

SAPIENT SPECIES

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[NEW]

OVERVIEW

The Sapiant Species collection will focus on the various sapient species to be found within the Destiny Omega & Gelitech story world. Both Core Civilization and Alien species are featured. **NOTE:** The Rowa and the numerous varieties thereof will be featured in their own entry collection.

ANTZ

Sapient Species, Humanoid Insectoid, Engineered Ant
Descendant, Transformation Peril

Few would even begin to contemplate the idea that the world would be a much better place if it had a population of ant people running around. Trying to keep ants out of the pantry is tough enough when they aren't five feet tall and bent on turning the tables by setting out to trap you. It seems like common sense, really.

Thankfully for all the transformation fetishists out there, biologist Doctor Ti'kin Ch'vurri was not the sort of woman to be deterred by pesky little things like common sense. The tentacle-haired darinni worked in secret for several years, carefully concocting a composition of very specifically configured genes and chromosomes which took the world's ant problem to a whole new level. The resulting species of giant ant proved to be one of the few examples of a 'completely engineered' life form with true long term species viability. Secretly released into the transformation fetish scene in the year 4502, they've proved to be quite a successful, if generally little known, species.

Antz appear as black ants about two meters long when walking on all six legs, or about a third of a meter less when standing on their hind legs only. They are surprisingly light compared to their size, which is the primary reason they can exist at all, weighing 30-35kg each. Antz have no particularly unusual traits or abilities besides their emission of a particular blend of pheromones which produces an attractive effect of sorts. This effect seems tailored to make the members of the species seem just as socially, and even intimately, palatable to mammalian humanoids as attractive members of their own species.

Antz are fully, individually sapient, and can exist in normal society with few issues. Unlike their tiny natural counterparts, they are unable to dig out colonies in soil, instead living in existing natural caves or abandoned, albeit stable, mines. Their primary food source are the several species

of benign, luminous fungi that they cultivate within their subterranean homes, though they are capable of safely consuming just about anything the typical humanoid can. It is not uncommon for members of the species to exchange labor with locals for different types of food. At least one colony, living in an old mine in the mountain just north of Kima, near the city of Mashiva, has its own small farm.

If there's one thing Antz are known for, by those who know about them, it's their willingness to take just about any sapient mammalian humanoid back to their colony for 'intimate purposes'. Within the colony, guests are denuded and introduced to the two different forms of so-called demi-antz. Female demi-antz are eyeless, legless creatures endowed with gummy maws and a female reproductive orifice at the very tip of their abdomen. Male demi-antz are similar, but their male member is mounted upon a long, articulated leg, of sorts, protruding from their own abdominal tip. The former are found mounted along walls in masses of hardened ant-spit, while the latter are found mounted upon low ceilings.

Visitors to the colony will generally get to watch as male demi-antz copulate with females, both orally to feed them, and genitally, to fertilize their eggs. They also witness female demi-antz lay eggs. Females lay six to twelve eggs per cycle, each cycle lasting four days. Most of these eggs are not viable and will be fed to the males by the proper antz as part of their diet. The few that are are collected and cared for in special, secret chambers that visitors are not allowed to see.

Unlike most species with transformative powers, antz do not simply take what they can get. If a visitor is not overtly disgusted by what they encounter on their first visit to the colony, the antz will invite them back for a series of 'dates'. Each of these dates will involve similar encounters with the demi-antz, along with samples of their pleasantly sweet fungus. The fungus is perfectly safe for mammal

consumption, and can often be found for sale in communities near antz colonies.

Only those who are sufficiently attracted to the intimate features of the demi-antz are considered acceptable prospects for addition to the colony. Female visitors are expected to imbibe at least a few mouthfuls of male demi-antz effluent within the first four visits to the colony, while male visitors are expected to consume an equal amount of natural juices exuded by the female demi-antz in the same time. Both forms of effluent are mildly intoxicating, and have complex flavors that many mammalian humanoids find quite pleasant.

The reproductive effluents of both demi-antz sexes may contain the mutagenic triggers that will result in the imbiber's slow transformation into a demi-antz of their own physical sex. There is little chance of transformation during the first encounter with the fluids, but once the demi-antz sense that their 'partner' is comfortable with consuming their effluent, the chances of transformation rise. A first encounter transformation generally occurs in only one in a thousand cases. A second encounter transformation takes place once in every hundred cases. For the third to sixth encounters, the chances are one in four. Beyond that, transformation is nearly guaranteed.

When the antz sense that a visitor has begun their transformation into a demi-antz, they will come together in a large group to apply a mass of softly glowing, fungus laden spit in the spot selected for them. The visitor will then be lifted up and be stuck in place. The antz-spit adhesive is quite permanent, and the spot will remain the new demi-antz home for the remainder of their life.

Transformation into a demi-antz takes upwards of three days to complete. During the time, the subject is fed plenty of fungus and, for females in reach of an existing male demi-antz, plenty of masculine effluent as well. Sensations provided by the transformation have been described as strange, twisted, mildly uncomfortable, and mind bending, though never in a manner or magnitude to make the subject want it to stop.

The transformation into a demi-antz has a severe mental diminution effect. Demi-antz have no real need for complex thoughts, and therefore their brains are reduced to something more appropriate for their sole purpose in life. The subjects themselves are largely unaware of this, experiencing a smooth transition that, at any given moment, makes it seem that their current state is how they've always been.

There are only twenty-seven known demi-antz colonies at the time of this article's writing. Only the one at Kima is well known to the general public. Access is by antz invitation only.

ASHIRI

Sapient Species, Humanoid, Primate Descendant

Originating on the world of Ashir, only about 250 light years away from the fey'li homeworld of Fey'lin, the ashiri are a 'typical furless humanoid' most easily identified by their long, elf-like ears. Ashiri have skin that varies in color from light blue-gray to deep violet, with pastel shades of purple and violet being the most common. They tend to be of a slightly smaller than average stature, and are known more for their agility than their physical strength.

Ashiri tend to prefer various forms of form-fitting clothing, with a modern stylistic preference for shiny and/or partially translucent or transparent outfits. While older generations tend towards various stretchy natural and synthetic fabrics or rubbers, younger generations have shown a preference for so-called 'gelwear'. These are single-use outfits generated and disposed of using a closet-like home device that directly applies and removes a breathable gelatin of varying style, color, and transparency to the wearer's body. More recently, biogel has found itself quite popular among ashiri. Among the biogel wearing population, the ashiri are the second most numerous behind the fey'li, and just ahead of the mitanni.

In ancient times, the world of Ashir was a site of von'kir 'conquest'. The native ashiri population was completely converted to a faux-religion where being selected for transformation into a mindless, shriveled shu'riv 'pet' was the highest of devotional honors. It is now widely known that this religious conversion was just a means to gain enthusiastic compliance by the ashiri so that their bodies could be used for purely entertainment purposes by their von'kir masters. Despite this, many ashiri still hang on to the belief that being permanently physically and mentally corrupted, in such a seemingly unpleasant fashion, and in devotion to a fictional goddess, is a desirable life experience. As a result, thousands of ashiri become shu'riv every day on Ashir, and visitors to

certain old temple communities are often strongly encouraged to join in the 'fun'.

As a result of their von'kir past, the ashiri tend to be much more culturally accepting of exotic physical experience than most other humanoid species. In addition to actively promoting the shu'riv transformation to their fellow humanoid races, ashiri are often found actively participating in other alien efforts to purvey physically transformative experiences among the population of the Fey'li Empire. Chief among these are the so-called digital gorgons of the zexta, travel to the zuka resorts of Zembax, and the development of nanitch capabilities into something more varied in order to help attract paying tourists to their hives.

AVEYKA

Sapient Species, Humanoid, Avian Descendant

Hailing from the distant, largely unknown world of Gixadi, the aveyka are an unusual race of pale, blue skinned humanoids with iridescent, feathered "hair". They are tall and lanky, with four arms, and four digits on each extremity. Their slender faces are notable for their large, completely black eyes, and vaguely beak shaped nose and mouth. Their speech is bubbly sounding, yet halting and filled with excessively emphasized sharp consonants.

Very little is known about the aveyka homeworld, or about native aveyka culture. Those who have ventured into civilized space are invariably secretive and often quite intensely focused on whatever objective brought them into civilized space to begin with. There is no formal effort to make contact with the aveyka homeworld, nor is there any plan to, owing to its excessive distance from the outer borders of the civilized frontiers.

The aveyka are best known for their interstellar traveling carnivals that feature entertainments both alien and extraordinary. These carnivals are have a reputation for collecting all sorts of alien technologies in their travels, and often seek to find ways to use potentially quite hazardous devices as part of their offered entertainments. As a result of frequent accidents, most civilized nations require the carnivals to have constant safety supervision, if they allow them entry at all.

Physically transformative devices are a particular favorite among the aveyka carnies. Whenever, and wherever they think they can get away with it, the carnies frequently leave such items in places where unsuspecting carnival goers might discover and interact with them, largely for the carnies' own amusement. Such devices are often dressed up to seem mysterious, playful, and often far less than the permanently body altering machines they are.

DROCHAKI

Sapient Species, Humanoid Insectoid, Bee Descendant, BEES!!!

The drochaki are a race of tall, chittinous humanoid insects, dull black all over, with blue and black striped abdomens. They hail from the world of Anochak III, in the Marian Drift Prefecture of the Feyli Empire, though they can be found all over the region in small, self sustaining hive communities. Overall population: Approx. 7.6 billion.

The drochaki are renowned for their particular brand of highly belligerent pacifism. Their complete unwillingness to allow others to interfere with their peaceful lifestyle has served them well, even to the point of successfully resisting the advances of the ancient Key'vin'ta Empire in its waning days. This latter interaction brought the drochaki into contact with numerous other races, and after the fall of the ancient empire, was one of the few worlds where key'vin'ta interstellar portals remained in working order. This fostered a brisk trade in drochaki honey that continues to this day.

Drochaki honey is famous the Feyli Empire over for its sweetness, and the vast plethora of its subtle variations. These variations are produced thanks to the many would-be thieves who've attempted to make off with a taste of honey unpaid-for. While the drochaki are capable of delivering a disabling, hallucinogenic sting, they prefer a rather different approach to the honey thieves, one that's almost as renowned as the honey itself.

Drochaki honey is unique in its ability to indefinitely sustain an encased captive in a dreamy state of suspended animation. Each captive adds a unique flavor to the honey in which they are encased. This can be harvested in small batches provided that it is replaced by new honey, lest the captive be released before their designated time.

Honey thieves are encased in special prison hives, where their honey is harvested regularly.

Each drochaki community has its own prison hive, where captives are first mounted in a bees-wax restraint within the honeycomb, and then encased in honey. The only technology used in these hives are the drains that siphon honey from the cells in small batches for bottling and sale.

The thieves that make a poorly flavored honey are generally released after a few months. Those that make decently flavored honey may be kept captive for several years. Those that make finely flavored honey might be imprisoned for decades. Those that make magnificently flavored honey may never be released.

Certain races are known for the finer flavors of honey they create. Among these are feyli, mitanni, aiandi (aka elf-ears), and cibbarri. Honey thieves of these sorts are among the longest held captives. In the oldest prison hives on Anochak are feyli who were caught stealing honey some six thousand years ago, and who will certainly be adding their unique flavor to honey for many millennia to come.

EXOTAE

Sapient Species, Humanoid, True Alien, Hostile Transformation
Peril

While the vast majority of sapient organisms make their homes on reasonably hospitable planets, the truly alien exotae make their homes in the lifeless vacuum of space. Found throughout a long belt of star systems connecting the Marian Drift Prefecture with the Imperial Core, their hives resemble large asteroids or small moonlets, covered with dull gray dust and pockmarked with craters large and small. Were one to peel away the innocent looking mineral surface, one would discover a living mass of dark gray lumps, off-white sinews, and throbbing reservoirs of slightly luminous green fluid. Each hive has several portals through which its members can enter and exit the hive, though only the fleshy, crater-like main orifice is generally visible to the more careful of observers.

Exotae exist in what is arguably the most niche of niches for a predatory organism. Their principle prey consists of asteroid miners. They possess a disturbingly specific ability to sense other sapient's intention to mine asteroids within their territory, and use this information to set up highly effective ambushes in places generally thought to be free of exotae presence.

Once attacked, few can escape the exotae. Generally, the exotae do not actually attempt to kill their victims. Instead, they use their psychic powers along with their physical prowess to subdue as many victims as they can. These 'lucky' victims are packed into living, life sustaining sacs for the long flight back to the hive. Those putting up too effective a fight are killed and promptly consumed as sustenance. Survivors are rare, and generally only those who happen to have the technological means to resist their attacks with sufficient endurance to present the attacking exotae with the prospect of military grade reinforcement arriving before they can return to their hive.

In addition to the more vulnerable space miners, exotae are known to have a lesser taste for support ship crew, surveyors, and incautious recreational sailors who happen to blunder into their territory. Other vessels which tend to operate with shields always active are largely ignored. More heavily armed merchantmen and military units are actively avoided.

No evidence of the exotae hunting any sort of natural vacuum inhabiting prey has been found to date. This, combined with the strange physical nature of their reproductive process, has led scientists to the conclusion that the exotae are artificially engineered organisms. It is hypothesized that the creatures were intended to act as strategic weapons by some unknown ancient civilization against an equally unknown rival, denying them access to the necessary resources with which to build effective spaceborne defences.

The exotae themselves appear as hunched over demi-humanoids with rumpled, dark gray skin largely covered with off-white plates of extremely hard chitin. Their hands and feet have three digits each, all of which are adorned with massive chitin claws. Their heads somewhat resemble forward facing hatchet blades, with no visible eyes, ears, or other sensory organs. Their mouth is generally visible only as a vertical crease along the edge of the 'blade'. This only opens when the creature faces serious opposition, revealing a vast array of razor sharp teeth, and a pair of long, prehensile tentacle-tongues that can grab and pull threats into the creature's mouth.

The exotae generally avoid physical combat unless it is required in the attempt to secure victims for the hive, or kill and consume genuine threats. Instead, they attempt to subdue their victims in a far more insidious fashion. Exotae can focus their psychic powers on a single victim from a considerable distance. That victim quickly finds themselves daydreaming about something they particularly enjoy. Generally, such victims give in to the dream quite quickly, falling into a strange,

waking-lucid-dream-reverie that miners call 'the black bliss'. Others try to focus on their work, and sometimes manage to resist the deeper dream state. Few recognize what's happening, but those that do have the chance to take defensive measures, provided that they have the tools at hand.

Exotae are extraordinarily strong in all physical respects. When necessary to eliminate a threat, they are fully capable of tearing through just about any protective clothing that might be found in the average spacefarer's inventory. They are even capable of quickly shredding the best suits of light unshielded power armor, though heavier and militarized types are generally impermeable to their physical attacks. They will actively avoid entering into the proximity of active energy shields, which seem to interfere with their senses and psychic powers. This can be used to the defender's advantage, and with a bit of luck, a miner can save themselves by holing up inside of a sturdy confined space with a shield unit blocking the entry.

Exotae are largely immune to damage from anything less than a medium caliber armor piercing ballistic weapon. Energy weapons are more effective against an exotae's softer gray flesh, but their chitin is highly ablative. Highass plasma projecting weapons are generally the most effective personal weapons against exotae, though numerous hits are generally required to disable or kill one, as they are incapable of feeling pain, and generally disregard any injury that isn't sufficiently destructive to physically hobble them. Only light anti-vehicle weapons or larger are generally guaranteed to disable an exotae with a single hit, and these are rarely available on the extremely short notice the creatures tend to provide of their pending attacks.

If the tendency of the exotae to shred and consume pestersome victims who insist on resisting a bit too effectively is disturbing, what the creatures do to those brought back to their hive is exponentially more so. Unlike virtually every other known sapient species, exotae are not born as complete living organisms. Instead, they are born from the living flesh of the hive as a

collection of sections resembling skin-tight pieces of dark gray clothing adorned with chunks of off-white, chitinous armor. An errant suit might well be mistaken as a suit of inert organic armor by the uneducated or unwary. These suits are far from inert, however. Their true nature is only revealed as the pieces are put on, and the exotae make very sure that each and every one of their captives gets themselves forced into a full set at the earliest possibly opportunity.

Each captive acquired during an exotae attack is placed into a small, private, pressurized node near the center of the hive. While still consumed by the black bliss, their clothing is completely removed by claw, flesh sparing acid, or both. Once this is complete, they awake from their dream, floating in zero gravity, completely naked, and held firmly in the grasp of two of their exotae captors.

Where resistance was death outside the hive, within the hive resistance is actively encouraged by the exotae. They seem to delight in each captive's attempts to free themselves, and escape the ministrations of the third exotae present, who's sole duty is to force the victim to allow it to surround her with the suit's five separate sections. In what seems to be a purely masochistic tendency, the arms and legs are forced on first, giving the captive a considerable boost to arm and leg strength, as well as access to the same chitinous claws as her captors. Only then will the creature attempt to apply the core bodysuit, which splits open at the neck and shoulders for 'easy entry'.

The moment any section of an exotae suit is fully in place upon a captive's body, it instantly adheres to the covered area of skin. In a process that most describe as both deeply unsettling and decidedly uncomfortable, the section numbs and then rapidly digests the affected body part. As the flesh dissolves, the nutrients released fuel the development of entirely new muscles, structures, and internal organs. These replace the consumed originals with such rapidity that no particularly noticeable interruption of the wearer's life

processes occurs, regardless of exactly what is being 'transformed'.

Each section of the exotae suit provides its victim with some immediate tangible benefits. Further benefits come from combinations of sections. The core bodysuit increases its victim's health and endurance by three standard relative levels (SRLs) each. The arms each increase their victim's overall strength and agility by one SRL, while legs each increase the victim's overall strength by one SRL, and movement speed by two SRLs. Core and arms together increase the victim's upper body strength by an additional one SRL, while core and legs increase lower body strength by an additional one SRL. A full suit allows the victim to fly in zero gravity in almost arbitrary fashion with a movement SRL six levels higher than ground movement. It also allows the victim to run on all fours, adding an additional two SRLs to ground movement.

Once suiting is complete, each captive is snatched by a tentacle and held down on a leather mound while their exotae captors exit the node. They remain bound until all of the other victims of the same attack are fully suited. Once this is done, the mound opens up into an orifice, and the tentacle drags the captive through, and tosses them into a larger, communal node with all of their fellow victims.

In the presence of any being of compatible physical gender, a exotae suit victim's desire to copulate is considerable. In the presence of another compatible suit victim, the desire becomes an overpowering compulsion. This need to procreate has nothing to do with actual procreation, however. Instead, it is both the principle means by which the hive judges which prospective new members are worthy, and by which the formation of the final suit element, the head, is triggered.

Each captive within the central node is largely judged by the number of times he or she can successfully copulate with their fellow captives, though some may enter the node with an advantage over others. The two of each physical gender who resisted being forced into their exotae

suits most fiercely are treated as if they had already copulated twice. If they were particularly fierce, but gave in as the core bodysuit was nearly in position, they might be counted as having an additional copulation.

Beyond the initial pre-judgement, each copulation with a unique individual would carry a high degree of weight. Repeat copulations with a single individual would count far less. Fighting to access a new mate would add a bit of a bonus to a successful copulation.

After about twenty minutes, a tentacle will lash out into the communal node and drag the least successful individual into a fleshy mouth, inside which they will be rapidly, and painlessly dissolved into pure nutrients. For every ten minutes thereafter, the tentacle takes a new victim. If a particular captive is the last of their physical gender in the node, then they will get a free pass from that point forward. The process will only end when roughly a third of the group, or only one of each physical gender remain, whichever is larger.

As the hive judges its new prospects, their suits begin to grow up around their heads. Each successful copulation advances the growth two or three centimeters. At first this growth spreads up the back and over the top, until it reaches about a third of the way down the captive's forehead. After this, the growth spreads over the sides, and stops only when it's covered about half of the captive's cheeks. If the hive hasn't had its fill of unworthy prospects yet, no further growth will take place.

Once the hive is done consuming unwanted captives, the growth of the suit over each captive's face will recommence. It only takes a few further copulations to cover the captive's face and form the 'hatchet' in front of it. The final transformation of the captive's head is thus triggered, in the same manner as the original sections transformed the remainder of their body.

The new exotae can feel her brain dissolving in an intensely visceral kaleidoscope of brightly colored smells, meaty tasting sounds, and the terrifying feel of the newly completed body that her rapidly liquefying gray matter now inhabits. Despite the nature of the physical process, the new monster does not experience death. Instead, what was simply dissolved into what now is. All personality and memory is gone, replaced by the initial genetic memory common to all exotae. As this process completes, the physical and mental ratings effectively reset to those common to all newly created exotae. As a last act in the new creature's intensely physical drama, its organs of physical gender dissolve, leaving it completely sexless.

New exotae almost always join their older companions in hibernation, unless another raid is about to begin. It is believed that all wild exotae hibernate for the majority of the lives in order to pass time and conserve resources. Exotae are believed to live up to 80 years, though the exact lifespan of exotae in the wild is uncertain.

Every so often, the exotae will leave one or more of their suits in places where random interlopers might discover them. This is generally done in places where an actual attack would be too dangerous, but where the hive's desire to snare victims into some manner of exotae existence is just too great to completely ignore. As a result, quite a number of such suits have found their way onto the open market over the years, for better or for worse.

While most of these stray exotae suits vanish into the hands of anonymous buyers, with unknown results, a few brave souls periodically don a suit 'for science'. It is from these individuals that information about the physical sensations of the resulting transfiguration has been gained, but their rare, individual experiences have inevitably raised more questions than answers. Copulation with any partner is sufficient to bring their transformation to completion. The resulting 'free' exotae still loses all vestige of their former selves, and becomes an entirely new being. Unlike their wild counterparts, however, free exotae have far more civilized inclinations.

Free exotae lack any of the bestial tendencies which define their wild siblings. They possess an innate, rudimentary ability to communicate, conducted through psychically projected impressions and emotions. At the same time, they seem to lack the ability to manipulate the minds of others, or perhaps merely the lack of any inclination to do so. They are capable of working certain jobs and can live the sort of 'normal' life that such beings of limited learned knowledge and ability to communicate can be helped to live in modern society.

Exotae suits can periodically be acquired for the considerable sum of €25,000 in the shadier regions of the open market. XenoExotic has a standing offer of €100,000 each for up to ten individuals willing to don a suit and copulate to completion on film.

FEY'LI

Sapient Species, Humanoid, Feline Descendant

Of the known sapient races in the Maurae Galaxy, the feline humanoid fey'li are by far the most numerous, and by far the most politically powerful. Originating from the world of Fey'lin, at the heart of the civilized core of known space, the fey'li Empress rules over an empire of more than 10 trillion people dispersed over 250 homeworld, 1,450 rural, and 2,720 colony class planets on the southeastern galactic quadrant. The fey'li comprise roughly 30% of the Imperial population, a percentage that has been slowly increasing for almost a millennia owing to their relatively high reproduction rate.

On average, male fey'li stand between 1.6 and 1.9 meters tall, and are very muscular. Female fey'li stand between 1.4 and 1.8 meters tall and generally have a built somewhere between athletic and smoothly curved. Owing to fey'li metabolism, they rarely become overweight, but do require considerably more food per unit mass than most other humanoids in order to maintain a healthy physique.

Fey'li natural lifespan is approximately 900 years. Both sexes show little sign of aging after reaching what most could consider 'middle age'. The average cause of death is simply getting tired of life, and fading away peacefully.

Fey'li fur coloration generally follows typical 'wildcat' patterns. The most common patterns are leopard, cougar, lynx, and lion. Somewhat less common are tiger, caracal, and jaguar patterns. Rarer are snow leopard, black leopard, and 'reverse' or 'black' tiger patterns. Fur patterns are generally passed down maternally, though occasional 'flukes' will result in paternal fur patterns being passed on, or even sometimes a fur pattern possessed by an ancestor within 4 prior generations.

Fey'li have a disparate birthrate relative to sex. For every male, there are roughly eleven females born. This has led to the cultural acceptance of

multiple or 'pride' marriage structures, typically involving 2-6 females forming a pride, generally, though not always, with a single male. Ever since the fey'li encountered other species, non-fey'li have been welcomed into prides, and mix prides are now the rule, rather than a rare exception.

Female fey'li do not require the participation of a male to become pregnant, and can induce pregnancy which results in a virtual clone of the mother. Lactation is continuous, beginning roughly at the age of maturity and continuing for life. Sexual endurance is quite notable, and copulation can go on until exhaustion and/or dehydration caused by constant lubricant production sets in.

Male fey'li are also notable for their sexual endurance. They can mate with several partners in succession, several times per day. As a result, and given the ratio of males to females, male fey'li are quite uncommon to see 'in the wild', as they're generally 'too busy' to be out and about running the world on a day-to-day basis.

Culturally, fey'li are far more open to exotic physical experience than most races in general. Physical transformation, even permanent transformation, has been common enough to be culturally acceptable for millennia. In modern times, this cultural attitude has become rather more publicly prominent with the legalization of domestic and foreign purveyors of such experience marketing their wares directly to Imperial citizens, within the Empire itself. Up to 100 million fey'li seek out such experiences each year, acts which are generally triggered by an early tiring with their current life, and seeking some alternative exotic enough to satisfy the need for a life that's sufficiently different.

GORGON

Sapient Species, Humanoid, Serpent Descendant, Petrification Peril

The Gorgons of Gorgenna are arguably the most terrifyingly dangerous humanoid species in the whole of the Fey'li Empire. At the same time, they're also totally undeserving of their reputation for 'killing' anyone who so much as locks eyes with them. No visitor ever returns from the arid, largely desert covered world alive. At least not in any recognizable sense of the word. That isn't the gorgons' fault, of course. They just can't help it.

Gorgons all appear as women of average to tall height, with pleasingly attractive physical proportions. Their skin is pale lavender, marked by patches of darker speckles on their backs, over their shoulders and upper arms, and down their rumps and outer thighs. Their eyes are said to be glowing purple, though no one has survived to say for sure, and technologically acquired imagery is always too distorted to tell for certain.

Rather than hair, a gorgon's head is covered with a crop of prehensile tentacles with serpent-like 'mouths' on each end. This gives the appearance of a head covered with snakes, though they are in fact equipped with two types of glands that present the first of their natural born perils. The tentacles always emit a lovely, jasmine scent that ensures their environment is quite pleasantly perfumed at all times. This odor includes powerful pheromones which serve to relax most other sapient humanoid species, but have no effect on gorgons themselves. Each tentacle can also spit a spray of much more powerful chemicals which tend to cause fascination with the gorgon, making it almost certain for the victim to gaze into the gorgon's eyes, should the gorgon turn their head in the victim's direction.

Anyone who looks directly into a gorgon's eyes finds themselves irresistibly compelled into instantly shift into a stable pose. In the next instant, with a sudden, hissing pop, their body is flash-transformed into solid marble. Gorgons

themselves are immune to this effect, unless they willingly, actively submit to it.

Being petrified by a gorgon is not actually a fatal experience. It is merely the manner that nature has provided to allow gorgons to trap and preserve an important means of supplementary sustenance. A gorgon is able to feed off the soul energy of their own petrified victims, as long as they're within a few hundred meters. They can also share this energy with other gorgons by channeling energy the energies of their own victims through themselves.

Sharing energy is one of the core elements of gorgon society. Barring accidental death, all gorgons give themselves up for petrification, typically offering themselves to those in their community who lack their own statues to feed from in communal submissions that take place every month. If there are already enough statues to go around, they instead offer themselves to esteemed individuals within their community. These powerful individuals act as keepers of society's food reserves. They are expected to share their collections during the cyclical famines caused by the orbits of Gorgenna's two moons, an essential act that means the difference between survival and the total extinction of the species.

The rarer the type of marble that any given gorgon victim is made of, the more intrinsically powerful the victim's soul, and the more energy that each of a gorgon's victims can provide over the course of one day's time. The most common material of the marble statues are white with soft gray streaks. Uncommon are white with a web of distinct, dark gray inclusions. Rare are white with dark green inclusions. Very rare are dark gray with distinct white inclusions. Extremely rare are black with distinct white inclusions, or green with white inclusions. Extraordinary are black with golden inclusions. Legendary are green with golden inclusions.

According to the gorgons' own reckoning, if a full meal consists of 100 points of energy, then

a common victim provides 1 point per day, uncommon 2, rare 4, very rare 10, extremely rare 25, extraordinary 50, and legendary 100. All victims can be 'sucked on' for more energy, but there is a risk of placing the victim into a state of dormancy, or even killing them. Doubling the energy draw creates an 80-20 chance of 3-30 days dormancy or death. Tripling the energy draw creates a 50-50 chance of 3-60 days dormancy or death. Quadrupling energy draw creates a 20-80 chance of 5-100 days or dormancy or death. Quintupling the energy draw means certain death.

While the marble of a gorgon victim's petrified body is virtually indestructible, it will deteriorate over time, eaten away by the soul energy which flows to the gorgon who created it. Only the base material slowly dissolves. For common victims, this means all of the material, but for others the distinct inclusions remain intact and hold their shape. As the base material vanishes, this leaves behind a very different kind of statue consisting of an open web of intensely colored stone. Drawing extra energy accelerates the process.

Over a normal lifespan, a common statue will last for about 20 years, uncommon 50 years, rare 100 years, very rare 250 years, extremely rare 750 years, extraordinary 1500 years, and legendary 5000 years. Every double draw dissolves the equivalent of 1% of the statue's maximum lifespan. Triple draws dissolve 5%. Quadruple draws dissolve 25%. Quintuple draws dissolve 100%. Once the statue's base material is 100% dissolved, the subject's soul peacefully departs the mortal realm.

Gorgon statues have no senses besides a dull sense of touch, and a purely mental sense of the connection between themselves and their maker. No communication can take place, but it does offer a certain comforting companionship to the captive soul. They have no awareness of other statues the gorgon has created, nor are they aware if their gorgon is sharing their energy with another.

When a gorgon is themselves petrified, or should they die beforehand, their own statues automatically connect to their creator's eldest

daughter. If there are no living daughters, the statues will randomly link to other nearby gorgons. If there are no gorgons within the normal feeding range, the statues will go dormant until a gorgon approaches within range.

Gorgons have extraordinary metabolisms, and their bodies are highly efficient at recycling wastes back into nutrients using the soul energy they absorb. They aren't completely without need for physical sustenance, however. They require at least half a normal meal a day to survive so long as they have sufficient soul energy available. In times of plenty, they will consume a much larger proportion of their diet as physical food. In times of famine, they will try to get by on half a meal. If those in any given community can't manage this, then enough will sacrifice themselves for the common good, as noted above, to reduce burden on the physical food supply, and to supplement the soul energy available to their family and neighbors.

Due to the gorgon's potent natural hazards, their people have had little useful direct contact with the outside world, even though they've been part of the Fey'li Empire for over five hundred years. This was arranged as much to prevent unacceptable intrusions onto Gorgenna by unscrupulous actors as it was to consolidate a previously unaligned territory sitting in the heart of Imperial space. That hasn't prevented countless visitors going to the planet in hopes of partaking of the exotic culture, all with very predictable results.

The reputation of the gorgons for hostility toward outsiders has been moderated in recent years thanks to the more open attitudes toward xenoexperience in general. Gorgenna is no longer the only world where visitors are free to come, but never to leave. That said, only a trickle of xenoexperience tourists make their way to nearby Gorgenna, while millions upon millions are willing to travel far to the edges of the Empire to offer themselves up to the rowa. Though the latter are much more active in making sure that no visitors ever leave their

home worlds, the passive, natural qualities of the gorgons seem so much more insidious that significant suspicion about their motivations remains.

The development of biogel has triggered a change to the typical gorgon equation. When a gorgon gets themselves a suit of biogel, it automatically covers their eyes. They can still see perfectly well, but it blocks their petrifying power. This has allowed at least a few dozen gorgons to visit other worlds, and experience other societies. Perils still remain, however, and it is quite common for even biogel clad gorgons to amass a small collection of statues as they live their lives beyond Gorgenna.

A biogel clad gorgon can, with considerable effort, cause their biogel suit to thin enough over their eyes to allow for petrification. However, due to the nature of the biogel, it will only work on victims who deliberately focus into the gorgon's eyes for at least ten seconds. The kiss of a gorgon can also be petrifying. This occurs when more than a few drops of fresh saliva make their way into the victim's mouth. While the victim is instantly compelled to take a stable pose, the petrification itself isn't instantaneous. It generally begins at the tips of the victim's lower extremities, and spreads upwards over the course of 3-5 minutes. Due to the more more physically intimate nature of this sort of interaction, the gorgon runs a risk of becoming entangled with the victim in such a way that freedom might actually require sucking their souls straight into the realms beyond.

All of a gorgon's other body fluids have a similar effect to their saliva, should they be extracted through the biogel suit. These effects can even survive most forms of processing, resulting in events like the Mashiva Mariners' University Cheese Incident. During this even, seven students and sixteen of their personal guests were petrified by 'gorgonzolla' cheese made from the collected milk of a gogron student, who'd been doing it because she'd heard fey'li and some others did it and wanted to fit in. She'd forgotten to mark the container with a warning, however, and ended up with quite a collection of statues to fill her private

room, and much larger 'museum space' in the subbasement of the library as well.

Anyone can travel to Gorgenna, though it may be difficult to find a ship that's willing to land on the world. The best bet is to get a passenger billet on a postal freighter, though a few small charter vessels advertise one-way trips in hopes that xenoexperience tourism to the world will take off at some point. The natives generally stay clear of the landing points themselves, trusting on automated freight systems to take care of unloading and primary sorting. A few enterprising communities have set up little 'temples' adjacent to the landing points, where visitors can approach safely, spend a little time seeing the sights from a safe distance, and then enter 'ritual' chambers where natives in need of new statues for their collection await.

MITANNI

Sapient Species, Humanoid, Sheep Descendant

When it comes to the cultural expression of bold individual overconfidence, the people of Mitan are arguably the most consistently exuberant of practitioners. Competitive to a fault, most mitanni see almost everything as a challenge to be faced down, often regardless of the consequences. While this has served them fairly well in the interstellar sphere, it has also led to near disaster one more than one occasion.

The mitanni people are genetic descendants of a long extinct species of woolly mountain sheep native to their home world Mitan. The defining features of the mitanni are cloven hooves, long tufted tails, and ram horn which can rapidly regenerate should they be damaged or lost. Both sexes are tall, standing between 1.9 and 2.2 meters in height, on average. They are generally well built, though they are notable for having a softer physique that hides their powerful muscles.

All mitanni have skin colors that range from pale aqua to deep violet. Unlike many sapient species, skin color isn't tied to genetic heritage, but rather develops over time dependent on the climate in which they were raised. Colder climates produce colors both pale and toward the aqua end of the hue range. Temperate climates produce blues and purples of middling intensity. Hot climates produce darker purples and violets. These color ranges hold true even for mitanni raised in areas with modern interior climate control. Mitanni raised in purely technological environments, such as aboard a space station tend to come out in the temperate color range.

The color of mitanni hair, tail tufts, and the hair above their hooves is tied to skin color. It will generally be darker in color, and trend in the direction of violet on the color scale. Thus an aqua mitanni may have a dark shade of light blue, and a blue mitanni may have a dark shade of purple hair. Violet mitanni typically have dark violet hair, though for some the color tends to approach more of a very dark pink.

Male mitanni are covered in a thick, curly white wool that needs to be shorn every few months to keep it from interfering with daily life. Their ram horns tend to be much larger than those of females. They come much closer together on the forehead, and the tips of the horns extend well in front of the face.

Female mitanni have no wool coat. Instead, they have long, lush hair on their heads as well as patches around their ankles. Their ram horns are smaller. Female mitanni are often inclined to style their horns much like they style their hair. Various methods are available, thanks to their horns' rapid regeneration ability. Most common are curved horns which roll back over the head, or run back and upward at a shallow angle. Far less common are handlebar horns, as they are often associated with the sort of submissiveness that mitanni culture abhors.

Generally speaking, mitanni culture is fairly 'normal' when compared to other major Fey'li Empire cultures. There are few hazards to unwary visitors to Mitan that aren't equally present in places like Ashir or Fey'lin. These generally come from various expressions of naive, foolish individual boldness which a visitor might get caught up in should they dare to suggest that they're as bold, or bolder, than the natives. With luck, this only involves getting embarrassed in some conventional way. Being that mitanni are well known for their taste for xenoexperience, however, there's also a fair chance that proving one's boldness might require acts that one might otherwise never contemplate.

Most believe that this aspect of mitanni culture dates back to the time when the key'vin'ta ruled Mitan. As with ever other sapient species that the key'vin'ta conquered, they were exposed to a high degree of conditioning. This was largely focused on enforcing the idea that everything their alien masters desired was desirable to them as well, no matter how outrageous or personally perilous.

It was the key'vin'ta who introduced the worship of the Nine Heavenly Hells to the mitanni as the ultimate part of the conditioning process. They came to believe that it was the ultimate afterlife, to be actively sought after regardless of the consequences. Of all those who the key'vin'ta used to power their temples, the mitanni were inevitably the most enthusiastic when given the chance, as it was a one way ticket straight to the Hells. So enthusiastic were they, that when the key'vin'ta removed themselves from the mortal realm in the 'Great Extinction', more than half the population of Mitan followed them.

In current times, the culture which the key'vin'ta imposed upon the mitanni tends to express itself in various games of fate. Xenoexperiences are partaken of by chance, or toyed with via various forms of peril play. Most of the time, these games are informal things done by individuals or small groups in an effort to see if they're really 'mitanni' enough for a place in the Hells. At other times, more formal acts might take place, including the use of religiously blessed dice who's roll upon encountering some xenoexperience will decide what the holder of the die is to do.

More recently, The Biogel Games have given mitanni an outlet for their competitiveness that satisfies their itch for imposing fates on willing individuals just like the key'vin'ta once imposed fates upon them. Biogel in general has allowed other sorts of competitive games to take on new, highly perilous aspects. As various other forms of xenoexperience become more commonplace, they too get added to the mix. Favorites include zexta jewelery, various rowa transformations, and even von'kin shrivelling.

One might encounter mitanni anywhere in the Fey'li Empire, but they are most prevalent in the Mitanni and Marian Drift Prefectures. Avoiding involvement in mitanni boldness culture is generally as simple as keeping one's opinion to one's self. This can become much more difficult with mitanni friends, as friends of the mitanni are often considered to have willingly made themselves part of mitanni culture.

NANITCH

Sapient Species, Nanite, Transformation Peril

Often classified as one of the known galaxy's most exotic life forms, the nanitch are a species of non-organic, mono-synthacell organisms. Individually, these artificial, microscopic carbon-silicon organisms are capable of basic movement on dry, smooth surfaces, or through most liquids using their dozens of tentacle-like mechanical cilia. They also have a very high resistance to caustic and acidic substances, high heat, electrical discharge, and ionizing radiation. As a defensive mechanism, they are also able to change their outer coloration at will, typically choosing one that allows them to blend in with their environment.

Nanitch gain their energy from a combination of heat and light. They can store a relatively significant amount of energy for their size, and can remain fully active for days in the absence of an energy source. Should that absence extend too long, they will go dormant. Once a source of energy is provided, it takes about ten minutes for them to fully charge up their internal 'capacitors' and become active again.

The one overriding motivation of all nanitch is to find other nanitch to combine with, and thereby create more usefully functional forms. As a basic ball of nanitch grows, it becomes more intelligent as each constituent nanitch adds its own capability to the whole. Initially, this ball can only take on more complex shapes that it has observed within its own vicinity. These are hardly perfect reproductions in any respect, and each form will carry with it the unique, bio-mechanical aspects that make any nanitch form instantly identifiable.

Once a mass of nanitch reaches a 'critical mass' of about 150,000 individuals, it can communicate with other nanitch masses of similar or larger size. At this point, a hive mind is formed, and the constituent nanitch will begin to create shapes that best fulfill the needs of the whole. Typically, the hive takes on a form most appropriate for

interaction with local sapient organic organisms, both to help establish itself as non-threatening part of its local environment, and to facilitate its growth. The nanitch hive located on a disused farm plot west of Runai appears to be a collection of bizarrely shaped, metallic gray mounds surrounding a tall, central, egg-shaped edifice. Numerous bio-mech humanoids can be found both within, and periodically wandering the locale in a reasonable imitation of their organic neighbors.

Should a nanitch form face a significant threat to its existence, it can separate in various, virtually arbitrary degrees in an effort to escape. As the nanitch lose intellectual ability the smaller their collective form(s) gets, this act is generally one of final desperation. This loss of intellectual capacity includes the permanent loss of collective memory. While the memories of a proper hive will be retained by the rest of the hive, should all aspects of the hive separate beneath the level of critical mass, all of the hive's collective memories will be lost.

Due to the fundamental impermanence of their intellectual ability, including the outward appearance of sapience with respect to their collective combinations, the nanitch form no genuine attachment to anything other than their own species, and their innate 'desire' to live. As a result, and though individual collectives of nanitch are able to develop what appear to be unique personalities, it is often argued that they are not genuinely sapient, and only imitating the variety present among their organic neighbors. Their generally cold, completely mechanistic treatment of those neighbors as resources for the hive's support and growth does little to help combat this sentiment. Even so, and despite almost a century of considerable fearmongering, they are considered 'organisms of alternative sapience' by the Feyli Empire. This provides them with full rights while in forms of critical mass or larger, and certain protective rights when not.

Nanitch found in forms lower than critical mass are typically collected and delivered to an already established hive whenever found. Groups of nanitch splitting off from a hive that has exceeded its realistic maximum size must obtain approval to establish a new hive. Depending on the locale, this may be as simple as obtaining property and getting a rubber stamp approval by the local administration, or as difficult as jumping through months worth of bureaucratic hoops before getting a local zoning exception.

Nanitch communicate 'telepathically' with organic sapient organisms. Direct stimulus of the auditory organs via hundreds of focused, sub-audible vibratory emissions is the mechanism used. This is highly effective, but precludes humanoid nanitch collectives from speaking to more than one person at a time. Generally, only within the hive's 'buildings' can the nanitch that form them create a more generalized audible emission, filling the space with arbitrary sound waves. Often this takes the form of soft, melodic tones. Whether or not this constitutes music or has some other function is a matter open for debate.

While the nanitch are benign at best, and perhaps a bit of a nuisance at worst, they do require living organisms in order to reproduce. While there is no definitive answer as to why, the most popular theory suggests that those who created the species desired to force anyone wanting to expand the number of nanitch to sacrifice themselves to facilitate the process. The one feature common to all nanitch hives, no matter the form or size of it, is the so-called 'nanitch pump', the structure via which sapient beings are typically physically converted into a shape consisting of roughly five billion nanitch.

The nanitch pump looks like lumpy-rimmed abscess in the floor of the hive's conversion chamber. While much of the hive is dark, metallic gray, the interior of the pump is almost silvery. Should a sapient being stand on this interior surface, it grows around its lower legs, back and arms in a virtual instant, raising its subject up into a semi-seated position while inserting nanitch injectors into his or her lower body

orifices. Hundreds of thousands of nanitch are released into the subject's body, converting flesh into more nanitch in a surreal, completely painless process that, more often than not, takes the form of the subject being transformed into a humanoid shaped nanitch collective similar to those already present in the hive.

Though the nanitch have no value whatsoever for the living mind of a subject being converted into more nanitch, they take considerable care to preserve it, and absorb its qualities into the hive mind. About half way through the subjects conversion, tendrils are inserted into his or her ears, and nanitch injected directly into the brain. These transfer all aspects of the conscious mind into the collective mind of the hive, where its constituent parts are picked through for anything the hive might find useful enough to retain.

Subjects converted to nanitch do not die, as evidenced by the lack of life essence 'flare' which always occurs when a living mind snaps back from the mortal dimension and returns to its fundamental plane of existence. However, exactly what happens to that still living stream of conscious thought is unclear. Whether or not a subject becomes one individual nanitch, or lives on as part of the hive's own consciousness is unknown. The only evidence thus far observed is the tendency of the resulting humanoid nanitch collective, when allowed to remain as such by the hive, to exhibit periodic behaviors suggestive that the source organism's mind is somehow specifically attached to it, and at least partially in control.

The nanitch do not specifically advertise their desire for subjects to be converted into more nanitch. They will, however, try to lure in individuals they encounter near the hive. At no point will they try to force individuals to step into a nanitch pump, or prevent them from leaving. Instead, they try to convince them to do so willingly. Words are the preferred method, though more recently, the nanitch have taken to decorating their hive's interior

with enticing, suggestive shapes. Several hives, including the one west of Runai, have taken to embedding humanoid nanitch collectives into the hive walls in poses often quite a bit more than just suggestive. Quite recently, this décor has been expanded to include unconverted organic subjects kept in a state of pleasurable bliss purely for the viewing pleasure of visitors who might be enticed into conversion.

The Runai hive acquires its organic décor by paying subjects for 2, 4, and 6 week stays. The hive gets a portion of the money to pay for these willing artworks through grants from the Imperial ExoLife Assistance Administration's ExoLife Cultural Promotion Fund. This provides sufficient funds for the maintenance of over five hundred such positions, making the hive quite a successful tourist attraction. What isn't paid for by the Fund is more than made up for by the tips offered by visitors.

Pay to become a living artwork in the Runai Hive is ¢1,400 for a 2 week stay, ¢3,200 for a 4 week stay, and ¢7,500 for a 6 week stay. Artworks can decline release at the end of their contract, and will automatically be considered into a new contract of the same terms as the first. When an artwork ends their time in hive, they are both paid and won't be able to take another contract for 6 weeks. Should an artwork remain within the hive for 18 continuous, uninterrupted weeks, they are so mind-numbed from the perpetual pleasure than they are incapable of resisting the contracts stipulation that they be converted into nanitch should the remain for that length of time.

VON'KIR

Sapient Species, Humanoid, Unknown Ancestry, Innate Transdimensional Power Peril

Few peoples throughout the annals of recorded history send shivers down the typical civilized persons spine than the ancient 'conqueror' race known as the von'kir. Their vast interstellar civilization once directly ruled nearly a sixth of the galaxy, and had established enclaves throught the remainder. Fundamental to their power was their innate ability to directly manipulate transdimensional power with their bodies and minds. Few could resist such sorcery, especially when it was applied in the manner for which the von'kir are still quite famous.

Von'kir of all sexes are nearly identical to the unaccustomed eye. They stand around 2 to 2.2 meters tall and are so slender that they appear slightly emaciated. Their skin is invariably a bland shade of slightly greenish gray. Darker speckles cover their bald cranium, shoulders, upper chest, back, and outer thighs. Their eyes are large and black, while their noses are so flat that they form a bridge between their eyes and little else. Once they achieve adulthood at the age of 25, their appearance does not change at all during their 350 year lifespan.

The only features which distinguish the von'kir sexes are their specific sex based organs. Male von'kir have flat chests, knobby testicles, and a penis that is long and quite leathery looking when erect. Female von'kir have small breasts with knobby nipples, and a shriveled, tight, and very dry vagina. Epicine von'kir have female breasts paired with male testicles and penis, or a flat chest with a female's genitalia.

Male von'kir are born to be soldiers. They have no other role in von'kir society owing to their limited ability to manipulate transdimensional energies without the aid of technology. They only mate with female von'kir. Only 10% of the von'kir are born male.

Female von'kir rule von'kir civilization. They are natural 'sorceresses', able to manipulate

transdimensional energies in a wide variety of ways. They will engage in intimate association with all sexes of von'kir. Only 15% of the von'kir population are born female.

Epicine von'kir make up the vast majority of the von'kir population. Owing to their unusual sexual organ combinations, their reproductive activities need to be far more cooperative than the typical humanoid species. They have a more limited ability to manipulation transdimensional powers than the females, though they do possess one particular power that is unique. Epicine von'kir who are neither pregnant or nursing can change their sex-state from one to the other by meditating for several hours without interruption. Epicine von'kir are also able to use power-enhancement artifacts to permanently transform a captive male or female into an epicine.

Von'kir society is naturally divided into seven castes. On the top are the Magistras, or teachers. Beneath the Magistras are the Sorceresses. Then come the Aquisitors, followed by the Soldiers. Beneath the Soliders are the Jurists. Then come the People. Beneath all this is an undercaste called the Beasts, souls fit only to serve as pets or beasts of burden.

The Magistras form the ruling council of the Von'kir Empire. There can only be 13 of these women at any given time. They are elected from among the Sorceress ranks by the Jurists to serve for 80 years. The Magistras elect one of their own to serve as their head of state. This Empress conducts diplomacy, sees to the administration of the laws, and otherwise acts as the formal mouthpiece for the Magistras.

The Sorceresses are those females who have been found particularly adept in the transdimensional arts. Their role in society is both administrative and supportive. Their magic often takes the place of various technological services including such things as advanced medicine and interplanetary travel. It is said that to become a Sorceress, one must be able to open a portal between worlds without

the aid of technology. Only about 10% of female von'kir can achieve this feat.

Aquisitors are tasked with punishing criminal transgressions at home as well as putting lesser sapient species into their proper caste place abroad. As such, they are the caste most often seen outside the core of von'kir space throughout history. Both male and female von'kir can be promoted to the Aquisitor caste. When working abroad, they may be accompanied by Soldiers, and where portal based travel is required, lead by a Sorceress. Members of the People may also accompany Aquisitors on occasion, generally whenever larger or more complex examples of von'kir artifice are to be transported and assembled. Aquisitors are generally nominated to the role by existing aquisitors, with final approval granted by the Magistra of the district in which the nominated aquisitor is to be initially based.

Soliders are exactly what their name suggests. They form the core of the military strength of Von'kir Empire. Ancient tradition told that only male von'kir could become Soldiers, though the necessities of interstellar conquest meant that epicine von'kir would eventually be accepted as well. A display of prowess during martial skill training and testing is required for formal nomination to this caste. Nominees are initially approved by a Sorceress in charge of the nominee's training establishment, and confirmed by the council of Magistras. This caste is prohibited to female von'kir.

The Jurist caste sees to the administration of justice among the von'kir people. Jurists are elected from the People, by the People, to serve in their new caste for a term of 20 years. Unlike Magistras, Jurists can be reelected for up to 7 terms throughout their adult life. Only Jurists are permitted to sit as judges of the law, act as prosecutors, lawyers, or directors of the domestic police. So long as a Jurist administers the letter of the law correctly, their decisions cannot be appealed to any higher caste. As such, they are the only caste with power over their superiors, serving as a powerful check and balance against corruption.

The People are, quite simple, the von'kir people. All are born into this caste and, barring election to the Jurists, or promotion to a higher caste, all remain in this caste. Unlike many other caste cultures, there is absolutely no stigma associated with belonging to this 'lowest' normal caste.

The Beasts, or Shrivs in the von'kir tongue, are twisted sexless abominations produced by exposing a sapient being to raw von'kir magical energy. They appear as emaciated, gray skinned versions of their former selves. They remember little of their former lives, reduce in intelligence to the point of being more animal than person. Humanoid victims are generally kept as status symbol pets, while more sturdy victims are used for various forms of basic physical labor. Despite appearances, and the lack of any status or standing accorded to the Beasts, von'kir law prohibits overwork or other harmful abuse.

To the average observer, von'kir society at home might seem almost normal, if not outright pleasant. Public services are expansive and totally free. Freedoms are many, and what laws there are are about as far from onerous as one might hope to get and still have an orderly civil society. Goods are plenty. Poverty is virtually non-existent. Crime is extremely low. However...

The course of von'kir conquest and the spread of enclaves throughout the galaxy did not come from any of the normal domestic pressures that generally lead to such activity. Instead, and quite curiously, it was the result of a vicious cycle of 'keeping up the Joneses'. As society advanced into modernity, items that were once luxuries only available to the higher castes became available to all. One luxury that didn't, at least initially, was the ability to own a former criminal turned Beast. They were so few and far between that only Sorceresses had any hope of acquiring one.

As the von'kir expanded using their portal magic and fairly traditional means, they soon found themselves in conflict with other sapient

peoples. The von'kir inevitably looked down on these magic-less people, and it wasn't long before they were viewed as being little better than Beasts. A bit of barbaric refusal to submit to von'kir took was all it took before they really were considered Beasts.

Natives captured in battle were transformed into Beasts, at first by the few Sorceresses that accompanied the Soldiers during their conquests. When the Soldiers started coming home with their own Beasts, often given as rewards for bravery, it created an expectation that those going to other worlds would be bringing home their own as a matter of course. Rules on which natives could be transformed were quickly relaxed to ensure that every Soldier had a chance to obtain their own shriveled beast.

What happened next led to a veritable orgy of transformation. If Soldiers could have beasts, then what about the People who went along to support them? And if those People could have Beasts, then what about the rest of the People? Surely they deserved the ability since all of von'kir society was supporting the conquests in some way or another.

The Magistras soon issued an edict that declared that any *people* who resisted von'kir rule were to be deemed Beasts. It would be up to specifically assigned Aquisitors to decide exactly what the word 'people' actually meant. Did it mean a village? A province? A whole species?

The Magistras also changed just how Beasts were to be distributed among von'kir society. Criminals were now to be given over to their victims, or to a randomly selected victim or their heirs in the case where more than one victim existed. Beasts created from other peoples were to be given as rewards to those who had conquered them, with any surplus sent home. Half of these were to be auctioned off to the People, with the other half distributed by lottery. A bonus was offered to Aquisitors who oversaw any surplus, paid out from a portion of the auction proceeds.

The bonus policy virtually ensured that there would always be an ample surplus of new Beasts to try and satisfy the hunger of the People for

these formerly exclusive status symbols. The von'kir began to push further and further away from their home. Their own numbers ballooned, while supplies of combative natives began to dwindle.

In an effort to get around the Magistras' limitation that only resisting peoples could be deemed Beasts, the Aquisitors began a campaign to convince natives to declare themselves Beasts. This effort took the form of a new 'religion' that promoted transformation as an ultimate act transition into a life truly free of all burdens, and especially those of the mind. To this end, the Aquisitors began to establish small colonial enclaves wherever they found a planet with sapient natives. Conflict was deliberately avoided, and numerous methods were deployed to convince the natives to offer themselves to the powers of the many magical artifacts which the von'kir had brought with them.

Natives were initially exposed to relatively benign von'kir magics. Healing was a particular draw to the 'temples'. Once there, they natives would face highly effective psychological tactics to help desensitize them to the idea of being physically transformed. Such transformation was never forced. Natives were required to initiate the process themselves. They were never told the truth about what the effects really were, and where they were going to wind up once it was complete, though outright trickery to get them to come into contact with an appropriate artifact was strictly prohibited.

What is now called The Civilized Core of Galactic Space, including what is now the Fey'li Empire, only saw von'kir enclaves established on its worlds. Exactly where the core of von'kir civilization was, and presumably still is, located is unknown. What is known is that the von'kir enclaves were in frequent conflict with the Key'vin'ta Empire and its own expansion plans. This kept the von'kir from establishing themselves well enough to weather the later storm of technological advancement and encounters with other sapient races with

innate transdimensional energy abilities. By the time of the formal formation of the Fey'li Empire, the von'kir had been gone from the Core for nearly a thousand years.

More recently, a number of von'kir have appeared on the frontiers. It is speculated that these are scouts, Aquisitors looking for new sources of Beasts to sate the appetite of a possibly resurgent Von'kir Empire. Few have lingered for very long, though at least one has settled herself into a home in the dark underbelly of Mashiva's Old City. Once a peril threatening only careless urban explorers and naive respondents to esoteric advertisements, she has recently become more open about her activities. No one is really sure what might have prompted this change, though no one can deny that she's found considerable success.

Currently, Mashiva is the only place where one can predictably encounter a von'kir, though their magical artifacts are located throughout the Core. Many are in museums, private collections, or in preserved temples. Others can be found in temple ruins, and a few can even be found in the most random of places.