

# The Marshes and Bal Sardan

A sprawling marshland and the city within  
*vl: Emilio, 8-2017*

## Terrain

A network of small islands, sandbars, and natural dams through a murky marsh. It is fairly flat; hills and caves are rare or non-existent. Some masses are large enough for building or agriculture. Rare quicksand or pockets of gas can be dangerous.

## Flora

Trees, vines, marsh grass, vines, occasional patches of valuable plants, and more vines. Some plants may be dangerous. (Nasty spiked thickets of carnivorous vines, like a land anemone?)

## Fauna

Mostly bugs; some fish and small reptiles & amphibians. Hopping, goose-sized flightless birds (tiny emus?) feed on the bugs and grass. Large amphibians (plated salamanders?) and shellfish (giant crabs?) compete for the top of the food chain. The silty waters and vine thickets may conceal older, bigger, and nastier residents.

## Atmosphere

Cool and humid; fog is nearly ubiquitous, and drizzling rain is common. Strong winds and storms are rare, as the marsh's perimeter breaks up most weather fronts.

- *Looks like:* If you transplanted the Florida Everglades to the Oregon coast. Lush, foggy, and foreboding.
- *Sounds like:* Mostly quiet except for the buzz of insects, especially near wetter areas. Condensation drips under trees, and water gently sloshes on the shore. Occasional bird calls or rustling of creatures.

## Natural resources

- *Water:* Marsh water is usually not safe to drink. Most springs and freshwater currents are secret or guarded. Rain and fog can be collected.
- *Wood:* Difficult to harvest and not of very good quality. People tend to use it for small objects, especially decorative or ceremonial objects made from burls. Scrub tree branches are used in mud construction.
- *Stone:* Rarely used, as stone is difficult to gather in the swamp.
- *Vines:* Source of high-quality fiber for ropes and adobe, used in construction of buildings, bridges, and barges.

- *Hunting & gathering*: Small creatures and the flightless birds are common food. Some vines produce edible fruit or nuts. Rare plants may provide valuable medical or alchemical ingredients.
- *Minerals & ores*: Rare or non-existent, mostly because the terrain makes mining virtually impossible.
- *Mud*: Ubiquitous and used in building construction. Dried vine fibers are mixed in for a kind of adobe.
- *Clay*: Fairly common, but still must be sought out; used for pottery and medicine. Skilled craftsmen know where to collect rare, metallic ore-rich clays that can be processed into decent-quality arrowheads, spear tips, and daggers.
- *Mysterious resource*: A valuable, plant-based resource lies deep in the marsh. The source and methods are virtually unknown to outsiders, and even the knowledgeable are still learning about it. (Rare swamp tree sap or root that is a powerful medicine? Fuel? Alchemical material?)

## Grimoire

- *Elemental*: The marsh is a boon for water & earth magic, offering many materials to manipulate. Air is somewhat useful; fire and lightning are uncommon (though pockets of swamp gas may be useful).
- *Mental*: The marsh is sparsely-populated, so mental powers are of limited use. A few animals are sophisticated enough to be controlled.
- *Arcane*: The marsh is deep and mysterious. Long-past ancestors or Immortals may have used it to hide or dispose of Arcane objects, practices, or worse. Arcane magic will usually operate normally, but some obscure areas may hold surprises.

## Residents

Humans have only have one major settlement, Bal Saar'dn or Bal Sardan, as that is most of the habitable land. Some people are savvy or harmonious enough to survive in the marshes outside Bal Sardan; others may be foolish enough to only think they can.

*Demonym*: Sardan (singular or plural)

## Composition

Bal Sardan is fairly ethnically and culturally homogenous, as they are isolated and virtually no outsiders emigrate there.

## History

Generations ago, Sardan and Noak were of the same desert tribe. They were masters of the sand and rock, making a living there that others would not even attempt, and this gave them security.

However, time was not on their side: the shifting desert, increasingly harsh weather, and brigands & invaders began to change everything their society was built on.

The desert could no longer nurture and protect them, and the great tribe made a decision to find a better home elsewhere. This disruption and stress began to reveal divisions in their society: the adventurous felt it was time to imitate the shifting sands by beginning a nomadic life beyond the desert, letting movement and adaptability be their strength. These became the Noak.

Others sought more security and stability, taking inspiration from the hidden, rocky canyons that protected them in the desert. They sought a remote and sheltered home, one that - like the desert - would appear hostile to outsiders but could nurture their hardy people. They found this in the vast marshes and founded Bal Sardan.

Over time, both peoples have nearly forgotten their lost kin. Some legends and artifacts remain of their shared desert past, though, tickling the curiosity of historians and storytellers.

[3:38 PM] ray\_ark: it was desert refugees settlement

[3:38 PM] ray\_ark: from main island

[3:38 PM] ray\_ark: thats why the architecture is still look desertish though it was build with mud

[3:43 PM] ray\_ark: btw bal sardan people tries to blend their culture with their environment

[3:44 PM] spanker: like in an aesthetic sense, or in a more spiritual or philosophical one?

[3:45 PM] spanker: e.g. in the desert they were more nomadic (early Noak?) because the desert sands shift, wind blows, they draw inspiration from that

[3:46 PM] spanker: but in the swamp they became more rooted and interconnected, like their environment

[3:49 PM] ray\_ark: hmm

[3:49 PM] ray\_ark: more cultural and spiritual

[3:49 PM] ray\_ark: but they bring most of their desert culture

[3:50 PM] ray\_ark: (deity, religion, architecture, philosophy)

[3:50 PM] spanker: how many generations have they been there?

[3:50 PM] spanker: in the swamp

[3:50 PM] ray\_ark: idk, but needs to be more than 7 or so

[3:50 PM] ray\_ark: maybe 10 ?

[3:50 PM] ray\_ark: maybe 5

[3:50 PM] ray\_ark: idk

[3:50 PM] spanker: long enough that they're just traditions, though

[3:50 PM] spanker: it ain't ol' granpap sittin' around tellin' stories of the sandy days

## Culture

The Sardan ideal is harmony within and stability outside. Over generations, the marsh's intricate waterways taught them the interconnectedness of the world, and the strong, far-reaching vines showed them the value of communal strength. They have a spiritual bond with the marsh and seek to grow their city slowly and carefully, for both the marsh's safety and their own.

*They typically like:* harmony, stability, modesty, honor, co-operation, honesty, holistic evaluation, fair negotiation & judgement, and respect for heritage.

*They typically dislike:* risk, greed, individual ambition, flashy dress or behavior, bragging, snap judgements, and quick fixes.

## Society

Clans are the core socio-economic structure and are comprised of nuclear families living in proximity. Families select a head to represent them in clan meetings, and clans then select a

representative for the city's political assembly, the Stone Table. Leaders are selected for their ability to represent their clan's & family's needs while respecting Sardan traditions and the other clans.

The Sardan do not have a dominant social class, and excessive ambition is frowned upon. Clan influence is judged by their ability to provide family stability in balance with the city's needs; clans that benefit the city as a whole (via trade deals or innovative resource development) are considered the most influential.

There is no dominant gender, but women sometimes carry more influence at the clan level. Inter-marriage includes complex clan negotiations to decide which clan the couple will belong to, and what compensation the other clan should receive for the loss of labor.

*The Stone Table:* it's literally a stone table for clan representatives. Or half of a table, at least, as it's a half-circle with an uneven edge. It's eye-catching because it's one of the only things in Bal Sardan made of stone - and sandstone, at that, which definitely does not exist in the marsh.

## Structures

Adobe, clay, and mud-thatch are the primary building materials. Very little wood is used due to their desert traditions and the marsh wood's drawbacks, so it usually only seen as doors or railings on nicer buildings. Sardan building materials, aesthetics, and the marsh's instability result in few buildings over two stories tall.

Families tend to live in cozy mud-thatch huts with half-high adobe foundations, while full adobe buildings are used for craftspeople, guilds, public houses, and the like. Buildings are rectilinear, but in a jumbled layout; the city developed in an organic fashion with no dominant street plan.

(Typical Sardan buildings look similar to the traditional desert dwellings of North Africa or the Mideast/West Asia, but made with darker & ragged swamp materials: flat adobe walls plastered over with clay or mud, with upper walls and roofs made of thatch or mud-thatch. Buildings have slightly raised foundations to avoid flooding.)

## Farming

The Sardan have scant farming traditions because of their desert origins. Spices and medicinal or ceremonial plants are cultivated, but only in the past couple generations have they attempted organized agriculture to feed their growing population. It is especially difficult because of the rarity of fresh water.

## Livestock

The Sardan's desert ancestors drove small packs of domesticated creatures (goats?) during their seasonally-nomadic life. These traditions continue as small herds kept by clans or neighborhoods.

## Food

Livestock, marsh-meat, and fish are the main proteins; strong cheese is made from the livestock's milk. Herbs are frequently cultivated by families, as Sardan value strongly-flavored foods. The dominant starch is a wild root (think taro or cassava) that some have begun to cultivate. Wild vegetables & fruit are collected from the marsh, including nut-like legumes (like peanuts or chickpeas). Salt and grains are rare, and these are sought from traders.

Bal Sardan wells are free for clans and respected guests, but they charge outsiders for fresh water due to its scarcity. Rainwater collectors and fog condensers (dense nets with a trough below) provide a significant portion of their water.

## Art

There are few strong aesthetic traditions or trends in Bal Sardan; the difficulty of marsh life leaves little room for artistic exploration. However, spiritual traditions result in exquisitely-crafted clan altars that all families contribute to.

Music is usually performed in duos or trios of percussion and woodwind. It is typically enjoyed by clans and families, and public performance is only for celebrations (i.e. no street minstrels).

Clothes tend to be simple, and modest decorations signify their clan.

## Medicine

Medical care in Bal Sardan is not as advanced as in other cities. Most common illnesses and injuries can be handled by local healers, but they have limited knowledge of sophisticated medicines or surgeries. They do have a few special and desirable medicines produced from plants only available in the marsh, especially for treating fevers and open wounds.

Sardan may seek outside help to treat severe problems, but their reluctance to depend on outsiders may delay treatment.

## Grimoire & spiritual practices

*Which Immortals do they worship, if any?*

The Sardan have retained the earth and air grimoire of their desert ancestors, primarily using it to aid in defense and cultivation. Their deepest traditions include some Arcane magic that is very rarely used to divine the future or defend from magical attack, but this is usually hidden from outsiders.

They do not have water grimoire traditions, but recent generations have begun to study it in hopes of improving their water supply and reducing the marsh's dangers.

## Crafts & technology

Sardan goods tend to be practical: clothes, simple arms & armor, marine equipment (small boats, rope, fishing nets), and building materials. Sardan vine fiber rope is considered some of the

strongest and most durable in the land, otherwise little is of notable quality. Their arms and armor are not very advanced, but sufficient for their needs.

The Sardan are not known as technological innovators, and they have few alchemists or tinkers. Nonetheless, they still value innovation if it aids their agricultural development.

## Economy & trade

Modest production and trading occurs in Bal Sardan, but they are not considered economically ambitious. The Stone Table will occasionally vote on whether to pool clan money for the public benefit, such as for infrastructure or defense. Otherwise, families and clans tend to spend and invest conservatively.

The scarcity of land and building materials, clan-centric society, and Sardan wariness towards outsiders means purchasing a house may be difficult for newcomers. Seeking favor with some clans can make it possible.

External trade is modest, as Bal Sardan is self-sufficient in most respects - and few traders wish to venture into the marsh with valuable goods. Clans tend to provide for their own food, but one or two farmers have large enough crops to sell surplus. However, there are still some valuable trade opportunities with Bal Sardan:

- *Tools*: the rarity of stone and metal results in mediocre tools, so they seek better quality ones from other areas.
- *Arms & armor*: similar to tools, arms & armor are desired for their guards.
- *Medicine*: they gather rare marsh plants to produce a few medicines that are highly prized.
- *Rope*: vine fiber rope rivals the quality of any other, and it and nets are sought by mariners.
- *Spices*: Sardan spices are unique and of high quality, perfect for adventurous Yorkhill chefs. However, they lack salt and seek it in trade.
- *Clay*: the marsh has great quantities of clay, but it is not usually worth transporting in quantity. Still, some ore-rich clays are unique and desired by alchemists and potters.
- *Water*: the Sardan will pay decently for fresh water, if anyone bothers to bring it in.

## Aggression & defense

The Sardan ideal is to seek stability within the world, so they are never the aggressor in a conflict. Their isolation and limited trade tends to reduce the chance of conflict with the outside world.

Their non-aggression does not mean pacifism, however. They retain a defense force, supported by all clans, that will swiftly respond to attacks by humans or creatures alike. Occasionally, persistent bandits or predators may prompt a counter-attack, but they are wary of stretching their guards too thin. In these cases, the Stone Table may approve the hiring of mercenaries or adventurers to end the conflict.

Clan defenders tend to use modest Sardan arms and armor, but they are tough and dedicated. They favor lighter armor to retain agility and reduce weight in the marshes. The Bal Sardan city guard is comprised of the best clan defenders, who use imported equipment of a much higher quality.

## Crime & justice

Crime is uncommon in Bal Sardan, and is usually perpetrated by unscrupulous outsiders. Internal crime tends to be minor, such as a shoplifting youth or less-than-honest trading deal. Clans seek harmony between them, but on rare occasion a family may turn ambitious.

Minor internal crimes are settled between clans in defense of their reputation. Major crimes, or those committed by outsiders, will be brought to the Stone Table.

The Sardan look down upon incarceration and corporal punishment as against their naturalistic view of the world, and consider them excessive save for severe crimes. Punishment is usually forced labor appropriate to the crime, such as repairing damage or assisting a harvest; refusal may result in punishment by their clan. Unrepentant criminals may eventually be banished, but this is very rare.