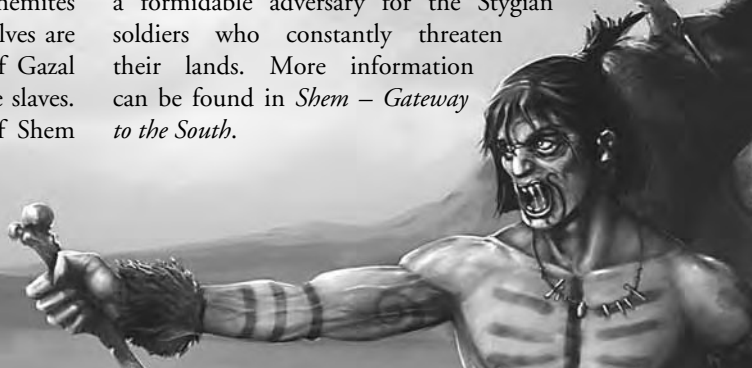
The Shemites are well-known as slavers, roving the Black Coast in slave ships, trading and raiding for 'human trade goods' to sell on the block in Shem. Virtually all Shemite cities and markets have slave blocks. Dancing girls, servants, labourers, gladiators, eunuchs and pleasure girls are common. Hyborian women dread slavery in Shem, where the depraved desires of the decadent Shemites shame and humiliate them. The Shemites themselves are also sometimes taken as slaves – the founders of Gazal in the deserts of the Black Kingdoms use Shemite slaves. Also, the Black Corsairs often raid the coasts of Shem for plunder and slaves.

## THE MILITARY OF SHEM

The mercenaries of Shem are considered to be men devoid of compassion or mercy. These cold-blooded killers for hire are inhumanly cruel, fighting with the ferocity and lust of wild beasts. They do not leave fallen foes behind but kill the wounded and the downed with pitiless intensity. Although some of the Shemitish mercenaries are skilled with swords and spears, their archers are the most in demand. Extremely keen of eye, the Shemites are feared for their deadly archery skills. They are practically born with bows in hand and horses beneath them. Dressed in scale corselets and cylindrical helmets, the sons of Shem are always ready for war. The elite warriors of the meadow Shemites call themselves *asshuri* and they do not refer to themselves as Shemites. They are members of whatever tribe or region they belong to. They are not Shemite *asshuri* but the *asshuri* of Nippr or the *asshuri* of Eruk. Their swords have pommels shaped as hawks and the material these are made of displays the prowess of the mercenary. An *asshuri* with an iron hawk has killed at least ten men in battle. A bronze hawk indicates twenty slayings in war. A silver hawk shows fifty confirmed kills. The gold hawk is given to those hearty warriors who have slain over a hundred men in various wars and skirmishes.

Shemite archers, armed with powerful bows, are capable of breaking the thunderous charges of armoured knights on their mighty horses. They can kill horses with their deadly shafts or pick off the knights from their mounts, heedless of their armour, for every suit has weak points – something the keen-eyed Shemites always manage to find with their stinging arrows. Only the Bossonians are regarded as better bowmen and only the Hyrkanians are considered superior horsemen and both points are hotly contested by the cruel Shemites.

The leaders of the Shemite Horde learn tactics and strategy from their western brothers. Although they rarely speak of it, they make extensive use of entrapment, military intelligence and mobility warfare tactics quite unlike the 'charge and destroy' methods employed by other hordes. These sophisticated skills, combined with the raw strength of their spirit, make them a formidable adversary for the Stygian soldiers who constantly threaten their lands. More information can be found in *Shem – Gateway to the South*.





## RELIGION IN SHEM

The polytheistic Shemites have a penchant for gods and goddesses. Each city state worships some obscene fertility god or goddess as its patron, trusting that their horrible, squat brass idols actually hold the essence and presence of those gods and goddesses. Most of these fertility deities are Earth Mothers of the sort common to agricultural communities. Gods are the subordinate lover gods of the goddesses. In many of these religions, male consorts are killed and reborn each year, coinciding with annual growing and harvest cycles. Many Shemite rituals involve enactments of this sacrifice and rebirth in caricatured, symbolic manners that often include human sacrifice and sexual rituals. Indeed, even coming before these awesome and feared gods, humanity must show humility, which often requires that worshippers approach on their hands and knees in the nude.

Most of these deities are simple in concept with elaborate and curious ceremonies dedicated to their worship. The gods are given copper or brass forms by skilled artisans who capture their obscene, pot-bellied forms and exaggerated sexual features. These idols are believed to be actual gods and goddesses. Although the temple districts of the towns usually have shrines to many of the gods, each city-state tends to identify with the aspects of one god over all the others. These symbols of deific power then become the chosen patrons. Bel, for example, is the patron of Shumir and Pteor is the patron of the Pelishtim. The patron gods have more than just religious power; they also provide political power. A powerful king is believed to have the support of a patron; a weak one is not.

The religions of Shem teach concepts of predestination, resulting in fatalism among the Shemites, who believe that if their day to die arrives, nothing they can do will change it. The sons of Shem do not struggle against fates regarded as inevitable. The eastern Shemites in particular pay homage to Fate and several of their gods and goddesses are deities of fate and destiny. The Shemites also believe in a just afterlife, a type of resurrection or reincarnation. The souls of evil men, according to the Shemites, are imprisoned in the bodies of apes as punishment for their wickedness.

Lofty white *zikkurats* are reared to their gods, for to the Shemites, the gods are quite real, not just some illusions conjured

by man's mind to explain the mysteries of the world. Unlike the gods of the Cimmerians, the Shemite gods supposedly respond to prayer, worship and sacrifice. Indeed, the very vitality, fertility and prosperity of the sons of Shem, collectively and individually, depend on said ceremonies. So strong are these gods in the minds of the Shemites, who dread and fear their awesome gods, that worship of them has spread to foreign nations. Anu the Bull-God is worshipped in Corinthia, the worship of the unwholesome fish-god Dagon and his debauched mate Derketo has found its way all the way south to Zembabwei and votaries of Ishtar are found in many Hyborian kingdoms to the north, particularly in Koth.

Some of the more prominent gods and goddesses of the decadent sons of Shem include Adonis, Anu, Ashtoreth, Bel, Derketo, Ishtar and Pteor. More information on these gods and others can be found in *Faith and Fervour*.

**Adonis:** The son of Anu and the mate of Ishtar, Adonis is a fertility god, both in a sexual, phallic sense and in terms of agriculture. His statues are nude, brass caricatures that emphasise his genitalia. Sex, for the Shemites, is not sinful but a complex and pleasurable rite that is spiritually and physically beneficial. Exotic techniques of sexual intercourse are highly prized by the sons of Shem. The myths of Adonis indicate he was slain or assassinated while hunting, either by a wild boar or by minions of his consort, Ishtar. Either way, the myth relates the message that death is necessary for life. Interestingly, Adonis is often symbolised by a boar, so his death by a boar is indicative of the fatalism of the sons of Shem – he was the instrument of his own death, bringing it upon himself. Ishtar travelled to the underworld to return him to life, passing through the seven gates of the underworld, shedding her clothing and threatening the demons that guard the gates as she went. In order to return to the earth, Adonis had to agree to remain in the underworld six months out of the year and, as a result, the earth must suffer through cold and infertile winters. In the spring Adonis returns and the priests celebrate by holding great festivals where the priestesses act out the journey to the underworld and the priests, stripped naked, gash themselves so as to spill their blood on the soil to symbolically awaken the fertility of the world. Even more important than the annual rites, the Shemites worship Adonis for personal fertility and sexual vitality. The love between Adonis and Ishtar sustains the world and physical love-play is allegorical to the intercourse between those two gods.

**Anu:** The sky-god Anu is worshipped throughout Shem. The domestication of cattle is significant in the civilising of man, so Anu is often given the form of a bull, a symbol of male power and virility. Cattle, oxen and bulls

are sacred to him and, save for useful cows, are sacrificed to him. The symbolism of the bull is one of strength, fury and toil. As oxen are used to till the earth to bring forth crops, so too is Anu considered a creator-god, tilling the universe to bring forth the gods and mankind. His roar frightens the heavens into releasing its water, bringing forth rain upon the earth. He reminds the earth of his power via his horns, which form the crescent moon. He is a fearsome and distant god that does not want to be troubled with day-to-day concerns and will send forth his wrath and fury upon those who bother him lightly. He is prayed to in order to bring forth the rains, for his roars still frighten the heavens into releasing water. In some regions, Ishtar is called upon to bring forth Anu's seed in the form of rain to fertilise the earth. In the east, he is prayed to by the desert tribes to lessen the harshness of the sun, for the rising of his horns in the night sky brings coolness to the hot lands.

**Ashtoreth:** Ashtoreth is Ishtar's handmaiden, a goddess of prostitutes. Sexuality in Shem is not considered base or sinful. Indeed, prostitutes are servants of Ishtar, commanded to sleep with any worshipper for a fee. The dancers of Ashtoreth symbolise sexual intercourse through the motions of their dancing. Ashtoreth desires that all Shemite virgins serve in the temples at least once in their lives and have sex with strangers. Sexuality is a form of purification and young girls are brought to the temples to have sexual intercourse with at least one man, often a priest but not always, before being allowed to leave. In some areas of Shem, Ashtoreth and Ishtar are identified as being the same, with both names used interchangeably. The goddess is often depicted in three forms: as a young woman, a virgin-harlot; as a fertile woman, her belly swollen with the fruits of her labours; and as an old woman, grown wise in the ways of men and women, a teacher of prostitutes and young wives.

**Bel:** Bel is one of the most travelled of Shemite gods. Worshipped in Zamora, Brythunia and elsewhere in addition to Shem, Bel is the god of thieves and patron of Shumir and Arenjun (in Zamora, see page 238). He is often depicted as an eagle carrying a forked bolt of lightning, hinting that he can steal the powers of the heavens and even the powers of the other gods if he so desires. His worship does not involve animal or human sacrifice. Conan speaks favourably of this god and Conan rarely speaks well of a god that demands live sacrifices.

**Derketo:** Derketo is a seductress deity, a temptress that attempts to win Adonis away from Ishtar. She is the essence of depraved sexuality. Her rites are orgiastic, even considering the sensual natures of Ishtar's and Adonis' ceremonies. The exotic techniques taught in the temples of Derketo are extremely intense. Her

sacred prostitutes are considered the embodiment of Derketo herself. She is a sexual predator who takes the vitality of her lovers into herself either in sacrifice or as a means of self-gratification. She copulates with others, particularly young men, via deceptive guiles or illusions, sheer coercion or by using her own personal attributes.



**Ishtar:** Ishtar is the ivory-bosomed goddess of Koth, Shem, Khauran and the East in general. She is the daughter of Anu, the Queen of Heaven, a goddess of fertility and war. Women's sexual fulfilment is part of her divine mysteries. Her cult uses languid but orgiastic rites to stimulate the earth into becoming fertile and productive. The priestess is believed to embody Ishtar during certain sensual rituals and bestow her favours on her followers to ensure prosperity and fertility. Sacred prostitutes probably aid in the rituals. The priests of Ishtar represent her sons and lovers and also aid in the rituals; if a woman is thought to be infertile, the priests attempt to impregnate her and give her a divinely-blessed child. If the various rituals of Ishtar are not followed, the worshippers fear that crops will wither and the urge to mate by man or beast will dwindle away. Ishtar's shrines and temples are exotic, lavish and ornate, in the fashion of the East, with bright colourful decorations and objects. Although Ishtar does





not ask for human sacrifices, animal sacrifices are often part of her fertility rituals. Her temples include ivory idols, which she is believed to inhabit. Priests and priestesses care for these sensuous idols and often dress and paint them depending on the ritual needs of the day or season.

**Pteor:** Pteor is the patron god of the Pelishtim. He is a minor god in the pantheon and is embodied by obscene idols that reflect the 'grossness' of his cult. The Pelishtim live in a fertile region of Shem, a region of herdsmen. Pteor may be symbolised by a ram or a sheep. A ram's horn symbolises male power. The male goat is often associated with sexual vigour. Pteor could also be a local version of Adonis.

## SHEMITE GOVERNMENT

There is no one king of Shem. Instead, each city-state in Shem has its own king and government, although most of the cities have similar customs and traditions in regards to government and politics. This aids Shem in keeping the city states competitive to the benefit of all; thus no city gets left out because it has fallen out of royal favour with a specific king. Likewise, there is no one single Sheikh of Sheikhs, ruler of all the nomad tribes. Each tribe is governed separately but a shared culture creates marked similarities from tribe to tribe.

### CITY-STATE GOVERNMENT

Shemite city-states are essentially theocracies. Although there is a hereditary aristocracy and a king, the temples are in charge of the city-states. There is no separation between religious and secular power.

The kings of Shem claim a religious and a historical right to rule. Not only are they the representative of their patron gods on Earth, they are also the sons of kings, part of a lineage stretching back to the Great Cataclysm.

Kingship is hereditary among the Meadow Shemites and Pelishtim. The king is most often from the warrior class, for he must be able to defend the city, enforce the laws, maintain the social order and lead wars. He must also take part in the religious ceremonies of the city-state. Thus he is a warrior and a priest. Many kings of Shem are essentially deified. The wife

of the king is a queen and she is often the high priestess of the city-state or the personification of a goddess. Some kings rule by employing terror. They ruthlessly suppress rebellions through the *asshuri*. They deport rebellious populations from their city-state if needed, making them wander in the desert to die. They even treat the people they conquer brutally. Despite their employment of cruelty and violence, Shemite kings do not have totalitarian power.

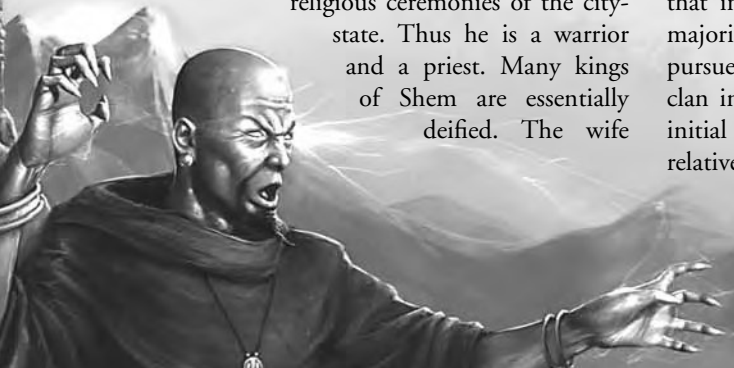
The king of a Shemite city-state is advised by a council of elders and by the priests. The aristocracy function as administrators, working for the king. The aristocrats work as scribes and functionaries in the service of the king. The aristocrats are responsible for drafting commoners to work on community projects, collect taxes in the form of a percentage of their crops and to ensure the canals and other methods of irrigation are in constant repair. Further, the aristocrats divide up the grain they collect for the city to give to its soldiers or any others it supports. The aristocrats exempt themselves from physical labour but there is no system for sycophants and hangers-on; each aristocrat has a duty to the king, the temple and the city-state.

The priests are charged with maintaining the social status-quo. They tell the commoners their hard labours are necessary because they were created to serve the gods. The priests often sit on the city councils of elders alongside the aristocrats to help advise the king. They help maintain social order by teaching that right belief means nothing but that right behaviour is the key to being blessed by the gods.

### NOMAD TRIBAL GOVERNMENT

The nomad tribes of Shem are essentially republics governed by opinion and tradition. No one can decree sovereign law to the nomads. No one can even enforce popular opinion. If a clan feels honour bound to act differently than the rest of the tribe, they are allowed to do so.

Honour and revenge are the highest laws and the highest forms of government. By placing such importance on honour, the individual nomad is compelled to uphold the name and respect of his family, clan and tribe. The fear of dishonour, not only of self but of family, virtually ensures that individual nomads comply with the wishes of the majority. The importance of vengeance allows nomads to pursue individual rights to the death, bringing their entire clan into a conflict regardless of how small or large the initial slight was. The fear of retribution by friends and relatives causes individual nomads to refrain from rudeness.



Thus social order among the nomads is maintained. Still, the tribes maintain an informal chain of command based on a concept of precedence.

Those with the highest rank of precedence are the commanders of the nomads. The Shemite nomads are commanded by *sheiks*, or chiefs, who dwell in large, silk-walled tents hung with gilt-worked tapestries and littered with rich carpets and velvet cushions.

The *sheiks*, or *shaykhs*, are elected by a council of elders from the family of the prior *sheik*. The power does not pass automatically to the eldest son as it would in Nemedra or Aquilonia. The council of elders chooses from the entire family, a system that often leads to violence between brothers as each tries to win the favour of the elders. Reputation and Charisma play large parts in the selection of a *sheik*. The *sheiks* are not dictators; they rule by consensus, negotiation, tradition and, occasionally, arbitration. Nomads have no respect for authority such as would be seen in civilisation; indeed, they meet their sheiks on even footing, so long as the proper respect is shown. The nomads are the most democratic of all people during the Hyborian age. The nomads follow only successful leaders and some, such as the Zuagirs, tend to have more faith in foreign leaders than those of their own race. They want loot and they will follow the chief who will lead them to it.

The council of elders determine how water resources are used and distributed. The sheik presides over the council but he is not a supreme authority. However, a sheik's position gives him an advantage in swaying councils and tribes. A sheik's expression of opinion, more often than not, becomes the tribe's de facto opinion. Such is the esteem in which the sheiks are held.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF SHEM

Shem is a large nation that lies between Koth and Stygia. To the west and to the east are Argos and Turan, respectively. In the west, Shem is meadowland. In the east, it is desert. The division seems to occur at the hills that rise between the Mountains of Fire on the border of Koth and the Ford of Bubastes on the Styx.

The deserts of Shem are vast and cover a wide variety of terrain, including sandy dunes, sun-baked mud, savannah and salt plains. Salt lakes are common in some areas, with attendant pillars of salt and ancient ruins that rise out of the hot plains in other places. Ancient tombs can

be found buried in the sands or burning on the baked savannahs, silent and grim testaments to the time when Stygia ruled this land.

**Asgalun River** – This watercourse, which splits right before Anakia, passes through Ghaza and Kyros, each on a different fork of the river.

**Libnum Hills** – These hills, where shepherds keep their flocks, overlook Asgalun.

**Mountains of Desperation** – North of Qjara and south of eastern Koth, the Mountains of Desperation are a near vertical range of mountains which many caravan pass through.

**Mountains of Fire** – The mountains of fire form a volcanic range that splinters off the Kezankian mountains and runs south-westerly from the northern border of Shem near Shumir.

**Pyrrhenian Mountains** – The Pyrrhenians are a range in north-western Shem that form a barrier between the fertile croplands of Shem and the uplands of Koth.

**Shan-e-Sorkh** – This region is called 'the Red Waste' and is an unproductive desert in the east. It has red sand and virtually no water. The Makan-e-Mordan is a haunted area in this region and means 'Place of Ghosts.' The city of Akhlata is built on a fertile oasis of green trees and lotus pools in the Makan-e-Mordan (see the entry for Akhlata below).

## IMPORTANT SHEMITE CITY-STATES

Shem is home to some 34 cities, 180 towns and over 19,000 villages or nomad encampments. Most of the cities and towns are in the west. The cities tend to be the seats of power for each city-state, ruling attendant towns and villages. The cities are constantly at war with each other, even though few, if any, are economically stable enough to exist without the trade that passes between the cities. Each city specialises in some tradable good or other, such as weaponry, wines or the herding of animals. Shemite cities are characterised by white zikkurats and gleaming towers. The only laws in these







cities are the ones enforced by the individual kings. What is against the law in one city-state may well be perfectly legal in the next. The list below is by no means exhaustive. More information (including some city maps) can be found in *Shem – Gateway to the South*.

**Abbadrah** – Abbadrah is a minor city-state of southern Shem ruled by Queen Afrit. It is a city of huddled white domes and zikkurats among the green bottomland and a cedar forest provided by the fertile flooding of the River Styx. Several caravan roads pass through this walled city, leading to Eruk to the north and to Asgalun to the west. Suburbs sprawl outside the wall, villages and towns that support the main city by growing barley and harvesting the trees. Near the crocodile-laden Styx, shanty-town villages are built on stilts against the annual flooding. The pyramid tombs of Stygia can be seen from Abbadrah. A former king of Abbadrah, enamoured of Stygian architecture, built his own necropolis outside the city with each noble's tomb supposedly laden with wealth and treasure. 11,000 inhabitants work and trade here.

**Akbitana** – Akbitana is a city-state of gleaming zikkurats on the caravan route between Kizzil-Bezzin and Tamba-Syn. Another route from Akbitana takes caravans to Nippr to the west. Akbitana specialises in fine steel weapons and armour. Its blacksmiths are the best in the world. Forges great and small line many of the streets and the heat here rivals that of the surrounding deserts and plains. Would-be apprentices from many lands travel here in hopes of learning the skills of the Akbitanan smiths. Akbitana is home to 10,987 inhabitants, not including the five towns and more than one hundred villages that pay tribute to the Akbitanan king for the protection of his *asshuri*.

**Akhlat** – Akhlat 'the Accursed' is built on a fertile oasis of green trees and lotus pools in the Makan-e-Mordan (Place of Ghosts) region of the Shan-e-Sorkh (the Red Waste). It is a stuccoed-walled city of stone, small in size, with bulging domes and squat guard towers. Once power-mad sorcerers dwelled here, until they called down a demoness from Beyond to serve as a goddess to the people. The demoness destroyed the sorcerers and the region and became a tyrant over the people. Conan destroyed the evil thing and now caravan travel has begun to traverse the once haunted Red Waste.

Akhlat has a population of 3,567 people but it is growing. It is ruled by Shaykh Enosh and his daughter, Zillah.

**Akkharia** – Akkharia is a southern city-state in the meadowlands of Shem on the caravan route out of Luxur. Trade routes also connect Akkharia to Anakia and Eruk. Akkharia is ruled by King Sumuabi. A haunted castle once stood outside Akkharia. The ghost of a sorcerer possessed a dog and ruled the castle for a decade until it was slain by Conan. The castle has since crumbled, leaving a barren scar upon the earth that still does not grow but the most deformed of crops. King Sumuabi does not like strangers entering the city after dark, so unless travellers can adequately bribe the guards at night, they have to sleep in one of the outlying villages or manses until morning. A temple of Ibis can be found in the temple district along with the usual shrines to squat, horrible Shemitish gods. Akkharia has a population of 11,238 people.

**Anakia** – Anakia is a city-state of the meadowlands of Shem. It is on the caravan route between Akkharia and Asgalun. The city-state has a foolish king. The Anaki wear silken kilts and velvet vests.

**Asgakin** – Asgakin is a city-state that specialises in the working of copper. The statues of many of the Shemitish temples are created by Asgakinim artisans. Many zikkurats, more than are normal for a city of its size, dominate the city, for the working of divine idols is a religious task of much importance. Asgakin has a population of 8,898, not counting the two towns and dozen villages that support it by working the copper mines.

**Asgalun** – See the entry for Pelisitia below.

**Baalur** – The eight-sided, sheer-walled city of Baalur, due to a curse in its past, has uncommon fears of common nightmares. It lies in the Pyrrhenian foothills. The countryside around the city is fertile valleys and rolling fields, all watered by snows and showers from the mountains. Baalur is the richest city of Shem insofar as crops and husbandry goes. Caravans to and from the southern nations pass through the city, as it sits on the convergence of several trade routes. The trade routes make the city quite cosmopolitan and people from a score of nations can be found here, either passing through or making a living. The people are finely dressed, displaying the wealth of the region. The minarets are leaved with gold and the windowlights glitter with jewels. Slave markets, amusement districts of mountebanks and fakirs and vine-draped courtyard bazaars provide entertainment and profit for the citizens and traders. The temple district holds shrines and churches dedicated to the innumerable Shemitish gods. The city even hosts a temple to Set, although it is an underground cult here. Its priests masquerade in public



as priests of Mitra, even holding Mitran services. This city-state is ruled by the aged King Aphrates and Queen Rufia. Their daughter, Princess Ismaia, rumoured to be the daughter of Conan, will ascend the throne upon their deaths. From seeds brought back from the far depths of the Black Kingdom, the city grows small plots of the rare silver lotus. Tea made from this lotus is popular here. Baalur is home to a population of 34,850, not including the network of towns and villages that work the lands and fields.

**Bêcharadur** – Bêcharadur was once a coastal city-state in the meadow region of Shem. It was destroyed by Imhotep the Ravager, a demon. It is now a razed and flattened city. The Shemites, considering it a cursed location, have not rebuilt it, despite its position on a rare harbour. Pirates occasionally use the site to hide or rest.

**Buryat** – Buryat is a city built low to the ground behind a sea of tall grasses. Dwarfish men live in this city on the meadows of Shem south of Akkharia. The people of the city worship Nasati, the Heaven Bear. They were driven out by Conan and some Æsir many years ago but have since returned.

**Eruk** – Eruk is a city-state of Shem whose *asshuri* are famed for their skill at arms. Located on the caravan trail from Akkharia into Koth, Eruk is built on the meadowlands near the hills that separate the grasslands from the eastern deserts. Eruk probably specialises in copper production and the smelting of iron, although Eruki steel is not as famed or as strong as Akbitanan steel. Another caravan trail from Stygia via the Ford of Bubastes passes through or near Eruk on its winding route to Shumir. Eruk has a population of 9,879, not including the four towns and many villages that are subject to its king.

**Kaetta** – Kaetta was a small Shemitish city-state that worshipped Mitra. The temple of Mitra in Kaetta was built upon the ruins of an ancient temple to Ibis. Located north of the Styx, it sat upon a plateau in the desert. It is now a ruin, its population slain and its temple defiled. The city specialised in opals.

**Khyfa** – Khyfa is a mountainous city-state that worships Mitra with fervent devotion.

**Kuthchemes** – Kuthchemes is a mysterious ruin in the far south-eastern deserts of Shem. The ruins are colossal: huge broken columns, cyclopean blocks of broken masonry, shattered remnants of massive statues. A massive dome of pure ivory with a golden spire housed the bones of Thugra Khotan until Shevatas the thief disturbed his

slumber. The Hyborians destroyed Kuthchemes around the time of Acheron's fall. More information and a map can be found in *Ruins of Hyboria*.

**Kyros** – Kyros is another city-state located on the Asgalun River, competing with Ghaza for domination of the wine trade. The *asshuri* of Kyros use a fighting style that favours prolonged combat designed to fatigue a foe into making a mistake. The lush vineyards around Kyros bear the fabulous grapes that make the finest wine in all of Shem and even of all the Hyborian Kingdoms to the north. The royal family of Kyros is immensely wealthy, hiring armies of *asshuri* to defend the source of their wealth, the vineyards. Kyros has a population of 13,458 people living around its white zikkurats, not counting the seven towns and uncouneted villages that work the vineyards for the city.

**Nedrezzar** – Nedrezzar is a Shemitish city-state between Baalur and Asgalun in western Shem. It borders Baalur, sharing a portion of the Asgalun River. It enforces a toll on trade passing over the bridge over the Asgalun. Many caravans avoid the toll by passing through a ford a few leagues to the east. The Nedrezzim are regarded as especially keen dealers, which is saying something among the Shemites. Nedrezzar is one of the smaller nations, with a population of 8,322 in its capital and only a couple of towns and a handful of villages maintaining its primary trading specialisation, farming.

**Nippr** – Nippr is a desert city-state well-known for the ferocity of its *asshuri*. Nippr lies south of the Kothian Escarpment and Khoraja on the caravan trail connecting Shumir and Akbitana. Another trail runs south toward the Styx, then follows the Styx to the Ford of Bubastes. The city is home to 11,217 people and dominates five smaller towns and several outlying villages. Built around a large oasis, Nippr and its villages serve as a market for the loot and booty brought in by the nomadic tribes such as the Zuagir. Occasionally the nomads have tried to take Nippr but its impressive *asshuri* have thus far managed to defend their home and its attendant towns. Nippr's patron is an earth-mother goddess known as Derketo, the seducer of Adonis, a queen of the underworld and fertility goddess. The largest of its zikkurats is dedicated to her worship.

**Pelishtia** – Pelishtia is the westernmost kingdom in Shem. The Pelishtim are renowned for their hardy *asshuri*, bold





adventurers and curious wise men. Shem is an ancient kingdom and the Pelishtim are steeped in sorcery. The scholars of Pelishtia live for hundreds of years and may well possess the secret of eternal youth. Certainly the Pelishtim sorcerers are afforded respect even among the Stygians and Khitans, for they are learned in arcane secrets and wander far in search of knowledge. The *asshuri* of Pelishtia travel as far as Zingara in the west and as far as Turan in the east in search of employment and adventure. They worship Pteor as patron, although the other Shemitish gods are not ignored and are sometimes afforded more reverence than Pteor. The Pelishtim accept the ideas of life after death, believing also in ghosts and the undead, knowing that a strong will can allow the dead to return to fulfil unfinished business.



✿ **Asgalun** – Asgalun is the capital of Pelishtia and Shem's most important seaport. Built on the mouth of a river, it lies on the coast of Shem on one of its few natural harbours. The reeking alleys and narrow, winding streets move travellers through older, decaying sectors of the city to newer, respectable portions. The city is a contrast of splendour and decay. Opulent palaces and wealthy and sumptuous temples to horrible,

squat Shemitish gods sit amid crumbling ruins of buildings from forgotten ages. Bêlit, the Queen of the Black Coast, is descended from Asgalanim kings. The inner city is built behind great walls of sun-dried brick and is forbidden to commoners who are not servants to the rich and who do not have passes. The king and his nobles dwell in their lavish palaces and pleasure houses with their mercenary defenders within the forbidden section. Canals bring water from the river to the inner city. Asgalun is home to 40,450 people, although many hundreds of villages and seventeen towns pay tribute to this powerful metropolis. The city employs mercenary Kushites to support its Pelishtim *asshuri*. The city is currently ruled by a feeble nephew of former king Akhîrom but the real power behind the throne is General Mazdak the Hyrkanian, a cold, unfeeling warrior. He recently had a wall built around the outer city to make the city more defensible and has been funnelling money into rebuilding the ruins and shanties.

✿ **Dan-marcah** – Dan-marcah is a coastal city of Pelishtia on the coast of Shem. It is not a large city but is self-sufficient in that it does not serve a larger city. Its economy is based on ship-building. Forests lie to the north of Dan-marcah and are used for ship building. 6,112 people live in Dan-marcah and many villages support its logging and forestry industries.

**Qjara** – Qjara is a city-state with golden-tan walls in the eastern portions of Shem. It specialises in salt. A river provides water for the town along its north side, creating a river marsh. The Mountains of Desperation lie to the north. Another low range that runs easterly is to the south-east. The priests here make the wealthy share with the poor. They worship the goddess Saditha. The caravan quarter of Qjara is just a fringe of low buildings, watering troughs and stables for a half dozen caravans. The caravansaries and inns of this quarter are open stalls with canopies. Qjara has a population of 7,555 people.

**Sabatea** – Sabatea is a city-state on the border of Stygia near the Taian mountains to the west of the Shan-e-Sorkh. The Sabateans worship the Golden Peacock and have a dark reputation for torture and abominable rites. It is home to the wizards of the Black Ring. Most Shemitish city-states hire Sabatean torturers for their expertise. Sabatea has a population of 11,288 people.

**Sark** – Sark is a city-state in the deserts of Shem. The buildings of Sark have tiled roofs, white zikkurats, white-washed domes and are all protected by battlemented walls. The soldiers of Sark wear bronze armour and

wield bronze spears. They worship an extremely blood-thirsty god known as Votantha. They are rivals of Qjara, which lies many leagues to the north and east. Clothing here consists of vests, kirtles and pleated kilts. Sark is ruled by a priest-king. The city-state commands volcanic forges in the south and mines in the mountains. Sark has a population of 10,233.

**Shumir** – Shumir is an ancient city-state in the east where Bel, the god of thieves, was born. Shumir lies on a juncture of caravan trails from Eruk to the west and Nippr to the south. Khoraja is just to the north-east. Shumir provides splendid *asshuri*, well trained in the arts of war and at fighting desert nomads such as the Zuagir. Shumir is home to 13,246 people and is noted also as a city of thieves, as befits the birthplace of Bel.

**Shushan** – Shushan, where the people dress in barbaric splendour, is the largest of the eastern city-states. Instead of kings, the rulers of this massive state call themselves emperors. The city is north of the Taia mountains in Stygia, where the Styx makes its ninety degree turn. It has a population that exceeds 30,000 people and nine towns; a vast number of villages and whole hosts of nomadic tribes pay tribute to this wealthy trading nation. The women wear jewelled breastplates with slender chains to hold them in place, gold anklets and jewelled bracelets, jade pendants from golden earrings and gem-crusted girdles that support nearly transparent silken skirts.

**Tal'ib** – Tal'ib is also called the 'City in the Waste' and is nothing more than the haunted ruins of a long dead city named Yb. It lies in a southern gorge of the Mountains of Desperation.

**Thujara** – Thujara is a town in western Shem. Its sun-baked mud walls rise above its grainfields and pastures, the sources of its income for trade. It has a population of 3,459.

**Yamman** – Yamman lies southwest of Khoraja and is a small city-state of white-washed adobe and stone. It has a population of 7,800 people. The city surrendered itself to the Stygian prince that followed Natohk during his war against Khoraja. It was ruled by King Ikthan during that time.

## SHEMITE HISTORY

The history of Shem begins with the nomadic savages known to the early people of the age as the Sons of Shem. Where they came from and who they were is unknown but it is known that they appeared to the east of Stygia.

The Stygians ravaged and persecuted the Sons of Shem unmercifully, for they were unwashed savages to the Stygians, fit only for slavery and slaughter on the darkened altars of even darker gods. For centuries the Stygians preyed upon the Sons of Shem, driving them from the east into the west, through Stygia, which at that time bordered Acheron, not having yet been driven south of the Styx. The Sons of Shem settled in the pastoral meadowlands they found in the west, lands claimed by Stygia at that time.

The Hyborians, burning and pillaging their way between the mighty nations of Acheron and Zamora, settled in the region north of these pastoral lands and forged the land of Koth. The Kothian Escarpment provided a natural border between the Sons of Shem and the Kothians; however, the Kothian Hyborians established relations with the nomads. Slowly, inexorably, the Sons of Shem became more and more civilised from their contact with Stygia and Koth.

Koth fell under the domination of horrible Acheron and Shem laboured under the overlords of Stygia, who used the Shemites to plunder their own lands and send streams of wealth to their masters. Stygia was a harsh mistress to the Shemites and when the Kothians decided to war against the mighty serpent of the south, the Shemites were there, bows in hand, to drive back their hated rulers behind the foul River Styx. Still, the Shemites only managed to exchange the yoke of the Stygians for less galling subjugation by the Kothians.

The Shemites had congress with Argos after the fall of Acheron, as well as with Koth. After a little more than four hundred years of Kothian oppression, the Sons of Shem rose, united and made themselves an independent nation. The unity was, unfortunately, unsustainable among the proud Shemite kings, all of whom wanted to be High King. Thus it is today. Shem remains an unstable collection of squabbling city-states and nomadic tribes.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Shumirim thieves have stolen an unfinished brass idol of Adonis from the Asgakinim copper and brass workers, angering the god. Characters must find the unfinished idol before the essence of the god pours forth its wrath and destroys whatever town some priest has doomed by hiding the idol there.





# The Southern Desert

## The Black Desert Kingdoms

'But it was hot and lonely and weary, and I saw only sand, sand – and the blazing blue sky. The sands burned my feet, and my sandals were worn out quickly. I was so thirsty, my canteen was soon empty. And then I wished to return to Gazal, but one direction looked like another.'

– *Drums of Tombalku*

The Southern Desert is a vast, waterless wasteland for much of its area. It is located in the midst of Kush, Stygia, Darfar, Amazon, Tombalku and the southern Black Kingdoms. While the deserts of eastern Shem and the Eastern Desert are indeed harsh, the conditions of those deserts pale in comparison to the arid world of the southern desert.

### THE RACES OF THE SOUTHERN DESERT

The southern desert is home to several different races and tribes, including the Gazali, the Ghanata, the Tibu and the Xuthalans. There are likely other tribes as well but these are the major tribes and/or the tribes mentioned by Robert E. Howard. The Games Master can easily create additional tribes or peoples if desired. The Southern Desert is vast enough to hold many different cultures if needed.

#### THE GAZALI

The fatalistic Gazali (offered as a playable race in *Ruins of Hyboria*) are an offshoot of the Hyborian race, having been chased out of Koth nearly a thousand years ago for Mitra worship. They have vague, kindly faces with soft, mild eyes that seem wrapped in their dreams.

They do not fear nor do they wonder. The Gazali receive strangers with casual and impersonal ease. They age gracefully, without wrinkles, though their hair greys with time. All Gazali are inherently corrupt (see page 402 of *Conan the Roleplaying Game* for rules on Corruption) because they have lived for so long among demons and glowing, otherworldly globes. The Gazali have no slaves and do not know war. They make extensive use of drugs and hypnotism to explore their own dreams and introspective fancies while awaiting death at the hands of Ollam-onga. They have been out of touch with the world for 900 years and still believe that King Bragorus rules Nemedia and King Epius rules Aquilonia. They are all priests, scientists, scholars and teachers. Self-sufficient in most ways, the Gazali can create food through sorcery or science. They speak Gazali, a derivative of Kothic.

#### THE GHANATA

The Ghanata are fierce desert nomads who live in the eastern reaches of the southern desert. They are a black race related to the Kushites, a mix of black and Shemitish blood and have their own racial characteristics in *Conan the Roleplaying Game*. They are mostly a wiry race but the strong among them tend to be large and overweight. The Ghanata are loosely organised into tribes but their social structure is practically non-existent beyond the idea that might makes right. Strangers are not welcome among the xenophobic Ghanata. The Ghanata are merciless, brutal and unsocial. They value their horses and camels more than each other. Strength and prowess are worshipped as desirable traits above all else. Tests of prowess and strength are common; combat is seen as the ultimate test. For this reason, most Ghanata fight with melee weapons instead of ranged weapons. Most Ghanata ride camels because horses do not survive long in the region; owning a horse, however, is seen as a status symbol.

#### THE TIBU

The Tibu are a race of mask-wearing steppe and desert riders found in the south. They are of mixed Stygian and native black races. They have brown hawk-

like faces. They have tall builds and are both lean and wiry. Their heads are typically long and they have fairly narrow noses and regular features. Their hair is woolly and dark and their skin is usually dusky. The Tibu are ferocious devils who war with the other peoples around them. Players who want to play members of the Tibu should use either the generic Northern Black Kingdom Tribesman (Kushite) or the Ghanata racial template from *Conan the Roleplaying Game*; the choice depends on whether the player wants barbarian or nomad as the favoured class. Players may also use the Stygian (hybrid) template found in *Stygia – Serpent of the South* to reflect their mixed ancestry. The Tibu are impressed by endurance, so most Tibu characters put their highest physical statistic in Constitution.

The basic social structure among the Tibu is the family unit. Beyond this, a Tibu honours his clan, which is known through a common ancestor's name and symbol. Each clan has taboos associated with it. Any member of a Tibu clan is allowed to use clan resources, including groves, springs, pastures and food. Outsiders who make use of these resources without permission are treated with violence. Many Tibu tribes have been brought into the Tombalku empire. The descriptions here apply to the Tombalku Tibu as well as the free Tibu just north of Tombalku.

The Tibu remind many people of jackals in temperament and are reputed to be fierce, suspicious, untrustworthy, rapacious, cunning and deceitful warriors. They are known to sweep out of the deserts and attack tribes in Kordafan, Kush, Ghanata, Gazal and Amazon. They are recognised for their endurance, for their raids often carry them over huge stretches of waterless lands, often with a hundred miles or more between watering stops. They can easily go for a day without water before ill-effects set in. Expert trackers, they can travel hundreds of miles with indefatigable focus, even on foot. They often travel four or five days between water, so few can follow the Tibu when the Tibu decide to withdraw.

The Tibu rarely make eye contact when listening to someone. To indicate that one is listening, the Tibu raise their eyebrows slightly once in a while; be warned, if a Tibu raises his eyebrows too high, he believes he is being shouted at (it is the equivalent of shouting 'I am listening!' in a speaker's face), which is considered rude. Laughing while discussing an important matter is also considered rude.

## XUTHALANS

The Xuthalans are remnants of the Old Kosalan race. Yellow-skinned and slant-eyed, the Xuthalans are lotus-eaters, preferring drug-induced dreamlands

over reality. The Xuthalans live only for sensual joys. When not slumbering in their addled comas, the Xuthalans have the intellect and learning to be among the foremost of the Hyborian age's scientists, although they are unpredictable in their behaviour. The Xuthalans were taught the Stygian tongue by Thalís and they speak their own dialect of Old Kosalan.

## HONOUR

The southern desert is one of the harshest environments imaginable and the people who live there have adapted several measures to help them survive. Some have developed codes of honour so hospitality can be expected, while others have built walls around themselves and devoted themselves to the occult or to drugs.

**Gazali:** The Gazali are a Kothic offshoot and some of them might have a civilised code of honour but years of service in the company of a demon have pretty much destroyed most true honour. It is unlikely that a Gazali character will have a code of honour. Mostly the Gazali are uncaring of strangers.

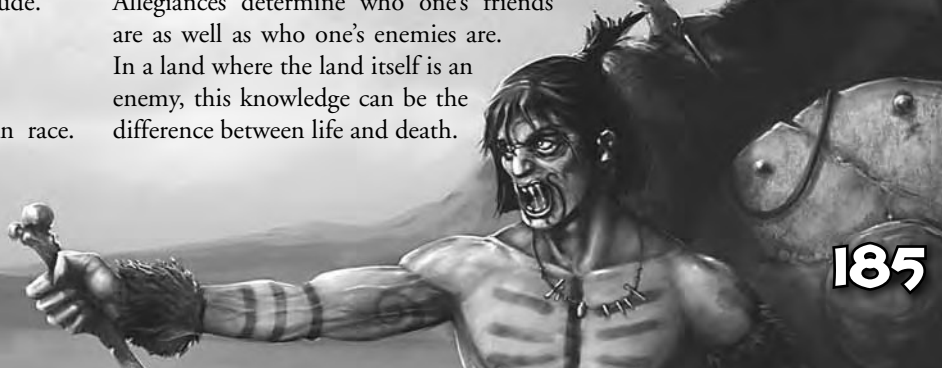
**Ghanata:** The Ghanata usually have no code of honour, even a barbaric one, unless a strong chief wishes to force his followers to obey one. Strangers can expect to be brutalised, raped or attacked on sight.

**Tibu:** The Tibu usually have the barbaric code of honour described in *Conan the Roleplaying Game*. They believe in taboos, hospitality and assistance but they also believe in vengeance, reciprocity, restitution and blood feuds. Taboos are usually clan based and are handed down through the families from the founder of the clan.

**Xuthalan:** The Xuthalans, like the Gazali, are a degenerate race and do not have codes of honour among them. If they catch a woman, they will use her as a sexual toy just as they did Thalís.

## ALLEGIANCE

Allegiance is a powerful concept in a land as unforgiving as the southern desert. Allegiances determine who one's friends are as well as who one's enemies are. In a land where the land itself is an enemy, this knowledge can be the difference between life and death.





**Gazali:** A Gazali's primary allegiance is toward his chief or leader, unless he is a chief or leader without a higher chief or leader.

**Ghanata:** When a Ghanata has an allegiance, it is offered to the strongest warrior.

**Tibu:** The Tibu social structure is clan-based but the individual shapes society, not the other way around. Each Tibu is expected to construct a society most useful for that Tibu. Although the clans are patrilineal, most Tibu maintain ties with their maternal families to ensure allies no matter where they wish to travel in Tibu lands. Most Tibu characters have their immediate families as their first Allegiance and their clans as their second. Those Tibu who are part of Tombalku (see page 206) usually have the dual kings as their first Allegiance.

**Xuthalan:** A Xuthalan's primary allegiance is to Thog the Ancient if to anyone. There may be a Xuthalan king; if so his name is unknown.

without arrows and a quiver is incomplete. Weapons and accessories without magical symbols on them are also considered incomplete.

The Ghanata dress in tatters, stolen clothing and desert-appropriate attire. The affluent might wear wide silk pantaloons gathered about the ankles and broad sashes or girdles wrapped repeatedly about their waists. A huge belly is a sign of power; it says that the person can afford to eat plenty – or is strong enough to steal plenty.

**Tibu:** The Tibu are known for wearing masks. These masks are ceremonial and practical and protect their faces from the sun and sand. The masks represent spirits and/or ancestors. They are usually worn as helmets and provide protection as primitive great helms. Totem ancestors are popular subjects for masks, exhibiting a clan identity.

While wearing masks, the Tibu warriors believe they are possessed of the mask-spirits' powers and cunning.

In addition to the masks, the Tibu wear white cotton robes, light pants and scarves worn as turbans. Boys wear cotton tunics and pants and girls wear tunics with wraparound skirts. The Tibu – including the women – arm themselves with scimitars and daggers.

**Xuthalan:** The Xuthalans dress in silk tunics and high-strapped sandals. They are armed with short swords.

## SOUTHERN DESERT CLOTHING

**Gazali:** The Gazali dress in silken tunics and soft sandals.

**Ghanata:** The Ghanata wield curved, razor-sharp knives and flare-tipped scimitars. Sabres and tulwars are also common and may be substituted for scimitars. All weapons of the Ghanata have magical glyphs inscribed on them and are made of 'white-iron'. The Ghanata prefer not to use 'incomplete' weapons. A scimitar without a belt is incomplete. A bow



## SEX ROLES IN THE SOUTHERN DESERT

**Ghanata:** Male authority is paramount among the Ghanata. Women are little more than slaves. Men are the source of power, control and influence. Women are expected to behave in a dignified manner according to the whims of the men, especially the warriors, who believe the women of the craftsmen are little more



than sluts. The craftsmen hold their women to strict roles as well but believe the warriors are too controlling, so the craftsmen allow women to work independently at the crafts but, despite what the warriors believe, do not go so far as to give their women sexual freedom. Women are expected to cook, clean, gather and raise children while men take care of war, hunting, herding and spiritual matters. Both sexes work in their small, subsistence-level fields if they do any agriculture at all.

Women among the Ghanata do have allies among the *Sande*, a secret society of women in charge of initiating girls into womanhood. This society takes care of the women of Ghanata and ensures fertility among them, instructing them in the ways of sex. This female secret society also wears masks to achieve communion with the ancestors and guardian spirits. Those seen as special or particularly adept at leading others are sometimes initiated into the secret society.

**Tibu:** Among the Tibu, the women have a considerable amount of power. While the father of the family is the head of the household, he usually discusses family decisions extensively with his wife before making them. When the father is away from the house, the wife has complete control of all the property until his return. She has the power to buy and sell cattle and can even decide to move the family from one pasture to another.

## LOVE AND MARRIAGE IN THE SOUTHERN DESERT

**Ghanata:** The Ghanata concept of marriage, especially among the warriors, is characterised by a fear of adultery.

**Tibu:** Marriages are not arranged among the Tibu as individual choice is too high a priority among them. Although a Tibu might seek familial or clan opinions on the matter of marriage, he is by no means required to do so. Also, once two Tibu get married, the rest of the family and clan may not do anything to change it. The only rule inhibiting free choice is the three grandfathers rule – no Tibu may marry another who is three or more generations removed. A Tibu male may have more than one wife but this is rarely done. Like in most Black Kingdom societies, the Tibu pay the fathers of their intended brides a bride price, which is usually settled in goats, cattle, camels or horses. Women are around 15 or 16 when they marry and men are 18–20 years old.

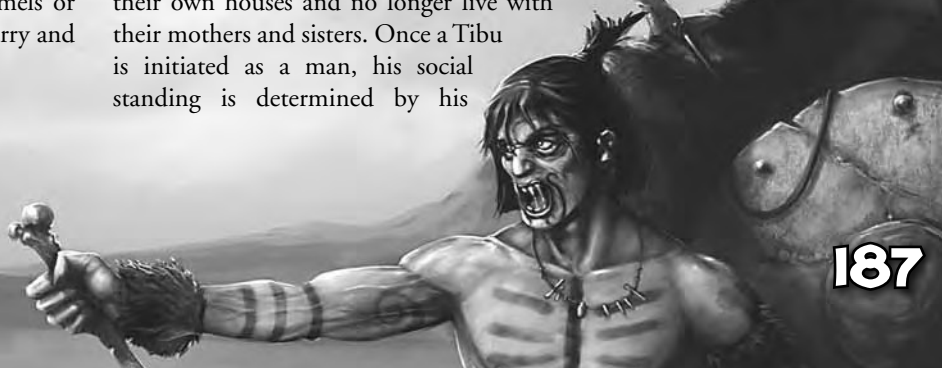
## SOCIAL STANDING

**Ghanata:** Social standing among the Ghanata is based on strength of arms, wisdom or charisma. There are two basic divisions in Ghanata society. The two divisions are the warriors (*tunka mangu*) and the craftsmen (*nyamakala*).

The *tunka mangu* are nomads, killers and raiders who bring plunder back to their people. Authority is their purview and they either command or advise those who command. If members of the *nyamakala* have problems, a *tunka mangu* has the authority to settle them.

The *nyamakala* families forge the weapons of the warriors and make the clothing, religious masks and tools of the people. They are looked down upon for they are dependant upon the warrior class for survival. They are also more settled than the warrior class. The *nyamakala* are further divided into four groups, the *tago* (smiths), *sabko* (carpenters and foresters), *jaru* (singers) and *gangko* (leather workers). *Nyamakala* boys, when they come of age, are initiated in a ceremony after they are circumcised. Once initiated, they are allowed to sit in on the secret meetings and obtain spiritual guidance. If a spirit calls one to become a leader, the called one creates a helmet mask for communion with the spirit during dances. Any divinations are then sung to those interested in the revelations from the otherworld. Most shamans, diviners and witch-doctors come from the *nyamakala* families, for they control the secret of fire and the craft of the spirits. Those who deal with devils are usually from *sabko* families, for they are familiar with the forests where devils lurk.

**Tibu:** The period between childhood and adulthood is marked by a months-long initiation ceremony. The initiations are held at secret, sacred sites and boys of an age from all the clans gather every six or seven years at these sites. The boys are accompanied by a clan elder. The initiations are highly secret and women are especially forbidden from witnessing the rites. The rites are designed to bond the men together and reinforce the concept of male authority. The boys come back as mounted, armed and masked warriors, ferocious and full-fledged adult men. The newly returned men build their own houses and no longer live with their mothers and sisters. Once a Tibu is initiated as a man, his social standing is determined by his







Reputation score (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game* for rules regarding Reputation). Having really dark skin is cause for a -2 penalty to Reputation; having dusky skin (like a Stygian or Chaga) is preferred.

## PROPERTY

**Gazali:** The Gazali are without human passions or ambitions, so they own little other than what their forefathers brought with them from Koth. Their ideas of ownership are probably akin to those in Koth.

**Ghanata:** The Ghanata concept of ownership falls back on strength. Something is owned so long as the owner has the strength to protect or defend it. As far as inheritance goes, the chief's sister provides the initial dispensation but it is up to the chief's heirs (usually the sister's sons, not the chief's sons) to protect what was given to them.

**Tibu:** Land, animals, trees, water and other resources have a complex pattern of ownership. Some resources are owned communally by a clan, by certain families or even by individuals. An easy Knowledge (local) or Gather Information check can determine who owns what and who may use what. A Tibu never interferes with the privileged right of ownership of any resource owned by another Tibu – although they have no problem taking resources from the Ghanata, the tribes of Tombalku or other indigenous peoples.

**Xuthalan:** The Xuthalans sense of property is pretty much an idea of 'everyone according to his need.' Since they create supplies, including lotus, out of the air and can 'manufacture' all they desire, anyone can have whatever they want, at least to a degree. Of course, getting this dreamy people to actually manufacture something is another issue entirely.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

**Gazali:** Like the Xuthalans, the Gazali do not trade and do not have an existing economy. They create what they need through science or sorcery.

**Ghanata:** The Ghanata see trade and economy as statements of strength. They raid for what they want and defend what they want to keep. Wealth is measured by livestock and status symbols, such as weapons and horses.  
The Ghanata

also insist on being paid protection money to allow trade routes through their territory. Much of the slave, gold, ivory and salt trade from the south to north passes through Ghanata territory. The Ghanata also provide camels in trade. Several past Ghanata chiefs have tried to forge the tempestuous Ghanata people into a nation based around the wealth of this trade but so far have failed in their imperialistic designs.

**Tibu:** The Tibu raise livestock and grow dates and a few grains around the oases they control. They use slave labour to mine salt and natron, which is used by their healers and as trade goods. They also use slave labour for the little agriculture found in their regions, as the Tibu themselves despise farmers.

**Xuthalan:** The Xuthalans do not trade and do not have an existing economy. What they need is created through science or sorcery.

## THE MILITARY OF THE SOUTHERN DESERT

The southern desert is not a unified nation and does not have a military. Even the tribes do not organise armies distinct from their clans or tribes. Essentially any male is a warrior and part of the military, such as it is.

**Ghanata:** The Ghanata are guerrilla warriors, given to raiding and plundering. They fight with scimitars and other curved weapons from the backs of camels and horses. Although most of them carry bows for hunting, few fight with them as these weapons call their strength and bravery into question.

**Tibu:** The Tibu of the southern desert are guerrilla fighters and do not bother with standing armies or organised warfare. They are swift, plundering raiders and are known for their ferocity in combat. The men fight with scimitars and spears (lances) while mounted. The Tibu of Tombalku (see page 206) serve as cavalry under a war-chief with allegiance to the kings of Tombalku. The women are also fierce; all Tibu women are armed with daggers and many have scimitars as well. The Tibu are aggressive in temperament and inter-clan warfare is common. The Tibu are acknowledged as tough warriors with frightening levels of endurance.

**Xuthalan:** The Xuthalans do not have a military per se. They are armed with short swords but, because of their drug addiction, do not make capable warriors.



## RELIGION IN THE SOUTHERN DESERT

**Gazali:** Mitra is the god of the original Gazali but Ollamonga is now the demonic god of the lost city of Gazal. He is also worshipped by diabolic cults in the dark jungles and along the dusky rivers of Kush. He stalks Gazal every night, taking and slaying its few inhabitants at will. His mad cultists perform similar activities.

**Ghanata:** Jhil the Merciless is worshipped in Ghanata in gruesome ceremonies that include the torture of sacrificial victims. Ghanata holy men are also blacksmiths and weaponsmiths, the tamers of fire. Jhil is the son of Jhebbal Sag; Jhil's form is that of a raven. He is a bloodthirsty god, demanding that prisoners be flayed alive on his altar. Certain hideous rites require the priests to eat portions of human sacrifices. His priests use dice as a means of divination.

**Tibu:** The Tibu's religious beliefs are of an animist nature. They believe that all things, even the inanimate, have spirits. Ajujo is one of these spirits. Like other tribes of the Black Kingdoms, they also venerate their ancestors. Their masks supposedly give them mystical powers and great strength (see Craft (mask) in *Faith and Fervour*) because the masks themselves also have spirits. The religion of the Tibu is bloody and grim. Their altars are crude affairs, charred with fire and stained with blood. Accompanied by thundering drums, their priests dance grotesquely and captives are sacrificed to dire gods and vile spirits. Blood makes their magic mighty. They torture and kill captives in these gruesome ceremonies. The altar-huts of the Tibu are decorated with grotesque spirit masks, skulls of captives and other macabre religious icons. Their priests are expected to know something about horsemanship, so often have ranks in Handle Animal and Ride. Their tribal priests often take the Nature Magic sorcery style in order to acquire a horse as an *animal ally*. The religion of the Tibu enforces a few taboos regarding the eating habits of males and females. After puberty, boys and girls must eat separately. Men are never allowed to eat with their wives and children may not eat with adults of the other gender unless the adults are elderly.

**Xuthalan:** The Xuthalans worship Thog the Ancient who sleeps beneath their green-stone city. When Thog grows hungry, he stalks the dark corridors of Xuthal and eats some of the inhabitants until his hunger is sated. He satiates his other lusts in a similar manner. Although Conan fought Thog, it is likely the ancient god still lives and still stalks the haunted corridors of Xuthal where the lotus-eaters dream. See *The Scrolls of Skelos* for the statistics of Thog the Ancient.

## SOUTHERN DESERT GOVERNMENT

**Ghanata:** The Ghanata do not have a strictly hereditary noble system, although most rulers come from the warrior class since they will not follow a craftsman. For them, might makes right, so the strongest simply becomes chief until someone stronger comes along. The chief must always be willing and able to defend his title by force of arms. The best proof of strength is the ability to slay one's enemy with a single blow. A chief is known as a *ghana*.

**Tibu:** The Tibu are a split tribe. Some Tibu are free and others are part of Tombalku. Those who are part of the Tombalku empire answer to the kings of Tombalku. The free ones answer to familial and/or clan chiefs. The oldest male in a family has authority until he dies. A clan chief is chosen by the heads of the families through strict and complex rules. The clan chief is the spiritual head of the clan and has judicial powers, not executive powers. The clan chief may arbitrate conflict and order fines to be paid if compensation is called for. The Tibu legal code is a matter of restitution and revenge. Murder brings about a blood feud until the families decide to settle the matter with a blood price (usually paid with an agreed upon number of camels). Theft within the clan is forbidden and is usually handled with the return of the stolen property along with an additional camel. Theft and murder outside the clan is not an issue for the Tibu.

**Xuthalan:** Xuthal is ruled by a king. He is unnamed (if he lives) in the saga but Thalís suggests making Conan the king of Xuthal, so this is a form of government familiar to them.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF THE SOUTHERN DESERT

In the west, the Southern Desert is dry grassland and in the east it is a mixture of sandy desert and boulder plains. The sandy regions form sand seas with dunes higher than 300 feet. There are only seven major oases throughout the entire region and decades often pass without rainfall.





## IMPORTANT SOUTHERN DESERT CITIES

**Gazal** – Gazal is an ancient city of jade-green spires and minarets built amidst the palms of an oasis in the eastern portion of the southern desert. The walls of the city are also jade-green in colour. The city is greatly decayed and broken. The place is littered with rubbish, tall grasses and fallen masonry. A single red cylindrical tower reaches high into the sky amid the city and the people do not like to think upon the nameless horrors of that tower. The Gazali, a Kothic tribe, founded the city nine hundred years ago after they were run out of Koth for trying to reinvigorate the Mitran religion there. They built the city out of green stone from a prior city. Only the red tower existed intact when the Gazali arrived. The slaves that built the city for the Gazali revolted and fled, taking the camels and horses. The introspective rulers of the city are now so dreamy that the city is dying. The city is haunted by the Horror in the Red Tower, a thing that eats the people when it hungers. Named Ollam-onga, it was served by dire horsemen. It was killed by Amalric the Aquilonian, rendering the city safe again. If the Ghanata, Tombalku or Tibu hear of its death, they will likely loot the city immediately, for it is fear of the thing that keeps those ferocious tribes away. More information on Gazal and Ollam-onga can be found in *Ruins of Hyboria*.

**Xuthal** – Surrounded by sand, Xuthal is located in the western reaches of the southern desert. The city is populated by yellow-skinned, slant-eyed Xuthalans who worship a demon called Thog the Ancient. Xuthal lies a day's march north of an oasis and two days north of the grasslands of the south. Additional information about Xuthal can be found in *Ruins of Hyboria*.

## LOCAL CREATURES

The southern desert is home to scorpions and vipers. Scorpion species include the fat-tailed man-killer and the death stalker scorpions. Both are around four inches long and both have neurotoxic venom that can be fatal. Children and underweight people are at

the most risk of death as a fatal dose is dependant upon body weight (-5 on the save if body weight is low or if immune system is weakened for some reason).

The vipers are small and usually have a horn-like structure over the eyes. Nocturnal, they hide in the sand and, because of the shape of their scales, can appear to sink into loose sand. They can perform this sinking manoeuvre either coiled or outstretched. The venom of these sand vipers is a cytotoxin and, while painful, is rarely deadly, mostly causing swelling in the bitten limb, fatigue, nausea and vomiting if the saving throw is made (see pages 374–375 of *Conan the Roleplaying Game* for snake statistics and saving throws for venom). If the saving throw is failed, the victim's kidneys cease to function and the character eventually dies. These snakes can move across sand by sidwinding if they desire.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Characters might be hired to undertake a trading expedition to Xuthal. Perhaps Nataia is raising the venture to acquire more of the golden elixir found there. Perhaps a Stygian or other sorcerer is desirous of their lotus.

A new leader has appeared among the Ghanata and is forging the disparate tribes into a true empire with intentions on attacking either Tombalku or Kush, or even Amazon. The Player Characters are sent to negotiate with this fierce devil and find out how much truth exists in the curious tales.

Characters may hear of a treasure created by the science of Xuthal of the Dusk on the grasslands of Kush, giving them reason to visit the demon-haunted halls of that dire city where the dreamers hold sway, worshipping dark Thog the Ancient and creating strange things out of the primal elements. Perhaps a sorcerer wants to petition Thog for knowledge of the Outer Realm or perhaps a scholar wants to bind Thog in slavery, hiring the adventurers to hold the people of Xuthal at bay.



# The Southern Islands

## The Black Corsairs

...the warriors standing on the narrow deck were in full view. These were painted and plumed, and mostly naked, brandishing spears and spotted shields.

— *Queen of the Black Coast*

South of the Black Kingdoms of the continent are the island kingdoms. The islands are primarily jungle and volcanoes. Talking drums, tom-toms that beat out coded messages, can often be heard during the nights as the tribes communicate with each other. The island kingdoms are dominated by lush jungles, nameless and dark.

The dark warriors of the island kingdoms are tall and rangy. The islanders are tribal in nature and known for their exceeding cruelty and propensity for violence.

### HONOUR

As Conan points out in *The Vale of Lost Women*, 'What would be blackest treachery in another land, is wisdom here.' The people populating the island kingdom are not known for their honour. Hospitality is only owed to persons of the same clan. The islanders are capricious and cruel in all ways.

### ALLEGIANCE

Most southern Island tribesmen have a primary allegiance to their tribal king. This is followed by an allegiance to a secondary chief, such as a war chief or to their regiment. The third allegiance is to their clan chief or their father.

### INITIATION RITES AND ADULT NAMES

When men reach about sixteen years old, they are initiated into adult society and given new names. Only persons older than a young man are allowed to use his childhood name thereafter in reference to him. The young

man is presented to the chief and swears allegiance to the chief. He remains under that chief's command until he marries and establishes his own household. There are no particular initiation or puberty rights for women. When a woman becomes capable of having children, her parents simply let suitors know she is available.

### TABOOS AND CULTURE

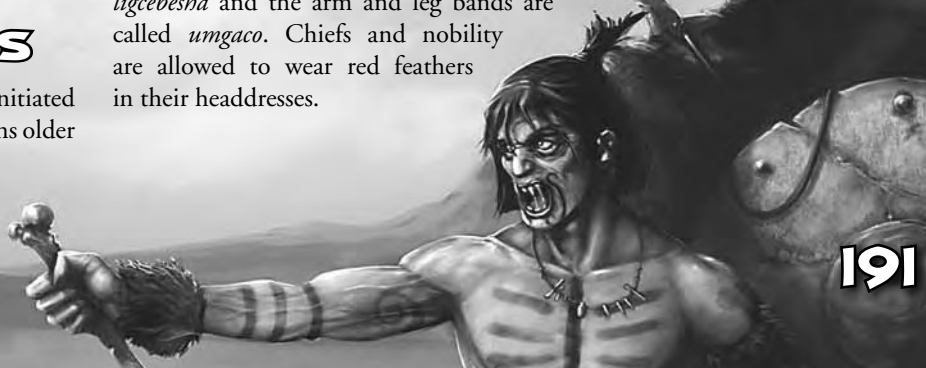
The people of the Southern Islands will not eat the meat of apes, crocodiles or snakes. Most of the islanders will also refuse dog, owl, vulture and crow meat but this varies somewhat from tribe to tribe.

People from different social classes do not eat together, including husbands and wives. A chief always eats alone unless in the presence of another chief. Those serving the food will not look at the faces of those served in order to preserve this sense of aloneness.

### SOUTHERN ISLAND CLOTHING

#### MALE TRIBESMEN

Male Southern Islanders are nearly nude but wear plumed headdresses. A young warrior wears a *lihiya*, which is a knee length loin cloth, which is almost skirt-like among some tribes. Over this, he wears a *lijobo*, or an animal skin apron indicative of his rank and power. He wears appropriate neck, arm and leg bands, much like the southern Black Kingdom tribesmen use to add bulk to their lanky bodies. The neck band is called a *ligebesha* and the arm and leg bands are called *umgaco*. Chiefs and nobility are allowed to wear red feathers in their headdresses.







## FEMALE TRIBESMEN

Girls dress in grass skirts and wear their hair loose. On ceremonial occasions a girl may wear beads on her upper torso but otherwise the upper torso remains bare. Once married a woman puts her hair up in a beehive style and may wear a goatskin over one shoulder; her upper torso no longer needs to remain bare. Once a woman has a child she wears a cow-skin skirt instead of a grass skirt.

## SEX ROLES IN THE SOUTHERN ISLANDS

The duties of men and women on the Southern Islands are distinctly separate with little to no crossover. Men are the dominant sex on the Southern Islands. Women are always given status below the men and are considered men's slaves and beasts of burden. A female child has a considerable amount of freedom but as soon as she is seen to be strong enough to work, she is put to work to the limits of her strength. The men will lead virtual caravans of young girls and wives to carry plunder and cargo from the shores to the villages. The men carry nothing but walking sticks. Once the women arrive home with any cargo from the boats, they must gather water and firewood from remote places. Once the wood and water is transferred from the wilds to the villages, the women must cook for their men and children. Meanwhile, the men may take walks or go to the meeting hut to talk with other men.

Women are responsible for all agriculture, pottery-making, basket-weaving, milking and brewing, while the men are responsible for any hunting or fishing. The men often draw lots for who is to do the hunting and fishing on a given day.

## LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Southern Island tribesmen treat women as slaves, so marriage is treated much like a slave purchase. Polygamy is allowed. There are two types of marriage. The first is accomplished by buying the girl's virginity. The second type is a marriage by mutual love.

The first type of marriage (marriage by purchase of virginity) is considered the most legitimate. A bride costs fifteen cows or the equivalent in plunder. Once he purchases a girl from her father, the man takes the woman to a

place where the old women from both families gather. The old women inspect the girl to make sure her virginity is intact. If she is shown to be a virgin, all is well but if she is found less than virgin, even if it happened against her will, trouble ensues. The purchase of a bride amounts to the purchase of virginity. Those found lacking in virginity must confess (often under torture) who invaded them so that the purchase price may be exacted from those who ruined her. This extraction of the purchase price is often done with extreme violence, as the named people often profess innocence (and they may well *be* innocent, for under torture a girl is likely to name people she does not like). The groomsman may decide to keep the bride (and the extracted price if he can get it) or send her back to her parents (in which case he gets half of the purchase price and the chief gets the other half).

If found to be a virgin, the girl is adorned in beads and taken to a hut that is joined to her husband-to-be's hut. She will live in that hut for a certain amount of time. This hut is forbidden to everyone but the groom and the bride. The bride is forbidden to leave the hut. The groom may enter it at will. When it is time for the wedding, the girl, usually pregnant by this time, is ceremoniously taken from the hut to participate in the marriage ritual, which involves sumptuous feasts and great expenditures on the part of the groom. All property of the wife then passes to the husband. If the husband dies, the bride of this type of marriage is required to mourn and show grief for a certain amount of time. If she does not, the spirit of her husband and all the ancestors will curse the village and grant the wayward bride an early grave.

The first virginity-purchased wife is the *uri*, the principle wife. Once new wives come along, the *uri* no longer has to work. The second virginity-purchased wife is called the *borenya*. She accompanies the husband on trips and is the head housekeeper, in addition to her other duties. The third virginity-purchased wife is given the title of *molobo*. She prepares the food for the husband and holds his plate while he eats, in addition to her other duties as a woman. Additional wives are given other symbolic tasks by the *uri*, who rules as queen of the household.

In the second type of marriage (marriage by love), which is seen as illegitimate but tolerated, there is no wedding ceremony or any great expense. The woman simply moves into a hut built next to or near her husband's. If her husband dies, the bride of this type of marriage is not even considered a widow, nor is she required to mourn or show grief. Also, her possessions remain hers and do not become her husband's. In essence she is nothing more than a concubine. Women who are not

virgins usually must accept this marital arrangement; these women are often widows who seek husbands. Any children a woman in this type of marriage has are the property of her first husband's family, not the property of her current husband. These concubines are required to help legitimate wives and serve as their personal servants.

## SOCIAL STANDING

Social standing in the Southern Islands is determined by birth. People of different social classes are not allowed to eat together. The upper class, *baita*, are essentially barbaric nobles. The legitimate children of the *baita*, meaning those born to a wife whose virginity has been purchased, are *baita*. Illegitimate children or children born to wives from love marriages are of whatever class the woman's first husband (if any) belonged to, for those children are his legitimate children. If both parents are *baita*, their children are considered *bobaita*, or doubly noble. Lesser ranks are expected to serve and protect the *baita*.

The chief of an entire island is called the *motuku moa motuku*, the lord of lords. He is the highest ranking *baita* in the village. The chief of a village is called *motuku mo* (village name); for example, the chief of the Elachá village would be called the *motuku mo che Elachá*. All *baita* in a village serve as counsellors of the village chief. Each village is made up of neighbourhoods of people claiming descent from a common ancestor or clan. These clans are led by clan patriarchs, who are the oldest males of the clans and are given the title of *botuku*. Those *baita* who distinguish themselves by killing an enemy in war and having five legitimate wives (i.e. their virginity was purchased) may have the additional title of *ebohoanna* (+5 bonus to Reputation for earning that title).

To become a village chief, a *baita* must have a wealth of goat livestock and a vast store of palm oil. He must have murdered through stealth or deception at least one enemy and his wives must have harvested four thousand yams annually during the past five years. Once those credentials are established, the *baita* may begin his own village and become a village chief after a ceremonial rite. The new village chief must pay a fee to his old village chief (usually around 20 goats), sacrifice a goat to his ancestors every two days for twelve days and swear allegiance to the island chief. If he does not wish to start his own village, or the chief of the island does not permit it (as is often the case when the rich *baita* is a woman), the *baita* becomes an *eboho kube* instead, still a title of high honour. A chief or *eboho kube* does not have to work the fields, for the entire village provides for persons of such rank, even if they are old, savage women. Even an *eboho kube*

has servants who fulfil his every desire. Other titles that might be awarded to certain *baita* include *ebiaso ota paho* (invincible one) or *eloola* (respected one).

Beneath the *baita* are the *babale*, who are a type of plebeian. *Bobale* women are allowed to marry *baita* men. Those who become rich may buy titles (*mochuku*) from the village chief. A *mochuku* is given a necklace of sheep beards to indicate his rank and is treated with deference by anyone of lesser rank. Recall the eating taboo – acquiring this rank may mean the *mochuku* may no longer eat with old friends now that he outranks them. Below the *mochuku* are the *babeba* (hunters), the *balako* (labourers) and *bume* (fishers), in that order.

Beneath the *babale* are the *bataku*, who are slavers and buy and sell *bataki* (indentured servants). They also perform the ignoble profession of merchant.

## SOCIAL MOBILITY

Social mobility in the Southern Islands is determined by wealth within the main classes. Only rarely will a chief of an island raise someone from one class to a totally different class. Killing enemies is another way to gain reputation and status.

## PROPERTY

### HUTS

Southern Island tribesmen live in huts built according to traditional patterns. Houses are rectangular and have five foot tall walls. The walls are built of tied together stakes. The roofs are thatched with palm leaves and held up by palm rafters. Inside are several rooms. Any bedrooms or kitchens have only one door in them and that single door leads outside the hut. Any rooms designated as reception rooms have many doors in all their walls. One room will have a fireplace where firewood is stored.

### VILLAGES

A Southern Island village is also constructed according to traditional patterns. The only variation one might find in a Southern Islander village is when a village must make a concession to landscape. About five minutes before reaching the village along the paths or roads, one finds an arch of wooden poles. On this





arch hang thousands of savage amulets made of tails, skulls, bones, feathers, horns, shells and other more grisly items, including bones of ancestors. This arched fetish serves as spiritual protection for the village. On both sides of the fetish arch, sacred trees are planted for the same reason – spiritual protection.

As one gets closer to the village, one will find a large hut with many doors built outside the village. This hut is larger than all the other huts in the village and is the meeting hut. It is also where any foreigners are required to sleep.

Beyond the meeting hut is the village. The village can be entered and exited through fetish arches just like those built at a distance from the village. Beyond the fetish arches is the grand plaza. The plaza holds two huts and two sacred trees dedicated to the spirit protectors of the village in the centre.

Beyond this grand plaza (and other sets of fetish arches) are the neighbourhoods, which are delineated by a barricade of fern tree trunk stakes. Each neighbourhood hosts a distinct clan of people headed by the clan or neighbourhood chieftains (elder patriarchs). The clan chieftains answer to the village chieftain in the centre of the village. Each neighbourhood has a small plaza in which a clay pot sits on a fern trunk. The pot either holds sea water or the water from a perennial spring. This symbolises the continued rebirth of the clan. Around this fern trunk are the skulls of enemies. The huts and houses are lined up in an orderly fashion within each neighbourhood.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

The Southern Islanders rarely create enough surplus to actually engage in trade. If a village, tribe or clan wants more, they raid someone else for it. Wealth is measured in numbers of goats.

## THE MILITARY OF THE SOUTHERN ISLANDS

Power in these lands is equated with military prowess or strategic innovation. All of these islands are usually involved in brutal battles and these savage fights for supremacy may be between individuals, families, clans, villages, social classes or whole islands. The Southern Islanders live in a state of constant war and eternal cycles of personal retribution. Crossing one of these islands alone is a tolerably good method of suicide. The islanders are likely to attack and kill strangers who land on their island as each islander's reputation is enhanced murdering enemies and strangers. Anyone who kills an enemy of the village is permitted the title of *boana*. Killing a personal enemy or a stranger gives one the superior title of *bohama*. The proof of a kill is the arm of the slain person, so a Southern Islander who needs proof of his first kill, or the kill of someone in particular, will cut off the arm off that person and carry it with him to his chief. The arm is then put in a jar of oil and set next to the killer's hearth.

The primary weapon of these tribesmen is the spear. A knobbed club is usually carried as a back-up weapon. They also carry tasselled leather shields. Some tribesmen attack from ambush using poisoned blow darts.

## RELIGION IN THE SOUTHERN ISLANDS

Magic is the focus of Southern Island religion. Magic is seen as the manifestation of the ancestors, who might have a good or an ill influence. The Southern Islanders believe that the supreme being creates souls and then sells them to ancestral spirits. These ancestral spirits become the masters and protectors of that soul for all time, so a soul, once born, must always honour his ancestor master. A Southern Islander will go to his ancestor spirit for all of his needs and will offer sacrifices to that ancestor. See *Faith and Fervour* for more information about ancestor veneration among the Black Kingdoms.

The world is governed by *bajula*, who are essentially Inquices (described in far more detail in *Faith and Fervour*). Humans and most ancestral spirits are governed by *baribó*, which are ancestral chiefs of the clans.

The Southern Islanders use witchdoctors and healers in their religion. The supreme witch doctor of the island is given the title of *bojiammé* and advises the island chief on





all matters where the ancestors must be consulted. The *bojiammé* is usually the island chief's main advisor. If the people believe that the ancestors are behind the chief, they will follow the chief more readily.

For more information on both the Inquices of the islands and the overall religion, including fetishes, drums and animism, see *Faith and Fervour*.

## TRIBAL GOVERNMENT ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

The title of chief or king applies to anyone from a village headman to a god-like king of many clans. The least of these chiefs are the heads of the families. The heads of the families are governed by a clan or neighbourhood chief. The clan chief answers to a village chief. The village chief answers to an island chief.

The position of chief is hereditary for the most part. Ineffective chiefs are simply killed, exiled or otherwise replaced. When a chief dies, his next oldest brother takes the office. When he dies, the next oldest brother takes over until the brothers run out, after which time the oldest son of the original chief is given the title of chief and followed by his brothers. A chief is not above the will of his people

and the people can demand restitution from a chief for a poor decision, so the chief surrounds himself with ministers, advisors and counsellors.

One of the most important of these advisors is the *bojiammé*, a witchdoctor. Sometimes only the island chief has the services of this individual. The *mpo* (prime minister, major domo) accompanies the chief wherever he goes, serves as his ambassador to other chiefs and appoints those who are to serve on various teams or missions for the chief. Another minister is the *tchoko o motuku* (sheriff), who serves as the eyes of the chief and is in charge of enforcement of rule. A third minister is the *luba lo motuku*, who serves as the chief's head executioner. A fourth minister is the *takamaala*, who commands the armies raised by the chief. A fifth minister is the *botuku o baita*, who is an elder of the nobility, the oldest noble on the island, the village or whatever the case may be. The *buac lo sam* is similar to a minister of revenue; he oversees island resources. If the chief desires anything, he sends this minister to fetch it for him or the tribe.

The will of the chief is supreme and anyone who dares violate his will is often put to death or, for minor offences, fined a certain number of goats. Only if the people as a whole disapprove of the chief can he be ordered to step down. The chief treats everyone beneath him as a slave and anyone wishing to speak to the chief must crouch before him. Even the women who serve food to the chief must crouch before him and hold his plate with both of their hands, never looking at his face as he eats. All property belongs to the chief and he may take any property he wishes at his whim, including wives. Any who protest are either killed or fined.

An island village may have run out of virgins for wives, so they may ask another village (either on the same island, a different island or even the mainland) to provide them with some. If rebuffed, the village organises a raid. The Player Characters may be in a village that is subject to this raid and have to defend a girl (or all the girls) from being taken.







# Stygia

## The Serpent of the South

'Human foes he did not fear, nor any death by steel or fire. But this was a black land of sorcery and nameless horror. Set the Old Serpent, men said, banished long ago from the Hyborian races, yet lurked in the shadows of the cryptic temples, and awful and mysterious were the deeds done in the nighted shrines.'

– Queen of the Black Coast

Stygia is a decadent, sinister menace, a black land of nameless horror feared by the Hyborian races. Ruled by a dark theocracy devoted to the cult of Set, its small population is notably xenophobic and the people are obsessed with the subjects of death and immortality, building dark tombs for their mysterious mummies. The population of about four million people is notably small for a kingdom of its size, for there is little arable land for the people to live on and there is a constant demand for sacrifices by the cults.

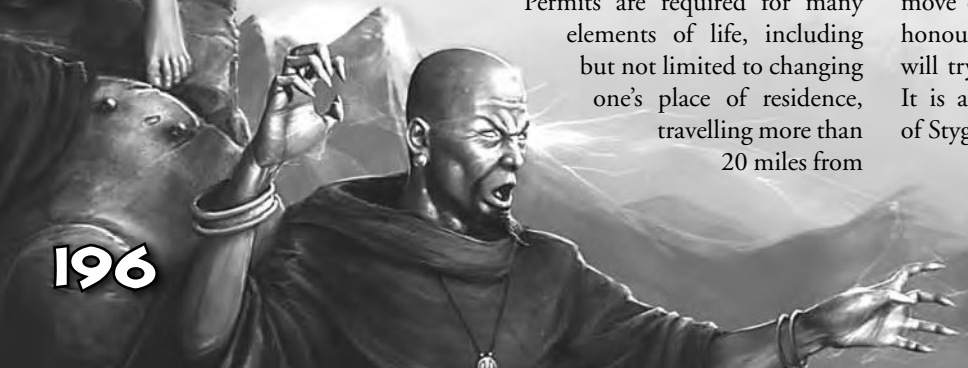
The cults utterly dominate Stygian society; the temples own most of the arable land and the government bureaucracy is filled with priests. As with many religions, this Stygian theocracy is conservative and closed-minded and minimal contact with the outside world is permitted. Thus trade is kept to a bare minimum. Stygia trades silk, ivory, skins, onions, papyrus, slaves and precious stones for grain, cattle and other agricultural products which their arid lands cannot produce or support.

### STYGIAN LAW

Stygian laws are restrictive and brutal. Permits are required for many elements of life, including but not limited to changing one's place of residence, travelling more than 20 miles from

one's home or owning weapons or armour. These permits provide a pair of powerful tools for the Stygian government: income and internal security. The selling of permits sends a steady stream of income to the ruling classes. Internal security is provided because permits are often denied and this prevents known dissidents from gathering. There is no legal recourse to those who are denied permits and doing something without the requisite permit invites severe punishments, such as fines, confiscation of goods and even physical mutilation, such as public whipping, hamstringing or execution. The bodies of criminals are not mummified. They are left to rot, denying them an eternal afterlife with Father Set.

Religious crimes are punished even more severely than secular crimes. Not attending a religious ceremony is cause for a hefty fine. Failure to tithe to the temple gives rise to fines even worse than the tithe would have been, plus the offender still must make the requisite tithe. Ceremonies are required by law and priests always charge for these services. Examples of these required rites are numerous: crops must be blessed; all children must be consecrated to Father Set; even the dead have requisite funerary rites that must be performed and paid for. Failure to meet these requirements may be considered heresy; the punishment for heresy is death, confiscation of all property and enslavement of the offender's entire family. Repeated failures are most definitely deemed heresy. In addition to the required rites, several animals enjoy protected religious status. Snakes and hippopotami are sacred and allowed to exist unmolested in Stygia. It is against Stygian law to injure either animal and doing so also provokes a charge of heresy. Although the priesthood does not insist on any particular behaviour before a hippopotamus, all Stygians must lie down when a snake is sighted and await the snake to either attack or move on. If a snake attacks, the Stygian chosen for the honour is considered blessed by Father Set and none will try to save him. Most Stygians so blessed go quietly. It is a strange custom but one accepted by the people of Stygia with quiet dignity.







## STRANGE CUSTOMS

Other Stygian customs likewise seem strange to foreigners. Stygians in foreign lands never eat in the presence of strangers, for example. These Stygians also refuse to discuss their native country. Perhaps they fear reprisals if they sound critical; perhaps they just do not want to think about the atmosphere and conditions they have left behind.

## STYGIAN CLOTHING

Stygians wear little to no clothing. What clothing is worn is thin almost to the point of transparency; the wealthier the Stygian, the more transparent the clothing. Silk is a common material in Stygia, worn even by base labourers. Linen is another material for clothing. Most Stygians remove all the hair on their bodies and wear wigs. Henna is a dye used to redden fingernails and hair. Kohl is a black powder used to rim the eyes, paint eyebrows and darken eyelashes.

The basic unit of clothing in Stygia is a simple rectangular piece of linen wrapped clockwise around the body to cover the area between the waist and the knees. Stygians turn the end of this loincloth back to make it double thick, tucking the top under the part already wrapped. A piece of the linen is then pulled up against the body and given a twist to prevent the interior portion from slipping down. Wealthier men wear a different kilt, one that is half-pleated and put on counter-clockwise, with the pleated part pulled forward into a peculiarly tied knot which is then tucked out of sight. Nobles wear long, transparent kilts over the short, half-pleated kilts. Older men wear longer kilts than younger men.

Women generally wear long, white, smooth and fitted tunics held up with wide shoulder straps. The upper edge of the tunic either comes over or just below the breasts and the lower edge of the tunic reaches to the ankle. This design allows for ample freedom of movement by leaving the arms

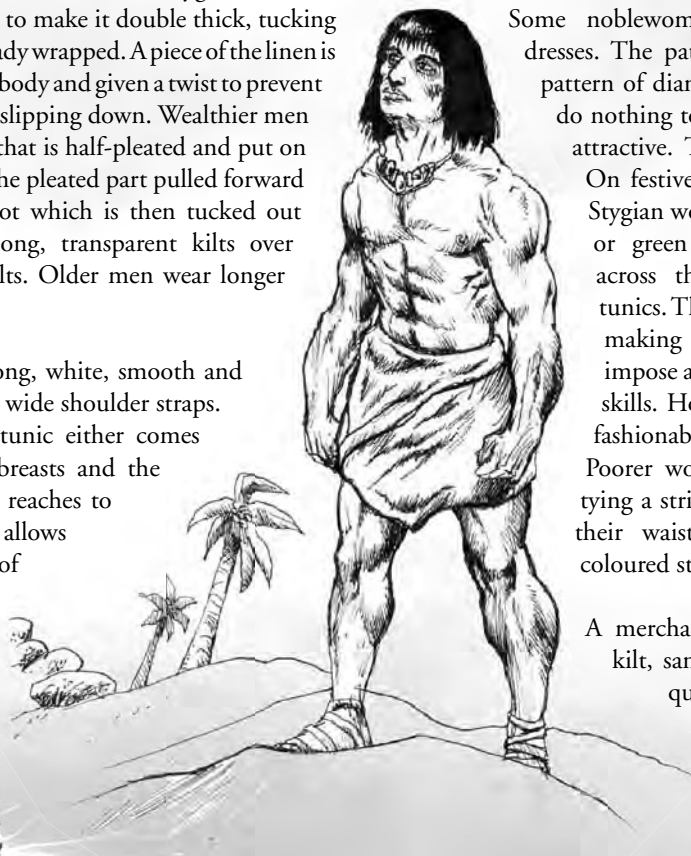
unencumbered. This dress is easy to dance and move in.. Expensive tunics may be painted with a pattern of coloured feathers. A longer Stygian linen dress for women has a deep and wide neckline, converging down to the waist. Most dresses cover only one shoulder, leaving the other shoulder and breast bare.

Often the tunic or dress is covered with an outer garment, a smooth or pleated cloak made from the finest linen. It may have short sleeves or it may be pinned together over the bust. Some versions are tied in decorative folds. Outer garments are always sheer enough to show off feminine curves. Most women still wear traditional (and often diaphanous) tunics underneath. The most expensive versions are diaphanous and skin-tight.

Different classes wear certain mantles. Conan snuck into Khemi once while wearing a fisherman's mantle, then later replaced that with a priest's mantle. A mantle is essentially a shoulder-wrap or hip-length cloak. Priests sometimes wear theirs over robes, sometimes just over their kilts. A mantle ends in a fringe tied into little knots. Nobles wear silk cloaks as mantles.

Some noblewomen wear beaded faience dresses. The pattern is akin to fish-net, a pattern of diamond-shapes. These dresses do nothing to conceal but are extremely attractive. They are most often blue. On festive occasions, the upper-class Stygian women wear nets of red, blue or green cylindrical faience beads across the middle third of their tunics. These nets restrict movement, making even sitting difficult. They impose a -1 penalty to all Dex based skills. However, sometimes dressing fashionably warrants the discomfort. Poorer women imitate this style by tying a string or two of beads around their waists or even ribbons with coloured stripes.

A merchant wears an opaque linen kilt, sandals and a mantle of high quality. A merchant mantle is generally a hip-length cloak with the hieroglyph for trade painted around the trim.





Stygia's royalty wear different clothes than the other classes of people in Stygia, displaying their power and their association with the gods. Their clothing is never bought. Clothing makers bring Stygia's royalty their clothing as gifts of devotion. Thus there are no prices for the following items. They cannot be bought in Stygia. No craftsman will make them for anyone other than the king and his family. The highest quality linens are so sheer as to be translucent to the point of transparency.

- ❖ **Nemes:** This is the royal headdress, complete with fine accordion pleating on the lappets. The band is bound tightly over the brows and tied at the back.
- ❖ **False Beards:** Worn by both men and women of royal stature, a false beard is an important symbol of divinity to the Stygians.
- ❖ **Shendyt:** The royal kilt, completely accordion pleated, is wrapped counter-clockwise around the body.

Instead of clothing, many female royals and noblewomen simply choose to paint their bodies with henna, often in clothing-like fish-net patterns. Other than the paint and perhaps some choice jewellery, they go nude or topless.

Most slaves work naked. Slaves who are the playthings of the nobility wear curious green necklaces to prevent their being bought and sold to commoners.

Servant girls go about their duties wearing only skirts or aprons if needed. Otherwise they perform their duties in the nude. They are expected to maintain hairless bodies so as to not embarrass those for whom they work. Servants with ceremonial duties in the temples of Set wear red robes of a yoked sleeveless style.

## SOCIAL STANDING

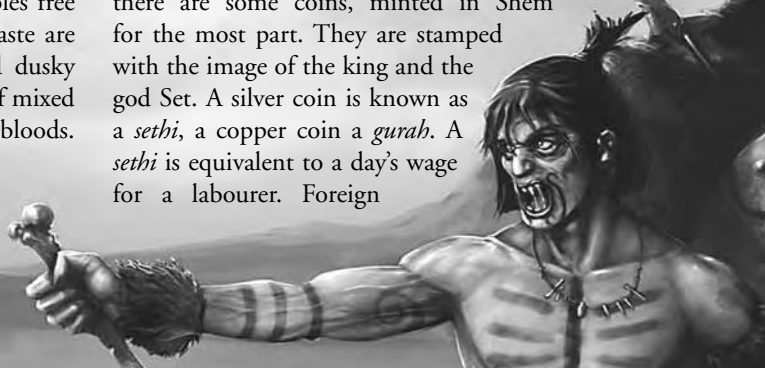
Mysterious Stygia organises its inscrutable society in a strict class system based largely upon physical racial characteristics. Stygian royalty and nobility are relatively tall people with black hair and fair skin, as were their ancient forebears, the original inhabitants of Stygia. Below these, the haughty, ruling elite of aristocrats, priests and the powerful middle class are dusky-skinned, hawk nosed men. Interestingly, it is this caste which most non-Stygians consider to be true Stygians. Holding the reins of power in the government and in the temples, the aristocracy leaves the nobles free to hang about the court at Luxur. The warrior caste are a tall and muscular breed, also hawk-nosed and dusky skinned. The lowest classes of serfs and slaves are of mixed heritage, a hybrid of various foreign and Stygian bloods. Below this are the foreign mercenaries employed to bolster Stygia's army.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

Despite its aridity, Stygia does support several industries. Stygia trades silk, ivory, skins, onions, papyrus, slaves and precious stones for grain, cattle and other agricultural products which their arid lands cannot produce or support. The palm date grows along the rich banks of the Styx. The Styx also supports a sizable fishing industry. Nomadic herding provides sustenance for large sectors of the non-urban population. Urban Stygians produce sorcerous jewellery, medicines and magical drugs made from such ingredients as the black and purple lotus. Silk and weapon manufacturing also form major export industries; although Stygian weapons are not favoured by non-Stygians, silk is produced in massive quantities. In addition to their own native products, Stygian merchants raid the Black Kingdoms for ivory, pearls, skins and slaves to trade, transporting them along the River Styx to the open sea. Stygian merchants even venture as far as Khitai, often in search of mystical pharmaceuticals. Stygia brokers luxury goods from Iranistan and Vendhya. Stygia's wealth is also maintained by its modest fleet, which preys upon Hyborean shipping. Despite its aridity, the country is rich and the wealth trickles down throughout the entire society, for even Stygian slaves wear silk.

For the most part, trade is done via barter. Even though Stygia has money, barter is still widespread. Often wages are paid in food since most people would spend their money on food anyway. Also, if one is frugal and stores a bit of food, one can become wealthy in times of famine. Many commoners have risen in estate because they knew how to save grain and, when a famine came, traded food to the starving for land and slaves. By the end of the famine, the former commoner found himself a wealthy land-owner. Labourers often trade work or crafted goods to the temples and priests in return for ceremonies, amulets and medicine.

In addition to barter, Stygia does have a form of money. While Stygia does not generally mint coins, they do melt gold, copper and silver coins they receive or steal from other nations down into golden, copper or silver rings of a certain weight. These rings serve as a form of money in Stygia. Nevertheless, there are some coins, minted in Shem for the most part. They are stamped with the image of the king and the god Set. A silver coin is known as a *sethi*, a copper coin a *gurah*. A *sethi* is equivalent to a day's wage for a labourer. Foreign







coins must be handled delicately. Aquilonian coins, for example, are illegal in much of Stygia, earning the bearer more trouble for him and his family than one might think is warranted. Also, all gold in Stygia belongs to the king in Luxur. Anyone with gold must have it as a gift from the king or must have stolen it from a tomb. All gifts from the king are recorded in the Treasury of Luxur.

Trade is not just an economic activity in darksome Stygia. It is also socially significant. The exchange of gifts between unequal parties plays a role in the acknowledgement of social standing, giving honour and displaying generosity. Giving a valuable gift gives a character a +1 bonus to Reputation since such a gesture increases the character's prestige. The most a character can gain in one year is a +3 bonus for gift giving and each gift must be larger than the last to have an effect on Reputation.

## THE MILITARY OF STYGIA

Stygia holds some of the most secure borders in the world with a ruthless army that is strictly disciplined. The ruling theocracy, obstinately conservative, forces their warrior castes to wear obsolete armour and use antique weaponry, including war chariots still made the traditional way. Chariot fighting is a noble art and cavalry is base, fit only for foreign mercenaries. While Stygian armies are walking anachronisms even in the Hyborian Age, they are effective. Their men and horses are accustomed to Stygia's climate and geography. Their armies are also augmented by the sorcerer-priests, who call black plagues out of darkened tombs to help repel invaders. The army is well coordinated and extremely mobile, brave and formidable. It is considered a major military power. The Stygian army could be called upon to quickly overwhelm invaders in sheer numbers, often negating superior tactics and equipment. Interestingly, despite their strengths, Stygia is very reluctant to send its forces abroad, even to reclaim captured lands.

Clubs, stone-headed maces, bronze and copper daggers and spearheads are typical Stygian weapons. The khopesh is a common weapon used in Stygia. Most weapons are made of bronze in Stygia, where craftsmen of the region are dedicated to old ways. Likewise, armour is made of bronze and is typically scale armour. Shields are rounded

at the top and flat at the bottom and are made of wood and hide. The most impressive Stygian weapon is probably the Stygian bow, which was developed as an answer to the Shemite bows. Only the upper classes are permitted weapons – the servants and labourers are not allowed to train or wear weapons and armour unless serving as conscripts. Off-duty soldiers, excepting officers, are not permitted to wear weapons and armour.

## RELIGION IN STYGIA

Religion in Stygia is synonymous with the worship of Father Set, who reigns supreme over that darksome land. His pantheon, however, includes several 'hideous, half-bestial gods' as subordinates. At one time, according to Xaltotun, much of the world was likewise dominated by the Old Serpent. Set, today, is worshipped primarily in Stygia and in places of strong Stygian influence, such as areas of Kush and Shem and by dark sorcerers everywhere. Set's symbol is a scaled serpent, coiled, with its tail in its mouth.

Set's is a bloody religion, a survival from the strange pre-human culture that was thrown down by the Stygians in pre-Cataclysm days. At one time, Set walked the earth in the form of a man and created that ancient and mysterious race. Now the god of the Stygians, Set's cult is outlawed by the Hyborians, who regard Set as the arch-enemy of Mitra and fear the gruesome and mysterious rituals of Set's priests.

The specific rituals used to worship Set are a guarded mystery but they are known to be gruesome and sinister, comprised of unspeakable rites and human sacrifices in grisly quantities. Priests wear monstrous, half-bestial masks surmounted by ostrich plumes in certain ceremonies. Silent, ritualistic processions also play an inexplicable part in this dark religion. Sacred objects, such as curious black candles that flicker with strange green light and staves with white skull heads abound in the Stygians' grim ceremonies of black magic. Sacred beasts, both terrestrial and otherwise, abound in their religious culture. Giant pythons hunt abroad in the dark alleys of black Khemi and innumerable human captives held in deep pits are sacrificed to amorphous monsters from the Abyss. Giant, drugged iridescent serpents coil in Set's temples, ready to accept worship and sacrifice from the priests of Set.

Almost all the priests of Set are sorcerers and they terrify their subjects as well as their enemies, for they can and will sacrifice their own followers to gain their corrupt ends. The most powerful of these priests are members



of the Black Ring. These priests gather in sacred spots, such as the pyramids that dot the Stygian landscape, to perform their rituals.

The pyramids of Stygia, possibly built by the pre-human race superseded by the Stygians, now serve as temples as well as tombs for the mummies of Stygia's elite. Mummification had been practiced by the Stygians long before the Great Cataclysm, even before they migrated into modern-day Stygia. It is still practiced today and represents a belief in an after-life for the faithful follower of Set.

## ISHITI

Ishiti is an eldritch snake demoness linked to Set and his black pantheon of grim gods. She is a demon who variously appears as a woman who is snakelike from the waist down with snakes for hair or as snake-like from the neck down. She governs time, serpents and snake-men. Her breath can change a man from human to snake-man. She does not like to be lied to. Even though she is a demon goddess of Set, she is not without compassion. Unlike the gods, she can manifest herself. She was originally worshipped by the snake-men of prehistory before they were slain by King Kull.

Ishiti is the demon that was summoned to guard the Haunted Pyramids in Stygia. For the tomb-builders in the necropolis outside of Luxur, she is a dangerous but merciful goddess who loves silence. She abhors liars and sinners. She is so fierce in her pursuit of liars she is called the Lion of the Summit. For the pious, she is a defender against snakebites, especially for tomb-workers. Ishiti is detailed as a demon lord (with statistics) in *Stygia – Serpent of the South*. Statistics for her 'children' can also be found in that volume.

Much more about Stygian religion, including the Mysteries of several of the cults, can be found in *Stygia – Serpent of the South*.

## STYGIAN GOVERNMENT

Stygia is a theocracy. The government claims its right to rule on behalf of Set, an unwholesome and ancient deity. The king demonstrates or claims to have the support of Set and his pantheon – and claims that any attempts to remove the king would risk the displeasure of all the gods. Almost the entire bureaucracy of Stygia is comprised of priests. The largest temple complexes are almost cities in and of themselves, employing almost

every sort of worker. Temple bakeries, breweries, fisheries, stables and farms can be found in these complexes. Produce and animals from the farms arrive constantly and everything is recorded by temple scribes. Craftsmen and administrators also work here as well as permanent priests. The city of Luxur's Temple of Set employs more than 81,000 people, for example.

Many thousands of Stygians are needed to make sure Stygia runs according to the king's desires. He claims to be master of the world and rules over all that is seen and unseen. The priests and the bureaucracy then serve as his eyes. The bureaucracy is arranged much like a pyramid.

The wide base of the pyramid is built from the common scribes. They function as clerks, record-keepers, tax collectors, supply distributors and accountants. Exceptional scribes can move into the next level of government and oversee the common scribes. Being even a 'common' scribe is still a respectful title and higher in status than a non-literate overseer of a farm. These scribes are primarily scholars, although any class can take the training.

Above the scribes in the scheme of Stygian government are the dignitaries, who are high priests, army officers, town officials and governors. The dignitaries live like wealthy landowners. Of course, most of them are wealthy landowners. Skilled scribes can often make their way to this tier of government. These characters are usually mid- or high-level non-noble characters, or low level nobles.

Above the dignitaries are the most gifted and influential of the nobles and dignitaries, chosen by the king to serve as his central administrators. They are usually given impressive titles, such as Master of the King's Surplus. Another high ranking dignitary is the Speaker of Set, who is one of the most politically influential and powerful sorcerers from Set's House of Life. Thoth-Amon currently serves as the Speaker of Set in the court of Ctesphon IV. These central administrators live almost like kings themselves, in huge houses approaching the size of palaces and with great numbers of servants. These administrators are almost always high level characters, although a few influential mid-level nobles rise to this station.

Above the central administrators are the two viziers of the king. One vizier serves Stygia from the bend in the Styx to the west and the other is in charge of Stygia from the bend in the Styx





toward the south. A diagonal line from the bend at Taia toward Sukhmet is the dividing line in the desert. These viziers are the eyes and ears of the king, to whom all things must be reported.

At the apex of the pyramid is the king of Stygia. He is the supreme judge of all disputes and the ruler of all people. He is the commander of the army and the representative of the gods on earth.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF STYGIA

**Bakhr River** – The Bakhr River is a small tributary of the Styx. It is a stagnant, muddy watercourse filled with deadly crocodiles. It joins the Styx north of Nebthu and east of the oasis of Khajar where Thoth-Amon dwells.

**Ellobolu** – Ellobolu is a long, narrow lake along the Styx in the east. It is lined with marble and is rumoured to be bottomless.

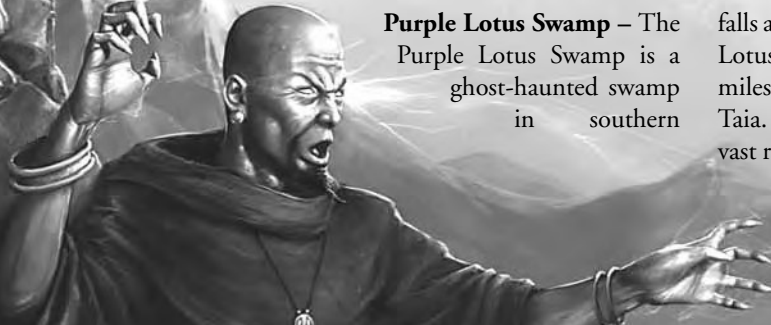
**Purple Lotus Swamp** – The Purple Lotus Swamp is a ghost-haunted swamp in southern

Stygia, where the purple lotus grows. Purple lotus is a plant the juice of which causes immediate temporary paralysis even in small quantities.

**Isle of Siptah** – The Isle of Siptah is an island off the coast of southern Stygia. Demons and monsters summoned and created by the legendary Stygian wizard Siptah dwell on this haunted island.

**Lake Zuad** – Lake Zuad is a large lake near the border of Kush where the Tlazitlan people originated.

**River Styx** – The River Styx is probably one of the most famous rivers in the Hyborian Age landscape and the defining geographic feature of Stygia. Also known as the Nilus, the Styx is by far the largest river of the South, a veritable lifeline of agriculture and fertility along its entire length, from the darkest realms of the Black Kingdoms to the gaping mouth at Khemi. The Styx binds Stygia in the north and is a wide, deep river, navigable for most of its length. Its source is somewhere in the jungles south of Zembabwei where the river runs marshy and thin, ridden with diseases and horrible insects. The river is broken by falls and white-water cascades once it moves past the Purple Lotus Swamp. The great bend of the Styx, two thousand miles or more upriver from its mouth, is at a section called Taia. Hills and cliffsides mark the northern shore of the vast river and various reedy channels, black lagoons, snake-



infested swamps and tributary streams and rivers flow into it from the south. Great crocodiles and massive hippopotami swarm the shallow regions of the Styx. The Stygians use the river to irrigate crops along the fertile land found on the shores of the Styx, which floods annually to deposit mineral rich soil along its length. Several small islands can be found in the wide expanse of the Styx and great cities, megalithic temples and statues are built on its shores, as are several noble estates. In a few places, such as the Ford of Bubastes near the Bakhr River, the Styx is fordable. The terminus of the Styx is the great black-walled city of Khemi which sits at its mouth, guarding the river.

**Taian Mountains** – The Taian mountains lie in Stygia's north-east corner where the River Styx makes its ninety-degree turn toward the ocean from the jungles of the Black Kingdoms. Some of the mountains are still active volcanoes.

## IMPORTANT STYGIAN CITIES

**Harakht** – Harakht is the accursed and ancient city of the Hawk-God where dusky Stygians in amber-hued robes sing strange dirges before his immense idols. Strangers are not allowed into the city. The city lies along the River Styx and is less than a day's ride from the Oasis of Khajar where lives the great Thoth-Amon. Harakht is covered in more detail in *Stygia – Serpent of the South*.

**Khemi** – Khemi, with its mighty black castles, is the priestly capital of Stygia and has a population of 25,300 people. It is the greatest city of Stygia, located by the Western Ocean. Despite the sea trade commanded by this city, Khemi is a sealed metropolis and does not permit non-Stygians entrance, except as slaves. Thus, all trade with Stygia must be done with Stygia's ships, captains and crews. The only exceptions are ambassadors and licensed traders and even they must leave the city after sunset. Monster snakes, which are kept in the temples, are allowed to move out in the city when they hunger, seeking prey. The people who catch sight of these ghastly horrors fall to their knees and await the determination of fate. Those that the snakes select are deemed sacrifices to Set. The killing of these snakes is one of the worst punishable crimes in the city. The city is dark after sunset and the only lights to be seen shine from the highest reaches of the oppressive buildings. The market closes with the coming of darkness and few walk the streets past that time. Artificial gardens of palm trees grow on the roofs of many of the buildings and most of the townsfolk sleep in those gardens. Bronze chariots, antique in their design, often carry the

nobles and priests around. The massive architecture of the city is overwhelming and oppressive. The streets are narrow but broaden somewhat as one enters the temple district. The Temple of Set in Khemi houses the mummies of many of the elder members of the Black Ring. Other temples in the district house other ghastly things. Most of the major pyramids and secret subterranean temples can be found near this black city. Khemi is covered in more detail in *Signs & Portents 21* and *The Conan Compendium*.

**Kheshatta** – Kheshatta is a loathsome city of dark magicians in southern Stygia. It lies on a caravan route from Kush. Today it is the headquarters of the Black Ring. Ruled by the magicians, the priesthood of Set has no real power here, nor does the King Ctesphon IV, pharaoh of Stygia. The city is a reputed treasure trove of forbidden eldritch lore and grim ceremonial items. With a population of more than 12,000 persons, it is a large city and well over a hundred of these people are dark wizards, members of the Black Ring. Kheshatta is covered in more detail in *Stygia – Serpent of the South*.

**Luxur** – Luxur, with a population of 18,894 persons, is the royal capital of Stygia, the site of the Ivory Throne where King Ctesphon IV sits. The king appears to be less xenophobic than much of the rest of the population, occasionally granting permission for foreigners, especially scholars, to study at Kheshatta. Luxur controls much of Stygia's river traffic and many of the caravan routes out of Shem, making it a strategic commercial centre of considerable importance, rivalling Khemi in economic wealth. Situated on the upper Bakhr River, Luxur's surrounding lands were reasonably fertile and well-watered at one time but the slow dropping of the Bakhr's waterline has caused some concern. Thoth-Amon maintains a residence here. The dusky goddess Derketo has a strong presence here, a sensual religion of sexual pleasures and orgies. Luxur is covered in more detail in *Stygia – Serpent of the South*.

**Nebthu** – Nebthu, the City of Tombs, is a ruined city that looms over the Bakhr River near the Styx. Nebthu is well known for the large stone hyena-sphinx that sits outside the crumbled foundations that are all that is left of the ancient town. The great pylons of the gates are all that remain of the blasted walls.

**Pteion** – Pteion is a ruin from ancient times in eastern Stygia. The desert has







swallowed it up. The city is rumoured to have been mostly underground anyway, founded by the serpent-men of Velusia. Pteion is covered in more detail in *Ruins of Hyboria*, including a map.

**Sukhmet** – Sukhmet is a southern Stygian town built among the grasslands of the border. Mercenaries bolster the defences of the city, protecting Stygia from Darfari raiders. Sukhmet is covered in more detail in *Stygia – Serpent of the South*.

## STYGIAN HISTORY

The people who would eventually bring about Stygia lived on the eastern coast of the Thurian continent in pre-Cataclysmic times. After Atlantis and Lemuria sank beneath the waves during the Great Cataclysm, this shadowy land of the Proto-Stygians was invaded by fleeing Lemurians. This pre-Stygian culture enslaved the refugees of the disaster and brutalised them. Crushed and destroyed, the Lemurians became little more than beast-men during their thousand or so years of captivity but they eventually threw off their yoke of slavery and destroyed their enslavers, burning their cities and smashing their culture. The few remaining Proto-Stygians, numbering perhaps in the low thousands, fled the slave wars and eventually came to the Vilayet, a great inland sea created by a lesser cataclysm some thousand years after the Great Cataclysm, and turned south. Some scholars of history believe a branch of these people did not turn south with the others but went north to found Acheron. Other scholars argue that this other branch founded Zamora. The truth is hidden behind the dim cloud of time.

Still, it is known that the Proto-Stygians who travelled south came upon the mighty river they named Styx and conquered a pre-human culture, the race of giant-kings mentioned in *The God in the Bowl* that had built the black pyramids and the haunted tombs beneath those pyramids. Little is known about this culture outside of a few precious clues. The pre-human race were taller than the average human of today. Their eyes glimmered like fiery pools beneath their brows. The Proto-Stygians came to admire these alien beings, treating the few who remained as gods and adopting many aspects of their alien culture. This mingled culture became Stygia.

Stygia expanded and ruled the lands of Shem, Argos, Koth, Ophir and, perhaps, southern Corinthia. Acheron was Stygia's most powerful rival, both

militarily and magically. Some scholars theorise that Acheron was founded by Stygian colonists and others theorise that Acheron was founded by a branch of the Proto-Stygians that founded Stygia. Evidence also seems to indicate that Acheron was founded by the pre-human culture supplanted by Stygia. Xaltotun, for example, is described as tall, white and as having luminous eyes. Akivasha, the vampire met by Conan in *The Hour of the Dragon* is also described as tall, white-skinned and as having luminous eyes. The cadaverous giant of Howard's *The Altar and the Scorpion* shared Xaltotun's sinuous, snake-like stride and fiery eyes. These tall, white-skinned, lambent-eyed people were overthrown by the Proto-Stygians and their worship of dark Set assimilated into burgeoning Stygian culture.

When the Hyborians destroyed Acheron centuries years later, the Stygians were driven behind the River Styx by the Hyborian men of newly founded Koth. Kuthchemes, once an important Stygian city, was sacked and abandoned. Never again did Stygia try to expand so far. Instead, the brooding kingdom concentrated more on internal affairs and defence, perhaps concerned that they, like their sinister sister Acheron, would also fall.

Today, Stygia is the dark, dreaming empire of the South, reviled by the Hyborian nations, yet ever a scheming stronghold for the black powers of Set.

## LOCAL CREATURES

Snakes of all sizes populate Stygia, as do jackals, lions and other carnivores. Huge crocodiles and river horses (hippopotami) thrive in the Styx and Bakhr rivers. Bizarre half-human creatures such as mantichore, lamia and mermecolion haunt the ancient, pre-human ruins. Statistics for these creatures can be found in *Stygia – Serpent of the South*.

## ADVENTURE HOOKS

A typical Stygian raiding party for Kushite slaves amounts to forty mounted warriors, all seasoned veterans without mercy. They surround a black village at night and strike at dawn, capturing the healthy and strong for transport back to Stygia. Those too young, too old or too sickly are slain on the spot. The characters could be part of this force or may be hired to defend a village, in the manner of *The Seven Samurai*.

Rumours persist of the existence of the 'Scroll of Life' or the 'Scroll of Thoth,' which can resurrect the dead or raise up mummies.



# Tombalku

## The Riders of the Southern Desert

'Who are these men?' asked the young Aquilonian.  
'The riders of Tombalku,' answered the Cimmerian.  
'Tombalku!' exclaimed Amalric. 'Then it is no myth!'

– *Untitled Draft*

Tombalku is a confederation of Black Kingdom and Southern Desert tribes based around the city of the same name. Tombalku's borders stay north of the regions where the tsetse fly lives because of the damage the fly does to its horses. Buried in the southern desert, Tombalku is mythical to most of the world but for the surrounding nations it is a major commercial centre. Tombalku is located three days south of Gazal (page 190). The riders of Tombalku routinely sweep through the deserts to the north to rid the land of the Ghanata thieves who prey upon them.

### RULING TRIBE

#### APHAKI

The Aphaki are the masters of Tombalku, despite being a minority race. The Aphaki were originally a Shemitish race who pushed into the southern desert several centuries ago. They may have originated from the Oasis of Aphaka mentioned in *Black Colossus*. They are a brown people with straight, dark hair. The Aphaki conquered many of the desert tribes and the tribes of the southern steppe. They are merciless and cruel. Player wanting to roll up Aphaki characters should use the racial statistics found in *Shem* – *Gateway to the South*.

### SUBJUGATED TRIBES

The confederation is an empire of subjugated tribes, including tribes of the Bagirmi, Bornu, Dongola, Mandingo and Tibu peoples. These tribesmen can be rolled up using the standard Northern Black Kingdom Tribesman (Kushite) race found in *Conan the Roleplaying Game*. The riders of Tombalku are semi-nomadic, so allowing the nomad class as a favoured class is a viable

variant rule for these characters. Listed here are the major tribes of Tombalku. There are other tribes, so the Games Master or players can make up new tribes if desired.

#### BAGIRMI

The Bagirmi tribes are nomadic pastoralists who herd cattle, sheep and goats on the dry grasslands of Tombalku. They are naturally traders but avoid the agricultural tribes. They have straight hair and noses, thin lips and skin the colour of copper; many people believe they come from Iranistani stock mixed with indigenous blacks. Unlike most of the Black Kingdoms tribesmen, the Bagirmi highly value anything of beauty, especially women. Bagirmi women are known for their delicate, aquiline beauty. This sense of the importance of beauty tends to give Bagirmi characters with a higher Charisma a higher status. Tattoos are seen as especially beautiful and a well-tattooed body is highly desirable, especially if the tattooing is done around the lips. Bagirmi also use Henna on their lips, giving their lips a black colour, which is pleasing to them. The Bagirmi are the most nomadic of all the Tombalkus and travel long distances with their cattle herds on the southern grasslands and savannahs. Cattle are considered part of their extended family and a Bagirmi usually names each of his cows. Bravery and fearlessness are traits to be extolled, so the Bagirmi are strong warriors. The initiation ceremony of boys to become men involves the boys hitting each other with sticks; they are not allowed to show pain but must laugh instead. Deaths have been known to occur during this initiation, so hard do they strike one another.

#### BORNU

The Bornu people are subsistence farmers, focused on the rainy season from May to October. They grow grain, such as millet and maize, as well as peanuts, sweet potatoes, cassava and other roots. They also raise livestock and are the



caretakers of Tombalku's horses. A few lucky Bornu raise some cattle but Tombalku gets most of its cattle from trading with the southern Black Kingdoms. Bornu villages in Tombalku have periodic or even daily markets but the largest Bornu market can be found in the capital of Tombalku. Aphaki officials oversee all Bornu markets and settle any disputes that may arise there. The Bornu have a near-feudal society of patron-client relationships. Aphaki rulers grant the Bornu chiefs what amounts to fiefs for their villages in return for their allegiance.

## DONGOLA

The Dongola are a trading people, given to working for the Aphaki and other tribes and trading either labour or goods in return for protection and income. Dongola has had ties with Stygia in the past and Stygian blood flows through their veins, much as it does among the Tibu. The Dongola mostly live around the Jeluba River. The Dongola tend to be a practical people and know where their strengths lie. Many work in Tombalku as tinsmiths and tailors. Before the Aphaki came, the Dongola were both despised and needed by the other tribes. They were despised because they made their living as traders and labourers instead of as warriors but needed because they offered gold, salt, copper and certain precious stones for trade. They still live in a dichotomy: despised for labouring as servants but needed for the amount of wealth at their disposal.

## MANDINGO

The Mandingo people are racially related to the Ghanata and are a mix of Stygian and Kushite. There is a western branch of this tribe living along the coast of Kush. They are fierce warriors and look down upon cattle-based nomads, such as the Bagirmi. The Mandingo are rarely without their spears and the young children carry curved swords for their fathers and older brothers.

## TIBU

The Tibu are described in more detail in the entries for the Southern Desert (see page 184). The subjugated Tibu tribes do not significantly vary in culture or appearance from the non-subjugated tribes just north of Tombalku.

## HONOUR

Most of the Tombalkus are herdsmen and have a typical herdsman mentality regarding honour. Basically, a Tombalku is driven to protect his honour violently. Failure to do so means the Tombalku is weak and this shows his enemies that his herds, his very livelihood, can be taken, for if he cannot defend his honour, neither can he defend his herd. Thus, any perceived challenge to a Tombalku's honour must be rebuked with violence and death. Individual variations on this are discussed below.

**Aphaki:** The original Aphaki who settled the region had the barbaric code of honour as described in *Conan the Roleplaying Game*. Most Aphaki today still maintain the barbaric code of honour out of fear of shaming themselves; it has become part of their religion now. At the heart of the Aphaki way of life is the clan. All Aphaki are derived from the Aphaki clan from Shem, so they treat themselves as equals and superior in all ways to the other peoples of the region. The Aphaki also maintain the usual rules of hospitality, revenge and patronage as found in *Shem – Gateway to the South*.

**Bagirmi:** The Bagirmi are noted for their sense of honour. Their sense of honour and behaviour is built around the ideals of patience, self-discipline, self-control, modesty, respect, wisdom and forethought. The Bagirmi do not lie, nor do they allow themselves to be put in shameful positions, nor do they allow themselves to show fear. The Bagirmi consider public displays of emotion to be shameful, so they are a stoic people. Self-sufficiency is important to the Bagirmi and they strive to have as few belongings as possible since it is easier to care for a few belongings on one's own than to care for a lot. Expressing discomfort in public is also considered shameful. A Bagirmi will not complain of hunger, thirst, pain or illness. A public flogging is considered a test of manhood (it must be endured without sign of pain, discomfort or emotion) and is often required before marriage. Loss of cattle is also considered shameful; a Bagirmi without cattle is no longer considered part of the Bagirmi tribe.

**Bornu:** The Bornu, as is typical with herding cultures, maintain a barbaric code of honour. This sense of honour gives a man social status, precedence and a right to respect. If his honour is attacked, the Bornu will counterattack – often physically. A Bornu who does not defend his honour is cast out as worthless. The Bornu are prepared to die to protect their honour.

**Dongola:** The Dongola, for they lost their herds long ago, have also lost most of their concepts of honour, at least in



the eyes of most of the other tribes. Some have adapted Shemite (Aphaki) honour as their own but few feel it as intensely as the Aphaki. This seeming loss of honour has discredited the Dongola in the eyes of most of the other tribes, who treat honour as a source of status and respect. That said, the Dongola do have a form of honour based around the concepts of mutual respect, modesty, politeness, patience and hospitality. Above all, the Dongola believe in the fulfilment of promises; their word is their bond. Despite this, the Dongola have a reputation for being without honour.

**Mandingo:** The Mandingo are a warrior culture and they have a barbaric code of honour. They respect those who bear arms and bear them well. Although the Mandingo rarely herd animals, they are socialised into being an honourable society. The Aphaki tend to accord the Mandingo a lot of respect for they typically see eye to eye in this regard. This respect is shown in that the Aphaki have adapted a dialect of Mandingo as the language to bind the empire together.

**Tibu:** The Tibu are described in more detail in the entries for the Southern Desert (see pages 184). The subjugated Tibu tribes do not significantly vary in culture from the non-subjugated tribes just north of Tombalku.

## ALLEGIANCE

The Tombalkus, regardless of tribe, tend to have allegiances toward their chiefs. Chiefs usually have an allegiance toward the black king of Tombalku, except the Bornu, who usually have allegiances to Aphaki lords in return for land. The Aphaki have an allegiance to the Aphaki king of Tombalku. Allegiance is also used in the Shemite custom of patronage, wherein a weaker person swears allegiance to a stronger person in exchange for protection; once a Tombalku agrees to be a patron, any insult to the person he protects is an insult to himself, so this arrangement is not handled lightly.

## CULTURE

**Language:** Each tribe has its own language and its own dialects. The Aphaki speak a dialect of Shemite, for example. A dialect of Mandingo is used as a common tongue to bind the empire together. All Tombalkus can speak this dialect of Mandingo in addition to their tribal tongue.

**Hospitality and Revenge:** The Aphaki have instilled throughout the people a grudging respect for desert Shemite customs of hospitality and an enthusiastic respect for the desert Shemite customs of revenge. Honour demands blood feuds according to the Tombalkus.

**Slaves:** The Tombalkus are a slaving people. All people, men and women alike, have the right to own slaves.

**Torture:** The Tombalkus enjoy torturing strong subjects, considering the ordeal to be great sport.

**Factions Upon Factions:** Tombalku has a definite caste system as multiple cultures strive for dominance. The Aphaki are the current dominant caste, having defeated the blacks in a civil war after Conan's arrival in the capital city. Beneath the Aphaki are several black tribes as described previously. These tribes all strive for dominance over one another, even as they each strive to dominate the Aphaki if they can. The strength of the various factions waxes and wanes over time. Only rarely does one king rule Tombalku. In order to keep the blacks in line, most of the Aphaki kings allow a black king from one of the major tribes to rule alongside him.

**Evening Strolls:** In the city of Tombalku, the people like to walk around in the late evening playing music, singing and dancing. This usually begins a few hours after sunset and lasts until after midnight.

## TOMBALKAN CLOTHING

Throughout Tombalku, slaves are usually dressed in voluminous skirts or kilts and are bare-breasted; this is done to strip them of their tribal identity. Otherwise, the different tribes of Tombalku are discussed separately.

**Aphaki:** The Aphaki wear white robes in the desert Shemite fashion. These robes, or *khilats*, have full, open sleeves and may have patterns embroidered on the edges. They are closed at the waist with a girdle or sash. Instead of a *kafeh*, the Aphaki wear turbans in Iranistani fashion. Women wear a pair of voluminous white trousers and a body-shirt of white gauze beneath their full-bodied, white robes or *chadors*. Both sexes may wear an outer cloak with a hood. More information about traditional Shemite clothing can be found in *Shem – Gateway to the South*.

**Bagirmi:** The Bagirmi of both sexes dress in long, colourful robes of yellow or red. These robes are flowing and embroidered. Both men and women are fond of tattoos, both permanent and temporary (using henna). Amulets are worn for spiritual or magical protection. Bagirmi women also wear a lot of gold ornamentation,







especially earrings. Silver rings and bangles are also common among the women; the more bracelets the better. The women also wear elaborate hairdos that incorporate amber beads. Bagirmi women braid their hair into five long braids and then arrange the braids in various hairdos or just let the braids hang. In addition to amber beads, many Bagirmi girls like to attach gold coins to their braids, especially old coins that have been passed down through the generations. The more elaborate the gold earrings, the higher the status the woman is considered to be. Bagirmi blacksmiths also make heavy, thick anklets of iron for the women to wear so they might have a cow-like walk, which is considered attractive by the Bagirmi men.

**Bornu:** The Bornu wear loose, flowing gowns with wide openings on both sides. They also wear loose trousers tied tight at the ankles and leather sandals and turbans. Their turbans often have plumes of horsehair added. The Bornu also wear protective amulets as necklaces or bracelets. The Bornu carry tear-drop-shaped wooden shields and long spears in battle.

**Dongola:** Dongola men wear white cotton tunics over trousers. Dongola women wear white cotton, short-sleeved, v-necked dresses with colourful sashes around the waist; they may add a white cloak or shawl if desired. More formal dresses have longer sleeves. Both men and women wear sandals.

**Mandingo:** Mandingo males wear long sleeved shirts and a wide, square-cut, sleeveless gowns. A Mandingo man may wear a loin-cloth or a pair of narrow-ankled trousers underneath the shirt and gown. The gown may be made of cotton or silk. Mandingo women wear long, wrap-around skirts and loose, scoop-necked smocks. The women also wear informal turbans. The men prefer more war-like headdresses, with feathers, bones and horns.

**Tibu:** Tibu clothing is covered on page 186. Tombalkan Tibu usually do not wear masks while serving as Tombalku's cavalry; the masks are relegated to ceremonial use only.

The Aphaki treat their own women with honour but feel any other woman taken in a raid becomes the legal property of the raider. Women may also be sold as concubines in order to settle a debt. Men are expected to be leaders, merchants and warriors.

**Bagirmi:** Bagirmi men see themselves as one corner of a triangle of interdependence. A man is in charge of taking care of pastures, water and protection for the other two corners of the triangle, his wife and his cattle. Bagirmi women, as another corner of the triangle, are in charge of food preparation, dairy work and child bearing. Bagirmi cattle are the third corner of this triangle and they offer milk and prestige to the man and his wife.

**Bornu:** Bornu men are in charge of agriculture, collection, going to market, repairs, transport and even sewing. Unlike the rest of the cultures in the empire of Tombalku, dying clothing is considered men's work by the Bornu. The Mandingo and Tibu in particular find this humorous. Bornu women cook food, clean house, raise children, conduct trade and make crafts. The chastity of women is part of their honour system, so an unchaste woman is dishonourable and shameful, both to the woman and to her kin.

**Dongola:** Among the Dongola, the men handle the finances and make all the critical decisions, while the women do the housework, raise the children and so on.

**Mandingo:** Most Mandingo tribes do not particularly subordinate their women politically. Indeed, some women rise to chieftain positions. Women who bear children are seen as strong, so women with many children and who manage houses with many wives are practically trained to be fine leaders; the Mandingo recognise this. Men are expected to be able to provide their wives with enough cloth for two outfits each every year; however, men are usually found sitting under a tree talking to other men if they are not out raiding, while the women are always doing work.

✿ **Bundu:** Women among the Mandingo also may join the *Bundu*, a secret society of women in charge of initiating girls into women, ensuring fertility among the women of Mandingo, instructing the women in the ways of sex and taking care of women in general. This female secret society also attempts to communicate with ancestral and guardian spirits in secluded forest settings while wearing ebony helmet-masks. After girls are initiated, the *Bundu* healers scarify the girl in teeth patterns to promote the belief among the uninitiated

## SEX ROLES IN TOMBALKU

**Aphaki:** Aphaki women are full partners in the household but their charisma rarely extends past their own families. They do most of the chores, however.



that the forest ate the girls and regurgitated them as adult women. Those seen as special or particularly adept at leading others are sometimes initiated into the secret society.

- ❖ **Poro:** The men have a similar secret society called the *Poro*. The *Poro* secret society has the power to curse people and establish taboos. Both secret societies have an interest in political power. They alternate control of the land and the people. The *Bundu* society has political and religious power for three years, then the *Poro* have it for four years. Three is considered a number symbolic of femininity and four is a symbolic number of manhood. Together, three and four create seven, which is considered a sacred number.

**Tibu:** The sex roles of the Tibu are described in detail on page 186 in their southern desert entry.

## LOVE AND MARRIAGE

**Aphaki:** Marriages are usually prearranged, although usually the people involved have some say in the matter. The cousin of any woman has the first right to ask for her hand. In order to marry another, she must ask the permission of each of her cousins. Polygamy is allowed; the more wives one has, the higher his social status.

**Bagirmi:** The Bagirmi may have more than one wife and marriages are commonly arranged. Brides are usually chosen on the basis of how many cattle they have. The Bagirmi live in small villages of family compounds. Virtually everyone in a Bagirmi village is related to everyone else.

**Bornu:** The Bornu also allow multiple wives if a man can support them. Marriage between cousins and other close kin is preferred. Marriages are usually arranged on the basis of social status and power, as marriages link families and increase social networks.

**Dongola:** The Dongola are not allowed to marry anyone related by blood for the past seven generations. Usually the husband is around 30 when first married and the girls are just finishing puberty. The groom's parents search for his bride. Once a suitable bride is found, a third-party mediator approaches the girl's family. If interested, the parents of the groom and the potential bride enter into lengthy negotiations for the bride-price. Once the price is settled, the groom pays the price and, in a seven-day ceremony, is married to the girl. Part of the process includes checking to make sure the girl is a virgin. The bride and groom do not actually meet until the seventh day

of the wedding. The groom takes the bride to his parents' house and takes her virginity during the next three days.

**Mandingo:** Marriages for Mandingo girls begin at birth, when the girls are betrothed to Mandingo boys twelve years of age or older, preferably their maternal cousins. When the girl is of marriageable age, her betrothed, now a man, begins to pay the bride-price to her family. Once the full payment is made, the wedding takes place and the girl is transferred to her new husband's home. Regardless of the marriage, a woman's loyalty is to her family and the man's is to his family; the man does not own the wife's possessions, either. She retains whatever she brings to the marriage. The Mandingo, after marriage, treat each other's names as taboo. Husbands and wives will come up with pet names for each other and use only those when referring to each other. Polygamy is permitted if a man can afford more than one wife.

**Tibu:** Marriage customs among the Tibu are described on page 187. The Tibu of Tombalku are no different than the free Tibu of the southern desert in this regard.

## SOCIAL STANDING

**Aphaki:** Position and status are important to the Aphaki, just as they are for most Shemite tribes. Social standing is based on Reputation and occupation. The higher a person's Reputation and occupation, the more respect he is afforded. The king is at the top of the hierarchy. The heads of families, known as patriarchs, are also given high accord. Leaders who lose Reputation without avenging that loss are usually deposed, if not killed. For example, when Zehbeh was deposed as one of the kings of Tombalku, he *had* to return at the head of an army and nearly destroy the town or he probably would have been killed.

**Bagirmi:** The Bagirmi has a fairly strict social system comprised of the *Rimbe*, the *Neybe* and the *Jeyaabe*. The *Rimbe* are those who raise cattle and wield political clout. They are subdivided into the *Ardiibhe*, who are essentially nobles. Village chiefs and leaders come from this class. The Bagirmi are pushing the Aphaki to accept a *Rimbe* as the black king who traditionally rules beside the Aphaki king. The *Hunbhe* are freeborn nobles but serve the *Ardiibhe*. The *Neybe* are craftsmen. This class is also subdivided into the *Golle*, who are artisans, the *Lawbe*, who



are praise singers and oral historians and the *Nahgotubhe*, who are performers. The *Jeyaabe* are labourers and are captives of war or their descendants. They are virtual slaves among the Bagirmi.

**Bornu:** The Bornu ascribe social status according to wealth and power, so patronage (Allegiance) and family are essential in establishing both. The Bornu want to see a Bornu king on the throne with the Aphaki to protect their interests above the interests of the other black tribes.

**Dongola:** The Dongola base their social system on occupation. The Dongola priests are at the top of their social pyramid. Their elders are the second tier of authority and respect. The priests are the spiritual leaders of the Dongola while the elders are the social leaders. Farmers rank higher than traders. Traders rank higher than craftsmen. Craftsmen rank higher than hunters. Hunters rank higher than herdsmen.

**Mandingo:** Social status among the Mandingo is based on a hierarchy of castes formed around nobles and their vassals. The bottom of the Mandingo social ladder are the slaves, who are usually prisoners of war. Status is also based on lineage, as the children of former kings (before the Tombalku subjugation), chiefs and generals have a higher status than those of more common birth. The warriors sit at the top of the social pyramid and social standing is achieved through birth, bravery and skill at arms. The Mandingo are plunderers and raiders; they bring back the riches of other tribes and regions to their people. These warriors have the right to arbitrate disputes among lesser Mandingo. The Mandingo, while pleased to have had a strong Suba leader at one time, would love to see a Mandingo king on the throne of Tombalku. Beneath the warrior class, the Mandingo have a craftsman class who support the warriors by making weapons, clothing and tools. Craftsmen depend on the warriors for survival, so they are seen as a lesser class. They are settled in permanent villages. This group includes smiths, woodworkers, singer/historians and leather workers. This craftsman class is where shamans and priests come from, for they practice their crafts by bringing themselves in tune with the demons and spirits of the material they are working with. The singer/historians are Black Kingdom bards who tell stories, advise people, sing praises and maintain an oral history. They are considered walking tomes of scholarly knowledge. They are the most respected of the craftsman class because song and word are understood to have special magical potency.



**Tibu:** The social structure of the Tibu is described on page 187. The Tibu work as borderers and scouts for the two Tombalku kings.

## PROPERTY

Tombalku huts and houses are thatched roof structures with thick walls of mud, straw and dung. Houses are surrounded by high walls of the same material. A house is entered through a tall gateway in the enclosing wall. This gateway is decorated with colourful designs and protective glyphs. Inside the house, the adults sit on an elevated wooden deck, or they sit on the ground outside the hut or house on colourful mats. On a hot summer night, the entire family sleeps outside the house but within the retaining wall. The house has a receiving room for guests, a storage area, a kitchen and bedrooms. The courtyard between the house and the wall includes an outdoor sitting room for summer use, an outdoor kitchen and at least one shady spot. In the shady spot sit giant pottery jars filled with water.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

Tombalku is a great trading nation, a crossroads of trade coming from the south into Kush or even Amazon or Darfar, although its distance has made it seem semi-mythical. Tombalku is difficult to reach by any means.

Copper is one of Tombalku's major trading goods. Copper is mined in the north and traded in bars. Typically six bars of copper trades for ten gold coins. In addition to copper, Tombalku trades in salt, which is often considered more valuable than gold in both the immediate north and the savannahs of the south. In the north, ten gold coins might purchase a camel load of salt but the price is four times that in the south where salt is extremely rare. Other trade goods include ivory, feathers, animal skins, gold dust and slaves. The Aphaki work hard to ensure trade passes through their city.

The tribes who practice agriculture usually grow millet and sorghum as the staple crops, along with some beans, peanuts, melons and cucumbers; however, little of this is surplus, so it is rarely traded with other nations. Tombalku trades for gold and, among some tribes, cattle. Most of the caravan trade is handled by the Aphaki and the Dongola. Local trade is done via village markets, where the various tribes trade their unique produce for that of other tribes; for example, the Bagirmi trade their dairy produce with other tribes for grain, cloth and other things.

## THE MILITARY OF TOMBALKU

Tombalku maintains an army to defend its borders and to attack those who will not pay tribute, a practice not followed by most of the Black Kingdoms. Each tribe is obligated to fulfil a certain quota of fighting men. The military of Tombalku are armed with curved swords and long spears. Fully a tenth or more of the army is cavalry, with riding horses maintained primarily by the Bornu. Those villages defeated by the armies of Tombalku are taken to the capital and sold into slavery.

Tombalku divides its army into a northern division and a southern division. Each army has its own general. The two kings of Tombalku appoint the two generals.

## CAVALRY

An important part of Tombalku's army is its cavalry. It is more important in the north than the south, however. Tombalku cannot expand south with cavalry because of the tsetse fly but it can certainly use its horsemen in its wars to bring in the rest of the Tibu and quash the Ghanata. The cavalry is composed of units of 50 horsemen commanded by a war-chief who answers directly to one of the generals. Below the war-chief are two officers. The senior officer commands thirty horsemen and the junior officer commands twenty. The Tibu and

the Aphaki both contribute a large number of the cavalry forces of Tombalku. The Tibu ride on Bornu horses, while the Aphaki usually have slightly superior Kushite horses. The Bornu villages take care of the horses and put up the horsemen. The Bagirmi also put up a large number of horsemen for Tombalku.

## INFANTRY

Much like the cavalry, the infantry is also divided into smaller units. The war-chief commands ten units of ten (100 warriors in total). His senior officer commands seven of those units and his junior officer commands three of those units. Although these are infantry forces, the three commanders are mounted. The infantry has a much heavier presence in the south than in the north because the horses cannot easily withstand the diseases coming from the south. Most of the infantry are archers – there is a ration of three archers for every spearman. The Mandingo provide most of the archers; they use iron arrow heads with poisoned barbs. The archers are equipped with two quivers of arrows and large shields of animal hide in addition to their bows and a supply of poison. Mandingo spearmen also poison their war spears and javelins; they are also equipped with animal hide shields. Dongola spearmen use hunting spears and shields; their bowmen rarely use poison. Aphaki units prefer scimitars and lances.

## RELIGION IN TOMBALKU

The Aphaki worship Jhil the Merciless. Through their conquest, many of the black tribes, such as the Mandingo, worship Jhil as well. However, many of the black tribes worship Ajuju the Dark One and his kin. This worship was dying out until a Suba named Sakumbe took the throne and reinvigorated the religion. More details on Jhil and Ajuju can be found in *Faith and Fervour*.

**Aphaki:** The Aphaki have a highly animistic religion and believe in spirits and gods that inhabit virtually everything around them. Their personal tribal spirit is Jhil the Merciless. The Aphaki believe in mercilessness due to this trust in their tribal spirit. The Aphaki also honour their ancestors. Lightning is the path of messengers between the heavenly spirits and the earthly spirits. Disease and bad luck are caused by demons. Worship is done through animal sacrifice; immolation is





preferred but a knife will do the job if needed. An altar is usually nothing more than a pile of stones. Each man performs his own sacrifice while a priest oversees to witness the omens and read the will of the gods.

**Bagirmi:** The Bagirmi worship Ajuju the Dark One and his ilk. This belief includes aspects of ancestor veneration and animism as discussed in the section on religion in the Black Kingdoms found in *Faith and Fervour*.

**Bornu:** The Bornu have an animist religion involving the sacrifice of animals and the belief in spirit-possession. Ajuju the Dark One is one of thousands of spirits; otherwise, the religion is similar to the southern Black Kingdoms' belief in Inquice/Baka (as found in *Faith and Fervour*, including the spell *white darkness*).

**Dongola:** The Dongola worship both Ajuju the Dark One and Apedemak (a Kushite god described in *Faith and Fervour*). Dongola religious beliefs are similar to Kushites'. The Dongola also believe everyone and everything is a combination of opposites, so rituals must be followed to maintain balance. The Dongola worship their ancestors. They also have a secret masked society that knows rituals to ensure that a person's soul will move from his corpse to a future relative in a primitive version of reincarnation.

**Mandingo:** The Mandingo worship Jhil the Merciless in gruesome ceremonies that include the torture of sacrificial victims. Mandingo holy men are also blacksmiths and weaponsmiths, the tamers of fire. Some scholars believe the Aphaki picked up their worship habits from mingling with the Mandingo. This belief includes aspects of ancestor veneration and animism as discussed in the section on religion in the Black Kingdoms found in *Faith and Fervour*.

**Tibu:** The religious beliefs of the Tibu are discussed on page 189.

recently accepted another black king in order to stabilise the nation. According to Conan, Zehbeh is a lean, brown-skinned devil. Zehbeh is one of the kings in the default timeline of *Conan the Roleplaying Game*. The other king can be created and established by the Games Master. This king can be a member of one of the dominant tribes or he may be a complete outsider (and thus seen as neutral by all the blacks) such as Sakumbe of Suba was before his death.

Most positions under the kings are filled either by Aphaki nobles or powerful chieftains of the primary tribes. These paramount chiefs serve as advisors and messengers to the kings in a council. The Mandingo, instead of sending a paramount chief, are represented either by the *Poro* secret society or its sister, the *Bundu*, depending on which society is in power; the *Poro* is in power for four years, then replaced by the *Bundu* for three, in repetitive cycles. These secret societies, before the empire of Tombalku arose, made laws and governed the Mandingo. Since these secret societies can place a curse on anyone, few disobey their orders and the kings of Tombalku realise this and ensure several of the top members of these societies have an allegiance to them. The kings control the Bornu by granting them fiefs of land; the actual fief-holders are required to live at the capital. These fief-holders, the most powerful chiefs of the Bornu, then appoint chieftains to administer the villages and fiefs.

Beneath the paramount chiefs (or the *Poro/Sande*), are the district chiefs, each of whom owes allegiance to a paramount chief. In this way, each paramount chief also has his council. A district chief has a council made up of village chiefs who owe allegiance to him.

All tribal and village chiefs are required by the kings to collect tribute and send it to Tombalku. They are required to recruit men for Tombalku's armies. The chiefs are also expected to organise labour groups if the kings desire work to be done. The tribal and village chiefs are empowered to act on minor matters as they see fit, as the kings do not have time to deal with trivial issues. The tribal and/or village chiefs report to representatives at the capital, who then report, if necessary, to the kings of Tombalku.

## TOMBALKAN GOVERNMENT

Tombalku is ruled by a system of two kings, one king an Aphaki and the other a black.

Shortly after Conan's visit there, the Aphaki Zehbeh conquered the city and, for a while, sat on the throne alone. He

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF TOMBALKU

Tombalku is harsh desert in the north and grassy savannah in the south.



**Jeluba River** – the Jeluba River is a sluggish river that flows east from Tombalku. Its basin is mostly savannah and is the most fertile land in all of Tombalku. It supports an active ecosystem, including hippopotami, crocodiles, snakes, buffalos, lions, cheetahs, oryx, gazelles and other savannah animals.

## IMPORTANT TOMBALKAN CITIES

**Tombalku** – Tombalku is the capital of the nation with the same name. Tombalku is a strange, fantastic city set in the sands of the desert beside an oasis of many springs. Tombalku is built on a low, wedge-shaped escarpment amid palm and mimosa groves. The escarpment overlooks a bend in the Jeluba river. Tombalku is surrounded by a wall. The houses are clay and wattle with thatched roofs. The temples to Jhil are made of dressed stone, as is the king's palace. Many languages are spoken in the city, as members of several subjugated tribes live and trade there. The city is a hotbed of action; half a dozen factions vie for power and there are constant brawls in the taverns and streets as well as mutilations, murders and executions over women, gold and wine. The founders of the city were the ancestors of the Aphaki. The Aphaki have taught the blacks the art of war, using them for both defence and offence. Tombalku is ruled by two kings as described in the previous section. Tombalku has many wells that tap into the natural springs in the area and when the Jeluba floods, canals carry water to the city from the flood plains.

## HISTORY OF TOMBALKU

Tombalku began as a trading city established around a well because the location was near the Jeluba River and was also on a crossroads between several major tribes. The Aphaki arrived from Shem as trade envoys and quickly became its masters through wealth and political acumen. They established the city as a meeting place for camel caravans. Set on a major trade artery for gold and salt between the southern Black Kingdoms and the northern Black Kingdoms and Stygia, Tombalku quickly prospered. Eventually the Aphaki amassed enough power to exercise some military options. The Aphaki captured the major salt mine to the north of the slowly growing city and took control of the salt trade. Once this happened, their political and economic situation became fortified. Entrenched as the lords of the region, the Aphaki began to subjugate local tribes. Finding it difficult to rule the blacks, the Aphaki

set up a power-sharing situation with a black king who had grown powerful and was threatening revolt. From that day on, Tombalku was ruled by two kings. Subjugation continued until Tombalku became an empire. As Tombalku grew in prestige, it also grew in legend. Virtually everyone in the Hyborian age has heard of Tombalku but few have seen it due to its remote location; it has become semi-mythical.

At the time of Conan's arrival, Tombalku was ruled by Zehbeh (an Aphaki) and Sakumbe (a Suba from the Black Coast). Sakumbe was a popular king because he was neutral regarding most of the black factions and he was not a member of any of the subjugated tribes. Sakumbe had the general of the horsemen poisoned and put Conan in his stead. Sakumbe's witch-doctor, Askia, had Zehbeh's priest, Daura, executed. At Conan's suggestion, Askia denounced Zehbeh and a bloody civil war ensued. Zehbeh fled with his Aphaki riders, defeated. Conan took the throne vacated by Zehbeh and became co-ruler of Tombalku for a time but found he did not have any real power. When Conan stood up for a friend and caused Sakumbe to do the same, Askia slew Sakumbe with terrible magic. Conan, with his friend, fought his way out of danger just as Zehbeh returned with his Aphaki riders and attacked the city. In the attack, Tombalku was nearly destroyed but Zehbeh recovered his lost throne.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

A rival Shemite or Stygian group wishes to establish Tombalku as a competitor in the south and sends adventurers to scout out a suitable location and secure the goodwill of natives in the area. The group may also send the adventurers to destroy or capture the salt mines to the north of Tombalku.





# Turan

## Kingdom of Barbaric Splendour

Eastward, Shevatas knew, the desert shaded into steppes stretching into the Hyrkanian kingdom of Turan, rising in barbaric splendor on the shores of the great inland sea.

— *Black Colossus*

Shining Turan is probably the wealthiest nation of the Hyborian Age save Vendhya. The Turanian Empire is built upon the foundation of a large Hyrkanian force that swept out of the east on their horses, swinging around the Vilayet and finding that great inland sea to their liking. Their empire is vast, especially during the years of Conan's reign in Aquilonia, extending west even to the borders of Zamora, Shumir in Shem and Stygia. Empire-building is a popular pastime for Turanian kings. Now ruled by King Yezdigerd, the Turanian Empire shows no sign of slowing its growth, although the Zuagirs, kozaks and other races hinder its destiny of domination in the west.

Turan is an empire of incredible size, virtually encompassing the Vilayet Sea by the time Conan is king of Aquilonia. All but the most northerly reaches of the Vilayet are controlled by Turan on both sides of the inland sea. The northern reaches are too mountainous and cold for the Turanians to bother with. Turan borders Zamora, Koth, Shem and even sends forays into Hyperborea.

The Turanians are dark and generally tall and slender, the descendants of the ancient Lemurians once enslaved by the ancestors of the Stygians in ages past. They conquered the indigenous aboriginal people that lived in the region of the Vilayet and turned the region into a bastion of culture, commerce and beauty. Dry plains were irrigated and turned into an agricultural paradise.

## THE TURANIAN WAY

Turanians believe their civilisation is superior and that only by doing things their way can one advance in society. They teach particular protocols to be practised in court, in the baths, in the street and in almost every aspect of their lives. Most Turanians have a civilised Code of Honour to reflect this trust in their civilisation and their protocols.

The Turanians are a proud people, pleased with the imperialism of their leaders and the wealth brought to them in tribute from subjugated people.

## TURANIAN CLOTHING

Turanian males are typically bearded and wear turbans, sashes and loose-fitting trousers. The warriors wear gold-spined helmets, white silk shirts, sleeveless mail, baggy trousers and tiger-skin cloaks. One type of clothing is the talismanic shirt, which is a tunic or shirt decorated with holy images and symbols. Talismanic shirts are believed to offer good luck or even work as armour. The Turanian women are veiled. In more conservative circles, usually the upper classes, the women favour the khalat, a long costume that conceals the entire body.

Slaves, dancing girls and other performers usually wear little more than belted tunics or *gömleks*. Some wear little more than vests (or halter-tops) and slim belts with two strips of silk depending from the centre in front and back. Most slaves in Turan are foreign, so they do not wear veils, although Turanian dancing girls do.

## SOCIAL STATUS

The top rung of the Turanian social ladder is the ruling class. The ruling class are effectively the slaves of the king, for their job is to enlarge, protect and exploit the resources of Turan in his name. The ruling class includes the clergy, the nobility, the administrators and the military.

Beneath the ruling class are three productive classes. The first of these three are the farmers. Farmers comprise the

majority of Turan's citizens. The average farm is large enough for subsistence farming but since a portion of each crop must be sold to pay the taxes, a farmer's wives often make crafts to supplement their income. Farms in Turan are rarely isolated entities. Usually farmers congregate into villages and all farm around the village.

The second of the three productive classes are the craftsmen. Craftsmen live in towns and sometimes in the cities. Typically, a town is known for its particular craft and the craftsmen of that town only produce that product. This allows for superior products and promotes the trade engine for which Turan is so famous.

The third of the three productive classes are the merchants. Merchants tend to be found in the cities and often specialise within the cities. Merchants who specialise in foreign trade tend to congregate in Aghrapur, while merchants who specialise in crop trading live in another city.

Outside of the basic social classes, there is one other social group – the slaves. Slaves are not considered part of the social structure of Turan although they are omnipresent.

## SOCIAL MOBILITY

Turan is an empire with a meritocracy as a basis for wealth and rank; military service is often key to advancement. Social mobility occurs often in Turan. Slaves rise to become rulers and then may well fall down again, just to rise once more. Three attributes define the ruling class of Turanians: the Turanian must claim loyalty to the king and Turan, show knowledge of the culture, language and the Turanian Way and practice the worship of the Living Tarim and other Turanian gods. Without these attributes, a person is simply considered to be a subject of the Turanian Empire. These attributes can be gained – or lost – by virtually anyone.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

Glittering Turan builds its wealth by trading goods from distant realms and exacting tribute from threatened peoples. Built along the gorgeous shores of the Vilayet Sea, most of Turan's internal trade goes via ships protected by Turan's purple-sailed war galleys. Mule trains haul goods along caravan trails into the interior and south of the Vilayet, connecting with routes from Iranistan, Vendhya and Khitai. Trade to the west crosses the Kharamun Desert to Zamboula, Turan's caravan crossroads. An alternative route to the west goes through Vezek to the Akrel Oasis and on to Khauran and further. Turan controls so many of the caravan routes that kingdoms such as Koth,

Shem, Brythunia and Zamora pay tribute to ensure that the trade goods flow. Virtually anything can be found in the *suks*, or open-air markets of Turan.

The market is the central feature of Turanian urban areas and the most important commodities in the market are agricultural items – most commonly olives, wheat, pomegranates, oranges, cumin, coriander, almonds, dates, cotton and apricots. People of the cities do not farm, so they rely on the outlying farmers to bring in their produce and animals. 90% of Turanian exports are agricultural goods, especially those exports headed toward Shem or Stygia. Caravans are loaded with figs, grapes, olive oil, nuts, sesame, dates, barley, wheat, tobacco, coffee, tea, dried fruit, chestnuts, rice, sugar and spices. Trade in dried fruit, both domestic and international, is vital to Turan; dried fruit serves as a sweetener in most Hyborian age kingdoms due to the high price of cane sugar. Most Turanian cities have specialised markets for different types of food, just as they have differing guilds for the preparation of various foods. Each market has a local judge who sets the prices. Each market also has its own enforcer, known as a *muhtasib*, who ensures the judge's rules are followed and that any scales used by the merchants are fair. The local judge and the *muhtasib* also ensure food is fresh and of high quality.

Each town also has a quota of goods that must be sent to Aghrapur to sustain the Turanian capital and its patrolling armies. Aghrapur is too big to sustain itself locally, so the entire empire chips in to serve the metropolis. Smuggling is rampant in Aghrapur – although most of it is the smuggling of goods out of Turan. Turanian price controls enforced by the guilds often mean merchants can get better prices outside of Turan, so, in order to reap greater profits, merchants often try to smuggle more than their quota of goods out of Turan. Imperial agents patrol the cities and markets to make sure smugglers are not taking so much as to deprive the capital of its resources. Smuggling dried fruit and raisins is a lucrative business in Turan so long as one does not get caught. These agents also make sure the local judges set the meat prices extremely low in order to motivate herdsmen to take their animals to Aghrapur to get a better price – ensuring the capital has a ready supply of fresh meat.

Trade goods for Turan also include human goods: slaves. Trade in human beings is far-reaching. Many Brythunians, Nemedians, Stygians, Shemites, Zamorians,





Darfari and Kushites all find themselves on the slave blocks of Turan. Slaves not only perform labour the Turanians feel is beneath them but also work as spies for the Turanians and as pawns in their games of power and intrigue. The slave markets of Turan are described as 'glutted'. Demand for slaves in Turan is high but the supply is so plentiful that slaves are not expensive. Turanians are regarded as harsh masters, though, and many slaves escape into the steppe, joining the Kozaki in order to lash back at their former overlords. The worst taskmasters among the Turanians are the shipmasters who force the slaves to row the great ships that propel much of the interior Turanian trade. A ship slave does not last long under the conditions on most of those craft.

## TURANIAN MILITARY

The Turanians are noted for their superb archery skills, especially with their double-curved Hyrkanian bows. For swords, the Turanians favour scimitars and they also carry ten foot long lances for spearing their foes from horses. Extremely militant and exceptionally organised, Turan attempts to expand its empire in all directions, dominating Iranistan, threatening Vendhya, conquering the caravan cities of the eastern deserts, battling Hyperborea and sending troops into Zamora and Brythunia. The Turanians prefer to use cavalry, using mercenaries if they need infantry.

Turan straddles the boundary between nomadic fervour and civilised warfare. Their cavalry ride the plains but their generals study the military science first established by the Hyborians centuries ago. Turanians still value the raider's freedom but recognise the importance of disciplined action controlled by strategic intent. This combination of old and new makes the Turanians perhaps the only real challengers to Hyborian hegemony in the current age. Turan's regular army is divided into two types: the standing Imperial army and the provincial forces.

## THE IMPERIAL ARMY

The Imperial Army is the smaller of the two types of army in Turan. The Imperial army is subdivided into the Mighty Archers, the Armourers, Miners, Artillery Men and the Horsemen. The Marines are technically part of the Imperial Army but people often do not consider them as such.

**The Mighty Archers:** The Mighty Archers of Turan maintain themselves as if at war basis at all times. Numbering no more than 30,000, they are constantly ready for action. Since they need to be able to mobilise at a moment's notice, they are forbidden to marry. They live in barracks and train regularly. They are expert mounted archers and lancers. They are an elite Turanian unit designed in part to prove the superiority of modern methods of warfare. They draw their numbers from among the elite archers of the realm and it is said they have never been beaten in battle. Those who wear the spiral helms and leopard skin cloaks of the Mighty Archers have proven, in battle, that they stand for the future.

There are 101 battalions. These battalions number around 40 to 70 men each. Thirty-four battalions serve the king of Turan directly; they are his personal guards. Soldiers who serve the king directly often become officers in the other battalions later since the king can usually observe their merits first hand. The remaining battalions are charged with maintaining security throughout the empire. They are stationed at strategic locations and serve as police and firemen when needed. They serve as guards of city gates in nine month rotations, returning to Aghrapur for three months when their tour is done. While in Aghrapur, they serve as guards for the Imperial Council and its members or they serve as Aghrapur's police and fire departments for the duration of their stay. Wages are paid quarterly, with bonuses for special duties.

**The Armourer Corps:** Trained as infantry units with Hyrkanian bows, the Armourers are primarily charged with making the weapons used by the Mighty Archers. They are also responsible for transporting the weapons wherever they are needed. There are rarely more than 600 men in this corps. A member of this corps must be a skilled weaponsmith or armourer.

**Miners:** The miners are tasked with laying sieges to enemy forts, castles and walled cities. They are skilled at digging tunnels and ditches beneath walls and other strategic areas. Imperial miners are split into two divisions. One division remains with the Imperial Army and is paid a constant quarterly wage. The other division is trained, then sent out to various provincial armies. This latter division is paid in whatever manner the province pays its forces; they are not paid out of the king's funds beyond the training phase.

**Artillery Men:** The Artillery Men usually travel and train with the miners. Like the miners, they are trained to carry out sieges, although instead of digging, they build and operate siege engines of all types (see *The Free Companies*



for various siege engines available during the Hyborian age). The Artillery Men are split into three divisions. One division remains with the Imperial Army and is paid a constant quarterly wage. The other division is trained, then sent out to various provincial armies. This latter division is paid in whatever manner the province pays its forces; they are not paid out of the king's funds beyond the training phase. The third division is stationed permanently at various forts to man the engines against enemy attack. The third division is usually paid through land grants. Although technically part of the imperial army, the third division is under the command of the fort commanders.

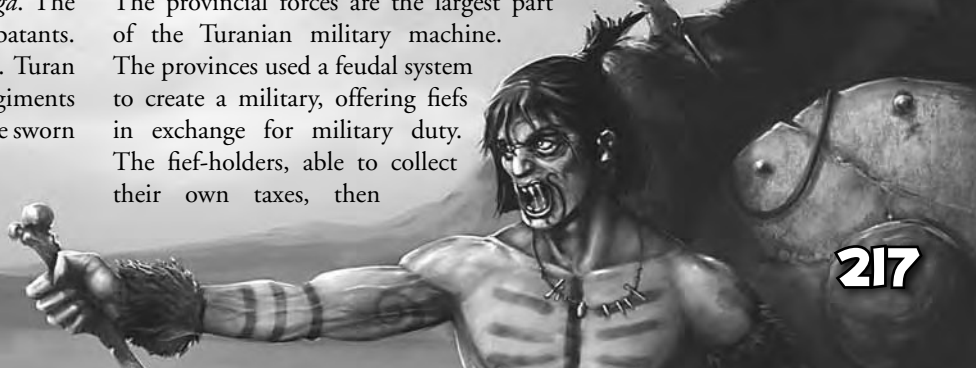
**The Horsemen of the Empire:** The Horsemen of the Empire are an imperial cavalry unit. They usually fight guerrilla wars or strike down foes after they have been weakened by the archers. For the most part, they are maintained in Aghrapur, much like the Mighty Archers, although some are stationed in important cities on rotation. They are paid a quarterly stipend. The commanders of the Regiments are commanded by an imperial *aga*. The Horsemen are skilled archers and melee combatants. They can fight on horseback and as infantrymen. Turan maintains six regiments of cavalry. The first two regiments are Turanian cavalry units. Only Turanians who have sworn Allegiance to the king may serve in the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game* for

rules on Allegiance). The next two regiments are foreign mercenary cavalry units. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment is largely non-Turanian Hyrkanians and the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment is built of truly foreign mercenaries. The final two regiments, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, are considered elite and serve only the king.

**Marines:** Other Turanian soldiers are employed not as cavalry but as marines, sailing the Vilayet to protect Turan's shipping and shores from the Red Brotherhood. Most of the glory, however, goes to the land forces and the commanders of land forces. The navy's duty is to protect shipping and transport soldiers. Most marines are archers. The Turanian navy has two divisions: marines and ships. The marines are the warriors and fighters. The ships division maintains old ships and constructs new ships.

## THE PROVINCIAL ARMIES

The provincial forces are the largest part of the Turanian military machine. The provinces used a feudal system to create a military, offering fiefs in exchange for military duty. The fief-holders, able to collect their own taxes, then





raise and provide for their own commanders much as Aquilonian lords sustain knights and retainers to uphold their own military obligations to a superior lord. Soldiers are given smaller fiefs from the larger fiefs for their service. Provincial forces bring their own arms and armour instead of relying on a central treasury as the Imperial Army does. Fief holders are expected to maintain horses, arms, food and other equipment for themselves and their retainers in proportion to their expected (not actual) income from the fief. Heroic and special duties entitle fief holders to bonus lands (and taxes) from the provincial ruler. When a fief-holder dies, retires or is injured to the point of retiring, his oldest son usually takes over but the bonus lands awarded to the original holder returns to the provincial ruler so he can give them out again to those who earn them. If there are no male heirs, all the land returns to the provincial lord. In addition to taxes, the lord of a fief is entitled to half of all legal fines enacted against his peasants (the other half goes to the provincial lord). When a provincial army is called up, the provincial lord arranges for 10% of his cavalymen to stay behind and administer all the fiefs. Most of these forces serve as cavalry, although a few specialised forces have been developed in Turan.

**Fortress Guards:** In some areas fortress guards are conscripted from the population but mostly the fortress guards are part of the provincial forces, serving several months out of the year in return for their fiefs with their retinue. In combat, in addition to manning the walls, fortress guards often form a light archery unit, serving in front of any siege equipment to protect the main forces from attack until they are ready. This division of the provincial forces are split into an infantry force and a cavalry force.

**Trade Guards (Nomads):** Military and trade routes are protected by provisional forces. They are usually paid for by villages who want the routes and passes protected. The villages usually work hard to maintain and serve the Trade Guards. These provincial forces tend to be descendants of the original Hyrkanian nomads and they tend to be of the nomad class. They consider themselves 'true' Hyrkanians, for they still maintain fairly Hyrkanian-style lives. Extremely competent Trade Guards are often invited to care for the horses or falcons of Turanian nobles or for the king and the royal family.

Trade Guards are exempt from taxation, although they are technically not part of

the ruling class. Trade Guards are allowed to charge a fee from any caravan or merchant they protect along a trade route; however, they must also pay fair compensation to any traveller who is robbed along a protected route. This ensures they do their duty. Local villages provide for the Trade Guards, not the Imperial Treasury or the provincial treasuries. Villages that provide Trade Guards for a province are often awarded tax exemptions or reduced taxes by the provincial or fief rulers.

**Raiders (Nomads):** Provincial forces along the borders tend to be light cavalry forces who are known as Raiders. These raiders are paid to raid enemy territories for weapons, trade goods, money and slaves. They also keep enemy kingdoms too busy to organise forces to take on the Imperial Army *en masse*. They serve provincial princes and many of them live a nomadic lifestyle along the border provinces. As raiders, they are exempt from taxation so long as they do their jobs. They are paid by being allowed to keep anything they raid. Their territories and duties are hereditary. Some Raiders serve as Trade Guards during slow seasons or to add to their incomes.

## RELIGION IN TURAN

Robert E. Howard says little about the religious practices of the Turanians, who worship Erlik, a god of death and Tarim, a mystic healer and patron of the Turanians. More about the religion of the Turanians can be found in *Faith and Fervour*.

### ERLIK

Erlik was supposedly the first man, a creation of Ulgen. Erlik was taken to the heavens and given the mantle of death and, in time, seemed to supplant his creator in popularity. Hyrkanians, of course, love the kill, so perhaps it is not surprising that a god of death, fire and war became more popular than a creator god. Erlik is called the 'Yellow God of Death' and he numbers among his followers cannibals with filed teeth.

Erlik is called by many names. He respects the noble warriors who wield life and death on the battlefield. Lotus is considered a holy sacrament to the followers of Erlik and is reserved for those who reach Paradise. The followers of Erlik do not appreciate non-believers using lotus. The Paradise promised by Erlik to his true believers is peopled by beautiful *mekhrani* who live in the pleasure houses of eternity.

Erlik has an opposite number called Thutala, a trickster who appears to unbelievers in a whole host of different guises. The followers of Erlik call any foreign god 'Thutala'.



## TARIM

Tarim is supposedly a mystic who may have founded Turan. Since Tarim's high priests are all under the mental domination of the Master of Yimsha, it is possible that the religion is spurious, an invention of the Black Circle used to dominate the Hyrkanians. The priests of Tarim do, at least, seem to have some loyalty to Turan and its king. The Seers of Yimsha probably pose Tarim as an avatar of Erlik himself in the form of a god of herding and animal fertility.

Historically, Tarim led the Lemurians off their sinking isles to the shores of the main continent. He lived on in the form of his descendants, for thousands of years later he led the Lemurians, now known as Hyrkanians, to the eastern shore of the Vilayet and founded Aghrapur. The Living Tarim, Tarim Incarnate, is a holy person descended from the original leader. Although few know it, the last descendant died in a war after he was kidnapped by rival Hyrkanians. Turan wisely has not let the people know that the 'Living Tarim' is dead.

Turanians living near Koth or Shem have also added Ishtar to their gods, calling her Yenagra. She has alabaster skin and is otherwise worshipped as the Kothic Ishtar (see page 144). Other Turanians still worship Ahriman and other bizarre deities, such as Ormazd, a bright god who battles the devil, Ahriman.

## THE GOVERNMENT OF TURAN

The Turanians are a proud race, pleased with the imperialism of their leaders and the wealth brought to them in tribute from subjugated peoples. The kings of Turan are harsh taskmasters, permitting no rebellions, uprisings or dissention. When one ascends to the throne, all of his brothers and his brothers' children are put to the sword to prevent even the possibility of civil war. When a king dies, the first of his children to reach the capital is declared the new king.

Turan is broken up into provinces, or satrapies, ruled by a satrap. The king of Turan appoints generals and secretaries of state to serve alongside the satrap lest the governor grow too powerful. With the power divided among the three, each has to report to the king and personal inspectors visit frequently. The duty of the satrap is to protect the heartland by administering the outer provinces, particularly as regards the frontiers, to prevent Turan's centre from being threatened. The satrapy is also responsible for paying taxes and/or tribute to Aghrapur. By

tradition the satrap is always a loyal Turanian of Hyrkanian descent. This is not law, merely tradition and nothing keeps it from being broken should the king of Turan want to honour another race with a satrapy. The satrapies are further broken down into city-states that are somewhat autonomous. The duty of the appointed general is to see to the welfare of the armies and militia of the satrapy, assuring they are used only for purposes that benefit Turan as a whole. The secretary of state is there to serve as an official liaison and diplomat, both for the satrap and for the king of Turan.

## NON-TURANIANS

The lands conquered by the Turanians were once home to aboriginal peoples. The Yuetshi, who now dwell along the south-western shore of the Vilayet, are an example of these original settlers of the Vilayet. The Yuetshi people are described as 'ape-like' and ugly. They are an indigenous people living in the swamps and streams of the region. They have long arms, short legs and flat, yellow, slant-eyed faces. They dress in sheepskins. They are not a warlike people, preferring to till the earth and herd their animals. Still, their favourite weapon is a saw-edged crescent blade that can disembowel a man with an upward stroke.

Other non-Hyrkanians in Turan are the Khozgari hillmen that dwell in the Khozgari Hills, the foothills of the Misty Mountains. They are a warlike, barbaric tribe of hillmen that respect only overwhelming strength. They often raid the lowland Turanians and the king of Turan must pay them bribes to keep them in the hills. The hillmen often take these bribes but attack anyway. They are treacherous people for barbarians. They were driven out of their homelands by the Hyrkanians and into the hills, giving them no love for the conquerors. They are pitiful bowmen but fierce melee fighters.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF TURAN

Turan lies among the hills and marshes of the Vilayet, extending to the mountains of the south the deserts of the east and the steppe of the northeast. It borders Zamora, Koth and Stygia. Trees line the coast of the Vilayet between the







water and the snow-capped Colchian Mountains. For the most part the deserts end at the Colchian Mountains but by a freak of nature, a long crescent of desert extends deep into southern Hyrkania.

**Akrim River** – The Akrim River winds through patches of meadow and farmland in the Akrim valley, surrounded by the tall mountains of the Colchians. This short river empties into the Vilayet somewhere south of the Zaporoska. A castle, the fortress of Gleg the Zaporoskan, clings to the side of one of those dark cliffs. The nearest Turanian outpost is three days' ride from the mouth of the river.

**Colchian Mountains** – The Colchians are a high, rocky mountain range south of the Vilayet. They are snow-capped mountains and extend from the Zaporoska along the southern coasts of the Vilayet. The Akrim River is one of many that cuts through these mountains to reach the Vilayet. The Gorge of Diva is a canyon that runs parallel to the Akrim. At the Diva waterfall, the gorge and the Akrim merge. The Kasmar Pass cuts through to the east and west. The pass is high and is often snowed in.

**Eastern Desert** – The Eastern Desert is a vast desert that gives way to steppes in the north and the Kharamun Desert in the south. To the west it eventually gives way to the highlands of Koth and the meadows of Shem. Many portions of this desert are disputed between the Turanians and the Zuagirs of Shem. One of several caravan routes moves goods from Vezek to the Oasis of Akrel, then into Khauran.

A new route is currently being established from the Oasis of Yukkub to Akhlata the Accursed.

❖ **Oasis of Akrel** – The oasis of Akrel, located in the deserts east of Khauran and west of Turan, is where Conan hides Khaurani rebels during the events of *A Witch Shall Be Born*.

❖ **Shan-e-Sorkh** – This region of the Eastern Desert is called 'the Red Waste' and is an unproductive desert in the east. It has red sand and virtually no water. The Makan-e-Mordan is a haunted area in this region and means 'Place of Ghosts.' The city of Akhlata is built on a fertile oasis of green trees and lotus pools in the Makan-e-Mordan.

**Ilbars River** – The Ilbars River, rising from its sources in the Kezankian Mountains on the border of Zamora, is an important watercourse of Turan. After leaving the Zamorian Marches and joining with the Nezvaya River near Kherdpur, the river flows past Akif and into the Vilayet. Runoff and rivers from the Kezankian Mountains engorge the Ilbars until it is a swollen, fantastic river. It fans out into a broad estuary as it empties into the Vilayet.

**Kezankian Mountains** – These mountains form a natural barrier between Zamora and Turan. Many things lurk in these mountains, including ape-men and villages of hill people. The hill people of the Kezankians are notoriously hostile toward strangers. The range was created during the lesser cataclysm and is younger than some of the other mountain ranges in the known world.

The Nezvaya River runs through the northern part of the range, creating a corridor between Zamora and Turan. Another pass lies near Arenjun, as does the Temple of the Bloodstained God. Ape-men dwell in the northern reaches of the Kezankians.

**Kharamun Desert** – This sandy desert is in the southwestern portions of Turan, between the Vilayet and Zamboula and south of the Eastern Desert.

**Mountains of Jebail** – The Mountains of Jebail are a small range of hills near Sultanapur. The Lake of Tears can be found in this range.



**Misty Mountains** – The Misty Mountains run along the western shore of the Vilayet Sea, south of Aghrapur. The mountains are home to the powerful Khozgari hillmen. The Bhambar Pass and the road of Garma provide access to the Vilayet for the people of Samara, two days south of the pass. The Ghoufag are another aboriginal tribe of barbarians living in the mountains; they fight with the Khozgari. The Theggir are another tribe found in the mountains. The burial grounds of the ancient kings of Turan lie in these grand mountains, as do the lands belonging to the People of the Summit, called Shangara. King Angharzeb of Turan once battled the People of the Summit but their magic and monsters defeated his army. Intelligent, hairless apes haunt the Bhambar Pass but they keep mostly to themselves. These monsters use robes and fine Turanian scimitars to fight, although they are crude swordsmen. A serpentine keep is built atop the narrow walkway of a mountain wall that bisects a dizzying abyss. It was once the keep of the People of the Summit but is now garrisoned by Turanians.

**Nezvaya River** – The Nezvaya is a long but shallow river that cuts through the Kezankian Mountains in northern Turan. It cuts through the steppe on its path to the Ilbars River. Its source is in the Graaskal Mountains of Hyperborea (see page 105). The Frozen River is a tributary to this river.

**Nightmare Swamp** – Nightmare Swamp is the name of the mist-covered swamp near Fort Ghor. Nightmare Swamp is an unhealthy region with a ruin hidden in its depths. The ruin is the city of Puhru-Shatammu, which was once a centre of commerce until it was cursed by a demon. It was abandoned about a hundred years before Conan's time. In addition to cursing the city, the demon also summoned a devil-lizard (a carnivorous dinosaur) to protect the ruin. A copy of the book of Vathelos can be found in this ruin.

**Valley of the Sun** – The Valley of the Sun is the location of an oasis in northern Turan. There is a gold mine there.

**Vilayet Sea** – The mighty Vilayet is a two-thousand mile long, three hundred mile wide inland sea patrolled by Turanian war-ships under purple sails. These war-galleys, the pride of Turan's navy, plunder virtually any foreign ship on the Vilayet for infringing on Turan's interests. The Vilayet is known for its savage storms, especially during the autumn and winter months. For hundreds of miles along the western shores are the glittering cities of the Turanians, such as Shahpur, Maypur, Sultanapur, Khawarism and Aghrapur. A few Hyrkanian ports inhabit the eastern coast. Turanian ships rarely venture north of Shahpur. The Vilayet plays host to pirates as well, including the Red Brotherhood. In the north, the shores are mountainous. There are both marshes

and mountains in the south and the west. Trade from the east crosses the Vilayet to Aghrapur from Rhamadan or Khorusun instead of trying to go around the southern end of the Sea. The Zaporoskan swamps, the Zaporoska River and its pirates, the Kozaki, and the Zaporoskans themselves make travel around the southern end hazardous at best, although a trade route to Zamboula does pass through the Colchians. Three major rivers drain into the Vilayet: The Ilbars, the Zaporoska and the Nezvaya. Many minor rivers also drain into it, such as the Akrim and the Yelba. The Vilayet is home to many islands, charted and otherwise. Most are uninhabited and reputed to be haunted. Iron-like green stones can be found on the islands.

✿ **The Isle of Iron Statues** is a small, oval island in the northern Vilayet Sea near the western shore. Ancient ruins built of the great iron-like green stones can be found in the region. The largest ruin is a great hall where rows of iron statues stand. The island is avoided by the sailors of the Vilayet Sea. The builders of these ruins may have some connection with the unknown builders of Xuthal (see page 190), for a bird screams out, 'Yakkoolan yok tha, xuthalla!' Some scholars believe that the original builders were eastern Lemurians, who were finally wiped out by the lesser cataclysm. The northern shore of the island rises up to a series of cliffs that drop into the Vilayet.

✿ **Xapur the Fortified** is the island home of the extinct Dagonians. The island rises out of the Vilayet in sheer cliffs a hundred and fifty feet tall. Its interior is jungle. A ruined city made of those colossal green stones can be found here. The foundations of the wall, stumps of broken columns and a great dome remain. Underground tunnels crisscross beneath the earth, perhaps hiding some ancient treasure. The Dagonians were a white race, although dark-skinned with black hair. The city was founded by a thing from the Abyss named Khosatral Khel, which was worshipped by the Dagonians in grisly rites of human sacrifice.

✿ **The Zhurazi Archipelago** is demon-haunted and stalked by horrible lizard-gods that are worshipped by yellow-skinned savages. The archipelago is in the south end of the Vilayet. Two large islands and a string of several small islands are surrounded by treacherously shallow waters, making the archipelago an ideal location for pirate rendezvous. The larger Turanian ships cannot close in on the smaller pirate craft here, nor do Turanian maps show soundings of this region.





**Zamorian Marches** – These lands are on the Turanian side of the Kezankian Mountains and separate the mountains from the Eastern Desert. At one time they were under Zamora's control but now Turan dominates the region. The Marches are thousands of square miles of steppe, with thin rivers containing run-off from the Kezankians that eventually join the Ilbars river. The Nezvaya is the eastern border of the steppe land.

**Zaporoska River** – The Zaporoska is a major river of Turan, especially for the pirates and kozaks. The terrain around this river is rugged enough that Turan has never quite subdued the region. The river is navigable for much of its southern reaches but Turan sends few ships down this dark river because of the concentrations of outlaws who will happily overpower the expeditions. The mouth of the river lays amid dank swamps thick with reeds. The native people of this region are sturdy people called Zaporoskans. They typically wear fur caps in the manner of the Hyrkianians. The Zaporoska is the unnamed river of Khauran mentioned in *A Witch Shall Be Born*.

## IMPORTANT TURANIAN CITIES

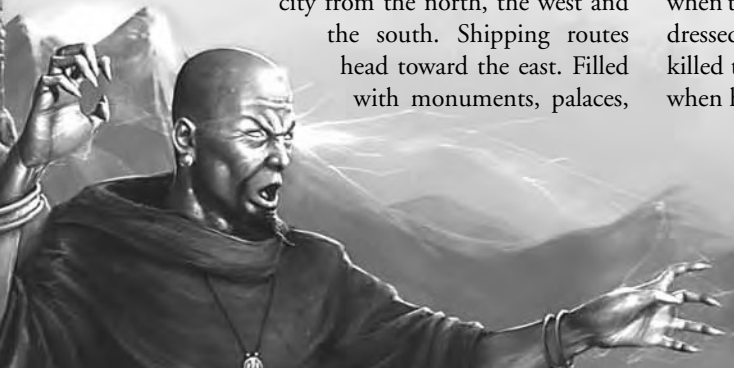
Turanian cities are among the grandest of the Hyborian Age. The *suks*, open-air market places, are a feast for the senses. Colours and textures and sounds and smells and even tastes come from all directions. Scarlets, greens and turquoises smash headlong into shining silks and dingy cloths, which in turn are set off by the bright shine of precious metals and the dull glint of iron and polished woods. Great towers glitter in the sun and stand brightly against the moon. Minarets and spires decorated with arabesques and fantastic designs stand proudly over the great palaces of marble and gold as vast caravan trains move toward the bazaars with the goods from a thousand cities.

**Aghrapur** – Aghrapur is the many-towered, glittering capital of Turan, a massive seaport on the Vilayet. It is probably the largest and most glorious of all cities of this age, the epitome of the opulent East. Located on the Ilbars River and at the eastern terminus of the Road of Kings, Aghrapur is the primary trading city of Turan. Caravan routes enter the city from the north, the west and the south. Shipping routes head toward the east. Filled with monuments, palaces,

statues, temples and fountains, Aghrapur is a beautiful city that displays the wealth of many kingdoms. Domed temples, white zikkurats, people with turbans and spired helmets chased with gold wearing flowing robes of silk and satin, tall minarets and arabesqued spires that gleam in the sunlight like small suns are but hints of the splendour a visitor to Aghrapur experiences. Aghrapur is the most populous city west of the Vilayet. Aghrapur employs skilled Akbitanian smiths, enigmatic Khitan sword-masters, slinky Zamorian thieves, nude Zamboulan dancers and alien Vendhyan artisans to create the beauty and extravagance of this jewelled city. No city in the world is more luxurious. Aghrapur is a glittering Turanian city of haggling merchants who create a din of barter, slant-eyed wenches brazenly posturing, canopied litters bearing wealthy, discreetly veiled princesses and conquering slavers presenting nude slave-girls on the block. The grand palace of the sultan, King Yezdigerd, is built on a crag overlooking the Vilayet Sea and is probably the most magnificent palace to ever be built since the Cataclysm sank Atlantis. It contains endless rooms, perfumed gardens, gold-worked doors, Vendhyan tapestries, Iranistani rugs and, of course, the legendary throne room of the King of the Empire of Turan. This vast chamber includes fifty foot doors worked in glorious gold, fantastically carved pillars that reach so high the keenest eye cannot see the tops from the polished marble floor and enough lamps and candles to rival the sun. Imperial guards, resplendent in scarlet cloaks and white turbans mounted with peacock feathers, stand ever at the ready to protect the grand sultan of the Empire.

**Akif** – Akif is a major Turanian city on the Ilbars River that is characterised by constant caravan travel. Is a popular stopping point for caravans travelling to and from Sultanapur, Shahpur and Aghrapur, either on the overland routes or on the Ilbars River. Great merchant ships do nothing but travel back and forth from Akif to Shahpur, Sultanapur or Aghrapur, making a living ferrying merchandise from caravans who hunger for a boat ride or who do not wish to actually go to the great Turanian cities of the Vilayet for other reasons. The caravan trail from Akif continues on to Fort Wakla deep in the Zuagir territory.

**Al Azair** – Al Azair is a southern Turanian city where the god Zed was once worshipped. Worshipers of Zed were one with their god when they killed in his name, especially when they killed helpless virgins tied to altars. The Zeddites dressed in red and pink clothing and wore tall hats. Conan killed the high priest of Zed and burned down the temple when he stole their sacrificial knife for the gold in it.



**Alhmet** – Alhmet was a Turanian satrapy in the eastern desert. The castle there is now nothing but a ring of scorched earth surrounded by a circle of standing stones. It was attacked by imperial forces for not paying taxes for two years.

**Amapur** – Amapur is a city located some distance from water, yet it has an ancient wharf.

**Aqaba** – Technically a well or oasis in the southern deserts, Turan has built walls and a keep around Aqaba to control the water on this trade route, forcing caravaneers to pay them a substantial fee for water that was once free for all. A small Turanian garrison maintains the peace here and enforces the toll.

**Ashraf** – Ashraf is a Turanian outpost to the west of Djamal in Hyrkania. The regiments here are made up of Hyrkanians commanded by Turanians. Ashraf is largely a military installation and is not a regular stop for merchant caravans.

**Bougankad** – Bougankad is the name of five small villages that have combined to form a fortified town on the steppes east of the Kezankian Mountains and north of Zamora.

**Crimson Springs** – Crimson Springs is a city high in the foothills of the Colchian Mountains near the Valley of Demons.

**Dimmorz** – Dimmorz is a northern Turanian province among the Hyrkanian foothills.

**Djemaal** – Djemaal is a small trading city on the road between Turan and Ghulistan. It lies to the east of Ashraf. Although occupied by Turan, it is also claimed by Hyrkania. It was once sacked by renegade Hyrkanians rebelling against Turanian domination and oppression. Storytellers still tell the tale of the rise of Othbaal the Executioner and the Sons of the White Wolf who sacked Djemaal and tugged at Yezdigerd's beard in doing so.

**Gala** – The town of Gala lies between the Shimak River and Fort Zheman. Several miles outside of Gala one finds the stone keep known as Achmai Hold.

**Gharat Temple** – This temple lies fifty miles south of Fort Wakla, on or near the caravan route between Yukkub and Fort Wakla. It is built on an oasis.

**Fort Ghor** – Fort Ghor is a Turanian castle to the southeast of the Vilayet. It guards the eastern caravan routes.

**Fort Wakla** – Out in the Eastern Desert on the Road of Kings, not far to the west from Vesek, Fort Wakla is really a city, maintaining its name from the days when it was nothing more than a border fort guarding a caravan oasis from Zuagirs. A high, crenulated wall surrounds the city and its oases. The city is described as roomy, with enough buildings for both merchants and thieves to make their livings. Even though it lies on the Road of Kings, Fort Wakla is fairly isolated as it is not a destination but a waypoint for most caravans. Wakla works hard to either produce or trade for the trappings of civilisation to slowly build its city. The fortress, although a grim pile of grey rock designed to withstand desert storms and heavy sieges, is a virtual palace on the inside, crammed with art and luxuries. The city is known for its colourful nightlife. The quarters by the western wall are reserved for caravans. Taverns in Fort Wakla are much like western taverns, although the customers are more colourful. Pleasure houses provide for travellers in search of an evening's entertainment. Storytellers tell grim stories about Yamad al-Aphta (Conan) the Zuagir, making him out to be more magical and horrible than mythical ogres. Fort Wakla's *suks* hold the treasures of many nations. Caravans leaving Fort Wakla may travel south to Yukkub, east to Vesek, west on the route that eventually heads to Khoraja or north to Kherdpur. The satrap of Fort Wakla is charged with defending the Road of Kings from attack, primarily from Zuagirs from the south or kozaki from the north. The Zuagir tribe of Duali live near here in a village at an oasis.

**Hirut** – Hirut, although occupied by Turan, is technically a Ghulistani city. See page 103.

**Khawarizm** – Khawarizm is the southernmost major city of Turan. It is remarkable for being extremely degenerate, especially in its treatment of slaves. There are no ports between this city and Aghrapur. The satrap of Khawarizm, Jehungir Agha, is charged as Keeper of the Coastal Border. His troops are expected to guard the frontier from pirates and kozaks alike. His riders are also plunderers and raiders, having raided even Nemedra for slave-girls. The satrap of Khawarizm is also in charge of negotiating for hostages at Fort Ghor. Jelal Khan, who owns a castle in Khawarizm, is a nobleman who is well known for degeneracy that exceeds all others. As he promised, Conan once burned Khawarizm to please one of his women, breaking through six imperial ships in his escape. Even







rebuilt, Khawarizm is a large city. The purple-sailed fleet of Turan is built and repaired in the ship-yards here. With defence of the nation as its charge, many young soldiers are stationed here early in their careers. Khawarizm has a population of 49,800 people.

**Kherdpur** – Kherdpur is a fortified city on the steppe between Turan and Zamora. It lies north of Fort Wakla and is not far from the main caravan route north from that city. It is located at the juncture of the Nezvaya and Ilbars rivers.

**Khurusun** – Khurusun is a walled port city of goldsmiths located on the south-western coast of the Vilayet. Its open-air markets are filled with gold. It is ruled by a satrap charged also with defending the caravan routes to the west into Hyrkania. Conan and his savage kozaki once stormed the city and burned it. The satrap also commands the military city of Secunderam, where he marshals his forces on the Hyrkanian steppe in the east. The Turanians from Khurusun and Secunderam once attacked Vendhya but were slaughtered by the Kshatriyan forces. Golden Khurusun has a population of 12,389 people.

**Samara** – Samara is a Turanian town on the Road of Garma, which leads through the Misty Mountains. Samara lies to the west of the Misty Mountains.

**Secunderam** – Secunderam, although occupied by Turan, is technically a Ghulistani city. See page 103.

**Shahpur** – Shahpur is a relatively unimportant Turanian caravan city on the edge of the Kharamun Desert. The city is a good twelve days' ride east of Zamboula. Many Western cartographers mistakenly place Shahpur on the Vilayet in the north. The city lies in the south on the caravan route called the Samara Road. The main gate, the Arch of Good Fortune, empties into a large plaza in the city. On the western edge of the city is a ruined temple dedicated to the elder god Ahriman. Hills lie to the south and a minor range of low mountains lie somewhat to the west. Caravans pass through this city constantly and its open-air markets are glutted with slaves from Koth, Punt, Zembabwei, Stygia, Shem and the Hyborian nations to the west. Shahpur has a population of 13,450 people. It was once known as Elkar of the Waves when the Vilayet was larger than it is now. Before that, it was known as Zhagg of the Black Desert when Atlantis was a chain of smoking volcanoes. The village of Uhras is tributary to Shahpur.

**Subarak** – Subarak is a Turanian-occupied seaport along the Bloody Coast of Hyrkania. Conan once sacked the city.

**Sultanapur** – Sultanapur, the Golden Queen of the Vilayet, is a port city on the Vilayet. It is ruled by a military governor. Before the Turanians rode around the southern horn of the Vilayet, cutting a bloody swath before them and conquering all, this location was a Zamorian city. After it was sacked and burned, the Turanians rebuilt it. It lies to the north of Aghrapur. A caravan route travels from Sultanapur to the Kezankian mountains to the Zamorian city of Khesron. The slave-markets here, fed by Zamorian kidnappers, are glutted with beautiful but cheap slave-girls.

**Telmak** – Telmak is the location of a camel market (held three times per year) one day's ride southwest of Shahpur.

**Vezeck** – Vezeck is a trading city where caravans are charged a toll. It lies on the caravan road north of Yukkub and south of Fort Wakla. Three caravan trails converge at Vezeck: the route south to Yukkub; the route to the west to the Akrel Oasis; and the route north to the Road of Kings, which merges with Vezeck to the west of Fort Wakla.

**Walls of Sulimar** – The Walls of Sulimar was a brief Turanian military post that has long since been abandoned. It lies a day's ride to the east of the well of Harith. All that remain there are the walls. Zuagir and Hyrkanian nomads occasionally camp there to allow the ruined walls to protect them.

**Well of Adhmet** – The well of Adhmet lies three days to the east from Djemal. A small hut has been built here as a small way-station for travellers.

**Well of Harith** – The well of Harith lies on the other side of a dry gorge with rocky slopes from the well of Adhmet. The Turanians built walls around it and made brief use of it as an army post that has since been abandoned. The well is used by Kozaks, Zuagirs and other desert nomads, such as the Juhanna, the fiercest nomads in the region. The Well of Harith lies one day's ride to the west of the Walls of Sulimar. There is only a trickle of water in the well but it is enough for most travellers.

**Yukkub** – Yukkub lies to the south of Fort Wakla and north of Zamboula. The caravan trail from Zamboula splits at Yukkub. One route travels northeast toward Akif and the other route travels northwest toward Vezeck. Another split at an oasis along the first route offers the choice of travelling to Fort Wakla. A new route to Akhlat has been made in the Makan-e-Mordan, which lies to the west of Yukkub.





**Zamboula** – Zamboula is a major trading city in the Kharamun Desert. A string of oases provides water to the city. Built by dusky skinned Stygians, ruled by conquering Turanians, patrolled by Pelishtim mercenaries, peopled by mongrels, Shemites, Ghanaras, Kushites, Darfari and visited by Zuagirs and caravaneers from the east and south, Zamboula defines the term cosmopolitan, putting even the greatest trading ports of Argos to shame. As a Zuagir told Conan, Zamboula is ‘where white, brown and black folk mingle together to produce hybrids of all unholy hues and breeds.’ The city is well laid-out, with

Sword-Maker bazaars, Horse Markets and other divisions. Because of the Darfari cannibals, which few strangers know about, no native of the city will sleep in the streets. Even the beggars find some niche in which to barricade themselves before the fall of night. Zamboulan dancers are the best trained dancers in the world and are known for their nude dances. Centuries ago, Zamboula was naught but a small trading town of the Kharamun nomads. The Stygians built the small town into a city and settled it, bringing Shemite and Kushite slaves. Ceaseless caravans brought wealth and the wealth brought the Turanians, who swarmed out of the desert and conquered it, pushing back Stygia’s borders.

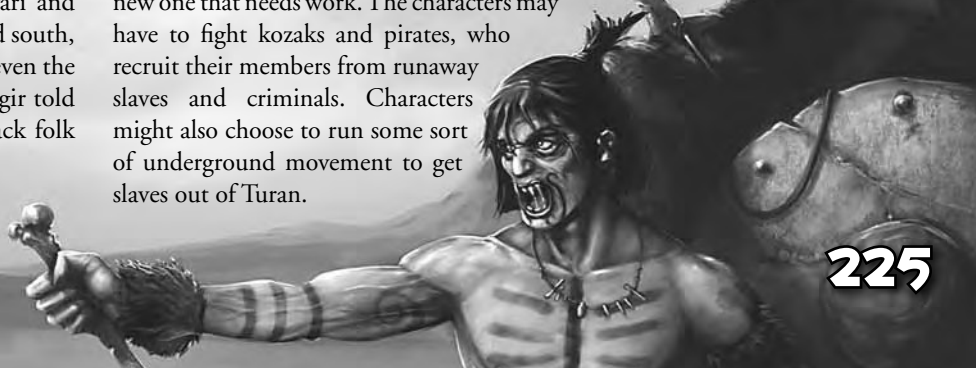
Jungir Khan is the satrap appointed by Turan to govern the region. Different religions are practiced in this place. Set, Bel, Ishtar, Erlik, Tarim and Yog are all well-represented. Even bestial Hanuman has a huge temple that squats alone in a large square. Outside the spires of Zamboula, all is sandy desert, although the Shanki Oasis lies not too far away toward the northwest.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

There are approximately 252 standing fortifications in Turan and over 30 of them have been abandoned in the last two centuries. Any number of adventures could be crafted based on the discovery or exploration of one of these keeps. Perhaps something important was left behind and the adventurers have been hired to escort a hopeful treasure finder to the location. These keeps might also be populated by Zuagirs, kozaks or hillmen. Rebellious satraps might hole up in them once the king has ousted them.

Someone has learned that the Living Tarim is dead and is spreading rumours. King Yezdigerd and the Seers of Yimsha have no wish for this ‘prophet’ to continue and hire the characters to assassinate him. Alternatively, this prophet may hire the characters to defend him from Yezdigerd and his soldiers.

Characters might be hired to catch runaway slaves. Many Turanians would pay more to have a trained slave recaptured than to buy a new one that needs work. The characters may have to fight kozaks and pirates, who recruit their members from runaway slaves and criminals. Characters might also choose to run some sort of underground movement to get slaves out of Turan.





# Vendhya

## The Golden Kingdom

'Gold? There is more gold in Peshkhauri than you ever saw... and it is but a drop of all the treasure of Vendhya.'

— *The People of the Black Circle*

Vendhya is a land to the far southeast, ruled by the Devi Yasmina. Its capital is Ayodhya, the most marvellous city in this exotic kingdom. The people of Vendhya tend to have an olive skin tone, a slim body-style and straight black hair. They are also remarked for having large dark eyes. The Vendhyan women use make-up to enhance their eyes to further that effect.

### A MYSTERIOUS CULTURE

Life in Vendhya is good, especially if one belongs to the Kshatriya caste. It is a mysterious, philosophical, religious culture but its mysteries and philosophies are geared around enjoying life. Vendhyan artwork exemplifies this love of life and much of their artwork and written literature is of an erotic nature. The highest art form is dance. Dance in Vendhya is often a spiritual experience, which tells stories of the gods, great heroes or even moral lessons. As with all of its art, Vendhya's dance is striking and distinctive, especially the beautiful and complicated codes of hand-gesturing included in the various dances. For the Vendhyans, the hand alone can portray emotions of all sorts, as well as represent gods, humans, nature, action and animals. Each pose, each movement of the body or hand creates an effect or atmosphere that borders on magic, affecting man and nature equally.

The combination of man and nature impacts not just dance but all of Vendhya's art. Paintings, carvings and sculptures feature hallowed,

multi-armed gods and goddesses as well as inspiring mortal heroes. The art is embellished further with dazzling arrays of spirals and curvaceous lines, including vines, tendrils, arches and domes, each detailed in painstaking exactness. Vendhya's beautiful art appears very exotic to Hyborians.

Beyond the impressive art, much about Vendhya's culture is different from Hyborian culture. For example, Vendhya does not have inns as might be found in Shadizar the Wicked. Instead, the Vendhyans prepare guest houses for travellers, as pilgrims to and from their numerous cities are many. Taverns exist and are a good source of information. However, foreigners are not trusted in Vendhya and are simply treated as potential spies. The DC of any Gather Information checks in Vendhya will be much higher for a foreigner than for a native-born Vendhyan.

Spying is an ancient art in Vendhya but the price to pay if caught can be one's life or even slavery. Slavery is a fact of life in Vendhya. Slaves can be of any caste and slavery is often used as a punishment.

### VENDHYAN CLOTHING

Everyday activities are proscribed and restricted by numerous religious and secular rules. Even clothing is affected by these rules, although some choice in attire is allowed. The basic garment in Vendhya is called a dhoti, which is an unstitched length of filmy cloth wrapped around the lower part of the body, similar to a skirt. Women can wear a choli, which is a loose fitting blouse, if they want. Women in warmer regions tend to wear far less than the women on the mountainous slopes. Tribal women sometimes wear saris, a length of fabric wound around the entire body, with the loose end thrown over the shoulder. Urban Vendhyan women rarely wear saris. Clothing tends to be gauzy and coloured beautifully, for the Vendhyans have a deep appreciation for gold, silver and jewelled embellishments. Some women wear turbans, although this is uncommon. Women wear make-up and jewellery, including armbands, rings, waist belts, leg and anklets, earrings, nose rings, toe rings, crowns, tiaras and other headdresses. Some women wear filmy robes



or gauzy veils over their other clothing. Some dancing girls wear only the veil, ankle-bells and finger-cymbals.

Men also wear the dhoti, although it is usually white or black, not the bright colours worn by women. The dhoti can be worn as a skirt, or it can be wrapped through the legs to make a garment resembling trousers. Some men wear upper garments, such as vests or fitted shirts, while others do not. Almost all men wear large turbans. Men also wear some jewellery, such as rings, anklets and bracelets. Many adorn their turbans with feathers.

## MARRIAGE

Women, except those given to an ascetic life or born to the ruling caste, are obliged to marry by the priests of Vendhya, usually around the age of nine. Polygamy is permitted if such a practice can be afforded. A Kshatriya must marry a Kshatriya but may have pleasure slaves of lower castes. If a woman's husband dies, it is considered honourable for her to immolate herself on her husband's pyre but she is not required to do so. Certain stones are set up in a shrine after a woman performs this ceremony and these stones are worshipped as holy.

## HOUSING

The proscriptions in life extend even to housing. Except for the palaces and the temples, Vendhyan homes are cut from the same mould. Each one is made out of brick, stands one or two stories high and has a flat roof. Built around a courtyard, each Vendhyan home has windows facing into this central open area; the exterior walls have no windows, for privacy is prized. Every home has its own well and a privy. Pipes of clay lead from the private bathrooms to an extensive sewer system beneath the streets, be it city, town or village. These sewers drain into rivers and streams nearby.

## SOCIAL STANDING

Vendhya's culture resembles that of the mythical India described in the Vedas and the people are divided into distinct classes, or castes. The people are born into these classes and this arbitrary system of division cannot be altered by skill, prestige or wealth. However, the caste system is similar to the feudal system of the Hyborians for the caste system implies a series of privileges and corresponding responsibilities. The caste system is not intended as a scheme for oppression but simply for order and organisation. Although vertical mobility is not possible, horizontal mobility certainly is. The highest of these classes, at least in regards to secular power,

are the Kshatriyas, who are considered semi-divine beings in their own right and from whom the king is chosen.

Higher in spiritual power than the Kshatriyas but lower in secular strength is the philosopher caste. To them belongs the responsibility for religious observances and education. The next category is the merchant class. Although some merchants have wealth to rival their rulers, they are limited in actual power – they cannot hope to raise themselves to the ruling caste; class is a birthright and cannot be altered. Below the merchants are the serfs. A lower class exists, technically outside the caste system, one created for the conquered aboriginal peoples of the area. This is an 'untouchable' class and they are treated with contempt and scorn, forced to live outside the cities, towns and villages. They are also banned from participating in Vendhyan religious rites.

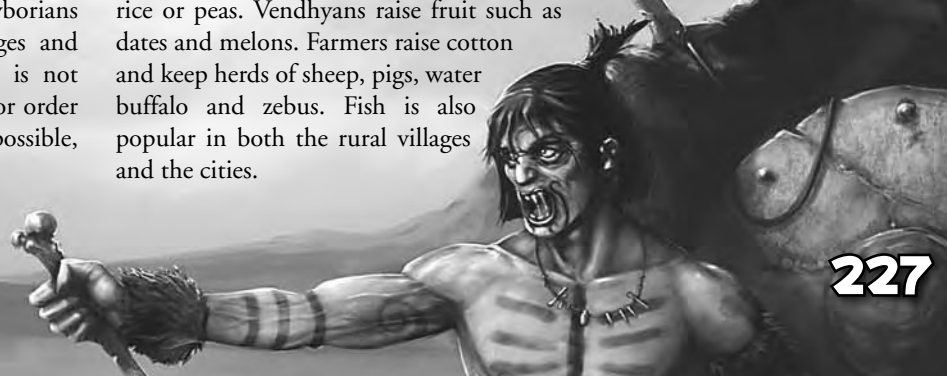
## SOCIAL MOBILITY

Only Kshatriya can take the noble class, either at first or any other level. Vertical mobility in Vendhya is impossible, so a Vendhyan character from a lower caste will not be able to garner much power – unless he leaves and returns with a false identity, or possibly becomes a member of the ruling class in some other nation.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

Vendhya is largely self-sufficient. It boasts abundant mines of precious metals and a well-developed agricultural base, including textiles such as cotton and silk. Vendhyan steel is light and nearly unbreakable, so Vendhyan swords are in demand in the eastern nations. Vendhya trades with Iranistan and Turan, although Vendhyans never trade their best items. The best work of Vendhya's artists, farmers and craftsmen go to Vendhyans. Anything left over is for trade.

A popular wine, both as an export and within the nation, is Shirakman Wine, a Vendhyan scented wine. It is unclear whether Shirakma is a region in Vendhya or the name of a vineyard, or even just the type of wine. In addition to wine, Vendhyan meals include warm tasty wheat bread served with barley, rice or peas. Vendhyans raise fruit such as dates and melons. Farmers raise cotton and keep herds of sheep, pigs, water buffalo and zebus. Fish is also popular in both the rural villages and the cities.







The Vendhyan government uses the nobles to organise mass feeding ceremonies, as well as public distribution of grain and other necessities, to insure the economic survival of the people.

## THE MILITARY OF VENDHYA

Even the military is affected by religious rules and regulations. Only members of the Kshatriya caste can fight in the military, so most Vendhyan soldiers are Kshatriyan nobles or soldiers who have at least one level in noble. Other soldiers come from the Nayars, a warrior sub-caste of the Kshatriyas.

The Kshatriya nobles form the backbone of Vendhya's fighting forces. These caste soldiers train for war their entire lives. Many are not truly suited for it; they lack the willingness to kill or the reflexes needed to keep them alive. However, just as many can wield scimitar, light lance and bow just as easily as they can recline in their luxury palaces. In war, each Kshatriya wears a scale corselet topped with a steel cap. They carry light lances for use on horse back and scimitars for hand-to-hand fighting. Most also carry short but powerful bows, giving them the ability to act as archers if the need arises. Although they are trained in the art of archery they must dismount to make an effective archer unit.

The lancers are soldiers or noble/soldiers who fight from horseback. They are equipped with *chabar-aina* armour, light lances, kukris and khandars (all described in *Tito's Trading Post*). Alternatively, they can be equipped with scimitars instead of khandars.

The infantrymen are archers, foot-soldiers or borderers (see *Hyboria's Fiercest* for the role of borderers in Vendhya). The archers wield their traditional hunting bows with care, practicing for hours every day, working on both pin-point accuracy and rapid volleys of arching arrows. They wear leather jerkins and steel caps in battle. The foot soldier learns the subtle arts of spear and shield. He wears a leather jerkin and protects himself with a large shield. He carries a wide bladed hunting spear, useful more for pinning tribesmen to the ground than hunting game.



High-level soldiers become instructors and are expected to perform as doctors and healers. Many start taking ranks in Heal after they are appointed to such a role.

## RELIGION IN VENDHYA

Vendhya reveres the mystical religion of Asura, a religion born of enormously complex rituals derived from four great books, the compilations of centuries of religious thought and practice. The priestly class prize their intellectual acumen and they use that intelligence to further their own aims. The people believe in a cosmic order and in cause and effect that extends beyond the physical realm. Even



as the Vendhyan civilisation was taking shape, the priests taught that if these mysterious and shadowed rituals were performed incorrectly, the cosmic order would be disturbed and catastrophe would follow, for Asura kept a keen eye on how smoothly the world ran. Of course, the priests were the only ones that could perform these clamorous rituals properly, allowing them to rise as a class above even the Kshatriyan rulers, at least in spiritual matters. As a result of this sense of cosmic order and justice, Vendhyans believe in a heaven, a hell and the judgment of souls. More information about Asura and the cults of Vendhya can be found in *Faith and Fervour*.

## ASURA

Asura is the chief god of Vendhya, the protector of the royal family there and anywhere else they have influence. For the Asuran priests, sorcery and religious ritual amount to nearly the same thing. These priests understand sorcery and the best ways in which to fight and foil the activities of sorcerers. They understand the power of magical links and counsel the Vendhyan royal family to destroy shorn hair, nail trimmings and other bodily waste materials.

The Vendhyans, with their strong belief in cause and effect, carry that thinking toward an idea of fate, an idea that reinforces the rigid caste system for each man's position in life is a direct and unavoidable consequence of fate determined in a prior life. A man's fate is his duty. The Vendhyans have developed an intricate system of astrology and cosmic laws to help divine both causes and effects, thus determining potential fate. The Asuran priests teach that life is illusory and the only final truth comes after death, in the light of the soul. The cult devotes itself to 'penetrating the veil of illusion of life.'

Asura's doctrines reveal that all beings reincarnate and that the purpose of life is the paying of the karmic debt against the soul. Each evil act extends the cycle of reincarnation; each good act shortens it. Those who suffer earned their trials in previous lives; they are not to be pitied.

The Vendhyans also do not believe that time is a steady, linear progression; time is cyclical. Everything that has happened before will happen again and nothing will ever happen that has not happened before. This cycle binds the universe together with Asura. Again, the priests insist their rituals are necessary for the proper functioning of this all-important cycle, for each ritual is a mystical repetition of events crucial to the continuation of the universe.

Asura is the chief god of the Vendhyans, much as Mitra is the primary god of the Hyborians but, unlike Mitra, Asura does not rule the heavens alone. He leads an entire pantheon of mysterious gods. Katar is the vile goddess who leads the Katari, Vendhya's dreaded assassins.

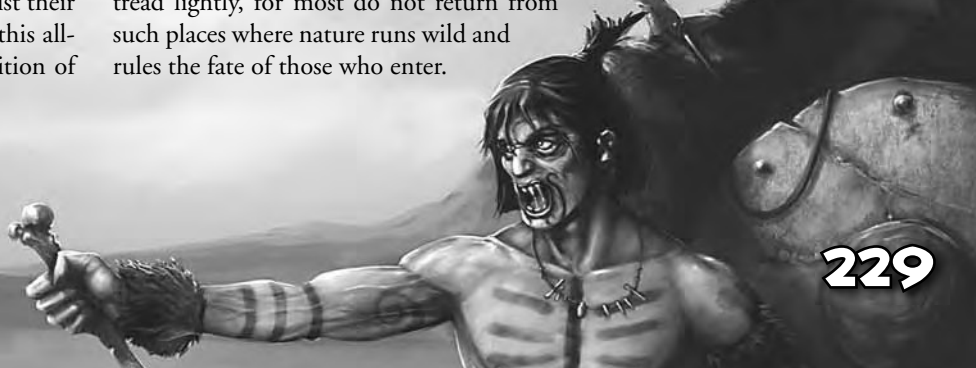
Yama is the king of devils in Vendhyan belief. Yizil is another of their strange pantheon but little is known of him. Hanuman is also worshipped in Vendhya. His image often adorns the doors and windows of Vendhyan temples as a guardian demon.

## VENDHYAN GOVERNMENT

The government of Vendhya is efficient and organised. The people, other than the aboriginal 'untouchable' caste, are treated well. They have free medical care and all from the highest government official to the soldiers to the servant are paid regularly. Artisans, be they craftsmen or poets, are paid a stipend from the government so that they have the free time to devote to their art. People who labour on public works are also paid by the government instead of just strong-armed into it, as would be the case in Aquilonia or Nemedea. Even the poor are fed, for the towns and cities each have a large, central building for storing communal grain. Few Vendhyans are selfish enough to store their own grain. Food is for all to enjoy, not for hoarding.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF VENDHYA

Vendhya as a whole is extremely fertile, although the stony regions of the Himelian foothills are considerably less so. This fertility brings about a well-developed agricultural environment. In addition, Vendhya's northern mountains are a thriving source of copper, silver, gold and iron. Unfortunately, the southern coasts are ill-suited for seafarers and sea ports, limiting much of Vendhya's trade to overland routes, which the Himelian tribesmen make dangerous. Vendhya has wide expanses of untamed forests and jungles where man should not tread lightly, for most do not return from such places where nature runs wild and rules the fate of those who enter.





**Femesh Valley** – Femesh Valley lies along a tributary of the Jhumda River.

**Forests of Ghendai** – These dire forests lie but a few leagues to the west of Gwandiakan in eastern Vendhya. The people of the area avoid cutting down the tall trees or going anywhere near the forest so no road cuts through this dense wood. The forests are filled with huge swarms of tiny, stinging flies and dangerous fevers that bring intense pain that lingers until death brings an end. Most Vendhyans would rather die than risk the insanity and infections of this fearsome forest. Because of its reputation, the forest continues to expand and grow, swallowing entire cities over time. One such city was Maharashtra, which now lies inside the confines of this killer wood. The forest has a thick canopy overhead that effectively hides the hot sun but creates a greenhouse heat. Birds scream and monkeys play in the high canopies of the forest, creating a noise that can be almost overwhelming.

**Himelian Mountains** – This is an impressive mountain range north of Vendhya. The mountains are cold and high. An important pass through the mountains is the Zhaibar Pass, which is the road from Peshkhauri into Hyrkania beneath the watchful mountain Yimsha and through the valley of Gurasha. This range is inhabited by fierce tribesmen. Trails criss-cross the mountains except in the virtually impassable centre but mostly these paths are thin and dangerous; few civilised men would even dare to cross them without an army, largely because of the tribesmen. Most of the passes are suitable for horse-travel. Only the hillmen know all the paths and features of these twisting, hulking mountains and vast, engulfing escarpments. The Zhaibar Pass is the most famous route through the mountains, although others such as the Shamla Pass and the Amir Jehun Pass exist. Snow makes most of these passes impossible to travel in the winter months, although the summer brings caravan travel from Hyrkania to Vendhya. The southern reach of this dangerous range is called Ghulistan. The south-western portion of Ghulistan is referred to as Afghulistan. Several tribes of hillmen reside in these dark mountains, including the Zhaibari, the Wazuli, the Dagozai, the Khurakzai, the Wamadzi and the Uzbek. For more information on the hillmen, see the Ghulistan chapter on page 100.

**Jhumda River** – This river flows south-west through Vendhya from the Himelian Mountains. The river lies between Ayodhya and the Ghulistan border. It also runs along the border of Kosala, a kingdom to the west of Vendhya.

**Misty Isles** – The Misty Isles are islands off the western coast of Vendhya. Secret herbs and plants are grown here and sold to sorcerers and connoisseurs around the world.

## IMPORTANT VENDHYAN SITES

Cities, towns and villages are noisy places in Vendhya. The gongs and chanting from the temples reverberate through the air but the villages and towns are lively places of great secular activity. Not only are the people vivid and loud, the animals are too. Vendhyan cities are characterised by the number of free-roaming animals that roam them. Monkeys hang out in the bazaars and shops, hoping to steal fruit from a stall or a passer-by. Elephants trumpet as they tromp around, led by Kshatriya squads. Birds of all sorts squawk incessantly.

**Ayodhya** – Ayodhya is the capital of Vendhya and has been the seat of powerful monarchs for centuries. The city was built and maintained as a symbol of Kshatriyan authority in this huge realm. This is where the Devi Yasmina rules. The city is laid out with a sacred centre, a royal zone and an urban core, all separated by irrigated valleys. It is home to more than 460,000 residents, making it a massive Hyborian age metropolis.

**Bhagobah (Ruin)** – The ruin of Bhagobah is located a half-day's journey from Gopur, deep in the jungles of the south. It was built by slobbering homunculi, who summoned the people of Gopur, who were never heard from again. It is haunted by the undead form of an ancient hero and great worms worshipped as gods.

**Gopur** – Gopur is a city of golden minarets. It lies near the southern jungles. It is ruled by Princess Khajura. The people of the city must hide at night or be lured to Bhagobah by the ghost of a prince, the brother of Princess Khajura. Those who are lured are never seen again.

**Gwandiakan** – Gwandiakan is the first city some caravans crossing the Himelias stop at; it is located in eastern Vendhya. It also served as a favoured summer resort for



Kshatriyan nobles until the great forest of Ghendai started growing too close, bringing with it deadly plagues and swarms of biting insects. Here the women dress from head to toe but in such sheer silk that the clothing actually conceals nothing. Dancers dress in veils that are discarded until they are dancing nude with but a single veil over their faces. The city is becoming more and more deserted as the forest creeps closer and closer. It currently has a population of some 26,000 people, although it could easily hold and support 150,000. Great walls surround the city, which is characterised by alabaster towers, minarets and domes.

**Jhelai** – This is a cave-pocked mountain where ascetics live. This sect requires a separation of past, so the monks and hermits no longer use names nor do they abide by the caste system used by the rest of Vendhya. Most of these hermits are scholars, although they do not use books or tomes for their philosophies and theurgies. They are consulted as oracles by those who know of them.

**Kanghra** – Kanghra is a northern Vendhyan city. The King's Summer Court can be found in a beautiful vale in this city.

**Maharashtra (Ruin)** – This is an ancient city of Vendhya. The streets are covered in dirt and humus and the trees of the tall forest that surrounds the ruin have grown everywhere. Two thousand years ago, this was the city of the first Vendhyan King, Orissa. When he died, he was worshipped as a god in a temple built over his tomb. Five hundred years later, the city was sacked and abandoned. In time it was absorbed by the Forest of Ghendai and its location lost.

**Najapur** – Najapur is a city-province of western Vendhya. The province is mostly verdant forests.

**Peshkhauri** – This is a powerful city and province in north-western Vendhya an hour's ride westward or northward of the Himelians. Like all Vendhyan cities, Peshkhauri is relatively noisy, replete with song, instruments and the noises of animals. This is a dangerous city, charged with keeping the hillmen in the hills. The prison quarters are separated from the rest of the city by a massive wall inset with an iron-bound door under an arch. The door is always guarded. Peshkhauri has a population of more than 28,000 people.

**Shirakma** – Shirakma is a region of Vendhya where wine is produced.

## MINOR KINGDOMS RELATED TO VENDHYA

### GHANARA HOMELAND

South of Vendhya and Kosala are the rainforests of the subcontinent, the homeland of the people who now occupy Kosala. These lands are dominated by a brown-skinned people. One of the major tribes in the area is the Ghanar; its people are known as the Ghanara. In addition to the Ghanara, there is a group of Picts living in the extreme south.

✿ **Khorala** – Khorala is a ruined city deep in the jungles south of Vendhya. A hermit dwells here alone as a sorcerer. It was from here that the ring known as the 'Star of Khorala' originated.

### THE GOLDEN KINGDOMS

Located between Iranistan and Vendhya, these kingdoms are unnamed by Howard. They are governed in much the same way as Vendhya, with white-skinned rulers considered little short of divine. They are ruled by kings. The people here speak Iranistani, a language related to those of Ghulistan and Vendhya. They are largely located on plains, although these are somewhat hilly (and mountainous in the north).

✿ **Venjipur** – Venjipur is on the Gulf of Tarqheba to the east of Iranistan. It was once an empire dominated by Khitan expatriates. With Venjipur no longer a viable empire, Turan has tried unsuccessfully to annex the kingdom. It exports hemp and extracts of red and purple lotus. Venjipur also profits from the caravan route between Iranistan and Vendhya.

✿ **Karapur** – Karapur is a city of Venjipur.

### KOSALA

Kosala lies to the east of Vendhya and south of the Himelian Mountains. In *Shadows in Zamboula* by Robert E. Howard, Baal-pteer describes a strong, brown people who worship Yajur through ritualised human sacrifice accomplished by strangling. In *Red Nails*, also by Howard, Conan says that the Kosalan people look similar to the Vendhyans; they







are slender, olive-skinned humans with finely chiselled features who appreciate dancing, feasting and love-making. The original people of Old Kosala were of the latter type, having Lemurian origins. Powerful necromancers, they loved peace. They were later invaded by the brown-skinned people from the southern jungles. This invasion was the impetus for a group of Old Kosalans to leave the area and found Xuchotl in the Black Kingdoms.

❁ **Yota-pong** – Yota-pong is a city in Kosala, where the main temples to Yajur are located.

## UTTARA KURU

Uttara Kuru lies just north of the Himelian Mountains but south of Meru. It is more specifically located just north of the area where Vendhya's northern border meets Kosala's northern border. Some claim there is an elixir in Uttara Kuru that brings eternal peace of mind, ensures the infirmities of old age never happen and quenches thirst forever. For this reason, the people are thought to be ageless and without disease. Since they are supposedly ageless, Uttara Kuru elects its kings to rule for certain periods of time so that no one person rules for all time. Also, this is supposed to be a land with a form of gold used by the gods for their ornaments. Uttara Kuru is also deemed to have an unbeatable military force defending its borders. Women in Uttara Kuru are utterly free; they may even stray from their marriages without censure for they have a culture of free love. Uttara Kuru is noted also for its ponies. There are nine major mountains and nine major lakes in their territory; one of the deeper ravines is said to have a bamboo forest. The architecture of the capital city (also called Uttara Kuru) is haunting and strange. Most people dismiss this land as mythical.

❁ **Mount Kai-Lesh** – Every year, Uttara Kuru is the destination of thousands of pilgrims who arrive to walk around the holy mountain Kai-Lesh, believing that to walk around the mountain on foot (a fifteen hour ordeal for someone in good shape) will bring good fortune. It takes three days of hard walking just to reach the mountain from the pass at the juncture of Vendhya's and Kosala's respective northern borders.

❁ **Kusai** – Kusai is a dank smelling vermin city on the outskirts of Uttara Kuru. Its inhabitants are squalid and feral.

❁ **Shinu** – Shinu is the dread village of the dead where caches of gold are hidden, for evil men come to Shinu to pay gold for a living death. The village reeks of death.

## VENDHYAN HISTORY

During the Cataclysm, the uninhabited Vendhyan peninsula was thrust violently against the Thurian continent. The Himelian Mountains were pushed to their remarkable heights by this brutal crash of land mass against land mass. This hot land of steamy jungles and sweltering plains was soon discovered by the pre-Hyborian peoples and they built great cities across the land. These magnificently ornate cities were served by water supply and drainage systems unmatched anywhere in the world. They carried on widespread trade and marked their wares with certain inscribed stone seals. Their organised city-states, numbering in the hundreds, sprung up throughout the entire peninsula during the 800 years their culture flourished.

Approximately 2,500 years ago, this glorious realm began to gradually slip into decline. Trade networks slowly broke down even as agriculture was being disrupted by powerful monsoons that shifted the courses of life-giving rivers. A nomadic northern people, remnants of the Lemurians who called themselves Kshatriya, swept through Himelian passes and conquered city-state after city-state, spreading their savage domination across the Vendhyan peninsula. Armed with swift chariots, the Kshatriya people, led by King Orissa, quickly captured and destroyed the aboriginal cities. The fascinating culture of the aborigines was utterly destroyed by the King Orissa and his Kshatriyas. The Kshatriyas, however, built up an exhaustive record of this civilisation's religious beliefs and practices. Originally passed along as an oral tradition for centuries, these beliefs and practices were compiled in four great books.

During this time, the economic culture of King Orissa's people altered and grew; they began an agricultural way of life, abandoning their old nomadic lifestyle. This drastic change did not diminish their basic character, however. Fearless and prideful, they remained an intense people who reigned supreme over those they conquered. The Kshatriyas treated their conquered victims with contempt and scorn. A principle of segregation was born as they divided their citizens into castes, hereditary groups of social classes.

In time, the Kshatriyas were no longer merely violent, invading nomads, the ancient descendents of the Lemurians; they became the builders of an ancient and proud civilisation, a single kingdom known as Vendhya. No longer recognisable as Lemurians, they developed independently from the rest of the Thurian continent and now rule one of the most advanced and mysterious civilisations of the Hyborian Age.





## LOCAL CREATURES

Vendhya's jungles provide a variety of fascinating life. Elephants, tigers, panthers, cheetahs, gazelles and gorillas can be found there and beautifully coloured birds fill the trees. Yaks and oxen wander through the highlands of the north. Some of these have been domesticated by the hill peoples.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

The Devi's advisors desperately want her to marry and produce an heir. Adventures could be woven around the characters being hired to escort her potential husband to

Vendhya. Perhaps someone will try to assassinate the Devi before she can marry and the characters get wind of the plot. Maybe the characters are hired to do the killing – and King Conan hears of the plot...

A warrior on horseback named Kalki, deemed an avatar of Asura by the Vendhyans, has raised a Vendhyan army and intends to lead this army north to conquer the world.

During the time of the Hyrkanian invasion, many of the old towns were abandoned and the people frequently stashed away mysterious hordes of religious copper objects. Occasionally these hordes are found by the Vendhyans or other adventurers, unleashing horrible events.





# Zamora

## Towers of Spider-haunted Mystery

Spider-haunted Zamora is a mysterious nation of thieves, kidnappers, extortionists, prostitutes and sorcerers. Small villages boast white hedge witches and the larger cities have powerful priests that work such potent magic that even the king fears them.

Zamorians, as a race, tend toward dark complexions with dark eyes and black hair. Pale skin is considered beautiful and healthy and is seen as a symbol of wealth and breeding. Those whose skin tones approach alabaster are admired by all for their grace and beauty. Many trade routes pass through Zamora, particularly through Shadizar the Wicked, giving a cosmopolitan air to many of its cities and creating a melting-pot of humanity. Shemites, Corinthians, Turanians, Hyrkanians and others have found homes in Zamora. Zamora is a lively place. More information on Zamorians and their culture can be found in *Shadizar – City of Wickedness*.

### A WICKED RACE

Priests and wizards seem to be ever in abundance in Zamora, although their presence is nowhere near as visible as in shadow-haunted Stygia. Zamora is an ancient kingdom, descended from a mysterious race known as the Zhemri, an elder and evil race from pre-Cataclysmic times. The fortunes of the Zhemri and, later, Zamora rose and fell constantly. Currently the 3,000 year old civilisation has fallen into decadence and its people are viewed as a wicked race of thieves, cutthroats and sorcerers.

Zamorians do not respect the rights of others. They do what is best for them. Bribery is a way of life in Zamora and is expected and encouraged. Few

Zamorians will even consider making a business transaction unless some sort of bribery is involved. Jobs are taken with the expectation that bribery will be part of the income.

Jobs are offered knowing the applicant will accept bribes

to grease the wheels of business transactions. Expert testimony, justice in the courts, as well as other goods and services are for sale to the highest bidder. Bribery produces cynicism and a general distrust of institutions among the Zamorians. Zamorians, on the whole, do not trust in the integrity of professional services, of government and the courts, of law enforcement, of religion and of anything touched with bribery.

### THE MOST FAITHFUL THIEVES

Zamorians do make the best thieves and are well-regarded for not betraying their employers if hired for thievery. This has nothing to do with honour but is entirely an instance of the Zamorians realising that a certain degree of faithfulness is simply good for business.

### HEDONISM

Zamorians have a tendency toward egoist hedonism. Every pleasure is good and natural. Pleasure is preferable to pain, which is bad and to be avoided. Most Zamorians concentrate primarily on maximising their personal pleasure and minimising their personal pain. For many in Zamora, pleasure has become the measure of right and wrong. Sensual indulgence, for many, has become the ultimate in what is good, right and salutary. Even a Zamorian's pursuit of wealth is indicative of this basic hedonism, for power and status are deemed to be pleasures in life. The Zamorians, for the most part, believe the only way to deal with lust and vice is to satiate them, to satisfy their every craving. The Zamorians feel their 'anything goes' approach to sexuality is completely natural. So long as sex is possible with a natural creature, be it man, woman or animal, then it is being done according to nature.

### SEX ROLES IN ZAMORA

Human beings, especially women and children are, for the most part, property or potential property to the Zamorians.



Women are valued either for their domestic abilities or their entertainment abilities. In the minds of Zamorians, women fall into one of the two categories.

An unmarried woman remains in the custody of her father during his life or under another fraternal relative if the father is dead. Fathers have the complete right to dispose of their children as they see fit, eventually selling the girls to prospective husbands as purchased property. Women in Zamora cannot hold a civil office.

## LOVE AND MARRIAGE

The idea of chivalric, courtly or romantic love really has not hit the Zamorians. Lust is readily acknowledged but marriages are largely either arranged or made for economic or social reasons. Marriages tend to be handled much as any business contract, complete with terms and payments. Courtship is considered to be a career move, not a romantic interlude. A woman's property is transferred to the man upon marriage, so courting is taken with deadly earnest by both men and women. Neither leads the other on unnecessarily. A woman, as stated earlier, treats herself as valuable property, knowing full well that once she is married or sold, she will not only be subordinated to her husband/purchaser but completely equated with him in a legal sense.

## ZAMORIAN CLOTHING

All social classes wear cloaks or blankets when the weather is cold or wet. Likely the first sign of status in Shadizar, clothing and appearance styles among the economic classes often reveal more than is intended. Women dress provocatively, if at all and ornamentation tends to be somewhat erotic.

Among the poor, clothing is a personal issue and is usually considered an expression of individuality. Clothing is usually stolen, handed down from others or bought used. Scars, tattoos and body piercing are common in the lower economic echelons, as these enhance individuality and otherwise mark people who feel they are lost in the masses.

Those in the servant or craftsmen classes tend to wear clothes appropriate to their vocations, although many add personalised touches as a nod toward individualism. Apprentices wear leather aprons. Harlots and dancers wear little but jingling girdles of coins, sometimes with two strips of silk, sometimes not. Carriers wear

rough tunics. Muleteers use whips to drive their beasts. Although Zamorians are dark skinned by nature, the working classes have the darkest skin from spending the most time outdoors.

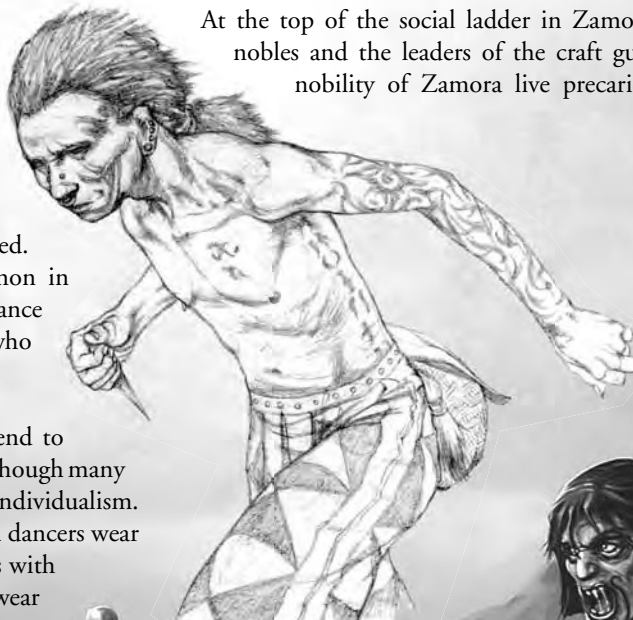
People in the merchant class tend to wear velvet, fine linens and some silks. Clothing is chosen for quality and ease of use and wear. Clothing must be well-crafted yet still be functional. Versatility is more important than artistic or aesthetic merits. Many who climb to this rank from the lower economies wear gloves to hide the scars and roughness of their hands, which might betray their lowly origins. As a person's wealth increases, jewellery replaces body piercing and tattooing as marks of individualism. When members move up to stand among the wealthy, pains are often taken to hide marks that are now considered boorish or counter-cultural.

Nobles wear silk and other high quality materials. Fit, aesthetic merit, craftsmanship and quality are more important than functionality or individual expression. Surprisingly, jewellery is worn sparingly but what little is worn is always of the highest quality and beauty. Colours tend to be muted and understated. Pale skin is considered beautiful and healthy and is also a symbol of wealth and breeding.

## SOCIAL STANDING

There are five distinct economic classes in Shadizar, each with its own unspoken rules and hidden habits. These classes are economic in nature and are based around people's opportunities to develop resources.

At the top of the social ladder in Zamora are the nobles and the leaders of the craft guilds. The nobility of Zamora live precarious







lives. Should their estates, reputation or popularity ever be perceived to exceed King Tiridates', their lives are forfeit. Should they show even the slightest sign of discontent in their lord, their lives are forfeit. The king has spies in every household as well as assassins. The nobles know this. Many nobles even know who the spies are but do nothing about them for fear of royal reprisals for harming loyal subjects on the king's mission. The nobles of Zamora organise themselves by Houses. These noble Houses strive to rise in the king's favour without raising the king's drunken paranoia. The Houses engage actively in the vice and trade of Zamora, employing complex networks of intermediaries to control the wealth of the city. Some of the noble families are little more than organised crime families and others are descended from ancient Zhemri nobility, inheriting their wealth and status generation after generation. The nobles control so much of the wealth in Zamora the king must play a careful game. Even though he is a tyrant, he knows he needs some level of fear and support in the noble classes to remain in power. Many of the nobles are highly charismatic and diplomatic men who understand Tiridates and the demands of power. These nobles tend to have the king's ear.

Beneath the nobles are those who have recently attained wealth. These are the first of their generation to enter into wealth and tend to be focused on increasing their income, stability and social standing. Members of this economic class tend to mix attitudes of the merchant class and the noble class.

Below those of newly made wealth is the merchant class. The merchant class tend to resolve their issues around the elements of work, achievement and material wealth. Work is done for the acquisition of wealth and position. Possessions are objects purchased with money, such as knick-knacks, mass-produced art objects, homes, clothing, drugs and similar items. Merchants tend to rationalise poor decisions instead of taking responsibility for them, although this is not a universal trait by any means. Members of this class usually do not have slaves but a few of the richer ones may have a slave-concubine.

Below the merchants are the servants and craftsmen. They believe in good and bad luck. Few choices are considered and they often simply try not to get caught in a mistake. Many of them prefer to just focus on doing a good job.

Work and achievement are important as aspects of their individuality. Being able to do something deemed useful is important to those in this economic class.

The lowest class (other than the slaves) are the generational poor. These people have lived in poverty for two or more generations. They own very little and mere physical survival is their daily goal. Decision making involves the elements of survival, relationships and entertainment. With limited material things at hand, survival is what life is about and what most time is spent accomplishing. The law of the street is the governing principle of their lives. A person must be able to defend himself and his possessions.

Slavery in Zamora dates back to Zhemri times. Slavery is an institution in Zamora. It is advocated and encouraged and has deep roots in society. Modelled on the domestication of animals, Zamorian law recognises slavery and has done so as far back as the most ancient histories can find. Slaves, however, are not the dominant labour force in Zamora. In Zamora slaves tend to be concubines first and foremost and household servants or eunuchs only as a secondary option. Slaves tend to be symbols of status as well as concubines and eunuchs. Slavery in Zamora is not a racial issue; Zamorians are fairly non-discriminatory in whom they enslave. If a person is in a position to be enslaved, that person is enslaved. Brythunian women are a particular favourite, although Kushites, Khitans, Hyrkanians and other Zamorians often find themselves on the trading block. Youth and beauty are the prime requisites for enslavement.

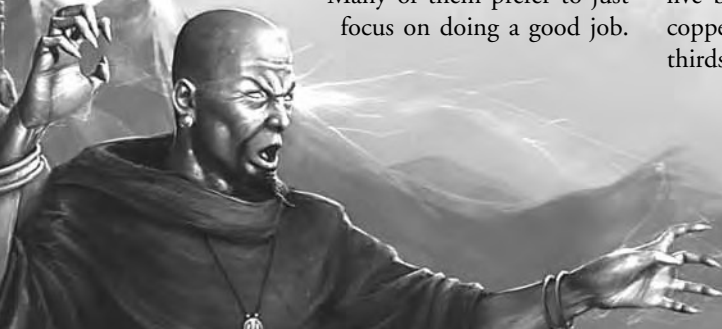
## **SOCIAL MOBILITY**

Social mobility is achieved by earning more money or marrying into a higher category.

## **TRADE AND ECONOMY**

Zamora, especially in the cities of Shadizar and Arenjun, is a marketplace for Turanian slave caravans. Even though Zamora is a bit concerned about the Turanians nipping at their mountainous borders, Zamora is pleased to accept Turanian caravan trains. Slavery is quite accepted in Zamora.

Many of the common people outside of the big cities live by herding sheep or cattle. Zamora also mines tin, copper and iron from the mountains that cover two thirds of Zamora's borders.



## THE MILITARY OF ZAMORA

Zamora's regular army is usually around 10,000 men strong. They wear plain steel caps, bronze greaves, bucklers and leather jerkins studded with bronze buttons. Their primary weapon is the spear, although bows, pikes and short swords are also common. If the King of Zamora decides he needs more men in the army, he merely decrees such and it is done. He can order any man, woman or child to serve in his army for any length of time. Zamora lacks the hierarchy of the Hyborian nations, where civilised rules of precedence and fealty govern the lives of the people; if Tiridates orders something, it is carried out. Most of the regular army is stationed in whatever city the king is staying in, usually Shadizar or Arenjun.

Zamora's usual tactic against invading forces is to assassinate the commanders or curse the rulers of the kingdom that sent the units across the borders. The actual army is better suited to hunting down renegades, dissidents and criminals than it is to fighting opposing armies. Soldiers often travel in groups of five. Usually three are armed with bows and two are armed with pikes. All five bear short swords at their sides and bucklers at their backs when marching.

The Zamorian royal guard, called the King's Own, are the elite of the regular army. Most members of the royal guard are Zamorians who have proven singularly adept at finding rebels and criminals and who have managed to establish the proper contacts and proffered the expected bribes at the right time to the right people. Although most of the royal guard have a reputation for villainy, some are reputed for bravery. These men are often chosen to personally accompany the king when he travels. The king also stations royal guards with people of importance or influence as a sign of his favour.

The Watch (day watch, evening watch and night watch) militia is the police force of the cities of Zamora. They work for the magistrates. They are typically armed with bills. Their power, derived from a mandate from the king, is ample for maintaining order and, conversely, for supporting crime.

## RELIGION IN ZAMORA

The Zamorians worship many divinities and have no problem with importing and accepting foreign gods. Most Zamorian cities have local patron gods that embody the cities in some manner. The spider-god of Yezud is such a patron deity. Other gods represent natural

forces or concepts, such as the Shemite god Bel, worshipped in Zamora as the god of thieves and patron of the city of Arenjun. Foreigners to Zamora find the Zamorian pantheon extremely complex and difficult to understand, if not downright oppressive. All Zamorian priests enforce absolute obedience among their congregations and are quite skilled in mesmerism to ensure unwavering loyalty. More about Zamorian religion can be found in *Shadizar – City of Wickedness*.

## THE SPIDER GOD

One of the most famous of Zamora's many gods is the spider-god of Yezud, known as Zath. The Games Master can use whichever name he pleases. The cult centre for Zath is in Yezud, where temple girls wearing black jet beads 'dance before the black stone spider which is their god'. Zath is a god of purity and its priests battle degeneracy. Their goal is to purify Zamora and bring about a new golden age. The main temple of Yezud, larger than the palaces of Turan, boasts a mammoth statue of the spider-god. It is a weird, hideous, black and hairy-legged idol of polished black stone. Zath is a deification of the huge, ogreish black spiders that are native to Zamora, such as the one at the top of the Tower of the Elephant.

Religious rites to Zath are extremely ritualised and involve many priests and naked dancing girls draped only in black beads. The sanctuary of Zath's temple has two doors on either side of an altar. From the left-hand door walk a procession of stately priests, a dozen of them in turbans of coloured silk and embroidered, brocaded robes of varied colours. They carry jewelled ritual staves topped by either gold or silver, depending on rank. In the lead is the High Priest, who wears white robes and a black turban. One of the priests then leads the congregation in a weird song that proclaims Zath's purity. Four of the priests then ritually move to an ever-burning flame that is kept in the temple and perform complex rites involving a silver chalice, a bronzed mirror, a jewelled dagger and a key of gold, passing each item through the smoke of that eternal fire.

After this complex and largely incomprehensible ritual, the priests line up on either side of the sanctum and the eight dancing girls, prized for their virtue and flexibility, walk impressively and solemnly through the right-hand door. One of the priests plays eerie music through a flute and the girls begin a lascivious





dance that ends with each prone on the floor, touching one of the legs of the mammoth statue of monstrous Zath. Hand in hand, the dancing girls leave and the high priest addresses the congregation with his sermon. The dancing girls return, dressed more conservatively in rainbow-hued gowns and sing hymns as donations are collected. Afterward, another song is sung by the congregation and the ritual ends.

The people of Yezud believe that their statue of Zath *is* Zath, and that the spider-god can assume a living form at will, usually at night, in the presence of priests. The primary form of execution in Yezud is to feed a criminal to the spider-god.

## BEL

The spider-god of Yezud is not Zamora's only deity. The Zamorians import gods from other lands and peoples as well, depending on need and desire. One such god is Bel, a god of thieves in the Zamorian pantheon. Regarded well by Conan in comments made to Bêlit, it is unlikely this god requires human sacrifice, as so many of the gods of this age do. Bel is described as both lusty and clever, as befitting a god of thieves. Bel is a Shemite god, yet is still regarded as the patron god of Arenjun.

## ONG

Another god in Zamora is the lion-headed god of pain, Ong. Ong is worshipped by accepting various methods of pain and bondage. His centre of worship is in a city of the same name in the northern reaches of Zamora.

## ZAMORIAN GOVERNMENT

Zamora is not a feudal society. Zamora is an absolute despotism, rife with corruption and sorcery. King Tiridates is a drunken tyrant but he understands the essence of Zamora. Zamora understands the fearful predicament the king leaves them in, however. They cannot allow the king to fail, for there is no organised opposition which can take over power should he fall. Everything is staked on the king; this system permits lightning efficiency when things are good but nothing to fall back on when times are bad.

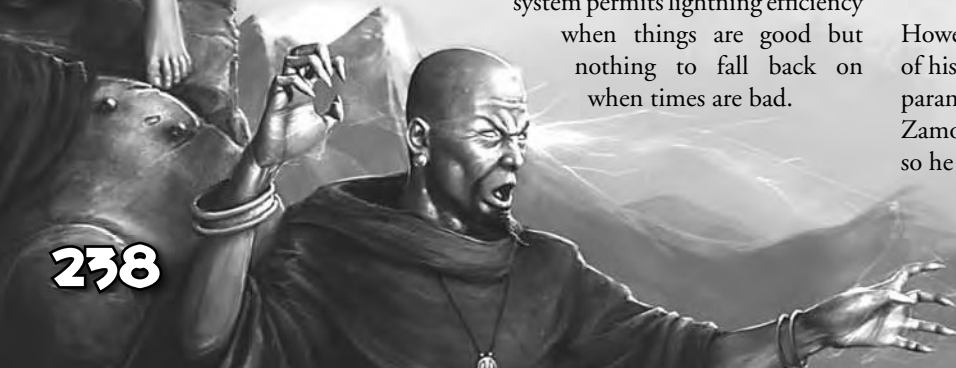
Although his commands are still inviolate, King Tiridates is now easily pulled and tugged in various directions by charismatic and powerful persons. Worse yet, he is often so drunk he cannot think, allowing his Chief King's Counsellor to make decisions and issue orders in his stead. Wizards and priests play upon his fears and paranoia to make him act and react in an almost puppet-like manner. The royal family and the nobles must also be placated yet they have power to change his policies when necessary. His seraglio is a hotbed of intrigue and sexual persuasion. Secret enemies in the court also have their influence on the king of Zamora.

Zamora's king does not allow public airing of any political thoughts that differ from his own. His drunken, tyrannical rule, however, is strongly hated by many Zamorians. Secrecy is the key to those who count themselves as opposed to King Tiridates. The seeming omnipresence of spies coupled with the swiftness with which the king reacts to news of opposed political factions discourages large groups from gathering, preventing united action. Military groups would like to see a larger standing army and less of a reliance on subterfuge and rumoured sorceries. Some groups favour a Hyborian-style feudal government. Most would just rather take the reins of totalitarian rule for themselves, deeming themselves more fit to rule by nature or nurture. Many priests have ruling designs, believing Zamora should be a theocracy modelled on Stygia or other ancient cultures.

The King of Zamora tends to protect his nation with an impressive array of assassins, sorcerers and spies. He does not trust strength of arms or the inner moral character of his subject population to protect him, so he keeps his standing army relatively small and focuses instead on assassins and kidnappings, diabolic sorceries and arcane wards, subterfuge and espionage.

Only the King of Zamora has the authority to hire mercenary armies. Any other noble who attempts to do so risks his life, his family and his property. Mercenaries might be hired in small forces as personal guards, providing lawful permission is obtained. Most mercenaries in Zamora are there to gather news about wars in other lands. The many caravan routes passing through Shadizar makes the city a prime place for foreign news and rumour.

However, Tiridates does use mercenaries as commanders of his Zamorian military units. King Tiridates is extremely paranoid and knows a foreigner cannot hope to lead Zamora, for its ways are strange and evil to foreign eyes, so he avoids giving too much power to any one Zamorian.



Hence, he hires foreigners to lead his armies, confident that they cannot use their military power to usurp his throne or conquer his lands.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF ZAMORA

Zamora is an arid, infertile land not suited for farming. Mountains border the kingdom on the north-east and on the north-west sides. In the time of Conan's rulership of Aquilonia, Turan had conquered the Zamorian Marches on the east side of the Kezankian Mountains.

**Desert of Yondo** – Due east of Ong in the north, this wasteland is known for its thorns and cacti. Many of the cacti hold poison instead of water, although few know this. The desert is home to many normal desert animals, vipers and lizards especially, as well as many abnormal ones, including two-headed vipers, snakes that can survive being split asunder and giant beetles. The desert used to be a fertile plain but was destroyed by black magic.

**Karpash Mountains** – These mountains mark the border of Zamora against the nations of Brythunia and Corinthia. The Karpash Mountains comprise an extensive range extending from Brythunia to Ophir. Several passes between Corinthia and Zamora are named, such as Donar Pass, Haraan Pass and the Haunted Pass.

❖ **Haunted Pass** – High in the Karpash Mountains on the north fork of the Corinthian Road, the Haunted Pass between Corinthia and Zamora is noted for the eerie sounds the winds make there. A haunted lake where undines live, Spokesjo, lies at the top of the pass.

❖ **Mount Turio** – This ice capped mountain was once the tallest peak in the Karpash range between Zamora and Corinthia; however, it turned out to be volcanic and the mountain exploded, blasting the top half into volcanic ash ten million years ago. Time healed the wounds and an icy, deep crater lake filled with Sargasso weed remained. A recent re-eruption destroyed the lake.

**Kezankian Mountains** – These mountains form a natural barrier between Zamora and Turan. Many things lurk in these mountains, including ape-men and villages of hill people. The hill people of the Kezankians are notoriously hostile toward strangers. The range was created during the lesser cataclysm and is younger than some of the other mountain ranges in the known world. The Nezvaya River runs through the northern part of the range, creating a corridor between Zamora and Turan. Another pass lies near Arenjun, as does the Temple of the Bloodstained God.

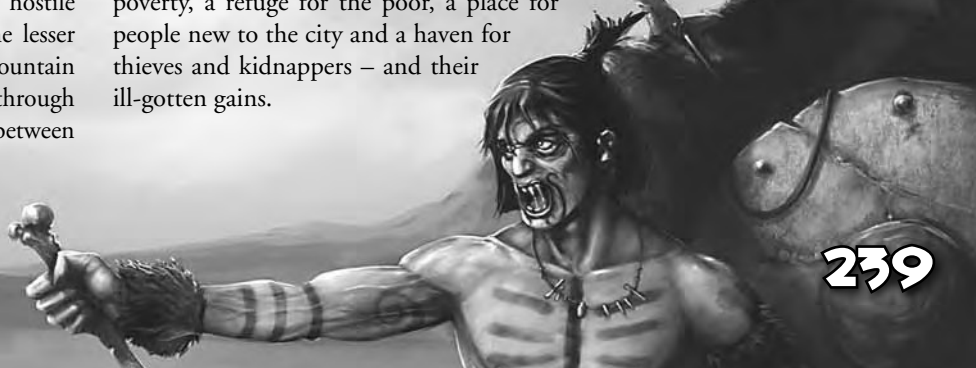
## IMPORTANT ZAMORIAN CITIES

Zamorian villages tend to be low buildings sprawled out around small temples with slender towers. Gongs can often be heard ringing from the towers and fragrant smoke rises from the myriad altars. Many sport tall statues of gods and demons. Most cities, such as Shadizar, are built around oases.

**Arenjun** – Often confused with the City of Thieves, Arenjun is located toward the southeastern border of Zamora, near the Koth-Khauran corner.



**City of Thieves** – The city known as 'the City of Thieves' can be found near the Brythunian border. Yara once lived here in the Elephant Tower, a perfect, gleaming tower that rose a hundred and fifty feet and showed no opening. The jewel-encrusted tower crashed into gleaming shards after Yara's death and the ruin can be seen still in an overgrown and abandoned garden in the temple district. It is in the lawless Maul, one of the most dangerous areas in Zamora or in any kingdom of the Earth, where rogues of all sorts gather. The maul is a place of abject poverty, a refuge for the poor, a place for people new to the city and a haven for thieves and kidnappers – and their ill-gotten gains.







**Kalandor** – Kalandor is a small city at the foot of the Zamorian mountains that handles trade from Brythunia. It is located at the Zamorian end of a mountain pass into Brythunia. It has a population of nearly 9,000.

**Khesron** – This Zamorian city lies at the other end of a caravan route through the Kezankians to Sultanapur in Turan.

**Ketha** – Ketha lies on the caravan trail between Shadizar and Zamboula. Its economy is based on nearby stone quarries and the skill of its stone masons. It has a population of 9,000.

**Larsha** – Larsha is a ruined city near Shadizar. Legends tell of great treasures and a horrible curse lurking within. It was built in Cataclysmic times by the Zhemri and was ruled by giant kings. In the centre of the city stood a royal palace carved out of a massive crag. Within this darksome ruin lurked the mummies of the giant kings that eternally guarded their treasures. Conan encountered seven of these; they were, he discovered, destroyed instantly by sunlight. In Conan's youth, after his adventure within the walls of Larsha, the city was largely destroyed by an earthquake. That monolithic black basalt palace is now nothing more than a huge hill of rubble. Any passages or chambers that may still exist beneath the vast broken blocks remain hidden to this day. The severe damage of the earthquake reduced the city to rubble, yet people still avoid the ill-reputed ruin, afraid of lingering curses.

**Ong** – Known for its brutal inquisitors, Ong is another city-state of northern Zamora. The lion-headed god of pain, also called Ong, is worshipped here. The city has a population of nearly 2,500.

**Ramaraj** – Ramaraj is a Zamorian city of sculptured gardens and beautiful spires. It lies among forested lands near the mountains. It is a wealthy trade town with a population of almost 5,000.

**Sayara** – Sayara is a small northern Zamoran city on the trade route between Shadizar and Kalandor.

**Shadizar** – Known as 'Shadizar the Wicked', this complex city is well-known as a city of thieves. It is separated into different 'quarters', such as the Desert, a maul where debaucheries performed in privacy elsewhere are done quite

publicly with a mind toward profit. The tavern of Abuletes can be found there and is reputed to be one of the best in Shadizar. Here the dancers dance naked and the thieves barter openly. The Desert is also home to the infamous Katara Bazaar, where Turanians sell their slaves and places such as the House of the Lambs of Hebra, an infamous 'specialised' brothel, prosper. Eriakes's Inn is a popular stop for foreigners newly arrived in Shadizar and is at the edge of the Desert. Although other quarters of the city are patrolled by city guards, the Desert is not. Elsewhere in the city, the nobility dwell in beautiful palaces with lush gardens. Although Shadizar is the capital of Zamora and home to Zamora's despotic, drunken ruler, much of the city is virtually ungoverned, save by whatever government can be bought with bribery, sorcery and brutal violence. The king's palace is alabaster and its walls are five times the height of a man. Those walls are protected by the King's Own, loyal troops that wear gilded half-armor and horsehair-crested helms. Within those walls are the throne rooms and chambers of the king, where servants, dancing girls and playthings, dressed only in jewelled necklaces, attend to the needs of the drunken king and cavort with the king's advisors and sycophants. Shadizar has a population that averages 38,000 people.

**Yezud** – Yezud is well known as the city of the Zathites, the worshipers of the Spider-God. Yezud is built upon a fantastic crag on Mount Graf in the Karpash Mountains. A single pass moves up those hump-backed mountains, a path that alternately widens enough for a small village then narrows so that only a single horse can move through it easily. The final village on the path is Khesron, which boasts one public house, Bartake's Inn. Only Zath's priests and those who work for the temples are permitted to remain within Yezud's walls overnight. Yezud and its satellite villages have a combined population of 6,438 people.

**Zamindi** – Zamindi is a village on the road between Shadizar and Yezud. Conan once rescued Nyssa, a witch, from being burned at the stake by the villagers here. The village breeds horses and is known for its fleet-of-foot population. The people here are accepting of white witchcraft but burn perceived black magic practitioners at the stake. Zamindi has a population of 702 people.

**Zardas** – Zardas is a sizable town at the crossing of two roads just north of the border between Koth and Khauran. A small river passes through it. A large cattle-market, its stockyards and pens are located two miles downriver. Zardas is a walled city, with corrals for the caravan animals just outside those walls. It is a colourful place where most of the buildings are made of brick or local stone, painted bright colours and ornamented with striped





awnings. The streets are narrow and bravos of every sort are common. The courtyards of the wealthy are filled with fragrant bushes and polished flagstones. The roofs of the wealthier homes boast gardens with penthouses in their midst. Zardas has a population of 6,229 people.

## ZAMORIAN HISTORY

Zamorian history begins in the time-shrouded past, the time of Valusia and Atlantis. An ancient people known as the Zhemri existed outside of the kingdom of Valusia. Some sages believe the Zhemri were part of Grondar. When the Cataclysms rocked the Earth, a remnant of this culture survived. For a thousand years they existed among the torrential rivers and vast jungles of that epoch. Slowly degenerating to a stone-age existence, they merged with another tribe – although through conquest or agreement is a matter for the scholars to debate. Five hundred years later the Zhemri ‘devils’ sought to revive their ancient culture, a culture preserved primarily through an oral tradition and to rise again to dominance.

The Zhemri culture fought for another thousand years to rebuild their culture and regain their ancient glories. They mined old ruins for artefacts and icons. Old Zhemri libraries were uncovered and the knowledge of the ancients was deeply delved into. The Zhemri also found themselves battling tribes of Hyborians and other peoples of the era as Hyperborea grew in power. In the fighting, a sense of national identity was regained and the kingdom of Zamora was born from the ashes of the time-lost Zhemri culture.

Zamora traded extensively with Acheron and had nearly the same sinister reputation as that long-dead culture. That Acheron fell to the Hyborians and Zamora did not tells something either of the might of the Zamorians or of their treachery.





# Zembabwei

## The Hybrid Trading Empire

Thutmekri came to Keshan at the head of an embassy from Zembabwei... Thutmekri likewise had a proposition to make to the king of Keshan, and it also concerned the conquest of Punt – which kingdom, incidentally, lying east of Keshan, had recently expelled the Zembabwan traders and burned their fortresses.

The benevolent kings of Zembabwei desired only a monopoly of the trade of Keshan and her tributaries – and, as a pledge of good faith, some of the Teeth of Gwahlur. These would be put to no base usage. Thutmekri hastened to explain to the suspicious chieftains; they would be placed in the temple of Zembabwei beside the squat gold idols of Dagon and Derketo, sacred guests in the holy shrine of the kingdom, to seal the covenant between Keshan and Zembabwei.

– *Jewels of Gwahlur*

Zembabwei is a trading empire with multiple kings that lies southeast of Punt. It is the most urban culture in the Black Kingdoms. Although Kush may have Shumballa, most of its other natives live in rough villages. In Zembabwei, the city and fortress are the centre of life. Zembabwei gets plenty of rain and is perfect for human habitation and the foundations for a major trading empire: fertile soil, lots of grazing land, sources of copper, iron and tin, elephants for ivory and vast amounts of timber and gold.

Zembabwei's northern border is with Iranistan. To the northwest is Punt and to the south is Atlaia.

### A HYBRID CULTURE

Zembabwei is a hybrid culture, a blending of Kchaka, Rozwei, Mlembwei and Vendwei tribes with possible Iranistani, Kusalan and Shemite lineages. Due to some superficial similarities, such as the worship of Dagon, Zembabwei may even have Yuetshi or Lemurian-of-the-East influences. The Zembabwans build circular cities of stone, enhancing the potential link. Regardless of its racially integrated past, Zembabwei is now a Black Kingdom.

As a result of generations of racial mixing, modern Zembabwans have dark skin, aquiline noses and narrow lips. Only the Maswei have retained a fairly pure bloodline but they are a recent addition to Zembabwei, having migrated from Atlaia only a few generations ago. The racial mixing has also turned the Zembabwans into skilled engineers, capable of building massive stone structures without mortar, as well as impressive dams, water conduits and irrigation canals. Zembabwan mines include both horizontal and vertical shafts dug deep into the earth. Many of their stone cities display well-constructed terraces carved into hills. Their stone masonry skills rival those of the Hyperboreans, using chequered, chevron and herringbone patterns in the walls. In addition to their remarkable masonry skills, the Zembabwans are accomplished goldsmiths and copper workers. The Zembabwans provide copper tools and weapons to many of the more barbaric tribes living in and around the area.

The primary clans found in Zembabwei include the Kchaka, Mlembwei, Rozwei and Vendwei; these clans comprise the people most considered to be Zembabwan and who live in the urban centres. Other tribes such as the Maswei also live in Zembabwei but not in the urban centres. Culturally and racially, the Maswei are related to the Atlaian Yaraba clan and are fairly indistinguishable from them, at least to an outsider (see page 42 for more on the Yaraba). Even harder to locate than the semi-nomadic Maswei are the true barbarians of Zembabwei. They lurk in the deepest jungles of the south, these strange people who war with the Atlaian Nyama and Kimambi clans. These clans are

similar to the pygmy clans of the deep jungles described in the Black Coast chapter (see page 50).

Most Zembabwan clans, especially those descended from the Mlembwei, will not eat rabbit, carrion or pork. Zembabwans always kill their prey by bleeding it to death.

## ALLEGIANCE

Poorer Zembabwans owe allegiance to the head of their clan first and foremost. He is regarded as a chief. A paramount chief reigns over the chiefs (see *Across the Thunder River* for a paramount chief prestige class if one is desired). This paramount chief is usually a noble and rules from the central part of the citadel. Most Zembabwans have a secondary allegiance to this paramount chief. Reigning over the paramount chiefs of Zembabwei are the twin kings. Many Zembabwans have also given their allegiance to one or both of these kings.

## DANCE AND MUSIC

Dance and music are integral parts of Zembabwan life. The main instruments for the Zembabwans are the drums, gourd rattles and the Mbira, which is made with metal keys attached to a soundboard. All magic is performed with dancing, as are more secular traditions such as courting, story-telling and entertainment. Dances are powerful in Zembabwei and have a visible impact on the people, although there are never actually any spectators – everyone either sings along, dances along or plays an instrument.

Zembabwan characters with maximum ranks in their Perform (dance) skill may have a +3 bonus to Reputation as long as maximum ranks are maintained; the Zembabwan with the most ranks in the city-state has a +5 bonus to Reputation and is treated nearly as a chief. Ranks in Perform (sing) and Perform (any musical instrument) are similarly regarded.

## WEAPON DANCE

Although most of the southern Black Kingdoms engage in elaborate dances involving their weapons, the Zembabwans have stylised their dance more than most. They dance with weapons in preparations for war and, later, as a war remembrance when the soldiers return. The best dancers in the weapon dance are accorded high honour and may even be given a cow or steer by an impressed noble.

## ZEMBABWAN CLOTHING

Zembabwans like cotton, so much of it is imported to supplement the small amount they are able to grow and harvest themselves. The Zembabwans wear cotton wraps around the hips, dyed a variety of colours (the Maswei prefer red), as well as animal skin skirts and more barbaric wear. Plumed headdresses, earrings, necklaces and bracelets complete the costume. Some of the wealthier members of society dress similarly to Shemites or Iranistani, having traded for such clothing.

To the south, the Maswei also dress in wraps, preferring the colour red to the exclusion of most other colours, although blue is fairly popular as well. In addition, all Maswei wear large hoop earrings. The wealthier a Maswei becomes, the more red can be found in his clothing and jewellery. Almost all Maswei males have one front tooth removed to help them produce a piercing whistle which helps them control their cattle.

Even further south are the jungle people, who do not wear clothing, although a few concede to put on a loincloth before going to the stone cities of the Zembabwans to trade their herbs, lotus and poisons for other goods.

## SEX ROLES IN ZEMBABWEI

Men milk and herd the cows (it is taboo for women to do either), as well as hunt, fish and farm. During the non-growing season, the men work in the mines and do any construction work needed by the nobles. The women help with the farming, do the housework and make all the utensils. Women also supplement the family income by selling pottery and baskets, while men often work as blacksmiths, masons or carvers.

## LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Marriages are usually arranged between the groom and the bride-to-be's family. Zembabwans are not allowed to marry anyone within their own urban centres. When a male Zembabwan decides to marry, he chooses his bride and identifies her to a friend. This friend goes to the urban centre, climbs to a high vantage, points at







her and shouts 'There she is!' The girl's family chases the friend with weapons. If the friend is caught, he is beaten and may even be killed. Symbolically, this represents an ancient way of fetching a bride – abduction. Essentially the friend is breaking into the village and stealing the girl. He must be rebuffed. Once rebuffed, the friend returns to see if the family is agreeable to marriage. If so, the groom arrives and negotiates with the girl's father and uncles for the bride wealth, which represents the restitution for 'breaking into the village and abducting a girl.' This bride wealth usually involves jewellery, clothing and a lot of cattle. It often takes years for the groom to pay the debt. Once it is paid, the girl is given to the groom and he takes her to his village so they may be married. If any children are born before the debt is paid, the children belong to the bride's family, not to the father, so paying this debt in full is important to ensure an heir.

## SOCIAL STANDING

About 5% of the population belong to the ruling elite of Zembabwei. These few control virtually all of the cattle and the natural resources of the land, including the gold, copper, iron and tin mines. The ruling class oversee the accumulation of tribute from the peasants living around the stone citadels.

The poor generally have hard lives, forced to work for the wealthy for little gain. During the growing season, the poor tend the fields of grain and the flocks of cattle. After the harvest, the poor are forced to dig for the precious metals desired by foreign nations. Panning, digging out open pits and even sinking mine shafts are part and parcel of the labour of the poor Zembabwan and the wealthy have full claim to any gold found.

## SOCIAL MOBILITY

Anyone who can manage to amass a certain amount of cattle and trading wealth can join the ruling elite. Cattle is often given as a reward for bravery in battle as well as for other feats as deemed fit by the nobles. Also, the diviners of Zembabwei can change the fortunes of any man, for if the spirits call for a poor man to become the next paramount chief of a city, or for a poor set of twins to become the kings of Zembabwei, then that is the way it goes.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

The Zembabwans are traders and empire-builders. The kings of Zembabwei want to monopolise the trade of the south. Trade caravans from Iranistan, Vendhya, Khitai and the southern Black Kingdoms pass through Zembabwei's northern capital. To protect the caravan routes, the Zembabwans build great trading fortresses of stone. The slave trade is active here and slaves are traded with Iranistan, Shem and, via Zamboula, Turan. Zembabwei has a port city and conducts maritime trade with Kosala, Vendhya and Khitai. To protect the trade, Zembabwei builds trading fortresses along the caravan routes. Foreign goods are valued here more than gold or anything produced by Zembabwei itself. Fine cloth, ornaments and other artefacts of foreign manufacture are coveted by the poor and hoarded by the wealthy. Zembabwei occasionally has skirmishes with Iranistan in the Gold Mountains (see page 125) because of the precious metals found there. The Zembabwans also trade with the mysterious jungle people far to the south of their land for jungle herbs, poison and rare lotus products.

Long-horn cattle are native to the area and are the measure of wealth in Zembabwei, as they are believed to be more stable than currency. Almost all of the cattle belong to the elite. The dominant meat among the wealthy is beef. The lower classes eat sheep, goat and wild game. The poor raise sheep, goats and chickens for wealth and dietary needs.

Around the stone citadels the Zembabwans grow maize, millet, sorghum, beans, peanuts, pumpkins and sweet potatoes.

## THE MILITARY OF ZEMBABWEI

The trading outposts are almost always accompanied by fortresses defended by armies of savage spearmen which Zembabwei has waiting in the wings, always ready to move forward and attack a weaker culture and force tribute from it. The military strategy and weaponry of Zembabwei are similar to those of the southern Black Kingdoms (see page 54). The ruling elite often use scimitars and weapons more similar to those of the Shemites and Iranistani, however. Horses are virtually unknown in Zembabwei because of the deadly tsetse fly, so the Zembabwans have no horse cavalry.

The most elite of the Zembabwan forces are the wyvern riders. These soldiers (they are trained in precious little else but the soldier class) specialise in flying the great



pterodactyl wyverns of Zembabwei, fighting from their backs with spears. Unlike most Black Kingdom tribesmen, these elite soldiers rarely take the Fighting Madness feat for fear of losing control of their wyverns.

## RELIGION IN ZEMBABWEI

Zembabwei has an interesting mix of religions, including aspects of god worship, as well as more traditional beliefs in spirits, ancestors and animism. Dancing and music play a major role in all Zembabwan celebrations, whether secular or religious. Dancing is such an ecstatic and spiritual experience for the Zembabwans that some become possessed by spirits during dance.

## GODS OF ZEMBABWEI

The Zembabwans worship Derketo and Dagon and the capital city boasts of a holy shrine where squat, gold statues of both deities sit.

Derketo is a seductress deity, a temptress, the essence of depraved sexuality. Derketo is an Earth-Mother deity of fertility. Her rites are orgiastic, sensual and sexual, designed to bring about the blossoming of the earth. Many of her orgies last for weeks. The dancers and priestesses for Derketo are also temple prostitutes and find that sex is the best way to capture and hold on to male worshippers. Certain dark ceremonies re-enact the world-renewing mating of Dagon and Derketo. The exotic techniques taught in the temples of Derketo are extremely intense and can cause Corruption (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game* for rules on Corruption). Her sacred prostitutes are considered the embodiment of Derketo herself. She is a sexual predator who takes the vitality of her lovers into herself either as a sacrifice or a means of self-gratification. She copulates with others, particularly young men, via deceptive guiles or illusions, sheer coercion or her own personal attributes.

Dagon is the Zembabwan god of the underworld, fertility and grain. He is worshipped in the form of a gold idol and is the most important god in Zembabwei. This fish-man god demands that his worshippers approach him in the nude. He lusts constantly after Derketo. His worshippers abstain from eating fish but abstain from little else; Dagon's rites and ceremonies are orgiastic and self-indulgent. He is also a war god. He likes to see the trophies of his victories piled before him, especially the heads of his enemies. He is said to favour those who promise to bring him the heads of their enemies. He is also an agricultural god and favours corn especially.

## TWO KINDS OF SPIRITS

The Zembabwans believe in a spirit world that is quite active. They believe there are two basic kind of spirits, the Chava and the Vadsimu. The Chava are wandering spirits, demons and ghosts. Chava spirits are inherently outsiders, the ghosts of people who are not Zembabwan. The spirits of animals and natural objects fall into this category as well. They can be good or they can be evil, just as any outsider to Zembabwei could be either. The Vadsimu are the ancestral spirits of the Zembabwan people, maintaining everything that is honourable and protecting the society. The ancestors will withdraw their protection if the people stop respecting the traditions and their traditional way of life.

## DIVINATION

The Zembabwans, like the Tombalkans, divine the future with a cast of dice. There are four dice, each of them basically a miniature tablet of wood, ivory or bone. On one side of each of these small tablets is a distinctive design; the other side is blank. There are sixteen possible throws, so for more complicated divinations, some diviners use more than one set of dice – up to eight sets.

Once the dice are at hand, the Zembabwan diviners have a choice of methods. To use the first method, the diviner opens himself up to spirit possession. The diviner enters a trance, throws the dice and anything the sorcerer says is taken to be the words of the spirit possessing him instead of his own words. The spirit can read the designs and understand their meaning. The second method presumes that the spirits possess the dice. The spirits arrange the dice, which can then be read by the diviner. The diviner must ritually cleanse the dice from time to time to keep them pure for the inhabiting spirits. In addition to using dice, the spirits often communicate with diviners via revelatory dreams.

## SYMBOLISM

The Zembabwans put symbolism into most of their art and their religious artefacts. Pythons symbolise young men, the rain and the fertility of the land. Old women represent the unity of family. Twisted snakes represent young women and sexual fertility. Crocodiles symbolise sacred, fearless leadership. Crocodiles are held as especially holy because they can swim to the bottom of the depths and communicate directly to the ancestors who are believed to live there.





## ZEMBABWAN GOVERNMENT

Zembabwei is ruled by twin kings and has been since the various tribes were united by the Zembabwans and their pterodactyl steeds. The kings must be twins and both must be alive. If one twin dies, the other must commit suicide or be killed. This is to prevent succession problems. Diviners then choose another set of twins to rule the nation. The kings are advised by a council of elders and diviners. These elders are sent by the paramount chiefs to advise in their stead.

Beyond the kings, the wealthy elite, the nobles, rule from the citadels of the trading fortresses. They are a form of centralised power; they answer to a paramount chief and to the kings. The paramount chief, like the kings, is chosen by the diviners. Since the diviners speak the will of the spirits and the gods, these paramount chiefs essentially inherit their power from divine favour and are considered only slightly less mystical than actual gods. The paramount chiefs are advised by a council of elders and diviners. The elders are the heads of the clans who live around the fortresses. The paramount chiefs receive tribute from the families they rule and protect.

The diviners of Zembabwei have a considerable amount of power. They advise the wealthy and the powerful and, in many cases, choose those who will lead the people.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF ZEMBABWEI

Zembabwei has mountains in the north, which, as one moves south, become dry grasslands. During the two rainy seasons (April to June and October to December), these grasslands become virtual swamplands because of flooding. Continuing south, the grasslands give way to steppes. Beyond the extensive steppe land, grassland and small forests spring up. Further south, one begins to encounter denser forests and jungles.

The coast is hot and humid, the north is dry and the inland is fairly temperate. During the two rainy seasons, the rainfall is usually heavy and falls in the late afternoon and in the

evening. February to March is the hottest time of the year in Zembabwei, while July to August is the coldest.

Significant numbers of wildlife live here, such as buffalo, crocodile, elephant, leopard, lion, rhinoceros and wildebeest.

**Tana Valley Forests** – the Forests of the Tana Valley, which lie to the west of Maswei territory, are reputedly haunted. The Wapokomwei live in a stone-citadel city-state high above the valley but they rarely venture into the heavily wooded valley itself. The mountains surrounding this valley are the original homeland for the pterodactyl wyverns later tamed by the Zembabwans.

## IMPORTANT ZEMBABWAN CITIES

The cities of Zembabwei are usually built on hills. The wealthier a citizen is, the higher on the hill that citizen is allowed to live. The poorest citizens live on the plains surrounding the hill. Stone walls that enforce the stratification created by distinctions in wealth encircle the hills. The wealthiest can even afford privacy walls around their courtyards. In these cities iron is smelted and forged into tools and weapons and precious metals are worked into forms of artistic beauty. Wood and soapstone is carved into ornate dishes and figurines. Cone-shaped grain towers store food against drought and famine. Other towers serve as eyries for the pterodactyl wyverns of the elite soldiers.

There are a great many of these cities. City names may be those of the tribe or clan originally comprising the local population, such as Mlembwei, Zezruwei, Rozwei, Vendwei and Wapokomwei. Games Masters may create or place these cities as story needs dictate.

**Great Zembabwei** – The capital of Zembabwei is referred to as Great Zembabwei. The city lies in the north of the nation. It is constructed as a typical city, just on a larger scale. It is built around two massive hills, so has twin citadels of concentric stone circles.

**Old Zembabwei (The Forbidden City)** – The Forbidden City lies in southern Zembabwei and is ruled by a wizard-priest of Damballah, the Zembabwan name for Set. The black altars of Damballah run red with the blood of sacrifices. Three million black barbarians follow this priest from his skull throne. The flying men of Zembabwei, warriors mounted on wyverns, patrol this region, based



out of topless towers without doors or windows. It is said that the serpent men of Valusia founded the city before King Kull crushed the last remnants of their race before the Cataclysm. The Forbidden City is built upon a great hill, ringed by walls and roofless round towers.

## ZEMBABWAN HISTORY

Old Zembabwei was founded in the ages before man. Legends suggest that the foundations of Old Zembabwei were built by the serpent-men of Valusia and that Set, Yig Han and Byatis were worshipped there. Other legends suggest the site was originally a green-stone city erected by the Lemurians-of-the-East. As the ages unfolded, Old Zembabwei was abandoned and fell into ruin. The site was held to be cursed by the local tribes and so was ignored for generations.

Eventually, the Zembabwan tribe, an offshoot of the Kchaka people who lived to the west, were driven from their homes by Atlaian expansion. The Zembabwei clan of the Kchaka people discovered the ruins of Old Zembabwei. Realising that other people would not go near the site, they built a new city over the ruins, following a similar plan but using plain stone instead of green stone.

Giant wyverns from the mountains around the Tana Valley haunted the entire region, hunting people as food. The Wapokomwei especially suffered but the Zembabwans did not live in their city unscathed by the pterodactyls. A Zembabwan hero named Lumbeba travelled to the mountains and stole some eggs from the wyverns. He raised the hatchlings and found them trainable. Tamed, the beasts became mounts for the Zembabwans. With these terrible monsters as their steeds, the Zembabwans slowly conquered the neighbouring people, such as the Wapokomwei, the Rozwei and the Lembwei. The building of stone cities in the pattern of Old Zembabwei was instituted throughout the realm in order to better control the people and maintain the empire. Lumbeba and his twin brother were installed as kings after the hero divined that Zembabwei should always be ruled by twins.

The Zembabwans created a minor empire based on cattle and farming. The Iranistani discovered gold in the kingdom and so they set up relations with the Zembabwan kings to mine the land. Racial mixing began at this point. Later, Shemites, possibly Sabateans, travelled south for the gold. Mining became more significant as the Zembabwans realised they had power. Trade was established with Shemite and Iranistani traders. Gold, copper, ivory and slaves were exchanged for luxury items, such as luxuriant clothing, cotton, and advanced weaponry such

as scimitars. The Shemites who settled into the area slowly vanished as a Shemite people, becoming incorporated into the tribes through marriage because most of the Shemite settlers were male.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

The Wapokomwei of the south-western forests believe the woods are haunted by a thing called a *kitunusi*. There are two kinds of *kitunusi*, according to witnesses. The first walks about like a man. The second uses its arms to move while its legs are held in a cross-legged sitting position. The tribesmen are unclear about whether these are two distinct types of creature or the same type using different means of locomotion. The clear thing is that those who become frightened (through Terror of the Unknown, perhaps) are stricken with paralysis for the rest of their lives. Those who wrestle with the creature and can successfully tear off even a piece of its blue cotton-like garment have their fortunes made. The cloth of the *kitunusi* replicates itself over time and is worth a fortune. The man who acquires some of this cloth can become wealthy and may move his family higher up on the hill. Player Characters could be engaged in a treasure hunt for some of this cloth, either for themselves or for some foreign merchant for whom they work. No one, apparently, has any of this cloth, so it is unknown if the creature or the cloth really exists, although all Zembabwans claim that it does.

The Tana Valley forests hold not just the *kitunusi* but also a haunting demon called the *ngojama* who looks like a dark man with an iron claw in the palm of his right hand. The demon pounds the claw into the heads of those who sleep in the forest.

Zembabwei is also rife with legends about haunted or sorcerous musical instruments. A popular legend is that of the *Ngoma Lungundu*, or the drum of the dead. If played by a king or chief during battle, it guarantees the victory of his people over their enemies, for it strikes the Terror of the Unknown into his foes. Sometimes the passion of the chief beating the drum is such that his enemies swoon or even die from the Terror. Legends suggest that when so moved, ghosts and spirits also beat the drum to accomplish their own aims.







# Zingara

## Chivalry, Conspiracy and Treason

It was an unquiet land through which he rode. The companies of cavalry which usually patrolled the river alert for raids out of Poitain, were nowhere in evidence. Internal strife had left the borders unguarded. The lone white road stretched from horizon to horizon. No laden camel trains or rumbling wagons or lowing herd moved along it now; only occasional groups of horsemen in leather and steel, hawk-faced, hard-eyed men, who kept together and rode warily. These swept Conan's with their searching gaze but rode on, for the solitary rider's harness promised no plunder, but only hard strokes.

Villages lay in ashes and deserted, the fields and meadows idle. Only the boldest would ride the roads these days, and the native population had been decimated by the civil wars and by raids from across the river. In peaceful times the road was thronged with merchants riding from Poitain to Messantia in Argos, or back. But now these found it wiser to follow the road that led through Poitain, and then turned south down across Argos. It was longer, but safer. Only an extremely reckless man would risk his life and goods on this road through Zingara.

The southern horizon was fringed with flame by night, and in the day straggling pillars of smoke drifted upward; in the cities and plains to the south men were dying, thrones were toppling and castles going up in flames.

— *The Hour of the Dragon*

Once the proud possessor of a major shipping industry, Zingara is an exotic land that exists between the Pictish Wilderness, the Bossonian Marches, Aquilonia and Argos. Although often thought of merely as Argos' maritime rival, Zingara has in the past been a land of agriculture and elegance. Zingarans have concepts of honour and allegiance much like those of the Aquilonians (see page 13).

Zingara is now a land torn apart and ruined by civil war. Historically a king ruled the land out of Kordava but the elegant, bejewelled and hosed princelings and nobles, who usually fought petty battles among themselves and the Poitainians, rose up and destroyed themselves and their noble kingdom in flame and blood. The refined swordsmanship of the Zingarans had unfortunately turned against itself. Now the kingdom is faltering, unable to support itself due to burnt and salted fields, destroyed armies and crushed castles. The ghouls of the central region have begun to prowl all over the region, even in the north, toward the Poitanian border.

More information about Zingara can be found in *Argos and Zingara*. An overview is provided here.

## ELEGANT AND SOPHISTICATED

Manners and pleasures in Zingara were elements of its elegance and sophistication. Ballet troupes learned the finest dances in the schools and the fine art of fencing was taught to all noblemen. Waving scented handkerchiefs, the nobility of Zingara plotted and conspired against fellow nobles even as they spoke eloquently of philosophy and civility.

## SWORDSMANSHIP

In Zingara's prime, Zingaran swordsmanship was taught in both formal fencing-schools and the deadly backstreets of every city, though many Zingarans learned to use only the civilian arming sword, rather than the more military-oriented broadsword. The Zingarans developed



one of the most sophisticated forms of elite fencing ever created, a sheer art form to behold. Many of these fencing schools may still survive and those that have burned are slowly being rebuilt. Many feel that these schools, which also taught principles of chivalry, are essential to the rebuilding of Zingara, to keep it from sliding backwards into barbarism. All they need is a strong king...

## NEITHER EXPLORERS NOR COLONISTS

Turan is remarked by its imperialistic expansionist policies. Aquilonia's nobility are greedy for land and wealth, willing to take them from Nemedra, the Pictish Wilderness, Cimmeria or anywhere else. Ophir hungers for Aquilonian soil. Koth wants to retake Khauran and Khoraja. Stygia slumbers with barely restrained hostility, remembering the glory days of the empire it threatens to restore. Zingara, however, desires no colonies, desires no new lands. They are a civilised people and they have what they have. Trying to lord over lands that are possibly hostile to invaders is a stress Zingara chooses not to bear. Instead, they seek commercial domination of the sea for their growth and wealth and continued independence. A Zingaran usually only leaves Zingara by force, be it force of arms or force of circumstance.

## DIEET

The pig is the most important food animal for common Zingarans; the nobles prefer to eat lamb, mutton, goat and kid. Cereals and grains are also important to the Zingaran diet. Barley grows in the south and is a staple there; wheat grows in the western part of the interior. In the southeast one finds a lot of citrus fruits, although collecting them is a danger because of ghouls. In the northwest, apples and pears are common in the Zingaran diet and beef supplants pork as the primary meat for commoners. Throughout Zingara, olive oil is used heavily and grapes are commonly grown as well. Cumin, cloves, cinnamon and black pepper are the most common spices used, although the wealthy import sugar and other spices.

## FAMINE

Zingara right now is in the middle of famine, marking an end to a period of prosperity. The civil wars have killed peasants in vast numbers – now there is not enough to feed the wealthy elite (another reason Zingara does not heavily utilise infantry; killing peasants decreases the food supply). This famine has created high levels of criminal behaviour as well as disease. As fields were burned

and the people were killed, the prospect of starvation became apparent, so they did what they had to in order to survive, killing draft animals for food and eating the grain that had been set aside for the next year's planting (hoping more could be found later). This reduced the peasants' ability to produce food the following year, which created another cycle, with the same results. As the people found themselves less and less capable of producing food, they began to turn to the roads – banditry became the norm. Those who would not become bandits flocked to the cities. The cities had a greater means of trading for food, so food was more plentiful in the cities. As the peasants flocked to the cities, they flooded them and created a class of urban poor the likes of which Zingara had never before known. The urban poor, desperate for food, often took to crime. Crime is high in most Zingaran cities now. Cities are trying to distribute food to these poor to keep them under control but that process is beginning to show its toll on the prosperity of the cities. Why should the city's workers work so that unwashed peasants can eat? Famine is spreading across Zingara and with the famine comes disease.

## ZINGARAN MARRIAGE

Aristocratic and noble marriages in Zingara are arranged by the fathers of young girls and the girls usually know nothing of their intended husbands other than their titles, position and connections. The betrothal is a formal arrangement lasting only a few months, allowing the intended pair a few stiff and brief visits supervised by the parents to ensure the daughter's continued chastity. Affection in a marriage is considered irrelevant by the parents. Against popular custom, the Mitraic religion fights for the rights of a couple to choose their own spouses. Ultimately there are two principal events of any marriage: the betrothal and the wedding. The betrothal is a promise to marry in the future, whereupon a contract for the bride-price is given, rings are exchanged and the whole affair is sealed with a betrothal kiss; the wedding is an agreement that both parties are now married. For the marriage, the bride and her attendants are brought to the temple on horses provided by the groom. At the temple, the priests chant and pray, blessing the union. Again, the contract is sealed with a kiss. The newlyweds are forbidden to enjoy each other for at least one night following the wedding. Some localities enforce a three day wait after the wedding, a ritual of purity for the Zingarans. The couple enjoys a procession through town and the town feasts, sports and celebrates, often for days.



It is unlawful in Zingara for a woman to be forced to marry against her or her parents' wishes. A maiden daughter is required to have parental or guardian consent to marry, lest a hefty fine be levied against her. A widow is independent, however and requires no one's consent (unless she owes Allegiance to a lord, who always has a final say over who marries his female tenants) but she can be fined if she is deemed to marry too quickly after the death of her former husband. Marriage to an older woman is deemed contrary to natural law in Zingara and is thought to lead to deformed children, so this is prohibited in all but the most extraordinary of circumstances.

A particularly Zingaran temptress is the procuress. Access to the most desirable Zingaran women is limited and difficult, so the procuress provides an essential service. This temptress is skilled at third-party seduction on behalf of men wanting to meet women beyond their social and legal means. She evades the guardians of a woman's chastity and brings about desired clandestine meetings with the man, using disguises such as physician, peddler, hairdresser, tutor and other such persons that might be admitted to a woman's presence as pretext to visit the woman in her house. The procuress also knows where women gather and may meet a targeted woman there. Parents and husbands, although they may find out about the man, are rarely able to get their hands on the procuress. If they can, she may find herself flogged, enslaved, banished, fined or even burned at the stake. Typically, if she successfully snares an unattached girl or widow, she is fined one quarter of her goods. If she snares a wife or betrothed woman, she is given the death penalty. If her plot is discovered before the unchaste rendezvous occurs, she (and all that she owns) is placed at the mercy of the father, husband or betrothed of her target; they are not allowed to kill her, so they usually enslave her or drive her out of town.

## ZINGARAN CLOTHING

Zingarans try to dress well. Trunk-hose and doublets of silk with puffed and slit sleeves are common for the men. Cloaks hang from their shoulders. Boots of the finest Kordavan leather adorn their feet. Soldiers dress in steel and satin. Armour and garments are always ornate and made of the best material that can be afforded, stolen or made.

Thin black moustaches are also common. Royal soldiers dress in burgundy and gold. Red and yellow are considered lucky colours. The wealthy tend

to dress brightly while the commoners wear more subdued tones. Unmarried women wear their hair long; married women bundle their hair into coifs or hair bands.

## SOCIAL STANDING

Zingara has evolved into a stratified society that is both complex and racially motivated. These social classes are discussed in more detail in *Argos and Zingara*. Social mobility is generally accomplished through marriage.

The upper rung of the social ladder are the high nobles, which include the barons, counts, certain viscounts and vassals. The barons hold the largest land grants, followed by the counts. The rents of various free towns are given to the barons and counts by the king to ensure they can support an adequate number of knights. They are descended from the bravest and proudest of Zingaran knights, usually dating to the Hyborian invasion. They are exempt from corporal punishment and have the right of trial by their peers. They must, however, serve the king's army for two months of the year. They must serve longer if the king pays their expenses. These ranks of nobility are hereditary only. The king is forbidden from granting anyone any of these ranks. The bottom rung of this stratum are the heirs of the barons and counts and are titled as viscounts.

Viscounts are also the upper rung of the middle nobility. The viscounts serve the counts. Viscount of the middle nobility is the highest noble title a king can grant. Viscounts receive land from the king in return for military service. Their tenure is hereditary but the king can alienate their land at will. The middle nobility have titles that are hereditary to a point – they are hereditary for the life of the king. Each king has the right to appoint his own viscounts, comitores and vasvessores, although he often just reappoints the existing ones for the most part to avoid unnecessary conflict. Zingara, however, is currently a nation with no king, so this rung of nobility is the most unstable for the moment. Comitores are the noble aids of viscounts. The lowest of the middle nobility include the vasvessores, who are vassals to the counts and comitores.

The knights are nobles or soldiers who command at best a single castle or manor; they are the lowest rank of nobility. A knight is expected own a wife, have children and possess a horse. They are also expected to have arms. Originally knights were vassals of the king but now they are allowed to be the vassals of the upper and middle nobility. They and their households are excused from municipal taxation should they enter a city or live within its jurisdiction.



The urban classes follow the noble classes. Esquires are those with grants enough to enable them to support a horse and arms. They are frequently vassals of the knights. Merchants who become wealthy enough or have aided the king or a baron may be granted this title. They are exempt from taxation but are bound to serve for three days a year in the case of war. Esquires who fail to take the field when summoned by their knightly lords may be fined heavily. Below the esquires are the burgueses, including bankers, doctors, advocates, merchants, brokers, agricultural procurers, shopkeepers and the like. Beneath the burgueses are the condishions. The condishions are craftsmen and artisans. The leaders of these classes are not merchants or artisans, though. The leading citizens are soldiers, stock ranchers and plantation owners who live within the walls of a city but own vast amounts of property in the country beyond the walls.

The lower classes include propertied men and non-propertied men. A propertied man is a free man who lives in a village or more rural setting and owns his own land or, at most, owes rent on his land. Most propertied men are farmers, although some are more specialised, such as village blacksmiths, coopers or millers. Propertied men only owe a lord labour obligations during harvest time. Propertied men do not need to pay the various fees and fines imposed by the feudal lord, although they do pay taxes. A non-propertied man is tied to a plot of land owned by someone else. Non-propertied men cannot leave the land they are tied to without their feudal lord's permission. In addition to working their own lands, they are required to labour on the lord's estates as well, giving up also a portion of their own personal harvest to their feudal lords. They may be asked to perform other labour services as well, such as repairing a road or building a bridge. Non-propertied men are otherwise free. They may accumulate personal wealth, for their social constraint is not an economic constraint.

## TRADE AND ECONOMY

Zingara's primary export is probably tin, which is essential for the making of bronze. The mountains of this proud land are mined for tin, a rare commodity in any land but readily found here. Their once great plantations yielded crops of grapes, sugar, tobacco and grain. Black serfs were brought in to work these vast plantations of southern Zingara, labouring under the whips of cruel slave-masters hungry for wealth and prestige. No more. Most of those fields are gone, burnt by the civil wars that raged from one end of Zingara to the other. From the grapes, highly regarded Zingaran wines were once distilled. Even this industry has come to a crashing halt in recent

years. In addition to the agricultural products produced in the fertile southlands, leather was another staple product from the Zingarans. This industry proceeds even today.

Historically, Zingara tried hard to outdo Argos in the seas. The Zingarans managed to trade along the Pictish Wilderness, despite the intense ferocity of the Sea-Tribes that exceeded even the savagery of those Picts that ravaged Velitrium. Zingarans traded tin, ostrich plumes from Kush via Stygia, wine, weapons and other goods for copper ore, hides, gold dust, whale teeth, walrus tusks and other goods made by the Picts. The Picts tend to fiercely resist contact with the Hyborian nations but reluctantly traded with the Zingarans, probably because they were not entirely Hyborian and had a distant kinship with the Picts. This trade is something the traders of Argos never try. The coast is too savage, largely uncharted (at least by Argossean chart-makers) and frightening. Today, there is little trading going on by Zingaran merchants along the Pictish Wilderness. The Picts have, as a result, increased the frequency of their raids, sensing the instability of Zingara.

## THE MILITARY OF ZINGARA

Zingara is now constantly in a state of war, so most of its armies are small and lightly equipped. They have to be able to move long distances quickly and return home. The 'armies' of Zingara are nominally united under the king. However, in truth each lord maintains his own troops that he might lend to the common cause or not depending on his own agenda. More often, he uses his troops to engage in open rebellion against the throne.

The regular army are those knights and soldiers raised by the various feudal lords as part of their obligations to the barons, counts and the king himself. The regular army is comprised of knights, lesser cavalry, archers and infantry. These armies also have officers, adjutants, scouts and supporting trains.

Zingara's elite knights are just as skilled as their Poitanian enemies and perhaps somewhat more numerous. However, given the difficulties in fielding even a single unit of knights it is unlikely that this numeric superiority will ever translate into a distinct military advantage. Their absolute numbers may be higher but their lack of central authority







means their full numbers will never take the field. Each unit of Zingaran knights centres around a single, charismatic noble. This noble will often be a named character who acts with the support of his troops. Noble knights are lower nobles who agree to fight as part of their feudal obligations. They typically hold Allegiances to Zingaran nobles, their families and their unit commanders. The commoner knight is a class of knight unique in the Hyborian world. Commoner knights are non-noble men who are wealthy enough to purchase a horse and arms and who agree to fight for a free city as part of its militia.

The Zingaran arbalesters train to contain and block enemy infantry units, with emphasis more on swordsmanship than on actual archery. Most lords field their own arbalesters and the king uses his own funds to maintain a unit as well. Arbalesters are not as effective as Bossonian Longbowmen on the field of battle but they can have a significant impact on cavalry or other massed troops.

The Zingaran men-at-arms are esquires who have risen from the ranks of noble-born soldiers to begin their long march to glory, or who have at least survived long enough not to be considered completely expendable by their lords. Some are commoners who, through virtue of service as soldiers, have been granted noble status as esquires. Zingaran men-at-arms ride into battle beside their noble leaders. Each knight unit has two units of men-at-arms to act as support. They usually have to swear allegiance to their knights.

Largely untrained peasants, the infantrymen of Zingara simply try to stay alive. They go to battle because of their feudal relationship with their lords. They do receive some training with spears or hunting bows before being sent out to face down heavy cavalry but nowhere near enough to hold their ground against repeated charges. Fortunately, the nobles do not really expect them to hold their ground long.

## RELIGION IN ZINGARA

Mitra is the head of the pantheon in Zingara. This is interesting because in all other Hyborian nations, Mitra is the One True God. The melting pot of Zingara has also produced a melting pot of religions.

Mitra, as the god of the last conquerors, now rules supreme over the other gods in a Zeus-like role. The saints have vanished but the legions of heaven and hell remain. A variant of Ishtar

probably serves as Mitra's consort in a court that contains Shemitish and Pictish deities, all with portfolios of power in a complex fashion duplicating the complicated Zingaran court. More about Zingaran religion can be found in *Faith and Fervour*.

## ZINGARAN GOVERNMENT

Before the civil war Zingara was an atypical feudal land, a monarchy in Hyborian fashion, though not a true Hyborian kingdom. Under a dazzlingly complex political system, dukes and counts rule fiefs in the name of the King in Kordava, although in most cases that fealty was, at best, nominal and somewhat confusing. The nobles of Zingara were a proud, individualistic race, not given to subservience. They rebelled both openly and secretly. This continual backstabbing, political manoeuvring and social ladder-climbing under weak kings who were more concerned about the state of Argos' shipping brought about the final dissolution of Zingara as a bastion of civilisation and good breeding. Today, Zingara is a faltering anarchy. There is a movement in Zingara to move away from the old feudal system, which clearly has failed, to a republic. Most Zingaran temptresses support the movement to turn Zingara into a republic. Zingaran manipulators and infiltrators can be found on almost every level of politics in their attempts to make this governmental concept a reality.

In the past, most court officials did not hold hereditary positions, so in many ways Zingara was never as traditionally feudal as Aquilonia or Nemedra. Court positions were instead paid positions. Zingara was atypical in its feudal system in other ways as well. Land grants were not always linked to vassalage or Allegiance. Sometimes land was granted simply as a reward or, when granted to the temples or clergy, to earn a place with Mitra in the heavens. Also, vassalage and Allegiance did not automatically come with land rights, as in Aquilonia or Nemedra. Land that was given could also be retaken by the giving lord or his heirs. Immunities to royal justice were also never handed out as noble privileges and even so-called 'free' cities occasionally felt the heavy hand of royal intervention.

## ZINGARAN TOWN GOVERNMENT

Zingaran towns are governed primarily through an open council, an assembly of all the male householders. These councils generally meet once per week after the religious services of the week. A magistrate is appointed



by the king to be his representative at these councils. This arrangement works well for villages and small towns but city-sized urban areas find this to be unworkable – there are few buildings able to hold all the male household owners of a city and still allow them to be heard.

Larger cities divide their areas up into townships headed by Mitraic temples. Each township in a city elects a juryman to represent his township and their needs. The jurymen of each township then meet and make decisions along with the king's magistrate. The jurymen are also charged with maintaining order in their township, so they operate as constables and soldiers. In addition to the jurymen, 24 noblemen are appointed to sit on the council. These are given the title of regulator.

The magistrates of the city are assisted by officers to enforce the laws. These magistrates have the power to raise small armed forces to police and defend a city. One of the officers who answers to the magistrates is the Mayor of Justice, who hears criminal cases on a daily basis at the prison. Civil cases are heard by the Mayor of the Ordinaries. A chief constable usually oversees the township juryman constables. Public scribes ensure the orderly conduct of life by recording all transactions, such as legal proceedings, council proceedings and actions and similar duties. Many Zingaran cities have a town standard-bearer, whose duty is to lead a city's army into battle. Other officials

include council messengers and a council proctor – who would speak for the council at the court of the king. The Constable of Payments is a Zingaran official delegated to ensure the collection of payments ordered by the courts and the mayors. The prison is run by a council-appointed man given the title of Fiel. A mayordomo supervises any land owned jointly by the council and is responsible for all public accounts. The mayordomo is served by a public accountant and a fund collector.

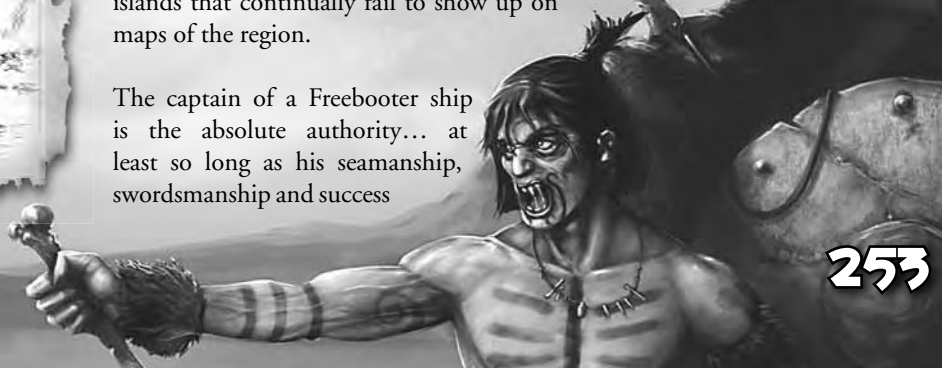
The council also appoints two Mayordomos of the Streets, who are responsible for ensuring that the streets are kept clean. They appoint examiners to check the weights and measures used by merchants, as well as the overall quality of most of the merchandise sold in the city. Two clerks are appointed to oversee public works and agriculture. Another official is designated to measure lands and watch over the boundaries of the plantations and manors.

## ZINGARAN FREEBOOTERS

The Freebooters were once loyal Zingaran subjects that were given legal charters as privateers to prey upon Argossean shipping and stop the Barachans. Fierce Zingaran independence soon reared its savage head and the Freebooters went renegade, preying even on their own country's ships. This backstab did not endear them to the Zingarans.

The Freebooters are not welcome in Zingaran ports. Like as not, the renegade pirates will find themselves hanged if they show themselves. Likewise they are not welcome at Tortage in the Barachans. Their bases are outside of Zingara, although no one knows exactly where. Perhaps there are tiny nations between Zingara and the Pictish Wilderness or between Argos and Zingara. Perhaps the Freebooters have a city here where they can safely fence their goods. Any number of islands could lie off the shores of Zingara, Argos, Shem or the Pictish wilderness that are either not large enough to be depicted on the standard maps or have simply been forgotten. Conan himself seems to practically trip over small islands that continually fail to show up on maps of the region.

The captain of a Freebooter ship is the absolute authority... at least so long as his seamanship, swordsmanship and success





in plunder acquisition holds up. To obtain the rank of captain, a qualified Freebooter must kill the former captain in a fair fight. Anything less is considered a mutiny, the last choice for an oppressed crew.

There is a time honoured tradition of baiting strangers among the Freebooters, where strangers are tested with violence. This establishes a stranger's status among a Freebooter crew. The testing is both brutal and bloody. The pirates press around the stranger menacingly. One man pushes the brawl. It begins with taunts and insults, then the fight starts. It is a one-on-one fight and how the stranger comports himself establishes his 'rank' among the crewmembers. The stranger does not need to win but he must not prove himself a coward or a weakling.

The Freebooters dress in a typically pirate fashion. They wear sashes, bare chests, silken pantaloons, great loops of gold in their ears, sabres, cutlasses and so on. These pirates often sail in carracks; large, sea-worthy ships.

The Freebooters are rapacious and cruel and are feared as much as the Barachans, especially by the Argosseans. They maraud ships and raid coastal towns. Fortunately for coastal nations and sea-faring trade, the Freebooters are not numerous, which makes the handful still out there all the more famous and well-known.

## MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF ZINGARA

Zingara is a fertile land. Two great rivers, the Thunder and the Black, flow through it, although the mouth of the Thunder River is claimed by Argos. Zingara borders the ocean and has at least one major port, Kordava. Mountains and great forests separate Zingara from the Pictish Wilderness. These mountains are rich in tin. The Alimane River provides a border with Poitain. The border with Argos is a ghoulish forest. The Zingg valley is the dominant interior feature and lies between the Black and Thunder Rivers. The interior of the kingdom is notably fertile, perfect for growing sugar cane and vineyards.

**Alimane River** – The Alimane River marks the border between Aquilonia and Zingara.

It is too shallow in places to allow much, if any, navigable river trade. In *The Hour of the Dragon* Conan walks his horse across the river.

A caravan trail follows the banks of the Alimane. The road crosses the road to the Khorotas at the village of Pedassa.

✿ **The Place of Skulls** – This is the north-eastern corner of Zingara where many raids and battles with Poitain have taken place. It is a grim region of blood and death. Most assuredly it is haunted. King Conan, angered by continued Zingaran invasions and by the Zingaran assassination of King Milo of Argos, utterly destroyed a host of Zingarans led by Duke Pantho de Guarralid here.

**Baracha Strait** – The Baracha Strait is the stretch of water between Zingara and the Barachan Isles. It is considered a dangerous place to be.

**Black River** – The Black River has a swift current, yet is quite deep and rather wide, carrying a large volume of water. The river's source is somewhere in the mountains of northern Pictland. It flows southward along the border of the Bossonian Marches, then along the frontier border of Westermarck. Eventually it curves to the west as it flows into Zingara on its course to the open sea. The Zingaran capital of Kordava sits at its mouth.

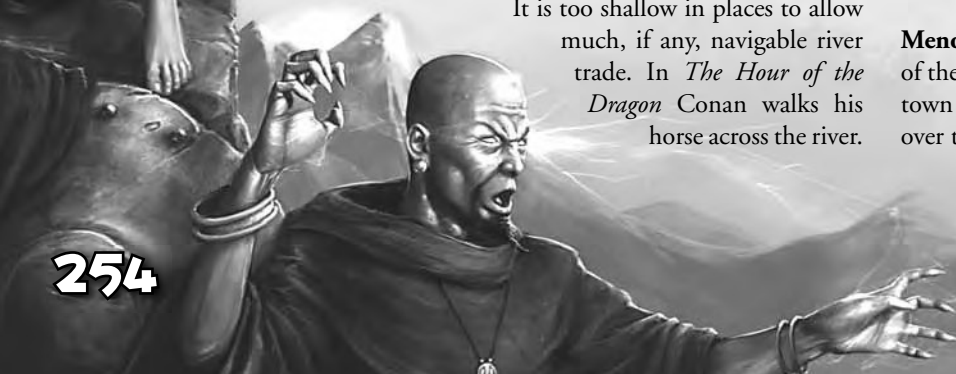
**Ebrough River** – The Ebrough River is an important waterway in Zingara. It flows near the Kosso River.

**Forest of Ghouls** – This dark forest in southern Zingara is on the border of Argos in the foothills of the Rabirian Mountains. These woods are uninhabited because of the ghouls, eaters of human flesh, the children of unholy matings with demons of the underworld by a lost and forgotten race. Somewhere in these primitive woods is an ancient, accursed city where the ghouls live. Panthers also stalk the woods.

**Island of the Twelve-Eyed God** – This island lays six weeks west and southwest of the Zingaran coast. Disloyal, sorcerous Mitraic priests brought treasure plundered in Kordava to this island and fashioned from the gold an ancient monster-god idol that looks insectoid. This idol is based on a real monster that is said to dwell on the island. The temple of the twelve-eyed god is in a castle built atop an immense crag jutting out of the centre of the isle.

**Kosso River** – The Kosso River is an important waterway in Zingara. It flows near the Ebrough River.

**Menorka** – This is a large island a day's sail from the Island of the Twelve-Eyed God. It has a small population in a port town named Mahyon. The rest of the population is spread over the island in small farms and villages.



**Rabirian Mountains** – This mountain range in northern Argos forms a border between Argos and Zingara. It is also the location of the Cave of Zimgas, where a being known as a ‘watcher’ lives. These serrated peaks have forested crests and are broken by the Saxula pass, ‘a deep cleft in the central ridge, as if made by a blow from an axe in the hands of an angry god’. The pass is near the Alimane river. The foothills of the Rabirian mountains are rocky and are home to several villages. These mountains are full of precious ores and are extensively mined.

**Sagro River** – The Sagro River drains into the ocean and is a fairly major waterway in Zingara. The city of Jerida is built on its eastern bank near the mouth of the river.

**Thunder River** – This is another important river for Argos and is a point of contention with the Zingarans, who covet it so they can have a port at its mouth. It was named Thunder River for the long stretches of white-water rapids in northern Zingara and southern Bossonia. The Argosian port city of Napolitos sits at its mouth.

**Torture Rock** – Officially called Coastal Prison #4, Torture Rock is a cyclopean crag located six days’ sail from the Zingaran shore. A massive Zingaran prison of stone and iron is built on this rocky pinnacle thrust up from the ocean. It is manned by Shemite mercenaries under the watchful eye of a Zingaran official. Hammerhead sharks lurk in the ocean around it.

**Trallibes** – The Trallibes are islands off of Zingara, perhaps off the coast of the Pictish Wilderness. They may be the secret stomping grounds of the Freebooters, who are hanged if they return to Kordava or any Zingaran port. These islands may also be surrounded by reefs and shoals.

**Zingg Valley** – A fertile valley between the Black and Thunder Rivers, with mountains on either side, this is the birthplace of Zingara, the original settling area of the indigenous people regarded as similar to the Shemites.

## IMPORTANT ZINGARAN CITIES

Zingara is about the size of Spain. It has 44 cities, nearly 200 towns and over forty thousand villages. About 19 of these cities, 90 towns and 10,000 villages have been razed in the civil war, mostly in the north.

Many spots in towns, cities and villages are frequently (or even exclusively) set aside for exclusive use by women. There are areas of cities, usually

where women’s work is predominantly performed, that are considered off-limits to men. Most cities have public baths, with set hours for men and other hours for women. Prostitutes tend to hover around the baths during the hours men are intended to use them.

**Cascaan** – Several days north of Argos, Cascaan is a fishing village built on the side of a mountainous hill overlooking the Thunder River. Its defining attribute is that it is broken up into layers with ramps and ladders leading up the vertical face of the hill. The streets are ledges along this hill. A small dock allows for boats to be moored for fishing on the Thunder River.

**Guarralid** – Guarralid is the capital of a duchy of the same name in Zingara. It is the centre of winemaking in Zingara. The town is also famous for its hot baths. Zingaran nobles make journeys to Guarralid for medicinal reasons, often wintering here.

**Icaria** – Icaria is a mountain village nestled in the Rabirian Mountains among hundreds of miles of pine forests, cliff faces, valleys and gorges. The narrow streets are filled with flowers overflowing from white-washed balconies. A colony of Brythunian expatriates lives here. Icaria is the commercial centre of a fairly large network of manors and villages located in this area of the Rabirians.

**Jerida** – Jerida is a coastal city in Zingara surrounded by rich, irrigated farmlands. It is the capital city of Jerida, a large barony of Zingara. It originated with a powerful fort that was later expanded into a full-fledged castle on a great hill. Sieges are common against this city because the city commonly sides with anyone warring against the king of Zingara. A large Mitraeum was built here (in a second castle) about two and half centuries ago but it was converted into soldier barracks about seventy years later. Smaller Mitraea now serve the people for their religious needs in Jerida. Jerida is known for its horse celebration each spring. Zingara’s equestrian skills are shown off, with elaborate parades demonstrating the riding skills of the knights, all decked out in their richest finery. The entire city becomes a huge riding ring, with events throughout, such as jumping contests, horse races and pageant shows. The secondary castle becomes a massive horse market for the duration of this seven-day festival. A secret cult of Dagon runs much of the city behind the scenes. Those who belong to this cult make extreme efforts to







hide their Allegiance. The council knows of this cult and fears it, not knowing who among them could be cultists. The average person in Jerida knows nothing of this cult. The cultists masquerades as followers of Mitra. Only when the select few rise beyond the fourth inner mystery do they become truly indoctrinated into the cult and its sorcerous teachings. *Argos and Zingara* includes a map of Jerida.

**Karnemet** – Karnemet is an untamed port town on the Zingaran sea-coast. Guilds are a powerful force in Karnemet.

**Kordava** – Kordava is the walled capital of Zingara. Almost 50,000 residents call this great harbour home. The nominal king of Zingara lives here in his palace. Before the ravishing civil wars described in *The Hour of the Dragon*, Kordava had one of the finest harbours on the Western Ocean. An unsurpassed school of swordsmanship is located here, run by the great Master Valerio. This school turns out some of the most renowned swordsmen of Zingara's courts. A typical night watch detachment consists of six guardsmen. Entering the city from the road to Messantia, travellers come to the central market located on the south side of the city. This market is filled with jostling humanity pouring in from beleaguered, outlying towns and villages, bringing produce from the limited, remaining fields, fish from the sea and goods produced by the various guilds of the towns. The eastern side of the city, behind great magistrate halls and administrative buildings, is home to the prison and the Dancing Yard, where public executions take place. By royal concession, mountebanks peddle souvenirs from the more famous condemned men as the crowds gather to watch the villains hang.

Although many cities have their thieves' districts, Kordava's is unique. Centuries ago an earthquake crumbled much of Kordava, sinking it into the sea. The city was rebuilt over the ruins. Displaced homeless poor found that they could find shelter by digging out the old streets beneath the new foundation. Called the Pit, this district is a subterranean warren where any lurid vice or sordid entertainment can be enjoyed. The city barracks lie on the north-west side next to the royal palace. A beautiful castle is located to the east of the barracks and is noted for its floor of polished crystal. Princess Chabela de Ramiro, the daughter of old King Ferdrugo still lives here. Kordava itself is ruled by a duke in his own castle. That a king also resided here shows the complex feudal system that existed in Zingara.

Thus far, Kordava has avoided most of the damage the civil wars have wrought in the north. Kordava is described in much more detail in *Argos and Zingara*. A map is included as well.

**Kova** – Kova is the capital of the principality of Kova. The city has been largely devastated by famine and war. It is the size of a large city but has a population more suited to a small city, mostly of women, children and the elderly and infirm. Food costs seven times as much as listed in *Conan the Roleplaying Game* because of the vast depopulation and famine conditions (milk and beef cost eleven times as much). Most of the inhabitants suffer from malnutrition and other ailments.

**Oto** – Oto is a city that concentrates on barley and sheep. A warren of narrow streets twists and turns within the city walls in a haphazard manner, with courtyards, palaces and temples appearing without reason or warning. Doors tend to be 15 feet high and have elegant iron knockers and hinges.

**Salduva** – Known as the White City, Salduva is the capital of the province of Salduva. The city of Salduva was founded two thousand years ago between the banks of the Ebrough and Kosso Rivers in the Salduva district of Zingara. Great walls, an advanced sewage system, a great theatre and cobbled streets are emblematic of this Zingaran city. The city lies on a trading crossroads between the Zingaran cities Mavrit, Oto, Bulentia and Basur. The ruined town of Velkite lies not too far away, destroyed by the civil wars. Salduva is connected with the rise of Mitraism in Zingara, for it is here that Epemitreus appeared to the Zingarans. He appeared to Saint Seo while standing on a large pillar. A Mitraeum is built around that pillar and each year, 20 days after the autumnal equinox, a festival is held in Salduva to honour this miraculous event. This city is held to be the 'granary' of Zingara because its primary export is cereal crops. This city, however, is currently being hit hard by the civil wars and famine. Poor weather in recent years is increasing the famine and the problems caused by famine. At its height, Salduva had nearly 15,000 inhabitants. It now has fewer than half this number. Many buildings, manors and fields lie abandoned. Salduva at the default time for *Conan the Roleplaying Game* has the physical size of a large city, the population of small city and the income of a large town.

The most important cultural feature of Salduva is its regional cooking. Its cooks are renowned throughout Zingara for their skill. Instead of receiving Profession (sailor) as a background skill, Salduvans receive Craft (cooking). The area around Salduva is also the only



place in the world known to grow borage and cardoom. These two vegetables require laborious cleaning but have their own special and distinctive tastes that make the result worth the extra effort. Stews based on fowl, pork or lamb, made with tomatoes, peppers, onion, garlic oil and a touch of hot spices are especially beloved in this area. Snails in hot sauce is another popular Salduvan dish.

❁ **The Great Mitraeum of Saint Seo:** This is the largest and most monumental Mitraeum in Salduva, built around the pillar Epemitreus stood upon when he appeared to the great Zingaran saint, who converted to Mitraism immediately. It has eleven domes and exquisite frescoes on all its vaults.

**Shar** – Shar is a wealthy sea-port city of Zingara that is only now beginning to feel the effects of the northern civil wars. It has been a free city for a long time, so the loss of the king has had a minimal effect on its population. The city was founded upon the ruins of an older civilisation the name of which has not survived. Curious ghosts in bizarre garb are occasionally seen; many folktales centre around these mysterious figures from the distant past.

**Yorkin** – Yorkin is a Zingaran hamlet located in a deep forest plagued occasionally by ‘the Bear God.’ On the night of the autumnal equinox, a ritual battle between the founder of Yorkin and the Bear God is the focus of a three-day festival.

## ZINGARAN HISTORY

Zingara evolved out of a group of primitives in the valley of Zingg. These early Zingarans were similar to the Shemite in appearance and lived south of the Picts. Several thousand years later, a southern tribe of Picts attacked them, invading their peaceful agricultural society. The Picts settled there. They intermarried and adopted much of the Zingg culture, mixing and matching ideas and bloodlines as time went on, creating an exotic culture.

Then, as happened to many of these burgeoning cultures, the Hyborians arrived, burning, looting and slaying everything in their paths, conquerors of unequalled passion. The Hybori tribe that discovered the valley of Zingg conquered and, in turn, mixed in their heritage with the cauldron brew of culture already there. For five hundred more years this triple concoction boiled and bubbled, even as Acheron fell in flames beneath the scintillating torches and singing swords of the Hyborians and the Hyrkianians finally rode out of the east to establish Turan. Zingara had risen from its fertile valley.

Neighbouring Argos was founded on the heels of Acheron's demise, a vulture that dove for the sea trade established by that now-dead kingdom. Commerce sprung up between Zingara and Argos, as well as between Zingara and Poitain. Blood and kinship developed between this trio of nations. From the people of Argos, Zingarans learned about the wealth to be gained from the sea trade and so Zingara built ships and sailed the mighty blue oceans, seeking wealth and treasure abroad.


At some point in history, Zingara decided to sink Argos' merchant fleet, chartering patriotic privateers with letters of marque to plunder their enemy's shipping and, perhaps, to drive piratical Argosseans out of the Barachan Isles. Known as the Zingaran Freebooters, they preyed upon the Argosian coastal towns and shipping with a rapacity not even the Zingaran nobility could have anticipated. The ancient feud between Argos and Zingara took an extremely bloody turn with the chartering of pirates. The Argosseans had their own band of pirates, the Barachans, whose favoured targets were Zingarans, especially Zingaran Freebooters. Although the Barachan pirates refrained from attacking Argosian ships in return for safe harbour in Messantia and other Argosian ports, the Freebooters turned renegade and began to attack Zingaran ships and coastal towns just as often as they did Argosian ships and towns.

The independent nature of the Zingarans, which would later show itself in countless rebellions against Aquilonia, likely explains why the Freebooters broke free of their noble charters. Ships are like countries or kingdoms unto themselves and the proud Zingarans treated them like independent states of Zingara. Just as the chivalric dukes of Zingara engaged in petty conflicts among themselves, conflicts that raged into full out civil wars, so too did these little states wage war against their own kind.

## ADVENTURE / CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Zingara is ripe for conquering right now. Its people are beggared and its nobles are in ruin or in hiding. The characters could be defending Zingara or come as part of an invading force. Perhaps the Freebooters have found their patriotism again and have decided to defend their home, or perhaps they have decided that simply gutting what is left of Zingara would be more profitable.





# Other Hyborian Age Peoples

## KOZAKS

Although not part of Hyrkania proper, the wild steppes north and west of Turan are populated by criminals and soldiers who have taken up the Hyrkanian way of life, living on horseback in a nomadic and bloody lifestyle of violence and looting. Called the Kozak (KAHS-ak) by the Turanians, they call themselves the Free-People. Kozaks are superior horsemen and exceptional warriors, ready for battle at any moment.

Anybody can join the *kozaks*, if the *kozaks* consider him a worthy warrior. Kozaks are independent and known for their free spirit. Men of all nations, each with a score to settle against mighty Turan, live among the Kozaki in the vast steppe.

The region the Kozaks dwell in was originally peopled by non-Hyrkanian pastoral folk of unclassified or mixed heritage. The Hyrkanians are cruel masters – especially the Turanians – and the dregs of their society flee into the steppe to be absorbed by these aboriginal people. The Kozaks probably number in the tens of thousands but unity is a difficult dream to realise with such independently-minded folk. As it stands, the *kozaks* are split into multiple communities, each having its own *hetman* (leader). These *hetmen* are not chosen by virtue of noble lineage or any other hereditary fact. Kozak leaders are chosen for being dynamic, vital and powerful, willing to dare raids against their hated foe, Turan.

The Kozaks prey upon the Turanians almost exclusively, targeting outposts, villages and caravans. They live primarily on the Steppe but sometimes they pitch their camps as far east as the Zaporoska River. They raid caravans going to or coming from Khitai, Vendhya and Iranistan. Kozaks take Turanian captives and the Turanians take Kozaks captive. Each ransoms their captives to the other, meeting at Fort Ghorri in force for these distrustful summits.

Kozaks, like the Hyrkanians, are superb horsemen. In *Red Nails*, Conan tells Valeria, 'I was a Kozak before I was a pirate. They live in the saddle.' They can remain in the saddle for extremely long periods of time, even sleeping in the saddle. Their horsemanship is necessary for survival; their guerrilla tactics require impressive mobility. They raise horses, stealing them from caravans or buying them from the Zuagirs, the bandits who live in the deserts to the south of the steppes (see Shem, page 172).

Kozaki are often named for the rivers they operate around. Kozaki around the Zaporoska River, for example, are called Zaporoskans. The Kozaks dress as Hyrkanians, wearing their daggers and weapons girdled high on their hips.

## THE RED BROTHERHOOD

In the great land-locked Vilayet Sea exist an sea-faring equivalent of the Kozaki. Control of that sea is of great importance to Turan but the Turanians are harsh taskmasters and their escaped criminals, slaves and unemployed mercenaries gather together to pull Yezdigerd's beard by preying upon the merchants and changing the course of the mighty shipping lanes. Occasionally Turanian ship-captains, tired of escorting caravans for little recompense, turn pirate in hopes of making a better living.

The pirates of the Vilayet are known as the 'Red Brotherhood' and they ply the sea-lanes fairly freely, making use of the uncharted, unnamed islands that dot the Vilayet. Turanian ships tend to cruise the southern shores and stay away from the interior of the inland sea, while the pirates make use of the entire Vilayet. The pirates prefer to prey upon ships that cross through the interior, travelling east to west, for these ships usually have fantastic treasures from the East in their cargoes.

In addition to mere piracy, the Red Brotherhood also engage in smuggling, willing to take on cargoes that Turan has outlawed or taxes too heavily. The pirates have accumulated enough wealth that several pirate-

captains have built strongholds on the shores of the Vilayet or its islands. The Hyrkanian coast of the Vilayet is known as the Bloody Coast. More about the Red Brotherhood can be found in *Pirate Isles*.

## THE BARACHAN ISLANDS

Thirteen volcanic islands off the coast of Zingara comprise Baracha. Although nearer to Zingara, the Barachan Isles are settled by renegade Argossean buccaneers. The buccaneers are not fond of Zingaran privateers. More about the Barachan pirates can be found in *Pirate Isles*.

## TORTAGE

Tortage is a roaring port-of-call filled with pirates, loot and blood-shed. It is a safe haven for most pirates. Tortage was founded over two hundred years ago. The town receives fresh water not only from rainfall but also from a lake high in the mountainous island called High Lake.

Tortage is a harbour among rocky cliffs. Its main military units are the pirate ships floating in its bay. Reefs and other dangers lurk just below the surface; navigators who do not know the way are likely to get snagged and never make it into the harbour. The rocky cliffs prevent ships from mooring anywhere around the main island and attacking overland. Also, there is an old fort in the town, the original pirate settlement built over two hundred years ago. The permanent residents have formed their own militia, who garrison the fort. Pirates may hole up there if necessary. Also, the town itself is not without some protection. The roofs of the houses are mostly slate, preventing ships from firing flaming arrows into town and burning it down. Most buildings in Tortage also have shutters and iron-grills over the windows. One warship, manned by militia, patrols the water.

Tortage is the main port of call for the Barachan pirates and its culture is much like that found on Barachan pirate ships. Newcomers to Tortage are allowed to wander as they will but they are not allowed a voice in city affairs until they have served a term in the militia or have owned and operated a business in Tortage for at least a year. Disputes in the city are handled through duels. Most duels are over with first blood. Business owners and ship captains may also arbitrarily judge disputes that occur in their presence if they choose to do so. Tavern owners often do this to avoid damage to their property or employees. Anyone who challenges the judgement of a business owner or ship captain will likely be attacked by any and all around him.

Drunks sleep openly in the streets during good weather. Few Barachans will rob a fellow pirate while in Tortage. Those caught doing so are usually dealt with harshly. Of course, this is merely a guideline, not a hard and fast rule covered in the town's charter, which all Barachans tend to follow in order to be welcome here. The seven slums of Tortage do not even attempt to follow this guideline, so most pirates avoid the slums. Tortage is covered in more detail in *Argos and Zingara*.

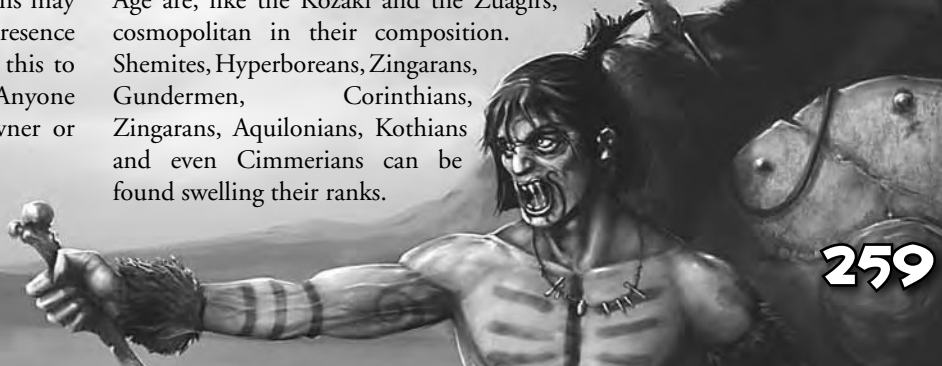
## THE FREE COMPANIES

The mercenaries brought up the rear, a thousand horsemen, two thousand spearmen. The tall horses of the cavalry seemed hard and savage as their riders; they made no curvets or gambades. There was a grimly businesslike aspect to these professional killers, veterans of bloody campaigns. Clad from head to foot in chain mail, they wore their visorless headpieces over linked coils. Their shields were unadorned, their long lances without guidons. At their saddlebows hung battle axes or steel maces, and each man wore at his hip a long broadsword. The spearmen were armed in much the same manner, though they bore pikes instead of cavalry lances.

They were many men of many races and many crimes. There were tall Hyperboreans, gaunt, big-boned, of slow speech and violent natures; tawny-haired Gundermen from the hills of the northwest; swaggering Corinthian renegades; swarthy Zingarans, with bristling black moustaches and fiery tempers; Aquilonians from the distant west. But all, except the Zingarans, were Hyborians.

— *Black Colossus*

Ferocious, cruel, lustful and without mercy, the mercenaries of the Hyborian Age are, like the Kozaki and the Zuagirs, cosmopolitan in their composition. Shemites, Hyperboreans, Zingarans, Gundermen, Corinthians, Zingarans, Aquilonians, Kothians and even Cimmerians can be found swelling their ranks.







Not everyone is cut out for a life of peace and tranquillity, farming their land or picking their orchards while their children play underfoot. The thunderous spirit of storms fires the blood of some and their restless natures know no path other than violence and bloodshed. These men are the Free Companions, a common name for those who otherwise are known as mercenaries. They know no liege other than the one who pays them and no liege owes them service other than payment.

The mercenaries lie outside the feudal governments that pervade the Hyborian kingdoms. Theirs is a dangerous life. If the mercenaries lose and their lord is defeated they do not get paid. Money and loot go to the successful and the victorious. If their lord negotiates peace with the enemy while the mercenaries are battling in hostile territory, the lord does not have to negotiate for the mercenaries' free passage out of enemy territory – and they do not necessarily get paid in this event either. The lord has no feudal duty to pay ransoms for captured mercenaries. No feudal duty stops the mercenaries from looting and pillaging their former lord's lands, either.

Despite the dangers for both sides, mercenaries fill definite needs in Hyborian Age warfare. Few lords can afford to maintain standing armies of gigantic size, especially during periods of peace. It is far easier to hire a temporary army and dismiss its soldiers when the need is gone than to pay ongoing salaries for armies that may or may not be needed. Also, most Hyborians do not consider infantry to be an honourable form of service. Mercenaries rarely care about such things and can serve as infantry without faltering, follow orders and maintain discipline, things which most levied infantry cannot do with their minimal training. On the other side of the coin, most mercenaries are too free spirited to serve in a regular army and too hot-blooded to maintain peace-time posts. For them, the thrill of life is in fighting, wenching and looting. Working as mercenaries virtually guarantees them their bloodthirsty thrills until they die.

Mercenaries can be found from one side of the world to the next, from the Pictish Wilderness to Khitai, from the cold mountains of Nordheim and Hyperborea to the hot jungles of the Black Kingdoms. Anyone willing to fight for gold is welcome in their ranks, be he man, woman or child.

During times of peace, when no wars are in the offing, the Free Companions are problematic. They take to looting, raiding and terrorism to keep themselves occupied. Few mercenaries, however, grow wealthy and retire. Their loot is quickly spent and they hunger for adventure and excitement – which ultimately reward them with death. More about mercenary life can be found in *The Free Companies*.

## THE EASTERN OCEAN

The eastern ocean lies to the east of the main continent.

**Lemuria** – Far to the southeast of Khitai are the mist-shrouded island remnants of Lemuria. Lemurians may have been the original Kosalans and Khitans, the original builders of the green stone cities and definitely the progenitors of the Hyrkanians.

**Shima Straits** – The Shima Straits are an island kingdom that lies between Khitai and Yamatai.

**Yamatai** – Yamatai is a volcanic island kingdom not far from Khitai.

## THE SOUTHERN OCEAN

Located on the eastern side the Black Kingdoms and south of the bulk of the mainland (including Vendhya and Khitai), the Southern Ocean is filled with islands and mystery.

**Rahaman Islands** – The Rahaman Islands are a chain of islands south of the Islands of Pearl. These islands are extremely far out to sea.

✿ **Arawu** – Arawu is the central island of the Rahaman chain. It is called the 'Shore of Bones' because the Ganaki and the Kezati do battle here. Arawu is crescent-shaped. The southern end has a massive pile of skulls and there is no wildlife on the island.

✿ **Ganaku** – Ganaku is a large tropical island to the east of Arawu. It was once known as Rahama and peopled by giants known as Rahaman. The Ganaki people live here, a mixture of Rahaman and Vendhyan blood. The Vendhyans killed the Rahaman for the secret of immortality but the fountain of immortality created the evil creatures of the Deadlands and dried up. The Ganaki are a tall people; the shortest one is taller than Conan the Cimmerian. They worship Muhingo, an ancestor spirit. Ganaku is located east of Arawu. One area of the island, the Deadlands, is populated by giant spiders and venomous snakes. Only the most vile creatures live in the Deadlands.



☼ **Rahamji** – Rahamji is a ruin built by the giant Rahaman around a fountain of immortality in the middle of the Deadlands of Ganaku. The looted treasure of Maharastra can be found here, as well as the Opaline Throne of Orissa. A horrible carving of a Vendhyan deity has the power to devour souls. The ruin is a walled tower.

☼ **Zati** – Zati is the ‘Stone Island’ of the Rahaman Islands, a sheer pillar of rock. It lies to the west of Arawu. The Kezati, a tribe of man-sized vulture, live in caves and nothing else lives here.

**The Islands of Pearl** – The Islands of Pearl are to the south of Iranistan and are the home of several tribes, such as the Gwardiri, Bajris and Udwinga.

**Misty Islands** – The Misty Islands are small islands off the west coast of Vendhya. Secret herbs are grown here. The Misty Islands should not be confused with the Isle of Mist in the Western Ocean.

## THE WESTERN OCEAN

The Western Ocean is a vast place filled with several islands and locations. Some of the islands located in the Western Ocean are the mountain-tops of sunken Atlantis.

**Blood Isles** – The Blood Isles are a string of islands off the coast of Kush. The southernmost island is the closest to the mainland. Anyone sailing between the Blood Isles and the mainland runs the risk of piracy for the islanders know little else. The islands may be analogous to the tops of the Togo Mountains.

**Death Island** – Death Island is a volcanic island due south of the Isle of the Black Ones. The island is surrounded by deadly coral reefs and the volcano is active.

**Haunted Sea, The** – Far to the west of Kush’s shore is the Haunted Sea. The Isle of Mist lies within.

**Isle of Mist** – The Isle of Mist is a shrouded island in the midst of the Haunted Sea. Tezcatlipoca, a shaman from even further west, is the Lord of the Mists and ruler here. Ahmaan the Merciless, a Black Corsair of a hundred years ago, met his fate here. The Isle of Mist is peopled by a dwarfish race that is dying because their women are gone. According to one legend, after Conan secures the enchanted axe of Ahmaan, he slays the shaman and the island sinks beneath the waves.

**Isle of the Black Ones** – The Isle of the Black Ones is located several weeks to the west of Zingara. It holds crypts filled with hieroglyph-carven gold guarded by strange monsters. The Isle of the Black Ones is detailed in *Ruins of Hyboria*.

**Mu** – Mu sank beneath the waves of the Cataclysm, leaving only the tops of the Mountains of Valla above the water. Na-hor, the City of the Crescent Moon, may be found here. Na-hor falls to ruins toward the end of the Hyborian age, so in the default timeline of *Conan the Roleplaying Game* Na-hor may still be somewhat active, although fairly degenerate. The people here worship Xultha. The ruins of Karath, the Shining City and the original capital, can be found under the waves of the ocean. The remnants of Lemuria are to the northwest.

**Nameless Isle** – The Nameless Isle lies far off the Black Coast where a temple to Tsathoggua, the toad-god, squats.

## THE FAR SOUTH


### THE LAND OF NO RETURN

The lands south of the Southern Black Kingdoms, between Atlaia and the Southern Islands, are completely unknown. The land beneath the jungles and veldts of the southern Black Kingdoms eventually become savannah and desert again, just like the land north of the southern black kingdoms.

**Fires of the South** – The fires of the south originate from a volcanic mountain range mentioned by Bêlit in *Queen of the Black Coast*.

**Yanyoga** – Yanyoga is the cave-city built at the extreme end of the continent in a range of mountains. Yanyoga is built on a chalk-white mountain. The lower reaches of that mountain have been carved into a death’s head. This death’s head is unimaginatively called the Great Stone Skull. From the ground, the skull appears more as an ornate palatial façade, complete with rows of slender pilasters and statues of nymphs, satyrs and many-headed gods. The city is said to have been founded by Vendhyan castaways, although the truth is far more sinister – the last remnants of the Valusian serpent-people supposedly reside here with yellow-skinned slaves. They are ruled by Queen Lilit.





## Campaign and Adventure Starters

How do you get a party together and get them to *want* to cooperate and adventure together? A thorny issue for some games. The introduction is the key and that key introduction is one of the most fantastic elements of the *Conan* game. The Games Master has complete control of the introduction; the story does not have to pick up right where the last one ended. With the assumption that time has passed, weeks, months or even years, the gear and treasure (and girls) picked up by the characters by the end of the last game is spent, lost or abandoned. The characters have whatever the Games Master wants them to have for the game, putting them at advantage or disadvantage as desired. Likewise, the characters are wherever the Games Master desires, in whatever situation needed to provide the motivation required to proceed with the adventure. Characters from disparate cultures often must form a rogue's alliance when placed initially in a mutually hostile situation.

Here are some beginning scenarios taken from the writings of Robert E. Howard for inspiration.

- ❖ The typical tavern beginning. Characters overhear the goal of the adventure (*The Tower of the Elephant*).
- ❖ Characters chased by authorities or other hostile party into the setting of the adventure (*The Hall of the Dead* (fragment); *Queen of the Black Coast*; *The Pool of the Black One*; *The Black Stranger*; *The Valley of the Lost*; *The Man on the Ground*). This is possibly one of REH's favourite beginnings.
- ❖ Characters are already at the site of the adventure (*The God in the Bowl*).
- ❖ Characters are in jail and must either escape or make a bargain to get out, taking them to the site of the adventure (*Rogues in the House*).
  - ❖ Last survivor of a battle finds source of the adventure on the battlefield or near it (*The Scarlet Citadel*).
- ❖ Last survivor of a battle finds the source of the adventure while wandering lost in some forsaken wilderness or swimming in a body of water (*The Frost Giant's Daughter*; *Xuthal of the Dusk*; *The Pool of the Black One*).
- ❖ The characters chase after a girl into the wilderness, finding the adventure (*The Vale of Lost Women*; *Red Nails*).
- ❖ Character is walking through a foreign city and encounters the adventure (*The Snout in the Dark*; *Drums of Tombalku*; *Black Colossus*).
- ❖ The characters are in a position of power (*A Witch Shall Be Born*; *The People of the Black Circle*; *Phoenix on the Sword*; *The Scarlet Citadel*; *The Hour of the Dragon*; *Drums of Tombalku*).
- ❖ Someone important to the characters is being held hostage and the characters are there to arrange the release (*The People of the Black Circle*).
- ❖ The party is clinging precariously from a cliff (*Jewels of Gwahlur*).
- ❖ A nightmare or dream plagues or aids the party (*Phoenix on the Sword*; *The Hour of the Dragon*).
- ❖ The party rides home after a victory and an emissary from an enemy people arrives for the party (*The Shadow Kingdom*).
- ❖ The characters are in an ancient temple while a foe from an elder age enters the temple to kill them (*The Altar and the Scorpion*).
- ❖ The characters hear of a lost treasure and decide to ride for it (*The Skull of Silence*; *Jewels of Gwahlur*).
- ❖ The characters are bored, lounging in the lap of luxury, when a slave girl whispers to them of a fabulous place they can visit (*The Mirrors of Tuzan Thune*).
- ❖ The characters are resting peacefully when an ally bursts in demanding justice, for a friend of his has been kidnapped (*The Black City*).
- ❖ The characters receive a message from a friend telling them of his impending doom, a tale of murder and supernatural revenge (*The Dead Remember*).



- ❖ There are warning of uprisings by the slaves throughout the territory the characters are riding through (*Black Canaan*).
- ❖ The character is walking somewhere, perhaps led there by a note, through a wilderness or in a city, when a scream pierces the still night or a haunting moan raises the character's hackles (*Black Hound of Death; Moon of Zembewe*).
- ❖ The characters see a native of the region taking the long route around a landmark, leading to questions about the landmark in general (*The Horror from the Mound*).
- ❖ The characters have escaped from slavery to encounter a strange man who knows their names, yet he is not a hunter of runaway slaves on their trail (*The Twilight of the Grey Gods*).
- ❖ A girl is watching one of the characters, in secret love, and one who loves her carries her away against her will (*Spear and Fang*).
- ❖ The characters have set sail and, several days from port, a stowaway has boldly come forth into the cabin, telling them that those they sail to aid plot against them and that a traitor is on board. The strange man leaves the cabin and all the men on the deck swear no one has entered or left the cabin save the characters (*Delenda Est*).
- ❖ The characters meet a girl who speaks with an ancient dialect and dresses quaintly, calling the characters by names not their own, which she swears are their true names from long, long ago (*Marchers of Valhalla*).
- ❖ A dead girl washes up on the shore, the daughter of a local woman. When the characters arrive, the woman curses two of the characters to be the death of each other (*Sea Curse*).
- ❖ A corpse of a friend or lover washes up on the shore – and comes back to life (*Out of the Deep*).
- ❖ The characters are hunting a bandit through the mountains (*The Lost Race*).
- ❖ The characters stand witness to a brutal ceremony of human sacrifice performed so the people they are aiding prophetically know something of upcoming events (*Kings of the Night*).
- ❖ Captive or serving as diplomats, the characters watch as members of their own race are cruelly crucified or tortured (*Worms of the Earth*).
- ❖ The characters were in a heavy sea battle and have been captured, but a storm has driven the ship into an uncharted island (*The Gods of Bal-Sagoth*).
- ❖ At a fork in the road, they encounter someone telling them to take a different road than originally intended (*Skulls in the Stars*).

## ADVENTURE IDEAS INSPIRED BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

The Heart and Soul of the *Conan* game is Robert Ervin Howard, the creator of Conan the Cimmerian, the fantastic and primal barbarian whose adventures inspire those of us reading this text and playing this game. How can we, who are not REH, create adventures that are, to us, at least similar in tone to the prose we all love? One way to do this is to look at some of the themes that are present in Bob Howard's yarns and recreate those themes in our own way, putting ourselves into these stories as Howard threw himself into them.

## POPULAR THEMES IN HOWARD

Some basic themes that appear in Howard's stories include the lost race theme, the little people theme, the barbarism vs. civilisation theme, the weird menace theme and the tragic heroism theme. Of course there are other themes present, such as 'man and animal are one' and the ever-present themes of hatred, murder, revenge and obsession, but the previous ones should be enough to start with.

## THE LOST CITY/RACE

The lost city theme is explored by Howard in many of his stories. Two wonderful examples are *The Voice of El-Lil* and *The Lost Valley of Iskander*. Conan himself encounters more than his share of lost cities in numerous Conan stories. Conquered peoples who have fled their homeland to build a stable city in their own style in foreign lands, utopias, lost tribes of the Sons of Shem and aboriginal remnants found in forgotten hills all have their place in Hyborian Age campaigns. In *The Hour of the Dragon*, REH hints that descendants of the ancient Acheronians still live in the hills of Nemedra, a perfect seed for a lost-city-themed adventure. The mountains of Corinthia and the unexplored reaches of the Black Kingdoms are perfect for adventures with this theme. Some non-Howard stories with this theme that can be used for inspiration include several of Edgar Rice Burroughs' stories, such as *Tarzan and the Lost Empire* and *Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar*, and







H. Rider Haggard's *Allan Quartermain*. Lost valleys filled with dinosaurs and peoples that should be extinct thrive in these sorts of adventures. Part of the fun of this type of campaign is the chance to explore peoples and ideas that otherwise might be inappropriate to the known world. Although an enjoyable, interesting theme, it is one not explored as much today as it was earlier in the last century. Akin to the lost race theme is Howard's *little people* stories, discussed next.

## THE LITTLE PEOPLE

Robert E. Howard was enamoured of the Celts and their mythology. Influenced by the stories of Arthur Machan, he wrote several tales about the small, semi-human beings who lived in underground warrens, fostering their hatred of the surface people, which had festered since pre-historic times. Although Howard didn't use these antagonists in a Hyborian Age tale, they appeared with some frequency among his best non-Conan stories, such as *The Children of the Night*, *People of the Dark*, *The Little People* and *Worms of the Earth*.

In these stories, the Little People appear as a stocky race with broad heads that appear large for their short and scrawny bodies. Their faces are broad and square with flat noses, thin mouths and pointed ears. Their skin is scaly, yellow and mottled like a serpent. Although some tribes wear the skins of animals, most wear the skins of serpents as loincloths. Their alien language is akin to the sound of reptiles. Although some tribes use captured bows, most use primitive weapons such as knives and cudgels. They are human, but are often referred to as vermin or reptiles by upper world folk, for these Little People live in the darkness beneath the world, driven there by the people who conquered their lands in the forests. Probably the best place to locate these folk is near the Cimmerian-Pictish border.

Their underground system of caverns, chasms and corridors are accomplishments modern engineers would be hard pressed to duplicate. They make curious designs on the walls of their lairs. They worship Cthuluid gods around mysterious black stones squatting horribly on piles of grisly skulls. They sacrifice Cimmerians and Picts to their dark gods. Dagon is a name that crops up a couple of times in the Howard stories in relation to these people, making that a likely name for their god.

Although they now shun the light, even that as mild as the moonlight, they do steal forth in the darkness to haul off women from the Picts and Cimmerians. They can mate with regular humans, creating serpentine half-breeds with mottled skin and pointed ears. Although not an original Hyborian race, the Little People are in keeping with a common Howard theme and are not inappropriate. Statistics for the Children of the Dark appear in *Ruins of Hyboria*.

## BARBARISM VS. CIVILISATION

The stories of the Little People emphasise the decadence a fallen race sinks into. Robert E. Howard often wrote about the inherent instability of civilisation. Civilisation is prone to decadence and collapse, in his view. The idea of civilisation encroaching on wilderness is another persistent theme in his work. The colony of Venarium, the whole of Westermarck and their abortive attempt to colonise beyond the Black River, the collapse of Acheron, the fall of the Tecuhitli and Xotalanca people of Xuchotl and others all display this theme. Howard wasn't calling us to go back to barbarism in some sort of nostalgic life-style choice; he was saying eventually we would be forced into it. This is another theme that can be explored again and again. Howard also believed we all have an inner barbarian in us that civilisation can't destroy. When we get angry enough, that veneer of civilisation falls away as the unnatural thing it is. No matter what civilisation does, the barbarian in us lives and the civilised man dies eventually, forgetting how to survive in adversity. This theme explores the suppression civilisation plays on everyone's 'internal barbarian.'

Zingaran expatriates may try to establish a colony on the Pictish wilderness or on an abandoned island. Although Zingarans are not by nature colonists, these could have been forced out by the civil war or by order of the king.

Stygia could decide to colonise the Black Kingdoms, as could Shem or Hyrkania.

Smaller scale civilisations could also be used. There are any number of minor kingdoms that Howard either glosses over or never mentions. Who knows what kingdoms truly lie to the east of the Vilayet? What weird menaces lurk in the shadowed temples and mountains of the world?

## WEIRD MENACE

Howard's King Kull stories were laced with hybrid monsters and cerebral, conceptual weird events. The story *The Skull of Silence* has Kull battling the absence of sound. While he rarely did more than just touch on such ideas



in the Conan stories, they are part of Howard's overall style and could certainly be used in a Conan adventure. Just as *The Phoenix on the Sword* was a rewrite of his *By This Axe I Rule!*, a Kull story, so too can Games Masters rewrite the Kull stories into *Conan* adventures. Similarly, Cthulhu-style adventures, mixing the visceral, pulse-pounding action of Howard with the immensely bleak monstrosities of Lovecraft, can fit easily into a *Conan* campaign, although such stories should be used sparingly. Having Great Cthulhu crush Nemedra underfoot is hardly Howardian. Still, the atmosphere of the weird menace campaign lends itself to the overall theme of tragic heroism that runs through virtually all of Howard's Conan, Kull, Bran Mak Morn and other stories.

### TRAGIC HEROISM

An element of sheer genius that pervades Howard's writing is the element of tragic doom that hovers over everything and man's unwillingness to submit to that inevitable end. Even though civilisation is doomed to degenerate into savagery, man continues to build his cities and his kingdoms. Even Conan fights for the side of civilisation most times, as he battled the Picts for the Aquilonians in *Beyond the Black River*. The quintessential Howard yarn has a character that fights the inevitable with tooth and nail, with every fibre of his being, refusing to give in to whatever doom lingers ahead. Howard's characters bring about their own realities, ignoring the vultures that swoop overhead, waiting for failure. Conan strangles the Aquilonian king and takes his crown despite his barbarous origins. Bran Mak Morn forges an empire of his own degenerate people, knowing full well that as soon as he dies all of his accomplishments will be swept away. King Kull, trapped by the traditions of civilisation, refuses to give in and breaks the tradition in grandiose style. From stories of boxers to those who fight the minions of the Outer Void, Howard's heroes refuse to follow the flow of time and history. They stand as bulwarks against those tides, knowing they will ultimately fail to change the flow permanently. This heroism is one element of what makes his stories so fabulous. His heroes do what so many of us wish we could do: stand up to the circumstances around us and do what we want to do.

Building up the atmosphere of ultimate doom and maintaining it is hard to do, but it makes for a rewarding campaign as readers watch the players and their characters resist that doom, fighting against it every waking moment. The stories of Bran Mak Morn are perfect for this sort of campaign. The Conan stories, such as *The Queen of the Black Coast*, have elements of this, but the Bran stories are inundated with this phantasmagorical atmosphere of man struggling to stay alive in an elemental manner.

Characters may summon horrible demons and gods to try to stop the doom that encroaches. They may find themselves in hostile lands without hope of passing through unscathed... or alive. They may be forced to defend a city that is woefully undermanned and weakly fortified. They may have to defend themselves against an elitist upper class that has all the advantages. Turan's slow subjugation of any people in the path of its imperialism is another potential scenario that could well have this atmosphere.

### BLACK MAGIC

In addition to the infusion of tragic heroism, Howard liberally sprinkled dark magic into his tales. This magic is grim and horrific, made powerful by its vileness. All of the Conan stories have this element of the supernatural, the source of many of Conan's problems. Many of his non-Conan stories also have this element. Some superb examples include *Black Canaan* and *The Haunter of the Ring*, which features Thoth-Amon's infamous ring found by modern 1930's investigators. The magic in his stories is inimical to mankind, monstrous secrets that blast the souls of mere men. While wizards and the like are certainly part of this theme, black magic artefacts found by innocents, demons summoned by the ignorant and debased cultures protected by dark spells also belong here, lest the constant inclusion of a wizard becomes too repetitive.

### OTHER ADVENTURES

Adventure ideas are a wealth beyond measure for many Games Masters and authors. One can take these ideas and morph them into multiple adventures that are similar but equally enjoyable. *The Scarlet Citadel* and *The Hour of the Dragon* are examples of this from Robert E. Howard. They weave the same basic themes, but are two extremely wonderful tales in their own rights. Listed below are some basic plots taken from various Howard tales for the reader's own imagination to take hold of and give flight to, again and again.

- ❖ The party is deposed from power by dangerous rivals and, thought dead, must regain their former station and enact revenge at the same time (*The Scarlet Citadel*, *A Witch Shall Be Born*, *The Hour of the Dragon*).





- ❖ A fabulous treasure is held in a hard-to-access location and the characters want or need to retrieve it (*The Tower of the Elephant*, *The God in the Bowl*, *Jewels of Gwahlur*, *The Black Stranger*, *Worms of the Earth*, *The Hour of the Dragon*).
- ❖ Horrible entities threaten a kingdom or person and the characters are chosen to end the threat (*Rogues in the House*, *Black Colossus*, *The People of the Black Circle*, *Beyond the Black River*, *Shadows in Zamboula*, *The Tower of the Elephant*).
- ❖ Lost and desperate, or perhaps just exploring, the characters find a lost city or treasure (*Xuthal of the Dusk*, *Red Nails*, *The Devil in Iron*, *Queen of the Black Coast*, *The Pool of the Black One*, *The Black Stranger*).
- ❖ Horrible artefacts are discovered and must be put to rest (*The Black Stone*, *The Haunter of the Ring*).
- ❖ The characters must do something horrible to win (*Worms of the Earth*).
- ❖ A beautiful woman needs to be rescued from a horrible fate. (*The Vale of Lost Women*, *The Little People*)
- ❖ There is an identity-change, allowing the character to learn something he might otherwise not know – often in the form of a past life experience (*The Children of the Night*, *People of the Dark*, *Queen of the Black Coast*).
- ❖ Horrifying gods of old still walk the earth bringing doom and madness to men (*The Frost Giant's Daughter*, *The Thing on the Roof*, *The Black Stone*, *The Fire of Asshurbanipal*, *The Hoofed Thing*).

- ❖ Drunken murder begets supernatural revenge (*The Dead Remember*).
- ❖ The characters are invited to view a talking cat (*Delcartes' Cat*).
- ❖ Slaves have found a shaman among them, who is raising the slaves up in revolt against their masters, using horrible magic to bolster their efforts (*Black Canaan*).

In addition, stories from other sources likewise make fantastic adventures. The *Conan the Barbarian* comics are a treasure-house of adventure ideas. Movies such as *Pirates of the Caribbean* and such supernatural adventure stories can also be inspirational. Many of Errol Flynn's movies, for example, have the requisite action of a *Conan* tale; all that is lacking is the supernatural element.

Robert E. Howard was inspired by other authors and some of his best tales come from his spin on those inspirations. Inspired by Arthur Machan's *Novel of the Black Seal* and *The Shining Pyramid*, he wrote *The People of the Dark* and *The Little People* respectively, real gems in Howard's crown of prose output, where, unlike Machan's originals, he allows the protagonists to survive and succeed in violent fashions. The best adventures, however inspired by other sources they are, will be the ones that come from your heart, problems, frustrations and philosophies.





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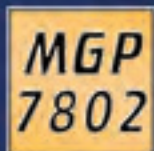
## RETURN TO THE ROAD OF KINGS

WITH TENSE EAGERNESS HE SEARCHED THE TREE-TOPS BELOW HIM, AND EXHALED A GUSTY SIGH WHEN HE CAUGHT THE GLINT OF MARBLE DOMES AMIDST THE TWINKLING GREEN. IT WAS NO MYTH, THEN; BELOW HIM LAY THE FABULOUS AND DESERTED PALACE OF ALKMEENON

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