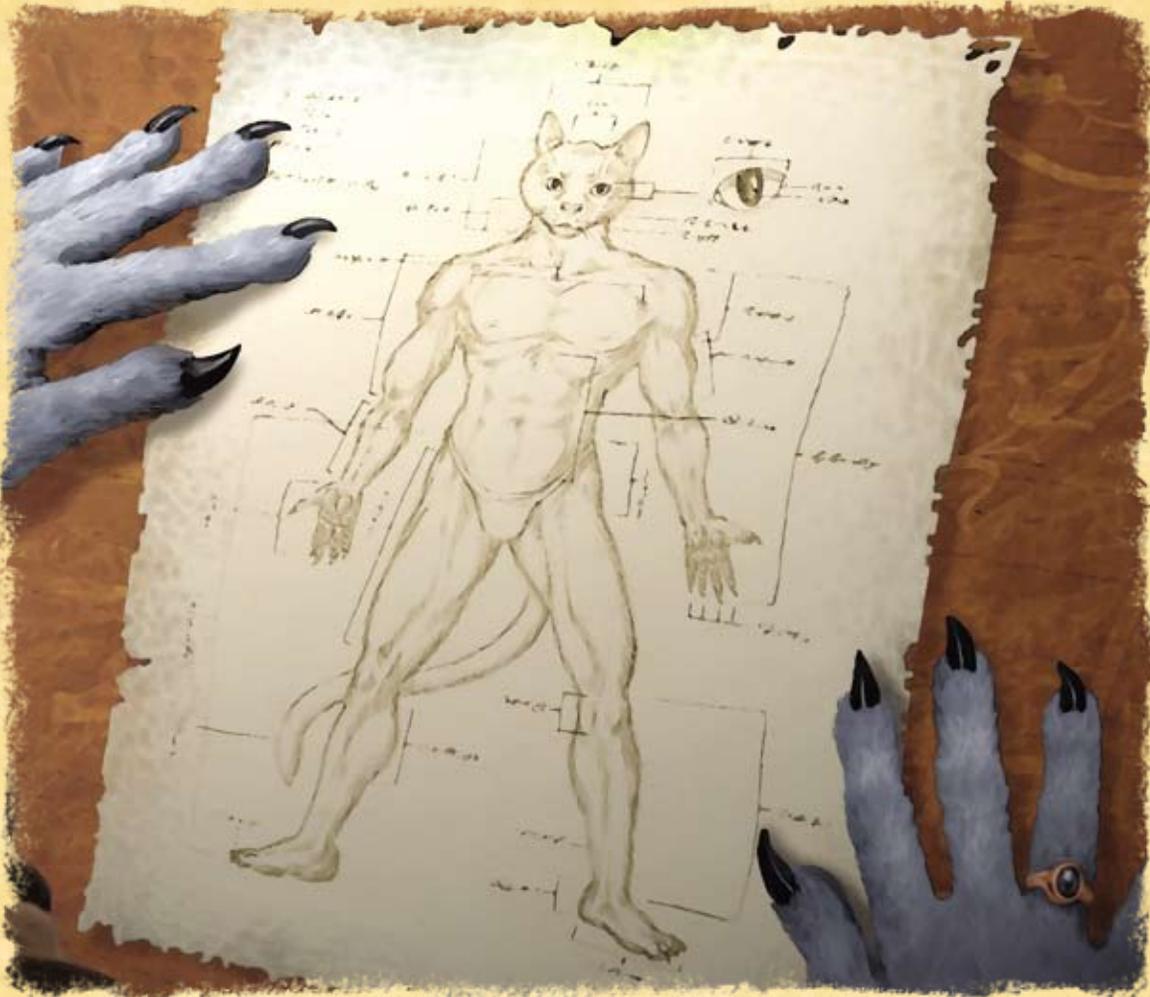


## VII. The Physiology of the Zoics



Anthropomorphic animals are human-like animals, sometimes called “funny animals” or “critters” as popularized in comics and cartoons. These creatures are the character races for this fantasy setting. Even though funny animals include such characters as Mickey Mouse and Woody Woodpecker, in the Shard RPG, these anthropomorphs are much more realistic and not quite so “cartoony.” To help distinguish our version of these from others, we have chosen to call them Zoics. Imagine these creatures being designed by Industrial Light & Magic or by Henson’s Creature Shop, and you get a good visual for them. The magically transformed Zoics developed a unique physiology. Rather than being several species, they magically became one linked race, with an amazing variety of shape, size and appearance. They gained the ability to interbreed to an extent (see Reproduction) and share several characteristics in common. Dárdūnah Zoics fall into three basic types: mammals, birds, and reptiles/amphibians. These were the only types of animals that were hyper-evolved. There are no animorphic fish, crustaceans, or insects/arachnids. As far as cetaceans are concerned (whales, dolphins, porpoises), though they are considered mammals, they don’t currently appear in the world’s fiction.

<NOTE: We chose these animals for purely aesthetic reasons. We encourage new players to introduce whatever animals they wish. Personalizing the world of Dárdūnah is exactly what we hope anyone interested in this setting will do.>

## External Physiology

These Zoics, or *jānah* (“the people”), as the inhabitants would come to call themselves, are all rather human-like in form. They are bipedal and have five fingers and an opposable thumb on each hand (although the fingers could have special adaptations such as sheaths for retractile claws, sucker pads, extra joints, thick hoof-like nails, etc. depending on the features of the animal they are based on). They are plantigrade, meaning that they possess human shaped legs and feet (again, with special adaptations for running, leaping, bounding, digging, etc.) and the general build of the human form. They retain tails and unique or defensive skin coverings (fur, scales, feathers, leathery hides, quills, etc.), unique defenses (such as venom, musk, or camouflage) and they all retain unique head or facial characteristics (tusks, horns, trunks, snouts, etc.) Furthermore, all *jānah* have primary and secondary sex characteristics similar to humans, thus the sexes are easily differentiated.

## Internal Physiology

The *jānah* share a common internal physiology. All of the *jānah* are warm-blooded, bear live young, and function in a similar biological way. Certain highly specialized internal physiologies such as internal “gills”, multiple stomachs, or special adaptive traits, are retained by the *jānah*. Therefore there are variations among species, but only in a few cases are they extreme.

## Size

Size-wise, *jānah* also resemble humans much more than they do their original animal species. The size for most *jānah* ranges from about 3 feet to about 12 feet (give or take a few inches). Small *jānah* were magically “evolved” from small animals and likewise large from large. Therefore it would not be unusual to find a mouse *jānah* that measured 3 1/2 feet as an adult, or to find an elephant *jānah* that measured 12 feet as an adult. Most other Zoics fall in between this range somewhere. There is no hard and fast rule. Mostly it is a matter of personal preference and the size-ranges outlined in the Animal Templates.

If, as a player, you want to play a huge animorph (10 1/2 to 12 feet), pick a huge animal on which to base the animorph like an elephant, rhino or giraffe. If you prefer a large animorph (8 1/2 to 10 feet), then choose a horse, bull, bear, ox or tiger. A medium animorph (6 to 8 feet) covers a broad range of animal types, as this is the average height range for Zoics, and it is possible for most average-sized animals to get this big, regardless of initial size. However, as a general rule, small Zoics (4 1/2 to 5 1/2 feet) should come from smaller animals such as rodents, weasels,

small cats or birds, and tiny Zoics (3 to 4 feet) should come from very small animals such as diminutive rodents, tree frogs, small bats or hummingbirds. Whereas it is technically possible to have a 4-foot elephant or an 8-foot mouse (in the same way dwarfism and gigantism occur among humans), this is generally not the case, being abnormal and potentially unhealthy.

## Diet

Although most *jānah* have become omnivorous, certain types still prefer herbivorous or carnivorous diets. Incredibly specialized diets (such as those of koalas or vampire bats) have disappeared, though many such Zoics may demonstrate a strong inclination towards a certain type of food (a particular herb/grain or blood). However, in most cases, the *jānah* are as adaptable as humans and can exist on a wide variety of diets. As a clarification, carnivores feast on the flesh of indigenous Dārdūni animals (*suthra*), and not on other Zoics. It is important to note that any *jānah* who eats the flesh of another is considered a cannibal, and there are social stigmas attached to cannibalism though it is practiced in some remote parts of the world.

## Mammals

Mammals are called *vajrah*. Specific animal traits not specifically prohibited by the new animorphic form are retained by all *vajrah*, just as if they were normal animals. Such things as marsupial pouches, bat wings (see Flying *Jānah*, below), diving ability, special senses, and other such animal abilities are kept.

## Birds

Birds are called *paksin*. Those who evolved from flying birds can still fly and possess somewhat hollow bones. Flightless birds became flightless *paksin*. Except where noted above, all other specific avian traits are retained.

## Reptiles and Amphibians

Reptiles, snakes, and amphibians are called *sarpah*. As with *vajrah* and *paksin*, *sarpah* retain all of their animal characteristics not excluded by their animorphic form, including offensive and defensive abilities (such as venom), as well as special senses and adaptive traits (heat sensors, gills, webbed feet, breathing skin). Snakes have human form (arms and legs), but they retain their long slender bodies and possess sinuous, prehensile tails.

### Flying Jánah

All animals that were capable of some form of flight retain this ability in their animorphic form. Therefore, many birds, all bats and a few other mammals, and even some reptiles possess wings or wing-like membranes that allow them to fly or glide in the air. Those animals that had special adaptations for flight, such as hollow bones or light frames, retain them to some extent in their new forms. This usually includes the need for a high-calorie diet due to the great amount of energy expended while flying.

Paksin and bats share a similar structure to their wings. Paksins' wings are an extension of their arms, growing out from their shoulders, upper arms and forearms. The hands are found at the end of what, in a bird, would be classified as its *marginal coverts*. The long primary feathers grow out from the wrist joint along an extended bone which acts almost like a sixth finger. Bats' hands are located where their wing claw would be, with the rest of the wing growing out from slender wrist bones, which also act as additional fingers.

It is possible for an animorph with flight to lose this ability due to injury, or to be born with a congenital defect that would disallow flight. Animals who do not possess the ability to fly cannot normally gain wings (see Reproduction), though magic can create mutations and other strange endowments (see "Ritual of Endowment" in the Magic chapter in the *Basic Compendium*). However, these mutations would be considered social pariahs, and would be hard pressed to survive, mainly because such things would seem so unnatural as to be viewed demonic by most average individuals.

### Reproduction

All jánah have the ability to interbreed to some extent, regardless of initial species. They all share similar external genitalia, which is similar to humans. Traits such as internal genitalia, penile sheaths and bones, or other highly specialized reproductive systems have disappeared. However, there are some rules for these magical genetics. Here is how it works.

All of the three main categories of jánah (vajrah, paksin, and sarpah) can interbreed freely within their own category or **jenu**. "Jenu" is a common word used on Dárdünah to indicate the differences between species. One jánah may ask another, "What jenu was the merchant that you met?" wanting to know whether that merchant was a bear, an eagle, an iguana, etc. Jánah cannot interbreed outside of their category except with magical assistance (see Magical Breeding, below). However, despite this interbreeding, there are absolutely no mixed breeds on Dárdünah. When two distinct species of the same category mate, the resulting offspring will have a 45% chance of being whatever animal type the mother is, a 45% chance of being whatever animal type the father is, with the remaining 10% chance going to some other animal type found in either parent's ancestry. Are you

totally confused now?

Let's try an example. Mother is a lioness and father is an Andalusian stallion. They decide to have a child. The child will have a 45% chance of being a lion or lioness, a 45% chance of being an Andalusian stallion or mare, a 5% chance of being some animal type in the lioness' ancestry (whatever her parents, grandparents, great grandparents, etc. might have been) or a 5% chance of being some animal type in the stallion's ancestry. Did you follow that? The couple cannot ever have a "lionhorse" or a "horselion" (a single animorph which shared both parent's traits). Thus, a bear and a weasel will either produce a bear or a weasel (or some other distinct animal type in their ancestry) but never a "weaselbear". A frog and a cobra will produce either a frog or a cobra. An eagle and a hummingbird will produce either an eagle or a hummingbird... you get the picture.

As stated earlier, all jánah have live births. Furthermore, all jánah have the capability to suckle their young. Gestation periods vary from 4 to 8 months depending on the type of animal (the shorter periods going to more prolific animals). Multiple births are not uncommon, though litter-bearing animals no longer have 8-12 pups per litter. Most jánah give birth to one offspring (those animals which already do so continue this tradition in animorphic form). Multiple-bearing animals (mammal, avian, or reptile/amphibian alike) will usually bear only one offspring, though incidents of multiple births (2-4 young) are somewhat common (1 out of every 3 births or so). Rarely will a jánah, regardless of type, bear more than 6 young at one time, though, just as with humans, it is possible. And remember, multiple births follow the "no mixed breeds" rule. The GM would have to determine the animal type of **each** youngster using the above guidelines.

Certain births may still require specialized environments to facilitate the process (for example, water for amphibious births), and this is determined by the birthing traits of the original animal (frogs, salamanders, etc.) Marsupials carry their young to term, bearing them like all other jánah, but they can then use their pouches to carry their young around in. Young whose mouths are not suited to suckling (many birds, for example) can still lick the milk from their mother's nipple (as flamingos do on our world), and even suckle somewhat with the more "pliable" beak-edges near where it joins their face, but their diets are usually supplemented by soft foods before other natural suckling cubs are.

### Magical Breeding

Despite the interbreeding restrictions, jánah have not been prevented from forming mating bonds with Zoics outside of their category. In a society where magic is an active, influential part of existence, it would only be a matter of time before the jánah learned to use this magic to help them alter their breeding restrictions. Further, jánah society has also developed adoption and surrogate parenting social practices (see The Values of Family).

There are specialized sir'hibasi and mángai, whose training falls (somewhat) under the Healer's school, who are able to magically allow jánah to interbreed outside of their category. They are called *Pari*. A lengthy and complicated ritual must be performed (not listed in these books, as it is VERY rare) and the sir'hibas must prepare the couple, through herbal remedies, prayer, and meditation, in order for them to be able to conceive a child. There are some risks involved, and the ritual is not always successful. Often, several attempts must be made before conception occurs (if it does at all), and the couple runs the risk of becoming permanently infertile due to the powerful herbal remedies they must ingest. Furthermore, these rituals can sometimes produce abominations (see *Jánah Mutations*), a sign of great disfavor from the devah.



## Sex, Courtship, and Weddings

Within the more reserved, strict, and traditional societies, Dárdūnah's predominantly Satyan courtship and wedding rituals have remained stable for hundreds of years because most such jánah live in village communities that cling to traditional ways. Wedding preparations often begin a year before the wedding when a mángai, working with the couple's birth dates and times, determines an auspicious wedding date that will bring good fortune and prosperity to the bride and groom. Dating is not common within these more traditional cultural groups of Dárdūnah. A male

smitten with a young female may initiate a meeting with her parents, but only through an intermediary. A respected elder, possibly a relative of the bride or groom, usually arranges such matches. Sometimes parents let the bride and groom meet to find out if they will like their chosen spouse. But in more rural and traditional families, they meet for the first time on their wedding day. Also, according to most popular traditions, the woman's family sends property, money, a wardrobe, or other gifts to the groom's household so she can live in the style to which she is accustomed.

Within more urban and less traditionally restricted areas of society there seem to be greater freedoms concerning relations between those jánah who find themselves attracted to one another, and although open public displays of attraction are still somewhat frowned upon, there is a certain degree of "looking the other way" when it comes to "chance" encounters between lovers, with private trysts being fairly common. In such societies, sexual encounters can seem more casual, especially in cases such as brothels and some bathhouses, where it is solicited openly and legally. Of course, in the cases of the rich, influential, and very powerful, their choices concerning pleasure and relations with another jánah are rarely questioned. Even in these less restrained societies, however, when the subject of marriage arises, the respected traditions of the union itself once again come into play, and the families of the prospective couple become involved. For more information concerning the Marriage Ceremony itself, see that particular section in the chapter on Society, Politics, and Religion.

## The Values of Family

Family values, the treasuring and honoring of fellow family members, and the passing on and teaching of social rituals are seen as incredibly important and sacred tasks, which are emphasized as part of the marriage union itself. Parents seen as delinquent in such duties, either to each other or their children, can end up being ostracized by society in many ways, perhaps even becoming outcaste.

Though children are not necessarily seen as "people" until they go through the ceremonies inducting them into their Caste, they are nonetheless seen as valued and precious members of the family, a source of pride and honor, representing an important communal bond. In the cases of parents who fail in their parental duties in the eyes of other members of their family, or even their friends, or in the case of tragedy striking a family such that children become orphans, the local mángai will usually step in to take action, often taking the children under their own care as wards of the local temple, and

either raising them there to serve a life of devotion, or finding appropriate jánah to act as surrogate parents for the children, who will generally be ritually inducted as part of their new family. Likewise, in some areas such as larger cities, orphanages are operated by local temples that follow local laws pertaining to the adoption of such children. They actively take part in observing the families into which the children are placed and maintaining a connection with them throughout their lives until they become true members of their Caste.

### Jánah Mutations

There are rare cases (perhaps the special Pari Rituals allowing magical breeding go horribly awry, curses bring horrible misfortune, poison from dangerous places of the earth affect the unborn child, or merely the great disfavor of the Devah is made visible), where a child is born with some terrible malformation or mutation. This might manifest as some primal body configuration, mentality, or behavior hearkening to the jánah's true purely animalistic roots, the abominable combination of several different types of species traits (and all the wonder or strangeness that might imply), hideous malformations of the body or mind due to birth defects, or even the strange changes that can come from the powers of magic or the intervention of a demon (including the horrible and monstrous blending of jánah and suthra).

Regardless of whether these mutations are hideous and terrible, or even beautiful and beneficial, such jánah will be viewed as abominations by society as a whole (regardless of what individual people may think), and will be ostracized at best, feared, and attacked and killed on sight at worst. The best that such a jánah could hope for would be to find someone caring enough to either put them out of their misery at birth, or to find a way to raise them out of the general public eye in the belief that they might one day find life and happiness somewhere far from normal society. Life among the normal populace will usually never be possible for such aberrations of the natural order of things upon Dárdūnah.

### Lifespan and Disease

Jánah lifespan has also become more uniform. Lifespan ranges from 30 years to well over 100. Life expectancy is more a matter of social status, general health, diet, and luck rather than animal type, though species does play into the formula. Poorer jánah, with subsistence lifestyles that deny them access to medicine and medical treatment, tend to have shorter life spans due to disease and hard living. Wealthy jánah have longer life spans for the opposite reasons. Age can also be magically lengthened using Endowment Rituals (see *Magic in the Basic Compendium*), thus many sorcerers tend to live longer lives. Thus, a wealthy sorcerer who also happened to be a tortoise could expect to live a long time (perhaps over 200 years), whereas a poor laborer who happened to be a mouse would be lucky to live past 30 years of age.

Jánah are prone to many diseases that afflicted them as animals on Earth, plus a few new ones unique to Dárdūnah. Many common human ailments such as cancer, heart disease, venereal diseases, viral respiratory infections, arthritis, senility, etc., affect many jánah. Unique Earth animal diseases such as viral infections (mange, scale rot, rabies, etc.) have their Dárdūni equivalents and still afflict many Zoics. In short, jánah are prone to many human and animal diseases, both old and new. There are, however, a few unique Dárdūni diseases that deserve special mention.

Heaven's Madness is a fatal but rare disease whose cause is unknown. For the most part, it only afflicts users of magic (or *sir'hibasi* as the natives refer to them) or those jánah who travel extensively in the Dreamworld. The disease can run its course in a few weeks or take as long as several years, depending on the strength of the victim. It slowly rots the brain, causing madness, catatonia and eventually death. There is no cure and the disease is 100% fatal. Priests claim that the illness is a divine punishment against those *sir'hibasi* who would seek to discover forbidden knowledge.

The Plague of the Gray Skin is a virulent fungal infection contracted when jánah come in contact with spores from the deadly Gray Skin Mushroom (see Flora). The spores cause a covering of a sickly gray malodorous mold to form over the afflicted area. This mold will quickly spread (in a matter of weeks) to cover all of the body, and will begin to consume the flesh underneath, causing it to rot and fall off. This plague is highly contagious, and any contact with an afflicted jánah is almost certain to bring on the disease. If the disease is caught early enough, the victim may be saved by burning the afflicted area (a treatment which produces hideous scarring), and carefully cleansing the rest of the body with mildly acidic liquids. However, due to the virulence of the plague, few jánah are willing to administer this treatment, and so victims are usually killed and their bodies burned. Fortunately, jánah burn Gray Skin Mushrooms on sight, and thus they are now rather rare. Usually, they can only be found in the deepest regions of uninhabited jungles.

Other unique Dárdūni diseases are either viral infections or fungal parasites. Among the viral plagues are The Yellow Eye Plague (named after the side effects of leaving the eyes closed shut with mucus), The Quivering Dance Plague (named so because of the palsy which afflicts victims in the latter stages of the disease), The Plague of the Sarpah Throat (a severe variety of mumps which causes the throat to bloat obscenely), and The Weeping Blood Plague (which causes a victim to hemorrhage from every orifice, including the eyes). Among the fungal parasitic infections is Skin Rot (which afflicts all jánah, and causes the skin to fall off), Maze Worm (which causes a thick welt to spread out in a web-like configuration all across the body, causing severe itching and diarrhea) and The Ash Plague (a leprous skin infection which causes the extremities to wither into a powdery substance). Almost all of these ailments are treatable if diagnosed in time, but many are fatal.

*Chapter VII: The Physiology  
of Animorphs*

