

ALTERNITY

ACTION CHECK

ONLINE  MAGAZINE

STAR*DRIVE

GAMMA WORLD

DARK•MATTER

The Races of Alternity



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Table of Contents

Race articles for the Alternity roleplaying game from Dragon Magazine

Cover Art	Fraal by Dragon Ciric (kvasaclimited@sezampro.yu)
Page 3	World of the mechalus [Wolfgang Baur]
Page 14	World of the Sesheyans [Stephen Kenson]
Page 24	World of the T'sa (Stephen Kenson)
Page 34	World of the Weren [Wolfgang Baur and Paul Peterson]

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WORLD OF THE MECHALUS

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Interfaces: The World of the Mechalus By Wolfgang Baur

(From Dragon Magazine #250 August 1998)

Physiology

The mechalus are a technologically advanced people who colonized the entirety of their star system prior to human contact. This humanoid species made a conscious effort to alter their physiology. Genetic engineering and cybernetic implants on the molecular level are now a natural part of mechalus biology. With biomechanical parallels of their nervous systems, the mechalus are doubly shielded against neurotoxins and nerve gasses. Without their mechanical systems, their bodies would succumb to the biowarfare agents still lurking on Aleer's surface. Without their biological side, their machine side would lack both sentience and the ability to process minerals into metals - eventually collapsing from an inability to repair itself. The mechalus are neither flesh nor machine; they are symbiotes.

Symbiosis

The typical mechalus stands about 1.8 meters tall, and weighs about 90 kilos. While at first glance they appear human, closer inspection reveals some major differences. Veins of circuitry are interwoven with flesh and blood, and mechalus hair combines protein strands with cable filaments. Unlike humans who have undergone surgery to install cybernetic enhancements, a mechalus's form is completely natural-each is born with this synthesis of flesh and biomechanics, not altered through surgery. The secret is in the life cycle of their inorganic side: the mechalus nanite cycle.

In fact, all mechalus are symbiotes, depend-

ing on both mechanical and biological systems. Their mechanical side has taken over because the species cannot reproduce without biological help. Mechalus reproduce sexually much as mammals do; the biological components of both parents form the nucleus that grows into another mechalus. But the biomechanical side of the species is passed down strictly through the maternal side. When a female mechalus reaches child-bearing age at about 23, the

mother's processor and self-repair nanites fashion copies of themselves for later use, a process that requires almost two years. When the mother becomes pregnant, this mechanical seed joins the fertilized biological embryo and helps it survive to term. Most mechalus couples bear four to five children in their youth, around age thirty, which is considered the optimal time for reproduction.

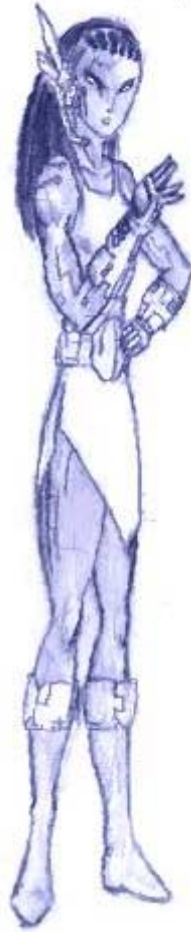
Mechalus life expectancy is about the same as that of humans, though they normally maintain good health and active lifestyles until death.

Cybernetics

All mechalus are born with a nanocomputer, its data storage area, and an extra data storage area. This nanocomputer is thoroughly integrated with the biological functions. The extra storage provides room for growth and for fault-tolerant data mirroring. All mechalus have built-in reflex devices and a selection of data tendrils (the equivalent of NIJacks) to match various hardware types. These components allow them to use programs stored in their neural slots.

The mechalus's biological nervous system is little more than a backup system for its mechanical and electrical relays.

Data tendrils are given to mechalus children as a coming of age present. In the biotechnical world of mechalus anatomy, computer and storage facili-



ties aren't implanted surgically. Instead, they grow and then regrow according to specifications detailed from within their bodies. These specifications change throughout their adult life; they only replace a few external components. The process of regrowing or updating a system is called a flash-upgrade (for software) or a flesh-upgrade (for hardware), and it can be undertaken by a mechalus at any stage of its life. The flash-upgrade is a simple matter of downloading and reformatting the code for a particular biomechanical system. The flesh-upgrade process is much more involved and takes from 1-4 weeks. It requires a special mineral diet and deliberate infection with upgrade nanites, much as human life extension treatment requires viruses to complete gene therapy. The upgrade process prevents adults from becoming outdated or surpassed by younger models; most mechalus undergo a flash-upgrade every year.

Overload

Mechalus are naturally immune to the human condition called cykosis; their very nature is friendly to the integration of machine and biological systems. They can integrate more cyberware into themselves than can other races (1.5 times as much as a human), partly because the implants they receive are tailored to their special metabolisms. But they can still suffer adverse effects from an excess of cyberware. Any mechalus who installs enough cyberware to suffer cykosis becomes a blood-hungry warrior of the old Credo tradition, losing most higher reason and reverting to violence. Some non-mechalus mistake this condition for cykosis. In most cases, this means that the hero becomes a supporting cast member under the GM's control.

Optional Rule: Direct Interface Bonus

Mechalus interface filaments grant a -1 step bonus not only to Computer Science skills (due to direct interface) but also to all skill checks that require the use of a computer interface. These skills include *Vehicle-space, air, land* (PL 6 and higher vehicles), *System Op*, and *Armor Op* (for PL 7 and higher armor).

Ghost Skins

Many Credo warriors have an implanted body temperature regulator, called a ghost skin. This implant reduces the mechalus's skin temperature to match the surrounding ambient temperature. As a result, IR sensing cannot detect them. This cyberware costs 4 skill points and has a cyber tolerance size of 2.

The costs for Ordinary, Good, and Amazing versions of the material (which provide a -1, -2, and -3 bonuses to Deception-*stealth*, respectively) are \$1,500, \$3,000, \$4,500.

Interfaces

To many humans, the mechalus's most disturbing physical features are their interface adapters, small tentacle-like prehensile wires that the mechalus use to link themselves directly to various digital systems. The wires are compatible with most computer systems, and since the Rignonmor Star Consortium stays on top of technical trends, there are very few systems that a mechalus's hardware can't access. They know the location of input/output ports on most machines, their nanocomputers keep internal schematics of most devices, and they can match processor and bus clockspeeds using an internal processor as easily as a human increases or decreases his breathing. They carry communications protocols for all major hardware systems, updating these on a regular basis. For the mechalus, bits of code are no more interesting than vitamins are to humans.

While it's true that computers are very intolerant of spiking and surging power, the mechalus interfaces work within the parameters of the machines they merge with. When plugged in, the mechalus runs device driver daemons in the background; these let it manipulate the system directly. A mechalus linking into a new machine can write appropriate code and communication protocols by making a successful *Computer Science-programming* skill check, much as a human might adapt to the quirks of a new type of car.

The mechalus interface fails only in a few special cases. A secure computer might not have an input device, it might have proprietary input devices, or it might have the input jack locked by a password. As long as the mechalus has the tools to juryrig a solution or find the system. In all cases, the mechalus is limited by the software funning on the computer and can do anything that could eventually be done with a keyboard, mouse, or data tendrill.

History

For most of their history, the mechalus were a warrior race engaged in constant battle. They didn't just stumble upon their present pacifism; they earned it during centuries of slaughter and ecocide. After generations of war, the mechalus lost their taste for killing just over 350 years ago. (All of the following dates appear in Galactic Standard format.) Ironically, a species bred for war now campaigns for

peace.

Progress Level 0 and 1: Electric Youth

The mechalus followed an unusual path of technological development. Within the past 20,000 years, they began using stone tools and herding animals. By 8,000 years ago, they had created an agricultural society, and the founding of city-states led to their first great wars. These wars led to the intense development of metallurgy; Aleer, the mechalus home planet is rich in silver, iron, titanium, tungsten, gold, and tin. The mechalus soon learned to forge bronze and iron-and-around 6,000 years ago-to master electricity.

Though the mechalus learned to command electricity early in their development, they remained an agricultural society. At first, they used metal/acid batteries for simple tasks such as anodizing jewelry, rustproofing iron, and even generating light. Soon, however, they began building simple static charge weapons, able to kill with a single massive shock. As their mastery of electricity grew, their weapons improved. By 5,000 years ago, the mechalus had learned how to generate electricity from both static charges and batteries; their metalworkers even learned how to capture lightning for later use. Their use of electricity remained sophisticated throughout their later development.

Progress Level 2: The Long Wars

Throughout the fourth millennium BC the mechalus formed four great empires-bodies that, unlike human nations, remained stable for thousands of years. Pesh, Leenest, Megarin, and Oldurreg each controlled one of the planet's six great continents. The remaining two continents were contested by smaller nations and provided a place for the larger nations to fight proxy wars.

Pesh was the earliest empire to form, founded by priests of the Mechalus's sky-god Ositan. Considered inventive but dishonorable by the other nations, Pesh remained a capital of learning, scholarship, and industry. Ositan's priesthood had been the first to discover electricity, and their knowledge quickly spread to other nations.

Leenest was next, a confederation of city-states from the river-valleys. In time, it grew to dominate the surrounding mountains and their hydroelectric power, but its strength remained firmly grounded in its large population and fertile agriculture.

Megarin traded by sea with Pesh but also contested Pesh's control of the vital trade routes between the mines of Ota and Megarin's armories. Its people were sailors and explorers, always finding

new sources of ore for their smelters.

Finally there came Oldurreg, a splinter state founded by refugees from Megarrin. Living high on the central Ota plateau and along the coast of the Otean sea, the Oldurreg are famed as miners and as the most stubborn of the mechalus, as immobile in their opinions as their mountains. Oldurreg are considered slow but stable among the mechalus.

By the end of the millennium, those four nations had colonized the entire planet and controlled 90% of Aleer's land mass. The remainder was split among various client states, the polar cap, and neutral states conducting precarious balancing acts among the greater powers. The nations fought occasional naval wars and diplomatic struggles, but they also devoted great effort to agriculture and science. Electricity-generating waterwheels and windmills were in place by the middle of the period.

From the third millennium to first millennium BC, the mechalus entered an era of retreat from progress. Religious struggles and questions of proper government preoccupied them in brief periods like the human Renaissance from -182 to -230, but it didn't last. But by the end of the period, in -230, Oldurreg, beset by internal discontent, unified its warring princes by declaring war on Megarin, launching a war of conquest that soon engulfed all other nations.

The intractable stubbornness of the Oldurreg kept the war going well beyond any reasonable duration. The war dragged on for the next 400 years, with ever-increasing stakes: losers were enslaved, massacres became policy, and total war against civilian targets was common as early as 150. This constant struggle had its price: mechalus institutions were changing to meet the challenges of institutionalized warfare.

Progress Level 3: Decline of Tyrants

During the years from 295 to 1,100 AD, the mechalus institutions governing the great nations slowly reduced the role of the Jowh ("tyrant"). Nations were ruled more often as a diffuse collection of like-minded citizens; civil councils replaced monarchies. The mechalus simply refused to give their lives for the pride or ambition of any one ruler, but they fought savagely for any cause their whole society took to heart. By 826 AD, Megarin armies were drafted by national custom, rather than from the retinues of the tyrants and their lords.

Pesh followed Megarin into changing its imperial heritage; it deposed its entire ruling class in a decade of bloody civil unrest. Oldurreg remained the only holdout, retaining its feudal system while tightening control through the use of labor champs and

reprisals against anyone questioning the Tyrant of Oldurreg. More and more, however the true power in Oldurreg lay in the hands of the bureaucrats and secret police chiefs, rather than any individual.

Progress Level 4: Motorization

In the 1100's, the invention of the air-powered chuff rifle and chuff cannon (see "Technology") changed the fundamental rules of warfare, leading to the use of trenches, siege engines, and other emplacements, as well as the decline of the Nidrazh ("marauder") cavalry elite units. Aleerin cavalry is a thing of the past. During the Cheanet Campaign between Pesh and Megarin cavalry units were an important factor in warfare; elite Nidrazh rode hipolat-beasts, four-legged herd animals that weighed more than 1,200 kilos and required years of training before they could be deployed in battle. The hipolat's thick, rhino-like skin provided good protection against arrows and slashing weapons, and its heavily reinforced skull allowed it to break through enemy ranks, barricades, and even light fortifications. However, the high-strung and over-bred hipolat were poor subjects for adaptation to the age of biological warfare that followed; the last of the breed died in 1576, after the Bleeding Air Offensive.

By the 1200's, the Pesh had developed an electrical motor to power war machines, a breakthrough that allowed it to hold onto an image of greatness in the 1300s. On the inside, through, resource exhaustion and internal rebellions brought Pesh to the brink of surrender.

By the 1400's, mechalus warriors were augmenting themselves with integral armor and night-vision sights. The first biological ammunition for chuff rifles was deployed in 1498; countermeasures included improved armor and immune-boosting chemicals. Fortunately, Aleer is very poor in fissionable materials such as uranium, so the mechalus never developed nuclear weapons. Their conventional wars dragged on, and many battle zones soon became vast chemical and biological wastelands.

Progress Level 5: The Plague Years

The centuries of war took their toll. Mechalus numbers dwindled as biological and chemical weapons spread unchecked, destroying the nation of Pesh in the first of the Great Plagues, in 1573. The First Plague was quickly followed by the Bleeding Air Offensive, the Blinding Plague, and the Plague of Slow Rot. In 1588, the Megarin nation issued filter masks to all citizens and implanted corneal shields to counter the Blinding Plague. Vaccines, improved filter masks, and other countermeasures were soon deployed in

every nation, but the bioweapons of this period still make occasional appearances on Aleer today. Outbreaks of the Scarlet Plague and the Blinding Plague are especially prevalent in the former Pesh and Megarin territories, respectively. These fresh occurrences of plague are thought to be the result of wind-borne spores or perhaps the release of trapped gas from ancient underground weapons sites.

In 1649, the nation of Oldurreg collapsed, overrun in a chemical bloodbath that has left much of the continent of Ota barren to this day. With the collapse Oldurreg's bread baskets, the other nations faced a wave of hunger and even starvation.

Leenest and Megarin continued their struggle at a greatly reduced pace for almost another 150 years after the first plague wars. Eventually, in 1757, the Megarin found a way to implant a self-sustaining suite of cybergear that protected the young and curbed the nation's shocking infant mortality rate. Border wars, sabotage, guerrilla wars, and terrorist attacks against reservoirs and food supplies became more common than wars of conquest. Over time, Megarin's supremacy in both biological weapons and in biomechanical defenses gave its citizens a numerical and technological edge. In 1888, the Megarin began the final offensive in what they called the War of Unity. Leenest's capital, Bogdarin, fell to General Thetor's First Army 12 years later, and the planet has been unified ever since.

Fallout

The annihilation of the Oridin gave the aleerins pause. For almost 200 years, they had clawed their way onto a distant planet and destroyed its native population. Suddenly, their culture was rudderless. Their victory produced a radical change in aleerin culture. They put aside their warlike ways and began debating their Warrior's Credo, the self-defense implants, and all the armaments of war.

The debate split the mechalus into two camps: the radical Kiscaes ("Negationists") and the more practical Pegonts ("Those who Remember"). The uncompromising Kiscaes were the radical pacifists, those who swore that their own biological components were incompatible with peaceful existence. Shedding the last remnants of organic life, the Kiscaes sought to become one with their computers. After stripping aleerin military vessels of their weaponry, in 2195 they left in the Aleerin stellar fleet, a slower-than-light set of lightships heading out toward the galactic rim on a 1,000-year voyage.

Those who remained on Aleer still felt the impact of the Kiscaes's departure for decades, as the fleet slowly sailed out of communication range. In

2214, Aleer lost contact with the fleet, but despite persistent follow-up, no one has ever been able to establish whether the Kisceae fleet was destroyed or simply stopped answering. The mechalus have never discussed the destination of the Kisceae fleet with human visitors; the fleet has never been found by human survey ships. It might have been destroyed or it might have settled a nearby planet. Few humans even know of the story, and the mechalus have refused to comment.

However, the Pegont spent little time grieving for their wandering half. They believed the fault of the genocide lay in a system that allowed charismatic leaders to make decisions for the people, and in the Warrior's Credo software developed during the Wars of Unity, which demanded blood for blood. The Pegont didn't want to give up their biological side; on the contrary, they believed that the mechalus integration of biological and machine elements was entirely compatible with peace, that each side balanced the other. They worked for change, slowly driving the old Warrior's Credo out of the mainstream, though they retained the underlying hardware. In the final touch to heal the wounds of war, mechalus settlers established a per-

ter, as the aleerin ships bombarded Orod with biological weapons. Thetor was unwilling to attempt a conquest on the ground so far from home; indeed, there was much to do on Aleer, unifying the planet and factories. Until his body's death in 2020, the UAA maintained a quarantine of the planet while the rest of the system was settled.

The second aleerin landings, in 2039, were a massive effort; remembering the risks of starting a war they couldn't finish, the aleerins had spent years building an armada to carry more than 100,000 UAA troopers to Orod. The landing parties met no resistance; the biological weapons had done their work. The dead lay everywhere.

The aleerin armies found city after city deserted. The few scattered survivors in the hills and in Orod's fernlike forests were rarely more than shadows in the forest, and even they were dying out. The plague-ravaged oridin were incapable of launching more than sporadic attacks against the aleerin occupation of their world. By 2145, the oridin genocide was complete. The last known oridin died in the Nestor Hills that year. Scattered reports of remnant populations of oridin continue to this day, but no physical evidence has ever materialized.

In many ways, the aleerin culture never recovered from the genocide.

Progress Level 6: Interplanetary War

Around 1901, Thetor's renamed Unified Aleer Army (UAA) expanded its reach across all of the Aegmac planets in system ships powered by solar sails and with solar laser engines. After almost 70 years of exploration by robot surveyors, the aleerins finally sent astronauts to visit nearby planets, starting with the planet Orod, which was known to harbor the right conditions to sustain carbon-based life. Filled with expansionist fervor, the aleerins made contact with the oridin, a second sentient species within their own star system, in 1966.

The oridin were not nearly as technically advanced as the aleerin, but they had built cities and formed several primarily theocratic cultures. Physically, the oridin resembled the aleerins themselves, but without any biomechanical enhancements. Their genetic and physical similarity has never been properly explained, though some aleerin legends hint at contact with starfaring races in the distant past. Perhaps the oridin were carried to their planet by a Precursor race, or perhaps they were the result of a secret colony founded by a nation desperate to survive the Wars of Unity. The truth will probably never be known, since the oridin didn't survive.

The two species hated each other from the moment of first contact; oridin zealots overran the aleerin ship and slaughtered all hands. A strange slow-motion war followed for the first decade thereaf-

Progress Level 7: Contact

In 2281, humans from the Rigunmor Star Consortium entered the Colee system. Rigunmor diplomats were astounded by the thousands of lightsail system ships travelling throughout the system, and by the computer and electronic marvels they saw when they made contact with the *Pirsk*, the vessel where the Rigunmors and the aleerins met to negotiate the terms of their shared future. The Rigunmors spared no expense to demonstrate the advantages of an alliance, offering exclusive trading rights, access to Rigunmor stardrive technology, and even the colonization rights to several nearby systems.

In retrospect, it's clear that the Rigunmors, normally hardheaded traders, could have driven a much harder bargain, but the awesome sight of such an advanced alien species seems to have overwhelmed the Rigunmor negotiators. To the amazement of the Rigunmor delegation, prepared for months of arbitration, the aleerins signed a commercial agreement after only a few days.

Though the aleerins hid it well, they were still recovering from a century of incredible internal turmoil and were quite vulnerable at the time. They had no war fleet. The Rigunmor proposal to incorporate Aleer within the Rigunmor sphere of influence met no

resistance. The aleerins even accepted the name that humans gave them: mechalus. Shedding their old name seemed another way to forget the past.

2501: Current Prospects

The mechalus' unique abilities and technology have contributed to the Star Consortium's growth as an interstellar power, and in return the Consortium has rewarded them with planets of their own, rich contracts, and preferred seats on several commodities exchanges.

Rumors abound that the mechalus are the force behind the Consortium's ability to fend off determined Grid attacks by VOIDCORP™ and even Insight during the Second Galactic War. Even the most pacifist mechalus, it turned out, didn't consider Grid warfare a form of violence. As long as the mechalus contain the specters of their violent past and remain at the heart of the Rignunmor technical elite, they will thrive.

Culture & Society

More than any human culture save the Nariac, mechalus culture relies heavily on machinery and computers. The mechalus make extensive use of robots in limited applications (primarily manufacturing and exploration), and they are adept at building them. However, they consider the employment of robots in any task dishonorable-or at the very least, incredibly rude-because robots can be "irresponsible," and poor programming can result in disaster. The very thought that robots can perform the work of an aleerin is insulting, because it implies that the biological sides of the workers are unimportant. Aleerins are loathe to give offense in this way, and so only use robots in jobs that no one yet holds: being sent out as explores, or surveillance machines, or in new factories.

Among modern aleerins, the Pesh are suspect for a number of reasons, primarily because of their religion and their way of waging war. First of all, the Pesh believe that the fully mechanical mechalus aboard the Kiscac Fleet (see "Fallout") are blessed; their transformation was something holy, and those left behind can only console themselves with the thought that at least some mechalus achieved this state.

Worse, the Pesh use robots in war, a tactic that mechalus view the way most 20th-century humans view putting weapons in the hands of children. It can be done, but it isn't right. Robots are not capable of winning through guile, or superior will, or the sheer rightness of their cause. The Pesh-hard pressed in the great wars-simply don't care.

While mechalus have accepted the human name for them since first contact, they have their own names as well. Among themselves, they refer to about 50 primary, sometimes overlapping groups, such as the Pettier, Megarin, the United, Credenza, and sometimes Witnesses. They seem content with humanity's name for them and rarely provide additional information; they see "mechalus" as a trading name used by others, just as humans call citizens of other nations by names they prefer.

The mechalus believe in Occam's razor as applied to personal relationships; that is, the simplest solution is always preferred. They are loyal to a few close friends and efficiently ignore everyone else. Humans find this attitude a little off-putting, since the mechalus place no value on chit-chat or small talk.

This efficiency extends to family life. The mechalus never marry and don't raise children, though they do take mates for the year or more required to bring a child to term. Once the child is born, its parents give it over to the community, which raises all children communally in a group parenting process. Special emphasis is placed on computer and Grid technology, with young mechalus training their skills against elders in the *aleer eshtal*. The *aleer eshtal* is not a real place but a site on the mechalus Grid set aside for virtual combats. There, young mechalus train and receive instruction from older mechalus, fight prize bouts, and eventually undergo the initiation rights that grant them full standing as an adult. Though it is rarely discussed with outsiders, this initiation seems to revolve around a test of worthiness through combat against an elder, then a recitation of the rights and responsibilities that adults enjoy. Offworld mechalus have established similar Grid arenas in other star systems with a large mechalus population.

When it comes to matchmaking, the mechalus are anything but romantic. They choose mates because it is the logical thing to do. To the mechalus, reproduction is an ordinary consequence of their biological side, just as war is grim and dirty work for the unclean, and exploration of the galaxy is necessary but hazardous work.

The mechalus consider themselves superior to "unshaped" species like the weren or sesheyans; they respect the Nariac and the Thuldans because they at least aspire to be more than what crude nature made them. They consider members of other stellar nations foolish for forgoing the obvious benefits of biological engineering.

At the same time that most mechalus are unromantic, devoted members of their communities, they see a certain appeal in breaking free. The

Credo warriors and the independent contractors who leave Rigunmor space have a certain cachet, because they turn their backs. The mechalus might not approve publicly, but they are privately titillated by anyone who breaks free of their roles and attempts to forge his or her own path.

Pidgin Aleerin

The following list of mechalus terms and phrases is meant merely as an introduction to the subject. The interested student should consult the nearest Rigunmor Grid for a more thorough treatment of the topic.

Ammunition	Potal
Atmosphere	Li'ie
Battery	Kiel
Change	Kileer
Chuff Rifle	Charega
Driveship	Merefalta
Drivespace	Meree
Electronic	Eshta
Interface	Nist
Lightship	Pinfalta
Nanite	-chi
Negationist	Kiscae
Pacifism	Fentrit
Pistol	Char
Planet	Ylor
Programmer	Kindota
Rigunmor	Rigum
Robot	Iolite
Ruler (obsolete)	Jowh
Ship	Nileer
Stadium, or Grid	Aleer eshtal
Stranger	Orod
Star	Seno
Starfall	Te'mere
Systemship	Falta
Those who Remember	Pegon
Pacifism	Marvega
Vacuum	Na
Victory	Thetor
Wanderer	Geshlor
Where is the ...?	Petopo ...?

Government & Politics

Mechalus government is based on consensus politics and group action; individual efforts are rewarded, but rebelling against a decision that has already been made is almost unknown. At its heart, mechalus government consists of a distributed system of efficiency-monitoring expert systems and feedback-linked law enforcement. Literally dozens of

parties are part of the Aleerin system, though only four command more than 10% of the electorate. For example, the Traditionalists (23%) believe that things should stay pretty much the way they are, while the Biometricians (18%) believe that perfection of economic models and profit analysis in the Rigunmor style will ultimately lead to mechalus success throughout the galaxy. Small groups of militant Creedans (about 2%) agitate for more aggressive policies. Other than that, there are no elaborate elections, no scandals, and few hot-tempered debates. To anyone but a political analyst and economist, mechalus government is dull.

Instead of depending on a hierarchy of rulers, the mechalus technocracy relies on local experts to make local group decisions for most matters. The leader in any given field is agreed upon by his followers, and that leader is given temporary authority to solve a particular problem. A rotating set of advisors and judges (which the mechalus translate into Standard as "magistrates") provides guidance to larger groups, leading construction and production teams or rendering and executing verdicts in criminal cases. Planetary and system-wide decisions are made by brief Grid debate and referendum. Since the mechalus usually agree quickly, these decisions are prompt. Politician is a part-time occupation for a mechalus, and it is considered a somewhat shameful profession at that.

This is not to say that there aren't mechalus capable of command or who wield considerable authority. Many do, even while holding down a secondary job such as janitor, writer, or gardener. In most cases, they deny that they hold such authority, at least in public. Mechalus who live among humans are more likely to admit to such ambitions. Even so, false modesty and false humility run deep in the mechalus spirit.

Finally, there's the matter of crime and punishment. The mechalus legal system depends on retribution, much like many human systems, but it does not imprison the criminal. A petty criminal (and crime rates are low among the mechalus) is usually forced to make restitution to his victim, paying a blood price for injuries and damages. This custom is similar enough to the Rigunmor criminal justice system that it attracts little notice in the Star Consortium. The same can't be said for the pacifism implants, which the mechalus reserve for cases of treason, murder, rape, piracy, kidnapping, battery, extortion, and psionic assault.

In the case of severe crimes, the felon is fitted with a simple restraining device that disallows all sudden motion. This implant, called a "warden," pri-

marily affects movement and striking, but effectively cuts STR and DEX in half. While the implant remains attached to the criminal's central nervous system, he is drugged, passive, and content, unable to commit crimes and sometimes even unable to care for himself. The implanted criminal usually becomes a beggar, a ward of the state, or an indentured servant, depending on the degree of incapacitation and the ruling of the magistrate for the case. The warden destroys itself after a duration chosen by the magistrate at the time of sentencing. A few criminals have attempted to remove a warden, generally without success; a surgeon with the Medical Science-surgery skill and the cybernetic surgery skill rank benefit must make a complex skill check of at least 6 successes and often more. Failure results in brain death for the implant's carrier.

The Cult of Thetor

The mechalus are not a deeply religious people, though they find the Insight religion attractive. They are offended by the anti-technological notions of the Hatire and many Old Earth splinter groups, but for the most part they find human notions of religion irrelevant to their lives and their culture. Since deities are not an active part of the universe they perceive, why waste any time on them?

The most important belief system of the mechalus has been driven underground for hundreds of years: the Credo of War. The Credo was a statement of belief about the honor of war and the glory of combat; it was widely rejected by the mechalus after their defeat of the oridin and their adoption of pacifistic principles, but it has held on in isolated groups, generally those on the fringes of mechalus society.

It wasn't always so. Their strongest leader, Thetor, is now widely regarded by mechalus historians as an aberration of their nationalist youth. Thetor was a programmer, visionary, and general who first programmed and promoted the Credo during the Wars of Unity on behalf of his home nation, the Megarin BioMetric Republic.

In the end, Thetor's warlike implants led the mechalus to genocide, and the backlash has reinforced their aversion to strong leaders of any kind. Anyone seeking personal power is considered immoral at best and criminal at worst. Mechalus are masters at passive resistance to "dangerous demagogues," a category that includes most human heads of state, corporate executives, and religious leaders of all stripes. Thetor's physical body is known to have died in 2020, but his followers claim his spirit was recorded and implanted in the Alerin Grid. Oc-

casional sightings of a Grid shadow tattooed with an hourglass, the symbol of the cult, give new life to the legend every few years. Whether Thetor's consciousness survives is largely a matter of faith for Creedans.

The story has some basis in reality, because the Creedans have always been the keepers of the machinery that transformed a mechalus into a fully mechanical being, or *iolite*. These machines operated by the careful use of magnetic imaging of each individual cell, then nanite construction of a mechanical copy. The nanites copy each cell, destroying it in the process, called *iolification*. The last of these devices known were taken away by the Negationists aboard the Kisceae Fleet, but sometimes a gridpilot claims to have found schematics of the device among the data cores of Pesh or some older source, inevitably involving files that require a dozen data format transfers to decode. Such claims are never verified, and surely any such device would be rejected by the mechalus themselves.

These few believers of the Creed who remain active today are known variously as the Thetites (as they call themselves) or Creedans (as others call them); they are convinced that mechalus appeasement of humans has been nothing but a disaster. They believe that abandoning their traditional ways after the orodin genocide was a terrible mistake, and they preach a doctrine of re-armament and rebellion, seeking to establish a sovereign mechalus state. To them, the fight for independence is sacred duty, and any blood shed is a sacrifice to the cause.

To humans, the Warmongers resemble a cross between a terrorist group and a religious cult; in fact, they are neither. The Credo is a technological implant, a particular view of the world dictated by certain hardware and software. While it was useful during the Wars of Unification, most modern mechalus consider the Credo implants outdated relics of a past they would rather forget. However, rogue, over-cybered mechalus can revert to fearsome berserkers; this Credo reaction is also sometimes triggered when a mechalus accidentally kills an intelligent being. The fact that the credo spontaneously resurfaces from their mechanical lineage at times is deeply disturbing to most mechalus. While it is unusual to profess Creedan beliefs, it is illegal to actually harbor the Credo implants. Any mechalus caught with this software is exiled from Rignunmor space.

Spacecraft & Weapons

The mechalus are regarded as the finest designers of medical and biological software in the Star*Drive™ universe. Mechalus in-system explorers,

transports, and battle craft are state of the art, and their computers rival the best produced by VoidCorp and Insight.

The mechalus are recognized as the unquestioned masters of computer and Grid technology; they are the front line defenders of Rignunmor Grid sectors against hostile tampering. In fact, their skill at manipulating the Grid is so advanced, only the best of Insight and VoidCorp can match them. For the Rignunmors and those lucky enough to secure mechalus labor from the Consortium, mechalus technology provides a powerful source of efficiency and protection. But the mechalus are also masters in other technologies. Two items found nowhere else are the mechalus lightship and the chuff rifle.

Mechalus in the AD&D® Game

The mechalus are a poor addition to many campaigns because of their heavy reliance on advanced technology. However, they do fit in as visitors to the PLANESCAPE® setting, especially in tech-heavy regions such as the lawful plane of Mechanus and the modrons. PCs might consider the mechalus simply a new type of modron, or an experimental fusion of modron and human forms.

In other campaigns, the mechalus are best used as individuals, perhaps creations of a strange god, perhaps summoned by a spell gone awry. The mechalus make good creations for the research of a mechanically-inclined wizard like Halaster of Undermountain in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign setting. They can also provide additional far-future characters in the *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks* or *Tale of the Comet* adventures.

Lightships

The mechalus were a spacefaring culture long before humans arrived. The mechalus explored and settled their entire star system well before humans arrived. Their vehicles were lightships, spacecraft powered by solar wind and lightsails. Lightsails are aluminum and plastic foils that permit a lightship to capture the solar photon flux for propulsion. While photons have no rest mass, they do have mass while in motion, and thus momentum. When the light collides with the reflective sail material, the photon pushes the sail forward when it is reflected. The total force on the lightship is proportional to the sail's area, and the ship can be steered by tilting the sail with respect to the solar wind.

To follow an inward spiral, the lightship slows down and starts to fall toward Agemac, assuming a tighter, faster, elliptical orbit around the star. For an outward spiral, the photon pressure accelerates the

sail, moving it away in larger slower, orbit around the star.

The lightships can make the trip from Aleer to Orod in roughly 300 days, less when powered by solar lasers fired to accelerate them from the ground. Although they are much slower than other system craft, lightships carry reasonably-sized payloads much more cheaply than gravitic induction system ships. A mechalus system trader isn't burdened by a stardrive's cost and size-and because it's flight is remotely piloted, it requires no onboard crew. The lightships are so efficient that their use has even spread beyond the Agemac system, and now traders throughout the Rignunmor Star Consortium hire them for transshipping any nonperishable cargo. By hitching rides on fortress ships or other large ferry ships, the mechalus lightships have spread throughout the Star Consortium. However, by treaty they are forbidden from being piloted outside RSC borders, manufactured for export, or sold to anyone but Rignunmor citizens. Since all lightships require a direct pilot neural interface, the odds of one being pirated or stolen are slim.

LightSails

Mechalus lightsails are made from simple materials like aluminum and plastic, using extremely sophisticated manufacturing process. Aluminum is cheap, does not oxidize readily, and provides reflectances of 85-88%. All lightsails are spun by special factories in Aleeran high orbit. The sails are typically about a micron thick and constructed from a thin film of aluminum backed by a plastic lining. The lining makes the sail strong enough to survive folding and packing for launch, landing, and redeployment, and it prevents wrinkling. The problems of meteorite punctures and electrostatic charging have been solved by the application of grounding seams, repair nanites, and self-sealing material.

The solar sail vehicle must be rigged with four main design criterion in mind, performance, rigidity, stabilization and control. The mechalus use heliogyro sails, which operate using the same principle as helicopter blades. The twelve blades of the heliogyro stay rigid and in the same plane due to rapid rotation. The heliogyro also solves the problem presented of launching by rolling the sail blades up. When the sails must be deployed after orbital insertion, the spacecraft simply spins to unfurl the sails. Though speed and individual payload capabilities of lightsail ships vary by as much as a factor of five, the values given below are fairly typical. They represent a middle of the line ship, a twelve-blade heliogyro operating both with and without ground-based laser

LightShip Travel Timetable

Destination	Duration (days)	With Solar Laser (days)	Typical Payload (kg)
Geshlor	530	84	8,300
Orod	290	33	10,800
Gontis	500	107	5,000
Blagieur	900	159	1,500

acceleration.

Chuff Weapons

The chuff rifle is the standard small arm of the mechalus. It operates on the same principle as the air rifle, but the chuff rifle is as far advanced beyond the human air gun as the Vulcan cannon is beyond the Gatling gun.

While the chuff rifle has an effective range comparable to a rifled small arm; the weapon itself is lighter. Chuff rifles are made especially to interface with mechalus feedback mechanisms; they feel awkward in human hands, and all nonmechalus suffer a +2 step penalty when using them without a cyberlink.

A chuff rifle is an extremely stealthy weapon: it emits no smoke, flash, or burn residue, and it makes very little noise when fired (less than a silenced slug-thrower—the “chuff” of the name). Furthermore, chuff rifles don’t emit enough heat to be tracked by IR sensors; they are “cold” weapons.

The chuff rifle’s standard round is paralytic, using tailored toxins to target the nervous system and lock the voluntary muscles. If the target’s armor fails to entirely stop the primary damage of the attack, he’s been exposed to the toxin and must attempt a Constitution feat to resist its effects: Use the table below to determine the toxin’s effects; all damage on this table ignores armor effects. In the days before the death of Thetor and the rise of mechalus pacifism, chuff rifle rounds were far more toxic, killing their target by stopping the victim’s heart or destroy-

ing his neurotransmitters. Even the modern paralytic toxin can sometimes have a deadly effect, as represented by the Critical Failure result on the Paratoxin Results Table.

A chuff pistol has a decent chance to pierce a flak jacket or CF coat, and a rifle can pierce

assault gear or a battle jacket. To get through something heavier requires a chuff launcher—unless you first weaken the armor with acid rounds.

Chuff rifles are made in both single-shot and fully automatic versions; pistols are single-shot only. Pistols can fire only standard rounds; the WP and EMP ammunition are made only for the older, large caliber chuff launchers.

While chuff rifles typically fire paralytic rounds, they can fire another type of ammunition as well, the “acid round.” This ammunition really isn’t acid at all, but it contains nanites that attack and break down all organic compounds and armoring compounds for a limited duration. Each shot permanently reduces the target’s armor by 1/d4-1/d4+1 points, depending on whether the shooter achieved an Ordinary, Good or Amazing success. The target’s armor degrades at one point per round until the full effects are felt. For example, someone in a d4+1 armor vs. LI who is hit by an acid round that inflicts 2 points of damage to his armor winds up with armor equal to d4-1 after two rounds pass. A rifle caliber acid round can destroy body armor entirely, given enough hits. At that point, a victim is vulnerable to paralytic rounds. However, it’s just not effective to use acid rounds on an armored vehicle; it takes too many shots and too much time to destroy heavy plating. It takes hours to destroy armor plate, even after it is hit by hundreds of acid rounds. Treat objects of Good or Amazing toughness, like cars and buildings, as immune to these rounds. On the other hand, a hit

Chuff Weapons Table

Weapon	Acc	Md	Range	Type	Damage	Cost
Chuff Pistol	-	F	9/18/30	HI/O	d4s/d4+ 1s/1d4+ 2s	1,400
Chuff Rifle	-1	F/B/A	30/90/210	HI/O	d4s/d4+ 2s/1d4+ 2w	1,900
Acid Rounds	-	-	-	HI/O	1d4-2s/1d6-1s/1d6-1w	10 each
Acid Rounds*	-	-	-	HI/O	1d4+ 2w/1d6+ 1w/1d6+ 1m	10 each
Chuff Launcher	-	F/B/A	20/40/150	HI/O	1d6s/1d6+ 1w/1d8+ 1w	5,000+
EMP Rounds	-	-	-	HI/G	2d4s/2d4+ 4s/2d8+ 2s	300 each
WP Rounds	-	-	-	En/G	1d4+ 2s/1d6w/1d8m	200 each

*Acid rounds cause more damage to cyberware, mechalus, and robots. Use the second damage line for these targets.

on a typical small arm renders it useless in short order (2d8 rounds).

Modern chuff weapons are designed to incapacitate, not kill. Older models from the 21st and 22nd century turn up occasionally, and these are much deadlier, built to a larger caliber that can fire larger toxic flechettes, white phosphorous rounds, and even electromagnetic pulse (EMP) rounds. The white phosphorous rounds are especially deadly, as they shatter on impact and burn in an oxygen atmosphere.

The earlier chuff rifles often loaded focused electro-magnetic pulse (EMP) rounds, burning out electrical components. These rounds do damage only to targets with electrical components: cyberware, robots, body tanks, and machinery such as e-suits or computers. The mechalus themselves are somewhat shielded from such pulses by their redundant biological and mechanical systems and take only half damage from these weapons. Many human machines are less secure.

Paratoxin Result Table

CON feat	Effect
Amazing	No additional damage
Good	d6s
Ordinary	2d4s
Failure	3d4s
Crit Failure	d4m

The Mechalus Homeworld

The mechalus homeworlds orbit the star Ågemac, a K-class star just out of the G range and cooling. The system is unusual in that it has two easily habitable planets, Orod and Aleer. Aleer is smaller and warmer than Earth, with a thinner atmosphere that most humans consider acrid because

of its high levels of chlorine gas. Its gravity is very close to Earth-normal. The mechalus have inhabited Aleer for as long as the species has existed (according to the fossil record) but have only relatively recently colonized Orod, the planet which was once home to the system's second sentient species. Orod is larger but colder than Aleer, with less seasonal variation.

The system is also home to a hot gas giant named Geshlor, a hothouse planet named Fontis, and a sterile icy rock named Blagieur at the system's edge.

In addition to their home system, the mechalus have colonized more than 20 other worlds in Rigunmor space, including the second worlds of Agema, Afsha, Condree, Colet, Drochi, Galvy, and Maray and seventeen colony worlds and holdings. They are widely settled throughout Rigunmor, Concord, Orion, Insight, and StarMech space.

Mechalus are the dominant life forms on their home planets, but they are the only members of their genus. All other plants and animals are domesticated and carefully controlled, or are weeds and pests that have found niches in Aleer's heavily bioengineered environment. The mechalus see no reason why plants and animals shouldn't be perfected just as they have been. Most surviving species exhibit astounding rates of growth, little or no aggression, and a range of specialized traits useful to industry.

The mechalus have no respect for any life form unable to survive on its own; environmental and ecological world-views are simply aberrations in their eyes. They see those who hold such views as foolish sentimentalists unable to face up to harsh realities, and often treat them the way humans might treat a mentally retarded person, gently but always condescendingly.

The Agemar System Homeworlds

	Aleer	(Nileer)	Orod
Primary	Agemar	Aleer	Agemar
Planetary Class	Class 1	Class 4	Class 1
Gravity	G2 (0.98g)	G2 (1.05g)	G2 (1.1g)
Radiation	R1 (8 rem/yr)	R2 (4 rem/month)	R1 (2 rem/yr)
Atmosphere	A2 (N, O, CO2, Cl)	A0 (trace)	A2 (N, O, CO2, Ne)
Pressure	P3 (0.91)	P0 (trace)	P3 (0.96)
Heat	H2 (19.1° C)	H2 (-27.9° C)	H2 (8.4° C)
Orbital Distance	0.71 AU	0.71 AU	0.86 AU
Diameter	5,910 km	2,132 km	7,571 km
Year (Earth days)	218.5 days	218.5 days	days
Day (standard hours)	27.04 hours	14.1 hours	31.8 hours
Axial Tilt	19.4°	12.9°	7°
Density	1.05	0.87	1.04

*Wolfgang's most recent work has been editing the STAR*DRIVE campaign setting. He keeps hoping that he'll grow a mechalus interface tendril to learn new software more quickly (and improve his Quake II scores).*

WORLD OF THE SESHEYANS

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The Twilight Jungle: The World of the Sesheyans By Stephen Kenson

(From Dragon Magazine #261 July 1999)

From the stone age to the space age, they are savage hunters from a night-bound world, enslaved by a powerful stellar nation and thrust into the light of the 26th century. Fighting to sustain an ancient culture amid the scientific wonders of galactic civilization, the sesheyans are held by many as an example of humans' unfair treatment of alien species.

Primitive aboriginals living on the largest moon of Gamma Leonis III, sesheyans were discovered by VoidCorp explorers. The corporation took advantage of the sesheyans' primitive nature and arranged a contract placing them in service of VoidCorp in perpetuity. In effect, a stellar nation turned an entire alien race into its slaves. The sesheyans have learned a great deal about the galaxy since signing that fateful compact more than two hundred years ago, and many have begun to work in secret to free their people.

Physiology

Sesheyans are perhaps the most "alien" species encountered thus far by humans. They average 1.7 meters tall with sleek, whipcord muscles. The sesheyian skeleton is composed of light, strong cartilage, so sesheyans weigh only an average of 40 kilograms and have extraordinarily flexible joints and posture, allowing them to crouch and bend for extended periods of time without discomfort.

Sesheyans are hexipedal, having six limbs. The upper arms end in four fingers (including an opposable thumb), and the lower legs end in three splayed toes. Both of these sets of limbs have short claws, allowing sesheyans to climb trees and perch

on branches in their native jungle. The two middle limbs are slim and end in six long slender "fingers" with flaps of leather skin stretched between them, forming a pair of wings with a span of six meters. The wings allow sesheyans to fly on their homeworld and other worlds with Earth-normal or lighter gravity and sufficient atmospheric pressure.

The sesheyian head is wide and round, with four small eyes on each side and topped with a pair of elongated ears. Their eyes are highly sensitive to light, having adapted to the twilight environment of the jungles of Sheya. The blunt snout covers a wide mouth filled with sharp, bony ridges rather than teeth. Sesheyans have a voice box capable of producing a wide range of sounds, and they have no trouble learning and speaking human or other alien languages.

Sesheyans have long, finned tails used for balance and flight control. The tail ends in a series of spines connected by leathery skin. The spines can flex to widen or narrow the "fan" at the end of the tail, providing steering while in flight. Sesheyans also open or close their tail fans to display emotions: those in an excited mood open their tail fans, while those in a quiet,

contemplative mood close their tail fans.

From the Stone Age to the Gravity Age

According to sesheyian fable, their race originated in what is known as enoshai, or the "Twilight Dream," a timeless state of being connected with the vastness of space and the night sky. The first sesheyans were created by Vec't'lr, the Brood Mother, whom the sesheyans associate with the second-largest moon of Gamma Leonis III. Her twin sons are Tal, the Hunter, and Neshii'en, the Trickster, associated with the gas giant's two smaller moons, which chase each other endlessly across the sky.

Sesheyans were created to be the greatest



Pidgin Sesheyan

As a general rule, singular sesheyan words ending in “-a” or “-ai” are made plural by changing the ending to “-ei,” such as “aikai” to “aikei” or “jaeja” to “jaejei.” Most sesheyan words involving advanced technology are loan-words learned from VoidCorp. For example, the sesheyan word for “drivespace” is “dryspas,” the same word pronounced with a strong sesheyan accent.

aikaloska?	“Does the ghost grasp you?” or roughly, “Do you get it?” or “Do you understand?”
aikai	“ghost,” a figure from sesheyan fable
aikaya	“ghost walkers,” the dead, and sesheyans in the employ of VoidCorp
aikeita	The Day of Ghosts (July 13, 2274)
apassa	armor
dryspas	drivespace
enoshai	“twilight dream,” sesheyan history and myth
enoshaikai	“ghosts of the twilight dream,” stars, and moons (as seen from Sheya)
esosha	“free heart,” native sesheyan
huraikai	“Wind Spirits,” sesheyans who have escaped VoidCorp
hureja	“wind claw,” a native sesheyan weapon
ieshean	food
jaeja	dagger
keita	day (one revolution of Sheya)
laesa	laser (also aikenoja, “ghost light spear” to primitive sesheyans)
losaika	“keeper of ghosts,” shaman
oja	spear
sesha	hunter
sesheyan	“hunters of the land,” the sesheyan race
sheya	“hunting land,” the sesheyan homeworld
unja	wing
wonto	“tokens of trade,” money

hunters of Sheya, “the hunting land.” (The name sesheyan means “hunters of the land.”) In the days of the Twilight Dream, great heroes like Tal and Neshii’en lived among the sesheyans, teaching them. Over time, they became a part of the history and culture of the sesheyans, their names invoked by hunters and shamans.

For millennia, life on Sheya was largely the same. The tribes hunted (and warred occasionally), shamans kept the wisdom of the past, families mated and grew, and the cycle of life went on. The sesheyans existed in the timeless realm of the Twilight Dream – until the arrival of VoidCorp.

Aikeita: The Day of Ghosts

On July 13, 2274, a VoidCorp exploratory vessel landed on the largest moon of Gamma Leonis III. There, project leader JT795 42IWQ (Erim Ollander) made contact with the sesheyans. To the primitive sesheyans, the arrival of the explorer ship was nothing less than the appearance of ghosts from the night sky, as in their ancient fables. The visitors dis-

played magical powers: Their weapons spat fire, blinding light spilled from their instruments, and their bodies were tall and strange. Sesheyan shamans called the arrival of these strangers aikeita, “the Day of Ghosts.”

The VoidCorp crew had little difficulty making peaceful contact with the sesheyans, who considered them visitors from the Twilight Realm. Understanding the value of their discovery, JT795 42IWQ decided to remain on Sheya and conceal her discovery, even to the point of not sending transmissions to VoidCorp management, lest they be overheard by agents of another stellar nation.

Immediately after translating their language enough to converse with the sesheyans, JT795 42IWQ negotiated the Sesheyan Compact with the leaders of the most powerful tribes. The Compact granted the sesheyans right of passage off their homeworld and access to advanced technology. In exchange, the sesheyans agreed to serve VoidCorp in perpetuity. In essence, every sesheyan became a VoidCorp employee, subject to VoidCorp rules and authority.

Sheyan Fauna

The jungles of Sheya are filled with a wide variety of animal and plant life. Two of the better known Sheyan predators are described here.

Issha

Issha are tree-dwelling reptiles similar to Terran snakes. An issa has a blunt, triangular head with three eyes along each side and deep pits behind the eyes which serve as scent organs. The body is up to 4 meters long and muscular, covered with fine scales and patterned to match the jungle foliage. The issa has a hinged jaw, allowing it to swallow its prey whole. The jaw is equipped with fangs that inject a deadly venom. Issha coil around tree limbs where they wait to drop on unsuspecting prey. The sesheyans use issa hide to make fine, soft leather.

STR 11 (d4+8)	INT 1 (Animal 4 or d4+2)
DEX 11 (d4+8)	WIL 7 (d6+3)
CON 7 (d4+4)	PER 2 (Animal 6 or d4+4)
Durability: 7/7/4/4	Action Check: 17+/16/8/4
Move: run 24, walk 6	#Actions: 1
Reaction Score: Good/1	

Attacks:

Bite	12/6/3	1w/d4w/d4+2w	LI/O
Crush	10/5/2	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O

On a successful bite attack where at least 1 wound penetrates the victim's armor, the issa injects its venom. The onset time is d4+1 rounds. At the end of this time, the victim must make a Constitution feat check to resist the toxin.

Result	Damage
Critical Failure	Death
Marginal	1d6m
Ordinary	2d6w
Good	d6w
Amazing	d4w

Defenses:

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +2 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 Armor: d4+2 (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills:

Unarmed Attack [11]-*brawl* [12]; Stealth [11]-*hide* [15], *sneak* [15]; Awareness [7]-*intuition* [9], *perception* [13].

VoidCorp now owned the sesheyen race.

At first, the sesheyans were delighted by the Compact, since it seemed to them a religious experience of unprecedented proportions - a chance to share in the power and wisdom of the ghosts and to serve them faithfully. As time passed, the sesheyans began to discover that their visitors were not all they appeared to be.

When news of the Sesheyen Compact arrived, VoidCorp management was supremely

pleased. They immediately ordered the exploitation of this valuable new resource. VoidCorp ships arrived on Sheya and established bases to handle administration of the population for the maximum utility of the company. Sesheyans were displaced from their long-held territories without consideration. Their company assumed supreme authority on Sheya, and any disagreements on the part of the sesheyans were handled swiftly and forcefully.

Thousands of stone-age sesheyans were

Ska

Ska are large jungle carnivores similar to great cats. They are hexipedal, having six legs. The rear two pair of legs are adapted for running and climbing, while the front pair are for climbing and fighting, allowing the ska to rear up on its back four legs and slash with its front claws. If it manages to strike with its foreclaws, the ska can also rake with its middle claws. It also has a jaw full of sharp, bony ridges capable of inflicting a terrible bite.

The ska's hide is striped or dappled, providing camouflage in the jungle. It has poor vision, but its senses of hearing and smell are incredibly sharp, allowing it to stalk prey in near-total darkness using scent and vibration alone. Ska tend to be solitary hunters, occasionally appearing in mated pairs. They rest atop tree branches, sleeping during the daytime and hunting at night.

Sesheyans consider the ska the fiercest and most dangerous prey in their native jungles. Sesheyans hunters often make use of ska hide, teeth, and claws as decorations, and weapons carved from ska bone are considered the most potent.

STR 13 (2d4+8)	INT 3 (Animal 10 or d6+7)
DEX 11 (2d4+6)	WIL 11 (d6+8)
CON 11(2d4+6)	PER 3 (Animal 11 or d8+7)
Durability: 11/11/6/6	Action Check: 15+ /14/7/3
Move: run 50, walk 10	#Actions: 3
Reaction Score: Ordinary/2	

Attacks:

thrust into training programs designed to test their capabilities and make them useful employees. VoidCorp discovered that the sesheyans were remarkably intelligent and adaptable. They were able, even eager, to learn new languages and technologies, which the sesheyans considered magical. VoidCorp decided that the sesheyans would serve the company in several ways, especially in handling menial or difficult tasks. In a matter of years, sesheyans were being shipped off their homeworld by the thousands to serve their new employer.

To those who remained on Sheya, the sesheyans taken by VoidCorp became aikaya, "Ghost Walkers." From their point of view, Ghost Walkers had left the living world behind and entered the Twilight Realm. For all intents and purposes, they had died and moved on to a new life elsewhere. Sesheyans held funeral rites for family-members chosen to leave Sheya and travel with the ghosts; their lives as hunters of the land were over.

The Twilight Realm

When the other Stellar Nations discovered the Sesheyans Compact, there was an outcry against VoidCorp. Many denounced VoidCorp's exploitation of the species. For their part, VoidCorp officials pointed at the primitive conditions on Sheya and all the humanitarian aid, education, and technology that VoidCorp had devoted to assisting the sesheyans in

becoming galactic citizens. They also pointed out that the sesheyans were considered full VoidCorp employees, with the same rights and responsibilities as employees of any species. VoidCorp defended their actions and ignored protests from other Stellar Nations who called for them to renegotiate or suspend the Compact.

As the years passed, sesheyans in the employ of VoidCorp learned to function in a technological society. Their children were born as employees of VoidCorp, often away from Sheya itself. Sesheyans breeding was originally limited by the delicate balance of their ecosystem and the relatively harsh living conditions on Sheya. Now, the sesheyans were limited only by the requirements of VoidCorp corporate breeding programs, which encouraged employees to produce even more employees. The sesheyans population exploded across numerous VoidCorp worlds as the sesheyans lifespan was greatly extended through modern medical technology.

Billions of sesheyans have grown up never having touched the soil of their homeworld, hearing only legends of the hunting land where their people originated. Some of the new generations of sesheyans threw themselves into the corporate culture, serving to the best of their ability and seeking advancement where they could find it. Others, educated and raised by VoidCorp, began to see flaws in the Sesheyans Compact.

What The Sesheyans Think

Since their first fateful encounter with humans, sesheyans have been exposed to many different races. Although individual views vary, here is what the two main sesheyian factions generally think of the other major races of the STAR*DRIVE setting:

Fraal: “The fraal understand the value of technology. They assisted humans in reaching the stars much the same way humans later assisted us.” – *Ghost Walker*

“There is a quiet wisdom to these people, much like the most enlightened of us. Although they are not hunters or warriors, they have a great inner strength.” – *Wind Spirit*

Humans: “Humans were our patrons and guides to the stars. They are a clever and inventive people. We still have much to learn from them.” – *Ghost Walker*

“Humans are as changeable as the wind, and as dangerous as ska. They have equally great capacities for kindness and cruelty.” – *Wind Spirit*

Mechalus: “A capable and industrious race, with an understanding of technology that makes them valuable business partners.” – *Ghost Walker*

“The Mechalus are fine examples of a race that has put aside their need for violence, but they have merged too much with their machines and lost the fire of their spirit.” – *Wind Spirit*

T’sa: “The t’sa foolishly reject all outsiders. If their inventive and industrious nature could only be harnessed, they could become truly productive members of galactic society.” – *Ghost Walker*

“The t’sa saw the dangers in accepting human aid and kept their independence. The question is, are they willing to aid others in regaining what they have?” – *Wind Spirit*

Weren: “Brutal fighters, useful as mercenaries, but they refuse to learn the lessons offered by superior cultures.” – *Ghost Walker*

“They have no idea how fortunate they are to have the Orlamu rather than VoidCorp as patrons. May their blood philosophy help them walk the dangerous path between independence and slavery.” – *Wind Spirit*

The Galactic Concord

In the more than two hundred years since the signing of the Sesheyian Compact, some sesheyans have turned against VoidCorp. The chaos of the first and second Galactic Wars allowed a few million sesheyans to escape from VoidCorp space to other stellar nations or unknown frontiers like the Verge. VoidCorp maintains that all seshey-

ans remain their employees, and it works to hunt down any “absentees” (as they are known). The discovery of the sesheyian colony on Grith in the Corrivale system of the Verge has led VoidCorp to lay a claim on the colonists before the Galactic Concord. The Grith colonists maintain they have been on Grith since long before the Sesheyian Compact, transported there by a precursor race that once inhabited the planet. Thus far, the Concord has upheld the sesheyian claim.

There have been occasional uprisings and rebellions of sesheyian employees on VoidCorp worlds. Rogue sesheyans who attempt to return to their homeworld are detained by the VoidCorp authorities. Even if they manage to slip unnoticed into the sesheyian population, their former friends and families consider them dead or – if born off-world – complete non-entities. The majority of native sesheyans refuse to have any dealings with these Ghost Walkers and do not listen to what they have to say. Still, there is some discontent on Sheya about the Compact, and some native sesheyans have realized that VoidCorp does not have their best interests at heart.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity for the sesheyans since the Day of Ghosts came when VoidCorp agreed to recruit half a billion sesheyian employees to join the Galactic Concord. Although they remain employees, these sesheyans have greater opportunities for interaction with people from other Stellar Nations and societies. Many sesheyans hope to plead their case to the Concord and gain assistance in overturning the Compact, but the Concord is far too new and still testing its authority in civilized space. It will be some time before the Concord can challenge VoidCorp’s claim.

Culture & Society

Before VoidCorp’s arrival, sesheyans maintained a simple, tribal culture based around the extended family unit. Even two hundred years after the Sesheyian Compact and their introduction into galactic civilization, some sesheyans maintain their old customs.

Families & Tribes

Sesheyian families tend to be quite large, mainly due to the sesheyian definition of “family.” They do not limit family ties to biological connections; sesheyian families include extended clans with many relationships. Sesheyans do not mate for life but instead have many mates and many children over a lifetime. A group of sesheyans in-

volved in mating – along with their children, close friends, and other relations – make up the whole of a family. The sesheyan language includes many terms for relations that do not translate into human languages.

A tribe is composed of a group of families. The structure of the sesheyan tribe is fluid, shifting according to the needs of its members. Tribes split when they've grown large enough, breaking into two or more tribes that go their separate ways. Likewise, sesheyan tribes encountering each other might exchange families as a sign of friendship, strengthening the ties between them before moving on. In this way, stories and history are spread among widely dispersed tribes. This practice also serves to maintain a healthy gene pool.

Tribal and family loyalties are suppressed by VoidCorp, which emphasizes loyalty to the company above all else. Some tribes on Sheya are allowed to maintain their traditional structure, but they can be broken up by VoidCorp officials at any time to serve the company's needs. Ghost Walker sesheyans do not maintain tribal ties.

Aikei

Sesheyans have as broad a range of emotions and expression as humans, if not more, but they do not change moods as quickly or as arbitrarily as humans do.

To the sesheyans, every state of being is embodied in a mythic archetype from their fables, known as an *aikai*, meaning ghost or spirit. When a sesheyan needs or wants to experience a particular state of being, he or she calls up the appropriate *aikai*. A sesheyan on the hunt calls upon the ghost of the Hunter and, for him, nothing other than the pursuit and capture of the prey is important. On other occasions, a sesheyan might call upon the ghost of the Dreamer, the Dancer, the Traveler, or the Maker. Each basic archetype also has dozens, if not hundreds of variations associated with particular situations. So there is a Patient Hunter, a Feral Hunter, a Hunter Who Speak With Spirits, and so forth.

Each of the hundreds of aikei is strongly rooted in sesheyan myth. Some are spirits or animal totems, while others are based on great heroes from legend. Instead of saying, "I am sad," a sesheyan says, "the ghost of sadness is upon me" to express sorrow. The elaborate rituals and myths associated with various aikei makes it seem – from the human point of view – as if a sesheyan has many different personalities. A sesheyan embodying the Brood Mother can be tender and nurturing. The

same sesheyan can call up the Feral Hunter and kill prey with savage abandon.

VoidCorp officially bans the practice of aikei, but it is so strongly rooted in the sesheyan psyche that it is nearly impossible to eradicate. Modern sesheyans continue to use aikei to express themselves, but the mythic elements have faded almost completely.

Using Aikei

The best means of simulating the sesheyan use of aikei is through the Faith perk (*Player's Handbook*, page 104). The perk allows a sesheyan hero a greater chance of success when invoking the appropriate ghost in a situation. Not all sesheyans have this perk, only those with considerable faith and skill with the old ways (particularly shamans). The use of the perk is limited to actions suitable to primitive sesheyans, not for actions involving modern technology or ideas. A sesheyan might use aikei to improve a use of Melee Weapons-*blade*, but not Melee Weapons-*powered* or Computer Science.

Example: *Edolan, a sesheyan hunter, is trying to sneak past a Hatire guard on Grith. She calls upon the ghost of the Silent Stalker, focusing entirely on making her movements as quiet as a jungle stalker. Edolan has the Faith perk and rolls a Good success on her perk check. This gives her an improvement of two degrees of success on her sneak check result.*

Clothing and Decoration

Sheya is a temperate world with little climatic variation. Sesheyans have little use for clothing, often wearing only simple loincloths. Belts and harnesses allow them to carry things. Even in galactic society, Sesheyans wear little, unless environmental conditions dictate otherwise.

Sesheyans like to decorate themselves and often wear different kinds of jewelry. Native sesheyans tend to wear jewelry made from natural materials, particularly carved animal bones and teeth, as well as carved and stained wood. Since the arrival of VoidCorp, sesheyans also wear metallic jewelry, including rings in their ears and pierced through the skin of their wings or tails.

Sesheyans also use paints to decorate their bodies. Particular patterns of decoration are often associated with particular aikei, so sesheyans wanting to invoke the ghost of the Hunter paint their bodies accordingly. Sesheyans use tattooing to decorate themselves in a more permanent fashion, usually something related to a great accomplishment

or a patron spirit. Sesheyan shamans are often tattooed in this manner. Patterns tattooed on the skin of their wings are the most common.

Sesheyans living in galactic society tend to eschew many of the personal decorations worn on Sheya. This is mostly out of deference to VoidCorp policy, which prefers employees maintain an appropriately “businesslike” appearance. Sesheyans employed by VoidCorp as scouts and spies are given greater leeway and often wear more decorations.

Outside Influences

Sesheyan culture has been irrevocably changed by contact with galactic civilization. Although the old ways are still practiced by tribes on Sheya, sesheyans living away from their homeworld must adopt human mannerisms and abandon or hide their traditional customs and rituals to fit in. Many sesheyans fear that continual suppression of their culture by VoidCorp will cause them to lose their unique cultural identity entirely.

Since the Compact, sesheyan society has split into three fairly distinct segments: the *esosha* (Free Hearts), the *aikaya* (Ghost Walkers), and the *huraikai* (Wind Spirits). Free Hearts are those sesheyans still living on Sheya. The Ghost Walkers are sesheyans in the employ of VoidCorp. Sesheyans who escape from VoidCorp become Wind Spirits. Wind Spirits are considered outlaws throughout the galactic arm, and even other stellar nations cannot always shelter a Wind Spirit from the vengeance of VoidCorp.

The split between these three factions of sesheyan culture is even deeper than most people realize. After two hundred years as galactic citizens, the sesheyans cannot return home. The differences between the Free Hearts and the other of their race are substantial. Free Hearts cling to the ancient culture and traditions of Sheya, permitted to do so by VoidCorp. They have little comprehension of the vastness of galactic space or the true nature of VoidCorp. Many Free Hearts remain as primitive as their pre-compact ancestors. To sesheyans born away from their home world, Free Heart life seems either idyllic or hopelessly primitive. Having learned so much, the galactic sesheyans cannot return to a blissful state of ignorance.

Despite the claims of the Wind Spirits, many Ghost Walkers are content with their lot as employees of VoidCorp. Raised since birth to honor and appreciate the company, these sesheyans are completely loyal to VoidCorp. They look with pity on

the primitive Free Hearts, who are unaware of the wonders of life among the stars, and with disgust on the Wind Spirits, who betrayed their benefactors. A few Ghost Walkers harbor misgivings about VoidCorp and the Compact, but most are as loyal as VoidCorp’s human employees.

The Wind Spirits have benefited from modern education and technology. They claim to understand the nature of interstellar politics in a way

New Careers

VoidCorp Assassin

One of the many areas in which VoidCorp employs sesheyans is in a contemporary model of their role as hunters. Skilled and patient hunters able to fly silently and stalk prey in the dead of night, sesheyans make superlative assassins. Once given an assignment, the archetypical sesheyan assassin never gives up until either successful or dead. The activities of such assassins outside of VoidCorp space has not helped to endear the sesheyans to other stellar nations, which suits VoidCorp (and many sesheyans) just fine.

Signature Equipment: laser rifle, CF softsuit

Free Agent Core Skills (25 points): Ranged Weapons, *Mod-rifle*, *Security-security devices*, *Stealth-hide*.

In the Verge: VoidCorp assassins go wherever they are ordered by the company. VoidCorp’s strong interest in many systems of the Verge (particularly Corrivale) is enough to warrant the attention of a trained assassin when a precise strike is needed.

Sesheyan Shaman

Sesheyan shamans are the spiritual leaders of their people, keepers of sacred lore and history. While most shamans do not leave Sheya, some have found their way to the stars as employees of VoidCorp, especially shamans who possess skills useful to the company, or those potential rebels VoidCorp prefers to have off Sheya. Sesheyans continue to pass on the traditions and teachings of shamanism, even though such things are banned by VoidCorp.

Signature Equipment: dagger, bone necklace, fetishes, and sacred items

Diplomat Core Skills (20 points): Knowledge-*first aid 2*; *Deception-bluff*; Entertainment; Leadership-*inspire*.

In the Verge: Sesheyan shamans can often be found in the jungles of Grith, helping guide the tribes while working to maintain the traditions and rituals of their people.

their ancestors could not have imagined when they agreed to the Sesheyan Compact. Wind Spirits range from pirates and renegades to political activists who claim VoidCorp illegally and immorally enslaved their race. Either way, VoidCorp considers them criminals to be hunted down.

Government

Before the arrival of VoidCorp, sesheyan tribes were governed by a council of the eldest members, usually including their greatest hunters and the tribe's shaman. Matters were decided by simple vote, usually involving various rituals to call upon helpful ghosts and a divination by the shaman to read any omens.

The Sesheyan Compact officially dissolved all political and social organizations on Sheya and replaced them with VoidCorp institutions. Teaching and practicing sesheyan traditions is banned by VoidCorp, except in certain areas of Sheya where company scientists study the sesheyans' native culture.

Since the Compact, all sesheyans are considered citizens (employees) of VoidCorp from the moment of birth, just like all other sentients in VoidCorp space. The sesheyans are governed by the same set of rules and regulations as any other VoidCorp employee. They are assigned Employee Identification Numbers at birth and may apply for positions with VoidCorp. VoidCorp holds the dozen or so sesheyan Vice Presidents in the company as examples of what the sesheyans can achieve, as well as showing their equal treatment.

In practice, it is often difficult for sesheyans to advance within VoidCorp. Some sesheyans manage to overcome the limitations of their culture and background to rise in the ranks, but they do so at the cost of their cultural heritage and traditions.

Religion

Religion and ritual have been central to sesheyan life throughout their history, but they are vanishing due to the influence of VoidCorp. The tribes on Sheya still follow the old ways and keep their traditions alive, mostly as a "living laboratory" for VoidCorp scientists to study. Elsewhere in VoidCorp space, however, the practice of any religion is banned. Possession of religious icons or artifacts is subject to heavy fines and other penalties. Still, the practice of sesheyan religion continues in secret among some, particularly the Wind Spirits.

Sesheyan religion is based around stories told by their shamans. The fables revolve around important figures from myth and history, and they pro-

vide the framework for the many different ghosts the sesheyans believe in. The practice of fable animism involves telling the various stories at the correct times, often in conjunction with certain rituals to honor the ghosts of the tale, particularly reenactments of legendary events and rituals intended to maintain things like the movement of the celestial bodies and the continued prosperity of the hunt.

"And so Neshii'en found himself trapped in the heart of the Ska Mother's lair when she returned. Thinking quickly, Neshii'en covered himself with the scent of the cubs, knowing the Ska Mother's sight was weak. He rolled on the ground and imitated the mewling noises of the other cubs as the great Ska Mother came closer. She nuzzled the cubs with her head, and Neshii'en lay still, calling on the ghost of the Great Ska to be with him, making him like a ska cub. The Ska Mother did not notice him among her children and so dropped the prey she captured for them and lay down to sleep. While the Ska Mother slept, Neshii'en spirited away one of the cubs to become his friend and companion. He named the cub Nura the Brave, and she became Neshii'en's good friend."

– from **"The Tale of Neshii'en the Trickster and the Great Ska Mother," a traditional sesheyan fable**

"Neshii'en found himself in great trouble when the Manager returned to her office unexpectedly. Thinking quickly, Neshii'en wrapped a cord from his pouch around his neck, folded his wings, and bowed his head, his eyes cast down as the Manager entered. Neshii'en called for the ghost of the Humble Servant to be upon him as the Manager asked him what he was doing in her office.

"A thousand pardons, SZ472 556XX,' he said, 'I come on an errand for Vice-President KG228 712ZA. He requests an immediate update on the status of...your project.' The Manager regarded Neshii'en for a long moment, but she saw nothing but the Humble Servant, eager to do his employer's bidding. She told Neshii'en to return to Vice-President KG228 712ZA and tell him an update would be immediately forthcoming. Dipping his head in obedience, Neshii'en backed out of the room, his folded wings concealing the information chips taken from the Manager's safe. The manager's anger was great when she discovered what Neshii'en had done, but the Trickster had already vanished like a shadow among the trees."

– from **"The Tale of Neshii'en and the Foolish Manager," a modern sesheyan fable**

Shamanism

The central figure in sesheyian religion is the shaman, known as the *losaika*, or “keeper of ghosts.” VoidCorp xenologists have noted remarkable similarities between sesheyian shamanism and that practiced by primitive human cultures. In essence, a shaman is “called” to the profession by a sign from the spirits, often an omen or an illness in which the shaman has visions. Many neophyte shamans spend lengthy periods alone in the jungle seeking such visions.

The student is apprenticed to an experienced shaman, who teaches the various stories, legends, and rituals the new shaman needs to know. The process takes several standard years, at which time the new shaman is presented to the tribe in a special ritual.

Sesheyian shamans have considerable authority in their tribes, since they are believed to be in closest contact with the ghosts and their wisdom. Scientists have discovered that some sesheyian shamans possess psionic abilities, which they often use to aid their rituals and perform their duties. They speculate that the emergence of psionic abilities, especially telepathy and clairvoyance, may induce the “visions” required to become a shaman. These abilities most likely account for sesheyian tales of the fantastic powers of their shamans. Psionically-gifted sesheyians are high on VoidCorp’s recruitment list.

Weapons & Technology

Before the arrival of VoidCorp, sesheyian technology was limited to bone knives and simple snares woven from jungle vines. The sesheyians had not even discovered the use of fire, due to damp conditions in the jungles and their efficient night-vision which precluded the need for artificial lighting. All

advanced technology on Sheya is imported by VoidCorp to supply their own operations and is kept strictly under control, out of the hands of any possible sesheyian rebels. Sesheyian employees of VoidCorp have access to all of the company’s advanced technology, the same as any other employee.

The pre-existing sesheyian technology is still effective. Many people who have scoffed at the image of sesheyians wielding bone knives and simple spears have discovered just how effective, to their own regret.

Weapons

The standard sesheyian tool and weapon is the *jaeja* (dagger). Sesheyian daggers are typically carved out of bone and curved, with a point and a single cutting edge, about 20-30 cm in length. Some sesheyians also make use of straight, double-edged daggers chipped out of stone. Since the arrival of VoidCorp, nearly every sesheyian hunter carries a metal dagger on a leather belt around the waist.

The short spear is another common sesheyian weapon. Originally tipped with bone or stone, modern spearheads are made of metal. Sesheyian hunters can hurl spears with deadly accuracy from the air, and spears are a preferred weapon for occasions when tribes go to war with each other. While hunting, sesheyians also use various types of darts, made of wood or bone. Small darts are fired from a blowgun made of hollowed out wood, while heavier darts are thrown.

A native sesheyian weapon is the *hureja*, or wind claw, a melee/throwing weapon that consists of a short wooden shaft ending in two blades of bone (metal for modern versions) that curve in opposite directions. The wind claw is grasped and wielded from the middle of the shaft. It can be thrown a con-

Sesheyian Weapons

Weapon	Skill	Acc	Md	Range	Type	Damage (O/G/A)	Actions	Hide	Cost
Bone Dagger	Melee- <i>blade</i>	0	-	Personal	LI/O	d4s/d4w/d4+1w	4	+3	10
Metal Dagger	Melee- <i>blade</i>	0	-	Personal	LI/O	d4w/d4+1w/d4+2w	4	+3	20
Spear	Melee- <i>blade</i>	0	-	Personal	LI/O	d4w/d4+2w/d4m	3	-	15
Blowgun	Ranged- <i>blowgun</i>	0	F	per STR	LI/O	1s/d4s/d4w, plus poison	1	+1	10
Dart	Athletics- <i>throw</i>	0	F	per STR	LI/O	d4s/d4w/d4+1w, plus poison	2	+4	5
Wind Claw	Athletics- <i>throw</i>	0	F	per STR	LI/O	d4w/d4+2w/d4m	4	+2	15
Bola	Athletics- <i>throw</i>	0	F	per STR	LI/O	1s/d4s/d4+1s, plus entangle*	1	+3	20

Special Effect – Entangle: The weapon entraps the target, restricting movement. Each level of success applies a +1 modifier to the target’s actions, so an Amazing success imposes a +3 penalty. Bolas affect only actions involving use of the entangled limb(s). Getting out of the entanglement requires a Strength or Dexterity feat (including the entanglement penalty).

siderable distance by a skilled hunter.

Sesheyan hunters also use a weapon similar to an Earth bola: three or four round stones tied together by tough cords. The bola can be thrown a considerable distance by a capable hunter and can entangle the limbs or wings of small prey animals.

In addition to their various native weapons, sesheyans have proven adept with modern 26th-century weapons. Their sharp eyesight makes them capable marksmen, once they become accustomed to the feel of a modern gun. An airborne sesheyan with a laser pistol is a formidable opponent.

Sesheyans normally wear little or no armor, since it tends to interfere with their wings and weighs them down. They can wear light, modern body armor specially tailored to accommodate their body structure and wings, however. This armor is generally limited to softsuits and similar light, flexible materials. Cerametal armor and bodytanks modified to fit sesheyans are extremely rare, and sesheyans don't generally like wearing them. A deflection harness is perhaps the ultimate armor for a sesheyan: light, unencumbering, and capable of being built into a pair of bracelets, a belt, or an amulet.

The Sesheyan Homeworld

Sheya is the fourth and largest moon of the gas giant Gamma Leonis III. Although it orbits more than ten times the distance from its star than Earth orbits its sun, GLIII puts out considerable heat, warming the surface of Sheya and making it quite habitable.

The moon is cut with a network of deep valleys. While the higher altitudes are cold and arid, the valleys are warm and lush. Native plant-life grows

riotously throughout the lowlands, forming a heavy jungle canopy that soaks up the heat and limited light that falls on the surface of Sheya, cloaking the ground below in perpetual twilight. Sheya's ecosystem is filled with various lifeforms, of which the sesheyans are the top of the food chain. Sesheyan hunters stalk wild game in the jungles, from snake-like reptiles to large, sleek jungle predators and game animals.

Sheya

Primary Planetary Class	Gamma Leonis III Class 1
Gravity	G1 (0.84g)
Radiation	R1 (9 rem/yr)
Atmosphere	A2 (N, O, CO ₂)
Pressure	P3 (1.12)
Heat	H2 (22° C)
Orbital Distance	10.2 AU
Diameter	5,840 km
Year (Earth days)	6,716 days
Day (standard hours)	22.4 hours
Axial Tilt	8°
Density	1.07
# Satellites:	None

*Steve Kenson is the author of the Avengers: Masters of Evil adventure for the MARVEL SUPER HEROES™ Adventure Game. He is a lifelong fan of science fiction and a new fan of the STAR*DRIVE campaign setting.*

WORLD OF THE T'SA

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Blink of An Eye: The World of the T'sa By Stephen Kenson

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Don't blink or you'll miss it. See? In that second, the t'sa did something. It might be something good, or it might be something bad, but they did something. Quick thinking and quick acting, the t'sa are always busy, always looking for something new. It's this trait that drove them to colonize space, and it continues to drive them toward new challenges in the STAR*DRIVE campaign setting for the ALTERNITY game.

The t'sa are a reptilian race from a world where mammals never developed to out-evolve reptiles. Instead, smaller reptiles became smarter, outstripping the larger reptiles with brains rather than brawn. The t'sa have been applying their native inventiveness and curiosity to the development of their civilization ever since.

The t'sa are perhaps the most industrious race in the known galaxy. They are certainly the fastest growing civilization among all the human-dominated Stellar Nations. The t'sa are fiercely independent and proud of their achievements. They are also the indirect cause of the two worst wars in galactic history. If anything is certain, it's that the growth of the t'sa civilization holds surprises for everyone in known space.

Physiology

T'sa are small reptilian humanoids, standing from 1.1 to 1.4 meters tall on average and weighing 30 to 50 kilograms. They have a sleek hide of small, overlapping scales that cover whipcord muscles. Skin color ranges from dark brown through greens to red, ochre, and golden. Male t'sa tend to have brighter skin tones than females. The t'sa head is small and triangular, with a blunt snout, slitted nostrils, and small, slitted eyes. The head is topped with

a tall, finned crest that reveals the t'sa's family heritage. T'sa have long, whiplike tails that are always in motion, lashing from side to side or twitching slightly even when the t'sa is standing still (a rare occasion indeed).

Although they are reptiles, t'sa are warm-blooded. They are oviparous, laying eggs to produce young. T'sa feel the urge to mate only one week out of every three to five years, a period they call t'ak tau. Otherwise, they do not concern themselves with the issue of procreation and find the human preoccupation with mating activities humorous. Female t'sa lay small clutches of four to ten eggs, which hatch after roughly twenty-seven days. Young t'sa mature rapidly, reaching adulthood in only three months. The mother cares for the hatchlings during this time, then leaves them to fend for themselves. Thus, t'sa do not develop strong emotional bonds with their parents. T'sa families are based around the egg-clutch or brood of siblings.

T'sa are omnivorous, eating both plant and animal material. T'sa prefer their meals raw or lightly cooked, often highly spiced. Eating small animals alive is considered a delicacy. Humans planning on eating in t'sa establishments or visiting the T'sa Cluster are advised to make the t'sa aware of their dietary needs.

History

The t'sa evolved on Taasa, a large, warm planet dominated by thousands of small lakes, swamps, and marshes rather than oceans or seas. Early life on Taasa developed much like life on prehistoric Earth, with many different types of amphibians and reptiles. Unlike Earth, however, Taasa never evolved insectoid or mammalian lifeforms. Instead, small quick lizardlike creatures began to develop greater intelligence and hands with opposable thumbs. Eventually they became the early ancestors of the modern t'sa: intelligent, swift, and inquisitive.



Pidgin T'sa

assa	food
at'dwa	water
cha	mine
cho	yours
ch'nakan	guiding spirits
Ch'Nal	the creator-god
ch'sa	guide of the people, a Ch'Nalist priest
ch'tass	family/egg-clutch
dait'sya	dagger
det'sya	tattoo patterns
k'chal	guardian
K'san Ch'nak	the guiding spirit of the t'sa
naka	many
nal	one
sa'toso?	where is...?
sheen'esh	cold/freezing
sheen'esh'ach	cryogenic
sho'ileer	spear
so'naka?	how many/much?
Taasa	the t'sa homeworld
t'ak tau	the mating time
ursh'hue	achievement/success
va'moosh	failure (literally "sinking")
xakksha	a kingdom or nation

Progress Level 0: The Stone Age

The early t'sa soon began to shape their environment. They employed intelligence and cunning to evade hostile predators, forming secure communities. They discovered the use of fire, a valuable tool for keeping other creatures at bay. The t'sa also developed simple weapons, particularly spears and knives, for use in hunting. Unlike other intelligent species, the t'sa rarely used their weapons against each other. Their non-confrontational nature allowed them to avoid much of the warfare that fills the history of races like humans, mechalus, and weren. From the beginning, the t'sa were able to cooperate for the overall benefit of their species.

Progress Level 1: The City Age

The t'sa began to build larger communities, interconnecting webs of alliances between clutches, known as *xakksha*. This led to the development of the first cities on Taasa around 20,000 years ago, considered the dawn of t'sa civilization. T'sa cities often grew quite large, surrounded by terraced farms and animal pens. Large predators remained a concern, but the t'sa learned to domesticate many animals for food and labor. The rich, moist marshlands

provided waterborne plants for consumption.

These advances allowed more time for pursuits such as exploration and scientific research. T'sa curiosity drove explorers all across Taasa, leading to much cultural and genetic cross-pollination and the early rise of a homogeneous world culture. T'sa scholars and scientists discovered and explored astronomy, animal and plant husbandry, and chemistry. Metal-working lagged behind other sciences, due to the lack of large metallic deposits on Taasa and the lack of warfare to encourage technological development. Spears and daggers remained the main t'sa weapons, since swords required too much metal. The t'sa needed improved weapons only for hunting and fending off larger predators. Their naturally tough hide eliminated the need to develop armor for millennia.

The City Age also saw the beginning of modern t'sa religious and spiritual beliefs with the development of their *Ch'Nalism*, based on earlier animistic t'sa practices. The doctrine of many different types of spirits involved in the creation and guidance of the world created a tolerant and open-minded belief system for the t'sa. All t'sa are considered under the guidance of the same spirit, so religious conflict between the t'sa was minimal. The basic tenets of Ch'Nalism have changed little since this earliest point.

Progress Level 2: The Growth Age

As their progress reduced the hazards of their environment, the t'sa expanded rapidly – in some cases, too rapidly. The growing populace demanded new territory and new frontiers, sending t'sa explorers searching for new lands to settle. The lack of oceans limited travel on the surface to walking or riding beasts. The was too uneven and marshy in most areas for the development of land vehicles, and large ships weren't effective without seas. Water travel was limited to small boats, which often required portage to move from one lake or river to another.

Early on the t'sa hit upon the idea of air travel as a means of getting from place to place. T'sa inventors began experimenting with gliders based on the wing-structure of native flying reptiles and birds, as well as lighter-than-air balloons. Such vehicles were useful only for short trips and required considerable altitude. Still, the t'sa continued to look to the sky as their new frontier.

The growing population and the demand for new territory caused some problems among the t'sa. For the first time, there was reason

for competition between groups of t'sa. T'sa clutches and xakksha struggled to gain the most useful and valuable land. Explorers rushed to find the best new territories for settlement. Fortunes were made by the t'sa who founded new cities and offered opportunities for growth, while other explorers lost their lives in hostile swamps or to native predators. Skirmishes and wars broke out between competing xakksha from time to time. Still, this competition was limited in comparison to the wars of expansion and conquest fought on other worlds.

New Career: T'sa Martial Artist (Combat Spec)

T'sa *sha'cre'tasa*, or martial artists, are useful as bodyguards or explorers. Their smaller size often causes opponents to underestimate them, allowing them to work covertly with ease. A *sha'cre'tasa* is never truly unarmed and can react with incredible speed. Martial artists often seem calmer and more "centered" than most t'sa, carrying themselves with a deadly grace and ease.

Core Skills (33 points): *Acrobatics-defensive martial arts 2*, *dodge*; *Stamina-endurance*; *Resolvemental resolve*.

In the Verge: T'sa martial artists are known to wander the Verge, seeking employers able to afford them and opponents worthy of their skills. Along the way, they seek to learn as much as possible to help them refine their art. A fighter who defeats a t'sa martial artist in combat can expect to have the t'sa request to study with him or her for a time to learn and improve.

Progress Level 3-4: The Scientific Age

As the population continued to expand, the t'sa moved across Taasa in an inexorable wave of civilization. There was no Industrial Revolution on Taasa. T'sa technology progressed at a steady pace, with each new development well-integrated into their society before the next came along. They developed sophisticated metal-working techniques using the limited resources available. The first functional t'sa airship, using lighter-than-air gases, was built fifteen thousand years ago. The t'sa began to harness hydraulic and steam power about thirteen thousand years ago.

For thousands of years, the t'sa continued to colonize areas of Taasa and develop new technologies, exploring the world around them. They tamed or wiped out the most dangerous animals, advanced agriculture and medicine, developed sophisticated means of air-travel, and looked for new ways to expand their understanding of the universe. Competition between xakksha continued, along with the oc-

casional war of expansion, but the t'sa settled most of their conflicts peacefully.

T'sa astronomers developed theories relating to the existence of other planets and stars before the first cities arose on Earth. By the time the pyramids were being built in Egypt, the t'sa were ready to travel to other worlds.

Progress Level 5: The Space Age

The t'sa achieved interplanetary travel nearly 4,500 years ago. They first put unmanned probes and satellites into orbit around Taasa, using them to study and survey their homeworld, as well as gathering information on other planets in their star system. Not long after that, they sent probes to other planets in their home system. That was followed by manned exploration of the system, sending t'sa crews to land on other planets for the first time. The t'sa quickly determined that several of the planets in their home system were capable of supporting colonies, and a new frontier was opened.

The t'sa space program was not without its hazards. One difficulty the t'sa encountered in their earliest space flights was the length of time it took to travel from one planet to another. The t'sa do not take well to extended periods of confinement, particularly not long months spent in tiny space capsules. From the beginning, the t'sa looked at ways of suspending the crew of a space vessel so they could endure the long journey. This began the development of cryogenic technology, which the t'sa continued to refine over the centuries. Many early t'sa astronauts and explorers died in accidents when their vehicles or cryogenic systems failed, but the t'sa kept trying.

For more than a thousand years, the t'sa explored and colonized planets in their own star system. The process of building new colonies and early terraforming efforts occupied them for some time. It also continued to stimulate the advancement of t'sa technology. Advancements developed for the space program were applied to everyday life: new computer, medical, and propulsion technologies, for example. The t'sa population boomed with the availability of new frontiers for them to explore. As the population grew, so did the number of t'sa clutches and individuals who sought to expand the frontiers of their race.

The planetary colonies of the t'sa and the need for communication between them led to the expansion and refinement of the t'sa version of the Grid. An extensive information network already covered all of Taasa, but now the t'sa Grid needed to

expand to encompass the colony worlds as well. Limited to light-speed communications links, the t'sa grid suffered from extensive timelags, a problem t'sa technicians continuously worked to correct.

New Diplomat Career: T'sa Ch'sa

Ch'Sa are knowledgeable about the t'sa faith and tend to be good at dealing with people. The career is unique in that it is never the t'sa primary career and may be combined with another career choice. T'sa who become Ch'Sa often have the Faith perk, able to call upon reserves of inner strength in times of need.

Core Skills (23 points): Knowledge-*theology*; Resolve-*mental resolve*; Teach; Leadership-*inspire*.

In the Verge: Ch'Sa are found throughout the Verge. Unlike most clergy, they are nearly invisible, since they do not proselytize or display their position in t'sa society. A ship's engineer may turn out to be a Ch'Sa who offers to conduct religious rituals for t'sa on board ship. There is no center for Ch'Nalism in the Verge, but small public shrines are found on any world with a t'sa population.

Progress Level 6: The Interstellar Age

Although t'sa scientists labored unsuccessfully to discover a means of faster-than-light travel, the t'sa did not allow their lack of a stardrive to slow their expansion to the stars. They sent probes into the depths of interstellar space and surveyed new star systems using powerful telescopes. When they discovered a suitable planet in a nearby star system, they made ready to colonize it.

Without a stardrive, the trip would take over a century. Generational starships were not an option for the fast-breeding t'sa; within only a decade, the population of such a t'sa ship would increase tenfold. The t'sa refined their sophisticated cryogenic technology, already used to suspend t'sa colonists and space-travelers for long journeys in-system. Thousands of brave t'sa colonists entered suspended animation and began their journey toward the stars, guided only by their ship's computer systems and crewmembers who were periodically awakened. When the t'sa discovered other habitable planets, they followed the same course, sending out sleeper ships of colonists to explore and settle the new frontier. So began the expansion of the T'sa Cluster.

Life on the colony worlds was often hard, virtually cut off from Taasa, with communications taking years between systems at light speed. But the t'sa persevered and prospered, much like their ancient ancestors who colonized distant regions of Taasa.

Colonies grew rapidly; a few thousand t'sa were able to populate a planet in just a few generations. The t'sa might have continued sending out sleeper ships and colonizing worlds in this way for another millennium or more, if it weren't for their first fateful confrontation with another intelligent species: humans.

Progress Level 7: Contact

In 2296, explorers from the Orion League discovered the T'sa Cluster. Humanity was, to say the least, shocked to find an entire interstellar civilization on the expanding frontiers of human space. Except for the fraal, all the other species humans had encountered thus far were limited to their own star system, at best, but the t'sa had traveled to the stars on their own.

The t'sa were initially cautious in their dealings with humans, but they were fascinated by the humans' possession of a functional stardrive and what that implied for t'sa science and technology. Several colonial states made overtures and tried to annex the T'sa Cluster, but the t'sa firmly refused. Although they wished to join galactic society, the t'sa had no desire to become a client state of any human nation. The diplomatic conflict over the disposition of the T'sa Cluster stretched tensions between human interstellar powers to the breaking point, leading to the First Galactic War.

The t'sa remained carefully neutral during the war. They negotiated and traded with various factions, always careful to distance themselves from what they saw as a human conflict. When the dust from GW1 settled, the t'sa continued their trade relations with the new stellar nations. They had gained, among other things, stardrive technology in exchange for t'sa developments in cryogenics and biotechnology. This gave t'sa explorers and settlers a newfound freedom, allowing the species to settle three additional worlds during the war. During the Interbellum and the chaos of the Second Galactic War, the t'sa maintained their neutrality and expanded their territory, settling another fifteen worlds by the end of GW2. This increased the size of the T'sa Cluster to some twenty-three worlds.

With the end of the Second Galactic War and the founding of the Galactic Concord, the t'sa were finally accorded the recognition they desired. The Concord offered the T'sa Cluster the status of Concord Neutrality, surrounded by Concord space. The Cluster would have complete autonomy in exchange for favorable trade agreements with the Concord and cultural exchanges. The t'sa agreed, and the Cluster truly joined galactic society. Millions of t'sa

chose to serve the Concord, seeking opportunities for exploration and advancement. Billions of t'sa had already emigrated from the Cluster and chosen to become citizens of other stellar nations. With plans to colonize another forty-one worlds in Concord space, the T'sa Cluster continues to expand, and the t'sa are becoming a force to be reckoned with in galactic society.

Culture & Society

As a race, the t'sa are hyperactive, quick-witted, curious, gregarious, and technologically oriented. They tend not to be aggressive, although they are fiercely proud of their history and their achievements. T'sa are simultaneously fascinated and repulsed by humanity; they are curious about humans and their technology, but repelled by human aggression and arrogance.

The first thing that comes to mind when a human thinks about the t'sa is that they are fast. The t'sa are bundles of nervous energy. They rarely stand still for more than a few moments. Even then, their tails usually lash from side to side and they fidget in ways humans often find annoying. When necessary, t'sa can explode into a flurry of motion quicker than the eye can follow, making them more dangerous in a fight than their reputation suggests. T'sa talk quickly, and conversations in their native language are often too fast for non-t'sa to follow. When speaking other languages, t'sa have a tendency to repeat themselves or use different synonyms of the same word to get their meaning across to listeners of other, less "quick-witted" races. For example, a t'sa merchant might call out, "Come, come good sentients people folk. Come and examine my fine wares products goods!"

T'sa are extremely curious. Some would say too curious. They are born explorers, always wanting to know what lies just beyond their reach. Mysteries fascinate them. A t'sa cannot stand not knowing what lies behind a locked door, or what some new technological artifact does. Oftentimes, t'sa curiosity becomes a problem when they begin poking around things better left alone, such as sneaking past that locked door, or pressing buttons on the technological artifact. A great many t'sa explorers end up dead because they became overly curious and forgot to take proper precautions. Non-t'sa often have to keep a close eye on their t'sa companions to keep them from wandering off and getting into trouble.

The t'sa also have what many other races consider an unhealthy interest in other people's busi-

ness. Among themselves, the t'sa believe that asking personal questions is simply a way of getting to know someone better, and they're quite open with information about themselves. They think nothing of asking complete strangers about the intimate details of their lives, and often forget that humans and other races find such questions rude.

Part of the inborn t'sa curiosity is their fascination with technology. The t'sa consider science the greatest opportunity for exploration and discovery. They are driven to unravel scientific mysteries and to discover new ones. All t'sa have at least some interest in the inner workings of different machines and devices. They have a knack for understanding how things work. T'sa make excellent engineers and technicians because of this, and many ships have a t'sa engineer on board. T'sa love to tinker and can occupy themselves for hours studying a new piece of technology. Hopefully, the t'sa remember how to put it back together again afterward.

Family Life

T'sa do not marry or mate for life like some other races do. Mating is conducted casually, since it does not constitute the same commitment for t'sa that it does for other races. T'sa mate with an eye toward producing progeny that will be an asset to the community and the t'sa race, making them pragmatic. T'sa are often bewildered by the importance other races attach to mating customs and rituals. To them, courting is simply a waste of valuable time.

The t'sa say "every t'sa is part of a family." From the moment they are born, the t'sa are part of a social unit: the egg-clutch. T'sa are highly social beings and enjoy having others around them. T'sa do not like to be alone unless they have somewhere to focus their attention. A t'sa who is hard at work can shut out the rest of the world for hours, but a t'sa who wants to relax always seeks out some kind of companionship. T'sa make friends easily, and they are loyal to their friends until death. Humans are often amazed how quickly t'sa form emotional bonds with others, even members of other races. A t'sa can become friends with someone he or she has just met, and such a friendship may last for a lifetime. For their part, the t'sa do not understand the social divisions among humans and other races. The concept of human nationalism confuses the t'sa, who have had a unified culture for millennia. The t'sa are loyal to individuals and to the idea of their race as whole, but the idea of being loyal to the abstract division of a nation is alien to them. T'sa xakksha involve

complex systems of loyalties, but they are personal loyalties, given from one t'sa to another, and the t'sa recognize that they are still of one race and culture.

Status

Status among the t'sa is measured by achievement, both individual and family related. A t'sa who achieves great wealth or fame not only advances his or her own status, but that of the entire clutch as well. Likewise, a t'sa clutch can be brought down by the infamy of one sibling. This makes t'sa families fairly tightly knit, since they succeed or fail based on the actions of any of the siblings. T'sa are achievement-oriented “go getters” by human standards. Every t'sa seeks to achieve greatness in a chosen field, whether that be discovering new worlds, inventing new technologies, founding a new company or guild, or mastering another field. It is this desire for achievement that led the t'sa into space and continues to drive them to explore new worlds and seek out new challenges.

Somewhat naïve by human standards, the t'sa desire for achievement makes them prey for con-artists offering get-rich-quick scams and similar schemes. This has led to the dual t'sa view of humans as kindred spirits who share a desire for exploration and achievement, and liars and cheats who simply stumbled into the discovery of the stardrive. The t'sa have something of a love/hate relationship with humans, although their interaction with the Concord has helped to improve the t'sa opinion of humanity.

As part of their status-conscious culture, the t'sa often decorate their bodies with complex tattoos, called det'sya, that reflect their individual heritage and achievements, as well as profession and personal tastes. A t'sa with proper det'sya patterns gains a -1 step bonus to encounter checks with other t'sa, and a t'sa can learn a great deal about another just by looking at his or her tattoo patterns.

A Friend in Every Starport

T'sa have a knack for making friends (and enemies) wherever they go. Well-traveled t'sa often seem to know everybody. To reflect this, a t'sa hero may wish to take the Celebrity perk. The hero is well known by many people, although not necessarily a celebrity. Any perk check resulting in a Critical Failure means that the hero has run into an old enemy rather than a friend, while a Failure indicates a place where the hero isn't particularly welcome, due to past problems. Reputation and Powerful Ally are also common perks for t'sa heroes.

New Free Agent Career: T'sa Ka'Nak Agent

The *Ka'Nak* is a secret t'sa government organization dedicated to the preservation of t'sa independence and sovereignty. It answers directly to the chosen leader of the T'sa Cluster, and few outsiders even know of its existence. Even the Concord is unaware of the true scope of the Ka'Nak. Agents spy on the Stellar Nations to gather information vital to the security of the Cluster. There is a minority movement within the Ka'Nak to further the welfare of the t'sa people at the expense of other nations by stealing technology and committing acts of sabotage. So far, Chaluk Chisier has suppressed these elements, fearing they could damage the Cluster's relations with the Galactic Concord.

Core Skills (32 points): *Acrobatics-defensive martial arts; Athletics-climb, jump, throw; Stealth-sneak; Investigate; Interaction.*

In the Verge: T'sa Ka'Nak agents operate occasionally in the Verge to protect t'sa interests there. The expansion of the Verge is something the t'sa have a stake in, and they're also interested in keeping up-to-date on the activities of the other Stellar Nations, especially members of the Expansion Pentad who may have designs on t'sa space, colony worlds, or technology. Some t'sa agents operate under deep cover as members of other professions for years before being called upon to take on a particular mission.

Government & Politics

By human standards, t'sa government is pure anarchy. For the t'sa, their complex system of loyalties and relationships makes perfect sense. T'sa society is based around a concept they call xakksha, which humans translate as “kingdom” or “nation.” It is similar to the feudal system in Earth's history, and it arose during the earliest periods of t'sa civilization. In a xakksha, each t'sa is strongly loyal to the other members of his or her clutch (siblings), forming a t'sa ch'tass, or “family.” Humans generally refer to a ch'tass as a “clutch,” and most t'sa accept this term. Each clutch in turn owes loyalty to another clutch of higher status. Each group of siblings is loyal to each member of another group of siblings. Clutches join together to form different clans, professional associations, guilds, and companies. These join together to make up the individual xakksha which comprise modern t'sa society. This forms a complex web of duties and obligations on the part of the t'sa. Despite the fact that a xakksha is a nightmare to show on an organizational chart, it seems to function quite well for the t'sa. There are hundreds of xakksha currently spread throughout the T'sa Clus-

ter, with more appearing all the time as the t'sa form new alliances. A t'sa can easily determine another t'sa's xakksha from appearance, scale markings, and *det'sya* tattoos.

The T'sa Cluster is a Concord Neutrality existing in Concord Prime space. Although under the protection of the Galactic Concord, the Cluster is autonomous in terms of government, a stellar nation unto itself. The t'sa have their own policies and laws and enforce them. Visitors to the Cluster are notified of this by automated Concord gridsats scattered along the border of t'sa space. They provide complete downloads of t'sa laws and customs for visitors to observe. The t'sa encourage trade and tourism. They welcome visitors to their worlds, but they do not tolerate criminal or violent behavior. The Concord maintains an embassy on Taasa to facilitate relations between the Cluster and other stellar nations.

T'sa laws are fairly simple and straightforward. They are based on a strong respect for the rights of the individual. Violations of an individual's rights, such as violence or theft, are punishable by fines and imprisonment. Fines or other forms of reparation are the most common punishment, dating back to ancient t'sa history. The guilty party must compensate the victim or surviving family members. Enforced labor or social service is also quite common. Imprisonment is considered a particularly harsh punishment by the t'sa, who do not take well to confinement. Criminals are more likely to be placed under "house arrest" and equipped with a tracking device that allows the authorities to monitor them. The t'sa do not believe in the execution of criminals, since they believe that everyone has something to contribute, even if they do so as part of a forced labor camp.

Relations between the T'sa Cluster and other stellar nations vary, but most stellar nations consider the Cluster a wild card in the political deck. Chaluk Chisier, the leader of the Cluster, is a wily politician with the best interests of his people at heart. For the time being, the Cluster is a strong ally of the Galactic Concord, which provides recognition and protection.

A considerable amount of political intrigue takes place between the t'sa and other stellar nations, despite the close ties to the Concord. Intelligence agents from the Stellar Nations work undercover to learn what technology and assistance the t'sa provide to the Concord. Agents of the t'sa Ka'Nak organization (roughly translated as "guiding protectors") keep a close watch on any Stellar Nation that might threaten the Cluster's sovereignty. Eventually, the T'sa Cluster's ongoing and rapid ex-

pansion will become an issue that will test the diplomatic skills of Chisier and the Concord.

Religion

The t'sa follow a polytheistic religion known as Ch'Nalism. It is based on the ancient t'sa belief that each aspect of the universe is governed by a particular guiding spirit, known as a Ch'Nakan. The greatest of the spirits is Ch'Nal, the creator of the universe. However, Ch'Nal is a lofty spirit and has little to do with the day-to-day running of its creation, leaving it to the various Ch'Nakan. There are literally thousands of Ch'Nakan in t'sa belief, spirits for virtually every type of being and thing in the universe. The t'sa give particular honor to K'san Ch'Nak, the guiding spirit of the t'sa race. K'san Ch'Nak is said to embody the t'sa ideals of achievement, curiosity, quickness, and friendliness: the perfect t'sa. Many t'sa joke that it is fortunate their guide is an immortal spirit; if K'san Ch'Nak were mortal, his curiosity and trusting nature would have gotten him killed many times over.

Ch'Nalism is the only major religion on Taasa and have been for nearly all of t'sa history, allowing the t'sa to avoid the religious conflicts that have plagued human history. The religion is very accommodating to new and variant belief systems, since all they require is the addition of another Ch'Nakan to the ranks. Also, because everything in the universe has a guiding spirit, the t'sa have few problems with the religious beliefs of other races, seeing them as facets of the complex pattern created by Ch'Nal. While some t'sa living outside the Cluster have chosen to adopt other religious beliefs, within the Cluster, nearly all t'sa follow Ch'Nalism. The t'sa also see no conflict in following Ch'Nalism and another religion at the same time.

Ch'Nalism has priest of a sort, those t'sa who are recognized as particularly in tune with the Ch'Nakan and K'san Ch'Nak. They are known as Ch'Sa, or "guides of the people." However, Ch'Sa are expected to have careers and lives outside of their religious duties. There are no full-time priests of Ch'Nalism among the t'sa, nor is a Ch'Sa required for the practice of the t'sa religion. Public shrines are maintained, and many worshipers gather on holy days, but most worship takes place in the home at small personal and family shrines devoted to K'san Ch'Nak and the clutch's own guardian spirits.

Spacecraft & Weapons

The t'sa have had spacefaring ships longer than any other race except the fraal. The t'sa were

launching their earliest space vessels when humans were still perfecting ocean vessels. However, the progress of t'sa space technology remained slow and steady until their encounter with humans and their acquisition of the stardrive, so t'sa ships still lag behind the most state-of-the-art human vessels.

System Ships

The t'sa use modern ship designs with gravity drives, but they still have hundreds of older ships with fusion plants powering ion or fusion torch engines. They are slow by modern standards, but the t'sa see no reason to scrap them while they are still functional. They are in the process of refitting older ships to use gravity drives.

Most t'sa system ships are cargo haulers that carry materials between planets in a system. The haulers can also be easily fitted to carry t'sa passengers in freezer compartments, treating the passengers themselves as cargo. This eliminates the need for extensive life-support systems and reduces the space needed for each passenger to a minimum. It also reduces the cost of a trip across-system to only fifty Concord dollars, although such a trip might take as long as a month. While the t'sa don't mind this method of travel – interplanetary trips being quite dull, after all – members of other races don't care much for the t'sa "ice cube express," as humans often call it. They are usually willing to pay the additional cost for a more comfortable, faster ship to get them where they're going. Many of the new gravity-drive ships in the T'sa Cluster re used to ferry tourists and VIPs who want to avoid travel in deep freeze.

Sleeper Ships

The t'sa also apply their cryogenic technology to interstellar travel. T'sa colony ships are drive-space vessels with vast cargo holds to contain thousands, even millions of freezer units holding t'sa colonists destined for a new world. Even with drive technology, a trip to a new system can take months. The t'sa can install less powerful and less costly drive units in their colony ships by placing the colonists in suspension for the duration of the trip. The ship's computer systems and a small crew can handle its operation. For long journeys, the crew may also enter suspension during the ship's starfalls, emerging to make navigational adjustments and maintenance checks of the ship's systems.

Unarmed Combat

When it comes to weapons and armor, the t'sa started off with the evolutionary advantages of a tough hide, claws and sharp teeth. Although the t'sa

T'sa Views

The t'sa are certainly not shy with their opinions; just ask them. Although individual t'sa views may vary, here is generally what the t'sa think of the other major races of the STAR*DRIVE galaxy:

Fraal: "All is talk, talk, talk, think, think, think. The fraal always think, but they never do – at least, not by themselves. The fraal gave humans the tech science and the learning knowledge to travel to the stars. Imagine what we could have done if they'd found us instead."

Humans: "Lucky, lucky, lucky, that's what humans are. A human slips in the mud and comes up with gold. They were lucky with dark matter, lucky with mass reactors, and lucky with the stardrive. If you spend time with humans, things will never be dull. Toube is, some humans think their luck makes them better than everone else."

Mechalus: "They know plenty. They understand the importance of science tech, but they're always about computers, Grid, and shadows. They need to jack out, unplug sometimes, and explore the real world."

Sesheyans: "We will never, ever, ever be like the poor sesheyans, taken advantage of by humans, treated like property slaves. They remind us to always remain free independent, standing on our own."

Weren: "Humans don't know them like we do. They think weren are just brutes who fight, war, battle all the time. But weren understand many things: philosophy, living, and dying. Try talking to them sometime. Just be careful not to get them mad."

avoid confrontations whenever possible, they have also learned how to defend themselves. In particular, the t'sa have developed many different styles of unarmed combat in the history of their civilization. Such combat styles have been further refined since the t'sa spread throughout the galaxy and often prove a surprise to individuals who think the t'sa are cowards who shy away from a fight.

The various t'sa martial arts styles almost all fall under the Acrobatics specialty skill *defensive martial arts*. They rely on sweeps, blocks, and swift motions designed to take advantage of the strength of a larger and more powerful attacker and the natural speed and agility of the t'sa. The most popular style is sha'cre'ta, which includes training in Resolve as well as Acrobatics. Many t'sa learn the Acrobatics broad skill and have at least basic martial arts training.

Melee Weapons

In addition to unarmed combat training, the t'sa still make use of various melee weapons based on ancient designs and updated with modern materials. The first is the *dait'sya*, a thin, double-bladed dagger designed to slip between the scales of an opponent. T'sa traditionally fight with a *dait'sya* in each hand. The dagger's lightweight design, combined with t'sa speed, reduces the penalty of fighting with two weapons by 1 step.

The other traditional t'sa melee weapon is the *sho'ileer*, or short spear. It is 1.5 meters long, topped with a thin two-edged spearhead. The *sho'ileer* can be wielded in melee combat or thrown. Several spears are usually carried, traditionally in a quiver slung across the back.

Ice Guns

Early t'sa explorers and colonists adapted cryogenic technology to produce this unusual weapon, which uses a widely available ammunition: water. Cryogenic coils inside the gun freeze water from the ammunition clip into sharp projectiles of super-hard ice that are fired at the target using a blast of compressed air. Ice guns are not as effective against hard armor: Double the effects of rigid armor when resisting their damage.

Ice guns are quiet and easy to use and reload, so long as a supply of water is available. Additionally, the projectiles melt away in an hour or two, leaving no evidence. This and the fact that liquids other than water can be included in the gun's ammo mix have made ice guns popular weapons with assassins throughout the Verge and the Stellar Ring. They are also still in use on t'sa colonies in the Cluster.

Whip Guns

Whip guns, known as *ch'raak* to the t'sa, are another military application of t'sa technology. They are named for the whipcrack noise they make when fired. Whip guns use superconductors to create powerful magnetic fields, accelerating metallic projectiles to great speed. With the use of PL7 superconducting technology, whip guns are slim and compact

weapons. They have considerable range and virtually no recoil because of the lack of chemical propellants.

Body Armor

Throughout most of their history, the t'sa neglected the development of personal armor. Their own scaly hides protected them from most weapons. Early t'sa warriors wore cured hides, but Taasa was too metal-poor for the production of metallic armor, which would have slowed the swift t'sa fighting style. It wasn't until the development of projectile weapons capable of easily penetrating their scales that t'sa gave thought to more advanced armor. *Ptokh k'se* is a weave made of alloy wire and heavy ballistic cloth, worn to protect the torso and limbs. It protects well against most impact weapons (with an armor value of d4-1/d4-2/d6-3 for LI/Hi/En). In general, the t'sa do not like wearing heavier armor, as it interferes with their movements and only slows them down. "The best defense, protection, armor" the t'sa say, "is to be anywhere, elsewhere, when the attack gets where you were."

Homeworlds

Taasa orbits the star Ch'Nara, a G-class main sequence star. Taasa is larger and warmer than Earth, with a thick, damp atmosphere that humans find acrid due to traces of chorine. Despite Taasa's larger size, gravity is near Earth-normal because of the smaller amount of metals present in the planet's crust. Seasonal variations are limited due to the planet's small axial tilt. The t'sa have long since domesticated the many different animal species on their homeworld. The more dangerous predatory species have been wiped out. The t'sa still use large bipedal lizards known as *zar'each* as riding animals, since the surface of their world is often swampy and difficult for land vehicles. Most traveling is done via aircars and slow-moving airships.

Taasa's larger moon, N'Chalak, was terraformed by the t'sa who settled it millennia ago. It have gone from being a dry world with a thin atmosphere to a lush, miniature version of Taasa, although with more carefully engineered waterways. The

T'sa Weapons Table

Weapon	Skill	Acc	Md	Range	Type	Damage (O/G/A)	Actions	ClipHide	Cost
Dait'sya	Melee-blade	0	-	Personal	LI/O	d4+1w/d4+2w/d4+3w	4	- +2	250
Sho'ileer	Melee-blade	0	-	Personal*	LI/O	d4w/d4+2w/d4m	3	- -	15
Ice pistol	Modern-pistol	0	F/B	6/12/40	HI/O	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	4	15 +2	500
Whip pistol	Modern-pistol	0	F/B/A	20/40/200	HI/O	d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m	4	12 +2	850
Whip rifle	Modern-rifle	0	F/B/A	80/400/800	HI/O	d6+1w/d6+2w/d6+1m	4	20 -	2000

T'sa Homeworlds

	<i>Taasa</i>	<i>(N'Chalak)</i>	<i>Ka Taasa</i>
Primary	Ch'Nara	Taasa	Ch'Nara
Planetary Class	Class 1	Class 1	Class 1
Gravity	G2 (1.03g)	G2 (.94g)	G2 (.97g)
Radiation	R1 (7 rem/yr)	R1 (6 rem/yr)	R1 (3 rem/yr)
Atmosphere	A3 (N, O, CO ₂ , Cl)	A3 (N, O, CO ₂ , Cl)	A3 (N, O, CO ₂ , Cl)
Pressure	P3 (1.05)	P3 (1.01)	P3 (1.1)
Heat	H2 (21° C)	H2 (20° C)	H2 (19.2° C)
Orbital Distance	0.83 AU	0.83 AU	14 AU
Diameter	7,890 km	3,642 km	7,677 km
Year (Earth days)	247.4 days	247.4 days	362.5 days
Day (standard hours)	28.2 hours	18.3 hours	23.7 hours
Axial Tilt	8°	10.4°	7°
Density	0.97	0.89	1.13
# Satellites:	2 (N'Chalak and N'Shona)		

greenery and settlements of N'Chalak are visible from the surface of Taasa on clear nights. The planet's other moon, N'Shona is a lifeless rock the t'sa mine for useful minerals and metals.

The system's other inhabited world was originally known as Za'lor. It was renamed Ka'Taasa ("New Taasa") when it was settled more than a thousand years ago. Ka'Taasa is smaller and cooler than Taasa, but its dense atmosphere helps to trap in heat and provide a comfortable environment. The rocky terrain is covered by a variety of hearty plant-life, and numerous crater lakes and deep tarns cover the lowlands of the planet. The middle elevations are home to t'sa cities that teem with activity.

The Future

Things change quickly for the t'sa, moving ever toward the future. Trends come and go on t'sa worlds in the blink of an eye, but always their fascination with the unknown, and with the advancement of technology, remains. With the power of the stardrive in their hands, the t'sa have opened a bold new chapter in the history of their race, expanding to new worlds and new frontiers at an ever-increasing rate.

It may be that the t'sa will navigate the treacherous waters of interstellar politics and take their place as a true power among the human-dominated stellar nations, or the t'sa may become the spark that ignites interstellar war for a third, and perhaps final, time. Only time will decide the fate of their civilization, but one thing is certain: So long as the t'sa are involved, it won't be boring.

Steve Kenson's fascination with lizards comes from his boyhood love of dinosaurs. His appreciation for the t'sa comes from seeing them in action. (And they really are that fast!)

WORLD OF THE WEREN

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Blood Philosophy: The World of the Weren The Honorable Warriors of the Star*Drive Universe By Wolfgang Baur and Paul Peterson

(From Dragon Magazine #256 February 1999)

The bloody history of the weren has been molded by the harsh conditions of Kurg, their homeworld. The unrelenting climate and the dangerous ecosystem threatened the weren for millennia, but in time they made the race both powerful and resistant to hardship. The weren had no choice but to grow strong.

Though Kurg's hostile climate still shapes weren culture today, a new force now affects the way the weren live. For the last three hundred years, they have been deeply influenced by human contact and tutelage. During these centuries, the weren have made remarkable strides in all areas of endeavor. As a result, weren society has split. Most weren live offworld, among starfaring nations such as the Orlamu Theocracy or the Orion League; but the clan elders, the ancient seats of power and status, even the root of weren identity, remain locked in the artificially maintained isolation of their frozen homeworld.

Progress Level 0: The Hunters

The earliest weren were small groups of nomadic hunters and gatherers, perpetually wandering Kurg's temperate equator. They followed migrating herds of wild animals, relying on their powerful claws and excellent camouflage to hunt both large and small game. To hunt and grow fat was the ideal weren life. Unfortunately for the weren hunters, times weren't always good. A crippling illness, a poor hunting season, or a lingering

injury might keep the hunters from providing enough meat to feed the family. In lean times, the weren foraged for roots, nuts, and the fatty Kurgish vegetables called *hgoumas* and *palna*. Their claws served them well in cracking open the enormous seed pods so common among Kurgish plants. Somehow, the weren scraped by, though ancient legends tell many tales of hunger and want. Even today, success is described as *gru-vat* or "meat-bringing," and poverty is sometimes called *hgoumas mat nate* or "a diet of hgoumas."

In these times, the nomadic weren lived in tight family groups, banding together to ensure success in the hunt and to defend themselves against other weren. They fought primarily over status, mates, or access to hunting grounds. The weren were far more successful than other predatory species, and the world was their garden.

Weren historians refer to this period as the Hunter's Age. Few records remain from that time, but in general it was a time of stone tools and simple laws. Though it lies thousands of years in the past, it remains a source of nostalgia for modern weren who must deal with the frustrations and dilemmas of interstellar life, commerce, and technology. Many modern weren art forms hearken back to this simpler time, which the weren treasure as the fountainhead of all that is good and right in their culture.



Progress Level 1: The Great Clans

After millennia of wandering, many weren settled in the rich coastal valleys of Kurg's single temperate continent, farming *palna* root and seedpods and herding the *marrizhe*, a powerful migratory herbivore that has some small resemblance to a yak – if a yak had a triple-layered pelt and enormous

Pidgin Weren

ambush	nahet
ammunition	narda
argument	taten
Attack!	Gru!
avatar	gontal
bravery, brave	gruun
chief, lord	parag
claw	ta
conclusion	ot
cowardice	ierto
criminal	ielmar (“blood slave”)
drivespace	drashee-ot
duel	tateg
flintlock	lesstor
honor	darut
human	neetal
I surrender!	Lu narad ohutoc
offworld	Kurg-ot
Orlamu	Olam
pacifism	ierto-uvar
premise	ingve
priest	tendelar
purifier	togruelar
rifle (modern)	lessmat
ship	drashee
soul	uumesteg
Stop!	Tegget!
strength	guu’el
sword	tadec
victory	unk-taren
vigilante	mannevar
Where is the...?	...-eg?

shovel-like horns capable of breaking up the permafrost. (See the sidebar, above.) Suddenly groups of weren no longer had to follow their food around. The simple family groups of the Hunter’s Age gradually grew into more extended families and became clans. To this day, the clan remains the fundamental unit of weren society, much as the clutch is the unit of t’sa society or the nuclear family is among humans.

Each clan laid claim to a territory and settled into the task of becoming civilized. The numbers of weren pursuing agriculture grew rapidly. Contact between the clan settlements remained sporadic, though explorers often crossed the mountains and rivers separating the most fertile regions. Over time, the nomadic weren were pushed farther and farther away from the rich river lands and out onto the subarctic tundra. Food was plentiful there, and the conflict between nomadic and settled weren declined for

several hundred years, until population pressures once again brought the two major branches of the weren family tree into conflict.

The renewal of major raiding was sparked by a relatively minor incident. A prized marrizhe stud from the city of Urdevec by the name of Inaillo (literally, “dusty coat”) was captured by a group of rustling nomads called the Anbem. The steed’s owner was Ioshaj Urdev, the captain of Urdevec’s warband, and the insult was the latest in a series of setbacks for the city of Urdevec. The city weren responded by raiding the culprits, visiting the Anbem camp when the hunters were all tracking down game. Urdev’s soldiers killed a number of young and elderly weren and burned the nomad’s tents. The resulting spiral of violence eventually dragged in more than a dozen coastal cities and nearly a hundred nomadic bands. Though individually the nomadic weren were more than a match for the sedentary weren of the coastal cities, the settled weren could marshal much greater numbers at once, and eventually they also had better weapons and training for war. Though the settled weren always returned to their homes for planting and harvests, in between, their warbands took a toll on the nomadic raiders. The raids increased in frequency and intensity over the following generations, and the code of raiding only for food and status fell into disuse. Bloodshed became commonplace during even the simplest raids.

Progress Level 2: Rise of the Warlords and Purifiers

The clan-based culture of the coastal settlements gave the weren more free time to pursue goals beyond the production of food and offspring. Several classes of specialists arose: warlords like Acomsi Talmi, priests like the conniving Black Prophet, and professional soldiers like the Captains of Urdev or the young exiles called the Wandering Daughters were chief among them. Although priests and warriors had long existed in roving bands of weren, these figures now led large groups. The warlords established semi-dynastic lines, though inheritance was never easy or certain. At the same time, the traditions of the Lawreaders and the blood prices they set (See “Culture & Society,” below) prevented the settled clans from tearing themselves apart from the inside as they grew into groups of hundreds of thousands.

The priests—once little more than advisors and witch doctors—found strength in numbers as well, and several weren city states of the period were functionally theocratic states. The most successful of these, the Church of the Purifier, has survived to the

New Career: Tracker

This Free Agent career is only available to primitive weren from the hinterlands of Kurg; more sophisticated and educated weren from the Orlamu Theocracy are not raised from birth with the requisite emphasis on survival, pursuit, and hunter's lore. The tracker is the weren woodsman *par excellence*. Always born into one of Kurg's nomadic tribes rather than its settled clans, the tracker masters the arts of camouflage and stealth from an early age. Many trackers profess the Reckoner faith or follow the animist priests of the nomadic clans.

Signature Equipment: Marrizhe-hide parka, snowshoes, firestarter materials, flintlock, skinning knife

Suggested Skill Package: Unarmed Attack–*brawl*, Primitive Ranged Weapons–*flintlock*, Awareness–*intuition*, Stealth–*hide*, *sneak*, Investigate–*search*, *track*. Cost: 40 points.

modern era. Religious warfare never really found a foothold on Kurg, though; the practical weren simply adopted the religion of whatever warlord ruled at any given time. The use of the trappings of several weren religions to lend authority to these warlords was common; the proof of the inherent value of any religion was its ability to attract followers and popular support, or to raise them up from within. Concepts of martyrdom are notably absent from the period; weren just didn't fight for their religious beliefs as fiercely as they did for their clan and lineage.

The greatest rival to the Purifier faith during the Age of Warlords was the movement called the Spiritual Reckoning. The Reckoning and its followers ("Reckoners," for short) leaned heavily on the importance of lineage, making one's bloodline of paramount importance and creating a priestly class with great authority over its followers' lives. The faith's central tenet is that all living weren are judged by the spirits of their forbearers at their death. Only those found worthy are allowed into the Sacred Host of weren patron ancestors, giving them the authority to judge those who die after them. Furthermore, each Reckoner bloodline is strengthened by the blood of defeated enemies; a weren who kills many foes is imparting spiritual strength to his sons and daughters. The faith blossomed for about 250 years, but after a series of setbacks during the Black Wars (see below), the numbers of the Reckoners declined, and today fewer than 3% of all weren on Kurg follow this once-mighty faith. Their reputation for pride and a well-known willingness to die give other weren pause

before challenging a member of any Reckoner clan.

By this point the year-round warbands of the early settled era had become standing armies. They and the other members of the upper classes were supported by the farming and herding of the lower working class. The armies of the coastal cities turned against their neighbors; a few warlords managed to hold onto more than a single city, though the turnover in the political fortunes of the weren city-states was often quite swift. In addition, the well-trained armies allowed the clans to increase their own food supply by stealing food from their neighbors, or taking it from neighbors as tribute. By the end of the Age of Warlords, the warriors formed the core of weren society, and all else revolved around them.

Progress Level 3: The Black Wars

Life on Kurg continued in this pattern of feuds, small raids, and short, bloody wars for millennia. In 2117, the weren of the Kell clan made a technological leap that almost destroyed the species. Krazhe the Wise – an elder, priest, and inventor among the Kell – discovered the explosive properties of sulfur, carbon, and saltpeter: gunpowder.

The Kell clan warriors quickly put this new discovery to use and created basic firearms and enormous grenades. With these new weapons, they slaughtered two neighboring clans and occupied their cities, suffering only minimal losses themselves. They then consolidated their hold on this new territory and launched attacks at their new neighbors. By that time, however, the word had spread, and enough guns had been captured in battles that these clans had copied them. Unfortunately, they just did not have time to make many of them before they, too, were conquered by the Kell clan. They were more successful at slowing the attack down, so clans farther from the center of the expansion had even more time to research these new weapons. When the Kell next attacked, they met two allied clans who were also armed with gunpowder. The battles of that summer's campaign were a fierce series of slaughters for both sides, now remembered simply as the Black (or Bloody) Summer. Despite the horrendous losses, gunpowder technology spread like wildfire over all the coasts and even into the interior – as soon as the nomads of the North and South learned the value of the new weapons, they raided, seized, or traded for them.

As gunpowder spread, weren warfare itself changed. The bloodier campaigns decimated the warrior classes. Each battle claimed more weren lives, and battles became more common. Every clan

believed that gunpowder gave them an advantage over their enemies. The weren population actually declined; indeed, the weren were in danger of reducing their numbers so severely that their clan holdings would fall apart, and the town weren might have lapsed into a barbaric state. Traditionally, coastal soldiers could not enlist until they were twenty years of age. At its worst, in the Kell Campaigns of 2234 to 2236, flintlocks were pressed into the hands of tuskless "warriors" as young as twelve years old (see "Physiology" below).

As the species stood on the brink of racial suicide, however, the weren were rescued. In December 2246, the OSS *Brightfall* – an Orlamu Theocracy survey vessel – was on a routine follow-up mission when they discovered the weren civilization. The soldiers and scouts on board, all from the Orlamu Theocracy, studied the weren for several months, watching, waiting, and examining every detail of the weren culture. They did not reveal their presence, instead sending the information back to the Theocracy. The Theocracy conducted a strenuous debate at the highest levels, considering how best to approach this new species. The weren systems of religious philosophy and their often complex political structures implied that weren held great promise, but their vendettas and blood feuds were in serious danger of destroying them. At last, the Orlamu Theocracy agreed that not doing anything was surely worse than interfering in the weren's affairs, so on the 12th of May, 2247, the External Affairs Ambassador signed an internal document called the Contact Decree. Within hours, a first contact specialist named Jamal Kidwai (later called Jamal Abuweren) was dispatched to the planet's surface, and a new age of cooperation, learning, and occasionally violent misunderstanding began.

The conflict between the clans didn't exactly end with the arrival of humans, but at least it gave the clans something different to think about. Weren priests and philosophers speculated endlessly about the weren place in the universe; some of these debates turned bloody. The Orlamus kept the violence down to an occasional murderous rush, rather than the constant and total warfare they had found on their arrival. The weren entered into an age of rapid – but carefully managed – technological growth that they are still undergoing. The Induced Renaissance began, and within a decade the Orlamus were accepting petitions from worthy weren to leave Kurg and travel the stars.

Progress Levels 4-7: Post-Contact

After the arrival of the Orlamus, the divisions between the two societies on Kurg grew even deeper. The settled weren accepted the Orlamu offer of guidance, but the nomadic clans of the North and South rejected the offworlders.

The townland weren have benefited greatly from contact with the offworlders. In the last two hundred years, their Induced Renaissance has been sustained by the knowledge that the universe extends far beyond Kurg – and many of the youngest, most violent weren left to explore and settle the outside world. With just the slightest push of Orlamu guidance, the weren have made great advances in art, communications, literature, and medicine.

The Orlamus rarely interfere directly in weren affairs; at most, they advise and nudge the weren to the point where the weren make the advances themselves. Most Orlamu influence has been tangential, through the education and training of weren warriors. A small fraction of these trained, modern weren secretly return to Kurg to teach their fellows what they have learned. Though officially forbidden by the Orlamu, in practice it is difficult to prevent.

The Orlamus first attempted to put some controls on weren warfare. They forced the leaders of the townland clans to agree to stricter codes of conduct on the battlefield. For the first time, surrender and ransom became options for a commander, and no modern weren army dares to attack during a truce. But despite these limited successes, two hundred years of Orlamu effort have not really stopped or even blunted the weren taste for war. The weren spent far too many millennia doing battle, and combat is too much a part of their culture for it to be forgotten so quickly. More importantly, the Orlamu quickly recognized the value of having the galaxy's finest warriors available to them. Within a generation after contact, elite weren combat teams, with their superior camouflage and endurance, won the Theocracy more than a few battles in the Second Galactic War. The weren shock troops remain a potent resource for dealing with problems today.

The nomadic tribes of the far North and South, where life was much colder and mow difficult, followed a different road after contact. Those who accepted Orlamu offer of guidance benefited in the same ways that the townland clans did, while keeping their traditional way of life mostly intact. Others, however, refused to bargain with humans and sought lands untainted by human footsteps. The Orlamus even helped in this, setting aside certain regions as

"cultural preservation districts." Humans are still forbidden to enter these districts today. Oddly, the clans that fled into these districts most often were those who were most hard-pressed by starvation and other weren. In the vast empty regions, they sought to avoid old enemies and rejected all contact with humans. They believed that the Orlamus had come to help their enemies destroy them, and they would not be convinced otherwise.

After being driven from their usual lands, these weren fundamentalists lived much the way they always had: following vast herds of marrizhe across the frozen wastes and raiding their old neighbors in the townlands for anything they could carry away. The strategy worked, and from 2200 to about 2400, the raiding cultures expanded, eventually generating much alarm among the Orlamu, who saw themselves losing the fight against barbarism. Though the raiders were surprisingly successful for several generations, recently the raiding culture has been fading away. In the long run, the raiding clans lacked the town clans' numbers and technology, and neither the preservation districts nor their hit-and-run guerrilla tactics prevented reprisals by their own kind. In the end, the impulse to adopt new ways and abandon clan warfare has won out over many old rivalries. At least, those clans who accepted human help – however minor – have won out over those clans that turned their back on the galaxy and tried to remain frozen in time.

2501: Current Prospects

Though the policy of nonintervention remains in place, in practice weren culture on Kurg has continued to react to humanity's presence. However, the reaction is not always easily understood. For instance, weren art continues to mystify Orlamu observers, as it seems to be relentlessly realistic, but the weren emphasis on indirect symbolism and allegory reveals many layers of meaning to an educated weren, even in something as relatively straightforward as a bust or a landscape painting. At the same time, many young weren emulate human styles; perspective painting and abstract art were both unknown to the weren at first contact but have since been adopted by some clans. Their value is still hotly debated among weren traditionalists.

At the same time, a few weren and humans have become great celebrities on Kurg, primarily philosophers grappling with meaning, cosmology, morality, and aesthetics. Many young weren read Nietzsche and find his work compelling – the dead German would be amused to find that 26th-century

aliens have built him a small shrine. Despite this small inroad, most weren find the arguments of their own kind more satisfying and more comfortable. Modern weren philosophers such as Unlarg Jndoor are held in high regard, and the weren see no conflict in the fact that Jndoor is at once a philosopher, a bookkeeper, and a reservist in the Undevec artillery. His volume *On Hunter's Ethics* even enjoyed a brief popularity among the Orlamus.

Life is different for weren who have left Kurg. When a weren wishes to leave Kurg, he or she must first petition the Orlamus for permission. If this is granted, and it usually is, the weren must then arrange to pay their way off the planet. This is difficult for most weren, as the cost can be rather high. Many choose at this time to have their way paid for them by the Orlamu military, or by any one of a number of mining or heavy industry companies, all of whom have recruiters stationed on Kurg for just such opportunities. In exchange for a ticket offplanet, these weren agree to work for a certain period of time to pay off their debt. All of this is carefully monitored by the Theocracy, to insure that the weren are not mistreated or taken advantage of by these corporations.

Weren who have recently emigrated offplanet often suffer serious loneliness and homesickness. Many suddenly find themselves thrust into a society where they are a very small minority, surrounded by unfamiliar technology. Some remain at the jobs they took to repay their ticket debt, even after that debt has been repaid. They prefer the security offered by guaranteed work and the respect they receive for their natural abilities, especially in the military.

The Orlamu military has benefited more than most from the discovery of the weren. Indeed, weren shock battalions are the elite ground forces of the Orlamu military. Their strength and stamina make a troop of weren much more effective than the human equivalent. How do you defeat a squad of 2.2-meter-tall, battle-frenzied killing machines who shrug off wounds that would certainly kill humans? Weren units are always led by weren officers, and their battalions are given considerably more latitude than others. Members of other species have been allowed to join weren units, but this is rare. In most cases, a week of weren training kills soldiers of other species. The ones who survive can be numbered among the best soldiers of the Stellar Ring.

Some weren have searched out their fellow off-world clan members and formed colonies, companies, or mercenary groups. They've become offworld splinters of their clan, and earn much wealth

and honor, often sending money back to relatives still on Kurg. Others have banded together into a broader, pan-weren alliance and have founded communities welcoming any weren who wishes to join. Weren who put clan before species are excluded from these communities, for fear that old hatreds could tear the community apart. So far, all of these experimental communities have succeeded, and the Orlamu are justly proud of the progress their client species has made.

However, not all weren are so idealistic or so willing to give up their clan heritage. Many offworld weren simply set off on their own and adopt a variety of professions to make a name for themselves. These weren learn to live among the other species of human space and to deal with PL 6 technology. Most adapt slowly but eventually have no more problems than anyone else.

Offworld weren do have a unique problem: they are cut off from the social hierarchy. A weren's sense of self is so tied to his place, his family's place, and his clan's place in society that removal can erode a weren's identity. For this reason, weren born and raised on Kurg keep close tabs on news from home, especially news related to clan status and rivalry. This hunger for the latest developments has been exploited by the major news services, and getting updates from Kurg into the hands of recent emigrants is a small but steady industry. Every news carrier in the Orlamu Theocracy (and many others) carries current news from Kurg, and some weren buy from several different carriers just to make sure they don't miss anything.

Weren have been leaving Kurg since the Orlamus arrived, and as a result, some weren have been settled elsewhere for as long as five generations. These expatriate weren lead a dual life, balancing their simple heritage with the high tech world around them. Weren parents make every effort to teach their children the importance of honor and clan, but these things fade over time. Those who can afford it arrange for their children to live on Kurg for a while, to better appreciate what it means to be weren, but the weren culture outside Kurg is in sharp decline. As is the fate of most discovered cultures, weren society is being replaced by the more active, discovering culture, which in this case is human.

Weren of the Orlamu Theocracy have adapted to the modern world and have internalized the values, history, and culture of Old Space. The most straightforward example of weren culture being absorbed by the more dynamic human culture is in the Lighthouse, where weren serve as bodyguards,

security officers, and even priests of the Orlamist faith – but weren no longer fight each other for the honor of their clan. The weren have adopted the ways of humankind, leaving the dust and snow of Kurg far behind.

Culture and Society

Each weren's place in society is governed by many factors, but by far the most important are clan, lineage, battle prowess, and wealth. When two weren meet for the first time, the interplay of these factors determines how they react to each other.

An important omission from the equation is gender. Weren recognize few differences between the sexes, and males and females are held in equal regard. According to tradition, all titles and offices are open to all weren, though in practice a clan generally is either matriarchal or patriarchal, rarely allowing both sexes access to the clan's positions of leadership.

Clan is the single most important weren attribute. Much of each weren's sense of worth is wrapped up in the history, strength, and accomplishments of his or her clan. To some extent an individual always serves his clan first and himself second.

Clan dictates how weren feel about each other. The political alliances or enmity between two clans can dictate how two weren react when they first meet. In the most extreme cases, two weren who have never set foot on Kurg may fight to the death on sight, simply because their clans are currently at war.

The greatest punishment for a weren is the removal of the offender's claws, euphemistically called *pito ta* or "claw-washing." Because weren claws – unlike human fingernails – are extensions of their bone structure, their removal cripples the criminal's hands for up to a year, and many never heal properly. Even the most hardbitten weren veteran can be intimidated by the thought of being left helpless, unable to hunt, fight, or duel, and unable to handle most implements without clumsy prostheses. Lesser punishments include banishment, castration, enforced servitude, and – among nomad clans – ritual scarring to create patchy fur.

Family lineage is in some sense a subset of clan but is far more specific. Weren take pride in their family's deeds in service to their clan. Each line's most famous members color the way their clansmen relate to them, and the duties the family has undertaken in the past often govern what duties they are given in the present ("Since you are of the line of Haargel the Slayer, you must lead the

charge”).

Sometimes a family’s worthy forebears were nobles, but weren nobility is not generally hereditary. Most noble positions are held for life, barring extraordinary circumstances. When a noble’s position – such as clan paragar, or leader – becomes available, all clan members may choose to compete to take their place. Each candidate must show the clan why he or she deserves the position, usually by declaiming both his family lineage and his personal accomplishments. In a few cases, the position falls to a noble’s son or daughter, unless someone else can show a clearly superior lineage. In these cases, a noble title shifts from one family when circumstances dictate change; for instance, a warrior may step forward to take the leadership when a clan has just begun a war. If the offspring or noble somehow alienates the clan or shames his lineage, his position might evaporate entirely.

Weren respect nothing more than combat ability. The entire culture glorified warriors for centuries. They learn to fight early, in earnest struggles against their siblings for their share of food. They fight for position within their family as they mature. The best fighters are chosen early and trained to become the armies of the weren, fighting for clan honor and for their own place within the clan. Almost all noble positions go to a clan’s warriors; a few fall to the clan’s priests or philosophers.

Wealth is a relatively new factor in calculating status. Until about 2200 or so, the best warriors were also the wealthiest weren. As weren civilization grew and trade expanded, merchants became more important. The richest weren traders now wield enough power to dictate terms to the nobles they supposedly serve, or to ignore them entirely. As more weren leave the planet and enter cultures where wealth is the single most important social marker, more and more of them are adopting a consumer or capitalist orientation.

Technology

Technology on Kurg is a curious amalgam of late feudal and early industrial techniques operating side-by-side with much more advanced ideas. The impact of the Orlamus on weren technology is subtle but pervasive; they decide what does and doesn’t make it to the planet surface. Indeed, the Orlamu forbid anyone from introducing any new technology onto Kurg without their approval. Their screening procedures are thorough, and their punishments very harsh. However, small shipments of various technological items are smuggled onto the planet

and hoarded by the clan leaders, primarily for personal use or for a surprise defense during an attack.

While the Orlamus seek to guide the weren further along the path to galactic civilization, they rarely give them anything outright. All the weren’s advances must be earned. At the same time, the Orlamus do push the weren into certain channels, resulting in great advances in areas that the Orlamus hold dear. For example, medical technology on the planet stands far ahead of the rest of their technology. They understand the germ theory of disease, and they know how to prevent infection.

In most other areas, however, the weren remain artificially held to a lower progress level, roughly equivalent to what was available during the 1600s in Europe. Single shot black powder pistols and rifles are the weapons of the day, though the weren versions of black powder weaponry are much more powerful than human weapons of the same era, due to the weren’s ability to handle a greater recoil.

Weren transportation on Kurg is woefully inadequate. Traveling weren must walk, travel by sled, or ride marrizhe. The marrizhe serve the weren not only as food animals but also as beasts of burden. They are also the preferred mount of soldiers and raiders, as they can carry heavy loads for great distances. Most communications rely on hand-carried letters, although the Orlamus have relaxed their ban on technology when it comes to communications gear and allow the clan leaders to communicate face-to-face over vid screens. The Orlamu feel that this helps move the weren toward civilization, as open communication defuses political tension more often than it provokes it. This policy also keeps the Orlamus much better informed, because they monitor these conversations closely.

Offworld weren use the same technology available to other species, but they suffer from some problems unique to their worldview and culture. For new immigrants, moving from a 17th-century technology into the Fusion Age is a hit of a shock, and weren don’t generally adjust well. They remain suspicious of new technology and stubbornly cling to familiar ways of doing things. They lack the innate curiosity of the t’sa or the logical investigative rigor of the mechalus.

When a weren interacts with items that look familiar, they usually don’t work quite as he thinks they should. For example, most weren have seen and used black powder pistols. Hand a northern clan warrior a 9mm zero-g pistol, and what is he going to do? He does not understand the basics: breech load-

ing, releasing a safety, cocking an automatic, or unjamming the weapon, so he'll be more likely to shoot himself than an enemy. Combat specs of other species learn these things from watching holos from an early age. Not so the weren. When he fires the weapon, he often misses because he leads the target too much; the muskets he is familiar with all have a much slower muzzle velocity. And this example just covers firearms, a technology with which the weren are familiar. Imagine how they might react to a computer terminal.

Some weren never overcome their resistance to new tools and ways of getting things done. These poor, stubborn souls stick with what they know for their whole life, unable to adjust fully to the modern technology; if they are lucky, their offspring fare better. However, most weren overcome their reluctance and fear of change. In a few months or a year, they are fully integrated in interstellar society. In fact, despite their bad reputation, most offworld weren have no problem with teleology, since they grew up with fewer misconceptions. In many ways, the technophobic weren is just a stereotype.

Other problems are harder to overcome. For instance, weren don't exactly match the standard human body size. Anything they wear or use must be specially made to fit, and they pay twice as much for clothing, armor, and even vehicles and housing. Weren size does have certain inborn advantages, however, such as allowing them to use larger and heavier devices easily. For instance, weren construction workers can lift massive riveters that would require expensive robots in a human-only shipyard, and weren miners use more powerful plasma torches to move ore faster. Most important to action-oriented heroes, weren can handle heavier weapons.

Several weapon manufacturers have created large-caliber, special-purpose weren guns with greater masses and heavier recoils. More powerful than any human equivalent, the recoil of a weren gun can shatter a human arm. To a weren, though, they are more comfortable to use than normal guns, sized to fit weren proportions and accommodate their claws. The only drawback of these weapons is that they rely on the simplest mechanical principles, to more easily accommodate weren technophobia. A typical example of these weapons is the 25 mm weren shotgun, a double-barrel breech loading weapon about 1.4 meters long and weighing about 16 kg. The weapon is easy to use, easy to maintain, and absolutely devastating in combat.

In addition, weren are extremely skilled at infighting, using weapons based on clawlike attacks.

The most famous example is the sword claw, a long and heavy blade strapped to the weren's forearm. While it is too large and heavy to be effectively used by a human, when combined with the tremendously long reach of weren, the sword claw can be quite deadly.

Weren Weapons

15.2 mm SMG: With a 10-round clip, this weapon doesn't fire long, but it doesn't need to: reports from the field indicate the 15.2 can take down a klik or even two with a single burst, much less when on autofire. Given its remarkable recoil, however, even weren sometimes have trouble tracking a target.

25 mm Shotgun: With a roar that makes a weren seem quiet, the 25 mm shotgun packs a lot of ammo and is deadly at close range. Like all shotguns, it is drastically less effective at anything beyond short range. Weren enjoy firing it once before closing into hand-to-hand combat, and many Orlamu marines carry them for boarding actions.

Dueling Claw: Smaller than a sword claw and meant for use in formal duels aboard a spaceship (where sword claws are simply too unwieldy), the 10-cm-long dueling claw has become a favorite concealed weapon for many weren, both on Kurg and offworld. On Kurg they are usually simple steel blades fitted to an individual weren. Offworld, they are usually made of much sharper and harder ceramics, undetectable by metal detectors.

Greatsword: Made of high-grade alloy steel and honed to a fine edge offworld, the greatsword is fully 2 meters long and weighs more than 10 kilos – it is unusable by anyone of less than 14 Strength. Due to its remarkable construction, the greatsword is said to be able to carve through body tanks and small vehicles.

Herder's Club: Used primarily to keep truculent marizhe moving, this spiked club – often called a *vennet* – is sometimes used as a dueling weapon among Kurg's nomadic tribes. On Kurg, it is also sometimes a symbol of authority, and many are beautifully carved, inlaid, and gilded. These ceremonial vennets are carried by local princes or the leaders of nomadic tribes. Among off-world weren, they are considered curios or conversation pieces.

Klickstopper 13 mm Pistol: Firing what are essentially .50 caliber bullets, this five-shot revolver is durable and powerful, capable of penetrating light vehi-

cle armor.

Sword Claw: Resembling a fistful of short swords, the sword claw is a metal gauntlet made to conform exactly to a particular weren's fist and fit snugly over his or her natural claws. The blades arc as much as 25 to 35 cm long, and some offworld varieties are made of tungsten carbide steel.

Government & Politics

Kurg's government is divided along the ancient clan lines, with states representing the twenty major clans. Of these, twelve are townland clans of the equator, and eight are nomad clans of the North and South. The number of clans changes frequently, as weaker clans are decimated or destroyed in war and minor clans gain enough strength to take their place. Each clan is a large, extended group of families with common ancestors who are sometimes mythic figures. Each town clan governs a fertile stretch of the main continent. In the nomad lands, each clan follows a particular herd of marrizhe, living almost entirely from the hunt.

Each clan is led lead by a single individual. Though their titles vary, these leaders are always the rulers, military leaders, and source of authority for the clan. Their word is law, hut their power is balanced by the will of the clan. The clan nobles forcibly remove a townland leader who makes too many bad decisions, replacing him with one of their own. In the nomad clans, a bad leader is usually overthrown by his strongest general.

A layer of noble families supports the clan leaders. In the townlands, each family head governs some portion of the clan's Lands. The family must provide wealth and warriors for the clan in exchange for this privilege, and the exact details of each clan's contribution are often the subject of lengthy negotiations when a new clan leader is appointed. However, once settled, the terms never change until the death of one party or the other.

In times of war, many weren, even those who

are spacefaring citizens of the Orlamu Theocracy – use a system of weregeld among themselves to quickly settle disputes. In this system, every crime has a price that must be paid in coin. If a criminal cannot pay the price for a crime, he becomes an *ielmar* and must redeem himself in combat by a heroic decd. Indeed, under the tradition of the ielmarg, the perpetrator must serve and defend the injured party, and only that party can release the criminal from his or her obligation. In a way, the ielmar offers a form of institutionalized forgiveness, though the most reprehensible ielmar are never forgiven for their crimes.

On Kurg proper, the ielmarg tradition is supplemented by a system of harsh physical punishments. Law enforcement is the obligation of the local lord. A lord's personal guard might serve as a town watch, or a hired set of warriors might do the job. In either case, they are aided by a caste of wandering warriors pledged to justice. These are the *mannevar*, vigilantes who enforce the laws as hest they can. Though most Orlamu understand the tradition of the mannevar, such vigilante action is not allowed in the Theocracy. In theory, this restricts the mannevar to Kurg, though in practice many weren still feel the need to mete out punishment when one of their own goes bad.

Weren laws are fluid things, since the law at any given time is whatever is agreed upon by the entire clan. The clan leader may declare a law at any time, as may the barons under him to an extent; but if the law is unjust or flies in the face of tradition, the clan ignores it. Likewise, if the majority of the clan feels that a law is necessary, it is quickly passed. This can result in some interesting rules and regulations. For example, the Katern clan still has laws regarding the proper means of splitting a catch of fish, and anti-pirating laws, even though they are entirely landlocked. The laws remain from a time when they held territory on the eastern coast.

The secret of weren jurisprudence lies in knowing what the clan wants. This can be so difficult that even the weren have trouble figuring it out,

Weren Weapons Table

Weapon	Acc	Md	Range	Type	Damage (O/G/A)	Actions	Size	Cost	Hide	Cost
15.2mm SMG	+1	B/A	15/30/80	HI/G	d4+ 1w/d6+ 1w/d4m	4	-/10	50	+2	4500
25mm Shotgun	0	F	9/15/40	HI/O	d6w/d8w/d4+ 1m	2	10	25	+3	800
Dueling Claw	0	-	Personal	LI/O	d4w/d4+ 2w/d4+ 3w	4	-	-	-1	300
Great Sword	0	-	Personal	LI/G	d4+ 3w/d6+ 2w/d4+ 1m	2	-	-	+4	2500
Herder's Club	0	-	Personal	LI/O	d4+ 3w/d6+ 2w/d4+ 1m	2	-	-	+1	5
Klickstopper Pistol	0	F	5/10/40	HI/O	d4+ 2w/d4+ 3w/d4+ 3m	2	5	25	+4	900
Sword Claw	0	-	Personal	LI/O	d4+ 3w/d6+ 3w/d4+ 2m	2	-	-	+1	400

which is why most clans appoint Lawreaders, special servants of the clan leaders whose job it is to publicly recite the relevant laws of the clan on formal occasions (such as at a trial, coronation, or marriage), and to represent defendants against their accusers. Very few clans have an established way to poll their members for their opinions. Clan leaders and nobles must develop an intuitive feel for what the clan might approve; judging the shifts in weren law is essential to the political career of any noble. Many weren diplomats in the service of the Orlamu are nothing less than failed aspirants to the clan leadership.

Weren Dueling

The weren emphasis on honorable battle has led to a large, unwritten code of behavior regarding the proper ways, times, and forms of violence. When and how a weren fights often seems complicated to outsiders, but at its heart are some very simple rules. A weren does not fight an obviously inferior opponent. Most weren consider nonweren to be inferior by definition, and unworthy of a formal challenge. Adult weren rarely start a fight without cause, though what counts as starting a fight is fairly loosely defined and often depends on the weren's mood. Honorable weren kill only opponents who clearly intend to kill them. Even then, a weren does not usually kill someone who did not have a realistic chance of killing them. Weren often fight to determine rank, to settle an argument, or to advance in social standing. When two weren meet, they fight to decide who dominates the relationship unless one of them immediately accepts a subordinate position. When challenging a superior to take his place, the challenge must be made on the superior's home ground at a propitious hour; seconds or intermediaries such as priests are often used to choose a proper time for the challenge. In a few cases, these challenges are purely formal; no actual combat ensues, but the prearranged "loser" still must appear, face off against his opponent, and then concede. Noble titles cannot be won through a challenge, except when the position is vacant. Challenges made during times of crisis are always frowned upon.

Weren Orthodoxies

The Kurgish weren are great believers in two faiths, one held by the townland weren, the other maintained by the nomads of North and South. The townland weren follow the Purifier faith, whose central tenet declares that the soul grows more and more adept at the many tasks put before it, until finally, in its last incarnation, it surpasses physical

boundaries and becomes a *gontal*, an avatar of sorts. These avatars are often worshipped by the still-living followers of the faith.

A small but growing number of weren have adopted a belief system based on a misinterpretation of Orlamu doctrine. These "heretics" believe that drivespace is a form of paradise, a place that carries the soul to a better world. When a weren is done with earthly life, it is time to accept the Orlamu offer of emigration. Those who make their "Last Pilgrimage" are often violently disappointed when they discover that not all worlds of the Orlamu Theocracy are paradises.

Offworld weren often retain their native faith, but many also adopt the Orlamist worship of drive-space. Given the incredible technological leap from riding marrizhe-back to making starfall between star systems, perhaps this shouldn't be too surprising. Most weren reject Humanity Reformation, Christianity, Buddhism, the Church of the Oracle, and Judaism, but a small number of converts to Islam have been recorded.

Physiology

Kurg's low temperatures favor large, stocky body types. Weren, with their large mass-to-surface-area ratio, fit the type perfectly and retain heat well. They suffer much more from hot temperatures than from cold ones, though the smell of an overheated weren means that most of their companions suffer along with him.

Male and female weren show relatively few external physical differences. Their size and strength are roughly comparable. The easiest way to tell the difference on sight is that males have much larger tusks and manes.

A typical weren stands 2.2 meters tall and is almost as wide across the shoulders. Weren weigh about 150 kilograms, though many settled weren are even heavier, since sedentary weren quickly accumulate an insulating layer of body fat. Weren muscle tissue is very dense, providing resistance to injury and fatigue.

Weren fingers end in long, tough, partially retractable claws. Weren take great pride in keeping these razor sharp.

A weren's body is covered with thick fur, starting in a mane. This is not ordinary hair, however. Most furry species generate each hair from long chains of dead cells. The thicker, heavier weren hair is multi-layered and able to change color like a chameleon's skin. Pigment cells of various colors – primarily white, gray, green, and brown – line its length. When these cells either expose or hide their color,

Weren Unarmed Combat

The weren excel at Unarmed Combat. However, as written in the Player's Handbook, the Unarmed Combat skill rank benefit specifies increased damage ranges based on a human. Weren heroes who reach rank 8 in brawl inflict $d6w/d6+2w/d6m$, plus any Strength bonuses, instead of the damage inflicted by all other species. A weren who reaches rank 7 in power martial arts inflicts $d6+2w/d6+4w/d4+2m$, plus any Strength bonuses.

the entire strand of hair changes color.

Weren have limited control over this natural camouflage; they can adopt the hue of a nearby color, blending into the background, but they cannot change individual hairs or even small groups of hairs. The camouflaging action is almost entirely involuntary, but it is an important part of weren heritage. Ambushes are considered honorable tactics among weren, and the use of deception to gain a tactical advantage has a proud history on Kurg. Even now, a warrior who approaches a foe for close combat through the use of stealth is held to be more honorable than one who betrays the presence of his comrades through a rash charge.

Only the most desperate weren employ their tusks in combat, since they don't cause appreciably more damage than human teeth. The tusks are certainly bigger than human teeth, but they are poorly positioned for attacks.

The tusks of male weren continue to grow throughout their lifetime; the tusks of female weren reach a certain length (about 4 cm) and stop. Male weren usually file their tusks down to a reasonable length, much as humans trim their beards or t'sa maintain their crests. Among some weren warriors, exceedingly long tusks are a sign of status. Other than the difference in tusks, the degree of weren sexual dimorphism is fairly low, but weren themselves can always tell a male from a female.

Kurg

The weren homeworld is about the size of Earth, with a similar atmosphere and an orbit about as far from the sun as Mars is from Sol. The climate at the equator is temperate, though this quickly gives way to subarctic steppes and taigas toward the poles. The planet's ice caps are enormous and consist primarily of water, but they include dry ice

(frozen carbon dioxide) at the poles.

Its distance from the sun and the low eccentricity of its orbit give Kurg little variation in seasons. It is a bit colder in winter, and the snow belt stretches very close to the equator, but the best approximation of Kurgish weather at any given time is simply "damn cold." Kurg's star, Tinnale, is a Class G star that shines about two and a half times as brightly as Sol. It is slightly larger than Sol and burns a thousand degrees hotter. If Kurg were as close to Tinnale as Earth is to Sol, it would be a charred rock.

Kurg's land mass is unevenly distributed in its shallow seas. Weren culture evolved and still remains centered in one large continent about the size of Europe, Africa, and Asia combined. Many much smaller landmasses are scattered around the globe, and small weren tribes have settled a couple of these, but they are much less advanced than their cousins. Contact with these lost cousins is extremely difficult; Kurg's seas are treacherous and filled with icebergs even in the summer months.

Kurg's ecosystem, like those of many primarily arctic worlds, shows little variation; a small number of species completely dominate the environment. Few species evolve on a planet with few differentiations in global climate. Also, the low carrying capacity of the arctic ecosystem requires Kurg's animals to forage a wider area to survive. At the same time, the low temperatures favor creatures with low surface-

Marrizhe

STR 20 (2d4+15)	INT 3 (Animal 8 or d4+6)
DEX 4 (d6)	WIL 12 (d4+10)
CON 17(2d4+10)	PER 2 (Animal 10 or d4+8)
Durability: 25/25/13/13	Action Check: 9+/8/4/2
Move: run 24, walk 6	#Actions: 2
Reaction Score: Marginal/1	

Attacks:

Horns	14/7/3	d6+2s/d6w/d6+1w	LI/O
Stampede	12/6/3	2d8s/2d6+2w/2d4+1m	LI/G

Defenses:

+4 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
-2 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks

Skills:

Unarmed Attack [15]; Movement [17]-*race* [18]; Stamina [17]-*endurance* [18]; Awareness [13]-*perception* [14].

Whether encountered on their homeworld or in the most distant reaches of the Verge, the weren – despite the influence of offworlders – remain as primal and rugged as the cold world that spawned them.

area-to-mass ratios; big creatures retain heat better than smaller ones. As a result, Kurg is dominated by a smaller variety of large herbivores and predators rather than a plethora of smaller but more diverse species. The most famous of these species is the marrizhe.

Wolfgang Baur is not quite furry enough to be mistaken for a weren. Paul was twice that hairy and had almost achieved total control over his hair's color-changing properties, until he had a tragic accident involving a large rock, paper, and scissors.

Weren Homeworld

	<i>Kurg</i>
Primary	Tinnale
Planetary Class	Class 1
Gravity	G2 (1.04g)
Radiation	R1 (13 rem/yr)
Atmosphere	A2 (N, O, CO ₂ ,Ar)
Pressure	P3 (0.91)
Heat	H2 (1.7° C)
Orbital Distance	1.48 AU
Diameter	7,910 km
Year (Earth days)	627.0 days
Day (standard hours)	22.9 hours
Axial Tilt	2.9°
Density	1.05
# Satellites:	None

