

The Thousand Tribes of the Onontakha

Greetings, young warrior. You wish to learn the stories of our people? Then close the tent against the biting wind, and breathe deeply of the smoke. It will sting your eyes, but it will clear your mind. Come, sing with me....

We are Onontakha.

We are the thousand tribes of wind and sky.

We are the beloved children of the Serpent.

Across the plains of the land roam the thousand tribes of wind and sky.

The children of the Serpent hunt in the forest and the jungle.

We who were driven from our homelands by the dark ones,

We who have been hunted by the hives.

Still we endure.

Cunning is our legacy; guile and wits our weapons.

Surrounded by enemies unnumbered,

we survive and we grow strong.

We are Onontakha.

When the soulless ones issue forth they will not find us.

Wind and sky fight them.

When the snow dies, we creep into their hives and in silence we begin our counting.

We are the beloved children of the Serpent.

We are the thousand tribes of wind and sky.

We are Onontakha.

Close your eyes and listen, young warrior. No one should go to battle without knowing why. Let me speak the stories unto you.

This is the first tale of the Onontakha.

Before time, before us, Oneida (the sun) tried to force himself on Atotarho (the moon). She fought him off, and his seed was scattered across the sky, where it formed the stars. But Oneida is powerful, and soon Atotarho was swollen with new life. Atotarho implanted the five eggs into the body of Youhen (the land). From those eggs came the Gods - we know them by their earthly names - Basilisk, Serpent, Ant, Coyote and Jaguar.

Each of the Gods wished to have children of their own, so they fashioned them in their own likeness out of the raw stuff of the land. But only the Serpent knew the value of thought and so only his children could think as he did. When the Ant saw what the Serpent had done he grew jealous. He struck at Serpent and stole from him two eggs. Ant fed these eggs to his own soulless brood, believing the children of Ant would consume the souls of the Serpent, and take them for themselves. Ant and his children fled the plains, away from the vengeance of his brothers. So ends the first story of the Onontakha, the creation of our people and the soul stealing children of Ant.

Take a moment, child. Stretch your legs and refresh yourself with water. Are you ready now? Come sit beside me again and I will continue.

This is the second tale of the Onontakha.

Many years ago, the Onontakha had forgotten the lessons of the Serpent. We had become foolish and modelled ourselves on the ways of the Ant. We built great structures of dirt and mulch, much like the myrmidons. To our great shame, we became so fond of these mud houses that we could not bear to leave them when we were attacked. The dark ones, the Illini, attacked in great numbers and no weapons could be found that would keep them at bay. Every day without relent the Illini came again; weapons could not harm them, land would not placate them, gold would not buy them, they destroyed everything they found and murdered everyone they caught.

So the Onontakha prayed to the Ant to beg help against the Illini, but Ant was angry at our foolishness and he sent a rain of fire to drive us from our homes. With nowhere to rest, we fled. The Illini pursued us for many days, hunting us night and day. We ran to and fro, crying our sorrow. Who can help us now? Eventually the land became dry and hot, with little water, and that too foul to drink. Sorely pressed, we stumbled beneath the parched skies, while the Illini returned to our homes. Still the Onontakha marched until we passed over the spine of the world seeking somewhere we might live. We came to the place where the wide plains and deep forests give way to the greater sea. This is where we made homes, ever watchful lest the pernicious Illini pursue us to this new land.

Yes, child. The Illini of legend, the Illini of nightmare. We must never forget how our tribe was scattered and broken, our children lost to us. Never. But listen well, listen to the third tale of the Onontakha- we are not helpless as once we were.

This is the third tale of the Onontakha.

Long ago, before even my greatfather's greatfather was hatched, the children of the Ant came into the lands of the Onontakha. They came when Brother Snow died and they built great domes of wood and mulch in the mountains. Eager to hide their true natures, they called themselves by the name myrmidon. For many years the Onontakha slept, not realizing the danger that grew close by. In the months before Brother Snow returned, the mindless servants of the Ant came out of the mountains to attack the children of the Serpent.

For many days we Onontakha fought the myrmidons until the bodies of the soulless ones were piled one upon each other. The children of the Ant fled and the Onontakha were victorious. None could count the number lost, for the soulless ones had stolen the bodies of the slain warriors. The loss was great, but we Onontakha believed the enemy defeated and we rejoiced.

Brother Snow came and winter was hard for those who remained. Still we rested, ignorant of the danger. In the months before Brother Snow returned the soulless children of the Ant again issued forth from their mountains and their numbers were even greater than before. The Onontakha knew then we would be destroyed, for though we could defeat the children of the Ant in a single battle, how could we hold our ground against a foe that would return just as strong with each new fall?

Then at last we remembered the name of the God who loves us best, He who created us, and prayed to the Serpent for aid. The Serpent sent a messenger, the Raven, to speak with the Onontakha. The Raven showed us how to fight with cunning and intelligence. Raven gave us the learning of poisons, the bite of the Serpent, and taught us how we might use this gift to destroy our enemies. No more would we face the soulless ones in open battle. Instead we hid ourselves in the woods and forests or upon the plains where the children of the Ant could not find our families. When the sky was flush with winter air, our brave warriors would steal into the lands of the myrmidons and hunt them as they did the unicorn or the beaver.

This is our story, child. The story of the Onontakha, the thousand tribes. Remember it and tell it in your turn. Remember to thank our father Serpent, to celebrate the coming of spring and the passing of the seasons. Give thanks for our gifts and use them well. Go now, train hard and run proudly with the wind and sky- they are ours.

LIFE IN THE TENTS

The Onontakha are separate tribes, each ruled by a chieftain and their high priests. In most tribes, when an Onontakhan chief dies, the tribal priests choose a successor. If the person chosen proves unsatisfactory then the high priest can revoke his position as chief. This process is called "dehorning the chief" because the ceremonial headdress that signifies his office is taken away. The name comes from the tradition in some tribes of using the antlers of an elk to form the basis of the ceremonial headdress. Young warriors often banter over the size of the horns of their elders.

Warfare between tribes within the nation is subject to negotiation, only occurring with the full consensus of the council of tribal elders. We live life surrounded by enemies; life is far too dangerous for us to engage in deadly battle with each other unless there is no other way. For this reason, the family members of slain warriors can seek revenge on captured prisoners from the enemy war band. Children captured in battle should be adopted into your tribe and raised as your own with no stigma attached. If they cannot be protected from you, then you are clearly in a better position to provide them with a good life.

Combat during tribal war generally takes the form of raids. Weapons are seldom poisoned, as the intent is not to kill, rather it is to defeat. The gift of the Serpent should not be used rashly. The greatest honour comes in "Counting coup", touching an armed opponent. Less honourable, but still worthy, is disarming, followed by disabling an opponent. Killing an Onontakhan opponent is the poorest show of skill and brings no honour. In some tribes the warriors wear beads or feathers to show the enemies they have defeated. If defeated in combat, it is usual to withdraw and take no further part in the combat. Sometimes, you may be taken captive, but more usually will be allowed to withdraw in peace. This is how civilized people fight battles.

Warfare outside the nation is another matter entirely. The myrmidons try to exterminate everything they can reach. When we attack the myrmidons, lone warriors or bands of warriors undertake raids to hunt and kill the myrmidon warriors of an enemy hive. It is exceptionally rare for a tribe to become involved in a "stand-up fight", as experience has shown you cannot win by such means. The Tlaxti and the Azarch attack in autumn, using soulless warriors, mindless drones that attack in great numbers without fear of loss. These creatures will die in droves, but the myrmidon warriors can replace them within a season, no matter how great the loss. Although the soulless resemble the myrmidon warriors they should be thought of as animals, though they are far more dangerous.

The myrmidon warriors lead the soulless into battle; they have no concept of civilized warfare so they are fair game for poison and, since they fight alongside the soulless, there is no point in demonstrating superior ability to them, for they will not withdraw. Kill them or take them captive. As creatures born out of the theft of Serpent's eggs, they are despised. Of all our foes the Tlaxti are the most despised, and are often taken captive in order to brutally torture them before they are slain or used as training tools by the young warriors. Never forget that a number of your family have been slain by the myrmidons and be aware there is a worse fate - many of your tribe have vanished into the hives never to be seen again. Vast areas of land once claimed by the tribes have been lost to the myrmidon kind.

Each of our tribes lays claim to a large area of hunting lands, having lived here since the time of legends when we crossed the spine of the world fleeing a rain of fire sent by the Ant to drive us from our ancestral hunting grounds. Like all gifts from the Ant, this was a mixed blessing for it destroyed the homes of stone and dirt which bound us to the land and, though we lost much, it freed us from our shackles allowing us to flee from the foul Illini. Since we settled here, we have been locked in struggle against the Tlaxti and the other

myrmidon hives, sometimes making gains, but more often being driven back. Through war and conquest the Tlaxti and the Azarch have stolen all the land with anything in the way of natural resources and we know that they will not stop until they have it all. But we are a nomadic people; each tribe follows the herds of unicorns across the plains, setting up our tepees to create temporary campsites as bases for the hunt, here on the plains where our enemies cannot find us.

In most tribes, males and females hunt; the preferred weapon being the hunting bow, with spears also in common use. The tips of both are frequently poisoned. Occasionally, large groups of animals are driven off cliffs or into painstakingly dug pits, particularly in preparation for religious events which usually involve feasting. Both men and women most commonly dress in simple leather or fur tunics and trousers. As well as sparsely decorated work clothes, most will have intricately decorated feast or ceremonial dress. Those warriors who have earned the right signify their honour with beads, carved from both wood or stone, and feathers sewn in patterns directly onto the leather. Officeholders, such as senior priests and council members, will have ceremonial headdresses, the higher ranking roles having very ornate pieces.

The Gods and the Totem Spirits

The myrmidons crawl on their bellies before their Gods. We do not worship the Gods; it is enough to acknowledge their patronage. The Gods watch over us and hear our prayers in the way that a dutiful parent might watch over a child. The idea of worshipping the Gods is foolish and ridiculous and belittles our Gods as well as the people who crawl. One would not worship a parent! In times past, the Ant punished us for growing weak. When the myrmidons threatened to destroy us, the Serpent sent his servant the Raven to teach the Onontakha how to survive using guile and cunning. This is no different from the way a parent will punish or reward a wayward child.

Of course the Raven is not a God, merely the servant of one, but it is the teachings of the Raven that many Onontakha know and follow. The Gods have many servants and these beings bring the wisdom and bounty of the Gods to those that they wish to reward or punish. Thus it is that an Onontakhan priest of the Serpent would describe himself as a follower of the Raven. There are many other animal totems amongst the Onontakha, such as the Cougar and the Eagle who are known to be servants of other Gods. It would be disrespectful to make effigies of the Gods, but it is both fitting and right to carve wooden totems of the spirits whose advice you take.

Every tribe has its own totem spirits but there are few who do not acknowledge the part that the cunning Raven has played in helping us to survive. It is cunning, guile, and the ability to play our enemies off one against the other which has allowed the Onontakha to survive. These things the Raven taught us and if we forget the being that brought us the lessons, then we will soon forget the lessons themselves. Hide when your enemy is strong, strike when he is weak. Life is sacred; do not trade the lives of your family and friends for land or food. These things can be taken back, but when your children have been sent to the Gods not even the totem spirits can bring them back.

If you wish to talk directly to the Gods, then send your prayers to them on the smoke of a fire or burning herbs. By this way you commit your words to the wind and the sky where the Gods wait to hear them.

While they are obviously important, but for them we would not be here, Oneida, Atotarho and Yoyhen are not Gods. Do not dwell on what it is they are. They are, that is enough. The gaze of Oneida brings warmth and life, but his close attention brings pain and death. Atotarho sends us the rains that we rely on, but also the storms and blizzards that kill. Sometimes Yoyhen stirs, and the land trembles as he shifts in his slumber. Like fleas we scurry across the body of Yoyhen, living out our lives. Yoyhen sleeps on obliviously. Sometimes we irritate Yoyhen, and he rouses. If a flea irritates you, you do not track down the individual that bothered you, you kill all the fleas you find. So it is with Yoyhen. Scratch gently enough his skin, and you may prosper, burrow into it like a tick, and he will awaken. Some do not understand this; their ignorance places us all in peril. Burn them off as you would any parasite.

The Current Situation

For many decades we have suffered a slow but steady decline at the hands of our ancient enemies, the myrmidons. There is a shaky truce with the Solarians and the Azarch, but no truce made with the warlike and savage Tlaxti has ever lasted. Know that and remember it well. They know the value of fine words, and in some winters their soulless may march against another tribe or even another hive. But their soulless march and if it is not for your souls they come this fall, then they will come another year. Any truce you make with these people cannot last, they will break it, they always have. Two score times and more we have treated with them and still our tribes have slowly been forced to lose more and more ground to the waves of soulless Tlaxti.

Roughly nine winters ago, strange occurrences begun happening within the lands of the Onontakha. Strange beings began appearing, parts of the land began getting up and walking about. Carved statues began moving and talking. At first it was only a few, and only occasionally, but over time greater numbers of the Awakened races appeared. The tribes were thrown into uproar. Was this the beginning of a new scourge, sent by the Ant? Had the ancient foe returned? Was this a new tactic developed by the Tlaxti? Or had the Solarians disturbed the very land with their misguided worship? At the same time, strange new materials started to be found throughout the land. Previously known substances started to show strange unexpected properties.

Many of the Awakened were slain no sooner than they had awoken, but some however were taken and questioned in order to determine just what threat they posed. None knew what they were, why they had awoken, or even whence they came. It was discovered that while they did not awake with the power of speech, it could be taught to them. It appeared that they had no collective awareness or goals, and appeared to be little more than children, no matter what form they took. Some tribes chose to deal with them in the same way they did captive children, and there are therefore Awakened who have been adopted into the Onontakha.

The first explorers to arrive, or at least the first within Onontakha territory in memory or story, arrived in lands held by the Atotarho tribe, roughly two years after the

beginning of the awakening. While initial contacts were somewhat fraught, with Canusatha, leader of the tribe's Coyote-sworn warriors, declaring the explorers "clearly a Tlaxti ploy" and conducting early raids against them, wiser heads prevailed and peaceful contact was established by their chief, Sirichasha, and by Karenhassa, Raven priest.

Clearly the newcomers had access to strange new things. They had peculiar ideas, but it was possible to trade with them. Much was made of their desire for land, as it was evident that some of them wished to remain when the rest attempted to return to their homes, and so the Atorarho became the first tribe to acquire metal items in exchange for land, food and furs.

Some within the tribes, led by Scarureo of the Haudenosaunee, argued that these newcomers were no better than Tlaxti, and should be treated as such and driven back into the ocean. Others, particularly Akwesasne, senior Cougar priest of the Onundagaono, argued that the strange new things brought by the foreigners could finally give the Onontakha the edge over the Tlaxti. Good or bad, the invaders were few, and if necessary to be fought later than it was foolish not to take advantage of all that they could offer. A third, much smaller faction, led by Kanienka, a junior Raven priest of the Onayetoka, believed that this was the beginning of an invasion by the legendary Illini; however this garnered little support, since the Illini were known to have worshipped the Ant, and these strangers worshipped peculiar new gods. The largest group, however, was led by Scarure, chief of the Ohwachira, and believed that patience was the way forward, that the foreigners should be dealt with on a case by case basis and that little good would come of global policy.

The main significant decision that was agreed was the right of an individual tribe to deal with the newcomers on their own land. If they chose to trade with them, even to trade land with them, then that was their right as a tribe. Killing the newcomers out of hand was generally agreed to be a bad idea, if only because no one tribe was foolish enough to want to stand alone against them, and not enough tribes would agree to oppose them. The right to respond with force to offences was unanimously acclaimed, however.

Now, we begin to see a chance to reverse the long years of decline. We have stolen the magic, which the settlers have brought with them, and focused our energies on the most powerful kind of magic, alchemy. This alone will not be sufficient, but the settlers have brought other gifts. Their spears, tipped with steel, are far more deadly than any weapon before and they have been foolish enough to trade dozens of these deadly weapons for an area of land barely large enough to feed a tribe for a month. What is more, they clearly have more of them and they know how to make them. All of these things and more we can take from these settlers and use them as weapons against the enemy.

These settlers possess one other advantage; their numbers are rumoured to be as great as those of the Azarch or the Tlaxti yet, unlike the myrmidons, they all possess a soul. You have heard opinion divided about how best to handle the newcomers, perhaps openly, perhaps secretly, perhaps they themselves are a threat? One thing is clear, if they end up in conflict with the Tlaxti then it can only be to the benefit of our people. The most assiduous followers of the Raven are already planning ways to make this happen.

Rules

Herb lore — All Onontakhan characters have knowledge of the traditional herbal remedies used by the Onontakhan people. This allows you to gather herbs during downtime. Your passport will tell you what the properties of the different herbs are.

Sacred burial ground — If an Onontakhan character has purchased a sacred site then they will receive a sacred burial ground. Sacred burial grounds are spots where the Onontakha take their dead to be buried so that their bodies cannot be stolen by the Azarch and Tlaxti. Such sites contain considerable religious and spiritual power.

Flint weapons — The best melee weapons that the Onontakha are able to make are manufactured from flint. These weapons are inferior to the steel weapons used by the colonists, but a character who selects a craft weapon skill will be able to make a wide variety of flint weapons. Onontakhan bows are just as effective as the bows used by the colonists.

Hunters and dried food — All Onontakhan men-at-arms are hunters, able to hunt the plains and forests of the New World for game. Every point spent on men-at-arms provides the character with ten Onontakhan hunters equipped with longbows. Onontakhan hunters can produce dried meat that does not rot and lasts indefinitely.

Inurn — Many generations ago, the Raven granted the ability to inurn the spirits of the dead, allowing Onontakhan shamans to ensure that the spirits of the most powerful members of the tribe remained with them. By burying the inurned soul of a character in a sacred burial ground, the Onontakha can retain access to the skills that the character knew in life.

Tribe size — A group of players starting an Onontakhan tribe receive hunters and dried meat for free, determined by size of the tribe. The tribe size is the maximum number of players who have booked to attend a Profound Decisions event with an Onontakhan primary character. You receive all the advantages listed in the table below.

Tribe Advantage	Amount received
Onontakhan hunters	Tribe size X 10
Dried meat	Tribe size X 10 tons
Land	Tribe size X 100 sq. miles

The tribe will gain additional hunters and dried meat after any event where the tribe size increases. You do not gain additional land if the tribe size increases after the first event.

Onontakhan characters may purchase additional hunters using the men-at-arms advantage as normal.

Cultural skills — The following skills taken at character creation will result in their Onontakha equivalent.

Rulebook skill	Onontakhan skill
Craft <i>weapon</i>	Fashion flint weapons
Mastercraft <i>weapon</i>	Fashion improved flint weapons
Lay-to-rest	Inurn