

# The Satrapy of Rukh

The land of a thousand caliphs

Where a wise pauper may become a satrap, and a foolish satrap may become a pauper



## Shay Satra and the thousand Caliphs

Many, many years ago, the caliphs of the thousand tribes were constantly at war. They fought great battles across the desert, until the sand ran red with the blood of many avians. It seemed that, despite many meetings and treaties, peace was an impossibility; and the caliphs despaired. No sooner would peace be established, then another caliph would die in the night and the conflicts would start all over again. Some of the caliphs were very wise, and some very brave, but it seemed that no agreement could ever be reached between them.

About this time, a travelling storyteller visited the Caliph Gyon. He spoke very cleverly and he earned much respect for his skilful tales. So Caliph Gyon told him of his problems with the other caliphs.

"What you must do," said the storyteller, "is find a man who is both brave and wise, to bring you all together."

"Do you know of such a man?" said the Caliph.

"Aas, no," said the storyteller. "But I am sure he will become known to you." And with that he left.

Despite the encouraging words of the storyteller, the Caliph Gyon was still in despair. His own plan for peace had been ruined when his daughter Haruna had entirely failed to please the eye of the Caliph Tarkind's son.

"You look unhappy, and on such a fair day," said a passing desert wanderer.

"What is fair about it," said Gyon. "My last chance for peace has been destroyed because of my ugly daughter."

"For shame," said the stranger. "A father who thinks his own daughter ugly has no right to good luck. But I have seen the bird concerned, and she does indeed have pale plumage. Let me see what I can do." The stranger continued on his way until he came to the market. He bought many precious metals and dyes in the market, and returned with them to the Caliph's daughter. Over the next few days, much chanting was heard in the house of Gyon, and at sunset of the third day, out came the Caliph's daughter in her bridal finery, her plumage shining in the sun, and singing a beautiful song. The son of Tarkind was so dazzled by her beauty he married her on the spot.

"How did you manage such a thing?" asked the Caliph.

"Ah," said the stranger. "I happen to know that at sunset, the fall of light on this very spot is such that it will make even the lightest dusting of metal glow like gold. What man could resist such a songstress?"

"What is your name, and how may I repay you?" asked the Caliph.

"My name is Shay Satra. I would ask that you do not speak my name abroad and that when the time comes, I will ask for one word in return."

"Just one word? But I am a caliph and can give you precious jewellery, or find you a beautiful bride."

"I have no need for jewellery and no time for a bride," said Shay Satra and he smiled at the Caliph. "All I ask is one word when the time comes."

Caliph Gyon thought for a moment, and agreed. After all, he could not in good conscience refuse the stranger, and what harm could one word do? As a gesture of faith, he gave Shay Satra a large jewel.

Now the Caliph Tarkind was delighted that his son was now married, but he still had one terrible problem. His next nearest rival, the Caliph Fursind, had recently acquired a new camel for his herd. However, to Tarkind's eye, the new beast matched exactly the one which had been stolen from him just days before. He had sent out a troop of his best warriors to return the animal, but Fursind had it guarded by a savage horned beast, which his men could not defeat. As he was kicking the pegs of his tent in anger, a stranger walked past and said;

"You look very angry, and on such a peaceful day. What troubles you?"

"Hum, what's peaceful about it?" asked Tarkind. "Fursind has stolen a camel from my herd and I cannot reclaim it."

"For shame," said the stranger. "A man who allows a fine animal to be stolen doesn't deserve such fortune. But I will see what I can do."

The stranger then set off to the market, where he bought an old goat, and a large quantity of Oco powder. He folded the powder into some vine leaves and fed them to the goat. Then a moment after the goat had swallowed down the leaves, he slit its throat. When he reached Caliph Fursind's stables, he threw the dead goat to the fierce beast guarding the herd, which pounced upon the still warm flesh and wolfed it down whole. Soon the powerful Oco powder did its work and the beast fell

into a deep slumber. So the stranger crept past the terrible creature and took the fine camel from the stables and returned it to Tarkind.

"How did you manage this?" asked Caliph Tarkind, full of astonishment.

"I defeated the beast with a little guile and some vine leaves," said the stranger. "Here, I have brought you its head."

Caliph Tarkind was overjoyed and said, "What is your name and how may I repay you?"

"My name is Shay Satra. I would ask that you do not speak my name abroad and that when the time comes, I will ask for one word in return."

This puzzled the Caliph, who asked the stranger "Do you not want rich clothing or a herd?"

"I have no need for rich clothing, nor time for a herd," said Shay Satra and he smiled at the Caliph. "All I ask is one word when the time comes."

So, Caliph Tarkind thought, what harm could a word do? and agreed. As a gesture of good faith, however, he gave Shay Satra a fine robe.

Years passed, and in time every caliph in Rukh came to owe Shay Satra one word. Shay himself had grown wealthy from his many adventures and deeds, from wrestling terrifying beasts in the desert, to reaping figs. Exactly seven years from the day that the storyteller first appeared to Caliph Gyon, he returned to his lands. The caliphs were still feuding and so the storyteller suggested that Caliph Gyon invite them to a meeting to try to resolve their differences once and for all.

Thinking this an excellent suggestion, the Caliph sent messages on his fastest camels to all the other caliphs. Soon they were all together, but no sooner did one caliph try to speak than the arguing would begin again and now that they were all together it was worse than ever.

So Caliph Gyon offered food and wine to his guests and called for the storyteller to come and entertain the caliphs. But when the storyteller arrived he said "Each and every one of you I have made a promise to. I have told you that a man who is brave and cunning will come to lead you, and I have found the man you seek."

The caliphs were all astounded, and called for this man to be brought forth.

The storyteller said, "In just one moment; but first he has asked that I mention his terms. He seeks to be appointed over you, to advise and dictate in all things. In exchange there will be peace."

The caliphs muttered and shouted. "We will not give up our power!"

"Do you agree," said the storyteller, "that a deal when struck must be honoured?"

"Yes," answered all the caliphs, unwilling to admit to their fellows they were dishonourable.

"Then remember the deals you struck!" said the storyteller, and he cast off his cloak. To the astonishment of all, the caliphs realized that the storyteller was in fact Shay Satra in disguise.

"Caliphs of Rukh," he said, "I have done each of you service and in exchange I asked for one word. I ask now that you appoint me your leader, that you follow my rules and that the word you repay me with is YES! Do you agree to appoint me as satrap?"

The caliphs had no choice but to agree, even though they knew they have been cleverly tricked by Shay Satra. When he was given the gold turban that denotes a great leader, Shay Satra produced many fabulous jewels and items from the world. These he gave to the caliphs saying, "I have many sons, but the position I now hold will not pass to them. You caliphs will always have the power to appoint the new successor, so that good relations will grow between all."

This is the story of the first satrap □ wise and brave and honest. Tell it well and often!

## Rukh

Rukh is a land of great contrasts. The majority of it is a rolling desert and very inhospitable to most forms of life. Some parts of the country, however, along the banks of the great rivers that flow through the deserts, on the coast and near oases, are verdant and full of life. The majority of the Rukhi people live in these green havens among the dunes, but there are still tribes that cling to the oldest traditions and wander the large deserts with the camels and their sun-blackened tents. The desert has been a bane and a defence for the Rukhi for all time. Those who are born to the desert can survive there, but it is death to strangers and outsiders.

Rukh exports many luxuries to the rest of the Known World. In addition, it is rich in mineral wealth and the mountains of the interior are home to many productive mines. All Rukhi have a love of gold and silver and all manner of precious gems and jewellery, and they are found here in greater abundance than in any other part of the Known World. Few dispute the claims of the Rukhi jewellers to be the best in the world and their work is always in great demand from Kamakura to Tritoni.

The land of Rukh has grown out of desert and oasis tribes which contested for many hundreds of years. According to legend, when the caliphs of the tribes were united by the cunning Shay Satra, the Satrapy of Rukh was formed. In modern Rukh there are literally hundreds of tiny caliphates. Each oasis, port or city has its own caliph. Within their lands, the caliphs are very powerful; their word is law and only the satrap may overrule them. But most caliphates are very small and few caliphs possess a great deal of power.

The people of modern Rukh are effectively split into two types: those who cling to the old traditions and wander the deserts, and those who live in the brightly painted cities and ports. The tribes are very independent of the satrap and the caliphs. They wander through the unclaimed desert leading herds of camels and goats which they bring to the caliphates to trade. The Rukhi desert is vast and the tribes are so scattered that each has its own customs and traditions, although the idea of hospitality is almost universal. To turn a man out in the desert is usually a death sentence; it is not something a desert Rukhi would do without the gravest provocation, so they place great store by their hospitality, although many foolish visitors have learnt to their peril that it does not do to take that generosity for granted.

In the caliphates, people are more cosmopolitan and here the modern Rukhi traditions of scholarship and storytelling, trade and adventure come together. The old desert traditions of hospitality endure and all Rukhi enjoy similar things; dancing and singing and most especially storytelling. There is a strong mercantile element to most professions in Rukh, people here love to haggle and everyone is seeking ways to make a few extra Riel. Every storyteller is looking to perform his work before the satrap, every merchant is hoping to sell his cargo to a caliph. Rukh is a land of dreams, and while the people here can tell the difference between dreams and reality they consider it rather boorish to linger on such petty details. It is a common saying in Rukh that the Gods would not have given a man a heart if they did not mean it to beat with desire for good fortune, excitement and adventure.

Rukh is a very unforgiving place unless you are knowledgeable about its flora and fauna. Navigating the trackless deserts is very difficult and finding sources of food and water even more so. Because of this it is almost impossible to approach Rukh with an army by land. Instead, you would need to approach from the sea. Since the large population centres of Rukh are all found in the verdant areas by the coast or by major rivers, the people have a strong naval tradition. They build very distinct ships, dhows with triangular sails and shallow keels which are suited to the local conditions. These vessels have served to protect the land from invading naval forces for hundreds of years. Although one on one they are no match for a Malathian vessel or a Flembic galeass or even a battle barge, the Rukh produce hundreds of these small ships, as they are cheap to build and easily maintained.

The conditions which keep armies from attacking into Rukh also keep armies from attacking out. Because of this, Rukh has little in the way of expansionist military tendencies. There is a warrior tradition, but it is more individualistic than most seen elsewhere in the world. Conflict between two Rukhi individuals is as likely to be resolved with a bout of storytelling as it is with scimitars. In battle against invaders, the Rukhi prefer to try to scatter their opponents as widely as possible so that they can face them one on one.

## Rashan and the Emperor of Kamakura

*There was once a Rukhi storyteller who was called Rashan and, although he was still a young man, he was at that time considered by many to be the finest storyteller in the whole of Rukhi. But Rashan was not content to be merely the finest storyteller in Rukhi, he was determined to be the greatest storyteller in the world. And so he set out on a grand journey and travelled far to the north to the frozen lands of the bushii.*

*When he arrived in Kamakura he demanded to be taken to the Emperor's palace. The guards were suspicious of Rashan at first, for he had travelled with great haste and his robes were still dirty from the road.*

*"What do you want with the Emperor of Kamakura, oh son of Rukhi? We have no time for beggars here!" said the guards, thinking to dismiss Rashan from the gate.*

*"Foolish bushii! I am Rashan, who has conquered the seven serpents of Jadrapua. I am the same Rashan that helped the daughter of the Caliph of Mabin elope with a common stable hand. I am Rashan the greatest storyteller in all of Rukhi and I have come to this land to have your Emperor admit that I am the greatest storyteller in Kamakura too!"*

*By now a crowd had begun to gather and word had reached the Emperor of the disturbance at his gate, so he sent for Rashan and had the storyteller brought before him. Rashan bowed once, and then a second time, to show respect for an Emperor, and then said,*

*"Emperor of Kamakura, I am Rashan, a Rukhi storyteller. It is possible that you may have heard of me, for I am the same Rashan that purchased a bolt of blue silk for just a glimpse of a setting sun, and I am also the same Rashan who carried an entire army of men across a vast desert. I have come to Kamakura to tell you one of my tales. I am the finest storyteller in Rukhi and if you listen to a tale of mine then I will take any wager that your honour will force you to admit I am also the finest storyteller in all of Kamakura"*

*"Bold words, Rukhi beggar" said the Emperor to Rashan. "I hold your life as your wager. I wish to hear the story of how you bought a bolt of blue silk for just a glimpse of a sun and*

*how you carried an army of men across a desert on your back."*

*Rashan smiled then, for this one was one of his finest tales and even with his life as wager he knew he could not lose. But before he could begin, the Emperor spoke again.*

*"Before you begin, Rukhi beggar, I have been warned that the Rukhi people are all braggarts and liars. You should know that you stand in a holy place and if you speak but one word of a lie, or move but the breadth of a hair from the truth, my guards will cut you down."*

*At this Rashan quailed, for he knew the Emperor had tricked him and never meant to hear his tale the way it should be heard. He stopped for a moment, but then he remembered the very first story his father told him when he was just a child.*

*"Great Emperor of Kamakura, I will tell you the tale of how I bought a bolt of blue silk for a glimpse of a setting sun, and of how I once carried an entire army across a desert, but first I would tell you of a great recipe I discovered upon my way to your palace."*

*And with that he began to regale the Emperor and all his court with a description of the most sumptuous banquet that had ever been tasted. Soon the whole court were entranced and the more Rashan described this extraordinary meal, this fabulous food, this dish of delights, the more the Emperor and his court became desperate to sample this exquisite food. Finally, with every spice named, with every superlative exhausted, Rashan asked the Emperor if he wished to sample this astonishing recipe. But when the Emperor indicated he would, Rashan brought forth a handful of dried figs, and some fruit and cheese.*

*"What is the meaning of this? Where is this great meal of which you spoke?" demanded the Emperor.*

*"Ah great Emperor, alas you see the meal before you. Or at least you see what would have been a great meal had I but had the time and the freedom to prepare it. But alas you see it stripped of its beauty, bereft of its spice and denuded of aroma. And, alas, in such a state I fear it must appear to you as little more than a handful of figs and some fruit and some cheese. But, oh my Emperor, if only you could have tasted it as it might have been presented to you, then you would have known you supped with the Gods. Still you have the meal as it truly is without embellishment or addition."*

*And with that he claimed it was too late then to tell his tale but he promised the Emperor that he would recount the tale for him the next day. So the next night he returned before the Emperor but before he could begin his tale, the Emperor said,*

*"Do not forget, Rukhi beggar, that you stand in a holy place and if you speak but one word of a lie, or move but the breadth of a hair from the truth, my guards will cut you down."*

*But Rashan merely smiled to the Emperor and he promised him that he would indeed tell his tale just as the Emperor had commanded, but first he had a fine gift for the Emperor. And then he began to tell the Emperor and his court of a fabulous piece of gold work that he carried with him, crafted by the finest jeweller in Rukhi, worked from solid gold into the shape of a tiny bird; no bigger than a thumbnail but so delicately made that if a zephyr blew, the bird would seem to whistle and flutter back and forth. So amazing was Rashan's description of this great jewel, so incredible did he make it sound, that soon everyone was eager to see this amazing work. So when Rashan asked the Emperor if he would accept his*

*gift, the Emperor nodded. Rashan then produced a small nugget of gold, rough and unworked except where the water had worn it slightly so that in a certain light it looked a little like the shape of a bird.*

*"What manner of gift is this? Where is the great jewel you promised?" demanded the Emperor.*

*"Ah great Emperor, alas you see the jewel before you. Or at least you see what would have been a great jewel had I but had the time and the freedom to prepare it. But alas you see it as raw and unpolished as when it was pulled from the ground, with no skill or art or craft to it at all. But, oh my Emperor, if you could have seen it as I imagined it, then you would have truly possessed a jewel worthy of a man chosen by the Gods to rule. Still at least you have the jewel as it truly is, without embellishment or addition."*

*Once more Rashan claimed that he was now too tired to begin his tale but he promised the Emperor that he would return the next day and then he would recount his extraordinary story. Another day passed and once more he returned to the Emperor's presence but this time the Emperor seemed in a better mood, saying:*

*"Twice I have found your words more charming and enticing than the thing they truly described but in gaining the truth I have lost the beauty of the moment. Tonight, Rukhi storyteller, you will tell your tale, but I would hear it as you would tell it, as if you were on the sands of Rukh."*

*At this, Rashan bowed once and then once more for respect and then he began his extraordinary tale, telling the Emperor of how the Caliph of Bapan was assailed by Malathian brigands who threatened his city. And how the Caliph had sent word to his brother, the Caliph of Sufai, who, keen to help his brother, had sent an army to drive off the murderous thieves. But the Malathians had sold their souls to an evil djinn who came in the night and slit the soldiers' water bags as they marched across the desert to Bapan. And how only the stirring tales of Rashan who was with them had given them the courage to continue, his simple words carrying them across the desert.*

*And then he told the Emperor of how, in reward, the Caliph of Bapan had offered him the hand of his beautiful daughter in marriage. And how, when he went to woo her, she had proclaimed that she would only wed Rashan if he brought her a bolt of blue silk from Ara Maska. And how old Ara Maska was the most famous weaver of silk in all of Rukh, but he would not give away even one single swatch, for he had been born blind and would not trust a man he could not see. But when Rashan sought him out, he found the old man crying, for the sun was setting and he could feel the warmth on his face, though he had never seen it. So Rashan painted him such a picture of its beauty and majesty that just for a moment the blind weaver saw a glimpse of the setting sun, and in gratitude he gave the storyteller a bolt of blue silk.*

*And so, finally, the Emperor of Kamakura understood what every young Rukhi learns from their parents when they are but fledglings; that the best stories touch the truth like the hairs of an artist's brush. That the art of the storyteller is not in the figs and the cheese and fruit that he provides but in the banquet of tastes and smells that his art conjures from these simple ingredients. And that even the finest diamond or the brightest jewel will look dull until it has been polished. So it is that the art of the storyteller is not in the story, but in the telling.*

## DEVOTION

Although the caliphs do their best to encourage the worship of the Merchant or the Smith, hoping to promote the strength and prosperity of their caliphate, the Weaver is the first love of most Rukhi. All weavers play a special role in Rukhi society, just as their association with Her gives them an almost blessed air. The fact that most Rukhi adore beautiful clothes and fine cloth helps, of course. The most famous temple of the Weaver in the world is the Marble Eye in Makhand but almost every port and city has at least one shrine or temple to the Weaver. A number of people have claimed that Almandra the Veiled Warrior is in fact the current Satrap, Mushtaq na Hib. However a number of people have also claimed that Almandra is really Mela Neeta, the caliph of the neighbouring city of Asude. And some have claimed that Almandra is the daughter of the previous Satrap, Tariq Alabee, who was enormously popular for his daring displays of juggling, where he would astound visiting dignitaries by keeping nine razor-sharp knives in the air at once.

By and large, the Rukhi people are amongst the most devout and god-fearing people outside of Fidelia, but they carry their faith in their hearts, they do not wear it on their sleeve. Prayers have their place, and blessings are important, but the majority of the Rukhi prefer to act on their faith rather than build temples to it. Oddly, for a group of people so addicted to lavish stories, they seem to think that what you actually do in life is considerably more important than what you say you are going to do. Worship in Rukh often involves dancing in the cool desert evenings, and great storytelling festivals.

## CURRENT POLITICS

The single most exciting thing for Rukh today is the Maelstrom and the New World. The subject is discussed in every bazaar in every caliphate, and in every tent in the desert. Half the people in Rukh are convinced that the entire New World is populated with murderous egg-stealing natives and filled with heaps of treasure waiting to be claimed. A danger greater than any that has been known for an age, but with a prize to match it. The thought that the New World contains magic, as well as gold, silver and gems in great abundance, simply makes the prospect even more exciting. Everyone in Rukh can tell stories of the New World: either they have been there themselves or perhaps they know a woman who knows a man who has. Since every tale becomes more magnificent with each telling, then the New World becomes more exciting and appealing, but also more dangerous and gruesome, with every passing day.

One of the first to set sail was Khaled Adham, the third son of the current Satrap. He has been given the leadership of those avians who have carried the Rukhi flag to the New World. If they succeed, and the colony becomes a new caliphate, with all the wealth and magic and power that is thought to be available in this new land, then it is certain to ensure their place amongst the most famous heroes of all Rukhi legend, perhaps as famous as Shay Satra himself.

On a more mundane level, several Rukhi merchants have begun to notice how much trade has improved since the Maelstrom opened. Not because any great cargoes have returned from the New World, although much is expected; it is still too early for that yet. Rather, the improved fortunes appear to have arisen because half the pirate population of the Free Islands have set sail for the Maelstrom, hoping to seek their fortunes in the New World. Whilst it does take much of the excitement out of making the Free Island run round to Flambard and Amun-Sa for trading house shipping, it has meant better prices and profits for all. Some of the pirate vessels will undoubtedly have been lost when attempting the passage but several prominent caliphs have begun to publicly voice the hope that the Rukhi colony will be able to ensure that the other pirate captains meet a similar fate now that they have left the protection of the Free Islands behind.