

DON'T LOSE YOUR HEAD

The history of head-taking in Perrenland

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“Ornhulf Weisspeer you’re nothing but the son of a Uitlander trollsop fostered onto a weak and pathetic clan” bellowed Iringal Hussen across the battlefield. Ornhulf paused in hacking his at Hussen opponent’s shield as around him each side took a pause recognising the opening lines of a “Skam-Oost” or calling out.

“Well at least I don’t have any Orc blood polluting my bloodline, and my father was legitimate... you half-breed blaggard” replied Ornhulf after a moment’s reflection. For the next minute as each man exchanged insults the two clans drew apart reforming themselves into separate battle lines as their champions approached each other. Finally, Ornhulf, who had final right of say, called upon his Clan Kondrednaar to set a time and place for “Kondsturm”, or “the battle for the head”.

One of the stranger traditions in Perrenland is the practice amongst the clans of “head taking”. This practice, according to the lore keepers, has been passed down from the Ur-Flan culture that used to dominate the region before the great migrations; a culture that, rather than vanishing, has simply adapted into what Perrender society is today.

The Kondsturm is responsible for the ongoing nature of inter-clan rivalry, and the main reason why pitched battles are generally called off and resulting casualties keep low. Perrenders consider a battle between champions to resolve a current issue to be the best and most honorable test of a clan’s rights. It could be perceived by the less well educated that, to Perrenders, the Kondsturms are all but a series of ongoing, but deadly, games - played out see who is the best, season after season. The matters involved often seem trivial and unjustified, and can range from “who has the plowing rights to a few acres of fertile land on a border” to “who actually owns that prize bull who has been rustled countless times by each side”? Simple matters mostly, but ones that can quickly cause damage if not settled quickly.

The Kondsturm ends in one side or the other collecting a head and taking it back to the main stadt associated with the head-taker. Here, it is presented to the Graf (noble) of the clan who in turn hands it to his Kondrednaar (lore speaker) so that it can be properly prepared for mounting on the walls of the stadt. The more famous the head that is taken, the more prominently it is displayed, and the less it is shrunk in the preservation process. The head becomes the property of the clan whose hero claimed the head, and its theft by the losing clan is strictly forbidden. Such an act would result in a major loss of honour and perhaps even full scale inter clan warfare. Full-scale warfare between clans is something each Kondrednaar is tasked to prevent. The most successful, and famous, of them never allow blood to flow freely between the clans if such a thing can be avoided.

To date, the most famous of all Kondsturm was at the battle of Der Rood-Oosting (98 CY). During this battle, the Kondrednaar of the Vosser Clan convinced the Aerdi

Roodberg nation, not then considered a clan of Perrenland, to participate in a mass Kondsturm to determine who had ownership rights of the fertile Volverdyva valley, south of the town of Clatsberg. Spurred on by their Kondrednaar, the Vossers succeeded in taking several hundred Roodberg heads that fateful morning. This effectively drove the Aerdi invaders from the land, much to the dismay of the Roodbergs who, to this day, consider the heads taken in that battle to have been taken under false pretences.

Many foreigners new to the country are instantly affronted by the heads, many of then centuries old, that adorn the walls of Perrenlands clan leaders stadts. This may be one of the reasons why Perrenland is still viewed as a barbaric country despite evidence to the contrary. Perrenders themselves get a macabre sense of pleasure as they watch foreign dignitaries pale and whisper about the practice amongst themselves in their foreign tongues. The experienced foreign diplomat, however, knows that the best way to gain a semblance of trust amongst the clan leadership is to inquire about the history of a particular head, or to comment on the appearance of a new one. This gives the clan noble the opportunity to produce his Kondrednaar, or clan lore speaker : a bard with special skills and training in the preservation and story keeping of the nobles' heads. The Kondrednaar may even bestow the rare honour on such visitors, by having the head, through closely guarded magical secrets, recall its own glorious end!

The Skam-Oost or "Calling out" is a vital part of the Kondsturm. Traditionally, only Perrender clan members can initiate a Skam-Oost and, although not always directed against another member of one of Perrenlands clans, it is rare for a non-clan head to be considered worthy of a Kondstur – and besides, they seldom stick to the rules. In game terms for LG Perrenland regional scenarios, a PC who is a clan member can use the Skam-Oost to draw out a significant clan based NPC to single combat. A breach of the single combat nature of this event by a PC or their party would result in exile from the region of the entire group. Most importantly if you lose your head you cannot be raised. The winner of a Kondsturm has the right to claim the field, and the other side must back down, revenge killings are not allowed under Perrender law.

Clan Kondrednaar (Clan Lore Speaker)

It is difficult to establish the true origins of the Clan Kondrednaar. They seem to have been around from times well before the establishment of Perrenland as a nation. The connection of the Kondrednaar to the dead might well stem from ancient Ur-Flan practices. Little of these times are understood even by those who are Kondrednaar. Each of the modern Perrenese clans has a history that extends deep into pre-Perrenland times.

The Kondrednaar of a Perrenese clan is a bard with particular skills. More than just a clan knowledge keeper, the Kondrednaar is a person with a special affinity with his clan. He also has a connection to the dead, divining knowledge from the heads of the foes defeated in battle.

In times of clan fighting, the Kondrednaar uses the heads of defeated foes to demoralise and hurt his enemies and can summon the strength of the clan spirit to aid him in battle.

Much of the Kondrednaar's knowledge is little understood in the current times. Some find the ways of the Kondrednaar strange and archaic, but when there is clan trouble, the Kondrednaar is the one who can rally the clan warband, and make the difference. The Kondrednaar has a place in many rituals and gatherings of the clans. The Kondrednaar of modern Perrenland is an adviser to those clan leaders willing to respect their ways.

Those who become Kondrednaar are those who revere and study lore. A Kondrednaar will know much clan lore and history. Many who become Kondrednaar have studied in the temples of the Old Kerk of Perrenland. Some of the ways of the Kondrednaar have similar roots to those of the Old Kerk. While the Old Kerk is an organisation with temples and rules, the Kondrednaar have no such organisation.

Much of the knowledge learnt by the Kondrednaar has been passed orally for generations and much has still not been put down in writing. As well as knowing clan laws and history, the Kondrednaar will know something of folklore and legend. No Kondrednaar will remain hidden amongst the folk of a clan for long. Part of the duty of any Kondrednaar is to remind the clan of its illustrious history or fateful past with tale telling and ballad singing.

The Kondrednaar exists not just for the past, but also for the present and future. It is the Kondrednaar who will pass on tales of today's heroes and villains of the clan to the next generation. A clan leader will tread carefully around the Kondrednaar for fear of offending him and appearing in a bad light in the tales of tomorrow. A Kondrednaar might have both friends and enemies in his own clan. Generally though, the Kondrednaar's vitriol is reserved for the enemies of the clan.

Each of the Perrenese clans will have its Kondrednaar, and while in some ways opposed, they all come from similar traditions and background. A gathering of Kondrednaar from different clans will be a noisy occasion. Not warriors, but bards are the ones who become Kondrednaar. However some Kondrednaar might have levels in fighter or priest or any of the other classes.