

been passed down for generations. If the Mak Terresk cannot cure a Corruption, then the member is often killed for the safety of the entire gather.

ULERSH (THE ELDERS)

The eldest member of each recognized clan is known as that clan's Ulersh, the oldest voice of the bloodline. This person is never the clan Torkash, who leads the clan in day-to-day efforts. Instead, the clan Ulersh sits on the Ulersh Gourm – the Elder Council – advising the High Chieftain and discussing the larger issues for the entire gather.

In some gathers, the Ulersh is always male, while in some others; it is generally a female who is chosen. The majority of gathers, however, have no real gender rules; the eldest is chosen, either way.

In addition to the clans, the eldest shaman or priest in a gather also sits on the Ulersh Gourm. More often than not, this person is the most direct and constant adviser the High Chieftain has.

TORKASH (CHIEFTAIN)

Each clan has a chieftain, one who leads the family and administers its affairs. In many gathers, the chieftain is appointed by the clan Ulersh, often with the advice and input of other elders. Some gathers have traditions requiring trial by combat (though this is more ritual than real), while still others use similar rituals for choosing a clan Torkash as the Rorock Paal.

As a general rule, the chieftain is responsible for everything that his clan members do or fail to do. This can sometimes lead to the chieftain receiving punishment on the behalf of his clan.

Among other duties, the Torkash of a clan is responsible for leading her clan to war. She must therefore be strong, intelligent, and capable of leading well in battle. Many clans have the tradition that no challenge may be issued on the eve of battle; in the aftermath, however, if the Torkash failed the clan in some fashion, a direct challenge – to the death – can be offered, and it must be answered.

TERRESK (SHAMAN)

Those who directly serve under the Mak Terresk are simply Terresk, the other shamans of the gather. They are immune to all task requests and other work, serving only as directed by the Mak Terresk. They cannot, however, abuse their station to order others around.

In truly militant gathers the Terresk are martially capable as well. They are often expected to lead the way in great battles, showing the courage expected in others.

OHLMA (THE GIFTED)

In more advanced gathers, there are those who have the education or training to perform tasks and crafts that elevate them above the average citizen. Tradesmen and masters of specialized crafts – merchants, metal workers, and even artists – are held outside the normal structure and encouraged to pursue their talents.

The Ohlma are not expected to participate in the normal daily chores and activities, directed instead to pursue their craft or trade to their greatest ability. What they do or create is expected to benefit the gather in some significant way, which the Ulersh Gourm acts as the arbiters to determine.



TRAVELING THROUGH A GATHER

Not surprisingly, the arrangement of gathers is based on a combination of clan and community function. There are districts, called *domin*, and each district falls under a clan's control and responsibility. The physical layout of a typical gather follows fluid, circular formations starting with Mak Torkash's home in the center; there is often an outer, all-encompassing wall of wood and mud that surrounds everything but the farmlands.

Surrounding the central ring, many overlapping circles form rings as well. Larger gathers have multiple rings, ever expanding to the outermost wall. The domicile of the presiding Torkash is usually at the center of each of these circles, though other leading people might also be there. In gathers that have often seen war, primarily in the North, there may well be multiple ring walls fortifications throughout.

The gobliness are not generally riders, but there are plenty of oxen and mules used for pulling carts and wagons throughout the gather and surrounding farmlands. Most gathers have four main roads, often paved or at least highly worked, running North-South and East-West through the gather. In addition to the domicile of the Mak Torkash, the main market is located near the center of the gather, at the intersection of the two roads.

Most gathers still deal heavily in barter, though gathers that do regular trade with outsiders are more than happy to see coins of the realms. Raw resources, grains, and livestock are the main exports, and what isn't sold is traded for finished goods from the other races and cultures of Shaintar.

Travelers who have any kind of dangerous look about them will soon notice that large and intimidating orcs and ogres are keeping an eye on them. Particularly perceptive travelers might also spot the goblin or three that are surreptitiously trailing the group. These are the Gurraul, the Protectors who see to it that the gather's peace is maintained in the name of the Mak Torkash. Such travelers who gain the honor of being hosted by a Torkash will have escorts, both to show them around and to see that they remain unmolested by those of the gather who might treat them ill (for some clans, the old hatreds from wars past run very deep).

Most travelers stay in the few crude inns that might have space. Some are asked to stay with a clan, and these fortunate few will be introduced to hospitality

that can be surprisingly friendly and warm. The communal stead of a clan is an almost sacred place, a domain dedicated to the shared lives of the bloodline that resides there. To share this space with an outsider is a solemn and special thing, and such guests can expect the highest form of acceptance that a gobliness can give.

On the one hand, this means the traveler will work for his supper. Everyone in the house participates in the preparation, serving, and cleaning up for every meal. Other tasks that have yet to be completed for the day must be wrapped up before anyone is allowed to eat.

On the other hand, the meal is a wondrous, often boisterous and celebratory affair. It may be a bit heavy on the meats, starches, and grains for some diets, but there is always plenty to go around, and lots of conversation as everyone shares the stories of the day. As well, visitors are treated as "blood" while they eat and sleep under a clan's roof. This means the clan will fight for a guest as though they were one of the clan.

In the evening, there are more stories, songs, and games. While the younger are sent to bed, the elders might well tap a keg or pour some favored liquor while discussing the latest doings in the world. Travelers are highly valued for the news they might bring of lands beyond the walls of the gather.

Some gathers, despite interest in foreign trade, are generally hostile to outsiders; these are most common in the northern lands near Shaya'Nor or Kal-A-Nar, where raids frequently occur. Travel through these places can be a very dangerous prospect, for the Gurraul in such a place might well decide the very presence of an outsider is threat enough to warrant immediate confrontation. Such confrontations can be quite lethal. This is why it's always a good idea to purchase a few things at the market so that at least some of the locals have reason to be well disposed to the visitors.

OF SPECIAL INTEREST

There are many unifying elements to gobliness society. There are also many things that set them apart from one another. It is both the unifying elements and the diversity that make the gobliness a culture truly set apart in Shaintar. Below are some of the more notable parts of the gobliness culture.

KURIK MAL, THE RITUAL OF DISCOVERY

When they come of age (usually between thirteen and fifteen), many gobliness go on a traditional quest to become full members of their gather. The Kurik Mal is very much a coming of age trial. Often, it is merely a camping trip with an emphasis on proving one's survival skills before beginning the role in the gather for which one is intended. Sometimes, however, the Kurik Mal is rife with danger and mystery, usually because spirits get involved with the path of the gobliness in question.

In those gathers that follow the oldest traditions of the Kurak Mal, the Torkash of the young gobliness presents him to the Mak Torkash and the Ulersh Gourm, who give their official blessing to proceed. Then the Torkash and a Terresk chosen by the clan make preparations for the ritual to begin.

The trial normally consists of three parts; the first part is called Ferischul ("the First Journey"), during which the young gobliness must travel a fair distance from his home gather to a location of spiritual importance to his people, often a distant burial ground or place of historical significance. For the Ferischul, the young one is only able to bring one weapon and one change of clothing. He may not bring food of any kind, nor is he allowed to bring any other item save a jar or bottle of a strange brew called balae, a noxious drink prepared by the Terresk specifically for this individual.

The "Journey" normally takes one week, during which time the young gobliness must hunt, make shelter, and fend for himself, sometimes in a hostile environment. It is said that the Ferischul ensures each gobliness will be a productive member of his society and will know how to live with the land, rather than on it.

Once the would-be adult gets to his destination, he must find a safe and quiet spot to sit and drink the balae, thus initiating second part of the trial called Vai-chok - "the Dreaming." It is believed that the "Dreaming" will reveal to the young gobliness what it is that the ancients would have of him, what path he should take.

More often than not, it is merely a hallucination-filled night of drunken dreams; in the morning, the young man or woman begins the journey homeward, prepared to take up the role of his or her family or to claim a vision leads him or her on another path. The clan's chosen Terresk will then "read" the newly

raised adult, claim that the vision is true or "mis-read," and will assign the young man or woman to whatever role the family or Torkash wishes.

The last part of the Kurik Mal is then undertaken, the Uulron-lor, translated as the "Night of Making." The family and friends undertake a feast and celebration, but the new adult must suffer hazing and trials of duress and pain amidst the fun and eating. In many gathers, these trials have tapered off into playful parodies of the ancient practices, but some of the more brutal gathers still engage in the harsher forms, where it's actually possible to die during the Uulron-lor. In those gathers, this is a last-chance means of making certain no weaklings are allowed to become adults in the gather.

ROROCK PAAL, THE CHOOSING TRIALS

The long-standing tradition of orcs standing at the top of the social ladder does not remove the need for the orcs to determine their own "pecking order" within their ranks. In ages past, there were the Rorock Paal - the Choosing Trials. Through a series of tests of strength, endurance, and prowess, the community at large would come to know who the strongest and most capable orcs were, and leadership and other positions would go to the orcs who did the best during these trials.

Many gathers still observe the Rorock Paal in some fashion, usually at an annual festival. In other gathers, the process has become either rote or ritualized, or else has fallen into disuse. However, the essence of the Rorock Paal has expanded beyond the trials, leading to a social custom that often confuses or intrigues outsiders who are made aware of it.

Whenever more than one orc gathers in a place (if the orcs are not from the same gather or social group), a series of subtle interactions occurs. Through body language and other signs, each orc will indicate whom he sees as his better or superior. Most of the time, this results in a quiet acknowledgment of order and everyone moves on from there. However, particularly proud or competitive orcs will challenge for dominance.

In such cases, this may manifest as a simple challenge, such as a test of strength, throwing axes at a target or simply taking turns pounding one another until one falls down. Some orcs will take things farther, wishing for a formal gathering and a series of trials; however, most orcs consider this to be in extremely bad taste when done outside of gathers.

In some rare cases, where the orcs come from gathers or clans that have long-standing blood feuds, these trials can be lethal. This is much more common in the North than the South, where it is highly frowned upon.

GOBLINESH MILITARY FORCES

As a general rule, goblinessh do not differentiate between military service and their normal lives. All able-bodied males, and those females who choose, train in combat from childhood. When there is a need, they put on armor, draw weapons, and follow their Torkash into battle.

Thanks to the Rorock Paal, the orcs already have established lines of seniority; they quickly determine who will lead each element based on this structure, assigning goblins and ogres as appropriate, and always with the dictates of their Torkash, as well as the Mak Torkash and the Ulersh, guiding them.

There are more militaristic gathers where some members are permanently assigned defensive and related roles. Many such gathers in the North will follow Imperial organization, while the few such gathers one finds in the South will tend towards either Olan or Grey Ranger ranks and structure.

THE SHAMANS

The traditional spiritual leaders of the goblinessh have always been the Terresk, the shamans who deal with the spirit world on the behalf of the goblinessh people. In most cases, these shamans serve the same role – and channel the same gifts – as druids in other cultures. Their ways are more naturalistic and raw, but the results are much the same.

THE WAR PRIESTS

Over the last century, goblinessh preaching the ways of Ceynara have come to many of the Northern gathers and begun building followings. In some cases, they challenge the local shamans and, defeating them, assume their place as spiritual leaders. In others, they join forces with the shamans who follow the Flame.

Some gathers reject them, either expelling or outright destroying these would-be priests of the people. However, the more troubled or more violently minded gathers welcome these harbingers of the coming of the Queen of War. Temples and shrines are built, and some of the gathers that truly welcome the Church of Ceynara discover a kind of prosperity they did not know before as resources begin pouring into their community.

DAK URRAL M'OG, THE GUARDIAN GATHERS

The end of the Dragon War in 2234 marked the only time in Shaintar's history when virtually all of the nations and people combined their efforts against a common foe. The ritual at Og m'Drakar – the Dragon Gate – successfully cast out the Dragon Lords and their minions, nearly starting another war in its aftermath. The matter of who would guard the mysterious island of ancient power caused a vicious and vitriolic debate that raged for days. The Emperor's emissary actually drew blood against the chief diplomat of Lanthor, and everyone saw another war about to begin right on the bloody fields of the last battle.

Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed when the Quo Unias of the Fae stepped forward, standing next to a mighty ogre warrior all there knew as Jorg Rockfang. Calling for attention, she presented Jorg to the gathered leaders; the presentation was a mere formality, for all there knew that it had been Jorg who had held the main road up the cliffs leading to where the ritual had taken place. A missing arm and eye were testament enough to his sacrifice, but his single remaining eye burned fiercely with determination as he faced the gathered diplomats and rulers.

"The goblinessh have always lived in the places between your lands. We are mighty, and clever, and enduring. We know how to hold our ground, and how to build in places where others see only obstacles and move on. My Mak Torkash has granted me the boon of choosing my own lands and building my own gather. I would choose the place North of here, where the Dragon River flows into the great Tear of Shanais. There I will build not only a gather, but a fortress, and I will guard this holy place of our great glory. Let three others of my kind do the same, to the South, West, and East of the great lake, and you may all know the ancient place is guarded by those who live best where you are not."

On that day, the four gathers of the Dak Urral m'Og were founded at the cardinal points around Og m'Drakar. Jorg built his fortress to the North and called it Kolfis. Char was built to the West, while Grol grew on the East bank of the great lake. Finally, Fylg was built in the South, completing the bounding circle of protection around the ancient "Eye of the Dragon." Since that day, all four gathers have worked together to patrol the shores and the lake, never wavering in their sworn duty to see that the ancient portal on the island is never used to unleash the Dragons back into Shaintar. Combining spirit wards, arcane alarms, and

constant patrolling, the gobliness of the Guardian Gathers are ever vigilant and take great pride in the honor of their ancient duty.

They have only ever failed once; in that it was against the avatar of Vainar himself, none of Shaintar has ever faulted them for it. Nonetheless, the efforts of the four gathers have been enhanced since that day, making it nearly impossible to make it to the island citadel undetected.

TROLLKEEP

Created by Adam Dray

In ancient times, the fifty-foot chasm this walled town resides next to was a dark haven for the troglanesh, the sides of the cliffs a honeycomb of tunnel entrances into deep warrens where Corruption festered and thousands of troglodytes, hobgoblins, and trolls feasted on every other living thing they could find. They were terrors of the region, a horde of doom every population center for many miles in any direction lived in constant fear of.

The day the gobliness Vakshun Clan arrived, the terror of the Troll Gorge came to an end. Ashayra Vakshun, possessed with what many called the Silver Spirit, led her people to war against these creatures she held as blasphemous. The battles without and within raged for weeks, leaving precious few of her clan alive – but all of the troglanesh were dead and burning in the bottom of the chasm by the time she was done.

The tale of her deeds called other gobliness from far and wide, aiding in her rebuilding of her clan; Trollkeep was built atop the chasm of Troll Gorge.

Always an atypical gather, Trollkeep is an eclectic town that mixes classic gather characteristics with more human-style trappings and establishments. Despite others rallying to Vakshun's banner, her clan never fully recovered, and many folks of other races came to Trollkeep to pursue mining, fishing on the Tears of Shanais lake, or to gain access to the exceptional river trade opportunities. Trollkeep is also a burgeoning center for many questionable – and outright criminal – activities. The residents watch for truly evil influences, especially those of Dark persuasions, but they are otherwise fairly permissive of anything that brings money through the gates.

What few know is just how much Trollkeep's population has truly changed; a huge portion of the residents are actually members of Grayson's Grey Rangers. They've been steadily infiltrating and becoming part of the Trollkeep population for

a couple of years, securing many of the caverns in the warrens below for their growing operations. The twofold mission of the Trollkeep Rangers is to act as a watch post for both Kalinesh and Shaya'Nor military activity, as well as to act as a safe zone and transfer point for slaves being smuggled out of both of those nations.

The current commander of the Trollkeep Ranger Outpost is Captain Addisane, a no-nonsense woman who frequently disguises herself as a man to make it harder to track her movements. Ostensibly, she's a broker for various caravans and river barges coming through the region, a perfect cover for what she does. She often coordinates with an ogress by the name of Wentuo, a highly intelligent merchant who aids in a lot of efforts to get escaped slaves further south.

Rangers are often posted to Trollkeep as a kind of hardship tour, either to add the experience to their record for future advancement, or else to whip them into shape due to hacking off too many commanders. A significant portion of the Ranger ranks are gobliness, probably a higher percentage than in any other outpost. In the days of the Kal Civil War, the Trollkeep Outpost has become even more important to the Ranger operations.

THE BLOODSOOTHERS

The recent awakening to the truth of the origins of the gobliness is tied to the recent changes in the Veil between Shaintar, Corelisia (the spirit world), and the rest of Starfall. Certain gobliness are experiencing dreams – many during their *Kurik Mal*, others during one form of trial or another – that reveal to them the Silver Tree and its importance to the destiny of their people. The awakening to this truth affects different gobliness in very personal ways.

A small-but-growing number of goblins, orcs, and ogres who have this awakening seek others to share their epiphanies with, hoping to find the meaning and the purpose. Eventually, they are drawn to the Bloodsoothers.

In the time before the Dragon Wars, a brave and devoted orc named Ukarar Kralle stood with a paltry few remaining defenders of his gather against an overwhelming force of troglanesh and shayakar. Seeing the end of his clan and his gather at hand, Ukarar's spirit cried out for the strength and power to save them, offering himself in sacrifice to whatever spirit might hear his plea. His cry was made in anguish and rage, and he felt his blood burning with vengeance and loss.