

Chapter Eight – Character Races & Backgrounds

CHARACTER RACES

Racial options for Isles campaigns are highly variable due to the structure of unlimited worlds linked through the Gates. Races that originate in the known, Imperially-assimilated isles are provided in the released templates found in this chapter, along with information on their native Isles and cultures.

While all characters travel to new colonies from the Hardistaan Imperial homeworld, they do not have to originate from there. Many Imperial citizens originated from Isles of the old and new Empire, and some have come from other unattached worlds through various means such as temporary rifts.

You can choose to play a character from any of the Isles backgrounds and races listed below, or you can create your own cultural background or Isle. You can choose to make your character's culture as a variant of human or an existing culture by defining a subculture and a Variable Template. You can also choose to create an entirely new race by creating your own Isle and racial package and submitting a new Standardized Template using the Character Race Creation system detailed in this chapter.

CREATING A RACIAL TEMPLATE

VARIABLE TEMPLATES:

These templates may represent a particular 'race' of beings, or may simply reflect cultural differences between characters of the same race but with different origins and backgrounds. Players may create these using the formulae below.

Individual Variable Template:

- Up to 18 points of 'Advantages'. May only choose from certain Advantages, but each character may determine their Advantages individually.
- No Disadvantages
- Any costuming requirements you choose.

Cultural Variable Template:

- Up to 22 points of 'Advantages'. May only choose from certain Advantages.
- Each racial cultural area or group may determine their Group's advantages, but must choose them as a group.
- No Disadvantages
- Light costuming requirement, sufficient to distinguish you from human or other racial templates.

These templates do not require plot approval to play. However, Cultural Variable Templates do require you to submit your template and a basic background (1 or 2 paragraphs, est. word count of 250-500 words) describing your race, culture and/or group. You may play these characters at the event immediately following your design and submission, without permission or approval. If you intend to develop your template into a full racial template, you will be required to follow the full review process for Standardized Templates below. Cultural Variable Templates, once submitted, will be used as the canon/standard for any other characters who wish to come from that particular group or culture.

While the Plot Staff would appreciate notification of any Racial Templates being used for any character:

- Individual Variable Templates do not require any submission before being allowed in game play.
- Cultural Variable Templates do require submission but do not require approval before being allowed in game play.

- Standardized Templates require submission, review and approval before being allowed in game play.

STANDARDIZED TEMPLATES:

These templates always represent a particular race or racial subdivision of beings. All members of any standardized race have the same bonuses and penalties. Anyone may play a character from any of the released standardized templates. All original races, backgrounds and templates must be submitted to the Isles staff for approval before they will be allowed into game play. Submissions must be received a minimum of 3 weeks before any event to be considered for that event. Asylum plot does not guarantee approval of submissions; you must have received written confirmation before your race and background is considered approved and playable. All races and backgrounds submitted and approved for use will be considered canon to the Isles multiverse and available for use by Asylum plot or for future release as accessible racial templates at the discretion of the Isles staff.

To create a Standardized Racial Template, you choose items from the following Advantages and Disadvantages chart. You may choose to spend up to 25 points in Advantages without choosing any Disadvantages. Choosing Disadvantages will give you Disadvantage Points. Your Disadvantage points can be used to increase the limit of the number of Advantage points you can spend. You can choose as many Disadvantages as you like, but only the first 15 points in Disadvantages will raise your Advantage limit on a 1 to 1 point ratio, up to a maximum limit of 40 points in Advantages. You must also choose a costuming requirement for your race that clearly sets them apart from other racial appearances. It must be a reasonable requirement for any player to manage. Costuming requirements are usually done with theatrical makeup, hair colour, hairstyle, prosthetics and other appearance altering techniques. They can also be fulfilled by unique clothing requirements. You can choose anything from Light to Heavy Costuming requirements. Heavy Costuming is the ONLY Disadvantage that will raise your Advantage point limit over 40. If you choose 15 other points in Disadvantages and also choose Heavy Costuming, you will have 42 points in Advantages to spend.

Traits

Standardized Template racial traits should follow the formula of a) identifying the world of origin and b) identifying the specific species. For example, Elves come from Faerindae, and people from the Isles are referred to as Faerine. So, the traits for a specific species of Elf, like Daybreak, would be Faerine, their origin, and Daybreak Elf, their race.

THE CHARACTER RACE CREATION SYSTEM

ADVANTAGES	ADVANTAGE POINT COST
Bonus Skill (*see below)	(2 times base level of skill) in points
Innate Talent (*see below)	(5 times base level of skill) in points
+1 Vitality 10 points	10 Points
+1 Sanity 10 points	10 Points
+1 Karma 10 points	10 Points
+2 Vitality 25 points	25 Points
+2 Sanity 25 points	25 Points
+2 Karma 25 points	25 Points
Racial Skill – special (*) 10 points	10 Points
DISADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGE POINT GAIN
Light Costuming Requirement (*see above)	0 Points
Heavy Costuming Requirement (*see above)	2 points
-1 Vitality	5 points
-1 Sanity	5 points
-1 Karma	5 points
-2 Vitality	10 points (+ +)
-2 Sanity	10 points (+ +)

-2 Karma	10 points (+ +)
<i>(+ +) Characters whose races have a -2 disadvantage are required to purchase a minimum Stamina Pool of 3 in the related Pool</i>	
Combat Style Restriction	1 point each
<i>- Choose Shield, Two-Handed Weapon, Florentine or Paired Weapon</i>	
Combat Styleset Restriction (all of the above)	4 points
Situational +1 Stamina for all skill use	10 points
<i>- e.g: in light, in darkness, etc.</i>	
Talent Rating Requirement – Minimum of 5	3 points
Talent Rating Limitation – Maximum of 5	6 points
Talent Stamina Pool Limit - Variable	(10 minus limit times 2) in points
Penalty Skillset (*see below)	3 points
Penalty Skillset bonus (*see below)	1 points
Penalty SkillType (*see below)	6 points
Heavy Penalty Skillset (*see below)	5 points
Heavy Penalty Skillset bonus (*see below)	2 points
Heavy Penalty SkillType (*see below)	10 Points
Banned Skill (*see below)	(1/2 base level of skill rounded down) in points
Armour Value Restriction (*see below)	Maximum armour = (7 minus the AVR limit) x 2

Light Costuming Requirements

Light costuming requirements are usually minimum changes or makeup, such as pointed ears for certain Elves or a facial tattoo mark for Cyndir. Light clothing costume requirements might include items such as a particular colour sash that must be worn. Light requirements distinguish the race from other characters, but don't take a great deal of time or effort to put on.

Heavy Costuming Requirements

Heavy costuming is used to describe changes such as full facial makeup, alteration to anthropomorphic animal features, and changes of entire hair colour. Heavy clothing costume requirements might include entire uniforms, outfits made from particular colours and materials such as all green leather or all black satin. It might also include extreme clothing requirements, such as the full body and head coverage of the Viragee. Heavy requirements usually create very drastic and distinct appearance changes and often take a great deal of time and effort to maintain.

Bonus Skill

Choose a skill that you would like your race to be naturally good at learning. Characters from your race will be able to buy this skill at a reduced cost. They will pay 2 XP less per skill rank they purchase for this skill, but the minimum cost per rank cannot be reduced below 1.

Innate Talent

Choose a skill that you would like your race to have a natural ability to use. Characters from your race will be able to buy this skill at a reduced cost. They will pay 5 XP less per skill rank they purchase for this skill, but the minimum cost per rank cannot be reduced below 1.

Racial Skill

You can design a unique skill or ability exclusively for characters of your race. You will have to submit your Racial Skill design for staff approval before you can buy it for your character. Racial Skills must be purchased normally, and do not automatically count as Bonus Skills or Innate Talents unless you also purchase those Advantages to use with the Racial Skill.

Penalty Skillset

Choose a set of 5 skills that you think your race would find more difficult to learn. The 5 skills you choose should have something in common and be appropriate or thematically connected to your race's background and culture. These skills will cost characters from your race an extra 2 XP per rank to purchase.

Penalty Skillset bonus

The Penalty Skillset bonus gives you an additional disadvantage point if all 5 skills in your Penalty Skillset

use an Attribute that you have chosen a Talent Rating Limitation or a Talent Rating Requirement for. For example, if all 5 of the skills in your Penalty Skillset use the Mental Attribute, and you have a Talent Rating Limitation for Mental skills, then you automatically earn the Penalty Skillset bonus point as well.

Penalty SkillType

Choose a SkillType that you think your race would find difficult to learn. SkillTypes are entire categories of skills, such as Psionics skills, Combat skills, Wizardry skills, Thieving skills or Production skills. You may not choose Other as your SkillType Category. All skills in your Penalty SkillType will cost characters from your race an extra 2 XP per rank to purchase.

Heavy Penalty Skillset

Choose a set of 5 skills that you think your race would find more difficult to learn. The 5 skills you choose should have something in common and be appropriate or thematically connected to your race's background and culture. These skills will cost characters from your race an extra 5 XP per rank to purchase.

Heavy Penalty Skillset bonus

The Heavy Penalty Skillset bonus gives you additional disadvantage points if all 5 skills in your Heavy Penalty Skillset use an Attribute that you have chosen a Talent Rating Limitation or a Talent Rating Requirement for. For example, if all 5 of the skills in your Heavy Penalty Skillset use the Mental Attribute, and you have a Talent Rating Limitation for Mental skills, then you automatically earn the Heavy Penalty Skillset bonus points as well.

Heavy Penalty SkillType

Choose a SkillType that you think your race would find difficult to learn. SkillTypes are entire categories of skills, such as Psionics skills, Combat skills, Wizardry skills, Thieving skills or Production skills. You may not choose Other as your SkillType Category. All skills in your Heavy Penalty SkillType will cost characters from your race an extra 5 XP per rank to purchase.

Banned Skill

Select a skill that you think your race is unable to learn, or unable to perform for whatever reason you choose. No characters from your race will ever be allowed to purchase this skill.

Armour Value Restriction

Your race cannot use or wear armour over your racial restriction level, calculated at (7 minus your chosen limit) X 2 for points. E.g.: for an Armour Value Restriction of 3, you would have [(7-3) X 2], or 8 disadvantage points.

** There are examples of racial template creation and the application of bonus and penalty advantages and disadvantages in the second appendix Reference Section B. **

ISLES RACES

STANDARDIZED TEMPLATES

All of the races below are 'Standardized Templates' which have already been approved.

Faerindae (Faerine)

The Isle known as Faerine is the primary homeland of the various species called Elves. Faerine was the first Isle discovered by the Empire and though there were some small clashes initially, it joined the Empire willingly as the first Imperial Province. It is also remarkable in that it is one of the only Isles to have been part of the Old Empire and rediscovered in the New Empire. The initial Hardistaan report on Faerine was very informative:

The Imperial Geological Survey team has evaluated Faerine as a world of advanced geological age and moderate axial tilt. This has resulted in a moderate climate and a landscape dominated by rich oceans. Notice regarding the lack of mountainous regions has caused speculation that this is due to a natural erosion pattern indicating support for the believed geological age of the world and some concern for its continued ability to support its population. The indigenous population, made up of various species of what have been termed 'elves', inhabits the single, large landmass just above the equatorial line.

While the different races do seem to maintain civil relations, they also retain a marked cultural isolation from one another. For example, the Nightfall Elves remain in the gentle hills of the Northern section of the continent while the Daybreak Elves prefer the flatter lands of the equatorial band. The Sunith Elves are likeliest to be found in the forest regions while the Vintnae tend towards the rolling hills that seem to replace Faerine's mountains. Little contact or reporting exists on the reclusive Ethmahem Elves.

One of the few things we do know of the Ethmahem Elves is that they raise the delicate Resurrection Lily and are known to occasionally trade seedlings and harvested flowers. This herb, along with various native craft goods and a very popular and delightful native ale represent Faerine's largest export contributions to the Empire. Faerine has a negligent percentage of ores and minerals native to the Isle, though there are traces of old deposits long since diminished beyond use.

Elves: Daybreak

Traits: *Faerine, Daybreak Elf*

Advantages:

- Bonus Skill: First Aid (4 points)
- Bonus Skill: Star of the Fates (2 points)
- Bonus Skill: Strong Mind (12 points)
- Bonus Skill: Gemcutter (6 points)
- Racial Skill Access: Furies Solar Grace (*see below) (10 points)

Disadvantages:

- +1 Extra Stamina Cost to all skills when in darkness (+10 points)

Costuming:

- Light: Pointed ears, gold or white streaks in their hair, avoidance to dark clothing, streak of white or pale gold extending upwards from outer edge of eyebrows

Furies' Solar Grace [Physical/Other 5]: When in direct sunlight, you may spend thirty seconds resting, using no skills. If you are not interrupted, you may spend 5 Physical Stamina points to call 'Heal to Self' to recover 1 Vitality. While counting for this skill, you may not recover Stamina. If the sun is shadowed by clouds, this ability cannot be used, though short (~10 seconds or less) periods when the sun is obscured will merely pause the thirty-second count instead of canceling it. This ability may be used while bleeding out to become stable instead of healing, but if the character bleeds out and dies before the count is finished, the ability cannot be used.

Elves: Vintnae

Traits: *Faerine, Vintnae Elf*

Advantages:

- Bonus Skill: Carver/Sculptor (4 points)
- Bonus Skill: Fletcher (10 points)
- Bonus Skill: Jeweler (4 points)
- Bonus Skill: Ringsmith (10 points)

Disadvantages:

- Maximum Physical Pool: 8 (+4 points)

Costuming:

- Light: Pointed ears, red or purple ‘jewel-tone’ streaks in their hair, tend towards well-coordinated, well-dressed appearances and fashion, streak of red or purple extending upwards from outer edge of eyebrows

Elves: Nightfall

Traits: *Faerine, Nightfall Elf*

Advantages:

- Bonus Skill: Hide in Shadows (18 points)
- Bonus Skill: Resist Poison (8 points)
- Bonus Skill: Disarm Trap (6 points)
- Bonus Skill: School of Alchemy (8 points)

Disadvantages:

- +1 Extra Stamina Cost for all skills when in light (+10 points)
- Minimum Spiritual Talent 5 (+3)

Costuming:

- Heavy (+2): Pointed ears with grey accents, black streaks in their hair, dark tint to lips, optional grayish cast to face or optional dark skin, tend towards black or dark toned clothing, streak of grey or black extending upwards from outer edge of eyebrows.

Elves: Sunith

Traits: *Faerine, Sunith Elf*

Advantages:

- Bonus Skill: Track (6 points)
- Bonus Skill: Hunter/Herder (8 points)
- Bonus Skill: Wood/Bonesmith (6 points)
- Bonus Skill: School of the Land (8 points)
- Racial Skill Access: Treemeld (*see below) (10 points)

Disadvantages:

- Max Armor Value of 3 (+8 points)
- Penalty Skill Set: Mining (all Miner skills and School of Metals) (+3 points)

Costuming:

- Heavy: Pointed ears, bark, leaf, or wood patterned markings on part of the face, usually around the eyes, dark brown streaks in their hair, tend toward ‘woody’ clothing usually in all natural fabrics, streak of green, brown or tan extending upwards from outer edge of eyebrows

Treemeld [Spiritual/Other 7]: You may call 'Imbue by Nature' to assume Spirit form while touching a tree. While this skill is in use, you gain the 'Spirit' trait, during which time you may and must call 'Spirit' to negate any effect which strikes you which is not 'to Spirit'. You are not considered to be 'resting' while this skill is in use, and thus may not recover Stamina points. You and all items you are carrying may not be searched, picked up, or otherwise moved, nor may anything be thrown over you. If you move, break contact with the tree, speak, or use any game skills, this skill ends. If you successfully receive an Agony effect or go unconscious, this skill ends. Using this skill costs 7 Spiritual Stamina points.

Elves: Ethmahem

Traits: *Faerine, Ethmahem Elf*

Advantages:

- Bonus Skill: Tongue of the Muses (8 points)

- Bonus Skill: Haunt (10 points)
- Bonus Skill: Fates Salvation (14 points)
- Bonus Skill: School of the Spirit (4 points)

Disadvantages:

- Minimum Spiritual Talent of 5 (+3 points)
- Maximum Physical Talent of 5 (+6 points)

Costuming:

- Heavy (+2): Pointed ears, pale skin, blue and white streaks in their hair, tendency toward ice-toned clothing (white, blue, purple, pale green) and light / ethereal fabrics and styles, streak of blue extending upwards from outer edge of eyebrows

Burr Tthok

Burr Tthok is an extremely turbulent world, subject to severe atmospheric conditions and a slightly higher gravity. Chains of mountains cutting across turbulent small seas dominate the surface of the planet. Burr Tthok has 3 small moons in non-synchronous orbits, causing highly variable tidal conditions and contributing to the frequent storms. The mountains are constantly swept with high winds and driving rains. Very little exists on Burr Tthok's surface, except for a small number of sheltered, isolated canyons hidden deep in the mountain ranges. In some of these were found small farms or homesteads, but never far from entrances to the more extensive and safe underground regions.

The inhabitants of Burr Tthok chiefly live in extensive underground cities that span across gigantic tunnels from extinct volcanic activity and massive natural canyons. There is only one sentient race of people inhabiting the Isle, the Cyndir, but they are divided into clearly delineated cultures. The first culture is called the Tthun, a strong and hardy race of people well suited to their harsh environment. The second are the Mandret, a people who seem almost frail next to their more powerful counterparts, but who are highly evolved in technological crafting.

The Cyndir are arranged into a feudal society, with various tribes owing loyalty to one of the great kings whom they refer to as Thandros, which seems to be a title. Throughout the history of Burr Tthok, it seems various tribes have gone to war with each other, and the Thandros maintain a standing guard army of warriors called the Tthrunin. Cyndir culture is very structured and unforgiving, rigidly bound by laws of honour and warrior's codes. All Cyndir are tattooed with their tribal mark or brand when they come of age in their culture. The mark is always placed on the face, although the young Cyndir is permitted to choose where on the face they wish to display their tribal identity and badge of honour. This is a very important ceremony that some Cyndirrin tribes will allow outside visitors to witness, but only on the understanding that they are being paid a great and solemn honour to be allowed to attend. Inquiries determined that while an unmarked Cyndirrin is nearly unheard of, should one exist they would be shunned, banned and probably killed, for there are no laws protecting the lives of honourless outcasts.

Warriors in Cyndirrin society who have made their 12th kill are permitted to wear a warrior's braid, usually a side-lock of hair. These are often decorated with finely crafted metal beads inscribed with runes that brag of the warrior's prowess and cajole the spirits to protect them in battle.

The Mandret do not seem to participate in the warrior caste, nor do they wear braids or beads. They seem to have smaller and more modest tattooing on their faces as well. Overall, they are not as strong or sturdy seeming a people as the Tthun, but they do share the same grayish tint to the skin and many have similar features. It is clear that there is a distinct genetic relationship between the two cultures, but they have likely been divided and evolved along separate lines for many generations.

The Mandret are articulate and skilled technical craftsmen. Some of the finest and most delicate metalsmithing known to the Empire is produced from Burr Tthok. All of the Cyndir rely on and value the near legendary artistry in Mandret weapons and armour.

Upon successful diplomatic relations with Burr Tthok, the Guilds were eager to establish trade relations with the Mandret, to gain access to a number of the unique ores, minerals and metal resources in the widespread and numerous mines of this Isle. Mandret smiths were also highly sought, employed for highly paid commissions and to teach their superior smithing techniques. It is well known in the Empire that the finest weapons and armour come from Mandret smiths.

The Mandret also hold another unique status in the Empire. They are the only people who discovered the Empire before the Empire discovered their Isle. Their proficient technical experimentation and creations led them to their own method for reaching across Isles. While they will not share their techniques, we have assurances that it is difficult and rare, and perhaps it is fortunate that Hardistaan was the first Isle they discovered.

Cyndir: Tthun

Traits: *Cyndiran, Tthun*

Advantages:

- Bonus Skill: Blacksmith (6 points)
- Bonus Skill: Gemcutter (6 points)
- Bonus Skill: Hammersmith (10 points)
- Bonus Skill: Metalworker (4 points)
- +1 Vitality (10 points)

Disadvantages:

- +1 Extra Stamina Cost when in open spaces (+10 points)

Costuming:

- Heavy: Dark grey stonelike skin, facial tattooing particular to tribal or family affiliation, all hair longer than shoulder length may include at least one runic-beaded braid (+2 points)

Cyndir: Mandret

Traits: *Cyndiran, Mandret*

Advantages:

- Bonus Skill: Jeweler (4 points)
- Bonus Skill: Ringsmith (10 points)
- Bonus Skill: School of Metals (8 points)
- Bonus Skill: Noble Metals Miner (6 points)
- Bonus Skill: Gemstone Miner (8 points)

Disadvantages:

- +1 Extra Stamina Cost when in open spaces (+10 points)

Costuming:

- Heavy: Dark grey stonelike skin, facial tattooing particular to tribal or family affiliation (+2 points)

Niemas

Of all the worlds that were cut off from the Heartworld after the Answer, it is said that no people mourn the loss of their homeland more than those of Niemas. These people, called the Gypsies, Caravansi and Nomads, quest endlessly for their lost home. They describe Niemas as a beautiful place full of lush, warm forests and sweeping, jewel-like deserts, of wide, rolling oceans and tropical islands of paradise. The Bloodfolk of Niemas are largely nomadic, moving as they need in order to meet the daily survival and happiness of their families. The family or tribal unit is the cornerstone of their society, defining their identity and purpose. Niemas was the Twenty-Third Isle discovered by the Empire and was not fully

explored by the Imperial Survey teams, so very little is known of it save what the native People of the Blood are able to describe. When Niemas was originally welcomed into the Empire, her curious and highly nomadic natives eagerly embraced Imperial travel and the exploration of other worlds. Many left as entire family groups and have been known to show up in every unusual corner of the Empire. When the Gates collapsed, however, no group was more determined to go home, and no group has more strongly pursued an agenda aimed entirely at the rediscovery of their homeworld.

Bloodfolk: Gypsies

Traits: *Nieman, Gypsy*

Advantages:

- Racial Skill Access: Blood Healing (*see below) (10 points)
- Bonus Skill: Gift of the Fates (10 points)
- Bonus Skill: School of the Arts (4 points)
- +1 Karma (10 points)

Disadvantages:

- Max AC of 4 (+6 points)
- -1 Sanity (+5 points)

Costuming:

- Light: Must wear some conspicuous clothing in bright red and purple colours

Blood Healing [Spiritual/Other 5]: After touching a target for three seconds, and using no other skills, you may call 'Heal to <your Family Name>' at the cost of one Vitality. If this effect is not successful (i.e. you touched the wrong target), you do not lose the Vitality. Using this skill requires no Stamina points.

Bloodfolk: Caravansi

Traits: *Nieman, Caravansi*

Advantages:

- Bonus Skill: Self-Control (12 points)
- Bonus Skill: Insight (8 points)
- Bonus Skill: Inspiration of the Muses (4 points)
- Bonus Skill: School of Man (4 points)
- Bonus Skill: Language Theory (2 points)

Disadvantages:

- -1 Vitality (+5 points)

Costuming:

- Light: Must wear some conspicuous clothing in bright blue and purple colours

Bloodfolk: Nomads

Traits: *Nieman, Nomad*

Advantages:

- Bonus Skill: Avoid Blow (16 points)
- Bonus Skill: School of the Land (4 points)
- Bonus Skill: Eye of the Fates (4 points)
- Bonus Skill: Diagnose (2 points)
- +1 Vitality (10 points)

Disadvantages:

- Max AC of 4 (+6 points)
- -1 Sanity (+5 points)

Costuming:

- Light: Must wear some conspicuous clothing in green and bright purple colours

Systril

Systril, the Sixth Isle discovered in the New Empire, is a world near to Asylum. It is teeming with life throughout its vast forests and jungles. At first glance there would seem to be no civilization to the world at all. Then you meet the inhabitants, the Animae, who are capable of changing between animal and nearhuman form. The Survey team thought the Animae were the animals of their world, but these natives possess strong inherent magic given to them by their nearness to nature. The world is a wild place where the Empire has built only one small town. The natives do not appreciate any disruption of their natural cycle.

There is a story to the Animae and the Empire's first visit to Systril. The initial survey team found a natural world of incredible complexity and beauty when they first arrived. They explored a land they believed was uninhabited and free for Imperial exploitation. In preparation for a colony, they broke earth and clear-cut a field to begin construction. That was the last report they sent.

The second survey team was more cautious. They examined the native fauna and found that there was a strong magical presence in all creatures of Systril. One enterprising mage, deciding magic was a sign of higher intelligence, attempted to communicate via spells. She selected a pack of wolves who were watching the survey team closely and attempted to look for ways to ask them about the missing survey team. She learned more than she was prepared for in the bargain.

All life on Systril is intelligent.; the plants, the animals, the birds, everything., and they all communicate constantly. Their greater society is a complex interweaving of the natural cycles, and everything from predator to prey is interconnected. The natives live in the universal "now" where the cycle determines what comes next, and not necessarily the individual. The complexity of the Animae's society was far beyond the research team's ability to comprehend.

However the exchange of communication was not one way. The Animae also learned of the Empire in the exchange. They learned of tools and worlds, civilizations and magic. While the survey team watched in amazement, the wolves near to them began to experiment with these new ideas and forms.

The pack changed, stretching and shifting into a close approximation of a humanoid form. They attempted to imitate the speech of the survey team, in gruff but comprehensible voices. The survey team quickly shifted the focus of their exploration to helping the Animae explore them and begin an attempt at diplomatic relations. They apparently succeeded well enough that the Animae and all of Systril came to accept an Imperial presence and Imperial visitors, just as they began to choose to explore other worlds themselves.

It has never been quite clear to the Empire what their relationship to Systril is. The Empire gingerly counts Systril as an Imperial colony, but its long-term purpose has yet to be determined. The world has only a small footprint on it and remains relatively unchanged. Groups of Animae travel throughout the Empire in the humanoid guise they have learned to adopt to promote familiarity and ease of communication. The most common Animae found in the Empire are predatory species, such as cats, bears and wolves. The occasional Herbivore Animae has been seen, but it is far rarer that they leave their homeworld. Researchers have speculated that this may be due to the naturally aggressive nature of predators and the relative caution of the other species.

The Animae in their explorations have shown some common traits. Wanton destruction of nature or natural resources often throws them into a killing rage. Also, they only resume their animal forms on Systril where it is believed their power and ability to do so are strongest. They very rarely learn magic; their command over the natural forces of their homeworld is unsurpassed in all the Empire.

The most common Animae accept the human terms for them of Ursine, Feline, and Lupine. They differentiate each other primarily by specific sub-species, and apparently by scent. Of the Lupines, there are 27 known species recognized, each with it's own culture and social order. Most are based on the Lupine "Pack" model, but there are differences even in that. Similarly, the Felines generally hold a looser pack structure with the females being the stronger hunters and often leading family groups or prides. The Ursines, on the other hand, tend to be solitary and each family unit has it's own fiercely defended territory.

Animae: Ursines

Traits: *Systrillian, Ursine*

Advantages:

- +2 Vitality (25 points)
- Bonus Skill: Battle Rage (12 points)
- Bonus Skill: Basic Combat (2 points)

Disadvantages:

- Penalty Skill Set: Fine motor coordination skills - Pick Lock, Locksmith, Disarm Trap, Jeweler, Ringsmith, Gemcutter, Clothier/Weaver (+3 points)
- Heavy Penalty Skill Type: Scholar (+10 points)

Costuming:

- Heavy: Bear makeup or half-mask, fur-colored skin, etc. (+2 points)

Animae: Lupines

Traits: *Systrillian, Lupine*

Advantages:

- Racial Skill Access: Pack Howl (*see below) (10 points)
- Bonus Skill: Track (6 points)
- Bonus Skill: Bone Break (10 points)
- +1 Vitality (10 points)

Disadvantages:

- Heavy Penalty Skill Type: Scholar (+10 points))

Costuming:

- Heavy: Wolf makeup or half-mask, fur-colored skin, etc. (+2 points)

Pack Howl [Spiritual/Other 5]: You may shout, howl, or cry out your pack howl (which may be a simple howl) loudly. After doing so, you may call 'By My Voice, Imbue to <your Family Name>. Those who are affected by it immediately recover 2 Physical Stamina, up to their maximum. You do not take this effect. Using this skill costs 5 Spiritual Stamina points.

Animae: Felines

Traits: *Systrillian, Feline*

Advantages:

- Bonus Skill: Intimidate (16 points)
- Bonus Skill: Disengage (4 points)
- Bonus Skill: Agony (6 points)
- Bonus Skill: Basic Combat (2 points)
- +1 Vitality (10 points)

Disadvantages:

- Penalty Skill Set: Civilized Production - All Miner skills, Blacksmith, Bladesmith, Founder, Platesmith,

Ringsmith, Locksmith, Metalworker, Jeweler (+3 points)
- Heavy Penalty Skill Type: Scholar (+10 points)

Costuming:

- Heavy: Cat makeup or half-mask, fur-colored skin, cat ears, etc. (+2 points)

Virago

The Viragee, or Swamp Walkers, are the descendants of a group of gate travelers from an early exploration era who somehow lost their way between gates. A large, well-equipped party of colonists, headed for a prepared and sedate colony, they stepped through the gate and into a swampy hell. No one has ever been able to determine what went wrong with the gate transfer that sent them to Virago, which was not a known world at that time.

A dozen years ago, a new gate was opened onto the swamp world of Virago and contact was made again with the Empire. Diplomatic relations were established and Virago is now being developed slowly as it has Alchemical resources valuable to the Empire in its deeper waters. There have also been some scientific research stations established and privately funded, as Imperial scientists are endlessly fascinated by the adaptations the colonists, now the Viragee, had to make to survive. Nearly all the Viragee left their 'home world' once Imperial contact was established and are engaged in exploration for a new home. Those that stayed are generally the elders who live in their houses in the trees, watching the swamp and remembering.

Virago is a very still world. With no moons and little tilt to the planetary axis, there are no tides; the endless water tends to stagnate. What small amounts of circulation there exist are caused by weather, though little of that penetrates the Hanchoo swamps. The world is nearly completely covered with water. There is open water around the equatorial band and swamps canopied with huge overarching Hanchoo trees cover a great deal of the poles. There are few solid landmasses, the largest being about 200 yards square. Land in general is very rare and the small pieces of dry land there have great Spiritual and ritual significance.

Once contact was re-established, researchers were able to learn a great deal about what befell the original colonists. Some was pieced together by records and through old tales and songs. 90% of the colony apparently died in the first year, killed by drowning, vicious and toxic creatures, and the malevolent, pervading gases that inhabit the swamp.

Those that lived adapted. They took to the trees and built groups of structures there that they call Aeries. They learned to travel over the sprawling roots of the great Hanchoo trees that grow over most of the planet. The misty, drifting fogs of gasses make the surface of the swamp a twilight at mid-day and dark as ink in the night.

The Viragee do not go into the water, ever. The water is inhabited by legions of nightmarish creatures, from a four inch long eel-like slug with a nerve poison that will paralyze a human in seconds, all the way up to dinosaur-sized reptiles in the deeper water. There are numerous dangerous lifeforms across the world; piranha-like fish, poisonous snakes, hundreds of species of reptiles, and numerous birds and insects that have adapted to Virago's toxic atmosphere. These creature form a delicate, if uneasy, ecological balance in a series of micro-ecosystems that are being carefully documented so as not to disrupt the planetary balance while acquiring valuable resources.

The Viragee travel over open water using very small canoes, usually suited for one person. Their apparent original design was for sitting, but most Viragee stand in them and pole about the shallow swamps. The little crafts look ridiculously inadequate but they are surprisingly more substantial than they seem. Larger versions of the craft exist, for groups and elderly, but a hunter would never be seen in such a thing. Pride insists that he dare the swamp to devour him.

Other travel utilizes a sort of aquatic snowshoe called Huartes. They are made of circles of highly buoyant

reeds woven into floats that the hunter can wear on his feet. This gives him the ability to cross small sections of open water and clamber over roots and reeds. These work particularly well on reeds, where they get some support by the vegetation. A hunter who has used these for his entire life can walk from tree to water to swamp with virtually no pause in his stride. A hunter trained in using Huartes will walk with a slightly bow-legged walk once on dry ground due to being used to having to spread his feet apart to accommodate the devices.

Viragee Society

The colonists that arrived on this planet were agrarian and little prepared for the reality they had to deal with. Most of their equipment was lost in the first hour after their arrival. Those who survived tended to be the young and agile. The society they invented was an adolescent one, filled with bravado and daring, bravery and foolishness. They quickly learned to be pragmatic however, and to take the measures needed for survival. While they are easy to underestimate, one should not forget that each of the Viragee is descended from a gene pool that has been thoroughly culled. These are tough survivors.

Viragee tend to die young. A revered elder statesman may be only 30 or so years old. Back on Virago, the oldest man on record was 47 when he died. The Viragee are considered adult at the age of 14.

Appearance:

Viragee rarely expose any skin to the outside air. Their world has taught them to believe that corrosive Spirits will attack their skin, and the noxious gasses of Virago's swamps lend serious credibility to this belief. They cover their mouth and nose with cloth at all times when outdoors, believing that evil spirits will get into their bodies through the mouth or nose. At home in the swamp, especially during times of great trouble, they will cover even their eyes with a sheer, gauzy material.

Research has revealed that the toxic and noxious gases in the Virago swamps, which are generated by the eons of stagnant and festering filth, can produce the effects of the things the Viragee fear. These gases can cause infection and rot of unprotected skin and when inhaled through the mouth or nose. They can cause corruption, infection and necrosis, starting in mucus membrane tissue and rapidly expanding to pulmonary corrosion, eventually ending in a horrible and painful death. A simple barrier of cloth woven from a specific reed seems to adequately filter the gases and this results in the Viragee's near neurotic compulsion to stay covered at all times. Convention allows the face to be uncovered indoors where it is safer, but the Viragee will only take off clothing down to the skin behind cloth hangings that are impenetrable to the gases. While the dangerous and toxic gases generally don't exist off of their home world, the persistent habits are very strong preservation instincts that are rarely overcome. A bare face anywhere but in a private and "safe" hearth makes them very nervous and uncomfortable. It also means that if a Viragee bares his or her face to you, he or she has accepted you as a member of his or her family group. There is no greater sign of trust and respect among their society.

There are few woods in the swamp that are suitable for making bows, so archery is not a common skill among the Viragee. Living in the trees has had an effect on their cultural development as well. Smithing and metalworking are foreign to them and open flames make them very uneasy. Food is prepared in a variety of ways, but rarely involving fire. One of the more common methods of preparing food is to dry and preserve it using salt, making a jerky sort of food that is easy to transport through the swamps, and reasonably tasty. The use of salt is very important in the Viragee household. Salt is a valuable commodity and a family rich in salt is very wealthy. Where the salt holders are placed on the table, and your seat relative to this container, indicates your importance to the group. Sitting at the high end of the table is referred to as sitting in a "salted" seat.

The protein in their diet is mainly fish, but there are some large, carnivorous reptilian creatures that they also hunt for food. They are excellent hunters with an almost mystical ability to track creatures through the swamp. They have an acute sense of detail and can spot the unnatural swirling of the scum floating on the surface of the water where their prey removed its foot minutes ago, or the impression of that foot in the ooze at the bottom of the water in clearer water. Broken twigs and crushed leaves are clear road signs to

their sharp eyes.

The Hunters are the nobility of the Viragee. The Hunters are respected above all others for their ability to survive in the swamps and the Hunters take great pride in this reverence. They are deferred to in public and take offense easily. They live a life of danger, but by a very strict code that seems to hold great store in bravado. They challenge death every day and will challenge other hunters to foolish bets and risks.

It should be noted that there is little, if any differentiation between the sexes in Viragee society. A hunter is as likely to be female as male. The origin of this egalitarian attitude is thought to have originated in the dress of the Viragee, which hides all primary and secondary sexual characteristics, and leaves ability as the determining factor in a Hunter's worth.

Their native weapons tend to be made of bone and scales, teeth and wood. They do have some metal weapons, made from the little they were able to scavenge from the stuff the original colonists brought through, but over the years these few weapons have gained the status of revered artifacts and are considered to be magical in nature. They are excellent with spears and clubs and have adapted quickly to the new technologies that make the unimaginably wondrous weapons available to them now, but tend to be very uncomfortable in high tech worlds. They can understand a sword, but a gun just seems to be almost too much. Their new metal swords they revere as gifts from the Fates.

These are the Templates for various niches in the society, each with it's own skills and restrictions.

Viragee Warrior (Hunters)

The Hunters are the nobility of the Viragee (see about the Hunters, above)

Viragee Healer

Viragee Healers are second in the social ladder of the Viragee as the group that keeps the Hunters alive. Many of the Healers will undergo grueling tests so that they might be allowed to travel with hunting parties and are considered to be honored guests, worthy of being seated in salted seats. These people are specialists in the spells that get hunters back on their feet and are able to get out of dangerous situations themselves. While they dedicate themselves to the Hunter's well-being, they are not to be taken lightly.

Viragee Mystic

The Mystics are revered, sometimes even feared. They revel in their rituals that are designed to add mystery and inscrutability to their profession. A great deal of what they do is just showmanship, but there is a core of true ability in the most respected of these individuals.

Viragee Mage

Many Viragee Mages take to this profession late in life, and many are former Hunters. They find some satisfaction in providing the protections and ritual magics for the safety of the Aerie. The Viragee have no battle spells of their own and their discovery of such things in other Imperial worlds was a revelation. That revelation has attracted some younger Viragee to try their skill in battle with magic, but old habits are hard to break. Magic is still thought of primarily as an old man's profession, though it is hoped that attitude will have dissipated within a few generations.

Viragee Aerie Tender

These are the Viragee that stay in the Aerie and prepare and gather the food, as well as make most of the various items needed. Again, please note that these Tenders are as likely to be male as female.

Viragee: Hunter Caste

Traits: *Viragian, Viragee*

Advantages:

- Bonus Skill: Track (6 points)
- Bonus Skill: Parry (10 points)
- Bonus Skill: Hunter/Herder (8 points)
- +1 Vitality (10 points)

Disadvantages:

- May not use the Shield fighting style (+1 points)
- Heavy Penalty Skill Set: Farming and Mining (Forester/Farmer, School of Metals, and all Mining skills) (+5 points)

Costuming:

- Heavy: Must wear full, dark, concealing clothes at all times, with no bare skin except the face. Must wear facial veil when outdoors. (+2 points)

Viragee: Healer Caste

Traits: *Viragian, Viragee*

Advantages:

- Bonus Skill: Healing Potion (10 points)
- Bonus Skill: School of Alchemy (8 points)
- Bonus Skill: First Aid (4 points)
- Bonus Skill: Furies Balm (10 points)

Disadvantages:

- May not use the Shield fighting style (+1 points)
- Heavy Penalty Skill Set: Farming and Mining (Forester/Farmer, School of Metals, and all Mining skills) (+5 points)

Costuming:

- Heavy: Must wear full, dark, concealing clothes at all times, with no bare skin except the face. Must wear facial veil when outdoors. (+2 points)

Viragee: Mystic Caste

Traits: *Viragian, Viragee*

Advantages:

- Bonus Skill: Insight (8 points)
- Bonus Skill: Tongue of the Muses (8 points)
- Bonus Skill: Haunt (10 points)
- Bonus Skill: Whimsy of the Muses (4 points)
- Bonus Skill: Language Theory (2 points)

Disadvantages:

- May not use the Shield fighting style (+1 points)
- Heavy Penalty Skill Set: Farming and Mining (Forester/Farmer, School of Metals, and all Mining skills) (+5 points)

Costuming:

- Heavy: Must wear full, dark, concealing clothes at all times, with no bare skin except the face. Must wear facial veil when outdoors. (+2 points)

Viragee: Mage Caste

Traits: *Viragian, Viragee*

Advantages:

- Bonus Skill: Spirit of the Hearth's Protection (14 points)
- Bonus Skill: Walking the Spirit World (16 points)
- Bonus Skill: Star of the Fates (2 points)

Disadvantages:

- May not use the Shield fighting style (+1 points)
- Heavy Penalty Skill Set: Farming and Mining (Forester/Farmer, School of Metals, and all Mining skills) (+5 points)

Costuming:

- Heavy: Must wear full, dark, concealing clothes at all times, with no bare skin except the face. Must wear facial veil when outdoors. (+2 points)

Viragee: Tender Caste

Traits: *Viragian, Viragee*

Advantages:

- Bonus Skill: Herbalist of the Furies (8 points)
- Bonus Skill: Diagnose (2 points)
- Bonus Skill: Potter (4 points)
- Bonus Skill: Clothier/Weaver (4 points)
- Bonus Skill: Leathersmith (8 points)
- Bonus Skill: Forester/Farmer (6 points)

Disadvantages:

- May not use the Shield fighting style (+1 points)
- Heavy Penalty Skill Set: Mining (all Mining skills and School of Metals) (+5 points)

Costuming:

- Heavy: Must wear full, dark, concealing clothes at all times, with no bare skin except the face. Must wear facial veil when outdoors. (+2 points)