

Traveller5 Walkthru – Sophont Creation – Ael Yael

This design walkthrough applies the sophont creation steps to the Ael Yael, a sophont people previously described for Traveller.

Introduction

An integral part of the Official Traveller Universe (OTU) is the presence of aliens – nonhuman people who not only interact with players, but can even be player characters. In fact, from the beginning of Traveller, aliens were intended to be part of the Traveller game. A quote from a 1980 handout on aliens states:

The minor races, of which there are hundreds within the area of known space, will be largely left up to individual referees, although we will be detailing some of them ourselves.

An “alien design system” was never made. The requirements were potentially mind-boggling. How do you create gas giant aliens? Or Pentapods? What about gigantic aliens, or tiny ones? How do you deal with internal organs, genetics (or equivalent), the senses, and so on? To add to the burden was the need for player-character-enabled aliens to have a career generation process, unique skills, and unique advantages and disadvantages when handling equipment. Thus Classic Traveller did without a system, and only a handful of aliens were profiled.

Traveller5 has a design system for aliens (called “sophonts” for an unambiguous term) which is limited to those understandable to humans, and likely to interact with them without undue logistical problems. Thus the “Major” aliens can be designed, as can many “minor” aliens, but for instance the Jagd-II-Jgd cannot. At least, not with the core system...

Preliminaries

1. My source for guidance is JTAS 15.
2. I am focusing on the sophont card data, not writing up the Ael Yael. They have unique features that belong in a writeup; I'm not distilling that here.

Process

1. Checklist (p545)
2. Card (p546)
3. Fillform (p547)

These first three steps orient us to the process and the outputs of the system; actual work begins with the homeworld, on page 548.

4. Homeworld (p548)

All of this data can be taken directly from existing sources, or implied from them.

HomeStar: K6 V (from the sector UWP data for Gushemege)
Habitable Zone Orbit: 2 (from p548)
Mainworld Orbit: 2 (from p548)
Homeworld SAHPG: 48465 (from JTAS 15)
Climate: Temperate (from p548)

5. Environment (p549)

Native Terrain: Rough Wood (mod -2) - implied from JTAS 15 and the fact that this makes it possible to generate a flyer with this terrain type.

Locomotion: Flyer (from JTAS 15)

Niche/Subniche: Carnivore Pouncer (implied from JTAS 15)
Breathes: Air-8 (from the UWP)

6. Characteristics (p550)

I'm selecting the physical characteristics to match the description in JTAS 15: namely, they're significantly lighter than humans, but otherwise similar. Agility serves a dual purpose here: it makes the sophont lighter, and reflects the Ael Yael's nature as a flyer.

I'm rolling flux for C4 (Int), and C5 (Edu). JTAS 15 specifically mentions SOC, so we'll keep it typical.

Str 2D
Agl 2D
End 2D
Int 2D
Edu 2D
Soc 2D

7. Caste (p551) - NONE, SKIP

8. Gender (p552)

A - Components - Flux (2-4) = -2 = EAB Genders

Gender Table:

2 Egg Donor (E)
3 Activator (A)
4 Bearer (B)
5 flux (3-2=1): B
6 flux (3-4=-1): E
7 flux (6-2=4): A
8 flux (1-5=-4): E
9 flux (3-3=0): A
10 flux (5-2=3): B
11 flux (3-3=0): A
12 flux (4-5=-1): E

Table B. Gender-based Differences

The "E" gender here is the baseline, so I roll Flux for the other two.

I'll note here that JTAS #15 says to subtract 1 from Strength. I think that I'll try simply noting that in the Strength Difference column for the 'E' gender, and use a DM-1 for the other two genders for Strength.

E: Str-1
A: Str-2, End-4, Edu+5
B: Str-4, Agl+3, End-3, Edu+3

Table C. Gender Assignment
flux (1-6=-5) Assigned by family. Assignment is fixed.

9. Life Stages (p553)

Flux for each of the nine life stages.

I'm going to take the "metabolic requirements" from JTAS #15 to imply that their lifespan is shorter than a human's, and apply a heartbreaking DM -2 to nine flux rolls here, one roll per life stage:

(Stage 0 is 1/2 term)

-3: 1 term
+1: 2 terms
+3: 3 terms
-4: 1 term
-3: 1 term
-4: 1 term
-4: 1 term
-6: 0 terms
-2: 1 term

Average lifespan: 11.5 terms = 46 years

10. Senses (p554)

For the senses, except for vision, I will roll for presence first, from table A.

+1 (Hearing), +0 (Smell), -2 (Touch), -1 (Unaware), +3 (Percept)

Eyesight is "slightly better" and "extends into infrared". I'm not going to put flux on the sight roll, then, but infrared leaves a lot to interpretation. Luckily, the vision columns on table B suggest that a K6 V star is likely to produce ACR vision. I'd prefer CRG, but let's go with ACR.

As for vision strength, JTAS #15 gives us a clue: their eyesight is a strategic advantage in a group. If I assume this makes it easier to spot things one range band away, then vision should be at least the baseline (16) plus 3. I'll pick baseline+6, or 16+6=22.

Flux rolls for Hearing are: -3, -1, -2, 0. Consulting table B, that yields C=10, Freq=5, Span=2, Voice=6.

Flux rolls for Smell are: 1, 0, -2. R=3, C=16, Sharp=1.

Flux rolls for Touch are: 5, -2. C=26, Sensi=2.

Flux rolls for Perception are: 3, -1, -1. C=22, Tone=2, Poice=2.

Language Medium is Verbal.

The Racial Scent (Table D) is... well, I will fudge the first three characters as AEL. The last three, randomly, are WUL.

11. Body Structure (p555)

Table A. We already know this, so we can select it from Table A: Bilateral, HBS-T-WL-LN-T.

Table B. We know *some* of this from JTAS #15. Others we'll have to roll on. Note that there's a DM-1 for flyers in this table.

Skeleton: flux is 3-5, DM -1 = -3 = Cartilage interior.

Fluids: flux is 2-2, DM -1 = -1 = Blood.

Skin: flux is 5-5, DM -1 = -1 = Skin (JTAS #15 illo looks like skin, so OK)

Weapon: 6-1, DM-1 = +4 = Spikes. The illustration for JTAS #15 doesn't show things that look like spikes, BUT their feet indicate potential claws. Since my flux roll indicated a weapon, I'll say that the illo does indeed depict usable Claws as weapons.

Manipulators: JTAS #15 specifically states that Ael Yael suffer a DM-2 when using human weapons. Looking at the table on page 557, under the "alien" use column, I see that Graspers and Sockets both offer a -2 disadvantage when using "alien" equipment. The definition for Socket doesn't fit Ael Yael, but Grasper might ("Three or more mutually opposed flaps or digits capable of clamping an object between them.") This adds the interesting fact that Ael Yael manipulators have more than one opposed digit, a useful tidbit. So, Graspers it is.

12. Special Abilities (p556)

JTAS #15 hints that Ael Yael have "special racial talents". This might just be their vision and perception capabilities, but let's see if there's more at work here by rolling flux on "Special Abilities" for the race as a whole, and then for each gender.

Ael Yael talent: flux 2-3=-1 = none.

Gender E talent: flux 4-2=2.

Gender A talent: flux 4-4=0 = none.

Gender B talent: flux 5-1=4.

E and B have talents. Rolling 1D for each yields a 6 and a 4, respectively.

Indexing E's flux roll (+2) with its 1D roll (6) gives it Craftsman.

Indexing B's flux roll (+4) with its 1D roll (4) gives it improved (+2) sense of smell.

Meh. Mildly interesting, but not game-changing. Although I suppose this means finely crafted goods come from the craftsritters on Jaeyelya. That's interesting.

Voice. Rolling flux once and 1D once (+4 and 3) on the Voice table, they speak in "Clicks and Pops", and their "Poice" is "Common". Looking at their illustration in JTAS 15, I can believe the clicks and pops bit.

15. Sophont Size (p559).

Their size, as mentioned, is $[2+1+2] \times 12 = 60$. From JTAS, their average weight is 50 kg; this is reasonable, since the Body Form Profile table would let us "slim down" the Ael Yael due to their thin profile.

Next Steps

At this stage, we have enough information to fill out the sophont card and fillform. If we have additional information available, or are going the extra mile and writing some text and obtaining illustrations, we can follow this excellent template for creating an alien module, posted on COTI by Wil Hostman:

- *Document length:*
 - *Major sophont: a book*
 - *Minor sophont: 3 to 10 pages*
- *1 page capsule, readily copyable.*
 - *3-views, taking 1 column (2x1/2 col)*
 - *1/4 column overview*
 - *1/4 col basic att mods & CGen outline*
- *1-5 pages of psychology*
- *1-10 pages of special rules, as needed.*
 - *character generation changes*
 - *explicit stateroom/LS requiriements*
 - *standard design pattern changes*
- *0-20 pages Worked Examples of any special rules.*
- *0-10 pages of subculture notes*
- *0-10 pages of governmental notes for their interstellar polities*
- *1/8 page per page of illustrations*