

CONAN[®]

FAITH AND FERVOUR



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FAITH AND FERVOUR

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Introduction

RELIGION IN THE HYBORIAN AGE

RELIGIONS IN THE Conan stories are generally dark, brutal affairs, full of secrets and monstrous priests. Most of the stories give religion a rather unholy, unclean air. Conan the Cimmerian strives to conquer and tread a primitive time with primitive religions. This volume in the *Conan the Roleplaying Game* series is designed to enhance the roleplaying aspect of scholars, cultists and religious leaders in the Hyborian Age.

In the Conan stories, it is left unclear as to whether the gods exist or not. The descriptions for the Hyborian Age gods, which may or may not be real entities, do not include 'statistics,' such as might be found in many sourcebooks. Even if a Games Master does consider the Hyborian Age gods to be real, they would possess powers that no mortal, not even the mighty Conan, could hope to defeat. Thus the need for monster-like statistics for these gods is still unnecessary. Conan does not come into armed conflict with Set but only with Set's priests. Keep in mind that just because a certain demon claims to serve a deity, that demon could be lying or may have the same misconceptions about the gods as some mortals have.

Since this volume does not contain useless statistics for the gods, the question becomes, what does a priest of a god worship and why does he worship it? This volume is designed to answer those questions, not to become some sort of 'divine bestiary' of fiends and foes for *Conan the Roleplaying Game* characters to fight and defeat.

The religions are divided up largely by culture and even a few heresies and alternate religions at variance with the 'official' religion of an area are detailed. New feats, spells and other concepts are also detailed.

Readers will note that a few things are left vague. For the most part, this book does not try to describe each and every ritual or even catalogue all the possible rituals a given religion might have. A game should live during actual play, and players and Games Masters both should be able to contribute to the overall

world; a completely comprehensive work would diminish a player's and a Games Master's ability to make the game world of the Hyborian Age his own, with its own rituals and gods and concepts.



Prayer & Sacrifice

PANTHEONS AND GODS

MOST OF THE gods are structured together into pantheons, which are worshipped in particular regions. This is because those gods who are worshipped in more than one kingdom often seem to change according to the perceptions and culture of their new worshippers, so that in effect the Asura worshipped in the Hyborian kingdoms is no longer the same Asura worshipped as part of the Vendhyan pantheon. Thus what appears to be the same god may be worshipped within different pantheons. While worshippers of one pantheon might be respected by and happily engage in debates with the priests of another, as worshippers of a different form of the god they are not regarded as having the same privileges as local worshippers.

Some of the gods are sufficiently powerful that they are the only one worshipped by many people in a particular region. Sometimes these lone gods are worshipped alongside a more established local pantheon; other times they are suppressed, regarded as demons by the official state religion.

A character who is a worshipper or priest of an entire pantheon may well have a preferred god or gods within that pantheon but he will call upon whichever deity is most appropriate at the time. A priest of a pantheon can officiate at the services of any of the gods of that pantheon.

TYPES OF RELIGIONS

There are many types of religion in the Hyborian Age. Mystical, nature, prophetic, revealed, sacramental and tribal religions all exist throughout the nations of the world. Many of these religions revolve around the same pantheon of gods and are simply alternative paths argued and debated among the priests and holy men, but others are truly alternative types of religions. Most Hyborian Age religions are complex enough that many of these types are intertwined. An example might be a revealed religion with sacraments that create a mystical experience.

Religions often grow and change and these types may help a Games Master develop a history for a religion. Perhaps a charismatic leader of a tribal religion has a mystical experience and a revelation. He leaves his tribe and begins to spread the word of the revelation and his teachings are written down. He encourages people to use lotus to re-enact the mystical

experience and thus creates the first sacrament of the religion. Later, after his death, his tribal symbol becomes a holy symbol for the new religion, adding another sacrament, and his burial place becomes holy. His teachings are preserved and guarded as the revelations of the god he worshipped. Thus the tribal religion is converted to a revealed religion with sacramental aspects.

Mystical Religions: Mystical experiences are at the heart of this type of religion. In order to understand the divine and become devout one must have a mystical experience of some sort. Life, society and even fellow believers are of no consequence. The divine must be experienced directly and individually. Usually these religions do not go beyond a single person but occasionally there arises a charismatic and powerful individual who constructs a social structure built around the achievement of the preferred divine experience. These religions usually die with the charismatic leader unless a new authority quickly takes over. Ritual, sacraments and traditions are used to aid beginners in achieving the divine experience but are ultimately thought of as crutches and the goal is to get rid of the need for such crutches as soon as possible. A problem with this religious form is its unpredictability. Anyone can have any sort of experience and come away with virtually any message, inspiration, insight or teaching, even if it contradicts the current authority's teachings. These alternative insights may generate their own followings, creating a split or even hostility in the religion. Some mystical religions revolve around the use of certain drugs or around certain acts, such as masochism or even orgasm. Many of the mystery cults are simply craftsman guilds devoted to protecting the secrets of their chosen craft. At annual festivals the various craft guilds put on complex morality plays emphasising myths and philosophies relevant to their chosen craft.

Nature Religions: Among the earliest sort of religion developed by men, nature religions present gods and supernatural powers as revealed through natural events and objects. Deities can be metaphorical or literal. Nature as a whole is often treated as sacred; everything in the universe is connected by an intricate web of energy. These religions are almost always polytheistic. They do not rely upon sacred writings, individual prophets or single religious figures. Shamans act as religious guides to serve the community

but any believer is considered to be capable of experiencing divinity and the supernatural. Often all members are considered members of the clergy and both men and women can be found in leadership positions. Religious events are held in open air courts or outside of cities. Few followers erect permanent sacred buildings, preferring to leave nature unmodified as much as possible. Most of these religions have a darkness lurking behind them, a 'dark side' inclined toward the mastery of nature and other humans. Unfortunately, many people tend to embrace the darker elements of these types of religions.

Prophetic Religions: A prophet defines a prophetic religion. Prophets guide and warn society, playing an ongoing and dynamic role, something other religions cannot provide with their static texts and past messages. Oracles play a large part in prophetic religions. Prophets do not authoritatively interpret past revelations; instead, prophets receive new and ongoing revelations. The past is not important. The new information being received supersedes the past. The focus is on society and action as manifestations of divine will and presence. The nature of society is a portent of divine will. If good things are happening, the gods are happy but if bad events are ongoing, divine anger is evident... and the prophet will reveal what the gods want from man to fix society. Obedience to divine will is mandatory in these religions to avoid divine anger and retribution. Correct behaviour is far more important than correct belief. Members of prophetic religions can be found in all Hyborian Age nations, preaching their visions and revelations, warning everyone of their impending doom.

Revealed Religions: A revealed religion has a set of revelations, usually given to mankind by a god or gods, as its symbolic centre. The law is communicated to believers in the form of sacred writings, prophets or miracles. These things express the will or desires of the god or gods. Revealed religions teach that their god or gods are active and real. They have a hierarchical structure in terms of religious leadership and even in relationships between members. Priests are considered intermediaries between the human and the divine. They usually serve as

authoritative interpreters of existing revelations, but sometimes serve as conduits for continued revelations. The primary duty of the believer is to be loyal and perform slavish obedience to the religion's gods and/or priests. Few of these religions exist at this point in Hyborian history. Thieves often consider the theft of the written revelations of these few temples to be a testament to their thieving abilities.



Sacramental Religions: A sacramental religion emphasises that the divine is present in some fashion in physical objects and in the mystery-laden rituals of the temple. Contact and communication with the divine is sought through these objects and rites, which serve to impress upon the believers their obligations. Statues, food, animals and furniture can all be manifestations of the divine or temporary dwellings for the divine. Note that an object itself is not divine but merely a manifestation or dwelling. Such an object is a source of inspiration and comfort, not some sort of golem to come to life if one prays hard enough, although a sorcerer might delude his followers into thinking otherwise by animating one once in a while. A sacramental religion may regard a statue of a god as a dwelling place of divine power but not worship it as a god itself. Sacred objects, especially if they carry sacred substances, are treated with reverence at all times and mysterious rituals transmit the object's divine power to the participants. Priests are religious specialists and may either hold permanent positions or just temporary ones for the duration of a single ceremony. Permanent priests may be considered guardians of the sacred and administrators of the religion's deepest secrets.

Sacrament and ritual reinforces the power of religious authorities so other religion types may include sacramental portions. Nature religions may regard a particular river as a sacred site where the divine resides during certain rituals and revealed religions may have several sacraments, relics and rituals whereupon the divine may touch mortal lives. Sacred prostitutes are often sacramental, for their bodies become living hosts of the divine when they are performing their erotic arts. One of the dangers of sacramental religions is that people might come to believe that the objects themselves are divine and worthy of worship. Another is that the people might believe the objects and rituals to be merely symbolic, without real religious significance and certainly without real power. Many of these religions invent stories 'proving' the power of their relics to maintain the beliefs of the followers, such as holy symbols, relics or words repelling the undead or dispelling demons. Many sex cults are sacramental in nature.

Tribal Religions: A tribal religion is unique because one cannot truly join it. Tribal religions do not seek converts or to spread their message. They have something to say to their members but do not expect anyone else to care about that message. A member is born into a tribal religion and those who are not born into the tribe are simply treated as though they will never actually understand it. Thus, no attempt is made to teach a tribal religion to others. The priests of these religions are essentially interpreters, expected to analyse the traditions of the religion and show the people how to apply those traditions to new situations. Tribal priests also interpret omens and signs, looking for approval or disapproval of human actions by the spirit world or the divine.

WORSHIP

Each character may worship all the gods of one pantheon, if he so chooses, or pick a single god to revere. Some characters may be more or less undecided as to religion, though there are few adventurers in the Hyborian Age who are genuinely atheistic. Many, like Conan, are wary of joining a cult but are still tolerant of every different religion – so long as it does not adversely affect them, such as the fell worship of Set. Few adventurers would deny outright the existence of the supernatural, since they see evidence of sorcery and diabolism so often; it is only natural to at least hope that good gods exist too.

REQUIREMENTS OF WORSHIP

A worshipper needs to meet certain conditions, depending on the cult. Usually this involves providing a certain number of sacrifices each year, or donating money and goods to the temple, or sometimes simply giving up one's time to meditation and study. Most cults also demand that the worshipper offers allegiance to the cult (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game* for rules concerning Allegiance).

It is not usually possible to worship more than one pantheon or god, since priests take a dim view of worshippers who seem uncommitted. However, in certain cases evil cults will actively encourage their worshippers to pose as orthodox members of the dominant religion in the land. That way they can maintain a socially acceptable front while continuing their diabolical practices in private.

Any character who regularly participates in religious services (if appropriate), pays any tithe required by the temple and generally acts in a manner appropriate to a worshipper of the god in question.

BENEFITS OF FOLLOWING A RELIGION OR WORSHIPPING A GOD

Each god or pantheon offers certain benefits to its worshippers, so long as they remain in good standing with the cult. The benefits tend to vary from god to god and are listed in the individual descriptions of each god or pantheon. Complete descriptions of the various benefits are given below. Note that no deity offers all the following benefits – check the individual entries to find out what each god offers.

Atonement: A character who has broken the terms of his code of honour, or



who has broken one of the rules of his god, may seek out an ordained priest of his deity and ask for atonement, if the deity offers this benefit. Usually the priest will expect a donation to the temple of around 50 sp multiplied by the character level of the character who desires atonement and then send him off on a suitable holy quest for the god. Once the quest is completed, the character regains his code of honour or is returned to his standing as a worshipper of the god, as appropriate. The priest who assists with the atonement must be in good standing at the temple. Note that deities whose cults have no particular requirements for their worshippers do not usually offer atonement either. A character who fails to keep his tithes paid up loses the benefits of worship until his back dues are paid.

Corruption: Some cults are so vile and debauched a save vs. Corruption needs to be made on a regular basis (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game* for rules on Corruption). As Conan points out, many of the religious among the Zamorians seemed a bit touched in the head. If a corrupt person fails a Corruption save, madness may well ensue.

The entry will include the save interval if diligent observation of ritual is performed and the save DC.

Drugs: All worshippers of a god or pantheon that offers this benefit have access to at least one form of lotus and other drugs for purchase. The temple also provides a haven for the use/abuse of the desired substance. Priests will often tempt new recruits with cheap or even free samples in hopes of capturing their souls with the vice. Other temples use drugs to achieve holy visions, receive divine guidance or just to increase their magical power.

Faith: All worshippers of a god or pantheon that offers this benefit gain a +2 morale bonus to all Will saving throws. This represents their faith in the religion, which can be a powerful source of spiritual strength when faced with evil sorcery or unnatural creatures. Faith is generally offered only by the more 'civilised' religions – those which regard themselves as somewhat above the supernatural.

Oracles: Some prophetic religions provide oracles for the faithful. Often this is related to the Spells benefit but only divination spells are cast for the devout. There is no cost for these spells, although donations are always accepted.

Sacred Prostitutes: All worshippers of a god or pantheon that offers this benefit have access to the temple's sacred prostitutes at places of worship. These prostitutes help the religion catch men for their god or goddess. They are the lures, the delicious flesh on a spiritual hook. By paying attention to the lonely, a sacred prostitute can bring in new recruits, keep current cultists satisfied and satiated, catch unsuspecting sacrifices, provide high priests with leverage against the wealthy and the strong or serve any other function the high priest of a temple might conceive. The sacred prostitute is well trained in the arts of massage, touch and erotic stimulation. Some religions believe physical pleasure signifies the presence of the gods. Sexual pleasure is one of the gods' greatest gifts, essential to fertility and life. Religions that embrace sacred prostitutes tend to view everything in sexual terms: rain or seeds, male images, are given to a receptive earth, a female image. The feminine quality is worshipped and the use of a sacred whore is considered to be loftier than the base use of a common harlot. Some religions, however, condemn the use of temple prostitutes and consider such use to be the worship of a foreign goddess and an act of heresy.

Spells: Priests, shamans or other representatives of a god who offers this benefit are willing to cast any of the spells they know on a member's behalf at half the usual cost (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game*). A parenthetical entry after 'Spells,' such as 'Spells (Counterspells, Divination),' indicates that only spells from those sorcery styles will be cast.

BEYOND WORSHIP: PRIESTS

Priests come in all shapes and sizes and in every degree of piety from the most corrupt, black-hearted scoundrel to the most serious religious philosopher. In theory they have all the restrictions and benefits of worshippers (except for the requirement to pay a tithe), along with several more, but in practice many a priest simply uses his position to gain political influence, bribes and other 'fringe benefits.'

Although scholars can choose the 'lay priest' background at 1st level, a fully ordained priest must have selected the Priest feat at 4th level or above. In either case, a priest may have access to certain forms of sorcery through the temple but will usually be banned from learning other types of sorcery.

Each temple has specific requirements and benefits for its priests and specific means of enforcing its requirements. Usually the simplest punishment is to deny a character his priestly status. If this is done, the priest immediately loses the benefits of the lay priest background and (if he has it) the Priest feat. These benefits can only be reinstated if the character goes to his high priest for atonement. Even then, the high priest may refuse to grant atonement if the character's transgressions were too severe.

Note that certain religions have no particular rules about priests abusing their authority and position to get rich. For some churches, this is simply the standard way for a priest to earn a crust. The more civilised religions usually frown upon such behaviour and if a priest is caught extorting money from his flock, or worse, offering to sell them salvation or spells without authorisation, he is quickly punished.

SORCERY OF THE PRIESTS

Priests are not in the business of casting real sorcery for people. They do produce an incredible number of charms and medicines but true sorcery is always done for personal benefit. Keep in mind the role of magic in the Hyborian Age. Sorcery should not be used to make life easier for civilisation as a whole, especially as some sort of alternative to technology. Priests do not cast spells frivolously. They cast them to gain personal power in one way or another. Magic does not solve day-to-day survival concerns in the Hyborian Age. If it did, then Stygia's priests would have found a way to turn the deserts into fertile fields flowing with milk and honey, a sure way to wealth if ever there was one. Alas, priests cannot alter life and ecosystems to that degree. Be sure when using priests and sorcerers in the Hyborian Age



not to give in to temptation and make every curse real, every amulet truly magical and every priest sorcerous.

COSMOLOGY

There are planets other than the Earth of the Hyborians. The planet Earth is surrounded by a belt of light but beyond that is the Outer Dark, home to many a strange demon.

Beyond the Outer Dark, deep within the emptiness of the void, lie several strange planets. The most notable one – and the one that seems to have the closest connection to the Earth – is Yag. It is described variously as a green planet and an accursed planet, presumably because it is covered with weird plant life that is inimically hostile to the life of Earth. At some point thousands of years ago, a great civil war shook Yag, which is when the god Yogah (see page 56) first came to Earth as an exile. More recently, the seeds of the vampiric plant Yothga drifted down to Earth, though they are able to grow nowhere but in Hell. Some scholars speculate that Yothga was sent in search of Yogah by the kings of Yag, but it seems equally likely that this cosmic plant simply reproduces by casting its seeds far into the void.



Skills & Feats

TALENTS OF THE RELIGIOUS

THE RELIGIOUS TEND to have skills the non-religious do not understand or know how to use.

CRAFT (MASK)

This skill allows you to carve exceedingly powerful images. Masks connect the Picts and Black Kingdom natives (especially the Tibu) to the dread spirits that inhabit their dark lands. The masks imitate human and animal forms and are unique for each wearer – when anything but a simple mask is crafted, the owner of the mask must be involved in the ritual and his blood, saliva or hair may be required to attune the mask to his body. If worn by another, the mask is treated as a Simple Mask (see below).

These items are sacred to their owners and are not worn frivolously. While wearing a mask, a Pict or Black Kingdom tribesman merges (albeit on a superficial level) with the spirit world and gains special powers over himself and the physical world around him. Furthermore, higher quality masks must be earned and the right to wear them is a sign of respect and power. Masks are commonly used in rituals, during the hunt and when making war (rituals in their own way). They are typically carved to represent the thing they wish to influence, are adorned with feathers and have special properties:

Mask	Craft DC	Qualities*
Simple Mask	12	+1 Intimidate, –2 Spot
Masterwork Mask	20	+2 Intimidate, +2 Disguise, –2 Spot
Hunting Mask	20	+2 Survival, +2 Hide vs. animals, +2 Handle Animal (animal type of Mask)
War Mask	25	+1 bonus to attack rolls, +1 Fortitude saves, +1 DR, –2 Spot
Shaman Mask	25	+2 Perform (ritual), –2 Spot
Totem Mask	30	+2 Magic Attack, +2 Perform(ritual), –2 Spot

*All bonuses are circumstance bonuses

Simple Mask: Many Picts or Black Kingdom tribesmen might have one of these that they carved themselves in or near their hut or cave – simple masks are placed to ward off ill spirits and worn during their tribe's many festivals.

Masterwork Mask: This is a finer version of the Simple Mask – only a skilled craftsman might undertake to create such a thing.

Hunting Mask: This is crafted after the animals that are the source of a hunt. A hunt master might wear a hunting mask and may have many masks, wearing one when stalking a deer and another when hunting a panther.

War Masks: This terrifying mask shows fiercely exaggerated expressions of its owner. It sets loose the warrior spirit within



the wearer. Chiefs and honoured warriors might don these before going into battle. In addition to their ritual qualities, war masks also provide some degree of protection.

Shaman Mask: As the leaders of tribal rituals, most shamans will have at least one mask. A Shaman Mask represents a tribe's totem animal and only a Shaman may wear a mask of this type. By donning this mask, a shaman calls upon the power of the animal spirits to aid in his rituals.

Totem Mask: Much like the Shaman Mask, a totem mask possesses the greatest power and craftsmanship.

For the benefit of calculating cost and time, a simple mask has a price of 200 sp and a masterwork mask has a price of 600sp. However, since the wood and tools to create masks are readily available in the Pictish wilderness and most of the Black Kingdoms, the only actual costs are for any special adornments added (gold, silver, exotic feathers and so on)

A mask has a hardness of five and 15 hp.

Special: Possession of another's mask allows you a Magical Link (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game*) to the mask's owner and gives a +1 insight bonus to any Magic Attacks made while using it against him. The bonuses conveyed by Craft (body paint) and Craft (mask) do not stack.

DIPLMACY

A successful Diplomacy check changes attitudes in respect to yourself and occasionally others. Detailed here is a new application of the Diplomacy skill.

Conversion: One of the most important duties of a priest is to induct new members into his cult. One way many cults establish their hierarchy is by promoting those who bring in the most new blood. With numbers come power, and the priests who bring a cult power get rewarded. Thus, it is in the best interest of a priest to convert as many non-believers as he can. There are many ways to do this. Two popular methods are by using coercion (promising death/pain either in this life, the afterlife or both) or using bribery (promising a heavenly reward). In order to attempt a conversion, a priest needs an audience, a relatively quiet place to speak and about an hour's time (give or take given the circumstances).

If a priest meets the prerequisites for the conversion, he preaches the doctrine of his cult for an hour. He can also dedicate more time to the conversion, with each additional hour adding a cumulative +1 bonus to the eventual Diplomacy check (to a maximum bonus equal to his scholar level). Additional hours of dedicated preaching need not be performed concurrently, meaning the priest can spend days

or even weeks paving the way for the final conversion check. Once the priest feels the time is right, he then attempts a Diplomacy check. In order for the check to succeed, the priest must change the target's attitude to Helpful, meaning the base DC of the check varies by the target's initial attitude, as well as other modifiers (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game*). If the target, or anyone within the group of targets, has five or more ranks in Sense Motive, then the DC is increased by another five. If the priest has tried and failed to convert the target (or anyone in the group) in the past, the DC is increased by a further two. If the priest's Diplomacy check succeeds, then he has converted his audience to his faith.

- ❖ *Multiple Converts:* It is possible for a priest to convert more than one person at a time. Extremely charismatic priests can sway throngs of people to their beliefs with impassioned sermons. It is, however, more difficult to convert a mass audience since the priest does not have the time to really bond with any one member of the audience. For every 10 people or portion thereof in the audience the DC of the check is increased by two. Hitting the target DC when converting more than one person means 25% of the crowd (rounding down) is converted. For every five points by which the check succeeds, another 25% of the crowd is converted.
- ❖ *Results of Conversion:* New converts claim the priest's religion as their primary faith but this does not mean they worship the priest's god exclusively. In the Hyborian Age, most worshippers pay at least lip service to all gods. Conversion does mean that a new convert will by default be Helpful to the priest who converted him, Friendly to any other priest of his new faith and Indifferent to all others who openly practise the faith. Of course, extenuating circumstances and a priest's behaviour can cause the convert's attitude to change for the worse, as normal.
- ❖ *When to Ignore the Dice:* Under no circumstance can a conversion be forced upon a Player's character by means of a Diplomacy check, no matter how high the result. As always, only the Player has the right to decide what his character will or will not choose to believe in.
- ❖ *Building Up to Conversion:* Normally it is a good idea for a scholar to build up towards a conversion by first priming his audience. The best way to do this is with public preaching, as is popular in Zamora. In doing so, and with a successful Diplomacy check, a scholar can slowly sway the crowd's attitude so it is more friendly to him and thus more receptive to the ideas of his cult. A priest cannot attempt to convert a crowd on the same day in which he has swayed their attitude through Diplomacy.

- ❖ *Perform (oratory)*: A priest with five or more ranks in Perform (oratory) gains a +2 circumstance bonus with all attempts to use Diplomacy to sway a crowd towards conversion.

KNOWLEDGE (MYSTERY: GOD)

This is a more defined version of Knowledge (religion) for the highly symbolic Hyborian Age faiths. While most commoners believe in the outward myths and rituals, those initiates who delve into the mysteries learn that things are not as literal as they once believed. Stories of virgin births and shadowy conceptions, murders and resurrections are symbolic of deeper spiritual truths. Knowledge of these spiritual truths benefits a character in many ways. Characters who study a particular god's mysteries earn ranks in this skill. A character who delves into the deepest mysteries of Bast would take ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Bast); a character who delves into the mysteries of Mitra would take ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Mitra).

Knowledge of mysteries earns characters certain benefits depending on the god or goddess studied and the number of ranks in the skill. Some gods have more levels of mystery than others. Every three ranks in this skill allows a character an opportunity to learn a new mystery for a particular god.

If a pantheon is polytheistic, then characters may know mysteries from multiple gods. For example, in the Stygian religion, a character may be Keeper of both Bast's First Mystery and Set's Fourth Mystery. Once a character knows all the mysteries of a particular god he may take the title of Keeper of All Mysteries of that god,

such as the Keeper of All Set's Mysteries. The benefits of this skill are covered in each individual god or goddess entry in this volume. Each level of Mystery earns a character a +1 Reputation boost.

A character must retain purity in regards to his religion in order to retain the benefits of a mystery. Some uses of this skill require an additional Perform (ritual) check. Characters are forbidden to teach this knowledge to anyone who has not been initiated in the order. Anyone known to be breaking this restriction is usually hunted down by other members of the religion.

PERFORM (RHETORIC)

This application of the Perform skill allows a religious speaker to capture the attention of a crowd of bystanders. With a successful Perform (rhetoric) check (DC 15 + 1 for every two non-Player people in the crowd) the speaker captures the attention of those nearby who are not engaged in pressing business. Each one caught up in the cult leader's speech must make a Will save (DC 10 + cult leader's combined scholar and noble levels + Charisma modifier) to voluntarily leave the area before the cult leader has finished speaking. The power of a cult leader's rhetoric is not greater than the instinct for self-preservation. Captivated onlookers

may leave the area without making saving throws if their own safety or that of a dependent is threatened. If used against a specific Player Character or Non-Player Character, the Perform (rhetoric) check is opposed by the character's Sense Motive check. A character gains a +1 synergy bonus for every five ranks of Knowledge (religion) possessed.



PERFORM (RITUAL)

Healing Sympathy: Part of healing and medicine in the Hyborian world, especially in primitive cultures, is the use of 'spells.' While doctors do not use sorcery, they do perform certain rituals in accompaniment to their alchemy and herbalism. The use of these rituals prepares the patient mentally to be healed, a state of mind conducive to healing in the first place. If the patient believes in the magic, he is more likely to be healed of his ailment. Thus, having five or more ranks in Perform (ritual) gives healers a +1 competency bonus to any Heal check. Every five ranks in Perform (ritual) after the fifth rank earns a cumulative +1 bonus to Heal skill checks.

Play on Superstitions: A Pictish or Black Kingdoms shaman may make a Perform (ritual) check to play upon the deep superstitions of other tribesmen. The performance must be at least 10 minutes long, cannot be interrupted and only influences Picts or Black tribesmen who watch the entire performance. At the end of the performance, the Shaman may make an opposing Perform (ritual) check to the tribesmen's Sense Motive checks. The shaman gains a +1 circumstance bonus to any magic attacks directed toward audience members who fail this opposed check. If any tribesmen beat the shaman's check by five or more, the shaman gains a -1 circumstance penalty to any magic attacks directed toward them. The tribesmen may also attempt to deride the shaman's feeble attempts to influence them. If this happens, attending Picts or Black Kingdom tribesmen may make a second Sense Motive check with a bonus equal to the number of Picts deriding the shaman's performance. Repeat attempts may be made, but at a -4 penalty for each successive try. These effects last until the next sunrise.

SENSE MOTIVE

Cold Reading: The Shemites, especially the Meadow Shemites, depend upon the whims of the gods for their fate. Many seek to know what the gods have in store for them, so they visit fortune-telling stalls in the cities. Some of those who set up fortune-telling stalls are genuinely clairvoyant. Others are less gifted practitioners whose art is based more on reading the person than on reading the cards or the signs. There have always been and always will be unsophisticated, trusting, fatalistic people who want to know more about their future, usually so they can be reassured that they will find a good partner, marry, settle down and be prosperous. As long as this class exists, there will also be the other class of person who makes a tidy living by exploiting them.

A cold reader is someone who sets himself up as a fortune-teller but has no genuine abilities. Instead he relies on body

language and verbal cues to gain information about his subject. Most cold readers are palmists, as it is much easier to 'read' a person if you can hold his hand while asking him questions. These questions usually begin as vague statements; as the cold reader gets a feel for the candidate, the statements become more specific. Tiny reactions, such as pulling away or pushing forward are giveaways from which the cold reader can make deductions. For example, a cold reader might say something along the lines of 'I sense a great deal of love in your life' and on feeling the client jerk away or tense up, modify this to 'love which Ishtar has denied to you, for yours is a lonely soul.'

The cold reader's technique is to establish trust by telling the subject facts about himself which the reader 'could not possibly know,' all derived from cold reading, before making a set of cosy predictions designed to make the subject feel good about himself and his future. The cold reading is not intended to tell the subject anything he did not already know. It is only performed in order to give the semblance of clairvoyant ability on the cold reader's part.

Check: You may use this skill in two ways. If you have the necessary paraphernalia to pass yourself off as a fortune-teller and you have a place from which you can work, such as a market stall or a tent, you may use your Sense Motive skill as if it were a Profession skill, practising your trade and making a decent living. You may make a skill check for any given week of dedicated work and earn half your check result in silver pieces.

Alternatively, you may use cold reading to eke information from someone. This can only be done if the other person is willingly talking to you in the context of fortune-telling; you cannot use the ability to pry information from an unwilling target. For every minute of cold reading, you may make a Sense Motive skill check (DC 15); this is raised to DC 20 if you cannot, for whatever reason, take the hand of the subject. A successful check allows you to learn something about the subject that he has strong feelings about. Cold reading detects emotional issues about others, so if a subject was feeling guilty about neglecting his mother, suspicious of a lover's fidelity or anxious about an imminent caravan raid, these would be likely subjects to pick up on.

Retry: Retrys are permitted, but failure to produce information about the subject (and thus confirm your supposed divinatory ability) is likely to cause them to give up and try someone else.

Special: Any character with five or more ranks in Bluff receives a +2 synergy bonus to cold reading

checks, as they are more able to make their probing questions seem like incisive statements.

Seek the Fear: By making a Sense Motive skill check (DC set by audience's mean Will save), you figure out how to appeal to an audience's worst nature. Your words provoke fear and anger, turn friend against friend, and even inspire witch hunts. You receive a +2 competence bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy and Perform checks when inciting distrust and paranoia.

FEATS FOR THE HYBORIAN RELIGIOUS FANATIC

All characters within the *Conan Roleplaying Game* will select at least one feat at 1st level, and more as they rise in levels. Feat selection is a crucial part of customising each character, and care should be taken to choose feats that complement the character's class features, racial traits and other capabilities.

CLINGING POWER (SORCERY)

Your excess Power Points drain more slowly.

Prerequisites: Knowledge (arcana) 9+ ranks, must know at least two sorcery styles.

Benefit: When your Power Points are greater than your base power points, they revert to your base at a rate of one Power Point every two hours.

Normal: Power Points revert to your base at a rate of one Point every hour.

DANGEROUS INSINUATIONS (GENERAL)

You know how to appeal to an audience's worst nature. Your words provoke fear and anger, turn friend against friend, and even inspire witch hunts.

Prerequisites: Cha 13+

Benefit: You receive a +2 competence bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy and Perform checks when inciting distrust and paranoia.

Special: This stacks with the similar bonus created from the Seek the Fear use of Sense Motive (see below).

DECEPTION OF SET (GENERAL)

Others find it more difficult to sense the horrors in your soul.

Prerequisites: Bluff 11+ ranks, 5+ Corruption Points, Foul is Fair

Benefit: Others must make a successful Sense Motive check opposed to your Bluff check to sense your sorcerous nature. Additionally, you gain a +2 on your Will save when opposing someone attempting to determine how powerful you are.

EPIPHANY (GENERAL)

You can deliver an uncannily apropos statement that stuns others into sublime understanding of a concept.

Prerequisites: Wis 15+, Knowledge (religion) 6+ ranks, Zamorian

Benefit: You can issue a single-sentence statement once per day about a religious concept with which you are familiar. The words simply occur to you on the spur of the moment, dredged from your unconscious or gifted by the gods above (or demons below). Each creature that can understand you and hear you must attempt a Will save (DC set by Knowledge (religion) check). Failure means the listener does not understand the wisdom of your statement and so does not benefit from it. Success indicates that the listener has gained some vital understanding of the topic at hand. You must also make a Will save to benefit from your own statement – you do not necessarily understand the words that come to your mind any better than others do. For the rest of the encounter, a listener who has made a successful saving throw gains a +2 bonus on all checks relating to the religious topic commented upon. For example, if you see a Zathite approaching and make a statement about the curious religious practices of his particular sect, anyone who understands your utterance gains a +2 bonus on Diplomacy or Sense Motive checks when dealing with the Zathite or any other members of his sect for the rest of the encounter. Once the listeners and the Zathite part, the effects end.

FIRES OF THE RITUAL (SORCERY)

Your ritual performances grant you influence over others.

Prerequisites: Must know one Sorcery Style, Skill Focus (Perform (ritual)), must be Pictish or a Black Kingdom tribesman

Benefits: When you use the Play on Superstitions feature of the Perform (ritual) skill (page 11), you may choose to make your Perform check against a DC 15 instead of an opposed check. Success grants a +1 circumstance bonus to any magic attacks directed toward any audience members (including non Picts). Failing by five or more results in a -1 circumstance penalty to any magic attacks directed toward audience members.

Normal: The Play on Superstitions feature can only be used against other Picts or Black Kingdom tribesmen and is an opposed roll.

FOUL IS FAIR (GENERAL)

You can mask the effects of your corruption.

Prerequisites: Bluff 7+ ranks, 1+ Corruption Point

Benefit: Your Corruption does not affect your Charisma-based skill checks when dealing with another character who has a Code of Honour.

FREE THINKER (GENERAL)

You are freed from aspects of traditional religious dogma and ritual and may study forbidden styles of magic.

Prerequisites: Wis 13+, Priest

Benefit: You may learn any style of magic as might a scholar with the Independent background. You are no longer limited by the choices given to ordained priests.

Special: There may be political or social ramifications to this feat if your independence is discovered and deemed heretical by temple elders or high priests of your sect. The Games Master may impose penalties for disloyal priests if discretion is not taken.

RELIGIOUSLY DRIVEN (GENERAL)

Your thirst for knowledge about your religion knows no bounds.

Benefit: You have no level limits on the maximum number of ranks you can take in Knowledge (Mystery: Any God). You can rise through the mysteries as fast as you want to.

RESIST TEMPTATION (GENERAL)

You are hardened to sexual advances and magical effects intended to entice you.

Benefit: You gain a +4 resistance bonus on Will saves against spells or spell-like effects that affect the attitude of the victim. You also gain the resistance bonus against Diplomacy checks that have sexual overtones.

SORCEROUS INSTRUCTOR (SORCERY)

You are a superb guide and instructor in the ways of sorcery.

Benefit: During your action, you designate any sorcerous ally within 30 feet of you to receive a +1 morale bonus on their magic attack roll.

NEW SPELL SHAMANIC ECSTASY (BASIC DIVINATION)

PP Cost: 1+ points

Components: V, S

Casting Time: One hour

Range: Personal

Target: Self

Duration: Concentration, up to eight hours

Saving Throw: Will save DC 10

Prerequisites: Must have almost died from damage (had less than 0 hit points) or must have suffered from a long, protracted illness, or must have been struck by lightning or must have spent a Fate Point to show Fate's hand in the character's destiny

Skill Check: Relevant Perform skill (DC 12)

Some cultures do not divine matters from the stars but from looking inward to spectrums of internal reality or casting their souls out of their bodies to consult with spirits. After strenuous training, the shaman can contact the inhabitants of the higher and lower planes, as well as talk with nature spirits in order to aid the passing of souls into the next world, cure the sick or travel the world. Tribesmen believe there is a connection between human behaviour and the rest of the natural world, so afflictions such as illness or bad luck are probably the consequence of incorrect behaviour, such as breaking a taboo and/or insulting a spirit, or perhaps a curse has been put on the tribe by another. The shaman may

simply want some additional insight on a voyage or activity.

The Verbal and Somatic components are designed to put the caster into a trance known as *shamanic ecstasy*.

Some pound a drum, others dance and others chant.

Choose a Perform skill (other than Perform (ritual)) as the means of going into the trance. Upon making the skill check, the shaman goes into an altered state of awareness, a trance. He makes a Will save or he becomes lost in this other world and another shaman must bring him back within three days or the body of the shaman dies.

This spell requires some Games Master adjudication. No matter what a shaman is trying to accomplish, be it getting permission from a mountain spirit to climb his mountain or trying to heal the sick, the shaman is dealing with spirits and demons.

Simple Resolution: For example, a shaman may enter a trance to heal someone. Once the spirit causing or allowing the illness is found, the shaman must make a decisive choice, struggling in a physical battle with the spirits (he can add his base attack bonus to his Heal check against the Heal DC or Save DC in the case of some diseases, poisons or madness), engaging in cunning debates (he can add a Knowledge score to his Heal check) or solving a problem diplomatically, pleading supplication with the spirit causing the problem (he can add his Diplomacy score to his Heal check). The shaman prevails in the end (hopefully), sending uncooperative spirits back into the void, dismissing other spirits or even capturing them in jars or pots. Some spirits are simply forced to agree to a compromise (adding an Intimidate score to the Heal check). If the shaman is trying to use the spell to do something other than Heal, another check can be substituted; for example, if *shamanic ecstasy* is used to gain permission to pass over a mountain, the shaman may have to negotiate or battle the spirit of the mountain (use the Climb DC of the mountain unless the specific statistics of a spirit are known) in order to gain an insight bonus (determined by the Games Master) to his Climb checks while climbing that mountain on that one journey, or the Games Master may choose not to

allow random encounters while passing over the mountain on that particular journey, or the weather might be favourable – whatever the Games Master deems appropriate.

Complex Resolution: Alternatively, the healing process can be fully roleplayed out – described to the shaman character as a monster or demon. Combat or Diplomacy ensues as normal, but the shaman's Heal ranks modify the other relevant rolls. For example, if the shaman fights a spirit, he adds his Heal ranks to his base attack bonus instead of Strength or Dexterity; if he engages in a dialogue with the spirit, he can add his Heal ranks to his Diplomacy or Intimidate check; if he casts spells at the spirit, he can add his Heal ranks to his magical attack bonus. Any synergy bonuses for related skills also apply here. Once in the spirit world, a shaman, with a Perform (Ritual) check of DC 10 + Animal HD, can change form to that of an animal, gaining that animal's natural attack forms. If the spirit does damage to the shaman, he takes the damage for real and can die for real. Engaging the spirit world is potentially deadly for a shaman.

If there was some sort of negotiation, the shaman tells the tribesman or the tribe what will appease the cruel spirits and cause them to end the problem. To not meet the responsibilities required by the spirits is a sign of disrespect, shredding the balance and harmony of the spirits' environment. This can give the Games Master a campaign hook to hang a quest upon.

Special: Like *astrological prediction*, *shamanic ecstasy* is a basic spell for the Divination sorcery style; any spell with *astrological prediction* as a pre-requisite can also use *shamanic ecstasy* in its place as an alternate pre-requisite – however, all Divination spells that use this as a pre-requisite instead of *astrological prediction* require the caster to enter *shamanic ecstasy* before casting the other spell.



Mitra's Might

THE MITRAN RELIGION

MITRA IS REGARDED as the one true god to those that worship him in Hyborian lands, a commander of a heavenly host, standing in the universe without pantheon nor even a consort to support his cosmic reign (except in Zingara; the Zingarans have given Mitra a mate). Mitra, the Judge of Souls, is known as the redeemer of the dead. His enemy is Asura, who planted the seeds of evil among men. Mitra protects the righteous from the demonic forces of Set, who serves Asura. He is a deity of truth, loyalty, air, light, vegetation and prosperity. He annihilates evil and is omniscient and eternally watchful. He never rests in his infallible overseeing of the world. He is a warrior god who brings victory. His first worshippers were the soldiers of the Hyborian nation of Aquilonia. The religion spread to the warriors and soldiers of Poitain, Nemedra and Hyborian lands. For many centuries the Mitran religion remained a religion of the soldiery. From there, it spread throughout the entire Hyborian culture.

The Hyborians also acknowledge a host of Mitran saints. The religion of Mitra has seven heavens and nine hells. Mitra is worshipped in ceremonies every seven days on a day considered to belong to the sun (the Sun Day), as Mitra is a sun god. In Messantia and the coastal cities, Mitra's followers are apt to tolerate other cults, although the worship of Set is still viewed with extreme suspicion and anger. Rural Hyborian lands are intolerant toward other religions.

Mitra is believed to be everywhere, above the world, about the world and among the stars. The temples merely focus his being into one place.

PHILOSOPHY OF THE MITRAN RELIGION

Mitran religion has to meet the needs of a society for it to become prominent. Part of the unwritten requirements of a religion is that it maintains and justifies a culture. The Mitran religion does this. Mitra is a feudal lord, reigning over a celestial host of lesser godlings known as saints. Mitran religion demands that its followers adhere to a certain code (identical for all practical purposes to the Civilised Code of Honour found in *Conan the Roleplaying Game*). Mitra worshippers should observe this code of honour if they truly follow their god. The religion offers stories and myths to

explain how to live life and what people can expect after they die. The Mitran religion defines the Hyborian culture. It offers theories on atonement and faith, teaching that only through Mitra and his rituals can a person be happy and free of sin. The Mitran religion condemns the self in many ways, and includes taboos on sex and any kind of behaviour seen as boorish or barbaric.

Mitra is the Truth

When Mitraism swept through the Hyborian world, it had to contend with and defeat many rival religions. It had to set itself up as superior to other religions and as the only true religion. Followers had to have an enemy against which all other gods and faiths were powerless so they could be labelled 'false'. Mitra is portrayed as the god of truth and loyalty, despising those who lie or worship devils, such as the serpent gods Asura and Set.

Cultural Justification

Like other religions, one of the main purposes of Mitra's religion is to ensure the continuation of its followers' culture and teach a certain kind of behaviour. Do this and all is well; do that and you anger Mitra and bring hardship upon yourself. This is a simple equation that serves virtually all the world's religions and Mitra's is no different. The people of Hyborian lands are expected to behave in certain cultural ways. Ceremonies are intended to strengthen the people's trust in the culture.

Spiritual and Worldly Truths

Like all religions, Mitra's religion attempts to overcome the fear of death, promising that even though things are not necessarily fair in this life, they will be in the next. While Mitra's religion does teach certain things that cannot be tested or proved, such as the existence of an afterlife, it does not try to teach anything that can be observed to be true or false. Belief in a proposition that is provably false ultimately discredits the cult or religion that teaches the false 'truth,' so Mitra's religion does not try to teach anything approaching a 'scientific truth'. Mitra's religion does not claim that it has all the answers.

Religious Intolerance to Achieve Secular Power

Mitra's religion does suppress powerful cults because it does not want to lose hold of its power over the people. If the king of Hyborian lands suddenly had two or three religions pressuring him to make various decisions, the power of each individual religion would be lessened. By maintaining a religious monopoly on the culture and upon the king, Mitra's religion makes sure its desires have more of an impact on the king's decisions. Mitra's religion practices religious intolerance because Mitra is more 'right' than other gods and because the practice of religious intolerance promotes his secular power.

Sorcery

There is a common misperception that the Mitran priests do not use magic. This is incorrect. Robert E. Howard, in *The Hour of the Dragon*, wrote: 'When the magic of the Mitran priests failed against the magic of Xaltotun's acolyte...' Clearly Robert E. Howard intends the priests of Mitra to be capable of at least Counterspells and such. However, the priests of Mitra generally do not appreciate most forms of sorcery, considering it to be the work of demons. For purposes of *Conan the Roleplaying Game*, the following sorcery styles are considered black magic to the priests of Mitra: Curses, Hypnotism, Nature Magic, Necromancy, Oriental Magic and Summonings. From *The Scrolls of Skelos*, the styles of Cosmic Sorcery and Immortality are also considered black magic. A character who has progressed to the Fifth Mystery of Mitra's religion is allowed to learn any magic not considered black magic.

SACRAMENTAL AND MYSTICAL

Mitra's is a sacramental and mystical religion. It is sacramental to commoners and becomes mystical to the priests when they are initiated into the Inner Mysteries. Eventually, as one makes his way through the labyrinthine hierarchy of the cult, one is indoctrinated in the Mysteries of the cults. A character learns the Mysteries by taking ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Mitra). The spiritual truths of the human soul are guarded around symbols and codes that, when understood, open the doors for power.

Every religion has Outer and Inner Mysteries. The Outer Mysteries are the myths and rituals everyone who worships the god knows and may participate in. However, only the Initiated may know the Inner Mysteries, wherein the 'Truth' of the religion is revealed. These Inner Mysteries are not dogmas to be believed blindly or even really taught – they are myths to be entered into, in an altered state of awareness. A myth is a sacred code that contains profound

spiritual teachings; moving through the Inner Mysteries teaches the keys that unlock the spiritual teachings. The initiated are given impressions and put into a certain frame of mind. The secret truths of a Mitran temple (known as a Mitraeum) are divided into seven Inner Mysteries. In most Hyborian lands, women are forbidden from learning the Inner Mysteries. Argos, the exception, allows women to learn the first and second Mysteries. No one who has not been initiated may learn the mysteries and it is forbidden to speak of the Mysteries to the uninitiated. Every active male worshipper is expected to go through the first four mysteries while only specialised priests are expected to climb higher. Each Mystery is to some extent a manifestation of a single deep longing in the human spirit for a sense of contact with the ultimate mystery.

The First Mystery: Those who learn this Mystery (at least three ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Mitra)) are known as ravens and wear raven masks during certain rituals. Those initiated into this Mystery are considered active in the Mitran religion and are eligible to receive the benefits of worship for Mitra, including the benefits of faith and atonement. An initiate is taught the rituals that will appease the guardian of the first level of heaven, assuring him a place there in the afterlife. The initiate must fast for three days and three nights before being initiated as a full-fledged raven in a ceremony that involves being dunked into water. The initiate begins training in self-control, learning indifference to distracting emotions and pain.

The Second Mystery: Those who learn this Mystery (at least six ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Mitra)) are known as Brides of Mitra. Initiates become brides during a ceremony in which they receive thirty lashes as a sacrifice to Mitra and as further experience in self-control and pain indifference. Brides of Mitra learn in more detail how Mitra transformed into human form to become the saviour of the Hyborians. Through introspection and spiritual growth, these initiates learn the rituals that will appease the guardian of the second level of heaven, assuring them a place there in the afterlife. Knowledge (Mystery: Mitra) becomes a class skill if it was not already. They wear veils in certain ceremonies and rituals. Each initiate learns the reasons for the taboos, and if he keeps the taboos, he may use his knowledge to mentally fortify himself to perform Mitra's work and may add a +3 to any one skill check once per day or add a +1 sacred bonus to his Defence Value once per day for five rounds. The Brides of Mitra learn that self-control allows one to be a clear thinker, level-headed and unbiased. Brides of Mitra (and all higher ranks) are permitted to bathe in temple grottos in order to wash away both guilt and sin. This is as far into the Mysteries that Argossean women can go. Most Hyborian nations do not allow women to learn any of the Inner Mysteries, but Argossean women have managed to get this far in. Female Brides of Mitra dress in blue hooded robes and cloaks, and often wear concealable weapons beneath



the robes. Many are trained as assassins by the temple, used against the followers of snake cults and those who consort with demons. Some male Brides of Mitra serve as guards for the cult. Most, however, are simply worshippers and have no function in the temple.

The Third Mystery: Those who learn this Mystery (at least nine ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Mitra)) are known as Soldiers of Mitra. Through introspection and spiritual growth, these initiates learn the rituals that will appease the guardian of the third level of heaven, assuring them a place there in the afterlife. The initiation into this Mystery, in addition to some painful tests, involves offering an initiate a crown at sword's point. The initiate is to push aside the crown and affirm that Mitra is his crown. Thereafter, the Soldier of Mitra never wears a crown, even at a banquet or military parade; the wearing of crowns of any sort has become a new taboo. He must refuse all crowns by saying

'it belongs to Mitra, my god.' Honey is applied to the hands and beneath the tongue of the initiate. It is believed honey allows for spiritual growth and regeneration. Initiates are taught that man is not comfortable in the physical realm but more properly belongs in the spiritual realm. Soldiers of Mitra are also taught that all humans were once part of a Universal Soul from which some souls, whether on a mission for Mitra or enticed by materialism, descended from their spiritual state into physical bodies. Soldiers of Mitra are taught vigilance, allowing the character to add a bonus equal to his Mystery rank -2 to all Spot and Listen checks. For example, a Soldier of Mitra gains a +1 bonus, a Lion of Mitra gains a +2 bonus, and so on. They also learn a certain amount of indifference to pain. They are shown some of the minor Saintly Relics of the temple (varies by temple; some have better relics than others). This increases the bonus from Faith to a +3, which may be applied to saving throws involving pain as well as against Terror or fear. A Soldier of Mitra must keep the taboos to gain this bonus.

The Fourth Mystery: Those who learn this Mystery (at least 12 ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Mitra), plus the character must have donated a manor or a substantial sum of money to the temple) are known as Lions of Mitra. They wear lion heads in certain ceremonies and rites. This is the final Mystery a non-clerical member can learn. Through introspection and spiritual growth, initiates learn the rituals that will appease the

guardian of the fourth level of heaven, assuring them a place there in the afterlife. The initiation into this level is painful, proving to the temple that the initiate can withstand pain with detachment. Indeed, this Mystery teaches the Lions to remain aloof and detached from society as a whole, that society is built upon the lies of Asura and the other demons, such as Set. The priests teach the Lions to detach themselves from negative emotions and rely on thought and logic. They are taught to be wise, courageous, just and temperate. The Lions of Mitra are the order's mightiest of warriors and are expected to withstand the diabolic spells of the snake-worshipping cults. They may add their Wisdom modifier to any saving throw against a spell cast by a known worshipper of any sort of snake god (such as Asura or Set); in the case of a Will save the Wisdom modifier is effectively added twice. The Lions must keep the taboos to gain this bonus.

The Fifth Mystery: Those who learn this Mystery (at least 15 ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Mitra) and one or more ranks in Profession (priest)) are known as Bori. They are also called Adepts of the Third Circle. They have symbolically died and been reborn through water. The initiation involves a simulated death by murder of the initiate. He lies in a tomb for three days, fasting and meditating. On the third day, he is 'resurrected' and may walk from his tomb. He is sprinkled with blessed water. This is the first of the Inner Mysteries available to clergy. After his simulated death and resurrection, the initiate must make a pilgrimage to black-hearted Mount Golamira in Aquilonia, the mount of eternal time, to learn the secrets of this Mystery. They learn the truth about the Great Old Ones; characters must make a Terror save (Will DC 18) or gain temporary insanity (unless the character rolls a '1' on the save, in which case he gains permanent insanity). Honey is applied to the hands and beneath the tongue of the initiate. It is believed honey allows for spiritual growth and regeneration. The initiates are taught to heal the sick, exorcise demons, provide miracles and calm storms. Initiates of this Mystery may learn sorcery. They are taught the rituals that will appease the guardian of the fifth level of heaven, assuring them a place there in the afterlife. They wear an ancient-style ritual hat during certain ceremonies.

The Sixth Mystery: Those who learn this Mystery (at least 18 ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Mitra) and three or more ranks in Profession (priest)) are known as Sun-Couriers. They are also called Adepts of the Second Circle. This is the second of the Inner Mysteries available to clergy. The initiates are taught the rituals that will appease the guardian of the sixth level of heaven, assuring them a place there in the afterlife. These mystics learn that the universe was created by Mitra and the physical world (the Earth) was created by the Principle of Evil. They learn that the mummification procedures practised by the Acheronians and continued by the Stygians are an attempt by Evil to emulate the death-resurrection-reign cycle promised by Mitra and make men believe they can do by alchemy, that which Mitra claims can only be done by him and those who join him. Sun-Couriers get the first hints that Mitra is allegorical and not a real entity. Sun-Couriers understand the importance of truth and knowledge, allowing them to add their Wisdom modifier to all Knowledge skill checks and Knowledge is Power checks (for scholars). Sun-Couriers must keep the taboos to gain this bonus.

The Seventh Mystery: Those who learn this Mystery (at least 21 ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Mitra) and six or more ranks in Profession (priest)) are known as Fathers. They are also called Adepts of the First Circle. This is the last of the Inner Mysteries available to clergy. The initiates are taught the rituals that will appease Mitra, the guardian of the

seventh and ultimate level of heaven, assuring them a place there in the afterlife. They learn that the physical realm, created by the Principle of Evil, is a lie, an illusion perpetrated upon man to make them believe in materialism and to put their trust in things that can be measured and seen. They learn that everyone is 'god made flesh,' a spirit trapped in a physical body. The initiates are taught to transcend that ultimate lie and see through the illusions of Asura (Set is but an incarnation of Asura). Indeed, the mystics at this level understand that Mitra, Asura, Set and all the gods are but myths and allegories to aid in the understanding of the human soul and its mysteries. They learn to touch the ultimate mystery...

MITRAN RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS

One feature common to all Mitraea is a depiction of a zodiac curving above several figures carved into the back wall. The dominant figure is that of Mitra slaying a scarab. Two boys, twins (sometimes depicted as a pair of columns instead of boys), watch, along with a small dog and a rabbit. Mitra is treading upon a serpent. A bull (or his head) is sometimes depicted to the far left of the arrangement, waiting in the wings. A hunter's bow and club often float between the boys and the bull.

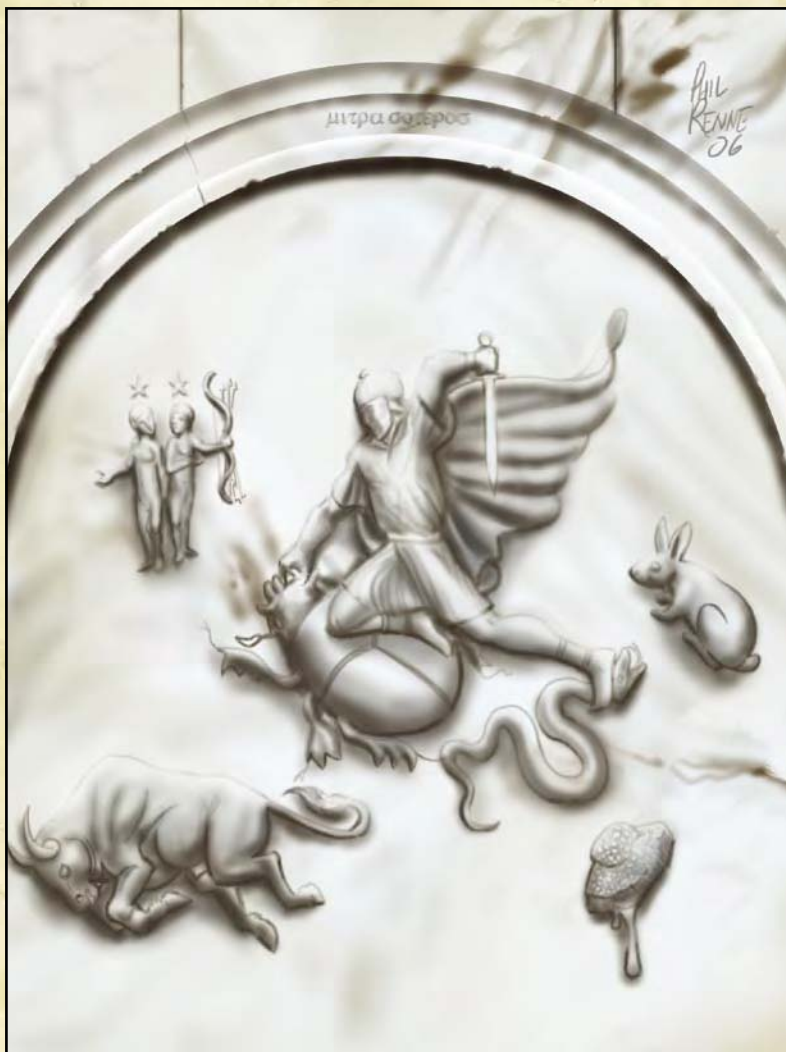
The Scarab: The scarab represents the reign of the Stygians and Set, which was broken by the coming of Epemitreus. It represents the coming of Evil (the Stygians and the great serpent, Set).

The Serpent: To the Mitrans the serpent is the symbol of ancient and evil knowledge. Anyone who worships black knowledge of things men were not meant to know is a serpent-worshipper to the Mitrans. Worshipers of Asura and Set fall neatly into this category. Evil knowledge has corrupted men and given them civilisation, which is by nature corruptive of people.

Honey: Honey is a symbol of ancient wisdom. The honeycomb is a manifestation of divine harmony in nature and represents insight and wisdom.

Twins: The twin boys seen on Mitran emblems represent guiding lights for those hoping to break out of mortal physicality into the heavenly realm of Mitra. They also represent the brotherhood of warriors. Soldiers of Mitra are taught the twins also represent heightened awareness. St. Elmo's fire, an electrical discharge from the masts of ships during thunderstorms, is seen as the worldly manifestation of the twins.

The Bull: The bull represents the wrath of Mitra against the wickedness of the world. Those indoctrinated in the fifth



Mystery of Mitra learn why the Mysteries must be kept secret from those not ready to learn them. They are taught that the bull represents an upcoming period of tribulation and the fall of the world brought about by a person trying to teach the Mysteries of Mitra to people who were not properly initiated. The bull charges and destroys everything in its path. The bull represents the transformation of humanity in a great wash of blood and fire.

Weapons of the Hunter: These represent the ancient Acheronians and/or Giant-Kings who have lost their weapons to the Hyborians (the land Hyboria now occupies used to be Acheronian territory). Those who progress to the Bori level of Mystery learn that these weapons also represent the esoteric powers and wisdom of Acheron, the beings bred from human/demon couplings. Those who pass further into the Mysteries learn that the number 17 is the number of the Hunter who once held the weapons, and the Hunter is the unifier of man under the false-worship of serpents (Set and/or Asura). Those who learn the fifth Mystery of Mitra learn that the weapons of the hunter also represent the Picts, who bring forth the bull of Mitra. They are taught that

the Picts were raised by Mitra to be inherently afraid of serpents because Mitra intends them to be the source of his wrath should the world ever come to despise him and break his taboos – they were bred by Mitra to despise ancient secrets and civilisation, to hate Asura and all his serpent brood.

The Dog: The dog is seen as an emblem of the werewolf, the symbol of those who pretend to be with Mitra but are not, those who pretend to be a friend of man but who will turn and feast upon him. Those who learn the sixth Mystery of Mitra learn that the dog may represent people who pretend to accept Mitra but who, in truth, do not. There is much conjecture as to who these people are.

The Rabbit: The rabbit represents the moon and is said to possess the secret of life. The rabbit knows the unknowable. It represents rampant growth which brings with it sexual proclivity and excess. It represents how the spirit needs to rise in rebellion against the serpent, the symbol of physical life, which is a lie against Mitra's promised life. The rabbit also represents the taboos of the Mitran faith. The rabbit is everything that is unclean and forbidden, although it looks cute and cuddly. The rabbit represents false intuition and the madness that comes with learning that which should not be learned.

RELIGIOUS TABOOS

Man has a distinctive aversion to things that cause him harm and religion takes this aversion to another level by making activities believed to cause spiritual harm forbidden or taboo.

Honour: Mitran worshippers are expected to uphold the civilised code of honour.

Blood: Sacrifices to Mitra are bloodless. Blood represents physical life, which is a lie propagated by Asura. Therefore, blood has little meaning to Mitra. Blood contains magic which can be used for Evil. Blood is also associated with pain, suffering and death, aspects of life the true Mitran attempts to divorce himself from.

Women: Women are not allowed to advance beyond the first Mystery of Mitra. Women also cause lust and passion in men and so contact with women should be kept to a reproductive-based minimum.

Corpses: A faithful man will not tread upon a corpse, harm a corpse or otherwise anger a corpse for fear of disease or ill-magic.

Leather: A faithful Mitran will not wear leather clothing or armour because it amounts to wearing the skin of an animal, which could turn the wearer into a lycanthrope or anger the animal whose corpse was despoiled by the leatherworker. This taboo does not hold in Zingara, Brythunia, Gunderland, Tauran or the Westermack.

Animals: Related to the taboo of corpses, the Mitrans are not allowed to eat the flesh of animals that have died of natural causes.

Sex: Chastity is expected for at least three days before engaging in important religious rituals. Anyone who has had sexual intercourse the night before may not approach a Mitran altar or enter into a Mitraeum. Anyone who cooks or prepares food must be chaste. Beekeepers must also be chaste before handling their hives.

Slaves: Slaves may not enter an area where worship is to take place unless they have been slapped in the face by one of the faithful, which transfers some of the faithful's freedom to the slave. Slaves do, however, have a right of sanctuary at a Mitraeum.

Linen: Linen, which is used to shroud corpses or to keep out evil demons that prey upon corpses, is forbidden at Mitran rites.

Lying: It is forbidden to lie. The lie is a construct of Asura and the serpents and should not be used by the faithful of Mitra. One of the fundamental dilemmas of Mitran faith is the self-deception people already live under, the illusions of life that everyone shares. Mitrans do not add to the web of lies already around them. All of life is an illusion – do not create more illusions.

BENEFITS OF WORSHIPPING MITRA

Each god or pantheon offers certain benefits to its worshippers, so long as they remain in good standing with the cult and Mitra is no exception. Worshipping Mitra gives the benefits of Atonement and Faith.

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth 2 sp/level/month to the local temple of Mitra. Live an honest and virtuous life. Do not practice sorcery or associate with sorcerers. Oppose those who carry out human sacrifice or traffic with demons.

Benefits of Worship: Faith, Atonement.

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: May not know or learn any sorcery styles, or associate with sorcerers. Must lead the faithful in prayer. Must not tolerate any other religion. Must lead a still more honest and virtuous life than the faithful. Must arbitrate fairly in disputes whenever asked. Must not fall into superstitious ways.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard.

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Usually excommunicated, but may be attacked by the virtuous worshippers of Mitra.

THE MITRAIC CLERGY IN HYBORIAN LANDS

The village priest of Mitra holds a special position in Argossean hierarchies. He is held to a different standard of behaviour than commoners or nobles, and special expectations are held of the priest. The priests of Mitra perform the services that keep the spiritual order of society. Although many come from the upper classes, once a person becomes a member of the priesthood, all such secular concerns are repudiated. Comprised of neither commoners nor nobles, the priesthood of Mitra is a third power in Hyborian lands, a power of literacy, medicine and education, influencing the codes of honour developed and practised in Hyborian lands as well as officiating at most ceremonies of state, granting legitimacy to the aristocratic order.

The priest always has certain privileges and responsibilities, regardless of what the peasants and serfs think of him. A priest is usually a local boy who is sent to a temple around the age of seven to ten where he serves as an oblate then returns as a priest a few years later. To ensure that a child becomes an oblate, the parents bring the child, male or female, to the temple on the Day of Oblation. The child is brought to the altar and his right hand is wrapped in the altar cloth. The parents then kiss the hand and present it to the priest. If the priest accepts (and he almost always does), he takes the hand and pours water on the child's head or hand. After the parents leave, the child is ceremonially stripped of all clothing and given the simple black robes of the priesthood. The child is then taken in and taught a new daily routine, one very different from the probably pampered lifestyle the child was used to prior to becoming an oblate of Mitra.

The oblates learn discipline, theology and philosophy. Members of the Mitran priesthood who began their careers as oblates usually have maximum ranks in Knowledge (religion) and Concentration. Prayers are offered at regular intervals and all of life is regimented. Even times for relieving oneself is prescribed and enforced. In the winter, the oblates are allowed one meal per day but for the rest of the year they are

allowed a light dinner in the evening. Most of the meals, however, are relatively sumptuous compared to the rough fare of most commoners and non-nobles. The oblates are required to watch each other for infractions and to inform on their fellows if an infraction occurs. Thus, most Mitran priests who began their religious careers as oblates also have the Alertness feat. Characters who join the order late (which may be prohibited in some areas – allowing adults to join is currently a point of contention among the theologians) may or may not have those skills or feats.

Priests of Mitra are taught many things at the temples in addition to theology and philosophy. Many learn practical aspects of their culture, such as smithy work, carpentry, stone work, mining, smelting, minting, marriage brokering, mercantilism and diplomacy. Although priests are not labourers, knowing something of these skills aids them in ministering to the village they will eventually return to. Small villages may only have one priest, while larger ones have a priest and an acolyte. He is exempt from labour obligations owed to the feudal lords and he is forbidden to become a citizen of most cities. Even though he is unable to become an alderman or part of the village government, his opinion is usually consulted. He is almost always considered to be in the upper cliques of the village, although this is sometimes tempered by his behaviour. For example, if the village priest is a known drunkard, his opinions may well be discounted and he may only be consulted on matters of ritual. A priest must lead a life even more virtuous than that demanded of Mitra's non-clerical followers. Although the Mitran clergy can marry, marriage is seen as a liability, so many keep concubines in secret. Members of the clergy are often asked to arbitrate disputes.

Some of the larger temples of Mitra command their own lands and fiefs, including attendant villages. In such cases, the temple is to the village as a baron is to his estates. In these cases the temples represent authority and are not considered part of a village, even if the temple is within a village or town. Even though the temples of Mitra are supposedly beyond such earthly concerns, the wealthy aristocrats donate lands and manors to the temples to ensure status among their neighbours, divine favour and a convenient place to settle relatives without means, inheritance, dowry or land. With these lands and treasures, the temples have become wealthy estates on their own, overseeing hordes of commoners and vast numbers of granaries. Some temples own as many as 800 manor houses and one temple in central Hyborian lands has at least 8,000 people living on its vast holdings. The high priest of a large temple is usually among the most powerful men in Hyborian lands, wielding influence and clout as well as the most well-placed nobleman. There are no particular rules forbidding priests from becoming rich but society does frown on priests who blatantly flaunt their enjoyment of temporal pleasures.

Learning is the order of the day among Mitran priests. Priests often hire themselves out as tutors to the aristocratic order. The Mitran priesthood developed the standard Argossean script with its clearly formed letters, replacing older, more jumbled and usually barely legible scripts. The Mitran clergy leads the faithful in prayer, imploring all to live honest and virtuous lives. The clergy of Mitra oppose human sacrifice and demon-worship. They also collect the two silver piece per level tithe from the population each month. They battle oppression but often disdain actual violence. Priests of Mitra are encouraged to show mercy to fallen foes on the field of battle, a teaching the priests have passed on to the aristocracy. Most Mitran priests are stationed at a temple but a few are known as wandering priests. Note that priests who have killed even a single man are not allowed to officiate over weddings.

Priests of Mitra wear black, knee-length robes with hoods or cowls. A heavy tunic is usually worn over the robe on cool or cold days and a light tunic is worn over it during comfortable or hot weather. Heavy woollen pants are worn in the winter. A belt and a pair of shoes or sandals are also worn. Most priests also carry a knife with them. Argossean priests carry the Litus, which is a crooked staff that is 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 the Litus has origins in pre-Mitran times and that Argossean Mitranism simply adopted the symbol when the religion was taken up by the Argosseans.

Priests of Mitra are cast out of the order if they are found to be practising black magic. Any non-aristocrat found practising black magic is burned as a magician, including fallen priests.

Priests and clergy of foreign gods, as well as most wandering clergy of Mitra, are considered to be outsiders and are treated warily by the other orders of society. Most of Argossean society wonder if these priests are protected in any way, although the priests of Asura seem to be feared somewhat in Hyborian lands. King Conan has mandated religious tolerance, although many feudal lords refuse to honour that particular mandate and Conan has more important things to do than send soldiers out to enforce religious freedoms among his feudal vassals.

Clergy characters are usually scholars or nobles in class but do not have to be. Some begin play with a level or two in noble, then multiclass into scholar when they join the temple. Others are scholars with the Noble Blood feat from *The Scrolls of Skelos*. Most clergy are younger sons of the aristocracy who, lacking prospects because of having neither inheritance nor dowry, had been placed in the temples as children in hopes they might find

power and prestige in the Mitran hierarchy. Sometimes the younger children of wealthy commoners also place their children with the temples, so nobility is not a requirement for this social order if a player wants to play a Mitran priest. Although scholars can choose the 'lay priest' background at 1st level, a fully ordained priest must have selected the Priest feat at the 4th level or above. In either case, the priest may have access to certain forms of sorcery through the temple but will usually be banned from learning other types of sorcery. Few scholarly priests pursue magic for fear that, even if they practise white magic, they may be misunderstood, cast out of the order and burned as heretics or sorcerers. Most Mitran sorcerers gain official approval from those higher in the hierarchy before indulging in such studies. Those who are granted approval are carefully watched by the priesthood. All priests of Mitra take the civilised code of honour, at least initially.

MITRAEA (MITRAIC TEMPLES)

Mitraea, the sanctuaries of Mitra, are usually in caves, which represent empty tombs and the promise of eternal life offered in the Mysteries of Mitra. The chapels are small and each brotherhood has a maximum of 100 members. If a brotherhood exceeds that, another Mitraeum is established. These temples are places where devotees can feel close to divinity and have religious and mystical experiences.

A Mitraeum is usually rectangular, often around 75 feet by 30 feet with a vaulted ceiling. The walls, ceiling and floor are usually white marble. A gold frieze often runs along the walls, decorated with scenes from the life of Mitra. An aisle runs down the centre of the temple and a stone benches run along either side for the cult's members to sit upon. Most Mitraea hold around twenty or thirty people comfortably. Behind an altar of clear green jade, unstained with sacrifice, stands the pedestal whereon sits the idol of Mitra. He is shown with magnificent shoulders, clear cut features, wide straight eyes, a patriarchal beard, and thick curls of hair

confined by a simple band about the temples. Behind the altar and the image of Mitra is a wall carving depicting Mitra slaying a scarab.

The Mitran religion frowns upon ostentatious religious displays, and their temples idealise this by their relatively symbol-free architecture. 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 the Mitran religion does not sacrifice humans or 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.



Aquilonia's Asura

HERETICAL RELIGION IN THE HEART OF HYBORIA

THE RELIGION OF Asura is largely an underground, secretive one, since many Hyborians regard Asura as no more than a demon; however, his cult stretches over most of the world from Vendhya across all the Hyborian kingdoms, his worshippers meeting in hidden safe-houses in every major city.

Aquilonia is home to one of these secretive cults of Asura, at least under King Vilerus – the later reforms of King Conan extended freedom to all religions in Aquilonia, much to the disgust of many ordinary Mitra-worshippers who still feared the cult of Asura. The cult's influence extends throughout Aquilonia but no further south than the Khorotas. The cult has a secret, highly magical communications and spying network, based around the *sorcerous news* spell and other spells of the Divination sorcery style.

Asura is known as the Shining One. He came to the world and gave man civilisation. He revealed the secret wisdom of the heavens to men in order that they may use the knowledge to combat evil. Freedom of thought is emphasised in the Asuran cult.

PHILOSOPHY OF THE ASURAN RELIGION

The Grand Illusion of Life

Life is a grand illusion perpetrated by Ahriman and the Asuran cult tries to see past that illusion. Asura grants a man wisdom to control his impulses and insight to see past the obvious. Evil is a manifestation of the grand illusion.

Evil

The Asurans believe evil is in the eye of the beholder and is a relative concept, not an absolute one like the Mitrans claim. To an Asuran, evil exists in Asura (or whatever one wants to name their god) just as poison exists in a snake. The poison is not poisonous to the snake, nor is evil harmful to a god. What is evil is only evil from Man's point of view and depends upon how it is used. To a snake, poison helps it defend itself and capture prey – so too is Asuran 'evil' used. There is no absolute evil but relative evil is a horrible reality. Thus, while sorcery can certainly be used for evil, it is not inherently evil.

Equality

Men and women are equal in the Asuran religion. Any difference between men and women is on a physical level only and thus part of the grand illusion.

Violence

Asurans condemn violent crime and treachery.

Religious Tolerance

To the Asurans, all religions have the same basic goals and lead men on the same basic paths, so there is no reason why coexistence should not be actively pursued. The shallow differences between various religions are part of the grand illusion. If one peers deep enough, all religions are functionally the same. Although Mitraists believe the Asurans to be devil-worshipping cannibals, the Asurans harbour no ill-will against the Mitran religion, nor do they spread lies about the religion. In general, Asurans find mystery religions to be silly and do not engage in pointless ritual initiations and any sort of irrational ceremony. However, they do not disparage those who enjoy such things.

Vigilance

Asura watches the cosmos to witness its unfolding and so too must the Asurans. Divination spells are used for this purpose, and spells such as *sorcerous news* are especially beloved. Like serpents, they lie in the shadows and watch, waiting for the opportunity to act in their best interests. One of the things they watch for is Acheronian activity. They know pockets of Acheron still survive, especially in Nemedias, and they know the weaknesses of the Acheronians. They know the Giant-Kings are the offspring of Ahriman, a powerful demon, and are a relative evil on the earth. Followers of Asura strive to have high ranks in Spot and Sense Motive in order to see past the illusions of evil. The Asurans are also vigilant in their watch for Corruption, especially among their own members. Wisdom is an important statistic for Asurans.

Secrecy

Popular antagonism has driven the cult into hiding. They have become experts at disguise and secrets. Their temples are cunningly hidden. Ironically, the

cult whose purpose is to see past illusion are actually masters of illusion. Those who seek to unravel secrets are masterful at preserving their secrets – often to their own detriment, as their secrecy leads to even worse rumours about their faith. This secrecy is further preserved by not evangelising or proselytising their religion; only those who are born into the religion are able to practise it. Even marrying outside the religion is frowned upon.

Afterlife

The soul of the deceased stays with the corpse for three days while the priests perform purification ceremonies. While the body makes its way down the Khorotas River, the soul makes a pilgrimage to the afterlife. If the soul is judged more good than evil, then it is allowed into heaven. If judged more evil than good, it is condemned into a frozen and cold pit of eternal darkness.

TABOOS

It is taboo to speak about anything unlawful, for it might lead one to do the act. Lying is also taboo as it contributes to the overall illusion of life. It is also taboo to earn points of Corruption or to do things that risk Corruption.

ASURAN RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS

Fire: Fire and light are the ultimate symbols for the Asurans. They are symbols of divine illumination. Fire especially must never be defiled. Prayers are said before candles, open flames or lighted braziers. The sun and the moon may also serve as prayer foci, as they are also sources of light.

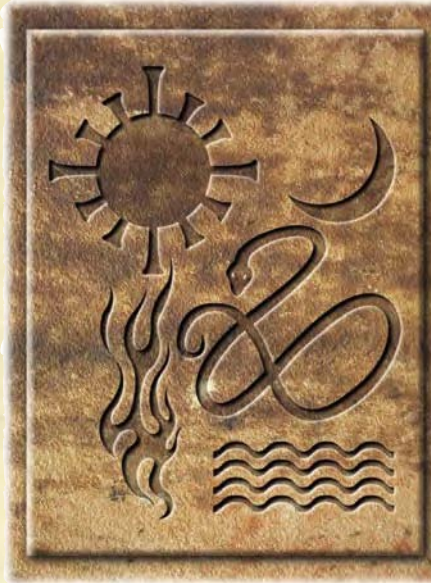
The Serpent: The serpent is the symbol of ancient knowledge. By worshipping sorcerous knowledge, which they symbolise with a serpent, the Asurans became known as snake-worshippers. Asura gave knowledge to Man and brought him out of barbarism. The followers of Asura have knowledge of all the wizards of the East, who are greater than the wizards of the West. This knowledge is meant to help the Asurans combat those who misuse knowledge for relative evil. Asura is symbolised by a white snake and Ahriman is symbolised by a black snake. The black snake wrapped around the world is an image of the grand illusion perpetrated on the world by evil.

Water: Water is seen as a metaphor for life and rivers of any size are venerated as

goddesses. The pouring of water also plays a role in many Vendhyan rituals and spells.

DISPOSAL OF THE DEAD

Pilgrim boats carry their dead out to the sea, down the great Khorotas river, in symbolic recognition of the cult's historic connection with water. The dead are known as pilgrims. The Asurans believe cremation of corpses is an evil created long ago by Ahriman and the practice is forbidden to Asurans. Burning a corpse or person on a pyre is considered an unredeemable sin. The consumption of human corpses is likewise taboo. Corpses should not be buried. The Asurans consider the elements to be holy, especially earth, fire and water, and these elements should not be contaminated by corpses. It is better that a corpse is left to the birds of the air, for they are creatures from heaven. As it is, the Asurans send their dead down the Khorotas River in a black boat piloted by a slave. Mourning for the dead is heavily discouraged, especially in public. Such displays of emotion are seen as particularly Ahrimanic.



BENEFITS OF WORSHIPPING ASURA

Each god or pantheon offers certain benefits to its worshippers, so long as they remain in good standing with the cult and Asura is no exception.

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth 3 sp/level/month to the local priests of Asura; keep secret about your membership in the cult; carry out duties for the priesthood as required; do not become Corrupt; oppose those who carry out human sacrifice or traffic with demons.

Benefits of Worship: Atonement, Faith, Spells (Counterspells, Divination).

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: scrupulous honesty is required in all things except in the matter of concealing the existence of the cult from outsiders; you must work for the greater good of the cult and the god in everything you do and you must avoid becoming personally wealthy.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus the following: Spot and Sense Motive become class skills (even if the priest gains levels in a non-scholar class); sorcery teaching is available (Counterspells, Divination, Oriental Magic, Prestidigitations, *master-words and signs*, and *summon elemental* only).

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Removal of priestly status.

Gods of the Black Kingdoms

RELIGION IN KUSH AND BEYOND

MANY OF THE Black Kingdoms' religions are dominated by superstition and magic. Monkeys and apes are commonly believed to hold the souls of men punished for past crimes. Shamanistic beliefs co-exist with ancestor worship and the worship of local gods and demons. Monstrous *things* from the Outer Realms, such as Ollumonga, Thog, Thaug and Khosatral Khel are worshipped in lost cities and decadent villages. Derketa, the Queen of the Dead, is worshipped in Kush and Zembabwei, and the vile fish-god Dagon is also worshipped.

Black Kingdom religion is driven by cultural and personal needs for power, safety, protection and life. Many residents of the Black Kingdoms feel incapable of achieving those needs on their own – they need a tribe and they need supernatural help. Any act, rule or custom that strikes against those driving needs, or stifles the growth of man, is considered evil. Any act or custom that increases those needs is good. Participation in the culture is good and becoming a hermit or being forced into exile is bad, for example. Words and language are powerful forces to the tribesmen of the Black Kingdoms, for they evidence the animating soul and personal power of all things.

Almost all Black Kingdom religions reinforce the need for community as the best way to achieve power, safety, protection and life. The various religions of the Black Kingdoms reinforce the need for the tribesmen to participate in all the rituals of initiation, honour the family and clan, commune with the community and bond with the ancestors.

The idea of proximity is another powerful concept in the Black Kingdoms. Everything in the dark worlds of the Black Kingdoms is seen to be part of everything else, close in spirit if not spatially. Rituals of all sorts return the tribesmen to the sacred times of the ancestors, heroes and cultural archetypes. Thus the past is close to the present and the rituals ensure this remains so. Things that are considered separated by a distance from their origin are also seen to be weaker, so it is important to retain proximity. The son is weaker than the father is one aspect of that mindset. A tribesman far removed from his tribe is seen to be weaker than he would be if he were with his tribe, the 'origin' of the tribesman, so to speak. Likewise, the present world is perceived close to the after-world, which is, in turn, close to the Source of All Things. The proximity of the after-life means that the

tribesmen live close to the dead, as so much of their religion revolves around the veneration of their ancestors.

Men are seen to be far from the Source of All Things, which may be a god or a force (depending on the tribe or nation). This Source is separated from man by spirits, demons and ghosts. Thus, because of their weak proximity, men are weaker than the gods and the Source. By remaining close to their ancestors, and giving their ancestors power to be closer to more powerful spirits, the tribesmen of the Black Kingdoms hope to be made closer to the Source of All Things and, thus, be more powerful. Priests and tribal magicians hold a special place in the tribal world because they are seen to be closer than anyone else to the other-worlds leading to the Source. This proximity makes things sacred. Note that ancestral power comes from procreation – one cannot become an ancestor in the after-life if one does not have children in this life.

The world around the tribesmen is seen to be a source of inexhaustible life and can be used by tribesmen to increase their own lives, to allow them to be *more* alive. The Black Kingdom tribesmen would never accept a Cimmerian god because Black Kingdom tribesmen are interested in the gods' willingness to help man, to further their power, safety, protection and life, whereas a Cimmerian god does nothing for man. The Black Kingdom tribesmen strive to have a close, personal relationship with the world around them, the spirit world and the gods.

Fetish-Wands

Black Kingdom sorcerers often use rattles, pompons, fetish-sticks, whips and similar hand-held ritual instruments when casting spells. These instruments are built from a core of exotic materials, such as the hair of rare beasts or feathers from birds of symbolic significance, and are expertly crafted (which means all such fetish-wands are masterwork). These rattles and other paraphernalia enable a Black Kingdom sorcerer, tribal magician, witch-doctor and so forth to cast spells which would normally require him to touch the object the spell is being cast upon without actually touching that object; instead, he only has to touch the object with one end of the fetish whilst holding the fetish's other end. In addition, the masterwork nature of



the fetish-wand gives a +1 bonus to the sorcerer's attack roll. A typical fetish-wand has Defence 7, five hit points, hardness 5, a break DC of 16 and costs 500 silver pieces (in relative value, not necessarily in coin).

ANCESTOR VENERATION

Ancestor veneration, while not the same as worshipping a god, is still one of the most basic forms of Black Kingdom cults, tied very much into the worldview of the Black Kingdom tribesmen. Life is a sacred power, and one strengthens that power through community and culture – and the continuation of community of culture increases the sacred power of life. Part of community continuation is the veneration of ancestors, the maintenance of a proximity to the after-life and the spirits dwelling within that afterlife.

Part of this community continuation is also found in naming, because if a descendant is given the name of an ancestor, that ancestor can live in his descendant.

Ancestors only survive in the after-life so long as they are not forgotten, so Black Kingdom tribesmen ritually communicate with their ancestors in order to assure good health, long life

Variant Rule for Tribal Magicians of the Black Kingdoms

Performed Magic: Upon achieving 3rd level in barbarian, the tribal magician can, in lieu of Trap Sense, gain an additional competence bonus to Perform checks and magic attack rolls. This increases as Trap Sense normally would, thus a tribal magician achieving his 9th barbarian level would gain an additional +3 to his Perform checks and magic attack rolls.

and many children. In addition to the power to help his kin, an ancestor also has the supernatural power to harm his kin – which is why they are feared as well as respected. Ancestors can be visible or invisible and are believed to have the power to possess man or beast. Ancestors are believed to often visit their descendants in the forms of snakes, hyenas and other animals, or to have direct communion through possession. If forgotten or neglected, ancestors strike out at their descendants through curses and calamities. The living and the dead form a totality that must be engaged if life is to be lived fully. A man without ancestors (without family) is a man with only half a life.

No Black Kingdom tribesman can communicate with a spirit who is not kin – thus the idea of proximity intrudes even here. Ancestors are supposed to be close to the Source of All Things. A Black Kingdom tribesman cannot become an ancestor unless he produces children. Likewise, only those who lead good lives (keep a Barbaric code of honour or uphold whatever moral standards the tribe has) become ancestors. Ancestors must be role-models, sources of tradition and stability.

Ancestor veneration is a part of an overall tribal religion, so no attempts are ever made to bring others 'into the faith' or get them to worship their own ancestors. There are no ordained priests for the veneration of ancestors – each person is his own 'priest' in regards to his own ancestors. Priests serve higher powers and interact with the other spirits of the world instead of the ancestral ones on behalf of the tribe.

ANIMISM

Most Black Kingdom religions are animistic, teaching that a single Supreme Being or Source of All Things rules a host of lesser gods and spirits. Animals are considered earthly representatives of certain gods, each of whom have a specific function and the power to control certain aspects of a tribesman's life. The Source of All Things is generally considered to be uninvolved in life, having minimal proximity to the present world. The lesser gods and spirits, however, are closer to the present world and are willing to influence a tribesman's life positively or negatively. The quantity and quality of attention paid to the spirit or god by

the worshipper determines which way that influence goes. Most Black Kingdom religions teach that the spirits and gods desire sacrifice – often human or animal sacrifice.

Black Kingdom beliefs include the idea that any object, whether animate or inanimate, whether intelligent or non-intelligent, is possessed of a spirit. Spirits can occupy anything, so the entire world around the tribesmen is alive. Animals, plants and even forces of nature, such as lightning or hurricanes, are possessed of spirits just as man is, so everything must be treated with respect and ritual. Ritual is a part of life, important for placating the spirits so that food may be found and survival ensured. When something dies, the spirit lives on.

GODS OF THE BLACK KINGDOMS JHEBBAL SAG

This ancient nature god once received the worship of all living things, man and beast alike. Today it is thought that the only humans who still revere him are savages, the Picts and many of the Kushite and Black Kingdoms tribes, though a few scholars may know of Jhebbal Sag's existence through evidence found all over the world, in cave paintings or the very oldest manuscripts. It is said that the animals have not forgotten Jhebbal Sag and can still be controlled by his followers. He is known to have two sons, Gullah and Jhil, but in all likelihood has many more sons who are minor gods, one for each animal.

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth 2 sp/level/month to the priests (Aphaki worshippers of Jhil only), or provide one human sacrifice per year (Aphaki, Picts or Kushites). The whole of Pictish and Kushite society is expected to contribute directly to the upkeep of their priests (who are usually known as tribal magicians), building them their 'devil-devil huts' and giving them a portion of the game caught by every hunt.

Benefits of Worship: Spells (any except Oriental Magic).

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus must know the Nature Magic sorcery style and the Tormented Sacrifice feat.

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

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Captured alive, then sacrificed.

GODS OF 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 doses of witchcraft, tribal magicianism and Gallah superstition into the faith. Kushite kings, regardless of their actual religion, are almost always depicted on lion-thrones, in honour of the ancient Kushite god Apedemak; the Chaga consider Apedemak to be a manifestation of Maahes (see page 82).

The specific rituals used by the Chaga to worship Set are shrouded in secret, but they are known to be gruesome and sinister, comprised of unspeakable rites and human sacrifices in grisly quantities. In certain ceremonies, priests wear monstrous, half-bestial masks surmounted by ostrich plumes. 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 Chaga's grim ceremonies of black magic. Sacred beasts, both terrestrial and otherwise, abound in their religious culture. Most of 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 cult of Set among the Chaga is identical to the cult of Set in Stygia, although only the first five Mysteries can be learned – which the Set followers believe to be the whole of the faith. The Chaga do not build pyramids prior to a king's death. A Chaga king, when he dies, is buried in the ground and a small (compared to Stygian monuments), steep-sided pyramid is built above the grave.

Gallah tribal magicians wear monstrous, half-bestial masks surmounted by ostrich plumes in certain ceremonies dedicated to Jullah. Silent, ritualistic processions also play an inexplicable part in this dark religion. Gallah tribal magicians tend to focus on curses and magical links. They often learn the *Doom of the Doll* curse (see *Conan: The Scrolls of Skelos*), taking feats such as Hexer and Focused Magical Link. Crafts are also important to this class of tribal magician. The blacksmiths of Kush can make iron heads for spears and lances, garnering them a reputation bordering on magical, for they steep their art in mystery, guarding their secrets of turning raw iron ore into durable metal tools. Blacksmiths become tribal magicians or work closely with them.

The Kushite tradition of scholarship is in many respects far more open-minded than that of the supposedly more 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 lay priests – though a senior witchman can be a harsh taskmaster, he is genuinely concerned for the welfare of his lay priest and desires to train him to be an asset to the tribe.

In addition to Set and Jullah, the Shemite Derketo has been adopted by the Gallah Kushites as Derketa, Queen

of the Dead, particularly along the shores and the border of Stygia.

Kushite Witch-Finder

The Kushite witch-doctors, witchmen or witch-finders are particularly famed for their countermagic 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 outfit, in classical shamanic style. They also often sport long, wild dreadlocks.

APEDEMAK

Worshipped in the larger towns and cities of Kush, Apedemak is a god of lions, war and abundance. He usually appears as a python with the torso and arms of a man and the head of a male lion, although he occasionally is shown as a powerful warrior dressed in a Stygian manner with four lion heads, one facing each direction (so only three are ever seen). His temple possesses a single chamber entered through a single pylon gate; the chamber has six columns supporting a wooden roof. He is sometimes depicted holding an elephant and a lion on leashes and is sometimes shown sitting on an elephant throne. Sorcerers devoted to Apedemak often make animal allies of lions. His worship has largely died out in Shumballa but is strong in the south. He leads a pantheon of gods that include Dedwen (a god of incense and trade), Arensnuphis (god of the hunt, often pictured with an antelope thrown over his shoulders) and Sebiuwerker (goddess of procreation, companion of Arensnuphis).

Requirements of Worship: Provide four animal sacrifices per year. The whole of Kushite society is expected to contribute directly to the upkeep of their tribal magicians, building them their temples and giving them a portion of the game caught by every hunt.

Benefits of Worship: Spells.

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus must know the Nature Magic sorcery style and the Tortured Sacrifice feat.

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

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Captured alive, then sacrificed.

JULLAH

Jullah is a gorilla-god, a son of Jhebbal Sag who lives on the Moon. Bull apes are sacred to him. His religion is less organised than that of Set or Apedemak and is a nature religion based on the myth that at one time men and animals spoke the same language and worshipped the same god. He is brother to Jhil, the merciless raven god. Jullah represents the baser instincts of human nature, especially considering an ape's uninhibited sexuality. These base instincts are brought to the fore by worshippers of Jullah. Apes show man which fruits are safe to eat, so Jullah is also a protector spirit, as well as an incarnation of the most aggressive human behaviours.



Temples to Jullah are usually in underground caves or in devil huts where many fires are always kept ablaze. A great ape is usually kept in these temples (see *Conan: Tales of the Black Kingdoms* for statistics of the great apes).

The priests of Jullah have a sacred rite known as the Sacred Ritual of the Ascended Bride. This ceremony, performed infrequently when Jullah is deemed to

be particularly unhappy or enraged at the world, involves the sacrifice of a hundred women – a ritual that is devastating to local tribes to pull off. This ritual usually creates waves of war as the women are kidnapped and, if care is not taken, can easily lead to the death of the sorcerer who called for the ceremony if he is found out. However, if successful, the sacrifice chosen to become the 'bride' of Jullah is transformed into the Black Spawn of Jullah (see *Conan: Tales of the Black Kingdoms* for statistics of the Black Spawn of Jullah).

Spells to summon Jullah usually bring the Tentacle Spawn of Jullah or the Black Spawn of Jullah, a large demon believed to be Jullah's corporeal form. See *Conan: Tales of the Black Kingdoms* for statistics of these manifestations and this demon.

Jullah cultists often learn to kill with their bare hands in a manner similar to that of the great apes, although they still carry spears and shields to protect themselves from wild animals. In addition to Fighting-Madness, they often take the Brawl and Improved Unarmed Strike feats. Those who prove their intense devotion and their mastery of unarmed combat are initiated into the religion more truly and are called Elders. If they take three or more ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Jullah) they gain a +1 competence bonus to their Magic Attack Roll when casting spells from the Nature sorcery style. If they have six or more ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Jullah), they are treated as being a level higher for the purposes of determining Animal Allies (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game*). If a Jullah Elder has nine or more ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Jullah), he gains a +1 bonus to his magic attack rolls if he uses the Awful Rite of the Were-Beast to create a were-ape.

Requirements of Worship: Provide one human sacrifice per year. The whole of Kushite society is expected to contribute directly to the upkeep of their tribal magicians, building them their 'devil-devil huts' and giving them a portion of the game caught by every hunt.

Benefits of Worship: Spells (any except Oriental Magic), orgies

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus must know the Nature Magic sorcery style and the Tortured Sacrifice feat.

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

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Captured alive after a fearsome chase, then sacrificed.

DERKETA

Derketa is the Kushite death goddess and Queen of the Dead. She is probably derived originally from the Derketo of Zembabwei, Stygia and Shem, though the attributes of the two goddesses are quite different. She is 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 represent her as the mate of Jullah. Human sacrifice is part of Derketa's ceremonies, achieved using the poisoned Apples of Derketa. The juice of these fruits can kill, by either ingestion or external application. Tribal priests of Derketa take the Carouser and Debaucher feats, focusing on curses, hypnotism and magical links for their magic. Sexual enslavement via magic

(see *enslave* in *Conan: The Scrolls of Skelos*) is a common end to enemies of Derketa's tribal priests.

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth 1 sp/level/month to the priests of Derketa.

Benefits of Worship: Spells.

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Must know at least one sorcery style.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (any sorcery styles except Oriental Magic and Summonings).

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Send an assassin after them, or sexually enslave them.

GODS OF DARFAR

Cannibalism is not just an example of perverted dietary preferences among the Darfari; their ghastly cult demands such grisly fare. The eating of people is a matter of ritual and symbolism. The Darfari prefer bludgeons as weapons as they prefer to beat their enemies to death or unconsciousness, feeling that this retains the flavour of the meat far better than slicing them open and letting their blood spill upon the earth. The Darfari of Zamboula swear by Set, but their masters are Set worshippers.

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 went well, is then covered with leaves and earth in the cooking pit to be roasted alive.

After the victim is cooked, he is removed from the hot pit and taken to the temple 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 temple, cut up and distributed to the tribe.

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.

The Darfari do not worship any one particular god, but have 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 mystical entities to bring chosen weather, to encourage a good harvest or to bring about success in war. Their magic is not usually directed against terrestrial foes. The spear and club are usually far more reliable against flesh and blood than magic. Nature magic, divination and curses are common sorcery styles for a Darfari tribal priest. Darfari priests, like southern Black Kingdom priests, suffer slightly from the racial penalty to Charisma, which diminishes their magical attack. The offsetting bonus to Strength, while it helps in a melee capacity, does not help with scholar abilities.

Their religion is both a tribal and a nature religion (see pages 3-5 for definitions).

- Requirements of Worship:** Eat human flesh at least once per month; participate in a raiding party to capture suitable victims at least once every three months.
- Benefits of Worship:** Spells (Counterspells, Curses, Divination and Summonings).
- Requirements for Ordained Priesthood:** Ritual Sacrifice feat.
- Benefits of Ordained Priesthood:** Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (Counterspells, Curses, Divination and Summonings sorcery styles only).
- Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests:** Next on the fire.

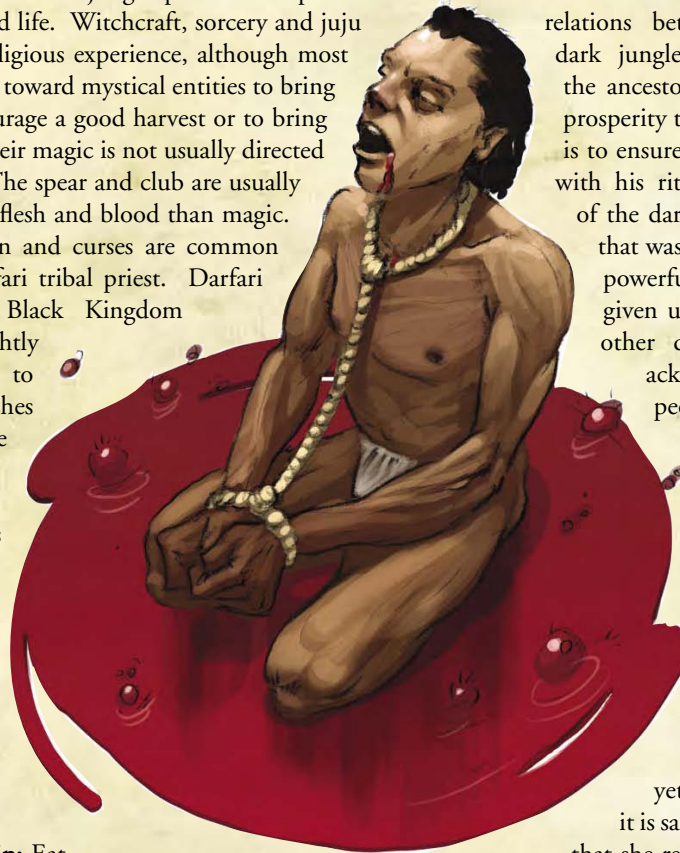
GODS OF KESHAN

The priests seem to 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, which does not rot, does exist 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 ruling class treat those stationed beneath them fairly and will intermarry with them.

The deification of Yelaya indicates some form of ancestor worship consistent with some forms of primitive animism. Rituals are designed 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. Gwahlur is one of the dark jungle gods, a king of darkness that was thrown down by the other darkly powerful gods and his glowing teeth given unto men for safe-keeping. Many other disgusting and bestial gods are acknowledged and worshipped by the people of Keshan.



The religion of Keshan centres around the holy city of Alkmeenon. The priests of Keshan have come to the city via secret ways for centuries, seeking the great Oracle of Alkmeenon for wisdom and portents. The Oracle itself is Princess Yelaya, the last recorded ruler of the city. Yelaya died at an early age, yet her beauty never waned. Indeed, it is said that her body never decayed and

that she remains as stunning in death as she was in life. Each night when the moonlight floods the palace, she rises from her repose to once more rule over the city, attended only by flitting shadows of bygone ages. It is during these times that the priests used to come before her to petition her concerning the will of the gods. A century ago this practice ceased, for it is said that the high priest at that time was corrupt and came seeking to steal the fabled *teeth of Gwahlur*. An unknown doom struck him down and only a handful of his followers returned to report the grisly tale. It is whispered that Gorulga, the current high priest of Keshan, has renewed the ancient practice and once more consults the Oracle.

PRINCESS YELAYA, ORACLE OF ALKMEENON

Yelaya was the last ruler of the ancient white race that once controlled Keshan from their hidden palace at Alkmeenon. She died as a young woman, yet her body remained unspoiled and as beautiful in death as it was in life. The ancient peoples of Keshan took this as the last sign that this ancient royal line had triumphed over the older, darker gods and had ascended into divinity. The body was preserved in the palace at Alkmeenon where it became the divine mouthpiece of the god’s will – the Oracle of Alkmeenon. Soon afterward,

the ancient city was declared sacrosanct, though none now remembers why it was abandoned in the first place.

In essence, the Keshanni pantheon is a highly ritualised form of ancestor worship, with the entire royal family of Alkmeenon down through the ages having been deified in the eyes of the people. Yelaya's amazingly preserved body is viewed as an oracle and her deified spirit is believed to communicate the collective will of the gods to those mortals who petition it with the proper respect on moonlit nights. This, coupled with the fact that the royal family was known to have kept the *teeth of Gwahlur* hidden in Alkmeenon, is seen as proof that these ancient rulers have passed from mortal to divine. The possession of these relics is perhaps even more telling than Yelaya's body, as it is widely accepted in Keshan that the *teeth of Gwahlur* are the glowing teeth ripped from the very mouth of the dark jungle-god Gwahlur upon his defeat – trophies to assure the people of their ancestor's divine might.

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth 1 sp/level/month to the priests of Keshan; pay fealty to the royal line of Keshia.

Benefits of Worship: Faith.

Requirements of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: must be male; must be a scholar with the lay priest (Keshan Priesthood) background; must uphold the good of Keshan and its people above all else; must obey the words of Yelaya the Oracle of Alkmeenon as the holiest of law.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (Counterspells only); access to the royal court at Keshia (including the royal family, advisors, foreign emissaries and so forth); initiation into the cult of Yelaya (which includes knowledge concerning the intimate details regarding the secret ways into Alkmeenon, the proper rituals for entering the city, petitioning the Oracle and removing the *teeth of Gwahlur* from their hiding place and knowledge of where these relics are hidden in Alkmeenon); 'privileges' with the royal dancing girls.

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Flayed alive in the great square of Keshia.

GODS OF PUNT

The people of Punt worship an ivory goddess. Robert E. Howard did not name this enigmatic goddess, but L. Sprague de Camp has given 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 is a round, domed marble building in the shape of a skull, built before the arrival of the Gallahs. The statue is made out of a single piece of ivory. The tribal priests and clergy of Punt portray themselves as messengers of the gods and/or spirits, for the gods speak only to the priests by way of oracular statues. The clergy of Punt have so much power

because they are the mouthpieces of the gods that Puntish kings will even commit suicide at their command.

Punt is a land of incense and myrrh. These are traded with other nations, whose people often burn the incense to clear the air in sickrooms. Other cultures use the incense to drive away baneful spirits during certain ceremonies. Incense is known to clear the mind and spirit, giving a calm feeling even in stressful situations, making it perfect for use while meditating or praying. Myrrh quiets the mind and builds confidence. Those under the influence of myrrh gain a +1 bonus to all Charisma-based skill checks.

THE IVORY GODDESS (NEBETHET), QUEEN OF DARKNESS, MISTRESS OF THE NIGHT

The Ivory Goddess is said to come to life when the light of the full moon strikes her ivory idol; at this time she speaks her omens. The chiefs of Punt consult her before each grave decision. Stygians identify her with Nephthys (see page 82), although she is more likely the deified form of an ancient Puntish queen named after that divinity.

The Temple of the Ivory Goddess is a round, domed building of white marble. To enter one must pass a barred portal with a huge portcullis of green bronze resembles a mouth with bared fangs and is flanked on the second story by two square windows, which appear like empty eye-sockets. The result gives the temple the appearance of a great silver skull on a hill. The portcullis is raised via a hidden catch in the wall (Search DC 22 to find).

Inside the Temple of the Ivory Goddess is an upstairs room with an old wooden floor and a trap door. The trapdoor opens on stairs to the lower floor. The lower floor has a spacious rotunda surrounded by a circle of marble columns that support the domed roof. Six small copper lamps hang from long chains beneath the circle of the dome. On the perimeter opposite the great portal, backed by a fretted marble screen, is a dais set with three marble steps. The ivory statue of the goddess stands upon the dais.

Prior to Conan's 37th year, a grotesque statue stood upon the dais. The ghostly statue of that time was wonderfully nude, well-rounded and seductive, but instead of having a woman's equally attractive facial features, the face was that of a ghoulish death's head, a terrible and naked skull. Although the size of a small woman, the horrific statue was carved from a single piece of ivory. After Conan's 37th year, a new ivory statue



was carved to look like Muriela, a Corinthian dancer who dared to impersonate the Ivory Goddess. The new statue is beautiful beyond comparison with mortal beauty.

Behind the rotunda are dusty apartments protected by a withered oracle-woman and a horrible man-ape with a baboon-snout and a loin-cloth (the son of the crone and Jamankh the hyena-demon). One small apartment is built behind the statue where a priestess can stand and speak for the statue. The unnamed old woman was the Ivory Goddess' oracle prior to the story, *The Ivory Goddess*; Muriela, the Corinthian dancer, is the new oracle after that.

Requirements of Worship: Offer Allegiance to the Ivory Goddess and obey the commands of her oracle.

Benefits of Worship: Atonement, Oracles, Spells (Divination and Counterspells only)

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Ritual Sacrifice feat.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (Counterspells, Curses, Divination and Hypnotism sorcery styles only).

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Fed to the crocodiles.

JAMANKH THE HYENA-DEMON

In addition to ancestor worship and a few deities, Punt is also host to several demons, such as Jamankh the Hyena-Demon. He represents dark wisdom, greed and sexual deformity. Jamankh preys upon corruption and vileness. His appearance is so terrifying that the sight of his shadow strikes man and beast dumb with fear. He continually changes his sex from male to female and back again. He is a patron of prostitutes and deviant sexuality. Jamankh is depicted as either attacking frightened prey or laughing with his debased and profane knowledge. He has powers of divination and knows the secrets of necromancy and summonings. It is said that his priests can mediate and learn the names of whomever they are concentrating on, for Jamankh always calls his victims by name. He is a master hypnotist and can always see his victims around him. He sends his faithful sorcerers pet hyenas to hunt with and he encourages his followers to take the form of a hyena. Those who worship him slowly take on horrible deformities as Corruption envelopes their souls. Many become virtual Hyena-Men. Jamankh is unable to resist a naked woman and will often mate with beautiful sacrifices to produce horrible children.

Requirements of Worship: Obey priests of Jamankh, sacrifice at least one human to the god per month.

Benefits of Worship: Spells (any).

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Ritual Sacrifice feat; Debaucher feat; obey the high priest of Jamankh; sacrifice at least one human per week to Jamankh; have Jamankh for a demonic patron (as per the Greater Demonic Pact spell in *Conan the Roleplaying Game*)

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (all sorcery styles, although those who learn Shape-shifter from Jamankh can only appear as deformed objects or creatures – unless the form chosen is that of a hyena, in which case the spell allows a normal form).

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Capture them and sacrifice them to Jamankh by casting the Awful Rite of the Were-Beast and turning the disloyal priests into werehyenas.

NEW SPELL

CURSE OF THE HYENA-GOD

Curses

PP Cost: Three points

Components: V

Casting Time: One standard action

Range: Evil Eye, Touch or Magical Link

Targets: One creature

Duration: 1d6 + eight days

Saving Throw: Will negates

Prerequisites: Magic Attack Bonus +1, *lesser ill-fortune*

Magic Attack Roll: Sets DC for target's Will saving throw

A common legend in the Black Kingdoms is that the soul of a human devoured by a hyena is forever visible to that hyena. This curse replicates that legend. The recipient of this curse sees the ghosts of anyone they have slain, intentionally or unintentionally. The first spectres arrive in 1d2 hours after the successful casting of the spell; additional spectres arrive with alarming regularity (as the Games Master needs in order to create suspense and horror). Note that until the first ghost arrives, there is no noticeable effect on the victim of the spell. Also, this spell does not conjure actual spirits, but simply brings the guilt of the victim into visual play – so the spectres of anyone the victim *believes* he has killed will also show up, regardless of the truth. Thus, if a victim believes he was responsible for his grandmother's death on some level, she will appear to the victim. These gruesome ghosts dredged from the past hover around the character, stand over him while he tries to sleep and appear to try to communicate with him their anger over being killed (however, unless the victim is prone to hear voices through insanity, the phantoms make no noise).

The result of this congregation of horrors is that, for the first seven days, the character becomes shaken. A shaken character takes a –2 penalty on attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, and ability checks. Shaken is a less severe state of fear than frightened or panicked.

Also, because they lay down next to the character, lean over him, float above his body and so forth, the character will have problems sleeping. Unless the character makes another Will save (DC set by the sorcerer's original magic attack roll), he will be unable to sleep – and suffer the effects of fatigue. A fatigued character can neither run nor charge and takes a –2 penalty to Strength and Dexterity. Doing anything that would normally cause fatigue causes the fatigued character to become exhausted. After eight hours of complete rest, fatigued characters are no longer fatigued. After becoming fatigued, if the sleeplessness persists, the character becomes exhausted. An exhausted character moves at half speed and

takes a –6 penalty to Strength and Dexterity. If the character continues to suffer from sleeplessness after becoming exhausted, he remains exhausted and suffers 1d6 hit points of nonlethal damage per day until the character gets eight hours of sleep, when he moves back to being merely fatigued. Another eight hours of sleep restores the character from the fatigued state until he suffers another night of sleeplessness.

After the first week, the character must make another save or become frightened that the horrors will never cease. A frightened creature flees from the source of its fear as best it can. If unable to flee, it may fight. A frightened creature takes a –2 penalty on all attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks and ability checks. A frightened creature can use special abilities, including spells, to flee; indeed, the creature must use such means if they are the only way to escape. Unfortunately, running does not help – as the spectral visions give chase. The character may find himself fighting monsters only he can see. Another Will save must be made whenever the character falls down from exhaustion: if failed, the character becomes helpless for 24 hours, curled into a ball, shaking with fright; if successful, the character returns to a shaken state until the next day, when the character must again make the save to avoid becoming frightened.

A helpless target is treated as having a Dexterity of zero (–5 modifier). Melee attacks against a helpless target get a +4 bonus (equivalent to attacking a prone target). Ranged attacks get no special bonus against helpless targets. Thieves, pirates, temptresses and Zingarans can sneak attack helpless targets. As a full-round action, an enemy can use a melee weapon to deliver a coup de grace to a helpless foe. An enemy can also use a bow or crossbow, provided he is adjacent to the target. The attacker automatically hits and scores a critical hit. A rogue also gets his sneak attack damage bonus against a helpless foe when delivering a coup de grace. If the defender survives, he must make a Fortitude save (DC 10 + damage dealt) or die.

This curse has no effect on necromancers (sorcerers with knowledge of the Necromancy sorcery style) or a sorcerer with five or more points of Corruption. Although they see the dead people, they merely regard the spectres as a grotesque inconvenience.

GODS ALONG THE BLACK COAST & SOUTHERN ISLANDS

Along the Black Coast, the natives engage in black religious practices centred around horrific spirits and

gods known as Inquice or Loa or Baka (depending on the specific tribe and religion). These minor deities are colourful characters that run the range of human traits and emotions; there are seductive Inquices, capricious Inquices, wrathful Inquices, friendly Inquices and so on. Rituals are performed in secret languages learned by the priests, along with sacred dances and certain dietary practices. Central to the faith, regardless of the specific tribal beliefs, is the belief in the efficacy of sacrifices to the godlings, which may be animal or even human. Ancestor veneration is also part of the religions along the Black Coast. Priests and sorcerers (known as Nganga) along the Black Coast tend to emphasise magical links, taking feats and crafts along those lines.

Black Coast sorcerers rarely take the Immortality sorcery style (from *Conan: The Scrolls of Skelos*) because immortality among the practitioners of this religion is not a perpetual personal condition but a communal recurring condition. The natives of the Black Coast believe every person has two souls (if not more): an individual but transient *emi* soul and a communal and reincarnating *iponri* soul, which is sort of an ancestral guardian soul. At death, if the tribesman led a morally responsible life, the *iponri* soul rejoins the spirit world of Inquices and gods and may reincarnate again with a new destiny to live out. Particularly strong *emi* souls may become *iponri* souls. *Iponri* souls are part of the gods, so every person is thus born with a predisposition to worship their very nature – the Inquices; further, a person is predisposed to worship the Inquices who are strongest within the person. The kings of the various tribes and tribal nations of the Black Coast are almost uniformly considered to have Shango *iponri* souls.

There is a spiritual hierarchy in Black Coastal religions. The humans are at the bottom of the hierarchy. Above the people are the Nkuyu, who are the ancestors of lineage. The Nkuyu may be named and invoked for aid – they may also reincarnate as *inponri* souls. The Simbi, who are further removed from humanity, are above the Nkuyu. The Simbi are known as the ‘twice-born’ and are tribal ancestors who have not recently lived as people. They are invoked for special blessings but are known to be unpredictable. The people of the Black Coast regard the Elementals in *Conan the Roleplaying Game* as Simbi (so a *summon elemental* spell is called *summon Simbi* along the Black Coast). Above the Simbi are the Inquices, the remotest of ancestors and the closest to the Source of All Things (Nzambi Mpongo). They are Outsiders in all respects. The Inquices are no longer individual ancestors; all ancient blacksmiths, for example, have become the Inquice known as Ogun. The Inquices represent the spirits of natural forces and are minor deities. The demons presented in *Conan the Roleplaying Game* and its supplements would be considered Inquices along the Black Coast and might be considered the massed

souls of evil sorcerers who are denied rebirth due to immortality and Corruption.

Fetishes

The use of talismans and fetishes is extremely common along the Black Coast. The fetishes may be as simple as a statue of the Inquice or god (known as an Nkizi), or they may be dried animal heads (or other parts) dedicated to one of the Inquices. These fetishes are sold for medicine because of their spiritual powers. When used on a believer, the fetish either confers a +1 bonus to a skill check or saving throw if properly invoked. The character should state that he is invoking the fetish and display it prominently. For example, a healing fetish offers the bonus to Heal checks or on the save against a disease (whichever fits the situation better). A fire spirit Nkizi may give the bonus to Craft (metalworking).

Also, Nkizi can be made as a ward against certain actions. For example, a tribesman may fear thieves, so he begs a priest to make a Nkizi ward to protect his house. The Nkizi is made to provide a –1 penalty to any thieves attempting to steal from the house, affecting their Hide, Move Silently, Appraise and other skills. This is not a magical effect, it is psychological – so the Nkizi must be seen by the thieves before it is effective. Any native thief will recognise what the Nkizi is and suffer the psychological effect but a foreign thief will just regard it as a neat statue and suffer no ill consequences. Ultimately a Nkizi or fetish must be believed in for it to work. They are created according to specific formulae known to the priests (Knowledge (arcane) check (DC 18) to know how to make any one particular Nkizi). If the knowledge is known, a fetish can be made with a Craft (fetish) check (DC 12) in a week’s time; the construction of an Nkizi or fetish involves giving it ‘magical’ charges, such as certain seeds or herbs, within its belly, head, back or sex organs.

A fetish or Nkizi is believed to be in close proximity to the supernatural, so they are used sparingly and with extreme caution. Improper or even frequent use causes reverse effects and curses to befall the abuser. In addition, someone using a fetish or Nkizi improperly or for a use not intended when it was activated has to make Corruption saves as with any other contact with the otherworldly.

Drums

Drums are the primary source of music in Black Coast cultures and are considered a source of power. Drums are played incessantly for hours on end during religious ceremonies and the tribesmen dance in orgiastic abandon. There are four kinds of drums used in Black Coast ceremonies. The manman drum is a large, three-foot tall drum beaten by a standing drummer. The drummer uses a small wooden hammer with one hand and his other hand is used bare. The second drum is a two-foot tall drum that is beaten with bare

hands by a seated drummer who holds it between his knees. If the magic is intended to be beneficial to all, the third drum is the bula drum, which is a small drum beaten with two long sticks by a seated drummer. The fourth drum is a huge drum used only in the darkest of ceremonies. Carved from a single tree trunk, this drum usually exceeds six feet in height and is called the assotor drum. Drummers stand on platforms to beat the assotor drum, which is considered a fetish item (providing a +1 bonus to all Perform (ritual) checks).

INQUICE/BAKA

Inquices (or Baka or Loa) are the spirit forces the followers appeal to in order to assure success in life and give distress to their enemies. The Inquices are considered ancient spirits and caretakers of the land. They require many ceremonies and offerings of those who worship them and the tribesmen of the Black Coast are extremely obedient. Many Inquices are ancestors who were able to control certain elemental forces to such a degree they were forever associated with that force. For example, an ancestor who was a blacksmith became the Inquice Ogun. For all intents and purposes, these are similar to the orisha of the Ataians. These beings function as demon lords for the purposes of pacts, patronage and summoning.

Adjassou: Female Inquice of spring water. She angers easily and is usually depicted with bulging, fish-like eyes.

Aida-Wedo: The wife of Damballah, she is the Inquice of fertility and newborns. She accepts sacrifices of white chickens and white eggs. She is represented by snakes and rainbows; her colour is white.

Damballah: He is the head of the Inquices. Like Jhebbal Sag, he is one of the first Inquices. Damballah protects the Inquices and the people of the Black Coast. He is a god of serpents and is associated with Set or Yig by the Stygians. He is a patron of hypnotism.

Djab: Djab is the Inquice of black magic and ill-fortune. Djab prefers sacrifices of black chickens or people.

Erzulie Dantor: She is the cruel Inquice of jealousy and vengeance, the patron of temptresses and those who have been betrayed, especially in love. She is the dark side of Erzulie and she hates men.

Erzulie: She is the beloved Inquice of love, beauty, purity and romance, a patron of dancing, flowers and all things beautiful. White doves and fragrances are her favoured sacrifices. She is not generally well-disposed toward women, whom she sees as rivals.

Galunga: He is the grotesque Inquice of the sea, protector of fishermen and sailors. His sacrifices are drowned.

Guédé: He is the horrible Inquice of the Dead. His knowledge is the accumulated knowledge of all the deceased, so he is omniscient in matters of the past. He is depicted as a darkness, a foul spot of black hovering on the landscape, guarding the land of the dead.

Jhebbal Sag: This ancient nature god once received the worship of all living things, man and beast alike. He is one of the first.

Kariempembe: This dark Inquice of trees, plants and healers lives among rocks and ravines, killing those who offend him.

Legba: This is a guardian Inquice and keeps the material world separated from the world of the Inquices. Every ritual begins with a sacrifice to wise Legba.

Lusa: Male Inquice of the sun.

Manu: Female Inquice of the moon.

Marassa: The sacred twin Inquices, who died in their youth. They are the balance of the universe and are considered to be two parts of the same whole. The Marassa are saluted at every ritual.

Mombu Mombu: This stammering Inquice causes storms and torrential rain. He is also responsible for floods. He lives at the bottom of ponds and rivers in the form of a dead warrior.

Nago Shango: This Inquice is the lord of thunderbolts. His temples are kept by a mysterious group of priestesses who are chosen only from among women of the clans.

Nkita Kiamasa: She is the Inquice of herbal healing; she never possesses anyone during rituals as she is also charged with protecting religious ceremonies.

Ogun: The Inquice of metal-working and fire.

Oya: This female Inquice can control floods and direct the force of hurricanes and tornados.

Pungo Dibudi: This entity is the Inquice of all things male, including warfare, phalluses, politics, iron and metalworking. His symbol is the primary tribal weapon and his colour is red.

Sakpata: This powerful Inquice brings disease, especially smallpox. Sakpata is also associated with light rains. Evil witch doctors have been known to summon Sakpata to commit acts of devilry.

Sobo: He is the Inquice of thunder. He is a patron of warrior cults, the soldiers of the Black Coast.

Requirements of Worship: Each of the Inquice require specific annual ceremonies and sacrifices. A follower of any particular Inquice must pay a tithe worth 2 silver pieces per month to the appropriate temple or shrine, or offer one animal or person in sacrifice per year.

Benefits of Worship: Spells, Oracles.

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Must know at least two sorcery styles.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (any sorcery styles except Oriental Magic).

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Cast an *ill-fortune* spell on them, renewing it as needed to perpetuate it.

NEW SPELLS

WHITE DARKNESS

Summonings

PP Cost: Four points

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1d20 minutes

Range: Personal or Touch

Targets: One creature

Duration: 1d6 hours

Saving Throw: Will negates

Prerequisites: Knowledge (arcana) six ranks, Perform (dance) two ranks, magic attack bonus +1, *demonic pact* or *master words and signs*

Magic Attack Roll: Sets DC for target's Will saving throw

The character becomes possessed by a god or *Inquice*. The character must dance in an orgiastic manner in order to cast this spell on himself, a tribesman dancing with him or a helpless creature in the centre of his dance. As the character dances, he feels a strange numbness that is glorious in its whiteness and horrifying in its darkness. An unearthly chorus will identify the god or *Inquice* entering the character and power will flood the body, threatening to burst out and explode through the chest and head of the character. The character must choose to accept the possession or may touch another to pass the power into the other creature. The possessing outsider seizes control of the character (usually the caster) and the character acts as though he is the god, demon or *Inquice*. A character may volunteer to fail the saving throw.

The character gains the Possessed template for the duration of the spell. Once a character takes this template, he forever runs the risk of being possessed again in stressful situations. The Will save against this eventuality is 10 + the number of times the character has been possessed by that entity. Thus, a Black Coast native who has been possessed by the *Inquice of War* might find himself possessed by the spirit again whenever combat starts to go against him – and he could end up slaughtering friend as well as foe. If cast on a Player Character the Games Master may take control of the character for the duration of the spell. The subject of the spell is completely unaware of his surroundings for the entire duration and will remember nothing of his actions later.

Possessed Template

Once a possessing outsider takes control of a character, this template determines the character's statistics during the possession. The possessed character is the base creature and the possessor is the possessing outsider. Unless otherwise noted, use the base creature's statistics. This is a generic template; some entities may have their own particular

templates. For example, a character possessed by Jhebbal Sag may take the Child of Jhebbal Sag template in *Conan: The Scrolls of Skelos* at the Games Master's option.

Hit Dice: The possessing creature cares little for the character's body. The base creature's Hit Die type becomes a d12 (if the character has more than ten levels, the additional hit points are +4 per level over tenth), as the possessor ignores the pain and other damage inflicted upon it.

Attacks: The base creature gains a slam attack that deals damage according to its size (1d6 plus size modifier, minimum of one). This slam may be used in place of the base creature's natural attacks.

Special Attacks: The base creature gains the possessor's supernatural or spell-like special attacks. In addition, it gains the following special attack:

Hideous Spew (Su): The possessed creature may generate a massive flow of stomach acid, showering its enemies in a blast of acidic spray that can strip away their flesh. This is a line up to 20 feet in length that can target one creature as a ranged attack. Those hit by the line of spew may make a Reflex save for half-damage (DC 15+ possessed's Dexterity modifier). The possessed may use this ability three times per day.

Creature Size	Spew Damage
Tiny	1d6
Small	1d8
Medium	2d6
Large	2d8
Huge	4d6
Gargantuan	4d8
Colossal	6d8

Abilities: Replace the base creature's Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma with the possessing creature's scores (assume Int 18, Wis 20 and Cha 20 if specific stats are not known). The base creature gains a +4 bonus to Strength, +2 bonus to Dexterity and a +4 bonus to Constitution. The possessor can manipulate its victim's body to draw improved physical power from it.

Skills: Use the possessing creature's skills (assume Balance +23, Climb +23, Craft (alchemy) +23, Craft (herbalism) +23, Intimidate +23, Jump +23, Knowledge (arcana) +23, Knowledge (religion) +23, Listen +23, Perform (ritual) +23 and Spot +23 if specific skills are not known). In addition, the possessing creature may choose up to 1 + its Intelligence modifier of the base creature's skills it may use.



Feats: Use the possessing creature's feats (assume Power Attack, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (slam), Improved Bull Rush, Improved Overrun if specific feats are not known).

Corruption: Anyone willingly undergoing possession must make a Corruption save. Assume the possessor has a +10 magical attack bonus if a specific one is not known.

GODS OF SOUTHERN BLACK KINGDOMS

The Southern Black Kingdom natives have their own brand of religion and priesthood. There are tribal priests, isangomas and inyagas. The tribal priests are usually witch-finders, concentrating on counterspells and divination, or they are priests of dark gods such as Jhil and Agujo, concentrating on curses and counterspells as sorcery styles. Isangoma are female spiritualists who commune with the spirits of the ancestors. They primarily focus on divination and counterspells as sorcery styles. Some delve into curses and necromancy. Inyanga are male herbalist tribal magicians, wise in the knowledge of flora and fauna. They learn nature magic as their first sorcery style, taking feats such as Self-Sufficient, Skill Focus (craft (herbalism)), Skill Focus (heal), Skill Focus (knowledge (nature)) and Skill Focus (survival).

Like many Black Kingdom religions, the tribes of the south believe in a creator god who does not bother to interact in day-to-day human affairs. This god, the Source of All Things, is called Nkulu. The only way the southern tribesmen can appeal to the spirit world, a great kingdom called Unkulunkulu, is through the ancestors, the AmaDlozi. Only through divination can the AmaDlozi be reached. The Isangoma play this role of diviner; their role is important in the daily life of the tribe. Praise and offerings are heaped upon the AmaDlozi, for if they are forgotten they may try to be remembered by causing problems. To the southern tribesmen, the body is not important but the spirit is, so dead tribesmen are left to the animals. The exception to this is a chief. Chiefs are buried in a sitting position, wrapped in the skin of a black bull sacrificed the same day. The burial takes place in the centre of the chief's primary village.

In addition to the AmaDlozi, the religion of the southern tribesmen includes spirits who live in animals, forests and caves, such as Ajuju (known as the Dark One). Many of the villages include a pile of stones called isivivane. The isivivane, signs of respect for local nature spirits, are created when tribesmen pick up stones with their left foot, take them into their right hand, spit on them and place them in the pile to ensure successful journeys.

All misfortune is interpreted to be the result of evil sorcery or offended spirits, not the result of natural causes or poor planning. When misfortune occurs, the Isangoma are consulted to see what caused the problem. If the Isangoma declare the ill-fortune was the result of evil sorcery, a witch-hunt ensues. If the Isangoma declare the problem to be an offended spirit, a sacrifice is made to the spirit to placate it. Lightning is controlled by the spirits, so anyone or anything struck by lightning was so struck because the spirits desired it. Persons killed by lightning are not mourned, animals killed by lightning are not eaten and trees struck by lightning are not used for any reason. The southern Black Kingdom tribesmen fear lightning and, if a storm approaches, will go from their village, beating their shields or burning herbs, imploring the spirits to spare them and the village.

A witch-hunt is a serious affair and anyone exposed as a sorcerer (and not an isangoma or other culturally accepted tribal magician) is exposed and tortured to death along with his family. Those condemned to die rarely make an objection to the accusation since all southern tribesmen know their bodies and spirits can be taken over without their knowledge or memory. The belongings of an exposed sorcerer or witch belong to the chief, which gives chiefs incentive to accuse wealthy tribesmen who might challenge their authority. It is said that poverty ensures a long life among the southern tribesmen.

GODS OF THE DESERT TRIBES

GAZAL

Gazal is an ancient city of jade-green spires and minarets built amidst the palms of an oasis. The Gazal have no slaves and do not know war. They make extensive use of drugs and hypnotism to explore their own dreams and introspective fancies. 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 people are friendly and dreamy. They dress in silk tunics and soft sandals. They have been out of touch with the world for 900 years, still believing King Bragorus rules Nemedra and King Epius rules Aquilonia. 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 city was left with priests, scientists, scholars and teachers. The introspective rulers of the city are so dreamy that the city is dying. The city was haunted by the Horror in the Red Tower, a *thing* that ate the people when it hungered. Named Ollam-onga, it was served by dire horsemen. It was also 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.

Ollam-Onga

Ollam-Onga is 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.

Requirements of Worship: Obey priests of Ollam-Onga, sacrifice at least one human to the god per year.

Benefits of Worship: Spells.

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Must know at least three sorcery styles and the Ritual Sacrifice feat; obey the high priest of Ollam-Onga; sacrifice at least one human per month to Ollam-Onga.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (any sorcery styles except Oriental Magic).

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Dedicate the entire resources of the cult to slaying them.

GHANATA & TOMBALKU

The Ghanatas are a fierce desert people who are related to the people of the northern Black Kingdoms and loosely organised into tribes and even smaller groupings. Their social structure is almost non-existent. Might makes right among these dark people. Illiterate and unsociable, the Ghanata are not friendly toward strangers, given to brutalise, rape or attack wanderers from foreign lands. Expert riders of horses and camels, the Ghanata fight with curved, razor-sharp knives and scimitars. They worship Jhil the Merciless in gruesome ceremonies that include the torture of sacrificial victims. Ghanata holy men are also blacksmiths and weaponsmiths, the tamers of fire.

Tombalku is a factionalised city in the Black Kingdoms that is considered mythical by the Hyborians. There are two kings of Tombalku, for it is a confederation of tribes that pulled together to defend themselves against other large nations. Founded by the Aphaki, a Shemitish tribe, they interbred with the black desert tribes, creating a brown, straight-haired race that is the ruling caste. The Aphaki worship Jhil, but the blacks worship Ajuju the Dark One and his kin. The Aphaki fight with scimitars. The blacks fight with spears. The blacks in Tombalku are the real power. There are a half dozen tribes and factions plotting against each other. The city boasts taverns, murders, mutilations, executions, women, wine, gold and everything a mercenary traveller could want. There is constant ethnic strain between the Aphaki and the blacks, who are related to the Suba tribe of the Black Coast. Some of the tribes consolidated under the black king include the Bigharma, the Borni and the Mindango. Tombalku's wealth derives from control of several trade routes in the region.

Ajuju

Ajuju, known as the Dark One, is the main god of the native people of Tombalku, though he is also worshipped in the southern Black Kingdoms, particularly Suba. His priests adorn themselves in feathers, bells and snake skins.

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth 1 sp/level/month to the priests of Ajuju.

Benefits of Worship: Spells.

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Must know at least two sorcery styles.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (any sorcery styles except Hypnotism, Necromancy, Oriental Magic, and Summonings).

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Casting an *ill-fortune* spell on them.

Jhil the Merciless

Jhil is another son of Jhebbal Sag, whose 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 the human sacrifice. His priests use dice as a means of divination. Jhil is also the main god of the Aphaki, an originally Shemitish race who are now the ruling caste of Tombalku. The Aphaki do not seem to revere Jhebbal Sag, however.

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth 2 sp/level/month to the priests (Aphaki worshippers of Jhil only), or provide one human sacrifice per year (Aphaki, Picts or Kushites). The whole of Pictish and Kushite society is expected to contribute directly to the upkeep of their priests (who are usually known as tribal magicians), building them their 'devil-devil huts' and giving them a portion of the game caught by every hunt.

Benefits of Worship: Spells (any except Oriental Magic).

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood:

Standard, plus must know the Nature Magic sorcery style and the Tortured Sacrifice feat.

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

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests:

Captured alive, then sacrificed.

TIBU

The Tibu are a tribe of ferocious, masked desert and steppe riders. Their religious beliefs are of an animist nature, believing all things, even the inanimate, have 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) on page 8) 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 their captives are sacrificed to dire gods and vile spirits. Blood makes their magic mighty. They torture and kill captives alive 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 for 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.

GODS OF ZEMBABWEI

The Zembabwans worship Derketo and Dagon, and the capital city boasts of a holy shrine dedicated to the empire where squat gold statues of both deities sit.

DAGON

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 Zembabwe, along with his consort Derketo. This fish-man god demands his worshippers approach him in the nude. He lusts after his consort, Derketo. His worshippers abstain from eating fish but abstain from little else; his rites and ceremonies are orgiastic and self-indulgent. He is also a war god. Dagon 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, especially favouring corn.

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth 1 sp/level/month to the priests of Dagon.

Benefits of Worship: Spells.

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Must know at least one sorcery style.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (any sorcery styles except Hypnotism and Oriental Magic).

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Sending a demon after them, or cursing them.

DERKETO

Derketo is a seductress deity, a temptress, the essence of depraved sexuality. Derketo is an Earth-Mother type 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, finding sex is the best way to capture and hold onto 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 through her own personal attributes.

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth 2 sp/level/month to the priests of Derketo; participate in at least three orgies a year.

Benefits of Worship: Spells (Counterspells, Divination and Nature Magic only); Orgies (at least once a month).

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Must know at least one sorcery style.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (Counterspells, Divination and Nature Magic only); perks include training noble girls in the ways of pleasure.

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: None.

Inner Mysteries: See *Conan: Stygia – Serpent of the South* for a description of Stygia's version of Derketo. Her Mysteries are identical.

GODS OF ATLAIA

Located south of Zembabwei, Atlaia is a mysterious kingdom. Howard mentions it as a Black Kingdom in *The Hyborian Age*, so it must be sizable, although none of the stories he wrote took place there. The Atlaians divide themselves into twelve great kingdoms, each ruled by a clan that proclaims a venerable ancestry extending back to the time of the Old Empire.

Densely packed gnarled jungles and dry savannahs punctuate Atlaia's landscape. A lengthy range of ancient mountains, called the Ogun, run across the land and provide a natural barrier from west to east. The thickest of the jungles in the land is called the Olu-Igbo, named after the orisha of the jungles. Interspersed throughout this region are numerous tribal kingdoms, each dwelling in the remnants of the ancient empire over which they hold stewardship.

OLORUN AND THE ORISHA PANTHEON

The people of Atlaia worship a plethora of gods, which they call orisha. The orisha are revered by many tribes of the Black Kingdoms and are considered ancient spirits and caretakers of the land. The chief orisha is Olorun, lord of the gods, king of the sky and earth. Olorun is also called Olodumare, the Master of Endless Space. The orisha require many ceremonies and offerings of those who worship them and the Atlaia are extremely obedient.

There are several greater orisha, who are considered very powerful, and there are

numerous lesser orisha, who are minor spirits and demons of little consequence. Some additional orisha include:

Orunmila: The son of Olorun, Orunmila is the lord of divination and is carefully tended to by a sect of seers in Atlaian society.

Obatala: The King of the White Cloth, maker of the land and patron of the first and most ancient city of the Old Empire. The ruling class of the Atlaians reveres Obatala in shrines.

Ogun: The lord of iron, Ogun is the patron god of smiths, hunters and warriors. The great Ogun Mountains are named in his honour.

Eshu: The god of chance and misfortune, as well as the messenger who moves between gods and men. Eshu is a dangerous being and his appearance is presaged by language becoming incomprehensible, for he is the lord of languages. He carries the sacrifices offered to the gods up to their mysterious realm in Endless Space.

Olu-Igbo: The lord of the bush and jungle, possibly a child of Jhebbal Sag.

Shango: The lord of thunderbolts, said to have been worshipped by the Old Empire as well. His temple is located in the southern end of Atlaia and is kept by a mysterious group of priests who are chosen only from among women of the clans.

Sonponno: This dark orisha is the lord of diseases and bringer of the plague. Evil witch doctors have been known to summon Sonponno to commit acts of devilry.

Requirements of Worship: Each of the orisha require specific annual ceremonies and sacrifices. A follower of any particular orisha must pay a tithe worth 2 silver pieces per month to the appropriate temple or shrine, or offer one animal in sacrifice per year. Sonponno and Eshu must receive a human sacrifice annually. Olorun and the other orisha only require a human sacrifice if the worshipper has fallen out of favour or failed to participate in the ceremonial warfare of the summer.

Benefits of Worship: Spells (any except Oriental Magic).

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus most orisha cults require knowledge of the Nature Magic sorcery style. There are special requirements to join the priesthood of Olorun. The character must be a member of the ruling clans of Atlaia and must be chosen at the end of the ceremonial warfare of summer. Only women may join the cult of Shango.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available in any style except Oriental Magic.

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Captured alive, then released in a ceremonial hunt to be killed in sacrifice.

Brythunian Heresies

BRYTHUNIAN VARIANT RELIGIONS

BRYTHUNIA IS A Hyborian nation. As such, the people primarily worship Mitra. He is regarded as the one true god, followed by a legion of saints and a celestial host of angelic beings. The religion of Mitra has a heaven and a hell and followers are suspicious and intolerant of other cults, especially in the rural villages and towns. Mitran temples are only basically decorated, with a minimum of pomp, 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 allow only one in each temple, for Mitra's true form was unknowable and awesome, and the idea that a man or woman might be able to capture his divinity is blasphemy.

In some backwoods areas of Brythunia, Bori is still worshipped, but that is uncommon at best. Bori is a primitive warrior god from their early polytheistic Hyborian origins. Near the Zamorian border, many Brythunians worship the Zamoran gods, careful not to be found out by the Mitrans, who deem that anything worshipped by the fiendish Zamorans must be a demon. Both Bori and the Zamoran gods usually require some sort of blood sacrifice in their worship.

The hillmen of the Kezankian Mountains have their own ancient gods to worship. These gods seem to be aligned with the four elements. Their religion involves geometric designs and ideograms. One of the holiest of symbols is a cross with arms of equal length exactly aligned to the four directions. At the end of each arm is a circle. Each circle has one of four ideograms of the ancient gods, secrets signs of the four elements.

Brythunian scholars tend to be rather sorcerous. Most Brythunian scholars have the Noble Blood feat (from *Conan: The Scrolls of Skelos*), otherwise the character has to labour for a living and never has a chance to become literate or the opportunity to lead a leisurely life of books and study. Many of these scholars no longer own land; they sell their land for their tomes or for their training. Others are sent by their families to become members of the Mitran or Amalian clergy, depending on whether they are from the south or the north, respectively.

Brythunian scholars are much like every other scholar in their skill selections. Bluff, Intimidate, Knowledge (nobility) and Perform are usually chosen as background skills. Bluff and Perform are usually chosen as adaptive skills.

AMALIAS PLUVIUS

The temples of Sargossa proclaim Amalias Pluvius to be the chief god of the Brythunians, worshipped there in complete defiance of Mitra. This god is featured heavily in Leonard Carpenter's *Conan the Savage*. The proclamation of divine supremacy is spurious at best, wishful thinking on the part of the Sargossans. Amalias is worshipped as a reliever of droughts and a bringer of rain. His temples have many statues and ornate temples. His followers believe in omens and signs. During the hallowed Feast of Amalias, gambling for profit is illegal. It is a high holy day and all vices are illegal and profane. Blasphemers breaking sacred law are sent to the mines to work. Another high holy observance is Naming Day. On Naming Day, which occurs on whatever day a travelling priest appointed for an appearance visits a given locality, the circuit priest names all the virgin children of a mature age, entering their names in the church register, and allowing them permission to pursue marriage or concubinage. The virgin's forefinger is cut with a copper knife and the resulting blood is used as ink to pen the name into the register. A copper sacrificial knife is ritually worn by priests of Amalias around the neck. They dress in elaborate grey robes. From birth, Amalias' faithful are taught the Amalian Laws, Prophecies and Divine Revelations, including myths of the Brythunian race's origin, as well as the names and histories of the pantheon's lesser gods. Many of their priests are charlatans and do not know real sorcery. At best they tolerate local shamans and healers but are quick to hang a witch if a scapegoat is needed.

Requirements of Worship: Obey priests of Amalias and his pantheon; promote Amalias as the chief god of the Brythunians; promote Sargossa as the capital of Brythunia and its king as the King of Brythunia; tith 4 sp/level/month to the local temple

Benefits of Worship: Faith, Atonement

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Must have 9 ranks in Perform and Diplomacy; 4 ranks in Sleight-of-Hand.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available in Divination and Conjuring.

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Sent to work in the hidden gold mines of the Karpash Mountains for the remainder of their lives.

WICCANA

Rural areas in Brythunia worship the goddess Wiccana. 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 priestesses of Wiccana.

Her religion is primarily a nature religion with aspects of a mystery religion. The Wiccana religion promotes ethics among its followers, promoting each member to strive to be a virtuous person in order to succeed. The religion offers its adherents a good, happy and fulfilling life. To achieve this aim, the followers of Wiccana must revere nature, adopt a Code of Honour (some covens promote the civilised code, others promote the barbaric code. Both are defined in detail in *Conan the Roleplaying Game*) and must agree to live by the right virtues. The religion is not focused on 'good action' as much as it is focused on 'good thought'.

Wiccana is worshipped by rural Brythunians as a nature goddess. Her priestesses, for she does not accept male priests, never cut their hair, wear white linen dresses, embroidered in patterns of mistletoe leaves and berries, and carry small golden sickles at their belts. Ordained priestesses wear their hair bound back with a white linen band. Her acolytes braid their long hair in tight spirals about their heads. They study herbalism and healing. Although the priestesses live in the villages, Wiccana is worshipped in sacred groves. Men are not usually invited to the groves save as sacrifices to Wiccana. They guard a certain magical blade dangerous to Acheronian beasts of fire.

Many Brythunian 'nymphs' (temptress/borderers described in *Conan: Hyboria's Fallen*) are worshippers of Wiccana.

Rural Brythunians, no matter how poor or violent, will not lay a hand on a Wiccana priestess. Occasionally priests of Amalias hang them, but this usually raises the ire of the rural folk, so this is a rare occurrence at best. Mitran priests often burn them as witches.

Requirements of Worship: Revere nature, revere priestesses of Wiccana

Benefits of Worship: Atonement, Spells

Special: Sorcerers trained in this tradition cannot use the Rule of Defence.

They do not learn how to defend themselves in a magical torrent of power.



Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Must know the Nature Magic sorcery style. Must have 9 or more ranks in Craft (herbalism), Knowledge (nature) and Heal. Must not know the Necromancy sorcery style. Must be celibate (although not necessarily virgin).

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available in any style save Necromancy, Summoning and Oriental Magic.

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Sacrificed to Wiccana in a sacred grove.

Inner Mysteries: The Inner Mysteries are learned by taking ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Wiccana). Every three ranks makes one eligible for the next Mystery.

- ❖ The first Mystery of Wiccana reveals most of the basic symbolisms of the religion, allowing a character with three ranks of Knowledge (Mystery: Wiccana) to use ritual paraphernalia to enhance her rituals. If the character adds an Focus or Material component to her spells that otherwise would not have one, she gains a +1 competence bonus to one aspect of the spell. For example, by using an appropriate focus item, a Wiccana might get a +1 bonus to the Knowledge (arcana) skill check to cast *astrological prediction*.
- ❖ The second Mystery of Wiccana teaches the initiate to understand nature. She may treat Survival as a class skill no matter what class is taken.
- ❖ The third Mystery of Wiccana teaches the initiate rituals to unlock the truest powers of herbs. She gains a +1 competence bonus to Craft (herbalism) and Heal.
- ❖ The fourth Mystery of Wiccana teaches a priestess how to eke the most out of ceremonies and rituals. She adds +5 to the average check result of a Power Ritual (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game*). Non-sorcerous worshippers are never initiated into this or higher Mysteries.
- ❖ The fifth Mystery of Wiccana teaches a priestess to be a master. The Rule of the Master applies to her coven,



which is considered a sorcerous society, even though they take the lay priest background. (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game* for the Rule of the Master).

THE SUDDAH OBLATES

Another variant religion mentioned in Brythunia occurs in Steve Perry's *Conan the Defiant*. Based out of 'The Temple That Will Not Fall,' the Suddah Oblates are a peace-loving cult of martial artists living in the mountains of northern Brythunia. The Oblates fight with the *fimbo*, a type of cane, as well as staves, nets and ropes. They oppose violence but will use it if a diplomatic solution fails or is impossible (such as defending oneself against animals or brigands).

They do not eat anything with warm blood but they can eat fish. Their main temple is a massive structure balanced on an impossibly thin spire of rock. Women are not allowed inside their temples. The high priest of the Suddah Oblates is known as the Highest Oblate. Scholars of this order take exotic weapon proficiencies and Craft skills. The Suddah Oblates accept children from families who cannot afford the children they have or fear conflicts over inheritance. All Suddah Oblates must make an oath of Allegiance to the temple. This Allegiance must be renewed annually.

Requirements of Worship: Celibacy, must never use an edged weapon in combat, oppose violence when possible, must eat no meat or fowl.

Benefits of Worship: Faith

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Must be celibate.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available in Oriental Magic and Prestidigitation. Cannot know any sorcery prior to ordination.

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Expelled from the order.

Crom & His Dark Race

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. Crom is a dire god, as gloomy as the Cimmerians themselves, and as dangerous. 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.

In *The Tower of the Elephant*, Howard wrote, 'His gods were simple and understandable; Crom was their chief, and he lived on a great mountain, whence he sent forth dooms and death. It was useless to call on Crom, because he was a gloomy, savage god, and he hated weaklings. But he gave a man courage at birth, and the will and might to kill his enemies, which, in the Cimmerian's mind, was all any god should be expected to do.'

Crom was imagined to live on Ben Morgh so Cimmerians stay away from that tall mountain to avoid his 'dooms and death.' After death, the Cimmerians believe their spirit travels 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.

Cimmerian funerary customs are quick and deadly. The slain are left where they fell, or disposed of simply; it is no matter, since their shades are departed. A wake

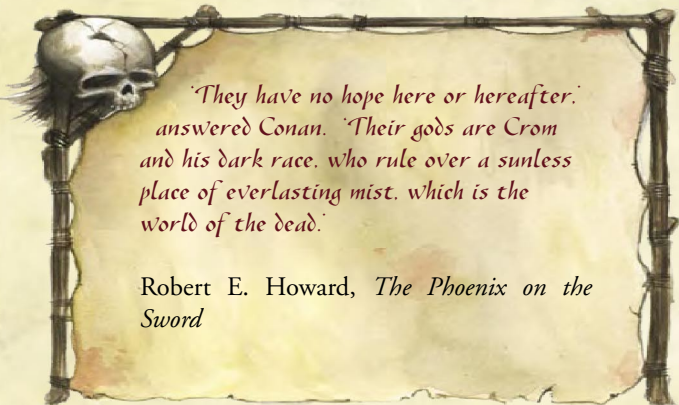
is held, with those present drinking a toast to the departed, then pouring out the remainder of their beverages onto the ground for the dead. If revenge is called for – and the Cimmerians can feud like no-one but the Tlazitlans – the drinking-vessels are then smashed, with each warrior boasting of how he personally will take his revenge on behalf of the deceased. Such vengeance is usually in the form of a number of heads, to be collected from the enemy tribe that

slew him. Many of the Cimmerian tribes practice headhunting of their fallen foes in a ritualistic manner, similar to that of their later Celtic descendants.

To capture the feel of Howard's milieu in your campaign, avoid the pitfall of presuming Crom is 'good'. Cimmerians do not *want* to attract Crom's attention, or any god's, for Conan once said he would

not want to walk even on their shadow. As Conan said, 'What use to call on him? Little he cares if men live or die. Better to be silent than to call his attention to you; he will send you dooms, not fortune! He is grim and loveless...' The actions of Crom, of any *real* supernatural entity, usually bring about the destruction of men, not the succour of man. Simply put, the Cimmerians do not pray to Crom... ever.

An indifferent creator god is a characteristic of many animist religions. The primitive religious beliefs of the Cimmerians fall into this category. Spirits walk the earth and they inhabit the things of the earth. While men have no chance of communicating with Crom, they might be able to influence the spirits through minor rituals. Ritual is a part of life, important for placating the spirits so that food may be found and survival ensured. They have death rituals, divinatory rituals, agricultural rituals, hunting rituals, rites of passage, healing rituals and war rituals. Common rites of passage include birth rites, naming rites, marriage rites, initiation



'They have no hope here or hereafter,' answered Conan. 'Their gods are Crom and his dark race, who rule over a sunless place of everlasting mist, which is the world of the dead.'

Robert E. Howard, *The Phoenix on the Sword*

rites (such as initiating a warrior or a chief) and death rites. Many of these rituals, while rooted in an animist or ancestor-worship religious context, have practical purposes. Most of these rites involve chanting or singing sombre dirges.

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. Cimmerians do not worship their own gods lest their attention be attracted.

Cimmerians do not build temples. The spirit world occupies two places, the soul and the universe (the invisible and the visible), so specific places cutting them off from the world would also effectively cut them off from the soul. A temple is a civilised concept the Cimmerians do not really understand.

CROM AND THE CIMMERIAN PANTHEON

Crom is the main Cimmerian god. He grants no boons save strength of arm and will, which are his gifts to all Cimmerians. He and his pantheon do not truly have worshippers or priests. Nominally, every Cimmerian is a follower of Crom but they have long since learned that he takes pride in them only if they never call on his aid during their lives. Cimmerians are expected to take what they want from life using Crom's gifts, not call on him for assistance every time they are in need. That would be weak and Crom despises weaklings – he would sooner see them dead than help them out.

According to Robert E. Howard, the Cimmerians also have lesser gods. In a list of names prepared in 1932, Howard

'Crom! I know this place! The blind bards have sung the story of this battle with the Vanir around every campfire in Cimmeria!'

Larry Hama, 'The Corridor of Mullah-Kajar', *Conan the Barbarian*, Vol. 1, No. 117, December 1980

*This was something he could understand.
The barbarians had their oracles.*

Robert E. Howard, *Black Colossus*

gives the names of several Cimmerian gods, including Badb, Morrigan, Macha, Nemain, Dianchecht and Dagda. In later stories, Conan swears by the names of Lir and Mannanan Mac Lir. Just as with Crom, these gods and goddesses are considered to be bleak and dire entities and are not worshipped. To the Cimmerians, these gods' names are to be used when making a particularly strict oath or when cursing but never in a more religious context.

Badb: 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: 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: Macha is a goddess of war, but she also is in charge of fertility, helping to fill the land with warring Cimmerians.

Mannanan Mac Lir: The son of Lir, Mannanan Mac Lir is also a sea god in a more humanised, heroic form but governs weather too.

Morrigan: The primary Cimmerian war goddess is Morrigan. If the Cimmerians had philosophers or even priests, they might speculate that Badb, Macha and Nemain are aspects of Morrigan; the ordinary Cimmerians do not much seem to care.

Nemain: Another war goddess, Nemain, also governs sacred springs and wells. In battle she is known as 'the venomous'.

Requirements of Worship: Be a Cimmerian.

Benefits of Worship: None.

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: None (no priests).

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: –

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: –

CIMMERIAN ORACLES

Cimmerians are not the scholarly sort and are prohibited from taking the scholar class at 1st level. 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. Those Cimmerians who take the barbarian/scholar multiclass path are known as oracles, as befitting their superstitious nature. These oracles can read the dooms 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. These Cimmerian oracles learn the sorcery style of Divination only; thereafter they take bonus feats in lieu of additional sorcery styles and, when they run out of divination spells to learn, they take +2 skill points in lieu of additional advanced spells.

CIMMERIAN BLIND BARDS

In addition to the oracles, Cimmeria also has an oral tradition of story-telling by blind-men who can no longer provide for themselves, their families or their clans. Cimmerians fear the written word, believing letters and runes to be magical. Blind or blinded Cimmerians often multiclass into scholars and become the oral repositories for Cimmerian and clan histories and stories, thus earning their keep. It is also possible that Cimmerians intentionally blind their bards to prevent them from becoming literate. Again, just like the oracles, if a blind bard of Cimmeria learns a sorcery style, he will likely limit himself to Divination only. Many Cimmerians consider writing to be a form of magic, so literacy is rarely available to Cimmerian scholars who have not travelled. These scholars will focus on Knowledge skills (as many as possible) and Perform skills (to convey their knowledge).



Hyborian Bori

RELIGION OF GUNDERLAND AND HYPERBOREA

DESPITE THE OPPRESSIVENESS of the Mitran religion, a few small cults exist in the greater Hyborian nations. The Gundermen, for example, originally worshipped Bori, a primitive god from their early polytheistic Hyborian origins. Small cults that worship this ancient god still exist, for the Gundermen returned to worshipping this ancient god after Aquilonia fell.

Most Hyperboreans and some Gundermen still worship the old Hyborian god-hero Bori. Isolated and aloof, the Hyperboreans missed the religious revolution that enveloped the rest of the Hyborian kingdoms converting them to Mitra worship, and the few Gunderman worshippers simply resisted the revolution. 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 instead of moving on to some more complex, ritualised religion as their southern kin did.

Bori is a god of wisdom and war, a bringer of victory and a receiver of the dead. He cast down Ymir and the frost giants to allow the Hyborians to move south.

SACRIFICES

Every ninth year, in honour of the defeat of Ymir, human sacrifices are offered to Bori. Hundreds of prisoners or slaves are sacrificed and hung from trees. This mass human sacrifice is illegal in Gunderland but widely practised in Hyperborea. Other than the ninth year sacrifice, pigs and horses are the

normal annual sacrifices for Bori. The penises of sacrificed stallions are given to women in order that they may perform a fertility rite with them. The meat from the pig and horse sacrifices are boiled and the blood is sprinkled on statues of Bori, on the walls of homes and on the worshippers themselves. Once the meat is cooked, the village gathers around to have a meal with Bori and the spirits. Ale is drunk in large quantities. The first round is dedicated to Bori. The second round is dedicated to the family dead (who are believed to continue to take part in the ceremony every year). The Borians believe they are filled with the power of the gods and spirits once they become drunk.

In years of famine, kings and chiefs are often sacrificed to Bori under the belief that their incompetence brought about the famine. Prisoners are often sacrificed to Bori just as a matter of course, and some Nemedian scholars argue that every person killed in battle by the Borians constitutes a sacrifice to that ancient god. Other sacrifices to Bori are performed in order to gain a change in circumstances or weather; the sacrifice in these instances is usually chosen by lots among the warriors desiring the change. Sacrificing someone who will not benefit from the change in circumstance is not considered helpful.

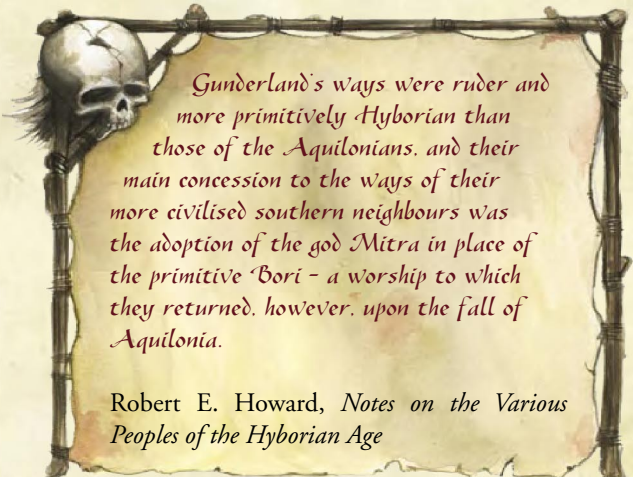
MAJOR BORIAN FEASTS

Jare Feast: On the first day of spring, the Borians hold the Jare feast, which is dedicated to the rebirth of life. The feast involves decorated eggs as an emblem of new life.

Kupala Feast: On the first day of summer, a fire celebration is held. Burning fires light the night and youngsters traditionally couple up on this day. This day is particularly holy to blacksmiths and weaponsmiths.

Perun Feast: On the first day of autumn, the Perun feast is a harvest festival involving fortune-telling and animal sacrifice.

Korochun Feast: Held on the first day of winter, the Korochun feast is a feast of the ancestors. Fires are burned to keep the deceased warm and dinners are held in honour of the dead so they will not hunger for the next year. Wooden logs are traditionally lit at crossroads.



Gunderland's ways were ruder and more primitively Hyborian than those of the Aquilonians, and their main concession to the ways of their more civilised southern neighbours was the adoption of the god Mitra in place of the primitive 'Bori - a worship to which they returned, however, upon the fall of Aquilonia.

Robert E. Howard, *Notes on the Various Peoples of the Hyborian Age*

SORCERY & SEID

The practise of sorcery is considered unmanly among Borians; however, women may practise a form of shamanism similar to the Nordheimir *völva*. Female practitioners of *seid* among the Borians are called *seidkona*. *Seidkonas* wear blue cloaks and a hood of black wool trimmed with white cat fur. They carry symbolic staffs of power (called *seidstaffs*) which aid in their magic. The *seidstaff* allows a *seidkona* to cast spells which would normally require her to touch the object the spell is being cast upon without actually touching that object; instead, she only has to touch the object with one end of the *seidstaff* whilst holding the staff's other end. In addition, the masterwork nature of the *seidstaff* gives a +1 bonus to the sorcerer's attack roll. A typical *seidstaff* has Defence 7, five hit points, hardness 5, a break DC of 16 and costs 500 silver pieces (in relative value, not necessarily in coin). *Seidkonas* learn Divination, Nature Magic and Curses as sorcery styles. Unlike the Nordheimir *völva*, the Borian practice of *seid* does not involve hypnotism.

The practise of *seid* involves praying to spirits that inhabit the natural world, such as individual trees, the rivers, the ridged mountains or even the forests as a whole.

BENEFITS OF WORSHIPPING BORI

Bori was the ancient god of the all the Hyborian tribes, when they were barbarians. He is thought to be a deified chieftain, a powerful war-leader who led the tribes to victory in their days of conquest. He is still worshipped in Hyperborea and occasionally in Gunderland, though most Gundermen have adopted the worship of Aquilonia.

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth 2 sp/level/month to the local priests of Bori.

Benefits of Worship: Atonement, Faith.

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Standard; may not take money directly from worshippers other than their regular tithes.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard.

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests:
Removal of priestly status.



Hyperborean Heresies

SORCEROUS RELIGIONS

HYPERBOREA IS IN the grip of horrific changes. The faith of Bori is giving way to grim sorcerous cults worshipping death-goddesses, thunder-gods and other sorcerers-made-divine. Sorcerers teach that they are gods, that the world was created when the egg of a god-like bird exploded. The sky is the shell of the egg, suspended on a pole located far to the north. The shell rotates, creating the motion of the stars.

The sorcerers teach that the soul is brought at the moment of birth and taken away when a person dies. Many Hyperboreans sleep with wooden carvings of birds in order to secure the safety of their souls. Many sorcerer-gods in Hyperborea keep flocks of birds or use Nature Magic in order to appear as though the birds bring and take souls from them.

There are many sorcerer-gods rising in Hyperborea, each with legions of Witchmen. Some of these sorcerer-gods include Ukko (who knows weather sorcery styles from *Conan: Pirate Isles*), Ajattara (a sorceress-druid (scholar/borderer) who lives in a foreboding forest), Akka (the consort of Ukko), Pekko (a sorcerer infamous for his sorcerous garden and taste for barley-beer) and Nyyrikki (a sorcerer huntsman). The most famous of the sorcerer-gods is Louhi, who styles herself as a death-goddess.

LOUHI THE DEATH GODDESS

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 of 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.

This he knew for Louhi, priestess-queen of the Witchmen, who regarded her as the living avatar of their death-goddess.

L. Sprague de Camp, *The Witch of the Mists*

Even the brooding Cimmerians in their forested ridges and misty hills know the infamous sigil of this order, the White Hand. The sight of it often sends the bravest men trembling. Members of this order are known as Witchmen or Witchwomen, all of whom are virtual devils in human guise, without the taint of compassion or any other constraint that limits other men to sensible or moral behaviour.

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.

Although Louhi is a mortal sorceress, she is considered to be the living avatar of the Hyperborean death-goddess. She is the master of the cult and all worshippers must follow the Rule of the Master as given in *Conan the Roleplaying Game*. She teaches magic, warping her followers' bodies, minds and souls in exchange for their obedience. Louhi has many daughters; those who wish to court one of those daughters are usually sent on suicide missions by Louhi to prove their worth.

BENEFITS OF WORSHIPPING LOUHI

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth 1 sp/level/month to the local priests of Louhi, attend at least one cult meeting/month.

Benefits of Worship: Spells (Counterspells, Curses, Divination, Immortality, Necromancy, Oriental Magic, Prestidigitation).

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: must know at least three sorcery styles and three advanced spells; Knowledge (arcana) 8

ranks; must give up at least three magical links to oneself to the cult's avatar.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (Counterspells, Curses, Divination, Immortality, Necromancy, Oriental Magic, Prestidigitation)

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Killed in a sorcerous ritual.

HYPERBOREAN PRIESTS & WITCHMEN

Hyperborean scholars are a fearsome lot, gaunt and tall, with white hair and immense endurance. Hyperborean scholars suffer because of their languid personalities, which leave them an uncharismatic bunch. The scholars of Hyperborea appear in the stories in various forms. L. Sprague de Camp and Lin Carter introduced the White Hand and the Witchmen of Hyperborea; Kurt Busiek introduced several immortal, languid sorcerers.

Hyperborean scholars emphasise Prestidigitation, Nature Magic, Summonings, Weather Witching (see *Conan: Pirate Isles*) and Immortality (see *Conan: 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 *Conan: The Scrolls of Skelos*). Others are capable of corrupting creatures, remoulding them in the vats of life to create *gurnakhi*, giant slave soldiers. They live lives of luxury and decadence, dependant upon their slaves for all their basic needs. Feats such as Carouser and Debaucher are common among them.

When one of these immortal scholars tires of life, after centuries of carousing to the point where he has no desire to carouse further, he walks to a bridge built over a supposedly bottomless chasm and flings himself off.

Hyperboreans are given Craft (stone) and Intimidate as background skills, plus the character may choose one other skill. Scholars should choose Perform (ritual) and Intimidate as their adaptable traits – no matter what class the Hyperborean scholar may multiclass into later, he has been trained from birth to cast spells and intimidate others. He will always want those to be class skills. Choosing Intimidate for the Hyperborean's Adaptable racial feature also effectively negates the penalty to the skill from the lowered Charisma of the race. The competence bonus also stacks with the Hyperborean racial bonus to Intimidate.



Lords of Hyrkania & Turan

RELIGION IN HYRKANIA

Basic Cosmology

The shamans have a cosmology where the cosmos has multiple layers, all connected by some spire, be it a tree or mountain. This system of belief requires that souls and bodies are separate entities. The religion is one of nature and is animist, for the Hyrkanians believe spirits walk the world around them, living in all things. To a Hyrkanian, the sky itself is a spirit-god with a soul. Kanum Kotan is the name of the land of evil gods and unseen forces. It lies to the north of Pathenia.

The Power of Words

The Hyrkanians believe words create reality if said with conviction. Melodies and songs carry words of power, and the drum is the primary instrument. They believe in astral projection and have similar ideas about out-of-body experiences where battles with hostile spirits occur. Astral projection 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.

Sacrifices to the Gods

The most famous way the Hyrkanians make live sacrifices is through the Pole-offering. Horses, humans or game meat are suspended from poles and dedicated to the gods. A well-known sacrifice is made after a man's marriage. 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 approach any closer than sixty feet.

Idols

The Hyrkanians make idols out of felt to represent the images of their household gods. These idols are set up on the sides of the tent-doors. Hyrkanians always offer these idols the first milk from their flocks.

Temples

The sites of Hyrkanian worship are cairns of stones with a single vertical pole sticking out of the centre where prayers and sacrifices are performed. Turanians, however, build temples to their gods.

GODS OF HYRKANIA & TURAN

The Hyrkanians believe all things have a dominant spirit, especially things that have long been in the possession of the living. Above the spirits are the gods, who live on seventeen floors above the world and on seven levels beneath the earth.

Erlík: Erlík was supposedly the first man, a creation of Ulgen, but he was not given a soul. Erlík attempted to create a soul for himself but failed. Erlík 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. Erlík is called the 'Yellow God of Death,' and according to L. Sprague de Camp, his most fanatic followers are cannibals with filed teeth. Shamans claim that a horrific dog of Hell guards the path to Erlík's realm. Sacrifices are made to Erlík whenever evil spirits strike someone. Erlík has seven sons and seven daughters and he rules the seventh and final level of the nether world. Erlík and Ulgen work together. If Ulgen expects a sacrifice and does not receive it, he often sends Erlík to punish the one who did not offer the sacrifice. That man or woman must then make a sacrifice to both gods before his or her life is righted. Erlík respects the noble warriors who wield life and death on the battlefield. Lotus is considered a holy sacrament to the followers of Erlík, reserved for those who have reached Paradise. The followers of Erlík do not appreciate non-believers using it. The Paradise promised by

Erlík to his True Believers is peopled by beautiful *mekhrani* who live in the pleasure houses of eternity. In Turan, Erlík has overtaken the Everlasting Sky in popularity.

Eke-otuken: Eke-otuken is the earth-mother.

Emegelji Eji: The wife of the Everlasting Sky, known as the very old grandmother.

Ongot: The ongot are the collective household gods, which are ancestor spirits.

Ormazd: Some Turanians worship bizarre deities such as Ormazd, a bright god who battles the devil, Ahriman.

Qurmusata Tngri: This god is the originator of fire.

Sulde: These are ancient spirits of the military. They animate standards, flags and military insignia.

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 have probably posed the Tarim as an avatar of Erlík himself, taking the form of a god of herding and animal fertility. Historically, Tarim was the leader that led the Lemurians off their sinking isles to the shores of the main continent. He lives on, century after century in the person of his descendents, 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 that 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' has died.

Thutala: Thutala is, a trickster who appears to unbelievers in a whole host of different guises. The followers of Erlík call any foreign god 'Thutala' or his minion.

Ulgen Tngre (The Everlasting Sky): The Everlasting Sky, Ulgen is the creator of all there is. He lives at the summit of the divine mountain.

Ulla: Ulla is the moon-goddess. Many who worship her take the Eyes of the Cat feat.

Yenagra: 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 74), although a little more restrained in terms of worship.

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth 1 sp/level/month.

Benefits of Worship: Atonement, Faith.

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Knowledge (religion) 6 ranks.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard plus as follows: sorcery teaching available (Divinations and Nature magic only).

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Cast out of the temple.

THE HYRKANIAN SHAMAN

The Hyrkanian shaman is a master of ecstasy and usually has a magical specialty, such as control over fire or health. He enters an ecstatic state and his soul is believed to leave his body and go into the spirit worlds. The Hyrkanian shaman has spirit helpers and can communicate with these spirits. However, unlike the ecstatic experiences of Black Coast natives, the Hyrkanian shamans retain control of their consciousness. Only on the rarest of occasions would a Hyrkanian shaman become possessed. Hyrkanian shamans have techniques for lucid dreaming and out-of-body experiences. They can work with dreams while being conscious and they can fly out-of-body so their souls can take journeys. Hyrkanian shamans take journeys into the nether realms, the Outer Dark, to higher levels of existence or even, some claim, to parallel physical worlds. Some can travel out-of-body to other parts of the world.

Most nomads who become shamans do so because they had a near-death-experience which honed their shamanic intuition. Others become shamans after being hit by lightning, taking a great fall or nearly dying from a horrible illness. Many report dreams of their organs being consumed by spirits and replaced after or during these experiences – and thus the old nomad is reborn a new man, a shaman. Regardless of the truth or fantasy of such dreams, the near-death experiences tend to give the nomad an increased ability to work with others, an understanding of what it means to die and what can be done to help people live. Most Hyrkanian shamans are men but women are not forbidden by any means.

Types of Shaman in Hyrkania

There are many varied types of shamans in Hyrkania, depending on where the tribe primarily lived because the shamanistic religion is invariably tied to ecology. Some are merely healers, others are skilled hunters, and others exist to ward off evil spirits in efforts to stop plagues or kill witches and sorcerers. Many shamans deal primarily with the forces of the world, either the classic elements such as wind, or the animal kingdom such as wolves. Stories tell of shamans who can sit naked in the snow and melt ice with their body heat. Other shamans can turn into animals. Most Hyrkanian shamans, however, are concerned primarily with the continuation and reproduction of family and are associated with the cult of skies and mountains.

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.

Skills and Abilities of Hyrkanian Shamans

Hyrkanian shamans are part of the nomadic tribe, are part of the cavalry and are also horse-archers. Feats improving their archery are almost certainly taken, especially Far Shot, for which the Hyrkanian does not need to meet the prerequisites, Mounted Combat and Mounted Archery. Hyrkanians are well-reputed for being able to shoot things at incredible distances. For this reason, a Hyrkanian will often keep his Spot skill as high as possible. It is easier to shoot a thing at a distance if one can see that thing in the distance. A Hyrkanian shaman will usually keep his Ride and Survival skills maximised. A Hyrkanian will rarely walk as much as 20 paces if he can ride instead. He will often put at least five ranks in Handle Animal to earn the synergy bonus to Ride. He will usually teach his horses tricks. The shaman will also put ranks in Hide in order to attack from ambush at range. Moving silently is secondary to Hide, as the Hyrkanian scholar rarely gets up close to his prey, and distance hides sound fairly well.

Hyrkanian shamans will often have ranks in Craft (blacksmith) as well as in various Perform skills. Hyrkanian shamans should put their strongest statistic in Charisma.



Shamans live and die by the effectiveness of their magic. A high magic attack bonus is better than more spell points. A high Charisma also adds to Perform bonuses, an important aspect of shamanistic life.

Shamans are expected to be able to heal the tribe, so ranks in Heal are a must. Self-Sufficient and Skill Focus (heal) are well-chosen feats for Hyrkanian shamans who specialise in healing. Those who focus on warding off evil spirits take the Counterspells sorcery style early in their careers. Others take the Weather Witching style (presented in *Conan: Pirate Isles*) or the Nature Magic sorcery style.

Clothing and Accoutrements of Hyrkanian

Shamans

Clothing: Shamans traditionally wear white clothing, usually inherited from previous shamans. Many Hyrkanian shamans believe metal on or about their body is essential. Some carry up to forty pounds of metal strips and bells sewn onto their clothing to represent feathers. Over this kaftan is worn an apron of cotton strips in various colours. Over the apron is worn a leather belt hung with mirrors because evil spirits fear mirrors and because the shamans believe a mirror reflects everything, including secret thoughts. They often wear helmets with horns, but around Pathenia, they wear red silk headcloths instead of helmets.

Wearing metal (weapons do not count) gives a shaman a +1 circumstance bonus per 10 lbs. (maximum +4) while in the spirit world to do whatever he needs to do (see the spell *Shamanic Ecstasy* on page 13). It offers no bonus in the 'real' world, only when the shaman is in a trance.

Drums: Hyrkanian shamans prefer kettle drums, which they believe make a sound that frightens evil demons and drives them away. Another drum used by the Hyrkanian shamans is a small drum with a handle and rattles inside. The drumstick is an important part of a shaman's regalia. Some are carved with a horse's head on the end, some are carved to look like horse's hooves, some actually *are* horse's hooves. Others are just thin sticks covered in snake-skin with coloured ribbons dangling from the mouth of the snake. War drums are made from the skins of black bulls.

Horses and Animals: Hyrkanian shamans traditionally ride white horses and, if they have pets, keep white animals as companions.

Ancient Traditions in Khitai

KHITAN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

THE KHITAN PANTHEON is as mysterious to Westerners as the whole of that distant nation. Shaven-headed priests are said to have temples deep in the Khitan jungles; entirely religious communities are common. 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.

BASIC COSMOLOGY

The Khitans believe the universe has three basic divisions: the heavens, the earth and the underworld. Each division retains connections to the other. By extension, all interconnected things retain those connections, thus a person is connected to a father and a mother, who are, in turn, connected to their parents in a chain spanning throughout all of history. Thus, a person is connected to all of his ancestors.

Heaven and the underworld are not reward and punishment arenas. Heaven is where the cosmos is controlled by the Source of All Things and his attendant gods, nature spirits and ancestral souls (known as *hun*). The underworld (sometimes called the underworld of yellow springs) is just a place where other souls (known as *po*) live much as they did in life.

DUALITY IN SOUL

The Khitans believe a person has two souls. The first is known as the *hun*. This soul materialises at birth and moves into heaven after death, becoming a spirit linked to his descendants. The second soul, known as the *po*, materialises with conception and, at death, descends into the underworld as a ghost linked to its physical corpse and/or tomb.

ANCESTOR VENERATION

The primary form of Khitan worship revolves around the veneration of ancestral spirits. As stated earlier, a Khitan believes in a continuing connection with parents, who are connected to their parents, who are connected to their parents and so on, all in an everlasting chain reaching through the dimmest mists of history to the family of the Yellow Emperor.

Pathenians and some Hyrkanians believe the Emperor in Yellow to be Erlik, the first man.

Gifts, usually in the form of wine and food, are offered to the ancestors to show respect and to make the lives of the ancestors easier. Food, wine and precious objects offered to the ancestors feed and aid the ancestor spirits. Slaves sacrificed to the ancestors grant the ancestor spirit a slave in the afterworld. These offerings may be made in temples devoted to ancestors of a village, or they may be made in shrines within the home, where a list of dead relatives is kept in an altar. Not providing the gifts on a regular basis can bring about natural or personal disasters. Khitans believe their ancestors continue to have a keen interest in the affairs of humanity – especially in the affairs of their descendants. Thus, Khitans are expected to inform their ancestors of any major decisions and seek their guidance.

Cultural Justification

Khitai's religion, like most religions, serves to justify and maintain the existing culture, emphasising aspects of the culture that are deemed important. In Khitai's case, the veneration of ancestors cultivates the value of kinship. This ancient practice teaches filial piety, family loyalty and lineage continuity. Through ancestor veneration, a family is bound together through generations almost without number. The veneration of ancestors also fulfils another basic human need: the need to believe in an afterlife. Ancestor veneration reinforces the belief that the souls go on after death, so death is nothing to be feared, for the souls will be taken care of by descendants. History is also important to Khitans. After all, they fight, live and die for causes and they do not want those struggles to be forgotten, so they, in turn, make sure they remember their ancestors and their deeds so their own will be remembered by future generations.

SPIRIT & DEMON WORSHIP

The sorcerers of Khitai summon to the earth their dark gods so 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*, was



educated in Khitai and when she took over Khauran, she conjured up Thaug to put in a temple, conducting sacrificial rituals to appease it. This, along with evidence from other stories, indicates an eastern practise of demon-worship. As more and more demons are summoned and worshipped, the pantheon grows and becomes ever more complex.

SACRIFICES TO THE SPIRITS & ANCESTORS

Human sacrifice is the name of the game for Khitan priests. Ancestral spirits require blood to be spilt to prove the serious nature of any request. River, mountain and other nature spirits often require similar tokens of seriousness. In addition to human sacrifice, animal sacrifice is also rampant, especially large animals such as elephants and rhinoceroses. There is a Khitan notion that a person's spirit lingers on in a spirit world after death. If a scholar shows proper respect to departed ancestors, this realm's powers can be tapped to aid the living. This being the case, the dead in Khitai are buried with possessions and slaves needed to live a comfortable life

in the hereafter, for a comfortable, pleased spirit is more conducive to giving advice or favours when requested. Further, the spirits of ancient kings act as intermediaries to the actual gods, who are strange and unknowable to mortals. Spirits are nourished by human blood, so vast numbers of human sacrifices are necessary to maintain the integrity and unity of Khitai.

RELIGION IS PERSONAL, NOT UNIVERSAL

Khitai's cults, unlike many Western religions, do not bother teaching they are of the only true church and that all the others are fundamentally flawed. Khitan worshippers simply do not care. Few Khitans are well-travelled enough to even know about other religions, so Khitai's religions do not have the need to compare themselves to other religions. They do not claim other religions are 'flawed' or have false teachings. Khitan priests are not evangelists nor missionaries. They do not try to win converts or spread their religion.



RELIGIOUS & SORCEROUS MUSIC

Bells and chimes also play a large part in solemn Khitan rituals. Almost all Khitan bells have a two-pitch quality, the sound depending on where the bell is struck by the mallet. Almost all bells are inscribed to indicate the notes they play, indicating remarkable musical achievement, for the pitches are calculated before the bell is cast in bronze. These bells range in size from eight inches to over five feet in height. Some nobles and scholars have sets consisting of 64 of these two-pitched bells covering the entire range of sizes. These sets are usually arranged hanging mouth down in three rows on a huge L-shaped frame capable of supporting the three tons of bronze bells. The 19 smallest bells occupy the top row. The 33 middle-sized bells occupy the middle row and are used for the melody. The remaining bells, the largest, are on the bottom row to produce the accompaniment. The whole set is played by numerous musicians working in concert, often accompanied by dancers. Owning a complete bell set gives a noble or scholar a +1 bonus to Reputation.

MALE & FEMALE ENERGIES

As far as sex goes, in Khitai, both men and women are seen to have magical forces within them that are counterpoints to each other and necessary for life. The female magical force is felt to be infinite within each woman, but the male magical force is considered quite finite. Thus, sexual relationships are seen as a necessary transfer of these forces to the other. Since the female force is infinitely contained in each woman, she is expected to climax multiple times, masturbate often and have sex with other women if she wants. Men, however, are expected to climax once, and must never masturbate or have sex with another man, since they would lose their finite magical energy and not get anything back. Women who have sex with many men are felt to have more magical energy, so many men seek out prostitutes.

KHITAN PANTHEON

The Khitan pantheon, rumoured to host more than nine thousand gods, originates from the lands of the West. Scholars doubt even the strange, shaven headed priests of Paikang who talk to faceless demons in the lost jungles know the names of all nine thousand, so only a few will be discussed below. The complete pantheon contains hundreds of immortals and demigods, including deified historical figures. Demons and outsiders

are often worshipped as gods because they are plainly seen, have awesome powers and have mystical knowledge.

The gods of Khitai live as men do, in a hierarchy much like that found in Khitai, with all the gods serving an emperor god named Yun. The lesser gods are served by demigods, who are served by spirits, immortals and human souls. Tales show them with human characteristics, including faults. They live in homes just as the Khitans do. The worship of the gods is distinct from ancestor worship. The Khitans do not have difficulty in believing in multiple gods and worshipping many things, for to the Khitans, many things are deserving of worship and honour.

Cheng-Ho: Cheng Ho is the moon-goddess of Khitai.

Yogah: Yogah is the strange, elephant-headed star-being from the story *The Tower of the Elephant*. His memory is worshipped still as a god in Khitai. He is a god of magic and sorcerous knowledge.

Yun: Yun is the main god worshipped in the jungle temples. He is the head of the Khitan pantheon, but almost nothing is known of him save that his worship seems to involve music in the form of chimes or bells.

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth 3 sp/level/month to the priests, or serve at the temple full-time as a monk.

Benefits of Worship: Atonement, Faith, Spells (any).

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: must know the Oriental Magic sorcery style; vows of obedience, poverty and chastity are common, but not universal; expected to be scrupulously honest and a powerful leader.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (any).

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Exiled from Khitai and set to wandering the Earth.

KHITAN PRIESTS

There are two kinds of Khitan priest: the shaman and the ritual priest. The shaman serves the villages, living out of a house or personal temple, and uses magic to control life circumstances and events, cure the sick and predict the future. Ritual priests serve the temples and live in communes.

Most Khitan priests and sorcerers value information above all else and though they will not hesitate to slay those who deserve to die or are their allotted targets, they prefer to avoid unnecessary deaths. They also learn Oriental magic and curses, making them highly effective combatants. They favour staffs as weapons and, if they can get them, they

prefer Staffs of Death (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game*) as a means of delivering their spells. Khitan sorcerers almost always travel and train in small groups. One member of the group will be the senior sorcerer, responsible for teaching the others. He will usually be scrupulously fair but is by no means a pushover.

SORCERY STYLES

The kings of Khitai like diviners. Only the king practises divining but he employs court diviners to interpret the results of the oracle bones. Many Khitan priests, if they do not begin the game with the Oriental sorcery style, begin with the Divination style. Further, Khitans are notorious demon worshippers, so many eventually take the Summoning sorcery style (if they do not start out with it) and make pacts with demons lurking in the lost jungles to learn spells and magic. Most Khitan scholars take each of these styles as early as possible. Cosmic Sorcery (from *Conan: The Scrolls of Skelos*) is another popular style for Khitan sorcerers. They are also known as hexers. Virtually all the sorcery styles are open and recommended for a Khitan sorcerer.

Khitan scholars in search of immortality have a curious method of doing so. They believe only total seclusion can bring about the spirits' permission to earn immortality. Those who learn the Immortality sorcery style (from *Conan: The Scrolls of Skelos*) forbid their servants to reveal their whereabouts to anyone, even another servant, and enclose all walkways on their property so that no one ever knows where they really are until the style is mastered (all spells known in that style).

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 a tomb shaft a small section 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. These 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. Many Khitan hermits lurk around these tombs, practising Divination and Necromancy sorcery styles.

SKILLS & FEATS

Knowledgeable is a good choice of feat for the Khitan scholar, taking advantage of the character's racial bonus to make the Khitan seem like a veritable walking encyclopaedia. Walking quietly is important to Khitans, so a few ranks should be placed in Move Silently. Their inscrutable, almost unemotional, mien makes Bluff another natural choice. They are also known for careful word choice and precise emphasis on tone and inflection, making Diplomacy yet another natural choice. Of course, ranks in Perform (ritual) and Perform (any music or dance) are a must, especially if the Khitan intends on summoning elementals and other powerful outsiders to his service. Music plays an important cultural role in Khitai's esoteric rituals, so putting ranks in musical performance skills is equally important. Most of a Khitan's servants will also have Perform (any music or dance) skills to help with any large rituals or play large instruments, such as the bells described earlier.

ABILITY SCORES & REPUTATION

Khitai's culture expects priests to be honest and charismatic. Charisma will usually be the highest ability score a Khitan scholar has. Most will also take the honest subtype of Reputation, especially if they are seeking ordained priesthood. Respect is accorded to those with the most followers, so even Khitan sorcerers take the Leadership feat if they seek popular support or noble respect. Many Khitan scholars also take vows of obedience, vows of poverty and/or vows of chastity. These are not universal among all scholars, but they are fairly common.

CLOTHING

Khitan priests dress in high-necked, long silk jackets, embroidered trousers, hooded and wide-sleeved robes of a very dark grey or black material and sandals beneath their robes. The men shave their heads. The women fix their hair in complicated coiffures.

Nemedia's Ibis

HERETICAL RELIGION IN HYBORIA

IBIS IS A god forbidden in Stygia but exists in a strange relationship with Mitra in Nemedica. Their shared opposition to Set gives them a common cause but some of the priests of Mitra are suspicious of the Ibis worshippers, distrusting anything with such a close connection to the land of their enemies – and rightly so. A god of moonlight and knowledge, Ibis's priests teach he was self-created. He is depicted either as an ibis-headed human or simply as an ibis. He always carries a pen and scrolls and is the recorder of all things. He invented alchemy and, until his banishment, was the scribe of Set. He created the law of the monster-kings and is said to have married truth, proclaiming the Giant-Kings and the things of old to be more powerful than the dusky-skinned usurpers of the Styx. When the Khari came to the lands of the Styx, they vanquished the Giant-Kings of old, horrible monsters with antiquated laws. These kings fled the lands of the Styx and founded Acheron. When they fled, they took Ibis with them, as well as Set. The Khari, however, to indicate a new order was coming, banished the old scribe and gave Set a new scribe, Djehuty (see page 82).

Ibis, however, continued to serve Set in the pantheon of Acheron. Nemedica was once the heart of Acheron before it was conquered by the Hyborians. All things Acheronian were thrown down and the surviving Acheronian people fled into hills and valleys to hide in bleak villages and hamlets, shadows of their former selves. One of the Acheronian cults, the cult of Ibis, did not want to go into hiding and did not care to be hunted down, so the cult's priests made a hard decision. Seeing the way the wind was blowing, the decision was to aid the Hyborians. Pretending to be opposed to Set, they helped the Hyborians hunt down and destroy every vestige of Acheron and the cult of Set they could find. The cult, its ranks substantially reduced from the wars, established itself firmly in Nemedica. A millennia and a half later, when the religion of Mitra swept through the Hyborian world, the cult of Ibis found itself untouched, an ally of sorts against evil and oppression. The Ibis cult survives to this day in Nemedica, the old heart of Acheron, in the city of Hanumar. Hanumar is the home of Kalanthes, the last Acheronian-style high priest alive today. Another cult of Ibis exists at the Oasis of Nafri. The high priestess of Ibis there is named Paniwi and was trained in Acheronian alchemy and magic by Kalanthes himself.

PHILOSOPHY OF IBIS' CULT

The Cult of Ibis teaches that men are little gods, that the spirit within transcends the flesh. The cult teaches that man is born in order to commune with nature but that the spirit is still god-like – but that men have forgotten how to touch their godlike natures. Alchemy and magic are part of a god's power and knowledge is the ultimate power. With knowledge comes godhood. If he partakes of enough knowledge, a scholar becomes as the gods are.

Although Ibis's cult opposes the cult of Set to some degree, this is largely a façade. Ibis followers do not actively practice religious intolerance at all. Their own existence is too precarious to practice such a philosophy; Set's cult, for example, is far larger and has far more resources than Ibis's meagre cult and could destroy them if Set's cult saw the need to do so. Still, the priests of Ibis and the priests of Set like to play deadly pranks on one another and oppose each other politically when able.

SACRAMENTAL AND MYSTICAL

The cult of Ibis is a sacramental and mystical religion. It is sacramental to commoners and becomes mystical to the priests when they are initiated into the Inner Mysteries. The cult often becomes sorcerous when the priests learn the Inner Mysteries and terrors.

VENERATION OF STATUES

The priests of Ibis believe their god may, at any time, possess statues depicting him; they are receptacles for the god's *Ka* (Charisma). The statues are often made in the nude and the priests clean them and clothe them in clean linen outfits and headdresses daily. Petitioners sometimes bring the statues offerings of food, wine, blood and mummified animals as sacrifices. Not venerating the gods' statues is dishonourable and brings certain doom upon the heads of all involved. By performing these ceremonies, the priests show the people

the gods must be cared for in order for them to care for the people.

RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS

The cult of Ibis is a religion steeped in mysticism. Animals, weather, terrain and emblems all have powerful magic contained within them.

Writing Palette and Reed Pen

Ibis once carried the ankh (see page 81), the symbol of life, but this symbol has vanished over time as it has become equated with Stygian religion. Now Ibis is shown holding a writing palette and a reed pen. These are his symbols of office, as a recorder of knowledge.

Crescent Moon

The beak of the Ibis represents the crescent moon, and Ibis often is shown with a crescent moon on his headdress. Priests of Ibis also have a crescent moon on their headdresses as well.

Calendar

As a god of the moon and of learning, Ibis is associated with calendars and his image often illuminates or adorns calendars in Nemediia.

IBIS, THE BANISHED GOD OF ALCHEMY

Ibis has a relatively small but respected cult with cordial but uncomfortable relations with the cult of Mitra in Nemediia. Ibis was once a respected part of the grim, bestial pantheon of gods worshipped by the Giant-Kings of old, then became a respected god among the black-hearted pantheon of Acheron and, only when Acheron was in flames, did the cult suddenly become respected as 'goodly'. Many suspect this façade is but a false-face on a darker truth. Many Mitrans argue that the Ibis cult is just as evil as Set, but others argue differently.

Ibis himself is now portrayed to outsiders as a simple moon-god, a patron of scholars and those who seek to gain sorcerous knowledge but use it for moral ends. He is also portrayed as having an abiding hatred of Set, a serpent who oppresses knowledge and true alchemy. It is whispered that worshippers of Ibis survive in Stygia itself, keeping their religion secret but ever eager to foil the schemes of Set and his followers at any opportunity. It is also whispered that the cult of Ibis may be just as evil as the cult of Set, just opposed to the serpent-god's cult, and that its supposed 'morality' is the morality of Acheron – but those who whisper such



things do not whisper them for long. Ibis is an ancient god of knowledge and its priests *know* things that should not be known.

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth 2 sp/level/month to the priests of Ibis; report any Set-worship, sorcery or related activity to your nearest priest of Ibis as soon as possible; publicly oppose those who carry out human sacrifice or traffic with demons.

Benefits of Worship: Faith, Atonement, Spells (Counterspells and Divination only); may call on priests for protection against Set and his minions generally.

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: must know Counterspells sorcery style. Must be willing to fight Set and his minions wherever they are found, even at great personal risk. May not associate with demonic entities or minions of Set. May not learn the Curses, Necromancy or Summonings sorcery styles until invited to the Inner Circles of Ibis.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (Counterspells, Divination, Prestidigitations). Those of the Inner Circle may learn any sorcery, for Ibis records all things. Although Ibis hides things, he does not like for things to be forgotten.

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests:

Excommunication, unless the priest has been associating with minions of Set, in which case capture and summary execution.

Inner Mysteries: The Mysteries of Ibis are learned by taking ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Ibis). Every three ranks makes one eligible for the next Mystery.

- ❖ The first Mystery of Ibis reveals most of the basic symbolisms of the religion, allowing a character with three ranks of Knowledge (Mystery: Ibis) a +1 bonus to Knowledge (arcana) and Craft (alchemy). May learn the Curses Sorcery Style if approved by the High Priest of Ibis – the character must swear an oath not to cast curses in public upon pain of torture and/or death.
- ❖ The second Mystery of Ibis gives the character an understanding of truth and lies, giving the character a +1 bonus to all opposed Sense Motive skill checks to see if someone is lying and a +1 bonus to Disguise and Bluff. The Keepers learn that man became physical in order to commune with nature, but retains his spirit – and his connection with the Creator God. The Keepers learn that future Mysteries intend to teach them how to become gods again and lose the physical.
- ❖ The third Mystery of Ibis teaches the importance of knowledge and how knowledge can be achieved through organisation and goal-setting. Keepers of the Third Mystery of Ibis have a +1 bonus to all Knowledge skills. This stacks with Skill Focus and Knowledgeable feats. The truth of the origins of the Giant-Kings is taught as is how the Sons of God found the daughters of Men fair. The history of Acheron and of Stygia-before-it-was-Stygia is taught. The Keepers are taught that sorcery was never meant for Man but was a power taught to them by fallen gods of old.
- ❖ The fourth Mystery of Ibis teaches how Ibis created all that is in the world through sacred geometry and mathematics. The Keeper of the Fourth Mystery learns the sacred geometries of the human body. The Keeper of the Fourth Mystery may learn the Necromancy Sorcery Style if approved by the High Priest of Ibis – the character must swear an oath not to cast curses in public upon pain of torture and/or death. He learns how the sacred geometry can build anything. The Keeper of the Fourth Mystery gains a +1 bonus to Knowledge (engineering & architecture).
- ❖ The fifth Mystery of Ibis is that Ibis is a demi-urge and is not the true light of the universe. The Keeper of the Fifth Mystery may learn the Summonings Sorcery Style (*Master Words and Signs*, not *Demonic Pact*) if approved by the High Priest of Ibis – the character must swear an oath not to cast curses in public upon pain of torture and/or death. The Keeper learns of the Source of All Things, the Light of the Universe and gains a +2 bonus on saves versus Corruption.

❖ The sixth Mystery of Ibis sends the priest into an ecstasy wherein he believes he travels through the cosmos in an astral form and is invited to read from the *Book of Ibis*. This book is a collection of 36,535 scrolls said to contain all the knowledge of the universe. It can only be found by the worthy. This book of knowledge allows the Keeper of the Sixth Mystery of Ibis to add his Wisdom modifier to all Knowledge skill checks and Knowledge is Power checks (if a scholar).

❖ The seventh Mystery of Ibis is that of immortality. The sacred geometry of the soul is discovered, as well as the horrible secrets of bodily regeneration and/or rebirth with an intact memory/soul. The consciousness of the Keeper of the Seventh Mystery of Ibis is expanded and the Keeper may behold the Immortals. Further, the full truth about the hieroglyphics are unfolded – they are not just for writing – they are magical keys to Immortality. The cause of death is the love of the body, of the physical. Immortality comes from knowledge of the true self. The Keeper may learn the Immortality style of magic, as a bonus Sorcery Style.

PRIESTS OF IBIS

Priests are initiated into the priesthood by a ritual shaving of all bodily hair followed by a baptism in a sacred pool to symbolise the coming out of the Cosmic Ocean. If the candidate has not been circumcised, he undergoes the appropriate ceremony. The candidate is anointed with oil and sprinkled with water. The candidate is then led to the statue of the god or goddess of the temple and taught the secret ways to touch and work with the statue. The candidate is then lead away for a ten day fast. At the end of the ten days, the initiate is exposed to black lotus blossom (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game*) in order to reveal the Inner Mysteries of the god or goddess necessary for his job. These characters are permitted to take Profession (priest) ranks. They do not take the Priest feat.

If a priest is to become a full time priest, he serves for a term as a full-time priest and earns enough knowledge in the Mysteries to have earned initiation into the Second Mystery of his temple. If the character meets all prerequisites he goes through another Initiation and must also make an appropriate sacrifice to the gods and to the king, often a blood sacrifice. Thereafter, the character is permitted to take the Priest feat and, if he has enough ranks in the Knowledge (Mystery) skill, he may learn the Second Mystery of his cult. The ordained priest of Ibis is given a set of robes (or a mantle) befitting his status and is given a new ranking.

TEMPLES OF IBIS

The temples of Ibis are built identical to Stygian temples (see *Conan: Stygia – Serpent of the South*).

Nordheimir Religion

THE PRIMAL FROST-GIANT KING

THE ÆSIR WORSHIP Ymir the Frost Giant King. Dread Ymir rules icy Valhalla, where the dead dwell in a realm of long halls, snowy glaciers, and eternal drinking, wenching and fighting. 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 if one drinks one's self unconscious. Thus, inebriation is a religious obligation as well as a social activity.

Life 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 lived life and met 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.

YMIR AND THE NORDHEIMIR PANTHEON

Ymir is the primal frost-giant king and god of both the Aesir and Vanir. To the Nordheimir, he represents the Earth itself, which they perceive as formed entirely of ice and snow. He is worshipped not in elaborate rituals but by doing battle all day, then drinking and singing all night.

Ymir appears predominantly in the creation myth of the Nordheimir, who have little enough need for the gods save as sources for their tall tales and wild songs. He is said to have been the first living being, created from thawed ice just before the second creature, the primal cow Audhumla. His only nourishment came from milking Audhumla. Ymir's body produced the first humans, a man and a woman congealed from the sweat of his left armpit. From these sprang the races of Vanir and Aesir.

Atali: Ymir's daughter Atali is an enchantress who lures wounded men to their deaths in the ice. She has a number of brothers who resemble huge, rime-bearded Nordheimir warriors and who ambush her victims with their great axes, if the poor mortals have not already died of exposure. She brought *seid* to the women of Nordheim (see the section on Nordheimir *Völvas* on page 62).

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth 1 sp/level/month to the local temple, increasing to 8 sp/month during the raiding season (typically two months during autumn, after the harvest is in).

Benefits of Worship: Atonement, Faith.

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Must have at least three levels in the barbarian class. Priests of Ymir are expected to be warriors first and foremost; many a raider has retired to become a priest after years of battle and slaying.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (Curses, Divinations and Nature Magic only).



Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Banishment from the tribe.

NORDHEIMER GODI AND GODAR

Nordheimer shamans, known as *godi* in Vanaheim and *godar* in Asgard, tend to be more political than religious, taking a chieftain-like role as well as ensuring the proper ceremonies are conducted for any given event. Religion tends to be a personal event among the Nordheimer, but even they have their oracles, much as the Cimmerians do. A Nordheimer can only take the scholar class by virtue of his bloodline, his wealth and his Reputation. If he is found lacking in any of these three areas, then he will not be chosen for this role. The character must be descended from a king or a *godi/godar*, he must be wealthy as Nordheimer measure wealth and his Reputation must exceed 10 before he can multiclass into scholar. Often, multiclassing into scholar is an act of retirement for heroes and legends. Worship is conducted outdoors in places such as beneath guardian trees, near sacred wells or within sacred arrangements of stones. The Nordheimer shaman focuses on divination sorcery styles almost exclusively, although a few branch out into cosmic sorcery, nature magic and/or hypnotism. Mostly, they take the bonus feats and bonus skill points in lieu of new styles and further advanced spells once they have learned the divination style.

Among the Æsir, who are each fiercely independent, religion is viewed as a personal matter. They have no time or interest in having priests interpret Ymir for them. Each man is his own intermediary to Ymir. The Æsir 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 Æsir 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 their ale in fantastic quantities and singing lustful songs celebrating their wars and heroes. These ceremonies, occurring in the spring, mid-summer and autumn, last for days and are loud, brutal affairs for such is their life.

NORDHEIMIR VÖLVAS

A *völva* is a Nordheimir sorceress who practises *seid*, the Nordheimir version of Shamanism. *Seid* is considered unmanly in Nordheimir tradition, so almost all *völv*as are female. A few men, however, especially after a near-death experience, do take up the path.

Seid is considered unmanly because it is a manipulative practice, which runs counter to the Nordheimir code

of forthright behaviour for men. Old women *völv*as are seen as representatives of the spirits of death. The primary forms of magic practised by *völv*as are Divination, Hypnotism, Nature Magic and Curses. Really old and powerful *völv*as practise Necromancy.

*Völv*as wear black cloaks and hoods of black wool trimmed with white cat fur. Some are nude beneath; others wear standard clothing for Nordheimir women. A few carry swords. They carry symbolic staffs of power (called *seidstaffs*), which aid in their magic. The *seidstaff* allows a *völva* to cast spells which would normally require her to touch the object the spell is being cast upon without actually touching that object; instead, she only has to touch the object with one end of the *seidstaff* whilst holding the staff's other end. In addition, the masterwork nature of the *seidstaff* gives a +1 bonus to the sorcerer's attack roll. A typical *seidstaff* has Defence 7, five hit points, hardness 5, a break DC of 16 and costs 500 silver pieces (in relative value, not necessarily in coin).

When learning the Divination sorcery style, the *völva* learns *shamanistic ecstasy* (see page 13), not *astrological divination*. The *völva* is said to become discorporeal and take the likeness of an animal as she travels through the realms of reality. She achieves the trance through a variety of means, depending on who trained her. Lotus, sleep deprivation, sensory deprivation and chanting are all methods used by various *völv*as.

Level Nordheimir Völva

1	Shamanic Ecstasy
2	Entrance
3	Psychometry (Torment (from <i>Conan: The Scrolls of Skelos</i>) if bonus spell is available)
4	Hypnotic Suggestion, Lesser Ill-Fortune
5	Visions
6	Domination
7	Dream of Wisdom (Ill-fortune if bonus spell is available)
8	Savage Beast, Summon Animal
9	Greater Ill-Fortune
10	Ranged Hypnotism
11	Enslave (from <i>Conan: The Scrolls of Skelos</i>) (Visions of Torment and Delight if bonus spell is available)
12	Sorcerous News, Warding (Note: character gains Curse of Yizil as a free spell at this point)
13	Greater Warding
14	Dance of Atali (from <i>Conan: The Scrolls of Skelos</i>)
15	Draw Forth the Soul (Free choice if bonus spell is available)
16	Death Touch, Raise Dead

Dark Rites in Pictland

RELIGION OF THE PICTS

THOUSANDS OF YEARS of prowling darkly fantastic forests and reeking black swamps creates a rather sinister outlook on the gods and the spirit world. Religion and dark spirituality infuse everything the Picts do. Hunting and war are spiritual activities for the Picts. The building of cities and the making of clothing are spiritual exercises. Minor ceremonial gestures accompany some of the most routine of activities and deeds. There is no separation of state and religion for the Pict, no such thing as secular and spiritual divisions. Thus, religious activities are an important focus for tribal life. Many of the dire festivals and appalling ceremonies held by the savage Picts focus around the cycles of the growing and hunting seasons. Singing, dancing and feasting, along with elaborate, darksome ceremonies conducted by shamans, generate unity and co-operation among the Picts. Like any religion, the dark beliefs of the Picts provide them with inner strength, purpose and a sense of belonging. Devilish rites for birth, marriage, death, harvest, the hunt, war and even unfulfilled wants and desires are important to the tribes.

DARK RITES IN THE DIM FORESTS AND DAUNTING SWAMPS

The Picts are renowned for their particularly bloodthirsty rites to satisfy unsavoury gods and horrible black spirits. Although not all of their ceremonies are as gruesome and gory as might otherwise be inferred, a great many are. Some ceremonies involve human sacrifice; others involve animal sacrifice, such as dogs or deer. Some sample rituals are discussed below. The Games Master is encouraged to create additional rites and ceremonies to suit his needs for the campaign.

'Who knows what gods are worshipped under the shadows of that heathen forest, or what devils crawl out of the black ooze of the swamps?'

Robert E. Howard, *Beyond the Black River*

The Feast of Souls

When a Pict dies the shaman calls for the Feast of Souls, an elaborate burial ritual. Burial customs vary from tribe to tribe, but most either bury their dead with stakes or an earthen mound to mark the site or they place the corpse in a bark coffin on a platform raised eight to ten feet off the ground. Everyone in the village prepares food for the deceased's family and it is eaten by the tribe in a barbaric feast as villagers give gifts either to the family or to the corpse. This ceremony is to help the soul of the deceased make a successful journey to the afterlife. The Picts, however, differentiate the soul from the ghost, and the ghost of the deceased wanders the homes of the Picts until the Feast of the Dead is performed every decade or so.

The Feast of the Dead

When a village is moved to a new location the final ritual performed at the location of the old village is the feast of the dead. The women gather the bones of all the Picts who have died, strip the bones of any remaining flesh and wrap them in beaver pelts. The men dig a common grave as the putrid remains are gathered and stripped. The bundles of skeletons are draped over long poles and mingled into the communal pit. Gifts are exchanged, usually beaver robes, and a general celebration is held as the ghosts of the dead are relieved from haunting the location further.

SACRED PLACES OF SINISTER SIGNS AND SHADOWY PORTENTS

The world is alive and teeming with benevolent and malevolent spirits, many of whom resent the intrusions of man upon their damp woodland. Many of these spirits exist in greater concentrations or closer to this realm in certain places of strange aspect. Each tribe has at least one holy site, sacred to their village and their shaman. Rarely, however, do more than one tribe share the same sacred ground, and the tribes do not often respect the hallowed sites of other tribes. These sites might be places of great beauty, past tragedy or incredible weirdness. All of these grounds are tainted with power, however. The Picts also believe that underwater

monsters and demons lurk in the rivers and lakes of the wilderness. Graveyards are also holy ground. If a village catches on fire, the villagers first protect the graveyard before tending to their own homes; if the graveyard is neglected, then the dead spirits grow hostile to the tribe.

The Picts believe in the power of dreams and visions, both of which are considered portentous signs of things to come or things that have been hidden. Serious and fatal maladies are often the result of thwarted wishes and desires. Often when a Pict falls ill, the village tries to fulfil the individual's desires as interpreted by the sick person's dreams. If his dream was of a girl in the village, then the warrior might be allowed to consort with her. If the dream was of the death of an enemy, a war-party might be sent out to kill the foe. If the dream was of a possession, then that possession would likely be handed over to the Pict. The shaman usually interprets the dreams, and if he realises there is nothing to be done for the warrior he interprets the dreams to be something unattainable.

Mystical power resides in every thing, in every action and in every place. 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 to harness the mystical powers of all things. These are the shamans.

THE SHAMANS, MASKED DEVILS IN FEATHERED PLUMES

The shamans of the clans wield terrible magical powers, often wielding more influence than the chiefs of the clan. The shamans are the centre of the nasty religious and horrible ritual aspects of the Picts. Picts understand good and evil as indications of whether or not



obligations to the malicious spirits are being met and the shamans control this aspect of life. They are mediums acting as intermediaries between this world and the dark spirit world. Fortunately for the Westermarck and the rest of the world, the various tribal shamans spend most of their time battling spirits or each other rather than banding together and raiding the Hyborian kingdoms. Thus some of the earliest spells they learn are curses, and they love practising such spells on rival tribes.

The magic of the Pictish shaman is bloody and grim. Their altars are crude affairs, charred with fire and stained with blood. Accompanied by thundering drums, the shaman dances grotesquely and his captives are sacrificed to the Picts' dire gods and vile spirits. Blood makes their magic mighty. These ceremonies revolve around the hunt and the cycle of life, including births, rites of passage and deaths. Pictish shamans are wary of sharing their magic, and this even extends to teaching it to their own tribe or even family. Acolyte shamans must be constantly on the alert to prove their loyalty, or they are likely to find themselves used as the next sacrifices to the weird Pictish gods.

Feathered Plumes and Grinning Scarlet Masks

Costume and performance are inextricably linked to a shaman's success. They may act like animals, dress as animals and possibly even transform *into* animals. Pictish shamans favour feathers, bones and simple loincloths as their garb, using war paint and other ceremonial colouring to show off their intent and call their spirits' attention. Feathers hold mystical significance to the shaman and his followers. Masks are also common to enhance the mood or use as a magical focus. The ability to change form to fight spirits is also crucial to the shaman, either in reality or via his 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. The drums are holy to the Picts, who liken it to the heartbeats of the spirits. With such emphasis on performance, for shaman magic must be shown and displayed to the tribe despite the inner experience of it, Charisma is a vital characteristic for the successful shaman. They must hold the attention of the tribe and convince them they are powerful enough to command the spirits that infuse their wild land. This reliance on performance can be shown in-game through the Performance (Ritual) skill. Every 5 ranks of Performance (Ritual) gives a +2 synergy bonus to Heal and Survival checks.

A Pictish shaman may make a Perform (ritual) check to play upon the deep superstitions of other Picts. The performance must be at least 10 minutes long, cannot be interrupted and only influences Picts who watch the entire performance. At the end of the performance, the Shaman may make a Perform (ritual) check opposed by the Picts' Sense Motive checks. The shaman gains a +1 circumstance bonus to any

magic attacks directed toward audience members who fail this opposed check. If anyone beats the shaman's check by five or more, the shaman gains a -1 circumstance penalty to any magic attacks directed toward those Picts and they may attempt to deride the shaman's feeble attempts to influence them. If this happens, audience Picts may make a second Sense Motive check with a bonus equal to the number of Picts deriding the shaman's performance. Repeat attempts may be made, but at a -4 for each successive try. These effect last until the next sunrise.

A shaman's mask often represents the tribe's totem animal or helper spirit and is used in rituals by the shamans, turning the shaman from a mere man to a supernatural giant with ominous powers in the eyes of the tribe. By donning this mask, a shaman calls upon the power of the darksome spirits infusing the world to aid in his rituals. In *Wolves Beyond the Border*, the shaman wears a scarlet mask that represented one of the forest-devils. Rules concerning masks can be found on page 8.

If a Pict is healed of a sickness by a shaman, that Pict usually is given a mask by one of the mask-carvers of the tribe, or he carves his own, and is expected to help the shaman do healings from that day forward. Thus, the shaman slowly creates a large group for power rituals (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game* for rules on Power Rituals). The Pict take a rank in a Perform skill upon gaining their next level so they can aid in the rituals. Although many take ranks in Perform (ritual), other performances aid the shaman as well, such as drumming and dancing.

Dreams and dream interpretation are also important to a shaman, for many believe illness springs from unfulfilled desires. Dreams can also identify witches who have cursed the sick Pict. Still, healing is not their primary focus. In the world of the Pict, catching game is far more important for the clan, so most of a shaman's magic is directed at 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 indulging his own personal needs and goals. A Pictish shaman who fails to stave off death from disease and illness may well be forced to sacrifice his own life by his own tribe for his ineffective weakness.

THE MOUNTAINS OF THE DEAD AND THE HARSH GODS OF THE PICTS

The Picts believe in a dark afterlife. After death, their souls enter the spirit world and haunt the black Mountains of

the Dead in the uplands of the Dark Land. At night, the ghosts of the Picts are thought to walk among their villages, eating any food that is left out overnight. Picts who die violently are supposed to be violent in the afterlife and even dealing with their corpses is said to be dangerous. Picts who die in war paint are honoured in the afterlife. Generally, it is supposed by the Picts that their spirits take the form of their bodies at the moment of death, which is why the mutilation of a Pict body is considered an insult – and part of the reason why Picts almost always mutilate the corpses of their foes. Such mutilations hamper the spirit in the afterlife.

Spirits do not just live in the afterlife. According to the Picts, the spirits are everywhere, existing and co-existing with everything. The trees have spirits. The animals have spirits. Rocks have spirits. By mollifying and worshipping the spirits, the Picts feel they are at one with the universe. By breaking taboos or dishonouring the spirits, they may bring doom upon themselves or, even worse, upon their entire tribe. Many of the gruesome ceremonies practised by the Picts are not directed toward their own dire gods, but to placate the spirits.

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 will 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.

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, the shaman paints a skull black and casts it into Gullah’s fire. Upon entering a trance, the shaman 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 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.

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 has empowered 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...

Jhebbal Sag

This ancient nature god once received the worship of all living things, man and beast alike. Today it is thought that the only humans who still revere him are savages, the Picts and many of the Kushite and Black Kingdoms tribes, though a few scholars may know of his existence through evidence found all over the world, in cave paintings or the very oldest manuscripts. It is said that the animals have not forgotten Jhebbal Sag and can still be controlled by his followers. He is known to have two sons, Gullah and Jhil, but in all likelihood has many more sons who are minor gods, one for each animal.

Gullah: Gullah is a gorilla-god, a son of Jhebbal Sag who lives on the Moon. Bull apes are sacred to him. He is also known as Jullah to folk called the Gallahs, the ordinary people of Kush.

Requirements of Worship: Provide one human sacrifice per year. The whole of Pictish society is expected to contribute directly to the upkeep of their priests (who are usually known as tribal magicians), building them their ‘devil-devil huts’ and giving them a portion of the game caught by every hunt.

Benefits of Worship: Spells (any except Oriental Magic).

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus must know the Nature Magic sorcery style and the Tortured Sacrifice feat.

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

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Captured alive, then sacrificed.

Typical Acolyte Progression

Level	Pictish Shaman
1	Summon Beast
2	Lesser Ill-Fortune
3	Greater Summon Beast
4	Ill-Fortune, Warding
5	Rune of Jhebbal Sag
6	Greater Ill-Fortune
7	Greater Warding
8	<i>Dance of the Changing Serpent, Shamanic ecstasy</i> (or bonus feat)
9	Free Choice
10	Free Choice

LIGUREAN RELIGION

Robert E. Howard says nothing about the religious nature of the Ligureans. Since the race is not named after animals as are the Picts, it stands to reason that the Ligureans do not have totem spirits. According to *Black Sphinx of Nebthu*, the Ligureans worship nature as a whole, with deities not unlike those of the Cimmerians in name. Their nature deities, called the Lords of Creation, are savage deities. Nuadens Argatlam of the Silver Hand is the Lord of the Great Abyss and is one of these Lords of Creation. The druids worship their dark gods and goddesses in great groves in the north-eastern reaches of Pictland. The largest and greatest of these groves is called Nuadwyddon.

Their wizard-priests are known as druids. They dress in white, travel with staves and carry golden sickles tucked into their belts as emblems of their rank. Even the greatest and most bloodthirsty of the Pict warchiefs dare not harm one of the druids. These druids appear to be impartial to the feuding, neither aiding nor hindering the violent feuds raging throughout the Pictish wilderness. However, they are not impartial to the activities of black magic, particularly magic wrought by the priests of Set. This attitude may come down from racial memories of Acheron and their treatment of the Picts and the early Ligureans, or from actual oral traditions handed down through the generations. L. Sprague de Camp also indicates that the Ligurean druids are familiar with Mitran symbols and wards. This knowledge likely came from centuries of warring with the Bossonians.

The Ligurean druids walk the Pictish wilderness, interpreting the mysteries of environments they believe to be steeped in magic, placating dark nature spirits with grim ceremonies

and gruesome rituals of fire and blood. Their religion calls them to drench their altars with blood and even their divination spells often call for them to consult the entrails of human beings. In addition to their arcane roles in the rituals of barbarians, the druids are often called upon as judges and the guardians of tradition. They function as teachers and repositories of ancient, present and future lore. Many believe the gods worshipped by civilised man, including Mitra, Ishtar and Bel, are weak concepts at best, born from the pretentious babble of ruminating philosophers who know nothing of sex, birth or death. They believe their gods and their spirits, are older and vaster than the puny gods of the Hyborians.

THE LORDS OF CREATION

The Ligureans worship the Lords of Creation, nature gods and goddesses not unlike the Cimmerian pantheon. Nuadens Argatlam of the Silver Hand is one of the Ligureans' Lords of Creation. He is also known as the Lord of the Great Abyss. Another of their Lords of Creation is Mother Danu. Jhebbal Sag is also treated as a Lord of Creation.

Requirements of Worship: Be a Ligurean

Benefits of Worship: Spells

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Must know at least one sorcery style

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: Knowledge (nature) is a class skill regardless of class, sorcery teaching, ability to move peacefully among Pictish and Ligurean tribes without fear of ambush or unprovoked attack

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Sacrificing them to the Lords of Creation, either on an altar (stabbed to death) or within a giant wicker man (burned alive).

The Acolyte Path of the Ligurean Druids

Scholar Level	Ligurean Druid spells learned
1	Summon Beast
2	Warding
3	Greater Summon Beast, Rune of Jhebbal Sag
4	Animal Ally, Shamanic ecstasy
5	Visions
6	Children of the Night
7	Dream of Wisdom, Greater Warding
8	Ill-Fortune, Lesser Ill Fortune
9	Free Choice
10	Free Choice

Shem's Polytheism

SHEMITE RELIGION

THE SHEMITE RELIGION is polytheistic and largely based on fertility and fate. Originally, the animistic religion was a combination of nature and tribal religion with literal deities. Shemite's original religion was a nature religion because of the importance of herds and their fertility; the sun, the moon and the stars were their gods. Things natural and non-living, such as mountains, were considered to be imbued with divine energy. Humans, especially the Sons of Shem, were caretakers of the world under the watchful eyes of the gods. Their original religion was also tribal in that the Sons of Shem did not set out to convert others – one was either of the tribe and part of the religion or one was not a Son of Shem and thus not 'chosen'. This early form of Shemite religion gave them a cosmology and a cosmogony – the structure and origin of the world and the place of humans in it.

The Sons of Shem may have originated somewhere mountainous where their gods lived on high mountain tops. For shrouded reasons, they were forced to leave their homeland. This exodus also changed the nature of their religion. With their movement to the plains and deserts of Shem they no longer had great mountains to worship upon, so they erected artificial mountains known as zikkurats. With the construction of the zikkurats, the basic nature religion became more sacramental. Further sacraments were added to the religion, such as sacred prostitutes, who were believed to become living hosts for the divine when they were performing their erotic arts. Statues of the gods were seen as dwellings or manifestations of the gods. These sacraments and rites were created to impress upon the Sons of Shem their obligations toward the gods.

Driven from their homelands and into barren wastes, conquered by Stygians and forced to fight daily against the elements for their very lives, their religion had to evolve to explain the harshness of the Shemite's lives. Thus the nature aspect of the religion turned prophetic. A priestly caste developed to guide and warn the Sons of Shem. The priests and healers of modern Shem still reflect this new stage. The priests do not interpret past revelations but instead receive new and ongoing revelations. Society and action are manifestations of divine will. If good things are happening, the gods are pleased. If bad events are occurring, then divine anger and retribution is observed. The priests must

then reveal what the gods want from man to fix society. Correct behaviour is emphasised over correct belief, giving rise to the almost universal acceptance of codes of honour among the Shemites. Thus, the natural tribal religion became a primarily prophetic religion with sacramental aspects and a few vestigial tribal traits.

PREDESTINATION & SIN

Shem's priests teach dire concepts of predestination, resulting in fatalism among the Shemites, who believe that if their day to die arrives, there is nothing they can do to 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.

Shemite religion offers an explanation for hardship and misfortune – acts displeasing to their gods cause the gods to send forth demons to afflict the offender, his family or even his city, depending on the severity of the sin. These demons bring about disease, plagues, madness, enemy conquerors, infant mortality, environmental disasters and monsters. The gods have good intentions and have given the Shemites all that they have, but they also have great powers and are not above demonstrating those powers when riled. All are born with the capability to displease the gods, so the Shemites teach that when one suffers one should not curse the gods, but glorify them in attempts to atone for the displeasing act and to appeal to their better nature in order to receive deliverance. Thus the Shemite emphasis of correct behaviour over correct belief is displayed. Behave correctly or the gods shall smite the sinner, regardless of his belief. Should the god choose to smite, one could only pray and/or bear it. Meadow Shemites pray with their hands clasped across their chests and with the hopes that their gods will have pity and mercy.

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. The gods control past and future, as well as all natural events. The anger of the gods is expressed in tidal waves, drought, earthquakes and other natural disasters. The gods hold human

fate in their collective hands, which is as it should be, since the gods created the Sons of Shem for the express purpose of serving the gods. The idea behind Shemite religion is that all of humanity stands at the mercy of the gods – thus comes the fatalism of the Shemites. They know that if a god has made a decision, then that decision will stand unless someone knows the correct ritual to appease the god.

SPIRITS & MAGIC

Shemite religion was originally strongly animistic, meaning everything around the Shemites was spiritual and possessed of divine energy and even conscious thought. Rocks and trees and rivers might all be attributed human emotions. Magic was, and remains, the only explanation for how the world worked. Everything was godly and of the gods. The Meadow Shemites especially had no sense of themselves as a growing civilization. According to them, they did nothing to build a civilization – it was all given to them by the gods. Among the Pelishtim, this animistic aspect of Shemite religion has remained stronger than in the rest of Shem. The Pelishtim believe each person has a ghost, spirit or godling following each and every individual at all times. Much of their prayers are directed toward these personal gods, entreating them to speak on the behalf of an individual in the assembly of the gods.

To insure the continued favour of the gods and goddesses in the heavens, the priests of Shem are expected to offer daily prayer and sacrifices. Meals are cooked for the gods and goddesses. Their portions are the right legs, kidneys and rump of the animals. The rest of the sacrificial animals are eaten by the participants of the ritual. Priests perform ritual ceremonies to ensure wealth and prosperity, such as pouring water over sheaves of grain or bushels of fruit to bringing rain or flood. Sexual rituals are enacted to ensure the fertility of fields and flocks. Most magic is sympathetic magic, not sorcerous magic. The magic works because the recipient of the spell believes it works. Most functions of the priests of Shem can be handled with a successful Perform (ritual) check opposed by a Will save (which can be automatically failed if desired). If the 'magic' is believed then it works.

Since much of Meadow Shemite life revolves around the will of the gods, so the primary form of magic practised in Shem is divinatory. Shemites tend to be somewhat insecure because they can never be entirely sure of a god's intentions toward them. The priests relieve that insecurity by practising fortune-telling in a variety of manners, revealing through signs and portents the will of the gods. Those who can afford the best bring the priest an animal or slave to sacrifice. After the ritual slaying, the priest can then examine the organs of the animal or slave to foretell the future and divine the intent of the gods. Most priests practice hepatoscopy, the art of reading an animal's liver for signs from the gods. Other methods include interpretation of smoke patterns created by

burning certain dark incenses, interpretation of the patterns formed when oil is poured into water, the patterns made by the remnants of tea or coffee, the movement of cosmic bodies and the interpretation of dreams or other seeming omens. The stars are watched closely by the priests; every movement of the visible planets and stars is carefully catalogued (note that Venus is believed to be the Star of Ishtar in Shem, not a planet). Any form of observable phenomena is scrutinised and recorded, including weather patterns, animal behaviour and astronomical movement. Great volumes of observational data are compiled and stored for the reference of future generations. Other magic used by the Shemites include ritual formulas and hymns and amulets designed to ward off demons or positively influence the gods toward a supplicant or a city-state.

In addition to the oracles and soothsayers discussed above, some of the priestly class are actual conjurers and sorcerers. Regardless, spell use as described in *Conan the Roleplaying Game* is never seen in Shem as a daily event or as a means of modernising the Shemite civilisation. As mentioned elsewhere in this volume, the lawmakers of Shem are unaware of such spells as *mind reading* and *psychometry* and do not use them to solve crimes. Spells are strictly used to influence the gods, not to manipulate men.

DEATH & THE AFTERWORLD

The Sons of Shem do not have as established a view of the afterlife as many of the other Hyborian age nations. Heaven and Hell are nebulous ideas at best for them – instead they have a dark land of the dead for the departed to reside in. What a person does during life made no difference; when a person dies, the gods consign that person to the afterworld, which is also known as Aralu. Although ruled by Nergal and Ereskigal, the gods of the Shemites really have no power there. They only have power on the world of life. This means one can pray to the gods to help during life, but praying to them to aid one after death would be fruitless. Death seals one's fate and nothing can be done about it.

The afterworld is a dark place where the ghosts of the deceased wander around aimlessly, bored and miserable. Their wanderings can bring them out of the afterworld where they can haunt the living and feed off them like vampires. To prevent this, the Sons of Shem attempt to placate the dead by giving them gifts of food and beer, staving off their restlessness. Many illnesses are believed to be caused by forgetting one's ancestors and not appeasing their hungers.

The afterworld of the Shemites can be entered through numerous openings, especially through caverns or

underground rivers. Another opening is believed to be in the city of Eruk. To enter the afterworld, one must be completely naked by the time one passes through all seven gates. Once through the seven gates, one must then deal with the ferryman.

In addition to ghosts and demons, the sun and the moon are also thought to rest there for short periods. At night, the sun rests in the afterworld; the moon rests there for a few days each month, which is the Shemite explanation for the new moon. The dead are given rules when they arrive, such as nudity, no weapons allowed and silence.

MYTH & MYSTERY

Shemite religion is one of mythology and mystery. The most important myths include the Creation of the World, the Great Cataclysm, the Descent of Ishtar into the Afterworld and the Sacred Marriage of the patron god. Almost all of these myths reveal the mysteries of birth, death and resurrection, paralleling the agricultural cycle.

DEATH & BURIAL

Meadow Shemite Burials

Meadow Shemites and Pelishtim are people of custom, tradition and ritual. Funeral rituals are vital to the survival of civilisation because if the dead are not properly buried, they will come back to terrorise their living relatives. Toward this end, the Shemites bury their dead in great graveyards away from the city and its fields beneath a huge mound that may hold thousands of graves organised in regular lots, complete with alleys and streets. These graveyards are normally less than one square mile but larger ones are not unknown. The four square mile grave site attached to Asgalun is reputed to hold hundreds of thousands of graves.

Dead commoners are wrapped in matting or, if they can afford it, a coffin of clay or basket-thatch. The wealthy dead are placed in coffins of brick. A sticky substance known as bitumen is used as mortar for the coffins. Within the coffin, the corpse is placed on its side, its legs drawn up and its hands placed over its face. Personal belongings, such as cylinder seals, weapons and jewellery, are placed with the body. Certain rituals to trap the soul and prevent it from escaping the tomb are read. If the deceased was wealthy, he might be escorted to the grave by servants and musicians, who then drink a drug to knock them unconscious. After the ritual, the priests and labourers seal the tomb or bury the coffin four to twelve feet underground, sealing in any living servants to be buried alive along with the dead so they may serve their master even in death.

The belief in ghosts and spirits is so strong among the Shemites that it is traditional for a Shemite



king who has conquered a city to open the graves of that city to release the souls of the ghosts so they can hunt down any relatives among the enemy soldiers who might have escaped.

Nomad Burial

Nomads are buried with an east-west orientation in shallow graves. Field stones mark the head and feet of the deceased. If the nomad is buried in a particularly hostile environment, the entire grave is covered with stones. The clothing of the deceased is left on top of the graves for the use of travellers and the needy. Women are often buried with their jewellery among some of the tribes.

FOREIGN WORSHIP & MITRA

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 in the north, particularly in Koth to the north.

The Shemites, on the whole, particularly ridicule the worship of Mitra as the one 'true' god, for he is male. Shemite worship is one of annual renewal, which requires a female. How can Mitra renew the people when he has neither a vagina nor access to one? Thus, to the Shemite, the Mitran religion is doomed to be stagnant and unchanging, unresponsive to anything. The stagnant and unchanging aspect of the Mitran religion is further revealed to the Shemite because the Mitran religion is basically a revealed religion, a religion which has been given a set of revelations from Mitra in the long past which are now interpreted and enforced by scholars and priests. If Mitra set down his rules once and for all, then what good is he? Does he not have anything to say regarding the present? Life is constantly changing, but the Mitran religion is not – indeed it cannot. All it can have are new 'interpretations' of old, static laws, which make the Shemites wonder why Mitra did not make the laws clear enough without 'interpretation' in the first place.

THE GODS OF 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 the 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. Crops grow because a male god mates with a female goddess. When the hot and dry summer arrives and the fields and meadows burn brown, they know the male gods are dying, but when the fields bloom in the autumn, their gods are resurrected. Thus it is in Shemite religions, the male consort is 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,

*'But the gods are real,' she said,
pursuing her own line of thought.
And above all are the gods of the
Shemites - Ishtar and Ashtoreth and
Verketo and Adonis. 'Bel, too, is Shemitish,
for he was born in ancient Shumir, long, long
ago and went forth laughing, with curled
beard and impish wise eyes, to steal the gems
of the kings of old times.'*

Robert E. Howard, *Queen of the Black Coast*

humanity must show humility, often requiring worshippers to 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 with exaggerated sexual features. These idols are believed to be the actual god or goddess in question. Although the temple districts of the towns usually have shrines to many of the gods, each city-state tends to identify closer with the aspects of one of these gods over all the others. These symbols of deific power then become the chosen patron. Bel, for example, is the patron of Shumir and Pteor is the patron of Pelishtia. The patron gods have more than just religious power; the patron also provides political power. A powerful king is believed to have the support of the patron, a weak one does not.

Some of the more prominent gods and goddesses of the decadent sons of Shem are listed below.

ADONIS (TAMMUZ)

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, a god of vegetation and crops. 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 as she went and threatening the demons that guarded the gates. 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 winters of cold and infertility. 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. Some city-states call him Tammuz. Some city-states give Anu or Pteor the role of Adonis in the rituals and myths. The name is not

all that important to the Shemites since correct behaviour is far more important than correct belief.

AHURAMAZDA

Ahuramazda is a god of wisdom and creation, unique in Shem to the great Imperial city-state of barbaric Shushan.

ANU

The night sky-god Anu is worshipped throughout Shem. He is a god of kings and is not particularly friendly toward commoners. He is the god of the heavens above the winds (the winds are the domain of El-Lil) and his domain is best seen, of course, at night. The domestication of cattle is a significant event in the civilisation 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 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. His roar frightens the heavens into releasing water, bringing forth rain upon the earth. He reminds the earth of his power via his horns, which is the crescent moon.

Anu is a fearsome and distant god who does not want to be troubled with day-to-day concerns and will send forth his wrath and fury upon those who bother him. 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, his second consort and his daughter, is called upon to bring forth Anu's seed in the form of rain to fertilise the earth. This is often done with a public sexual ritual between the high priest of Anu and the high priestess of Ishtar. In the east, Anu 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.

Anu's symbol is a shrine surmounted by horns. His number is 60 and his sacred place in the heavens is the 'heavenly equator'. Anything he can put into words becomes reality in that instant. His first consort, Antu, was replaced by their daughter, Ishtar. Antu and Anu created the demons before he replaced her. Antu is represented by the planet earth as a whole.

ASHNAN

Ashnan, the sister of the Lahar, is the fertile goddess of grain. Like her brother, she is vain and arrogant, belittling her brother in order to make herself look greater. Ashnan was created to provide the

gods with food. She did not want to be a servant and refused. Her refusal (along with her brother's similar refusal) brought about the creation of humanity to serve the gods. Ashnan is regarded as powerful and is well-liked by the Shemites, for she is considered one of their greatest supporters – possibly because she fears that if the gods destroy humanity then she will be forced to serve her creators. She is also regarded as a patron of beer, another source of her popularity among the Shemites. She is known as a kindly maid by the Shemites. She is the consort of El-Lil, the god of winds and is the mother of Nergal and the moon.

ASHTORETH

Ashtoreth is Ishtar's handmaiden, a goddess of prostitutes. Sexuality in Shem is not considered base nor 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. In some areas of Shem, Ashtoreth and Ishtar are identified as being the same, with both names used interchangeably. She 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, 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, stealing even the powers of the other gods. His worship does not involve animal or human sacrifice. Conan speaks favourably of this god and he rarely speaks well of a god that demands live sacrifices. Bel's primary worship centre, his zikkurat, is in Shumir.

DAGON

This fish-man god is a god of fertility and renewal. Like most of the Shemite gods, he demands his worshippers approach him in the nude. He lusts after Derketo and, in some city-states, is regarded as her primary mate. His worshippers abstain from eating fish but abstain from little else; his 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, especially favouring corn.

DERKETO

Derketo is a seductress deity, a temptress who attempts to win Adonis/Pteor away from Ishtar. She is the essence of depraved sexuality. Her rites are among the most orgiastic of Shem's religions, even considering the sensual natures of Ishtar and Adonis' ceremonies. The dancers and priestesses for Derketo are also temple prostitutes, finding sex the best way to capture and hold onto male worshippers. Certain dark ceremonies re-enact her masterful arranging of the rape of Ashnan by El-Lil because Derketo desired to be the goddess of grain and beer. Other ceremonies re-enact the 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 through her own personal attributes. She is the patron of Nippr.

ELLAEL

Ellaël is the sun god and the god of justice. He drops into the underworld at the end of every day. While there he sleeps and decrees the fate of the dead. He is depicted as a man with sunlight streaming from his shoulders. His weapon is a saw-toothed crescent knife. He also has the power to transform other beings into other shapes and in this respect he is a god of alchemy. He also upholds truth, justice and righteous behaviour. He gives law to man and is considered a patron of oracles. His zikkurat is located in Abbadrah.

EL-LIL (ENLIL, ASHAR)

El-Lil is the fearsome god of the wind, the son of Anu and Ki. As god of the wind, he separated day from night, and he created summer and winter. He shaped humanity from clay and breathed the winds of life into the people. He also invented for them the pickaxe and the hoe so they could better serve the gods in place of Ashnan, whom he loved. The early myths of the Sons of Shem tell of his raping Ashnan and his banishment by Anu to the underworld. Ashnan fell in love with El-Lil and followed him to the underworld. He raped her at each of the seven gates, posing as the guardsmen of the gates. With each rape she gave birth to another god or monster. One of those offspring is Nergal and another is the moon. He returned to the kingdom of the gods when it was revealed that Derketo, in the guise of Ashnan, had actually seduced him and magically induced the rapes. Ashnan understood this and became El-Lil's consort and brought him back to the heavens to rule over the winds. The rise and fall of El-Lil to the underworld and back is celebrated at the beginning and end of the growing season in

great parades and sexual morality plays, replacing the stories of Adonis/Pteor and Ishtar in some city-states, or running concurrently with those celebrations as a reinforcement of the gods' roles in shaping mortal events. In most city-states, however, El-Lil's role changed with the rise of Ishtar and Adonis in popularity. El-Lil is a god of dooms, the lord of wind-storms, floods and cataclysms, particularly in Pelishtia, Nippr and Eruk.

El-Lil is strong, powerful and utterly merciless. He is a favourite god among many units of *ashburi*, who strive to be as merciless as this great god of cataclysms and wind. He is the god who gives kings their positions, the father of Yakin-Ya, the first king of the Pelishtim. This also makes him a god of racial pride. He does not tolerate mixed marriages between the Sons of Shem and outsiders, and any offspring from such unions are thrown into the fires of his altar as abominations. His sacred number is 50. He was once the patron god of Nippr, but, because of his rape of Ashnan, he was supplanted by his true seducer, Derketo. He still has a small zikkurat in the larger temple complex dedicated to Derketo in Nippr. He is still the patron of Eruk. His temple there houses a great gong created from dark sorcery, a gong known as his Voice. He is often pictured with the Tablets of Destiny, which gives him power of the fate of man. He also wears a horned crown to symbolise his power.

Later, El-Lil is foretold to retake patronage of Nippr, and Derketo's great six-tiered temple (which was built on top of his five-tiered zikkurat) will be the foundation for his monstrous seven-tiered zikkurat. Even later, after the next cataclysm, his centre of worship will be moved to a city known as Eridu, wherein a ten-tiered zikkurat will be raised. El-Lil is known as Ashar in Ashabal.

EMESH

Emesh is the god of summer and is the brother of Enten, the god of winter. Emesh is in charge of trees, houses, temples and cities. He and his brother quarrel over who is the god of farmers.

ENTEN

Enten is the god of winter and is brother to Emesh, god of summer. Enten is in charge of wildlife and domesticated herds. He considers himself the god of farmers, a point of view hotly contested by Emesh.

ERESKIGAL

Ereskigal is the dread and cold goddess of the underworld. Her consort is Nergal and she is served by demon-gods such as Namtar. She is Ishtar's sister. When Nergal was sent to her to be punished for

disrespecting another god, she was attracted by his ferocity and invited him to have sex with her. He did, then left, which angered her. She appealed to Anu and begged for Nergal to be forced to marry her. Anu did not like the idea but Ereskigal pointed out that she, unlike many others, had never asked for a favour from great Anu. Anu relented and sent Nergal to her and they were married. The dancers and priestesses for Ereskigal are also temple prostitutes, finding sex is the best way to capture and hold onto male worshippers.

GOLDEN PEACOCK

The Golden Peacock of Sabatea derives from a Shemite god known to the nomads as Azazel. His name among the Meadow Shemites is Melek or Melek Taus. While the other gods give man buildings and farming implements, the Golden Peacock gives mankind war implements and vanity tools, such as cosmetics. Just as the peacock is beautiful and prideful, so too are those who wear cosmetics and so must the Golden Peacock be. He invented copper smelting from an ore known as Melekite. He is also the founder of Shemite alchemy and is associated with longevity. He is a being of light, which is why he is immortal. To live forever, one must be beyond time. To be beyond time, one must move at light's speed. At that point, past, future and present are all as one. The Golden Peacock's light body is multi-hued and streaking, much like a peacock's tail. The point of much of Sabatean alchemy is to change one's body of clay into a body of light in order to achieve godhood and immortality.

The Golden Peacock's colours are black and red. He is a god of destruction and rebellion. He is also a god of bestial carnality. The main religious thrust of the Golden Peacock is that one must always question tradition and dogma. Fixed ideologies are the antithesis of this cult. Even the idea of Fate accepted by most Shemites is questioned and challenged by the Sabateans. Their ability to prod and destroy basic foundations of belief and trust form the background of the Sabatean reputation for interrogation and torture.

The Golden Peacock is a tempter god and his followers refuse to follow 'right behaviour' as practised by most Shemites. Most Shemites consider the Golden Peacock to be a fallen god and, possibly, the originator of sin and the demons. The

INSHUSHINAK

Inshushinak is the patron god of Shushan, who sits upon a serpent throne, pouring out precious water. He is a kind god for the most part and aids in the judgement of the dead.



ISHTAR (BELTIYA)

Ishtar is the ivory-bosomed goddess of Koth, Shem, Khauran and the East in general. She is the daughter of Anu, as well as his second consort. She is the Queen of Heaven, a goddess of fertility and war. The sexual fulfilment of women is part of her divine mysteries. Her cult uses languid but orgiastic rites to stimulate the earth into becoming fertile and productive. Many early goddesses were embraced and identified as her. The ivory goddess of Punt is probably Ishtar or, in later centuries, will become identified with Ishtar. She is a goddess of desire and the arts. As a goddess of the arts, she knows that the greatest art often comes from sorrow and pain, so she often sends such dooms to man in order to bolster the art of the world.

According to the Shemites, Ishtar is the daughter of Anu and the sister of Adonis, her lover (or, in Pelishtia, the sister and lover of gross Pteor). She is the dominant one of the pair, sexually aggressive as befits a fertile war goddess. She is usually depicted as having wings and is symbolised by the lion. She is said to have been birthed full-grown from a stone cracked open by a bolt of green lightning cast by Anu on the site where Asgalun now stands. Anu sends forth rain, his seed, to fertilise the earth at Ishtar's bidding. She rules the cosmos and the stars, the things that govern human

behaviour. Her priests also believe sexuality also governs human behaviour, so she is also a goddess of sexuality. The Zodiac is her girdle and divination is an important aspect of her religion, practiced in the courts of Shem. 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 Shem, training people to follow the law of their rulers as a religious duty.

Ishtar's statues are approached in the nude. Wearing clothes is tantamount to lying or deceiving in her eyes. Her rites are conducted as languid orgies in which cosmic congress is ensured by mortal enactments of the union of the gods. The priestess is believed to embody Ishtar during certain sensual rituals and bestows her favours on her followers to ensure prosperity and fertility. Sacred prostitutes 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, giving 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, and she is believed to inhabit those idols. The idols are sensuous and are cared for by the priests and priestesses, often dressed and painted depending on the ritual needs of the day or season.

Ishtar wears seven articles of clothing: a great crown upon her head, earrings, necklaces of beads, toggle pins at her breast to hold her shawl, a girdle of birth-stones around her waist, dangling bracelets and anklets and a traditional linen garment, worn as a shawl as a dress, her right arm and shoulder bare (sometimes her right breast is bare as well). Traditional Shemite dances represent these seven types of clothing as veils. Because Ishtar had to remove each in her mythological descent into the underworld, the dance slowly removes each veil until the dancer is as nude as Ishtar was when she finally reached the underworld. Ishtar is associated with song-birds and her temple gardens often have several held in cages. Her priests import them from exotic regions of the world.

Ishtar's symbol is an eight- or sixteen-pointed star. She is also represented by the sacred number 15 and by her sacred animal, the lion, which she is sometimes pictured as riding. The dragon is also holy to her. She is also the patron of Dibalt (known to us as Venus) and the Bowstar (known to us as Sirius). Ishtar is known as Beltiqa in barbaric Shushan.

KIRIRISHA

Kiririsha is a goddess of mighty Shushan. The Lady of Life, Kiririsha is the consort of Napirisha. She has dominion over the sacred grove and is the mother of the gods.

LAHAR

Lahar is the god of cattle, the brother of Ashnan, goddess of grain. He is vain and desires nothing but praise. He is the inventor of the Shemite bow according to the priests, and fights with a Shemite bow and a club. He was created to provide meat for the gods but refused to comply. He was happy to create cattle and other herd animals but he was no servant. Thus the creation of humanity was brought about. If Lahar and Ashnan would not serve, then the gods had to create a servitor race – humanity. Lahar is not the patron of any particular city and thus, has no temples, shrines or zikkurats erected in his honour.

LUGAL-IRRA

Lugal-irra is a minor god of doorways and passages. His image is often carved around doors to protect the homes. Other than symbols around doorways, he has no actual temples, zikkurats or shrines. He is the brother of Neti.

NABU

Nabu is the god of scribes, having invented writing and teaching it to man so he can record events. He also wrote the Tablets of Destiny. His temples are places of accounting and record-keeping and can be found in all of the major temple complexes in the cities of Shem. He is the auditor of heaven and hell.

NAHHUNTE

Nahhunte is both sun-god and god of law in Shushan, standing at the side of Inshushinak.

NAMTAR

Namtar is a servant of Ereskigal and is often called the 'Fate-Cutter.' He commands the sixty diseases of man and men give him offerings to stave these off. He has no actual shrines or zikkurats.

NAPIRISHA

Napirisha is the god of snakes and water in Shushan. He is the chief deity of Shushan mythology. He sits on a throne made from a folded snake. He has one human ear and one animal ear. He is also the chief deity of traditional Iranistani, practised by those who

have not taken up the worship of Asura. His consort is Kiriirisha, the Lady of Life.

NERGAL

Nergal, the god who prowls by night, is the god of the underworld and the husband of dreaded Ereskigal. He is a hunter god, a war god and a plague god, covering pestilence, famine and disease. Nergal is the husband of the goddess Ereskigal and is the son of El-Lil and Ashnan. He has the power to open passages to the underworld to allow dead souls to enter his dark realm. He wields a scimitar and a lion-headed mace. Certain apocryphal tales discuss a magical talisman known as the Hand of Nergal, which can summon the shadow of Nergal, a type of demon. He is an enemy of Adonis (or Tammuz) in some stories. Some traditions hold he is merely the dark side of Adonis born from Adonis' death.

Nergal became the lord of the underworld when Ereskigal attempted to punish him for being disrespectful to another god. He pulled her off her throne by her hair and threatened to cut her head off. Aroused, Ereskigal offered to make love to him. He slept with her for seven days and left. Ereskigal appealed to Anu and begged that he send Nergal to be her consort. Anu complied and made Nergal return to the underworld and marry Ereskigal.

Nergal commands seven demons known as the Sebitti. They help him to kill surplus populations, especially noisy surplus populations of people or animals. Nergal kills with disease. He also commands a demon called Irra, who is a god of disease.

Nergal is associated with the noon-time sun, which can destroy man, and the planet Mars. He is often pictured as a lion or a lion-headed colossus. He is more feared than worshipped and he has no known shrines or priests.

NETI

Neti guards the seven gates of the afterlife. Ishtar met him on her descent into hell and he made her discard a piece of clothing at each gate until she was forced to enter the nether realms in the nude. He has no known shrines, zikkurats or temples in Shem.

NINA

Nina is a goddess of fish and water. She wooed Dagon but lost him



to Derketa. She is pictured as a mermaid in some areas but as a more hideous half-woman/half-fish in other areas. Her worship is decadent in the eyes of the Hyborians, seen as little more than orgies and prostitution. Her worshippers seek to transform themselves into fish-people.

NINKASI

Ninkasi is the patron of inebriation. She brews beer from dough and makes wine for the gods. She is the patron of Ghaza. She is a dancer in the heavens and is said to be glorious in both her bold nudity and her sensuous movements. The dancers and priestesses for Ninkasi are also temple prostitutes.

PAGESTINDUG (GESTIN)

Pagestindug is the god of wine and his wife is the beautiful Ninkasi. His chosen city is Kyros and he protects vineyards and grapes. He is also a god of orgies and celebrations.

PINIKIR

Pinikir is a fierce goddess who protects mighty Shushan upon the orders of Inshushinak. She is a savage warrior goddess.

PTEOR

Pteor is the patron god of the Pelishtim and replaces both Adonis and El-Lil in their myths. He is otherwise a minor god in the pantheon, displayed by obscene idols that reflect the 'grossness' of his cult. He is the son of Anu and is a god of fertility, the night sky and male sexual power. The Pelishtim live in a fertile region of Shem, a region of herdsman. Pteor is usually symbolised by a ram or a sheep. A ram's horn symbolises male power. The male goat is often associated with sexual vigour. In Asgalun, Pteor is a bull-headed god with obscenely exaggerated male characteristics. His temple in Asgalun sits on top of a great seven-storied zikkurat from which his priests read the will of the gods from the stars. The great idol of Pteor in Asgalun has a brazen door in his stomach where a great fire can be built and sacrifices thrown. Vents in his ears release the smoke. In times of crisis children are thrown into the belly of Pteor to win his pleasure. In Pelishtia, Pteor is represented as all-wise. The cult of Pteor celebrates sexuality and the phallus; their celebrations and rituals often descend into an orgy. Many of Pteor's followers' festivals begin with a public show of nude performers followed by a ritual display of various people engaged in all manner of sex acts, including bestiality. Eventually the audience is invited to join.

SADITHA

Saditha is the patron goddess of Qjara and she teaches that she is the One True Goddess. She is a warrior-goddess as well as a goddess of family life and fertility – yet she has no consort. By tradition, the king of Qjara mates with the high priestess to provide the annual renewal ritual needed by the people. The highest ranking priest is her holy champion. The dancers and priestesses for Saditha are also temple prostitutes.

SAMKHAT

Samkhat is the goddess of happiness, joy and orgasms. She is the sister of Enki and the mate of Siduri. She is an extremely sexual goddess and her worship is more erotic than almost any Shemite god or goddess, save Derketo and Ishtar. In the Shemite myths, she and her mate are the ones who taught men and women how to pleasure themselves. She is often depicted as a handmaiden of Ishtar or as a pleasure-slave to Derketo. Like the worshippers of Saditha, the dancers and priestesses for Samkhat are also temple prostitutes.

SIDURI

Siduri, the mate of Samkhat, is the god of merriment and happiness. He gives man temporal joys and pleasures. He is depicted with an exaggerated male member, which he uses to the delight of gods and goddesses alike.

VOTANTHA

The people of Sark worship an extremely blood-thirsty god known as Votanthe, the Tree of Mouths. Votanthe is reputed to have blasted cities and empires into oblivion for their sins and wrongful behaviour. He demands human sacrifices and is considered a stern law-giver, as well as a hero, fire-bringer and trickster. He is often portrayed as a handsome warrior.

YAKIN-YA

Yakin-Ya is thought by Nemedian scholars to be one of the first rulers of the Sons of Shem, from the time before they migrated West and one of the first rulers to claim divine descent. The meadow Shemites believe him to be descended from the gods from the time when they walked the earth and is worshipped as a god. For a time he was considered the god of a large Hyrkanian antelope and was a shepherd god. As the Sons of Shem settled in the meadows of Pelishtia, he transformed into a god of faith and right behaviour while retaining some elements of a shepherd god. He is usually represented as the right pillar nearest the altar in the holy temple atop any given zikkurat.

YOG

Yog is known as the Lord of the Empty Abodes. The Zuagirs believe the Darfari worship Yog by roasting and eating human victims, then immolating their bones. He is said to have dominion over all empty places, such as deserts and the Outer Dark. His association with fire comes from ancient encounters with sun-burns while out in the empty wastelands of the Shemite/Turanian deserts. Yog immolates his victims through the sun, so the Zuagirs have learned to associate this deity with the burning habits of the Zamboulan Darfari.

OTHER GODS

There are more Shemite gods and goddesses than can be covered and most of them are minor at best. Some do not even seem to have powers but are simply revered because their anger can still affect men. Many cities in Shem have shrines to these gods but no zikkurats.

Minor Gods

God	Portfolio
Enbilulu	Rivers
Enki	Semen, the watery abyss
Enkimidu	Canals and ditches
Hendursanga	Fire, weapon specialisation
Kabta	Pickaxe and brick moulds
Mushdamma	Foundations and houses
Nammu	The sea, the watery abyss
Nanna	The Moon, Fate
Nanshe	Orphans and widows
Narunte	Victory
Ninurta	South Wind, Warrior god
Sumugan	Plants and animals on the plains
Uttu	Weaving and clothing

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth 1 sp/level/month to the local temple; sacrifice at least one camel, one horse, one bull, two cows, or six goats per year to the pantheon.

Benefits of Worship: Spells (any but Oriental Magic, Necromancy and Summonings).

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Must have at least two levels in either the nomad class or the soldier class. Shemite priests are expected to have 'served their time' in society before joining the priesthood.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (any sorcery styles except Oriental Magic, Necromancy and Summonings).

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Let them go; their families will sort them out, one way or the other.

THE PRIESTHOOD

The priests hold a certain prestige in Shemite society. Each priest in the meadow kingdoms must have at least two levels in soldier to prove they have served the state for a time before taking a religious life. To be a priest or shaman among the nomads requires at least two levels in the nomad class for the same reason. In order to serve society, each member of the priesthood must have at least lived as one with the society.

Shemite priesthood in the meadow cities teaches that humanity was created to serve the gods, to do the labour not befitting a god to do. Priests teach that the gods revealed to humanity all the skills and abilities they have and use, that the Shemites have no ability or skill without the gods and no chance at survival without the gods. All change comes about by divine revelation or inspiration, not from humanity's perspiration.

Still, the priesthood knows enough to manipulate and control society on their own, using divination, tradition and ritual to gain their own ends. The people of Shem believe strongly in divination and in demons. Many priests can use this belief to move their own agendas forward because only priests are taught the precise rituals to influence gods and demons – thus the priests can easily influence the city-state as a whole.

In addition to their magical duties, the priests are also charged with controlling the economy of the city-state, redistributing the produce of the farmers and craftsmen to the people of the city as needed, after taking out for their own needs.

Meadow Shemite priests 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 the Counterspells and, for those who can find the spells on their own, Summoning sorcery styles, 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 the 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 influence the gods whose decisions determine human fate and to ward off demons. The *baru* healers learn the divination sorcery style as well as the counterspells style.

Shemite priests never learn necromancy, which is believed to be the worst and most vile abuse of sorcerous power. Shemite priests also never enter into demonic pacts. Even the priests 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 city-state that supports them and gives them their high station.

Most Shemite priests 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?

THE ZIKKURATS OF THE GODS

Lofty white zikkurats are reared to their gods, for to the Shemites, the gods are quite real, not just some illusion conjured by man's mind to explain the mysteries of the world. On top of the zikkurats are Shemite temples. The largest zikkurat, the true centre of the city-state, is the home of the city's patron god or goddess.

The zikkurat is a massive stepped pyramid holding aloft a rectangular temple. The zikkurats are not hollow and do not generally have rooms or passages. A new king often enlarges the main zikkurat by building on top of the previous one, creating a 'nested doll' effect. If a tomb robber were to dig into a zikkurat, he would find a smaller one within, then another, then another. One end of the zikkurat has three staircases radiating out from the centre of the front wall. The three staircases converge at a tower gate, which then opens to a single staircase leading up to the temple. The sloping glazed-brick walls have weep holes to draw moisture from the core of mud-brick. All the straight-lines on the zikkurat are slightly convex to make the structure more aesthetically pleasing. Often the mud-brick deck floors are gardens.

A Shemite temple is a mud-brick building and has a rectangular central nave with aisles running along either side. Rooms for the musicians, singers, priests and priestesses line the aisles. An altar for animal and vegetable sacrifices stands at one end of the temple in front of a statue of the temple's deity. This great statue is the physical dwelling of the god or goddess. Great torches and sconces send dark shadows flickering and dancing across the entire nave. Certain black rituals and gruesome sacrifices are performed at this altar daily, some public, some not so public. Monthly feasts are also held in this shadowed vestibule. Of course, the twice-annual sacred marriage by the king to the high priestess also takes place on the bloodstained altar, which is decorated and prepared as a bed for the occasion, which is a sexual ritual designed to link the god's magical essence to the people.

Just as the zikkurat represents a mountain to the Shemites as a home to the gods, there is also a representation of the sea in every temple and shrine. This representation of the sea, called the *apsu* basin, is an elaborately decorated stone basin found in Shemite temples to represent the beginning. Depending on the god or goddess of the temple or even the specific ritual being performed by the priests, this basin might be filled with water, molten metal, quicksilver or any number of exotic or mundane fluids. Many of these basins have a means of being heated.

The temple complex includes more than the temple and zikkurats of varying sizes. Granaries and storehouses are



maintained near the temples for the sacrifices left by the people. Estates of the high priests and priestesses, grand mansions by most standards yet dwarfed by the zikkurats, are also part of the temple complex.

NOMADS & RELIGION

The nomads are generally not as fervent about their religion as their meadow kin. Clan customs and concepts of honour have a higher impact on ethics and morality than religion. Still, they do have their religious beliefs. In addition to the gods listed above, their religion is still highly animistic. Spirits and gods abound, especially at night, living in sacred caves, rock formations, oases, dunes and palm groves. Angels are known as serpents of fire and are considered beings of light. They are represented by lightning and are considered messengers between heaven and earth.

The nomads also believe in a host of demons known as Se'irim. Azazel is the chief of the Se'irim, the hairy demons of the desert. These demons mostly lurk in and around the ruins of fallen civilisations and cities. They bring about disease and ill-luck.

The Faith of Set

THE GRIM GODS OF STYGIA

STYGIA

RELIGION IN DARK 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. The cult of Set and his grim pantheon is a sacramental and mystical religion. It is sacramental to commoners and becomes mystical to the priests when they are initiated into the Inner Mysteries. The cult becomes darkly sorcerous when the priests learn the blackest of Set's inner mysteries and terrors. Worship is usually done by raising ones arms. This outstretching of the arms is done before all images of the gods and before approaching the king, who is considered a living representative of Set and likewise worthy of worship.

Note: This section is a short précis on the chief deities and religious strictures used as part of Set's pantheon. For full details on the gods mentioned in this chapter see *Conan: Stygia – Serpent of the South*.

PHILOSOPHY OF SET'S CULT

Religion in Stygia is about maintaining and justifying the culture. Stygian religion exists because it offers an explanation for how things in the world work and how people should behave. Stygian priests are not evangelists nor missionaries. They do not try to win converts or spread their religion. Their gods supervise aspects of their lives, that is all. Their religion is mostly one of symbolism, symbols used to help arrive at esoteric truths hidden behind the symbols. Many Stygians do not even believe in the literal existence of their gods – for many, they too are symbols of hidden truths. The basic tenets of Set's religion include the following:

- ❖ **Correct Behaviour**
- ❖ **Religious Intolerance to Achieve Secular Power**
- ❖ **Set Is Not 'Right,' Just Strong**
- ❖ **Spiritual Truths, Not Worldly Truths**
- ❖ **Veneration of Sacred Animals**
- ❖ **Veneration of Statues**
- ❖ **Veneration of the Dead**

An 'Evil' Religion?

Another aspect of the Stygian religion is that, while it is regarded as an 'evil' religion by outsiders, it does not actively attempt to smite 'good.' The Stygian people, including the busy priests, are too concerned about their day-to-day needs to worry about attacking other religions. They will defend their homeland to be sure but they are not out to rid the world of all that is 'good.' Quite the contrary, actually. They see Set and his grim menagerie of gods as 'good' for them and their cultural needs.

While the Set cult is one of the world's darker religions, that does not mean it or its priests will do stupid things to rid the world of a supposed 'good' god. When the Set cult as a whole acts against any one thing, be it a person, a religion or a nation, it is not a religious crusade. It acts because it brings power, wealth and prestige to the king, the cult or Stygia as a whole. The Stygian religion is harsh, pervasive and oppressive but it certainly is not stupid and not given to acting stupidly or out of religious fanaticism. The mysterious Stygian religion is more about preserving a certain culture than it is about smiting other religions, even if foreign religions are supposedly 'good' and Set is supposedly 'evil.'

THE SOUL & THE AFTERLIFE

The Stygians believe a person is actually made up of several parts. The Ba incorporates the soul (Wisdom) of a person and is depicted as a bird with a human head hovering over a person. The Xu is a person's knowledge (Intelligence). The Ka is a person's genius (Charisma), often talked about as an invisible double of a person. The Xa is the name of the physical body (Strength, Dexterity and Constitution). The Xa is perishable but the other parts are immortal. This is discussed in more detail in *Conan: Stygia – Serpent of the South*.

STYGIAN RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS

- ☒ The Ankh
- ☒ The Knife
- ☒ The Obelisk
- ☒ The Regalia of the King
- ☒ The Scarab (Dung Beetle)
- ☒ The Sesheset

SET, THE FIRST SERPENT, THE SCALED GOD OF STYGIA

Set is the old serpent-god of Stygia but is also worshipped by the Chagas of Kush, certain degenerate cults of Shem and fell sorcerers throughout the Earth. Set's symbol is a scaled serpent, coiled, with its tail in its mouth. He is the mortal enemy of Mitra and of the Hyborian Kingdoms but he also hates his old scribe, Ibis. At one time, according to Xaltotun, much of the world was likewise dominated by the Old Serpent. Today Set is worshipped primarily in Stygia and in places of strong Stygian influence, such as areas of Kush and Shem, and by dark sorcerers everywhere. His 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 mysterious pre-human 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.

There are seven known Mysteries in the Cult of Set. Ancient records of the Giant-Kings and the Acheronians give tantalising hints of more Mysteries long lost to history. The Acheronians seem to have had nine Mysteries and the Giant-Kings twelve. During various periods of war and conquest these later Mysteries have been lost because Mysteries are never recorded, only passed down orally. Some texts hint that perhaps the eleventh or twelfth Mystery of Set involved some relationship between the keeper of the Mystery and the man-serpents buried deep in the dark tombs of Elder Stygia.

Requirements of Worship: Obey priests of Set, even if called upon as a sacrifice; tithe 2 sp/level/month to the local temple.

Benefits of Worship: Spells.

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Must know the First Mystery of Set; have an Allegiance to Set; obey the high priest of Set, obey the laws of the land in Stygia (which are largely made by the priests of Set in any case).

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood in the House of the Black Ring: Must know at least two sorcery styles and the Tormented Sacrifice feat; obey the high priest of Set, obey the laws of the land in Stygia (which are largely made by the priests of Set in any case).

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (any sorcery styles except Oriental Magic); +4 circumstance bonus to all Gather Information and Intimidate checks while in Stygia; corruption.

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Slay them by sorcery at a distance if at all possible.

Inner Mysteries: Learning the Mysteries of Set is cause for Corruption saves at DC 21+ the rank of the Mystery. They are learned by taking ranks in Knowledge (Mystery: Set). Every three ranks makes one eligible for the next Mystery.

- ☒ The first Mystery of Set reveals most of the basic symbolism of the religion, allowing a character with three ranks of Knowledge (Mystery: Set) a +1 bonus to Knowledge (arcana) and Craft (alchemy).
- ☒ The second and third Mysteries of Set allow a variety of bonuses because the initiate learns the purposes and symbolic truths of many of the minor gods; these benefits can be found throughout this chapter. Also the scholar gains a cumulative +1 bonus to his Knowledge is Power ability (i.e. a +1 bonus for the second Mystery and an additional +1 bonus for the third).
- ☒ The fourth Mystery of Set reveals the truth about Yig, Yezm and the Great Old Ones; characters with a code of honour lose it at this time. They also learn that life is a minor thing and the only way to live is to attain great power. Characters at this level gain a +1 bonus to Intimidate because they will now do whatever they must to attain power and everyone knows it. Also, keepers of this Mystery earn a +2 bonus to Handle Animal checks in regards to snakes. Keepers of this Mystery are often called Hidden Ones.
- ☒ The fifth Mystery of Set teaches how the symbols of the cult reveal the true nature of life and its origins; keepers of this Mystery earn another +1 bonus to his Knowledge is Power ability. They also learn the power of manipulation of the masses. The character gets a +1 bonus to all Charisma-based skill checks used to manipulate Non-Player Characters to do his bidding. This can stack with similar Corruption bonuses if the scholar has five or more points of Corruption.
- ☒ The sixth Mystery of Set teaches the initiate the true power of dreams. Any skill, power or spell dealing with dreams

or visions can be performed with a +1 bonus to any one roll related to the spell, skill or power. If someone tells the initiate a dream, the initiate may learn something unexpected about the dreamer. The initiate, if told a dream, may make a Sense Motive skill check (DC 15). A successful check allows the initiate to learn something about the subject that the subject has strong emotions about. The initiate detects emotional issues about others, so if the subject feels guilty about neglecting his mother, suspicious of a lover's fidelity or anxious about an imminent caravan raid, these would be likely subjects to pick up on.

- ❖ The seventh Mystery of Set is reserved only for sorcerous priests who make a pilgrimage to Erkulum and undergo horrible initiation rites to test the willpower of those desiring to understand everything behind the cult. Those who survive the deadly initiation understand the true nature of power and can manipulate the universe around them to their own ends. Their spells are nearly inviolate – the Keepers of All Set's Mysteries gain a +2 competence bonus to their magic attack rolls. A Keeper of All Set's Mysteries understands that his ability to accomplish something is directly related to his will to accomplish that thing. By making a Wisdom check (DC equal to the DC of the task at hand), he gains a +10 bonus to the relevant skill(s) until that task is done. This black Mystery may only be learned in Erkulum, the City of Set, regardless of how many ranks the priest has in Knowledge (Mystery: Set).

THE PANTHEON OF SET

These gods and goddesses serve Set and are invoked to aid the priests as needed. They are never worshipped instead of Set, but alongside Set. Much more information on these gods and goddesses can be found in *Conan: Stygia – Serpent of the South*.

- ❖ **Ahephi the Baboon-Mummy, Protector of the Lungs**
- ❖ **Bast, Daughter of Set, Goddess of Evil Sendings**
- ❖ **Bat the Cow-Goddess, Set's Prophet**
- ❖ **Bes, the Musician Dwarf, Protector of Children**
- ❖ **Derketo, Set's Whore, the Sable Queen (Anuket, Derketa)**
- ❖ **Djehuty, Set's Scribe and God of Knowledge (Thoth)**
- ❖ **Ehtum, Lord of the Sunset**
- ❖ **Hap-I, Lord of Papyrus and Lotus**
- ❖ **Harakht, Lord of Eclipses, the Hawk-God**

- ❖ **Hathor, the Fire of Set's Eye (Sukhmet; Aset)**
- ❖ **Heqat, Frog-Goddess of Midwives**
- ❖ **Idris, the Defender of Set, The Eye of Divine Vengeance (Edjo; Buto)**
- ❖ **Imsety, Protector of the Heart**
- ❖ **Ishiti, the Demon-Goddess of Time**
- ❖ **Kebb, the Great Cackler**
- ❖ **Khepra, the Rising Sun**
- ❖ **Khnemu, the Source of the Styx**
- ❖ **Maahes the Lion, Son of Bast, God of Storms**
- ❖ **Min Koptos, the Noble Phallus of Man**
- ❖ **Montu, Raging Slayer of the Sun's Enemies**
- ❖ **Nefertem, God of Perfume and the Black Lotus**
- ❖ **Neith, the She-Male Arbitrator**
- ❖ **Nekhabet the Vulture, the Right Eye of Set**
- ❖ **Nephthys, the Lady of the House, Barren Wife of Set**
- ❖ **Nuit, the Insatiable Sky**
- ❖ **Qebsneuf, Protector of the Intestines**
- ❖ **Satet, She Who Bathes Set**
- ❖ **Selkhet, the Gruesome Lady of the Beautiful Tent**
- ❖ **Seshet, Set's Librarian and Architect, The Painted Lady**
- ❖ **Shu, The Withered One Who Holds Up the Sky**
- ❖ **Sobek, the Crocodile God**
- ❖ **Tef Ma'uti Nu, the Water of the Sky**
- ❖ **Th'mumathph the Jackal-Mummy, Protector of the Stomach**
- ❖ **Tawerat, the Hippopotamus Concubine of Set**
- ❖ **Usir, the Reborn Phoenix God, Activator of Set's Eyes**
- ❖ **Yinepu, the Still-Born Jackal-Headed God**

THE PRIESTHOOD

The priests of Stygia, largely comprised of priests of Set, hold the reins of power, both in government and in temple hierarchies. Despite the modern meaning of the word priest, the word to a Stygian does not necessarily denote a religious leader. Anyone serving a function for a temple or the government is called a priest. The most able in society are found and invited to join the priesthood, allowed to move up in society and supervise others once their training is complete. Most priests in Stygia are actually 'part-time,' serving one month out of every three; these are called *phyle* priests. Priests also hand their positions down from father to son. The High Priest of the Temple decides who will be called to priesthood. More information about the priesthood and its culture can be found in *Conan: Stygia – Serpent of the South*.

Mystical Reverence for Asura

RELIGION IN VENDHYA

VENDHYA REVERES THE mystical religion of Asura, a revealed religion born of enormously complex rituals derived from four great books, the compilations of centuries of religious thought and practice. Worship consists primarily of sacrifices and chanting. Asura is the chief god of Vendhya and the protector of the royal family there and anywhere else they have influence.

COSMIC ORDER

The people believe in a cosmic order, cause and effect that extend 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 are the only ones able to perform these clamorous rituals properly, allowing them to rise 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.



The Vendhyans do not believe that time is a steady, linear progression; rather, they believe that time is a cyclical perception. Time is a revolving cycle where everything that has happened before will happen again and nothing will ever happen that has not happened before, and 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.

Some known rituals (called yagnas) include various fire rituals. The Agnihotra is an oblation to Agni, the spirit of fire. Other rituals are sacrificial, such as the Ashvamedha (horse sacrifice) and Purushamedha (human sacrifice). At dusk and dawn most Vendhyans perform the Agnihotra, which is a spiritual ritual healing. The practitioners of Agnihotra purify themselves with water, build or stir a sacred fire, chant sacred songs and recite a prayer to Asura through Agni (the fire).

ART & RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION

Vendhya is a mysterious, philosophical, religious culture, but its mysteries and philosophies and culture 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 is the dance. Dance in Vendhya is often a spiritual experience, telling of gods, great heroes or even moral lessons. Dancing is an art in which artist and the art he creates are one and the same. 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 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. Vendhyans are not Hyborian and their art is not Hyborian art.

SORCERY & RELIGION

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 understood the power of Magical Links, and counsel the Vendhyan royal family to destroy shorn hair, nail trimmings and other bodily waste materials. Sorcery and magic are often accompanied by sound and clamour. Mantras (verbal components) are appropriate to all spells cast by a Vendhyan.

Also important is water and pigment. These two common substances play a large part in nearly every Vendhyan ritual. Female Vendhyan scholars use pigment to create abstract designs on floors as part of their spellcasting. These devilishly ancient and magically potent designs are treated as concentrated forms of their wills, desires and hopes. Both male and female sorcerers ritually pour pigment over images of gods or daub it onto the skin of those to receive their aid. Craft (pigment) is a common skill among Vendhyan sorcerers, male and female. The Painter of Dreams and Visions, Patterns of Protection and Patterns of Shelter feats from *Conan: The Free Companies* would be appropriate for a Vendhyan dabbler. Water is seen as a metaphor for life and rivers of all sizes are venerated as goddesses. The pouring of water also plays a role in many Vendhyan rituals and spells.

LOTUS & SOMA

Lotus is both a plant and a god to the Vendhyans. It is made into a drink enjoyed by the gods in great quantities and is the substance that made the gods into gods. Mortals may partake of lotus drinks and briefly access the powers of the gods. The pounding of the lotus stalks with stones to make the elixir of the gods is said to send those thusly employed into shamanic ecstasies. The lotus is mixed with milk and honey to make the holy elixir known as *soma*. The lotus god (called Soma) is usually depicted as a bull or a bird.

REINCARNATION

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 earn their trials in previous lives; they are not to be pitied. There are societal

reasons for believing in reincarnation, just as any other religion tends to promote beliefs that justify its own society. In Vendhya, the concept of reincarnation instils a sense of accountability. Everyone knows they will be rewarded for good deeds and punished for bad deeds. This instils a logical reason to treat everyone kindly among the people. Belief in reincarnation also teaches people the value of hard work, for only through hard work can they reach their karmic potential and become better in their next incarnation. The concept of reincarnation also offers an explanation as to why bad things happen to good people – obviously, the bad thing is payback for something a person did in a prior life, so he should just accept it and deal with it and reap good karma out of it later.

FATE

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 fate that has now become a duty. The Vendhyans have developed an intricate system of astrology and cosmic laws to help divine both causes and effects, thus determining potential fate. Divination and Cosmic Sorcery are common styles for Vendhyan sorcerers.

LIFE IS AN ILLUSION

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.' The illusions of lies can leave a person a prisoner of the world instead of just a visitor.

SOUND

Sound is one of the most critical aspects of life to a Vendhyan. Sound is both the source of matter and the key toward freedom from matter. Creation came about when Asura beat upon a drum. There are four stages to sound and only a master who understands all four stages can truly be free. A Vendhyan is trained to understand that sound conveys the idea of an object or concept. Letters are the seeds of existence because speaking the sounds creates existence. Sound indicates the presence of a speaker and is thus evidence of consciousness on some level. Each stage of sound is indicative of a stage of life, a stage of enlightenment. Only a fully realised consciousness can fully hear a sound and fully live life. The more a person refines his consciousness, the better his perception of sound.

The lowest stage of sound is that which is easily perceived by listening. Above that is unexpressed sound, or mental sound. This is the level of thinking. Only those with the most discriminating of intellects can hear this sound from others. A Vendhyan who has the *mind-reading* spell is a master of this

level of hearing. The next stage gives sound possession of colour and form. Language differences cease to exist because speech and the experience spoken of are linked and heard. A master of this level of sound can understand the basic gist of anything said to him, regardless of language. Some masters claim to be able to understand animals at this stage. They claim to hear through the navel, not through the ears. The highest level of sound is transcendent sound, sound which is beyond physical perception. There is no distinction between object and sound and an object's sound contains everything about the object. Only the greatest of souls can hear on this level.

ASURA AND THE VENDHYAN GODS

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. As there are a million gods in the Vendhyan pantheon, only a select few are discussed here.

Agni: Agni is the god of fire. Fire is a sacred element among the Vendhyans and is never defiled. Many Vendhyan temples feature ever-burning flames. Agni is a messenger to Asura.

Hanuman: Hanuman is also worshipped in Vendhya. His image, wielding a *gada*, often adorns the doors and windows of Vendhyan temples as a guardian demon. He symbolises strength, cunning, longevity and passion.

Katar: Katar is the vile goddess who leads the Katari, Vendhya's dreaded assassins. Katar judges the souls of the dead and weighs their karmic debt, deciding the form of their next reincarnation. The dreaded Katari are incorruptible assassins but they kill in their own way and in their own time – they do not take orders beyond the acceptance of a commission. They are also suicide warriors and will assassinate their prey even when they have no hope of escape. They do this because Katar promises them paradise if they die during an assassination, which is a holy task.

Soma: Soma is the god of lotus and the holy drink of Soma.

Yama: Yama is the king of devils. He has six limbs and a beast's head. He is heavily worshipped in Meru, where the priests teach that if the people ever revolt, Yama will destroy the civilisation.

Yizil: Yizil is another of their strange pantheon, but little is known of him.

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth three sp/level/month to the local priests of Asura; keep secret about your membership in the cult; carry out duties for the priesthood as required; do not become Corrupt; oppose those who carry out human sacrifice or trafficking with demons.

Benefits of Worship: Atonement, Faith, Spells (Counterspells, Divination).

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: scrupulous honesty is required in all things except in the matter of concealing the existence of the cult from outsiders; you must work for the greater good of the cult and the god in everything you do, and you must avoid becoming personally wealthy.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus the following: Spot and Sense Motive become class skills (even if the priest gains levels in a non-scholar class); sorcery teaching is available (Counterspells, Divination, Oriental Magic, Prestidigitations, *master-words and signs*, and *summon elemental* only).

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Removal of priestly status.

VENDHYAN PRIESTS

Higher in spiritual power than the Kshatriyas, but lower in secular strength are the priests, and to them belong the responsibility for religious observances and education. Education is provided by Ashramas (hostels) located deep in the forests of Vendhya. The priestly class prize their intellectual acumen, and they use that intelligence to further their own aims. Vendhyan scholars always maximise their Perform (ritual) skills, often taking Skill Focus (Perform (ritual)) and Performer feats to ensure against error in their performances of these rituals. Sorcerers who learn the Curses sorcery style believe they are part of this sense of justice in the cosmos.

There are several kinds of ordained Vendhyan priests. A Vendhyan priest must be fully ordained before permission to perform rituals is given. The Hotar is the head priest and is charged with presiding over sacrifices. He is also in charge of the Hymns of Asura. The Udgatar priest intones the hymns for the Hotar priest. The Udgatar priests are in charge of the Chants of Asura, which are only chanted at ceremonies using the lotus plant. The Adhvaryu priest carries out the actual sacrifice and is in charge of the Liturgy of Asura. The Atharvan priest performs lotus rituals, fire rituals and sorcery. They are often associated with demonology and are the only priests permitted to learn the Summonings sorcery style. The Atharvans technically rank above the Hotar priests but rarely participate in public rituals.

Atharvans who advance in power usually leave the temples to wander in the Himelians to hear the gods first hand. They are allowed to 'author' new chants, rituals and liturgies because they are so close to the gods. They are known as Rishi. They undergo a ceremony freeing them from all mortal allegiances and they leave the temples for the mountains. Some take their followers with them, others renounce their cohorts and followers. Many fall prey to the barbarians, others never return and yet others turn Rakshasa, becoming black masters

of sorcerous covens. These are legendary, earth-shaking characters. When a Rishi returns from the mountains, this is a renowned event, for most Rishi only return to add to the wisdom of the temples, with new ceremonies, meditation techniques, spells and rituals.

For the Vendhyan 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. A common first style to learn is Counterspells. Vendhyan sorcerers also understand the power of Magical Links, and counsel the Vendhyan royal family to destroy shorn hair, nail trimmings and other bodily waste materials. Pigments often play a role in rituals, so Craft (pigment) is a common skill among Vendhyan sorcerers, male and female.

Rakhsha: These Vendhyan scholars are experts in Oriental Magic. They are ascetics and mystics who are not part of established temples. They have the acolyte background instead of the lay priest background. They usually combine this expertise with at least some knowledge of martial arts, to complement such spells as warrior trance. They are also skilled hypnotists, capable of defeating most foes without so much as lifting a finger or breaking a sweat. Finally, most learn at least a measure of countermagic, recognising that another sorcerer is a far greater threat than most ordinary humans could ever be.

Most rakhshas wear plain robes and appear unarmed, though they often have concealed weaponry or sorcerous objects under their robes. Rakhshas are usually acolytes of far more powerful groups.

Level	Rakhsha
1	Entrance
2	Calm of the Adept
3	Darting Serpent
4	Warrior Trance, Warding
5	Hypnotic Suggestion
6	Domination
7	Savage Beast
8	Lesser Ill-Fortune
9	Greater Warding
10	Mass Hypnotic Suggestion

VENDHYAN TEMPLES

Vendhyan temples are massive edifices. The principal shrine always faces the rising sun and the primary entrance faces east. The temples are designed to emulate the idea that a person is moving from the temporal world into an eternal one by walking through the temple chambers.

There are a few rules. People may not wear any kind of footwear indoors and feet must never point toward the gods or their emblems. When sitting, feet are to be folded. If sitting, one must never sit so that his back faces the inner sanctum. Women cannot enter the temple during the first four days of their menstrual cycle. It is also not permissible to enter the shrine or touch a deity's statue without permission from a priest.

RELIGION IN THE MOUNTAINS

As savages, the Himelian tribesmen probably had shamanistic beliefs, and likely worshipped spirits of the earth and wind, as their entire world is dominated by wind-swept mountains. Grey apes lurk in the hills, so cults of Hanuman may possibly be found, 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, or perhaps they have no gods or their gods have no names.

Shamanistic beliefs are the most likely, considering the hillmen's entire 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 such as Yimsha and Raktavashi where black magic and diabolism is practiced, shamanism in the Himelians probably centres around the destruction of evil spirits and doing 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 plaguing the tribe 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 is gained through underground passages protected by tight passages animated 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 naming.

Hillmen shamans are highly charismatic figures, and 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.

Religion in Zamora

A MAZE OF FORMULAS AND RITUALS

THE ZAMORIANS AS a whole are polytheistic and the people of Shadizar are no less so. Religion is considered a civilised refinement by the Zamorians and is embraced by most of them as a factor that raises even the lowest of them above the level of savage. Few foreign gods are accepted alongside the authentic Zamorian deities derived from ancient Zhemri myths and beliefs, Bel being a notable exception. Different Zamorian cities have patron gods, forces that embody the city or an aspect of the city. Yezud, with its infamous spider-god, is the most familiar of these patron gods. Bel, a Shemite god, is the patron of Arenjun, which is also called the City of Thieves. Several aspects of Zamorian religion are worthy of note. The importance of religion, the eerie beauty of their temples, the complex nature of their beliefs, the domination of the priests and the myriad strange gods are all facets of Shadizar's temple district.

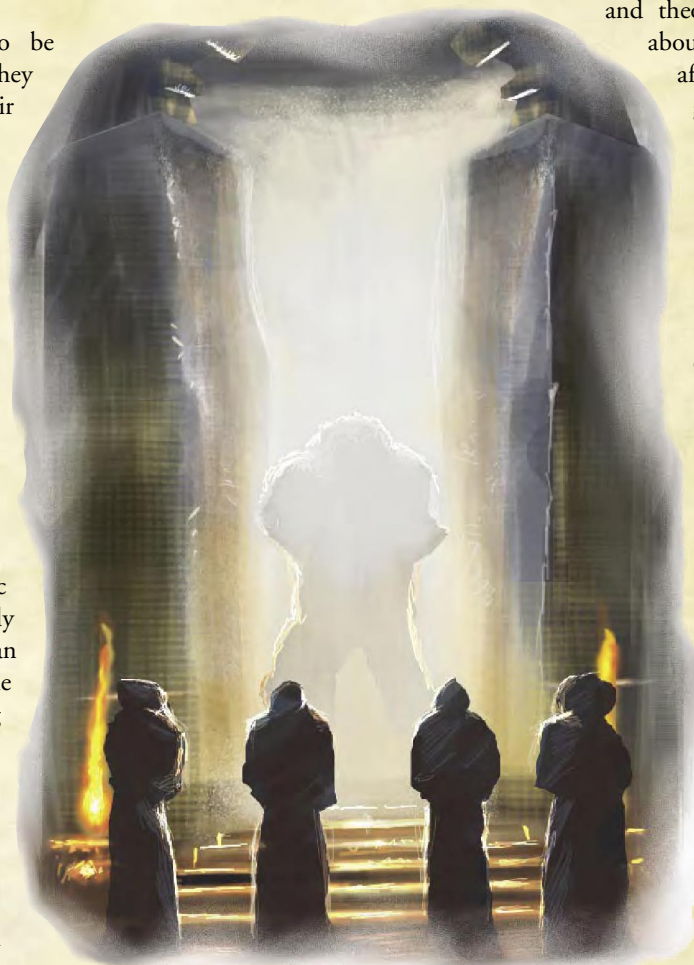
Zamorians find religion to be economically important and they believe in the power of their multiple gods and priests. Like marriage, religion is considered by most Zamorians as an economic tool, not a spiritual tool. Most of the religions the Zamorians find tasteful would shock a votary of Mitra, for Zamorian religions embrace vice to an alarming degree, daring the vengeance of long-suffering gods of purity. Most of these religions embrace and idealise gross or animalistic sexual theories and purely physical uses of sex. Zamorian religions tend to condemn the idea of a spiritual meaning toward sex and ideas about romantic love, as these theories run contrary to the obviously economic value of sexuality, virginity and marriage. Since any Zamorian can see firsthand the economics of these concepts,

the idea of a spiritual value of these things is alien and corrupt. Casual, mindless promiscuity is almost always emphasised over sentimental and non-measurable attitudes about purity and sexuality. Two great festivals are celebrated throughout Zamora in its temples: The Spring Festival and the Festival of All Gods.

Temples in Zamora are strange and beautiful buildings. Largely they are built in districts designated for temples, but this is not always the case. The buildings glitter in the starlight and are often blindingly bright in full sunlight. They are built out of white marble for the most part, with golden domes and silver inlays.

Foreigners commonly find the Zamorian pantheon complex and difficult to understand. Philosophers and theologians hold long debates about reality, the cosmos, life after death, heresies, truths and gods. Zamora's religion is intricate and complicated, housed in a mire of bizarre rituals masking, amplifying or altering the more simple Zhemri truths and beliefs. Their religions also seem to most foreigners to be oppressive, for Zamorian priests enforce absolute obedience among their followers.

Grim priests and foul sorcerers are abundant in Zamora, all practicing diabolisms such as murderous rites of human sacrifice, wicked acts of soothsaying and foul divinations through ghostly contact with spirits and demons. Many





Zamorian priests are quite skilled in hypnotism and use their mesmerisms to ensure unwavering loyalty and unswerving devotion. Zamorian priests range from the most corrupt, black-hearted frauds to the most serious theologians. In theory they have all the restrictions and benefits of worshippers (except for the requirement to pay a tithe), along with several more, but in practice many a priest simply uses his position to gain political influence, bribes and other 'fringe benefits.' Many Zamorian priests are eligible to marry into noble families, thus raising their own rank considerably.

Although scholars can choose the 'lay priest' background at 1st level, a fully ordained priest must have selected the Priest feat at 4th level or above. In either case, the priest may have access to certain forms of sorcery through the temple but will usually be banned from learning other types of sorcery.

Many of the major religions also have heretical cults comprised of people who vary from the main religion either on minor points or, occasionally, on major faith items. Much debate ensues between members of outwardly similar religions but who inwardly disagree on seemingly small facts and theories. These conflicts occasionally result in open combat, though the King of Zamora keeps an eye on the religions and their influence on the masses; he will take whatever action or inaction is necessary to maintain power.

TEMPLES AND CULTS IN SHADIZAR THE WICKED

Most temples and cults in Shadizar do not worship one god in particular but the entire weird pantheon of Zhemri divinities. Although cults given to individual deities do arise in Shadizar, such as the cult of the Night God created by Roy Thomas and the cult of the Spider God, these are unusual cases of fanaticism. Most Zamorians disagree over which divinities are dominant and which are irrelevant but the deities are there all the same. Zath, Omm or other spider gods figure prominently in many of these religions. Games Masters can make up their own cults or use these generic templates.

Sex Cults

A sex cult is usually a fertility cult devoted to the exploration of sexuality as a religious experience. In many sex cults, women are dedicated to their gods by an act of ritual defloration. Several of these religions are founded on the idea that a virgin goddess is also the protector of childbirth. Often these cults form occasions for sexual depravity or excess. Open orgies may be the preferred form of worship or more discreet visits to temple prostitutes, male and female, may be the norm. Many religions have concepts of sexual freedom and indiscriminate sharing of partners. Sex cults often make it clear that inability or unwillingness to share sexually with a fellow member demonstrates selfishness and a lack of spirituality. Some sex cults forbid incest, others encourage it. Some of the sex cults require that members serve as sacred prostitutes at least once, regardless of rank in secular society. Thus a lowly commoner could have intercourse with a highborn noble without stigma or shame. Some fertility cults are less debauched than others and, instead of wholesale bacchanalian orgies, the priest and priestess have ritualised intercourse on holy days to promote fertility in the land or among the people. Some religions, however, condemn the use of temple prostitutes and consider the use of such to be the worship of a foreign goddess and an act of heresy. Many of the religions of Shadizar also have sex cults on the side that are considered auxiliary or branches of the main religion.

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe of 2 sp/level/month to the local temple.

Benefits of Worship: Sacred Prostitutes. Some may offer the benefit of Corruption (1/year; DC 12).

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Knowledge (religion) 10 ranks; must know the Hypnotism sorcery styles. To become a high priest, a character must have the Debaucher feat (see *Conan: The Scrolls of Skelos*).

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (Hypnotism and Enchantment

only); much of a Zamorian priest's time serving the temple is taken up with religious debate, giving all priests who have served for at least one year a +2 competence bonus to all Knowledge (religion) checks.

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Expulsion from the cult.

Mystery Cults: Mystery cults are sacramental religions whose members believe the performance of certain rituals will give them knowledge unavailable or unknowable by normal men. Many of these cults are led by sorcerers or demons. Some cult leaders believe they have died and been reborn as a god. These cults offer secret wisdom and lost truths, including such bizarre beliefs as: aliens from other planets and other times visit the world, possess people or even kidnap people; man was preceded by a strange plant-like creature as the first life on earth; possession by spirits is good; and certain rituals can unlock the potential of the mind, unleashing a man's psychic powers. Some mystery cults have aspects of sex cults, holding weird orgies in the dark and summoning fiends from the Outer Dark to dance with them.

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe of 4 sp/level/month to the local temple.



Benefits of Worship: Faith; Spells (usually hypnotism or divination or Oriental).

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Knowledge (religion) 10 ranks; must know the Hypnotism or Divination or Oriental sorcery styles (depending on the focus of the cult).

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (Hypnotism or Divination or Oriental only); much of a Zamorian priest's time serving the temple is taken up with religious debate, giving all priests who have served for at least one year a +2 competence bonus to all Knowledge (religion) checks.

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Expulsion from the cult, harassment.

GODS IN ZAMORA

The following gods and pantheons are worshipped in Zamora:

- ☒ Azoth, The Dreaming One
- ☒ Bel, God of Thieves
- ☒ Morath-Aminee, The Eater of Souls
- ☒ Nameless Night God
- ☒ Omm the Unspeakable
- ☒ Ong, God of Pain and Atonement
- ☒ Shan Demigod of War
- ☒ Zandru, Lord of the Nine Hells
- ☒ Zath, God of Purity

For more information on these see *Book I: The Games Master's Guide* in *Conan: Shadizar – City of Wickedness*.

The Games Master is encouraged to create other gods to replicate the numerous and complex pantheon of Zamorian gods. Howard implies that Zamora has a complicated theological structure but gives no details. Most writers following in Howard's footsteps have simply created individual gods independent of each other or a common Zhemri mythology. Instead of trying to create a coherent Zhemri/Zamorian mythology from scratch, which is beyond the scope of this work, this section merely details some of those gods created by past authors. Some gods are so minor information is scarce. For example, in *Conan the Destroyer*, by Robert Jordan, the character of Malak utters, 'Ravana's Weeping Eyes,' 'Shakuru's Burning Teeth,' 'Fidesa's Teats,' 'Danh's Bony Rump,' 'Badb's Holy Buttocks,' 'the Nine-fold Names of Khepra' and 'Sigyn's Bowl,' but no other information is offered. Other gods mentioned in various Zamorian stories include Sareth and Zamm.

Mitra & Zingara

RELIGION IN ZINGARA

THE RELIGION OF Zingara is a vague at best. Zingara is not a Hyborian nation according to Howard, although they were conquered by Hyborians as most other nations were. L. Sprague de Camp establishes Zingara as a nation of Mitra worshippers, though it is not unreasonable to presume that gods akin to the Shemite pantheon and the Pictish gods also exist there.

According to L. Sprague de Camp, Mitra is the head of the pantheon. 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 serves as his consort in a court that contains Shemitish and Pictish deities, all with portfolios of power in a complex fashion duplicating the complicated Zingaran court.

MITRA, GREAT PRINCE OF LIGHT

Mitra is the one unknowable god and from him came the archons known as the Sabaoth, god-like entities who comprise the celestial host. Mitra demands that his worshippers stand upright before him rather than prostrating themselves and does not require either man or beast in sacrifice. He is a god of rights and justice; those kingdoms that have adopted his rule usually have at the very least some kind of minimal human rights that apply even to the lowliest of peasants, though the Zingarans get around this with some complex theology to allow them to continue owning slaves. Worshippers of Mitra are encouraged to battle oppression and seek out justice wherever they can. At heart Mitra is a warrior god, holy to soldiers and knights, who are encouraged to show mercy on the field of battle, forgiving enemies.

It is possible that this latter concept is the origin of chivalry among the Zingarans.

THE SABAOTH

These celestial beings sprung from Mitra's essence. In the past they were erroneously worshipped as gods, but Epemitreus the Sage established their true nature to the Zingarans.

Abrazas

With the head of a rooster, the body of a man and feet like a mass of snakes, Abrazas is a horrific figure. He is the number 365 and he commands this many demons and archons in the world, ensuring the world moves as it should. Originally a servitor of Urçi, once the truth of Mitra was revealed, he rebelled and offered his Allegiance to Mitra. He is now the general of Mitra's armies. Every act he makes is good and evil, truth and lie, light and dark. He speaks lies so that his listeners learn truth. His word kills and resurrects all in the same moment.

Ahriman

Ahriman is the archon of anger and discord. He is the source of evil and taunted Mahri into creating Urçi. He then influenced Urçi into becoming a jealous and angry god. He taunts those in power and brings strife and disease wherever he looks. His power is to bring down those who wield power. He is a force of rebellion. He created Set and Asura to oppose Mitra. He is the father of Atophys and Hedone.



Aletheia

Aletheia is the truth of Mitra, the guardian of secrets and true knowledge. When one advances through the Mysteries of Mitra, Aletheia is invoked to show the way, to enlighten the path and darken all heresy so it cannot be seen as true. The sister of Nous, she sprang directly from Mitra.

Atophys

Atophys is the essential nature of things, the good or evil hearts of everything. He gives people and objects corruption or virtue, and allows them to grow according to their nature.

Azâzêl

Azâzêl is the archon of arms and armour, the god of metalworking and war. He is also the god of cosmetics and beauty. He is symbolised by the peacock. He is sometimes portrayed as a demon, working devices of torture.

Elaios

The archon of olives and agriculture, Elaios is also the god of peace and the cessation of strife. Even he has a wrathful side, though, and can take up arms as a god of war when defence is needed.

Hedone

Hedone is the ancient goddess of pleasure, both virtuous and corrupt, now treated as the archon child of Macaria and Ahriman.

Iadabaoth

Iadabaoth separates time into past, present and future, breaking eternity into discernable ages and years. A god of separation and the creation of gulfs, he is also an alchemical god, teaching the breakdowns of chemicals and herbs.

Macaria

Macaria is the archon of happiness. She is also the patron of martyrs, ensuring their names are remembered for all time. She is the mother of Atophys and Hedone.

Mahri, the Black Goddess

Mari is a chthonic goddess who, with Mitra, is the power of creation and destruction. When Mitra and Mahri gather in the high caves of the mountains, they create storms. Mahri is Mitra's mate and is a variant on the Shemitish Ishtar, although she is less obviously sensual and more chaste. It is said that her movements create the weather. When it is raining, she is in the mountains; when it is dry, she is in the central plains.

She is a goddess of wisdom and fate, the feminine aspect of the soul of Mitra. She is typically represented as crowned by stars. The Zingarans believe she, in a state of confusion after her creation, brought about the creation of Urci, who created the world and ruled it in its infancy. Mahri and Mitra then sent Epemitreus into the world to relieve it of the bonds of Urci and to worship the true god, Mitra.

Nous

Nous is the force of thought, the power of the mind. When one thinks, he does so with Nous's essence, in his realm and through his will. Nous is the brother of Aletheia.

Semjâzâ

Semjâzâ is the archon of enchantment and herbalism. He is followed by seven saints, mortals who climbed into the heavens through their herbs to join Semjâzâ. These saints are Amaros, who has the power to overcome and end enchantments and curses; Baraqual, who understands the cosmos and is the teacher of astrology; Ezeqeel, who teaches the knowledge of the weather and the planting seasons, and can read the signs of the birds as they fly; Saniel, who knows the course of the moon and teaches lunar omens; Kokabel, who learned the constellations of the heavens and can read omens from them, for the gods write their intent upon the heavens; Araquel, who knows the animals of the earth and can divine the will of Mitra from the movements of animals and their remains; and Shamsiel, who knows the glowing Sun and its motions, and can read signs and portents from that glowing sphere of light, the essence of Mitra. These demons are served in turn by sorcerers, witches and herbalists.

Sraosha, Messenger of Mitra

Sraosha is the voice of Mitra, the offspring of Nous and Aletheia. His word has power and can drive off evil at the command of Mitra, his grandfather. The cock is his holy animal; its crowing calls the pious to their religious duties. Sraosha is also identified with fire, and is said to be the source of divine inspiration, the bridge between man and Mitra. It is Sraosha's voice that is within each person to guide him to right behaviour. Sraosha is the channel of communication between our physical mind and our spiritual selves. His is the voice of intuition.

Urci, The Creator of Earth

Urci is the name the Zingarans once gave the sky and its powers. He is now considered to be one of the celestial court and the actual creator of the world. He tried to rule the world with an iron fist until the coming of Epemitreus. This god has fallen into disuse in Zingara and is part of an ancient tradition. He was

born of Mahri when she desired to create something without the aid of Mitra. Ashamed of her deed, Mahri wrapped Urui within a cloud and gave him a throne. Alone, he thought he was One, the only thing in existence, he created the world out of loneliness and ruled it with an iron hand, proclaiming himself the Creator and One True God, for he did not know there were others more powerful than he and that he had been created. He created Abrazas to serve him.

Zurvan, Lord of Infinite Time and Space

Zurvan is infinity, an unthinkable, unknowable concept to man. He is the offspring of Nous and Aletheia. Zurvan is not his name; he is nameless. Zurvan is his title, coming from an ancient and now unused Zingg valley tradition of a ritual timekeeper called a zurvan. He is portrayed as a winged, lion-headed man wrapped in the coils of a constrictor from chest to feet. The snake represents the eternal motion of the sun. Zurvan is the father of Macaria, the happy spirit, and Ahriman, the angry spirit.

EPEMITREUS THE SAGE

Epemitreus was a powerful foe of Set and priest of Mitra, fifteen hundred years before the time of Conan. He now sleeps beneath the mountain of Golamira in Aquilonia, but can appear in dreams to grant resistance to Set and his followers. He rarely does so unless there is a dire threat to Mitradom, but when he does he can inscribe his symbol, the phoenix, upon a mortal weapon to render it greatly powerful against the demons of Set, Ahriman and Asura. He is said to have appeared in Zingara in the city of Salduva, where he stood upon a great pillar and spoke to the warrior Seo, who was later sainted.

SACRAMENTAL AND MYSTICAL

The Zingaran Mitraic cult is a mystery cult just as it is in Argos. It has Outer and Inner Mysteries. The Outer Mysteries are the myths and ritual everyone who worships Mitra knows and may participate in. However, only the Initiated may know the Inner Mysteries, wherein the "Truth" of the religion is revealed. In Zingara, women are forbidden from learning the Inner Mysteries. Anyone who has not been initiated may not learn the Mysteries. It is forbidden to speak of the Mysteries to the uninitiated. Every active male worshipper is expected to go through the first four Mysteries while only specialised priests are expected to climb higher.

Each mystery is to some extent manifestations of a single deep longing in the human spirit for a sense of contact with the ultimate mystery. The Mysteries of Zingaran Mitraism are

identical to those practised by the Argosseans and are described in detail on pages 16-18.

RELIGIOUS TABOOS

The religious taboos of Zingaran Mitraism are the same as the Argossean taboos (page 19) except for the proscription against the wearing of leather. Zingaran leathermaking is considered an important industry and there is no taboo against it in Zingara.

BENEFITS OF WORSHIPPING MITRA

Each god or pantheon offers certain benefits to its worshippers, so long as they remain in good standing with the cult and Mitra is no exception. Worshipping Mitra gives the benefits of Atonement and Faith to those who are indoctrinated into his Inner Mysteries.

Atonement: A character who has broken the terms of his code of honour, or who has broken one of the rules of Mitra, may seek out an ordained priest of his deity and ask for atonement. Usually the priest will expect a donation to the temple of around 50 sp multiplied by the character level of the character who desires atonement and then send him off on a suitable holy quest for Mitra. Once the quest is completed, the character regains his code of honour or is returned to his standing as a worshipper of Mitra, as appropriate. The priest who assists with the atonement must be in good standing at the temple.

Faith: All worshippers of Mitra gain a +2 morale bonus to all Will saving throws against sorcery or Terror. This represents their faith in the religion, which can be a powerful source of spiritual strength when faced with evil sorcery or unnatural creatures.

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth 2 sp/level/month to the local temple of Mitra. Live an honest and virtuous life. Do not practice sorcery or associate with sorcerers. Oppose those who carry out human sacrifice or traffic with demons.

Benefits of Worship: Faith, Atonement.

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: May not know or learn any sorcery styles, or associate with sorcerers. Must lead the faithful in prayer. Must not tolerate any other religion. Must lead a still more honest and virtuous life than the faithful. Must arbitrate fairly in disputes whenever asked. Must not fall into superstitious ways.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard.

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Usually excommunicated, but may be attacked by the virtuous worshippers of Mitra as a result.

Arcane Religions

THE FOLLOWING RELIGIONS represent examples of cults too small to be included in *Conan the Roleplaying Game* in the section on religion. They are based on deifying a powerful wizard or demon lord, or are so closely confined to a specific place and people as to not warrant inclusion in that chapter. However, all offer some training in sorcery for those of their worshippers who dare.

Note that several of the entities mentioned here as minor gods are also potential opponents in combat.

HANUMAN

Hanuman is worshipped in Zamboula and presumably to a lesser extent in Turan and Vendhya. He is a bestial ape-god of extremely ill repute – even devout Set-worshippers fear him and his debased cult. Human sacrifice is common in the temples to Hanuman; in Zamboula, at least, its adherents enjoy considerable political influence which they are free to use and abuse as they see fit. Hanuman is considered the most magically accomplished of all Vendhya's deities. He is said to be able to change his size

and/or weight as needed, to have an iron will stronger than any other, to have more mastery over all creatures than Jhebbal Sag and to have the power to build or tear down at will, often through dance and war. The cult emphasises control – control of self, control of the world around, control of others – as the path toward spiritual enlightenment. Revenge, lust and predation are all traits shown by Hanuman's priests and cultists. The cult is biased toward its members taking action to further their own individual interests through the use of cunning and intellect, as well as physical and charismatic power.

Requirements of Worship: Pay a tithe worth 2 sp/level/month to the priests of Hanuman.

Benefits of Worship: Spells.

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Must know at least two sorcery styles, including Hypnotism. Must know the Ritual Sacrifice feat.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available (any sorcery styles); +1 circumstance bonus to Charisma-based skill checks in Zamboula, due to the unusual influence of the cult in that town; bribery, corruption and abuse of power are positively encouraged.

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Captured alive and sacrificed.

ISHITI, THE DEMON-GODDESS OF TIME

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 a medusa who is 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.

Requirements of Worship: Obey priests of Set, even if called upon as a sacrifice; tithe 2 sp/level/month to the local temple

Benefits of Worship: Spells.

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Must sacrifice at least one victim per year to Ishiti; must know at least two sorcery styles and the Tortured Sacrifice feat; obey the high priest of Set; obey the high priest of Ishiti

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available in any style save Oriental Magic.

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Betrayers of Ishiti or Set are sent to an island on a different plane and imprisoned and tortured for all eternity.

KHOSATRAL KHEL

Khosatral Khel is remembered by few indeed, but may be worshipped by the occasional evil sorcerer among the Yuetshi, Hyrkanians and even Kozaks. As a god of domination, dimly recollected in legend as the most baleful opponent of all right-thinking folk in the region, he doubtless provides much in grisly lore to any who will grant him obeisance. For more information on Khosatral Khel, see *Conan: The Scrolls of Skelos*.

KING BULL

King Bull is a sacred symbol in the western portions of the Border Kingdom. During his autumnal festival, all travellers are left unmolested and all the people are at peace. A woman is stripped and bound, sacrificed to the living avatar of King Bull at the climax of the festival. If the King Bull becomes old and loses his virility, a tedious ritual is performed at the festival whereupon the old King Bull is slain with a certain flint knife and a younger bull inaugurated as the new avatar of King Bull. Ancient custom forbids the raising of any other weapon against the King Bull, which is an embodiment of luck and the fertility of the flocks and herds.

Requirements of Worship: Attend the autumnal festival in the Border Kingdom every year, obey the priest and priestess of the King Bull, never draw a weapon on the King Bull.

Benefits of Worship: Spells.

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Must sacrifice at least one victim per year to the King Bull.

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Spells (Nature Magic, Divination)

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Tied, naked, to a stake and sacrificed to the King Bull.

SKELOS

Though Skelos is often said to have been no more than a powerful, mortal sorcerer, he is also worshipped as a god of magic by many sorcerers, particularly those who are not quite so evil as to revere Set but who still seek after dark and forbidden knowledge. For more Information on Skelos, see *Conan: the Scrolls of Skelos*.

THAUG

First known for being summoned by Salome in *A Witch Shall Be Born*, Thaug is a traditional demon in eastern Kothic mythology, and has been summoned by witches known as Salome since time immemorial. For more information on Thaug, see *Conan: The Scrolls of Skelos*.

TOLOMETH

In addition to Mitra and some variant religions, pockets of demon-worship can be found in Brythunia. Tolometh, a black god of the abyss, is one such 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 Potrebia, as well as a magical amulet burst asunder and spread across the Hyborean landscape.

Tolometh is a demon worshipped by the most corrupt of Brythunian scholars. His eye is a single amulet blasted into six parts. When this amulet is reassembled, Tolometh will arise from his sunken slumber to sear the Earth. He promises great power and wealth to those who align themselves with him. Tolometh has three horns and one eye, a moon-bright gem found in a monstrous meteor.

Requirements of Worship: Do Tolometh's bidding, seek out his shattered eye-amulet, try to summon him from his sunken depths.

Benefits of Worship: Spells.

Requirements for Ordained Priesthood: Must know at least two sorcery styles and the Tortured Sacrifice feat

Benefits of Ordained Priesthood: Standard, plus as follows: sorcery teaching is available in any style save Oriental Magic.

Typical Punishments for Disloyal Priests: Tortured to death as a sacrifice to Tolometh.

YAJUR

Yajur is the bloody-handed god of stranglers, worshipped almost exclusively in mysterious Kosala, whose rites are terrible and deadly. For more information on Yajur, see *Conan: the Scrolls of Skelos*.

Roleplaying Priests and Cultists

PEOPLE ALWAYS SEEM to want to believe in something and the priest is there to make sure the people believe in something that will help him personally. The priest is a scholar who has, through the force of his personality, accumulated a measure of wealth and social stability, becoming a faux noble, granting himself the title of High Priest, using the resources of his 'religion' for his wealth and taking advantage of the privileges accorded to him by an unsuspecting population. He is a master of charismatic rhetoric, using trickery, showmanship and patter to fake miracles or otherwise persuade the masses to obey him. He presents his new religion as a revelation the world has been awaiting with anxious breath. He may even write 'ancient' texts that offer prophecies he or his chosen god/person is the fulfilment for. He may take existing texts and take prophecies out of context to prove his case, claiming multiple layers of meaning for prophecies already shown to have come to pass before his time. Many cults are based around a person, claiming the person is the living avatar, the son or chosen of an existing deity. Some of these cults, such as the cults of Tarim or Bori, eventually achieve legitimacy. Other cults are based around specific practises; sex cults are examples of this sort of cult. They tend to be small. Still others are based around an object, often linking with a pre-existing religion of an established deity. These cults claim to possess the hand of a saint or the shroud of a god or other such holy relic.

Many priests form religious colonies, areas cut off from the world as much as possible because of the belief that the world is less enlightened than the priest and his followers. These areas are as self-sufficient as possible. These colonies often prescribe a code of dress for their members based on the priest's ideas of the right way to live. Heads may be shaved or hair may be grown long. The rules may vary by sex. For example, in Robert Jordan's *Conan the Unconquered*, the Cult of Doom led by Jhandar required men to be bald and women to never cut their hair. Women or men may have to cover their bodies entirely or be constantly nude. Some may require certain colours to be worn to indicate rank in the society while others emphasise a society without stratification, so everyone dresses the same. Most of these societies are xenophobic and all are stricter than the surrounding society from whom the followers are drawn in some way or another.

The Power of Leadership

The value of the Leadership feat to priests and scholars cannot be overstated. The ability to gather absolutely loyal followers and cohorts is immensely valuable. They are valuable in many ways. If the followers have at least one rank in Perform (ritual), the scholar can perform a Power Ritual (see *Conan the Roleplaying Game*). They can quickly become an army of defenders, the unshakable core of a crusade. Priests can create armies of sages, lay priests, manuscript keepers, accountants, astrologers and the like to boost his own influence in temples and cities, giving him influence and power no spell could easily replicate.

The Importance of Reputation

A scholar's Reputation is important. While not as concrete a possession as it is for a noble, it is still vital for the character. If a scholar is known and recognised, he may be able to avoid actually casting a spell to get things done. The Hyborian Age is not the standard fantasy milieu where wizards are a dime a dozen and are treated without prejudice or fear. Sorcerers are fearsome people in the Hyborian Age, the ogres around which dozens of tales are spun. Without a high Reputation, for example, a scholar will not be sought out by the Black Ring for inclusion in their august order. Few sorcerous covens and groups accept applicants; those groups actively seek out those they wish to have among them. The only way to be sought out is to maintain a high Reputation. One does not want to have to boast of his accomplishments. It is far better if commoners already fear the scholar before he even arrives. Scholars also do not like to do public displays, or 'tests,' to prove they are sorcerers. Again, it is better for the scholar if those approaching him already believe in his powers.

Many of the wizards and sorcerers contained within Howard's Conan stories are obsessed with their own rankings and reputations. From a game standpoint, most sorcerers (but not all, lest they become predictable) will strive to enhance their reputations. Often, this means leaving survivors to tell the tale or some other proof of their power. Peer reputation, of course, is better than general knowledge, but a sorcerer will take whatever he is given and work with that. Sorcerers, especially those who belong to sorcerous societies, will often work to demolish a rival sorcerer's reputation.

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CONAN[®]

FAITH AND FERVOUR

**'GATHER ROBED ONES, YE KEEPERS OF FLAME AND FAITH,
THE HOUR IS COME 'ROUND ONCE MORE WHEREIN WE MAKE
SACRIFICE TO THE DARK ONE WHOM WE WORSHIP. O NIGHT
GOD, THOU WHOM WE DO SERVE, YET NE'ER HAVE SEEN,
ACCEPT THEE NOW THIS UNWORTHY GIFT, THIS SOILED AND
SINFUL OFFERING, THIS HUMAN HECATOMB. TAKE HER HENCE,
FROM THIS VALE OF SORROW, TO THE UNENDING BLISS OF
THINE ETERNAL SHADOW, THY HEAVENLY ABODE. COME!
COME NOW!'**

Do you fear the gods? Would you tread upon their shadow? Do you expect help from the gods or do you help yourself?

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