

## Cultural Package: Fir Bolg - Green Mane (the Braided)



Geography: The Midvale tribal land once known as Northern Caeralten is a broad expanse of grassland swept across rolling hills broken occasionally by small pockets of woodland and winding creeks. It see's hot dry summers and biting cold, wind driven winters that deter all but the hardiest of denizens. Water sources are far apart and often dirty. Wood for fires is often unavailable.

Natural Resources: The most abundant resource of the Midvale tribal lands is the vast herds of nomadic wildlife. They vary from the moderately docile steppe pony to the great elk, and even the aggressive and dangerous woolly rhino. Besides its wildlife the only notable resource to be found is in the scattered stands of wood, where rare and potent herbs are known to grow if one has the eye to spot them.

Metal deposits are unheard of and wood is reserved for tool and weapon making, though the stunted trees of Midvale are known for providing exceptionally strong and durable wood.

Along the eastern portion of Midvale lies a dried out lake bed which is now a large salt flat. The herds make seasonal use of this salt but it is not pure enough to be collected for large scale trade.

Rumours persist of a humble creek deep in Green Mane territory that is filled to overflowing with diamonds. But since the tacit Green Manes only wish to trade for steel, woven cloth and glass, questions about diamonds return only mute shrugs and

disinterest. The Green Mane's have come to refer to these errant diamond hunters as "summer ice followers".

Trade: A purely barter system, trade is conducted solely by the Chief of the tribe. Trade items often desired by the Green Mane's are: steel, woven cloth, glass bottles, women, and information. They are known to barter for these things with: food, rare herbs, unrefined salt, bows, arrows, women, and water. While a Green Mane can be coaxed to barter his own knowledge it is at great cost to the questioner.

Green Mane are very open to the concept of Trade, but will react violently to any perceived notion of aggression. Shouting can literally get your entire party killed when bartering with a Green Mane Chieftain.

Costume: Hair is universally dyed green and can be a variety of shades depending on any given tribes method of hair coloring. Amongst the Green Mane, tribal affiliation can be determined by the shade of green the hair is dyed. Clothing is made from a collection of furs, leather, and woven grass. Woven cloth is a rarity and is highly prized, especially wool. Colors are muted earth tones that reflect the land around them and aid in blending into the surrounding grass land. Pieces of plant and animal life are often incorporated into clothing such as sprigs of grass, leaves, bark, bones, and feathers.

Traditionally men and women wear a tight fitting vest and loose fitting leggings bound with cord around the shins. It is not unheard of for both men and women to wear a loose skirt of grass or fur, though leggings are often worn under this.

In the cold season wraps are added to arms and legs and secured with cords. A fur or woven cloth (if owned) will often be placed around the shoulders and held together at the neck with the off hand, this crude cloak is never tied in place and only rarely covers the head. Hats of any sort are a cultural taboo as they conceal the hair of the Green Mane.

Costume does not vary much from man to woman with two exceptions. The first being that only male Green Mane's may braid their hair, since only men are allowed to handle weapons and thus take spirits. The other exception is that when a Green Mane woman finds she is pregnant or has a child with her that has not yet been weaned she is required to travel bare-chested (regardless of weather). This is thought to strengthen the unborn child and also serves to mark a woman as pregnant amongst the tribe.

The Braid: Only men may wear the braids, they are marks of kills notable enough to be made as spirit offerings to their totem. Men with many braids have powerful totems protecting them and should be treated with respect if not fear. A Spirit Talker usually determines if a kill is worthy of a braid, but in their absence a hunter is allowed to judge for himself if a kill was worthy. He must however present himself to the first Spirit Talker he encounters (even if the Spirit Talker is not of his family unit) and present his new braids and recite his kills. If the Spirit Talker judges the kills unworthy he will remove the braids. Having even one braid removed is an extreme loss of face and can even result in a Chieftain losing his position.

Certain creatures, Trolls, Ogres, and the like have such a fearsome reputation that should a hunter bring one down they are granted the privilege of a fang braid. This is similar in every way to a standard braid except that it is ended with a tooth from the vanquished creature.

Daily Life: The Green Mane Fir Bolg are a nomadic people who follow and hunt the herds of the Midvale tribal lands in small family groups. Particularly large herds can (and do) support multiple family groups who will travel as one tribal unit. Given the close proximity to the herds and the ease by which sound travels on the grasslands, the Green Mane have by necessity become a very laconic people. They do not waste words and often sign between each other with simple hand gestures rather than speak. When they do choose to speak phrases are clipped and often given to metaphor to explain complex (for a Fir Bolg) concepts. Their poetic turn of phrase issued from soft deep voices is often surprising to beings used to more boisterous Fir Bolg Tribes. Lies are a foreign concept, as is singing. Music, mostly drums are reserved for rituals.

The primary purpose of Green Mane men in Fir Bolg society is to hunt and protect the tribe. Weapons are built solely by men and are practiced with out of sight of women. Tool Makers are also always men; however women are allowed to be taught how to create basic tools for their own work. Gathering herbs and edible plants, cleaning of game, cooking, hauling of possessions, even starting fires are all the tasks of women. While not as warlike as some of the other Fir Bolg tribes the Green Manes are fairly numerous (if spread out) and communicate with each other fairly amiably, this is largely thanks to a tribal gathering held once a decade. Every ten summers the Green Mane's travel en mass to the salt flats in the eastern end of their territory and the tribes compete in a series of contests to determine the standing of each tribal unit. This creates a firm hierarchy that helps to regulate tension between the families.

The Chief of the winning clan becomes the ultimate authority in the land and at this time hears any grievances between families or against other races or Fir Bolg tribes. He

then issues any compensation or punishments as he sees fit. This is the one time when the Green Mane can be called to war. If the High Chieftain decides that a great enough wrong, or a dangerous enough threat exists than he can call the entire Green Mane Tribe to war.

Law: A Chief may punish any action as a crime as he sees fit. Certain acts are considered so heinous amongst the Green Mane that they are universally reviled and must be punished regardless of a Chieftain's personal feelings. These are:

- No Green Mane aside from a Spirit Talker may commune with the dead.
- No woman may wield a weapon, nor take a spirit (wear a braid).
- No woman may make a demand of a man, nor refuse the command of a man.
- No woman may strike a man, or named boy child.
- A deformed child cannot be kept without conducting the Moon Trial.

Punishments for minor infractions are often simple beatings or loss of standing within the tribe. All other crimes are punished by the death curse. The death curse is ordered and the duration allotted by the Chief, and is performed by the Spirit Talker. The Spirit Talker dyes a black band horizontally across the eyes of the condemned and then conducts a ritual funeral for the cursed. Members of the tribe are then permitted to pass on last words to the cursed individual through the Spirit Talker before the spirit is banished. This banishment can last anywhere from a week to the dreaded "forever death". The process by which the death curse (the black dye) is removed is a closely guarded secret amongst the Spirit Talkers.

The Moon Trial is conducted by the mother and father of the deformed child under the supervision of the Chieftain and the Spirit Talker. The day following the birth of the deformed child, the father carry's the infant away from the tribe for half of a day's light and leaves it in the wilds. The following morning the mother of the child is permitted to attempt to reclaim the child, though she is not required to do so. If the child is found and then returned alive it may stay with the tribe, though this is no guarantee the child will live to see adulthood.

Marriage: Marriage if it can be called such is determined by the Chieftain who often consults with the Spirit Talker on such matters. The marriage confers no special benefits to the women aside from which man's fire she will tend. In practice the Chieftain simply orders a woman when of child baring age to leave her father's fire and go to another man's.

Mating and Child Rearing: The Fir Bolg are a savage people and the Green Manes are no exception. Any man may mate with any woman at any time they wish, the only exception is that a pregnant woman or woman currently with still nursing young may not be mated with, though it is only a very minor infraction for doing so. Women are roughly forced onto all fours and mounted from behind in the manner of an animal.

Any children that issue from such unions are considered to be from the man whose fire that woman tends. This is largely due to the Green Mane's believing that children are a product of the parents' spirit totems fighting with each other to create offspring. The Green Mane's believe that a man's totem must overcome his woman's totem in order for a child to be born, sex is not part of the process nor required between partners to create children. It is simply a pleasant past time. If a woman does not conceive it is believed that her totem is too strong for her mates to conquer.

Children are not named or given totem until they are three summers of age. During this time they are free to play and do for the most part as they wish. When they receive their name and totem (from the Spirit Talker) they are given one more year to play freely, and establish a pecking order amongst each other. On their fifth summer they begin to be taught the skills they will need to survive in Midvale. Common punishments for named children are beatings and to be ignored by the tribe.

Medicine: Healing and alchemy not related to rituals or poisons are the domain of the Medicine Woman. She is still expected to follow all the laws and expected behaviour governing women in Green Mane life, but she is granted some leeway to pursue her own work rather than be devoted solely to regular womanly duties.

Religion: Religion is the realm of the Spirit Talker and is not so much practiced as feared. The Green Mane's do not worship the gods; they believe the current gods invaded the spirit realm and forced the spirits to make their home on this plane, forcing the spirits from their proper place. Offerings and prayer are made to personal animal totems in an attempt to gain protection against the spirit realm. What is and is not acceptable conduct when appeasing a totem is determined by the Spirit Talker. Ancestor worship is unheard of, as the Green Mane's fear that to draw the attention of a similar creature's spirit could result in possession. Animal totems are safer to draw the attention of as they cannot possess a Fir Bolg body. By gaining the favour of an animal totem with similar traits to their own they gain a measure of protection from the spirit realm. The trade off for this protection is that the totem spirit attaches itself to the Green Mane and is not guaranteed to always be benevolent. Powerful totem spirits while strong are also often fickle.

A woman's totem is often a weaker creature, while male totems are often more powerful animal spirits (though not always). Since a man's totem must be strong enough to conquer his mates for a child to be born, careful consideration is given to which fire a woman with a stronger than usual totem will go.

God worship is looked on with some confusion and for the most part avoided. The gods are obviously powerful but they live in a far away realm, it is considered wiser to be wary of the forces on this plane, before worrying about other realms.

Only the Spirit Talker is allowed to actually commune with the spirits. Doing so requires the ingestion of powerful herbs that weaken the spirits hold to the body. Only the iron will of the Spirit Talker keeps his spirit from being ripped free, or worse his body possessed. The herbs that allow the Spirit Talker to perform his duties weakens his body and brings him faster to death than the rest of the tribe. Some of the most powerful Spirit Talkers come from the deformed children who survive the Moon Trial, since they enter the world so close to the spirit realm. Some are even rumoured to be able to commune with the spirit realm without the use of the herbs.

#### Rituals:

The Naming – On their third summer children are given their name and their totem.

The Moon Trial – Deformed Children are left in the wilds overnight a day's hike from camp and can be retrieved the following day if still alive.

The Death Curse – Cursed Green Mane's have a black band dyed across their eyes and are banished (considered dead) for a certain amount of time.

The Questioning – The Spirit Talker asks for guidance from the totem of a Green Mane.

The Blood Hate – The Spirit Talker gives a Green Mane man to the spirits as an offering to send the tribes anger to an enemy.

The Summoning – The Spirit Talker call's out to a fallen Green Mane and entreats their totem to guide them back to their people. If a totem is fond enough of their charge they may do this without a summoning, but this often takes longer without the aid of the Spirit Talker.

Military: The Green Mane does not have warriors so much as hunters. Their hunters however are stealthy, patient, cunning, and extremely proficient in setting ambushes. Their truest strength lies in their ability to remain unseen and then strike out suddenly

with poisoned arrows and perfectly placed spear. When at war they often commit only a portion of their numbers to a main attack force armed with hardened leather shields and spears. The remaining group (as much as half) wait in concealed positions for the battle to start before striking at the leadership and support troops of the enemy with bow and spear. Alchemy is made use of frequently by the Green Mane when in battle.

Perhaps the most formidable weapon the Green Mane possesses is the Blood Hate spirits. Green Mane men sacrificed to the spirit world and set upon their enemy. In actuality the sacrificial man is saturated with potent potions that remove his ability to feel pain or fear, and give him great strength and perceptive powers. The concoction is ultimately fatal but the results are terrifying to behold. Part of this is due to the fact that the drugged Green Mane believes he is a spirit and feels only the need to seek out those who have wronged his people and kill them. The results of the Blood Hate rituals are not raging berserkers, but silent beasts who leave poisoned corpses and torn out throats in their wake.

#### Hierarchy:

- High Chieftain
- Chieftain
- Spirit Talker
- Veteran Hunters
- Tool Makers
- Hunters (13 years of age or greater)
- Crippled and Elderly Men (unable to hunt or 40 years of age or greater)
- Medicine Woman
- Elderly women (50 years of age or greater)
- Male Children (under 12 years of age)
- Women (able to bare children)
- Women Children (are not yet able to bare children)
- \*Crippled Women (crippled women are left in the wilds to die)

#### Relations with Other Races:

Fir Bolg - The other Fir Bolg tribes and the Green Mane generally ignore each other. This tentative peace is no doubt due to the Midvale Tribal lands being devoid of any great resources and the Green Manes eerie ability to disappear into a near featureless landscape. Amongst some Fir Bolg tribes stories are told of the slow anger of the

Green Mane. How years after an attack hundreds even thousands of Green Mane can descend without warning upon an unsuspecting tribe.

Einher - Einher will on occasion make land fall on the coast of Green Main territory to trade. To signal their intent they light huge bonfires the smoke from which can be seen for miles. Through trial and error the Einher have learned to curb their usual boisterous nature when dealing with the Green Mane and to select a man from amongst their numbers to act as their "Chief" when bartering.

Oxgar – The Green Mane revere the Oxgar believing that they are descended from a Tribe of Fir Bolg so blessed by the Ox Totem that it has gifted them with a physical manifestation of its strength. A Green Mane will always seek to gain the attention and respect of an Oxgar. So too will a Green Mane give aid to any Oxgar in need of assistance.

Fetch – In an existence where possessions consist of only those items required to survive theft can result in extreme hardship even death. The Green Mane have learnt that Fetch will steal regardless of threat or warning and so simply kill them on sight when they encounter them. So deep seated is their association with the Fetch race and theft that the Green Main word for the theft is in fact "Fetch". It is inadvisable to ask a Green Mane to fetch you an item, as it is the equivalent of telling someone to steal something for you.

Humans – The "poison tongue" as they are called by the Green Mane are considered deceitful and viscous. An encountered human will be given one brief warning to leave the Green Mane lands, if they continue to travel deeper into Green Mane territory they will eventually be ambushed and likely killed. Armed incursions by humans into the Midvale Tribal lands are not granted the warning to leave.

Wood Fae, Pixies, and Ajaunti – Any race with a discernable connection to the spirit realm is regarded much as the civilized races would view the infernal. They are avoided if not outright feared. If one of the "spirit touched" races is encountered an offering is made and the Spirit Talker entreats the beings to leave. Most times the offering works and the beings leave. If they do not leave it is a very serious matter and the Chief of the encountering tribe must decide to either travel away from the territory or remove the tainted beings from the land. Should he decide to remove the threat the killing ground must be marked and warded by the Spirit Talker to show that it is unclean and dangerous spirits are contained within.

Woad and Flynd – Two races exist in direct competition with the Green Mane for the bounty of the herds, the Woad and the Flynd. When signs of Woad or Flynd hunting groups are discovered near a tribes herd the Green Mane become very agitated, their usual response being to track down and attack the rival hunters. Often the initial attack

results only in the injuring of a few Woad or Flynd, as the Green Mane are hesitant to engage in outright fighting if it can be avoided. The attacks however are persistent and increasingly aggressive until the rival group is either run off or wiped out.

Dwarves – A strange thing happens on the rare occasion when a Green Mane encounters a Dwarf. They become enraged brandishing weapons while shouting, “water Fetch” which literally translates to water thief. They then demand that the Dwarf give them all of their possessions. If the Dwarf does this then they may leave unharmed albeit naked and without any belongings. If they refuse the Green Manes demand then they are attacked, either way the possessions of the Dwarf are immediately buried in the ground. It is unknown why the Green Mane behave in this way though some sages have theorized that the Midvale Tribal land was once a much more vibrant place. That Dwarven mining either rerouted springs from the mountains or perhaps emptied the great lake that once existed on the eastern portion of Midvale, turning the land barren and dry. This however is all speculation.