**Species Profile: Hillkin**

### **Quick Reference**

**Species:** Hillkin  
**Average Height:** • Males: 3'8" to 4'0"  
 • Females: 4'5" to 6'0" (neotenous stage remains under 2')  
**Average Weight:** • Males: 160–220 lbs (dense, compact musculature)  
 • Females: 100–140 lbs (lithe, elongated frame)  
**Lifespan:** 130–200+ years (females live longer; neoteny extends lifespan further)  
**Anthropomorphic Reference:** Naked mole rat-derived rodent-humanoids; strongly sexually dimorphic. Males are squat and tusked, females tall, willowy, and neotenous.  
**Skin/Fur/Eyes:** Pale pink to off-white skin with almost no melanin. Large, beady black eyes adapted to low-light vision. Sparse white fur or fuzz; males develop full-body coats that rust with age. Females retain minimal hair, usually limited to a head of hair and fine fuzz. All Hillkin have whiskers extending from the upper lip and eyebrows; males grow thick and bristly, females ethereal and sparse.

**Noteworthy Traits:**

* Extreme sexual dimorphism: squat, muscled, tusked males and neotenous, willowy females.
* High disease resistance, pain tolerance, and regenerative durability evolved from subterranean environments.
* Distinctive incisors in both sexes; males develop two upper and two lower tusk-like teeth used for digging, defense, and ornamentation.
* Males' tusks are heavily modified: lower pair shaped into upward V and ringed, upper pair capped and extended over chin.
* Females experience prolonged neoteny until reproductive maturity is needed, then grow in height and spinal length with each litter.
* Male speech is rough and difficult to parse due to dental configuration, though they understand common language fluently.
* Females are articulate, intelligent, and often serve as diplomats or public representatives.
* Individual identification relies on musk and tusk adornment more than facial recognition.

**Summary:** The Hillkin are a biologically unique, sapient rodent-species descended from mole-rat ancestry and native to Hasdvarda. In their prime, they served as engineers, laborers, and collaborators in the golden age of the Dravaknyr’s Nyrsk. Male Hillkin are compact and powerfully built with tusk-like incisors and dense musculature; female Hillkin are rare, long-lived, and undergo dramatic neotenous development, becoming tall and intelligent queens when needed by the colony. Their musk, teeth, and fur mark their identity more than facial variation. Following the fall of Nyrsk, the Hillkin were left unprotected—becoming targets of poachers, biothaumaturgists, and extinction. Now they are remembered more as legend than living people, their scent lingering in the ruins of the past.

### **Cultural Exposition: The Hillkin**

The Hillkin are a sapient, subterranean-derived species native to the island of Hasdvarda, where they once lived in a deeply entwined symbiotic relationship with the Dravaknyr. Biologically distinct and socially complex, the Hillkin are a communal, semi-colonial people whose behavior and physiology are shaped by a unique evolutionary lineage.

The Hillkin are diminutive in stature, rarely exceeding four arms (roughly four feet) in height for males, though adult females may grow significantly taller, approaching human height in many cases. Their lifespans are roughly double that of humans or Dravaknyr, with females living even longer on average. Evolutionarily adapted to subterranean environments, Hillkin possess exceptional low-light vision and show signs of environmental hardiness, including high disease resistance and remarkably durable skin, resistant to abrasions and minor trauma.

Their skin is pale and nearly devoid of melanin, often appearing pinkish beneath a soft, white fur. This fur tends to yellow or rust with age and exposure, and in males especially, becomes denser over time—particularly along the jawline, forming thick beards and mustaches. This fur absorbs and retains a naturally produced musk—an earthy, spiced scent sought after by perfume-makers across Halferth.

Sexual dimorphism in Hillkin is pronounced. Males are broad, compact, and muscular, with animalistic features, deep-set black eyes, and heavy dental ornamentation. Their most distinctive trait is their tusk-like incisor pairings—two upper and two lower—which are decorated and modified as part of cultural tradition. The lower tusks are shaped into a wide V formation to resemble boar tusks, while the upper set grows long and straight, capped in blunt ornamental metal, extending downward over the chin and neck as both a weapon and symbolic protection. These tusks, once used in digging and combat, now serve as cultural identifiers, reinforced through generations of design.

Male Hillkin speak in a deep, guttural tongue made even more difficult to decipher by their dental configuration. Their speech is rarely understood by outsiders, and typically, only other Hillkin or their close Dravaknyr allies are fluent. As a result, most diplomatic or off-island duties fall to the Hillkin females, who are better understood and often perceived as the 'voice' of the species.

Female Hillkin, by contrast, are rare and treated with great reverence. Their appearance is far more humanlike, with slighter features, finer fuzz, and significantly reduced dental protrusion. Females undergo a prolonged state of neoteny, often remaining in a childlike physical form for decades. Maturation into full adulthood occurs only under precise conditions—usually when a new queen is needed within the colony. In rarer cases where population balance requires, young females may undergo a form of physiological transition and take on male characteristics instead. Adult females are tall, willowy, and almost mustelid in shape—long-bodied and graceful. Their similarity to human women has led to occasional cross-cultural fascination, with some describing them as strangely beautiful in an alien, unsettling way.

Hillkin society operates under a strict, genetically-influenced hierarchy. They are a colonial species, structured around a reigning Broodmother Queen and a handful of sub-Queens. Only one queen at a time produces offspring, the reproductive cycle determined by factors including population density, genetic health, and societal need. Sub-Queens manage regional burrows or specialized roles within the colony, but do not breed unless conditions change.

The selection of the next Queen is partially genetic and partially environmental. Neotenic females are monitored, and those displaying the right physical and temperamental markers are groomed for potential succession. This process ensures diversity and minimizes deformities or decline in lineage, supporting the long-term health of the Hillkin.

While the Queen rules in terms of breeding hierarchy, governance is often more decentralized. Tasks and authority are divided across labor groups and familial bands, with a strong cultural emphasis on obligation, craft, and mutual support. Hillkin value precision and reliability. Though not especially innovative, they are masterful at following instructions and executing designs to perfection, particularly those passed down from the Dravaknyr. Their capacity for detailed construction and coordination made them ideal collaborators in Hasdvarda’s golden age.

The Hillkin identity is defined not by dominance or conquest, but by continuity, strength, and craftsmanship. Their culture emphasizes work over word, service over spectacle. They take immense pride in their ability to build and endure, even if they do not always fully comprehend the purpose of the designs given to them by others.

Their loyalty to the Dravaknyr was absolute, and they viewed themselves not as vassals but as a brother-species. The Dravaknyr engineered, designed, and envisioned; the Hillkin, through skill and labor, realized those plans in stone and steel. Together, their society flourished in Hasdvarda. The Dravaknyr protected the Hillkin from threats—particularly the predations of the H'Rask, who once hunted Hillkin for their hides, tusks, and supposed longevity-inducing organs. With Dravaknyr guardianship, those ancient fears faded into legend.

But when Nyrsk fell, it fell hard—and the Hillkin fell with it. The abyss that now swallows the Sea-Claimed Kingdom also swallowed thousands of Hillkin. Entire boroughs were flooded or shattered, especially those in the southern cliffside warrens. Without their ancient protectors, the Hillkin were left vulnerable to a world that had long forgotten their role in building it.

In the wake of the cataclysm, the H’Rask resumed their ancestral predation. Hillkin were again hunted, their bodies seen as repositories of prized materials: durable hides, workable ivory, and rare musk. Their tusks became axe handles and bone flutes. Their organs and blood—rumored to bestow resistance to disease and aging—were targeted by darker forces: biothaumaturgists, rogue genetic alchemists, and charlatan physicians. These predators did not strike with spears, but with coin, contract, and quiet abduction.

Despite their contributions and complex societal structure, the Hillkin are now functionally extinct. Though for a time they remained more present in memory than the Dravaknyr, their population dwindled rapidly in the generations following the fall of Nyrsk. Without protectors or a place to rebuild, they became increasingly rare, their image and history fading into obscurity. In much of Halferth, the Hillkin are no longer regarded as a living people, but as myth—half-remembered builders and mole-eyed ghosts in borrowed stories.