**Species Profile: Salman**

### **Quick Reference**

**Species:** Salman  
 **Average Height:** 5'5" – 5'10" (surface-dwelling, post-metamorphosis)  
 **Average Weight:** 200–280 lbs (dense musculature with high water content; ~75 lbs in aquatic nymph state)  
 **Lifespan:** Indeterminate in aquatic form; 90–100 years after metamorphosis to surface-dwelling adulthood (elder phase). Biological maximum likely exceeds this but is unreachable post-transformation.  
 **Anthropomorphic Reference:** Essentially large, man-shaped salamanders. Long-limbed, smooth-skinned, and flexible, adult Salman resemble upright versions of large amphibians, with broad appendages, wide-set eyes, and a fluid, boneless-seeming gait. Their form is strikingly simple: it’s a big, dark salamander on two legs. In their rarely-seen neotenous state, Salman are smaller and far less humanoid in appearance. These aquatic nymphs are pale, frilled, and ghostlike—bearing strong resemblance to oversized axolotls or olms.

**Pigmentation:** Salman have no hair or any such notable analog. Surface-dwelling adults have skin in deep, drab tones—black, olive green, or deep violet—with minimal markings. In their aquatic, neotenous state, their skin may range from pale pink to light lavender, often with external gill frills and semi-translucent flesh. Adult eyes are wide-set, with round pupils trending toward horizontal slits—giving some a look of constant disapproval or distant contemplation. Irises range from green to gold to burnt orange. Eyes are pure black in youth, presumed vestigial or potentially tuned for extreme low light.

**Noteworthy Traits:**

* Entire skin surface functions as an extension of their olfactory and gustatory systems—used for smell and taste.
* Cold-blooded metabolism; thrive in cool, damp, oxygen-poor environments.
* Highly resistant to airborne toxins, due to mucosal film and dermal filtering.
* Reproduce asexually while in aquatic nymph state. Undergo spontaneous metamorphosis into adult form; metamorphosis is one-way.
* Post-metamorphic Salman are unable to return to aquatic life.
* Naturally androgynous; adopt gendered roles only for clarity when integrating with other species.

**Summary:** Salman are amphibious, androgynous humanoids native to a secretive subterranean ecosystem beneath Halferth’s mountains. Their early lives are spent as neotenous aquatic nymphs—pale, frilled, and ghostly in fungal-lit waters. At an unpredictable internal signal, they undergo metamorphosis into terrestrial adults: stout, robust, and no longer suited for the deep. Surface-dwelling Salman are regarded for their stillness, perceptiveness, and culinary genius, owing to their full-body chemosensory skin. They are secretive and understated, with no visible homeland, nation, or army—only quiet observation. Their presence is calm, deliberate, and often enigmatic. What they choose to share is selective. What they do not, no one can force.

### **Cultural Exposition: The Salman**

The Salman are a secretive, amphibious species believed to originate from an extensive subterranean cave network running beneath the mountains separating the High Circle from the Hivelands. While their precise homeland remains unexplored by surface-dwellers, it is known to house expansive, bioluminescent fungal forests and a complex, closed-loop water system. This isolated aquatic system is not connected to any other known water source in Halferth.

Despite their alien physiology and unknown origins, Salman integrate into human and mixed-species cultures with surprising ease. Lacking any discernible centralized culture of their own—or perhaps intentionally withholding it—they adapt fluidly to the customs around them. When asked about life beneath the mountains, most Salman give vague or contradictory answers, often redirecting the conversation or dismissing it entirely. Their secrecy does not stem from shame, but seems to be a cultural norm grounded in an unwillingness to share what outsiders have no right to know.

The subterranean realm they come from is uncreatively called “The Salman Caves” by surface-dwellers. When asked what the caves are called in their own tongue, Salman simply say: “Salman Caves.” Whether this is literal, mistranslated, or sarcastic remains unclear. Entry into this underground realm is, for all practical purposes, impossible for surface-dwellers. The route includes lightless depths, low-oxygen corridors, and a final underwater channel that only Salman physiology can safely navigate.

What is known about their lifecycle is fragmented but significant: Salman do not reproduce sexually. All known surface Salman are biologically adults but functionally elders—having metamorphosed from neotenous aquatic nymphs after an indeterminate span of time in the caves. Once transformed, they are no longer suitable for subterranean life and ascend to the surface to spend the remainder of their lives aboveground. Salman do not return once they leave. Occasionally, however, a still-neotenous “youth” emerges early—accidentally or intentionally—confirming many aspects of this life cycle. While this emergence is exceedingly rare, it has been witnessed by non-Salman thanks to the quiet watch kept by adult Salman who periodically visit the cave exits. These individuals, acting without schedule or ceremony, simply wander to the cave mouths to check for new arrivals. When an early neotenous youth is found, it is gently scooped up, swaddled in soaked dark cloth or seaweed, and cared for tenderly. These early arrivals are not expected to live long—and often pass swiftly—but they are not mourned. Rather, they are seen as fortunate: spared the long walk of surface life, they are considered to have ascended directly to whatever sacred afterlife the Salman believe awaits them. On rare occasions, one may survive long enough to begin metamorphosis properly, their transformation witnessed and confirmed by surface-dwellers. This lends further credence to what little is understood about Salman biology.

Salman are frequently respected for their wisdom, tranquility, and lack of pretense. They are methodical, precise, and often ascetic in manner. In many communities—particularly the High Circle—they are employed as scribes, herbalists, physicians, or chefs. Their natural aptitude for tasting and scent-tracking through their skin lends them near-supernatural culinary ability, and it is commonly said that they "have something in their skin that just makes food taste better.”

Salman express care and protection through the use of the word "egg"—a cultural shorthand used to refer to any young or vulnerable being. To a Salman, a child, a delicate item, or even a fragile moment might be described as “egg.” This subtle linguistic gesture reveals a deep reverence for potential life, innocence, and things worth guarding.

Their personalities range from reclusive to sociable, but rarely aggressive. Salman speech is concise and unembellished—often brief, but weighted with finality. They speak with clarity and precision, leaving little room for misinterpretation or debate. Though their tone is not cruel, they are often matter-of-fact, speaking truths as they see them without cushioning. Even in kindness, they offer no unnecessary softness. While they are not evasive, they are habitually sparing with explanations. A Salman rarely elaborates unless asked—and even then, they may offer only what is strictly necessary. Questions are often met with observations, parables, or silence, letting the listener arrive at meaning without coercion. Even then, they may answer a question with a parable or reflective silence.

Salman are androgynous by nature and do not categorize themselves into male or female roles unless interacting with human societies that require such definitions. To a Salman, gender pronouns are a tool of translation, not identity.

Though some scholars believe they maintain hidden social structures or subterranean rituals, no formal evidence has ever been confirmed. Salman claim no nations, no religion, and no armies. Their influence is subtle, their presence quiet but deeply felt in every place they choose to settle. Their relationship to Halferth seems to be one of careful participation, not dominance. Of all the known species in Halferth, the Salman are perhaps the least understood—and perhaps intend to remain that way.