

Ssú

“Four wide-spraddled legs extended out from the twisted column of the torso ... The head was oval, the face only vaguely human; there were two eyes, round and black-gleaming, and nostril slits but no nose. The mouth consisted of a vertical ellipse. It was the thing’s skin that was the most repellent: it resembled mottled gray parchment peeling from a roll, the ends loose and ragged, very much like the winding sheet of a corpse long in the grave.”

from Flamesong by M.A.R. Barker, ©1985 DAW Books



Ssú

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The ancient Ssú were once masters of the land masses of Tékumel, while their cousins the Hlüss ranged the coasts and the seas. They hate mankind for destroying the original form of their world. There are two sub-species: the Grey Ssú, and the larger Black Ssú. Both species are excellent magic-users, and they also possess a limited hypnotic ability which can immobilise human warriors or cause them to turn and fight their friends.

Physical Attributes

Though differing in height (the Grey Ssú are between 1.71 and 1.90m in height, the Black between 1.83 and 2.41m), both varieties of Ssú are similar in appearance: a central torso set upon a narrow abdomen from which extend four equidistant legs.

There are two upper arms ending in three digitated hands (the largest ‘finger’ functions as a thumb), but they sometimes rear up on their back legs to fight, using their middle limbs to hold a shield or another weapon. The head has two eyes, nostril slits, and a mouth shaped like a vertical oval. Their outer integument is wrapped around their limbs like paper on a roll, and the loose ends of this ‘skin’ keep pulling off in fragments, making the Ssú look like a tattered mummy. The Ssú smell rather like musty cinnamon, and their language sounds like a sweet, high chiming, rippling up and down the scale like a chorus of little bells. They have three sexes: males (15 percent), females (5 percent), and neuter worker-fighters (80 percent).

Enclaves

The Grey Ssú dwell just north of Salarvya and Pechano, while the Black Ssú are found on a biggish island far off in the western ocean. There are also enclaves on Tékumel’s other continents. They yearn to retake their ancient stronghold of Ssúganar, now in Pecháno.

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