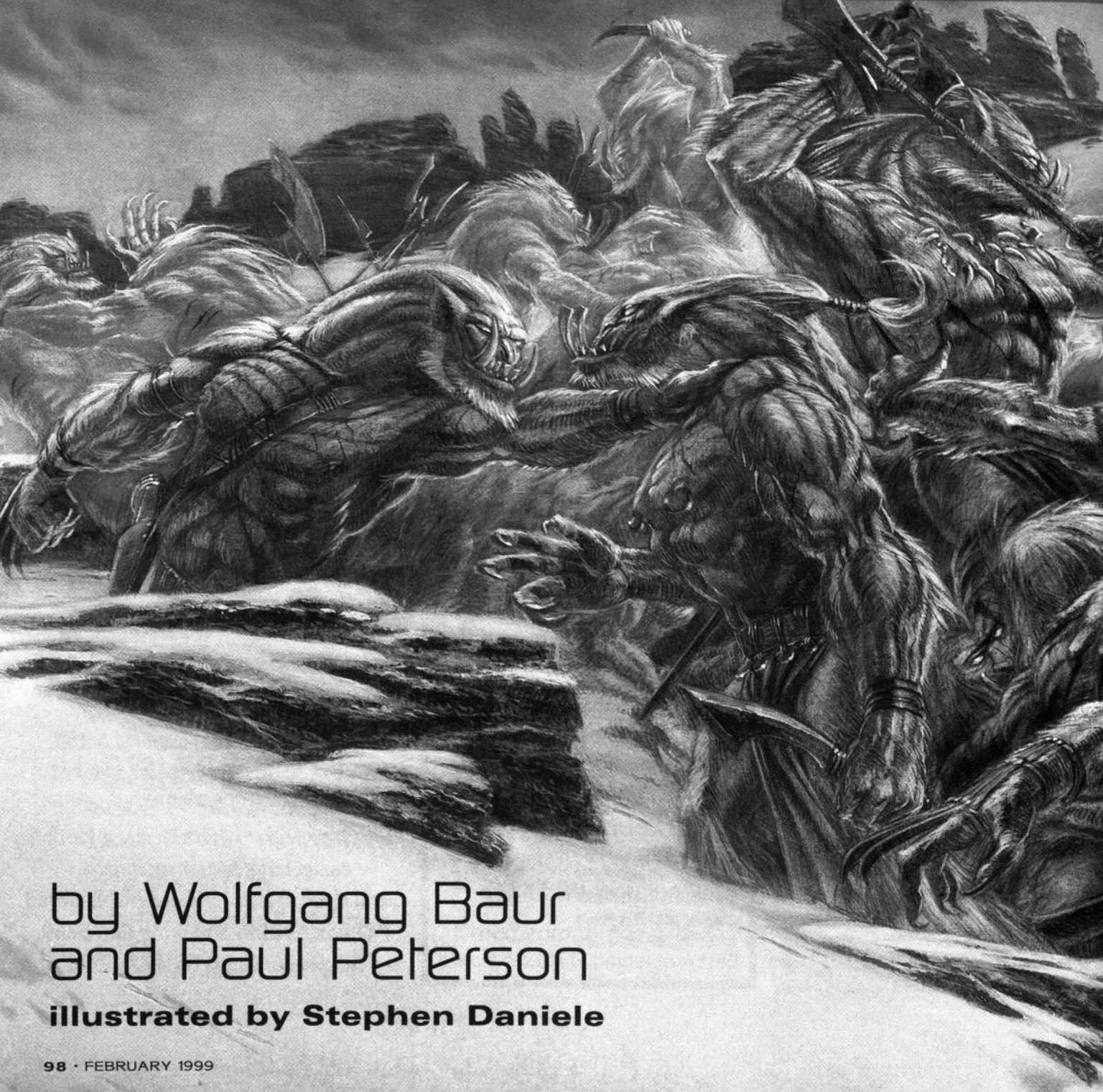


A R E S™

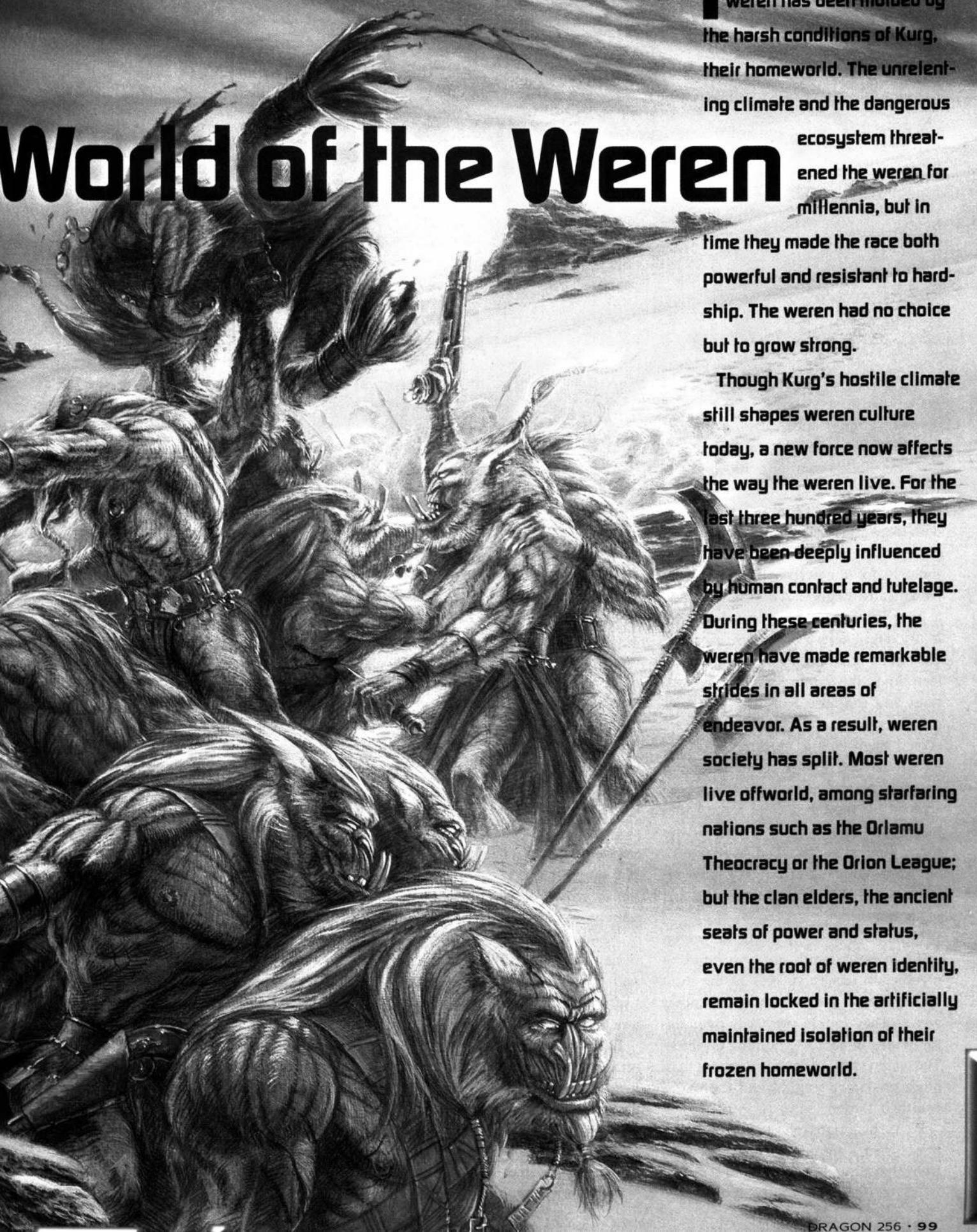
Blood Philosophy: The

The Honorable Warriors of the STAR*DRIVE™ Universe



by Wolfgang Baur
and Paul Peterson

illustrated by Stephen Daniele



World of the Weren

The bloody history of the weren has been molded by the harsh conditions of Kurg, their homeworld. The unrelenting climate and the dangerous ecosystem threatened the weren for millennia, but in time they made the race both powerful and resistant to hardship. The weren had no choice but to grow strong.

Though Kurg's hostile climate still shapes weren culture today, a new force now affects the way the weren live. For the last three hundred years, they have been deeply influenced by human contact and tutelage. During these centuries, the weren have made remarkable strides in all areas of endeavor. As a result, weren society has split. Most weren live offworld, among starfaring nations such as the Orlamu Theocracy or the Orion League; but the clan elders, the ancient seats of power and status, even the root of weren identity, remain locked in the artificially maintained isolation of their frozen homeworld.

Marrizhe

STR	20 (2d4 + 15)	INT	3 (Animal 8 or d4 + 6)
DEX	4 (d6)	WIL	12 (d4+10)
CON	17 (2d4 + 10)	PER	2 (Animal 10 or d4 + 8)
Durability: 25/25/13/13			Action Check: 9+/8/4/2
Move: run 24, walk 6			#Actions: 2
Reaction Score: Marginal/1			

Attacks

Horns	14/7/3	d6 + 2s/d6w/d6 + 1w	LI/O
Stampede	12/6/3	2d8s/2d6 + 2w/2d4 + 1m	LI/G

Defenses

- +4 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
- 2 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks

Skills

Unarmed Attack [15], Movement [17]—race [18], Stamina [17]—endurance [18], Awareness [13]—perception [14]

PL 0: The Hunters

The earliest weren were small groups of nomadic hunters and gatherers, perpetually wandering Kurg's temperate equator. They followed migrating herds of wild animals, relying on their powerful claws and excellent camouflage to hunt both large and small game. To hunt and grow fat was the ideal weren life. Unfortunately for the weren hunters, times weren't always good. A crippling illness, a poor hunting season, or a lingering injury might keep the hunters from providing enough meat to feed the family. In lean times, the weren foraged for roots, nuts, and the fatty Kurgish vegetables called *hgoumas* and *palna*. Their claws served them well in cracking open the enormous seed pods so common among Kurgish plants. Somehow, the weren scraped by, though ancient legends tell many tales of hunger and want. Even today, success is described as *gru-vat* or "meat-bringing," and poverty is sometimes called *hgoumas mat nate* or "a diet of *hgoumas*."

In these times, the nomadic weren lived in tight family groups, banding together to ensure success in the hunt and to defend themselves against other weren. They fought primarily over status, mates, or access to hunting grounds. The weren were far more successful than other predatory species, and the world was their garden.

Weren historians refer to this period as the Hunter's Age. Few records remain from that time, but in general it was a

time of stone tools and simple laws. Though it lies thousands of years in the past, it remains a source of nostalgia for modern weren who must deal with the frustrations and dilemmas of interstellar life, commerce, and technology. Many modern weren art forms hearken back to this simpler time, which the weren treasure as the fountainhead of all that is good and right in their culture.

PL 1: The Great Clans

After millennia of wandering, many weren settled in the rich coastal valleys of Kurg's single temperate continent, farming palna root and seedpods and herding the marrizhe, a powerful migratory herbivore that has some small resemblance to a yak—if a yak had a triple-layered pelt and enormous shovel-like horns capable of breaking up the permafrost. (See the sidebar, above.) Suddenly groups of weren no longer had to follow their food around. The simple family groups of the Hunter's Age gradually grew into more extended families and became clans. To this day, the clan remains the fundamental unit of weren society, much as the clutch is the unit of t'sa society or the nuclear family is among humans.

Each clan laid claim to a territory and settled into the task of becoming civilized. The numbers of weren pursuing agriculture grew rapidly. Contact between the clan settlements remained sporadic, though explorers often crossed the mountains and rivers separating the

most fertile regions. Over time, the nomadic weren were pushed farther and farther away from the rich river lands and out onto the subarctic tundra. Food was plentiful there, and the conflict between nomadic and settled weren declined for several hundred years, until population pressures once again brought the two major branches of the weren family tree into conflict.

The renewal of major raiding was sparked by a relatively minor incident. A prized marrizhe stud from the city of Urdevec by the name of Inaillo (literally, "dusty coat") was captured by a group of rustling nomads called the Anbem. The steed's owner was Ioshaj Urdev, the captain of Urdevec's warband, and the insult was the latest in a series of setbacks for the city of Urdevec. The city weren responded by raiding the culprits, visiting the Anbem camp when the hunters were all tracking down game. Urdev's soldiers killed a number of young and elderly weren and burned the nomad's tents. The resulting spiral of violence eventually dragged in more than a dozen coastal cities and nearly a hundred nomadic bands. Though individually the nomadic weren were more than a match for the sedentary weren of the coastal cities, the settled weren could marshall much greater numbers at once, and eventually they also had better weapons and training for war. Though the settled weren always returned to their homes for planting and harvests, in between, their warbands took a toll on the nomadic raiders. The raids increased in frequency and intensity over the following generations, and the code of raiding only for food and status fell into disuse. Bloodshed became commonplace during even the simplest raids.

PL 2: Rise of the Warlords and Purifiers

The clan-based culture of the coastal settlements gave the weren more free time to pursue goals beyond the production of food and offspring. Several classes of specialists arose: warlords like Acorsi Talmi, priests like the conniving Black Prophet, and professional soldiers like the Captains of Urdev or the young exiles called the Wandering Daughters were chief among them. Although

priests and warriors had long existed in roving bands of weren, these figures now led large groups. The warlords established semi-dynastic lines, though inheritance was never easy or certain. At the same time, the traditions of the Lawreaders and the blood prices they set (See "Culture & Society," below) prevented the settled clans from tearing themselves apart from the inside as they grew into groups of hundreds of thousands.

The priests—once little more than advisors and witch doctors—found strength in numbers as well, and several weren city states of the period were functionally theocratic states. The most successful of these, the Church of the Purifier, has survived to the modern era. Religious warfare never really found a foothold on Kurg, though; the practical weren simply adopted the religion of whatever warlord ruled at any given time. The use of the trappings of several weren religions to lend authority to these warlords was common; the proof of the inherent value of any religion was its ability to attract followers and popular support, or to raise them up from within. Concepts of martyrdom are notably absent from the period; weren just didn't fight for their religious beliefs as fiercely as they did for their clan and lineage.

The greatest rival to the Purifier faith during the Age of Warlords was the movement called the Spiritual Reckoning. The Reckoning and its followers ("Reckoners," for short) leaned heavily on the importance of lineage, making one's bloodline of paramount importance and creating a priestly class with great authority over its followers' lives. The faith's central tenet is that all living weren are judged by the spirits of their forebearers at their death. Only those found worthy are allowed into the Sacred Host of weren patron ancestors, giving them the authority to judge those who die after them. Furthermore, each Reckoner bloodline is strengthened by the blood of defeated enemies; a weren who kills many foes is imparting spiritual strength to his sons and daughters. The faith blossomed for about 250 years, but after a series of setbacks during the Black Wars (see below), the numbers of the Reckoners declined, and today fewer than 3% of all weren on Kurg follow this



once-mighty faith. Their reputation for pride and a well-known willingness to die give other weren pause before challenging a member of any Reckoner clan.

By this point the year-round warbands of the early settled era had become standing armies. They and the other members of the upper classes were supported by the farming and herding of the lower working class. The armies of the coastal cities turned against their neighbors; a few warlords managed to hold onto more than a single city, though the turnover in the political fortunes of the weren city-states was often quite swift. In addition, the well-trained armies allowed the clans to increase their own food supply by stealing food from their neighbors, or taking it from neighbors as tribute. By the end of the Age of Warlords, the warriors formed the core of weren society, and all else revolved around them.

PL 3: The Black Wars

Life on Kurg continued in this pattern of feuds, small raids, and short, bloody

wars for millennia. In 2117, the weren of the Kell clan made a technological leap that almost destroyed the species. Krazhe the Wise—an elder, priest, and inventor among the Kell—discovered the explosive properties of sulfur, carbon, and salt-peter: gunpowder.

The Kell clan warriors quickly put this new discovery to use and created basic firearms and enormous grenades. With these new weapons, they slaughtered two neighboring clans and occupied their cities, suffering only minimal losses themselves. They then consolidated their hold on this new territory and launched attacks at their new neighbors. By that time, however, the word had spread, and enough guns had been captured in battles that these clans had copied them. Unfortunately, they just did not have time to make many of them before they, too, were conquered by the Kell clan. They were more successful at slowing the attack down, so clans farther from the center of the expansion had even more time to research these new weapons. When the Kell next attacked,

New Career: Tracker

This Free Agent career is only available to primitive weren from the hinterlands of Kurg; more sophisticated and educated weren from the Orlamu Theocracy are not raised from birth with the requisite emphasis on survival, pursuit, and hunter's lore. The tracker is the weren woodsman *par excellence*. Always born into one of Kurg's nomadic tribes rather than its settled clans, the tracker masters the arts of camouflage and stealth from an early age. Many trackers profess the Reckoner faith or follow the animist priests of the nomadic clans.

Signature Equipment: Marrizhehide parka, snowshoes, firestarter materials, flintlock, skinning knife

Suggested Skill Package: Unarmed Attack—*brawl*, Primitive Ranged Weapons—*flintlock*, Awareness—*intuition*, Stealth—*hide, sneak*, Investigate—*search, track*. Cost: 40 points.

they met two allied clans who were also armed with gunpowder. The battles of that summer's campaign were a fierce series of slaughters for both sides, now remembered simply as the Black (or Bloody) Summer. Despite the horrendous losses, gunpowder technology spread like wildfire over all the coasts and even into the interior—as soon as the nomads of the North and South learned the value of the new weapons, they raided, seized, or traded for them.

As gunpowder spread, weren warfare itself changed. The bloodier campaigns decimated the warrior classes. Each battle claimed more weren lives, and battles became more common. Every clan believed that gunpowder gave them an advantage over their enemies. The weren population actually declined; indeed, the weren were in danger of reducing their numbers so severely that their clan holdings would fall apart, and the town weren might have lapsed into a barbaric state. Traditionally, coastal soldiers could not enlist until they were twenty years of age. At its worst, in the Kell Campaigns of 2234 to 2236, flintlocks were pressed into the hands of tuskless "warriors" as young as twelve years old (see "Physiology" below).

As the species stood on the brink of racial suicide, however, the weren were

rescued. In December 2246, the OSS *Brightfall*—an Orlamu Theocracy survey vessel—was on a routine follow-up mission when they discovered the weren civilization. The soldiers and scouts on board, all from the Orlamu Theocracy, studied the weren for several months, watching, waiting, and examining every detail of the weren culture. They did not reveal their presence, instead sending the information back to the Theocracy. The Theocracy conducted a strenuous debate at the highest levels, considering how best to approach this new species. The weren systems of religious philosophy and their often complex political structures implied that weren held great promise, but their vendettas and blood feuds were in serious danger of destroying them. At last, the Orlamu Theocracy agreed that not doing anything was surely worse than interfering in the werens' affairs, so on the 12th of May, 2247, the External Affairs Ambassador signed an internal document called the Contact Decree. Within hours, a first contact specialist named Jamal Kidwai (later called Jamal Abuweren) was dispatched to the planet's surface, and a new age of cooperation, learning, and occasionally violent misunderstanding began.

The conflict between the clans didn't exactly end with the arrival of humans, but at least it gave the clans something different to think about. Weren priests and philosophers speculated endlessly about the weren place in the universe; some of these debates turned bloody. The Orlamus kept the violence down to an occasional murderous rush, rather than the constant and total warfare they had found on their arrival. The weren entered into an age of rapid—but carefully managed—technological growth that they are still undergoing. The Induced Renaissance began, and within a decade the Orlamus were accepting petitions from worthy weren to leave Kurg and travel the stars.

PL 4-7: Post-Contact

After the arrival of the Orlamus, the divisions between the two societies on Kurg grew even deeper. The settled weren accepted the Orlamu offer of guidance, but the nomadic clans of the North and

South rejected the offworlders.

The townland weren have benefited greatly from contact with the offworlders. In the last two hundred years, their Induced Renaissance has been sustained by the knowledge that the universe extends far beyond Kurg—and many of the youngest, most violent weren left to explore and settle the outside world. With just the slightest push of Orlamu guidance, the weren have made great advances in art, communications, literature, and medicine.

The Orlamus rarely interfere directly in weren affairs; at most, they advise and nudge the weren to the point where the weren make the advances themselves. Most Orlamu influence has been tangential, through the education and training of weren warriors. A small fraction of these trained, modern weren secretly return to Kurg to teach their fellows what they have learned. Though officially forbidden by the Orlamu, in practice it is difficult to prevent.

The Orlamus first attempted to put some controls on weren warfare. They forced the leaders of the townland clans to agree to stricter codes of conduct on the battlefield. For the first time, surrender and ransom became options for a commander, and no modern weren army dares to attack during a truce. But despite these limited successes, two hundred years of Orlamu effort have not really stopped or even blunted the weren taste for war. The weren spent far too many millennia doing battle, and combat is too much a part of their culture for it to be forgotten so quickly. More importantly, the Orlamu quickly recognized the value of having the galaxy's finest warriors available to them. Within a generation after contact, elite weren combat teams, with their superior camouflage and endurance, won the Theocracy more than a few battles in the Second Galactic War. The weren shock troops remain a potent resource for dealing with problems today.

The nomadic tribes of the far North and South, where life was much colder and more difficult, followed a different road after contact. Those who accepted Orlamu offers of guidance benefited in the same ways that the townland clans did, while keeping their traditional way of life mostly intact. Others, however,

refused to bargain with humans and sought lands untainted by human footsteps. The Orlamus even helped in this, setting aside certain regions as "cultural preservation districts." Humans are still forbidden to enter these districts today. Oddly, the clans that fled into these districts most often were those who were most hard-pressed by starvation and other weren. In the vast empty regions, they sought to avoid old enemies and rejected all contact with humans. They believed that the Orlamus had come to help their enemies destroy them, and they would not be convinced otherwise.

After being driven from their usual lands, these weren fundamentalists lived much the way they always had: following vast herds of marrizhe across the frozen wastes and raiding their old neighbors in the townlands for anything they could carry away. The strategy worked, and from 2200 to about 2400, the raiding cultures expanded, eventually generating much alarm among the Orlamu, who saw themselves losing the fight against barbarism. Though the raiders were surprisingly successful for several generations, recently the raiding culture has been fading away. In the long run, the raiding clans lacked the town clans' numbers and technology, and neither the preservation districts nor their hit-and-run guerrilla tactics prevented reprisals by their own kind. In the end, the impulse to adopt new ways and abandon clan warfare has won out over many old rivalries. At least, those clans who accepted human help—however minor—have won out over those clans that turned their back on the galaxy and tried to remain frozen in time.

2501: Current Prospects

Though the policy of nonintervention remains in place, in practice weren culture on Kurg has continued to react to humanity's presence. However, the reaction is not always easily understood. For instance, weren art continues to mystify Orlamu observers, as it seems to be relentlessly realistic, but the weren emphasis on indirect symbolism and allegory reveals many layers of meaning to an educated weren, even in something as relatively straightforward as a bust or a landscape painting. At the same time,

Culture & Society

Each weren's place in society is governed by many factors, but by far the most important are clan, lineage, battle prowess, and wealth. When two weren meet for the first time, the interplay of these factors determines how they react to each other.

An important omission from the equation is gender. Weren recognize few differences between the sexes, and males and females are held in equal regard. According to tradition, all titles and offices are open to all weren, though in practice a clan generally is either matriarchal or patriarchal, rarely allowing both sexes access to the clan's positions of leadership.

Clan is the single most important weren attribute. Much of each weren's sense of worth is wrapped up in the history, strength, and accomplishments of his or her clan. To some extent an individual always serves his clan first and himself second.

Clan dictates how weren feel about each other. The political alliances or enmity between two clans can dictate how two weren react when they first meet. In the most extreme cases, two weren who have never set foot on Kurg may fight to the death on sight, simply because their clans are currently at war.

The greatest punishment for a weren is the removal of the offender's claws, euphemistically called *pito ta* or "claw-washing." Because weren claws—unlike human fingernails—are extensions of their bone structure, their removal cripples the criminal's hands for up to a year, and many never heal properly. Even the most hardened weren veteran can be intimidated by the thought of being left helpless, unable to hunt, fight, or duel, and unable to handle most implements without clumsy prostheses. Lesser punishments include banishment, castration, enforced servitude, and—among nomad clans—ritual scarring to create patchy fur.

Family lineage is in some sense a subset of clan but is far more specific. Weren take pride in their family's deeds in service to their clan. Each line's most famous members color the way their clansmen relate to them, and the duties

the family has undertaken in the past often govern what duties they are given in the present ("Since you are of the line of Haargel the Slayer, you must lead the charge").

Sometimes a family's worthy forebears were nobles, but weren nobility is not generally hereditary. Most noble positions are held for life, barring extraordinary circumstances. When a noble's position—such as clan parag, or leader—becomes available, all clan members may choose to compete to take their place. Each candidate must show the clan why he or she deserves the position, usually by declaiming both his family lineage and his personal accomplishments. In a few cases, the position falls to a noble's son or daughter, unless someone else can show a clearly superior lineage. In these cases, a noble title shifts from one family when circumstances dictate change; for instance, a warrior may step forward to take the leadership when a clan has just begun a war. If the offspring or noble somehow alienates the clan or shames his lineage, his position might evaporate entirely.

Weren respect nothing more than combat ability. The entire culture glorified warriors for centuries. They learn to fight early, in earnest struggles against their siblings for their share of food. They fight for position within their family as they mature. The best fighters are chosen early and trained to become the armies of the weren, fighting for clan honor and for their own place within the clan. Almost all noble positions go to a clan's warriors; a few fall to the clan's priests or philosophers.

Wealth is a relatively new factor in calculating status. Until about 2200 or so, the best warriors were also the wealthiest weren. As weren civilization grew and trade expanded, merchants became more important. The richest weren traders now wield enough power to dictate terms to the nobles they supposedly serve, or to ignore them entirely. As more weren leave the planet and enter cultures where wealth is the single most important social marker, more and more of them are adopting a consumer or capitalist orientation.

Weren Dueling

The weren emphasis on honorable battle has led to a large, unwritten code of behavior regarding the proper ways, times, and forms of violence. When and how a weren fights often seems complicated to outsiders, but at its heart are some very simple rules. A weren does not fight an obviously inferior opponent. Most weren consider nonweren to be inferior by definition, and unworthy of a formal challenge. Adult weren rarely start a fight without cause, though what counts as starting a fight is fairly loosely defined and often depends on the weren's mood. Honorable weren kill only opponents who clearly intend to kill them. Even then, a weren does not usually kill someone who did not have a realistic chance of killing them.

Weren often fight to determine rank, to settle an argument, or to advance in social standing. When two weren meet, they fight to decide who dominates the relationship unless one of them immediately accepts a subordinate position. When challenging a superior to take his place, the challenge must be made on the superior's home ground at a propitious hour; seconds or intermediaries such as priests are often used to choose a proper time for the challenge. In a few cases, these challenges are purely formal; no actual combat ensues, but the prearranged "loser" still must appear, face off against his opponent, and then concede. Noble titles cannot be won through a challenge, except when the position is vacant. Challenges made during times of crisis are always frowned upon.

many young weren emulate human styles; perspective painting and abstract art were both unknown to the weren at first contact but have since been adopted by some clans. Their value is still hotly debated among weren traditionalists.

At the same time, a few weren and humans have become great celebrities on Kurg, primarily philosophers grappling with meaning, cosmology, morality, and aesthetics. Many young weren read Nietschze and find his work compelling—the dead German would be amused to find that 26th-century aliens

have built him a small shrine. Despite this small inroad, most weren find the arguments of their own kind more satisfying and more comfortable. Modern weren philosophers such as Unlarp Jndoor are held in high regard, and the weren see no conflict in the fact that Jndoor is at once a philosopher, a bookkeeper, and a reservist in the Undevec artillery. His volume *On Hunter's Ethics* even enjoyed a brief popularity among the Orlamus.

Life is different for weren who have left Kurg. When a weren wishes to leave Kurg, he or she must first petition the Orlamus for permission. If this is granted, and it usually is, the weren must then arrange to pay their way off the planet. This is difficult for most weren, as the cost can be rather high. Many choose at this time to have their way paid for them by the Orlamu military, or by any one of a number of mining or heavy industry companies, all of whom have recruiters stationed on Kurg for just such opportunities. In exchange for a ticket offplanet, these weren agree to work for a certain period of time to pay off their debt. All of this is carefully monitored by the Theocracy, to insure that the weren are not mistreated or taken advantage of by these corporations.

Weren who have recently emigrated offplanet often suffer serious loneliness and homesickness. Many suddenly find themselves thrust into a society where they are a very small minority, surrounded by unfamiliar technology. Some remain at the jobs they took to repay their ticket debt, even after that debt has been repaid. They prefer the security offered by guaranteed work and the respect they receive for their natural abilities, especially in the military.

The Orlamu military has benefited more than most from the discovery of the weren. Indeed, weren shock battalions are the elite ground forces of the Orlamu military. Their strength and stamina make a troop of weren much more effective than the human equivalent. How do you defeat a squad of 2.2-meter-tall, battle-frenzied killing machines who shrug off wounds that would certainly kill humans? Weren units are always led by weren officers, and their battalions are given considerably more latitude

than others. Members of other species have been allowed to join weren units, but this is rare. In most cases, a week of weren training kills soldiers of other species. The ones who survive can be numbered among the best soldiers of the Stellar Ring.

Some weren have searched out their fellow off-world clan members and formed colonies, companies, or mercenary groups. They've become offworld splinters of their clan, and earn much wealth and honor, often sending money back to relatives still on Kurg. Others have banded together into a broader, pan-weren alliance and have founded communities welcoming any weren who wishes to join. Weren who put clan before species are excluded from these communities, for fear that old hatreds could tear the community apart. So far, all of these experimental communities have succeeded, and the Orlamu are justly proud of the progress their client species has made.

However, not all weren are so idealistic or so willing to give up their clan heritage. Many offworld weren simply set off on their own and adopt a variety of professions to make a name for themselves. These weren learn to live among the other species of human space and to deal with PL 6 technology. Most adapt slowly but eventually have no more problems than anyone else.

Offworld weren do have a unique problem: they are cut off from the social hierarchy. A weren's sense of self is so tied to his place, his family's place, and his clan's place in society that removal can erode a weren's identity. For this reason, weren born and raised on Kurg keep close tabs on news from home, especially news related to clan status and rivalry. This hunger for the latest developments has been exploited by the major news services, and getting updates from Kurg into the hands of recent emigrants is a small but steady industry. Every news carrier in the Orlamu Theocracy (and many others) carries current news from Kurg, and some weren buy from several different carriers just to make sure they don't miss anything.

Weren have been leaving Kurg since the Orlamus arrived, and as a result, some weren have been settled elsewhere for as long as five generations. These

expatriate weren lead a dual life, balancing their simple heritage with the high tech world around them. Weren parents make every effort to teach their children the importance of honor and clan, but these things fade over time. Those who can afford it arrange for their children to live on Kurg for a while, to better appreciate what it means to be weren, but the weren culture outside Kurg is in sharp decline. As is the fate of most discovered cultures, weren society is being replaced by the more active, discovering culture, which in this case is human.

Weren of the Orlamu Theocracy have adapted to the modern world and have internalized the values, history, and culture of Old Space. The most straightforward example of weren culture being absorbed by the more dynamic human culture is in the Lighthouse, where weren serve as bodyguards, security officers, and even priests of the Orlamist faith—but weren no longer fight each other for the honor of their clan. The weren have adopted the ways of humankind, leaving the dust and snow of Kurg far behind.

Technology

Technology on Kurg is a curious amalgam of late feudal and early industrial techniques operating side-by-side with much more advanced ideas. The impact of the Orlamus on weren technology is subtle but pervasive; they decide what does and doesn't make it to the planet surface. Indeed, the Orlamu forbid anyone from introducing any new technology onto Kurg without their approval. Their screening procedures are thorough, and their punishments very harsh. However, small shipments of various technological items are smuggled onto the planet and horded by the clan leaders, primarily for personal use or for a surprise defense during an attack.

While the Orlamus seek to guide the weren further along the path to galactic civilization, they rarely give them anything outright. All the weren's advances must be earned. At the same time, the Orlamus do push the weren into certain channels, resulting in great advances in



areas that the Orlamus hold dear. For example, medical technology on the planet stands far ahead of the rest of their technology. They understand the germ theory of disease, and they know how to prevent infection.

In most other areas, however, the weren remain artificially held to a lower progress level, roughly equivalent to what was available during the 1600s in Europe. Single shot black powder pistols and rifles are the weapons of the day, though the weren versions of black powder weaponry are much more powerful than human weapons of the same era, due to the weren's ability to handle a greater recoil.

Weren transportation on Kurg is woefully inadequate. Travelling weren must walk, travel by sled, or ride marrizhe. The marrizhe serve the weren not only as food animals but also as beasts of burden. They are also the preferred mount of soldiers and raiders, as they can carry heavy loads for great distances.

Most communications rely on hand-carried letters, although the Orlamus have relaxed their ban on technology when it comes to communications gear and allow the clan leaders to communicate face-to-face over vid screens. The

Orlamu feel that this helps move the weren toward civilization, as open communication defuses political tension more often than it provokes it. This policy also keeps the Orlamus much better informed, because they monitor these conversations closely.

Offworld weren use the same technology available to other species, but they suffer from some problems unique to their worldview and culture. For new immi-

grants, moving from a 17th-century technology into the Fusion Age is a bit of a shock, and weren don't generally adjust well. They remain suspicious of new technology and stubbornly cling to familiar ways of doing things. They lack the innate curiosity of the t'sa or the logical investigative rigor of the mechalus.

When a weren interacts with items that look familiar, they usually don't work quite as he thinks they should. For example, most werens have seen and used black powder pistols. Hand a northern clan warrior a 9mm zero-g pistol, and what is he going to do? He does not understand the basics: breech loading, releasing a safety, cocking an automatic, or unjamming the weapon, so he'll be more likely to shoot himself than an enemy. Combat specs of other species learn these things from watching holos from an early age. Not so the weren. When he fires the weapon, he often misses because he leads the target too much; the muskets he is familiar with all have a much slower muzzle velocity. And this example just covers firearms, a technology with which the weren are familiar. Imagine how they might react to a computer terminal.

Some weren never overcome their resistance to new tools and ways of getting things done. These poor, stubborn souls stick with what they know for their whole life, unable to adjust fully to the modern technology; if they are lucky, their offspring fare better. However, most weren overcome their reluctance

Weren Weapons

Skill	Acc	Md	Range	Type	Damage (O/G/A)	Actions	Clip	Size	Cost	Hide	Cost
15.2 mm SMG	+1	B/A	15/30/80	HI/G	d4 + 1w/d6 + 1w/d4m	4	—/10	50	+2	4500	
25 mm Shotgun	0	F	9/15/40	HI/O	d6w/d8w/d4 + 1m	2	10	25	+3	800	
Dueling Claw	0	Personal	—	LI/O	d4w/d4 + 2w/d4 + 3w	4	—	—	-1	300	
Great Sword	0	Personal	—	LI/G	d4 + 3w/d6 + 2w/d4 + 1m	2	—	—	+4	2500	
Herder's Club	0	Personal	—	LI/O	d4 + 3w/d6 + 2w/d4 + 1m	2	—	—	+1	5	
Klickstopper Pistol	0	F	5/10/40	HI/O	d4 + 2w/d4 + 3w/d4 + 3m	2	5	25	+4	900	
Sword Claw	0	Personal	—	LI/O	d4 + 3w/d6 + 3w/d4 + 2m	2	—	—	+1	400	

and fear of change. In a few months or a year, they are fully integrated in interstellar society. In fact, despite their bad reputation, most offworld weren have no problem with technology, since they grew up with fewer misconceptions. In many ways, the technophobic weren is just a stereotype.

Other problems are harder to overcome. For instance, weren don't exactly match the standard human body size. Anything they wear or use must be specially made to fit, and they pay twice as much for clothing, armor, and even vehicles and housing. Weren size does have certain inborn advantages, however, such as allowing them to use larger and heavier devices easily. For instance, weren construction workers can lift massive riveters that would require expensive robots in a human-only shipyard, and weren miners use more powerful plasma torches to move ore faster. Most important to action-oriented heroes, weren can handle heavier weapons.

Several weapon manufacturers have created large-caliber, special-purpose weren guns with greater masses and heavier recoils. More powerful than any human equivalent, the recoil of a weren gun can shatter a human arm. To a weren, though, they are more comfortable to use than normal guns, sized

Weren Unarmed Combat

The weren excel at Unarmed Combat. However, as written in the *Player's Handbook*, the Unarmed Combat skill rank benefit specifies increased damage ranges based on a human. Weren heroes who reach rank 8 in *brawl* inflict d6w/d6+2w/d6m, plus any Strength bonuses, instead of the damage inflicted by all other species. A weren who reaches rank 7 in *power martial arts* inflicts d6+2w/d6+4w/d4+2m, plus any Strength bonuses.

to fit weren proportions and accommodate their claws. The only drawback of these weapons is that they rely on the simplest mechanical principles, to more easily accommodate weren technophobia. A typical example of these weapons is the 25 mm weren shotgun, a double-barrel breech-loading weapon about 1.4 meters long and weighing about 16 kg. The weapon is easy to use, easy to maintain, and absolutely devastating in combat.

In addition, weren are extremely skilled at infighting, using weapons based on clawlike attacks. The most famous example is the sword claw, a long and heavy blade strapped to the weren's forearm. While it is too large and heavy to be effectively used by a human, when combined with the tremendously long reach of weren, the sword claw can be quite deadly.

Weren Weapons

15.2 mm SMG: With a 10-round clip, this weapon doesn't fire long, but it doesn't need to: reports from the field indicate the 15.2 can take down a klick or even two with a single burst, much less when on autofire. Given its remarkable recoil, however, even weren sometimes have trouble tracking a target.

25 mm Shotgun: With a roar that makes a weren seem quiet, the 25 mm shotgun packs a lot of ammo and is deadly at close range. Like all shotguns, it is drastically less effective at anything beyond short range. Weren enjoy firing it once before closing into hand-to-hand combat, and many Orlamu marines carry them for boarding actions.

Dueling Claw: Smaller than a sword claw and meant for use in formal duels aboard a spaceship (where sword claws are simply too unwieldy), the 10-cm-long dueling claw has become a favorite concealed weapon for many weren, both on Kurg and offworld. On Kurg they are

usually simple steel blades fitted to an individual weren. Offworld, they are usually made of much sharper and harder ceramics, undetectable by metal detectors.

Greatsword: Made of high-grade alloy steel and honed to a fine edge offworld, the greatsword is fully 2 meters long and weighs more than 10 kilos—it is unusable by anyone of less than 14 Strength. Due to its remarkable construction, the greatsword is said to be able to carve through body tanks and small vehicles.

Herder's Club: Used primarily to keep truculent marrizhe moving, this spiked club—often called a *vennet*—is sometimes used as a dueling weapon among Kurg's nomadic tribes. On Kurg, it is also sometimes a symbol of authority, and many are beautifully carved, inlaid, and gilded. These ceremonial vennets are carried by local princes or the leaders of nomadic tribes. Among off-world weren, they are considered curios or conversation pieces.

Klickstopper 13 mm Pistol: Firing what are essentially .50 caliber bullets, this five-shot revolver is durable and powerful, capable of penetrating light vehicle armor.

Sword Claw: Resembling a fistful of short swords, the sword claw is a metal gauntlet made to conform exactly to a particular weren's fist and fit snugly over his or her natural claws. The blades are as much as 25 to 35 cm long, and some offworld varieties are made of tungsten carbide steel.

Government & Politics

Kurg's government is divided along the ancient clan lines, with states representing the twenty major clans. Of these, twelve are townland clans of the equator, and eight are nomad clans of the North and South. The number of clans changes frequently, as weaker clans are

decimated or destroyed in war and minor clans gain enough strength to take their place. Each clan is a large, extended group of families with common ancestors who are sometimes mythic figures. Each town clan governs a fertile stretch of the main continent. In the nomad lands, each clan follows a particular herd of marrizhe, living almost entirely from the hunt.

Each clan is led by a single individual. Though their titles vary, these leaders are always the rulers, military leaders, and source of authority for the clan. Their word is law, but their power is balanced by the will of the clan. The clan nobles forcibly remove a townland leader who makes too many bad decisions, replacing him with one of their own. In the nomad clans, a bad leader is usually overthrown by his strongest general.

A layer of noble families supports the clan leaders. In the townlands, each family head governs some portion of the clan's lands. The family must provide wealth and warriors for the clan in exchange for this privilege, and the exact details of each clan's contribution are often the subject of lengthy negotiations when a new clan leader is appointed. However, once settled, the terms never change until the death of one party or the other.

In times of war, many weren, even those who are spacefaring citizens of the Orlamu Theocracy—use a system of weregeld among themselves to quickly settle disputes. In this system, every crime has a price that must be paid in coin. If a criminal cannot pay the price for a crime, he becomes an *ielmar* and must redeem himself in combat by a heroic deed. Indeed, under the tradition of the *ielmarg*, the perpetrator must serve and defend the injured party, and only that party can release the criminal from his or her obligation. In a way, the *ielmar* offers a form of institutionalized forgiveness, though the most reprehensible *ielmar* are never forgiven for their crimes.

On Kurg proper, the *ielmarg* tradition is supplemented by a system of harsh physical punishments. Law enforcement is the obligation of the local lord. A lord's personal guard might serve as a town watch, or a hired set of warriors might

do the job. In either case, they are aided by a caste of wandering warriors pledged to justice. These are the *mannevar*, vigilantes who enforce the laws as best they can. Though most Orlamu understand the tradition of the mannevar, such vigilante action is not allowed in the Theocracy. In theory, this restricts the mannevar to Kurg, though in practice many weren still feel the need to mete out punishment when one of their own goes bad.

Weren laws are fluid things, since the law at any given time is whatever is agreed upon by the entire clan. The clan leader may declare a law at any time, as may the barons under him to an extent; but if the law is unjust or flies in the face of tradition, the clan ignores it. Likewise, if the majority of the clan feels that a law is necessary, it is quickly passed. This can result in some interesting rules and regulations. For example, the Ketern clan still has laws regarding the proper means of splitting a catch of fish, and anti-pirating laws, even though they are entirely landlocked. The laws remain from a time when they held territory on the eastern coast.

The secret of weren jurisprudence lies in knowing what the clan wants. This can be so difficult that even the weren have trouble figuring it out, which is why most clans appoint Lawreaders, special servants of the clan leaders whose job it is to publicly recite the relevant laws of the clan on formal occasions (such as at a trial, coronation, or marriage), and to represent defendants against their accusers. Very few clans have an established way to poll their members for their opinions. Clan leaders and nobles must develop an intuitive feel for what the clan might approve; judging the shifts in weren law is essential to the political career of any noble. Many weren diplomats in the service of the Orlamu are nothing less than failed aspirants to the clan leadership.

Weren Orthodoxies

The Kurgish weren are great believers in two faiths, one held by the townland weren, the other maintained by the nomads of North and South. The townland weren follow the Purifier faith, whose central tenet declares that the soul

Pidgin Weren

Ambush	Nahet
Ammunition	Narda
Argument	Taten
Attack!	Gru!
Avatar	Gontal
Bravery, Brave	Gruun
Chief, lord	Parag
Claw	Ta
Conclusion	Ot
Cowardice	Ierto
Criminal	Ielmar (literally, "blood-slave")
Drivespace	Drashee-ot
Duel	Tateg
Flintlock	Lessor
Honor	Darut
Human	Neetal
I Surrender!	Lu narad ohutoc
Offworld	Kurg-ot
Orlamu	Olam
Pacifism	Ierto-uvvar
Premise	Ingve
Priest	Tendelar
Purifier	Togruelar
Rifle (modern)	Lessmat
Ship	Drashee
Soul	Uumesteg
Stop!	Tegget!
Strength	Guu'el
Sword	Tadec
Victory	Unk-taren
Vigilante	Mannevar
Where is the?	...-eg?

grows more and more adept at the many tasks put before it, until finally, in its last incarnation, it surpasses physical boundaries and becomes a *gontal*, an avatar of sorts. These avatars are often worshipped by the still-living followers of the faith.

A small but growing number of weren have adopted a belief system based on a misinterpretation of Orlamu doctrine. These "heretics" believe that drivespace is a form of paradise, a place that carries the soul to a better world. When a weren is done with earthly life, it is time to accept the Orlamu offer of emigration. Those who make their "Last Pilgrimage" are often violently disappointed when they discover that not all worlds of the Orlamu Theocracy are parades.

Offworld weren often retain their native faith, but many also adopt the Orlamist worship of drivespace. Given the incredible technological leap from

Kurg

Primary	Tinnale
Planetary Class	Class 1
Gravity	G2 (1.04g)
Radiation	R1 (13 rem/yr)
Atmosphere	A2 (N, O, CO ₂ , Ar)
Pressure	P3 (0.91)
Heat	H2 (1.7°C)
Orbital Distance	1.48 AU
Radius	7,910 km
Year (Earth days)	627.0 days
Day (standard)	22.9 hours
Axial Tilt	2.9°
Density	1.05
# Satellites	None

riding marrizhe-back to making starfall between star systems, perhaps this shouldn't be too surprising. Most weren reject Humanity Reformation, Christianity, Buddhism, the Church of the Oracle, and Judaism, but a small number of converts to Islam have been recorded.

Physiology

Kurg's low temperatures favor large, stocky body types. Weren, with their large mass-to-surface-area ratio, fit the type perfectly and retain heat well. They suffer much more from hot temperatures than from cold ones, though the smell of an overheated weren means that most of their companions suffer along with him.

Male and female weren show relatively few external physical differences. Their size and strength are roughly comparable. The easiest way to tell the difference on sight is that males have much larger tusks and manes.

A typical weren stands 2.2 meters tall and is almost as wide across the shoulders. Weren weigh about 150 kilograms, though many settled weren are even heavier, since sedentary weren quickly accumulate an insulating layer of body fat. Weren muscle tissue is very dense, providing resistance to injury and fatigue.

Weren fingers end in long, tough, partially retractable claws. Weren take great pride in keeping these razor sharp.

A weren's body is covered with thick fur, starting in a mane. This is not ordinary hair, however. Most furry species generate each hair from long chains of dead cells. The thicker, heavier weren hair is multi-layered and able to change color like a chameleon's skin. Pigment

cells of various colors—primarily white, gray, green, and brown—line its length. When these cells either expose or hide their color, the entire strand of hair changes color.

Weren have limited control over this natural camouflage; they can adopt the hue of a nearby color, blending into the background, but they cannot change individual hairs or even small groups of hairs. The camouflaging action is almost entirely involuntary, but it is an important part of weren heritage. Ambushes are considered honorable tactics among weren, and the use of deception to gain a tactical advantage has a proud history on Kurg. Even now, a warrior who approaches a foe for close combat through the use of stealth is held to be more honorable than one who betrays the presence of his comrades through a rash charge.

Only the most desperate weren employ their tusks in combat, since they don't cause appreciably more damage than human teeth. The tusks are certainly bigger than human teeth, but they are poorly positioned for attacks.

The tusks of male weren continue to grow throughout their lifetime; the tusks of female weren reach a certain length (about 4 cm) and stop. Male weren usually file their tusks down to a reasonable length, much as humans trim their beards or t'sa maintain their crests. Among some weren warriors, exceedingly long tusks are a sign of status. Other than the difference in tusks, the degree of weren sexual dimorphism is fairly low, but weren themselves can always tell a male from a female.

Kurg

The weren homeworld is about the size of Earth, with a similar atmosphere and an orbit about as far from the sun as Mars is from Sol. The climate at the equator is temperate, though this quickly gives way to subarctic steppes and taigas toward the poles. The planet's ice caps are enormous and consist primarily of water, but they include dry ice (frozen carbon dioxide) at the poles.

Its distance from the sun and the low eccentricity of its orbit give Kurg little variation in seasons. It is a bit colder in winter, and the snow belt stretches very close to the equator, but the best

approximation of Kurgish weather at any given time is simply "damn cold."

Kurg's star, Tinnale, is a Class G star that shines about two and a half times as brightly as Sol. It is slightly larger than Sol and burns a thousand degrees hotter. If Kurg were as close to Tinnale as Earth is to Sol, it would be a charred rock.

Kurg's land mass is unevenly distributed in its shallow seas. Weren culture evolved and still remains centered in one large continent about the size of Europe, Africa, and Asia combined. Many much smaller landmasses are scattered around the globe, and small weren tribes have settled a couple of these, but they are much less advanced than their cousins. Contact with these lost cousins is extremely difficult; Kurg's seas are treacherous and filled with icebergs even in the summer months.

Kurg's ecosystem, like those of many primarily arctic worlds, shows little variation; a small number of species completely dominate the environment. Few species evolve on a planet with few differentiations in global climate. Also, the low carrying capacity of the arctic ecosystem requires Kurg's animals to forage a wider area to survive. At the same time, the low temperatures favor creatures with low surface-area-to-mass ratios; big creatures retain heat better than smaller ones. As a result, Kurg is dominated by a smaller variety of large herbivores and predators rather than a plethora of smaller but more diverse species. The most famous of these species is the marrizhe.

Whether encountered on their home-world or in the most distant reaches of the Verge, the weren—despite the influence of offworlders—remain as primal and rugged as the cold world that spawned them.



Wolfgang Baur is not quite furry enough to be mistaken for a weren. Paul was twice that hairy and had almost achieved total control over his hair's color-changing properties, until he had a tragic accident involving a large rock, paper, and scissors.