

INCARNATIONS



Character Creation
in the
Sa'adani Empire

*Sample Documents
For Personal Use Only
© 2011 Storybones
www.storybones.net*

STORYBONES™

Greetings, Fellow Gamer!

This is an overview of **the character development process** in my correspondence RPG. The correspondence approach I describe applies to the main game as well.

I play this style mainly in my SF setting, but also occasionally in my fantasy settings. The basic concepts apply to both.

In my [Sa'adani Empire \(science fiction\)](#) game, character creation (both for the face-to-face campaign and the correspondence game) follows a similar process. The correspondence game converts much of this into a written interactive narrative, instead of a table-top interactive conversation.

In both cases, character development is a “pre-game” to the main adventuring. At many points in the development process we may pause character generation as we resolve dramatic encounters or complete side adventures to see what impact a character decision may have on the development process and subsequent factors (stats, NPCs known, skills learned, associations created, and so on).

The underlying premise here is that reincarnation is a given. (This reflects the cosmology of the Sa'adani Empire.) The players each begin as a soul who chooses certain life experiences in order to get the foundation needed for experiences and mastery the soul wants in this lifetime. (This has other implications in later game play as well.)

This results in unusual character development aspects. For instance:

Sociocultural overview is important, so PC grasps what she is getting into, and the real meaning her development choice(s) will have on her forthcoming life. The culture and way of life here has heft and consequence.

PC picks some overarching objectives for this incarnation. This choice can be deferred until end of chargen process but these goals will be incorporated into adventure opportunities and XP scoring.

Dice rolls for PC stats are not usually simply “random”. They may be adjusted to reflect soul objectives, or challenges the GM deems would be in place and suitable for this soul (if not at the moment of rolling, then over the course of development.)

The development process has a lot of back and forth: PC states objective, GM informs of factors to consider if taking X path, PC makes choice of path. GM then resolves outcomes. This may be in role-playing process with PC, or as GM-generated narrative event.

For instance: PC chooses to learn xenology at an academic institute while still under-aged. There is a bully there who is riding the PC. How does the character deal with this kind of encounter?

This may become a mini-game. Depending on results, the PC might (for example) gain influence, lose an attribute point (bully breaks his leg; his nimbleness is never the same again), acquire a bonus for a certain skill use in the future (discovered an unexpected aptitude for brawling, maybe, when he punched the bully out?), may gain an ally for the future (the NPC who helped him limp to the infirmary). If he's unlucky, he's gained an enemy for life and may also have started inter-clan hostilities with the bully's family. The PC does not have to role-play such risky encounters (it is often safer to simply dice them through), but it creates more depth when they are engaged with dramatically.

Similarly with career progression: this game allows for characters to "age" themselves and acquire skills and a history in the process IF they wish to do so (otherwise, their adventuring begins when they hit age of majority at 16 yrs old). If they choose a career path, much of this is resolved with dice, but the GM provides a detailed narrative adventure accounting for the highlights and personal impact of their experiences. As with the development of minors, portions of the career path may also be gamed out, especially when events represent a crisis or potential turning point in the PC's development.

Two examples of career progression narratives are given on the next page. These are stories spun based on a character's stats, abilities, choices, achievements, rewards, and dice rolls during part of his career progression. Following that is a sampling of the introductory material provided (in gradual installments!) to introduce players to the development process and the choices they make as they work through their incarnation.

This game system incorporates elements cribbed from Traveller (career progression), Harn (pre-adventuring development), SpaceQuest (caste system), GURPS (the deadliness of damage), and many other aspects that have suited my purposes over the years (and things of my own creation as well, of course). I have mutated them into a whole that works well for this game. That said, the system is under revision (I want a system more uniquely original that I can trademark), but the game I want to play in the near future will be using these rules as represented here.

Because of the (potentially very) involved nature of this sort of character development, **gaming in this system unfolds slowly**. (That's the trade-off for the depth of experience.) On average, expect 1 or 2 turns/week, although more when we're hot in the middle of something. I've found it is not unusual for the char development process to take 2 months or longer. Abandon any expectations you have for the pacing and timing of a f2f game. This is a creative writing experience for both of us. If you are familiar with journal-style rp-ing on a weekly basis, that is more akin to the pacing here. (That said: certain combat or crisis situations we do game in a more immediate way, via chat system or even just rapid-turn-around email. So not everything moves that slowly. ;)

Questions/playing interest? Write me at Teramis@deborahchristian.com.

SAMPLE CAREER NARRATIVES

Some or all of these progressions may be role-played in writing, depending on mutual interest and significance of events.

Example 1. Events that affect skills or abilities are marked in Red.

AGE: 17

Assignment: Technical Brotherhood, College

Location: Evrones College of Technical Brothers, Locanan, Locanan Ss

Your second year you are much more settled into your environment. You become friendly with your fellows on the advisory council. The council doesn't seem to be doing much good, but you and your buddies get a lot of drinking done and see a lot of local night spots in Locanan, so if nothing else you **become more proficient in carousing.**

Practicum classes continue, this year with more repairing of mechanical devices, and you somehow get picked for a workshop project that will rebuild an air car and incorporate all kinds of Technic-designed upgrades. For some students this is an opportunity to work on electronics and cyberchips, improving functions like the pilot AI and driver interaction. But somehow most of the fun work gets done by more senior students, mostly Technics who are at the school for their periodic re-training classes. You get shuffled into the grunt work end of things, and end up knowing a whole lot more about **how to repair vehicles** than you'd ever planned on learning.

Two good things come out of this, though. One is that in your eagerness to see what others were doing in their more interesting tech work, you quested out with your psi power as well as your attention. In doing so, you discovered you could **sense something about the tech** around you. This unlocked the door to a new skill for you in your psion classes: **Sense Devices**, the ability to detect technology devices in an area near you, and tell what they do.

Example 1

AGE 31

Branch/Unit: Dragon Corps, Shield Guards

Assignment: Subversion

Duty Station: Alkabeth, Resa Ss, Shanovar Sec.

This year, the work of winning hearts and minds continues. Your counter-insurgency ops proceed. House Decadan now has a target to hate: you, with your continuing success stopping locals from cooperating with them. You couldn't foresee, though, that they'd hate you enough to target your home with a tactical nuke...

Your saving grace was that a not-very-tech-savvy local native used the weapon against you. His point of aim was off, and the boat house was ground zero. The scenic klick-long lake became a crater, and part of the estate was sheltered from the blast by the hillside between you and the lake. You don't remember them digging you out of the rubble. Not only were you still alive, but you still had some parts of your body intact. The next timeless while was a fog of surgeries, **regrown limbs**, the blue aseptic glow of a med bed, and anti-radiation drugs. You could be grateful you already had a bionic spine that kept you knit together during a blast that destroyed most everything around you...

Maybe inhaling a nuke for lunch makes people rethink their priorities. **They promote you** one more grade before you muster out. It's tempting to think of it as a consolation prize for getting yourself blown up, but in reality it is recognition for the special ops missions you accomplished on Alkabeth.

Level 5, Marine (Dragon Corps): BAB 3, FORT 2, REF 2, WILL 2, DEF 2, INIT 2

Skills Gained: Logistics, +1 Karma Point, +1 Reputation

Body Mods: Bionic legs (+ Encumbrance, Endurance, HP in legs)

Final Rank: O5. Title: Colenis ("Command Leader") Development Pts Earned: 1

INCARNATIONS

Character Creation in the Sa'adani Empire

“Souls choose their body and beginning life circumstances so they are situated to have certain experiences in their physical lifetime. These decisions are made while the soul is yet disincarnate. Their reasoning for such choices is usually forgotten when the body is inhabited. Yet these formative choices have much to do with the talents, skills and direction that an individual's life will take.”

- Jul, lauzimfre monk,
Den Saido Temple, Calex

There are four phases to creating a person to inhabit Sa'adani space.

1. Primary Attributes. We determine attributes, partly by chance, but you (the soul) have the opportunity to adjust these within certain limits in order to better serve your ultimate goals.

2. Secondary Attributes. We determine elements of “chance” in the circumstances you are born in to. Things such as caste, standing of your birth family, familial associations, opportunity for career or education and so on, may seem circumstantial to the person living the life, but there are no coincidences. You will have an opportunity to influence some of these outcomes, or to volunteer for

more challenging circumstances in order to develop your personality and character in other ways.

3. Skills and Training. The newly incarnate person acquires education and skills and goes through an aging process. At the end of this process, the person will be ready to begin the next phase of his life in the company of other adventurers. Depending on the soul's desires, the incarnate may gain quite a lot of life experience before starting off in a new direction.

4. Resources and Equipment. We determine what the incarnate has accrued for resources in the course of life up to the time of current events. Once equipped and situated to the best of his abilities or desires, he will be ready to see where the twists of fate take him next.

The first step is the least interactive of all these, but the entire process requires a fair amount of give and take between game-god and soul. We will be working out the details of your genesis and evolution for a while to come. At some point during this process, souls will be asked to talk to each other to determine if and how their incarnate selves may have ties of mutual interest, kinship or other association that gives them reason to connect in the Sa'adani Empire.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

As you contemplate what you want to be in your adventurous incarnation, the following should be taken into consideration.

To Caste or Not to Caste

Although you will incarnate in Sa'adani territory, you may or may not be of old-line Sa'adani heritage. The dominant population is, of course, caste-born Sa'adani. However, many worlds have native alien populations with various forms of social organization, and there are some pockets of iconoclastic, minority human cultures that do not follow the imperial mainstream customs. Here are the tradeoffs if you go one way rather than another.

Caste. Being set in a social hierarchy gives automatic kinship network ties and familial associations, perhaps even powerful connections, mentors or sponsors. A person with caste usually starts out

with a few more resources: an inheritance, a gift of money from the family, an heirloom weapon, and so on. It is only possible to improve caste by gaining prestige or marrying higher up the scale, but persons with at least respectable (rather than low) castes may have many doors opened to them in the Empire. High caste persons are likely to have some kind of leadership role or obligation; low caste may fit in readily with the underworld and more shady sides of life. Caste-conscious Sa'adani are bound by rather more social and etiquette rules than those without caste. By the same token, the power elite lives by this code and so looks with kinder regard upon other citizens who fit neatly within the caste system.

No Caste. Persons who do not fit neatly into a social hierarchy are a bafflement and an irritation to the Sa'adani as a whole. Why any civilized person would shun their appropriate niche in the world is difficult for them to grasp. Persons without caste may be treated in wildly disparate ways by the caste-oriented citizens (or systems) they encounter. Persons with no caste are often assigned an arbitrary pseudo-caste designator so that official systems and staff know how to deal with them.

In caste-less places, people are judged more by their reputation and how they conduct themselves, than by assumptions about their qualities based on birth status. The positive side of this is that casteless citizens can find or make their own niche in the world (although this works far better in casteless regions like the CAS Sector, outside of the reach of much of the official Sa'adani bureaucracy). The negative is that some doors are permanently closed to them. The more they deal with old line Sa'adani, the more of a handicap this can be.

Psionics “The Talented”

Active psi talent is a very uncommon but not rare talent in the Empire, and persons gifted with this ability are usually called, simply, “Talented.”

The Talented are almost always detected as school children. They undergo compulsory testing and licensing in their Talent, and effectively gain caste in the process. Once licensed, certain psionics disciplines are open to them as career paths (or indeed, required of them, depending on their abilities). These disciplines are Attunement, Psychonetics, Microcosmic Rapport, and Bioempathy. See *Occupations*, below.

Cybernetics

There is a wealth of cybertechnology available in your home region, from external decks that speed the wired user in running the virtual net (“netrunning”), to neural interfaces designed to interface with starship controls, to program chips for new skills, to novel abilities due to cybersystems (eg, a video camera hidden in the eye; adrenal pump for sudden burst of speed; weapons concealed within the body.) Some people acquire cybermods for fun, but others make a serious career out of it, getting practical use out of their mods. The people most heavily wired tend to be military; spacers; certain derevin members; law enforcement; cyberdeckers and others who make a living off the Net or cybergear itself .

The Attunement Point of View...

"Mutates know nothing of universal laws and subtleties. They owe their psionics to a scrambled genome and rote memorization of the symbols of power. They are like cooks who slavishly follow a recipe in order to produce even the most mundane dish.

"We Lahaji, now...we are like fine chefs, who've mastered all the basic proportions. If need be, we can stir something up off the top of our heads. We know what ingredients go in what measure: how much psychic force to use, when to visualize, when to employ a trance, how to rein power in or let it flow unleashed. We are the creators in our discipline. Mutates are mere practioners."

Ajal Kamahr
Head, Kamiso Temple School

...and the Psychonetics One

"Lahaji cloak themselves in mysticism, but that's not what it takes to do psionics. Just active psi and a lot of hard work and concentration. That's all there is to it. You don't need to master the mysteries of the universe, like they suggest. Sure, they might be more spontaneous in their psionics, but there's a lot to be said for the tried-and-true Psychonetics formula. It's predictable, repeatable every time, and there're no surprises in it. This is a science, not an art."

Yuriso
Grand Master
Academy of Applied Psychonetics

The plus side to getting wired is the skill or enhancement itself, and what one can do with it. The down side is that cyberparts cumulatively take a physical toll as they task more and more of the brain's circuitry. Heavily modified persons run a small risk of cyber-psychosis, a mental or nervous breakdown of varying degrees of severity. Sometimes this can be recovered from, sometimes not. Psi-active persons have an extremely high risk of this breakdown the more systems they wear.

Body Mods

Bodies are easily repaired and parts replaced or modified. Some people do this out of choice rather than medical necessity. While the more rigid and traditional noble castes still frown upon this practice, most Sa'adani citizens consider the modest use of body modifications to be a practical reality of the world today.

Body mods range from cosmetic changes in appearance, to significant body sculpting, to genetic alterations (altering, for instance, the natural color of the hair). Other kinds of mods overlap with the installation of cybergear. Someone may chose to have skeletal supports installed if they will be working for a long time on a very high gravity world, for example, or certain weapons systems that can be installed in the body require some degree of modification in order to accommodate the system.

The plus side to body mods is that certain attributes can be altered or improved from what they were originally. The negative is that repeated or extensive mods are physically taxing and there may be some repercussion in health or function for the individual.

Drugs

Many of the physical effects of personal enhancements (cyber or mods) can be achieved through use of recreational or gray market drugs. Rec-drugs are plentiful and easily obtained, although some say this is the Empire's way of pacifying the masses. It is true that drug use is more commonplace in the CAS Sector than in other parts of the Empire.

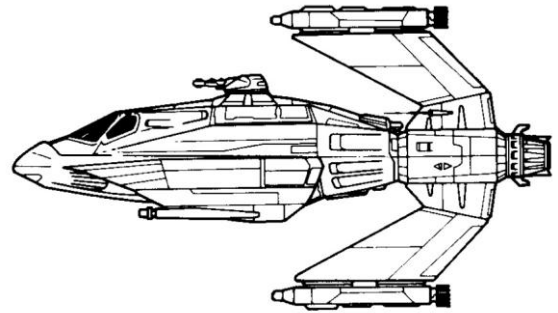
Spacefaring

Advances in the last 250 years have allowed the Sa'adani superior space flight capability. Starships have come within reach of interested individuals, no longer taking years to build or a lifetime to pay off. Sa'adani modular designs are quickly assembled, easily modified and repaired, and far more affordable than the fueled jump ship designs that regions like the CAS Sector were known for. Resonant crystals power the inverted warp that is faster than plasma core warp technology. The best Sa'adani ships cover a light year in an hour, bringing the reaches of space far closer than before. Of course, even at that rate it would still take over a year to journey from one far end of the Empire to the other.

Given this ease of access to spaceflight, some persons choose to own ships for pleasure, for business travel, for trade or exploration. **If this beckons you, there are some quirks to space travel that should be noted:**

The zone of inverted warp visited by Sa'adani ships is not an empty bubble of non-space. Rather, it is a bubble of *other* space: a sense-bending realm that is home to its own assortment of denizens. Space travel is hazardous except along well-patrolled routes. That is one reason for the Imperial Navy presence along chartered star lanes: they patrol warp space to make sure that civilian ships are not attacked by other-space life forms or anomalies. Ship's viewscreens and gunner turrets include filters that reduce that alien energy spectrum to something that hominid brains can grasp. Still, there are tales of external repair crews going space-crazy and being lost in warp.

No ship that is warp capable travels without functional weapons systems, except perhaps for escorted transports. Even passenger liners carry a full complement of shields and weaponry. So while it is fairly safe to travel established star lanes, spacefarers who venture off the beaten path are rather more prepared for conflict. They may also be wildly successful, however, by bypassing commercial starlanes and cutting days or weeks off of delivery times. Some very fast ships such as couriers transit warp with little or no encounters, because their speed makes them difficult for hostile aliens to close with.



Imperial Navy Blastboat. Used in system and space lane patrol and short sorties from carriers.

Aliens

Aliens are generally not psionic, and are not as given to human interests in body mods or cybergear. Their standing in the Empire is sometimes as allies, usually as dependent peoples, and generally of a lower caste than Sa'adani humans. If a soul is considering incarnation as an alien, commune with the game-god for more information.

OCCUPATIONS

Here is a brief overview of some popular types of life opportunities a newly incarnated person may pursue. It is possible to experience more than one of these careers by working in one for a time, then retraining for another. The average lifespan is 120 years, and a working lifespan can easily go to 100.

The Sa'adani often structure occupations into a guild-like association called a *cailos*. Membership is automatic for many careers and confers certain benefits on members.

[CUT]

Other Items of Interest

Karma Points

Caste

Caste Tables

Attribute Generation

Skill Points and Skill Purchases

Names and Naming Conventions

Language Notes

Improving Abilities

- Skill acquisition and descriptions

Education, Training, and Career

Options

Psionics

Career Progression (if chosen)

Enhancements

Inheritance, Property, Friends and Family

Equipping and Investing

Initial Situation