

# H.E.X. (HYDROGEN ERBIUM XENON)

Scientific name: *Vinhic*

- 🦖 **Length:** 1-2 meters
- 🦖 **Height:** 1 meter
- 🦖 **Weight:** Around 150kg
- 🦖 **Classification:** Other
- 🦖 **Life expectancy:** Around 75 years
- 🦖 **Diet:** Omnivorous
- 🦖 **World population:** Unknown



The H.E.X. is a species that originated on the planet H.E.X.. The species and planet features in the story *Earth From An Alien Viewpoint*, which involves the H.E.X. visiting Terra Prime (their name for Earth).

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## **Meta-Level**

The universe inhabited by the H.E.X. is made up of a wide variety of space-capable civilisations, many of which are aggressive. A number of stories have been written about individuals seeking freedom from, or within, these civilisations.

### **Moral Tone**

[A description of any moral tones present in the work.]

### **Utopian / Dystopian Qualities**

While this is not explicitly stated, the universe the H.E.X. live in can subjectively be said to have a strong dystopian leaning. Much of this comes from its themes of hierarchy, often enforced at the expense of the well-being of the individual, although this may be more welcome to those with an enthusiasm for hierarchical societies.

### **Supernatural**

[Introduction needed.]

### **Magic**

Magic exists in the H.E.X.s' universe.

The H.E.X. are not familiar with magic at the beginning of *Earth From an Alien Viewpoint*, but Reico-Lin discovered it during their exploration to Earth and introduced the rest of the H.E.X. to it.

For further information about the workings of magic, see the Pacific Shores Magic System Lore Bible.



# Physiology

H.E.X. are difficult to describe in terms of their appearance due to their shape-shifting tendencies, but they are tough and resilient.

## Appearance

H.E.X. are amorphous shape-shifters that routinely present as blobs of coloured gel. In their 'neutral' form each individual is very similar to every other in its body shape, with the most obvious distinction between individuals being the coloured striations along their bodies.

### *Diet*

H.E.X. are capable of ingesting most materials. They use the nutrients they acquire by doing this to organically shape-shift parts of their bodies into useful objects (this can include complex objects such as tools or machinery). These machine parts grow as part of the H.E.X.'s body; they can detach the tool if needed, but this usually requires intervention from an AI. Most H.E.X. lack the ability to detach a tool unaided.

There are a few materials that H.E.X. find indigestible, such as teflon. Their full range of digestive capacity isn't well documented, but they tend to struggle to digest anything that resists acid.

### *Limits Around Shape-Shifting*

While H.E.X. are very good at shape-shifting, they are not natural mimics, so behaving convincingly like a member of another species tends to be harder work for them. For this reason, shifted H.E.X. observe the species they are mimicking in order to learn how to present themselves as a member of that race. The H.E.X. have their own psychological leanings, and some are easier for them to ignore or disguise than others.

H.E.X. generally only shape-shift to reflect the outer appearance of another species and don't bother mimicking the appearance of that species' internal organs. Generally a H.E.X. may recreate the internal organs of a creature if they stay in that form for a long time or if they expect to be injured. This can extend to the brain, and H.E.X. who mimic

the composition of the brain of the species they're mimicking can begin to develop similar behavioural patterns, tics, etc. That looks strange when done by a H.E.X..

### *Optimal Size*

The optimal maximum size for a H.E.X. is around 150kg. Beyond this, most H.E.X. tend to feel an instinctive need to split to reduce their bulk.

Warriors are an exception to this. They tend to be a little bit bulkier and heavier so that they can take extra hits from weapons and still fight. A Warrior's general maximum weight is 200kg.

## **Intelligence**

Overall they are highly intelligent, although their intelligence tends to be distributed among the elite, with lower-caste individuals using their mental abilities far less. They are capable of using tools including single-use rockets, to the point that they have developed AI. They use their shape-shifting ability to create any tools they require. H.E.X. brains work differently to those of humans. They don't possess a central brain, and instead rely on a network of neurons throughout the animal's entire body. This is why H.E.X. offspring retain some of the knowledge of their parent, and it's also why H.E.X. wait until they're big enough to sacrifice a workable portion of their neural net and recover easily.

Because of this, offspring have a similar neural structure to that of a fully-grown H.E.X.. It is not a young, growing system like that of a human child, but a working portion of an adult system.

They are community-minded, some might even say they have a hive mentality, and as such, care about one another. However, culturally they lack a strong grasp of the concept of the well-being of the individual, and this means that the care they feel for one another has more to do with care for the overall population than the individual. As such their dedication to well-being does not extend to creatures outside of their own species. H.E.X. are also pragmatic about the fact that they are a destructive species, and as a result have something of a "let's get on with things" mentality. That isn't to say that H.E.X. entirely lack individuality; they are capable of individual variation in personality, but a mix of caring only about the well-being of the H.E.X. community and varying measures of disregard and callousness towards other species is common. The occasional, more selfish individual exists.

### *Memory Inheritance*

Memory is passed down from one 'generation' to another. If an event made a big impression on a H.E.X. then this sense of importance around the event or anything related to it (such as the location it happened) will feel important to the offspring.

Largely however, a newly-split 'child' H.E.X. starts life with a new slate, memory-wise. The memories passed down from one generation to the next get hazier, the more generations the memory is passed to. In the current day, most H.E.X. feel little or no emotional connection to the Day of Darkening, although they are aware that it happened.

This is because the original trauma felt by H.E.X. on the discovery of the Darkening has already been integrated into H.E.X. neural nets. They don't like that the Darkening happened/is happening, but they already have plans in place to overcome the problem, and new H.E.X. sense this.

H.E.X. are capable of feeling overwhelmed. Usually when this happens, the H.E.X. is given a wide berth by others in order to give it the space to calm itself down. H.E.X. culture is not skilled at, nor designed to handle emotional distress, so active forms of support are rarely forthcoming. One of the few offerings that one H.E.X. might make to another is to reassign it to the Builder caste, which is generally presents less stress to perform adequately. When it recovers, it can be readmitted to its original caste.

### **Reproduction**

This species reproduces asexually; when one individual grows big enough it splits to form two new H.E.X.es. Occasionally two individuals will merge (or 'tighten'), but this is rare. Newly-split H.E.X.es are independent from the beginning of their lives, although they benefit from being guided by their parent H.E.X..

The ideal split to create a new H.E.X. is between 60-40 and 70-30, with the larger portion identifying as the parent. Any H.E.X. with a body-weight of 25% or less of that of a fully-grown adult will likely experience cognitive problems due to not having enough of a neural net to function effectively.

### **Common Medical Conditions**

The idea of medical intervention is a little strange to H.E.X., so as such they haven't developed a library of medical conditions, nor treatments of those conditions. For a

community-minded species, individuals compromised by sickness would be a burden on the system and not worth the expenditure required to make them healthy. Despite this, it seems obvious that one of the most devastating conditions a H.E.X. could experience would be blindness.

### *Blindness*

Given that H.E.X. communicate using bioluminescent light, blindness would be disastrous for a member of this species. It is rare for a H.E.X. to be completely blind however, as much of the surface area of their bodies is capable of reading light, which means that a H.E.X. could only be blind if most of its body was deformed.

Such a H.E.X. would not only be blind, but also mute and effectively deaf. On the very rare occasion that a H.E.X. arises with this condition they are usually brought into a lab to be fitted with as many sensors as possible. Then they are sent to another planet on a one-way exploratory mission to act as a drone. There, they wander, doubtless extremely confused and frightened, until they die of natural causes or are killed by the native flora or fauna.

### *Heat/Cold*

The heat and cold that occur as part of natural weather cycles do not affect H.E.X.. However, extremes of heat and cold can, and for this reason H.E.X. equip themselves to protect their tissues from cryogenic freezing and for temperature-based weapons (such as flamethrowers, to give an arguably unlikely but illustrative example).

Heat and cold can impair their cognitive function and shape-shifting, trigger their acid/digestion process, and in extreme cases, damage their DNA and their bodies. The exact range of temperatures that H.E.X. can tolerate are unknown.

H.E.X. are more vulnerable to heat than to cold. Over-heated H.E.X. have difficulty maintaining their shape as their gelatinous bodies become looser, and if the H.E.X. is unable to shed the heat it can experience something akin to a stroke or aneurysm. Under extreme heat they can be baked solid. This can kill the H.E.X., however it must be stressed that the temperatures required are difficult for most civilisations to generate. H.E.X. are fairly likely to dehydrate and crack naturally, but this is not lethal.

H.E.X. can be frozen and if this happens, they can be cracked, or parts can be sheared or snapped off. Note that a H.E.X. remains partially aware even if frozen, and it is possible for a frozen fragment to fight after it has defrosted. The most notable parts of

its awareness are its ability to perceive light, so a frozen H.E.X. or H.E.X. fragment will be able to observe its environment. Warrior H.E.X. with AI augmentation is likely to have an enhanced ability to track its surroundings.

Some AIs designed by the H.E.X. are made to react to cold, to prevent a H.E.X. from freezing.

### *Flattening/Spreading*

Spreading a H.E.X. too thin is lethal to it, as once it becomes spread too thin it cannot contract.

### *Minor Illnesses*

H.E.X. experience a few minor illnesses, including one in which they do not contract as well as normal, and another where they drop tiny pieces of themselves. To an unfamiliar observer, the latter gives the appearance of the H.E.X. being covered in sweat. To an affected H.E.X. this experience can be downright horrifying as they release a multitude of tiny H.E.X. with extremely limited cognitive function from their surface. They are however, capable of reabsorbing these.

### *SGVM Virus*

Many species are vulnerable to the virus created artificially by the Telemi and the H.E.X. are among them.

## **Geographical Distribution**

Officially, the H.E.X. live on one planet, the planet H.E.X., and nowhere else. Unofficially they like to engage in missions to other planets, so a few individuals are dotted incognito throughout the universe.

### **Countries, Cities, Towns, and Settlements**

Given the invasive nature of H.E.X., the nearest they generally have to settlements - with one notable exception - is a small number of planets. Other space-faring of space-aware civilisations work hard to prevent them from spreading onto their own planets.

#### **Planet H.E.X.**

The surface of the planet H.E.X. is dark, icy, and barren, as the planet itself is no longer within a solar system thanks to an event called the Darkening. Much of the planet's remaining life has found a foot-hold in its cave systems. This is in no small part thanks to the H.E.X. themselves, who use the best of their technological skills to keep the ecosystem alive, however scant it might have become.

The H.E.X. maintain farms to grow edible plants. Builder-caste H.E.X. are trained to eat fruit and excrete the seeds to ensure they are not digested, and these seeds are used to grow the next generation of crops. These same builders remain close to the growing plants and glow either blue or red. Blue light is energy-rich and encourages the plants to grow as vigorously as possible, while the red light encourages them to produce flowers and fruit. To any H.E.X. observing this, the effect is akin to watching a choir whispering to the plants to encourage them to grow.

The Builders are instructed not to eat the crops. While some Builders defy this rule and take the occasional nibble of the crops, they are mostly obedient so the crops do not sustain any significant damage.

The Darkening took hundreds of H.E.X. lifetimes, and it was only after their planet was well on its way to leaving its solar system behind that they realised what was happening. By then it was too late for the H.E.X. to be able to prevent or re-instate their

planet, so instead they focused on preserving as much of the planet H.E.X.'s life as they could. They were unable to save all of the planet's life, and in the current day only the hardier or more adaptable species remain.

### *The City of H.E.X.A*

H.E.X.A is the only notable city on planet H.E.X.. It is a sprawling metropolis that contains approximately 80% of the world's population of H.E.X..

### H.E.X. 2 and H.E.X. 3

The H.E.X. briefly managed to escape their native planet as the Darkening took effect, and colonised two other planets in their solar system, which they named H.E.X. 2 and H.E.X. 3. This didn't last however, as a while after settling they alerted the rest of the galactic community about their presence, which prompted the community to recognise them for the highly dangerous species they are and try to wipe them out.

While the planets themselves still exist, they have been wiped clean of H.E.X. by other space-facing species who considered the H.E.X. too dangerous to be allowed to colonise any secondary planets.

The cleansing was achieved by introducing a bacterial infection to H.E.X.es 2 and 3 without the H.E.X.s' knowledge. The H.E.X. were carriers of the disease and unwittingly contributed to its spread. This bacterium was known for infecting most flora and fauna, and decimated the ecosystems of the two planets, rendering the H.E.X. unable to live there. The two colonies died and no more H.E.X. were sent to replace them.

In the current day both H.E.X.es 2 and 3 are lifeless.

## **Infrastructure**

The H.E.X. live beneath the surface of their home planet, in cave systems that they have been adding to for centuries. The caves are dark (which suits a species that communicates by bioluminescence), relatively warm, humid, and support a great deal of plant life.

### **Architecture**

'Construction' may not be the most appropriate description for how H.E.X. create their living and working spaces. Normally, rather than making a building they will eat away at the rock in an undeveloped part of their cave system until it has the entrances, hallways, and rooms that they need.

As this requires for H.E.X. builders to eat, if given the choice they will prefer to 'build' in old fissures that have cooled. These seams are rich in minerals from deep within the planet, which themselves are useful for H.E.X. who wish to make items. The politics of these 'construction sites' is managed so that higher-caste members of society get to eat there too.

#### *Energy Production Plants*

One of the more common buildings the H.E.X. construct is energy production plants, such as nuclear plants.

#### *Threshold and Corridor Sizes*

The Ashenti designed the Builder class to inadvertently assist with maintenance of this maximum size. They programmed the Builders to instinctively build thresholds and corridors a certain size so that they are easy to squeeze through for H.E.X. up to the size of around 150kg, but become harder to cross for any H.E.X. bigger.

### **Education**

Newly split H.E.X. inherit the knowledge their parent had. This is called 'memory imprinting'. This memory can go 5 or 6 generations back, depending on the mental

capabilities of the individual H.E.X. and whether they themselves are from a regular splitting or a tightened splitting.

H.E.X. are schooled to reinforce this knowledge, to update their knowledge, and to learn new skills that their ancestors did not learn. The H.E.X. generally prefer to train younger, fresher minds than retrain older individuals.

### *Greanditer*

The Explorer academy that Reico-Lin went to. It has a reputation for being a little more 'creative' and diverse in its approach than non-Explorer schools.

### *Secrets*

Most galactic species contribute to a pool of knowledge from which all participants benefit; not so the H.E.X.. Their frosty relationship with the rest of the community means that this pool of knowledge is theoretically out of their reach. However, they are not above sending an Explorer to gather knowledge held by other species while disguised as an individual of an accepted species.

The H.E.X. keep their own pool of secret knowledge. They do not release their AI to other species, instead keeping it for their own use only. Even if they did share their technical knowledge, it would require significant redesign to work for non-H.E.X. as most of the H.E.X.s' AI is connected to their bodies; they are essentially cyborgs.

## **Energy Sources and Usage**

The H.E.X. use fusion and fission for energy, and release the byproducts - heat and water - into the cave system to help the vegetation in their cities thrive.

They are capable of generating fuel for their energy generation plants using their bodies, but don't usually do so in practice. Creating a piece of plutonium or any other reactive material requires them to excrete a specific amount of their own body mass. They can recover from this, but the H.E.X. do not normally generate power this way. Instead they seek geothermals and other sources of power to start the process of fission or fusion.

## **Healthcare and Medicine**

The H.E.X. are not medically inclined. This is in order to preserve resources. Minor illnesses are inconsequential enough to be ignored. Major ones can impact the H.E.X.'s performance of its duties. If a H.E.X. is less able to work due to sickness then the general response is to demote or cull it, and admit a healthy H.E.X. to the role instead.

### *'Contraception' and Forced Splitting*

Normally once a H.E.X. reaches a certain weight it will divide itself and a portion of its mind into the new H.E.X.. This new body is typically about one-third the weight of the parent. Splitting is avoidable however, and a H.E.X. can withhold from splitting if it so desires, regardless of its size.

A H.E.X. can be forced to split. This is something that Reico's AI did to it once the AI decided it did not want Reico's input any longer. When it initiated the split, it retained a changeable H.E.X. body while Reico was forced to attain a permanent human form. Generally splitting is a non-traumatic event for both parent and offspring. However, H.E.X. like to have a certain amount of preparation time before they separate a part of themselves to create an offspring so any situation where the parent didn't get the chance to do this will be traumatic for both parent and offspring.

An example of this is H.E.X. who are cleaved on the battlefield. If a H.E.X. is cut so that part of it falls off, and that new part is large enough to survive, then it is likely to be naturally aggressive throughout its life due to the trauma of its 'birth'.

### *Injury*

Killing a H.E.X. is difficult due to their amorphous nature, but being spread very thin over a wide enough area can be lethal for them. A H.E.X. can rebuild itself for as long as its mind remains compact enough, but if it is spread thin, then the H.E.X. becomes unable to contract or dispel any excess heat that it may be subjected to, and the individual dies.

### *Mind-Uploading*

Elderly H.E.X. upload their minds to a computer so that they are not lost. The process of uploading a hex involves breaking their body down into nothing but electrical impulses. When they do this, they join legions of other minds from H.E.X. who went through the same process. The minds are kept together as a hive-mind.

## **Sanitation**

[Introduction needed.]

### **Travel / Transport**

Due to the nature of H.E.X. life and their ability to create most of the goods they're likely to need, they have little need to distribute goods.

## **Position in Ecosystem**

The H.E.X. are an engineered species, so did not develop alongside other species. As a result they do not fit into any ecosystem and are purely an invasive species.

When the H.E.X. were introduced to their native planet they instantly became the alpha predators. They wiped out the other native predators (which generally approached the H.E.X. first in the hope of finding food) and then the prey animals.

In the current day all that's left on H.E.X. is vegetation and the H.E.X. themselves.

### **Dominant Species**

H.E.X. recognise non-H.E.X., including other dominant species, as living creatures. They understand that they move and think. However, they rarely consider another species worthy of inclusion into H.E.X. society. As they consider H.E.X. to be superior to these other creatures, they consider it optimal for there to be H.E.X. living in the territory they have found the non-H.E.X. in, rather than the natives. This is why H.E.X. are prone to killing other species that they find on other worlds. The greatest value a non-H.E.X. can generally have for a H.E.X. is as food or as a source of information.

### **Plants**

Thanks to the Darkening, plants have difficulty growing on planet H.E.X.. The severe lack of sunlight makes larger, more complex plant life impossible. The only flora that exists there are small plants - H.E.X.'s equivalent of single-celled algae and mosses - and these generally only grow in the H.E.X.s' tunnels. They get their nutrients by hybridising with fungi and bacteria to become lichens, and some plant cells photosynthesise light either from starlight or from the H.E.X., who use light to communicate with one another.

The plant life that shares the H.E.X.s' caves has fallen into a symbiotic relationship with the H.E.X.. The various colours that the H.E.X. use when luminescing have begun to impact on the pigments the plants use to photosynthesise, and in the current day the cave plants exhibit a range of colours to most efficiently capture the H.E.X.s' light. Aside from this, the H.E.X. eat plants and prefer them to minerals, so they have a personal interest in ensuring that their flora thrives.

### **Fungi**

Fungi find it easier to survive on H.E.X. as they do not rely on sunlight in order to live.

### **Predators**

The H.E.X. have no predators any more by the current day. They never truly did, given their ability to consume anything that touches them, including predators. H.E.X. flesh - a pungent jelly/goop - is also an acquired taste which most animal species never developed.

### **Pollinators**

The presence of plants on planet H.E.X. has continued, in turn, to support pollinating insects.

### **Artificial Life**

The H.E.X. have the technological ability to create AI and use it for scouting missions, among other things.

## Technology

The H.E.X. are able to produce their own technology on an individual level. However, a few items that the H.E.X. use are too complex for an individual to create without a team-effort. These include the technology required for space travel, and Artificial Intelligence.

### Technological Age

The H.E.X. are space-capable, and have well-developed AI.

#### *Artificial Intelligence*

Most AI do not have the ability to think for themselves and are only adept at the exact task for which they were made. AI with intelligence that surpasses this are rare. Reico-Lin was fitted with one such AI for its journey to Earth.

#### *Space Travel*

The H.E.X. are deeply invested in space travel. Mostly they are keen to find other planets on which to settle, which can offer them better resources than their native planet. They also like to travel to other planets to improve their own knowledge base by spying on other species.

The Elders' model of operation for this means that they generally only seek new worlds, they don't usually act to colonise them. However they occasionally do try to colonise a new world if it seems particularly ideal for H.E.X., such as its climate being within the Goldilocks Zone, the mineral composition of the planet being rich, or if it has lush plant life that the H.E.X. find palatable. So far they have not found such a planet. Any worlds that have come close to fulfilling these criteria (and it may be noted that the H.E.X. could benefit from settling on most other planets in Goldilocks Zones due to their home planet being a rogue that is almost completely unable to support life), The General discourages settling on.

The H.E.X. use a combination of technological knowledge and their own shape-shifting capability to explore other planets. Usually a H.E.X.'s body is soft, but if one is selected to explore another planet, it forms a hard shell and is then fired into space using a

single-use rocket protected by a force-shield, at a trajectory that allows them to land on the planet they wish to explore. When it arrives, it shape-shifts the hard casing away and begins to explore.

However, this technique only works in one direction. A few Explorers become stranded and are unable to return to their native planet. Stranding is a deliberate act by the Elders who do not want a candidate to enter their caste, and sending an unwanted candidate on a mission is a viable way to prevent this. Explorers that the Elders genuinely want among their rank will create a forcefield shell-casing for the Explorer to use for a return trip. The ratio of stranded to non-stranded Explorers is low so as not to arouse suspicion among the general Explorer population.

A vital part of the H.E.X.s' space travel strategy is the creation of worm holes. The H.E.X. are capable of creating worm holes away from their planet but do not have the ability to equip Explorers to create more to return. The Ashenti do, however, and they do this artfully to maintain their anonymity while also ensuring that the H.E.X. continue to explore.

#### *Return Space Travel*

When a space journey is expected to involve an Explorer's return, the travelling H.E.X. is provided with the means to create a second force-shield. However, building the propulsion system on the alien planet to allow the H.E.X. to begin its homeward journey is left up to the H.E.X. itself. Only a few H.E.X. have the training necessary to be able to do this.

#### *Energy Barrier*

A powerful force-field with the ability to withstand several nuclear blasts. The energy barrier is an invention by the H.E.X. that allows their Explorers to travel between planets. This invention also allows a H.E.X. to appear as a non-H.E.X., as it can be programmed into the shape of any other life form. This comes in handy for H.E.X. Explorers, as maintaining a deliberate shape with their bodies unaided eventually becomes tiring, so energy barriers allow them to spend more time in disguise after their endurance runs out. Once a H.E.X. has programmed an energy barrier to do this it only has to maintain the colour of the creature it is mimicking, which is far easier for a H.E.X. than maintaining a shape.

### **Agriculture**

For a civilisation that's so advanced in some ways, the H.E.X. never developed an agricultural system. They remain 'hand to mouth' eaters.

### **Industrial Status**

H.E.X. are not physically capable of mass production, so haven't had an Industrial Era in any way recognisable to humans. Their production method - use of their shape-shifting ability - is time-consuming so they only produce what they need.

### **Industries**

#### *The Hardware Industry*

A H.E.X.'s ability to create its own tools means that every individual is their own Swiss army knife, so there is only a limited market on their home planet for hardware, if any at all.

However they do have a market for cooperation between two or more H.E.X. for when a task requires more than one individual or tool, as while H.E.X. are resourceful, there are limits to their dexterity. Generating tools requires energy so a H.E.X. can become winded from doing a lot of this type of work, so often a H.E.X. will request help so that expenditure of energy is spread between multiple H.E.X..

#### *The Construction 'Industry'*

Most buildings that the H.E.X. produce are hive-like complexes that are eaten out of the rock by Builders, in which multiple H.E.X. can live.

As this form of construction also requires for the H.E.X. to eat, construction is managed carefully. When one H.E.X. has eaten enough it will make way for another H.E.X. to eat its fill. They do this partly because a H.E.X. that over-eats will grow faster, and the usual way of sacrificing extra bulk is to produce a child, which not every H.E.X. wants to do.

A quirk of this situation is that the Builders eat while working so do not eat before or after work, so they don't tend to seek to visit the farms.

On the rare occasion that two H.E.X. like each other enough to only want one another's company they can secure a corner of the hive for themselves, but H.E.X. are very socially-minded so this is not a common occurrence.

The layouts of these buildings are generally made to encourage the inhabitants to travel towards hubs so that they can spend time in one another's company.

These hubs are good for encouraging the H.E.X. to talk to one another to help improve community cohesion, but they are also storage areas, and are well-insulated. When H.E.X. spend time in these hubs they can discuss material usage with one another and use it more efficiently through teamwork, and they can benefit from one another's physical warmth.

### **The Sciences**

[\[Introduction needed.\]](#)

## **History**

The H.E.X. have a chequered history, largely on account of them being designed specifically as an invasive species. The intelligence of their elite provides a counterpoint to this depending on context, but largely it only serves to make them more terrifying.

### **Evolution / Genesis**

This species does not have bones so never left a fossil record, but they had had no reason to believe that they hadn't evolved on planet H.E.X.. However, this was not true and they had, in fact, been engineered into existence by the Ashenti.

The Ashenti implanted the H.E.X. with instincts and left other false clues on planet hex about their origin as a species to make it appear as if the H.E.X. had developed by a process of natural selection. The H.E.X. scientists had had no reason to reject their species' origin story until the Darkening.

The Darkening led to a great deal of existential fear and uncertainty, and this led to the population discussing their origin and fate as a species, which led to a re-examination of their origin.

As a result of all this the H.E.X. developed some new origin stories, none of which they could be sure were right. One said that the now-rogue planet, H.E.X., was their original planet, but this was not the only one. Since then they have explored in the hope of finding their original planet, along with, perhaps, a native population of H.E.X.. This would be the most convincing evidence they could expect for another planet being their true place of origin.

### **Timeline**

#### *The Creation of the H.E.X.*

The H.E.X. were created by the Ashenti species as a genetic manipulation experiment and environmental cleansing tool. The name H.E.X. is an acronym: Hydrogen Erbium Xenon.

Their goal was to create a species capable of surviving any environment and of mass-reproduction, release the species on any planet the Ashenti wished to populate, wait for it to consume all planetary resources, and then land on the planet themselves once there was no other life present to 'contaminate' the environment.

The H.E.X. were intelligent enough to recognise that they would consume one-another if they didn't learn to control themselves, so after a time they devised the caste system so that they could work as an overall community to properly manage their resources rather than fight over them as a number of disparate clans.

At least, that is the memory that was imposed on the H.E.X. population. What actually happened was that the Ashenti introduced The General to their population, which introduced the caste system. This was a move by the Ashenti to impose extra control over the H.E.X., as the H.E.X. were even better at devouring everything around them than the Ashenti had predicted.

### *The Darkening*

At one point in H.E.X. history, a rogue planet big enough to disrupt the planetary bodies of the H.E.X.s' solar system passed through it. Its gravitational pull attracted planet H.E.X., and by the time the rogue planet was gone, H.E.X. had already left its orbit with no realistic hope of returning, and went spinning away from its solar system over a time-span of hundreds of H.E.X. lifetimes.

Since then, life on the surface of the planet H.E.X. has withered, and the H.E.X. themselves put deliberate effort into keeping the underground caves warm and survivable for themselves. They had little interest in preserving biodiversity on their own planet, and anything else that retreated into the caves with them did so incidentally, and ran a greater risk of being consumed by a H.E.X..

### *Day of the Darkening*

The day that it dawned on the H.E.X. what was happening to their planet.

### *Unveiling of the Origin Myth*

See Genesis section above for further details.

### *Creation of the Caste System*

After H.E.X. society had developed to the point that it created its clan system, the clans began to act as rivals to one another, which led to a great deal of in-fighting. An

individual H.E.X. named The General recognised the potential for catastrophe in this situation and revolutionised their society into a caste system that was far less likely to self-destruct.

#### *The First Elders*

When The General switched H.E.X. society from the clan system to the caste system, the leaders of the clans became the first Elders.

#### *The First Explorers and Warriors*

These took more time to establish.

#### *The First Builders*

Any H.E.X. who was not deemed to be a leader or a suitable candidate for exploration or fighting was relegated to this category.

#### *Settlement on H.E.X. 2 and H.E.X. 3*

When the H.E.X. discovered that the Darkening was occurring, they analysed the planet's trajectory for the closest two inhabitable planets that it would pass by. Two qualified, and they travelled to both.

It is not stated anywhere that H.E.X.es 2 and 3 did not already harbour their own ecosystems, including intelligent life. The H.E.X. sent a number of settlers to each planet, mostly Builders, a few Warriors, and a pair of Explorers.

Later, other, interplanetary species discovered the H.E.X. and learned of their destructive tendencies, and destroyed H.E.X.es 2 and 3, and their H.E.X. populations with them.

#### *The H.E.X.s' First War*

The H.E.X. involved themselves in a war during the time they were on their second and third planets at the request of the Ashenti, who sent the H.E.X. a generic request for help. The General responded positively to this request and petitioned for the H.E.X. to send assistance, and such a positive response to the Ashentis' request by such a powerful and respected figure successfully created the leverage needed for the H.E.X. to send troops to help. Once the other alien species learned what they were, decided that the H.E.X. could not be allowed to spread.

One of the practical difficulties the alien species had was the consequences of this. They discovered that the H.E.X. were difficult to destroy, so that the only way to assure their destruction was to destroy the three planets on which they had settled. To do this

would impact on the gravity of the overall solar systems to which H.E.X.es 2 and 3 belonged, and any that H.E.X. 1 was close to. Instead, they decided to eradicate the H.E.X. from H.E.X.es 2 and 3 as best they could without blowing up either planet (indeed, they succeeded in this), and aim to imprison and contain the H.E.X. via red tape.

The practical upshot of this was that the H.E.X. have been cornered so that they cannot legally leave their home world.

### **Historically Significant People**

#### *The General*

The H.E.X. who developed the caste system. This saved the H.E.X. species from a potentially disastrous civil war between its clans.

The H.E.X. as a species is a victim of its own success; it fulfils the remit that the Ashenti created it for, but does it too well. As a result, the Ashenti have had to take remedial action to keep the H.E.X. in check to ensure that they do not strip the entire universe of its biodiversity or ruin their own goals. One of the ways they did this was by creating The General. The General was mostly effective, and the H.E.X.s' progress has slowed down drastically, though its progress through the universe has not been stopped completely. The General is consciously loyal to the Ashenti. However, it has certain weaknesses, including the risk to the integrity of its consciousness if it absorbs anybody or anything else that represents a radical deviation from its own consciousness. This is why it was reluctant to admit Reico Lin to the Elders, as it would then need to absorb Reico Lin. The General is curious as to what would happen if it absorbed an Ashenti.

The General is much older than any H.E.X. has a right to be, and warding off deterioration and death is one of its biggest challenges. It does this partly by consuming unique data from newer Elders. The amount of data that makes up The General means that it is two or three times larger than most other H.E.X.. If its true size and nature were understood than the Explorer class would be deeply concerned about this monster in their midst.

#### *Reico-Lin*

An Explorer-type H.E.X. who went to Terra Prime (Earth). It was fitted with an experimental combat-explorer module.

When Reico went to Earth it was caught by B.A.D (the Bureau of Alien Detection/Detention/Diplomacy/Destruction), who tagged it with an R.F.I.D to keep track of it. In order to stop this device from working, Reico turned a portion of its own body into a powerful EMP device to damage it.

Reico disguised itself as a human and lived on Earth for a while. During this time it discovered the joys of sugars and carbs, and took a liking to sweet/sour foods such as key lime pie.

### *Eclies*

An Explorer-type H.E.X. who worked as a scientist and was good friends with Reico. Eclies took the responsibility of implanting Reico with AI for their final mission, at the instruction of the Elders.

Eclies only discovered the true purpose of the AI later, and attempted to warn Reico.

## **Nations Founded**

H.E.X. start colonies; these cannot easily be called anything as complex as “nations”.

## **Wars and Alliances**

### **Alliances**

The H.E.X. do not have any allies. Very few other species trust them enough due to their shape-shifting abilities to put any stock in their trust, and the H.E.X.s’ original purpose was to cleanse entire planets of other life, which continues to show in their behaviour to this day, despite their lack of willingness for it to be so.

Here are a few details about the nuances of the relationships the H.E.X. do have with other species.

### *Ashenti*

The Ashenti created the H.E.X. as a cleanser of planets, so that they could inhabit the planets after the H.E.X. had finished devouring the entire native ecosystem. They still encourage them to colonise worlds, however they do it obliquely by using The General

as a proxy. They rarely contact the H.E.X. directly, and when they do they never reference the fact that they created them. They keep the fact that they were the creators of the H.E.X. a closely-guarded secret.

The Ashenti feel ambivalent about the creation of the H.E.X., as the H.E.X. are better at destroying ecosystems than they anticipated.

### *Other Shape-shifting Races*

The H.E.X. see other shape-shifting races as 'sibling' races, but consider their extreme flexibility of their shape-shifting ability to make them superior to less-flexible shifting races. This includes the Yyxhil, which are only capable of mimicking organic structures. Despite this general sense of superiority that the H.E.X. feel over the Yyxhil, the H.E.X. are curious about the Yyxhil because unlike H.E.X., they can transform without having to maintain a specific weight; Yyxhil can shape-shift to other forms above and below their native weight.

Aside from this curiosity, the H.E.X. have little to do with them as they are unable to further examine the Yyxhil without initiating war. Perhaps the H.E.X. would defy this if not for their concern that if a Yyxhil eats a H.E.X. then this may allow the Yyxhil to develop the ability to turn into organic matter also, which would render them a superior shape-shifter to the H.E.X..

### Wars

The H.E.X. were designed to decimate entire worlds and render them barren. Being able to win any war waged against them is a prerequisite for this. As such they are considered a plague by most other species, and wars have been initiated against them.

Their impulse to explore, colonise, and eat everything in sight interferes greatly with their diplomatic abilities.

### *Ashenti*

Only the Elders know that the H.E.X. were created by the Ashenti. Even then, the only reason they know about them is because the Ashenti created The General. The Ashenti did this to keep the H.E.X. in check.

The General succeeded by switching H.E.X. society from a clan-based model to a caste-based one, but it didn't stop there. When The General was uploaded to join the other Elders, its willpower was so strong that the lesser Elders began to assimilate its personality. As a result of this, The General is still at work in the current day, staging a coup of the society by absorbing the Elders into its consciousness. It restricts information about this as much as possible to ensure that the rest of the universal community does not realise that the H.E.X. are returning to their previous, war-like mentality.

#### *Other Non-H.E.X. Species*

The H.E.X. are not natural cooperators, mainly due to the difficulties they have with trusting others - which itself is a result of the distrust other species often have of them. As a result, they no longer build positive relationships with other civilisations.

This is frequently problematic due to their natural curiosity, which leads them to organise regular missions to explore the universe regardless of the consequences. They may be prepared to risk the consequences of coming into contact with other species, but they generally try to avoid conflict if possible by shape-shifting to disguise themselves as a member of a native species on any planet they visit. Other species now know that they do this.

Many H.E.X. harbour inter-generation memories of the extermination by other species of their ancestors, who lived on H.E.X.es 2 and 3, particularly how they were massacred or forced to flee, and how their second and third planets were destroyed. In light of this, other species who are also aware of this aspect of H.E.X. history fear retaliation by the H.E.X. and are wary of H.E.X. using their shape-shifting ability to present as a member of their own race, and what damage they might do if this happens.

Other species do not only fear military infiltration and attacks; they are also wary of other crimes such as theft. Therefore, other species tend to get uncomfortable whenever they know there are H.E.X. around.

This situation of mutual distrust combined with H.E.X. and non-H.E.X. insistence on interacting with one another has created a delicate situation. To attempt to mitigate it, H.E.X. make use of peace treaties to establish a basic common ground of peace, but do not tend to build upon inter-species relationships beyond this.

Despite them being feared, the H.E.X. consider themselves in need of the protection that treaties provide, both from outright war and from a variety of harsh penalties that other

species subject them to, such as injunctions on them colonizing other planets, and authorized exploration only.

H.E.X. explore without having their missions authorized, and they are well aware that they are violating the very treaties they feel they depend on.

### *Inter-species Warfare*

The clans that existed before the caste system was installed used to fight constantly. It took the actions of The General to prevent further fighting by creating and putting the caste system into practice.

### **Trade Routes Established**

H.E.X. are very unlikely to establish trade routes with other civilisations due to their lack of trust, and capitalism in particular doesn't lend itself well to H.E.X. society - hence, they would have little need to make money from trading.

### **Disasters**

[Introduction needed.]

### **Discoveries**

[Introduction needed.]

### **Inventions**

[Introduction needed.]

### **Changes in Standards of Living**

H.E.X. are not known for their rich imaginations, particularly with regards to how society could be different. This extends to improvements in standards of living.

## **Slavery**

The H.E.X.s' caste system, combined with their hive-mind, renders them as productive as they can be, with or without reward.

## **Social Movements**

[Introduction needed.]

## **Culture**

Most of H.E.X. culture is economical and provides little succour or interest for people with rich emotional lives, as the H.E.X. as a species are community-minded so do not feel it appropriate to act selfishly, and have poor emotional fluency. However, they do have a unique culture.

### Art

The H.E.X. are not particularly well mentally-equipped to understand the concept of art, as they are not emotionally fluent as a species, and art generally requires an emotional response to qualify as 'art'.

Their general lack of understanding of art caused them to make a large mis-step in their assessment of Earth: the Elders sent Reico Lin to Earth on the basis of a video that they believed was information, but was in fact a movie about fictional creatures.

### *Entertainment*

H.E.X. do not have a concept of entertainment, especially not as a discipline to be developed as a career. They generally lack emotional fluency as a species, so art or entertainment of any kind is unlikely to appeal to them. H.E.X. also have little concept of boredom, as this too is an emotion, so H.E.X. generally do not understand what it means to want to be entertained. As H.E.X. do not consider entertainment beneficial, they would consider an artistic career path pointless.

### *Tactile Art*

A large quantity of the admittedly small sum total of H.E.X. art is tactile in nature. A H.E.X. can experience it by touching/crawling on it. When they do, they may feel soothed by its shape or texture, or be distracted: mazes and escape-rooms are a fairly common choice for this reason. Emotionally distressed H.E.X. may seek out such pieces of art, to help calm themselves down.

### *Dim/Short-lived/Interactive Light Shows*

The H.E.X.s' specialism in the development of AI allows them to create light-shows, including interactive ones. H.E.X. are well-adapted to detect light, so bright or constant lights are unpleasant to most individuals. Individuals in need of soothing may enjoy soft or pulsing lights. For them, this would feel like being whispered or murmured to gently. H.E.X. do not like constant light, including from UV-active items. They much prefer pulsing lights, so for this reason they do not like anything ultraviolet.

### **Clothing**

H.E.X. do not wear clothes.

### **Food**

Generally, H.E.X. can and will consume anything that can be dissolved. In order to eat, a H.E.X. will roll on top of the item it wants to consume and then ooze its body around it. Then it digests the item.

H.E.X. prefer to eat plants, which they farm. However they get a wider range of nutrients from mineral seams. When they exhaust a mineral seam then they dump any depleted rock into the farms for the plants to grow in.

### *Calorific Expenditure and Thinking*

H.E.X. consider thinking to have an energetic cost, and they manage their energy resources carefully, which means that they manage thinking within their society carefully too. Most H.E.X. go about their lives without much thought. Only Elders and Explorers are encouraged to think, and individuals who naturally like to think will try to move into the Explorer rank, sometimes with a view to moving from there to the Elder rank (this is the only way to become an Edler, as the Elders only accept new initiates from the Explorer rank).

Builders tend not to think much as this is a waste of energy. Instead, they do as they are told.

Warriors do not split as often as H.E.X. from other castes. This is so that they can have a bigger bulk than other H.E.X. for as much of the time as possible, which provides them

with a strategic and survival advantage in the battlefield and on the odd occasion they need to smother and subdue other H.E.X..

This potentially creates a strategic disadvantage if a Warrior needs to chase a non-Warrior through narrow passages, as they occasionally need to do in the cities on H.E.X.. When they believe that their target might escape them they use their AI to talk to one another and coordinate to head off the miscreant.

### *Cannibalism*

H.E.X. can and do occasionally cannibalise one another. When this is done, it is usually by a lower caste member eating a higher-caste one, to take its place.

H.E.X. from the Builder caste are the most likely to cannibalise others. There are a few factors working in, and against, their favour. They are poor thinkers so are less likely to consider the consequences of cannibalising a higher-ranking H.E.X.. However, their poor thinking abilities also makes them easy to outsmart, so higher-ranking H.E.X. are usually able to evade a Builder who appears to be approaching with the intention of eating it. Builders are also the highest in number of any caste, so the law of averages means that one occasionally gets lucky and eats a higher-ranking H.E.X..

Warriors have sharper minds so are better equipped to consider usurping another H.E.X., but the only caste-shift that would make sense for a warrior would be to become an explorer. Warriors tend to function in teams however, and tend to prefer social contact with others of their own kind, and this usually deters any warrior from usurping an explorer.

Usurping others in this way is considered abhorrent behaviour and is discouraged. If the offending H.E.X. is caught then their body is dispersed and none of it is eaten by the rest of society. Instead, their bodies are boiled until their gel breaks down and then to use them as fertiliser for their plant farms.

### *Radioactive Materials*

H.E.X. enjoy consuming heavy metals and any other materials that emit energy. For them, radioactivity is a delicacy. Energy-rich food sources require less energy to consume, and this is why they like it so much.

### *Sugars/Carbohydrates*

H.E.X. are capable of enjoying sugar and carbs. However, they do not get to experience these on their native planet as, although they do indeed eat plants that are native to

planet H.E.X., they never took the time and effort to selectively breed them to make them more palatable as their main focus for delicacy is radioactive materials. To do so felt like a waste of resources and energy to them.

The only H.E.X. who has ever discovered the pleasures of sugars and carbs was Reico during its expedition to Earth.

Sugars and carbs are worthless to the H.E.X. from a nutritional standpoint, as they require more calories for them to process into a form they can use than the food itself contains.

### **Language**

H.E.X. communicate with one another using bioluminescent light. They have only one 'language', which they call H.E.X.. On a day to day basis they flash and pulse light at one another to communicate.

Elder H.E.X. who have reason to interact with, or eavesdrop on civilisations that rely on sound (for example, conversations between some non-H.E.X. species) use AI to translate the pressure waves created by vocal sounds into a light-based equivalent.

#### *Naming Convention*

H.E.X. that are the result of a regular split are given their own name, along with a hyphen and the name of their parent, e.g., Reico-Lin.

### **Religion, Faith, and Spirituality**

The H.E.X.'s hive-mind situation implies a spiritual approach akin to ancestor worship. For this reason, the H.E.X.s' approach to spirituality provides no space for 'atheism' as it is commonly known that the Elder hive-mind exists.

The only sense in which 'faith' is relevant to the H.E.X. is faith in the good and benevolent nature of the Elders. A small number of Explorers feel ambivalent towards the Elders and are unwilling to assume that everything they do is completely benevolent, but they lack any concrete information about what the Elders could possibly be doing.

Ultimately these Explorers are only able to be generally skeptical, and that is the limit of it.

Any Explorer who is understood to be skeptical of the Elders' good intentions are sent on a one-way mission to a destination expected to be lethal.

### **Personal Celebrations**

H.E.X. are disinclined towards truly individual celebrations such as birthdays, but they will celebrate holidays with their clans.

#### *Clan Holidays*

In the days of the clans, individual clans had their own holidays, usually including the anniversary of the creation of their clan. Since the dissolution of the clans and creation of the caste system these celebrations are frowned upon by The General and considered unofficial. The General does not like to encourage this kind of behaviour as it may encourage the Builders to think for themselves more, which could cause an uprising. On the other hand, these celebrations help to build bonds which are beneficial to H.E.X. society as a whole so it doesn't abolish them.

Warriors and Builders have the strongest tendency to maintain clan holidays, as both castes require H.E.X. to be naturally regimented and group-or-team-orientated, which clicks well with the concept of clans. Warriors and Builders can request information about which clan they derived from, if they are anxious to know. When this happens the Elders oblige but often do not tell the truth. Instead they lie and tell the querying H.E.X. it belongs to whichever clan the Elders deem to be the most likely to make that H.E.X. easier to manipulate. They tend to select to leverage shame or gratitude.

It is uncertain whether any H.E.X. exist in the current day that existed at the time of the clan wars. If they do they would be likely to feel a certain nostalgia for the clan days but consider the inter-clan wars to be chaotic and bad for the species overall.

Some H.E.X. will use clan holidays as a means of shirking their duties, with their reasoning being similar to that of a mental health day for humans. During celebrations they do team activities and work together on community-building projects. They may build art projects such as statues. They may also encourage Explorers to tell them stories of their adventures. They do not have much spare food so do not incorporate

feasting into their celebrations, and clan celebrations tend to be low-level celebrations that do not warrant a day off work.

### **Public Festivals**

While H.E.X. tend to be hard workers, they also like to bond with one another over recognised festivals. They are not particularly emotionally fluent creatures but these festivals serve them well as bonding rituals.

#### *The Darkening*

The H.E.X. have a bittersweet 'celebration' (which is perhaps better described as a lamentation), about the Darkening. It was initially a time of lamentation or mourning. Over time however, their observance of this event has turned into something more celebratory.

For a couple of days prior to the anniversary of their discovery of the Darkening, H.E.X. gorge themselves on minerals and organic material. On the day of the Darkening itself they fast, and on the two days following, many split to create new H.E.X..

The very fact of the Darkening has implications for the H.E.X.s' measurement of time. They no longer have the luxury of days (with sunlight) and nights (without), nor years that they can count by orbits around their sun. Instead they rely on the mathematical system of another species that originates from a different planet. This system is not a decimal system.

The H.E.X. may develop a time-measuring framework based on the internal rotation of their planet's core.

### **Sport**

[Introduction needed.]

### **Social Dynamics**

H.E.X. are naturally sociable creatures. However, they are also generally unemotional on a day to day basis, which means that their conversational patterns tend to focus on activities, facts and thoughts.

### *Social Mobility*

The structure of H.E.X. society does not ordinarily facilitate social mobility: most H.E.X. will never move from one caste to another. However, they are capable of understanding social mobility as a concept, and this is why some will try to achieve social mobility by usurping the lives of a higher-ranking H.E.X. by eating it and taking its place. This behaviour is deeply frowned upon in H.E.X. society, however.

Social mobility within a clan was relatively easier - though not easy - during the clan days. In truth there was a strict hierarchy within the clans, it was easier for a H.E.X. to strike out on its own to found a new clan or attempt to take over another clan than to try to rise through the ranks of their own clan. If a H.E.X. did win leadership of a new clan, it would often proclaim itself as leader and then change the ranks to benefit it.

Taking over one's own clan by usurping the leader rarely worked, as a new leader was considered to be unstable until they had established themselves, and this instability tended to prompt other H.E.X. from the clan to usurp the usurper. The few clans who did this evicted themselves from the H.E.X.s' gene pool, leaving only those with less tendency towards individualism and more towards community-minded sentiments.

Mobility became more of a hot-button issue when H.E.X. society switched from the clan system to the caste system. The Elders were keen to firmly establish the caste system, and this tightly restricted mobility through the caste tiers at first. They continue to only grant ascension on rare occasions.

### *Demotion*

It is absolutely possible for a H.E.X. to descend through the castes as well as ascend. This usually happens when a H.E.X. fails to perform the duties expected of it in its current caste, or shows itself to be a burden or a hindrance to the achievement of the caste's goals.

A demotion is initiated by other members of the caste filing a petition to get the offending H.E.X. reclassified. If there is not enough support for this, then the offending H.E.X. may simply be reassigned to a different job or to undergo training for that caste from the beginning.

The Explorers do not like to do this, as reassigning a H.E.X. intelligent enough to have entered the rank of Explorer in the first place, into the Builder rank, confers a risk that the ex-Explorer would talk with the Builders and educate them, encouraging them to think. This would cause an uprising, and perhaps a riot, which the Explorers would not want. Instead they kill their unwanted caste members by sending them on one-way missions. Builders who refuse to do their work are generally sent to do the most menial task imaginable, often something either next to useless, or genuinely useless, such as counting individual algae. This happens rather than a death-sentence as the H.E.X. may be more useful alive than dead. If they are deemed to be truly useless then they are killed.

### *Promotion*

In the current day, there is a specific route for Explorers and Warriors to become Elders. Explorers must complete several missions that are assessed to be dangerous or of significant enough advancement to the H.E.X..

Warriors need to prove themselves to be exemplary Warriors - and exemplary H.E.X. in general, and this needs to be acknowledged by an Elder. This rarely happens as it is highly unusual for a Warrior to have anything to do except for guard duty, which presents little opportunity to impress Elders. However, preventing a usurping would qualify as proving oneself to be exemplary and attracting the attention of an Elder. A Warrior who repeatedly assumes more responsibility over time may also qualify.

### *Example*

Reico Lin was in the process of being selected to become an Elder; their mission to Earth was to be their final mission before being admitted to the Elder caste. However, Reico was unaware that the Elders didn't want them among their ranks and were trying to get them killed.

This is a great example of the ambivalence the Elders feel towards adding to their rank. Reico Lin was a free-thinker and had the potential to solve a lot of the problems in H.E.X. society and be a true asset to the Elders. However, this quality of free-thinking also made Reico Lin more difficult to control. It was The General who felt the most threatened by this. The General did not want to have to spend too much energy on subverting and absorbing a new Elder, and it understood that Reico Lin would require a great deal of energy. Indeed, it was entirely possible that Reico Lin could absorb it instead.

### *Rules and Taboos Around Shape-Shifting*

While H.E.X. are capable of shape-shifting to take on the appearance of other species, practice of this skill is strictly controlled. The habitable areas of planet H.E.X. are optimised for their own species and for anything beneficial that grows there, not for alien species, so if a H.E.X. shifts into something that needs light to see then it may become lost in the H.E.X.s' unlit cities, or if it grows too large then it may harm other H.E.X. by standing on them. Overall, H.E.X. feel that they are not trusted enough to practice their shape-shifting skills, but most citizens grudgingly comply with the rule.

### *Safety in Clan-Based System*

Being a lone H.E.X. with no clan could be dangerous. They risked being eaten by larger groups and could never fully relax due to the risk of being ambushed by other H.E.X.. A single H.E.X. can fight effectively, but not against multiple other H.E.X.. Occasionally a lone H.E.X. would succeed in finding others who were in a similar position and they would protect one another, but often, clan-less H.E.X. were forced to live on the outskirts of civilization.

### Bigotry

The H.E.X. are somewhat prone to classism.

### *Unwanted Elder Prospects*

The Elders are protective of their clade, and are prepared to kill would-be prospects to join their ranks if they don't want them. To do this, they normally send the prospect - invariably an Explorer - on a mission without providing them with the ability to return.

### *Builders*

Builders are generally believed to lack the intelligence to make their own decisions. The Builders themselves do not generally appear to be concerned about this, or else are resigned to it.

## **Sexuality and Romance**

H.E.X. reproduce asexually and inherently pass on their knowledge to the next generation. Because of this, they do not form nuclear families of mother-father-child like humans do. While a young H.E.X. can be more vulnerable than an older one, they don't have quite the same approach to childhood as humans.

### *Merging/'Tightening'*

Tightening is the term used for two or more H.E.X. who merge together to form a single H.E.X.. The H.E.X. who enter into a tightening generally do it because they enjoy one another's company and want to be together permanently.

When two H.E.X. merge their colours may or may not blend. This depends on whether they are planning to stay merged or whether they're merging to create two new H.E.X..

Culturally, merging has not been thoroughly studied by the H.E.X. so it remains a mysterious, subversive, even shady activity for most of them.

Occasionally in ancient times, new clans would be founded on the basis of two merging H.E.X.. When two H.E.X. merged, their personalities would combine within the new H.E.X. they became together. Later, if and when they split, neither of the resulting H.E.X. would be the same as they were prior to the tightening, which would mean that neither could return to their old clans. Instead they would found a new one.

Tightening in the current, caste-based system is frowned upon because the merged H.E.X.es lose their unique personality, and even if they de-merge, the two H.E.X.es will no longer be the same two who merged, but two different combinations of the characteristics of the mergers. This attitude towards tightening is a result of the clan days: if two H.E.X.es from different clans merged then they would each take on the characteristics of a rival clan, which each clan generally assumed were inferior to their own clan. Typical characteristics included colour: each clan had its own distinct colour, or particular aptitudes for processing certain materials over others.

While tightening is not taboo, it is considered not natural, nor that it should be the normal course of a H.E.X.'s life.

One of the reasons that H.E.X. who merge and remain together is considered so odd is that they become much larger than the generally-accepted maximum size and weight, and refuse to sacrifice any part of their bodies to make a child.

### *'Marriage'*

The concept of marriage is alien to the H.E.X.. However, two H.E.X.es who merge and then de-merge will spend more time around one another than they do around other H.E.X., including rearranging their lives to do so.

H.E.X. can merge and then de-merge. The difference between this and a single H.E.X. producing an offspring is the intent, and subsequent naming convention of the resulting two H.E.X.. Two de-merged H.E.X. will each have longer names than usual, e.g., Rei-(second parent's name)-Lin. The final name of such a hex is always the most significant part of the H.E.X.'s family line.

In addition, suffixes such as -co (as Reico-Lin has) would be dropped to reduce confusion over the identities of both parents. The longer a H.E.X.'s name is, the more potential for confusion about its identity.

#### *Death Ritual/Culling/Population Control*

Splitting to create a new H.E.X. is self-governed. When there becomes too many, the Elders arrange a cull.

Deaths generally occur via culls when the population gets too dense. The H.E.X., especially the Elders, are very aware that their world has scant resources to support them and as a result, do not allow for there to be too many H.E.X..

During a death ritual, the offspring consumes the parent. This is a sombre event for all involved.

Due to the fact that most H.E.X. are Builders, plus the fact that Builders do not think for themselves very much so are unlikely to consider the problematic situation they're in, Builders are disproportionately the ones selected for these rituals. The least-productive Builders are the ones generally chosen for this.

Older H.E.X. who have become less productive (again, this usually means Builders, whose work is very physical) tend to be culled too. Dementia can be a leading reason for this in any caste.

#### *Multiple Parents*

Sometimes multiple smaller H.E.X. feel a desire to have a child but are still too small to create one themselves. If several smaller H.E.X. discover that other smaller H.E.X. feel the same way then they will group-merge to create a child between them.

### **Child-Rearing**

### *'Child'-Rearing*

When a new H.E.X. is made via de-merging, both new H.E.X.es are considered new individuals, and neither will identify as the original H.E.X.. In practice this means that each H.E.X. has its own sense of self and develops its own set of memories.

### *Intergenerational Memories*

H.E.X. can pass academic knowledge, observations, and facts to the next generation. However, H.E.X. folklore and other information with emotional connotations can be passed on too, and this tends to be more faithfully transmitted.

New H.E.X. are completely capable of functioning in society as well as adults from the moment they come into existence. H.E.X. society's rules and norms are generally based on their instincts, so a new H.E.X. only needs to rely on its instincts to know how to behave. Overall, H.E.X. are expected to be self-sufficient.

For anything too complex for this, such as how to navigate their educational system, H.E.X. are generally helpful enough to one another that a more experience one will help a confused or lost H.E.X..

## **Politics**

Much of H.E.X. politics revolves around conflict. H.E.X. are either a great ally or your worst enemy on the battlefield, depending on which side you're on. They are generally distrustful of other species, but at the same time are curious. This does not sit well with most other species.

### **Economic System**

H.E.X. are too self-sufficient for capitalism to be a viable route for them. The same is mostly true for socialism: they are hive-minded, but their self-sufficiency means their need for mutual support is relatively light, compared to humans.

See [Economy](#) for further details.

### **Government / Leadership Style**

H.E.X. society is run on a caste system, led by the Elders.

When H.E.X. grow old, they are either culled (see above), or if they are Elders, have their consciousness uploaded to a computer and join a hive-mind which rules over society. The H.E.X. are governed by a hive-mind of their past and present Elders. For the most part the Elders do not assist with the day-to-day running of the H.E.X. community, and instead steer the overall development of their race. Most H.E.X. hope that they will eventually become an Elder, as the role both confirms that the individual is of great value to its community - an esteemed title, essentially - and allows it to give to its community all the more. The occasional H.E.X. may like the idea of Elderhood for personal glory, though this is far more unusual.

Individuals who have achieved notable things earn the right to petition to join the Elders. The Elders are in a hive-mind, meaning that they constantly communicate with one another within a computer system. This computer-based communication style makes Elders difficult to distinguish from one another, as the computer flashes to

communicate with the Elder, and the Elder loses its individual colouration that makes it easy to tell apart from other H.E.X..

The individual coloration for an Elder is dark grey or black, due to the constant combining of the various colours of the H.E.X. who have merged into it. The General keeps its own colour, but whenever it shows itself as part of the collective it presents as dark grey or black.

An Elder is scanned multiple times during its life. During scanning, it is physically plugged into the system so that the scan of its mind can be uploaded or updated. When it becomes old, it is scanned and its mind uploaded one last time, and then its body is absorbed by the other living Elders.

Elders experience a problem with their minds merging if the group remains stagnant for too long. While the Elders are still conscious, they can become increasingly stuck in their ways the older they get. Continued, repeated use of their neurons with no variation means it becomes easier for the data packet to break down. Introducing new Elders 'defragments the drive' so to speak. If this happens then their knowledge becomes synched, which corrupts the data, and the individual Elders' personalities begin to merge, which they consider to be undesirable. The Elders are generally distinguished individuals who dislike the idea of losing their individuality, and their ability to contribute something unique. Becoming 'part of the mass', even an esteemed mass such as the Elder mass, is an unpleasant thought to most Elders, so they prefer to prevent it from happening. They resolve this by admitting new members to their caste every few generations to keep the dynamic fresh and to help each individual remain distinct.

The Elder collective only works if no one Elder is too strong. However, The General has an unusually forceful personality which throws out the collective's entire dynamic. This is a bad enough situation, but the full truth of the situation is worse than this: The General eats the other Elders and requires new minds to join the collective in order to survive - even in its current, digital state it must still eat - and update itself with new information.

## The Caste System

### *Elders*

The Elders are elite Explorers who have performed remarkable achievements that allow them to petition, and with luck be admitted to, the Elder caste. The Elders make decisions that affect the whole of H.E.X. society.

### *Explorers*

The second-highest level of the caste system. The Elders are sent to explore other worlds, gather information, and map resources. They are routinely outfitted with AI to help with this.

In addition to exploring, the Explorers are often creative and scientifically skilled individuals who create AI.

### *Warriors/Combatants*

Defenders of the home planet, and far smaller in number than the other castes. They, too, are outfitted with advanced AI to help them fight. This AI can use the energy inside a H.E.X.'s body to generate radiation pulses, among other tricks.

In times of need they are capable of drafting new Warriors, usually from among the Builders, however this is rare as the Warriors are usually capable enough and enjoy sufficient numbers to be able to manage most crises.

Whenever Builders are upgraded to become Warriors, it is made clear to them that this is a temporary situation and that they will be reverted back when they have served their usefulness. This is to help prevent undue upward mobility.

### *Builders*

While they are called 'Builders' here, the true remit for this caste is far broader: not only do they build, but they also maintain the entire infrastructure needed to keep H.E.X. society running. This is the largest caste by number, but while they are acknowledged as important to the smooth running of their world, they are not considered worthy of making their own decisions.

Among their other tasks, they maintain energy barriers.

In order to maintain the H.E.X. farms, Builders travel through the farms, expelling chemicals and materials required for them to grow and bond to, and pick up and carry away impurities and bugs to ensure that the crops are not ruined.

Despite this downtrodden situation most Builders do not resent their position in life, as they lack the creativity to imagine their lives to be better. For much of the time they are on auto-pilot. The few Builders who are better thinkers than their menial workload requires, tend to find the situation mind-numbing and stop thinking for the sake of preventing themselves from going insane with boredom.

### **Military and Law**

If you are able to drop or fire a dozen H.E.X. onto a battlefield then they will quickly begin absorbing corpses and discarded technology. They are also able to absorb anybody who tries to engage them, and they reproduce quickly - especially when there are corpses to absorb.

Shooting a H.E.X. will cause it to feel pain, but a bullet wound does not cause damage as they are able to discard the injured part of their body and regrow it as they continue to fight. In practice, H.E.X. are able to dominate a battlefield in a short space of time.

This, along with their ability to shape-shift and create almost any tool or weapon they desire at a moment's notice, makes them a feared addition to any battle situation.

### **Law**

The H.E.X.s' laws are decided by the Elder caste and enforced by the Warrior caste. There is little crime in H.E.X. society. The worst crime a H.E.X. can commit according to most H.E.X. cultural sensibilities is to consume another one of its own kind. When this happens, it is dealt with swiftly and severely, with the offending individual broken apart but not eaten by any other H.E.X.. For the criminal H.E.X., having others refuse to eat it is the ultimate rejection, and this is often devastating for the criminal, given the community-mindedness of the H.E.X.. This also means that the criminal will vanish from the collective memory much quicker, which in itself is highly likely to be upsetting for the individual.

### ***Merging Protection***

H.E.X.es merge often enough, and experience enough backlash from the rest of H.E.X. society, that laws have been written to protect mergers.

### ***Theft***

H.E.X. don't tend to have an issue with theft, as their ability to create any object out of their own bodies negates the need to steal.

*Violence*

Most disputes remain 'verbal' and rarely if ever become physical.

## **Propaganda**

[Introduction needed.]

## **Economy**

The H.E.X. economy can be described as weak. Other species do not readily trade with them, and H.E.X. are self-sufficient, socially minded, and cooperative.

### **Currency**

H.E.X. earn time to spend in their 'farms' based on their merit in society, thereby bypassing a financial system. As such, it is a bartering system.

They earn merit by working at a 'job' that is assigned to the individual H.E.X. based on their caste. For example, a Builder may need to clean or dissolve communal spaces and maintain the structures that aid in the smooth running of the community.

Warriors tend to work more sporadically, so as a result their time in the gardens is limited.

Quantifying the work of Explorers is harder as they generally don't have a job outside of exploration. Wherever it can, an Explorer will work on AI and develop new technologies to help with explorations. Generally their merit is calculated based on the amount of time they are expected to be away on a mission. For this reason, Explorers don't like being stuck in the laboratory and competition for positions on exploratory missions is fierce. This can lead to some cut-throat politics between Explorers.

Elders are digital constructs so do not need to eat.

### **Business**

Overall, H.E.X. are both cooperative and self-sufficient, and this means that they don't tend to require a payment-for-services arrangement the way more individualistic species such as humans require, in order to get a task done.

*B.A.D. (Bureau of Alien Detection/Detention/Diplomacy/Destruction)*

A secret organisation that takes a holistic approach to the management of aliens that land on Earth. Its focus is primarily on scientific discovery and the enforcement of the safety of Earth's population.

Unfortunately there is a tendency towards in-fighting as the various departments strive to respond in different, often contradictory ways. For example, the Detention and Destruction departments have a tendency to injure or kill aliens, and their actions often have a detrimental effect on the diplomatic relationship between Earth and the invading alien species. The Diplomacy department often puts effort into thwarting Detention and Destruction so as to prevent this kind of damage, and to enable them to work with, instead of against, the aliens.

B.A.D. was formed as a direct result of the Tunguska Event in Russia. Until then there had been alien response agencies but these had been disparate. B.A.D. is these agencies, united.

The agency does not only investigate aliens. It also monitors and responds to magic used on Earth, and is designed to respond to anything else Abnormal.

#### *The Keepers of the Secret/Osyrians*

An organisation that works against B.A.D. Their animosity for B.A.D. is so extreme that Osyrian agents will kill B.A.D. agents if they encounter them.

They too respond to alien threats but are prepared to do so publicly, without maintaining secrecy. They have a logo in the shape of the Eye of Osiris.

## Credits

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Want to upgrade to an Infographic or video, or expand your setting into a worldbuilding project? Email me on [hello@thecharacterconsultancy.co.uk](mailto:hello@thecharacterconsultancy.co.uk) and I will be happy to help you!

~Hayley, The Character Consultancy