

The Kutari
Ascension High Orcs
OFFICIAL ASCENSION RACE PACKET

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Tahl carefully dug around the base of the plant, pushing back the soil, exposing the roots. He moved slowly, deliberately, knowing that this sample might very well mean both another food source for the Cairn, and a method of filtering their water. "Hurry!" hissed the Oathsworn next to him, shifting her weight. Tahl could feel the Warden's tension, the coiled-spring need to pace. It was not helping.

"Patience...." Tahl murmured. He was almost done.... "We don't have time for patience," the Warden responded in a low voice, drawing her sword. "Something's caught our scent!" A few more passes with the trowel, and Tahl was able to wiggle the plant free. With practiced movements, the sample went into a leather-wrapped container and slipped into his pack. He could hear their impending attacker crashing through the underbrush - possibly a Vreech, or something else big enough to be a serious threat.

The pack went onto his back in a fluid, practiced motion. "Let's go!" he shouted as he leapt to his feet, pulling a hatchet from his belt as he lurched forward. He flipped the trowel around, ready to block with it if needed, trying to dismiss the thought that, if it really did come down to it, his blocking attempt likely wouldn't matter. He focused on putting one foot in front of another. He might be carrying the salvation of the Cairn in his pack, and he would NOT be easy prey.

High Orc Racial Basics

Once a long-lived race content with a simple existence of farming, the Kutari have given much, and changed much. Their lives are much shorter now, and much harder, as the world has forced them into a more martial role. The trials they have undergone have reshaped them. They still bear the hardiness of their formerly pastoral lives, but it has been tempered, reforging them into a people ready to fight at any moment, should the need be.

As a whole, High Orcs tend to be straightforward, taking things as they are, preferring to take action instead of wishing about things. They remain strong through adversity, and take whatever

small pleasures they can. Life has given lemons to the High Orcs - and the High Orcs stare life in the eye while eating those lemons, and then comment on how they like the sour taste.

High Orc History

Once, things were so much simpler for us.

While others focused on pursuing the mysteries of magic, or epic feats of heroism, we aligned ourselves with the simple rhythms of the world. The reward of a hard day's work; the feel of good tilled earth; a love of all things that grow. We learned the secrets of raising animals, guarding herds, soothing the feral. We mastered the art of growing plants, harvesting food, to the point where any who had a knack with plants was said to have a "green thumb", a subtle reference to our talents. Where we went, life flourished, and was good.

We took joy in our industrious life, greeting each dawn with a smile at the promise of the day to come. We bonded with our neighbors, from the rambunctious Celestial Chorus with their lovely songs, to the fierce Dryads, who often brought us new creatures to raise. Through it all, we were the rock, the familiar stability, building our homesteads and farmhouses, reading the weather, living in harmony, following the dance of the seasons.

That changed when the invasion happened.

We were not used to fighting. Strong, yes, from long hours of hard work, but weapons were not our forte. We were forced to turn plows and shears to swords, in a vain attempt to defend ourselves. The Dryads stepped forth, as always, the stalwart defenders, and allowed us to retreat, regroup. They saved us, a testament to our long bond, our shared love of the earth. We sacrificed, for the ritual. Our long years, the lifetimes we could spend learning the ebb and flow of the world, were ripped from us, truncated, giving us a mockery of a lifespan. A decade, roughly, making us seem more like the plants we once raised than the farmers who grew them.

Worst still, the Dryads fell into a deep sleep after the ritual, one from which they could not be woken. We brought them with us, into the Cairn. Laid them to rest among the gardens we maintained, hoping what growing things we could surround them with would help sustain them - and to help us remember who we were, what we had been, what we had given.

In the wake of the Dryads' loss, we were forced to fight. The struggle left us feeling as though the blade was as familiar in our hands as the rake. Generations passed in the depths of the earth, splitting our time between fighting and trying to raise enough food with too little space, too little water, too little light. Lost were the days of long winter evenings spent telling stories and working on crafts, long summer days covered in well-earned sweat.

We may never regain what we lost, may never regain our years, our fields, our peace. But we will never forget them, for they gave birth to us just as surely as our current hardship has.

-Darva of House Moonleaf

Recent History

Given their role as guardians of the groves, High Orcs are very sensitive to changes that impact the groves. Recent issues with making sure that there is enough light, air, and water to their groves have left a number of Orcs concerned about their ability to continue to feed everyone in the Cairn. At the rate that things are going, it may only be a few generations, at best, before drastic measures need to be taken.

Recently, a few Dryads have started to wake. While most Dryads are still in their coma-like sleep, the few that are awake have been taken in by the Houses who cared for them. These Dryads all seem to be at a loss as to why they fell into that sleep, as well as why they have woken up.

[As of 2023]: The hard limit of 10 years has been lifted due to the action of the local Bastionite Kutari and their friends. The recalibration of the lifespans to be longer (but still widely speculated to what length) has been complicated.

High Orc Culture

War did not come easily to us. Our instincts were more tuned to patience, to the slow rhythms of farming and animal husbandry. That pace was a luxury we could no longer indulge in. We retrained ourselves, each lesson written in pain and blood, etched into our bodies in the form of scars and broken bones. We learned how to fight. We learned how to kill. And we became very, very good at it.

-Lorekeeper Sen of House Greenbough

In the wake of the invasion and the Fall, Kutari culture changed. So much was lost simply by being left behind as they fled; some was lost to death, as Orcs were torn asunder. The keenest cuts, however, were the losses that came from no longer having the time. Skills and traditions that took years to master no longer served the Kutari; while they still valued such things - and, in fact, felt the pangs of their loss - there simply wasn't the time to spend on such things. With reluctance, they turned such things over to others, trusting the Librahms to preserve the knowledge, and focused on the two things that they were entrusted - continuing to feed people, and fighting to protect the sleeping Dryads.

Families gathered into Houses, each one responsible for different groves within the Cairn. These groves served a dual purpose - to grow food for those who dwelt within the Cairn, as well as a resting place for the Dryads during their slumber. As the years passed, each grove differentiated itself slightly, gaining an expertise in a particular plant or animal. Ever mindful, they maintained other plants, so as to not over-specialize, but most Houses will admit to having their pride and honor tied to a particular food that they're most skilled at.

The adaptation of living in the Cairn has resulted in a curious people. In some respects, Orcs seem almost impatient, almost high-strung. The patience that once marked them as a people now seems nearly an enemy, and idleness wasteful. And yet, the Kutari retain some of their trademark calm, seeking joy and meaning in little things, simple things. Living each moment is important to them, as they pack as much life into the years they have as is possible. This leads to a people who are at once almost always in motion, but also capable of incredible focus on seemingly mundane tasks.

As such, High Orcs tend to be a very straightforward people. Misdirection and lying, while totally understood, is generally not appealing - put simply, none of them have time for any of that. Long-term plans are fine, and something they are familiar with - but for the High Orcs to value them, those long-term plans need to be practical. Given the long-term nature of cultivating certain plants and animals, and how long it takes for changes to bear fruit (sometimes, quite literally), some projects are handed down from generation to generation, as a family attempts to improve certain breeds or strains. Being selected to carry on such a familial project is a great honor.

High Orc Holidays & Celebrations

Traditionally, the Kutari had few holidays. They maintained seasonal festivals, tied to planting and harvesting, or to birthing and weaning animals. Their focus on finding joy in the little things, in treating every day as a celebration, dissuaded set festivals. Since the Fall, they have doubled-down on this approach. Living underground has disrupted the natural rhythms that they once observed; now, harvests are tracked grove by grove, crop by crop. As such, the seasonal festivals have fallen by the wayside, one more casualty of what they sacrificed. Instead, they focus on taking each day as it is, finding joy and happiness as they can, armed with the constant reminder that life is fleeting, and short, and that time waits for no one - especially not for a short-lived race.

High Orc Racial Elders

Given their short lifespan (on average, about a decade), there is a significant amount of churn in High Orc Racial Elders. Candidates are chosen by the Houses, typically after the Orc in question reaches 7 years of age, although rare exceptions are made for exceptional Orcs. Those chosen spend extensive amount of time learning with the Librahm Biata, and are expected to act as teachers and advisors for the rest of their lives, spreading knowledge to all High Orc Houses.

High Orc Names

Kutari first names tend to be short, one or two syllables, such as Sen, Darva, or Tahl, though recent trends have led many Kutari to take names from other cultures as well. Last names are very important for the Kutari, showing their bond with their family, and with the groves that family maintained. These names come from pre-Fall times, and frequently reference things High Orcs

have not seen in countless generations. High Orcs who manage to distinguish themselves sometimes are granted longer names or epithets to signify their deeds. Longer names are normally awarded by the leaders of each House, or by racial elders.

High Orc Racial Notes

The Kutari have changed much since the Fall. In some ways, their shortened life spans have been a boon for them, allowing them to adapt faster than other races.

Due to their farming efforts - both dealing with alchemical substances to help plants grow, and from dealing with poisonous plants or animals - the Kutari have developed a resistance to poison (Racial Resist Poison, 4 Build). Their passion for defending their Dryad allies eventually forged them into effective warriors. This approach has made it easier for them to take up weapons (all Weapon Skills are at half cost) and stay on their feet (Racial Resolute, 2 Build) (-1 cost for Hardy). Because of their historical connection with the earth, and the subsequent change to fighting, High Orcs find it slightly difficult to start on the path of learning Celestial magics (double cost for Read Magic). Their martial skills are a direct relation to the farm tools they used to use. It is well known an Orc with a polearm is a common and feared sight.

High Orc Dress

The Kutari tend to favor rugged, simple clothing, in muted earth tones.

Clothing that is loose enough to work in (or fight in) is preferred. Stylized nature themes (leaves, flowers, etc) are common in jewelry or decoration, but these can be a bit fanciful, as some pieces are based on things the Orcs haven't seen in countless generations, relying on other artist's renderings.

High Orc Racial Makeup

As Orcs, the Kutari have the signature tusks and green skin of their race. All exposed skin should be green, either due to makeup, or some form of lightweight "base layer" type clothing (such as Underarmor™). Tusks can either be store-bought prosthetics, or made with crafting supplies such as moldable plastic.

Interactions with Other Races

Of all other races, High Orcs have the tightest connection with the Dryads - which is somewhat ironic, given that most High Orcs have never actually interacted with an awake Dryad. Their shared connection to the earth, and their long-ago collaboration, forged a bond between the two races that time has not been able to erase.

High Orcs have a very active relationship with the Biata as well; given their short lifespans, and their need to access the experience of their ancestors, High Orcs frequently talk to Biata Librahms about storing or accessing memories - perhaps too often, depending upon the Biata's viewpoint.

High Orcs have an oddly comfortable reaction to the Wylderkin, seemingly inherently familiar with the Kins' animal natures. Neither side seems to talk about it very much, simply content with the immediate familiarity. The Sylvanborn are a source of fascination for the High Orcs. Their long lives and mercurial natures mean that there is a wealth of information available from them, but much like a game of chance, there's little telling how any attempt will turn out. High Orcs will often beg Sylvanborn for stories, but know to take those stories with a grain of salt.

Relations with the Selunari can be somewhat strained at times, as Selunari tend to be the exact opposite of what the Kutari stand for. Colorful in clothing, elaborate in their machinations, and uprooted in their lifestyles, High Orcs simply cannot wrap their minds around why the Selunari choose to live the way that they do.

Regarding Elves, the Orcs have a very complicated relationship. The Dark Elves seem the most unchanged: still larger-than-life, still engaged in elaborate efforts that are likely more effort than they are worth. The Harbinger Elves, who sacrificed others but not themselves, represent the worst of Elvenkind: hubris, arrogance, and a disregard for others. But the Stone Elves, in the eyes of the Kutari, have suffered the worst, and are mere shells, echoes of what Elves used to be. The Elves of the forest. Once were very similar to the way of life of the dryads. They lived in harmony with nature but soon before the fall they tried to manipulate it. Even now the Orcs feel they are up to something.

High Orcs have a keen gratitude to the Dwarves, as their preparation of the Cairn allowed everyone who made it to safety to survive over the long years. They consider their service in raising food to be their payment for their keep.