

# The Merisusi Duumvirate

The reavers of the north  
The Gods will set all the lands of the world to war until only one remains



*Welcome to Merisusi; a frozen land of ice and snow, but one where you will find the warmest welcome anywhere in the Known World. Gestfrihet, the ancient tradition of hospitality, is more than a matter of survival in this frozen landscape, it is more than an act of friendship in a hostile land, it is our way of life. Under the valiant leadership of the Heyhund and the Giersuse we strive to create a land of prosperity and consequence, a place of hearth and home, strong enough to defend itself against all others, rich enough to welcome all into its heart. By sharing what we have with strangers, we prove the strength and power of our community, we gain new allies and we grow in strength. Gestfrihet does not diminish the lord, rather his stature and his power grow with every honest man that chooses to feast at his table.*

*"I am Skandrick, skald of the portshold of the Theorvaldlings of the Sea Wolves of the Merisusi. The greatest tale of our nation is of its birth, the Epic of Gorthor and Erielle which you all know well. I will tell you a smaller story, but no less important for it tells of the first portshold. The first community. Both Cormorant and Sea Wolf have tales of these early days, but I am mokoshi and will tell the tale of Theorvald: founder of the first true community that would band together to form the Sea Wolves long before they faced the might of the Cormorant Queen."*

*"These hundreds of years ago, small bands of mokoshi wandered lost among the mountains of the ice, with no hope and no future. Forever fighting, and killing for nothing but the lust for battle, and the screams of a dying enemy. It was not war, this fighting of long ago. This was a dark time, an evil time; where there were no families, only killing. Of our mokoshi warriors, Theorvald the Strong was the most famous, the most renowned, the most storied. Theorvald was one to whom friendship meant nothing, a war wanderer and a solitary killer. But the stories of the northlands soon become prayers, on the long nights of hard watch when all you have to talk to is your God. So the Smith heard of him, and his burgeoning arrogance, and his love of self. And when Theorvald next went to leave the Valley of the Singing Wind, valley of his winter rest, the Smith stood in his way."*

*"For a year and a day, whenever Theorvald attempted to leave the Valley to go a summer-raiding, something would stop him. The pass would collapse, or a particularly fine caribou would cross his path, or maybe the storms would be too severe. But the Smith led others to the valley; the weak, the aged and those Theorvald found unworthy of the reputation of his axe. And Theorvald's triumphs were in small things, in aiding the stricken or the young."*

*"On that final day, the Smith let him leave. Theorvald stood above the valley, looking down at the community that had grown around him, and he found he missed Agnetha, whom he had rescued from the great bear, and little Kaetrig, who he had found drowning in the cold river, and Arnvald, who had come to the valley to lay down his arms, not keep them swinging. And for the first time Theorvald realized he did not wish to kill his enemies to prove his might, and now his heart swelled with a new desire. To see his clan raised supreme, to see them stronger and better provided for than any other clan in the mountains. It was better to fight to preserve this clan that had formed around him, than it was to defeat the greatest warriors of whom stories told."*

*"So he set out hunting, determined to find the bravest and the strongest warriors to fight so that those he slew could never become a threat to the people of his clan. And at the end of summer he returned with many warriors at his back, for some of those he defeated he let live if they would agree to join his clan. And so we became settled, and formed portsholds, each married to the sea by a mighty port and shipyard."*

## A Brief History

In the beginning, the Merisusi were many disparate people, clans of mokosh lived on the continent of Murland, north of the human lands which are now called Freiboden, while flocks of avians lived on Sentoris, near the lands that are now called Alkyon. For many decades there was near continuous warring between the clans, but in time they were conquered by the two most legendary figures of Merisusi history. Gorthor, the first Heyhund, the Sea Wolf King, waged a savage war of conquest bringing every major mokosh clan under his control. Erielle, the

first Giersuse, the Cormorant Queen had used brilliant diplomacy to unite most of the avian flocks under her leadership.

Seeking new lands to conquer, Gorthor set sail across the Sharamoor Sea and eventually came to the lands of the Cormorant Queen. Here he waged a bloody war, sacking and looting countless Cormorant nests before a climactic battle between the Sea Wolves and the Cormorant hosts left both monarchs dead and the pride of each nation slain. For many people of other lands, a battle that so few on either side survived

would have marked the birthplace of an enduring hatred for generations to follow. For the Merisusi, it was obvious that the only way either side might endure the impending winter was to come together, and so the two peoples were united.

A new Heyhund and a new Giersuse were chosen and the hosts of each swore loyalty to their lord, a tradition that endures to this day. The lands of the Merisusi were united but they soon came to face a new threat, the soldiers of the Renian Empire were gaining ground all across Murland and Sentoris. New war hosts were raised but the lands of the Merisusi had no farms to support vast armies and though every Merisusi was a match for three times their number of foes, they faced odds that many times and more and hold after hold was lost.

The Heyhund and the Giersuse parleyed with the commander of the Renian forces and after many days of difficult negotiation a truce was agreed. The lands of the Merisusi became part of the Renian Empire and provided hosts of warriors to fight in the Renian battles, but in return the Heyhund and Giersuse would remain as monarchs ruling the land in accordance with the wishes of the Renians.

It would have been easy to cling to honour like a child and rebel at every opportunity the Gods sent, for there were many. But the Merisusi accepted that they had been defeated by a stronger nation. In defeat they saw a chance to gain, as both avian and mokosh people had gained in the past, by embracing those who had proved to be stronger than them. So the Merisusi opted to become a loyal part of the Renian Empire, and their land prospered. For a while all seemed well and as the Renian Empire advanced across the Known World it seemed that they would conquer every land. Priests of the Smith talked of scriptures, of the time to come when one community would command the world and the Time of the Gods that it would herald.

Tragically, the Renian Empire did not last, the weaknesses inherent in its structure, its lack of a central leadership or a strong authority meant that the senators who shared power between them competed for wealth and influence and power, peddling favours to others like merchants haggling over fish. And like the merchant who haggles too long, the fish grew rank and in the end the entire rotting edifice collapsed under the weight of its own corruption. The weight of their own written laws overwhelmed them as senators sought to use the laws against their fellow men.

But the dream of a world united under one leadership, of a community strong enough to defend itself against all enemies, of a land rich enough to feed every man and woman and still leave an offering for the Gods endures. Those who wish to see the Time of Gods become a reality strive to make Merisusi such a land. It is for these reasons our enemies fear us, for they do not understand us. We come to conquer, not to destroy.

## Life in Merisusi

The Merisusi live in communities called portsholds, small ports built on the jagged, rocky coastlines of the Merisusi mountains where families first banded together against the cold. Each portshold is ruled over by a Merisusi grave, who is appointed by the Heyhund or the Giersuse. These people are the cold-hearted reavers of the north, the monstrous phantoms of legend used to scare naughty children to bed. Once, the stories were closer to the truth, but no longer. The modern Merisusi are not merely the raiders of yesterday, nor are they cold-hearted, unlike the storms of their winters. The Merisusi, in their halls, dress in the brightest of colours, reds, greens, yellows, and wear ornate jewellery, some crafted from within the clan, some from other

clans, and some from their wars on the warlanders. The long winters are brightened with feasting, games both physical and mental, and storytelling.

The Merisusi, both mokosh and avians, love stories and songs. Ours is an oral tradition, and stories are a major part of the culture. All want to hear of brave deeds, and the fate of their brethren. Of course we have scribes, and many of their fine carvings include tales carved within them, but when a story is told it is meant to be shared not hoarded on pieces of paper like ledgers or accounts. Singing is also an important part of Merisusi life. Singing is an act of defiance in the face of any enemy, be it a Malathian man-o-war, a Mayan coastal village ripe for the plucking, or a storm off the Cape of the Howling Serpent. We sing to show the Gods we are not afraid to face what they have sent us for only those whose souls have not known fear are taken by the valkyrja to join the Smith in His feasting hall. A place in the afterlife awaits us all, but only those who have proved their worth will have a chance to sit at the feasting table with the Smith.

We are ruled by our Giersuse and our Heyhund, the ancient titles for the Cormorant Queen and the Sea Wolf King. One throne exists for each of the races of the Merisusi, but neither King nor the Queen may reign without each other. When either the current Heyhund or the current Giersuse dies, the other will step down and their heirs, Giervulf the Sea Wolf prince and Aaltvine the Giersuse's daughter, will be ceremonially wed and they will ascend the throne together. It is this traditional custom that ensures the strength of the Merisusi people, neither the Sea Wolves nor the Cormorants can rule alone, neither can rule without the other. Apart we were weak, together our people are strong.

## War and Conquest

Every grave and landgrave must be certain to provide a host of a certain size for the service of the king and queen when they are called. These men and women are equipped with mail and weapons by the graves and are expected to be trained and disciplined in the arts of war. Much is made by our enemies of the coats of mail, double woven for our strongest warriors, of the axes taller than a man and of bows that put an arrow through a shipside. The truth is that it is discipline that makes the Merisusi forces so feared.

In battle, every member of a grave's host will form up with the grave leading the line. Solid blocks of men, armed with shields and spears or heavy bladed axes. Every man knows that none around him will give ground. The Mill'ense like to boast of their cavalry charges, but horses have not the discipline or the ability to fight in closed ranks that the warrior possesses. When the Sea Wolves charge, the weight of mail hurled from foot to foot will make the ground shake beneath your feet; a mass of solid metal and muscle that cannot be denied.

The Cormorant hosts are just as deadly. Any Alkonian regiment can learn to stand in a block and fire their crossbows, but few archers can keep close formation whilst at full charge. The Cormorants move about the battlefield with iron discipline; heedless of risk, they flit from position to position using their deadly bows to turn battles in our favour. A Cormorant archer can put an arrow through a man's skull at the very moment that a Sea Wolf unseams him with an axe, such is their skill. It is not training that allows the Merisusi to fight with such skill and ferocity, it is discipline.

Our enemies call us bloodthirsty, but it is not a thirst for battle which drives the Merisusi warriors, but a hunger for victory. In

the end, one nation will be proved stronger than all others; there are many lands and many people but only one of them can be the strongest. Once we were an onrushing host of mokosh berserks and disorganized skirmishing avians, the Merisusi of today are disciplined in war. We have no use for peasant levies or slave soldiers, no time for fops and dandies in their lace. No Merisusi soldier walks onto the field of battle without a coat of mail and weapons that would not shame a king. And once on the battlefield we stand, in serried ranks, to repel the wildest Gnoll mercenary or the most skilled Mill'en musketeers.

We do not war for a love of killing; we do not raid because of a lustful greed for gold. For a disciplined nation, war has a purpose, to strengthen the nation and to weaken your enemies. Anything else is anarchy and blood rage. Every summer, the clans will leave their winter halls, and their arks will sail for the villages and towns of the warmlanders. Here they will raid, mainly from coastal villages, but sometimes into tidal estuaries, as far as a proa or raptor can reach and keep their keel intact. Their raids often take slaves, rather than kill, and always take whatever goods and food they can find.

Every raid weakens the nations we prey upon, every golden coin and every slave that we take in loot strengthens our own. How else to build a nation that will one day span the Known World and beyond in this land of ice and snow? At the final battle, when the Smith descends from the heavens to feast with the victors on the battlefield of Gotterdammerung, only one community will remain; the one that has proved itself the strongest. Every axe that is raised by a Merisusi warrior, every spear that is planted, every arrow that is nocked is wielded to ensure that that nation is ours.

## Gestfrihet

Although we are ruthless in war, not every man is our enemy. There is no purpose in needless slaughter, the Smith makes warriors of men and women, not butchers. Those enemies we defeat we take as slaves, but those who pose no threat to the Merisusi are welcome in our halls. Gestfrihet was the foundation of our nation, the sharing of hospitality that brought the Cormorant people and the Sea Wolves together.

We still preserve this ancient tradition, for who knows what strength the next guest the Gods send could bring to your table? Ruthless in battle but gracious in hospitality is the Merisusi way, destroy your enemies, embrace your allies. The better and the quicker to separate the two.

## Ships

What need be said about the Merisusi ship? The Malathians make boast to build the fastest, the Alkonians and the Rukhi the ships with the largest cargo holds, but the Merisusi make ships such as no other nation in the Known World can equal. There is no vessel on the waves that can defeat an able captain in charge of a proa, and a skilled Merisusi grave at the helm of a raptor can sink two man-o-wars in short order.

Merisusi ships are built for war, to destroy our enemies, to seize their goods and to shatter their strength. When the time comes, control of the waves will be as important as the battle upon the land. Merisusi shipwrights are the masters of their craft and their vessels are built to ensure that no others can match ours. The Malathians may be faster, but their pirate ships still flee the waters when the Merisusi sails appear on the horizon. The Merisusi are the masters of the sea, one more omen of what is to come.

## Religion and Belief

The Merisusi have little time for religion, we do not raise churches and temples, we do not gild statues and stain glass to show our devotion. We honour our Gods with actions, not prayers, with deeds not sermons. At the heart of our faith are the ancient prophecies that the time of the world is not unlimited, that the end will come and that, when it does, one nation will stand supreme over all the others. Gotterdammerung, the end of time, is the moment of the last battle, when the final victory will be won. On that day the Gods themselves will descend from the heavens and the world will become a place of peace for the nation that endures and survives the final challenge.

Each of the Gods seeks to help the people of the land work towards victory in this cataclysmic battle. Supreme over all the Gods is the Smith, for He is the strongest amongst them and all warriors pledge their deeds in battle to His name. The Huntress is the spirit of justice within society, without which no community can hope to stay whole for long. Every grave and landgrave keeps a learned skald wise in the lore of the Huntress to advise him on fitting punishments for those who are guilty of crimes while on their land.

Followers of the Fisherman seek to earn their place in society by providing for the needs of all. Without the hard work and industry of every man, woman and child no land can hope to grow. The Midwife is the mother of invention, She teaches us not to embrace tradition too tightly, to learn from our foes and to gain from them. Of all the Gods, only one is not well thought of, for though the Scribe is highly placed in many lands, in Merisusi He is seen as something of a cheat and a trickster. His followers seek to bind their enemies with writing, holding them to treaties and texts. Some lords will keep a follower of the Scribe in their retinue for they are useful to count tallies with merchants and write letters to foreigners if nothing else.

## Current Politics

The New World is the single most important discovery of our lives, for it forebodes the coming of the end, Gotterdammerung, the final battle, the day when one community will stand supreme. While the Maelstrom divided the world, the old prophecies could not come true, there could not be an all-consuming battle from which one nation would emerge triumphant over all. Now the Gods have seen fit to remove this ancient barrier so that finally it is possible for one nation to reign supreme. That nation will be the Merisusi, but the battle will not be fought in the Known World but in the New.

Already the nations of the world are scrabbling for advantage. Malathian pirates, Alkonian traders, and Gnoll mercenaries are setting sail in vast numbers. These people do not seek to strengthen their clans, their people, their nations; they act out of vanity and greed. This does not make them any less dangerous, a wave need not be high to overturn your ship, it need only catch your helmsman unaware. We are aware and the Merisusi go to build the power and the strength of the Merisusi nation and to ensure that no other wave grows high enough to overturn our ship.

*We were a month out of Nordon and running full sail through the Aganic Ocean when the Maelstrom just opened up and let rip with the worst storm the sea has ever known. The wind was so strong that the main mast snapped in two places, and that was with just enough sail to keep us running. The mizzen went soon after, taking most of the rigging with it. The rain came down like hammers, driving into flesh so hard, and the lightning lit up the sky. So fast it came, that sometimes it felt brighter than thousand suns, all at once, and it struck into us like javelins from the Gods.*

*We were in the Pale Rose, an old Mill-eneese whaler that had been refitted. She was screaming, her timbers taking such a battering from the storm. Being the carpenter, I was trying to patch up the holes that kept appearing, but it was a hopeless task. All we could hope for was that we were closer to land than we thought we were, or that we'd hit a reef and stick to it before we sank. But no such luck. With an almighty scream, what was left of the main mast came ripping out, gutting the Rose like a rotten fish. Nothing I could do but grab the first thing to hand and hope it floated. It's the Weaver's own luck I'm here today to tell this tale. Captain McHern had told me the Rose's old masthead needed changing, so I'd been working on another and almost finished it. Beautiful she was, a winged angel, cut so it looked like she was wrapped in the finest scarlet samite, urging the ship forward. Made it out of pale wood and all, just to make sure she was as pale as possible. Good job too. Pale wood's lighter.*

*So here I am, bobbing up and down like a cork, holding on for life and limb, praying to the Weaver that wouldn't it be nice if they didn't need me right now. And for the longest time I was like that; just the storm, me, and the masthead. All I could think was hold on, hold on. Next thing I knew, someone was pulling me aboard. All I could do was shiver and hold on to the lady, but there we were, on the deck of a raptor. Everyone knows the Merisusi reputation: the terror of the seas, slavers who loot and pillage every settlement they can find.*

*Well, thought I, this is it. Life in the deeps or life as a slave. But no, the strangest thing happened. They were talking to me, pointing and gesturing, but I was so numb and shaking, I didn't know what was going on. Then one of them, the biggest, leaned in close and said something. Gestfrihet. I didn't know what was going on so I nodded, hoping that if I agreed then he wasn't going to kill me. And then the second miracle occurred. They got me dry, out of the storm, and some broth in me. And not a chain in sight. When I could actually think right, I found out I was on a raptor called the Scarlet Bride, and that Captain Brakkon was the big mokosh who saved me.*

*We were still in the storm, but the raptor was big enough to handle it. It ran through the storm, with the wind howling behind it fit to kill, yet the crew fearless and singing. I swear on the Weaver they were singing like this was a high summer's day, with nothing but a good breeze. Every so often, a couple would come off shift, see me huddled in these blankets sat next to the masthead, and grin and nod. Next thing I know, one of them's asking if I carved her, so I says yes. Then he hands me a block of wood, and asks if I can do him.*

*Well, fair's fair, they saved my life, so least I can do is a little carving. Next thing I know, I'm doing one for all of them. Well, I stayed with them for four whole days in the end. I gave the captain the masthead as soon as the storm lifted the next morning. Clear blue skies and a beautiful calm sea. I couldn't believe his reaction. He shouted to everyone to come and see, then grabbed me like a long lost brother. Soon we're all on deck, and the Scarlet Bride is getting a new figurehead, while the rest of the crew are all getting involved in a celebration, with singing, dancing, and all sorts of games going on. The food was good too, spicy and rich, filling without bloating you. Finest food I've ever had on board ship, to tell the truth. Well, after that, we were all best pals really. They wouldn't let me help out though, saying it wasn't right for a guest to be working, especially such an honoured one, but I still felt bad about it. So to pass the time, I just made these little carvings of the crew. And on the fourth day they put me on the beach in Malathia, barely a day's sailing from where I'd started.*

*Weeks later I heard a Merisusi raptor had sailed right into the docks at Nordon. Sunk three corsairs that were moored up and damaged half a dozen more before fleeing. Apparently the raiders got right up close to the other ships so the guards couldn't use the harbour defences on them. One man claims he was on one of the ships that went down. He told me the reaver had a masthead carved like an angel in flight.*

*Damn strange folk the Merisusi.*