

PARAMOS GUIDE

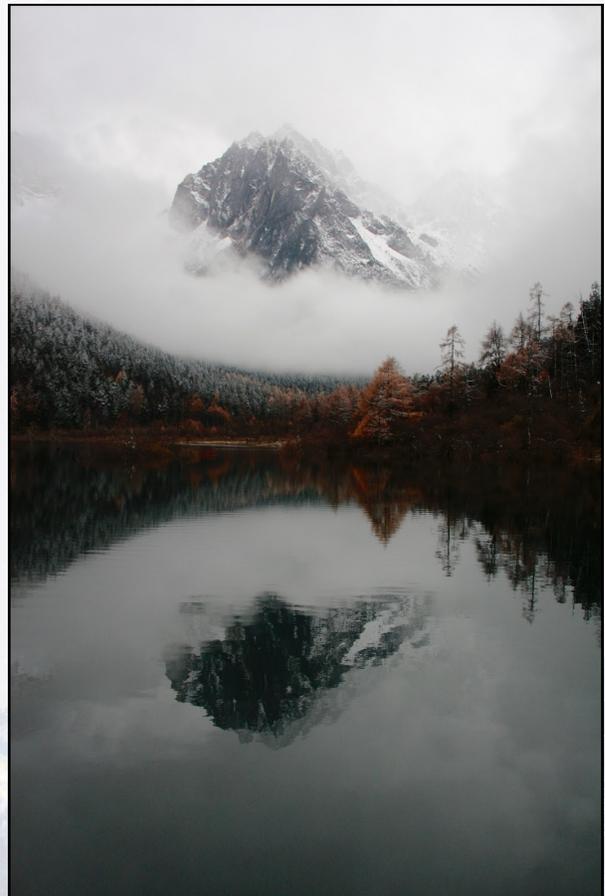
Due to their mountainous homes, the people of the Paramos have remained largely untouched by the troubles of the rest of the Known World. Known for their pragmatism and value of the community above all, few ever venture past the end of the mountain range. Rather than endure the invasion of the Half-Century War, the people drove deep into hiding and emerged years later to a world entirely changed. Now that the conflict is over and rebuilding is underway in the south, more and more traders have found their way north to the lands of the Paramos to discover a people who have been so wrongly painted by tales of hardened and ferocious mountain men. While once these outsiders would have been seen as exiles and treated with immense suspicion, the new regularity of those people bearing no icon has softened the Paramos to outsiders, and the call of this new world beyond has begun to pull the young and curious away from their mountains.

LANDSCAPE & CLIMATE

The Paramos people are known for their unique choice of homeland: the northern mountains. Their settlements span the miles of the southern tips of mountain range, which is believed to stretch endlessly northward. The region encompasses the lower wooded flatlands and thawed valleys, to the peaks around Limni Lake, and ends at the edge of the Known World. The area supports evergreen forests of pines and firs, numerous lakes, and countless valleys hiding between the peaks.

The climate varies little across the range, except for the far northern reaches. The weather is usually moderate in the spring and summer months with bitter winters that drive people and animals alike into the mountain caves for shelter from the harsh winds and freeze.

The mountains contain vast networks of tunnels, caverns, and even several fresh springs. Most clans make their homes and towns within these tunnels, carving out new rooms as space is needed or the older ones collapse.



NAMING CONVENTIONS

Common names for the Paramos people tend to draw inspiration from Inuit and Polish names and are composed of a first name, given at birth, and a second name chosen when they

reach maturity. As these names have proven to be more difficult for the southern cultures to pronounce, it has become a common practice for those who travel, or move away from the mountains, to pick a nickname that is easier on southern tongues.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The Paramos live in various clans that dot the mountain range. A Paramos clan is overseen by a Lore Keeper and protected by a champion. The Lore Keeper acts as the group's head and is responsible for making any major decisions regarding the wellbeing of the clan. Each Lore Keeper is literate, while many of their fellow Paramos are not, and act as the clan's record keeper and diplomat. They are trained from a young age and are taught both the written and oral history of their clan and their stories.

The champions, known as a Talilk, are paragons of the Paramos and of the clan's way of life. They are often the best and brightest a clan has to offer and are trusted to handle internal disputes and keep the peace. They are also the ones who will lay down their lives if a dispute between clans can not be solved diplomatically. The role is won, rather than appointed, and can be challenged by an adult in the clan. These duels are to the death with minimal rules, meaning that it is not always the strongest who will be Talilk, but rather the one with the best combination of strength and wit.

A new Lore Keeper and Talilk may set out on their own to forge a new clan. A Paramos may leave their current clan with only the clothes on their backs and one weapon or tool. If the group survives a winter alone they are officially considered a new clan as of the summer and acquire a name. It is customary for both Talilk and Lore Keeper to present themselves at the Summer Moot to show their success. At this time all Lore Keepers make note of the new clan. *(Please note: Talilks & Lore Keepers are not playable to start)*

The Paramos place a heavy emphasis on community, as well as aiding and accepting one another. An individual is allowed to pursue whatever path they desire, but everyone is expected to pull their weight to add to the community's resources. While all jobs are valuable, most Paramos clans hold miners, hunters, blacksmiths, and furriers in high regard due to their practicality. Highly skilled practitioners of these professions are often invited into a council to

advise and provide guidance to the Lore Keepers. That being said, every member of a clan is considered important in their own way for how they contribute to the continued survival of those around them.

Paramos clans operate more like large families, in which everyone has a role to fulfill. As a family, the fruits of each person's labor is shared and their successes and failures are a direct reflection on the clan as a whole. As such, the Paramos clans are primarily self policing and troublesome members are dealt with swiftly and either brought to heel or are taken to the Lore Keeper for final judgment.

ATTIRE

- Clothing choices are based on the climate, with lighter cloth worn by the southern clans, and heavier textiles and furs by the mountain dwellers. They do not wear excessive non-magical jewelry and will often only wear their single favorite piece in addition to their clan's icon.
- Paramos favor long belted tunics or long dresses with over layers, with simple trim and edging. They tend towards earthy or bright dyes in their clothing. Most wear plain colors or use horizontal striping patterns to adorn their clothing.
- Due to the climate and their coexistence with bats, many Paramos wear hats. Simple fur and boiled wool hats are preferred as they provide the most warmth and also have a small amount of padding against loose stones falling from cave ceilings.
- Paramos rarely don any form of armor, as combat is primarily the concern of the Talilk, and it is viewed as a hindrance while hunting or gathering. On the rare occasions that they do, the pieces are made of boiled and hardened leather, rather than metal. Metal armor is seen as ornamental, excessive, and impractical for the climate.

COMMON CUSTOMS

- Each Paramos has a personal icon that hangs from the side of their belt. They might be items, pendants, or stitched on fabric. This is how the Paramos identify one another, and an individual without one is seen either as an outsider— not to be trusted— or worse, an exile. If an icon is offered to and accepted by an outsider, they are viewed as a friend or member of the clan.
- Paramos go to extreme lengths to survive, doing things that are taboo in other cultures. Some clans in the far north have been known to use absolutely all available resources to endure harsh winters.
- Children are raised communally. They are seen as the clan's children, not as belonging to individuals who contributed to their creation. Some maintain good relationships with their parents, but many don't know or care about their identity, as they are raised and taught by the clan from weaning.
- The Paramos recognize that the intentions behind an action are what matters and the resulting outcome should be judged based on the original intent. Should an individual prove to be a persistent danger to the community, they are exiled. An Exile is stripped of all associated icons and turned out with the clothes on their backs and whatever basic tools they can carry.
- The bones of the deceased are honored in a way that shows the past is looking out over the future. Practices differ between clans, but there are stories of the bones being added to building material to continue to guard the next generation, or fashioned into instruments or even weapons.
- If combat between clans is inevitable, two Talilks will fight to the death at the Summer Moot. The winning clan will be seen as in the right, with the losing clan accepting the result as final. This matter of conflict resolution has ensured that clans do not lose unnecessary lives in open warfare or duels.
- Due to the harsh environments and constant dangers presented in the mountains, Paramos are always careful to keep their wits about themselves and are quick to alert those around them when danger is spotted. Those who have moved south have cultivated a reputation of being trusted lookouts.
- Natural curiosity is a well fostered trait within the clans. Careful lines are drawn to caution against reckless behavior, and to instead encourage thoughtful exploration of the environment.
- Animal encounters are part of life in the mountains, and there exists great respect between the Paramos and the magnificent beasts who share their homeland. It is not uncommon to see bats roosting up above in the quiet areas of the caves, or small burrowing rodents moving about across the pathways. Larger predators are given a wide berth and are warded away from the caves by spreading the scents of other predators around the entrances, and, of course, by strong doors.
- Reading and writing have traditionally been the purview of the Lore Keeper, as most stories are passed down via oral tradition. Many Paramos who have moved out of the mountains have taken to learning to read and write themselves.

BELIEFS & RELIGION

Worship of the Gods in Paramos culture is typically limited and traditionally a very personal practice. The Paramos often provide petitions in thanks for small blessings, such as a successful hunt or excavation of a cave expansion, but rarely petition in search of aid. The Paramos value the strength of self and feel that asking for help from the Gods diminishes their own personal successes, and may attract unwanted attention as well. As a result, the Paramos generally show their thanks privately, with small personal shrines, as it is uncommon for a clan to have a centralized shrine to the Gods.

HOLIDAYS

The Thawing: When the ice and snow melts, the Paramos can finally leave their underground sanctuaries. A weeklong celebration is held where the caves are emptied and the Paramos enjoy the warmth and sun for the day. The celebration includes feasting and organized group hunts to restock the food stores from the winter. Children play large games of hiding and seek in the woods near the caves until nightfall and gather around large fires to hear stories of the winter from their Lore Keepers.

The Summer Moot: On the longest day of the year, the Lore Keepers and representatives of all clans travel to a central location to meet and discuss topics pertaining to the people. The Lore Keepers focus mainly on settling inter-clan issues, specifically regarding land disputes or other disagreements. Their representatives typically discuss trade and other smaller issues. If a grievance between clans cannot be settled, both Talilks will fight to the death to settle the matter. During the Moot, Lore Keepers exchange stories from the year, both by swapping stories with other clans and by listening to the spirits that have passed. Some Paramos will ingest certain flora that induces a state which makes them more open to hearing what words the Black God allows to filter through.

The Day of Darkness: On the longest night of the year the clan will huddle together around a single fire with a large feast. The Lore Keeper will tell stories from sundown to sunrise to keep spirits up. It is believed that if the Lore Keeper should run out of stories before the dawn, the clan will not survive the winter.

MAJOR CLANS

Hojny (The Singing Valley): Hojny (The Singing Valley): Of all of the clans of the Paramos, many would say that the Hojny {hoy-neigh} have it easiest. They are the Southernmost clan, making their home at the base of the mountains. Their location allows for farming, and some of this group have even constructed above-ground dwellings that they live in year-round. The gentler climate makes the Hojny the most numerous clan by far, with lower mortality rates in

children and adults. In current times they have increased their trade, supplying the southerners with wood and ore. The clan has the nickname of the "Singing Valley" because of their lower elevation and their stories, which take the form of song.

Ikpik (The Lords of the Lake): Blessed with a lake amidst their caves, the Ikpik {ick-pick} territory is the center of commerce for the surrounding clans and its members act as arbiters during the Summer Moot. The lake allows for limited trade throughout clan territories, and as such the Ikpik offers aid to whatever groups they can and organize the transport of surplus goods from one clan to another as needed. This is never done at a cost to their own survival. This role has begun to take a new form as new trade routes to the south have opened up. This is an opportunity that the "Lords of the Lake" are interested in exploring, but are cautious of what changes the exposure may bring. Their traditions are passed down through reenactment, and their trade means that their people know and can act out the history and stories of many of their compatriots.

Przykry (The Frozen City): To the far north lies the Przykry {shu-krit} clan. It is rumored that they are so far North that even the caves themselves are covered in ice, giving the clan the nickname The Frozen City. While not as numerous as the other major clans, their harsher lifestyle has earned them great respect. Their stories are passed down through chants that are harsh yet beautiful in their own way. They are known as the most accepting of all of the clans; if someone can survive, they are welcome. Due to the travel time, fewer members of the Przykry travel to the Summer Moot than other clans, but those who do are certainly noticed.