ARCHETYPAL SPECIES

CUSTOMIZATION SUPPLEMENT

beck

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Archetypal Species*! This book is an examination and expansion of the guidelines found on pages 193 to 194 of the *Genesys* Core Rulebook.

Those two pages have some good advice for GMs creating their first archetype or species, but there's a lot more nuance to it than be fit into two pages! Also, there have been two additional books (as of the time of this publication) that have helped develop the art form that is archetype creation.

ARCHETYPE? SPECIES? WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

The Genesys Core Rulebook has this to say about the difference:

> "*Species is the word we use to describe anything that's sentient, but not human. In a fantasy setting, your elves, dwarves, orcs, and gnomes would all be different species. In a sci-fi setting, your intelligent aliens are all different species.*"

> "*Archetypes are what we call different types of humans. You see this in movies and books: the archetypical jock or nerd, for example. Basically, it's a specific kind of person. We created archetypes so that players have character choices in settings where everyone's playing a human.*"

Put another way,

> "*Species differentiate the various sentient creatures in a setting. Archetypes differentiate the same species of creatures in a setting.*"

To keep things simple, I will be using the term "species" throughout this document. All the advice, unless specifically said otherwise, applies equally to species and archetypes alike.

In the following pages, we will be examining all six steps of creating a new species. Note that the order presented here is slightly different than you'll find in the *Genesys* Core Rulebook.

1. The Capsule
2. Starting Characteristics
3. Wound Threshold
4. Strain Threshold
5. Free Skill
6. Starting XP
7. Other Abilities

CREATING A NEW SPECIES

STEP 1: THE CAPSULE

Step 1 is what I call the capsule. This is the seed from which the species will grow. Whenever there is a question in the following steps, you should return to the capsule to find the answer.

The capsule is a two to four sentence description of the species. You don't need to go into too much detail here, just enough to get an idea of what your species is and what makes them different from the rest.

Examples:

- The laborer (*Genesys* Core Rulebook, page 37) is a strong and tough character. Best chosen for those who lived a life of hard labor or for when you want to be a melee-focused character.

- The intellectual (*Genesys* Core Rulebook, page 38) is a character who has a background in the sciences and/or medical fields. They are well-read and knowledgeable about a great many topics.

STEP 2: STARTING CHARACTERISTICS

The starting characteristics for your species helps to differentiate them right away. We know that a tough species will have a good Brawn, for instance, and a charismatic one will have a good Presence.

When coming up with your own species, don't feel like you need to stick to these characteristic spreads: they are just a starting point for your species. You are allowed and encouraged to tweak them to your needs!

There are two main characteristic arrays that you can choose, with a third option that is rarer to see. Note that the starting characteristics will impact the species' starting XP.

THE ROCK STAR

This characteristic array is the default the book expects you to start with. You choose one characteristic that the species is known for and give it a 3, choose another characteristics they are not best with and give it a 1. The remaining four characteristics are given a 2.

This characteristic spread gives the rock star 100 starting XP.

Most species will be a Rock Star: the smart yet frail species, the stubborn yet agile species, etc. People know and expect this within their RPGs.

An important thing to keep in mind is that you do not need to have one species with a 3 for each characteristic, and you can have two species with the same characteristic at 3! Just be sure that the characteristic given a 1 is different and their abilities set them apart enough.

For example, you can have two smart species (Intellect 3), and to differentiate them, one can be smart but frail (Brawn 1) while the other is smart but gullible (Cunning 1).

If you're having problems figuring out what characteristic to give the 3 and which to set at 1, go back to the capsule. If you can't discern what number to put where, you might need to spend a bit more time fleshing it out.

THE ALL-STAR

The All-Star is the baseline, average, species. It has a 2 in all characteristics. It's not especially talented at one thing, but neither is it lacking. In all currently published books, the Average Human species is the All-Star.

Because of the more middle-of-the-road characteristic spread, the All-Star begins with 110 Starting XP.

While this species might appear more dull than the rest, it is an important one to have as an option. With a 2 in every characteristic, it is the (second) most customizable species. Many people enjoy this species since they can spend their starting XP on whichever characteristic they want without having to play to—or against!—the other species' type or theme.

While it will be touched on later, it is important to point out that the All-Star has the most versatile but "boring" special ability: recover a spent Story Point. This further reinforces the All-Star's place as the create-your-own character since Story Points are so useful.

THE CREATED

While most species will conform to either the Rock Star or the All-Star, sometimes you'll see the Created as an option. This species is even more customizable than the All-Star because all characteristics are set to 1.

Because of this, they begin with 230 starting XP. While that seems like a lot of XP, keep in mind that to get a 2 in every characteristic would cost 120 XP (the XP cost is 10 times the new rank, so rank 2 costs 20 XP for each characteristic).

This species is usually restricted to actual created species, such as sci-fi robots or clockwork automatons. The bioroids from *Android: Shadow of the Beanstalk* fall in this category (but start with a 3 in Brawn to represent their sturdy construction) as well as the robot found on page 183 of the *Genesys* Core Rulebook in the *Twilight Imperium* setting.

STEP 3: WOUND THRESHOLD

A species' wound threshold (WT) is how much physical damage they can take before being incapacitated, and defaults to 10 + Brawn.

STEP 4: STRAIN THRESHOLD

A species' strain threshold (ST) is a measure of how much stress they can put up with before giving in or passing out, and defaults to 10 + Willpower.

STEP 5: STARTING SKILLS

Most species start with one free rank in a skill thematically linked to their capsule. Sometimes this is one specific skill, but a species which can have more variation could pick from a list of two or three skills. For example, the animalistic alien (*Genesys* Core Rulebook, page 182) gets one free rank in a choice of 3 different skills.

Of course, not all species need to start with a free skill rank. If omitted, increase the starting XP of the species by 5.

An important thing to note in regards to starting skills: the *Genesys* Core Rulebook suggests that "*[a] single rank in a skill is worth 5 XP, unless that skill synergizes well with the species' starting characteristics. If the skill is linked to a characteristic that starts as a 3 or higher, it's worth 10 XP.*" However, no currently published species follows this suggestion, and so it will be ignored in this guide.

STEP 6: STARTING XP

At this point, the foundation of the species has been laid. We know the starting characteristics, wound threshold, and strain threshold.

From here, you should take stock of the species' starting XP, so that you can know how much more you can customize it before you hit the XP floor.

While you can have a species that only has 30 starting XP, in practice no one would want to choose it because of its hyper-specific niche. The common practice is to go no lower than 70 starting XP because anything less isn't enough to customize a starting character!

It's at this point that some starting XP can be spent to customize the species a bit.

CHANGING CHARACTERISTICS

This is only a good idea for a Created species, as seen with the bioroids. All-Star and Rock Star species should take special care when changing their characteristics. For example, the Animalistic Alien (found on page 182 of the *Genesys* Core Rulebook) has two characteristics at 3, one at 1, and the remaining three at 2. However, this reduces the starting XP of the species to 70.

The XP cost to increase a characteristic by one is 10 XP times the new rank. Therefore, to increase a characteristic from a 1 to a 2, it will cost 20 XP. If you want to increase a characteristic from a 2 to a 3, then it will cost 30 XP, and so on.

However, if you want to increase a characteristic from a 1 to a 3, then you must pay for each increase separately. In this example, you would pay 20 XP to bring the 1 to a 2 and then 30 XP to bring the 2 to a 3, for a total of 50 XP.

CHANGING WOUND THRESHOLD

Wound threshold is more malleable than characteristics, and there is even a built-in mechanic for it: the Toughened talent. Using the cost for talents, we can easily alter the wound threshold of the species.

A minor change, one point either way, won't adjust the starting XP. This means that you can have a 9 + Brawn, 10 + Brawn, or 11 + Brawn WT without cost.

If you want your species to be tougher, you can increase their WT by 2 for 5 starting XP (the equivalent cost of a tier 1 talent). Or, if you want them to be extremely robust, you may increase their WT by another 2 for an extra 10 XP (the cost of a tier 2 talent).

On the opposite end, you may reduce their WT by 2 or 4 to increase the starting XP by 5 or 15. This is, in effect, having negative ranks in Toughened.

Keep in mind that starting WT is modified by Brawn, so even if you don't modify starting WT having a 1 or 3 in Brawn will impact the WT of a character. And, since Brawn also is the base for soak, having a high Brawn pulls double duty when determining the toughness of a character.

CHANGING STRAIN THRESHOLD

Strain threshold defaults to 10 + Willpower. And, like WT, can be adjusted with the proper application of XP using the guidelines provided by the Grit talent.

You may increase their ST to 11 + Willpower for a cost of 5 starting XP, or 12 + Willpower for a cost of 15 starting XP.

In addition, you may reduce the ST to 9 + Willpower and gain 5 starting XP or reduce it to 8 + Willpower and gain 15 starting XP.

It may seem weird that you get twice as many points in WT for the same XP cost, but keep in mind that strain can be recovered as easily as spending A, whereas wounds are harder to heal.

Like with WT, starting ST is modified by Willpower. So you can manipulate starting ST by having a 1 or 3 in Willpower and not adjust the base amount of ST.

ADJUSTING SKILLS

In addition to adjusting the wound and strain thresholds, you can also modify the starting skills and skill ranks.

For example, the average human (*Genesys* Core Rulebook, page 37) grants one free rank in two different non-career skills. The clone (Android: *Shadow of the Beanstalk*, page 27) begins with two ranks in two skills.

Starting XP cost for these skill ranks are the same as if it were in-career skills: 5 XP times the new rank. So the clone, for example, has 25 XP spent on their starting skill ranks (remember that they get one rank free, then 5 XP for rank one in the second skill and 20 XP total for the two rank two skills).

STEP 7: OTHER SPECIAL ABILITIES

All species have some sort of special ability, ranging from the mundane to the exotic. This is where the true differentiation of species is.

Special abilities are things that no other species has; it's what sets them apart from the rest.

The special abilities are also the only step where the difference between a species and an archetype really matters—and even then, not always!

Because archetypes are different facets of the same species, their special abilities are usable once per session whereas a species ability is less potent but is more likely to always be available.

For instance, all archetypes—with the exception of bioroids and clones (both from *Android: Shadow of the Beanstalk*), have an ability that is usable once per session and costs a Story Point to use. All the different species found in both *Realms of Terrinoth* and the *Genesys* Core Rulebook have special abilities that are more passive and showcase the physiological differences of the species.

Whether it's the nimbleness of the Elves, the dark vision of the Dwarves, or the battle rage of the Orcs, species abilities are always there to prove the species is different.

CREATING SPECIAL ABILITIES

While there is a list of potential special abilities on page 193 of the *Genesys* Core Rulebook, you're going to want to make unique abilities for your unique species. While you can definitely use the examples on page 193 to jumpstart your creativity, there is a lot more to pricing out an ability than just guessing.

On the whole, you should use the guidelines for talents (*Genesys* Core Rulebook, pages 194–196) to determine the cost of your ability. Mechanically speaking, the only difference between a talent and an ability is that any character can potentially have a talent, but abilities are unique to a species.

Depending on if you're creating an archetype or a species will determine how many abilities it should have.

An archetype usually has just one. Species, on the other hand, can have 2 or 3 unique abilities.

Since all archetypes are of the same species, the abilities tend to be more limited to showcase the smaller differences between the archetypes. Species, on the other hand, have abilities that are able to be used more often, to showcase the differences in the genetics of the species.

As mentioned before, the human archetypes from the *Genesys* Core Rulebook have one ability that is usable once per session. Revenants (*Genesys* Core Rulebook, pages 152–153), on the other hand, always add ☐☐ to medicine checks due to their unique physiology.

In either case, go back to your capsule and brainstorm a few different vague ideas of special abilities. Not all ideas will be useful, so it's better to have a few to choose from then focusing on one idea.

If you wish, take a look at the talents in the various books for inspiration. For example, the Mongrel species (*Genesys* Core Rulebook, page 152) has two abilities: The Beast Within and The Human Spirit, which are the Shapeshifter and Shapeshifter (Improved) talents with a different name. Some of the Elf subspecies (*Realms of Terrinoth*, pages 62–63) have the Nimble ability. It is a lesser version of the Defensive talent (*Genesys* Core Rulebook, page 80) and costs half as much.

In short, a standard rule of thumb shows that most archetype abilities are active and require a Story Point to use.

Species abilities can either be passive or active, and of varying potency and cost.

Keep in mind that not all abilities must be positive traits. Exotic-Atmosphere Breather and Fearsome (*Genesys* Core Rulebook, page 193) are both negative traits that increase the starting XP of any species that has those traits. With regards to negative traits, the only negative traits we see in published content are mechanical—no strictly in-universe role-playing hooks are given XP costs. Both bioroids and clones from *Android: Shadow of the Beanstalk* are seen as property by most denizens of the setting, but this is only mentioned in their description and are not used to give them more starting XP. If an ability would modify a roll or directly impact a character's ability to function, then it should factor into their XP.

You may have noticed that the guidelines for modifying starting wound and strain thresholds are based on the Grit and Toughened talents. Lowering a species' starting wound threshold, for instance, is a negative rank or two of Toughened.

You can use this as a guideline for other negative abilities that increase starting XP. For example, a frail species might not have a lower wound threshold, but all Critical Injuries they suffer receive a +10 to the result (an inverse of the Durable talent).

EXAMPLES

Now that we know how to make a new archetype and species it's time to put the theory to work. I will be making one archetype and one species built around the same basic premise to showcase how one idea can become more than one archetype or species. These examples will be based on mobility and getting around easier and faster than normal.

THE GYMNAST

1: CAPSULE

Gymnasts spend countless hours honing their bodies to move in ways normal people can't. They seem to glide over the ground instead of just walking, flowing through a crowd as water around rocks. The Gymnast can get to places in ways most people only believe works in Hollywood. They train their mind just as much as their body, letting their will take over when their bodies fail.

2: STARTING CHARACTERISTICS

Because Gymnasts have to push themselves to be better than they think they can be, I'm going to make them a Rock Star in Willpower. They dedicate themselves to their craft and can push past the physical limitations of their body to do the amazing. Because they spend so much time focusing on their craft, it doesn't leave a lot of room for more scholarly pursuits, so they get a 1 in Intellect.

2	2	1	2	3	2
BRAWN	AGILITY	INTELLECT	CUNNING	WILLPOWER	PRESENCE

3: WOUND THRESHOLD

Starting WT for a Gymnast is going to be 9 + Brawn, because I see this archetype as mind over matter.

4: STRAIN THRESHOLD

Because my capsule is all about movement, in Genesys that means more maneuvers. That means more ST. Without changing anything, their starting ST will be 13: 10 base plus Willpower 3. I'm going to bump that up to 11 + Willpower so an even 14 starting is going to be a lot of extra maneuvers before the Gymnast starts to feel the fatigue.

5: FREE SKILL

I think that Athletics is the best skill, since it is the skill that covers gross motor skills: climbing, jumping, running, swimming, etc. With their starting Brawn 2 they will have, at the minimum, ⬡◆ as their dice pool whenever the GM decides they need to roll, which isn't a bad baseline.

This skill rank is free and doesn't cost any XP.

6: STARTING XP

The Rock Star begins with 100 starting XP and the 11 + Willpower ST costs 5 XP. This means that before a special ability, the starting XP of a Gymnast is 95.

7: OTHER ABILITIES

Because this is an archetype and not a species, I'm going to stick to the tried-and-true special ability: once per session spend a Story Point to do something within its purview.

Going along with the idea of being able to move like nobody else, their ability is going to let them move to any location within medium range as long as they could physically move there. This is a modification of the Parkour! (Improved) talent from *Android: Shadow of the Beanstalk*, found on page 51.

Now it just needs to be put in *Genesys* terms:

In The Blink of an Eye: Once per session you may spend a Story Point to activate this ability. If you do so, your character may, as a maneuver, move to any location within medium range, as long as they could run, climb, jump, swim, or crawl there. The GM may decide that certain impassable terrain (like a 12 foot wall) cannot be bypassed by this ability.

This ability is based on a tier 4 talent, so should start at 20 XP. However, it costs a Story Point and can only be used once per session instead of every round. These restrictions feel like they are enough to drop the cost to 5 XP. And remember that pricing abilities is like pricing talents: it's just as much art as science.

After accounting for the special ability, the Gymnast has 90 starting XP.

GYMNAST

Gymnasts spend countless hours honing their bodies to move in ways normal people can't. They seem to glide over the ground instead of just walking, flowing through a crowd as water around rocks. The Gymnast can get to places in ways most people only believe works in Hollywood. They train their mind just as much as their body, letting their will take over when their bodies fail.

ARCHETYPE ABILITIES

2	2	1	2	3	2
BRAWN	AGILITY	INTELLECT	CUNNING	WILLPOWER	PRESENCE

- **Starting Wound Threshold:** 9 + Brawn
- **Starting Strain Threshold:** 11 + Willpower
- **Starting Experience:** 90
- **Starting Skill:** Gymnasts starts with one rank in Athletics during character creation. They obtain this rank before spending experience points, and may not increase Athletics above rank 2 during character creation.
- **In The Blink of an Eye:** Once per session you may spend a Story Point to activate this ability. If you do so, your character may, as a maneuver, move to any location within medium range, as long as they could run, climb, jump, swim, or crawl there. The GM may decide that certain impassable terrain (like a 12 foot wall) cannot be bypassed by this ability.

SYLVAN

1: CAPSULE

Classic literature has elves that live in the forest as graceful beings, able to move more freely than humans ever could. Their grace of foot is only matched by their knowledge of the wild places where man fears to tread. Because they live in the wilderness, they all know how to hunt with bow and arrow.

2: STARTING CHARACTERISTICS

Since this is an elven species, I can just copy the characteristic array from *Realms of Terrinoth*, page 63, or the *Genesys* Core Rulebook, page 142.

2	3	2	2	1	2
BRAWN	AGILITY	INTELLECT	CUNNING	WILLPOWER	PRESENCE

3: WOUND THRESHOLD

Also copying the Elves, this species will have a WT of 9 + Brawn. It's not just because that's what the other books say, either. But I'll get to the reason in step 6.

4: STRAIN THRESHOLD

With no reason to choose otherwise, Sylvan will have a ST of 10 + Willpower.

5: FREE SKILL

Because Sylvan are the masters of the wild places, they will start with one free rank in Survival.

6: STARTING XP

The starting characteristic array, also a Rock Star, gives them a starting XP of 100.

7: OTHER ABILITIES

I like the lore that says elves can see well at night, but I don't want to give them full dark vision, which costs 5 XP. Instead, I want to give them what I call Starsight. It allows them to see just fine on a starry night or when the moon is full. Starsight removes ■ from dice pools due to darkness.

Starsight: When making skill checks, Sylvan remove ■ imposed due to darkness.

Dark Vision, which removes ■■, costs 5 XP, so Starsight is literally half as good so it should cost half as much. But I can't have 2.5 XP. Thankfully, reducing WT by 1 is *also* half as good as a tier 1 talent, so it, too, is "worth" -2.5 XP. These combine together to even out to 0 XP.

This is a good example of taking a holistic look at the species instead of a point-by-point approach. Individually these two modifications don't change anything, but together they do.

In addition, the Sylvan need their mobility ability. Because this is a species and not an archetype, it's going to be a passive ability that can be used frequently.

Their ability will reduce the ⟑ and ⟳ cost of a free maneuver by half, so it only takes ⟑ from a skill check by the Wood Elf or ⟳ from an enemies skill check to trigger the free maneuver (instead of the usual ⟑⟑ or ⟳⟳).

Since this doesn't increase the maneuver limit on your turn, it works great to cut down on the strain cost of taking a second maneuver. But there is no limit on out-of-turn maneuvers, so this ability should only work once out-of-turn.

Put in *Genesys* terms, we get:

Deft: You may spend A from any skill check to perform an immediate free maneuver that does not exceed the limit of two maneuvers per turn. In addition, once per round on an opponent's turn, you may spend ⟳ to perform one maneuver as an incidental.

This ability is reasonably powerful, but requires you to give up A on your skill check to use, so it will only cost 5 XP.

The Sylvan has 95 starting XP.

SYLVAN

Classic literature has elves that live in the forest as graceful beings, able to move more freely than humans ever could. Their grace of foot is only matched by their knowledge of the wild places where man fears to tread. Because they live in the wilderness, they all know how to hunt with bow and arrow.

ARCHETYPE ABILITIES

2	3	2	2	1	2
BRAWN	AGILITY	INTELLECT	CUNNING	WILLPOWER	PRESENCE

- **Starting Wound Threshold:** 9 + Brawn
- **Starting Strain Threshold:** 11 + Willpower
- **Starting Experience:** 95
- **Starting Skill:** Sylvan starts with one rank in Survival during character creation. They obtain this rank before spending experience points, and may not increase Athletics above rank 2 during character creation.
- **Deft:** You may spend A from any skill check to perform an immediate free maneuver that does not exceed the limit of two maneuvers per turn. In addition, once per round on an opponent's turn, you may spend ⟳ to perform one maneuver as an incidental.
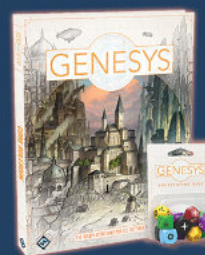
ARCHETYPAL SPECIES

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Have you ever looked at the various species and archetypes in *Genesys* games and wondered how the author or authors decided on those numbers? Or have you wanted more guidance than the two pages in the *Genesys* Core Rulebook?

Look no further than *Archetypal Species*. This supplement is a deep-dive into the finer points of creating an archetype or species for the *Genesys* Roleplaying Game! It includes more advice and pointers for determining each and every number you see in a species or archetype as well as suggestions for coming up with special abilities.

In addition to all the advice, there are examples that go through the process, step by step, to create one new human archetype as well as a new species. Both examples are based on the same design principles but are completely different in the end!