

RED SHADOWS OF HERPA 1



ighteous war and devotion to Agrik's demonic servants, the V'hir, are the hallmarks of the *Order of the Red Shadows of Herpa*. The order traces its lineage to the bodyguards of the astrologer-priests of the Corani imperial court. Today they are politically powerful through the sponsorship of the clerics of the *Order of Herpa the Mace* and rich from the mineral wealth of Menekai. To most peasants, they personify all that is to be feared in Agrikans: easy rage and domination of the weak. To certain factions of Rethem's nobility, they represent the virtues of an Agrikan knight: fearlessness, dogged pursuit of victory, loyalty to those who earn it, and a firm belief that might is granted to those who deserve and use it. Although called to holy war against the Kubora of Peran, they also seek to avenge a recent betrayal that stains their honor.

ORIGINS AND HISTORY

Astrologers of all types fell from favor before the Corani Empire collapsed. The Herpans and their protectors (called Terahni) formed cells that worshiped in secret through the Theocracy of Tekhos that followed. Few who encountered these apparently respectable scholars suspected their Agrikan faith; those who did seldom lived long enough to report them to the Morgathian tribunals. The Herpans called their protectors the "Red Shadows" for the blood they spilled in service to the faith.

After shepherding their theology through the Interregnum, the Herpan priests and warriors saw a strong leader in Arlun the Barbarian; this began a tradition of support for the Rethemi crown. Later, the influence of King Nemiran led the Agrikan Church to recognize the Red Shadows as a military order. In 681, Nemiran granted them the fief of Menekai.

When Ezar's War began, the Red Shadows embraced the conflict with Kanday and its Laranian knights. After years of bloodshed, King Puril of Rethem attempted a bold invasion to break the stalemate. The Red Shadows sailed with Puril and led the charge that stormed Sarkum in 688; they were beside the king when he was mortally wounded. Back in Golotha, the Agrikan primate, the Herpans' spiritual leader, died unexpectedly and the order's rivals in the *Order of Mamaka* replaced him with one of their own. The Red Shadows immediately returned north, the loyalty and strength of the lay membership they had gathered on campaign giving pause to the new masters of the church. The accommodation reached with the Mamakans has held the church together for a generation, but the tensions remain.

CURRENT SITUATION

The Red Shadows took Themeson keep from the Thardic Republic in 708 at the behest of the Herpan hierarchy. Only six years later, they lost it to traitors from within their own order, a stain on their honor they cannot forgive. The Herpan priesthood, however, maintain a public peace with the schismatic priestesses who incited the traitors. They encourage the holders of Menekai to vent their rage on the Kubora of Keserin and Quarien forest hundreds instead. The priests say that when Peran is theirs and Kanday falls, the traitors at Themeson will pay for their offense and beg for death on the altars of Herpan temples. Some Red Shadows boil with rage at being denied their rightful revenge and strain at the leash they feel their priests have imposed upon them. For the first time in decades, perhaps centuries, the Herpan priests and their protecting warriors have different objectives.



Shield: Argent, a flaming mace proper and tenne.

Supporter: A wyvern erect azure.

Motto: *Stand in the blood of glory.*

Registry: Sanguine Saltire, 692.

The Peran Crusade

Although natural resources may have first sent the Red Shadows into the forested valleys around Menekai, it is theology that has driven them deeper into Peran. Their sponsoring clerics, the Order of Herpa the Mace, believe the Red Shadows are the swords that will exterminate the Kuboran tribes of Peran, securing the order land, wealth, and the favor of the crown. "First Peran, then Kanday, then everything else," is the tempting strategy the Herpan leaders whisper into the king's ear.

For the Red Shadows, a crusade against the barbarians is a worthy test. The Red Shadows share the savage tribesmen's delight in single combat and believe the unfathomable behavior of the Kubora speaks to Herpan mysticism. Some among the order say that the Kubora are a lost tribe of Agrikans who have simply forgotten their history. The Kubora could become an unstoppable army if only they would accept the truth of the Fiery Lord of Balgashang and the future he has written in the stars.

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