

The Ironborn

The Iron Islands

The Iron Islands are a group of seven islands in Ironman's Bay, which are Pyke, Great Wyk, Old Wyk, Harlaw, Saltcliffe, Blacktyde and Orkmont lying off the western coast of the continent. The inhabitants of these harsh isles are known as Ironmen in the rest of Westeros, 'The Ironborn' amongst themselves.

They are ruled by House Greyjoy of Pyke, chosen to rule the Ironmen after Black Harren's line was extinguished during the Conquest. Prior to the arrival of Aegon the Conqueror, the Ironmen ruled over the Riverlands and much of the western coast of Westeros.

The Ironmen are men of the sea, and their naval supremacy was once unmatched. The Seven of the Andals find small favor with the Ironborn, as their allegiance is given to their native Drowned God.

Bastards born in the Iron Islands are given the surname Pyke.

The Ironmen

Ironmen are raiders and reivers, used to taking what they want from those who cannot hold it. They are not farmers (The motto of House Greyjoy is 'We do not sow'). Their respect of the Sea is strong, and manifests in their faith, the reverence shown to the Drowned God.

Sailors and warriors are respected amongst the Ironborn, as are the Drowned Men, priests of the Drowned God. The weak men of the mainland (Greenlanders) are ignored or disparaged, taken as slaves (or thralls) in raids, or left to grow another crop for the next season's 'harvest'.

Currency and trade are generally given short shrift, real men take what they need. Gifts are an exception to this; gifts given by great lords are used to strengthen ties of duty and honour, above and beyond the strong bonds of kinship that are so important to the Ironborn.

The Ironborn are prickly about their honour, although it is far more direct than that of the Knights of Westeros, it is still a potent force. Hospitality is important to Ironborn, and once a man has taken salt at your table, his sins must be great before any retaliation will be looked upon kindly by society at large.

History of House Greyjoy

The House descends from the legendary Grey King in the Age of Heroes. Legend says the Grey King ruled the sea itself and took a mermaid to wife. Aegon the Dragon ended the line of the last King of the Iron Islands, but allowed the ironborn to revive their ancient custom and choose who should have the primacy among them. They chose Vickon Greyjoy and his line.

Balon Greyjoy

Lord of the Iron Islands, King of Salt and Rock, Son of the Sea Wind, Lord Reaper of Pyke, captain of the Great Kraken. A harsh and fierce man, devoted in most respects to ironborn custom. Balon stands in rebellion against the Iron Throne, and has declared himself the king of the Isles once more. Balon's elder sons Rodrik and Malon sail with the crew of a raiding vessel the Sea Whore, ordered their by their father to gain experience in the ways of the ironborn. (This description is set nine years before the first novel).

The Drowned God

Worshipped solely by the Ironmen in Westeros, the Drowned God's domain is the sea. The religion of the Drowned God is old, dating back to before the Andal invasion. The Andal invaders of the Iron Islands converted to the local religion rather than supplant it with the Seven as they did in the South. The Drowned God religion supports the Ironmen's naval, culture. They believe that the Drowned God created them to rape, reave, and carve out kingdoms. The Drowned God himself is believed to have brought flame from the sea and sailed the world with fire and sword. The eternal enemy of the Drowned God is called the Storm God.

Drowning and resurrection feature prominently in the prayers and rituals of the Drowned God religion. Drowning is the traditional method of execution for the Ironmen, but it is also considered a holy act, and the most faithful have no fear of it. Newborn are "drowned" shortly after birth, being submerged into or anointed with saltwater. Clergymen, called Drowned Men, are drowned a second time in earnest and brought back to life with a crude form of cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Drowned Men wear roughspun robes of mottled green, grey, and blue. They carry driftwood cudgels to use in battle, and skins of saltwater to perform ritual anointments. A common prayer is, "What is dead can never die, but rises again, harder and stronger."

The Drowned God does not gift his power to his followers, but exacts strong and binding prices for his aid. The Drowned God is only called upon at times of great need, as he exacts his payment quickly, and usually requires souls to consider the debt paid.

Ironborn consider it lucky to die at sea, and especially so to drown, as it means you will make your way to the Drowned God's halls all the sooner. Ironborn burial rites are simple and quick, and usually involve burial at sea. Traitors and those unworthy of a warrior's reward in the afterlife are burned, their souls doomed to wander outside the halls.