

## The Confederacy of Sampson

*7 million people, not including those living in the Republic of Sampson, live in the Confederacy.*

The Confederacy of Sampson is the name of the innumerable kingdoms, dukedoms, keeps, and city-states which populate the western half of the known world. The entirety is allegedly united by a system of taxation and recruitment to support the Border Keeps in the war against the Ssall. The system was created 300 years ago shortly after the area revolted from the Holy Empire.

The western part is much more committed to the tax system than the eastern part as the treat is much more real to them. The eastern part of the confederacy dues pay, though not at much, as they consider their money is being wasted on what they consider “useless protection.”

The Border Keeps trump up their importance in “protecting all humanity.” After three hundred years, however, the tale has grown stale. It can not be denied however, that the Border Keeps house the most highly trained and deadly of human soldiers known anywhere with the possible exception of the Ootish in Sander.

The Confederacy of Sampson has huge numbers of mercenaries due to frequent warring. The various kingdoms do not let their confederation prevent of petty feuds, and war is one of the most common activities of any lord or noble in the heart of the Confederacy. Military structures vary, depending upon the specific country.

Peasants in these areas use quarterstaves, clubs, and small knives to resolve their differences.

### Tain River and the Border Keeps

The Border Keeps run along the Tain river as a break against the perceived Ssall invasion from the west. Each keep is supported by the Confederacy of Sampson. Most keeps are continually involved in raids and invasions against the Ssall.

In addition The Tain river area is one of the richest agricultural land known anywhere. In spite of constant war, the production of the Border Keeps is simply amazing in its quantity and quality. This only enhances how rich the Border Keep lords are.

The Border Keeps have knights and lords who fight alongside the peasants quite often. In this area the peasants serve 3 months a year in active duty. Most fields are communally owned and are always being tilled. These peasants learn how to use classically “noble” weapons, and many wear armor supplied by the keeps during combat.

The Border Keeps are in charge of the tax, and they tax the surrounding areas heavily, and through this tax get enough iron to arm the knights and lords. Foot soldiers usually have a pole arm and shield with leather

armor. The pole arms are usually iron tipped. For close combat, they use any number of types of melee weapon.

### Slimies

*In modern days, the people of the Confederacy refer to the Border Keep soldiers as slimies, as they “live in a swamp and fight with frogs and fishes over the rights to this and that patch of mud.”*

### Salit Wood

Salit Wood is a large forest which is patrolled by Foresters in the Queen of Salit's name. The Queen of Salit is in continual conflict with the people of the Fire God. The country exports wood and wooden devices for money which is then spent hiring mercenaries and buying armor and weapons to fend off the Fire God's fanatics.

The people in the Salit Wood area have access to trees which provide good wood for bows. These people use longbows and quarterstaves. Due to this, they have adapted to the art of bow-based combat and are now world-renowned archers.

### Offending a Salit Peasant

*It has been said that bothering a Salit peasant is a foolhardy plan unless there is good cover.*

*Salit Wood has an army of renown composed of both men and woman. Because of this, woman mercenaries throughout Tigmar gain credibility when they say they are from Salit Wood.*

### Dragon's Tongue

No one lives on the Dragon Tongue save for isolated settlements of free peasants, barbarians, and hermits. The Dragon Tongue is said to be infested by dragons who terrorize any who attempt to live there. The heavy foreboding forest of the upper reaches of the mountains only add to the fear.

In fact the Dragon Tongue is goblin free, fairly tame, and mineral rich. A few towns and villages are on the north coast side of the Dragon's Tongue, and sell iron to Sampson, who remain ignorant of the location of the iron's origin.

There are a few dragons, and the people of the Dragon Tongue living near these beasts have complex systems of sacrifice, or purchase slaves for sacrifice from other lands, in order to deal with them. This usually allows for an uneasy peace between the great exploiters and the exploited.

## **The Republic of Sampson**

*3.5 million people live in the Republic of Sampson.*

*150,000 live in the capital, Sampson City.*

The largest independent part of the Confederacy of Sampson is the Republic of Sampson. The capital of the Republic is the Sampson City, situated along the coast of the Gulf of Sampson.

The Republic of Sampson has no defined border due to continual upheaval of their border provinces and keeps. Due to this they define their dominion by the sum total of all lands which pay taxes to the city. Currently the Republic of Sampson is, roughly speaking, the area spanned by the three branch rivers which go into the Gulf of Sampson north of the Kingdom of the Fire God.

This area of Sampson is primarily agricultural as it rains often enough to provide a good amount of water for the crops. There is also some iron production in the foothills of the Dragon's Tongue.

Sampson's people are also Aranists, and many of the very religious travel to the City of Light on pilgrimages. This is called the "Great Trek," and the road to the City of Light, called the Holy Road, is very well traveled. Because of this, it is infested by road barons. On the flip side, however, there are many towns and cites which lie along it.

The Republic has a standing army which is usually in the field. It is normally either engaged in expansionist activity or in quelling uprisings. The armies usually have excellent discipline and training which is said to be a remanent of the generals of Sampson who settled in the area when they ran out of things to fight.

The Republic is filthy rich due to their mining operations maintained in the foothills of the Dragon's Tongue, and so are able to maintain a military. They generally hire large numbers of mercenaries from the surrounding areas.

### ***Doom of Technology***

*The wise of the world fear the insolence of Sampson City and its exploration of technology. Many fear Sampson is soon to be destroyed by the Watchers who are dedicated to preventing the evils of technology from entering the world.*

### **Sampson City**

The capital of the Republic is very rich and prosperous. As the most racially tolerant city around, Sampson has been known to even have rich, free Mogs within its walls. They also have a largish Kudite population. This enlightenment is probably due to the huge amount of trade, money, and leisure time in the city and the exposure to the northern rim and island kingdoms of the Sea of Akka.

The City is currently experiencing a huge Renaissance of sorts, and the writings and ideas originating here are

both incredible and frightening to behold. Some excellent steel forging practices have recently come from the City as well as some water clock makers of world renown.

Sampson is also very much like Lorac al Tur in that it houses an incredibly spoiled elite. Dueling is a popular sport, as is Dak and stone maul dueling. Sampson spends much of time attempting to prove cultural superiority to Lorac al Tur, as Sampsonese are painfully aware that their original culture is owed to the Holy Empire.

The politics of Sampson City is very much what is to be expected in a republic. The poor nobility and the rich merchants are continually squabbling with each other about rights to senatorial seats, and the plebeians often find the need to riot and protest the injustices acted against them.

Suffice to say Sampson is one of the best training grounds and sources of excellent assassins.



## The Holy Road

The Holy Road is a strip of culture which reaches across the continent. Most any type of merchant or adventurer as well as pilgrim can be found walking on its thousands of miles seeking money or work. Mercenaries use this road to travel quickly across continent, as do merchants.

Due to this, the types of villages and towns along the road are very eclectic, and the people varied. The inns of the Holy Road are said to be the best found anywhere. Below are a sampling of the kinds of areas which exist on it.

### The Inn at Hot River Springs

This Inn was built by a group of Earth pilgrims returning to Sampson City from the City of Light. They stopped at the Hot River Springs when one of their members became seriously ill and found the place to be delightful and conducive to their prayers and meditations.

They built small homes using stone and some trees they found in the area and took up a life of farming. Shortly afterwards they collectively decided they wanted to provide a retreat for other pilgrims and travelers passing through and so built the inn and stables which are a delight to hold for all who travel on the Holy Road.

Today the area is a bustling village of Earth Followers and houses one of the larger temples to the Mother. The Inn itself is a large rambling one story affair with a large common room and many common sleeping rooms. The food is simple and the accommodations unusually clean and also very spare. The entire place is run by priests and monks. They disallow arms and armor within their doors, and do not serve drink which is perhaps the largest discouragement for troublemakers possible. They are not all pacifists, however, and should trouble start some priest invariably shows up with a sword to enforce tranquility.

There is a mineral spring which gives the place its name. The priests there have worked closely with it to bring to the light its healing characteristics. Now many old people and people stricken with chronic pains and illness come to be healed in the allegedly holy waters.

Both the inn and the healing come at quite modest prices. The inn charges four shivers per night for room and board for those without a symbol of Earth on them, and two shivers for those who carry a symbol of Earth. Known priests of Earth are housed for free. A bath at the spring along with a healing session with a priest and a cup of herbal tea costs a Crescent for non Earth-followers and five shivers for earth followers.

Currently the place is run collectively and all decisions are only made through unanimous vote of the residents. A High Priest of sorts does live in the place

and runs the church, but she does not play a major role in the politics and does not participate in the voting process.

### Pintara of Earth

She is a fairly young high priest of Earth in her late thirties. She has spent her life studying and wandering from place to place as many Earth Followers do. She gained recognition by performing a miraculous ritual in Farman, saving an entire town's crops from a drought.

She is a wise but by no means quiet woman who delights in the discussion of theology and politics in the world at large. Many priests of other denominations come to her to debate issues ranging from the divinity of the Emperor to the true nature of the Sea of Tears. She is very tolerant in these debates, and is said to not have had turned any suspicious person or heretic into the Witchhunters.

She has a husband, also a priest of Earth, who works in the inn and spends much of his time farming.

### The Barracks

This small town situated just outside the border of the Kingdom of Sampson is perhaps the largest mercenary hangout known throughout the world. The town has many rooms which come very cheaply, and a large number of restaurants and street vendors who specialize in things like beer and meat.

In the center of the town is a large inn for the more wealthy of travelers and a large building colloquially called the Meat Shop. In this building mercenaries in need of work hang out and wait for orders. Many kingdoms in the Confederacy send delegates to the Barracks when they are in need of more than a few dozen men. The Barracks has been known to muster and supply within a few weeks more than five thousand mercenaries.

The Barracks will arrange transportation for a price, and other than that takes two shivers per mercenary provided. The people who run the Barracks also get money from the room and board costs of the mercenaries.

The Barracks also employs a few dozen mercenaries to act as police as the place is situated in disputed territory so neither the Kingdom of Sampson or the Tyranny of Watts will lay claim to it and supply law enforcement.

### Father Jumbo

Father Jumbo runs the place. He is a large man who is massively scarred. Currently he is in his late forties, and is respected by many as having been an excellent heavy mercenary.

### Larry the Accountant

Larry is a man who is slight of frame and constantly on the move. He deals with the Barracks finances and is a good friend of Father Jumbo. Larry keeps track of each person through, is said to never forget a face, and does ask employers later on how their specific mercenaries turned out or whether there were any greats or duds in specific. This information is then collected, organized and then used. Larry probably has the best estimate as to who the best active purchasable combatants are in the Sampson area.

#### Jug-Goth

Jug-Goth is the mog captain of the guard of the Barracks. A genetic nightmare, he stands at seven feet and a handful of inches and weighs in at four hundred pounds. Jug-Goth, though slow of speech, has been rumored to have had taken on and beaten four armed and armored mercenaries using only a heavy oak table leg.

#### The Second Fence

This store situated just outside the Barracks, runs a fence for stolen or looted arms and armor as well as other valuables. They most likely sell these things in bulk to the Barracks, but they also sell to the passerby for fairly cheap.

Many mercenaries end up selling their own equipment at the Second Fence so as to stay longer in the Barracks in hopes of work.

#### The Halfway House

This inn celebrates its position of being half way between Sampson City and the City of Light. It is run by two old women called Mully and Joan, and is frequented mostly by priests. It provides cheap room with discounts for the unarmed.

#### Mully and Joan

These two old women are still fairly sprightly and run the inn with the help of a few younger hands. They enjoy gossip and know pretty much everyone of importance who has traveled on the Holy Road, with specialties in religious figures. They keep a record of people they deem as being blessed who have stayed at the Inn, and they have named all their rooms after such persons.

#### Light in the Mire

This place, around ten miles outside the City of Light, is a house of prostitution coveted by many. It is said to be the best whorehouse within the city lights.

#### Caralyn the Whore

Caralyn is renowned for her beauty, and is said to have had been coveted by a noble prince multiple times despite her profession. She has turned them all, however. She is the favorite whore of the Light in the Mire.

She is saving money towards purchasing a farm, or bailing out a lover in debtors prison according to who you

ask. Her manner is usually happy though many tell of seeing her staring sadly out her room window at the City of Light in the dusk.

In actuality she was studying to be a priestess of Sun who was somehow found in the chambers of a High Priest named Lamrik. This scandal fell entirely on her and Lamrik accused her of using witchcraft or a love potion to seduce him. Her friends say she claimed he had forcibly raped her after luring her into his rooms with promises of a discussion on the symbol of the lantern in a text she had been reading. Nevertheless the priesthood eventually kicked her out penniless, called her a whore, and pointed down the Holy Road at the Light in the Mire saying she could be a priestess there.

#### The Pilgrim's Inns

These are a string of around fifty Inns which dot the Holy Road every twelve miles. The Pilgrim's Inns are owned by a man named Jad of Sampson City who claims to supply these inns as he is, "not capable of maintaining a priestly life and so I wish to help others with perhaps stronger spirits than I achieve the great glory of witnessing the City of Light." Others point to his incredible fortune which is growing steadily as his true incentive.

Nevertheless, the Inns are simple stone buildings with the same sign depicting a walking robed figure hanging out each of their doors. Each Inn has two common rooms for sleeping and one dining area. There are no individual rooms as this would, in Jad's words, "raise costs outside of a Pilgrim's range, and not foster community as well as common rooms do." The Inns sell not only room and board but robes, sandals, packaged food, and walking sticks to the traveler. To Jad's credit, pilgrims who look like pilgrims do get a cheaper fare than other travelers. Pilgrims can also do physical work, if any work is available, for room and board for one night.

## St. Kland

*Saint Kland was a militant Follower of Sun who during a Ssall invasion single handily pushed back and killed ten Ssall with the words of Sun. He died in the conflict, but that in addition to previous miracles at arms caused the Church of Sun, prominent in the northern Border Kingdoms, to bestow upon him the title of saint.*

St. Kland is a typical border keep which is partially responsible for the beginnings of a new Ssall-human war in earnest instead of mere border squabbles.

We present St. Kland in a fair amount of detail as model of a standard type of kingdom found in the Confederacy and Border Keep areas.

St. Kland consists of a central castle and some limited lands which are run by soldier-farmers. The lands have not actually been attacked in some years, and currently the soldier-farmers spend their time farming, training, and working on draining a small section of swamp on the other side of the Tain river and building another keep there. So far they have dug one main drainage ditch, built a mound for the keep, and built most of the first story of the keep itself.

The castle has an actual blacksmith of some skill, stables, kennels, kitchen, and the other trappings suited to a typical castle. The castle is situated on a manufactured hill and has a shabby moat. The moat is mostly filled with swampy water and mud and is not very deep. On the interior of the castle is the keep itself. The keep is a five story stone structure situated on another small hill. Most of the village is at the foot of the hill and is walled and also surrounded by the moat. The only unprotected buildings are some huts of ill construction which provide summer housing for the soldier-farmers.

The fields are mostly drained swamps and are covered with drainage ditches which run off excess water. Over the years the better fields have been built up to around a foot above the normal lay of the land by the continual moving of dirt from ditch to dry land, and so now they are more dry than normal. Other fields which are more damp are used to grow water crops such as a derivative of rice.

There are some groves of trees in the nearby vicinity, the largest of which is called Kland wood. Kland wood is used for firewood and lumber, but is regarded with some suspicion as it is said to be haunted. A crazy hermit lives in the wood who is sometimes consulted for advice.

The King of St. Kland who is named Samp DuOrchera is a short tempered warlike bastard by all people's accounts, including his dearest friends. DuOrchera has three sons and two daughters, and his plan is to bestow St. Kland upon the eldest son, to bestow a new kingdom which shall be called DuOrchera to his second son, to send his youngest son to Sampson

City for schooling, and to marry off the daughters as quickly as possible to the two neighboring kingdoms, East Dral and Fern, who are protected by St. Kland and who seem to resent more and more the stiff taxes they have to pay to it.

So far DuOrchera's plans are going rather nicely. His youngest son is in school, the keep has the preliminaries of a foundation, and one of the daughters is in fact married off to the prince of East Dral. The other daughter, being only ten years of age, has two year yet before he can marry her off, but he is waiting eagerly.

DuOrchera also makes some extra pocket money along with his farmer-soldiers by claiming to the Confederacy he needs three hundred men, and then renting out two hundred men to interior kingdoms as mercenaries. So far this little scheme has gone unchecked, and the coffers are full enough that the masons for the new keep are actually getting paid.

The most recent bit of news on St. Kland is the Ssall have noticed the new foundations and keep being laid out on the wrong side of the Tain river and have been slowly pulling together enough Ssall for a massive strike. Luckily for DuOrchera, he had some traitorous humans who have joined the Ssall and one of them was a double agent and reported these plans back to him. So currently DuOrchera is frantically trying to collect his soldier-farmers so he can start a full war as if a noticeable conflict flames up then he can easily get more soldiers and more funds from the Confederacy.

## People of St. Kland

### Jaral of St. Kland

Jaral is the captain of the guard and is an accomplished soldier. He suspected Ssall annoyance at the invasion of their lands, and was the one who orchestrated the spying. He is a cautious man who enjoys the occasional battle but much prefers the maneuvering and thinking beforehand. He is renown for setting excellent traps and for tricking his opponents with unsuspected maneuvers.

### Sally DuOrchera-Vallens III

The queen kept her original family name and passed it along, as per her tradition, to her daughters who will keep the Vallens when they get married but will loose the DuOrchera.

The queen is a slight, battered woman who was married off to DuOrchera as a last resort by her family as a way to decrease their taxes. She was raised in the interior Confederacy, and spends much of her time wishing for those days to return. She is very educated and was what caused the youngest son to be sent to school as soon as possible. She is also sick much of the time and spends her time in the nice gardens of St. Kland with her ladies in waiting, waiting.

#### Samp DuOrchera II

The eldest son of the king, DuOrchera II is a masochistic, violent, manipulative bastard of boorish intelligence and manners. He has spent his time learning how to kill things and is now quite good at it. Now at the age of eighteen he uses a massively spiked flail and a shield. In many ways Samp suffers terribly as he wants the respect of inheriting St. Kland as well as the potential for war and violence which he suspects his brother Kull will inherit in the new kingdom of DuOrchera.

#### Kull DuOrchera

Kull is a slow and fat boy who is much smarter than his father and brothers give him credit for. He spends much of his time with Jaral who is more of a father than his true father. The King does love Kull in his own way, but it is clear that his elder brother is much preferred.

Kull looks with some excitement at the prospect of a real war gearing up on the border, and hopes his father will let him participate. This prospect, fortunately for Kull, is very likely even though Kull is only a moderately good fighter at the young age of thirteen.

#### Sally DuOrchera-Vallens IV

At the age of ten, she looks with fear on the coming years. Her elder sister's departure was a blow for her two years ago, and she grew very sick. She has never fully recovered.

#### Butra of the Harp

The court fool and bard, Butra is enjoyed and kicked by all. Butra plays the part of a foolish fool, but is actually a rather nice man. Crippled by a disease at birth, his legs are stunted and wobbly which causes much guffaws from the royal family. He was raised in Sampson City and educated by one of the Senators to be an 'intellectual fool.' Sadly he outsmarted the senator, made too much of a fool of him, and was sold to DuOrchera as a punishment. He now spends a lot of time with both Sallies, as he finds in the younger a sweet and intelligent girl, and in the elder a wonderful source of humor and conversation.

#### Drun the Blacksmith

Drun is a silent and unremarkable man who has learned how to make swords of fairly good quality over the years. People trust him absolutely and so he has ended up keeping things for people and acts as a village bank.

#### The Crazy Hermit

The Crazy Hermit who is simply called Sir by those who talk to him is an adept Kaine reader. He is hard to talk to and very flighty. The most effective way to talk to him is to give him food or clothing and then ask him some question. Usually he will get out his Kaine sticks and do a reading after donning the clothing or eating the food. He lives in a mud hut on the outskirts of Kland Wood and

gets angry when people cut down trees near him.

## Kingdom of the Fire God

This extremely militant kingdom worships the volcano it surrounds. They believe a family of dragons lives in the mountain and that the dragons will only be appeased by continual sacrifices. They spend much time fighting with their neighbors, taking peasants as slaves, and throwing victims in the volcano.

They used to dominate the entire western half of Tigmar but were beaten back during Sampson's incredible conquest of Tigmar. However Sampson did not fully exterminate the Fire God priests, and they slowly rebuilt their power at the volcano, and a short fifty years later began to expand again.

The smoke from the volcano is fairly thick and the particles cause a large amount of rain to fall in the south and west lands of the volcano. Due to this, this area is the richest farmland, save the Tain river area, known anywhere. The Kingdom is able to maintain its independence due to this food source.

In addition the mountain is very mineral rich, so most troops of the Kingdom of the Fire God have metal armor, usually a breast plate over a chain tunic. All the Paladins wear full plate.

The Kingdom of the Fire God says it is not part of the Confederacy of Sander, and continuously attempts to purge any Aranists along with any denominations of forbidden faiths from within their borders.

The army of the Kingdom of the Fire God consists of special paladins who lead bands of priests and soldiers. Citizens, as a religious duty, are required to serve 1 year out of every 3. Many serve 4 years from 15 to 18 and then have 12 years during which they grow old and, hopefully, too feeble to fight again.

The Kingdom of the Fire God's military is led by a warrior-priest cult that uses a special kind two-handed balls-and-chains called Sanctifiers as their sole weapon. Sanctifiers have a compartment in which one can secure burning coals. When these weapons are swung, air is forced through the ball, and they shriek and leave trails of sparks.

The Paladins also have a special form of dueling using double-ended burning brands. These are six foot staves with each end wrapped in oil cloth and set aflame. The fight lasts until one of the duelists is victorious or the flames are extinguished.

The Kingdom is only interested in technology for military purposes. It has mastered the production of Greek Fire and has horribly powerful siege machines.

An old invasion against the Kingdom had descriptions of being bombarded with metal rocks propelled by explosions, fire and smoke. So far, such devices have not spread beyond the mountain itself, but the legends have prevented further attempts at invasion.

*"We had retreated to the small keep in Fant near Salit*

*Wood. The Paladins laid siege and were quickly destroying the walls with their machinery.*

*In desperation we decided to assault them, and, after a prayer to Sun, charged from the gates.*

*It was horrible. I almost say it would have been better to stay in the keep than experience what we experienced.*

*Foul smoke billowed from the charging mass of Fire God soldiers, who were led by humans who were closer to demons in their form and mannerisms.*

*They wore full plate like it was clothing, and seemed to be burning. Sparks flew from their huge weapons which shrieked and wailed like living things as they swung them around their heads.*

*They never tired. We, choking with smoke issued from their incense bearers, quickly succumbed to the invulnerable demons. Our screams were drowned by demonic howling. Those who were wounded and yet still escaped from the scene never healed. Their soot covered wounds, cursed by the paladin's hands got infected and that was the end.*

## Goblins

Goblins is the name given to the people of the 208 tribes of the Sakradam Ash Vaghul (roughly translated All Under Heaven - a rather pretentious name the Goblins have given their state). At present, the Goblins cover all the mountains OF WHAT and lay claim to the rest of the world. What other people can claim that their god has come down to guide them? The Goblins relish this fact, and, so, believe that they are clearly exalted above all other races and can dwell where they wish. Unfortunately for the Goblins, the righteousness of their claims is not clear to anyone else. Indeed, no one else really understands that they are making such statements of ownership. To most the Goblins are a natural calamity that strikes the world every twenty years, no different really than a hurricane or a tidal wave except that they are more predictable.

*"I am not so anxious that we should note the horrible savagery of these acts as concerned that, whilst judging their faults so correctly, we should be so blind to our own. I consider it more barbarous to eat a man alive than to eat him dead; to tear by rack and torture a body still fully feeling, to roast it by degrees, and then give it to be trampled and eaten by dogs and swine - a practice that has not only been read about but seen within our own memory, not between ancient enemies, but between neighbors and fellow-citizens and, what is worse, under the cloak of piety and religion - than to roast and eat a man after he is dead."*

*-Montaigne, On Cannibals*

## Physical Characteristics

Goblins are a small people averaging about 4'2". Their skin is rubbery and amazingly tough, not to mention a rather ghastly shade of gray. This plus their rather hideous facial features (large noses, heavy protruding brows, bulging red eyes, little tufts of facial hair everywhere etc.) makes them look like the quintessential children's bogeymen. Their appearance is such that they are thought demons by many priesthoods and used to exhort the faithful to better behavior "Repent ye ungrateful sinners and the gods will have mercy upon us and condemn these demons to the pits of hell from which they sprung!". It is perhaps needless to say that the sinners have not yet repented and the Goblins are still free of the pits of hell. The Goblins themselves do not share this negative view and in fact consider themselves rather distinguished looking, taking particular pride in their many tufts of hair. There is very little sexual dimorphism among the Goblins, except that females have wider hips and mammary glands. Due to their small stature and spindly limbs Goblins of both sexes are not strong but are very quick and agile.

Goblin life spans are very short. They are born more

fully formed than humans and mature more rapidly. By the age of 3 they are sexually mature, by the age of 6 they can be considered middle aged, and by the age of 9 they are usually dead. Mothers have sizable litters and can expect to lose most of their children. It is possible to greatly extend this life span through a drug appropriately named Vollogrfad (lifegiver). This drug is found in the leaves of a very rare plant and can be made only with great difficulty. It is normally given only to shamans who thus extend their life spans three or four fold.

## Goblins Before the Coming of Kurmansu

Before the coming of Aufsarg the Goblins were a collection of 208 stone-age hunter-gatherer tribes dwelling in the rather inhospitable Southern Mountains. They gathered roots and berries and hunted a variety of small and moderately sized birds and mammals. They made a variety of crude stone tools and weapons, and, as Goblin hunters were quite small and weak, they brewed a nasty paralytic poison to help them hunt. They also made considerable use of traps and ruses. The mountains were quite rugged so the Goblin people were very divided; the 208 tribes had very little contact with one another. There was one peculiar feature in their lives. In the mountains, after a long 17 year dormancy a plant called Okstak (food plant) springs to its full, nearly man-sized, height. The plant then flourishes for about 3 years and again becomes dormant. This plant provides the richest and most abundant food source known to any people. The Goblins take full advantage of it and the population soars very rapidly. Goblins are more sexually active and litters are larger. Unfortunately after 3 years the plant enters its dormant phase and the Goblins are faced with a population far higher than the mountains can possibly support. In traditional Goblin society most of this population starved or were killed fighting one another (at other times Goblins were not very violent to one another; the tribes were so isolated there was no real need to be). The population then slowly increased (very slowly) until the Okstak grew again.

The traditional Goblin religion was based around the shamans, who communed with the gods through spirit trances. Goblin religion was essentially animistic, and many things possessed spirits. The spirits of hunted animals had to be appeased, the spirits of Okstak had to be implored to rise, etc. There were gods as well as spirits, and chief among them were Gutsamon, god of the sky and Kurmansu, god of the earth. The center of Goblin religion was the great volcano Fars Magrad (fire peak). Here shamans journeyed to commune with the great spirits of fire and the god Kurmansu. By breathing the fumes they could gain visions, and by watching the currents of lava they could see the future. At Fars Magrad

they could also find the Gifts of Kurmansu (obsidian). The shamans were also just about the only contact that distant tribes had with one another. A shaman had license to wander far and wide through the mountains searching for rare herbs, particularly Vollogrfad, and looking for apprentices. Goblin shamans are always in need of apprentices to perform their dirty work for them, and, as apprentices have very high mortality rates (all those fumes and herbs have horrendous side effects), shamans are always searching for more. Because of this wandering, the 208 tribes were not as varied technologically (a clever new tool design could always get the shaman a few new apprentices) or linguistically as their isolation might have permitted.

### **The Coming of Kurmansu**

Many years ago (Goblin dating systems are quite poor), a Goblin named Aufsarg was born in the Ratramand tribe. As a young Goblin he showed himself to be both clever and prone to dreams and ecstatic frenzies. He was snapped up by a wandering shaman and survived the rituals of apprenticeship. He became one of the most powerful shamans in memory. One night he slept near the summit of Fars Magrad and had a great vision. He saw the civilizations of the world, including cities and towns, metal, stable food sources, and many other wonders. When he awoke he was inspired to gain all these things for his own people.

Aufsarg remembered that in ancient times the god Kurmansu was said to walk the earth and speak with his children. Aufsarg dedicated his life to finding a way to make this god come to earth again and lead the Goblins into a new era. Only a god could unite the 208 tribes. So Aufsarg invented a great ritual which could summon Kurmansu into Fars Magrad. He called a great assembly of all the shamans and through the use of some spectacular rhetoric, skillful politics, and well timed assassinations, convinced his fellows to attempt this great ritual. Hundreds of Goblin shamans gathered in a great circle and danced, chanted and beat drums. Fars Magrad rumbled ominously and after an hour of wild effort they felt the presence of Kurmansu and implanted within the presence the instruction to make the Goblins great. Then the shamans collapsed, completely drained of energy, some dead, some merely unconscious.

### ***The Rules Behind the Story***

*What the shamans summoned was not Kurmansu but a very powerful (force 20) spirit. This spirit found itself suddenly in possession of consciousness and thought, and with only one goal - namely, to make the Goblins great.*

The God immediately set about learning. It drained the memories of many of the small forms around it and learned what a Goblin was, and the rudiments of Goblin

history and culture. It then stopped the hearts of all those shamans who were still alive who might question in any way its leadership, among them Aufsarg. When the remaining shamans awoke it announced that they had succeeded in their efforts and that he was indeed Kurmansu. He would lead them to power and greatness if only they followed him absolutely. This commandment was accompanied by some spectacular pyrotechnics courtesy of Fars Magrad and the remaining shamans nodded vigorously.

### **The Creation of the Sakradam Ash Vaghul and the Wars Against The South**

Kurmansu's first action was to unite the 208 tribes to focus all Goblindom on his plans. With his own spectacular powers and the support of almost all the surviving shamans (a few had not come to the assembly) this did not prove that difficult. Most tribes were willing to serving a god and those who were not were quickly convinced by the overwhelming power of Kurmansu. Though he found that his power was concentrated at Fars Magrad and that he was incapable of leaving this volcano, he learned that he could form vaguely Goblinoid shapes out of fire which could leave. He could project his power through these beings, called Hakrust (agents). Having united the Goblins into what he called the Sakradam Ash Vaghul the shamans outlived their usefulness. They still received dreams and visions that Kurmansu could not control. This was intolerable so he had them all thrown into Fars Magrad as sacrifices, having first striped them of all there memories and talents. They were replaced by a new set of Goblins whose powers came solely from Kurmansu. Their loyalty could be completely trusted. They were called wardens and given the drug Vollogrfad, and a staff through which they could converse with Kurmansu.

At this point the Okstak emerged from its long dormancy and the Goblins multiplied as usual. Kurmansu knew this was an inevitable occurrence and had prepared for it. He had devoted considerable thought to how to make the Goblins great. He realized that to create a civilization complete with cities and all the other things Aufsarg had seen, a stable food source was necessary. At most times the mountains could not support anything above the usual Goblin population, and the Okstak caused a population surge that could not be sustained. New land was needed where grain could be grown, and a higher population accommodated. The tundra was unacceptable for obvious reasons, and the pine forests were not very fertile, and well defended by the Ssall and Graer-Staz. This left the southern human lands, which had the advantage of already being farmland. So, Kurmansu remained calm during the huge

population explosion and just as the food ran low directed most Goblins into the human lands. The only Goblins left behind were those the mountains could sustain, wardens and those Kurmansu thought would be good breeding stock. The rest, males, females, and children poured down into human lands in search of food.

Before the coming of Kurmansu, the excess population had always destroyed itself in isolated mountain valleys. Never before had a great mass of Goblins come down from the mountains. And it truly was a massive horde and the number of Goblins involved was beyond count. Shocked historians were reduced to the use of stock phrases like "as numerous as the sands of the sea and the stars of the sky." The Goblins lacked all military experience, their weapons were made of stone, and armor was a myth, but they were many and they were hungry, and they had hope of returning from whence they came. Moreover, a god was with them. The farmers and shepherds at the foot of the mountains had time enough to look shocked and not much else before being overrun and eaten. Word of the invasion reached the towns and cities of the north and there was widespread panic. A few crackpots said that this was the judgment of the Watchers and that the end was near. The more practically minded of the empire gathered an army and sent south to face the horde.

The horde meanwhile ravaged the South very much like a swarm of locusts, stripping the land and leaving nothing behind them. They ate the grain, the sheep and the humans, and burned what they could not eat. A few prisoners were sent back to Kurmansu for questioning, along with a few samples of metal for further research. Elements of the horde encountered the imperial army near the unwallled town of Sekriast. Initially the army slaughtered their tiny opponents by the thousands, but there were so many that a flood of replacements took the places of the slain. By nightfall, the exhausted Imperials had been driven into the town save for a few on swift horses with no compunctions about leaving their companions to certain death. These troops fled south and announced the defeat. The army awoke to find themselves completely surrounded by the horde (a few had no patience and went elsewhere, but to most this was a bountiful source of fresh food). The humans now knew that the fate of the fallen was to be eaten and fought almost as desperately as their opponents, but, as they were few, the town was stormed. As the Goblins fought their way in the commanders of the army decided that anything was better than being eaten and they fired the town, hurling themselves into the flames. Many Goblins perished in the fire and much food was burned to ashes. The Goblins were not happy.

Tidings of the disaster caused widespread panic. The crackpots suddenly seemed very reasonable. The temples

were flooded with desperate worshippers and the priests prayed night and day for mercy. In cities, the militia was quickly mustered, and those living in rural areas fled to walled cities with their possessions. The Goblins followed close behind and encountered walls for the first time. No degree of frenzied desperation could carry a four foot humanoid over a twenty foot wall. The cities held and the Goblins, having eaten everything around them and behind them, soon starved, or, weakened by hunger succumbed to disease. The prayers for mercy turned to psalms of rejoicing, bells rung in every city and town, the crackpots were again known as crackpots, and the Emperor personally sacrificed a dozen bulls. The humans, thinking the wars were over, drifted back to their homes. The foot of the mountains was soon reoccupied, as so much empty land could not be allowed to go to waste.

In the mountains there was a great deal of muttering and cursing. However, the expedition was not a total failure. Prisoners were taken and drained of their memories and knowledge. Samples of metal weapons and armor were brought back, and a fair amount of intelligence was gained. During the next twenty years the Goblins learned how to work iron, and fortunately this metal was quite plentiful. The Goblins also developed siege equipment. Kurmansu continued to consolidate his control, increasing the number of wardens. Unfortunately, much of time had to spent in the day to day search for food, so there was not as much preparation as desirable. Kurmansu was still fairly confident that his improved forces could overthrow the human empire.

Twenty years after the first assault another great horde of Goblins poured out of the mountains. They were just as numerous but somewhat better equipped. Instead of stone weapons many carried crude iron ones, and a few even had scraps of armor (though most of these were reserved for the wardens). Once again, they swept across the frontier with ease. The humans, however, knew what was happening this time. The people of the south did not even try to stand but fled south burning their fields and killing their livestock. The army that hurried south did not try to engage the horde but concentrated on slowing them down. Instead of a wealth of food and resources the horde encountered burned and ruined fields and empty houses. They starved much faster this second time. Far fewer reached the walled cities of the south and these weakened forces could not storm the cities strengthened as they were by both refugees and the still intact imperial army. Though the devastation was impressive, the second invasion was much less successful than the first. The humans came warily back to the South driven by the need for land, but they were warier this time. A small expedition was sent into the mountains but did not return. Unfortunately, the humans once again failed to take any prisoners and were quite in the dark about what was

occurring. The priests decided that these invaders were clearly demons and this seemed as good a hypothesis as any.

In the mountains there was much gnashing of teeth. Clearly a new plan was needed. Kurmansu realized that the humans could not be defeated by merely ravaging their southern frontier. Their strongholds were in the south and they could repopulate the South. The Goblins could not occupy anything in the wake of the population crash caused by the destruction of the horde. The Goblins had to destroy the structure of the Empire in one blow, and then reoccupy the land at leisure. Kurmansu looked to lake Mandarak (said to be the home of the minor Goblin god Mandarak and known by Humans as the Sea of Tears) as a way to insert his forces deep into human territory much more quickly. So the Goblins near Lake Mandarak were ordered in their less than copious free time to start constructing boats. And build boats they did, though some starved, bravely serving the common good, as Kurmansu put it, because they worked rather than hunted. Still, the boats could only carry a small portion of the horde.

Twenty years after the first invasion the third horde descended on human lands. The humans were by this point getting rather suspicious that this disaster happened once every twenty years. They dealt with this invasion much as they had the last one, but more skillfully. However, as the army began its delaying actions and the fields were going up in flames word came that a Goblin army had appeared at the southern end of the lake near the great city of Calasta. The empire had no lake fleet and the Goblin boats, feeble though they were, passed unmolested to the southern shore. Calasta was assaulted and demanded help. The Imperial army rushed south, ceasing their delaying action to deal with the greater threat. Meanwhile, after 5 days of wild assaults, the Goblin army stormed the unprepared Calasta, the third city of the Empire. As they raged through the streets the defenders fired the city and left it a ruin, and saved many from their fate in Goblin cookpots. Once again bells tolled in every city, and incense and prayers drifted up to heaven.

Fortunately, the Imperial army, after a forced march, encountered the Goblins not far from Calasta. The Goblins had taken heavy casualties in the fight for Calasta and no longer had numbers to compensate for their pathetic combat skills. In a pitched battle the Goblins were driven into lake Mandarak and slain to the last. The southern horde suffered

The South was again populated by daring and hungry souls accompanied by some troops. Calasta was rebuilt, though not on the same scale as before. Finally, a considerable portion of the imperial tax revenues went into building a strong lake fleet.

In the mountains the Goblins occupied themselves with loud lamentations, considerable beating of breasts, and much tearing of hair. Kurmansu planned to attempt the same strategy during the next invasion with an expanded naval force. He also sought to extend his godly power to the human lands, searching through the currents of the earth. He planned to cause a great earthquake on the southern shore of the lake shattering the human defenses. This would allow his Goblins to reach the capitol without expending their resources on assaulting walls and forts along the way. While he was searching, however, some ungrateful Goblins chose to revolt against his benevolent rule. Certain Goblins with shaman-like powers had been born and combined with some ungrateful, power-hungry chieftains in encouraging some Goblins to revolt, yelling about freedom. A rather strange war began between the loyalists and the rebels. Neither side could spare much time from finding food to actually fight each other. The war dragged on, but, with the power of Kurmansu, the issue was never really in doubt, and the rebels were mostly slain, though a few fled far away from his reach. The humans built a fortress to observe the southern coast and during a trial of his strength, Kurmansu destroyed it with an earthquake. After that he felt quite confident.

When the time came, Kurmansu sent his hordes and unleashed the earthquake. However, the earthquake was from his base of power and he found the tremendous power he unleashed dragged him into almost certain annihilation. At the last moment he clawed his way from the brink by gathering all his power, and then collapsed back into Fars Magrad. When he pulled in his power the wardens staves shattered and all that had been built by his sorcery collapsed. The invasion was even less well organized than usual due to the ensuing demoralization and the wardens' consternation. The earthquake had shattered the cities near lake Mandarak but the fleets had miraculously survived. The little Goblin boats were annihilated on the lake except for a few bands which reached the shore only to be routed by local militias. In the South, the humans were well prepared and had no difficulty in completing the usual Goblin slaughter.

Kurmansu recovered from his effort with the conviction that he would never try anything so rash again. This was the last long range earthquake ever attempted by the Goblin's god. Humanity rebuilt the ruined cities and again repopulated the South. Several great invasions have been launched since the fourth, but none have encountered much success. The new Imperial navy has always destroyed most of the boats and the direct land invasions have inevitably failed.

After much diligent effort, the Goblins have developed a very hardy grain called Ingmok that will grow in a few places. This allows Kurmansu to keep a

permanent body of guards plus a few metal smiths and artisans. The Goblins now give the members of the horde some military training before they charge into battle. They produce increasingly effective metal weapons and armor, and iron continues to be abundant. Kurmansu's eugenics program is gradually creating bigger, stronger Goblins, and ones not prone to strange and treasonous visions. He is now seeks three things; a way to defeat the human fleet, an easy way to knock down walls, and a way to increase the speed of his forces. Several ideas have been attempted, most notably the creation of a large sea serpent, which was quite effective but took too much effort. Now the Goblins have found a substance that burns very well even in water, especially with a few additives. With a good delivery system (they are now working on a pump), it should allow them to annihilate the imperial fleet. Finally, Kurmansu has gradually increased the scope and range of his powers. He can reach human lands with more ease with every passing year.

The humans have come to accept the periodic Goblin attacks. The generally favored theory maintains that the Goblins are the scourge of the gods sent to test the faith and courage of the people. Every twenty years, just before the invasion, there is a great ceremony held to inform the gods that the people have repented and there is no need for an attack. The Empire has changed considerably due to the Goblin attacks. To maintain both an army and a navy and to repair the damage done, taxes have increased in number and collectors are more efficient. The government is better organized. The people and the nobility has put up with this due to the threat of invasion. Screaming about the Goblin threat can usually exhort money when all else fails. The humans have launched several expeditions into the mountains to find out more but they have either discovered nothing of value or have not returned. Several attempts to establish observation posts on the southern shore of the lake have all failed due to catastrophic natural disasters. Wizards in the service of the Empire have identified a huge accumulation of power within a certain volcano but have failed to learn more. The priests have announced that this is the dwelling of the Watchers, and occasionally they ask for a major attack against it. However, the Empire's resources simply do not allow such a venture to launch and supply major expeditions into the barren mountains (also some "cowards" question the wisdom of attacking the home of a demon prince). So the humans endure the attacks, and have been very successful in resisting them. The southern fields are occupied until just before the Goblin attack and then reoccupied soon afterwards. The damage the Goblins have inflicted in recent attacks is not great, and some humans are becoming quite complacent.

### **Goblin Dress, Weapons, and Armor**

Most Goblins wear whatever they can. Furs and dressed animal skins are most common, but clothes made out of leaves and bark are also available. Wardens wear large crimson cloaks as a mark of office. Kurmansu's personal guards, metal smiths, and technicians wear blue cloaks. Admission into any of these groups is considered a great honor and Goblins compete vigorously for positions. Weapons are very limited. Most popular, because they are easily produced and used, are short spears with iron tips. Stone hammers and the occasional metal ax are also used in close combat. Hunting bows are fairly common, though their pull is so feeble that they must be tipped with a paralytic poison to do much. With the poison they are quite deadly, but even light armor can repel the shot. At sea, these arrows are usually rapped with oil soaked cloth and used to try to set ships on fire (not very successfully). Among Kurmansu's guard there are a few crossbows copied from human samples. Due to the scarcity of metal smiths with much free time, armor is rare. Much of it is stolen from humans. Most armor is made of beaten metal plates hung over the shoulders or sown on to leather clothing. Armor is most common among Kurmansu's guard.



## The Ssall

*The current Ssall population is estimated at about 3 million.*

*For a brief history of the Ssall civilization, see Ssall History on page 296.*

The huge area known to most as the Ssasas-Ssall is the home of a race of intelligent creatures called the Ssall. The Ssall appear to be bipedal frogs that have attained human stature. Close examination of the Ssall reveals that they are not amphibious, however, and are warm-blooded animals. Possessing greenish skin, the Ssall feel very much like frogs. Ssall attain adulthood at 7 years and generally live to the age of 40 or 50.

The Ssall take their name from what they perceive as their duty - work. They believe themselves to have been chosen by their gods to spread the swamp and protect its denizens. This work they perform tirelessly and in the faith that they do the divine will. *The power of the orb let the owner of the item quickly and successfully mutate genes as desired. As the item can only alter X chromosomes, however, the males of the species were left mostly unaltered.*

rent castes are not genetically has fairly unique abilities and sall, the priestesses known as the Errack, actually have gills for visiting temples swallowed by the swamp. The priestesses serve as a loose government to the Ssall.

By far the largest group of the Ssall is the Ssall-asa, or "small worker" group. The Ssall-asa are responsible for feeding and supplying all other Ssall. An honorable occupation, the Ssall-asa are revered by all other Ssall as the true Ssall - the ones who do the work given by their gods.

Warriors comprise the third caste of the Ssall. Larger and tougher than other Ssall, these warriors protect the swamps from invaders and also serve as police. Referred to as the Grakka by their sisters, warriors are well supplied and trained for their duties.

The final known caste of the Ssall is extremely small. They have no caste name as they are shunned, but are referred to as the Unnamed caste by human beings. These Ssall are stooped and fat compared to other Ssall, and often a bit slow intellectually. While all other Ssall are incapable of speaking non-Ssallish languages, the Unnamed caste can due to their abnormal physiques. The Unnamed speak various human languages and the tongue of the Zalpas, and this makes them an irreplaceable asset to the Ssall. They are often used as

scouts, translators, diplomats, and some have even been executed for practicing the way of the Grukuss - magic.

Priestesses at the major temples, housed in the two remaining cities, produce offspring. Priestesses from towns journey to these cities to reproduce.

The Ssall trade with the Tandite Roamers to the north. In return for rare Western spices, the Ssall provide gems, sometimes iron, and swamp rarities. The Ssall themselves have an active internal trade system that relies upon bartering and arbitration by priestesses in times of conflict. The Ssall are on good terms with the Graer-Staz of the Eldar's Forest and provide weapons and armor to these wolfmen. The Zalpas and the Ssall have a rather ambiguous relationship, fraught with petty wars and reconciliations.

## The Grukuss

Magic is despised by most Ssall, for magic led to the destruction of their once powerful and advanced civilization. The history of the Ssall Empire is important to their current caste system and mentality. For a brief history of the Ssall civilization, see Ssall History on page 296.

The Ssall females were once merely large frogs, like the Ssall males, although always a bit brighter, according to Ssall mythology. The gods gave them a gift, however, in the form of a huge glowing orb. The Ssall soon learned that eggs placed around the orb could be magically manipulated into special forms by daily movement of the eggs to certain positions. Although many of the initial attempts produced only monstrosities, the Ssall females became adept at placing and moving eggs rapidly.

The Ssall females became intelligent enough to use the orb by accident; some eggs were accidentally laid around the orb in the correct position to increase the embryos' general intelligence. This new generation of Ssall learned to use the orb to produce interesting and startling creations.

The orb spent its force after one hundred years, and its cracked remains can still be found in the largest Ssall temple. The Ssall, expecting that the goodness of the gods was not infinite, were not caught completely unaware, however, and they had manipulated their genes so as to be able to control the growth of embryos through diet. By eating various items found in the swamp at the appropriate times, the child can be manipulated into becoming a member of the various castes by turning off undesired genes. Only the priestesses are fertile; other Ssall have various pieces of their own genetic code shut off in the process of becoming specialized and do not have developed reproductive systems.

Two major religious denominations of Ssall appeared

during the growth of their empire. The Ssall-gaa, now extinct, formed the larger of the two sections, the Ssall-kaa the smaller. The two groups lived peacefully except that the Ssall-kaa criticized the Ssall-gaa's child-rearing habits.

The Kaa think it their duty to only create members from a given caste during one period of the year. Ssall mythology holds that the various castes were first created in a certain order within the span of the year, and the Kaa reenact this myth. The Gaa, however, simply produce members of any caste as needed.

Additionally, the Kaa limit the number of Ssall created. Also according to mythology, a certain number of each caste were produced during the last year of the orb's potency. The Kaa reproduce this number to pay thanks to their gods for deliverance from their state of ignorance, while the Gaa simply have as many offspring as convenient. The Kaa still hold to this tradition, and this has greatly hampered the increase of the Ssall population after the time of the Grukuss.

The Ssall Empire collapsed after twenty years of uneasy peace with a new caste known as the Grukuss. The Grukuss emerged from corrupted Gaa warrior eggs - the Kaa were in the worker period of their cycle at the time. The Grukuss succeeded in destroying almost the entire Ssall Empire before their numbers were so diminished that they had no recourse but to flee into the dark recesses of the swamp. For more information on the fall of the empire, see the brief history on page 296.

The food source important to the warrior caste had been tainted by a moss at the time of the Grukuss, and this resulted in their creation. Seen as a punishment by the gods for Gaa irreverence, the Kaa quickly became the dominant religious denomination in the remains of the empire.

The Grukuss themselves are horribly twisted Ssall. They share many features of the various castes. Now thought to be demonic in origin, the Grukuss are intensely magical. They are superb magicians and used magic to destroy and kill the Ssall. Ssall now hate magic as a work of the Grukuss, and with good reason.

### **Ssall Animal Workers**

The Ssall have domesticated several forms of insects and small animals to perform various specialized tasks. Genetically manipulated themselves through selective breeding, the insects are usually gigantic and intelligent enough to realize that the Ssall are their friends. Although they may not be termed as bright, they have developed intelligence above that of their tiny insect cousins.

The most common insect used by the Ssall is the Ssli ant. Ants the size of squirrels, the Ssall-asa workers use these arthropods as food transports. They behave as other

ants, and create a chemical trail. These animals deposit the food they are given in the correct location often enough to make them useful workers.

Garbage collectors known as the Assalla, roaches, crawl about the Ssall abodes eating those things perceived as garbage and unwanted by the Ssall. Food is normally kept in "safe" areas where the Assalla do not patrol.

The Ssall enjoy occasional feasts of Urkkassa meat. These animals are lizards the size of pigs. Kept in small herds, these wily animals have some suspicion of their dubious fate. Thus, herding beetles the size of small dogs are used to maintain the herd. These beetles are also assigned the task of killing weak and sick herd members, which they are then allowed to consume.

### **Ssall Combat Animals**

The most common of all Ssall combat insects is the Kuuka-ssaak. This beetle is worn as a helmet by many Ssall warriors and by all Ssall mounted troops. This large stag beetle permits telepathic communication between other Kuuka-ssaak wearers or special mounts. Very useful for organizing troops and laying ambushes, these beetles are the Ssall favorite.

Some what rarer is the Koss, a giant insectoid mount. Koss understand and usually obey commands given to them through the Kuuka-ssaak, although they will occasionally become distracted. Koss are usually ridden, although they may be used as attack beasts without a rider. Human soldiers dislike the Koss because it is a derivative of the stink beetle; Koss discharge clouds of foul gas that usually result in uncontrollable vomiting for human beings and goblins (the Ssall are either immune or are able to ignore the effects of the cloud). See the Monster section for more details.

Giant dragonflies, known as Sssss, the Ssall attempt to reproduce the noise they make, are used as aerial cavalry units. Capable of carrying a rider, Sssss are not often deployed due to their limited numbers, and are usually reserved for reconnaissance missions. Still, the Sssss can be devastating battle mounts when used en masse.

An animal kept in pools that the Ssall wish to guard, normally containing submerged temples or occasionally Ssall males, is the Gup-Gup fish. Essentially piranhas, these fish mercilessly attack anything besides Ssall that stray into the pool. The Gup-Gup will attack Grukuss that enter the pools.

### **Ssall Equipment and Technology**

The Ssall military is provided with the best equipment available. The Ssall have the capability to smelt steel, and so the Ssall use well made steel weapons. Not usually considered expert craftsman, Ssall metal tools and weapons are nonetheless functional and sturdy. The Ssall

do not have a shortage of iron like the human portion of Tigmar. Still, the Ssall prefer not to engage in mining, and so excess iron is rarely produced for trade.

The sub-tropical climate of Ssasas-Ssall makes heavy and stifling armors impossible to wear. Ssall compensate by wearing organic armors fashioned from the shells of animals such as giant tortoises. Often, only the Kuuka-ssaak beetle helmet along with a shell breastplate is worn. Mounted troops wear armors made of small chitinous shells that cover the legs and chest. Ssall sometimes carry either wooden or metal shields. Information on specific Ssall armors may be found in the Arms and Armor section of Cinis.

### Ssall History

The Ssall civilization is extremely ancient, as reported in mythology believed to date to the time of the magical orb. A rough estimate of the date of the Ssall civilization is 1000 years, although considerable leeway is possible in either direction.

The empire seems to have experienced three major phases before the time of the Grukuss. For about the first 300 years, the Ssall occupied themselves building elaborate cities, developing technology, and increasing their numbers. Note that some of the interior lands of the Ssasas-Ssall seem to have once been fertile islands. These islands have since submerged into the depths of the swamp, although the Ssall priestesses still sometimes visit these ruins.

It was on these interior lands that the Ssall concentrated their construction efforts. Many sprawling one story structures (the Ssall for some reason never built multiple story buildings) were made, and several cities could be found on the major islands.

During the second period which lasted approximately 200 years the Ssall began their great mystical project. Taking as a god-given mission to enlarge and protect the swamps teeming with life, the Ssall both explored many surrounding territories and established outposts.

The workers concentrated primarily on the western lands, and hence little evidence of Ssall efforts can be found on the eastern, human areas. The Ssall enlarged the swamp by digging complex channels to cause floods. Although now this project has been temporarily abandoned, the Ssall managed the increase the size of their swamp by over 200,000 square miles in a mere 200 years.

During this period the Ssall fought several petty wars with the Zalpas, their first contact with another highly intelligent race. These wars were usually over small contractual details and were never serious in nature, but an attitude of distrust still pervades in both races.

In return for metallurgy and iron, the Ssall offered protection to the Zalpas. The Ssall are still thought to abide by this contract in return for occasional technological improvements.

During the latter part of this historical period the Ssall established contact with the Graer-Staz. These two races shared a similar respect and veneration for the wilderness, and in fact their mythologies have been mutually influenced. The Graer-Staz are currently supplied with weapons by the Ssall, and both maintain a strong alliance.

The third period is the time of the great collapse. The Grukuss emerged from eggs, and were tentatively embraced by the Ssall as fifth caste. The Grukuss were still generally disliked however, and were accordingly given the social status of the Unnamed Caste.

The Grukuss lived among the Ssall in uneasy peace for about 20 years. During this time they established themselves as the scholars of the Ssall Empire and began a reconstruction of Ssall history.

One Grukuss, Gurap-Gup-Saa, discovered some texts lost in a temple that had been recovered by scouts. She undertook their decipherment and learned the way of the Grukuss - magic.

Furthermore, she discovered that her powers far outstripped those of the text's authors, and she began to transmit this knowledge among her friends. In the small space of 10 years, about 50 Grukuss became fully proficient in magic secretly; they hid their knowledge from the other castes.

A Grukuss named Saraap then fomented open revolt. Dissatisfied with the social rank of the Ssall, she managed to convince about 200 Grukuss to revolt, including about 40 of the witches.

The other witches, led by Gurap-Gup-Saa, resisted to the best of their abilities but were quickly overwhelmed. The Ssall began the wholesale slaughter of the Grukuss in an attempt to regain control, which in turn caused the other Grukuss to revolt.

Backed by powerful magic, the Grukuss lowered several Ssall islands and killed hundreds of thousands. Finally so reduced in number by the persistent efforts of the Ssall warriors, the Grukuss, with only 2 remaining witches, beat a hasty retreat into the swamp.

The Grukuss have waged a guerilla war against the Ssall ever since. By stealing males, the Grukuss were able to reproduce, and now many breeding pools are guarded by Gup-Gup fish.

The Grukuss formed a militaristic state, with a hierarchical command system. Magic has proliferated among these naturally gifted witches, although many are lost in warfare.

The Ssall were forced to abandon their now-submerged cities because the only caste with functional

gills is the priestess group. A quick project led by Kaa militants finally converted, banished, or killed the remaining Gaa. The banished Gaa established a small settlement now known as the Alliance of Kannara; see The Alliance of Kannar on page 298 for more details. The Kaa, now in charge of the ruins of the Ssall Empire, needed to select a course of action.

Encouraged by religious conviction, the Kaa decided to eradicate their bane, the Grukuss, at any cost. As the Grukuss moved eastward, the Ssall began to rebuilt their empire primarily in this direction.

At present, the Ssall population is rather low because of the Kaa's mating ethics. Still, they have fared well against the Grukuss, and the Grukuss have finally been chased into the area known as the Mire. Here the Grukuss have built small towns on the islands, and they patrol their territory ceaselessly.

### **The Empire Broken**

The Ssall Empire never recovered after the time of the Grukus. Huge expanses of once cultivated territory are now empty jungles. Four great Ssall cities have sunken into the mire because of Grukus magics employed during battles. Only two Ssall cities remain, each a mere shadow of their former greatness. Many sections of these two cities are crumbling ruins, and only a few districts are inhabited at present. Still, the remains are impressive, and the cities are still cities.

The first of the two cities is Ssa'Grup'Grup. Once the largest Ssall settlement, the city now houses about 25,000 Ssall. Only about ten percent of the original city is still used, demonstrating the former grandness of the Ssall Empire. Ssa'Grup'Grup is beyond the juncture of the Gerruki and the Gerruk rivers. This fine location assures a continual supply of fresh, clean water and alluvial deposits for farming, although erosion has at times presented a problem.

The second city of the Ssall, Ribbors, also lies along the Gerruk river at its junction with the Gerruka. Once the administrative center for about half of the Ssall Empire, the city houses many beautiful and awesome structures built in the golden era of the Ssall. Lovingly repaired, these buildings are now homes as well as temples and governmental centers. Approximately 15,000 Ssall live in Ribbors.

Towns still abound in the eastern territory of the Ssall. Almost all excess population is now moved to the cities in an attempt to reinstate centralized control. As the Grukus fought their way east, they left a trail of destruction in their wake, and the Ssall have yet to recover these blasted regions. Still, the 3 million Ssall control a huge and fertile area.

### **Salli'assar's Failed Coup**

Ssa'Grup'Grup and Ribbors, while nominally allies, compete for control. Each city wishes to become the center of the new civilization, and each presents good reasons for their claim. Ssa'Grup'Grup is nearer the Grukus, and massed population near these deadly foes would allow a better chance of final victory. Additionally, Ssa'Grup'Grup currently houses a much larger population than Ribbors. Ribbors, however, used to be one of two Ssall capitals. The breathtaking scale of the city is only fitting for the greatness of the Ssall theocracy. Many Ssall in towns still look to Ribbors for political guidance.

The conflict is far from peaceful, despite the unitary tendency of Ssall priestesses. Each city maintains its own army, and they do not cooperate as well as they might, as various generals vie for control on the human and Grukus war fronts. Although hostilities have not yet led to outright war, tensions slowly build as time passes.

The most threatening event of recent years was the attempted coup of Salli'assar, general of Ribbors and Commander of the Ruuk, the Ribbor's northern army. Feeling betrayed by Ssa'Grup'Grup persistent attempts to gain power, she met with Grukus ambassadors. Here, she agreed to end the war with the Grukus provided that all hostilities on both sides cease in return for aid against Ssa'Grup'Grup and the human threat.

Salli'assar marched on the city with a small army of loyalist Ssall warriors with a special contingent of Grukus witches. Surprisingly little resistance was encountered on the way to the city, and Salli'assar expected a crushing victory. This could not be farther from the truth.

Ssa'Grup'Grup priestesses, despite their hatred of magic, had permitted a small group of Unnamed to learn the way of the Grukus as an experiment, with the understanding that the lives of the Unnamed were forfeit at any time the priestesses wished. These Unnamed, trained for over ten years as a group, formed a formidable battle-magic unit. Divining an impending threat through oracles, the priestesses commanded these Unnamed, along with a group of elite guards, to advance and meet the unknown foe.

Although the Grukus are powerful witches, the battle-unit of Unnamed proved unstoppable during the ensuing battle. Salli'assar herself was captured by the elite guards and taken to Ssa'Grup'Grup, where she was interrogated and then executed in the most dishonorable way possible by being fed to Gup-Gup fish and male Ssall. The few rebel survivors and Grukus retreated to Grukus lands as firm allies.

Ribbors was livid at every turn of events. Not only did their own trusted general conspire with the Grukus, but Ssa'Grup'Grup had permitted the way of the Grukus within their own lands knowingly. Conversely,



Ssa'Grup'Grup complained about the treachery of Ribbor's commanders, and seized control of the southern army once and for all.

### Present Times

The two cities became uneasy allies under the renewed attacks by the Border Keeps, aware of their precarious position. Still, a real wound in the unity of the Ssall lies hidden below a superficial exterior of cooperation and friendship. Towns have tended to remain aloof from the conflict, realizing that the priestesses will eventually decide upon the proper course of action with or without their input. After all, the Ssall-asa is a worker, not an administrator.

A new battle plan has been created in the hopes of annihilating the Grukкус once and for all. By diverting troops from the human borders, the Ssall hope to overwhelmingly assault Grukкус strongholds. The new magically capable unit of Unnamed would provide support for the traditional army and might allow the final victory so desired. All is contingent on peace with the humans, however, as now all the troops stationed along the Tain are currently occupied with grueling guerrilla warfare. Hence, diplomats have been widely dispersed among various kingdoms and states.

### The Alliance of Kannar

The Alliance of Kannar is best described as a mixture of cultures, Ssall, human, and Mog. All three races exist in relative harmony within their tiny territory, the demands of survival forcing codependence and cooperation.

The community began shortly after the time of the Grukкус. Some of the few unconverted members of the Gaa escaped death at the hands of the Kaa, opting instead for banishment. Although many of the banished died at the hands of Kaa "purification patrols" while leaving Ssall territories, a small group of workers led by a pair of priestesses managed to escape detection and fled southeast.

Exhausted and demoralized, the small group stumbled upon a village of primitive humans living in an inhospitable subtropical jungle at the juncture of two rivers (see map). The Ssall Empire at its height tolerated infringement of their far southern territories because these areas are usually too cold to be valuable to the Ssall and the human beings moving into the area were perceived as so few as to be utterly harmless. These uncivilized invaders respected the Ssall's privacy, and never ventured deep into the Ssall heartland, thus assuring their continued welcome.

The natives, suspicious that the Ssall group might be a war party, decided to treat the foreigners kindly hoping to lessen the chance of attack. The natives provided food and shelter to the group of Ssall, who greatly appreciated their help. Abundant unexploited natural resources in the area permitted the Ssall to build a tiny ramshackle town of wood in the space of a few months, where they decided to remain during the winter. Usually foraging for food, the Ssall eked out a miserable but tolerable existence without requiring the aid of the human villagers, fully aware that they would lose a military struggle without any warriors.

The Ssall transmitted various innovations, most of them agricultural, to the primitive peoples in the region. Pleased with the useful gifts of the foreigners, the villagers provided gifts to the Ssall. Hoping to learn more, some of the elder villagers spent copious time with the Ssall, and some learned to speak a grotesque variant of the Ssall tongue, allowing rapid and clear communication for the first time since the Ssall had arrived.

Apparently the Ssall and local peoples worked out a peace agreement, neither bunch particularly desiring armed confrontation. The Ssall continued to teach the human beings and raise their standards of living wherever possible, while the humans taught the Ssall to exploit the resources of the area more fully and provided workers for the first major cooperative effort ever attempted, the construction of a Ssall temple for

breeding purposes.

The tiny but beautiful stone temple, completed in about four years of ceaseless work, was stocked with Ssall males stolen from ponds by human raiding parties. The Ssall, now capable of reproduction, rewarded the primitives by aiding them in their attempts to control the waters of the nearby rivers, greatly enhancing their ability to grow large crops.

The next thirty years of history remain a mystery, for all records from those times were lost in a fire that gutted part of the town built together by people and Ssall. What can be reconstructed is that the primitives and Ssall created a council of chieftains and old worker Ssall to serve as a government, the priestesses being required for reproduction at almost all times. The council settled disputes by voting, and apparently worked fairly effectively.

The records resume about when a band of human and Mog refugees arrived. Texts indicate that Mogs en route in a caravan to their next owners staged a revolt aided by a few sympathetic people, and managed to escape pursuit by heading into the jungle. The group was nearly dead from starvation and disease when they stumbled upon the human-Ssall settlement, and they begged for aid.

The council elected to aid the refugees. Although over half of the group died due to incurable diseases, the remainder assimilated themselves into the small civilization, thus introducing Mogs.

At some unspecified time, the nascent civilization dubbed themselves the Alliance of Kannar, after a figure in the bizarre mixed-mythology developed in the growing civilization. Today, Kannar is still known only as a trading post to most, a place where supplies can be obtained for fair prices and rare goods purchased. Kannar is still extremely isolated, and maintains only a small militia that serves as a police force.

The Alliance of Kannar can best be described as thriving. The mixed population of Ssall, Mogs, and humans has grown to a healthy size. The populace itself mostly lives within a quaint stone city, painstakingly constructed on the banks of the nearby river.

The culture of the Alliance of Kannar is far from average; elements of Mog, Ssall, and human society have been amalgamated into an unrecognizable mixture. The civilization now bases itself on the Principle of Life, and medical technology has become far advanced beyond anything known to the rest of the world. The Principle of Life dictates a code of ethics, behavior, life-style, social position, and cooperation to all of the inhabitants of Kannar. The Principle of Life is the central tenet of the primary religion of Kannar, Hui-Staa (the language developed in Kannar is speakable by Ssall, humans, and Mogs, although awkward for all three).

Hui-Staa envisions the world as a tiny instant in the

scope of infinite eternities. As each eternity wanes, a new eternity takes its place. Those who follow the Principle of Life hope to live again in the following eternity; failure to live again results in annihilation, not condemnation to suffering.

The religion is divided into three separate groups, with members expected to attend all three at various points in their lives. The first, headed by the Ssall priestesses, is the eternity of birth, and is occupied primarily with instilling a respect for life and virtue, and functions as an educational system. Children of all races attend this group until after puberty, when they can move to the next cycle.

The second group, run by Ssall workers, Mogs, and humans, is the eternity of struggle. This group works for the benefit of the community, each member donating a certain amount of time per year to communal projects, and also serves as a governmental trade guild. Jobs can be procured through the cycle of struggling. Members stay in this group roughly until retirement. The rationale behind the group is to ensure that each person lives according to the Principle of Life, and it is here that members can earn the chance of rebirth in another eternity.

Finally, the eternity of dissolution is reserved for the terminally ill, the crippled, and the retired elderly. This group is supported by the cycle of struggling if individual families cannot carry the burden. Run by whomever happens to be a suitable leader at the time, the eternity of dissolution encourages its members to participate in the community and enjoy the remainder of their lives without worry.

Those who fail to join Hui-Staa are generally ostracized from society, although they are allowed to stay within the lands of Kannar provided that they behave decently. One cannot join Hui-Staa and not pass through all of the cycles, hence it is rare for conversions to occur past middle-age.



## The Tandus Wastes

*The Tandite Roamers number about 1million, most of which are spread thinly over the Tandus Wastes.*

The Tandus Wastes, known as Salted-Lands by its denizens, are inhabited primarily by human beings and the occasional Zalpas outpost. The people of the Wastes, called the Tandite Roamers by outsiders, have a few permanent settlements in the more habitable regions of the desert and salt flats.

The northeasternmost section of the desert is sere, and mostly contains regions of sand dunes separated by rockier areas. The western part of the Wastes north of the Mountains of the Karag are barren salt-flats due to recession of Akka's Branch. The most habitable part of the Tandus Wastes are the more northerly coastal sections. These areas tend to be dry steppes and rocky desert soil with low vegetation. Some of the land in this part of the Wastes is arable, however, and here the Tandite Roamers have settlements.

The people of the desert survive by a combination of trade and subsistence agriculture. Some Roamers also keep small herd of goats and sheep in nearby hilly areas. Rare animals, spices, finished goods, and such are carried across the Western Tandus Wastes to the settlements near Akka's Branch to await transport to Sampson and the Holy Empire. Two massive caravans cross the deserts each year to transport these expensive goods, and during these periods Tandite Roamer settlements appear as desiccated remnants of their former selves. During the summer and winter, caravan off-seasons, however, these inhospitable towns become lively cities, full of life.

The Ssall have managed to create a loose, and secret, alliance with the Tandus dwellers. Certain rarities are moved by the Ssall over the Mountains of the Karag in return for imported goods and military protection from the north, as the Ssall simply cannot afford to fight a two-front war due to their small numbers. Thus, the desert dwellers have a supply of valuable commodities both from the north and across the desert.

The life of the Tandite Roamer is what one expects of a steppe agriculture-dominated society. Except for the influx of imported goods and wealth during the time of the caravan, the desert folk live unluxuriously in adobe homes. Settlements always contain at least one large fresh-water well. Some areas inhabited by the Tandite Roamers receive a decent amount of rain, and these areas rely much more on the cultivation of plants for survival.

The Tandite Roamers are never known to have engaged in warfare; then again, they have never been threatened or invaded from the East. Tales of battles fought against Western invaders exist, but as most people of Tigmar have no contact with this West, the veracity of

such stories cannot be easily evaluated.

