

DOOWAN[®]

THE ROAD OF KINGS



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THE ROAD OF KINGS

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Introduction

Welcome to Hyboria

INTRODUCTION

ROBERT E. HOWARD and the other Conan writers, artists and film makers have woven a fascinating tapestry of wealth, poverty, pitch black evil and epic struggles for life in a world determined to kill even the hardest. Herein is written the descriptions of this harsh world: proud lands of tarnished civility burning with civil wars; barbaric wildernesses of savage killers hunting with primitive weapons; dreaming kingdoms of dark priests worshipping with bloodied daggers; noble demesnes of arrogant knights fighting with grim determination; ancient realms of haunted towers lurking with baleful menace; towering crags of icy rock slumbering with hidden peoples; and great seas of crimson waves brimming with cruel pirates.

As the Road of Kings takes a traveller through the glittering and decadent realms of the lost Hyborian Age, so too does this tome work toward the same end. These fabled lands of ancient times are the shimmering background of Conan the Roleplaying Game, the gleaming backdrop against which your action is set. These cultures, the grand forbearers of more modern times, are magnificent and degraded all at the same time. Each culture has its dark, rotten core and its flashy exterior, its gilt mask of civility.

It is our world, yet it is not a world any of us would recognise. It is a world that is dimmer than the memory of a fleeting dream, yet is bright as the glowing dimness of a dying ember lying amid the coals of a lost fire. It is a world of the distant past, from a time before our recorded history, a time that is forgotten by us... almost. Much as the ghost of Conan may have stood behind Bob Howard of Texas and told his tales for us to enjoy, the ghosts of that far-flung age may come to us to tell their tales, so we may live them again and thrill to their adventures.

Open up the book of Von Junzt, which lies grim and foreboding in front of you, and read about an age undreamed of by modern science. Open the tome called *Nameless Cults*, where is written a translation of the Nemedian Chronicles, and read of black eons known to us as the Hyborian Age...

AQUILONIA

The Proudest Kingdom of the World

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

The Nemedian Chronicles

AQUILONIA IS THE most advanced and powerful of the Hyborian kingdoms, with a proud, relatively wealthy populace. Its politics are rife with intrigue, murder and horror, with countless plots and intrigues amidst the barons and counts who maintain ancient feuds from generation to generation. With frontiers that are often tested by Picts, Cimmerians, Nemedians and Ophireans there is opportunity within its borders for warrior and courtier alike.

Nearly twenty five million people live in the various counties, baronies, villages, towns and cities of Aquilonia. Two of the great Hyborian metropolises can be found in Aquilonia: Tarantia and Shamar. King Conan's census following his great victory in the Year of the Dragon revealed fifty other large towns and cities, nearly three hundred smaller towns and over thirty thousand villages, with almost a half million residents living in innumerable hamlets, thorp or individual farms and homesteads.

Aquilonia represents the pinnacle of Hyborian age society – a realm of enlightenment and prosperity. Even so, its forms of government and its treatment of the various economic classes of people fall back on ancient Hyborian traditions instead of a more efficient form of government. Aquilonia has a feudal government, being ruled by a king, who divides up the land and the responsibilities of the kingdom among various barons and counts, who then subdivide up their properties and responsibilities further. The reigning monarch of Aquilonia is King Conan who took, and has defended, his crown by force of arms.

Aquilonia is an impressively large kingdom, larger even than its king can effectively rule. Without a surfeit of troops enough to enforce his will everywhere, Aquilonia is left with a fragmented government of local powers, counts and barons, who perform civil and military functions in the name of the king for an equally fragmented kingdom subdivided into numerous fiefs and sub-fiefs.

Aquilonia is broken up into provinces, many of which are further subdivided into smaller fiefs or civil territories. Many of these boundaries are poorly defined or in dispute, with the lands near the country's borders further confused. This is extremely evident in the west, where the Westermarck, which considers itself to be part of Aquilonia, is separated by Gunderland, which does not despite an agreement to the contrary. The divisions tend to undermine the sovereignty of the king and lead to inefficient government by the counts, barons and those subordinate to the upper nobility.

The counts and barons of Aquilonia hold noble titles and fiefs from the king granting them official power. The granting of these fiefs is done by a patent, or contract, wherein the noble swears fealty to the king and the king grants the noble all rights pertaining to the land proffered as fief, including an accompanying title of nobility. These noble titles are inherited through the male line, although the king may remove a title at his pleasure. The eldest son or the husband of an eldest daughter almost always inherits the noble title. The actual property of the fief, however, can be divided among the lord's heirs as may see fit. If a dispute over inheritance occurs, especially in a case where a nobleman produced no heir, the king may intercede and name an heir.

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

'I found Aquilonia in the grip of a pig like you - one who traced his genealogy for a thousand years. The land was torn with the wars of the barons, and the people cried out under suppression and taxation. Today no Aquilonian noble dares maltreat the humblest of my subjects, and the taxes of the people are lighter than anywhere else in the world.'

R. E. Howard. The Scarlet Citadel



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

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

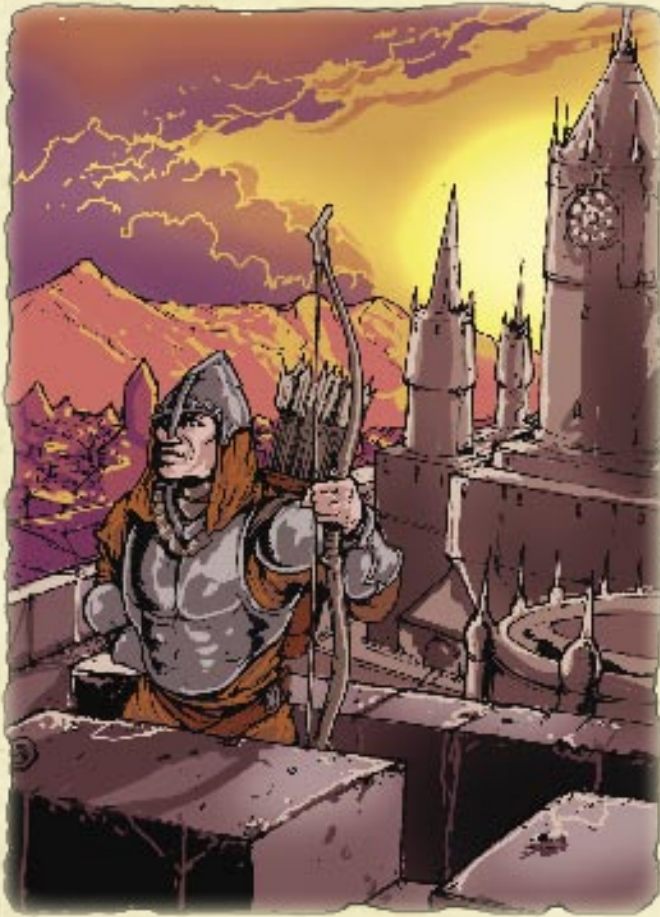
These local lords maintain their own military, and can nominally be ordered by the king to fight. These military men, knights and chevaliers, have become, over time, their own social class. Many of these quasi-independent units have taken up colourful and well-known names – the imperial troops are the Black Legion and the king's personal protective knights are known as the Black Dragons. The soldiers of Aquilonia include both powerful cavalry and impressive infantry. Aquilonia appears to be unique in the world in its recognition of the importance of a trained infantry. Most of the infantry are Gundermen, who excel at the spear and poleaxe, and

Bossonian archers, who are without equal in the Hyborean age for bowmanship. In time of national war, King Conan can command hosts in excess of 50,000 troops. Troops in Aquilonia are often signalled via the oliphant, an ornate ivory instrument that a skilled performer can use to imitate everything from the roar of a lion or elephant to the gentle sound of a breeze.

The Aquilonian army favours a standard formation for Hyborean hosts. The centre, heavily armoured knights, is the strongest section. The wings are composed of lesser cavalry units that are supported by pikemen and Bossonian archers. The wings move in advance of the centre. The archers unleash their stinging death and the pikemen and swordsmen move in afterward. The archers lift their aim to fire at the back ranks of the foe so as to avoid killing their own soldiers. The cavalry units move in next, followed by the knights on their immense horses.

The wealthy in Aquilonia dress well. Silken jupons, close-fitting jackets with gilt-braided skirts and jagged sleeves are typical outfits worn in the courts. Hair is usually curled and scented, bound with cloth-of-silver or cloth-of-gold bands. Most nobles wear a sword, though many of them are merely ceremonial weapons. Others wear simple tunics with hose and soft leather boots.

Far below the status of the nobility and the military, beneath even the station



of the commoners, the slaves of Aquilonia toil. Thoth-Amon, the greatest sorcerer in the world, lived as a slave in Aquilonia until he freed himself. The cult of Asura in Aquilonia is known to treat its slaves well, though they're often put to unpleasant uses, such as piloting the boats of the dead down the Khorotas river. The people of Gunderland, however, keep no slaves and find even the mere idea of slavery to be distasteful. This is one of the causes of dispute between the two countries.

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF AQUILONIA

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

one goes far enough west, Picts. The most notable geographic features are the rivers.

Alimane River – The Alimane is a river marking the border between Aquilonia and Zingara, rarely used much for river traffic, being too shallow in places to allow boats up its length as it features many fords and crossing points. A caravan trail follows along the banks of the Alimane before crossing over the Khorotas at the village of Pedassa. The Ford of Nogara is a common route for trade from the Saxula Pass to cross the Alimane. A road passes from here to Culario, the capital of Poitain.

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

Black River – This river is the frontier border of Aquilonia and the site of many battles with the savage Picts. The river has a swift current, yet is quite deep and rather wide, carrying a large volume of water. The river's source is somewhere in the mountains of northern Pictland, flowing southward along the border of the Bossonian Marches, then along the frontier border of Westermarck, eventually curving to the West as it flows into Zingara on its course to the open sea. The Zingaran capital of Kordava sits at its mouth.

Brocellian Forest – The Brocellian forest lies between the southern Poitain cities and the Imirian Escarpment. Peasant superstitions, encouraged by nobles wishing to keep their hunting preserves, has it that unnatural beings haunt the trees and prey upon the unwary. A road runs through the forest toward the Imirian Escarpment where the Bitaxa River carves out the Giant's Notch, a large gorge through the escarpment that the road follows. It takes a day to cross the width of the forest from the edge to the escarpment. Satyrs are rumoured to live in this dark forest but Trocero and his barons have never encountered them while hunting in the forest.

Fury River – This river, flowing southwest past Sicas, eventually joins the Khorotas River.

Golamira, Mount – This is the Mount of Eternal Time, called 'black-hearted' in Aquilonia. The legendary prophet Epimetreus' body was laid to rest here 1,500 years ago in a magically protected tomb. Legend has it that his spirit ventures forth in dreams when Aquilonia is in dire need.

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

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

Khorotas River – This major river is navigable in its middle reaches and flows within a mile of Tarantia. Once in the Poitainian mountains, the river falls in a series of picturesque falls, cascades and rapids. The Tybor and the Alimane merge with it before it flows

to the Western Ocean at Messantia in Argos. The Road of Kings crosses the Khorotas near its confluence with the Tybor. Fishermen and merchant boats are the usual craft seen on the river, but occasionally a slender, black craft bearing one of the dead of Asura floats down the river. The road crosses the river to the Alimane at the village of Pedassa.

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

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

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

Tybor River – The Tybor river is a placid, much travelled river marking the border between Aquilonia and Ophir. Being both deep and wide, it is in common usage by barges and watermen for transport of passengers and goods alike.

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

IMPORTANT AQUILONIA CITIES

Tarantia - the capital of Aquilonia, the 'most princely city of the world's West.' This great walled city stands regally on a plain not far from the Khorotas River in south eastern Aquilonia on the Road of Kings. This city is a formidable centre of commerce as well as the home of the King of Aquilonia, Conan. The Imperial troops based here are called the Black Legion, and the king's personal bodyguard are known as the Black Dragons. The gates are guarded by great bronze portals. The wealthy travel about town in chariots. It has a population of 80,256 persons.

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

'I have strong reason to suspect that it is now on its way to Sicas, in Aquilonia, if it is not there already... It is not a great city, but it is said to be a wicked one. It lies a few miles off the king's high road between Tarantia and Shamar, at the confluence of two rivers, the Ossar and the Fury. Its wealth comes mainly from its nearby silver mines, and this wealth has attracted persons of a rough sort. The royal officials there are, it is said, of an understanding and forgiving nature.'

John Maddox Roberts, Conan the Rogue

† The Iron Tower: 'The grim Iron Tower stands apart from the citadel, amid a maze of narrow streets and crowding houses where the meaner structures, appropriating a space from which the more fastidious shrank, had invaded a portion of the city ordinarily alien to them. The Tower was, in reality, a castle; an ancient, formidable pile of heavy stone and black iron, which served as the citadel before the new fortress was built. The infamous Iron Tower is used now to execute Aquilonia's political enemies, although a thousand years ago or more it was the primary castle of the Hyborian king who originally ruled these lands. The interior of the Tower is as forbidding and gloomy as the exterior.'

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

Galparan – Galparan is a city on the furious Shirki river, and is the site of a risky crossing. It has a population of over ten thousand.

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

Shamar – Shamar is an ancient city, possibly older than Atlantis itself. It is a walled city built on the Tybor River's banks and the river itself supplies the water for its moat as two ends of it are connected to the river. The southern walls are against the river. The walls have ballistae mounted on them. A duke governs the city, and its most famous export is its wines. It is a strategic and powerful city, and has been attacked many times. Ophir has laid siege to it at least three times, Nemedi has attempted to capture it twice and Aquilonia even attacked it once during a rebellion. Its duke maintains a large militia force that exceeds 2,500 soldiers, and is said to be recruiting heavily.

'Broad plains ran to a wide winding river, beyond which the level lands ran up quickly into a maze of low hills. On the northern bank of the river stood a walled town, guarded by a moat connected at each end with the river.'

'By Crom!' ejaculated Conan. 'It's Shamar! The dogs besiege it!'

R. E. Howard. The Scarlet Citadel

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

Tuscelan, Fort – Fort Tuscelan was a fort on the east bank of the Black River and was charged with protecting Conajohara from the Picts. It failed and was destroyed by the Picts.

Velitrium – The market center of the Westermarck province of Conajohara. It is the site of a great battle between Aquilonia (led by Conan) and the Picts. It is the only settlement left in Conajohara. It has a population of under a thousand.

AQUILONIAN PROVINCES

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

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

Amilius – A barony of Aquilonia. It is located in northern Aquilonia. It was once ruled by Tiberias until he was brought down by Valerius. Tiberias later avenged himself against Valerius.

Attalus – Called one of the most important as well as Aquilonia's most culturally and commercially advanced baronies of Aquilonia by Howard, little else is known about this rich province. The barony of Attalus is located in the southeast of Aquilonia.

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

'Between Aquilonia and the Pictish wilderness lie the Bossonian Marches, people by descendants of an aboriginal race, conquered by a tribe of Hyborians, early in the first ages of the Hyborian drift. This mixed people never attained the civilization of the purer Hyborians, and was pushed by them to the very fringe of the civilized world. The Bossonians are of medium height and complexion, their eyes brown or grey, and they are mesocephalic. They live mainly by agriculture, in large walled villages, and are part of the Aquilonian kingdom. Their marches extend from the Border Kingdom in the North to Zingara in the Southwest, forming a bulwark for Aquilonia against both the Cimmerians and the Picts. They are stubborn defensive fighters, and centuries of warfare against northern and western barbarians have caused them to evolve a type of defense almost impregnable against direct attack.'

R. E. Howard. The Hyborian Age

Cantrium – One of the central baronies of Aquilonia ruled by Baron Maloric. This barony was visited by King Conan in *Marvel's Conan the King*, issue 25.

Castria – A barony of Aquilonia mentioned in *Red Moon of Zembabwei*. It is one of the central provinces. Conan offered it as a reward to the Zingaran Murzio, one of his spies.

Couthan – A barony of Aquilonia, ruled by Baron Monargo, it is located in the heart of Aquilonia.

Gunderland – Gunderland is a northern province between the Aquilonian heartland and Cimmeria. Gunderland was once a separate kingdom but chose to become a vassal state to Aquilonia to avoid being subsumed as a subject people. Despite their concessions to Aquilonia, the people of Gunderland view themselves as relatively independent. Its people are tawny-haired and grey-eyed and, with no slaves and little interbreeding with other peoples, are the purest of the Hyborian bloodlines.

† **Raman** – Raman is a county of Aquilonia located along the border of northern Gunderland. Many border wars have been fought here. The old Baron of Raman was named Ulric and fought against Conan in the civil war. A grey-haired warrior, a veteran of border wars with the

wild Cimmerians and peoples of the Border Kingdom, he was said to be a survivor of Venarium. Baron Ulric has a nephew named Balthus of Tauran.

Gunderland was once a separate kingdom, but was brought into the larger kingdom, less by conquest than by agreement. Its people never considered themselves exactly Aquilonians... and their main concession to the ways of their more civilized southern neighbors was the adoption of the god Mitra in place of the primitive 'Bori.

R. E. Howard. Notes on the Various Peoples of the Hyborian Age

Karaban – A county of Aquilonia. It is located in the heart of Aquilonia and is one of the central provinces. Its count, dwarfish Volmana, was killed by King Conan for treachery some years back.

Kormon – A barony of Aquilonia. It is located in the heart of Aquilonia and is one of the central provinces. Baron Thasperus governs this barony along with the fief of Schohira.

Lor – A barony of Aquilonia, it is located in the heart of Aquilonia and is one of the central provinces.

Manara – A county of Aquilonia, it is located in the heart of Aquilonia and is one of the central provinces.

Pellia – Although most of Aquilonia is ruled by either counts or barons, this province was, at one time, governed by a prince claiming a royal blood-line, presumably the same thousand year old blood line that produced Numedides. Prince Arpello of Pellia had imperial designs, and was the strongest prince of the central regions. In 'The Scarlet Citadel', Conan referred to the prince of Pellia as a

South of the ranges the rich and beautiful plains of Poitain stretched to the river Alimane; but beyond the river lay the land of Zingara.

Even now, when winter was crisping the leaves beyond the mountains, the tall rich grass waved upon the plains where grazed the horses and cattle for which Poitain was famed. Palm trees and orange groves smiled in the sun, and the gorgeous purple and gold and crimson towers of castles and cities and reflected the golden light. It was a land of warmth and plenty, of beautiful women and ferocious warriors. It is not only hard lands that breed hard men. Poitain was surrounded by covetous neighbors and her sons learned hardihood in incessant wars. To the north the land was guarded by the mountains, but to the south only the Alimane separated the plains of Poitain from the plains of Zingara, and not once but a thousand times had that river run red. To the east lay Argos and beyond that Ophir, proud kingdoms and avaricious. The knights of Poitain held their lands by the weight and edge of their swords, and little of ease and idleness they knew.

Robert E. Howard. The Hour of the Dragon



butcher. Conan threw Prince Arpello off the palace walls to fall a hundred and fifty feet before smashing into the streets. Pellia is now governed by a baron appointed by King Conan.

Poitain – Poitain, ruled by Count Trocero of Culario, is the southernmost county of Aquilonia, and is Conan's most loyal province. In addition, Poitain is one of Aquilonia's most important provinces. Less than two decades ago, Trocero himself led the Poitainians against Tarantia, and many Aquilonians remember the devastation Poitain is capable of causing if they should rise up again. Poitain's landscape is of rolling plains and picturesque meadows. Agriculture flourishes in Poitain. Crops of wheat, roses, and palms are common. Orchards of oranges are also known. The heraldic emblem of Poitain is a golden leopard. The people here are dark and long-headed, except for some of the peasantry along the Bossonian border, who resemble the Bossonians. These are hardy folk, bred to war from a life time of protecting their wealth from greedy neighbours. Also there exist remnants of an aboriginal race in the more primitive parts.



The Saxula Pass through the Rabirian Mountains provides access to Argos.

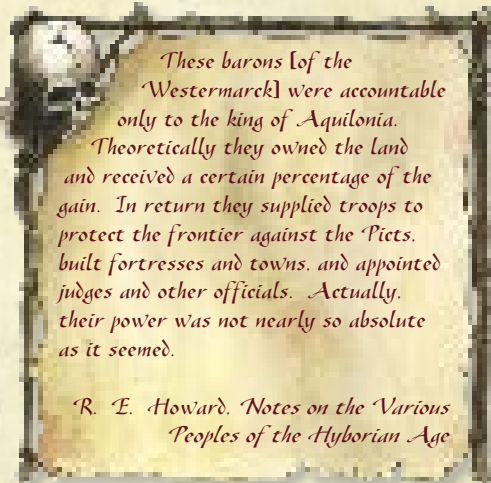
- † **Imirus** – A barony of Aquilonia, it is located in northern Poitain. Governed by the fat Baron Guilaime who took the fiefdom from Baron Roaldo, Baron Guilaime's valour is much talked of, along with his loyalty to Conan.
- † **Ronda** – A barony in northern Poitain, this agricultural region is ruled over by Baron Ammian.
- † **Armavir** – Armavir, in the north of Poitain is ruled over by the fat Baron Justin and is another farming province.

The Tauran - This province in northwest Aquilonia is a land of open groves and sun-dappled meadows dotted with forests. Although not a border province, the people of the Tauran feel they are as important to the defence of Aquilonia as any of the frontier provinces. They consider themselves superior woodsmen, but are viewed by the Bossonians as 'ox-eyed yokels' who mean well, but are lacking in serious woodcraft. The Tauran is famed for its hunting, and the deer and panther native to this region are favoured targets. This is a civilised realm, yet the posturing of its people as some sort of frontiersmen give a rustic flavour that is quite charming. Homes in this province are thatched cottages with glazed windows. The economy is agricultural, based on its extensive fruit groves and the herding of domesticated farm animals in its beautiful pastures.

Thune – Thune is a county of Aquilonia, ruled over by a count. Its former lord, Count Ascalante of Thune was the leader of an unsuccessful assassination attempt against King Conan.

Torh – A barony of Aquilonia. The overlord of Conawaga, Baron Brocas, governed here during the civil war that led to Conan becoming king. Baron Brocas supported King Numedides.

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



These barons [of the Westermarck] were accountable only to the king of Aquilonia. Theoretically they owned the land and received a certain percentage of the gain. In return they supplied troops to protect the frontier against the Picts, built fortresses and towns, and appointed judges and other officials. Actually, their power was not nearly so absolute as it seemed.

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

- † **Oriskonie:** The northernmost province, ruled by a royal patent under the jurisdiction of a baron of the western marches. This is the least populated province of Westermarck. This province, during the civil war that put Conan in power, supported Conan, driving out the baron-appointed governor and savagely fighting those loyal to King Numedides.
- † **Conawaga:** Located between Oriskonie and Schohira, Conawaga is ruled by a royal patent under the jurisdiction of a baron of the western marches. Conawaga is the largest, richest and most thickly settled province of the Westermarck. This is the only province of the Westermarck where landed gentry have settled in any substantial amount. Baron Brocas of Torh ruled Conawaga during the rebellion, and forced the province to support Numedides.
 - ⊙ **Scandaga:** The capital of Conawaga.
- † **Schohira:** The smallest province, just north of Thandara, ruled by a royal patent under the jurisdiction of a baron of the western marches. This barony also supported Conan during the civil war. It is governed by Baron Thasperas.
 - ⊙ **Thenitea:** This is a village on Ogaha Creek, and is the rallying point of the army of Schohira.
 - ⊙ **Coyaga:** The landholders of Schohira dwell in this provincial town. It lies ten miles beyond Ogaha Creek.
- † **Thandara:** The southernmost province and 'the most purely pioneer province' (Howard, *Notes on the Various Peoples of the Hyborian Age*). This province is ruled by an elected military commander. Originally, this province was nothing of the sort. It was a fortress by the name of Thandara on Warhorse River. Built on the order of Aquilonia's king and manned by royal troops, it found itself swamped with settlers when Conajohara fell to the

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

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

RELIGION IN AQUILONIA

The Aquilonians worship Mitra, the 'universal god of the Hyborians'. The Aquilonians are fervent in their devotion to Mitra and the Mitran priests completely dominate religious life in Aquilonia despite King Conan's refusal to persecute foreign religions. He is regarded as the one true god, standing in the universe with no pantheon nor even a consort to support his cosmic reign. He does command a heavenly host, many of which are saints in Mitran theology.

'Plain and unadorned in comparison to the lavish display of Ishtar's shrines, there was about it a simplicity of dignity and beauty characteristic of the Mitran religion.'

'The ceiling was lofty, but it was not domed and was of plain white marble, as were the walls and floor, the former with a narrow gold frieze running about them. Behind an altar of clear green jade, unstained with sacrifice, stood the pedestal whereon sat the material manifestation of the deity. Yasmela looked in awe at the sweep of the magnificent shoulders, the clear cut features - the wide straight eyes, the patriarchal beard, the thick curls of his hair, confined by a simple band about the temples. This, though she did not know it, was art in its highest form - the free, uncramped artistic expression of a highly aesthetic race, unhampered by conventional symbolism.'

R. E. Howard, 'Black Colossus'

The religion of Mitra has a heaven and a hell, judging again from exclamations from Mitra's followers in the Canon, which implies a concept of Judgement. His followers are suspicious and intolerant of other cults, although certain cults raise their ire more than others. Most hated above all cults are the cults of Set and his entire pantheon, hard followed in distaste by the Pictish gods.

'[Gunderland's] ways were ruder and more primitively Hyborian than those of the Aquilonians, and their main concession to the ways of their more civilized southern neighbors 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.'

R. E. Howard, 'Notes on the Various Peoples of the Hyborian Age'

In addition to their intolerance toward foreign religions, the Mitran religion frowns upon ostentatious religious displays, and their temples idealise this thought 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 doesn't sacrifice humans nor animals to their omnipresent deity. A single dignified statue is likewise permitted, but is not worshipped. Any statues of Mitra are considered attempts by the faithful to visualise Mitra in an idealised form, for his true form was unknowable.

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

Despite the oppressiveness of the Mitran religion, a few small cults exist in Aquilonia. The Vendhyan god, Asura, has a small following, although few, if any, native Aquilonians worship this feared religion. The Gundermen originally worshipped Bori, a primitive god from their early polytheistic Hyborian origins and small cults of that ancient god still exist, for the Gundermen returned to worshipping this ancient god after Aquilonia fell. During King Conan's reign, religious tolerance was mandated.

AQUILONIAN HISTORY

*I climbed out of
the abyss of naked
barbarism to the throne.
and in that climb I spilt
my blood as freely as I
spilt that of others.*

*R. E. Howard. The
Scarlet Citadel*

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

Although even less is known about the fall of Acheron, according to Xaltotun the fall was precipitated by the theft of the Heart of Ahriman and a feathered barbarian shaman used its power to defeat the priests of Set. After the fall, the Hyborian tribes founded Aquilonia and Nemedica on Acheron's ruins.

*Ages ago Set coiled about
the world like a python about
its prey. All my life, which is
as the lives of three common men.
I fought him. I drove him into the
shadows of the mysterious south, but in
dark Stygia men still worship him who
to us is the arch-demon.*

*R. E. Howard. The Phoenix on the
Sword*

From its original capital of Tamar, Aquilonia expanded violently, eventually extending to Gunderland, Poitain, Nemedica and the non-Hyborian realm of Bossonia.

Nearly a thousand years after its founding, Aquilonia absorbed Gunderland and

Bossonia and divided its territories up as fiefs for Aquilonian barons.

*Their present king is the
most renowned warrior
among the western nations.
He is an outlander, an
adventurer who seized the
crown by force during a time
of civil strife, strangling King
Numedides with his own hands, upon
the very throne. His name is Conan,
and no man can stand before him in
battle.*

R. E. Howard. Hour of the Dragon

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

Six hundred years later finds Epeus the Sword-wielder king of Aquilonia, according to Howard's *Drums of Tombalku*. He battled the Nemedians when King Bragorus of that realm invaded. Sometime during the next four centuries the capital of Aquilonia was moved to the religious center of Tarantia during a period of intense fighting with the kingdom of Poitain.

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

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

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

During most of Conan's adventuring life, King Vilerus ruled Aquilonia. King Vilerus had dreams of imperial conquest, desiring to rule by might and fear. Not learning from history, Vilerus declared the Pictish lands between the Thunder and Black Rivers to be a new Aquilonian province, the Westermarck, believing

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Although Conan is a strong despot, his rule is not without contention. The commoners are loyal to him, for he has lightened their taxes and protects them from the excesses of their lords. The frontier lands, especially the Westermarck, and Poitain are also devoted to Conan. It was they who supported Conan during the civil war. However, many of the older provinces of Aquilonia are not as pleased. He has reduced their tax revenues and curtailed their ways in regard to the treatment of the common people. Conan, to these barons, is a savage usurper who must be brought down. Campaigns of imperial intrigue as these barons fight not only amongst themselves for power, but also against King Conan would make for an impressive campaign or story backdrop. Many of these nobles know that Nemedria might commit troops to help support a royal coup and a restoration of the old dynasty.

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

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

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

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

Conan was about forty when he seized the crown of Aquilonia, and was about forty-four or forty-five at the time of 'The Hour of the Dragon'. He had no male heir at that time, because he had never bothered to formally make some woman his queen, and the sons of concubines, of which he had a goodly number, were not recognized as heirs to the throne.

He was, I think, king of Aquilonia for many years, in a turbulent and unquiet reign, when the Hyborian civilization had reached its most magnificent high-tide, and every king had imperial ambitions. At first he fought on the defensive, but I am of the opinion that at last he was forced into wars of aggression as a matter of self-preservation. Whether he succeeded in conquering a world-wide empire, or perished in the attempt, I do not know.

R. E. Howard, Letter to P. S. Smith

the disjointed and discordant Picts would never unite to stand against this colonization effort. Shortly after he divided the new Pictish land up among some of his favoured vassals, he died and was replaced by his nephew, Numedides, who continued where Vilerus left off, pushing even further. This effort also failed when the Picts fought back as an allied force under the wizard Zogar Sag. The grim assault on Fort Tuscelan in Conajohara by the Picts left only one survivor. Even though Conan, a mercenary at the time, was able to lead Aquilonia into stopping the Pictish Invasion, the Aquilonians lost the new province of Conajohara.

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

A plot to kill King Conan arose a year later and might have succeeded if not for the magic of Thoth-Amon, whose summoned demon killed the leader of the rebels before he could score a deadly blow to the wounded king, and the intervention of the sage Epimitreus, whose magic sigil saved Conan from the same monster. Later events saw Conan embroiled in a fight for his life against the plans of the kings of Ophir and Koth, removing another pretender to the throne before finally knowing two years of peace, ruling with a firm but tolerant hand.

...many of the barons would secretly hail the overthrow of Conan, who is a nobody without royal or even noble blood.

R. E. Howard, The Hour of the Dragon

ARGOS

The Maritime Kingdom

ARGOS IS ONE of the Hyborean kingdoms that rose out of the ashes of Acheron when it fell three thousand years ago. Situated on a coastline with natural seaports, unlike Shem, the people of Argos have become master sailors, crafty pirates and powerful merchants. Argos is a smaller nation with a population just over seven million people. Sixteen cities glitter along the beautiful coast of Argos. Messantia, the capitol, is a metropolis with over 35,000 inhabitants. Most of the inland residents live in towns and villages. Short and stocky, the Argosseans share traits with Zingarans and Shemites, with whom the original Hyborean inhabitants have spent centuries marrying and breeding with.

Argos was at peace. laden ox-wains rumbled along the road, and men with bare, brown, brawny arms toiled in orchards and fields that smiled away under the branches of the roadside trees. Old men on settles before inns under spreading oak branches called greetings to the wayfarer.

...all the sea ports of Argos were cosmopolitan, and Messantia was the most polyglot of all. Craft of all the maritime nations rode in its harbor, and refugees and fugitives from many lands gathered there. It was not only legitimate trade that flowed into Messantia; smugglers and buccaneers played their part.

R. E. Howard, The Hour of the Dragon

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

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

Argos is a feudal kingdom, ruled by King Milos (see sidebar), split into fiefdoms. Despite its feudal governance, the majority of the wealth is not owned by its barons but instead is held in the hands of the merchant Houses who are the true power behind the barons, many of whom hail from within these Houses. Beneath the king, the counts, and barons and the Houses are the military officers; as ship captains and generals of armies, these individuals also hold great status in Argos. At the bottom of the social ladder in Argos are the slaves. The strongest and most spirited slaves fought as gladiators for the pleasure of the Argosseans. Juma the Kushite won his freedom in an important gladiatorial show – great shows of prowess and skill can win a gladiator his freedom. Argos raids for slaves along the coasts of Kush and the Black Kingdoms, though many rich merchants also hold more educated peoples as slaves in their businesses. Despite the stratification of its society along the lines of wealth, Argos is relatively stable, having little civil unrest.

Note on the King of Argos: If the campaign is set after the events of de Camp's 'Black Sphinx of Nebthu, then prince Ariostro, Milo's second son, is king. Zingaran forces killed Milo and his elder son and captured the western provinces of Argos.

Argos is more stable politically than most of the Hyborean realms. Aquilonia seems to be constantly rebelling and fighting, with provinces ceding and being reacquired. Robert E. Howard describes Messantia as being without wall, utilising the sea for defence. This indicates Messantia did not fear military action from neighbouring provinces and fiefs – its only fear was from a naval assault. Presumably if a foreign army had reached Messantia via an overland route, then Argos would already have been effectively conquered. The fighting between the various Houses, nobles and lords were largely economic and political battles and rarely involved military actions.

The various fief-holders beneath King Milos administer their own estates and exercise their own justice. Most of them mint their own money, levy whatever taxes and tolls they want, and field armies. Although each has pledged fealty to King Milos, these individual lords are supreme within their territory. Not even an emissary from the king would dare to interfere with a ship captain on his own ship.

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

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

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

Day by day the blue waters rolled empty to their view, broken only by fishing craft which fled like frightened birds ahead of them, at the sight of the shields hung along the rail. The season for trading was practically over for the year, and they sighted no other craft.

R. E. Howard, The Hour of the Dragon

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

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

Messantia and the other ports in Argos historically held a lax attitude to shipping laws. They made their money off of sea trade and illegitimate trade was profitable. The Barachan pirates, mostly Argosians, have a safe harbour in Messantia, so leave most Argosian shipping alone for that reason. However, Black Corsairs and any that associate with them are summarily hung if caught by the Hyborians. The Corsairs burned and destroyed anything they did not want, taking anything they desire without remorse or care and they do not, in general, trade. The Corsairs and their

activities are not appreciated by the Argosians; they rather fear the Black Corsairs, including the legends of Amra, the bloodiest and most horrible of the Corsairs ever to sail the ocean. Conan (Amra himself) did manage to find a fence in Messantia, but he was a rare exception. Few merchants will risk their necks to fence goods from the Black Corsairs, for the laws are not lax in that regard.

There's nothing we can't conquer. We'll have our feet on a ship's deck before the Stygians open their ports for the trading season. And then we'll show the world what plundering means!

R. E. Howard, Red Nails

Laws in Argos do exist, however. Black Corsairs and those that traffic with them are hung, the guards are charged with keeping the peace and those called to court cannot refuse to testify when charged to do so. The courts of Argos favour the rich and are regarded as venal and corrupt by many more law-abiding nations.

Argos and Stygia wax and wane in their relations as each would be the rulers of the sea-lanes. Largely this is a cold war, a maintenance of a status quo among the two kings of the sea. Battles are usually small-scale and profitable, primarily being various acts of piracy, hijacking or smuggling. While Argos has successfully crushed the Stygian fleet in the past, it has not gone on to attempt any land invasion, afraid that Stygia's Kushite trade might be diverted overland.

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF ARGOS

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

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

Alimane River – This important trade river merges with the Khorotas shortly after it enters Argos. The Alimane has many fords so it is not navigable for most of its reaches, although trade routes lie alongside the river.

One such ford is the Nogara which lies near the Saxula Pass of the Rabirian Mountains and is one of three fords that lead from Argos to Aquilonia.

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

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

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

Rabirian Mountains – This mountain range in northern Argos forms a border between Argos and Zingara. It is also the location of the Cave of Zimgas, where, according to *Conan the Guardian* by Roland Green, a being known as a 'watcher' lived. These serrated peaks have forested crests and is broken by the Saxula pass, 'a deep cleft in the central ridge, as if made by a blow from an axe in the hands of an angry god' (L. Sprague de Camp, *Conan the Liberator*). The pass is near the Alimane River. The foothills of the Rabirian Mountains are rocky and are the home of several villages, such as Stag's Leap. These mountains are full of precious ores and are extensively mined.

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

IMPORTANT ARGOSSEAN CITIES

Messantia – Messantia is the capital city of Argos and is Argos' richest sea-port. It lies at the mouth of the Khorotas River and has no walls, relying on the sea and its navy to protect it. The city serves as a trading center as well as a shipyard for much of the Hyborian world. The city's laws are designed to protect the rich and those employed by the city (such as city guards) and those laws are often over-looked in regards to sea-rovers, especially the Barachan pirates.

The city has an estimated population of 35,400 people, which fluctuates during the year. Its population reaches its peak during the trading season. Here also resides King Milo of Argos and his court. Messantia is also an anchoring end of the Road of Kings and the beginning of many caravan routes into the interior nations. The main road to Tarantia first winds through the Argossean kingdom, then moves along the eastern border of Poitain. Another route to Tarantia went northwest into the ghoulish forests of Zingara, then along the Zingaran shore of the Alimane.



Athos – Athos is mentioned as an upland Argossean city, located on the plains of Meru, whose citizens are said to be fat, richly garbed and cruel as fiends. It is a decadent city where pleasure is foremost on the minds of its citizens. Athos was once ruled by a queen and is still resplendent in its fabulous wealth. The turrets and towers of the city are made of ivory and many of its domes are gilded in gold. Its population wears jewels from Khitai and its streets are perfumed with oils from Vendhya to provide visual and olfactory pleasures to those that wander the city. It has enslaved its sister city across the river, Zotoz. The people worship the goddess Gita, an insect goddess. Red Sonja slew Queen Sortilej, a priestess of Gita. Likely another ruler was appointed by King Milo from the same House. Every year Athos sponsors a sporting event called the Games of Gita. During the time of Queen Sortilej these games were fixed, however the games are fair now.

Napolitos – This powerful city is situated at the mouth of the Thunder River. Koth once attempted an invasion of Argos using this harbour as its main thrust.

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

Venzia – Venzia is a seaport that has canals. The avarice of its merchants puts gods of greed to shame. Red Sonja once was attacked en route to this city by the Sons of Set. She was riding there from Zingara, so I presume it was near the border of that nation.

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

RELIGION IN ARGOS

Argos is an Hyborian kingdom and they worship Mitra primarily. Argos is a bit more than a mere Hyborian nation, though. Argos is a trading nation and the people from many nations come here, live here, work here and worship here. This has bred a certain amount of tolerance for foreign gods, particularly Shemite and Kothic gods. Many Argossean freebooters and fences, especially, hold Bel in high regard.

Mitra is regarded as the one true god to those that worship him in Argos, a commander of a heavenly host, standing in the universe with no pantheon nor even a consort to support his cosmic reign. The Argosseans also acknowledge a host of Mitran saints, as do the Aquilonians. The religion of Mitra has a heaven and a hell, judging again from exclamations from Mitra's followers in the Canon, which implies a concept of Judgement. Unlike Aquilonia, however, his Argossean followers are apt to tolerate other cults, although the worship of Set is still viewed with extreme suspicion and anger.

'Mitra of the Hyborians must be a strong god, because his people have builded their cities over the world.'

R. E. Howard. The Queen of the Black Coast

Even in Argos the Mitran religion refrains from ostentatious religious displays and their temples utilise 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 doesn't sacrifice humans nor animals to their omnipresent deity. A single dignified statue is likewise permitted, but is not worshipped. Any statues of Mitra are considered attempts by the faithful to visualize Mitra in an idealized form, for his true form is unknowable.

Another god found in Argos, particularly among the privateers, freebooters and fences, is Bel, a god of thieves imported from the Shemite pantheon. Bel is described as both lusty and clever, as befitting a god of thieves.

REGIONAL HISTORY

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

Thus it was that 3,000 years ago Argos was part of Acheron. When Acheron fell, the lands known now as Argos were claimed by the invading Hyborians. The Sons of Shem and the Hyborians fought for the lands, but ultimately the Hyborians, sweeping down

from Poitain, won. Argos was the last of the pieces of Acheron to reorganise into a Hyborian nation, following Nemedias and Aquilonia. Its location on the ocean was its source of wealth and power and it became the maritime capital of the Hyborian Age, renowned for its ships and sailors.

'There is a strong Shemitish, even a Stygian strain among the peoples of Koth, and to a lesser extent, of Argos, while in the case of the latter, admixture with the Zingarans has been more extensive than with the Shemites.'

R. E. Howard. The Hyborian Age

Although technically a feudal government ruled by a king, it is the merchant Houses that hold the wealth of the kingdom, thus it is the merchant Houses that hold the power.

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

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

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

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

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

All sorts of islands exist along the coasts of Argos, Zingara, Shem and the Black Coast. Argos could try to colonise some of them and build harbour towns so some minor maritime state doesn't start taking some of its sea traffic, or Argos could just send ships to root out pirates hiding among those islands.

BORDER KINGDOM

The Haunted Land

THE BORDER KINGDOM serves as a safeguard between Brythunia and Nemedra and the savage tribes of the north, home of exiled nobles and rebel heirs of the greater Hyborian kingdoms, it is a wild and desolate land much liked by those feeling justice abroad.

The land was called the Border Kingdom. It was a dreary waste of desolate, empty moors which swept off to the dim horizon. Here and there gnarled and stunted trees grew sparsely. Waterbirds rose flapping from misty bogs. A cold, uneasy wind whined through rattling reeds with a lonely song.

L. Sprague de Camp, The Witch of the Mists

It is a kingdom without a unifying king, ruled by barons who do as they wish. These barons are often exiled or rogue nobles from the other Hyborian nations and bring with them the customs and habits of their own lands. While much of the land is inhospitable, fit for raising goats or sheep, some areas permit subsistence farming. Most of the larger towns exist on the trade routes, where robber barons earn a living from extorting revenue from the traders that pass through in exchange for safe passage, although some desperate barons will loot the caravans regardless. The merchants put up with this because the extortion and bribery is still less than the tariffs and taxes of Nemedra.

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

Criminals of all sorts often find refuge here and have hidden

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

Youths in the villages and itinerant homes across the Border Kingdom flock to the towns for romance and excitement, creating a bustling environment in most of the towns. Although most of these towns are dirt poor, they do sport pubs and other forms of public entertainment for the caravans.

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

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF THE BORDER KINGDOM

The Border Kingdom is a wasteland of moors and, toward the edges, sparse forests. The land is rocky and unwelcoming. Stories tell of areas blasted by historic meteorites that leave everlasting damage and of areas haunted by cannibal natives degenerated from inbred groups of lost renegades.

The climate is wet and cold, often said to have incessant rain by those who know it through tavern tales.

Eiglophian Mountains – An incredible mountain range that separates Vanaheim, Asgard and Hyperborea from the southern kingdoms. Passes through this impressive range of rock and ice are usually blocked during the winter by weather conditions but otherwise afford traffic between the frozen north



and the warm south. A small portion of this cold range passes through the northern reaches of the Border Kingdom. A tribe of Hyperboreans called the Verunians live in these mountains, fighting off attacks from cannibal pithecanthropoids who also live in the higher peaks of the range.

† **Snow Devil Glacier (The River of Death Ice)** – This is a titanic Eiglophian glacier that flows along the borders of Hyperborea, the Border Kingdom and Asgard. It is also known as the River of Death Ice. It can be seen easily from the top of a nameless pass that leads southward into the Border Kingdom from Asgard. This pass moves along the fringes of this glacier and is dangerous because of hidden crevasses, thin snow bridges and sudden avalanches. Small, gnarled trees litter the rocky slopes of the pass, living on the water and soil brought by the glacier. This glacier is a place of fear among the people who live in the north, even among those who had likely never seen it. Of course, it was not uncommon for entire parties of men to perish on the dangerous glacier. The glacier is home to the vampire ice worm of the north, variously called the Remora or *yakhmar*, as well as tribes of hairy humanoids who are a few steps back on the evolutionary ladder.

Great Salt Marsh – This dreary basin may be the remnant of a great, inland sea created by the Cataclysm. Few venture into the actual marsh, preferring the treacherous, but decidedly safer, outskirts. The edges of the marsh are swamps and bogs of cold, black water and scrubby patches of bracken cut by meandering streamlets and dotted by hummocks of dry grass. The area is dominated by hazes and fogs generated by the bogs and swamps.

The area is largely treeless and many of the hummocks are not sound. The gloomy land is thick with swooping bats, wild dogs, croaking frogs and dangerous vipers. Degenerate beast-men live among the swamps and bogs, descended from generations of run-away slaves and escaped criminals. If a traveller continues moving northeast through here, he will encounter rising hills and Skull Gate, the entrance into Hyperborea.

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

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

This was the 'Border Kingdom, an area bordered by 'Nemedia, 'Brythunia, Hyperborea, and Cimmeria, with a finger of land thrust into Gunderland and the 'Bossonian Marches. It was a land too diffuse and primitive for the strong kingship of the south, and although it was termed a kingdom, it could seldom be determined just who was the king of the place. Frequently there were several claimants to the title, leading to inevitable warfare. The eastern sector through which he now rode was the domain of petty chieftains and he hoped to avoid their squabbles if he could.

John Maddox Roberts, Conan the Valorous

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



CITIES AND PROVINCES IN THE BORDER KINGDOM

Although the Border Kingdom appears virtually uninhabited, it is not as barren as first it appears. Well-worn foot trails crisscross the nation, although a traveller may not ever see those who tread upon those trails. Small villages and hamlets can also be found, as well as the castles of the 'barons' – those hardy villains who did not gain their barony from the contract of a king, but from their force of arms and ability to dominate the lands and those that live off of those lands. There are nearly a thousand villages of small size, none of more than five hundred inhabitants, with nine larger towns holding the bulk of the urban populace, Cragfell being the largest of them. Trade routes exist, run by merchants seeking to avoid heavy Nemedian taxes and tariffs. The robber barons and trade towns of the Border Kingdom have their own tolls, but most merchants find them lighter and easier to bear than the Nemedians and their weighty demands.

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

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

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

Cragfell – A western Border Kingdom province characterised by helmets with bull's horns and shields decorated with the head of a bull. Its people are horsemen armoured in cuirasses of mail or scale. The people of Cragfell are fair-haired and blue-eyed, cousins to the Gundermen. They carry a standard decorated with a bull's skull and bull tails. The people of Cragfell have names similar to the Gundermen, such as Aelfrith, a chieftainess of Cragfell. Cragfell is a village built on a crag, surrounded by a crude wall of piled stones. The road up the low mountain circles Cragfell so that travellers must keep their unshielded side toward the wall, where the blue-eyed guards watched with bows and spears. At the center of the fort is a long, elaborately decorated timber hall. Cragfell is a wooded land where pigs are raised and crops are grown and is a land where even the commoners have at least a spear handy, if

not a hunting bow. The boys often work as servants in the keep for the cavalry and even the women can be warriors and leaders here. The people of Cragfell have adopted several Nordheimer practices, such as steam saunas. Each autumn they celebrate the Great Festival where the King Bull, their most sacred symbol, is honoured. This festival is a peaceful gathering where any may attend, regardless of race or creed. Cragfell lies to the south of Atzel. The main villages of Cragfell has a population of 4,430 people.

D'eim – This is a large town dedicated to Mitra. At one time, a tower was built here, supposedly dedicated to Mitra, but truthfully dedicated to Set. With the aid of Conan, the townspeople pulled the tower down and buried many of Set's demons and secrets in the rubble. D'eim sits on a plain in the foothills near Cimmeria and has a population of 6,012 people.

Eridu – Eridu is a city in the eastern portion of the foothills of the Border Kingdom just beyond the mountain ranges of southeastern Cimmeria. Eridu is not in the Haunted Lands and is to the west of the Great Salt Marsh. Yet another sub-human race dwells in the rocky badlands of this region that are not Yemli nor Beast-Man, a race controlled by the men of Eridu. The city itself is located in a surprisingly fertile, steep-walled valley around a central lake. In the center of the lake is an island. Eridu was once a city in Brythunia. Defeated many generations past, its people fled into the Border Kingdom with their most sacred relic, a great golden rune gong. They encountered the sub-humanoids of the area and enslaved them. The city was ruled by a cruel high priest of Moloq, but the coming of Conan changed this. The people of this city had cut out the tongues of their sub-humanoid slaves, so the older generation of sub-humanoids are silent, though their children still have their voices. The city is now ruled by Queen Naluna.

Kaddonia – A province bordering Phalkar.

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

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

† **Alkarion** – the capital of Phalkar. It is ruled by Stefanya, the daughter of Thormond and Chrysala. She was placed on the throne by Conan and would support him and any of his causes if the need arose. Alkarion has a population of 18,239 people.

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

Ravengard – Baron Torkal Moh, who rules Ravengard, sends forth armed men to force 'tribute' from wayfarers and caravans passing through his barony. A common punishment in Ravengard is to tie criminals to four stakes in the hot sun. Ravengard is infested with rats and eventually they come out to eat the condemned man while he lies screaming. One road leads to the castle of Ravengard where the walls are at least 18 feet tall (6 meters). The courtyard of Ravengard sports a horrible garden of twisted plants that eat flesh and a certain deep pool.

Sfanol – This is a village like many others in the Border Kingdom. Sfanol sits on a caravan route between Brythunia and Aquilonia, hoping to serve the merchants who travel those otherwise desolate routes to avoid paying Nemedian tolls. Conan rescued a woman about to be burned at the stake for witchcraft, while passing through en route to the province of Phalkar. Sfanol's main social hub is its tavern named 'The Tavern of the Ringing Bell.'

Syternia – This is a market town located near the Cimmerian border ruled by a baron who often rides out in the town to find girls to spend the evening with. Syternia has a population of 3,645 people.

Tarsus – For years Tarsus had never known war or famine and revelled in peace and prosperity, until the king died, leaving his daughter Narcia in a power struggle with the more popular Castrica. The city was soon left without king, queen, princess or wizard, and was looted by Conan and his mercenaries. A castle once stood high in the hills outside of Tarsus, the last refuge of the king in the event of a revolution, but now a gaping hole marks the spot. The location is considered cursed and haunted still by the people of Tarsus.

RELIGION IN THE BORDER KINGDOM

The Border Kingdom is a Hyborian nation and largely worships Mitra, the 'universal god of the Hyborians'. He is regarded as the one true god by those who worship him, the commander of the heavenly host and the saints.

The Hyborians do not sacrifice humans to their god, Mitra...

R. E. Howard. The Slithering Shadow

The religion of Mitra has a heaven and a hell. His followers are suspicious and intolerant of other cults, although the cult hasn't the power in the Border Kingdom to do much about the various cults and religions that persist in the secret places of the baronies and provinces.

Even in the Border Kingdom, the Mitran religion frowns upon ostentatious religious displays, and their temples here continue to use relatively symbol-free architecture. Mitra's temples are stately, artistic and beautiful despite their relative plainness compared to other temples. The altar is a symbolic gesture at best, for the Mitran religion doesn't sacrifice humans nor animals to their omnipresent deity. A single dignified statue is likewise permitted, but is not worshipped. Any statues of Mitra are considered attempts by the faithful to visualise Mitra in an idealised form, for his true form was unknowable.

The rise of this kingdom drove forth many other tribes for, defeated in war, or refusing to become tributary to their castle-dwelling kinsmen, many clans set forth on long treks that took them halfway around the world. And already the more northern tribes are beginning to be harried by gigantic blond savages, not much more advanced than ape-men.

The blond savages of the far north have grown in power and numbers so that the northern Hyborian tribes move southward, driving their kindred before them... Five hundred years later the kingdoms of the world are clearly defined. The kingdoms of the Hyborians, Aquilonia, Nemedia, Brythunia, Hyperborea, Koth, Ophir, Argos, Corinthia, and one known as the 'Border Kingdom' - dominate the western world.

R. E. Howard. The Hyborian Age

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

Ishiti – A snake goddess of Set. She is a demon that variously appears as a woman who is snake-like from the waist down or as a medusa who is snake-like from the neck down. She appears to govern time, serpents and snake-men. In one story, her breath could change a man from human to snake-man. She is worshiped by scholars of the region, but not in any sort of public manner.

Ymir – The frost giant Ymir is also worshipped, especially in the areas bordering on Asgard.

King Bull – The people of western Border Kingdom pay homage to King Bull and hold a festival in his honour every autumn where any may attend in peace. A certain ritual is performed on the second night of the festival by highborn women in

the nude and any man who witnesses this ritual is summarily executed. The King Bull is a flesh-and-blood bull that the people believe is possessed by a divine spirit. When the current King Bull grows old, if it has not already been slain by a younger bull, it is killed during the Festival and another chosen.

LOCAL HISTORY

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

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

LOCAL CREATURES

BEAST-MEN

Medium Humanoid

Hit Dice: 1d8+1 (5 hp)

Initiative: +2 (+1 Dex, +1 Ref)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 12 (+1 Dex, +1 natural)

DR: 1

Base Attack/Grapple: +0/+2

Attack: Club +3 melee (1d8+2/x2)

Full Attack: Club +3 melee (1d8+2/x2)

Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1)

Special Attacks: Improved grab

Saves: Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +1

Abilities: Str 15, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 7, Wis 12, Cha 8

Skills: Hide +2, Move Silently +2, Spot +2, Survival +2

Feats: Alertness

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

Organisation: Solitary, patrol (2-4) or horde (5-20).

Advancement: By character class (favoured class: barbarian)

These are wild, feral natives that live in the swamps and fens around the Great Salt Marsh. They live on crayfish, wild dogs, bats, frogs and any human prey they can find. They

Twilight came, plunging the bogland in gloom. The gray stallion shied nervously, as his hooves came out of the sucking mud with a smacking sound. Bats swooped and chattered in the dusk. A mottled, clay-coloured viper, thick as a man's arm, slithered noiselessly over a mold-covered log.

* * *

Suddenly the muddy heather was alive with men. They were filthy, gaunt, and naked save for twists of greasy rag about their loins. Long, matted hair lay in a tangle about their snarling faces.

L. Sprague de Camp. The Witch of the Mists

wield the most primitive of weapons. Their eyes glitter with a feral light and their hands have long fingernails that serve as primitive talons. A beast-man usually will not single-handedly attack a foe. They fight in hordes whenever possible.

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

Improved Grab (Ex): If a creature with this special attack hits with a melee weapon (usually a claw or bite attack), it deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. No initial touch attack is required. The beast men can use this ability to grapple opponents of the same size. The beast man has the option to conduct the grapple normally, or simply use the part of its body it used in the improved grab to hold the opponent. If it chooses to do the latter, it takes a -20 penalty on grapple checks, but is not considered grappled itself; the beast-man does not lose its Dexterity bonus to DV, still threatens an area, and can use its remaining attacks against other opponents. A successful hold does not deal any extra damage. When a beast-man gets a hold after an improved grab attack, it pulls the opponent into its space. This act does not provoke attacks of opportunity. It can even move (possibly carrying away the opponent), provided it can drag the opponent's weight.

HALF-MEN OF ERIDU

Medium Monstrous Humanoid

Hit Dice: 2d8+2 (11 hp)

Initiative: +0

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 11 (+1 natural)

DR: 1

Base Attack/Grapple: +2/+4

Attack: Claw +3 melee (1d4+2/x2) or bite +1 melee (1d6+1)

Full Attack: 2 Claws +3 melee (1d4+2/x2) and bite +1 melee (1d6+1)

Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1)

Special Attacks: Improved grab

Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft.

Saves: Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +3

Abilities: Str 15, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 9, Wis 10, Cha 8

Skills: Listen +1, Spot +2, Survival +2

Feats: Multiattack

Climate/Terrain: Eridu and the surrounding crags

Organisation: Solitary, patrol (2-4) or horde (5-20).

Advancement: By character class (favoured class: barbarian)

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

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

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

They fight with tooth and nail, trying to overwhelm their foes with sheer numbers, surrounding and grappling their enemies.

Improved Grab (Ex): If a creature with this special attack hits with a melee weapon (usually a claw or bite attack), it deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. No

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

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

'Roy Thomas, 'The Voice of Moloq'. Conan the Barbarian Vol. 1. No. 263. Dec. 1992'

initial touch attack is required. The beast men can use this ability to grapple opponents of the same size. The half-man has the option to conduct the grapple normally, or simply use the part of its body it used in the improved grab to hold the opponent. If it chooses to do the latter, it takes a -20 penalty on grapple checks, but is not considered grappled itself; the half-man does not lose its Dexterity bonus to DV, still threatens an area, and can use its remaining attacks against other opponents. A successful hold does not deal any extra damage. When a half-man gets a hold after an improved grab attack, it pulls the opponent into its space. This act does not provoke attacks of opportunity. It can even move (possibly carrying away the opponent), provided it can drag the opponent's weight.

YEMLI

Medium Monstrous Humanoid

Hit Dice: 5d8+10 (28 hp)

Initiative: +10 (+3 Dex, +7 Ref)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 20 (+3 Dex, +2 natural, +5 dodge bonus)

DR: 2

Base Attack/Grapple: +5/+9

Attack: Claw +9 melee (1d4+4)

Full Attack: 2 Claws +9 melee (1d4+4) and bite +7 melee (1d6+2)

Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1)

Special Attacks: Improved grab

Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft., scent

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

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

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

Feats: Multiattack, Track

Climate/Terrain: The Haunted Lands

Organization: Solitary, patrol (2-4) or horde (5-20).

Advancement: By character class (favoured class: barbarian)

Grey horse, grim rider: 'Both meld together to form a mere speck on the vast, desolate wasteland which makes up so much of the 'Border Kingdom. And both shiver from time in silent horror of the shadowy shapes which creep and crawl along behind them. Shapes which are not quite human...

These are the 'Yemli... those twisted crimson-eyed demons who are feared even by the fierce northern nomads who sometimes ride this way to raid 'Nemedía to the south. 'Brythunia to the east. 'Bleached skeletons of men and animals tell of other men at other times who likewise travelled this trackless path... and of what befell them. Conan knows why this is called... the Haunted Land.

'Roy Thomas. 'The Curse of the Conjuror'. Conan the Barbarian Vol. 1. No. 46. Jan. 1974

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

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

Improved Grab (Ex): If a creature with this special attack hits with a melee weapon (usually a claw or bite attack), it deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. No initial touch attack is required. The yemli can use this ability to grapple opponents of the same size. The yemli has the option to conduct the grapple normally, or simply use the part of its body it used in the improved grab to hold the opponent. If it chooses to do the latter, it takes a -20 penalty on grapple checks, but is not considered grappled itself; the yemli does not lose its Dexterity bonus to DV, still threatens an area, and can

use its remaining attacks against other opponents. A successful hold does not deal any extra damage. When a yemli gets a hold after an improved grab attack, it pulls the opponent into its space. This act does not provoke attacks of opportunity. It can even move (possibly carrying away the opponent), provided it can drag the opponent's weight.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

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

The Border Kingdom, with its inbred, degenerate families of criminals, is the perfect setting for something Lovecraftian. Although all of the Hyborian Age kingdoms excel in the potential for horror, the Border Kingdom is strange and twisted in a manner few other places can equal. The desolate landscape is not as barren of life as one might think, with bizarre, frightening things haunting the moors and scraggly forests. One night a traveller could encounter a den of Zamoran kidnappers hiding out with their victim, waiting for ransom, the next the sub-humanoid remnants of some immoral family that has lived in the same hovel for the past forty generations. Cannibalism, necrophilia and demon-worship seem to abound in the Border Kingdom. Other journeys through the Border Kingdom might be completely devoid of encounters save the bleak landscapes. Robber barons and insane lords rule here and their laws are without constraint.

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

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

BRYTHUNIA

The Pastoral Kingdom

BRYTHUNIA IS A large agricultural realm of herders and beautiful blonde women. Brythunia's population of over twenty million is almost entirely found within the villages and hamlets that predominate its rural countryside.

While Aquilonia and Nemedra are firmly entrenched in the feudal system, Brythunia's government is less certain. Brythunia is a kingdom without a sense of itself, a kingdom without a supreme feudal king or, rather, a kingdom with far too many 'supreme' kings. Each city-state fancies its capital as THE capital of Brythunia and each king styles himself the King of Brythunia. Brythunia has its Gryphon Thrones, Ebon Thrones and several others to be sure.

A pastoral kingdom of callused herders, sun-bronzed farmers and wilderness-wise hunters, Brythunia's vineyards and orchards are plentiful and its city-states are prosperous. While kings and barons rule the larger towns, burgomasters and elders run smaller towns. Its aristocracy is based upon the ownership of land, especially those who own lands in the fertile river valleys of the central and southern regions. Nobility is not a matter of royal patents or the granting of fiefs, as it is in Aquilonia and Nemedra. Nobility is land ownership and the ownership of land passes along the male line and with the land goes the title. This system creates smaller provinces, counties and minor kingdoms than are common in Aquilonia or Nemedra. The system of law in Brythunia is likewise broken and disparate, with little unity. In western Brythunia, slow impalement is the preferred method of execution.

A buxom, blonde-haired peasant wench walked boldly toward the two men, her generous charms shifting suggestively beneath a flimsy garment of gauzy, red-dyed cotton. One of the villagers groped her firm, rounded behind as she strutted past; she giggled and swatted the man's hand away, her attention focused on the two strangers.

Sean A. Moore. Conan the Hunter

The nation receives a lot of rainfall, or snowfall in the north and during the winters. Brythunia has a short growing season because of the savage winters, but its people, attuned to nature and its whims here, are able to work around that.

In addition to agricultural products from the fertile farms of Brythunia, the nation has one other important export: slaves. The women of Brythunia tend to be blonde and beautiful, endowed with a sprightly spirit that make them favoured slaves of the rich and powerful of other nations. Rumour and jokes portray the blond Brythunian women as being especially eager and willing for sex play.

Judging by their famed blonde tresses and pale skin, the Brythunians are Hyborian, although their blood has been intermingled with the Zamorans and with remnants of ancient Acheron who fled the downfall of their corrupt empire. Apparently there were no aboriginal inhabitants of the region when the first Hyborians pushed southward.

In war, Brythunia is like most of the Hyborian nations in that cavalry played a major role. Battles are fought in a similar manner. First, the armies exchange flights of arrows. Second, the pikemen clash until the front ranks of at least army was broken. Third, the knights in their great armour and on their massive horses crush through and decide the battle. This method of fighting leaves Brythunia in the same straights as all the Hyborian nations save Aquilonia: no trained infantry to speak of. Infantry is thought of as mere spear-fodder and not an honourable profession. The rabble recruited quickly in times of war to serve as foot soldiers are given minimal training and are easily broken and demoralised. Thus, Brythunian city states hire mercenaries to serve as trained infantry soldiers.

Robert E. Howard records that Turan often raided Corinthia and Nemedra, riding through Brythunia with ease. This implies that Brythunia did not have a strong army nor any unity at all. Likely the Brythunians were terrified of Hyrkansians and their wild horseman hordes who swept through, burning, looting, and taking slaves.

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF BRYTHUNIA

Southern Brythunia is largely forested but the northern reaches are considerably less so. Eastern Brythunia boasts a few swamps, many of which are reputed to be haunted. Eastern Brythunia is also rather mountainous and hilly, contrasting with the western plains. Many rivers bisect the interior of Brythunia, creating a very fertile, pastoral landscape.

Graskaal Mountains – These cold mountains form a harsh barrier against Hyperborea and is where Conan once found a sword in the crypt of a giant-king. These jagged mountains are cold and icy for much of the year and a frozen river runs eastward along the length of these mountains. It is a wild country, dark and gloomy even in the summer months, of pines and spruces and of great granite cliffs that tower into the cold, icy sky. Numerous passes break through these mountains, especially in the northeast.

*Yesterday, at sunset, they
had caught up with him at a
frozen river on the borders of
Brythunia.*

*L. Sprague de Camp. The Thing in the
Crypt*

Karpash Mountains – This long and rugged range of mountains is the south-eastern border between Brythunia and Zamora. These mountains have been known for volcanic activity and have pockets of gold and other rare ores. The mountains vary greatly in their composition and types of stone. Some portions are quite low and weathered, others rise up as monolithic monsters determined to stop all comers. Innasfahn is a village at the mouth of one of the few passes through this range, a pass called 'The Path of the Serpent' for its winding, treacherous trail.

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

Lema Plains – This is a plains region in north-western Brythunia composed primarily

*The putative boundary with
Brythunia lay along the crest of the
northernmost stretch of the Karpash
Mountains, but there the only evidence
was a marker of stone set up by Zamoran
king centuries before, praising him, his ancestry
and accomplishments, and proclaiming that all
land to the south belonged to Zamora. In this
high wasteland, neither nation bothered with
guardposts or border patrols.*

*The true border lay many miles in the south,
where the mountain road led down from the pass
and into the fertile lowlands.*

John Maddox Roberts. Conan and the Amazon

of prairies and ranges of open field. It lies to the south of the Great Salt Marsh of the Border Kingdom.

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

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

IMPORTANT BRYTHUNIAN CITIES AND SITES

Only the largest Brythunian cities have walls. Most of the towns and villages, built against copses of coniferous trees or on mountainous crags, tend to be open to make entry easier for the farmers and herdsman. Water is essential to the lifestyle of the Brythunians, either to water crops or herds, so a strong river or babbling brook is always near a Brythunian village or town, as opposed to relying on wells or an oasis.

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

Berthalia – Michael Fleisher created this Brythunian city-state in *Conan the Barbarian*, Vol. 1, No. 157, 'The Wizard'.

It has winding and narrow streets crowded with merchants. The city's biggest attraction is its bazaar, which is described as 'well-stocked.' It is governed by a weak and cowardly king who wears a horned crown. The city itself lies about six leagues from a particularly large mountain in the nearest range. It has a population of 8,369 people.

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

Innasfaln – Innasfaln is a city in the Karpash mountains, reputed to have the smoothest ale in Brythunia and beautiful blonde Brythunian women who apparently live up to their reputation. The city lies on one of the few passes through the Karpash mountains.

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

Leng – Leng is a walled town in the hills of eastern Brythunia. Its walls are low, made of rough stone, and is in disrepair, with even the town gates having long since rotted away without being repaired. Most of the buildings are built low to protect them



from the winds, but the warehouses of the rich and wealthy are towers four or five stories high, though few use them to keep anything of worth in more recent times. The town is largely lawless, used by bandits and vagabonds en route to other more prosperous places. The peasants here wear tunics of hairy hides and are primarily herdsmen, tending to goats and a few cattle. Slavers use the town as a stopping point on the road to Zamora and the deserters of many armies have found a place of peace here, resulting in a polyglot of languages being heard in the city's dank taverns, a veritable ghost town come to life. While hardly two thousand people count the city as home, it is roomy enough for several times that number.

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

The town was called Leng. It lay in the hill country of eastern Brythunia, not far from the borders of Corinthia and Nemedia, at the convergence of two passes that allowed access through the mountains to the plains that lay to the east, west, and south. Once, much traffic had traversed the mountains by way of these passes and Leng had prospered. But trade routes had shifted, and for many years the greater part of the town had lain derelict, a place for the occasional caravan to camp within wall to break the wind that blew without cease among the hills. Herdsmen grazed their cattle and sheep on pastures that had once been the sumptuous gardens of the wealthy merchants of Leng.

John Maddox Roberts, Conan and the Amazon

The walled city of Pirogia teemed with the usual sights and sounds of local Brythunian nightlife. Fair-skinned, blond-haired Brythunians, at work and play, jammed the streets and plazas. Scattered groups of laughing Kezankian hillmen staggered in and out of the many taverns along the winding ways. The stern-faced city guards regarded these drunkards as a nuisance but gave them a wide berth. Their king, Eldran, was descended of Kezankian stock and would not take kindly to reports of city guards roughing up his countrymen.

Beyond the maze of cobblestone streets were poorly lit, stinking alleys, strewn with refuse. Beggars and drunks shuffled along these dark, noisome, rat-infested avenues, mumbling to themselves in hoarse voices. Later, the cheap sour wine they swilled would take its toll, and they would pass out in the same alleys for the night. Some would never awaken, but to give the city guard its due, even the sleazy alleys of Pirogia were safer than the best in many large cities. A prudent man, however, would keep one hand on his sword-hilt and the other on his purse before venturing into one alone.

Sean A. Moore, Conan the Hunter

Potrebia – This is a southern Brythunian city-state and boasts a shrine to Tolometh, a black god of the abyss. Potrebia boasts a population of 10,326 people.

Sargossa – Once ruled by King Typhas, Sargossa is capital to a powerful city state. The metropolis is replete with seedy dives filled with brothels and criminals, though those the guard takes a dislike to are likely to find themselves working in hidden gold mines of the Karpash Mountains for the King of Sargossa. Prisoners in Sargossa are drugged with white lotus dust, a drug that blinds and paralyzes, to keep them docile and captured. The Danibos river waters Sargossa and creates a lush, fertile terrain for the city-state. It is a walled city of fifty thousand and is in the northern portion of central Brythunia.

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

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

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

Yarvash – A town in Brythunia with a temple to Amalias. This town is part of Sargossa's province.

RELIGION IN BRYTHUNIA

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 pure beings. The religion of Mitra has a heaven and a hell and is suspicious and intolerant of other cults, especially in the rural villages and towns. Mitran temples are 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 only allow but 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 god from their early polytheistic Hyborian origins and is a warrior god. Near the Zamorian border, many Brythunians worship the Zamoran gods, careful not to be found out by the Mitrans, who deem anything worshipped by the fiendish Zamorans to be a demon. Both Bori and the Zamoran gods usually require some sort of blood sacrifice in their worship.

'Mitra would have folks stand upright before him - not crawling on their bellies like worms, or spilling blood of animals all over his altars.'

'R. E. Howard, Black Colossus'

Other areas in Brythunia worship the goddess Wiccana, a goddess mentioned in several of the Conan novels published by Tor books. She seems to have only priestesses who are essentially witches and doesn't appear to have a major following. Likely she is a nature goddess. Many of the Brythunian witches burned by the Mitrans for demon-worship are probably priestesses of Wiccana.

The hillmen of the Kezenkian Mountains have their own ancient gods to worship that seem to be aligned with the four elements.

In addition to the barbaric hillmen, some of the civilized provinces of Brythunia have their own god. Amalias, proclaimed by the temples of Sargossa to be the chief god of the Brythunians, is worshipped in that province in place of and in complete defiance of Mitra. 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. The religion was one with many statues and ornate temples. It is a superstitious religion and many things are considered omens by the worshippers.

Other religions in Brythunia are typified as singular cults, though some, such as the male-only Temple of Suddah Oblates, called 'The Temple That Will Not Fall', in the mountains of northern Brythunia, are large for all their isolation. Other gods include Targol, who fought the Demon Lords, especially Yog of Darfar; his is a dead religion, for the Yoggites slaughtered and sacrificed all the priests of Targol several centuries past.

In addition to variant religions, pockets of demon-worship can be found. 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 Hyborian landscape.

LOCAL HISTORY

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

When the Hyborians moved southward, the Hyborians first settled in the corridor between Acheron and Zamora, an area that included modern Brythunia, into the areas of Ophir, Koth and Corinthia.

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

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

LOCAL CREATURES

DIRE SWORD-TOOTHED LEOPARD

Large Animal

Hit Dice: 16d8+48 (120 hp)

Initiative: +14 (+2 Dex, +12 Reflex)

Speed: 40 ft.

DV: 17 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +6 natural)

DR: 7

Base Attack/Grapple: +12/+24

Attack: Claw +20 melee (2d4+8)

Full attack: 2 claws +20 melee (2d4+8), bite +14 melee (2d8+4 plus puncture, AP 12)

Space/Reach: 10 ft. (2)/5 ft (1).

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

Special Qualities: Scent, low-light vision

Saves: Fort +13, Ref +12, Will +11

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

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

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

Climate/Terrain: Brythunian Mountains

Organization: Solitary or pair

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

Proceeding to the lower edge of the meadow where lay a broad, muddy river-ford, he found along the bank many tracks and spoor indicating a miscellany of game: antelope and mountain buffalo, wolf and foraging bear: the hair-cufted, bone-filled droppings of small predators, and the blunt-padded prints of mountain cats.

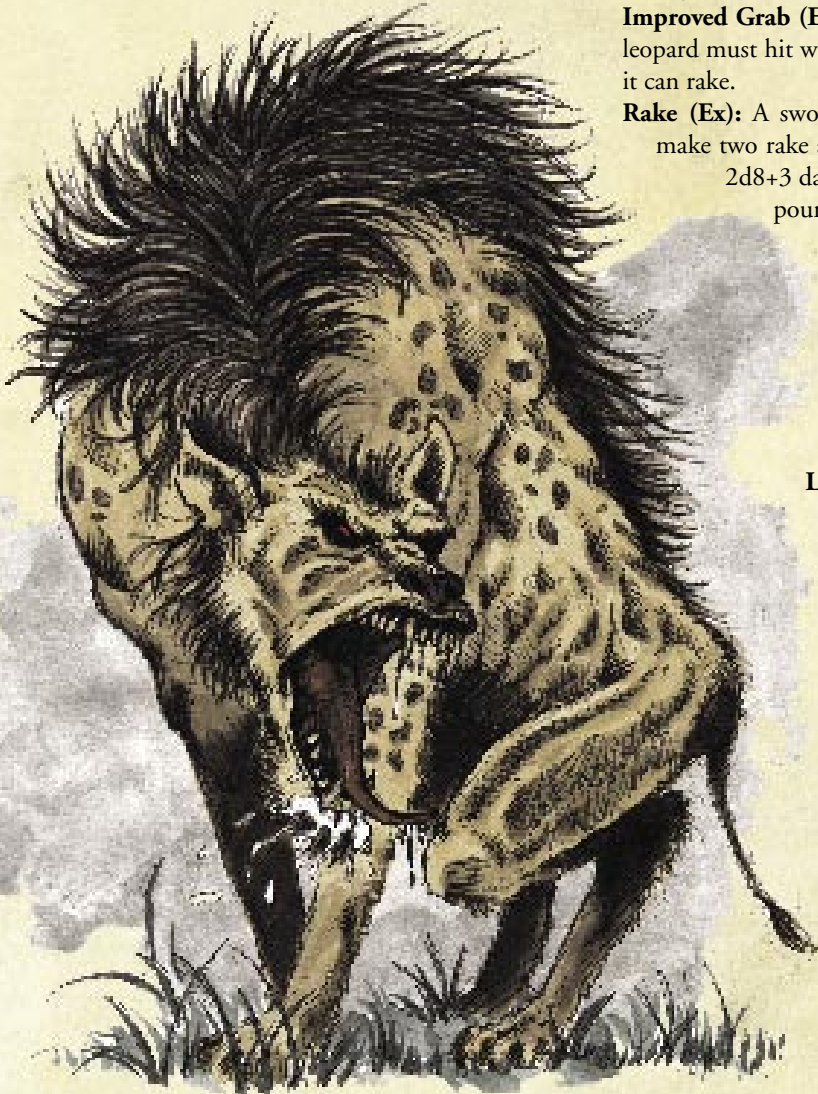
Leonard Carpenter, Conan the Savage

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

Sword-toothed leopards are not so common as in former times, now that humanity and wild cats have spread over many of their old hunting grounds. Deep in the forests of the Pictish Wilderness, though, they can still be found wild, and shamans of the Pictish race often call upon them as powerful allies.

Combat

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



(12 on 2d6), in which case the bite damage drops to 2d4 + damage bonus.

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

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

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

STICH

Large Animal

Hit Dice: 4d8+16 (34 hp)

Initiative: +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Ref)

Speed: 60 ft. (12 squares)

DV: 16 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +5 natural)

DR: 7

Base Attack/Grapple: +3/+11

Attack: Talons +6 melee (2d6+4 plus puncture AP 12)

Full attack: Talons +6 melee (2d6+4 plus puncture AP 12) and 2 foreclaws +1 melee (1d3+2) and bite +1 melee (2d4+2)

Space/Reach: 10 ft. (2)/5 ft (1).

Special Attacks: Pounce, puncture, poison spit

Special Qualities: Scent, low-light vision

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

Pounce (Ex): If a sword-toothed leopard leaps upon a foe during the first round of combat, it can make a full attack even if it has already taken a move action.

Puncture (Ex): A sword-toothed leopard's bite attack which does a critical hit on an opponent is considered to have punctured a major blood vessel. The victim will lose a further 1 hp per round (in blood loss) until the wound is healed by either the Heal skill or some sorcerous means.

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

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

Leonard Carpenter, Conan the Savage

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

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

Steve Perry, Conan the Defiant

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

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

Feats: Run, Track

Climate/Terrain: Brythunian/Zamoran mountains

Organization: Solitary

Advancement: 5-8 HD (Large)

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

Combat

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

Poison Spit (Ex): A stith can spit glowing, emerald green poison by making a ranged touch attack. The spit has a range of 10 feet and is highly acidic (AR 10). A full blast does 2d8 points of damage (Reflex save DC 14 for half damage). Even a partial hit can inflict a potential disease (the Games Master may choose one he prefers for the area). The save is Dexterity based.

Pounce (Ex): If a stith charges, it can make a full attack.

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

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

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

There are approximately 475 castles in Brythunia, although about 70 of them are ruined or abandoned. Each of these are ripe for the exploring.

There might be pocket cultures of ancient Acheronians existing in the backwoods of Brythunia, inbreeding to keep their blood-lines pure and delving into dark secrets to rebuild Acheron of old.

One of the kings of Brythunia may declare himself *the* King of Brythunia, demanding tribute from the other kingdoms. Characters might be hired to enforce this king's position or to bring him down.

The surrounding nations consider Brythunia to be a laughable kingdom and often send in invading armies. Sometimes these invasions are intended as conquests or slave raids, but as often as not they are considered mere training exercises for their troops so they can be prepared for 'real' missions.

CIMMERIA

Land of Darkness and Night

ALTHOUGH CONAN IS Cimmeria's greatest son, Robert E. Howard didn't actually write any tales set in Cimmeria itself. However, Conan dropped a lot of hints about his native culture. Cimmeria is a bleak nation of forested hills and towering mountains. Rain clouds hover perennially over the dark hills, bringing stinging rain, slick sleet and freezing snow. Rank upon rank upon rank of dark hills rise and fall in all directions, forested with strange, dusky trees that give the land a frightening, menacing appearance, even by day. Its appearance at night would terrify a civilised man to the brink of sanity. Its depressing forests are home to something over a million dark-haired, despondent savages, though no census of the populace has ever been taken. Descended from ancient Atlanteans, the fierce savages of this oppressive realm are grim survivors in a realm that kills softer men.

*'A gloomier land never was
- all of hills, darkly wooded, under
skies nearly always gray, with winds
moaning drearily down the valleys.'*

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

Tall and powerful are the Cimmerians and their eyes sparkle blue or grey beneath their dark manes. Cimmerians are regarded as one of the most fierce and savage peoples in the world yet many in the far south regard them as semi-mythical. The Aquilonians used to despise them, considering them rude villagers of small consequence. The battle of Venarium proved the Aquilonians wrong, for the Cimmerians united against a common foe and slew every Aquilonian man in the fort, leaving no survivors save a Gunderman named Gaeric and an Aquilonian girl named Tamera, the daughter of Metrius, the commander of Venarium, Gaeric the Gunderman is now the Count of Raman, a county of Gunderland.

Cimmerians do not respect weakness or civilised softness and that which they do not respect they'd just as soon kill as leave it alone. Even Cimmerian women display this savage strength, fighting alongside the men in battle. Cimmerians are organised on the basis of clans and tribes and do not build cities. Conan was a member of the Snow-hawk tribe in the north-western portion of Cimmeria. His father was a black-smith of the tribe, but his grandfather was a member of a southern clan. Conan's grandfather was also a wanderer who often raided into the Hyborian nations.

Robert E. Howard theorized that Conan's grandfather may have told Conan tales of the Hyborian nations, whetting the young Cimmerian's own wanderlust.

Primarily hunters and gatherers, the Cimmerians are also raiders and plunderers, striking south into the Hyborian nations, west into the lands of the Picts, east into the Border Kingdom and even north into the frosty realms of the Æsir and Vanir. Cimmerians also raid amongst themselves, fighting blood-feuds and stealing cattle or wives. Battle for the Cimmerians is a way of life and the mark of manhood. The Cimmerians scream out a strange, ululating battle-cry when a battle is joined, an eerie sound that strikes fear into the soft hearts of Cimmerian enemies.

The Cimmerians do not practice refined sword-play as do the sword masters of Zingara or the martial artists of far-off Khitai, but battle with well-earned experience bought in blood on numerous battlefields where survival is not so much a matter of technical skill as it is intense spirit and indomitable will. Even the children do not pick up sticks to pretend at fighting. Fighting is a serious business among the Cimmerians. One does not make an enemy of a Cimmerian unless willing to fight for one's life.

That attitude makes Cimmerians polite to one another, although they lose none of their blunt directness in that courtesy. Howard wrote in *The Tower of the Elephant*, 'Civilized men are more discourteous than savages because they know they can be impolite without having their skulls split, as a general thing.' Impoliteness is an invitation to a quick fight to the death among the Cimmerians. Of course, few Cimmerians fear death and even fewer respect authority. Cimmerians respect honour and prowess. Honour and reputation for the Cimmerians is a mixture of courage, honesty, integrity, loyalty, and physical prowess, the traits most prized by the Cimmerians. They will treat those who are honourable and skilled with respect. Cimmerians do not have social rankings beyond that simple attitude. Chief or herdsman, it doesn't matter. Cimmerians are not taught to fear and respect kings and chiefs because of their title as civilised men are.

Other customs can be found in Cimmeria other than solemn devotion to clan and honour. Usually the Cimmerians keep to their own clan and do not assemble en masse. The Aquilonians

*'The women of the
Hyborians do not fight like
your Cimmerian women.
Conan.'*

*Robert E. Howard, Black
Colossus*

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF CIMMERIA

believed the Cimmerians could not and would not unify, but history has shown the error of that belief. If troubled by foreign invaders to such a degree that one clan alone cannot stay the tide, the Cimmerians send out the Bloody Spear, a spear that is not sent out lightly. This custom is a serious one to the Cimmerians. It was the Bloody Spear that summoned the clans against Venarium and it was the Bloody Spear that again summoned them to unify against the demons of Ben Morgh in *Conan the Valorous*. This custom temporarily ends all blood-feuds until the threat is ended. Often the blood-feuds come to the rise immediately after the fall of the joint enemy without delay.

The songs of the Cimmerians tend to be sombre dirges inspired by their dark moods and the grey lands surrounding them. They do not hope that the gods will help them nor do they ask for aid from any source, divine or mortal. They are a practical people of tradition, custom and honour. Cimmerians are solemn folk and do not boast of victories, which would be considered prideful and rude, and an invitation to be forced to prove himself. Unlike the Vanir and Æsir, the Cimmerians do not feast in a loud, boisterous fashion and they do not engage in 'friendly' brawls when drunk. If a Cimmerian fights, that Cimmerian kills.

Although Cimmerians will happily plunder those they kill in battle, they are not petty thieves and none make their living in Cimmeria stealing from the clans, especially their own. Such thievery is considered cowardly and dishonest. If a Cimmerian cannot win what he wants by fighting for it, then the Cimmerian solemnly goes without. A Cimmerian also does not keep slaves or sell their people into slavery. They abhor weakness and slaves are weak, else they would not be slaves.

*"I never saw another
Cimmerian who drank aught but
water, or who ever laughed, or ever
sang save to chant dismal dirges."*

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

Weaponsmithing is a craft plied with much devotion in Cimmeria. The sword is easily the preferred weapon of the Cimmerians. They craft their own broadswords and plunder them from other cultures as well. The spear is a close second in preference, used by those who can not afford or plunder a sword. Cimmerians do not favour the bow; when Cimmerians fight, it is face to face as warriors, not standing at a distance in safety, however they do use bows for hunting. Weapons are valued and often decorated in beautiful designs, such as animals or knot-work patterns. Cimmerians do not go unarmed after childhood, and usually wield spears, daggers and heavy, straight swords.

Most Cimmerians went unarmoured but some clans use round shields in battle. Armour is often considered to be cowardly, although some of the more practical Cimmerians have been known to ignore that attitude.

Cimmeria is a dark, heavily wooded land of hills and shadowed valleys. Snowy run-off from the Eiglophians and dark clouds that bring near-constant, stinging rain mean the land is a dismal, damp country that bears little comfort for visitor or native alike.

*"It was so long ago and far away
I have forgotten the very name
men called me.*

*The axe and flint-tipped spear are
like a dream.*

And hunts and wars are like shadows.

I recall

Only the stillness of that sombre land:

The clouds that piled forever on the hills.

The dimness of the everlasting woods.

*Cimmeria, land of Darkness and the
Night.*

Robert E. Howard. Cimmeria

In an early draft of *Phoenix on the Sword*, Howard writes of Cimmeria, 'A gloomier land never existed on earth. It is all of hills, heavily wooded, and the trees are strangely dusky, so that even by day all the land looks dark and menacing. As far as a man may see his eye rests on the endless vista of hills beyond hills, growing darker and darker in the distance. Clouds hang always among those hills; the skies are nearly always grey and over-cast. Winds blow sharp and cold, driving rain of sleet or snow, and moan drearily among the passes and down the valleys. There is little mirth in that land, and men grow moody and strange.' This is the truest image of Cimmeria.

Eiglophian Mountains – The Eiglophian Mountains form the border between Cimmeria and Nordheim. This is a mighty mountain range of ice and snow characterized by dangerous and almost impassable passes. Deadly glaciers abound, awesome rivers of ice and death.

- † **Ben Morgh, The Mountain of Crom** – The holiest place in Cimmeria, this fascinating wall of precipices and sheer cliffs is the tallest mountain visible from Cimmeria and is believed to be the home of their dread god, Crom, from whence he sends forth fearsome fates and dire deaths. It is also simply called Mount Crom. It is in north-eastern Cimmeria. The chiefs of the clans are buried at the base of the mountain in a place called the Field of the Dead.



and sombre to an unhealthy degree. Conan was an exception, which is why he fled the land, desperately seeking an escape, diving into a life of violence in the hopes of finding something worth living for.

Snowhawk (Canach) – This is the tribe Conan belongs to. This tribe is located in the north-west of Cimmeria, among the cold mountains. The Snowhawk tribe has various rituals and customs they observe. One ritual is the ritual of manhood, performed when a warrior reaches their fifteenth year. The Cimmerian is sent out mid-winter armed only with a sword and wearing a bearskin for warmth to survive in the wild for a day

Field of the Chiefs – This field in north-western Cimmeria is where clans gather. It is dotted with ancient Atlantean stone structures, including the Standing Stone, a central shaft of mossy black rock. No clan claims this land of eerie, carved stones with a certain weird geometry depicted on them.

and night. John Maddox Roberts names this tribe the Canach in *Conan the Valorous*.

IMPORTANT CIMMERIAN CLANS

The region this clan dwells in is misty and drizzly. One is hardly ever out of earshot from the sound of falling water, for the combination of plentiful rains and rocky crags create many waterfalls and springs. These people tend to have sharp features. Conan's clan fights a blood-feud against the Nachta clan. This clan averages around three to four hundred members when all gathered together. The chieftain of the clan is addressed as Canach, or Canach of Canach.

The country claimed by and roved over by his clan lay in the northwest of Cimmeria, but Conan was of mixed blood, although a pure-bred Cimmerian. His grandfather was a member of a southern tribe who had fled from his people because of a blood-feud and after long wanderings, eventually taken refuge with the people of the north.

Robert E. Howard. Letter to P.S. Miller

Her lips twisted in a bitter smile. Aye, civilised men sell their children as slaves to savages, sometimes. They call your race barbaric, Conan of Cimmeria.

'We do not sell our children,' he growled, his chin jutting truculently.

Robert E. Howard. Shadows in the Moonlight

Darkwolf – This is another clan that fought against the Aquilonians at Venarium. Their most famous warrior was Shawan, and his death at Venarium was a great loss to the mighty Darkwolf.

Cimmerians do not build cities and many of the clans are semi-nomadic, following the herds and moving about according to the season. While gaelic tribe names are the most common, some of the Cimmerian tribes towards the north of the country go by animal names such as Blackowls and Greybears.

Galla – This clan of Cimmerians is regarded even by other Cimmerians as being particularly primitive and savage. With their hair tied into topknots and their bodies tattooed with intricate knot-work designs, they present a fearsome appearance. They ornament themselves with bone amulets and necklaces, bear wooden shields and their favoured weapon is a knotted club instead of a sword. Their kilts are made of wolf-skin and they do not bother with boots or sandals.

This is a gloomy land and its people are depressed

Ice Leopards – This is another tribe of Cimmerians that took part in the siege of Venarium. Fenrik was one of the best warriors of this clan and was sent as a delegate to discuss the possible war against Venarium. This tribe wanders far to do battle with foreigners and has fought Picts, Vanir and Hyperboreans. Fenrik died in the battle against the Aquilonians but he accounted well for himself before he fell.

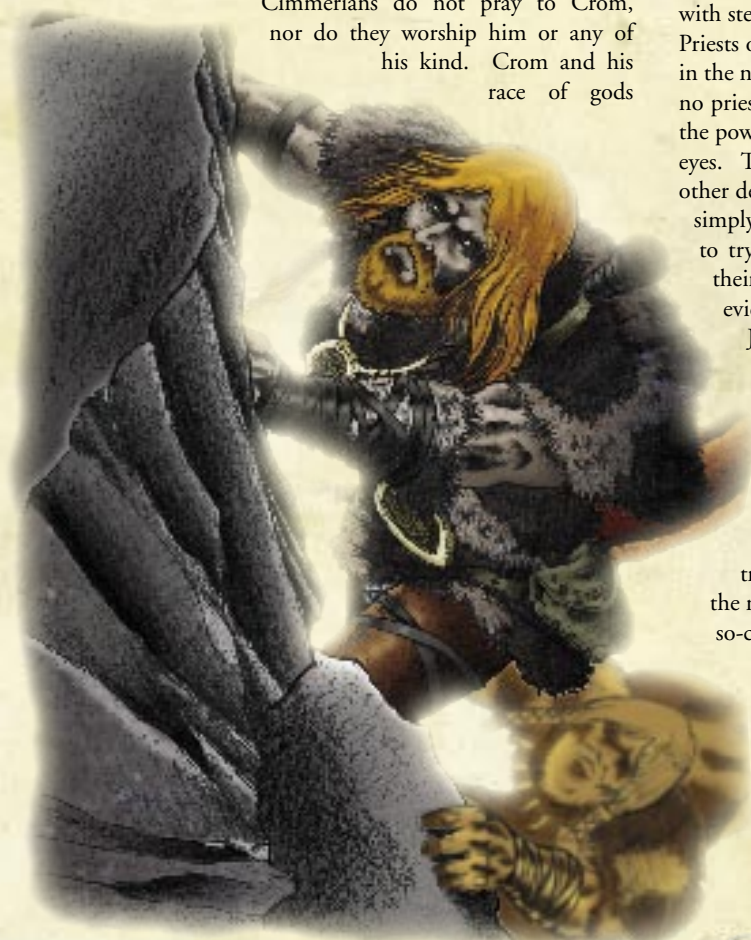
Murrog – This south-eastern Cimmerian tribe has had a feud with Conan's clan (Snowhawks or Canach) for at least five generations and prey upon the people of the border kingdom. They are brown-eyed and square-jawed.

Raeda – This is another clan of Cimmerian savages. This clan has long noses and braided hair. Their greatest warrior was a barbarian named Chamta who was killed fighting a scaly menace from Ben Morgh.

Tunog – This Cimmerian tribe paints their faces in war and have high foreheads. They wear wolf-skin loincloths instead of kilts.

RELIGION IN CIMMERIA

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 took pride in a Cimmerian if that Cimmerian never called 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.'

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

Robert E. Howard. 'Black Colossus'

Crom was imagined to live on Ben Morgh so Cimmerians stayed away from that tall mountain to avoid his 'dooms and death.' After death, the Cimmerians believe their spirit travelled to a grey realm, misty and icy, where they would forever wander in cheerless gloom. Still, the Cimmerians did not fear death and gladly met it with steel in hand and a war cry on their lips.

Priests of other lands tend to be sorcerers, using maleficent magic in the name of whatever god they worship. The Cimmerians have no priests, sorcerers, shamans or witches. Those who traffic with the power of the gods, even through prayer, are weaklings in their eyes. The Cimmerians do not make sacrifices to Crom or any other deity and see those that do as either touched in the head or simply weak. The Cimmerians are superstitious, not wanting to try the gods. They do have oracles however, as befitting their superstitious nature. These oracles could 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.

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.

Badb is a war goddess who often appears in the shape of a crow. Badb favours the Cimmerians with the gift of battle fury at birth just as Crom grants the Cimmerians the might and will to slay their enemies.



Lir, the father of Mannanan Mac Lir, is the god of the sea in its primal, elemental form, which is a little strange as Cimmeria is a land-locked nation without access to the ocean. Perhaps in their history, the Cimmerian lands included part of Pictland (which would also account for some of the Cimmerian hatred of that dusky race). His son governs the weather as well as the sea.

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

Morrigan seems to be the favoured war goddess of Cimmeria. The Cimmerians do not seem bothered that most of their gods and goddesses govern warfare and strife.

Nemain is yet another war goddess, but is also the patron of sacred springs and wells. In battle she is known as 'the venomous.'

LOCAL HISTORY

Prior to the Cataclysm, Atlantis created colonies on the mainland. When Atlantis sank beneath the cold waves and the world died, the Continental Atlantean colonies escaped the destruction. They were besieged by apes and ape-men, and the Atlanteans had to fight hard for survival. The secret to steel and metallurgy was lost to them, however they became skilled stone-masons, retaining still their artistic heritage.

North of Aquilonia, the westernmost Hyborian kingdom, are the Cimmerians, ferocious savages, untamed by the invaders, but advancing rapidly because of contact with them: they are the descendants of the Atlanteans, now progressing more rapidly than their old enemies the Picts, who dwell in the wilderness west of Aquilonia.

Robert E. Howard. The Hyborian Age

The Atlanteans encountered the brutal Picts and the long fight with this overpowering force demolished the Atlanteans and the few survivors were forced to become as savage as their foes. For five hundred years the two races continued to fight, instead of learning to advance their civilisations. The Picts had the advantage, for they were numerous and led by powerful kings, while the Atlanteans were separated into disparate clans. Slowly, inexorably, the two cultures destroyed each other. Then, a lesser cataclysm further threw the two races backwards down the path of evolution.

A thousand years after the lesser cataclysm, the descendants of the Atlanteans were little more than ape-men. Their people no longer had the capability for language and did not know even the rudiments of fire or tools. They dwelled in the northwest, where the hills were forested, and probably extended their range all the way to the Ocean. The Picts had fared better, however, and still

retained their name and a basic language. They dwelt in the southwest.

After another five centuries the Atlanteans at last had progressed forward. Completely unaware of their heritage, their history lost to them, the ape-men were slowly becoming men again. Another thousand years found the descendants of Atlantis creating a primitive society. Over the next five hundred years, this race of man was calling themselves Cimmerians. They started advancing quickly after they made contact with the Acheronians and, later, the Hyborians. The Cimmerians regained the art of steel and developed most of their culture. The Picts had already pushed them from the sea into the region north of Aquilonia.

The next era of five hundred years introduced the Cimmerians to the Vanir and the Æsir, who swept down from the north, claiming the lands above the Eiglophians. Through all these eras, despite the clashes against the Picts, the Hyperboreans, the Nordheimr, the Acheronians and other races, the Cimmerians kept their blood-lines pure, intermarrying only amongst their own tribes.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Howard wrote no tales set in this foreboding land of craggy mountains, dark forests and dreary winds, preferring perhaps to leave it semi-mythical, a land many wonder about but fear to travel. The Games Master may want to encourage this sense of mystery about the land and likewise not set any of his own campaigns in this savage land. Cimmeria is a terrible land and is apt to bring nightmares and gloomy memories and deep depressions.

Although Aquilonia, after the battle of Venarium, never again tried to colonise Cimmeria during Conan's lifetime, other nations may well have tried. The Vanir often raid into Cimmeria for slaves, as do the Hyperboreans. Perhaps the characters are members of these raiders, moving quickly and quietly into the moody realm of Cimmeria to capture slaves, or maybe the characters are intent on stopping a raid. Perhaps the Vanir decide they want Cimmerian lands for their own and set up their own colony and someone needs to rouse the Cimmerians to again put aside their blood-feuds and unite against a common foe.

His ancestors had faced the terrible giant bear, the dread snow-dragons of the Eiglophian mountains, and the rare saber-toothed tiger of the cave country. They had fought these creatures knee-deep in winter snows, while the quivering curtain of the northern lights flickered overhead.

L. Sprague de Camp. The Witch of the Mists

CORINTHIA

The Land of Mountainous City States

CORINTHIA IS THE Hyborian Age equivalent to Italy, complete with internal rivalries and espionage. It is an ancient kingdom that co-existed with Acheron and is highly developed with an established aristocracy and a powerful priesthood.

When I served with the mercenaries of Corinthia, we swilled and wenched all night and fought all day - aye, blood ran down the channels of our swords.

Robert E. Howard, Black Colossus

The Corinthian senate, composed of delegates from each of the city-states do not pass law. That is the power of the king. The senate does, however, control much of foreign affairs and internal political arenas, as well as advise the king, which is its primary purpose.

As in many kingdoms, murder is illegal in Corinthia, unless sanctioned by the king or in defence of self and home. Slavery is perfectly legal within the boundaries of Corinthia. In most cases, Brythunian women are sold by Zamoran slave traders, though Kothians are known to sell Corinthian slaves from the south.

Corinthian warriors are an uproarious lot, drinking all night and fighting all day. They fight with straight blades with blood grooves. In war, Corinthia is like most of the Hyborian nations in that cavalry plays a major role. Battles are fought in a similar manner. The armies converge and exchange missile-fire, then the pikemen rush toward each other and try to break through each other's ranks so the armoured and mounted knights can crush the enemy and cause them to flee before their might. This method of fighting leaves Corinthia in the same straights as all the Hyborian nations save Aquilonia: long on archers and knights but short on trained infantry. Infantry is thought of as mere spear-fodder, and not an honourable profession. The rabble recruited quickly in times of war to serve as foot soldiers are given minimal training and are easily broken and demoralised. Thus, Corinthian city-states hire mercenaries to serve as trained infantry soldiers.

Corinthian soldiers dress in whatever they can afford. The knights wear heavy armour and the pikemen wear less. Daily wear among the Corinthians is barely touched upon in the stories. The rich in Corinthia wear ornate gowns, often with hoods. Wide cloaks are thrown over the finery for outdoor travel.

Corinthians are no longer pure-blooded Hyborians. Centuries of intermingling with Zamorians, Stygians and other trade races have darkened their skin somewhat, although they still remain stout and tend toward tawny hair.

Trade drives the economy of Corinthia. The Road of Kings is an important economic highway and is probably the single most unifying factor in Corinthia. This dependence upon trade indicates mining is not an important resource in Corinthia. Either the mountains of Corinthia are barren of ore or they are too dangerous to fully explore. The latter is the more likely scenario. Mining does occur in Corinthia but is rarely profitable enough to supplant international trade as the major economic force.

Most of the larger cities are built along the Road of Kings where the economy is the strongest. Nearly 100 towns, seventeen cities and one metropolis lurk along that stretch of road, housing over 734,000 of Corinthia's seven million residents. Away from the Road and along tributaries of the Road and various rivers, the towns grow smaller and smaller, giving way to nearly ten thousand different villages, hamlets and isolated farms and homes. Over 250 castles and forts have been built and remain standing, with some dating as far back as Acheronian times. Almost 35 percent of those forts are now abandoned, lost due to changes in trade flow, conquest, monsters or even magic.

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF CORINTHIA

Corinthia is a triangle of land south of Brythunia, west of Zamora, east of Ophir and north of Koth. Its landscape is mostly dominated by the Karpash mountains, which run along its south-eastern, southern, and south-western borders. A portion of the southern 'point' of Corinthia is desert where the city-states of Kamalla and Zahmahn are located. The northern reaches of Corinthia are agricultural plains and rolling hills. Through here passes the

Road of Kings, where most of the larger cities and towns lie. The west is dominated by forests that rise on jagged mountainous ridges until the Karpash Mountains rise above the tree-line, separating Corinthia from Ophir.

'Bloddolk Forest?' the young Cimmerian repeated.

Aye. A place of strange fauna and stranger flora. It lies away from the Corinthian road, to the north, along a side path. We must travel that way to reach Sovartus's domain. Not many men essay to ride that path: of those who do, few return.

Steve Perry, Conan the Fearless

Bloddolk Forest – The Bloddolk forest is a reputedly haunted forest northwest of Mornstadinus. The forest is home to carnivorous trees, bizarre plants and unseen denizens that dance just out of sight. Most of the inhabitants aren't deadly, just curious, however, it is better not to rile them. Bloddolk is a dense wood and travel is difficult through it. A wide river also moves through the area with only two or three fordable spots; otherwise it is a deep river.

Dodligia Plain – The Dodligia plain, north of the Bloddolk forest, is a huge plain, flat and bare save for the occasional butte and a few rocky ridges. An odd peak sits alone on the plain, a mountain without a range. The mountain, called Castle Slott, is honeycombed with tunnels and rooms, although much of it is collapsed and destroyed.

River Corinthia – This river runs through the eastern part of Corinthia. It is a wide, easy-flowing river whose source lies in the Karpash Mountains.

Sea of Gray Despair – This 'sea' was once the site of a great city during the years Acheron, Zamora and Stygia ruled, and Corinthia was a fertile trading ground between the powers. The great city reared here was both powerful and rich and a barbaric enemy from the lowlands, possibly another wave of Hyborians, razed the city and ruined the surrounding land with salt. Ultimately a great curse was laid on the ground. Over the centuries the land has grown again, although it is still a bleak wasteland. This wasteland is in the central regions of Corinthia and men fear it, avoiding it. Werewolves haunt this foul plain.

Karpash Mountains – The Karpash Mountains are an extensive range of mountains extending from Zamora to Ophir. From the Corinthian side, the approach to the Karpash is one of many forested ridges that slowly build up to becoming the rocky Karpash range. Several passes between Corinthia and Zamora are named in the apocryphal texts, such as Donar Pass, Haraan Pass and the Haunted Pass.

† **Black Caves** – The Grotterium Negrotus is an extraordinarily vast cavern system beneath the Karpash Mountains of eastern Corinthia. Much of the system is overgrown with glowing,

† **Haunted Pass** – High in the Karpash Mountains on the north fork of the Corinthian Road, the Haunted Pass between Corinthia and Zamora is noted for the eerie sounds the winds make. A haunted lake, Spokesjo, lies at the top of the pass, where *undines* live.

The high parts of the ridge were rocky and treeless, the tallest and most exposed trees having been burnt or splintered by lightning storms that evidently struck this wild land with devastating frequency. In consequence of this, the marshall soon came to a place where a view opened out on more forested ridges – rank upon rank of them, extending to the jagged wall of the Karpash Mountains in the blue southerly haze.

Leonard Carpenter, Conan the Great

† **Mount Turio** – This ice capped mountain was once the tallest peak in the Karpash range between Zamora and Corinthia, however, it turned out to be volcanic and the mountain exploded, blasting the top half of the mountain into volcanic ash ten million years ago, according to Steve Perry in his *Conan the Freelance*. Time healed the wounds and an icy, deep crater lake remained, filled with Sargasso weed. A recent re-eruption destroyed the lake.

† **Western Pass** – With a creepy reputation for being peculiar, this little used pass through the Karpash Mountains crosses from Corinthia to Ophir. A stark, square keep constructed of stone and manned by Corinthians watches the pass. A ghostly, ancient ruin, a temple to the demon Kthantos, haunts this lonely pass.

IMPORTANT CORINTHIAN CITIES

Cities in Corinthia tend to be sprawling affairs, with little or no central planning, just haphazard construction when more space was needed. Poorer sections of town are not paved and are quite filthy. Corinthian buildings usually have a small ledge around each story

He slunk along alleys and shadowed plazas until he came to the district which was his destination – the Maze. Along its labyrinthian ways he went with the certainty of familiarity. It was indeed a maze of black alleys and enclosed courts and devious ways: of furtive sounds, and stench. There was no paving on the streets: mud and filth mingled in an unsavoury mess. Sewers were unknown: refuse was dumped into the alleys to form reeking heaps and puddles. Unless a man walked with care he was likely to lose his footing and plunge waist-deep into the nauseous pools. Nor was it uncommon to stumble over a corpse lying with its throat cut or its head knocked in, in the mud. Honest folk shunned the Maze with good reason.

Robert E. Howard, Rogues in the House



Lanjau – An ancient Corinthian city that is now in ruins. It was guarded by a giant lizard-dragon before it was destroyed in a great earthquake and spouts of flame. It had a rumoured treasure horde that was guarded by giant mummies. It lies near the city of Atilleos but is located on no map.

Limnae – This is a small city-state of Corinthia.

Lonika – According to Roy Thomas, this is a city-state of the fertile meadowlands in central Corinthia. It lies southwest of Polopponi, but was razed by King Zhenkri of Athros. The only recorded survivor was Princess Kassa, who lived there as a hostage of good faith. She has since returned to her father, the king of Polopponi.

created by the continuance of the window ledges. Conan mentions sewers while under the house of Nebonidus, so the wealthier districts of the towns have some form of sewer system.

Anuphar – Lying strategically upon the Road of Kings, Anuphar is another prosperous city-state in Corinthia. It lies upon the Road of Kings and is the home of Hobb, a one-time companion of Conan.

Athros – This is an extremely powerful city-state that once had dreams of empire under King Zhenkri, called the Lion of Corinthia. That king was slain by Conan. Still powerful and militant, this city controls a large section of meadowland in central Corinthia. It lies southeast of Polopponi and several leagues to the east of Sea of Gray Despair. It has a population of 12,400 residents.

Atilleos – According to Roy Thomas, this is a Corinthian city-state bordering rival Menalos. It isn't far from the ruins of Lanjau. It has a population of 5,500 residents.

Ezar Bar Q'um – Ezar Bar Q'um vies for power over neighbouring Khumar Rhun. It is located in a mountainous region.

Kamalla – According to Roy Thomas, Kamalla is a small city in the desert of south-eastern Corinthia. It is a walled city that once was visited by slug-like sorcerers from another dimension. 7,800 people reside there.

Khishtam – Khishtam is a village in Corinthia where an inn outside the village is reputed to have excellent ale in their common room... and a lot of lice in their beds. It has a population of 745 people.

Khumar Rhun – Khumar Rhun, located high in the mountains, battles primarily with their rival city-state, Ezar Bar Q'um. The spired city, accessed via an arched stone bridge over a deep cleft in the mountains, boasts of a labyrinth. Ishtar is worshipped here as the primary religion.

Menalos – Another Corinthian city-state recorded by Roy Thomas, a rival of bordering Atilleos. Much of their army died of the purple plague in Lanjau at one time. Their armies still refuse to enter that forbidding ruin to this day. It has a small population of 5,400 people.

After a weary day's walk Conan sighted the city of Mornstadinos, the first Corinthian city he had seen. True, there were no towers or tall spires such as graced Shadizar or Arenjun, but the settlement boasted a high wall and many buildings, even if most seemed more squat than those in other cities he had known.

Steve Perry, Conan the Fearless

Mornstadinos – Mornstadinos is a city-state in eastern Corinthia. Its narrow cobbled streets are a confusing morass of alleys, dead ends and by-ways. Stables are built next to grand temples next to open air markets. One of the inns in the city is known as the *Milk of Wolves Inn*. Destroyed by a tornado once, it has since been rebuilt. Another inn is the *Smoking Cat Inn*. The guards of this city are corrupt and easily bribed and the merchants are willing to haggle. The citizens call Mornstadinos 'The Jewel of Corinthia'. It is a walled city with squat buildings. Some small industries work here. The buildings, even the small mansions of the wealthy, are made of adobe and stone. It has some 11,000 residents.

Naplonia – Naplonia is a western Corinthian city-state created by James

Owsley in *Conan the Barbarian, Vol. 1, No. 204-205*. The estate of Baron Strakkus, an elder statesman of Corinthia, lies here. Baron Strakkus is apparently a sorcerer who guards a gate to another dimension – his home dimension. In issue 205, the region was called Aplonia. The gateway collapsed into rubble after Conan and Red Sonja escaped from Strakkus' clutches. It has about 4,000 residents.

Nywenh La – This Corinthian city-state lies in the southern portion of Corinthia and is a sheep-raising community. There is a nearby lake hemmed in by mountains. The king of Nywenh La once promised his daughter, Gywnella, to be married to the king of Berthalia in Brythunia to seal a trading alliance. Nywenh La does not lie on the Road of Kings and needs such trading alliances to increase its sheep-herding economy. Gywnella eventually ran off with her Corinthian lover. Since then the state has slowly diminished in size and prosperity. It has 3,560 residents.

'King Kerbogha's Polopponi is an anomaly in the loose-knit confederation of Corinthian city-states. In less than two decades this minor watering-hole along the Road of Kings has grown into a many-towered marvel. Corinthians whisper, by night, of what the king may have pledged to demons in exchange.'

'Roy Thomas. Lions of Corinthia'

Polopponi – Polopponi is a marvellous city-state in the meadowlands of central Corinthia. It was built upon a tor along the Road of Kings, towering and majestic over the surrounding plain. This city-state exchanged royal children as hostages with the city-state Lonika at one time. The walls of this glittering city are decorated with fantastic designs. It is ruled by King Kerbogha and his blind daughter, Kassa. The city is prosperous because the king *did* make a bargain with a demon, a deal that eventually lost him his son. It has a 40,800 residents.

Vesci – Vesci is a town of western Corinthia. Usually omitted from maps, its economy is virtually bankrupt, a forgotten village that now has turned decadent and villainous. Crime and sin abound. The worst of the criminals can be found in a tavern called 'The Rat's Nest'. A sorcerer obsessed with eyes lived far outside the city, but was later hanged for an inconvenience done to the Captain of the Guard. Despite its poverty, Vesci still had enough land to provide serfdoms for several barons.

Zahmahn – Zahmahn lies in Corinthia on the main pass between Koth and Corinthia. The city-state is ruled by Queen Yaila, a former slave until Conan made her a queen. Her husband is Lord Godrik. The city was founded by a Kothian exile named Zahmahn. After the Kothian's death, only queens have ruled the city-state. Conan once battled a tentacled *thing* he suspected may have once been human. The city has tall towers and minarets. Zahmahn has a population of 13,000 people.

RELIGION IN CORINTHIA

The Corinthians worship Mitra, the 'universal god of the Hyborians'. The Corinthians, close to Zamora and Koth, are a bit more tolerant of other religions than Aquilonia, but the Mitrans themselves remain zealous in their devotion to Mitra. He is regarded as the one true god, a god of light commanding a celestial army and a host of saints. Mitra either condemns souls to Hell or raises them to him in Heaven. Intolerant piety exemplifies this religion of supposed goodness. The Mitrans prize stately and almost plain architecture, preferring the awesomeness of Mitra over the sweeping, symbolic architecture of the other temples to the other gods. It is a point of pride with the Mitrans that their temples as well as their god is different and, to their eyes, superior to the others. The Mitrans do not worship statues and do not sacrifice humans or animals to Mitra.

'What does a wolf with his leg in the trap say?' laughed the priest. 'I am in your power, and, if we are to escape we must aid one another. I swear, if we survive this adventure, to forget all your shifty dealings. I swear it by the soul of Mitra!'

'I am satisfied,' muttered Murilo. 'Even the Red Priest would not break that oath.'

'Robert E. Howard. Rogues in the House'

Anu is another god worshipped in Corinthia. Anu is a Shemitish god, a sky-god symbolized as a bull and controls the weather. He is a creator god as well, having fashioned the world and humanity from his own thoughts. He is worshipped with curious rites in front of obscene brass idols that often involve the sacrifice of bulls and cattle. He is a fearsome deity and not to be petitioned lightly. He does not like to be bothered with day-to-day concerns and his attention is often wrathful. His worship is meant to appease him, not to demand things from him. The presence of Anu indicates that other Kothian or Shemite gods might also be worshipped in Corinthia. Zamorian gods might also be worshipped close to the Zamorian border.

CORINTHIAN HISTORY

Corinthia was a kingdom even during the time of Acheron, although it was distinct from that vile realm of purpled towers and nefarious necromancies. Orastes of Nemedias tells Xaltotun that Corinthia regained its independence after the fall of Acheron. This has several implications. One, Corinthia was an independent state before and was again an independent state.

Zamora and Acheron existed at the same time and traded with each other. This trade took them through the mountainous regions where Corinthia was formed, probably by Acheronians and Zamorians

interested in protecting trade routes from barbarian raiders, or even from Stygian raiders from the south, which shared coterminous borders with Acheron. When the Hyborians raided from the north, pushed by successive waves of northern barbarians, they could not invade the stronger Acheron nor Zamora, so they settled in the wild expanse between and south of the two dark nations.

These early Hyborian states never amounted to anything more than city-states because they continually were supplanted by new waves of Hyborians from the north, overrunning and destroying what was built only to build again. The last wave of Hyborians to enter the region were a tribe calling themselves the Corinthi, probably led by a King named Corinth. To the north of them were the Nemedi, and north of the Nemedi were the Aquiloni. The Corinthi, who subjugated earlier Hyborian tribes and mingled with the Zamorians, eventually fought the Stygians and helped push them back out of the mountains and fields of Corinthia. For a short time Corinthia was an independent state but later fell under the dominion of the Acheronians.

Fortresses were built along the trade routes between Zamora and Acheron and became the city states of Corinthia. Eventually, through prolonged contact with Acheron, Stygia and Zamora, the Hyborians became stronger, stealing their technology but avoiding their decadence. Eventually, the Hyborians rose against Acheron and overran it. That Zamora stood strong indicates that either

Zamora was militarily stronger than Acheron or Stygia, or that they helped the Hybori.

All was not so well for Corinthia, however. Its city-states depended upon trade for their economy. When Acheron fell, so to did the trade. What was independence if the people starved? Concerned with their own economy and internal problems, Corinthia gained little when the Hybori carved up Acheron. Trade must flow knew the Corinthians, so they started building the Road of Kings, connecting it up to pre-existing roads. The city-states, who often collected tolls and other tribute from earlier Zamoran-Acheron trade, agreed to reduce or eliminate such barriers to trade in order to encourage traders moving from the east and south into the growing kingdoms of Aquilonia, Argos and Nemedi to use a route through Corinthia.

Once trade was restored, Corinthia settled into its new role and, to this day, still maintain the Road of Kings, dependent upon the trade of the Hyborian world for its economy.

CREATURES OF CORINTHIA

Corinthia seems to be haunted by more than its share of were-beasts. Both *Rogues in the House* and *Conan the Fearless* mention or feature them, as do several of the comic books. Mammoths wander the hills and cleft valleys of Corinthia. Hill panthers, condors and carnivorous trees are also more or less common. Some lakes are haunted by water spirits called *undines*.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

The Mitrans have tired of the cult of Anu and have decided to burn the temples and kill the priests as criminals and sorcerers.

The crags and valleys of Corinthia hide tribes of aboriginal ape-humanoids as well as Acheronian ruins. Characters can try to find these ruins in search of ancient treasures.

During a joust at one of the major Corinthian cities along the Road of Kings, a stranger enlisted wearing the armour of Khitai. He lasted nearly the entire tourney, downing several foes before he himself fell. He did not rise, and when they lifted the flaring great helm with face mask, onlookers found an empty suit of armour. This entity has returned for the past five years, each time with the same result. It is nearing time for the annual joust again...



Ghulistan

The hairy hillmen of The Himelians

THE HIMELIAN MOUNTAINS are separated into different regions. The southern portion of the range facing Vendhya is called Ghulistan. The south-western portion of Ghulistan is called Afghulistan. A number of small tribes inhabit these colossal hills. The inhabitants of the Himelians are divided into many different tribes and clans of tall, hairy hill-men, both strong and fierce. These hill-tribes have their own barbaric code of honour, disdaining civilised behaviours, making fun of the weak and foolish. Above all, they seem to hate traitors. Like the Hyrkianians, they prize horses and like the Vendhyans they prize customs and traditions. Like both, they fear mesmerism and sorcery. They are a fatalistic, superstitious lot, but easily enthused, especially at the prospect of slaughter and loot. They are of the east, and bound by long traditions and ancient ideas. A survivalist culture, the hillmen have adapted well to their surroundings.

'You do not understand the peril. An hour's ride from this spot the hills swarm with barbarians who make a profession of murder and rapine.'

'It would be a fight every step of the way, with hairy hillmen hurling down boulders from every height, and rushing us with their long knives in every valley.'

Their dirt-floor homes are fairly large, made of uncut rocks cemented with mud with a rock and mud roof supported by heavy beams. The roof has a trap-door and a ladder leading up. The huts do not have large windows, just small loopholes. A single door leads out and a stable is attached to a doorway with no door across from the exit. The hill-men sleep on beds of leaves covered with sheepskin. An iron grid laid over blocks of stone provides a crude kitchen. Their clustering villages of rock and mud huts are built on relatively level areas in the mountains. The hillmen keep dogs as pets, using them to hunt with and guard the villages.

The men of the Himelian tribes tend to be hairy and ragged. On their heads sit wide turbans. Their curly hair is long and they are bearded. Their faces are cragged and wizened from

the harsh Himelian winds. They are tall and boast broad, hairy shoulders. The men wear sturdy sheep- or yak-skin tunics, belted cloaks and soft leather boots. When traversing the higher slopes, they wear huge fur greatcoats with sleeves long enough to envelop cold hands. They gird themselves with Bakhariot belts that hold their ivory and gold hilted tulwars. They squat or sit cross-legged in the Eastern fashion when resting, and are superb guerrilla fighters. They fight with javelins, stones, arrows, yard-long knives, scimitars or tulwars. They have no taboos against wearing armour and may well have captured Turanian or Kshatriyan armours available to them. The tribesmen are also aware of the superior bows made by the Hyrkianians and those weapons are especially prized among the hillmen.

The women of the Himelian culture dress in embroidered vests, wide-sleeved shirts and baggy, wide trousers. Some tribes prefer long dresses in bright patterns over their leggings. Sandals provide their footwear, protecting their feet from the razor-like crags of the mountains. Young girls go without head coverings, but mature women cover their heads with long coloured headscarves. The colour of the headscarves depends on the tribe they belong to. The scarves are usually tied around the head with a long trail hanging down the back. If the headscarf displays a prominent amount of white along with the tribal colour, then the woman is married. Ghulistani women do the cooking and household chores, and are expected to perform these duties no matter what. Failure leads to a whipping. The women tend to be slim, practical people, and many are characterised as 'she-wolves.' They have no taboos against public nudity and in the summer often dispense with the shirt and even the vest.

There are hundreds of tribes in the mountains, each following charismatic warriors. These leaders rule by might; as barbarians, the hillmen have no compunction about killing an ineffective, traitorous or weak leader. Unlike the civilised people to the south, they do not teach that their kings are holy, divine, or special in any way, so the chiefs must defend their right to rule by force of arms and willpower. These leaders settle intertribal disputes in an arbitrary fashion that is not argued further. Disputes between tribes are settled via war and feuding. Tribes probably raid each other for wives, as well, to prevent too much in-breeding among the close-knit clans. Few fights are fought by the hillmen in open conflict. The hillmen are guerrillas and fight in that manner – stealthy assassinations by night and quick raids under cover of darkness that are completed in an explosive burst of violence then are over.

The Ghulistani have their own barbaric code of honour that teaches bravery, steadfastness, persistence and hospitality. The hillmen tribes believe strongly in this code, nearly to the point of fanaticism. Every action they take either enhances or weakens their honour and the honour of their clan. Hospitality of their guests extends even to the protection of those guests. The hillmen will also offer refuge to fugitives if the fugitive makes a sincere offer of peace. Hillmen will defend their property and women as well as their honour. The right of revenge is also granted by this code. There is no concept of 'turning the other cheek' here. Any slight against a hillman's honour must be met and avenged by the slighted hillman. This right of revenge is called the blood-feud. To kill someone in an act of justified revenge is not a crime, nor is it dishonourable to the avenger or to the kin of either party. Unfortunately, one side often disagrees as to whether a killing was justifiable or not, and this results in a vicious cycle of revenge and death that goes on for generation after generation – a true blood feud.

Ghulistan and the other hillmen are given virtual free reign in their mountainous kingdom. They are too fast and too savage for the Turanian, Hyrkanian or Vendhyan armies to flush out and destroy. In a sense, the haunted hills of the Himelians are the ultimate peace-keepers, maintaining distance between three powerful kingdoms: Turan, Hyrkania and Vendhya. Vendhya has the worst of it. With few natural ports along its ocean borders to the east, west and south, and the largest mountains in the world on the northern border, Vendhya trades only with difficulty with the other nations of the world.

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF THE HIMELIANS

The hillmen of the Himelian Mountains live among the foothills of the most massive mountain range of the lands, a mountain range that will one day become the Himalayas. These foothills are virtual mountains in and of themselves if they were abutted against

She felt even her anger being submerged by awe as they entered the mouth of the Pass, lowering like a black well mouth in the blacker walls that rose like colossal ramparts to bar their way. It was as if a gigantic knife had cut the Zhaibar out of walls of solid rock. On either hand sheer slopes pitched up for thousands of feet, and the mouth of the Pass was dark as hate. [...] She glanced at the stark outlines of the mountains all about them and shuddered. Her soul shrank from their gaunt brutality. This was a grim, naked land where anything might happen. Age-old traditions invested it with shuddery horror for anyone born in the hot, luxuriant southern plains.

anything less than the Himelians. In the southwest lies Ghulistan and the southwest of Ghulistan is called Afghulistan, a fair-sized section of hill and mountain Ghulistani country conquered by the Afghulis.

The hills are dominated by one major geographic form – the Himelian Mountains. These mountains define the life of the hillmen and their sphere of influence. Only the hillmen know all the paths and features of these twisting, hulking mountains and vast, engulfing escarpments. The Zhiabar Pass is the most famous route through the mountains, although others exist, such as the Shamla Pass and the Amir Jehun Pass. Snow makes most of these passes impossible to travel in the winter months, although the summer brings caravan travel from Hyrkania to Vendhya.

They moved in soft thick darkness, in which she sometimes glimpsed vaguely gigantic walls sweeping up like black ramparts, or great crags shouldering the stars; at times she sensed echoing depths beneath them, or felt the wind of dizzy heights blowing cold about her.

Himelian Mountains – This is an impressive mountain range north of Vendhya. The mountains are cold and high. An important pass through the mountains is the Zhaibar Pass, which is the road from Peshkhauri into Hyrkania beneath the watchful mountain Yimsha and through the valley of Gurasha. Fierce tribesmen inhabit this range. Trails criss-cross the mountains, except in the virtually impassable center, but mostly these are thin, dangerous paths that few civilised men would even dare to cross without an army, largely because of the tribesmen. Most of the passes are suitable for horse-travel. The icy upper mountains of the mighty Himelians are avoided even by the hillmen, for they are impassable.

Gurashah Valley – This river valley runs through the northern reaches of the Himelian foothills. Two main passes between Vendhya and Hyrkania run through this valley: Amir Jehun Pass through Afghulistan and the longer Shalihaz Pass.

Jhelai – This is a cave-pocked mountain in the Himelias where ascetics live. This sect requires a separation of past, so the monks and hermits no longer use names nor do they abide by the caste system used by the rest of Vendhya. Most of these hermits are scholars, although they do not use books or tomes for their philosophies and theurgies. They are consulted as oracles by those who know of them.

Jhumda River – This river flows south-west through Vendhya from the Himelian Mountains. The river lies between Ayodhya and the Ghulistan border. It also runs along the border of Kosala, a kingdom to the west of Vendhya. Several tributaries feed into it. One such tributary, leading from the Himelians, flows through Femesh Valley.



Mount Raktavashi – Mount Raktavashi is in Kirghiz country, although the hillmen in the region fight over it. The Kirghiz live in a stronghold known as the Forbidden City. The Kirghiz worship Raktavashi, the son of Erlik, Chief of the Seven Princes of Death. Horrible ghouls, the servants of Raktavashi, repeat, parrot-like, the last words of their victims, haunting the lower slopes of this bleak mountain. The stronghold itself is divided into castes, and the ruling castes are the shaven-headed, Khitan-featured monks who commune with unguessed spirits, contemplate black mysteries of the hidden cosmos, and read vile tomes of arcana. Kirghiz guards are huge brutes with shaven pates, but for a long topknot. Legends say the stronghold was reared by a demon-worshipping cult driven from a far-off homeland. The city's economy is based on herding and has a small bazaar where fruits brought in from other lands are bought and sold.

Mount Yimsha – Mount Yimsha is the home of the Black Seers, practitioners of the worst sorts of black magic who seldom interfere in the lives of mortal men. The mountain home of the sorcerers is in an uninhabited region of the Himelians to the northwest of the hillmen's territories. The hillmen fear the Seers and avoid the mountain, considering it cursed and unholy, and will not build their villages near it or even within sight of it. When the Black Seers travel, they move as a crimson cloud or tornado effect enfolds them, creating the effect known as 'Yimsha's Carpet', which sends witnessing hillmen running for cover. The top of Yimsha is permanently snow-encrusted. Near the snow-line, just above it, is the greater keep, a fantastic castle built by magic on the icy slopes, cut from the very stone of the mountain. Below that is a stone tower, the lesser keep, where the acolytes of the Black Seers, minor sorcerers, keep watch and practice their sorceries. Yimsha's slopes are too much for horses, and no paths allowing for steeds exist. A great chasm exists between the two keeps, a four hundred foot wide, five hundred foot deep chasm of death, filled with a deadly gas which can only be safely traversed by following a difficult to see thread of gold ore highlighting a safe path. This chasm encircles the mountain completely. Beyond that chasm is a broad stair cut out of a green, jade-like substance.

Zhaibar Pass – The Zhaibar Pass is a thirty-three mile long pass through the Himelian Mountains. At its thinnest point the Pass is only 18 feet wide (3 metres) and its widest point is 415 feet (137 metres). The pass is walled by precipitous cliffs that tower up to a thousand feet in height. Countless invasions have poured through this important pass, including the invasions that brought about the present kingdom of Vendhya. Great caravans of camels and horses move through this pass, bringing goods from Hyrkania, Khitai and Turan to Vendhya, as well as returning to those far off nations with Vendhyan goods.

IMPORTANT HIMELIAN TRIBES

There are hundreds of Himelian tribes, a few of the most prominent are featured below.

Afghuli – The tribe of hillmen over which Conan was once chief. They dominate Afghulistan. One of their largest villages is named Ghor. They are extremely hostile toward traitors and can work themselves into a violent frenzy even in an argument. They are a large enough of a tribe to have more than seven headmen. Conan once led this group of hillmen in his attempts to unify all the tribes so he could plunder Vendhya. Tales are still told of Conan of Ghor in Afghulistan.

Dagozai – This tribe who hunt with arrows, often patrol the long Shalazah Pass between Vendhya and Gurashah.

Galzai – This tribe of the south-eastern portion of the Himelians lives to the north of the regular trails of the region, somewhere between the two Wazuli villages and Afghulistan.

Irakzai – Another tribe haunting the Himelians along the lower Zhaibar Pass. They are greedy and considered to be jackals by the other tribes. This is one of the more mercenary tribes, willing to be bought for gold. They usually avoid the crags of the Himelians because they have many enemies there. They prefer to fight with light hunting bows, but are adept with the tulwar for close combat.

Khirguli – Living in the region of Ghulistan closest to the Talakma mountains around Meru, the Khirguli are a fierce band of mountaineers, living higher in the mountains than most of the other tribes. They gain an additional +1 racial bonus to Climb checks.

Yasmina, confused by the rapidity of events, not quite sure just what had happened, saw a vague shape rush out of the darkness, bare feet slapping softly on the rock, ragged garments whipping on the wind of his haste. [...] They did not see Yasmina, for Conan's massive body hid her. But peeping from her covert, she knew icy fear for the first time that night. These men were more like wolves than human beings.

Khirghiz – These hillmen dwell around Mount Raktavashi and protect the stronghold there. They worship the children of Erlik.

Khurakzai – The Khurakzai are another tribe of hillmen living in the region near Afghulistan.

Uzbek – The Uzbek are a small tribe that lives in the southern reaches of Afghulistan. They are not known for keeping captives.

Wamadzi – The Wamadzi are eastern hillmen who haunt the crags and passes between Vendhya and Khitai. They live closest to the towering, snowy inner reaches of the Himelians.

Wazuli – The Wazuli, a nocturnal tribe, live around the river valley of Khurum, but hunt all over the range, especially around the Zhaibar Pass. The Wazuli are further divided up by village. There are Khurum Wazuli and Jugra Wazuli, living in villages of the same name. They reside to the east of Afghulistan. They are silent in movement and attack by ambush, launching javelins or rocks before rushing in with their yard-long knives. They are hospitable to their allies, merciless against their enemy. Like many hillmen, they have a distinct 'what's-in-it-for-us' attitude. The *Conan* game rules give further statistics for Wazuli characters.

Zhaibari – The Zhaibari are a tribe of hillmen that live in the region around the Zhaibar Pass. They are allied with Vendhya and often serve as scouts for the caravans moving through the passes. Their traditional blood-enemies are the Wazuli.

RELIGION IN THE HIMELIAN MOUNTAINS

As savages, the Himelian tribesmen probably had shamanistic beliefs, and likely worshipped spirits of the earth and wind as wind-swept mountains dominate their entire world. Grey apes lurk in the hills, so cults of Hanuman could even 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 perhaps their gods have no names.

Shamanistic beliefs are the most likely, considering the hillmen's entire lifestyle is so entirely dominated

GHULISTAN

by the ecology around them. However, the influence of Vendhyan religion probably has 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 a layered one, 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 the 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.

HIMELIAN AND GHULISTAN HISTORY

The Himelian tribesmen probably descend from intelligent aborigines that developed after the Cataclysm, remnants of ancient peoples trapped in the rising mountains and forced to adapt to their new surroundings, becoming more and more savage with each successive in-bred generation. Later, new blood may have come to them from the Lemurian incursions that founded Vendhya. Some scholars speculate that the original tribesmen may have been called the Ghuli, giving rise to the name of the region.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

*An hour's ride westward
or northward and one
crossed the border and was
among the Hills where
men lived by the law of the
knife.*

There are no end to the possible adventures that could occur in the dark Himelian mountains where possible death lurks around every imposing crag and treacherous turn. Mountains where sorcerers lurk in secret conclaves can be found here and rumours of treasures long forgotten from pre-Cataclysmic times abound.

Considering the small, close-knit clans of hillmen, it is not too hard to imagine a degenerate, in-bred clan existing in a Lovecraftian scenario of bizarre horror. A lost group of luckless adventurers, barely alive after being hunted by one of the larger clans, stumbles upon this clan where hospitality is feigned and where horrors far worse than the mere torture and death proffered by the other hillmen waits for them.

Given the name of the land, Ghulistan, the possible name of the original tribe dwelling there, the Ghulis, and Turanian legends of monstrous ghuls, it is not hard to speculate that the original inhabitants were possibly cannibals. Perhaps later encounters with Hyrkanians, Lemurians and Vendhyans ended this practice among the hillmen, but perhaps there are still remote hillmen who still practice the eating of men.

The hillmen seem willing to cooperate in dire situations, allying themselves with Vendhyan Kshatriyas at one point in the Howard story, *The People of the Black Circle*. Conan himself believed they could be united into a sizable force. An entire campaign could easily be woven about adventurers efforts to unite these tribes and, of course, Vendhyan and Turanian attempts to stop them. Likewise the adventurers could be among the Vendhyans or Turanians trying to stop the unification by some ogre of the wild raising the wild men up in arms against the civilised world.

HYPERBOREA

Bleak Plains and Broken Hills

HYPERBOREA

HYPERBOREA IS A cold, windy land to the east of Asgard with a population approaching perhaps two million souls. The Hyperboreans are noted slavers - the sight of their tall, pale haired caravans will often cause a village to hide their children or send them away for fear of losing them. While they used to build nomadic yurt-style dwellings, most often covered in horse hides, they are now 'civilised' and many of them dwell in cities, though riding skills are still prized.

Eventually the Hyperboreans began building out of stone, and castles rose on the landscape. Hyperborea's early economy was based on herding and rye agriculture. Great swaths of dark pine were burnt to clear land. As the chiefs of the Hyperboreans built their stone keeps, they found they lacked the means to really patrol the areas they controlled. The commoners herding their animals couldn't really identify borders nor did they care too. Thus rose an idea of common access. Everyone in Hyperborea is allowed to wander the forests of the land at will, regardless of the ownership of the land in question.

The gaunt Hyperboreans still hunt wild animals, herd domesticated animals, gather meager berries and pick pale mushrooms to supplement their sparse gardens of grains and vegetables. Their culture, although prosperous at first, became inclusive, shunning most outside trade contact,

Few dwelt in this cold realm of fear, where the wintry sun shone but briefly. They who ruled here reigned from high-towered keeps of cyclopean stone. As for the common folk, a few miserable, terror-haunted serfs in clusters of dilapidated hovels eked out a drab life from the soil.

L. Sprague de Camp, The Witch of the Mists

The ancient kingdom of Hyperborea is more aloof than the others, yet there is alien blood in plenty in its veins from the capture of foreign women - Hyrkianians, Asir, and Zamorians.

Robert E. Howard, The Hyborian Age

so the Hyperboreans have minimal industry. Still, the Hyperboreans are skilled at woodcraft and stonework. Common Hyperboreans know how to move through the pine forests and survive in the wild for days. Many Hyperboreans go on extended wilderness forays, even going so far as to visit other countries.

Hyperborean women usually wear a horn-shaped cap, a long laced bodice, a hip-length jacket and a broadstriped cloth skirt. Aprons are worn as well, as are warm cloaks for outdoor travel. Girls wear silk or linen headbands instead of the hat. Noble girls wear thin tiaras or headbands that are more elaborate. Hyperborean men wear simple shirts, long trousers, a jacket or coat, hat or cap, and often wear a scarf about the neck during the long, cold winters. The men usually wield broadswords, if they can get one, or axes. Stone weapons are still seeing use in the backwoods, isolated areas of the already isolated nation.

Hyperborea is not a populous kingdom, despite its large size. The warmer climes to the south were inviting to the original clans and most pushed on southward. Those that remained were a stubborn breed that loved the ridged hills and dark forests. The small population is often not enough to do the necessary work for the various lords in their stone citadels, so the Hyperboreans



use slave labour extensively, and the Hyperboreans are harsh taskmasters. The use of slaves in Hyperborea eventually gave way to the lords of that kingdom treating all people, even Hyperborean serfs, as slaves of a sort.

Hyperboreans are a cruel people, given to torture to create fear in others. They are extremely tall and durable, but centuries of oppression by their overlords has made them a people that are not strong in character or personal, inner strength. Still, they are strong, malicious and aggressive. Given their height, alien appearance and their reputation for cruelty, most people prefer to give wandering Hyperboreans a wide berth.

Those that practice sorcery, and there are many in this grim land, are known as Witchmen, and they rule from many of the bleak fortresses that squat horribly on the tops of cleared knolls and wooded ridges. They serve sorcerous queens and kings, dressing solemnly in black with white, faceless masks. The Witchmen use wooden rods with rounded, platinum ball-tips as mystical weapons that can shoot pain through their victims with the merest touch without leaving a tell-tale mark. Many of the Witchmen worship a death-goddess, and often choose a powerful sorceress as her living incarnation. The Witchmen are also known as the White Hand, which is their symbol. The Witchmen are deadly assassins and considered some of the best fighters in the world, despite only being armed with their rods.

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF HYPERBOREA

The landscape of Hyperborea varies considerably. Close to the Border Kingdom, Hyperborea takes on a sinister, mist-shrouded aspect of meres and wastelands. Further north, Hyperborea is a land of dark pines and rolling ridges that eventually give way to sub-arctic tundra and arctic wildernesses.

Eiglophian Mountains – An incredible mountain range that separates Vanaheim, Asgard, and Hyperborea from the southern kingdoms. Passes through this impressive range of rock and ice are usually blocked during the winter by weather conditions but otherwise afford traffic between the frozen north and the warm south. A small portion of this cold range passes through the northern reaches of the Border Kingdom. A tribe of Hyperboreans called the Verunians live in these mountains, fighting off attacks from cannibal

Like devils from some lightless hell they seemed. long-jawed faces white as fungi, pale and soulless amber eyes, and hair of colourless flax. Their gaunt bodies were clad all in black, save that the red mark of Haloga was embroidered on their bony chests. It seemed to Conan's fancy that the marks were bloody tokens of hearts that had been torn from their breasts, leaving naught but a grisly stain behind. The superstitious youth almost believed the ancient legends that these men were mere cadavers, animated by demons from the depths of some black hell.

L. Sprague de Camp, Legions of the Dead.

pithecanthropoids who also live in the higher peaks of the range.

- † **Snow Devil Glacier (The River of Death Ice)** – This is a titanic Eiglophian glacier that flows along the borders of Hyperborea, the Border Kingdom and Asgard. It is also known as the River of Death Ice. It can be seen easily from the top of a nameless pass that leads southward into the Border Kingdom from Asgard. This pass moves along the fringes of this glacier and is dangerous because of hidden crevasses, thin snow bridges and sudden avalanches. Small, gnarled trees litter the rocky slopes of the pass, living on the water and soil brought by the glacier. This glacier is a place of fear among the people who live in the north, even among those who had likely never seen it.



Of course, it was not uncommon for entire parties of men to perish on the dangerous glacier. The glacier is home to the vampire ice worm of the north, variously called the Remora or *yakhmar*, as well as tribes of hairy humanoids who are a few steps back on the evolutionary ladder.

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

Graaskal Mountains – This range separates Brythunia from southern Hyperborea. These cold mountains are where Conan once found a sword in the crypt of a giant-king. These jagged mountains are cold and icy for much of the year and a frozen river runs eastward along the length of these mountains. It is a wild country, dark and gloomy even in the summer months, of pines and spruces and of great granite cliffs that tower into the cold, icy sky. Numerous passes break through these mountains, especially in the northeast.

IMPORTANT HYPERBOREAN SITES

Haloga – Haloga is a foreboding Hyperborean fortress in the middle of a bowl-shaped valley. The fortress is made of cyclopean stones with but a few windows and several arrow slits. The massive masonry is fitted and smoothed down so it is virtually impossible to climb. The rocks are as smooth as glass and is fitted so well together that hand and toe holds are nonexistent. The lowest arrow slits are about 18-20 feet off the ground. The interior, with wooden floors and support beams, is sparse and cold. It's people wear dark clothing with a red mark and are ruled by Queen Vammatar the Cruel. Conan served as a slave here for a short while in his youth.

...and east of Asgard is the country of the Hyperboreans, who are civilized and dwell in cities.

Robert E. Howard, Phoenix on the Sword, First Draft

Pohiola – Pohiola is a grim stone fortress in Hyperborea, ruled by the witch Louhi. The keep is basically a huge hall with a roof so high it can barely be perceived through the shadows cast by the torches. Several crenelated, squat turrets flank the hall itself. Aside from a few crude wooden items, it is almost not furnished at all. The portcullis is of iron and the gate is made from some black wood with iron nails marking out a darksome rune. The piled stone walls of the keep are twenty paces thick. Prisoners can be kept manacled to the wall in the main hall or kept in deep, dry wells sunk into the floors of the vast hall. Depending on whether or not the Games Master sets his campaign before or after the apocryphal *‘The Witch of the Mists’*, this pile may or may not be ruled by Louhi and her Witchmen. Conan and his Aquilonians burned the keep down at the end of that story, but it could have been rebuilt.

Sigtona – Sigtona is a legendary keep, known in horrible tales told around fires in cold Asgard about its grim queen who is rumoured to exist on human blood. It is the first keep encountered on the road from the Border Kingdom to Pohiola.

RELIGION IN HYPERBOREA

Most Hyperboreans still worship the old Hyborian god-hero Bori. Isolated and aloof, these Hyborians missed the religious revolution that enveloped the rest of the Hyborian kingdoms converting them to Mitra worship. Likely the worship of Bori is some form of ancestor worship. Still a primitive culture, at least by Hyborian standards, the Hyperboreans probably still worship their ancestors instead of moving on to some more complex, ritualised religion as their southern kin did. Over time, and through contact from their slaves, the Hyperboreans may have added some foreign deities to Bori's pantheon, such as Ymir from Nordheim or the sky-gods of the Hyrkanians.

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

Although there is no written evidence, Hyperboreans might also pray to spirits that inhabit the natural world surrounding them, such as individual trees, the rivers, the ridged mountains or even the forests as a whole. This form of religion would be appropriate given the primitiveness of the people in this nearly forgotten realm. Possibly imported from Hyrkanian slaves, shamanism likely also exists as a means of interceding between the people and the

Another factor has added to the impetus of Hyborian drift. A tribe of that race has discovered the use of stone in building, and the first Hyborian kingdom has come into being - the rude and barbaric kingdom of Hyperborea, which had its beginning in a crude fortress of boulders heaped to repel tribal attack. The people of this tribe soon abandoned their horsehide tents for stone houses, crudely but mightily built, and thus protected, they grew strong. There are few more dramatic events in history than the rise of the rude, fierce kingdom of Hyperborea, whose people turned abruptly from their nomadic life to rear dwellings of naked stone, surrounded by cyclopean walls - a race scarcely emerged from the polished stone age, who had by a freak of chance, learned the first rude principles of architecture.

Robert E. Howard, The Hyborian Age

spirit realms of nature. Shamanism usually co-exists with blacksmithing, so the town blacksmith may be considered vested with near-magical powers in strongly shamanistic areas.

L. Sprague de Camp introduced the idea of a death goddess among the Witchmen of Hyperborea, a goddess that is incarnated in mortal form, usually an ancient crone 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.

HYPERBOREAN HISTORY

During the Great Cataclysm that broke the world, the great chief Bori took his tribes north. After thousands of years, Bori is still remembered in the north, but now as a god to a people calling themselves Hyborians. The Hyborians, northmen with tawny hair and grey eyes, had developed a culture that was warlike yet artful. The early Hyborians were warrior-poets and hunters, although some of the southern tribes were already raising cattle.

Starting with hunters and fishers, the Hyborians started drifting southward, conquering native clans, isolated aborigines and, over time, intermarried with their conquered foes. Pure blooded Hyborians followed, wave after wave, each of them slowly conquering or intermingling with the prior waves, building homes out of horse-hide that could easily be moved. Still, hunting and fishing was the primary economy, and most of life's needs could be found in the dark evergreens of Hyperborea's ridges.

Suddenly there arose on the plains a castle, the first of the new age, a stone dwelling piled high for the defence of the horsemen. This was a turning point in history and was

the founding of Hyperborea. The Hyperboreans gave up their nomadic life style and began to cultivate fields, burning forests to clear land. Eventually, the stone dwelling Hyperboreans took to conquest and domination, spreading their castles far and wide, driving refugees and fleeing tribes even further south as they burned more forests to create fields for cultivation and for grazing cattle and horses. As the horses and cattle grazed, larger open spaces were created, as well as labyrinthine paths through the pine forests. Small boys, too young to do other work, shepherded the cattle. Eventually the Hyperboreans started fencing in their cattle and horses behind low walls of piled rocks to keep

them from harming precious crops of rye as well as to protect the herds against predators and raiders.

A thousand or more years later, purer, northern Hyborian tribes, driven south by the rise of the Nordheimer, conquer Hyperborea. The new rulers of the realm retain the name, however. Over the next thousand years, the new Hyperborea resists the continued waves of northern Hyborians as the latter are driven out of the north by the Nordheimer. They Hyperboreans began making a name for themselves as slavers already. They had brutal clashes with the Hyrkanians as they swept out of the east on their horses, beating their kettledrums.

Thus Hyperborea, the first of the Hyborian kingdoms, stands aloof and unknown in the far north, fighting wars or raiding for slaves in the lands of the Nordheimer, the Cimmerians, the Brythunians and the Hyrkanians.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

The Witchmen of Hyperborea have been stealing blond children from the homes of the wealthy and well-bred for some breeding scheme they have come up with.

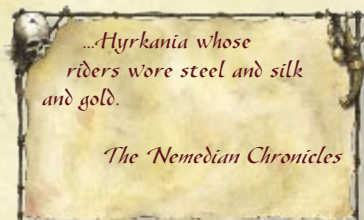
The characters could be contacted to hunt down mammoths for some army or menagerie.

Hyperboreans often send bands of slavers into Cimmeria and Asgard. Characters could join one of these bands or fight against them. Perhaps the Hyperboreans send slavers south into Brythunia or Zamora.

HYRKANIA

The Riders of the Steppe

HYRKANIANS ARE NOMADIC horsemen, cruel and ruthless, whose violent rampages across the steppe are still spoken of in frightened voices, as if the brutal conquests had happened but yesterday and not years, decades or centuries before. The area called Hyrkania lies to the east of the Vilayet and ranges from tundra, taiga forest, steppe, prairie and even desert. The Hyrkanians conquer all that they see, swarming over the terrain in overwhelming numbers on fleet horses.



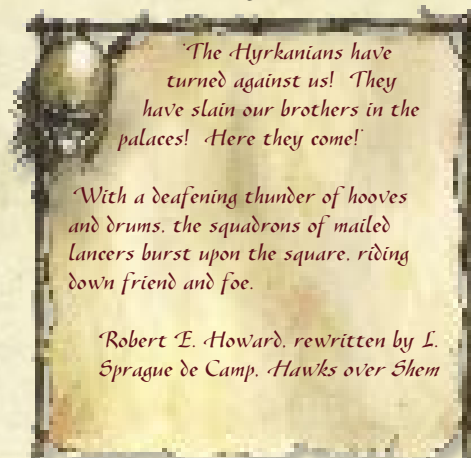
Hyrkania's population is unknown. The size of the nation is vast. Some Aquilonian scholars estimate well over forty million persons, including the Kozaki and the Turanians, but the truth is unknown. The borders of Hyrkania are so vast, and cover so many types of terrain it is hard to tally the population. Aquilonians estimate nearly sixty thousand villages.

The Hyrkanians, masters of the double-curved bow, dominated the Vilayet both in military might and in economic might. Hyrkanians are described as shrewd merchants and traders. They defend their trade cities, their caravans and their trade routes with swift warriors mounted on sturdy steppe horses. In battle, the Hyrkanians would form virtual swarms of violent rage, sending thousands of riders to war. In Howard's *Shadows in the Moonlight*, the Hyrkanians sent 15,000 cavalymen against Conan's 5,000 *kozaki*. These deadly riders are trailed by an enormous herd of spare mounts and, in major battles involving scores of thousands, are preceded by thousands of civilians, driven forward by the riders as a vast human shield. Villages faced with the prospect of coming under the sword would often surrender, which was fine by the Hyrkanians, who would accept tribute and loot, drawing taxes and additional troops from the surrendered villages. Those that did not surrender were burned and destroyed without mercy.

To say that the Hyrkanians are superb with their horse-archery is like saying Cimmerians are hardy folk. They are especially adept at firing their bows from the back of a running horse and their training involves horsemen encircling a herd of game, each with one arrow, and each expected to kill with that one arrow. Able to fire up to six arrows per minute, the Hyrkanian cavalry have no equal in battle.

They armour themselves in urine-hardened horsehide, wearing a tightly woven silk shirt beneath robes to blunt the damage of enemy arrows, and use a small shield to protect their face. A spired steel cap with dangling earflaps protects the skull and iron squares are sewn into the fabric of their boots to protect their calves. Much of their armour and clothing is trimmed in fur. A typical Hyrkanian warrior carries his double-curved bow of wood, sinew and horn and up to three quivers of arrows. Most Hyrkanians also carry hooked lances, a scimitar or sabre hooked to his belt or saddle and a dagger strapped to his left arm.

Hyrkanian generals tend to be audacious and bold. They know their troops could be depended upon to fight without fear. The generals are quite cunning and are not against trying new tactics. The Hyrkanians usually began battles with archery, filling the air with as many arrows as possible. If the enemy charges, they light dung fires to create smoke and the archers melt away on their horses to be replaced by Hyrkanian cavalry with long lances and sharp sabres who hide within the smoke to surprise the oncoming knights. Kettledrums are also used to create a fearsome din that echoes above the horse-beats of their onrushing hordes.



Hyrkanians have a disciplined cavalry that is divided up in squads of ten, troops of fifty, companies of a hundred and divisions of 10,000. Commanders, or *kagan*, are those proven in war, not tribal chiefs. A squad-leader is called a ten-commander or a commander-of-ten. Other commanders of larger numbers follow similar naming schemes. Commanders signal with flags during the day and with lanterns in the nights.



Hyrkanians are born to the saddle, learning to ride before they learn to walk. Hyrkanians almost always travel with three or four horses per warrior and they never stop to change horses; switching mounts is done on the run with the Hyrkanian simply gathering up his stuff, including the saddle, and vaulting onto another steed. Their stirrups are designed for adroit manoeuvres, being disk shaped to provide a solid platform. Horses are a measure of power and wealth among the Hyrkanians and all of them have names. Horse races, hunting and archery contests are popular past-times. Hyrkanians rarely walk more than twenty paces unless the need is great. An Hyrkanian who needs to be somewhere rides his horse.

The men of Hyrkania are not alone in their mastery of the bow and the horse. Hyrkanian women are also deadeye archers and accomplished equestrians. Although not members of the Hyrkanian cavalry, women follow the warriors to put the wounded to death and collect arrows for re-use. Hyrkanian women are practical people and are almost cold-blooded when it came to death. Marvel's Red Sonja, an Hyrkanian, is not that unlikely of a character. Hyrkanian women are not pampered and could fight, although they are expected to remain loyal and follow whomever wins them in combat.

Hyrkanians typically go bearded. Additionally, they wear turbans or high fur hats, sheepskins, wide-sleeved tunics, sashes and loose-fitting trousers. The women are veiled. In more conservative circles, usually the upper classes, the women favour the khalat, a long costume that conceals the entire body.

One of the largest nomad tribes on the steppe is the Kuagir. Princess Zosara, the daughter of King Yildiz of Turan, married the Great Khan Kujula of the Kuagir, and bore him an heir. The Great Khan does not know it, but Zosara's son is Conan's.

*'You're as bad as a
Hyrkanian woman, with
your damnable veil.'*

*'Robert E. Howard, 'Black
Colossus'*

Another nomad tribe to be found in the far northeast of Hyrkania is the Wigur, a short, bandy-legged race with dark skin and braided black hair. The favoured class for the Wigur is barbarian and they dress in furs and skins, painting their faces in stripes and circles. They are a shamanistic people. Their shamans can conjure up visions with their drumming and incense.

A nomad tribe in the deserts of the south are the Juhanna, the fiercest desert nomads around the region surrounding the well of Harith, lands claimed in name by Turan (see page 130). The Juhanna are honourable and fair foes. They do not like for women to speak boldly as men do, however they incongruously seem to respect Ishtar.

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF HYRKANIA

The Hyrkanian steppe is a dry, cold grassland, rolling along in smooth, low hills. There isn't much humidity in the air because the steppe is located away from the ocean and close to mountain barriers. The soil is poor and thin, supporting only grasses. Virtually no trees can be found on the steppe. The steppe has warm summers and really cold winters. The northern steppe see a lot of snow and rain comes in small amounts. The Hyrkanian steppes experience long droughts and violent winds. These droughts of the summer combine with the heat, the browning dry grasses and just about any sort of ignition to create dangerous, quick spreading prairie fires.

*'Between the inland sea
and the eastern borders of
the native kingdoms lie vast
expanses of steppes and in the
extreme north and extreme south,
deserts.'*

*'Robert E. Howard, The Hyborian
Age'*

The western edge of Hyrkania is the eastern shore of the Vilayet Sea. It is bound on the east by Khitai, on the south by the Talakma Mountains and in the north by cold tundras, vast pine forests and frozen wastelands.

Loulan Plateau – The Loulan Plateau is a Hyrkanian steppe land in the east. The Hyrkanians here have strong Khitan bloodlines and tell stories of the 'desert man of forbidden Pathenia', a man-like ape that dwells in the snow-covered mountains, a veritable abominable snowman. The plateau is also home to jerboas, small mammals that burrow in the thin soil. Summers are hot and winters are frigid.

*'They came forth on the
southern slopes of the
Talakmas at last, to look upon
a fantastic sight - a vast, green
valley that sloped down and away
before them. It was as if they stood
on the lip of a stupendous dish. Below
them, little clouds crept over leagues
of dense, green jungle. In the midst
of this jungle, a great lake or inland
sea reflected the azure of the clear,
bright sky.'*

*L. Sprague de Camp and Lin Carter,
The City of Skulls'*



This plateau is described by L. Sprague de Camp as lost and bleak. In Howard's original story, *Three Bladed Doom*, the reference was to the Gobi Desert. For *The Flame Knife*, L. Sprague de Camp changed the name to the Loulan Plateau, thus its location should be approximately where the Gobi Desert is.

Meru – The kingdom of Meru lies in a great bowl-shaped valley of jungle between the peaks of the Talakma Mountains and the mighty Himelians. The valley also has a huge inland lake or sea named *Sumero Tso*. Called the Cup of Gods, Meru is home to stocky, brown, lazy, fatalistic people. The only garment for the Meruvians, male and female, is a short skirt. The priests shave their heads, their religion is shamanistic and they believe in reincarnation. Their chief god is Yama, the king of demons. They make slaves out of captives, usually Hyrkanians or the occasional Himelian hillman. The capital of Meru is Shamballah and is ruled by a god-king. Shamballah is a city of rose-red stone amid paddies and fields between the jungle and *Sumero Tso*. The gates to the city are of green bronze and cast in the shape of a skull. The architecture is ornate and sculpted. Gigantic faces hewn from red stone glare down from walls and towers. Their mythology is one of many-armed gods and demons. Carvings in the form of human skulls are omnipresent. Even the people wear human skull-shaped ornaments hung on golden chains about their necks. There are seven cities around *Sumero Tso*. The other six are: Shondakor, Thogara, Auzakia, Issedon, Paliana and

*He, too, had heard the roar
of the ten-foot bronze trumpets
that blared over the bare black
mountains of forbidden Pathenia, in the
hands of shaven-headed priests of Erlik.*

*L. Sprague de Camp (rewriting 'R. E.
Howard'). The 'Flame Knife'*

Throana. The cities are deemed sacred. To avoid the dangers of the jungle, the Meruvians trade via ships that ply the *Sumero Tso*, pulled by galley slaves at the oars.

Pathenia – Pathenia is a frigid mountainous region somewhere in the north, north of the Loulan Plateau and north of Hyrkania in general. Some scholars believe Pathenia to be the country of origin for the Hyrkanians, where they developed their nomadic lifestyle. Those who dwell in Pathenia apparently worship Erlik.

*He had traversed hundreds
of leagues of bleak Hyrkanian
steppe and skirted the foot-hills of the
towering Talakma Mountains.*

*L. Sprague de Camp and Lin Carter. The
Curse of the Monolith*

Talakma Mountains – The Talakma Mountains are an arid range that breaks off from the Himelians to merge with them after arcing to the east, forming an effective border between Hyrkania and Meru. They are analogous to the Kunlun Mountains that fringe northern Tibet. The Talakma Mountains are bitterly cold and fiercely wind-swept. Hard frost forms nightly, although actual snowfall is rare. The soil is salty, keeping all but the hardiest of plants from living here. The rough conditions are impossible for most animals to endure for long and only the toughest find homes here. Snow leopards, wolves, yaks and brown bears live here in small numbers, as do other mountain breeds of animals. A few lakes exist, but most are dry. Virtually no one chooses to live among the heights of these dire mountains, although the foothills are home to some hillmen

'Before him lay the steppe, a sea of grass stretching from the Vilayet to distant Khitai, from the northern border of Vendhya to the pine forests of the far north. It was a land of few rivers, much of it semi-desert during the long dry season, when its parched grasses could become a terrifying ocean of flame, ignited by lightning or the actions of men. Few but steppe nomads roamed the vastnesses of the plain, but its southern periphery was crisscrossed by the ancient caravan routes that linked the lands of east and west, and at intervals along these routes, wherever there was an abundance of water, there were the legendary cities of the caravans: Lakmashi of the Silver Gates, where precious metals were worked before transshipment to east and west; Malikta, where the jewels, stones, pearls and jade of the east were traded by the hundredweight; Bukhrosha, city of incense and spices; and lordly Sogaria, where the silks of Khitai were dyed with pigments from Vendhya and the far isles of the eastern sea, and then woven into wondrous fabrics by the artisans of the city.

John Maddox Roberts, Conan the Marauder

and their herds of sheep and goats. A hill race in lacquered armour lined with gold and gems called the Azweri live in these mountains, capturing slaves for the Meruvians. They fight with scimitars, spears and clubs. The Azweri are yellow skinned and slant-eyed. Another tribe live in the Talakma foothills of Kusan: the Jaga, a tribe of headhunters.

Wuhuan Desert – This desert, according to Bjorn Nyberg, is in eastern Hyrkania, north of the Himelians and the Talakma Mountains.

Zarfhaana Steppes – These steppes, deep in Hyrkania, predate the Cataclysm. Early Hyrkanians here worshipped the White Wolf.

IMPORTANT HYRKANIAN CITIES

Other than areas in Turan, Howard doesn't name Hyrkanian cities nor does he describe them. Being nomads, the Hyrkanians probably don't actually build cities. They create camps and temporary villages, maintaining great herds of horses. Other people build cities in Hyrkania, however, such as the Turanians, along the caravan routes. The following cities in Hyrkania are apocryphal.

Bakharus – Bakharus is best known as the makers of a style of belt worn all throughout the region, even into Ghulistan. Likely the town lies on a caravan into Vendhya from the Vilayet. They breed rugged horses.

Balkhana – The province of Balkhana lies in the foothills of Hyrkania and is opposed to Turan's greedy expansionism.

Bukhrosha – Bukhrosha is a huge trading city with a population that verges on 18,000 permanent residents. It is called the city of incense and spices, which is their commercial specialty. It is governed by a Turanian satrap and is at the confluence of trade routes from Vendhya and Khitai.

Lakmashi – Lakmashi of the Silver Gates is another trading city on the caravan route from Turan to Khitai that includes Sogaria and Bukhrosha. Precious ore mined from the mountains of the south are brought here, where goldsmiths from Hyrkania, Turan and Vendhya labour to turn the ore into works of art. Lakmashi has a population of 15,000, many of whom are slaves driven by the smiths to smelt and purify the ores.

Makkalet – Makkalet was once the chief trading rival of Aghrapur. Makkalet lied on the eastern shore of the Vilayet across from the Isle of Iron Statues. It was one of the richest cities of the east. The city defended itself primarily by flaming arrows and flaming ammunition flung from massive siege engines. A beautiful, brooding temple to Tarim was once here, carved and immense. Even the steps of the main wharf of the city was crafted from marble. The city was governed by King Eannatum and Queen Melissandra. Its famed serpent walls

had repelled Khitan hordes and Vendhyan raiders, but fell, in the end, to the ravaging Hyrkanian troops of Turan led by Prince Yezdigerd. Queen Melissandra survived the siege, bearing a child of Eannatum's. Perhaps her child will return and rebuild this once impressive city that glittered on the shores of the Vilayet like a jewel in the sun.

Malikta – Malikta is yet another trading city along the road from Turan to Khitai, the same string of roads that includes Sogaria and Lakmashi of the Silver Gates. Malikta is famed for its accomplished jewellers and even the poor here wear gems and diadems. This is a smaller city with a population that rarely exceeds 9,000 people, and drops to nearly 6,000 when the trade routes slow down.

Pah-Dishah – Pah-Dishah lies some three weeks ride to the east from Makkalet. The city is ruled by King Ghannif, the father of Queen Melissandra of Makkalet. Red Sonja, an Hyrkanian, once led Pah-Dishah soldiers to defend Makkalet. It is a vast city with a large population of 32,000 residents.

Razadan – Razadan was burnt to the ground by Yezdigerd during his wars of conquest for his father Yildiz. The city is the twin of Dimmorz, another city besieged by Yezdigerd. Shaven-headed Hyrkanians worshipped a stone idol in this region. The body was kept at Razadan, the head at Dimmorz. Together the head and body made for a powerful living statue if commanded by one who holds a certain amulet. Amulet, head and body are now somewhere in Aghrapur.

Sogaria – North of the Turanian border, Sogaria lies in a fertile valley in the western part of the steppes. Great gongs sound at night to signal the closing of the gates. Outside the city are pens and common fields for the mounts and animals of the caravans. A little closer to the city are the camping grounds of the caravaners.

Two riders sat their mounts atop the escarpment overlooking the small but fertile valley in which beautiful Sogaria nestled like a great jewel on a cushion of green silk. All around was arid plain, but within this tiny valley, water worked its ancient magic and caused the land to blossom. Many caravan trails converged upon this land of well-kept fields and orchards, where the very field hands wore silk, which was bartered in Sogaria as cheaply as was cotton in Vendhya or linen in the western kingdoms.

John Maddox Roberts, Conan the Marauder

Once night has fallen only those with lead seals marked by a magistrate are permitted to enter, but most of the guards can be bribed. Described as a lordly city, Sogaria takes Khitan silks and colours them with Vendhyan dyes to be traded in the west. The towers of the public buildings are crafted out of white marble and the homes of the wealthy are equally grand. Few here are destitute. Hanging gardens fill the roofs and balconies of the city and flowers grow in quantity. The streets here are paved and sculpted fountains spray water at most intersections. Sogaria is allied with Turan and can send to Bukhrosha for reinforcements if needed. Sogaria has a population of 26,000 Hyrkanians.



Sythia – Sythia is a city-state of the frigid lands in the north, bordering on eastern Hyperborea. A sorcerous queen rules Sythia, and there is a horrible Pit of Lost Souls in the citadel. The path to the citadel is lined with sticks mounted with skulls.

Vidara – Vidara is a Corinthian city in the foothills of Hyrkania. The city is walled and lies between the Turanian province of Dimmorz and the Hyrkanian province of Balkhana. It is a peaceful community of expatriates governed by a head councilor. A great, rounded and eerie structure sits in the city of herdsmen and farmers. The people do not go into this grand temple called the House of the Cursed. Tunnels run from beneath the House to where the Cursed live, Corinthians who have a rotting disease. The city was built by someone other than the Corinthians, who found it abandoned.

RELIGION IN HYRKANIA

The Hyrkanians, like the Turanians (see page 130) worship Erlik, a god of death, and Tarim, a mystic healer and patron of the Turanians.

Erlik was supposedly the first man, a creation of Ulgen. Erlik was taken to the heavens and given the mantle of death and, in time, seemed to supplant his creator in popularity. Hyrkanians, of course, love the kill, so perhaps it is not surprising a god of death, fire and war became more popular than a creator god. Erlik is called the 'Yellow God of Death,' and, according to L. Sprague de Camp, his followers are cannibals with filed teeth.

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.

Some among the Hyrkanians share the shamanistic beliefs and practices of many nomad societies, with the drum holding a potent symbol for these shamans who still follow the more primitive religion of their forebears.

The shamans, prevalent mostly in the northern Hyrkanian societies, 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 similar ideas about out-of-body experiences where the battles with hostile spirits occur. It 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. 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

It was long years ago, say our priests that the sea gods of ancient Lemuria waxed angry and reached up sea-weed-laden hands to pull all the islands of Lemuria down to their heaving bosoms... A leader rose up amid the cataclysm - the man called Tarim! He stilled his tribesmen's panic, and directed them to flee into the very sea they feared! He was a mystic - a seer who healed the sick and the lame - and who unerringly led his people westward across the sea... westward - toward the setting sun till they settled on what is not the eastern shore of the Vilayet and became known as Hyrkanians. Later still, some of my nearer ancestors crossed even that inland sea and founded Aghrapur, capital of the kingdom now called... Turan! 'But there is no Hyrkanian, on either side of the Vilayet, who pays not homage to Tarim! He lives on, century after century, in the person of his descendants, each of whom is declared to be Tarim Incarnate!

Roy Thomas, Hawks from the Sea

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.

The shamans have 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. 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 could 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.

Among those shamanistic Hyrkanians a common belief is in the Everlasting Sky, which further enhances the shamanistic view of Hyrkanian religion. The sites of its worship are cairns of stones with a single vertical pole sticking out of the center where prayers and sacrifice were performed.

HYRKANIAN HISTORY

The history of Hyrkania and its peoples begins with the history of the Lemurians and, of course, the Cataclysm which sank their islands. The Lemurians lucky enough to escape the devastation of their homes were promptly enslaved by the mysterious non-Thurian civilisation dwelling on the east coast of Thuria in a land called Pathenia. For thousands of years the Lemurians were beaten down and oppressed by their enslavers until they finally rose up and destroyed their masters in a savage massacre, for the Lemurians were now little more than beasts.

The kingdom of Khitai developed and traded with the new masters of Pathenia, which resulted in their rise from the level of beasts and savages. As they pulled themselves out of their bestial nature toward becoming a new people, they now had a new name: Hyrkanian. They moved slowly and inexorably westward, where the Hyborians were beginning their own ascent toward domination. Even as the remnants of their former masters conquered the pre-human giant-kings and founded Stygia, the Hyrkanian culture, aided by contact with Khitai, developed their own unique way of life. Finding themselves on the steppe, the Hyrkanians mastered the horse.

Empowered by their historic victory over their former masters, the Hyrkanians developed a warrior culture that expanded by conquest. Aboriginal peoples were either absorbed or utterly destroyed by the Hyrkanians, depending on their willingness to submit and pay tribute.

Now the Lemurians enter history again as Hyrkanians. Through the centuries they have pushed steadily westward, and now a tribe skirts the southern end of the great inland sea - Vilayet - and establishes the kingdom of Turan on the southwestern shore. [...] Toward the latter part of the period other Hyrkanian clans push westward, around the northern extremity of the inland sea, and clash with the eastern outposts of the Hyperboreans.

Robert E. Howard, The Hyborian Age

Eventually the Hyrkanians reached the Vilayet Sea. News of their coming no doubt filled the Hyborian tribes with no small amount of fear, as Hyperborea was likely besieged with fleeing aborigine tribes of the north telling of the fierceness of this ravaging horde of pillaging horsemen.



To the south swarmed an extremely powerful tribe of Hyrkanians and swiftly they swung northward around the Vilayet and founded Turan. Other Hyrkanians swarmed around the north end of the Vilayet and collided with the Hyperboreans in horribly violent clashes against their eastern outposts. The Hyperboreans managed to stem the rampaging tide of the Hyrkanians and continues to do so. Turan is still their greatest kingdom and the Hyrkanians continue their westward push, promising to bathe the west in red blood and brilliant fire as they trample the stone walls of the Hyborians.

HYRKANIAN CREATURES

The Hyrkanian horses thrive on the steppe, as do the goats, sheep and cattle which the Hyrkanians herd. Other plains creatures include elephants, dire wolves, mammoths and various kinds of small game. A lot of the animals that live in Steppe are grazing animals, such as rabbits, mice and antelopes. Most of the herbivorous animals on the steppes form herds or dig burrows. The great grey apes can be found in the mountainous regions, including the ape man of Pathenia.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

The Hyrkanians might sponsor long, days-long marathon horse races across treacherous steppes and deserts that the adventurers might stumble across or participate in. Perhaps the adventurers are in the way of victory, perhaps they are hired to stop certain of the racers from finishing or perhaps they are among the racers.

Many Hyrkanians resent the Turanians and their expansionist policies. These Hyrkanians, who also despise the Turanian gods of Erlik and Tarim, want a return to their old shamanistic ways. A charismatic Hyrkanian has risen up and gathered up several tribes of Hyrkanians and has begun attacking Turan. Characters might well get swept up in this war on one side or another, or may well be caught in the middle.

Characters could be sent to find the elusive ape man of Pathenia, a beast similar to the Yeti or the abominable snow man.

Any number of adventures could be devised around the Hyrkanians attacking Hyperborean, Brythunian, Shemite, Kothian or Khorajan cities. Perhaps a war between the Hyrkanians and the Zuagirs, with the *kozaks* caught in the middle would be interesting.

He had never seen an elephant, but he vaguely understood that it was a monstrous animal, with a tail in front as well as behind. This a wandering Shemite had told him, swearing that he had seen such beasts by the thousands in the country of the Hyrkanians; but all men know what liars were the men of Shem.

Robert E. Howard. The Tower of the Elephant

IRANISTAN

Land of Gaudy Silks and Spired Helmets

THE PEOPLE OF Iranistan are described as being broad in the shoulder with black hair. Some are described as short, others as tall. They have a dark complexion. Various tribes of Iranistani vary slightly in description. Although the Iranistani population is composed of many distinct tribal units, much of their way of life is essentially the same.

It concerned the past actions of one Kerim Shah, a nobleman from Iranistan, who had dwelt for a while in Peshkauri before coming on to the court at Ayodhya.

Robert E. Howard, The People of the Black Circle

Iranistan's major products include hand-woven rugs, embroidered clothing, silks, wool, cotton, nuts and fruits, wines, opium, hashish, various oils (petroleum and olive), coal, copper, talc, barites, sulphur, lead, zinc, iron ore, salt, slaves and precious and semiprecious stones.

Love of art is one element shared in common among the Iranistani. Virtually everything Iranistani make is attractive. Even the most common items, such as bags to carry produce to the bazaars, are embroidered and decorated. Even the animals are dressed in woven finery. Fine calligraphy and visual arts are displayed in the beautiful trimmings that adorn the buildings. The Iranistani respect the arts as well as artists, in both visual and literary fields. Poetry and story telling are time-honoured traditions among the Iranistani.

Beyond art, the vital importance of family is another common element found in the Iranistani culture. Families are extremely close-knit here and a tribe is simply several branches of a single family, led by a tribal chief whose word is law for the entire tribe. Villages are built around the family unit, self-sufficient groups that follow a headman, usually the oldest male in the village, who in turn follows the tribal chief. In the larger cities, the headman is a wealthy land-owner who is called a khan. The nomads call their headmen sheiks.

Iranistani tribes have their own codes of honour that is similar across the entire nation, a code

that teaches family honour, pride and hospitality. Family is more important than the individual. Family defines the individual. Personal honour is also family honour and vice versa. First and foremost is an Iranistani's immediate family. His most intense loyalty always lies here, and then out to other kin, on out to the most remote clan member, then out to the king. Pride is another word for personal honour for the Iranistani, not braggadocio. Honour and pride is respect for oneself. Insults must be paid for, no matter how great or how small. The men refer to insults as having something undesirable in their beards.

They had arrived in Anshan ragged and half-starved. Now they were gaudy in silken pantaloons and spired helmets of Iranistani pattern, and loaded down with weapons.

L. Sprague de Camp, The Flame Knife

Hospitality is also important to the Iranistani. Generosity is honourable, so food and drink must be given to anyone who comes to them in peace. All guests must be protected, so the Iranistani take responsibility for all who are in their homes. Their honour depends on this. This is often called the bond of salt, or eating a man's salt. Once a person is a host's guest, that person is safe, not to be poisoned or betrayed, nor can the guest harm the host.

'Balash loves me not. He'll spit in my beard, and then I'll kill him and his dogs will slay me.'

'Then be wise and make not their mistake. Will you take me to him who awaits me, or will you cast dung in his beard by scorning his commands?'

L. Sprague de Camp, The Flame Knife

The Iranistani people, regardless of tribal affiliation, tend to be fatalistic, willing to follow whatever fate they believe their god, Asura, has given them. Fate is important to the Iranistani and they believe the gods command their destinies, both as individuals and as a nation. They do not get depressed at the dooms they see before them, just accepting of them.

The Iranistani males wear baggy silk or cotton pantaloons, long shirts or striped robes hanging nearly to the knees and belted at the waist with a wide sash and an embroidered vest. That sash also holds their weapons and often bristles with multiple knives. Most adult males are heavily bearded. Many wear turbans with a long strip hanging down the back and draped over a shoulder or a large sheep-skin cap. Others, particularly the nomads, wear *kaffiyehs*, striped to identify their tribe. Many of the soldiers wear a turban wrap around their spired steel caps. Everything worn, from the basest of clothing to armour and weaponry, is ornate and decorated. The women also wear baggy silken trousers with a vest. Veils may also be worn, but are not required. Jewellery is worn by many of the women. Armlets, bracelets, necklaces, tiaras, headbands and thin gold or platinum belts are common adornments. Their hair is kept long, and held in pony-tails by jewelled bands. Just as it is with the men, so it is with the women in regards to embroidery; everything worn is embellished and decorated. Iranistani men and women both wear soft shoes with upward-pointing toes.

The government of Iranistan is nominally feudal. The king of Iranistan is theoretically supported by the tribal chiefs, but this rarely proves to be the case in reality. The tribal lords, if they disagreed with the king, simply left the court and ignored him. If the king wants to enforce his will, he has to send his army out of Anshan to do it by force of arms. The Iranistani will not run from such a fight for their code of honour would prohibit such a thing. They are honour bound to protect what is theirs, be it land, women or personal honour. Thus are royal disputes settled. Often the royal troops return with the offending chief's head, or with the chief himself, who may then be hung in an iron cage for the birds to slay. However, the king does make decisions for the nation as a whole and protects the various kings who are in his good graces from outside invasions. He rarely intercedes on any one side in the case of an internal blood feud. Iranistani code permits wars of revenge.

In battle, the Iranistani are brutal, hewing at a fallen foe until little of the remains are recognizable. Unlike the Hyrkianians to the north, the Iranistani are more apt to use crossbows or javelins than bows, and are not well regarded as marksmen.

*'Nay, by Asura!
My clan has held
Kushaf since the days
of Bahram. Let the king
rule in Anshan: this is mine!*

*L. Sprague de Camp (rewriting
'R. E. Howard). The Flame
'Knife*

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF IRANISTAN

Ilbars Mountains – The Ilbars mark the border between Iranistan and Turan. They lie south of the Colchian Mountains. Between the two ranges are petroleum fields. The cities and towns of the Ilbari are technically under the control of Iranistan. The Ilbars River passes through the range into Iranistan. Drujistan and the Gorge of Ghosts lie in the southern reaches of the mountains. Passes through the mountains allow for trade between Iranistan and Turan.

Ilbars River – The Ilbars River, rising from its sources in the Ilbars Mountains, is the main watercourse of Turan. After leaving the Ilbars and passing along the western edges of the Colchians, it flows along the Misty Mountains, separating that range from the eastern desert. Run off and rivers from the Misty Mountains engorge the Ilbars River until it is a swollen, fantastic river. It runs past the city of Samara to the caravan city of Akif. At Akif, the Ilbars makes a ninety degree turn toward the Vilayet. It fans out into a broad estuary as it empties into the Vilayet. Aghrapur is built near the mouth of the river.

Mountains of Gold – These mountains form Iranistan's southern border. The Iranistani mine gold and other precious ores from these peaks, as well as pan gold from the rivers and run-offs from them.

IMPORTANT IRANISTAN CITIES AND TRIBAL LANDS

Villages in Iranistan are comprised of mud-brick houses (although the wealthy might have stone-walled home) surrounded by a low wall. Nomads in Iranistan use tents instead of houses. The village economy is agricultural, based on whatever that village specialises in, such as grapes and wines, wheat and barley, various nuts or teas. The men of the village work the fields and the women perform the household duties. Older children herd the animals, a form of wealth for the Iranistani, or help the men in the fields. The civilised villagers and the barbaric nomads have a symbiotic existence together. The villagers allow the nomads' herds of goats and sheep to graze their fields after harvest and again before planting, because the animals' droppings helps to fertilize the ground. The nomads, in turn, purchase supplies from the villagers and the villagers buy wool, milk and slaves from the nomads.

Anshan – Anshan is the glittering capital of Iranistan and the Anshan tribal lands. Anshan is situated on the Anshan River on a tall mound. Anshan is the chief economic and cultural center of Iranistan, where the King of Iranistan rules. The city produces textiles and

wood products. Anshan was founded by traders who used the location to transfer goods from Vendhyan, Kosalan and the Black Kingdom caravans to Turan-bound caravans. The location proved prosperous, and soon satellite villages sprung up, growing almonds, junipers, pistachios, grapes, wheat and barley. This spired city and its surrounding villages has a population of over a 166,660 Iranistani ruled by a powerful king. Kobad Shah was the ruler during the period described by *The Flame Knife*, and could easily raise a heavily armoured infantry army in excess of 10,000, a pitifully small number compared to his stronger ancestors. Thus, Kobad Shah used mercenaries extensively to bolster his army, especially *kozaki* or Hyrkanian cavalry. Kobad Shah's son, Arshak Shah, now rules Anshan. This proud city is distinctly civilised and holds to a civilised code of honour as more befitting its cultivated culture, not a barbarous one as hold the uncouth nomads and outlying Iranistani tribes.

Bajkari – The Bajkari are a nomad tribe of Iranistani allied with the Kaklani. They wear distinctively striped kaffiyehs. They are familiar with the coastlines of Iranistan and usually range to the east of the Kaklani. They travel with crossbowmen and most of them know how to swim.

Denizkenar – Denizkenar is a port city of southern Iranistan. It lies to the north of the Mountains of Gold and trades primarily with Vendhya, the Black Kingdoms to the south and other Iranistani cities along the coast. Trade routes pass through Denizkenar to Anshan. The Denizkenari number about 13,866 people in their tribe, including the outlying villages.

Drujistan – Drujistan is the name given to the southern portion of the Ilbars Mountains, a haunted place where few could live. It lies beyond a deep canyon called the Gorge of Ghosts. According to L. Sprague de Camp, Drujistan is a 'forbidding array of black crags and frowning cliffs, a wild, haglike chaos of broken black rock.' It is a day's ride south of the Kushafi country and hides the city of Yanaidar in its mountains.

Kaklan – The Kaklani tribes live in the southern lands of Iranistan, near the shore. Their robes and sashes are yellow with red stripes. They have a long-standing blood feud against the Zariri tribe. They number around 6,669 people. They are considered to be a very barbaric people who practice shamanism.

Kasfir – Kasfir is an Iranistani city with a well-known slave market. Only the most beautiful of slaves are sold here, and the slave market pays a premium for such slaves to sell. Kasfir raiders and traders travel as far as Brythunia, Vendhya and Kush to gain the

'A long day's journey southward, among mountains so wild and barren not even a goat could dwell among them, lies the country we call 'Drujistan.'

'Drujistan!' echoed Conan. 'Land of demons, eh?'

'Aye! An evil region of black crags and wild gorges, shunned by wise men. It seems uninhabited, yet men dwell there – men or devils. Sometimes a man is slain or a child or woman stolen from a lonely trail, and we know it is their work. We have followed and glimpsed shadowy figures moving through the night, but always the trail ends against a blank cliff, through which only a demon could pass. Sometimes we hear drums echoing among the crags, or the roaring of the fiends.'

L. Sprague de Camp (rewriting R. E. Howard). The Flame Knife

prettiest slaves. They will pay off fathers for their daughters or steal them if the fathers will not sell the daughters. Many Iranistani and Turanian harem-girls come from the flesh market of Kasfir. Kasfir has a population of 8,569 people.

Kushaf – Three days away from Anshan, Kushaf is the tribal land of the Kushafi in the Ilbars Mountains. Howard's original tale indicates the chief commanded three hundred swordsmen. If one swordsman out of twenty people can be called into service for a quick army and if one out of a hundred is a permanent soldier, then this tribe has about 5,000 members among its various familial villages. Their villages are about a day's journey northward from Drujistan.

Venjipur – Venjipur is not part of Iranistan proper. It is a rain-forested kingdom on the Gulf of Tarqheba to the east of Iranistan and south of the Colchian Mountains. It once was an empire dominated by Khitan expatriates. No longer a viable empire, Turan has tried unsuccessfully to annex the kingdom. It exports hemp and extracts of red and purple lotus. Venjipur also profits from the caravan route between Iranistan and Vendhya.

'Of all the flesh markets of the east, none could compare to that of 'Kasfir, in Iranistan. There beauty could be bargained for and men squandered fortunes to possess their fantasies.'

'Don 'Kraar. ...In the Eye of the 'Beholder'



Zariri – The Zariri are an Iranistan tribe who hate the Kaklani with a passion that can only exist in the confines of a generational blood-feud. They are a nomad tribe led by a sheik named Jaral. This tribe boasts of 3,335 members among its wandering people. They live in tents, primarily, and move from north to south and back again throughout the year. They are not as strong in battle as they would like, and often hire foreign mercenaries to bolster their numbers when they feel the need to go to war.

IRANISTANI RELIGION

The northern Iranistani primarily worship the Vendhyan god Asura. This religion, born of enormously complex rituals derived from four great Vendhyan books, celebrates a cosmic order, a belief in cause and effect that extends beyond the physical realm in such a way that failure to perform

the proper ceremonies or keep sworn oaths would disturb the cosmic order and catastrophe would follow. As a result of this sense of cosmic order and justice, Vendhyans believe in a heaven, a hell and the judgment of souls.

Asura is the chief god of Iranistan and was imported in from Vendhya as Iranistan struggled toward civilisation. Likely the Vendhyans were the most civilised people the early Iranistani encountered, and the Vendhyan sense of karma and fate matched closely to their own instinctive fatalism. The Asuran religion, with its strong belief in cause and effect, carry that thinking toward an idea of fate, fate that becomes a grim duty. To the Iranistani, there is no fate but the fate Asura gives. Man has little say in the matter.

The southern Iranistani nomads have a shamanistic religion derived from their Hyrkanian forebears.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Trading conflicts could provide interesting stories in Iranistan.

The various tribal holdings of the Iranistani are not always friendly toward the king and his dictates. The Iranistani king could send the characters to battle these wayward tribes, or perhaps the characters will be in a position to defend the troublesome tribe from the king.

Turan would love to conquer Iranistan and could send troops through the Ilbars.

Iranistan may decide to send a raiding party to Zamboula to steal goods from a particular caravan or as a cover to a kidnapping.

KHAURAN

Land of The Queen of Sorrow

KHAURAN IS ONE of many small principalities that won independence from Koth. Robert E. Howard names but a couple of these tiny realms. Khauran, like many of these little states, controls portions of the trade routes into Koth and derives much of its wealth from those caravans. Its domination over the trade routes keeps Koth from reacquiring the kingdom as part of its empire. Too much turbulence in that land might well be bad for business. Still, Khauran fears usurpation by Koth or Shem, as they are a small kingdom without much of a military presence.

Khauran has a population of some three million, with most found within its many villages and has but a single city.

Many caravan routes pass through Khauran. One such caravan route has the ominous name of the 'deadman's journey', a route that passes through the southern deserts and around the bend in the River Styx into the Black Kingdoms. Slaves from Zembabwei and Punt are the primary goods traded on that route, but it is a deadly route, passing through several hostile territories. Another trade route runs to Shadizar.

Khauran is ruled by the Ashkaurian dynasty, a matriarchal line of nobility. Currently it is ruled by Queen Taramis, who is growing old and wise. She is a well-regarded ruler, almost worshipped by the Khaurani. She is 'famed for her virtue, justice and tranquillity.' Taramis is the daughter of Queen Ialamis. The queen dresses conservatively, so that only her face, palms and fingers are unhidden by the shimmering satin and yielding velvet of multiple skirts and royal robes. This dynasty is cursed, both with promises of a succession of evil witches and through the brevity of life for those who choose to be consorts to the queens.

Khauran is a civilised kingdom, one that does not like scandal among its rulers, nor does it appreciate wild debauches, despite its state religion. The Khaurani believe in marriage and its sanctity and expect its rulers to act in a regal manner. Over drinking is frowned upon.

There is but one city of any size in Khauran and it shares the name of the kingdom. Outside of that city, there are villages, hamlets and individual farms and homes. The city-dwellers are of Hyborian descent, but the villagers and peasants of the land are not. They descend from native tribes that lived in the area

before the Hyborians conquered it. In addition to the Hyborian Khaurani and the aboriginal peasants who till the soil of the fields and vineyards, nomad tribes such as the Ekinari live in the deserts beneath the river in the southwest.

Male Khaurani wear hose and shirts; otherwise the Khaurani dress in a manner consistent with Koth, although individual fads and fashions occasionally rise here to give some distinctiveness to their dress. Beards are popular in Khauran.

The women wear their hair piled high, often wrapped around cones or other head-gear to give the illusion of volume. The wealthy weave pearls and jewellery into their hair as well. Earrings of pearls or gems are also common and the women lacquer their glistening eyelashes to make them longer. Necklaces are often worn around their necks. The women wrap a bandeau of silk around their upper body. They wear heavy girdles that support their silken skirts. The skirts are worn long and voluminous, slit up the sides to reveal flashes of leg as they walk. Their sandals are upturned at the toe and sport lifted heels.

In the first place, 'Khauran is a kingdom of no great size, one of the many principalities which at one time formed the eastern part of the empire of 'Koth, and which later regained the independence which was theirs at a still earlier age. This part of the world is made up of these tiny realms, diminutive in comparison with the great kingdoms of the 'West, or the great sultanates of the farther 'East, but important in their control of the caravan routes and in the wealth concentrated in them.

'Robert E. Howard. A Witch Shall Be Born

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF KHAURAN

The countryside of Khauran is two-fold. Most of it is meadows, fields and vineyards. Cattle is the primary herd-animal. Across the river, to the south, Khauran is sandy desert, eventually giving way to the deserts of Shem and the Hyrkanians, where the Zuagirs of Shem and other tribesmen hold sway. Khauran is a fertile land and its crops yield at least three harvests a year.

The rich farmlands of Khauran are pleasant and the people are generally happy, apt to wave at passing caravans as they go about their work.

The Oasis of Akrel – The oasis of Akrel, located in the deserts east of Khauran and west of Turan, is where Conan hid Khaurani rebels during the events of *A Witch Shall Be Born*. The story does not say clearly whether the oasis lies to the east of the city of Khauran, yet still within the borders of the principality of Khauran, or if it lies east of the entire kingdom in the deserts fought over by the Shemites, the Turanians and the Zuagirs.

IMPORTANT KHAURANI CITIES

Khauran – The city of Khauran is the only city of size in the entire kingdom. It has a population of 21,800 residents. It is a walled city of gleaming towers and marbled palaces. A gorgeous temple to Ishtar is on the main square across from the palace. Inns and taverns abound, catering to the caravan traffic that is the city's lifeblood.

Nearly a mile behind, the walls and towers of Khauran rose sheer out of the meadowlands. [...] On either side of the city, and beyond it, stretched the fertile meadowlands, with cattle browsing in the distance where fields and vineyards checkered the plain. The western and northern horizons were dotted with villages, miniature in the distance. A lesser distance to the southeast, a silvery gleam marked the course of a river, and beyond that river sandy desert began abruptly, to stretch away and away beyond the horizon.

Robert E. Howard. A Witch Shall Be Born

Khauran is the most southeasterly of these principalities, bordering on the very deserts of eastern Shem. The city of Khauran is the only city of any magnitude in the realm and stands within sight of the river which separates the grasslands from the sandy desert, like a watch-tower to guard the fertile meadowlands behind it. The land is so rich that it yields three and four crops a year, and the plains north and west of the city are dotted with villages. To one accustomed to the great plantations and stock farms of the West, it is strange to see these tiny fields and vineyards: yet wealth in grain and fruit pours from them as from a horn of plenty. The villagers are agriculturalists, nothing else. Of a mixed, aboriginal race, they are unwarlike, unable to protect themselves, and forbidden the possession of arms. Dependent wholly upon the soldiers of the city for protection, they are helpless under the present conditions. [...] The people of the city are Khauran's ruling caste, predominately Hyborian, and valorous and warlike.

Robert E. Howard. A Witch Shall Be Born

KHAURANI RELIGION

Despite the ruling caste's Hyborian heritage, Khauran's primary religion is centred around the fearsome goddess Ishtar, the daughter of Anu, instead of Mitra. Ishtar is worshipped as the Queen of Heaven and a goddess of sexuality, fertility and war. She is usually depicted as having wings and is symbolized by the lion. She is a Shemite goddess, said to have been birthed full-grown from a stone cracked open by a bolt of green lightning on the site where Asgalun now stands.

Ishtar's shrines and temples are exotic, lavish and ornate, in the fashion of the East, with bright colourful decorations and objects. Still, it is a western religion now, probably descended from frenetic Ashtoreth and Derketo-style worship rites, restrained somewhat, but still exotic and sensual enough to be attractive to worshippers. Although Ishtar does not ask for human sacrifices, animal sacrifices are often part of her fertility rituals. Her temples include ivory idols, and she is believed to inhabit those idols. The idols are sensuous and are cared for by the priests and priestesses, often dressed and painted daily depending on the ritual needs of the day or season.

As a fertility religion, her followers believe the heavens fertilise the earth, represented by Ishtar, by way of rain, the sky god's seed. Her rites are conducted as languid orgies in which cosmic congress is ensured by mortal enactments of the union of the gods. The priestess was believed to embody Ishtar during certain sensual rituals and bestows her favours on her followers to ensure prosperity and fertility. Sacred prostitutes probably aided in the rituals. The priests of Ishtar represent her sons and lovers and also aided in the rituals; if a woman was thought to be infertile, the priests would 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.

As the Queen of Heaven, Ishtar rules the cosmos and the stars, for these things govern human behaviour. The Zodiac is her girdle and divination is an important aspect of her religion, practiced in the courts of Khauran. Magic, often in the forms of charms or celestial horoscopes, is also worked by her priests and priestesses. Laws, in lands watched over by Ishtar, are a form of magic, and the breaking of laws is tantamount to sacrilege. Thus the priests and priestesses of Ishtar work with the kings and queens of Khauran, training people to follow the law as a religious duty.

The religion believes in an afterlife. Hell is hot and guarded by seven gates and legions of demons. The damned there are tormented.

KHAURANI HISTORY

Khauran was once part of Shem and was populated by an indigenous people of uncertain origin. During the age of Acheron, as Koth was forming out of individual principalities, Khauran was formed. It existed for many decades, or longer, as an individual nation but eventually was absorbed by Koth. Later, probably after the fall of Acheron, the principality again fought for its freedom and won it.

In order to gain assurance of continued independence and prosperity, one of the early queens of Khauran mated with a demon. The demonic blood still runs through the veins of the royal family, and once per century twins are born, one with a crescent birth mark on her bosom, the other without. The crescent-marked child is named Salome, after the first witch of Khauran, and usually is slain. The demon apparently is a jealous godling, for those who marry the queens of Khauran seem to lead short lives thereafter.

CREATURES OF KHAURAN

Jackals, desert wolves, vultures are common animals for this area. The land is fairly settled and patrolled, keeping most of the larger, dangerous animals out.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

A certain statue of Ishtar, renowned for its healing properties, has been sent to Stygia to help a member of the ruling caste there recover from an illness. The caravan carrying the statue may have been captured by Zuagirs or Shemites and the adventurers are charged with recovering it. The adventurers could be the ones transporting it to Stygia, or returning it to Khauran. Perhaps the adventurers are hired to steal the statue away from the caravan, either by enemies of the ill Stygian or by devotees of Ishtar who want the statue for their own temple in Koth.

During the reign of Salome, several decades gone, many Khaurani were sold to Turanian slavers. Perhaps a few have managed their freedom and now seek to return to their home. Perhaps they wish vengeance against Taramis, not realising it was her sister Salome who was the one responsible for their slavery.

KHITAI

Land of the Ancients

KHITAI IN THE Far East is little known to the Hyborians yet is probably the most important and most famous kingdom of that region. Robert E. Howard continually refers to it as shrouded in jungles. This is an alien land to most Hyborians with unfathomable people. Even the Turanians find them unnervingly inscrutable. The people in general are called kindly by Yag-Kosha. The few who leave Khitai to wander the West are rarely described so generously.

Khitai is an insular kingdom; few ever leave it. The ones who do leave are scholars and sorcerers. That they are yellow-skinned worshippers of bizarre gods and demons is not to be doubted, however. Their eyes have a typical oriental look and their hair is dark. The priests have their heads shaven. The knowledge and traditions of these people are esoteric and ancient. The people here have a taste for spectacle and tradition. The Khitan people are also noted for being extremely knowledgeable and wise, well-versed in ancient lore and folk-tales.

The common people are taught that the *cheng-li*, the white people who live outside the Great Wall, are cannibals. Their first reaction to such people is likely to be fear. They live in bamboo huts with flaring, shingled roofs. The people dress in high-necked, long silk jackets and embroidered trousers, the women fixing their hair in complicated coiffeurs. Swords are forbidden to the common people, so they have learned to fight bare-handed in amazing flurries of violence, using esoteric techniques handed down through familial lines for

generation after generation. The nobles dress similarly, but their dress is made out of more elaborate materials. Silk and cotton are common materials for clothing.

Khitai caravans trade with Kusan, Turan, Stygia, Meru, Vendhya and Iranistan. Their caravans are loaded with jade, cloth-of-gold, silk, lotus blossoms, domesticated jungle animals, gold, silver, spices, charms, amulets, porcelain figures and vases and many other works of oriental art. These caravans, and a few exiled Khitans, are the only contact with the West. Björn Nyberg asserts that Khitan steel is weak, so quality steel may be something the Khitans seek in trade.

The kingdom was once ruled by Yah Chieng the Terrible. He ruled for almost twenty years, grinding the Khitans into poverty with his taxes and extortion. Although Conan slew Yah Chieng, the remainder of his clan, the Yah, may still hold power. The god-king, an emperor, rules Khitai from Paikang.

*It was made from
the black lotus, whose
blossoms wave in the lost
jungles of Khitai, where only
the yellow-skulled priests of
'Yun dwell.'*

*Robert E. Howard, The
Tower of the Elephant*

*At last I alone was left,
dreaming of old times among
the ruined temples of jungle-lost
Khitai, worshipped as a god by an
ancient yellow-skinned race. Then came
'Yara... he brought me up from the lost
jungles of Khitai where the gray apes
danced to the pipes of the yellow priests,
and offerings of fruit and wine heaped
my broken altars. No more was I a god
to kindly jungle-folk.*

*Robert E. Howard, The Tower of the
Elephant*

Infantrymen are unarmoured, wearing high-necked, padded jackets and embroidered trousers. Archers wear light armour. Charioteers wear slightly heavier armour and light helmets secured with elaborate bows. Commanders and other officers wear intricate, lacquered armour, complete with tassels and flaring helmets secured with a complicated bow. This armour design has an exotic, sinister look to Westerners.



MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF KHITAI

Robert E. Howard always refers to Khitai as being tangled amid dark jungles, thus Khitai must be located in a tropical or subtropical region. Björn Nyberg's *Return of Conan* gives further details on Khitai. The west is dominated by desert and steppe. This gives way to stagnant swamps, vast bogs and dank marshes. The tall reeds become bamboo forests which then give way to tangled jungles. These jungles, which hide innumerable ruins, then become rolling plains peopled by saffron-skinned herdsmen. This land is cut across by the Great Wall of Khitai. More grassy plains give way again to humid jungles. These jungles, however, are not as trackless as the previous ones. Paths can often be found in them, cut by human hand. It takes an average of eight days to cross this thick jungle to Paikang.

Kusan – The oriental kingdom of Kusan lies outside the Great Wall. It is a satellite kingdom to Khitai. It is friendly to Turan and has a trade agreement with that nation. Its capital city goes by the same name.

Kara-Korum – The Desert of Black Sands, the Kara Korum, is the area where 'devil winds', great blasts of heat, wash over the area around the graceful city of Wan Tengri.

Lake Ho – Lake Ho is a large lake in western Khitai noted for its armoured crayfish. Wan Tengri is built upon its shores. The lands around the lake are controlled by the Wan clan.

Mountains of Night – This range of mountains provides a natural border to the west of Khitai.

Wuhuan Desert – The Wuhuan is an incredibly vast wasteland, arid and sandy along the western border of Khitai. In *The Return of Conan*, it took Conan twenty-five days to cross this horrible land. It is populated by small bands of nomads, similar to the Hyrkanians. This desert then gives way to bogs and swamps.

IMPORTANT KHITAN CITIES

Khitai is a huge land, with many cities and villages, although most, like Shoulun, are too small to give more than its name. Many villages and towns are centres of commerce and industry where intricate art and ornaments are created. Others are religious centres where only priests dwell. The Saga tells of a place where black lotus grows, where only priests of Yun are allowed to live. The Saga does not say if Yun is the name of the city or the name of a god, but most scholars believe the latter.

'He was a magician from far Khitai, returning to his native kingdom after a journey to Stygia. He took me with him to purple-towered Paikang, its minarets rising amid the vine-festooned jungles of bamboo, and there I grew to womanhood under his teaching. Age had steeped him deep in black wisdom, not weakened his powers of evil. Many things he taught me.'

'Robert E. Howard. A Witch Shall Be Born'

Paikang – Purple-towered Paikang is the fairest of all Khitan cities. Hosts of glittering warriors shield it from the warlike ambitions of its neighbours, Shu-chen and Ruo-gen. Built



Wan Tengri – Wan Tengri in western Khitai is noted for its high, graceful towers. It lies on Lake Ho and is in the center of the Desert of Black Sands. It is ruled by a sorceress of the Wan clan. It is dominated by a great fiery tower, from whence come the devil winds that protect the city.

KHITAN RELIGION

The Khitans hold to many strange beliefs and bizarre superstitions. One example is the legend that death must answer any question put to her by a man with courage enough to grasp and hold her. Khitan temples serve as sorcerous schools, teaching knowledge of all sorts. The emphasis on music in Khitan temples suggests some form of shamanism. The worship of Yogah of Yag also indicates that the Khitans like to worship beings they feel are real.

The sorcerers of Khitai probably summon the dark gods to their earth so that they can be worshipped in person. In many of the stories, cities founded by easterners have dark gods living in nameless pits. Salome, in *A Witch Shall Be Born*, 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, 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.

in the midst of 'vine-festooned jungles of bamboo', the city is ancient and fabulous. Every year, the Yah clan hold a festival in Paikang in honour of their conquest of the city. This festival is called the Dance of the Lions. The god-king of Khitai rules from here.

These parts had once been rich and civilised, long ago when Western civilization was barely in its morning glow. In many places Conan found crumbling ruins of temples, palaces, and whole cities, dead and forgotten for thousands of years. Their empty window-holes stared blackly like the eye sockets of skulls in somber forgetfulness. Vines draped the worn and pitted statues of weird, pre-human gods. Chattering apes shrieked their displeasure at his intrusion into their green-mantled walls.

‘Björn Nyberg, The Return of Conan

The Khitan pantheon, rumoured to host more than nine thousand gods, is mysterious to the lands of the West. Doubtless even the strange, shaven headed priests of Paikang who talk to faceless demons in the lost jungles know the names of all nine thousand, so only a few will be discussed below.

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

Yogah – Yogah is a strange, elephant-headed star-being from green-breasted Yag who dreams in the great blue vastness of Space. His memory is worshipped still as a god in Khitai. Probably he is a god of magic and sorcerous knowledge.

Yun – Yun is the main god worshipped in the jungle temples. Shaven headed priests conduct his ceremonies using the music of chimes and bells.





At first glance in the dim half-light, the creature would seem a lion, though a huge black-maned one. Yet, there is something in its face, its shape, its aspect, something nearly human, something agelessly, unmistakably evil! This something arouses ancestral fears, primeval hatred in the barbarian's breast, and he steps forward to slay it with a loathing he could never fully comprehend. Yet, as the sight of an upraised blade rouses the beast-thing to a snarling rage, it proves that even Khitan wizards may not know everything about the strength of the fabled mantichore! Slaving, sharp-fanged jaws yawn wide, taloned claws reach out to tear and rend.

Roy Thomas, The Temptress in the Tower of Flame

KHITAN HISTORY

Yogah of Yag, also called Yag-kosha, who is himself older than man can reckon, calls the yellow-skinned race inhabiting those lost jungles ancient. What is ancient to a race that is virtually immortal and lived here since the age of dinosaurs? This race must be one of the first to rise up in the far-flung past.

The foundations of Hyborian Age history, Robert E. Howard's *The Hyborian Age* and the stories themselves, say nothing of the history of Khitai. Although some apocryphal histories equate Khitai with the ancient civilisation destroyed by the forebears of the Hyrkanians, this does not seem likely.

The Stygians (who *are* the remnants of that destroyed culture) and the Khitans, while both

sorcerous people, are so physically dissimilar this 'history' is unsatisfactory. Howard left Khitai's history as a mystery and so shall it be here.

KHITAN CREATURES

Waterfoul, tigers, marsh buffalo, giant snakes, komodo dragons and many other fantastic animals can be found in Khitai. Its jungles are teeming with life, and strange monsters, carnivorous plants and vicious predators are an ever-present danger.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

The Yah Clan, put into power by Yah Chieng the Terrible, may want vengeance against King Conan for the slaying of their king. Characters may catch wind of this plot and may be in a position to help or hinder the Khitans on their mission of death.

Demons and monsters, such as Yogah of Yag, lurk in the dank jungles of Khitai, where scholars can learn things man was not meant to know and where shaven-headed priests dance and worship them as they learn at the demons' feet.

Some sorcerers like to enslave the demons that lurk in the temples of vine-shrouded Khitai and may send characters out to capture them or to scout them out.

Khitai is the location of many types of rare lotus plants. Characters may be sent to find various lotus plants or to travel with caravans for protection of their lotus.

KHORAJA

A Kothic Piece of Shem

KHORAJA IS AN independent realm, but often 'guided' politically by Koth, who has long wished to control this little slice of Shem. However, since King Conan placed a puppet monarch on the throne of Koth, the pressure on Khoraja has lessened considerably. The kingdom is ruled by a hereditary monarchy. The current king is Khossus, who is more absorbed in pageantry and protocol than in actually ruling. At night, King Khossus is fond of lotus wine and foreign dancing girls. Most affairs of state are left to courtly sycophants and dilettantes. The king's sister, Yasmela, who once ruled as Queen-Regent during a period when her brother was kidnapped by Ophir, has no official power anymore, but she still practices her feminine wiles on her brother and some of the more powerful courtiers to keep her hand in Khoraja's politics.

Most of the underclasses here are Shemite and the nobility are Kothic. The kingdom is feudal in design, with counts in charge of various areas of Khoraja. Khoraja has 300 knights, all minor noblemen of Kothian descent. At one time they had over 500, but Natokh's horde whittled them down to less than 150. Time has healed some of those wounds. Its light cavalry is made of Zaheemi hillmen, who are similar to Shemite nomads. The sons of lesser nobility that have been ruined and are penniless make up the Khorajan spearmen, infantry who march to support the more honourable knights. In times of war, Khoraja spends much of its treasury on mercenaries due to the weakness and small number of loyal nationalist troops.

In terms of culture, Khoraja is very similar to Koth, and is a mixture of Shemite, Hyborian and Eastern ideas and ethics. Long traditions guide its laws and its people are proud to be an independent nation. It derives its wealth from the caravan route that passes through the Shamla Pass.

Khoraja is home to almost a million and a half people living in one city, eighteen towns and about a thousand small villages.

On the southern side the hills fell away sheerly, marking a distinct geographical division between the Kothian uplands and the southern desert. The hills were the rim of the uplands, stretching in an almost unbroken wall. Here they were bare and desolate, inhabited only by the Zaheemi clan, whose duty it was to guard the caravan road.

Robert E. Howard, 'Black Colossus'

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF KHORAJA

The southern border of Khoraja is the distinct Kothian Escarpment, which separates the deserts of the Zuagirs from the fertile lands of Khoraja. This escarpment is pierced by the Shamla Pass, which is important to Khoraja as a main caravan route passes through here from the Hyborian kingdoms to the lands of the East and South. It is from the traffic of this route that Khoraja derives its wealth and its very existence. That pass also protects it from Koth, for if Khoraja stops the caravans here, much of the Hyborian world's trade would come to a standstill until trade started flowing through Zamora or the city states of Shem, bypassing Koth entirely.

IMPORTANT KHORAJA CITIES

Khanyria – Khanyria is a walled town in Khoraja with a population that barely exceeds 2,000 people. The walls are described as towering and the buildings are domed. Khanyria is the home of Pelias the Sorcerer, the scholar who helped Conan against Tsotha-lanti. He dwells in a yellow tower amid an expanse of gardens and lawns in the northern end of the city. Pelias does not bother with walls. His tower is yellow because the outside of it is plastered with gold coins. He likes his drink and other fleshly pleasures and is often indulging his obsession with them. The streets of Khanyria are narrow but cobbled. The city guard here do not stop strangers during the day without a good reason, but it is against their custom to leave their doors open at night. It is a pretty peaceful city where East and West meet to barter and trade.

Khoraja – As is common in the small city states, the capital city of the realm also bears the name of the realm. Khoraja is the capital of Khoraja. It has temples to Ishtar and other Shemite gods and still has a nearly forgotten shrine to Mitra. The palace is surrounded by gardens on all sides but one, which opens onto the street. The streets are lit by cressets placed at regular intervals. The city is described as cavernous. It has a population of approximately 30,000 people.

RELIGION IN KHORAJA

Khorajan religion is identical to Koth's religious environment. See page 73

KHORAJAN HISTORY

Khoraja is dominated by the Shamla Pass, as it is one of the key strategic points for control of the trade routes. The Pass was originally dominated by the Zaheemi hillmen, who were akin to the Shemite nomads. Shem settled the area and built the original town of Khoraja, taking control of the pass away from the Zaheemi. Koth desperately desired control of that pass and invaded the area many times. Eventually Kothian adventurers took over the area to control the trade route that goes through Shamla Pass. These adventurers, however, had a rebellious mindset and eventually declared their independence, which remains to this day.

'He talks frequently of selling me in wedlock to fat Shemite kings for advantageous trade treaties!'

Conan listened patiently to Yasmela.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

King Khossus wants to sell his sister off in marriage to a Shemite king for a trade treaty. He may hire the characters to escort her to her new husband. Conan might send troops to whisk her away from such a fate that the characters must fend off. Other kings, Kothian or Shemite, may try to kidnap her to force Khoraja to do something favourable to that king.

Zamoran kidnappers may kidnap the king once again for Ophir, leaving Yasmela again in charge, hiring the characters to go rescue her brother.

KOTH

Hub of Overland Trade Routes

KOTH IS ONE of the oldest Hyborian kingdoms, a vast meadowland north of Shem, founded alongside Corinthia and Ophir. It is a vast land populated by 8,850,000 people in over 11,000 small villages, 107 towns and a score of cities. Ruled by warring princes and barons, the Kothian culture is a strange brew of Shemite, Stygian, Acheronian and Hyborian ideas and ways. Currently, Koth is vassal to Aquilonia.

To the south the Hyborians have founded the kingdom of Koth, on the borders of those pastoral countries known as the Lands of Shem...

Robert E. Howard. The Hyborian Age

For most of Conan's career, the tyrant king of Koth was Strabonus, a man who was as 'penurious of his knights as of his coins'. He crushed his people with heavy taxes and ponderous levies. However, three years ago, Conan crushed in his skull at the battle of Shamar, as detailed in *The Scarlet Citadel*. During Conan's life, Koth was constantly in various states of rebellion, with princes and barons fighting for the throne against the tyrant. After the tyrant was slain, the rebellions and civil wars grew even more intense, but Balardus became the king of Koth, swearing allegiance to Conan as a vassal king. Khorshemish remains the capital of Koth.

Then Conan dispatched heralds in black-and-gold tabards to his vassal-kings, Ludovic of Ophir and Balardus of Koth. He curtly bade them each to raise a force of two thousand horse and foot.

L. Sprague de Camp. Black Sphinx of Nebthu

Koth's military is primarily dark-faced knights and cavalry, although they are supported by spearmen and mercenary troops, usually Shemitish archers. The knights are trained for seven years and at great expense before they are unleashed in combat. The Kothian troops wear livery embossed with the golden helmet of Koth. Most sport beards, often in the ringleted fashion of the neighbouring Shemites. The Kothic spearmen are giants in mail brigandine and steel caps. Koth also maintain a cavalry of light horse skirmishers called *spahis*. They are often sent in to scout out areas and to ravage a countryside before the bulk of the army arrives.

City dwelling Kothians dress well, often wearing different sorts of aprons over their clothes depending on their trade. The more wealthy wear velvet pantaloons and silk shirts. The women wear brightly coloured and embroidered dresses and shifts. Kothians tend to be olive- or dark-skinned.

Part of Koth's economy is based on slavery. Kothic slavers trade all over the world for slaves. Some Kothians believe they are so skilled at kidnapping they travel to Zamora to vie for that trade. Another portion of Koth's economy is based on the herding of long-horned cattle. However, most of Koth's economy is based on trade.

In front of him stood Tsotha, and on divans lounged Strabonus and Amalrus in their silks and gold, gleaming with jewels, naked slave-boys beside them pouring wine into cups carved of a single sapphire.

Robert E. Howard. The Scarlet Citadel

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF KOTH

KOTH

A week's ride northward, the desert ran into a tangle of barren hills, beyond which lay the fertile uplands of Koth, the southernmost realm of the Hyborian races.

On the southern side the hills fell away sheerly, marking a distinct geographical division between the Kothian uplands and the southern desert. The hills were the rim of the uplands, stretching in an almost unbroken wall. Here they were bare and desolate...

Robert E. Howard, 'Black Colossus'

Koth is the southernmost Hyborian kingdom. It is bordered along the south by a mass of sheer and barren hills, creating a form of escarpment between southern Koth and the northern edge of Shem. These steep hills have but a few passes. The Shamla Pass in Khoraja is one. A single pass goes into Corinthia through the Karpash Mountains to the north at Zahmah. Another pass is near Eruk, in Shem. At least two passes go through the mountains into Ophir.

Koth is landlocked, so it has no ports but it is a fertile land. Western Koth is sub-humid prairie, meadowlands, forests, orchards and farms, with blue lakes and rivers ensuring its fertile lands remain so.

The roads in Koth tend to meander and are rarely in a straight line, often finding the most inconvenient of paths over hills and into deep gorges. Most of these roads are ancient and were built to pass close to eldritch sites or religious shrines, not so much for the mere movement of caravan traffic. Thus travel through Koth is rarely done in straight lines and takes longer than many expect.

Dagoth Hill – This infamous hill is the site of pre-human ruins. It is haunted by demons that are willing to sleep with human women.

Khorgas River – The Khorgas River lies in a narrow, shallow valley that winds through farms and pasture land. Steep hills line the valley, dotted with the homes of serfs on their farms and the occasional keep of one of the lesser nobles of Koth. The river is slow and shallow, easily fordable along most of its length, although cascades and deep pools break at least one section, near Khoraja. The closer to Khoraja the river winds, the more the valley hills become mountainous, and the river becomes a mere brook. A square military tower sits on the mountains over the valley at the border to Khoraja.

They skirted the barrens of central Koth, where streams emptied into a lake so salty that the few plants marching along the marge were armed with spines and thorns. In time they reached more fertile country and stopped to rest.

L. Sprague de Camp and Lin Carter, 'Shadows in the Dark'

Lake of Salts – A salt lake lays in the central barren region of Koth, surrounded by cacti and other thorny plants. The lake is quite large, several leagues long. The Islands of Pearl lie in the midst of the salt lake, though few know of them.

Mount Khrosha – The Kothian escarpment, the low range of hills separating Koth from Shem, rises to even greater heights around the great volcano Khrosha. Iron forged in this hellish fire-pit has no equal for hardness.

Yivga River – This river lies in eastern Koth.

Zamanas Mesa – This mesa is reputed to be haunted, a 'bad place.' It is located along the Kothian Escarpment between Khoraja and Khauran. Two unequal prominences of stone outcroppings lie in the center of the mesa. The Harangi hillmen dwell in villages of plaster-stoned walls and conical roofs near this mesa.

It was a long, jagged height that reared before them like the crest of some great beast, steeper and rockier than the surrounding hills. Yet its nearer end, spreading out ahead of and slightly below them, formed a level mesa that looked both habitable and defensible. This plateau was roughly triangular or wedge-shaped, like the head of a salamander, elevated above the surrounding canyons by cliffs on two sides; on the third it merged with the loftier slopes of the razorback ridge. There was an approach to it via a sloping promontory of stone that angled forward and down from one side near the front of the ridge; this steep, natural causeway passed close up to the mesa's corner and looked as if it would be easy to defend by means of projectile fire.

Leonard Carpenter, 'Conan the Renegade'

IMPORTANT KOTHIAN CITIES

Daramish – Daramish is a small backwater city in eastern Koth at the base of low mountains. The women here dress extremely conservatively, with veils, full robes and cloaks.

El-Shah-Maddoc – El-Shah-Maddoc is a walled city in Koth with a population of 12,300 people. It is built in the meadows regions. It was conquered by King Irham of Syreb to control the trade in the region. It was later utterly destroyed in a magical blast.

Khorshemish – Khorshemish, 'the Queen of the South' is a walled city of tall spires built on the crest of a sheer hill. The city is said to be a city of wonders, from the gold-chased gates to the palace itself. King Khossus V built this city on the ruins of an older city after Acheron fell, over three thousand years ago. The first palace of Khossus V was built on the location of the Scarlet Citadel, but he abandoned it and built another in the suburbs. Finally, Khossus V moved the capital of Koth to a city in eastern Koth. King Akkutho I decided to rebuild the Khorshemish palace many years later, building it into a fortress. The sorcerer Tsotha-lanti later built the Scarlet Citadel with that fortress as its foundation. 44,253 residents live in Khorshemish. A forest lies to the east of the city.

Meshken – Meshkan is a boisterously happy little town thirty miles west of Khoraja. It has plenty of loud taverns and has a colourful night life. A half-day ride further leads one to the king of this province in Castle Vhalcken.

Syreb – Syreb is a Kothian city-state in the meadows of Koth known for its famous warrior, the gladiator Jahib-Re, who served Prince Irham long, long ago. Jahib was retired and served Irham as a councilor, his glory days long behind him, until he was killed

by a demon. King Irham is a foolish king. He attacked and conquered El-Shah-Maddoc at one point, then rebelled against King Strabonus.

Tantusium – Tantusiam is Kothian city-state. The main gate is imposing, flanked by two stout round towers. The gates themselves are metal studded wooden valves. There is no defensive works overhanging the gates themselves. A stone bulwark, however, is built to block the swinging motion of a battering ram, forcing caravan traffic under the towers. When it's prince decides to war, the city relies on Free Companions – companies of mercenaries. Inside the gate is a plaza of inns, shops and merchant stalls. The street is winding, but is cobbled in most places, although some of the streets are made of steps as the city is built on a hill. The citadel inside is hidden behind a façade of tall buildings, making it hard to see from the streets.

Korveka – Korveka is a barony of Koth against the borders of Khauran. Most in Khauran feel Korveka should be a part of Khauran. Korveka's main produce is melons.

The Kothians had long since abandoned the worship of Mitra, forgetting the attributes of the universal Hyborian god. (...) Ishtar was much to be feared, and all the gods of Koth. Kothian culture and religion had suffered from a subtle admixture of Shemite and Stygian strains. The simple ways of the Hyborians had become modified to a large extent by the sensual, luxurious, yet despotic habits of the East.

Robert E. Howard, Black Colossus

...the spires of Khorshemish stood up gleaming and rose-tinted on the southeastern horizon, the slim towers overawed by the grim scarlet citadel that at a distance was like a splash of bright blood in the sky. That was the castle of Tsotha. Only one narrow street, paved with marble and guarded by heavy iron gates, led up to it, where it crowned the hill dominating the city. The sides of that hill were too sheer to be climbed elsewhere. From the walls of the citadel one could look down on the broad white streets of the city on minaretted mosques, shops, temples, mansions, and markets. One could look down, too, on the palaces of the king, set in broad gardens, high-walled, luxurious riots of fruit trees and blossoms, through which artificial streams murmured, and silvery fountains rippled incessantly. Over all brooded the citadel, like a condor stooping above its prey, intent on its own dark meditations.

The mighty gates between the huge towers of the outer wall clanged open, and the king rode into his capital between lines of glittering spearmen, while fifty trumpets pealed salute.

Robert E. Howard, The Scarlet Citadel

RELIGION IN KOTH

Kothians worship the gods of Shem and their faith is centred on the fearsome goddess Ishtar, the daughter of Anu, having abandoned Mitra approximately 900 years before Conan's time. When Koth was founded by the Hyborians, they probably worshiped Bori, but when the great religious revolution came, Koth also was swept up in its fervour, converting to Mitraism. However, the conversion was not as strong here as elsewhere and the Kothians fell away, preferring the unrestrained and orgiastic practices of the Shemites to the stately processions of the Mitrans.

Ishtar is worshipped as the Queen of Heaven and a goddess of sexuality, fertility and war. She is usually depicted as having wings and is symbolized by the lion. She is a Shemite goddess, said to have been birthed full-grown from a stone cracked open by a bolt of green lightning on the site where Asgalun now stands.

Ishtar's shrines and temples are exotic, lavish and ornate, in the fashion of the East, with bright colourful

decorations and objects. Still, it is a western religion now, probably descended from frenetic Ashtoreth and Derketo-style worship rites, restrained somewhat, but still exotic and sensual enough to be attractive to worshippers. Although Ishtar does not ask for human sacrifices, animal sacrifices are often part of her fertility rituals. Her temples include ivory idols, and she is believed to inhabit those idols. The idols are sensuous and are cared for by the priests and priestesses, often dressed and painted daily depending on the ritual needs of the day or season. Her followers are expected to approach the statues naked and on their knees, as befitting a supplicant.

As a fertility religion, her followers believe the heavens fertilise the earth, represented by Ishtar, by way of rain, the sky god's seed. Her rites are conducted as languid orgies in which cosmic congress is ensured by mortal enactments of the union of the gods. 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 probably aid in the rituals. The priests of Ishtar represent her sons and lovers and also aid in the rituals; if a woman was thought to be infertile, the priests would 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.

As the Queen of Heaven, Ishtar rules the cosmos and the stars, for these things govern human behaviour. The Zodiac is her girdle and divination is an important aspect of her religion, practiced in the courts of Koth. Her priests and priestesses also work magic, often in the forms of charms or celestial horoscopes. Laws, in lands watched over by Ishtar, are a form of magic, and the breaking of laws is tantamount to sacrilege. Thus the priests and priestesses of Ishtar work with the kings and queens of Koth, training people to follow the law as a religious duty.

The religion believes in an afterlife. Hell is hot and guarded by seven gates and legions of demons. The damned there are tormented. There is a concept of judgement and a certain amount of ethical teachings. Perhaps it is this similarity that causes the religion to be more palatable than most to the Mitrans.

The Harangi Hillmen and the other hillmen of the Kothic Escarpment tend to be shamanistic. One such shaman is said to have plucked out his eye and given it a full ritual burial so that it could continually gaze upon the spirit world.

KOTHIC HISTORY

During the of Age of Acheron, when that great nation shared borders with Stygia, came the Hyborians. Stygia controlled the lands now called Corinthia, Koth and Shem. When the Hyborians poured through the lands that would become Brythunia in a later age, they were stopped in Corinthia and held there for some years. Waves of Hyborians continued to push southward and Stygia allowed the Hyborians to settle in the lands of Koth, Ophir and Corinthia as vassal provinces. Contact with the elder races of Acheron, Zamora and Stygia proved beneficial to the Hyborians, who made giant leaps in their cultural advancement.

Eventually, the Hyborians, possibly with aid from Acheron and Zamora, pushed the Stygians out of those meadows and mountains, pushing them back through Shem and, with the help of the Sons of Shem, behind Kuthchemes, which was sacked. Koth became the overlords of Shem after these bloody battles. In events unrecorded, the new nations of Koth, Corinthia and Ophir then became vassals of Acheron, paying them tribute. Perhaps the Hyborians attacked Acheron and were repelled. Perhaps Acheron merely threw its weight around. In any case, western Koth became subject to the kings of Acheron.

Three decades later, the Kothians, under King Khossus V, betrayed their masters and aided the other Hyborian tribes in bringing down the great kingdom of Acheron. That ancient kingdom was divided up and Koth regained its independence.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Khauran might host a campaign to capture the barony of Korveka from Koth. The characters could be hired to defend Korveka or to raze it.

With nearly three hundred castles in the land, and with about a third of them abandoned or ruined from wars, there are plenty of places for characters to explore.

Even though Koth is now a vassal to Aquilonia, the long Kothian tradition of rebelling against the king is still alive and well. Rebel kings still hire mercenary armies to fling at the true king.

KUSH & THE BLACK COAST

KUSH

THE SO-CALLED Black Kingdoms of the Hyborian Age are a grouping of disparate indigenous peoples, each with their own habits, religions and lifestyles. The differences from one culture to the next vary more expansively than can be discussed fairly in a work of this size. With the broadest of strokes, some of the better-known tribes and kingdoms will be discussed below. The Games Master is encouraged to do his own researches into real-life or fantastical Africa to give a more realistic flavour to games run in these jungle-shrouded kingdoms where violence is taken as a daily matter of course.

Giant black men squatted in the doorways of their thatched huts, or lolled on the ground in their shade. Black women went up and down the streets with water-gourds or baskets of food on their heads. Children played or fought in the dust, laughing or squalling shrilly. In the squares the black folk chattered and bargained over plantains, beer and hammered brass ornaments. Smiths crouched over tiny charcoal fires, laboriously beating out spear blades. The hot sun beat down on all, the sweat, mirth, anger, nakedness and squalor of the black people.

Robert E. Howard, Snout in the Dark

ancestors. The Chagas and the Gallahs live in a state of constant tension that seems always to be on the brink of snapping into open conflict.

South of Stygia are the vast black kingdoms of the Amazons, the Kushites, the Atlaians and the hybrid empire of Zimbabwe.

Robert E. Howard, The Hyborian Age

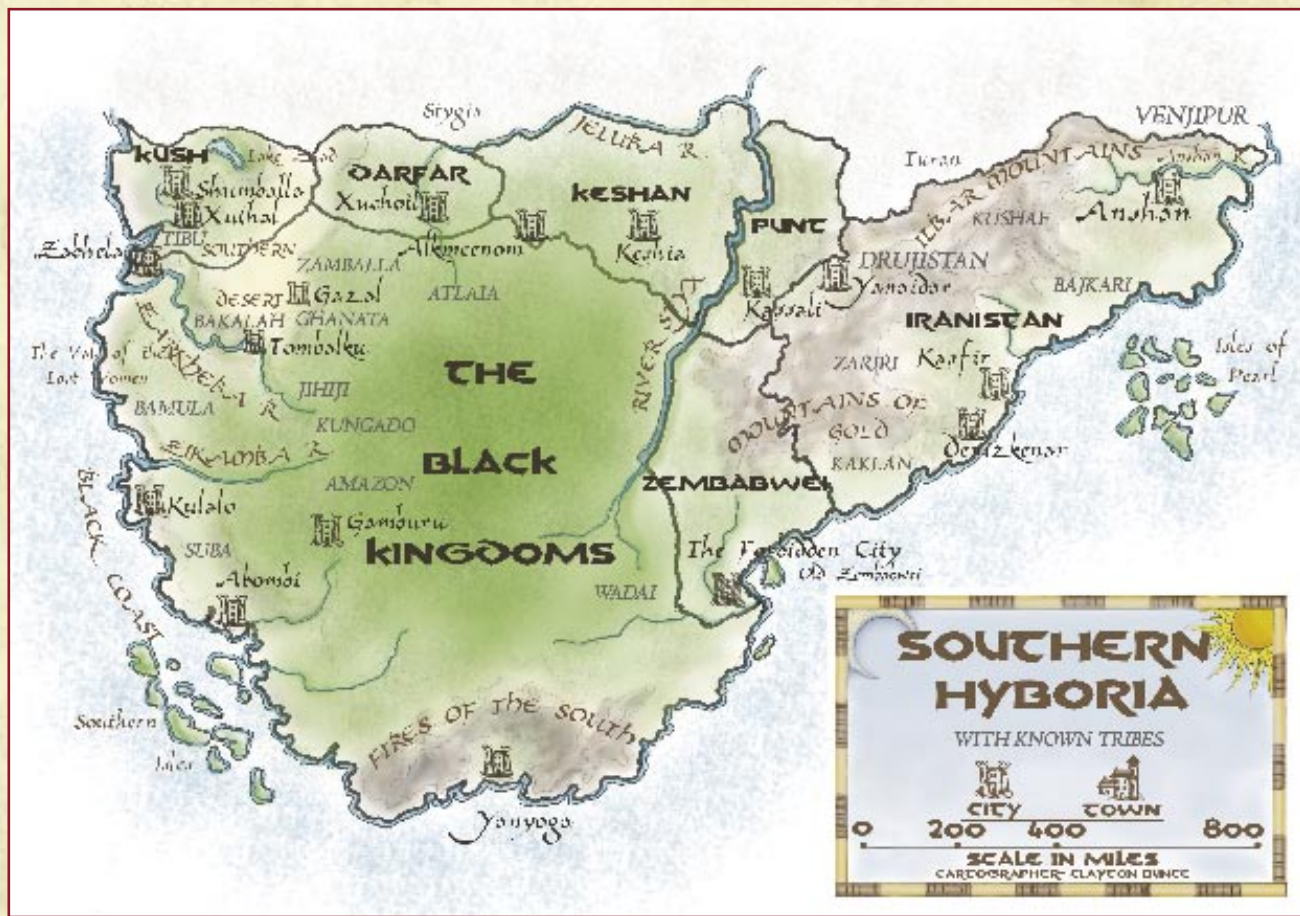
While the causes of the Chaga's retreat from Stygia are not recorded, they are likely owing to the oppressive theocracy of the snake kingdom, a theocracy that was not brought south by the Chaga when they took up rulership of Kush. The priests of Set do not rule here, although Set is the primary god of the Chaga. The Chaga kept aspects of their native Stygian culture that they like, such as the love for hunting and political manoeuvring, but discarded elements they disliked, such as free-roaming giant serpents, an oppressive priesthood and an endless array of ceremonies and rules. The Chaga control the wealth of Kush, directing the trade of gold, copper, salt, leather, dried fruit and, of course, slaves through the nation.

KUSH

Although most of the northern realms call all the Black Kingdoms by the name of Kush or Cush, Kush is but the name of one of many nations struggling to rise above the others in the southern realms. Situated just south of Stygia on the shoreline, Kush is the kingdom most often visited by Stygians, Shemites and Hyborian adventurers seeking lost cities and jungle temples.

Kush is separated into two peoples, the Gallah and the Chaga. The Gallah are the original inhabitants of Kush and are by far the most numerous. The minority Chaga are the ruling caste, descended from conquering Stygian adventurers. The Gallah people are ebon giants, taller than standard and dark brown in colour. The Chaga are even taller than their subjects and lighter in countenance, though they are darker than their dusky Stygian

Western Kush is composed of savannahs, open and vast, where the black tribes graze their cattle. Elephants, rhinoceros, wildebeests, zebras, giraffes and hundreds of other game animals live on these savannahs. The savannahs have both a wet and a dry season, with high temperatures throughout the year. Widely spaced trees are tough and durable, though the soil of the western lands are mineral poor. Many of the plants are fire tolerant, even requiring fires for growth and germination. Different tribes rule the wilds of Kush. The Mandigo live along the coast in a long string of trading villages. The Baghirimi, Dangola, Khalis, Zumba and Bornu are tribes of the grasslands. Near the border of Kush is Lake Zuad, where dwell the Tlazitlans.



These tribes pay tribute to the Chaga of El Shebbeh, the inner city of Shumballa.

The armies of Kush are based around spearmen supported by swift, albeit lightly armoured, cavalry. They are some of the most dangerous spearmen to confront, particularly in their native lands, despite their disdain for armour. Kush is simply too hot for armour and the horses used by the Kushite cavalry are too small to support heavy armour. The blacksmiths of Kush do make iron heads for the spears and lances, garnering themselves a reputation bordering on magical, for they have steeped their art in mystery, guarding their secrets of turning raw iron ore into durable metal tools. In many villages the blacksmith and shaman work closely together or are one and the same.

The ruling class of Kush worship Set, while the common masses of Gallah worship Gullah in opposition to Set. The Chaga have modified their Set worship somewhat over the centuries from the original Stygian ceremonies, mixing in doses of witchcraft, shamanism and Gallah superstition into their faith.

The specific rituals used to worship Set are a shrouded secret, but they are known to be gruesome and sinister, comprised of unspeakable rites and human

'Behind these came a motley array of wild men on half-wild horses - the warriors of Kush, the first of the great black kingdoms of the grasslands south of Stygia. They were shining ebony, supple and lithe, riding stark naked and without saddle or bridle.'

'R. E. Howard, 'Black Colossus'

sacrifices in grisly quantities. Priests wear monstrous, half-bestial masks surmounted by ostrich plumes in certain ceremonies. Silent, ritualistic processions also play an inexplicable part in this dark religion. Sacred objects, such as curious black candles that flicker with strange green light and staves with white skull heads abound in the Chaga's grim ceremonies of black magic. Sacred beasts, both terrestrial and otherwise, abound in their religious culture. The priests of Set are largely all 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.

In addition to Set and Gullah, the Shemite Derketo has been adopted by the Kushites, particularly along the shores and the

border of Stygia, as Derketa, Queen of the Dead. To many of the tribes, she is a type of Earth Mother figure – goddess of fertility as well as of death, symbolising the circular nature of life. She is most often represented as the mate of whatever god each tribe holds supreme; the Gallah of Punt, for example, represent her as the mate of Gullah. Worship of Derketa, Queen of the Dead, involves orgiastic rites done before squat golden idols. Human sacrifice plays a focal part of her ceremonies; on the most sacred feast days, those sacrificed are given poisoned fruit called the Apples of Derketa. The juice of those fruits could kill, whether by ingestion or external application.

Kush and Stygia carry on a crude form of trade in slaves, although neither pays the other for the merchandise. Instead, they just raid each other for their slaves. The Kushites raid Stygia, even as far as Kheshatta, for white or dusky-skinned slaves and the Stygians repay in kind, raiding Kush to acquire human chattel for slavery or sacrifice. Kush also raids inland tribes for slaves to be sold along the coasts to Argossean, Zingaran and Shemite traders.

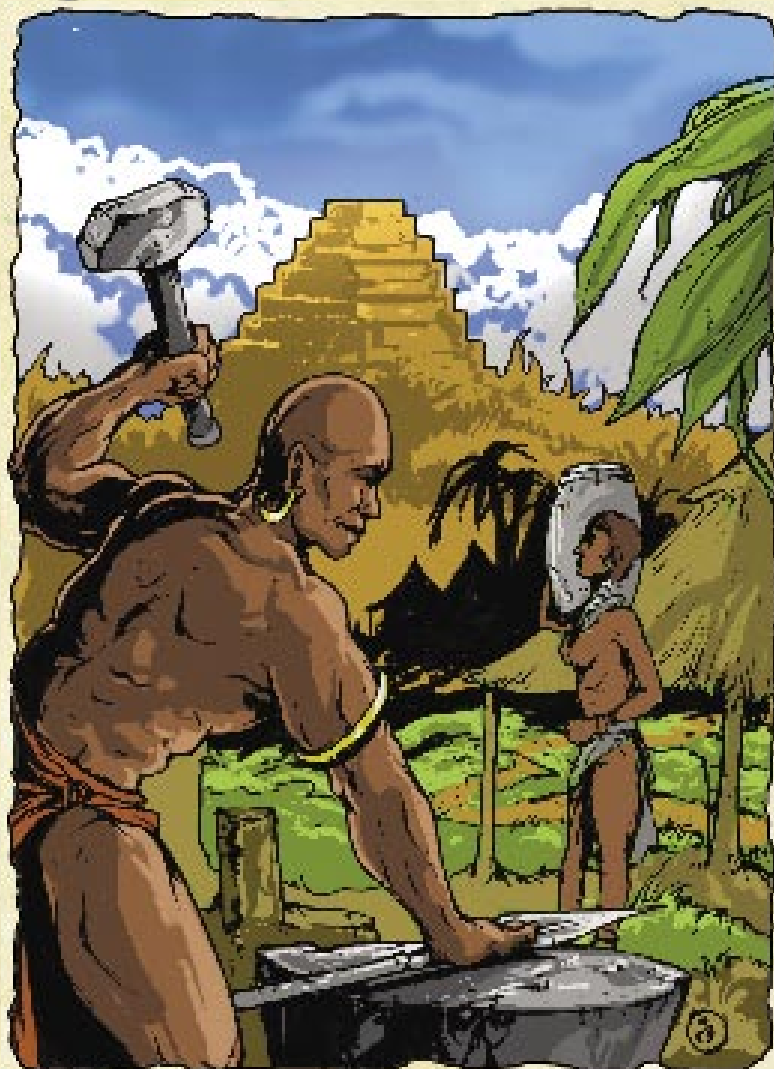
Shumballa – Shumballa is the capital of Kush, a city founded by Stygian adventurers, carved out by sword, cunning and sorcery. It is built next to a narrow river on a grassy plain in Kush. The city contains a thickly walled inner city named El Shebbeh, where the Chaga live and rule, and an outer city called Punt (not to be confused with the nation of Punt discussed below) where the Gallahs dwell in subjugation. The streets of Punt are filthy and chaotic, a veritable shanty-town. In

Looking over the parapet, he saw below him the silent streets of the inner city of Shumballa, the palaces and gardens, and the great square, into which, at an instant's notice, a thousand black horsemen could ride, from the courts of adjoining barracks.

Looking further, he saw the great bronze gates, and beyond them, the outer city that men called 'Punt, to distinguish it from 'El Shebbeh, the inner city. Shumballa stood in the midst of a great plain, of rolling grass lands that stretched to the horizon, broken only by occasional low hills. A narrow, deep river, meandering across the grass lands, touched the straggling edges of the city. 'El Shebbeh was separated from 'Punt by a tall and massive wall, which enclosed the palaces of the ruling caste, descendants of those Stygians who centuries ago had come southward to hack out a black empire, and to mix their proud blood with the blood of their dusky subjects. 'El Shebbeh was well laid out, with regular streets and squares, stone buildings and gardens. 'Punt was a sprawling wilderness of mud huts, the streets straggled into squares that were squares in name only. The black people of 'Kush, the Gallahs, the original inhabitants of the country, lived in 'Punt; none but the ruling caste, the Chagas, dwelt in 'El Shebbeh, except for their servants, and the black horsemen who served as their guardsmen.

'Robert E. Howard, Snout in the Dark (Draft)





contrast, El Shebbeh is clean and organised, a civilised city. The two sections of the city are connected through the great wall via enormous bronze gates. The Chaga accrue fabulous wealth by controlling the movement of trade goods through the kingdom. This city has a population of 12,908 people, not including the white slaves preferred by the wealthy.

Xuthal – Xuthal is a spired, oasis-watered city gleaming on the grasslands of Kush. The thirty-foot high city walls are built of a greenish stone that shines like glass. Designed as one great palace, with each building inside the walls and interconnected, its houses are lofty and made of the same material as the walls. The homes are decorated with velvet tapestries and the interior walls, floors and ceilings, continue the green stone architecture. Glowing jewels, charged with radium light many of the chambers, brightening or darkening with but a touch. Gold friezes decorate the walls in curious designs. Furs and satin cushions litter the floors. Tables are made of polished ebony. Goblets made of jade and utensils of gold abound. The city is populated with a yellow race with slightly slanted eyes, but otherwise Hyborian in type. They dress in silk tunics and high-

strapped sandals. They arm themselves with short swords. They speak Stygian, as well as an unknown tongue. They are lotus-eaters, living in a drug induced dreamland, visiting impossible realms such as Andarra, Tothra and Kuth of the Star-Girdle. The people grow black lotus in certain pits in the city. The city is fairly well populated, but most times the inhabitants are slumbering, visiting their dreamlands. Their lives are erratic at best, vague and unfocused. They eat, sleep, love and dream. Their lives are full of erotic excess and know more about sexual and sensual pleasures than any in the world. When not in their dreams, they are among the foremost scientists of the age. Like Xuchotl, the people of Xuthal manufacture their food out of the four elements. They also create a golden elixir that heals wounds. They are poor warriors, slow and clumsy, but they are brave. They worship Thog the Ancient, who sleeps beneath the city.

When Thog grows hungry, he stalks the nighted corridors of Xuthal and eats a few of the inhabitants. Although Conan fought Thog, it is likely the ancient god still lives and still stalks the haunted corridors of Xuthal where the lotus-eaters still dream.

Zabhela – Zabhela is a harbour city on the coast of Kush. Caravans take shipped goods to Shumballa from here, as goods to be traded from Shumballa and other parts of Kush find their way here to be shipped. The caravan trails from here even extend as far as Sukhmet in Stygia. It has a population of 9,000 people.

DARFAR

Darfur lies to the east of Kush, to the west of Keshan and to the south of Stygia, in a land dominated by hot grassland plains that eventually give way to dank, humid jungles in the south. The Darfari are closer in racial type to the southern blacks than they

It was a gigantic black man, naked but for a loin cloth. One hand still grasped a knotty-headed bludgeon. The fellow's kinky wool was built up into hornlike spindles with twigs and dried mud. This barbaric coiffure had given the head its misshapen appearance in the starlight. Provided with a clue to the riddle, Conan pushed back the thick red lips and grunted as he stared down at teeth filed to points... the man on the floor was a cannibal slave from Darfar.

Robert E. Howard. Shadow's in Zamboula

are to the Kushites. Often going naked, but at times adorned with rings of ivory or precious metal in their noses, ears or lips, they are very dark of skin, tall and lithely muscled with extremely kinky hair. Probably their most distinctive characteristic is their filed teeth. The Darfari are cannibals.

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. Apparently, they do not eat just any old carcass. They did not eat, for example, the Darfari Conan killed. 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 god they worship is unknown. The Darfari of Zamboula curse Set, but their masters are known to be worshippers of Set. Perhaps they worship some sort of leopard or cheetah god and their cannibalism is in honour of the predatory nature of the great cats. The Zuagirs believe the Darfari worship Yog, Lord of the Empty Abodes, with fiery rites that always end with the consumption of human flesh. Chances are they do not worship any one particular god, but have a shamanistic religion based on many disgusting gods, such as Yog, 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 isn't directed against terrestrial foes. The spear and club are usually far more reliable against flesh and blood.

The cannibalism of the Darfar is ritualistic and grisly, part of their daily life as proscribed by their vile religion. In Zamboula the Darfari practise their cannibalism at night only, but it is likely that in their homeland, the Darfari are shameless in their cannibalism and practise it even in the light of day. They keep few slaves themselves, eating any prisoners they might take in war, although they probably buy slaves from the southern kingdoms, eating them as well. Probably their chiefs receive the choicest portions. The skulls of their victims decorate poles outside their huts and the hands and feet decorate trees outside their villages. The Darfari probably also eat other food as well – it is doubtful they fall upon themselves for food. They live in a jungle land dense with an amazing variety of potential food sources.

The Darfari are hunters by nature, and their grasslands and jungles are filled with ferocious game. Stegosaur-like dragons dwell in those humid

jungles south of Darfar, as do all manner of wild cats, snakes and birds. The hot grasslands in the north probably host elephants, giraffes and cheetahs. Still, some agriculture is known among them. They grow cotton and tobacco as cash crops for trading. They also harvest ivory from the elephants in the western reaches, or perhaps they poach elephants from Kush.

The savage Darfari are regarded as thieves and murderers, without a hint of civilisation. Still they are considered valuable as slaves. Most adventurers are likely to encounter Darfari as slaves in Shem, Turan or Hyrkania.

Xuchotl – Xuchotl is an ancient, oval-shaped city located to the south in the jungles that infest the lands of Darfar and beyond. The immediate terrain surrounding the city is a few miles of desert-like savannah complete with cacti. The plain is circular, surrounded entirely by jungle. The city looks black in the night, and blood red in the day. The city is entirely enclosed by a great wall and there are no outside courts – the entire city is roofed in one manner or another, with tremendous halls used as streets, massive four story houses and mansions and long spires extending high into the skies. Inside, the city is green and crimson, for the very walls are made of jade and the floors are tiled in the curious red stone used for the exterior. The ceilings are comprised of lapis lazuli and strange green fire-stones are set in the ceilings that glow with a sickly, wan light. Some of the homes are walled in marble, ivory or chalcedony instead of the jade found in the halls. In some places, skylights of clear crystal allow the sunlight in. There are no windows or exterior streets. Furniture of marble, jade or carnelian squat on Khitan silk rugs amid thick cobwebs. Friezes of bronze, gold and silver decorate the walls, displaying the original eastern builders feasting, dancing and lovemaking. The city was built by Kosalans. More than fifty years ago, the Tlazitlans of Lake Zuad took control of the city, finding it sparsely populated. For fifty years the Xotalanc and the Techultli had warred in the city, fighting for control of the city, resulting in the city being split basically in two, with a no-man's land of halls and mansions between the

two citadels. The Tlazitlans called the intervening area the Halls of Silence. They dress scantily in silks and jewels. They considered the monsters that roam the encircling jungles as immortal dragon-gods. Those stegosaurian dragons were resurrected by dark necromancy and kept out of the plains area by magic cast by the original Kosalan builders. The Tlazitlans exterminated themselves and the city was devoid of human life when Conan and Valeria left it.

'Keshan was a barbaric kingdom lying in the eastern hinterlands of Kush where the broad grasslands merge with the forests that roll up from the south. The people were a mixed race, a dusky nobility ruling a population that was largely pure negro. The rulers - princes and high priests - claimed descent from a white race which, in a mythical age, had ruled a kingdom whose capital city was Alkmeon. Conflicting legends sought to explain the reason for that race's eventual downfall, and the abandonment of the city by the survivors. Equally nebulous were the tales of the Teeth of Gwahlur, the treasure of Alkmeon. But these misty legends had been enough to bring Conan to Keshan, over vast distances of plain, river-laced jungle, and mountains.'

Robert E. Howard, Jewels of Gwahlur

KESHAN

Keshan is another of the northern Black Kingdoms. Located to the east of Darfar and to the west of Punt, Keshan is a land of vast grassland prairies that merge to the south with great, humid forests. The people of semi-mythical Keshan are not exactly friendly with unattached strangers.

The black people of Keshan dwell in bee-hive huts of thatch. They are horsemen and are not particularly suited for travelling among mountains and jungles. Indeed, the jungles to the southwest are forbidden to them. The men wear little save plumed headdresses, animal hide loin cloths and rings of ivory or precious metal in their noses, ears or lips. The women wear sandals and short skirts held up by thin girdles.

The rulers, a lighter-skinned people descended from an unknown white race, dress similarly, but with wealthier materials. The wealthy women, for example, add gold breast-plates, skirts of silk and jewelled girdles.

Unlike Kush and other Black Kingdoms with mixed races, the relations between the lighter-skinned rulers and the dark blacks are fairly harmonious. Blacks can rise in station, as evidenced by the black priests that serve under Keshia's ruling high priest. 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 shamanism. Rituals are probably used 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 insure the welfare of Keshan as a whole with his ritualistic magic. Gwahlur is one of those dark jungle gods, a king of darkness that was thrown down by the other darkly powerful gods and his glowing teeth were given unto men for safe-keeping. Many other disgusting and bestial gods were acknowledged and worshipped by the people of Keshan.

Keshan's hereditary enemy is the kingdom of Punt (not to be confused with the outer city of Shumballa in Kush that shares the same name), which lies on the other side of a mountain range and the River Styx. The northern portion of the mountains and the river are virtually impassable.

Keshia – Keshia is the capital of Keshan. The royal city is nothing more than a swarm of thatched huts crowded around a mud wall that encloses a palace of stone, mud and bamboo. It has a population of 6,549 people. Story-tellers in the market

squares love to tell tales of the treasures to be found in legendary Alkmeenon, jewels not to be duplicated in the world, rubies, emeralds, diamonds, a throne made entirely of gold and the loot of an ancient world. Keshia trades with Shem via an overland route. The Keshans like dancing-girls from the north and the Shemites are only too happy to provide them.

Alkmeenon – Alkmeenon is the ruined city of the ancient founders that house the legendary treasure known as the Teeth of Gwahlur. The Oracle of Alkmeenon, Princess Yelaya, is said to make pronouncements and divinations here. Princess Yelaya was the last ruler of Alkmeenon and, when she died, her youthful and beautiful body did not decay. Her spirit is the supposed oracle. Priests of old went to her to learn wisdom, but the custom has died off since one priest tried to steal the Teeth and a doom came upon him. The priest Gorulga reinstated the tradition. The city is located in the south-western corner of the kingdom amid uninhabited jungle that is taboo to common men. The royal palace of Alkmeenon is surrounded by great cliffs, a vast natural amphitheatre three or four miles in diameter, with a couple of secret passes that only the priests of Keshia know. One of the secret passes is on the south side of the valley, where there is a broad pool at the base of the cliffs. Under the surface of the water is a cave mouth that enters the inner city of Alkmeenon. The city itself lay outside the cliffs, swallowed by the jungle. Jungle has also claimed the inner palaces and lotus trees grow among the south wall of the cliffs near the avenue that leads to the palace. An unhealthy underground river of frigid, black water passes beneath the palace and the Teeth of Gwahlur, the wealth of an epoch, fell into that darksome, cold river.

PUNT

Punt is an eastern Black Kingdom, south of the Turanian desert, east of Keshan and westward of Zembabwei. The River Styx and a mountain range form the western border of the kingdom. In southern Punt, the Styx fans out into a morass of swamps and fens. Punt is often besieged by slavers from Turan, Stygia and Keshan. Punt was established by adventurous Gallahs of Kush after they discovered the wealth of gold in the mountain streams. They named the nation after their home, the outer-city of Shumballa.

'We'll go to Punt. The people of Punt worship an ivory woman, and they wash gold out of the rivers in wicker baskets.'

'Robert E. Howard. Jewels of Gwahlur'

Punt is ruled by King Lalibeha. The people of Punt wear short robes with cowls. The spearmen wear ostrich-plumed

headdresses, hold rhinoceros-hide shields and wield feather-tufted spears. Puntish tribesmen excel at the spear, wielding it with savage efficiency. Their fighting is not one of form and structure. They fight to slay and to slay quickly. The Puntish people also make use of mercenaries, primarily Kushite spearmen and Shemite bowmen.

Their economy is based on the gold trade, for they supposedly sieve from the mountain streams great nuggets of gold, some the size of goose eggs. The Puntish people also hunt and manage some subsistence farming on the hot plains.

They worship an ivory goddess that some men 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.

Kassali – Kassali is the royal city of Punt. In its centre rise the gold- and crystal-encrusted towers of the sun-dried mud palace of King Lalibeha and the painted temple to the ivory goddess. The city is built on a great, grassy hill. At the far end of the grassy plain around twinkling Kassali is the shrine-temple to the ivory goddess.

THE SOUTHERN KINGDOMS

The kingdoms south of Kush, Darfar, Keshan and Punt are dominated by lush jungles, nameless and dark.

The dark warriors of the Southern Kingdoms are tall and rangy. Their warriors wear white plumes in their hair, but rarely bother with armour. The southern blacks are tribal in nature, resembling the great African tribes like the Zulus and Bantu. They often go naked, but may be adorned with rings of ivory or precious metal in their noses, ears or lips.

The spearman armed with an ox-hide shield is the level of 'soldier' among the Black Kingdoms. Ritualistic displays of aggression are often used to intimidate an opponent rather than having an all out war, since most tribes are too small to survive if they sustain heavy casualties. However, wars do sometimes occur and tend to be bloodthirsty when they do.

Wizards and sorcerers in the Southern Kingdoms are known as shamans, isangoma (female) or inyanga (male). The isangoma tend to be spiritualists who commune with the spirits of the ancestors. The inyanga is a herbalist shaman, wise in the magic of flora and fauna. The shamans are usually witch-finders or priests of dark gods such as Jhil and Agujo.

The list of nations listed below is by no means exhaustive. Various pastiches and comics have added materially to the list below and surely the Games Master will further add to it for his own campaign.

It was some shambling horror spawned in the mysterious, nameless jungles of the south, where strange life teemed in the reeking rot without the dominance of man, and drums thundered in temples that had never known the tread of human foot.

Robert E. Howard, Jewels of Gwahlur

Amazon – Amazon is one of the largest southern Black Kingdoms. Here the women are the warriors and the smallish men are suppressed in near-slavery, quite the reverse of the rest of the Black Kingdoms. Their currency is quills filled with gold. They purchase slaves from the Ghanatas. Their capital is called Gamburu.

Atlaia – Atlaia is a mysterious kingdom south of Stygia. Robert E. Howard mentions it as a Black Kingdom in *The Hyborian Age*, so it must be sizable, although he wrote no stories taking place there. It may lay next to Amazon.

Bakalah – The Bakalah are a savage tribe which lived just south of Kush's borders. They often attack Kushite raiders, as they return from forays into Stygia. Near to them are the Bamulas, another warlike tribe of the region just south of Kush. Tools and implements are made of bamboo, stone, ivory, gold or bronze. They eat smoked meat, roasted yams, mealies and bread. They drink a type of beer. Their villages, protected by bomas, are collections of thatched huts hung with mats made of bamboo. The men wear silver and ivory ornaments on their limbs, leopard skins gird their loins and white plumes decorate their headdresses. The women dress lightly, often just a wisp of silk from the traders twisted about their hips. They use elephant-tusk horns as well as drums in their ceremonies and magic, punctuated by hideous chants and frenzied dancing. They fight with spears and shields. Power in these lands is equated with military prowess or strategic innovation. Their victims, if not sacrificed for their shamans, are fed to wild animals.

Bamula – The Bamula are a warrior tribe south of Kush and near the land of the Bakalah. For about a year, Conan was their war-chief. They dress similarly to the Bakalah, with leopard-skin loin-cloths and plumed headpieces, wielding spears and hefting long ox-hide shields. Power in these lands is equated with military prowess. As Conan observed, 'What would be blackest treachery in another land, is wisdom here.'

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



Kungado—a tribe of the Blacklands east of Bamula territory. (*Conan the Barbarian* #102, 'The Men Who Drink Blood', by Roy Thomas)

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

Zamballa – The Zamballa are a small tribal nation south of Darfar. In the Conan comics published by Marvel, Zula was a prince of the Zamballa.

THE BLACK COAST

The Black Coast lies along the Western Ocean. Coastal ships from Stygia, Shem, Argos and Zingara ply these waters, trading regularly with the tribes. Stygia is the primary trader here and often attempts to block other traffic. Talking drums, tomtoms that beat out coded messages, can often be heard during the nights as the tribes communicate with each other. Primarily jungle or savannah, these tribes are the most 'civilised' of the Black Kingdoms from their constant dealings with Stygian and other foreign merchants. The people along the Black Coast have access to Hyborian weapons, but

they are expensive and there is little training available in their proper use.

Abombi – Abombi is a town on the Black Coast that was raided by Bêlit and Amra (Conan).

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

Nameless Isle – The Nameless Isle lies far off the Black Coast where a temple to Tsathoggua, the toad-god, squats.

Suba – Suba is a tribe of the Black Coast. Sakumbe of Suba was a fat corsair that sailed with Bêlit and Amra (Conan). Bêlit is said to have lived for a while with the Suba. They worship Ajujo the Dark One.

Southern Isles – The Southern Islanders are very dark of skin, tall, and rangily muscled. Their warriors wear white plumes in their hair, but rarely bother with armour. These islanders are the primary source of pirates among the Black Corsairs. The Black Corsairs of the Southern Isles are among the most feared pirates of the world, raiding up and down the Black Coast as far north as Stygia and even beyond.

THE SOUTHERN 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 have become so dreamy that the city is dying. The city is haunted by the Horror in the Red Tower, a *thing* that eats the people when

it hungers. Named Ollam-onga, it was served by dire horsemen. It was killed by Amalric the Aquilonian, rendering the city safe again. If the Ghanata, Tombalku or Tibu hear of it, they will likely loot the city immediately, for it is fear of the thing that keeps those ferocious tribes away.

Ghanata – The Ghanatas are a fierce desert people related to the people of the northern Black Kingdoms 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.

Tombalku – 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. One of the kings is of the Aphaki caste; the other is a black. The Aphaki worship Jhil, but the blacks worship Ajujo 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 and intriguing 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.

Tibu – The Tibu are a tribe of ferocious, masked desert and steppe riders. They war with the Ghanata and against Tombalku. Their masks supposedly give them mystical powers and great strength.

ZEMBABWEI

Zembabwei is a trading empire with multiple kings that lies southeast of Punt. It is a hybrid culture, a blending of black and possibly Iranistani, Kusalan or even Hyrkanian influences. It is the most urban culture in the Black Kingdoms. Although Kush may have Shumballa, most of its other natives live in rough villages. In Zembabwei, the city and fortress is the centre of life. Zembabwei gets plenty of rain and is perfect for human habitation and the foundations for a major trading empire: fertile soil, lots of grazing land, sources of copper, iron and tin, elephants for ivory, vast amounts of timber and gold.

Thutmekri came to Keshan at the head of an embassy from Zembabwei.

Thutmekri was a Stygian, an adventurer and a rogue whose wits had recommended him to the twin kings of the great hybrid trading kingdom which lay many days' march to the east. He and the Cimmerian knew each other of old, and without love. Thutmekri likewise had a proposition to make to the king of Keshan, and it also concerned the conquest of Punt - which kingdom, incidentally, lying east of Keshan, had recently expelled the Zembabweian traders and burned their fortresses.

The benevolent kings of Zembabwei desired only a monopoly of the trade of Keshan and her tributaries - and, as a pledge of good faith, some of the Teeth of Gwahlur. These would be put to no base usage. Thutmekri hastened to explain to the suspicious chieftains: they would be placed in the temple of Zembabwei beside the squat gold idols of Dagon and Derketo, sacred guests in the holy shrine of the kingdom, to seal the covenant between Keshan and Zembabwei.

Robert E. Howard, Jewels of Gwahlur

The Zembabweians are traders and empire-builders. The kings of Zembabwei want to monopolise the trade of the south. Through its northern capital trade caravans from Iranistan, Vendhya, Khitai and the southern Black Kingdoms pass. The slave trade is active here, trading with Iranistan, Shem and, via Zamboula, Turan.

Long-horn cattle are native to the area and are the measure of wealth in Zembabwei, believed to be more stable than currency. Foreign goods are valued here more than gold or anything produced by the Zembabwei itself. Fine cloth, ornaments and other artefacts of foreign manufacture are coveted by the poor and hoarded by the wealthy. The poor generally had a hard life, forced to work for the wealthy for little gain. During the growing season, the poor tended the fields of grain and the flocks of cattle. After the harvest, the poor were forced to dig for the precious metals desired by foreign nations. Panning, digging out open pits and even sinking mine shafts were part and parcel of the labour of the poor Zembabweian, and the wealthy had full claim to any gold found.

The cities of Zembabwei are usually built on hills. The wealthier a citizen is, the higher on the hill that citizen is allowed to live. The poorest live on the plains surrounding the hill. Stone walls encircle the hills, walls that enforce the stratification created by distinctions in wealth. The wealthiest could even afford privacy walls around their courtyards. In these cities, iron is smelted and forged into tools and weapons and precious metals are worked into forms of artistic beauty. Wood and soapstone are carved into ornate dishes and figurines by slaves gathered from neighbouring kingdoms. Cone-shaped grain towers store food against drought and famine.

Their trading outposts are almost always accompanied by fortresses defended by savage spearmen, of which Zembabwei has armies waiting in the wings, always ready to move forward and destroy a weaker culture and force tribute from it.

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. Derketo is an Earth-Mother type deity of fertility. Her rites are sensual and sexual, designed to bring about the blossoming of the earth. Dagon is likely a sea god of some sort. He may be the Lovecraftian god of the same name. Howard doesn't really say one way or the other.

Zembabwei boasts an everglades-like marshland in the north and thick jungles and rain forests in the south and east. The Styx is its western boundary and the Southern Ocean is its eastern border.

The Forbidden City – The Forbidden City lies in southern Zembabwei, ruled by a wizard-priest of Damballah, the Zembabwan name for Set. The black altars of Damballah run red with the blood of sacrifices. Three million black barbarians follow this priest from his skull throne. According to L. Sprague de Camp, the flying men of Zembabwei, warriors mounted on wyverns, patrol this region, based out of topless towers without doors or windows. It is said that the serpent men of Valusia founded the city before King Kull crushed the last remnants of their race before the Cataclysm. The Forbidden City is built upon a great hill, ringed by walls and roofless round towers. If the campaign is set after the apocryphal events of *Red Moon of Zembabwei* in *Conan of Aquilonia*, then the wizard priest is dead and the religion of Damballah ended.

THE FAR SOUTH

The lands south of Atlaia are largely unknown. L. Sprague de Camp wrote *Shadows in the Skull* which takes place in these far lands. Jungles extend down beyond Zembabwei and the Black Kingdoms, eventually giving way to veldt and savannah, then into plains and deserts on down to the extreme tip of the continent.

Yanyoga – Yanyoga is supposedly a city at the end of the subcontinent where the last remnants of the Valusian serpent people still live with yellow-skinned slaves.

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

The Black Kingdoms exist on a sprawling subcontinent filled with jungles, savannahs and mountains.

Fires of the South – The Fires of the South are volcanic mountains of the far southern Black Coast.

Jeluba River – The Jeluba river flows east from Tombalku, a sluggish river moving lazily among grassy savannahs. It flows across Darfar and Keshan to join either the Styx or the Zarkheba.

Lake Zuad – This lake, near the border of Kush, is where a race of mongrel Stygians mixed with an eastern race of unknown origin live. They're called Tlazitlans.

River Styx – The River Styx is probably one of the most famous rivers in the Hyborian Age landscape. Also known as the Nilus, the Styx is by far the the largest river of the South. The Styx binds Stygia in the north and is a wide river, navigable for most of its length. Its source is somewhere in the jungles south of Zembabwei. The great black-walled city of Khemi sits at its great mouth, guarding the river. Hills and cliffsides mark the northern shore of the vast river, and various reedy channels, black lagoons, snake-infested swamps and tributary streams and rivers flow into it from the south. Great crocodiles and massive hippopotami swarm the shallow regions of the Styx. The Stygians use the river to irrigate crops along the fertile land found on the shores of the Styx, which floods annually to deposit mineral rich soil along its length. Several small islands can be found in the wide expanse of the Styx, and great cities dot its black shores. Impressive megalithic temples and statues are built on its shores, as are several noble estates. In a few places, such as the Ford of Bubastes near the Bakhr River, the Styx is fordable. The great bend of the Styx, two thousand miles or more inland, is at a section called Taia. The river is broken by falls and white-water cascades once it moves past the Purple Lotus Swamp and by the time it has reached the end of Zembabwei it has become marshy and thin, ridden with diseases and horrible insects.

Zarkheba River – The Zarkheba is a poisonous river emptying into the ocean. Up the river at some distance is a city of giant towers and incredible walls. There are no crocodiles, birds or four legged beasts of any kind inhabiting the river or its environs.

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

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

RELIGION

Much of the Black Kingdoms' religions are dominated by superstitions 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 Ollum-onga, 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. The Darfari may well worship Yog, Lord of the Empty Abodes, in fiery ceremonies that end with the consumption of human flesh.

CREATURES OF THE BLACK KINGDOMS

Kush is home to a thin, hardy breed of horse, as well as rangy cattle. Any sort of African animal can be found in the various terrains of Kush and the Black Kingdoms. Lions, crocodiles, panthers, cheetahs, snakes of all types, boars, giraffes, gazelles, hyenas, jackals, spiders, vultures and thousands upon thousands of other species. The savannahs, forests and deserts of the Black Kingdoms absolutely teem with vivacious and vicious life.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Lost treasures, forgotten vales where gods of the Outer Dark are worshipped, savage raids and grand hunts for fantastic creatures all come to mind for adventures and campaigns in the Black Kingdoms.

In the Kushite city of Shumballa, the people of Punt, tired of labouring for the richness of the Chaga, may rise up in revolt, especially if a group of hardy adventurers lead them. Perhaps the adventurers work for the Chaga rulers of Shumballa and must put down the uprising of the Gallah, killing their leaders and shamans.

Someone has diverted the trade traffic from the caravan trails of Kush, which, in turn, diverts wealth from the ruling Chaga in Shumballa. Perhaps the characters are responsible. Perhaps the Chaga turn to their oracles, who tell them to turn to the adventurers to solve the mystery.

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

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

The Tibu of the desert have found a hideous mask of unspeakably dark power and are using it to wage a victorious war against

Tombalku and the Ghanatas. The characters find themselves in the midst of a three sided desert war, or perhaps they are hired as mercenaries to defeat the frenzied Tibu. Perhaps the adventurers have found this nefarious mask and the Tibu have come out of the south into the Hyborian lands to take it, ravaging and pillaging as they move ever closer to the characters.

Buried in the eastern catacombs of Xuchotl are the mouldering bones of its greatest wizards, buried with their dim secrets of nightmarish sorceries. A scholar may want to mount an expedition through the jungles of Darfar, past the dragon-gods and into the haunted city itself to plumb the dark depths of those nighted crypts in search of time-lost mysteries of darkest sorceries.

A new power has taken up residence in Xuchotl, either using it as a base from which to build an empire or to practise lone sorceries. Perhaps a cabal of magicians, similar to the Black Circle or Black Ring has taken residence to research lost Kosalan magic in peace. The characters, as mercenaries, have been chased through the forests by the cannibal Darfari and come upon lost Xuchotl and find the new residents...

For those involved in mercenary campaigns, war between Keshan and Punt would make for an exciting extended campaign. Perhaps Zembabwei could get involved on one side or the other. The characters may have to work as diplomats to sway the Zembabwan kings to support their chosen side. It is known that the Zembabwans want the Teeth of Gwahlur.

Characters may hear of a treasure created by the science of Xuthal of the Dusk on the grasslands of Kush, giving them reason to visit the demon-haunted halls of that dire city where the dreamers hold sway, worshipping dark Thog the Ancient and creating strange things out of the primal elements. Perhaps a sorcerer wants to petition Thog for knowledge of the Outer Realm or perhaps the scholar wants to bind Thog in slavery, hiring the adventurers to hold the people of Xuthal at bay.

Thalis the Stygian's end in *Xuthal of the Dusk (The Slithering Shadow)* is described in terms that could mean she was not devoured by Thog the Ancient. Robert E. Howard wrote, '*She heard Thalís' voice pleading frenziedly, but no voice answered. There was no sound except the Stygian's panting voice, which suddenly rose to screams of agony, and then broke into hysterical laughter, mingled with sobs. This dwindled to a convulsive panting, and presently this too ceased, and a silence more horrible hovered over the secret corridor.*' What if Thalís had not been devoured by Thog, but forced to mate with it? What unholy thing might be such a child birthed from that unhallowed mating?

A typical Stygian raiding party for Kushite slaves amounts to forty mounted warriors, all seasoned veterans without mercy. They surround a black village at night and strike at dawn, capturing the healthy and strong for transport back to Stygia. Those too young, too old or too sickly are slain on the spot. The characters might easily come across this force, either as it is preparing to attack a village or as they are leading the newly acquired slaves north to Stygia.

NEMEDIA

The Dragon Throne

NEMEDIA IS THE second great kingdom of the Hyborians, technologically and economically superior to the other Hyborian nations save Aquilonia. Nemediā's culture is similar to Aquilonia's, although the Nemedians emphasise feudal bonds more and personal freedoms less. Still, Nemediā is well regarded for scholastic and intellectual freedom – the greatest historians, the most famous philosophers and the pinnacle of powerful orators in the West are Nemedians. Nemediā's population exceeds twenty million people. Recent tax collector statistics show Nemediā has over 25,000 villages, 200 towns and 45 full-fledged cities.

The last glints of the sun shone on the golden banner of Nemediā with the scarlet dragon, unfurled in the breeze above the pavilion of King Tarascus on an eminence near the eastern cliffs.

Robert E. Howard. The Hour of the Dragon

Nemediā is an ancient kingdom, proud of its cultured sophistication and civilised traditions. Although settled by the Hyborians, three thousand years ago this was the land of Acheron and traces of Acheronian blood flows through many of the veins of Nemedian Hyborians. The hills of Nemediā still holds groups of people who boast of their Acheronian descent.

Nemediā, ruled by King Tarascus, maintains a strong feudal government. Its king recently led the Nemedian army to attack Aquilonia, only to be humbled by King Conan who both defeated its army and captured Tarascus, setting the slave girl Zenobia as his ransom. Nemediā still founders under the weight of the reparations enforced by King Conan as part of his demands for Nemediā's surrender. Although not as popular as he once was, Tarascus still holds the throne of Nemediā. As king, Tarascus divides up the land and the responsibilities of the kingdom among various barons and counts, who then subdivide up their properties and responsibilities further in smaller and smaller fiefs.

The counts and barons perform civil and military functions in

the name of the king in their assigned fiefs. These aristocrats swear fealty to the king and, in return, gain his official permission, called a patent, to govern areas of his kingdom. This gives the aristocrat all rights pertaining to the fief but he is expected to pay tribute to the king and to raise armies for the king in times of national war. The baronies and counties of Nemediā are large, usually thousands of acres, often too large for the top aristocrats to rule efficiently, so they further divide up their granted fiefs to lesser nobles who swear fealty to the baron or count in return for power. Unfortunately, the boundaries of these fiefs are not always absolutely defined and conflicts over rights and duties sometimes turn into armed warfare.

The functioning of the whole empire centers about the king: it works for his protection and empowerment. Of course, the monarch is almost never seen in a remote principality such as this. Nevertheless his spies abound, and his power remains absolute even here. We must be ever mindful of him, if only to offset the natural tendency of local authority to trespass on kingly office.

Leonard Carpenter. Conan the Warlord

The fief granted by the king and the lesser sub-divisions of that fief include both private property and a noble title. The private property includes a manor house or even a castle and one or more cities, towns and associated villages. A third of the land supports the noble and his retinue and the serfs are expected to spend at least half their time working the noble's lands and crops. The serfs, in turn, can expect the protection of the noble from his knights and soldiers. The noble title, once granted, can be passed on through bloodlines. These noble titles are inherited through the male line, although the king may remove a title at his pleasure. The eldest son or the husband of an eldest daughter almost always inherits the noble title. The actual property of the fief, however, can be divided among the lord's heirs however he may see fit. If a dispute over inheritance occurs, especially in a case where a nobleman produced no heir, a higher ranking noble in the chain of fiefs and sub-fiefs may intercede and name an heir, following complex rules of chivalry.

Beneath the commoners and the serfs, who are still free, are the slaves. Laws prohibit the harsh treatment of slaves, after all, Nemedias is not Zingara, where slaves in the field are beat with whips. Nemedias recognises that a well-treated slave is less likely to rise up in revolt. Rebellions by slaves are not uncommon during the Hyborian Age but few uprisings are recorded in Nemedias, where many slaves would refuse freedom if it were offered to them. Who would feed and shelter them if they were freed? Nay, Nemedias is a civilised land and the people of that land know their place in the feudal hierarchy. There is a measure of safety in the stability of Nemedias's current social structures.

Just a moment, 'Dionus,' ordered 'Demetrio. 'Fellow, I am chief of the Inquisitorial Council of Numalia. You had best tell me why you are here and, if you are not the murderer, prove it.

Robert E. Howard, 'The God in the Bowl'

Law is part of the stability of Nemedias's social structures. Nemedias has a civilised court system that is complex in its attempts to be just. The courts in the cities are called Courts of Justice, where judges appointed by the ruling nobles sit. A higher court exists in Belverus with judges appointed by the king so that larger cases of national jurisdiction can be tried. The Courts of Justice maintain Inquisitorial Councils to investigate crimes and carry out the duties of prosecution. The police, in turn, serve the Inquisitorial Councils and are virtually all-powerful in their duties. Few Nemedians would dare to resist one of the police. They are well known for beating and torturing commoners to gain confessions if necessary. One gouged out a girl's eye in court because she would not incriminate her lover.

Close on their heels marched the ... spearmen, always comparatively few in any Hyborian state, where men thought cavalry the only honourable branch of service.

Robert E. Howard, 'Black Colossus'

The courts are harsh taskmasters, though they try to make the punishments fit the crimes and to make restitutions as fair as possible. Also, the courts will attempt to exonerate the innocent if the guilty can be found. Unfortunately, if the guilty cannot be found, sometimes the innocent must suffer so that at least the illusion of justice is served. Those who cannot pay their debts may find themselves sold into slavery, along with their families if the debt is high enough, to raise the revenues necessary to pay creditors. Debt slaves

are branded on the shoulder, preventing them from ever again entering free society. The law is explicit in other ways as well. The murder of a commoner sends the killer to the mines, the intentional death of a tradesman sends the assassin to the gallows and the slaying of a rich man calls for burning at the stake. Attempted theft merits ten years of hard labour at the mines. The Nemedians are civilised enough to submit to the police and the courts and their cruelties are accepted as necessary.

As a civilised nation, the citizens gild their words in honeyed phrases, veiling their meanings to preserve a sense of respectability and etiquette. The conservative Nemedians who do not conform to their sense of good manners are disliked and may be treated with a varying levels of hostility (dependent perhaps on the Charisma of the offending party and the importance of the offended party). People who ask questions too directly are not likely to find the answers they seek. The challenge in Nemedias is to properly present oneself, to show that co-operation is returned in kind yet without openly saying so. Gather Information DC's for barbaric characters will be much higher in Nemedias than for civilised characters.

A dully glinting, mail-clad figure moved out of the shadows into the starlight. This was no plumed and burnished palace guardsman. It was a tall man in morion and gray chain-mail - one of the Adventurers, a class of warriors peculiar to Nemedias: men who had not attained to the wealth and position of knighthood, or had fallen from that estate: hard-bitten fighters, dedicating their lives to war and adventure. They constituted a class of their own, sometimes commanding troops, but themselves accountable to no man but the king. Conan knew that he could have been discovered by no more dangerous a foe-man.

Robert E. Howard, 'The Hour of the Dragon'

Although Nemedias does not have castes in the sense that Vendhya does, the nation does have a sense of class and status among its citizens. Nemedias is strict in its feudal hierarchies and each citizen knows his or her place on that complex schedule of servants and masters, of duties and privileges. Citizens are constantly, although largely subconsciously, aware of rank and station. Artisans, for example, are beneath the wealthy merchants and traders. Nobles, descended from noble blood-lines, are on the highest tiers of society. Noble status is required for most offices of state. Only those of noble lineage may serve on the Courts of Justice. The heads of the Inquisitorial Councils are

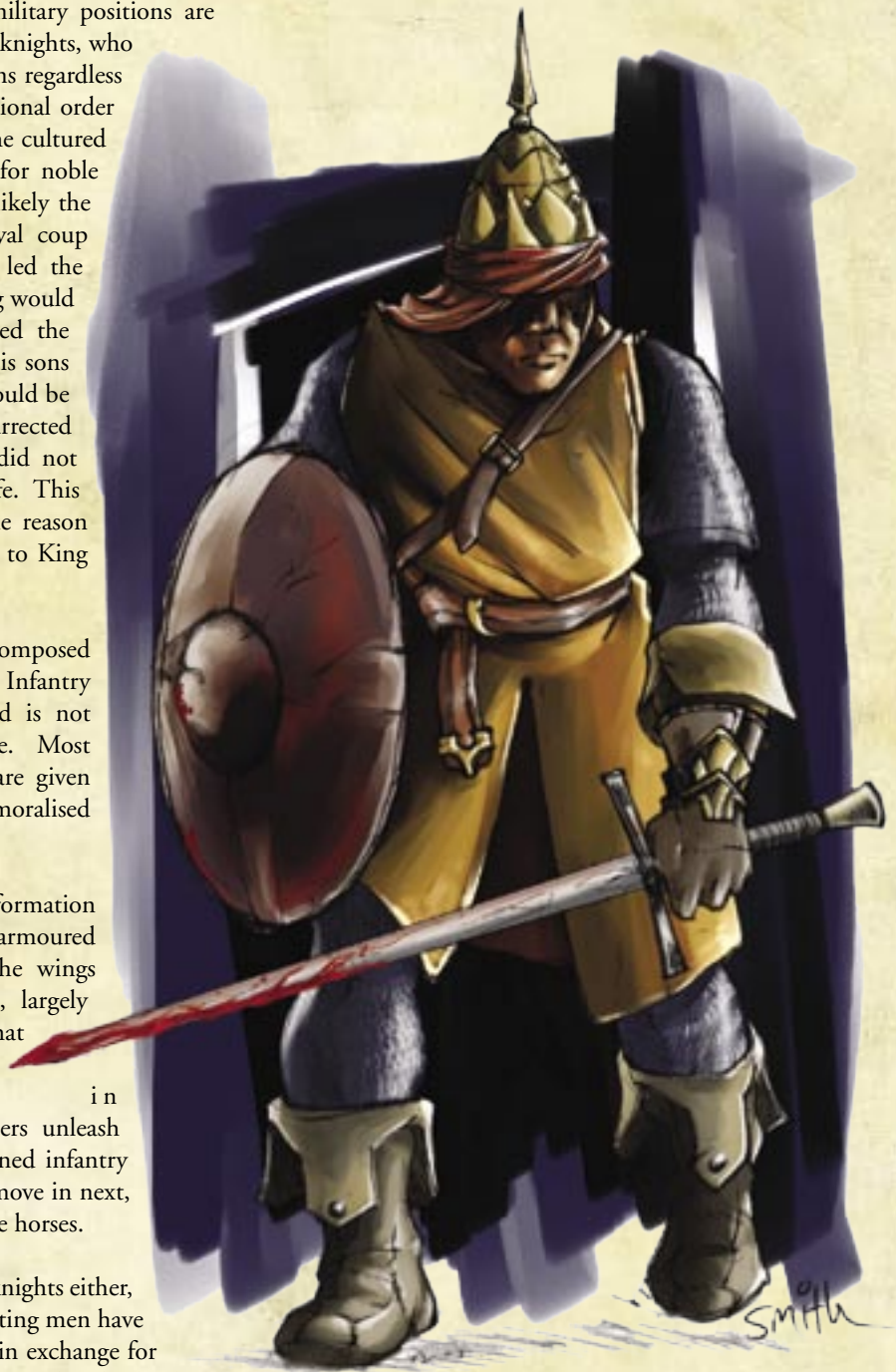
also of noble birth. High ranking military positions are also reserved for the nobility, as are the knights, who offer protection to all Nemedian citizens regardless of rank. Chains of command, processional order and heraldry are all second nature to the cultured Nemedian. Above all is a reverence for noble blood and royal prerogative. It is unlikely the Nemedians would ever sponsor a royal coup as the Aquilonians did when Conan led the revolt against Numedides. Such a thing would be uncivilised. When Tarascus desired the throne of King Numa, the king and his sons had to die naturally so his ascension would be unopposed. The Nemedians who resurrected Xaltotun in *the Hour of the Dragon* did not want to see Nemedias torn apart by strife. This respect for noble blood is, in part, the reason why the Nemedians so strongly object to King Conan's reign in Aquilonia.

Nemedias maintains a powerful army composed of its noble knights and heavy cavalry. Infantry are considered fodder for archers and is not an honourable field of military service. Most of the infantry are commoners that are given minimal training. They are easily demoralised in combat.

The Nemedian army favours a standard formation for Hyborian hosts. The centre, heavily armoured knights, is the strongest section. The wings are composed of lesser cavalry units, largely composed of Adventurers (see below), that are supported by infantry conscripts and arbalesters. The wings move in advance of the centre. The arbalesters unleash their deadly bolts and the quickly trained infantry move in afterward. The cavalry units move in next, followed by the knights on their massive horses.

Not quite mercenaries, but not landed knights either, are the class of Adventurers. These fighting men have pledged fealty to the king of Nemedias in exchange for the right to battle honourably and to wander the land. They fight with great swords and dress in mail hauberts. They do not concern themselves with gaudy displays or the best armour in the latest styles, as do the lordly knights. They are grim warriors, more concerned about the serviceability of their accoutrements. This is the class that non-nobles who wish to fight for the glory of Nemedias but lack the wealth and bloodlines to claim a knighthood aspire toward.

If a citizen doesn't care to fight and wants out of his situation, Nemedias is also a land of scholarship and education.



Although noble sponsorship is necessary to gain any kind of Imperial grant, noble blood in and of itself is not a requirement. History is a special favourite among the Nemedian scholars, as the famous *Nemedian Chronicles* testify. Other fields include theology, science, cartography and arcanology. Of course, sometimes these scholars find themselves moving down sorcerous paths, as Orastes did in *The Hour of the Dragon*. The most outstanding scholars are employed by the Dragon Throne to produce their works for the crown, to be stored for posterity. It is through such employment that we know so much of the Hyborian Age.

This road from Belverus was the only road that crossed the border for fifty miles from north to south. It followed a series of passes through the hills, and on either hand lay a wide expanse of wild, sparsely inhabited mountains. He maintained his due easterly direction, intending to cross the border deep in the wilds of the hills that lay to the south of the passes. It was a shorter route, more arduous, but safer for a hunted fugitive. One man on a horse could traverse country an army would find impassable.

'But at dawn he had not reached the hills: they were a long, low, blue rampart stretching along the horizon ahead of him. Here there were neither farms nor villages, no white-walled villas looming among the clustering trees. The dawn wind stirred the tall stiff grass, and there was nothing but the long rolling swells of brown earth, covered with dry grass, and in the distance the gaunt walls of a stronghold on a low hill. Too many Aquilonian raiders had crossed the mountains in not too-distant days for the countryside to be thickly settled as it was farther in the east.

Robert E. Howard, The Hour of the Dragon

Another way to change station in Nemedi is, of course, through marriage, although it is rare for people of different classes to really get to know each other. Also, most noble marriages are arranged. Typically a comely Nemedian girl had more hope of a higher marriage than the males. Still, marriage brokers find themselves busy.

Nemedian commoners wear coarse, knee-length shirts corded about the waist with rope. Merchants wear togas and robes. Servants wear woollen clothing, long belted tunics for the men, embroidered blouses and woollen skirts for the girls. The nobility typically wear cavalry boots, fur or leather kilts and pleated silk shirts. The priests wear silken robes. Nemedians take pride in their culture and never dress outside of their station.

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF NEMEDIA

Nemedi is a fertile land. Mountains and hills form a border with Aquilonia with only a few passes. Great grasslands lie to the immediate east of those mountains, where few farms and villages exist for fear of the Aquilonians who raid those lands. Those mountains are highly wooded. To the east flows a great river that forms the border with Brythunia. To the

north is the barren lands of the Border Kingdom, a Great Salt Marsh forming that border. To the south rise the hills of Ophir. The various mountain ranges sport an assortment of mines. Copper, gold and silver are all mined, usually by slave labour.

Several provinces, baronies and duchies separate the lands into governable pieces. Baronies such as Tor, Vastia and Dinander can be found.

Darkwood Forests – These pine forests extend along the east of Nemedi. Few people travel the faint trails through this shadowed forest. Wildlife abounds within, especially wolves and bears. Bandits also make lairs in the shade of its tall pines. The forest is home to brooding stone castles and stalking werewolves hungry for prey. Rumours persist of satyrs, vampires and ogres.

Urlaub River – The Urlaub is one of many rivers in Nemedi, providing the ancient land with fertility. Edram Castle can be found on its shores within the province of Dinander. It is a snaky river with lush green fields on either side. A triple-arched stone bridge crosses the river at Edram Castle, giving the fief holder a stranglehold on traffic through this area via taxation or tolls. Out beyond the rich fields, the terrain gives way to lightly forested foothills. The river is not fordable along most of its length. Edram Castle overseas the tax collection of Varakiel.

Varakiel Marshes – The Varakiel Marshes in northeastern Nemedi is a desolate wetland filled with snakes, cats and bears. The edges of the swamp give way to tilled fields and villages. This fertile region is simply called the Varakiel and is subject to the fief-holder of Edram Castle, who is in turn subject to the baron of Dinander.

Yellow River – This river runs along the western border of Brythunia until it forks in the southwest corner. Many historic battlegrounds lie on either side of the river, the sites of wars and skirmishes with Nemedi. This river flows to the north and empties into the Great Salt Marsh of the Border Kingdom.

*...And I don't know this man
whereof you speak - Sergianus, isn't
it? 'But Tor's no duchy.'*

*Conan turned himself a bit more around.
'Sergianus is duke's son of Tor, in
Nemedi.'*

*'Well,' Nebinio said. 'Mayhap he's just making
himself more important. Tor's a barony,
Presided over by a baron. 'Baron Amalric is
about... oh, fifty, perhaps. Has a son who will
succeed him, also named Amalric.'*

Andrew J. Offut, Conan the Mercenary

IMPORTANT NEMEDIAN CITIES

The cities of Nemedi tend to be the capitals of the baronies and counties. Systems of villages, towns and hamlets support the cities. Not many stories take place in Nemedi, so not all of the baronies are known. There are approximately 45 baronies and counties in Nemedi, each corresponding to the 45 cities. Below are a few of the better known cities.

Belverus – Belverus is the capital of Nemedi. It is a walled city surrounded by rich meadowlands, gardens, orchards, vineyards and pleasure villas. Slaves with pikes keep casual watch over the villas and gardens at night. The fountain of Thrallos stands a mile out from the city in a ring of oak trees. Belverus has a population of 55,707 people.

Dinander – Dinander is a Nemedian city, the capital of a barony. It lies to the north of Belverus and is a walled city. It oversees the Urlaub fief, as well as Edram Castle. Verakiel is part of this fiefdom in the east. A portion of Verakiel is uninhabited swamp, another portion an uncultivated area that once was a battlefield and is now avoided. The city of Dinander has a population of 8,558.

Hanumar – Hanumar is a city in northern Nemedi. It does not lie on a direct road to Aquilonia and is the home of Kalanthes, a priest of Ibis. Hanumar is a fair sized city with a population of 11,762.

Numalia – Numalia, on the Road of Kings, is the second largest city of Nemedi, a Hyborian Age metropolis, boasting a population of 45,379 residents among its gleaming spires.

Numalia also lies on the southern caravan route, a well-travelled road through Ophir, Koth and Khoraja. The police here are identified by their scarlet tunics and they carry short stabbing-swords and bills. Lord Ostorio Bragorus is the Governor of Numalia. One of the roads of Numalia is called the Palian Way. The wealthy of Numalia live in villas and usually travel by chariot. This city is featured in the Robert E. Howard story, *The God in the Bowl*.

Tor – Tor is a barony of Nemedi and the name of the capital city of the barony. Baron Amalric of Tor helped resurrect Xaltotun in Howard's *The Hour of the Dragon*. Amalric of Tor sponsored Orastes in his scholarly pursuits that led to that dark resurrection. Tor is a powerful, walled city with a population of 19,776 people.

RELIGION IN NEMEDIA

Nemedi is a Hyborian nation that honours that most universal of Hyborian gods, Mitra. He is regarded as the one true god by his followers, the head of an army of heavenly beings and saints. Mitra's religion has a heaven and a hell and the resulting concept of Judgement. The Mitran religion frowns upon pretentious religious displays and their temples romanticise this thought by their comparatively symbol-free architecture. Mitra's temples are overpoweringly plain, yet dignified, inspired and lovely despite losing the lavish and ornate architecture that preoccupies the designers of other temples. The altar is a symbolic gesture at best, for the Mitran religion doesn't sacrifice humans nor animals to their universal 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.

The priests of Mitra are instructed in many things, for the teachings and works of Mitra have brought about the power and splendour of the Hyborian kingdoms. Arus, the Nemedian priest of Mitra, from Howard's *The Hyborian Age* gives an example: Arus understood the basics of mining, smelting and working iron ore.

*...clad in the silken robes of a Nemedian
priest, gesturing with his slender white
hands as he expounded the eternal rights
and justices which were the truths of Mitra.
'Doubtless he pointed with repugnance at the
rows of skulls which adorned the walls of his hut
and urged Gorm to forgive his enemies instead of
putting their bleached remnants to such use.*

Robert E. Howard, The Hyborian Age

'Why should a man in Stygia send Kalanthes a gift? Ancient gods and queer mummies have come up the caravan roads before, but who loves the priest of Ibis so well in Stygia, where they still worship the arch-demon Set who coils among the tombs in the darkness? The god Ibis has fought Set since the first dawn of the earth, and Kalanthes has fought Set's priests all his life. There is something dark and hidden here.'

R. E. Howard. The God in the Bowl

Despite the rigid control the feudal system has in Nemedi, with its strict laws and intense law enforcement, Nemedi is far more tolerant of alternative religions than Aquilonia. Likely this is because of Nemedi's scholastic nature and the crown's endorsement of philosophical thought. Thus, in Nemedi, a wide range of religious beliefs can be found. Worship of ancient Ibis, the order of the Sceptics, temples to Shemitish deities and others can be found across the length and breadth of the nation.

Ibis is an ancient foe of Set and likely originated within the culture of the Giant-Kings that introduced Ibis to the proto-Stygians as a reaction to the oppressive cult of Set. It may even have originated in Acheron, explaining perhaps its continued existence in Nemedi. Ibis is a small cult, all but died out. Still, they are thought well of in Nemedi as foes against evil and Set, although the Mitran religion is distrustful of them. Kalanthes is well known in Nemedi.

'The barbarians who overthrew Acheron set up new kingdoms,' quoth Orastes. 'Where the empire had stretched now rose realms called Aquilonia, and Nemedi, and Argos, from the tribes that founded them.'

Robert E. Howard. The Hour of the Dragon

The Sceptics are another order of religious thought in Nemedi. They claim that there are no gods but what man names and chooses to believe in.

Shemite gods are also worshipped here. The sexual aspects of Ishtar's faith make it an attractive religion for this otherwise reserved population. Even votaries of Set can be found in darksome temples within the borders of tolerant Nemedi.

NEMEDIAN HISTORY

Nemedi is a three thousand year old kingdom with roots that lie in the destruction of ancient Acheron. Among the last of the Hyborian tribes sweeping southward were the Aquiloni and Nemedi tribes. The Aquiloni and the Nemedi attacked Acheron after their feathered shaman stole the Heart of Ahriman and defeated Xaltotun's sorceries. Acheron was put to the sword and Python was sacked.

The Hyborians divided up the land and the Nemedi settled in the eastern end of Acheron's holdings. Most scholars believe Nemedi was the first nation to form over the ashes of Acheron. Many of Acheron's strongest holdings were in this land and many of their books and records survived. Nemedi rapidly became a centre for learning and the Hyborians made vast strides in their culture here, quickly achieving 'civilisation' and an atmosphere of sophistication. Laws were developed and set down by the early kings, laws still adhered to today.

History was deemed of value and the Nemedian kings sponsored historians to reconstruct as much of history as they could, to write down what happened in the world, sending them out to all nations of the world to learn their histories and recording them as the *Nemedian Chronicles*. Nemedi was likely the dominant Hyborian kingdom early in its history, until Aquilonia superseded it when it managed to acquire Poitain, Bossonia and Gunderland.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Built on the ruins of ancient Valusia and once a part of the sorcerous kingdom of Acheron, Nemedi has many hidden ruins that might contain fearful horrors. Python - the ancient capital of Acheron - is a lost city; its treasures have lain unrevealed for centuries. Modern Hyborian scholars believe that the City of the Purple Towers lies in north-eastern Nemedi, in the wilds near the Border Kingdom.

NORÐHEIM: ASGARÐ

Home of the Æsir

ASGARÐ IS A part of Nordheim, the area north of Cimmeria that includes Vanaheim. The Æsir are a numerous people, estimated around 5,349,550 blond northerners in all. Asgard is not a unified kingdom serving one supreme king. Essentially the Æsir are a village-based people who are bound by a common way of life, nothing else.

Tall and fair and blue-eyed. Their god is Ymir, the frost giant, and each tribe has its own king. They are wayward and fierce. They fight all day and drink ale and roar their wild songs all night.

R. E. Howard. The Phoenix on the Sword

The Æsir are fierce warriors, proud and honourable. With white hot enthusiasm they pursue life, facing death fearlessly with a song on their lips. They were giant men who valued honour, loyalty and reputation above all things, for their land was harsh. Even the women are strong, running households while the men war with each other across the icy plains and mountains.

War is an essential ingredient in the life of the Æsir. War is their economy. War is their social setting. War is their religion. War measured courage. War measured honour. War measured manhood. This being the case, weapons are of prime importance to a golden-hair Æsir. Their favoured weapons are the broadsword and the axe. Hunting and war spears are also commonly seen.

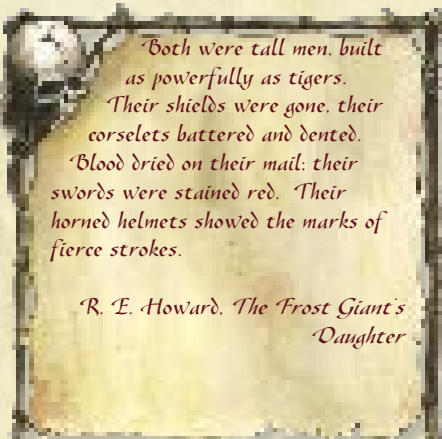
Weapons are so important in the life of an Æsir they are almost

always highly ornamented, etched with exotic designs or runic characters. The Æsir tend to prefer dragons or birds of prey in their complex ornamentation. In addition, they also etch stylised nature designs into their armour, clothing and tools as well. The Æsir often wear leather helmets reinforced with pieces of metal, including a piece of iron or steel over the nose. These helms are often decorated, in addition to mere design-work, with horns to symbolise fierce power. Mail shirts and large shields are standard. The common shields seen among the Æsir are made of wood and covered in leather hide or bearskin. A round metal hump is placed in the centre of the outer face of the shield to protect the hand holding the shield.

Ferocity and courage are not the only measure of manhood among the Æsir. Self-esteem is also valued, and a portion of self-esteem revolves around appearance. Using combs made from antlers, the Æsir groom themselves daily, braiding their hair, moustaches and beards. Many carry small tools to clean their fingernails and ears with them. The Æsir bathe at least once a week, and use saunas for health. In addition to grooming, self-esteem includes a measure of status. Status among the Æsir is achieved through combat prowess or wealth. The display of wealth gives an Æsir status. Their clothes and armour have coins sewn onto them. Coins are also hung on chains and worn as jewellery, displayed with arrogant pride. Jewellery is equally prized by Æsir men as by the women. Precious metals are often melted down and recast as wearable items, such as bracelets or armlets.

The Æsir use precious metals, usually silver, in trade. They pay for goods with coin or an appropriate weight in silver, cut off from their jewellery. The Æsir rarely carry purses or sacks of coin because of the noise. It is easier and quieter to recast the coins as a bracelet, and then just slice off pieces of it as needed. The Æsir also engage in

barter for trade goods. Of course, their preferred manner of gaining necessities is to raid a rival for them.



The frigid northlands are not suited for agriculture, and the Æsir do not practice farming. The Æsir do not herd animals either. They hunt for their livelihood as befits a warrior race. Their wasteland realm isn't as barren of life as a first glance might suppose. The frozen mountains and icy plains support bears, mammoths, moose, reindeer and similar beasts of the wild. Wild fruits and berries supplemented their diet. Dependent upon wildlife, their villages, built using whatever materials are close at hand or can be readily raided, are usually near known animal trails and water. In the centre of these villages stood the largest and longest of the many buildings. This great hall was the home of the king.

The Æsir have many kings, for each village is like a kingdom unto itself. A king, to the Æsir, is any local warrior who could maintain a following, using both income and honour to hold onto that following. The king always led his warriors into battle, which meant that most Æsir kings died young, but with barbaric honour and pride.

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF ASGARÐ

Blue Mountains – This range of rocky and frozen mountains forms the border with Vanaheim. The mountains tower over ice plains and appear blue in the distance. It is said that Ymir walks abroad in these cold mountains.

Eiglophian Mountains – An incredible mountain range that separates Vanaheim, Asgard and Hyperborea from the southern kingdoms. Passes through this impressive range of rock and ice are usually blocked during the winter by weather conditions but otherwise afford traffic between the frozen north and the warm south. A small portion of this cold range passes through the northern reaches of the Border Kingdom. A tribe of Hyperboreans called the Verunians live in these mountains, fighting off attacks from cannibal pithecanthropoids who also live in the higher peaks of the range.

- † **Snow Devil Glacier (The River of Death Ice)** – This is a titanic Eiglophian glacier that flows along the borders of Hyperborea, the Border Kingdom and Asgard. It is also known as the River of Death Ice. It can be seen easily from the top of a nameless pass that leads southward into the Border Kingdom from Asgard. This pass moves along the fringes of this glacier and is dangerous because of hidden crevasses, thin snow bridges and sudden avalanches. Small, gnarled trees litter the rocky slopes of the pass, living on the water and soil brought by the glacier. This glacier is a place of fear among the people who live in the north, even among those who had likely never seen it. Of course, it was not uncommon for entire parties of men to perish on the dangerous glacier. The glacier is home to the vampire ice worm of the north, variously called the Remora or *yakhmar*, as well as tribes of hairy humanoids who are a few steps back on the evolutionary ladder.

MAJOR CITIES OF ASGARÐ

There are an estimated 10,900 villages and 67 towns in Asgard. The Æsir do not build cities.

ÆSIR RELIGION

The Æsir worship Ymir the Frost Giant King. Dread Ymir rules icy Valhalla, where the dead dwell, 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 sprang 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, it 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 drank one's self unconscious. Thus, inebriation is a religious obligation as well as a social activity.

"Who are you to swear by Ymir?" she mocked. "What know you of the gods of ice and snow, you who have come up from the South to adventure among an alien people?"

R. E. Howard. The Frost Giant's Daughter

It is likely that there are regional gods as well, considering the Æsir and their life-style. They have no unified government to enforce anything. If there are such local gods among the associated villages of Asgard, the Conan saga is silent. Any local gods are subordinate to Ymir, in any case.

In the north, golden-haired, blue eyed barbarians, descendants of the blond arctic savages, have driven the remaining Hyborian tribes out of the snow countries, except the ancient kingdom of Hyperborea, which resists their onslaught. Their country is called Nordheim, and they are divided into the red-haired Vanir of Vanaheim, and the yellow-haired Æsir of Asgard.

R. E. Howard. The Hyborian Age

Among the Æsir, who are each fiercely independent, even religion is viewed as a personal matter. They have no time, or interest, in priests to interpret Ymir for them. Each man is his own intermediary to Ymir. The 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.

Life was 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 mirrored how one lived life and met one's dooms. For the common folk, the afterlife will be dull and dreary, a life spent gathering and serving the warriors. For valiant warriors, however, the afterlife would be filled with fighting and feasting in the snowy plains and halls of Valhalla.

SIR HISTORY

After the Cataclysm destroyed the civilisations of the world, humanity began again its fight for dominance. Among these, a primitive people, only slightly more evolved than the Neanderthal, travelled north and fought the snow-apes. They drove these monsters north of the arctic circle to perish, and they occupied the cold northern lands as conquerors. These snow-apes, over the next several thousand years, managed to evolve into gigantic blonde arctic savages, and pushed back south. A thousand years later, they finally pushed the Hyborians south and established Nordheim. These barbarians were split into two major groups based primarily on hair-colour. The yellow-haired Æsir settled in the inland portion of Nordheim and called it Asgard. They are not Hyborian, and their bloodline remains pure.

LOCAL CREATURES OF ASGARD

Asgard supports an abundant amount of wildlife among its tundras, glaciers and taiga forests. Musk ox, reindeer, moose, fox, bear and mammoth are common.

NORÐHEIM: VANAHEIM

Home of the Vanir

VANAHEIM IS A part of Nordheim, the area north of Cimmeria that includes Asgard. The Vanir are a numerous people, estimated at nearly five million red-haired northerners in all; they are not as numerous as their foes, the Æsir. Like the Æsir, Vanaheim is not a unified kingdom serving one supreme king. Essentially the Vanir are a village-based people who are bound by a common way of life, nothing else.

In order to survive in their cold wastelands, the Vanir have built a religion around battle and warfare. Aggression is worshipped, and the Vanir are undoubtedly fierce warriors, chasing after life with intense enthusiasm, singing songs even as they die, swords in hand. Huge, they are giants among the races and even their women are strong, taking charge of the villages while the men prey upon other tribes, the Æsir, the Cimmerians or themselves.

The Vanir have a Nordic culture of tribes ruled by a king who lives in a great hall about which the tribal village is built. Their economy is based on limited farming and extensive hunting, as well as war. The Vanir are quick to fight among themselves and raid their neighbours. Conan was born during a war between Vanir raiders and Cimmerians.

Their entire lifestyle is focused on battle. It is their livelihood, their religion and their culture. In battle, the red-haired Vanir sought courage, valour, honour and glory. In battle, they fight with broadswords, axes and spears, often ornately decorated with ferocious images of dragons, bears and birds. Their helmets, reinforced leather helms or steel caps, are usually horned. They wear mail shirts and leather-sheathed shields with a round metal hump in the centre.

Like the Æsir, the Vanir believe in appearance and are not a dirty people. They make combs from antlers and many carry small tools with them to clean their fingernails and ears. Their red beards and manes are often braided and groomed. The Vanir bathe weekly and use saunas for health reasons.

Status among the Vanir is achieved through combat prowess or wealth. Those Vanir who achieve a level of wealth often display this wealth. This is not considered vanity, but just another part of their culture. Hiding one's wealth is cowardly, showing fear of thieves. Coins are sewn onto clothes and armour or worn



as jewellery. Precious items, such as statues and the like, plundered from other races are melted down and recast as wearable items, such as bracelets. If the Vanir need money for trade, they just hack off a piece of jewellery they wear and use that.

In the north, golden-haired, blue eyed barbarians, descendants of the blond arctic savages, have driven the remaining Hyborian tribes out of the snow countries, except the ancient kingdom of Hyperborea, which resists their onslaught. Their country is called Nordheim, and they are divided into the red-haired Vanir of Vanaheim, and the yellow-haired Æsir of Asgard.

R. E. Howard. The Hyborian Age

The Vanir have many kings, for each village is like a kingdom unto itself. A king, to the Vanir, is any local warrior who could maintain a following, using both income and honour to hold onto that following. The king always led his warriors into battle, which meant that most Vanir kings died young, but with barbaric honour and pride.

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF VANAHEIM

The Vanir live among frozen tundras and icy plains. It lies west of Asgard and north of Cimmeria and the Pictish Wilderness. It is a bleak and sombre land. Thin taiga swamps cover the southern borders, but the vast majority of the nation is snow-covered tundra and icy mountainous crags. Most Vanir live along the coast, where the living conditions are less severe, where they hunt marine mammals in kayaks.

Blue Mountains – This range of rocky and frozen mountains forms the border with Asgard. The mountains tower over ice plains and appear blue in the distance. It is said that Ymir walks abroad in these cold mountains.

Eiglophian Mountains – An incredible mountain range that separates Asgard, Vanaheim and Hyperborea from the southern kingdoms. Passes through this impressive range of rock and ice are usually blocked during the winter by weather conditions but otherwise afford traffic between the frozen north and the warm south.

MAJOR CITIES OF VANAHEIM

There are an estimated 8,800 villages and 62 towns in Vanaheim. The Vanir do not build cities.



VANIR RELIGION

Vanir religion is virtually identical with Æsir religion. See page 93 for details.

VANIR HISTORY

Possibly descended from the pre-Cataclysmic people of Thule, the Vanir swept south out of the arctic to rule Nordheim with the Æsir, whom they hate. The progenitors of the Hyborians fought the ancestors of the Nordheimer and drove them north of the Arctic circle. In time, these savage man-apes evolved into humans, who swept southward, pushing the Hyborians out of their way. The Nordheimer were divided by hair colour. Those with red hair went west of the Blue Mountains, and those with yellow hair went to the east of that range.

LOCAL CREATURES OF VANAHEIM

Their wasteland realm isn't as barren of life as a first glance might suppose. The frozen mountains and icy plains support bears, mammoths, moose, reindeer and similar beasts of the wild.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Of course, bands of Cimmerians and Æsir invade Vanaheim for no other reason than to raid and fight.

The Frost Giant's daughter could reappear. Perhaps she took a friend of the characters, and the characters head to Vanaheim to seek her out to avenge their friend.

During Conan's age, even though the Vanir live along a coast, the long-proved longships of the historical Vikings



had not been invented yet. Perhaps the first of these ships now appear, and hordes of blood-thirsty Vanir swarm along the Pictish Coast to invade Zingara or the Barachan Islands.

Although the Vanir also share a border with the Pictish Wilderness, there were few raids between the two cultures. The warm woods likely made the Vanir skittish and the Picts didn't care much for the frozen tundra of the northmen. However, Cimmerian, Hyperborean or Æsir raids could force a tribe or two south into the Pictish Wilderness. Perhaps the characters, during a sojourn among the Vanir are with the tribe during this flight southward. Perhaps the characters are the ones pushing this tribe of Vanir into certain doom among the savage Picts.

WESTERN OCEAN



THE WORLD OF HYBORIA

- PLAINS
- FORESTS
- STEPPES
- DESERT
- CITIES
- FORTRESSES
- OTHER



Ophir

The Kingdom of Gold

OPHIR, A VASSAL to mighty Aquilonia, is a Hyborian kingdom that lays 'like a tapering wedge between the border of Aquilonia and the vast southern kingdom of Koth.' With a population of approximately 4,320,000 persons, it is one of the smaller Hyborian realms. Ophir's knights wear gold-gilt armours and Ophir's queen once offered a roomful of gold as a reward for the return of a stolen ring. It follows that Ophir is a wealthy nation of much gold. Ophir also co-existed with Acheron and for part of its reign was either a part of Acheron or paid tribute to it as a vassal kingdom. This makes the kingdom extremely old, older than Aquilonia, Argos or Nemedra.

'I will take you to the Stygian borders. The Stygians will send you home to Ophir.'

She stared up at him as if she had not heard aright. 'Home?' she repeated mechanically. 'Home? Ophir? My people? Cities, towers, peace, my home?'

'Robert E. Howard. The Vale of Lost Women'

'Then Conan dispatched heralds in black-and-gold tabards to his vassal-kings, Ludovic of Ophir and Balardus of Koth.'

L. Sprague de Camp. 'Black Sphinx of Nebthu'

Ophir is a feudal kingdom, as many Hyborian kingdoms are. It is not as unified as Nemedra and is more fractious than Aquilonia. Ophir has a fragmented government by an aristocratic class of local powers, counts and barons, who perform civil and military functions in the name of the king for an equally fragmented kingdom subdivided into numerous fiefs and sub-fiefs.

The area of Ophir is broken up into smaller territories, or provinces. These in turn are broken up into even smaller pieces. Often the boundaries are not well defined, nor do the various

lands ruled by a count or baron need to be contiguous. The divisions tend to undermine the sovereignty of the king and lead to inefficient government by the counts, barons and those subordinate to the upper nobility. The lack of definite borders also leads to wars between the nobles and many prosperous towns lie in disputed territories.

The counts and barons of Ophir hold noble titles and fiefs from the king granting them official power. The granting of these fiefs are done by a patent, or contract, wherein the noble swears fealty to the king and the king grants the noble all rights pertaining to the land proffered as fief. The fief includes both private property and a noble title. These noble titles are inherited through the male line, although the king may remove a title at his pleasure. The eldest son or the husband of an eldest daughter almost always inherits the noble title. The actual property of the fief, however, can be divided among the lord's heirs however he may see fit. If a dispute over inheritance occurs, especially in a case where a nobleman produced no heir, the king may intercede and name an heir.

Unfortunately, the political and military structure of Ophir tends to maintain only the illusion of unity beneath the king. The counts and barons frequently can and do ignore the edicts and commands of the king. Although the king rules all of Ophir in theory, the true practice of power there shows that the king rules Ianthe and its surrounding manors only.

'What of you? Your brother, Amalrus, holds the eastern half of your kingdom and defies you... the people... are crushed into the earth by tyrannous taxes and levies.'

'Robert E. Howard. The Scarlet Citadel'

The kings of Ophir seem to be of a treacherous sort. King Moranthes II, a weak, effeminate ruler who relied upon his strongest barons for support, double-crossed the ruler of Khoraja and captured him, holding for ransom and threatening to sell him to Koth. He also captured his own wife, Queen Marala, for lewd behaviour among his courtiers during an absence. He also sold his daughter, Olivia, into slavery for refusing to marry a prince of Koth. The following king, Amalrus, betrayed Ophir's ally, Aquilonia, and sided with Koth against that great nation, capturing King Conan and sending troops into Conan's realm. He also was a weak king, for his brother fought for his right to the crown, holding the eastern half of the kingdom. The current king of Ophir, Ludovic, is an Aquilonian vassal-king, subject to King Conan.

The noblemen tend to be just as treacherous and greedy as its kings. Baron Rigello, cousin to King Moranthes II, once burned ten villages of his fief when the folk couldn't deliver their quota of crops due to drought. Noblemen are armed with slender swords and dress in silks and gold, decorated in gleaming jewels. The knights of Ophir wear mail gilt with gold and sport plumed helmets. Their tabards and clothing bear a star-shaped emblem.

*Ophirean knights
in gilded mail leaped
their horses over
mounds of corpses to slash
at the solitary figure.*

*Robert E. Howard. The
Scarlet Citadel*

Ophir maintains a powerful army composed of its noble knights and heavy cavalry. Infantry are considered fodder for archers and not an honourable field of military service. Most of the infantry are commoners that are given minimal training or mercenaries. They are easily demoralised in combat.

The Ophirean army favours a standard formation for Hyborian hosts. The centre, made up of heavily armoured, plumed knights, is the strongest section. The wings are composed of lesser cavalry units in gilded mail that may be supported further by infantry conscripts and mercenary archers. The wings move in advance of the centre. The cavalry units move in next, followed by the knights on their enormous horses.

The country folk of Ophir tend to be a silent, surly lot, particularly in times of unrest. They do not trust outsiders and are unlikely to answer any questions that cannot be handled with a grunt or a monosyllabic reply. Foreigners will likely face stiff DC penalties to the use of Gather Information from the Ophireans.

Merchants in Ophir like to wear voluminous hooded robes. These robes help to cozen the customers. Servants wear distinctive smocks, their quality dependent upon the rank of the person served.

Doctors and leeches swear oaths to help all, no matter what side of the law they stand upon.

In addition to nobles, merchants, commoners, knights and kings, Ophir has a reputation for science. In lanthe, climbing claws have been invented that aid in the ascension of walls.

The economy of Ophir is mining. Gold ore and mineral deposits are brought out of the eastern mountains. Still, the kingdom is hardly the wealthiest and most prosperous of Hyborian realms. The Ophireans desire and need treaties and trading agreements with other nations, for there are many trading routes that do not pass through little Ophir. The nobles sell their children into slavery for money and nobles hold other nobles ransom to raise funding. The treacherous Ophireans will usually side with the ones that offer the most advantage, either in coin or in trading agreements. Diplomacy is a well-regarded art among the Ophireans and Ophir's kings and nobles are usually superb diplomats.

*With five thousand knights he had ridden
into the grassy meadowlands of Ophir,
to find his former ally, King Amalrus of
Ophir, drawn up against him with the hosts of
Strabonus, king of Koth.*

Robert E. Howard. The Scarlet Citadel

*Conan chose the shortest route to Lanthe, the capital.
His road wound through craggy borderland that huddled,
lone and deserted, save for the ramshackle huts of
peasants who eked out a bare living as goatherds. Then,
little by little, the country grew fertile, and after
seven days of journeying within the kingdom, Conan rode
among golden fields of ripening grain.*

L. Sprague de Camp. The Star of Khorala

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF OPHIR

Ophir is a hilly land of forests and plains in the west and is quite mountainous in the east. It is a fertile land, crossed by rivers and streams. The people raise grain and herd animals.

Plain of Shamu – This is a meadowland of Ophir, where Conan lost five thousand Aquilonian troops against the combined forces of traitorous Ophir and stingy Koth. It lies south of the Tybor river.

Red River – The Red River is a tributary of the Khorotas. Ianthe sits on its shores.

Tybor River – The Tybor forms a border between Aquilonia and Ophir. It is a placid river, deep and wide, with much river traffic. It is usually crossed by ferry at Shamar, an Aquilonian city.

IMPORTANT OPHIREAN CITIES

Frosol – Frosol is a county of Ophir with an impressive six towns in its fief. Its capital boasts 12,345 citizens.

Ianthe – Ianthe is the capital of Ophir. Straddling the Red River, Ianthe is a city of domes and towers ornamented with metal. Houses are roofed with red tiles and the taller ones can be seen over the city walls. The palace of Ianthe is built upon the remains of the original citadel. A tavern called the *Wild Boar* can be found within. Ianthe has a population of 21,600. Eight towns owe direct fealty to the King of Ophir, supporting the city. (*Shadows in the Dark, Star of Khorala, Conan the Triumphant, Conan the Great*)

Lodier – Lodier is the name of an Ophirean barony. Four towns are in its domain. Its capital city is the home of 10,876 Ophireans.

Mecanta – Mecanta is the name of an Ophirean county. Mecanta is known for its use of guerrilla-style arbalesters and powerful counts. Its capital has a population of 14,568 people. Five towns are under the dominion of its count, in addition to the city.

Terson – Terson is the name of an Ophirean barony. 9,955 people reside in its capital city. Four towns labour in the gold mines of this fief.

Theringo – Theringo is the name of an Ophirean county and castle. Built on a plain, it was the location of the Battle of the Hundred and One Swords two hundred years ago. Queen Marala came from this line of fief-holders. The old castle is in ruins. Four towns still owe fealty to the count of Theringo, though there is no capital city any longer.

Vendishan – Vendishan is a county or barony of Ophir. Vendishan, the capital of the region, has a population of 12,339 people. Four towns owe allegiance to the ruler of Vendishan.

'(Mitra) does not inhabit this cold stone, as your priests tell you Ishtar does. He is everywhere - above us, and about us, and he dreams betimes in the high places among the stars. 'But here his being focuses. Therefore call upon him.'

'R. E. Howard. 'Black Colossus

RELIGION IN OPHIR

Mitra is a Hyborian kingdom and primarily worships Mitra. However, they have had, and continue to have, much contact with Kothians and Shemites, so the worship of Ishtar has filtered into the kingdom. Overall, Ophir is more religiously tolerant than many Hyborian kingdoms.

Mitra, by those who worship him, is regarded as the one true god, although worship of Ishtar is accepted in Ophir as preferable to the demon worship of other religions. The religion of Mitra has a heaven and a hell and a concept of Judgement. The Mitran temples stand in stark contrast to Ishtar's, as the former are symbol-free and stately, almost to the point of being plain. Still the Mitran temples have a powerful presence that cannot be denied. The Mitrans do not sacrifice animals or men to their god, nor do they pretend to know what Mitra looks like. The single statue permitted in a Mitran temple is nothing more than a statue to the Mitrans, naught but an attempt to visualize his nature in a form the human mind can comprehend.

'Plain and unadorned in comparison to the lavish display of Ishtar's shrines, there was about it a simplicity of dignity and beauty characteristic of the Mitran religion.'

'R. E. Howard. 'Black Colossus

Ishtar is worshipped as a goddess of sexuality, fertility and war. She is usually depicted as having wings and is symbolized by the lion. She is a goddess imported from Shem, but her worship here disdains human sacrifice, although animal sacrifice is still practiced in her exotic and ornate temples. Her lavish 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 daily depending on the ritual needs of the day or season. Her

followers are expected to approach the statues naked and on their knees, as befitting a supplicant.

As a fertility religion, her followers believe the heavens fertilise the earth, represented by Ishtar, by way of rain, the sky god's seed. Her rites are conducted as languid orgies in which cosmic congress is ensured by mortal enactments of the union of the gods. The priestess was believed to embody Ishtar during certain sensual rituals and bestows her favours on her followers to ensure prosperity and fertility. Sacred prostitutes probably aided in the rituals. The priests of Ishtar represent her sons and lovers and also aided in the rituals; if a woman was thought to be infertile, the priests would 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.

As with the Mitran religion, Ishtar's faith believes in an afterlife. Hell is hot and guarded by seven gates and legions of demons. The damned there are tormented. There is a concept of judgement and a certain amount of ethical teachings. Perhaps it is this similarity that causes the religion to be more palatable than most to the Mitrans.

OPHIREAN HISTORY

During the age of Acheron, when that great nation shared borders with Stygia, the Hyborians began streaming out of the north in hordes and waves, violent and savage. Stygia, at that time, controlled the lands now called Corinthia, Koth and Shem. When the Hyborians poured through the lands that would become Brythunia in a later age, they were stopped in Corinthia and held there for some years. Waves of Hyborians continued to push southward and Stygia allowed the Hyborians to settle in the lands of Koth and Corinthia as vassal provinces. Contact with the elder races of Acheron, Zamora and Stygia proved beneficial to the Hyborians, who made giant leaps in their cultural advancement. Continued waves of Hyborians pushed them into the previously unexplored regions of Ophir, where gold and diamonds were discovered.

The older kingdoms of Ophir, Corinthia, and western Koth, which had been subject to the kings of Acheron, regained their independence with the fall of the empire.

Robert E. Howard, The Hour of the Dragon

Eventually, the Hyborians, possibly with aid from Acheron and Zamora, pushed the Stygians out of those meadows and mountains, pushing them back through Shem and, with the help of the Sons of Shem, behind Kuthchemes, which was sacked. Koth became the overlords of Shem after these bloody battles. In events unrecorded, the new nations of Koth, Corinthia and Ophir then became vassals of Acheron, paying them tribute. Perhaps the Hyborians attacked Acheron and were repelled. Perhaps Acheron merely threw its weight around. In any case, Ophir became subject to the kings of Acheron and great trains of gold, jewels and slaves poured into the kingdom of their masters.

Three decades later the Hyborian tribes brought down the great kingdom of Acheron and Ophir regained its independence. Ophir established an unsteady feudal society in time with the original Hyborian inhabitants lording it over newcomers and any aboriginal remnants found therein.

Two hundred years ago, Count Alarkar tried to provide a stable government for Ophir by forcing the nobles and the king to sign a charter. The charter would have delineated the rights and duties of all subjects of the kingdom. The attempt failed due to treachery.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

King Ludovic, vassal-king to Aquilonia's King Conan, is having difficulty consolidating his reign. The brother of the deposed king Amalrus still holds a tight hold on the east, claiming a blood-right to the throne. Many Ophirean barons, chafing under the reparations demanded by King Conan for the damage they wrought upon Aquilonia in the war detailed in Howard's *The Scarlet Citadel*, support the rebel prince, either in secret or in outright rebellion.

A traveller has related that merchants in Lodier mention the phrase 'Iä! Xuthalla!' in nearly every conversation, however, no one recalls using the phrase upon questioning. The nobles have become restless at this recent news, fearing the rise of some ancient Lemurian evil.

PICTISH WILDERNESS

Land of Painted Devils

THE PICTS ARE a warlike race of barbarians, strong and shadowy, the most fierce of all the savage races. Robert E. Howard had a fascination for the real-life Picts, the Caledonians of Scotland. From the information he had on the real Picts and by sprinkling in facts and fancy about the Native Americans, he was able to weave a fantastic saga of the fictionalised savages that had such an inexorable grasp on his imagination. Picts can be found in his *Kull* stories, as well as the three *Conan* stories, *Beyond the Black River*, *The Black Stranger* and *Wolves Beyond the Border*. The Picts also figure prominently in his essay, *The Hyborian Age*. One day the Picts will destroy Aquilonia and bring about the end of the Hyborian Age.

The Picts are a short but broad, swarthy-skinned folk. They are a white-skinned race, but the civilised folk never refer to them as such. Their homes are decorated with the grisly skulls of enemies. They live in caves and tree shelters, as well as mud-and-wattle huts collected in villages. The villages are surrounded by a stockade. Every aspect of their life is dominated by an awareness of their lush environment. Every rite, ceremony and superstition emphasises a respect for their environment. Their art expresses this connection with nature, portraying the plants, animals and people in their region and usually focusing on their tribe's chosen totem animal. They paint distinctive designs on their faces and bodies that identify their tribe and their purpose – hunting or war.

The Picts have developed a method of communicating over long distances using drums. Called talking drums, these instruments echo for miles, raising fear in the hearts of the Hyborians who hear them. The Picts are expert at these drums and they know the effect the drums create in the non-Pict.

The Picts have a Stone Age culture, one of the most primitive of the Hyborian Age. They live in small tribes and hunt in their game-rich woodland wilderness, tracking with exceptional skill. These tribes are built around clans named for their totem

Beyond the river the primitive still reigned in shadowy forests, brush-thatched huts where hung the grinning skulls of men, and mud-walled enclosures where fires flickered and drums rumbled, and spears were whetted in the hands of dark, silent men with tangled black hair and the eyes of serpents. Those eyes often glared through the bushes at the fort across the river. Once dark-skinned men had built their huts where that fort stood, yes, and their huts had risen where now stood the fields and log cabins of fair-haired settlers, back beyond Velitrium, that raw, turbulent frontier town on the banks of Thunder River, to the shores of that other river that bounds the Bossonian Marches. Traders had come, and priests of Mitra who walked with bare feet and empty hands, and died horribly, most of them, but soldiers had followed, and men with axes in their hands and women and children in ox-drawn wains. Back to Thunder River, the aborigines had been pushed, with slaughter and massacre. But the dark-skinned people did not forget that once Conajohara had been theirs.

Robert E. Howard, 'Beyond the Black River'

animals. Identity is deep-seated and complete. These clans often believe they are descendants of that animal spirit or that the totem animal assisted a common ancestor in some way.

Each tribe lives in its own distinct region with individualistic traditions and rituals. These clans do not generally co-operate and usually war with one another. A clan is simply a group of related families. To the Pict, family and kinship is key to the stability of the tribe, defining the individual Pict's rights and

They dwelt in clans, which were generally at feud with one another, and their simple customs were bloodthirsty and utterly inexplicable to a civilised man.

Robert E. Howard, The Hyborian Age

obligations toward others. To be a cousin, a son, a daughter, a nephew, a father or an elder defines distinct roles for the Pict. These familial roles delineate how Picts act toward one another, depending on relationship. Those few foreigners who come to their villages for a length of time find themselves 'adopted,' given the name of 'brother' or even 'cousin' so the Picts know their social positions and how to act toward them.

Different clans emphasise different skills, although all Picts tend to master most of the useful hunting skills as best they can. Those of the Turtle clan emphasise endurance, crafts, traps and listening. The Alligators emphasise stealth for their ambush tactics and many take ranks in Bluff. The Hawks and Eagles tend to be fantastic at Spot skills. It is hard to hide from them. The Wildcats are strongest at moving silently, sneaking up on their prey. The Wolf clan attacks in packs, often driving their victims over long distances while making sporadic attacks designed to exhaust their chosen foe. They specialise in tracking skills, such as Search and Survival. Ravens concentrate on the Survival skill and pluck out the eyes of their captives to ensure against escape. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of tribes living in the Pictish Wilderness. The Games Master is encouraged to develop his own based on various animals that might be found there. Both players and Games Masters should pick skills to complement the tribal totem, so that Picts do not become 'generic.' Each tribe should play differently, even though they share certain characteristics.

Picts do not make slaves of people, foreign or rival tribesmen. They use their women to perform their drudgery and chores, thus to their minds they have no need of slaves. Instead, their captives are sacrificed to the spirits and their gruesome gods or traded to other tribes in return for their captives. Some Pictish tribes burn their captives alive. Others put them to the knife. Still others feed them to animals or carnivorous plants. Torture is commonplace, as this pleases the vengeful spirits. The sense of vengeance among the Picts is intense. Blood-feuds are also common, generation-spanning wars against enemy tribes.

The Zingarans are among the few who regularly trade with the Picts, plying their ships up and down the Pictish coast, bargaining with the painted men of the wild. They trade hides, copper ore, gold dust, whales' teeth and walrus tusks for weapons, ornaments and wine. Among the ornaments the Picts seek are ostrich plumes. One thing they do not trade are slaves. The Picts do not sell themselves or each other into slavery. They are too individualist and prideful to do anything of the sort. Picts will also supplement their trading by raiding into Zingara to steal tin from the mountains and grain from the fields.

Other humans also dwell in the Pictish Wilderness. The Ligureans, another white but non-Hyborian race, live in the forest, warring with the Picts. They are tall and fair, although of unknown origin. Perhaps they are the remnants of an aboriginal race supplanted by the Hyborians and driven into the wilderness and they took up the lifestyle of the Picts in order to survive.

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF THE PICTISH WILDERNESS

The Pictish Wilderness is a lush forest, an expanse of dire swamps and lushly vegetated woodland, hilly and almost jungle-like in its vitality and fertility. To the east dwell the Hawks, Ravens, Wildcats, Turtles, Panthers, Alligators and Otters tribes. The Hawks, Ravens, Wildcats and Turtles are to the northeast and the Panthers, Alligators and Otters dwell more to the south, but all of them live along the Thunder River. To the west is the great confederacy of the Wolves, and the Eagles live to the west of the Wolves, along the shores of the ocean.

"Between the warriors and the dancing shaman stood one who was no 'Pict'. For he was as tall as I, and his skin, light in the play of the fire. But he was clad only in doeskin loincloth and moccasins, and his body was painted, and there was a hawk feather in his hair. So I knew he must be Ligurean, one of those light-skinned savages who dwell in small clans in the forest, generally at war with the 'Picts' but sometimes at peace and allied with them. Their skins are as white as an Aquilonian's. The 'Picts' are a white race, too, in that they are not black or brown or yellow; but they are black-eyed and black-haired and dark of skin. Neither they nor the Ligureans are spoken of as 'white' by the people of 'Westermarch, who only designate thus a man of Hyborian blood.

Robert E. Howard, Wolves Beyond the Border

"Beyond that river lay a huge forest, which approached jungle-like density along the spongy shores... The forest beyond the river might seem desolate and vacant of life to the ignorant eye, but life teemed there, not alone of bird and beast and reptile, but also of men, the fiercest of all the hunting beasts.

Robert E. Howard, 'Beyond the Black River'

The land is vitally important to the Picts, essential to their identity. The Picts deal with the realities of their woodland realm every moment. No matter where or when, the Picts are aware of their environment. They could mimic animal calls to attract prey within the range of their weapons. They can make use of natural lighting and foliage to hide within mere feet of prey. The environment provides the materials each of them uses to live – homes, weapons, clothing and food. The Picts who live

along the shores of the ocean are not seafarers, however. They comb the beaches for walrus and whale carcasses thrown up by the waves and they do fishing along the shores. They do not venture far out into the wild, blue ocean.

Black River – The Black River is the frontier border of Aquilonia and the site of many battles with the savage Picts. The river has a swift current, yet is quite deep and rather wide, carrying a large volume of water. The river's source is somewhere in the mountains of northern Pictland. It then flows southward along the border of the Bossonian Marches, then along the frontier border of Westermarck. Eventually it curves to the West as it flows into Zingara on its course to the open sea. The Zingaran capital of Kordava sits at its mouth.

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

IMPORTANT PICTLAND SITES

Ghost Swamp – Ghost Swamp is a place where the Picts parlay. It lies to the south and west of Tullien's Creek in the Westermarck of Aquilonia.

This country was a howling wilderness. The Cimmerian knew that for a thousand miles this western coast ran bare and uninhabited except by the villages of the ferocious sea-land tribes, who were even less civilized than their forest-dwelling brothers.

The nearest outposts of civilization were the frontier settlements along Thunder River, hundreds of miles to the east. The Cimmerian knew he was the only white man ever to cross the wilderness that lay between that river and the coast. Yet that door was no work of the Picts.

Robert E. Howard. The 'Black Stranger

Korvela Bay – Korvela Bay is a coastal colony established by the exiled Count Valenso de Korzetta from Zingara. A wooden fort-castle was built here by the Count's servants and destroyed nearly a year later by the Picts.

RELIGION IN THE PICTISH WILDERNESS

Thousands of years of prowling darkly fantastic forests and reeking black swamps creates a rather sinister outlook on the gods and the spirit world. Shamanism is the primary Pictish religion, although it is hard to speak of Pictish 'religions' as though the concept is similar to the Western religions that exist alongside secular, daily life. For the Picts, their ideas of spirituality, superstition and rites are inextricably intertwined with their day-to-day lives in such a tight manner that separation is impossible. Religious life and secular life are one and the same, both utterly dominated by the menacing environment around them. The most minor and trivial of daily activities has a deep spirituality involved in its performance. Mystical power resides in every thing and in every action. Every Pict must pay heed to the baleful spirits that infuse all things. To insure 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. This is the shaman.

Hell, the woods along the river are swarming with Picts! That's why they got us. Zogar's brewing war-magic: no mere raid this time. He's done something no Pict has done in my memory - united as many as fifteen or sixteen clans. His magic did it: they'll follow a wizard farther than they will a war-chief.

'Robert E. Howard. 'Beyond the 'Black River

He knew he was the only white man ever to cross the wilderness that lay between that river and the coast. Yet that door was no work of the Picts.

'Robert E. Howard. The 'Black Stranger

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 hateful spirit world. If a Pict is 'evil,' not meeting the obligations of the spirit world and the ubiquitous environment, he may find hunting sparse, for the darksome spirits control the quantity and quality of game animals. Intense rhythmic drumming induces a ritual trance when the hunters require the shaman's help, allowing the shaman's soul to enter the spirit world to find the source of the



difficulty in hunting. The shaman then tells the Pict what will appease the cruel spirits and cause them to release the animals they have hidden away. To not meet the responsibilities required by the spirits is a sign of disrespect, shredding the balance and harmony of the environment around them. The nightmarish environment and the hateful spirits are one, bound together, the source of life for all, the source of identity for the tribe and the source of strength for the individual Pict.

The tribes are named after their totem animals. These totems are vitally important to the clans. To the Turtles, the shell of the turtle encompasses the universe. The turtle is enduring and patient, as are the clansmen of the Turtle. Their jewellery is made of tortoiseshell, which has an amazing lustre and translucency when polished. To the Alligator, their totem animal is a ferocious hunter, able to take down large prey. The Alligator clan sees themselves in this light. The tribe's shamans use the alligator's liver and entrails to create powerful magic. The Hawks and Eagles are among the most predatory of the clans, their totems symbolising the warrior and the hunter. The Wildcats are perfectly adapted killing engines, lithe and silent, traits that clan emphasises. The Wolf clan attacks in packs, often driving their victims over long distances while making sporadic attacks designed to exhaust their chosen foe. The raven, which taught the early Picts how to survive, is seen as a messenger or prophet from the spirit world. In any case, the clan's totem animal serves as a spirit guide, especially to the shaman.

My brother had not painted a skull black for you and hurled it into the fire that burns for ever on Gullah's black altar. He had not whispered your name to the black ghosts that haunt the uplands of the Dark Land. But a bat has flown over the Mountains of the Dead and drawn your image in blood on the white tiger's hide that hangs before the long hut where sleep the Four Brothers of the Night. The great serpents coil about their feet and the stars burn like fireflies in their hair.

R. E. Howard. 'Beyond the Black River'

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. Feathers hold mystical significance to the shaman and his followers. Masks are also common to enhance the mood or 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.

Once all living things worshipped him. That was long ago, when beasts and men spoke one language. Men have forgotten him: even the beasts forget. Only a few remember. The men who remember Shebbal Sag and the beasts who remember are brothers and speak the same tongue.

R. E. Howard. 'Beyond the Black River'

Shamans are skilled at the use of herbal medicines and the use of plants for rituals and spellcasting. Still, healing is not their primary focus. In the world of the Pict, catching game is far more important for the clan, so most of the shaman's magic is directed in the direction of bringing about prosperous hunts. Family and clan are still at the heart of Pictish society and the shaman exists as a community servant, not as some private sorcerer delving deep into his own personal needs and goals.

The magic of the Pictish 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 the captives are sacrificed to their dire gods and vile spirits. Blood makes their magic mighty. They burn captives alive in these gruesome ceremonies, torture the captives and kill the captives. These ceremonies revolve around the hunt and the cycle of life, including births, rites of passage and deaths. The Picts believe in a dark afterlife. After death, their souls will enter the spirit world and haunt the black Mountains of the Dead in the uplands of the Dark Land.

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 an eternal flame set upon it. 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 then can speak to the ghosts and spirits. Gullah, as a moon deity, probably also serves as a guardian of the spirit world. He mirrors the vices of humanity, and of all the creatures in the animal kingdom his anthropoid appearance most closely mimics that of man. 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...

'But what was that - that thing you killed in the altar-hut?' asked 'Balthus, with a shiver at the memory of the dim seen horror.

'One of Zogar's gods. One of Shebbal's children that didn't remember and had to be kept chained to the altar. A bull ape. The Picts think they're sacred to the Hairy One who lives on the moon - the gorilla-god Gullah.'

R. E. Howard. 'Beyond the Black River'



HISTORY OF THE PICTISH WILDERNESS

The Picts were a barbaric race during even the dim, legendary age before the Cataclysm. They lived out on the western ocean on a chain of islands. When the Great Cataclysm rocked the foundations of everything, the Pictish islands were thrust up, forming mountains in a new continent. The Picts were annihilated, save for a single colony in the south of Valusia. For the next millennium the Picts reverted back to stone-age savagery and even lower. They hunted remnant groups of Atlanteans in the ruins of Valusia.

Even through the Cataclysm they retained a sense of identity and remained in one area, but the lesser cataclysm destroyed this and the Pictish clans were scattered. The term 'Pict' no longer was a term of racial identity, but just a word used to distinguish them from the animals, for they no longer had contact with any other human beings. The Atlantean survivors who were formerly the enemies of the Picts fell even further, regressing and degenerating into apishness.

Thus they stayed until the coming of the Hyborians from the north. They found the Picts still at a stone-age level, having had no contact with the Acheronians nor the people of the Zingg Valley. The Picts were driven into the forests of the west, a region of wilderness that

stretched from the border of Vanaheim in the north to Zingara in the south. To the west the ocean bound it, and to the east the Bossonian Marches hemmed them in.

In recent history, Aquilonia made an ill-fated attempt to colonise part of the Pictish Wilderness. It was an expansion effort initiated by King Vilerus and continued by King Numedides. The Picts refused to submit meekly and they unleashed their fury, destroying the fort the Aquilonians built in a war reminiscent of Aquilonia's colonisation attempt in Cimmeria.

LOCAL CREATURES

Boars, elks, panthers, sabre-tooths, snakes, bears, wolves, stegosaur dragons and all sorts of strange monsters and animals lurk in the forests of Pictland. Among the strangest are the *Chaken*, semi-human ape beasts, with peaked heads and the Swamp Devils.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

The characters have heard of a lost treasure deep in the Pictish wilderness and must go into that trackless land of death to seek it out.

Characters on a sea voyage find their luck has finally run out when their ship splinters on the shores of Pictland. The characters must now decide to build a fort on the shore and hope for an unlikely rescue or to plunge into certain death and try to cross Pictland into some more civilised realm.

The Picts have risen again to assault Aquilonia, Cimmeria or Zingara. The characters must either defend the nation in question, the city in question or, perhaps, they are fighting on the side of the Picts.

A Nemedian scholar is putting together a Hyborian bestiary and wants reports of sub-humanoids in the Pictish Wilderness confirmed. He is putting together a safari into that wild land, heedless of the dangers, dismissing tales of the Picts as simply primitive men running around naked and fearful of civilised man. Alternatively, this scholar could be putting together a menagerie of sorts and wants some Pictish wildlife captured, especially the elusive *Chaken*.

A scholar may wish to document Pictish shaman rites for his own mystical researches into sorcery. He may hire characters to kidnap a shaman or to lead him to a tribe so that he may try to bribe his way into their society.

Shem

The Pastoral Lands

PASTORAL SHEM IS a non-Hyborian land of decadent despots in the west and fierce nomads to the east. This influential nation of over fifteen million people is a powerful commercial engine, drawing in wealth through overland trade via the well-travelled caravan routes that criss-cross the arid deserts and pastoral meadowlands. Trade is the life's blood of Shem and its debauched city-states seem to specialise in their manufacture of goods, living off of the unending camel trains. The luxuriant kingdoms are constantly at war with each other, each trying to steal domination of various trade routes, trying to destroy competition in search of ever elusive monopolies in some good or another.

The coastline of Shem has few natural harbours, making the overland routes extremely important. Those lush city-states that do control a harbour have additional power but also need to defend their power all the more often from jealous rivals. The Pelishtim, inhabitants of Pelishtia, hold the best and most powerful harbours, their constant need to defend their sea trade and overland trails have turned them into noted warriors. However, their near-legendary avarice means that few ships wish to put into Shem to trade, as there is little profit in dealing with the sons of Shem once the outrageous harbour taxes, and myriad of other charges are taken into account within a port.

These trading kingdoms are the homes of the meadow Shemites, who are generally of medium height with hook noses, dark eyes and blue-black hair. Some families have Stygian blood, however, and they are gigantic, broadly and strongly built, with similar facial features to the shorter Shemites. The wealthy, urban Shemites wear loose, floor-length robes with sleeves. The robes are usually embroidered and may be made of dyed fabric and trimmed with cloth-of-gold. The poor wear simple sashed or belted tunics that are about knee-length.

Rich or poor, Shemites are renowned as unrepentant liars and tellers of tall tales. Treasures, riches and beautiful things cause

Soon the character of the coastline changed. No longer they sailed past steep cliffs with blue hills marching behind them. Now the shore was the edge of broad meadowlands which barely rose above the water's edge and swept away into the hazy distance. Here were few harbors and fewer ports, but the green plain was dotted with the cities of the Shemites: green sea, lapping the rim of the green plains, and the zikkurats of the cities gleaming whitely in the sun, some small in the distance.

Through the grazing-lands moved the herds of cattle and squat, broad riders with cylindrical helmets and curled blue-black beards, with bows in their hands. This was the shore of the lands of Shem, where there was no law save as each city-state could enforce on its own. Far to the eastward, Conan knew, the meadowlands gave way to the desert, where there were no cities and the nomadic tribes roamed unhindered.

Robert E. Howard, The Hour of the Dragon

the hearts and souls of the Shemites to soar. They live to accumulate wealth and beauty, surrounding themselves with jewellery and lovely slaves. Some are content to gather their wealth via trade and mercantilism, although many Shemites have a roving mindset, willing to travel to find riches and slaves far from home. Most adventuring and wandering meadow Shemites are either merciless mercenaries or Pelishtim scholars.

The mercenaries of Shem are considered to be men devoid of compassion or mercy. These cold-blooded killers for hire are inhumanly cruel, fighting with the ferocity and lust of wild beasts. They do not leave fallen foes behind, but kill the wounded and the downed with pitiless intensity. Although some of the Shemitish mercenaries were skilled with swords and spears, their archers were the most in demand. Extremely keen of eye, the Shemites are feared for their deadly archery skills. They are practically born with bows in hand and horses beneath them. Dressed in scale corselets and cylindrical helmets, the sons of Shem are always ready for war. The elite warriors of the meadow Shemites call themselves *asshuri*, and they do not refer to themselves

as Shemites. They are members of whatever tribe or region they belong to. They are not Shemite *asshuri*, but the *asshuri* of Nippr or the *asshuri* of Eruk. Their swords have pommels shaped as hawks and the material it is made of displays the prowess of the mercenary. An *asshuri* with an iron hawk has killed at least ten men in battle. A bronze hawk indicates twenty slayings in war. A silver hawk shows fifty confirmed kills. The gold hawk is given to those doughty warriors who have slain over a hundred men in various wars and skirmishes.

Shemite archers, armed with powerful bows, are capable of breaking the thunderous charges of armoured knights on their mighty horses. They can kill horses with their deadly shafts, or pick off the knights from their mounts; heedless of their armour, for every suit has weak points – something the keen-eyed Shemites always manage to find with their stinging arrows. Only the Bossonians are regarded as better bowmen and only the Hyrkanians are considered superior horsemen, and both points are hotly contested by the rapacious Shemites.

After these rolled a horde that seemed to encompass the desert. Thousands upon thousands of the warlike sons of Shem: ranks of horsemen in scalemail corselets and cylindrical helmets - the asshuri of Nippr, Shumir, and Eruk and their sister cities: wild white-robed hordes - the nomad clans.

Robert E. Howard. 'Black Colossus'

Roaming in their white-robed hordes, nomadic Shemites dwell in the eastern deserts. They raid their western cousins constantly, burning with a fierce hatred for their civilised kin. Many consider the cities, towns and villages of Shem to be little more than storehouses for things until the nomads want them. Among the desert nomads, the most notorious, the largest and most widely travelled tribe is the Zuagir. These determined riders of the hot sands range from Zamboula to Zamora, fighting savage battles along the eastern edges of the Hyborian nations, surviving through terrorism and plundering civilised lands. Other tribes include the Azilis.

The standard dress for one of the nomad men is a white, girdled *khilat*, a robe with full open sleeves, linen, cotton or silken breeches and a flowing head-dress that falls to the shoulders and is banded about the temples with a triple circlet of braided camel-hair called a *kafieh*. The amount of embroidery on the *khilat* or *kafieh* indicates the relative position and wealth of the wearer. Cloaks are of camel hair.

The girl was a 'Brythunian, whom Conan had found in the slave-market of a stormed Shemite city, and appropriated. She had had nothing to say in the matter, but her new position was so far superior to the lot of any Hyborian woman in the Shemitish seraglio, that she accepted thankfully.

*'Robert E. Howard. 'The Slithering Shadow'.
A.K.A Xuthal of the 'Dusk*

She was... a terrified and humiliated dancing-girl, such as can be bought in almost any Shemitish market-place.

'Robert E. Howard. 'Jewels of Gwahlur

They also wear turbans wrapped around spired helmets. The women wear a *chador*, or a full-body robe that includes a hood and veil.

The nomads live, argue, sing and mend among lines of camelhair tents, while the sheiks, or chiefs, who command them dwell in large, silk-walled tents hung with gilt-worked tapestries and littered with rich carpets and velvet cushions. The nomads will only follow successful leaders and tend to have more faith in foreigners to lead them than in one of their own. They want loot and they will follow the chief who will lead them to it.

The Shemites are well known as slavers, roving the Black Coast in slave ships, trading and raiding for 'human trade goods' to sell on the block in Shem. Virtually all Shemite cities and markets have a slave block. Dancing girls, servants, labourers, gladiators, eunuchs and pleasure girls are common. Hyborian women dread slavery in Shem, where the depraved desires of the decadent Shemites shame and humiliate them. The Shemites themselves are also sometimes taken as slaves – the founders of Gazal in the deserts of the Black Kingdoms used Shemite slaves. Also, the Black Corsairs often raid the coasts of Shem for plunder and slaves.

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF SHEM

Shem is a large nation, lying betwixt Koth and Stygia. To the west and to the east are Argos and Turan, respectively. In the west, Shem is meadowland. In the east, desert. The division seems to occur at the hills that rise between the Mountains of Fire on the border of Koth and the Ford of Bubastes on the Styx.

The deserts of Shem are vast and cover a wide variety of terrain. Sandy dunes to sun-baked mud to savannah to salt plains. Salt lakes are common in some portions, with attendant pillars of salt and ancient ruins rise out of the hot plains in other places. Ancient tombs can be found buried in the sands or burning on the baked savannahs, silent and grim testaments to the time when Stygia ruled this land.

Off the coast of Shem at least one island exists, although it rarely is shown on maps of the region. In *Queen of the Black Coast*, as Tito's ship sails past Shem, the story reads, 'Around the long point of an island off the starboard bow...'

Asgalun River – This watercourse, which splits right before Anakia, passes through Ghaza and Kyros, each on a different fork of the river.

Libnum Hills – These hills, where shepherds keep their flocks, overlook Asgalun.

Mountains of Fire – The Mountains of Fire are a volcanic range that splinters off the Kezankian mountains and runs south-westerly from the northern border of Shem near Shumir.

Pyrrhenian Mountains – The Pyrrhenians are a range in north-western Shem, forming a barrier between the fertile croplands of Shem and the uplands of Koth.

Shan-e-Sorkh – This region is called 'the Red Waste,' and is an unproductive desert in the east.

It has virtually no water and has red sand.

They sighted the coast of Shem - long, rolling meadowlands with the white crowns of the towers of cities in the distance, and horsemen with blue-black beards and hooked noses, who sat their steeds along the shore and eyed the galley with suspicion. She did not put in: there was scant profit in trade with the fierce and wary sons of Shem.

Robert E. Howard, Queen of the Black Coast

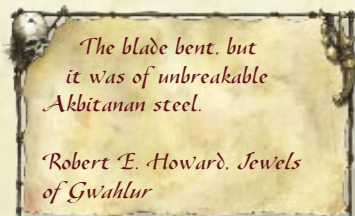
The Makan-e-Mordan is a haunted area in this region and means 'Place of Ghosts.' The city of Akhlat is built on a fertile oasis of green trees and lotus pools in the Makan-e-Mordan (see the entry for Akhlat below).



IMPORTANT SHEMITE CITY- STATES

Shem is home to some 34 cities, 180 towns and over 19,000 villages or nomad encampments. Most of the cities and towns are in the west. The cities tend to be the seats of power for each city-state, ruling attendant towns and villages. The cities are constantly at war with each other, even though few, if any, of them are economically stable enough to exist without the trade that passes between the cities, for each city has specialised in some tradable good or other, such as weaponry, wines or the herding of animals. Shemite cities are characterised by white ziggurats and gleaming towers. The only laws in these cities are the ones enforced by the individual kings. What is against the law in one city-state may well be perfectly legal in the next. The list below is by no means exhaustive.

Abbadrah – Abbadrah is a minor city-state of southern Shem. It is a city of huddled white domes and ziggurats among the green bottomland and a cedar forest provided by the fertile flooding of the River Styx. Several caravan roads pass through this walled city, leading to Eruk to the north and to Asgalun to the west. Suburbs sprawl outside the wall, villages and towns that support the main city, growing barley and harvesting the trees. Near the crocodile-laden Styx, the shantytown villages are built on stilts against the annual flooding. The pyramid tombs of Stygia can be seen from Abbadrah. A former king of Abbadrah, enamoured of Stygian architecture, built his own necropolis outside the city, with each noble's tomb supposedly laden with wealth and treasure. 11,000 inhabitants work and trade here. Queen Afrit rules here.



Akbitana – Akbitana is a city-state of gleaming ziggurats on the caravan route between Kizzil-Bezzin and Tamba-Syn. Another route from Akbitana takes caravans to Nippr to the west. Akbitana specialises in fine steel weapons and armour. Its blacksmiths are the best in the world. Forges great and small line many of the streets and the heat there rivals that of the surrounding deserts and plains. Would-be apprentices from many lands travel here in hopes of learning the skills of the Akbitanan smiths. Akbitana is home to almost eleven thousand, not including the five towns and over a hundred villages that pay tribute to the Akbitanan king for the protection of his *asshuri*.

Akhlat – Akhlat 'the Accursed' is built on a fertile oasis of green trees and lotus pools in the Makan-e-Mordan (Place of Ghosts) region of the Shan-e-Sorkh (the Red Waste). It is a stucco-walled city of stone, small in size, with bulging domes and squat guard towers. Once power-mad sorcerers dwelled here, until they called down a demoness from Beyond to serve as a goddess to the people, who then destroyed the sorcerers and the region, ruling as a tyrant over the people. Conan destroyed the evil *thing* and now caravan travel has begun to traverse the once haunted Red Waste. Akhlat, ruled over by Shaykh Enosh and his daughter Zillah, has a population of a mere three and a half thousand, people but is growing steadily.

Akkharia – Akkharia, ruled over by King Sumuabi, is a southerly city-state in the meadowlands of Shem on the caravan route out of Luxur. Trade routes also connect Akkharia to Anakia and Eruk. A haunted castle once stood outside Akkharia. The ghost of a sorcerer had possessed a dog, and it ruled the castle for a decade until slain by Conan. The castle has since crumbled, leaving a barren scar upon the earth that still does not grow but the most deformed of crops. King Sumuabi does not like strangers entering the city after dark, so unless travellers can adequately bribe the guards at night, they will have to sleep in one of the outlying villages or manses until morning. In the temple district, along with squat shrines to the Shemitish gods, can be found a temple of Ibis. Akkharia has a population of over ten thousand.

Anakia – Anakia is a city-state of the meadowlands of Shem. It is on the caravan route between Akkharia and Asgalun. The city-state has a foolish king. The Anaki wear silken kilts and velvet vests.

Asgakin – Asgakin is a city-state that has specialised in the working of copper. Asgakinim artisans create the statues of many of the Shemitish temples. Many zikkurats, more than would be normal for a city of its size, dominate the city, for the working of divine idols is a religious task of much importance. Asgakin has a population of nine thousand people, not counting the two towns and a dozen villages that support it by working the copper mines.

Asgalun – See the entry for Pelishtia below.

Baalur – The eight-sided, sheer-walled city of Baalur, due to a curse in its past, has uncommon fears of common nightmares. It lies in the Pyrrhenian foothills. The countryside around the city is fertile valleys and rolling fields, all watered by snows and showers from the mountains. Baalur is the richest city of Shem insofar as crops and husbandry goes. Caravans to and from the southern nations pass through the city, as it sits on the convergence of several trade routes. The trade routes make the city quite cosmopolitan and people from a

score of nations can be found here, either passing through or making a living here. The people are finely dressed, displaying the wealth of the region. The minarets are leaved with gold and the windowlights glitter with jewels. Slave markets, amusement districts of mountebanks and fakirs and vine-draped courtyard bazaars provide entertainment and profit for the citizens and traders. The temple district holds shrines and churches dedicated to the innumerable Shemitish gods. The city even hosts a temple to Set, although it is an underground cult here. Its priests masquerade in public as priests of Mitra, even holding Mitran services. The aged King Aphrates and Queen Rufia rule this city-state. Their daughter, Princess Ismaia, rumoured to be the daughter of Conan, will ascend the throne upon their deaths. From seeds brought back from the far depths of the Black Kingdom, the city grows small plots of the rare silver lotus. Tea made from this lotus is popular here. Baalur is home to a population of nearly thirty-five thousand, not including the network of towns and villages that work the lands and fields.

Bêcharadur – Bêcharadur was once a coastal city-state in the meadow region of Shem. Imhotep the Ravager, a demon, left the city razed and flattened. The Shemites, considering it a cursed location, have not rebuilt it, despite its position on a rare harbour. Pirates occasionally use the site to hide or rest.

Buryat – Buryat is a city built low to the ground, hiding behind a sea of tall grasses. Dwarfish men live in this city on the meadows of Shem south of Akkharia. The people of the city worship Nasati, the Heaven Bear. They were driven out by Conan and some Æsir many years ago, but have since returned.

Eruk – Eruk is a city-state of Shem whose *asshuri* are famed for their skill at arms. Located on the caravan trail from Akkharia into Koth, Eruk is built on the meadowlands near the hills that separate the grasslands from the eastern deserts. Eruk probably specialises in copper production and the smelting of iron, although Eruki steel is not as famed or as strong as Akbitanan steel. Another caravan trail from Stygia, via the Ford of Bubastes, passes through or near Eruk on its winding route to Shumir. Eruk has a population of 9,879 people, not including the four towns and many villages that are subject to its king.

Ghaza – Ghaza is a city-state of Shem that has built its ziggurats on the western fork of the Asgalun River. This city has specialised in vineyards and wine, competing with Kyros, a city not far from Ghaza. Ghaza's population approaches 11,000 people. Four towns and many villages supply the labourers for the vineyards in the region.

Kaetta – Kaetta was a small Shemitish city-state that worshipped Mitra. The temple of Mitra in Kaetta was built upon the

ruins of an ancient temple to Ibis. Located north of the Styx, it sat upon a plateau in the desert. It is now a ruin, its population slain and its temple defiled. The city specialised in opals.

Khyfa – Khyfa is a mountainous city-state that worships Mitra with fervent devotion.

Kuthchemes – Kuthchemes is a mysterious ruin in the far south-eastern deserts of Shem. The ruins are colossal: broken columns of huge size; cyclopean blocks of broken masonry; shattered remnants of massive statues. A massive dome of pure ivory with a golden spire housed the bones of Thugra Khotan, until Shevatas the thief disturbed his slumber. The Hyborians destroyed Kuthchemes around the time of Acheron's fall.

Kyros – Kyros is another city-state located on the Asgalun River, competing with Ghaza for domination of the wine trade. The *asshuri* of Kyros use a fighting style that favours prolonged combat designed to fatigue the foe until that foe makes a mistake. The lush vineyards around Kyros bear the fabulous grapes that make the finest wine of all Shem and even of all the Hyborian Kingdoms to the north. The royal family of Kyros is immensely wealthy, hiring armies of *asshuri* to defend the source of their wealth, the vineyards. Kyros has a population of 13,458 people living around its white ziggurats, not counting the seven towns and uncounted villages that work the vineyards for the city.

Nedrezzar – Nedrezzar is a Shemitish city-state between Baalur and Asgalun in western Shem. It borders Baalur, sharing a portion of the Asgalun River. It enforces a toll on trade passing over the bridge over the Asgalun. Many caravans avoid the toll by passing through a ford a few leagues to the east. The Nedrezzim are regarded as especially keen dealers, which is saying something among the Shemites. Nedrezzar is one of the smaller nations, with a population of over eight thousand people in its capital and only a couple of towns and a handful of villages maintain its primary trading specialisation, farming.

Nippr – Nippr is a desert city-state well known for the ferocity of its *asshuri*. Nippr lies south of the Kothian Escarpment and Khoraja, on the caravan trail connecting Shumir and Akbitana. Another trail headed southerly toward the Styx, then follows the Styx to the Ford of Bubastes. The city is home to over ten thousand, dominating five smaller towns and several outlying villages. Built around a large oasis, Nippr and its villages serves as a market for the loot and booty brought in by the nomadic tribes, such as the Zuagir. Occasionally the nomads have tried to take Nippr but its impressive *asshuri* have thus far managed to defend their home and its attendant towns. Nippr's patron is an earth-mother goddess known as Derketo, the seducer of Adonis, a queen of the underworld and fertility goddess. The largest of its zikkurats is dedicated to her worship.



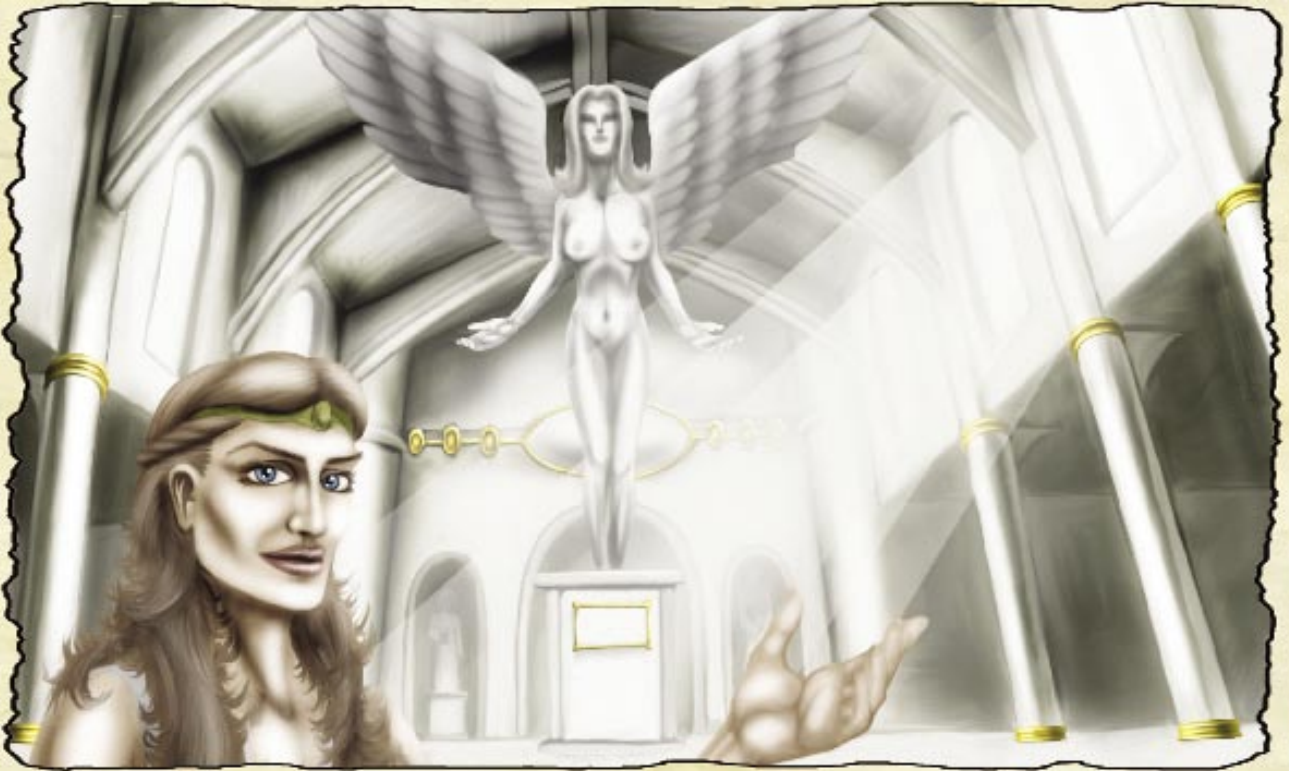
'From knows how long he dwelt here, but it must have been for centuries. The wise men of the Pelishtim know how to increase the span of their lives for hundreds of years. I've seen some of them myself.'

Robert E. Howard, Jewels of Gwahlur

Pelishtia – Pelishtia is the westernmost kingdom in Shem. The Pelishtim are renowned for their hardy *asshuri*, bold adventurers and curious wise men. Shem is an ancient kingdom and the Pelishtim are steeped in sorcery. The scholars of Pelishtia live for hundreds of years and may well possess the secret of eternal youth. Certainly the Pelishtim sorcerers are afforded respect even among the Stygians and Khitans, for they are learned in arcane secrets and wander far in search of knowledge. The *asshuri* of Pelishtia travel as far as Zingara in the west and Turan in the east in search for employment and adventure. They worship Pteor as patron, although the other Shemitish gods are not ignored and are

sometimes afforded more reverence than their own supposed patron. The Pelishtim accept the ideas of life after death, believing also in ghosts and the undead, knowing that a strong will can allow the dead to return to fulfil unfinished business.

- † **Asgalun** – Asgalun is the capital of Pelishtia and Shem's most important seaport. Built on the mouth of a river, it lies on the coast of Shem on one of its few natural harbours. The reeking alleys and narrow, winding streets move travellers through older, decaying sectors of the city to newer, respectable portions. The city is a contrast of splendour and decay. Opulent palaces of the wealthy and sumptuous temples to horrible, squat Shemitish gods sit amid crumbling ruins of buildings from forgotten ages. Bêlit, the Queen of the Black Coast, was descended from Asgalanim kings. The inner city is built behind great walls of sun-dried brick and is forbidden to commoners who are not servants to the rich and have not a pass. The king and his nobles dwell in their lavish palaces and pleasure houses



within the forbidden section with their mercenary defenders. Canals bring water from the river to the inner city. Asgalun is home to more than forty thousand people, although many hundreds of villages and seventeen towns pay tribute to this powerful metropolis. The city employs mercenary Kushites to support its Pelishtim *asshuri*. The city is currently ruled by a feeble nephew of former king Akhîrom, but the real power behind the throne is General Mazdak the Hyrkanian, a cold, unfeeling warrior. He recently had a wall built around the outer city to make the city more defensible and has been funnelling money into rebuilding the ruins and shanties.

† **Dan-marcah** – Dan-marcah is a coastal city of Pelishtia, on the coast of Shem. It is not a large city, but is self-sufficient in that it does not serve a larger city. Its economy is based on ship-building. Forests lie to the north of Dan-marcah and are used for ship building. Six thousand people live in Dan-marcah and many villages support its logging and forestry industries.

Qjara – Qjara is a city-state in the eastern portions of Shem with golden-tan walls. It specialises in salt. A river provides water for the town along its north side, creating a river marsh. The Mountains of Desperation lie to the north. Another mountain range is to the south-east, a low range that runs easterly. The priests here make the wealthy share with the poor.

The 'Black Ring' was a fable and a lie to most folk of the western world, but Conan knew of its ghastly reality, and its grim votaries who practice their abominable sorceries amid the black vaults of Stygia and the nighted domes of accursed Sabatea.

Robert E. Howard. The Hour of the Dragon

They worship the goddess Saditha. The caravan quarter of Qjara is just a fringe of low buildings, watering troughs and stables for a half dozen caravans. The caravansaries and inns of this quarter are open stalls with canopies. It has a population of seven thousand.

Sabatea – Sabatea is a city-state on the border of Stygia near the Taian mountains to the west of the Shan-e-Sorkh. The Sabateans worship the Golden Peacock and have a dark reputation for torture, abominable rites and a home for the wizards of the Black Ring. Most Shemitish city-states hire Sabatean torturers for their expertise in that field excels. Sabatea has a population of eleven thousand people.

Sark – Sark is a city-state in the deserts of Shem. The buildings of Sark have tiled roofs, white ziggurats, whitewashed domes and are all protected by crenellated walls. The soldiers of Sark wear bronze armour and wield bronze spears. They worship an extremely bloodthirsty god known as Vothantha. They are rivals of Qjara, which lies many leagues to the north and east.

Clothing here consists of a vest, kirtle and a pleated kilt. It is ruled by a priest-king. The city-state commands volcanic forges in the south and mines in the mountains. Sark has a population of ten thousand.

Shumir – Shumir is an ancient city-state in the east where Bel, the god of thieves, was born. Shumir lies on a juncture of caravan trails from Eruk to the west and Nippr to the south. Khoraja is just to the north-east. Shumir provides splendid *asshuri*, well trained in the arts of war, especially at fighting desert nomads such as the Zuagir. Shumir is home to thirteen thousand people and is noted also as a city of thieves, as befits the birthplace of Bel.

Shushan – Shushan, where the people dress in barbaric splendour, is the largest of the eastern city-states. Instead of kings, the rulers of this massive state call themselves emperors. The city is north of the Taia Mountains in Stygia, where the Styx makes its ninety-degree turn. It has a population that exceeds 30,000 people and nine towns, a vast number of villages and whole hosts of nomadic tribes pay tribute to this wealthy trading nation. The women wear jewelled breastplates with slender chains to hold them in place, gold anklets and jewelled bracelets, jade pendants, golden earrings and gem-crusted girdles that support nearly transparent silken skirts.

Tal'ib – Tal'ib is also called the 'City in the Waste,' and is nothing more than haunted ruins of a long dead city named Yb. It lies in a southern gorge of the Mountains of Desperation.

Thujara – Thujara is a town of western Shem. Its sun-baked mud walls rise above its grainfields and pastures, the source of its income for trade. It has a population of less than five thousand.

Yamman – Yamman lies southwest of Khoraja and is a small city-state of white washed adobe and stone. It has a population of eight thousand people. While under the rulership of King Ikthan, the city surrendered itself to the Stygian prince who followed Natohk during his war against Khoraja.

RELIGION IN SHEM

The polytheistic Shemites have a penchant for gods and goddesses. Each city-state worships some obscene fertility god or goddess as its patron, trusting that the horrible, squat brass idols actually hold the essence and presence of those gods and goddesses. Most of these fertility deities were Earth Mothers of the sort common to agricultural communities and her subordinate lover gods. In many of these 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, 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 divine power then become the chosen patron. Bel, for example, is the patron of Shumir and Pteor is the patron of the Pelishtim. The patron gods have more than just religious power; the patron also provides political power. A powerful king is believed to have the support of the patron, a weak one does not.

The religions of Shem teach concepts of predestination, resulting in fatalism among the Shemites, who believe that if their day to die arrives, then nothing they can do will change that. The sons of Shem do not struggle against fates regarded as inevitable. The eastern Shemites, in particular, pay homage to Fate, and several of their gods and goddesses are deities of fate and destiny. The Shemites also believe in a just afterlife, a type of resurrection or reincarnation. The souls of evil men, according to the Shemites, are imprisoned in the bodies of apes as punishment for their wickedness.

Lofty white zikkurats are reared to their gods, for to the Shemites, the gods are quite real, not just some illusion conjured by man's mind to explain the mysteries of the world. Unlike the gods of the Cimmerians, the Shemite gods supposedly respond to prayer, worship and sacrifice. Indeed, the very vitality, fertility and prosperity of the sons of Shem, collectively and individually, depend on said ceremonies. So strong are these gods in the minds of the Shemites, who dread and fear their awesome gods, that worship of them has spread to foreign nations.

Near the farther wall on a granite throne, staring for ever toward the arched doorway, sat the monstrous and obscene Pteor, the god of the Pelishtim, wrought in brass, with his exaggerated attributes reflecting the grossness of his cult.

'Robert E. Howard. Jewels of Gwahlur



'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 Derketo 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

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.

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

Adonis: The son of Anu and the mate of Ishtar, Adonis is a fertility god, both in a sexual, phallic sense and in terms of agriculture, a god of vegetation and crops. His statues are nude, brass caricatures that emphasize 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 guard the gates as she went. In order to return to the earth, Adonis had to agree to remain in the underworld six months out of the year and, ever since, the earth must suffer through winters of cold and infertility. In the spring Adonis returns and the clergy celebrate by holding great festivals where the priestesses act out the journey to the underworld and the priests, stripped naked, gash themselves so as to spill their blood on the soil to symbolically awaken the fertility of the world. Even more important than the annual rites, the Shemites worship Adonis for personal fertility and sexual vitality. The love between

Adonis and Ishtar sustains the world and physical love-play is allegorical to the intercourse between those two gods.

Anu: The sky-god Anu is worshipped throughout Shem. The domestication of cattle is a significant event in the civilising of man, so Anu is often given the form of a bull, a symbol of male power and virility. Cattle, oxen and bulls are sacred to him, and, save for useful cows, are sacrificed to him. The symbolism of the bull is one of strength, fury and toil. As oxen are used to till the earth to bring forth crops, so too is Anu considered a creator-god, tilling the universe to bring forth the gods and mankind. His roar frightened the heavens into releasing its water, bringing forth rain upon the earth. He reminds the earth of his power via his horns, which is the crescent moon. He is a fearsome and distant god and does not want to be troubled with day-to-day concerns and will send forth his wrath and fury upon those who bother him lightly. He is prayed to in order to bring forth the rains, for his roars still frighten the heavens into releasing water. In some regions, Ishtar is called upon to bring forth Anu's seed in the form of rain to fertilise the earth. In the east, he is prayed to by the desert tribes to lessen the harshness of the sun, for the rising of his horns in the night sky brings coolness to the hot lands.

Ashtoreth: Ashtoreth is Ishtar's handmaiden, a goddess of prostitutes. Sexuality in Shem is considered neither 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. Ashtoreth wishes that all Shemite virgins serve in the temples, performing sex with strangers, at least once in their lives. Sexuality is a form of purification and young girls are brought to the temples to have sexual intercourse with at least one man, often a priest but not always, before being allowed to leave. In some areas of Shem, Ashtoreth and Ishtar are identified as being the same, with either name 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, see page 151). 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 spoke favourably of this god and Conan rarely spoke well of a god that demanded live sacrifices.

Derketo: Derketo is a seductress deity, a temptress that attempts to win Adonis away from Ishtar. She is the essence

of depraved sexuality. Her rites are orgiastic, even considering the sensual natures of Ishtar and Adonis' ceremonies. The exotic techniques taught in the temples of Derketo are extremely intense. Her sacred prostitutes are considered the embodiment of Derketo herself. She is a sexual predator who takes the vitality of her lovers into herself either as a sacrifice or a means of gratifying of herself. She copulates with others, particularly young men, via deceptive guiles or illusions, sheer coercion or through her own personal attributes.

Ishtar: Ishtar is the ivory-bosomed goddess of Koth, Shem, Khauran and the East in general. She is the daughter of Anu, the Queen of Heaven, a goddess of fertility and war. 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.

According to the Shemites, Ishtar is the daughter of Anu and the sister of Adonis, her lover. 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 symbolized 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 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, practised 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, are a form of magic, and the breaking of laws are 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.

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 probably aid in the rituals. The priests of Ishtar represent her sons and lovers and also aid in the rituals; if a woman is thought to be infertile, the priests attempt to impregnate her, 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 daily depending on the ritual needs of the day or season.

Pteor: Pteor is the patron god of the Pelishtim. He is a minor god in the pantheon, displayed by obscene idols that reflect the 'grossness' of his cult. The Pelishtim live in a fertile region of Shem, a region of herdsman. Pteor may be symbolised by a ram or a sheep. A ram's horn symbolises male power and the male goat is often associated with sexual vigour. Pteor could also be a local version of Adonis.

SHEMITE HISTORY

The history of Shem begins with the nomadic savages known to the early people of the age as the Sons of Shem. Where they came from and who they were is unknown, but it is known that they appeared to the east of Stygia.

Far to the south dreams the ancient mysterious kingdom of Stygia. On its eastern borders wander clans of nomadic savages, already known as the Sons of Shem.

Robert E. Howard. The Hyborian Age

The Stygians ravaged and persecuted the Sons of Shem unmercifully, for they were unwashed savages to the Stygians, fit only for slavery and slaughter on their darkened altars of even darker gods. For centuries the Stygians preyed upon them, driving them from the east into the west, through Stygia, which at that time bordered Acheron, not having yet been driven south of the Styx. The Sons of Shem settled in the pastoral meadowlands they found in the west, lands claimed by Stygia at that time.

The Hyborians, burning and pillaging their way between the mighty nations of Acheron and Zamora, settled in the region north of these pastoral lands and forged the land of Koth. The Kothian Escarpment provided a natural border between the Sons of Shem and the Kothians, however, the Kothian Hyborians established relations with the nomads. Slowly, inexorably, the Sons of Shem became more and more civilised from their contact with Stygia and Koth.

Koth fell under the domination of horrible Acheron and Shem laboured under the overlords of Stygia, who used the Shemites to plunder their own lands and send streams of wealth to their masters. Stygia was a harsh mistress to the Shemites and when the Kothians decided to war against the mighty serpent of the south, the Shemites

were there, bows in hand, to drive back their hated rulers behind the foul River Styx. Still, the Shemites only managed to exchange the yoke of the Stygians for the less galling subjugation by the Kothians.

The Shemites had congress with Argos after the fall of Acheron, as well as with Koth. After a little more than four hundred years of Kothian oppression, the Sons of Shem rose, united, and made themselves an independent nation. The unity was, unfortunately, unsustainable among the proud Shemite kings, all of whom wanted to be the High King. Thus it is today. Shem remains an unstable collection of squabbling city-states and nomadic tribes.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Ancient tombs can be found buried in the sands or burning on the baked savannahs, silent and grim testaments to the time when Stygia ruled this land. Although most have already been looted, there is always the hope among treasure-seekers of an unspoiled mother lode of ancient Stygian treasures buried in the sands of Shem. Sorcerers and dabblers might seek out these tombs, treasure or no, so they can send forth black plagues from their depths to enforce their will upon some hapless Shemite chieftain or king.

The Shemite soul finds a bright drunkenness in riches and material splendor, and the sight of this treasure might have shaken the soul of a sated emperor of Shushan.

Robert E. Howard. Queen of the Black Coast

A sorcerer may seek out Kuthchemes to bring out the *thing* from the Outer Void that dwells in a pit near the darksome temple of the ruin. Characters may need to stop him or the wizard could hire the characters to protect him on his journey from the Zuagirs.

Shumirim thieves have stolen an unfinished brass idol of Adonis from the Asgakinim copper and brass workers, angering the god. Characters must find the unfinished idol before the essence of the god pours forth its wrath and destroys whatever town some priest has doomed by hiding the idol there.

STYGGIA

The Serpent of the South

STYGGIA

STYGGIA IS A decadent, sinister menace, a black land of nameless horror feared by the Hyborian races. Ruled by a dark theocracy devoted to the cult of Set, its small population is notably xenophobic, and the people are obsessed with the subjects of death and immortality, building dark tombs for their mysterious mummies. The population of about four million people is notably small for a kingdom of its size, for there is little arable land for the people to live on and there is a constant demand for sacrifices by the cults.

'Human foes he did not fear, nor any death by steel or fire. But this was a black land of sorcery and nameless horror. Set the Old Serpent, men said, banished long ago from the Hyborian races, yet lurked in the shadows of the cryptic temples, and awful and mysterious were the deeds done in the nighted shrines.'

Robert E. Howard, The Hour of the Dragon

The cults utterly dominate Stygian society; the temples own most of the arable land and the government bureaucracy is filled with priests. As with many religions, this Stygian theocracy is conservative and closed-minded, and minimal contact with the outside world is permitted. Thus trade is kept to a bare minimum. Stygia trades silk, ivory, skins, onions, papyrus, slaves and precious stones for grain, cattle, and other agricultural products that their arid lands cannot produce or support.

'A god must have his sacrifices. When I was a child in Stygia the people lived under the shadow of a priest. None ever knew when he or she would be seized and dragged to the altar.'

Robert E. Howard, The Slithering Shadow

Despite its aridity, Stygia does support several industries. The palm date grows along the rich banks of the Styx. The

Styx also supports a sizeable fishing industry. Nomadic herding provides sustenance for large sectors of the non-urban population. Urban Stygians produce sorcerous jewellery, medicines, and magical drugs, such as the black and purple lotus. Silk and weapon manufacturing also form major export industries; although Stygian weapons are not favoured by non-Stygians, silk is produced in massive quantities. In addition to their own native products, Stygian merchants raid the Black Kingdoms for ivory, pearls, skins and slaves to trade, transporting them along the River Styx to the open sea. Stygian merchants even venture as far as Khitai, often in search of mystical pharmaceuticals. Stygia brokers luxury goods from Iranistan and Vendhya. Its modest fleet also maintains Stygia's wealth, preying upon Hyborian shipping. Despite its aridity, the country is rich and the wealth trickles down throughout the entire society, for even Stygian slaves wear silk.

'In good time,' muttered Conan, his eyes burning on Thalís ivory limbs. 'What are you, a Stygian woman, doing here?'

'I came here when a young girl,' she answered. 'I am the daughter of a king, no common woman, as you can see by my skin, which is as white as that of your little blond there.'

Robert E. Howard, The Slithering Shadow, AKA Nuthal of the Dusk

Mysterious Stygia organises its inscrutable society in a strict class system based largely upon physical racial characteristics. Stygian royalty and nobility are relatively tall people with black hair and fair skin, as were their ancient forebears, the original inhabitants of Stygia. Below these, the haughty, ruling elite of aristocrats, priests and the powerful middle class are dusky-skinned, hawk nosed men. Interestingly, it is this caste which most non-Stygians consider true Stygians. Holding the reins of power in the government and in the temples, the aristocracy leaves the nobles free to hang about the court at Luxur. The warrior caste are a tall and muscular breed,



'First was a long line of chariots, drawn by the great fierce horses of Stygia, with plumes on their heads - snorting and rearing as each naked driver leaned back, bracing his powerful legs, his dusky arms knotted with muscles. The fighting men in the chariots were tall figures: their hawklike faces set off by bronze helmets crested with a crescent supporting a golden ball. Heavy bows were in their hands. No common archers, these, but nobles of the South, bred to war and the hunt, who were accustomed to bringing down lions with their arrows.'

'Robert E. Howard, 'Black Colossus'

also hawk-nosed and dusky skinned. The lowest classes of serfs and slaves are of mixed heritage, a hybrid of various foreign and Stygian bloods. Below this are the foreign mercenaries employed to bolster Stygia's army.

Stygia holds some of the most secure borders in the world with a ruthless army that is strictly disciplined. The ruling theocracy, obstinately conservative, forces their warrior castes to wear obsolete armour

and use antique weaponry, including war chariots still made the traditional way instead of utilising a more mobile cavalry. Chariot fighting is a noble art, and cavalry is base, fit only for foreign mercenaries, which Stygia does use as the nation's cavalry. While their armies are a walking anachronism even in the Hyborian Age, they are an effective force. Their men and horses are accustomed to Stygia's climate and geography. Their armies are also augmented by the sorcerer-priests, who call black plagues out of darkened tombs to help repel invaders. The army is well co-ordinated and extremely mobile, brave, and formidable, considered a major military power. They could quickly be called upon to overwhelm invaders in sheer numbers, often negating tactics and superior equipment. Interestingly, despite their strengths, Stygia was very reluctant to send its forces abroad, even to reclaim captured lands.

Not only is the Stygian army strictly disciplined and regimented, so too are the people of Stygia. Stygian laws are restrictive and brutal. Permits are required for many elements of life, including but not limited to changing one's place of residence, travelling more than 20 miles from one's home, or owning weapons or armour. These permits provide a pair of powerful tools for the Stygian government: income and internal security. The selling of permits send a steady stream of income to the ruling classes. Internal security is provided because permits are often denied, and this prevents known dissidents

from gathering. There is no legal recourse to those who are denied permits, and doing something without the requisite permit invites severe punishments, such as fines, confiscation of goods, and even physical mutilation, such as public whipping, hamstringing or execution. The bodies of criminals are not mummified. They are left to rot, denying them an eternal after-life with Father Set.

Religious crimes are punished even more severely than secular crimes. Not attending a religious ceremony is cause for a hefty fine. Failure to tithe to the temple gives rise to fines even worse than the tithe would have been, plus the offender still must make the requisite tithe. Ceremonies are required by law and priests always charge for these services. Examples of these required rites are numerous: crops must be blessed; all children must be consecrated to Father Set; and even the dead have requisite funerary rites that must be performed and paid for. Failure to meet these requirements may be considered heresy; the punishment for heresy is death, confiscation of all property and enslavement of his or her entire family. Repeated failures will most definitely be deemed heresy. In addition to the required rites, several animals enjoy a protected religious status. Snakes and hippopotami are sacred, and allowed to exist unmolested in Stygia. It is against Stygian law to injure either animal, and doing so also provokes a charge of heresy. Although the priesthood does not insist on any particular behaviour before a hippopotamus, all Stygians must lie down when a snake is sighted and await the snake to either attack or move on. If a snake attacks, the Stygian chosen for the honour is considered blessed by Father Set and none will try to save him. Most Stygians so 'blessed' go quietly. It is a strange custom, but one accepted by the people of Stygia with quiet dignity.

Other Stygian customs likewise seem strange to foreigners. Stygians in foreign lands never eat in the presence of strangers, for example. These Stygians also refuse to discuss their native country. Perhaps they fear reprisals if they sound critical, perhaps they just do not want to think about the atmosphere and conditions they have left behind.

'At last, the next summer, I came to trial before King Ctesphon and the High Priest. Nefri and but one of my children had survived the rigors of the dungeon, and her hair was all fallen out. The laws of King Tuthamon XVIII concerning aid to foreign foes of Set and Stygia were read to us, and under these laws the High Priest pronounced our doom.'

John Boardman. The Testament of Suftru

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF STYGIA

Bakhr River – The Bakhr River is a small tributary of the Styx. It is a stagnant, muddy watercourse filled with deadly crocodiles. It joins the Styx north of Nebthu and east of the oasis of Khajer where Thoth-Amon dwells.

Ellobolu – A long, narrow lake along the Styx in the east. It is lined with marble and is rumoured to be bottomless.

Purple Lotus Swamp – The Purple Lotus Swamp is a ghost-haunted swamp in southern Stygia, where the purple lotus grows. Purple lotus is a plant whose juices cause immediate temporary paralysis in even small quantities.

Isle of Siptah – The Isle of Siptah is an island off the coast of southern Stygia. Demons and monsters summoned and created by the legendary Stygian wizard Siptah dwell on this haunted island.

River Styx – The River Styx is probably one of the most famous rivers in the Hyborian Age landscape and the defining geographic site of Stygia. Also known as the Nilus, the Styx is by far the largest river of the South, a veritable lifeline of agriculture and fertility along its entire length, from the darkest realms of the Black Kingdoms to the gaping mouth at Khemi. The Styx binds Stygia in the north and is a wide, deep river, navigable for most of its length. Its source is somewhere in the jungles south of Zembabwei. The great black-walled city of Khemi sits at its great mouth, guarding the river. Hills and cliffsides mark the northern shore of the vast river, and various reedy channels, black lagoons, snake-infested swamps and tributary streams and rivers flow into it from the south. Great crocodiles and massive hippopotami swarm the shallow regions of the Styx. The Stygians use the river to irrigate crops along the fertile land found on the shores of the Styx, which floods annually to deposit mineral-rich soil along its length. Several small islands can be found in the wide expanse of the Styx, and great cities dot its black shores. Impressive megalithic temples and statues are built on its shores, as are several noble estates. In a few places, such as the Ford of Bubastes near the Bakhr River, the Styx is fordable. The great bend of the Styx, two thousand miles or more inland, is at a section called Taia. The river is broken by falls and white-water cascades once it moves past the Purple Lotus Swamp and by the time it has reached the end of

'Khemis was not like the seaports of the Hyborians, where types of every race swarmed. The only aliens here were Negro and Shemite slaves... Strangers were not welcome in the cities of Stygia, tolerated only when they came as ambassadors or licensed traders. But even then the latter were not allowed ashore after dark.

R. E. Howard. The Hour of the Dragon

'Nor did Master Tito pull into the broad bay where the Styx river emptied its gigantic flood into the ocean, and the massive black castles of Khemi loomed over the blue waters. Ships did not put unmasked into this port, where dusky sorcerers wove awful spells in the murk of sacrificial smoke mounting eternally from bloodstained altars where naked women screamed, and where Set, the Old Serpent, arch-demon of the Hyborians but god of the Stygians, was said to writhe his shining coils among his worshippers.

Master Tito gave that dreamy, glass floored bay a wide berth, even when a serpent-prowed gondola shot from behind a castellated point of land, and naked dusky women, with great red blossoms in their hair, stood and called to his sailors, and posed and postured brazenly.

R. E. Howard. Queen of the Black Coast

Zimbabwe it has become marshy and thin, ridden with diseases and horrible insects.

Taian Mountains – The Taian Mountains lie in Stygia's north-east corner where the River Styx makes its ninety-degree turn toward the ocean from the jungles of the Black Kingdoms. Some of the mountains are still active volcanoes.

IMPORTANT STYGIAN CITIES

Stygia is home to 12 powerful cities, 61 towns, and over 6,400 villages. The villages are jumbles of low, dun-coloured mud huts. Some cities and towns come to us as names only, such as Erkulum, the walled city of Set, and Qarnak, where ancient and forgotten tombs face the Styx.

Harakht – Harakht is the accursed and ancient city of the Hawk-God where dusky Stygians in amber-hued robes sing strange dirges before his immense idols. Strangers are not allowed into the city. The city lies along the River Styx and is less than a day's ride from the Oasis of Khajar where lived the great Thoth-Amon.

Khemis – Khemi, with its mighty black castles, is the priestly capital of Stygia and has a population of 25,300 people. It is the greatest

city of Stygia, located at the port on the Western Ocean. Despite the sea trade commanded by this city, Khemi is a sealed metropolis, and does not permit non-Stygians entrance, except as slaves. Thus, all trade with Stygia must be done with Stygia's ships, captains and crews. The only other exceptions are ambassadors and licensed traders, and even those traders must leave the city after sunset. Monster snakes, kept in the temples, are allowed to move out in the city when they hunger, seeking prey. The people who catch sight of these ghastly horrors fall to their knees and await the determination of fate. Those that the snakes select are deemed sacrifices to Set. The killing of these snakes is one of the worst punishable crimes in the city. The city is dark after sunset, and the only lights to be seen are in the highest portions of the oppressive buildings. The market closes with the coming of darkness and few walk the streets past that time. Artificial gardens of palm trees grow on the roofs of many of the buildings, and most of the townfolk sleep in those gardens. Bronze

chariots, antique in their design, often carry the nobles and priests around. The massive architecture of the city is overwhelming and oppressive. The streets are narrow, but broaden somewhat as one enters the temple district. The Temple of Set in Khemi houses the mummies of many of the elder members of the Black Ring. Other temples in the district house other ghastly things. Most of the major pyramids and secret subterranean temples can be found near this black city.

Kheshatta – Kheshatta is a loathsome city of dark magicians in southern Stygia. It lays on a caravan route from Kush. Today it is the headquarters of the Black Ring. Ruled by the magicians, the priesthood of Set has no real power here, nor does the King Ctesphon IV, pharaoh of Stygia. The city is a reputed treasure trove of eldritch forbidden lore and grim ceremonial items. With a population of 12,563 persons, it

'My brother was Theoteles, and we were of the house of Chelkus, scientists and noblemen of Ophir. By special permission of the king of Stygia, my brother was allowed to go to Kheshatta, the city of magicians, to study their arts, and I accompanied him. He was only a boy -- younger than myself... her voice faltered and broke.

Robert E. Howard. The Vale of Lost Women



is a large city, and well over a hundred of these people are dark wizards, members of the Black Ring.

Luxur – Luxur, with a population of 18,894 persons, is the royal capital of Stygia, the site of the Ivory Throne where King Ctesphon IV sits. The king appears to be less xenophobic than much of the rest of the population, occasionally granting permission for foreigners, especially scholars, to study at Kheshatta. Luxur controls much of Stygia's river traffic and the caravan routes out of Shem, making it a strategic commercial center of considerable importance, rivalling Khemi in economic wealth. Situated on the upper Bakhr River, Luxur's surrounding lands were

I am a daughter of Luxur, and before I had known fifteen summers I had been led through the temples of Derketo, the dusky goddess, and had been initiated into her mysteries. Not that my first years in Xuthal were years of unmodified pleasure! The people of Xuthal have forgotten more than the priestesses of Derketo have ever dreamed. They live for sensual joys. Dreaming or waking, their lives are filled with exotic ecstasies, beyond the ken of ordinary men.

Robert E. Howard. The Slithering Shadow. AKA Xuthal of the Dusk

reasonably fertile and well watered at one time, but the slow dropping of the Bakhr's waterline has caused some concern. Thoth-Amon maintains a residence here. The dusky goddess Derketo has a strong presence here, a sensual religion of sexual pleasures and orgies.

Nebthu – Nebthu, the City of Tombs, is a ruined city that looms over the Bakhr River, near the Styx. Nebthu is well known for the large stone hyena-sphinx that sits outside the crumbled foundations that are all that remains of the ancient town walls. The great pylons of the gates are all that remain of the blasted walls.

Pteion – Pteion is a ruin from ancient times in eastern Stygia. The desert has swallowed it up. The city is rumoured to have been mostly underground anyway, founded by the serpent-men of Velusia.

Sukhmet – Sukhmet is a southern Stygian town built among the grasslands of the border. Mercenaries bolster the defences of the city, protecting Stygia from Darfari raiders.

RELIGION IN STYGIA

Religion in Stygia is synonymous with the worship of Father Set, who reigns supreme over that darksome land. His pantheon, however, includes several 'hideous, half-bestial gods' as subordinates. At one time, according to Xaltotun, much of the world was likewise dominated by the Old Serpent. Set, today, is worshipped primarily in Stygia and in places of strong Stygian influence, such as areas of Kush and Shem, and by dark sorcerers everywhere. Set's symbol is a scaled serpent, coiled, with its tail in its mouth.

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.

The specific rituals used to worship Set are a guarded mystery, but those sinister rituals are known to be gruesome and sinister, comprised of unspeakable rites and human sacrifices in grisly quantities. Priests wear monstrous, half-bestial masks surmounted by ostrich plumes in certain ceremonies. Silent, ritualistic processions also play an inexplicable part in this dark religion. Sacred objects, such as curious black candles that flicker with strange

He saw great towering black walls, pedestals half hidden in the shadows upholding images of hideous, half-bestial gods. Men moved in the shadows, dark, wiry men, clad in red, silken lincloths. They were bearing a green jade sarcophagus along a gigantic black corridor... thieves sneaking through a subterranean temple of Set, in Stygia.

A teak door stood partly open, and gliding through this, knife in hand, he came out into a great, dim, shadowy place whose lofty ceiling was only a hint of darkness high above him, toward which the black walls swept upward. On all sides black-arched doorways opened into the great still hall. It was lit by curious bronze lamps that gave a dim weird light. On the other side of the great hall a broad black marble stairway, without a railing, marched upward to lose itself in gloom, and above him on all sides dim galleries hung like black stone ledges.

Conan shivered; he was in a temple of some Stygian god, if not Set himself, then someone only less grim.

Robert E. Howard, The Hour of the Dragon

green light and staves with white skull heads abound in the Stygians' grim ceremonies of black magic. Sacred beasts, both terrestrial and otherwise, abound in their religious culture. Giant pythons hunt abroad in the dark alleys of black Khemi, innumerable human sacrifices are given to amorphous monsters from the Abyss held in deep pits and giant, drugged iridescent serpents coil in their temples, ready to accept worship and sacrifice from the priests of Set.

The priests of Set are largely all sorcerers, and they terrify their subjects as well as their enemies, for they can and will sacrifice their own followers to further their own corrupt ends. The most powerful of these priests are members of the Black Ring. These priests gather in sacred spots to perform their rituals, such as the pyramids that dot the Stygian landscape.

The pyramids of Stygia, possibly built by the pre-human race superseded by the Stygians, now serve as temples as well as tombs for the mummies of Stygia's elite. Mummification had been practiced by the Stygians long before the Great Cataclysm, even before they migrated into modern-day Stygia. It is still practiced today, representing a

Far to the east, the Lemurians, levelled almost to a bestial plane themselves by the brutishness of their slavery, have risen and destroyed their masters. They are savages stalking among the ruins of a strange civilization. The survivors of that civilization, who have escaped the fury of their slaves, have come westward. They fall upon that mysterious pre-human kingdom of the south and overthrow it, substituting their own culture, modified by contact with the older one. The newer kingdom is called Stygia, and remnants of the older nation seemed to have survived, and even worshipped, after the race as a whole had been destroyed.

Robert E. Howard, The Hyborian Age

Kallian Publico believed that it contained the diadem of the giant-kings, of the people who dwelt in that dark land before the ancestors of the Stygians came there. He showed me a design carved on the lid, which he swore was the shape of the diadem that legends tell us the monster-kings wore.

Robert E. Howard, The God in the Bowl

belief in an after-life for the faithful follower of Set.

STYGIAN HISTORY

The people who would eventually bring about Stygia lived on the eastern coast of the Thurian continent in pre-Cataclysmic times. After Atlantis and Lemuria sank beneath the waves during the Great Cataclysm, this shadowy land of the Proto-Stygians was invaded by fleeing Lemurians. This pre-Stygian culture enslaved the refugees of the disaster and brutalised them. Crushed and destroyed, the Lemurians became little more than beast-men during the thousand or so years of captivity, but they eventually threw off their yoke of slavery and destroyed their enslavers, burning their cities and smashing their culture. The few remaining Proto-Stygians, numbering perhaps in the low thousands, fled the slave wars and eventually came to the Vilayet, a great inland sea created by a lesser cataclysm some thousand years after

the Great Cataclysm, and turned south. Some scholars of history believe a branch of these people did not turn south with the others, but went north to found Acheron. Other scholars argue that this other branch founded Zamora. The truth is hidden behind the dim cloud of time.

Still, it is known that the Proto-Stygians that travelled south came upon the mighty river they named Styx and conquered a pre-human culture, the race of giant-kings mentioned in 'The God in the Bowl,' that had built the black pyramids and the haunted tombs beneath those pyramids. Little is known about this 'pre-human' culture outside of a few precious clues. The pre-human race was taller than the average human. Their eyes glimmer like fiery pools beneath

Long ago their rule stretched far north of the Styx, beyond the meadowlands of Shem, and into the fertile uplands now inhabited by the peoples of Koth and Ophir and Argos. Their borders had marched with those of ancient Acheron.

Robert E. Howard, The Hour of the Dragon

their brows. The Proto-Stygians came to admire these alien beings and their culture, treating the few who remained as gods and adopting many aspects of their alien culture. This mingled culture became Stygia.

Stygia expanded and ruled the lands of Shem, Argos, Koth, Ophir, and, perhaps, southern Corinthia. Acheron was Stygia's most powerful rival, both militarily and magically. Some scholars theorise that Acheron was founded by Stygian colonists, and others theorise Acheron was founded by a branch of the Proto-Stygians that founded Stygia. Evidence also seems to indicate that evil Acheron was founded by the pre-human culture supplanted by Stygia. Xaltotun, for example, is described as tall, white and as having luminous eyes. Akivasha, the vampire met by Conan in 'The Hour of the Dragon', is also described as tall, white-skinned, and as having luminous eyes. The cadaverous giant of Howard's 'The Altar and the Scorpion' shared Xaltotun's sinuous, snake-like stride, and the fiery eyes. These white-skinned, luminescent-eyed, tall people were overthrown by the Proto-Stygians, and their worship of dark Set assimilated into their burgeoning culture.

When the Hyborians destroyed Acheron centuries years later, the Stygians were driven behind the River Styx by the Hyborian men of newly founded Koth. Kuthchemes, once an important Stygian city, was sacked and abandoned. Never again did Stygia try to expand so far. Instead, the brooding kingdom concentrated more on internal affairs and defence, perhaps concerned they, like their sinister sister Acheron, would also fall.

Today, Stygia is the dark, dreaming empire of the South, reviled by the Hyborian nations, yet ever a scheming stronghold for the black powers of Set.

LOCAL CREATURES

Snakes of all sizes populate Stygia, as do jackals, lions and other carnivores. Huge crocodiles and river horses (hippopotami) thrive in the Styx and Bakhr rivers. Bizarre half-human creatures such as manticore, lamia and mermecolion haunt the ancient, pre-human ruins.

CROCODILE, GIANT

Huge Animal

Hit Dice: 7d8+28 (59 hp)

Initiative: +1

Speed: 20 ft. (4 squares), swim 30 ft.

Defense Value: 16 (-2 size, +1 Dex, +7 natural), touch 9, flat-footed 15

Damage Reduction: 7 (leathery hide)

Base Attack/Grapple: +5/+21

Attack: Bite +11 melee (2d8+12) or tail slap +11 melee (1d12+12)

Full Attack: Bite +11 melee (2d8+12) or tail slap +11 melee (1d12+12)

Space/Reach: 15 ft./10 ft.

Special Attacks: Improved grab

Special Qualities: Hold breath, low-light vision

Saves: Fort +9, Ref +6, Will +3

Abilities: Str 27, Dex 12, Con 19, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 2

Skills: Hide +1, Listen +5, Spot +5, Swim +16

Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Skill Focus (Hide)

Environment: Warm marshes

Organisation: Solitary or colony (6-11)

Advancement: 8-14 HD (Huge)

Level Adjustment: -

These huge creatures usually live in the Styx River and can be more than 20 feet long. Giant crocodiles fight and behave like their smaller cousins.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

The inhabitants of Stygia have been building castles for the last 3,000 years. There are approximately 156 standing fortifications in Stygia. 101 castles are in active use, while 55 castles are ruined or abandoned; 117 castles are located in settled areas, and 39 castles are located in remote areas, unsettled areas, or wilderness.

A typical Stygian raiding party for Kushite slaves amounts to forty mounted warriors, all seasoned veterans without mercy. They surround a black village at night and strike at dawn, capturing the healthy and strong for transport back to Stygia. Those too young, too old or too sickly are slain on the spot. The characters could be part of this force, or may be hired to defend a village.

Bizarre half-human creatures such as manticore, lamia and undead haunt the ancient, pre-human ruins of Stygia.

Rumours persist of the existence of the 'Scroll of Life' or the 'Scroll of Thoth', which can resurrect the dead, or raise up mummies.

AKIVASHA - THE QUEEN OF ETERNAL LIFE

Medium-Size Humanoid Stygian Noble 20

Hit Dice: 10d8+10+(10x2) (75 hp)

Initiative: +2

Speed: 30 ft.

DV (Dodge vs. Ranged): 22 (+2 Dex, +10 Level)

DV (Dodge vs. Melee): 22 (+2 Dex, +10 Level)

DV (Parry vs. Melee): 27 (+2 Dex, +15 Level)

DR: -

Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +15/+15

Attack: Slam +15 melee (1d4) or Tulwar +19 (1d8/18-20)

Full Attack: Slam +15/+10/+5 melee (1d4) or Tulwar +19/+14/+9 (1d8/18-20)

Special Qualities: Title, rank hath its privileges, wealth, special regional feature +4, ally, comeliness, etiquette, family ties, lead by example +8, enhanced leadership, do you know who I am?, rally, absolute power

Space/Reach: 5 ft. x 5 ft./5 ft.

Magical Attack Bonus: +5

Saves: Fort +7, Ref +8, Will +19 (18 vs. hypnotism)

Abilities: Str 11, Dex 15, Con 13, Int 17, Wis 19, Cha 25

Skills: Appraise +6, Bluff +33, Diplomacy +41, Gather Information +37, Intimidate +17, Knowledge (arcane) +8, Knowledge (history) +13, Knowledge (nobility) +24, Knowledge (religion) +15, Listen +6, Ride +5, Search +6, Sense Motive +35, Spot +24

Feats: Alertness, Defensive Martial Arts, Improved Unarmed Strike, Investigator, Iron Will, Leadership, Mounted Combat, Negotiator, Persuasive, Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Steely Gaze



Akivasha

Climate/Terrain: Stygia

Reputation: Brave 85 (+9 to Bluff and Intimidate if person has heard of her)

Treasure: Standard

Advancement: By character class.

The name of this ancient, evil, beautiful princess, the daughter of Tuthamon, who revelled in purple feasts amid the black halls of ancient Luxur, still is heard throughout the Hyborian lands in song and legend as a beautiful symbol of eternal life. Ten thousand years ago, she loved life and all the meanings of life, and to win life she courted death. She could not bear to think of growing old and shrivelled and worn, and dying at last as hags die. Using dark rites, she 'wooded Darkness like a lover' and his gift was eternal life. Although the world believes she ascended into the heavens to live as a goddess of youth, in truth she descended into the tombs of her ancient land as a vampire. She is not truly Stygian, as she lived before the founding of Stygia. She is of the ancient race of giant-kings that founded Stygia, the remnants of whom still live as the nobility of Stygia.

She has ivory skin, and is tall, lithe, voluptuously figured, with thick tresses of black hair. She wears nothing but velvet sandals and a broad jewel-crusted girdle about her waist. Her flesh is cold, and her eyes glow in the darkness like golden fire.

She survives her encounter with Conan, so she still makes for a formidable foe in a Hyborian campaign.

Special Attacks: A vampire retains all the special attacks of the base creature and gains those described below. Saves have a DC set by the vampire's magic attack roll unless noted otherwise.

Blood Drain (Ex): A vampire can suck blood from a living victim with its fangs by making a successful grapple check. If it pins the foe, it drains blood, dealing 1d4 points of Constitution drain each round the pin is maintained. On each such successful attack, the vampire gains 5 temporary hit points.

"I am Akivasha! I am the woman who never died, who never grew old! Who fools say was lifted from the earth by the gods, in the full bloom of her youth and beauty, to queen it forever in some celestial clime! Nay, it is in the shadows that mortals find immortality! Ten thousand years ago I died to live for ever! Give me your lips, strong man!"

Robert E. Howard, The Hour of the Dragon

Children of the Night (Su): Vampires command the lesser creatures of the world and once per day can call forth 1d6+1 rat swarms, 1d4+1 bat swarms, or a pack of 3d6 wolves as a standard action. (If the base creature is not terrestrial, this power might summon other creatures of similar power.) These creatures arrive in 2d6 rounds and serve the vampire for up to 1 hour.

Dominate (Su): A vampire can crush an opponent's will just by looking onto his or her eyes. This is similar to an evil eye spell, except that the vampire must use a standard action, and those merely looking at it are not affected. Anyone the vampire targets must succeed on a Will save or fall instantly under the vampire's influence as though by a *domination* spell. The ability has a range of 30 feet.

Special Qualities: A vampire retains all the special qualities of the base creature and gains those described below.

Fast Healing (Ex): A vampire heals 5 points of damage each round so long as it has at least 1 hit point.

Immunities (Ex): A vampire is completely immune to cold.

Resistances (Ex): A vampire has electricity resistance 10.

Abilities: Increase from the base creature as follows: Str +6, Dex +4, Int +2, Wis +2, Cha +4. As an undead creature, a vampire has no Constitution score.

Skills: Vampires have a +8 racial bonus on Bluff, Hide, Listen, Move Silently, Search, Sense Motive, and Spot checks. Otherwise same as the base creature.

Feats: Vampires gain Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, and Lightning Reflexes, assuming the base creature meets the prerequisites and does not already have these feats.

Environment: Any, usually same as base creature.

Organization: Solitary, pair, or gang (3-5).

Advancement: By character class.

Corruption: As base creature +4.

TURAN

Kingdom of Barbaric Splendour

SHINING TURAN IS the wealthiest nation of the Hyborian Age save Vendhya, though Vendhya's position in the Far East means it is out of the reach of most trading caravans or ships. Born out of Hyrkania, Turan is home to approximately 25 million Hyrkanians. The Turanian Empire is built upon the foundation of a large Hyrkanian force that swept out of the east on their horses, swinging around the Vilayet and finding that great inland sea to their liking. The Turanians have built thirty-six large and small cities, over 190 towns and more than 24,000 villages or nomadic encampments. Their empire is vast, especially during the years of Conan's reign in Aquilonia, extending west even to the borders of Zamora, Shumir in Shem and Stygia. Empire-building is a popular pastime for Turanian kings. Now ruled by King Yezdigerd, the Turanian Empire shows no sign of slowing its growth, although the Zuagirs, *kozaks* and other races hinder its destiny of domination in the west. (Note: If the campaign takes place after the events of *The Return of Conan*, published in *Conan the Avenger*, then someone other than Yezdigerd is king of Turan.)

Eastward, Shevatas knew, the desert shaded into steppes stretching into the Hyrkanian kingdom of Turan, rising in barbaric splendor on the shores of the great inland sea.

Robert E. Howard, 'Black Colossus'

Turan is a vast empire of incredible size, virtually encompassing the Vilayet Sea by the time Conan is king of Aquilonia. All but the most northerly reaches of the Vilayet are controlled by Turan on both sides of the Vilayet. The northern reaches are too mountainous and cold for the Turanians to bother with. Turan borders Zamora, Khauran, Shem and even sends forays into Hyperborea.

The Turanians are dark and generally tall and slender, the descendants of the ancient Lemurians, once enslaved by the ancestors of the Stygians in ages past. They conquered the indigenous aboriginal people that lived in the region

of the Vilayet and turned the region into a bastion of culture, commerce and beauty. Dry plains were irrigated and turned into an agricultural paradise. Olives, wheat, pomegranates, oranges, cumin, coriander, almonds, dates, cotton, apricots and cotton are grown in Turan.

The Turanians are a proud people, pleased with the imperialism of their leaders and the wealth brought to them in tribute from subjugated people. The kings of Turan are harsh taskmasters, permitting no rebellions, uprisings or dissension. When one ascends to the throne, all of his brothers and his brothers' children are put to the sword to prevent even the possibility of civil war. When a king dies, the first child to reach the capital is declared the new king.

Turan is broken up into provinces, or satrapies, ruled by a satrap. The king of Turan appoints generals and secretaries of state to serve alongside the satrap lest the governor grow too powerful. With the power divided among the three, each has to report to the king and personal inspectors visit frequently. The duty of the satrap is to protect the heartland by administering the outer provinces, particularly as regards the frontiers, preventing Turan's centre from being threatened. The satrapy is also responsible to pay taxes and/or tribute to Aghrapur. By tradition the satrap is always a loyal Turanian of Hyrkanian descent, not any of the subjugated people. This is not law, merely tradition, and nothing keeps it from being broken should the king of Turan want to honour another race with a satrapy. The satrapies are further broken down to city-states that are somewhat autonomous. The duty of the appointed general is to see to the welfare of the armies and militia of the satrapy, assuring they are only used for purposes that benefit Turan as a whole. The secretary of state is there to serve as an official liaison and diplomat, both for the satrap and for the king of Turan.

Glittering Turan builds its wealth out of trading goods from distant realms and exacting tribute from threatened peoples. Built along the gorgeous shores of the Vilayet Sea, most of Turan's internal trade goes via ships protected by Turan's purple-sailed war galleys. Mule trains haul goods along caravan trails into the interior and south of the Vilayet, connecting with those routes from Iranistan, Vendhya and Khitai. Trade to the west crosses the Kharamun Desert to Zamboula, Turan's caravan crossroads. An alternative route to the west goes through Vezek to the Akrel Oasis



Trade goods for Turan also include human goods, slaves. Their trade in human beings is far-reaching. Many Brythunians, Nemedians, Stygians, Shemites, Zamorians, Darfari and Kushites all find themselves on the slave blocks of Turan. Slaves not only perform labour the Turanians feel are beneath them, but also work as spies for the Turanians and as pawns in their games of power and intrigue. The slave markets of Turan are described as 'glutted.' Demand for slaves in Turan is high, but the supply is so plentiful that slaves are not expensive. Turanians are regarded as harsh masters, though, and many slaves escape into the steppe, joining the *kozaki* in order to lash back at their former overlords. The worst taskmasters among the Turanians are the shipmasters who force the slaves to row the great ships that propel much of the interior Turanian trade. A ship slave does not live long under the conditions on most of those craft, so cruelly driven are they.

The Turanians are noted for their superb archery skills, especially with their double-curved Hyrkanian bows. For swords, the Turanians favour the scimitar and they also carry ten-foot-long lances for spearing their foes from horses. Extremely militant and exceptionally organised, Turan attempts to expand its empire in all directions, dominating Iranistan, threatening Vendhya, conquering the caravan cities of the eastern deserts, battling Hyperborea and sending troops into Zamora and Brythunia. The Turanians prefer cavalry, using mercenaries if they need infantry.

and on to Khauran and further. Turan controls so many of the caravan routes that kingdoms such as Koth, Shem, Brythunia and Zamora pay tribute so the trade goods flow. Virtually anything can be found in the *suks*, or open-air markets, of Turan.

In the glutted slave markets of Aghrapur, Sultanapur, Khawarizm, Shahpur, and Khorusun, women were sold for three small silver coins - blond Brythunians, tawny Stygians, dark-haired Zamorians, ebon Kushites, olive-skinned Shemites.

Robert E. Howard, The Devil in Iron

The Turanians have a disciplined cavalry that is divided up in squads of ten, troops of fifty, companies of a hundred, and divisions of 10,000. Commanders, or *kagan*, are those proven in war, not tribal chiefs. A squad-leader is called a 10-commander or a commander-of-10. Other commanders of larger numbers follow similar naming schemes. Commanders signal with flags during the day and with lanterns in the nights. Better quality scimitars are given to soldiers who earn higher and higher rank. If a Turanian is demoted, his superior officer takes his scimitar and breaks it in front of the ranks. The demoted Turanian then must take a scimitar appropriate to his rank.

Turanian males are typically bearded, wear turbans, sashes and loose-fitting trousers. The warriors wear gold-spined helmets, white silk shirts, sleeveless mail, baggy trousers and tiger-skin cloaks. The Turanian women are veiled. In more conservative circles, usually the upper classes, the women favour the khalat, a long costume that conceals the entire body.

The lands conquered by the Turanians once were home to aboriginal peoples. The Yuetshi, who now dwell along the southern shore of the Vilayet, are an example of these original settlers of the Vilayet. The Yuetshi people are described as 'ape-like' and ugly. They are an indigenous people to the area, driven into the valleys of the Colchians by the Hyrkanians. They have long arms, short legs and flat, yellow, slant-eyed faces. They dress in sheepskins. They are not a warlike people, preferring to till the earth and herd their animals. Still, their favourite weapon is a saw-edged crescent blade that can disembowel a man with an upward stroke.

Another example of non-Hyrkanians in Turan are the Khozgari hillmen that dwell in the Khozgari Hills, the foothills of the Misty Mountains. They are a warlike, barbaric tribe of hillmen that respect only overwhelming strength. They often raid the lowland Turanians and the king of Turan must pay them bribes to keep them in the hills, bribes which they often take but ignore the reason behind them, attacking anyway. They are treacherous people for barbarians. They probably were driven out of their homelands by the Hyrkanians and into the hills, giving them no love for their conquerors. They are pitiful bowmen, but fierce melee fighters.

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF TURAN

Turan lies among the hills and marshes of the Vilayet, extending to the mountains of the south, to the deserts of the east and to the steppe of the northeast. It borders Zamora, Khauran and Stygia. Trees line the coast of the Vilayet between the water and the snow-capped Colchian Mountains. For the most part the deserts end at the Colchian Mountains, but by a freak of nature, a long crescent of desert extends deep into southern Hyrkania.

Akrim River – The Akrim River winds through patches of meadow and farmland in the Akrim valley, surrounded by the tall mountains of the Colchians. This short river empties into the Vilayet somewhere south of the Zaporoska. A castle, the fortress of Gleg the Zaporoskan, clings to the side of one of those dark cliffs. The valley here is home to the Yuetshi. The nearest Turanian outpost is three days ride from the mouth of the river.

Colchian Mountains – The Colchians are a high, rocky mountain range south of the Vilayet. They are snow-capped mountains, so high they are,

'Yezdigerd, king of Turan, was the mightiest monarch in the world. In his palace in the great port city of Aghrapur was heaped the plunder of empires. His fleets of purple-sailed war galleys had made Vilayet an Hyrkanian lake. The dark-skinned people of Zamora paid him tribute, as did the eastern provinces of Koth. The Shemites bowed to his rule as far west as Shushan. His armies ravaged the borders of Stygia in the south and the snowy lands of the Hyperboreans in the north. His riders bore torch and sword westward into Brythunia and Ophir and Corinthia, even to the borders of Nemediia. His gilt-helmeted swordsmen had trampled hosts under their horses' hoofs, and walled cities went up in flames at his command.'

Robert E. Howard, The Devil in Iron

and extend from the Zaporoska along the southern coasts of the Vilayet. The Akrim River is one of many that cuts through it to reach the Vilayet. The Gorge of Diva is a canyon that runs parallel with the Akrim. At the Diva waterfall, the gorge and the Akrim merge. The Kasmar Pass cuts through to the east and west, giving a route between Iranistan, Turan and Venjipur. The pass is high and often snowed in. The Venji river runs from the Colchians to the Gulf of Tarqheba between Iranistan and Vendhya. (see page 60 for information on Venjipur.)

Eastern Desert – The Eastern Desert is a vast desert that gives way to steppes in the north and the Kharamun Desert in the south. To the west it eventually gives way to the highlands of Koth and the meadows of Shem. Many portions of this desert are disputed between the Turanians and the Zuagirs of Shem. The best caravan route passes from Turanian Aphaka to the Shemite city of Shusha. Another caravan route moves goods from Vezek to the Oasis of Akrel, then into Khauran. A new route is currently being established from the Oasis of Yukkub to Akhlat the Accursed.

- † **Oasis of Akrel** – The oasis of Akrel, located in the deserts east of Khauran and west of Turan, is where Conan hid Khaurani rebels during the events of *A Witch Shall Be Born*.
- † **Shan-e-Sorkh** – This region of the Eastern Desert is called 'the Red Waste,' and is an unproductive desert in the east. It has virtually no water and has red sand. The Makan-e-Mordan is a haunted area in this region and means 'Place of Ghosts'. The city of Akhlat is built on a fertile oasis of green trees and lotus pools in the Makan-e-Mordan (see the entry for Akhlat on page 111).

Ilbars Mountains – The Ilbars mark the border between Iranistan and Turan. They lie south of the Colchian Mountains. Between the two ranges are petroleum fields. The cities and towns of the Ilbars are technically under the control of Iranistan. The Ilbars River passes through the range into Iranistan. Drujistan and the Gorge of Ghosts lie in the southern reaches of the mountains. Passes through the mountains allow for trade between Iranistan and Turan.

Ilbars River – The Ilbars River, rising from its sources in the Ilbars Mountains, is the main watercourse of Turan. After leaving the Ilbars and passing along the western edges of the Colchians, it flows along the Misty Mountains, separating that range from the eastern desert. Run off and rivers from the Misty Mountains engorge the Ilbars River until it is a swollen, fantastic river. It runs past the city of Samara to the caravan city of Akif. At Akif, the Ilbars makes a ninety-degree turn toward the Vilayet. It fans out into a broad estuary as it empties into the Vilayet. Aghrapur is built near the mouth of the river.

Kezankian Mountains – These mountains form a natural barrier between Zamora and Turan. Many things lurk in these mountains, including ape-men and villages of hill people. The hill people of the Kezankians are notoriously hostile toward strangers. The range was created during the lesser cataclysm and is younger than some of the other mountain ranges in the known world. The Nezvaya River runs through the northern part of the range, creating a corridor between Zamora and Turan. Another pass lies near Arenjun, as does the Temple of the Bloodstained God. Ape-men dwell in the northern reaches of the Kezankians.

Kharamun Desert – This sandy desert is in the south-western portions of Turan, between the Vilayet and Zamboula and south of the Eastern Desert.

Misty Mountains – The Misty Mountains run along the western shore of the Vilayet Sea, south of Aghrapur. The mountains are



home to the powerful Khozgari hillmen. The Bhambar Pass and the road of Garma provide access to the Vilayet for the people of Samara, two days south of the pass. The burial grounds of the ancient kings of Turan lie in these grand mountains, as do the lands belonging to the People of the Summit, called Shangara. King Angharzeb of Turan once battled the People of the Summit, but their magic and monsters defeated his army. Intelligent, hairless apes haunt the Bhambar Pass, but they keep mostly to themselves these days. These monsters use robes and fine Turanian scimitars to fight, although they are but crude swordsmen. A keep of mottled serpentine is built atop the narrow walkway of a mountain wall that bisects a dizzying abyss. It was once the keep of the People of the Summit but is now garrisoned by Turanians.

Nezvaya River – The Nezvaya is a large river cutting through the Kezankian Mountains in northern Turan. It passes by Yaralet in the Zamorian Marches, cutting through the steppe on its path to the Vilayet. Its source is in the Graaskal Mountains of Hyperborea (see page 49). The Frozen River is tributary to this river.

Vilayet Sea – The mighty Vilayet is a two thousand-mile long, three hundred-mile wide inland sea patrolled by Turanian war-ships under purple sails. These war-galleys, the pride of Turan's navy, plunder virtually any foreign ship on the Vilayet for infringing on Turan's interests. The Vilayet is known for its savage storms, especially during the autumn and winter months. For hundreds of miles along the western shores are the glittering cities of the Turanians, such as Shahpur, Maypur, Sultanapur, Khawarism and Aghrapur. A few Hyrkanian ports inhabit the eastern coast. Turanian ships rarely ply north of Sultanapur. The Vilayet plays host to pirates, as well the Red Brotherhood (see page 163 for more details). In the north, the shores are mountainous. There are both marshes and mountains in the south and the west. Trade from the east crosses the Vilayet to Aghrapur from Rhamadan or Khorusun instead of trying to go around the southern end of the Sea because of the Zaporoskan swamps, the Zaporoska River and its pirates, the *kozaki*, and the Zaporoskans themselves, although a trade route to Zamboula does pass through the Colchians for those insisting on not making the boat trip. Three major rivers drain into the Vilayet: The Ilbars; the Zaporoska; and the Nezvaya. Many minor rivers also drain into it, such as the Akrim and the Yelba. The Vilayet is home to many islands, charted and otherwise. Most are uninhabited and reputed to be haunted. Iron-like green stones can be found on those islands.

† **The Isle of Iron Statues** is a small, oval island in the northern Vilayet Sea near the western shore with ancient ruins built of the great iron-like green stones found in the region. The largest ruin is a great hall where rows of iron statues stand. The sailors of the Vilayet Sea avoid the island. The builders of these ruins may have some connection with the unknown builders of Xuthal, for local birds scream out, '*Yakkoolan yok tha, xuthalla!*' Some scholars believe these original builders to be eastern Lemurians, finally wiped out

by the lesser cataclysm, leaving only ruins. The northern shore of the island rises up to a series of cliffs that drops into the Vilayet.

- † **Xapur the Fortified** is the island home of the extinct Dagonians. The island rises out of the Vilayet in sheer cliffs a hundred and fifty feet tall. Its interior is jungle. A ruined city made of those colossal green stones found on many of the islands can be found here. The foundations of the wall, stumps of broken columns and a great dome remain. Underground tunnels crisscross beneath the earth, perhaps hiding some ancient treasure. The Dagonians were a white race, although dark-skinned with black hair. A thing from the Abyss named Khostral Khel founded the city, and it was worshipped by the Dagonians in grisly rites of human sacrifice.
- † **The Zhurazi Archipelago** is demon-haunted and stalked by horrible lizard-gods worshipped by yellow-skinned savages. The archipelago is in the south end of the Vilayet. Two large islands and a string of several small islands are surrounded by treacherously shallow waters, making the archipelago an ideal location for pirate rendezvous. The larger Turanian ships cannot close in on the smaller pirate craft here, nor do Turanian maps show soundings of this region.

Zamorian Marches – These lands are on the other side of the Kezankian Mountains, separating the mountains from the Eastern Desert. At one time they were under Zamora's control but now Turan dominates and settles the region.

Zaporoska River – The Zaporoska is a major river of Turan, especially for the pirates and *kozaks*. The terrain around this river is rugged enough that Turan never quite subdued the region. The river is navigable for much of its northern reaches but Turan sends few ships down this dark river because of the concentrations of outlaws who will happily overpower the expeditions. Its mouth lies amid dank swamps thick with reeds. The native people of this region are sturdy people called Zaporoskans. They typically wear fur caps in the manner of the Hyrkanians. The source of the Zaporoska is in the Himelian Mountains.

IMPORTANT TURANIAN CITIES

Turanian cities are among the most grand of the Hyborian Age. The *suks* or open-air market places are a feast for the senses. Colours and textures and sounds and smells and even tastes assault from all directions. Scarlets, greens, turquoises smash headlong into shining silks and dingy cloths, which, in turn are set off by the bright shine of precious metals and the dull glint of iron and polished woods. Great towers glitter in the sun and stand brightly against the moon. Minarets and spires decorated with arabesques and fantastic designs stand proudly over the great palaces of marble and gold as vast caravan trains move toward the bazaars with the goods from a thousand cities from around the

known world. Turan has built at least 26 of these grand cities, 133 smaller towns and over 14,000 villages.

Aghrapur – Aghrapur is the many-towered, glittering capital of Turan, a massive seaport on the Vilayet, probably the largest and most glorious of all cities of this age, the epitome of the opulent East. Located on the Ilbars River and at the eastern terminus of the Road of Kings, Aghrapur is the primary trading city of Turan. Caravan routes enter the city from the north, the west, and the south. Shipping routes head toward the east. Filled with monuments, palaces, statues, temples and fountains, Aghrapur is a beautiful city, displaying the wealth of many kingdoms. Domed temples, white zikkurats, people with turbans and spired helms chased with gold, wearing flowing robes of silk and satin, tall minarets and arabesqued spires that gleam in the sunlight like small suns are but a hint of the splendour a visitor experiences. Aghrapur is the most populous city west of the Vilayet, home to 160,000 people. Aghrapur employs skilled Akbitanan smiths, enigmatic Khitan sword-masters, slinky Zamorian thieves, nude Zamboulan dancers and alien Vendhyan artisans to create the beauty and extravagance of this jewelled city. No city of the world is more luxurious. Originally a Zamorian city before the Hyrkanians came, Aghrapur is now a glittering Turanian city of haggling merchants creating a din of barter, slant-eyed wenches brazenly posturing, canopied litters bearing wealthy, discreetly veiled princesses, and conquering slavers presenting nude slave-girls on the block. The grand palace of the sultan, King Yezdigerd, is built on a crag overlooking the Vilayet Sea and is probably the most magnificent palace to ever be built since the Cataclysm sank Atlantis. Endless rooms, perfumed gardens, gold-worked doors, Vendhyan tapestries, Iranistani rugs and, of course, the legendary throne room of the King of the Empire of Turan. This vast chamber with fifty foot doors worked in glorious gold, fantastically carved pillars that reach so high the keenest eye cannot see the tops from the polished marble floor and enough lamps and candles to rival the sun. Imperial guards, resplendent in scarlet cloaks and white turbans mounted with peacock feathers, stand ever at the ready to protect the grand sultan of the Empire.

Akif – Akif is a major Turanian city on the bend of the Ilbars River. It has a population of 22,456 people but constant caravan travel swells it to well over 30,000 most of the time. It is a popular stopping point for caravans travelling to and from Aghrapur, either on the overland routes or on the Ilbars River. Great merchant ships do nothing but travel back and forth from Akif to Aghrapur, making a living ferrying merchandise from caravans who hunger for a boat ride or do not wish to actually go to Aghrapur for other reasons. The caravan trail from Aghrapur continues on to Fort Wakla deep in the Zuagir territory. This route is the Road of Kings.

Al Azair – Al Azair is a city of southern Turan where the god Zed was once worshipped. Worshipers of Zed were one with their god when they killed in his name, especially when they killed virgins tied helplessly to altars. The Zeddites dressed in red and pink clothing with tall hats. Conan killed the high priest of Zed and burned down the temple when he stole their sacrificial knife for the gold in it. Al Azair is a minor city with but 2,487 people living there.

Alhmet – Alhmet *was* a Turanian satrapy in the eastern desert. The castle there is now nothing but a ring of scorched earth surrounded by a circle of standing stones; the imperial forces attacked the castle for withholding tax monies.

Aqaba – Technically a well or oasis in the southern deserts, Turan has built walls and a keep around it to control the water on this trade route, forcing caravaners to pay them a substantial fee for water that once was free for all. A small Turanian garrison maintains the peace here and enforces the toll.

Ashraf – Ashraf is a Turanian outpost to the west of Djemal in Hyrkania. The regiments here are made up of Hyrkanians commanded by Turanians. It is largely a military installation and is not a regular stop for merchant caravans.

Dimmorz – Dimmorz is a northern Turanian province among the Hyrkanian foothills.

Djemal – Djemal is a small trading city on the road between Fort Ghori and the Zaporoska River. It lies to the east of Ashraf. Although within the borders of Turan, it is also claimed by Hyrkania. Renegade Hyrkanians rebelling against Turanian domination and oppression once sacked it. Story tellers still tell the tale of the rise of Othbaal the Executioner and the Sons of the White Wolf who sacked Djemal and tugged at Yezdiger's beard in doing so.

Gharat Temple – This temple lies fifty miles south of Fort Wakla, on or near the caravan route between Yukkub and Fort Wakla. It is built on an oasis.

Fort Ghori – Fort Ghori is a Turanian castle to the southeast of the Vilayet. It guards the eastern caravan routes.

Fort Wakla – Out in the Eastern Desert, on the Road of Kings, not far to the west from Akif, Fort Wakla is really a city, maintaining its name from the days when it was nothing more than a border fort guarding a caravan oasis from Zuagirs. A high, crenelated wall surrounds the city and its oases. The city is described as roomy, with enough buildings for both merchants and thieves to make their living. Even though it lies on the Road of Kings, Fort Wakla is fairly isolated, as it is not an end but a means for most caravans. Wakla works hard to either produce or trade for the trappings of civilisation, slowly building its city. The fortress, although a grim pile of grey rock designed to withstand desert storms and heavy sieges, is a virtual palace on the inside, crammed with art and luxuries. The city is known for its colourful nightlife. The quarters by the western wall are reserved for caravans. Taverns in Fort Wakla are much like western caverns, although the customers are more colourful. Pleasure houses provide for the travellers in search of an evening's entertainment. Storytellers tell grim stories about Yamad al-Aphta (Conan) the Zuagir, making him out to be more magical and horrible than mythical ogres. Its open-air markets, called suks, hold the treasures of many nations. Caravans leaving Fort Wakla may travel south to Yukkub, east to Akif, west on the route that eventually heads to Koraja, or north to Kherdpur. The satrap of Fort Wakla is charged with defending the Road of Kings from attack, primarily from Zuagirs or *kozaki*. The Zuagir tribe of Duali lives near here in a village at an oasis.

Although large enough to house tens of thousands more people, Fort Wakla has a permanent population of only 13,450 people.

Khawarizm – Khawarizm is the southernmost port of Turan on the western edge of the Vilayet. It is remarkable for being extremely degenerate, especially in its treatment of slaves. There are no ports between this city and Aghrapur. The satrap of Khawarizm, Jehungir Agha, is charged as Keeper of the Coastal Border. His troops are expected to guard the frontier from pirates and *kozaks* alike. His riders are also plunderers and raiders, having raided even Nemedra for slave-girls. The satrap of Khawarizm is also in charge of negotiating for hostages at Fort Ghori. Jelal Khan, who owns a castle in Khawarizm, is a nobleman who is well known for degeneracy that exceeds all others even in Khawarizm. As he promised, Conan once burned Khawarizm to please one of his women, breaking through six imperial ships to escape. Even rebuilt, Khawarizm is a large city. The purple-sailed fleet of Turan is built and repaired in the shipyards here. With defence of the nation as its charge, many young soldiers are stationed here early in their career. Khawarizm has a population of 50,000.

Kherdpur – Kherdpur is a fortified city on the steppe between Turan and Zamora. It lies north of Fort Wakla and is not far from the main caravan route north from that city. It has a population of 7,731 people.

Khoraf – Khoraf is a port city where the slavers bring the fairest women of the South. It is often a target of the Vilayet pirates. It is located on the eastern coast of the Vilayet. The city has a population of 10,876 people. This city lies south of Rhamdan and is connected to that city by a Turanian road, allowing the two cities to help each other out in times of military crisis. If Khoraf is harried by pirates, any slaves or goods needing to be shipped to Aghrapur by the Aghrapuri buyers would travel up this road to be shipped out of Rhamdan. Likewise, if Rhamdan is besieged by sea, their goods travel down this road to be shipped from Khoraf. Many ships from Khawarizm patrol these waters to protect the shipping, but they tend to concentrate more on Rhamdan, although many times the ships stop here to allow the soldiers time to dally with the slave-girls.

Khorbhul – Khorbhul is a Turanian outpost north of the Himelians, just off of the pass through the mountains. Khemsra from *The People of the Black Circle* spoke of taking Khorbhul to drive the Turanians out of the Himelians. At the time of *The People of the Black Circle*, this was Turan's most eastern outpost. By the time of Conan's rule in Aquilonia, Turan has likely grown past this old fortress. From its humble beginnings as a border fortress, it has grown in trade with the Himelian hillmen and with Vendhya to become a small trading city with a population of 6,704 Turanians.

Khurusun – Khurusun (alternative spellings – Khorusun; Khorosun) is a walled port city of goldsmiths located on the north-western coast of the Vilayet. Its open-air markets are filled with gold. It is ruled by a satrap charged also with defending the caravan routes to the west into Hyrkania. Conan and his savage *kozaki* once stormed the city and burned it. The satrap also commands

the military city of Secunderam, where he marshals his forces on the Hyrkanian steppe in the east. The Turanians from Khurusun and Secunderam once attacked Vendhya but were slaughtered by the Kshatriyan forces. Golden Khurusun has a population of 12,389 people.

Maypur – Maypur lies to the west of Fort Wakla on a caravan route.

Onagrul – Onagrul is a secret stronghold of the Vilayet pirates on the eastern shore of that sea, probably in the northern reaches where few Turanian galleys are likely to find them.

Rhamdan – Rhamdan, north of Khoraf, where the great caravan road ends, is another port that is often targeted by pirates. The ships of Turan tend to sail Rhamdan's waters often to protect the shipping that carries goods from the far east to Aghrapur and other western ports. A caravan road connects Khoraf and Rhamdan, allowing the two cities to lend each other military support and allowing goods to move from one city to another if a city is besieged or harried by pirate activity. This city lies across the Vilayet from Aghrapur, built there to facilitate the transport of goods so that caravans can avoid the swamps and pitfalls of trying to cross the Zaporoska.

Secunderam – Secunderam is a large Turanian military outpost on the edge of the Hyrkanian steppe near the Himelians and is part of the Khurusun satrapy. The military governor here derives troops from Khurusun, as well as gold to pay his armies well for protecting the borders against Himelian hillmen, Vendhyans and Hyrkanians.

Shahpur – Shahpur is a relatively unimportant Turanian caravan city on the edge of the Kharamun Desert. The city is a good twelve days ride east of Zamboula. Many Western cartographers mistakenly place Shahpur on the Vilayet in the north. The city lives in the south on the caravan route called the Samara Road. The main gate, the Arch of Good Fortune, empties into a large plaza in the city. On the western edge of the city is a ruined temple dedicated to the elder god Ahriman. Hills lie to the south and a minor range of low mountains lie somewhat to the west. Caravans pass through this city constantly, and its open-air markets are glutted with slaves from Koth, Punt, Zembabwei, Stygia, Shem and from the Hyborian nations to the west. Shahpur has a population of 13,450 people. It was once known as Elkar of the Waves when the Vilayet was larger than it is now. Before that, it was known as Zhagg of the Black Desert when Atlantis was a chain of smoking volcanoes.

Sultanapur – Sultanapur, the Golden Queen of the Vilayet, ruled by a military governor, is a port city on the Vilayet. Before the Turanians rode around the southern horn of the Vilayet, cutting a bloody swath before them and conquering all, this location was a Zamorian city. Sacked and burned, the Turanians rebuilt it. It lies to the north of Aghrapur.

A caravan route travels from here to the Kezankian mountains to the Zamorian city of Khesron.

The slave-markets here, fed by Zamorian kidnappers, are glutted with beautiful

but cheap slave-girls. Sultanapur has a population of over 50,000.

Many caravans passed through this town of Shahpur, rounding the southern tip of the Vilayet, coming through the passes of the great southern range, faring across the desert from Koth, Punt and Zembabwei.

John Maddox Roberts, Conan and the Manhunters

Vezeke – Vezeke is a trading city where caravans are charged a toll. It lies on the caravan road north of Yukkub and south of Fort Wakla. Three caravan trails converge at Vezeke: the route south to Yukkub; the route to the west to the Akrel Oasis; and the route north to the Road of Kings, merging with it to the west of Fort Wakla.

Walls of Sulimar – The Walls of Sulimar were a brief Turanian military post that has long since been abandoned. It lies a day's ride to the east of the well of Harith. All that remain are the walls. Zuagir and Hyrkanian nomads occasionally camp there to allow the ruined walls to protect them.

Well of Adhmet – The well of Adhmet lies three days to the east from Djemal. A small hut has been built here as a small way station for travellers.

Well of Harith – The well of Harith lies on the other side of a dry gorge with rocky slopes from the well of Adhmet. The Turanians built walls around it and made it a brief army post that since has been abandoned. The well is used by *kozaks*, Zuagirs and other desert nomads, such as the Juhanna, the fiercest nomads in that region. It lies one day's ride to the west of the Walls of Sulimar. There is only a trickle of water in the well, but it is enough for most travellers.

In the meantime, I think we'll ride eastward and storm that Turanian outpost at Vezeke, where the caravans pay toll.

Robert E. Howard, A Witch Shall Be Born

Yukkub – Yukkub lies to the south of Fort Wakla and north of Zamboula. The caravan trail from Zamboula splits at Yukkub. One route travels northeast toward Akif, and another split at an oasis along that route offers the choice of travelling to Fort Wakla. The other route travels northwest toward Vezeke. A new route has been made to Akhlat in the Makan-e-Mordan, which lies to the west of Yukkub.

Zamboula – Zamboula is a major trading city in the Kharamun Desert. A string of oases provides water to the city. Built by dusky skinned Stygians, ruled by conquering Turanians, patrolled by Pelishtim mercenaries, peopled by mongrels, Shemites, Ghanaras, Kushites, Darfari and visited by Zuagirs and caravaneers from the east and south, Zamboula defines the term cosmopolitan, putting even the greatest trading ports of Argos to shame. As a Zuagir told Conan, Zamboula is 'where white, brown and black folk mingle together to produce hybrids of all unholy hues and breeds.' The city is well laid-out, with Sword-Maker bazaars, Horse Markets and other divisions. Because of the Darfari cannibals, which few strangers know about, no native of the city will sleep in the streets. Even the beggars find some niche to barricade themselves into before the fall of night. Zamboulan dancers are the best-trained dancers in the world, known for their nude dances. Centuries ago, Zamboula was naught but a small trading town of the Kharamun nomads. The Stygians built the small town into a city, settling it, bringing Shemite and Kushite slaves. Ceaseless caravans brought wealth, and the wealth brought the Turanians, who swarmed out of the desert and conquered it, shoving back Stygia's borders. Jungir Khan is the satrap appointed by Turan to govern the region. This fabulous city of towers and minarets is home to 28,000 people. Different religions are practiced in this place. Set, Bel, Ishtar, Erlik, Tarim and Yog are all well-represented. Even bestial Hanuman has a huge temple that squats alone in a large square. Outside the spires of Zamboula, all is sandy desert, although the Shanki Oasis lies not too far away toward the northwest.

TURANIAN NAMES

If you want a little more colour for your Turanian character's name, you can add a small descriptive 'title' in front of the name (the Turanians do not use surnames. At most they may give the name of their parent after their given name, separated by *ibn* for 'son of' or *bin* for 'daughter of'). Some common ones are: *Áqá* (equivalent to 'mister'); *Darvish* (designates a mystic); *Dihqan* (designates lesser nobility); *Hájí* (designates someone who has made a holy pilgrimage somewhere); *Mírzá* (designates someone who is learned and literate; a scholar); *Mullá* (designates a priest or acolyte of Erlik or Tarim); *Shaykh* (designates a chief of a tribe or ruler of a small town or village); *Siyyid* (designates someone descended from the Tarim's family); *Ustád* (designates a master craftsman). You can also append the city the character is most associated with either before or after the name by adding an *-i* after the name, such as *Aghrapuri* or *Vezeki*. If the name of the city comes before the name, it means the character has made a pilgrimage to that city. *Suhaym Vezeki* is the name of a person from *Vezek*. *Vezeki Suhaym* is the name of someone who is known for making trips to *Vezek*.

The meanings of the titles sometimes change if used *after* the name. For example, *Mírzá* designates a prince if used after the name. For example, *Mírzá Suhaym* is the name of a scholar, but *Suhaym Mírzá* is the name of a minor prince.

Other common titles are *amir*, *agha* or *shah* (designates a chieftain, commander, or prince); *sheriff* (a rare hereditary title among the Turanians); *pasha* (a non-hereditary title given to civilians for exemplary service to Turan); *bey* (military commander of a small

regiment; sometimes used as a title for a governor of a district or small province); *efendi* (a noble or important person); *khan* (clan leader or land owner); *sirdar* (noble title similar to a count); *wazier* or *vizier* (similar to a prime minister or secretary of state).

RELIGION IN TURAN

Erlik was supposedly the first man, a creation of Ulgen. Erlik was taken to the heavens and given the mantle of death and, in time, seemed to supplant his creator in popularity. Hyrkanians, of course, love the kill, so perhaps it is not surprising a god of death, fire and war became more popular than a creator god. Erlik is called the 'Yellow God of Death,' and his followers are cannibals with filed teeth.

*'I worship Set, and the
Turanians bow to Erlik,
but Totrasmek sacrifices to
Hanuman the accursed! The
Turanian lords fear his black
arts and his power over the hybrid
population, and they hate him.'*

*Robert E. Howard, Shadows in
Zamboula*

Erlik is called by many names, including the Yellow God of Death. He respects the noble warriors who wield life and death on the battlefield. Lotus is considered a holy sacrament to the followers of Erlik, reserved for those who have reached Paradise. The followers of Erlik do not appreciate non-believers using it. The Paradise promised by Erlik to his True Believers is peopled by beautiful *mekhrani* who live in the pleasure houses of eternity.

Erlik has an opposite number called Thutala, a trickster who appears to unbelievers in a whole host of different guises. The followers of Erlik call any foreign god 'Thutala' or a minion of his.

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 Erlik 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 rival Hyrkanians kidnapped him. Turan wisely has not let the people know that the 'Living Tarim' has died.

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, although a little more restrained in terms of worship. Other Turanians still worship Ahriman and other bizarre deities, such as Ormazd, a bright god who battles the devil, Ahriman.

LOCAL HISTORY

The history of Turan and Hyrkania starts with the history of the Lemurians and, of course, the Cataclysm which sank their islands. The Lemurians lucky enough to escape the devastation of their homes were promptly enslaved by the mysterious non-Thurian civilisation dwelling on the East Coast of Thuria in a land called Pathenia. For thousands of years the Lemurians were beaten down and oppressed by their enslavers until they finally rose up and destroyed their masters in a savage massacre, for the Lemurians were now little more than beasts.

During this time, other races also survived the Cataclysm. Lemuria of the west became great islands, but Lemuria of the east survived in a region of lakes strung together. These people still retained some of their technology and magic and reared great cities of the iron-like green stones found in that region. Worshipping the great fish-god Dagon and Xultha, an ape-god, they have a strange knowledge of curious architecture. They did not cultivate the land, as they could make food out of the elements and used tools made of polished obsidian and jade and argillite. They were finally destroyed by the second, lesser cataclysm, which turned the string of lakes into the mighty Vilayet. The remnants became the Dagonians, the Yuetshi and other tribes and they fell to the level of beasts and stone-age primitives.

The kingdom of Khitai developed and traded with the new masters of Pathenia, which resulted in their rise from the level of beasts and savages. As they pulled themselves out of their bestial nature toward becoming a new people, they now had a new name: Hyrkanian. They moved slowly and inexorably westward, where the Hyborians were beginning their own ascent toward domination. Even as the remnants of their former masters conquered the pre-human giant-kings and founded Stygia, the Hyrkanian culture, aided by contact with Khitai, developed their own unique way of life. Finding themselves on the steppe, the Hyrkanians mastered the horse.

In the Vilayet region, the great being Khosatral Khel came from its unholy realm and became a god to the Dagonians, building them a city in the Lemurian style – all interconnected and cyclopean, using the iron-like green stones. They enslaved the Yuetshi and for a generation they died on the altars of Khosatral. A Yuetshi priest forged a knife from a meteor that fell and led the slaves into revolt, throwing down Khosatral and slaughtering the Dagonians.

Returning to the far east, we find the Hyrkanians empowered by their historic victory over their former masters and developing a warrior culture that expanded by conquest. Aboriginal peoples were either absorbed or utterly destroyed by the Hyrkanians, depending on their willingness to submit and pay tribute.

Eventually the Hyrkanians reached the Vilayet Sea. To the south swarmed an extremely powerful tribe of Hyrkanians and swiftly they swung northward around the Vilayet and founded Turan. Turan is still their greatest kingdom and the Hyrkanians continue their westward push, promising to bathe the west in red blood and brilliant fire as they trample the stone walls of the Hyborians.

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

There are approximately 252 standing fortifications in Turan and over 30 of them have been abandoned in the last two centuries, either from war, drought, magic or monsters. Any number of adventures could be crafted based on the discovery or exploration of one of these keeps. Perhaps something important was left behind and the adventurers have been hired to escort a hopeful treasure finder to the location. Zuagirs, *kozaks* or hillmen might also populate these keeps. Rebellious satraps might hold up in them once the king has ousted them.

Someone has learned that the Living Tarim is dead and is spreading the rumours. King Yezdigerd and the Seers of Yimsha have no wish for this 'prophet' to continue and hires the characters to assassinate this orator. Alternatively, this someone may have hired the characters to defend him from Yezdigerd and his soldiers.

Characters might be hired to catch runaway slaves. Many Turanians would pay more to have a trained slave recaptured than to buy a new one that needs work. The characters may have to fight *kozaks* and pirates, who recruit their members from runaway slaves and criminals. Characters might also choose to run some sort of underground movement to get slaves out of Turan.

VENDHYA

The Golden Kingdom

VENDHYA IS A land to the far southeast of the Hyborian continent. Ruled by the Devi Yasmina, Vendhya's population is over twelve million. Largely rural in disposition, some 20 cities dot the countryside and, while there are nearly 200 towns, the vast bulk of the population can be found in the 20,000 villages that fill out the hot jungles and rocky mountains of this fabulous kingdom. Ayodhya, the capital, is reckoned by Vendhyans and visitors alike to be the most marvellous city in this exotic kingdom.

Gold? There is more gold in Peshkhauri than you ever saw... and it is but a drop of all the treasure of Vendhya.

Robert E. Howard. The People of the Black Circle

Vendhya's culture resembles that of the mythical India described in the *Vedas* and the people are divided into distinct classes, or castes. Born into their given class, citizens are unable to alter this arbitrary system of division by skill, prestige or wealth. However, the caste system is similar to the feudal system of the Hyborians as it carries with it certain privileges and corresponding responsibilities. The caste system is not intended as a scheme for oppression but simply for order and organisation. Although vertical mobility is not possible, horizontal mobility certainly is. The highest of these classes, at least in regards to secular power, are the Kshatriyas, from whom the king is chosen. In *People of the Black Circle*, Howard writes, 'The rulers of the golden kingdoms south of the Himelians were considered little short of divine.'

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. The next category are the merchant class. Although some merchants have wealth to rival their rulers, they are limited in actual power – they cannot hope to raise themselves to the ruling caste; class is a birthright and cannot be altered. Below the merchants are the serfs. Technically

outside the caste system, a lower class exists, one created for the conquered aboriginal peoples of the area. This is an 'untouchable' class and they are treated with contempt and scorn, forced to live outside the cities, towns and villages, as well as banned from participating in Vendhyan religious rites.

Everyday activities are proscribed and restricted by numerous religious and secular rules. Even clothing is affected by these rules, although some choice is allowed. The basic garment in Vendhya is called a *dhoti*, which was an unstitched length of filmy cloth wrapped around the lower part of the body, similar to a skirt. Women can wear a *choli*, which is a loose fitting blouse, if they want. Women in warmer regions tend to wear far less than the women on the mountainous slopes of Vendhya. Tribal women sometimes wear a *sari*, a length of fabric wound around the entire body, with the loose end thrown over the shoulder. Urban Vendhyan women rarely wear the sari. The clothing tend to be gauzy and coloured beautifully, for the Vendhyans had a deep appreciation for gold, silver, and jewelled embellishments. Some women wear turbans, although this is uncommon. Women wear make-up and jewellery, including armbands, rings, waist belts, leg and anklets, earrings, nose rings, toe rings, crowns, tiaras and other headdresses. Some women wore filmy robes over it all, including a gauzy veil. Some dancing girls wear only the veil, ankle-bells and finger-cymbals.

Men also wear the *dhoti*, although it is usually white or black, not the bright colours worn by women. The *dhoti* can be worn as a skirt, or it can be wrapped through the legs to make a pants-like garment. Some men wear upper garments, such as vests or fitted shirts, while others do not. Almost all men wear a large turban. Men also wear some jewellery, such as rings, anklets and bracelets. Many adorne their turbans with feathers.

Women, except those given to an ascetic life or born to the ruling caste, are obliged to marry by the priests of Vendhya, usually around the age of nine. Polygamy is permitted if such a practise can be afforded. A Kshatriya must marry a Kshatriya,

but may have pleasure slaves of lower castes. If a woman's husband dies, it is considered honourable to immolate herself on the husband's pyre, but she is not required to do so. Certain stones are set up in a shrine after a woman performs this ceremony and these stones are worshipped as holy.

The proscriptions in life extend even to housing. Except for the palaces and the temples, Vendhyan homes are cut from the same mould. Each one is made out of brick, stands one or two stories high and has a flat roof. Built around a courtyard, each Vendhyan home have windows facing into the courtyard; the exterior walls has no windows, for privacy is prized. Every home has its own well and a privy. Pipes of clay lead from the private bathrooms to an extensive sewer system beneath the streets, be it city, town, or village. These sewers then drain into rivers and streams nearby.

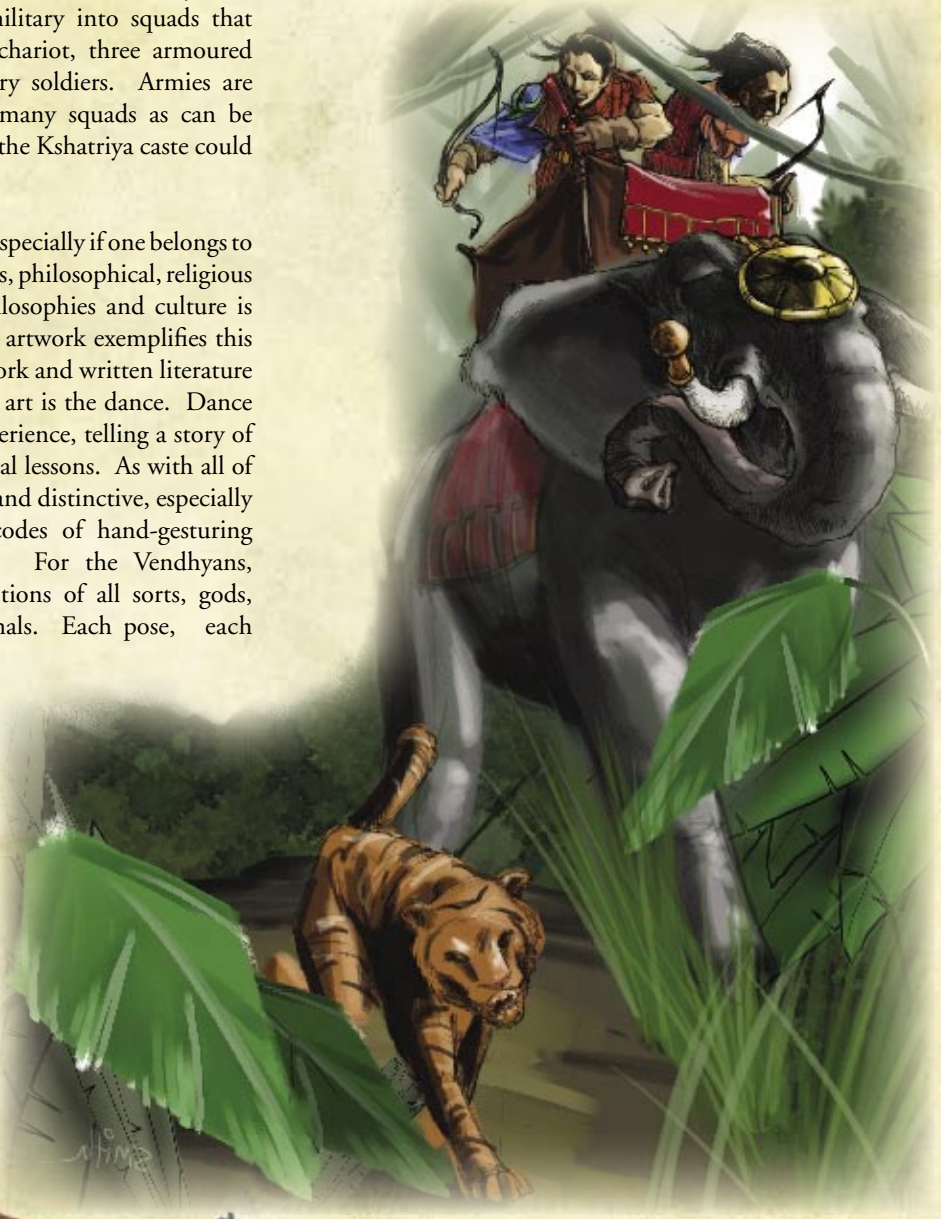
Religious rules and regulations affect even the military. The people of Vendhya form their military into squads that contain exactly one elephant, a chariot, three armoured lancers on horse, and five infantry soldiers. Armies are formed by bringing together as many squads as can be gathered. Also, only a member of the Kshatriya caste could fight in the military.

Still, life in Vendhya is a good one, especially if one belongs to the Kshatriya caste. It is a mysterious, philosophical, religious culture, but its mysteries and philosophies and culture is geared toward enjoying life. Their 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 a story of the gods, great heroes or even moral lessons. As with all of its art, Vendhya's dance is striking and distinctive, especially the beautiful and complicated codes of hand-gesturing included in the various dances. For the Vendhyans, the hand alone can portray emotions of all sorts, 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.

Beyond the impressive art, much about Vendhya's culture is different than the Hyborians' culture. For example, Vendhya does not have inns as might be found in Shadizar the Wicked. Instead, the Vendhyans prepare guest houses for travellers, for pilgrims to and from their numerous cities are many. Taverns exist, however, and are a good source of information. However, foreigners are not trusted in Vendhya and are simply treated as potential spies. The Difficulty Class of any information sought with a Gather Information check will be much higher for a foreigner than for a native-born Vendhyan.



Spying is an ancient art in Vendhya, but the price to pay if caught can be one's life or even slavery. Slavery is a fact of life in Vendhya, established by Robert E. Howard in *The People of the Black Circle*, where he writes, 'Trembling slave-girls knelt at the foot of the dais...' Slaves can be of any caste and becoming one is often a punishment.

The government of Vendhya is efficient and organized. The people, other than the aboriginal 'untouchable' caste, are treated well. They have free medical care and all the people, from the highest government official, to the soldiers, to the servants are paid regularly. Artisans, be they craftsmen or poets, are paid a stipend from the government so that they have the free time to devote to their art. People who labour on public works are also paid by the government instead of just strong-armed into it, as would be the case in Aquilonia or Nemedea. Even the poor are fed, for the towns and cities each have a large, central building for storing communal grain. Few Vendhyans are selfish enough to store their own grain. Food is for all to enjoy, not for hoarding.

Vendhya is largely self-sufficient, having abundant mines of precious metals and a well-developed agricultural base, including textiles such as cotton and silk. Vendhyan steel is light and nearly unbreakable, so Vendhyan swords are in demand in the eastern nations. Regardless, Vendhya trades with Iranistan and Turan, although Vendhyans never trade their best items. The best of Vendhya's artists, farmers and craftsmen go to Vendhyans. Anything left over are trade goods.

A popular wine, both as an export and within the nation, is Shirakman Wine, a Vendhyan scented wine. The Saga is unclear whether Shirakma is a region in Vendhya, or if it is the name of a vineyard, or even just the type of wine. In addition to wine, Vendhyan meals include warm tasty wheat bread served with barley, rice or peas. Vendhyans raised fruit such as dates and melons. Farmers raise cotton and keep herds of sheep, pigs, water buffalo and zebus. Fish is also a popular meat in both the rural villages and the cities.

The people of Vendhya tend to have an olive skin tone, a slim body-style and straight black hair. They are also remarked for having large dark eyes. The Vendhyan women use make-up to enhance their eyes to further that effect.

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF VENDHYA

Vendhya is extremely fertile, although the stony regions of the Himelian foothills are considerably less so. This fertility

brings about a well-developed agricultural environment. In addition, Vendhya's northern mountains are a thriving source of copper, silver, gold and iron. Unfortunately, the southern coasts are ill-suited for seafarers and sea ports which limits much of Vendhya's trade to overland routes, which the Himelian tribesmen make dangerous. Vendhya has wide expanses of untamed forests and jungles where man should not tread lightly, for most men do not return from such places where nature runs wild and rules the fate of those who enter.

Forests of Ghendai – These dire forests lie but a few leagues to the west of Gwandiakan in northern Vendhya. No road cuts through this dense wood, nor has one ever. The people of the area even avoid cutting down the tall trees or going anywhere near it. The forests are filled with huge swarms of tiny, stinging flies and with dangerous fevers and diseases that bring intense pain that lingers until only death can bring an end. Most Vendhyans would rather die than risk the insanity and infections of this fearsome forest. Because of its reputation, the forest continues to expand and grow, swallowing entire cities over time, such as Maharashtra, which now lays inside the confines of this killer wood. The forest has a thick canopy overhead that effectively hides the hot sun, but creates a greenhouse effect of heat. Birds scream and monkeys play in the high canopies, creating a noise that can become almost overwhelming.

They were following a faintly marked path dipping down into ravines so deep the sun never struck bottom. Labouring up steep slopes where loose shale threatened to slide from beneath their feet. and following knife-edge ridges with blue-hazed echoing depths on either hand.

Robert E. Howard. The People of the Black Circle

Himelian Mountains – This is an impressive mountain range north of Vendhya. The mountains are cold and high. An important pass through the mountains is the Zhaibar Pass, which is the road from Peshkhauri into Hyrkania beneath the watchful mountain Yimsha and through the valley of Gurasha. This range is inhabited by fierce tribesmen. Trails criss-cross the mountains, except in the virtually impassable center, but mostly these are thin, dangerous paths that few civilised men would even dare to cross without an army, largely because of the tribesmen. Most of the passes are suitable for horse-travel. Only the hillmen know all the paths and features of these twisting, hulking mountains and vast, engulfing escarpments.



The Zhiabar Pass is the most famous route through the mountains, although others exist, such as the Shamla Pass and the Amir Jehun Pass. Snow makes most of these passes impossible to travel in the winter months, although the summer brings caravan travel from Hyrkania to Vendhya. The southern reaches of this dangerous range are called Ghulistan. The south-western portion of Ghulistan is referred to as Afghulistan. Several tribes of hillmen reside in these dark mountains, including the Zhaibari, the Wazuli, the Dagozai, the Khurakzai, the Wamadzi and the Uzbek.

Jhumda River – This river flows south-west through Vendhya from the Himelian Mountains. The river lies between Ayodhya and the Ghulistan border. It also runs along the border of Kosala, a kingdom to the west of Vendhya.

Misty Isles – These are islands off the western coast of Vendhya. Secret herbs and plants are grown here and sold to sorcerers and connoisseurs around the world.

The 'Vendhyan night was preternaturally still, the air weighty and oppressive. No slightest breeze stirred, leaving the capital city of Ayodhya to swelter. The moon hung heavily in the sky like a monstrous yellow pestle, and most of the few who ventured out to see it shuddered and wished for even a single cloud to hide its sickly malevolence. There were whispers in the city that such a night, such a moon, were omens of plague, or of war, but certainly of death.

'Robert Jordan, Conan the Victorious

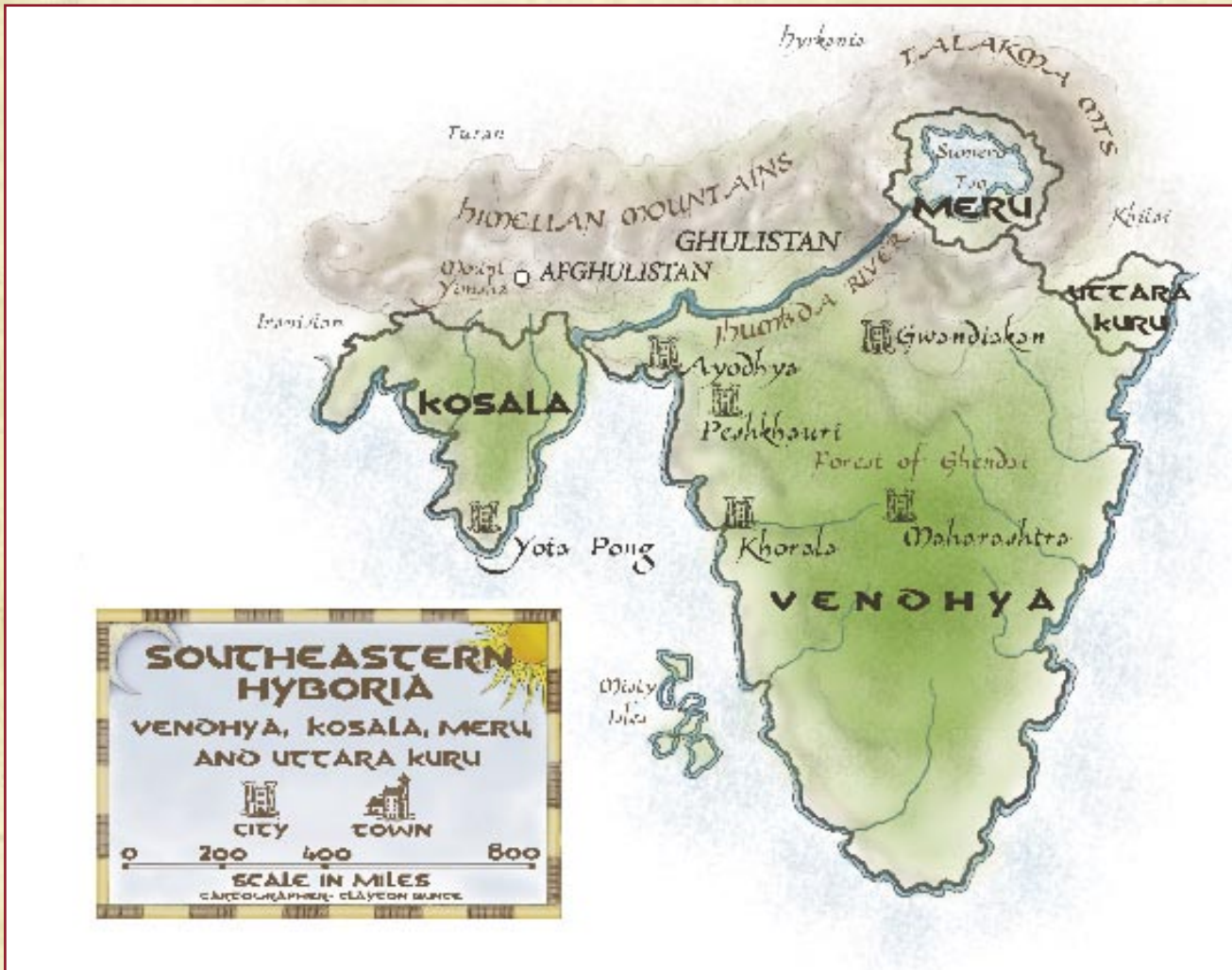
From the hills overlooking Gwandikan, Conan stared at the city in amazement. Alabaster towers and golden domes and columned temples atop tiered, man-made hills of stone spread in vast profusion, surrounded by a towering stone all leagues in circumference.

'Tis bigger than Sultanapur,' Enam said in awe.

'Tis bigger than Sultanapur and Aghrapur together,' Hordo said.

'You judge by the smallness of your own lands,' Vynhra mocked. [...] 'Many cities in 'Vendhya are as large or larger,' she went on. 'Why, Ayodhya is three times so great.'

'Robert Jordan, Conan the Victorious



IMPORTANT VENDHYAN SITES

Cities, towns and villages are noisy places in Vendhya. Not only do the gongs and chanting from the temples reverberate through the air, but the villages and towns are lively places of great secular activity. Not only are the people vivid and loud, but so are the animals. Vendhyan cities are characterized by the amount of free-roaming animals. Monkeys hang out in the bazaars and shops, hoping to steal a fruit from a stall or a passer-by. Elephants trumpet as they tromp around, led by Kshatriya squads. Birds of all sorts squawk incessantly.

Ayodhya – Ayodhya is the capital of Vendhya, the seat of powerful monarchs for centuries. The city was built and maintained as a symbol of Kshatriyan authority in this huge realm. This is where the Devi Yasmina rules. The city is laid out with a sacred center, a royal zone, and an urban core, all separated by irrigated valleys. It is home

to 466,480 residents, making it a massive Hyborian age metropolis.

Gwandiakan – This is the first city most caravans crossing the Himelias stop at. It also served as a favoured summer resort for Kshatriyan nobles until the great Forests of Ghendai started growing too close, bringing with them deadly plagues and swarms of biting insects. Here the women are covered head to toe, save for the dancers, but in such sheer silk that their clothing conceals nothing. Dancers dress in veils that are discarded until they are dancing nude, or with but a single veil over their face. The city is becoming more and more deserted as the forest creeps closer and closer. It currently has a population of over 25,000, though it could easily hold and support over five times that number, leading to many areas of the city that have become abandoned save for criminals and the desperate. Despite the increasing closeness of the forest, the city is still chiefly recognised by its alabaster walls and minarets.

'Your head, Cimmerian!' taunted 'Baal-pteor. I shall take it with my bare hands, twisting it from your shoulders as the head of a fowl is twisted! Thus the sons of Kosala offer sacrifice to Yajur. Barbarian, you look upon a strangler of Yota-pong. I was chosen by the priests of Yajur in my infancy, and throughout childhood, boyhood, and youth I was trained in the art of slaying with my naked hands - for only thus are the sacrifices enacted. Yajur loves blood, and we waste not a drop from the victims veins. When I was a child they gave me infants to throttle; when I was a boy I strangled young girls; as a youth, women, old men, and young boys. Not until I reached my full manhood was I given a strong man to slay upon the altar of Yota-pong.'

Robert E. Howard, *Shadows in Zamboula*

Khorala – Khorala is a ruined city deep in the jungles of Vendhya. A hermit dwelled here alone as a sorcerer. It was from here that the ring known as the 'Star of Khorala' originated.

Maharashtra – This is an ancient city of Vendhya, said by chroniclers to look 'as though some malevolent god, unwilling to wait for the slow wearing away by rain and wind, had commanded the forest to attack and consume all marks of men.' The streets are covered in dirt and humus and the trees of the tall forest surrounding the ruin have grown everywhere. Two thousand years ago, this was the city of the first Vendhyan King, Orissa. When he died, he was worshipped as a god in a temple built over his tomb. Five hundred years later, the city was sacked and abandoned to become absorbed by the Forests of Ghendai and its location lost.

Peshkhauri – This is a powerful city and province in north-western Vendhya, but an hour's ride westward or northward of the Himelians. Like all Vendhyan cities, Peshkhauri is relatively noisy, replete with song, instruments and the noises of animals. This is a dangerous city, charged with keeping the hillmen in the hills. The prison quarters are separated from the rest of the city by a massive wall inset with an iron-bound door under an arch. The door is always guarded. Peshkhauri has a population of 28,569 people.

MINOR KINGDOMS RELATED TO VENDHYA

Kambuja – Kambuja lies to the east of Vendhya amid a steaming jungle. Its capital is Angkhor and, prior to the events of 'The Witch in the Mists' by L. Sprague de Camp, is ruled by Pra-Eun, the Lord of the Scarlet Circle, a sacred god king. Pra-Eun had amber skin and snake-like eyes. Whether these physical characteristics were part of his sorcerous corruption or standard traits for his people, the Saga is silent. The Games Master must make that decision. Perhaps the Kambujans are descended from remnants of the snake-people that King Kull conquered in pre-Cataclysmic times. Pra-Eun was killed by Euric the Huntsman, an Aquilonian who arrived with Prospero in the nick of time to help King Conan. Presumably, if the campaign is set after the events of 'The Witch of the Mists', someone else has taken the throne of Kambuja.

Kosala – Kosala lies to the west of Vendhya, separated from the golden kingdom by the Jhumda river. Different stories conflict as to the type of people that live here. In *Shadows in Zamboula* by Robert E. Howard, Baal-pteor describes a strong, brown people who worship Yajur by ritualized human sacrifice accomplished by strangling. In *Red Nails*, also by Howard, Conan says the Kosalan people look similar to the Vendhyans, slender, olive-skinned humans with finely chiselled features who appreciate dancing, feasting and love-making. Yota-pong is a city in Kosala, where the main temples to Yajur are. Some scholars believe Kosala was founded by Lemurians of a branch separate from that which spawned the Hyrkianians.

Uttara Kuru – Uttara Kuru is a far eastern land that is sandwiched between Kambuja and Vendhya, threatening and threatened by both. Chengir Khan, in Nyberg's *Return of Conan*, suggested conquering Uttara Kuru.

'Men say our cult is a survival of the ancient Stygian serpent-worship. That is a lie. Our ancestors came from Vendhya, beyond the Sea of Vilayet and the blue Himelian mountains. We are sons of the East, not the South, and we have knowledge of all the wizards of the East, who are greater than the wizards of the West.'

Robert E. Howard, *The Hour of the Dragon*

RELIGION IN VENDHYA

Vendhya reveres the mystical religion of Asura, a religion born of enormously complex rituals derived from four great books, the compilations of centuries of religious thought and practices. The priestly class prize their intellectual acumen, and they use that intelligence to further their own aims. The people believed in a cosmic order, a belief in cause and effect that extends beyond the physical realm, so, even as the Vendhyan civilisation was taking shape, the priests taught that if these mysterious and shadowed rituals were performed incorrectly, the cosmic order would be disturbed and catastrophe would follow, for Asura kept a keen eye on how smoothly the world ran. Of course, the priests were the only ones that could perform these clamorous rituals properly, allowing the priest class 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.

Asura is the chief god of Vendhya, and the protector of the royal family there and anywhere else they have influence. For the Asuran priests, sorcery and religious ritual amount to nearly the same thing. These priests understand sorcery and the best ways in which to fight and foil the activities of sorcerers. They understood the power of magical links, and counselled the Vendhyan royal family to destroy shorn hair, nail trimmings and other bodily waste materials.

The Vendhyans, with their strong belief in cause and effect, carry that thinking toward an idea of fate, an idea that reinforces the rigid caste system, for each man's position in life is a direct and unavoidable consequence of fate, a fate they 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. The Asuran priests teach that life is illusory and the only final truth comes after

Through the hot, stifling night the temple gongs boomed and the conchs roared... [Yasmina] threw her head up in a gusty gesture of wrath and despair as the thunder of the distant drums reached her ears.

'The priests and their clamor!' she exclaimed. ...Outside, the gongs and conchs brayed and thundered and the priests gashed themselves with copper knives.

R. E. Howard. The People of the Black Circle

More than two thousand years earlier, a conqueror called Orissa had carved a score of small nations and city-states into the kingdom of Vendhya, with himself as its first king. And when King Orissa died, an army of twenty thousand warriors was entombed with him, a royal bodyguard for the afterlife, preserved so perfectly by intricate thaumaturgies that though they no longer lived, neither were they dead as ordinary men died.

'Robert Jordan. Conan the Victorious

death, in the light of the soul. The cult devotes itself to 'penetrating the veil of illusion of life.'

Asura's doctrines reveal that all beings reincarnate, and that the purpose of life is the paying of the karmic debt against the soul. Each evil act extends the cycle of reincarnation; each good act shortens it. Those who suffer earned their trials in previous lives; they are not to be pitied.

The Vendhyans also do not believe time is a steady, linear progression; time is a cyclical perception instead. 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.

Asura is the chief god of the Vendhyans, much as Mitra is the primary god of the Hyborians, but, unlike Mitra, Asura does not rule the heavens alone. He leads an entire pantheon of mysterious gods. Katar is the vile goddess who leads the Katari, Vendhya's dreaded assassins.

Yama is the king of devils in Vendhyan belief. Yizil is another of their strange pantheon, but little is known of him. Hanuman is also worshipped in Vendhya. His image, wielding a *gada*, often adorns the doors and windows of Vendhyan temples as a guardian demon.

VENDHYAN HISTORY

During the Cataclysm, the uninhabited Vendhyan peninsula was thrust violently against the Thurian continent. The Himelian Mountains were pushed to their remarkable heights by

Simple Weapons

| Weapon | Cost | Damage | Critical | Armour Piercing | Range Increment | Hardness | Hit Points | Weight | Type |
|-----------------------------|------|--------|----------|-----------------|-----------------|----------|------------|--------|----------|
| Light Simple Weapons | | | | | | | | | |
| Bagh nakh [†] | 5 sp | 1d4 | x2 | 1 | - | 10 | 1 | 1 lb | Piercing |
| Katar [†] | 3 sp | 1d6 | x2 | 1* | - | 10 | 1 | 1 lb | Piercing |
| Kukri | 3 sp | 1d6 | x3 | 2 | - | 10 | 1 | 1 lb | Slashing |
| Peshkabz [†] | 1 sp | 1d6 | x2 | 3* | - | 12 | 1 | 1 lb | Slashing |

Martial Weapons

Light Martial Weapons

| | | | | | | | | | |
|------|-------|-----|----------|---|---|----|---|-------|----------|
| Kora | 50 sp | 1d8 | 19-20/x2 | 1 | - | 10 | 3 | 1½ lb | Slashing |
|------|-------|-----|----------|---|---|----|---|-------|----------|

One-Handed Martial Weapons

| | | | | | | | | | |
|----------|--------|------|-----|---|---|----|---|------|----------|
| Khandar* | 125 sp | 1d10 | x2* | 3 | - | 12 | 5 | 3 lb | Slashing |
|----------|--------|------|-----|---|---|----|---|------|----------|

Two-Handed Melee Weapons

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--------|--------|-----|----|---|---|----|----|------|-------------|
| Talwar | 150 sp | 2d8 | x2 | 3 | - | 10 | 10 | 6 lb | Slashing |
| Gada | 3 sp | 2d6 | x2 | 4 | - | 5 | 10 | 6 lb | Bludgeoning |

* See the weapon description for special rules. † Finesse weapon. ® Reach weapon.

this brutal crash of land mass against land mass. This hot land of steamy jungles and sweltering plains was soon discovered by the pre-Hyborian peoples, and they built great cities across the land. These magnificently ornate cities were served by water supply and drainage systems unmatched anywhere in the world. They carried on a wide-spread trade, and marked their wares with certain inscribed stone seals. Their organized city-states, numbering in the hundreds, sprung up throughout the entire peninsula during the 800 years their culture flourished.

*With a grim smile,
Conan tried the balance
of the blade she had given
him - a long Vendhyan
steel, light but well nigh
unbreakable.*

*Robert E. Howard and L.
Sprague de Camp. The Flame
Knife*

Approximately 2,500 years ago, this glorious realm had begun to gradually slip into decline. Trade networks slowly broke down even as agriculture was being disrupted by powerful monsoons that shifted the courses of life-giving rivers. A nomadic northern people, remnants of the Lemurians, calling themselves Kshatrya, swept through Himelian passes and conquered city-state after city-state, spreading their savage domination across the Vendhyan peninsula. Armed with swift chariots, the Kshatriya people, led by King Orissa, quickly captured and destroyed the aboriginal cities. The fascinating culture of the aborigines was utterly destroyed by

the King Orissa and his Kshatriyas. The Kshatriyas, however, did build up an exhaustive record of this civilisation's religious beliefs and practices. Originally passed along as an oral tradition for centuries, these beliefs and practices were compiled in four great books. During this time, the economic culture of King Orissa's people altered and grew; they began an agricultural culture, abandoning their old nomadic lifestyle. This drastic change did not diminish their basic character, however. Fearless and prideful, they remained an intense people who reigned supreme over those they conquered. The Kshatriyas treated their conquered victims with contempt and scorn. A principle of segregation was born as they divided their citizens into *castes*, hereditary groups of social classes.

In time, the Kshatriyas were no longer mere violent, invading nomads, the ancient descendents of the Lemurians; they became the builders of an ancient and proud civilization, a single kingdom known as Vendhya. No longer recognizable as Lemurians, they developed independently from the rest of the Thurian continent and now rule one of the most advanced and mysterious civilizations of the Hyborian Age.

VENDHYAN EQUIPMENT

Vendhya has survived so long in near independence from other nations that they have many unique items not found in the standard *Conan* rules. These weapons are exotic to non-Vendhyans.

| Armour | Cost | DR | Maximum Dex Bonus | Armour Check Penalty | Sorcery Failure | Speed (30 ft.) | Weight |
|------------------------------|----------|----|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------|
| Medium Armour | | | | | | | |
| Chahar-aina | 2,000 sp | 6 | +4 | -4 | 70% | 25 ft. | 20 lb |
| Heavy Armour | | | | | | | |
| Mail Hauberk and Chahar-aina | 3,600 sp | 9 | +1 | -8 | 95% | 25 ft. | 55 lb |
| Mail Shirt and Chahar-aina | 2,400 sp | 8 | +2 | -7 | 85% | 25 ft. | 40 lb |

WEAPON DESCRIPTIONS

Bagh Nakh: The *bagh nakh*, also known as tiger claws, is a nasty concealed weapon along the lines of brass knuckles with spikes. It is commonly held hidden in the hand with the claws on the palm side, not projecting from the knuckles. The weapon punches nasty tearing wounds in unarmoured foes.

Gada: The gada is a large war-club associated with martial arts in Vendhya and various militant gods. It is noted for its oversized head. The weapon is often made of brass and is the holy weapon of Hanuman.

Katar: The katar is a punching dagger. Some versions were scissored to allow two side blades to spring free of the central dagger. This version does +1d6 points of damage when open.

Khandar: This sword has a straight blade made of reinforced Vendhyan steel and is designed solely for hacking foes apart. A bar projects from the pommel, allowing it to be wielded with two hands for more powerful blows, changing the critical damage to x3.

Kora: Essentially a Vendhyan shortsword, this weapon has a forward curving blade with an extremely wide end, much like an axe. The sharp side is on the concave portion. This weapon is often used to perform ceremonial sacrifices in the incensed temples of Vendhya.

Kukri: The kukri is a heavy forward curving dagger meant for slashing. It serves the Vendhyans in place of a dagger and/or hand axe, able to perform the functions of either in a superior manner.

Peshkabz: The peshkabz, with its T-shaped cross-section, is a dagger designed to pierce armour.

Talwar: The talwar (not to be confused with the tulwar) is a curved, pointed sword, wide at the base and tapering down

to a sharp point like a curved, long triangle. Like the kora, this weapon is often used for religious sacrificial rites.

ARMOUR DESCRIPTIONS

Chahar-aina: The chahar-aina is also known as 'four mirror' armour, worn over quilted armour. Four plates, one over the chest, one over the back and one over each side comprises this regional armour.

LOCAL CREATURES

Vendhya's jungles provide a variety of fascinating life. Elephants, tigers, panthers, cheetahs, gazelles and gorillas can be found, and beautifully coloured birds fill the trees. Yaks and oxen wander through the highlands of the north, and some have been domesticated by the hill peoples.

CHEETAH

Medium Animal

Hit Dice: 3d8+6 (19 hp)

Initiative: +4

Speed: 50 ft. (10 squares)

Defence Value: 15 (+4 Dex, +1 natural), touch 14, flat-footed 11

Damage Reduction: 2 (tough skin)

Base Attack/Grapple: +2/+5

Attack: Bite +6 melee

Full Attack: Bite +6 melee (1d6+3) and 2 claws +1 melee (1d2+1)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Trip

Special Qualities: Low-light vision, scent, sprint

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +7, Will +2

Abilities: Str 16, Dex 19, Con 15, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 6

Skills: Hide +6, Listen +4, Move Silently +6, Spot +4

Feats: Alertness, Weapon Finesse

Environment: Warm plains

Organisation: Solitary, pair, or family (3-5)

Advancement: 4–5 HD (Medium)

Level Adjustment: —

Cheetahs are swift feline predators of the plains. A cheetah is a little over a metre long and weighs 110 to 130 pounds.

Combat

Cheetahs make sudden sprints to bring down prey.

Trip (Ex): A cheetah that hits with a claw or bite attack can attempt to trip the opponent (+3 check modifier) as a free action without making a touch attack or provoking an attack of opportunity. If the attempt fails, the opponent cannot react to trip the cheetah.

Sprint (Ex): Once per hour, a cheetah can move ten times its normal speed (500 feet) when it makes a charge.

CROCODILE, MARSH

Medium Animal

Hit Dice: 3d8+9 (22 hp)

Initiative: +1

Speed: 20 ft. (4 squares), swim 30 ft.

Defence Value: 15 (+1 Dex, +4 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 14

Damage Reduction: 5 (leathery hide)

Base Attack/Grapple: +2/+6

Attack: Bite +6 melee (1d8+6) or tail slap +6 melee (1d12+6)

Full Attack: Bite +6 melee (1d8+6) or tail slap +6 melee (1d12+6)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Improved grab

Special Qualities: Hold breath, low-light vision

Saves: Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +2

Abilities: Str 19, Dex 12, Con 17, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 2

Skills: Hide +7*, Listen +4, Spot +4, Swim +12

Feats: Alertness, Skill Focus (Hide)

Environment: Warm marshes

Organisation: Solitary or colony (6–11)

Advancement: 4–5 HD (Medium)

Level Adjustment: —

Crocodiles are aggressive predators that grow to be about four metres long. They lie mostly submerged in rivers or marshes, with only their eyes and nostrils showing, waiting for prey to come within reach. They prefer slow-moving, shallower areas. They have also adapted to live in reservoirs, irrigation canals, and other man-made bodies of freshwater, but are occasionally reported from saltwater lagoons. They have wider heads than most other crocodiles, and are referred to by the Vendhyans as 'water monsters.'

Combat

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, a crocodile must hit with its bite attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, the crocodile establishes a hold on the opponent with its mouth and drags it into deep water, attempting to pin it to the bottom.

Hold Breath (Ex): A crocodile can hold its breath for a number of rounds equal to 4x its Constitution score before it risks drowning.

Skills: A crocodile has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line. *A crocodile gains a +4 racial bonus on Hide checks when in the water. Further, a crocodile can lie in the water with only its eyes and nostrils showing, gaining a +10 cover bonus on Hide checks.

ELEPHANT

Huge Animal

Hit Dice: 11d8+55 (104 hp)

Initiative: +0

Speed: 40 ft. (8 squares)

Defence Value: 15 (–2 size, +7 natural), touch 8, flat-footed 15

Damage Reduction: 7 (thick, tough hide)

Base Attack/Grapple: +8/+26

Attack: Gore +16 melee (2d8+15)

Full Attack: Slam +16 melee (2d6+10) and 2 stamps +11 melee (2d6+5); or gore +16 melee (2d8+15)

Space/Reach: 15 ft./10 ft.

Special Attacks: Trample 2d8+15

Special Qualities: Low-light vision, scent

Saves: Fort +12, Ref +7, Will +6

Abilities: Str 28, Dex 10, Con 21, Int 2, Wis 15, Cha 7

Skills: Listen +13, Spot +11

Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Iron Will, Skill Focus (Listen)

Environment: Warm plains

Organisation: Solitary or herd (6–30)

Advancement: 12–22 HD (Huge)

Level Adjustment: —

Massive herbivores of tropical lands, elephants are unpredictable creatures but nevertheless are sometimes used as mounts or beasts of burden. Elephants in Vendhya are valuable workers. Although man-eating elephants are extremely rare, they are not unheard of. Man-killing elephants are more common. When enraged or frightened, an elephant may attack. Domesticated elephants that kill people are not destroyed; they are calmed down. The victim is replaced and life goes on.

This entry describes a Vendhyan elephant. Elephants from the Black Kingdoms are slightly larger and stronger (Strength 30), but less readily trained (Wisdom 13). They stand eight to ten feet tall at the shoulder. Females weigh about three tons and males can weigh up to six tons.

Combat

Elephants tend to charge at threatening creatures.

Trample (Ex): Reflex half DC 25. The save DC is Strength-based.

LION, VENDHYAN

Large Animal

Hit Dice: 5d8+10 (32 hp)

Initiative: +3

Speed: 40 ft. (8 squares)

Defence Value: 15 (–1 size, +3 Dex, +3 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 12

Damage Reduction: 3 (tough hide)

Base Attack/Grapple: +3/+12

Attack: Claw +7 melee (1d4+5)

Full Attack: 2 claws +7 melee (1d4+5) and bite +2 melee (1d8+2)

Space/Reach: 10 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Pounce, improved grab, rake 1d4+2

Special Qualities: Low-light vision, scent

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

Abilities: Str 21, Dex 17, Con 15, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 6

Skills: Balance +7, Hide +3*, Listen +5, Move Silently +11, Spot +5

Feats: Alertness, Run

Environment: Warm plains

Organisation: Solitary, pair, or pride (6–10)

Advancement: 6–8 HD (Large)

Level Adjustment: —

The Vendhyan lion, which is 5 to 8 feet long and weighs 200 to 550 kilograms, is a lazy and indolent creature. Females do the hunting, and drag their prey back to the pride, where the males eat first.

Combat

Pounce (Ex): If a lion charges a foe, it can make a full attack, including two rake attacks.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, a lion must hit with its bite attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can rake.

Rake (Ex): Attack bonus +7 melee, damage 1d4+2.

Skills: Lions have a +4 racial bonus on Balance, Hide, and Move Silently checks. *In areas of tall grass or heavy undergrowth, the Hide bonus improves to +12.

RHINOCEROS

Large Animal

Hit Dice: 8d8+40 (76 hp)

Initiative: +0

Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares)

Defence Value: 16 (–1 size, +7 natural), touch 9, flat-footed 16

Damage Reduction: 8 (extremely thick hide)

Base Attack/Grapple: +6/+18

Attack: Gore +13 melee (2d6+12)

Full Attack: Gore +13 melee (2d6+12)

Space/Reach: 10 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Powerful charge

Special Qualities: Low-light vision

Saves: Fort +11, Ref +6, Will +3

Abilities: Str 26, Dex 10, Con 21, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 2

Skills: Listen +14, Spot +3

Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Improved Natural Attack (gore)

Environment: Warm plains

Organisation: Solitary or herd (2–12)

Advancement: 9–12 HD (Large); 13–24 HD (Huge)

Level Adjustment: —

The rhinoceros is infamous for its bad temper and willingness to charge intruders.

The one-horned Vendhyan rhino, which is 12 feet long, 5 to 6 feet high at the shoulder, and weighs up to 6,000 pounds, has poor vision and cannot see a non-moving animal 100 feet away. Its sense of smell and hearing, however, is extremely acute.

Combat

When it is harassed or annoyed, a rhinoceros lowers its head and charges.

Powerful Charge (Ex): A rhinoceros deals 4d6+24 points of damage when it makes a charge.

TIGER, VENDHYAN

Large Animal

Hit Dice: 6d8+18 (45 hp)

Initiative: +2

Speed: 40 ft. (8 squares)

Defence Value: 14 (–1 size, +2 Dex, +3 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 12

Damage Reduction: 3 (tough hide)

Base Attack/Grapple: +4/+14

Attack: Claw +9 melee (1d8+6)

Full Attack: 2 claws +9 melee (1d8+6) and bite +4 melee (2d6+3)

Space/Reach: 10 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Improved grab, pounce, rake 1d8+3

Special Qualities: Low-light vision, scent

Saves: Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +3

Abilities: Str 23, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 6

Skills: Balance +6, Hide +3*, Listen +3, Move Silently +9, Spot +3, Swim +11

Feats: Natural Attack (claw)

Environment: Warm forests

Organisation: Solitary

Advancement: 7–12 HD (Large); 13–18 HD (Huge)

Level Adjustment: —

In Vendhya, the tiger is the king of the wild, reigning supreme. The only thing a tiger fears is another tiger. It can be found almost all over the kingdom, ranging from mangrove swamps, sandalwood forests, the high foothills of the Himelians, or the vast plains.

The Vendhyan tiger is a rich-coloured animal with a short coat. It averages 3 metres in length, and weighs around 180-230 kilograms. The females weigh about 45 kilograms less than the males and are slightly shorter.

Combat

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, a tiger must hit with a claw or bite attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can rake.

Pounce (Ex): If a tiger charges a foe, it can make a full attack, including two rake attacks.

Rake (Ex): Attack bonus +9 melee, damage 1d8+3.

Skills: Tigers have a +4 racial bonus on Balance, Hide, and Move Silently checks. *In areas of tall grass or heavy undergrowth, the Hide bonus improves to +8.

‘Ah, the Devi rules with a wise and firm hand, though she has no consort to stand by her side and uphold her. But the nobility say the throne needs a warlike spirit. It is even whispered that her cousin Chengir Khan has an eye for the supreme power and also for herself. Hitherto she has repulsed his wooing, but public sentiment will soon force her to decide. The dynasty must be carried on, and Yasmina must do her duty to the realm.’

‘Bjorn Nyberg, The Return of Conan’

ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

The Devi’s advisors desperately want her to marry and produce an heir. Adventures could be woven around the characters being hired to escort her potential husband to Vendhya. Perhaps someone will try to assassinate the Devi before she can marry and the characters get wind of the plot. Maybe the characters are hired to do the killing – and King Conan hears of the plot...

A warrior on horseback named Kalki, deemed an avatar of Asura by the Vendhyans, has raised a Vendhyan army and intends to lead this army north to conquer the world.

During the time of the Hyrkanian invasion, many of the old towns were abandoned, and the people frequently stashed away mysterious hordes of copper religious objects. Occasionally these hordes are found by the Vendhyans or other adventurers, unleashing horrible events.

There are more lost ruins in Vendhya than are known. Many date from the time of the aboriginal pre-Vendhyans. Others simply were abandoned due to war, plague or monsters.

ZAMORA

Towers of Spider-Haunted Mystery

ZAMORA IS A mysterious nation of thieves, kidnapers, extortionists, prostitutes and sorcerers. Small villages boast white hedge witches and the larger cities have powerful priests that work such potent magic that even the king fears them. Zamora's population is approximately fourteen million persons, many of them packed into overcrowded cities. The two largest cities, Shadizar and Arenjun, boast a combined population of more than 70,000 people. Thirty-one lesser cities dot the landscape, averaging around 10,000 people each. The vast bulk of the population can be found in the nearly 200 towns and 18,000 villages that are spread out across the nation small, desperate bastions of farmers and herders banded together for protection and survival.

...Zamora with its dark-haired women and towers of spider-haunted mystery...

The Nemedian Chronicles

Zamora is not a Hyborian kingdom peopled with Hyborians – thus its culture does not even faintly resemble that of the Hyborian realms. Zamora is not a feudal society. Zamora is an absolute despotism, rife with thievery and sorcery. In Conan's youth, its king was Tiridates. The king, however, tends to fear the powers of priests and ancient wizards and often seems to be a puppet-king played by the strongest mesmerist. The king is a drunkard, preferring to remain drunk than to have to deal with his fears while sober. For years Yara of the Elephant Tower was the true power in Zamora. He was killed by dark magic from Yogah of Yog with some help from Conan.

...Zamora was an absolute despotism where differing political opinions were not tolerated.

Robert E. Howard. Letter to P.S. Miller

Priests and wizards seem to be ever in abundance in Zamora, although their presence is nowhere near as visible as in shadow-haunted Stygia. Zamora is an ancient kingdom, descended from a mysterious race known as the Zhemri, an elder and evil race

from pre-Cataclysmic times. The fortunes of the Zhemri, and later, Zamora, rose and fell constantly. Currently the 3,000-year-old civilisation has fallen into decadence and its people are viewed as a wicked race of thieves, cutthroats and sorcerers.

The thieves of Zamora are the most faithful of men to their trust.

Robert E. Howard. The Hour of the Dragon

Zamorians do make the best thieves and are well regarded for not betraying their employers if hired for thievery. This has nothing to do with honour, but is entirely an instance of the Zamorians realizing that a certain degree of faithfulness is simply good for business.

Many of the common people outside of the big cities live by herding sheep or cattle. Zamora also mines tin, copper and iron from the mountains that cover two thirds of Zamora's borders.

Zamora, especially in the cities of Shadizar and Arenjun, is a marketplace for Turanian slave caravans. Even though Zamora is a bit concerned about the Turanians nipping at their mountainous borders, Zamora is pleased to accept Turanian trains. Slavery is quite accepted in Zamora.

It was exactly such laughter as he had heard bubble obscenely from the fat lips of the salacious women of Shadizar. City of Wickedness, when captive girls were stripped naked on the public auction block.

Robert E. Howard. The Scarlet Citadel

Zamorians, as a race, tend toward a dark complexion with dark eyes and black hair. Many trade routes pass through Zamora, particularly through Shadizar the Wicked, giving a

cosmopolitan air to many of its cities, creating a melting pot of humanity. Shemites, Corinthians, Turanians, Hyrkanians and others have found homes in Zamora. Zamora is a lively place.

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF ZAMORA

Zamora is an arid, infertile land, not suited for farming. Mountains border the kingdom on the Northeast and on the Northwest. In the time of Conan's rulership of Aquilonia, Turan had conquered the Zamorian Marches on the east side of the Kezankian Mountains.

'That is Thak,' answered the priest, caressing his temple. 'Some would call him an ape, but he is almost as different from a real ape as he is different from a real man. His people dwell far to the east, in the mountains that fringe the eastern frontiers of Zamora.'

Robert E. Howard, Rogues in the House

Desert of Yondo – Due east of Ong in the north, this wasteland is known for its thorns and cacti. Many of the cacti hold poison instead of water, although few know of this. The desert is home to many normal desert animals, especially vipers and lizards, as well as many abnormal ones. These include two-headed vipers, snakes that can survive being split asunder and giant beetles. The desert used to be a fertile plain but was destroyed by black magic.

Karpash Mountains – These mountains mark the border of Zamora against the nations of Brythunia and Corinthia. The Karpash Mountains are an extensive range of mountains extending from Brythunia to Ophir. Several passes between Corinthia and Zamora are named in the apocryphal texts, such as Donar Pass, Haraan Pass and the Haunted Pass.

† **Haunted Pass** – High in the Karpash Mountains on the north fork of the Corinthian Road, the Haunted Pass between Corinthia and Zamora is noted for the eerie sounds the winds make. A haunted lake, Spokesjo, lies at the top of the pass, where undines live.

† **Mount Turio** – This ice-capped mountain was once the tallest peak in the Karpash range between Zamora and Corinthia, however, it turned out to be volcanic and the mountain exploded, blasting the top half of the mountain into volcanic ash ten million years ago, according to Steve Perry in his *Conan the Freelance*. Time healed the wounds and an icy, deep lake-filled crater remained, filled

with Sargasso weed. A recent re-eruption destroyed the lake.

Kezankian Mountains – These mountains form a natural barrier between Zamora and Turan. Many things lurk in these mountains, including ape-men and villages of hill people. The hill people of the Kezankians are notoriously hostile toward strangers. The range was created during the lesser cataclysm and is younger than some of the other mountain ranges in the known world. The Nezvaya River runs through the northern part of the range, creating a corridor between Zamora and Turan. Another pass lies near Arenjun, as does the Temple of the Bloodstained God. Ape-men dwell in the northern reaches of the Kezankians.

IMPORTANT ZAMORIAN CITIES

Zamorian villages tend to be low buildings sprawled out around small temples with slender towers. Gongs can often be heard ringing from the towers and fragrant smoke rises from the myriad altars. Many sport tall statues of gods and demons.

'That evening they came to the first Zamoran village, a sprawl of low buildings and small temples where gongs sounded from slender towers at all hours. Fragrant smoke rose from the altars of the gods, and the marketplace bustled with all the usual activity of commerce.'

John Maddox Roberts, Conan and the Amazon

Arenjun – Arenjun is known as 'the City of Thieves.' Yara once lived here in the Elephant Tower a perfect, gleaming tower that rose 150 feet and showed no opening. The jewel-encrusted tower crashed into gleaming shards after Yara's death and the ruin can be seen still in an overgrown and abandoned garden in the temple district. It is in the lawless Maul, one of the most dangerous areas in Zamora, or in any kingdom of the world, where rogues of all sorts gather, including 'furtive cutpurses, leering kidnappers, quick-fingered thieves, swaggering bravoos with their wenchies.' The Maul is a place of abject poverty, a refuge for the poor, a place for people new to the city and a haven for thieves and kidnappers – and their ill-gotten gains. Arenjun has a population average of 30,000.

Kalandor – Kalandor is a small city at the foot of the Zamorian Mountains that handles trade from Brythunia. It is located at the Zamorian end of a mountain pass into Brythunia. It has a population of 8,764 people.

Khesron – This Zamorian city lies at the other end of a caravan route through the Kezankians to Sultanapur in Turan.

Ketha – Ketha lies on the caravan trail between Shadizar and Zamboula. Its economy is based on nearby stone quarries

Torches flared murkily on the revels in the Maul, where the thieves of the East held carnival by night. In the Maul they could carouse and roar as they liked, for honest people shunned the quarters, and watchmen, well paid with stained coins, did not interfere with their sport. Along the crooked, unpaved streets with their heaps of refuse and sloppy puddles, drunken roisterers staggered, roaring. Steel glinted in the shadows where rose the shrill laughter of women, and the sounds of scufflings and strugglings. Torchlight licked luridly from broken windows and wide-thrown doors, and out of those doors, snatches of obscene songs, rushed like a blow in the face.

'Know that in Zamora, and more especially in this city, there are more bold thieves than anywhere else in the world, even 'Koth.'

Robert E. Howard, The Tower of the Elephant

and the skill of its stone masons. It has a population of 9,000 people.

Larsha – Larsha is a ruined city near Shadizar. Legends tell of great treasures and a horrible curse lurking within. Built in Cataclysmic times by the Zhemri and ruled by giant kings, legend has it that the centre of the city was a royal palace carved out of a massive crag. Within this darksome ruin lurked the mummies of the giant kings that eternally guard their treasures. Conan encountered seven of them; they were, he discovered, destroyed instantly by sunlight. In Conan's youth, after his adventure within the walls of Larsha, an earthquake largely

Larsha was said to be immensely old. According to the tales, it went back to Cataclysmic times, when the forebears of the Zamorians, the Zhemri, formed an island of semi-civilization in a sea of barbarism.

Stories of the death that lurked in these ruins were rife in the bazaars of Shadizar. As far as Nestor had been able to learn, not one of the many men who, in historic times, had invaded the ruins searching for the treasure rumoured to exist there, had ever returned. None knew what form the danger took, because no survivor had lived to carry the tale.

A decade before, King Tiridates had sent a company of his bravest soldiers, in broad daylight, into the city, while the king himself waited outside the walls. There had been screams and sounds of flight, and then – nothing. The men who waited outside had fled, and Tiridates perforce had fled with them. That was the last attempt to unlock the mystery of Larsha by main force.

Robert E. Howard and L. Sprague de Camp, The Halls of the Dead

destroyed the city. That monolithic black basalt palace is now nothing more than a huge hill of rubble. If any passages or chambers still exist beneath the vast broken blocks they remain hidden to this day. The severe damage of the earthquake has reduced the city to rubble, yet people still avoid the ill-reputed ruin, afraid of lingering curses.

Ong – Known for its brutal inquisitors, Ong is another city-state of northern Zamora. The lion-headed god of pain, also called Ong, is worshipped here. The city has a population of 2,456 people.

Ramaraj – A city-state of Zamora. (SS 180)

Sayara – Sayara is a small city of northern Zamora on the trade route between Shadizar and Kalandor.

Shadizar – Known as 'Shadizar the Wicked,' this complex city is well-known as a city of thieves. It is separated into different 'quarters,' such as the Desert, a *Maul* where debaucheries performed in privacy elsewhere in the city is done quite publicly with a mind toward profit. The tavern of Abuletes can be found there, and is accorded to be one of the best in Shadizar. Here the dancers dance naked and the thieves barter openly. The Desert is also home to the infamous *Katara Bazaar*, where Turanians sell their slaves, and places such as the *House of the Lambs of Hebra*, an infamous 'specialized' brothel. Eriakes's Inn is a popular stop for foreigners newly arrived in Shadizar and is at the edge of the Desert. Although other quarters of the city are patrolled by city guards, the Desert is not. Elsewhere in the city, the nobility dwell in beautiful palaces with lush gardens. Although Shadizar is the capital of Zamora and home to Zamora's despot, drunken ruler, much of the city is virtually ungoverned, save by whatever government can be bought with bribery, sorcery and brutal violence. The king's palace is alabaster and its walls are five times the height of a man. The King's Own protects those walls, loyal troops that wear gilded half-armor and horsehair-crested helms. Within those walls are the throne rooms and chambers of the king, where the servants, dancing girls and playthings of the king, dress only in jewelled necklaces, attend to the needs of their drunken master and cavort with his advisors and sycophants. Shadizar of over 40,000 inhabitants.

More information on Shadizar will be featured in the forthcoming *Shadizar, City of Wickedness* sourcebook.

Yezud – Yezud is well known as the city of the Zathites, the worshipers of the Spider-God. Yezud is built upon a fantastic crag on Mount Graf in the Karpash Mountains. A single pass moves up those hump-backed mountains, a path that alternately widens enough for a small village then narrows so that only a single horse could move though it easily. The final village on the path is Khesron, which boasts one public house, Bartake's Inn. Only Zath's

Night caressed Shadizar, that city known as 'the Wicked,' and veiled the happenings which justified that name a thousand times over. The darkness that brought respite to other cities drew out the worst in Shadizar of the Alabaster Towers, Shadizar of the Golden Domes, city of venality and debauchery.

In a score of marble chambers silk-clad nobles coerced wives not theirs to their beds, and many-chinned merchants licked fat lips over the abductions of competitors' nubile daughters. Perfumed wives, fanned by slaves wielding snowy ostrich plumes, plotted the cuckolding of husbands, sometimes their own, while hot-eyed young women of wealth or noble birth or both schemed at circumventing the guards placed on their supposed chastity. Nine women and thirty-one men, one a beggar and one a lord died by murder. The gold of ten wealthy men was taken from iron vaults by thieves, and fifty others increased their wealth at the expense of the poor. In three brothels perversions never before contemplated by humankind were created. 'Doxies beyond numbering plied their ancient trade from the shadows, and twisted, ragged beggars preyed on the trulls wine-soaked patrons. No man walked the streets unarmed, but even in the best quarters of the city arms were often not enough to save one's silver from cutpurses and footpads. Night in Shadizar was in full cry.

Robert Jordan, Conan the Magnificent

priests and those who work for the temples are permitted to remain within Yezud's walls overnight. Yezud and its satellite villages have a combined population of 6,438 people.

Zamindi – Zamindi is a village on the road between Shadizar and Yezud. Conan once rescued Nyssa, a witch, from being burned at the stake by the villagers. The village breeds horses and is known for its fleet-of-foot population. They are accepting of white witchcraft, but burn perceived black magic practitioners at the stake. It has a population of seven hundred.

Zardas – located at the crossing of two roads just north of the border between Koth and Khauran. Built next to a small river, it is a large cattle market.

'Those fellows must have horses,' he muttered between clenched teeth.

'Aye, sir: the village breeds them and has a score of the beasts. And the lads are spry afoot: they beat the other villages in foot races at every fair. I used to be proud of my village.'

L. Sprague de Camp, Conan and the Spider God

RELIGION IN ZAMORA

The Zamorians worship many divinities, having no problem with importing and accepting foreign gods.

Most Zamorian cities have local patron gods that embody the city in some manner, the spider-god of Yezud being one such patron. Other gods represent natural

forces or concepts, such as the Shemite god Bel, worshipped in Zamora as the god of thieves and patron of the city of Arenjun. Foreigners to Zamora find the Zamorian pantheon extremely complex and difficult, if not downright oppressive. All Zamorian priests enforce absolute obedience among their congregations and are quite skilled in mesmerism to ensure unwavering loyalty.

One of the most famous of Zamora's many gods is the spider-god of Yezud,

called Zath by some. The cult centre for Zath is in Yezud, where temple girls wearing black jet beads dance before the black stone spider that is their god. Zath is a god of purity and the goal of its priests is to purify Zamora and bring about a new golden age, freed from degeneracy. The main temple of Yezud, larger than the palaces of Turan, boasts a mammoth statue of the spider-god. It is a weird, hideous, black and hairy-legged idol of polished black stone. Zath is a deification of the huge, ogreish



He had entered the part of the city reserved for the temples. On all sides of him they glittered white in the starlight - snowy marble pillars and golden domes and silver arches, shrines of Zamora's myriad strange gods. He did not trouble his head about them; he knew that Zamora's religion, like all things of a civilized, long-settled people, was intricate and complex, and had lost most of the pristine essence in a maze of formulas and rituals. He had squatted for hours in the courtyard of the philosophers, listening to the arguments of theologians and teachers, and come away in a haze of bewilderment, sure of only one thing, and that, that they were all touched in the head.

Robert E. Howard, The Tower of the Elephant

black spiders that are native to Zamora, such as the one at the top of the Tower of the Elephant.

Religious rites to Zath are extremely ritualised and involve many priests and naked dancing girls draped only in black beads. The sanctuary of Zath's temple has two doors on either side of an altar. From the left-hand door walk a procession of stately priests, a dozen of them in turbans of coloured silk and embroidered, brocaded robes of varied colours. They carry jewelled ritual staves topped by either gold or silver, depending on rank. In the lead is the High Priest, who wears white robes and a black turban. One of the priests then leads the congregation in a weird song that proclaims Zath's purity. Four

Then the priests, with measured tread, formed two lines along the sidewalls of the sanctum, as through the right-hand door eight dancing girls approached the spider-god. All were naked save for enormous strings of jet-black beads, intricately threaded to resemble the webs of spiders. Jewels flashed in their ebon hair and on their graceful fingers like dewdrops in the morning sun.

He who wore the sapphire robe produced a flute and played a haunting melody, to which the girls performed a stately dance around the mammoth idol, their strings of beads jingling and clashing as their slender bodies swayed and undulated. Conan whispered:

'I thought Zath was a god of purity. Those lassies look not to me like a preachment more chastity.'

'Sh, sir! You do not understand,' breathed the boy, his eyes alight with religious fervor. 'This is a sacred dance, ancient and honourable. The virtue of our dancing girls is guarded with the utmost vigilance.'

L. Sprague de Camp, Conan and the Spider God

of the priests then ritually move to an ever-burning flame kept in the temple and perform complex rites involving a silver chalice, a bronzed mirror, a jewelled dagger and a key of gold, passing each item through the smoke of that eternal fire.

After that complex and largely incomprehensible ritual, the priests line up on either side of the sanctum and the eight dancing girls, prized for their virtue and flexibility, walk impressively and solemnly through the right-hand door. One of the priests plays eerie music through a flute and the girls begin a lascivious dance that ends with each prone on the floor, touching one of the legs of the mammoth statue of monstrous Zath. Hand in hand, the dancing girls leave and the high priest addresses the congregation with his sermon. The dancing girls return, dressed more conservatively in rainbow-hued gowns and sing hymns as donations are collected. Afterward, another song is sung by the congregation and the ritual ends.

The people of Yezud believe that their statue of Zath *is* Zath, and that the spider-god can assume a living form at will, usually at night, in the presence of priests. The primary form of execution in Yezud is to feed a criminal to the spider-god.

The spider-god of Yezud is not Zamora's only deity. The Zamorians import gods from other lands and peoples as well, depending on need and desire. One such god is Bel, a god of thieves in the Zamorian pantheon. Regarded well by Conan in comments made to Bêlit, it is unlikely this god required human sacrifice, as so many of the gods of this age do. Conan tended to display disgust at any god that demanded human sacrifice. Bel is described as both lusty and clever, as befitting a god of thieves. Bel is a Shemite god, yet is still regarded as the patron god of Arenjun, the City of Thieves.

Another god in Zamora is the lion-headed god of pain, Ong. Ong is worshipped by accepting various methods of pain and bondage. His center of worship is in a city of the same name in the northern reaches of Zamora.

ZAMORIAN HISTORY

Zamorian history begins in the time-shrouded past, the time of Valusia and Atlantis. An ancient people known as the Zhemri existed outside of the kingdom of Valusia. Some sages believe the Zhemri were part of Grondar. When the Cataclysms rocked the Earth, a remnant of this culture survived. For a thousand years they existed among the torrential rivers and vast jungles of that epoch, slowly degenerating to a stone-age existence, they merged with another tribe – although through conquest or agreement is a matter for the scholars to debate. Five hundred years later



Of the civilized races of the Thurian Continent, a remnant of one of the non-Valusian nations dwells among the low mountains of the southeast - the Zhemri... To the southeast the descendants of the Zhemri, given impetus by new blood resulting from admixture with some unclassified tribe, are beginning to seek to revolve some faint shadow of their ancient culture.... Southeast of Hyperborea a kingdom of the Zhemri has come into being, under the name of Zamora.

Robert E. Howard, The Hyborian Age

And we saw this race of devils, survivors of the ancient civilization that was before Atlantis sank, come once more into culture and power - this accursed kingdom of Zamora.

Robert E. Howard, The Tower of the Elephant

the Zhemri 'devils' sought to revive their ancient culture, a culture preserved primarily through an oral tradition, and to rise again to dominance.

The Zhemri culture fought for another thousand years to rebuild their culture and to regain their ancient glories. They mined old ruins for artefacts and icons. Old Zhemri libraries

were uncovered and the knowledge of the ancients were deeply delved into. They also found themselves warring against tribes of Hyborians and other peoples of the era as Hyperborea grew in power. In the fighting, a sense of national identity was regained and the kingdom of Zamora was born from the ashes of the time-lost Zhemri culture.

Zamora traded extensively with Acheron and had nearly the same sinister reputation as that long-dead culture. That Acheron fell to the Hyborians and Zamora did not is an insight into either the might of the Zamorians or their treachery, for they may have aided the Hyborians.

ADVENTURES AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

The inhabitants of Zamora have been building castles for over three thousand years. There are approximately 500 standing fortifications in Zamora of varying ages and sizes. 180 of these piles of ancient stones are ruined or abandoned, either through war, pestilence or magic. Most of them are hidden in remote or unsettled areas, or wilderness. All manner of treasure or dangers may be rumoured to exist within the ruined walls of these towers and citadels.

ZINGARA

Land of Chivalry and Conspiracy

ZINGARA

ZINGARA IS A land torn apart and ruined by civil war. Historically a king ruled the land out of Kordava, but the elegant, bejewelled and hosed princelings and nobles, who usually fought petty battles among themselves and the Poitanians, rose up and destroyed themselves and their noble kingdom in flame and blood. The refined swordsmanship of the Zingarans unfortunately turned against itself. At its peak, Zingara had a population of nearly twenty million inhabitants. Today, that number is considerably less, under nine million still count the kingdom as home. The kingdom is faltering, unable to support itself – fertile fields are outnumbered by those left salted, burned farmhouses dot the landscape and far too many of the country's castles and armies have been crushed. The ghouls of the central region have begun to prowl, even toward the north and the Poitanian border.

Zingara was a feudal land, a monarchy in Hyborian fashion, though Zingara is not a true Hyborian kingdom (see sidebar on the king of Zingara). Under a dazzlingly complex political system, dukes and counts rule fiefs in the name of the King in Kordava, although in most cases that fealty was, at best, nominal and somewhat confusing. The nobles of Zingara are a proud, individualistic race, not given to subservience. They rebelled both openly and secretly. This continual backstabbing, political manoeuvring and social ladder-climbing under weak kings who were more concerned about the state of Argos' shipping brought about the final dissolution of Zingara as a bastion of civilisation and good breeding. Today, Zingara is a faltering anarchy.

The King of Zingara: King Ferdrugo de Ramiro is dead. If the Games Master sets the campaign prior to the events

of *The Black Sphinx of Nebithu* (or decides those events never happen in case players want to try for the throne), then the throne of Zingara sits empty. After the events of that story, King Conan has set up a puppet throne in Zingara. King Olivero and Queen Chabela de Ramiro rule under the overlordship of Aquilonia. Even so, the kingdom is still in anarchy. The civil wars have ruined the kingdom. Much work needs to be done to restore order. This will require money and troops, something the new king and queen do not have a lot of. Will they indebt themselves further to King Conan and ask for aid? Will they strive to squash Argos' shipping to capture the

It was an unquiet land through which he rode. The companies of cavalry which usually patrolled the river alert for raids out of Poitain, were nowhere in evidence. Internal strife had left the borders unguarded. The lone white road stretched from horizon to horizon. No laden camel trains or rumbling wagons or lowing herd moved along it now: only occasional groups of horsemen in leather and steel, hawk-faced, hard-eyed men, who kept together and rode warily. These swept Conan's with their searching gaze but rode on, for the solitary rider's harness promised no plunder, but only hard strokes.

Villages lay in ashes and deserted, the fields and meadows idle. Only the boldest would ride the roads these days, and the native population had been decimated by the civil wars and by raids from across the river. In peaceful times the road was thronged with merchants riding from Poitain to Messantia in Argos, or back. But now these found it wiser to follow the road that led through Poitain, and then turned south down across Argos. It was longer, but safer. Only an extremely reckless man would risk his life and goods on this road through Zingara.

The southern horizon was fringed with flame by night, and in the day straggling pillars of smoke drifted upward; in the cities and plains to the south men were dying, thrones were toppling and castles going up in flames.

Robert E. Howard, The Hour of the Dragon

sea trade market? What about the future? The king and queen have eleven children, princes and princesses all and the bloody civil wars seem ripe to begin again...

Once the proud possessor of a major shipping industry, Zingara is an exotic land existing between the Pictish Wilderness, the Bossonian Marches, Aquilonia and Argos. Although often times thought of merely as Argos' maritime rival, Zingara has in the past been a land of agriculture and elegance.

Manners and pleasures in Zingara were elements of their elegance and sophistication. Ballet troupes learned the finest dances in the schools and the fine art of fencing was taught to all noblemen. Waving scented handkerchiefs, the nobility of Zingara plotted and conspired against fellow nobles even as they talk elegantly of philosophy and civility. There is a movement in Zingara to move away from the old feudal system, which clearly has failed, to a republic.

...they had learned to work crudely in copper and tin, which was found scantily in their country, and for which latter metal they raided into the mountains of Zingara, or traded hides, whale's teeth, walrus tusks, and such few things as savages have to trade.

Robert E. Howard. The Hyborian Age

...ride incessantly through the fields with whips in their hands like the slave drivers of the black serfs who toil in the plantations of southern Zingara.

Robert E. Howard. A Witch Shall Be Born

Historically, Zingara tried hard to outdo Argos in the seas. The Zingarans managed to trade along the Pictish Wilderness, despite the intense ferocity of the Sea-Tribes that exceed even the savagery of those Picts that ravaged Velitrium. They traded tin, ostrich plumes from Kush via Stygia, wine, weapons and other goods for copper ore, hides, gold dust, whale teeth, walrus tusks and other goods made by the Picts. The Picts tend to fiercely resist contact with the Hyborian nations, but reluctantly traded with the Zingarans, probably because they are not entirely Hyborian and have a distant kinship with the Picts. This trade is something the traders of Argos never try. The coast is too savage, largely uncharted (at least by Argossean chart-makers) and frightening. Today, there is little trading going on by Zingaran merchants along the Pictish Wilderness.

The Picts have, as a result, increased the frequency of their raids, sensing the instability of Zingara.

Zingara's primary export was probably tin, which is essential for the making of bronze. The mountains of this proud land are mined for tin, a rare commodity in any land, but readily found here. Their once great plantations yielded crops of grapes, sugar, tobacco and grain, and black serfs were brought in to work these vast plantations of southern Zingara, labouring under the whips of cruel slave-masters hungry for wealth and prestige. No more. Most of those fields are gone, burnt by the civil wars that have raged from one end of Zingara to the other. From the grapes, highly regarded Zingaran wines were once distilled. Even this industry has come to a crashing halt in recent years. In addition to the agricultural products produced in the fertile southlands, leather was another staple product from the Zingarans. This industry proceeds even today.

In its prime, Zingaran swordsmanship was taught in both formal fencing-schools as well as in the deadly backstreets of every city, though many Zingarans learn only the civilian arming sword, rather than the more military-oriented broadsword. The Zingarans developed one of the most sophisticated forms of elite fencing ever developed – a sheer art form to behold. Many of these fencing schools may still survive and those that have burned are slowly being rebuilt. Many feel these schools, which also taught principles of chivalry, are essential to the rebuild of Zingara, to keep it from sliding backwards into barbarism. All they need is a strong king...

The Zingarans were by nature neither explorers nor colonists.

Robert E. Howard. The Black Stranger

Zingarans try to dress well. Trunk hose and doublets of silk with puffed and slit sleeves are common for the men. Cloaks hang from their shoulders. Boots of the finest Kordavan leather adorn their feet. Soldiers dress in steel and satin. Armour and garments are always ornate and made of the best material that can be afforded, stolen or made. Thin black moustaches are also common. Royal soldiers dress in burgundy and gold.

Turan is remarked by its imperialistic expansionist policies. Aquilonia's nobility are greedy for land and wealth, willing to take it from Nemedica, the Pictish Wilderness, Cimmeria or anywhere else. Ophir hungers for Aquilonian soil. Koth wants to retake Khauran and Khoraja. Stygia slumbers with barely restrained hostility, remembering glory days of empire that it threatens to restore. Zingara, however, desires no colonies, desires no new lands. They are a civilised people and they have what they have. Trying to lord over lands that are possibly hostile to invaders is a stress Zingara chooses not



to bear. Instead, they seek commercial domination of the sea for their growth and wealth and continued independence. An exception to that rule may be Poitain, which Zingara may well consider its own; perhaps Poitain is the aggressor in the many battles that take place over the Alimane River. Poitain is also a land well known to the Zingarans. A prideful people, seeking out new lands smacks of dissatisfaction with their homeland and culture to the Zingarans. They will usually only leave Zingara by force, be it force of arms or force of circumstance.

ZINGARAN FREEBOOTERS

The Freebooters were once loyal Zingaran subjects, given legal charters as privateers to prey upon Argossean shipping and to halt the depredations of the Barachans. Fierce Zingaran independence soon reared its savage head and the Freebooters went renegade, preying even upon their own country's ships. This treachery did not endear them to the Zingarans.

The Freebooters are not welcome in Zingaran ports and more often than not these renegade pirates will find themselves hanged should they be found there. Similarly,

they can find an unwelcome reception at Tortage in the Barachans and so have made their bases on remote, mostly inhospitable flea-speck islands about the sea. An uncounted number of islands could lie off the shores of Zingara, Argos, Shem and the Pictish wilderness that are either not large enough to be depicted on the standard maps or have simply been forgotten.

The captain of a Freebooter ship is the absolute authority... at least so long as his seamanship, swordsmanship and success in plunder acquisition holds up. To obtain the rank of captain, a qualified Freebooter must kill the former captain in a fair fight. Anything less is considered a mutiny, the last choice for an oppressed crew.

There is a time-honoured tradition of baiting strangers among the Freebooters, where they test the stranger with violence. This establishes the stranger's status among the crew. The testing is both brutal and bloody. The pirates press around the stranger menacingly. One man pushes the brawl. It begins with taunts and insults, then the fight starts. It is a one-on-one fight, and how the stranger comports himself establishes his 'rank' among the crewmember. The stranger does not

need to win, but he must not prove himself a coward or a weakling.

The Freebooters dress in a typically pirate fashion. Sashes, bare chests, silken pantaloons, great loops of gold in their ears, sabres, cutlasses and so on. These pirates often sailed in carracks, a large, sea-worthy ship.

The Freebooters are rapacious and cruel, feared as much as the Barachans, especially by the Argosseans. They maraud ships and raid coastal towns. There probably are not too many of these pirates or one of the larger nations would have sent more forces out to tame them. Also, plenty of sea-faring traffic carries trade good across the oceans. If there were so many pirates out there that no ship could pass unscathed, then trade would be shifted overland and Argos and Zingara would be out of business – and would, without hesitation, wage such a war on the pirates that the seas might never wash out the taint of blood from the shores of their island abodes. The Freebooters are not numerous, which makes the handful still out there all the more famous and well-known.

MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF ZINGARA

Zingara is a fertile land. Two great rivers, the Thunder and the Black, flow through it, although Argos claims the mouth of the Thunder River. Zingara borders the ocean and has at least one major port, Kordava. Mountains and great forests separate Zingara from the Pictish Wilderness. These mountains are rich in tin. The Alimane River provides a border with Poitain. The border with Argos is a ghoulish forest. The Zingg valley is the dominant interior feature and lies between the Black and Thunder River. The interior of the kingdom is basically fertile, perfect for growing sugar cane and vineyards.

Off the coast of Zingara are the Barachan Islands, the Trallibes, and at least one other island. The infamous pirate Tranicos looted the castle island of the exiled Stygian, Prince Tothmekri, before heading to the Pictish Wilderness to hide the treasure. On most maps of the Hyborian Age, only the Barachans are shown. That island may be off of the Zingaran Coast, the Argossean Coast or possibly the Shemite coast.

Alimane River - This river marks the border between Aquilonia and Zingara. It is too shallow in places to allow much, if any, navigable river trade. In *The Hour of the Dragon*, Conan can walk his horse across the

South of the ranges the rich and beautiful plains of Poitain stretched to the river Alimane; but beyond the river lay the land of Zingara.

Covetous neighbours surrounded Poitain and her sons have learned fortitude in incessant wars. To the north the land was guarded by the mountains, but to the south only the Alimane separated the plains of Poitain from the plains of Zingara, and not once but a thousand times had that river run red.

Robert E. Howard. The Hour of the Dragon

river. A caravan trail follows along the banks of the Alimane. The road crosses the road to the Khorotas at the village of Pedassa.

† **The Place of Skulls** – This is the north-eastern corner of Zingara where many raids and battles with Poitain have taken place. It is a grim region of blood and death. Most assuredly it is haunted. King Conan, angry at continued Zingaran invasions even after their civil war and by the Zingaran assassination of King Milo of Argos, utterly destroyed a host of Zingarans led by Duke Pantho de Guarralid here.

Black River – The Black River has a swift current, yet is quite deep and rather wide, carrying a large volume of water. The river's source is somewhere in the mountains of northern Pictland. It then flows southward along the border of the Bossonian Marches, then along the frontier border of Westermarck. Eventually it curves to the West as it flows into Zingara on its course to the open sea. The Zingaran capital of Kordava sits at its mouth.

Forest of Ghouls – This dark forest in southern Zingara is on the border of Argos in the foot hills of the Rabirian Mountains. These woods are uninhabited because of the ghouls, eaters of human flesh, the children of unholy matings with demons of the underworld by a lost and forgotten race. Somewhere in these primitive woods is an ancient, accursed city where the ghouls live. Panthers also stalk the woods.

Rabirian Mountains – This mountain range in northern Argos forms a border between Argos and Zingara. It is also the location of the Cave of Zimgas, where, according to *Conan the Guardian* by Roland Green, a being known as a 'watcher' lived. These serrated peaks have forested crests and are broken by the Saxula pass, 'a deep cleft in the central ridge, as if made by a blow from an axe in the hands of an angry god' (L. Sprague de Camp, *Conan the Liberator*). The pass is near the Alimane River. The foothills of the Rabirian



IMPORTANT ZINGARAN CITIES

Zingara has 44 cities, nearly a 200 towns and over 40,000 villages. About 19 of these cities, 90 towns and 10,000 villages have been razed in the civil war, mostly in the north. The saga names several places, such as Jerida, but does not indicate if they are cities, towns, villages, estates or provinces. Guarralid may be the name of a duchy. Yorkin is the name of a small hamlet in Zingara.

Kordava – Kordava is the walled capital of Zingara. 49,954 residents call this great harbour home. The nominal king of Zingara lives here in his palace. Before the ravishing civil wars described in *The Hour of the Dragon*, Kordava had one of the finest harbours on the Western Ocean. An unsurpassed school of swordsmanship is located here, run by the great Master Valerio, turning out some of the

most renowned swordsmen of Zingara's courts. A typical night watch detachment consists of six guardsmen. Entering the city from the road to Messantia, travellers come to the central market, located on the south side of the city, filled with jostling humanity pouring in from beleaguered, outlying towns and villages, bringing produce from the limited, remaining fields, fish from the sea and goods produced by the various guilds of the towns. The eastern side of the city, behind great magistrate halls and administrative buildings, is the prison and the Dancing Yard, where executions open to the public take place. By royal concession, mountebanks peddle souvenirs from the more famous condemned men as the crowds gather to watch the villains hang. Although many cities have their thieves' districts, Kordava's is unique. Centuries ago an earthquake crumbled much of Kordava, sinking it into the sea. The city was rebuilt over the ruins. Displaced homeless poor found that they could find shelter by digging out the old streets beneath the new foundation. Called the Pit, this district is a subterranean warren where any lurid vice or sordid entertainment can be enjoyed. The city barracks lie on the north-west side, next to the royal palace. Located to the east of the barracks is a beautiful castle, noted for its floor of polished crystal. Princess Chabela de Ramiro, the daughter of

Mountains are rocky and are the home of several villages. These mountains are full of precious ores and are extensively mined.

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

Trallibes – Islands off of Zingara, perhaps off the coast of the Pictish Wilderness. These may be the secret stomping grounds of the Freebooters, who are hanged if they return to Kordava or any Zingaran port. These may also have been an area of reefs and shoals.

Zingg Valley – A fertile valley between the Black and Thunder Rivers, with mountains on either side, this is the birthplace of Zingara, the original settling area of the indigenous people regarded as similar to the Shemites.

ZINGARA



old King Ferdrugo still lives here. Kordava itself is ruled by a duke in his own castle. That a king also resides here shows the complex feudal system that exists in Zingara. Thus far, Kordava has avoided most of the damage the civil wars have wrought in the north.

On the prie-dieu also stood a small painted icon of Mitra, Lord of Light and chief divinity of the Kordavan pantheon. An impulse to seek supernatural guidance brought her to stand shivering on the tiles. Wrapping the lacy coverlet about her voluptuous, olive-hued body, she crossed the bedchamber to kneel before the idol.

L. Sprague de Camp, Conan the Buccaneer

ZINGARAN NAMES

Zingaran names tend to have a definite Latin cast to them, almost Spanish or gypsy in sound. Male names tend to end in 'o' for men and 'a' for women. Often, Zingarans put the name of their family estate or home city in their name, using 'de' between their given name and the final name. Count Valenso de Korzetta is an example of a full name, meaning 'Count Valenso of Korzetta' with Korzetta being the family estate. Prince Zapayo de Kova is another example from the Conan Saga.

Next to the Picts, in the broad valley of Zingg, protected by great mountains, a nameless band of primitives, tentatively classified as akin to the Shemites, has evolved an advanced agricultural system and existence.

Robert E. Howard, The Hyborian Age

Zingaran characters gain a +2 racial bonus to any Profession skills they should take. Zingarans also gain a free proficiency with the rapier.

RELIGION IN ZINGARA

The religion of Zingara is 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 Zingaran 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 king-like role. The saints have vanished, but the legions of heaven and hell remain. A variant of Ishtar probably 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.

ZINGARAN HISTORY

Zingara evolved out of a group of primitives in the valley of Zingg. These early Zingarans were similar to the Shemites in form and lived south of the Picts. Several thousand years later, a southern tribe of Picts attacked them, invading their peaceful agricultural society. The Picts settled there. They intermarried and adopted much of the Zingg culture, mixing and matching ideas and bloodlines as time went on, creating an exotic culture.

The world was entering an age of iron, an age of war and imperialistic ambition: some strong man might well rise above the ruins of nations as a supreme conqueror.

Robert E. Howard, The Hour of the Dragon

Then, as happened to many of these burgeoning cultures, the Hyborians arrived, burning, looting, slaying everything in their paths, conquerors of unequalled passion. The Hybori tribe that discovered the valley of Zingg conquered and, in turn, mixed in their heritage with the cauldron brew of culture already there. For five hundred years more this triple concoction boiled and bubbled, even as Acheron fell in flames beneath the scintillating torches and singing swords of the Hyborians and the Hyrkarians finally rode out of the east to establish Turan. Zingara had risen from its fertile valley.

Neighbouring Argos was founded on the heels of Acheron's demise, a vulture that dove for the sea trade established by that now-dead kingdom. Commerce sprung up between Zingara and Argos, as well as between Zingara and Poitain. Blood and kinship developed between the trio of nations. From the people of Argos, they learned about the wealth to be gained from the sea trade, and so Zingara built ships and sailed the mighty blue oceans, seeking wealth and treasure abroad.

At some point in history, Zingara decided to just sink Argos' merchant fleet, chartering patriotic privateers with letters of marque to plunder their enemy's shipping and, perhaps, to neutralise piratical Argosseans out of the Barachan Isles. Known as the Zingaran Freebooters, they preyed upon the Argossean coastal towns and shipping with rapacity not even the Zingaran nobility could have anticipated. The ancient feud between Argos and Zingara took an extremely bloody turn with the chartering of pirates. The Argosseans had their own band of pirates, the Barachans, whose favoured targets were Zingarans, especially Zingaran Freebooters. Although the Barachan pirates refrained from attacking Argossean ships in return for safe harbour in Messantia and other Argossean ports, the Freebooters turned renegade and began to attack Zingaran ships and coastal towns just as often as they did Argossean ships and towns.

The independent nature of the Zingarans, which would later show itself in countless rebellions against Aquilonia after it conquers the nation, likely explains why the Freebooters broke free of their noble charters. Ships are like a country or kingdom unto itself and the proud Zingarans would treat them like independent states of Zingara. Just as the chivalric dukes of Zingara engage in petty conflicts among themselves, conflicts that rage on up to full out civil wars, so too would these little states wage war against their own kind as well.



ADVENTURE AND CAMPAIGN HOOKS

Zingara is ripe for conquering right now. Its people are beggared and its nobles in ruin or in hiding. The characters could be defending Zingara or sent as part of an invading force. Perhaps the Freebooters have found their patriotism again and have decided to defend their home or perhaps they have decided that simply gutting what is left of Zingara would be more profitable.

A noble of Zingara, fleeing the carnage, was unable to find his daughter before being forced off his land. He hires the characters to go into war-torn Zingara to rescue her.

The Barachan Pirates have also sensed the fatal wounding of Zingara and may mass to make an all-out assault on Kordava, to burn it to the ground. This may create the scenario for a massive war between the Barachans and the Freebooters.

Tired of being left out of all the trade afforded by the Thunder River, Zingara has decided to attack Napolitos, hiring mercenaries and buccaneers to aid their noble knights in the conquest. Players, as mercenaries, could work for either side of this war as participants fighting in the battles or as diplomats trying to stave off all-out war. Perhaps Aquilonia will come to the aid of Argos. Perhaps Aquilonia will do nothing, unaware of the attack at first.

In a campaign set in Zingara's prime, before the final civil wars destroyed it, players could try to stave off the destruction and save the dissolution of the great maritime nation.

In a campaign set after King Olivero is given the Zingaran throne by King Conan of Aquilonia, characters could be hired to help restore order to the trampled nation. This would work particularly well for Aquilonian or Zingaran characters who might be compelled to act out of a sense of national pride.

In a campaign set during the civil wars, characters could be put in command of units for mass combat scenarios, laying siege to castles and destroying rival princes' armies. Although the north is burning, the wars in the south still are being waged with venomous ferocity.

Other Peoples of the Hyborian Age

KOZAKS

ALTHOUGH NOT PART of Hyrkania proper, the wild steppes north and west of Turan are populated by criminals and soldiers who have taken up the Hyrkanian way of life, living on horseback in a nomadic and bloody lifestyle of violence and looting. Called the *kozaks* (KAHS-aks) by the Turanians, they called themselves the Free-People. *Kozaks* are superior horsemen and exceptional warriors, ready for battle at any moment.

Anybody join the *kozaks*, if the *kozaks* consider him a worthy warrior. *Kozaks* are independent and known for their freespirt. Men of all nations, each with a score to settle against mighty Turan, lived among the *Kozaki* in the vast steppe.

The region the *kozaks* inhabit was originally peopled by non-Hyrkanian pastoral folk of unclassified or mixed heritage. The Hyrkanians are cruel masters, especially the Turanians, and the dregs of their society would flee into the steppe to be absorbed by these aboriginal people. The *kozaks* probably number in the tens of thousands if they ever unite, but unity is a difficult dream to realize with such independently minded folk. As it stands, the *kozaks* are split into multiple communities, with each having their own *hetman* (leader). These *hetmen* are not chosen by virtue of noble lineage or any other hereditary fact. *Kozak* leaders are chosen for being dynamic, vital and powerful, willing to dare raids against their hated foe, Turan.

The *kozaks* prey upon the Turanians almost exclusively, targeting outposts, villages and caravans. They live primarily on the Steppe, but sometimes they pitch their camps as far east as the Zaporoska River. They raid caravans going to or coming from Khitai, Vendhya and Iranistan. *Kozaks* take Turanian captives and the Turanians take *kozaks* captive. Each ransoms their captives

to the other, meeting at Fort Ghori in force for these distrustful summits.

Kozaks, just like the Hyrkanians, are superb horsemen. In *Red Nails*, Conan tells Valeria, 'I was a *kozak* before I was a pirate. They live in the saddle.' They can remain in the saddle for extremely long periods of time, even sleeping in the saddle. Their horsemanship is a necessity for survival; their guerrilla tactics require impressive mobility. They raise horses, stealing them from caravans or buying them from the Zuagirs, the bandits who live in the deserts to the south of the steppes (see Shem, page 108).

Kozaki are often named for the rivers they operate around. *Kozaki* around the Zaporoska River, for example, are called Zaporoskans. The *kozaks* dress as Hyrkanians, wearing their daggers and weapons girdled high on their hips.

On the broad steppes between the Sea of Vilayet and the borders of the easternmost Hyborian kingdoms, a new race had sprung up in the past half-century, formed originally of fleeing criminals, escaped slaves, and deserting soldiers. They were men of many crimes and countries, some born on the steppes, some fleeing from the kingdoms in the west. They were called 'Kozak, which means wastrel.

'Dwelling on the wild, open steppes, owning no law but their own peculiar code, they had become a people capable even of defying the Grand Monarch. Ceaselessly they raided the Turanian frontier, retiring in the steppes when defeated.

'Robert E. Howard, The Devil in Iron

THE RED BROTHERHOOD

In the great land-locked Vilayet Sea exist a sea-faring equivalent of the *kozaki*. Control of that sea is of great importance to Turan, but the Turanians are harsh task-masters, and their escaped criminals, slaves and unemployed mercenaries gather together to pull Yezdigerd's beard by changing the course of the mighty shipping lanes by preying upon the merchants. Occasionally, Turanian ship-captains, tired of escorting caravans for little recompense, turn pirate in hopes of making a better living.

The pirates of the Vilayet are known as the 'Red Brotherhood' and they ply the sea-lanes fairly freely, making use of the uncharted, unnamed islands that dot the Vilayet. Turanian ships tend to cruise the southern shores and stay away from the interior of the Sea, while the pirates make use of the entire Vilayet. The pirates prefer to prey upon ships that cross through the interior, travelling east to west, for these ships usually have fantastic treasures from the East in their cargoes.

In addition to mere pirating activity, the Red Brotherhood are also smugglers, willing to take on cargoes Turan outlaws or taxes too heavily. The pirates have accumulated enough wealth that several pirate-captains have built strongholds on the shores of the Vilayet or its islands.

The mercenaries brought up the rear, a thousand horsemen, two thousand spearmen. The tall horses of the cavalry seemed hard and savage as their riders: they made no curvetts or gambades. There was a grimly businesslike aspect to these professional killers, veterans of bloody campaigns. Clad from head to foot in chain mail, they wore their vizorless headpieces over linked coils. Their shields were unadorned, their long lances without guidons. At their saddlebow's hung battle axes or steel maces, and each man wore at his hip a long broadsword. The spearmen were armed in much the same manner, though they bore pikes instead of cavalry lances.

They were many men of many races and many crimes. There were tall Hyperboreans, gaunt, big-boned, of slow speech and violent natures; tawny-haired Gundermen from the hills of the northwest; swaggering Corinthian renegades; swarthy Zingarans, with bristling black moustaches and fiery tempers; Aquilonians from the distant west. But all, except the Zingarans, were Hyborians.

Robert E. Howard, 'Black Colossus'

...with the pirates of Vilayet, men of much the same breed, they harried the coast, preying off the merchant ships which plied between the Hyrkanian ports.

Robert E. Howard, 'The Devil in Iron'

'Vilayet is an Hyrkanian pond.'

'Some folk don't think so,' grined Conan grimly, 'notably the slaves that have escaped from galleys and become pirates.'

Robert E. Howard, 'Shadows in the Moonlight'

More information on the Red Brotherhood can be found in the forthcoming *Pirate Isles Sourcebook*.

THE BARACHAN ISLANDS

Thirteen volcanic islands off the coast of Zingara comprise Baracha. Although nearer to Zingara, the Barachan Isles are settled by renegade Argossean buccaneers. The buccaneers are not fond of Zingaran privateers.

Tortage – Tortage is the only major city among the Barachan Islands mentioned in the Saga. It is a roaring city filled with pirates, loot and bloodshed. It is a safe haven for most pirates, save the Black Corsairs and the Zingaran privateers.

THE FREE COMPANIES

Ferocious, cruel, lustful and without mercy, the mercenaries of the Hyborian Age are, like the *Kozaki* and the *Zuagirs*, cosmopolitan in their composition. Shemites, Hyperboreans, Zingarans, Gundermen, Corinthians, Zingarans, Aquilonians, Kothians and even Cimmerians can be found swelling their ranks.

Not everyone is cut out for a life of peace and

tranquillity, farming their land or picking their orchards while their children play underfoot. For some, the thunderous spirit of storms fire their blood and their restless natures know no path other than one of violence and bloodshed. These men are the Free Companies, a common name for those who otherwise are known as mercenaries. They know no liege other than the one who pays them, and no liege owes them service other than payment.

The mercenaries lie outside the feudal governments that pervade the Hyborian kingdoms. It is a dangerous life. If the mercenaries lose, and their lord is defeated then they will not get paid. Money and loot goes to the successful and the victorious. If their lord negotiates a peace with the enemy while the mercenaries are battling in hostile territory, the lord does not have to negotiate for free passage out of enemy territory – and they do not necessarily get paid in this event either. The lord has no feudal duty to pay ransoms for captured mercenaries. The mercenaries do not have a feudal duty to not loot and pillage their former lord's lands, either.

Despite the dangers for both sides, mercenaries fill definite needs in Hyborian Age warfare. Few lords can afford to maintain standing armies of gigantic size, especially during periods of peace. It is far easier to hire a temporary army and dismiss them when the need is gone than to pay continual salaries for armies that may or may not be needed. Also, most Hyborians do not consider infantry to be an honourable form of service. Mercenaries rarely care about such things and can serve as infantry without faltering, following orders and maintaining discipline, something most levied infantry can not do with their minimal training. On the other side of the coin, most mercenaries are too free spirited to serve in a regular army and too hot-blooded to maintain peace-time posts. For them, the thrill of life is in fighting, wenching and looting. Working as a mercenary virtually guarantees them their blood-thirsty thrills until they die.

The mercenaries can be found from one side of the world to the next, from the Pictish Wilderness to Khitai, from the cold mountains of Nordheim and Hyperborea to the hot jungles of the Black Kingdoms. Anyone willing to fight for gold is welcome in their ranks man, woman or child. Valeria is an example from Robert E. Howard's Conan stories of a female mercenary. Red Sonja is an example from the comics.

During times of peace, when no wars are in the offing, the Free Companies are problematic. They take

'I was one of those dissolute rogues, the Free Companies, who burned and looted along the borders. There were five thousand of us, from a score of races and tribes. We had been serving as mercenaries for a rebel prince in eastern Koth, most of us, and when he made peace with his cursed sovereign, we were out of employment: so we took to plundering the outlying dominions of Koth, Zamora and Turan impartially.'

Robert E. Howard, (Shadows in the Moonlight)

to looting, raiding and terrorism to keep themselves occupied. Few mercenaries, however, grow wealthy and retire. Their loot is quickly spent and their life is one that hungers for adventure and excitement – and ultimately rewards them with death.

More information on the Free Companies can be found in the forthcoming *Free Companies Sourcebook*.

ANCIENT PEOPLES

ACHERON

When Robert E. Howard first penned *The Hyborian Age*, he made no mention of Acheron. As he wrote the Conan stories, he tended to stick with his fictional history. Later, though, he added the dark kingdom of Acheron with its purple towers and vile sorcerers. The addition of this extremely large and important kingdom does not fit all that smoothly with his history. L. Sprague de Camp made the most famous attempt to shoe-horn in Acheron, but other theories on Acheron do exist. The Games Master must decide which theory he likes best or come up with his own.

ACHERON (GIANT-KING THEORY)

Xaltotun is the most famous of the Acheronians written about in the Saga, appearing in *The Hour of the Dragon*, where we learn the most about Acheron in general. Looking at a description of Xaltotun, a few features can be noted. He is tall, white of skin, dark-haired and possesses glowing eyes. The description is almost identical to the description of Akivasha, who is from the race of pre-human Giant-Kings that populated Stygia before the dusky-skinned

Stygians came. The description also fits the elder race encountered in a King Kull story. Thus, it follows that Xaltotun, who is descended from years and years of dark diabolism, is one of the Giant-Kings. Since Xaltotun is also an Acheronian, Acheron must also have been founded by the Giant-Kings of old and not by an offshoot of the dusky race that founded Stygia after conquering the Giant-Kings, as L. Sprague de Camp indicates.

The Acheronians are an elder race, a race of wizards extending back through history for hundreds of thousands of years. Acheron was established by colonising the Khorotas and Tybor river valleys. When the Stygians overthrew the Giant-Kings, refugees travelled by ship to their colonies in the West. Acheron grew and became a kingdom. The Stygians ended up putting the Giant-Kings on pedestals and their heirs became the ruling caste of Stygia. This event cemented an alliance between Stygia and Acheron.

The Hyborians, when they came south, came down through Brythunia and through the Border Kingdom and the Bossonian Marches. Koth, Ophir and Corinthia were settled by the Hyborians, as were the Bossonian Marches. The Acheronian kings, Xaltotun tells us, used to capture the Hyborians as slaves and sacrifices. Koth, Ophir and Corinthia became more civilised than those Hyborians in Bossonia. This allowed Acheron to control those three nations. Eventually, new tribes of Hyborians swept southward, the Aquiloni and Nemedi tribes. They paved the way for the final destruction of Acheron and the Giant-Kings.

ACHERON (DE CAMPIAN THEORY)

L. Sprague de Camp establishes that Acheron is a branch of Lemurians, an offshoot of those dusky-skinned people that founded Stygia. One problem with this theory is that Stygia was not founded by Lemurians. It was founded by the unknown and unidentified race that *enslaved* the Lemurians. Regardless, this race established Acheron at the same time Stygia was founded. It existed for 500 years before the Hyborians started knocking on its doors in the north. Acheron battled the Hyborians for 2,000 years before it finally fell. The Hyborians then went down and conquered Koth, Ophir and Corinthia from whatever tribes held those newly independent states (Howard tells us those nations co-existed with Acheron, were independent states before Acheron dominated them, and had their independence restored with the fall of Acheron).

This theory is less than satisfying because Howard tells us that the Hyborians founded Koth, Ophir and Corinthia,

but this theory either has a non-Hyborian origin for these realms or denies their co-existence with Acheron. Any way it is looked at, this theory ignores much of what Howard has established. It ignores Xaltotun's obvious racial characteristics, the Hyborian origins of several nations and co-existence with Acheron of same and shows a misunderstanding of who founded Stygia.

A revised version of this origin has been postulated where Acheron was a Stygian colony that began in the Tybor valley and moved north, allowing for the Hyborians again to filter around through Gunderland and the Bossonian Marches and through Brythunia, allowing for Hyborian-founded-kingdoms of Koth, Ophir and Corinthia. Some of the tall, white, luminous-eyed rulers of Stygia, the remnants of the Giant-Kings, travelled with the Stygians when they set-up these colonies, explaining the racial characteristics of Xaltotun.

THE BUILDERS OF GREEN-STONE CITIES

In five of the *Conan* stories written by Robert E. Howard, Conan encounters cities built of green stone. In all cases, the original builders have long since vanished. Who built them? Why are they not mentioned in *The Hyborian Age*? What happened to them? These cities all seem to have names with the letter 'X' in them. They are all designed very symmetrically with all the buildings interconnecting, often so that the city appears to be one large, mammoth castle. They could create food and other items out of the basic elements with their magic and/or science. They could build cities in inaccessible places. Howard's *Kull* stories proved a clue that indicate that the Lemurians did not need cultivation or agriculture and had knowledge of strange architecture. Could the builders of the green-stone cities be a lost colony of Lemurians? It is certainly an interesting possibility, but likely no one will ever be sure. This Hyborian mystery provides Games Masters with the chance to run adventures exploring this strange, unknown race.

Notables of the Hyborian Age

KING CONAN

Medium Human Male Cimmerian

Barbarian 15/Soldier 2/Thief 1/

Pirate 2)

Hit Dice: 10d10+50+15+6+2+4 (137 hp)

Initiative: +20 (+6 Dex, +14 Reflex save)

Speed: 25 ft.* (plate armour)

DV (Dodge): 29 (+13 level, +6 Dex)

DV (Parry): 25 (+7 level, +8 Str)

DR: 14 (+10 plate armour, +2 visored helm, +2 natural)

Attack: Greatsword +26 melee; or Bossonian longbow +24 ranged

Full Attack: Greatsword +26/+21/+16/+11 melee; or Bossonian longbow (+8) +24/+19/+14/+9 ranged

Damage: Greatsword 2d10+8, or Bossonian longbow 1d12+8

Special Attacks: Ferocious Attack, To Sail A Road Of Blood And Slaughter, Sneak Attack +1d6/+1d8, Sneak Attack Style (broadsword), Greater Crimson Mist, Versatility (proficient with all weaponry, double threat range)

Special Qualities: Fearless, Bite Sword, Trap Sense +5, Uncanny Dodge, Improved Uncanny Dodge, Mobility, Improved Mobility, Greater Mobility (not usable in current armour), Damage Reduction 2/-, Seamanship +1 (+1 to DV on board ship), Pirate Code (Barachan Rockets and Smoke), Trapfinding, Barbaric Code of Honour.

Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1)

Saves: Fort +20, Ref +20, Will +13 (+16 vs. Corruption, +15 vs. fear or Terror)

Abilities: Str 26, Dex 22, Con 21, Int 20, Wis 19, Cha 21

Skills: Balance +16, Bluff +28, Climb +20, Decipher Script +13, Hide +15, Intimidate +15, Gather Information +10, Jump +10, Knowledge (arcana) +15, Knowledge (geography) +15, Listen +13, Move Silently +25, Perform (song) +6, Profession (sailor) +12, Ride +15, Search +8, Sense Motive +14, Spot +13, Survival +15, Swim +13



Feats: Track, Diehard, Endurance, Fighting-Madness, Leadership, Sleep Mastery, Dabbler (Counterspells), Striking Cobra, Navigation, Combat Expertise, Improved Sunder, Greater Sunder, Improved Trip, Brawl
Possessions: Greatsword, superior black-painted plate armour (maximum Dex bonus +3), superior visored helm, arming sword, poniard, Bossonian longbow, 24 arrows.

[A] tall man, mightily shouldered and deep of chest, with a massive corded neck and heavily muscled limbs. He was clad in silk and velvet, with the royal lions of Aquilonia worked in gold upon his rich jupon, and the crown of Aquilonia shone on his square-cut black mane; but the great sword at his side seemed more natural to him than the regal accoutrements. His brow was low and broad, his eyes a volcanic blue that smoldered as if with some inner fire. His dark, scarred, almost sinister face was that of a fighting-man, and his velvet garments could not conceal the hard, dangerous lines of his limbs.

Robert E. Howard. The Hour of the Dragon

The above possessions and game statistics assume Conan is fully prepared for war, and attired accordingly. If attacked at his palace, he might be unarmoured, and if expecting something more like a skirmish than all-out war, he is more likely to wear a simple mail shirt or mail hauberk than the full plate armour he is given here. Although Conan has had access to Akbitanan weapons at times during his career, he does not appear to use them when king of Aquilonia, presumably wielding Aquilonian-made weaponry instead.

Even as king, Conan is still very much a man of action. If he discovers a threat to his rule, he will tend to ride out and meet it head-on – though these days he may ride out at the head of many thousands of armoured knights. He has learnt a certain degree of caution, and will certainly act in a manner befitting his high Intelligence; but given no other options, he would sooner be acting than sitting about in a council meeting.

His position as king will probably never be entirely secure. Perhaps no king is ever so fortunate as to be secure, but Conan in particular must deal with almost constant attempts by the old ruling house to restore its crown. Even the common people, though they know on one level that Conan is the best thing that has ever happened to Aquilonia, still sometimes feel an emotional nostalgia for the old tyrant King Vilerus. In any event they are fickle, and soon forget the liberating benefits Conan's reign has brought, especially if roused by a sentimental bard or charismatic rebel.

CONAN THE THIEF

Medium Human Male Cimmerian Barbarian 2/Thief 1

Hit Dice: 2d10+1d8+9 (29 hp)

Initiative: +9 (+4 Dex, +5 Reflex save)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV (Dodge): 15 (+1 level, +4 Dex)

DV (Parry): 13 (+0 level, +3 Str)

DR: -

Attack: Broadsword +5 melee; or improvised thrown weapon +4 ranged

Full Attack: Broadsword +5 melee; or improvised thrown weapon +4 ranged

Damage: Broadsword 1d10+4, or improvised thrown weapon 1d6+1 or 1d8+1

Special Attacks: Sneak Attack +1d6/+1d8, Sneak Attack Style (broadsword), Crimson Mist, Versatility (only -2 penalty for non-proficiency)

Special Qualities: Fearless, Bite Sword, Trapfinding, Barbaric Code of Honour.

Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1)

Saves: Fort +6, Ref +9, Will +6 (+9 vs. Corruption, +8 vs. fear or Terror)

Abilities: Str 17, Dex 18, Con 17, Int 16, Wis 15, Cha 17

Skills: Balance +9, Climb +10, Gather Information +4, Hide +9, Intimidate +4, Jump +8, Knowledge (arcana) +4, Knowledge (geography) +4, Listen +7, Move Silently +9, Search +7, Spot +7, Survival +7, and Swim +7

Feats: Track, Fighting-Madness, Sleep Mastery, Brawl

Possessions: Broadsword, tunic, belt, loincloth.

He saw a tall, strongly made youth standing beside him. This person was as much out of place in that den as a gray wolf among mangy rats of the gutters. His cheap tunic could not conceal the hard, rangy lines of his powerful frame, the broad heavy shoulders, the massive chest, lean waist and heavy arms. His skin was brown from outland suns, his eyes blue and smoldering, a shock of tousled black hair crowned his broad forehead. From his girdle hung a sword in a worn leather scabbard.

Robert E. Howard. The Tower of the Elephant

Conan as a young man is impetuous almost to the point of foolhardiness, but he is already quick and strong enough to deal with most of the wild situations into which he throws himself. This version of Conan reflects him around the time of *The Tower of the*



Elephant. By the time of *The God in the Bowl* and *Rogues in the House*, he has likely advanced by around two or three more levels of barbarian, adding further raw combat prowess and toughness to his already considerable abilities. It seems that however great a thief he becomes, he will always need to fight his way out of the situation at some point.

Conan's skills and feats reflect for the most part his past as a wild hillman in Cimmeria, where we know he spent his time fighting and raiding, climbing mountains, and tracking wolves and other creatures. This past stands him in good stead as a thief. His style is very much suited to stealth, but he relies on his climbing skills to bypass most obstacles rather than bothering to learn the intricacies of lock-picking. If he must get past a lock, he will simply use his already powerful muscles to burst it open, despite the noise. He has picked up a little knowledge of geography on his travels from Cimmeria through Vanaheim, the eastern Hyborian kingdoms and Zamora. He is also trying to learn a little of the ways of wizards, not through any especial desire to become one but because he recognised early on that they often have the most valuable loot.

CONSTANTIUS

Medium Human Male Kothic soldier 10

Hit Dice: 10d10+20 (75 hp)

Initiative: +6 (+3 Dex, +3 Reflex save)

Speed: 25* ft. (plate armour)

DV (Dodge): 18 (+5 level, +3 Dex)

DV (Parry): 22 (+7 level, +5 Str, +1 Parry)

DR: 12 (+10 plate armour, +2 visored helm)

Attack: Greatsword +17 melee; or arbalest +13 ranged

Full Attack: Greatsword +17/+12 melee; or arbalest +13 ranged

Damage: Greatsword 2d10+9 melee; or arbalest 1d12 ranged

Special Attacks: Heavy Cavalry Formation (+1 AP within 20 ft. of other allied heavy cavalry), Heavy Infantry Formation (+1 damage within 10 ft. of other heavy infantry)

Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1)

Saves: Fort +9, Ref +6, Will +2

Abilities: Str 20, Dex 16, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 8, Cha 14

Skills: Diplomacy +11, Gather Information +4, Intimidate +15, Knowledge (geography) +3, Profession (siege engineer) +14

Feats: Leadership, Power Attack, Cleave, Great Cleave, Weapon Focus (greatsword), Weapon Specialisation (greatsword), Improved Critical (greatsword), Combat Reflexes, Parry, Reflexive Parry, Mounted Combat, Spirited Charge, Greater Weapon Focus (greatsword)

Corruption: 2

Leadership: 14 (+10 level, +2 Cha, +2 cruelty)

Possessions: Plate armour, visored helmet, greatsword, arming sword, poniard, Hyborian warhorse, arbalest, 20 bolts, good-quality arming doublet and hose.

Constantius, whom men called the 'Falcon, was tall, broad-shouldered, slim-waisted, lithe and strong as pliant steel. He was handsome in an aquiline, ruthless way. His face was burnt dark by the sun, and his hair, which grew far back from his high, narrow forehead, was black as a raven. His dark eyes were penetrating and alert, the hardness of his thin lips not softened by his thin black mustache. His boots were of 'Kordavan leather, his hose and doublet of plain, dark silk, tarnished with the wear of the camps and the stains of armor rust.

'Robert E. Howard. A 'Witch Shall 'Be 'Born

NATALA, THE BRYTHUNIAN SLAVE GIRL

Medium Human Hyborian Commoner 1

Hit Dice: 1d4+1 (4 hp)

Initiative: +0

Speed: 30 ft.

DV (All): 10

DR: -

Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +0/+0

Attack: Unarmed +0 (1d4 subdual)

Full Attack: Unarmed +0 (1d4 subdual)

Special Qualities: Adaptability, weapon familiarity (greatsword), illiteracy

Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1) /5 ft. (1)

Magical Attack Bonus: +0

Saves: Fort +1, Ref +0, Will -1

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 9, Wis 8, Cha 13

Skills: Bluff +3, Craft (cooking) +7, Craft (weaving) +7, Sense Motive +1

Feats: Skill Focus (cooking), Skill Focus (weaving)

Climate/Terrain: Brythunia

Reputation: Talented 1

Code: Civilised

Treasure: None

Advancement: By character class.

Possessions: Dancing girl outfit, dagger.

Natala was a Brythunian girl caught by Shemitish slavers. Appropriated by Conan, she shared an adventure with him in Xuthal. Familiar with the whips of Shemitish slavers and the whips of Thalís, she accepted her 'acquisition' by Conan with pleasure. The rough life of the camp had given her more strength and stamina than the average woman possesses, but still she was nowhere near the equal to Conan.



Constantius is a fairly typical Voivode of the Free Companies, a powerful mercenary captain who was exiled from Koth for his pillaging, murdering and other crimes. He now commands a vast force of Shemites from the Meadow Cities. He is cruel, largely indifferent to the needs of others, and ruled entirely by the desires of the moment. He would happily make an alliance with Set himself if he thought he could profit by it.

The game statistics above assume that Constantius is ready for all-out war. If encountered during a negotiation, he will be unarmoured, and armed only with arming sword and poniard.

Constantius' Shemites are Asshuri, powerful warriors clad in mail or scale armour and armed with the light desert lances and powerful Shemite bows. He has fully ten thousand of them (soldier or nomad 1 and 2) in his mercenary army at present, though the vast majority have no personal loyalty to him – they are simply hired swords, working for him for as long as they are well-paid. He has only 19 men directly loyal to him, most of them Shemitish archers like the rest. The Shemite mercenaries generally are armoured in steel caps and mail or scale hauberks, and armed with light lances, scimitars and Shemite bows.



NAFERTARI (ALSO KNOWN AS ZABIBI)

Medium Human Female Stygian Noble 14/Thief 2

Hit Dice: 10d8+20+12 (77 hp)

Initiative: +15 (+5 Dex, +10 Reflex save)

Speed: 40 ft.

DV (Dodge): 21 (+6 level, +2 Dex)

DV (Parry): 20 (+8 level, +2 Str)

DR: 0

Attack: Dagger +17 melee finesse; or thrown dagger +17 ranged

Full Attack: Dagger +17/+12/+7 melee finesse; or thrown dagger +17 ranged

Damage: Dagger 1d4+2 melee finesse; or thrown dagger 1d4+1 ranged

Special Attacks: Social Ability: Entertainer, Sneak Attack +1d6

Special Qualities: Social Ability: Comeliness, Social Ability: Savoir-Faire, Title (satrap's mistress), Rank Hath Its Privileges, Wealth, Do You Know Who I Am?, Lead by Example +6

Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1)

Saves: Fort +7, Ref +15, Will +11

Abilities: Str 15, Dex 20, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 12, Cha 24

Skills: Appraise +11, Balance +13, Bluff +14*, Diplomacy +15*, Disguise +9*, Escape Artist +9, Gather Information +12*, Handle Animal +14, Intimidate +13*, Jump +11, Knowledge (arcane) +11, Knowledge (nobility) +3, Open Lock +10, Perform (dance) +31*, Perform (ritual) +15, Ride +9, Search +6, Sense Motive +3, Sleight-of-Hand +8, Tumble +15

Feats: Exotic Weapon Proficiency: Stygian bow, Leadership, Skill Focus (Perform – dance), Skill Focus (Gather Information), Weapon Focus (dagger), Lightning Reflexes, Acrobatic, Agile, Dodge, Run, Fleet-Footed

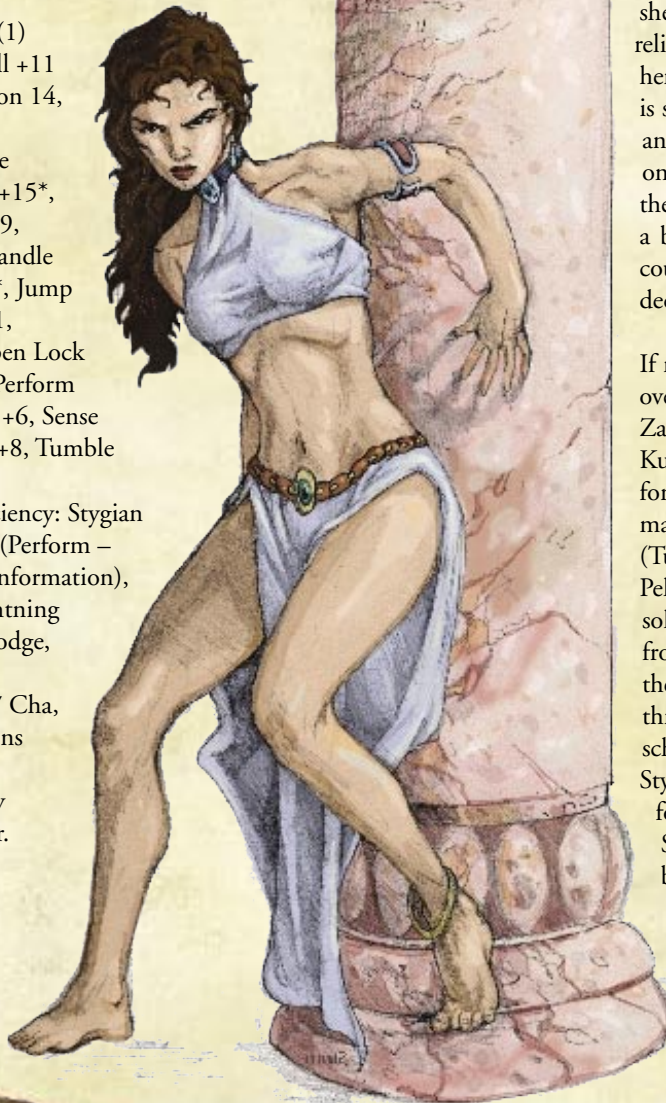
Leadership: 29 (16 level, +7 Cha, +4 noble, +2 base of operations – palace at Zamboula)

Possessions: Noble-quality dancing girl outfit, dagger.

Nafertari is descended from ancient Stygian nobility, though her ancestors also include Shemites and Turanians. Her influence in the city of Zamboula is unparalleled. She is a part of one of the Stygian noble houses that once governed the city and which still have a good deal of political power, and she has also taken advantage of the city's new Turanian rulers by becoming mistress of the satrap, Jungir Khan. It is widely believed in Zamboula that Nafertari is the true ruler, and that Jungir Khan is no more than her pawn. Given her captivating beauty, this seems entirely plausible.

Nafertari is an aristocrat first and foremost, but her lust for power is almost equalled by her desire for objects of beauty and magic, and it is to this end that she learned the certain skills of a thief. She thinks nothing of robbing her fellow nobles, particularly if they have magical items of great power. Her main game though is politics, at which she is very good – but she thinks she is even better than she is, and relies overmuch on her beauty to get her through most situations. She is so good at hoodwinking others, and so used to being obeyed at once even if said others realise they are being hoodwinked, that a bold and perceptive adventurer could certainly turn the tables and deceive her in return.

If need be, Nafertari could call up over a thousand loyal followers in Zamboula, a mixture of Stygians, Kushites, Turanians and Shemites for the most part. These include many members of her palace guard (Turanian soldier 2), a few of the Pelishtim city watch (Pelishtim soldier 1), younger warrior-nobles from the old Stygian families of the city (Stygian noble 1), her three court magicians (Stygian scholar 5, Stygian scholar 5, and Stygian scholar 6), and ordinary folk of the city (Kushite or Shemite commoner, nomad, or barbarian 1). Her cohort is a



Wadai tribesman who is skilled both with matters of healing and war (barbarian 14).

BARON AMALRIC OF TOR

Medium Human Male Nemedian Noble 16

Hit Dice: 10d8+(2x2) (53 hp)

Initiative: +8 (+3 Dex, +5 Ref)

Speed: 25 ft.

DV (Dodge vs. Ranged): 22 (+2 Dex, +6 Level, + 4 large shield)

DV (Dodge vs. Melee): 18 (+2 Dex, +6 Level)

DV (Parry vs. Melee): 23 (+1 Str, +8 Level, +4 large shield)

DR: 12 (plate armour and visored helm) (DR 11 if visor is up)

Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +12/+13

Attack: Heavy Lance +16 melee (1d10+1/x3/ 4 AP)

Full Attack: Heavy Lance +16/+11 melee (1d10+1/x3/ 4 AP)

Special Qualities: Title, rank hath its privileges, wealth, special regional feature +3, *ally* (x2), *smear others*, lead by example +6, enhanced leadership, do you know who I am?, rally, adaptability (+2 circumstance bonus to diplomacy and bluff), weapon familiarity (greatsword)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Magical Attack Bonus: +4

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +8, Will +12

Abilities: Str 13, Dex 16, Con 11, Int 19, Wis 15, Cha 20

Skills: Appraise +19, Bluff +28, Diplomacy +28, Gather Information +20, Intimidate +26, Knowledge (local) +12, Knowledge (religion) +10, Knowledge (nobility) +15, Ride +21, Sense Motive +23, Spot +8

Feats: Leadership, Mounted Combat, Persuasive, Negotiator, Power Attack, Spirited Charge, Ride-by Attack, Quick Draw, Trample, Steely Gaze

Climate/Terrain: Hyborian kingdoms

Reputation: Villain 85 (+9 to Bluff, Gather Information, and Intimidate if person has heard of him)

Treasure: Standard

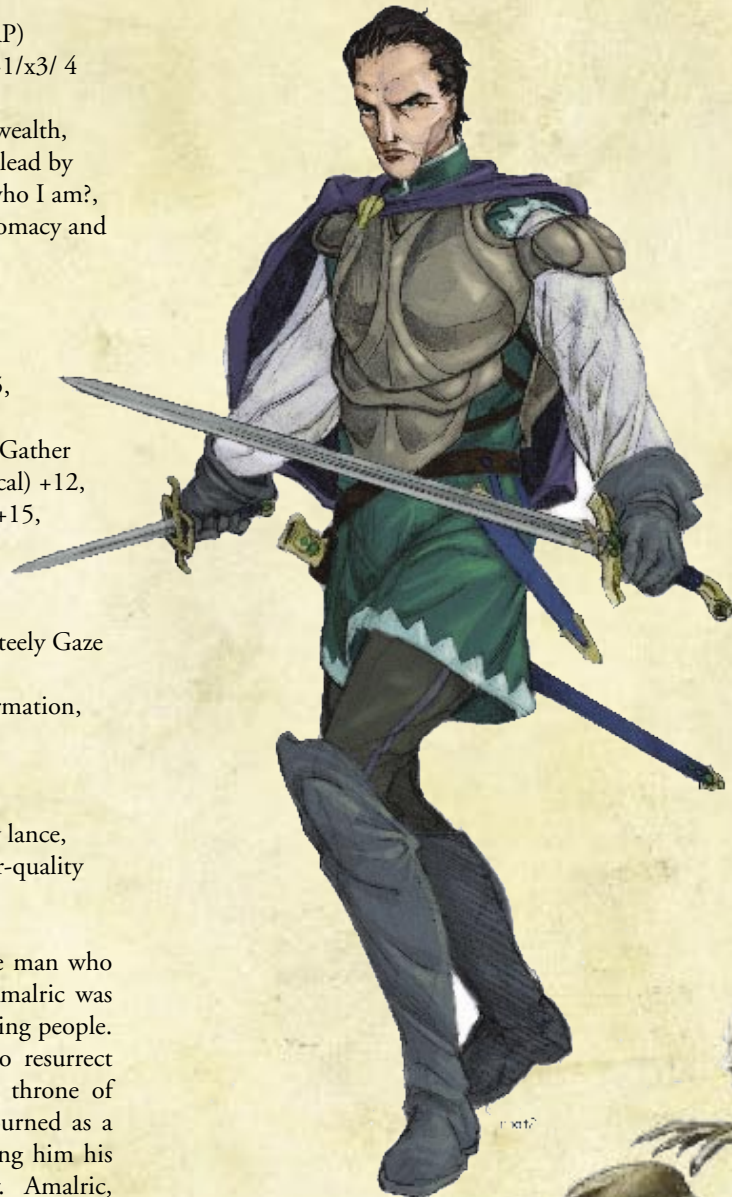
Advancement: By character class.

Possessions: Plate armour, visored helmet, heavy lance, greatsword, poniard, Hyborian warhorse, superior-quality arming doublet and hose.

A Nemedian, Amalric, Baron of Tor, was a large man who supported Valerius as the king of Aquilonia. Amalric was known for his skills at plotting, planning, and using people. He organised Orastes, Tarascus, and Valerius to resurrect Xaltotun in a bid to remove Conan from the throne of Aquilonia. Amalric saved Orastes from being burned as a magician and thus enlisted the mage's help, giving him his first powerful ally. Xaltotun was his second ally. Amalric, intending Tarascas and Valerius to be nothing more than puppets, plotted to become an emperor over the Hyborian Kingdoms.

Amalric was beyond being merely wealthy. He had enough wealth to replenish the royal treasury of Nemedia after Tarascus took over. Amalric was the real ruler of Nemedia during Tarascus' reign. Amalric himself crowned Valerius the king of Aquilonia after Conan was deposed. Amalric wanted to see Aquilonia crushed, destroyed of its last shred of independence, and then he wished to seize it for himself, rebuild it after his own fashion with his vast wealth, and use its men and natural resources to wrest the crown of Nemedia from Tarascus.

Amalric was killed by the lance of Pallantides during the battle that restored Conan to power. He often fought on horseback in full harness with a lance.



OLGERD VLADISLAV

Medium Human Male Hyrkanian Nomad 13

Hit Dice: 10d10 + 30 + 9 (99 Hit Points)

Initiative: +16 (dex)

Speed: 30 ft

DV (Dodge vs. Ranged): 25 (+4 Dex, +9 Level, +2 Favoured Terrain)

DV (Dodge vs. Melee): 25 (+4 Dex, +9 Level, +2 Favoured Terrain)

DV (Parry vs. Melee): 24 (+3 Str, +9 Level, +2 Favoured Terrain)

DR: 5 (Mail Shirt)

Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +13/+16

Attack: Cherkees Knife (scimitar) +16 melee (1d8+3/18-20 x2/ AP 5) or Hyrkanian Bow (+3) +19 (1d10+3/19-20 x2/ AP 6)

Full Attack: Cherkees Knife (scimitar) +16/+11/+6 melee (1d8+3/18-20 x2/ AP 5) or Hyrkanian Bow (+3) +19/+14/+9 (1d10+3/19-20 x2/ AP 6)

Face/Reach: 5 ft/5ft

Special Attacks: Nomad Charge +2

Special Qualities: Track, Favoured Terrain (Plains) +4, Born to the Saddle, Second Favoured Terrain (Desert) +1

Saves: Fort +11, Ref +12, Will +5 (only +3 vs. Hypnotism)

Abilities: Str 16, Dex 18, Con 17, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 14

Skills: Bluff +10, Climb +6, Craft (Bowyer) +4, Handle Animal +12, Hide +9, Listen +10, Move Silently +8, Ride +21, Search +8, Spot +9, Survival +15

Feats: Mounted Combat, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Ride-by Attack, Weapon Focus (Hyrkanian Bow), Rapid Shot, Trample, Improved Initiative, Mounted Archery, Endurance, Mobility, Diehard Spirited Charge, Improved Mobility, Far Shot

Climate/Terrain: Steppe

Reputation: 82 (Cruel; +9 bonus to Intimidate and Bluff checks, not reflected in skills above)

Corruption: 0

Allegiance: None

Code of Honour: None

Advancement: By character class

Possessions: Mailed shirt, spired helmet, heavy lance, cherkees knife (scimitar), Hyrkanian bow, Turanian desert warhorse.

Olgerd Vladislav is a former hetman of the Zaporoskan *kozaki* turned chief of a

Zuagir tribe. He is a hard man, and toughness is the only quality he respects in a man. He misjudges Conan, however, and Conan removes him from his position. Olgerd lives, however, and may return later to harass Conan in a search for vengeance.

He dresses well for a *kozak* and sometimes even wears a silk turban wrapped around a spired helmet (increase his DR appropriately if he is wearing his helmet).

Note: L. Sprague de Camp rewrote Howard's *Three-Bladed Doom* into *The Flame Knife* and placed this character in that story. Known as The Tiger in that apocryphal story, he was the power behind the throne of Yanaidar and was killed by Conan. As the story was not intended to be a Conan yarn by Howard, Games Masters may wish to consider the story as spurious, allowing an older Olgerd to be in power somewhere, perhaps plotting to bring Conan down from his Aquilonian throne. Even if the story is considered canonical in your campaign, Olgerd could still be of use. Perhaps he did not die as previously thought. Perhaps he haunts Drujistan as a ghost. Perhaps some Iranistani sorcerer has resurrected Olgerd.



mate

Exotic Weapons

| Weapon | Cost | Damage | Critical | Armour Piercing | Range Increment | Hardness | Hit Points | Weight | Type |
|---------------------------------|-------|--------|----------|-----------------|-----------------|----------|------------|--------|----------|
| One-Handed Melee Weapons | | | | | | | | | |
| Whip*†® | 10 sp | 1d3 | x2 | - | - | 2 | 3 | 2 lb | Slashing |

* See the weapon description for special rules. † Finesse weapon. ® Reach weapon.

Whip: A whip deals nonlethal damage. It deals no damage to any creature with an armour related damage reduction or a natural armour bonus of +3 or higher. The whip is treated as a melee weapon with 15-foot reach, though you do not threaten the area into which you can make an attack. In addition, unlike most other weapons with reach, you can use it against foes anywhere within your reach (including adjacent foes).

Using a whip provokes an attack of opportunity, just as if you had used a ranged weapon. You can make trip attacks with a whip. If you are tripped during your own trip attempt, you can drop the whip to avoid being tripped. When using a whip, you get a +2 bonus on opposed attack rolls made to disarm an opponent (including the roll to keep from being disarmed if the attack fails). You can use the Weapon Finesse feat to apply your Dexterity modifier instead of your Strength modifier to attack rolls with a whip sized for you, even though it is not a light weapon for you.

THALIS THE STYGIAN

Medium Human Female Stygian (Acheronian) Noble 5

Hit Dice: 5d8 (23 hit points)

Initiative: +3 (+2 Dex, +1 Ref)

Speed: 30 ft

DV (All): 14

DR: -

Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +3/+4

Attack: Whip +5 ranged (1d3/x2) or dagger +4 melee (1d4+1/19-20/x2 / 2 AP)

Full Attack: Whip +5 ranged (1d3/x2) or dagger +4 melee (1d4+1/19-20/x2 / 2 AP)

Space/Reach: 5 ft/5 ft

Special Qualities: Title, Rank Hath Its

Privileges, Wealth, Special Regional Feature

+1, Comeliness, Lead by Example, Exotic Weapon

Proficiency (Stygian Longbow)

Magic Attack Bonus: +2 (+3 if using curses, should she learn magic)

Saves: Fort: +3, Ref: +3, Will: +5 (-2 racial penalty to all saving throws against Corruption)

Attributes: Str 12, Dex 14, Con 11, Int 13, Wis 12, Cha 18

Skills: Bluff +12, Craft (alchemy) +5, Diplomacy +12 (+11 against non-noble Stygians), Handle Animal +6 (+8 when driving a chariot), Knowledge (arcane) +5, Knowledge (religion) +7, Perform (ritual) +16, Perform (dance) +6, Sense Motive +9

Feats: Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Whip), Weapon Finesse, Skill Focus (Perform: ritual), Great Fortitude

Climate/Terrain: Xuthal

Organisation: Solitary

Reputation: 4 (talented)

Corruption: 5 (detached)



Advancement: By character class

Possessions: Whip, dagger and noble-quality kirtle.

Descended from the Giant-Kings that founded Stygia, Thalys is of the ruling caste of that dark nation, ivory-skinned, tall, lithe and dark-haired. As part of that insular group, she shares Acheronian and Stygian traits. She is the daughter of a king in Luxur and when she was fourteen she had been led through the temples of Derketo, initiated into her sexual mysteries. She was abducted by a rebel prince when she was a young girl of about fifteen. With an army of Kushite bowmen, the Stygian and his kidnapped girl travelled south until they all died. She was placed on a camel and the camel wandered until it came to the city of Xuthal, where she was revived with their golden wine. She is pretty much a sexual plaything for the

men of Xuthal now, just about the only reason they will forgo their lotus sleep for a space. She knows more about erotic pleasures than even the priestesses of Derketo now and is an expert in Derketo's sensual rituals. She has a lithe strength few would suspect in her. She has no modesty when it comes to her curses if angered.

Wearing distinctive perfume, Thalys is tall, lithe, and clad in a narrow girdle crusted with jewels. A slim, jewelled dagger juts from the girdle. A burnished mass of night-black hair sets off the whiteness of her ivory body. Her dark eyes, shaded by long dusky lashes, are deep with sensuous mystery.

She captured Natala to become Thog's bride, but instead was possibly mated to the *thing* Thog herself. If that was indeed her fate, her



child would be fully grown by now. Her experiences with Thog have made her quite corrupt.

KING TARASCUS OF NEMEDIA

Medium Human Male Nemedian Noble 15

Hit Dice: 10d8+30+(5x2) (89 hp)

Initiative: +14 (+5 Dex, +5 Ref, +4 Imp. Init.)

Speed: 25 ft.

DV (Dodge vs. Ranged): 23 (+3 Dex, +5 Level, +1 Dodge, +4 large shield)

DV (Dodge vs. Melee): 19 (+3 Dex, +5 Level, +1 Dodge)

DV (Parry vs. Melee): 23 (+1 Str, +7 Level, +1 Parry, +4 large shield)

DR: 12 (superior Aquilonian plate armour and visored helm; DR 11 if visor is up)

Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +11/+12

Attack: Akbitanan Broadsword +22 finesse melee (1d10+1/17-20 x2/ AP 6)

Full Attack: Akbitanan broadsword +22/+17/+12 finesse melee (1d10+1/17-20 x2/ AP 6)

Special Qualities: Adaptability (Bluff and Sense Motive), Title, rank hath its privileges, wealth, special regional feature +3, *ally, smear others, reputation*, lead by example +6, enhanced leadership, do you know who I am?, weapon familiarity (broadsword)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Magical Attack Bonus: +3

Saves: Fort +8, Ref +12, Will +9

Abilities: Str 13, Dex 20, Con 16, Int 15, Wis 11, Cha 18

Skills: Bluff +24, Diplomacy +22, Gather Information +22, Intimidate +16, Knowledge (local) +12, Knowledge (nobility) +12, Knowledge (religion) +4, Ride +15, Sense Motive +24

Feats: Leadership, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Combat Expertise, Power Attack, Dodge, Improved Critical (broadsword), Intricate Swordplay, Parry, Weapon Focus (broadsword)

Climate/Terrain: Nemedica

Reputation: Brave 87 (+9 to Bluff and Intimidate if person has heard of him)

Treasure: Standard

Advancement: By character class.

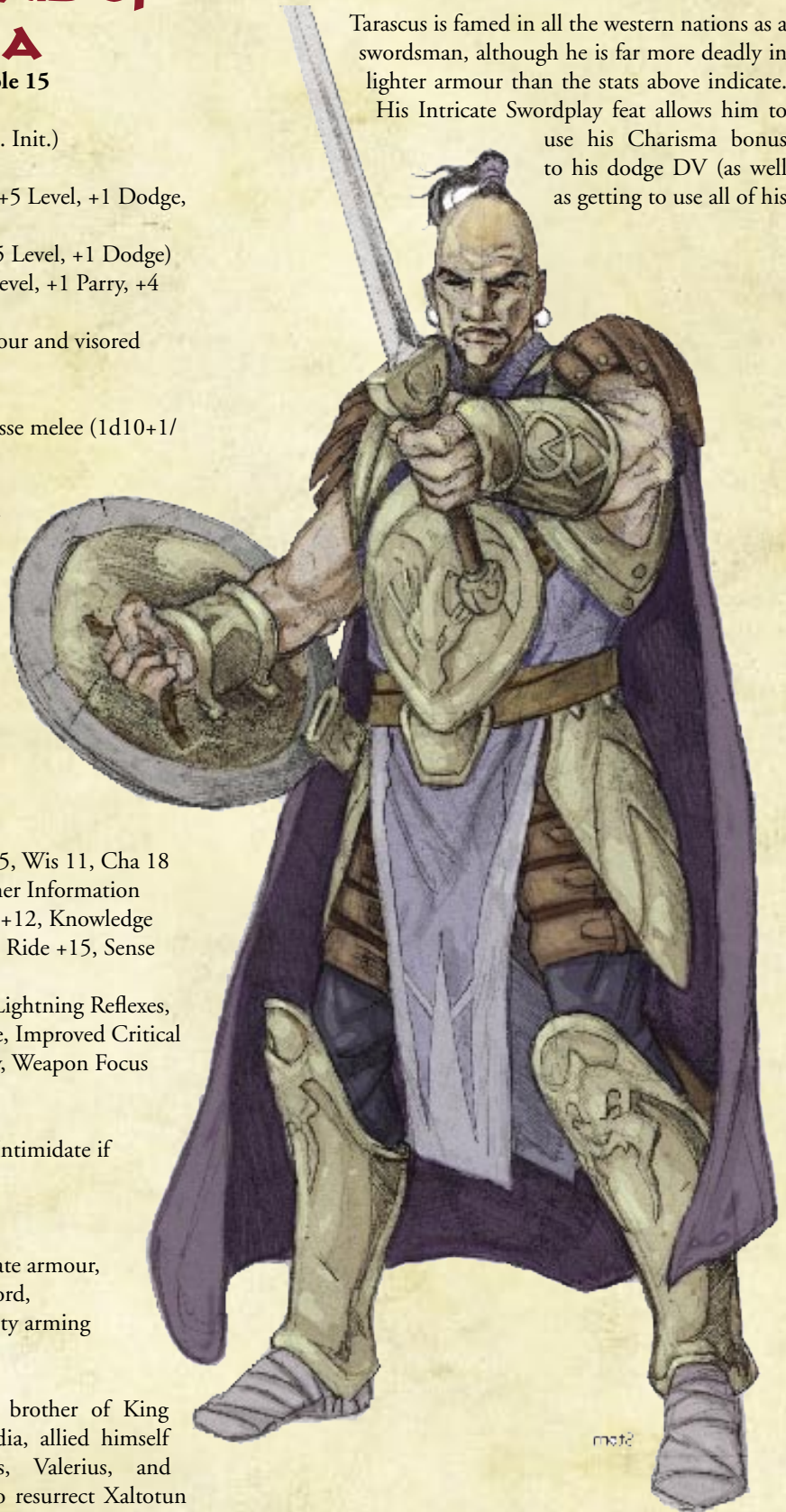
Possessions: Superior Aquilonian plate armour, visored helmet, Akbitanan broadsword, Hyborian warhorse, superior-quality arming doublet and hose.

Tarascus, the younger brother of King Nimed of Nemedica, allied himself with Orastes, Valerius, and Amalric to resurrect Xaltotun so that he could be

king of Nemedica; Xaltotun made sure, via magic, that this happened. Tarascus is described as a small, dark man. He is quick on his feet and deadly with a sword.

Tarascus is famed in all the western nations as a swordsman, although he is far more deadly in lighter armour than the stats above indicate.

His Intricate Swordplay feat allows him to use his Charisma bonus to his dodge DV (as well as getting to use all of his



mt2

Dex bonus). However, in mass warfare he decks himself out in full plate armour.

VALERIA

Medium Humanoid Female Aquilonian

Pirate 7/Soldier 2

Hit Dice: 7d8+2d10+16 (62 hp)

Initiative: +14 (+5 Reflex save, +5 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

Speed: 30 ft. (unarmoured)

DV (Dodge): 21 (+6 level, +5 Dex)

DV (Parry): 17 (+4 level, +3 Str)

DR: -

Attack: Arming sword +13 melee finesse; or thrown dagger +12 ranged

Full Attack: Arming sword and dagger +13/+12/+8 melee finesse; or thrown dagger +12 ranged

Damage: Arming sword 1d10+3, dagger 1d4+1

Special Attacks: Ferocious Attack (additional attack), To Sail A Road Of Blood And Slaughter, Sneak Attack +2d6, Sneak Subdual

Special Qualities: Bite Sword, Uncanny Dodge, Mobility, Seamanship +2 (+2 to DV on board ship), Pirate Code (Barachan Rockets and Smoke), Poison Resistance +1.

Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1)

Saves: Fort +10, Ref +10, Will +3

Abilities: Str 16, Dex 20, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 12, Cha 15

Skills: Bluff +16, Intimidate +7, Move Silently +17, Profession (sailor) +8, Sense Motive +10, Spot +6, Tumble +19

Feats: Leadership, Weapon Focus (arming sword), Dodge, Combat Expertise, Improved Disarm, Improved Feint, Improved Initiative, Combat Reflexes

Possessions: Arming sword, silk breeks, leather boots, dagger.

Valeria is one of the most infamous pirates of the Red Brotherhood of the Barachan Isles. She has commanded ships and led raiding parties all over the Argossean and Zingaran coast and beyond, up and down the Black Coast. She has also worked as a mercenary soldier, assisting the Stygians with the defence of the border city of Sukhmet.

Valeria's only real weaknesses are that men do not always take her seriously due to her beauty, and that she is relatively inexperienced when it comes to land-based adventuring, though she is a real demon once aboard a ship. More than once she has had to leave a bad situation because of the desire of men who would not take 'no' for an answer – often killing them before she goes, but unwilling to wait around for the revenge of their comrades. She is extremely wary of male attention. Though she enjoys it and finds it flattering, she



will not give in to it and thus give the man power over her. Any who try to take her by force will find themselves rapidly skewered on the end of a sword moving faster than they can see.

During the events of *Red Nails*, Valeria and Conan work together for a time, though she is gone before his next adventure. It is presumed though that she still lives, and could be found working as a mercenary or

captaining a pirate ship almost anywhere in the known world.

THE DEVI YASMINA

Medium-size Human Vendhyan Female
Kshatriyan Noble 20

Hit Dice: 10d8+10+(10x2) (75 hp)

Initiative: +2

Speed: 30 ft.

DV (Dodge vs. Ranged): 22 (+2 Dex, +10 Level)

DV (Dodge vs. Melee): 22 (+2 Dex, +10 Level)

DV (Parry vs. Melee): 27 (+2 Dex, +15 Level)

DR: -

Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +15/+15

Attack: Dagger +15 melee (1d4) or Tulwar +19 (1d8/18-20)

Full Attack: Dagger +15/+10/+5 melee (1d4) or Tulwar +19/+14/+9 (1d8/18-20)

Special Qualities: Title, rank hath its privileges, wealth, special regional feature +4, ally, comeliness, etiquette, family ties, lead by example +8, enhanced leadership, do you know who I am?, rally, absolute power, civilised code of honour, allegiance to Vendhya

Face/Reach: 5 ft x 5 ft./5 ft.

Magical Attack Bonus: +5

Saves: Fort +7, Ref +8, Will +19 (18 vs. hypnotism)

Abilities: Str 11, Dex 15, Con 13, Int 17, Wis 19, Cha 25

Skills: Appraise +6, Bluff +33, Diplomacy +41, Gather Information +37, Intimidate +17, Knowledge (arcane) +8, Knowledge (history) +13, Knowledge (nobility) +24, Knowledge (religion) +15, Listen +6, Ride +5, Search +6, Sense Motive +35, Spot +24

Feats: Alertness, Defensive Martial Arts, Improved Unarmed Strike, Investigator, Iron Will, Leadership, Mounted Combat, Negotiator, Persuasive, Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Steely Gaze

Climate/

Terrain:

Vendhya

Reputation: Brave 85 (+9 to Bluff and Intimidate if person has heard of her)

Treasure: Standard

Advancement: By character class.

Possessions: Noble-quality outfit, dagger.

The Devi Yasmina, sister of the late king, rules Vendhya as a goddess-queen. Although she is a mortal woman, the people of Vendhya consider her a reincarnation of a goddess, one of Asura's consorts. Her power is upheld both by the noble warrior caste and the Priests of Asura. She is prim, proper and queenly in manner.

At the time of her brother's death, she vowed to find the slayers and her searches led her to the occult. She has read *The Book of Skelos* and made other arcane researches, so this gives her some skill in the Knowledge (arcane) category. She went to the borders of her kingdom to find Conan, the chief of the Afghulis, so that she could force him to kill the Black Seers of Yimsha, who killed her brother. The governor of the border kingdom had captured several Afghuli sub-chiefs, and she was going to ransom them back to Conan in return for the heads of the Black Seers. Unfortunately for her plans, Conan arrived earlier than expected and kidnapped the Devi, hoping to use her to ransom some of his captured sub-chiefs.

Yasmina played a cat-and-mouse game of intrigue with Conan, but the feelings that rose within her concerning the ferocious hill chief's carnal attentions confused her. In the end, they parted, despite a growing fondness between them. Conan returned to his wild hillmen, Yasmina went back to her throne.

At the time of King Conan's reign in Aquilonia, Yasmina is in her mid-forties. She has grown even more powerful with age and she is not above using seduction to achieve her aims. Her courtiers continue to pressure her to marry and bear an heir to the throne, but thus far she has resisted their entreaties.



storn

Although she does not usually carry one, she can wield a tulwar as a martial weapon, and is proficient with the light lance. She gains a +4 attack bonus with either weapon.

ZENOBIA, QUEEN OF AQUILONIA

Medium Human Female Hyborian Noble 2

Hit Dice: 2d8 (15 hp)

Initiative: +1 (+1 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV (Dodge): 11

DV (Parry): 10

DR: -

Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +1/+0

Attack: Unarmed +2 finesse melee (1d4 subdual); or dagger +2 finesse melee (1d4-1/19-20 x2/ AP 0)

Full Attack: Unarmed +2 finesse melee (1d4 subdual); or dagger +2 finesse melee (1d4-1/19-20 x2/ AP 0)

Special Qualities: Adaptability (Diplomacy and Sense Motive), weapon familiarity (greatsword), illiteracy, title, rank hath its privileges, wealth, special regional feature +1

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Magical Attack Bonus: +0

Saves: Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +5

Abilities: Str 8, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 15

Skills: Appraise +4, Bluff +6, Diplomacy +11, Gather Information +7, Handle Animal +4, Hide +3, Intimidate +4, Move Silently +3, Perform (Dance) +4, Sense Motive +11, Spot +7

Feats: Negotiator, Persuasive

Climate/Terrain: Tarantia

Reputation: 20 (Honest: May apply +3 to her Bluff, Sense Motive, and Gather Information checks.)

Code: Civilised

Treasure: None

Advancement: By character class (probably noble).

Possessions: (as slave) Noble-quality slave girl outfit, dagger. (As Queen) Superios-Noble's outfit, dagger.

Zenobia is a slender and supple girl. As a slave in Nemedi, she wore naught but a wisp of silk twisted about her loins and a jewelled breast-plate. As a queen in Aquilonia, Zenobia dresses more regally. She has dark eyes and white, alabaster limbs. Her hair is a mass of dark foam with a burnished lustre.

Zenobia was once a slave in King Nimed's seraglio, and later of King Tarascus'. Probably of noble birth, she was sold into slavery by her parents to Nemedi's king in hopes of royal favour. She helped Conan escape imprisonment in Belverus and showed her wisdom in her choice of weapons and horses to give Conan. She is regal and poised, though passionate. After Conan defeated Tarascus and Xaltotun, he claimed Zenobia as his queen.



Games Mastering Conan

RUNNING A HYBORIAN Age campaign can be a little daunting. Atmosphere, tone, pacing, everything that pervades the Hyborian Age is particularly vivid and, while easy to recognise, is not always so easy to capture. Sure, a thesaurus book-marked to show a selection of words similar to black and evil might help and a green-stone city or two may be called for, but there is more to Howard's Hyborian Age than word selection and ruined cities. You have to be able to capture the *vision*.

*Let obscene shapes of
Darkness ride the earth.
Let sacrificial smokes blot out
the skies.
Let dying virgins glut the 'Black
Gods' eyes.
And all the world resound with
noisome mirth.*

*'Robert E. Howard, 'Which Will
Scarcely 'Be 'Understood*

Like Lovecraft's work, Conan's world is bleak and doomed. Unlike Lovecraft's stories, Conan *can* stem the tide, if only for a short time; anything he creates will eventually be washed away, destroyed and forgotten, yet he strives anyway with unmatched vitality. It is a complex vision of black dooms and stalwart striving that infuses all of the Conan stories. No matter what Conan does, eventually the Hyrkanians will sweep from the east toward the Picts, who will sweep over Aquilonia from the west, and crash together in the center with the Nordheimer. The Hyborian Age *will* come to an end. Time may allow itself to be stalled, but it never goes back. Xaltotun cannot resurrect ancient Acheron. Stygia will never rise again to be the super-power it once was. The people, however, struggle anyway. All they can do is *live*, knowing that as soon as they stop the struggle, all that they wrought will come crashing down.

Part of this multifaceted vision goes beyond the doomed history laced with terrific striving. Magic is also part of the vision. The Hyborian Age is a *low-magic* world, for lack of

a better term. This does not mean that there is little magic. Indeed, virtually every *Conan* story reeks of magic. The difference between 'low' magic and 'high' magic is frivolity. Magic in the *Conan* setting is never frivolous. Magic does not solve day-to-day dilemmas. Magic is not a substitute for technology. When the day is done, men with swords decide the day. The use of magic in a *Conan* story is a frightening element. Many of the *Conan* stories read more like horror stories than pure fantasy. Magic is also larger than life in



a *Conan* story, not a common element of life. There are no trivial spells here, cast on a whim without consequence or harm. Magic in this campaign should be epic and earth-shattering. Magic must have a sense of doom and foreboding attached to it. Magic is a violent art, requiring blood and sacrifice. Magic is not a high art, it is a low power, learned in the blackest of pits and among the most degenerate of dark sources.

Violence is another aspect to capturing the atmosphere appropriate to the game. This is where many games can fall down. Too much time is spent pondering and philosophising in many of them. While this may be perfectly fine in other settings, this is not Conan's way. Action, constant and bloody, is the hallmark of the Conan stories. In *The People of the Black Circle*, when the identity of the Devi is revealed to Conan of Ghor, the reader is not told what goes on in Conan's mind. He is shown. In an instant burst of action, Conan kidnaps her, leaping out of a window with her in tow. Something should always be happening, be it violent or weird. Do not describe every step *ad infinitum*. Capture the scene in broad strokes. The Conan stories can explore an entire city, including history of same, in a paragraph or two. Take all of your frustrations and channel them into this campaign – letting it become an expression of rage, much as Howard's Conan stories were his expressions of anger and frustrations at his world. Drive your game at a frenzied pace. Put yourself into your games.

A successful Conan game should have more to it than just violence, forbidden magic and a doomed atmosphere. You should strive to put a sense of mystery in the games. The characters should come across things that surprise them. Lost cities, ancient monsters and strange islands appearing in the mists all should be part of the game. When Conan climbs onto the island of Xapur, he expects to find mouldering green-stone ruins, not a restored city. Characters have their own agendas, their own obsessions and their own blind-spots. Throw twists into the stories and strive for unique solutions sometimes.

While much of the above is up to you, hopefully the following sections will aid you in the construction of your own Hyborian Age tales of action and adventure.

The desert shimmered in the heat waves. Conan the Cimmerian stared out over the aching desolation and involuntarily drew the back of his powerful hand over his blackened lips. He stood like a bronze image in the sand, apparently impervious to the murderous sun, though his only garment was a silk loin-cloth, girdled by a wide gold-buckled belt from which hung a saber and a broad bladed poniard. On his cleancut limbs were evidences of scarcely healed wounds.

At his feet rested a girl, one white arm clasping his knee, against which her blond head drooped. Her white skin contrasted with his hard, bronzed limbs; her short, silken tunic, low-necked and sleeveless, girdled at the waist, emphasized rather than concealed her lithe figure.

Robert E. Howard, Xuthal of the Dusk (A.K.A The Slithering Shadow)

SAMPLE STARTING SCENARIOS

One of the great things about this game is the start. The games master does not need to ponder how to get the characters to the location of his next fantastic setting and mystery. The game master just needs to put the characters there with whatever equipment the game master wants the characters to have.

How do you get a party together and get them to *want* to co-operate and adventure together? A thorny issue for some games. The introduction is the key and that key introduction is one of the most fantastic elements of the *Conan* game. The Game Master has complete control of the introduction; the story does not have to pick up right where the last one ended. With the assumption that time has passed, weeks, months or even years, the gear and treasure (and girls) picked up by the characters by the end of the last game is spent, lost or abandoned. The characters have whatever the Games Master wants them to have for the game, putting them at advantage or disadvantage as desired. Likewise, the characters are wherever the Games Master desires, in whatever situation needed to provide the motivation required to proceed with the adventure. Characters from disparate cultures often must form a rogue's alliance when placed initially in a mutually hostile situation.

Here are some beginning scenarios taken from some of the *Conan* writers for inspiration.

- † The typical tavern beginning; characters overhear the goal of the adventure (*The Tower of the Elephant*)
- † Characters chased by authorities or other hostile party into the setting of the adventure (*The Hall of the Dead* (fragment); *Queen of the Black Coast*; *The Pool of the Black One*; *The Black Stranger*; *The Valley of the Lost*; *The Man on the Ground*). This is possibly one of Robert E. Howard's favourite beginnings.
- † Characters are already at the site of the adventure (*The God in the Bowl*)
- † Characters are in jail and must either escape or make a bargain to get out, taking them to the site of the adventure (*Rogues in the House*)
- † Last survivor of a battle, finds source of the adventure on the battlefield or near it (*Fragment* – completed by Lin Carter as *The Hand of Nergal*; *Iron Shadows on the Moon*, AKA *Shadows in the Moonlight*; *The Scarlet Citadel*)
- † Last survivor of a battle, finds source of the adventure while wandering lost in some forsaken wilderness or swimming in a body of water (*The Frost Giant's Daughter*; *Xuthal of the Dusk*, AKA *The Slithering Shadow*; *The Pool of the Black One*)
- † The characters chase after a girl into the wilderness, finding the adventure (*The Vale of Lost Women*; *Red Nails*)
- † Character is walking through a foreign city and encounters the adventure (*The Snout in the Dark*; *Drums of Tombalku*; *Black Colossus*)
- † The characters are in a position of power (*A Witch Shall Be Born*, *The People of the Black Circle*, *Phoenix on the Sword*, *The Scarlet Citadel*, *The Hour of the Dragon*, *Drums of Tombalku*)
- † Someone important to the characters is being held hostage and the characters are there to arrange the release (*The People of the Black Circle*)
- † The party is clinging precariously from a cliff (*Jewels of Gwahlur*)
- † A nightmare or dream plagues or aids the party (*Phoenix on the Sword*; *The Hour of the Dragon*)
- † The party rides home after a victory and an emissary from an enemy people arrives for the party (*The Shadow Kingdom*)
- † The characters hear of a lost treasure and decide to ride for it (*The Skull of Silence*; *Jewels of Gwahlur*)
- † The characters are bored, lounging in the lap of luxury, when a slave girl whispers to them of a fabulous place they can visit (*The Mirrors of Tuzan Thune*)
 - † The characters are resting peacefully when an ally bursts in demanding justice, for a friend of his has been kidnapped (*The Black City*)
- † The characters receive a message from a friend telling them of his impending doom, a tale of murder and supernatural revenge (*The Dead Remember*)
- † Warning of uprisings by slaves race through the territory the characters are riding through (*Black Canaan*)
- † The character is walking somewhere, perhaps led here by a note, through a wilderness or in a city, when a scream pierces the still night or a haunting moan raises the character's hackles (*Black Hound of Death*; *Moon of Zembewe*)
- † The characters see a native of the region taking the long route around a landmark, leading to questions about the landmark in general (*The Horror from the Mound*)
- † The characters have escaped from slavery to encounter a strange man who knows their names, yet he is not a hunter of runaway slaves on their trail (*The Twilight of the Grey Gods*)
- † A girl is watching one of the characters, in secret love, and one who loves her carries her away against her will (*Spear and Fang*)
- † The characters have set sail and, several days from port, a stowaway has boldly come forth into the cabin, telling them that those they sail to aid plot against them and that a traitor is on board. The strange man leaves the cabin and all the men on the deck swear no one has entered or left the cabin save the characters (*Delenda Est*)
- † The characters meet a girl who speaks with an ancient dialect and dresses quaintly, calling the characters by names not their own, which she swears is their true names from long, long ago (*Marchers of Valhalla*)
- † A dead girl washes up on the shore, the daughter of a local woman. When the characters arrive, the woman curses two of the characters to be the death of each other (*Sea Curse*)
- † A corpse of a friend or lover washes up on the shore – and comes back to life (*Out of the Deep*)
- † The characters are hunting a bandit through the mountains (*The Lost Race*)
- † At the end of a great battle the characters find a powerful Akbitanan weapon, exactly one for each of them (*Men of the Shadows*)
- † The characters stand witness to a brutal ceremony of human sacrifice performed so the people they are aiding prophetically know something of upcoming events (*Kings of the Night*)
- † Captive or serving as diplomats, the characters watch as members of their own race are cruelly crucified or tortured (*Worms of the Earth*)
- † The characters have been in a heavy sea battle and were captured, but a storm has driven the ship into an uncharted island (*The Gods of Bal-Sagoth*)
- † At a fork in the road, they encounter someone telling them to take a different road than originally intended (*Skulls in the Stars*)

ADVENTURE IDEAS FROM THE CONAN STORIES

The heart and soul of the *Conan* game is Robert Ervin Howard, the creator of Conan the Cimmerian, the fantastic and primal barbarian whose adventures inspire those of us reading this text and playing this game. How can we, who are not Robert E. Howard, create adventures that are, to us, at least similar in tone to the prose we all love? One way to do this is to look at some of the themes that are present in Robert E. Howard's yarns, recreating those themes in our own way, putting ourselves into these stories as Howard threw himself into them.

POPULAR THEMES IN CONAN AND SWORD AND SORCERY

Some basic themes that appear in Conan stories include the lost race theme, the barbarism vs. civilisation theme, the weird menace theme and the tragic heroism theme. Of course there are other themes present in his work, such as 'man and animal are one' and the ever present themes of hatred, murder, revenge and obsession, but these should be enough to start with. Please read as much Robert E. Howard as you can; such efforts can only make your games more like his stories in tone.

THE LOST CITY/RACE THEME

The lost city theme is explored by Howard in many of his stories. Two wonderful examples are *The Voice of El-Lil* and *The Lost Valley of Iskander*. Conan himself encounters more than his share of lost cities in numerous Conan stories. Conquered peoples who have fled their homeland to build a static city in their style in foreign lands, utopias, lost tribes of the Sons of Shem and aboriginal remnants found in forgotten hills all have their place in Hyborian Age campaigns. In *The Hour of the Dragon*, Robert E. Howard hints that descendants of the ancient Acheronians still live in the hills of Nemediā, a perfect seed for a lost city themed adventure. The mountains of Corinthia and the unexplored reaches of the Black Kingdoms are perfect for adventures with this theme. Some non-Howard stories with this theme that can be used for inspiration include several of Edgar Rice Burroughs' stories, such as *Tarzan and the Lost Empire* and *Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar*, and H. Rider Haggard's *Allan Quatermain*. Lost valleys filled with dinosaurs and peoples



that should be extinct thrive in these sorts of adventures. Part of the fun of this sort of campaign is the chance to explore peoples and ideas that otherwise might be inappropriate to the known world. Although an enjoyable, interesting theme, it is one not explored as much today as it was earlier in the last century. Akin to the lost race theme is Howard's *Little People* stories, discussed next.

BARBARISM VS. CIVILISATION THEME

The stories of the *Little People* emphasise the decadence a fallen race falls into. Robert E. Howard often wrote about the inherent instability of civilisation. Civilisation is prone to decadence and collapse, in his view. The idea of civilisation encroaching on wilderness is a persistent theme in his work. The colony of Venarium, the whole of Westemarck and their abortive attempt to colonise beyond the Black River, the collapse of Acheron, the fall of the Tecuhitli and Xotalanca people of Xuchotl and others all display this theme. Howard was not calling us to go back to barbarism in some sort of nostalgic life-style choice. He was saying eventually we would be forced into it. This is another theme that can be explored again and again. Howard also believed we all have an inner barbarian in us that civilisation cannot destroy. When we get angry enough, that veneer of civilisation falls away as the unnatural thing it is. No matter what civilisation does, the barbarian in us lives and the civilised man dies

eventually, forgetting how to survive in adversity. This theme explores the suppression civilisation plays on everyone's internal 'barbarian.'

Zingaran expatriates may try to establish a colony on the

'Barbarism is the natural state of mankind; the borderer said, still staring at the Cimmerian. Civilization is unnatural. It is a whim of circumstance. And barbarism must always ultimately triumph.'

'Robert E. Howard. 'Beyond the Black River'

Pictish wilderness or on an abandoned island. Although Zingarans are not by nature colonists, these could have been forced out by the civil war or by order of the king.

Stygia could decide to colonise the Black Kingdoms, as could Shem or Hyrkania.

Smaller scale civilisations could also be used. There are any number of minor kingdoms that Howard either glosses over or never mentions. Who knows what kingdoms truly lie to the east of the Vilayet? What weird menaces lurk in the shadowed temples and mountains of the world?

WEIRD MENACE THEME

Howard's *King Kull* stories were laced with hybrid monsters

'Kull could almost see the form of the Silence now, the frightful Silence that was coming out of its skull, to burst the skulls of men. It twisted, it writhed in the unholy wisps and shadows, it laughed at him! It lived! Kull staggered and toppled, and as he did, his outflung arm struck the gong. Kull heard no sound, but he felt a distinct throb and jerk of the waves about him, a slight withdrawal, involuntary, just as a man's hand jerks back from the flame.'

'Robert E. Howard. The Skull of Silence'

and cerebral, conceptual weird events. Stories like *The Skull of Silence* has Kull battling the absence of sound. While he rarely did more than just touch on such ideas in the Conan stories, they are part of Howard's overall style and could certainly be used in a Conan

adventure. Just as *The Phoenix on the Sword* was a rewrite of his *By This Axe I Rule!*, a *Kull* story, so too can Games Masters rewrite the *Kull* stories into *Conan* adventures. Similarly, *Cthulhu*-style adventures, mixing the visceral, pulse-pounding action of Howard with the immensely bleak monstrosities of Lovecraft, can fit easily into a *Conan* campaign, although such stories should be used sparingly. Having Great Cthulhu crush Nemedra underfoot is hardly Howardian. Still, the atmosphere of the weird menace campaign lends itself to the overall theme of tragic heroism that runs through virtually all of Howard's *Conan*, *Kull*, *Bran Mak Morn* and other stories.

TRAGIC HEROISM



THEME

An element of sheer genius that pervades Howard's writing is the element of tragic doom that hovers over everything and man's unwillingness to submit to that inevitable end. Just as civilisation is doomed to degenerate into savagery, man continues to build his cities and his kingdoms. Even Conan fights for the side of civilisation most times, as he battled the Picts for the Aquilonians in *Beyond the Black River*. The quintessential Howard yarn has a character that fights the inevitable with tooth and nail, with every fibre of his being, refusing to give in to whatever doom lingers just on the edge of conquering. Howard's characters bring about their own realities, ignoring the vultures that swoop overhead, waiting for failure. Conan strangles the Aquilonian king and takes



his crown despite his barbarous origins. Bran Mak Morn forges an empire of his own degenerate people, knowing full well that as soon as he dies all of his accomplishments will be swept away. King Kull, trapped by the traditions of civilisation, refuses to give in and breaks the tradition in grandiose style. From stories of boxers to those who fight the minions of the Outer Void, Howard's heroes refuse to follow the flow of time and history. They stand as bulwarks against those tides, knowing they will ultimately fail to change the flow permanently. This heroism is one element of what makes his stories so fabulous. His heroes do what so many of

us wish we could do – stand up to the circumstances around us and do what we want to do.

Building up the atmosphere of ultimate doom and maintaining it is hard to do, but it makes for a rewarding campaign as you watch the players and their characters resist that doom, fighting against it every waking moment. The stories of *Bran Mak Morn* are perfect for this sort of campaign. The *Conan* stories, such as *The Queen of the Black Coast*, have elements of this, but the *Bran* stories are inundated with this phantasmagorical atmosphere of man struggling to stay alive in an elemental manner.

Characters may summon horrible demons and gods to try to stop the doom that encroaches. They may find themselves in hostile lands without hope of passing through unscathed... or alive. They may be forced to defend a city that is woefully undermanned and weakly fortified. They may have to defend themselves against an elitist upper class who has all the advantages. Turan's slow subjugation of any people in the path of its imperialism is another potential scenario that could well have this atmosphere.

'Gods black and white, dark and light! he shook his clenched fists above his head in the black gust of his passion. 'That I should stand by and see a man of mine butchered on a Roman cross - without justice and with no more trial than that farce! 'Black gods of R'lyeh, even you would I invoke to the ruin and destruction of those butchers! I swear by the Nameless Ones, men shall die howling for that deed, and Rome shall cry out as a woman in the dark who treads upon an adder!'

'Robert E. Howard, Worms of the Earth'

BLACK MAGIC



THEME

In addition to the infusion of tragic heroism, Howard liberally sprinkled dark magic into his tale. This magic is grim and horrific, made powerful by its vileness. All of the *Conan* stories by Howard have this element of the supernatural, the source of many of Conan's problems. Many of his non-*Conan* stories also have this element. Some superb examples by Robert E. Howard include *Black Canaan* and *The Haunter of the Ring*, which features Thoth-Amon's infamous ring found by modern, 1930's investigators. The magic in his stories are inimical to mankind, monstrous secrets that blast the souls of mere men. While wizards and the like are certainly part of this theme, black magic artefacts found by innocents, demons summoned by the ignorant and debased cultures protected by dark spells also belong here, lest the constant inclusion of a wizard becomes too repetitive, a problem that plagues many of the pastiches.

OTHER ADVENTURE

IDEAS

Many Games Masters love adventure modules. The thing to do is to feel excited about the work; if that is lost, then the published adventure will lose the visceral intensity a *Conan* game should have. While actual adventure modules are good, adventure ideas are a wealth beyond measure for many Games Masters and authors. One can take these ideas and morph them into multiple adventures that are similar but equally enjoyable. *The Scarlet Citadel* and *The Hour of the Dragon* are examples of this from Robert E. Howard. They have the same basic themes, but are two extremely wonderful tales in their own rights. Build a basic outline and work from that. Listed below are some basic plots taken from various Howard tales for your own imaginations to take hold of and give flight to, again and again.

- † The party is deposed from power by dangerous rivals and, thought dead, must regain their former station and enact revenge at the same time. (*The Scarlet Citadel*, *A Witch Shall Be Born*, *The Hour of the Dragon*)
- † A fabulous treasure is held in a hard-to access location and the characters want or need to retrieve it. (*The Tower of the Elephant*, *The God in the Bowl*, *Jewels of Gwahlur*, *The Black Stranger*, *Worms of the Earth*, *The Hour of the Dragon*)
- † Horrible entities threaten a kingdom or person and the characters are chosen to end the threat. (*Rogues in the House*, *Black Colossus*, *The People of the Black Circle*, *Beyond the Black River*, *Shadows in Zamboula*, *The Tower of the Elephant*)
- † Lost and desperate, or perhaps just exploring, the characters find a lost city or treasure. (*Xuthal of the Dusk*, *Red Nails*, *The Devil in Iron*, *Queen of the Black Coast*, *The Pool of the Black One*, *The Black Stranger*)
- † Horrible artefacts are discovered and must be put to rest. (*The Black Stone*, *The Haunter of the Ring*)
- † The characters must do something horrible to win (*Worms of the Earth*)
- † A beautiful woman needs to be rescued from a horrible fate (*The Vale of Lost Women*, *The Little People*)



- † Identity-change, allowing the character to learn something he might otherwise not know – often in the form of a past life experience (*The Children of the Night*, *People of the Dark*, *Queen of the Black Coast*)
- † Horrifying gods of old still walk the earth bringing doom and madness to men (*The Frost Giant's Daughter*, *The Thing on the Roof*, *The Black Stone*, *The Fire of Assurbanipal*, *The Hoofed Thing*)
- † Drunken murder begets supernatural revenge (*The Dead Remember*)
- † The characters are invited to view a talking cat (*Delcartes' Cat*)
- † Slaves have found a shaman among them, who is raising the slaves up in revolt against their masters, using horrible magic to bolster their efforts (*Black Canaan*)

In addition, stories from other sources likewise make fantastic adventures. The *Conan the Barbarian* comics are a treasure-house of adventure ideas. Movies such as *Pirates of the Caribbean* and such supernatural adventure stories can also be inspirational. Many of Errol Flynn's movies, for example, have the requisite action of a *Conan* tale, all that is lacking is the supernatural element...

Robert E. Howard was inspired by other authors and some of his best tales come from his spin on those inspirations. Inspired by Arthur Machan's *Novel of the Black Seal* and *The Shining Pyramid*, he wrote *The People of the Dark* and *The Little People* respectively, real gems in Howard's crown of prose output, where, unlike Machan's originals, he allows the protagonists to survive and succeed in violent fashions. The best adventures, however inspired by other sources, will be the ones that come from your heart, your problems, your frustrations and your philosophies.

OH MIGHTY PRINCE

THE FRAGMENTARY SCROLL YOUR MOST HONOURED SELF WISHED TRANSLATED IS NOW RENDERED INTO OUR TONGUE. IT DOES INDEED SPEAK OF THE LIFE OF THE REAVER TURNED RULER KNOWN AS CONAN AND THE ANCIENT KINGDOM HE RULED. HOWEVER, OH DREAD PRINCE, IT DOES NOT SPEAK OF HIS TREASURES AND WHERE HE DISPOSED OF THEM; INSTEAD, IT TELLS OF THE ROLL OF YEARS.

MY MOST HONOURED AND MAGNIFICENT LORD, THE SCROLL IS BUT A CALENDAR OF THE TIME, TELLING HOW THE ANCIENTS MEASURED THE PASSING OF THE YEARS USING BARBARIC REFERENCES EVEN IN THEIR SUPPOSEDLY CIVILISED KINGDOMS. EACH YEAR WAS DEDICATED TO AN ANIMAL - SOME TWENTY-ONE IN TOTAL AND, AS THE YEARS ROLLED AROUND, SO TOO DID THE NAME OF THE YEAR. THUS IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN SAID THAT A MAN WAS BORN IN THE YEAR OF THE LOTUS, TWENTY-TWO YEARS LATER IT WOULD BE THE YEAR OF THE LOTUS ONCE AGAIN.

FOR YOUR APPRAISAL, I HAVE LISTED WHAT WE BELIEVE TO BE THE FULL ROLL OF YEARS BELOW. HOWEVER, SOME OF THE WORDS WERE UNCLEAR SO, UNTIL WE CAN OBTAIN A MORE COMPLETE COPY OF THESE, WE CANNOT BE CERTAIN AS TO THESE.



FEATS

BOND OF BLOOD [GENERAL]

Your alliances are stronger than usual.

Prerequisites: You must have an intact Code of Honour.

Benefit: You gain a +4 circumstance bonus on Charisma-based skill checks when dealing with someone of the same allegiance. This overrides and does not stack with the normal +2 bonus.

CHOKER [GENERAL]

You may attempt to strangle your opponent when in a grapple.

Prerequisites: Improved Grapple

Benefit: During a grapple, you may use the special Choke action. You can choke your opponent for 1 round by winning an opposed grapple check (made in place of an attack). Normal suffocation rules apply with one exception: since this is a violent suffocation, the character can only hold her breath for 1 round per point of Constitution. If a character successfully breaks out of a Choke, he is considered stunned for 1 additional round after.

Normal: Choking is not a valid grappling option.

Normal Suffocation Rules: A character who has no air to breathe can hold his breath for 2 rounds per point of Constitution. After this period of time, the character must make a DC 10 Constitution check in order to continue holding his breath. The save must be repeated each round, with the DC increasing by +1 for each previous success. When the character fails one of these Constitution checks, he begins to suffocate. In the first round, he falls unconscious (0 hit points). In the following round, he drops to -1 hit points and is dying. In the third round, he suffocates.

DECEPTION OF SET [GENERAL]

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

Prerequisites: Bluff 11 or more 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.

DISABLING STRIKE [GENERAL]

Choose one type of weapon; your attacks with this weapon can hinder your foes.

Prerequisites: Improved Critical with the weapon selected, Greater Weapon Focus with the weapon selected, BAB +12 or higher

Benefit: Anytime you hit with a critical attack, you may select one of the following effects:

- † *Arm Strike:* The target gains a -2 circumstance penalty on to hit rolls and takes an additional -5 on all skills that have an armour check penalty.
- † *Leg Strike:* The target loses his Dexterity bonus to armour class and his base movement is reduced by 10 feet.
- † *Head Strike:* The target is blinded by blood.

Each of these effects lasts for 1d3+1 rounds.

Special: Any creature that is immune to critical hits is not vulnerable to Disabling Strike. You must be able to see the target well enough to pick out the vital spot and must be able to reach the spot.

A soldier may select Disabling Strike as one of his bonus feats.

EXPLOSIVE POWER [GENERAL]

You can focus your strength for devastating attacks.

Prerequisites: Power Attack, Str 17+, BAB +5 or higher

Benefit: As a full round action you may make a single melee attack using your highest BAB and utilizing Power Attack at your highest bonus. If the melee attack is successful, it is treated as a critical.

Special: Creatures immune to critical hits are also immune to this effect.

FEIGN DEATH [GENERAL]

You can make others believe you are dead.

Prerequisites: Perform (pantomime) 5 or more ranks

Benefit: In reaction to an opponent successfully dealing damage to you, you may make a Bluff check to appear unconscious or dead. Opponents may make an opposed Sense Motive check to see through your ruse. If your Bluff is successful, your opponents are considered flat-footed with regard to your next attack. You are not denied your Dexterity bonus while using this feat but circumstances related to your Bluff could affect other's attacks against you (prone, eyes closed, etc). At the GM's discretion, bonuses or penalties may be awarded for attempts to improve your Feign Death attempt or for opponents to see through them.

FOUL IS FAIR [GENERAL]

You can mask the effects of your corruption.

Prerequisites: Bluff 7 or more 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.

GREATER OVERRUN [GENERAL]

You barrel over you opponents with greater ease.

Prerequisites: Str 17+, Power Attack, Improved Overrun, BAB +7 or higher

Benefit: You may make a number of additional overrun attempts equal to your Strength bonus during a single round. Each attempt must be against a different target. Also, you gain a +6 bonus on your Strength check to knock down your opponent (this replaces and does not stack with the bonus gained by Improved Overrun).

Normal: Without this feat, you can make only one overrun attempt per round.

Special: A soldier may select Greater Overrun as one of his bonus feats.

GREATER UNCANNY DODGE [GENERAL]

Your reflexes are so finely tuned that opponents find it difficult to successfully ready an action against you.

Prerequisites: Improved Uncanny Dodge, Improved Initiative, Dex 19+

Benefits: If an opponent readies an action targeting you or an action you take, he must succeed at an opposed Initiative check against you. If he fails, your action completes before his readied action begins and he is considered flat-footed with regard to the action you take. You gain a +4 bonus on your opposed check (but not on normal initiative rolls).

Normal: The readied action occurs just before the action that triggers it. If the triggered action is part of another character's activities, you interrupt the other character.

GROUNDED [GENERAL]

You are less susceptible to the call of insanity.

Prerequisites: Resolute

Benefit: If you would normally be granted a Major Insanity, you may make a second save at the same DC to turn it into a Minor Insanity instead.

INSIGHT INTO MADNESS [GENERAL]

Your own descent into darkness has given you insights into other's souls.

Prerequisites: You must have at least 1 Corruption Point

Benefit: You can detect another's corrupt nature just by looking at them as described in the section 'The Rule of the Sorcerer's Soul' in the *Conan* core rules.

Normal: Only sorcerers, magical beasts and outsiders have this ability.

KICK DOWN THE DOOR [GENERAL]

You make an impressive entrance.

Prerequisite: Improved Sunder

Benefit: When you make a successful Strength check to break down a door you may immediately take a partial charge at anyone you find beyond it. You foes are considered flat-footed.

Normal: Breaking a door is a standard action.

LIKE WHITE ON RICE [GENERAL]

Warriors with this feat have learned to anticipate their opponent's next move, leaving them no options for escape!

Prerequisites: BAB +6 or higher, Dodge, Combat Expertise, Improved Initiative

Benefits: The character may designate a new opponent each round. If that opponent takes a five foot step, the character may choose to immediately follow him with his own five foot step even if he has already moved this round.

Normal: You may only take a five foot step on your own turn and only if you take no other movement that turn.

LOOK WHAT I CAN DO! [GENERAL]

Your battlefield antics leave your opponents dizzy.

Prerequisite: Perform (Buffoonery, Dance, Juggling, Mime or another GM approved physical type) 5 or more ranks

Benefit: Following a successful Tumble check through an area threatened by an opponent, you may make a perform check (DC20). If successful, the next attack you make against the opponent does not allow her to add her Dexterity bonus to her armour class. This attack must be made on or before your next turn.

NO PRISONERS [GENERAL]

'To feel your foes' bones crack under your boot heel and their blood on your face . . . that's the feel of victory.'

You slay your foes so brutally, their allies fear you.

Prerequisite: Great Cleave

Benefit: Each time you drop a foe in melee, all other opponents gain a -1 confidence bonus to AC and attacks against you. These penalties last for the remainder of the current combat and they stack (max -5).

RESOLUTE [GENERAL]

Your steadfast demeanor makes you less susceptible to corruption.

Prerequisites: Iron Will

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus to all of your Corruption saves.

SAVAGE DANCE [GENERAL]

*'Float like a butterfly.
Sting like a bee.
Your hands can't hit
what your eyes can't see.'*

Your opponents wear themselves out trying to make contact with your constantly moving body.

Prerequisites: Combat Expertise, Dodge, BAB +4 or higher
Benefit: If your opponent fails to injure you for 3 consecutive rounds, he gains a -1 endurance penalty to hit and damage. This penalty increases by one for each consecutive round past four that he fails to injure you. (-1 in the fourth round, -2 in the fifth round, etc). If he successfully strikes you, all accumulated penalties are removed.

SUPERIOR OVERRUN [GENERAL]

You overrun your opponents effortlessly.

Prerequisites: Str 17+, Power Attack, Greater Overrun, BAB +13 or higher

Benefit: Your overrun attempts are a part of your movement and do not count as a standard action. Also, you gain a +8 bonus on your Strength check to knock down your opponent (this replaces and does not stack with the bonus gained by Greater Overrun).

Normal: Without this feat, an overrun attempt is a standard action.

Special: A soldier may select Superior Overrun as one of his bonus feats.

THE BIGGER THEY ARE, THE HARDER THEY FALL [GENERAL]

You are able to use your opponent's size against them in feats of Strength.

Prerequisites: Power Attack, Dodge, BAB +7 or higher

Benefit: Treat all opponents one or more size categories larger than yourself as one size category smaller than their normal size when making opposed Strength checks or grapple checks in combat.

Special: You cannot use this feat if you are denied your Dexterity bonus against the opponent.

TOUGH AS NAILS [GENERAL]

You are able to shrug off the effects of subdual damage.

Prerequisites: Diehard

Benefit: You are unaffected by subdual damage.

TRUSTWORTHY [GENERAL]

Your upstanding nature allows you to broaden your Allegiances.

Prerequisites: Diplomacy 5 or more ranks, You must have an intact Code of Honour

Benefit: You may establish a number of additional allegiances equal to your Charisma modifier.

Normal: You may only have up to three allegiances.

Special: If you break your Code of Honour, you lose this bonus. All but three of your allegiances will be considered broken. The GM may dictate which groups or people shun you as a result of your dishonourable actions.

UNARMED THROW [GENERAL]

You are capable of tossing opponents into your allies' path.

Prerequisites: Improved Unarmed Strike, Improved Grapple

Benefit: When you make a grapple attempt against an opponent while unarmed, you may attempt to throw him into any square adjacent to your own. If successful, the opponent is prone and in the target square. The opponent's movement during the throw can provoke attacks of opportunity against them.

WARNING SHOT [GENERAL]

'I'd think twice about that if I were you!'

Your prowess with a weapon can demoralize your opponent. By removing a foe's hat, cutting off a button, or performing some other nonlethal act, you can make your opponent think twice about fighting you.

Prerequisites: Combat Expertise, Weapon Focus (weapon being used)

Benefit: As a standard action, you may make a melee attack against an opponent at your highest BAB. If successful, instead of dealing damage normally, you may make a special Intimidate check as a free action. Your Intimidate check receives a +1 bonus for each point by which you exceed his Armour Class. If successfully intimidated, the target becomes shaken for the remainder of combat. A shaken character takes a -2 penalty on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws.

CONAN

THE ROAD OF KINGS

NEMEDIA, OPHIR, BRYTHUNIA, HYPERBOREA, ZAMORA WITH ITS DARK-HAIRED WOMEN AND TOWERS OF SPIDER-HAUNTED MYSTERY, ZINGARA WITH ITS CHIVALRY, KOTH THAT BORDERED ON THE PASTORAL LANDS OF SHEM, STYGIA WITH ITS SHADOW-GUARDED TOMBS, HYRKANIA WHOSE RIDERS WORE STEEL AND SILK AND GOLD. BUT THE PROUDEST KINGDOM OF THE WORLD WAS AQUILONIA, REIGNING SUPREME IN THE DREAMING WEST.

As the Road of Kings takes a traveller through the glittering and decadent realms of the lost Hyborian Age, so too does this tome work toward the same end. These fabled lands of ancient times are the shimmering background of *Conan the Roleplaying Game*, the gleaming backdrop against which your action is set. These cultures, the grand forbearers of more modern times, are both magnificent and tarnished. Superficially cosmopolitan and enlightened, nestling beneath this glittering exterior a core of ancient barbarism lingers.

Herein are written the descriptions of this harsh world: Proud lands of blemished civility burning with civil wars; barbaric wildernesses of savage killers hunting with primitive weapons; dreaming kingdoms of dark priests worshipping with bloodied daggers; noble demesnes of arrogant knights fighting with grim determination; ancient realms of haunted towers lurking with baleful menace; glowering crags of icy rock slumbering with hidden peoples. All this and more, for know, O prince, that this is Hyboria!

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