

# Paramos

*"The longer the tunnel, the deeper the tale"*

Due to their mountainous homes, the isolationist people of the Paramos have remained largely untouched by the troubles of the rest of the known world. Known for their pragmatism and value of the community above all, few ever venture past the end of the mountain range. The recent conflict of the Prytanos invasion drove them deep into hiding to avoid destruction, and for this, they remained mostly untouched. Some clans did not even encounter the invaders, who were not prepared for extreme climates. Now that the conflict is over and rebuilding is underway in the south, more and more traders have found their way north to the lands of the Paramos to discover a people who have been so wrongly painted by tales of hardened and ferocious mountain men. While once these outsiders would have been seen as exiles and treated with immense suspicion, the new regularity of those people bearing no totem have softened the Paramos to outsiders, and to the idea of the world beyond.

## LANDSCAPE & CLIMATE



The the Paramos take their name from their homeland, the Panaramos Mountains. Their settlements span the length of the mountain range, from the lower wooded flatlands to the highest peaks, ending at the edge of the known world. The area is home to evergreen forests of pines and firs, and numerous lakes dot the valleys between the peaks.

Climate varies little across the range, except for the far northern reaches. The weather is usually moderate in the spring and summer months with bitter winters that drive people and animals alike into the mountain caves for shelter from the harsh winds and snow.

The mountains contain vast networks of tunnels, caverns, and even several springs. The many clans of the Paramos make their homes and towns within these tunnels, carving out new rooms as space is needed or the older ones collapse.

## GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The people known as the Paramos live in various clans that dot around the mountain range. A Paramos clan is overseen by a Lore Keeper, and protected by a champion. The Lore Keeper acts as the group's head and is responsible for making any major decisions regarding the wellbeing of the

clan. Each Lore Keeper is literate, while many of their fellow Paramos are not, and act as the clan's record keeper and diplomat. Lore Keepers are trained from a young age and are taught both the written and oral history of their clan and their stories.

The champions, known as a Talilk, are paragons of the Paramos and of the clan way of life. They are often the best and brightest a clan has to offer and are trusted to handle internal disputes and keep the peace among the clan. They are also the ones who will lay down their lives if a dispute between clans can not be solved diplomatically. Talilk are chosen for their physical and mental prowess and can be challenged by any adult in the clan. These duels are to the death with minimal rules, meaning that it is not always the strongest who will be Talilk but rather the one with the best combination of strength and wit.

A new Lore Keeper and Talilk may set out on their own to forge a new clan. Any Paramos may leave to join with only the clothes on their backs and one weapon or tool a piece. If the group survives a winter alone they are officially considered a new clan and acquire a clan name. It is customary for both Talilk and Lore Keeper to present themselves at the Summer Moot to show their success, but this is not mandatory, as a messenger bearing the totem will suffice. At this time all Lore Keepers make note of the new symbol and add it to the heraldries.

The Paramos place a heavy emphasis on community, as well as aiding and accepting one another. An individual is allowed to pursue whatever they desire, but everyone is expected to pull their own weight to add to the community's resources and not be a hindrance. While all jobs are valuable, most Paramos clans hold miners, hunters, blacksmiths and furriers in high regard due to their practicality. Highly skilled practitioners of these professions are often invited into a council to advise and provide guidance to the Lore Keepers.

The Paramos recognize that the intentions behind an action are what matters and the resulting outcome should be judged based on the original intent. Lore Keepers and Talilks act as arbiters and are given full authority to pass judgement. Should an individual prove to be a persistent danger to the community the Lore Keepers can choose to inflict exile as a punishment. An Exile is stripped of all associated clan markings and turned out with the clothes on their backs and whatever basic tools they can carry.

## NAMING CONVENTIONS

Common names for the Paramos people tend to draw inspiration from the Inuit and Polish traditions, and are comprised of a first name and a second name passed down through the family. As these names have proven to be more difficult for the southern cultures to pronounce, it has become a common practice for those who travel or move south to pick a nickname that is easier on southern tongues.

## BELIEFS & RELIGION

Worship of the Gods in Paramos culture is limited and traditionally very personal. Paramos often provide petitions in thanks for blessings, but rarely petition in search of something. The Paramos value the strength of self and feel that asking for aid from the Gods diminishes their own

personal successes. As a result, the Paramos generally show their thanks privately and it is very uncommon for a Paramos clan to have a centralized shrine to the Gods.

## CLOTHING

Due to their way of life the Paramos are a practical people who focus more on form over function, and luxury is often seen as superfluous. Clothing choices are based on the climate, with lighter clothing being worn in the more southern clans, and heavier furs being worn in the northern mountains. Paramos do not wear excessive non-magical jewelry and will often only wear their single favorite piece in addition to their clan's totem.

- Paramos typically favor long belted tunics often with simple trim and color blocking. The Paramos favor either dark and earthy tones or bright dyes in their clothing. Long simple dresses with overlays and sturdy boots are common for women. Most Paramos wear plain colors or use horizontal striping patterns to adorn their clothing.
- Due to the generally cool climate outside, and their coexistence with bats inside, the Paramos have taken to wearing hats. Simple fur and boiled wool hats are preferred as they provide the most warmth and also have a small amount of padding against loose stones falling from cave ceilings.
- Paramos rarely don any form of armor, as combat is primarily the concern of the Talilk, and it is viewed as a hindrance while hunting or gathering. On the rare occasions that a Paramos may wear armor, the pieces are made of boiled and hardened leather, rather than metal. Metal armor is seen as ornamental and excessive.

## CUSTOMS

- Each clan of the Paramos has a totem that is either stitched or forged into an item that every member of the group will display. This is how the Paramos identify where one another are from, and an individual without one is seen either as an outsider -- not to be trusted -- or an exile, the worst thing for a Paramos. If a totem is offered to an outsider and they accept it, then they are viewed as a member of the clan and a member of the Paramos people.
- The Paramos are willing to go to extreme lengths to survive, even doing things that would be viewed as taboo in another culture. Some clans in the far north have been known to partake in cannibalism of finished individuals, rather than allow fresh food go to waste.
- The bones of the deceased are honored in a way that shows the past is looking out over the future. Practices differ between clans, but there are stories of the bones being added to building material to continue to guard the next generation, or fashioned into instruments or even weapons.
- If combat between clan is inevitable, two Talilks will fight to the death at the Summer Moot. The winning Talilk's clan will be seen as in the right, with the losing clan accepting the result with no further argument. The losing clan is awarded one rematch within two years.

This matter of conflict resolution has ensured that Paramos do not lose unnecessary lives in open warfare or duels, and is considered a major part of their way of life.

- In the spring and summer months most people live above ground to hunt and gather to prepare for the next winter. As such, they have no real permanent structures above ground but have instead construct shelters that can be moved from place to place with ease. Their true home is their underground cities where there miners and masons live all year round, sometimes only seeing the sun for the week of The Thawing.
- Animal encounters are simply part of life in the mountains, and there exists a great respect between the Paramos and the magnificent beasts who share their homeland. It is not uncommon to see bats roosting up above in the quiet areas of the caves, or small burrowing rodents moving about across the pathways. Larger predators are never engaged. They are given a wide berth, and are warded away from the caves by spreading the scents of other predators around the entrances, and, of course, by strong doors.

## HOLIDAYS

The Paramos have three major celebrations. The Thawing in the spring, The Summer Moot and the Day of Darkness. The celebrations are not tied to particular calendar days, but instead to certain events as the seasons change.

- **The Thawing** takes place when the ice and snow melts and the Paramos can finally leave their underground sanctuaries. A weeklong celebration is held where the caves are emptied and the Paramos enjoy the warmth and sun for the day. The celebration includes feasting and organized group hunts to restock the food stores from the winter. Children play large games of hide and seek in the woods near the caves until nightfall and gather round large fires to hear stories of the winter from their Lore Keepers. The Paramos dedicate a single night of this festival to honor those who did not survive the winter. Family of the deceased will decorate a log with intricate carvings in honor of their family member and the logs are burnt together at the end of the night in a large bonfire to release the spirits that may remain trapped in the caves.
- **The Summer Moot:** On the longest day of the year, the Lore Keepers and representatives of all Paramos clans travel to a central location to meet and discuss various topics pertaining to the Paramos people. The Lore Keepers focus mainly on settling inter-clan issues, specifically regarding land disputes or other disagreements. Meanwhile, their representatives typically discuss trade and other smaller issues. If a grievance between clans cannot be settled, both groups' Talilks will fight to the death to settle the matter. During this time the Lore Keepers also exchange stories from the year, both by swapping stories with other clans and by listening to the spirits that have passed. Some Paramos will ingest certain flora that induces a state which makes them more open to hearing what words the Black God allows to filter through.
- **The Day of Darkness** takes place on the darkest day in the year, usually around the middle of winter. On that day the community will all huddle together around a singular fire and as large a feast as possible is prepared. The Lore Keeper will tell stories from sundown to

sunrise to keep the spirits of the clan up. It is believed that if the Lore Keeper should run out of stories before the sun rises the clan will not survive the remainder of the winter.

## MAJOR CLANS OF THE PARAMOS

While there are many different clans of Paramos, three major clans tend to be given the most consideration during the moots. These are the Hojny of the South, Ikpik near the center and the lake and the Przykry to the North.

### **Hojny (The Singing Valley)**

Of all of the clans of the Paramos many would say that the Hojny {hoy-neigh} have it easiest. They are the Southernmost clan, making their home at the base of the mountains. This has allowed farming to take hold, and some of this group have even constructed above ground dwellings that they live in year round. Their slightly more forgiving environment makes the Hojny the most numerous Paramos clan by far, even though they still make their homes in conditions that other civilizations would balk at. In modern times they have begun to do more trade, as southern civilizations increasingly desperate for ore and wood look towards the mountains. The clan has the nickname of the Singing Valley because of their lower elevation and their stories, which take the form of song.

### **Ikpik (The Lords of the Lake)**

Blessed with a lake amidst their caves, the Ikpik {ick-pick} have long been the center of commerce for the Paramos people, and act as arbiters for the clans during the Summer Moot. Their lake allows for limited trade throughout parts of Paramos, and as such the Ikpik offer aid to whatever groups they can, ensuring that as many groups as possible survive the winter. This is never done at a cost to their own survival. Instead, they organize the transport of surplus goods from one clan to another as needed. This role has begun to take a new form as new trade routes that reach further south open up. This is an opportunity that The Lords of the Lake are interested in exploring, but they are cautious of what it might mean for their way of life. Their traditions are passed down through reenactment, and their trade means that their people know and can act out the history and stories of many of their compatriots.

### **Przykry (The Frozen City)**

To the far north lies the Przykry {shu-krit} clan. It is rumored that they are so far North that even the caves themselves are covered in ice, giving the clan the nickname The Frozen City. While not as numerous as the other major clans, their harsher lifestyle has earned them great respect from many of the other clans, and even some of the Beast People to the north. Their stories are passed down through chants that are harsh yet beautiful in their own way. They are known as the most accepting of all of the clans; if someone can survive, they are welcome. Due to the travel time, fewer members of the Przykry travel to the Summer Moot than other clans, but those who do are certainly noticed.