

Chapter One: Round the Fire

An Introduction to the Salsham'ai

I am Betalsan, Branch Mother of the village of Kellarb in the region of Vuntilsway. I oversee the running of the village, the enforcement of the laws, and the payment of taxes.

We are the subjects of the Great Trunk Mother. We are the children of Lady Themnass and Lord Shroma. We are guardians of their creation and of the balance of Pas Aat. The flatfeet call us 'Tree Folk', and some believe that we are tree spirits and other such nonsense simply because we don't blunder about making lots of noise and scaring our brothers and sisters of the forest.

We respect all living beings and try to preserve our homeland in its balanced state, bringing just enough order to the forest to supply our needs without destroying the wilderness. We are famed for our woodcarving and our weaving skills. Compared to the flatfeet, we're also a great deal more subtle!

The salsham'ai, or 'tree folk' as the humans sometimes call them, are a slender, half-high arboreal folk. They are born for life in the trees; their prehensile feet make them extremely agile climbers and all salsham'ai have a natural and instinctive ability to change their skin tones to blend in with the greens and browns of the forest. They live to about 40 human years old on average, with 50 being quite unusual.

In the World of Conclave the Salsham'ai hail from the large island of Denralia, close to the Continent of Perfection. They share this land with the Denra-Lyr humans, and the two societies have generally co-existed peacefully throughout their history, a peace most likely aided by the tall mountain range that separates the two species. They live in the great forest formed by a tree known as the *braashak*. Properly, the forest is the *braashak* and the *braashak* is the forest, because the tree reproduces by sending down creepers that take root and eventually thicken to become a new tree, linked to the parent tree. In this fashion the *braashak* has become one vast single organism spread across Salsham'ai lands.

Salsham'ai communities are built inside the hollow trunks and branches of the *braashak*, connected by rope bridges, swing ropes and the interconnecting branches of the great forest organism. Most of these communities are village-sized but the regional capitals are the equivalent size to a small human town. The national capital

Thalsa is an ancient city with wide branch roads and stone-built structures.

The salsham'ai are an egalitarian folk. The sexes are considered to be equal in ordinary life, legally and socially, but political leadership, *The Motherhood*, is a strictly female preserve where the leaders are thought of as a mother of a family. The whole culture is organised on the model of an extended family, where everyone in the same village are 'trunk-cousins' to each other. 'Aunt' and 'Uncle' are used as terms of respect to an older person; to one younger or the same age, 'Cousin'. All salsham'ai, therefore, feel a duty to watch out for one another and to offer assistance to any 'family' member who needs it. In Thalsa, where the population is much larger, this social obligation is conducted with less diligence than in the smaller communities, but to a human it still seems a very close-knit and amiable place to visit. Whilst salsham'ai only rarely bestow upon outsiders the honour of being considered family members, neither are they, as a whole, exclusive and cliquey towards non-salsham'ai.

Teaching, pastoral care and spiritual matters are some of the responsibilities of the *Lozemasters*; wise salsham'ai who keep the traditions of the people alive through the generations. Much of the *Lozemasters'* knowledge is passed on orally, although the salsham'ai are beginning to use the written word as well. Many, but by no means all, *Lozemasters* are able to use magic or deal with the spirit world, keeping faith with the various

mysterious creatures that the salsham'ai term *The Shay*.

Those salsham'ai who are able to use magic refer to an essence that they call *Pas Aat*. This is a mystical energy that flows in and around all living and natural things. By influencing the flow of *Pas Aat*, a salsham'ai magician is able to work her magic.

About ten percent of salsham'ai are agoraphobic to some degree and prefer to stay within the canopy of the *braashak*. Those that are not, or who are able to overcome their fears, often travel abroad and there are quite a lot of immigrant communities scattered throughout the former Imperial lands.

Personality: Salsham'ai are a nature-loving, spiritual folk. They are generally quiet-natured, preferring discussion over violence, but will not shy away from the need to defend themselves or their friends. Their society is matriarchal, although not an absolute monarchy; rather it has the feel of a vast extended family. Salsham'ai love family get-togethers, story-telling, knowledge and crafts. Young salsham'ai are given a sense of belonging and their reciprocal duty to society very early in life, and all salsham'ai grow up knowing that the extended family is there to help them.

Physical Description: Salsham'ai height averages 3 feet tall. They resemble slender and delicate looking humans except for their feet, which have thumbs and prehensile toes. Skin tones range from pale white to light brown, eyes are green or brown and hair is usually dark brown to black, sometimes light green, greying with age as a human. Hair is straight, and worn long in both sexes, often plaited with feathers and carved beads. Men do not grow beards. Salsham'ai like to wear simple clothing; tunics, loin cloth and hooded ponchos made from homespun wool, leather or fur. Swirling patterns in natural dyes provide a splash of colour, and carved wooden necklaces are the most common form of jewellery.

Relations: Salsham'ai are open and accepting of all who prove themselves polite and honourable. They do not have any racially orientated preferences, getting on equally well with humans, elves, halflings, gnomes and dwarves. They have similar interests and attitudes to sylvan elves, and since both races are few in number there is rarely competition for living space. In the World of Conclave, salsham'ai get on equally well with humans, tlaxu, edraldi, durdrn and gloppies (although if anything they have the greatest respect for mountain tlaxu). Those unfamiliar with salsham'ai often treat them as a joke due to their small size and quiet ways, but the wise treat them with respect.

Alignment: Salsham'ai see themselves as simply another part of the world. Their society is based around the concept that everyone should look after each other, and so they are often found in healing or counselling roles, even amongst non-

salsham'ai. Therefore they have a tendency towards Good. Salsham'ai believe in a balance between Concordance and Chaos, and so have an equal tendency towards Law, Neutrality and Chaos.

Salsham'ai Lands: The salsham'ai live in the *braashak*, a huge forest of trees that are in fact a single organism. Cuttings of the *braashak* have been transplanted where the salsham'ai colonise, most notably 'Little Thalsa' in a former parkland in the port city of Llaza. In the original *braashak*, bordering Denra-Lyr, the salsham'ai live in the mid-upper levels. Lower levels of the undergrowth harbour dangerous beasts and are avoided.

Religion: Salsham'ai believe in a balanced interdependence of the forces of Concordance and Chaos. Shroma, Lord of Chaos, is their Sun deity and a wild, horned hunter. Themnass, Lady of Concord, is a learned and placid moon goddess. Together the two guide the cosmos, Shroma providing the raw energy and Themnass the focus and guidance. Salsham'ai also believe in a life essence that they call 'Pas Aat'. This mystical energy flows through and around all things, and can be shaped and focused, guided as one might guide a climbing plant. It is used for shamanic magic, understanding nature spirits, for healing and many other uses.

Classes: With close ties to the natural world, salsham'ai are often druids or rangers. The most common fighting class, however, is still the fighter. Monks are slightly more common than barbarians, since the salsham'ai tend to emphasise inner calm over wildness, although followers of Lord Shroma often take levels in barbarian as they learn to access the chaos within. Shamans are more common than clerics of Shroma and Themnass, because the spirits are closer to everyday life than the gods. Rogues are fairly common, although salsham'ai rogues are usually trained skirmishers rather than thieves and low-lives. Arcane magic is fairly common with about equal numbers of wizards and sorcerers. With a strong musical and story-telling tradition, bards are popular. About the only class that is rare to the point of non-existent amongst salsham'ai is the paladin.

Language: Salsham'ai speak Themnassic, a soft-sounding language with few harsh syllables. There is also a tongue called Shromic, which is semi-conscious in nature and used only for rituals and meditations.

Names: Salsham'ai names are 'discovered' at birth by a Lorewarden, and are Shromic in nature. These are usually transliterated into Themnassic. The names carry some impart of the individual's destiny, although the true meaning is often hidden even from the wise.

Salsham'ai male names: Dhalooth, Oth'sol, Dervin, Mathoos, Garbi.

Salsham'ai female names: Rotara, Lyra, Betalsan, Magbe.

Adventurers: Salsham'ai away from home are usually the curious - scholars, Lorewardens and

others in search of knowledge. The salsham'ai also maintain a spy network, the Roots, to keep abreast of foreign affairs. They often find employment as sailors, being perfectly adapted for working amongst the rigging. Salsham'ai who live in, or near, human settlements prefer to live in local wooded areas, but where this is not possible they build round houses supported on stilts.

Salsham'ai from Llaza have often picked up human traits, and will follow a simple thirst for adventure, money or excitement. It is rare, however, for a salsham'ai not to have some altruistic motive in adventuring and they are more likely to take a job that entails helping someone than for simple personal gain.



Salsham'ai Racial Traits

- Salsham'ai are agile, and have a strong connection to nature but they are small and relatively weak. They gain +2 to Dex and Wis, but -2 to Str.
- Salsham'ai base speed is 20 feet.
- **Small:** As small creatures, salsham'ai gain a +1 size bonus to Armour Class and attack rolls, and a +4 size bonus to all Sneak checks. They must use smaller-sized weapons and equipment, and can only carry three-quarters as much as a Medium character.
- **Arboreal:** Salsham'ai have a climb speed of 10 feet per round. They can always count the Climb skill as a class skill. They gain a +8 racial bonus in all Climb checks. They must make a Climb check to climb any wall or slope with a DC or more than 0, but may always choose to take 10, even if rushed or threatened whilst climbing. If they choose an accelerated climb, they move at normal ground speed (20 feet per round) and make a single Climb check at -5 penalty. Salsham'ai cannot use the run action whilst climbing.
- **Camouflage:** Salsham'ai have an almost instinctive colour-change ability. This is subtle, and works best in their natural habitat. A salsham'ai gains a +4 racial bonus to Hide if in woodlands, or +2 if in surroundings with woodland tones (such as next to a log cabin). This colour change only affects their skin tone, not their clothing so if the salsham'ai is wearing something brightly coloured, she does not get this bonus.
- **Prehensile Feet:** Salsham'ai are able to grasp and manipulate objects with their feet almost as well as their hands. This enables them to attack and perform skills requiring manual dexterity (such as Sleight or Disable Device) using their feet. Their grip is not perfect, however, and any

check made whilst using feet as the primary manipulating appendage takes a -4 penalty. Further, the character needs to use his hands to steady himself (such as by hanging from a branch, for example) whilst using feet to manipulate anything. At the Gamesmaster's discretion, a salsham'ai may also get a +2 racial bonus to checks to prevent a fall (see under Climb skill) and related actions such as a Reflex save to avoid a pit trap.

- +2 racial bonus to Craft, Diplomacy and Knowledge (nature) checks.
- **Automatic Languages:** Themnassic and Common (or Low Imperial for the World of Conclave).
- **Bonus Languages:** Shromic, Elvish*, Sylvan*. (* replace with High Imperial and Denralian for the World of Conclave).

Typical skills

The following are culturally typical Craft and Perform skills that salsham'ai might know, as well as common weaponry used. Salsham'ai characters are not restricted to these lists.

Craft/Profession skills: Blacksmith, Bone- and Horn- working, Brewer, Carpenter, Dyer, Embroidery, Flint-Working, Jeweller, Herbalist, Leatherworking/Tanning, Masonry (rare), Mining, Tailor, Weaver, Woodcarving .

Perform skills: Play Charo, Sing, Storytelling.

Weaponry: Clubs, Kick Dagger, Short Bow, Short Composite Bow, Sling, Throwing Axe, Thrown Club, Skill of Raindrops (unarmed style), Spider in Amber (unarmed style).

Table: Random Starting Ages

	Adulthood	Barbarian Rogue Sorcerer	Bard Fighter Paladin Ranger	Cleric Druid Monk Shaman Wizard
Salsham'ai	12 years	+1d4	+1d6	+2d6

Table: Aging Effects

	Middle Age	Old	Venerable	Maximum Age
Salsham'ai	25 years	35 years	45 years	+2d20 years

Table: Random Height and Weight

	Base Height	Height Modifier	Base Weight	Weight Modifier
Salsham'ai, male	2'	+2d6	26 lb.	x (2d4) lb.
Salsham'ai, female	1' 10"	+2d6	24 lb.	x (2d4) lb.

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