

The Masked Countries of Parashkanan

THE MASKED COUNTRIES OF PARASHKANAN

North of Bellgard country, west of the Red Desert and Martens, is a realm known as the Masked Countries. These lands are ruled by the Hooded Masters of Parashkanan, a great city almost four hundred miles north of Bellgard. Parashi culture is dominant within the Masked Countries, and the most famous element of Parashi culture gives the region its name: almost all Parashi adults make some effort to conceal their faces, in tribute to their Hooded Masters.

HISTORY OF THE MASKED COUNTRIES

Long ago, as humans reckon time, before the Hooded Masters, rulership of the northwestern lands was divided among many small human kingdoms. There was peace among them only by dint of their collective submission to the Sarnathan Empire. Some six hundred years ago, the Empire fell, and peace in the northwest fell with it. For a while, there was chaos. Then came the Hooded Masters.

The origin of the Hooded Masters is a great mystery, and if anyone knows the secret, they are not telling. All that is known is that once they appeared, they very quickly seized control of the Parashi culture, and turned their people into a conquering army. Under the Masters' direction, the Parashi founded a new city - Parashkanan - in a place where no city had ever stood.

The Masked Army marched first against nearby kingdoms that had fallen under the rule of cruel tyrants, and when their kings died, many of the newly conquered peoples were glad to join the march. Strengthened by powerful magic wielded by the Hooded Masters, the army of Parashkanan could not be stopped. In less than fifty years, the Masters took control of all the northwestern lands.

Since then, Parashkanan has risen to become one of the great powers of the Known World. The people of the Masked Countries are well-fed, prosperous, peaceful, and largely literate. Parashi culture and the laws of the Hooded Masters demand openness to and tolerance of outsiders, and the Hooded Masters have a large population of non-humans as their subjects. It has been two hundred years since Bellgard last threatened Parashkanan. Martens and Parashkanan squabble periodically, but Martens has yet to emerge the victor from such a conflict.

GOVERNMENT OF THE MASKED COUNTRIES

The Hooded Masters erased the old kingdoms, and re-divided the northwest into Cantons. They also purged the rulers of the old kingdoms, and assumed all power. The Hooded Masters tolerate no aristocracy or noble titles within the Masked Countries. All power and authority is vested solely in the Masters, which they exercise via a civil service called the Benevolence. Each canton is governed by a Provost, chosen by the Masters from the ranks of the Benevolence. Each town is governed by a Procurator, nominated by the canton's Provost and approved by a council within the civil service.

Parashkanan spends a breathtaking amount of money to maintain a free and compulsory school system throughout the Masked Countries, and many students compete avidly for a chance to apply to the civil service. Typically, one in ten students are chosen to apply, and only one in ten applicants are admitted. Parashi refer to this as being “captured by the Hooded Masters”, and the successful applicants are called “captives”. Each year, every canton holds a celebration in honor of their citizens who have just been “captured”.

PARASHI CULTURAL NOTES

Things of or pertaining to the culture of the Masked Countries are generally referred to as “Parashi”: Parashi wine, Parashi songs, Parashi art.

Things of or pertaining to the government or other official business of the realm are referred to as “Masked”: Masked laws, a Masked delegation, the Masked ambassador.

The people of the Masked Countries are referred to as “Parashimen”, singular “Parashiman”. This word is a Westrud development of “Paraksh Minh”, meaning “soldier of the Parash”.

The Masked Countries are vast, and once there were many kingdoms there. Since the Parashi conquest, thanks to the vibrancy of Parashi culture and the absolute rule of the Hooded Masters, Parashi culture has become dominant. Nevertheless, many cultural remnants persist throughout the Masked Countries.

Parashi culture is open and tolerant. They do not discriminate against “outsiders”, human or otherwise, and welcome members of any culture or species to live among them. For generations, the schools have taught students to be curious about others and to learn from them. Runini travel freely throughout the Masked Countries; Graditeli trade avidly among them; Parya are welcomed as teachers; the Salainen are particularly welcomed for their magical expertise.

There is no serfdom or formal peasantry within the Masked Countries, because there is no aristocracy. All who dwell within the Masked Countries are subjects of the Hooded Masters, equal before their law. The Benevolence governs lightly; citizens are taxed modestly; the law protects and binds equitably. Generally, civil servants are educated, well-trained, and good-intentioned; when they fail in their duties, or abuse their power, they are caught by the Watchers and put to death.

Most Parashimen are religious. Ancestor veneration is almost universal. Observance of the passing seasons is a major component of Parashi culture, and thus many worship the seasonal gods. Craft and scholarship are vibrant parts of Parashi society, and so many towns host temples to Elenath and Fusorin.

The Hooded Masters have ruled Parashkanan and the Masked Countries for centuries and many believe they are immortal, but while their power is often felt, they are very rarely seen. Parashimen tell many stories about the Masters: some true, most exaggerated fables. A Parashi parent might tell their child “behave or the Masters will come and take away your father’s nose!” They might tell the story of the Boy Who Cried Wolf, except the Masters appear at the end of the story, turn into wolves, and eat the boy.

Parashimen talk about the Hooded Masters as if they lie in wait around every corner, waiting to strike. One might conclude that they are ruled by boogeymen, monsters, or ghosts - and happy about it.

COMMON PARASHI EXPRESSIONS

“Masters take me if I lie!” - often accompanied by performatively raising the wrists as if to be cuffed.

"I'll feed you to the Masters!" - A threat, usually deadly serious if not meant literally.

"Fix your mask." - Used to tell another they have revealed too much or are talking too much.

"Show [my] face" - Used to mean "honestly", "speaking from the heart". "Show face, I don't know what to do." Often accompanied by partly moving whatever garment covers the speaker's face.

"Smell the smoke!" - A comment to indicate that someone else is lying or otherwise telling a fabulous tale.

"There is no smoke in Parashkanan" is a common expression meant to allude to the great power of the Hooded Masters.

ARISTOCRACY OF THE MASKED COUNTRIES

There isn't one. The Hooded Masters rule; everyone else serves. The Benevolence governs, carrying out the directives of the Masters and making most day-to-day decisions of government according to the laws and their own judgment.

From time to time, an arrogant or insane person, far from Parashkanan, tries to establish themselves as an independent "Lord". These rebels are hunted down by the Hussars, and burned alive by fire that makes no smoke.

PARASHKANAN MILITARY NOTES

The principal military of the Masked Countries is a body of light cavalry called Hussars. There are a few thousand of them, rotating in companies of a hundred throughout the realm of the Hooded Masters (a "Hussar Hundred"). They are widely seen as romantic heroes and adventurers by the citizenry. They fight with shortbows, sabers, and lances, and it is well-known that they can call upon the magic of the Masters if pressed.

Each canton's Provost is responsible for maintaining a militia, called the Canton March, with members recruited by the Procurator of each town. The Marchers train with pikes, longswords and shields, and longbows. A typical canton maintains at least fifty Marchers on active duty at any time. Their task is to patrol the roads, protect travelers, and lend support to Procurators who need to investigate potential threats in the countryside. When more are needed, more are raised.

In Parashkanan itself, and sometimes abroad in the land when a traitor must be found, additional security is provided by the Watchers. These black-robed, hooded figures carry black-bladed glaives and greatswords, and keep their faces hidden at all times. They almost never speak to anyone except witnesses to the crimes they must avenge. They seem to be able to disappear and reappear at will, though whether this is invisibility or teleportation is anyone's guess. They are often accompanied by mobs of crows. Generally, when the Watchers find their prey, they do not kill. Instead, the Watchers vanish, taking their prey with them. The captives are never seen again.

COINS OF PARASHKANAN

Gold Piece: Standard ("he paid 400 standard for that horse!")

Silver Piece: Mark ("just 30 mark for a large room and two hot meals, sir!")

Copper Piece: Count ("here, boy, four count for your services. Now run along.")

Platinum Piece: Bar (used by merchants and the civil service to make transport of large payments easier)

THE CITY OF PARASHKANAN

Sometimes called The City Without Smoke.

Population: 225,000 in winter, 200,000 in summer.

Earth architectural reference: Czech Baroque architecture; city largely built in Siheyuan-style squares.

Earth cultural reference: Austro-Hungarian, Czech.

Language: Westrud.

Heraldry: Geometric red and grey bird of prey on a grey background.

Parashkanan is subdivided into the City and the Cantons. *There are too many Cantons to list here, and instead they will be described by region.* Please see below for more detail.

Domain	The City of Parashkanan
Location	Four hundred miles north of Bellgard City, where the Roaring River plunges over a cliff and forms a lake called The Well of the West.
Ruler	The City of Parashkanan is ruled by the Hooded Masters, who are said to reside within the Tower of the Torch at the city's center. It is governed by a Provost, like any canton in the realm. Civil order is enforced by a company of Hussars and crime is investigated and punished by the civil service and the Watchers.
Culture	Parashkanan is a very Parashi place: open and tolerant but unforgiving. Causing trouble, hurting others, interfering with trade or the public peace: these are good ways to get thrown out of the city, banished forever, or simply killed. The enforcers of the Masters' law have few restraints upon their judgments. The streets of Parashkanan wind around and through giant square blocks, each with a central courtyard. A single block might comprise a dozen multi-family buildings, the houses and businesses of three or four merchant families of modest means, or a single compound belonging to a single wealthy family and their business. Many central courtyards serve as marketplaces, parks, or other such gathering spaces. Parashkanan hosts a population of over ten thousand Graditeli, many of whom are actually citizens and subjects of the Hooded Masters; several thousand Parya; thousands of Runini who are permanent residents and subjects, and thousands more who are passing through; and a complete Metsa Salainen village that took over the compound of a wealthy wizard who died without heirs. The city is busy all day and all night, and one is never far from business, entertainment, or opportunities of one sort or another. Worshipping Helios in public, or conducting any form of evangelism or proselytizing, is against the law in Parashkanan - punishable by exile or death. Almost all other religious practice is tolerated. Typical masking practice in the city includes veils, tall collars, and actual masks.

Economy	Parashkanan is the central trade hub of the Masked Countries, gathering up raw materials from across the lands and converting them into finished goods in the city's many workshops. The city is host to large temples of most of the gods, which draw pilgrims, scholars, and applicants from across the Known World. The Church of Elenath and the Benevolence of the Hooded Masters work together to maintain large, well-funded schools in Parashkanan, known as the Colleges. These draw scholars from across the Known World who contribute enormously to the city's economy and prestige. Thanks to the openness of Parashi culture, the city is an excellent place for representatives of various species to gather. Many large projects involving scholars, artisans, and merchant representatives from across the Known World are planned and organized in the city.
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Notes	"There is no smoke in Parashkanan" is a common expression meant to allude to the great power of the Hooded Masters. It is also mostly true. Any subject of the Masters can ask for their hearth to be blessed. To submit this request, a citizen must approach one of the Watchers, and ask for their help: "I seek the blessing of the Masters!" If the supplicant is a subject of the Masters, the Watcher will produce a scroll, hand it to the supplicant, and vanish. The supplicant must then write out their request and sign their name. They then bring the scroll to the Tower of the Torch, and cast it into one of the braziers gathered around it. From that point on, if the supplicant wishes to light any fire in their home (from a small candle to a large hearth), they need only to touch the fire-place and say "Please grant me fire." The fire that appears does not require fuel and does not produce smoke, although it produces a normal quantity of heat and is just as dangerous. The fires burn until the next sunrise. Famous Colleges of Parashkanan include: The College of Scholars of Elenath Wonderworker, an academy of magic. "Wonderworker College". The College of Scholars of Stars and Moons, focused on astronomy and navigation. "Stars and Moons College". The College of the Servants of Benevolence, the elite school for the civil service. "Benevolence College". The College of Ancient Brass Masters of Music, a school founded by bards. "Old Brass College". The College of Silver Arts and Mystery, a school founded by bards. "Silver College". The Parashkanan College of History and Language, a prominent school attended by many foreign aristocrats and the children of local merchants. "Parashkanan College". Six Scholars College of Research, a small but highly prestigious school run by six masters of various disciplines in science and magic. "Six Scholars". For almost two hundred years, the Hooded Masters tolerated a guild of thieves in their city, but very recently the guild members were rounded up by the Watchers and burned in a great ring around the Tower of the Torch. Also burned in that same mass execution was a group of men identified as "Heliosan madmen", and a pair of Parashi merchants with business interests in Voors. The city's remaining thieves are now staying very, very quiet.
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Domain	Cantons of Chalk Bay
Location	Northwest of Parashkanan, around the bay of the same name. The most northwesterly point on the mainland.

History	Between the Fall of the Sarnathan Empire and the time of the Hooded Masters, the people of the Chalk Bay took to the sea, raiding and reaving along the coast, as far south as Wellen. The Parashi conquest put an end to those ways. The reavers of Chalk Bay did not fall easily to the Hooded Masters. It is said they only laid down their arms when Voll stopped answering their prayers, showing that they had displeased him.
Culture	The people of Chalk Bay are still proud seafarers, though their raiding days are behind them. They celebrate many holidays for Voll, including banquets to remember great storms of old. They call the sea "Voll's country", and give the ashes of their dead to the waves. Typical masking practice in the Chalk Bay includes scarves and hoods against the cold oceanic winds.
Economy	The largest city in the Chalk Bay cantons is Whiteport, so named for the chalky cliffs from which it was first hewn. Whiteport is an important stop for the Callentan Fleets, allowing the Chalk Bay cantons to export huge quantities of apples and fine ciders. They also export sea salt and scrimshaw art. Parashkanan imports many shiploads of iron ingots from Voors annually through ships that unload at Whiteport.
Notes	The conquest of Chalk Bay was bloody and hard, and left many unburned corpses to rot away. Where they died, many rose up again as ghosts, and to this day it is not uncommon to spot the ghost ships of undead reavers upon the Bay. The Order of the Silver Flame of Laeth works closely with Provosts and Procurators throughout the Chalk Bay cantons, as well as traditional tribal leaders, to respectfully lay these spirits to rest. Legends tell of lost ancient weapons, armor, and magical artifacts, supposedly secreted in barrows across the region's old battlegrounds, guarded by the ghosts of long-dead warriors.

Domain	Cantons of the Hawk Hills
Location	Ranging north a hundred miles from Parashkanan to the Clouded Sea, from the Chalk Bay in the west to the Least River in the east.

History	"Hawker" culture is just as old as Parashi culture, and is so called for their fascination with falconry. At the time of the rise of the Hooded Masters, the Hawker people were ruled by a family of brutal warrior princes, whose demands for bloodshed had ceased to be exciting and become simply oppressive. Their soldiers, though skillful, had terrible morale, and they folded before the march of the Masters. Once the Hawker Princes were dead, the underlying sophistication of Hawker culture helped them assimilate quickly into the new world of the Masked Countries. Many old Hawker families make up the backbone of the Benevolence.
Culture	The people of the Hawk Hills are proud of their heritage of sophistication and order, and they make a virtue of contributing to civil society. Their wealthy citizens are expected to contribute more than their share, especially to education, and so the Hills boast many fine schools. There are many "Hawk Lodges" throughout these Cantons whose members work to preserve Hawker culture. From time to time, one or another of these lodges gives rise to a Hawker independence movement, or even a Hawker supremacy movement. These insurrections are strangled in the cradle by Watchers and Hussars. Typical masking practice in the Hills includes long hats (front to back) and veils.
Economy	The Graditeli city of Skrienigrad lies within the Hawk Hills, and this is a major organ of the Hawk economy. Centuries ago, the Hawkers learned about mining from their Graditeli neighbors, and ever since then have mined the Hills extensively. The Hawk Hills maintain extensive farmland and orchards, but the terrain is far from ideal for these uses. Produce of the Hawk Hills is generally consumed there. Wealthy Hawker families generally make their money by investing in Callentan merchants, Bellgard landowners, and Voorish miners. By reinvesting their wealth in the Hills, they keep the region prosperous.
Notes	Hawker warrior culture has largely given way to the culture of service, but continues to express itself via Hawk Lodge culture and the practice of dueling. Hawkers enjoy dueling as much as Martensen nobles, and under the gender equality of the Hooded Masters, they produce twice as many fine duelists per capita. Hawk Hills mining projects have begun to reach "too greedily and too deep", as the saying goes, and have recently found their way into places where monsters dwell.

Domain	Cantons of the Least Lands
Location	From the Hawk Hills in the west, across the Least River to the Forest of Whispers to the east, north of the Great Rainy, south of Whalesbay.
History	The Least Lands are low-lying, well-irrigated, temperate country that have been the breadbasket of the North for many centuries. They cannot compete with Bellgard in this way, but the Least Lands grant Parashkanan a degree of food independence that the other realms do not have. The Least Lords never maintained much of an army, and so when the Hooded Masters arrived there was little hope of repelling them. In true Least fashion, the Least Lords accepted reality and pledged themselves to the Masters without a fight. The Masters allowed them to peacefully relinquish their hereditary noble rights, and the family lines of the Least Lords faded quietly away. Today, the Least Lands are a place of prosperous farming villages, raising huge amounts of grain to feed the Masked Countries alongside local specialties like Least Pears, pear brandy, Whalesbay oysters, and goat cheese, traditionally prepared in ash logs.
Culture	The Least Lands are peaceful, prosperous, temperate, and safe. The people who live there are generally happy, and therefore tend to be slow-moving and resistant to change. Least Lands culture is focused on village life: a year-long series of seasonal festivals, rituals, ceremonies, and holidays. The seasonal gods are very important to Least Lands culture. The all-consuming nature of these endless holidays means that Leastlanders are often inward-focused and unconcerned with the world outside the fields that surround their village. Leastlanders who chafe at this well-ordered life often leave to join the Hussars or seek adventure abroad. Typical masking practice in the Least Lands is focused on broad-brimmed straw hats and lightweight, linen scarves.
Economy	Agriculture and fishing are the pillars of the Least Lands economy. Exports are divided between wagon-trains southwest to Parashkanan and the docks of Whalescove, the largest city of the Least Lands, where the Callentan fleets visit.
Notes	The low-lying terrain of the Least Lands is often shrouded by fog, and the villagers of this region tell many ghost stories about “what’s out there in the mist”. It is said that there are “spirits” dwelling in the Least River who must be appeased; this is no small part of Least Lands ritual practice.

Domain	Cantons of the Singing Seas
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Location	From the Forest of Whispers in the west, northeast along the Whalesong Coast across the Great Singing Sea to the River Grace, and south in a long arc to the borders of Redpath.
History	The Greater and Lesser Singing Seas have been a homeland for humans, Parya Candra, Graditeli, Runini, and Salainen since time immemorial. The cities of the Singing Seas maintain records going back to the dawn of the Sarnathan Empire, documenting their history as integrated, vibrant places. Many communities in the Singing Seas have been places of habitation for over ten thousand years. Just before the Hooded Masters and their Parashi Masked Army arrived, the cities of the Singing Seas had fallen into the hands of human-supremacist tyrants. The Hooded Masters had the rulers rounded up and burned alive. Of all the lands that would become the Masked Countries, the Singing Seas took the longest to come to heel. To this day, the Benevolence maintains a close watch over the cantons of this region, and the Watchers are not unknown to their ancient streets and country roads.
Culture	The people of the Singing Seas are strong, proud, and prosperous; in another world they would be a kingdom of their own. They boast of fishermen who sail farther north than any other; of miners who dig deeper; of indefatigable fighters and cunning wizards. Singing Seas culture is a culture of heroes and hero-worship. Tavern songs honor great deeds and bold achievement. Singing Seas cantons are the closest to the Borderland, Redpath, and Martens, and thus the “Singers” see themselves as the first line of defense against invaders: military, cultural, or anything else. They are proudly defiant against and intolerant of Martensen culture in particular, rejecting anything that smacks of Martensen “nobility” customs. Whereas Hawkers drink wine and Leastlanders drink cider and brandy, Singers are a beer-drinking people. Their Tavern and Brewer Societies have developed elaborate, arcane systems of rules governing how beer should be made in its many varieties and forms. Typical masking practice in the Seas includes half-masks and chain veils.
Economy	Singing Seas beer sells well across the Known World, especially to Graditeli. These cantons also produce a large amount of iron ore and finished iron and steel products, especially tools and weapons. Both the Greater and Lesser Singing Seas are famous for their pearls, the harvesting of which is governed by Mussel And Pearl Societies based in lakeshore villages. The diversity of the Singing Seas geography and climate means that a great variety of agricultural and finished goods are produced here.

Notes	The Forest of Whispers and the Singing Seas are not named thus for no reason. It is not uncommon to hear disembodied voices when near these places. Singers customarily regard the voices as real, belonging to actual entities. It is not uncommon for Singers to respond to the voices when they feel they are being directly addressed. Visitors from other lands can find this disturbing. A small group of Takalu recently settled near the Lesser Singing Sea. After some consternation about how to integrate them into the community, the local Singers dubbed them the "Scale Society" and invited them to join the nearby beer garden.
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Domain	Cantons of the Great Rainy
Location	South of the Least Lands, west of the southern tip of the Singing Seas, east of High Riding, and running south along the Great Red River to the Bellgard duchy of the same name.
History	The Great Rainy Basin is a broad lowland encompassing lakes, rivers, and marshes. Where there are hills, there are hollows; where there are forests, there are dales and dells. It is an excellent place in which to disappear. As the name suggests, it is a very wet country. Locals like to say that they invented the hood, the hat, the hut, and the concept of hiding. There has never been a large human population in the Great Rainy. There are several small Metsa Salainen villages here, two chavani of the Parya Candra, and several Runini bands. What humans there are live in small villages devoted to farming and fishing. When the Masked Army came to the Great Rainy, they were greeted by a group of druids who were granted a private audience with the Hooded Masters. Following that meeting, the Masters turned their army around and marched away. To this day, the Great Rainy is only lightly governed by the Benevolence, and the Hussars have only a small presence.

Culture	People of the Great Rainy call themselves “Rainborn”. Rainborn folk place great stock in treating strangers as guests, and treating guests with courtesy. When asked about this, the Rainborn will say “you never know who might come wandering out of the swamp.” Perhaps thanks to their wet, cool surroundings, the Rainborn greatly value comfort: specifically, being warm and dry. Their houses are small, but well-made and tight against the damp. Rainborn go from place to place in small, flat-bottomed boats more than by horseback, and even their boats are fitted with snug shelters to keep dry. Great Rainy natives make little distinction between the various peoples who live in the region. It is very common for humans to live among the Salainen or Parya or vice versa and think nothing of it. Tall or short, fat or thin, human or otherwise, Rainborn are generally dressed alike: knee-length waterproof parka, tall boots, wide-brimmed hat. Rainborn are devoted more to the Mother than to any other god, and druids are more common and more connected to communities here than anywhere else in the human world. Typical masking practice in the Great Rainy includes drooping rain hats, deep hoods, and hair worn long and braided around.
Economy	Rainborn are mostly subsistence farmers and fishers. They earn gold by cutting down a modest quantity of the fast-growing Marsh Pine trees, which they float down the Great Red River to sell in Bellgard or east through Singing Seas to Redpath, where it is highly prized. Pelts of the Fog Otter fetch a high price in Parashkanan, where they are sewn into capelets and hats. And, strangely, Rainborn divers sometimes recover precious stones from the river bottoms; sale of these stones to outlanders can support a Rainborn village for a year.
Notes	Druids of the Great Rainy are said to hold many secrets. One such secret is that they have been fighting a pitched battle against a bizarre invasive vine that seems to thrive on blood - animal and otherwise. Masked schools in the Great Rainy typically take the form of great barges. This is a courtesy to the Rainborn, who have little enough dry ground to build on.

Domain	Cantons of the High Riding
Location	West of the Raining River and the Great Rainy Basin, just south of Parashkanan, east of the Kingtree Forest and north of Bellgard’s Northern Reach.

History	The High Riding is a plateau, rising up from the Great Rainy Basin and stretching for a hundred miles to the Kingtree Forest. It is a place of rolling hills and shadowed valleys, ancient woodlands and wide, grassy plains. The High Riding is also the birthplace of the Parashi people, whose culture and values have spread across the Masked Countries. While Parashkanan is the apex of Parashi culture - open but aggressive, welcoming but demanding, tolerant but unforgiving - and has become powerful, urbane, and above all <i>rich</i>, the High Riding is the true heart of the Parashi people. Peppered by large villages and small towns, the Riding retains a great deal of unfarmed, undeveloped space: wide stretches where herds of wild horses roam and Parashi go to learn about themselves. It is said that the vigorous and courageous nature of the Parashi was what led the Hooded Masters to choose them to lead their conquest of the northwest. Today, the principal road connecting Parashkanan to Bellgard and the south passes through the High Riding. Foreigners heading north for the first time often mistakenly think the High Riding <i>is</i> Parashkanan, because they see everything they expect: men and women on horseback, well-built towns of stone overseen by the stern Benevolence, masked faces, and braziers of smokeless fire. Typical masking practice in the High Riding includes chain veils, linen scarves, deep hoods and tall collars.
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Culture	The High Riding is primarily home to humans, though several Runini bands call the region home, along with at least one chavani of the Parya Candra. Highriders grow up steeped in a culture of courtesy and respect, where growing up means learning how to break rules, define yourself, and become a useful part of society anyway. They grow up around horses and riding, and often understand themselves in terms of their relationship with the animals. Hundreds of years ago, the Parashi lived in tiny villages or nomadic bands, traveling with the horse herds. Today, they live in large, well-built towns, but the Parashi are not sedentary. They will often give their houses to each other, or to strangers, or simply leave them vacant for a year while they go to live and work in another part of the Masked Countries, or abroad. Highrider merchants are fearless, leading their caravans on long, complicated trade voyages through many lands. They return after months or years with profits and treasures that change the destinies of families or entire towns. The High Riding provides many Hussar recruits every year, and every Hussar rides a horse from this region. Religious practice in the High Riding is dominated by ancestor veneration and worship of the seasonal gods and the Three.
Economy	The High Riding has grown wealthy from overland trade managed by their bold merchant families. Local agriculture is minimal, mostly providing staples, including various cherished grains that are fermented into potent liquors. Highrider horses are regarded as among the best in the Known World, second only to the Sauravara horses of the Parya. The largest towns of the High Riding are built along the trade road running south to Bellgard, and are centered on “caravanserays”: large complexes of inns, stables, and secure courtyards for parking wagons.
Notes	Animals of the High Riding have an almost uncanny intelligence. Hunting in this part of the world can be very difficult and dangerous for the hunter. More sorcerers discover their power in the High Riding every year than in all the rest of the Masked Countries combined.

Domain	Cantons of the Kingtree
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Location	From the High Riding and the Roaring River in the east to the Green Coast in the west; south of Parashkanan and the Hawk Hills, north of Wellen and the Broken Lands.
History	The Kingtree Forest after which this region is named is ancient. Local legend tells that in times past, the Sarnathan Empire warned the locals to be respectful of the forest, and to this day they take from it but carefully. After the Sarnathan Empire fell, chaos broke out in the Kingtree region as the people of the woodland villages began to make war on each other. Stories from that time hint at the presence of an otherworldly power tormenting the humans and turning them towards violence. This time of turmoil did not last long, though, for the Kingtree was the first region to fall to the Hooded Masters. It is said that the Masters themselves walked ahead of the Masked Army as they marched into Kingtree, working magic to subdue the spirits of the forest. With the presence of the Parashi and the Hooded Masters, the chaos and violence was quieted, and soon enough the people of Kingtree had joined the Masked Army in marching across the northwestern lands. Today, the Kingtree region thrives, with coastal fishing villages and river port towns along the Roaring. Small villages dot the Kingtree Forest itself, where a very particular culture has evolved.

Culture	The Kingtree is in many ways a step back in time. Smaller villages are still built around communal longhouses; it is the least-literate of the Masked Countries; there is little direct trade with the outside world; many people still live at least partially by hunting and gathering. Agriculture is small and not intensive; there is more herding than farming. “Treemen” tend to be uncomfortable with large towns and cities, and even with the infrastructure they require such as cobbled roads and stone bridges. Social life in the Kingtree is built around families and clans, which are headed by chiefs. Any given Procurator of the Benevolence might have four to ten chiefs under their direct supervision. As is their habit almost everywhere, the Benevolence governs lightly in the Kingtree. Worship of Varda and his “family”, the seasonal gods, is common and important in the Kingtree. Varda’s priests teach gentle use of the land and respect for the Forest. Treemen attend great gatherings of clans to observe the turning of the seasons. Thanks to the clannish nature of Kingtree culture, their towns are not very diverse. There are communities of Parya Candra and Metsa Salainen in the Forest itself, and there is commerce and peace between them and the humans, but the various species rarely live in each others’ communities. Typical masking practice in the Kingtree includes leather or hide hats, colorful bandanas and wool scarves.
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Economy	Each year, the Vardan priests of the Kingtree country gather to determine which part of the Forest may be logged. The high-quality hardwoods taken from this land fetch a high price in every city across the Known World. Kingtree agriculture is barely enough to serve local needs, and produces no exports. Animal pelts and leathers from the many and various creatures of the Kingtree Forest are highly prized in Parashkanan and beyond. By far the most important part of the Kingtree's economy is the town of Treeport, along the Roaring River between Parashkanan and the sea. Ships which are too large to sail upriver to the Well of the West dock in Treeport and unload their goods onto barges which take the cargo the rest of the way. Like Parashkanan, Treeport is a canton unto itself, and the Provost of Treeport is considered the most senior Provost in the region. Each year, the Parya Candra of the Kingtree Forest produce one longbow which they offer to the Provost of Marbledown as a kind of tribute. The Benevolence sells these bows at auction in Parashkanan, and the generally enormous proceeds are considered to the Candra's tax payment for the year.
Notes	It is said that the name "Kingtree Forest" is not without meaning, and that the actual King of the Trees lives somewhere deep within the woodlands. Treemen produce some of the finest scouts and best archers in the Masked Countries.

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