

The Serpent

God of Guile and Cunning

A hero will die a glorious death, while around him the ruthless survive

This is the first tale of the Serpent

It happened at this time that the winter grew so cold that the rivers turned to stone and no fish could be had there, and the herds moved far away in search of fresh pasture and did not return. At this time, there were two tribes that lived on the plains and as winter began to bite, each realized that the food they had stored would not last the winter.

So the chieftain of the first tribe disguised himself as an old woman and, taking a large strip of dried meat, he set out for the home of the second tribe. At first they tried to drive the old woman away, telling him they had no food to spare. But the chieftain told them that he had come to trade and wished to exchange the meat for a single piece of fruit.

The elders of the second tribe readily exchanged the strip of meat for a piece of fruit; they asked the chieftain why he gave away his meat so readily when times were so hard. At first the cunning chieftain refused to answer, saying that his secret was given him by the Gods and could not be told. But the elders pressed him until eventually he revealed that he had found a magic spring in the mountains where the water still ran and where so many animals came to drink that even an old woman could hunt with ease. But that now he had so much meat he had grown hungry for fruit and so he had come to the valley to trade.

At this the elders pressed the chieftain to tell them where this blessed spring was, but for a long time he refused. In the end he agreed to tell them where the spring was, in exchange for all the nuts and fruit that the tribe had stored for the winter. The elders agreed, thinking that they would not need the simple fare if they could hunt at the blessed spring; so they gave the chieftain their food and he told them where they could find the spring.

The chieftain returned to his tribe bearing the food, and his people rejoiced for now they would not starve. The elders of the second tribe set out to find the magical spring, but the directions that the chieftain had given them led to a hive of the children of the Ant and they did not return. Stripped of food, bereft of wisdom, their tribe did not survive the winter.

In the spring, when the waters thawed and the herds returned, a raven came to bring the blessing of the Serpent. Thinking to find two tribes, He could discover only one. He found the chieftain and challenged the man saying;

"You donned the clothes of an old woman and deceived a fellow tribe to steal their food. You were raised as a warrior to fight with honour and courage but you have endured as a thief and a liar. Tell me why you should be worthy of the God's blessing?"

But the chieftain looked at the Raven and said.

"When I was young and foolish I hunted these plains, with no thought but my own pride. Then I was the warrior of which you spoke. But now I hunt not for myself but for my tribe who cannot hunt. Will my pride bring them food? Will my courage keep them warm? Will my honour keep them safe? If I put my virtue before their lives, how then am I worthy of the God's blessing?"

The Raven knew then that the chieftain was a true follower of the Serpent and He delivered the blessing of the Gods to him.

Beliefs

The Serpent encourages all of His followers to be shrewd, cunning and ruthless. The world is a dangerous place; to survive you must be more dangerous than the world. Strength comes from a ruthless pragmatism; do what is necessary to survive. It is seductively easy to be noble and high minded; everyone would like to be the great hero, admired for their bravery, their honesty, their tenacity and their principles. Will these noble virtues help if you are dead and those who rely upon you for food, protection and leadership starve? You best serve your own interests, and those of the people you lead and protect, by having the courage to fight with every weapon available to you. To do anything less is to put your honour before the survival of those you claim to care about.

Pathological deceit and self-serving dishonesty are not admired by the Serpent. If you gain a reputation as a liar then no one will trust you. Like the spear that becomes blunt with every use, guile must be employed only when it is needed. Ruthless use of cunning and guile are the gifts of those who serve the Serpent and His gifts should be used to serve the interests of your tribe and your family, not turned to selfish reasons. After you die you must defeat the Serpent in a battle of wits to enter paradise. Those who have not learned to use deception and guile to succeed have merely survived. There is no place for them in the realm of the Serpent.

Followers of the Serpent

The Serpent is the favoured God of the Onontakha who refer to themselves as the children of the Serpent. Most tribes have at least one priest of the Serpent, and in some tribes every member is a devotee. Most Serpent followers within a tribe will work together, making their responsibility to the tribe, or in some cases to the other devotees within the tribe, their paramount concern.

Serpent worship is less common amongst the Tlaxti and the Azarch, both of whom commonly worship other Gods. There are Serpent worshippers amongst their people, and the Onontakhan consider them their most deadly enemies, but worship of the Ant or the Basilisk is more common.

Commandments of the Serpent

The world is dangerous; you must be more dangerous than the world to survive.

Honesty is valuable; expend it carefully to achieve your goals.

Fight to protect your own with every weapon at your disposal; scruples are the weapons of your enemy.

Your wits are weapons; hone them and keep them sharp.