

Sethen Culture and History

The term 'Sethen' originates from an ancient dialect of this reptilian race. It is derived from S'Hs'The'en, which meant 'the brotherhood' or 'clan gathering.' It was adopted and corrupted by the Orcs who first encountered Sethen during coastal raiding along the southern continent. Early Sethen culture flourished in a variety of environments over a broad geographic range. They had coastal settlements, though they never developed significant seafaring skills. There were cities and villages in forests, wetlands, and plains, but the largest by far was the city of Hram A'Ssam situated in a vast, dense jungle. Though geographically remote, Hram A'Ssam was the cultural and religious center of Sethen society.

Religion played an important role in Sethen culture, and still does today. The priests and clerics were revered. They constituted a class unto themselves and were shown respect almost equal to that of the tribal elders. Their position was mostly hereditary, though not entirely exclusive. Particularly pious individuals were taken on as acolytes and could eventually be accepted into the priesthood if they so desired. Their primary deity closely paralleled the attributes of Diakonoff and upon exposure to the other civilized races, the Sethen quickly accepted him. They still do, however, tend to represent him with a reptilian countenance. The worship of Diakonoff agrees with Sethen mores. They hold personal honor and courage in very high esteem. While worship of the other deities is by no means forbidden, Diakonoff is viewed as the most noble patron of the Sethen.

Sethen culture is dominated by the Hs'The'en Council lead by the S'shan, the Sethen king. Leadership of the great houses, and the corresponding seat on the Council, are coveted positions that only the strongest can achieve and only the wisest and eldest can maintain. Council seats and other prominent positions are usually won through personal combat. Anyone, even the S'shan, can be challenged at any time. The result is a duel according to ancient traditions in which the victor deposes his opponent. These duels, called the Maran S'Anat, are typically bloody, but only occasionally fatal.

While the right to lead is determined by personal prowess, the Sethen are by no means barbaric combatants. They are keenly aware that strong and intelligent leaders are valuable assets. They therefore show great respect and deference to old and wise Councilors. Elder Sethen may be an easy mark for a younger man in his physical prime, but they are rarely challenged unless they become corrupt or irrational. It is much more common for an aging Councilor to voluntarily relinquish his authority, thereby allowing two or more younger candidates to vie for his position.

The S'shan holds supreme authority over virtually all aspects of the society. He governs with the aid of the Council, but he is by no means required to follow its advice. Some S'shans have been known to go directly against a consensus of the Hs'The'en. If the decision proves to be correct or beneficial it serves to increase the S'shan's power. However, if the outcome is not good, his wisdom and authority fall into question. He is much more likely to be challenged after such an event.

The S'shan's position is far from hereditary. Because the strongest and most skillful succeeds, it is rare for a son to follow his father as S'shan. A few short dynasties have occurred, but none have lasted for more than four generations.

A female Sethen on the Council is an extreme rarity, though there are currently two women holding esteemed seats on the Hs'The'en. There has never been a female S'shan and the likelihood of that happening in the foreseeable future is very slim. In fact, few females care to become involved in politics at all. Even the spouses of the S'shan and Councilors tend to distance themselves from the

political scene. This trend causes many outsiders to perceive that females play a secondary or subservient role in Sethen society. This would be a false assumption. Females' legal rights are roughly equivalent to males'. Furthermore, males often defer to the females in domestic affairs. Each village or locale has at least one Sens'sa. She is a wise and influential matriarch in her region. The Sens'sae are usually skilled in herbal healing and medicines. They are sometimes priestesses in their own right. It is common for even the powerful Councilors to visit a Sens'sa from time to time for advice.

One of the most significant events in Sethen history was the exodus. The Sethen civilization prospered across a large part of the southern expanse of the Old Continent. However, they were eventually forced to gradually leave their cities and villages. The world was changing and even the mighty and proud Sethen could not fight the unyielding forces of nature. The climate of the Southlands was becoming warmer and the desert that occupied the center of the continent was slowly expanding. The plains, forests, and even the jungle began to give way to the encroaching sands.

At first, individual families and small villages began to relocate northward toward more temperate areas. But the S'shan and High Council soon realized that the problem facing them would not be solved so easily. After much debate, and in an effort to keep the Sethen kingdom intact, the Council made a bold decision to move the entire population to more hospitable land. The Sethen began to organize the relocation of their entire society. The fact that they attempted such a feat at all is a testament to their unity and confidence. That they succeeded is little short of a miracle. It is likely that no other race could muster the leadership, discipline, and dedication to accomplish such a task.

They went forth in three progressions. One followed the eastern seacoast. The second went directly north. The third followed a northwesterly path to more fully explore the expanse of continent. They maintained contact with one another by scout-couriers dispatched every few days. The central group was the largest and was led by S'shan Tsai. The other groups were under the leadership of senior Council members. During this exodus, the full Council met only infrequently, about once every few years. Progress was slow. They traveled a few weeks or months at a time, then would halt and construct a semi-permanent encampment where they would spend the winter months. On several occasions, the Sethen migration halted for over a year while advance scouts negotiated a safe route for the population.

S'shan Tsai died on the twelfth year of the journey. He was killed in a rockslide while traversing a mountain pass. This event could have meant the end of the endeavor, for it was his leadership that held the assembly together. Fortunately, he was succeeded by his son, J'Rasac, who shared his father's abilities. Though young, he was able to maintain the assembly and continue his father's dream. S'shan J'Rasac reigned for fifty-eight years and died of natural causes. His authority was never challenged. This continuity of strong leadership undoubtedly contributed to the eventual success and resettlement of the entire Sethen race.

The Sethen advance scouts first made contact with Humans on the ninety-sixth year of the migration. The scouts were fortunate enough to sight the Men from a distance. What they saw was a band of mounted soldiers, complete with chain and plate armor. Until encountering Humans, Sethen had made very little use of metal armor, preferring leather instead. This mostly holds true even today. After observing the Men for some time, they returned and made a full report. Included in the report was a detailed description of the amazing beasts on which the Humans rode, for this was also the Sethen's first encounter with a horse.

S'shan Hs'Saraat, who had succeeded J'Rasac, immediately called a gathering of the full Council. He sent messengers to the East and West marches and ordered a halt, requiring that the Councilors attend

upon him with all haste. It took sixteen days for the couriers to return with the leaders of the East March. It would take even longer for the others due to their westward movement. In the mean time, S'shan Hs'Saraat did his best to ensure his people remained hidden and to avoid contact with the Humans. While they waited word from the west, the Councilors present began discussions on how to deal with the alien people.

Another nine days passed before the couriers sent to the west returned. Unfortunately, they were alone. They were unable to locate the West March. They reported that they had found signs of its passage, but were unsuccessful in making contact. Their path had been blocked by a large river that had flooded its banks due to recent heavy rainfall. Two scouts were left behind to search for a safe crossing. It was decided that the others would return to report the delay.

The news did nothing to settle an already chaotic situation. Hs'Saraat, who was prone to be overconfident and impulsive, then made a hasty decision to move forward and encounter the Humans. In following Sethen fashion, he ordered a gathering of the full war host. The assembly was to march in regal procession to greet the Men and lay the groundwork for cultural interaction. The intent was not to fight, but to show the might of the S'shan and his dominions. Hs'Saraat had made a grave error in failing to send more scouts to evaluate the Humans. He believed he was marching toward a simple rural settlement of hunters and farmers. He did not realize that his spies had only viewed the outlying areas of the Human Kingdom of Derthaven.

At the sight of the Sethen force, the rural Humans panicked and fled, spreading the news of the monstrous invaders. For two days Hs'Saraat marched on, seeing only vacant villages and abandoned farms. On the third day, they emerged from a dense forest to see before them a great stone castle on a gentle rise in the middle of a valley of lush crops. On the slopes before the castle were arrayed Men, horses, and large machines the likes of which the Sethen had never dreamed.

The ignorant and xenophobic Humans took the Sethen advance for an invasion force and immediately opened fire with catapults, mangonel, and ballista. The Sethen watched with curiosity as the machines began to function. They stood, perplexed, for a few brief moments until the first rounds of the volley began to impact around them. Instantly, there was confusion and terror as the ground shook, the wounded screamed, and the blood of Sethen warriors flowed. It was not long before the entire host was scattered and retreated piecemeal back to the encampment.

A few days later, after gathering all that he could of his routed men, S'shan Hs'Saraat prepared now not for diplomacy but for war. So began the bloodiest war the Sethen have ever known. After regrouping and properly arming, the Sethen army was a formidable match for the Humans. Their tough scales, poisonous spit, and battle prowess mad them difficult opponents even for the Human's artillery and armored cavalry. Twelve days passed, seeing two large battles and several small unit skirmishes. It quickly became obvious that neither side possessed a distinct advantage.

Then, messengers arrived from the West March under the command of Lar'Aas Fen Is'Shas. They bore incredible news. It seems the West March had also encountered Humans. However, the results of their meeting were quite different. They had made peaceful contact with the Kingdom of Alessandria and were seeking the S'shan's orders for treaty negotiations. Not realizing that they were dealing with two separate nations, Hs'Saraat sent word back that they must first conclude a truce before treaties could be thought upon. King Petrav of Alessandria, however, seized this moment to invade his rival of Derthaven. Alessandria and Derthaven had been at odds for nearly two centuries; experiencing sporadic fighting, border disputes, and several aborted attempts at invasion. Now he saw his opportunity to finally overpower his enemy, and he intended to use the Sethen to help him do it. He replied to S'shan Hs'Saraat to continue the fight, for the opponent he fought was Petrav's

enemy as well, and this action would help seal an alliance between the Sethen and Alessandria. Even while the messengers were carrying his reply, Petrav mobilized his armies.

Hs'Saraat, left with little choice, continued his attacks and over the following months and coordinated his efforts with the Alessandrian armies. With pressure from the west as well as the south, Derthaven began to collapse. Within three years, the kingdom ceased to exist. Alessandria occupied the northwestern third of the conquered lands, and the Sethen settled the remainder. Hs'Saraat, however, did not live to see the victory. He was killed in the second year of fighting and was succeeded by S'shan Lar'Aas who had led the West March.

The Sethen learned much from their first encounters with the Humans and subsequently exercised better judgment when they met the Elves and Dwarves. They are on good terms with the other members of the Peace Council, but share a particularly close relationship with the Dwarves whose weapons the Sethen warriors hold in very high regard. The Sethen kingdom is stable and influential. While they are relatively new to global politics, they have proven their abilities and are treated as near equals by the more ancient races.

The lands of the Sethen kingdom today are primarily those won in the fall of Derthaven, save for the addition of an expanded northern frontier that they acquired later. That land sustains a healthy and prosperous nation. The soil is ripe for farming, but the Sethen don't seem to have the aptitude, or perhaps the patience, to exploit this resource. They prefer to hunt game for their primary food source. In recent decades, though, Humans have begun to settle amongst the Sethen and make better use of the fertile valleys. They are welcomed by their reptilian landlords and treated fairly.

Most Sethen males still follow the path of the warrior and are some of the most skillful the world has ever known. Their society is not lacking in other aspects, though. They are also quite capable in the arts of science, medicine, smithing, and religion. Sethen mages are a reclusive lot, but they too are very skilled. The Sethen sense of personal discipline, courage, and honor is an invaluable attribute, respected by all other races.

Sethen women give birth to a clutch of one to three soft leathery eggs. A few hours after birth an infant Sethen will hatch from its egg using an egg tooth. In a clutch of three eggs, one Sethen will usually fail to hatch and die. Often, clutches of two eggs will produce identical twins. Sethen reach adolescence at about 10 years of age. The average lifespan for a Sethen is 70.