

INTERACTING WITH THE SHOANTI

This adventure assumes that the PCs follow the path of least resistance as they attempt to earn the trust and assistance of the Shoanti. When they first enter the Cinderlands, chances are good that they have limited knowledge about the territorial tribes, but their earlier interaction with Thousand Bones gives them an advantage, especially if they use magic like *sending* or *dream* to contact the shaman beforehand. Even if they arrive at the Kallow Mounds unannounced, Thousand Bones quickly learns of their arrival and welcomes the PCs into the camp with open arms—assuming the PCs helped recover Gaekhen's body in "Edge of Anarchy."

Attempting to contact the Lyrune-Quah or the Sklar-Quah before the PCs have made peaceful contact with the Skoan-Quah dramatically increases the difficulty of the adventure, since the Sklar-Quah react to intruders with violence and the Lyrune-Quah are quite adept at avoiding encounters entirely. In this event, divination spells and wandering monsters can be your friend. Use the results of spells like *divination* or *commune* to guide the PCs toward the adventure's next part. If they wander too long, they could encounter a band of Skoan-Quah boneslayers who can serve as guides to the Kallow Mounds—if it's not too heavy-handed for your taste, these boneslayers could even have been sent out to find the PCs after their shaman Thousand Bones received a vision of their coming.

Of course, if the PCs seem bent on remaining hostile with the Shoanti (or if they failed to deliver Gaekhen to Thousand Bones), you can run this adventure in a more straightforward manner—give the Sun Shaman of Fireford an ancient scroll or stone tablet that contains the required information the PCs need to send them on to Scarwall to retrieve the sword *Serethial*, at which point they'll be able to win this information after a long and bloody battle against the Shoanti tribes.

assassins; see page 15 for their statistics). Try to impress upon the PCs the fact that there's little they can do in Korvosa at this time to save the city—that their skills are more useful in the Cinderlands. Until they learn from the Sun Shamans of the Sklar-Quah precisely what it is that's granted Ileosa such power, skirmishes and other actions taken in Korvosa itself are little more than a waste of time and resources, and only serve to give Ileosa and her draconic patron more time to cement their rule.

PART TWO: CLAN OF THE SKULL

By the time the PCs venture into the Cinderlands, they should know that their first target is a place called the Kallow Mounds, the heart of Skoan-Quah territory and the home of Thousand Bones, one of the few Shoanti willing

to speak with *tshamek* (oustiders). Neolandus knows that the Kallow Mounds are located about 50 miles east of Kaer Maga, as does any PC who can make a DC 25 Knowledge (geography) check.

The Kallow Mounds

Although the Skoan-Quah are not as warlike as the Sklar-Quah, they still remain distrustful of strangers, particularly when *tshamek* encroach upon the ancestral burial grounds at the Kallow Mounds. The Skoan-Quah mark their territories with large rock cairns topped with animal skulls—markers that double as both signposts and warnings to deter strangers. As the PCs approach the Kallow Mounds, these cairns grow more and more frequent.

As soon as the PCs get within a half-mile of the Kallow Mounds, they are intercepted by a group of four Skoan-Quah boneslayers—warriors who patrol Shoanti burial mounds and are trained from an early age to be particularly effective against the undead. The four boneslayers are somewhat surprised to see *tshamek*, but greet them nonetheless. Their demands for what the PCs are doing approaching their campsite aren't completely rude and hostile, and as long as the PCs state their desires plainly, the boneslayers agree to lead them into their camp. Mentioning Thousand Bones or Gaekhen sets them at ease, for the old shaman has told his people of how the PCs retrieved the young warrior's body for him.

The Kallow Mounds themselves are a collection of hundreds of cairns, the burial sites for all three Cinderlands Shoanti tribes for the past 300 years. The Skoan-Quah are the caretakers of these cairns, and typically camp at a small dale on the westernmost edge of the mounds. At any one time, approximately 75 Skoan-Quah barbarians dwell in this camp, with a constant influx of new nomads maintaining this level as smaller tribes move on. Most of these nomads are 1st-level barbarian humans, but there's always at least a dozen boneslayers in camp as well.

The chieftain of the Kallow Mounds, and of all the Skoan-Quah, is a quiet and gaunt man named **One-Life** (CN male human ranger 9). He has lived in the Kallow Mounds for his entire adult life—unlike his tribe, who remain nomadic, Chief One-Life dwells permanently in this small camp with his direct family. Another permanent resident of the camp is an elderly woman known as **Ash Dancer** (CN female human ranger 2/cleric 9), the tribe's eldest and most experienced shaman and the leader of the boneslayers. The Kallow Mounds are further protected by a crippled dragonne named **Wicked-Claws** (N 12 HD dragonne, no fly speed). The dragonne lost his wings to a bulette some years ago, and Chief One-Life saved the proud creature from certain death. No longer able to soar the skies above, Wicked-Claws has adopted the Skoan-Quah and can often be seen sunning atop a cairn not far from Chief One-Life's tent. Finally, the

Kallow Mounds are also the current home of **Thousand Bones** (CG male human cleric 8), one of the Skoan-Quah historians. Since he and his followers withdrew from Korvosa in the face of increasing hostility, Thousand Bones has become more and more concerned with the future. He knows that the trouble in Korvosa has weakened the city, and he knows his Shoanti kin (particularly those among the Sklar-Quah) are eager to strike when they perceive Korvosa's defenses are down, but he also knows that—even crippled—Korvosa can field a potent army. If the Shoanti declare war now, there will be no victors, only tragedy on both sides of the Storval Rise.

Although the initial contact with the Skoan-Quah could be tense, these tensions fall away once Thousand Bones arrives on the scene. His ready smile and welcoming calls do much to set the other Shoanti at ease, and their initial hostility gives way to curiosity—many of the Skoan-Quah have never seen an honest-to-goodness *tshamek* before. Thousand Bones waves aside any talk of Queen Ileosa or Kazavon for now, telling the PCs that he has similar worries of his own but that such a discussion should be held at the proper location and time—in this case, Thousand Bones suggests, during the evening's Bone Council fire.

Until evening, Thousand Bones arranges for a guest yurt for the PCs to rest in. He has plenty of food and water delivered to the tent, and even visits the PCs himself for some time—he's eager to hear about their adventures since they recovered Gaekhen's body, and if he learns that the man who dishonored the young brave has been punished, he nods in appreciation of the justice. If the PCs ask, Thousand Bones is willing to guide them to the cairn in which Gaekhen's ashes now rest.

Feuding Guests

The PCs are not the only guests destined to visit the Kallow Mounds this day. At some point after the PCs have arrived and are at rest in their yurt, or perhaps as they are returning from Gaekhen's cairn, another visitor arrives—a brash young hero of the Sklar-Quah named Krojun Eats-What-He-Kills. Krojun, along with an honor guard of a half-dozen Burn Riders, arrives at the Kallow Mounds for the same reason every other Shoanti visits—someone important has died. In this case, they bring the body of Berak, a Sklar-Quah hero known for leading many successful attacks against orc aggressors from Urglin. Krojun was no friend of Berak, but he was asked to bring the hero's body south to the Kallow Mounds to join with the other heroes by his chieftain. Krojun knew better than to speak ill at the time, but the journey has left him bitter and cranky.

When Krojun arrives at the Kallow Mounds, the Skoan-Quah silently accept Berak's body and begin preparing it for interment. Krojun has little interest in staying for

SHOANTI PCS

It's possible that some of the PCs are Shoanti. It's even possible they might have chosen to be members of one of the Cinderlands tribes. In this case, that the PC has spent so much time in the company of *tshamek* means the Sklar-Quah are likely to see him as *tshamek* as well. Being accepted back into a Shoanti tribe could add an interesting layer to such a PC's quest, but it shouldn't suffice as a shortcut to avoid having to earn the Sklar-Quah's respect.

Nevertheless, if there is at least one Shoanti character in the party, the group gains one respect point (see page 26).

the ceremony, but before he leaves he notices that the Skoan-Quah have other visitors, either by seeing the PCs directly or simply by noticing that the guest yurt has been prepared and is in use. He quickly seeks out Chief One-Life and demands to know who visits, and when he discovers the visitors are the PCs, he seeks them out, his rage and indignation growing.

Thousand Bones is quick to come to the PCs' side before Krojun confronts them. He warns the PCs that Krojun is a hero to the Sklar-Quah, and that blood spilt here would undermine the already shaky situation between the tribes. When Krojun does arrive, he spends a few moments sizing up the PCs with a sneer before turning to address Chief One-Life: "Why do the Skoan-Quah harbor *tshamek* trespassers?"

As Chief One-Life struggles to find an explanation that won't further enrage the towering visitor, Thousand Bones nods at the giant's words as though considering them carefully, but then responds sharply, "Tell me, Krojun, when did the Sklar-Quah become judges of who trespasses on the Kallow Mounds where the ashes of our fathers lie?"

"Your words change the question, Thousand Bones," answers the Shoanti hero with a snort. "These ones bring trouble to the Cinderlands, and you know it. The coming days shall reveal to us all who is right about them."

"Perhaps," answers Thousand Bones. "But not today, and not here. Would you have word of Berak's burial tainted by bloodshed get back to your Sun Shaman?"

Krojun pauses, the cords in his neck straining, but then he exhales and grins. "You misunderstand me, Thousand Bones. My grief has wounded my words. But see to it that no *tshamek* defiles our memories here." His smile broadens as he pulls a thin leather loop from one of his packs. "Certainly, though, guests of the Skoan-Quah must be brave to come this far. You wouldn't mind if I tested the courage and strength of your guests, would you?"

A DC 25 Knowledge (local) check is enough to recognize that the leather loop is a prop for a Shoanti game known as "sredna." Thousand Bones looks to the PCs with a shrug, indicating that this choice is theirs. Only one PC need

RESPECT POINTS

This adventure is all about earning the respect of the Sklar-Quah. As the PCs accomplish goals during this adventure, they are awarded respect points. Keep a tally of these points, as at the adventure's end, this total will determine the degree of their success or failure.

accept the challenge—if none do, Krojun laughs heartily and returns his loop to his pack. “It is a wonder they made it here at all, Thousand Bones,” he says, and with one final glance at the PCs, he turns to join his fellow braves while they see their brother off before they leave for Sklar-Quah lands themselves.

A “Friendly” Game of Sredna

In sredna, two opponents face one another on their hands and knees with their foreheads spaced just over a foot apart. The contest requires a thin cord of leather tied in a loop. One end of the loop is placed behind the ears of each competitor so that the players are bound to one another. When the game begins, each player stares his opponent in the eye while slowly attempting to crawl backwards. The resulting tug-of-war results in extreme pain as the leather digs into the soft part of the back of the neck and skull. At some point, one of the competitors relents, acknowledging defeat by bowing his head, causing the strap to roll over the top. Sredna games typically only last for seconds, but two evenly matched opponents might duel much longer. In such cases, standoffs and ties are frequent.

When a sredna match begins, each player must spend three “breaths” (3 rounds) staring into each other's eyes before attempting to pull. Pulling before the 4th round is an immediate disqualification. Intimidation and patience are almost as important tools to win sredna matches as is strength. During these initial 3 rounds, the players make opposed Intimidate checks by growling, gnashing teeth, and spitting insults. Each time a player wins one of these checks, he gains two sredna points, and in the case of a tied Intimidate check, both players gain one sredna point.

On the 4th round, each character makes an Initiative check to determine when he moves. On his turn, a character may opt to tug or dig in.

Tug: The characters make opposed Strength checks. A defending character who dug in on his previous turn receives a +4 bonus on this check. If the tugging character wins the check, he gains two sredna points. If he fails (or if the results are evenly matched), his opponent gains two sredna points instead.

Dig In: The character readies himself to withstand his opponent's tug, he gains a +4 bonus on his next Strength check to resist a tug.

At the end of each round, total up each player's sredna points. This is the DC each player must make on a Fortitude save to continue the match. A player who fails this save collapses and loses the match. If both players fail their saving throw, the match is declared a draw. Characters who possess the Endurance feat gain a +4 bonus on this saving throw.

If the match lasts longer than 6 rounds, Krojun activates his greater rage to give himself an additional edge over the PC; he also activates his rage in response to any PC doing the same.

Krojun respects bravery, and even if he beats his opponent, he good-naturedly claps the PC on the shoulder and proclaims, “Almost as good as an aurochs calf. Nothing to be too ashamed about.” With a hearty laugh, he reclaims his strap and returns to his kin to see to their brother's burial. The party earns one respect point for this feat.

If, on the other hand, the game is a draw, Krojun says nothing. He regards his competitor with narrowed eyes, then with a curt nod returns to the funeral. The party earns two respect points.

If the PC beats Krojun, he topples to the ground with a roar of rage and rolls about in the dust for a moment. By the time the barbarian has regained his feet, his roar has turned to laughter. “You pull like an aurochs dam in heat, little *tshamek*. Well done!” He finishes his compliment with a quick nod of the head and another grin before rejoining his brothers. The party earns three respect points.

Krojun Eats-What-He-Kills

Krojun is a symbol and hero of the Sklar-Quah. As a young brave, Krojun sought the means to enact revenge upon an orc champion named Kyrust Chiefkiller, a Rotten Tongue marauder from Urglin who had long organized brutal raids upon Krojun's tribe. Desperate, Krojun sought the aid of a reclusive Shoanti sorcerer who lived alone deep in the Mindspin Mountains. The hermit sent Krojun on several punishing tests, promising him that if he succeeded he would earn the power he needed to defeat Kyrust. The tests were harrowing indeed, designed in part to train Krojun in the ways of the Thunder and Fang fighting style, and it took Krojun many months to complete them. In the end, he stood before the sorcerer in triumph. When Krojun demanded his reward, however, the sorcerer responded only that he had no reward to give and vanished. Krojun's rage was great, and when he returned to his people empty-handed, he found that his entire tribe had been enslaved by Kyrust. Krojun tracked the slave caravan for days, finally catching up to it a few miles from Urglin's gates, and in a fantastic display of rage and power, single-handedly defeated the orcs and their leader Kyrust. It was only as Krojun claimed the orc's *belt of giant strength* as both a trophy and a symbol of the Sklar-Quah's power over the orcs that he realized the truth—that strange old sorcerer

had indeed given him a gift: the gift of rage. Without the skills and strength Krojun honed in completing the tasks the sorcerer had set him to, he would surely have fallen in such a combat as he had just won.

Today, Krojun is at the forefront of the Sun Clan's efforts to strike back at the orcs and *tshamek* who have hammered away at the Shoanti for centuries. The little remaining space upon his rippling muscles that has not already been tattooed or branded is frequently plastered with war paint in symbols of Shoanti pride.

When Krojun learns of the PCs' entry into the Cinderlands, he quickly becomes obsessed with them. In his interactions with the orcs of the north and the *tshamek* of the south, Krojun has noted that, despite his tribe's teachings, the *tshamek* are not as savage or cruel as the orcs. He has seen much of his own people reflected in the workings of *tshamek* bravery, tenacity, and strength, but he has not yet been fully convinced that they deserve his respect. With the PCs, he hopes to test them, to learn more about their ways, and to hopefully prevent what he believes will be a disastrous war, should his people march on Korvosa.

If Krojun survives to the end of the adventure, and the PCs pass their initiation into the Sun Clan, Krojun becomes a lifelong friend and ally, calling the PCs his *nalharest* (brothers). This will be difficult to achieve, however, as Krojun seeks to challenge the PCs several times during the adventure, and he does not pull his punches.

KROJUN EATS-WHAT-HE-KILLS CR 12

Male human barbarian 12

N Medium humanoid

Init +1; **Senses** Listen +0, Spot +0

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 10, flat-footed 16
(+6 armor, +2 Dex, -2 rage, +2 shield)

hp 155 (12 HD; 12d12+72)

Fort +14, **Ref** +6, **Will** +7

Defensive Abilities improved uncanny dodge, trap sense +4;

DR 3/—

OFFENSE

Spd 50 ft.

Melee +1 *thundering earth breaker* +18/+14/+8 (2d6+7/×3) and +1 *klar* +18 (1d6+4)

Special Attacks greater rage 4/day

TACTICS

Before Combat Only if Krojun knows he is about to face great opposition does he apply his *orange Shoanti war paint*.

During Combat Krojun charges fearlessly into battle, preferring to fight toe-to-toe against foes to make full use of his Thunder and Fang fighting style. Krojun is fond of screaming his own name whenever he lands a critical hit against a foe.

Morale Headstrong, Krojun has courage to spare. He is not a fool, however, and withdraws if vastly outnumbered or overmatched, or upon being reduced to 20 hit points or less. Only when raging does he fight to the death.

Base Statistics AC 20, touch 12, flat-footed 18; **hp** 119; **Fort** +12, **Will** +4; **Melee** +1 *thundering earth breaker* +15/+10/+5 (2d6+4/×3) and +1 *klar* +15 (1d6+2); **Str** 16, **Con** 16; **Grp** +20; **Skills** Climb +15, Jump +30

STATISTICS

Str 22, **Dex** 15, **Con** 22, **Int** 8, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 12

Base Atk +12; **Grp** +19

Feats Endurance, Thunder and Fang, Track, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (earthbreaker), Weapon Focus (klar)

Skills Intimidate +16, Jump +32, Ride +17, Survival +15

Languages Common,

Shoanti

SQ fast movement, illiteracy

Combat Gear

potion of cure serious wounds (2);

Other Gear +2 *hide shirt*,

+1 *thundering earth breaker*,

+1/+1 *klar*, *belt of giant*

strength +4, *boots of striding and springing*, *orange Shoanti war paint* (3 doses)

The Bone Council Fire

As night falls, Thousand Bones invites the PCs to join him at the center of the camp. The majority of the other Skoan-Quah retire early to their tents out of respect for the Bone Council Fire—the only



KROJUN

NEW FEAT: THUNDER AND FANG

You have mastered the ancient Shoanti fighting style of Thunder and Fang, allowing you to fight with increased effectiveness when wielding an earth breaker and a klar. As you swing at foes with Thunder (your earth breaker), you slash at them with the Fang (your klar).

Prerequisites: Str 15, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (earth breaker), Weapon Focus (klar)

Benefit: As long as you are fighting with an earth breaker and a klar (and you make attacks with your klar as your offhand attack), you can fight with both weapons as if you were wielding a double weapon, and retain your shield bonus to your Armor Class granted by your klar. Treat your klar as a light weapon for the purposes of determining your total penalty to attack.

Special: A fighter may select Thunder and Fang as one of his fighter bonus feats.

people present are the PCs and their allies, Thousand Bones, Chief One-Life, and Ash Dancer. During the council, both One-Life and Ash Dancer remain quiet, letting Thousand Bones do all the talking. As Thousand Bones speaks, Ash Dancer sprinkles the fire with a greenish-brown herbal dust from a weathered pouch. A few moments later, the fumes encapsulate anyone who remains by the fire; the effects cause a slight blurring of the vision and a feeling of ease, but have no actual game effects. Thousand Bones's speech to the PCs is short and direct, as is his way.

"You have already done my people a great favor by returning the body of one of our warriors. I sense now you come to me to ask a favor in return, yet know that by doing this favor, you are helping us all. The Skoan-Quah are a peaceful people, yet we are also all but shunned by our kin. Our willingness to mix with *tshamek* shames many of my brothers and sisters in the other quahs. Only their respect for our tradition of guarding and protecting the dead of all Shoanti keep them from open hostility against us. My words do not reach their ears when I advise against war on Korvosa. They hear tales of the city in flames, of its king dead, of disease ravaging its people, and they see this as the time foretold. A time when the Shoanti can ride down from these burning lands and reclaim greener lands to the south, lands that were once ours. Yet war is not good for us. My brothers do not see that, even crippled, Korvosa remains a powerful enemy. It is best to make your enemies your friends, do you not think? Yet my brothers do not listen to these words. They see weakness, they demand action.

"Yet you could not know of the coming war. You come to me with a different favor. Speak of what you wish of me, and perhaps we may find our needs are the same."

Thousand Bones listens to the PCs' tale quietly and somberly, answering questions they might pose him as detailed below.

Tell us about the Shoanti who dwelt by the river before Korvosa was founded. "This was many generations ago, yet it is a wound that has never healed. My brothers among the Skoan-Quah have forgiven, but our numbers are small. We were once a part of the Sklar-Quah, yet our readiness to forgive marked us traitors and we were exiled from that clan. In the generations that passed we grew more at peace with our role here—there is beauty in the Cinderlands, if you know where to look. We have abandoned our memories of lives below the rise in a way the Sklar-Quah have not. Those memories poison them. They do not see that this land is theirs. They only see lands that their ancestors called home. If you seek more wisdom of those times, you must seek out the keepers of words among the Sklar-Quah. You must seek the words of a Sun Shaman."

What can you tell us of Midnight's Teeth? Thousand Bones' brow furrows at this question and he appears to be deep in thought for a moment before answering. "The name is not unfamiliar, yet I know little more than that I have heard it mentioned but twice by Sun Shamans of the Sklar-Quah. Always in reference to the past, and to what you now call Korvosa."

Can we simply walk into a Sklar-Quah camp and ask them for aid? "Sadly, no. You are *tshamek*. Outlanders. Rightful or not, the Sklar-Quah will see you as the children of those who murdered their ancestors and drove them from the green lands. The Sun Clan does not like outsiders at the best of times. And less so now that war against Korvosa is on every brave's lips."

Tell us more of this talk of war on Korvosa. "It pains my heart. Many will die, Shoanti and *tshamek* alike, if such a tragedy comes to pass. The Sklar-Quah talk of a great Burn Run from the Storval Rise all the way to the heart of *tshamek* lands, to Korvosa. The Sklar-Quah's mood is very dark. This is hard for the Skoan-Quah. We have made paper with Korvosa, agreeing that we will not make war. Yet after the Sklar-Quah raid, the *tshamek* will come north, led by your new queen. They will kill many Shoanti brothers and sisters, including Skoan-Quah. The winter will be harsh and many giants will be coming south to take advantage of the loss of braves.

Can you talk to the Sklar-Quah for us? You're not *tshamek*. "Alas, this will not work. They would ask us why we want to know of such things. We would have to tell them. They will not give us secrets to tell *tshamek*."

Is there any way the Sun Clan will stop treating us as *tshamek*? "You must understand. The Sklar-Quah are very certain of these things. They may come to respect lone *tshamek* after many days of seeing them act honorably, but

what you ask is for the Sun Shaman to lay bare his quah's heart. The deepest memories of his clan. These memories are not for *tshamek*. Not since Skurak the Reborn have the members of the Sklar-Quah unbanished a man and welcomed him into their quah.

Skurak? How did he manage it? Thousand Bones smiles enigmatically for a brief instant before going on. "The legend of Skurak is of a great warrior and greater traitor to the Sklar-Quah. He slew his brother, a brave of even greater courage. To the Sklar-Quah, family is purity—crimes against the family are the greatest a man can commit. Although Skurak claimed the death was an accident as he and his brother were hunting, others spoke of murder spawned of jealous rage. Skurak was declared a *tshamek* by the Sun Shaman and cast out. But before Skurak left he said he would be born again and return to his tribe. This he did. He went to the killing grounds of the great Cindermaid the Clan-Eater. Skurak walked up to the beast carrying only his dagger. Without fear he dove inside the beast and cut his way out. He returned to the clan and declared he had been reborn, and had left his misdeeds behind in the cleansing fire of Cindermaid's belly. The legend says the Sun Shaman accepted this and Skurak's time as a *tshamek* was spoken of no more."

What is Cindermaid? "A legend, yet one of flesh and blood. Cindermaid dwells on the northernmost edge of Shoanti lands, in the place where Shoanti and orc and giant vie for life and water. His hunting grounds are known as the Feeding Grounds of the Quah-Kael, the land of the Clan Eater. The orcs of Urglin avoid this region; the giants of the north hunt only on its edges. Within, few have returned to tell tales, but those who do speak of a mountain that crawls and of fire that roars."

So this is a way for us to earn the Sklar-Quah's favor? To be eaten by and then escape from Cindermaid? "Perhaps. Yet this route is more complex than you suspect. The Sklar-Quah would never believe the words of *tshamek* on such a matter, nor would they risk travel to the Feeding Grounds just to see foolish outlanders attempt to recreate legends. I could come with you, if my bones were not so tired, yet I am Skoan-Quah. My words would hold little light with the Sun Shaman, I fear."

Here Thousand Bones grows silent for a moment, and Ash Dancer speaks for the first time. "They could bring a Truthspeaker, Thousand Bones."

What is a Truthspeaker? "There are those among our people who, after living lives without lie and never speaking falsehood, have earned the title of Truthspeaker. It is a rare honor, one that requires many years of chastity, of self-control, of introspection. There are Truthspeakers among the Sklar-Quah, yet that does not help you. Were

that the Skoan-Quah had one. Yet The Skoan-Quah and the Sklar-Quah are not the only Shoanti in the Cinderlands. I have heard tell that the Lyrune-Quah, who dwell in the shadow of the Wyvern Mountains far to the northwest, have Truthspeakers among them. If you could perform the ritual of rebirth at the Feeding Grounds of the Quah-Kael in the presence of a Truthspeaker, his words would be all the proof you need to secure an audience with the Sklar-Quah."

Where do we even find the Moon clan? "The Lyrune-Quah are nomads. This time of year, they gather at a place sacred to them, a place called the House of the Moon at the northeasternmost edge of the Wyvern Mountains. Yet I fear that they will distrust you as *tshamek* as well, unless you bring to them proof of your honesty and need."



THOUSAND BONES



TOO MANY CHAINED QUESTS?

Warning! The structure of this adventure may not be to the liking of some groups. “A History of Ashes” is designed both to introduce several NPCs and to show off the Shoanti and the Cinderlands, but some players get annoyed by overly complex quests. In this adventure, your players need to secure an audience with a Sklar-Quah Sun Shaman to learn what he knows about Kazavon. But in order to do that, the PCs are expected to undertake a large number of preliminary quests, each one granting a reward that allows the next stage in the chain of quests to occur.

You know your group better than I do. If your players balk or resist the concept of being forced to undertake a specific line of quests in a specific order, you might want to consider removing a stage or two from the quest chain in “A History of Ashes,” or perhaps changing the order around. For example, rather than asking the PCs to go to the Acropolis of the Thrallkeepers to get the Spherewalker’s Mark just so they can prove to the Lyrune-Quah that they can be trusted, perhaps Thousand Bones simply sends the PCs directly to the Lyrune-Quah. Once the PCs get there, Truthspeaker Akram can agree to witness the PCs’ encounter with Cindermaid only if they first do him a favor by escorting one of his nephews to the acropolis so he can receive the Spherewalker’s Mark. You can even just skip the acropolis entirely, setting it aside as an extended encounter for the PCs to explore along the way—perhaps the acropolis is nothing more than the closest shelter at hand when an unexpected emberstorm strikes.

—James Jacobs

What can we bring them to secure their aid? “The Lyrune-Quah are unusual among the Shoanti. They do not seek enlightenment through our ancestors, but from the Song of the Spheres. They are devotees of Desna, and they trust those who worship her. Yet that trust is, alone, not enough to earn the aid of a Truthspeaker to be witness to your heroics against Cindermaid. The faithful of Desna have a tradition of exploring distant and dangerous places as a way to honor their deity, who watches over all who travel. When they reach the goal of their pilgrimage, a priest leaves a found-mark to honor his journey. One of the Lyrune-Quah’s greatest ancestors was a priest of Desna named Tanjah—their legends speak of her pilgrimage into an ancient ruin and her discovery of a potent relic sacred to Desna, a stone globe held deep within a place called the Acropolis of the Thrallkeepers. Those who follow Tanjah’s footsteps and seek her found-mark upon this globe are said to be given the Spherewalker’s Mark, and with this mark, the Lyrune-Quah would welcome into their camp even their most bitter rivals.”

What is the Acropolis of the Thrallkeepers? Where is it? “It is a ruin left over from an ancient time, a time when great powers ruled over this land. We speak of these ancient lords only in whispers today, but you may know their mark by the Sihedron, the seven-pointed star. I know not what perils await you within the Acropolis, but its location is not unknown to the Skoan-Quah. When you are ready to leave, I shall send with you four boneslayers to lead you there.”

How can we repay you for your help? “By convincing the Sklar-Quah you are friends, that you represent Korvosa, and that war is not in anyone’s best interest. This will save both our peoples needless pain and grief. If you can earn their trust and respect enough to learn from them the secret of what their ancestors watched over before the outlanders drove them away, they will listen to your words and see the wisdom there. This is all I ask, and it benefits you as well.”

Once the PCs have asked their questions and are sure of their goals, Thousand Bones tells them that he will not send them into the Cinderlands on their quest alone or unarmed. He calls forth four brave young Skoan-Quah boneslayers, introducing them as Ahalak, Hargev, Nalmid, and Shadfrar. These four are the PCs’ guides through the Cinderlands, and lead them where they need to go. Further, he presents some gifts to the PCs: five *potions of cure serious wounds*, a *wand of create water* (44 charges), a *wand of endure elements* (23 charges), and five pots of *Shoanti war paint* (three red and two silver). If asked about these gifts, Thousand Bones smiles and says, “I had suspected for some time you would need my help. These gifts are nothing to me, but they may be everything to you.”

SKOAN-QUAH BONESLAYERS (4)

CR 4

Human ranger 2/cleric 2

CN Medium humanoid

Init +1; **Senses** Listen +3, Spot +3

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 11, flat-footed 14

(+4 armor, +1 Dex)

hp 25 (4 HD; 4d8+4)

Fort +7, **Ref** +4, **Will** +6

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee mwk earth breaker +6 (2d6+3/×3)

Ranged mwk composite longbow +5 (1d8+2/×3)

Special Attacks favored enemy (undead +2), feat of Strength 1/day, greater turning 1/day, turn undead 6/day (–1, 2d6+2)

Spells Known (CL 2nd)

1st—*detect undead*, *hide from undead*, *sanctuary* (DC 14)

0—*create water*, *detect magic*, *mending*, *purify food and drink*

D domain spell; **Domains** Strength, Sun

TACTICS

During Combat The boneslayers prefer to fire their bows from covered positions, but if one of them is attacked in melee, the others quickly come to his aid.

Morale Boneslayers fight to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 13, **Con** 12, **Int** 10, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +5

Feats Extra Turning, Improved Turning, Totem Spirit (Skoan-Quah), Track

Skills Concentration +6, Handle Animal +4, Heal +10, Hide +4, Knowledge (nature) +5, Knowledge (religion) +6, Move Silently +4, Survival +8

Languages Common, Shoanti

SQ spontaneous casting (cure spells)

Combat Gear *potion of cure moderate wounds, potion of delay poison, potion of lesser restoration*; **Other Gear** masterwork hide shirt, masterwork earth breaker, masterwork composite longbow (+2 Str), *white Shoanti war paint*, holy symbol

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Totem Spirit This feat (described in the *Rise of the Runelords Player's Guide*) grants the Boneslayer a +2 bonus on weapon damage against undead and a +2 bonus on Heal checks.

PART THREE: ACROPOLIS OF THE THRALLKEEPERS

With the gifts given by Thousand Bones and the assistance of four reliable guides, the journey to the Acropolis of the Thrallkeepers should be relatively safe, depending on how often you wish to liven up the trip with wandering monsters. At times during the journey, feel free to have the PCs make Spot checks; whoever rolls the highest catches a glimpse of what seems to be another small group of riders on a distant outcropping. A DC 40 Spot check confirms that the man at the head of this group is Krojun—the Sklar-Quah is keeping an eye on the PCs as they travel, waiting for an opportunity to test them further. If the PCs attempt to confront him, he easily avoids them unless the PCs teleport directly to his location, a display of power that spooks his men but simply makes Krojun smile. In such an event, he points out that the Cinderlands are a dangerous place, and if the PCs die, someone needs to carry their bodies back to the Kallow Mounds, lest they rise as lost souls. He lets lie the implication that he also wouldn't pass up the opportunity to loot the PCs' dead bodies if the opportunity arose.

You can heighten the tension caused by the war party's presence by drawing out this distant game of cat and mouse, perhaps to the point of where it becomes unclear who is hunting whom. Until the PCs actually reach the Acropolis of the Thrallkeepers, however, try to avoid having too many direct confrontations with Krojun's band.

A Grim Warning

As the journey progresses, the PCs should come upon at least one grisly totem—the rotting head of a Shoanti man mounted on a sharp wooden pole, the other end of which has been jammed into a cleft between two rocks so that the head hangs out almost like a flag on the side of a building. Bright red crossbow bolts have been driven into each of the head's eyes.

The boneslayers accompanying the PCs mutter and whisper at this discovery. If asked about it, one of the Sklar-Quah says the head belonged to a Sklar-Quah, but was placed here by a “*tshamek* devil” the Shoanti call the Cinderlander. The brave goes on to explain that, for the past several years, this mysterious figure has stalked the Cinderlands. He never attacks large groups—targeting only lone braves with a strange “sideways screaming bow.” There are plenty of legends and tales about the Cinderlander, who he is, where he's from, and why he hunts the Shoanti. The Skoan-Quah believe he is the unquiet ghost of a Korvosan general who stalks these lands and will continue to slay Shoanti until his victims equal those the Shoanti took from him. Two crossbow bolts in the eyes have become the Cinderlander's calling card, but the aged condition of the head implies that the mysterious killer is long gone from the region. In any event, one of the bonecallers scrambles up to retrieve the decapitated head. Without knowing the Shoanti's identity, his ashes cannot be interred in the Kallow Mounds, so instead, that evening, the boneslayers hold a short service of their own, burning the head, scattering the ashes, and burying the skull under a cairn of rocks.

More information about the Cinderlander and his role in this adventure can be found on page 21.

Arrival at the Acropolis

As the PCs approach the acropolis, the sky on the horizon begins to darken alarmingly. A DC 20 Knowledge (nature) check or a quick warning from one of their boneslayer guides confirms the worst—an emberstorm is brewing. Powerful duststorms filled with blasts of burning ash and cinders, these devastating storms are feared by the Shoanti for their swift speed and terrible fury—known as Black Blizzards to most tribes, the advent of an emberstorm could be taken as a bad omen, as the boneslayer companions are quick to point out. The PCs should have plenty of time to find the entrance to the acropolis before the storm strikes, though—see page 74 of *Pathfinder #7* for rules if the PCs get caught unprotected in the emberstorm itself.

The Acropolis of the Thrallkeepers sits atop a raised area in the shadows of the Wyvern Mountains. Built originally by an order of Thassilonian wizards known as the Thrallkeepers (a competing order against the