



# The Smith

God of hearth and community  
The strong will conquer the weak



*It was during the dark days before the Merisusi were one, before even the rise of the Sea Wolves or the Cormorants.*

*Berowen was a giant among mokoshi and stood a full head taller than any of his folk. And his arms were strong and powerful, and his armour was fine and strong, being good hard-boiled leather, with a fine helmet of burnished bronze.*

*Berowen was the mightiest warrior of his time; his beautiful axe a spinning butterfly of finest iron, it was so sharp, and his arms so strong, that no other could stand above him in war.*

*The Gods saw Berowen, and he was lucky. His herd of cattle was big, the bulls mighty, the cows strong. He had many sheep giving fine, soft wool, fields of barley and wheat, and the plumpest chickens laying many, many eggs. Soon men and women came to Berowen not to kill him, but to serve him; be it in his hall, in his fields, or as his warriors.*

*But all was not well within the valley of Berowen. For just as Berowen was fearless in battle, his son was cowardly. No one would know, for Honnar was as fair, as tall, as strong as his father, but in his heart he was as weak as a mewling calf.*

*And one day, when raiding with his warriors, an arrow feathered Berowen's neck from afar.*

*At first, no one was worried. Honnar seemed just like his father, and his beautiful wife Maggrith ensured the crops were brought in on time, and that the cattle were fed and watered.*

*After the mourning feasts for Berowen were finished, a stranger came to the valley. Clad only in hardened leather armour, the equal of Berowen's, and leather skirt. On her brow was the symbol of the Smith, at her side was a sword, uncommon in those days, and within her was a fire that belied the tempest blowing around her as she hammered on the door of Honnar's hold.*

*Honnar had her brought to him, and he offered her hot wine, honey and fresh baked bread; but she would not feast with him.*

*"Guard yourself", the stranger said, "for, as we sit here and talk, many of your father's men gather in the next valley, to take his land now that he is gone".*

*But the weakness in Honnar's heart took hold, and even though the stranger told him, and Maggrith beseeched him, to attack the valley and to ensure the safety of his hold, Honnar would not. To hide his fear, he claimed that these men had been his father's warriors and would not attack his hold for they would respect him as they had his father.*

*And the snows broke into spring, and they did not come. And spring mellowed into summer, and they did not come. Summer softened into autumn, yet still they did not come. Winter fell in a dozen gentle falls and still they did not come.*

*But when the first thaws began they came.*

*Harsh was the fire that had been Berowen's hold. The cattle and his sheep and his chickens were taken and divided amongst his enemies, whilst his granary was poisoned as they poured salt water over his bountiful harvest.*

*And Honnar was killed, cowering, while his men died around him, honouring nothing but the memory of Berowen.*

*Some time later, the stranger returned to the valley that had been Berowen's, and saw the waste of what had been.*

*Maggrith, who lived but was no longer beautiful, met her and they talked; but only water and gruel did they eat.*

*"Guard yourself", the stranger said, "for, as we sit here and talk, many of Berowen's men gather in the next valley, to take his land now that he is gone".*

*This time, though, Maggrith did not beseech her husband for aid.*

*Taking a sharp knife and a hand axe, she donned a white cloak for disguise and left by herself; not for revenge, but to protect, even though it was growing dark.*

*Next morning she returned, but her cloak was red, not white. And the next night she took another white cloak, but this time another of the women went with her. The night after that, five of them went, and then a raging torrent.*

*Slowly, the wealth of the valley returned; the cattle, the sheep, the chickens. The hold was rebuilt, and the fields replanted, until again it was as if Berowen was amongst his people.*

*And so it was that, in the seasons following, the darkness of that time was lightened in the Valley of Maggrith, who was beautiful in the eyes of the Smith.*

## Beliefs

*"The man who works for his own ends will gain his reward in this life. The man who works for the good of the community will gain his reward in both lives. He will be raised up and honoured by his fellow men while he lives, and he will be honoured by the Smith when he goes to the next life."*

*"The architect may design a mighty fortress; but without foundations it cannot be raised, without labourers it will not be built and without warriors it will not be protected. A strong community brings benefits for all, more food to eat, a safer place to live, a longer life. Scholarly learning and artistic works require the presence of a strong community before they can flourish. Those who seek to support the community seek to create a place in which all other virtues can take root."*

*"A rich man with an expensive house might order his servants not to spill water upon the fine wooden floors of his home. When the first fire takes hold, his servants will not be held to their master's order but should with all due speed quench the flames, otherwise the house will be lost. So it is that laws are the servants of a community, they are not meant to be held rigidly; rather they should be employed wisely, in the service of everyone. If the laws support the interests of a select few then they encourage unwholesome greed and selfishness and lend themselves readily to abuse."*

*"If a man desires a great house to be built, he will hire many workers to help him put the bricks in place. Each man he hires must be told what bricks he will carry and where he will place them. Otherwise the walls will not hold and the house will not stand. Those who desire to build a great civilization must impose the rights of the community over the will of the individual. Otherwise their house will not stand and their people will be broken."*

*"A soldier does not place his weapons in the hands of his enemies. Nor does a nation give up its secrets to its neighbours. But a man who keeps a servant will see that*

*the servant is fed and housed. If he does not feed the servant, and the servant cannot feed himself, then he will starve. Civilization can only grow if the strong aid the weak and this can only happen through conquest. Those who are defeated may oppose their conquerors, but in the years that follow their community will grow stronger as it copies the structures of the one that conquered it. Thus their people become stronger and richer with time. Like the servant, they are employed and fed; better than the freedom to starve. No nation need give aid to their enemies, but every nation has a responsibility to conquer those around them who have become weak."*

*"Kings and queens who fear to move to counter the threats to their lands, place their kingdoms in jeopardy. A king is not a figurehead; he does not rule to gain personal wealth and power but to serve his kingdom as its leader; to him alone falls the responsibility for ensuring that the kingdom is not threatened. When a danger is discovered he must act swiftly to counter the threat and every member of the community must act with him to ensure they overcome the danger."*

*"Those who do not seek to strengthen their community, those whose rule merely strengthens themselves, have no moral authority nor right to rule. Only a fool carries a sword that has rusted, for it will break in battle and he will be slain. He should take the blade and have it hammered and re-forged so that it is whole again. A community that becomes corrupt and decadent cannot long endure and the sooner the walls are pulled down, the sooner they can be raised back up."*

*"Every community strives to become strong and to grow. Those that enjoy the blessing of the Smith will prosper. In this way they are like a rich man who has many sons. When they are young, each one vies for his father's approval and seeks to prove himself; but in the end only one can inherit if the estate is not to be sundered. So the Smith has ordained that in the end only one community will remain."*

## The Church

The followers of the Smith are split by a doctrinal difference, which begins within the oldest and most ancient teaching of the religion. The earliest followers of the Smith believed that eventually one tribe will grow to the point where it is strong enough to conquer all others, at which point it will conquer heaven itself. Interpreting the meaning of this teaching and its implications separates those who form the Church of the Smith from those who will not acknowledge the authority of any outside their own community.

Amun-Sa is the home of the effective leadership of the Church of the Smith, where He is known as the Soldier. The high

priest, Nhairtoun, is a firm member of the unity sect of the Smith, as was his predecessor. All the followers of the Smith know that eventually one nation will become so powerful that it conquers all others. Whilst all clergy view unification of nations as a way to build bigger, stronger nations, the unity sect do not view conquest as the only method to achieve this. They argue that closer links between allied communities can forge bonds of alliance, which turn enemies into friends.

The commandments of the Smith are unswerving in demanding that His devotees accept the threats that face them and deal with them as swiftly as possible. For centuries, this commandment has been interpreted to require conquest and destruction of enemy nations. Followers of the Smith have been at the forefront of wars of conquest and destruction

waged against the enemies of their land as they sought to uphold His tenets.

Many worshippers of the Smith still hold these traditional views, but in recent years a more liberal interpretation has been advanced. The unity sect argues that alliance and cooperation can lead to amalgamation of nations just as effectively as conquest. They claim that the Smith requires His followers to eliminate threats against their community, but that this does not mandate the destruction of all other communities. They argue that improving relations with other nations brings greater cooperation and reduces the likelihood of attack and conquest, so the threat is reduced. This doctrinal development has split the followers of the Smith in many lands, especially in Amun'Sa which has traditionally opposed any links with foreigners. The high priest walks a fine line in a land where contact with outsiders is considered by the most extreme to border on treason.

The switch by Nhairtoun's predecessor has boosted the strength and influence of the unity sect considerably. It has also brought this section of the Church firmly under the control of the Amusar priests, where the massive military strength and social pre-eminence of the faith makes it ubiquitous. The overwhelming majority of Smith followers in Amun'Sa do not follow the unity sect, and some dissenters have suggested that Nhairtoun has assumed leadership of the unity sect with the intention of destroying it. Given the enduring hatred of the Amusars towards foreigners it is not a totally incredulous suggestion.

The unity sect seeks to bring communities together by exchanging knowledge and learning between them. In practice, the sect spends its time and resources spreading knowledge and technique across the world in order to strengthen all of the nations in which its followers hold sway. The hope is that the nations will be drawn closer by these ties, leading to the creation of a single powerful nation that will be acceptable to the Smith. Young devotees are given the opportunity to travel across the world and witness work done in other societies. Thus ships rigged with Merisusi rigging styles may be found in Alkyon, and Kamakuran swordmaking techniques are not unknown in Bantustan. The aim of the unity sect is to strengthen all communities, or at least all those who are receptive to being strengthened.

The actions of the unity sect are viewed with some misgivings by the leaders of their lands. Most are keen to prevent any military or economic advantages falling into the hands of their neighbours, but they are all desperate to use the network that the Church of the Smith has developed to try to learn what secrets other lands have developed.

The opponents of the unity sect are known as the primary sect, although they do not call themselves this. In fact some members of the primary sect do not acknowledge that there is any split at all, as they do not acknowledge the unity sect as true Smith worshippers. These traditionalists believe that conquest is the most blessed way of ensuring a strong nation. They point out, with some justification, how nations that

conquer other nations grow stronger and cause all nearby nations to grow stronger as well, in response to the threat.

Some traditionalists go so far as to actively oppose the unity sect. They believe that for one community to conquer another, the differences between them need to be exacerbated. Conquest cannot occur until one community is strong enough to overwhelm the other, and they strive to bring this about. Obviously there is no cooperation between the Smith followers of different nations who follow the older ways for each strives to ensure that it is his nation that has the upper hand.

The ultimate expression of these beliefs occurs amongst the Merisusi. The Merisusi nation is built upon the premise that one day a single nation will emerge triumphant, having conquered all neighbouring lands; they strive to ensure that this nation is theirs. The Merisusi do not just seek to strengthen their own community but also to weaken all others. They attack and raid communities across the world, taking slaves and loot back to their harsh northern home. Whilst some dislike their methods, there is no denying that they have orthodox tradition to support their aggressive stance; 'the strong expropriate what they cannot conquer'. If the Merisusi were more numerous, it seems likely their raids would grow more vicious and destructive until they launched an all out attack upon whichever neighbour presented the weakest opposition.

## The faithful in the known World

Early in its history, Amun'Sa was an early advocate of the unity sect, but two centuries ago, changes in the religious and political leadership of the nation brought followers of the primary sect to power. After two centuries of such leadership, most Amusars tend to the primary sect, though the high priest is making careful steps to bring a more balanced view to the faith there. In Merisusi, of course, the primary sect predominates, and few have any time for unity views which are seen as foolishness at best and blasphemy at worst. Harang is the leader of the devotees of the Smith in Merisusi.

Smith worship is popular amongst all mokosh, not just the Merisusi, and he has many shrines and temples in Kamakura and even more in Bantustan. The Gnolls tend towards the primary sect, but they do not go as far as the Merisusi. Gnolls go to war only for their own advantage, not simply to cripple and destroy their enemies. Most Kamakurans embrace the unity sect, though by no means all. Some worshippers of the Smith have faced problems in Kamakura recently for speaking out against the Shogun's decree on darkpowder.

Smith worshippers are few and far between in Alkyon and Rukh, but those that do exist are firm advocates of the unity sect and many are openly contemptuous of other views. There are even fewer Smith worshippers in the Tritoni lands or in Maya and those that do exist tend to favour the primary sect. Neither sect dominates the thinking in any human nation, although the Smith is popular in all four, particularly Flambard.

