

Tribe and Power among the People

Who rule the Char-Un? Those who can! As you read my missives, I hope you come to realise what a formidable, fearless and brutally practical people they are...so just ask yourself this: just what kind of men are able to dominate them? Ask yourself that and thank Great Sedenya that they are our allies.

– *Promantis*

To the People, all life is a struggle, a challenge. Indeed, they often use the word for war, *vech*, as another word for life. However, they do not see this as a burden, but a blessing – Panishi decreed that theirs would be lives of hardship and conflict to make them stronger and more formidable, until they were fit to fulfil his mission of conquest of all the lands and peoples rightfully under his dominion. From this, it follows that those who rule should be the most formidable, whether this means the strongest or the most cunning. Char-Un politics is thus hardly for the faint-hearted.

Just as Kargzant rules the heavens, so too do men rule the Char-Un, and they follow chieftains known as pans, chosen on the basis of their ability to defeat their predecessors. However, just as ma-Tamara, the Red Moon Mare, hangs implacably in the sky during both night and day, while Kargzant the Sun Stallion gallops across the heavens and then through the Dark Steppe, so too the women of the People are hardly subservient adornment. Instead, they have their own ways and hierarchies, dominated by the pan's first wife and the crones, forming a strong foundation for daily life. The men may be the posturing chieftains and glittering warriors, but there is as much pride in a haughty Char-Un girl, and any captives or wounded enemies who see the eager approach of the womenfolk, skinning knives in their hands, will consider them no less fearsome than the men.

The Tribes

There are eleven tribes of the People, each with its own distinctive characteristics, tattoos and traditions, although whatever internal rivalries there may be – and there are many, often bloody – all are united by their contempt for the Muddy Hands and their respect for Panishi and the destiny he dreamed for them. The tribes are:

Alsurg, perhaps the most practical and flexible of all the People, happy to use their slaves to carry out those impure practices such as sheep-herding which also bring them wealth.

Bagzil, a tribe of raiders and hunters, about whom it is said that the only predictable thing about their ambushes is that there will be one.

Chagurin, who claim that they were directly descended from a union between Panishi and his horse, citing as evidence their traditional strength and bulk.

Emilzur, proud traditionalists who cling closely to the Old Ways and disdain those of less rigid views.

Erecheneg, whose propensity for underhand tactics is equally resented and respected throughout the People.

Gosgun, the dour 'Flaming Fists,' whose motto was rendered by Promantis as 'A Little Less Conversation, A Little More Action,' but which is more accurately 'Mount 'Em or Kill 'Em, Don't Talk To 'Em.'

Kokkochur, famous as much for their generational feuds as their skills as relentless trackers.

Senggiros, whose memories of past glories (the first ur-Pan to rule after Panishi rode into the sky to his new place in Kargzant's warband was a Senggiros) mean that they are perhaps the most implacably opposed to the Uradyn at present.

Tamdarijin, the horse masters, whose skill is legendary even among the Char-Un, and who are also the most populous of the tribes.

Targarungos, arguably the most free-spirited of the People, who raise hawks said to be able to spot a gopher from the other side of Erigia.

Uradyn, the tribe of ur-Pan Orgrol, renowned as violent and boastful warriors.

Each of the eleven tribes is divided into from four to seven clans. They are ruled by a lo-Pan, a chieftain who has managed to best the incumbent and been acclaimed by his people. He will be advised by the elders and shaman of the tribe and would do well to listen to the advice of his first wife, the Ma Nay, who manages the affairs of the women, but rule is his alone. He has absolute power over the il-Pans, the warband leaders, and all other members of his clan, until the day he is successfully challenged for his place or else chooses to step down. This is not as rare as foreigners might think, because part of the pragmatic ways of the People is to know when a battle is not worth fighting, and the clan and tribal shamans of the Paths of Fire and Earth (who are barred from becoming pans) will often step in to encourage a chief who faces a strong challenge to step down and serve as an elder and counselor. After all, Panishi's dictum is that 'Living is living, and dead is dead.'

The Pan of a tribe is chosen by the lo-Pans – sometimes he is one of their number, sometimes not, but he must always have the blessing of the senior Kargzant shaman of the tribe. Of course, this is sometimes a cause for sudden and bloody turnover amongst the