

# UNDERWORLD LORE

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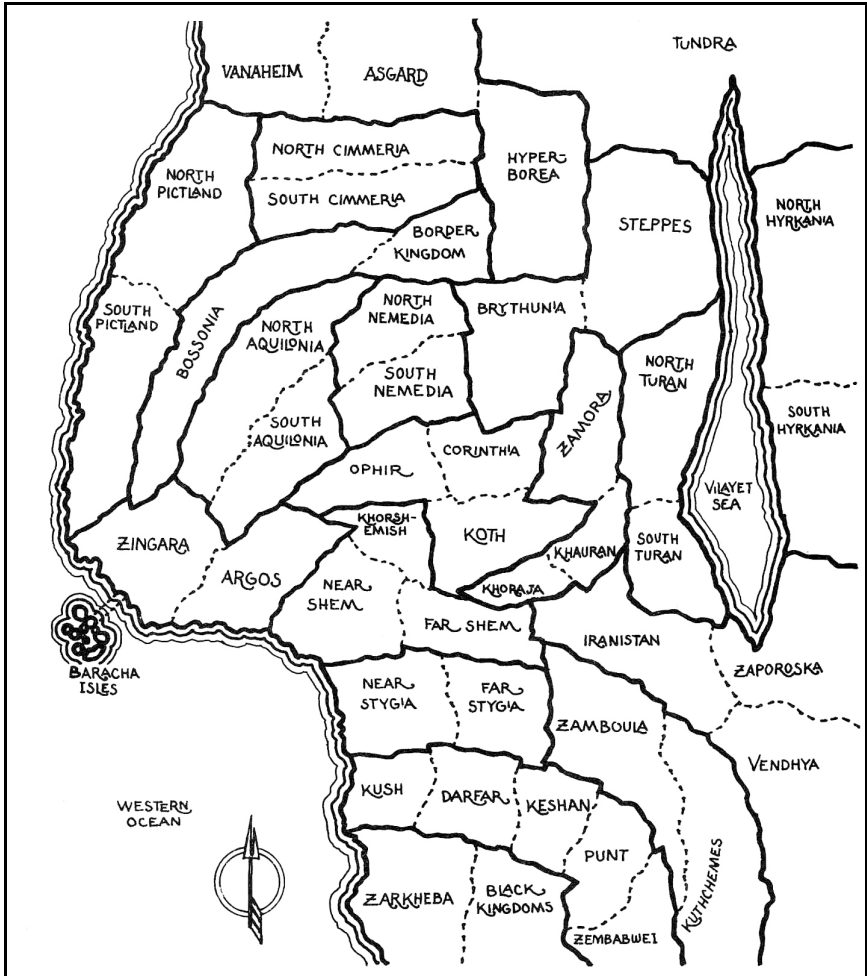
Conan brooding by *John Buscema*  
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**EIGLOPHIAN LODGE**

# LANDS OF THE HYBORIAN AGE

## c. 10,000 BCE

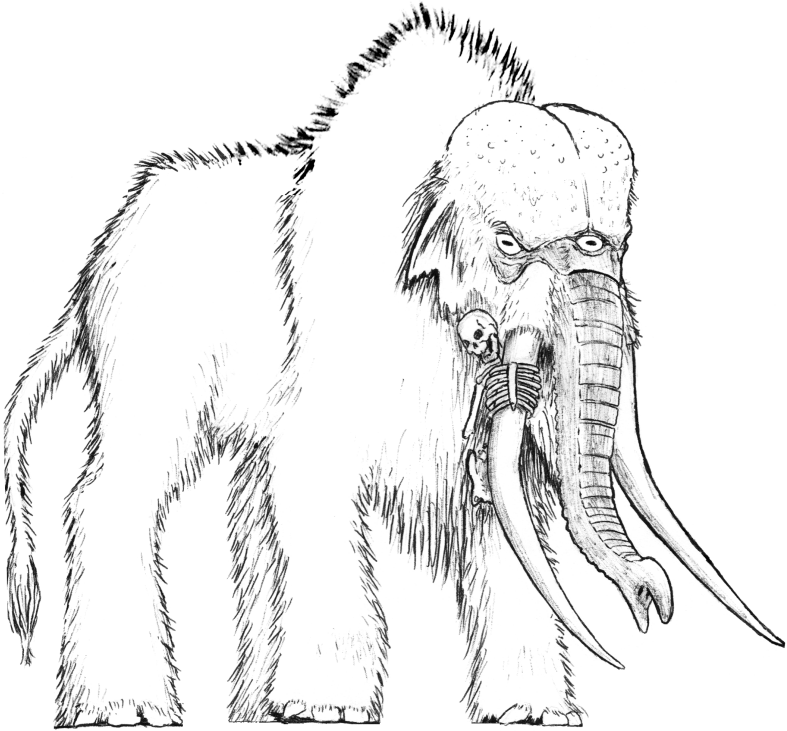


**R** NOW, OH PRINCE, that between the years when the oceans drank Atlantis and the gleaming cities, and the years of the rise of the Sons of Aryas, there was an Age undreamed of, when shining kingdoms lay spread across the world like blue mantles beneath the stars..."

*The Nemedian Chronicles*



Conan (artist unknown)



# **VOR-MAMMUT**

## **Horror of the Cimmerian Uplands**

by Arnold Kemp  
illustration by Joseph Cole



## *Hark!*

Freezing is a common death in the northern lands, and is perhaps not so unpleasant because it is always expected. It is certainly nothing compared to the wretched terror of a man stalked and killed by sabertooths over the course of many days. Or consider the death of a man poisoned by a Black Sunok, who feels his heart fall quiet in his chest and realizes that it will never beat again. And mourn for the warrior bested in battle, whose head is sawed off while he is still alive and held aloft, so that he may watch his friends fall even as the blood drains from his brain.

Yes, there are many deaths in Cimmeria, but there is one that is worse than all the others. It is the death that the VOR-MAMMUT brings us. No man boasts that he does not fear to be killed by the white mammoth, because to be killed by the vor-mammut is to die a thousand times. Here is the story of one of those deaths. You will listen to it.



THERE WAS A SHAMAN called Mirkuut, who once lived not so far

from here. When the vor-mammut took him, he was in a young woman's tent, amputating her frostbitten ear that had become gangrenous. A soft snow was falling outside and the dogs were sleeping in their kennels. Without a roar or any prelude, the vor-mammut plowed through the thick hide walls, impaling Mirkuut through his belly, and then carrying him out into the tundra. In less than six seconds, the tentpole had been broken and the young woman trampled into crumpled gore.

They say that Mirkuut's screams echoed long after he had been carried off. Indeed, for days afterwards, the wind carried his cries back into his village, begging for rescue, or if rescue was impossible, then at least death. For when a vor-mammut carries you off, it carries you to hell.

In shape, a vor-mammut resembles a lean mammoth, but with the gait and muscular proportions of a boar. They are all albinos, with shaggy white hair and pinkish-red eyes. Although they are smaller than mammoths, they are faster. Much faster than a man, and perfectly capable of keeping pace with a swift horse.

Gaze upon its tusks! They are sharper than the blades you carry. Thick as your leg, and with a certain

curve that is considered most beautiful by those who are wicked. Nowhere else in the world will you find an instrument more suited to impalement than the tusk of a vor-mammut.

These tusks—these great weapons—were not given to the vor-mammut by the gods at the dawn of creation. The vor-mammut stole their tusks from greater warriors among the beasts, and in time, the thieves became warriors themselves. And like any warrior, they know the way to care for their weapons.

If you are truly unlucky, you may hear them sharpening their tusks at dusk. They perform this chore with sinister patience and dreadful regularity. I doubt you will forget the slow scraping of that dread ivory against a menhir at night. Quiet your breath, then, and steal away from that accursed place!

Their heads are slung low, and their trunks brush against the snow. Some say it is the weight of their stolen tusks drags their head down, but this is not so. They lower their heads to honor the princes of hell. They have looked into the yawning abyss and gazed upon the demon princes. They have counted the lord of hell in all the generations of eternity. In the face of this infernal majesty, what can they do but bow?

The strength of a vor-mammut is in his neck. This is where his power is, and where his heart's blood pumps most thickly. Their shoulders are high, and their backs tower above men like the crags of white mountains. The muscles of his neck are more powerful than you could dream, and it is said that they can lift mountains when given a place to wedge their tusks.

They use this great power to kill us and trample our works to dust. When they charge, they lower their head, raising it only at the moment of impact. And with all the force of an avalanche, they spear the man through his belly—always through the belly—with such force that the man slides down the entire length of the tusk, so that he is face to face with the beast. He can see the world reflected in its red eye, and it can taste the blood that streams down his leg.

With its prey upon its tusk, the vor-mammut continues back into the wild places, where it throws the man atop the black lichens and devours him.

They are not like the wolves or the great cats. You may observe them eating sedge grass and rushes beside the rivers. The vor-mammut can subsist on grains, as the mammoth does, and be not lessened by it. The

secret truth of the matter is that the vor-mammut hunts and devours us because *such a thing is pleasing to it*.

It is said that the vor-mammut desire to eat us while we are yet alive, and this is true. After being impaled and carried off, the unfortunate souls can be heard screaming and crying all the way to the horizon.

Hearing our suffering is also pleasing to the vor-mammut. They are drawn by the sounds of torture or the lamentations of women. You have wondered why we do not mourn our dead with weeping. Now you know.

Just as the demons imitate our shapes—poorly—so does the vor-mammut imitate the mammoth. You have only to look into its face to see that there is nothing of the mammoth in it, only hatred and cruel hunger.

Look in the smoke! Do you see it? Look closely, and learn what all men fear!

Attend now, its thick and leering lips! The vast and protuberant forehead, which houses the brain of a damned thing! The sallow crust around the pink eyes, and the long eyelashes, stiff as the bristles of a fly! See the mottled teeth that push up through its gums, like the knuckles of a corpse newly-revealed in

spring-time snowmelt! And everything mounted atop the terrors of its ivory, looking down upon you as a king upon his throne.

Cursed is the one who has a chance to kill a vor-mammut but does not! Their friends shall flee from them and they shall die alone. Wretched is the one whose sword-arm wavers in the face of the beast! Their courage will fail them in the moment of greatest need, and their enemies will move undetected. And most damned of all is the one who gives succor to that fell beast! They shall die the death of cowards, and dogs shall lick up their blood!

Be not like that foolish king, who sought to appease the vor-mammut. He offered them virgins, tying the young women to trees, where they dangled in their paths like ripe fruit. He raised monoliths in the wilderness, that they might never be far from a tall stone upon which to sharpen their tusks.

See now how his city has fallen! Only stones crowd the marketplace now, and wolves den in the basements. The snow-choked streets are empty save for ghouls, for all travelers know to turn back when they see the circles of standing stones. Only thieves and madmen approach the walls of that blasted ruin, or gaze upon the rows of tusks upon which

he impaled his enemies, in vain imitation of the beast that he worshipped.

He is nothing now, and less than nothing. So great is his dishonor that if I spoke his name to you, it would turn into ashes upon my tongue.

There is an ancient law of this land. All who see a vor-mammut must give warning to others, even enemies. Those who see the vor-mammut but do not pass on the warning are put to death.

Likewise, all of the warriors of a settlement must go forth and slay it when they are told of it. If they do not, a second vor-mammut will come, and then a third, and then the city will fall and all its people be devoured.

The vor-mammut can be killed like any other beast. Its neck is strong and its magic is great, but once it sees its dark blood staining the snow, it will give up a great cry and fall over dead.

You will need many warriors to kill the vor-mammut. The simplest way to track it to its den—usually a cave or a grove of ancient pines—is by following the cries of its victims as it charges away. The tracks it leaves behind will lead you astray.

This is why, if you find yourself upon that pearly tusk—that most damned and unenviable of places—you must always shout as loud as possible. Weaker men will be tempted to strike it. This provokes it, and it will grab your legs, turn you sideways, and dash out your brains against the ground.

Those who would track the vor-mammut must be strong of mind as well. The trail of the vor-mammut is confounded by the powers of hell, and distance and time are different there.

There are tales of warriors who set out to track the vor-mammut, but allow themselves to become blinded by doubt and fear. Though their pursuit only seems like days, in truth they follow it for months or years, growing gaunt and insane as they chase it to the ends of the earth.

Those that die in the hunt of a vor-mammut become ice wraiths.

Those that do not die, but instead follow the vor-mammut to its destination, suffer a far worse fate.

There is a place, far to the north, beyond the borders of any map drawn by the hands of men, where the vor-mammut go to die. It is their graveyard and their greatest work. A vast valley of bones,

stretching as far as the eye can see, rotting and splintering upon the snow. When it freezes, the ice in the bones cracks and groans, giving voice to the hordes of nameless dead that the vor-mammut have claimed since before the dawn of history.

Beneath that field of bones is a gateway to hell, and all who die in that place go directly into the fire. No god or spirit has power here. It is a place of utter darkness.

This is why even a brave and virtuous man may be sent to hell if he is eaten by the vor-mammut. This is why “may you be carried by ivory” is one of the blackest curses we utter. This is how we know that hell is real, and that it is watching us.

Now I must tell you of the third eye of the vor-mammut. This is the last secret wisdom you will need before you set out. Listen well.

I was not speaking in the language of poets when I told you that the vor-mammut gazes upon hell. It has a third eye amid its sloping forehead, slightly larger than the other two and rimmed with a peculiar wetness. When it opens this eye, it perceives hell, and hell gazes back out through it.

You must not look into that eye!

If you do, a shudder will run through you and your spine will feel as water. You will feel a presence—as if great hands have taken hold of each of your limbs. Then your arms and legs will twist under this great force. They will twist and keep twisting until all of the bones are torn and splintered, and even if the vor-mammut does not devour you or your companions abandon you, you will never run again.

Circle behind it. This will be difficult—they never stop moving. Thrust your spear behind its jaws and do not be trampled or crushed. Stay with your fellows, and above all, never doubt your courage.

Do these things and you may triumph. It is said that the only baptism a warrior needs to be assured of a place in heaven is in the blood of the vor-mammut.

Go now and consider these secrets. If you return from your hunt, remember to bring my payment. With a length of tusk, I will make a staff for myself that will strengthen my magics. And from its hide I will make you a white cloak, and no one in these lands will ever doubt your strength again.

—*Umak White-Breath, shaman*

## VOR-MAMMUT

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>Hit Dice:</b>    | 10  |
| <b>Armor Class:</b> | 5 [14]  |
| <b>Attacks:</b>     | +10/+10 Gore (1d10+4 damage, Impale)<br>+10 Trample (2d6+4) |
| <b>Move:</b>        | 15  |
| <b>Save:</b>        | 3   |
| <b>Morale:</b>      | 11  |
| <b>CL/XP:</b>       | 13/2300   |
| <b>Special:</b>     | third eye   |

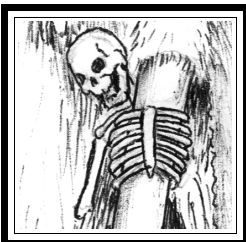
Despite being, basically, a small mammoth, a vor-mammut is stealthy and has a 3-in-6 chance to surprise. This increases to a 4-in-6 chance if the area is completely covered in thick snow. If it impales a creature, it will try to run away and eat it before it dies and freezes. While running away, it will flee from pursuers. But, if it is seriously wounded ( $\frac{1}{2}$  HP or less) or its third eye is damaged, it will fly into a rage and fight to the death.

This is just the most common behavior; vor-mammut are quite intelligent and can have very different tactics or goals.

Impale: A target is impaled when a vor-mammut (1) attacks and a d10 rolls a 10, or if the vor-mammut is (2) charging and a d10 rolls a 4 or higher. Impaled targets get -4 to attack, cannot move, and take 1d6 damage each turn. In place of an attack, the vor-mammut can smash an impaled creature against the ground, automatically dealing maximum damage.

Trample: A vor-mammut can use its Trample against any number of smaller creatures that it moves over. If it is surrounded and people aren't bunched up, this is usually only a single target per turn.

Third Eye: If a vor-mammut opens the eye in its forehead, it gains a gaze attack that does 3d6 damage. The target then makes two saves. If the first save is failed, the target's legs are shattered. If the second is failed, their arms.



**Arnold Kemp is the proprietor of *Goblin Punch*, a blog full of clever ideas for tabletop RPGs. It can be found here:**

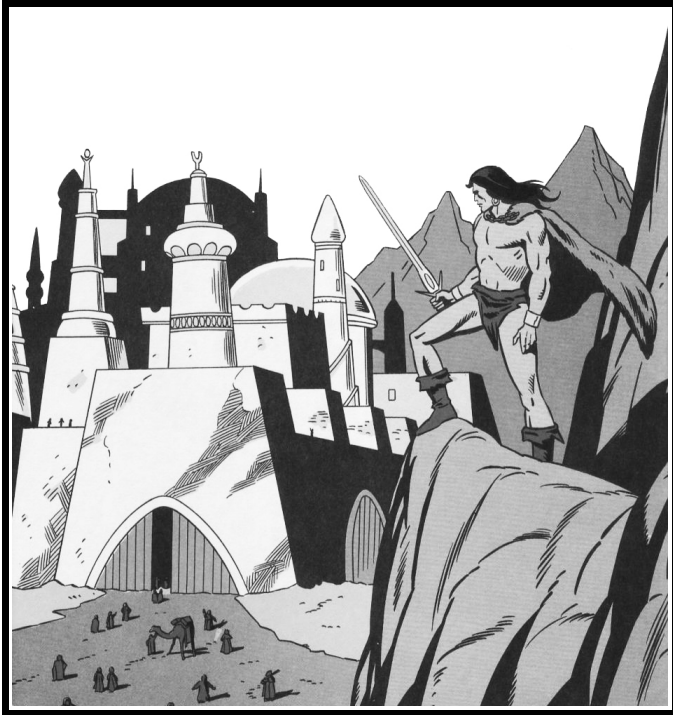
**<http://goblinpunch.blogspot.com>**



Red Sonja by John Byrne  
© Marvel Comics, Disney, whatever

# ***By Ishtar's notch!***

Some disarming, amusing, odd and little-known facts concerning the history and cultures of the Hyborian Age



AS RELATED BY THESE NOTED HYBORIAN SCHOLARS

Stephen Bartok, biopunk, Capheind, Trey Causey, Eric "Needles" Fabiaschi,  
The Frostbeard, Greg Gorgonmilk, Garrison James, Kaiju, kipf1881,  
Ynas Midgard, Jonas Mustonen and Matthew Schmeer



## AQUILONIA

King Conan's harem is said to be filled with at least two women from each of the nations of Hyboria, but he prefers one of those who come from the wild tundra, as she reminds him of the first woman he ever laid with in his youth.

The peasant revolt in South Aquilonia was instigated by the two warring sorcerers named Fandelmas and Bechtheld. Their cruel magics and diabolical curses have transformed the countryside into a surreal landscape of tin-metal flora and melting fauna.

## ARGOS

Argos is known for its many almost magical marvels. Most technologically advanced of young civilizations they grasp sciences and understanding none else have even began to understand. It is all wasted on frivolous things like mechanical owls that hoot at temple entrances or geared devices that track movements of stars and planets. They become weaker every passing year, border of Near Shem being like exposed soft belly in front of lean and hungry wolf.

“Niftesck” is a marriage ritual practiced mainly in the southwest region of the kingdom. In it, the male must submit to having one of his teeth being pulled out before he may marry his bride. Traditionally, a member of the bride's family performs this honor. The bride must listen to the ritual but must not watch. Modern renditions of the ritual allows for the bride to offer humorous commentary of what she thinks is proceeding. Ancient renditions of the ritual allows for the bride to refuse to marry the groom if the groom sounds like he is experiencing too much pain and discomfort. In reality, in modern renditions of the ritual, the groom is never refused marriage based on his performance at this ritual. The bride keeps the removed tooth as a prized souvenir, often displayed prominently in their home.

The origins of this ritual are not entirely known. One possible origin is the tale of Tavas the Warrior, a rather inept farmer who went into battle in order to impress the women in his village to marry him. Tavas returned fairly wounded as compared to other, more competent warriors but the women swooned for Tavas due to the injuries that he had suffered. Another possible origin is that it is a residual ritual from the days where people worshiped the god Jalakari, who was said always to appear with a physical imperfection, such as one arm shorter than the other or a prominently missing tooth.

### ASGARD

“The Test of Rage” is a regional ritual where men plunge their swords into the permafrost ground in a test of strength and fitness. The men only receive one attempt and how deep they can penetrate the ground determines their standing in their local militia. No one has ever been able to slam their swords into the ground so far as to go all the way down to the hilt.

A related ritual involves men having two swords. They thrust one sword into the ground and carry the other into combat. Those who come back alive are allowed to pull their swords out of the ground. Those swords that remain become the impromptu gravestones for the fallen soldiers, never to be touched again until rust takes them over. Some hills are said to be covered with such swords in varying states of rust.

### BARACHA ISLES

Each of the Baracha Isles worships a different aspect of Barach, Petty God of Sacrificial Goats. One island worships The Black Goat, one The White Bleat, one The Mottled Liver, one The Marbled Eye, etc.

On the high holy feast day of Barach, islanders from every island gather in a great flotilla in an isolated bay. of the largest island. Each island's representatives slaughter 100 goats, the sea turning red with froth. The high priestess of each isle drinks a tanked of the bloodied sea and prostitutes herself to the crews of other islands' ships. Any children of these matings are pledged to Barach's service.

In this way, peace between the isles has been maintained for over a thousand years.

### **BLACK KINGDOMS**

In the Black Kingdoms, there exists a ziggurat built upon an ancient temple built upon an ancient holy site built upon the remains of a giant tree. To the surface of the giant tree clings a phosphorescent colony of sentient, psionic bacteria, organized as a hive-mind. This creature controls the local population for a three-mile radius around the temple.

The only humanoids immune to the bacteria's psionic control are goblins, who have been waging a slow-simmering, unsuccessful effort to destroy the temple for millennia.

### **BORDER KINGDOM**

The Border Kingdom is not an actual kingdom. It is a representative republic, and the vote is given only to those who can afford to pay an annual tithe to the Temple of the Undying Sun. Only exiled nobles from other lands who pay an annual tithe to the Temple of the Undying Sun may run for office. It is said that the Goddess of Light is pleased with the current state of affairs, but may be persuaded to support another system of rulership for the right price – which is rumored to be the death of her rival Goddess, The Lamentatress of All Flesh.

A rite of passage for pubescent boys of the Border Kingdom is to swim across the Milksnake River while fully clothed. The origin of the ritual is said to have been a village boy who spied a marauding band preparing to attack a village on the other side of the river. The boy immediately jumped into the river and swam across it, warning the village in ample time to ward off the marauders.

"The Festival of The Waldea" is celebrated here, where the Waldea fruit grows rampant. The Waldea fruit is used extensively outside it's obvious food potential - It's natural purple color is often used for painting. Boiling waldea juice for the aroma is frequent. The fruit itself is used to practice, of all things, juggling: The bottom half of the fruit is unusually solid while the top half is equally fragile, forcing a juggler to ensure that they are always catching the bottom half of the fruit. Accomplished jugglers can juggle five waldeas without breaking a single one; Less experienced jugglers will often face the embarrassment of having purple hands, thus originating the Border Kingdom phrase that a person who is untalented is "purple-handed."

## **BOSSONIA**

The mothers of Bossonia wean their children with radishes, so that they may get used to the bitter taste of war.

Speaking of Bossonia, this land of rugged and self-sufficient people has defended itself from slavers and barbarians for generations but not without a price. Their mentality is unusually intolerant. Cimmericians and picts, if not able to defend themselves are usually lynched as spies, foreigners from other parts of the world are in general thought as plague carriers and witches. Economy has not developed and foreign merchants are harassed and Bossonians have hard time grasping that merchant must make profit and haggling is seen by Bossonians as insult.

In Bossonia fathers do not address their children by name until their eighth birthday. To do so invites ridicule and bad luck.

## BRYTHUNIA

Brythunia's elite calvary rides fearsome porcine mounts.

The cavaliers of Brythunia paint their porcine mounts with elaborate designs in bright colors. The current Champion of the Lists favors ragged streaks of red against a background of green. The heir to the Lotus Crown rides a blue mount whose face is painted with white sunbursts.

“Schmials” are dresses with deep, personal value that women make for their daughters in Brythunia. Traditionally, schmials are plain dresses made of unusually heavy material. In more modern times, these dresses are traditionally tan or brown although ancient schmials appear to have been made using other colors. Mothers make their daughter a schmial when the daughter reaches the height of their mother's hips. The schmiel is typically made very large in relation to the child's size so that the child may grow into the dress, using it all of the way through to early adulthood or beyond. A woman stops wearing their schmiel should she become a grandmother. Women do not mend their schmials for that is the responsibility of their daughter. Daughters keep the schmials of their mother after they have passed on and some families are known to have over ten schmials, kept in meticulous condition. Schmials become highly personalized over time and often reflect the personal growth and history of that woman. It is extremely taboo to steal or damage a woman's schmiel, to the point where local robbers and thugs will avoid stealing any clothing, lest they unleash the wrath of an entire village.

The origin of the schmiel is not known. There is some speculation that the schmiel originated during the Maltas Era, where female

royalty from that era would only wear their regal gowns while sitting on their thrones and would wear very plain outfits on every other occasion.

“The Mackelton Steps” is a phrase used in Brythunia to signify a hopeless endeavor. The phrase originates from the ruined Mackelton Castle, where one of the spires has partially collapsed but keeping the majority of the spire staircase intact. The result is a spiral staircase that leads to nowhere. “I could plow that field if you want but, without the rain, you may as well climb the Mackelton steps before you see any crops grow there before next year.”

## CIMMERIA

Despite the harsh conditions North and South Cimmeria produce the most beautiful people in the known world. Lean athletic types with cold eyes like jewels.

Men of North Cimmeria often let their hair long grow long and seem to take great care of it. Despite being rather blunt and dispising civilized ways they are remarkably vain.

Women of South Cimmeria, known to be exceedingly handsome, are often born with bodies of men.

Girls of South Cimmeria undergo ritual circumcision at nine months if age. The offending flesh is often worn around the neck in a cloth bag well into adulthood.

## CORINTHIA

Many Corinthians celebrate an annual festival called the Orgy of Atronis, a celebration of the Black Ram God. During this three-day function all social barriers between man and beast are forgotten as the populace partakes of the hornwine—a powerful

hallucinogen derived from the fruit of the *saphian*, a deep-rooted scrub found on the grassy slopes of local mountain ranges.

Every Prince of Corinthia who wishes to be king must convince a coterie of nobles of his worthiness by undergoing various feats of strength. The nobles are drawn from states allied with Corinthia and the nobles themselves design the challenges. It is said the current king stole an item from a petty goddess' boudoir to win his current position.



Hyborians Hate Snakes by Lee Barber

“Summer Flutes,” a musical instrument, are so made from the shafts of the White Flomass trees that are prominent in central Corinthia. The shafts are naturally hollow, allowing for the ease of construction of the flutes. However, once the shafts are cut from the tree, the wood dries up, irreversibly changing the pitch of the flute and rendering the flute effectively useless after only a few weeks of use. Lest anyone think that the inhabitants are reckless in cutting up White Flomass trees for this purpose, it is actually beneficial - White Flomass trees need to be routinely cut back in order to avoid overgrowing themselves and dying out.

## **HYPERBOREA**

There are rumors of fabulous hidden ancient Atlantean cities of green stone and treasure hidden upon the border between Hyperborea and the tundra. Many have ventured there and few have returned. Those who have tell strange tales of ancient demons, frost giants and much, much worse. Occasionally an ancient soap stone figure or piece will turn up in trade caravans. Some of these have proven to be pure Atlantean jade and gold.

“The Stone Castle,” a sprawling stone building that rises nearly sixty feet into the air and nearly one hundred feet into the ground, is a relic of the failed Tynn Dynasty. Every day, subjects were to find and deposit stones larger than a man's fist to royalty in order to build a commanding castle. The castle was an ongoing construct with no intention of ever ceasing. Even years after the Tynn Dynasty collapsed, some former subjects continued the practice of collecting and depositing stones at the site, out of fear of angering the spirits of the departed Tynn royalty. The result is “stone mound,” now a grass-covered hill that is just southwest of the Stone Castle.



The chain of mountains called “Smoke Top Mountains” received their name by being a primitive attempt at visual telegraphy. Each mountain was equipped with a large stone fire pit, from which a crew of three would build a roaring fire and then send a series of smoke signals. Two crew members would maintain the fire while one would watch for signals from the other mountains. The range of mountains extended 62 miles and roughly connected the cities of Vanashe and Pierpeton.

The telegraphy existed for nearly 20 years and worked in a limited fashion, with only vague and general messages able to be conveyed (such as “low on water” and “king seeks audience with king”). Such messages could be conveyed within a few hours as opposed to the multiple days that it would take even skilled travelers to traverse the steep and uneven terrain that separated the two cities. Ironically, despite the name, the operators learned that nighttime telegraphy with the flames were more effective than daytime telegraphy with the smoke. The telegraph method was ended when the Vanashe leadership radically changed and their relations with Pierpeton soured.

The Heated Caves of Gorr (sometimes spelt Gorria) are so named because of thermal vents that run close to the caves, with the caves becoming so hot that a person could sweat inside of them profusely despite frigid temperatures outside. As a result, the caves are used recreationally by locals as a reprieve from the harsh winter months.

## HYRKANIA

The fierce nomadic warriors of North Hyrkania are some of the finest horsemen in the Hyborian lands. As they are constantly on the move, being literally “born in the saddle” is seen as a sign of good fortune.

Every sixth night the hetmen of the nomadic tribes of North Hyrkania drink yak piss to ward off the silent curses of their wives.

“The Scratched Stones” are a series of pillars in Southern Hyrkania with an unknown language carved into them from top to bottom. Despite several attempts by experienced scholars, the language remains indecipherable.

## IRANISTAN

In Iranistan it is customary for men to have two wives: One is for reproduction and raising of any children (called the “House Wife”) while the other performs household chores and accompanies the husband for social events not hosted at the husband's residence (called the “Companion Wife”). When a husband hosts an event at his residence, though, it is the House Wife who accompanies the husband. It is rare that both wives are formally accompanied to any event with their husband and it is considered socially taboo to do so.

## KESHAN

A valley in Keshan is the site of a ruined city of malachite pillars. No one knows who built the place. The still-paved sections are coated in a pestilent green dust that causes a slow, irritating rot, unless you take precautions, such as using a garlic poultice or washing affected areas with good Zamoran wine. One merchant, a Nemedian it is said, came back with a load of high grade malachite, chipped from some of the broken pillars. It fetched a good price. Before he collapsed into a frothing pool of blood and green ichor. For some reason a number of Stygians place an extremely high value on this stuff. It could be a lucrative trade...if one knew some way to not succumb to the green death...

Keshan's annual calendar begins at harvest time. Each harvest moon, the priests of Keshan burn a great effigy of the current

Queen in an elaborate ceremony, during which the Queen cuts the throat of her current consort. A new consort is chosen from among the gathered priesthood by casting dice on the bloody hide of a recently flayed leopard. The elected is then stripped bare, scourged with whips dipped in the venom of the jubjub vine, and then wrapped in a blanket woven of nettles. The queen and consort publicly consummate the beginning of the new year on an altar in the capitol city's square constructed for this purpose each year. They then rule together for the following year. At the end of the year, the consort is clothed in finery and stuffed alive into the Queen's effigy to become the sacrifice for the coming year.

## **KHORAJA**

There is rumored to be a salt lake in arid southern Khoraja where a Kothic legion is buried. Who or what drowned the legion is unknown; Imperial records are strangely terse on it, other than to say it was "lost." Villagers living nearby whisper tales of the undead corpses of the legionaries rising from the saline depths at night to catch the unaware and drag what hapless folk they can back down with them.

It is told that in Khoraja rules of hospitality are so strict that you may insult your host by receiving a bowl of pomegranate soup in the wrong manner. Travelers must also keep in mind that drinks must be completely consumed in one go.

Only in this region of Hyboria can you see an entire village with eight-sided huts and houses. The tradition started when Grand Priest Torti JaMolk, visiting from far away, was forced by constant poor weather conditions to extend his stay in the region by another season. Used to his distinctive eight-sided chapel and unimpressed with the one he was forced to reside in, he persuaded the local clergy to build a similar chapel and promised to return if

one was so built.

The chapel was built but the Grand Priest never returned; He died of Ultimorsis (commonly referred to as “the cold shakes”) just one year later. His architectural suggestion, though, became popular with the natives and eight-sided huts, houses, sheds, stores continue to be built to this day.

## KOTH

The improbable gods of Koth find the number 4 offensive. Consequently all carriages in the land have only three wheels.

The yaffa disc is a traditional weapon of Koth's Jallonese region. Traditionally made of a single block of wood but more recently made of metal, bone or other suitable materials, the yaffa disc is both used as a projectile and a hand-to-hand weapon. All men own a yaffa disc but it takes considerable practice and skill to use it effectively as a weapon. The aerodynamic properties of the yaffa disc makes it a considerable threat. Experts with the weapon are able to hit a one foot wide target from fifty yards away with enough force to split large fruit completely apart. Prowess with the weapon includes the weapon's ability to arc considerably during flight, seemingly uncontrollably to the untrained eye.

Caravans, wagons and coaches tend to be painted in garish shades of red and yellow vertical stripes in Koth. The tradition goes back to the monks, who would paint their wagons with bright colors and odd patterns to indicate from afar to waiting bandits and robbers not to plunder their vehicles while on transit for they had nothing to offer them in the way of gold or riches. How the varied patterns and colors transitioned to the traditional red and yellow vertical stripes is not entirely known.

## KUTHCHEMES

Kuthchemes is a rugged, mountainous jungle terrain. In the deep reaches of a distant mountain valley, it is said the most beautiful bird in the world makes it home. The bird is said to be larger than a man and it is reported to be flightless, living in burrows it digs beneath the rich jungle loam with its powerful talons. No one has ever brought back so much as a feather from its plumage, as the bird is rumored to be poisonous to the touch and possesses the ability to saw a man in half with one chomp of its massive beak.

In the past year Gronosis, Tyrant of Kuthchemes, had three prophetic visions. When the three-fold prophecy is complete the forgotten god Blioberis will rise from his watery grave and consume the flesh of mortals.

Two of these prophecies have already been realized.

The coins minted in Kuthchemes are square or rectangular for a peculiar reason: A forgotten warlord disliked rounded coins because he felt like they did not stack well in large quantities. After the warlord died, the custom was maintained. Foreigners travel quite a considerable distance to collect the odd coins and some say that the local economy is propped up more for the coin's collectable novelty than the economic value of the region.

## NEMEDIA

“Matamata” is the unusually thick, unusually dense blanket made exclusively in Nemedi. The blanket is made from the fur of the toshka goats, which shed three to four times during the hot summer months. Matamata blankets are typically made two inches thick and are most likely used as blankets by people to survive the harsh winter months. Matamatas are not typically comfortable and many people sleep in robes and gowns to blunt the Matamata's typical coarseness. Some matamatas have a softer, thinner blanket

sewn to the bottom side to compensate for this design limitation.

The Cluvan monks, so named for the range of Nemedian mountains where their monastery resides at, are known for taking a vow to always portray a stoic appearance, never smiling, laughing or raising their voice in emotion. This vow originates from High Priest Frowtal, who was said to always speak in a low, slow voice when channeling deities.

It is ironic that these monks have taken such a stoic vow, as their personal library of over 25,000 tomes features one of the most extensive selections of comedies in all of Hyboria, including the only known complete volume set of “The Tales of Abe and His Merchants” by the esteemed author Bolo ViThalk (which also features handwritten notes by the author in preparation for another book that was never released).

## OPHIR

In Ophir there is a villiage from which you can see sigils in the elder tongue upon the nearby mountain. Those sigils I shall draw for you now (please cross yourself and prey to umtumtum for safety):

## HOLLYWOOD

None know what these runes portend, but some wager that it is the signature of Umtumtum himself, a final flourish at the end of creating all things.

“Prespata” is the oldest known system to record music, so named for the Prespara tribe from which the notation was first discovered with. The method involved a series of symbols which gave the note and length of note but no other information, such as spaces between notes. Prespata music is novel and not genuinely

appreciated outside of musical historians. The musical notation was written on vases and was once thought to be mere decoration. When archeologists wrote of their discovery, the typesetter misspelled the word “Prespara” and the misspelled word stuck in society despite several attempts at fixing it.

## PICTLAND

Picts have a legend that they are forbidden to speak of to outsiders. It describes, in great detail, a group of Pict warriors slaughtering a herd of unicorns and drinking their blood. Some conservative Picts consider this story one of the greatest, exemplifying every feature true warriors should have, and would pay rather handsomely for a live unicorn to partially re-enact the tale.

“Mud Whiskey,” a form of alcohol, is such a culturally acceptable drink among Picts that children as young as four are known to be served it. It is said that natives of Pictland drink more mud whiskey than they do water.

## SHEM

In Eastern Shem, after the harvest is completed, the children of the farmers who worship Ishtar play a game called Kahsht.

Villagers chose an outsider who is sacrificed in the hope of assuring another bountiful harvest next season. The chosen one's throat is slit, and the blood is collected in a stone pot which is then carried by a priest or priestess to each well on the farm, whereupon three drops of blood are added to the water.

Afterwards, the corpses are burnt on a pyre along with other offerings. Before that, the heads are removed and then thrice bound in the discarded head wrappings of the elevated Sisters of Shem (ideally, each from a child, woman, and a crone). They are then given to the village children who hit them with a stick

throughout the fields until the wrappings can no longer contain the remains. The field that the game ends in will then remain fallow for three harvests.

It is said that the round-headed priests of Vendhyan are very much preferred for Kahsht, but that those of the Brythunians allow for longer matches, owing to the thickness of their skulls...

True Shem is a meter wide strip of land between Near Shem and Far Shem.

The people of Far Shem believe their nation owns the True Shem. The people of Near Shem believe the people of Far Shem to be heretics, as all Near Shemites know that True Shem is ruled by Near Shem.

Neither Far Shemites nor Near Shemites may pass through True Shem without the proper prayers and petitions and performing the intricate, sacred ritual of Ear Purging. Because of the demands of this ritual, Near Shemites and Far Shemites do not trade with one another. Thus have Korsh-Emish and Near Stygia profited by encouraging both Shems to pursue their claims against one another on the field of battle.

A great performance in Shem is not met with a standing ovation or a clapping of hands, but instead the audience chants “Jata! Jata! (pronounced Jah-tah)” in unison. It is not certain where the practice originates.

## STYGIA

The Ashgari Valley is the only place in Hyboria where you can find all five species of the wingleaf flowers growing natively. No one has yet figured out why, despite several attempts at transplanting them to other regions (with no success).



A Stygian man proves to his elders that he is fit for marriage by performing a push-up while his fiancée sits on his back the number of times that she is old. No one knows where the ritual originates from.

## TURAN

Sometimes during great storms on the steppes, six-legged horses can be seen, ridden by four-armed men. People believe that if one beat them in a duel, they would become loyal followers.

The people of the steppes stuff their pillows with long grasses and fragrant herbs. The smell is said to prolong life and give women erotic dreams.

“Pazae Nal” is the name given to the undeciphered texts scrawled onto cave walls in Southern Turan. Linguist experts have determined that the characters in the texts are syllabic in nature and could originate from the ancient Ullibi tribes that once inhabited the region. However, the modern descendants of the Ullibi, who now occupy Iranistan, use a dialect of Northern Ghosh as their language and retain no knowledge of any past language.

## VANAHEIM

A hair fashion for young women is to shave the back of their heads completely bald and grow out the front hair and put that into a braid in the back.

The arctic ice on the coast has forced the Vanir to innovate and use metal plating on the bow of their ships to break through the icy waters. The first versions of these boats used the metal shields of fallen soldiers so that those soldiers could feel as though they could still contribute to the protection of their living comrades.

## VENDHYA

Vendhya has the busiest slave market in all of Hyboria.

When you cross from Iranistan to Vendhya keep in mind many benevolent petty gods worshipped openly in Iranistan are thought as demons and evil spirits in Vendhya. It is generally thought as good idea to hide holy symbols, amulets and trinkets when going to Vendhya. Reactions to foreigners expressing devotion to what Vendhyans consider demons are varied, locals might just scoff at their ignorance or react with frenzy equaling Bossonian witchfinders.

## VILAYET SEA

The Vilayet Sea was not always a sea. Vilayet was once a lush and fertile valley, a vast nation-state nestled between the Hyrkanian Mountains and the Turanian Highlands. Vilayet was known throughout the world for its exotic fruits, fine-woven tapestries, and a particular breed of horse called the "fire mare," said to be able to speed across the lands faster than wildfire. Alas, a volcanic eruption in the northern part of Vilayet triggered a series of earthquakes that unleashed a previously unknown underground freshwater sea, and the waters rose to fill the vast nation-state's valley in a matter of days. It is said that the great treasure-house of Faroun El-D'hab, last emperor of Vilayet, still rests beneath the waves in one of his palaces in the capitol city.

## ZAMORA

In Zamora, every rug merchant is also a member of the Assassin's Guild.

When a patron at a pub or bar wants the barmaid or waitress to refill their glass in Zamora, they grab the glass and tap the bottom of it onto the table three times in quick succession. The tables, expectedly, are designed to amplify such noise and a bar can often

hear how busy they are by the "wooden chatter."

## ZAPOROSKA

When the Blue Yir flowers first bloom across the fields of Zaporoska each spring, the Zaporoskim all partake in the most anticipated festival of the year.

The Yirsigga begins with the cooking of vast cauldrons of pottage created from the end of the stored winter grains. Great strands of green algae have been harvested from the Vilayet Sea leading up to this event and distributed across the land. The fairest maiden below the age of 16 in each village adorns herself with these algal strands that are tied into 150 intricate knots to become what is known as the Djeftina with the help of the Miggar, a group of old women who have all been the Djeftina in their younger years. This girl then performs the Tandzinark, a long exhausting dance commemorating the first arrival to Zaporska across the sea.

Finally, as night falls, all the women of the village don long conical hats. The younger the woman is, the taller the hat is allowed to be. The variety of colors and paintings on the hats reflect the deeds of each woman's family throughout the history of Zaporska. Men then grab their Zhamar, a circlet of intertwined branches crafted of the Ghot bush. The men then chase the women through the fields, casting their Zhamarem at the women's hats in hopes of encircling them with a successful throw. A Zaporoskim man who makes such a throw is allowed to lay with the woman he has thus encircled for the remainder of that evening.

During the festival of the Yirsigga in Zaporoska before ceremonial harvesting of algae begins the throne of Old Zaporska is brought before the Vilayet Sea and a ceremonial "king of the sea" is crowned. The coronation stone is an oblong tablet with a detailed

map of lost Vilayet beneath the waves.

Zaporoska refuses to allow ships of other nations to dock in its ports. Any ship not flying Zaporoskian colors is immediately impounded and its crew sold into slavery – usually to slavers bound for Vendhya.

### ZARKHEBA

Zarkheba is a matriarchy ruled by women warrior-priests. The ruling council openly welcomes and shelters pirates, buccaneers and privateers along its treacherous Southern Scurvy Coast.

### ZEMBABWEI

Beyond the civilization of great Zembabwei with its conical towers and protective walls – in the unforgiving wilderness hushed whispers tell of creature called the kerit that eats only the brains of its victims. Some say it is a beast that walks like a man. Some whisper that the kerit is an ancient sorcerer that eats the brains of men to in order to increase his longevity.





**CRONAN THE INCORRIGIBLE**

by Dick Bronze





# CROM

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by James Mishler  
illustration by Paul Gallagher

**I**n the beginning, the gods created men and women, and let them wander in a garden, lush and warm and beautiful. There they knew no pain, no suffering, always had enough to eat and drink, and knew not of war. Crom, who was not among the gods who created mankind, came upon them one day, for in those days he wandered. When he found these men and women, he thought perhaps the worms of the earth had grown arms and legs, for they were weak and worthless.

To show the other gods how wrong they were to create mankind thusly, Crom took the likeliest bunch and told them of the marvelous things he had seen in the world outside the garden, and of the great things that a man might accomplish beyond mere existence if he had but the courage. He then gave these first true men blades, and told them that if they learned thereby the Riddle of Steel, they could join him in Valhalla, his great hall, where they would know true joy for all eternity. And thus the fathers and mothers of the Cimmerians left that accursed garden long ere it fell.

Since that day Crom has waited in Valhalla for those courageous few who have learned the Riddle of Steel. To those who plead to him in their weakness, he sends only curses and dooms. Thus our land of Cimmeria is a land of cold, grim men, for many fail their god, and know the greatness they could have if they but had the courage to seek the answer to the Riddle of Steel. And though Cimmerians who have failed him may wander Crom's cold, grim hell for all eternity, at least they once knew life through struggle, while all other men have known but the death of cowardice since the day they were born.



Crom is not served by priests; he grants no spells, and provides no power to those who follow him. The spell-casting needs of the Cimmerians are served by an order of druids who at times seek to placate Crom with offerings and rituals, though he never answers their prayers or their curses. He is more likely to let his will be known through omens, such as the sighting of a black raven carrying a bloody branch, or a black wolf bearing a beating heart in its mouth, or a grim gray warrior standing amidst the fog upon a lonely, unassailable crag.

Cimmerians are a taciturn, grim people, appropriate to a grim god. Their cold, fog-shrouded lands for crags and forests, moors and plains seem to leech the hope out of them and out of visitors. To merely survive in that grim, gray land is a daily struggle. They only know joy when they are in battle or otherwise struggling, seeking to show their courage and might and hoping to please their god. Those who displease him with their cowardice and weakness are sent curses or demons to further bedevil them. Those who please him are granted a place in his hall, Valhalla... or at least, so the legends say.

High upon his mountain, Sròn Càrn Crúaich, Crom is usually found sitting upon his grim, gray throne in his hall, Valhalla. Valhalla stands empty, or at least seems to, to any living mortal who finds it. Where they expect to see a great glittering hall warmed by fires and filled with warriors feasting upon groaning tables, they instead find an empty cold hall, filled with mists, the skulls and bones of men strewn at Crom's feet. If asked, Crom simply states that none living have yet been found worthy of seeing the joys of his hall. Only the honored dead may know its joys.





# CROM

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| <b>Symbol:</b>      | A barbarian bastard sword point-up superimposed on a tall, craggy mountain |
| <b>Alignment:</b>   | Neutral  |
| <b>Movement:</b>    | 180' (60')   |
| <b>Armor Class:</b> | 8, 4, 0, or -4   |
| <b>Hit Dice:</b>    | 300 hp (30 HD)   |
| <b>Attacks:</b>     | 3 (Sword)  |
| <b>Damage:</b>      | Special  |
| <b>Save:</b>        | F30  |
| <b>Morale:</b>      | 12   |
| <b>Hoard Class:</b> | Special  |
| <b>XP:</b>          | 26,500   |

Crom takes the form of a man of grim countenance and mighty thews, bronze of skin, with coal-black shoulder-length hair and blazing-hot blue eyes. Crom usually stands 12' tall seated upon his great throne, but can change his size from anything from man-sized to titan-sized at will. He always manifests in the size of his opponent, the better to make the battle a proper challenge. He usually only wears a girdle, a cave-bear loin cloth, and sandals; as such, he has an AC 8. If the occasion calls for it, he wears an iron helm with great dragon-etched bull horns, "Ríchiosa," that reduces his AC to 4. Further, he can don a shirt of dragon scales, "Nearth," that gives him an AC 0; should his enemy be even more potent, he carried a magical shield, "Mairfidh," that reduces his AC to -4.

He wields a heavy bastard sword, "Dúshlán," the Challenger. It has a magical bonus equal to that required to hit the target, and no more; i.e. no bonus for normal beings, as per a silver weapon for those needed silver weapons, up to a +5 bonus for gods and demons requiring such to be hit. His strength grants him a +10 bonus to hit. The base damage of the bastard sword varies depending on his height; if he is human height, it deals 1d10/2d6 base damage; if he is 12' tall, 2d10/4d6; 18' tall, 3d10/6d6; 24' tall, 4d10/8d6; and 30' tall, 5d10/10d6. It deals double damage against Lawful and Chaotic beings. After all other damage is rolled add +10 due to his mighty strength. Crom can be harmed

by normal weapons. He also possesses the abilities of a 30th level Fighter, 15th level Druid, and 15th level Ranger.

Crom goes forth into the world to watch his people, the Cimmerians, and remind them of his presence, especially when they do not live in the shadow of Sròn Càrn Crúaich. When he goes forth he takes the form of a large black raven, a black dire wolf, or an old, grizzled, Cimmerian warrior. In any form, he is often lame, or bent, or otherwise weak-seeming. Thus, when his followers fail in their courage, he shows them success in spite of his infirmity, as the old raven defeats the young eagle; the lame wolf defeats the mountain lion; or the old one-handed warrior slays the Pictish raiders single-handedly. He does not save his people, no; he leaves them to their fate. But for the survivors, they have witnessed a feat of great courage and strength in the face of adversity, where those who seem weak can be victorious if they but have the courage.

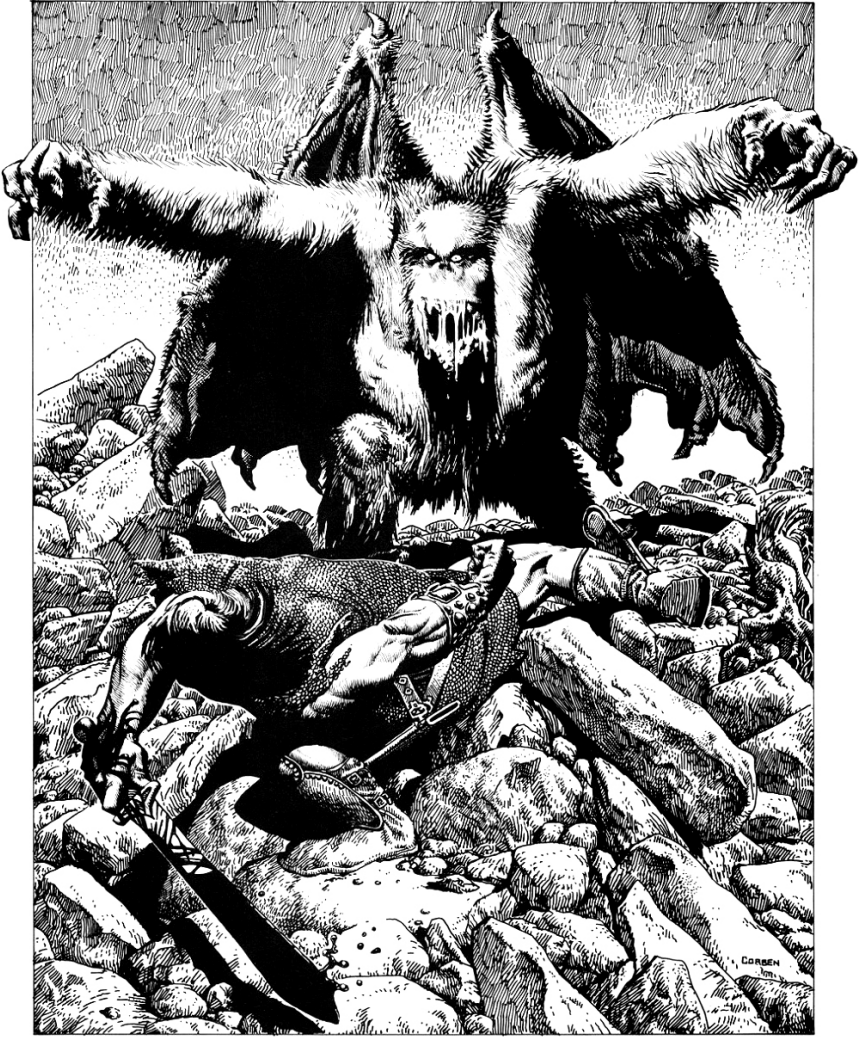
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**James Mishler is the architect of THE OLDEN LANDS, an old school style campaign setting available in PDF via RPGNow and DriveThruRPG.**

**<http://jamesmishlergames.blogspot.com>**

**Look for his upcoming Hyborian gazetteer supplement, THE CIMMERIAN CAMPAIGN, coming soon from Underworld Lore/Eiglophian Lodge.**



Scene from "Queen of the Black Coast" by *Richard Corben*

# THE HYBORIAN AGE

by Robert E. Howard

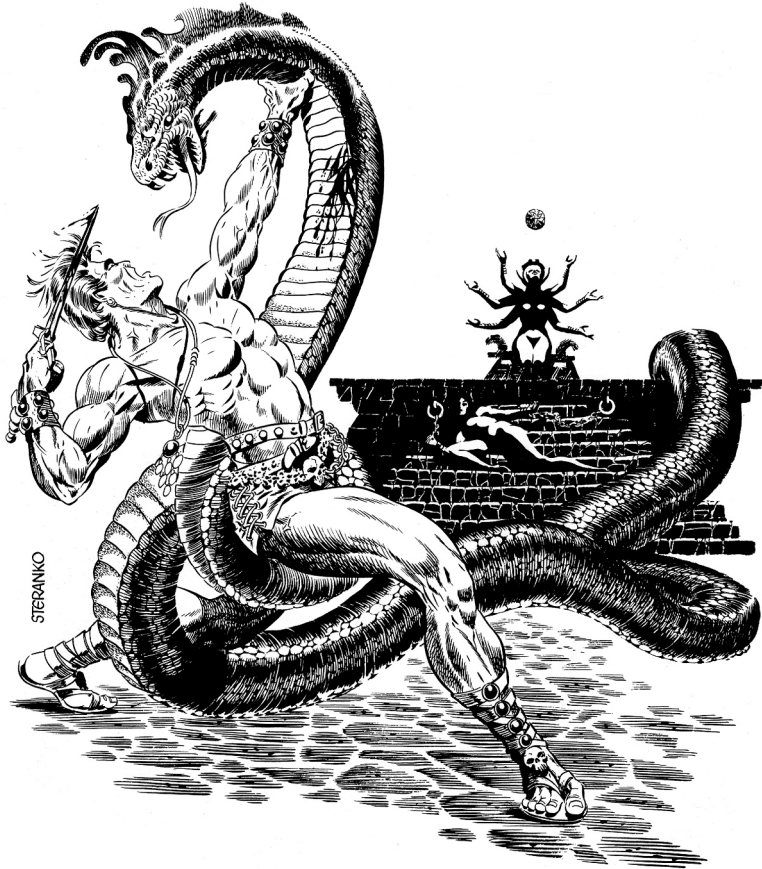
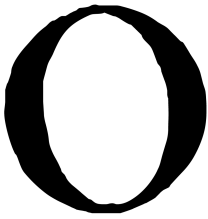


Illustration by Jim Steranko



f that epoch known by the Nemedian chroniclers as the Pre-Cataclysmic Age, little is known except the latter part, and that is veiled in the mists of legendry. Known history begins with the waning of the Pre-Cataclysmic civilization, dominated by the kingdoms of Kamelia, Valusia, Verulia, Grondar, Thule and Commoria. These peoples spoke a similar language, arguing a common origin. There were other kingdoms, equally civilized, but inhabited by different, and apparently older races.

The barbarians of that age were the Picts, who lived on islands far out on the western ocean; the Atlanteans, who dwelt on a small continent between the Pictish Islands and the main, or Thurian Continent; and the Lemurians, who inhabited a chain of large islands in the eastern hemisphere.

There were vast regions of unexplored land. The civilized kingdoms, though enormous in extent, occupied a comparatively small portion of the whole planet. Valusia was the western-most kingdom of the Thurian Continent; Grondar the easternmost. East of Grondar, whose people were less highly cultured than those of their kindred kingdoms, stretched a wild and barren expanse of deserts. Among the less arid stretches of desert, in the jungles, and among the mountains, lived scattered clans and tribes of primitive savages. Far to the south there was a mysterious civilization, unconnected with the Thurian culture, and apparently pre-human in its nature. On the far-eastern shores of the Continent there lived another race, human, but mysterious and non-Thurian, with which the Lemurians from time to time came in contact. They apparently came from a shadowy and nameless continent lying somewhere east of the Lemurian Islands.

The Thurian civilization was crumbling; their armies were composed largely of barbarian mercenaries. Picts, Atlanteans and Lemurians were their generals, their statesmen, often their kings. Of the bickerings of the kingdoms, and the wars between Valusia and Commoria, as well as the conquests by which the Atlanteans founded a kingdom on the mainland, there were more legends than accurate history.

Then the Cataclysm rocked the world. Atlantis and Lemuria sank, and the Pictish Islands were heaved up to form the mountain peaks of a new continent. Sections of the Thurian Continent vanished under the waves, or sinking, formed great inland lakes and seas. Volcanoes broke forth and terrific earthquakes shook down the shining cities of the empires. Whole nations were blotted out.

The barbarians fared a little better than the civilized races. The inhabitants of the Pictish Islands were destroyed, but a great colony of them, settled among the mountains of Valusia's southern frontier, to serve as a buffer against foreign invasion, was untouched. The Continental kingdom of the Atlanteans likewise escaped the common ruin, and to it came thousands of their tribesmen in ships from the sinking land. Many Lemurians escaped to the eastern coast of the Thurian Continent, which was comparatively untouched. There they were enslaved by the ancient race which already dwelt there, and their history, for thousands of years, is a history of brutal servitude.

In the western part of the Continent, changing conditions created strange forms of plant and animal life. Thick jungles covered the plains, great rivers cut their roads to the sea, wild mountains were heaved up, and lakes covered the ruins of old cities in fertile valleys. To the Continental kingdom of the Atlanteans, from

sunken areas, swarmed myriads of beasts and savages—ape-men and apes. Forced to battle continually for their lives, they yet managed to retain vestiges of their former state of highly advanced barbarism. Robbed of metals and ores, they became workers in stone like their distant ancestors, and had attained a real artistic level, when their struggling culture came into contact with the powerful Pictish nation. The Picts had also reverted to flint, but had advanced more rapidly in the matter of population and war-science. They had none of the Atlanteans' artistic nature; they were a ruder, more practical, more prolific race. They left no pictures painted or carved on ivory, as did their enemies, but they left remarkably efficient flint weapons in plenty.

These stone-age kingdoms clashed, and in a series of bloody wars, the outnumbered Atlanteans were hurled back into a state of savagery, and the evolution of the Picts was halted. Five hundred years after the Cataclysm the barbaric kingdoms have vanished. It is now a nation of savages—the Picts—carrying on continual warfare with tribes of savages—the Atlanteans. The Picts had the advantage of numbers and unity, whereas the Atlanteans had fallen into loosely knit clans. That was the west of that day.

In the distant east, cut off from the rest of the world by the heaving up of gigantic mountains and the forming of a chain of vast lakes, the Lemurians are toiling as slaves of their ancient masters. The far south is still veiled in mystery. Untouched by the Cataclysm, its destiny is still pre-human. 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. Here and there about the world are scattered clans of apish savages, entirely ignorant of the rise and fall of the great civilizations. But in the far north another people are slowly coming into existence.

At the time of the Cataclysm, a band of savages, whose development was not much above that of the Neanderthal, fled to the north to escape destruction. They found the snow-countries inhabited only by a species of ferocious snow-apes—huge shaggy white animals, apparently native to that climate. These they fought and drove beyond the Arctic circle, to perish, as the savages thought. The latter, then, adapted themselves to their hardy new environment and thrived.

After the Pictish-Atlantean wars had destroyed the beginnings of what might have been a new culture, another, lesser cataclysm further altered the appearance of the original continent, left a great inland sea where the chain of lakes had been, to further separate west from east, and the attendant earthquakes, floods and volcanoes completed the ruin of the barbarians which their tribal wars had begun.

A thousand years after the lesser cataclysm, the western world is seen to be a wild country of jungles and lakes and torrential rivers. Among the forest-covered hills of the northwest exist wandering bands of ape-men, without human speech, or the knowledge of fire or the use of implements. They are the descendants of the Atlanteans, sunk back into the squalling chaos of jungle-bestiality from which ages ago their ancestors so laboriously crawled. To the southwest dwell scattered clans of degraded, cave-dwelling savages, whose speech is of the most primitive form, yet who still retain the name of Picts, which has come to mean merely a term designating men—themselves, to distinguish them from the true beasts with which they contend for life and food. It is their only link with their former stage. Neither the squalid Picts nor the apish Atlanteans have any contact with other tribes or peoples.



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 myterious 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 been worshipped, after the race as a whole had been destroyed.

Here and there in the world small groups of savages are showing signs of an upward trend; these are scattered and unclassified. But in the north, the tribes are growing. These people are called Hyborians, or Hybori; their god was Bori—some great chief, whom legend made even more ancient as the king who led them into the north, in the days of the great Cataclysm, which the tribes remember only in distorted folklore.

They have spread over the north, and are pushing southward in leisurely treks. So far they have not come in contact with any other races; their wars have been with one another. Fifteen hundred years in the north country have made them a tall, tawny-haired, grey-eyed race, vigorous and warlike, and already exhibiting a well-defined artistry and poetism of nature. They still live mostly by the hunt, but the southern tribes have been raising cattle for some centuries. There is one exception in their so far complete isolation from other races: a wanderer into the far north returned with the news that the supposedly deserted ice wastes were inhabited by an extensive tribe of ape-like men, descended, he swore, from the beasts driven out of the more habitable land by the ancestors of the Hyborians. He urged that a large war-party be sent beyond the arctic circle to exterminate these beasts, whom he

swore were evolving into true men. He was jeered at; a small band of adventurous young warriors followed him into the north, but none returned.

But tribes of the Hyborians were drifting south, and as the population increased this movement became extensive. The following age was an epoch of wandering and conquest. Across the history of the world tribes and drifts of tribes move and shift in an everchanging panorama.

Look at the world five hundred years later. Tribes of tawny-haired Hyborians have moved southward and westward, conquering and destroying many of the small unclassified clans. Absorbing the blood of conquered races, already the descendants of the older drifts have begun to show modified racial traits, and these mixed races are attacked fiercely by new, purer-blooded drifts, and swept before them, as a broom sweeps debris impartially, to become even more mixed and mingled in the tangled debris of races and tag-ends of races.

As yet the conquerors have not come in contact with the older races. 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 revive some faint shadow of their ancient culture. To the west the apish Atlanteans are beginning the long climb upward. They have completed the cycle of existence; they have long forgotten their former existence as men; unaware of any other former state, they are starting the climb unhelped and unhindered by human memories. To the south of them the Picts remain savages, apparently defying the laws of Nature by neither progressing nor retrogressing. 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.

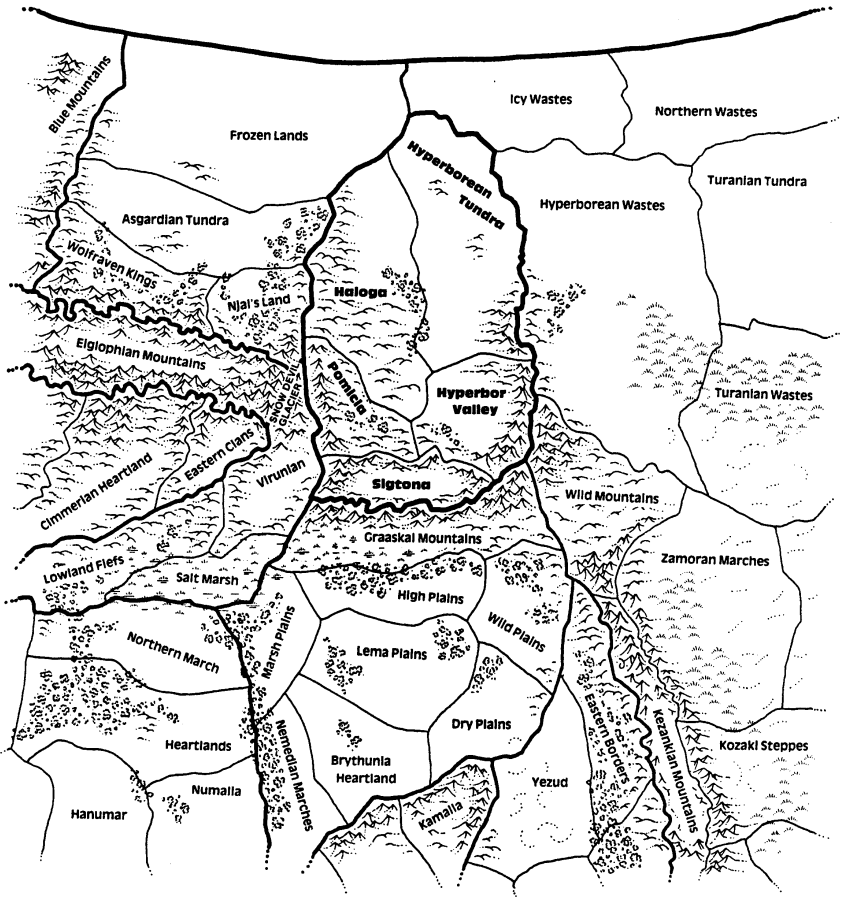
Next to the Picts, in the broad valley of Zingg, protected by great mountains, a nameless band of primitives, tentatively classified as akin to the Shemites, has evolved an advanced agricultural system and existence.

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 horse-hide 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.

The rise of this kingdom drove forth many other tribes, for, defeated in the 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.

# HYPERBOREA

- |   |                      |   |           |   |        |   |              |
|---|----------------------|---|-----------|---|--------|---|--------------|
|  | Seacoast             |  | Mountains |  | Forest |  | Steppe       |
|  | River                |  | Hills     |  | Desert |  | Swamp or Bog |
|  | Country Border       |   |           |   |        |   |              |
|  | Province or Sea Zone |   |           |   |        |   |              |



The tale of the next thousand years is the tale of the rise of the Hyborians, whose warlike tribes dominate the western world. Rude kingdoms are taking shape. The tawny-haired invaders have encountered the Picts, driving them into the barren lands of the west. To the northwest, the descendants of the Atlanteans, climbing unaided from apedom into primitive savagery, have not yet met the conquerors. Far to the east the Lemurians are evolving a strange semi-civilization of their own. To the south the Hyborians have founded the kingdom of Koth, on the borders of those pastoral countries known as the Lands of Shem, and the savages of those lands, partly through contact with the Hyborians, partly through contact with the Stygians who have ravaged them for centuries, are emerging from barbarism. The blond savages of the far north have grown in power and numbers so that the northern Hyborian tribes move southward, driving their kindred clans before them. The ancient kingdom of Hyperborea is overthrown by one of these northern tribes, which, however, retains the old name. Southeast of Hyperborea a kingdom of the Zhemri has come into being, under the name of Zamora. To the southwest, a tribe of Picts have invaded the fertile valley of Zingg, conquered the agricultural people there, and settled among them. This mixed race was in turn conquered later by a roving tribe of Hybori, and from these mingled elements came the kingdom of Zingara.

Five hundred years later the kingdoms of the world are clearly defined. The kingdoms of the Hyborians—Aquilonia, Nemediia, Brythunia, Hyperborea, Koth, Ophir, Argos, Corinthia, and one known as the Border Kingdom—dominate the western world. Zamora lies to the east, and Zingara to the southwest of these kingdoms—people alike in darkness of complexion and exotic habits, but otherwise unrelated. Far to the south sleeps Stygia,



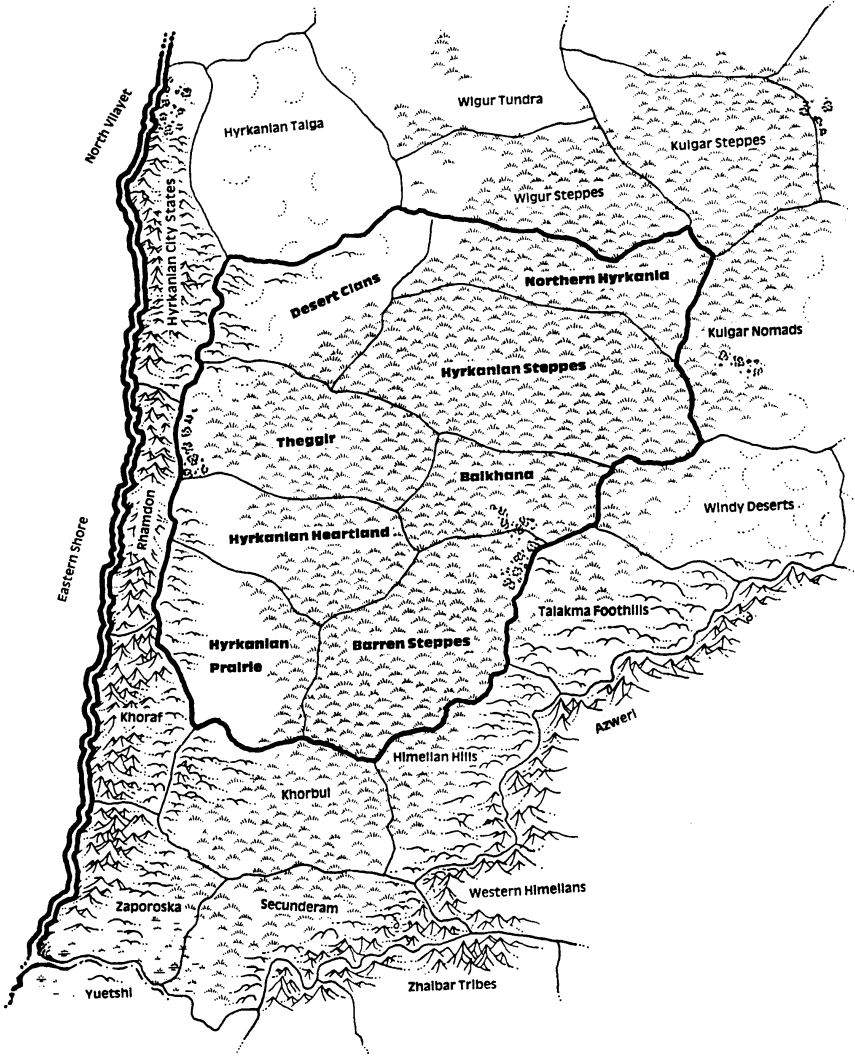
untouched by foreign invasion, but the peoples of Shem have exchanged the Stygian yoke for the less galling one of Koth.

The dusky masters have been driven south of the great river Styx, Nilus, or Nile, which, flowing north from the shadowy hinterlands, turns almost at right angles and flows almost due west through the pastoral meadowlands of Shem, to empty into the great sea. North of Aquilonia, the western-most 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 steadily than their old enemies the Picts, who dwell in the wilderness west of Aquilonia.

Another five centuries and the Hybori peoples are the possessors of a civilization so virile that contact with it virtually snatched out of the wallow of savagery such tribes as it touched. The most powerful kingdom is Aquilonia, but others vie with it in strength and mixed race; the nearest to the ancient root-stock are the Gundermen of Gunderland, a northern province of Aquilonia. But this mixing has not weakened the race. They are supreme in the western world, though the barbarians of the wastelands are growing in strength.

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.

# HYRKANIA





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. 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. The non-Hyrkanian dwellers of these territories are scattered and pastoral, unclassified in the north, Shemitish in the south, aboriginal, with a thin strain of Hyborian blood from wandering conquerors. 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.

Glance briefly at the peoples of that age. The dominant of Hyborians are no longer uniformly tawny-haired and grey-eyed. They have mixed with other races. 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. The eastern Brythunians have intermarried with the dark-skinned Zamorians, and the people of southern Aquilonia have mixed with the brown Zingarans until black hair and brown eyes are the dominant type in Poitain, the southern-most province. The ancient kingdom of Hyperborea is more aloof than the others, yet there is alien blood in plenty in its veins, from the capture of foreign women—Hyrkanians, Æsir and Zamorians. Only in the province of Gunderland, where the people keep no slaves, is the pure Hyborian stock found unblemished. But the barbarians have kept their bloodstream pure; the Cimmerians are tall and powerful, with dark hair and blue or grey eyes. The people of Nordheim are of similar build, but with white skins, blue eyes and golden or red hair. The Picts are of the same type as they always

were—short, very dark, with black eyes and hair. The Hyrkanians are dark and generally tall and slender, though a squat slant-eyed type is more and more common among them, resulting from mixture with a curious race of intelligent, though stunted, aborigines, conquered by them among the mountains east of Vilayet, on their westward drift. The Shemites are generally of medium height, though sometimes when mixed with Stygian blood, gigantic, broadly and strongly built, with hook noses, dark eyes and blue-black hair. The Stygians are tall and well made, dusky, straight-featured—at least the ruling classes are of that type. The lower classes are a down-trodden, mongrel horde, a mixture of negroid, Stygian, Shemitish, even Hyborian bloods. South of Stygia are the vast black kingdoms of the Amazons, the Kushites, the Atlaians and the hybrid empire of Zembabwei.

Between Aquilonia and the Pictish wilderness lie the Bossonian marches, peopled 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.

Five hundred years later the Hyborian civilization was swept away. Its fall was unique in that it was not brought about by

internal decay, but by the growing power of the barbarian nations and the Hyrkanians. The Hyborian peoples were overthrown while their vigorous culture was in its prime.

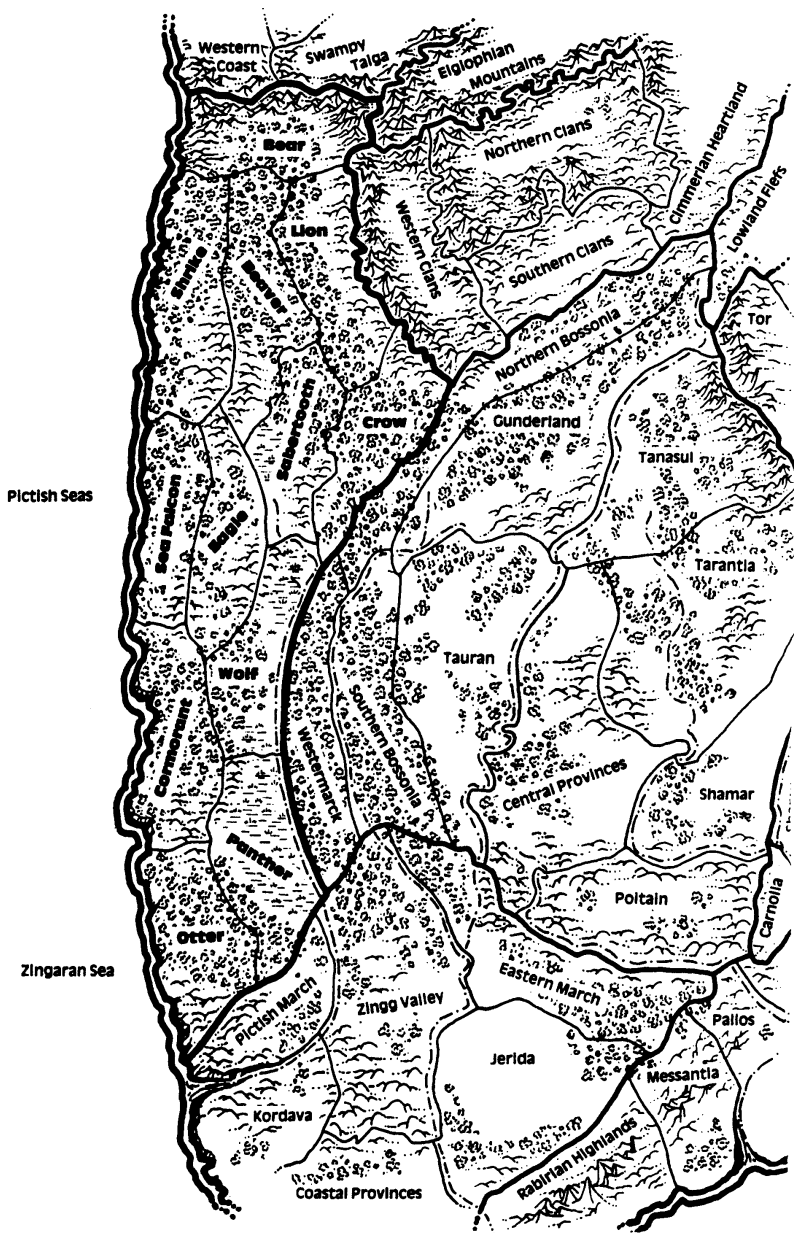
Yet it was Aquilonia's greed which brought about that overthrow, though indirectly. Wishing to extend their empire, her kings made war on their neighbors. Zingara, Argos and Ophir were annexed outright, with the western cities of Shem, which had, with their more eastern kindred, recently thrown off the yoke of Koth. Koth itself, with Corinthia and the eastern Shemitish tribes, was forced to pay Aquilonia tribute and lend aid in wars. An ancient feud had existed between Aquilonia and Hyperborea, and the latter now marched to meet the armies of her western rival. The plains of the Border Kingdom were the scene of a great and savage battle, in which the northern hosts were utterly defeated, and retreated into their snowy fastnesses, whither the victorious Aquilonians did not pursue them. Nemedias, which had successfully resisted the western kingdom for centuries, now drew Brythunia and Zamora, and secretly, Koth, into an alliance which bade fair to crush the rising empire. But before their armies could join battle, a new enemy appeared in the east, as the Hyrkanians made their first real thrust at the western world. Reinforced by adventurers from east of Vilayet, the riders of Turan swept over Zamora, devastated eastern Corinthia, and were met on the plains of Brythunia by the Aquilonians who defeated them and hurled them flying eastward. But the back of the alliance was broken, and Nemedias took the defensive in future wars, aided occasionally by Brythunia and Hyperborea, and, secretly, as usual, by Koth. This defeat of the Hyrkanians showed the nations the real power of the western kingdom, whose splendid armies were augmented by mercenaries, many of them recruited among the alien Zingarans, and the barbaric Picts and Shemites. Zamora was reconquered from the Hyrkanians, but the people discovered that they had merely

exchanged an eastern master for a western master. Aquilonian soldiers were quartered there, not only to protect the ravaged country, but also to keep the people in subjection. The Hyrkanians were not convinced; three more invasions burst upon the Zamorian borders, and the Lands of Shem, and were hurled back by the Aquilonians, though the Turanian armies grew larger as hordes of steel-clad riders rode out of the east, skirting the southern extremity of the inland sea.

But it was in the west that a power was growing destined to throw down the kings of Aquilonia from their high places. In the north there was incessant bickering along the Cimmerian borders between the black-haired warriors and the Nordheimir; and the Æsir, between wars with the Vanir, assailed Hyperborea and pushed back the frontier, destroying city after city. The Cimmerians also fought the Picts and Bossonians impartially, and several times raided into Aquilonia itself, but their wars were less invasions than mere plundering forays.

But the Picts were growing amazingly in population and power. By a strange twist of fate, it was largely due to the efforts of one man, and he an alien, that they set their feet upon the ways that led to eventual empire. This man was Arus, a Nemedian priest, a natural-born reformer. What turned his mind toward the Picts is not certain, but this much is history—he determined to go into the western wilderness and modify the rude ways of the heathen by the introduction of the gentle worship of Mitra. He was not daunted by the grisly tales of what had happened to traders and explorers before him, and by some whim of fate he came among the people he sought, alone and unarmed, and was not instantly speared.

# PICTLAND



The Picts had benefited by contact with Hyborian civilization, but they had always fiercely resisted that contact. That is to say, they had learned to work crudely in copper and tin, which were 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. They no longer lived in caves and tree-shelters, but built tents of hides, and crude huts, copied from those of the Bossonians. They still lived mainly by the chase, since their wilds swarmed with game of all sorts, and the rivers and sea with fish, but they had learned how to plant grain, which they did sketchily, preferring to steal it from their neighbors the Bossonians and Zingarans. They dwelt in clans which were generally at feud with each other, and their simple customs were blood-thirsty and utterly inexplicable to a civilized man, such as Arus of Nemediá.

They had no direct contact with the Hyborians, since the Bossonians acted as a buffer between them. But Arus maintained that they were capable of progress, and events proved the truth of his assertion—though scarcely in the way he meant.

Arus was fortunate in being thrown in with a chief of more than usual intelligence—Gorm by name. Gorm cannot be explained, any more than Genghis Khan, Othman, Attila, or any of those individuals, who, born in naked lands among untutored barbarians, yet possess the instinct for conquest and empire-building. In a sort of bastard-Bossonian, the priest made the chief understand his purpose, and though extremely puzzled, Gorm gave him permission to remain among his tribe unbutchered—a case unique in the history of the race. Having learned the language Arus set himself to work to eliminate the more unpleasant phases of Pictish life—such as human sacrifice, blood-feud, and the burning alive of captives. He harangued Gorm at length, whom he

found to be an interested, if unresponsive listener. Imagination reconstructs the scene—the black-haired chief, in his tiger-skins and necklace of human teeth, squatting on the dirt floor of the wattle hut, listening intently to the eloquence of the priest, who probably sat on a carven, skin-covered block of mahogany provided in his honor—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 the hut and urged Gorm to forgive his enemies instead of putting their bleached remnants to such use. Arus was the highest product of an innately artistic race, refined by centuries of civilization; Gorm had behind him a heritage of a hundred thousand years of screaming savagery—the pad of the tiger was in his stealthy step, the grip of the gorilla in his black-nailed hands, the fire that burns in a leopard's eyes burned in his.

Arus was a practical man. He appealed to the savage's sense of material gain; he pointed out the power and splendor of the Hyborian kingdoms, as an example of the power of Mitra, whose teachings and works had lifted them up to their high places. And he spoke of cities, and fertile plains, marble walls and iron chariots, jeweled towers, and horsemen in their glittering armor riding to battle. And Gorm, with the unerring instinct of the barbarian, passed over his words regarding gods and their teachings, and fixed on the material powers thus vividly described. There in that mud-floored wattle hut, with the silk-robed priest on the mahogany block, and the dark-skinned chief crouching in his tiger-hides, was laid the foundations of empire.

As has been said, Arus was a practical man. He dwelt among the Picts and found much that an intelligent man could do to aid humanity, even when that humanity was cloaked in tiger-skins and

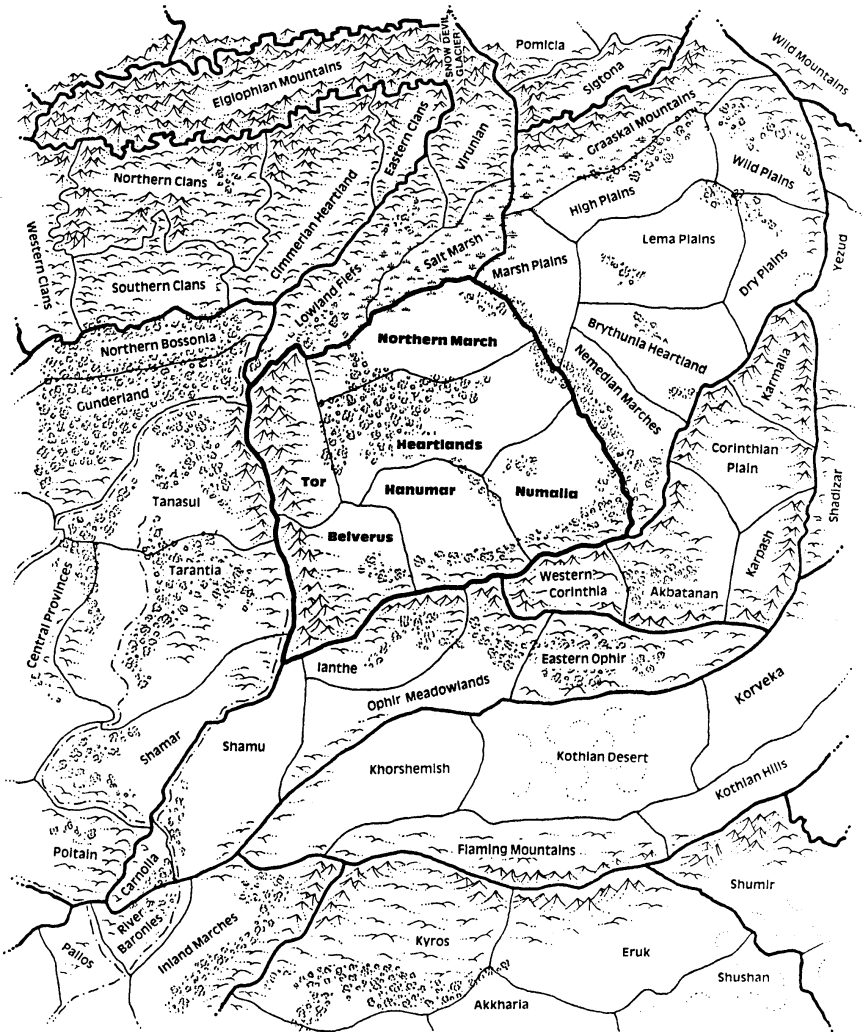
wore necklaces of human teeth. Like all priests of Mitra, he was instructed in many things. He found that there were vast deposits of iron ore in the Pictish hills, and he taught the natives to mine, smelt and work it into implements—agricultural implements, as he fondly believed. He instituted other reforms, but these were the most important things he did: he instilled in Gorm a desire to see the civilized lands of the world; he taught the Picts how to work in iron; and he established contact between them and the civilized world. At the chiefs request he conducted him and some of his warriors through the Bossonian marches, where the honest villagers stared in amazement, into the glittering outer world.

Arus no doubt thought that he was making converts right and left, because the Picts listened to him, and refrained from smiting him with their copper axes. But the Pict was little calculated to seriously regard teachings which bade him forgive his enemy and abandon the warpath for the ways of honest drudgery. It has been said that he lacked artistic sense; his whole nature led to war and slaughter. When the priest talked of the glories of the civilized nations, his dark-skinned listeners were intent, not on the ideals of his religion, but on the loot which he unconsciously described in the narration of rich cities and shining lands. When he told how Mitra aided certain kings to overcome their enemies, they paid scant heed to the miracles of Mitra, but they hung on the description of battle-lines, mounted knights, and maneuvers of archers and spearmen. They harkened with keen dark eyes and inscrutable countenances, and they went their ways without comment, and heeded with flattering intent-ness his instructions as to the working of iron, and kindred arts.

SOON, PICTS CAME  
AND WENT *FREELY*  
INTO ALL *AQUILONIA*.



# NEMEDIA



Before his coming they had filched steel weapons and armor from the Bossonians and Zingarans, or had hammered out their own crude arms from copper and bronze. Now a new world opened to them, and the clang of sledges re-echoed throughout the land. And Gorm, by virtue of this new craft, began to assert his dominance over other clans, partly by war, partly by craft and diplomacy, in which latter art he excelled all other barbarians.

Picts now came and went freely into Aquilonia, under safe-conduct, and they returned with more information as to armor-forging and sword-making. More, they entered Aquilonia's mercenary armies, to the unspeakable disgust of the sturdy Bossonians. Aquilonia's kings toyed with the idea of playing the Picts against the Cimmerians, and possibly thus destroying both menaces, but they were too busy with their policies of aggression in the south and east to pay much heed to the vaguely known lands of the west, from which more and more stocky warriors swarmed to take service among the mercenaries.

These warriors, their service completed, went back to their wilderness with good ideas of civilized warfare, and that contempt for civilization which arises from familiarity with it. Drums began to beat in the hills, gathering-fires smoked on the heights, and savage sword-makers hammered their steel on a thousand anvils. By intrigues and forays too numerous and devious to enumerate, Gorm became chief of chiefs, the nearest approach to a king the Picts had had in thousands of years. He had waited long; he was past middle age. But now he moved against the frontiers, not in trade, but in war.

Arus saw his mistake too late; he had not touched the soul of the pagan, in which lurked the hard fierceness of all the ages. His persuasive eloquence had not caused a ripple in the Pictish

conscience. Gorm wore a corselet of silvered mail now, instead of the tiger-skin, but underneath he was unchanged—the everlasting barbarian, unmoved by theology or philosophy, his instincts fixed unerringly on rapine and plunder.

The Picts burst on the Bossonian frontiers with fire and sword, not clad in tiger-skins and brandishing copper axes as of yore, but in scale-mail, wielding weapons of keen steel. As for Arus, he was brained by a drunken Pict, while making a last effort to undo the work he had unwittingly done. Gorm was not without gratitude; he caused the skull of the slayer to be set on the top of the priest's cairn. And it is one of the grim ironies of the universe that the stones which covered Arus's body should have been adorned with that last touch of barbarity—above a man to whom violence and blood-vengeance were revolting.

But the newer weapons and mail were not enough to break the lines. For years the superior armaments and sturdy courage of the Bossonians held the invaders at bay, aided, when necessary, by imperial Aquilonian troops. During this time the Hyrkanians came and went, and Zamora was added to the empire.

Then treachery from an unexpected source broke the Bossonian lines.

Before chronicling this treachery, it might be well to glance briefly at the Aquilonian empire. Always a rich kingdom, untold wealth had been rolled in by conquest, and sumptuous splendor had taken the place of simple and hardy living. But degeneracy had not yet sapped the kings and the people; though clad in silks and cloth-of-gold, they were still a vital, virile race. But arrogance was supplanting their former simplicity. They treated less powerful people with growing contempt, levying more and more tributes on

the conquered. Argos, Zingara, Ophir, Zamora and the Shemite countries were treated as subjugated provinces, which was especially galling to the proud Zingarans, who often revolted, despite savage retaliations.

Koth was practically tributary, being under Aquilonia's 'protection' against the Hyrkanians. But Nemediæ the western empire had never been able to subdue, although the latter's triumphs were of the defensive sort, and were generally attained with the aid of Hyperborean armies. During this period Aquilonia's only defeats were: her failure to annex Nemediæ; the rout of an army sent into Cimmeria; and the almost complete destruction of an army by the Æsir. Just as the Hyrkanians found themselves unable to withstand the heavy cavalry charges of the Aquilonians, so the latter, invading the snow-countries, were overwhelmed by the ferocious hand-to-hand fighting of the Nordics. But Aquilonia's conquests were pushed to the Nilus, where a Stygian army was defeated with great slaughter, and the king of Stygia sent tribute—once at least—to divert invasion of his kingdom. Brythunia was reduced in a series of whirlwind wars, and preparations were made to subjugate the ancient rival at last—Nemediæ.

With their glittering hosts greatly increased by mercenaries, the Aquilonians moved against their old-time foe, and it seemed as if the thrust were destined to crush the last shadow of Nemedian independence. But contentions arose between the Aquilonians and their Bossonian auxiliaries.

As the inevitable result of imperial expansion, the Aquilonians had become haughty and intolerant. They derided the ruder, unsophisticated Bossonians, and hard feeling grew between them—the Aquilonians despising the Bossonians and the latter resenting the attitude of their masters—who now boldly called themselves

such, and treated the Bossonians like conquered subjects, taxing them exorbitantly, and conscripting them for their wars of territorial expansion—wars the profits of which the Bossonians shared little. Scarcely enough men were left in the marches to guard the frontier, and hearing of Pictish outrages in their homelands, whole Bossonian regiments quit the Nemedian campaign and marched to the western frontier, where they defeated the dark-skinned invaders in a great battle.

This desertion, however, was the direct cause of Aquilonia's defeat by the desperate Nemedians, and brought down on the Bossonians the cruel wrath of the imperialists—intolerant and short-sighted as imperialists invariably are. Aquilonian regiments were secretly brought to the borders of the marches, the Bossonian chiefs were invited to attend a great conclave, and, in the guise of an expedition against the Picts, bands of savage Shemitish soldiers were quartered among the unsuspecting villagers. The unarmed chiefs were massacred, the Shemites turned on their stunned hosts with torch and sword, and the armored imperial hosts were hurled ruthlessly on the unsuspecting people. From north to south the marches were ravaged and the Aquilonian armies marched back from the borders, leaving a ruined and devastated land behind them.

And then the Pictish invasion burst in full power along those borders. It was no mere raid, but the concerted rush of a whole nation, led by chiefs who had served in Aquilonian armies, and planned and directed by Gorm—an old man now, but with the fire of his fierce ambition undimmed. This time there were no strong walled villages in their path, manned by sturdy archers, to hold back the rush until the imperial troops could be brought up. The remnants of the Bossonians were swept out of existence, and the blood-mad barbarians swarmed into Aquilonia, looting and

burning, before the legions, warring again with the Nemedians, could be marched into the west. Zingara seized this opportunity to throw off the yoke, which example was followed by Corinthia and the Shemites. Whole regiments of mercenaries and vassals mutinied and marched back to their own countries, looting and burning as they went. The Picts surged irresistibly eastward, and host after host was trampled beneath their feet. Without their Bossonian archers the Aquilonians found themselves unable to cope with the terrible arrow-fire of the barbarians. From all parts of the empire legions were recalled to resist the onrush, while from the wilderness horde after horde swarmed forth, in apparently inexhaustible supply. And in the midst of this chaos, the Cimmerians swept down from their hills, completing the ruin. They looted cities, devastated the country, and retired into the hills with their plunder, but the Picts occupied the land they had over-run. And the Aquilonian empire went down in fire and blood.

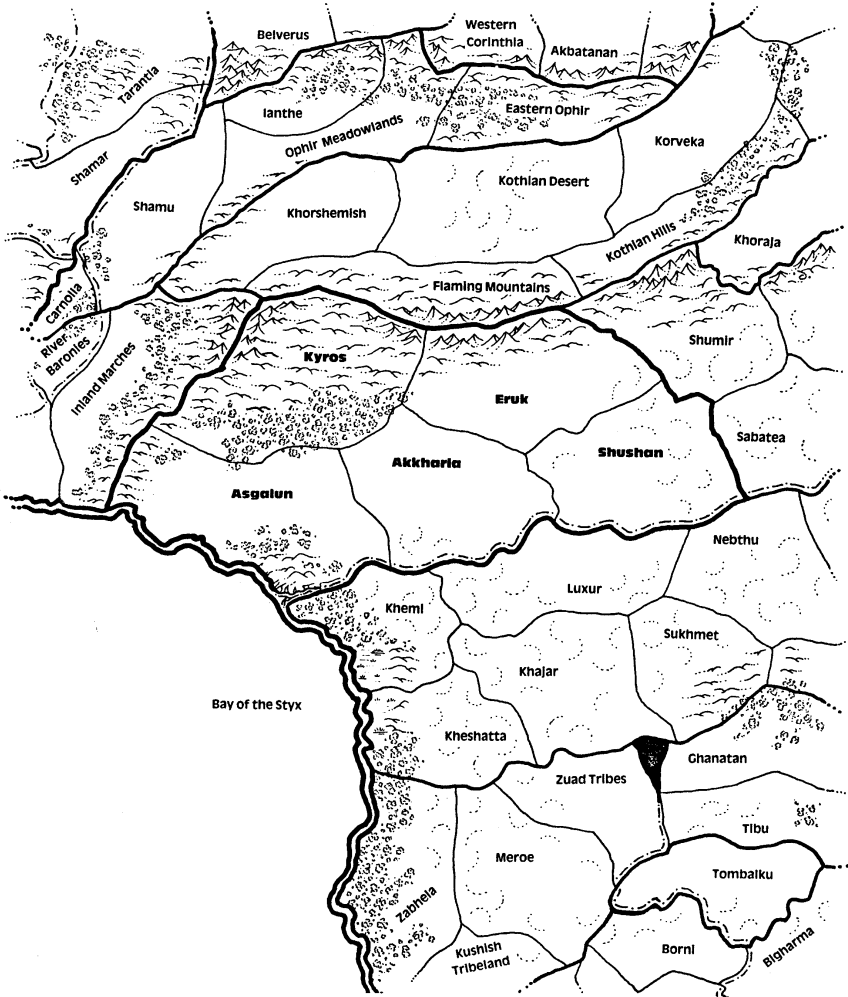
Then again the Hyrkanians rode from the blue east. The withdrawal of the imperial legions from Zamora was their incitement. Zamora fell easy prey to their thrusts, and the Hyrkanian king established his capital in the largest city of the country. This invasion was from the ancient Hyrkanian kingdom of Turan, on the shores of the inland sea, but another, more savage Hyrkanian thrust came from the north. Hosts of steel-clad riders galloped around the northern extremity of the inland sea, traversed the icy deserts, entered the steppes, driving the aborigines before them, and launched themselves against the western kingdoms. These newcomers were not at first allies with the Turanians, but skirmished with them as with the Hyborians; new drifts of eastern warriors bickered and fought, until all were united under a great chief, who came riding from the very shores of the eastern ocean. With no Aquilonian armies to oppose them, they were invincible. They swept over and subjugated Brythunia,

and devastated southern Hyperborea, and Corinthia. They swept into the Cimmerian hills, driving the black-haired barbarians before them, but among the hills, where cavalry was less effectual, the Cimmerians turned on them, and only a disorderly retreat, at the end of a whole day of bloody fighting, saved the Hyrkanian hosts from complete annihilation.

While these events had been transpiring, the kingdoms of Shem had conquered their ancient master, Koth, and had been defeated in an attempted invasion of Stygia. But scarcely had they completed their degradation of Koth, when they were overrun by the Hyrkanians, and found themselves subjugated by sterner masters than the Hyborians had ever been. Meanwhile the Picts had made themselves complete masters of Aquilonia, practically blotting out the inhabitants. They had broken over the borders of Zingara, and thousands of Zingarans, fleeing the slaughter into Argos, threw themselves on the mercy of the westward-sweeping Hyrkanians, who settled them in Zamora as subjects. Behind them as they fled, Argos was enveloped in the flame and slaughter of Pictish conquest, and the slayers swept into Ophir and clashed with the westward-riding Hyrkanians. The latter, after their conquest of Shem, had overthrown a Stygian army at the Nilus and over-run the country as far south as the black kingdom of Amazon, of whose people they brought back thousands as captives, settling them among the Shemites. Possibly they would have completed their conquests in Stygia, adding it to their widening empire, but for the fierce thrusts of the Picts against their western conquests.



# SHEM

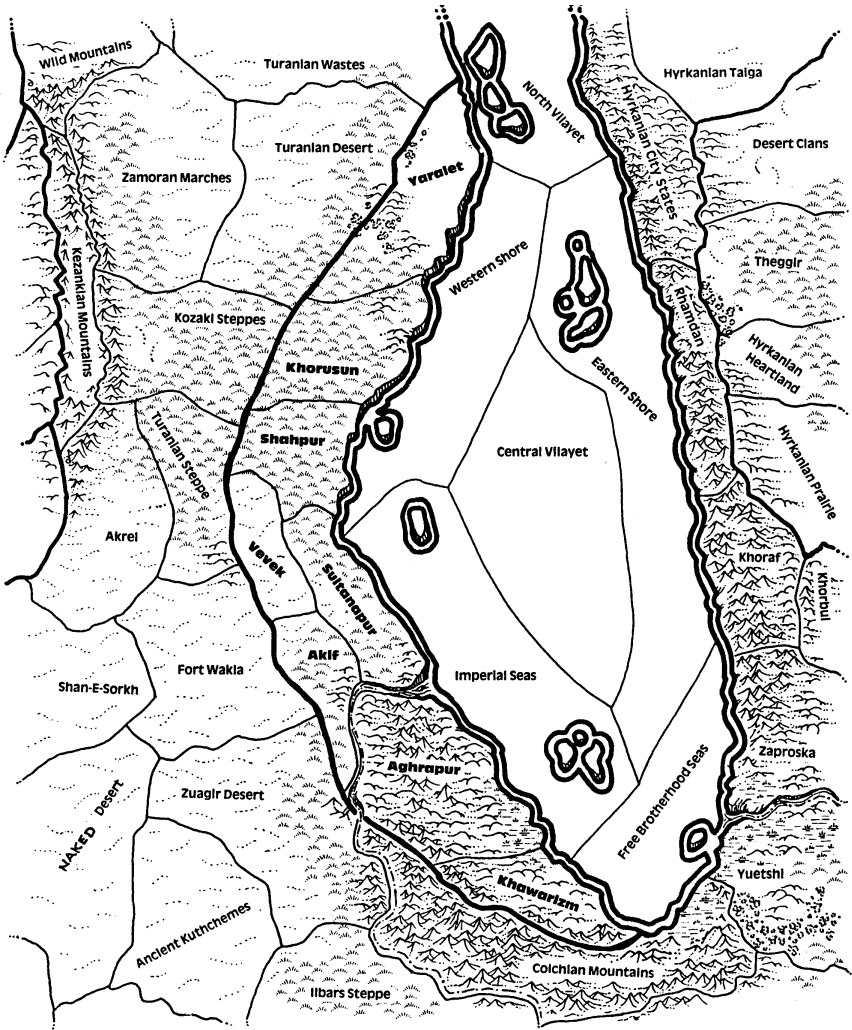




Nemedia, unconquerable by Hyborians, reeled between the riders of the east and the swordsmen of the west, when a tribe of Æsir, wandering down from their snowy lands, came into the kingdom, and were engaged as mercenaries; they proved such able warriors that they not only beat off the Hyrkanians, but halted the eastward advance of the Picts.

The world at that time presents some such picture: a vast Pictish empire, wild, rude and barbaric, stretches from the coasts of Vanaheim in the north to the southern-most shores of Zingara. It stretches east to include all Aquilonia except Gunder-land, the northern-most province, which, as a separate kingdom in the hills, survived the fall of the empire, and still maintains its independence. The Pictish empire also includes Argos, Ophir, the western part of Koth, and the western-most lands of Shem. Opposed to this barbaric empire is the empire of the Hyrkanians, of which the northern boundaries are the ravaged lines of Hyperborea, and the southern, the deserts south of the lands of Shem. Zamora, Brythunia, the Border Kingdom, Corinthia, most of Koth, and all the eastern lands of Shem are included in this empire. The borders of Cimmeria are intact; neither Pict nor Hyrkanian has been able to subdue these warlike barbarians. Nemedia, dominated by the Æsir mercenaries, resists all invasions. In the north Nordheim, Cimmeria and Nemedia separate the conquering races, but in the south, Koth has become a battleground where Picts and Hyrkanians war incessantly. Sometimes the eastern warriors expel the barbarians from the kingdom entirely; again the plains and cities are in the hands of the western invaders. In the far south, Stygia, shaken by the Hyrkanian invasion, is being encroached upon by the great black kingdoms. And in the far north, the Nordic tribes are restless, warring continually with the Cimmerians, and sweeping the Hyperborean frontiers.

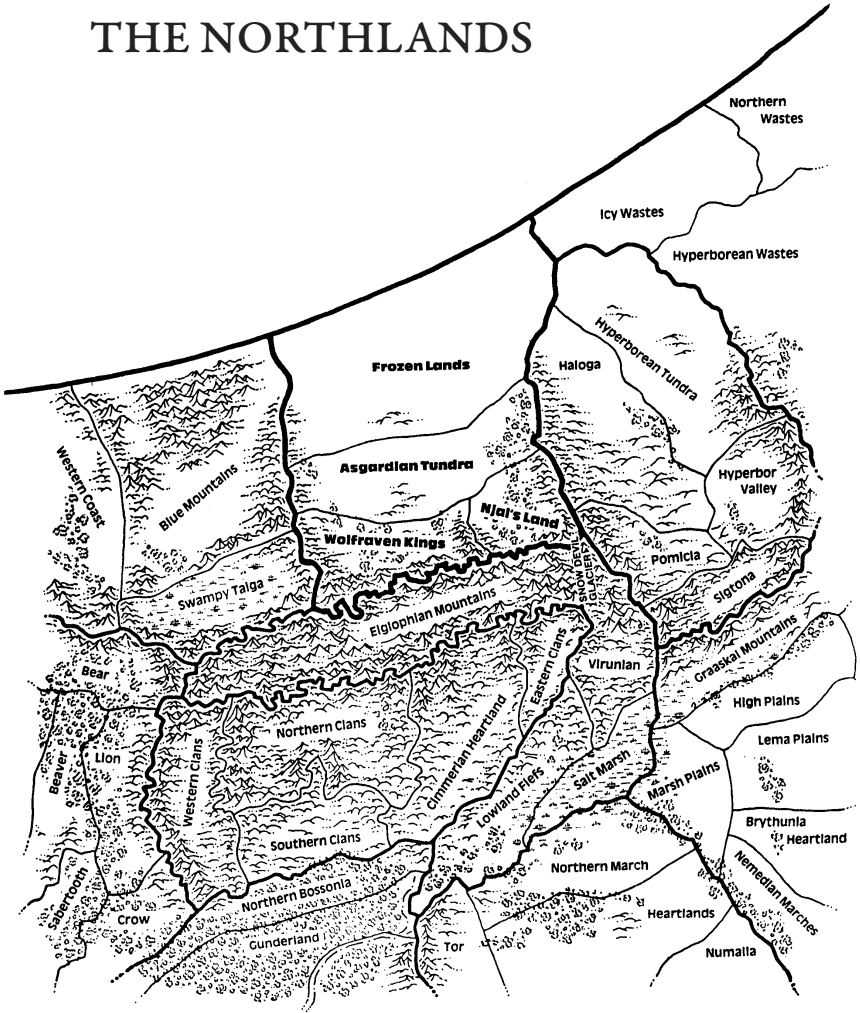
# VILAYET SEA



Gorm was slain by Hialmar, a chief of the Nemedian Æsir. He was a very old man, nearly a hundred years old. In the seventy-five years which had elapsed since he first heard the tale of empires from the lips of Arus—a long time in the life of a man, but a brief space in the tale of nations—he had welded an empire from straying savage clans, he had overthrown a civilization. He who had been born in a mud-walled, wattle-roofed hut, in his old age sat on golden thrones, and gnawed joints of beef presented to him on golden dishes by naked slave-girls who were the daughters of kings. Conquest and the acquiring of wealth altered not the Pict; out of the ruins of the crushed civilization no new culture arose phoenix-like. The dark hands which shattered the artistic glories of the conquered never tried to copy them. Though he sat among the glittering ruins of shattered palaces and clad his hard body in the silks of vanquished kings, the Pict remained the eternal barbarian, ferocious, elemental, interested only in the naked primal principles of life, unchanging, unerring in his instincts which were all for war and plunder, and in which arts and the cultured progress of humanity had no place. Not so with the Æsir who settled in Nemedia. These soon adopted many of the ways of their civilized allies, modified powerfully, however, by their own intensely virile and alien culture.

For a short age Pict and Hyrkanian snarled at each other over the ruins of the world they had conquered. Then began the glacier ages, and the great Nordic drift. Before the southward moving ice-fields the northern tribes drifted, driving kindred clans before them. The Æsir blotted out the ancient kingdom of Hyperborea, and across its ruins came to grips with the Hyrkanians. Nemedia had already become a Nordic kingdom, ruled by the descendants of the Æsir mercenaries.

# CIMMERIA and THE NORTHLANDS



Driven before the onrushing tides of Nordic invasion, the Cimmerians were on the march, and neither army nor city stood before them. They surged across and completely destroyed the kingdom of Gunderland, and marched across ancient Aquilonia, hewing their irresistible way through the Pictish hosts. They defeated the Nordic-Nemedians and sacked some of their cities, but did not halt. They continued eastward, overthrowing a Hyrkanian army on the borders of Brythunia.

Behind them hordes of Æsir and Vanir swarmed into the lands, and the Pictish empire reeled beneath their strokes. Nemedias was overthrown, and the half-civilized Nordics fled before their wilder kinsmen, leaving the cities of Nemedias ruined and deserted. These fleeing Nordics, who had adopted the name of the older kingdom, and to whom the term Nemedian henceforth refers, came into the ancient land of Koth, expelled both Picts and Hyrkanians, and aided the people of Shem to throw off the Hyrkanian yoke. All over the western world, the Picts and Hyrkanians were staggering before this younger, fiercer people. A band of Æsir drove the eastern riders from Brythunia and settled there themselves, adopting the name for themselves. The Nordics who had conquered Hyperborea assailed their eastern enemies so savagely that the dark-skinned descendants of the Lemurians retreated into the steppes, pushed irresistibly back toward Vilayet.

Meanwhile the Cimmerians, wandering southeastward, destroyed the ancient Hyrkanian kingdom of Turan, and settled on the southwestern shores of the inland sea. The power of the eastern conquerors was broken. Before the attacks of the Nordheimr and the Cimmerians, they destroyed all their cities, butchered such captives as were not fit to make the long march, and then, herding thousands of slaves before them, rode back into the mysterious east, skirting the northern edge of the sea, and vanishing from

western history, until they rode out of the east again, thousands of years later, as Huns, Mongols, Tatars and Turks. With them in their retreat went thousands of Zamorians and Zingarans, who were settled together far to the east, formed a mixed race, and emerged ages afterward as gypsies.

Meanwhile, also, a tribe of Vanir adventurers had passed along the Pictish coast southward, ravaged ancient Zingara, and come into Stygia, which, oppressed by a cruel aristocratic ruling class, was staggering under the thrusts of the black kingdoms to the south. The red-haired Vanir led the slaves in a general revolt, overthrew the reigning class, and set themselves up as a caste of conquerors. They subjugated the northern-most black kingdoms, and built a vast southern empire, which they called Egypt. From these red-haired conquerors the earlier Pharaohs boasted descent.

The western world was now dominated by Nordic barbarians. The Picts still held Aquilonia and part of Zingara, and the western coast of the continent. But east to Vilayet, and from the Arctic circle to the lands of Shem, the only inhabitants were roving tribes of Nordheimr, excepting the Cimmerians, settled in the old Turanian kingdom. There were no cities anywhere, except in Stygia and the lands of Shem; the invading tides of Picts, Hyrkanians, Cimmerians and Nordics had levelled them in ruins, and the once dominant Hyborians had vanished from the earth, leaving scarcely a trace of their blood in the veins of their conquerors. Only a few names of lands, tribes and cities remained in the languages of the barbarians, to come down through the centuries connected with distorted legend and fable, until the whole history of the Hyborian age was lost sight of in a cloud of myths and fantasies. Thus in the speech of the gypsies lingered the terms Zingara and Zamora; the Æsir who dominated Nemedias were called Nemedians, and later figured in Irish history, and the

Nordics who settled in Brythunia were known as Brythunians, Brythons or Britons.

There was no such thing, at that time, as a consolidated Nordic empire. As always, the tribes had each its own chief or king, and they fought savagely among themselves. What their destiny might have been will not be known, because another terrific convulsion of the earth, carving out the lands as they are known to moderns, hurled all into chaos again. Great strips of the western coast sank; Vanaheim and western Asgard—uninhabited and glacier-haunted wastes for a hundred years—vanished beneath the waves. The ocean flowed around the mountains of western Cimmeria to form the North Sea; these mountains became the islands later known as England, Scotland and Ireland, and the waves rolled over what had been the Pictish wilderness and the Bossonian marches. In the north the Baltic Sea was formed, cutting Asgard into the peninsulas later known as Norway, Sweden and Denmark, and far to the south the Stygian continent was broken away from the rest of the world, on the line of cleavage formed by the river Nilus in its westward trend. Over Argos, western Koth and the western lands of Shem, washed the blue ocean men later called the Mediterranean. But where land sank elsewhere, a vast expanse west of Stygia rose out of the waves, forming the whole western half of the continent of Africa.

The buckling of the land thrust up great mountain ranges in the central part of the northern continent. Whole Nordic tribes were blotted out, and the rest retreated eastward. The territory about the slowly drying inland sea was not affected, and there, on the western shores, the Nordic tribes began a pastoral existence, living in more or less peace with the Cimmerians, and gradually mixing with them. In the west the remnants of the Picts, reduced by the cataclysm once more to the status of stone-age savages, began,

with the incredible virility of their race, once more to possess the land, until, at a later age, they were overthrown by the westward drift of the Cimmerians and Nordics. This was so long after the breaking-up of the continent that only meaningless legends told of former empires.

This drift comes within the reach of modern history and need not be repeated. It resulted from a growing population which thronged the steppes west of the inland sea--which still later, much reduced in size, was known as the Caspian--to such an extent that migration became an economic necessity. The tribes moved southward, northward and westward, into those lands now known as India, Asia Minor and central and western Europe.

They came into these countries as Aryans. But there were variations among these primitive Aryans, some of which are still recognized today, others which have long been forgotten. The blond Achaians, Gauls and Britons, for instance, were descendants of pure-blooded Æsir. The Nemedians of Irish legendry were the Nemedian Æsir. The Danes were descendants of pure-blooded Vanir; the Goths--ancestors of the other Scandinavian and Germanic tribes, including the Anglo-Saxons--were descendants of a mixed race whose elements contained Vanir, Æsir and Cimmerian strains. The Gaels, ancestors of the Irish and Highland Scotch, descended from pure-blooded Cimmerian clans. The Cymric tribes of Britain were a mixed Nordic-Cimmerian race which preceded the purely Nordic Britons into the isles, and thus gave rise to a legend of Gaelic priority. The Cimbri who fought Rome were of the same blood, as well as the Gimmerai of the Assyrians and Grecians, and Gomer of the Hebrews. Other clans of the Cimmerians adventured east of the drying inland sea, and a few centuries later mixed with Hyrkanian blood, returned westward as Scythians. The original ancestors of the Gaels gave



their name to modern Crimea.

The ancient Sumerians had no connection with the western race. They were a mixed people, of Hyrkanian and Shemitish bloods, who were not taken with the conquerors in their retreat. Many tribes of Shem escaped that captivity, and from pure-blooded Shemites, or Shemites mixed with Hyborian or Nordic blood, were descended the Arabs, Israelites, and other straighter-featured Semites. The Canaanites, or Alpine Semites, traced their descent from Shemitish ancestors nuxed with the Kushites settled among them by their Hyrkanian masters; the Elamites were a typical race of this type. The short, thick-limbed Etruscans, base of the Roman race, were descendants of a people of mixed Stygian, Hyrkanian and Pictish strains, and originally lived in the ancient kingdom of Koth. The Hyrkanians, retreating to the eastern shores of the continent, evolved into the tribes later known as Tatars, Huns, Mongols and Turks.

The origins of other races of the modern world may be similarly traced; in almost every case, older far than they realize, their history stretches back into the mists of the forgotten Hyborian age...

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The maps found in this section are original to the play-by-mail game **Hyborian War**. They have been slightly modified.



Illustration by *Arkhein*

Arkhein 2013



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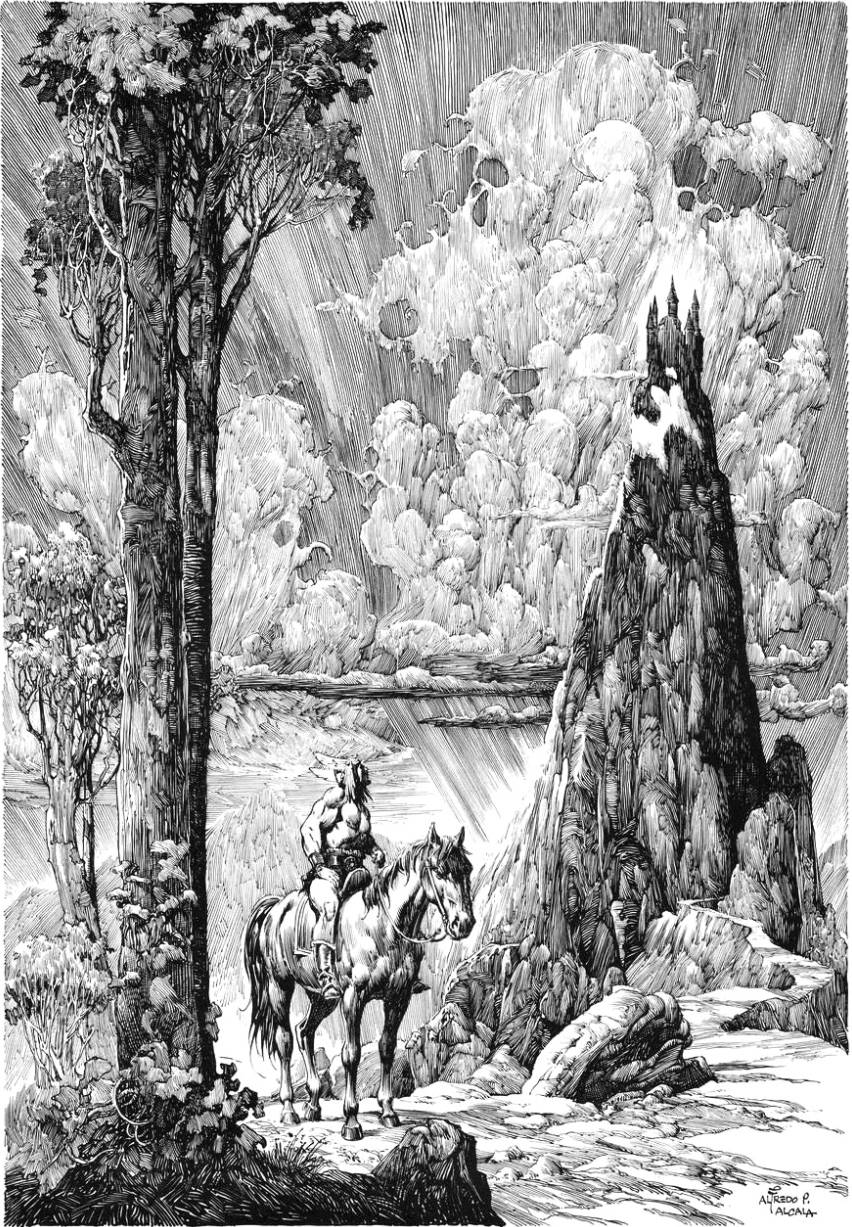


Illustration by Alfredo Alcala



*Obligatory Wendy Pini as Red Sonja photo (circa 1980)*

**NEXT ISSUE:** *Ghosts & the Occult*