

A Historical Account of the Derthan Peoples

Years ago, in the infant stages of the Peace Council, there existed the Kingdom of Derthaven. The aristocracy of Derthaven, under King Louis Montdeux IV, had long since become poisoned by internal corruption of greed and struggle for power. The king had been resisting the Peace Council since its first ambassador made contact. On-going conflicts with the Western bordering nation of Landisfarne (now a district of Alessandria) had led to countless incidents of fighting, border disputes, and threats of invasion. The strain between the two kingdoms existed for nearly two centuries. The cost of such frequent endeavors had put Derthaven in tremendous debt with its ally, Grendon, who would supply weapons, troops, and luxuries for the wealthy. The debt weighed heavily upon the lower class, which made up the vast majority of its population, with food rationing, high taxes, and few rights. While the fields and farmsteads that surrounded its mighty castle were abundant with crops, most produce was passed on to Grendon (as payment) and the aristocracy of Derthaven. The common man struggled to survive, let alone prosper in the corrupt monarchy. If not for the events that transpired, a volatile revolution surely would have erupted.

Rumors from villagers, fleeing the outlying farmsteads of Derthaven, began to spread as they fled their homes from an apparent invasion from the South. Villagers were insane with fear of what were described as monsters, marching from the deserts, overtaking their homes. King Louis became annoyed by the ill-educated commoners and their seemingly ludicrous folk tales of man-lizards, later discovered to be the Sethen people. The reports continued to fall upon his ears as his own appointed lords began to flee their lands as well. By the time the king had assembled his guard to arrest the "fearful fools," and send them back to work, a small force of lizard-men marched upon the walls of the castle itself. The creatures were armed and armored, but were of no threat to the mighty stronghold. Appalled by their beast-like appearance and the trouble they had been causing him, the king ordered his guard to "do away" with them. Loading terrible machines of war, still un-paid from Grendon, the King's Guard unleashed a superfluous barrage unto the unsuspecting creatures. Within moments, the invasion (as it was presumed) was over. Those few Sethen left alive were forced to flee. King Louis Montdeux IV threw the greatest, and last, party he or his aristocracy would ever live to see.

The castle was well defended, but its provisions soon began to diminish. The Derthan king's excessive use of force had exhausted most of his standing army and its supply in the early months of the war that followed. The calculating nature of the Sethen absorbed the overuse of force time and again with few major losses, but neither side had the clear upper-hand. The king received word from his ambassadors that Grendon would offer no further aid without payment was. Louis was outraged. Sitting in his chambers,

surrounded by concubines, and already planning an invasion of Grendon, the king was oblivious to the new threat that descended upon Derthaven. A grand army of Landisfarne had marched from the West and begun to lay siege to the walls of the castle, in support of their new-found Sethen allies. Pressure from both fronts soon led to retreat. Louis ordered all remaining Derthans be conscripted. With all armory reserves expended, and no means of obtaining new equipment, these make-shift soldiers were armed with nothing more than long wooden staves, sharpened to a point at one end. The king ordered this untrained militia to escort him away to more defensible positions.

Within three years, those who survived had reached the Eastern border of Derthaven, and had nowhere left to run. Battle followed them everywhere as they fled, and their numbers were reduced to a few hundred. King Louis Montdeux IV ordered a final stand. His militia consisted of men and women of all ages, including the elderly and very young, with none of soldierly background. These few conscripts, armed with crudely-fashioned spears, that remained turned and walked south. Avoiding the ensuing forces of the Sethen and Landisfarne, they disappeared into the desert. The king fled to the lands of Grendon, and was never seen again. The Derthans left behind were integrated into the soon to be established Kingdom of Alessandria, and have prospered in the new age of peace. Those that abandoned their king in the final days of the war, however, were destined for other things.

An Oral History of the Derthan People

As told by Raja Fajalahn

Our past is not our destiny, my family. The Father has explained this to me in a vision. We have been punished for the stain of injustice that we have left upon the world. We have been punished for the suffering and greed of our ignorant wanton desires. Do not live in anguish, for the night we stood up as a people is the night that Diakonoff wept for us. His tears fell to the deserts, where we hid, as diamonds. I saw in his tears that we have been victims only of ourselves. The Sethen are powerful in faith to the Father, and our lands were a gift to them. They will make use of it, where we have squandered the blessing. We must strive to emulate these humble people. We must overcome the inherent evil that taints our blood, by being just, true, and pure. We must strive to live without sin if we are ever to be delivered to paradise.

The Father has told me he will not judge the actions of any Derthan, lest he recognize his face. Shroud your faces, cover your voice that I be the only Derthan he sees and hears. I

will carry the sins of us all, that you, my family, will walk in paradise as I have seen it. There is much blood in our path: blood that will stain my hands alone. All here are equal, aside me: who is to be the most despised. I know that we will again enter paradise, and become privileged in the Father's grace, but I know not when or how. We will survive by any means that we can, while giving to those what they show unto us. We will give equally to all that equally give. We will kill all that will kill. We will welcome and love all that will welcome and love.

I have promised Diakonoff that my line be his to condemn. Those of my immediate blood will continue to guide the course of our people. The Father, Diakonoff, shall be respected above all deities. Those who hear his voice, and speak his words must also be seen and heard, without shroud. They are not to be judged as I. It is not their face you see or voice you hear; they are those of the Father. Still, they are responsible for their sin as I, and must be respected, as their judgment will be harsh in the presence of Diakonoff.

We must practice hard the art of war, that we may again be welcome in paradise. Our contrition is not yet over. For years we will wander the sands, and many enemies we will be forced to defend against. The father has shown me the way of the spear; the Holy Dragoon. The Dragoon shall defend us from all evils. These shall be our elite warriors, but all of us are soldiers when needed. We are all of equal rank, but must lend ear to those of experience that we may succeed. Their voices are the only to be heard in battle. We must fight until the hand of peace is extended to us, once again. When that day has come, our true purpose will be shown to us in paradise.

A Summation of Derthan Activity and Customs in Recent Years

The Derthan peoples survived in the deserts south of the Sethen lands for several decades. They have become nomadic hunter-gatherers responsible for the pillaging of numerous southern-most outposts of both Alessandrian and Sethen military. No survivors are ever found upon investigation. Seemingly, they would kill everyone, take everything, and move on to another outpost. In truth, they fight only when necessary to survive, and welcome any who don't raise a sword to join them, and share as equals. Most often only soldiers were killed. Those that surrender are welcomed with open arms. Any such person that would seek more than their share, harm another, or disgrace the community is placed into slavery. The Derthan stance on slavery is that of mercy. They believe that by forcing the body to suffer will chastise the soul; so that Diakonoff will show them mercy in the next life. The entire community "owns" the slave, and an oath of repentance will usually end a person's enslavement. Only the most dangerous Derthans are slaves; whether it is due to violence or anarchist, anti-communal actions, they are always of threat. Their life was difficult; nevertheless they grew in number to the size of a traveling nation.

Derthan community is of paramount to all members of their society. This sense of themselves has given them one of the most feared and efficient militaries of the age. While all Derthans are considered equal, they no less show great respect and understanding for the chain of command in military endeavor. Only the appointed officer, or Balif, who is chosen by his/her own ranks, can issue orders to the unit. If the Balif is killed, the unit will follow his/her last words to their death. The only word they will hear over the Balif, is that of the Raja himself. Each unit typically consists of one Balif, one to two surgeons, a cleric (who is not permitted to fight), and between thirty and sixty conscripts. While all Derthans are generally skilled warriors, very few would claim it as a profession. There are two exceptions to this rule; the Dragoon and the Dervish.

Dragoons are warrior monks. They are masters of defense and nothing, thus far, has ever broken through a line of Dragoon. They are trained, from birth, to selflessly protect the community at any cost. Their skills in warfare are only surpassed by their devotion to Diakonoff. While they are great masters, they are sworn to humility and self-discipline. They are believed to be destined to fulfill this role, and while most are selected by some sign during their mother's pregnancy, there have been few cases in which one was shown the way, later in their lives. The Dragoon are typically eunuchs, if male. Their courage, calculating minds, presence, and strength of faith have thus insured that the Derthan people have yet to lose ground on the field of battle. Dragoons are seldom attached to units of conscripts, normally fighting in line formation together. If such a case should occur, the Balif, while not obligated to do so, will most often follow the Dragoon's orders instead. No battle is won in defense alone, as the Derthans are well aware. In such fashion, the Dragoons will often select conscripts, who demonstrate particular trends in behavior, to be trained as Dervish.

The Dervish are those with a will for battle. They are those who pull away from their ranks to reach battle first and revel in victory. The Dragoon have seen the effect such an individual can have on the strength of any formation, and so they are removed to fulfill other tasks. The Dervish are trained to be lightly armored skirmishers, always wielding twin sabers. Their main objective in battle is to be individual, chaotic, and unpredictable. They are seldom given specific orders in combat, but have been known to work with one another from time to time, entirely separate from the main forces. The inherent strength of the Dervish in war is its greatest struggle in the community. They often find difficulty becoming accepted members of society in peaceful times. Their individual nature tends to drive them to selfish and prideful tendencies. Some become so proud of the self, that they refuse to veil their faces; so they can receive credit for their sins when they die. Some will distance themselves from the community, fending for themselves, so that they do not poison the selfless. There are more than just a few slaves that were once Dervish, as well. Dervish are as different from the Derthan people as they are from one another.

The majority of the Derthan people are always prepared for combat, but do not consider it their way of life. Derthans are typically chosen for a particular craft or profession from childhood. They seek to perfect whatever they undertake for the best of the community. They dress in simple clothing (best suited for their environment), veils to shroud their faces, few adornments, if any, so as not to set themselves apart from another. All are considered to be equal, regardless of age, sex, race, or belief. While Diakonoff is accepted as their patron deity, they have since accepted reverence to all deities as persons of other cultures and races have joined the community. It is common practice, however, that the other deities are the children of Diakonoff, and that he must be first revered. It is believed that the sun is the eye of Diakonoff, while at night, in the darkness, he scatters his eyes across the sky to better watch the ways of the world. They believe he is always watching, and will only remove their veils indoors or if shielded from the sun.

The Derthans believe that the Raja, by bearing his face, carries the sins of all persons of the community. The Raja has come to be treated as their king, out of respect for the great sacrifice he has made, and the immense punishment they believe awaits him in death. As such, he is gifted with the finest things the community has to offer, has many wives, and his word is never questioned. When a Raja dies, it is customary that he be dragged through town as the entirety of the community whips his body with sticks. The body is then dragged into the desert, and left for judgment. The Derthans believe that doing so will punish him enough on earth that Diakonoff will spare him from an eternity of suffering. The day an heir is chosen, from the line of the Raja, to replace him is a very somber one. For three days the Derthan people will mourn the new king; wailing each day at noon and midnight.

There are very few celebrations in their culture. One such occasion is when violent slaves are pitted against one another, great beasts, and volunteer combatants in bloody tournaments. The winner, if any, may be pressed back into servitude or accept training as a Dervish. The Raja, knowing sin, chooses who is clean and sinful. It is by his approval only, that a killing blow is dealt during such an event. The tournaments are celebrated not for their violence, but rather that they believe the slave's suffering in the arena will absolve them of their sins. More often than not, the loudest cheers can be heard when a combatant refuses to fight, seeking to repent and rejoin the community. Such tournaments are rare, however, normally occurring no more than once yearly. Tournaments have, from time to time, been held to choose Balifs, but these are not nearly as celebrated.

The recent actions of the Derthans are vague and unsubstantiated. The Derthans claim that they were approached by an ambassador to King Gordian of Alessandria and

promised lands in the new continent as well as a voice on the Peace Council. They believe, yet forgive, that the king betrayed them; providing them with faulty ships that led to three failed attempts to cross the ocean. The Raja, having lost his only son in the final attempt, decided to have all Derthans cross in one final effort. Roughly crafted ships, mostly salvaged from wreckage near the coast, carried nearly twelve thousand Derthans across the sea. When the ships came into sight of Anchor point, only eight thousand had survived. Derthans claim that the Prince's men in Anchor Point killed their ambassador while the survivors of Anchor Point, still loyal to the Prince, claim they invaded outright. Whatever the cause, Anchor Point was razed and stands now as the new home of the Raja's people, Newhaven. The Raja's fury, caused by the deaths of the bloody conflict, was soon relieved with peaceful negotiations with the people of Corsotha. Corsotha was held as a province of Derthaven, but soon after relinquished to the rule of its own people.

In this new world of lush forests and fertile land, the Derthans believe they have finally been delivered to paradise. Their communist-theocracy is readily adapting to the new world. The Raja is putting forth efforts to continue commercialism and trade by taxing the port he now holds. He has also hired experts, with the goods/coin left by Anchor Point, to train his people to build permanent shelter and work the land. Many Derthans have begun to remove their veils, and speak their names freely, as they feel the Raja should no longer be responsible for their sins now that they are delivered from the sands. Nevertheless, the Derthan people have the utmost respect for their king, as well as the needs of the community.

A typical Derthan is polite, even-tempered, yet always prepared for the necessity of battle. A typical Derthan will never strike first in an altercation, unless, of course, the intent is obvious. At times, a Derthan's demeanor can often-times come across as condescending, especially when discussing religion. While a Derthan will forgive (what they believe to be) ignorance, he/she will not hesitate to point out that the Raja and the teachings of the Derthan people are right. While they attempt their best to be humble, they do believe that the Raja has all the right answers, which often proves a conflict of interest. The Derthans believe that justice, honor, and community are the paramount to all civilized societies, and will not easily be dissuaded from believing so. A typical Derthan is always eager to help for the best of the community, but hesitant to assist (or seek assistance) in a personal matter. At this point, the Derthan people consist of nearly every race, but not in great number, and have a community of nearly nine thousand. The Derthan standard is an emblazoned, yellow sun on a brown field.