

# Cultural Overview

*Morwenna the Fair speaks:*

Gyruff has changed greatly since the coming of the giants. Much has been lost, and even more is in danger of being lost. In addition to the mere physical destruction and lives lost, perhaps the greatest damage has been to our culture. Living as helpless refugees in foreign lands, dependent upon powerful neighbors for the wherewithal to free our land, buffeted by strange new gods and foreign ways, we have struggled to retain that which made us unique, our Gyric culture. Let me tell you of the Gyruff of my youth, when the Gyri still held to the old ways. May the Makers grant that we return to them, when the giants are gone at last...

Unlike the rest of the Flanaess, Gyruff is still primarily Flannae. Due to our isolation from the rest of the Sheldomar Valley, the Oeridians and Suel tribes did not settle in mass numbers in our homeland. Instead they kept to the south, deterred by the woodlands that were the homes of the elves that had no love for these two human tribes. As the centuries wore on, small groups and single families of Oeridians and Suel settled in our lands, but they were sensible and adopted our ways and customs.

The ancient Flan were a peaceful, self-reliant people. They lived in extended families that would wander with their herds into the mountains in the summer and back into the lowlands in the winter. As they traded with the other migrating tribes, our ancestors learned new skills and technologies. Gradually, the Flan settled down into farms and small villages. Towns were slow to develop as our forefathers loved the wilderness and were uncomfortable living in densely populated cities. These farms have developed into our current steadings and crofts. I'll explain those in a moment.

True to our Flan heritage, the Gyri are a boisterous, passionate people, and I wouldn't trade one of them for 10 Oeridians and the gods help you if you tried to push a Suel on me! We are loud and zesty and are prone to over-reaction and exaggeration. Our reputation for being terribly stubborn is well earned, but we are ultimately pragmatic. We are quickly bored and get restless when we stay in one place for too long. Uncomfortable with large crowds, Gyri prefer small gatherings of family and friends. Our absolute conviction that Gyruff is the greatest of all lands and that its people are the best irks our neighbors for some reason.

Unlike many other realms, the Gyri have always enjoyed excellent relations with the demihumans of the area. Possibly due to the low human population or devotion to

the nature deities, the elves, gnomes, and dwarves do not feel threatened by the humans of Gyruff. There are regular visits to the cities of the elves in the Dim Forest, Hornwood, and Oytwood, as well as the gnome towns in the Stark Mounds. Inter-marriage between the humans and the olvenfolk is not uncommon. Never seen it happen between dwarves and humans or gnomes and humans though. That's just too creepy to contemplate. While not allowing any visitors deep into their citadels, the dwarves regularly trade worked stone, gems, and metal goods with us for food, wood, leather, and wool.

Gyruff's relations with the human lands are not as good, however. The quiet arrogance of the Gyri has created rifts between our country and its neighbors. Keoland was an aggressor in the past, but it has lost its teeth with the years. They would be soft, living in their rich valley if they didn't make so many problems for themselves. Their internal squabbling is worst than the most vicious inter-family feuding in Gyruff. The culture of the Gran March is drastically different from our ways as it is militaristic, overly controlling and restrictive. The Gyri respect the people of Sterich as they also face the same threats from the mountains.

Blood is thicker than water, and the most important social unit in Gyruff is the extended family. Due to the creatures crawling down from the mountains, we have developed very strong ties to our kinfolk, as we are dependent upon each other for defense. These blood ties dominate everything in Gyruff and are the basis for class, standing, and nobility. Gyri are proud of their families and very loyal to their kin. Sometimes this gets the better of us, and blood feuds between families are an occurrence all too frequent. Fortunately, the druids take a dim view of Gyri fighting Gyri and put a stop to it when they can.

Traditionally, families live together on a single steading or croft. For you outlanders, a steading is a large farm with wooden walls enclosing the house and barn to protect against raiders and beasts. The open space in the middle is called a garth. Crofts are small farms without walls. Family life centers on the home, which is the key part of the steading or croft. In a steading, the home is most often a large two-story wooden building that is built to withstand the raids by orcs and minor giants and is the keystone in the defense of a steading.

Gyric culture is more gender equitable than elsewhere in the Flanaess. Both men and women can hold property, earn money, and deal in trade. Traditionally, land can only pass to an able bodied man, because of the need to be able to defend it against raiders. This is now true only in the western and northern parts of Gyruff. In fact, the current ruler of Oytmeet is a woman! Not just any woman, though, mind you. She's a tough one who can swing a sword with the best of them. So I guess she can defend her lands just

fine. But over all, men are responsible for the defense of the steading or croft and providing food for the table. Women are responsible for ensuring that the larders are full and the supplies plentiful. As a consequence, most traders deal with the women of the household, and many merchants are women.

Young boys are taught how to use the bow, as well as a melee weapon, and how to hunt and farm. Because Gyruff is a dangerous land even in the best of times, young girls are also given weapon training, primarily in the bow. The Gyri do not have the luxury to have half the population wilting at the first sign of battle. Able women are expected to fight alongside the men to defend the kith and kin against all harm.

Both young men and young women are expected to marry young and start having children right away. With such a small population and so many hazards, it is imperative that families have as many children as possible. To not get married and not have children is just wrong, as it fails your family and weakens the land as a whole. Marriages are consecrated by a variety of faiths. My personal favorite is Ehlonna – her being the goddess of fertility and all. Pelor is also popular because of gifting of strength to the marriage. Before I forget, you shouldn't marry inside your steading. Look outside your immediate family. Trust me on this one.

Marriages can be undone. It is not something to be done lightly. A lot of very awkward questions get asked, especially when there are children and a farm involved, and sets of parents want to know what went wrong. In addition, a priest of the same faith as the priest who performed the wedding must dissolve it by ceremony. And no, it doesn't have to be the same priest.

Gyri are predominately Flan in appearance with the typical dark wavy or curly hair, eyes that are brown, hazel, amber, or black, and skin that range from light copper to dark brown. The Gyri are short compared to the other human tribes, but they are very muscular and sturdy of build. Suel or Oeridian traits are present, but infrequent. It has been said however, that the Gyri have received the best traits from their mixing with those two peoples.

Due to the influence of Keoland, the people of Gyruff have adopted Keolander style of dress but have added some Flan touches. Solid primary colors or earth tones are favored. The strange check and plaid patterns favored by the Oeridians are just not seen very often. Jewelry consists of bracelets, rings, necklaces, and hair and head bands. Ear piercing is not common in Gyruff so earrings are not worn. And that goes for all the other heaven knows what that the Bakluni pierce. The most distinctive piece of jewelry is the torque, which are pieces of metal worked into a ring with a gap, worn tightly around the neck or the arm.

Common men wear long, loose tunics that are belted at the waist over top of breeches that extend just past the knee. The tunics are not worn in hot weather. High boots with soft soles are favored because of the rocky and uneven ground of Gyruff. A tabard-like vestment is worn over-top for formal occasions or when weather turns cold. A stout cloak pinned at the shoulder is worn for protection against the elements, while allowing easy access to a sword or axe. Men's hair is commonly worn long and tied back, while facial hair is trimmed short. Brimmed hats are popular in the summer, and fur hats in the winter. Axes and swords are typically worn on sword belts on the hip.

Common women in Gyruff wear loose single-piece dresses with short sleeves, buttoned up the front. Sometimes they wear breeches like the men. An apron with pockets for carrying tools and other useful items is common. Long hair is a sign of fertility and beauty in Flan culture and if possible, women rarely cut their hair. Instead, it is bound up in intricate twists and braids. Women rarely wear hats, preferring hooded cloaks, which can be lined with fur in the winter.

Because of their wealth, the nobility dresses in all fashion of strange and bizarre dress. Some have even been know to wear hose like people in the Kingdom of Aerdy. Pelor save us! Noble and rich men wear knee-length coats, decorated with embroidery and buttoned up the front, over top of a tunics and breeches. Wealthy women dress in fine gowns that are not practical for physical labor, but since they've got other people to do their work for them, that isn't really a problem.

The traditional Gyri diet has not changed much in hundreds of years. Since settling down into steadings and crofts, leeks, turnips, and grains make up the bulk of meals. Unlike many other regions, Gyruff has an abundance of meat in its diet due to the quantity of game in the woods (primarily venison and rabbit) and most families kept a flock of sheep. Cattle are rare, so goat's milk is more common than cow's milk, and most cheeses are made from it. Grapes do not grow in Gyruff, so wine must be imported from Keoland. Ale and mead fill the void quite nicely for most Gyri. Yes, quite nicely. Two distinctly Gyri dishes are laver bread, which is an oatmeal pancake, and rarebit, which is goat cheese on toast.

Most Gyri speak two different languages. Flan is the original tongue of the people, and it is still well known to most people in Gyruff. In the more isolated areas, it might be the only language that is spoken. In the larger towns, Common is also spoken, but in the rural western areas, most Gyri know little more than a few phrases and words. A few also know Keolandish, which is the used in the lowlands of the Sheldomar Valley.

Of course, the elves have their language, the dwarves theirs, and the gnomes theirs! Some half-orcs speak the orcish language as well. It's a confusing mess on major feast holidays or affairs of state when the demihumans send representatives to the Duke's court, let me tell you. But you would be surprised how far you can get with some grunts, hand gestures, and facial expressions. No, I'm not speaking from experience. I can speak all of these languages.

The Gyri worship two broad classifications of deities. The first and most important are the nature gods: Beory, the Oerth Mother, and her children Obad-hai and Ehlonna who represent the male and female aspects of nature respectively. Pelor was their father, and he is seen as the paternal figure and civilizing force in Gyruff. The second group consists of those gods that promise protection: Trithereon, Pholtus, St. Cuthbert, and Mayaheine all have substantial followers, but historically have had less influence than the nature deities. Since the invasion by the giants, the deities of defense have become much more prominent, especially Trithereon and Mayaheine.

One custom that is distinctly Flan, and therefore Gyri, is the planting of a tree in every household. This tree is either planted by the door to the home or in a courtyard or in the center of the enclosure of the steading. To the Gyri mind, the tree represents the household and as it grows and becomes stronger so too will the family. Family members who go on long trips will often take a leaf from the tree with them as good luck. Family gatherings are often held under its branches, and it is often the center of celebrations and festivities. During the celebration of Needfest, families decorate the tree with garlands, lights, and ornaments. The richer the family, the more extensive and expensive the decoration. Families will travel (miles if need be in the less-settled areas) to their neighbors to see the decorated trees and compare.

As a land with few inns and hostels, hospitality is very important to the Gyri. Any traveler can expect a warm meal and a place by the hearth at any steading or croft. Of course, the Gyri have expectations of guests too. Guests are supposed to help the family and do an odd chore or two before departing. One hand washes the other, and both come out clean.

Entertainment in Gyruff consists of storytelling, playing the harp, as well as dancing. The harp is very important to Gyri home life and even the clumsiest of us can pluck simple melodies from the instrument. Keolandians mock Gyruff by claiming that even the barns have harps. While this is not true, (what can you expect from Keolandians, anyway?), almost every house has one. Traditionally, the harp is passed to the youngest son and cannot be sold or claimed from debtors.

Gyri love to dance, and learning complicated dances are as much as growing up as learning to hunt and fish. Bards, or scops, hold a cherished place in Gyruff society and are respected far more than in other lands, as they are the lorekeepers and poets of Gyruff. In an illiterate society, such as Gyruff, the oral tradition kept by the scops is important to the identity of the country. Scops also carry news and messages from one far-flung steading to another.

Gyruff has rarely been at war through its history, but humanoid and giant raiders from the Crystalmists and the Barrier Peaks are a sad fact of life. In this skirmish-style of combat, Gyri prefer to use spears, axes, and swords and rarely wear armor heavier than studded leather and brigandine. Heavier armor must be imported from elsewhere. The greatest threat in the Gyruff arsenal is our long bows. Yew trees grow thick in the Hornwood, and these trees produce strong but supple wood that is used to manufacture the five-foot tall bows of Gyruff.

The wooded and hilly terrain of Gyruff limits the use of cavalry. Only the Grand Duke maintains a mounted force of any size. However, like our Flan ancestors, we Gyri are excellent horsemen. Most use small, light, surefooted horses that are nimble enough to cope with the terrain. These horses are good in the wooded hillsides, but terrible in the open plains.

So there you have it, Gyruff as it once was. Now you know what we are fighting to restore, though sometimes I fear it may be lost forever...

*May the wind always be at your back,  
Morwenna the Fair*