

BALLA

Eerily beautiful, nature-loving and emotion-fearing

You are of the Balla, a lithe, light-boned species known for becoming ever more eerily beautiful with age. Balla children appear unformed and somewhat grotesque, even to their parents. Despite your clumsiness and unbecoming appearance, you were trained by your elders for an adulthood of grace and beauty. By the time you reached sexual maturity, around the age of eighteen, you had gradually transformed into a silky-haired, bright-eyed being with perfectly symmetrical facial features and ideally proportioned musculature. After this time, your interactions with other species changed. You were treated as an object of awe, and granted unconscious deference. As a point of honor, balla are trained not to use their appearance to achieve dominance over others. Although this principle is not universally followed, the average balla is a surprisingly awkward seducer.

Like all Balla, you are rocked by powerful emotions which you continually work to contain and conceal. Without constant mental discipline, you might faint, weep uncontrollably, or surrender to violent rage. By far the most common symptom of emotional surrender is derangement of the senses. A device known as the *mor sohn* allows you to literally bottle up your excess emotions. If you fail to use it or lose access to it, you risk slipping forever into a hallucinatory fog. Use Emotion Suppression to fight these emotions.

Other hallmarks of balla culture include an affinity for the natural world, a devotion to your peoples' ancient calligraphic scripts, a tradition of aching beautiful music, and a love of rhetoric.

Play the Balla... if you want to play a beautiful but awkward Vulcan-like space elf with emotional issues, pick the Balla.

Position in the popularity poll: 6th

Example Names: Essa, Isto, Onme

Boosts (get a point back when you spend a point): Botany, Geology, History (Balla), Zoology

Suitable Drives: Altruism, Atonement, Avenger, Bleedism, Chronicler, Combinism, Entrepreneurial, Exploration, Family Tradition, Justice-Seeker, Nowhere Else To Go, Professionalism, Pursued, Scientific Inquiry, Tech Hound

Unique Drives: Self-Exclusion

Species-Specific Abilities: Emotion Suppression

Cybernetic Compatibilities: Dataloader, Headdisk, Internal Headset

Cybernetic Clashes: Motobooster, Phosphoryltic Battery, Popclaws

Vioware Affinities: Brainwave Recycler, Heighten PreFrontal Cortex

Vioware Susceptibilities: Keratinized Epidermis, Refractive Skin, Slickskin,

Special: Inspiring Presence: Once per episode, you may spend 1 Inspiration point to refresh one of another PC's general ability pools (Health excepted). This must occur in a moment of relative calm and reflection—that is, not in the middle of a fight, ship combat, or other crisis or contest.

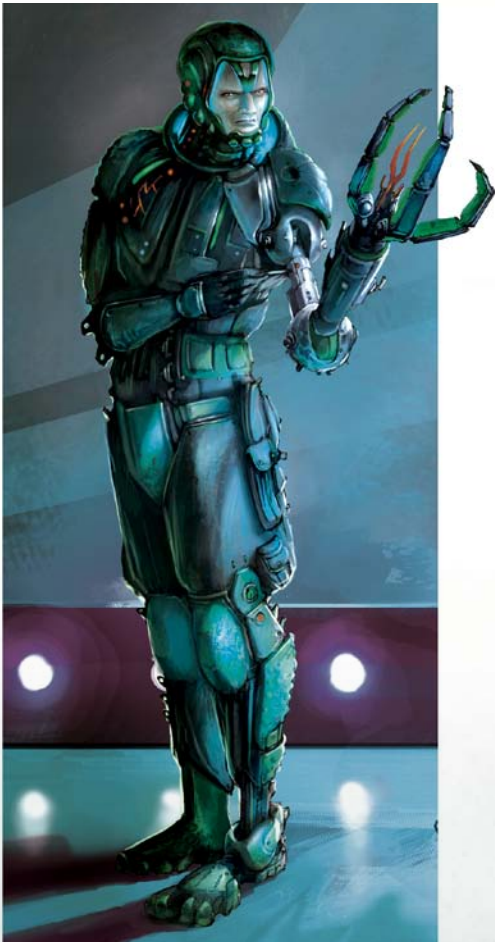


CYBES

Former humans radically altered by cybernetic and genetic science

You are a genetically and cybernetically altered being, originally from human stock. You are the results of supersoldier experimentation undertaken during the Mohilar War. In all likelihood, you served in the war.

If you're like most of your kind, you consider yourself a new species, homo amplius. About 70% of cybes fall into this category. Cybes of this persuasion seek to build their own settlements and cultures. If you count yourself among them, you envision a utopian cybe society based on the principles of self-determination, mutability of body and soul, and personal freedom. Attempts to found such societies have proven rocky so far. When outsiders point this out to you, you might reply that you're doing much better than homo sapiens a single generation after it first appeared. Among fellow cybes you might be willing to admit that the tenuous



interpersonal connections fostered by cybe ideology make for volatile communities—especially when the innate aggression installed in your genes by Combine geneticists kicks in. You are nonetheless determined to lay the foundations for a perfect society. Since the cybes intend to render themselves effectively immortal through additional modification, they'll be living with the results of today's political developments for centuries to come. If you're a member of this dominant faction, you call yourself an amp or evolver.

Play the Cybe... if you want to use lots of lovely enhancements and vioware (p. 126 and p. 137) and don't mind a bit of bookkeeping.

Position in the popularity poll: Joint 2nd

Example Names: Altruist, Explorer, Unforgiver

Boosts (get a point back when you spend a point): Culture (Cybe), Bullshit Detector, Virology

Suitable Drives: Altruism, Atonement, Avenger, Bleedism, Chronicler, Combinism, Comradeship, Derring-Do, Entrepreneurial, Exploration, Faith, Hotshot, Justice-Seeker, Nowhere Else To Go, Professionalism, Pursued, Programming, Role Model, Scientific Inquiry, Tech Hound

Unique Drives: Integrationist, Social Engineer

Species-Specific Abilities: Enhancement Integration, Neural Rewiring

Cybernetic Compatibilities: All

Cybernetic Clashes: None

Vioware Affinities: All

Vioware Susceptibilities: None

THE DURUGH

Sneaky ex-enemies of the Combine who can phase through solid matter

You range between 127 and 168 cm in height. Dense musculature and bone structure makes you heavier than a human counterpart. Your fingers are disproportionately long and thin, your thumbs thick and partially bifurcated. Durugh tend toward pale complexions and dark hair.

Other species may instinctively recoil at your twisted features and hunched physiques, but you durugh certainly came in handy during the Mohilar War. Your ability to briefly phase between dimensional layers made your people ideal spies and infiltrators. A once-despised enemy of The Combine, your people initially threw in your lot with the Mohilar when war broke out. Your much-derided penchant for double-dealing proved indispensable when your martyred former king, Ukshqa, used his access to the Mohilar mothership to discover their genocidal plans for your race after the Combine was defeated. Thanks to the Bogey Condurum,



due credit for the defeat of the Mohilar has been taken away from you. Still, you are sure that the durugh were somehow instrumental to victory. Although a small faction of durugh want to go back to the old ways and fight the Combine, a new majority seeks peaceful union with it. Since then you have learned that the universal tolerance espoused by the Combine is more ideal than reality. The durugh were the primary foes of the Combine peoples for generations, and old perceptions die hard.

Play a Durugh... if you want to play a sneaky character who can shift through walls (Phase p. 50) but isn't entirely trusted

Position in the popularity poll: 7th

Example Names: Auraria, Coran, Elavius

Boosts (get a point back when you spend a point): Decryption, Explosive Devices, History (Durugh), Downside, Negotiation, Filch, Preparedness, Surveillance, Infiltration

Suitable Drives: Altruism, Avenger, Chronicler, Comradeship, Entrepreneurial, Exploration, Faith, Footloose, Justice-Seeker, Nowhere Else To Go, Professionalism, Pursued, Programming, Role Model, Scientific Inquiry, Sexual Adventure, Something To Prove, Tech Hound

Unique Drives: Phase Rider

Species-Specific Abilities: Phase

Cybernetic Compatibilities: Breadbox, Handgun, Interface Transducer

Cybernetic Clashes: Aidkitter, Berserker, Episealant

Vioware Affinities: Aggravator, Chameleon, Dominator, Mr. Grey, Peacepipe, Scrambleface, Scrambleface Ultra, Snakehisser, Stiumulust

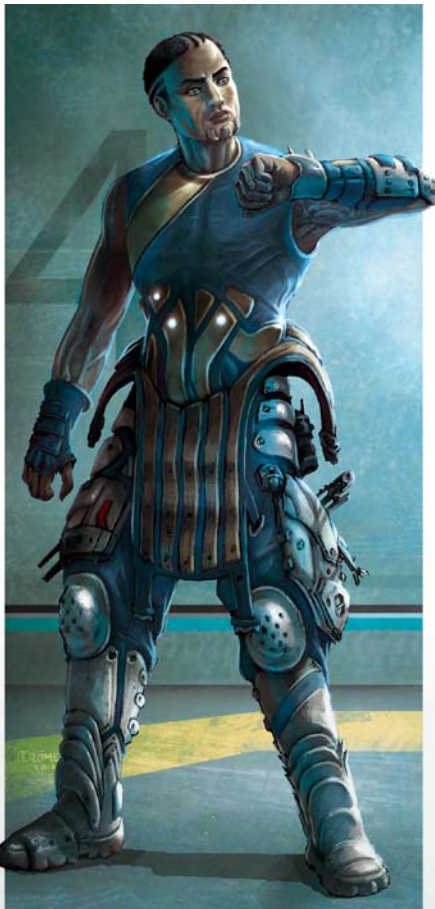
Vioware Susceptibilities: Proprioception Booster, Tiresias

HUMAN

Adaptable, resourceful and numerous

As a human, you belong to the Combine's most numerous and politically dominant species. You probably look just like a particularly fit and attractive human being of the early 21st century. About one in twenty humans now boast genetically inherited body modifications. These originated in a vogue for cosmetic form alteration that flourished during the historical period known as the Flowering. Today it is not uncommon to encounter people with brightly hued skin, pronounced facial ridges, luminous hair, or cat-like eyes. Some conformist cultures require all citizens to display a distinctive set of cosmetic alterations; others insist on original human form, or OHF as it is called. As with any species, use of vioware may also alter your appearance.

If you have a high opinion of your species and its history, you believe yourself inspiring, innovative, and resourceful. If you take a more jaundiced view, you see a history of chauvinism, unchecked expansion, and heedless resource consumption.



Humans are the most pleasure-seeking and libidinous of the major species. Depending on your personal attitudes, you may celebrate its devotion to fleshly rewards or view it as a tragic flaw to be stoutly resisted.

Play a human... if you want a straightforward and versatile character you already know how to play

Position in the popularity poll: 1st

Example Names: Jerr Badur, Wal Minez, Drea Choi

Boosts (get a point back when you spend a point): pick any four: History (Human), Inspiration, Flattery, Flirting, Negotiation, Reassurance, Business Affairs, Ground Craft, Helm Control, Medic, Naval Tactics, Public Relations, Battle Console, Shuttle Craft, Systems Design, Systems Repair, Viro Manipulation

Suitable Drives: any non-unique drives

Unique Drives: none

Species-Specific Abilities: none

Cybernetic Compatibilities: none

Cybernetic Clashes: none

Vioware Affinities: none

Vioware Susceptibilities: none

Special: Dauntless: During any fight, ship combat or contest you may, when a general pool other than Health drops to 0, roll a die. On a result of 1, that pool instantly refreshes. You may refresh one pool per episode in this way.

Kch-Thk

Warrior locust people who migrate to new bodies when their old ones are destroyed

You belong to the only non-mammalian race among the Seven Peoples. You look like a six-foot-tall humanoid locust. You walk on two legs and use your other four to wield weapons. The egg you were originally hatched from was chosen after an exhaustive process of inspection by your clan, a colony of several thousand individuals. After a long nutrient soak, you emerged from it in larval form. Hundreds of other slightly less perfect larva were imprinted with your DNA during this nutrifying process. Upon hatching, you were invested with a name and trained in the six warrior arts. You proved your competence as a fighter—if you hadn't, you would have been slain and reduced to nutrient mush for someone else's larva. After this time you may have specialized in some other task, or continued to devote yourself to warlike pursuits.

Dying is a way of life for you. Your chitinous body is all but disposable. When it is destroyed or damaged beyond repair, you can migrate your consciousness into a new larva kept in a temperature-controlled grk-k'ka chamber. It is then doused in a hyper-nutrient bath and, in a matter of days if not hours, regrown to full size. The new body is in every respect a copy of the original, without any lasting damage it may have suffered during its undoubtedly short existence. (Sadly, you also lose any implants or vioware you had installed, which is why your people don't much bother with these technologies.) You can migrate your consciousness over great distances. Assuming no anomalous local conditions apply, if your chamber is anywhere on the same planet as you, or is on your ship in orbit around the planet, you're golden. You can't, however, migrate over interplanetary distances.

Play a Kch-Thk... if you want a quirky warrior who loves to chow down on anything, and can survive death (Migrate Consciousness p. 47), but doesn't get much use from cyber- or vioware.

Position in the popularity poll: Joint 2nd

Example Names: Bs-Zd, Krdzt-Ktchh, Kth-Srk

Boosts (get a point back when you spend a point): History (Kch-Thk), Intimidation, Scuffling, Shooting

Suitable Drives: Altruism, Avenger, Bleedism, Chronicler, Combinism, Comradeship, Derring-Do, Entrepreneurial, Exploration, Footloose, Hotshot, Justice-Seeker, Nowhere Else To Go, Professionalism, Pursued, Programming, Role Model, Scientific Inquiry, Something To Prove, Tech Hound

Unique Drives: Hunger Tourism

Species-Specific Abilities: Migrate Consciousness

Cybernetic Compatibilities: Aidkitter, Amper, Biofueler

Cybernetic Clashes: Breadbox, Headdisk, Ocular Input Analyzer

Vioware Affinities: Morphological Mimicry, Refractive Skin, Slickskin

Vioware Susceptibilities: Brainwave Recycler, Latency Suppression, Mr. Grey



TAVAK

Armado-like followers of a serene warrior ethic

At an average seven feet in height and topping the scales at close to half a ton, you are a tavak, the most physically robust of the seven peoples. Descended from armadillo-like creatures of your homeworld, Tav, you are covered with hairy plates of natural armor. Piercing retractable claws wait within your long, wrinkled fingers. Your culture transformed when your ancestors discovered the warp corridors and reached the stars. Before that, your people were peaceful, placid insectivores, surviving through an instinct for social harmony. When they reached space, they found it a cold and forbidding environment, wracked by warfare. They also discovered that their naturally armed and armored body morphologies gave them a physical edge over their rival peoples. Over the course of a generation, they transformed themselves into formidable warriors. Yet even as they embraced the art of combat, they held fiercely onto their traditions of spiritual serenity and political coexistence.

Humans take credit for brokering the formation of the Combine, but it is the Tavak philosophy that provides it with its guiding principles.

By default, you are calm, centered and even somewhat sleepy. Only when danger threatens to you arouse yourself with the warrior's mantra and transform into a furious fighting machine. You end the fight with decisive but not excessive force, then return to your state of lowered excitation. Or that is what happens under ideal circumstances. In fact, the quick transition from peace to war has left you susceptible to battle frenzy. When in this state, your fury is a terrible thing to witness, a danger to foe and friend alike.

Play a Tavak... if you want to be a serene warrior-philosopher at risk of berserk fury (Resist Battle Frenzy p. 51).

Position in the popularity poll: 4th

Example Names: Gedad, Pevat, Vutat

Boosts (get a point back when you spend a point): History (Tavak), Interrogation, Reassurance, Athletics, Scuffling, Shooting

Suitable Drives: Altruism, Atonement, Bleedism, Chronicler, Combinism, Comradeship, Entrepreneurial, Exploration, Footloose, Justice-Seeker, Nowhere Else To

Go, Professionalism, Pursued, Programming, Role Model, Scientific Inquiry, Sexual Adventure, Something To Prove, Tech Hound

Other Modifiers: Hit Threshold +1, hand to hand Claw attack +1damage

Unique Drives: Meditative Reconciliation

Species-Specific Abilities: Resist Battle Frenzy

Cybernetic Compatibilities: Berserker, Mesodermal Jumper, Motobooster

Cybernetic Clashes: Bad Liver, Neurojolter, Nightvision,

Vioware Affinities: Latency Suppression, Regenerate

Vioware Susceptibilities: Skeletal Fluidity, Keratized Epidermis, Tiresias

Special: Your marksmanship is so well-honed that you can, at will, do lethal damage while firing a weapon tuned to a non-lethal setting. You never have to pay Shooting points to switch a weapon from a non-lethal to lethal setting.



VAS MAL

Near-omniscient energy beings devolved by disaster into psychic humanoids

Once—less than a blink of an eye in cosmic reckoning—you were infinite. You were the Vas Kra, beings of pure energy and universal consciousness. Though you were not gods, and sought not the worship of biological beings, you sometimes received it all the same. Your thoughts reverberated through the universe. You became one with the great cycles of being and unbeing. All was revealed to you. There was neither happiness nor unhappiness. Neither desire or contentment. There simply was the Vas Kra, and that was balanced and infinite.

From time to time your sense of pervading essence led you to intervene in mortal affairs. Through this act you forged a bond with the beings called humans. You saw their potential and their tragedy, and were moved. You fostered coincidences, caused unseen connections. And through this action the warring species achieved unity, and formed the mortal polity called the Combine.

Thus were sown the seeds of your doom. The Mohilar, whoever they were, found the sub-atomic anomaly you had thus generated and used it to end your eternal primacy. Their doomsday weapon followed it, homing in on your energy signatures. You were devolved. Yet your new bodies were not the perfect specimens of distant memory. They were weak, malformed, hideous.

This happened five or so years ago, as mortals reckon time. To be bounded not only by physicality but chronology is a loathsome burden indeed!

You appear as a 92-122 cm humanoid, your head oversized, your eyes black and enlarged, your body spindly and twisted. Your skin is gray or grin and semi-translucent. When you use your psychic powers—mere mocking echoes of what you once possessed—your luminous brain can be seen pulsing within your skull. Although you still retain vestigial remnants of your universe-spanning mental abilities, they overtax your puny new bodies. There are only a few thousand of you now. Despite your small numbers, your influence on post-war history has led the mortals to regard you as the seventh of the great peoples of the sector. You seek to reverse the devolution process and return to your immortal oneness.

Play a Vas Mal... if you want to play a devolved former god with lots of psychic abilities (and the requisite reading required), who doesn't get on with vioware or cybertech.

Position in the popularity poll: 5th

Example Names: Cornelius King, Herman Picasso, Monroe Kirby

Boosts (get a point back when you spend a point): Linguistics, Vas Mal Culture, Xenoculture, Bio Signatures, Energy Signatures, Communications Intercept, Sense Trouble

Suitable Drives: Altruism, Atonement, Comradeship, Exploration, Nowhere Else To Go, Pursued, Scientific Inquiry

Unique Drives: Re-evolution

Species-Specific Abilities: Consciousness Simulation, Dreamsight, Farsight, Neurosight, Timesight, Pathway Amplification, Probability Override, Psychic Vitality.

You start play with **Psychic Vitality** and up to two of the other species-specific abilities. You may gain other abilities from this list when improving your character during play. The first rating point in any newly acquired species-specific ability costs 5 build points.

Psychic Vitality is an essential counter to the condition of psychic depletion (sidebar; p. 50), which exacts a toll on you whenever you use one of your other species-specific abilities.

Cybernetic Compatibilities: none

Cybernetic Clashes: all

Vioware Affinities: none

Vioware Susceptibilities: all

