

Introduction

The Hefiosa is a thousand-plus square miles of rugged uplands and equally rugged individualists. While nominally part of the Thardic Republic, in truth the civil authorities have never had even the scantest control over the independent-minded goatherds and farmers

who eke out a living from its thin soil. Those herders have a well-earned reputation for banditry, and they have been a thorn in civilized Tharda's side since the earliest days of the Corani Empire.

Environment

The hills are a large sedimentary dome, heaved up by unknown geological forces from deep underneath, and cut by innumerable deep valleys. The region was moderately glaciated in the Ice Age, and several moraine lakes dot the region. The only patches of level ground are slender strips at the valley floors and a few plateaus at the summit of the hills.

The complex sedimentary formations that constitute the hills are one of Harn's most important mineral sources. Salt, tin, gypsum, mica, iron, and even silver are mined in the region, and the Thardans are anxious to mine even more. The small amounts of gold occasionally found in the Imris River have long fueled speculation of a mother lode in the hills, but none has ever been found in the hills.

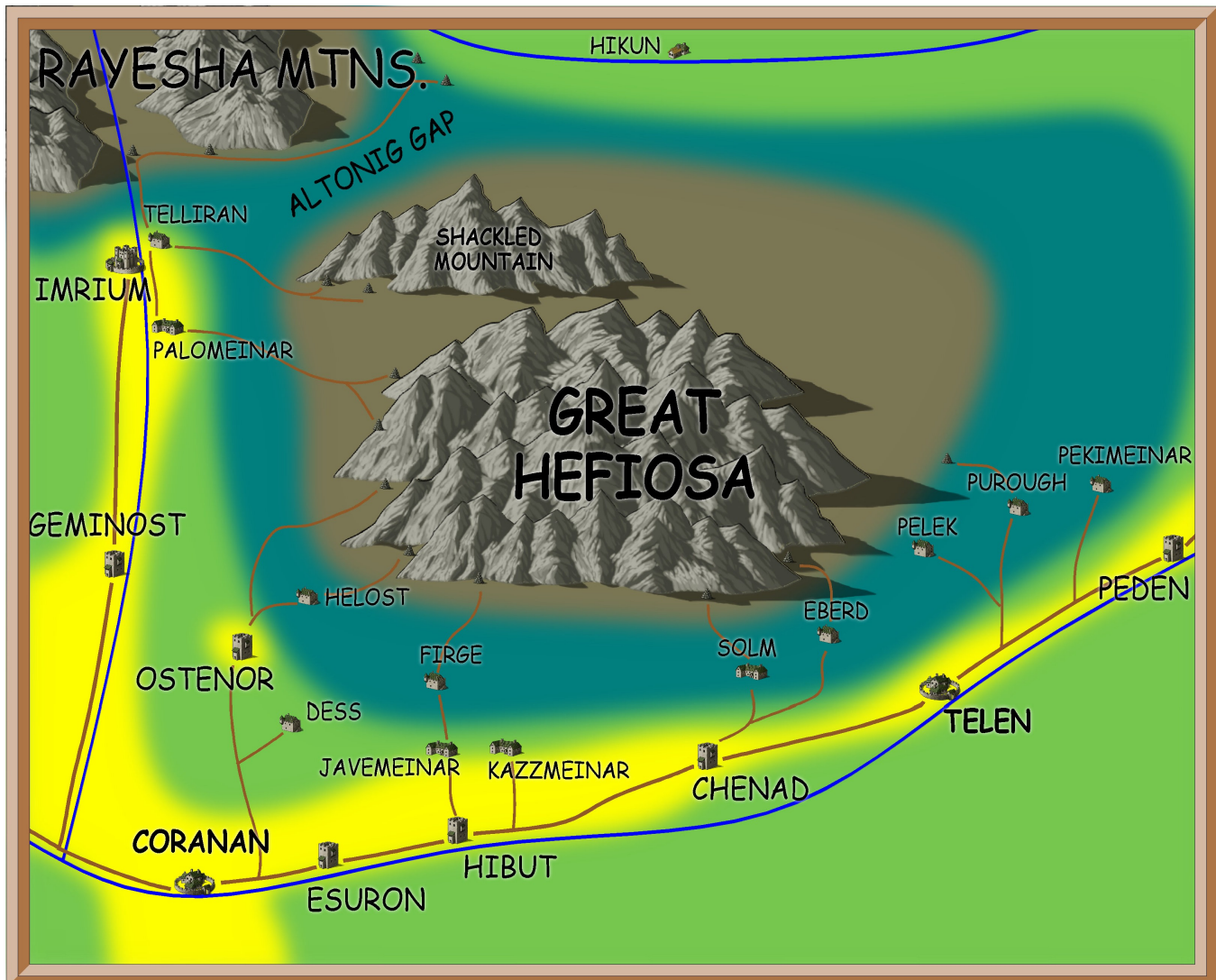
Tall firs cover most of the land, with deciduous strips emerging along the valley floors. As the entire region is well-grazed, the forest floor is surprisingly clear. With the deep valleys and tall trees, very little light reaches the ground and the cover is sparse. In this environment horses and cattle have little forage, but the less finicky goats do well.

Due to the altitude, winters are cold and snowy, while summers are mild and very pleasant. The main agriculture is goat herding, and the main crops are oats and barley, farmed with hoes rather than plows. The Hefiosans also forage in the woods and reap copious quantities of mushrooms, berries, and a wild leek-like root.

Ivashu are a considerable problem for the Hefiosans. Yelgri are particularly common, but at least the northern part of the region seems to be along a migration path for all types of Ivashu from Araka-Kalai. But while being a hazard, these invaders are also a source of income for the Hefiosans. They are inventive trappers, and they are a major source of Ivashu for the Pamesani Games.

Gargun are less of a problem. Small bands do cross the Altonig Gap from the Rayesha Mountains, but they rarely survive long. When they are detected, the Hefiosans quickly band together and hunt them down. In addition, the gargun can rarely resist the temptation of hunting the Khora goats – almost always a fatal attraction.





Population

No census has ever been taken, but there are about 400–500 farmsteads in the Hefiosa, and the population is likely 3000 to 6000. Local pride gives the Hefiosans status as an ethnic tribe – they claim to descend from the same warriors that nearly destroyed the young Corani state in 365 TR. That bloodline has been augmented by innumerable immigrants from the lowlands, as the region has always been a haven for outlaws of all kinds.

The region has no political organization, and only the barest social structure. There are no villages or even hamlets. The greatest concentration of people

occurs where as many as a dozen homesteads may be strung like pearls along ten or so miles of valley bottom. In the winter each homestead will shelter an extended family of up to twenty people. In the summer the young men and boys (and some girls) leave the stead to graze the goats on the higher reaches, while the women and old men tend the farm and forage the local forest. In the spring and fall the goats are moved to the lowland deciduous forest, which increases the herder's contact with the lowlanders and increases conflicts.

So spread out are the Hefiosans that there are no roads and only the barest of tracks in the entire region.

The only discernible paths follow the rivers and streams. Horses are uncommon and carts rare, and the open forest floor is easily traversed by goats and walking men.

The Hefiosa is bare of temples, fortifications, or civic structures of any kind. The Hefiosans tend to be

uninterested in the gods – only fitting, they say, since the gods seem uninterested in them. However, Haneanism is spreading among the women. Many have embraced the sensual religion as a method of gaining some control over their headstrong menfolk.

Economics

While each homestead is self-sufficient in most regards, some supplies have to be purchased from the outside. To this end, the Hefiosans descend to villages around the perimeter of the region for twice-annual trade fairs. In the spring the women bring their winter weaving and in the autumn they bring their highly regarded cheeses to trade. The men trade some livestock and spend their wives' earnings on metalwares, tools, and copious quantities of beer. Ostenor has the largest trade, although Palomeinar (near Imrium) is growing in popularity. Javemeinar and Kazzmeinar (near Hikut) and Solm (near Telen) host a considerable amount of trade.

More important to the fiscal livelihood of the region is the fanosel trade. Fanosel berries are collected by the men while they watch their goats, and processed during the Winter into psychoactive crystals. Fanosel is not illegal to possess in Tharda and Rethem, but trading in it is for any but a guilded apotheker. Therefore the

fanosel trade runs through illicit channels, and is controlled by bandits with ties to the urban Lia-Kavair.

The several mines in the Hefiosa are owned and run by guilded miners from the lowlands. They are generally shut down in the winter due to weather. The Hefiosans tolerate the mining – the nearest farmstead generally collects a modest “rent”, while bandit gangs are “hired” for protection.

The tall firs of the Hefiosa would be extremely valuable, if only the Hefiosans would tolerate a woodcutter. But the locals have staunchly refused to allow any outsiders to cut a single fir, and they themselves are reluctant to cut very many. Some small trees are cut for buildings and fences, but the larger trees are left alone. Builders and shipwrights in Coranan and Telen covet the straight, long beams, but are forced to go far afield to the Gernal and Rayesha Mountains to get them.

Folkways

The Hefiosan will say with pride, “We never let go of a belief once it is fixed in our minds.” They are an intensely conservative people, even by Harn's generally mulish standards. A statement commonly heard is, “I had better be right, because you know I'm hard to turn.”

Hefiosan Law

Hefiosan society is intensely personal. Clans and families have very limited influence over their

members, even within a single household. The Hefiosan disdain for authority is remarkable. Even the authority of the parent over the child is minimal once the child is old enough to herd goats or otherwise earn his or her way. In fact, children have equal standing with adults from that time on.

There is no system of justice whatsoever, but crimes among Hefiosans rarely go unpunished. Young men consider it a duty and a pleasure to act as vigilantes, and earn status among their peers by doing so. A

Hefiosan who commits rape or theft against a weaker Hefiosan can expect a relentless pursuit by such men, each intent on pummeling him until senseless. (Or to death, if not a Hefiosan.) Although the men prefer to engage in a stand-up bout of fisticuffs, if the criminal is particularly tough they won't hesitate to gang up or even ambush him. If the criminal wins one fight the ordeal still continues, as other young toughs will take their turns.

If the crime victim is capable of his own revenge, he is expected to seek it. But Hefiosans are not foolhardy – “Better a living dog than a dead lion,” is a common refrain. A man too weak to win his fight will recruit friends or use trickery or ambush to press his case, though his reputation will suffer.

For better or worse, women have equal status with the men. There are few traditions that make a distinction between the two genders. While the usual division of labor has men herding and women farming, there are many women herders, and most older men end up returning to the farmstead. The only special status accorded women is during pregnancy and while nursing. Crimes against such women are considered particularly heinous.

Marriage is consensual and permanent. Adultery is rare, and generally gets punished. The men (and sometimes the women) do engage in amorous adventure among the lowlanders, but these peccadillos are completely acceptable.

This is an example of a general trait of Hefiosan

A Few Examples of Hefiosan Rituals, Traditions, and Beliefs

The most important traditions concern farming and foraging. Specific rituals and rules dictate exactly when a plant, tree, or mushroom can be harvested, where the goats may forage, when they can breed. Often the rule is hidden in a ritual. The women of Clan Werren braid a straw hangman figure as they age their cheeses. Every day a single specific knot is added to the figure. When certain parts are completed, the women move or process the cheese in certain ways. When the little hangman is complete, it is burnt, the ashes are kept and smeared on the udders of the goats for the benefit of the next year's cheese.

In the Moorek Clan, squash is to be planted on the first crescent of Nolus. The planting is done by the women and one young boy. All strip naked, and the women dance around the boy. Then they plant the seeds while singing a certain lascivious song. When done, they roll in the dirt like pigs until exhausted.

There are countless rules and rhymes for babies and toddlers. Their wee-track must be printed in the first snow to ward off croup. The first woodtick he suffers from is important – it must be killed with an axe for the child to grow clever with tools, or a bell to give him a singing voice.

Most beliefs are inconsequential. If a butterfly enters a house then a visitor will soon appear. To forget a lost love, wash your face in cobweb dew.

The Hefiosans are completely sure of the efficacy of their traditions. Any skeptic will be reminded that these traditions have kept the Hefiosans fed, warm, and unconquered for centuries – and what “civilized” people can say as much? They do not consider their rituals “magic”, nor do they believe they are propitiating nature spirits or the gods. Nor do they spend time considering why the rituals work. Their attitude is prosaic – the rituals are simply, “the way the world works”.

It is possible that there is more to the rituals than they understand, and perhaps there is a smattering of magic or propitiation hidden in the traditions. No Shek P'Var has ever been able to study the matter closely enough to know.

society. Agreements and contracts among themselves are inviolable, but agreements with outsiders have no weight. It is perfectly acceptable to lie, cheat, or steal from a lowlander, but to do the same to a Hefiosan is to invite a pummeling.

Religion and Magic

As might be expected in a profoundly conservative society, Hefiosans have a rule or ritual for almost every activity. The roots of these rituals are lost to memory, and most are nonsensical or nearly so. But by keeping to the rote the Hefiosans are able to scratch a living from this unlikely land.

To fail to observe these rules is unthinkable. Hefiosans are keenly aware of the precariousness of their existence, and thus are terrified of the consequences of failing to follow the proven ways of their ancestors. However, there can be substantial differences in observances from clan to clan. Rarely are these differences material to the well-being of the community, and conflict among the clans is rare. As

long as the tradition has been proven by long practice it will be respected by other Hefiosans.

The Hefiosans pay no attention to the stars – perhaps because the deep valleys and tall firs hide most of the sky. But they pay close attention to the moon, and continuously consult it for guidance on planting, harvesting, and foraging.

Hefiosans don't reserve their disdain just for formal religion. They also scoff at fortune-tellers of all kinds. “Tell me the hour of the next rain and you'll have my ear,” is their usual retort to would-be soothsayers. But they do have one weakness in this area – a terrible desire to know of their own death grips many older Hefiosans.

Many stories revolve around the consequences of ever learning this secret. The Hefiosan is very fatalistic, which in the youth contributes to their foolhardiness and in the elderly can lead to a brooding ill humor. This melancholy is fed by the unpredictability of death in the hills – avalanches, Ivashu, and violence all strike with the random lethality of lightning.

Ivashu and the Hefiosans

The Ivashu are greatly feared among the Hefiosans – more for their magical nature than the physical threat they pose. Fortunately, Ivashu are not particularly common, as the Pech River below Geldym Falls is broad and deep and forms a considerable barrier to their migration. Only in the areas near the Altonig Gap are Ivashu notably common.

The Hefiosans fear the Ivashu largely because their magical nature threatens the conservative workings of the land. It is not just that the tall firs protected for centuries can be uprooted in an instant by a careless Hru, while carefully nurtured mushroom patches are a mere snack for a Nolah or Aklash. The presence of the Ivashu threatens the basic patterns, rhythms, and rituals of Hefiosan life. If any ritual fails – if a crop fails, or snow falls too soon in the season – it is almost always due to the unwelcome presence of an Ivashu.

By far the most feared is the Umbathri. The mockery of an Umbathri is intolerable – it threatens the efficacy of their rituals, and it strikes at their pride. They are considered an omen of death, and no ritual is known to repel one. More than a few Hefiosans afflicted by an Umbathri have killed themselves in despair.

Countless charms are used to attempt to repel the Ivashu. The most important one is created from the testicles of their castrated kids. The potion is created during an annual celebration – one of many such events, as the Hefiosans appreciate any opportunity to party. The blood is then smeared on trees on the periphery – the lowlanders generally assume the bloody symbols are a threat directed at them.

Banditry

The Hefiosan reputation for banditry relies much on the boisterous behavior of its men. During the trade fairs they amuse themselves at the lowlanders' expense – brawling with the men and badgering the women. They compete with each other in the commission of petty crimes – the more audacious and pointless, the better. The time they spend in the stocks or gaol is often the only time they spend sober during the entire fair.

Outside of the fair there are further opportunities for conflict with the lowlanders. Goats are difficult animals to herd, and the Hefiosans are quick to claim any lowlander's stray as their own. When their own goats wander to the lowland pastures they are just as quick to accuse the farmer of thievery. Not only do they reclaim the goat, but they generally pilfer some additional property as “recompense”. Thus even the most ordinary Hefiosan goatherd is a bandit in the eyes of the lowlanders.

But the true bandits are the bands of men that use the Hefiosa as a power base from which they can strike at all of Tharda. About a half-dozen large bands exist at any one time. They can form quickly when a charismatic leader emerges and gains attention through some notable success. They can disband instantly as well, usually through internal dissension when the leader loses their aura of success. Members easily flow from band to band, and many goatherds join bands temporarily, returning to their herds when they become dissatisfied.

The bandits are a mix of hill-born Hefiosans and lowland outlaws. Their ranks swell in the summer, but diminish in the winter as the weather cuts into their employment opportunities. The farmsteaders and the bandits co-operate in many ways. Besides the all-

important fanosel trade, they co-operate in keeping the Republican Guards at bay, and the farmsteaders sell food and supplies to the bandits. But the relationship is an uneasy one. Some newcomers fail to respect the natives and prey on them as though they were common peasants – a strategy that generally earns an early death. The more powerful bandit gangs put pressure on the farmsteaders, even threatening violence at times, to ensure the fanosel trade continues. And in the internecine battles amongst the bandit gangs, the farmsteaders often suffer in the crossfire.

But while the farmsteaders may be wary of the bandits, they despise the Republican Legions. Many an enthusiastic Marshall or Commander has sought to burnish his reputation with a foray into the hills. Most quickly become frustrated by the bandits' mobility. But before giving up they usually arrest a few farmsteaders for conspiracy, burn a couple farms, and march a few “bandits” back to headquarters for a quick trial. The pattern was most egregiously repeated by a young Kronas Elernin in 707 TR. As Commander of Ostenor he led a foray that ended in the destruction of dozens of farms and the arrest of over one hundred Hefiosans. Twenty men were eventually convicted and executed as bandits – including several over sixty years of age and two 12-year-old children.

Only the bandits use horses in the Hefiosa. They are invaluable in the rugged land, and the well-grazed forest floor allows the horses to move quickly without the need for trails. But the lack of fodder presents a challenge to the bandits, especially in the winter. Some bandits keep their horses and winter in lowland valleys, but this puts them at considerable risk. Those with better connections with the lowlanders sell their horses each winter, buying new ones in the spring.

Bandit Leaders

Ravenna of Oorn

One man who joined Ravenna's band didn't realize for three months that his leader was a woman. Ravenna is a plain-faced woman of 35, tall and sinewy, and with the rough manners and gravelly voice of a man. She is also an excellent archer and bola-thrower, and an expert with her long spear, both mounted or on foot.



A native Hefiosan, Ravenna was the oldest of three sisters. As she had no brother Ravenna took on the many responsibilities of a boy in the household. This is unremarkable in the Hefiosa – there are many such tomboys, and a few become bandits like Ravenna. Ravenna is remarkable only for her skills as a leader, fighter, and bandit.

Ravenna identifies strongly with her Hefiosan roots. She recruits only from the Hefiosans, and considers herself the protector of the farmsteaders. Her band fluctuates in size, and has at most twenty members. Every winter they disband, with most joining their families on the farms. Ravenna, though, spends the

winter in the lowland cities, quietly spying.

Ravenna does not consider herself an ordinary bandit. Her gang earns spoils by taking protection money from the miners of the Pech Valley, especially those traveling through the Altonig Gap. But she justifies her payment by occasionally hunting the yelgri in the area. She also is the main purveyor of Ivashu – captured by the farmsteaders or by her own gang. Most of her income comes from the fanosel trade, which she is a major participant in. Her gang engages in little direct banditry, and she mostly hones her formidable combat ability against Ivashu rather than humans.

Arona

The only lowlander in Ravenna's gang is the similarly plain-seeming Arona. She is a short, compact woman, somewhat younger than her friend and leader. Quiet and intelligent, she is also a deadly killer, a master of the dagger, sword, and shortbow.



Arona was born in Golotha, and taken into the Navehan temple at a very early age. She was raised to

Hefis of the Broken Knee

The Hefiosans have many folktales, most of which are unique to their region. By far the greatest number involve the character of Hefis of the Broken Knee. But Hefis appears in two distinct forms, which is confusing to outsiders – but not the locals.

In some stories Hefis is a huge giant that lives below the Great Hefiosa – or perhaps *is* the Great Hefiosa. He strides among the forests with an enormous fir as a crutch, tending his goatherd. He knows all the best ways, and Hefiosans speak of any particularly effective ritual or tradition as being “Hefis' Wisdom”. Sometimes he gives his wisdom as a gift to someone who has earned his appreciation. But he also brings doom – typically in the form of an avalanche – often without any apparent provocation.

But Broken Knee Hefis is also an wizened old man with a crooked staff. It is said he knows of every man's death. If his crutch is stolen he can be forced to answer any question. But if he manages to get a hand on the thief, his grasp is unbreakable. Strong men have died from that grasp – only those clever enough to trick this trickster into letting go survive.

be an Navas-Kara assassin, and served the Navehans well for many years. But Arona never connected emotionally with the Navehan creed, and while content to serve the temple, she had no loyalty whatsoever to her masters. The leaders assumed that behind her quiet obedience was unquestioning faith, and she gained ever more important and difficult assignments.

Eventually her success brought her in contact with a corrupt Arasha (Chief Deacon), who was using temple assassins to further his own personal agenda. Discovering his treason meant Arona was herself endangered, and even after killing the traitor she considered leaving the temple to be her wisest course. She lives in constant expectation of being named for a Dezenaka killing, but handles it with equanimity as she is confident in her own abilities.

Arona met Ravenna last winter in Telen. Both were posing as men, and both perceived the other's disguise. Arona assumed Ravenna was a fellow assassin, but in the ensuing fracas Ravenna came out the better. Arona was shocked and impressed by Ravenna's reluctance to kill her, and the two quickly bonded. Their loyalty to each other is absolute.

Rindle Erenbruck

Rindle is a likable young man, tall and strong. He is also a famous brawler of enormous power and skill. He is also an expert with the two-stone Hefiosa Bola – an ubiquitous tool all goatherds master. His exploits have drawn a cadre of two dozen like-minded men, and together they terrorize the villages on the periphery. Rindle never planned to be a bandit, and he doesn't recruit. But his charisma, skill, and attitude have attracted a fanatically loyal band. Now Rindle faces the challenge of supporting his boisterous entourage.



Until recently he has relied on crude pillaging for income. But as the band grows such sorties are becoming larger and more dangerous. He dabbles in the fanosel trade, but is stymied by his lack of connections among the lowlanders.

Other bandit leaders realize the precariousness of his position. Dolpatray has made repeated offers to make him his lieutenant, but Rindle is a proud Hefiosan and won't ally with an outsider. He is on good terms with Ravenna, but she considers him unserious and fears he would be an unreliable ally. Clan Laren has made contact as well, with some success.

Aron Dolpatray

Aron is a doubly rare creature – an old, fat bandit. He has survived thirty years in the Hefiosa, and is now quite gray. He is also portly enough to require two horses at all times – he alternates mounts as each gets winded. Before coming to the Hefiosa he was well placed in the Corani Lia-Kavair, and his remains intimately tied to that group.

Aron is well organized and very smart. His gang operates in three groups, each of about a dozen men. Most come from Coranan, fleeing local justice. Fanosel is the backbone of his empire, though he is more proud of his control over the silver mine. His connections in Coranan often lead to precisely targeted attacks on merchants on the Ostenor and Telen Roads. He also provides a haven for all kinds of contraband too hot to be kept in Coranan.

Aron has placed guards at most of the common paths into the Hefiosa. These are ordinary-seeming farmsteads, and only a Hefiosan would recognize the differences between one of these farms and a true Hefiosa stead. An experienced farmer might notice some signs of farming incompetence, such as crops planted too early, late, deep or shallow. Aron recruits older Lia-Kavair from the cities that need or want to “retire” to the dull life of a farmer. He provides them

with some continuing support, and in return they provide smoke signals warning of incoming patrols, and also act as low-level go-betweens.

Aron would like to bring Ravenna and Rindle into his orbit, but has been rebuffed by both. He despises Shazzard and distrusts Clan Leren. He is completely ruthless, but not unnecessarily violent. He believes that the threat of violence is usually more effective than the act of violence.

Aron's chief lieutenant is known only as Silent Venn.

A huge man, Venn suffers from a severe lisp and thus rarely speaks. This turns out to be an advantage – his gang are very proficient with hand signals, are expert ambushers. Most people naturally assume a man so big and quiet is also a dullard. He is actually very sharp – sharp enough to prefer people think otherwise.



Shazzard Melay

Shazzard is a compact man who most will mistake for a Kuboran tribesman. His face is tattooed, giving him a fearsome aspect. Those familiar with the barbarians will not recognize the meaning of tattoo



– Shazzard gives several different explanations. At times he has claimed to be a Navehan assassin, a Pagaelin tribesman, and a Hepekerian sheikh. All that is known for certain is he was an outlaw in Golotha before earning a reputation here as a killer.

Shazzard is an extremely violent man, and a remorseless killer. On several occasions he has killed helpless victims with little reason. His band is almost entirely recruited from lowlanders, with just two Hefiosans. These two, Abel and Arthen, are shunned

by other Hefiosans for various crimes against their kin. Shazzard is a relative newcomer, with just three years in the Hefiosa. He is very successful, but despised by almost all.

Most of Shazzard's success comes from simple highway robbery, mostly on the Telen Road. Audaciousness is his hallmark, and is a major reason for his success. He controls only a small part of the fanosel trade, but he enjoys shaking down the miners for additional income.

The other bandits are contemptuous of Shazzard, and believe his recklessness and violence will eventually be his ruin. But they also fear that their own gangs may be damaged in the process, and all would like to be rid of him.

Clan Leren

The oldest of the Hefiosa bands, Clan Leren consists of four brothers and their followers. While they dabble in the fanosel trade, their main activity consists of carefully planned acts of brigandage. They are audacious, sometimes reaching even within the walls of Coranan and Shiran. And they can travel far afield – even into Kanday and Rethem. They plan and train obsessively for every mission – sometimes taking a full year to prepare. As a result they almost always achieve their goal.

Despite their extraordinary success, turnover is high among their band. In part this is due to the clan's rigorous demands – members spend hours each day honing their bodies and their skills. But mostly it is due to the extremely arrogant attitude of the brothers, who treat their followers with unveiled contempt. Still, they pay extremely well, and many men value the training they receive. Ravenna served the Clan for four years – perhaps a record – before starting her own band.

The four brothers are so close in age and appearance that few outside the gang can tell them apart. The four are complete equals within the group, and

they share duties interchangeably. They often take advantage of this verisimilitude in their operations. Their names are Merthen, Dathen, Garven, and Mikkel, but each is usually addressed as “Deethe Leren”. The origin of this nomenclature is unknown.

Clan Leren has been operating for at least forty years, and yet the brothers still appear as healthy men of no more than forty or fifty years. Naturally, rumors abound to explain this anomaly. The most popular rumor, and one subtly encouraged by the Clan, is that they gained long life through a pilgrimage to Araka-

Kalai. The story has them passing several tests to reach Ilvir's own sanctum and receiving a reward of long life.

The truth is simpler – the four brothers are Morsindar, and they conduct their banditry specifically to advance the Morsindar cause. Their targets are chosen in consultation with their brethren, and their revenues help finance the Morsindar cause throughout the region. They have benefited greatly from the insularity of the Hefiosans, and they have been able to operate in secret from these hills for over two hundred years.

Lawmen

Harmon Kainel

Commander, Ostenor Cohort

Young, intelligent, wealthy, and powerful, Harmon Kainel is an up-and-coming force in Thardic politics. His clan is closely allied with Kronas Elernin. Years ago they supported



Kronas in being appointed Commander of Ostenor, which was a key stepping-stone in his career. The clan was later rewarded with manors in the Kusem District. Clan Kainel is one of three clans that dominate the district, along with Clan Onaxis and Clan Erm. Relations between the clans is at least polite, and sometimes warm, as there have been numerous marriages among them. In local society it is considered impertinent to mention the fact that Clan Onaxis is closely allied to Clan Nordaka – Kronas Elernin's archrivals.

The 34-year-old Harmon is aiming to become the Warden of Coranan, and Kronas has suggested that he follow his example and launch a major raid into the hills. This would be popular almost everywhere, but Harmon is reluctant. He has participated in two such

raids as a captain, and is well aware that they are at best ineffective and at worst a moral travesty. Harmon is not a particularly pious man but has a strong moral sense. But the pressure on him is considerable, even from his own clan.

Ramil Onaxis

Captain, Telliran Company (Ostenor)

The Onaxis clan owns most of the Ostenor lands, and Ramil, age 38, has been a captain in the Ostenor Cohort for almost 20 years. He enjoys the position, as it insulates him from the boring business of manorial management and clan



politics. He is relaxed, confident, warmly regarded by his troops, and by merits should have been promoted to commander long ago. But he dislikes politics, and he likes his current assignment just ten leagues from his home.

Ramil has a practical attitude towards the Hefiosans in his area. He treats the farmsteaders with respect, and his frequent patrols are fairly cordial. When the Hefiosans descend on Palomeinar to trade each fall

and spring, he spends the weeks beforehand warning the farmsteaders that while minor crimes will earn minor penalties, major crimes will not only be prosecuted harshly, but will bring an end to the fair. The Hefiosans put pressure on their own men to keep under control, and the Palomeinar fairs are almost always very successful.

Ramil does pursue serious criminals vigorously, and usually successfully. His company has captured more bandits than any other since his arrival.

Fellan Elernin

Captain, Eberd Company (Chenad)

Fellan, age 28, is a cousin of the powerful Marshal Kronas Elernin, and realizes that his position is that of a political pawn. While loyal to his cousin, he is not particularly enthusiastic in his role. He performs his tasks with



minimum effort and competence, and is seemingly without any ambition. He is also secretly addicted to fanosel, which he obtains through an agent of Aron Dolpatray. Not only is he addicted, but he supplies several of his friends. Eberd Company makes only half-hearted attempts to patrol their section of the Hefiosa, and Eberd and nearby Solm are major conduits for illicit trade.

Jovan Kardan

Captain, Firge Company (Hibut)

Jovan Kardan, age 23, is the son of the Hibut Commander, and is driven to prove himself as a commander. His father is an important ally of Kronas Elernin, and Jovan consciously models himself after the great Marshal – or at least, as the Marshal is portrayed in popular accounts. Firge is the closest garrison to the Hefiosa, and Jovan relishes being



on the “front lines”. He is extremely aggressive, regularly sending forays miles into the interior and arresting any young male he can. However, at least four members of his company are in the pay of the Hefiosans, and the expeditions are rarely successful.

Karl Erm

Captain, Helost Compamu (Ostenor)

Karl is a newly minted captain, just 19, and is completely intimidated by his position. Whether he is a coward has not been tested, but he is completely without any command of his troops. His clan is not very important



outside Ostenor, but Karl stands to eventually inherit the clan leadership. This position is an important step in his grooming, and he is terrified that his family will discover how badly he is performing so far. Fortunately for him, his Commander is quietly sympathetic and is looking for a way to help the young man.

Marsin Omnin

Captain, Purough Company (Telen)

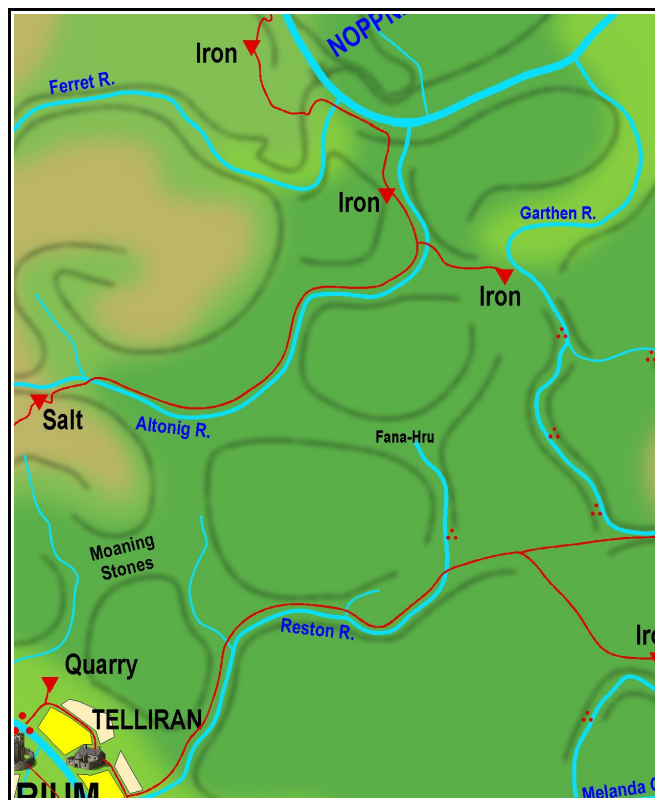
Marsin, age 28, is an ambitious man, frustrated by his clan's relative impotence and the remoteness of his post. He would greatly prefer a post in the Red Guard, but his Marshal and Commander, the powerful Cobart



Nordaka, insists on keeping him in this post. He resents this, unaware that his clan is nearly bankrupt, and Cobart is attempting to protect him from the scandal which will soon engulf his father and uncles. Marsin is a competent soldier, though his soldiers are bored and somewhat undisciplined. He usually makes only cursory patrols beyond the nearby mineheads, and only occasionally penetrates more deeply into the hills.

The Altonig Gap

The gap between the Hefiosa and the southern reaches of the Rayesha Mountains is a unique maze of canyons. When Harn was gripped in an ice age several thousand years ago, ice often formed huge dams that cut off Lake Benath from the Thard River. Lake Benath found other outlets, one of which was up the Pech River, across the Gap to the Imris River. Ice dams also clogged this outlet at times, and the occasional collapse of these dams led to massive floods that carved impressive canyons and littered the landscape with inexplicable features. Thus the Altonig Gap is a devil's garden of cliffs, canyons, pits, boulders, and rockfields.



Today no human scholar has any plausible theory regarding the origin of the Altonig landscape. The only scholarly interest in the area has been in the mineral deposits unrelated to the scoured landforms. Local speculation is muted, and limited to conventional

mythological explanations connecting the area to Ilvir and his Ivashu.

This is appropriate, because the Altonig Gap has an extremely high concentration of Ivashu. Simple geography explains this in part – the Gap is the easiest route out of the Benath Basin. But there may be other reasons for the high numbers.

Yelgri

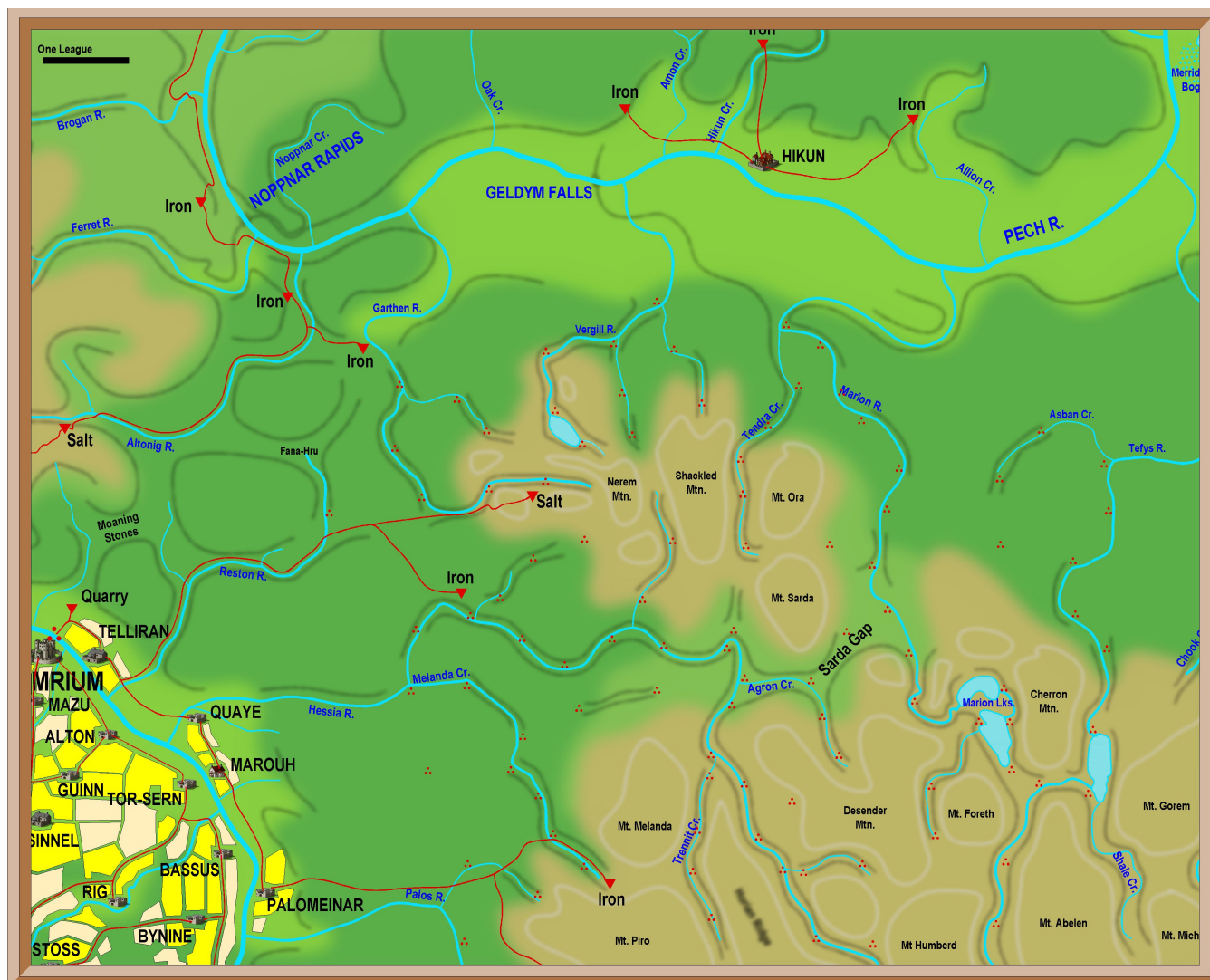
Ivashu and bandits aren't the only hazards of the Gap. Yelgri find the countless cliffs and bluffs ideal habitat, as they offer outstanding views for hunting and safe havens from attack. They also have learned the habits of the miner caravans, and can lay effective ambushes along the way.

Ravenna's band has learned some tricks for fighting the Yelgri. When escorting a caravan for profit, she creates three groups. One group goes ahead very visibly, which usually sets the Yelgri to creating an ambush. A second group parallels the first group and attempts to surprise the ambushade. Meanwhile, the main group follows safely behind. At the very least they usually break up the ambush. At best they manage to kill several Yelgri before they can fly to safety.

Ravenna is concerned that the Yelgri are smart enough to eventually adjust their tactics, which would make her job much more difficult.

Moaning Stones

The Moaning Stones is an enormous jumble of boulders and gravel, punctuated by short cliffs and rocky knobs. The largest boulders are found in the eastern end – many are the size of a peasants' hovel. As one moves west the boulders tend to get smaller, until the formation peters out into a coarse gravel bed. Small willows dot the rockfield, precariously rooting themselves in the scant soil.



Not surprisingly, the area is home to a large band of Hru. At night their low-pitched, throbbing “songs” can be heard in Imrium. During the day they hide in their boulder-form, but they are protected by innumerable Ivashu of other types, including swarms of Vlasta.

The tremendous Ivashu population is only partly due to the location and landscape. In Imperial times, the Ivashu were a constant drain on Imrium's prosperity. In response, Melderyni lorists were brought in to find a solution. Their imperfect idea was to place a magical “attractor” which would draw the Ivashu like flypaper. Ivashu who enter the Moaning Stones never leave it – the carnivorous ones eventually waste away,

while the earth-drinking Hru slowly increase in numbers. Some larger Ivashu, such as Nolah and Aklash, seem able to shake off the attraction, and are not common here.

The focus of the magic is a rock-crystal sphere planted deep in the rockfield. On their own initiative the Hru have built a cairn of enormous stones to protect it. Knowledge of the sphere was lost in the Balshan Jihad, but descriptions of it exist in chantries in Melderyn.

Fana-Hru is a similar, smaller landscape near the center of Altonig Gap. It is also home to Hru, but a less remarkable number of other Ivashu.

Adventuring in the Hefiosa

Vegetation and Terrain



Lowland Deciduous Forests are a diverse mix of trees, shrubs, and vines. Except when close to settlements the undergrowth is generally thick, and travel is difficult without a trail or road. Off-trail travel by horse is nearly impossible. Game-trails do criss-cross the forest, but unpredictably and rarely in a useful direction. The Pech Valley also supports a plethora of Ivashu. Winter snows are usually limited to minor dustings.



Upland Deciduous Forests feature mostly larger, hardier species. Forests near settlements and the Hefiosa are used for goat grazing and woodcutting, and the forest floor is relatively clear. Travel on foot is easy even without a trail, although horses are hampered by the low tree branches. Goat trails are ubiquitous in these areas. Outside the range of the herders these forests become cluttered and travel is much more difficult. Snow is an additional hazard in the winter, although it doesn't usually accumulate.



Highland Coniferous Forests are dominated by tall firs. The forest floor is kept clear by goats, and travel is easy by foot or horse, even without trails. However, forage is extremely limited. In the Rayesha Mountains the floor is cluttered with brambles, and travel is much more difficult. On the canyon bottoms aspen and cottonwood replace the conifers. In the winter these areas usually accumulate substantial depths of snow.



Cliff and Canyon lines indicate particularly steep slopes. These are not “contour lines”, and do not indicate actual elevations. And they are not consistent – in an otherwise flat area a line might mark a modest bluff, while in the mountains only the major canyons are depicted. The lines merely mark contours that a traveler might find notable, and might effect his path or plans. In the Altonig Gap, these contours are vertical cliffs created by the ice age floods. In the Hefiosa they are canyons that vary in slope from near-vertical to merely steep – generally too steep for a horse, although paths may exist in some places.



Summit Lines indicate the heights of the Hefiosa. The Hefiosa is a single dome-like plateau, deeply scarred by canyons. These summit areas are thus relatively flat and easily traversed.

Entering the Hefiosa

The Hefiosans do not take well to strangers. Most lowlanders are assumed to be either spies scouting for the Republican cohorts, or outlaws looking to join a bandit gang. Neither will receive any hospitality. Spies will usually be killed without trial or fanfare.

Those wishing to join a bandit gang are best off making contact with connections in Coranan or Telen. The Lia-Kavair are well-connected with Aron Dolpatray, and if favorably disposed they can arrange an introduction. Another possible source of contacts are the miners who pay protection and hire the services of the bandits. And during the seasonal fairs direct contact can be made with Hefiosans of all kinds.

Plot Ideas

Gold Mining

Rumors of gold in the Hefiosa have a long history, a whenever an odd nugget is found in the Imris

River or a Hefiosan spends too freely at a fair interest is renewed. The characters themselves may decide to try prospecting, or they may be hired as escorts.

Prospecting is also a plausible cover for other activities.

Order of the Crescent Star

The Navehans are not the only people searching for Arona. A secret alliance called the Order of the Crescent Star operates in opposition to the Navehans, seeking them out and destroying them, if possible. The order takes its name from a hidden star that tradition claims appears in the exact center of Yael when the moon is at its thinnest waxing crescent. The organization recruits exceptional people from many religions, institutions, and origins. It maintains its secrecy to protect its members from Navehan reprisals.

Rumor of an apostate Navehan has reached the Order, and to recruit or interrogate Arona is the highest priority of the local organization. But the Order lacks any useful operatives in the Hefiosa, and have little information on her whereabouts or activities.

It should be noted that Arona (and Ravenna) are on the knife's edge, morally. Both could easily plunge further into brigandage and violence, or they could each see their virtues revealed and rewarded. Properly approached, this mission is not about the physical hazards, or even of diplomacy – although those will be important. Success will hinge upon whether the characters can engage Arona and Ravenna and connects these two loners to the world of heroes.

Too Many Hru

It seemed like a good idea at the time, but after a few hundred years the crystal device buried in the Moaning Stones may have outlived its usefulness. So many Hru have accumulated that their stomping are being felt in Telliran and Imrium. Cracks in walls are being blamed on the tremors. The locals have only a crude understanding of the Hru, and no idea why they have congregated in such numbers so close to their homes.

In addition, many people in Imrium would benefit from a better road through the Altonig Gap. A better connection with the Pech Valley would divert a

considerable amount of metals trade from Stimos and Shiran.

A daytime investigation will yield no Hru – hidden as they are among the many equally huge boulders. But it will meet dangerous numbers of hungry Ivashu predators. If a means of foiling the Vlasta and other Ivashu is found, the investigation could discover the cairn, surrounded by starving and dying Ivashu. Gaining access to the interior of the cairn, however, might take the help of its builders.

Bringing Up Karl

Harmon Kainel hires the adventurers for a double-purpose mission. The party is to take four or so



horsed men from the Helost Cohort, including its young captain, on a scouting mission deep into the Hefiosa. Kainel is looking for an appropriate target for a possible major expedition, and he wants to test and teach his new captain. The mission starts out uneventfully, with the party meeting various sullen, uncooperative locals. But deep in the hills, late in the day, they find fresh horse tracks – less than an hour old. And a goatherd – a wiry woman – nearby volunteers some information. “Those are Shazzard Melay's tracks. There's a corral about a half-league up I'll wager he's camping at. If you want to make recompense for stomping up my goats' forage, I'll take my pay in his blood.”

The group will be slightly outnumbered, but will have the advantage of surprise. But the fight with Shazzard is only half the adventure. Karl Erm will be trembling with fear and excitement. He might break and run – dooming the whole party – if the adventurers are not wise. Success will hinge on whether they can bolster the boy's confidence and put him in a position where he can prove to himself that he has what it takes

to fight and command.

A Few Quick Hooks

Hunting Ivashu. A quick buck awaits the party that can survive the hazards of the Moaning Stones to capture Ivashu for the Pamesani Arenas.

Woodcutters. Hefiosan timber would be worth a lot of money in Coranan. The timberwrights hire the party to escort a member tasked with negotiating an agreement.

Treasure Recovery. Clan Leren stole something very valuable from someone very powerful. Getting it back will require a very resourceful party.

We Know You Know ... Too Bad For You. A particularly observant member of the party realize that a certain man and a woman are actually both women. They don't know who they are, but when the couple realize their cover is tattered, if not completely blown, they take action to protect their identities.

Reining in Rindle. The adventurers are in a peripheral village when Rindle and his men appear. (Perhaps the party has been hired to find Rindle, or is seeking a bounty.) A brawl is inevitable, but the key is how the adventurers handle victory or defeat.

Something Left Behind. Five years ago a Laranian mission was massacred. Lost in the disaster was the relics of local saint. These relics can't be left in the hands of the heathens.

Mole Hunt. Aron Dolpatray has been a little too successful at robbing caravans on the Telen Road. Marshal Cobart Nordaka suspects Dolpatray has a mole among his tollkeepers, tax assessors, or other officials. He needs operatives outside his normal channels to root him out.

Blackmail. Someone is using Marsin Omlin's family situation to blackmail him. He needs a streetwise group

Legends of the Khora Ram

The Khora Goat is an extraordinary animal unique to the Hefiosa. A mature buck can measure six feet tall at the shoulder and weigh as much as a small horse. Their spiral-shaped horns can measure over four feet long, and are prized trophies. (The does have smaller horns of four to eight inches.) But these trophies are rarely taken from a live animal – the Khora ram is one of Harn's deadliest animals, and is treasured by the Hefiosans.

The Khora is extremely aggressive. Their hair is thick and tough, and is proof against almost any animal bite, and all but the best-placed blows from a gargun's spear, sword, or club. Rams have been known to kill or disperse entire packs of gargun, and to gore a barded warhorse and then its rider. But the Hefiosans know their habits well enough that they rarely come into conflict. Some Hefiosan's claim that Khora blood runs in the veins of their goats, making them strong and meaty. Others claim that Khora blood runs through the Hefiosans' veins, making them proud and irritable.

Lowlanders prize trophies from the Khora goat. It is reputed that the hair can be used to make nearly impervious armor – such coats can be bought as far away as Orbaal, but are almost always fakes. Real horns are more available, as the bandits occasionally come across a corpse. The horns are popular trophies, and are also used in various elixirs. All manner of wondrous properties are ascribed to Khora milk, which the credulous can easily purchase on the streets of Coranan.



to unearth the connection between his father and the Hefiosans.

A Simple Delivery. Harmon Kainel must undertake a secret mission to Telen. The main roads are not an option. He has a simple plan – just skirt the edge of the Hefiosa – and he needs a few trustworthy men from outside the normal chain of command.

Bringing the Word. Both the Agrikan and Laranian Churches desire to proselytize the Hefiosa, spurred by rivalry and potential riches. The adventurers are asked to help a group to build a temple-fort to use as a base.

Early Winter. The snows come early and often, and many goats are lost. Hunger forces the Hefiosans to desperate thievery on all frontiers. While the Senate debates a violent crackdown, one merchant sees an opportunity. He needs a smart, resourceful group to

negotiate the sale of food to the proud Hefiosans – to make a fortune and avert a war.

An Emperor Born. While Emperor Medak and his family was executed by the Balshans in 565 TR, rumors persists that at least one child escaped. It is said that a loyal family retainer spirited the baby Prince Solon out of Coranan, only to be captured by Hefiosan bandits. Today, many Thardic factions have an interest in a possible “true heir”.

The Joust. A knight has seen a troubling dream. A faceless knight wielding two lances awaits him under a canopy of giant firs. Should he answer the call, he might find that a huge Khora Ram has gone mad with an unknown fever and has forced the goatherders from its mountain.

A Conversation Regarding the Hefiosa

The old thief regards the coins on the table carefully, takes a long look around the room, and leans back. He speaks with a long drawl, as though to say as little as he can in as much time as possible. He speaks openly, and you note that he seems pleased with the men at a nearby table cock their ears a bit in your direction. You probably won't get any deep secrets from this man, but you will at least get a tale.

“I spent two years in the Hefiosa, when things got too hot here for me in Coranan. Back then the Vesser Gang was big up there. I rode with Marden Vesser – he's been dead for ten years now, I think. The first thing I had to learn was to ride. All the bandits go by horse. It's so steep with all those canyons you'd have to be half-goat to walk it.

“course, that's what the locals are. Goatherds, mostly, grazing their goats all over those mountains. They got farms, too, but nothing like the farms around here. Just little farms down in the canyons. Raise what they need and not much more. They don't take to

outsiders – not even us bandits, even though without us they couldn't sell their sweet. (“Sweet?” Fanosel – it tastes sweet if you ever try it.) That's alright. Their women are the ugliest I've ever seen.

“Don't go up there in winter. The wind whips down those canyons – you'll freeze your ears off if you get caught in it. Every farm has a stack of firewood taller than the house out back. They need it. We always wintered lower down, but that's dangerous because the Republican Cohorts can find you. That's how Vesser finally got bit. I could only take one winter there. We camped in the Altonig Gap, in the north. We got caught in a snowstorm once and ended up spending four days in an iron mine without food. One winter was enough for me.

“The cohorts all stay in the lower forests. They won't go into the tall forest with less than a hundred men. Up there it's not just the bandits, but the goatherds too. You don't mess with those guys – they've been fighting since they were born. Some of

them join the gangs, but you can't trust them. Not a drop of honor or honesty among them. They'd never tolerate 'em in the guild.

“Yeah, I admit, they spooked me some. When you head up there you'll see they paint witchy words in blood on all the trees. It's a spell they put on all us outsiders. Vesser didn't believe it, but maybe that's why he's dead.

“Mostly we'd just shake down the miners, or go down to the lowlands to do a little highway robbery. Vesser had some contacts he's sell the sweet to down here, but I didn't know much about that.

“How'd I get there? I knew a guy that knew a guy that was a mule for the Vesser's sweet. He arranged it for me. I doubt he's still around now – he sure ain't working for Vesser, now.

“You want my advice? If you are looking for a way to disappear, find another. It's too cold, and there's no place to spend your money and get drunk.” And with that he flips a silver coin towards the woman at the keg. “Now, do you want to hear about the year I spent hiding in the Haele Temple? It was the biggest heist ever in Shiran, and we planned it two years ahead . . .”

Author's Notes

The germ of this piece was a bit of speculative geography I posted on a lythia.com forum. I had put together a map indicating the likely extent of ice during the ice age – someone else had raised a question about it, and the idea intrigued me. One of my conclusions was that the Lake Benath Basin was almost certainly covered by an ice sheet.

Not everyone was convinced that this ice sheet existed – it wasn't mentioned in the canon, and the evidence is entirely circumstantial. But in the course of the discussion, I realized that *if* it existed, there would be evidence in the landforms around the lake. Unfortunately the existing maps are too coarse to show the expected forms.

So I made my own map. If the Benath Basin held an ice sheet, then there might be evidence of major changes in river flows and even catastrophic flooding as the ice sheet grew and shrank. The real-world models were the Great Lakes – which at various times drained several different ways, and the Missoula Floods that scoured huge areas of Oregon and Washington. The landscape and features of the Altonig Gap draw heavily from the landforms of the Columbia Basin.

Of course I had to extend the “what-if” another level. *If* there was ice in the basin, there would be dry canyons, rockfields, and scoured bluffs. *If* there were such features, what might take advantage of them? Yelgri were an obvious candidate – they would thrive in the bluffs. It was also obvious that Ivashu would use the canyons, as Pech Valley is almost a funnel to draw them this way in their wanderings. Putting Hru among the boulder fields that were formed wherever the flood waters slowed down was a no-brainer.

A couple features begged for explanations. The windings of the road between Imrium and the Noppnar Rapids area could only be explained by the existence of some hazard on the more obvious route. The gap between the main Hefiosa and the northern section (our “Shackled Mountain” became a second, smaller outlet for Lake Benath that was probably active only once. Mountain lakes gained glacial moraines.

I was well on the way on this project when I realized that there was almost no canon or fanon on the Hefiosa. I once ran a long-running campaign based in Coranan, and frankly I never used the Hefiosa to its full potential, simply because there wasn't any real guide to what was there. A few snatches about bandits, fanosel, and

some history of barbarians that almost toppled the Empire before it even got started was all there was. I couldn't find any fanon that provided anything more.

It was tantalizing. Someone had to live there – and someone interesting. More than a few bandits, if they really defeated the Corani so decisively. A hardy sort – Harn's only true mountain people. I considered the Greek bandit/patriots of the early nineteenth century as a cultural model – half bandit, half patriot, half drunken brawlers. There are plenty of other examples of mountain herders living in perpetual conflict with the lowland farmers. To fill out the folkways I used the settlers of Appalachia – emigrants from the Scottish Borderlands – and if any of the rituals or superstitions seem a bit over-the-top, I assure the reader that they are actually toned down from the real-world models. Broken Knee Hefis was shamelessly stolen from Ilkka Leskela, who has written a tremendous amount of excellent fanon. Climate was a problem – the Hefiosa is colder than Greece or Spain, so I rather cavalierly posited the existence of the wild leek to fill out the human diets. The goats' diet I leave undescribed, since I expect few players will play goat characters. The Khora were a late addition – a response to the challenge of explaining the general paucity of gargun. Based on the Markhor of central Asia, I rather like the adventuring opportunities that they provide.

I deliberately left most of the Hefiosa unmapped, to allow the game master flexibility. I also don't presume to name every bandit gang or cohort captain, again to allow for embellishment. My own gaming style runs towards character-driven adventures, and the Hefiosa lends itself perfectly to scenarios inspired by westerns and gangster movies. But the Altonig Gap provides plenty of scope for those prefer more direct forms of conflict.

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