# Bhedmi

Bhedmimi, often known colloquially as “earthbloods,” are a stoichen race originally native to Dan’khal·al. Though the bhedmimi did not carry written records of their life on Dan’khal·al when they migrated to Itlnis, expeditions to abandoned nest sites have uncovered evidence that they had adopted sedentary agriculture long before their migration. These practices, along with the naturally communal nature of the race, allowed for the growth of early civilization.

Though their tight-knit nature initially made integration among other races difficult for the bhedmimi, the generations that have passed since their initial migration have sufficed to overcome the worst of these hurdles. Supported by steadfast determination and unwavering loyalty, bhedmi communities have served as the foundations for some of the strongest and most enduring institutions and nations in recorded history.

## History

Much of what is known of the history of the bhedmimi as a race has been pieced together from records found in ancestral nests high in the mountain-like stalagmites of Dan’khal·al. At the heart of every nest site lies a chamber containing a massive stone, carved into the surface of which is a register of the births, deaths, and maternal relationships of the community. Though these registers contain little direct information, the pieces of information that have been gleaned from them have been instrumental in reconstructing bhedmi life on Dan’khal·al.

### Origin

Due to the written nature of the nest registries, the majority of what is known of bhedmi life on Dan’khal·al describes periods after the advent of writing among the bhedmimi, leaving the race’s prehistory mostly unknown. Curiously, however, most of the nest registries list one or more “primordial stones” by name. According to what has been pieced together, bhedmi traditions held that the race was born from stones that were granted the spark of life by the lichen inhabiting their surface. Some believe this tradition to have been more allegory than belief, reinforcing the interdependence of the bhedmi lifestyle by linking their very existence to the idea of cooperation.

Curiously, the nest registry of one site recorded a dao alongside the primordial stones as one of the ancestors of the community. It is unclear whether this indicates a line of descent from the genie race or if the entry is meant to record a dao who aided that community in its early days. Other than that isolated case, however, most of what is known of the relationship between bhedmimi and dao comes from the dao themselves, who do not shy away from admitting that they enslaved bhedmimi and used them for labor in their mines and construction. Indeed, dao historians take a certain perverse pride in the sustainability of their slaving efforts, noting that only a handful of bhedmimi would be taken from a given nest, and never those likely to be breeding in the near future.

### Migration to Itlnis

Examination of nest sites on Dan'khal·al has established that bhedmimi had developed full behavioral modernity, including language, music, and other cultural universals, before the Stoichen Migrations. While no bhedmi record of the migration itself remains, some texts from the ancient Fēthekēng Rādzāng described the appearance of the "new" race on Itlnis. As in many cases, a great number of the original texts were lost in the Shattering, but some information has survived to the present day.

While it is generally accepted that the anthropoid species native to Itlnis initially met the stoichen races with some degree of suspicion, the few remaining records of the time indicate that the bhedmimi were exceptionally unwilling to trust other species. Though the records of the time theorized that this xenophobia stemmed from the mistreatment of the race by the dao, it is now assumed that the natural tendency of bhedmimi toward interdependence and cooperation worked against them in this case: members of other races were outsiders, not part of the social webs and structures that the bhedmimi relied upon. They were thus viewed as alien, and potentially threatening.

While it is possible that some bhedmi nest communities may have remained on Dan'khal·al, the vast majority of bhedmimi made the migration to Itlnis and adapted to a diverse array of environments. Modern bhedmimi are spread globally, with a dominant presence in Sekál and Tšu Šijāng, a significant presence in Karatšja and Vanska, and a minority presence in Hanāša, Hüliš, and Tirdu li-Dar.

## Habitat and Population

Early bhedmi settlements were dependent on proximity to crystal forests and, to a lesser extent, water and other natural resources used for subsistence. While bhedmimi have a strong nesting instinct, they tend much more towards sculpting than assembly, and their nests were usually established in pre-existing caves or abandoned dens of other creatures that the bhedmimi subsequently altered to meet their needs. For the most part, the natural climbing ability of bhedmimi encouraged the establishment of nests at high altitudes, usually on natural formations such as the vast stalagmites, stalactites, and columns that typify the geography of Dan'khal·al. However, some nests have been discovered at lower altitudes, and one recently uncovered site was actually located *beneath* the "ground level" of its surroundings. Nests were highly permanent, usually consisting of networks of tunnels honeycombing the land formations from which they were excavated.

As Dan'khal·al lacks a sun or similar primary energy source, life in that cavernous world has adapted to a very different set of conditions than seen on other planes. While there is no sun in the sky—or, indeed, any sky for a sun to sit in—light and energy are shed by unique mineral formations known as solar crystals. In most cases, solar crystals appear simply as thin lines covering stone surfaces such as tunnel walls, often surrounded by plant life competing for the light and energy that they shed. However, larger formations do exist, and it is not uncommon to see a several-foot crystal floating in midair with a tree wrapped around it. Concentrations of

such larger crystals allow for the growth of vast subterranean forests, and many bhedmi nests depended on this capacity to support wild vegetation and local animal life.

After the migration to Itlnis, the bhedmi population underwent a series of fluctuations as the species adapted to the new environments in which they found themselves. Moreover, after bhedmimi adapted socially and began to integrate with other races, the inclusion of other species in their social webs and the adoption of outside cultural mores seems to have caused a drop in bhedmi birth rates, as reproduction was not always possible or considered acceptable in situations in which it might previously have been so. These trials have been overcome, however, and the modern bhedmi population is stable and keeps pace with that of other anthropoids. The species has also adapted to a variety of different habitats, from the harsh badlands of Karatšja to the verdant fields and forests of Sekál.

# Biology

## Anatomy and Physiology

As is often the case, many aspects of bhedmi physiology are closely homologous to corresponding physiological aspects of other anthropoid races. They follow the basic anthropoidal body plan, with two legs, the torso, two arms, the neck, and the head, and share the same basic bodily systems. Like most anthropoids, however, bhedmimi have several anatomical traits that set them apart from other races.

While minerals play an important role in the biology of all anthropoid races, bhedmimi, like many species from Dan'khal·al, incorporate mineral deposits directly into their bodies in place of some of the protein-based materials common among species from other worlds. As a result, bhedmi horns, nails, and hooves are effectively made of stone, and the surface of bhedmi skin has been compared to densely packed soil. Moreover, when exposed to conditions that lead to cornification in other anthropoids, bhedmi skin will develop patches of stone instead of calluses. Similarly, injuries sustained by a bhedmi may leave behind a stone formation in place of the scars more common among other species.

The most complex of these mineral-based structures is, without question, the wool that covers a bhedmi's head and upper chest. While other areas of the body have protein-based materials replaced wholly by minerals, the thin strands of mineral glass that form the wool are actually encased and supported by a protein sheath that grants them a degree of elasticity and crimp. These gestalt fibers are further protected by a waxy secretion, similar to the lanolin found in sheep and other woolbearing animals, that waterproofs the mane and maintains the strength and elasticity of the protein sheath. When scoured of this protective wax, bhedmi wool becomes stiff and brittle, and the sharp glass strands that make up the core of the fibers may slice through their protein sheaths.

The length and coarseness of bhedmi wool, combined with some properties of the protective wax and flakes of the bhedmi's soil-like skin, provide an ideal environment for the growth of plant life. And, indeed, bhedmimi have formed a symbiotic relationship with a specific family of

woody plants originally native to Dan'khal·al. These plants, which have diversified into a number of different regional subspecies, run their roots around and even into the gestalt fibers of bhedmi wool. In addition to obtaining shelter and protection from their hosts, the plants also absorb moisture that the wax repels from the fibers. In return, the bhedmi appears to be provided with some amount of extra nutrients via diffusion and absorption through the hair and skin. Some evidence suggests that the plants may also process some of the protective wax secreted by the bhedmi, preventing excess buildups.

Plants are passed to a young bhedmi by adult members of its community or nest, most commonly by direct contact. In most cases, a young bhedmi is fully seeded by the time it is a few weeks old. The plants that sprout from these initial seeds will form the core of the mane's ecosystem, with later additions generally unable to establish enough of a presence to directly compete with them. While most modern bhedmimi pay close attention to the contents of their manes, keeping them clean and hygienic, an untended mane may attract a wide variety of organisms ranging from moths and beetles to fungi and algae.

In a similar fashion, bhedmi skin is often mottled with patches of lichen or similar growths. While most mosses and fungi are viewed as parasitic growths and scoured as soon as they are noticed, most lichens do not feed on their hosts and may therefore be tolerated. The development of bodily lichen most commonly begins on a stony patch somewhere on the surface of the skin. After the initial colonization has occurred, the lichen spreads via vegetative reproduction, with fragments of the original lichen falling onto other areas of skin and continuing to grow on the new surface. While bhedmi-hosted lichens may still reproduce sexually like other fungi, the resultant spores are generally dispersed to grow elsewhere, rather than developing on the same host.

Cultural norms and individual taste govern how much effort is put into removing, styling, or cultivating bodily lichen. Most cultures that with a dominant or significant bhedmi presence are more or less accepting of lichen, viewing it as analogous to bodily hair in other races. Cultures in which bhedmimi form a minority, however, may not distinguish between lichens and parasitic growths, viewing either as indicative of poor hygiene. In some warrior cultures, significance is given to the number of lichen patches on one's body, a tradition that stems from the tendency of bodily lichen to cover the stone left by injuries sustained in battle.

In addition to these more visible traits, bhedmimi also possess several respiratory adaptations. Bhedmimi have been found to tolerate higher levels of fixed air[*] than other mammals, allowing them to reuse air inhaled above ground and thereby survive in low-oxygen environments such as underground burrows. Moreover, evidence suggests that bhedmi lungs are capable of absorbing mineral dust that would cause restrictive ventilatory defects in other anthropoids, and there are some indications that such dust might actually be metabolized and used by the body as an additional source of material for its many mineral structures. Bhedmimi are

[*] [Carbon dioxide]

unusually resistant to airborne allergens, and it is rare for the spores or pollen from hosted mane plants or lichen to cause any breathing difficulties among bhedmimi.

Bhedmimi have excellent hearing, and the pinna of each ear can rotate up to 180°, giving the potential for 360° hearing without having to move the head. The vestibular system of the inner ear is also more highly developed than in several other anthropoid races, giving bhedmimi keen proprioception—the unconscious sense of where the body and limbs are at all times. Bhedmi eyes have horizontally slit pupils and multifocal lenses that may be responsible for the race's ability to see color at many different light levels.

Though the bhedmi skull structure is somewhat informed by the presence of a set of curling horns, it overall diverges only slightly from the typical anthropoid skull. In contrast to the horns of ohanya, which heavily define that race's skull structure, bhedmi horns require only a slight thickening of the frontal bone to support their weight. Most of the notable differences between bhedmi skulls and those of other anthropoids are the result of their specialized ears, leading to differences in the acoustic meatus and bony labyrinth of the temporal bone.

Bhedmimi are notably shorter than most other anthropoids, and have a heavy, thick body type. Despite their heavyset appearance, however, bhedmimi are generally very athletic, and are often at least as strong as members of larger races. The muscles of the neck are also generally more developed than those of other anthropoids, presumably in order to accommodate the weight of the stone-plated horns and plant-filled mane.

Bhedmi legs terminate in cloven hooves and display an unguligrade stance. The sides of bhedmi hooves consist of the same type of mineral deposits found on their horns and fingernails, and can be used to catch and hold to a crack or tiny knob of rock while climbing. In addition, the undersides of bhedmi hooves bear a special traction pad that protrudes slightly past the nail. This pad has a rough-textured surface that provides a considerable amount of extra friction on smooth rock, yet is pliant enough for any irregularities in a stone substrate to become impressed in it and thereby add to the skidproofing effect.

It is estimated that the average worldwide height for an adult bhedmi female is about 122 cm (4 feet), while the worldwide average height for adult bhedmi males is about 114 cm (3 feet 9 inches). Shrinkage of stature is not typical among aging bhedmimi, though it has been observed in some extremely aged individuals. The average mass of an adult bhedmi is 66-76 kg (146-168 lbs) for males and 72-82 kg (159-181 lbs) for females. As is the case with most creatures native to Dan'khal·al, bhedmi blood is light green in hue.

## Mating and Life Cycle

As with other mammals, bhedmi reproduction takes place as internal fertilization by sexual intercourse. Female bhedmimi undergo a menstrual cycle similar to that of human females, and the species is one of the very few nonhuman mammals known to do so. The effect of menstrual synchrony is particularly strong among bhedmimi, with cycles generally synchronizing after only a few weeks of close contact.

After fertilization and implantation, gestation occurs within the female's uterus. Bhedmi gestation occurs over a period of five months, after which time the fully grown fetus is birthed from the mother's body and breathes independently for the first time. Most bhedmimi are born with full, albeit short, manes, which will be seeded over the following weeks.

Bhedmi infants are typically 2-3 kg (5-7 lbs) in weight and 35-40 cm (13-16 inches) in height at birth. The skin of newborn bhedmimi is often slightly mottled due to imperfect mineral deposition during gestation. In most cases, these irregularities fade within five weeks as new deposits replace the old. Helpless at birth, bhedmimi continue to grow for some years, typically reaching sexual maturity at 15 to 18 years of age. Males continue to develop physically until around the age of 21, whereas female development continues until around age 24. The bhedmi life span can be split into the standard anthropoid stages of life, with development of the horns beginning in childhood.

Unlike many anthropoids, bhedmimi do not usually form pair bonds as a part of mating or childrearing. Both males and females will mate with multiple partners if the opportunity arises, demonstrating no preference for unmated partners over those that have previously mated. As a result, bhedmi paternity is often unclear, and all members of a community—including non-reproducing members—are involved in cooperative care of the children produced by the reproducing females.

The strong menstrual synchrony experienced by female bhedmimi and the race's communal approach to children have been theorized to stem from a latent eusociality mechanism in the species. While ethical considerations have prevented any controlled experimentation, observations have indicated that, when a bhedmi community is subjected to extreme conditions and a dearth of resources, the menstrual cycles of most females will be suppressed, while a small number of females will display increased fertility. However, a number of methodological flaws have been found in the studies reporting this quiescent eusociality, and the theory has yet to receive any definitive support.

For various reasons, including biological causes, female bhedmimi live on average about five and a half years longer than their male counterparts—the average life expectancy at birth of a female is estimated at 113.2 years compared to 107.7 for a male. At least one bhedmi is known to have reached the age of 150 years, though claims of such extreme longevity are few and far between.

## Diet

Bhedmimi are omnivorous, capable of consuming a wide variety of plant and animal material. Varying with available food sources in regions of habitation, bhedmi groups have adopted a range of diets, from nearly purely vegetarian to primarily carnivorous. In some cases, loss or removal of the symbiotic plants growing in a bhedmi's mane can lead to deficiency diseases unless appropriate changes are made to the individual's diet.

Evidence from nest sites on Dan'khal·al has implied that bhedmimi developed sedentary agriculture comparatively early in their development as a species, allowing them to support sizeable populations off of the crystal forests near their nests. However, the nature of the solar crystals and their patterns is not particularly conducive to many of the agricultural methods practiced by anthropoids on worlds with true suns. As a result, the bhedmimi developed what has been called "wild farming," or "forest farming," a kind of agroforestry that relies heavily on intercropping with wild plants and integrating crops and livestock into the natural ecosystem.

In general, bhedmimi can survive for one to six weeks without food, depending on stored body fat. Survival without water is usually limited to three or four days. Bhedmimi also require a greater intake of minerals than other races, displaying symptoms similar to protein deficiency if their needs are not met. However, the extent of this requirement varies regionally, apparently as the result of environmental factors. Some bhedmimi meet this requirement through the use of "sucking stones," which are cleaned and treated for this purpose.

## Biological Variation

Biological variation in the bhedmi species manifests primarily in traits such as cranial structure, horn shape, eye color, wool area and type, height and build, and skin color. The typical height of an adult bhedmi is between 1.0 m (3 ft 3 in) and 1.3 m (4 ft 3 in), although this varies significantly depending, among other things, on sex and ethnic origin. Body type is partly determined by heredity and is also significantly influenced by environmental factors such as diet, exercise and sleep patterns, especially as an influence in childhood. In addition, populations that have for a long time inhabited specific climates tend to have developed specific phenotypes that are beneficial for surviving in those environments—thinner wool with less coverage in warmer regions, slimmer and more agile builds in heavily forested regions, and high lung capacities at high altitudes. Similarly, skin tone varies clinally, correlating to the most common proteins and minerals present in the soil of a region.

Bhedmi skin tone ranges from a deep ochre brown to slate grey. While this color is hereditary, bhedmimi have sometimes been observed to undergo shifts in skin tone after dwelling in a new region for a significant period of time. Not all bhedmi display such a shift, however, and it has not been determined whether or not this shifted skin tone is hereditary. While the children of tone-shifted individuals usually display the same tonal shift, it is possible that they are simply responding to the same environmental factors as their parents.

Both the texture of bhedmi wool and the area that it covers vary ethnically. Wool tends to be both thicker and curlier among bhedmimi adapted to colder climates, and the mane grows across the entire top of the chest. By contrast, bhedmi ethnic groups from warmer regions tend to have thinner wool, more wavy than curly, and the mane sprouts only from the back and the tops of the shoulders. In ethnic groups in which the woolen mane does not cross the front of the chest, the shoulder wool often curls inwards to cover the bare area.

Bhedmi horn shape varies slightly by individual, but some variance can be accounted for by ethnic origin. Some bhedmi populations bear horns that curl tightly around their ears, while

others possess a larger, looser curve.  In addition, the horns of some ethnic groups possess an exaggerated outward curl. The shape and size of bhedmi horns do not appear to vary by sex, with males and females having horns that are approximately the same size and shape. The material from which the horns are formed varies regionally, and may be influenced by the most common minerals in the area.

Bhedmimi have white sclera and irises that show a wide range of coloration, mostly warmer hues such as orange, gold, or red. Rarely, a bhedmi's irises may appear green or hazel. However, even in such cases, the true pigmentation of the eye still lies somewhere between gold and black: the appearance of these atypical colors results from light scattering, and is an instance of structural color.

Though not a true case of biological variation, it should be noted that the woody plants growing in bhedmi wool generally vary by ethnicity. Since an infant's mane is seeded by the community shortly after birth, the population subgroup into which a bhedmi is born usually determines the plant subspecies that will be hosted. However, exceptions do exist: in circumstances in which a bhedmi is born outside of a community, the mane may be seeded solely by parental interactions, or it may not be seeded at all. Bhedmimi who mature without having been seeded often feel a generalized sense of isolation and restlessness. Even if they are later accepted by a community and seeded by its members, it is common for such bhedmimi to continue to feel some degree of "impostor syndrome."

## Psychology

The pattern of bhedmi encephalization appears consistent with the theory of convergent intelligence, with postnatal brain growth in modern bhedmimi allowing for extended periods of social learning and language acquisition in juveniles. However, as with most anthropoid races, the increase of brain volume over time affected different areas within the brain unequally, leading to slight behavioral differences between bhedmimi and other races. The frontal lobes, which play important roles in regulating voluntary movement and predicting social consequences, have increased disproportionately, as has the parahippocampal gyrus, which has been related to the process of recognizing environmental and social "scenes." As a result, bhedmimi have excellent motor control and tend to weigh decisions more heavily on their social ramifications.

The differences between the bhedmi brain and the brains of other anthropoid races have led some to call the bhedmimi more innately "wise" than the other races, though others have questioned the usage of such a term in this context. Certainly, bhedmimi are more prone to consider the consequences that will be faced by the group, rather than the individual, but opponents have pointed out that there are many circumstances in which such behavior can be unwise. Moreover, it should be stressed that this behavioral trend is merely a species-wide tendency, not an absolute truth, and individual bhedmimi are fully capable of acting according to self-interest.

## Consciousness and Thought

Like all true sapients, bhedmimi possess sufficient self-awareness to recognize themselves in a mirror. By 20 months, most bhedmi children are aware that the mirror image is not another bhedmi.

Due to its proportionally larger frontal lobes and developed parahippocampal gyrus, the bhedmi brain is particularly suited to socialization and cooperation. This capacity, combined with the race's natural tendency to interdependence, leads many bhedmimi to value the input and opinions of others as highly as their own experiences. From a bhedmi perspective, it is much more likely that one individual will be incorrect than that every member of the group will be incorrect in the same way. Even if no individual is correct, the truth can be found by examining the ways in which their interpretations differ.

While some might expect this focus on group consensus to lead bhedmimi to blindly accept what they are told, the truth is a little more complicated than that. It is true that, in the absence of any conflicting evidence or experiences, many bhedmimi tend not to challenge the status quo. However, if a bhedmi has reason to believe that the group's opinion is flawed—whether due to lack of information or flawed reasoning—she will often consider it her duty to correct the error. In fact, to do otherwise is considered selfish: as bhedmimi value the input of others, withholding one's own input is to benefit from others without giving them anything in return.

## Motivation and Emotion

Like all anthropoids, bhedmimi function on internal definitions of positive and negative that drive the search for satisfaction and avoidance of conflict. However, while these categories are fundamentally determined by the individual brain state and experiences, bhedmimi are notably more readily influenced by social norms than many other anthropoid species. Bhedmimi also tend toward tribalism, with strong definitions of in-group and out-group.

The value that the bhedmi psyche places on the group, along with its higher susceptibility to social influences, has a subtle effect on bhedmi motivation. While many assume that bhedmimi would tend more strongly to conflict avoidance in general, the truth is slightly more complicated. Avoidance of conflict within the group is, indeed, generally considered to be the strongest motivator in the psychology of the species, but the avoidance of other conflict is actually a less significant motivator than the libido.

In fact, rather than displaying the docility associated with the sheep to which the species is often visually compared, bhedmimi are often passionate, emotional beings. The value that they place on the group and fellow group-members stems not from rational consideration, but from genuine love and affection. Individual emotional needs and desires are felt and acted upon freely; moreover, the communal love common to the species often leads bhedmimi to experience strong positive emotional responses from providing emotional support and aid to those close to them. Perceived threats to loved ones or the group as a whole elicit strong

emotional reactions from bhedmimi, sometimes even more so than similar threats to the self would.

Among bhedmimi, happiness is most strongly associated with comfort. Happiness is often considered to be a state of tranquility and satisfaction, but that is understood to be distinct from peace and satiation. Peace without love is oppression, and satiation without passion is hardly satisfying. Moreover, as bhedmimi are highly empathic, the happiness of others directly affects one's own. The pursuit of happiness, therefore, is tied inextricably to love.

### Sexuality and Love

As pair-bonding is uncommon among bhedmimi, the species tends towards sexual promiscuity, though the extent to which sexual activity is casual or indiscriminate varies culturally. Similarly, social monogamy is less common than communal love, and cultures with a dominant bhedmi presence often place less importance on formal marriages than on group membership.

The distinction drawn by many anthropoids between romantic love and friendship is alien to the bhedmi mindset. While they can easily grasp the idea of loving one individual more than another, bhedmimi do not tend to view this as a categorical distinction. Sexual relations are "casual" not because bhedmimi do not invest emotionally in their partners, but because they are emotionally invested in so many people. The stereotype that a bhedmi will sleep with any interested party is inaccurate: bhedmimi are themselves only likely to display interest in individuals for whom they feel a significant degree of love.

Bhedmimi are more likely to display bisexual behavior than members of other anthropoid species. While individuals often display a mild preference for partners of one sex or gender over another, strict heterosexuality or homosexuality is relatively uncommon.

Though bhedmimi in general tend not to form pair bonds, some individuals display a greater tendency toward feelings of possessiveness and jealousy centered on a single lover. Some of these pair-preferring individuals are able to suppress their jealousy and hold only themselves to monogamy, but others become emotionally distressed and even violent if their lovers engage sexually with others. As pair-preference is rare among bhedmimi, such individuals cannot necessarily be paired together easily, and nest registries from Dan'khal·al record some members of their communities as having been exiled for "the sin of perceived ownership." In modern times, pair-preferring individuals account for the majority of interspecies relationships involving bhedmimi.

## Cultural Trends

Like most anthropoids, bhedmimi are highly social beings and tend to live in complex social groups. Indeed, bhedmimi do not draw a great distinction between "community" and "family," and generally tend to develop highly structured societies. Bhedmi cultures tend to share several traits, most of which can be seen as influences in those multi-species cultures with a significant presence of bhedmimi.

## Gender Roles

As with most visibly dimorphic races, the sexual division of bhedmimi into male and female has been historically marked by a corresponding division of roles, norms, and power. However, as the entire community is involved in the childrearing process, there has been no significant division of reproductive labor along gender lines, with cultural responsibilities regarding child care being shared by all present. On the other hand, since paternity is more difficult to establish in communities that lack pair bonding, only motherhood is typically recognized as significant. As a result, females tend to bear a greater cultural responsibility for leading the group, while males are more often seen as workers and defenders of the community.

## Kinship

Among bhedmimi, consanguinity is usually recognized only in the matrilineal descent, and affinity relations are practically unheard of. While bhedmimi highly value familial love and responsibility, these concepts are usually extended to the entire community as a whole, rather than being based on direct descent. Children commonly view all the adults of their community as parental figures, and adult bhedmimi rarely draw any strong distinction between their own offspring and those of fellow group members.

Like nearly all sexually reproducing sapients, bhedmimi tend towards the establishment of incest taboos to prohibit sexual relations between closely related persons. However, as bhedmimi often do not trace biological paternity, the norms of bhedmi-dominant cultures differ somewhat from those of cultures without a strong bhedmi presence. Relations between siblings that share a mother are often proscribed, while relations between siblings who share only a father are rarely mentioned. Male bhedmimi are often prohibited from relations with any group members who were born after the male began puberty, while female bedmimi may be permitted to engage in such relations so long as they are not with their own children.

## Appreciation and Cultivation

No matter how much its members love one another, any tight-knit group will necessarily experience conflicts and disagreements; in fact, some have argued that the emotional investment of communal love actually *increases* the likelihood that arguments will erupt. Being able to recognize and enjoy the good qualities of another in spite of disagreements or perceived flaws is critical to the integrity and survival of the group, and bhedmimi tend to place an accordingly high cultural value on the act of “appreciation.” This cultural emphasis often extends beyond this simple in-group concern, and it has been suggested that “appreciation” might be at the root of the elaborate codes of etiquette present in some cultures with a strong bhedmi presence.

Emphasis is also often placed on the appreciation of beauty and deeds. This appreciation is held as distinct from desire, in that it is not rooted in a desire to *possess* an object of beauty or *achieve* something for one’s own glory, but in a simple sharing of enjoyment. Stemming from this form of appreciation, bhedmimi also tend to hold a cultural value that has been termed

“cultivation”: the act of encouraging and supporting other group members in the pursuit of their natural talents and skills. To force an individual with innate artistic skill to labor as a farmer would be a waste, and the group would be all the poorer for it. By supporting one another in finding the best use for their talents, bhedmimi believe that the members of a group can grow into something stronger than a simple collection of individuals.

# Nasim

Nasayim, often known colloquially as “airbloods”, are a stoichen race originally native to Habakad. While the lack of stable, fertile ground on Habakad discouraged the development of sedentary agriculture as a regular practice, evidence indicates that some nasayim rookeries raised jeweled beetles for their molts. However, for the majority of their dietary needs, early nasayim relied heavily on hunter-gatherer practices.

Though the winds of Itlnis are rarely strong enough for the nasayim to take true flight, they have not gone to ground. Driven by insatiable wanderlust and indefatigable ambition, nasim explorers have charted paths to the world's most remote corners and uncovered some of its greatest wonders.

## History

While some preserved nasim rookery sites on Habakad showed indications of having once been inscribed with some form of writing, the windborne sands have worn away all but the faintest traces of such records. Those oral traditions that did survive to the time of the nasim migration to Itlnis were mostly concerned with familial ties, but some hints of the race's history remained.

### Origin

The lack of reliable source materials makes it difficult to pin down any specific details about early nasayim, but artwork in some of the oldest djinn palaces shows indistinct, mammalian airborne figures that could either be stylized depictions of nasayim or some ancestral species. However, as the djinn tended to regard nasayim as little more than vermin, their records are relatively sparse on the subject, noting only occasionally when a particularly large "infestation" had to be cleared out of one or more glass spires.

While this simple disregard of the nasayim would appear to evince a more benign relationship than that usually seen between genies and stoichen, some scholars have asserted this to be a manufactured narrative. They point to several significant holes and omissions in djinn histories as indicative of a concerted effort to whitewash their own past behavior, likely due to the fact that djinn have tended to engage in more trade with Itlnis than other genies have. Unfortunately, as there is little evidence on the matter either way, the truth may at this point be impossible to prove.

### Migration to Itlnis

Even in the absence of concrete evidence, it is assumed that nasayim had developed full cultural modernity, including language, music, and other cultural universals, before the Stoichen Migrations. It is known that, shortly after arriving, nasayim became enamored with wood as being much easier to work with than glass, and initially carved many of their new records into wooden panels. Unfortunately, most of these panels were lost in the Shattering, but the few that remain describe the migration as being heralded by a song on the winds of

Habakad that promised a world of gentle breezes and calmer skies. As the early nasayim enjoyed metaphor, this could be simple poetic embellishment, but it is in line with similar portents described by the records of other stoichen races.

While the nasayim were predisposed to keep to themselves, their curious and exploratory nature meant it wasn't long before they encountered the native races of Itlnis. Unused to walking long distances on the ground, but unable to achieve true flight without the tempestuous winds of Habakad, the nasayim migrants likely looked to other anthropoids for aid in adapting to their newfound home. Indeed, though few records of this time period remain, those that do often depict nasayim as friendly and eager to learn.

Given the ever-shifting nature of Habakad, it is impossible to know if any nasim rookeries remain in some of its remote spires, but it is assumed that the vast majority of nasayim made the migration to Itlnis, where they have adapted to a diverse array of environments. Modern nasayim are spread globally, with a dominant presence in Hanāša and Tirdu li-Dar, a significant presence in Hüliš and Sekál, and a minority presence in Karatšja, Tšu Šijāng, and Vanska.

## Habitat and Population

Early nasim settlements were centered on the fulgurite glass spires created by the immense lightning storms of Habakad. These spires, in addition to serving as easily-distinguished landmarks, could provide shelter from the worst of the storms and the near-constant light of Habakad's central sun. In many cases, branches of glass extending into the ground would also trap enough water to support a degree of plant life, which could in turn support the jeweled beetles whose shells provided crucial nutrients for nasim fulgridermis.

Reliance on these spires would have served to cap the realistic size of a nasim rookery. Not only would a community be limited by nearby sources of food and water, but also the physical space available within the nooks and crannies of the spire. Moreover, the largest spires would often be quarried by djinn seeking building material for their palaces, leaving only the smaller spires available for the nasayim. In some cases, nasayim would establish rookeries in spires too small to trap enough water for a full ecosystem, instead ranging far afield to gather fibrous plants with which to feed their beetles.

After the migration to Itlnis, the nasim population increased substantially, as they were no longer subject to the pressures that had previously capped their population sizes. The species has also adapted to a variety of different habitats, from the burning sands of Tirdu li-Dar to the treacherous marshes of Hüliš.

## Biology

### Anatomy and Physiology

Many aspects of nasim physiology are closely homologous to corresponding physiological aspects of other anthropoid races. They follow the basic anthropoidal body plan, with two legs, the torso, two arms, the neck, and the head, and share the same basic bodily systems. Like

most anthropoids, however, nasayim have several anatomical traits that set them apart from other races.

One of the most visually striking of these traits is the intricate metal filigree commonly seen on the faces, shoulders, spines, hips, and digits of nasayim, with some individuals also displaying filigree on their ears. Though easily mistaken for separate structures, these metallic growths are actually merely the surface elements of a single contiguous metal lattice, much of which is subcutaneous. Formally known as the fulgridermis, this unusual feature likely originated as an adaptation to the unpredictable storms of Habakad: as the excess charge on a charged conductor resides only on its exterior, having no influence on anything contained inside of it, the fulgridermis effectively insulates a nasim from serious internal damage from electrical discharges. In addition to this primary function, the fulgridermis also serves a number of secondary purposes, providing a small amount of structural support to compensate for the pneumatized bones of nasayim and locking certain joints in place when gliding.

Though considered part of the nasim integumentary system, most of the fulgridermis is not made of living tissue, and is thus incapable of self-repair. Instead, the metal is produced and repaired by the fulgridermal matrix, a network of highly specialized subcutaneous tissues that process metals extracted from food. As the primary function of the fulgridermis only requires that the conductor be contiguous, the structure places greater emphasis on tensile strength than on rigidity, and the fulgridermal matrix preferentially incorporates ductile metals into the fulgridermis. On Habakad, much of the metal used in the fulgridermis presumably came from the jeweled beetles that made up a key part of the nasim diet, as their exoskeletons are rich in an alloy of aluminum, bismuth, and copper. However, the fulgridermal matrix is capable of processing other forms of metal, and the composition of a nasim's fulgridermis is heavily influenced by what metals are present in their diet.

In many areas of the body, the fulgridermis is relatively soft and pliable, allowing for a full range of unimpeded motion without meaningfully straining the metal. In those areas in which the fulgridermis breaks the skin and forms the characteristic filigree, however, the metal is thicker and slightly more rigid. These regions also grow more vigorously than other portions of the fulgridermis, likely to account for environmental wear from the scouring winds of Habakad, and they may have developed as honest signals of mate quality. In less physically active nasim, lack of wear can lead to uncomfortably protruding filigree, especially among the aged. While malnutrition and other dietary deficiencies can also lead to a variety of disorders of the fulgridermis, some have theorized that the ability of the fulgridermal matrix to process various metals may give nasayim some measure of resistance to heavy metal poisoning.

While the fulgridermis may be the most visually striking adaptation of nasayim, the most complex is undoubtedly the praneumatic system, a network of tissues, vessels, and organs that produce, regulate, and circulate a unique mixture of lighter-than-air gases. Much like the circulatory and lymphatic systems, the praneumatic system runs through the entire body, with specialized air sacs in the proximal ends of limbs and in the neck that collect and distribute the praneumatic gases through tracheal tubes. These air sacs also serve to vent excess or stale gas

through their attached spiracles, and it is this function that produces the characteristic clouds of mist around the necks and shoulders of nasayim. The function of the praneumatic system is not merely aesthetic, however: by reducing the body's density, the praneumatic gases play a crucial role in the nasim ability to glide.

The exact nature of the biological processes of the praneumatic system is not fully understood, though some have suggested that it may be partially fueled by the metabolism of ambient magic. However, it is known that diet plays at least some role in the process, as the scent of a nasim's praneumatic gases can vary considerably based on recent meals. In fact, among nasayim, certain foods and dietary additives are valued for their uses as natural perfumes, and some believe that the effects of certain inhaled drugs can be conveyed to others by praneumatic mist. Illness often also affects the makeup of the praneumatic gases in a variety of ways, ranging from reduced outflow to imbalanced composition.

While most of the functions of the praneumatic system are autonomous, nasayim have a degree of conscious control over the venting process, and thereby over their weight. By completely closing their spiracles, a nasim can cease venting praneumatic gas and become lighter, making it even easier to glide. However, after a time, the stale gases will begin to accumulate, requiring that the nasim resume venting or risk rupturing one of their tracheal tubes. Conversely, by forcing their spiracles open and contracting their air sacs, a nasim can increase the rate at which they vent their praneumatic gas and become slightly heavier, making them more stable on their feet. In addition to their effects on body density, these adjustments to the venting process produce a visual impact on a nasim's praneumatic mist, either dissipating it entirely when venting is ceased or thickening it when the rate of flow is increased.

There is some evidence to suggest that the praneumatic system may have originally been more extensively integrated with the standard respiratory system, perhaps serving a more elaborate role of gas exchange and metabolism. The unidirectional airflow of the nasim respiratory system is built on a system of air sacs and passages similar to the structures of the praneumatic system, and some vestigial structures have been theorized to have once served as links between the two systems. Respiratory infections in nasayim are also capable of infecting the praneumatic system, which can have deleterious effects on an individual's ability to glide.

More than any of their other adaptations, however, the patagia of the nasayim that set them apart from other anthropoids. Extending from the base of the fifth finger to the waist, the patagium is a thin, highly vascular membrane of elastic skin that, when taut, catches the air and allows the nasim to glide. This membrane is supported by the styliform process, a calcified rod of cartilage extending from the wrist that normally rests against the forearm. When a nasim enters a glide, unique muscles in the wrist pivot the styliform process outwards, extending the patagium with a much greater surface area than would otherwise be possible. Though the membrane of the patagium is easily torn, it is only sparsely innervated and heals quickly. By contrast, the styliform process is as durable as any bone, but takes weeks to heal if fractured.

Nasayim have highly acute senses, with pronounced ears similar to those of bhedmimi and highly-specialized noses. The wet, hairless nose of a nasim features curved nostrils not seen in most other anthropoids, and the complexity of its inner structures grants the species a superior sense of smell. Nasayim also possess motile supraorbital, mystacial, and genal whiskers. These whiskers are primarily used for tactile sensing of air currents, though nasayim sometimes display whisking behavior as an anxiety response.

Though the nasim skull structure is somewhat informed by the size and placement of their ears, it otherwise diverges only slightly from the typical anthropoid skull. The acoustic meatus is notably higher on the temporal bone than is typically seen in other anthropoids, even bhedmimi, leading to additional differences in the shape and structure of the bony labyrinth. Some have suggested that the nasim skull seems to show some faint ridging to accommodate thickened fulgridermis around the cranium, but, if so, the effect is so subtle as to be nearly invisible to the naked eye.

Nasayim are somewhat taller than the average anthropoid species, and have a slim, lithe body type. They possess long, prehensile tails that are most often used as rudders when gliding, but that can also be used to hold onto an anchor point when climbing. Most nasayim are at least somewhat athletic, and those that are too heavyset often encounter difficulties remaining airborne.

The hands and feet of nasayim feature digital and metacarpal pads optimized for grasping and clinging, allowing them to maintain purchase on smooth climbing surfaces, and sport small claws derived from the fulgridermis. For similar reasons, the ankle and foot are unlike those of most other anthropoids. Instead of the hinge joint more commonly seen, the nasim ankle forms a pivot joint more akin to that of the wrist, allowing a much greater range of rotation and pronation. The hallux is also fully opposable, making the nasim foot almost as capable of grasping and manipulating objects as one of their hands.

It is estimated that the average worldwide height for an adult nasim female is about 180 cm (5 feet 11 inches), while the worldwide average height for adult nasim males is about 188 cm (6 feet 2 inches). Shrinkage of stature may begin in middle age in some individuals, but tends to be universal in the extremely aged, often accompanied by a greater protrusion of the fulgridermis. The average mass of an adult nasim is 56-66 kg (123-146 lbs) for males and 54-59 kg (119-130 lbs) for females. Much of the nasim body is covered in a double coat of fur, consisting of a soft undercoat and a coarser topcoat. The topcoat on the nasim scalp typically grows to a much greater maximum length than elsewhere on the body.

## Mating and Life Cycle

As with many mammals, nasim reproduction takes place as internal fertilization by sexual intercourse. Nasayim are typically considered to be monoestrous, with females entering heat at the end of the summer storm season, but a number of examples of conception outside of the standard breeding season have indicated that the species is also capable of induced ovulation.

Some have even suggested that nasayim do not truly go into heat at all, and that the seasonal change is simply one of multiple possible trigger conditions for ovulation.

After fertilization and implantation, gestation occurs within the female's uterus. Nasim gestation occurs over a period of five to six months, after which time the fully grown fetus is birthed from the mother's body and breathes independently for the first time. During this time, some number of the mother's mammaries will swell and begin producing milk. While all of the mother's nipples are biologically capable of milk production, generally only two or four "primary" breasts will do so. Unlike some other mammalian anthropoids, nasim nipples are not particularly sensitive and do not typically serve as erogenous zones.

While modern nasayim tend to only produce one or two offspring per pregnancy, their comparatively high rate of multiple births and their large number of nipples both indicate that broods used to be much larger in the past. Moreover, based on certain behaviors and some circumstantial evidence from Habakad, it is commonly accepted that early nasayim likely engaged in intraspecific brood parasitism. Curiously, rather than having developed strong rejection defenses to such parasitism, nasayim are instead predisposed to opportunistically bond with children entrusted to their care. Some have suggested that this may indicate that the original parasitic behavior was limited to familial or tribal groups, but others have postulated that the response may have developed in response to mafia-like parasitic strategies.

Nasim infants are typically 1-2 kg (2-5 pounds) in weight and 25-35 cm (10-14 inches) in height at birth. Newborn nasayim tend to be more densely furred than adults, with much larger eyes and no protruding fulgridermis. The fulgridermis begins to grow and protrude within the six weeks following an infant's transition from breast milk to solids, with much of the additional fur being shed during this time. Though capable of climbing and clinging to their parents within the first hour, nasim infants are otherwise helpless and continue to grow for some years, typically reaching sexual maturity at 14 to 16 years of age. Males continue to develop physically until around the age of 19, whereas female development continues until around age 21. The nasim life span can be split into the standard anthropoid stages of life, with development of the fulgridermis beginning in infancy. As nasayim age, they often develop spots on their skin that continue to darken and grow throughout their lives.

Though it is possible that, as in many species, biological factors result in a slight difference between the life expectancy of male and female nasayim, such a difference does not seem to be statistically significant—the average life expectancy at birth of a nasim of either sex is estimated at 81.9 years. Some nasayim occasionally live into their late nineties; higher ages have been claimed, but they are not well substantiated.

## Diet

Nasayim are omnivorous, capable of consuming a wide variety of plant and animal material. Varying with available food sources in regions of habitation, nasim groups have adopted a range of diets, from nearly purely vegetarian to primarily carnivorous.

All sources agree that the jeweled beetles of Habakad were crucial to the diet of early nasayim, so much so that nasayim carried the insects with them during the Stoichen Migrations. However, there is considerable dispute over the precise role that the beetles played: while some claim that nasayim merely ate the beetles' molts, others find it more likely that the beetles were consumed whole for a more complete nutritional experience. The conflicting evidence behind these claims may stem from differences between nasim rookeries on Habakad, with those more capable of supporting larger beetle populations dining on the insects directly and those limited to smaller populations exercising more care in managing their resources.

Unfortunately for the early nasayim, the beetles did not adapt well to life on Itlnis, with the thinner atmosphere proving more difficult for the oversized insects to breathe. Careful tending by nasayim has allowed the species to persist, but it has never thrived on this world and its numbers remain too low to feasibly provide for the global nasayim population. However, Itlnis is also rich in a much wider variety of food sources than Habakad, a number of which contained minerals that nasayim learned could also be incorporated into their fulgridermis, though the resulting display was often less colorful. As their jaws were developed to crush the metallic shells of the jeweled beetles, meat jerky and other foods that exercised the jaw muscles proved to be particularly popular with nasayim.

In general, nasayim can survive for four to ten weeks without food, depending on stored body fat. Survival without water is usually limited to a little over a week, though there have been a handful of exceptional cases in which a nasim lasted into their second week without any fluid intake. A properly balanced intake of metals in the diet is crucial to a healthy fulgridermis, and nasayim tend to prioritize green vegetables with high mineral content for that reason. In some cases, artificial dietary supplements may be used in order to avoid developing deficiency symptoms such as flaking or corrosion. Avoiding deficiencies in childhood is especially crucial, as failure of the fulgridermis to properly develop during youth can result in an incomplete fulgridermis throughout life. One of the most common symptoms of such childhood deficiency, known as "fulgral welts", is caused by a failure of the filigree to actually breach the skin, resulting in painful inflammation across the areas where it would normally display.

Due to the nature of the praneumatic system, nasim body odor is heavily correlated to dietary content, and many nasayim are careful to avoid foods that can result in foul emanations. As a result of this mindfulness about the effects of food on presentation, it is common for nasayim to think more about the aesthetics of food than other races, and they can sometimes be as fussy about how a meal is arranged on a plate as they are about how it tastes.

## Biological Variation

Biological variation in the nasim species manifests primarily in traits such as cranial structure, ear size, height and build, filigree display, tail pattern, and fur color. The typical height of an adult nasim is between 1.6 m (5 ft 3 in) and 2.1 m (6 ft 11 in), although this varies significantly depending, among other things, on sex and ethnic origin.

Body type is partly determined by heredity and is also significantly influenced by environmental factors such as diet, exercise, and sleep patterns, especially as an influence in childhood. In addition, populations that have for a long time inhabited specific climates tend to have developed specific phenotypes that are beneficial for surviving in those environments—more tail muscle mass in arboreal populations, denser fur in wetter regions, and a range of minor modifications to the praneumatic system. Tail patterns also seem to vary regionally, though this is more likely to be the result of populations being isolated from one another, rather than true adaptation.

Nasim base skin tone covers a range of light pinks and beiges, but shows little clinal variation. However, as nasayim age, their skin develops dark spots, usually beginning on the abdomen, which grow and spread as they age. While a correlation between exposure to sunlight and more extensive darkening has been shown, it is unlikely that this process is wholly caused by the sun, as it has been observed even among those few nasayim that dwell within the subterranean halls of the Fēthekēng Rādzāng. Perhaps due to the mechanics underlying this change, pigmentation disorders such as melanism and albinism are substantially more common among nasayim than other races.

The two layers of nasim fur range from cool greys, sometimes with an almost bluish tint, to browns and even coppers. Typically, though not universally, the topcoat is darker than the undercoat, but the two often share the same underlying hue. It is uncommon, though not unheard of, for a nasim's top coat and undercoat to be offset in hue, but even in such cases the colors are typically within a certain range of each other. Fur color tends to be hereditary, but the exact mechanism of inheritance is complex enough that it is also not uncommon for nasim offspring to have coats that appear unrelated to either parent's hue—a phenomenon that may be responsible for the historical success of intraspecific brood parasitism.

The pattern of filigree that erupts from a nasim's skin is, like a fingerprint, wholly unique to the individual, with no two nasayim having the exact same pattern. At least some filigree will always be visible on the shoulders, hips, spine, brow, and cheeks, with related growths also taking the place of claws and nails, but the amount of surface area taken up by filigree can vary wildly. While some nasayim may only sprout filigree in those universal areas, it also often extends onto the ears, hands, feet, upper arms, and outer thighs. Rarely, a nasim's arms and legs might be almost entirely covered in filigree, though it has never been recorded extending onto the patagium or tail, nor does it typically intrude into areas with praneumatic vents. The exact color of the filigree is dependent on the metals consumed by the individual nasim, and will therefore change over time if the individual's diet changes substantially.

Nasayim have white sclera and irises that show a wide range of coloration, from deep blues to browns, yellows, and, rarely, pink. Curiously, though the iris does not show any signs of fulgridermal growth, it has been observed that those who consume the shells of the jeweled beetles will sometimes develop a degree of iridescence in their irises. Those nasayim afflicted with pigmentation disorders tend to showcase unusual eye colors: red in the case of albinism, a dull purple in the case of leucism, and pitch black in the case of melanism.

## Psychology

The pattern of nasim encephalization appears consistent with the theory of convergent intelligence, with postnatal brain growth in modern nasayim allowing for extended periods of social learning and language acquisition in juveniles. However, as with most anthropoid races, the increase of brain volume over time affected different areas within the brain unequally, leading to slight behavioral differences between nasayim and other races. The cerebellum, which plays an important role in motor control and executive function, has increased disproportionately, as has the dentate gyrus, which has been related to the spontaneous exploration of novel environments and the formation of spatial memories. As a result, nasayim have unparalleled grace and are readily at ease in new and unfamiliar surroundings.

The differences between the nasim brain and the brains of other anthropoid races have led some to call the nasayim more innately “ambitious” than other races, though others have criticized such assessments as being unquantifiable and prone to a number of biases. Certainly, nasayim are less prone to bias in favor of the familiar, as they will often be comfortable in whatever new scenario presents itself, but such behavior can also lead to the abandonment of successful ventures in pursuit of an ultimately less advantageous novelty. Moreover, it should be stressed that this behavioral trend is merely a species-wide tendency, not an absolute truth, and individual nasayim may be more or less comfortable with the unknown.

### Consciousness and Thought

Like all true sapients, nasayim possess enough self-awareness to recognize themselves in a mirror. By 16 months, most nasim children are aware that the mirror image is not another nasim.

Due to its proportionally larger cerebellum and dentate gyrus, the nasim brain is particularly suited to exploring and navigating new scenarios and learning from those experiences. This capacity, along with the race's natural affinity for travel, leads most nasayim to value action over caution and freedom over security. To the nasim way of thinking, the potential for positive change outweighs the risk of making a mistake—after all, disadvantageous outcomes can be addressed by trying yet another new option. However, this perspective tends to be highly focused on the self, rather than seen as a universal principle, and nasayim in positions of power do not necessarily feel the need to extend their own desire for freedom and improvement to those under their authority.

Because of this focus on the unknown, nasayim tend to approach questions of loyalty from a different direction than some other anthropoids. Simple familiarity and comfort do not necessarily engender long-term commitment from a nasim, especially in the case of more distant or abstract connections. Instead, a nasim's loyalty must be earned through real actions and shared experiences, rather than being assumed from tradition and group membership. However, there is rarely any malice behind such attitudes, and nasayim can sometimes be

surprised and confused if confronted over their perceived disloyalty to a group or cause that they don't see themselves as having any stake in.

## Motivation and Emotion

Due to the ease with which they can adapt to new situations, along with their drive to exploration, nasayim have been variously stereotyped as being calmer or more excitable than the average anthropoid. However, it is potentially more accurate to describe nasayim as being less prone to anxiety, a predisposition that lends itself to the appearance of nonchalance or impulsivity.

This comfort with the unknown generally results in less emphasis on conflict avoidance in the nasim psyche. That is not to say that it is entirely absent, merely that nasayim tend to be more willing to take risks in all areas of life due to their faith in their ability to navigate the possible outcomes. It has also been suggested that the adaptations that allow nasayim to unconsciously track moving objects while airborne themselves may permit members of the race to maintain their focus even in chaotic situations, further reducing the need to avoid conflicts.

While nasayim are motivated in large part by the need for discovery and novelty, happiness is as complex a question for them as it is for any race. In many cases, nasayim associate happiness most strongly with the desire to return. Even the most restless member of the species has certain people, places, and things that they cherish enough to return to on a routine basis, and the loss of such touchstones can be difficult to process even if they have not been seen in years. Some have expressed that it is not merely about something being worth returning to, but the comfort brought about by the knowledge that it will be there upon one's return. This form of security can sometimes lead to possessiveness or even jealousy, especially if another lays claim to the subject of the return during the nasim's absence. When coupled with the race's more casual attitude to questions of loyalty, this possessiveness can seem contradictory and confusing to members of other races, further strengthening the nasim reputation for capriciousness.

## Sexuality and Love

Between their love of novelty and their casual approach to loyalty, nasayim have something of a reputation for being passionate but fickle lovers who throw themselves into new relationships with reckless abandon and then depart once they become bored. While this stereotype is exaggerated, it is true that nasayim are more willing to enter into brief relationships because they place less emphasis on long-term commitments. Similarly, while nasayim can be jealous lovers, their race’s history of opportunistic brood parasitism has left them with a propensity for casual adultery, though social expectations often lead them to reign in such behaviors.

Physical affection is an important part of both sexuality and romance among nasayim, and great emphasis is placed on physical contact even among friends. As a climbing and gliding species, nasayim instinctively associate a firm grasp with a sense of security, and so an affectionate nasim will unconsciously attempt to maintain some kind of grip on the object of their affection.

Often, this urge will manifest itself through the prehensile tail, which may wrap itself around the leg or waist of the nasim's companion.

Tactility is not the only sense important to nasayim, however, and more conscious displays of affection often engage with the race's keen sense of smell. Especially at the outset of a relationship, nasayim tend to fastidiously groom their lovers in order to remove unwanted scents. After the nasim is satisfied with the grooming process, they will then aggressively nuzzle against the subject in order to transfer their own scent. During this nuzzling, it is common for nasayim to more heavily vent their praneumatic gas in order to imbue as much of their scent as possible.

Homosexuality occurs among nasayim at a slightly higher rate than it does in other anthropoids, with multiple theories as to why. According to the biological theory, the relatively minor sexual dimorphism among nasayim—and especially the fact that the reproductive organs of both sexes are housed within identical genital slits—may have kept the species from developing a strong distinction between the sexes in terms of attraction. It has been observed that some male nasayim prefer not to extrude their penises from the genital slit when aroused, instead receiving greater pleasure from stimulation applied to the organ while still within the slit. Penetration of the slit by another male is one of the most common forms of this stimulation, and some have argued that the preference may have originated as a form of reproductive competition: by tricking rivals into inseminating his genital slit instead of a contested female's, a male could increase the likelihood that her offspring would be his.

By contrast, the psychological theory posits a link between homosexuality rate and the race's history of intraspecific brood parasitism. In a case where two females each wished to have their offspring raised by the other, co-parenting may have emerged as the obvious solution to the conflict, with the close proximity and shared responsibility eventually leading to attraction. Alternatively, some have theorized that opportunistic females may have relied on sexual favors to convince their targets to accept their children into the brood.

## Cultural Trends

Like most anthropoids, nasayim are highly social beings and tend to live in complex social groups. Left to their own devices, nasayim generally organize themselves into itinerant bands, rather than large-scale permanent settlements. Nasim cultures tend to share several traits, many of which can be seen as influences in those multi-species cultures with a significant presence of nasayim.

### Gender Roles

While nasayim do display a mild amount of dimorphism, the sexual division of nasayim into male and female has not been significantly marked by a division of roles, norms, and power along gender lines. While the mother does nurse newborns after birth, the historically itinerant nature of the species, combined with the need to carefully manage individual weight in order to

maintain lift, would likely have meant that parents would divide up childcare duties by child, rather than according to artificial categories of cultural responsibility.

## Kinship

Likely due in part to the race's history of brood parasitism, nasayim rarely track lineage in terms of direct descent, instead placing greater emphasis on simple membership in the clan or family group. As parents will opportunistically bond with children entrusted to their care, adoption is a common practice among the nasayim, and orphans are considered a rarity. Nasayim rarely draw a distinction between consanguinity and affinity, treating all familial ties equally.

## Peregrination and Aspiration

Life is a journey, but the destination at the end of that road is not one that inspires much impatience in travelers. While nasayim are driven to keep moving through life, they often see virtue in taking a long, meandering path that trades expedience for experience. One who travels for the sake of the journey itself will always be exactly where they need to be.

While such emphasis on the path over the destination might imply a leisurely attitude towards life, many nasayim also feel an instinctive urge to upward mobility—both literally and figuratively. This urge often manifests itself as a cultural emphasis on achievement or glory: while the journey may be more important than the destination, it is best for the journey to have been memorable when that destination is finally reached. To leave behind a sign of one's passing, either carved into the face of a stone edifice or etched into the history of a nation, is to truly make the journey one's own.

# Ohen

Ohanya, often known colloquially as "firebloods", are a stoichen race originally native to Qažadar. Due to the volatile nature of Qažadar, ohanya never adopted sedentary agriculture as a regular practice, stunting the development of an ohen civilization. Until their migration to Itlnis, ohen communities were uniformly hunter-gatherer societies.

Though circumstances slowed the rise of ohen culture, the ohanya have shown a unique affinity for acts of creation and art. Guided by intense passion and sudden inspiration, ohen artisans have been driving forces behind some of the greatest works of art and artifice in the modern world.

## History

The history of the ohanya as a species is somewhat unclear, as ohen communities on Qažadar relayed their history primarily through oral tradition. These traditions are generally concerned primarily with the history and folk heroes of the community, rather than the race as a whole.

### Origin

While ohen oral traditions say little of the origin of the species, they usually depict the advent of the ohanya as occurring at around the same time as that of the efreet, with the two races initially standing on something of an equal footing. Efreet accounts, by contrast, place the development of ohanya long after the original construction of the first Birinšar under the legendary efreet ruler Nuradeš. However, in light of the self-aggrandizing nature of efreet histories and the relationship between the two races, it is likely that the efreet account was fabricated in order to support their views on ohanya.

In either case, both accounts agree that the efreet treated ohanya as fundamentally inferior creatures. As the efreet empire grew larger and more decadent, the ohanya were eventually relegated to the level of animals, with some efreet keeping ohanya as pets and others hunting them for sport. Some accounts indicate that the efreet may actually have bred captive ohanya for desired traits, such as horn style, obedience, or size.

### Migration to Itlnis

Judging from the surviving oral traditions from Qažadar, ohanya had developed full behavioral modernity, including language, music, and other cultural universals, before the Stoichen Migrations. As the migrations occurred before the Shattering, it has proven difficult to establish how long ago they took place. Ohen traditions regarding the migration itself are vague and sometimes contradictory, but most speak of it as being preceded by visions and dreams of a peaceful, stable world, free of efreet influence. If these visions did occur, they could imply that planar convergence, divine intervention, or a combination of the two may have played a role in the Qažadarni migrations. Efreet records of this time period were kept in the first Birinšar, and were lost after the War of the Shattered.

The nature of early interaction between the migrant ohen and the anthropoid species native to Itlnis has been a source of long-standing controversy, due to the loss of historical records in the Shattering. In many cases, only the ohen oral traditions remain, and it is probable that ohen depiction of other races would have been warped by the fact that the only intelligent race with which the ohanya had previously had contact was the abusive and malicious efreet. It is most likely that both the ohanya and the native races of Itlnis were initially suspicious of each other at first contact, with some races being more or less accepting of the new species. The ohen traditions portray elves as particularly xenophobic, which is consistent with remaining historical records of the elves and their eventual fate.

While some ohen communities may have remained on Qažadar, the vast majority of ohanya made the migration to Itlnis and adapted to a diverse array of environments. Modern ohanya are spread globally, with a dominant presence in Karatšja and Vanska, a significant presence in Hanāša and Tirdu li-Dar, and a minority presence in Hüliš, Sekál, and Tšu Šijāng.

## Habitat and Population

Early ohen settlements could be either permanent, temporary, or some combination of the two, depending upon the mobility of the community and the volatility of environmental factors. Mobile communities typically constructed shelters using impermanent building materials or used natural formations for shelter where they were available.

Though ohanya, like many Qažadarni species, require very little water to survive, proximity to a somewhat stable source of water was often a determining factor in whether or not a permanent or semi-permanent settlement would be established. It was not for the water itself that these locations were so important, but its capacity to support wild vegetation and local animal life.

After the migration to Itlnis, the ohen population increased substantially, as many of the perils they had been forced to contend with on Qažadar were no longer present. The species also adapted to a variety of different habitats, from the snowy mountains of Vanska to the lush jungles of Hanāša.

## Biology

### Anatomy and Physiology

Many aspects of ohen physiology are closely homologous to corresponding physiological aspects of other anthropoid races. They follow the basic anthropoidal body plan, with two legs, the torso, two arms, the neck, and the head, and share the same basic bodily systems. Like most anthropoids, however, ohanya have several anatomical traits that set them apart from other races.

The most prominent of these traits is the fiery mane that covers an ohen's neck and scalp, often extending onto the upper chest and shoulders. This mane burns as hot as a normal fire, and

provides illumination as such, but is influenced by the ohen's personality and emotional state. The usual height and coverage of the flames differs by individual, and can change over the ohen's life. Extreme emotions can also affect the mane, with anger and passion stoking the flames higher, while depression and melancholy can reduce them to a low burn.

The flames can also be temporarily extinguished by a minor effort on the ohen's part, which has been compared to the amount of effort necessary to close one's eyes and keep them shut. Extinguishing a mane and keeping it extinguished has been reported to result in minor psychological discomfort for the ohen in question, and can lead to anxiety if sustained for an extended period of time. In this, it has again been compared to keeping one's eyes shut, as ohanya feel somehow cut off from the world while the mane is extinguished. Ohanya do, however, extinguish their manes to sleep, and an ohen's mane will usually extinguish naturally if she loses consciousness. The mane can also be extinguished by means that would normally put out a fire, such as smothering it or submerging it in water. While this does not produce as much discomfort as keeping the mane extinguished manually, it is still considered uncomfortable.

The exact mechanism by which the mane burns is unclear, but it appears that the relevant areas contain a modified form of ignis vascula, which may serve as the point of generation for the flames. It seems likely that the fire is fueled by the metabolism of ambient magic,[1] but no conclusive evidence for this theory has been found.

The ignis vascula are another distinguishing trait of the ohen, and are responsible for the unique skin patterns that characterize ohen appearance. A part of the circulatory system, the ignis vascula seem to have originated as a form of thermoregulation, as ohanya lack sweat glands or any other form of evaporative cooling. Rather than actually cooling the body, the ignis vascula actively radiate heat, making the skin of an ohen warm to the touch. This process produces a faint glow that, while not sufficient to provide any illumination outside of the body, causes the ignis vascula themselves to appear as a flowing, fiery tracery on the ohen's skin. For the most part, heat venting through the ignis vascula is controlled unconsciously.

In addition to the standard ignis vascula, four major modifications can be found in the general area of the head. The ignis palpebra, which runs along the top of the eye, appears to have served a primarily social function in allowing ohanya to determine the direction in which their companions were looking. The ignis trichos, which starts in the suprasternal notch and runs along the upper chest, shoulders, neck, and scalp, is theorized to be the source of the fiery mane. The ignis ajna, which starts in the center of the supratrochlear notch and runs upwards into the area of ignis trichos between the two greater horns, has historically had spiritual significance and may serve as a focal point when drawing on magical energy. Finally, the ignis ephelis, which displays as a series of freckle-like spots splashed across the face, appears to be a case of neoteny, and may have developed through sexual selection.

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[1] See "Biological Adaptations to Ambient Magic"

The fifth major modification of the ignis vascula, the ignis phalanx, is found in the hands and feet and runs more densely than other ignis vascula, producing a more solid coloration that usually tends towards “hotter” tones. Moreover, the ignis phalanx is integrated into a skeletal structure unique to the ohen race. Rather than the phalanx bones common to other anthropoids, ohen phalanges are actually made up of two separate bones connected by an interosseous membrane. While this structure might be expected to display less structural integrity than a single bone, the phalanges are also composed of a modified osseous tissue that incorporates iron sulphides such as greigite. The transition from the standard osseous tissue to this iron-based tissue begins in the carpals and tarsals, with the proximal phalanges being the first bones to be composed entirely of this material.

While most ignis vascula are placed primarily at the surface of the skin, the ignis phalanx also run closely around the phalanges, passing through the interosseous membranes to wrap around the bones. Unlike most vascular venting, the venting of heat through the ignis phalanx is under the conscious control of the ohen, allowing them to increase or decrease heat output. The ignis phalanx thus form one of the most potent natural defenses of ohanya: by increasing the amount of heat vented, an ohen can imbue physical strikes with searing heat. While the sheer density of the ignis phalanx is primarily responsible for this defense, the presence of iron sulphides in the phalanges enhances the effect, as the iron-based tissue has higher heat conductivity than standard osseous tissue. The unusual structure of ohen phalanges serves to maximize the surface area of bone that could be heated by the ignis phalanx, thereby increasing the effectiveness of this defense.

The ohen skull structure is heavily informed by the presence of two sets of horns: one set extending from the frontal bone, and a second that, unusually, extends from the temporal bone. The larger, primary horns that extend from the frontal bone curve back over the head before turning upwards. The upward turn occurs roughly halfway through the horn on the female, but closer to three-quarters of the way through the shorter horns of the male. The smaller, secondary horns of the temporal bone are integrated into the ohen ear structure and simply curve upwards. In addition to the actual bone of the horns themselves, it appears that their presence is responsible for the existence of the supratrochlear notch, as well as the sharp definition of the upper edge of the ocular orbits. The shorter, less heavy horns of the male may account for why the male’s supratrochlear notch is more rounded than that of the female.

Ohanya are notably taller than most other anthropoids, and have a long, slender body type. This distinction is especially visible in the arms and hands, which are disproportionately long when compared to those of other anthropoid races. In fact, ohen arms are long enough that ohanya can adopt a quadruped stance without serious difficulty, and can move around in such a position with comparative ease. Whether there is any function behind this ability is a topic of some debate, but it is not uncommon to see ohanya clamber around on all fours when moving around a cluttered area.

Ohen legs terminate in hooves and display an unguligrade stance, and a short tail remains at the base of the spine. Due in part to the developed musculature of their legs, ohanya can run faster than the majority of anthropoids.

It is estimated that the average worldwide height for an adult ohen female is about 218 cm (7 feet 2 inches), while the worldwide average height for adult ohen males is about 206 cm (6 feet 9 inches). Ohanya experience no shrinkage of stature as they age, but the bodies of the extremely aged become more slender and fragile. The average mass of an adult ohen is 68-78 kg (150-172 lbs) for males and 80-94 kg (176-207 lbs) for females. Despite being mammals, ohanya possess no hair anywhere on their bodies. As is the case with most creatures native to Qažadar, ohen blood is red in hue.

## Mating and Life Cycle

As with other mammals, ohen reproduction takes place as internal fertilization by sexual intercourse. However, unlike some other anthropoids, ohanya do not undergo hidden estrus. Instead, ohanya are seasonal breeders, entering a rutting period in mid-summer. While ohanya can experience arousal and engage in sexual activities outside of the rut, there is little biological drive to do so, and conception is exceedingly unlikely.

During the rut, both males and females undergo a shift in the display of their manes and ignis vascula. In females, the flames of the mane grow higher, usually extending significantly beyond the tips of her horns, and all of her ignis vascula intensify. In males, the mane burns lower, with the scalp clearly visible through the flames, and only the ignis palpebra intensifies.

In addition to these shifts in display, ohanya undergo several physiological changes during the rut. In the female, scent glands in the armpit and crotch begin to give off a smoky scent and the larynx swells, lowering the tone of her voice and allowing her to bugle. In the male, the genitals, which are normally proportionately smaller than those of other anthropoids, swell and begin to display faint ignis vascula.

Changes in behavior also occur during the rut. Females become more aggressive, often responding to stressors by tossing their heads in a manner that draws attention to the size of their horns. This head-tossing behavior, also known as “flaring”, is still common among ohanya during the rut, though modern ohanya rarely go so far as to literally lock horns. Females may also begin to bugle during the rut. In non-sapient ungulates, bugles are directed at potential mates in order to draw their attention to the bugler, and at potential rivals in order to establish dominance and ownership of the bugler’s chosen mate or mates. Among modern ohanya, some of this functionality is maintained—ohanya who are sexually attracted to females often display signs of arousal at the sound of a bugling female, while ohanya who are sexually attracted to males and not to females will display signs of stress—but it is generally considered rude to simply bugle at passers-by. Instead, bugling is generally incorporated into the courtship process as a type of “love song” used in private conversations.

Males, by contrast, become docile during the rut, often serving as a calming influence on their mates. Once a male has been selected by a mate, he will usually perform physical displays of affection for his partner, such as petting, stroking, and holding, throughout the rut. Males may also wear perfumes during the rut, a behavior that some believe to have its origins in self-anointing behavior similar to that demonstrated by other ungulates. However, as the usage of perfumes varies culturally, and is not performed at all by some individuals, others contend that it is a social, not biological, phenomenon.

After fertilization and implantation, gestation occurs within the female's uterus, and the changes brought about by the rut slowly reverse. During the week immediately following conception, the female's scent glands give off a pheromone that also brings her mates out of rut so that competitors cannot take advantage of their docile state. Even if an ohen does not successfully mate, they will come out of rut within 20 to 45 days.

Ohen gestation occurs over a period of six months, after which time the fully grown fetus is birthed from the mother's body and breathes independently for the first time. Ohen children are unique in that, if the mother chooses to take multiple mates, traits of more than one father may be present in a single child. The mechanism behind this is unclear, but may be linked to the slightly higher incidence of multiple births among ohanya when compared to other anthropoid races.

Ohen infants are typically 3-4 kg (6-9 pounds) in weight and 65-75 cm (26-30 inches) in height at birth. The ignis vascula display of a newborn ohen takes a form more similar to the ignis ephelis, covering the body with small, freckle-like spots of heat and color. In most cases, the display resolves into the more familiar vein patterns within two months, though there are some recorded cases in which the process took up to half a year. Though capable of walking within the first day of life, ohen infants are otherwise helpless at birth and continue to grow for some years, typically reaching sexual maturity at 11 to 13 years of age. Males continue to develop physically until around the age of 16, whereas female development continues until around age 18. The ohen life span can be split into the standard anthropoid stages of life, with horn growth beginning in infancy. Ohen females do not undergo menopause, but the biological drive of the rut starts to weaken later in life, a phenomenon that is generally considered to be a sign of the onset of old age.

For various reasons, including biological causes, female ohanya live on average about three years longer than their male counterparts – the average life expectancy at birth of a female is estimated at 75.2 years compared to 72.1 for a male. Some ohanya occasionally live into their late seventies; higher ages have been claimed, but they are not well substantiated.

## Diet

Ohanya are omnivorous, capable of consuming a wide variety of plant and animal material. Varying with available food sources in regions of habitation, ohen groups have adopted a range of diets, from nearly purely vegetarian to primarily carnivorous.

Current prevailing theories hold that early ohanya were true foragers, rather than nomadic herbivores. As such, they would have combined stationary food sources (such as fruits, grains, fungi, and insect larvae) with wild game that would have to be hunted and killed in order to be consumed. For obvious reasons, it is assumed that ohanya have used fire to prepare and cook food since fairly early in their development. It was only after the migration to Itlnis that ohanya were exposed to true agriculture, which substantially altered their diet.

In general, ohanya can survive for two to eight weeks without food, depending on stored body fat. Survival without water, by contrast, has been recorded at over two months. In general, ohanya are in much greater danger of water intoxication than dehydration, and it is possible for them to over-hydrate from the water content of some foods. For this reason, dried food is especially popular among ohanya, as are beverages that dehydrate the body.

As iron sulphides are used in the osseous tissue of ohen phalanges, ohanya require more iron and sulfur in their diet than other anthropoids. In addition to the normal effects of anemia, an ohen who does not receive enough iron may experience bone loss in their hands and feet, leaving their digits brittle and prone to breaking. In some cases, the bodies of ohanya suffering from chronic anemia have adapted by replacing the iron-based osseous tissue with normal, calcium-based osseous tissue. However, during this transition period, the heterogeneous composition of the bones makes them less structurally sound and more prone to fracture.

## Biological Variation

Biological variation in the ohen species manifests primarily in traits such as cranial structure, horn shape, eye color, mane area, height and build, skin color, and ignis vascula display. The typical height of an adult ohen is between 1.9 m (6 ft 3 in) and 2.4 m (7 ft 10 in), although this varies significantly depending, among other things, on sex and ethnic origin. Body type is partly determined by heredity and is also significantly influenced by environmental factors such as diet, exercise, and sleep patterns, especially as an influence in childhood. In addition, populations that have for a long time inhabited specific climates tend to have developed specific phenotypes that are beneficial for surviving in those environments—lessened heat exchange through the ignis vascula in colder regions, increased need for water and thereby resistance to water intoxication in wet regions, and high lung capacities at high altitudes. Similarly, skin tone varies clinally with “warmer” skin tones in hotter areas—where the ignis vascula must be more active in order to prevent overheating—and darker, “cooler” skin tones in colder or less sunny regions.

Ohen skin tone ranges from a warm reddish-brown to a cooler tone closer to black. In cases of albinism, the ignis vascula, no longer obscured by skin pigmentation, can cause an ohen’s skin to appear as a deep, rich red. It appears that skin darkening is an adaptation that developed as a means of regulating the heat exchange of the ignis vascula, with darker coloration resulting in more heat retention and redder skin allowing more heat to be radiated out of the body. As a result, albino ohanya often have to wear heavier clothing than normal in order to prevent losing too much heat. Skin pigmentation of modern ohanya is clinally distributed across the world, and in general correlates with the standard temperature of a particular geographic area.

Ohen skin has also demonstrated a limited capacity to darken in response to prolonged exposure to lower temperatures.

The ignis vascula display may be the highest-variance biological structure of the ohen race. While skin tone and other traits are often distributed clinally or ethnically, the patterns of the ignis vascula appear to be a wholly individual phenomenon, with high variance even between close family members. While major vessels of the circulatory system are nearly always in the same location on other species, two ohanya may have their major ignis vascula in entirely different locations. One might have many thin vessels on her arms and legs, with a few strong, intense vessels on her chest and back, while a second might have her strong vessels on her limbs and her chest and back covered with a thin tracery of vessels. Other than the absence of an ignis palpebra in some ethnicities, no correlation has been found between the locations of major ignis vascula and ethnicity or sex. Whether there is a purpose behind the observed variance has yet to be discovered.

Ohen horn shape varies by individual, but some variance can be accounted for by sex and ethnic origin. Most obviously, males tend to have smaller horns that stay close to the skull, while females have large, sweeping horns that curve upwards and away from the skull about halfway through their length. The reason for this difference is debated, but, as ohanya historically tended towards matriarchal communities, females may have engaged in more dominance challenges than males. It is also possible that females developed their prominent horns in order to more effectively defend their offspring. In some ethnic groups, the primary horns' final inwards curve may be more pronounced, or a more prominent initial outwards curve may be present. Less overall variance has been observed in the secondary horns, presumably due to their inclusion in the structure of the ear.

While the actual height and intensity of the flames of an ohen's mane seems to be determined by psychological factors, the actual area covered varies biologically, with the placement of the ignis trichos being correlated to both sex and ethnicity. In males, the mane occasionally extends into the face from above the ear, usually remaining behind the cheekbone and trailing off about halfway down the face. While this extrusion of the mane into the face has not been recorded in female ohanya, the manes of some females have been observed to extend into the supratrochlear notch, partially or wholly covering the ignis ajna. In addition, the manes of some ethnic groups extend onto the torso, down the back of the spine in females and down the sternum in males.

The sclera of ohanya is almost always black, but their irises can show a range of coloration, mostly within the warmer shades. At birth, most ohanya have red eyes, with pigmentation slowly beginning to produce pigmentation over the course of the first month. The most common eye colors among adult ohanya are yellow and orange, with a light brown showing up occasionally and red showing up more rarely still. From this, it has been suggested that the natural structure of the ohen iris would tend towards a reddish color, with the actual color of the eye resulting from the concentration of a primarily yellow pigment.

# Psychology

The pattern of ohen encephalization appears consistent with the theory of convergent intelligence, with postnatal brain growth in modern ohanya allowing for extended periods of social learning and language acquisition in juveniles. However, as with most anthropoid races, the increase of brain volume over time affected different areas within the brain unequally, leading to slight behavioral differences between ohanya and other races. The parietal lobes, which play important roles in integrating sensory information and in object manipulation, have increased disproportionately, as has the cingulate cortex, which has been related to emotion formation and learning. As a result, ohanya have a natural proficiency for tool use and construction and have an intuition-driven approach to problem solving.

The differences between the ohen brain and the brains of other anthropoid races have led some to call the ohanya more innately “creative” than other races, though whether or not the observed differences are truly significant enough to be considered worth categorization is a topic still in debate. That ohanya are guided more by intuition than by logic is a more accepted assessment, though it should be stressed that this is not to say that ohanya are incapable of logic, but simply that they tend more towards intuitive reasoning on average.

## Consciousness and Thought

Like all true sapients, ohanya possess enough self-awareness to recognize themselves in a mirror, and it is typical of their accelerated development that an ohen child can be expected to reach this recognition within 10 months.

Due to its proportionally larger parietal lobes, the ohen brain is particularly suited to the integration of sensory information. This capacity, combined with the greater emphasis on intuition and emotion typical of the ohen mind, leads most ohanya to value their own experiences and interpretations more highly than abstract information. From an ohen perspective, life is a supremely individual experience. Subjectivity is a common theme in ohen philosophy, and, while outside knowledge is not rejected, it is usually considered less telling than an actual experience.

Because of this focus on individuality and subjectivity, ohanya are often resistant to structures and modes of thought that seek to categorize individuals based on specific traits. To the ohen way of thinking, you cannot arrive at an understanding of an individual simply by taking the sum of labels that are applied to them. Instead, an individual must be seen as a complete whole, with traits and experiences contributing to their development, but not serving as a form of definition.

## Motivation and Emotion

Ohanya demonstrate a primarily emotion-driven existence, relying more heavily on the formation of emotions and learning through feeling than some other anthropoids. Studies of ohen behavior have contributed greatly to the understanding of the role of the cingulate cortex, which is more developed in the ohen brain than in those of other races.

The greater emotional drive of the ohen psyche, along with the higher valuation of learning through experience, has a subtle effect on ohen motivation. Conflict avoidance, while still present, is tempered by the belief that the actual nature of a conflict cannot be understood if the conflict is not experienced. So, while ohanya will avoid conflict if possible, their attitude towards the conflict itself will tend towards one of curiosity if they are unable to avoid it. This curiosity is usually present only the first time that a type of conflict is experienced—subsequent conflicts of the sort will be treated as known quantities. As ohanya tend to experience many of the most common types of conflicts in their childhood, this trait is only occasionally relevant among adults.

Happiness, as with all races, is a complex matter among ohanya. Among the young, the prevailing attitude is that one needs to experience as many things as possible in order to understand what leads to happiness. After accumulating experiences, however, many ohanya come to the conclusion that it is the emotional states themselves, not necessarily the temporal things that cause them, that ought to be pursued. Emotional health is therefore a major concern of ohanya, and they will often value it above physical health if necessary.

## Sexuality and Love

Ohen sexuality is subject to a number of common misconceptions among other races, most of them surrounding the rut. The popular depictions of the ohen rut as a time of chaos and mindless sexual activity is inaccurate in the extreme, as is the notion that ohanya are especially promiscuous in other parts of the year due to their inability to conceive.

In fact, ohanya retain all of their mental faculties during the rut. While they display some changes in behavior, their capacity for logic and reason is not directly impacted. The primary psychological changes brought about by the rut are an increase in emotional intensity and an increased libido. During the rut, ohanya become aroused more easily, and sexual pleasure is reportedly greater. However, like any anthropoid race, ohanya are fully capable of ignoring sexual arousal to engage in other activities. Among many ohanya, the rut is actually viewed as something of an inconvenience. Females might find themselves accidentally bugling while talking, and males can trap themselves in awkward social situations by attempting to comfort complete strangers. These embarrassing mistakes are most common during the first rut that an ohen experiences after reaching sexual maturity. On top of the awkwardness of the changes brought about by the rut, the intense emotions of the season can cause ohanya to burst into tears or explode into disproportionate anger. It is a stressful time of year for ohanya who do not intend to have children, and many are relieved when it is over.

Outside of the rut, ohen sexual behavior is dictated more by emotional desire than instinctual lust. Rather than mindless indulgence, such sexual activity tends to be informed by cultural norms and the relationships with the other participants. While it is true that ohanya are more sexually open than some anthropoids that undergo hidden estrus, sex still often has great emotional significance. Many ohanya treat sexual activity as an affirmation of an emotional

bond between individuals, and close friendships can include sexual elements without necessarily being considered romantic.

Ohanya tend towards passionate romantic love, though not always limited to a single partner. Evidence suggests that early ohanya were polyandrous, with a single female taking multiple male mates. While pair bonding is more common in modern ohanya, polygamous relationships still occur occasionally. Interestingly, as ohen sexual instincts are muted outside of the rut, it can be argued that the existence of these lasting romantic relationships among ohanya provides evidence against romantic affection being wholly rooted in sexuality.

Homosexuality occurs among ohanya at roughly the same rate that it does in other anthropoids, with a few notable unique behaviors. In polygamous relationships, it has been observed that normally heterosexual individuals of the same sex will sometimes engage in sexual activity. It appears that being in a shared relationship can cause attraction to result where it might not usually, as these individuals reported no pressure or intent other than what they normally experienced with partners of the opposite sex.

The most interesting phenomenon associated with ohen sexuality, however, is known as rut inversion. During the rut, an individual who displays rut inversion undergoes the changes in display, behavior, and physiology normally associated with individuals of the opposite sex. Rut inversion does not seem to have a single cause: some individuals simply display rut inversion from birth, while others start displaying it later in life. It has been observed that one member of a homosexual relationship sometimes begins to develop rut inversion, but it is also common for both members of such a relationship to maintain the standard rut, and not all individuals who begin displaying rut inversion late in life are homosexual. The exact causes and factors behind rut inversion are unknown, and it is treated more as a rare quirk than as a disorder.

## Cultural Trends

Like most anthropoids, ohanya are highly social beings and tend to live in complex social groups. However, without the presence of other races to unite them, ohanya tend towards smaller groups, rather than large nations. Ohen cultures tend to share several traits, most of which can be seen as influences in those multi-species cultures with a significant presence of ohanya.

### Gender Roles

As with most visibly dimorphic races, the sexual division of ohanya into male and female has been historically marked by a corresponding division of roles, norms, and power. Cultural differences by gender have often been believed to have arisen naturally out of a division of reproductive labor. For example, the fact that females, not males, choose their mates during the rut may have led to their more dominant position in early ohen culture. In addition, while fathers are usually responsible for non-feeding child care, ohen children instinctually follow their mothers around for the first few months of life and mimic her behaviors. The ensuing

cultural responsibility for leading children through early life is theorized to have developed into a greater cultural responsibility for leading the group.

## Kinship

Among ohanya, kinship groups tend to be valued most highly in the line of direct descent, and are usually traced in the matrilineal line. However, larger descent groups are still often acknowledged, primarily in the context of other lines of descent that are linked to one's matrilineal line. Rather than a single unit, clans or extended families are thus conceived of as several related lines, with connections being equal parts blood relation and diplomacy.

## Artwork and Storytelling

Possibly stemming from their psychological emphasis on individual experience and self-expression, ohanya tend to place high value on art and performance. Representative visual art and fictional composition are often regarded as the only ways to properly record emotions, as a simple record of facts cannot fully evoke an individual's emotional experiences. Similarly, performances, be they musical or dramatic, are viewed as a means to convey, explore, and interpret the emotions of both the composer and the performer.

Among ohanya, storytelling is considered to be a necessary skill, as it combines the record-keeping aspect of composition with the exploratory aspect of performance. All ohanya tell stories, both their own and those that they have heard from others. On Qažadar, this storytelling tradition led to the development of elaborate oral histories, which are responsible for most contemporary knowledge of ohen history.

# Suros

Surai, often known colloquially as “waterbloods”, are a stoichen race originally native to Baťrasa. Written records indicate that surai may have developed a form of sedentary agriculture several millennia before their migration to Itlnis, but the specifics of their practices have raised questions as to whether or not they can be truly be considered “sedentary” agriculture, as well as debates on the precise definition of such. In either case, the cultivation practices of surai on Baťrasa allowed for the growth of early civilization.

Though there are no longer any true oceans on Itlnis, the surai have demonstrated remarkable adaptability, adjusting to a predominantly terrestrial lifestyle with little difficulty. Aided by near-perfect memories and sharp reasoning skills, suros scholars have been responsible for some of the most significant historical and scientific discoveries that the world has seen.

## History

While attempts have been made to reconstruct a historical timeline for the surai as a race, these projects have been repeatedly frustrated by the nature of suros life on Baťrasa. Since different leviathans might have different habits and paths, and these might change as the creature aged, suros communities did not share a standard “year” time-unit. As such, piecing together the histories recorded by different groups is a maddeningly complicated and imprecise task.

### Origin

While it is often unclear what races arose when, suros histories and creation myths from their time on Baťrasa make it clear that the marids were already well-established by the time that modern surai came into being.  Indeed, many such stories begin with a variation on the same basic concept: “We opened our eyes, and the hunters were already here.” While the marids have been generally unwilling to open their archive doors to mortal scholars, several individuals have confirmed that their accounts agree with those of the suros in this matter.

Suros tales paint the marids as cruel, vicious hunters that worshipped a dark god named Apoleť, whose constant demand for blood drove the marids to hunt both surai and the leviathans upon which they lived. Marids have made no attempt to deny that they hunted the suros and their homes—some even still showcase various trophies and curiosities made from suros bone—but claim that they hunted for food, not in the service of any god.

### Migration to Itlnis

Surviving written records from their time on Baťrasa make it clear that surai had developed full behavioral modernity, including language, music, and other cultural universals, before the Stoichen Migrations. While surai records of this period are more complete than those of the other stoichen races, significant portions are still missing, and the inconsistency in time units used by the surai on Baťrasa has rendered them useless for the purpose of identifying the time

period during which the migrations took place. Moreover, most of the written material concerning the migration itself was lost in the Shattering, leaving only a fragmented narrative of the events.

From what has survived, it seems that some entity or entities—some claim that it was the leviathans—spoke or "sang" to the surai of calmer waters, on a world where the hunters could not reach them. Following this revelation, some of the accounts state that the surai were encouraged to swim down into the dark depths of Baťrasa, where hidden waterways led them to the oceans of Itlnis. If these records are accurate, they would strongly support the "planar convergence" theory behind the Stoichen Migrations, as they describe travel between the two worlds as a continuous passage. As usual, marid records are unavailable for comparison, and even sources normally willing to discuss their contents have refused to comment.

As the surai spent much of their time in the water, they most likely came into contact with the native anthropoid species of Itlnis only rarely. Conflicts between the migrant stoichen and other races seem to have been rare, though few records of this time period survived the Shattering. Curiously, some suros writings speak of another aquatic species, described as possessing an anthropic top half joined to the tail of a fish, but such mentions are rare, and none of the surviving records of other species attest the existence of such a race.

While some suros communities may have remained on Baťrasa, the vast majority of surai made the migration to Itlnis and adapted to a diverse array of environments. Modern surai are spread globally, with a dominant presence in Hüliš and Vanska, a significant present in Sekál and Tšu Šijāng, and a minority presence in Hanāša, Karatšja, and Tirdu li-Dar.

## Habitat and Population

Early suros settlements were both permanent and mobile: they made their homes on the backs of the great leviathans that swim through the waters of Baťrasa. The relationship between surai and the leviathans is agreed to have been a symbiotic one, though opinions remain divided as to whether it should be classified as mutualistic, commensalistic, or parasitic. Studies of the leviathans that survive today have shown that, while the presence of structures and buildings on the creatures can produce additional drag, a leviathan is not seriously affected by the mere presence of life on its surface. Much of the debate now centers on the "agricultural" techniques practiced by the surai, which seem to have involved growing food directly in the skin of the leviathans. As these techniques have been lost to the ages, however, it is impossible to tell what "crops" the surai were growing, much less the precise means by which they did so.

It is still somewhat unclear whether Baťrasuan leviathans are members of a single species that displays substantial biological variation, members of several species that share similar qualities, or purely individual creatures that are not "born" in the traditional manner and cannot be classified into species, as is the case with the Qažadarni phoenix. What is known is that, taxonomical considerations aside, each leviathan follows a unique path through the waters of Baťrasa, usually a circuit that repeats regularly. As such, it is difficult to make any

generalizations about suros settlements, as even the “seasons” experienced by a community would differ from leviathan to leviathan. Some leviathans might surface only once every cycle, while others might spend much of their time either at or just beneath the surface.

After the migration to Itlnis, the suros population seems to have remained similar to what it had been on Baťrasa, though there may have been slight initial fluctuations as they adapted to life without the leviathans. However, the population decreased sharply during the Shattering, with many lives lost as the sea floors cracked and the oceans boiled away. The population has recovered since then, however, and has adapted to a variety of different habitats, from the rivers and marshes of Hüliš to the wind-swept steppes of Tšu Šijāng.

## Biology

### Anatomy and Physiology

As is common, many aspects of suros physiology are closely homologous to corresponding physiological aspects of other anthropoid races. They follow the basic anthropoidal body plan, with two legs, the torso, two arms, the neck, and the head, and share the same basic bodily systems. Like most anthropoids, however, surai have several anatomical traits that set them apart from other races.

Of all these traits, the one to which the surai tend to ascribe the most cultural significance is the sara, commonly called the “third eye.” While it does indeed look like a sideways eye placed in the center of the forehead—complete with an “iris” and “pupil”—the sara is actually an entirely different kind of sensory organ: an electroreceptor. For the most part, passive electrolocation is performed by ampullary electroreceptors found in the iris of the sara, which sense the weak bioelectric fields generated by other animals. The purpose of the pearl-like pupil is not entirely clear, though it has been proposed that it might contain a high density of electroreceptors derived directly from the trigeminal nerves. While this electroreception normally only functions at a useful level underwater, some especially sensitive surai claim to be aware of their surroundings through their sara even on land.

Culturally, the sara is often given great importance as a spiritual and intellectual channel through which one can communicate with spaces of higher consciousness, and it is often associated with religious visions, clairvoyance, the ability to observe chakras and auras, precognition, and out-of-body experiences. In some traditions, the importance of the sara is literal, with its ability to sense electric fields being believed to possess the capacity to tune into the “current” of the universe and gain a solid foundation on which to reach more advanced levels of thought, while other traditions focus more on the organ as a metaphor for non-dualistic thinking.

Curiously, the sara has a parallel in the ignis ajna possessed by ohanya. Like surai, ohanya have historically ascribed spiritual significance to the ignis ajna. Its lack of sensory function, however, has led to very different traditions: instead of serving as a gateway to enlightenment, the ignis ajna is believed to serve as a focal point through which the individual draws magical energy

from their surroundings into the self. The passage is effectively reversed, with surai believing that they can reach *outwards* through the sara, while ohanya believe that the ignis ajna allows them to draw energy *inwards*. Moreover, there are distinct structural differences between the two, most notably the fact that the sara is positioned over an opening in the skull similar to an eye socket, while the supratrochlear notch in which the ignis ajna resides is simply an indentation in the skull. Though many have looked for a reason or meaning behind this similarity, no relationship between the sara and the ignis ajna has been found.

While other adaptations may be more complex, the most visually striking of the suros traits are the illicia. These long filaments consist of transparent membranes filled completely with pure water, and generally terminate in bioluminescent patches known as escae. If the membrane is damaged or severed, an illicium is capable of complete regeneration, including the growth of a new esca. While the membrane contains no visible musculature, surai can move their illicia in any direction, though they are not capable of complex motions such as grasping or holding a complex shape. Similarly, surai can control the brightness of their escae with as much ease as controlling one's facial expressions. Given the bioluminescent esca, the regenerative capacity, and the mobility of the illicia, it is generally accepted that the illicia originally served as lures for the purpose of catching prey. Two main types of illicia exist: the illicia trichos and the illicia cauda.

The illicia trichos, which are found primarily on the head, now play much more of a role in nonverbal communication than in predation. In close conversation, the way that the illicia move and the changes in the intensity of the escae have been likened to body language and blushing. Moreover, when underwater, the illica trichos and escae can be used in a sort of long-distance sign language for nonverbal communication. While some of this functionality can be replicated on land, the lack of water to support the illicia results in a lessened range of motion and thereby a lessened vocabulary. As surai age, the membranes of their illicia trichos begin to weaken and "unravel," sometimes even herniating to a mild extent. Newly-regenerated illicia will initially be as strong as they were in the suros's prime, but they will weaken faster and reach the same state as the other illicia in a comparatively short time.

The illicia cauda, which are found in two rows on the dorsal side of the tail, see much more of the "traditional" use as lures. They are also one of the main forms of sexual dimorphism in surai: females have smaller and more numerous illicia cauda than males. Unlike illicia trichos, the membranes of illicia cauda do not usually "unravel" as surai age, though some exceptions exist.

Bizarrely, examinations of the water contained within the illicia have shown that it is not drawn from water recently consumed by the suros, but instead appears to be a mixture of any and all water she has ever been in contact with. While it was originally suggested that the water was simply accumulated over an individual's life, subsequent tests have revealed that the water contained in a newly-regenerated illicium is still drawn from the same admixture of waters. It has been proposed that illicium water may be generated through metabolism of magic, and the

mixed nature of the water could well be linked to the clarity and tenacity of suros memories—though whether as a cause or effect is still unclear.

One of the most unique traits of the surai, both among anthropoids and among other creatures, is their complex respiratory system. While surai are capable of breathing both water and air indefinitely, it is taxonomically incorrect to call them amphibians, and they are incapable of any form of cutaneous respiration. Instead, they make use of a combined lung-and-gill complex that switches between the methods of gas exchange as needed.

Suros lungs are divided into two chambers: the superior chamber and the inferior chamber. These chambers are separated by the alveolar glottis, which is opened when the suros is breathing air and closed when breathing water. Unlike in the lungs of most anthropoids, the bronchus leading into the superior chamber—which is also known as the "respiratory sac"—does not itself branch into secondary bronchi and bronchioles, as the chamber contains no alveoli. This branching occurs on the other side of the alveolar glottis, with the opening protected by the glottis leading directly into the secondary bronchi in the inferior chamber—which is also known as the "true lung"—where the alveoli can perform gas exchange normally.

The respiratory sac also connects to the gills through an opening protected by the gill glottis. In contrast with the alveolar glottis, the gill glottis is closed when breathing air or inhaling water and opened when exhaling water. The gill glottis also replaces the laryx's role in phonation when breathing water, modulating pitch and volume when the suros "exhales" water to the gills. The gills, which have their arches mounted on the bottom three ribs, are also protected by cartilaginous opercula that are closed along with the gill glottis when above water to prevent the gills from drying out.

Whether breathing air or water, surai utilize two stroke breathing that relies on diaphragm-driven cavity expansion to create suction. When above water, air is drawn into both the respiratory sac and the true lung simultaneously, as the passage between the two makes them into a single continuous chamber. However, as alveoli are only present in the true lung, this method of breathing is less efficient than that of fully terrestrial creatures. When underwater, however, both the alveolar glottis and the gill glottis are closed during inhalation. As the respiratory sac is the only part of the lung that is open, less water is taken in during a single breath. To exhale water to the gills for gas exchange, the gill glottis is then opened, while the bronchial glottis closes the connection between the respiratory sac and the trachea, forcing the water out through the gills.

When switching between breathing air and breathing water, surai first empty their respiratory sac with a complete exhale. When switching from water to air, it is common to lean forward so that gravity contributes to the exhalation of water through the gills in order to prevent any fluid from remaining and later entering the true lung. For the same reason, the floor of the respiratory sac is angled towards the gill glottis, causing water to naturally flow down and out through the gills. Whenever the true lungs or gills are not in use, blood flow to the relevant structures is severely reduced in order to minimize inefficiency.

Suros lips are unique among the known anthropoid races, to the extent that it has been debated whether or not they should be classified as a different organ entirely. Rather than the simple folds of tissue typical of other creatures, surai possess a set of separated muscular hydrostats that can move either in unison or independently. These structures, known as hydrostatic barbels, replace portions of the orbicularis oris muscle that is found in the lips of other anthropoids.

Hydrostatic barbels are capable of mimicking all the standard functions of anthropoid lips, from sealing the mouth to articulating speech, as well as serving their own unique purposes. While the lips of other races provide only tactile senses, hydrostatic barbels also house taste buds on their tips and inner surfaces. These taste buds supplement the normal sense of smell, allowing surai to locate food in murky water, and compensate for the diminished functionality of the nares when above water.

In addition, as the nares are not connected to the respiratory system, all breathing both above and below water must be performed orally. By relaxing her barbels and spreading them slightly, a suros can breathe through the spaces between them without having to fully open her mouth. This method of breathing, known as gill-lipping, produces less drag than other forms of oral breathing and is often used when swimming at high speeds.

Some have compared the hydrostatic barbels to the tentacles that ring the mouths of polyps, theorizing that early surai might have had more developed “facial tentacles” that might have been used to capture prey. While it is generally considered unlikely that there is any relationship between surai and cnidarians, it is possible that the ancestors of the modern suros were more sessile creatures that attached themselves to leviathans with their claws and used their barbels to catch passing food.

Suros eyes are also highly distinctive, with pupils unlike those of any other anthropoid species. Rather than the round or slit pupils seen in other anthropoids, suros pupils consist of three connected segments that form separated "pinholes" when contracted. When light shines through these pinholes, multiple images shine onto the retina depending on the distance between the suros and the object being viewed. Only at the perfect distance will a single image be displayed—a distance that lines up perfectly with the suros's reach.

Surai possess an unusual skull structure that is informed heavily by their unique sensory organs. The most visible aspect of this structure is the pair of ossicones that sprout from the zygomatic arch. The skin covering these ossicones bears ampullary electroreceptors similar to—but weaker than—those found in the sara, which appear to be responsible for clarifying direction and serving as a sort of “peripheral vision.”

In addition to these visible protuberances, the suros skull structure has two less immediately obvious differences. The more significant of these differences is the saral orbit, a cavity in the center of the frontal bone that lies beneath the sara. This structure is nearly identical to the

ocular orbits, and serves to support and protect the structure of the sara, as well as connecting to the optic canal. The second, more subtle, difference lies in the shape of the nasal cavities. As the nares are purely sensory organs, and do not connect to the respiratory tract, the nasal cavity is not connected to the oral cavity. Moreover, the nasal openings are a bit more exaggerated than in other species, as each side must accommodate two nares.

Surai are slightly shorter than the average anthropoid species, with a sleek body type. Of all the tailed anthropoids, the surai have the largest tails, which serve as their primary means of aquatic locomotion. The size of the tail has a notable impact on suros posture, which is most visible when walking or running. When standing in place, surai can adopt something close to the typical anthropic posture by lowering their tails, but they are usually still pitched slightly forward.

The middle fingers of both hands and innermost toes of both feet bear large, sickle-shaped claws and are highly modified to accommodate them. The toes are held fully retracted off the ground, while each middle finger contains a fourth phalanx that rests in a retracted position. These claws were originally used to climb and cling to the leviathans of Baťrasa, with the modified digits serving to preserve the other functions of the hands and feet. As their original use is no longer relevant, some surai file or clip their claws for practical purposes, though long, well-kempt claws are still fashionable in many cultures.

It is estimated that the average worldwide height for an adult suros female is about 152 cm (5 feet), while the worldwide average height for adult suros males is about 158 cm (5 feet 2 inches). Shrinkage of stature may begin in middle age in some individuals, but tends to be universal in the extremely aged. The average mass of an adult suros is 50-60 kg (110-130 lbs) for females and 54-64 kg (120-140 lbs) for males. Despite being mammals, surai possess no hair anywhere on their bodies.

## Mating and Life Cycle

The suros reproductive system differs markedly from that of other mammalian anthropoids. Surai are polyestrous and, like many anthropoids, undergo concealed ovulation. Their estrous cycle is not seasonal, however, and is similar in several ways to a menstrual cycle.

While most mammalian anthropoids are placental mammals, surai are marsupials. As with other mammals, suros reproduction takes place as internal fertilization by sexual intercourse. However, rather forming a direct connection to the embryo through a placenta, the female develops a kind of yolk sac in her womb to deliver nutrients. Pregnancy is very short, typically 8 to 10 weeks, and the embryo is born at a very young stage of development.

Unlike most marsupials, surai genitals are not paired—the female has only one vagina, and the male's penis is not bifurcated—and the genital tract is not part of a combined urogenital system. However, like many marsupials, female surai do not give birth through the vagina canal. The birth canal, which corresponds to the median vagina of most marsupials, passes through a heavily-modified clitoris that serves to transfer the newborn to the male.

While lactation is typically performed by female mammals, female surai do not possess nipples. Instead, the male is equipped with a marsupium on his abdomen, with a strong ring of muscle that serves to keep the pouch watertight. After the embryo has developed sufficiently within its mother's womb, her clitoris everts into a temporary pseudopenis, which she uses to penetrate the male's pouch opening in order to deposit the newborn in the marsupium. There, it attaches to its father's nipple and nurses for a number of months.

As surai have a very short gestation period, the joey is born in an essentially fetal state. The blind, miniature newborn, the size of a bean, usually passes into the marsupium without incident, where it latches onto a teat for food. It will not reemerge for several months, during which time it develops fully. After this period, the joey begins to spend increasing lengths of time out of the pouch, feeding and learning survival skills. However, it returns to the pouch to sleep, and if danger threatens, it will seek refuge in its father's pouch for safety.

For several months after giving birth, lining up with the joey's development process within the marsupium, the mother feels a daily urge to visit her mate for "morning greetings". During these visits, pheromones from the joey calm the mother's urge to visit, and the mother may press her hands against the male's pouch in order to feel the joey moving within. It is common for the mother to bring her mate gifts during this time, a behavior that may originally stem from the need to provide him with food while he is slowed by the child in his pouch.

Lactation in males is initially triggered by a combination of pheromones given off by a female ready to deposit her child and the physical penetration of the pouch opening, and it continues for as long as the joey continues to nurse. While it is most common for the female to deposit her newborn in the marsupium of her mate, that can be impossible if the mate has died or is otherwise inaccessible. In such cases, it is common for a male family member to nurse the child, though other males close to the mother may also fill that role.

Joeys stay in the pouch for up to two years, or until the next joey is born. A newborn joey is unable to regulate its own body temperature, and may have difficulty breathing through its gills. Until the joey is capable of breathing with both structures and is old enough to leave the pouch, a pouch temperature of 30-32°C (86-90° F) must be constantly maintained, and the male must surface regularly in order to provide the joey with fresh air.

When ready to leave the pouch, suros infants are typically 8-10 kg (17-22 pounds) in weight and 60-70 cm (24-28 inches) in height. By this time, skin tone and countershading have fully developed, though it has been observed that some changes to skin pattern can occur after this point. Though no longer helpless by this time, surai continue to grow for some years, typically reaching sexual maturity at 14 to 17 years of age. Males continue to develop until around the age of 20, whereas female development continues until around age 23. The suros life span can be split into the standard anthropoid stages of life, with development of the claws and ossicones beginning in infancy.

For various reasons, including biological causes, male surai live on average almost five years longer than their female counterparts—the average life expectancy at birth of a male is estimated at 96.7 years compared to 91.9 years for a female. It is not uncommon for surai to live into their hundreds; higher ages have been claimed, but they are not well substantiated.

## Diet

Surai are mesocarnivores, with meat making up the majority of their diets. The exact percentage of the suros diet that is composed of meat varies with available food sources in regions of habitation, but is generally somewhere between 50% and 70%. This high meat content is supplemented with fungi, fruits, and other plant material.

For early surai, the most readily available meat on Baťrasa would have been fish, and many modern surai communities still rely heavily on fishing in order to meet their needs. While there is evidence that the surai held cultural taboos against eating the flesh of Baťrasuan leviathans, they also appear to have practiced some kind of "agriculture"—more properly aquaculture—based on encouraging the growth of algae, seaweeds, barnacles, and mollusks on the surface of the leviathans themselves. However, the exact nature of the early suros diet, both before the development of these aquacultural practices, is not entirely understood. It is assumed that surai discovered the use of fire in preparing and cooking food fairly late in their development as a species.

In general, surai can survive for two to eight weeks without food, depending on stored body fat. Survival without water, by contrast, is usually limited to two to three days. After the first full day without water, a suros's body begins to draw on the water stored in the illicia in order to stave off dehydration, resulting in a desiccated appearance.

## Biological Variation

Biological variation in the suros species manifests primarily in traits such as cranial structure, sara shape, ossicone shape, eye color, distribution of illicia, height and build, number and arrangement of hydrostatic barbels, and skin color. The typical height of an adult suros is between 1.4 m (4 ft 7 in) and 1.7 m (5 ft 7 in), although this varies significantly depending, among other things, on sex and ethnic origin. Body type is partly determined by heredity and is also significantly influenced by environmental factors such as diet, exercise, and sleep patterns, especially as an influence in childhood. In addition, populations that have for a long time inhabited specific climates tend to have developed specific phenotypes that are beneficial for surviving in those environments—larger true lungs in drier regions, shorter and stockier builds in regions without deep bodies of water, and a variety of differences in the distribution of electroreceptors. Similarly, skin patterns vary clinally, with starker countershading in watery regions—where the camouflage sees more active use—and less noticeable shifts in skin tone in more arid regions.

Suros skin tone demonstrates countershading camouflage patterns, with darker hues being present on the back and lighter colorations appearing on the ventral side. In many ethnicities,

the ventral side is a very pale shade of the same hue that appears on the dorsal side. The precise hue tends towards clinal distribution, and ranges from deep blues bordering on black and grey to more greenish hues and even dusty browns.

The shape and size of the sara also varies ethnically, with some ethnicities having smaller and more eye-shaped sara, while others have sara that can take up the majority of the forehead. Interestingly, the size and shape of the saral orbit does not always line up with the shape of the sara. For instance, the Vanskan suros phenotype has a sara that extends from just above the eyes to the edge of the illicia trichos, but the actual saral orbit is roughly similar in size, shape, and location as that of surai from Hüliš. While the orbit itself is not notably changed, however, the skull slowly slopes inwards around it, providing much of the same function that the orbit itself normally does. In most cases, facial muscles do not cross the saral orbit, but they can run beneath the sara in cases in which it exceeds the bounds of its true orbit.

Suros ossicone shape varies somewhat by individual, but major variances can be accounted for by ethnic origin. It has been theorized that different ossicone shapes may offer different advantages in electroreception in different aquatic environments, due both to the content of the water and the type of environment—river, lake, or sea—but no definitive proof has been found to explain these differences. However, if optimization for electroreception were responsible for these variations, it could also explain similar differences in the sara of different ethnicities.

The sclera of surai is usually black, but their irises show a wide range of coloration, from a piercing light blue to yellows, greens, and even reds. The pigmentation of the iris is duplicated in the pigmentation of the skin of the sara, for reasons that are still not entirely clear. Unlike in some species of anthropoid, the coloration of suros eyes derives from true pigmentation, rather than being entirely the result of structural coloration.

In addition to these cases, the number and size of hydrostatic barbels varies between individuals, and the location of the nares varies ethnically.

## Psychology

The pattern of suros encephalization appears consistent with the theory of convergent intelligence, with postnatal brain growth in modern surai allowing for extended periods of social learning and language acquisition in juveniles. However, as with most anthropoid races, the increase of brain volume over time affected different areas within the brain unequally, leading to slight behavioral differences between surai and other races. The temporal lobes, which play important roles in processing sensory input and memory formation, have increased disproportionately, as has the hippocampal formation, which has been related to spatial navigation and control of attention. As a result, surai have unusually sharp and extensive memories and tend towards a more logic-based approach to problem solving.

The differences between the suros brain and the brains of other anthropoid races have led some to call the surai more innately "intelligent" than the other races, though exactly how one objectively defines "intelligence" is the subject of its own ongoing debate. That surai are guided more by rationality than by leaps of intuition is a more accepted assessment, though it should be stressed that this is not to say that surai are devoid of emotions, but simply that they tend more towards logical reasoning on average.

## Consciousness and Thought

Like all true sapients, surai possess enough self-awareness to recognize themselves in a mirror. By the time they emerge from their fathers' pouches, most surai children are aware that the mirror image is not another suros.

Due to its proportionally larger temporal lobes and some unique developments in the parahippocampal gyrus, the suros brain has an unparalleled capacity for memory formation, storage, and retrieval. Some arcane research has implied a link between this capacity and the nature of the waters of the illicia, and it has been suggested that some of the structures of the parahippocampal gyrus were developed in order to store information related to water content to later be produced through metabolism of magic—possibly by other structures within the gyrus.

In any case, the tenacity and clarity of their memories often leads surai to consider things from a perspective of objectivity. Without the doubts that members of other races will often have about the contents of their own memories, a suros will remember things the way that they occurred. While she will most likely accept new information and recontextualize her knowledge appropriately, the idea that the memory itself could be flawed is an alien and an uncomfortable one for many surai. Cultures in which surai form a significant presence will often consider memory-altering magic to be taboo, even if they do not have similar prohibitions against enchantments and mental domination.

Because of this tendency to objectivity, along with the increased control of attention associated with the hippocampal formation, surai often value information gathering and rational thought as primary problem-solving tools. To the suros way of thinking, with enough information and careful deliberation, it is always theoretically possible to arrive at the correct answer. However, in part because their larger temporal lobes allow them to process sensory information in greater detail, many surai also recognize that any given situation or problem has an incredible amount of factors affecting it, and that perfect knowledge of every single one is not always a realistic goal. As a result, suros logic often takes instinct into account as a piece of information to be considered, rather than something to be risen above. After all, as they reason, instincts must exist for a purpose, so to disregard them would be to disregard one of the oldest and most basic sources of information available.

## Motivation and Emotion

While many who are unfamiliar with the species often assume that surai either suppress their emotions or lack them entirely, it is more accurate to say that they do not allow their emotions to rule them. A suros feels joy, anger, and the full emotional range with as much intensity as any anthropoid. However, surai are less likely than other to act immediately on their emotions, instead applying the same methodology of information gathering and rational thought to sources of emotional stress or the attainment of desired emotional states.

While this approach may seem contingent on a great deal of emotional restraint, it has been suggested that the clarity of suros memories may actually be responsible for their seemingly collected demeanor. As surai memories are far clearer than those of other races, and do not degrade and change as readily, they usually carry the full emotional context that the events did when they occurred. If surai were to respond to emotional stimuli with the same need for immediate action as races like the ohanya, they would eventually go mad from all the conflicting impulses. The suros psyche is well-adapted to the lingering nature of their emotions, however: while it registers emotional stimuli normally, the resulting motivation to action is usually felt less as an impulse that needs to be satisfied and more as what has been called “the responsibility to the self.” In the case of emotional problems that have already been resolved, a suros can satisfy this “responsibility” by reflecting on the memories of that resolution.

Along with this unusual psychological approach to satisfaction motivation, the suros tendency to careful deliberation and thought generally encourages conflict avoidance. In order to have the time and opportunity to seek knowledge and think through all the possibilities, it is important to not be in the midst of active conflict. Though surai have a notable ability to direct their attention to the task at hand, even in the face of environmental distractions, open conflict can present active barriers to gaining knowledge, and so is avoided as much as possible.

For most surai, happiness is something to be treasured, but not pursued for its own sake. As their memories of happiness do not lose their glow, happy memories will accumulate over the years, and can always be reflected upon. So, rather than chasing after something vague and undefined, many surai reason that it is best to pursue freedom from want and distress, for that state is one in which happiness may more readily occur and is desirable even if one is not necessarily happy at any given time.

## Sexuality and Love

As with emotions, those unfamiliar with surai often assume that they are sexual only by necessity, engaging in sexual activity solely for the purpose of procreation or in order to pursue some goal using sexuality as a tool. And, as with emotions, this is a misconception: the suros valuation of instincts as a source of guidance means that they feel sexual urges just like the members of any other race. However, it is true that, as with any situation, surai are more likely to stop and think through the ramifications of sexual activity before succumbing to their lust.

Many surai consider romantic love to simply be the intersection of instinctual lust and rational recognition of compatibility, but this does not lead them to dismiss it as unimportant. Instead, the proclamation of love is held to be one of the most intimate steps that a suros can take. To

proclaim one's love for another is to say that, having carefully weighed all of the options, one has reached the conclusion that there is no better match to share one's life with.

Because of this integration of rationality into the concept of love, some surai consider instinctual lust to pose no threat to one's love for another person. So long as the subject of lust is not recognized as being a better match than the one to whom love has been proclaimed, they believe that the satisfaction of that lust in no way harms the other relationship. This stance is far from universal, however, and many surai consider external sexual affairs to lead inexorably to a division of resources and conflicting loyalties that can destroy the original relationship, meaning that such indulgences undermine any declaration of love.

Homosexuality occurs among surai at roughly the same rate that it does in other anthropoids, but is accompanied by what is termed transthesiality. Transthesials derive more sexual pleasure from the secondary sex act, in which the female penetrates the male's pouch opening with her everted clitoris, and can be either heterosexual or homosexual. Male transthesials are more likely to seek sexual pleasure through stimulation of the pouch opening, whether by masturbation, penetration by a female's everted clitoris, or the penis of another male; female transthesials force their clitorises to evert into the pseudopenis state through anal stimulation and then likewise seek sexual pleasure through stimulation of the pseudopenis, penetration of a male's pouch opening or anus, or the penetration of another female's vagina or anus.

## Cultural Trends

Like most anthropoids, surai are highly social beings and tend to live in complex social groups. Left to their own devices, surai tend towards elaborate kinship clans, which can range in size from only a few families to large nations. Suros cultures tend to share several traits, most of which can be seen as influences in those multi-species cultures with a significant presence of surai.

### Gender Roles

While surai are a visible dimorphic race, the sexual division of surai into male and female has not been significantly marked by a division of roles, norms, and power along gender lines. As suros reproductive labor is split between both sexes more equally than is the case with many races, with the female carrying the child through gestation before transferring it to the male's pouch, cultural responsibilities around child care have not been assigned categorically to either gender.

### Kinship

Surai kinship groups value consanguinity and affinity relations nearly equally, establishing large descent groups that are interlinked to form larger communities. Due to the way in which romantic love is considered to include aspects of rational evaluation, marriage for the purpose of forming kinship alliances is not uncommon.

### Inquiry and Analysis

Due to the psychological importance of gathering information, surai tend towards the development of complex methods for acquiring knowledge through observation and quantification. Variations on the scientific method tend to be very important in suros cultures, often paired with the emphasis on objective truth. Surai say that any question worth asking is worth an answer—and also that all questions are worth asking.

While surai place great importance on inquiry and attaining knowledge, they also recognize that there is simply too much information in the world for a single individual to ever fully attain. One of the most important skills among surai is that of analyzing the work of others. By reviewing and analyzing what others have done, one both ensures that the others' work is the best that it can be and also gains new knowledge from the analyzed work.