





by

and Bill Bridges





VOROX }

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Pilgrims:

"Fear not the *Dalswaba*, the thing that walks as Graa Kal, for Father Gar watches over us. So does the Star brighter than all other stars. With its Light, we can hunt in the Dark!"

— Ulogana, *Badaswaba* shaman

"The clawless ones have forgotten the Law taught us by Graa Kal. They are weak and soft, fluttering like chidwits when humans speak. Only we remember the ways of blood and luck and wit. Ways that do not forgive. Ways that reward those who do not fail. We shall not fail!"

— KagongKagong, feral Vorox leader



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Printed in the US of A

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Alustro's Journal: All for One

"And as the stars shine in their multitudes and yet are aspects of the One Flame, so are you now a multitude who are one — angerak mates! Friends until death claims you. Loyal to one another beyond all other ties. Only three oaths are more binding: those to the Pancreator, to the Emperor and to your liege lords. So it is ordained in the Empyrean as well as the Gray Realms of our bodied existence.

"Where before you had but six limbs to devote, now you have 26. Never turn one against the other, but instead clasp them together. Combined, you are mighty. Use your strength of brotherhood to lift great weights from your own souls and those of others who are weak and alone. You shall never be lonely again, for your souls are one even though your spirits be many.

"Clasp hands and walk together into the Light!"

And so we did. Onganggarak led us as we stood in a circle, backs to one another, holding hands as we moved as a group from the shadows of the cathedral into the shaft of light descending from the apex. I blinked as its intensity hit my eyes, and also to hide my tears of pride.

Ong howled in joy and tugged Erian and I toward him, gripping us in a gentle but encompassing hug. Julia, clinging to my left hand, stumbled as I was drawn in, tugging her forward. Sanjuk, clasped to her, also stepped up, as did Cardanzo, holding to her left hand as his left held Erian's right. Erian completed the circle with her left hand clasped to Ong.

The burly Vorox released us and leapt amidst us, hugging the others now as they released their holds on one another. I clapped and the others followed my lead.

Howls and bellows erupted all around us as Count Galagadang's Vorox angerak cheered the union. The count himself laughed heartily from the dais, standing beside Philosophus Wing San-chi, who smiled as he closed the book from which he had read the *Angerakaal*, the ceremony of adult bonding for civilized Vorox, as devised by Archbishop Man-shao centuries ago.

It was a profound honor that Onganggarak had asked us to be his angerak, his bond mates in the most sacred oath a Vorox can make. We had traveled before with a similar privilege, as his *angruwa*, or closest friends. But now he formalized that bond and made it greater and permanent. An adult Vorox's *angwal*, or adult bond, is his most important, the one which will last the rest of his life. His asking us to be part of this bond is a sign of his complete trust and loyalty to us — incredibly rare among humans. How could we refuse?

I looked at Erian and knew that this meant a great deal to her. She had traveled far with Ong and had come to trust him greatly; many times had he saved each of our lives. What's more, she had no vassals but us. For Ong to request this of her was the best of compliments and confirmation of her leadership abilities.

Not all Li Halan — or Known Worlders for that matter — see it as such. To them, this union would surely be considered a joke, a barbaric custom that should have been ended long ago. They understand little of the strength and power the angerak holds for a Vorox. Although it is but a formal ceremony for us, for Ong it is the tying of his soul to ours. I must strive to respect that with all my being. I owe him no less.

As I write this account in the evening, full of food and wine after the feast Ong provided us, I think back on when we met this unique friend.

Was it really five years ago? We had come to Ungavorox seeking Captain Maria Sao-Lui Li Halan, an officer who had once loyally served Erian's father. She had heard of Erian's disenfranchisement and her brother's enmity, and sent word

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that she was safeguarding an heirloom that had belonged to Erian's mother. She had instructions to carry it until the day Erian would need it. That day, she told Erian in her message, had come.

Erian, Cardanzo, Julia and I came to Ungavorox in the *Hardball*, an explorer lent us by Charioteer Director Hendrix on Midian. Actually, he had contracted its use to Julia for certain specified mercantile operations. Ungavorox was not one of the specified destinations. However, we assumed our trip would be short enough that our scheduled trip to Criticorum would not be long delayed. Additionally, Julia's planned purchase of rare Ungavoroxian spices might even prove profitable.

We did not intend to get shot from the sky. As we approached the planet, a pirate vessel assailed us, damaging our maneuver jets. Julia managed to evade them and brought us in for a landing. Unfortunately, it was in the wild jungles, far from our destination of New Kowloon.

Everyone is raised with horror stories about the dangers that Ungavorox's jungles contain. Indeed, even breathing on the world can prove hazardous, as spores and insects lodge themselves in your breathing passages uninvited. Or so we'd heard. That last was exaggerated, but the dangers of predatory plants and animals were quite real.

As we disembarked to examine the damage to our small ship, we each wore breathers and full suits, too paranoid to touch anything. That's when we discovered that the ship was slowly sinking into some primordial mud from which I could not even dislodge the stick I had used to prod it.

Julia and Erian began arguing. Erian was convinced we'd lost our ship and would have to walk through who knew how many kilometers of jungle to reach even an outpost of civilization.

That's when the sharprats attacked.

Or they would have had it not been for Onganggarak. The Vorox's timely arrival to investigate the downed ship saved us from the beasts' assault. He had crept through the spiky grass and surprised their leader before we even realized we weren't alone. The other beasts squealed in surprise and ran back to their den, while Ong casually wiped his bloody glankesh sword on the blades of grass and introduced himself most eloquently to my lady: "What brings a fine lady like you to a swamp like this?"

The well-chosen words and humor were so incongruous I think we all stared in shock and surprise for a moment while Ong's smile (showing no teeth) grew the wider. He knew he had scored one on us.

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After introductions, he offered to help us prevent our ship from succumbing to the dagmush — this mud wasn't mud at all, but a lifeform intent on slowly digesting our hull. He disappeared for a time into the jungle and came back with massive loops of thick vine that resembled hopelessly tangled spider webs wound into a single line. He tied the vines to our ship's cone and then, with Cardanzo's help, tied the other ends to a nearby tree. This, he assured us, would keep the ship from sinking further while we repaired the engines.

As we waited for Julia to fix the damage (only she knew how to tinker with the arcane materials), we spoke at length with our unusual guest. By strange happenstance, he knew of Captain Maria Sao-Lui and could lead us to her in New Kowloon. He was himself a householder for Baron Emilio Cesarus Li Halan, a local lord serving as a liaison between certain Vorox lords and the court of Prince Flavius on Kish. Onganggarak, or Ong as we came to know him, had recently been serving as a go-between for his lord and a group of nomadic ferals who had moved into the wilds adjacent to the lord's fief.

What we did not learn until later was that he was not yet an adult, and had thus not chosen his angwal, or adult angerak. While he pretended that this did not bother him, it was clear that he was lonely. Otherwise, it is doubtful he would have been so friendly to strangers such as us.

It did not take Julia long to patch systems well enough to launch us to New Kowloon, where more extensive repairs could take place. Ong agreed to accompany us, for his lord was visiting the city and he could make a report on his recent time among the ferals in person. First, however, he introduced us to Captain Maria Sao-Lui, who commanded the garrison of Li Halan troops protecting the city.

She spent the next few days reminiscing with Erian about her family, and her mother especially. The details of their talks do not concern my account here. I spent the time with Ong, for he proved an excellent guide of the city. I accompanied him as he reported to his liege, and in doing so raised the curiosity of Baron Cesarus.

He had heard of my lady and her troubles, and after a long tea ceremony, confided in me that the pirates who attacked our vessel were not mere raiders. They were agents of a certain Baron Cornado Li Halan, an ally to Erian's brother. Baron Cesarus knew for a fact that Cornado sought to capture and deliver Erian back to her brother, where he could keep her in sight.

At the mention of Cornado, Onganggarak growled low and menacing — the first such sign of his bestial instincts I had yet encountered. It unnerved me greatly, and he was immediately apologetic and ashamed. Baron Cesarus asked Ong to leave us, and then explained to me that Cornado was Ong's original lord.

"He captured Ong as a cub in the deep wilds," the baron explained. "He treated him brutally in a crude attempt to civilize the young feral. I was ashamed to witness it, for I feel that the manner in which the Li Halan treat the Vorox reflects on our soul mirrors. If our own compassion is tar-

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nished, then so will be the Pancreator's compassion towards us.

"I made my disdain clear to Baron Cornado and he challenged me to a duel. It was an uneven match, for he was a renowned fencer and I was but a diplomat with only the barest of formal sword training. Nonetheless, the Pancreator intervened and won me the day when Cornado's foot slipped on a patch of zrux slime and he fell right onto my blade, awarding me first blood.

"Our terms, however, were not simply for honor. I demanded aforehand that, should I win, he would transfer Onganggarak to me. Cornado angrily allowed the transfer of loyalties before the gathered group of nobles and priests, and stormed away. I am sure the man stills bears a grudge, but one directed more against Ong than me."

He sighed and sipped his tea before speaking again. "I have become quite fond of Onganggarak. He is a model example of what his race can achieve in their climb from savagery. I shall now reveal my reason for relaying this tale to you: I would ask your lady if she will allow Ong to accompany her off-world, to remove him from Baron Cornado's ire. He can offer in return his loyalty and protection, should Cornado pursue her further. Ong would be a great aid in anticipating Cornado's tactics, for he knows him well.

"Onganggarak's *angwal*, his adulthood ceremony, is still a year away. In return for transferring his fealty to your lady, I request that she become *angruwa* to him, a companion and sister, teaching him of the human worlds while he protects her from her brother's assassins."

I thought the idea most interesting, for I had come to like Ong greatly. I told the baron that I would propose his idea to my lady. She, of course, readily agreed. She had also come to enjoy Ong's company, and felt that any ally she could gain against her brother was a good one.

Captain Maria Sao-Lui admitted that she knew Baron Cesarus to be an honorable man, but knew little of Cornado. "One would at first suspect Cesarus's reasons for surrendering a valuable vassal, but he surely cannot intend Ong to be a spy; the angruwa bond would provide too great a conflict of interest. Vorox take such oaths most seriously. Perhaps it is truly the case that he cares for Ong and wishes to remove him from Cornado's vengeance."

Only now do I realize other reasons Baron Cesarus had.

I knew too little of Vorox then, but I now understand the tragedy of Ong's early life. Over the years I have been able to learn from him, as he has been ready to tell it, his true story.

He was not taken from the jungle as a raw cub but as a youth who had already undergone his *kabaljal* and *angerakaal*. His angerak mates, who had grown up with him from infancy, were killed in a battle between Li Halan and Decados forces for control of a patch of land. This was during the later years of the Emperor Wars, when the fighting was at its fiercest and most meaningless, with forces opposing one another less for tactical reasons than as retaliation for past losses.

Only Ong survived the conflagration that swept the jungle, but he was caught and caged by Baron Cornado, who decided to make Ong a model example for his own ideas on how his house should conduct the Vorox civilizing process.

He was only with Cornado for a few months, but they were enough to scar him deeply. Only Baron Cesarus's kind and disciplined rule calmed him, and this only after he escaped and attempted to rejoin his feral tribe. They would not have him, however, suspecting that he was a civilized spy, and they threw him out. Dejected, with no tribe or angerak, he returned to the only place he even remotely associated with home. The baron forgave his leaving and raised him well, teaching him letters and good speech. Over time, Ong learned to control his wild manners even better than others of his kind.

And so he came to join our company. I think back on the happenstance that delivered him to us at our time of need in the jungle and marvel at where it has brought us today. The odds that such a boon friend could be met in such a manner are staggering, enough to throw doubt on the existence of coincidence in favor of a more ordered matrix to our meeting.

I am told that a Vorox who loses his angerak is a terrible creature, alone forever. And yet, Ong has overcome any instinctual depression and built his life anew along human principles. Perhaps he is less than a true Vorox because of it, but he is fully a part of our group. Indeed, after this evening, we are also a part of him.

He is no longer alone.

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Introduction

From the journals of Provost Guissepe Alustro:

My temper got the best of me and I cursed and kicked the stacks of books. They tumbled to the ground in unruly piles, the hours spent organizing them becoming one more wasted effort in a string of frustrations I had encountered of late.

I stared at the scattered books and groaned. I would have to start all over again. My anger might have had its moment, but it changed nothing. The library's secrets would never be revealed if we didn't have some means of searching it.

Ong padded on all sixes into the stone-floored catacomb, kicking up old dust I had managed to miss on my own trip into the old archives. He was too tall to stand with his full height in the low-ceilinged chamber. He looked around at the messy piles and the few neat stacks I had not managed to destroy in my momentary loss of control. He shook his head, giving me a scolding glance.

"Angerak brother," he said. "You still do not think like a Vorox."

I looked at him with obvious confusion. "I don't understand what that has to do with this task."

He moved to a pile and crouched on two legs as his four limbs began picking up books. He cursorily examined their spines and began stacking them nearby. "Old Vorox adage: Many limbs are better than one."

"Well, that's fine for you," I said, bending down to pick up books again. "But I've only got two hands, thank you."

He looked at me with a certain sorrow. "I do not mean the amount of limbs you have on your body, but those you can call on for aid. We are angerak. All our limbs are one. You can always request aid from an angerak mate, no matter the task."

I was ashamed. Ong had joined his soul to mine and my companions and I still didn't fully understand what that meant. We still thought of ourselves as separate people with distinct skills. If a task required mechanical expertise, it was Julia or Sanjuk's job. If it was diplomacy, it fell to Erian. Research and reading were my task.

And yet, it didn't have to be this way. There was no reason I had to spend days alone in this crypt stacking books by myself. Ong was happy to help. He clearly did not enjoy the task, but he knew I needed him.

"Ironic," I said, smiling. "It takes a Vorox to remind me of the Prophet's own word: 'You stand alone only in your own arrogance. Open your heart and you commune with the stars.'"

"Now you begin to understand," Ong said. He grinned and threw a book at me. I caught it and read the spine: Zobrovnik's *Inside the Decados Sanctum*. I looked curiously at Ong. He laughed and said: "I have the 'As" here, you start backward with the 'Zs'."

I sighed and went back to work.

VOROX

The Alien Expeditions Series

This series examines the lives of different alien races, both on their homeworlds and in new environments. Each book in the series will be a mix of third-person objective essays and first-person reports from a variety of sources, providing a comprehensive view of each race from multiple perspectives.

Some reports are provided by humans trying to catch a glimpse into these alien cultures, to understand them or gain a degree of control over their mysteries.

The colonialist attitude and its attendant arrogance inherent in humanity's historical relationships with these races is unavoidable. Such perspectives are revealed honestly in these books, and do not constitute an approval of imperialism. Depicting such historical realities — albeit in a fictional, far-future setting — can perhaps expose them to greater scrutiny. Judgments are left to the readers.

These races are wholly fictional. While certain aspects of their histories and cultures might resemble elements from actual human events or cultures, no specific reference to any real person or culture is intended. The authors may draw inspiration from the varied web of human history to add versimilitude and authenticity to their creations, but they intend no disrespect or cultural pilferage.

These books aim to open up new worlds and civilizations for consideration, evoking wonder and mystery as well as danger and sorrow.

What's In This Book

The first book in this series examines the Vorox. No consideration of these six-limbed sentients can be complete without a detailed look at the environment that forged them: The chaotic wilds of Ungavorox, one of the most diverse — and dangerous — ecosystems in the Known Worlds. Hence, this book also serves as a survey of Ungavorox's geography, flora and fauna, for each of these elements is reflected in the Vorox psyche and society.

• Alustro's Journal: All for One — A chapter from Provost Guissepe Alustro's journals reminiscing on the time Lady Erian's entourage met Onganggarak, their Vorox companion.

• Introduction — What you're reading now.

• Where We Came From (History) — From the discovery of Ungavorox by Second Republic explorers to its inhabitants' present-day dilemmas in self-sovereignty. • Who We Live With (Ungavorox) — A survey of the planet and its neighboring stellar bodies, along with its population centers — both civilized and feral. The bulk of this chapter details the varied lifeforms of the planet, beings the Vorox have interacted with for ages and with whom any explorer must contend.

• Who We Are (Culture) — Essays explaining aspects of Vorox culture, from their coming-of-age rites, to the importance of the angerak, to their language and cuisine. Includes two short stories shedding light on hunting and folk-lore.

• What We Do (Traits) — New combat actions available to Vorox characters, from Graa martial arts maneuvers to glankesh sword fencing and bolorang tossing. Also includes new character roles for both civilized and feral Vorox.

Roleplaying Vorox

Many players seem to stereotype Vorox as mere muscle or combat-monster character types. They don't have to be that way. Vorox are intelligent sentients, many of whom can speak Urthish as well as any native speaker, and some can even read and write just as well. Why not play a Vorox scholar? One who seeks knowledge among the Known Worlds and perhaps even has a culture-building agenda for his people back home?

Or perhaps a diplomat, sent to Byzantium Secundus to represent Ungavorox's interests in weighty decisions. Is she loyal to her own kind or greedy for the sort of kickbacks other factions are willing to give her in return for her influence?

How about a Vorox Engineer? There's no reason a select few can't earn admittance to this guild somehow, assuming they've got the technical know-how. They have to first raise their Tech scores to at least the human average, but after that, the sky's the limit.

A Vorox priest, anyone? It's rare, but possible, especially out in the jungles where few human missionaries dare to tread. What priests there are may be all too willing to recruit any native who shows aptitude and interest, and there's nothing preventing that ordained Vorox from spreading his gospel to the stars thereafter (although the more bigoted representatives of the so-called faith may object and attempt to stand in the way).

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Even the more martial-oriented Vorox, whether they be ex-commandos or Muster mercs, are more than just cardboard grunts. They have hopes and dreams beyond the battlefield. What are they?

These are just a few of the possibilities. Want a psychic or theurgic Vorox? Talk to your gamemaster about the possibilities. While Vorox cannot begin play with these powers or awaken them naturally, a few have managed to gain such

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Introduction

abilities (such as Zartch, of the Invisible Path). This usually involves dangerous exposure to a Philosophers Stone or other mysterious Ur artifact, but it is a possibility for those very rare few who not only venture among the stars but involve themselves in the mysteries and dangers awaiting there the few, the proud, the player characters.

Vorox Angerak Dramas

While Vorox may be somewhat common fixtures in any roleplaying group, there probably aren't a lot of epics composed entirely of Vorox characters. Below are some sketches for gamemasters and players interested in trying such a game.

A King's Ransom

Someone is plotting to kill King Kummanga, perhaps to replace him with someone more docile and sympathetic to the Li Halan or Merchant League. Clues, however, are vague. Someone's got to look into this and stop the assassins. Whoever successfully prevents the plot will surely gain the ear and goodwill of the king, but the ire and resentment of certain humans.

Wild at Heart

The player character angerak has been chosen to parley with the feral leader, KagongKagong. This is an unprecedented opportunity to get close to the mysterious rebel and either forge a new alliance beneficial to both ferals and civilized Vorox — or assassinate him and thus end his tyranny.

Mixed Human/Vorox Dramas

Ungavorox provides many adventuring excuses for a Voroxless player character cadre or those groups with only one or two Vorox representatives.

Old Family Secrets

Secretive patrons are seeking a group of explorers to travel to the forbidden keep of Jun Fang Kong on Gashkar, where members of the old family of Li Halan still reside in shame for their pre-Conversion ancestry. Just getting to the fief is hard enough; getting the hospitality of its residents once arrived is another hurdle. Rumors state that the entire family practices Antinomy. The patrons are insistent, however, demanding that a certain heirloom be "rescued" from its entrapment there. What is this object and why is it important? How much are these patrons willing to pay to get it back? And who would be foolish enough to undertake such a devil's task?

Octopus's Garden

A wealthy Li Halan noble is outfitting an expedition to study Ungavorox's little-seen oceans. He has manufactured a state-of-the-art submarine and wishes to crew it with humans to accompany him, for few Vorox can fit inside it. Who knows what wonders await beneath the waves? Surely, the dangers are not nearly so great as those on land... or are they?

Holy War

The Avestite deacon of Dirbirdar, Sollum Krayne, is seeking fervent mercenaries among the Faithful to help him wage a war against an enclave of heretical Vorox who preach Badaswaba, a degenerated teaching of Zebulon's gospels. These worshippers hide among the citizenry of Dirbirdar and perform ceremonies in the nearby jungles.

To counter this puritan's zealous thrust, a local Vorox merchant sympathetic with the Badaswaba worshippers is attempting to hire scouts to aid the faithful Vorox against any assault. He has also sent a messenger seeking aid from the Orthodox bishop in New Kowloon, but fears he has been intercepted or killed in the jungles. With little hope of outside intervention, the worshippers might be wiped out soon. Already, altercations are breaking out in the streets between the Avestite's followers and accused Vorox.

Can anyone help keep the peace?







Discovery

A Republican explorer discovered the jumproute to Ungavorox from Icon in the late 39th century, but the dense cloud of interstellar dust that engulfed the system, creating navigational difficulties, dissuaded authorities from conducting any organized surveys. It was not until the invention of the neutrino sensorium-field/differentiator in 3937 that starships were able to safely maneuver through the murky uncharted system, then known only by the designation RAS73228. After suffering innumerable technical setbacks due to nebular dust and excessive meteoric activity around the inner worlds, robotic scouts eventually reported that the star's second planet had a naturally breathable atmosphere and an abundance of native wildlife and vegetation. Unmanned probes dropped from orbit seldom functioned any longer than a day at most; each delivered tantalizing snapshots of lavish untouched wilderness, then swiftly succumbed to weather exposure, seismic events or attack by local lifeforms.

Despite the dangers of land and sky, corporate greed finally demanded that the vast untapped resources of the planet be made available to the good people of the Second Republic, and the first manned exploratory teams descended on the new world in 3951. They never returned. Neither did the second wave, nor the third; some lasted nearly a week before contact was lost, but others never survived to make their initial landing report. A fortified permanent settlement was under construction by the end of the decade, but by that time many of the Republic's finest naturalists had disappeared into the uncharted wilds of RAS73228/b, and popular opinion soon equated a mission to the savage world with a spectacular suicide bid. Nevertheless, lumber and mining industries fought to turn a profit from the difficult terrain. Heavily armed expeditions made short journeys out from Cameroon – the permanent settlement – accompanied by high-tech automated scouting drones to warn of danger. Braving earthquakes, tornadoes, lightning-quick predators, ill-tempered dinosaurian behemoths and all manner of carnivorous plants, these crews returned – when they returned at all – with small but valuable loads of exotic woods and minerals that fetched sizable prices in the Republican market. Before long, though, a new danger presented itself.

Indigenes

Early landing parties had been attacked with some consistency by one of the planet's most numerous medium-sized predators, a shaggy six-legged beast with venomous claws that had demonstrated the ability to rear up on its hind legs and use its upper limbs to grasp sticks, stones and bones to use as weapons. Later, individuals were captured and examined by industrial research groups; while the captives displayed a rudimentary intelligence and tool-using capacity, the savagery with which they fought against their captors seemed to argue against the possibility of sentient thought. Some were eventually taught to do menial labor, but only after being surgically declawed, biochemically detoxified and subjected to an extensive and often brutal training regimen involving drugs and neurosurgery outlawed elsewhere. Over time, this practice evolved into a full-fledged labor program, with teams of forcibly domesticated creatures working mines and timber trails under the scrutiny of armed wranglers.

As such teams were deployed in greater numbers at more distant sites, attacks by the creatures' untamed cousins not

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only escalated, but became increasingly effective. More sophisticated tactics were used, key personnel and equipment were targeted, and these apparently savage beasts suddenly seemed to develop an amazing comprehension of the more abstract principles of guerilla warfare, as well as some working knowledge of human technology and behavior. Corporate authorities tried to stifle news of the attacks, but gradually word leaked offworld and many Republicans began to suspect that the native predators might, in fact, be sentient after all.

Dramatic confirmation of these suspicions came in 3974, when a "domestication facility" in the southern latitudes was assaulted and destroyed by a large, well-organized force using captured weapons and equipment. All captives were released and important doctors and administrators were brutally slain; the blood of the victims was used to scrawl slogans in barely legible Urthish on the walls – slogans like "NO MORE TAMING" and "FREE VOROX." The survivors, including a holoreal news crew, were allowed to return to Cameroon where they relayed a message they got directly from the lips of the army's leader: "Stop."

Once news of the incident broke, the "Vorox Problem" became one of the most divisive issues in late Second Republic politics. Many felt shame at the way the new sentient race had been treated, and called for reconciliation and reparations. Others, primarily in the industrial sector, maintained that a declaration of war had been made, and urged the senate to authorize violent retribution. Still others noted the sudden ease with which these Vorox seemed to gain the ability not only to speak but also to write Urthish, as well as the competent yet limited understanding they had of human weaponry and technology. These Vorox were clearly intelligent, this faction counseled, but undeniably primitive nonetheless; they could not have learned so much about humans in so short a time without outside aid. It was unthinkable that any human would turn traitor to help this savage race, so in all likelihood these Vorox had captured humans and tortured them to learn how to fight their new enemy.

Investigation

Early in 3975, Senator G.T. Hausen of the Subcommittee of Alien Affairs arrived at Cameroon with a battery of advisors, consultants, observers, liaisons, assistants and assistant assistants. Hausen had himself lost a son to the wilds of RAS73228/b some fifteen years previously, a popular young xenologist and professional athlete whose departure and subsequent disappearance received much publicity. Hausen had been maneuvered into taking this post by certain warmongering factions in the Senate anxious to test their latest tech in a good old-fashioned alien war. By this time, field outpost commanders around the world had engaged in an unofficial campaign of wholesale genocide, with costly skirmishing as defoliation companies advanced into the southern reaches of the rainforest. It was widely expected that Hausen would turn a blind eye to these operations, abetting the covert jungle war while distracting the more liberal Republican authorities with plausible cover stories.

The senator, however, insisted that his first duty was to properly observe and assess the situation, and would not comment on policy either publicly or privately. What he did was open every log book and account file, tour every mine, mill and outpost, inspect every vehicle, piece of equipment and working installation, and interview employees at all levels of the corporate hierarchy. Every aspect of the logging and mining industry on the planet was noted, documented and accounted for. Meanwhile, an elite cadre of the senator's staff composed of alien operatives conducted independent reconnaissance expeditions to assess the planetary environment. Shantor cavalry paced the savannahs, prairies and deserts, and Hironem troopers were airdropped into jungle and swamp. A small flock of young Etyri scouts who had pledged their loyalty to Senator Hausen for his part in facilitating the Habari Accord on Grail took wing from the walls of Cameroon. Many were never seen again.

A month passed as anxiety mounted among company executives over the senator's lack of decisive action. Some took it as unspoken assent and continued to wage war on the natives within their own districts, while others refrained from offensive expeditions until they could tell which way the wind was blowing. Finally, two wounded and fatigued Etyri returned bearing the battered ovoid casing of a hovercam journal. After long private debriefing and careful review of the journal's content, the senator was galvanized into action. Brandishing senatorial authority like the proverbial Hook of Souls, Hausen fingered and arrested all the worst offenders in the war against the Vorox within the space of an evening. Executive officers of remote outposts who did not respond to non-aggression directives were noted for special investigation. Legal and diplomatic psychologists interrogated every guard with a record showing use of force against Vorox individuals or groups. Brutal images of filthy battered Vorox in maxicrete domestication camp cells were leaked to the media at large.

Once Hausen was satisfied that he had all the primary offending parties in custody, he had them – along with a large handpicked armed escort, a full holovid crew, his own entourage and many key executives – airlifted to the coastal plains where the jungle meets the shores of the world's largest inland sea. A day later their camp was approached by a vast company of Vorox, weapons held ready but advancing slowly and issuing neither challenge nor war-howl. Without launching any attack or showing any overt hostility, the

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WHERE WE CAME FROM (HISTORY)

Vorox gradually spread out to surround the senatorial encampment. The Etyri scouts parleyed with the native chieftains and led several of them into the human camp, where Hausen greeted them with a short direct speech in Urthish and replayed a few selected scenes from the recovered journal.

At this, excited word was relayed back through the stillswelling ranks of Vorox, which emitted a stirring howl of acclaim and parted to allow the passage of a single smallish figure into the human camp. Silently swaggering up to face the senator, the figure threw off its bulky cloak of spotted fur to reveal itself as a human male, slightly malnourished and scarred by the rigors of jungle survival, clad in the ragged remains of an environmental expedition suit. Without a word the two men embraced. Senator Hausen's long-lost son had been returned to him.

There then followed a week-long summit where the senatorial staff negotiated with Vorox leaders to halt the interspecies conflict, gaining substantial respect by offering the most grievous corporate war criminals as captives to the Vorox. Despite great enthusiasm for this offer from the assembled throng, the younger Hausen intervened to point out the wisdom of letting each race deal with its own criminals in its own way. This decided, the chiefs of the Vorox brought forth the perpetrators of the domestication facility massacre and, with a grand pageant of grave ritualistic fervor, beheaded them all and placed their skulls atop tall stakes erected just for the occasion. (Hausen later expressed a guarded regret for his diplomatic suggestion when he learned that the executives in charge of the domestication program were punished with little more than fines, public service and dishonorable demotions.)

H. Titus Hausen, the senator's son, became an instant celebrity, receiving invitations to lecture stadiums, interview programs and social functions even before the historic summit between his father and the Vorox had ended. The ordeal of surviving on the primitive world had changed him drastically. Once a photogenically buff and rosy-cheeked young social lion, the jungle had carved him into a gaunt lanky figure of lean compact musculature, skin bronzed to leathery toughness and thickened with scar tissue. Those who knew him as a professional athlete remembered his easygoing personable joviality; they now found him too grim and intense for proper company, his bluff humor replaced by a more savage biting wit. He would spend the rest of his life telling the story of his seventeen-year exploratory mission, from the crash landing that fatally injured his team and destroyed his communication equipment, the deliriumhazed bouts with local toxins and diseases, the gradual painful lessons of survival, to his first encounters with - and eventual acceptance by - the Vorox. Despite some early attempts to reintegrate himself into civilized society, he ulti-



mately spent most of his time with his adopted tribe in the deep jungle, leaving the planet only to visit his family, to confer with scientific colleagues or to speak to the senate on alien affairs issues.

New Citizens

Through the combined efforts of the Hausen family, the Vorox were welcomed into the society of sentient races despite a great deal of prejudice both open and secret. Titus knew the language and customs of the young race, and of the forces that shaped life on Ungavorox. Besides conveying his hard-won knowledge to academic authorities, he also taught the primitive aliens about life beyond their world, aided in this task by anthropologists who sympathized with his cause. Despite their pre-technological state of development, the Vorox showed remarkable ability to comprehend the physical realities of modern life, especially weapons and transportation tech. In fact, it was their basic understanding of the hovercam journal that not only allowed Titus to reunite with his father, but also enabled the Vorox to furnish proof of the genocidal war directed against them. Cultural differences, however, appeared to exceed their mental grasp; although they clearly understood concepts like love, respect, loyalty, wisdom and courage, their lives were guided by such primal instincts that these higher emotions were a sort of psychic luxury, too fleeting to form the basis of a social structure. Undaunted, Hausen and his colleagues managed to groom a few of the wisest tribal leaders into calm, soft-spoken, well-mannered emissaries, and when these emissaries returned with wondrous traveler's tales to tell, more Vorox were encouraged to learn what was necessary to travel offworld.

Emigration and biocompatibility laws prevented the new race from leaving their world in great numbers, but those individuals who had proven themselves capable of adapting to civilized customs and manners were allowed on carefully planned and warily supervised tours of the wonders of the Second Republic. Most worlds greeted these honored chiefs with the kind of polite awe reserved for museum curiosities, but in some places they were confronted with enraged bigots who broke through security cordons to accuse them of real and imagined atrocities from the domestication facility massacre. After one such incident where a physically abusive protestor fell to the poisonous claws of the guest chief, the tours were discontinued.

When the elder Hausen died in 3991, Vorox representatives in the senate found themselves at a loss without the guidance of their politically savvy patron, and the status of other Vorox throughout the Second Republic waned accordingly. Many who had made great sacrifices to assimilate into interstellar culture were deported back to their home planet, often for plainly spurious reasons. Dismissed as naïve primiVOROX }

tives by the powers that be, the Vorox watched their rights as sentients under Republican law dwindle while increasing amounts of their homeworld were given over to industrial developers. Those chiefs who had acclimated to civilization tried fighting this trend by legal means, but their savage cousins back home had little patience for such methods. Small territorial wars once again erupted across Ungavorox.

The role played by Titus Hausen in the Vorox wars was never entirely clear. It was obvious from his few public statements that his sympathies belonged to the tribes of the deep rainforest, but he was always careful not to condone retaliatory attacks by his adopted race. Many in the senate attempted to prove that the younger Hausen had turned against humanity and was actually conducting the war against the developers. New evidence for this came to light until 3996, when a Vorox taken captive during a raid on a mining camp admitted that the knowledge of explosives used by his party to seal the mineshaft was imparted by "our hairless brother." This was enough to convince the senate to put a very high price on the head of Titus Hausen, who never left Ungavorox in the last years before the Fall and never approached humans without a large retinue of well-armed Vorox at his back. The fate of Titus Hausen after the Fall has never been determined for certain; the few stories regarding him to come out of the jungle amount to little more than legend and rumor.

Dark Ages

The dawn of the Dark Ages saw a period of relative peace on Ungavorox, as the industrialists, deprived of the Republican economic infrastructure that supported them, ceased their aggressive exploitation of the land. Many settled in the few lands they could hold secure, establishing agrarian communities that kept an uneasy truce with their neighbors. Vorox who had learned and taken on human customs created their own villages modeled on human civilization, forming buffer regions between human and feral territories. House Li Halan, which controlled Icon, was more concerned with consolidating their power along strategically significant jumproutes, and paid little attention to the backward world. At first.

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Prince Tupal, a tyrant of House Li Halan in the days before the Cardanite conversion, was obsessed with the dark secrets of alien cultures, and took an interest in the fierce native race of Ungavorox. While the primitive Vorox afforded little in the way of the occult insights that he sought, their size, strength and savage fury in battle greatly impressed him, and he found the thought of commanding an army of such creatures pleasing in the extreme. His earliest attempts to train the Vorox who lived near the human fiefs met with varied degrees of failure; though they had lost none of their violent instincts, they managed to retain the values they



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Titus the Titan's Farewell

FLANAGAN: "Born to a respected senatorial family on Criticorum, educated at the finest universities – including Holy Terra Parochial - award-winning scholar and groundbreaking theorist, voted Most Eligible Bachelor by Young Republic Weekly for five years running, and, oh hell, what else? A veteran! That's right, some of you may remember how he helped put down the Kurga Nationalist riots on Khayyam a few years back! And last but not least, if I may say so, quite possibly the solidest defending flanker that any CircumStellar SpeedBall League squad coach could wish for – our own Titus the Titan!"

HAUSEN: "Thank you, Coach Flanagan, for that stirring introduction. You know, many people have asked me how I can divide my time between working on three doctorates and touring with Team Astro for the C.S.L. Well, I have always known that the day would come when I had to choose between the two things that I love most in life: Science and SpeedBall. I'm here now to let you all know – that day has come. This morning I received notification from the Burroughs Institute of Xenology that my application was accepted for a position on the next Astrographic Survey mission to RAS72338/b. The mission will depart in just three months, and I'll be gone for over a year. It hurts like hell to say goodbye when we're just six games away from the Megadome, and I'm sorry I won't be here to help the team take the Byzantine Chalice. But I tell you, there's something more important at stake here! Just beyond Icon there's a totally new world, with new life and new possibilities, that we hardly know anything about. Now, if my time with CircumStellar SpeedBall has taught me anything, it's the value of teamwork and of always having a clear and worthy goal to strive for. Anyone who knows me knows I value my place in a team whose goal is the expansion of human knowledge, and that's a cause I've devoted my life to. I can think of no clearer or worthier goal that humanity can reach toward. Thank you."

REPORTER (vox in absentia): A smattering of polite applause greets this stunning announcement from star flanker Titus Hausen, but the underlying mood of the room is all too plain. Disappointment from the stunned legions of devoted supporters, and dismay from the board of CircumStellar League stockholders who have garnered several fortunes banking on the Titan's popularity. Nobody can fault this remarkable young man's dedication to his chosen field, but to the hordes of fans he leaves behind, he will be sorely missed. I was able to speak with the Titan during the third-quarter break of his final game at the Astroplex last night....

REPORTER (prerecorded): Titan, we've been hearing talk of you doing fieldwork for the exploratory services! Can this be true? Sources have informed me that you're outfitting an expedition to that new jungle world! Does it worry you at all that no other explorer has yet returned from that planet? What can you be thinking?

HAUSEN (prerecorded): Well, I've known from the beginning that science was a hard game – a lot harder than SpeedBall even. There's no cheering crowds, but when you score, the rewards are a lot greater. For everyone. Who knows what could be waiting for us down there? That's what we've got to find out. And if we make any headway at all on this planet, it'll be thanks to all those who went before us, who were willing to take the same risks and make the same sacrifices. Even if we don't make it all the way through the first quarter, we'll have learned that much more to help prepare the teams that follow us. And besides, this is the most well-equipped exploratory mission ever assembled. The lander has complete medical facilities and enough rations to last for years. The amphibious all-terrain rover is armorplated, with navigational and protective force fields, exterior manipulator arms and eight independently mounted smartspoke wheeltreads. We've got ultralight drone gliders for long-range recon, some of the most powerful non-lethal armaments yet invented, electropulse capture nets, reinforced habitat tents and completely sealable environmental suits with biosystem monitors. Every piece of equipment has its own nanobrain, all tied into the central monitoring system on the lander. Every phase of the expedition will be thoroughly documented by hovercam journals, with all data running through the central system and stored in a memory bank with a 108-goog capacity. As mission commander, my plan is to hit the ground running, cover as much territory as fast as possible, get a steady stream of data flowing and learn as much about this new world as we can. I've got a good team, all well-seasoned experts who are ready to give that hundred and ten percent that we need to make this work. I think we're gonna come back with the most exciting exogeologic survey ever produced!

REPORTER (prerecorded): Thanks, champ! And good luck!

- Broadcast transcript, Holopathe News Service, ca. 3958.

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had acquired during their brief span of acceptance by the Second Republic, little realizing how brutal the rest of the universe had become since the Fall. Torn between the barbaric past their forefathers had abandoned and the adopted culture they never fully understood, they lacked the focus and discipline needed to be effective soldiers.

Decades later, Ustirin the Unspeakable discovered the ruins of an industrial domestication camp, and, after studying camp records and documentary holos, came to the conclusion that Tupal had been going about assembling a Vorox army the wrong way. Building upon the methods of corporate domesticators, but lacking most of their technological expertise, Ustirin learned to break down the Vorox psyche through a program of forced confinement, aversion conditioning and tortures both gross and subtle. These broken souls he then rebuilt with stronger versions of standard shock troop training, creating soldiers of unthinking loyalty who were yet capable of attaining awesome destructive battle rages. The process was slow and costly, however, with many Vorox left mentally destroyed and few trainers willing to take on the challenge of dealing with the massive tortured brutes. Ustirin did finally put together a small Vorox assault division, but his ultimate plan of using the four-armed warriors to conquer the Known Worlds never materialized, due to quick-tempered Vorox who were just as likely to attack comrades-in-arms as the enemy.

It was around this time that the practice of removing the venomous claws of the Vorox began, originally as a punishment for those who resisted training and domestication. Since so many individuals fought their captors with unvielding resolve, very few who became soldiers did so with all of their claws intact. Those who survived Ustirin's mad wars retired to Ungavorox, where their lack of claws became a status symbol among their civilized Vorox neighbors, and learned that this made many humans a lot more comfortable in their presence. By the time of Cardano the practice had become widespread among those Vorox who kept the company of humans; clawless Vorox found that they enjoyed a greater degree of acceptance and less fear from human society. After Cardano's conversion, some clawless Vorox were even allowed offworld to represent their communities at Li Halan courts.

During the reign of Prince Tristam Li Halan, popularly known as "The Saint" for his beneficent and caring attitude toward the lower echelons of society, the culture of the civilized Vorox took on its present form. Tristam acknowledged the growing population of civilized Vorox as a people earnest in their loyalty and faith, and accorded them many rights of self-governance they did not previously have. Young Vorox who displayed the virtues favored by humans were allowed to retain a single claw, and groomed for positions of power among their own kind. A noble class was thus created which showed such honest loyalty to House Li Halan that they were given command over small squads of native soldiers who had proven themselves capable of keeping strict military discipline. In this way the Saint was able to create the first truly effective Vorox Commandos, succeeding by subtle social engineering where the pain and force of the pre-Cardanite tyrants had failed. The prince was even granted safe passage into the outer jungle to negotiate territorial rights with uncivilized tribal chiefs. Nothing came of the negotiations, for the feral tribes knew themselves to be the undisputed masters of their vast impenetrable homeland and refused to recognize the right of the Li Halan to declare boundaries on their world.

In the centuries to follow, the civilized community grew slowly but steadily, cementing its relationship with House Li Halan by sending more Vorox Commandos to aid the house during barbarian invasions, peasant rebellions and wars with other noble houses. Although civilized Vorox never adopted the human system of a hereditary noble class, instinctively preferring their traditional angerak - or pack bond - structure instead, they took on other aspects of human culture learned from the Li Halan. Nobles conducted the affairs of their courts in rough imitation of the human model, mimicking the manners, speech and even clothing that they observed in their travels and from visitors to their homeworld. Despite the autonomy granted by Tristam the Saint, their courts were never without a substantial Li Halan presence, and many began to suspect that the human nobles still considered the Vorox too primitive to rule themselves. Vorox nobles gradually learned the political skills of subterfuge. intrigue and conspiracy, but found that they were terribly outclassed by the subtle and inscrutable Li Halan.

In 4864, thugs hired by a rogue branch of the Li Halan family (who had never accepted the conversion of Cardano) kidnapped the newborn heir of the duke of Kish. The kidnappers took the child, Gasparia, to Ungavorox, planning to deliver her to the degenerate family's impenetrable stronghold in Gashkar. Unfortunately (for the thugs), they made the mistake of crossing the deep jungle while trying to avoid the authorities, and fell prey to feral tribal raiding parties. The criminals were never seen again, and it was assumed that the human child shared their fate. Twelve years later, Gasparia Li Halan appeared in the outpost city of Dirbirdar. alive and healthy, and obtained passage offworld with group of Charioteer traders. She traveled the Known Worlds for the next two decades, performing in medicine shows and relating the tale of how she was raised by the ferals who rescued her. While she eventually reestablished contact with her noble family, she never challenged the position of her younger brother who took her place as heir, and showed not the slightest interest in house politics. Like H.T. Hausen, she eventually retired to the deep jungle; rumors persist that



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WHERE WE CAME FROM (HISTORY)

she took a human mate with her, and that their descendants yet exist among the feral tribes, living as the jungle Vorox live.

Now

At present, King Kummanga rules the civilized territories of Ungavorox, although close to a third of this area is taken up by Li Halan fiefs whose lords nominally accept the authority of the native king but actually consider him little more than their puppet figurehead. Kummanga has learned how to play that game, however, and cultivates allies among other human factions like House al-Malik and the Merchant League, giving the Li Halan cause for concern. Some have begun to whisper that he deliberately goads the feral tribes into near-constant warfare in order to keep the human fiefs dependent on the civilized Vorox army. The king has made the Vorox Commandos indispensable to House Li Halan by getting them to bear the brunt of key battles in the Emperor Wars; he also hopes to convince the pious Li Halan to lend more of his troops to House Hazat for the Kurgan Crusade.

Li Halan with estates on Ungavorox have grown increasingly wary of King Kummanga's politicking, but attempts to relay these fears to Flavius and other house leaders have met with derision, believing they have little to fear from the primitive, unlettered puppet-king with his crude attempts at intrigue. Some families are therefore plotting a coup to supplant Kummanga with a young noble by the name of Kabrannagu, who has earned a name for himself by leading many successful assaults against feral tribes of the outer jungle as a favor to Baron Tiberius Wu Lin Li Halan. Kabrannagu faithfully adheres to the values of Vorox civilization and holds an honest respect for the wisdom and power of House Li Halan. He does, however, harbor a secret enmity for Duchess Kim Khao of Del'est on Rampart; he recently responded to her plea for aid in squelching a peasant rebellion in her duchy by leading nearly 200 Vorox Commandos against the rebels. The rebellion ceased almost as soon as the Vorox troops took the field, but Kabrannagu soon began sustaining heavy casualties from a far more devastating foe - a number of Xyll warbeasts that the duchess neglected to warn the Vorox about.





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Who We Live With (Ungavorox)

Ungavorox Traits

Cathedral: Urth Orthodox (New Kowloon) Agora: Muster (New Kowloon) Garrison: 1 Capitol: New Kowloon Jumps: 4 Adjacent Worlds: Icon (dayside)

Solar System: Gara-Ya (Sun), Zumox (.354 — .745 AU), Ungavorox (.83 AU, Unjaabu, Unweema), Jod-Balja (4.6 AU, 7 moons), Jur-Zamish (12.3 AU, 5 moons), Yama (31 AU), Jumpgate (47 AU)

Tech: 2 (0 in feral regions) Human Population: 500,000 Alien Population: 100,000,000

Resources: Metal, contraband

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Exports: Raw ore, stone (building, sculpting, other), lumber, crude oil, leather goods, black market livestock, poisons

Landscape: The crust of Ungavorox is as varied and violent as the lifeforms that populate its surface, with a wide array of biomes and specialized habitats. A young world with many active volcanic regions, its dry land is clustered together in one large supercontinent that comprises nearly 50 percent of the planet's surface. Known as Ungava by its inhabitants, this landmass is divided into seven distinct subcontinents by turbulent seas and soaring mountain ranges, with three lesser continents and numerous large archipelagos. The vast storm-tossed stretches of the Ungavoroxian Ocean are dotted with volcanic island chains, many of which are so unstable that some have been known to appear and disappear within living memory.

Solar System

Gara-Ya: The sun of the Ungavorox system, though young, has a reddish dying appearance caused by the system's passage through a dark interstellar nebula of dust and gases. (The nebula interferes with all types of sensors except neutrino, resulting in a -1 penalty for all ships navigating the Ungavorox system.) Vorox mythology describes the sun as the remaining bloodshot eye of Father Gar, an ancestral spirit who lost his other eye while teaching the Vorox to hunt.

Zumox: The innermost planet is a swiftly spinning blob of molten rock flattened to a nearly oblate discus shape by centrifical force. A wide band of thin highly volcanic crust girdles its equator, separating the polar magma oceans. Much of the planet's volcanic ejecta is flung into orbit, forming a murky ring of dust and small asteroids. Zumox's highly eccentric orbit sometimes brings it so close to Ungavorox that its rings can be seen lashing out at the larger world with tidal meteor storms. Native lore tells of brutal and sadistic Uncle Zumotch, identified with a recently extinct species of flying carrion-eating reptile.

Ungavorox: The homeworld of the Vorox is protected from its dense and turbulent astronomic family by a highly charged ionosphere several hundreds of kilometers thick. This layer disperses excessive radiation in auroral lightshows, sifts successive waves of interplanetary dust into ribbed dune-drifts of magnetic longitude, and blasts apart showers of smaller meteors with lightning storms that spread like spiderwebs. Beneath the ionosphere, the air of Ungavorox is fundamentally Urthlike in every other respect.

Ungavorox has two moons, Unjaabu and Unweema. Unjaabu is a small irregular lump of ferrous red with an

eccentric orbit that causes drastic tides when it looms large in the sky approximately seven out of every eighty-three days. Unweema is larger and evenly spherical, with a more regular orbit, comparable to the moon of Holy Terra save for mottled hues of deep blue and green. Republican astrophysicists theorized that Unweema was formed from the same planetary mass as Ungavorox, while Unjaabu originated as part of Zumox's volcanic ejecta. Both moons are identified with ancestral Voroxian figures known variously as Grandmother and Grandfather Sky, Grandmother and Grandfather Mountain, and Grandmother and Grandfather Treetop.

Jod-Balja: A large gas giant painted in bright bands of red, orange and yellow, Jod-Balja is stretched into an oblate spheroid by its rapid spin, with thin rings visible only when one passes near the planet. The massive planet's high-speed rotation causes a gravitational anomaly, resulting in a -2 penalty for piloting rolls made by starships in its immediate vicinity. Jod-Balja has seven moons, two of which, Nganik and Burda, can be seen in the skies of Ungavorox at Jod-Balja's closest passage.

Jur-Zamish: A blue and violet gas giant just over half the size of Jod-Balja, Jur-Zamish has broad distinct rings and is sporadically lit from within by vast electrical storms that sweep its lower atmospheric levels. These storms generate intense electromagnetic pulses that can play havok with the communication, navigation and power systems of passing ships. Jur-Zamish has five moons, one of which is the site of a Li Halan mining colony.

Yama: The outermost planet of the system cannot be seen from Ungavorox, and, although its existence had been mathematically determined by Republican astrographers, it was not until the late 41st century that Yama was observed and named by Li Halan traders.

Geography

The face of Ungavorox is dominated by a fractured supercontinent called Ungava ("The Great Land") by its natives, surrounded by the Ungavoroxian Ocean, or Zumshas. The northernmost portion of Ungava is mountainous Mbadar, separated from the bulk of Ungava by the Ichena Sea, formed millions of years ago by a massive meteoric impact. A broad rocky isthmus connects eastern Mbadar to equatorial Gadang, which is carpeted by the densest jungle on the planet. This tropical rainforest extends unbroken eastward to the Faza peninsula, and westward across the Ixa - a chain of large swampy lakes connected by the broad Dirbu River — to Zureng, bounded on its northwest coast by a raw new mountain range, the Gasha Peaks. South of the Ixa, the grassland plains of Vrundur extend from the turbulent Jonki Gulf in the west to the more peaceful shores of the Sea of Gar Za in the east. Southward, the plains meet the inland seas of Jordul, carved out by glaciers during the planet's C

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most extreme ice age, some 200,000 years ago. The western, southern and eastern coasts of the Jordul Seas are enclosed by the temperate forests of Shenang, which give way to the antarctic tundra where Ungava's southernmost point disappears under the planet's south polar ice cap. In northeastern Shenang, the narrow subcontinental peninsula of Luran forms the southeastern shores of the Sea of Gar Za.

Three continents exist in various degrees of separation from Ungava. Opposite Shenang is frozen Zavun, half hidden under the polar ice, where a distinct subspecies of Vorox have lived ever since a land bridge connecting Zavun to Shenang disappeared some 30,000 to 40,000 years ago. The world's northernmost major land mass, Zapa, is completely isolated from the rest of the planet, a temperate region with its own plant and animal species that have never known the predations of either Vorox or grackle fox. The early astrographers who named these continents speculated that Zapa and Gashkar, below, were once united in the planet's original supercontinent, but were shattered and flung to opposite sides of the world by an immense meteoric or even cometary collision hundreds of millions of years ago. The impact from this collision obliterated most of that supercontinent and forced the landmass of Ungava to rise above the water on the other side of the globe.

The Gasha Peaks of Zureng were formed by the collision of an independent continent named Zeplun by the first humans to explore Ungavorox, but which has since been renamed Gashkar by the Vorox themselves. The northern and western stretches of Gashkar are mostly barren desert, and the cliff faces of its southeastern coast are separated from Zureng by a series of narrow rocky straits, the Zungashi, which have actually closed considerably in the thousand years since the survey teams of the Second Republic first mapped the world. (Due to the accelerated pace of Ungavorox's geology, major geographical features detailed on Republican maps — seldom updated during the Dark Ages have changed in the short millenium since the Fall. Modern adventurers would be well advised to obtain the services of a seasoned local guide rather than relying upon information a thousand years old.) The closing of the Zungashi Straits has radically altered the migratory routes of many equatorial fish species, resulting in the competitive evolution of stronger, more aggressive predators in the Ichena Sea.

Places New Kowloon

The capitol city of Ungavorox is New Kowloon, which caps a verdant hill overlooking the Bay of Hong on the relatively tranquil and temperate southwestern coast of Luran. Originally named Cameroon, the home base for Second Re-

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WHO WE LIVE WITH (UNGAVOROX)

public industrial expeditions was built into a steep-walled megafortress by the Li Halan during the early Dark Ages. Covering the walled portion of the city is the faintly shimmering dome of a low-intensity shield, originally installed by Republican scientists to keep out disease-carrying birds and the swarms of insects that sweep across the Sea of Gar Za every spring. Luminite tiles and strips decorating the city's gates further serve to keep the interior relatively free of pests, making New Kowloon the safest and most comfortable spot on the planet for thin-skinned humans.

The palace where the pre-Cardanite governor once ruled with an iron hand is now the seat of the Li Halan embassy, sharing a broad garden-lined avenue with the more roughhewn but equally impressive homes of the most prestigious Vorox nobility, including that of King Kummanga. Schools and other social institutions enable humans and civilized Vorox to mix, each learning of the other's ways and customs. Legitimate mechants - those allowed to trade by Li Halan authorities and Vorox nobles — also make their homes here, mostly in the squalid suburbs that cling to the outer walls of the city. Clustered around New Kowloon and along the shores of the Bay of Hong are small Li Halan fiefs - the most significant being Ru-Yi, ruled by Sir Huang Zu Li Halan - checkered with civilized Vorox communities, which give way to the lands of the noble angeraks, westward into the plains of Vrundur, southward to the temperate forests of

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an. ReShenang, and northeast into the light tropical rainforests of Luran.

Winuman Islands

A large chain of volcanic islands extending north from the equator several hundred kilometers east of Ungava, the Winumans are home to a breed of seafaring Vorox whose way of life predates the discovery of the planet by humans. Living off the bounty of the ocean, they swim and dive more than any other Vorox breeds; ancestral Islanders therefore tend to have thinner fur, their limbs and bellies almost bare in comparison to their mainland cousins. Considered in many ways the most advanced of the native cultures, the inhabitants have the most stable and peaceful society of any feral Vorox tribes. They share a common myth that they were descended from a more advanced prehistoric culture, having migrated to the Winumans after their homeland to the east was destroyed. Some have speculated that this mythic land was the ancient continent of which Gashkar and Zapa were once a part, but, in view of the vast scale of time involved, this hardly seems likely.

Although not united in any politically meaningful sense, all the Islands acknowledge the power of the chieftain at Winumanjaru, the largest island in the chain. Fiercely independent, they successfully resisted all attempts to civilize them until the 46th century, when Prince Tristam Li Halan



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granted the chieftain of Winumanjaru autonomous rule over the entire island chain, in exchange for a yearly tribute of rare shells, exotic seafood and giant pearls.

Shenangar Lu

Concealed by near-perpetual blizzards on the high antarctic plateau of southern Shenang, the heavily fortified military compound of Shenangar Lu is one of the most secluded inhabited spots in the Known Worlds. Essentially a Li Halan holding, the place is used for a variety of purposes, most of them known only to the noble house's military elite. Vorox Commandos train here before they are assigned offworld, and Jingcha military intelligence agents work in subterranean laboratories to develop covert technologies. Assignment to Shenangar Lu usually denotes some promising talent for those of the upper echelons, but is regarded as a punishment by the rank and file of the house's common soldiery.

A separate section of the compound houses a maximumsecurity prison where especially dangerous criminals or politically embarrassing captives are kept. The most belligerent of captured ferals are brought here to be tamed by brute force and systematic torture, or to die in abject captivity.

Dirbirdar

Originally a small trading outpost at the mouth of the Dirbu River where it empties into the Jonki Gulf, Dirbirdar has grown over the past thousand years into a large but nonetheless primitive city. Crude wooden docks and vermininfested warehouses line the waterfront, beyond which is the core of the city, the few rude buildings of wood and stone to have survived the many earthquakes that rock Zureng on an almost seasonal basis. Past this clear-cut zone of unevenly cobbled streets, narrow dirt roads lead into the jungle itself, winding past small unwelcoming taverns and places of dubious business, overgrown plantation mansions, ramshackle wooden houses and thatched huts. Above these human-style dwellings is the "Vorox Quarter," a precariously creaking complex of treehouses and rope bridges stretching across the jungle canopy.

Once a bastion of civilization at the edge of the jungle, generations of corruption — both among the early Li Halan governors and the noble angeraks who have ruled since have allowed Dirbirdar to degenerate into a haven for refugees from both civilized and feral tribes, black marketeers, mercenaries, bounty hunters, poachers, smugglers, gunrunners, pox-ridden prostitutes of all species, escaped slaves and criminals on the run, the worst lowlife from both Vorox and human society. With a simpering ineffectual governor and a gleefully corrupt Scraver boss, the real force for law and order is the deacon of the city's small Avestite temple, a dour and tough old pilgrim named Sollum Krayne. Policing troops periodically descend upon Dirbirdar to "clean up the place," but the more vigorous elements of the populace simply retreat into the jungle, reemerging once the coast has cleared. This movement attracts local predators, which then descend upon the city and wreak havoc until slain or driven back into the wilderness. Life is cheap in such a place, and tends to end abruptly with few to mourn its passing.

Gadang Jungle Stronghold

The equatorial rainforest grows most densely in northern central Gadang, "The Source of a Dozen Rivers," where the jungle canopy has up to seven distinct tiers and threatens to spill over the steep cliffs that rise into the mountainous Mbadar isthmus, marking the eastern shores of the Ichena Sea. This is the Voroxian heartland, the cradle, if not of their civilization, then of their consciousness; it was the complex business of surviving in the deep jungle that ultimately forced the species to evolve into something more than mere animals. Some consider it ironic that this terrain is now the homeland of those feral angeraks that most vehemently resist the efforts of humans to civilize their race. KagongKagong, the most powerful of the feral chieftains, has declared Gadang to be an inviolate sanctuary for any Vorox on the run from the "claw-cutters." (Refugees whose claws have already been removed, however, are subjected to endless trials, physical ordeals and tests of loyalty, merely to be allowed a grudging place on the lowest rung of the feral social ladder.)

This region boasts the most extensive Vorox settlements that predate human contact, with an estimated population thought to comprise over twenty percent of the planet's natives. Here the old songs are sung amid a way of life unchanged for well over a thousand years, even with the infrequent addition of stolen human technology. Enclosed treehouses and open platforms are linked to form sprawling villages sandwiched between canopy layers that hide them from both ground and sky. Despite the bitter attitude of the inhabitants toward human influence, some of these villages employ the high technology that is the hallmark of human civilization. Powerful and efficient cutting implements are especially prized (see "A Note on the Vine," in Flora, below), as are reliable means of starting and maintaining fire - always a difficult task in the wet humid environs of the rainforest. Weaponry, of course, is another valued commodity, but a sort of unspoken agreement among the feral angeraks restricts their use, for the most part, to defense against predators or human incursion; hunting and intertribal disputes are usually resolved as they were during the previous millennium, partly out of tradition or a rudimentary sense of honor. Many large settlements keep at least

{ Who We Live With (Ungavorox)



one blaster or automatic firearm mounted sideways on the trunk of the central tree, facing downwards to deal with climbing grackles and other large carnivores. Since the overwhelming majority of ferals understand nothing of the maintenance required to keep such weapons in working order (many are even unaware of the need to reload ammunition or recharge fusion cells), their use tends to be short-lived. Villages capable of thriving without them generally eschew their use, while those that depend upon such devices must trade with more well-equipped tribes or steal them from human settlements.

The only eyewitness accounts of this region available to non-Vorox come from the memoirs and holovids of H. T. Hausen, the only human ever to gain the respect and friendship of the deep jungle ferals. Most of the material consists of shaky, "hand-held" images of dense trackless rainforest, occasionally pausing to focus on a unique vegetative formation or switching to a telescopic view of some distant specimen of fauna. (Actually, Hausen was using a tiny camera mounted in one eye socket, having lost an eye during his first expedition and finding the high-tech hovering smartjournals useless in thick foliage.) House Li Halan has made special efforts to collect as much of Hausen's work as they can, hoping to compile a rough map of the deep jungle for use by troops engaging the feral angeraks – or even by bounty hunters attempting to collect the sizable price on KagongKagong's head. Their collection of data is limited, however, most of it copied and recopied from heavily edited holo-documentaries. The house even pays a retainer to the Merchant League's Academy Interatta in exchange for any of Hausen's original data found in library archives or uncovered by the Reclamations Department, but little has ever come to light. (Or so the Academy claims...)

One image that has found its way into the noble house's possession is grim, foreboding and especially tantalizing to those concerned with "The Feral Problem." Consisting of only a few brief seconds, the scene is glimpsed as the viewer emerges from dense undergrowth and ends abruptly as a Vorox guide in the foreground motions for the camera to stop recording. (This simple detail in itself speaks volumes about the degree of communication and trust that Hausen was able to establish with the ferals.) In the background, some hundred or more Vorox are dancing around a bonfire at the base of a low cliff, beyond which can be seen the craggy peaks of the Mbadar isthmus rising out of the high rainforest and disappearing into the misty sky. The cliff's distinctive face appears to be the result of both geological formations and crude attempts at monumental sculpture. A huge broad gash at the base presents rows of stalactites and stalagmites, exposed to the surface world by an ancient land-

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nhe not he tian is nece. ns, ny ose slide, like an open mouth with bared fangs. Above this are two more cave openings, carved into roughly symmetrical shapes, with a smaller fire centered in each to enhance the suggestion of two glaring, glowing eyes. Atop the cliff are two pointed "ears," one a natural outcropping, the other a precarious pile of stones; between these rises a twisting curving land-coral, completing the effect of a jungle Graa Kal grackle fox — gigantically portrayed in stone, including its wild tangled mane. This site, theoretically the meeting place of the feral angeraks and the court of KagongKagong, is believed to be the fabled "Cavern of Gara-Tor," a named wrenched from the lips of drugged and tortured feral captives.

The southernmost extent of Gadang is where it meets the Vrundur plains along the shore of the Sea of Gar Za; this was the site of the historic summit where the Vorox were formally recognized as a sentient race by the Second Republic and H.T. Hausen was reunited with his father. Since that time there has always been some kind of human settlement in the area, whether a colony of Republican anthropologists or a Li Halan noble estate. Currently it is the site of Wu Tuo Bang, the main estate of Baron Tiberius Wu Lin Li Halan, who maintains a line of fortresses along the edge of the grasslands to watch for feral tribes emerging from the jungle. KagongKagong has recently demanded the right to conduct traditional sacred hunts for the great beasts of the plains, and the movements of his parties across the Tiberian Marches (as the region has come to be known) has been interpreted as a full invasion, to be countered with armed resistance.

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The Ustirian Fief of Gashkar

Overlooking the Zungash Straits where the Gashkar subcontinent joins the Ungava supercontinent, the ominously towering keep of Jun Fang Kong is home to a branch of the Li Halan family claiming descent from Ustirin the Unspeakable, an Antinomist tyrant of the pre-Cardanite period. House Li Halan refuses to acknowledge the Ustirids, considering them a bastard offshoot line from a time that should be forgotten. It is whispered that the old family never gave up their demonic obsessions and still practice dark magicks in dank catacombs deep within their secluded stronghold. Forbidden to leave the Ungavorox system by authorities on Icon, the Ustirids continually plot to regain their position as the leaders of House Li Halan. Despite their interdiction, many have traveled offworld with the heavily bribed aid of corrupt Scraver smugglers based in Dirbirdar.

The keep itself does little to dispel the line's reputation; gaunt and angular, it combines early Dark Age ornamentation with a Second Republic tensegrity design that can survive the massive earthquakes to which the region is prone. An eerie howling seems to fill the air at all times, caused by a combination of perpetual atmospheric turbulence surrounding the mountain peaks and high-pressure geothermal eruptions. To reach the entrance, one must cross a narrow ravine — only five meters across at its mouth — via a precarious hanging bridge. This ravine gradually closes until its opposite sides touch at about sea level, several hundreds of meters below; the tectonic forces driving Gashkar into Ungava cause the two sheer rock faces to grind together periodically, ensuring that anything dropped into the ravine is lost forever and eventually ground into dust. The rear of the keep may only be reached by a treacherous mountain pass, beyond which is the vast barren desert that occupies most of Gashkar. The desert is broken here and there by salt marshes, and eventually gives way to the broad mud flats, sandbar shoals and wide continental shelf that mark the trailing edge of the Gashkar tectonic plate.

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Fauna

Nowhere is the primitive nature of Ungavorox more evident than in its lifeforms, both animal and vegetable. While the majority of inhabitable worlds have stable ecologies with well-defined predator/prey relationships, life on this planet is truly a constant struggle, with every species sporting natural weaponry or some defensive strategy that inevitably proves fatal to the unwary. Brightly colored birds can attack with razor-sharp beaks and claws, small fuzzy mammals can bare oversized incisors encrusted with toxins, and even the most innocuous, familiar-looking amphibian may be coated with corrosive secretions or spit venom with deadly accuracy. Those animals and plants that resemble known species seem gigantic and monstrous beside their counterparts. The large carnivores for which this planet is renowned appear not only in mammalian and reptilian form, but in avian, insectoid, arachnid and even invertebrate and vegetable varieties as well.

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Much of the eerie beauty of this world is the result of its strange accelerated evolutionary cycles; many types of species found only in one sort of environment on other worlds have adapted to completely different biomes on Ungavorox. Most striking are those lifeforms we often consider exclusively aquatic, which have evolved into landfaring airbreathers. The dense humidity and teeming microbial life of the Ungavoroxian atmosphere has enabled uwulun - anemones - of every size, shape, color and configuration to flourish alongside the flowers they often resemble. Laga, or giant coral polyps, journey inland to raise fantastic palaces of brittle cobweb, which in turn become havens for insects, lizards and birds. Beneath its huge ornate shell, the mountain whelk known as the wa-chala lounges on cliffs, ridges and overhangs, its dangling tentacles eager for any passing ram, goat or hill bison to stray near.

— Journal of the Republican Astrographic Survey, xi/ MMMCMXCVI; "Impressions of Ungavorox" by H. T. Hausen, X.D.

The discovery of Ungavorox was hailed by naturalists as the greatest find of the Republican era. Vehement competition arose among scientists vying for permission to explore the planet, undaunted by the soaring mortality rate of previous expeditions. Proper scientific study of Ungavorox ended with the Fall, and neither the pre-Cardanite nor converted Li Halan have collectively shown enough interest for it to resume in any meaningful way.

Essentially Urthlike in size and composition, Ungavorox was originally compared to Urth of the late Mesozoic Era, but quickly shrugged off such a narrow classification. Like the solar family in which it resides, Ungavorox is a dynamic, high-energy system with complex cycles that Republican science had barely begun to understand in the few decades before the Fall. Early archaeological digs plainly showed that global cataclysm and mass extinction were, geologically speaking, practically commonplace occurrences, causing the forces of evolution to accelerate to an amazing pace but preventing the world from ever achieving the stability of a "mature" planetary ecosystem. The turbulent astrophysical and geological circumstances of the world resulted in a degree of biological diversity that spanned not only every conceivable survival strategy but found creatures from widely separate evolutionary phases coexisting at the same time.

Lesser Fauna

The rich variety and diversity of Ungavorox's wildlife have resulted in many species which are essentially similar to those found on other worlds. Local types of canines, large felines, goats, bison, antelope, lizards, snakes, ants, beetles, dragonflies, spiders, scorpions, sharks, giant squid, eels, game fish and birds of prey are basically like their counterparts on other worlds, though larger, more primitive forms predominate.

— Sir Kagangak de Zureng, Royal Safari Captain to Prince Tristam Li Halan

A complete catalog of this world's animals has never been compiled, and even the wisest feral shaman would be unfamiliar with most common species outside of her region. Gamemasters are encouraged to invent as many animals as they need to populate stories set on this planet, beefing up the traits of normal animals or developing variations of the more distinctive species detailed below. (Note that some have much larger relatives, and others can grow so big with age that they can technically qualify as megafauna.)

Chidwit

The chidwit is a small flightless insectivorous bird, with no natural weaponry and very little in the way of defenses, making it one of the most timid creatures in the Known Worlds. The chidwit lives in small underground nests scratched from the ground beneath stones and among the roots of some of Ungavorox's less dangerous trees and shrubs. Resembling an Urthish kiwi with a longer neck and legs, it is equipped with a third eye mounted on a stalk that retracts into the top of its head, enabling it to scan the surrounding terrain before it decides to emerge from its nest. Once in the open, the chidwit relies primarily upon its long legs to propel it at speeds of up to 100 kilometers per hour. Additionally, it has a chameleon-like capacity for

camouflage; its feathers can be rotated by tiny subdermal muscles, allowing it to change and rearrange its plumage using the two most frequently occurring hues of its habitat.

Being compared to a chidwit in any way is one of the gravest insults a Vorox can suffer.

Quote: "What was that? Did you see it? Where did it go? Can we eat it? Damn, that was fast!"

Description: The chidwit looks like a cross between an Urthish kiwi and a roadrunner, with elongated neck and legs and a torso roughly the size of a lean chicken. Its narrow, slightly curved beak is used to pluck bugs and shrekma from dirt, grass and tree bark, and is sharp enough at the tip to be used as a weapon. Two bulbous eyes protrude from either side of its tiny head and a third eye extends on a flexible stalk from the top of the skull.

Roleplaying: Never leaving its burrow when larger animals are around, the chidwit darts here and there with blinding speed in its search for food. Automatically camouflaging itself whenever a potential predator is in view, it will flee at top speed if anything approaches too close say, 20 to 50 meters. Body: Strength 1, Dexterity 13, Endurance 2

Mind: Wits 2, Perception 9 Natural skills: Dodge 10, Fight 1, Observe 8, Vigor 10

Benefices: 360-Degree Vision, Camouflage Feathers (-6 to Perception rolls to spot a chidwit in its natural habitat or any other environment with a similar color scheme, usually yellow-green and brown) **Base Run:** 30 meters **Weapons:**

WEAPON INIT GOAL DMG Beak 1 14 1d Vitality: -10/-5/0/0



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WHO WE LIVE WITH (UNGAVOROX)

Jugar

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Called "sharprats" in Urthish, the jugat are omnivorous burrowing rodents whose vast subterranean warren-empires can be found in all but the rockiest ground of Ungava. The sharprat's name comes from the plow-shaped bill that dominates the front of its skull, used, like the flatter rounder bill of the Urthish platypus, to dig its way through the earth. Growing over a meter long in late adulthood, the jugat hides a lethal agility belied by its squat waddling frame, and is able to turn its digging instrument into an effective weapon with a flick of its neck. Oviparous (also like the platypus), jugat lay their eggs in heavily protected breeding-dens deep underground, surrounded by an extensive maze of chambers and tunnels. Jugat are viciously territorial, constantly

battling to protect their homes against subterranean invaders — giant beetles and centipedes, bore-worms, moles or a voracious species of eight-legged shrew. They have even been known to come to the surface and attack much larger creatures whose tread was heavy enough to disturb their warrens.



Base Run: 4 meters Weapons:

WEAPON	INIT	GOAL	DMG		
Claws	7	11	2d		
Plowbill	8	11	3d		
Vitality: -10/-6/-2/0/0/0/0					

Quote: "Be sure to watch your step here – ARGH! My leg!!"

Description: An adult sharprat measures one meter in length, can rear up on its hind legs to over half that height, and is covered in dark mud-caked fur. The thick bony plate forming its plow-shaped bill is kept razor sharp by constant digging.

Behavior: A lone jugat will never initiate an attack, but will fight if surprised or cornered. When their territory is threatened, like when a heavy animal walks over their underground den, every mature able-bodied jugat will emerge to attack the intruder. Body: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Endurance 4

Mind: Wits 1, Perception 2 Natural skills: Dodge 3, Fight 7, Observe 4, Vigor 5



Deng-jil

This tripedal mammal occupies much the same ecological niche as the Urthish gazelle, grazing on the grasslands and relying upon its speed and astounding leaping ability to elude predators. The deng-jil's most unusual trait is its three legs; the larger muscular central leg carries most of its weight and enables it to bound several meters through the air, while the smaller outer legs give it stability while standing and maneuverability when in motion. Its short narrow torso is balanced at front and back by a long neck and tail taller than they are wide, making its body a kind of vertical aerofoil capable of surprising directional changes in midair while bounding. The deng-jil's smallish skull is topped with a thick triangular bone plate, with the lower



point between its wide-set eyes and the upper portion serving as the base for two long curving horns, the leading edges of which are sharpened and, in some breeds, serrated.

Most types are small, standing a little over a meter at the shoulder, but larger breeds exist and one close relative, the slender and awkward-seeming deng-yom, stands some four meters at the shoulder and can stretch its three-meterlong neck to reach leaves and fruit on the trees where the jungle meets the plains. Generally shy and skittish, deng-jil go into a mating frenzy during late adolescence, and the compulsion to butt heads with sexual rivals can mount to such a fever pitch that some have been known to charge predators unprovoked. Deng-jil annually migrate in large herds, building up such blind momentum that any creature caught in their path is rammed and trampled. **Quote:** "Magnificent, are they not, My Lady? Oh, we shall be perfectly safe watching from this vantage point, as long as the herd does not change direc— " PUDUBUPUD UBUPUDUBUPUDUBUH...

Description: The most common variety of deng-jil, ranging from the temperate Jordul Seas to the northernmost savannahs of Vrundur, stands between 1.2 and 1.5 meters tall at shoulder/hip and is around 2.5 meters long from nose to tail. Color varies with the environs, and vertical stripes are common in the grasslands, often accompanied by a stiff narrow mane that mimics waving tips of tall grass.

Behavior: Generally shy and timid, stampeding away from any loud noise, sudden movement or unfamiliar

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shape, the deng-jil is quite dangerous nonetheless. Adults may join forces to drive a lone predator away from young and can be downright belligerent when in heat. Body: Strength 7, Dexterity 9, Endurance 6 Mind: Wits 1, Perception 6 Natural skills: Dodge 7, Fight 5, Observe 5, Vigor 8 Base Run: 26 meters; Leap: 4 meters Weapons: (STR bonus: +1d DMG) WEAPON GOAL DMG INIT Horns 5 14 4d Outer Hoof 4 4d 14 Inner Hoof 3 14 4d Charge 2 14 5d +1d / 3m

Vitality: -10/-7/-4/-1/0/0/0/0/0/0



WHO WE LIVE WITH (UNGAVOROX)

Tcheh-tchee

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More commonly known to offworlders as the scorpion gibbon, this eight-legged insectivore inhabits the middle heights of the jungle canopy, frequently venturing to ground level in search of ants, beetles, millipedes and grubs. Strongly resembling the Urthish gibbon, spider monkey and other long-limbed arboreal primates, the tchehtchee's torso measures less than half a meter, with four pairs of long multi-jointed limbs terminating in small paws with elongated nimble fingers, giving it an armspan of nearly two meters. It is covered with a thick coat of soft fluffy varicolored fur that must be constantly groomed for all the parasites it attracts. Large bulbous eyes mounted almost on opposite sides of the skull give the tcheh-tchee some 300



degrees of peripheral vision, only partially obscured by its thick mane and the striking rings of facial hair that protect the eyes from dust and flying insects. Its spine can curve until its head touches its pelvis, and can rotate in a full circle; its elbow joints are reversible, able to bend in either direction, and its shoulder sockets allow its limbs to swing in extremely wide arcs. A strong prehensile tail just over a meter in length is tipped with a poisonous stinger hidden in a tuft of fur.

Some time after the Fall an enterprising Charioteer noted the extreme agility and dexterity of the tcheh-tchee, and decided that the animal would make an ideal pet for zerogravity environments. The tcheh-tchee soon proved too stupid to be trained and too foul-tempered to be in any way domesticated, so the idea was abandoned, but not before several breeding pairs escaped. Small bands still survive in the inaccessible superstructures of large starships, freighters and orbital granaries, their fur dark and matted down with oil and grit, waging territorial wars with hull rats, living on the ants and roaches that feed on spillage and organic detritus.

Quote: "Oh! What an adorable little rascal! Would you

like a piece of fruit, darling? EEUGH!! DISGUSTING! FILTHY, FOUL, DISGUSTING LITTLE BEAST!!!"

Description: The largest breed of tcheh-tchee stands 50-60 centimeters tall, with a 1.3 meter armspan, and strongly resembles the extinct Urthish spider monkey, but with eight limbs. Its fur is brightly colored with striking patterns of jungle camouflage.

Behavior: The tchehtchee considers its primary role in life to interfere with everyone else's primary role; insatiably curious, it will boldly advance upon any newcomer to the jungle, confident of its ability to quickly scamper out of the reach of any danger. Once it has sized up its mark, it may do one of two things: throw its feces at the intruder, or attempt to remove any food-

stuffs, small shiny objects or any other loose items it can manage to gain — whether by force, stealth or a deceptive show of timid friendliness – and then throw its feces at the intruder.

Body: Strength 4, Dexterity 11, Endurance 3 Mind: Wits 4, Perception 7 Natural skills: Charm 6, Dodge 9, Fight 4, Observe 8, Sneak 5, Vigor 7 Learned skill: Throw 6 Benefice: Extra Limbs (8 total) Base Run/Climb: 14 meters; Leap: 3 meters Weapons: WEAPON INIT GOAL DMG

WEAPON	INIT	GOAL	DMG
Bite	3	15	1 d
Grapple	5	17	1 d
Leap	2	14	2d +1d / 3m
Tail stinger	5	15	2d + special*
Flung dung	6	17	special**

* Nerve toxin stuns target for 3 turns per point of damage taken. ** Target must make a Calm + Vigor or Stoic Mind roll or spend next turn retching.

Vitality: -10/-5/-3/-1/0/0/0

Zixalg

Similar to a common leech. the zixalg slithers through swamps, muddy jungle floors and heavily overgrown inland bodies of water, using its toothringed sucker-like mouth to suck blood (and other bodily fluids) from its prey. Unlike the leech, the zixalg has no natural anesthetic with which to numb its victim, clinging and feeding parasitically until discovered and removed; it must grapple and subdue its prey like most other native predators. Although an invertebrate, the zixalg's complex hydrostatic "skeletomuscular" system gives it the same potential strength and rigidity as a constricting snake, and it hunts in much the same manner. While capable of latching onto and passively bleeding a larger animal, the zixalg prefers to coil itself around its victim, flexing its body in waves to grind and

crush, bursting vessels and internal barriers until most of the innards have liquefied, then suck the carcass empty.

Hatched underwater from a jellylike egg mass, larval zixalg "suckle" off their parent's body until forcibly detached, at which time they begin to stalk small marine life - minnows, shrimp, crabs and often each other. (Pairs and clusters of evenly matched cannibalistic siblings sometimes form, each simultaneously feeding and feeding off the other, until one gains dominance or the entire cluster dies from mutual malnourishment.) Once it grows to twenty centimeters or so, the zixalg starts to hunt on land, attacking small bugs, reptiles and rodents; few live past this stage, growing perhaps a meter long at most. Particularly successful individuals may continue to grow, however, hunting ever-larger prey. Reports have come from the deep jungle of zixalg estimated at up to ten meters long, dropping out of trees or rearing up from the mud, their bodies shaggy with attached progeny.

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Ouote: "Wait a minute. My leg's tangled up in something under the surface, here. Come give me a hand with this — GLUBGLBLBlblbloop…"

Description: The example given here is for a "middle-aged" adult some three meters long and thirty centimeters in diameter. Its smooth slimy skin is black or dark olive-brownish and may be pocked with small suckermarks where it nurtured its young.

Behavior: The zixalg has no intelligence whatsoever and is motivated purely by the never-ending search for food. Its nervous system is so primitive that it does not respond to pain, and will continue to attack no matter how many wounds it receives. Normally found in swamp-water, it may venture onto dry land and even up trees if prey remains

nearby long enough to attract its attention. Body: Strength 12, Dexterity 5, Endurance 15 Mind: Wits 0, Perception 3

Natural skills: Dodge 1, Fight 5, Observe 2, Sneak 8, Vigor 7 Base Slither: 4 meters (on land) / 8 meters (in water) Weapons: (STR bonus: +3d DMG) Sucker Mouth (3 DMG; for every three victory points scored by Grapple attacks, the zixalg extracts a full Vitality level draining bodily fluids) WEAPON INIT GOAL DMG Grapple 2 10 4d/3d*

* A successful grapple means the zixalg attaches its sucker mouth:

3d continuous damage per turn after the first until it is dislodged as the zixalg drains bodily fluids (ignore armor and energy shields). Armor: Slick hide (ARM 3d)

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🖁 WHO WE LIVE WITH (UNGAVOROX)

Jutzik

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The eel-like jutzik appears in both aquatic and arboreal varieties, the latter rarely growing more than a meter in length while the former seems to have no upper limit to the sizes it can reach. Each is char-not so unusual for a carnivore on Ungavorox - and its narrow elongated skull, which terminates in a hard sharp point lined with backswept barbs. It feeds upon the soft internal organs of larger animals, penetrating the abdomen by spearing it with its head and gnawing away until it is either ripped out or squirms completely inside and nests within the dying victim. Mating pairs generally attack larger prey, persisting until they are able to fully occupy the abdominal nest and lay their eggs. Hatchlings feed upon the de-

caying carcass until they grow large enough to strike out on their own. The arboreal variety attacks from above, spreading its ribs to flatten its body and gliding in to attack.

Quote: "We should be safe from aerial attacks now that we're under cover of the trees —" SssschlukKT!

Description: The jutzik resembles a common tree snake, but with a hard skull shaped like the barbed point of a hunting arrow; the adult jutzik averages around one meter long, and is usually two to three centimeters in diameter. When gliding, its ribs spread to form an aerofoil approximately eight to ten centimeters wide, enabling it to navigate the dense jungle growth with deadly speed and grace.

Behavior: The jutzik, while not completely unintelligent, has few instincts other than to feed and to breed, both of which it satisfies in much the same manner: by diving headfirst into a much larger animal. If feeding, it will simply gnaw away at any innards within reach until it is removed, killed or sated. Mating pairs generally attack together, and will fight to the death in their attempt to burrow completely into the target's body, where they nest and lay eggs.

Body: Strength 2, Dexterity 7, Endurance 3

Mind: Wits 1, Perception 4 Natural skills: Dodge 7, Fight 6, Glide 9, Observe 5, Sneak 7, Vigor 6

Base Slither/Climb: 6 meters Base Glide: 30 meters Weapons:

INIT GOAL DMG

Spear Head616*3d** +1d / 1 m of clear, straight flightBite6132d

* Roll Dexterity + Glide

WEAPON

** If at least one point of damage penetrates armor, the jutzik's barbed skull is imbedded in the target's body — it delivers 3d damage each turn (no roll required) as it gnaws at the target's innards, ignoring armor and energy shields. Attempting to remove the jutzik by pulling it straight out automatically doubles the amount of damage done up to that point; this can be avoided by an equivalent number of victory points on a Physick roll.

Armor: Hardened spinal barbs (ARM 1d) Vitality: -10/-5/-1/0/0/0





VOROX A

Grek-kao

The grek-kao is a crablike crustacean, usually growing up to a quarter of a meter in diameter (although larger specimens can often be found), with eight thick muscular legs terminating in large steely razor-sharp claws. It feeds exclusively on the kao, a fruit that closely resembles the Urthish coconut, tearing through the thick fibrous outer husk and cracking the rockhard inner shell to get at the sweet pulpy flesh.

When the feral colony of the Winuman Island chain declared their independence from civilized Vorox rule in the 42nd century, General Nicola Li Halan led an assault team in powered armor to storm the Winuman beaches. As the team passed through the wide grove of kao-palms that lined the beach, they were sprayed

down with kao juice by the defenders and set upon by swarms of grek-kao that had been starving ever since the Vorox harvested all the kao days earlier. Although the herbivorous grek-kao did not attempt to feed on the occupants of the armored suits, all attackers suffered from deep lacerations, many were burned by internal electrical fires, some were dismembered as their armor was torn apart and several were vaporized when a suit's fusion pack was breached.

Quote: "What a lovely bunch of coconuts... I wonder if they taste as good as they – AAAIIIYEEEH!! MY FINGERS! MY FINGERS!"



6. Endurance 4

Description: The grekkao looks not unlike other known species of crab, but is larger and heavier than most, with thicker, stronger limbs and a much harder shell. Its claws look bulbous and almost comical when closed, but when open reveal menacing steely edges serrated like tailor's shears. Its body is generally thirty centimeters in diameter, and it has a sixty to seventy centimeter clawspan.

Behavior: Despite its impressive complement of weaponry and armor, the grek-kao is essentially a shy and retiring creature that tends to scuttle away at the approach of larger animals. When hungry, however, it will brave any danger standing between it and its food source, the kao palm.

Body: Strength 11, Dexterity

Mind: Wits 1, Perception 5 Natural skills: Dodge 5, Fight 6, Observe 4, Sneak 4, Vigor 7 Benefice: Extra Limbs (8 total) Base Scuttle/Climb: 4 meters Weapons: (STR bonus: +2d DMG) WEAPON INIT GOAL DMG Claws 6 12 6d Grapple 3 9 4d Armor: Exoskeleton (ARM 5d) Vitality: -10/-6/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0

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WHO WE LIVE WITH (UNGAVOROX)

Shrekma

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A Voroxian equivalent of the Urthish "vermin," shrekma refers to the omnipresent microscopic and near-microscopic organisms that permeate every possible niche in the biosphere of Ungavorox. Besides a thousandfold more varieties of common microorganisms, diseases and the like, the planet is also host to simple primordial singlecelled animacules large enough to be seen with the naked eye. Anywhere in the world, a close inspection of one's surroundings discloses hordes of undulating vermiforms and ciliates ringed with pseudopods migrating across any solid surface, schools of tail-whipping flagellates in any puddle or dewdrop and clouds of spiky pinheadsized heliozoans drifting through the aerial phase of their life cycle, cell walls puffed full of organically produced helium.

Shrekma gets its name from the ubiquitous shrek-fly, which breeds at all latitudes and in all terrains on Ungavorox.

Approximately the size and shape of a mosquitohawk, the shrek actually feeds on many toxins and the most virulent macroprotozoans, playing a significant role in checking the spread of aggressive diseases and dispersing accumulations of poison in the food chain. Shrek-flies tend to swarm around any creature passing into their vicinity, tasting the chemical signature of adjacent regions, and have developed a special love of the alien microbes that coat the bodies of visitors from offworld. Allowing shrek-flies to swarm on one's body can prevent disease from airborne infections, and drinking a preparation of shrek larvae can fortify one against the most common venoms of a given region. (This has become a mandatory requirement for newly arrived Li Halan troops;

troublesome recruits are usually ordered to harvest the larvae for their entire squad.)

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Цмніни

The frequency of geological upheaval on Ungavorox has caused many aquatic species to adapt to life on land, adding uniquely eerie touches to the landscape. Two such species are the laga and the uwulun, primitive multicelled animals that reproduce asexually. The laga is a meter-long cylindrical polyp that feeds on shrekma harvested from ground, water or air by long slender tentacles that may spread to form branching or fanlike shapes as necessity dictates. The laga secretes thin strips or sheets of waste that build up to form calcified coral-reef "palaces" composed of jagged razorthin edges. These towering labyrinths are added to by succeeding generations, so that some palaces may cover as much as an acre or more. The laga is harmless, helpless on its own, comparatively non-toxic and

considered a rare delicacy; rare because of the difficulty involved in locating and extracting one from the center of its sprawling palace without hunter and quarry both being sliced to ribbons.

The laga's larger cousin, the uwulun, is a gigantic anemone, essentially a mass of tentacles attached to a stomach open on only one end. While smaller varieties are found nearly everywhere on the planet, the uwulun grows to enormous size in the swamps, wetlands and rainforest where shrekma and small game are more plentiful. Mobile in its infancy, the young uwulun stakes out a territory where it can reach food on a regular basis, like well-traveled paths on the jungle's floor or lower branch layers. The uwulun settles into some kind of natural shelter such as a rock crevice, then accretes a shell-like covering to house its body and into which it can retract its tentacles when danger threatens. Because it is heavier and requires more food, the giant uwulun is stronger and more aggressive than its smaller relatives; it routinely attempts to engulf and devour prey too large for it to swallow completely, and will put up more of a fight in the process.

Quote: "Many believe the uwulun to be an exotic flower, but it is, in actuality, an animMFLJSHG!!"

Description: Ungavorox is known for its land anemones, which dot the landscape like neon-colored flowers. Uwulun are stationary, keeping their bodies hidden away in rock crevices, the variegated surfaces of land coral palaces, knot-holes in trees or burrows just beneath the ground surface. They feed by extending a dense mass of tentacles to grapple and engulf prey; when threatened, these tentacles can be retracted back into the uwulun's hiding place with lightning speed. Most uwulun are tiny, feeding on insects and shrekma, but in the jungle, where small game abounds, the uwulun grows large and aggressive. The example given

here is for the largest of these jungle giants, with a body over a meter in diameter and tentacles reaching outward to a radius of 3 meters.

Behavior: The uwulun will automatically extend its tentacles and attack any time prey of a suitable size wanders near; the approach of substantially larger animals will cause it to retreat into its hiding hole. The jungle breed described here will put up a fight for prey as large as a human or young Vorox, ignoring any damage short of that caused by large flames or sustained energy weapons fire. **Body:** Strength 5, Dexterity 30, Endurance 3 **Mind:** Wits 0, Perception 2

Natural skills: Fight 3, Observe 1, Vigor 7

Benefice: Extra Limbs (30 total)

Weapons: Grapple (+5 Initiative, 2 DMG)

WEAPON INIT GOAL DMG Grapple 8 33* 2d

* A roll or 19 or 20 is still a failure; 18 is a critical success. On any successful roll, add 5 victory points for the excessive goal number. **Vitality:** -20/-15/-10/-9/-9/-8/-8/-7/-7/-6/-6/-5/-5/-4/-4/-3/-3/-3/-2/-2/-2/-1/-1/-1/-1/0/0/0

Црінич

One type of shrekma actually tolerated in civilized territory is the large amoeboid ublundu, which feeds on other shrekma and many small pests. In the wild where it has many natural predators, the ublundu rarely grows larger than an adult Vorox's fist, but it is allowed to breed in cities like New Kowloon, keeping disease-carriers there in check. Ublundu frequently find their way into the sewer system, however, and soon grow so large that they cause blockages and backup. Then the quivering blob must be carefully herded out of the city by torches and flamethrowers. since any puncture of its cell wall releases vast gouts of cytoplasm - poisonous to offworlders and a breeding ground for harmful shrekma. Once driven to a scorched kill<image>

ing field, it is blasted and systematically burnt from a safe distance. Some merciless nobles have been rumored to keep giant ublundu in sealed pits, feeding them undesirables, interlopers, rivals and insubordinate henchmen.

Quote: "This is Purger's Guild Worker Number Six reporting. I still don't see what's clogging the main... Oh, bloody hell. Chief, I guess your hunch was right. Better send some back-up units down here. And tell 'em to bring plenty of torches — it's a big one."

Description: The ublundu is the largest of the native macrobial organisms, a gigantic amoeba usually found in stagnant bodies of water or city sewer systems. Although structurally similar to its microscopic brethren, its immense bulk prevents it from being as mobile or as dexterous. The traits below are for an ublundu around three meters in diameter by one meter thick, weighing just under a ton.

Behavior: Literally devoid of two brain cells to rub together, the ublundu is the most insensate of this planet's lower orders. Blind instinct drives it to engulf and absorb anything that might remotely qualify as a nutrient (i.e., any organic matter), and it will retreat from extreme heat or any other intense energy discharge, like electrical arcs or blaster fire. Ublundu can extend crude pseudopods to fight with, but lack the sensory or motor apparatus to use them effectively.

Body: Strength 15, Dexterity 2, Endurance 24

Mind: Wits 0, Perception 1

Natural skills: Fight 3, Vigor 10Weapons: (STR bonus: +4d DMG)WEAPONINITGOALDMGPseudopod353d

rocaacpea	0	0	0 th
Absorption	2	5	special

* Sustained attack: Once the ublundu accumulates a number of grappling victory points equal to the target's total Vitality, the target is completely engulfed within the giant amoeboid body. It will ooze into his orifices, quickly suffocating him (roll Endurance + Vigor each turn to stay alive, cumulative -2 penalty each successive turn). **Armor:** Slick outer membrane (ARM 2d)

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Медағанпа

Known Worlders marvel at the size and strength of the Vorox while deriding their brutish customs and simplistic modes of thought. They are shocked to learn that, by the standards of their homeworld, the Vorox are relatively weak and puny, their survival depending as much upon quick wits and raw animal cunning as upon physical prowess. Some of the giant beasts of Ungavorox can be seen in noble menageries, guild zoos and carnivals, but this is rare, because most are as difficult and expensive to keep in captivity as they are to capture in the first place. Spectators at such venues seldom realize that the huge and fearsome beasts before them are actually some of the planet's most gentle herbivores (comparatively speaking).

Graa Kal

The grackle fox — as this vicious predator is known to Urthish-speaking peoples — has become legendary as the most dangerous beast in existence, but few have ever seen one up close with their own eyes and lived to tell the tale. Until the Vorox learned to use tools and communicate complex ideas, the Graa Kal was the undisputed apex of the food chain. The cursory fossil evidence gathered by Second Republic scientists indicated that both the Graa Kal and the Vorox evolved roughly parallel to each other, competing for the same food sources and spreading out from the plains into other habitats at approximately the same time. Some theorize that the Vorox followed the Graa Kal on the hunting trail, observing and learning from the aggressive beast, while others assert that it was the Graa Kal that first began to prey upon its competitors to drive them away.

Vorox myth, however, is not so equivocal. In the earliest and most primitive legends, the grackle is identified with Gar, an all-father type figure similar in some ways to the "Horned Lord of the Great Hunt" from Gjartin lore. Although Gar may be somewhat likened to the beneficent culturebringers of most humanoid mythologies, he comes off as a far more harsh teacher than that of other races. The first Vorox heroes learned their lessons the hard way, with much bloodshed and loss of limb to remind them of past mistakes; most perish at the climax of their adventures, as tracking, capture and killing techniques are demonstrated upon them by their race's mentor. The eight-legged quasi-feline Graa Kal, large enough to bring down one of the giant armored herbivores single-handedly but swift enough to harry the fleet quick-witted Vorox, was Father Gar's favored tool of destruction, part of an arsenal that included lightning, earthquake, tornado, flood, plague and meteoric impact. Originally cast as the judge and enforcer of the Law of the Wild, the Graa Kal came to the prehistoric veldt from the south during the last ice age. Competing against the Vorox for the

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plentiful meat of the enormous, nigh-invincible vrongar (below), the Graa Kal soon developed a taste for the Vorox themselves, finding their unarmored bodies easier to prey upon (and apparently more appetizing). Later myths depict the Graa Kal as a purely malefic nemesis more akin to the "devil" of early humanoid monotheism, whose constant deadly presence eternally tries the tribe for weakness and foolhardiness.

The reign of terror imposed by the Graa Kal shaped the very core of Vorox racial consciousness. Forced from the grassland plains where they once ran free pacing the swift deng-jil and harrying the dour vrongar, the Vorox died in great numbers. Only those wary enough to quickly learn the rules of the new environments into which they migrated, and cunning enough to adapt to new modes of living, moving, tracking, hunting and killing, stood a chance of survival. In the deserts and mountains, some took to living in caves and burrows, relying on walls of stone and earth to keep the Graa Kal at bay. High in the equatorial rainforest, however, the Vorox race found a haven of its own, amidst the branches of the middle canopy, which were stout enough to support a full-grown Vorox but could not bear the weight of the more massive Graa Kal. A two-tiered system of living developed, whereby the most able members of a tribe would descend to the ground to hunt while the very young, the very old, the injured or the helpless could wait in the safety of the trees, ensnaring birds and insects. This division of labor fostered the evolution of the species, putting greater demand on its capacity to communicate and manipulate; language, semipermanent dwellings and compound tools of shaped wood and stone first appeared at this time and the first culture of the Vorox flourished amid the jungle treetops. Far below, however, the Graa Kal still prowled, hungrily eyeing the boughs swaying above, ever ready to teach the smaller mammals the consequence of a single misstep.



VOROX

Nearly a dozen distinct subspecies of grackle fox are known; they can mainly be distinguished by the coloring of their fur, patterned to provide a degree of camouflage in each breed's natural habitat. Most numerous and well known are the jungle-dwelling varieties, which tend to be slightly smaller and more agile than the shaggy, heavyset mountain grackle or the lean shock-maned stalker of the plains. The largest and most primitive type is the Graa Kung of the antarctic region, whose lethal bulk is concealed beneath thick rolling folds of fluffy snow-white fur. Only a few individuals of this subspecies still survive, as their primary food sources (a kind of tripedal mammoth and a highly intelligent walrus with an elongated body and more articulated front flippers) have been poached into extinction over the past thousand years since the arrival of humanity.

Quote: "I can only hope our telescopic cameras are picking this up, for, there in the underbrush, less than half a kilometer to the south, we are treated to a rare glimpse of the fabled grackle fox... Oh Merciful Pancreator, it's seen us! Those baleful burning eyes are narrowing as they turn in our direction! Run! RUN you fools! RUN FOR YOUR LI—

Description: The Graa Kal can best be compared to the Urthish lion, with its sleek, heavily muscled body and thick mane about its head and shoulders, but there the resemblance ends. Standing two to three meters tall at the shoulder, the Graa Kal measures up to four or five meters long from nose to rump with a two- to three-meter tail, and weighs over a ton. Its four pairs of legs, each terminating in venomous claws 30 centimeters long, can propel it to incredible speeds on open ground and enable it to climb any tree large enough to support its weight. Its face is dominated by a maw lined with razor-sharp fangs, the largest of which the saberlike incisors — reach nearly a meter in length and enable it to completely bisect an entire adult human or Vorox torso in one bite. Above this, flaring nostrils wrinkled in a perpetual snarl separate its two eyes, glaring orbs of reddish violet that seem to express only cruel cunning and unyielding malice.

Behavior: The Graa Kal is perhaps the single most intelligent non-sentient predator found in the Known Worlds, making it a truly formidable opponent for even the most heavily armed and armored of hunters. It can distinguish and remember the smell of poisons, drugs, explosives and metals if it has experienced the properties of these substances for itself. Likewise, any Graa Kal that has witnessed firsthand the operation of powered vehicles or firearms will retain a rudimentary understanding of what such devices can do, and may modify its tactics accordingly. Just to make matters worse, the Graa Kal also exhibits the feline behavior of "toying" with its prey, inflicting only minor damage and then allowing the victim to flee for a time so it can resume the chase it so enjoys, repeating this process several times before going in for the kill.

Body: Strength 21, Dexterity 15, Endurance 15

Mind: Wits 7, Perception 8

Natural skills: Dodge 4, Fight 10, Impress 9, Observe 5, Sneak 3, Vigor 10

Benefice: Extra Limbs (8 total)

Base Run: 24 meters

Weapons: (STR bonus: +6d DMG)

WEAPON	INIT	GOAL*	DMG
Claws	10	25	9d**
Fangs	9	25	11d
Charge	7	25	9d +2d / 3m
Leap	7	23***	10d +2d / 3m
Grapple	9	23***	9d
Maul****	7	23***	13d

* A roll or 19 or 20 is still a failure; 18 is a critical success. On any successful roll, add 2 victory points for the excessive goal number. ** Poison: -3 penalty on all actions until a number of turns equal to Vitality

•••• Add only 1 victory point for the excessive goal number. ••••• Only after successful grapple.

Armor: Hide and muscle (ARM 8d)

Vitality: -10/-10/-8/-8/-6/-6/-4/-4/-2/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/ 0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0



Vrongar

Brother Vrongar is a constant presence in Vorox mythology, the challenging and honorable prey tough enough to meet even the deadly grackle fox blow for blow. Lore relates that in the old time the Vorox were smaller, ran on all sixes and prowled the low plains in packs like wolves; the vrongar of this era agreed that the Vorox might prey upon their sickly young or infirm elderly, for the fiercest pack had little chance of taking down a vrongar in its prime. When the Vorox developed a highly effective method for killing adult vrongar, the herds found their numbers rapidly depleting and united with the Graa Kal to force the Vorox off the grasslands and into the jungle, the habitat that would eventually drive them to full sentience. From that time until the coming of man, the Vorox would venture down into the plains to hunt only the adult vrongar, and then only in large packs as a communal act of intense spiritual importance. Over the last thousand years, however, civilized Voroxian nobles have taken to hunting the vrongar as part of their rites of passage. Thus, visiting dignitaries may be treated to gore-drenched safaris, firing high-powered weapons from armored vehicles. (See "The Great Vrongar Hunt" story in the *Culture* chapter.)

The most common type of vrongar strongly resembles

the armored ceratopsian dinosaurs of the Urthish Cretaceous Period, and is a distant relative of the much smaller shanto beast (a kind of cross between a warthog and an armadillo). Standing anywhere from two to four meters tall at the shoulder, its massive bony cranium spreads to form a broad shieldlike crest ringed with horns, spikes and barbs, framing a face similarly fixed with curving tusks, bony knobs and strange branching protrusions like stubby antlers. Its barrel-shaped torso is supported by four pairs of short, thickly muscled legs and surrounded by dense folds of tough scaly hide; bony armor plates protecting the spine and hindquarters are common, sometimes locked closely together forming a solid shell like a turtle or prehistoric Urthish ankylosaur, and sometimes set perpendicular to the body like the stegosaur. Some breeds have a thick muscular tail tipped with spikes or a blunt clublike nodule. One desert-dwelling subspecies has nostril openings which extend to form straight hollow tubes; dust and grit building up in the nasal cavities are periodically expelled with a sharp loud snort, and the resulting projectile can strike with the equivalent force of a slug from a large-caliber rifle.

Despite its lumbering, brutish appearance, the vrongar is a highly intelligent beast, with complex herd societies,



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family structures and territorial politics. It mates for life and is fiercely protective of its young, which are extremely vulnerable for the first few years of life until their hide hardens into armor. Small herds have been known to deploy surprisingly sophisticated defensive and evasive tactics. Although they have never shown signs of true sentience, vrongar can communicate detailed information about predators, terrain and weather over long distances, with a language composed of rhythmic stomping, bellowing, trumpeting, pounding or grinding their armor plates and, in some breeds, resonating cranial cavities. Additionally, each herd uses a communal latrine area which can serve as a kind of biochemical bulletin board for herds that pass by later; by smelling the accumulated excrement, a vrongar can quickly learn about local vegetation, toxins and diseases, as well as the previous herd's size, composition and presence of members of breeding age.

Vrongar are generally accompanied by one or more species of bird or large insect that feed primarily upon the smaller insects and shrekma that accumulate and thrive in the crevices of the vrongar's armor plates. Except for these beneficial companions, the vrongar seldom tolerate the presence of other species, and refuse to breed — or often even eat in captivity. Tales are sometimes told among the Vorox of feral shamans who manage to befriend Brother Vrongar, riding the great beast as a battle-mount, but none can honestly claim to have witnessed such a spectacle. (Hundredyear-old medicine show posters depicting Gasparia Li Halan — "The Incredible Jungle Girl" — astride a bucking ceratopsid have been dismissed as mere ballyhoo.)

Ceratopsid skulls possess a talismanic significance not only for Vorox feral and civilized, but for many Li Halan and others who have come into contact with native Vorox culture. Many civilized lords and feral chieftains alike sit on thrones fashioned from the almost solar array of horns, or else have the head of Brother Vrongar mounted over the entrances of their palaces and strongholds. Even offworlders are fascinated by the vrongar's knobby, spike-maned countenance, which overlooks many noble courts as well as the main hall of the Emperor's private hunting lodge on Tethys. Vrongar poaching nearly brought the species to the edge of extinction during the middle Dark Ages, and preservation of the herds proved to be the only issue upon which Li Halan authorities, civilized Vorox and feral Vorox all agreed. (This agreement is tenuous at best, as the nobility still hunt when and where they please, provoking violent outrage from feral tribes.)

This widespread fascination stems from the belief that vrongar horns and other cranial protrusions are a potent aphrodisiac; while there has never been any conclusive medical evidence to support this, the association between vrongar horns and sexual activity is a strong one, stretching back into Vorox prehistory. In point of fact, the vrongar's horns

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are a vital part of its mating process, both as a visual display to attract partners and as a useful tool for reaching around and beneath rigid armor plates to massage and caress certain nerve clusters through the thick hide. This stimulates the mate into a degree of excitation necessary for intercourse, causing the genitalia to emerge from its protective cavity. A crucial leap in Voroxian evolution occurred when they learned to use branches and bones in a similar fashion, lulling the ever-vigilant vrongar into a passive state where it exposes its most vulnerable area, the thinner softer hide of its throat and belly.

The term vrongar specifically refers to the grazing ceratopsids of the grassland plains, but local variations may be applied regionally to any of a number of species of large heavily armored herbivore. These include a long-necked brontosaurian denizen of the deep swamp, and a stilt-legged crustacean of the islands and tropical coasts that combs shrekma off the leaves of the kao-palm with its branching fanlike antennae. Another type is a mountain-dwelling insect whose hundred tiny legs enable it to climb sheer cliff faces and which can, when threatened, curl itself into an armored ball so tightly sealed that it can survive a trip through the wa-chala's entire digestive tract.

Quote: "By Saint Mantius, what a splendid beast! What better test for a true man can there be, but to match his mettle against such a magnific—" SPULCH!

Description: Detailed below is the saurian ceratopsid of the Vrundur plains, the largest and fiercest of all the various beasts grouped under the name vrongar. Standing anywhere from four to five meters or taller at the shoulder and measuring eight to ten meters long, the vrongar weighs several tons and its footprint, over a meter in diameter, sinks into the driest packed earth and even some softer types of stone. The vrongar's skull is a solid armor plate spreading some three meters in diameter and ringed with a dozen or more horns, some dulled and broken, some honed to fine points; emerging from the center is the snout, equally armored except for its prehensile lips and a small portion of its throat. The vrongar's body is covered with a thick pebbly hide lined with rows of broad bony plates, some projecting sharp, jagged ridges at right angles to the body. Most breeds are equipped with a hard, heavy club-tail, usually spiked.

Of all the species collectively named vrongar by the natives, only the distantly related brontosaurian swamp-dweller is more massive, and none are stronger than the ceratopsids. A smaller, more heavily armored ceratopsid breed roaming the deserts is equipped with an unusual weapon — the ability to shoot a plug of dust and grit from its nostrils with unerring accuracy.

Behavior: Vrongar of all types are reputed to be foultempered, but this is based on the observations of intrusive explorers and hunters who openly violated the grazing ter-

ritory of the herds. In truth, the vrongar is a gentle and intelligent beast that is extremely protective of its family and herd. Except for smaller animals that pose no threat, nearly any creature or even a large moving object invading the grazing grounds is treated as a potential predator or competing grazer. Vrongar automatically charge such intruders until they either die or retreat to a sufficient distance (usually a kilometer or more).

Body: Strength 27, Dexterity 6, Endurance 20 Mind: Wits 4, Perception 4 Natural skills: Fight 8, Impress 9, Observe 6, Vigor 10 (Desert breed has Shoot 10) Benefice: Extra Limbs (8 total) Base Run: 20 meters Weapons: (STR bonus: +8d DMG) WEAPON INIT GOAL DMG RNG RATE SHOTS Horns/Tusks 14 10d 7 Bite 6 10 4d Tail 4 14 6d (+2d for those with spikes)

6 14 16d +3d / 3m Charge Trample 5 14 14d 2/day Snot Shot* 10 16 6d 10/20 2 * Desert breed only Armor: Hide and bony plate (ARM 15d) Vitality: -14/-10/-10/-8/-8/-6/-6/-4/-4/-2/-2/-2/0/0/0/0/0/

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Walur

These thermivorous heat-snails, which can grow up to several meters in length depending on how long they live, burrow near geothermal vents or climb to bask in direct sunlight, leaving a glittering trail of dry frost where they have passed. Slow-moving, with little intelligence to speak of, walur are attracted to any heat source which does not retreat too quickly; human-sized prey, if unconscious or held immobile, may be engulfed and freeze-dried within an hour. The walur's mantle is adapted in many different ways; some support large iridescent spiral shells, some may glisten with corrosive secretions, some may be lined with barbed spines or adorned with long trailing extensions that unfurl to reveal broad solar receptor sails.

Quote: "Damn, this cave is getting colder by the minute! But there's supposed to be a geothermal vent nearby. It doesn't make sense. Wait! Did you see something move over there?"

Description: The heat snail looks essentially the same as its Urthish counterpart, but averages 2.5 meters long as an adult and may reach two or three times that length in old age. The subterranean breed, the most numerous and primitive form of this species, is featureless, a pale leathery flap of thick dense flesh, save for the six strong, ropy, heat-sen-





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sitive tentacles it can extend up to half a meter from its leading edge. It can secrete a strong corrosive acid that it uses to burrow through the planet's rocky mantle. The rarer surface-dwelling varieties have evolved into two distinct types: one with a large collapsible sail-fin on its back used as a solar collector, found mainly in the mountains, and another that lives in the desert and secretes a large ornate shell into which it can retreat from predators. Both types have at least one pair of retractable tentacles that serve as eyestalks.

Behavior: Although not completely unintelligent, the walur appears to think of nothing other than looking for strong sources of heat upon which it can feed. The subterranean breed has few natural predators, and consequently takes little notice of intruders into its domain. The surface breeds are more wary and will attempt to retreat from most larger animals; some have been known, when hungry, to drain the heat from large plants and immobilized or recently killed animals.

Body: Strength 19, Dexterity 4, Endurance 16 Mind: Wits 1, Perception 1 (Surface breeds have Perception 4) Natural skills: Fight 4, Observe 5, Vigor 10

Base Crawl: 1 meter

Weapons: (STR bonus: +5d DMG)

WEAPON	INIT	GOAL	DMG
Grapple	1	5	8d
Freeze touch	4	8	special*
Corrosive touch	4	8	special**
Barbed spines***	4	8	7d

* All breeds: activates on contact, drains one Vitality level per touch, ignores armor and energy shields.

** Subterranean breeds only: activates on contact, 2d DMG every turn the target stays in contact, 1d DMG on turn after target breaks contact.

*** Surface-dwelling breeds only.

Armor: Tough hide (ARM 3d), Shell (ARM 7d, desert breeds only)

Vitality: -12/-10/-8/-6/-4/-4/-2/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/ 0/0/0/0/0

Wa Chala

This landfaring mollusk might be compared to the polyconstrictor, or tree squid, of the jungles of Kurga, but because both species are remote and obscure in the extreme no such studied comparison has ever been made. Primarily a denizen of the Mbadar mountain ranges (although previously unknown breeds have been reported along the Zungash Straits), this carnivore perches atop sheer cliffs or on rocky overhangs, unfurling its tentacles to grasp any prey that wanders within reach. Its hard shell protects it from

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other, more agile and mobile predators, even enabling it to survive earthquakes and landslides that would crush stronger unarmored animals. Weighing anywhere from a hundred kilograms to over a ton, its body is usually no more than a few meters in length, but with tentacles that can stretch ten meters or more. Other breeds exist: one, like the polyconstrictor, hunts from an arboreal perch in the deep jungle, while another burrows into the loose sand of the desert and grasps prey from beneath.

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Quote: "Watch your step on this ledge here. These mountains are still seismically active, remember, and the footing can be quite treacher — nghaARLK!"

Description: The example given below is a great mountain mollusk, with a body over three meters in diameter and five meters in length, weighing up to a ton. Its ten tentacles measure up to ten meters long, and are quick and strong enough to encircle and crush all but the largest land animals. Jungle and desert wa-chalas are smaller, with lower Strength and Endurance ratings; arboreal jungle mollusks have only a vestigial shell, and the burrowing wa-chala of the deserts have no shell at all.

Behavior: Despite the relative immobility of its bulky body, the wa-chala is nonetheless considered a highly aggressive predator. When young, before it reaches its full weight, the wa-chala can drag itself across open ground with surprising speed; during this period it seeks out an optimal feeding-perch, a cliff or branch that overlooks an area with a regular traffic of preferred prey animals. Once a suitable location has been found, the mollusk settles in place and begins to secrete a heavy thick shell that often grows to fit so closely into the surrounding terrain that it becomes part of the landscape. From this perch, the wa-chala can reach down to pluck up any animal that wanders into range. Body: Strength 16, Dexterity 14, Endurance 13 Mind: Wits 2, Perception 5 Natural skills: Fight 5, Observe 8, Vigor 6 Benefice: Extra Limbs (10 total) Base Crawl: 0.5 meters Weapons: (STR bonus: +4d DMG) INIT GOAL DMG WEAPON 7 18 6d Grapple Armor: Shell (ARM 9d; jungle breeds: ARM 3d)

Burjang Dukaa

In length alone, this terrifying and exceedingly strange creature could qualify as one of the largest carnivores known, but its mass rarely exceeds that of a grown human. The burjang is believed to be the last of the truly enormous arachnids that once inhabited the primordial swamp which eventually became Ungava's equatorial rainforest. Its name in Vorox translates roughly as "canopy strider" — a most apt description. Suspended on twelve impossibly thin legs that can measure as much as one hundred meters in length and arch up to thirty meters in the air, the burjang walks across the treetops of the jungle, distributing its slight weight so evenly that even the skittish birds of the uppermost canopy seldom note its presence. Its body is roughly spherical and generally two to three meters in diameter; mostly hollow, it serves as both mouth and stomach, opening from the bottom on hinges just below the cluster of leg joints on top. An array of sensory organs, facing downward from each side of the mouth's hard jagged edges, enables it to pinpoint prey as small as a cat on the jungle floor far below.

In both physical configuration and hunting method, the burjang closely resembles the Urthish opiliones, or "daddy long-legs." Once prey has been spotted, the burjang gathers its legs together and plunges its body straight down through the canopy at lightning speed, crashing through the foliage until it reaches its target, instantly engulfing it from above. This strike is an all-or-nothing prospect for the burjang; once submerged in the jungle foliage it can only move vertically, so if the prey escapes it must begin the process over again. (The burjang's perceptual range is confined to the area directly below it by the jungle's tree trunks, so a concentrated pursuit is nearly impossible.) With prey secured, it begins the more arduous and time-consuming task of hoisting its carcass-laden body back up to treetop level. Often its prey will prove too heavy to accomplish this right away, so the burjang must rest on a lower branch or may even try to finish feeding at ground level. This leaves it vulnerable to more terrestrial predators, especially the Vorox, who value its strong slender legs for making spears and arrows.

In old age, burjang tend to migrate to the outer rainforest and stake out a territory over one or more of the small clearings that dot the jungle's edge. There they stimulate the growth of certain savory roots and fungi by leaving their excrement in the middle of the clearing. (Having no alimentary tract, the burjang ejects the undigested portions of its meal back out its mouth.) These tubers and mushrooms at-

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tract the bottom-feeding herds of the jungle floor: rutboar, shanto, sharprats, assorted large rodents, lizards and beetles, all easy unsuspecting prey for the canopy strider. Burjang will fight to the death trying to seize or defend a bountiful clearing from another of their own kind.

Quote: "Listen — even those annoying birds have gotten quiet. Stay alert, men. Danger can come from any direction..." *snapsnapSNAP*CRASH* "Oh Merciful Maya! What is tha—" SHROMTCH!

Description: The burjang dukaa, a giant arachnid, has a spherical body some two meters in diameter, connected at the top to twelve slender legs up to 100 meters long. Its body – which is also its head – is mostly hollow, the bottom half consisting of three hinged mandibles with serrated edges that fit neatly together when closed. The interior cavity serves as both mouth and stomach, engulfing prey and spitting out waste once digestion has been completed.

Behavior: The burjang spends all its waking time hunting, gazing down into the jungle searching for prey large enough to be worth attempting a strike. (Adult humans and Vorox are just about right.) Its highly specialized mode of hunting can be terrifying to its intended targets, but can leave the burjang momentarily vulnerable to the more agile animals of the lower jungle. Characters at or near ground level may be given a full combat turn of warning when a burjang is striking near them, due to the noise it makes crashing through the rainforest canopy. If the burjang misses its first strike, it may attempt a second or third with cumulative -4 penalties each time; some daring ferals have trapped the burjang by baiting it into making several snaps until it has overextended itself and is unable to retreat to the treetops.

Body: Strength 24, Dexterity 2, Endurance 18 Mind: Wits 1, Perception 8 Natural skills: Dodge 1, Fight 10, Observe 5, Vigor 10 Benefice: Extra Limbs (12 total) Base Run: 40 meters Weapons: (STR bonus: +7d DMG) WEAPON INIT GOAL DMG

Bite 5 12 10d Armor: Exoskeleton (ARM 4d)

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Jalgur

This gigantic marine predator is to the ocean what the Graa Kal is to the land; the largest predator ever discovered, it makes the raw-headed armored sharks of the Ichena Sea seem tame by comparison. Adults measure upwards of twenty-five meters long and some aged specimens have been recorded at over twice that length. Its body consists mainly of heavily muscled spine lined with narrow scythe-shaped fins and rows of cilia sensitive to vibrations in the surrounding water. Squat rudimentary ribs serve more to anchor the serpentine musculature than to protect the elongated internal organs; the digestive tract, when empty, retracts into a row of pleated ventral folds, and during feeding stretches out to contain an amount of food over three times the jalgur's own volume. Having no abdominal muscles to control its intestinal processes, it must dive into one of the many abysmal trenches far beneath the Ungavoroxian Ocean, using the pressure of several kilometers of water to crush the contents of its meal, then undulating along the ridges of oceanic mountain ranges to simulate peristalsis.

(Besides mountains and trenches, the jalgur seems to favor volcanically active sites and geothermal venting zones, leading some to speculate that it has a thermivorous aspect to its digestive process, perhaps even finding the intense heat necessary to breed. Native legend would support this; the jalgur is said to have been born of the deep earth, and carries a molten lump of its home in its gut to burn its food with. The gouts of steam seen when the jalgur surfaces, however, are not the result of intestinal volcanism as locally believed, but a series of sinus cavities venting to equalize pressure among the innards after travelling from the denser lower depths.)

The face of the jalgur is pure nightmare. Its cranium is little more than an enlarged vertebra enclosing the primitive brain stem, with a socket in front for its single black eyeball, and ringed with hinged bases for its jointed, independently working mandibles. The eye is an organic crystalline lens nearly as hard as diamond; besides some industrial and ornamental uses, the jalgur's eyeball is sought by many pagans and Antinomists as a tool for scrying. Most jalgur have two pairs of mandibles: a large outer pair bristling with irregularly spaced fangs for seizing its prey, and a smaller inner pair lined with serrated incisors for tearing up the carcass and stuffing the chunks down the throat. Older individuals may grow more odd-numbered auxiliary mandibles



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of both types.

Winuman Islanders are especially wary of the jalgur. Sometime during the 47th century, a hoary specimen some sixty-two meters long attacked a fleet of fishing canoes and chased the survivors onto the beach and into their village. Less than half of the populace survived the assault, with many warriors perishing in attempts to immobilize and kill the thing. The severed head continued to snap spastically for a week before finally succumbing to starvation and suffocation. Its outer mandibles now form the gates to Winumanjaru Village, and the ventral hide covering the chieftain's lodge has weathered tropical hurricanes that leveled modern buildings of ceramsteel and maxicrete.

Quote: "Yep, matey, this is the kind of night when the sea plays tricks on a man. Why, I recollect one night off the coast of Gashkar—" *FFWHUUUSHSHSH*

Description: This marine predator has a sinuous serpentine body that measures 25 meters long, tapering down from its widest point just behind the skull, three and a half meters across, lined with rigid barbs and narrow spiky fins. Its one-eyed skull frames a maw three meters in diameter, with inner mandibles two and a half meters long and outer mandibles that can spread as wide as 10 meters at full extension.

Behavior: Like the burjang dukaa, the jalgur must hunt constantly; unlike the burjang, the jalgur is an effective predator that must find extremely large prey on a regular basis to feed its great bulk. Jalgur have been known to attack large ships, tearing apart fragile wooden vessels and even leaping across the decks of steel-hulled craft to sweep crew members into the water. **Body:** Strength 30, Dexterity 7, Endurance 35 **Mind:** Wits 1, Perception 7

Natural skills: Dodge 2, Fight 10, Observe 3, Vigor 10 Base Swim: 30 meters Weapons: (STR bonus: +9d DMG)

WEAPON	INIT	GOAL	DMG
Mandibles, large	10	17	12d
Mandibles, small	8	17	5d
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Armor: Scales (ARM 10d)

Flora

It is significant that most Voroxian and Urthish names for the local plant species coincide exactly when translated; designations like stiletto-grass, cleaver-bush, saw-flower, axe-fern and grenade-fruit are common. (However, it must be noted that, in the more primitive tongue of the Vorox, weapons tend to be named after the plants they resemble, rather than the other way around.)

— Seymour Kraelbourne, exobotanist, quoted in "The Most Dangerous Plants in the Universe," Holoreal Documentaries Syndicated, 3998

The vegetation of Ungavorox has much the same character as its wildlife — tough, resilient and startlingly capable of defending itself from predators. Any plant that does not present an exterior composed of scaly armored bark, razor-edged leaves or sharp thorns is undoubtedly poisonous. Herbivores are equipped with thick leathery lips subjected to constant laceration, abrasion and puncture, constantly growing molars harder than armor-piercing bullets, and the most caustic stomach acids and aggressive intestinal bacteria found outside of Symbiot space. Captured and transplanted grazers fed a softer diet tend to die swiftly of dental and alimentary overgrowth before malnutrition has a chance to set in.

The planet's most striking feature is its equatorial rainforest, stretching halfway around the world and carpet-

ing three subcontinents. Growing out of the remains of a vast inland swamp left by the fifth most recent ice age, the jungle's treetops rival many mountain ranges in sheer altitude, while its roots reach as deeply into the planet's crust as the ocean's floor. After several decades of exhaustive exploration and well-funded research, the Second Republic's foremost authority on alien plant life, Professor Kraelbourne, declared, "We have only begun to scratch the surface, barely begun to frame in our minds the orders of diversity encompassed within this extended polybiome. I could spend a life-time focused upon a single square meter of this place and still not be able to tell you how many different things are living and growing on it!"

Fortunately, Kraelbourne did provide an ecological overview of what he called the "hyperdeveloped tropical stratoforest." Delineating a many-tiered world of varying size and scale, he went on to describe how specialized enclaves formed their own miniature sub-ecosystems that were interconnected fractal-wise to a hierarchical order determined by the distinct layers of plant growth in the deep jungle. Each vertical level of growth exhibited its own particular character, with unique dangers, risks and rewards. H. T. Hausen publicly noted that the professor's schema agreed perfectly with the worldview presented through Vorox mythology. Hausen even collaborated with Kraelbourne on a proposed holoreal about tin cav hu. and the rive sor ran tella cav

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to 2 terw ame leaf the Ungavan deep jungle, but the only part of this project to survive the Fall is Seymour Kraelbourne's impassioned yet droning narration-track:

Ground and Root Complex

"Solid ground, well-packed earth and stone, the terra firma so familiar and beloved to all humanoid races, exists only where the outermost reaches of jungle give way to clearings and plains. Here large grazing lizards, rodents, shanto and rutboar roam through spiked shrubs and saw-toothed grasses in search of meaty toadstools, hardy tubers, spicy ferns and exposed mineral licks. As one moves deeper into the interior, however, dry ground gradually disappears beneath a carpet of decaying leaves until travel becomes a matter of navigating mazes of giant roots through a deep sickly-sweet smelling compost-marsh where shrekma and zixalg thrive. Fluorescent gases periodically bubble up from the marsh to mingle in long slow swirls with the oily multihued atmosphere. Hidden from the sun in perpetual midnight, the foliage of this realm is well fertilized but must compete fiercely against its neighbors; carnivorous, parasitic and cannibalistic modes of life predominate. Bioluminescent moss dangles like glowing stalactites from the constantly dripping undersides of enormous branches, where bloated milksap ants hang in sloth-like rumination. Heatsensitive fern fronds strain to reach and caress any passing warm body, desperate for a taste of secondhand sunlight. Land anemones gracefully harvest the constant traffic of microbes, macrobes, invertebrates and insects, unless threatened by snapping flowers or strangulating vines. Prowling schools of carrion moths swarm over everything in an evershifting carpet of fluttering pastels.

"In some inland regions, where conditions of altitude, rainfall and drainage permit, the compost-marsh recedes from drier terrain to reveal caves and tunnels cleanly eroded out from under the root-trunks of the largest trees. Sometimes large enough to shelter a whole angerak or more, these caves and tunnels are habitat and haven to sharprats, hummingbats, piranha bee hives, hibernating constrictors and gigantic earthworms that blindly engulf everything in their path. Toward the Mbadar isthmus, large underground rivers course through vaulted rapids of dangling root-ends, sometimes emptying into the lake-bed floors of vast subterranean caverns. A seldom-credited legend among feral tribes tells of a colony of blind albino Vorox living in one such cavern."

Lower Canopy

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"The first tier of the rainforest occupies a layer from 10 to 20 meters above ground level, composed of densely interwoven tree limbs averaging three and four meters in diameter. In some regions, broad thick webs of branch and leaf become so crusted over with organic detritus that grasses, undergrowth, shrubs and even small trees can take root. The ceiling canopy here may arch as much as 20 or 30 meters overhead, pellucid with a deep green twilight – except where seasonal swarms of locust-sparrows have stripped the upper canopies of their leaves, allowing blinding shafts of raw sunlight to spill into the lower jungle.

"Offworlders like myself can easily mistake this canopy layer for the ground itself, and tend to step blindly into dropholes if their movements are not carefully supervised. Furthermore, this is the realm of the jungle's largest predators: the sleek and lithe arboreal grackle fox, undisputed king of the jungle predators; the rainbow-scaled dart lizard with its venomous tongue barb that can extend three meters at seven times the speed of sound; the pouncing bark spider with its spine-shriveling ultrasonic screech; fat interminable constrictors that languidly drape themselves from tree to tree for what seems to be kilometers without end."

Middle Canopies

"Between 50 and 75 meters over the ground extend the intermediate canopy layers, where the Vorox make their homes along with most of the rainforest's mid-sized denizens. Many-limbed simians, loud elaborately plumed birds, gliding rodents, lightning-fast green snakes and branch eels, large insects of every conceivable type, all graze incessantly upon the rich bounty of the upper jungle: succulent fruitorchids nestled in brilliant neon petals, hardy seed clusters budding on twig-ends, tall hanging columns of vine-gourds, chewy sponge-leaves, meaty sides of tree-trunk fungus and uncounted varieties of juicy pop-berry. Here the trunks of the deep-jungle giant trees narrow to only a few meters in diameter, bark literally pulsing with veins of rich oily sap, and reach out with meter-thick limbs garnished with contrasting textures of delicate mosses and draped with creeper vines of every size and color. The branch-ends are cloaked in a nimbus of broad razor-edged leaves, with fine green vine shoots winding through their twigs, garlanded here and there with brightly painted flowers.

"Although hardly idyllic, life in the middle canopies is not so overtly violent as on the lower levels of the rainforest. Conflicts tend to be brief decisive flurries, almost elegant duels between poisoned fang, talon or stinger, ended in the blink of an eye. Gaunt thrumming horse-wasps and velvetbacked jelly-bees the size of pigs engage in spectacular aerial wars over dense flower clusters, caches of over-ripe fruit and quivering deposits of rainwater mold. The territorial urgings of birds is a source of constant activity; feathered aristocrats flash their wing displays and shrilly proclaim their right of domain over all within earshot. Squat crested needlebeaks fight to the death for perches at exposed sapveins where they hope to spend the rest of their lives as bloating tree parasites, with ever-growing tails of minutely patterned plumes that may reach up to six meters in length



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and provide shelter for insects, reptiles and even smaller birds.

"This environment is where we see the true instinctgenius of the Vorox. Amid these stately swaying branches they have built nests, homes and even villages supported by limbs too slender for large predators like the grackle to climb out upon."

Emergent Treetops

"From 80 to 100 meters above ground level, the average population of the rainforest reaches its maximum height, forming a near-solid ceiling of lime green overgrowth broken only where the fall of a larger tree has torn open the canopy, outer branches have been stripped bare by swarming insects, birds or other aerial vermin, or some other natural disaster has struck. Everything in this world sways with a slow gentle grace — except when wracked by storm or jarred by earthquake — and large mammals like ourselves may venture this far up only by clinging precariously to the trunks of the very tallest trees, here less than a meter in diameter. Visibility is severely restricted in all directions - this leafy layer resembles a stratum of translucent green cloud, complete with its own breeze currents, greenhouse ratios and precipitation pockets — but the experienced climber knows where stunning views of the surrounding countryside may be found.

"The largest predators of this realm are the ribbon-like gliding eel and the whip-tailed dragonfly, who prey upon all manner of delicate bird, sticklizard, stilt ant, leaping spider and caterpillar colony. Whole regions of lightly woven branch complex are veiled behind billowing spiderwebs hung with labyrinthine complexity. Where the sky can be seen at all, it burns with red and orange meteoric dust-stripes drifting along the equatorial magnetic tides. Sometimes one can glimpse the silvery passage of soaring sun-butterflies, whose paper-thin photosynthetic sail-wings may span up to 10 meters.

"The largest animal of any type indigenous to this layer would be the spindly 10-legged vaulting sloth, an herbivorous spider-shaped mammal that uses its own weight and strength against the elasticity of its surroundings for locomotion. By swinging in wide arcs astride long supple branches, plopping unharmed into dense leafy thickets, and even bending the emergent tip of a tree over double to use as a personal catapult, this nomadic arboreal grazer can travel several kilometers in an instant. Some Vorox have been said to have attempted transporting themselves in this fashion, but succeeded only in legend."

A Note on the Vine

Unfortunately, the classic stereotype of the nimble ape-man swinging deftly from treetop to treetop by means of a conveniently placed strand of creeper, an image dating to the antiquity of old Urth, has never been feasible in reality. In almost any jungle of the Known Worlds, putting even a fraction of one's weight on any given vine is less likely to result in a swift breathtaking journey across the canopy than a quick plummet to the ground amid a shower of dry leaves, flaked bark and swarms of angry insects.

The arboreal Vorox have been able to simulate this rather romanticized mode of travel, however, thanks to an extinct species of gigantic arachnid that inhabited Ungava's equatorial jungle in its early stage of formation. Much of their elaborate webbing — erected to ensnare the enormous insects of the primordial swamp — has survived to the present geological era, interlaced throughout the rainforest canopy. Any Vorox intimately familiar with a jungle region will know which vines and branches conceal an overgrown remnant of ancient spiderweb, strong enough to survive the eons intact and still support the weight of a large mammal or two. Natives travel almost exclusively via an aerial spiderweb circuit encompassing their canopy nests, hunting grounds, watering holes and lookout vantage points, ever mindful of the nearest twist of reinforced creeper to be used as escape route should predators or other enemies appear. Ferals of the equatorial zones boast that they could watch the sun rise on the east coast of Faza and set off to the west coast of Zureng without ever setting foot on the ground in between.

Until the advent of humans, webvine was left wherever it had hung for millions of years, since no tool yet known to the primitive planet could sever the organic polymer core of the web strand. With the first laser cutter, wireblade and flux edge tech to see use on the world before the Fall, there emerged a renaissance of treehouse and canopy nest architecture. Old webvine was gathered to bind together dizzying cities that lined the branches of the rainforest's oldest giants, cities complete with nigh-unbreakable guidelines, hanging ladders, swinging bridges, pulley-operated elevators and networks of tightropes, loose swing-lines, trapeze loops, slides and spring-webbed trampolines. Tribes who can gain access to powered blade technology have taken to harvesting webvine from the territories of tribal enemies, rather than cut up the original webbing of their own homes. In the present day, this practice has been the cause of violent conflicts between the tribes of the heavily harvested outer rainforest and the ferals of the more intact deep jungle.

Dag-mush

Quote: "Do you mean to tell me, soldier, that these hardened and blooded troops — veterans of the Emperor Wars all — are afraid to get their boots dirty marching through a little patch of — uh... Eeuww! YEEUGHK!! Get it offa me! GetitoffGETITOFF!!!"

Description: Subterranean deposits of dag-mush are nearly impossible to detect, but are usually found beneath spots that appear more lush and well fertilized than surrounding ground. Where dagmush has broken to the surface it appears from a distance as a glistening grayish mud; a closer look will reveal that its volume is constantly in motion, a swimming macrobial soup.

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> Behavior: Any animal more massive than an insect or small bird will sink into the surface of dag-mush unless it

can run faster than eight meters per turn. Any appendage submersed in dag-mush is held with Strength 5, as it clings and slowly spreads across anything that touches it. Dag-

mush can be scraped and scrubbed off using dry leaves or gravelly sand, but the only sure ways to remove all microbes - before some find a way into the body - involve combinations of clean running water, powerful antiseptics, fire, flaying or amputation. (Li Halan troops immediately remove and burn all footwear and leggings that come into contact with dag-mush.) If dag-mush enters the body, the victim must succeed in rolling Endurance + Vigor with a cumulative -2 penalty every span or lose one Vitality level until death or high-tech medical intervention occurs. Native remedies for dag-mush infection are rumored to exist, but are said to employ local toxins as dangerous as the infection itself.

Base Ooze: 2 centimeters



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Dagungul

This migratory parasitic root survives by intertwining itself amongst the root systems of the nearby foliage to leech out nutrients, and growing in the direction of well-fertilized ground, like beneath a large rotting carcass. At the center of the root web is a dense pulpy cortex that is gradually dragged through the earth as the dagungul roams in search of prime grazing land. This cortical tissue is not only nontoxic, easily digestible and nourishing, but apparently tasty to both native and alien lifeforms including humans. Feral shamans even credit it with healing properties. In swamps, jungles and dense forest, the dagungul can grow to permeate as much as a square kilometer of land, with a cortex of up to a hundred kilograms deep inside a cortical body dozens of



meters square and reaching over 10 meters beneath ground level.

A mature dagungul, with a cortex of 10 to 20 kilograms and a total body mass of 10 times that or more, leaves a tunnel up to a meter in diameter at places. Most stretches of tunnel soon disappear due to natural collapse and erosion, but those that do not become a haven for jugat, bore-worm, mole, beetle, spider, lizard, snake and any other burrowing creature. A dagungul may die from toxins, disease, seismic dismemberment, or having its cortex devoured by predators. Dead, it slowly putrefies from the outermost root branches inward, its mass eventually replaced with a viscous paste composed of decayed organic matter and swarming colonies of shrekma, called dag-mush. Exposed dag-mush sticks to anything that touches it, its

component organisms mounting exploratory caravans across their new environment until forcibly removed.



Bau-fao

This common fungus grows on any sort of decaying organic matter, but requires the flesh of an animal to complete its life cycle. Mostly found on the fallen vegetation of jungles and temperate forests, the lesser form of the bau-fao spreads slowly, dropping spores from its cap to the surrounding ground and seldom growing more than a few centimeters tall. On rare occasions, spores may find their way to the carcass of a recently deceased animal, in which case they tend to grow quickly into a larger heavier form, usually about half a meter in height. In this form, the cap everts, turning inside out so that the gills spread into a ball with a puckered opening at the top, and the upper stalk swells into a sac full of spores. The gills then begin to emit scents likely to attract some

large animal — usually edible fruit or fresh meat, although some species are rumored to give off the mating musk of certain animals.

Once an animal wanders close enough, the gills which at this stage have become sensitive to sudden slight changes in heat and air moisture - sense when the animal's face is nearby, then trigger a contraction in the fibers of the spore-sac. A thick cloud of spores is released with a belching sound; many spores become lodged in the unfortunate animal's oral and nasal mucus, and more may be drawn into the throat and lungs if the animal gasps in surprise. Once inside the body, the spores take root and grow quickly, usually suffocating the animal within a day or less (depending on the animal's size; an adult human may take two days to die, an adult Vorox three.) Within two weeks, a mature large-form bau-fao may be found growing out of the carcass's face.



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Zílu

This vine feeds on calcium slowly drawn from the skeletons and odd bones that frequently litter the ground in the tropical jungle. The zilu is indistinguishable from most other jungle vines, growing mainly around the favored hunting grounds of larger predators, and is often found looped about the limbs of the jud-joob tree (below). Although primarily a scavenger which grows in the direction of its food source at a rate comparable to most vines, the zilu, when hungry, is capable of slightly greater mobility, dropping from branches to ensnare birds, rodents and other small game. A starving zilu may make more aggressive attempts at larger prey, however, and can fully entangle any human-size creature that remains motionless within its reach for more than one span. Burning the



bark of certain trees produces noxious fumes — only mildly toxic to humans — that drive the zilu away.

Quote: "Looks like a good enough place to make camp..."

Description: The zilu vine exists in uncounted varieties that mimic the most common types of vine in the vicinity. The main central strand of an individual vine may measure anywhere from 10 to 30 meters in length, with a diameter of three or four centimeters at its thickest point near the root base.

Behavior: A glance at the traits below will show that an individual strand of zilu has little going for it; this vine's strength lies in numbers. Multiple strands working together add their physical traits into what is effectively a single organism. (Thus, when struggling against multiple strands, every four levels of damage inflicted on the vine reduce its collective physical traits by one each.) Certain high-traffic sites like watering holes and salt licks may be surrounded with zilu loops, snares and nets composed of as many strands as the gamemaster feels like putting there. Elsewhere, however, the zilu must "gather its forces" to go after large prey; in light outer jungle, one strand may join the effort for every hour the target remains motionless, while in the deep jungle zilu can gather at a rate of one strand every 10 minutes. For example, a character sleeping unguarded in the deep jungle for one hour may awake to find himself bound in coils with a Strength, Dexterity and

Endurance of 6 each. Targets who are awake and alert may roll Wits + Observe against the zilu's Wits + Sneak to notice the vines creeping closer. Zilu may also roll Wits + Observe when moving into position; success means the vine has strategically entangled arms, legs or even equipment (like, say, swords and knives). Critical success on this roll indicates the target's windpipe has been constricted. **Body:** Strength 1, Dexterity 1, Endurance 1

Mind: Wits 1, Perception 7

Natural skills: Fight 1, Observe 3, Sneak 10, Vigor 2 Base Creep: 1 meter Vitality: -2/-1/0



This cactus grows at the desert's outer boundaries and looks no different from most other species of cacti, but is an active predator nonetheless. Sensitive to ground vibrations, the raxa notes when an animal is nearby, then flexes its rudimentary musculature, causing part of its outer surface to crack and split and thus expose a small portion of its sweet moist inner pulp. As the animal approaches, drawn by the appetizing moisture, the raxa heaves convulsively, wrapping itself around the prey and driving its hypodermic quills into the body. Smaller prey is quickly sucked dry, while larger animals may wrest themselves clear. The profuse but relatively superficial bleeding that results from a raxa attack may be stopped by a thorough roll in fine sand, but not before attracting every scavenger in the area.

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Quote: "Water! Oh, thank the Pancreator! Water at last! What the — OWW!!! IT'S GOT ME! SOMEBODY HELP!!"

Description: The example given below is for the more famous upright variety that stands some two meters tall and has from one to five thick lateral branches, giving it a somewhat anthropomorphic (or voroctimorphic) quality. A smaller ground-covering variety, found over a wider range, has only half the physical traits but twice as much Charm.

Behavior: The Charm trait refers to the raxa's ability to entice prey closer with unusual flower formations or exposed moist tissue. The raxa may add the Victory Points from a preliminary Perception + Observe roll to its Wits + Charm roll. Body: Strength 9, Dexterity 6, Endurance 8 Mind: Wits 1, Perception 5

Natural skills: Charm 7, Fight 5, Observe 2, Vigor 10 Weapons: (STR bonus: +2d)

weapon init goal dmg Grapple 1 11 4d/2d*

* After a successful grapple, the raxa's hypdomeric thorns inflict 2d per turn. In addition, for every three turns the target remains grappled, the raxa drains one Vitality level in internal fluids. **Armor:** Tough outer fibers (ARM 3d) **Vitality:** -8/-5/-3/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

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Siwush

This carnivorous root is found mainly on the grassland plains, sometimes growing large enough to swallow an adult vrongar whole. The main part of its body is funnelshaped, with its lip at ground level and the smooth, vertically fluted wall of its interior kept slick with oily secretions. At the bottom of the funnel is a chamber where a combination of digestive acids and catabolic enzymes slowly break down the carcass of the prey into its component nutrients. The upper rim of the funnel is ringed with grasses, shrubbery or leaves that mimic the most common surrounding ground covering. Stolons, or horizontal stems, extend across the open mouth of the funnel, spreading their secondary shoots to hide the slippery pit from potential prey. The largest siwush roots may



have stolons so densely interwoven that a thin layer of soil may accumulate on top; although small animals might not fall through this camouflage cover, the nodes of the stolons are formed to hold together until a sufficient amount of weight has been put upon them, then all break simultaneously so that no dangling foliage is left for prey to grasp.

It is rumored that the legendary late Republican explorer Harold Titus Hausen met his end in the maw of a siwush root, but some hold that he was saved by the activation of his Vau life-cocoon and even to this day sleeps unharmed in the gut of a giant siwush just beneath the ground of some uncharted savannah.



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Pranata

Another botanical carnivore is the pranata flower, of which two major varieties exist - one adapted to the tropical jungle (characterized by a long flexible stem allowing it some degree of mobility) and another to the grassland plains (which has no stalk at all, opening flat against the ground). Despite its easily recognizable flowerlike physiognomy, the pranata has evolved very different functions for its parts, enabling it to feed on animal flesh and survive even in depleted soil and minimal sunlight. The seven stamens that radiate outward from the pranata's center, though slender, are strong and supple and capable of moving with lightning speed. Each is tipped with an anther hardened to form a steely razor-sharp toothlike appendage used to seize, im-

mobilize and lacerate its prey. Once these dagger-tipped tentacles have secured the prey, they draw it inward to impale it on the rigid central pistil, then the petals close to envelope the carcass and saturate it with digestive secretions.

Hard, leaflike outer petals also fold around the closed flower, forming an armored calyx to protect it during digestion (which may take upwards of several days depending on the size and type of prey). The jungle pranata is especially vulnerable while digesting, as it frequently devours animals too heavy for its stalk to support and must rest on the ground until most of the carcass has been broken down and the indigestible bones, claws and teeth have been ejected. The plains pranata, lacking the mobility of its jungle cousin, will attempt to engulf prey far too large for it with mindless tenacity, and has evolved a hardened saw-tooth edge to its petals, used to sever whatever appendage the flower was able to grasp. Some scientists speculate that the preponderance of six- and eight-limbed creatures on Ungavorox is nature's way of compensating for the likelihood of unwittingly stepping into a pranata.



Quote: "I daresay your greenhouse contains the most exquisite and delicate orchids I have ever seen, Count MumNFLGH—!"

Description: Coloration varies wildly from region to region; usually neon-bright displays glossy with sweetsmelling secretions that attract prey. Most pranata flowers grow no more than two meters in diameter across the petals, though some have been known to achieve up to twice this size. The traits given below are for an average sized flower, capable of engulfing a large dog or taking off the limb of a human- or Vorox-sized target. The swift-moving tentacular stamens bearing the daggerlike anthers generally reach two to three times farther in radius than the petals. Behavior: The plains

pranata is immobile, and must wait for prey to blunder within reach, but the jungle pranata's stem allows it a range of motion with a four- or five-meter radius, including raising itself to that height in the air. Like the raxa, above, the pranata may use Charm to lure prey with beautiful colors or an appetizing-looking interior, while curling its dangerouslooking stamens and petal-edges back out of sight.

Body: Strength 6, Dexterity 8, Endurance 6 **Mind:** Wits 1, Perception 2

Natural skills: Charm 5, Fight 6, Observe 2, Vigor 3 (Jungle species also has Dodge 2)

Weapons: (STR bonus: +1d DMG) WEAPON INIT GOAL DMG

Sharpened Anthers 6 14 3d Serrated Petal-edges 5 11 5d

Armor: Hardened calyx leaves (when open: ARM 3d; when closed: ARM 5d)

Vitality: -5/-3/0/0/0/0/0/0

VOROX]



JHQ-JOOP

The jud-joob tree is perhaps the single most universally hated and feared member of the Ungavoroxian vegetable kingdom. Like many other examples of native flora, the judjoob is a carnivore, distinguished by its prodigious appetite and advanced sensory-motor capacities. Found mainly in the deep jungle, variants have been reported in most of the planet's major biomes, with adaptations of shape, texture and foliage that mimic the large trees characteristic of each region. Nearly all varieties provide a home for smaller scavenging fauna, tolerated as symbiotic partners for the role they play in cleaning up after a kill, allowing the jud-joob to hide its true nature from intended prey.

The leaves of the jud-joob act as its sensory organs, being both sensitive to heat and capable of catching scent particles from the surrounding air; arrayed over a broad area, these dual functions enable the jud-joob to detect, identify and triangulate the position of almost any animal that passes within its reach. While its rooted base remains stationary and its trunk can bend only in broad arcs, its thick limbs possess great flexibility and strength and its thin outermost branches move with surprising speed and dexterity. Some subspecies have exposed upper roots that can sense the weight of an animal treading upon them, and may be capable of writhing and undulating in such a way as to cause the prey to lose its balance, or even to trap its paws or feet. Once ensnared, the prey is usually lifted high into the air and carefully dismembered so that its blood and other vital fluids flow down the trunk, there to be absorbed through deep grooves or pores in the bark. Some types of jud-joob simply hug their prey directly against the trunk, constricting and crushing the body until it bursts. Others have a more elaborate process of flaying and then rubbing the skinless carcass over all parts of the trunk.

Quote: "It's only the wind in the leaves. Now forget about it and get some shuteye...."

Description: The example given below is for a mediumsized tree standing some 15 to 20 meters tall, as is found in the light outer jungle. A plains breed growing only half as tall has the same Trait ratings as are given below, and can lure prey by spreading its branches to form a welcoming island of shade anywhere from 10 to 20 meters across. The giants of the deep jungle may have ratings up to twice as high in all physical traits. A rare evergreen variety is said to inhabit the coniferous forests of the south; it is as strong as the example below but only half as dexterous.

Behavior: The Sneak skill enables the jud-joob to position its limbs around unsuspecting prey without being obviously threatening. The jud-joob tree initially attacks with its outermost branches and twigs, which can reach up to five meters away from the trunk; these smaller branches are weak but quick and nimble, with Strength 5 and Dexterity 11, taking three to five points of damage each before they are severed. Because of its radial symmetry and broad distribution of branches, the jud-joob's penalties for multiple actions begin at -2 for two actions, -4 for three actions, -6 for four, etc. Once the outer branches have successfully grappled the target, it is passed inward to the thick strong main limbs, which, though clumsier, are immensely strong, easily crushing, twisting and dismembering the target. For the dual traits given below, the first number refers to the outer branches while the second refers to the main limbs, which may take eight to ten points of damage before they can be immobilized. The only way to kill the jud-joob is to fell it, separating the trunk between the roots and branches, then burning all the branches before it can drag itself to a safe place to take root, as well as killing the stump with fire, poisons or even dag-mush before it can send up new shoots. Body: Strength 5 / 25, Dexterity 11 / 3, Endurance 4 / 30 Mind: Wits 2, Perception 8

Natural skills: Fight 7, Observe 4, Sneak 3, Vigor 10

Weapons: (STR bonus: +7d DMG)

WEAPON	INIT	GOAL	DMG
Leaves/Twigs	7	18	10d

Armor: Bark (ARM 5d)





Who We Are (Culture)

Coming of Age

Compared to humans, Vorox have relatively short infancies and long puberties. The harsh demands of survival on Ungavorox ensure that only those who grow up quickly and still retain youthful vigor can long survive. Generally, a Vorox can quickly crawl or climb on all six limbs with some dexterity within two months after birth, and can walk on two limbs one month thereafter. Balance is learned quickly; year-old Vorox can leap through the canopy with as much acuity as young apes.

Most Vorox enter puberty at about seven years of age and mature into adulthood at 18. The average lifespan for a feral in the wild is 30-40 years. Civilized Vorox — generally used to better sanitation, medical care and less-dangerous daily lives — live to 50-60 years (sometimes longer). King Kummanga, 45 years old, is considered a doddering ancient by feral standards, while his rival, KagongKagong, at 28 years, is a young adult by civilized standards.

One of the oldest Vorox cultural traditions is the coming-of-age rite, the *kabajal*, "coming to growth." Infants, called *cheedba*, are transformed into *jalba*, or youths. The rite is still practiced by ferals today just as it was ages ago before first contact with other sentients. The rite has changed among the civilized Vorox, and is now heavily colored by human traditions, especially those of the Li Halan.

Among the ferals, the rite involves the cheedba's crafting of his first knife or properly working bow, followed by its use. For those in villages whose livelihoods depend more on gathering than hunting, the rite involves a test of jungle lore, such as the identification of a toxic species. For those few Vorox who display the gifts of shamanic promise, the rite involves the successful creation of fire.

Often, multiple cheedba are initiated during the same

rite, combining the kabajal with the *angerakaal*, the bonding ceremony for an angerak, where all the new jalba become as one.

Among civilized Vorox, the rite is a more formal affair and is usually performed for a single youth, who only later chooses (or is chosen by) his own angerak in a separate ceremony. The rite is most often a recitation by the youth displaying his learning, or a quiz administered by a teacher. The youth doesn't have to get the answers right to complete his coming of age, but he'll lose much respect if he doesn't do well. Alternatively, some rites involve sports or displays of prowess, but these do not impress humans so much as the former rites, and so are usually performed only within those communities with few human residents.

The rite ends with the ritual declawing of the youth. Vorox claw poison only gains the potency to take down human-sized beings once a Vorox reaches puberty. It is important to remove the claw before the youth gets used to using it. This rite is rife with metaphors for circumcision (although both males and females are declawed) and the shedding of animal savagery in return for the attainment of a higher, more cultured sentience. Nonetheless, it is hard to suppress the instinctual sense of emasculation or wounding. Months of intense culturation amounting to (often brutal) brainwashing follow the kabajal, enforcing the youth's identification with the lost claws as a necessary and noble sacrifice.

The rite usually ends with the awarding of a utilitarian garment to show the youth's entry into civilized society. This is commonly a belt or bandolier, but it could also be a loincloth (for those communities with prudish human overlords). Although this does little to take the place of lost claws, the item is often invested with almost sacred significance as a symbol of attainment.

Upon reaching adulthood, the young Vorox receives another rite, the *kumawa*, "the victory of luck." This is a



more serene ceremony, whereby the new adult is made aware of just how lucky he is to live into adulthood. Among the ferals, this is a time to thank all the Vorox's relations, including other species, for Ungavorox's other beings had just as much to do with the Vorox's long life as did his angerak (by either providing him with food or by not killing him yet).

The kumawa almost always involves a shaman, who leads the adult (and his angerak, if its members are also entering adulthood) into an altered state of consciousness with the aid of special concoctions. In this trance, the adults variously thank or taunt the *swaba* encountered (see "Religion," below), depending on their perceived role in helping the Vorox reach adulthood. They emerge from their trances as *walba*, adults, those who have cunning.

Civilized ceremonies are rarely more than celebratory meals, involving the new adult giving gifts to those who helped raise him or support him (his angerak). The community provides the meal but the gifts are the new adult's responsibility. Those communities that take this ceremony more seriously often expect a speech from the walba, displaying his civilized eloquence.

The Angerak

Few things are more important in a Vorox's life than his angerak, his "pack." The life of the angerak is more important than the individual, and Vorox will sacrifice themselves with little hesitation if it means saving an angerak brother or sister.

This certainly doesn't mean that all angerak members always get along — strife is common, and some members may even come to hate each other. However, all have an instinctual bond — no matter how dysfunctional — and will band together against outside enemies. Just as hate is possible, so is love. It is not uncommon for angerak members to mate.

Observers of Vorox culture and life believe that the angerak developed as a necessary tool to aid the Vorox in their ecological niche. They were too small to take down large game individually, but could do so when working together in pairs or groups. This, coupled with the constant stress of surviving against myriad predatory creatures, strengthened the group bond as the Vorox achieved sentience. Most of a Vorox's emotional life is inextricably linked with his angerak, so much so that late Second Republic xenologists believed that Vorox had a scant sense of individuality and self-agency. Even in the later Dark Ages, Furver Zos of the Oubliette opined that "the Vorox see themselves not so much as separate egos inhabiting distinct bodies but as facets of a single self extended through space through the agency of bodies, but whose core identity transcends spatial limitations."

While civilized Vorox have successfully managed to take the idea of the angerak and abstract it into the idea of a civilized nation (all citizens of which are fellow angerak members), they have not managed to transcend the instincts associated with such a bonding. Civilized Vorox thus tend to be highly nationalistic, boasting of their status and denigrating ferals who are not members of the privileged union. Their pride often leads them to attack any who insult their status — even humans. This "primitive tribalism" is often disparaged by Known Worlders, but is recognized by some as a necessary step in the overall process of "civilizing the savages."

Civilized Vorox have successfully bonded with non-Vorox, forming angeraks outside of their traditional societal groups. (Few ferals allows such bondings, although Titus Hausen and Gasparia Li Halan are examples to the contrary.) The Li Halan cannily ensure that the human commanders of the Vorox Commando units are each initiated into their unit's angerak and given high status within it. Thus, their orders ensure loyalty, although they are often required to participate in their unit's rites and celebrations at times to enforce this bond.

The average angerak consists of six to twelve members, although groups of up to 50 have been known.

An angerak is formed through a process of emotional bonding, usually between those who mutually experience a trial of stress or danger. The newly forged bond is formalized with the *angerakaal*, a ritual dance whereby members are oathed to one another.

Among ferals, angeraks are usually formed during the kabajal puberty rite, with every youth undergoing the rite being bound into the same angerak. The end of the kabajal ends with the youths banding together for a hunt (either to hunt game or collect dangerous substances), each using his self-crafted weapon or hard-learned lore. Completion of this trial is followed by a victory dance that seals the angerak. Members exchange bodily fluids by either rubbing open wounds against each other or catching another's spit.

Civilized Vorox have developed the custom of two different angeraks: the *angcheed*, or child bond, and the *angwal*, or adult bond. A youth's childhood playmates form an informal angerak, providing all the necessary emotional support and stability a growing Vorox requires. Upon reaching adulthood, however, the Vorox chooses his formal angerak — or has them chosen for him by an agreement between influential parents or even humans. The Li Halan sometimes interfere in such choosings, especially when it concerns prospective candidates for commando units. The adult bond supersedes the child bond but does not completely destroy it; one's childhood mates are friends for life, even if one's professional and adult career does not actively involve them.

WHO WE ARE (CULTURE)

A civilized adult angerakaal is a formal ceremony, where each member of the angerak stands side by side (or in a circle facing outward) as an official reads a Church-inspired litany exhorting all to heed the bond entered into by the participants. It is considered favorable if a human noble or priest attends. At the end of the litany, the angerak leaps and cheers, often playfully wrestling one another while onlookers applaud the physical relief from conformity.

A Vorox who loses his angerak mates is a tragic figure. While it is possible to be accepted into another angerak, it is not common. Once formed, an angerak does not easily admit new applicants. Exceptions are made for longtime friends or those who have performed great deeds, but the bond is never as deep as with one's original angerak.

Worse is the one who is exiled from his angerak. Only a terrible act of betrayal can initiate such an extreme denial of an angerak mate, but such events are told of in Vorox folktales. The lone Vorox is either a pitiful figure, doomed to die alone in the harsh world, or a terrifying demon, allied with his former angerak's *grumma* (see "Religion," below), and thus holding power over their luck.

Civilized Vorox who travel offworld often form *angruwa*, "faraway bonds," with their traveling companions. These temporary angeraks don't hold nearly the same intensity and loyalty as a formal angerak, but do provide the minimum necessary stability and companionship a Vorox needs.

Of course, the humans or other sentients the Vorox talks into joining his angruwa may or may not feel any such bond, and can break such ties with impunity, while the Vorox will be loath to betray his new mates. Li Halan nobles exploit the angruwa to their best advantage when choosing Vorox to join their entourages.

Religion

At first glance, pre-human-contact Vorox had a rather scant religion. In the place of any form of transcendent mysticism or superstition was a highly practical animistic knowledge base transmitted through folktales. Rather than speaking of disembodied spirits, Vorox believed that each creature, plant or animal, had an ancestor being whose deeds, actions and behaviors were emulated by all its creatures. The ancestor of everything was Father Gar, associated with the blood-red orb of the sun.

Each species has a *swaba*, a personality or "wit" of sorts that can communicate with Vorox shamans in trances, showing how its kind can grant luck or promise aid — or offer death and mutilation (not all species are friendly). However, this wit does not represent a disembodied spirit or soul, but rather that species' non-spatial mind or governing personality — its living ancestor. There is only one such wit per species, although the Vorox boast that each angerak has its

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From the Expedition Log of H.T. Hausen

"...while the batteries still have some charge left. I have been on this planet for just over three standard years now, if the ship chronometer is still accurate. Although much of that time was spent in the most god-awful fever delirium I have ever experienced, my periods of lucidity have allowed me to gain a substantial understanding of the language of my hosts. I call them Vorox, since that's what they call themselves. Despite their complete unfamiliarity with my species and the harsh conditions under which they survive, the tribe has shown great care and persistence in keeping me alive this long. The many toxins present in this environment complicate matters, but nevertheless ...

"...journal only functions intermittently, so I will try to keep my entries brief. Like I said, I've got a pretty good grasp of the language now, enough to hold up my end of a conversation. Besides warnings and lessons on how to survive this dangerous habitat, they've begun to tell me stories. Actual narratives. This alone confirms that they possess a level of abstraction that corresponds to the Sixth Criterion of Rachmuniski and Manehira's Seven Criteria for Determination of Sentience. Most tales are just basic teaching stories, more elaborate versions of the warnings and lessons just described. And it's obvious that this is a very new form for them. Plot and characterization are still very crude, like they've only just recently developed these skills and haven't quite worked out the nuances yet. Gee, listen to me — everyone's a critic, right? But still, as I learn to follow some of the longer narratives, I can't help but get the impression that there's...how can I say it? An evolution — no, an emergence, that's it! — an emergence of, well, not exactly a moral conscience per se, but some kind of attempt to project moral value onto the world at large. As competitive as this environment is, that seems doomed to failure. What kind of morality could possibly evolve on this planet, right? Yet, there it is. And that, to my mind, satisfies the Seventh Criterion for the...

"...ship itself seems beyond repair, but the many canopy layers we fell through diffused the impact so it looks pretty intact. There's more damage to the payload from sheer humidity than from the crash. In fact, the ship never even touched ground. It's still hanging where it fell, lodged in the lowest canopy. I had to climb several meters...

"...no fear at all. Caution, definitely. On occasion, some degree of awe. But above all, an overwhelming curiosity regarding the equipment I was able to salvage from the crash site. Not at all the stereotyped reaction we've come to expect from so-called primitives, eh? I suppose it's the complexity of the surroundings, the constant vigilance against the unexpected. Once I demonstrate what something does, they understand and accept it. Not without reservation, of course. Everything here — I mean everything — must prove itself in constant testing, whether it's a stone knife or a blaster, a climbing-vine or a jetpack. Now, as to the nuts and bolts and inner workings of my gadgets, well, the Vorox are still in a Paleolithic stage of development, after all. But just yesterday, the chief asked me if one of my drones could be used to scout a nearby clearing where they planned to hunt soon. Just like that. And I only showed him what the drone does the day before. I can scarcely imagine what sort of technology they might develop over the next, say, 10,000 years, given this amazing adaptability. Of course, it depends on whether we can keep their culture from contamination by human contact...."

own swaba.

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Each individual Vorox is believed to have an *oolma* and a *grumma* — a friend and an enemy swaba. One particular plant or animal swaba has favored that Vorox, and his luck dealing with that creature is good. The oolma is usually identified by one or a number of incidents involving that species wherein the Vorox was lucky with or was even saved by the swaba's creature. The grumma is just the opposite — a creature who has tried to kill the Vorox and with whom he has little or no luck. Vorox must be very careful in situations involving their grumma, for luck cannot help them. Conversely, situations involving their oolma are considered auspicious.

The oolma and grumma are not exactly the same things as totem spirits from human mythologies, for they are not considered to possess power or associations with abstract ideas or conditions; they merely aid in actual situations involving their kinds. One Vorox's oolma can be another's grumma, although it is extremely rare for angerak mates to share such mixed oolma and grumma. There is a small mystical movement among some civilized Vorox who believe the oolma to be local forms of guardian Empyrean angels and grumma to be demons associated with the Dark, but most priests have actively discouraged such attempts to admit what they consider to be bestial beliefs into the Church fold.

Vorox shamanism is practical and harsh. Rituals are used to either gain luck — a necessary edge over larger and more dangerous creatures — or to trick prey. The shaman's true skill is not in any magic but in knowing which swaba to bargain with for aid and which substances to ingest to enter the trance necessary for communication. All swaba demand a price or sacrifice of some sort, and the shaman's cunning is in striking the right bargain, which may involve fooling the swaba into accepting something worthless :"Aunt Zilu, I'll give you this fine and rare human-crafted pudding in return for your aid in hunting a chidwit." The promised pudding, a processed military ration stolen from a Li Halan camp, is tasteless and non-nutritious even for poor Aunt Zilu. Luckily, most swaba have short memories, and don't tend to remember small slights for long.

A shaman, called an *oklog*, must learn everything he can about the various substances — plant extracts, cooked animal organs or fluids — used to attain altered states of consciousness. Different substances provide different "frequencies" of communication, and the proper ones must be used lest a swaba take advantage of the shaman and drain his luck. Additionally, the period of the trance is a highly vulnerable time, for the shaman is often oblivious to his physical surroundings and must rely on his angerak to protect him while his own wit travels to far glades or fields. Some substances can even provide glimpses into the near future, but these are the riskiest, for the shaman's grumma can sometimes try to sever his connection to the present, forcing him to forever live in tomorrow while his body withers and dies in the present.

Ferals still practice such shamanism, although it is considered a scandal for a civilized Vorox to do so. For the most part, civilized Vorox worship the Pancreator in the same manner as the Li Halan, so far at least as any individual cares to. Most Vorox don't bother to contemplate such matters as life after death or the morality of one's beliefs simple action and practical living are busy work enough. Those Vorox who do have the leisure time for religion tend to become lay members of the Orthodoxy. It is said that the Brothers of Battle have accepted Vorox into their order from time to time, but few have the necessary religious ardor to pass the rigorous training let alone the years of spiritual tests required to remain in the order.

A syncretic religion mixing native shamanism and Pancreator worship has appeared in the more primitive villages on the margins of civilized and feral territory. Called *Badaswaba*, or "star wit," it sees the Pancreator — represented as a prominent star in the northern hemisphere's night sky — as the governing personality of the universe and attempts to bargain with it for luck. The best swaba intercessor for this is Father Gar, the Ungavoroxian sun. The Graa Kal, however, is not a swaba worth allying with, for it is the *Dalswaba*, the "dark wit," a devil representing the personality of the Dark.

Cuisine

Vorox are meat eaters; they do not eat vegetables. While they can occasionally digest them, they are incapable of gaining much nutrition from them, usually due to the natural pesticides that most native plants produce. A shrekma marinade can eliminate most of these pesticides but doesn't improve the taste; such meals are reserved for times when hunting is bad. Oddly enough, Urthish varieties of vegetables are worse on Vorox stomachs.

They do eat fruit, though, and specifically choose certain varieties (fwibza pears, glukmuz berries) that ferment in their stomachs, actually aiding their digestion of prey. The meat of most Ungavoroxian prey is often too tough and stringy to digest well; it must be partially decomposed before eaten. Again, marinating it in certain types of shrekma helps this process. While humans are completely disgusted with the idea of eating something that has been lying in dag-mush for two days, it says "supper's ready" to a Vorox.

A large, land-based mollusc called a zrux, once believed to be useless and cowardly, is now a prized pet due to its powerful digestive tract. The zrux can eat a wide variety of foods and excretes a juicy, tasty slime that retains many valuable nutrients, devoid of toxins. Zrux slime alone does not make a good meal, but it provides an excellent sauce.

Civilized Vorox have learned to cook their meat, and they thus aren't used to eating rotten meat like their ancestors did (or their contemporary feral neighbors still do). Ferals only cook meat on ceremonial occasions, when a shaman is available to light (and control) a fire.

Civilized chefs have gotten quite inventive with cuisine, mixing Urthish foods or prepackaged meals with local meats or insects. Inspired by human-invented ingredients, such Vorox have discovered a variety of Ungavoroxian spice extracts from plants. Some of these are now considered delicacies by humans (once their toxins have been neutralized by dag-mush and skrekma marinades) and are highly sought after. It is not uncommon for groups of civilized Vorox to dare the dangers of the jungle in search of spices and other delicious foods that can be prepared for the pricey human palate.

Medicine

All feral Vorox are conversant with a certain degree of local medical lore — those that aren't don't tend to survive long. This knowledge includes such tidbits such as how specific toxins cancel each other out and which foods can only safely be eaten in combination ("You can eat zixalg, but only if you swallow a grenade-fruit pit first."), or that shanto blood apparently preserves organic matter against decay; it is used for tanning (like tannic acid) and as a powerful antiseptic.

Civilized Vorox are not necessarily raised with such lore, but some can learn it. Most civilized Vorox know about the shrek-larvae innoculation for offworlders (see "Shrekma,"

in the Ungavorox chapter).

Few medical breakthroughs for humans have come from Ungavorox, although numerous poisons originate on the world. Indeed, it is considered something of an alchemical cornucopia for poisoners, and thus a breeding ground of sin in the eyes of the Church.

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Feral Vorox are quite adept with trauma medicine, knowing various ways to staunch wounds ("smear bilja pupae on the wound") or prevent pain ("chew on valk bark"), but such lore does them little good offworld, where such resources are nonexistent.

Language Bebold: The Proto-Tongue!

From "The Conundrum of a Pre-Technological Global Language" by Dr. Stanley Szukalsk, *The Journal of the Exo-Linguistics Study Group*, 3994, vol. 354, issue 7.

"The first human to learn the Voroxian language, Dr. H. T. Hausen, has discovered a startling uniformity among the various dialects of jungle, mountain, plain and tundra. While the expected variants of accent and pronunciation are found, the narrow vocabulary and simplistic grammar he has gleaned from his first contacts can easily be understood by distantly separated tribes in the farthest-flung reaches of the Ungava supercontinent. Even the loquacious Winuman Islanders, tentatively classified as a distinct subspecies of Vorox, retain enough recognizable word-roots and essential syntactic structures to readily understand the speech of any mainlander. This situation flies in the face of accepted linguistic science; global languages simply are not found among sentient races whose communication and transportation technology has not progressed to the point where one culture has gained dominance over the entire planet. The irony of such a epistemologically high order of paradox on this primitive world has not been lost upon the scientific community.

"On closer examination, this apparent contradiction is resolved as we recall what we know about the development of our own tongue. The ancients of Old Terra, who spoke several hundred distinct languages in the centuries before the Diaspora, believed that all the varieties of speech found on our homeworld were descended from dialects of one single original root-tongue, which they named at one time "Proto-Indo-European." Apparently, as we have intruded upon these Vorox quite early in their cultural evolution, the vocal constructs they utilized while emerging into sentience have had time enough to diffuse across the supercontinent, but not enough time to differentiate into diverse dialects. One can even distinguish between a deep structure of action-oriented predicates heard in the barking, yelping and howling of the plains hunters, elaborated by heavily adjectival noun-complexes denoted by intonations and inflections of grunts, moans, hoots and labial gibbers that form the broad rich technical vocabulary of the jungle environment.

"Furthermore, the Voroxian tongue is so profoundly primal that it clearly exhibits what has come to be called "paleolaryngeal onomatopoeia," i.e., that stage in the evolution of a sentient species when other creatures, landscape features, situations and aspects of the environment are all identified by distinctive phonemes that mimic the sound most closely associated with them. Proponents of paleolaryngeal development theories hold that the formation of a "categoric onomatopoetic noun-complex" is universal by its very nature, having a fundamental phonetic basis for a globally shared glossary of sounds common to all regions. Some even go so far as to suggest evidence of parallel phonetic associations between racial languages that evolved completely independently of each other, citing similar sound-meaning roots in human and non-human vocabularies.

"The Voroxian tongue has supplied the adherents of this school with numerous samples of raw unadorned phonemes that would seem to support their thesis. Their most commonly cited example is the most frequently used sound in the speech of the Vorox, the phoneme "-gar-," also pronounced as "-graa-." The form "-gar-" is more personal and individualized, usually appearing in the name of a successful hunter or animal of great destructive power; as "-graa-" it refers specifically to the act and actions of hunting and killing, being found in the name of the planet's uncontested chief predator, the Graa Kal or grackle fox. Paleolaryngeal theorists go on to note parallel syllables from other alien languages that employ the same or similar sounds: notably, the name "Ukar" which signifies a mythic blood oath to the Ukari people, and is the common word for "violence" in the Obunish tongue. Also cited were the Hironem "k'jurr," which means "to puncture, penetrate or insert;" the Ascorbite "gul't," meaning "to severe or detach;" the Etyri "rawk," denoting a diving attack or risky flight maneuver, and the Shantor "h'wurul," a charge or stampede. Some even present data from human language itself, such as the Old Middle Urthish word "gore," both a noun meaning "blood" and a verb for violent impalement, and the Kurgan "shikar," a hunter."

Glossary

Note that there is no consistant singular or plural formation for Vorox nouns; quantity usually depends on context. Also, noun and verbs often use the same sounds, relying on context to convey their meaning.

WHO WE ARE (CULTURE)

Aal = Binding, oath Anga = Bond mates (members of an angerak) Bada = StarCheed = LittleCheedba = Infant, child Chuk = AxeDal = Darkness Gar = Hunter Gur = One who catches Glang = Sword, long blade Graa = To hunt, to kill Grumma = Sworn enemy, antithesis Hong = To throwHoong = To flyHu-Mong = Human Leeyalong = Li Halan Jal = BigJalba = Youth, adolescent Kaba = To come, to arrive at one's destination Kuma = Victory Oolma = Ally, luck-bringer Ruwa = Long, far Shala = Water Shik = Knife

Swaba = The "wit" or non-spatial mind of a particular plant or animal species; sometimes referred to by humans as a spirit

Thok = Arrow Thung = Bow Ung = Land, ground, dirt Wa = Luck Wala = Cunning, wisdom Walba = Adult Yiwi = Short, near

Zil = Vine (regular vine, as distinguished from the dangerous zilu)

Zilzung = Webvine

Zung = Spiderweb

Zungur = "Webcatcher" (euphemism for a daring fool among ferals, or a leader among civilized Vorox)

Daily Life Civilized

Civilized Vorox live in communities built on human models, although with their own distinct ambience. Youths are taught to think in a cultured manner akin to human expectations. Increasingly, however, native art and even literature movements seek a unique Vorox synthesis, taking the best of the old ways (still practiced by ferals) and the new.



What Does a Civilized Vorox Do? (Careers)

Vorox society is non-bureaucratic and has yet to develop anything like the profusion of careers that high-tech societies host. Instead, Vorox are expected to perform whatever tasks are necessary to the maintenance of their communities, and individuals (or angeraks) are usually chosen for tasks based on demonstrated ability rather than preformed social roles.

In communities close to human settlements, however, Vorox often take on more formal career patterns.

Chieftains

The highest positions are reserved to the nobles, those who rule over territories and report back to their liege nobles, all the way up to the king, who supposedly receives and shares advice from a human council, traditionally made up of Li Halan, Church representatives and, occasionally, a League representative. Recently, Emperor Alexius has appointed a full-time Imperial representative to sit on the council.

Nobles, most often called chieftains — a less formal title — are attended by a host of advisors, bodyguards and servants. The closest such Vorox, the inner circles, are made up of a chieftain's angerak, his blood brothers and sisters whom he can trust no matter what crisis or treachery arises.

Some typical roles seen at a Vorox court are: Court Oklog (shaman), the Chieftain's Guard, the Chieftain's Hunters, court cooks, groomers (see below), and finally, administrators (who usually deal with humans, keeping records humans deem important).

Warriors

The rest of Vorox society is mainly made up of warriors, although this does not mean they fight all day. It simply signifies that, even among civilized Vorox, each and every member must be fit and ready to defend himself and others from Ungavorox's dangers.

Vorox still subsist mainly by hunting game, although some plains chieftains have instituted the practice of herding and domesticating animals. However, hunting is only part of a typical Vorox's day. The rest of his time is taken up with devising tools to aid in a hunt or to maintain a home against predators. With the advent of technology, these tasks take much less time, but tech goods cost money. Hence, civilized Vorox have adopted humanity's money economy.

The main sources of income are exports to human communities or offworld of items too dangerous for humans to gather for themselves — animal hides, plant fibers, etc. Thus, most Vorox make their livings as collectors, selling their catches to humans or, more often, to Vorox merchants who act as middle men for the transactions.

Vorox merchants, like merchants anywhere, have gained a reputation among their suppliers (the hunters) as swindlers who pay little for hard-won goods and sell them for high-firebird amounts to humans. Those merchants who aren't careful (i.e., by joining the League or building a good angerak bodyguard unit) often find themselves attacked by disgruntled hunters and run into the jungle to fend for themselves.

As Vorox society increasingly mimics human society, its members take on careers to provide for new necessities: tailors, blacksmiths, cooks, shopkeepers, crafters, etc. The high tech careers are the rarest, for even civilized Vorox society is more rural and low tech than most human societies.

Most Vorox are considered to be serfs whose labors profit mainly their chieftains. However, due to the deepened sense of community, wrought mainly through angerak ties, the general share of community effort is well distributed. Those few chieftains who have tried to emulate human noble tyrants did not succeed for long before their "serfs" abandoned them by returning to the jungle.

Economy

While the firebird is the international standard of currency, it is too rich for most Vorox. Hence, King Kummanga has ordered the minting of a unique local currency, the *skava*, considered by humans to be the equivalent of a talon. The bronze coin is stamped with Kummanga's profile on one side, and a single claw on the other, representing its authority as sole accepted coinage (except for firebirds, of course).

Most Vorox will accept no other currency than a skava, although among friends they still prefer barter trades. Only Vorox in villages with human commerce will accept firebirds, for they have a means of exchanging them for skavas. Out in the hinterlands, a firebird means little.

Likes/Dislikes

To a civilized Vorox, the best things in life are: Gaining respect, winning a contest (a hunt or even a game), gaining friends, building a family.

Things that are bad: Acting feral, losing a contest, spurning friends, insulting others, being insulted.

Feral

Ferals live in the traditional Vorox manner amid the deep jungle, a harsh, unforgiving existence from which they nonetheless manage to reap some joy and exaltation.



What Does a Feral Vorox Do? (Careers)

Feral society is extremely tribal, with families gathering into villages or roving communities, living off their wits and skills in the deep jungles. Everyone is expected to carry his own weight. Those who can't (due to either poor health or old age) will only be supported by the rest for a short while. If there is no improvement after that, the Vorox is expected to go out with a bang in a final hunt, perhaps even playing the role of prey to lure a predator the rest of the community is trying to catch. Angerak ties are strong but the jungle allows for no slack. Generally, the elderly and weak are left to defend the young in the high canopies, and are expected to sacrifice themselves to distract predators while the young leap away from the danger.

Because of the variety of needs, most ferals divide tasks among angerak members, with certain members learning certain skills while other members learn different skills. For instance, in a typical angerak, one or more members might be lookouts or scouts, another a toolcrafter (includes flintknapping, bow-making, etc.), and yet another a vine-weaver (for rope or nets).

One member of any hunting party is elected *zunger*, "webcatcher." This is generally, the stupidest or youngest and preferably the tallest and/or most expendable member of the party. The zunger walks at the head of the line, a position of "honor and respect." He thus saves everyone else from getting a faceful of spiderwebs. Clueless Vorox believe the party's assurances that the zunger is a title of honor, but the older and wiser ones realize that it's somewhat of an insult. The term has survived in the parlance of civilized Vorox but without the derogatory connotations, where zunger simply means "leader."

One of the most respected skills is grooming. Groomers are the most popular folk in any community, even if they aren't the best hunters or the mightiest warriors. Their task is to ruffle through another's fur to search for unwanted bugs or parasites, of which there is a veritable menagerie on every member of a returning hunting party. Groomers need to know how to hook their claws under a tick's head without poisoning their client. In addition to the social kudos, good work is its own reward — they get to eat the fattest, juiciest ticks first.

In those more permanent feral villages, some must learn the skills of maintaining the platforms and rope-bridges. This task generally falls to the elderly, or those who are recovering from wounds and cannot hunt. These builders usually direct bands of children and youths who do the work of tying the vines.



VOROX [

Economy

Ferals operate solely on a barter economy, trading tasks and favors. A group of hunters may trade a haunch of meat for a vine-weaver's rope, or an herb-gatherer may trade medicine in return for the use of a bodyguard escort as he collects his samples. These are not formal arrangements, however, so much as community tit-for-tats. Vorox will help fellow villagers without first requesting something in return, fully expecting that they can come to others later with their own requests.

Favors or trades outside of a tribe or community, however, do get more formal, with terms agreed before a task is complete. Those tribes that renege on deals may be raided later on, with the offended tribe taking by force whatever they want. Minor feuds begun by distant ancestors are still fought between certain feral tribes today.

Likes/Dislikes

For a feral Vorox, the best things in life are: A victorious hunt, eating your prey, tribal comradeship, raising cubs, living to old age.

The worst things in life are: Getting eaten, a failed hunt, betrayal, civilization.

Quirks and Customs

There are a number of things players should keep in mind when playing Vorox. These giant, multilimbed beings are alien sentients, and even the civilized ones have different expectations and behaviors from humans.

For instance, a full-toothed smile is a threatening gesture, as is a long, directed stare. Civilized Vorox tell themselves otherwise, but the instinct is still there; they may flinch or raise their hackles when strangers suddenly smile, although they're used to such smiles from familiar humans. When they try to smile themselves, it comes off very forced and somewhat mechanical, as they try to not to awaken an instinctual bloodthirst. Despite reputations to the contrary, even feral Vorox are not mindless beserkers; they are perfectly capable of controlling their instincts enough not to attack others. Hiding such emotions behind a façade of selfcontrol, however, is another matter entirely. While a Vorox will rarely lose control, his growling and pacing about is still unnerving.

Vorox have a different sense of personal space from most humans. Ferals are very close to fellow tribemembers and are prone to unconsciously begin grooming them during leisurely moments. They are far less comfortable around anyone else, however, and expect a considerable distance to be kept by others. Even civilized Vorox expect a degree of space between them and others, and this isn't just a hallmark of their size. The exception here is for members of their angerak, who can get as close as they like without making the Vorox uncomfortable.

With the exceptions noted above for tribemembers and angerak mates, Vorox rarely get physically jovial with others — they don't slap others on the back or shake hands willingly. Angerak mates, though, can get quite physical, to the point of injury at times.

Insulting physical gestures among Vorox aren't too different from those used by humans. Upthrusting arms or fingers are not friendly, unless clearly meant in a sexual manner, in which case they are taken on a case-by-case basis. Even worse are multiple upthrusting arms — using four arms to communicate one's distaste for another is extremely insulting. Using six is a declaration of war.

When greeting a Vorox, it is best to look at him with the head titled to the side and only a glance or two to meet his eyes (no extended staring). It is best not to offer a hand unless the Vorox initiates the gesture (civilized Vorox know human customs); otherwise, keep hands down and away from weapons. The Vorox word for hello is *kabawung*, "you are happily seen." Farewell is *tungtala*, "until soon."



The Great Vrongar Hunt

Prince Tristam Li Halan swept his gaze across the large fur-framed faces that peered intently at him through the light of the large campfire. He drew from his sash what looked like a slightly flattened cylinder twenty centimeters long, wrapped in strips of fine leather and colored ribbon, capped on one end by a stylized dragonhead and at the other by a perpendicular disk cast in a floral design with a narrow slot in the center opening into the interior of the cylinder. Snorts of restrained laughter sounded around the fire as those assembled recognized the object: a knife handle without a blade. Only a foolish human would bring such a useless item into the jungle, the prince knew them to be thinking.

His thumbnail found the tiny stud under the ribbon behind the hilt, pressed it. The handle thrummed in his palm and the insubstantial ghost of a curved tanto-shaped blade flicked out of the slot, glowing but barely visible in the flickering firelight. Rather than the superstitious awe he had expected, the great hairy figures leaned in close with curiosity and keen interest. After a moment the eldest among them looked up at him.

"Ah. Wireblade." The Vorox chief, Jung-Jung, spoke heavily accented but understandable Urthish, as did many members of his tribe.

Tristam glanced up at Kagangak, his guide, who returned the look with a raised eyebrow. Turning back to the old chief, Tristam asked, "You know of such devices?"

"Titus the Clever showed ancestors many wonders. We remember."

The largest of the younger Vorox pushed a loop of thick woody vine toward the prince and made a slicing motion with her open paw. "Cut. Cut!" There were sideways glances around the fire. Some of the other young ones seemed to be trying not to smirk.

Hissing faintly, Tristam's blade sank into the vine as though it were carved of whipped butter. Halfway through, however, it met resistance; the faint hiss became a faint whine for a second, then the vine fell away, sliced clean through. At its center was a thin core of milky translucent white.

"So you thought to fool me!" the prince said with a rakish grin. "You know of the wireblade. Well, I have been told of the strong webvine." He exchanged a wink with Kagangak. "The men of the Second Republic were prideful and godless — save for the great Titus, of course —" he hastened to add, "— yet they were skilled in the crafting of tools and weapons. Could any other blade have severed this webvine? Is this not a blade worthy to use upon the mighty vrongar?"

The Vorox, who were nodding in mounting agreement with the prince's words, stopped suddenly and looked to their leader. He had a comical pouting expression as he slid the edge of the severed vine along the soft sensitive flesh of his inner lip. The cut was perfectly smooth; no splinters, no frayed fibers. Even the strand of web at the core was sliced clean across. The chief looked at the wireblade. "No," he pronounced. "No good. Not for Brother Vrongar. We give you knife for Brother Vrongar."

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Tristam was handed a blade of knapped volcanic rock, not large by Vorox standards but with a long bark-wrapped handle that made the prince's hand seem tiny and childlike by comparison. The blade had obviously been chipped into shape with incredible skill and care, but, instead of a plain serrated edge, it had been painstakingly worked into a row of jagged teeth, like an irregular saw blade. For a moment the prince thought another joke was being played upon him, but the faces surrounding him were dead serious, the gravity of the occasion unmistakable.

"Your tribe does me honor by this fine gift," he humbly intoned. "I pray that I bring honor to your tribe by using it in the hunt tomorrow."

Later that evening, Prince Tristam and Kagangak walked a short way from the camp to take private counsel. Tristam knew they looked ridiculous together. He himself was wearing a rumpled shapeless outfit of reinforced khaki, covered with pockets of all sizes, buckles, snaps and loops for carrying gear and supplies. His arms and legs were bare, scratched and scraped from the rigors of the safari. His demeanor had changed in the past few weeks; gone were the stiff posture and formal manners required of him at court. He fancied that now he almost knew what it felt like to be a normal person rather than a ruler of worlds. His trusted Vorox guide, on the other hand, had insisted on wearing his fine tailored tunic and full hooded cloak with silver-thread trim and golden chrysanthemum-shaped brooch all the way across the dusty plains and into the rainforest. Even now Kagangak looked like a fashion-plate in the midst of the jungle, standing ramrod straight, upper arms behind his back with hands clasped military-style, lower arms crossed over his belly, two pairs of gloves impeccably creased and tucked into his girdle.

"I am satisfied that they are not jesting with me," Tristam was saying. "Are they just deliberately making my part in this hunt difficult? Look at this thing! How am I supposed to cut through that beast's hide with a blade like this?"

"They are ferals, my lord," Kagangak sighed. His Urthish was as perfect as his dress, and just as out of place in his wide, fanged maw. "They know not what is best for them. They cling to old ways blindly and stubbornly, and recoil in superstitious fear when shown a better way to live. Ever
and always has it been thus with them. Do not worry yourself overmuch on this account, my lord. They at least understand the consequences that will befall them if you are harmed or disgraced while in their care."

After a night of fitful sleep in the swaying treehouses of the tribe's "village," the hunting party gathered in the limbs of the tallest tree at the jungle's edge, there to look out across the plain and assess the nearby herd for likely targets. Vrongar were scattered here and there for kilometers in each direction, their great bulks rising above the tall grass, grazing in peace. This particular species of vrongar was characterized by a large bulbous hornlike protrusion emerging from the snout and forehead; the prince guessed that was the source of the distant trumpeting he heard. One lone female grazed apart from the rest of the herd, near where the grassland gave way to the jungle undergrowth.

"She is heavy," remarked the huge youngster that had handed Tristam the webvine the previous evening, whose name he thought was Shulungelek, or something like that. "Perhaps heavy with young?"

There was a general smacking of lips at this last comment, until the chief sagely noted, "Herd would not let her stray if she heavy with young. Just fat. And slow. Where is pile?"

"There." Another Vorox pointed at what looked like a heap of rubble midway between the jungle and the rest of the herd. "If herd not see us come out from jungle, we go to pile, then go to female, no trouble."

From the tree, Tristam was then taken to the small clearing nearby where the husk was kept. Though legless and shrunken, the gutted vrongar carcass towered over even Shulungelek's head. The pebbled hide, tanned with shanto blood, sagged wretchedly around the spine and ribs; the thick armor plates hung at unhealthy angles. The husk apparently had been used before; its horns were beginning to crack and splinter, and the thin hide covering the bony protrusions along the skull was peeling away to expose the abraded bone beneath. The prince doubted that even the stupidest beast could be fooled by this sad and gruesome thing.

As if reading this thought, Shulungelek clapped her great paw on Tristam's back — Kagangak stiffened at this informality but Tristam motioned him back — and said with a barking guffaw, "Good for us, Brother Vrongar, he not see so good!" She crouched down to roll the massive head to one side, hooked her left shoulders under the jawline and heaved the entire skull overhead in a feat of unbelievable strength.

Inside, he could see that the upper and lower molars had been tied together to hold the jaw shut. A wad of shanto bladder sealed the nasal cavity leading to the trumpet-bone, with a length of hollow bamboo-like reed jutting from the center. Wooden crossbeams wedged in place afforded

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Shulungelek an easy balanced grip as she tilted the giant skull side to side, back and forth, practicing her moves.

The rest of the angerak had completed their preparations, which consisted primarily of strapping their hind paws to the upper ends of short log segments whose lower ends were carved to resemble the elephantine feet of the vrongar. Many brandished forked tree limbs stripped of leaves and bark, or long bones with slightly sharpened stones tied to the ends. Hooting at each other's awkwardness, they stomped into the hollow interior of the husk, taking their places along the wide vault of ribs. As they hooked their arms under the rows of crossbeams and tested their grip, they reminded Prince Tristam of a shipload of galley slaves. The prince himself took up a privileged position in a sling woven of grass hanging beneath the forward shoulderblades. Small holes had been bored through the flanged cranial plate, permitting him to see ahead.

At a command from Shulungelek, the angerak shouldered their crossbeams and started chanting a hunting song in unison, softly, under their breath. Stomping in rhythm to the song, the hollow mock beast made its way from the undergrowth and out into the grassland plain.

The muggy humidity of the rainforest was one thing, but being inside a gutted vrongar carcass with the savage red sun of Ungavorox in plain view was another thing altogether. The prince was instantly drenched in perspiration, and the musk of Vorox exerting themselves in the enclosed space was overpowering. Through the peepholes, Tristam could see the pile dead ahead; beyond, the herd was scattered across the horizon like lumbering foothills of armorplated muscle. As they neared the pile, some of the largest members of the herd turned in their direction and began to move forward.

"I daresay a few of the bulls have spotted us. What must we do?" The prince would have been just as happy to abort the hunt right away.

Shulungelek said nothing, but took a deep breath, leaned forward and pressed her mouth to the bamboo tube. The note she blew was incredibly loud to Tristam's ear, but the stifled snorts he heard behind him told him it sounded thin and pitiful compared to the real trumpeting of a living vrongar. Shulungelek had played this part in many hunts; they obviously expected her to do a better imitation.

The bulls, however, seemed satisfied with her performance, and turned back to the herd. "They think us a sick one," Shulungelek explained. "Will leave us out here for Graa Kal."

Tristam's groin tightened at the very mention of the name. Jung-Jung had warned him that a grackle fox attack was the chief danger of the vrongar hunt, more so than the vrongar itself. He had seen, from a safe distance, two kills by grackle on this safari already. The speed and power of



the great predator was terrifying to behold.

They reached the pile in safety, and stomped right into the center of it. Tristam had been warned about this phase of the operation as well, but nothing could prepare him for the real thing. Just when I was getting used to the stench in here, he mused sourly as he watched his companions scoop up dripping handfuls of dung, smearing it all over their limbs and each other's backs. *I believe I'll skip this part when I tell this story at court. The things I do in the service of my people...*

Dropping from the sling into knee-deep warmth, he muttered aloud, "Is this really necessary for a successful hunt?"

"Very important," Shulungelek whispered as the prince reluctantly coated himself. "Must smell like vrongar. Brother Vrongar not see good. But smell real good. Him smell real damn good!" Tristam started to disagree, but realized that wordplay would only confuse the primitives.

Once the disgusting process was completed, everyone resumed their places and turned the husk toward the fat lone female. As they approached, their rhythmic stomping took on a more elaborate, almost sensual, cadence, pounding an insistent message into the ground. Now only meters away, the female turned her knobby face toward the approaching husk, bleating coyly.

When they were within range, Shulungelek grunted a

command and the angerak surged forward as one, ramming the husk skull-first into the female's hindquarters. Hearing her squeal, the prince feared that she would counterattack, but she only huffed and stamped and presented her flank for a more solid blow. Shulungelek braced herself and rammed again, hissing through clenched teeth, "You like? Oh yes, you like! Have more now!"

She worked the skull some more, adding a twisting movement that caused the husk to reverberate with the sound of horn against armored hide. The vrongar's squeals and bleats were replaced with a frenzied panting that sent blasts of hot moist wind through the grass beneath the husk. The mounting noise drowned out Shulungelek's shouted commands to the angerak as they angled the husk alongside the behemoth's body. Shoving against the creaking ribs, the Vorox deployed their bone and stick implements, reaching under the skirt of the husk to prod and jab at the now-manic female. Almost howling in fury, they echoed Shulungelek's licentious encouragements: "Take that!" "Again! And again!" "Get in there!" "Faster! Harder!" "Yes! YES!"

Prince Tristam swung wildly in his grass sling, battered against the ribs and spine that he thought must surely snap from the violence of the moment. He was reminded briefly of a naval battle he had once endured on a storm-tossed sea on Midian. Suddenly Shulungelek was tugging at his toe.

"Now, little chief, now! Killing stroke is yours!" she cried.

Dropping from the sling, he crouched where she had lifted the skull to one side. The vrongar was on the ground now, rolled almost on her side, her tremendous bulk shuddering and quivering. Her head lolled back, exposing part of her throat through a gap where her jaw and underplating parted. Tristam drew forth the knapped stone blade, gripping it hesitantly. The skin of the throat, the thinnest on the vrongar's body, looked as thick and tough as cowhide, the windpipe beneath as solid as iron. Switching the crude knife to his off hand, the prince pulled out his wireblade.

These are, ultimately, a pragmatic people, he told himself. When they see how much more efficient this device is, they will forgive me for ignoring their ritual requirement and embrace what civilization can offer them.

Activating the wireblade, he drew it across the windpipe with a graceful, effortless wave of his arm. The dense flesh parted, the cut so clean it had not even time to start bleeding. The body convulsed, holding its last climactic shudder. Above the sweep of the jaw and angle of the cheek, a tiny dark eyeball nestled deep in its bone-shielded socket rolled to regard him.

Then there was a piercing whistle as air was sucked through the severed throat, and another convulsion that clenched the muscles of the great neck and pushed the two sides of the wound tightly together. The beast let out one final labored exhalation and Prince Tristam was coated with a fine arterial spray from the air pressure behind the pursed wound. At the same time there was a deep rumble that instantly mounted into a deafening roar, which rattled Tristam's teeth, shook his innards like jelly and caused the entire husk to quiver. It was the trumpeting of the vrongar, its source less than a meter away across the huge face.

Shulungelek spat out a word that sounded to Tristam like "chidwit!" and the entire angerak erupted in mad panic. Flinging aside the husk with one mighty heave, the Vorox dropped their wood and bone implements and sprinted madly for the jungle. Tristam felt the ground tremble under his feet, thought, "Earthquake!" Turning, he saw a cloud of dust rising from the horizon where the entire vrongar herd was stampeding toward him. His knees were just about to give way when he was whipped from his feet by a sweep of Shulungelek's arm. The Vorox huntress dashed for the treeline with the Prince of House Li Halan tucked in her armpit, flopping like a rag doll.

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Once they reached the shade of the trees she relaxed her hold and Tristam thought safety had been gained, but she flung him roughly to her upper shoulders and leapt to a low-hanging branch. When she jostled him into position, he caught a brief glimpse of the female vrongar's still-twitching carcass before it was engulfed and trampled by the roaring stampede of her herd. Then he was flying through the trees, whipped by twigs, thorns and sharp-edged leaves, desperately clinging to Shulungelek's fur still slick with fresh dung. All around were howling, yelping Vorox, running along branches, leaping through the air, swinging on webvine, tearing across the canopy like a flock of startled birds. He saw Kagangak dive for a thick strand of vine that immediately tore free, sending him plummeting to the jungle floor. He landed, rolled, came up running on all sixes, his fine outfit ripping at the seams, unable to accommodate his primeval posture.

The rest of the flight through the trees was as a nightmare to Prince Tristam, a delirium-fugue of scratching limbs and leaves, of flying and falling, of howling and screeching and shrieking, of pounding thunder that shook the entire jungle. He awoke, lacerated, bruised and aching, on a treetop bed of bent branches, soft leaves and thick ferns. He had been washed, and his wounds, all thankfully superficial, had been treated with patches of moss and crushed berries. Kagangak, clothing in tatters, squatted at Tristam's feet, springing to stand when his prince stirred. Thronged about them, Jung-Jung's tribe stared in silence.

The prince was led back to the site of the village where he had spent the previous night. It was no longer there. The stampede had continued for over a hundred meters into the jungle before it spent itself; every tree, shrub and fern had been pushed over, uprooted, stomped flat, defecated upon. Only scraps of artfully bent branches, knotted vine or woven grass indicated that anyone had ever lived there. Tristam recalled having seen pregnant females, young cubs, some elderly and infirm amongst the tribe. Did they make it clear in time? He could not make his lips phrase the query. He could not lift his eyes to mark the faces around him.

Kagangak pulled a miniature squawker from his girdle and summoned the royal flitter in a low voice. Jung-Jung stepped up to glower down at the prince.

"In deep jungle," he growled, "you die for stupidity like this. We want not war with your tribe, so you live now. But we not sign your treaty. You leave now. Never return."

When the flitter arrived, Tristam and Kagangak boarded without a farewell, a wave, a look back. As he was borne aloft, the prince gazed down at the expanse of flattened rainforest.

"Trouble yourself not, my lord," Kagangak advised. "Your visit to my homeworld has met with more success than failure. Many treaties were signed. Many tribes have begun to see the light. Word of this incident will never travel beyond the jungle rim. Nobody at court shall ever hear of this. There shall be no dishonor, my lord."

"No dishonor..." Prince Tristam echoed weakly. "But I can never erase my own shame. I doubt my confessor can understand this, but have her ready to hear me when we return to court."

WHO WE ARE (CULTURE)

The Story of Lng As rold by Reengulong, nursemaid to King Kummanga's cubs

See, this Ung, he was a cub back in the old, olden time. He was a young, proud hunter. He said to Father Gar, "Father Gar, I'll hunt for your breakfast anything you want to eat. Anything at all, I'll get it. Just say."

Father Gar, he said, "I always eat anything I want. Except for chidwit-bird. That chidwit is just too goddamn fast for me. You get me a chidwit, Ung, okay?"

Now, Ung knows that nothing runs faster than a chidwit. Even Graa Kal can't catch a chidwit. So Ung sat down by the river and thinks how to catch one. He sat there so long, old Aunt Zilu-vine came and put her arm around him. Ung jumped up and said, "Get off me, Aunt Zilu! You'll not eat my bones today! I'm going on a great hunt for Father Gar!"

"What're you hunting for Father Gar, Ung?" said Aunt Zilu.

Ung said, "I'm hunting a chidwit-bird!"

Aunt Zilu said, "How you gonna catch a fast chidwit, little cub?"

"I don't know," said Ung.

"I've never tasted chidwit bone," said Aunt Zilu. "I'll tell you what, Ung. I'll help you catch a chidwit."

"How you gonna help me catch a chidwit, Aunt Zilu? You're the slowest thing in all the damn jungle. You only catch prey when it's dead or sleeping! Chidwits run fast all the time and sleep in holes in the ground. How're you gonna help me?"

"I'll call my sisters to help. Together we'll catch a chidwit with you. But you give us the chidwit's bones to taste before you take it to Father Gar."

So Aunt Zilu called her sister vines to come, and Ung pulled all of them together and held tight so they couldn't try and eat his bones while he was carrying them. But on the way to the chidwit's hole, they meet Graa Kal — Oh, stop crying! This is only story, you silly little cubs!

Graa Kal said, "Where you going with Aunt Zilu, little Ung? You crossed my land, now I'll eat you!"

But Ung said, "You can't eat me, Graa Kal! I'm hunting a chidwit for Father Gar!"

"You lying little cub!" say Graa Kal. "Even I can't catch a chidwit! I'll eat you, then tell Father Gar how you lied!"

"Then Father Gar will eat you for breakfast instead of a chidwit!" say Ung.

Now even Graa Kal must fear Father Gar, but he said, "Still, even so, you crossed my land. I'm gonna eat you!" Now, you all remember how, in the oldest of old, olden time, Vorox and Graa Kal and Brother Vrongar and Sister Deng-jil and all the family of running things, they all had 12 legs because they had to run all the time, right? Well, Ung, he was mighty damn scared, but he said, "How about you just eat my hind legs, then when I bring a chidwit to Father Gar, I'll tell him you helped. Maybe he'll give you a little taste and scratch your mane the way you like?"

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Graa Kal, he thinks, "I never tasted chidwit before." So he tears off Ung's hind legs and eats them. He says, "You run now! I'm gonna get hungry again real damn soon, little Ung!"

So Ung and Aunt Zilu and Aunt Zilu's sisters go far and fast, out of the jungle and onto the plains, and all of a sudden, they see — Zzzut! Vvvut! — streaks in the grass! Zzzut! Vvvut! Back and forth! That's how damn fast a chidwit runs, see? But Ung, he was the fastest runner in all the Vorox tribe. He takes off after the chidwit — Va-rooong!

Oh! They run this way and they run that way! Up the mountain! Down the valley! Over the river! Ung, he thinks now, "I'll never catch this chidwit even with all 12 legs! How the hell am I going to catch him with only 10?" That damn chidwit runs little Ung all the way across the dry dusty desert and then — Voont! — he goes into a hole in the ground.

Ung looks into the hole, and says, "Hail, little chidwit! I saw you way back on the plain and wanted to say hello! But I guess you didn't see me, because you ran away! Come out now and sit with me so we can talk a while."

But the chidwit says, "You think I'm stupid? Nobody says hello to a chidwit! If I come out, you'll touch me with your poison claw and take me away, and all my little chicks will starve to death! Why does everyone have to chase me all time? Why don't you chase Brother Vrongar? He's much slower, with plenty more meat, too! Now go away!"

Ung didn't know what to do, but Aunt Zilu said, "That chidwit'll never come out now. Tell you what, Ung. You go hide behind that hill there."

"Hide from a chidwit?" Ung cried. "I'm not scared of a chidwit!"

"Stupid cub!" Aunt Zilu said. "You hide so the chidwit thinks you're gone, see? Then it comes out of the hole and we'll catch it good!"

So Ung went to hide behind the hill. But hold! That was no hill! That was Brother Vrongar! Calm down, let me tell





the story!

Brother Vrongar says, "Why're you hunting on my land, little Ung? Don't you get enough to eat in the jungle? I should stomp you flat right now!"

"You better not stomp me!" Ung say. "I'm hunting a chidwit for Father Gar!"

"About goddamn time!" Brother Vrongar say. "I hate that damn chidwit! It eats up all the seeds before the grass can grow, and doesn't even eat bugs off me like the other bird-brothers. It always runs back and forth between the legs of my wives and calves, damn near causes a stampede! I said to Father Gar just the other day, 'Father Gar, you gotta do something 'bout that goddamn chidwit already —'"

Ung say, "So I can hunt it, and you won't stomp me?"

Well, Ung waits behind Brother Vrongar a long time. A long time. Until at last the chidwit pokes his eye out of the hole, doesn't see Ung, and so comes out of the hole and pecks for seeds. Aunt Zilu says, "Now throw me and my sisters, Ung! Scatter us far and wide like leaves in the wind!"

So Ung threw the vines and they spread far and wide, but they all held hands so they didn't fly apart. Now, the chidwit looked up, saw vines falling, and he ran this way but the vines fell there. He ran that way — but the vines fell there, too. Then Aunt Zilu came down on top of the chidwit and held tight. Ung grabbed the chidwit. Dancing around, he said, "What do you think, Brother Vrongar?"

"You're a damn good hunter!" say Brother Vrongar. "But watching you hunt gets me real hungry. You owe me for not stomping you flat right away, and those vines look mighty tender and juicy there. You know, I've never tasted good, tender jungle vine before, 'cause it grows way up in the treetops where I never get to visit. Out here all I ever get to eat is sharp old prickly-grass..."

Aunt Zilu whispers in Ung's ear, "Now that we caught the chidwit, I'll keep hold of it real easy, so you just leave my sisters here for Brother Vrongar. I never liked them anyway."

"And more chidwit bone for you," says Ung.

So Ung left the other vines for Brother Vrongar and headed back to the jungle, with Aunt Zilu holding the chidwit and sucking out its marrow. But when they crossed the desert, Ung was much more tired now. He got thirsty right away. Lucky for him, he smelled water before too long. He followed the smell and found an old cactus cracked open from the heat, its sweet juicy pulp drying fast in the sun. Ung leaned close to suck on the pulp, but — Ho! This wasn't just cactus, this was Uncle Raxa!

Uncle Raxa gave Ung a great big hug and said, "Hail, little Ung! I'm sure glad you came by just now! How'd you know I was so thirsty?" Uncle Raxa started to stick needles into Ung.

But Ung kicked and screamed and said, "You'll not suck

WHO WE ARE (CULTURE)

my blood, Uncle Raxa! I got a chidwit for Father Gar's breakfast and he'll be real mad at you if you don't let me go now!"

Uncle Raxa said, "Maybe so, cub, but still, I'm real damn thirsty. I'll tell you what. I heard from Uncle Zumox* long ago that the sweetest water of all comes from the mountain springs. How about you leave the chidwit here for me to keep safe and I can visit with Aunt Zilu while you go fetch me some spring water?"

Well, Ung didn't want to leave the chidwit, but even more he didn't want Uncle Raxa to suck his blood. So he agreed and left Aunt Zilu and the chidwit with Uncle Raxa and he went to the mountain. At the mountain he found a spring, but while he was gathering water, old Sister Wa Chala reached down and grabbed his hind legs.

"Hail, little cub!" said Sister Wa Chala. "What's your name? I've been sitting here a long time, but nobody ever comes by to see me! Why is that?"

Ung was so scared he jumped away and ran off so damn fast he left another pair of hind legs in Sister Wa Chala's grip! Now Ung only had eight legs, but he ran across the desert back to Uncle Raxa. When Ung gave water to Uncle Raxa, Uncle Raxa said, "Nobody ever kept a promise to me before. You're a good cub, Ung! Here's your chidwit for Father Gar's breakfast." He gave the chidwit back to Ung, but it was all scrawny and floppy like dead zixalg! And what else? Aunt Zilu, she was all brown and crinkly!

Ung said, "What the hell did you do, Uncle Raxa?"

"Well," said Uncle Raxa, "I told you already I was awful thirsty, right? Aunt Zilu and me were talking, and she sucked the bones out of the chidwit. She said, 'how about you have some of this chidwit blood, Uncle Raxa? That Ung's taking a long time coming back, and you look so thirsty.' So I drank blood from the chidwit, but I'm still thirsty, so I drink sap from Aunt Zilu, too. I didn't really like her anyway. She never comes to visit me."

By now, Ung was pretty goddamn tired of Aunt and Uncle. He just wanted to get back to Father Gar, so off he went, back to the jungle. On the way back, he passed Graa Kal again. Settle down! I already told you this was only story!

Graa Kal said, "What do you have there, Ung?"

"I told you I hunted a chidwit," said Ung. "Here's the chidwit! I'm taking it to Father Gar now!"

"Hold on, little cub!" Graa Kal said. "I'm hungry all over again! How about I eat you and the chidwit right now?"

Ung said, "I got no more time for this, Graa Kal! And besides, if you eat me, then Father Gar'll eat you! How about you just eat the hind legs of off me, then we'll both go to Father Gar? If he tells you that I lie, then you can eat the rest of me, okay?" So Graa Kal ripped another pair of hind legs off of Ung and they went to Father Gar.

Now, Father Gar, he sees Ung coming, carrying what looks like an old scrap of leather with feathers on it. And Ung only has six legs! Stop laughing! This is a serious story.

Father Gar said, "Dammit, cub! Where did you get to all day long? And what happened to all of them strong legs I gave you? You better have a chidwit for me, Ung!"

Ung gave the chidwit to Father Gar. He tasted it and said, "This chidwit is mighty damn tasty! Even if it is only chidwit jerky. Here, Graa Kal, you try some." He tossed a little scrap to Graa Kal, who swallowed it whole without tasting, like always. Father Gar said, "Why'd it get all dry and flat, Ung? You wasted all day playing, silly cub, instead of bringing me the chidwit right away? And where the hell are your legs at?"

Ung told Father Gar the story of Aunt Zilu and Graa Kal and chidwit and Brother Vrongar and Uncle Raxa and Sister Wa Chala and Graa Kal again and Father Gar called Ung a lying little cub and boxed his ears.

"I'm not lying," said Ung, "It was all true. If I didn't tell it true, let Grandfather Sky kill me right away with a lightning spear!"

"You stupid cub!" say Father Gar. "You know damn well Grandfather Sky's got no time to waste a lightning spear on a lying little cub! You bring me a fresh chidwit when the sun comes up next! You hear?"

Ung said, "Damn! I can't win! If I told you really true for real, let Grandfather Sky throw a lightning spear into me now!"

Well, Grandfather Sky, he watched Ung all day long with Aunt Zilu and Graa Kal and chidwit and Brother Vrongar and Uncle Raxa and Sister Wa Chala and Graa Kal again, so he knew Ung told true. Grandfather Sky threw a lightning spear into Ung! Father Gar knew then that Ung told him true!

* The zumox bird, a huge nasty brute known mythically as Uncle Zumox and identified with the innermost planet of the Ungavorox system, lived in the Mbadar mountains and became extinct under unknown circumstances, although it existed recently enough to be remembered in Vorox myth. It fed on Wa Chala, having evolved a big heavy axe-like beak for cracking open the shell. Zumox skulls can still be found on mountaineering expeditions. The rare zumox-skull axe is used as a ceremonial prop in hunting rituals by ferals to denote rank among members of a hunting party.

What We Do (Traits)

Movement

A Vorox's base running distance is 14 meters on two legs, 18 meters on four legs, 24 meters on all six. Their Extra Limbs are multifunctional (each can act as a hand or a foot), and are thus not as efficient at running as are extra legs (+2 base run per limb, rather than the usual +3).

Martial Practices Graa Martial Arts

Graa is not a formal martial art in that it has no standard katas or forms of practice or degrees of mastery. It is simply a collection of techniques and maneuvers used by Vorox fighters to gain advantages over their foes. The actions given below may be learned and trained by civilized Vorox. Although ferals are capable of learning them, few teach such techniques in the wilds, where instinct and strength tends to take precedence over studied maneuvers. (However, ferals can learn Banga, Drox and Throx, described in the **Fading Suns** rulebook.)

Multilimb Actions

Most Graa actions involve the efficient use of a Vorox's multiple limbs. The Drox and Throx actions (see **Fading Suns** rulebook) allow a Vorox to use more than one limb to perform two or more separate actions at the same time (i.e., grabbing someone by his lapels with one hand while throwing a grenade with another). Unless a Vorox learns one of these actions, he cannot perform separate actions with different limbs. However, other Graa maneuvers allow him to use more than one of his limbs to gain an advantage with a single action (i.e., Baja wrestling uses all of a Vorox's limbs to trap and pin a foe).

Note, however, that each of these Multilimb Actions requires a certain number of dedicated limbs; these limbs cannot also be used to perform separate Drox and Throx actions — they're already busy.

Denga (Level 1): Multilimb footwork. The Vorox may use four "legs" to gain two extra meters of free movement in combat without requiring a separate movement action (total of three meters allowed). If he uses all six limbs he can move a total of five meters (however, he cannot also use these limbs to perform other actions this turn without suffering the multiple action penalty).

Phrox (Level 2): Multilimb dodge. It helps to have extra limbs with which to jump out of the way. To perform this action, the Vorox must use at least four or more "legs." If successful, add three successes to resist attacks.

Baja (Level 4): Multilimb wrestling. Baja uses a Vorox's increased leverage and ability to distract a foe (even another Baja fighter) with his many groping paws. Baja requires the Vorox to use all his limbs to grapple and take down a foe.

INIT GOAL DMG EFFECT

-2 +2 4 +4 Str + Vigor (otherwise, resolve as a grapple action)

Tcheex (Level 4): This works just as the regular martial arts action Confuse Foe, except that Vorox can spend additional points when learning the maneuver to also utilize their many limbs to help fake out a foe; at least four limbs must be used, during which time they cannot also perform other actions in the same turn. Cost: +2 extras or experience points. Effect: Subtract one plus one per victory



point from opponent's block, dodge or parry goal for his next action

Krox (Level 5): Multilimb block. The Vorox must use all his limbs to aid his block. Add six successes to resist attacks.

Hunga (Level 5): Multilimb throw. As the Martial Throw action, but the Vorox can throw his foe one extra meter per success per extra limb used in addition to the first (at least two limbs must be used as legs, however, to steady himself). Also, the total distance is increased past the Str maximum by one meter per extra limb involved. For example, Ong (with a Str of 10) throws an Inquisitor into a pit using four limbs; he can thus throw him four meters per success for up to 14 meters away.

Unga (Level 5): Multilimb rooting. Extra +1 bonus per extra limb used to steady oneself (beyond the two already required to stand). For instance, the total bonus is +4 if a third limb is used, +5 with four limbs, +6 with five, and +7 with all six. These limbs cannot be used for other actions this turn.

Chala (Level 8): Multilimb bear hug. Per the regular Bear Hug action, but with the following modifications:

- INIT GOAL DMG EFFECT
- -2 -2 6 Can roll damage each turn until target escapes

Hungaba (Level 8): Multilimb throw group. As the Throw Group action, but one additional person can be thrown per extra limb used (the Vorox must use at least two limbs as legs to steady himself). If the Vorox also knows the Hunga action above, he can use extra limbs to throw people farther. **Garza (Level 10):** Multilimb strike. Limbs strike from two different directions, making it very hard for a defender to block or dodge both blows. This action suffers no multiple action penalty and does not require the Vorox to first learn Drox.

INIT GOAL DMG EFFECT

-1 -2

type* Attack with two limbs in same action (roll both attacks separately). A defender may block or dodge one attack with no penalty, but the other attack levies a -4 penalty to avoid.

* Fists deliver 3d (plus victory dice and any Str bonus), kicks deliver 4d but suffer an additional –1 initiative penalty. Poison claws deliver 3d + poison.

Weapons Glankesh Fencina

A Vorox can learn the regular fencing actions for fighting with one Glankesh blade, but he needs to learn special actions if he wants to use two (or more) to spice up the same maneuver. (These maneuvers can also be learned in place of the regular fencing actions, but they then only apply to fencing with Glankesh or Glanklar two-handed swords and cannot be used with rapiers or other blades.)

A Vorox could supposedly learn to adopt such special maneuvers for use with different slashing or clubbing (but not piercing) weapons (rapiers, axes, frap sticks, etc.), but he must learn each action separately for each weapon type. Since this art involves multiple blades coordinating as they





swing in different directions, it is doubtful that it could be adopted for wireblades; the practice sessions alone could prove deadly.

Glaax (Level 1): Multisword parry. Each victory point allows an additional Glankesh to block the blow and adds its weapon DMG as armor. This does not subtract from the victory points that add to armor.

Skaz (Level 5): Multisword disarm. Each victory point allows an addition Glankesh to catch the opponent's weapon; subtract one from the target's Str + Melee goal per extra Glankesh.

Zkurz (Level 6): Multisword wall of steel. The Vorox can make three parries plus one per victory point per extra Glankesh used.

Glangarza (Level 10): Two Glankesh strike from two different directions, making it very hard for a defender to block or dodge both blows. This action suffers no multiple action penalty, and does not require the Vorox to first learn Drox. Needless to say, two hands must be available to wield the two Glankesh.

INIT GOAL DMG EFFECT 6

-1 -2

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Attack with two Glankesh in same action (roll both attacks separately). A defender may block or dodge one attack with no penalty, but the other attack levies a -4 penalty to avoid.



Firearms

Some people are crazy enough to let Vorox handle firearms. Some of these Vorox have made an art of wielding guns, developing a few special twists using their many hands.

Zamla (Level 4): The Vorox can reload a gun with two hands (one to hold it, one to load it) at the same time he fires another gun (held in a third hand). Vorox who learn the Level 5 Graa Drox action can also perform this action.

Hungbada (Level 7): Vorox who learn the Leap & Shoot action can spend two additional extras or experience points to use extra legs for extended distance. Add one meter to the distance jumped per extra leg (i.e., using four legs allows for a four-meter jump, while five allows for five meters). Obviously, if six legs are used, the Vorox cannot also shoot a gun.

Zogzogzu (Level 10): The Vorox can fire one shot from four handguns and suffer no multiple-action penalty. Alternatively, he can fire two handguns and one rifle/shotgun sized gun, or two such large guns (two hands are required to fire one large or extra large gun).

DMG INIT GOAL -3

-2 per gun **Muscle-Powered** Ranged Weapons

The Voroxian Bolorang

This unique weapon seldom sees use anywhere but in the wilds of Ungavorox. Over the centuries, several bolorangs have made their way offworld and into the hands of weapon manufacturers, xenotechnologists, private collectors and civilized Vorox hoping for some way to reconnect with their lost heritage. The proper methods of constructing the device and using it to its fullest capacity, however, remain to this day the exclusive secret of the feral tribes.

Originally developed for hunting small game, the bolorang solved a problem common to jungle survival that of securing possession of a kill before scavengers and competing predators rushed in to seize it. When thrown by an expert, the bolorang can follow a fairly complex trajectory (sharp U-turns and wider S-curves are commonly reported flight paths), entangle small prey or other target objects, then lift and carry that target back to the thrower. While nothing larger than a bird, rodent or insect can be returned in this way, the bolorang can still prove an effective weapon against larger targets, instantly binding the limbs or constricting the throat of even a full-grown Vorox. A large bolorang strikes with enough momentum to sweep an average-sized human off his feet.



The bolorang is constructed of only the most primitive materials: stones, shells, wood and bone, chipped, ground and polished into smooth flat aerofoils, painted with vegetable dyes and blood, augmented with feathers, tufts of fur or cotton-like fibers — some for aerodynamic purposes and others for reducing the noise made during flight — all bound together in a tangled-looking network of slip-knotted leathern thongs, sliced thin and chewed over several times until soft, supple and pliable. (Some specialty weaponsmiths and speculative inventors have tried building better bolorangs using high-tech plastics and ceramsteel alloys, but, because the aerodynamic principles that enable this deceptively crude implement to perform have eluded the finest minds of both the Second Republic and the Supreme Order of Engineers, such attempts have uniformly failed.)

Throwing a bolorang effectively is nearly as complicated as knowing how to make one. To cast a curved flight path and/or retrieve a targeted object, at least two turns must be spent whirling the bolorang in a convoluted double-lassotwirling figure-eight pattern, releasing one part a fraction of a second earlier than the rest. Observers agree that this is far easier to accomplish with four arms than with two; the only humans currently known to have mastered the bolorang were H. T. Hausen and Gasparia Li Halan. The latter once claimed that she saw, hanging in the Cave of Gara-Tor, a huge bolorang too large for any sentient to use; she was told that Father Gar crafted it long ago to rescue Grandfather Sky from the clutches of Uncle Zumox.

See the chart for traits and rules.

Fathunga – Voroxian Long Bow

Vorox commandos sometimes use a special long bow made for their size, strength and multiple limbs (depicted on p. 174 of the **Fading Suns** second edition rulebook). The bow requires at least three limbs: two to hold it and one to draw an arrow. The bow has two strings running parallel to one another, each of which can be nocked and drawn at the same time, although this requires the use of an additional limb to hold the second arrow (the Rate given in the chart represents such a two-arrow draw performed twice in a turn). Needless to say, only a Vorox or similar multi-limbed person can use this weapon.

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Graa Martial Arts Actions

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Action	LVL	Roll	Init	Goal	DMG	Effect
Denga	1	-	-	-	-	Four legs allows 3 meters free movement; six legs allows for 5 meters.
Phrox	2	Dx+Dodge	-	-	-	Must use at least four legs. If successful, add three successes to resist attacks.
Baja	4	Dx+Fight	-2	+2	4	As grapple, but with +4 bonus to the Vorox's Str + Vigor roll.
Tcheex	4	Wits +Knavery	-	-	-	Must use all limbs. Subtract one plus one per victory point from opponent's block, dodge or parry goal for his next action.
Krox	5	Dx+Fight	-	-	-	As Dodge. Must use all limbs. If successful, add six successes to resist attacks.
Hunga	5	Dx+Fight	-2	-	3	If successful, roll Dx+Fight (+victory pts) vs target's Str+Vigor. If successful target is thrown 1m/success, up to Str. Add 1d DMG/3 m thrown. Per extra limb used: Add 1 m to throwing distance and total distance allowed.
Unga	5	Dx+Fight	-	-	-	+3 to resist being knocked over; additional +1 per extra limb used (beyond the two required to stand).
Chala	8	Dx+Fight	-2	-2	6	As Bear Hug. Can roll DMG each turn until target escapes.
Hungaba	8	Dx+Fight	-2	-	3	Roll vs. target's attack roll. If successful, throw target 1 m/ success, up to Str. Add 1d DMG/2 m thrown. Can throw one attacker per Fight rating, plus one per extra limb used (must use at least two legs, however). If Hunga (above) is also known,
						foes can be thrown farther.
Garza	10	Dx+Fight	-1	-2		Attack with two limbs in same action (roll both attacks separately). A defender may block or dodge one attack with no penalty, but the other attack levies a –4 penalty to avoid.

* Fists deliver 3d (plus victory dice and any Str bonus), kicks deliver 4d but suffer an additional –1 initiative penalty. Poison claws deliver 3d + poison.

Glankesh Fencing Actions

Action	LVL	Roll	Init	Goal	DMG	Effect
Glaax	1	Dx+Melee	griĝ	+2		Roll victory dice + weapon DMG as armor; each victory pts also allows one extra Glankesh to parry the blow and add its weapon DMG to the total armor.
Skaz	5	Dx+Melee	-2	-1		If successful, roll Dx+Melee (+ victory pts) vs. target's Str+Melee. If successful, target drops weapon, which can be thrown 1m/victory pt. Each victory pt allows an addition Glankesh to catch the opponent's weapon; subtract one from the target's Str + Melee per extra Glankesh.
Skurz	6	Dx+Melee	-	-	-	Can make three parries, plus one extra per victory die per ex- tra Glankesh used.
Glangarza	10	Dx+Melee	-1	-2	6	Attack with two Glankesh in same action (roll both attacks separately). A defender may block or dodge one attack with no penalty, but the other attack levies a -4 penalty to avoid.

Firearm Actions

Action	LVL	Roll	Init	Goal	DMG	Effect
Zamla	4	None	-		-	Can reload one gun with two hands while firing another gun held in a third hand with no multiple-action penalty.
Hungbada	7	Dx+Shoot	-1	-1	-	Leap 1 meter in any direction, +1 meter per extra limbed used (Cost: +1 extras or experience pts).
Zogzogzu	10	Dx+Shoot	-3	-2	-	Fire up to four handguns (or two handguns and one rifle, etc.) with no multiple-action penalty.

Melee Weapons

Weapon	Roll	Init	Goal	DMG	STR	SIZ	Cost
Glankesh sword	Dx+Melee	-	-	6	4	L	25 (15 for Vorox)
Glanklar two-handed sword*	Dx+Melee	+1	-	8	6	XL	40 (30 for Vorox)

* Wielding a Glankar requires two hands; take this into account when using multiple Glanklar or Glankesh fencing actions.

Ranged Weapons

Weapon	Roll	Goal	DMG	STR	RNG	Rate	SIZ	Cost
Bolo	Dx+Throw	-1	2	3	5/10	1	S	2
Bolorang	Dx+Bolorang	-4*	2**	•••	10/15	1/3	***	15 (3 for Vorox)
Lt Futhanga	Dx+Archery	-	8	5(8)†	40/60	4	L	20 (1 wing/arrow)
Hvy Futhanga	Dx+Archery	-	10	7(10)†	40/60	4	L	30 (1 wing/arrow)

* This applies to characters who possess the Throw Bolorang skill but who have only two arms, and to civilized Vorox who have enough arms but who do not have the Throw Bolorang skill. Two-armed characters who have not learned Throw Bolorang receive a penalty of -10.

** Strength bonuses may apply for larger versions of the bolorang. Victory points determine to what degree the bolorang is able to return to its wielder with its target securely entangled.

Victory Pts Effect

0 Target entangled where it stands.

Target pulled halfway back to wielder. +1 - +3

+4 - +6 Target pulled back to wielder's immediate vicinity.

Critical Target deposited directly into wielder's grasp.

*** Traditionally, each feral who learns the principles of the bolorang constructs her own personalized version; hence there is no standard size or Strength requirement rating. The chart below gives some general idea of the comparative size and capability of different bolorangs. In-flight diameter indicates not only the amount of room the bolorang needs to fly unimpeded, but also the radius of clear space the user needs to throw effectively. Also, the target should be no wider than half of the in-flight diameter to be fully ensnared. Carrying capacity is the maximum amount of weight that the bolorang can carry on its return flight, and is about half of the total weight of the bolorang itself.

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	STR	Carrying Capacity
neter)	3	0.5 Kilogram

S (0.8m in-flight diameter)

L (2.3m in-flight diameter)

M (1.5m in-flight diameter) 1 Kilogram 6

> 9 5 Kilograms

0.5 Kilogram

† Assumes a two-handed draw; if only one limb is used to draw the bow, use the STR in parentheses. The light bow is 120 lb. pull and the heavy bow is 150 lb. pull.



Character Roles

Civilized Vorox

Use the Character Histories provided on pp. 88-89 of the **Fading Suns** second edition rulebook, with the following voluntary modifications.

Early Career

Crafter: Use the Warrior's traits, but substitute the following:

Add: *Characteristics* — Wits +1; *Skills* — Arts or Artisan 3, Tech Redemption (Craft) 2

Remove: Graa martial arts actions

Merchant: Use the Warrior's traits, but substitute the following:

Add: *Characteristics* — Extrovert +1; *Skills* — Charm 3, Lore (Trading) 2, Speak Urthish (2 pts). In addition, the character can choose to substitute Charm for any Impress skill bonuses awarded at earlier stages.

Remove: Graa martial arts actions and either Melee or Shoot.

Vorox Commando

(Civilized Only)

The Li Halan have long sought ways to use their Vorox underlings in war. After all, with their plethora of physical advantages, they could run roughshod over almost anyone. Unfortunately, things have not turned out as well as expected. First of all, few humans want anything to do with Vorox, and finding troops to work with these furred monstrosities is a problem. Secondly, even fewer Vorox take to the discipline of military life. Finally, the Li Halan are unwilling to give the Vorox the equipment which would make them truly formidable in combat. At one point the Li Halan tried to create special units of feral Vorox with their claws still attached. Needless to say, these Vorox ended up causing more damage to the Li Halan than their enemies, and were either destroyed or released back onto Ungavorox, though at least a few escaped during the chaos of battle.



The end result is that many Li Halan include Vorox in their households but not in their armies. The exceptions to this are the Vorox Commandos, several small forces of civilized Vorox under the command of one of their own nobles. These nobles receive a fair amount of money from the Li Halan to use their own troops for the good of the house, and these troops usually carry out special missions. They are especially effective in pacifying areas threatened by rebellion. Below is provided a Character History method for creating Vorox Commando characters.

Upbringing

Choose either the Chieftain or Warrior upbringing from pp. 88-89 of the **Fading Suns** Second Edition rulebook.

Apprenticeship

Characteristics — Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Endurance +2; *Skills* — Melee +1, Shoot +2, Sneak +1, Vigor +1, Speak Urthish (2 pts), Survival 1, Tracking 2

Early Career

Characteristics — Strength +2, Dexterity +1, Endurance +1, Wits +1, Perception +2, Tech +1, Passion +2; *Skills* — Fight +1, Melee +2, Impress +1, Shoot +2, Sneak +1, Vigor +1, Lore (people and places seen) 1, Remedy 2, Survival 2, Tracking 2; *Benefice* — Rank (Sergeant) or 3 pts of Ally or Family Ties

Tour of Dury

Per p. 89 of the **Fading Suns** Second Edition rulebook. Vorox Commandos usually muster out with some of their equipment, which typically includes an Assault Rifle (500 firebirds), one or more Glankesh swords (15 fb each), and half-plate armor (30 fb).

Feral Vorox

Custom Creation: Use the traits given on pp. 93-94 of the **Fading Suns** second edition rulebook, except that all ferals have poison claws (like royal Vorox) and their Ostracized Affliction is Major (+3 pts). The cost is thus 14 pts.

Character Histories: The Character Histories provided on pp. 88-89 of the **Fading Suns** second edition rulebook are for civilized Vorox. Use those given below for feral characters.

Upbringing

Characteristics — Strength (base 4, max 12) +1, Dexterity +2, Endurance (base 4, max 12) +1, Wits (base 2) +1, Perception +1, Tech (base 1), Passion (always primary); *Skills* — Fight +1, Impress +2, Observe +1, Vigor +1, Survival 2, Tracking 1; *Blessings* — Predatory (+2 Perception, -2 Calm when hungry), Giant (+2 Vitality, base 14 meters run), Sensitive Smell (+1 Perception to discern scents); *Curse* — Uncouth (-2 Extrovert in social situations); *Benefices* — Bite (3 pts; Dx+Fight, Init –1, 3d DMG), Extra Limbs (6 pts; Total of six limbs usable as arms or legs), Poison Claws (6 pts: Dx+Fight, 3d DMG. Vorox poison is a slow-acting paralytic. If a claw inflicts damage, the target is poisoned and suffers

WHAT WE DO (TRAITS)

a cumulative –1 penalty per turn on all physical actions; when a number of turns equal to the target's Vitality rating is reached, the target is unable to take any physical actions for the rest of the span); *Afflictions* — Ostracized (+4 pts; major), No Occult (+6 pts; Cannot awaken Psi or Theurgy)

Apprentice

Ferals do not suffer the civilizing process and cannot join guilds.

Characteristics — Strength +1, Dexterity +1, Endurance +1, Perception +1, Passion +1; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Fight +2, Impress +1, Melee +1 or Throw Bolarang 1, Observe +1, Sneak +1, Vigor +1, Survival 1, Tracking 1

Early Career

Characteristics — Strength +2, Dexterity +2, Endurance +2, Wits +1, Perception +2, Passion +1; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Fight +1, Melee +1 or Throw Bolarang 1, Observe +1, Vigor +1, Survival 1, Tracking 1; *Benefice* — Family Ties (3 pts)

Jungle Lore: Lore (region) 1, Remedy 1, Sneak +1, Survival 3, Tracking 2

Combat Lore: Graa — Banga (charge), Drox (Second Hand)

Optional specialty roles:

Groomer: Substitute Charm for Melee or Throw Bolarang.

Toolcrafter: Substitute Artisan or Tech Redemption (Craft) for Observe.

Tours of Dury

Feral Vorox can take only ONE additional tour of duty (the first). They cannot become Imperial Cohorts or take cybernetics.

Oklog

(Shaman – Feral Only)

The oklog stands somewhat apart from the rest of feral Voroxian society, although not nearly so much as ancient Urthish shamans did. Oklog are often guarded by their warrior angeraks, members of which also do the dirty work necessary for the gathering of substances used in medicine or trance potions. While the oklog leads expeditions in search of ingredients, he simply points out what he wants, letting others take the risks of collecting it. However, those who do risk themselves this way are accorded precedence in partaking of the benefits gained thereby, whether it be a valuable healing draught or a euphoric meal.

Oklog are the intercessors between the swaba and the Vorox. It is their duty to demand, trick, wheedle, or cajole benefits and favors from the Vorox's neighbors. A trance undertaken to beg Brother Vrongar for relief after a period of poor hunting may result in the next hunting party's encounter with a placid herd, allowing an easy kill. The oklog is one who uses wits and cunning; without him, a Vorox village must get by on luck alone.

The oklog is also the one who traditionally makes and controls fire. While most ferals these days also know how to light a fire and keep it from burning the jungle down, in ceremonial situations, this job belongs to the oklog, who first brought fire to the Vorox as a gift from Grandfather Sky.

Upbringing

As the Feral Upbringing, above.

Apprenticeship

Characteristics —Dexterity +1, Endurance +1, Wits +1, Faith +2; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Lore (Ungavoroxian flora and fauna) 1, Remedy 1, Survival 1, Tracking 1

Early Career

Characteristics —Dexterity +2, Endurance +1, Wits +2, Perception +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith +2; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +2, Dodge +1, Fight +1, Observe +1, Sneak +1, Lore (Pharmacology) 3, Lore (Ungavoroxian flora and fauna) 1, Remedy 2, Survival 2, Tracking 1; *Benefice* — Family Ties (3 pts)

Tour of Dury

As the Feral Tours of Duty, above.





"Ah, yes... we see through our binoculars the wild Graa Kal, the mightiest predator in the Known Worlds. Merciful Pancreator — it's seen us! RUN!"

A Vorox stands nearly 10 feet tall, bristling with six limbs (each usable as a hand or foot), a full set of fangs, a superb sense of smell, and an uncouth attitude which gets worse the hungrier it gets. Noble Vorox (and their untamed cousins in the wild) even bear poison claws capable of paralyzing prey in mere minutes. What's more, Vorox travel in packs.

And they're still not the premier predators on their homeworld. Ungavorox is one of the universe's most inhospitable places — even the flowers are carnivorous. With such dangers constantly hanging over their heads or waiting from below their niches in the trees, it's no wonder the Vorox quickly developed sentience and a tight-knit society.

The Vorox book takes a close look at these fascinating sentients and the ecosystem that spawned them. From the swift but small Chidwit bird to the carnivorous Jud-joob tree, the Vorox's plant and animal neighbors are detailed in all their fatal glory. It is impossible to understand the Vorox mind without first knowing the beings that helped to forge it. Also includes: Vorox history, culture, geography, weaponry, new combat actions and character roles.

Each book in the *Alien Expeditions* series examines one or more alien races, detailing their histories, cultures and planets of origin from multiple perspectives.



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