

# Rule One

An independent  
Glorantha magazine

## Issue 9

**ZONG'S KNUCKLES**

**BADRAIE FROG PEOPLE**

**LIFE IN PRAX, PART I**



**Pus-Ridden Devils**

**Heroquests**

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# ZONG'S KNUCKLES

## Iskallor

### *A place of interest on the outskirts of Gork's hills*

Zong's Knuckles are five black stoned mesas, that tower above an area of dense bracken and stunted trees, on the very western edge of Gork's hills.

Positioned on the northern outskirts of the Elder wilds, with the legendary Griffin mountain some 50kms to the south, this area is a significant holy site for the local troll tribe, the Helwyr, which reside in the nearby hills.

Named after the knuckles of their hunting god Zong, the five stone towers stand guard above a holy ground; a place of troll ceremonies and a hidden source of lead.

Back in the mists of time, Zong's people had been hunted by a creature of fire and light, many taloned, thrice tailed and with burning fur. This would never do, so the brave hunter stalked the creature, until eventually trapping it on the edge of the vast forests that once covered the wilds. A great battle took place, which ended with the beast killed, skinned and eaten. But not before it dealt a wound to Zong's left hand.

Today, at the base of one of the mesas, is a deep crack, corresponding to the mythical injury inflicted on Zong. From the wound trickles a steady stream of molten lead, collected by local priests and turned into weapons, armour and bolgs, known as 'Zongs' in the local tongue. Coinage, that can be found as far away as the Big Rubble, where it is favoured

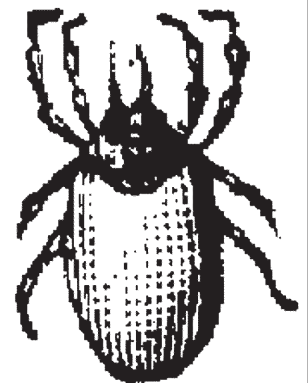
over the local currency for its slingshot accuracy. Each come stamped with simple facial features on both sides, showing a smiling face on one, a sad face on the other. They are the coin of choice for Pavis games of 'Two up'.

As mentioned, the area beneath the 'Knuckles', consists of dense, beetle filled bracken, stunted trees, gullies and paths that form a veritable maze. Within are several warm springs and pools, said to be where the blood of the fire beast fell. Home to large, lead scaled fish, the hottest pools are used to heat captured game, cooked within large cauldrons that sit in the superheated water.

Overall it is a place of shifting, moving shadows, darkness hunting spirits and rather laconic hunters, who when they do speak, are well known for their dry wit....

## Fauna

All varieties of beetles can be found, with swarms of wild ham beetles an easy source of food. There is also a ferocious hunting breed, used to take down larger prey in packs when hunting on the plains. Horned and often used in con-



junction with pits they are a prized possession of the Uz hunters.

Wild Enlo are rife, and rarely get out of control thanks to the vigorous farming of them by the local trolls.

Spiders of all shapes and sizes crawl about the five stone towers, making their homes

within the many caves and holes that dot their surface.

The knuckles jut out into the Elder wild's vast northern plain and during the twice-yearly herd beast migrations, is positioned perfectly for Uz hunters to catch prey. Beasts are drawn to the area by the promise of shelter, food, and warmth from the hot springs. They are channelled through the natural maze of gul-



lies into specially prepared clearings, where they are easily dispatched and butchered.

Dotted about are secluded hunters camps and ceremonial clearings, the whole area being a shrine to Zong. Draw beast spells or their equivalent will always work within its environs and troll hunters receive bonuses to any stealthy activities.

Local hunters have a shared habit of knuckle tattoos.

There are stories that Hombobobom played her drums here, to celebrate Zong's hunting prowess. Any of her followers can replace their own **Tambour** spell/ability with the local equivalent known colloquially as the "Shuffle"

### **Notable characters**

**Ash for Cash**, a priest of Argan Argar. He is a regular visitor to the mesas' lead spring, having made many long and devious pacts with the local Zong shaman. He runs his mint, deeper within clan lands on the southern side of Gork's hills and runs caravans twice a year into the troll hills and beyond.

**Duster** and **Sand-witch**. The local Helwyr shaman and his apprentice, both are followers of Zong and keepers of the truth.

Winner of last year's great hunt after trapping a particularly nasty griffin is **Silent Grog** a most devious hunter and owner of a magical sling.

The **Zing Zongs** troll ball team.



# The World of Plants

**Greg Stafford**

Another of the Form Runes which was popularly reproduced was the one we call the Plant Rune. The first one was universal, while all of the copies of it were less grand, more specific, more suited to their world, and tremendously more numerous.

Entering into the world of mythology can be a dangerous task. One of the greatest dangers is the assumption of Truth. Truth is not usually what one expects it to be, especially in the world where the gods live.

I think that we inevitably project our own Truth upon even the world of the gods when we visit it. We, when there, are still the Small Gods, and we are utterly incapable of understanding the entirety of a mythological event. So we perceive that event in the manner which is true to us.

If we visit again and revisit that mythological terrain, and it maintains its stability for us, even when we interact either consciously or in self defense, we take it to be a true mythic vision.

However, even that firm Truth may not be infallible. Other creatures, even other beings in that same vision, may perceive and participate in the exact same events but with a different understanding, experience, and Truth.

Nonetheless, despite these apparent differences, both are True. Harana Ilor lives in many places in the mythic world.

To illustrate some differences, here are two creation stories about the Green Age, both pretty much including the same events and many of the same entities. Both are true.

## The Human Story

### The First Tree

The Tree Form was one of the first Runes which proliferated from One to the Many. It was a shape, a sacred mold which was able to make more marvelous, copies of itself. Many have said subsequent trees and plants are inferior, by their very Nature as well as in actual structure to the Great Tree. After all, no trees in the known world grow several types of animals now, even among the menagerie of bestial vegetation from the East Isles which can be found for sale at their food shops in our own waterfronts of Nochet.



## Aldrya

In the earliest times lived a gentle god of light who shyly met a tender goddess of wetness, and one lay upon the other like the sunlight on the sea. Where they met they mingled and made something new, and this something was born to be the Young God named Flamal.



Flamal is the progenitor of all plants. Flamal progenerated with the feminine force which is called Grower. Flamal grew his many descendants. First made were the Vronkalings (conifers), and next the Embyli (broad leaved).

Flamal was a god of bright potentials bursting within him. He is called by many names, and known by many races, but for the beings who rule in the forests he is the Father of Seeds. Among those he knew his most beloved was Ernalda, who was turned bountiful by the meeting with him. They had a child, and her name was Aldrya.



Aldrya was loved by two jealous gods, each of whom threatened to destroy her if she loved the other. She sought refuge among the greater gods of the Gloranthan Court, and they gave her a place to remain forever upon the slopes of their citadel called the Spike. Thus was the first tree planted upon the cosmic mountain.

She bore wondrous fruit there, and others took these fruits and planted them far and wide. Each of these was born to be a Great Tree, and each of these was called Aldrya. The Great Trees bore fruit in their turn and covered the earth with vegetation according to the needs and capacities of the place. Thus, despite differences in local variation, all children of Aldrya know they are one kin. The vast and peaceful Green Age spread across the earth.

Aldrya took for herself a husband who is named Shanassee, who was a son of the goddess of Love. His presence added new depth and expression within the goddess, and together they brought forth the souls and spirits of the forest. From the trees came the beings known as the Dryads, who were the spirits of the trees, free to move but ever bound to the woody groves. From smaller plants, brush and wild shrubbery, came the Runners. They are less subtle and intelligent than their larger kin. Even in the Green Age these beings filled the woods.

When it was fashionable among the gods to do so Aldrya took the rune-being called Man, who was the first of his race, and with him created a race like him for her. These were the People of the Woods also known as Elves, who are also counted among the Aldryami.

The pixies have a different origin. They are said to have been fashioned by Shanassee for his wife out of some spare magic left over from the creation of the world. He gave them to her in a small turn of phrase and a jest to make her smile.



The Green Age filled itself with more life as the gods made more and more creatures. There was no problem when the woods and fields filled with beasts, but the Aldryami did not recognize the inherent dangers to come when beast began devouring beast. The ancient woods slowly reacted to the growing disaster of the Gods War, and more often such innocent bystanders were bruised and broken by the greater war.

During the fighting of the Gods Age, the new Power, Death, came into the hands of the elves through a wager by the Trickster. They took the Power and enchanted it upon the edge of their sacred earth tool, the Axe. With this they slew many Dwarf foes, and this turned cold all the world's stone forever.

Zorak Zoran, a troll god, then stole the weapons from the elves, and as he escaped, slew Flamal, father of Aldrya and beloved of all the gods. Thus the Axe then became the bane of elves. In her grief the goddess Ernalda commanded all of her children to withhold their bounty from the world until Flamal was returned to life. Aldrya obeyed and slept the unending sleep, and her children began to die, one by one, in the cold darkness.

The liberation of Flamal is sometimes called the "Secret Quest" of the Lightbringers, or the Greater Bonus by some. However, even his return to life would have had far less meaning without the long struggle of the Protectors

on earth to save the sleeping forms of their wards.

The Protectors were led by High King Elf, the leader of his race from among the undying Green Elves. He led a beleaguered band of elves through the whole of the Darkness, ever struggling to protect the empty bodies of the forest from their foes. In this he was aided by the gods Arroin and Yelmario, another wounded survivor, but he hated the god Oakfed, the Wildfire deity who devoured the once-magnificent forests of Prax and slew almost all there.

High King Elf was among those beings present in Dragon Pass for the I Fought We Won Battle where chaos was turned back upon itself.

Thus when the dawn came and the spirits of the living returned again to the world there was a prepared place for the Aldryami, who returned to their old places, inside of Time.

## The Elf Story

Elves, which are walking plants, are not really like humans, even though both types of creatures are truly People. The similarities between elves and humans are due entirely to their being copies of the primal Person rune. In fact, all the humanoid races are copies of this primal rune; their deep differences stem from the different interpretations and materials of their creators.



Elves do not have gods. When we humans interact directly with the spiritual power of the Aldryami, however, they might as well be. We can't do any better than to treat them as deities. The Gods of the Elves are not recognized as separate or divine entities by the Aldryami. Rather, these "deities" are parts of the Group Mind which all plants share, and with which the elves may commune and of which they expect to become a part.

Recognizing the elven Gods as distinct individuals is at least partially a human approach. I can only remember them as gods now, from the time I was an elf. I know that I felt otherwise then, but now, as a human again, I can not remember them except as gods. So as gods, I tell you of them.

## The First Plantings

In the beginning, there was the one, all-encompassing, the primal entity of which all else has been born. Although the original being was all things, he was also no things, and thus we name him It. When the time was right, It became the twins, Grower and Taker. It became all life, and all death, all that was and all that was not.

As Grower, It bore the life force of the universe. It was the spark of creation, the drive of expansion, the originator of life. From itself, Grower made the world. It became Arroin, the nurturing water, Gata, the protecting earth and Yelmalio, the warming sun. Finally, It became The Seed.

When Grower became the world, it made Arroin, who we call the healing waters, the nurturing provider, and the first father. In the new world, Arroin was the sea encircled the world and the rain which fell down upon the forests. Arroin provided Seed with nourishment.



The second of the Deities of Life who came from Grower was Gata, who we call the All-mother, the Enclosed, and the beautiful. In the new world, Gata was the earth that sat at the middle of the world, the rich field where life was first born. Gata provided Seed with sanctuary.

The third born entity of Grower was Yelmalio, who we call the unfailing light, the enveloping warmth, the wise father. In the new world Yelmalio was the great sun rooted in the middle of the sky, the light that shone upon the whole world. Yelmalio provided Seed with life.

After Grower had become the sea, the land and the sun, It became Seed. Seed lay within Gata's protective embrace, nurtured by Arroin and Yelmalio, and it became Flamal.

We know Flamal by many names. He is the father of all, the bearer of the life force, the unifier of spirit. As Flamal, Grower was reborn within the world. Flamal was The Great Tree, planted at the center of the universe, encircled by land, sea and light. From Flamal, there came many seeds, which spread

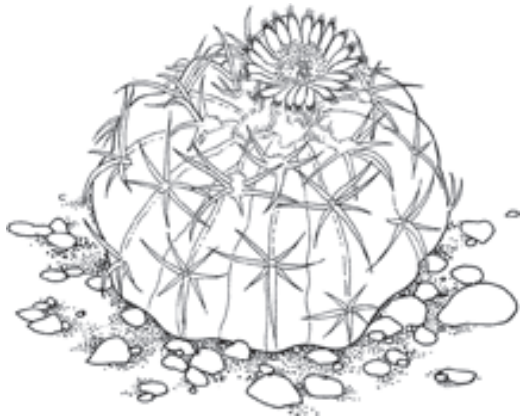


throughout the world. The first seed fell upon the earth, and that was Aldrya. The second seed fell upon the sea, and that was Murthdrya. Finally, a seed was lifted up to the sun, and that was Yelmdrya.

Aldrya is the Eldest Sister, the first daughter of Flamal born in the world. She is the mother of all plants grown upon the land, and is also the all-encompassing mind which includes all born upon Gata, both those growing and those taken. The Brown Elves, the Green Elves and the Yellow Elves are all part of Aldrya.

The second daughter born of Flamal was Murthdrya. She was nourished by healing Arroin. Murthdrya is the mother of all plants grown in the sea, and is also their communal consciousness. The Blue Elves are a part of Murthdrya.

The third seed of Flamal's seeds was lifted up to Yelmalio, Yelmdrya was born. Yelmdrya is the mother of all plants grown upon the Sun, as well as their collective soul. The White Elves are still a part of Yelmdrya though they are now gone from the world.



All grew, and the whole of Glorantha was covered with lush growth. Upon the top of the spike were the great and pure White Forests. Upon its slopes were the Yellow, and lower

down were the vast expanses of green covering the hills and flatlands. They grew some more.

At the end of the Age of the Grower, the entirety of creation was filled with life. But, since the Taker had not yet come into the world, the Growth continued, straining at the fabric of the universe. A tiny crack appeared into the universe, and a bit of Oblivion seeped into the world of Potential.



The elves, the mobile vegetables in the shapes of people, were the first to recognize another force which came to exist from overabundance. They call it Oblivion, which opposes the It-Potential. The Potential includes the powers of both growth and death, the eternal cycle of life and rebirth. Oblivion, however, takes things away without ever returning them. Chaos is a part of Oblivion.

When Oblivion came into the world the first of the elves were broken from Aldrya's group mind, which had previously encompassed

the whole world. They experienced self consciousness, and were shattered to be torn from the embrace of the forest mind. Their own religious ceremonies today still all act to link them with the annual cycles of vegetation. Any of them who are not distressed by their separation are considered to be Rootless, and pitied by all Aldryami.

## The Second Plantings

As Taker, It became the embodiment of entropy. It was destruction, dissolution and extinction. In all ways, Taker was equivalent to Grower, yet opposite. In truth, though, they were one and the same. A common elf truism states

*"There is no life without death; there is no death without life."* When Grower grew the world, Taker took itself; thus for a long time, only the power of growth surged in the world.

When Flamal's presence in the world had been fulfilled, Seed appeared once more in the world. The Seed which had been Taker was buried in Stone, hidden by Darkness and burned by Fire. All good things became bad. Water turned to fire, earth turned to stone and light turned to darkness.

Where nothing had ever grown, a new creature came forth, and that was Zorak Zoran, who was Taker reborn within the world.

Zorak Zoran began to move across the world, taking all he saw. Yelmalio fell first, and only Darkness was left. Beautiful Gata could not protect herself, and so she was destroyed, leaving sterile Stone before. Finally, Zorak Zoran turned upon Arroin, and so the healer fell, his mending waters becoming hurtful Oakfed. Then, Zorak Zoran turned to Flamal, and he took him into himself.



When the world began to darken, Arroin's nurturing waters ruptured and became the devouring flames of Oakfed. They burned the forests and scorched the land.

As the power of Taker rose, Gata began to harden. She became unyielding, infertile and sterile. Nothing living could grow in Akem (Stone) and so life began to disappear.



Finally, Yelmalio began to dim, and only the cold of Darkness was left. The freezing cold crept between fibers and organs and shattered Flamal's tender children, leaving only cold ice and lifelessness.

In the Darkness, Yelmdrya's (White Elf) children could not survive, and instead of the Growing race a new race of Takers came into existence. These creatures were the trolls, and the first among them was Kygor. The children of Kygor seek to consume all, enclosing the world in their darkness.

Nothing could grow upon the sterile earth, and thus Akem made his children from himself. Thus did Mostal come into the world, and his descendants, the dwarves. The Mostali are as sterile and lifeless as the god that birthed them.

Oakfed burned everything that it touched, leaving nothing living in its wake, but still it brought forth new life. Promalt was the first of the flame men, who marched through the world, trying to increase the domains of flame. The burning flame men sought to reduce the world to charred ash, but they only succeeding in destroying themselves, for now they are seen no more in the world.

In the Age of the Taker, there was one perfect moment where the Grower and the Taker were in balance. Many new being came into the universe, combining the aspects of the twins. Thus were born the black elves, who lived off the death of others, the red elves, who lived off their own dead, and finally men and beasts. But, the moment was quickly gone. The Taker continued to grow; the Grower continued to be taken.

As the Age of the Taker progressed, Zorak Zoran moved across the world slaying all that he saw. Even the Gods fell, first Yelmalio, then Gata and Arroin, finally Flamal itself. Only the Gods of darkness, stone and water were left behind.



It soon became obvious that the excesses of the Taker were as bad as the excesses of the Grower. The universe of Potential grew weaker and weaker, and Oblivion once more seeped in, this time as Chaos. The entire world was dying, but not the good death of the Taker, rather the bad death of Oblivion. It would never be reborn again.

Many elf heroes fought valiantly during the Age of the Taker, all trying to preserve the sacred growth. These heroes included High King Elf, Vronkal and Chalana of Arroin. But these protectors all fell. Eventually, all creatures of the Grower were dead, and the takers began to take themselves.

## The Third Planting

The Seeds, which had been buried deep, opened once again. Grower and the Taker were reborn again in the world. In the past, the Grower and Taker had been discoordinate, working disharmoniously rather than working together. As a result, the universe was nearly destroyed. This time, new beings rose.

Babeester Gor was the Taker reborn, but her aspect was slightly changed. Part of the Grower was within her, and so she took that which was unrecoverable, so that new Growth could occur. Babeester Gor destroyed all of that was left of the world, so that it could begin anew.

Voria was the Grower reborn, but she too was changed, now containing a bit of the Taker. She accepted Babeester Gor's death, knowing that it would bring better life. When all was gone, the spark of Potential in the sea of Oblivion nearly extinguished, Voria recreated the world.



When Voria recreated the world, the flowers bloomed etc.

In the new world, neither Grower or Taker was all-powerful. They both controlled equal parts of the world, and thus, at last, the Universe was at harmony.

In the annual cycle of flowering spring to falling autumn, the aspects of the world remained in harmony. For five centuries the forests rested easy and thick, content with their interactions with the other races.



## The Grafting Experiment

One group of elves was very friendly to other races. In the place where Dragons Live the Elf Lord called Fwalfa Oakheart had cooperated in a great battle against an army of Chaos. Many races and peoples cooperated in that fight, and it is called the Unity Battle because they fought as one against chaos. Ever since then the creatures that had fought shoulder to shoulder remained friends in the areas around Dragon Pass. Under the leadership of the Only Old One they formed the Unity Council, and brought their civilization to the shattered survivors of the Darkness.

Over the centuries the Unity Council met more and more other peoples, some of them only clans, while others were stronger tribes. They found the Empire of Dara Happa, too. The wise among them decided that they needed to reform the unity of all beings in their world.

The wise among them decided to create a new deity of harmony and peace. Saratin Seomale was the speaker for Talastar Forest. He was impressed with the plans. They saw the new deity as being the reconciliation between Potential and Oblivion, just as the Grower and Taker had been brought back together and redefined the nature of the plant world.

However, this effort clearly failed. Most of the elves in the world at that time thought it was misguided. Most elves today still think it was misguided.

# BADRAIE FROG PEOPLE

Roderick Robertson

*The Badraie Frog people were created for a campaign I was running, but it folded before they made any impact.*

**Ages:** All

**Habitat:** Fresh-water rivers, swamps

**Distribution:** Scattered communities throughout Glorantha

Descendents of the Great Spirit-Frog Badros, the Badraie (sing. Badrai) are large (nearly human-sized) frogs. However, their posture is bent, so they stand approximately 3 feet tall. Badraie live normally in swamps and river environments, but lost a war in God-Time to the Newtlings, so are relatively rare.

Badraie go through several phases of life. Badraie eggs are the size of grapefruits, laid in water in a protective covering of sticky-slimy gel. All the females of a community will lay their eggs in the same general location. When the younglings hatch, they are tadpoles; legless bodies with a relatively powerful tail. Within two years they develop arms and legs, and the tail is absorbed back into the body. From two years to about five they are children, taught the necessary skills to live in the swamp. From five years until they die they are fully-grown adults. While Badraie will protect tadpoles, they are not distressed if up to 90% of tadpoles die, as this is natural. Tadpoles have no names, and are not fully



“people” yet. Spawn-Nannies are Badraie who care for the eggs and swarms of tadpoles. A typical Spawn-nanny will spend several years with a single batch of eggs until the tadpoles grow limbs. Depending on the size of the spawn, it may have several nannies. Once a badraie has developed its arms and legs it is given a name, and inducted into the community.

The badraie religion most resembles animism, communing with the spirits of marsh and stream. Their technology level is low – they manufacture few products, using natural materials to fashion weapons and tools. They are master weavers of reeds and rushes.

Badraie are naturally amphibious, able to breath both air and water water. They require large amounts of water for both health and religious purposes – A Badraie will literally dry up if it remains out of water too long (about the same time that a human takes to die of thirst).

Badraie are hunter-gatherers, though a few rare herbs are planted and tended by Badraie. There is no gender bias in Badraie society. Either sex may take up any occupation. Females are gravid normally only a few

weeks once every two years, lay their eggs, and carry on with their lives.

**Weapons and Armor:** Bows and spears made of strengthened reeds are the only true weapons made by the Badraie. Bronze weapons are extremely rare, and highly prized. Iron is less prized, as it rusts in the normal Badraie environment. Armor is rare, and normally consists of woven reeds. Leather or Metal armor is not worn – leather rots too easily, and metal is too heavy for swimming. Lo-Metal and Sa-metal are obvious exceptions, but are so rare as to be non-existent in most Badraie communities.

**Innate Abilities:** Swim, Hide, Croaking Chorus, Loud, Swallow anything  $\frac{1}{4}$  their size or less

**Typical Occupations:** Gardener, Hunter, Shaman, Spawn-Nanny

## Badraie Religion

The badraie treat all Otherworld creatures as Spirits, no matter the Otherworld the creature comes from.

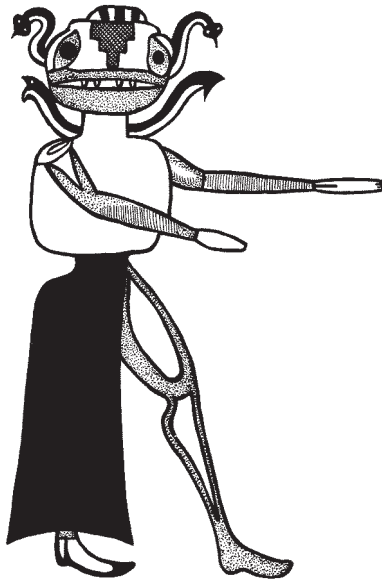
The oldest adult in the community leads the normal religious ceremonies. All badraie communities celebrate Laying Time (The week when all females lay their eggs and the Spawn Nannies are blessed, , some time in Late Sea Season) Birthing Time (When the tadpoles hatch from the eggs, sometime in late Dark Season) and The Day of the Great Frog, when Badros is celebrated (The first Day of Sacred Time).

To become a shaman, the Badrai must spend several years apprenticed to a shaman, then take a “Death Journey”, leaving the comfort of their natural habitat and spending 2 days completely dry (and slowly dying of dehydration), during which time they are tested by Brulep the Contrary. If they survive the ordeal, they will awaken their fetch and be a full shaman. Due to the wet climate of most Badraie homes, it may take several weeks for a prospective shaman to find a place where there is no water.

# Pus-Ridden Devils

## David Millians

The Pus-Ridden Devils are the remnants of Shang Hsa May-His-Name-Be-Cursed's program for recruiting servants from outside Kralorela. Already fading rapidly by the middle of his reign, its members now cling to the vestiges of their status, hoping for their luck to turn. They know their organization as the Bureaucracy of Heroes, but commoner and magistrate alike recognize them for what they are. The former never tire of bullying and berating these pathetic souls.



Successive waves of foreigners seeking to join the imperial government have discovered his organization and its promises and then despaired at the frustrations they encounter. Aging and decrepit members then appear before the latest newcomers, hoping to aid them where others have failed and thereby gain a powerful patron within the government. They provide advice, guidance, and representation to foreigners seeking to join Kralori elite society, but they have no meaningful power or influence.

Though some might properly classify this group as a "hero band", it should be sufficient to define their minor and miserable traits below.

**Entry Requirements:** Ambitious, Foreign

**Abilities:** Doctrine of the Bureaucracy of Heroes, Membership in the Bureaucracy of Heroes, Read Kralori, Soul Vision, Spirit Face, Symbolic Sight

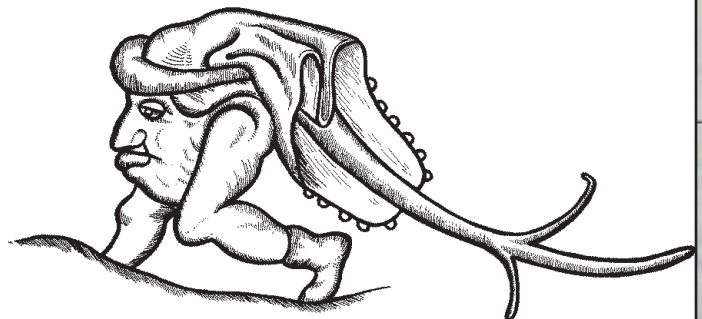
**Virtues:** a member's Ambitious trait eventually becomes Frustrated, Pathetic, or Raving.

**Talents:** Avoid Punishment, Baffle Rabble, Feign Humility

**Other Side:** None – Members gain their magic during rituals held amidst the ruins of the last Middle Sea Empire consulate in Kralorela, outside Lur Nop.

**Other Connections:** In their dreams

**Disadvantages:** Members suffer constant, low-level humiliations at the hands of the Kralori.



# LIFE IN PRAX, PART I

## Andrew Larsen

Prax is an arid steppe to the east of Sartar. In the beginning it was a lush and fertile region known as Genert's Garden, but in the Great Darkness, all the plants began to die and there was not enough food. The great spirit Waha declared that some must eat plants and the rest would eat the plant eaters. To decide which, all the residents of Prax played knucklebones. In most cases the humans won and the herd animals were obliged to eat plants and be eaten in return, but in one game, the Morokanth won and so their humans eat plants and are eaten in return.



Prax today is a dry region, with only one river that lasts all year (the Zola Fel, or River of Cradles). Most of the land is too dry to accept agriculture, although small oases dot the region, in which some farming does

take place. A few permanent communities exist along the River of the Cradles and at the oases, but most of Prax is only inhabited by the Animal Nomads. Despite the dryness of the land, Prax can be quite stormy, especially during the Winter Fertile season, when a good deal of rain falls and dry rivers (called the Serpents) briefly revive. The region varies in temperature with Summer growing as hot as 110 degrees during the day and 65 degrees at night and Winter being as cold as 45 degrees during the day

and 15 degrees at night. Dust storms are common during Summer

The Animal Nomads fall into the Major and Minor tribes. The Major tribes are the Bison, Impala, Sable, and High Llama riders and the Morokanth; these tribes are comparatively numerous, divided into many clans who continuously move about the steppe. The Minor tribes are the Rhino, Bolo Lizard, Ostrich, Zebra, and Unicorn riders; these tribes are much smaller in number, possessing only a few clans. The Bolo Lizard, Ostrich, and Unicorn riders represent significant variances from normal Praxian patterns religiously. There are a few other nomadic peoples, such as the Agimori (or Men-and-a-Half), the Pol Joni, and the Cannibal cultists (who mistakenly thought that Waha commanded them to eat other people).

The Major tribes are divided into clans, and the clans are composed of septs, loosely structured around family groups. Each sept has a sept-khan, from whose number the clan-khan is usually chosen. In turn, the clan-khans choose one of their number to be the High Khan of the tribe. The khans are responsible for the defense of their people and their enrichment through raiding. Equally important are the priestesses of Eiritha, the Mother of Herds. The herds are critical to survival in Prax and represent the major wealth of the people; it is the job of the priestesses to ensure the health and



well-being of the herds and the people. Each sept or clan priestess controls decisions involving the herds, including when (and where) the herds must move.

Praxian society is fairly rigid, a need imposed on them by the harsh conditions of Prax. Men are understood to wield the power of death, while women wield the power of life. Men are the warriors and hunters, while women are the herders and artisans, although a tiny number of women fight. Both deal with spirits as shamans.

### Praxian Social Patterns

The following discusses the general way that Praxian tribes are organized, but there is considerable variation on many points from one tribe to another. In particular, the Morokanth deviate on many points from the human clans. The Lesser tribes also differ substantially from the Major tribes.

A Praxian man may marry as soon as he has passed his adulthood rites, but typically a man spends a period as a bachelor, living in the bachelor's tent. Bachelor men see themselves in competition for any women available for marriage, and are likely to

engage in mock brawling, athletic competitions, and actual fights whenever there are potential wives around. Wrestling is a particularly important sport, in imitation of Waha; gambling with knucklebones is also common. Wom-



en in turn dance in the presence of bachelors to win attention and courtship from them. Ultimately, a man must win the favor of a potential wife and her parents, since the wife has final say, although parents are traditionally consulted and their advice normally taken. Under normal circumstances, a girl lives in her mother's tent until she marries for the first time.

Praxian marriage and family customs are strongly imitative of the reproductive patterns of Praxian herds. A man is permitted to take as many wives as he can protect. All children are equally his regardless of which wife bears the child; although Praxians know who their mother is, all of a man's wives are responsible for the children jointly and children are expected to respect all their father's wives. (The Praxian language actually has multiple words for mother, including "Mother-who-bore-me", "Mother-who wed-my-father" and "Mother-who nurtures-me"; this last can refer to any woman who nurses a child, any woman who tends his wounds, any animal whose milk he drinks, and the goddess Eiritha.) Consequently there is comparatively little conflict between wives over children, although favoritism does occur.

A bachelor is permitted to challenge a married man for the right to court his wife. This challenge normally takes the form of a fight or wrestling match, but in some clans may also take the form of a non-violent contest. If the

interloping bachelor wins the fight, he is permitted to court the man's wife, who has the right to accept the offer (thereby divorcing her first husband and marrying the suitor) or refuse and remain with her current husband. A woman who is unhappy with her husband will often elicit courtship by dancing before a bachelor, thus signaling her willingness to be courted. Although any man may challenge any married man, in practice most challenges are made by bachelors against men with multiple wives. It is considered an extreme insult to challenge a man who has only one wife. A man who loses his only wife returns to the bachelor's tent, a deep shame.

The primary form of wealth in Praxian society is herd beasts, which are the property of the women of the clan. A man is normally permitted to own only his mount. If he acquires more animals, they are normally gifted to one of his wives or, if he is a bachelor, to a sister or a friend who has no mount; he may reclaim these beasts to offer

a dowry. This means that women dominate the economic life of the clan, and men are understood to guard both the women and their wealth.

When a Praxian man reaches adulthood, he received weapons, a mount, and a few other items from his parents, and is expected to enrich himself through fighting and marrying a wealthy wife. A Praxian woman divides her herd beasts equally between her daughters (saving only mounts for her sons, and a share for herself), gifting them to her at marriage. Women represent their wealth publicly by wearing a necklace decorated with one bead for each herd animal they own (or expect to receive at marriage). A poor woman owns 1 animal for each member of her family, while a very wealthy woman owns 10 (this ratio holds for the Llama, Sable, and Morokanth tribes; among the Bison and Impala tribes, the numbers are higher).



Praxian clans are divided into septs, or family units. The size and number of septs in a clan varies considerably, but even a small clan has 5-6 septs. Each sept is united by kinship, so that its members will generally be the children or grandchildren of a common ancestor (usually a man, although among the Sable tribe, matriarchal septs are known). It is possible for a sept to be a single tent, although this is very rare because an isolated family is extremely vulnerable to raiding and other threats. When a man marries, he is gifted by his parents with a new ger (or tent); he will live in this ger with his wives and children (although wealthy families maintain a ger for each wife, with the husband sleeping in whichever ger he chooses, and the children staying in their mother's tent). Men move out of their parent's ger at adulthood and live in the communal bachelor's ger. Septs are exogamous; a man marries a woman from another sept or clan, who then joins his sept. (Marrying a spouse from the same sept is considered mildly incestuous, regardless of the actual blood relationship involved). Septs are free to welcome unrelated members, and it is common for a man from one sept to join the sept of a close friend. Bachelors sometimes leave their sept in hopes of finding wealth elsewhere, but except among the Sable tribe, it is considered effeminate for a man to join his wife's sept.

Each sept has its own khan, who is normally the oldest male who has attained khan status in his cult. However, any man of khan status is permitted to challenge his sept-khan for leadership; this most commonly happens when the sept-khan is too old or too badly injured to be an effective war leader for the sept. Challenge is sometimes the result of a serious enmity, but not inevitably; an older man may encourage his

favored son to challenge him for the khanate. Khanate challenge requires a duel, although either party may yield at any time after being wounded once. A challenger who loses is expected to accept his loss and not challenge the victor for at least one full year; the same is true of the loser, although among the Impala tribe a loser is normally barred from returning to the khanate.

The leader of the sept is therefore normally the father, grandfather, or uncle of most of the men in the clan, and related by blood or marriage to all of the women. Thus, although he is politically the leader of the sept, in practice, his leadership resembles that of a father more than that of an official. Among the Sable tribe, matriarchal septs are ruled by a khanum, who is always the Eiritha priestess of her sept.

Praxians take slaves, most commonly through raiding. All tribes do this, but the Morokanth are especially notorious for it; some Morokanth septs and clans focus their economy of slave-dealing more than herding (although among the Morokanth, the boundary between those two practices can be slightly fuzzy). A man is permitted to use his female slaves as concubines, and many bachelors own a female slave before they marry. Children born to a concubine are considered legitimate and free, but will inevitably be quite poor because they will inherit nothing from their mother. If a man has children by both wives and concubines, the children of his concubines will typically be looked down on, and many leave the sept when they reach adulthood. Female slaves are used for domestic chores, craftwork, and herding (depending on the range of skills they possesses). Male slaves are used for heavy labor and herding. However, because most Praxian men are warriors, and therefore potential threats as slaves, it

is normal to kill men in battle and enslave women, although some clans hamstring a defeated man to render him less dangerous, and other clans take men as slaves and sell them as quickly as possible.

Praxian men are understood to wield the forces of Death, while women wield the forces of Life. Most men worship Waha the Butcher, the god of the Praxian way of life; Storm Bull, the Praxian weather god and warrior against chaos; or Foundchild, the Praxian hunter, although a few men are shamans and worship spirits or ancestors more than a specific god. It is the job of men to protect the clan and bring resources into the clan through warfare and hunting. Most women worship Eiritha, the Herd Mother, or less commonly Helpwoman, the goddess of craftwork, although a few are shamans. It is the job of women to manage the domestic resources that the clan depends on for survival. Some men and women worship Daka Fal, the judge of the dead, who helps them contact their ancestors. A small percentage of men and women worship other deities less integral to the Praxian way of life, including Orlanth, Humakt, Chalana Arroy, Issaries, Yelmario, and Babeester Gor. Among Sable Riders, worshipping the Seven Mothers is common.

The Khan is nearly always a worshipper of Waha or sometimes Storm Bull; he is responsible for protecting the sept or clan and making it wealthier; he interprets and enforces the Yassa (the laws of Waha). The Eiritha Woman is the oldest or most powerful worshipper of Eiritha; she is responsible

for the health and fertility of the herd and the human members of the sept or clan, and has final say on any issue related to them. Thus in practice, the sept or clan is governed by its Khan and its Eiritha Woman working in conjunction; both are considered vital to the survival of the community and neither is seen as superior to the other.

Most clans also have a Bone Man (or Woman), a shaman who communicates with the ancestors and gains their aid. The Bone Man typically worships Daka Fal, but in some cases may be a shaman of Waha. The shamanesses of Eiritha are forbidden to deal with the dead directly, although they may worship their ancestors. Instead they mostly interact with fertility, animal, and plant spirits, as well as the various other spirits of Prax.

Because Praxian life is fairly precarious, Praxians tend to be fairly conservative toward innovation and outside cultures. A

Praxian trusts his sept first, others in his clan and tribe second, and other Eiritha tribes third. Those outside the Yassa deserve no trust at all, except the temporary convenience of trade.



# Heroquests

Calithena and Steve Marsh

*artwork by Fat Cotton*

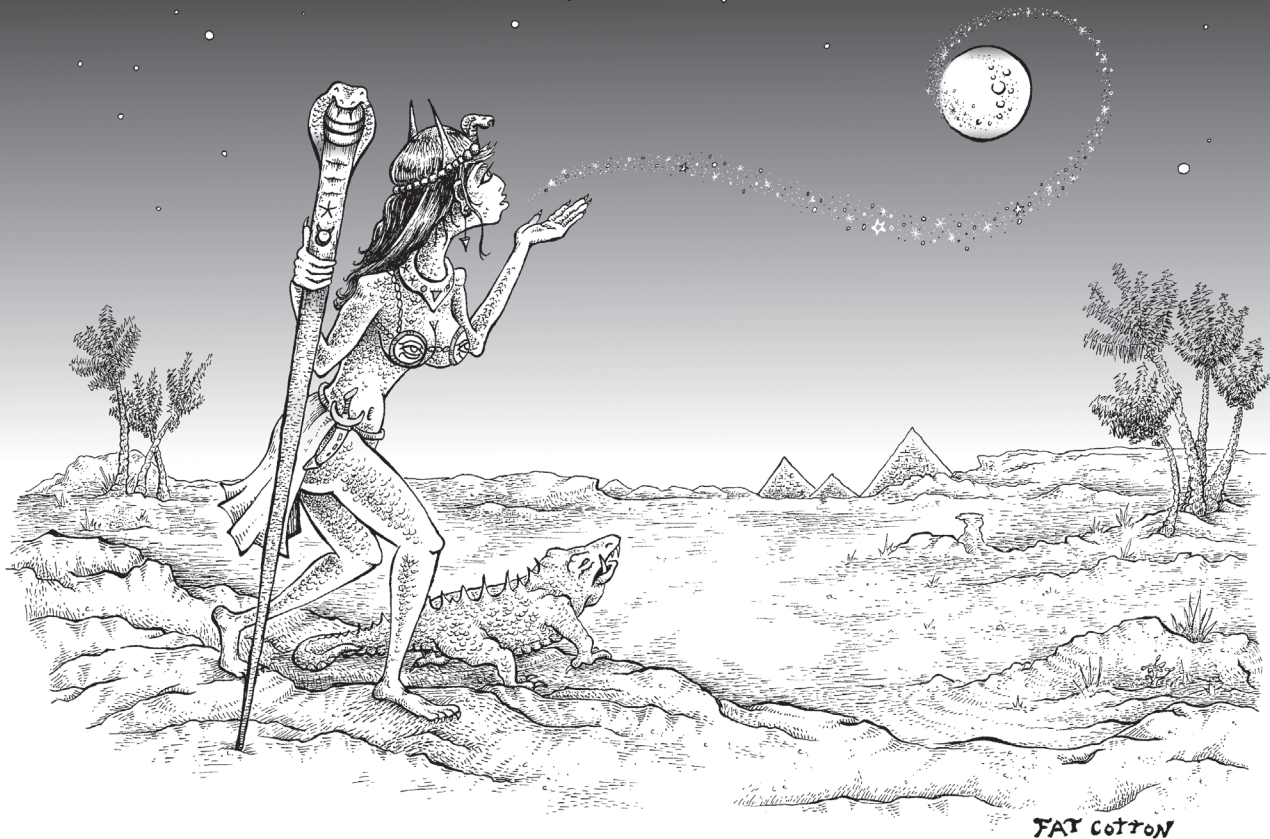
Glorantha is in many respects a unique fantasy world, and as such it contains a great deal of material useful for inspiration, imitation, and outright theft. In this article we would like to consider the heroquest concept, sundered somewhat from its Gloranthan origins, as a tool you can use in your own world to enrich your play.

Heroquests are rituals wherein mortals partake of immortal natures and participate in eternal patterns. In game, these may involve quite dramatic spectacles, re-enacting and even changing ancient myths or doing battle at the very courts of the gods. But at the same time, many real-world activities, such as the Stations of the Cross in the Roman Catholic tradition or even saying the US Pledge of Allegiance, have a heroquesting aspect to them as well. They are supramundane and involve participation in greater cultural and religious, historical and mythic wholes; they occur whenever a mortal reaches out past the ordinary world and takes part in the deeper structuring of psychic and historical reality. Regardless of the status of such activities in the real world, moreover, in fantasy realms where myth and reality blend they can have permanent effects on PCs and campaign worlds alike.

At the general level, there are several elements to be considered when running a heroquest. The first is the story itself. The

classic story-types are well-documented in gaming products (David Emigh's *The Quest* and the "Myth of the Month" feature at [glorantha.com](http://glorantha.com) are both good sources) and in the Jungian tradition (check out Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade, Carol Pearson, and Jung himself for ideas). Alternatively, instead of learning about things at one or more theoretical removes, you could simply read myths plucked from various real-world mythologies and tailor them to fit your own world's needs. But in any case the stories that really matter here are the ones relevant to your campaign's own mythological cycle. How were your gods and heroes born? What did they do? What are they doing 'here and now' – whatever that means in your cosmology? Once you answer these questions you will be in good position to consider what heroquesting in your world might look like. (You should remember to consider the story from multiple points of view – how would the giant tell the story of Jack and the Beanstalk?)

The next thing to consider is what the heroquest means for the hero – usually a PC, since it's often lame to play adventures where the PCs are the supporting cast in some NPC's big story. In game terms, heroquests are activities beyond the mundane wherein a putatively non-mythic creature (a normal, mortal PC) gains access to mythic powers and abilities. During a heroquest, one or more of the PCs will probably embody a



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heroic or divine persona and relate to other such heroic or divine personas through their adventures; enough of this and the PC will start to become a hero or demigod him- or herself. This gives PCs a chance to interact with supernatural and divine beings, sometimes bestows temporary powers upon him or her, and usually grants some more permanent kind of special blessing or magical ability to the PC if the quest is successful. The hero's transformation is the sort of thing that most GMs will be familiar with, since PCs gaining new and wondrous mystical powers is a staple of most fantasy RPGs. These transformations can sometimes be more complete and far-reaching than those offered by spells and magic items, however, given that the hero's journey through the quest makes the PC him- or herself at least a tiny part of the

mythic fabric of your campaign world. If there are special statuses for some PCs in your world – demigod, exalted, rune lord, rune priest, culture-hero or divine emissary prestige classes, and so on – specific heroquests can be great points of entry for them.

Where do heroquests happen? One possibility is to locate them in 'other planes' – the spirit world, or the realms of the gods – and in other mythic ages of existence. From some points of view this is what happens on Glorantha; on this reading when a heroquest occurs e.g. on the God Plane, the PC who walks the path 'is' at the same time the god. This approach follows (and usually, though perhaps not in Glorantha, reifies) Eliade's general approach of separating out sacred and profane spaces: the Godsrealms or the

Spirit World and the ordinary world, the outer planes and the prime material. An alternate approach, which Calithena has developed in the rigorously materialistic campaign world of Advent, is to treat the material world itself as fundamentally enchanted or magical, and to treat the space and time of heroquests as literal places – primarily in the hundreds of orbiting moons, deep within the ocean, and deep under the earth. In Advent the gods are material beings and the distinction between myth and history is nuncupatory. Del Beaudry's world Oceania as we understand it takes a third approach, wherein mythic reality has a 'planar' (or regio-like, if you remember *Ars Magica*) character, but is in some sense directly opened onto from the ordinary world the PCs inhabit, almost like several extra dimensions which coexist with the others but which can only be accessed at certain moments.

What resolution mechanics one uses for heroquests will be highly dependent on the nature of the world you run and the rules you use in other parts of the game. Here are a couple of observations, though. First, many of the greatest heroquests in Glorantha were originally successfully run using the highly 'naturalistic' and even 'simulationist' Runequest system, so you don't have to create weird metagame mechanics to mark the move from ordinary to heroic and divine adventuring unless you're inclined to do so. Second, heroquests are both the best and worst parts of an FRP sequence to revert to 'story logic' and free-form roleplaying to adjudicate outcomes. If the group and GM have it just right, there will be moments when it is obvious what should happen in terms of the underlying mythic reality, and going there can yield highly satisfying play. But at the same time, preserving the sense that something is at stake and that PCs must act themselves to

influence it is critical, and so reverting to free-form can sometimes make the players feel like passive spectators, robbing them of the crucial magic that makes mythically transformative play an interesting alternative. So use the free-form approach when it makes sense, but cautiously, and to amplify your players' actions rather than to thwart or redirect them.

There are principally three types of heroquest one can undertake, with increasing stakes:

**Reenactment:** In this simplest kind of heroquest – which can sometimes be a gateway to the higher types – the PCs will simply attempt to follow out an existing pattern of history, cosmology, theology, and/or myth. Success reaffirms and reinforces the myth, often securing blessings and/or rewards for the questors; failure ejects the PCs from their engagement with mythic reality, possibly with a few wounds and/or geases for good measure. Although there are certainly some long myth cycles that can be played this way, I recommend keeping adventures of this kind short, as they are often fundamentally railroads. They can be great short flavor adventures to get blessings, magic items, or mystical keys needed to complete some broader quest, however. If you do want to use a reenactment-style heroquest as the basis of a longer adventure, my recommendation is to at least stay open to the possibility that creative play or interesting random encounters will turn it into a quest of the second or third type.

**Reconnection:** This intermediate form of heroquest, which in Glorantha was often successfully undertaken by Arkat Chaosbane, is one in which new divine, cosmological, and mythic connections are formed. As Arkat discovered, though this is often unknown even to the gods themselves, the paths of myth and the pillars of the cosmos are far more

interwoven with one another than is commonly appreciated. The mysterious stranger who helped a deity from one pantheon might be revealed to be a trickster-demigod from another; the ancient enemies of one people might be revealed as the ancestors of another. Two gods from different places might even be discovered to be the same! This kind of quest often leads to interesting discoveries about the campaign world, and can be a good way to get PCs access to powers or allies from wildly disparate traditions.

**Transformation:** This is where the heroquest concept is potentially at its most radical and interesting, where the actions of the PCs actually have the potential to change the gameworld myths, legends, and structure forever. Some-times PCs choose to 'take the gameworld on' directly: for a great discussion of how one group dealt with the issue of rape in relation to the Gloranthan chaos goddess Thed and the Orlanthy pantheon, check out [adept-press.com/ideas-and-discourse/other-essays/goddess-of-rape/](http://adept-press.com/ideas-and-discourse/other-essays/goddess-of-rape/). At other times, things just happen. In one game, one of our PCs participated in a heroquest involving the God of Sunrises and Sunsets, who fell in love with the PC and offered her apotheosis: she could take his hand and become Consort of the Dawn. The fate of the mortal world was more important to her, though, and though she wept with his loss, she blew him a kiss goodbye ere she departed the Godsrealms en route to completing her quest. Her kiss caught the rays of dawn and coalesced into something new, a fourth moon that ever since has orbited the world of that campaign; and though the character did not become a god in the conventional sense, that moon has now always been there, and its mythic history is tied in with that PC's own as her adventures have continued.

How do PCs leave their mark on your campaign world, and what kind of mark can they leave? The naturalistic approach to this question is in many cases adequate. Raising armies, conquering kingdoms, leaving heirs, building castles, even holding local office or running an inn are all fine goals for many a PC. But the heroquest offers another possibility: the chance to change the mythic, physical, and cosmological structure of the fantasy world itself. At the metagame level, you can think of transformative heroquests as a kind of dialogue between players and GM, where the successful player can transform even the theology and cosmology of the campaign through his or her PC's actions. Such is difficult, of course, usually requiring clever play and tremendously powerful characters to find success; but if it can be done then the gameworld itself can be transformed, destroyed, or made anew. Having a heroquesting option within your game also makes a clearer path for PC apotheosis; they must undertake various heroquests with an eye towards inserting themselves into one or more existing mythologies.

Such things are not easy to accomplish, though. In Glorantha, Orlanth slaying Yelm is a pretty major event. Should you wish to save Yelm, you would have to go back past the beginning of time, work your way forward to that conflict, and then face the unshielded death rune. Your PC might very well be one of the many shadows or gleams of light that Orlanth shredded as he slew Yelm. Each of those was/is someone who thought he could transverse time and make a difference. None did, of course – so far.