

# The lands of the Tritoni

The wilderness at the end of the world  
Husband your strength, trust your pride

## A Brief history

What need have we for history and scholarship when we have the blessing of Bubastis? We see the value of knowing where animals hunt, which fruit can be safely eaten, how to brew poisons and purgatives. It is not learning that I disdain, rather that the idea of recording events of the past and studying them seems to me of no more value than counting the leaves of the forest. That something exists is not a reason to count it and study it. Let such matters handle their own affairs, concern yourself with your own.

What is worth remembering is who can be trusted and how far. And who has wronged you and how much. These things are worth keeping for they serve a purpose in shaping the future. Everything else is leaves on a tree; if you stop to study it, you will lose sight of the tree snake hiding in the leaves and you will be bitten.

## The Treachery of humans

This happened in the time of the king of the humans of the land they call Mill-en, generations before they were ruled by peddlers and tinkers as they are now. They desired then, as they do now, to cut the trees of the forest to make their ships of war. The king sent his woodcutters under darkness into the forests to fell the trees. They took over a hundred before we stopped them. Next he sent his warriors with their spears and their puny metal bows to guard the woodcutters while they worked. Another hundred trees were taken before we stopped them.

So their king sent men and women dressed in dresses and flimsy clothes to talk to the tribes. At first it seemed the king wished to deal honestly and purchase the wood he desired more dearly than the gold they worship. These men and women asked repeatedly to speak to the ruler of the Tritoni. But when they were told that the Tritoni tribes rule themselves the humans turned treacherous and deceitful and sought to turn tribe against tribe and to turn raiding into open warfare. Perhaps they hoped to weaken the tribes so that they could seize their lands.

The tribes met to discuss the matter and find a way to put an end to the wiles of the human king. The tribes agreed that the best way to deal with this human king was to send a queen so that he would be forced to deal with us as equals in ways that he could understand. The bajari of the Akhara tribe agreed to deal with the human king and was named Hekati Bajari, voice of the bajari, or queen to the humans who agreed to transport her in safety and honour to deal with their king.

The humans returned without the Hekati Bajari, who was being held prisoner by the human king in ransom for the wood he craved. The members of his pride took great delight in sophistry, on the one part pretending that the Hekati Bajari was merely enjoying the human king's hospitality, and then in the next breath implying that she would not be allowed to return until some deal was ratified by the tribes. It was clear that they thought their words were some form of clever hunt, though it was so simple it would not have cornered a mole or trapped a sloth. The humans were told to bring their king to the edge of

the forest with our Hekati Bajari where we would agree to all their demands.

The humans made camp less than four hours run from where the jungle ends. Their camp was so large it took them nearly half a moon to create it, building ramparts of earth and walls of sharpened wood. Five hundred horses clad in mail were led inside and a great many of the king's soldiers followed them. Finally, the human king arrived bringing the Hekati Bajari with him.

That evening, the tribes began their assault on the human fort. The guards on the perimeter were removed and the tribes approached under darkness to within bow range. After many had died, the king's soldiers mounted their mailed horses and rode out to fight the tribes. After they had fled, we continued to kill the people in the fort until, in the morning, a group of their soldiers rode out waving white cloth to indicate they wished to capitulate. The Hekati Bajari was returned to us and, as she was unharmed, the remaining humans were allowed to live. We do not believe they are aware that from the protection of their wooden fort they killed near twice as many of our number as we of theirs. Without devotion to Bubastis, they had no courage for their fight.

Since that day there have been many new kings of the human land and many of them have tried ways to steal our forests. Treachery is in their blood. For many years every attack has been repulsed and the jungle kept free of their kind but since they created their new weapons of darkpowder, which are as accurate and as deadly as our bows, they have won more than they have lost. Since they chose to begin killing their own and depose their king, the attacks have come less often but many bajari speak openly that now is the time to gather our strength and repay them for the lives they have taken.

## The Creed of Gnolls

The humans are not the only people to draw our vengeance, and our enmity with the Gnolls is older than that with the humans by many generations. The Gnoll tribes are like squabbling children; violence is the only lesson they understand and that is forgotten a moment after it is given. Each seeks to outdo the other, to be louder and more violent and greedy. This is just one tale of many of the greed of the Gnolls.

Untos Himbala, a Gnoll general, led a number of troops into the Tritoni forests in search of iron in the hills along the border between our lands. There he discovered the bohio of the Soyata tribe whereupon he slaughtered all of their number that he could catch, torturing them before consuming their bodies and torching their bohio. When the hunters of the local Soyata tribe returned, to find a Gnoll flag flying in the ruins, they went to the neighbouring tribes to draw upon their strength. Suhalia, the leader of the Soyata tribe at that time, led the tribes across the border into Bantustan, where we slaughtered one Gnoll for every member of the Soyata who had been killed.

In response, the Supreme Chief of the Gnolls sent more soldiers against us and fierce and bloody battles continued, until the

massacre of Idopass. At Idopass, many tribes of the Tritoni met many Gnolls. By nightfall there were many thousands dead on each side and still victory eluded us. Suhalia's daughter, Halusa, was named Hekati Bajari and met with the Gnoll chieftains to negotiate a truce. Some bajari felt Halusa had given too much, for the Gnolls had taken over three hundred Tritoni hunters as slaves during the conflict and these were never returned to us, but most bajari were happy that they would not have to face the stink of the Gnoll troops in the hunt again for a while.

## The Pride

Every Tritoni tribe is composed of a family grouping of prides, where the related females watch each other's backs. A pride consists of the female huntress and any male hunters that she keeps in her pride. Many females are forced to hunt alone as they are not strong enough or successful enough to keep even a single male. Technically, even a lone female is still a pride although they are rarely referred to as such. The term is more commonly used for the strongest and most powerful of the huntresses who will often keep prides with up to half a dozen males in them. It is not unknown for a particularly strong bajari, the tribal chief, to have up to a dozen males in her pride. The pride of the Hekati Bajari, called the carib, and includes hundreds of males although the majority of them are effectively ceremonial since the queen is usually too busy to hunt, hence the name.

When a huntress goes out to hunt for food in the jungle, she commonly takes her entire pride with her. The pride hunts as a single unit under the direction of the huntress. The skill of the huntress lies in how she places her hunters, how she utilizes their individual skills and how well she understands them. Although the huntress will always eat first, there has to be enough food for the pride and it is this that limits the number of males which a female can keep. The more successful she is as a huntress, the more food her pride will catch and the larger a pride she can support. The bajari of any tribe is the one with the largest, most successful pride; amongst the Tritoni respect is earned by your skills as a huntress and hence the size of your pride.

Many outsiders consistently confuse the role of a Tritoni male with that of a slave. Nothing could possibly be further from the truth. The strength, power and influence of a female is entirely dependent on the strength and skills of her pride. If she does not trust them implicitly, if they are not loyal and devoted to her, the pride has no chance of being able to hunt and feed. The harsh realities of life in the Tritoni jungles do not leave room to keep men who cannot be trusted to hold a spear against a charging boar or a rampaging aurochs. Equally, few slavers are happy to arm their slaves to the teeth and trust their lives to them in battle.

It is true that males are exchanged between prides, but every intelligent male wants to be part of a large and powerful pride, part of the entourage of a huntress with status and influence. The bigger the pride, the higher the status of all the males in it. On rare occasions where males are sullen or uncooperative in a pride then they are exchanged because no pride can tolerate such a presence for long. A skilled or capable male is an asset to even the largest pride. The Tritoni do not go to war, but when vengeance against outsiders is needed we do perform the hunt against them. Then the bajari will lead all the huntresses of her tribe against the offenders, but each huntress directs her own pride in battle. Thus the survival of the pride is dependent

on the role played by every member. The huntress may make the decisions, but her hunters are her eyes, her hands and her weapons, any intelligent huntress will try to assemble a pride where she can trust every member implicitly. A huntress who does not listen to the words of her males will soon be hunting alone.

The Tritoni have no use whatsoever for slaves. Because we are too proud to grovel in the dirt for food, we hunt as Bubastis intended. A male who wears chains and who must be beaten to work is of no use at all to a huntress. If people choose to bring slaves on to Tritoni lands, that is their own regard; the Tritoni will not free the slaves. A male or female who cannot free himself will not long survive in this harsh land so he is not worth helping. But if a slave rebelled and killed his owner, he is more than likely to be congratulated on a successful hunt and invited to join a bohio. If the slave is a male he may even be taken by a female for her pride.

Gaining males for your pride is always difficult, especially for huntresses who have none. There is an old saying amongst huntresses that "Getting a male is like birthing; the first one is always the most difficult." There is always a shortage of good males and unclaimed males are rare and are soon snapped up by a huntress looking to start a pride. The process involves the male being 'caught' (if unwilling). Most unclaimed males are young and just reaching adulthood and many have dreams of being part of a bajari's pride, so a lone huntress needs to show her skills in catching the male to make sure he accepts becoming part of her pride. The captured male will be part of a short ceremony, where he is marked by the successful huntress in some way, and shown to the huntresses in the tribe, so that they will know he is no longer unclaimed.

It is quite common for males to be claimed by a huntress from another tribe. If the male is already a loyal member of a pride, he will do his best to return, and only a very foolish or daring huntress will take a male loyal to another. Claiming a skilled male from the pride of a huntress in another tribe is usually reason for the other huntress to hunt you. Claiming a skilled male from the pride of a huntress in your own tribe is even more dangerous, as this often constitutes a challenge to the leadership of the bajari. But if a female takes a low ranking male, especially a troublemaker, the case may be resolved with a diplomatic incident, or gifts to the female who has been slighted.

On some occasions, males who are unhappy with their position in a pride, perhaps because they feel underfed or undervalued, may go out of their way to encourage another huntress to claim them. There are a number of coquettish wiles which are employed by ambitious males to attract the eye of a huntress that interests them, such as telling the males of another pride. Nonetheless the risks involved for the huntress should she steal a male belonging to another huntress mean that actual instances are relatively uncommon, no matter how much the male in question may be asking for it.

Tritoni only rarely keep males of other cultures; they are considered unreliable and not skilled enough to be worth feeding. On rare occasions, a male with particularly noteworthy skills, perhaps a master jeweller or smith, may be claimed. Since such males are of limited use for hunting, only the most powerful huntresses with the largest prides can consider claiming such a specialized male. Some very powerful females keep exotic males for pleasure, but this is regarded as extraordinarily frivolous

by most experienced huntresses and the male will usually be released or traded on when the novelty wears off.

## The Tribe

Most tribes consist of a dozen or more substantial prides with around half a dozen males, a few dozen females with perhaps one or two males in their pride and fifty to a hundred females with no males in their pride. They will claim a vast area of land around a bohio, a traditional Tritoni dwelling consisting of wooden roundhouses in a single great clearing. The bohio is often surrounded by a wooden palisade and will include a single wooden roundhouse for each female. There will be a single large meeting house, big enough to allow all the huntresses of the tribe to gather there. The other significant features are the shaman's hut and the central fireplace where important rituals and ceremonies are performed.

The female with the largest pride in the tribe will be the tribe's bajari. She represents the interests of the tribe in their dealings with others and sometimes intervenes in disputes between huntresses of the tribe. Discipline amongst males is none of her business and being a matter for the huntress or huntresses whose pride the males are part of. The other significant figure in the tribe will be the orkhon, the tribal shaman who interprets the will of Bubastis for the tribe. It is the orkhon who has the ability to call the Hunt against another sentient. The orkhon is held in high regard by every male and female in the tribe, since she is the earthly representative of the Huntress Bubastis, the Goddess of the Tritoni. If any member of the tribe has been sufficiently wronged that it requires the attention of the entire tribe, then the orkhon will call the Hunt against the offender and the entire tribe will attempt to hunt the perpetrator down and extract justice from them.

It is considered undignified for an orkhon to have to hunt for her own food. An orkhon does not hunt food, she calls the Hunt; her prey are those that have offended Bubastis, not mere animals. She is supported by the rest of the tribe and for this reason she does not need a pride that can hunt. Males that become crippled or too old to hunt effectively, or males who cannot hunt but have very useful skills, are often given to the orkhon, presuming she has enough food to feed them. There is no status in being in the orkhon's pride, no matter how large it grows; generally it is regarded as a position of pity by most Tritoni; males and females alike. An orkhon's pride can be very useful to a tribe though, providing the orkhon with males with useful skills, knowledge and experience that the tribe could not otherwise support.

Tribal life is relatively straightforward. A pride always eats and sleeps together in their roundhouse, with the males carrying out the work of preparing and cooking food. Each night, those huntresses who are present at the bohio (some may be away for days and even weeks whilst hunting) gather at the meeting place, the bajari's hut, to meet and discuss hunting, politics and tribal business. The males will usually take this opportunity to hold revels around the fire, often including storytelling, singing, dancing and drinking. One of the males from a pride will be chosen to attend the huntress in her roundhouse while the remainder continue drinking and celebrating around the fire for another hour before going to their beds.

## The Hekati Bajari and her Orkhon

The Hekati Bajari, the voice of the bajari, is not a queen,

although she is often called that to strangers. The Hekati is chosen by the bajari to represent them to outsiders. Long ago it was found that few foreigners are willing to deal respectfully with the Tritoni. Whilst several salutary lessons have been delivered to the likes of the Gnolls, the Mill-ense and others, the costs have been heavy. By calling the Hekati Bajari a queen, the Tritoni create a figurehead that outsiders can meet with and treat with as an equal. Before they had a queen, most outsiders seemed to think that the Tritoni would let them deceive, cheat or attack a tribe without incurring the wrath of all. This has led to numerous punishing wars which have cost the Tritoni dear even as they have left a bloody swathe across the enemies. Giving the outsiders a queen to deal with, complete with a pride consisting of hundreds of males so that they can see her status, makes outsiders deal with the Tritoni as a nation rather than individual tribes.

Since this beginning, the Hekati Bajari has grown to become a more useful position internally. To ensure that she represents the tribes well, the Hekati travels the Tritoni lands by chariot, visiting as many as she can. Constant meetings and discussions allow the Hekati to hear the words of the tribes and represent them to outsiders. Over time she has come to be seen as a focal point for the tribes.

Whilst no bajari would even consider accepting that the Hekati Bajari had some authority over them, she has grown to represent the collective decision of the Tritoni people and when she is seen to act in this way then she can draw on the wide support of many. Thus the queen becomes the mouthpiece for collective action between tribes, either Hunts against neighbouring powers or decisions like the one to gather people and resources for a Tritoni colony in the New World. Inshya is the current Hekati Bajari and has been for over six years now, a long time by such standards.

Much of the strength and power the Hekati Bajari does have is drawn from her Orkhon. Her Orkhon is the highest in the land, what outsiders would call a high priestess, and she speaks directly for Bubastis. The Orkhon acts as aide and adviser to the queen, the position of each bolstering the other. In theory, the Orkhon of the Hekati Bajari is the one with the power to call a Hunt of all the tribes, although that has not been done in many years. Where serious offenders have fled the Tritoni lands, the Orkhon will take a hundred or more males from the Hekati Bajari's carib and take the Hunt abroad to track down and punish those who have sinned. The current Orkhon is Lira Kayan.

## Tritoni and Outsiders

Tritoni will warmly welcome females of other races especially ones who would be capable enough to have status amongst the Tritoni. They understand full well that there are males in leadership positions in other lands but they occasionally show some disdain for the idea; it is regarded as odd, in the same way that outsiders' love of books and bits of paper is odd. Males of other cultures are tolerated, but not treated as such a prize as their own and they will deal with males in leadership situations if it will advantage them, if it doesn't then they are likely to blank the male out as a distraction. Those Tritoni less used to dealing with outsiders still refer to a nearby female for answers if they forget themselves. Again, they are not stupid, and will not try to order around leading males of other societies... unless they think they can get away with it.

Tritoni usually deal peacefully with representatives of the trading houses, especially as these pragmatically mercantile institutions are usually happy to provide female operatives for the Tritoni to trade with. The only exception is Rimici Capell whose agents are regarded with contempt as dishonourable and treacherous thieves, from the time of an old feud when Rimici Capell cheated the Hekati Bajari into accepting one of its useless pieces of paper which turned out to be not old enough to redeem for real money.

## RECENT POLITICS

The Tritoni have few resources to spare to found a new colony but in the face of similar efforts by their neighbours the stinking Gnolls and the treacherous Freiboden, they felt it wise to send those who could be spared to the New World. If there was something of value to be had from this hellish land then it would fall to these huntresses and their prides to ensure that it came to the Tritoni and did not fall to their enemies.

For more than five years the colony survived though it could not be said that it prospered. Some trade did come to the Tritoni lands bringing strange goods back from the New World but little else was heard. Then a flood of letters arrived before the Hekati Bajari talking of war and treachery and invasion by the Gnolls. A Tritoni was despatched to investigate the tales taking two of her males with her.

When she returned she confirmed the worst, that the colony had fallen to Gnolls, apparently due to treachery from within following feuds between the Tritoni tribes there. Each tribe blamed the other and nothing could be done to save them or the colony.

There was some talk of raising the hunt against the Gnolls in the New World to punish them for their invasion, but the Orkhon quashed the arguments making it clear that the Huntress disapproved of treachery and murder, not war. If the Hunt was to be called it must fall on those Tritoni who had failed to stand with their sisters against the Gnoll invasion. Few had the stomach for such a difficult journey to punish Tritoni, especially when it was obvious that they were now all enslaved by the Gnolls anyway.

So the Tritoni colony was abandoned and the Tritoni who had allowed their hunting grounds to fall to the Gnolls were left to face their own fate. A few prides talked about creating a new colony, to salvage the pride of the Tritoni people, but the Hekati Bajari and the Orkhon have made it clear that any who travel to the New World do so without their blessing.