

Robert E. Howard's

CONAN[®]



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CONAN THE KING

FEFE[™]

WELCOME TO THE THRONE

**WHEN I WAS A FIGHTING-MAN, THE KETTLE-DRUMS THEY BEAT,
THE PEOPLE SCATTERED GOLD-DUST BEFORE MY HORSE'S FEET;
BUT NOW I AM A GREAT KING, THE PEOPLE HOUND MY TRACK
WITH POISON IN MY WINE-CUP, AND DAGGERS AT MY BACK**

Just as Conan's ultimate destiny was to claim the throne of Aquilonia, the crown jewel of the Hyborian civilizations, *Conan the King* is the ultimate sourcebook to those kingdoms and the most dangerous battlefield of all: that of the court. With the guidelines contained within this book, players may fight to earn thrones of their own... or die trying.

- New options for player characters include the Courtier, Healer, Knight, Minstrel, and Noble, including new castes, talents, background stories, and other options.
- The flower of the Hyborian world: regal Aquilonia, where Conan became king.
- Guidelines for campaigns set on the road to the throne, or the intrigues and plots within the court.
- Monstrous foes such as Satha the Undying, Yogtha the demon-plant of Yag, winged night-mounts, and the demonic slave of the Ring.
- Allies and enemies such as Zelata the witch; the mad poet Rinaldo; the exiled priest Orastes; Xaltotun, resurrected lord of ancient Acheron; and more.
- Myths and magic of the dreaming west, from the state religion of Mitra to the hidden cult of Asura, with items such as the Heart of Ahriman and entities like the ghost of Epemitreus the Sage.
- New rules for the ultimate measures of status within the court: holdings and titles.
- Art and maps developed by new and experienced Conan creators.
- Developed with leading Conan scholars, this is the essential guide to the treacherous courts and battlefields of the Hyborian Age, just as Howard envisioned them!
- Important members of court such as Counselor Publius, Count Trocero, General Prospero, Zenobia the slave who became queen, and finally, King Conan.

This book requires the *Robert E. Howard's Conan: Adventures in an Age Undreamed Of* corebook to use.

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INTRODUCTION



CONAN THE KING



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

— Orastes, *The Hour of the Dragon*

From strident youth to king, that is the journey of our Cimmerian. The focus of the Hyborian Age has always been one of he who treads upon its jeweled thrones, Conan — barbarian, thief, mercenary, pirate, brigand, wanderer, adventurer, scout, and finally king by his own hand. It is during this final period of his chronicled life that he encountered perhaps the grandest scope of his ambitions and achieved the most. Far from the concerns of a rustic barbarian from a land thought mythical, Conan's attentions encompassed a continent in its entirety, his opponents more than single warriors, monsters, or even armies but entire countries.

It is into this grand theater that *Conan the King* plunges the player characters, a world where they may adventure in the castles and courts of the noble and the mighty, and fight battles to sway the fate of nations.

CHAPTER 1: KING CHARACTERS

From the lowliest beginnings can kings and queens be forged in the Hyborian Age. More common, one is born to rule, the happenstance of a coin toss by gods one will never understand. Here, then, are homelands, bloodlines, castes, caste talents, stories, archetypes, educations, war stories, and natures with which to create player characters from the ranks of noble, knight, or ruler.



CHAPTER 2: GAZETTEER

Here is presented the flower of the dreaming west in all its glory: Aquilonia and her many provinces, including the most notable of them, Poitain. The mightiest kingdom of the Hyborian nations is described at the time before, during, and after Conan's reign, marking the changes the barbarian king left in his wake. What current politics dominate this world, here at the peak of Conan's career? Find out within.

CHAPTER 3: EVENTS

It is not enough to have power; one must retain it. Whether suffering the acts of the gods, plagues, famines, or the man-made horrors of bloody war, no domain goes easy upon the brow that wears the crown. Yet events transpire in the throne rooms of each country that the masses are never privy to. The forces that shape empires might surprise those of lower station, and those elements that move kings and queens might surprise even themselves. There are forces in the world, and outside it, that are greater than the will of any mere ruler of people, and these are described within this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: MYTH & MAGIC

Legends haunt the mind and topography of the Hyborian kingdoms. From the artifact known as the Heart of Ahriman to creatures most believe to be myth, this chapter offers a

FROM THE JOURNALS OF JACK KIRWAN

I imagine him, the former king, his hair not unlike the snow-capped peaks of the mountains to which he returns, one final time, before he sets off to the Western Ocean, to that place where all our maps once enigmatically promised "here be dragons". Some few lines in *The Nemedian Chronicles* indicate that Conan found another entire continent for which we have no name.

I imagine him on whatever boat he used to cross that unknown gap, reflecting upon his life. He thinks first of the wild hills of Cimmeria which he knows he has seen for the last time in this life. He remembers the raid on Venarium, when he was but 15 winters old and already a legendary slayer of men. Yet the raids of his clan were not enough and he smiles now, the cold wind of the sea on weathered, lined cheeks, as he thinks of his first forays into civilization. A city in far off Zamora wherein he met an alien of tragic story whose life he ended as requested. Perhaps, for a moment, the Cimmerian's melancholy is visible on his face. But that gives way to laughter and the face twists into a grin remembering the man-ape he slew, his time as a mercenary and eventually captain of the guard for many a princess.

He learned war and piracy, he took then to the sea, warmer than this one, with a love that lingers in his heart still. Her name escapes chapped lips as memory marches on. The seasoned warrior becomes a general, the general becomes a king. He leaves the kingdom a better place after another host of adventures, but something restless still skitters inside, and he finally leaves the throne, perhaps to his heir. He heads into the great unknown which presages the greater unknown of his passing.

I imagine him here, on the East Coast of this land we call America but which had some other name then. Perhaps they had cities, or perhaps the rough natives were much as we know them today. What shape that continent had then is of no matter, Conan trod it. He trod this world where I was born. Some tens of thousand years ago he breathed in this air and exhaled. The world held particles of that breath for those millennia until I, perhaps, inhale them today.

Conan the Cimmerian saw the rise and fall of kingdoms. His age saw the rise and fall of civilizations. My world is on the brink of civilizations' end. Europe and the East march toward inevitable war and the machines we have today will make the Great War pale. My house is cold. I feel as old as the king though I am neither old nor crowned. I will turn off the light over my desk after I pen this last line, and I pray that I might get some sleep.

I imagine our world could use a man like him now.

bevy of items and concepts that exceed the bounds of the natural and the ken of humankind.

CHAPTER 5: ENCOUNTERS

From the elite Black Dragons to the denizens of courts across the civilized world, this chapter presents many notables with claims of fame or notoriety, or both. Kings, nobles, and sorcerers all are found here, ranging from Conan's staunch ally Count Trocero to his latter savior, Zenobia, who he promises to make his queen. Zelata the witch and Pelias the sorcerer are also represented. Monstrous foes such as Thoth-amon's baboon-demon also are revealed. Finally, Conan's greatest nemesis, Xaltotun of ancient Acheron, is brought back to life in this chapter, to menace the world anew.

CHAPTER 6: HITHER CAME CONAN...

Here we see the barbarian king of Aquilonia in all his savage glory, a rough-handed Cimmerian outlander turned into the king of the greatest nation of the world. Conan's varied and storied career has served him well, and despite rumblings of malcontent, Aquilonia has perhaps the most competent ruler in its history, if not all the world, as deadly with statecraft as he is with his battle-notched broadsword.

CHAPTER 7: WEALTH & HOLDINGS

One of the most valuable assets a noble might have is a holding, a piece of property — whether farm, castle, expanse of land, town, mine, or some other claim — that they can claim as their own, to dwell within (if desired) and ideally to draw wealth from. Holdings often come with titles, and this section provides rules for holdings and their role in gameplay. Described here also are the details of war and the vagaries of rule so that the gamemaster and players might resolve mighty conflicts and problems as needed, though rarely desired.

CHAPTER 8: THE ROAD OF KINGS

What is a ruler's life like? How much does one serve the crow rather than the other way around? What goes on inside a ruler's mind, how does she plan for war and expansion and deal with setback and even ruin? Roleplaying tips, a carousing at court table, and a host of ideas lay inside to fuel even the mightiest of ambitions.

CHAPTER 9: HEROES OF THE AGE

Sir Bared, first encountered in the **Conan** corebook, reappears in all his splendor

CHAPTER 1



CHARACTERS



The kingdoms of the Hyborians — Aquilonia, Nemedia, Brythunia, Hyperborea, Koth, Ophir, Argos, Corinthia, and one known as the Border Kingdom — dominate the western world.

— “The Hyborian Age”

People are oft defined by their homeland, but none so literally as a noble. They are, for better or worse, tied to the land of their origin by blood. Their history often intertwines with that kingdom whose people they rule. This is a strange relationship to those who live only by the land or, ever stranger, to those who wander. Most nobles have no choice. They cannot wander. Their lives are mapped out from birth to death. Of course, they are very well compensated for this strict life, and most peasants would gladly trade positions.

NOBLE HOMELANDS

The homelands of the dreaming west — fair Aquilonia, staunch Nemedia, defiant Ophir, and resilient Koth — represent the truest epitome of the so-called ‘dreaming west’. Brythunia is too rustic, Corinthia bears too much of the decadent Zamorian influence, Zingara too reckless, and Argos too focused on its own wealth. They consider themselves the most civilized of kingdoms in the western world, though the refined folk of Khitai and the expansionist Vendhyans would beg to differ.

Player characters from one of these four kingdoms are eminently suitable for court-based campaigns, and the gamemaster should allow players to pick freely or roll a d20 if a random choice is desired.

A character from Aquilonia may also select to be from the Bossonian Marches or Poitain. The Bossonian Marches and its provinces are described in *Conan the Scout*, and Poitain has the same talent and language, but is culturally distinct from Aquilonia. Poitain is described on page 30.

NOBLE CASTES

The nobles of a given kingdom may have many and varied titles, however their actual castes break down easily. As being noble is itself a caste, nobles only have two distinct sub-castes: **estateless** and **landed gentry**.

This is not to suggest that those of the same caste all have equal influence, but that power reflects far more than title and sometimes, even, of land. Thus, do the wheels of political maneuvering turn on factors like charisma, guile, deal-making, and the ever-present threat of violence.

HOMELANDS			
Roll	Homeland	Talent	Language
1–5	Aquilonia	Cosmopolitan	Aquilonian
6–10	Koth	Strife	Kothic
11–15	Nemedia	Cosmopolitan	Nemedian
16–20	Ophir	Gilded	Ophirean

NOBLE ANCIENT BLOODLINES

The *Ancient Bloodline* talent, described on page 17 of the *CONAN* corebook, describes the effect these ancient racial traits have on exceptional individuals, particularly those with an attribute of 12+. As described in the rules, these bloodlines manifest when a player character fails any Personality test. The gamemaster gains 1 Doom, and the player receives an additional d20 which must be used for the test (up to the maximum dice allowed).

Each ancient bloodline is different and affects its inheritors in various ways.

- **AQUILONIA:** Sons and daughters of “the Flower of the West”, Aquilonians are rightly proud of their direct lineage from Bori and consider themselves the exemplars of civilization. An Aquilonian failing a Personality test feels as if their pride has been injured, and becomes haughty and aloof, potentially blaming others for any misunderstanding.
- **KOTH:** Like Aquilonians, Kothians are descendants of the primitive Hyborian tribes who dominated the northern and western territories and defended them savagely against the Stygians and Acheronians of old. Failing a Personality test for a Kothian means an affront to civilization itself, and they are often loath to admit such a defeat, holding to tradition and rebuffing any conciliatory gestures.
- **NEMEDIA:** Descendants of the tribes who fought the ancient kingdom of Acheron and were ultimately touched by its bloodline, a Nemedian who fails a Personal test becomes arrogant and resentful, their decadent mind filled with notions of elaborate revenge. It is up to the player whether these are acted upon.
- **OPHIR:** Ophir has stood for centuries against much larger and more powerful neighbors on all sides, resisting attempts at being absorbed into Aquilonia, Nemedias, or Argos. When this bloodline is activated through a failed Personality test, an Ophirian’s initial instinct is to act defensively, rebuffing others and even abandoning any attempt at communication.

These Ancient Bloodlines act in all other ways exactly as described in the *CONAN* corebook.

ESTATELESS

Caste Talents: *Indebted, Subject* (*Conan* corebook, page 21)

Skill Gained: Persuade

Story: See page 7.

Social Standing: 3

You have a title but no estate. This may mean you are a knight (or equivalent) of the realm, but it could also mean that you or your family lost the estate and the wealth along with it. Nobles in the latter position often leave home, unable to bear the shame of being numbered among the common and impoverished.

LANDED GENTRY

Caste Talents: *Respected, Sheltered* (*Conan* corebook, page 21)

Skill Gained: Society

Story: See page 7.

Social Standing: 4

You have both title and an estate, which means you rule over your holdings. They produce income but also cause you to

owe fealty to those above you. You were most likely born with this status, though it may also have been conferred upon you after meritorious service or monetary ‘contributions’ to a lord. Almost anything can be bought in the Hyborian world, even nobility.

CASTE TALENTS

Nobles obtain talents necessary for rule, diplomacy, uncovering secrets, and the like. While a noble might be a very capable warrior, even Conan learns that brawn alone cannot solve all his problems with the crown.

Indebted

Your family once had considerable wealth and privilege, but now has been reduced financially, either disenfranchised or otherwise stripped of a formerly reliable source of income. Your family’s holding, whether a manor house or keep, is now its sole source of income, discretely being sold piece by piece. While in your homeland during Carousing, you may make a Challenging (D2) Society roll to generate 1

IMPROVING SOCIAL STANDING

Player characters are assigned Social Standing by the caste of their birth. This value affects many things, such as their interactions with others, the cost in Gold they must spend during Upkeep, and certain talents. Player characters — like Conan himself — are rarely settled into the social order of their birth, and thus may desire some means of improving their Social Standing.

Player characters can improve their Social Standing through these methods:

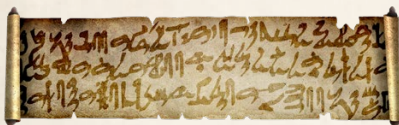
- **BUYING SOCIAL STANDING:** The most direct means of achieving a higher Social Standing, the player character must spend 20 Gold per rank of the desired upgrade when Carousing. *For example, increasing Social Standing from 1 to 2 requires 40 Gold.* The roll must be accompanied with a successful Society test with a Difficulty equal to the new Social Standing desired plus one step. *For example, increasing Social Standing from 0 to 1 is a Challenging (D2) Society test.* Additional Gold may be spent on this roll, with each 10 Gold allowing for +1d20, up to the Society Focus the character possesses. This additional Gold must be spent before the dice are rolled. Any Complications rolled for this test — successful or not — become social enemies, which the gamemaster will determine the nature of. If the test is unsuccessful, the Gold is spent and lost, to no effect other than lining the pockets of the desired class. Only 1 level of Social Standing may be increased per Carousing phase.
- **ROYAL FIAT:** In return for some great service to a royal court or ruler, the player character may simply be awarded a better Social Standing by

decree, given an elevated status within society and the means to maintain that status. This might take the form of a small stipend, connections to the 'right people', introductions to court, an office of some sort, or even a small profitable holding. This will only modify the Social Standing by +1 in one advancement, as it is difficult for others at that standing to adjust to the character's new status, and vice versa. Further advancement should be determined by the gamemaster.

- **CLASS MOBILITY:** This last means is unique to the character and the campaign and is entirely at the discretion of the gamemaster. Should a player character be able (or forced) to maintain a prolonged existence at another Social Standing, whether below their current rating or above it, the gamemaster may choose to adjust the Social Standing by ± 1 in the appropriate direction at the end of the character's next Carousing phase between adventures. The effects of this modified Social Standing take effect immediately after. It is not recommended to change Social Standing more than ± 1 at once, however.

Only one of these methods may be attempted per Carousing phase, and the gamemaster may choose to limit these even further. Social Standing is not entirely external, and the new status may take more than a little time to adjust to, even for the most adaptable of characters.

Gold per Momentum earned, representing the distasteful necessity of selling of your family's treasures. Unfortunately, any Complication rolled with this test reduces your Social Standing by 1, to a minimum of 0, and likely makes an enemy from within your family, angry at your reckless selling off of their inheritance.



Respected

You are treated with respect by the folk within your homeland, regardless of their personal feelings towards you. You may add +1d20 to any Society rolls made with anyone from your homeland who knows who you are and has heard of your family and is not of the same Social Standing as you. *For example, Sir Latrelius, an Aquilonian knight with a Social Standing 2, adds +1d20 to his Society rolls with any fellow Aquilonian of Social Standing 0, 1, or 3 or higher.* Those of the equivalent Social Standing consider you a rival, and you receive no bonus (or penalty). This is in addition to any suggested modifiers provided on page 19 of the **Conan** corebook.

NOBLE STORIES

Though they are seen to live a life of comfort, many nobles face their own hardships along the way. While any serf would gladly trade positions, to the noble in question, their reality may be gilded, but it is a gilded cage at times. Landed Gentry tend to have an easier time of it, as the Estateless are often knights and thus must fight in the king's wars.

LANDED GENTRY STORIES		
Roll	Event	Trait
1-3	Became Sudden Heir Apparent	Conflicted
4-6	The Second Child	Desultory
7-10	Long Standing Feud	Sworn Enemy
11-14	Blessed by the King or Queen	Pride
15-17	Dishonored in Court	Shamed
18-20	Arranged Marriage	Constrained

Became Sudden Heir Apparent

Your elder sibling died, or was perhaps banished, and you became the heir apparent. You did not plan this life. Yours was to be a lesser spectacle, free of the deep responsibility of rule. Now, your mother or father expects you to take the crown after them. Are you prepared? Are you willing? What did you do when you learned this was to be your fate?

The Second Child

You were never going to ascend to the title of your father, for others were in front of you. Were you fine with this or jealous? Perhaps you were sent away to a temple of Mitra or sent into combat. Perhaps you did nothing much at all and enjoyed a very easy life? What ambitions of your own do you have? Do you desire to rule and, if so, how far will you go to do so?

Long Standing Feud

Your family has an old rival. Perhaps you are both vying for the favor of the ruler of your kingdom. Maybe one of your ancestors aggrieved one of theirs and the matter has never been forgotten. Royal blood is old and so are the emotions which charge it. This other family, this enemy, may have done nothing to you personally, yet you were raised to hate them. Do you relish that anger or wonder about its justification?

Blessed by the King or Queen

Your family found sudden favor from the ruler of the kingdom. Perhaps you were given control of a prestigious piece of important land. Or you may have helped win a war. You might even have saved the ruler's life. Whatever

the reason, your family name was suddenly lifted to prominence and influence. This made you proud but caused jealousy and resentment in other families. Where do you stand now? What does the ruler expect of you, and who are your new enemies?

Dishonored in Court

Someone smeared you. It may have been publicly or through the vines of vicious rumors. In either case, it spread through court like wildfire. Your name was stained, tainted. Will you set things right? Were you guilty of what transpired to bring your name so low? Did you tough it out or leave? Where does your name stand now, and what does your family think of you?

Arranged Marriage

It is a common story in this age—you were arranged to be married by your parents. The union was intended to bolster influence, solidify power, or make up for having a title but little money left. You had no say in this matter. Did you go through with it? If so, are you married now? Perhaps you fled, turning your back on your noble lineage and took to the life of an adventurer. If so, is there something that brings you back now?

ESTATELESS STORIES		
Roll	Event	Trait
1-3	Recently Knighted	Fresh
4-6	Lost Your Family Estate	Regret
7-10	Given Rank by the King for Valor	Courageous
11-14	Bought Your Title	Ambitious
15-17	Poitainian Knight	Traditional
18-20	Nemedian Scholar	Well-schooled

Recently Knighted

Your knighthood is fresh. How it came about is up to you, but you are not used to the rank. By the same coin, the ranks of the elite are not used to you. You must learn etiquette and the strange world of noble rumor and politics. It is a much different world from whence you came. Will it suit you?

Lost Your Family Estate

Even noble families fall on hard times. Gambling debts, bad investments, the wrath of the ruler, all these can lead to the loss of an estate and, sometimes, all the families money. You have a title but nothing to back it up. Did you and your family stay in your homeland, knowing the other nobles looked down upon you? Or did you leave, and set up in a new kingdom? Perhaps you even betrayed your old liege to gain a new estate with an enemy.

Given Rank by the King for Valor

You proved your worth as the best people of the age do—on the field of combat. From lower beginnings, your prowess with the blade, or tactics, or raw courage set you apart. In time, you became knighted, perhaps even given a higher title. You are in a world where martial skill matters far less than before. Do your peers respect you, or do they see you as a curiosity, a rude soldier who pleased the king?

Bought Your Title

Titles can be bought. You were not granted an estate with the title, but you might build that in time. When the kingdom needs money for new roads, or churches, men and women of means appear and provide “donations.” These donations usually turn into titles. Clearly you wanted the title. What do you want next?

Poitainian Knight

Born to a proud line of noble warriors, you lived by a code since youth. You squired to one above you in rank and eventually took the name Sir or Dame after completing your training. You are one of the finest soldiers in the west, but also one of the best mannered, most selfless, and known for fidelity and honor.

Nemedian Scholar

A scholar in any other kingdom would have value but not rank. The Nemedian scholars, however, have title. They don't own land, but they are treated as nobles, so does Nemedia respect knowledge and history. In return for this privilege, you dedicate your life to learning and recording. History is your prime guide in all things. This age will end, even Nemedia will end. It is up to you to preserve it for all time.

NOBLE ARCHETYPES

The courtly world is a dangerous one, and many are the roles within it. Many, if not all, of the archetypes presented in the *Conan* corebook and subsequent sourcebooks might find a home in some court — perhaps as an unlikely advisor or exotic guest, or even winning a place there — but the gamemaster may wish to limit starting archetype choices for a campaign beginning or primarily set within a court environment. The following new archetypes are also especially useful additions to any campaign or adventure set within the civilized courts.

NOBLE ARCHETYPES	
Roll	Archetype
1–4	Courtier
5–8	Healer/Physician
9–12	Knight
13–16	Minstrel
17–20	Noble

COURTIER

The courtier is a creature of the court, whether an aide to the monarch, a functionary, or someone whose presence adds to the status of the court. Many are of noble birth, but rarely are they the heir apparent to their household and seek a place within the court as a means of bettering their own station and, in some cases, that of their family. Courtiers not coming from the nobility fill the ranks of squires, maidservants, clerks, agents, and especially favored servants. Most are expected to dwell within the court they serve, or have an estate nearby, and are often at the beck and call of their king or queen. Generally, courtiers spend their time serving the court in some fashion, attending functions and relaying messages, or sometimes merely adding to the quality of courtly life with their presence.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Society skill

CAREER TALENT: *A Modicum of Comfort* (CONAN corebook, page 82)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1

Expertise and +1 Focus to the following four skills: Insight, Lore, Observation, and Persuade

ELECTIVE

SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following three skills:

Counsel, Discipline, or Stealth

EQUIPMENT:

- Fine courtly clothing (several sets)
- Dagger or sword (player choice)
- Apartment in or near the palace
- 10 gold in personal funds for bribes



HEALER

Trained in the healing arts in a tradition appropriate to their homeland — whether physicking, herbalism and minor magic, or leech-craft — the healer has learned to administer to the injured, sick, and dying, binding their wounds, curing their ailments, and easing their pain. Whether this is done out of compassion or scientific curiosity, the healer's goal is ultimately the restoration of health, and if that cannot be attained, the cessation of misery.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Healing skill

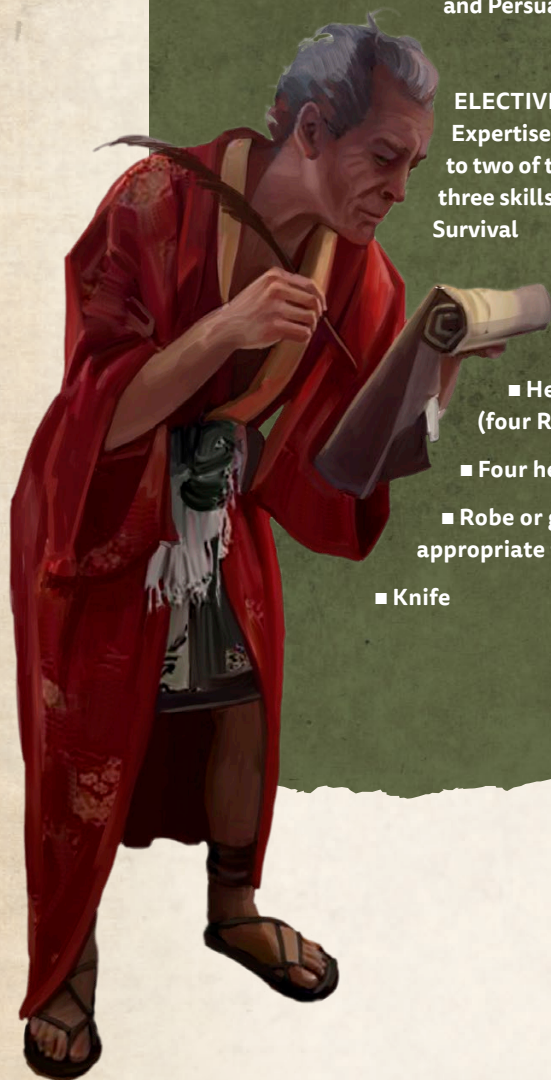
CAREER TALENT: *Bind Wounds* (CONAN corebook, page 67)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to the following four skills: Alchemy, Counsel, Insight, and Persuade

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following three skills: Craft, Lore, and Survival

EQUIPMENT:

- Healer's kit (four Reloads)
- Four healing poultices
- Robe or garments appropriate to role
- Knife



KNIGHT

The epitome of the civilized world's mounted cavalry, the knight dominates the battlefield, the thunder of the mounted charge striking terror into those on foot. Trained from youth in horsemanship, battle tactics, and weapon use, knights often put these skills to use in tournaments or as mercenaries, hiring themselves out in great companies. Some knights are of noble birth, landless and seeking acclaim and prestige on the path of iron, while others are essentially well-equipped mercenaries.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Animal Handling skill

CAREER TALENT: *Born in the Saddle* (CONAN corebook, page 59)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to the following four skills: Melee, Parry, Resistance, and Warfare

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following three skills: Command, Observation, and Society

EQUIPMENT:

- Full suit of plate armor (4 points, all locations)
- One-handed weapon of choice (broadsword, battle-axe, etc.)
- Three lances
- Medium shield
- Warhorse and riding horse



MINSTREL

The minstrel (or poet) has the ear of commoner and royalty alike, relaying messages to all with their art. Some compose their own verse, others sing ballads written by others, and some instead create poetry that can sway the fate of nations. Minstrels and poets alike are favored within most courts, not only entertaining and reflecting glory onto their patrons, but also speaking truth where others might dare not. Welcome at any event, they are often overlooked, and thus hear and see much when their hosts act unguardedly. They are generally passionate people and are oft drawn into conspiracies, usually unwisely.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Persuade skill

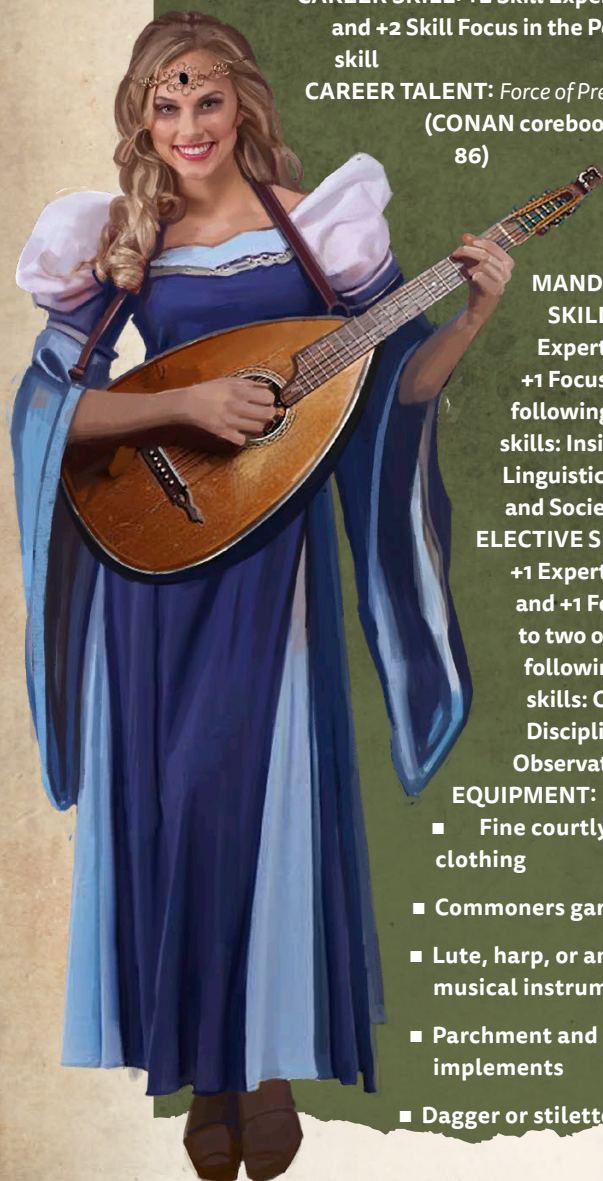
CAREER TALENT: *Force of Presence* (CONAN corebook, page 86)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to the following four skills: Insight, Linguistics, Lore, and Society

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following three skills: Counsel, Discipline, or Observation

EQUIPMENT:

- Fine courtly clothing
- Commoners garments
- Lute, harp, or another musical instrument
- Parchment and writing implements
- Dagger or stiletto



NOBLE

The noble is elevated by birth, one of the gentlefolk of their homeland, fortunate enough to be born with a title and wanting for little. Raised within a noble household or in the ruler's court itself, the noble is a political creature by necessity, taught to wield influence as a weapon with a far-wider reach than mere steel. With this inheritance comes the right to a title and some degree of prestige, regardless of whether it came with any land or wealth.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Society skill

CAREER TALENT: *A Modicum of Comfort* (CONAN corebook, page 82)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to the following four skills: Command, Persuade, Society, and Warfare

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following three skills: Command, Lore, and Warfare

EQUIPMENT:

- Fine clothing (several sets)
- A one-handed sword or dagger with gold and jewelled hilt (worth three times normal)
- Jewellery (rings, earrings, necklaces, bracelets, etc.) worth at least 10 Gold
- Signet ring
- Perfume
- Fine riding horse

SPECIAL:

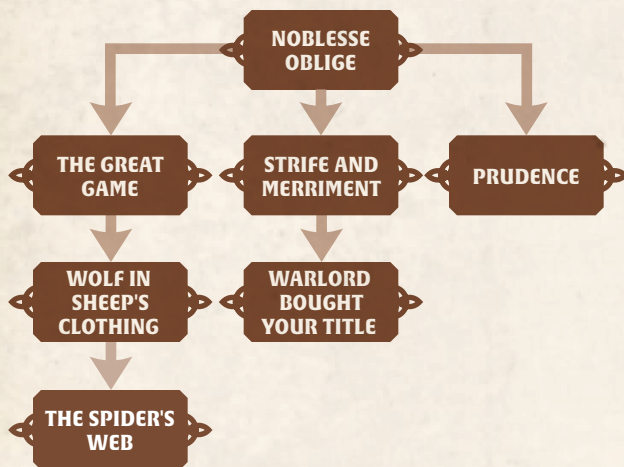
- Social Standing is automatically adjusted to 2.
- Nobles collect titles (and associated holdings) like trophies. Not only do you begin play with an appropriate title (regardless of your "), you may reduce the cost of receiving a title while Carousing by your "Social Standing. Your Social Standing is not adjusted further by additional titles after the first, however, and you do not begin with an initial Holding.



NEW TALENTS

The following new talents are primarily designed for rulers and characters commanding vast forces. However, with the gamemaster's permission characters of any sort may acquire these talents. These parallel to those from the *Conan* corebook.

COMMAND TALENTS



The Great Game

Prerequisite: *Noblesse Oblige*, a faction of Power 1 (see page 99 of *Chapter 8: The Road of Kings*)

Experience Point Cost: 200

Should your monarch inadvertently create a faction during a Control test (see page 100), you can intercede and attempt to draw away its power. Reduce your faction's Power by -1 and make a Daunting (D3) Command test. If the test is successful, the newly created faction's Power is also decreased by -1. Should you gain 1 Momentum on the test, your faction increases in Power by +1, returning it to its prior value. Should you score an additional 2 Momentum on the test, your faction increases in Power by a total of +2.

Noblesse Oblige

Prerequisite: Command Expertise 2, Persuade Expertise 1, Society Expertise 2, Warfare Expertise 1

Experience Point Cost: 200

Noblesse Oblige is the first formal recognition that you are worthy of being taken seriously by nobility. By taking on the obligation to aid your monarch wherever possible you gain the recognition that you're a part of the ruling elite and the authority to maintain military forces in the ruler's name.

Noblesse Oblige grants you a faction with a Power of 0. This Power can increase by +1 every Carousing phase until it equals 1/3 of your total number of Command and Warfare

talents, rounded up. The cost of raising your faction's Power is equal to its Power × 10 in Gold, until it is equal to half that of the realm's monarch. Once it reaches this level it cannot be increased with Gold alone.

Prudence

Prerequisite: *Noblesse Oblige*

Experience Point Cost: 200

Maximum Ranks: 3

When called upon to make or assist in a Justice test (see page 100), you can reduce the Difficulty of the test by one step for every rank of the *Prudence* talent.

Should you gain 2 Momentum on this test, your gain +1 Legitimacy. If you also possess the *Wolf in Sheep's Clothing* talent, your faction also gains +1 Power.

The Spider's Web

Prerequisite: *Wolf in Sheep's Clothing*, Thievery Expertise 1

Experience Point Cost: 600

You have learned the value of hidden allies. When a faction forms due to the incompetence of your monarch, you can spend a Fortune Point not to destroy the newly formed faction but to co-opt it. The faction is considered independent with its own Power rating, but you control its leadership and can utilize its Power as you see fit, allowing your faction to effectively exceed the monarch's legitimacy.

Strife and Merriment

Prerequisite: *Noblesse Oblige*

Experience Point Cost: 200

When a monarch of a homeland where you command troops attempts to maintain order, you can turn this into a Warfare Struggle (see page 102). The Difficulty of this Struggle is equal to the number of factions in the homeland not controlled by either party. Should you succeed in this Struggle you increase your faction's Power by 1.

Warlord Bought Your Title

Prerequisite: *Strife and Merriment*

Experience Point Cost: 400

Maximum Ranks: 2

When assisting a monarch in a Clash (page 103) you roll 2d20 instead of the normal 1d20 in a teamwork test. If purchased a second time, the *Warlord* talent gains +2 bonus Momentum for the Holding the Reins action (page 105).



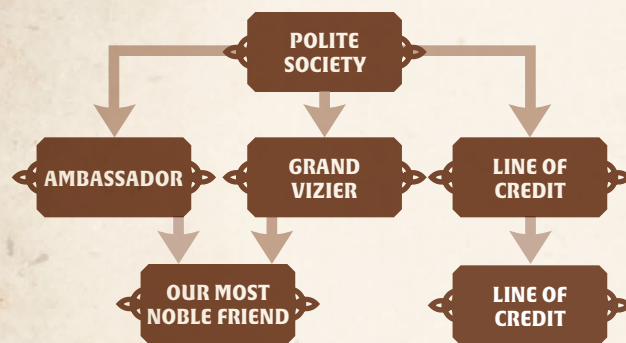
Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

Prerequisite: *The Great Game*, Command Expertise 3, Persuade Expertise 3

Experience Point Cost: 400

When your monarch makes a Control test (see page 100) you can spend a Fortune Point to allow the monarch to succeed in this test. Should you do this, you can engage a Command Struggle with any faction's leader, except the monarch. Should this test be successful, the targeted faction transfers 1 Power to your own faction, +1 Power for every 2 Momentum gained. If this would place your Power above the monarch's legitimacy, you must transfer Power to the monarch so that the monarch is at least your equal.

SOCIETY TALENTS



Ambassador

Prerequisite: *Polite Society*, Society Expertise 3, Social Standing 2+

Experience Point Cost: 200

Whether formally, informally, or even fraudulently, you carry the responsibility for communicating the edicts and desires of your sovereign abroad. Pick one country: while in this land your Social Standing is calculated as if you were within your own homeland. Should any combination of factors increase your Social Standing abroad to be equal to what it is in your homeland, your Social Standing is raised by +1 generally, and +1 specifically while in the other country.

This talent cannot raise your Social Standing to the equivalent of the monarch in either realm and has a maximum of 1 point below theirs.

Extortionist

Prerequisite: *Line of Credit*

Experience Point Cost: 400

Maximum Ranks: Special (see below)

You no longer rely on money to shore up your influence. You now have shared histories of embarrassing secrets, hidden poverties, and shameful favors done to avoid worse shame. Now when using the *Line of Credit* talent, you automatically

SOCIAL STANDING OUTSIDE OF HOMELAND

When in a country other than one's own, all player characters of Social Standing 3–5 decrease their Social Standing's value by –1 when dealing with that homeland's natives in all matters except cost of Upkeep. Those with Social Standing 6–9 decrease standing by –2, and those with Social Standing 10+ reduce their Social Standing to 9. This is only for the purpose of determining interaction with those in this other land and is not permanent.

roll +1d20 for free as those in your debt kowtow to your mere suggestion.

Choose one country and one skill each time the talent is purchased. The +1d20 from *Extortionist* only works within this country and for this skill, and no more than +1d20 can be gained from this talent for a specific combination of country and skill. You can choose the same country and different skills, choose different countries and the same skill, or different ones each time.

Otherwise, there is no limit to the number of times any character can purchase this talent.

Grand Vizier

Prerequisite: *Polite Society*, Society Expertise 3, Thievery Expertise 2, Gold 10+

Experience Point Cost: 200

Maximum Ranks: 3

You proclaimed yourself convincingly as an exiled noble from somewhere exotic, with a suitably grandiose title: whether the Grand Vizier from Greater Punt, Noble Ambassador from Vendhya, or Lord Commander of the Kingdom of Outer Khitai, or some other appellation. You may designate the intended Social Standing associated with this title, though the gamemaster has the final say. Any character with a Lore or Thievery skill of 4+ is unconvinced by your assertions, though they may be amused by your gall.

When making a Society test to appear to be of a greater Social Standing than you actually hold, you gain +1 bonus Momentum for every rank of this talent. This test is made against the character with the highest Social Standing within earshot, with any characters of equal or 1 lower Social Standing contributing to a teamwork test. Characters unaffected as above do not need to roll in this test: it is assumed they rolled a 1.

In addition to being required when introduced to new non-player characters, this test must be made at the start of Carousing as your perceived Social Standing will determine your Upkeep cost, rather than your actual Social Standing.

If the test is successful, you are treated as if your Social Standing is +2 higher than normal, with each point of Momentum increasing your Social Standing by +1, up to the maximum of your 'designated' Social Standing. This talent cannot raise your Social Standing to equal that of the realm's monarch: the maximum is 1 below theirs. If this test fails, you can be certain that immediate reprisals will ensue.

Line of Credit

Prerequisite: *Polite Society*, Lore Expertise 2, Persuasion Expertise 2, Society Expertise 3, one holding within your homeland

Experience Point Cost: 200

Your commercial exploits, while successful, often involve great amounts of patience, as nobles have more debts than jewels and demanding payment can lead to offence and execution more often than coin. Debts, though, can be repaid in other ways. A quiet word here, a strongly worded letter there — all prove that money is influence.

So long as you have at least 1 Gold when engaging in any Command, Persuasion, Society, or Warfare test in a place where you have a holding, you can pay X Gold to add +Xd20 to your roll. This cannot exceed the normal maximum of 5d20 but can be used on a teamwork test even if you are not the leader. The gamemaster can spend Doom when this talent is used, to increase the cost in Gold by X per point of Doom and can determine this extra expense before or after the dice are rolled.

For example, King Numa spends 2 Gold to add +2d20 on a Warfare test. He rolls two Complications, giving the gamemaster 4 Doom to use. Suddenly, the gamemaster determines that further and unexpected expenses increase the cost by an additional 4 Gold.

Our Most Noble Friend

Prerequisite: *Ambassador* or *Vizier*, Society Expertise 3

Experience Point Cost: 400

Maximum Ranks: 1 per country

You have made a solid impression on the realm's nobility earning friends and confidants across the court. You gain a faction in the realm with a Power of 0 and can use the *Tradesman* talent (*Conan* corebook, page 21) while Carousing, where you are forced to languish in luxury and contentment as your Upkeep is paid for by various members of the court.

Should you take this talent with *Grand Vizier* as its prerequisite and you fail your Society test, the talent is lost for that homeland and instead you gain the talent *Detested Rogue* (see the related sidebar to the right). Likewise, if you gain this title with *Ambassador* as the prerequisite, and the homelands go to war, you will be ransomed or incarcerated in comfort for the duration.

Polite Society

Prerequisite: Persuade Expertise 1, Society Expertise 2

Experience Point Cost: 200

You have spent as much time in the courts as in the bazaars and battlefields. As such, you are not affected by cultural differences when trying to fit in. Any penalty on a Society or Persuasion skill test caused by a lack of familiarity with regional culture can be ignored. This does not affect any increase in difficulty caused by Social Standing when using the Persuade skill.

DETESTED ROGUE

You have burnt your bridges in this homeland and your Social Standing is 0. In addition, those that torment you will not get into trouble for doing so. If recognized, you can be robbed and beaten at a moment's notice and complaints to the guards will just get you further abuse. When dealing with outcasts from this homeland your Renown increases by 2.

Note that this does not stop you from disguising yourself and choosing a more interesting title a few miles down the road.

WARFARE TALENTS



Bounties and Plunder

Prerequisite: *Eyes That See*, Melee Expertise 2, Thievery Expertise equal to Ranks

Experience Point Cost: 200

Maximum Ranks: 3

If both sides in a Warfare Struggle (see page 102) choose to Issue the 'No Quarter' order (page 103) and you lose, you can choose to pay 5 Gold to your remaining forces and

not lose the additional point of Power. At Rank 2, you can pay an additional 5 Gold when you win to ignore the Power loss that 'No Quarter' normally entails.

At Rank 3, you can make a Challenging (D2) Thievery test as a Free Action every time there is an exchange in which you are involved, whether as a general or a commander. On a success, and for every point of Momentum gained, you can reduce the cost of *Bounties and Plunder* by -1 Gold.

Diplomacy of Knives

Prerequisite: *Eyes That See*, Persuade Expertise 2, Stealth Expertise equal to Ranks

Experience Point Cost: 200

Maximum Ranks: 3

If your side in an exchange chose to issue the 'Fight if You Must' order (see page 103), you can spend 3 Momentum to force a monarch of your choosing to make a Control test. This Control test is in addition to any they might normally make, and you can apply any and all talents that you possess to bear in this test.

Each additional Rank of this talent decreases the cost by -1 Momentum.

Eyes That See

Prerequisite: Command Expertise 1, Warfare Expertise 1

Experience Point Cost: 200

You have spent enough time on the battlefield that you can quickly react to battlefield conditions. At the start of any combat, you can attempt a Challenging (D2) Warfare test. If successful, your opponent is forced to reveal their orders to you before you decide on your own. This talent can be used even if you are not in command of the army, though the decision on how to capitalize on this information is up to the commander of the army.

Guard the Flank!

Prerequisite: *Eyes That See*, Parry Expertise 2, Warfare Expertise equal to ranks in this talent

Experience Point Cost: 200

Maximum Ranks: 3

When working out casualties from an exchange where your opponent has used the 'Press the Advantage' order, you can ignore the first point of Discord (see page 105) that your faction suffers, and for every rank of *Guard the Flank!* you may reduce the number of casualties taken by 5%. This talent can only be used by the commander of an army. It is not enough to be a supporting leader.

For example, Ophirian King Almarus' army wins a Warfare Struggle against Nemedian King Stabonus' army, gaining 2 Momentum. Normally this would cause 20% casualties. Because Amalrus has *Guard the Flank!* this is reduced by 5% to 15%.

Loyal Following

Prerequisite: *Wreaths of War*

Experience Point Cost: 600

Your accolades are significant and have begun to overshadow all others. The people love you for the victories and plunder you gave them. The throne is in sight. You can gain a faction or increase a faction's Power by +1. Should you participate in a civil war, add up the number of victorious wars you have participated in as commander or general. Add this number to the Power of any faction you possess, as volunteers of all levels of training quickly join your ranks.

Regardless of what side you're on or the success of your side, so long as you survive the war, your faction's Power increases by +1. If, at the end of the civil war, you have the most Power of any faction remaining, you will likely be offered the throne.

Wreaths of War

Prerequisite: Must have won a warfare exchange and possess any two of *Bounties and Plunder*, *Diplomacy of Knives*, or *Guard the Flank!*

Experience Point Cost: 400

You have received royal honors for your participation in a war. If you won the latest war you were involved in, your status amongst the generals and militaristic rulers of other homelands is treated as if you were within your own homeland.

GAINING THE THRONE

It is one thing to gain the throne; it is another thing to keep it. If you accept a throne, your faction becomes friendly but separate from you. You lose direct control of it, so hopefully you'll have friends in its ranks and leadership. If you have the *Conqueror* talent it is almost a given that those who have been your allies are now in such a position, but power is a poison and these allies should not be abused with neglect.

Once the faction has separated from you, you now have a Legitimacy rating of 0. If you were born to the nobility (Social Standing 2+) this increases to 1.

NOBLE NATURES

While a noble could, in theory, have any nature, they tend toward those traits which fit their power over other men and women. Few are the sort of person you'd want to owe coin to in a Maul, yet entire realms pay them coin and more every day. Politically, it is, perhaps, not the best of times to live in.

NOBLE NATURES	
Roll	Nature
1–4	Ardent
5–8	Avaricious
9–12	Calculating
13–16	Evenhanded
17–20	Megalomaniacal

Ardent

Your goals may be secret, but their grandeur is not. You were not born to your station to idly sit and mind the land. Your lot, your destiny is to conquer, to expand, to make your holding greater than you left it. All other concerns are secondary; all other people must serve this goal. Your ambition may be tied to your ego or your firm belief that this world needs correcting, and it falls to you alone to do the bloody math.

- **Attribute Bonus:** +1 to Willpower
- **Mandatory Skills:** +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Command, Society, and Warfare
- **Elective Skills:** +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Insight, Observation, or Survival
- **Talent:** One talent associated with any of the above skills

Avaricious

He who dies with the most-stuffed coffers wins. You aim to win. Power is simply a measure of wealth. Land is simply a measure of the extent of your taxes. Conquest is only good if it turns a profit. Coin and coin alone are what you seek. Money is its own reward and you aim to collect so very much of it.

- **Attribute Bonus:** +1 to Intelligence
- **Mandatory Skills:** +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Insight, Society, and Thievery
- **Elective Skills:** +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Lore, Observation, or Persuade
- **Talent:** One talent associated with any of the above skills

Calculating

Courtly politics is a game and one at which you are expert. You move people as pieces in this game and, by extension, affect entire territories, perhaps even kingdoms. You are not so foolish as to think you are the only skilled player in this game, however, and you size up each new player well. This is a zero-sum affair and you intend to win. Losing means death or worse: a fall from the heights to which you are accustomed.

- **Attribute Bonus:** +1 to Intelligence
- **Mandatory Skills:** +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Counsel, Persuade, and Society
- **Elective Skills:** +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Command, Persuade, or Society
- **Talent:** One talent associated with any of the above skills

Evenhanded

You are one of the rare rulers of the day who thinks through the machinations of your enemies, the implications of your decisions, and seats your ego behind what is the best choice for the future. You are not rash but, when you act it is always decisive. You are confident you considered all the options and, after having done so, your path is clear. Those who would stand in the way should be wary.

- **Attribute Bonus:** +1 to Willpower
- **Mandatory Skills:** +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Command, Counsel, and Discipline
- **Elective Skills:** +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Command, Discipline, or Society
- **Talent:** One talent associated with any of the above skills

Megalomaniacal

This noble believes their rule is destined for greatness and that they, personally, are nigh-infallible. The actual results of their rule may argue completely otherwise, but the megalomaniac believes their power just and always in the right. Right being a product of what is good for them not what is actually just. Justice in the feudal system is a rare animal indeed.

- **Attribute Bonus:** +1 to Personality
- **Mandatory Skills:** +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Discipline, Persuade, and Warfare
- **Elective Skills:** +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Command, Discipline, or Persuade
- **Talent:** One talent associated with any of the above skills

NOBLE EDUCATIONS

Nobles have the means to the best educations in the Hyborian Age. Whether at home or abroad, the young noble is groomed for rule and prepared to lead armies. That, at least, is the plan. Many leaders fail, despite all the education in the world. The Hyborian Age is no different.

NOBLE EDUCATIONS	
Roll	Education
1–5	Foreign
6–10	Parental
11–15	Private Tutor
16–20	War Academy

Foreign

The grand tour of the world, or perhaps a single culture, was your education. Perhaps you studied with nearby allies, perhaps you were sent far to the East where they have forgotten more mysteries than the West will ever know. You are cultured, worldly, and possessed of points of view different from those rulers who never left their domains. This gives you a tremendous advantage, but sometimes causes other nobles to label your thinking that of a 'foreign devil'.

- **Mandatory Skills:** +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Linguistics, Lore, Persuade
- **Elective Skills:** +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Counsel, Insight, or Sorcery
- **Talent:** One talent associated with any of the above skills
- **Equipment:** A weapon or piece of jewelry from a foreign land

Parental

Your parents taught you to rule as they had, though perhaps omitting certain flaws in their own character. You were molded to be their scion, the extension of their own vision, and to continue what they had set out. The worlds they did not conquer weigh heavily upon you. You have no illusions about your intended purpose in this world, but is it what you want?

- **Mandatory Skills:** +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Lore, Persuade, Society
- **Elective Skills:** +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Command, Observation, or Warfare
- **Talent:** One talent associated with any of the above skills
- **Equipment:** A parent's signet ring

Private Tutor

The finest tutor in the land, perhaps from another land, came to live at your estate or took you into theirs. There you learned all manner of things encompassing the totality of human knowledge at the time. You know history and languages, stories of war and expansion, and may even have paged through some arcane tome like those wrought by Skelos. How you apply this vast amount of learning is left up to you. Your tutor may have offered guidance,

even demanded you follow their path, but knowledge unlocks doors otherwise closed, and once opened, are very hard to shut.

- **Mandatory Skills:** +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Craft, Linguistics, Lore
- **Elective Skills:** +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Alchemy, Observation, or Sorcery
- **Talent:** One talent associated with any of the above skills
- **Equipment:** A bevy of quotes from great philosophers of the age

War Academy

You were sent to a war academy. Your parent believed war was the surest means to controlling a kingdom and, dispensing with the niceties of diplomacy, gave you an education focused on the art, history, and outcome of war. This is not to say you are single-minded, only that you are more likely to make tactical decisions rather than instinctual ones and take up the sword more readily than the pen when it comes to problems solvable with violence. Would that one to wish every solution to be met with cold steel, one would not have to look far in the Hyborian Age.

- **Mandatory Skills:** +1 Skill Expertise and +1 Skill Focus to Command, Melee, Warfare
- **Elective Skills:** +1 Skill Expertise and +1 Skill Focus to two of the following skills: Parry, Ranged Weapons, or Resistance
- **Talent:** One talent associated with any of the above skills
- **Equipment:** A fine horse or fine melee weapon (+1 Gold value)

NOBLE COURT STORIES

Instead of War Stories as described in the *Conan* corebook, the noble character has a Court Story, some exploit within their household or that of their kingdom's court, whether tragic or beneficial, that set them upon the path to adventure. Roll 1d20 or pick a desired court story from the table below or select one from the corebook or another source.

Forbidden Romance

You did what nearly everyone has since the dawn of time: you fell in love. The problem is this was no arranged marriage. Your feelings in the matter are not only not paramount, they are irrelevant. Your duty is to pair or marry with whom you are told. This is not about love. Perhaps you fell in love with an enemy or even a commoner. In either case, the relationship was forbidden. Did you cast your love aside or push ahead despite the consequences? Where does that leave you now?

COURT STORY		
Roll	Court Story	Skill Improvements
1-2	Forbidden Romance	+1 Expertise and Focus to Lore and Persuade
3-4	Participated in a Coup	+1 Expertise and Focus to Persuade and Warfare
5-6	Sent on Diplomatic Mission	+1 Expertise and Focus to Linguistics and Warfare
7-8	Fallen Favorite	+1 Expertise and Focus to Melee and Society
9-10	Illicit Scion	+1 Expertise and Focus to Persuade and Survival
11-12	Undone by Politics	+1 Expertise and Focus to Insight and Persuade
13-14	Removed from Succession	+1 Expertise and Focus to Discipline and Society
15-16	Parent Killed	+1 Expertise and Focus to Melee and Lore
17-18	Ransomed!	+1 Expertise and Focus to Linguistics and Lore
19-20	Famous Vendetta	+1 Expertise and Focus to Melee and Thievery

Participated in a Coup

You gained or reclaimed your title in a coup, as a valuable member of a cabal which overthrew the born ruler of a given holding. But do those with whom you conspired still trust you? Do you trust them? Treachery grows in a heart fertile for deceit. Where do you stand?

Sent on a Diplomatic Mission

Your parent entrusted you with a diplomatic mission of great urgency. You were sent forth with a small retinue to settle a dispute, perhaps end a war. Did you succeed and bring favor upon you? Or was the task insurmountable, causing you to fail and be looked upon for the reason the war continued? How much blood do others see on your hands?

Fallen Favorite

You were the favored son or daughter until someone else came along. Perhaps it was another sibling that hooked your parent's heart or, worse, an outsider. You proved to be a disappointment, and another took your place. You fear your rightful title may even go to this newcomer. Will you kill to get what is yours or live a life of quiet ignominy?

Illicit Scion

You are not a legitimate heir. Most likely, you are the product of your parent's relationship with a concubine or other lover. This may be known to all or a secret between you and your parent. If it is known, you may have been cast out, sent to live in a monastery or disowned entirely. If it is a secret, can you be sure only you and your parent are in the know?

Undone by Politics

You were once popular. Politics reduced your station, and your title has little meaning now. Or you hold your title but lost your wealth, equally shameful to your peers. Or even worse, you may have dishonored yourself and made many enemies. Will you return to court, or take to the roads and let the four winds guide you?

Removed from Succession

Due to shifting politics, your place in line, or any other vagaries of the empire you were taken out of the direct line of succession. This might mean your parent, the ruler, was overthrown and you now live in a foreign land hoping to gain your title and power back. It may mean another relative assumed power before you could ascend and now you must watch them rule. Whatever the case, you must decide how far you will go to take back that which you believe to be yours by blood and right.

Parent Killed

Your mother or father was killed. You may still be heir, but you have a bitterness in you. Perhaps your uncle assumed the throne in your father's stead? Perhaps you anguish over how to exact your vengeance. Perhaps you were not destined for the throne and your brothers and sisters insist you let this past affront go. You cannot. You will see the kingdoms in the world topple, including yours, before you allow this act to go unavenged.

Ransomed!

You were captured while on holiday or during a war and ransomed back to your home after some time had passed. This allowed you to learn something of a foreign culture, and to learn your precise value in the world. You were changed by this and may look at all lives in terms of coin, usefulness, and inherent value to you personally.

Famous Vendetta

You fought in a well-known duel or brought a conclusion to a vendetta. Most likely, you killed your foe and took honor in doing so. However, your foe may have been the more popular. They may have been kin. You may have cheated and are thus being blackmailed by who helped you. Many things are possible. What is certain, though, is that a relative or lover or friend of whomever you killed waits in the shadows for their time to exact vengeance.

FINISHING TOUCHES

Now it is time to personalize your character, finalizing attributes, skills, picking a story if you haven't already, selecting an additional talent, picking one more language, establishing your starting Fortune Points, determining

damage bonuses, Soak, age, personality, etc. All of these follow the guidelines in the **Conan** corebook.

Appearance within royal court demands a higher standard of appearance than other careers and ways of life, so *Personal Belongings and Garments* and *Weapon and Provenance* tables specific to courtly life are provided. Finally, a list of *Sample Character Names* for these countries may be of use.

PERSONAL BELONGINGS AND GARMENTS

Roll	Personal Belongings	Garments
1-2	Signet ring	Fine fur cloak
3-4	An old, but valuable diadem	Silken pantaloons
5-6	Cloak pin made of gold	Hosiery
7-8	A book of peerage	Plumed cap
9-10	Suit of Plate	Jerkin with family crest
11-12	Your ancestor's pipe	Well-made boots
13-14	Amulet	An opulent cape
15-16	Land deed	Curled-toe shoes
17-18	The glass eye of a forebear	A fine dress
19-20	A fine steed from a far-off land	A battered crown

WEAPON AND PROVENANCE

Roll	Weapon	Garments
1-2	Broadsword	...given to you by your trainer
3-4	Lance	...you used in a tournament
5-6	Spear	...that early killed you in battle
7-8	Scimitar	...that was a diplomatic gift
9-10	Crossbow	...used before you were a noble
11-12	Two-handed sword	...taken from a foe
13-14	Fine steed	...from the family stables
15-16	Hunting dog	...part of a pack you used to hunt with
17-18	Shield	...scarred, but holds your family heraldry
19-20	Dagger	...given by a loved one to end a relationship

NOBLE NAMES

Nobles tend to have names lifted from their genealogy. Often, the same name repeats through history by simply

adding a numeral afterward. Surnames are little used save in official proclamations or deeds. Most surnames reflect the filial place of origin.

NOBLE NAMES

Homeland	Male	Female	Surname
Aquilonia	Annaeus, Crassus, Decius, Flavius, Galen, Martius, Otho, Publius, Servius, Tullius	Augusta, Balbina, Celaena, Domita, Fulvia, Lucilla, Magia, Orbania, Porcia, Vispania	De Helvia, De Mallius, De Pellia, De Pollus, De Vedius
Nemedia	Acathius, Albrecht, Bertolf, Caspar, Eustacius, Gerlach, Gotfrid, Hartung, Maurus, Volusian	Adula, Agnella, Columba, Cyra, Hiltrud, Imiza, Proseria, Sybelle, Vesta, Viviana	Die Chlotar, Die Gerin, Die Tor, Die Pomer

NOBLE MIEN

The western countries are all dominated strongly by the Hyborian ancestry but are also enriched by the old Zingaran bloodline out of the Valley of Zingg and even traces of the old Acheronian dynasty that ruled in the area. Towards the south and east in Koth and Ophir, one sees more of the influence of the Shemitish bloodlines and even that of the old Zhemri, who founded Zamora.

- **Aquilonian:** Aquilonians are dark-haired, have green, blue, or hazel eyes, and are generally fair-skinned. They are of average build, having lost much of the sturdiness of the Hyborian lineage. The southern province of Poitain shows much of the Zingaran influx, and the north and west of the kingdom are more Hyborian in nature, as it is in Gunderland where the Hyborian descent is wholly intact.
- **Kothic:** The people of Koth are physically a mixture of Hyborian and eastern bloodlines, showing a bit of Stygian, Zamorian, and even Shemitish influence. They range widely in appearance and physique, with slightly darker skin than their northern neighbors, and generally darker hair. Eyes are usually hazel or brown, occasionally darker.
- **Ophirian:** The people of Ophir are a mix of Hyborian racial stock intermingled primarily with Argossean and even some Acheronian influence, for that ancient empire was cast down, but its people were absorbed into the tribes inhabiting the land that would become Ophir. They are one of the wealthier nations in the Hyborian world, and as such, are better-groomed than most, and their garments and ornaments bespeak their financial prowess.
- **Nemedian:** Of the kingdoms described within these pages, the people of Nemedias are perhaps the most Hyborian overall in semblance and outlook, though they bear some of the taint of the Acheronian influence within their heritage. Generally tall and brown-haired, they are fair-complected and have light to hazel eyes. In character, they tend towards sophistication and even decadence.

GEAR & EQUIPMENT

Most anything a player character could wish for is available to a ruler, and there are few new or original items idiosyncratic to this level of wealth.

GARMENTS

Garb is equivalent to that worn elsewhere, though as most courts are home to the nobility, they feature the most current fashion and the highest quality of tailoring and materials. Garments are sewn with gold and silver thread, set with jewels and precious stones, made from silk and satin and other fine cloth, and generally brighter and more elegant than anything available the common or even monied classes.

See Courtly Garb in the Kits table on page 21 for prices.

WEAPONS AND ARMOR

All the weapons and armor types described in the **Conan** corebook are available to player characters in a court-based campaign, though some of the more regional or specific ones are less common, perhaps sticking out too much. Any reasonable castle has an armory with countless weapons, arrayed by type, well-tended and ready for use. The weapons used by any noble are usually worth more in Gold, due to being ornamented with gold, silver, and jewels, or other more exotic materials such as ivory. This can range to +1 or 2 Gold in price to many times the basic cost, as with clothing.

However, the court is rarely a place where folk go armed and armored. Courtiers and nobles and their ilk are usually equipped lightly, bearing no more than a sword at best, often only a dagger or belt-knife. Two-handed weapons, maces, axes, and missile weapons are for guards. Any armor beyond a breastplate or hauberk is a curiosity, and again reserved for guards or visiting generals.

That said, many palaces are also festooned with decorative weaponry and armor, shields and war-gear arrayed in displays or hung upon walls, either as décor or displays of loot, or both. In a fight within any palace interior, a player character may spend a Fortune point to find any piece of desired weaponry conveniently displayed upon the wall and ready for use. In such cases, however, the gamemaster

WEAPONS

Weapon	Reach	Damage	Size	Qualities	Availability	Cost	Encumbrance
Jousting Lance	3	3 	Unbalanced	Cavalry 2, Fragile, Knockdown	3	8	4
Jousting Shield	2	2 	1H	Shield 2	3	7	3

should secretly roll 1d6. An Effect means that the weapon has the Fragile Quality, due to poor care or extreme age.

Weapons unique to the courtly life are primary those found on the tournament grounds, particularly for knights to practice jousting as a means of earning glory and maintaining their martial abilities in peacetime.

- **Jousting lances** are made specifically for use in jousting, and as such are much longer and blunted, or tapering to a rounded end. Unlike such weapons made for combat, they are heavier and sometimes have flared guards called vamplates. They are too heavy to be thrown, and too long to be used as a spear. Many knights decorate them, painting them brightly and even hanging small silk ribbons or flowers upon them. On a successful hit, an Effect means the target is knocked out of line and their next attack in the round (if any) is at one additional step of Difficulty, in addition to being potentially knocked down.
- **Jousting shields** are designed specifically for use in this narrowed, specialized means of combat. They are

often shaped and angled specifically at protecting the knight's chest and arm, as well as presenting a clear target for the opponent. Unlike other shields, they are not particularly mobile, often even tied or buckled in place, and are thus little use in real combat. When jousting with another opponent who is also jousting, a jousting shield adds +1d20 to any Parry attempts against a single oncoming lance. However, it increases the Difficulty by one step against any other types of attacks.

- **Parade armor** is the peak of the armorer's art, but also its most frivolous. Ostentatious and highly ornamental, enamelled with precious metals and emblazoned with imagery and decorative motifs, this impressive panoply adds +1d20 to any Society rolls made while worn. Its weakness is that it is simply not made for combat, increasing the Difficulty of any Agility or Coordination skills — including Melee and Parry — by one step while worn. Like Heavy and Very Heavy Armor, it is impossible to swim in and suffers all the inconveniences of those classes of armor.

ARMOR							
Armor Type	Item	Locations	Armor Soak	Qualities	Availability	Cost	Encumbrance
Very Heavy Armor	Parade Armor	All	5	Very Heavy	5	32+	10

EQUIPMENT

Generally, rulers and their immediate retinue can have everything they could possibly ask for, without having to pay anything for them. Any reasonable castle's storehouses are vast, with all manner of clothing, goods, and personal effects from prior users. The goods one receives as a ruler are finer in quality and often more ornate than those afforded commoners, and more significant items come with stories attached to them: who gave it to what distant relative, what distant land is this from, what city this was captured in, from whom this was won, etc.

- **Musical instruments** of the age include stringed instruments such as the lute, lyre, harp, and wind instruments such as the flute (single or multiple-piped), multiple types of horns, and whistles; and percussion instruments such as drums of all types, bells, gongs, cymbals; and others such as rattles, sistrums; and many other types specific to different

homelands. Primarily used by minstrels or other entertainers, a successful performance of one or more musical instruments can be used to allow +1d20 for a Persuade or Society test when used to impress others, at the gamemaster's discretion.

- A **poisoner's ring** is one with a hidden reservoir of poison and a small needle or needles, allowing the user to administer a dose of poison with a gesture, such as laying a hand on the target's chest. When used outside combat this adds one step to an Average (D1) Thievery test to administer the poison, while in combat it is handled as an unarmed strike. A Complication means that the user has inadvertently pricked their own hand with the needle and poisoned themselves.

Poison is one of the most insidious threats to rulers, and most employ tasters and other means of prevention. *Conan the Thief* covers poisons in additional detail.

KITS					
Skill	Item	Type	Availability	Cost	Encumbrance
Alchemy/Thievery	Poisoner's Ring	Tools	3	5	—
Lore	Cartographer's Kit	Kit	4	5	2
Society	Courtly Garb	Tools	3	10+	2+
Society	Musical Instrument	Tools	2	10–30	3+
Society	Signet Ring	Tools	5	Priceless	—

TITLES

One of the activities player characters can do during Upkeep is to seek titles, as described on page 295 of the **Conan** corebook. Following are suggestions for suitable titles and the equivalent responsibilities for many regions of the Hyborian Age.

If a title is conferred while Carousing (see the **Conan** corebook, page 288) it will automatically increase the character's Social Standing by +1 as well as providing a Holding (page 78).

TITLES			
Social Standing	Region	Male	Female
9+	Hyborian	King	Queen
8	Hyborian	Prince	Princess
7	Hyborian	Duke	Duchess
6	Hyborian	Marquess, Margrave	Marchioness, Margravine
6	Turanian	Agha Khan	Khaness
5	Hyborian	Earl, Count	Earless, Countess
5	Turanian	Agha	Agha
4	Hyborian	Viscount	Viscountess
4	Hyborian	Baron, Landgrave	Baroness, Landgrave
3	Hyborian	Sir (Knight)	Dame



CHAPTER 2

GAZETTEER

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.

— “The Hyborian Age”

The dreaming west... the mightiest kingdoms of the Hyborian Age. Those and a collection of other names, some forgotten, refers to these few lands that make up the so-called ‘Hyborian world’: Aquilonia, Koth, Nemedia, and Ophir. During the age of Conan, each of these kingdoms is at the height of power. They possess storied cultures and are the envies, and the rivals, of the rest of the world.

Nemedia is described in *Conan the Thief*, Koth and Ophir in *Conan the Mercenary*. Here we describe the so-called greatest of the Hyborian kingdoms, Aquilonia, the Flower of the West. It is also, not coincidentally, the land whose throne was claimed by Conan, taken by his own hand.

AQUILONIA

Mighty Aquilonia, the looming power in the dreaming west. Her spires are like to reach the stars and her rulers’ ambitions no less grandiose. There is no other force to match her among the Hyborian kingdoms nor, perhaps, among all kingdoms. Yet Aquilonia’s fate is to fall to barbarians, as is the fate of all civilizations. The cycle plays out again, and this age is but a breath in the rhythmic vacillations of the world. Before her came Valusia, after her will come many others. They too, in their time, shall fall, returning the Earth to savagery. After all, it is in the nature of humankind to build and then tear down our towers, our aspirations, our dreams.

And yet Aquilonia’s story is that of a barbarian who became king and ruled better than all the civilized rulers who came before. Here, for that momentary span of a

mortal’s life, a man named Conan sat upon the throne and brought the best of the civilized and barbaric worlds under a single crown. He was unique, an outlier, and the world would not often see his like again.

BEING AQUILONIAN

An inherent arrogance comes with Aquilonian blood. They are the height of the known world and they know it. The affect comes off effortlessly and one must work to suppress it, so do the Aquilonians prevail over the other kingdoms. The Hyborians in general have this entitlement, for it is they who most recently threw off savagery and ascended to that stature of empire. Yet they are just the most recent, and it would do most of them well to be reminded of this



fact. Valusia is gone. Acheron before. Aquilonia has her due coming.

No matter, for now the Aquilonians are the preeminent power and, as a general thing, have no need of modesty. They are not necessarily overtly egocentric, but it is the nature of powerful empires that their citizens see the rest of the world as shadows formed by their light.

Yet Aquilonian have also accomplished a great deal. The descendants of Bori, the Hybori, rose from the wreck of the Cataclysm and again carved out civilization from rude savagery. Their walls are high, their armies well-disciplined and funded. Nemedia alone stands in her way, and it is likely only a matter of time before it falls under Aquilonian sway.

While taking pride in their blood, the average Aquilonian is conscripted to serfdom. Such is the way of the feudal state. And so, their lot is no better than that of a Nemedian serf or one from Ophir. In all things the average peasant gives fealty to those above them and ekes out their existence on borrowed land.

But the Hyborian nations have great wealth and with that comes some rudimentary education. They are masters of agriculture, animal husbandry, and blacksmithing. While the average Aquilonian cannot read, it is not unusual for a low-born person to possess that talent.

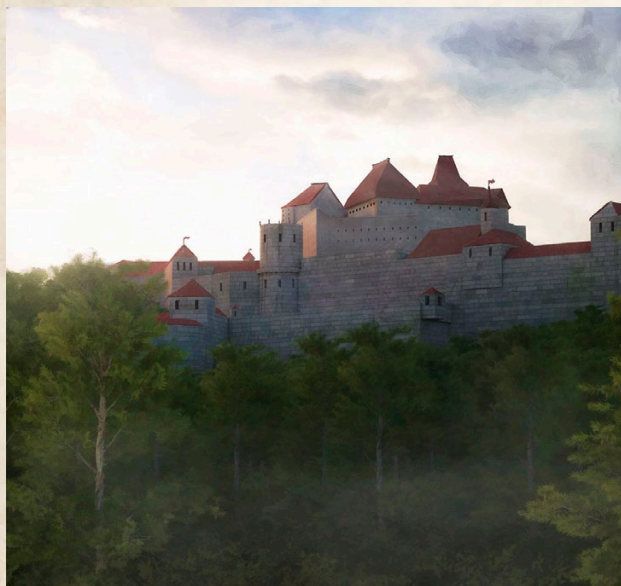
Slaves, of course, are afforded no status but are omnipresent in the markets, the squares, and even the farms of the Hyborian people. The day of an Aquilonian serf begins with dawn and ends with dusk. They work the field or, if lucky, supervise slaves doing so. From there it is night and dinner then they repeat the process. The life is not easy, but it is not as hard as those on the Westernmarck carving out and naming airy places from wild tangles of trees and savage men.

But this is a book about kings....

AQUILONIAN RULERS

Long ago, when the sons of Bori left to form the great kingdoms of the world, Aquilonia was founded by the eldest scion. He, whose name some say was Tamar though no one knows for sure, is the founder of Aquilonia. It is said he found a site upon a green swarded hill where he took up his spear, thrust it into the ground and told his vast tribe, "Here we will build a city the likes of which the world has never seen." No matter that that world had seen many such cities, and not all of them human, this son of Bori, Tamar, became a central figure for Aquilonian rulers. All save Conan claim his bloodline.

Tamar's tribe was the greatest among the Bori people, so the legend goes, and he thus took the largest and finest



land for himself and his people. This is why Aquilonia is rich in fertile land, rivers, and forests. She lacks the metal ores of some neighbors, but for these she trades and conquers.

When Tamar thrust his spear into the ground, the old mystics say a tree the size of the world sprung up from the shaft and gave shade to all the people of his tribe. They hewed this tree down and made from it the first houses, fort, and walls of Tamar, later called Tarantia. Today, serfs and children alone are like to believe this story, but the myth endures. In every square of every village there grows a tamarian tree, and it is an ill omen for it to die. And so, each village tends it well, as do the denizens of the city, whose squares have many such trees.

Yet in the unfolding of the tale there is more. The tree burned. Perhaps a god was mad, perhaps the Picts came and set fire to it — stories vary. What they agree upon is the great tree, and the city, burned. It was then that Tamar's son, whose name is lost to us, rebuilt the city not from wood but from marble. Marble he cut from the Earth with his own hands and which his followers laid as giants might toy blocks.

Tamar's son saw a phoenix rise from the ashes of his wooden city and knew then that it would be the enduring symbol for his people. So the story goes.

Every country has stories and every ruler tells them. It is the bloodlines alone that matter. And so Aquilonians look to their chroniclers, who as a rule are dispassionate and unbiased, to track genealogy. In this manner it becomes known who is to rule and who is to serve. Note that this does not mean the common serf has no bloodline. They do, it is simply not the blood of Tamar.

In this way Aquilonian society, aided by the chroniclers, organizes itself. Those of Tamar's direct bloodline are closest to the throne, while the more distilled the blood gets, the further from rule a family becomes.

Myth is the narrative by which the Aquilonian nobles claim rule, but habit enforces it, as happens in most kingdoms. There is little chance for advancement in Aquilonia. One is born to a station and there one mostly sits.

AQUILONIA BEFORE CONAN

Upon the ruins of ancient Acheron did the Hybori found what would become the Flower of the West, Aquilonia. Their constant wars with Cimmerians in the north and Picts to the west help harden this kingdom as a sword upon an anvil. Aquilonia likely began as a series of disparate territories brought under rule over time. However, such territories as the Bossonian Marches and the Gunderland never came fully under Aquilonian rule. They are vassals of a sort, though they retain the fierce edge of an independent spirit. Yet these men and women make up some of the finest of Aquilonia's host and form the bulwark between the central kingdom and the Picts.

Still, for being semi-independent, the territories have historically allied with Aquilonia in every conflict and it is unlikely a situation to change. The culture Nemedias would seek to impose on frontier's folk, such as those in the Westermarck, is nearly as distasteful to them as the cultureless world of the Picts.

Thus, Aquilonia is both established empire and budding frontier; her rulers ever eyeing the Pictish Wilds for conquest. To date, that conquest has been slow in coming, and while people in the Bossonian Marches abate the savage world of Pictdom, they have not pushed very far into that skein of wood and wildness.

In the center of the empire, the feudal system holds ultimate power, with deeded and titled gentry providing fealty, taxes, and troops to the king. It was due in part to the heavy taxation of Numedides that Conan was able to garner support, but no ruler of Aquilonia can afford not to heavily tax the empire. Empires are expensive, irascible things which require minding and regular offerings of gold and silver.

THE AQUILONIAN MILITARY

Most of Aquilonia, like most of the Hyborian kingdoms, is agricultural land. Farming makes up the bulk of work that Aquilonians do, howsoever they may be renowned for fighting. This is not to say that an Aquilonian serf is not tough, for they are that when mustered, but the bulk of the Aquilonian host, when set to the field, cannot be comprised of professional soldiers. Thus, they rely on the levies from their frontiers, who fight as professionals even if not, the mighty group of knights, particularly from Poitain, and mercenary groups hired when needed.

AQUILONIA UNDER CONAN'S RULE

The kingdom quickly changes under Conan's ministrations. The fertile soil which had been used as the hunting grounds for nobles is returned to the people, much to many a noble's chagrin. Conan prefers no god over another, and so religious freedom is enjoyed where once the light of Mitra was alone eminent. The army fights smarter battles, the populace profits from Conan's wars and Conan himself often leads such conquest.

In short, Aquilonia becomes an anomaly under King Conan. He is as just a ruler as any can remember. He is even-handed in his dealings at first, but a lion if betrayal surfaces. He fights for a people not of his own blood as he would for any Cimmerian blood-brother. Many people do not know what to make of him.

Broadly, Conan's career in relation to Aquilonia falls into three distinct eras, but only the first is chronicled to any significant degree.

The Usurper King

Conan ascends to the throne as a usurper, having served as a general in Aquilonia's army. He comes at a time when a weak, seemingly fatuous king has squandered his father's goodwill, such as it was. Numedides sits upon the throne. He is soft, a civilized man who has known little toil in his time. He taxes the people ruthlessly and pays the dividends to himself and the nobles. Numedides' constant wars cost money and provide little in return... until Conan comes along.

Through guile and sheer will, Conan slays the disliked king and takes the crown. Almost immediately afterward, he finds himself fighting to hold the throne. Conspirators within the kingdom, largely nobles who do not want a savage on their throne, effectively remove him from power on multiple instances. They are successful in ousting him on one occasion for some time, though this is a combination of Nemedian influence and a lost prince of Aquilonia, working in concert to conjure up the devil of Acheron — a revived sorcerer known as Xaltotun — to invade Aquilonia from within.

In any event, Conan's early time on the throne is tumultuous. He is constantly under threat of assassination and usurpation. Though comfortable with this situation, Conan comes to understand that it is not tenable for the people or the kingdom. He crushes the revolts and turns his attention toward the consolidation, then expansion, of his power. He is a military strategist of no small measure. Conquering is in his blood, and it is entirely likely he makes great progress against the Picts in the west as well as forging alliances with friends and old allies there. Nemedias remains a bulwark against Aquilonian expansion, and at some point, Conan likely forms a coalition to push back their border.

In the east, Turan looms large as a potential enemy and it is also likely that whoever follows dead Yezdigerd seeks revenge on Conan. A war between Turan and Aquilonia may easily occur in this period. In time, Conan's domain is vast, and few can challenge his rule.

As an aside, he has not yet taken an heir, though he has many children with his various concubines.

Builder of an Empire

Conan is now in his 50s, and his wars of conquest slow as he sets borders for his empire. He is an ambitious man, but not so foolish as to think he can rule the whole of the world. Nor would he want to. In this period of his life, Conan sets about strengthening Aquilonian, rebuilding old roads, deeding land

to loyal peasants, and generally creating an empire that other rulers envy.

What haunts and stalks him in these years is unknown. Perhaps fell sorceries from Acheron challenge him again. Perhaps Khitai and Turan push into his borders from the east. Perhaps the Picts become incensed and throw themselves at the borderlands.

Conan may have even left the throne by now, heading into the unknown limits of the Western Ocean where he came upon another continent and a whole other saga to his life. Did he return?

This is a good period in which to run a campaign that does not focus on Aquilonian wars or intrigue. There is no era of peace in the Hyborian Age, but this part of Conan's rule is comparatively calm. Adventurers may seek their fortune as they wish without having to get caught up in the politics of rule. Of course, this is less desirable if the player characters are themselves now rulers. In that case, Conan could easily disappear from the throne at this time, leaving a power vacuum which ensnares many of the great courts of the world. Who is his heir?

With Conan gone, who will rule? Can Aquilonia stand without him?

The Death of Conan

It is not known for how long Conan walked this Earth. Perhaps he grew old upon the throne, though this is unlikely as he was not born to die confused and feeble. Mayhap he returned to his native Cimmeria, coming full circle, and there confronted some hellish demon that he died fighting. Perhaps he ventured to the nameless continent across the Western Sea.

An older Conan — though still possessing strength and a keen mind — might present a target for younger rulers. How long, after all, can one man's luck last? Conan has no dearth of rivals. By the time he is in his 60s or 70s he has made many new enemies, either holdovers from his reign or new ones about which little is known.

Perhaps Conan sired a child with Zenobia and to this legitimate heir he abdicates his rule. The child takes the throne while the father again heads out into the unknown to tread the jeweled thrones of new places beneath his sandaled feet.

Perhaps Conan even dies on the throne or dies defending it, much as his predecessor Numedides did before him, or perhaps, like Kull, his ancestor from the pre-Cataclysmic age, he rode off into the sunset with a host of his greatest warriors beside him, crossing that final river and into the unknown.

In this way, Aquilonia is like most of its peers, though it does have a standing army. This is an age of near-constant war, and unlike our own feudal period, standing armies are common though not vast. Specific numbers are hard to come by, but it is known that some 45,000 knights fought against Nemedia under Conan. The size of such a host explains Aquilonian dominance in the age.

When the mighty Aquilonian army moves, the world, it is said, shakes. Nemedia, her historical foe, will one day pale in comparison to mighty Turan, blooming in the east. Should Aquilonia and that infant empire meet, what might be left of the world?

MITRA WORSHIP

Though rumors persist that a cult of Bori still lurks in the hills of Aquilonia, Mitra worship dominates the kingdom, particularly before Conan. Prior to the outlander's arrival, all other religions were looked upon with suspicion if not illegal. Mitraism stands as the central faith though it does not dominate the king or politics. It has influence, but it is not the force it will become after the Cataclysm.

Yet Mitra worship is expected of all Aquilonians, by both its priests and the rulers. Mitra binds the empire together, setting it apart from other 'foreign' lands and its own barbaric beginnings. Perhaps the latter is more important than anything in Mitra worship. It is an organized religion with proper temples, a single god, and rules for order. Compared to the barbaric cults which set upon the path to empire, Mitra is an excellent symbol for civilization.

So much so that the conversion of descendent of Bori to Mitraism is still seen as one of the key points in Aquilonian history. The Hybori had many gods, but when one of their great kings converted to Mitraism, presumably taken up from their Nemedian neighbors, that religion was soon declared the official belief for all the land. It is said the chieftain swore fealty to the god upon a golden staff or rod which Mitran priests claim to keep in the great temple in Tarantia, and adventurers believe is buried with the chieftain in some as-yet-undiscovered tomb.

Noble homes to serf farmhouses hold symbols of Mitra and Mitra's light, as divined by his priests, is believed to shine always upon Aquilonia.

Mitraism is discussed in further detail on pages 35–40 of *Nameless Cults*.



THE CULT OF ASURA

Yet Mitra is not, in practice, the only god worshipped in Aquilonia. While the church would have it otherwise, influences from the east, particularly the god Asura, hold secret sway in many towns and cities. But Asura's worship is a cult, forced to hide from the persecution of Mitran priests and their followers. Aquilonia has little room for eastern influence and it is only due to Conan, and Hadrathus the Asuran priest's role in his revival to the throne, that Asura is currently tolerated as a god.

In practice, Asura is a mystery cult whose initiation rituals are closely held. Asura is a god of wisdom and farsight for the believers here, and his priests are keepers of sacred knowledge both philosophical and practical. In their hands are maps and written accounts of Aquilonia which even the Great Library in Tarantia does not possess.

Hadrathus and the Asura cult appear on pages 63–64 of *Nameless Cults*, and the religion receives more coverage with Vendhya, the land it is native to, in *Conan the Wanderer* on pages 57–61.

THE CULT OF BORI

Bori became a god-figure sometime after his passing millennia ago. In the remotes hills of Aquilonia, some of the border territories, and secretly in some farm families, he is still venerated as such. For Bori's believers, Mitra is a false god, something created by people to impose order on their barbaric past. While no Aquilonian considers themselves a true pagan, some respect that wild precursor from whence they came.

So Bori continues to have influence, though the existence of such belief is so hardly acknowledged that it is not technically illegal. On its face, it is a relatively harmless cult that poses no threat to the crown or Mitra. This is only partially true. Bori's cult is largely irrelevant, but it is, in places, a front for minor cults which in truth worship the Great Old Ones. Such worship is decidedly not innocuous. In the dark of night, in fields of wheat or atop high hills, fires are sometimes seen. Around these fires sacrifices are supposedly made to gods that the human tongue struggles to pronounce. These gods are in some ways more real than the others worshipped by humankind, for they are beings whose legions once walked the Earth. These aliens of the Outer Dark lurk in the shadows cast by Mitra's light and wait for the day they can reveal themselves in their true and terrible glory.

None of this information is considered more than stories to frighten children, at least not in polite company. But Mitra's priests, and those who touch the gulfs of space to practice sorcery know that these gods are real, waiting in the antediluvian dark, in the seas, and in the voids of space to return to the world of mortals for their inscrutable purposes.

The cult of Bori appears in detail on pages 25–29 of *Nameless Cults*.

THE PICTS

Though buffer provinces separate the great central empire from the savage Picts, the Picts are as much a historical foe for Aquilonia as are the Nemedians. Yet, unlike with Nemedias, here is a clash of civilization versus barbarism and one whose outcome we know favors savagery. As written in “The Nemedian Chronicles”, perhaps the last of them, the Picts, in time, sweep across Aquilonia and drown it in civilized blood.

Yet that time is not now, and so the two natural enemies eye and prod each other warily across their ever-shifting border. The Picts are the dark reflection of civilization's mightiest power and its greatest enemy.

For the Picts, they think little of Aquilonia or the rest of civilization, at least for now. It will take the unfortunate intervention of Arrus, a Mitran missionary, to change that, for the worse, some 500 years after Conan's rule. In his naiveté and zealous worship, Arrus helps bring ruin to the civilizations of the Hyborian people, and with it, this magnificent era.

THE FIVE HUNDRED YEARS' WAR

The Five Hundred Years' War is something of a misnomer, but one embraced by both sides of the conflict. The belligerents are Aquilonia in the west and Nemedias in the east. While it is true that they have had numerous wars over the last half-millennia, their ‘war’ has not actually lasted for 500 years. Rather, wars protracted over decades, in one case nearly a century, comprise these 500 years of legend.

Nemedias considers itself the height of culture. Aquilonia considers itself the height of power. Both are correct, and being the two most powerful Hyborian nations, they are natural enemies. Where this rivalry began to is debatable. Some Nemedians claim that early Aquilonia, jealous of the culture and art it created, sought to destroy them like the barbarians they are. This of course ignores the fact that Nemedians descend from the same stock of barbarians, but that is of no import to the grievance.

The Aquilonians, for their part, claim Nemedias assassinated one of their early kings in a bid for power. There is little proof of this either. The two have warred for so long it little matters the inciting reason. The kingdoms are bitter enemies, and it is likely only the high peaks that divide them which keep the pair from constant invasion.

Those peaks allow each culture to survive. While it is true that Aquilonia is more powerful than Nemedias, it would put enormous pressure on the kingdom to go into all-out war. This happens several times during the reign of Conan and a few times before. In Conan's age, the Nemedians won, though they used a regrettable power from old Acheron which is friend to no person of good will.

CONAN THE PROBLEMATIC KING

Unfortunately, introducing Conan to a CONAN campaign can present many unique challenges. Conan is like a singularity, drawing all things unto him. There is nothing which resists his pull. Unless one of the players is playing Conan himself, he dominates any scene he is in, and if a player character, all others may feel superfluous. Even when Conan sits on the throne, he presents a potential problem for the gamemaster and player characters alike — he outshines the brightest of lights.

Therefore, it is recommended that the gamemaster cast him in some shadow to give the player characters the stage. Conan may be enthroned still, but their concerns lay elsewhere. Conan is a stable force in an unstable world. The player characters may work for Conan or oppose him or have nothing to do with him at all. What is most vital, however, is that Conan is not the one to have the adventures. In this period of his life, at least, Conan does not slay the demons from the Outer Dark or grind down fell sorcery unless it is thrust upon him — though even in his bedchamber he is unsafe from such assaults.

Conan should be on the throne attending to matters of state, and the player characters must be central to the action.

Thus, the two kingdoms war, and while Aquilonia gets the upper hand in most clashes, none have yet been definitive. Border skirmishes are common, and these can turn to full conflagrations if untended by diplomacy. Yet all the diplomacy in the world cannot help the two sides from combat, and much destruction has been wrought on either kingdom. The scars of old wars can be seen in mounded hills where masses of dead soldiers lay buried, in the scorch marks on large towns and cities that once burned, and in the continuing feud between the nobles of either kingdom who are no doubt related by blood howsoever they would deny it.

There is never real peace between the rivals, only an occasional dying down of hostility. It takes little to fan this spark into a full fire and set two vast hosts marching off to war.

That said, the Five Hundred Years' War is a legend among people on both sides. Veterans strip their sleeves and speak of scars earned against their nemesis in some or another battle. Families remember those who died or claimed victory in this five-century war, and on the mantle of many an Aquilonian and Nemedian farmstead, an old shield or sword, still well-tended, hangs in memory to some former service in the great and unending conflict.

A CULTURAL RIVALRY

Aquilonia and Nemedias are enemies on the field of battle but also rivals for the cultural crown of the Hyborian kingdoms. For now, Nemedias has the lead in this struggle. Nemedias is much more connected to the old Acheronian ruins upon which it is built, giving it a head start centuries ago when the Hybori began to settle and become civilized. By contrast, Aquilonia is more openly militant and largely rejected what was left of old Acheron.

This divide causes enmity between the two most powerful western kingdoms which, in turn, helps fuel their constant war. However, Aquilonia retains the military edge and, in this age, that is what matters.

Indeed, one who cannot trace lineage by oral means or written to one or another great battle is little thought of by their compatriots. Wealthy nobles seek the troubadours of Poitain to compose melodies and poems to reinforce and spread their legendary exploits while rank and file men and women toss old war stories back and forth across dagger-scarred bars in public houses lit with braziers where the smoke is so thick the tears flow readily from both the eye and heart.

The war is a dear thing to both peoples. That is the nature of humanity and this saga in which they find themselves.

THE RUINS OF ACHERON

Aquilonia, Argos, and Nemedias are all built upon the ruins of ancient, fell Acheron. They are, comparatively, newer kingdoms in the Hyborian world while Corinthia, Brythunia, and Ophir remember the shackles of Acheron on their older kingdoms.

And in Aquilonia, Acheron still holds influence. Not in a direct way, but the echoes of its cities and roads and even culture tumble down through the generations to modern citizens. While Acheron was an evil empire, it was also one of high culture, and the barbarians who swept it off the Thurian continent inherited their stone masonry, their old roads, their shipbuilding, and in some rare cases, their penchant for sorcery.

It is unknown whether Acheron had a feudal culture or not, but the organized hierarchy of current Aquilonian society was in part borrowed from the Acheronian model. The idea of having a single king itself is native to Acheron, at least insofar as the Aquilonians adopted it.

The sorcerous ways of that late empire are largely gone, and so much the better, but ruins lurk in craggy canyons, on high peaks, and in shadowed hills. In forests deep and

caverns twisting and forgotten, Acheronian ruins lurk. It is among these ruins that adventurers seek gold and silver and jewels and things best kept from the sight of men.

As in most Hyborian kingdoms, sorcery is ill regarded, yet it is always practiced somewhere in secret. Sitting on the ashes of the ancient empire built on sorcery, Aquilonian wizards are like to plumb the depths of that empire's knowledge of the Outer Dark. It is no accident that many an Acheronian demon served as tutor to sorcerers over the history of this empire nor that Nemedias, likewise built atop Acheron, turned to dead Xaltoltun to conquer her rival Aquilonia.

Yet let that tale, described in "The Nemedian Chronicles", serve as warning: it is best not to summon that which one cannot put down, and not to employ that which one does not understand.

NUMEDIDES

A king who was perhaps too greedy and perhaps less wise than his father, Numedides made many mistakes which helped lead to a barbarian ceasing the throne. He was arrogant and rash and his wars of expansion ended mostly in stalemates, costing the people blood and treasure. He was not a popular king, until years after his death.

Yet Numedides is not atypical of Aquilonian kings. While many were wiser and better tacticians, kings as a rule put themselves and the nobility first. That changes under Conan and is a profound point of demarcation. Under Numedides and others in his long line, Aquilonia has power, respect, and wealth, all of which are funneled straight and solely to the nobility.

The commoners enjoy a better life than most of their equals in other kingdoms, for the kings of Aquilonia are not fools, but either are they magnanimous. Thus, a campaign set during the reign of Numedides, or that of his forebears, should show no sign of egalitarianism.



AQUILONIAN GEOGRAPHY

Central Aquilonia is a fertile land and bestows much bounty to its people. Vast plains sweep down from the mountains to the east until they crash against the rivers which are the veins of the empire. To the north, high peaks wall Aquilonia off from savage Cimmeria and that is no small gift from Mitra to the average Aquilonian noble. The Cimmerians come over those mountains infrequently but, when they do, they leave naught but destruction in their wake. The Aquilonians have left them to their cold, somber land, preferring to war with the Picts who have neither steel to wield nor the blood of Atlantis running through their veins.

Hills are common, and the temperate climate creates regular seasons. There are no deserts in Aquilonia, nor many places of little rainfall. Marshes are common near some rivers, but most of the land is sturdy and ready for planting or building. The country is also the source of the marble Aquilonians proudly clad their great cities within.

Forests are very common, especially forests grown on arable land so nobles can hunt there at their leisure. This does not sit well with common folk but continues until Conan seizes the throne.

It is a beautiful land and an ideal place for a thriving civilization to settle and build.

PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES

As discussed previously, Aquilonia is made up of a series of provinces, each of which give fealty to the crown. Some are more territories, being as they sit along the frontier and have some autonomy whilst others are simply parts of Aquilonia which reflect either a disparate stock of settlers from times long past or divisions by the crown so long ago as to be nearly forgotten.

The provinces of Tauran, the Bossonian Marches, Gunderland, and the Westermarck are dealt with in considerably more detail in *Conan the Scout*, as they are far more pertinent to that aspect of culture and life.



Poitain

Of all the 'true' Aquilonian provinces, which is to say those whose people identify wholly as Aquilonian, Poitain is the most non-traditional. The people of Poitain, while decidedly Aquilonian, settled in this southern province and developed elements of a distinct culture and language apart from greater Aquilonia.

Chivalry, as the Hyborian Age understands it, is rooted here as are the famous knights of Poitain and the troubadours of the same. The province is very wealthy, tends toward a slightly warmer climate, and produces some of the finest warriors in the kingdom.

Poitain also has its own dialect, though few use it outside the area. It is an admixture of the old language of the Hybori mixed with southern influences. The Poitainians themselves tend to be slightly darker of hair and eyes than other Aquilonians, owing to the same mixing of blood with those of the Valley of Zinn in the distant past.

For more information on the knights of Poitain and its troubadours, see pages 36 and page 38, respectively.

Tauran

If a wilderness can be called docile, then Tauran is such. The land is only wild in comparison to those territories across the Shriki River in northern Aquilonia. It is by no means as rough as the Bossonian Marches or the like, and certainly nothing like the great forest of the Picts. Yet the people of Tauran are closer to the earth and content to raise cattle and other animals as opposed to widespread farming. While farms are present, they are fewer than in the central plains.

Taurans identify as wholly Aquilonian and have for some long while.

Westermarck

Comprised of other, smaller provinces, the Westermarck is territory carved right out of Pictish land. Even the names of the provinces are Aquilonian forms of ancient Pictish names. The people are necessarily hardy, and each province is ruled by a noble of Aquilonian blood, for better or for worse.

Westermarck's rangers are highly valued as scouts in the foreboding wilderness and serve the same role in Aquilonia's armies.

Gunderland

Gundermen are the purest of remaining Hyborian stock and do not take Aquilonian dominance lightly. In fact, they more than any other 'Aquilonian people' have rebelled against the crown. They lead a rough life of small, walled villages, vast forests, and healthy farmland. Tawny-haired like their ancestors, they are also stubborn, fierce fighters.

Still, for all that, Gundermen are part of the greater empire. To them, being Aquilonian is better than constant war against that great nation. The rich soil and beauty of

Gunderland are too prized by Aquilonian nobility to be left to rude people whose roots are so close to the sons of Bori.

Gunderland provides some of the finest infantry in the Aquilonian host. They are known for valor by Nemedians and Picts alike.

Bossonian Marches

Bossonians are not Aquilonian or even Hyborian as such. Their lineage stretches back to the Picts and splinters from there, and many millennia of mixing with Hyborian stock makes them appear largely Hyborian, even if some are darker-complected.

Independent and stubborn, Bossonians dislike Aquilonian rule, but tolerate it. The Cimmerians to their north and the Picts to their west cannot be bargained with. Bossonian archers are unparalleled in Aquilonian ranks and called up regularly for war. The legend of the fall of Venarium, and Conan's role in it, is well-told around the hearths of Bossonian homes. Some folk are even survivors of that grim slaughter, and proudly so.

LESSER PROVINCES

History does not leave us with all the details of Aquilonia's provinces, and quite likely, they change over time. In the era of Conan's rule, the following smaller provinces are known to have existed.

Karaban

This province has quiet farms and plantations. It is picturesque and largely devoid of major towns. This is rural Aquilonia in all its beauty.

Pellia

On the western edge of Aquilonia, Pellia boasts heavy forests broken up by grazing land where cattle are raised. Many Pellians serve as spearmen and are called to the frontier or, in times of war, wherever they are needed.

Thune

A southern province of Aquilonia, Thune is rich in vineyards and warm climate. Ascalante was once Count of Thune but was driven from his lands for plotting against King Numedides. He would repeat that mistake with Conan. It would be the last time he did so.

The wine produced here finds its way to all the ale houses of Aquilonia and far beyond. The grapes are known for their quality and taste from the frontier all the way to Turan.

Valkia

An eastern province, Valkia is right on the border with Nemed. A place of hardy people and forts, Valkia was the site of a great battle in the war between the two great empires of Aquilonia and Nemed. Over the centuries Valkia has seen the boots of many troops marching to and fro.

AQUILONIAN RIVERS

Some of the longest rivers on the Thurian continent break the topography of Aquilonian, rich veins that bring food, water, and quick transport. These rivers are no small key in the success of the empire though they extend beyond its borders.

Marshland is found near parts of the rivers, though little is impassable. There are, however, legends of deeper swamps where dark things dwell and witches who carry the blood of Acheron live and feast on human flesh. These are, of course, merely folktales.

The Shirki River

This deep river is home to rapids and isn't always easily forded. Many bridges of Aquilonian design allow easy passage to the frontier.

The Alimane River

Winding into the Khoratus, the Alimane cuts through two mountain ranges, leaving a large valley in the center. This river serves as the border between Poitain and Zingara.

THE FRONTIER

"Death or the frontier", goes the saying of Aquilonian serfs, for those are their two ways out of their station. To many, the frontier is far too dangerous a place to consider living in. Aquilonians, though, are a spirited people and enough venture there to keep it settled, and even expanding. Yet most serfs are well afraid of the frontier, for not only is life, as a practical matter, harder there, but the Picts are like to come out of their forest and slay entire families.

But the frontier is at the heart of the idea of the Aquilonian empire. It is that uncharted territory which civilization is destined to master. The Picts may throw themselves at the border like wolves upon a slain doe, but the Aquilonians are unlikely to stop pushing further inward. In every civilized person there is the barbarian, whether they will to recognize it or no, and inside every self-same person is the desire to crush that atavistic beast. Civilization hinges, precariously, on the balance and many see the frontier as the future.

Ironically, as described in "The Nemedian Chronicles", it is, but not in the way Aquilonians (or any other civilized Hyborian) would like. While Aquilonia will expand in nearly all directions, the Picts, in their deep, primeval forests will pour forth one day to rip down the gleaming towers of Tarantia as the Hybori once laid low the purple spires of Python.

The Tybor River

The Tybor River forms the southeast border of Aquilonia, dividing it from Ophir. Oft an ally, Ophir is nonetheless glad to have such a natural barrier between themselves and the might empire.

The Northern Khoratus

One of the longest rivers on the Thurian Continent, the Khoratus wends its way from northern mountains to the great Western Sea, forming the southern end of Poitain along the way.

AQUILONIAN CITIES

The jewels in the crowns of empires are their gleaming cities and none shine as bright as those in Aquilonia. To those who live in them, they may seem teeming metropolises of both grandeur and strife. To the outside world, they are legends of marble, craftsmanship, and sheer power. Certainly, in all the west, there is no greater city than Tarantia and no greater seat of power.

TARANTIA, CAPITAL OF AQUILONIA

Rolling plains of green lead to the gold and blue towers of mighty Tarantia, the heart of the Aquilonian Empire. Her outer walls are sheathed in marble as are her great temples and the royal hall. There is nothing quite like the site of the white, gleaming city on a clear spring day when the flowers burst from the grass and the orchards are full. The air is scented pleasantly which, to anyone who visits cities of the day, is itself unusual.

Some 300,000 or more people live in Tarantia, a figure only rivaled by the size of Aghrapur, though neither kingdom admits to having the smaller city. Such a sizable city has its underbelly, though, and the poor do not live in marble dwellings nor does their crowded borough smell of orchards and fresh flowers.

But all that is kept away from the eyes of the average citizen and, for most, Tarantia is the cleanest, safest city they will ever see. Around the great grounds of the palace stand guard the gleaming pikes of the Aquilonian watch. If one is allowed into the royal gardens, they will see that the Black Dragons are on patrol. These formidable warriors also sometimes patrol around the city center, ensuring that larceny and robbery is a short-lived means of making coin in this part of the city.

A circular city set upon a spot where much blood has been spilled, the city shines with morning light catching the gold and blue towers and beckons one to enter. Unlike the dubious charms of famed cities such as Zamora the

He stared at the familiar towers and streets of Tarantia, where a mob seethed and screamed, and at the same time he was somehow able to see the banners of Nemedra moving inexorably westward through the smoke and flame of a pillaged land. In the great square of Tarantia the frantic throng milled and yammered, screaming that the king was dead, that the barons were girding themselves to divide the land between them, and that the rule of a king, even of Valerius, was better than anarchy.

— The Hour of the Dragon

Accursed, one must hunt hard for such nefarious opportunities in Aquilonia's capital.

Under Numedides, no expense was spared to make the city the crown jewel of the empire and, while Conan has not let it slide, he offers bread and entertainment to the poor rather than new additions to nobles' villas.

Tarantian Geography

Like most cities of the age, Tarantia was not so much planned as grown. Her streets follow paths so old they used to be

mud tracks left by wagon wheel and horse. Her inner walls sprout here and there from beneath thick vegetation, showing the city's growth outward, like the concentric circles of a tree. Yet the attention given to the image of the city prevails in most cases, and the old city, Tamar, is lost behind centuries of progress and the indulgence of rich kings, fat on power and gold.

The Royal Palace

Made of white marble and domed in gold, the royal palace is sight to behold. Gardens surround four quadrants in which statues of former kings, heroes, and gods stand among fountains, chirping birds, and the ever-watchful eyes of the Black Dragons.

The king's personal quarters are in one of the tallest spires, while the Royal Hall is the official location of the king's business. Here, feasts may be held, or royal guests received. The throne itself sits at the end of the royal hall, fashioned of a single block of granite. It is plain in comparison to the ostentatious tapestries and finery around it, but reminds any king who sits upon it of the simple, rock-solid beginnings of this land and its people.

The Garden of Tamar

Near the Royal Palace, the Garden of Tamar is lush and more beautiful than even the gardens of the king. Under





HISTORY OF TARANTIA

Once called Tamar for the legendary ruler of the Hybori tribe that supposedly founded the city, Tarantia, or Tamar as it was then known, began as a place of rough brick and few towers. A squat city, like most of its day, it had but few buildings over two stories.

Some of these exist today, in various states of disrepair, mostly in the poor area save that they have been reworked to fit the image of the city. Rumors of ancient crypts, where the Hybori buried their dead, fuel the occasional treasure hunter in the sewers, but nothing has ever been found. Far more concrete is the under-city of Shamar, whose Acheronian ruins provide treasure both gross and sublime.

Conan, it is a public place where lovers can meet, philosophers can discuss esoteric points of debate, and all can enjoy imported flora and fauna from all over the continent. At night, lions now patrol the garden, a practice said to have been learned by the king in his youth.

A statue of Tamar, though weathered by touch and time, stands in the center of the garden, nearly featureless now

save for the sharp Aquilonian chin. Upon that smooth face many children and adults alike find themselves imagining their own face there, and its deep connection to the past.

Off-center of the statue sits the Tree of Tamar. This is representative of the ancient oak which supposedly sprang whole from Tamar's spear and was the size of a city. Granted, this oak is impressive, but is certainly not the size of Tarantia. It is, however, the oldest oak in Tarantia and all others started as seeds from this tree or one descended from it, by royal decree.

The Grand Temple of Mitra

An edifice to both belief and avarice, this huge temple is the largest temple to Mitra known — at least according to official Aquilonian decree. At night, huge braziers light the outside leading inward toward candles whose coronas evoke Mitra's own divine light. A dais dominates at one end, and doors lead to various chambers where priests and their attendants live.

The amount of gold here is a temptation to any thief, though to date none have tried to steal from the temple and lived. There are gibbets flanking the road leading to the temple where some have tried.

STEALING THE CALLING SHEET

Glinting riches live in the dreams of most thieves — gold, jewels, the sceptres of princes and kings. But there is another kind of wealth, that of information. The royal calling sheet is prepared each day by the king's scribes under supervision of his viziers. Certain news is routinely omitted. Yet even seeing the calling sheet the day before can provide a jump on the market or privileged information that might lead to the aforementioned wealth.

The gamemaster might consider some bit of information, vital to the player characters (or an employer), on the first or even the last draft of the sheet. The player characters must sneak into the scriptorium within the bounds of the royal palace and copy the sheet. Stealing it only alerts the scribes that it is gone. This must be a quiet job. Still, it's a more unusual job than most heists and could well involve those associated with high nobility.

The Calling Block

This was the slave block under Numedides, but Conan outlawed the trading of slaves inside city perimeters. However, even before that royal decree, the block offered another purpose. Each day at noon, the Royal Caller stands upon this block and presents an eager and amazingly quiet crowd with the news of the day. Much of the news is trivial, involving economics, noble titles, and the like, but people gather because even trivial news changes prices in the market and huge news can shift the fortunes of barons.

Library of Tarantia

The Great Library of Tarantia is impressive... to anyone who has not seen the Great Library of Belverus. The library seeks to compete with the Nemedian legend and, outwardly, it does. But inside one finds few experts as storied as Nemedian scholars, and there are books only the Nemedians know. This is something of a sticking point between the two kingdoms and something bolder Nemedian travelers are quick to point out — even those who cannot read.

Royal District

An area around the palace where nobles keep small villas and apartments, this district is not necessarily where rulers live. In fact, most Aquilonian barons and the like live on grand estates located on their holdings. This area is for nobles who are not direct heirs, or for visitations from those who are heirs or rulers.

This creates a different character to the Royal District of Tarantia than many other cities where, in fact, ruling nobles live daily. The area is also home to those close to the crown, be they viziers, favored knights, or minstrels. Conan, to his

credit, is widely supportive of minstrels and poets, giving them the freedom of their voices and bestowing patronage upon those who he favors. Particularly outspoken is the poet Rinaldo, once a champion of the Cimmerian king but lately becoming increasingly vocal in his criticisms of the barbarian and his lauding of Numedides.

Royal Market

Called 'Royal', this market holds the official imprimatur of the king. It is therefore the largest market of Tarantia and the most honest. Well-patrolled by guards, thieves ply other, smaller markets instead. This in turn sends more traffic to the Royal Market where heavier fees are exacted for stalls and booths.

Because Aquilonia imports most of its silver, gold, and other precious metals from other countries, prices can be steep in the Royal Market depending on the exchange rate. However, a city of this size offers much competition which drives down the prices of many goods. Leatherworking, blacksmithing, and other trade work is affordable as are local produce, unless brought in from the frontier.

A statue of Numedides stands in the center of the market during his rule but was torn down by a mob after Conan took power.

The Khorotas River

The legendary Tamar picked this spot because it sits on a hill overlooking the river, or at least it did. For many centuries, Old Tarantia sat just east of the river. However, as time passed and the city grew, it encompassed the river so that now it divides the city.

Numerous bridges offer passage across the river and most of the city is built along the incline, so flooding is rare.

The Dregs

This is largely where the poor live and eke out what existence they can in a city that shuns them. Things are better under Conan, but he is no missionary seeking to solve poverty. They can count on meals, that is about it.

The 'Dregs' is not a formal title, but everyone uses it. The area is so known for it lays on the low side of the city where the river tends to flood. It isn't a yearly occurrence, but it happens often enough to cause problems. For decades, if not a century, there has been talk of tearing down the Dregs, building up the land, and reclaiming it as a proper part of the city. Where the current denizens would go is rarely discussed.



SHAMAR

Though few know it, Shamar is the older city. In fact, it is the eldest extant city in Aquilonia. This is not so much a secret as it is a lost piece of knowledge, for Shamar was built atop an Acheronian city and incorporates some of the stone of the vanished culture in its composition.

That said, few buildings are recognizably Acheronian to any but the oldest of eyes. And, if someone of that age knows a given building is partly Acheronian, that is the least of anyone's problems.

To the average eye, Shamar is much like Tarantia but on a smaller scale. Perhaps 100,000 residents live in Shamar, ruled over by the titular Baroness of Shamar. Said baroness also controls a sizable portion of land outside the city stretching from the river to forests and beyond.

As noted, few cities are planned in the Hyborian Age and, strictly speaking, Shamar was not planned by its current residents but rather by the Acheronian predecessors. This is lost to time, and the lineage of Shamar nobility believes their predecessors set out to make a planned city, something they claim was the first of its kind.

Thus, Shamar appears as a series of concentric circular streets around a central hub, something like a modified

wagon wheel. To some, who possess forbidden knowledge, it looks quite a bit like a specific type of summoning circle. But there are few today who would note that.

The city lies south of Tarantia, enjoys the same river, and is home to great many river men, both traders and fishermen.

Royal Villa

Colonnades rather than spires mark the royal residence where the current Baroness of Shamar lives. Lush gardens and envy-green swards sweep along the land given to this home. Certainly, walls surround the villa, but they are not terribly high. Instead, the royal guard sees to it that intruders are dealt with expeditiously.

A huge, rectangular pool runs down the length of the estate and baths are plentiful. The Baroness hosts many revelries, some of which are whispered about in polite company and roared over in the city's taverns.

The Rock

In the central hub where the 'spoked' streets meet is a public park. In winter, snow blankets the scene, making it arguably more beautiful then, if starker. Even Nemedian painters have taken the park in winter as prized subject matter.





THE ROAD OF KINGS

The Road of Kings is more theory than reality, except in Aquilonia. The roads in this kingdom are the best from here to the Vilayet. The so-called 'Road of Kings' is centered in Tarantia and branches out across the kingdom.

Much of it follows old Acheronian roads, and one can follow the Road of Kings eastward through many of the Hyborian Kingdoms. The road is not consistent, however. In some places it is gravelled or paved with stones, while other parts are little more than a worn trail through the woods. Travelling the supposed whole of it therefore requires a guide.

A large rock, roughly circular on the sides and perhaps eight feet tall, dominates the center of the park. Some say it fell from the heavens, others believe it is merely a lump brought by previous people and not finished. Acheronians, after all, would have a dressed stone at the very least. What it is or why it is there is not known.

Some few dubious scholars and local madmen claim they see eroded glyphs on the rock, but no sane person believes these so-called glyphs are anything but weathering patterns.

Covered Market

Once, a rainy season closed the city market for over a week, causing an economic downturn in Shamar which wound its way through the rest of the kingdom. That is the story, at least. Records show that the rainy season was long enough to hurt the crops, and that caused the economic issues of that period.

Nevertheless, the rulers of the city decided to cover the market and it remains the only roofed market known of in the west. Rain or sun, people trade under the eaves of this wooden roof, the upkeep of which is a cottage industry in and of itself.

The Pict's Eye

This is gruesome bar, at least if one wants to drink free of the sight of human trophies. Pict skulls and teeth adorn the walls and bar. Many frontiersmen from the northwest, on their way back to trade their season's goods, are quite happy drinking among the dead visages of their enemies. A candelabra supposedly made of Pict bones hangs above the central bar, and a mummified Pict leans in one corner, his face preserved so that his tattoos are yet visible round his sunken nose.

Off-duty guards, visiting mercenaries, and the aforementioned frontiersmen favor this bar. A rumor persists that the place has a secret Pictish chef who, though 'tamed' by the owner, cooks dishes made of human parts. Few believe this, as the food has little meat, and when it does it is a far cheaper cut than human.

SOCIETIES OF AQUILONIA

Aquilonia fields some of the world's finest soldiers, but its elite fighters are far more skilled than those of many other kingdoms. Particularly, these are the knights of Poitain and the king's own guard, the Black Dragons. Another, less militant group is that of the troubadours of Poitain, a loose association of storytellers, minstrels, and poets.

THE KNIGHTS OF POITAIN

Duty and honor are oft tossed about terms which have little meaning in a savage age where few people follow a code. The knights of Poitain are serious about their code, one which is likely a forebear to chivalry. Yet where chivalry was more written about than practiced, the code of the knights lives in their day-to-day affairs and their demeanor on the battlefield.

Led by Count Trocero, the knights of Poitain are a much-feared, elite fighting force in the Aquilonian host. Though their code varies over the ages, its basic tenets remain consistent. They are:



- Be prepared to fight and die and do so with honor
- Fight for the welfare of all Aquilonians
- Reject deceit, unfairness, and cheating
- Support one's fellows in combat
- Respect and obey those in just authority
- Protect the weak
- Honor women
- Keep the faith of Mitra
- Never turn one's back on a foe
- Give quarter where quarter is due

THE BLACK DRAGONS

The personal guard of the king are called the Black Dragons. They are the finest soldiers in the land and, indeed, of almost any land. One can earn the right to be a Black Dragon by fiat of the king. At least such is the case under Conan. The Cimmerian's predecessors rarely took such a close personal interest in the individuals in their bodyguard (and some paid the ultimate price for such inattention). Conan, however, supervises the selection of those who would seek to defend him against any threat.

Previously, the king's guard went untitled and was comprised of Aquilonians alone. Under the Cimmerian, men and women far and wide seek to prove their worth among the Black Dragons' ranks, and it is only through distinguishing

The Black Dragons were on hand, wild with rage, swearing and ruffling, with their hands on their hilts and foreign oaths in their teeth. Of the young officer of the door-guard nothing was seen, nor was he found then or later, though earnestly sought after.

— "The Phoenix on the Sword"

themselves in battle that any are considered for the honor of 'wearing the helm'. The Black Dragons are easily recognized by the large, ornate yet practical helmets they were. These are, unsurprisingly, shaped into the visage of a leering dragon and each is made individually for the bearer. While the armor was always part of the Black Dragons' lot, it was rare that the warrior within the helmet was as fearsome as the helmet itself.

Indeed, many wealthy aristocrats bought their third or fourth sons easy positions within the Dragons, which was considered a sinecure by many. These Black Dragons were well known for abusing their privilege and constituting little more than a drinking club for the wealthy and indolent; and, occasionally, royal assassins for hire.

Conan's selection process for the Black Dragons, and his early purge of their ranks, has led to the position becoming

one of respect again. Now, the Black Dragons are considered the elite of the elite. Each must have earned his or her place at the King's side by acquitting themselves well in battle, undergoing a series of grueling training regimes devised by the King and his advisors (including a 14-day spell in the Pictish wilderness, armed only with a knife and a blanket).

This is supplemented by tests of loyalty (which are kept secret and changed regularly to prevent their being divined by potential infiltrators) and education in a range of subjects including basic chirurgery techniques, poisons and antidotes, and the history of the realm. Several Black Dragons have asked why a history of Aquilonia is necessary to defend the king; the answer offered is "the past is where people find an excuse to kill him".

BECOMING A BLACK DRAGON

As noted above, the process by which an individual becomes one of these famed guardians is rigorous, as it is designed to separate the wheat from chaff. This results in a fighting force as dedicated and loyal as any the world has seen, for the most part, though some few have been known to stray from their loyalty to the king.

Should a player character wish to become one of these stalwart defenders of the crown, here are the ways this might be accomplished:

- Firstly, the king may simply bestow the privilege of membership upon someone. In times prior to Conan, this was often bought and exclusive to the children of nobility, but the barbarian king has put an end to that practice and generally selects only those who impress him in some fashion, either through their bravery or past deeds.
- Membership may be earned, through dedicated study and trials of skill and knowledge. These can be abstracted as a series of skill rolls — Melee, Parry, Observation, Resistance, Healing, and Lore — all Challenging (D2). Momentum from one roll may be spent upon the next.

Once brought into the Black Dragons, the player character is given a suitable set of armor (arm and leg plates, plate cuirass, great helm) and equipped with a well-fashioned broadsword. While serving as a Black Dragon in Tarantia, Upkeep between sessions is halved (round up).

A Black Dragon is expected to either perform regular palace duties or act as one of the king's agents, in which case their duties should be determined by the gamemaster. It is in this latter role that a player character may both serve as a Black Dragon and be able to go on adventures with others who are not in service to the crown.

Those few who emerge sufficiently intact from the process are sworn in by the king and then billeted in the nearby barracks. Led by Conan's trusted general, Pallantides, the Black Dragons not only guard the king but perform secret and unnamed tasks for him deemed far too sensitive or dangerous to be trusted to others, something which their training also guarantees they are able to perform.

There are many dangerous foes in distant nations, and the Black Dragons take their duty to protect the King extremely seriously. So seriously that many threats are ended before they have become anything more than a vague idea in the mind of a potential usurper.

THE TROUBADOURS

Many courts abound in minstrels, but some elite few in Poitain are known as 'troubadors'. The poems and songs of troubadours oft times tell stories of the knights of Poitain, and it is unclear whether the myth preceded the actuality or the other way around. No matter now, as the troubadours sing about many things whilst also being hardened warriors.

They preserve the dialect of Poitain, though songs are usually composed and learned in the common dialect as well. Troubadours tout the glory of Aquilonia, the rise of its great houses, tales of daring and rescue, and solemn hymn of well-departed soul. Becoming a troubadour is a surprisingly arduous process, given the groups carefully cultivated image of indolence, jollity and swagger. The applicant must be recommended for admission by two currently existing members of the troubadours and this must be sanctioned by the *laureate* — the head of the order.

Once the candidate has been accepted, they must face the three trials of the troubadours. These are the *Trial of Truth*, the *Trial of Beauty*, and the *Trial of Legacy*.

- The Trial of Truth requires the prospective troubadour to acknowledge their former brothers and sisters in the order, learning the orders history and poetry and performing selected stanzas upon demand.
- The Trial of Beauty is a series of swordfights and other combats against the champions of the order — in which the aim is not necessarily to win (though it is certainly not to lose) but to retain grace and equanimity, irrespective of the course of the fight.
- The final, and most difficult trial is the Trial of Legacy in which the applicant must write a poem or song about some aspect of the recent history of Aquilonia. The work need not be perfect, but it must show enough potential to indicate that the candidate may one day write something worthy of inclusion amongst those poems the troubadours exist to commemorate and protect.

Poetry is, of course, far from the group's only concern. They are equally skilled with the blade and are ready to set aside the poems and songs at the cantonment campfire and take up arms against the foe on the battlefield the next day. They favor bright colors and lives of heady enjoyment. In this, they and the Knights often disagree. For, where a knight is sober and generally of even-nature, the troubadours are boisterous and ever-laughing.

AQUILONIAN RUINS

Aquilonia is not an old empire by the standard of the day, for Stygia watched Acheron fall. Nevertheless, 3,000 years of history lies behind the walls of Tarantia and upon the fields of Pellia. From the first rough-hewn caves where apelike pre-Hyborians painted sigils on the dark walls to the lost tombs of chieftains and former kings, civilized empires are still full of the ruins of lost days.

THE LOST TOMB OF TAMAR

Tamar, the legendary founder of Aquilonia died millennia ago, but no one has ever found his tomb. Yet people have searched for it for 3,000 years. The chieftain of the most powerful Hyborian tribe at the time, Tamar would have been buried with the wealth of Stygian pharaohs, or at least the Hyborian equivalent. Other tales maintain that Tamar was buried with his greatest and most powerful warriors and that, when the great darkness of the end comes for Aquilonia, he will rise again and lead his host out to war.

Some have equated Tamar with the other great, strange kings of the past who did not die but rode on, beyond the edge of the world — with Kull of Atlantis, with the Stygian priest-kings who do not die but simply slumber — and state that Tamar's tomb is no sepulcher but a doorway, a gate to some distant world, or other dimension. Can such as Tamar truly die, they ask, or do they merely move to some other and better world?

The most pressing and desperate of all these tales, however, is always that of Tamar's impossible wealth. The riches of the whole world were Tamar's, so go the many legends of his wealth and his endless conquests. Even the lands beyond the sea were pillaged and their gold and jewels and

magic brought back for the ancient Aquilonians to glory in. And they are still there, still to be found.

Such riches drive people mad and digs, treasure hunts, and expeditions have all been undertaken in the past. Some believe the tomb lies under Tarantia (the city was once named for him) while others think it sits in the mountains in the north, that the barbaric people buried him close to their ancestors. Whatever the case, people will continue to search for the tomb until it is found, or the next Cataclysm washes away the entire memory of this age.

THE CAVES OF YUGGOTH

Ancestors of the Hyborians, barely men, ventured into deep caves somewhere in the mountains of what is now Aquilonia. There, they encountered a glowing moss which, when ingested, seemed to connect their crude minds to another world. They painted sigils in these caves and worshipped Old Ones who, using the primitive humans as pawns, opened a gateway to the Earth from Yuggoth. They came through this portal once in the dim past but were thrown back for reasons unknown. Sorcerers believe the portal was sealed. Some say it can be opened again. More than a few are mad enough to try.

It is rumored that a mass grave of such pre-humans was found when digging foundations for an Aquilonian keep far enough from Tarantia that it was not dealt with by the king. The bones all glowed with a green fungus. The bodies were broken, human teeth marks visible on the skulls, the tibia, the ribs. The diggers soon succumbed to the same madness, falling upon each other in cannibalistic slaughter. The keep was never finished and was forgotten by all.

This cave has not been found, though it has been said that traces of the fungus can still be found in the region it was rumored to be found, no matter what method is used to exterminate it. Fire, poison, axes and picks... all would seem to have extirpated it. A few months later it returns, slightly stronger, slightly more difficult to eradicate. Those who try to destroy it complain that it seems to have an intelligence; a primitive, unrefined intelligence, perhaps, but something more than the simple desire to grow. It seems to watch them, unsettlingly, as they rip it up. And not only watch them but it seems to anticipate their coming. Learning from each destruction. Learning and waiting...



CHAPTER 3

EVENTS

The year of the dragon had birth in war and pestilence and unrest. The black plague stalked through the streets of Belverus, striking down the merchant in his stall, the serf in his kennel, the knight at his banquet board. Before it the arts of the leeches were helpless. Men said it had been sent from hell as punishment for the sins of pride and lust.

— The Hour of the Dragon

The lives of rulers and kingdoms knows no small amount of tumult. One monarch might rule wisely whilst the heir leads the people to ruin. Thus, are the vagaries of kingdoms kept within leather-bound tomes for the future to unravel. The story told of the player characters' exploits, and the domain they rule or serve, shall in time erode and bend to the ever-changing ear of tomorrow. What is more, it must be noted, that history is written by the victors. What happens now is only as real as those who live to shape its form.

Such are the events that beset kingdoms.

EVENTS OF THE COURT

From intrigue to true romance, the court is the hub of any kingdom's activity, that pulsing heart which, if enlivened burns far more and if pierced does bleed across the land like a red tide sweeping the ambition of ruler and serf alike away. Here are described the events that, like glaciers, gouge into and reform the continents whilst they shift their positions in geological time.

INTRIGUE

Most rulers must exist in the world of intrigue, and player characters are likely to be active agents in this world, instigating and participating in such plots. But intrigue can be proactive as well. At any time, in various courts around the

world, all manner of dastardly and disturbing schemes and conspiracies are being hatched, to grow and to thrive.

The player characters may have to deal with these events. A spy is in their court, or in their queen's retinue. They must root them out. But how? A spy is stealthy and clever by profession, how do the player characters discover who they are? Or, perhaps a given plot is only stumbled upon in its advanced stages. Perhaps the player characters learn that several conspirators have, for some while, plotted against the ruler and are now ready to assassinate her? Not only must they stop this first attempt, they must discover who is behind it, so it does not happen again.

COURTLY LOVE

Love is, perhaps, the counterpoint motive to power in the Hyborian Age. Men and women move mountains for love. They betray promises. They oppose the wishes of their families. Love might be welcome, so two who are betrothed might need escorting to a wedding sight. Only men and women of name can guard them. Thus, the player characters become involved.

Yet it is possibly more interesting if the love is forbidden. If the two lovers are meant to be together. What if one of them is a player character and the person whom they love threatens their title or even their land? The laws of the land might prevent such unions, especially if the lovers are of different classes or castes. How will the player characters react to such restrictions? Do they obey tradition and avoid controversy, or do they stand for principle, and individual liberty?



And what of love betrayed? What of the unfaithful person who coldly plays around on their partner who might possess a streak of vengeance in them? In this, there is not only a broken heart but someone who seeks to redress that wound. A scorned lover can be a horrible enemy. Are they after the player characters for something they did, or after another member of the court, even the ruler? Perhaps they feel betrayal is best repaid in kind?

The lover betrayed by a king decides to betray the king. But she decides not merely to betray his trust but the entire kingdom? What if the queen or concubine of King Tarascus of Nemedria decides to sell the Nemedian army out to an Aquilonian general? There are so many ways those closest can cut the deepest. When love is on the table, so too are the sharpest knives.

WAR AND PREPARATION FOR WAR

Provinces feud, nations fall to internecine combat, entire kingdoms, and alliances thereof, march to bloody war. For the average player character, who is not noble, who has no title, such a war may be a choice. From a knight all the way to a king, nobles have no such choice. To retain their title and land they must also participate in the war.

This may mean raising and leading troops. The game-master can use the rules in *Chapter 8: The Road of Kings*, if

desired, or may reduce a conflict to a smaller scale and use the mass combat rules from *Conan the Mercenary*. In either case, war is something not easily controlled.

Yet there are things noble player characters might be required to do besides simply raising troops. They might be trusted with secret missions behind enemy lines, the finding and assassination of a mysterious general, or the recovery of a kidnapped prince who the enemy threatens to kill.

An entire noble campaign might take place in the weeks leading up to a war and the war itself, either attempting to gain some strategic advantage for their own alliance, to stymie or hinder an enemy, to prevent the outbreak of war altogether, or to bring it to an abrupt end through some drastic measure.

Preparation for War

Another section of a campaign might involve preparations for war. The maneuvers of the pieces on the board of the game of kings can take months or years. The player characters might serve as spies, scouts, even diplomats in the lead up, or attempted prevention of, war. War, in all its forms and sizes, is constant in the era, but that doesn't mean it is good for those who participate. As demonstrated in *Chapter 8: The Road of Kings*, even the winners pay a cost in war. None come away unscathed.



AQUILONIA DURING KING NUMEDIDES' REIGN

Numedides was not a good king, but he wasn't a terrible one either. He ruled after his father died but did not carry his father's wisdom. Numedides also possessed enough greed for two kings and taxed the people heavily.

During his reign, both nobles and commoners were unhappy, though this is not unusual. Kings are rarely popular in this age, but Numedides was particularly disliked. Should the gamemaster remove or delay Conan's introduction into Aquilonian history, the prior king may have retained the throne.

Numedides' rule sees major arable land used as hunting grounds for nobles. Taxes for public works go to fund renovations of noble's estates or pomp and circumstance to the glory of Tarantia and the king himself. The borders are expanded aggressively, foolhardily, even, into Pictish territory and the frontier becomes even more volatile. Still, Numedides wasn't inherently evil as such and was essentially a product of his era. Good rulers are rare in the Hyborian Age.

If the gamemaster wishes, Conan need not exist. Perhaps he was slain while in one of his other adventures. Perhaps he took another throne or chose against the call by Numedides' outlaw generals. In any event, the player characters could enact and participate in Conan's usurpation on their own terms. Perhaps when the barbarian general makes his bid for the throne, the player characters are part of Numedides' trusted circle, or conspirators against him. Will they help or hinder Conan's efforts? What would it take for them to remain loyal to Numedides, or to throw their lot in with the Cimmerian on his path to power?

EVENTS OF KINGDOMS

The most carefully laid plans of mice and men fall apart when rough fortune has its way. Even the vagaries of chance can befall a court, whether aided or ignored by the ruler. The gamemaster is not required to use these events or perspectives, but they provide a quick, often harsher alternative or companion to the domain management rules in *Chapter 7: Wealth & Holdings*.

While these events assume the vantage of the rulers and nobles, they also affect everyone below those grand stations. There is no merchant or serf immune to the happenstance of fortune and the way their rulers deal with it as it hits.

Thus, while *Conan the King* focuses on the people who conquer and govern, this chapter may be readily applied to other roles, insofar as such events trickle outward like the blood of a dead ruler, spreading across the throne room floor, staining the sandals of all.

THE GAME OF KINGS

The mighty rulers of the Hyborian Age, along with their sniveling 'peers', play a different kind of game than that of the lowly wanderer. No longer is it merely one's own hide looked after, but that of entire nations. At this point in their careers, the characters have seen the hand of fate snap them from the jaws of death, have sent other foes screaming into those self-same jaws, and has eyed, and sometimes attained, many a prize. Yet no prize is as great as the throne of one of the Hyborian kingdoms. For a king makes his own fortune, and a queen demands her own tax.

The life of the wanderer, ambling across borders, is replaced by that the ruler who makes those borders. The crown's weight tethers them to the throne, and it is rare that the ruler ventures far from home and hearth without a mighty troop of personal guards. Instead, their lives are largely ones of politics, judgment, opulence, but relatively little adventure.

KINGDOMS IN PLAY

At least, that is how it is supposed to go. Even as king, Conan ruminates on this irony and, before long, he finds himself captured and once again resorting to his wits, muscle, and will to survive. This is an excellent and time-proven means of getting rulers into action but should be used sparingly. A ruler who is kidnapped or captured time and again does not make for a satisfying campaign for all others involved, as the course of events often risks too centered around a single figure.

Conan players are unlikely to tire of the thrilling death traps and ancient monsters that stand before them. If installed into positions of power, it is inevitable that they, like Conan, miss the thrill of action, the heat of the fray. There is no reason they cannot have these as king or queen. One must simply approach the game differently.

In traditional **Conan** adventures, events between sessions were largely abstracted and abbreviated, rarely the source of play. Carousing is rarely eventful, and mostly a re-set or change of scenery between 'real' adventures. For rulers, however, there is no such simplicity when Carousing. The time between heroic exploits involves treaties negotiated, battles planned, and intrigue ferreted out. All the time the ruler must contend with a more personal struggle than moving tokens on a map to plan a war. It is the war, or the assassination attempt, or quest given by a ghost in a dream, which become the staple of adventure.

However, this is not to say that all such in-between activities are worth attention. Most players do not want to role-play the negotiation of a trade agreement, nor does the gamemaster wish to roleplay their trade ambassadors they must deal with. Players *do* want to role-play what happens when the treaty is broken and war erupts. Yet rarely does a ruler lead from the front in the Hyborian Age, unless things have escalated to the point where the realm itself is in danger, and it is only the rarest of rulers who will take up the sword — or axe — to defend their realm directly.

Rarer still are the sorts of rulers who fight on behalf of their kingdoms alone, facing danger on a personal scale and forced to use their own wits and craft to survive.

Conan is a perfect example of both types of leader. He would not think of sending his soldiers into battle without himself the spear point of that deadly host. Likewise, he finds himself, usually through situations he cannot control, facing danger without his army at his side, stripped or bereft of authority, but not his own indomitable strength.

THE WORLD FROM ABOVE

To the king or queen, the Hyborian world is but a map spread before them. The ruler of Aquilonia sees their borders and the positions of their troops around them. To the southeast, Strabonus of Koth might think a freshly minted king is the perfect excuse for conquest. Picts pushing into the north and western borders. These are things the ruler ruminates on off-stage. They must move troops where best they think and shuffle resources, such as gold and food, wherever they must do the most good. The ruler receives intelligence from their allies and agents in various kingdoms and, sometimes, are visited by ancestors in gnomish dreams as Conan was in “The Phoenix on the Sword”.

Upon this map, almost a game board, the ruler moves their pieces. They determine what is to be done about a stirring rebellion. They order their scholars to pore over dusty scrolls looking for an answer to dreams or prophecies. A ruler might plan to attack Koth’s army before Strabonus strikes theirs. These are things that largely happen between sessions, with only brief scenes played out in character. Then, however, when the results of these deliberations are determined, whether rebellion, quest, or battle, once again play begins, focusing on the actions of the player characters.

THE WORLD FROM WITHIN

For most player characters, life has been focused on the place they are currently occupying, whether an ancient tomb, ruined temple, a portion of a battlefield, or the border of a kingdom. For example, in the case of trouble in the making, a non-player character king may have brought a small retinue, or in the case of a battle, a whole army. What

matters is that this sort of play is once again focused on the player characters as agents of change.

The king is at the head of the army, and his loyal friends or allies — the player characters — stand alongside them. Or perhaps a queen and her trusted companions have followed a prophetic dream — even better if it is one of the player character’s — to a lost Acheronian tomb. Inside is the only artifact known to defeat a dread, long-dead Atlantean wizard who has been released from their aeons-old bondage and threatens to destroy the kingdom from within.

In each of these cases, the magnitude of play varies from the greater world, where the fates of kingdoms are at stake, to the immediate world, where a single sword-strike can be decisive to settle an encounter. It is between these two extremes that the gamemaster must move the players, keeping their sights on the grand picture while nonetheless immersing them in immediate danger.

Here, the mass combat rules allow both the grander battle to play out while the actions of individual player characters might change the tide of the fray. For example, Conan and his Black Dragons make a desperate blaze of glory charge against a horde of Stygian soldiers led by a fell necromancer. This bold maneuver may win the day or lose it. Conan (or a different player character ruler) and the other player characters are there, cutting down swaths of foes like a scythe reaping corn. His bold stratagem breaks the wall of Stygians, rallies his own men, and allows Conan and company to press forward against the foul sorcerer himself.

Similarly, Conan may not be at the front of a great horde, but on a stealthy, dangerous mission with only a scant few of his Black Dragons. Perhaps they have ventured into the mysterious land of Stygia and, not wanting to draw undue attention, posed as a caravan. There, they must find the tomb of this wizard and use an artifact to prevent his resurrection. In a case such as this, the gamemaster’s focus should be on what matters to the player characters.

WHAT HAPPENS ON THE THRONE

After the Carousing phase between adventures, the player controlling the ruling character makes a series of rolls. The first indicates the nature of the event that affects their kingdom. The second gives a specific adventure seed and situation that needs the ruler’s attention. However, these are merely suggestions and starting points for the gamemaster’s use. If a campaign has progressed to this point, the gamemaster may very well have their own plans as to what lies in store for the kingdom and its ruler.

First, roll a d20. This roll determines the nature of the event.

NATURE OF EVENT	
D20 Roll	Nature of Event
1–6	Peaceful, no event
7–12	Intrigue
13–16	War
17–18	Unnatural
19–20	Roll twice: the event appears to be of one nature, but some other type of event is causing it.

Once the nature of the event is determined, the ruler's player rolls 1d20 on the appropriate table. The player may spend Fortune points for this roll, altering a result by one row up or down per Fortune point. These Fortune points do not return to the player before the next session of play. These are spent after rolling, and only need to be announced when the roll is made.

As an optional rule, the other players in the group may provide the ruler additional Fortune points on a 3-to-1 basis. Thus, 3 Fortune points from others in the group equal 1 Fortune point for the ruler, and each Fortune point may move the result up or down one row. This makes it costlier to influence the result but gives players much more control over what happens next in the campaign. Will they choose to spend their Fortune points for their own glory or the safety of their kingdom?

USING THE TABLES

The tables exist to spur the gamemaster and players toward their own adventures. The gamemaster is encouraged to extrapolate events based on their own campaign, but an element of randomness has always pervaded Howard's stories. While these might be called convenient plot twists, they are also the foundations — tropes — of pulp adventure. In these stories, a coincidence is only a bad trope if it isn't also countered with the unexpected. A femme fatale turns out to be the ally the protagonist never knew they had. The plotting count that would see the protagonist dead is an ally of convenience against a greater foe.

Many players have read Howard's *Conan* stories. Even if they have not, they have likely read stories influenced by Howard. Remember, when Howard wrote Conan and other heroes, he created many of the tropes which are now commonplace in fantastic fiction. The gamemaster, then, is in the precarious position of honoring Howard's ideas while putting a fresh enough spin on them to keep players guessing.

Yet Howard's gifts and prodigious writings are not something every gamemaster has time, or perhaps the ability, to access. The tables above may be combined to create even more complicated inter-adventure events. One need not roll

on only one table, or be limited to a single roll made by the player. The player may use the first d20 roll to determine the overarching theme of the event, and then roll again on one or other tables outside that sphere. In so doing, the tables create more complex or unpredictable adventures.

The gamemaster can also allow the players to roll their own and make a second set of rolls, secret from the players' rolls, and interweave this second adventure thread into the one the players select. When present to the players, they may decide which path they wish to follow, if they can...

King Conan's player rolls a 9 on the first d20. This indicates a War event. Rolling 1d20, he gets a 13. Conan has 3 Fortune Points to spend. He uses all 3 to move the result three rows up the table, indicating a long-time rival kingdom discovers a weak spot. Conan has a long-standing animosity with the Hyperboreans, so the gamemaster chooses that kingdom.

To add other factors, the gamemaster has Conan's player roll 1d20 twice more, this time with no modifier. The first is a 19. The second is a 14. The result of 19 suggests a member of the royal court makes a truce with a foe. The gamemaster decides a member of Conan's court allies with Hyperborea in a bid to seize the throne from this barbarian upstart.

The 14 indicates a terror from the Outer Dark is about to be released. The gamemaster decides the traitor in court is being used to draw Conan himself to the north, where "the blood of a newly crowned king" shall open the gateway to this inhuman horror. Hyperborea hopes not only to eliminate Conan but bring forth this eldritch foe to lead their armies south across the Hyborian kingdoms.

Of course, harnessing an elder god is not nearly so simple as obtaining a measure of the Cimmerian's blood, however famous he may be.

NATURAL EVENTS

The Hyborian Age is a time of turmoil. Nations frequently go to war. Civil unrest causes upheaval in cities, and disease stalks the land. A ship's captain may count on one situation when they set sail, only to find that events at their destination have completely upended that voyage's purpose. Following are some of these events that might occur along the coasts of the Western Sea. They are, in terms of the age, the eternal trinity of maladies kingdoms must contend with: war, strife, and plague.

WAR

Nations go to war, marching armies to their borders and sending their fleets to sea. Along the coast of the Western Sea, Zingara and Argos vacillate between war and peace.

INTRIGUE EVENTS

Roll	Intrigue Event
1	A concubine or spouse betrays the ruler.
2	A captured foreign spy warns of assassination.
3-4	Members of the aristocracy plot against the ruler.
5-6	A long-lost heir has claim to the throne.
7-9	A rival nation wishes to marry to unite the two kingdoms.
10-12	A long dead king may soon be resurrected.
13-14	A member of the court is kidnapped or turns traitor.
15-16	Someone close to the ruler is abducted.
17-18	A person to whom the ruler owes an old debt calls in their marker.
19	A member of the court secretly negotiates a truce with a mortal foe.
20	A trusted ally of the ruler owes a huge debt to a foreign power.

WAR EVENTS

Roll	War Event
1	Foreign troops mass along the border.
2	A peasant leader foments revolt.
3-4	The aristocracy plans a coup with the backing of a foreign army.
5-6	A long-time rival kingdom exposes a weak point the ruler might exploit.
7-9	Barbarians harry a remote border of the kingdom.
10-12	The nobles demand war with another kingdom.
13-14	The Free Companions are looking for work, and the kingdom has the resources to hire them.
15-16	Pirates or brigands threaten trade within the country's borders.
17-18	A rival king has died, leaving an internecine struggle for that kingdom.
19	Long thought dead, a rival heir returns with a troupe of mercenaries at their command.
20	A kingdom bent on becoming an empire decides that the player character's kingdom is its next target.

UNNATURAL EVENTS

Roll	Unnatural Event
1	A popular prophet whose belief threatens the kingdom's pantheon.
2	An Elder God has a cult growing in popularity among the peasants and aristocracy alike.
3-4	Someone with royal blood visits the ruler a dream, bearing a message that only they can stop an unnatural power from reappearing.
5-6	A rival ruler is revealed to be under the influence of a foreign sorcerer.
7-9	Caravans have been waylaid mysteriously. Only one soldier sent to protect them has returned. He claimed to have met a god.
10-12	The priests of a god in the kingdom's pantheon have all had the same, disturbing dream.
13-14	A terror sealed in the Outer Dark since the sinking of Atlantis is rumored to have reappeared.
15-16	The alignment of stars is now propitious for an event that is said to unseat kings.
17-18	Black lotus dreams are blamed for a rival king's madness, but something darker lurks beneath them.
19	A cult has risen to such power as to threaten both the player character's kingdom and its neighbors.
20	A mysterious leader forged disparate bandit, barbarian, or pirate groups into a force strong enough to threaten the player character's grip on the throne.

KING CONAN'S COURT

As a king, Conan is uninterested in ceremony. Any tradition he adheres to is for the sake of the nobles and not himself. He cares not for loquacious meetings, nor the petty discussions required to managing an empire. Still, he is king and does his duty.

As king, he also remembers the days when he was not. While he is by no means instituting egalitarianism and the destruction of class, Conan does empathize with the common folk far more than any king in memory. He wages war prudently, rather than ego. He taxes appropriately. He builds that which improves the empire. While he must maintain the elevated halo of kingship, Conan himself does not abide by such rules in private.

He is, however, king, and has earned it. He tolerates no disloyalty nor cowardice. Any man or woman under his reign is expected to fight, think, or work as hard as he. He does not demand they do as well as he, for he is a barbarian and civilized folk cannot hope to keep up, but he does expect maximum effort.

He is fair, inspiring, and a hero to the people while a terror to Aquilonia's foes. The Hyborian Age will not see his like again.

When they are at war, the princes of Zingara are quick to hire mercenaries to protect their holdings and to hire the Freebooters to protect their coast and shipping. When they are at peace, the Freebooters may act more like pirates than privateers. Argos, when not at war with Zingara, may be at war with Shem or Stygia. Though famously isolationist, Stygia frequently sends raids into Shem and from time-to-time sends its black galleys out to harry other nations. There is always war.

Times of war present opportunity and danger to merchants. Nations at war have need of all manner of material. But an army may as likely take the goods it needs as pay for them. Great profits can follow a victory, but victory is never certain. War offers smugglers opportunities to ship goods between warring nations or to run goods past blockades.

STRIFE

Civil unrest can be as dangerous and even more unpredictable than war. Zingara is famous for the fractious nature of its princes, but no country is immune to strife. Even the famous autocrats of Stygia have their slave revolts and power struggles, their solutions simply lean toward poison and sorcery over brawling in the streets. Civil unrest can come about due to political turmoil, famine, disease, or natural disaster. Zingara is famous for the ongoing political

disputes and duels between its would be rulers. Argos sees conflicts between its wealthy merchants, privileged nobles, and laborers. Strife can also create waves of refugees that spill over into adjacent lands, creating yet another destabilizing effect.

Strife can create opportunities for adventure as one faction seeks to gain advantage over another or when a losing side seeks to escape the retribution from the victors. Smugglers thrive on strife that creates demands for weapons, food, and other goods. Such strife makes transporting information, refugees, diplomats, and spies even more profitable. Strife creates uncertainty and unrest that can destroy a merchant's fortune or create opportunities to gain fabulous wealth.

PLAGUE

The cities of the Hyborian Age have poor sanitation, crowded conditions, and limited medical care that make them ripe for outbreaks of disease. Ships may avoid a city where there is an outbreak of plague, and ships coming from the city may be turned away by other ports. Yet, ships are also great incubators of disease that can spread quickly through the people on board. A ship filled with the sick may not be able to find a port, or a trader might encounter a ship drifting listlessly after its crew was overcome by disease.

In the cities, the sick may be quarantined or exiled, either driven out or shipped to some isolated island or mountain valley. Fear of the plague may spark riots that result in fire or other wanton destruction intended to purge sickness, or just the sick themselves, from a city.

Plague can also create a demand for medicines, and even in the harsh times of the Hyborian Age, there are missionaries of Mitra and other religious orders dedicated to caring for the sick. A physician or a missionary may seek a ship to take them to a city where there is an outbreak of plague or to go in search of needed medicine. Ship captains are not known for their altruism, so heavy bags of local coin can make the difference between life and death for the sick.

"What could tempt a pirate or buccaneer to this naked land?" muttered Valenso, staring into the sparkling contents of his goblet.

"What could tempt a count of Kordava?" retorted Zarono, and an avid light burned an instant in his eyes.

"The rottenness of a royal court might sicken a man of honor," remarked Valenso."

— "The Black Stranger"

UNNATURAL EVENTS

Conan was no stranger to the supernatural, the weird and magical darkness that permeates all the age. The real world alters in the shadow of the Outer Dark. The unnatural corrupts and bends straight life into crueler, inhuman forms. Conan's life as king, just like his life beforehand, is prone to events begat by wizards, executed by demons, and even invoked by fell necromancy.

As such, these strange and oft terrible occurrences should beset any such ruler, as well as making for epic and memorable adventures.

DEAD ACHERON

"Upon fell Acheron's bones are built the empires of Aquilonia, Nemedias and Argos," is writ in "The Nemedian Chronicles". Aquilonia and Nemedias are particularly at risk during Conan's reign, and in the times beforehand. Acheron was an empire of sorcerers, ones who were in league with the god Set and made pacts with things from the Outer Dark. Such corruption, such taint does not simply vanish. If the bones of Acheron comprise the foundations of these kingdoms, the Outer Dark is their marrow.

The resurrection of Xaltotun, and his attempt to bring Acheron back into the world, are but one hazard these kingdoms face. Deep in the earth or high in the mountains, remnants of Acheron lurk. In the hills it is even thought that degenerate tribes of Acheronian purebloods still live. Who can say what magic their shamans access on full-mooned nights?

Demons bound in the earth, the resurrection of others like Xaltotun or artifacts beyond those Conan encountered — any these might appear and suddenly shift the balance of power.

SCRYING

Though somewhat uncommon in the Hyborian Age, great sorcerers are capable of scrying. They can see that which is far away and even out of the era they inhabit. This creates a singular opportunity for spying. How does one defend against the unseen eye? How does one defend against a foe who has seen the future?

Such questions demand creative answers. If the players are used to sorting the Outer Dark with swordplay and will alone, the gamemaster may wish to add elements of espionage to their list of unnatural problems. A human spy can be rooted out and interrogated. But what of a demon, an all-seeing eye? How does the court even detect such a thing?

OTHER SORCERY

High atop Mount Yimsha, the self-titled the Master of Yimsha creates an unnatural disease which afflicts the king of Vendhya. What if such a plague were imposed on a player character ruler, or even the whole of their territory? Such are the threats posed by the powerful sorcerers of the age. Powerful wizards can literally move mountains. Can anything stop them from creating any of the natural disasters above using wholly unnatural means?

The flood or mudslide which kills many, stops trade, and blocks military movement might very well be the work of a sorcerer rather than nature. For that matter, nearly any event can imbued with the corruption of the Outer Dark. That influence is a dark shadow which changes the features of any scene under which it falls.

CORRUPTION FROM THE OUTER DARK

Perhaps the most insidious, and often hardest to spot, consequence of sorcery, or the presence of Acheron, is the corruption it leaves behind. Any who dabble with magic have felt its pull. Those who pursue the path of sorcery have already corrupted portions of their soul. But what if that corruption enters the court?

What if a close member of the royal coterie becomes indebted to the darkness, to a demon, or to her own lust for power through unnatural means? The weed that is sorcery grows quickly and, before one is aware, it may have spread through seemingly loyal nobles like a plague. It seduces and empowers people to do things they otherwise might not. One need not start off with bad intentions. One need only scrape the surface of the legacy of the Great Old Ones and their servitors to invite the host of them inside.

Perhaps that, ultimately, lead to Acheron's fall? Perhaps even the might, malicious wizards of that lost era could not control that which they summoned. Perhaps the Hyborians defeated Acheron after it had rotted on the inside. If so, certainly that rot did not disappear. Like a virus frozen in arctic ice, it lurks, waiting for some light to shine upon it and let it out again.

THE END OF AN ERA

With *Conan the King*, the career of the legendary thief, wanderer, and conqueror comes to a close. But the tale of his age does not. In the "The Hyborian Age", Howard described events after Conan's time, and how the world, as it inevitably does, turned from civilization to barbarism.

In this history, the Hyborian kingdoms meet their end not from decaying values and civilization, but from greed and overreach. Aquilonia is the primary engine for this

overreach and, as she begins to expand, she turns her neighbors into vassals. Only Nemedia consistently stands against the might of the Phoenix.

Meanwhile, a foolish Mitran missionary called Arus travels to the land of the Picts to civilize them. What he does instead inspires them to take up the secrets of steel and conquer half the known world. Yet they do not seek to build an empire of shining towers, but to pull them down and live in their ruins.

At this same time, the Hyrkanians sweep in on horseback from round the Vilayet Sea, and after many wars, take nearly the other half of the world as their own. In time, Aquilonia and even Nemedia fall as their armies swell with barbarian mercenaries, and the northern tribes of Cimmeria and Nordheim sweep from the cold north, cutting a path all the way to the southern coast of the Western Sea.

Another cataclysm finishes off the ruins of the Hyborian Age, and Conan, along with his world, are largely lost to the mists of time. Modern peoples trace their origins to such blood as Cimmeria, Asgard, Stygia, and Turan, but these names appear as if hooked from the collective unconscious, with no real memory of their having actually been.

There, Howard stops, leaving us with a history which spans from Kull to Jack Kirowan — and all Howard's heroes in between. Their canvas is the history of the world. Again and again people repeat the same mistakes in the world Howard sees. His stories are but glimpses at of some heroes of these varying times, and he died before he could complete his work.

Five hundred years after Conan's day, many a thousand score barbarians have trod their feet over the jeweled thrones of the Earth. The minareted towers have fallen, their empire hollow and filled with Picts and Hyrkanians, neither of whom wish to rebuild civilization. It is a dark time, the end of the Hyborian Age, one Dr. Kirowan likens to Europe after the fall of Rome. But this analogy cannot itself encompass the totality of ruin or barbarism which pulled down the so-called great works of civilization.

In time, another cataclysm will pull apart the globe and reshape it into our modern picture, but that time has not yet arrived. Instead, a few remaining points of civilization serve as beacons. Only remains of Nemedia and Turan boast anything approaching a city, and most people live in small clans or rude villages. Waddle huts replaced the baked-brick of homes of Shem, the marbled monuments of Tarantia. Gods older than time become known in this era, and it is the cults of Hyborian era that become heretical.

It is a time of adventure in an age bereft of organized nations. People roam as they will, the great Pict empire is little more than a confederation of tribes, while the Hyrkanians have once again turned to nomadism and raiding. From the ground poke the broken columns of once-proud Khorshemish, as in the desert the walls of Sabatea are

so covered by the sand as to appear like fences for farmers, though farming, too, is largely a thing of the past.

Humanity threw itself backwards in evolution, in that cyclical way it does in Howard's world, and what is left is a savage, untamed land more like Conan himself than the foreign lands over which his sandaled feet trod.

Gone in this time are the mighty armies. In their place remain only squabbling warbands and chieftains. The greatest prizes of the day lie in the old ruins of the Hyborian Age and the secrets of dark magic they contain. There are no libraries remaining, nor tutors. Demons are summoned as before, but humans have little knowledge with which to bind them. The world sits on the precipice of total destruction, felt in the heartbeat of every man, woman, and child.

These are grim times, times which call for adventurers of strong mettle. It is the death of history's most incredible, if forgotten, age.

GODS OF THE END

Most of the gods with which students of the Hyborian Age are familiar have little meaning now. Only Jhebbal-Sag and Erlik carry on in any real capacity. Instead, a host of new religions, primitive and animistic have spread, and the Great Old Ones find new popularity among a populace who dream not of spire rising into the night, but of the night falling across the end of time.

The Old Gods

Somewhere in the foothills of Cimmeria, Crom is still known, but the Cimmerians who swept out of their grim, gray land and cut their way south have largely forgotten him. Mitra, the ironic catalyst for this barbaric conquest, is forgotten in all but name. Old Set is once again known as Yig, and his temples are desert altars rather than pyramids. None invoke Bel, for thievery is no longer an occupation so much as a death sentence. There are no calls to Anu or Ishtar, their temples are wrecked or covered in the dust and cobwebs of centuries.

Where the Hyborian Age had no singular religion, neither does its end, though all share a general faith in doom; all-encompassing and pervading every individual spiritual belief. The people of this day know time is short. It is as if the echoes of the next cataclysm travel in reverse, bounding off one and all.

The New Gods

Though times are dark, they are only so compared to the heights of the Hyborian empires, and those are all but myth now. The people of the age know no other way of life, and their barbaric existence is apparently the natural state of humanity. In some ways, the hoary gilding of civilization has been forcibly stripped from humankind, leaving only that primal spark of life behind.

Such people worship gods of action, death, and chaos. Animism returns with great flourish, and shamans take the place of holy ones in the ruined cities of old empires. From the broken plinth of a statue of Ishtar, blood may now flow as animals are sacrificed unto a misunderstood old god so that the warlord of the city shall be kind in the coming harsh winter.

The gamemaster can invent, corrupt, pervert, and otherwise create new gods, uninfluenced by those who came before, as desired. Perhaps the beginnings of the more recent pantheons begin during this epoch, with storm and thunder gods taking the place of forgotten gods atop mountains and under the earth.

The Old Ones, long suppressed, might rise in the darkening of this new age. The time would be easy to know, for then humanity would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all people shouting and killing and reveling in joy. Then the liberated Old Ones would teach them new ways to shout and kill and revel and enjoy themselves, and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom. Meanwhile the cult, by appropriate rites, must keep alive the memory of those ancient ways and shadow forth the prophecy of their return.

The Oldest Gods

While people may have all but rid themselves of civilization, they have not rid themselves of those things which lurk in the dark corners of the Earth or those that originate from the deep gulfs between space and time. The Great Old ones speak more readily to uneducated ears, their chaos reflects the world as it has become, rather than the relative order which was.

Openly, now, groups worship the beings of the Outer Dark without fear of rapprochement. This makes these worshippers no saner than before, only less secretive.

THE POST-HYBORIAN WORLD

The shining kingdoms are all gone. In their hollowed ruins are barbarians, some sitting upon jeweled thrones served by the naked scions of kings, some under the outlander's whip, forgetting their civilized heritage and surviving as do rats in modern cities.

The old ways are gone. Surviving is a reality all its own. It is as if the harshest corners of Conan's world spread to encompass the whole of it. There are few steadings here and there, but no place is secure. Raiders thunder across broken roads that once carried forth armies and, instead of making war against another king, seek only to plunder the remnants of an age lost.



This creates new challenges for player characters and gamemasters alike. There is no reliable means of communication between one place and another. Gold holds less value than steel, and those who remember how to work it are sorcerers in their own rights.

Actual powers from the Outer Dark are as frightening as ever, but people are in no place to reject such help in a savage land as this. Where raiders dwell, behind them lie wizards who have made pacts with demons and whose ambitions toward empire are small compared to those who came before.

It is a place ripe for the corruption of unnatural, of Ancient Ones and Great Old Ones such as Cthulhu. Indeed, the entirety of humanity may fall to the old ones in times such as this. Perhaps it is the dim light of civilization alone which prevents his perverse contagion for dissemination. People look not under the earth for hell, but over the next hillside.

These are simpler times, and someone like Conan might loom even larger. These are days for which the barbarous mind is best-suited, and any man or woman who will persevere does so without the finery of the gone world.

What has been forgotten in the last half millennia? Shipbuilding? Writing? Working steel and other metals? This is a culture of stone and wood. Bone and tooth. Those who possess metal hold it sacred, those who can make steel are valued by the mightiest chieftains.

Perhaps empires will be carved out before the end, but they will be small and dark, full of strange ways and unholy demon-gods from beyond mankind's ken. This is the world in decline. It is, perhaps, little different than the world at the start of the Hyborian Age — wild, dangerous, unmapped, and free.

MYTH & MAGIC

Four men stood about the ebony table on which lay the green sarcophagus that gleamed like carven jade. In the upraised right hand of each man a curious black candle burned with a weird greenish light.

— *The Hour of the Dragon*

Myths accrete around royalty; legends of the power of the rulers of humankind are told throughout the dominions of the earth. Secret stories of healing hands, of long dead monarchs appearing in visions to warn of imminent disaster, of the connection forged between the ruler and the land which results in the wounds of the monarch manifesting themselves in the earth... all are legends whispered between folk in the corners of insalubrious taverns, glancing darkly towards the palaces which dominate their cities.

There is something magical about royalty — or so many would have it. It cannot simply be an accident of birth, they say, that elevates one so far above others. It must be ordained. It must be inscribed in the firmaments, or contained in the blood. It cannot, after all, be merely a combination of good fortune and a firmly swung sword.

While Conan's career may give the lie to such superstitions, there are many more myths which would seem to provide the irrefutable proof of the connection between the strange powers which form undercurrents in the world, and those who rule over other men and women. That is, of course, if one chooses to believe any of them.

Below are some of the more remarkable myths and claims of magic levelled at the rulers of the Hyborian epoch; perhaps some of them are true, or most frighteningly, perhaps all of them are.



THE TOUCH OF KINGS

In Aquilonia, it has long been claimed that the very touch of a royal hand can cure the most pernicious of diseases. Whether it is the coughing rictus, which arches the spine and claws out the lungs, or the plague, which leaves the sufferer studded with weeping black buboes, all can supposedly be alleviated with the brush of a monarch's hand. For this reason, rulers of Aquilonia have traditionally held open courts, once a year, welcoming the afflicted in and bestowing upon them the touch of royalty. Some have indeed seemed to be entirely cured by their brief contact with one of the royal blood. Others have continued to sicken and die.

Priests of Mitra have claimed that the success, or lack thereof, in a monarch's ability to relieve the suffering of the ill, reflects their closeness to Mitra and their fitness to rule. For those who practice the way of the god, ruling justly and wisely, caring for the people and tending to the land, their touch is capable of curing even the most hopeless of cases. For those who indulge themselves in carnality and other debauchery... well, they are as likely to hasten the end of those they touch. There is little evidence to really suggest that the touch of anyone of royal blood can cure the sick — whether in Aquilonia or elsewhere.

KING KHANUN

There are tales of a King Khanun, who ruled over much of the Black Kingdoms in the distant past, who was able to use his blood to not only heal the ill, but also to invest his

soldiers with great strength, and ferocious commitment to the cause. His chosen warriors — the honor guard of Khanun — were infamous for their savagery in battle and their unwillingness to leave a battlefield while any foe still lived.

It is said that, in a forgotten and crumbled palace, there are canopic jars which contain the ichor of Khanun, which never congeals. Some of the Black Kingdom's greatest warriors visit the palace, to try and obtain this potent elixir. Few have ever returned. The scant number who do gibber of undying, hulking warriors who bleed from their eyes and rasp the name of their lost king in gasping breaths, even as they cleave flesh from bone.

PROPHECY

The fate of a nation is tied to the fate of its ruler; inseparable, indivisible. When a king or queen dies, there is politicking, the frenzy of power-grabbing and sudden vengeance inflicted on those who were once untouchable but are now, suddenly, alone. When a dynasty falls, entire nations collapse into chaos, civil war, and anarchy. It is small wonder then, that so many expend their time and money attempting to discern the fate of monarchs in the stars. Where there are powerful rulers, there are those who wish to know everything they can about them — from their health, their beliefs and their temperament, to their life expectancy.

While some of this information can be discovered through simple observation and a well-placed spy, much of it cannot. And in the Hyborian Age, there are many who offer themselves as capable of divining the truth. Whether these self-proclaimed prognosticators are, in fact, genuine in their gifts is another matter. Certainly, there are those whose skills are entirely exaggerated. But there are others whose gifts are all too genuine and drawn from a source few would dare to whisper about. The methods for prophesying the fate of rulers are as divergent as those who claim to be able to read them; whether it is keeping careful track of the intersection between stars and planets in the night sky, poring through the entrails of the sacrificial lamb or listening to the whispering breeze as it stirs the branches of a sacred grove, there are always means of identifying the path of the future.

There are also creatures who can be called up, drawn from the shadows between worlds, and made to answer questions. All of these different methods for eliciting the future carry with them risk — of inaccuracy, or of madness. One might find the seeker killed by an enraged employer, who had been promised a queen's imminent death only to be thwarted. The other... well, the other might result in one's soul being torn from your body. Such is the cost of all magic, especially any magic which works.

Conan was silent. A vague shadow crossed his mind like a prophecy. In years to come he was to remember Amalric's words, when the dream became the reality.

— “Black Colossus”

Some monarchs, particularly those of Stygia and Vendhya, keep their own astrologers and prophets in court, routinely appraised of the shifting portents and their effect upon the schemes and strategies of the kingdom itself. In other nations, it is strictly forbidden to cast the prophecy of a ruler — why, the question runs, would anyone not seeking to murder the king want to know when they would die? In Hyrkania, the punishment for casting such a fortune is to be pulled apart by four of the king's horses. If you are of noble birth. Those of a less elevated station are merely buried alive.

Punishments are a good deal less permanent in Nemedi and Aquilonia, though fortune-telling and prophecy are frequently frowned upon, or considered ‘uncivilized’. This is especially true in Nemedi, where poetry and art are considered so central to the nation's concepts of itself; to claim the stars and planets as being interpretable by mortals is to be guilty of the highest hubris. Only art can attempt to describe the stars, and even then, must know itself beaten.

MITRA

The Aquilonians, as a rule, are devoted to the worship of Mitra. While he is far from the only god whose name is intoned by devotees throughout the land, he is indisputably most prominent. Or, perhaps it would be more correct to say, his priesthood is most prominent. It has ensured this prominence both through its care and ministration for the people throughout the Hyborian nations, but none more so than Aquilonia — even when faced with the depredations of tyrannical kings, of civil war and tempestuous nature, the temples of Mitra have always provided succor for those that required it.

They have also been swift in their persecution of any other incipient religion in the region. The priesthood of Asura was subjected to a lengthy pogrom, pursued and hounded everywhere they attempted to settle and preach. Until the coming of Conan the King, and even then, however, Conan was unable to prevent the Asurans from being driven underground. Despite this resistance to potential challenger faiths, the Mitra church remains a force for good in the Hyborian Age; it is relentless in its pursuit of black magic within its ranks and beyond, prepared to go to any lengths to deny the supremacy of the darkness beyond the world.

"Some gods are strong to harm, others, to aid; at least so say their priests. Mitra of the Hyborians must be a strong god, because his people have builded their cities over the world.

— "Queen of the Black Coast"

Mitra is said to look favorably upon those who would fight to resist the black rites of cruel sorcerers. Indeed, in person of great sages of the past, or in visions bestowed upon the chosen, Mitra visits his agents in this endless war, sending prophetic dreams and visions to guide those who would stand against the darkness. Those who are blessed in this fashion find even the bleakest of odds suddenly turning in their favor; despite these miraculous visitations, Mitra himself is never seen (though his the god is always depicted and referred to as male).

Only his mark is ever perceived: the Phoenix, potent reminder of Mitra's inexhaustible power. Sometimes this is a mark inscribed upon a blade, at others upon an amulet. Each offers its own protection against the things which enter in from the outer black, shapeless and horrific and craving the warmth of living flesh to sustain them. The mark, or Sign of the Phoenix, is the greatest scourge of those creatures from the outer dark known of in the Hyborian Age.

Mitra is also worshipped extensively in Nemedias, though his church is far less prominent there and would not be capable of exerting the same degree of influence over the practice of other religions as their peers in Aquilonia. Nevertheless, Mitra is still considered the chief god of the nation, with regular parades carried out in his name and a famous rite: the Phoenix Parade, conducted once a year. The Phoenix Parade involves the carrying of an enormous, beautifully made gold-painted wooden phoenix down, through each Nemedian town and city, until the procession reaches the city gate. Once there, the phoenix is set alight and burns, with incredible brightness and ferocity for a few minutes. As the flames die away, a child (typically a small girl) is sent into the smoke and returns, a few moments later, bearing a much smaller replica of the immolated phoenix.

Mitra's blessing is, so goes the belief, secured by this promise of the city's loyalty to him. There are tales of the dreadful fate which awaits a city where the rite is improperly conducted. Famine, invasion and destruction have all been claimed as the result of a failed Phoenix Parade and expiating the sin of such a failure is a lengthy and difficult process. Doing so often requires the intervention of senior priests of Mitra from other nations, who offer their consultation and guidance. They rarely do so for free.

MAGIC AND POETRY

As unlikely as it may appear, especially to the battle-hardened mercenaries who are forced to endure them in taverns, poets and actors possess power. True, it may not be as immediately obvious as a sword to the stomach, but to those who understand its uses, it is a formidable and deadly tool.

There is a reason Rinaldo the Poet was chosen to be among the conspirators who sought to usurp Conan's throne. There is a reason Conan's advisors abjured him to be wary of the effects of Rinaldo's final masterpiece "The Lament for the King". And it is not only through seizing and stirring the emotions of the populace that poets and actors can seek to shape the world; it is also through the performance of certain words and certain pieces of theatre. For what is a spell, after all, but a series of words? The right words, in the right order, in the right context, can achieve much, can achieve magic. Quite literally.

It is said that, in the reign of Conan, a company of players accidentally called forth an eldritch horror — through recreating the ostensibly fictional conjuring in a play called "Festus the Scholar". This indescribable abomination dwells still in the town which it reduced to rubble. There are some who claim that the play was written with the intention of summoning such evil, a spell deliberately concealed within the soliloquies and the choreographed entrances and exits of the various players all gradually accrete. The audience's cheers, laughter and condemnation of the villainous Festus...all result in a tempest of magic invocation, rending the thin veil which separates the world from the clutching tendrils of the Outer Dark. The name of the person who wrote Festus the Scholar is disputed. Some attribute it to Rinaldo the Poet himself, claiming this as his final attempt to assassinate Conan. Others claim it is the work of a Stygian magician and spy, Anen Deshret, who is well known and rightly feared for his power and the whimsical fashion with which he wields it.

As the priests of Mitra have cut down and cast out any who would draw upon the black arts, so those who would use them have been forced to become subtler in their use. For the unwary, there is nowhere truly safe, even in the apparent sanctuary of the Aquilonian and Nemedian nations.

In Nemedias, poetry has long been associated with magic, with those who incant and sing recognized as being touched by the gods in much the same way as they are in the frigid north. Those who can recall the old tales and the old ways, and recite them in verse, are in some way in touch with the past. To the Nemedians, there is a spiritual component to this; the inspiration of the poet is partly explicable by talent, but as much by the closeness of their connection with the past, with the spirits of the dead.



Song is an element of the extensive series of Nemedian funeral rites which are so important in that kingdom. The dead are recalled, remembered and preserved in verses and in melodies which reflect their strengths and achievements but which also form part of extensive familial lays. These great works are composed incrementally over hundreds of years, with each new generation adding a new verse until the full recitation of the piece can last hours or even days.

The great families of Nemedias often maintain their own bards, whose tasks are to remember the family lays, improve them, and ensure that they remain fashionable, adding to them when a major event transpires. There is a magic in such work, and those who are capable of it are often said to be 'spirit-touched', their eyes rarely focused on anything in front of them, but always wandering, distant and mazed.

A QUESTION OF LINEAGE

It is said that the royal line of Aquilonia is tainted. Certainly, the stability of its kings and queens has long been in question. When Conan seized the throne, few were truly sorry to see his predecessor replaced by someone for whom the execution of his people was more a duty and less a pleasure.

There are many stories which have sought to explain the apparent poisoning of the Aquilonian royal line; some have blamed incest, others merely the unfortunate combination of privilege and lack of consequences.

There are, however, much stranger stories. Stories which make reference to water spirits. The oldest, and strangest of these tales even give a name to the water spirit — Lusineme. Lusineme, so goes the story, was a powerful sprite who ensnared the king of Aquilonia's affections and married him, bearing him three children, all of whom would at one point sit upon the throne. The mysterious queen outlived both her husband and all three of her children, never seeming to age but never seeking to take the throne for herself, despite the certain fact that had she wished to, few would have tried to prevent her. Eventually, after her final child had died, leaving the throne to her grandchildren, Lusineme simply disappeared, leaving behind only a series of strange messages which have been recorded, in garbled versions in numerous grimoire.

Those scholars who have paid some attention to this myth, no matter how speculative or unusual it might be, all posit some connection between the mysterious Lusineme and the daughters of Ymir, the sullen and treacherous god of the frozen north. Of course, many more scholars dismiss the idea of such a water spirit as preposterous, and are probably right. Those who attempt to reconcile the ancient wisdom

of the past with the knowledge of the present day assert that Lusineme may have been a powerful sorceress, who was married to the King and whose power both ensured the success of his line but also corrupted it — for there is little which magic touches which is not warped by it.

Whether there is even the slightest grain of truth to the myths of Lusineme is difficult to say; certainly, there are many legends of strange, water-spirits in the folklore of Aquilonia. Whether this means one once ruled the land is a different matter. It does, however, offer further explanation for the speed with which Conan's acclamation as monarch turned to opprobrium; mighty warrior though he might have been, Conan's parentage was not that of a demi-god, as many of the kings and princes of Aquilonia have subsequently attempted to claim.

ANCROU

Nemedias is famed for many things: its knights and their legendary ferocity in battle; the veneration of art and the importance of preserving memory. These things combine in the astonishing cemeteries and graveyards found in the major Nemedian cities. Every tombstone is a masterpiece of engraving, of carving and etching. Those are of the highest ranks award themselves vast sepulchers — adorned with frescoes from the most gifted of artists and ornamented with exquisite mosaics and small, mechanically powered, fountains — each a monument to the wealth and prestige of its occupant and the ingenuity of its builders. It is an oft-commented upon thing, by visitors from places where such things are common, that none of these edifices are ever vandalized or stolen from. There are few watchmen set at the gates of these enormous cemeteries. And yet, even the most desperate and conscienceless thief will not risk prying free a few gems from a mosaic attached to a tomb. They fear the Ancrou. The Ancrou is the subject of a vast array of Nemedian legends; the name, in an old Hyborian dialect, translates as 'the graveyard watcher' and the ominous figure of a tall man, in a slouched hat and a shapeless robe decorates the gates to all Nemedian cemeteries. But it is not simply a folk belief; there are far too many cases of the Ancrou's very tangible revenge for it to be relegated to mere superstition.

Once, it is attested in "The Nemedian Chronicles", the great thief Shan Sheev, sought to liberate the intricate silver diadem buried with one of Nemedias's greatest queens. Sheev, of course, succeeded. Initially. Three days later he was found dismembered, in a locked room. The mark of the Ancrou had been placed upon him — a single thumb mark, located squarely, in the center of the forehead. The diadem had been returned to the Queen's brow.

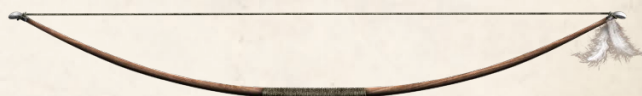
Other even more fanciful tales claim that Sheev's family were butchered in the same fashion, over a thousand miles away in Vendhya. The Ancrou's nature is not much speculated upon in Nemedias — is it an incarnation of death itself? Some dread ghoul or ghost? A demon from the outer dark? There are few prepared to hazard a guess. Instead, the Nemedians continue to decorate their imposing and beautiful cemeteries, content that they are protected. Outsiders who might scoff at this strange belief are usually quickly dissuaded not to; it is not hard to catch glimpses of the Ancrou, watching, half-observed from sight, at any funeral. Whether this is the actual Ancrou, or itself a funerary tradition designed to warn off thieves, who can say? But the myth is far too stubborn to die.

THE SEAT OF POWER

Thrones possess a magic all of their own. Men and women kill for the right to sit upon one. Whole nations have burned and died over the disputed ownership of a chair. But each throne is, of course, unique and bears with it the legacy of those who have sat in it before. The throne of Aquilonia is, perhaps unusually, somewhat plain. Made of stone and unchanged in the centuries since it was carved from a block of granite, its very permanence has resulted in dozens of tales of magic being imputed to it. As long as it remains intact, so goes the most popular myth, Aquilonia will never fall. It was also said that only one possessed of the royal blood could sit upon the throne without suffering painful death; this particular legend has not been much believed for many years.

The throne of Nemedias is more remarkable still, as it is formed from the bones and teeth of some vast and ancient creature which was, so go the stories, hunted to death by the first king of Nemedias (other scholars claim that the bones were found during work on the palace though such prosaic claims are much less popular). What the creature was none have been able to say. Some have opined that the bones resemble those of the great forest dragons, still found roaming the earth, though somewhat larger than those degenerate species. Others, that the bones are of nothing terrestrial. Those who prefer their myths to be quaint claim that the bones are in fact the horns of tame unicorns, dedicated and offered up to the king of Nemedias in tribute.

This seems unlikely but just as the memories of royal cruelty and dissolution are quickly forgotten in favor of comforting recollections of alms given and reprieves granted, so too do myths shift and alter to suit the temperaments and desires of those remembering them.



THE SORCERER'S PATRON

The wealth and prestige of kings, queens and other ruling aristocrats makes their patronage, and their favor, invaluable. Artists, musicians, actors, all compete with each other to secure the most lavish investment in their various masterpieces — but for some rulers, their money and their praise must yield more tangible rewards. The history of the Hyborian epoch is littered with tales of those who sought to secure the benefits of magic, plying magicians and sorcerers with gold. Power, longevity, success in war... all of these are within the purview of the greatest sorcerers. Or so they would have you believe.

Many are far less powerful than they claim. Perhaps the majority possess no magical abilities at all, and are merely charlatans... after all, kings and queens are not immune to the lure of tricksters who promise much and deliver little. Far more dangerous are those who do possess power — after all, why share it for gold when one can remove the royal family entirely and install oneself as ruler.

It is said that this is how Stygia became as it is today: a warren of corrupt priests and dark rituals. The Stygian kings sought out sorcerers and wizards of all kinds, relentlessly trying to assemble more and greater power. Xaltotun, Thoth-Amon, and others like them have served or ruled mighty cities and nations, using their power to secure fealty. Despite such hazards, kings and queens throughout the Thurian continent remain easily swayed by the potential of magic to increase their power, or procure immortality for them.

Perhaps such a conviction is to be expected; how long can a person remain elevated above all others before beginning to believe that the immutable laws of the cosmos do not truly apply to them? Perhaps, each believes that they will be the ruler powerful enough to escape corruption, or to find a loyal sorcerer or some such claim. Whatever the deception may be, it retains its power.

...he thrust a broad white hand into his fur-trimmed robe. When he brought it forth again it was as if he cupped in his palm a ball of living fire.

The other three drew in their breath sharply, and the dark, powerful man who stood at the head of the sarcophagus whispered: "The Heart of Ahriman!"

— The Hour of the Dragon

THE HEART OF AHRIMAN

There are few sorcerers in the world whose legend is more widely known, and name more dreaded, than Ahriman. In the long ago of the world, long before the Hyborian epoch inscribed itself upon the sinews of the world, Ahriman was the high priest of Set in the ancient city of Python. There his power waxed greatly and he used his sorcerous might to render himself a terrifying legend amongst the peoples of the world, though, at first none knew how he achieved his dark miracles.

The powers of the outer dark were his to command; he could raise the very dead from their tombs, summon eldritch horrors from the deepest abysses of space and time and live far beyond the span of mortal man. But, as was eventually discovered at great cost, his powers were not all of his own making. They were inextricably linked with the ancient and terrible gemstone — the Heart of Ahriman.

Who knows where Ahriman came by the gem, or what dread magic he performed to bind its powers to him, but perform them he did. Stories tell of thousands of sacrifices made to unnamed gods, of the lifeblood collected and poured into the gem. It is claimed that runes of power were etched into it, so hideous and redolent with eldritch power that only a blind craftsman could trace them without dying and even he was driven mad by their shape alone. Whatever the truth, at the end, the Heart of Ahriman existed.

With the gemstone, Ahriman became almost unstoppable. Acheron became the mightiest empire on the face of the earth. The mightiest and the darkest. Finally, having seen too much taken by the Acheronians, at the behest of their master Ahriman, a barbarian snuck into Ahriman's palace and plucked the stone from his sleeping breast.

Acheron fell, no longer to dominate a continent and Ahriman fled into exile, dying in Stygia, his unnatural longevity departing with the stone to which he had bound his life. But Ahriman's spirit did not depart; it was connected to the stone. While the stone endured, Ahriman was never truly dead. He waited, without thought and without shape, for it to be returned to him. And when it was, he rose again, to engage in a hideous plot against the King of Aquilonia, Conan the Cimmerian.

This was three thousand years after the fall of Acheron — such was the power of Ahriman, such was the power of his heart. The Heart itself is a gem stone; huge and red and seeming, in the light, to erupt with flame. It is enough to dazzle or even blind the unprepared and none who see it can deny its evident power. The Heart of Ahriman is a magical object of unspeakable power and it has to be destroyed, lest the world once again fall beneath its sway...

CHAPTER 5

ENCOUNTERS

Its neck arched, but before it could dart, Conan whipped his knife from under his mantle and struck like a flicker of lightning. The broad blade split that wedge-shaped head and sheared deep into the thick neck.

—The Hour of the Dragon

Even in civilized areas of the Hyborian age, all manner of threats arise to waylay and kill the unwary traveler. By far the most common of these in court is the scheming, nefarious mind whose machinations lead to death. Yet there are darker forces that work their tendrils through the windows of a queen's balcony, into the ear of an advisor's mind, and these are to be feared more so than any rude violence.

CREATURES OF THE NIGHT

People fears the night instinctively. Their atavistic memories recall what horrors bounded the slim circle of fire they tended when the world was young. Nemedian scholars, too, recall in no-faint pen the legends of fallen Acheron and, in an effort to fulfill the ambitions of their king, raise that which they cannot control.

BLACK HOUND (TOUGHENED, HORROR)

It is an age where one can make deals with demons, and those who do find their fate sealed. Upon their death, as agreed upon by a given pact, black hounds come to claim the soul of the unfortunate mortal who made the agreement.

These hounds carry the soul away into the netherworld or Outer Dark where they are forever bound to the demon that claimed them. There is, however, a rumored solution to this dilemma and it lies in the nature of the pact.

Should parties otherwise unknown to the deal witness (or hear the screams) of the one claimed, they may choose to intervene. In so doing, they demonstrate a selflessness which demons reject. Yet rejection of this altruism is not enough, the would-be heroes must defeat the hounds. If they fail, their souls, too, may be dragged to hell.

Black hounds also guard the graves and tombs of those who made such pacts. One could wander into them without even realizing a burial was near. They guard the secrets the demon gave the mortal, and fight as viciously to protect those secrets as they did to take the mortal's soul.

Only those deep into the lore of demonology of Aquilonia or Nemedia know of such beasts, or the means of summoning them.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	6	5	9
Agility	Brawn	Coordination	
11	11	10	



FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	2	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 9
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Horror), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Bite (M):** Reach 1, 5 , 2H, Vicious 1
- **Howls in the Night (T):** Range L, 4  mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Beast:** The hound can use its Fortitude Area of Expertise to make Threaten Attacks.
- **Bound by the Laws of Hell:** The soul of anyone killed by the hound is cast into hellfire and cannot be summoned by any means short of the *Barter the Soul* talent.
- **Dread Creature 2**
- **Ever-approaching Horror:** At Medium and Close Range the dog's *Howls in the Night* attack gains the Vicious 1 Quality. If the subject the hound has been sent for is driven mad by the *Howls*, they die of fright.
- **Inured to Cold, Fear, Fire, and Pain**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Rend the Soul:** When a hound bites the one it has been sent for, it can spend 2 Doom to inflict one extra Wound which cannot be avoided, even with a Fortune point. This is in addition to other Wounds inflicted, if any.
- **Sorcerer:** The hound can counter any spell by paying Doom equal to the number of successes rolled by the caster. If the caster is the one it was sent for, the hound can counter any spell for 1 Doom.

SLAVE OF THE RING
(NEMESIS, HORROR)

Tied to the Ring of Set, this demonic creature was summoned by Thoth-amon to kill Count Ascalante, his former master and tormentor. It is a four-legged shadow creature from the Outer Dark whose visage looks like the mummified face of he who summoned it.

Yellow-eyed, long-taloned, and nightmarish, this creature finds its prey and slays them. It then turns to any other target on its fell list. Fast, ferocious, and horrifying, a Slave to the Ring could be many things, but the prevailing theory

among sorcerers is that they are the souls of those who gave themselves to the Ring in life, only to serve it for the duration of time.

Servants of the Ring, like Thoth-amon, bend these creatures to their will, and perhaps in turn, will be so dominated.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
11	8	7	11
Agility	Brawn	Coordination	
11	13	12	



FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	4	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 17, Resolve 15
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Horror), Courage 4

ATTACKS

- **Brutal Claws (M):** Reach 2, 7 , 1H, Intense, Vicious 1
- **Visage from Hell (T):** Range C/M, 5  mental, Area, Stun, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Dread Creature 5**
- **Feeds on Fear and Pain**
- **Hated by Mitra:** Weapons bearing the Phoenix symbol gain the Piercing 1 Quality against the Slave so long as the sign was inscribed by a true believer.
- **Inured to Cold, Fear, Fire, and Pain**
- **Son of Set:** The Slave is incapable of being truly killed. Should it be slain in combat, it returns to the Ring where it must stay for a single day and night. It will remember any that have caused it such harm and will attack them or cause them ill as soon, and often, as it can.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Behold the Horror:** The Slave can spend 1 Doom to make a *Visage from Hell* attack at any time, even during another character's turn.
- **"Yes, Master":** The bearer of the Ring can pay 2 Doom to issue the Slave an order which it must obey.



Upon him crouched a great black thing which he knew was born in no sane or human world. Its slaving black fangs were near his throat and the glare of its yellow eyes shrivelled his limbs as a killing wind shrivels young corn.

The hideousness of its face transcended mere bestiality. It might have been the face of an ancient, evil mummy, quickened with demoniac life. In those abhorrent features the outlaw's dilated eyes seemed to see, like a shadow in the madness that enveloped him, a faint and terrible resemblance to the slave Thoth-amon.

— “The Phoenix on the Sword”

YOTHGA, VAMPIRE PLANT OF YAG (NEMESIS, HORROR)

The plant is not of this world, but rather from the alien world Yag, whence the Yaggites came. They say that its red leaves gain color from the blood of its victims. That may well be true. At first, the plant seems beautiful, almost irresistible. One might be drawn to it as to a rose, then a certain compulsion takes hold. It feeds on the life of its victims, sucking intelligence and strength from them as time winds on.

Once enthralled, the vines of the plant enfold its victim like a lover and will not let go. The captured one belongs to the plant then, and they often experience dreams of a green planet far from Earth, where things that should not be rule beyond time and reason.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	6	6	8
Agility	Brawn	Coordination	
13	14	12	



FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	3	Senses	3
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 17, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Tough Vines), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Grappling Vines (M):** Reach 3, 6 , 1H, Grappling, Persistent 3, Stun
- **Beguiling Charms (R):** Range M, 4 , 1H, Area, Intense, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Death Would be a Mercy:** If a victim is ‘driven mad’ by the plant, it can opt to keep them paralysed in a hellish living death. While the plant has such a character trapped, ensared within its vines, it gains the *Dread Creature 4* ability. The plant can only maintain one such pet at a time.
- **Inured to Fear**
- **Lover's Embrace:** Every Wound inflicted by the plant causes a Trauma instead.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Dull the Senses:** If the plant successfully grapples a character and maintains the grapple until its next turn it can pay 2 Doom to inflict 1 Wound.
- **Lure victim:** If the plant inflicts damage with its *Beguiling Charms* it can spend 1 Doom to force the character to move one zone closer to it.
- **Many-tendrilled:** For each Doom spent, the creeper may make one additional attack when it makes a Standard Action close combat attack. Each attack must be targeted at a different enemy. The creeper cannot use the Swift Strike Momentum spend.

The tendrils of the plant quivered as if in ecstasy, vibrating their full snaky lengths. Waves of changing hues surged over them; their color grew deeper, more venomous.

— “The Scarlet Citadel”



WINGED NIGHT-MOUNT (TOUGHENED, HORROR)

This pterodactyl-like creature summoned by Pelias at the Scarlet Citadel is a beast out of time. It precedes the Thurian Age by far, dating back to a primeval era when humans were but the slaves of Elder Gods.

The winged night-mount may or may not be extant. If it still lives in this world, it dwells in the highest aeries of nameless mountains where it protects its young and heeds only the words of people so ancient they are hardly people anymore.

Possibly, the winged night-mounts all fled this world with some of the servitors of the Old Ones and can now only be summoned by sorcerers from the Outer Dark. In either case, they are natural predators, and if one is not already bound by ancient word or spell, it is likely to kill its summoner. If luck smiles upon them, they will be taken back to the creature's nest to be devoured by its offspring. If not, the winged night-mount will take its victim into dark vales between worlds, perhaps abandoning it in some place beyond space and time.

ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	4	4	10
Agility		Brawn	Coordination
11		12	11
FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	3	Movement	3
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—
STRESS & SOAK			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stress: Vigor 12, Resolve 10 ■ Soak: Armor 4 (Horror), Courage 4 			
ATTACKS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Talons (M): Reach 2, 6 , Vicious ■ Fell Swoop (R): Range M, 5 , Grappling, Stun ■ Horrific Screech (T): Range M, 4 , mental, Stun 			
SPECIAL ABILITIES			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Inured to Fear and Poison ■ Mount ■ Night Vision 			
DOOM SPENDS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Bound by the Sorcerer: A winged night-mount bound to a sorcerer must obey its will. As the two are connected, the sorcerer and the winged night-mount get 1 more Doom when they act together. This Doom is free. 			

COURT AND COUNTRY

Though the most terrifying things lurk in the shadows between the sparse camp lights of civilization, the deadliest enemies in court are most often other people. Of all the creatures of this earth, humans alone have the guile and tenacity to plot continually against their own.

However, in those same courts one sees the other side of humanity as well, though more rarely. There are knights and heroes who fight for those too weak to fight for themselves. There are kings who put the kingdom before the self, and there are followers so devoted to their liege that they consider it an honor to give their life for them.

COUNTESS ALBIONA (TOUGHENED)

Lustrous golden hair and a slender frame belie a young woman with a heart of iron. The Countess is fiercely loyal to King Conan and aids him in regaining the throne. She dislikes dark magic and even fears it. That, however, seems her only weakness.

In time, as she gains age and wisdom, Countess Albiona will become a fine ruler.

ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	9	9	9
Agility		Brawn	Coordination
7		5	8
FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	—	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	2
Knowledge	2	Social	3
STRESS & SOAK			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stress: Vigor 5, Resolve 9 ■ Soak: Armor —, Courage 4 			
ATTACKS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dagger (M): Reach 1, Hidden 1, Thrown, Unforgiving 1 			

All but Ascalante wheeled at that cry, and then, howling like dogs, they burst blindly through the door in a raving, blaspheming mob, and scattered through the corridors in screaming flight.

— “The Phoenix on the Sword”

BARON AMALRIC (TOUGHENED)

The Baron of Tor, located in Nemedia, Amalric has ambitions beyond his current position. He conspires with others to resurrect Xaltotun, the fell Acheronian sorcerer, in a bid for power. His wealth is such that he is seen by some to be the real power behind Tarascus when that king takes the throne.

The Baron also wishes to install another puppet on the throne of Aquilonia: Valerius. However, Almaric does not recognize the power and ambitions of the dead sorcerer which is, in the end, his undoing.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	10	9	10
Agility	Brawn	Coordination	
9	9	8	




FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	2
Knowledge	2	Social	4

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 9, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Plate), Courage 5

ATTACKS

- **Broadsword (M):** Reach 2, 5 , Unbalanced, Parrying
- **Spear (M):** Reach 3, 6 , Unbalanced, Piercing 1
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 3 , mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Retinue:** Amalric typically leads a bodyguard of two or more mercenaries into combat equivalent to Toughened guard sergeants (*Conan* corebook, page 317). When attacking as a unit, each bodyguard grants Amalric +1d20 to his attacks and parries (to a maximum of 5d20).

DOOM SPENDS

- **"For Tor!":** When leading his soldiers into battle, Amalric can spend 2 Doom to grant all Minions +d20 to their attacks (to a maximum of 5d20).

If any shrewd individuals suspected that Amalric was the real ruler of Nemedia, behind the scenes, they were careful not to voice such heresy.

— The Hour of the Dragon

THE REBEL FOUR

Though many consider Thoth-amon Conan's most deadly foe, the reality is that the sorcerer's intersection with Conan was incidental at best in Howard's stories. Mentioned only sparingly, it is entirely possible that Conan and the Stygian sorcerer never met one another, and never came directly into conflict.

Inevitably, the most dangerous of Conan's enemies when he was king were normal men, conspirators who called themselves 'the Rebel Four':

- Count Volmana of Karaban, a now-impooverished noble who sees the conspiracy as a means to restore his lost estate to its former glory.
- Baron Dion of Attalus, a disenfranchised noble who saw himself as king, but was in truth being used to fund the conspiracy.
- Commander Gromel of the Black Legion, a giant of a man and a traitor to his king.
- Rinaldo the minstrel, a poet and firebrand, once one of Conan's partisans but now turned against him.

Finally, though he was not numbered among them, Count Ascalante, an Aquilonian outlaw who lost his estate and title and festers opposition against Conan within Tarantia itself, was in many ways the true viper in the nest of serpents, the most effective and competent of them.

These men worked from within positions of power in their own domains and within Conan's own court to sway sentiment against the barbarian king. Their conspiracy and its downfall, depicted in "The Phoenix and the Sword", might prove an excellent basis for a campaign set in the Aquilonian court, perhaps with the player characters as agents working for (or even against!) the barbarian king.


Otherwise, it might be that the Rebel Four were but one of many such conspiracies to beset Conan while he sits upon the throne.



PRINCE ARPELLO (TOUGHENED)

Prince Arpello claims a bloodline leading to the throne, but this is unlikely true. That does not stop the man from claiming the throne when Conan is trapped in the Scarlet Citadel, however. He proves himself more fool than ruler and wars with Publius over control. In the end, Conan decides Arpello's fate with extreme prejudice, hurling him from a high turret of the royal palace.

Yet Arpello is representative of many nobles who, having no direct line to the throne, scheme to make one. Would that he was an anomaly, the Hyborian kingdoms might be much better-ruled lands. As it is, for every fifty Arpellos, the populace is lucky to have one good king.

ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
7	7	6	7
Agility		Brawn	Coordination
6		6	6
FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	1	Movement	—
Fortitude	—	Senses	—
Knowledge	1	Social	2
STRESS & SOAK			
■ Stress: Vigor 6, Resolve 7			
■ Soak: Armor —, Courage 1			
ATTACKS			
■ Broadsword (M): Reach 2, 3  , Unbalanced, Parrying			
SPECIAL ABILITIES			
■ Pitiable Plea: Those wishing to kill Arpello in cold blood must make a Challenging (D2) Willpower test as he begs for his life. If they cannot do so, they hesitate long enough to allow the game-master to use Doom to grant him an escape.			

COUNT ASCALANTE (TOUGHENED)

This former noble lost both his lands and fortune. He turned to banditry on the edge of Aquilonia, and in time captured a powerful sorcerer named Thoth-amon, brought low while fleeing his homeland. Ascalante enslaved the wizard and later used him in a plot to overthrow Conan.

Allied with the so-called 'Rebel Four' (see page 60), Ascalante dealt with Conan, at least so he thought. In the


end, it was the Stygian sorcerer whom he thought he had control over who summoned a beast from hell that pounced upon Ascalante and killed him.

Ascalante had no loyalty to anyone but himself, in this life or in any other.

ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	10	10	9
Agility		Brawn	Coordination
9		9	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	2

STRESS & SOAK	
■ Stress:	Vigor 9, Resolve 9
■ Soak:	Armor 2 (Brigadine), Courage 3

ATTACKS	
■ Sword (M):	Reach 2, 5  , 1H, Parrying
■ Light Crossbow (R):	Range M, 3  Unbalanced, Volley, Unforgiving 1

DOOM SPENDS	
■ Leadership:	Ascalante may spend 2 Doom to grant +1d20 to a single Mob or Squad within Close Range. This bonus die may be used on any single skill test attempted by the group before the end of its next turn.

BARON DION (TOUGHENED)

The would-be king that Ascalante wanted to place on the throne was the fat baron of Attalus. Dion is a smuggler of liquor, and from this derives immense wealth. He was one of the Rebel Four and was the one being groomed to take Conan's place, due to his noble title and reasonable claim at the kingship. It was Dion's wealth, however, that caught Ascalante's eye, for the outlaw count needed funds to pull off his plan.

On his own, Dion is a cowardly man and is not trusted with anything of importance to the conspiracy. He even discovers Thoth-amon's secret identity beyond that of a slave. He dies when he inadvertently shows the Ring of Set to the fallen sorcerer and then unwittingly turns his back on the Stygian, thinking him harmless.

ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
5	6	6	6
Agility		Brawn	Coordination
5		5	5
FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	—	Movement	—
Fortitude	—	Senses	—
Knowledge	1	Social	1
STRESS & SOAK			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stress: Vigor 5, Resolve 6 ■ Soak: Armor —, Courage 1 			
ATTACKS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Knife (M): Reach 1, 3, 1H, Hidden 1, Improvised, Unforgiving 1 			

BLACK DRAGON (TOUGHENED)

The king's personal bodyguard under Conan, the Black Dragons are both an elite force and loyal retainers. While their primary mission is to guard the king, in truth Conan is a man who needs little guarding, and so he oft sends them on missions too dangerous or secret for most.

Conan knows each of the Black Dragons and trusts them with his life and his kingdom. In the case of Gromel, their former commander (page 63), his trust is misguided, and he ends up slaying the man along with the other assassins sent by the Rebel Four.

Despite this blot, there is no higher honor under his rule in Aquilonia than to be invited into their ranks. Many have died trying to prove their worth.

The Dragons drill in both skirmish combat and mass formations, being a threat on any field of battle. They have cleaved their way through ranks of Nemedian knights, horrors indescribable, and savage hordes of Picts — all for their king.

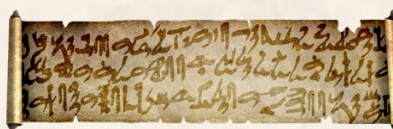
ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	9	9
Agility		Brawn	Coordination
11		12	10
FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	3	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	1

STRESS & SOAK	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stress: Vigor 12, Resolve 9 ■ Soak: Armor 4 (Plate Armor), Courage 3 	
ATTACKS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Broadsword (M): Reach 2, 8, Unbalanced, Parrying ■ Shield (M): Reach 2, 8, 1H, Shield 2, Stun ■ Famous Legion (T): Rance C, 6, mental, Stun 	
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ For the King: When two or more Black Dragons are in battle together, they become an unstoppable force. Each can ignore the first Wound they suffer so long as one other Black Dragon stands. 	
DOOM SPENDS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Brutal Aggression: Each turn the Black Dragon can choose to pay 1 Doom to make a second attack with their broadsword or pay 1 Doom to grant it the Intense quality ■ Retinue: Each Black Dragon is responsible for training three aspirants. These aspirants can be summoned for 3 Doom, when possible. They are equivalent to Toughened guard sergeants (Conan corebook, page 317) with the <i>For the King</i> special ability (above). 	

EPEMITREUS THE SAGE (UNDEAD)

His resting place known only to select members of Mitra's innermost circle of the high priesthood, the sage Epemitreus was the greatest of Mitra's priests, his wisdom and knowledge transcending death itself. So favored was this former savant that the god Mitra uses Epemitreus as his envoy to the living world, granting the ancient spirit the ability to manifest within dreams of those picked by Mitra, summoning the dreamers to his tomb. There, Epemitreus relates to them knowledge that might aid and further Mitra's cause. Being so picked is a great omen to the priesthood of Mitra, so rarely does it occur.

The gamemaster is encouraged to make use of this spirit for a suitable player character in a kingdom favorable to Mitra, and perhaps even to bestow one of them with the Sign of the Phoenix or an equivalent blessing. The Blessing of the Phoenix is described on page 36 of *Nameless Cults*. If attributes are desired, he is identical to the ghost described on page 337 of the **Conan** corebook.



...he came into a strange crypt, and saw a vague white-bearded figure sitting on a tomb. Conan's hair rose up and he grasped his sword, but the figure spoke in sepulchral tones.

"Oh man, do you know me?"

"Not I, by Crom!" swore the king.

"Man," said the ancient, "I am Epemitreus."

— "The Phoenix on the Sword"

GROMEL (TOUGHENED)

This giant of a Bossonian once commanded the elite Aquilonian military force called the Black Legion. He was one of the so-called Rebel Four and helped conspire to put Dion on the throne. Out of this, he wished to become the supreme general of Aquilonia's armies. He did not succeed, and died fighting Conan in the king's bed-chamber, part of the bloody attack that ended the Rebel Four's conspiracy.

Gromel habitually wears plate armor, has an imposing frame and attitude, and is a skilled fighter.




ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
7	7	7	9
Agility	Brawn	Coordination	
9	12	9	

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	3	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	1

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 12, Resolve 9
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Plate), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Two-handed Sword (M):** Reach 3, 7 , 2H, Vicious 1
- **Lance (M) (if mounted):** Reach 3, 6 , Unbalanced, Cavalry, Fragile, Vicious 2
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 4 , mental, Stun

DOOM SPEND

- **Leadership:** Gromel may spend 2 Doom to grant +1d20 to a single Mob or Squad within Close Range. This bonus d20 may be used on any single skill test attempted by the group before the end of its next turn.

HADRATHUS (NEMESIS)

This secretive priest of a forbidden cult is described full on pages 63–64 of Nameless Cults.



KNIGHT OF POITAIN (TOUGHENED)

The famed knights of Poitain form a large, elite portion of the Aquilonian host as it marches to war. Decked in shining, plumed helms and holding fast the banners of their lords, they charge valiantly into combat where steel and blood meet.

Each knight serves a lord of Poitain or may even be minor lords themselves. They owe fealty to that Baron, but more importantly, they all pledge loyalty first to Aquilonia and the king. This is why no internecine war has featured the knights fighting against the king.

They drill regularly, perform in tournaments that are popular for any who have means of seeing them, and regularly spar in complex sword combat. Though every knight in every land claims to be the best, these Aquilonian warriors may be the only group not deluding themselves.

ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	8	9	9
Agility		Brawn	Coordination
9		11	10
FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	2	Movement	2
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	3
STRESS & SOAK			
<div><div></div><div>Stress: Vigor 11, Resolve 9</div></div> <div><div></div><div>Soak: Armor 4 (Plate), Courage 2</div></div>			
ATTACKS			
<div><div></div><div>Two-handed Sword (M): Reach 3, 5🔥, 2H, Vicious 1</div></div> <div><div></div><div>Crossbow (R): Range M, 3🔥, Unbalanced, Unforgiving 1, Volley</div></div> <div><div></div><div>"For Poitain!" (T): Range C, 5🔥, mental, Stun</div></div>			
SPECIAL ABILITIES			
<div><div></div><div>Charge: Poitanian knights can re-roll any 🔥 that don't initially deal damage.</div></div> <div><div></div><div>Skin of Steel: When a knight takes damage, they can roll 4🔥. If the result is higher than 4, use this as their armor Soak instead of their usual 4.</div></div>			
DOOM SPENDS			
<div><div></div><div>Utmost Loyalty: What tempted in any way to rebel against the crown, a knight of Poitain can spend 1 Doom to ignore the attempt. If the attempt involves sorcery resisting the attempt will cost the knight their next Standard Action.</div></div>			

ORASTES (NEMESIS)

This former priest of Mitra turned to the dark arts and was cast out of his priesthood for so doing. Amalric, one of his conspirators in the plot to oust Conan from the throne of Aquilonia, saved him from being burned as a sorcerer. It is Orastes' knowledge which allows the return of Xaltotun of Acheron.

The man was a priest whose god did not offer the power he sought, and so he turned to the forces of the Outer Dark which promise all and deliver more... for a price. Despite turning against the Acheronian sorcerer at the last minutes, Orastes, like many reckless sorcerers, was slain by that which he brought up and could not control.

ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	13	11	11
Agility		Brawn	Coordination
7		6	8
FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	—	Movement	1
Fortitude	—	Senses	2
Knowledge	4	Social	2
STRESS & SOAK			
■ Stress: Vigor 5, Resolve 11			
■ Soak: Armor —, Courage 3			
ATTACKS			
■ Dagger (M): Reach 1, 3  , 1H, Hidden 1, Thrown, Unforgiving 1			
SPECIAL ABILITIES			
■ Sorcerer: Orastes is a skilled alchemist and maker of enchanted items, such as his looking glass and his use of the Heart of Ahriman to bring back Xaltotun. Spells he knows are <i>Raise Up the Dead</i> and <i>Summon a Horror</i> .			
DOOM SPENDS			
■ Enchanted Mirror: Showing no reflections, this finely wrought enchanted mirror allows Orastes to display desired visions within its silvered plane at a cost of 1 Doom. It cannot grant him visions of anything he does not already know or remember.			
■ Trusted Disciple: Orastes has an acolyte, a sorcerer named Altaro who, while nowhere his master's equal, is nonetheless loyal and no stranger to the dark arts. Orastes can summon Altaro at a cost of 1 Doom, and he is the equivalent of a sorcerer as described on page 321 of the Conan corebook. He has no spells, however.			

"I obtained a glimpse of your sarcophagus in the demon-haunted crypts below the black giant-walled temple of Set in the hinterlands of Stygia...from moldering manuscripts I learned of the Heart of Ahriman. Then for a year I sought its hiding-place, and at last I found it."

— Orastes, *The Hour of the Dragon*

KINGS AND COURTS OF THE DREAMING WEST

Rather than detail all the king's and lords of the west, here are descriptions for such allies and foes. These represent a mean of the abilities possessed by such noble rulers and do not supersede named entries in this or other CONAN sourcebooks. The gamemaster should adjust any character as desired.

Aquilonia

Aquilonia, the gleaming jewel in the crown of Hyborian civilization, has a line of succession dating back thousands of years,

The most recent kings were Vilerus, succeeded by his son Numedides. In Conan's early career, Vilerus was king, and the country was in decline. Numedides' ascension to the throne was a turbulent one, fraught with rumors that he had deposed his father with poison, and he proved himself unfit to rule. His reign was marked with excessive taxation, brutal treatment of his subjects, an excessively decadent court, pointless wars with former allies and neighbors, and aggressive expansion into the Pictish Wilderness beyond the Bossonian Marches.

In Numedides' time Conan entered the Aquilonian military as a frontier scout in the Bossonian Marches, and rose meteorically within the ranks, eventually becoming a general. Popular sentiment, fueled by angry nobles and the verses of the poet Rinaldo, rose against Numedides. A civil war ensued, with part of Numedides' army turning against him, led by Conan and a coterie of rebellious nobles.

- Albiona, Countess: Noblewoman loyal to Conan.
- Amalric: Baron of Tor; ally of Tarascus.
- Arpello: Prince of Pellia; called the 'Butcher of Pellia'; claims royal blood; Kings of Koth and Ophir, tried to make him a puppet king on the throne instead of Conan.
- Ascalante: Former Count of Thune; leader of the conspirators against Conan.
- Dion: Baron of Attalus; has some royal blood; conspires against Conan.
- Gromel: Commander of the Black Legions; conspires against Conan.
- Numedides, King of Aquilonia (d.): King before Conan; killed by Conan who took the throne.
- Pallantides: Commander of the Black Dragons.
- Publius: Chancellor and advisor of King Conan.
- Servius: Noble loyal to Conan.
- Trocero, Count: Count of Poitain; close ally of Conan.
- Valerius: Claimant to the throne of Aquilonia, in exile in Nemedias.
- Vilerius, King of Aquilonia (d.): King of Aquilonia before Numedides.
- Volmana: Count of Karaban; conspires against Conan.

Koth

The Kingdom of Koth is a mixture of north and south, west and east. Such diverse influence produced great ambition in King Strabonus. Unfortunately, he was not the equal of Conan and another now rules in his stead.

- Almuric, Prince of Koth: The rebel prince in whose army Conan served before being the last survivor.
- Strabonus, King of Koth; Ruthless despot. During much of Conan's career prior to taking the throne of Aquilonia, Strabonus was king. Strabonus is described on pages 78-79 of *Conan the Mercenary*.
- Arbanus: Kothian general who fell in combat on the plains outside Shamar.

Nemedias

The most culturally advanced of the Hyborian Kingdoms, Nemedias is a group of competing powers only marshalled by a powerful king. Tarascus currently rules during Conan's reign.

- Nabodinus, the Red Priest: This enigmatic figure was said to be the true power behind the throne of Nemedias for decades. In a campaign set prior to Conan's years as a thief, Nabodinus is a fixture in Numa's court, and holds the whole of the capital city in his thrall. Nabodinus is described on page 86 of *Conan the Thief*.
- Numa, King of Nemedias: King of Nemedias when Conan becomes king of Aquilonia
- Tarascus, King of Nemedias: Younger brother of Numa; becomes king after Xaltotun kills his predecessor with a plague.

Ophir

A country rich in gold and silver, gems and imported silk, Ophir is the wealthiest nation of the Hyborian kingdoms.

- Amalrus, King of Ophir: Ophir is rich in many things, but military might is not among them. The king relies on mercenaries and the machinations of his wife to compete with the other kingdoms.



KING OR QUEEN (TOUGHENED)

The ruler of a kingdom must have guile, wisdom, and a solid tactical mind. Some do. Others fail and watch their kingdoms crumble along with their ambitions.

ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	9	9	9
Agility	Brawn	Coordination	
8	9	8	

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	2	Senses	2
Knowledge	3	Social	4

STRESS & SOAK	
■ Stress: Vigor 9, Resolve 9	
■ Soak: Armor 3 (Royal Mail), Courage 2	

ATTACKS	
■ Courtly Sword (M): Reach 2, 5  , 1H, [Parrying]	
■ "I am King/Queen!" (T) Range C, 7  , mental, Stun	

SPECIAL ABILITIES	
■ Status: Their word is law and convincing them is seldom easy. They have a Social Standing 10 (see the rules for the Society skill in the Conan corebook, page 81).	
■ Guards: A king or queen is always accompanied by at least ten guards.	

DOOM SPENDS	
■ Royal Commandment: They can spend 1 Doom to grant Vicious 1 to a Threaten Action.	



KING OR QUEEN (NEMESIS)

Some rise above even the heights of their station. They are well-respected, or well-feared, by their citizens and a force to be reckoned with in the west.

ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	11	11	11
Agility	Brawn	Coordination	
11	12	11	

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	3	Movement	3
Fortitude	3	Senses	3
Knowledge	3	Social	5

STRESS & SOAK	
■ Stress: Vigor 15, Resolve 14	
■ Soak: Armor 3 (Mail), Courage 3	

ATTACKS	
■ Courtly Sword (M): Reach 2, 7  , 1H, [Parrying]	
■ "It is I Who Rules All!" (T) Range C, 8  , mental, Stun	

SPECIAL ABILITIES	
■ Status: Their word is law and convincing them is seldom easy. The ruler has a Social Standing 10 (see the rules for the Society skill in the Conan corebook, page 81).	
■ Guards: A king or queen is always accompanied by at least 10 guards	

DOOM SPENDS	
■ Royal Commandment: They can spend 1 Doom to grant Vicious 1 to a Threaten Action.	
■ Pet Assassins: Two of the guards can be upgraded to Bodyguards (see Conan corebook, page 313) for 1 Doom.	

PALLANTIDES, CAPTAIN OF THE BLACK DRAGONS (NEMESIS)

The commander of the Black Dragons is fiercely loyal to Conan and a fighter of nigh-unrivalled skill. He is quick to act, especially in defense of the king.

His life began as that of an Aquilonian soldier, and he served along the border of Pictland as well as in wars of conquest to the east. Pallantides' valor on the field eared him may promotions, but it was Conan who saw his real value and appointed him master of his personal guard.

ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	9	9	9
Agility		Brawn	Coordination
11		11	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	3	Movement	3
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	1

ATTACKS	
■ Broadsword (M):	Reach 2, 7  , 1H, Unbalanced, Parrying
■ Spear (M):	Reach 3, 6  , Unbalanced, Piercing 1
■ Reputation (T):	Range C, 6  mental, Area, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES	
■ Bodyguard:	Pallantides typically leads a bodyguard of two or more Black Dragons into combat (described on page 37). When attacking as a unit, each bodyguard grants Pallantides +1d20 to his attacks and parries, up to a maximum of 5d20.
■ Captain of the Black Dragons:	Pallantides has all the abilities of a Black Dragon (page 62).

PELIAS (NEMESIS)

A sorcerer in Khorshemish and longtime rival of Tsotharlanti. He is described on pages 77–78 of *Conan the Mercenary*.

PROSPERO, GENERAL OF POITAIN (TOUGHENED)

King Conan's seneschal and closest advisor; General of Poitain, and commander of that vaunted host of knights, Prospero is loyal to Conan. It is his respect for the king which likely guides his fidelity as well as the king's raw charisma and ability in combat.

Prospero led 10,000 Poitainian knights to try and hold Aquilonia whilst the fell sorcerer Xaltotun, along with Nemedian conspirators, invaded the great kingdom.

ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	9	10	10
Agility		Brawn	Coordination
10		10	9
FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	2	Senses	2
Knowledge	2	Social	3

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 10, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Plate), Courage 4

ATTACKS

- **Two-handed Sword (M):** Reach 3, 7, 2H, Vicious
- **Lance (M):** Reach 3, 6, Unbalanced, Cavalry 2, Fragile
- **Zeal (T):** Range Close, 5 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Poitainian Knight:** When attempting a Fortitude test while acting in the defense of the realm, Trocero can re-roll any d20 that is not initially a success. He may attempt one re-roll for each d20.
- **Captain of the Poitainian Knights:** Prospero has all the abilities of a knight of Poitain (see page 63)

DOOM SPENDS

- **Honor Above All:** When forced by any circumstance to perform an ignoble act, Trocero can spend 3 Doom to automatically succeed in any test needed to refuse to perform the action.
- **Infectious Zeal:** When leading a unit in a charge, Trocero can spend 3 Doom to Initiate a free Display using his Zeal attack and gaining the Area Quality.



PUBLIUS (MINION)

When Conan took the throne, Publius had been a counselor to Numdides and his son before him. Grown fat in his later years, he doesn't seem like much of a foe. But Publius is wise and clever when other people are dull and slow-witted. He knows the game of politics better than most and understands Aquilonia's nobles like no one else.

For all that, though, he isn't a particularly ambitious man. He is comfortable where he sits and loyal to King Conan. He knows his last years will be well-spent under the Cimmerian's rule. What's more, Conan often covers his gambling debts. What more could an old man ask for in a king?

ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	11	9	9
Agility		Brawn	Coordination
5		5	4
FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	1	Movement	—
Fortitude	1	Senses	2
Knowledge	4	Social	4
STRESS & SOAK			
■ Stress: Vigor 3, Resolve 5			
■ Soak: Armor —, Courage 1			
ATTACKS			
■ Dagger (M): Reach 1, 37  , 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1			
DOOM SPENDS			
■ Master Strategist: Any group which includes Publius as an advisor (he would ever fight), gains +2d20 for actions relating to strategy, due to his tactical acumen.			

RINALDO THE POET (TOUGHENED)

A popular poet and beloved by the people of Tarantia, Rinaldo was an early supporter of Conan, composing verses in admiration of the barbarian king and doing much to ease the city's acceptance of their foreign king. He became a favorite of Conan's, who supported the minstrel, moved almost to tears by the beauty of his verse.

At some point after Conan's ascension to the throne, Rinaldo visited Tsotha-lanti at the Scarlet Citadel. There, he was said to have been shown what lies in the Halls of

Horrors beneath that palace, encountering nameless monstrosities beyond comprehension. His poem, "The Song of the Pit", hints at what he saw there, but the contents of those verses were discounted as pure madness-fueled fantasies.

Perhaps it was this, or merely the play between his mercurial and melancholic personality that turned him against Conan, eventually leading the poet to join the Rebel Four. This mad minstrel conspires against Conan during his reign, writing and spreading verses that cause public sentiment to favor the old king, Numedides, even though that man was an outright tyrant. He joined the assassins sent by the Rebel Four and dies at Conan's sword, seeking to oust the foreign, base-born 'tyrant'.

ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
5	8	9	7
Agility		Brawn	Coordination
8		8	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	2	Movement	3
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	2	Social	3

STRESS & SOAK	
■ Stress:	Vigor 8, Resolve 7
■ Soak:	Armor —, Courage 3

ATTACKS	
■ Dagger (M):	Reach 1, 5  , 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving
■ Mad Cry (T):	Range C, 4  , Mental, Stun

DOOM SPENDS	
■ Lunacy:	For 1 Doom Rinaldo can erase any failed Willpower test and roll again for free. He is a lunatic, and things that scare normal folks do not always faze him. Then again, things that are harmless might frighten him senseless.

SERVIUS (TOUGHENED)

A noble and plantation owner loyal to Conan, Servius Galannus is well-bred man whose habits are neat and manners impeccable. He is a fair noble and well-liked by those peasants under his aegis. He is not abusive and often helps where other nobles would show cruelty.

He has no particular skill with arms, though he would serve loyally if called upon.

ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	9	9	8
Agility		Brawn	Coordination
6		6	6
FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	—	Movement	—
Fortitude	—	Senses	2
Knowledge	3	Social	2
STRESS & SOAK			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stress: Vigor 6, Resolve 8 ■ Soak: Armor —, Courage 2 			
ATTACKS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Old Sword (M): Reach 2, 3 , 1H, Fragile, Parrying 			

KING TARASCUS (TOUGHENED)

The younger brother of the king of Nemedra, Tarascus ascends to the throne by conspiracy when Xaltotun kills his brother through a black plague. The new king is not entirely ready for the throne but acquits himself well in the war with Aquilonia, even though he loses.

He has since spent time reflecting on his mistakes and those of the conspirators around him. While the Baron of Tor was alive, he manipulated Tarascus as one might a marionette. With the Baron dead, Tarascus learns to rule on his own, to mixed results.

Nemedra suffered a significant setback in the war with Aquilonia. Tarascus now faces angry nobles and others who, like himself, would plot to see another on the throne.



ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	8	8
Agility		Brawn	Coordination
9		9	7
FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	2	Social	4
STRESS & SOAK			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stress: Vigor 9, Resolve 8 ■ Soak: Armor 4 (Plate), Courage 3 			
ATTACKS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Courtly Sword (M): Reach 2, 5 , 1H, Parrying ■ "I am King!" (T): Range C, 7 , mental, Stun 			

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Status:** Tarascus' word is law and convincing him is seldom easy. He has a Social Standing 10 (see the rules for the Society skill in the **Conan** core-book, page 81).
- **Guards:** Tarascus is always accompanied by at least ten guards.

TROUBADOUR OF POITAIN (TOUGHENED)

The troubadours of Poitain are fighting poets and minstrels. Skilled in martial combat and mental acrobatics, the troubadours are unique to Poitain's martial culture. They dress garishly in the field, wearing brought colors and trumpeting great horns before they launch themselves headlong into the fray.

ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	9	10	10
Agility		Brawn	Coordination
9		9	10
FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	3	Movement	3
Fortitude	2	Senses	2
Knowledge	1	Social	3
STRESS & SOAK			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stress: Vigor 10, Resolve 10 ■ Soak: Armor 4 (Plate Armor), Courage 3 			
ATTACKS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Broadsword (M): Reach 2, 8 , Unbalanced, Parrying ■ Shield (M): Reach 2, 8 , 1H, Shield 2, Stun ■ Trumpets of Poitain (T): Range L, 6 , mental, Stun 			

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **"For Poitain!":** When fighting in defense of Poitain and parrying, any troubadour may re-roll one failed d20 but must accept the result of the second roll.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Song & Slaughter:** Once per scene, a troubadour can sing while attacking. The troubadour wears a manic look upon their face, and the song is a cheerful-sounding hymn of death. This can be terribly distracting. Up to three targets within Close Range lose their ability to parry for two rounds if they fail a Daunting (D3) Willpower test.

COUNT TROCERO OF POITAIN (NEMESIS)

A noble of once-independent Poitain in Aquilonia, Count Trocero rose to control of the legendary Poitainian knights, a capable fighting man with a reputation for integrity, bravery, and ingenuity. He is pragmatic and wily, and utterly devoted to serving his country and his men.

However, under Numedides, Trocero was hard-pressed to see the wisdom in the orders he was given. Foolish attempts at expansion, a poor handling of the Pictish border, and general corruption had all eroded Aquilonia's might. The Poitainian Knights were meant to be the vanguard of her forces, and Trocero believed that they were wasted with petty border skirmishes and violent responses to situations where simple diplomacy would have sufficed.

As leader of the knights, Trocero reached the grim realization that the greatest threat to his beloved Aquilonia was none other than its king, the tyrannical despot Numedides. He did what he could to right the course and see Aquilonia restored to its former glory, but the king did not heed Trocero's advice, and was seemingly intent on squandering Aquilonia's influence and power, losing its place as the most magnificent and highly developed kingdom in the whole of the Hyborian Age.

Trocero bided his time, serving and waiting, doing the unhappy business of keeping his country from invasion from its former allies and neighbors, riding across the countryside seeking to undo the damage that Numedides' rash decisions and inconsistent rule created. Then came Conan, and he threw in his lot with the barbarian usurper. Together, they brought peace and calm strength to the throne of Aquilonia. Now Trocero is among Conan's best friends and staunchest allies.

If encountered in the field, Count Trocero will likely be in the company of a small army of Poitainian knights (see page 63), flying under the standard of the crimson leopard, whether at camp or on the road.

Conan sat on a silken divan in a rich chamber whose filmy curtains the warm breeze billowed. Trocero paced the floor like a panther, a lithe, restless man with the waist of a woman and the shoulders of a swordsman, who carried his years lightly.

—The Hour of the Dragon



ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	11	12	13
Agility	Brawn	Coordination	
10	10	10	




FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	2
Fortitude	2	Senses	2
Knowledge	2	Social	4

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 10, Resolve 13
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Plate), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Two-handed Sword (M):** Reach 3, 7 , 2H, Vicious
- **Lance (M):** Reach 3, 6 , Unbalanced, Calvary 2, Fragile
- **Zeal (T):** Range Close, 5 , mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Poitainian Knight:** When attempting a Fortitude test while acting in the defense of the realm, Prospero can re-roll any d20 that is not initially a success. He may attempt one re-roll for each d20 but must accept the second result(s).

DOOM SPENDS

- **Honor Above All:** When forced by any circumstance to perform an ignoble act, Prospero can spend 3 Doom to automatically succeed in any test needed to refuse to perform the action.
- **Infectious Zeal:** When leading a unit in a charge, Prospero can spend 3 Doom to Initiate a free Display using his Zeal attack, gaining the Area quality.

VALERIUS (TOUGHENED)

Some kings rise above even the heights of their station. They are well-respected, or well-feared, by their citizens and a force to be reckoned with in the west. A noble closely related to Numedides, Valerius was destined for none of these things. Conan took a throne he thought should be his, and he was exiled to Nemedia.



There Valerius participated in a plot to get rid of the barbarian and put himself on the throne. It worked, for a while, and while king in Aquilonia Valerius allowed the Nemedians to run rampant through his own domain, inflicting cruelty and horror upon innocent Aquilonian citizens. His reign, while brief, was marked with atrocity and disorder.

However, like Numedides before him, Valerius found that Cimmerians are a force to be reckoned with and thus Conan earned his name by the blood of his blade and the fire in his veins. He meets his end in a narrow canyon where those whom he abused take the vengeance out upon him.


ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	9	8
Agility	Brawn	Coordination	
8	8	8	

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	3	Movement	3
Fortitude	3	Senses	3
Knowledge	3	Social	5

STRESS & SOAK	
■ Stress: Vigor 8, Resolve 8	
■ Soak: Armor 4 (Plate), Courage 2	

ATTACKS	
■ Courtly Sword (M): Reach 2, 5  , 1H, Parrying	
■ "Give Me My Duel" (T): Range C, 7  , mental, Stun	

SPECIAL ABILITIES	
■ Rash Fury: Valerius is easy to sway and when influenced by a successful Persuade or Society roll, he gains 1 free Momentum on any single action he immediately attempts supporting that counsel.	

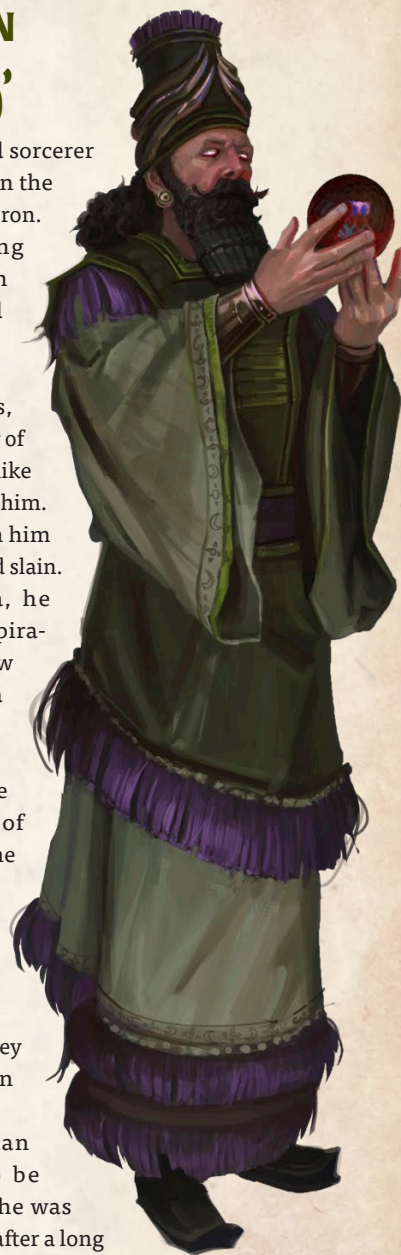
DOOM SPENDS	
■ Khitan Exiles: In his wide travels, Valerius encountered and saved four Khitan exiles, sorcerers and ascetic disciples who swore their loyalty to him. For 4 Doom he can summon them to his side, and they will act on his behalf, traveling anywhere and going to any lengths to serve him. The four Khitans always act together and are equivalent to sorcerers (Conan corebook, page 321). Each is equipped with a deadly staff cut from the poisoned wood of the living Tree of Death: Reach 3, 4  , 2H, Knockdown, Poisoned (Persistent 5), Vicious 5. These staffs act almost as living things, bending and stretching as they are used. In the hands of another, they can be deadly, a Complication causing the wielder to strike themselves for full effect.	
■ Royal Commandment: Valerius can spend 1 Doom to grant Vicious 1 to a Threaten Action.	

XALTOTUN (NEMESIS, HORROR)

This powerful resurrected sorcerer lived 3,000 years before in the powerful kingdom of Acheron. In pursuit of becoming the ultimate sorcerer in Acheron, Xaltotun learned the secrets of the Heart of Ahriman, a powerful artifact. Floods, plagues, disasters, he became master of them all, and the world is like to have trembled in fear of him. The jewel was stolen from him and he was overthrown and slain.





Dead for millennia, he was resurrected by conspirators seeking to overthrow Conan and take Aquilonia for Nemedia. Part of this arrangement involved Xaltotun causing a plague to kill the current king of Nemedia. Xaltotun was the most powerful wizard Conan ever faced, and his very touch flings the might Cimmerian into unconscious. However, the cabal soon realized that they called back far more than they could handle.

The Heart of Ahriman would again prove to be Xaltotun's undoing, for he was defeated by Conan's allies after a long quest to find that powerful artifact. It seems unlikely Xaltotun would have fallen to the Cimmerian or his allies otherwise. See page 55 for more on the Heart of Ahriman.



He sat there motionless, and slowly intelligence grew in his dark eyes and made them deep and strange and luminous. It was as if long-sunken witchlights floated slowly up through midnight pools of darkness.

— The Hour of the Dragon


ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
12	15	13	14
Agility		Brawn	Coordination
12		12	12
FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	3	Movement	3
Fortitude	3	Senses	4
Knowledge	5	Social	4
STRESS & SOAK			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stress: Vigor 15, Resolve 17 ■ Soak: Armor 4 (Unnatural), Courage 6 			
ATTACKS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A Touch of My Hand (M): Reach 1, 9 , Knockdown, Stun ■ Bitter Curses (R): Range C, 6 , 1H, Piercing ■ From the Depths of Acheron (T): Range M, 6 , mental, Stun 			
SPECIAL ABILITIES			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dread Creature 5 ■ Inured to Cold, Disease, Fear, Pain, and Poison ■ Keen Senses (All) ■ Sorcerer: The world has not seen his like in the ways of magic since his downfall. Xaltotun knows all sorcery spells and counter magic. ■ Unliving 			
DOOM SPENDS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Master of Acheron's Darkest Arts: Instead of rolling Sorcery tests, Xaltotun can pay Doom equal to the total Difficulty and Momentum needed to cast a spell. If Xaltotun chooses to do this, he can roll X  where X is the amount of Doom spent. Every Effect rolled gives 1 Doom to Xaltotun that he and only he can use. 			

ZELATA (NEMESIS)

The witch Zelata lives alone in the wilderness with her eagle and wolf. She is a witch, or perhaps a druid, adroit at the magic of scrying, spending all her time aiding others who come and seek her wisdom. She seems uncorrupted by the magic she wields, at least relatively. Zelata sees not only far away but through time. That is a power few possess, and one oft associated with the Outer Dark. For all that, she lacks any malevolence and only acts to aid others.

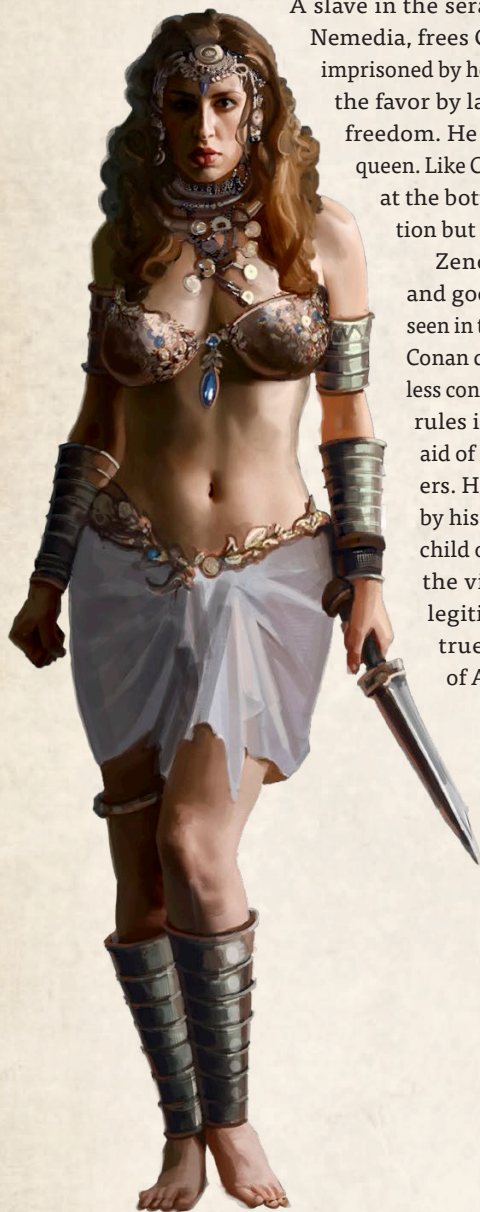
Conan happens upon her in his quest for the Heart of Ahriman, rescuing her from some assailants. In return, she

joins his crusade, shows the ousted barbarian king what transpires in Aquilonia in his absence and later joining forces with the priest Hadrathus against Xaltotun.

ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	9	10	11
Agility		Brawn	Coordination
7		6	7
FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	0	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	2
Knowledge	2	Social	2
STRESS & SOAK			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stress: Vigor 7, Resolve 12 ■ Soak: Armor 1 (Heavy Robes), Courage 2 			
ATTACKS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A Touch of My Hand (M): Reach 1, 5 , 1H, Hidden 3, Knockdown, Non-lethal 			
SPECIAL ABILITIES			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Keen Senses (All) ■ Great Eagle: Zelata's great eagle is equivalent to the wise old bird described on page 82 of the Conan corebook. She can summon it to her aid with a strange, far-carrying cry and see through its eyes as a familiar. ■ Grey Wolf: This huge, grey-furred wolf is Zelata's constant defender, menacing those who would threaten her and hunting for her when necessary. Use the writeup of the Toughened alpha wolf on page 333 of the Conan corebook to represent it. 			
DOOM SPENDS			

- **Control Animals:** For 2 Doom Zelata can attempt to take control of any animal (or a small flock or group). The animal falls immediately under her control and does her bidding unless it is controlled by another. In that case the owner must make a Dire (D4) Animal Handling test or the beast falls under Zelata's sway.
- **Sorcerer:** Zelata is an accomplished hedge witch and knows the spell *Commune with the Wild*. Most of her magic, though, is in the form of petty enchantments, with which she can mimic the results of the spells *Astral Wanderings* and *Atavistic Voyage* by burning prepared herbs. She can spend Doom in place of Momentum to replicate these two spells, bringing the visions to life before an onlooker.

QUEEN ZENOBIA (MINION)



A slave in the seraglio of the king of Nemedra, frees Conan when he was imprisoned by her master. He returns the favor by later demanding her freedom. He then makes her his queen. Like Conan, Zenobia begins at the bottom rung of civilization but rises to the top.

Zenobia has a courage and goodness in her rarely seen in this savage age. When Conan departs for that nameless continent to the west, she rules in his stead with the aid of his most loyal followers. He has many children by his concubines, but any child of Zenobia's will have the virtue of being born legitimate, and thus the true heir to the throne of Aquilonia.

Her dark eyes gleamed in the shadows, her white limbs glistened softly, like alabaster. Her hair was a mass of dark foam, at the burnished luster of which the dim light only hinted.

— *The Hour of the Dragon*

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	9	11	10
Agility	Brawn	Coordination	
9	7	9	

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	3

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 4, Resolve 5
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 5, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Taken by Beauty (T):** Range M, 3 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Queen of Aquilonia:** When in court, Zenobia may re-roll any failed d20s for Command, Persuade, or Society tests, but must accept the results of the second roll(s).

DOOM SPENDS

- **Staunch Ally:** Zenobia regains 1 Doom after spending Doom which she then transfers to a close ally. She can use this ability only once per round.
- **True Bravery:** Zenobia can muster courage like no other. When she takes any mental damage, she can spend 1 Doom to reduce the damage to 1.





HITHER CAME CONAN



King Conan slumbered and dreamed. Through swirling gray mists he heard a curious call, faint and far, and though he did not understand it, it seemed not within his power to ignore it.

— “The Phoenix on the Sword”

Conan's path to the throne has spanned the world and he has had more careers than any other, done more than perhaps any mortal alive in his time. His barbaric birth and the start of his career was chronicled in *Conan the Barbarian*, and *Conan the Thief* described his introduction to the decadent civilized world and his years stealing for survival. His time as a sell-sword was described in *Conan the Mercenary* and his rapid introduction and years of success was explored in *Conan the Pirate*. He has spent years as a bandit — chronicled in *Conan the Brigand* — and dwelt among desert and hill nomads of the east, a period found in *Conan the Wanderer*. His experiences into the south are discussed in *Conan the Adventurer*, and his eventual return to the dreaming west and its frontier is described in the pages of *Conan the Scout*. From the western provinces, he found himself at the head of a rebel army, winning the throne of Aquilonia for himself.

It is the time of Conan the King.

THE PHOENIX ON THE SWORD

Though Conan has been a benevolent ruler and brought many welcome reforms to his newly claimed kingdom, the people of Aquilonia are uneasy with a barbarian on the throne. Before he can settle in, he has a coup on his hands—one of the first of many.

A group known as the “Rebel Four” seek to assassinate Conan with the help of the enslaved, and now powerless wizard, Thoth-Amon.

Their plans, however, go awry for Conan is not an easy man to kill and the group eventually meet their fate at his hands. This is the first Conan story ever written by Robert E. Howard.

THE SCARLET CITADEL

Again, Conan faces insurrection. This time he is captured by a well-laid trap and taken to the Scarlet Citadel in Koth. There, he meets two ancient wizards and an enormous snake in the twisting passages beneath the citadel.

Using his guile and strength, and the aid of one of the sorcerers, Conan escapes the maze and eventually reclaims his throne.

THE HOUR OF THE DRAGON

The only novel Howard ever wrote about Conan is also the last published in his lifetime. In fact, it was serialized in *Weird Tales* and finished just before Howard's untimely death. This tale finds Conan again parted from the crown only this time Aquilonia is occupied by a rival, Nemedia, in his absence.

Conan takes up a difficult quest that takes him from Aquilonia, to Stygia, and beyond in search of a artifact called the Heart of Atrihman which is the only thing that can stop the resurrected Acheronian sorcerer Xaltotun. This is the most powerful foe Conan likely ever faces in all of Howard's tales. In the end, he of course regains the throne and promises a winsome ally he will make her queen for her help. After this tale, we know little of where or what Conan did. Letters from Howard suggest he eventually went to a nameless continent in the west. Beyond that, the rest of Conan's life is a mystery as this concludes the canon tales of his mythic saga.

THE CHILDREN OF CONAN

While Robert E. Howard never depicted Conan's eventual fate, and left the matter of his succession undescribed, he was clear in his belief that Conan did not die childless. In a letter to his good friend P. Schuyler Miller, Howard stated:

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

Rather than a single lawful and legally entitled heir, the barbarian king instead has many illegitimate heirs. Perhaps later in life, after marrying Zenobia, he produced a legitimate heir and groomed that child for the throne, but it is important to note that such an heir is likely to have many half-brothers and half-sisters, bastard-born though they be, who are older and cast just as much in their father's mold.

These offspring provide gamemasters with a rich vein of adventure material, and present players with an incredible background opportunity should a campaign be set in the time these offspring reach adulthood.

CONAN THE KING

Here we see Conan at the pinnacle of his achievements, claiming the crown of the greatest country in the Hyborian kingdoms and holding it through sheer force of will, despite conspiracies and enemies aplenty. Courtly life has not softened him a bit, and all his cunning, guile, and craft have made him a surprisingly effective leader. Perhaps his barbaric birth and the circuitous path to the throne has given him greater compassion for the life of the common folk than his predecessors and peers, for he has embarked upon many reforms, ending the cruel administration of his predecessor, King Numedides, and generally enriching and strengthening Aquilonia to its former glory.

Despite this shift from swordsman to statesman, Conan is still a fearsome fighter, even in his forties, and has lost none of the deadly efficiency and fierce resolve that kept him alive thus far. Depending on whether he is encountered before or after the events described in *The Hour of the Dragon*, he may have his queen, the former slave girl Zenobia, who risked all for him.

Whether he spawned an heir — or many — is left for the gamemaster to decide, and what destiny awaits him after Aquilonia's throne is similarly undetermined. Does he grow old and leave the throne to a son or daughter, does he die in battle defending his kingdom, or does he forsake the throne and set off into the mists of history, embarking on adventures beyond the known Hyborian world?





CONAN THE KING



AGILITY 12			
Skill	Exp	Focus	TN
Acrobatics	+4	+4	16
Melee	+5	+5	17
Stealth	+4	+4	16

AWARENESS 12			
Skill	Exp	Focus	TN
Insight	+3	+2	15
Observation	+2	+1	14
Survival	+3	+3	15
Thievery	+2	+2	14

BRAWN 14			
Focus	Exp	Focus	TN
Athletics	+3	+3	17
Resistance	+2	+2	16

COORDINATION 13			
Skill	Exp	Focus	TN
Parry	+5	+5	18
Ranged Weapons	+2	+1	15
Sailing	+3	+3	16

INTELLIGENCE 10			
Skill	Exp	Focus	TN
Alchemy	—	—	10
Craft	—	—	10
Healing	+1	+1	11
Linguistics	+3	+2	13
Lore	+2	+2	12
Siegecraft	+3	+1	13
Warfare	+4	+4	14

PERSONALITY 11			
Skill	Exp	Focus	TN
Animal Handling	+1	+1	12
Command	+4	+3	15
Counsel	+1	+1	12
Persuade	+3	+3	14
Society	+3	+1	14

WILLPOWER 13			
Skill	Exp	Focus	TN
Discipline	+4	+3	17
Sorcery	+1	—	14

BACKGROUND	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Homeland: Cimmeria ■ Caste: Barbaric ■ Caste Talents: <i>Savage Dignity, Uncivilized</i> ■ Story: Born on a Battlefield ■ Trait: Born to Battle ■ Archetype: Barbarian ■ Nature: Proud 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Education: Educated on the Battlefield ■ War Story: Defeated a Savage Beast ■ Languages: Aquilonian, Argossean, Cimmerian, Hyperborean, Kothic, Kushite, Nemedian, Nordheimer, Pictish, Shemitish, Stygian, Turanian, Zamorian

SOAK	
Soak	Armor 4 (Plate)
Courage	5

STRESS	
Vigor	
Resolve	

ATTACKS	
■ Greatsword (M): Reach 3, 9, 2H,	
■ Broadsword (M): Reach 2, 8, Unbalanced, Parrying	
■ Battleaxe (M): Reach 2, 6, 1H,	
■ Poniard (M): Reach 1, 6, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1	
■ Brawl (M): Reach 1, 5, 1H, Improvised, Stun	
■ Steely Glare (T): Range C, 2 mental, Stun	
■ A Mighty Name (T): Range C, 4 mental, Area	

TALENTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A Born Leader ■ Accent ■ Ancient Bloodline — Atlantean ■ Animal Magnetism ■ Agile ■ Captain ■ Command ■ Courageous ■ Deflection ■ Dodge ■ Hardy ■ Healthy Superstition ■ Human Spider ■ Inspiring Leader ■ Knack for Survival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lightning Reflexes ■ Living Shadow ■ Master Thief ■ Might ■ Mighty Blade ■ No Mercy ■ Polyglot ■ Savage Dignity ■ Savage Instincts ■ Silent Strider ■ Strong Back ■ Thief ■ Traveler's Tongue ■ Uncivilized

OTHER POSSESSIONS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Full Plate Armor and Great Helm ■ Greatsword ■ Broadsword ■ Battleaxe 	

FORTUNE POINTS	

HARMS	
Wounds	
Trauma	

SOCIAL	
Social Standing	10
Renown	10
Fortune	3
Gold	Unlimited

WEALTH & HOLDINGS

"You took plenty of risks in the past, when you were struggling for life and wealth in that lousy little shop down by the wharves, and were hand-and-glove with every buccaneer and smuggler and pirate from here to the Barachan Isles. Prosperity must have softened you."

— Conan, "The Hour of the Dragon"

When a player character reaches the level of a noble, whether landed gentry or estateless, the daily scraping out of a existence becomes something of the past. These types of characters are no longer ones who are lucky to have a sword and jerkin to their name. They now possess real wealth, possibly even land.

Conan began as barbarian to whom coins were foreign. From there, he won and lost fortunes over the course of his career. His life had no genuine stability until he became king in his forties. Prior to that, he made do as the sun rose. Conan might start the dawn with naught but a water skin (if that) and end with a fistful of jewels. Yet his wealth was invariably squandered on his lifestyle or taken by circumstances of fate.

Largely, this sort of uncertainty is what the previous **Conan** sourcebooks have portrayed: characters with no permanent home or source of income. Until now, they lived and died by the sword. All that changes when coin is no longer a concern.

WEALTH

Money, since before the Hyborian Age, has fascinated, driven, and enthralled humanity. Once humans started growing crops and resided in a single area, wealth and debt found them. Empires were built and ruined in its pursuit.

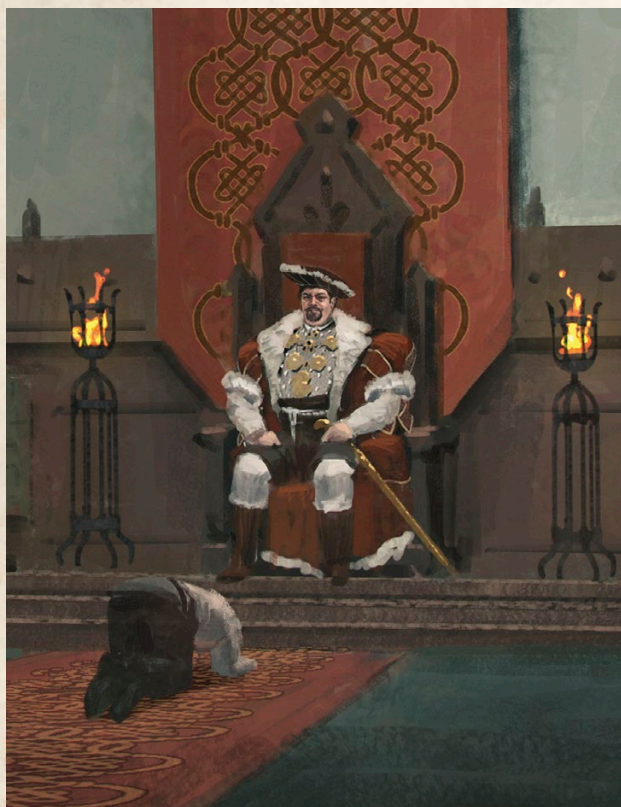
The player characters have likely sought wealth as well. While they may have a host of motives, gold is likely an allure if not a necessity. Yet now they no longer count every coin. They may buy largely what they desire, or simply ask for and receive it. Their motives change as such stability sets in.

For some, this is enough. Such characters retire and are heard of no more. For others, a new game begins: that of true power. Player characters now become those who move and shake the world. They have retainers at their disposal and may even possess some expanses of land. Some have castles, estates, or even cities.

Their power seems to have no end... but that is no longer a game. That is an ending.

Instead, player characters on the level of nobility now come up against things other than horrors from the Outer Dark and mercenaries whose blades are thirsty for blood. Simply slaying is no longer enough. Now, player characters must outmaneuver those who have always known privilege, and while they might take such foes in a one-on-one fight, they cannot so easily win against the ingrained guile that comes with fighting within the political for all of one's life.





HANDLING WEALTH

When player characters can have anything they need simply by asking, what motivates them? Most of Conan's career involves him in pursuit of some treasure or another. The player characters are likely the same. With that motive removed, new ones must be introduced.

This book assumed one of two scenarios. In the first, the player characters hold land but work as retainers, spies, knights, and special agents of a higher ruler. If one of their number is that ruler, the gamemaster should engineer situations where they must fight again as they did in their younger, more carefree days. Conan is dethroned more than once, even enslaved while he was so ousted.

The pinnacle of a royal-based campaign though, is one of the great political game. In such a campaign the player characters are rulers and they must make decisions for vast numbers of their citizenry. They trade in favors, alliances, and even war.

This is a higher tier of play, and all players should agree that they are ready to move toward a less traditional sword and sorcery campaign and focus on one which involves more political maneuvering.

HOLDINGS AND SOCIAL STANDING

To many nobles, the most important aspect of their identity is that which distinguishes them from commoners — their **titles**. However, the reality is that in day-to-day existence, a name — however vaunted — is worth its weight in air, and in some ways makes life more difficult due to the responsibilities and notoriety that come with a noble title. Titles cannot generate wealth in and of themselves. Instead, it is property — in the form of a **Holding** — that provides the noble with an income through taxation, renting, or through actual production of goods, and they serve as a place to store and keep their valuable possessions. Holdings at times can be sources of consternation, with the tenants causing problems or requiring attention, and at other times they are trophies to be flaunted. In some cases, they are arenas in which the owners may enact their private entertainment, whether hunts, parties, or other activities less savory.

For the most part, a Holding does not materialize out of thin air: it is handed down from generation to generation, sometimes taken away and gifted to others as fortune and favor rises and falls at court. In these latter cases, a Holding might have prior owners (or their families) lingering in some fashion, whether refusing to vacate or dwelling nearby. Perhaps the new owner of the Holding is expected to accommodate the prior owner and/or their family, letting them run things and continuing to dwell as if the property had not changed hands, or the Holding's new owner is responsible for turning out the prior tenants, whether diplomatically or through force.

Holdings vary tremendously from country to country, and in some a Holding is the equivalent of Social Standing on its own.

RECEIVING HOLDINGS

When a player character receives a title as a Carousing activity (**Conan** corebook, page 295), in addition to the title itself and the +1 bonus to Social Standing, they receive a Holding for free. Holdings come with their own benefits and responsibilities, described below.

Holdings

Each Holding is rated by a Social Standing required of its owner. In most cases, the owner's Social Standing is considerably higher. If, however, the owner's Social Standing is lower than that Holding, any Society tests made by the owner related to their title within the Holding are reduced by one step per point of Social Standing the owner is below the Holding's Social Standing rating. Thus, a player character

with a Social Standing of 6 with a Holding of Social Standing 7 is has a Difficulty increase of one step to all Society rolls in the same region as the Holding.

The *Holdings* table (see below) lists each type of Holding, its appropriate Social Standing, regions it might be found within, its type, a description, and the average income it produces per year in Gold.

LIMITS TO HOLDINGS

Player characters must maintain their Holdings, and thus must participate in the affairs of the kingdom in which they reside. This means they, too, pay taxes, though it is not necessary to calculate such. They owe fealty to the ruler above them, and during times of wars and emergencies must levy troops for them. In addition, the characters must roll four times per year on the *Events* tables found in *Chapter 3: Events*.

HOLDINGS				
Social Standing	Regions	Type	Description	Income
3	Town or City	House	A nicely furnished house in a nice area. Little actual land.	This produces no income unless renting out rooms. If so, 3 Gold per year may be generated
4	Town or City or Rural	Manor	A medium-sized manor with staff and acreage.	This produces 6 Gold per year.
5	Rural	Estate	This is a manor on a large plot of land. Smaller villages pay tribute. The player character is lord or lady of the region, though the region is not large.	12 Gold per year comes from such an estate.
6	Rural	County	The character has a major estate on a huge piece of land but also owns the surrounding country. The size varies by location, but at least 20,000 peasants owe fealty to this lord.	25 Gold per year comes from the farms, ranches, and other levies assets the owner possesses.
7	Rural	Province	The character has any sort of estate (or estates) they like. They have a personal retinue and are liable for raising troops from the counties under their control. Such a lord controls upwards of 50,000 people and many farms.	35 Gold per year falls into the character's pockets from the use of the land, the taxes levied, and other products such as timber, textiles, and the like.
8	City	City	This character owns an entire city and all surrounding territory. Sometimes, such characters are called kings or queens. They, too, control more than 50,000 civilians. They may call upon garrisoned troops and town guard. While the town watch owes direct fealty to them, the soldiers are those of the king or queen who may intervene if they wish.	40 Gold per year comes from the control of a city. Cities produce the most amount of goods, and as a bonus, the ruler taxes all the trade which goes on within their sphere of control. Everyone pays money to this person.
9	Country	Kingdom	This character is a king or queen. They control an entire kingdom and all assets belong to them in some fashion. They have an army and can call up a larger host for war. Such characters have impressive castles.	80 Gold per year comes from a kingdom. This is the ruler's own wealth and does not necessarily reflect what is in the imperial coffers. That could be a great deal more, as determined by the gamemaster.

THE HYBRID CAMPAIGN

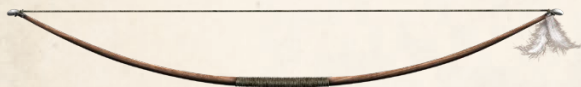
Some groups want the best of both worlds. Rulers often get what they want, and so too should players. Thus, a hybrid campaign is suggested. The player characters control their kingdoms, fiefdoms, baronies, etc., and plot for more power. This part of the campaign uses the rules in *Chapter 8: The Road of Kings*. Personal combat is treated as normal.

The other component to this campaign is that the players play *other* characters of lesser influence, who work for their other player characters. This can be quite interesting as the one player character or group directs

the actions of retainers who then must go out and do the dirty work. This is only for a gamemaster ready to put in the work and players willing to do the same.

As an alternative, the former player characters can simply become non-player characters whom the new group know of but do not yet interact with. This might be a mark of honor, having one's player character retired from play to be featured occasionally with a guest appearance in the campaign as a respected patron, employer, or even an enemy!

If the players and gamemaster agree, the player characters may also use the system in *Chapter 8: The Road of Kings*, a more detailed system of management and war. That decision depends largely on the sort of campaign desired. Some players and gamemasters relish the chance to plot and scheme for greater and greater power. Others would rather leave details to a few dice rolls and continue with more traditional sword and sorcery adventures.



RECEIVING INCOME

Income is portioned out four times per year. The gamemaster can determine how the player characters receive such funds. Some portion of this will be in coin, while other parts in goods, services, and fealty. Player characters may, for example, covert their Gold into troops and participate in a war. They may also use their Gold to fortify their Holdings, though this is left to roleplaying and the gamemaster's discretion.

Gamemasters may also have bandits heist the characters tax levies, steal cattle and other animals, and impose natural disasters (and their concomitant costs) as they deem fit.

CHAPTER 8



THE ROAD OF KINGS



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

— Orastes, *The Hour of the Dragon*

To live on in legends as a ruler of a land... that is the greatest goal of the adventurer, the crowning achievement of every king. The Road of Kings has twists and turns unguessed at. It is not for the timid. Yet if a player character is strong, possessed of strategy and luck, they too, may claim, and better still, hold a throne.

Conan the King concerns those who will, or at least try to achieve this immortality. It is for those player characters who eye not only the triumph of battle but the weight of the crown, the comfort of the court, and the troubles that come with all. Kings and queens, however, are but mortals, though to their people they seem so much more.

PLAYING AS RULERS

The traditional role of the ruler is largely aloof from the day-to-day frays Conan finds himself in. Yet even Howard's hero must deal with the banal realities of politics, for it keeps him on the throne as much does his fearsome reputation and penchant for killing. The gamemaster should strive to model this balance Howard achieves, using the mundane tasks of governance as a backdrop against which fierce action and unnatural horror threaten the very kingdom the player characters inhabit. Conan is decidedly not a game about treaties, and taxes, and marriages, though all these things may happen, as described in *Chapter 3: Events*.

Like Conan, player character rulers will oft find themselves, by choice or circumstance, drawn from the regal luxury of the court and back into the mud and blood in which empires are formed and defended. To conquer, the player character leads the army from the front. Such is the way of heroes in the Hyborian Age.

DEATH AND TAXES

The wild age in which the protagonists dwell is no different most — people are taxed, and they die. The ruler levies the tax and often decides who lives or dies. Such thoughts weigh heavy on a ruler, but **Conan** is a game of sword and sorcery adventure, not a meditative introspection on the nature of rule and its consequences.

The gamemaster, using the rules for domain management and war, helps set the balance for these elements. When in doubt, the player characters should be encouraged to head towards action and danger rather than to the council chamber when a problem rears its head.

STARTING AS RULERS

An intriguing — and challenging — beginning to a campaign could begin with the player characters as rulers or in the high employ of the same. Should the group start as nobles, knights, or even kings and queens, the gamemaster must

work with the players to determine how such a campaign framework is structured. Surely each character still has a noble or elevated backstory, unless the goal is to play through each character's path to the throne. Putting each as a potential ruler of a different land raises a logistical challenge that is best avoided: ultimately, it is difficult to imagine reasons that the monarchs of one kingdom and another adventure together, despite any bond of blood or friendship.

Thus, if the player characters wish to begin as highborn or newly minted nobles, they must inevitably be a part of the same court, with its attendant risk of a power imbalance. In a case where a player character is king or queen, this creates a campaign construct wherein the other player characters must inevitably form their retinue, or most valued allies. The most obvious means of avoiding this is to make the ruler a non-player character for whom the player characters are valued members of the court.

Most of the below campaign examples can incorporate starting at the top into their tapestries. So too could a story be told of the fall of a group of nobles and their way back to the top, or rejection of all things gilded and draped in craven power.

Cleaving a Path to the Throne

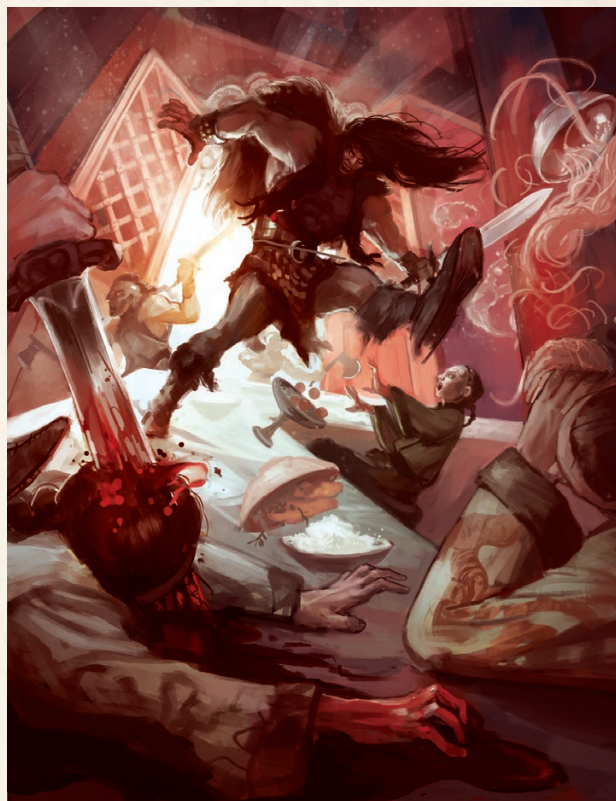
The prototypical Conan campaign would ideally start with rough and tumble characters at the bottom rung of society, working their way into the ranks of nobles and rulers who make the fashion and policy of the world. In such a campaign, cleaving one's way to power is apropos, and very Howardian.

Political intrigue is afoot in Howard's stories, but they serve as a frame for the action. To maintain the player characters' march from the barbarous killers to noble slayers (or their equivalents), the gamemaster may want to emphasize the battles and the backstabbing and downplay the actual detail of rule. Certainly, the rules set out in *Conan the King* allow both gamemaster and players to conduct business with a few simple rolls and get on with the action.

The Road of Shadows

Intrigue, duplicity, and assassination are also tools that unlock the throne. Conan largely rose to the throne on the strength of his sword-arm and power of his will, but even Howard notes there was skullduggery involved in his ascent, a coterie of disaffected nobles and generals who threw in with him and betrayed their own king to support a popular rival.

A campaign of intrigue is well within the scope of Howardian roleplaying. The player characters may either serve as agents for a ruler or scheme to set themselves up as rulers, or to put one of their own ranks upon the throne. To this end, they may pit enemies against each other while



offering them each seeming aid. They may kill those who get in their way. They might arrange for deals in back alleys with nobles who would never deign to meet in such criminal ecosystems were power not on the line.

Ultimately, it is recommended that whatever path to power the player characters take, it resolves itself in direct conflict, whether on a bloody battlefield or a more intimate skirmish in the throne room or right outside the royal palace. Let a player character strike the blow that wins for them a crown and a throne, rather than delegating that victory to a non-player character ally, however loyal.

TYPES OF CHARACTERS

The following are not archetypes as Conan defines them, but rather roles within a court or its shadows for players to slot their characters into. These convey no talents or rules benefits, but their stead provide guidance that helps the players and the gamemaster structure a role for player characters in an environ which is more codified than the typical player character group.

Kings & Queens

Being on top is the goal of many an adventurer. As there is no path to godhood in Conan's world, the next best thing is to rule the world of humankind as a mortal king or queen. Conan himself rises to the throne and continues to have epic

adventures after. There is no reason the player character cannot do the same.

However, reading about the exploits of an adventuring ruler is very different from having to play a support role to their primacy. The game must remain enjoyable for other players to continue with even if their character is not the ruler. Their roles carry less power in court, but the gamemaster must emphasize that they are equally as important in the adventures to come, and demonstrate this repeatedly in play.

Thus, the gamemaster must emphasize that the crown comes with its limits. Conan could not easily go unnoticed in the streets of his kingdom, and he found himself there was much that he could not do, even with the weight of the throne behind him. Similarly, this presents the gamemaster with the opportunity to emphasize the flexibility that other roles and types of characters, particularly those of different stations, possess.

Titled Nobles

The Hyborian nations are largely based on feudalism. The ruler owns the land and leases it to different vassals of varying levels. Player characters can be born into, or earn, such roles. A prince may wish to usurp his mother as ruler or to aid in war against a foreign foe. That selfsame prince may then enlist the help of other trusted nobles — dukes and duchesses, barons and baronesses, counts and countesses — to aid them. Likewise, a player character ruler could bestow such titles upon those who helped them rise to the throne; for who else would they really trust than those they've fought alongside: their dog-brothers and sword-sisters?

In either case, a group may thus play nobles, whether born as such or gifted with title and land by the ruler. They have domains to manage and wars to fight just as does the king. The baron who sits on the edge of border between Nemedia and Aquilonia is always on the lookout for spies, scouts, and outright signs of war, and they must also contend with managing their ruler's whims and needs, however real or specious.

INHERITING A THRONE

One natural evolution from a traditional CONAN campaign into a courtly-themed one is through inheritance. The CONAN corebook has the Noble Warrior archetype and this book provides the Noble (page 10). Other sourcebooks present similar archetypes, assuming some degree of royal blood. Castes can also delineate a connection to the royal bloodline, even if it is considered tenuous. While the base assumption is that this bloodline is of little use, and that the player character's title is ephemeral, there is no reason this must remain the case.

Many of the campaign and story suggestions in Conan the King assume that the player characters, are, like Conan himself, following a path of blood and will to take a throne. This does not always need be true. Following are some means by which a player character can actually be given a throne through legitimate means.

The King is Dead

The gamemaster may choose to invoke inheritance as a dramatic shift in the campaign, perhaps with such a noble-born character discovering that they are now heir to the throne, or a legitimate claimant, through some caprice or even some catastrophic event such as the illness that put Tarascus on the throne of Nemedia.

Perhaps the king or queen is dead, and the royal partisans seek a new heir who will prove more malleable than a direct inheritor. Or it might be that a savage struggle for succession has cleared the way and the player character has the strongest remaining claim. Into this vicious arena the player character is thrust, and must use their hard-won skills and wits — as well as those of their closest allies — to claim and hold the throne!

Born of Bastardy

Any player character might theoretically be an heir to the throne of their homeland, if perhaps the gamemaster

determines that they possess the royal bloodline. A grandparent or parent might be a former noble and heir to the throne, knowingly or otherwise, perhaps living in exile and keeping their identity a secret. In the case of particularly ruthless courts, growing up in secrecy with one's royal blood hidden from them might be the best means of staying alive.

The gamemaster should consider — perhaps asking the player if it is all right — whether a player character is the direct though bastardly, offspring, of a king or queen. Their true parentage has prior been concealed from birth for whatever reasons, whether shame, security, or simple ignorance, but now it is known. Or is it? Such knowledge might be announced with the arrival of assassins seeking to clear the board of any rival claimants to the throne. With this, the player character discovers their true parentage, and they can make their claim at the throne or die trying.

So, too, might such a group be given some land on the Aquilonian border, upon the other side of the Picts, with a decree to pacify and keep all the territory there forward that they can. A campaign like this is one of conquest and colonization, with ample opportunity for bloody, deadly combat. However, the nature of such a campaign may prove challenging for players, due to the unfortunate historical precedent. Howard did not shy away from this with his stories of the Aquilonian frontier: his depiction of the Picts as savages belied his affinity for them and his assertion that they were the true inheritors of the Earth, the ultimate survivors when forced into war against civilization.

Whatever the reason that brings them together, it is not uncommon for nobles to form alliances of convenience. The Rebel Four who seek to remove Conan from the throne in “The Phoenix on the Sword” represent the treacherous face of such an group, a craven assembly of conspirators who seek the throne for their own selfish reasons and must strive to besmirch their king’s reputation to gain a modicum of popular support.

Other Members of the Court

A veritable cornucopia of courtesans, spouses, viziers, spies, and even wizards round out every Hyborian Age court. There are those who hold specific roles and those who are merely there for their proximity to the throne, having performed some past service to the ruler, or because they have caught the attention of the court and been encouraged to stay.

Conceivably any type of player character could find a role as any of these, though ones with greater agency are more attractive to play. These individuals might also hold noble titles and serve regularly in the court while managing their own domain from afar.

Additionally, many dignitaries from other courts and kingdoms, particularly neighbors, are common fixtures in the halls of the palace, sent as ambassadors or envoys, and perhaps lingering for reasons of their own or otherwise. Player characters might be exotic to the folks of a Hyborian court — whether a Black Kingdoms chieftain or even a Hyrkanian sorcerer — and still be staunch allies of the ruler, even viewed as an equal.

One merely need look back to the Thurian Age and Conan’s antecedent Kull to see such an example. Beside Kull always was Brule the Spear-slayer, the Atlantean king’s best friend and sword-brother, yet the Pict held no real rank within the Valusian court other than being loyal to the king.

COURTLY CAMPAIGN THEMES

Nobles, rulers, and members of the court make for a fine group. The gamemaster may also present options for the player characters to form around a central theme integral to role of kings and queens in the Hyborian Age. As noted

HISTORY VS. PULP

The typical historical ruler did not venture off that regularly, and even leading their armies to war was more a rarity than a common occurrence. More often than not, kings and queens kept relatively safe upon their thrones and let others wage their wars. They incite wars but do not fight them. They send spies but do not spy themselves. Hardly ever were they forced to take up swords and don armor to defend themselves in their bedchambers or within their throne rooms... yet occasionally, just these sorts of things happened.

It is times like these that the gamemaster must focus on, letting the player character rulers, be they nobles or viziers, take an active role in the defense of their realm, and to enact their policies at lance-point if necessary. Howard again and again forces Conan into this position. The Cimmerian was kidnapped, poisoned, usurped, ambushed, enslaved, betrayed, and worse! And still he returned to take back his throne.

All these tactics, though gamemaster fiat, should be considered as tools for keeping the stakes high.

previously, most rulers don’t do their own dirty work, fight their own battles, or become their own spies. Conan did all these things in *The Hour of the Dragon* alone, but the gamemaster needn’t shoehorn the player characters into any prescribed idea of what rulers should be or what they must do to survive.

Courtly Roles

The gamemaster should consider what roles individuals could perform for and around the court. One player character might be the true leader of whatever domain the gamemaster decides they rule — ideally one that the player characters liberated together, or earned through play. That player character then becomes the ‘star’, which can be problematic.

As mentioned above, it might be that this single character is the ruler but a non-player character around whom the group centers their activity. Consider the possible roles:

- In such a case, one player character could be the vizier, the wisdom in their ear, a royal advisor.
- Another might be the royal spymaster, rooting out threats to the empire at any cost.
- One more serves as captain of the guard, responsible not only for the ruler’s safety at court but on journeys and in preemptive strikes.

- Another is the general or high-ranking military officer who serves in the field to do the royal duty.
- Finally, another is their herald, the official spokesperson to the outside world, whose voice carries the weight of the ruler in their absence.

Such a group of characters would be easy to submerge into the wilderness of adventure: spying, intrigue, and more makes for a game of power which does not privilege one player character above the others.

Black Dragons

Another group of influential characters could be Conan's own Black Dragons. In this case, Conan currently sits on the throne of Aquilonia and his Black Dragons are elite members of his military that carry out his most difficult assignments. Not all are mere nobles or warriors, some could have very different backgrounds and earned the right to wear the black armor and helm through a variety of means.

Such a campaign puts the player characters right in the court with Conan himself. Some players welcome this, others will not. Conan has a way of taking the spotlight from anyone, after all. But if Conan deeded them land and title, they owe fealty to him as king. Perhaps he disappears, as he does in Howard's stories, and the Black Dragons must track him down and restore him to the throne?

It may just be that Conan relinquishes his crown and vanishes into the wilds on another adventure, never to be seen again, instead of growing old on the throne. It is the gamemaster and players' game to determine what happens after that.

Alternately, the player characters need not be members of the Black Dragons precisely but might instead be the members of an equivalent group with a different ruler. Many are the Hyborian courts and each has need of such a stalwart group of loyalists, and such traditions may have been in place long before the Black Dragons, or even inspired by them.

Knights of Poitain

The knights of Poitain are a famed group of chivalrous men and women who operate in the unique titular province of Aquilonia. They automatically have land and title as befits their name. In this case, they may ally with the current leader of Aquilonia, be it Conan or Numedides, or they could help overthrow one or the other.

While Conan is the hero of Howard's stories, it is not a stretch to turn him into the villain of someone else's story. The red-handed barbarian took the Aquilonian country's throne by force, and it is up to the player characters to restore honor and a proper bloodline to the kingdom!



Nemedian Scholars

The most vaunted scholars of the Hyborian Age, the Nemedians also have the highest culture. Such a culture seeks to learn, and it cannot do so from within the pleasant confines of its borders. And so, the scholars send out groups of the high-born, or those who have earned title, to scour the lands outside of Nemedias for information, raw knowledge, secrets, and artifacts from the pre-Cataclysmic age.

Such a troupe must of necessity need warriors, thieves, philosophers, and sorcerers. Venturing forth to uncover the dark corners of the Earth requires many talents. Conan learned a lot in his day, but it was not his purpose to learn and record for the sake of posterity. He lived for the day. A scholarly group lives for history.

THE WEIGHT OF THE CROWN

Roleplaying a king or queen means that the player character takes a mantle of responsibility far greater than their immediate friends. The empire, barony, or even tiny fiefdom depends on this person for survival, prosperity, and victory in battle.

This is why the crown weighs heavy on the ruler's brow, for their problems are no longer only their own but, as Conan learned, the problems of hundred, thousands, perhaps millions of people.

Conan felt the old tug of the professional fighting-man...so his familiar devil whispered in his ear, and the phantom of his lawless and bloody past crowded upon him. But he did not turn aside.

— The Hour of the Dragon

As the quote avers, even Conan thought about leaving his responsibilities behind. But he did not. That choice is the border between ruler and pretender to the throne. Which will the player character ruler be?

Presented within Conan the King are rules to support the management of a realm and the means by which to wars that threaten it. However, there are many instances for roleplaying that fall beyond that which can be covered by game mechanics. When one leads a domain, be it huge or modest, one interacts with the leaders around them, with plots and schemes, and must be ready for war.

For Howard, more often than not the court intrigue is the framing story for action, but the gamemaster can choose instead to make the intrigue the center of play. At the level of rulers, player characters no longer want for food, money, shelter, or fame. These needs have been sated. Now they lust for power, or legacy, or even such a noble purpose as leaving a people better than they found them.

In any case, plotters stand in their way as do the minions of other kings and queens. The gamemaster could cap off a campaign with a grand plot between kingdoms, ending in a war, or the gamemaster could make it the focus of the entire journey the player characters undertake.

Playing as Retainers

A ruler does very little alone. Wherever they travel, they are escorted by scores of retainers and servants, determined to fulfil every possible need and requirement. Whether it is protection from the forces who might seek to overthrow and replace them, or the simple matters of ensuring there is food in enough quantity and of sufficient quality, every conceivable need is covered. Or can be, at least. These are the royal retainers — those whose life and fortune are tied to the royal family, who serve them as loyally and devotedly as possible.

Playing a retainer might involve the complete opposite, with the player characters secretly plotting to destroy their royal protector. Perhaps they seek the throne themselves; it is far from unusual for those with tangential claims to the

crown to occupy positions of responsibility at court. In part, this is the *largesse* of the monarch, benefitting their peers as a good ruler is meant to. It is also a form of divide and conquer, with the sons and daughters of the nobility kept at court to ensure that none become too greedy for power.

Of course, this wouldn't prevent those with an aptitude for subterfuge and a lust for the throne from conducting nefarious plans in the full view of the king. Equally interesting games can be had playing faithful servants of the ruler; who knows what plots need to be rooted out, or what secretive assignments the agents might be dispatched on?

Playing as Spies

No royal court of any importance is short of spies: how can it be? It is in the royal court that the most important decisions are taken and, perhaps most essentially, the power of influence can be most effectively wielded. Knowledge of such events is vital to other nations, to power brokers and those who would direct the course of the future. Spies are the best way of learning about the events in any court, in any land.

SAMPLE BORDER KINGDOM CAMPAIGN

The Border Kingdom is a skein of shifting power, loyalty, and war. Fiefdoms, baronies, and duchies rise and fall in the relative blink of an eye here. This land, left alone by the great powers, home to petty lords, and mighty warrior-queens, and all the rest makes for a perfect setting for a king-level campaign.

Here, the gamemaster can easily insert new domains and have the characters vie for them. They may make it their goal to carve out their own and, perhaps, unite the Border Kingdom under a single banner so that it becomes a power unto itself. This is open ground, the great unknown in the truest sense of the word as Howard mapped little of it for us.

What happens in the Border Kingdom is up to the gamemaster and players. There is no Conan to take the throne here; the cast is made entirely of original creations. Constant war plagues the kingdom, leading to an influx of mercenaries and armies comprised of strange bedfellows. Player characters can quickly see potential for their own kingdoms in such a place, but rising to the top is the real challenge.

In the case where the player characters arrive in the region with some form of reputation. They could insert themselves into an ongoing conflict, be it in the shadows or in the mud splattered fields. If they play things right, they can move up in power, each perhaps seizing the

throne of a minor barony until each player character holds their own territory and the group as a whole must decide how to proceed. Will the Border Kingdom begin to unite, or do the players want to fight amongst each other to see who survives?

The latter is not, admittedly, a traditional campaign but it offers all sorts of intriguing possibilities. The gamemaster naturally wants the actual players to remain friendly to one another, but their characters can turn on each other and scheme to become the one true ruler. Or course, non-player characters also have their own designs, and any rulers overthrown either remember the humiliating defeat (if still living) or have relatives to swear vengeance in their stead.

In the relatively small territory of the Border Kingdom, away from the eyes of the great empires, things happen on a microcosmic scale. This is a cauldron of ambition and treachery in which the players can freely interfere without the gamemaster having to rewrite and redraw the history of the Hyborian Age.

Of course, if the gamemaster does want to rewrite the era, perhaps Conan never existed at all. Perhaps a group of strangers, come from disparate lands, consolidated an empire on conquest and glory of which Howard never wrote. We have very little evidence left of this mythical age. Anything might have happened.

Playing a spy is an excellent way for player characters to be both of the court and outside it. Unlike retainers, whose life is tied to the court even if they seek to subvert it, a spy can always leave, can always return to the wilderness as they seek to return to their home. Spies are vital cogs in the eternally grinding machine of information; they may work for several different factions at once, including those within the court and without it. A spy may be loyal to one party, or loyal to none save themselves and their co-conspirators. A group of spies, all playing different sides off against one another is a perfect set-up for a party of player characters seeking to explore the many nuances of society's upper echelons.

PLAYING DURING CONAN'S RULE

The violent upheaval which led to Conan assuming the kingship of Aquilonia is a perfect time in which to set a campaign. On the one hand, it allows player characters to play in a world shaped by the Cimmerian's bloody hands; on the other, it allows them to do so without having the same chance of meeting him and having his legendary deeds eclipse their own.

There is a reason, at the opening of the "The Phoenix on the Sword", that Conan is frustrated. His barbarian spirit chafes against the formal structures of court. It may make it harder to tell an exciting story in some respects, but it means that the whole of the continent is now free of Conan. The player characters can claim it for their own, free of the risk of Conan's interference. They may still meet Conan, they may even (deliberately or accidentally) thwart his plans for his country, but no longer is he the same risk to a party's centrality to plot.

Indeed, Conan can become a potential source of valuable advice and plot hooks himself; what band of adventurers wouldn't gladly accept a commission from an aging Conan, to go and quell the uprising of the Picts on his border? Or avert a war with Nemedia? Or rescue a faithful advisor from the clutches of a Stygian snake-cult? Only the vilest of dogs would say no to a patron like Conan!

INTERNECINE WAR

The ascension of a new monarch to the throne inevitably brings tension with it; few lines of succession are as clear as might be desired. Few come into their power without having to, at the very least, carefully secure the loyalty of those who hold land and power in their new kingdom, before they are safely ensconced on the throne. In other circumstances, the questionable legitimacy of a claim to the throne can become something much more dangerous.

Civil war of the most brutal and bloody kind is a frequent side effect of the absence of a clear claimant to the throne.

Even if the nation is spared the bloodletting which civil wars inevitably inflict on the populace, palace coups can become quite frequent — with each new pretender managing to secure enough influence and money to seize the throne but not quite enough to keep it. Such times are perfect for mercenaries and other scoundrels who make their living at the edge of a blade. A new paymaster is always welcome and as new sides emerge and seek to take control, either in outright war or in carefully contained slaughter within the palace walls... those who can offer temporary loyalty and skill with sword or intrigue are liable to become prized commodities.

Player characters may seize upon such uncertain times as an opportunity to make their fortune, or make themselves rulers. In times where infrastructure is fractured or ignored and in which the brutal and the brave can take what they want for themselves, much can be gained by player characters and those they choose to support.

MAKING AN EMPIRE

Though much of the Thurian continent is well-established and settled, no small amount of it still disorganized enough that an opportunistic and powerful enough group of player characters might actually be able to take it over and carve a new kingdom out of land that once belonged to another. For example, the relatively young kingdom of Khoraja — described in *Conan the Mercenary* — was originally claimed as part of Shem, though remote and indefensible enough that some Kothic adventurers took it as their own, forging a new kingdom, albeit a narrow one, in the space between Shem and Koth.

A look at the map of Conan's world reveals a great deal of territory on borders between rivals who would be all-too-welcoming of a buffer kingdom between them. While Koth is perhaps too militant and well-defended, ringed with mountains, to claim any part of, Shem's eastern border is still relatively open. Keshan and Darfar's borders are mostly undefined, and any brave souls who can claim and hold land in Iranistan or Ghulistan are welcome to it, so long as they do not attempt to tax the hill nomads there. Most in the latter two countries would gladly trade the current

Characteristically most of the Hyborian nations were prone to ignore the growing menace. But in Khoraja, carved out of Shemite lands by the swords of Kothic adventurers, heed was given.

— "Black Colossus"



Vendhyans for a group of player characters as their rulers. For a nation more Hyborian in temperament, the Border Kingdom (described above) is prime for such opportunism, and Corinthia and Brythunia are both ripe for a bold claim.

Such an endeavor could prove an epic campaign in and of itself, perhaps with the player characters being allied with a would-be ruler of one of these territories. The player characters could be among this ambitious non-player character ruler's closest allies and agents as they make their move to claim a kingdom. An army is built, perhaps with their aid. Land is scouted, perhaps pacts are made with local leaders and chiefs. Then, perhaps by accident or foul play, the ruler is suddenly out of the picture, dead perhaps, or merely ousted as was Olgerd Vladislav by Conan. Now the player characters have their own army and a clear path to the throne of a kingdom all their own, a newly wrought land to change the maps forever. What will they call the place? Who will wear the crown? How will they defend it against its inevitable enemies?



SCHEMING AND PLOTTING

Conan the King presents mechanics for elevating one's position and even conducting war, but these rules are not intended to replace roleplaying. Roleplaying the schemes, the plots, the betrayals, the things revealed... these are all what the bulk of the player character kingmaking should involve.

That's easy enough to say, but it's not so easily accomplished. The players and the gamemaster must work together to decide what the goals of each player character are and what stands between them and said goal. Often, this object takes human form. Non-player characters are always important, but their personalities now shape worlds, curb ambition, or fuel the same.

A host of characters are found around every court. From the servant to the vizier, they all have information of value. Scheming to take a throne, or hold it, is a full-time job. To that end, the gamemaster must decide how much of it they want to be the focus of the campaign. If the players agree, and they want to play the great game of kings and queens, the gamemaster must set some ground rules.

GUIDELINES FOR PLAY

First, the players and gamemaster must agree whether the player characters are in this together or are potential adversaries. While inter-party conflict is not uncommon in a roleplaying game, it's usually not the default style. In a game of crowns, it could be.

This necessarily pits players against each other which is generally advised against. Yet certain groups will desire to compete not only against non-player characters, but player characters as well. As gamemaster, this puts the gamemaster in a difficult position.

The gamemaster should be certain before allowing this type of play. It changes the whole dynamic model the gamemaster has likely been using prior. The most important thing to obtain is consent from all the players in which they acknowledge that a campaign where the player characters are pitted against one another is likely to bring a great risk of personal animosity when things don't go smoothly for everyone.

For that reason alone, it is highly recommended that the gamemaster keep the player characters on the same side and have them scheme against shared enemies, rather than striving against one another. It is still entirely possible that they might have a falling out, and one might betray another, but it is best that this is a rare occurrence, rather than the default mode of play.

THE GROUP PLOT

In this model, the player characters act as a cabal or an alliance. They might initially operate in secret, or they may have holdings they each bring together. In either case, they are on the same side. They are a bloc and can gain much. The next question is: who are they fighting?

Here the gamemaster can allow the player characters to indulge their worst selves. Here sneak-thieves can murder and steal in the dead of night so long as they are doing it to non-player characters. If the player characters all hold territory in Aquilonia, then anything goes as to how they deal with Nemedra.

This satisfies the duplicitous nature of kingmaking and empire while keeping the nasty bits focused on outside enemies. The gamemaster doesn't want the player characters poisoning each other to get ahead, but if they want to take over Aquilonia, poison could be liberally spread about the court.

THE DIRTY BAG OF TRICKS

The tools to make, or unmake, an empire are not for the timid. They involve perfidy, betrayal, assassination, and more. Following are described of the methods and how they could apply to a kingdom-level campaign.

Blasphemous Rumors

Spreading rumors is mean, and dishonorable, and completely effective. Hints of scandal, strange allegiances, and other things which seed doubt have done in kings and their empires.

Rumors might spread that the king might be a heretic. Even minstrels sing about it in the streets, never mind that a player character paid them to do so. The queen is secretly an agent of Turan, and cannot be trusted. The heir apparent killed his older brother when they were young, and it was covered up.

In court, gossip travels fast. In fact, courts are in part founded on gossip. At a certain level of wealth, of comfort, stories denigrating others of one's class are a fine pastime. Thus, player characters with Persuade or Society skills, or simply clever personas, can spread rumors and see what happens. If the rumors happen to be true, that's all the better.

Yet what can rumors do? They provide an insidious tool to weaken enemies' reputations, but this is about ruling, not petty revenge. The player characters need to use rumormongering for such things as to place doubt in the heart of the king whose favored advisor they need out of the way. Or, more boldly, the player characters may need to get the nobles to doubt the king. Manufacturing evidence and then spreading it is completely fair in this kind of war of wills.

Bu building with a small rumor, the piling on of rumors that confirm the central premise of doubt, player characters can remove their enemies without having to kill them. The rumor is as deadly as the blade in the courts of the Hyborian Age.

That is just in court. Seeding rumors in other kingdoms, such as a rival is preparing to attack, can incite a conflict, perhaps a war, which plays to the favor of the plotters. If one wants to usurp the king, getting the kingdom involved in an unpopular war which distracts the ruler and angers the populace makes that goal a lot more likely. Of course, many rulers stumble into these things all on their own, and the player characters merely need to take advantage of the ensuing distrust.

Secret Alliances

Fealty is owed to the king, but it doesn't mean they always have it. That continues down the line of nobles and even their agents. Conan is a good judge of character. He knows who to trust. He's also an infuriatingly hard man to get the upper hand on. Yet even he falls to secret alliances in some of Howard's stories.

No matter how strong the ruler, a determined alliance of convenience can pose a real threat. Player characters are themselves a likely alliance and, depending on their positions, might be able to pull off quite a lot. Yet a group fresh to court is not going to be inconspicuous, so it makes

sense to enlist trusted members of the court to help in any given scheme. Player characters should be on the alert for those who have grievances. The gamemaster should populate each court with conflicting feelings and goals and, in so doing, provide a setting ripe for the formation of secret alliances.

For example, consider the situation in *The Hour of the Dragon*. Various conspirators wish to see the king of Nemedia gone, a new king in his place, and the conquest of Aquilonia after. As is classic Howard, this hinges on ancient, fell sorcery, but the plot also involves clear human motives.

Player characters are often used to achieving their goals through sheer martial force. The challenge of having to do so with guile and complexity may come as a welcome change. No matter how powerful Conan was as king, he still had to deal with those plotting against him in the shadows. The player characters can either be those plotters, or the ones they use as their agents.

Betrayals

The player characters may have every intent of betraying an ally, but what if that ally betrays them first? In the game of kings, everyone might be lying. Betrayals are at the center of intrigue and drama, and quite likely, the center of any political-based campaign. Deals are cut, broken, and reformed. Alliances shift like the wind, and the enemy of one's enemy may be their friend... or another enemy. It is a skein of hard-to-read motives and nigh-impossible-to-predict outcomes.

Practically what this means is that the gamemaster should strive to keep the player characters guessing. Did that alliance they signed in blood just now really mean the same thing to both parties? Can they trust that chamber boy they've befriended, or does he have another master he secretly reports to? Is that handmaiden's watchful eye merely to serve her queen, or is she filing away things to report to a rival?

However, though the gamemaster should keep things mysterious, they should also be fair, always providing the player characters with insight based on their abilities and talents, information that the players would not otherwise have. Someone with high Expertise or Focus with the Society skill might spot a betrayal coming and even use it to their advantage.

It's instances like these where the gamemaster should determine whether the dice should come into play, or whether to merely provide information to those who would otherwise earn it naturally. It is not necessary to roll if the outcome is primarily based on the players' roleplaying and decision-making, not on that of their characters. It can be equally rewarding for the players to use their own minds to plot and machine their ascendance to power!

Deception

"Courts are built on lies," says a line from 'The Nemedian Chronicles' attributed to the famed scholar Astreas. While this is oft true, it falls short of truth. More than lies, rumors, and that which comes off the forked tongue, are grander deceptions.

Entire armies can be faked, if one has the means, and it need not require sorcery, such as Conan demonstrated in "A Witch Shall Be Born". False intelligence is planted in the minds of faithful spies, who upon checking, find their other sources corroborate something which later turns out untrue.

Feints and the like are key in war, and war is a key part of power plays. Leverage is gained, or advantage created, when the enemy believes their opponent ready to do one thing and they do the other. This works in one-to-one encounters as well. What anyone says may not agree with what they later do.

This uncertainty creates a measure amount of paranoia which should be parceled out judiciously, as overuse can create a shadowy and uncertain labyrinth from which the player characters may never escape. If the players become frustrated and feel that nothing is true, they may lose investment in the game itself, and balk at continuing to play within the political arena.

Assassination

This is the most dramatic and final recourse but the one everyone seems to move toward first: killing the person whose title one desires. Sometimes, it really is that simple. Most often it is not. The player characters might plot an assassination of their own or be bought to perform one, in return for more power or influence with the new ascendant ruler.

Are the player characters would-be rulers themselves, planning assassinations or suffer their attempts, or are they retainers who try to prevent such regicides? In either case, an assassination, involving the player characters or otherwise, is a great way to shake up the status quo. Howard used it as a means of launching stories involving royal courts and political turmoil, no matter whether the story was set in court or the rocky hills near Mount Yimsha.

If the king is poisoned, be it through magic or alchemy, the player characters loyal to their liege may have to find the cure. First, though, they must find the assassin. This could lead to a web of problems which could touch on all the above themes, and the player characters could maintain their own agency while still working in service to the throne.

The moral code of the Hyborian Age is gray at best, but not every group cleaves to playing duplicitous nobles. Conan keeps a code of honor, albeit a barbaric one. Perhaps the player characters do the same. That means they don't start the coups, necessarily, but must still deal with their aftermath.



FEUDALISM

So far as any of the nations of the Hyborian Age possess anything as sophisticated as a political system, it is undoubtedly feudalism which predominates. Feudalism, in some form, exists across huge swathes of the Thurian continent; from the dreaming west: Aquilonia, Nemedia, and Brythunia; to Stygia, Kush, and to the east in Vendhya and Khitai. In all of these loosely defined nations, the ruler controls the land (at least in title). The land is then parceled off into territories, known as fiefdoms, to the wealthy and those capable of raising armies to offer support to the ruler when called upon. Those who are given the land are entitled to raise money from it, with peasants who reside upon the land obliged to pay tithes on any crops or animals they might own. The landowners often enforce their will and collect their taxes through threat of force, usually with an entrenched warrior-class, frequently the children of lesser nobles.

There is little else to the system beyond the obligation of each strata of society to render service to the one above it. Those who hold the wealth of a kingdom — the barons and dukes who constitute the king or queen's support and rivals — are each the dominant force in the regions they control. They alone have the right to form those who serve on their lands into a militia. These parcels of land, baronies

and duchies, are essentially small independent kingdoms within the overall architecture of a nation — each fiefdom a reflection of its guardian — some kindly tenants, some brutal overseers who exploit those who cannot defend against their tyranny.

Other nations in the Hyborian Age lack even this form of basic political infrastructure. Hyrkania, for instance, is essentially lawless, it's various roving tribes each striving against one another for power and prestige. It is widely considered, in the courts of the westerly nations, that should the Hyrkanian tribes ever fully unite under a great warlord, then the rest of the continent would truly tremble. Hyperborea is ruled by a king, but there is little in the form of smaller fiefdoms, and the king alone collects taxes directly from his immediate subjects.

Player characters are always aware of the feudal system in their journey across the continent; even if they do not use that name to describe it, the hierarchy which obtains is impossible to ignore. When entering Aquilonia, Brythunia, or Nemedia, the player characters are likely to initially encounter peasants. It may take some time and effort for them to secure passage to meet with someone more powerful — a knight in the service of a duke, for example — but most likely the player characters have sought to avoid such entanglements.

KINGDOMS AND THEIR POLITICS

While Howard mapped certain cultures and elements of history from history back to his invented one, they are by no means an exact match, and though the parallels are strong, they are not always exact. Howard's feudal system appears within the text of his stories, but it isn't dwelt upon. His kingdoms go to war, but the reasons are often provided within the context.

Yet Howard's world is recognizable as a pre-history to the real world. His cyclical history repeats across ages and names now familiar have their origins in the Hyborian Age, and far earlier. Herein are the major kingdoms of the age and their political structures at the time when Conan was king.

Each nation's ruler is described with a **Task Number (TN)**, representing that ruler's ability as a military leader or standing for their most favored general. This represents both the Command and Warfare Skills. The value in parentheses is the Focus. This value is used for times when that ruler goes to war (see page 102).



Aquilonia

The mightiest kingdom in the west, and possibly the strongest of the age, Aquilonia is at the peak of its power under King Conan. After coups and a war with Nemedia, Aquilonia has stabilized and finds itself in an enviable position. It won the war with Nemedia, who now retreats behind its borders to lick its wounds. Conan may well consider pursuing an expansion into Nemedia now that they are weaker. They also deposed him, and though he dealt with the plotters, he is not one to forgive a slight easily.

That said, Conan spared the life of Nemedia's king, Tarascus, who plotted against him. It is possible Conan pursues peace with Nemedia while focusing on the Picts or on threats emerging from the south.

Conan has not only seen the world but served in many of its armies or fought against them. He knows the ambitions of Koth and the capacity of Turan to sweep lesser kingdoms like Shem under their cavalry's hooves. From a tactical standpoint, Conan likely considers Turan a greater long-term threat than any of the Hyborian nations. As someone who detests the Picts, he is mindful of their unique ability to survive and expand. He holds a grudge against the Hyperboreans, for treatment he suffered when traveling through their land, but he is not willing to venture into that faraway land to revenge himself for slights suffered so long ago. As a barbarian, he knows what happens when one prods and wakes the bear.

Thus, Conan must weigh his decisions carefully. He is not so fool as to dismiss the primitive Picts, not his own kin, or the Nordheimers on his northern borders. Having ranged across much of the known world, he is under no illusion that Hyborian nations are the most civilized of their time.

Having returned arable land to farming, Conan increased the output of Aquilonia. He builds new roads and keeps others in good repair. Life is good for the lowliest peasant, or as good as such a life gets. While people grumble about the 'barbarian king' and nobles continue to eye the throne, Conan's hold on his crown is the strongest it has been since he seized power.

Five hundred years from Conan's time, Aquilonia falls (see *The End of an Era*, page 47). The Picts swarm over the civilized world, only to be met by barbarians from the east and the north. Even the Cimmerians drive south, in their time, cutting a swath through the continent as Conan might a foe. That is all in the future, though, and at this time, Aquilonia shines and flourishes.

- **Current State:** Thriving
- **Army Size:** Huge (60,000+)
- **Wealth:** High
- **Ambitions:** Push back Pictdom, possibly conquer Nemedia
- **Ruler:** King Conan (TN: 15, Focus 5)

Brythunia

A nation only in name, Brythunia is comprised of four minor kingdoms. Each descends from the clans that originally settled this stark land. Though they may rally under the same banner against a mutual threat, they are not always friendly amongst themselves.

Brythunia is also less advanced than the other Hyborian nations, being younger, and many Brythunians are happy that way. Nevertheless, Nemedia's recent setback causes the westernmost sub-kingdom, Hilder, to consider new options.

As Nemedia itself is made up of independent factions, Hilder, who always had the most ambitious political eye, sees opportunity. If they could ally with elements in eastern Nemedia, they could strengthen their own position and, possibly, finally unify Brythunia under a single banner.

To the tough, independent-minded Brythunians, this is a dubious proposition. It is unclear what the other three minor kingdoms would do if Hilder made such a move. However, with Aquilonia growing in power in the west, and Turan rising in the east, the time for a divided country may be at an end. For the good of all four kingdoms, unity and strength might be the best option. It is this tact that Hilder seeks to sell to its neighbors. For more information on Brythunia, see pages 58–59 of *Conan the Thief*.

- **Current State:** Unstable
- **Army Size:** Medium (30,000)
- **Wealth:** Medium
- **Ambitions:** To recover stability
- **Ruler:** No single ruler (TN: 14, Focus 3)

Corinthia

Comprised of city-states, Corinthia's position sharing its border with so many major kingdoms ensures a constant flow of trade and therefore money. This money supports hired mercenary armies that, coupled with those smaller armies of the city-states, provide Corinthia with protection.

That protection is necessary with neighbors like Zamora and Koth. Corinthia has a history of being invaded and sacked. When wars hit other countries, they have a history of receiving refugees. Right now, the city-states would like to consolidate power, but none can agree under whom.

The three major city-states are Magyar, Krotoa, and Stregos. The 'kings' of those cities are not in agreement on how to rule let alone who would rule, though it is likely the unification of the country becomes more popular as Turan pushes into Zamora (nearly abutting Corinthia).

The rise of Turan and its concomitant expansion threatens several kingdoms and nomad societies. Corinthia is directly in their path in the north, right after Zamora. Zamora is a devious enemy, but they hold no strong military as compared to the other kingdoms. Turan expands into their territory with relative ease, creating a vassal state.

The Zamorians are clever, though, and know which way the wind blows.

Corinthia, though, sees that Turan wants a huge empire. They are coming for the west. Before long, Corinthia will have to strengthen its alliances with other nations or throw their lot in with Turan. It is far more likely they will stay true to their Hyborian bloodline. See pages 36–45 of *Conan the Thief* for more information on Corinthia.

- **Current State:** Divided into city-states but very wealthy
- **Army Size:** Medium (30,000 plus another 20,000 mercenaries)
- **Wealth:** High
- **Ambitions:** Unification, but under which city-state?
- **Ruler:** Currently a triumvirate of kings squabbling for the edge (TN: 14, Focus 3)

Koth

Koth's 'misadventure' against Aquilonia and King Conan left them with a dead king and the missing power behind the throne. For years, perhaps decades, possibly even longer, the sorcerer Tsotha-lanti held the real power from his Scarlet Citadel. With he and King Strabonus now gone, and with Strabonus leaving no male heir, his daughter rules in his stead. Fasuta, the new queen, rose to power with the support of various factions left in the wake of her father's death. They saw a way to make her a puppet ruler and run the kingdom in her stead. For a while, this worked.

However, Fausta watched her father held under the thumb of Tsotha-lanti for a long while. It sickened her, but her father's dismissal of her as a worthy heir sickened her more. In secret, she studied under Tsotha-lanti and now knows more about magic than most men could and remain sane. Yet she is still sane.

She also adroitly manipulates the nobles who thought they would control her. As Turan encroaches on Koth, Fausta has become a symbol of Kothic resistance. Moreover, she's promised to retake the land adventures cut from Koth hundreds of years ago.

Can she fulfill this promise? No one knows. It may well rely on her power and pacts with the Outer Dark. Who can say what abilities and intelligence she now has at her command? She learned from a powerful wizard and now controls an empire, albeit a retreating one. Soon, she is likely to use her sorcerous ways to strengthen Koth, and possibly attack Turan. Koth is described on pages 28–33 of *Conan the Mercenary*.

- **Current State:** Stable
- **Army Size:** Huge (50,000)
- **Wealth:** Medium
- **Ambitions:** Reclaim lost territory; hold off Turan
- **Ruler:** Queen Fausta (TN: 13, Focus 2)

Nemedia

After a successful coup and a following invasion of Aquilonia, Nemedia seemed to have done the impossible: dominate the west. Yet Conan returned and drove the Nemedians back from whence they came. Their armies suffered huge losses, either killed on the field or disbanded. The highest culture in the land learned a powerful lesson about just how learned a barbarian king can be. Conan showed up King Tarascus in the end, and possibly saved all the west from a return to the age of Acheron.

None of that sits well with the nobility in Nemedia, but there is little they can do about it now. The Baron of Tor, who funded — and some say, pulled the strings on — Tarascus is dead. Yet the coffers of the kingdom were somewhat depleted by the war and the army, as well as people and towns on the border, must rebuild.

And so Nemedia finds itself having to wait. Its ambition is, for now, curtailed by the Cimmerian who sits on the greatest throne of the era. Tarascus is no military match for Conan, and he is wary of meddling with sorcery again. Thus, he hopes a solution presents itself. He likely makes overtures towards allies of Aquilonia, and enemies as well. If Nemedia is to conquer Aquilonia, it will need help.

Tarascus was spared by Conan and has not let that go to waste. He learned from the failed conspiracy and now sees he must build alliances slowly, seed doubt about Conan more subtly, and proceed with caution. For all of that, he



must control the minor kingdoms which comprise Nemedi, for Nemedi is not wholly feudal. Tarascus has quite an inventory of troubles. Someone may decide it is time to move against him. He is not a particularly strong king.

What Nemedi lost in the war is significant, but they did not lose their high culture. Nemedi is still the beacon of knowledge in the west and its culture the most advanced. Some in Nemedi are content with that, unwilling to go on another campaign of expansion.

In centuries to come, barbarians from the north come to serve in Nemedi's armies until they nearly outnumber the natives. These same Æsir come down out of their cold mountains and conquer Nemedi about the same time as the Picts make their move east. But all of this is in the future, and only wizards and creatures from the black gulfs of space and time have any knowledge of what is to come.

- **Current State:** Recovering from war
- **Army Size:** Huge/medium (60,000 normally, but at about 40,000 now)
- **Wealth:** High
- **Ambitions:** Rebuild army and reinforce border with Aquilonia
- **Ruler:** King Tarascus (TN: 14, Focus 3)

Ophir

With the death of King Almarus in a plot against Conan his wife, Yrrane is now queen. Some say she was the real power behind the throne all along. If so, she is well-prepared for rule. In fact, there are rumors she encouraged her husband toward his end.

Yrrane is very smart and, in an age that often underestimates women leaders, she plays her hand masterfully. She is probably the keenest political mind in the west. Brythunian by birth, she has already made overtures toward allying with that land. It would surprise no one if she also had eyes on unifying the kingdom under her rule.

Ophir has wealth the like of which no other nation can claim. Rich in gold and gems, the opulence of this country is astonishing. Yet where her husband spent carelessly, Yrrane spends with intent. Always reliant on mercenaries, Yraane is in the process of locking down several of the best companies under long-term contracts. This puts other nations in a predicament when they look for hired troops, and will cause some to turn to barbarians.

As she gathers contracted mercenaries, she also plans alliances, though she has not as yet revealed which countries she courts. Koth is in a position where it could use an ally right now as Turan creeps upon it every day. Yrrane will use this to her advantage though she has few illusions of standing against Turan alone. Perhaps more than any other queen or kingdom save Aquilonia, Ophir is currently driven largely by the personality of its ruler.

Yrrane would make an able political and tactical foe for Conan, should it come to that. However, she also respects his path to the throne, one that took her many more years and much more scheming and compromise to make.

- **Current State:** Stable
- **Army Size:** Medium (30,000); but can hire another 30,000 mercenaries
- **Wealth:** Highest
- **Ambitions:** Use the recent shifts in power to its advantage and hire mercenary companies for long-term contracts that keep them off the open market
- **Ruler:** Queen Yrrane (TN: 14, Focus 2)

Stygia

While other countries rise and fall, the Old Serpent watches with limpid eye knowing that Father Set will, in time, see Stygia rise again and make all the kingdoms of the earth tremble beneath his gleaming scales.

Stygia is ancient, one of the oldest on the Thurian continent and existed contemporaneously with Acheron. It is also a secretive land, with rituals and customs that seem insane to Hyborians and folk unused to open sorcery. They have power, the great Styx River, the Nilus, and a large navy. There is little Stygia cannot accomplish, but it is in no rush to do so... usually.

The encroachment of Turan changes that, as does Conan's defeat of Xaltotun, the Acheronian wizard who was found buried in Stygia. The Stygians do not dismiss the barbarians, for they remember Acheron falling to people like him of old.

Yet Stygia bows to the will of Father Set in all things, and it is that god's guidance which will determine Stygia's next move. Certainly, they will not allow Turan to press beyond their borders. Turan, for its part, fears the sorcery of this dark and ancient land and has yet to attack. This standoff cannot last.

While Cstephon is the king, it is the Priests of Set, nearly sorcerers all, who truly rule. Thoth-Amon of the Black Ring has regained his power, but it is not known how much influence he has in Stygia. He certainly controls a large sect. He may even control the entire Stygian empire.

The gamemaster must decide how they imagine this playing out. Conan and Thoth-Amon are not, as is popularly suggested, life-long enemies. The Stygian harbors no real animosity toward Conan, as they barely cross paths. However, Conan is no friend to sorcerers, and Thoth-Amon is no friend to anyone who would stand in his way.

- **Current State:** Biding its Time
- **Army Size:** Huge (50,000+)
- **Wealth:** Extremely High
- **Ambitions:** Conquest of the North and South
- **Ruler:** King Cstephon (TN: 15, Focus 3)

Turan

Other than Conan's ascent to the throne, the rise of Turan is the other biggest event west of the Vilayet. The Turanians lost their king, Yezdigerd, to that same barbarian, but his son replaced him without issue. Having decided to focus on expansion both to the east and west, Erkan, the current king has eyes that span from one ocean to the other.

Turan has the money and the army to push in both directions. Already, they have tamed the nomads and brigands to the west, and pushed into Shem, Zamora, and even territory claimed by Koth. The two kingdoms of Khoraja and Khauran are now vassals of the Turanian empire. They are undisputed on the Vilayet, but have yet to get rid of the Red Brotherhood.

The sun shines brightly on Turan, glints off the minarets and onion domes of her golden capital of Aghrapur. King Erkan deeded new land to new, loyal nobles and they continuously press their subjects into service within the Turanian military. Eventually, Erkan believes there is nothing he cannot accomplish.

In the east, however, Erkan has had less success. His own people, the Hyrkanians, are not an easily beaten group and the various clans are on the verge of coming together against Turan. If they do, that horde might not be satiated with sacking Turan's eastern front, but may raid the whole of the kingdom and possibly beyond. Erkan may have woken the sleeping giant of the dead god Erlik in provoking the Hyrkanians. Time will tell.

In the west, Erkan sees only Aquilonia as worthy foe. He also remembers that their barbarous king killed his father. His enmity with Conan knows no borders. It is likely they will square off, perhaps by proxy, in the coming years.

- **Current State:** Expanding
- **Army Size:** Huge (90,000+)
- **Wealth:** High
- **Ambitions:** To take the west and defeat the Hyrkanians in the east
- **Ruler:** King Erkan (TN: 14, Focus 4)

THE COSMOPOLITAN CITY

The nations in the Hyborian epoch are not exactly insular, but travel is lengthy and difficult, and most people never leave the village in which they were born, let alone cross borders. The Hyborian nations, however, are different, especially Aquilonia. In Aquilonia, the capital city is a place unlike any other. People from many nations gather to share in the wealth of the gleaming city, to exchange knowledge and to seek power, information, enlightenment and wonder. Such is the power of a place like Aquilonia; when a nation

reaches a certain point, it becomes something more than a location merely for its inhabitants. It becomes a destination, a place which exists beyond its geographical confines, which calls to those who live elsewhere, inviting them to experience something new, something different. A player character who comes to Aquilonia enters a different world. This should be a big moment; even the most apparently sophisticated of travelers is unlikely to have experienced anything quite like this place. It is vast; hundreds of thousands of people live in the city, far more than live in any comparable conurbation in the Hyborian Age.

No matter where they have been, the player characters should feel the sudden, staggering impact of their visit to Aquilonia (unless, of course, a player character was born there, in which case they should feel free to be as bored and *laissez-faire* about the whole thing as they wish). The cosmopolitan city is awash with adventures; culture clash produces one form of intrigue, homesickness another. Wherever the player characters go, they should be confronted by the exotic and the familiar in dizzying profusion. There aren't many places in the world like Aquilonia, and the gamemaster should make it memorable.

CAROUSING AT COURT

Drunkenness, violence, theft and various other acts of debauchery are far from exclusive to the lower ranks of society. In fact, the richer the wastrel, the more spectacular tends to be the debauchery. Additional money makes astounding parties and epic bacchanals much easier to organize and much easier to sustain. Woe betide those who would attempt to match a young Aquilonian noble on a determined binge; while a seasoned warrior might be able to match the young fop ale for ale, they are unlikely to have the resources to keep it up for the full month which many of the more reckless future rulers of the kingdom are wont to do.

Below is a carousing table for use by player characters embarking on a drinking binge with those at court. It can be used by any player character in place of the standard carousing table found on pages 295–298 of the *Conan* corebook.



COURT CAROUSING EVENTS

Result	Event	Description
1-2	A Noble Welcome	The player character is greeted with the warmth, hospitality and respect which they've always believed is their due — and so rarely has been. They walk away from their revels with an extra Gold in their pocket and having healed 2 additional levels of Stress.
3-4	A Stranger's Purse	With only hazy memories of the incidents of the night before, the player character awakes to find themselves clutching tightly to a full purse... which is quite definitely not their own. A quick examination finds 3 Gold and a strange amulet which thrums slightly, with unsettling life. Do they try and return it, keep it for themselves, or sell it? And are any of those options likely to be safe?
5-6	The Knight or Lady's Blessing	During the night, half-drunk and flush with the exultation of having survived another trek across hazardous terrain, the player character began to talk to one of the most beautiful and fascinating individuals they had ever met. This attractive stranger offered marriage, Gold, to shower the player character with anything they could want. They were refused, but vanished before the player character could remember to ask their name. But they left a small token, to remember — perhaps a scarf or an ornate scabbard. This blessing grants the player character +1 additional Momentum on the first test of their next adventure. It does nothing after this but remains a token of an unforgettable evening.
7-8	The Wrong Bed	There are always dangers to drinking within court; not least is the variety of assignations on offer to those who enjoy playing power games. The player character, however, was simply too drunk to realise they had become embroiled in a scandal. Waking in a bed not their own, they were soon chased from an elegantly decorated room by a less than happy husband or wife and several heavily armed guardsmen. The player character starts the next adventure with 1 point of Stress and loses one weapon of choice in the chase. They have also gained a powerful enemy — and a powerful friend...
9-10	A Firm Fellowship	Even in the relentless to-ing and fro-ing of powerful merchants, nobles, and other courtiers, there is room for true friendship. And somehow, the player character managed to find it. Sat next to one another for an entire evening, swapping tales of bravery, endurance, and dumb luck, they became fast friends. The next day, their new friend takes their leave of them, offering that should the player character ever needs a favor they have only to ask.
11-12	Betting Beyond One's Means	Gambling is a sign of wealth and distinction in court. Losing huge sums of money is nothing... what matters money to those with so much of it, after all? The problem is, the player character is not a baron or a duke. And getting into a game of dice or bones with them is... unwise. But they did it anyway and now they have lost all their Gold. They may also need to leave town, to avoid having to pay any more.
13-14	Invitation to a Soiree	Somehow, the player character managed to awaken in the marble fountain of a noble's house, with a damp but still legible invitation for them and your friends to attend the court's most fashionable party of the season. Attending might require spending some Gold, but it is also potentially the way to access the plots and intrigues of the court itself. Or to pull off one of the most daring and extravagant heists in history. The choice is theirs, of course.
15-16	Even here...	There is nowhere, in this epoch of the earth, sufficiently secure to be entirely free of thieves. And yes, even in the parties of the elite, the player character has been robbed by a common cutpurse. They can give chase and catch the thief — requiring a Daunting (D3) Athletics test to do so — or simply let them away with their Gold. It depends on how much they wish to fit in with the crowd; running after money is terribly demeaning.
17-18	A Prince in Disguise	The drunkard in the corner looks like everyone else. They are treated like everyone else and, for some reason, the player character took a liking to this one. When the host's brattish friends started pushing them, the player character stopped them. It's only in the next morning that they find out that the rather ineffectual drunk they assisted was one of the most powerful people in the country. They award the player character with 5 Gold for their help and gives you a new weapon of your choosing (Conan corebook, pages 145-152).
19-20	'Tis Time for a Hunt	The rich do so love to hunt. And the player character has been invited to join them; a signal honor indeed. The player must attempt a Challenging (D2) Coordination test: Failure: Lose 1 point of renown. 2-3 Successes: The player character earns a friend in the person of the organiser of the hunt. 4+ Successes: The player character gains 1 point of Renown and is widely regarded as amongst the most skillful hunters in the west.



KINGDOM MANAGEMENT

Running a kingdom is not a part time affair. It can and usually does occupy the vast amount of any player character ruler's attention. Usually the matters that a ruler must attend to are minor but every so often a real challenge comes to the fore. Often small matters will make or break a ruler's control and lead to an inevitable confrontation, so a ruler must be wary of the decisions they make.



Heavy is the brow that wears the crown, they say, and the management of territory is certainly cause for strain. From peasant uprisings to noble plots, a ruler struggles to keep control on the delicate balance of powers (see *Factions*, following) which keep them in power. When this balance is upset, the ruler is in danger, and all manner of things can go wrong.

"There was much bitterness. Blood was shed on both sides. The quarrel became a feud, the feud an open war. From the welter three factions emerged. Tecuhltli, Xotalanc, and Tolkemec. Already, in the days of peace, they had divided the city between them."

— "Red Nails"



FACTIONS		
Result	Event	Description
1	Court	The bureaucracy within the court itself, exerting their opinion upon the one who sits in the throne. This group could include counsellors, advisors, the treasurer, the judicial system, perhaps even the palace guard. Will not go to war.
2	Nobility	The nobles related by birth to the throne, and likely in the line of inheritance should the throne become vacant. Wealthy and with considerable sway within the kingdom and even without, they may be married into other kingdoms' noble houses, as well as claiming some of the best land in the kingdom.
3	Gentry	Landowning lesser nobles who have no direct claim to the throne but are always seeking a path to favor at court. Their children frequently are knights and noble warriors.
4	Family	A noble family with strong ties to the throne. They may be in exile in another country, or even may be a part of the court. The gamemaster should characterize this faction with the family's name and highest title held by any of its members, even if they are disenfranchised.
5	Rival	A popular rival, perhaps outlawed, but not always one with any blood tie to the throne. The gamemaster should characterize this faction with the rival's name.
6	Priesthood	Members of one of the dominant religions. Military forces will either be religious in nature or hired mercenaries. When defined, the gamemaster should designate which cult/religion this represents.
7	Nationalists	Idealists or zealots in favor of a strong kingdom and feeling that the existing ruler is weak, misguided, illegitimate, or otherwise inadequate. Often these are students or young nobles, and usually with money.
8	Traditionalists	Older and more traditional citizens of the country, usually with a vested interest in keeping things the way they are — or returning to the way they used to be.
9	Merchants	The merchants of the kingdom represent a significant power bloc, influencing trade and the flow of goods throughout the land. They may support the ruler, providing gold to finance wars, or oppose them by causing shortages of goods and fomenting unrest. Will not go to war.
10	Tradesfolk	Skilled tradesfolk, often organized into guilds. They may disagree on many things, but they know what's good for business and have tremendous influence within the kingdom. Will not go to war.
11	Scholars	Though historians, clerks, and others are often overlooked, scholars form the minds of the young and are responsible for official record-keeping. Theirs may be a quiet rebellion, but its influence will be felt nonetheless. Will not go to war.
12	Military	The standing army is usually loyal to the ruler, but at times may have a mind of its own, influenced by the wars it has fought on the prior ruler's behalf, and the feelings of its general.
13	Mercenaries	Whether disparate of mercenaries or an established group like the Free Companies, often mercenary groups hold considerable power, even in countries not their own.
14	Populist	A poet, minstrel, or other firebrand stirring up popular sentiment, can be a powerful balm to the ear... or rock in the sandal. They are often members of the very court they speak out against, and yet also wholly sympathetic to the common folk of the kingdom. Will not go to war.
15	Peasants	For the most part, the peasantry of a kingdom are silent, paying their taxes and living their lives as best they can. If they are pushed hard enough, they may resist paying taxes, resist working the fields, and bring the country to a standstill.
16	Ethnic	A particular ethnic group, whether a minority or an oppressed majority, has been given voice by a popular leader.

FACTIONS (CONTINUED)		
Result	Event	Description
17	Foreign	A sizeable population of foreigners from a neighboring kingdom has organized. They share a common opinion about their new home, and demand rights.
18	Cabal	A cabal has formed of several like-minded conspirators. Roll 1+2  . This is the number of active members in the cabal. Roll 1d20 to determine the nature of the founder of the cabal. Now roll 1  per subsequent member. On a roll of 1–4 the cabal member is identical in type to the first (such as another nationalist, etc.). For an Effect, roll 1d20 to determine the subsequent member's type, re-rolling this result if it is rolled again. Give the cabal a pretentious name.
19	Sorcerous	A sorcerer has undue influence within the kingdom, whether earned through loyalty to the throne or out of fear for their power. This may also characterize a solitary priest, holding a position of vast power apart from any religious order they supposedly represent.
20	Other	The gamemaster should determine the nature of this Faction: perhaps it is a secret society, a rebellious outlaw, a resurrected ancient sorcerer, a conspiracy by the serpent folk, or some other extraordinary foe. If desired, the gamemaster should roll another 1d20 to determine what form this Faction takes, as its true nature may be something entirely different than how it appears to the outside world.

FACTIONS

One of the most important aspects of controlling a kingdom is managing to keep the various constituencies in line and supporting the ruler. These groups are defined as Factions for the purpose of this system, and they can either be used for good or ill by the ruler, presenting a threat or serving as the bedrock for a Coalition (an alliance of Factions) when it is time to go to war (see page 102).


These groups vary dramatically in their makeup and their numbers, and can rise and fall, grow to strength and vanish almost instantly in the blink of an eye. When determining the nature of a newly established Faction, the gamemaster should use a *Kingdom Worksheet* (see page 106) and pick the type of the Faction or roll 1d20 on the Factions table to determine it randomly.

Factions whose descriptions state “*Will not go to war*” will not take part in a Coalition (see below).

When creating a new Faction, the gamemaster should characterize it as much as possible. Perhaps the faction is led by a significant non-player character (see *Chapter 5: Encounters* for examples, or use a sample name from page 18 and assign it to an appropriate generic non-player character type). The Faction may have a catchy title (‘The Black Alliance’), has some identifying mark (red scarves tied about the arm), or fly a distinctive banner (the old queen’s coat of arms). They may meet in a certain part of town, such as a famous square or tavern, or have a slogan they like to chant (“We shall never forget!”).

Fleshing out Factions in this way creates wonderful opportunities for the gamemaster to involve the player characters in all manner of skullduggery and political

maneuvering as the attempt to manipulate and otherwise deal with these groups as something more than mere assets.

If a Faction requires a TN for a skill test, the gamemaster should determine it based on the nature of the Faction or randomly generate its TN with a roll of 8+3 .

POWER

Factions have one attribute: **Power**. The higher the better. A Faction’s Power waxes and wanes as events transpire and political fortunes change.

If Power reaches 0, the Faction is dormant, and cannot accomplish anything. This doesn’t mean that it vanishes, or that all its members are dead: instead it means that they are simply without any meaningful ability to accomplish change in the kingdom they inhabit. The members of the Faction are out of favor, broke, leaderless, or disenfranchised enough that they are politically inconsequential until their fortune changes.

If the Faction at Power 0 gains 1 Power through events in the Dominion test (see below), it is active again. Perhaps some of the faces have changed, but it is recognizably the same group, with the same goals. Power cannot go below 0.

A ruler’s starting Power is equal to their Legitimacy (see *Legitimacy*, page 100), usually a value from 0–2. The Nobility usually has Power 2, unless they have been dramatically weakened, or they are especially strong.



DOMINION TEST

When Carousing, any player character ruler must attend to various matters of state. While ultimately the ruler has the authority to overrule their ministers, there are three skill tests that must be made: **Control**, **Order**, and **Justice**. These tests are jointly known as a **Dominion** test.

Any player character can make these tests but, as player characters can voluntarily fail, the ruler must trust those they would have act in their stead. The gamemaster must determine the Field of Expertise for any non-player character making the test for a player character. If trusting to a Faction, use that Faction's TN for any relevant tests.

Control

Control is a Command test used to keep Factions from forming. The Difficulty of a Control test is equal to the total Power of all the Factions within the kingdom. Most kingdoms tend to have at least 2 Factions of Power 1; the ruler and the nobility. If this test fails, a challenger comes to the fore. This isn't an immediate crisis, but a new Faction is created within the kingdom with a Power of 1.

Order

Order is a Warfare test. This is an Average (D1) test, though every Faction in addition to the ruler increases the Difficulty by one step. If this test is failed, one or more towns or villages falls victim to a significant threat, such as a powerful thieves' guild, bandits, or even armed insurrection. Additionally, should this test fail, the Power of one existing Faction increases by +1 as they step in to restore order.

For example, a kingdom (or province) currently has three different Factions. Their combined Power is 4. The ruler must pass a Dire (D4) Warfare test to keep the peace.

Justice

Justice is a Lore test made to ensure that tradition and perceptions of fairness are adhered to. On a failure a serious grievance is created. While rarely serious enough to have lasting consequences, this is enough to prevent a Ruler from gaining Legitimacy in the short term. Such a grievance should be determined by the gamemaster and, if desired, played out in game.

LEGITIMACY

All rulers must be legitimate in the eyes of the nobility and, to a lesser extent, the peasants. Legitimacy usually means a bloodline claim on the throne, but there are many other ways for a ruler to gain such **Legitimacy**. A simple system for tracking a player character ruler's Legitimacy appears below.

Starting Legitimacy

A player character born of the homeland who gains the throne by non-violent means, begins with a Legitimacy of 2. For each of these factors that the character does not possess, their Legitimacy decreases by -1, to a minimum of 0.

For example, Conan, while a canny ruler, is woefully illegitimate. He is not native to Aquilonia (-1 Legitimacy) and took the throne by force when he killed King Numedides (another -1 Legitimacy). He thus begins with a Legitimacy 0 and is initially reliant on other Factions to govern.

As mentioned above, a country's Nobility usually has Legitimacy 2: born in the homeland and came to power non-violently (through birth). This equates to Power 2 as a Faction.

Gaining Legitimacy

If the Dominion test is successful, and all three tests pass, then the ruler and only the ruler can attempt a Persuade test to increase their Legitimacy. This usually involves granting titles, monopolies, and licenses, as well as throwing a lavish feast or other display of wealth and largesse. Normally this has a cost of 10 Gold and a Difficulty equal to the ruler's current Legitimacy, but this Difficulty can be decreased by -1 should the ruler pay double this fee in Gold.

In Tombalku were various factions – Zehbeh and the brown priests, Kordof's kin who hated both Zehbeh and Sakumbe, and Sakumbe and his supporters, of whom the most powerful was Conan himself.

— Untitled Synopsis

The ruler can use Momentum as normal on this test, though the gamemaster can spend Doom to create a new Faction with a Power of 1 (costing 2 Doom), or to increase the Power of an existing Faction by paying Doom equal to the new Power of the Faction. *For example, a Faction with Power 2 costs 3 Doom to raise to Power 3.*

FACTIONS, POWER AND GOVERNING BY CONSENT

A ruler's Power is equal to their Legitimacy, and it is far from uncontested. A ruler with more Power than all the other Factions in their state can largely govern as they see fit, but this is a rare occurrence. It is more likely that the ruler has more Power than any other Faction, but less than the sum of all the other Factions. When this occurs, they must govern with consent. When a Challenge occurs, the ruler must find support with one or more Factions until

the combined Power of the ruler and their allies exceeds that of the other Factions.

This should be handled with roleplaying, with suitable bribes, promises, and adventures on the road to gaining the support of the Faction(s). A wise ruler endeavors to get as many Factions as possible on their side, as ignoring Factions is a sure way to create antipathy.

Gaining a Faction's support doesn't have to be hard, but it certainly can be. The army of a conquering hero might support the ruler so long as the ruler heeds their advice in military matters, whereas independence-minded territories might oppose the ruler on general principle and require massive bribes to agree on whether it's raining.

Long Term Solutions to Factions

The following are common means by which a ruler deals with Factions that they do not control entirely. The game-master may suggest or allow more, as desired.

- **Crushing a Faction:** A ruler can decide to **Crush** a Faction. This requires defeating the Faction in conflict (see **War** on page 102). This is, by definition, an internecine war. It's also a good way for player characters who are not rulers to play through a war.
- **Subduing a Faction:** A ruler uses politics to reduce the complaints of the Faction, thereby reducing its Power. This costs 10 Gold and requires a Society test, with a base Difficulty equal to the Faction's Power.
- **Embracing a Faction:** A ruler uses politics to convince the Faction to join with the ruler. Expensive and difficult, the gamemaster should determine the cost in Gold and consider requiring a steep favor from the ruler. An adventure might begin this way.

CHALLENGES

Once each year (or at the gamemaster's discretion) the ruler of a kingdom will face a true threat to their rule or to their kingdom's well-being: a **Challenge**. Challenges are more than the usual infighting and complaints that make up the day-to-day of managing a kingdom. Often a Challenge will require an adventure to resolve.

This doesn't mean that the Challenge needs to be the adventure itself. A Challenge that involves peace-making between two noble families might have an adventure on the journey to their estates. While the contrary is also true — the same Challenge might involve an adventure to discover how the factious families have been bewitched. Challenges should not be a simple roll of the dice but should require clever thinking and roleplaying. Challenges are a great way to get a noble player character back into the thick of a sword and sorcery plot.

The *Challenges* table may replace the tables for events on page 44-45, or used in conjunction, if desired. However,

CHALLENGES	
1d20	Challenge
1-2	Festival
3-4	Assassins at Court
5-6	Natural Disaster
7-8	Invitation to Visit
9-10	Feud/Duel
11-12	Dangerous Cult
13-14	Taxation Dispute
15-16	Sectarian Violence
17-18	Fire/Alchemical Disaster
19-20	Supernatural Occurrence

the gamemaster must decide whether a player character can move the Challenge on this table as they can with various events.

Festival

A special anniversary, religious event or holiday is on the horizon. This event must be paid for along with customary gifts and pleasantries. The ruler must prepare their state appropriately and convince the Faction heads to lend support so that the royal coffers are not be emptied by the event. Convincing each Faction requires a special favor which may lead to further adventures or simply a loss in Legitimacy.

Assassins at Court

A plot to assassinate an important visitor comes to fruition as a mysterious Faction rears its head. Can the visitor be saved from their wounds or will their death lead to war?

Natural Disaster

The land rumbles and the sea boils as nature wreaks havoc upon the kingdom. Perhaps mudslides bury villages, or a plague sweeps through the land. Regardless of the event, it is disruptive and expensive.

Invitation to Visit

The ruler is either invited to a state visit or must receive one. Much ado goes into the affair, but the parties in question must also be careful on their journey. A ruler is a high-ransom prize!

Feud/Duel

A feud between rival families or houses escalates. Someone is wronged and demands the ruler arbitrate. There is no easy answer. If there is a duel, someone important may have been killed. The ruler is in quite a predicament with only bad choices.

Dangerous Cult

A cult, probably lead by a charismatic leader, gains a following in the domain. Not only do they threaten the church, peasants and nobles alike are either in their thrall or afraid of them. People go missing in the night, victims of sacrifice to old, dark gods.

Taxation Dispute

Taxes are a constant. So is death. Only one can be argued with. The populace reacts poorly to new taxes or the nobility demands new taxes. Satisfying one means alienating the other.

Sectarian Violence

Two or more Factions reach the brink and fight. People die. If the violence isn't stopped, the ruler could have a war on their hands.

Alternatively, this manifests as a peasant revolt. Does the ruler negotiate with the commoners or put their would-be revolution down with an iron fist before it spreads?

Fire/Alchemical Disaster

A large town or city is consumed in flame. The loss is devastating. Refugees must be cared for. Trade is disrupted. What if it was caused by alchemy? The people do not like sorcery. It may be time to bur anyone who looks suspicious.

Supernatural Occurrence

Beasts appear in small, remote villages. A huge monster is spotted in a dark forest. Towns disappear overnight with no explanation. A Thurian Age wizard is risen from the dead. Anything the gamemaster can imagine could happen. The Outer Dark has all manner of horrors and perversions of the natural. When they intersect with the natural, bad things ensue.

WAR

War is essentially a struggle between power blocs. It is fought over multiple turns and conducted in several stages. Whether it be the clash of two provincial armies or the grad hosts of kingdoms, they are played out in the same fashion.

These rules do not attempt to replicate the detail or complexity of an actual war, but instead abstract the elements of an army, order, and outcomes to determine a final victor.

STAGE 1: RALLY THE TROOPS

Both sides reach out to different Factions and see whether they can gain non-interference or even aid. This aid doesn't have to be soldiers; ample supplies can be key to a successful campaign. Much of this can be handled with roleplaying



COUNTING UP THE RABBLE

It can be almost impossible to compare the minutia of detail that strategy, terrain, armament, invention, and temperament in a rules system before it becomes something altogether different. Such a detailed and 'realistic' treatment of mass combat is not the purpose of this system and is not recommended. The rules here serve as an abstract to offer support for the gamemaster's and players' requirements in kingdom-level play.

Therefore, when considering the numerical forces that make up a side's army the simplest thing to do is reduce the force to a single number. For the purposes of these rules, a unit is 10 average troops.

Where the forces are exceptional the unit value stays the same but the number of individual troops in the unit is reduced. Conan and Valeria might count as a veteran light infantry unit by themselves!

- An unseasoned irregular unit is worth 10.
- A trained light infantry unit is worth 20.
- A trained heavy infantry unit is worth 30.
- A cavalry unit is worth 35.
- A heavy cavalry unit is worth 45.
- Veterans increase the value of a unit by +5.
- Reserves decrease the cost by -5 but cannot be used in the first exchange of a war.

Example: The Army of Turan

With 1,000 veteran heavy infantry and 2,000 veteran light cavalry, along with another 5,000 trained light infantry, the army of Turan is a capable force, with a total value of 18,500. Should the nation face invasion, each of the five regional satraps can contribute a reserve of another 1,000 light infantry and 1,000 light cavalry, worth 4,500 (22,500 total). While this wouldn't help in the first exchange, the potential army of 41,500 points would likely make short work of any invader and might even have the strength to conquer their rival.

but the gamemaster should consider whether any Factions have been sidelined in the past, as these Factions might seek to exact a higher price.

At the end of this phase, each side in the conflict should know roughly what forces they can muster into a Coalition and the total Power that they bring to the table. Just as a powerful Faction is harder to control, it is also more powerful in the player character's army.

This is important as Factions that have suffered a loss in Power might sue for peace independently of their allies.

STAGE 2: ISSUE ORDERS

When armies clash, many more soldiers flee the field than are cut down. How they are dealt with varies tremendously and can alter either forces' capacity. There are three general orders that can be given to an army: **No Quarter**, **Press the Advantage**, and **Fight If You Must**. Both armies make the order in secret. The gamemaster decides which orders are issued for any non-player character army.

No Quarter

When the *No Quarter* order is given, the army will still take prisoners but those fleeing can expect to be picked off by archers or cavalry. Routs will become massacres, and battles will last longer than they might need to, leading to casualties on both sides.

When the *No Quarter* order is given by either side both sides lose 1 additional Power at the end of the clash where this is used. If both sides issue this order, the losing side will lose an additional 1 Power.

Press the Advantage

This is the most common order issued. It has no inherent disadvantage in that only the loser will suffer any loss of Power, but defeating an enemy in this fashion can be slow going and hence expensive.

A conflict is not just a battle, but involves scouting, movement, preparation, retreat, and more. Each conflict of the war takes place over an approximate month. This means the ruler must pay the Upkeep cost of the army for each conflict when this order is given. The Upkeep cost of the army is equal to its point value divided by 3,000, rounded up.

Fight If You Must

In situations where a political solution is more desirable than a military one, an order of *Fight if You Must* is given. The army seeks to evade the enemy where possible. This makes it difficult to secure victories of any note but, so long as the opposing force is not under *No Quarter* orders, casualties are few and far between. An army with this order will not lose any Power if defeated.

STAGE 3: CLASH

At this point the armies meet each other in the field. The leaders of the Coalition for each side engage in a Simple (Do) Warfare Struggle using the Teamwork rules, rolling against their TN. Bonus Momentum can be awarded for having more troops, better equipment, fortifications, etc. at the gamemaster's discretion.

EXAMPLE ARMIES OF THE HYBORIAN AGE

Armies of the Hyborian Age fought bloody battles for the glory of their rulers and the pure thirst for war. The composition of each nation's armies were overall quite similar given, the limits of technology at the time and preferred methods of warfare. Some countries had superior forces owing to particular armaments (types of bow, weight of armor, quality of cavalry, etc.) or superior training, but the presence of mercenaries to make up for these shortfalls is often a strong leveling factor.

The unit types for each are listed below. The actual composition is up to the players and the gamemaster to determine. Use the political breakdown on page 91–95 for an estimate of the total size of an army that any kingdom can field.

Kingdoms rarely summon full armies, but the circumstances are determined by the conditions for a particular battle. Troops marked as "(favored)" cost 20% less in upkeep for that given kingdom.

Aquilonia

- Trained light infantry
- Trained heavy infantry (favored)
- Cavalry
- Heavy cavalry (favored)
- Veterans

Nemedia

- Trained light infantry (favored)
- Trained heavy infantry
- Cavalry
- Heavy cavalry (favored)
- Veterans (favored)

Other Hyborian Kingdoms

- Unseasoned irregular (favored)
- Trained light infantry (favored)
- Trained heavy infantry
- Cavalry (favored)
- Heavy cavalry
- Veterans (favored)

Koth

- Unseasoned irregular
- Trained light infantry
- Trained heavy infantry (favored)
- Cavalry
- Heavy cavalry (favored)
- Veterans

Stygia

- Trained light infantry (favored)
- Trained heavy infantry
- Cavalry (favored)
- Heavy cavalry
- Veterans (favored)

Turan

- Trained light infantry (favored)
- Trained heavy infantry
- Cavalry (favored)
- Heavy cavalry (favored)
- Veterans (favored)

Barbarians

- Unseasoned irregular (favored)
- Trained light infantry (favored)
- Trained heavy infantry (favored)
- Cavalry
- Heavy cavalry
- Veterans (favored)

Hyrkanians

- Unseasoned irregular (favored)
- Trained light infantry (favored)
- Trained heavy infantry
- Cavalry
- Heavy cavalry (favored)
- Veterans (favored)

The side that scores the most Momentum wins the Struggle, inflicting 10% casualties for each point of Momentum and inflicting 1 point of Discord. Discord is a numeric value that measures the loss of morale a unit faces when in combat. If Discord is high enough, troops challenge their leaders' decisions, and ultimately desert them. If the winning side used the No Quarter order, then they count as if they scored +2 more Momentum in the Struggle. Complications might cause the winning side to suffer some other unfortunate circumstances, as determined by the gamemaster.

STAGE 4: HOLDING THE REINS

Once the Clash occurs, the ruler must deal with the fallout. Every point of Discord must be assigned to a Faction within the Coalition. A Faction cannot be assigned more Discord than it has Power, so it must be spread around between the members of the Coalition. Once this is assigned, the amount of Discord +1 is the potential Power that the Faction might lose.

Every point of Momentum rolled on a Challenging (D2) Command test made by that Faction's leader reduces the potential loss by -1, with the net indicating the amount of Power that the Faction loses for the rest of the war. If its Power is reduced to 0, the Faction leaves the Coalition, taking its forces with them.

If one side used the No Quarter orders, after this, one of the Factions reduces its Power by 1, without any test to resist it.

For example, King Tarascus' Nemedian army is comprised of three Power 2 Factions (King, Nobility, and Merchants). Ophir's Queen Yrrane has an army comprised of a loose Coalition of four Power 1 Factions (Nobility, Merchants, Priesthood, and Mercenaries) and one Power 2 Faction (King, or Queen in her case).

They come into conflict over a slight border dispute and send minor hosts to settle the issue. Their two armies, each consisting of 1,000 points of light infantry, clash. Each Coalition rolls a Warfare Struggle, using Teamwork rules for each side. The Difficulty is Simple (D0) for the fight itself.

Tarascus wins with 2 Momentum. Thus, Ophir loses 20% of its army (10% multiplied by 2, equaling 200 points of infantry) and inflicts 2 points of Discord upon Yrrane's Coalition. Yrrane must choose where these 2 points of Discord go, whether to one or more of her Factions. In Ophir's case, four of her Factions

"I was a swordsman in Prince Almuric's army that invaded Stygia, and of his thirty thousand, fifteen thousand perished by Stygian arrows, and the rest by the black plague that rolled on us like a wind out of the south. I was the only man who lived."

— Conan, *The Hour of the Dragon*

have Power 1 and thus can only suffer 1 point of Discord loss maximum. She has Power 2 and could risk the Discord loss but does not wish to take the chance.

Yrrane chooses the Mercenaries and the Priesthood. Each Faction must make a Challenging (D2) Command test, using their Power as the skill. The Priesthood rolls 2 successes, which is more than enough to reduce their Power loss from 1 to 0. The Mercenaries roll 1 success. Unfortunately, this is not enough to keep their Power, which reduces from 1 to 0.

The Mercenary Faction's Power is broken and their troops desert en masse. As the Mercenaries contributed 300 of the 1,000 infantry (30%), the 200 casualties described above are assumed to be greatest amongst their number.

STAGE 5: COMPARE COALITION POWER

Once the Clash has occurred, the two sides must compare Power. If one Coalition has twice the current Power of the other Coalition, that side wins the war, and the other Coalition disbands. The victorious Coalition restores its Power over the course of several months while the losing side's Coalition Factions suffer the permanent loss of 1 Power each. If any of these Factions have 0 Power they are defeated and are nullified, as described above in Power (page 99). A Faction cannot go below Power 0.

If neither side is victorious (a tie or the Powers are too close) the war continues, and the sides rally their troops again. The upkeep cost is also paid again. One can win a war by simply bankrupting the enemy.

Hyborian Age warfare is frequently more a battle of attrition than conquest. The armies of the age fight brutally but are composed of troops that may not necessarily stick around to be slaughtered.



KINGDOM WORKSHEET

[illegible]

KINGDOM WORKSHEET

[illegible]



HEROES OF THE AGE



*The Black Dragons were on hand, wild with rage, swearing and ruffling,
with their hands on their hilts and foreign oaths in their teeth.*

— “The Phoenix on the Sword”

Presented here are two worthies of the dreaming west, drawn from the creative talents of backers for the *Robert E. Howard's Conan: Adventures in an Age Undreamed Of* Kickstarter campaign, suitable for use as player or non-player characters. The first is Illiam, “The Red Sword”, an outlaw and rebel of the Bossonian Marches, fighting a one-man war against a noble house that has displaced his kin from their rightful land. Next is Sir Bared, depicted in the **Conan** corebook at the beginning of his illustrious career. Here we see him at its zenith, not unlike the course charted by Conan himself.

ILLIAM MAC GLENNUS, “THE RED SWORD”

The Glennus family was respected throughout the Bossonian Marches, a family of honest and hard-working settlers who were among the first to inhabit land within the region once it had been claimed by Aquilonia from Pict-held wilderness. Their holdings thrived, and as generations passed, they became leaders among those on that frontier, proud folk but always loyal to Aquilonia.

Under King Numedides, this came to an end, when the Glennus clan was ousted from their land. Their properties, farms, and all their holdings were given over to Lord Dornus, a wealthy noble from Tarantia, favored by the king. Dornus' family assumed ownership of the former Glennus lands



and offered to let the Glennus family continue to dwell there and work, serving as vassals on land they had once rightfully called their own.

Needless to say, this offer was not taken well, and the Glennuses and the Dornuses became enemies, with the Glennus clan settling in the woods of the Bossonian Marches, living in the wild and engaging in a guerilla campaign against the ones who sit lawfully, if not rightly, upon their lands. This campaign affected many beyond the noble house and the commoner clan, as other landowners and farmers within the Marches suffered its effects — banditry, kidnapping, livestock theft, and even burning of lands and properties.

To the outlaw Glennus clan were born twin sons: Illiam and Jhon. Their births were kept secret, for the Glennus patriarch feared that Lord Dornus' forces would seek them out and slay them. The boys were separated and raised apart, each within temples of Mitra far from the former Glennus land and out of sight of the Dornuses. They were then fostered among relatives, their names kept secret, and each was taught the arts of survival: sword, bow, and other woods-craft. Each knew his father, who would visit them in secrecy, but they remained unaware of one another. In time, each boy grew to fullness, eventually learning their true identities.

When their father was slain by Lord Dornus' forces, the young Glennus men, Illiam and Jhon, returned to their home territory, swearing vengeance. Jhon chose to take on the role of the family's head, seeking to find a legitimate end to the conflict between the rival families, while Illiam chose another path, that of the vigilante, taking on the guide of "The Red Sword", named for the curiously colored weapon he bears, found within an ancient barrow in the Pictish Wilderness.

Thus, the legend of this mysterious killer, plague to House Dornus, grew. Striking at night and taking on the guise of a leper during the day, Illiam seeks to apply pressure to his family's enemies where his brother cannot. The two meet only occasionally, avoiding the risk of exposure, for their semblance to one another is so strong that their kinship cannot be mistaken.

Player characters enter the Bossonian Marches and encountering either the Dornuses or Glennus clan will learn almost immediately of the feud, ongoing, and perhaps might find themselves enlisted to assist one side or the other. Which side will they favor: the so-claimed lawful owners of the land, or the outlaw who seeks to drive them from it?

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	9	10	10
Agility	Brawn	Coordination	
9	10	10	

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	1

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 12, Resolve 12
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Leather, Mask), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **The Red Sword (M):** Reach 2, 7 , 1H, Parrying, Persistence 3
- **Bossonian Longbow (R):** Range M, 7 , 2H, Piercing 1, Volley
- **Face of Fear (T):** Range C, 4 , Mental, Area

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **The Ochre Mask:** Illiam's mask, made of some dull yellow metal, is of a frowning, almost monstrous human. While wearing it he may re-roll any failed d20 on his *Face of Fear* Threaten attack but must accept the results of the second roll.
- **The Red Sword:** Described above, the Red Sword was found within an Atlantean-era burial mound, and the blade has the disquieting effect of causing wounds it caused to give off agonizing, lingering pain, adding the Persistent 3 Effect.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Night Reaver:** When making Movement tests relating to stealth while on the hunt for his enemies, Illiam may spend Doom as if it was Fortune, earning an automatic success as if he had rolled a 1.
- **Go to the Ground:** While in the Bossonian Marches, Illiam may spend up to 3 Doom for Momentum to be used seeking refuge through Movement or Social tests, concealing himself in barns, hideouts, or prevailing on others to conceal him.



SIR BARED

A noble-born in wealthy Poitain, Bared is the oldest son of a minor lord. His father intended him to take over the estate and represent them in the Aquilonian court, as partisans for Count Alcala. Bared had other ideas, though, spending his youth training in the arts of the knight — fighting with axe, sword, lance, and shield, as well as riding, courtesy, and tactics. He was blessed with his father's stature and strength, which he used well to his advantage.

When Bared came of age, he announced that he was becoming a knight, to join one of King Numedides' crusades, rather than taking up his family's estate. He put his inheritance behind him and rode off, owning only his war-gear, a purse of gold, and his title — all he would take. Sir Bared enlisted in one of Count Alcala's troops, serving alongside the other knights and noble sons, clad all in burnished steel atop their fine warhorses.

He fought in Zingara and Argos — more border skirmishes than any sort of true war — and was troubled when King Numedides ordered the armies against the people of the Bossonian Marches, quelling an uprising amidst the frontier folk. Despite his privileged position, Bared was troubled by the injustice he saw being perpetrated in the king's name. Rather than fraternizing with his peers, Bared spent his time amongst the common-folk, from professional mercenaries and fighting men to peasant conscripts. He learned what life was like for them, and for those in other lands, giving him much to think about.

After several successful campaigns, Sir Bared completed his service to the Aquilonian army. He chose to remain a landless knight, like one of the Adventurers of Nemedra. He vowed that he would use his abilities only in defense of just and noble causes. But always, he would roam, not settling down in any one place until he felt he had seen and done enough.

Thus far, Sir Bared has become enmeshed in several adventures of note, earned several scars, and gained some staunch allies and a few notable foes. His thirst for adventure is yet unquenched.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	9	9
Agility	Brawn	Coordination	
10	12	10	

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	1



STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 15, Resolve 12
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Full Plate), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Battleaxe (M):** Reach 2, 7, Unbalanced, Intense, Vicious 1
- **Heater Shield (M):** Reach 2, 5, 1H, Knockdown, Shield 2
- **Lance (M):** Reach 3, 7, 1H, Cavalry 2, Fragile
- **Righteous Challenge (T):** Range C, 3 mental, Area, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **One Man Shield Wall:** Sir Bared can grant his shield's Cover Soak to anyone in Reach.
- **Warhorse:** Sir Bared has a well-trained Nemedian warhorse in heavy barding (Armor 3).

DOOM SPENDS

- **Ferocious Charge:** When using his lance in a charge, Sir Bared can spend 1 Doom to grant the attack the Ferocious and Intense qualities. This can be done once per lance.
- **Rescue the Innocent:** If an innocent is threatened, Sir Bared can buy 1 Momentum with 1 Doom to move to protect the innocent. If within reach of someone threatening an innocent, he can pay 2 Doom to strike them with an improvised or shield attack, regardless of initiative order.



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THE HYBORIAN AGE AWAITS YOU



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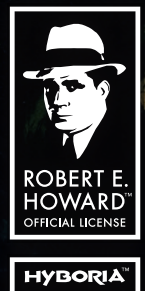
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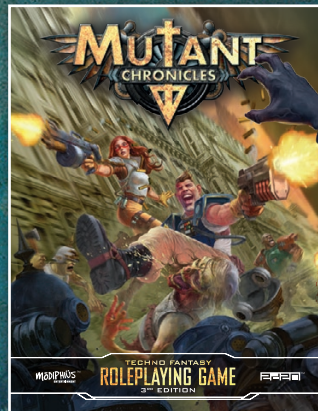
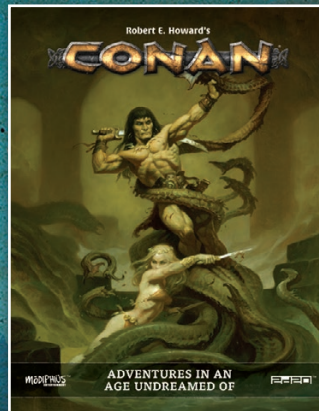
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