

A woman with a shaved head and a colorful, abstract swimsuit is swimming underwater. The background is a deep blue with white bubbles and some green and yellow streaks. The woman has a serious expression and her arms are outstretched.

STARCLUSTER 2

THE WORLD OF FAREN

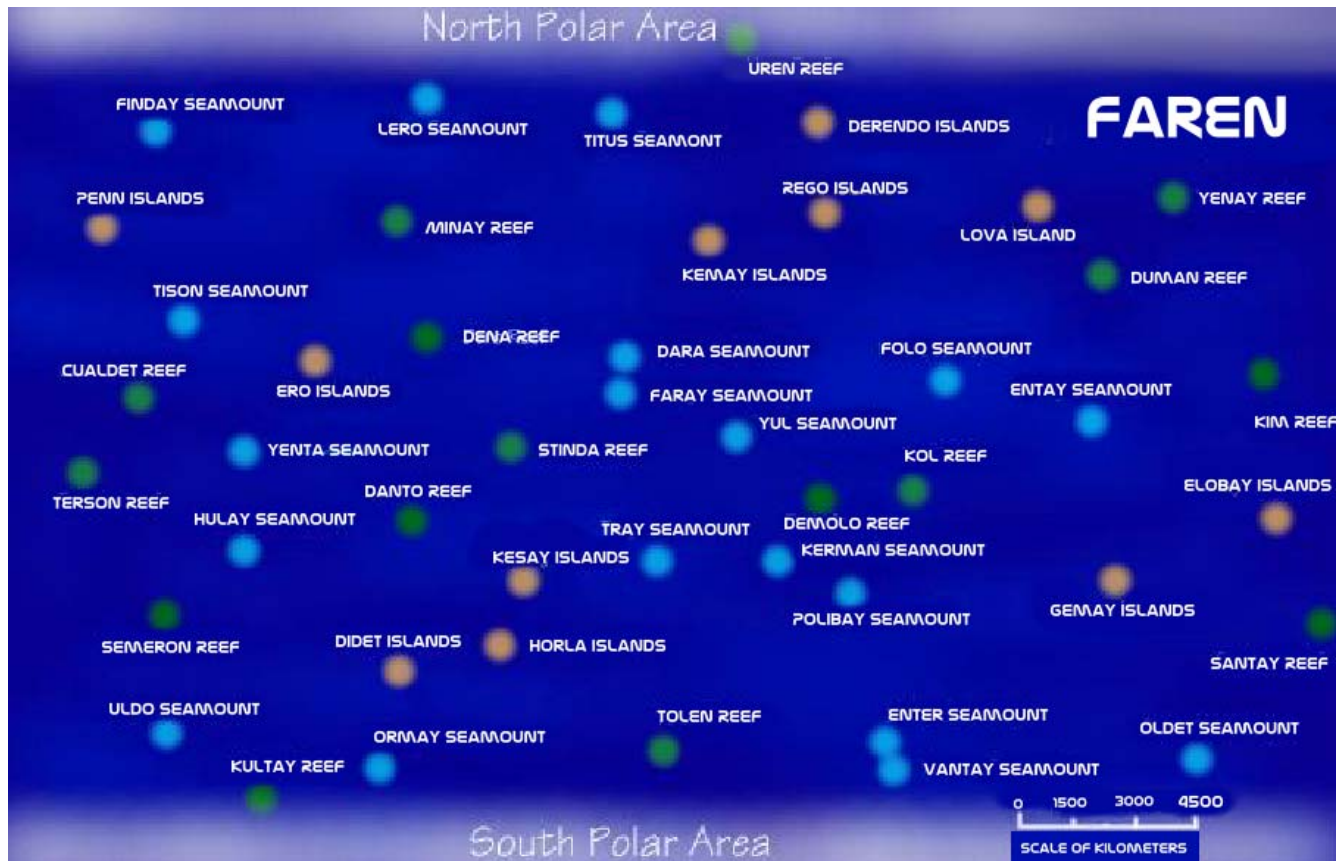
STARCLUSTER 2

THE WORLD OF FAREN

BY CLASH BOWLEY

FAREN

Faren is the name the Vantors use for their homeworld. "Faren" is also the word for "water" in several Vantor languages. Faren *is* water, an immense ocean covering the entire planet. There is some land, several hundred tiny islands scattered across the immensity of the world-ocean, but it is the ocean that holds life on Faren.



A MAP OF FAREN, SHOWING THE PRINCIPAL INHABITED AREAS.

THE LIFE ZONES

The deep waters of Faren hold a wide variety of life, called "Pelagic" life, which is fairly uniform over the whole planet. Pelagic life tends to be larger than that in shallow waters. Whales and whale-sized native life-forms cruise the deep ocean. The Pelagic food chain is based on krill, tiny creatures which drift through the world-ocean in vast quantities. Everything in the "deeps" eats krill or eats something that eats krill. The Vantors tend not to go out into the deeps much, except aboard vessels. Vantors prefer the richer, shallower waters.

In some places, the ocean floor rises almost to the surface. These places are called "Seamounts". Seamounts are underwater mountains which do not break the surface, even at low tide, and the tides on Faren are considerable, due to it being a double planet with Committed-to-the-Lord. The blue-white rays of Plush, Faren's sun, penetrate deeply into the waters, ensuring a lush growth on the tops of the seamounts. Seamounts are more numerous than reefs and islands combined.

"Reefs" are land exposed during low tide and submerged during high tide. Some reefs are rocky, some sandy, and others are composed of Earth coral or native Faren kithkes, which have silicate shells. Coral and kithke reefs tend to form in rings, protecting an inner lagoon rich in sealife. There are more reefs than islands on Faren.

Islands come in two varieties. First is the "Low Island". Low islands are barely above high tide, and covered with a growth of salt tolerant plant life. Sometimes low islands are part of a reef, sometimes they sit alone. The rockier islands are the haunt of seabirds, which nest on them. "High Islands" are volcanoes which have risen from the seafloor and into the atmosphere. The largest islands on Faren are high islands. The high islands contain a vast variety of evolved earth fauna and flora, as no native

Faren life is well evolved for land, and the evolved earth life is very competitive. Each high island is its own biosphere, with even neighboring islands in the same chain having a very different mix of life. Many high islands are surrounded by reefs and lagoons. Generally speaking, Vantors have left the islands alone. Ever since they moved into the warm lagoons of Faren, they did not need the islands to live on, and they have been left wild. The few Humans, Sastras, and Tagrisi who live on Faren have followed the Vantor example and live on floating offshore platforms, except for the area near the ground Spaceport on Ero Island. This is functionally the capital of Faren, and is certainly the largest landmass on the planet.

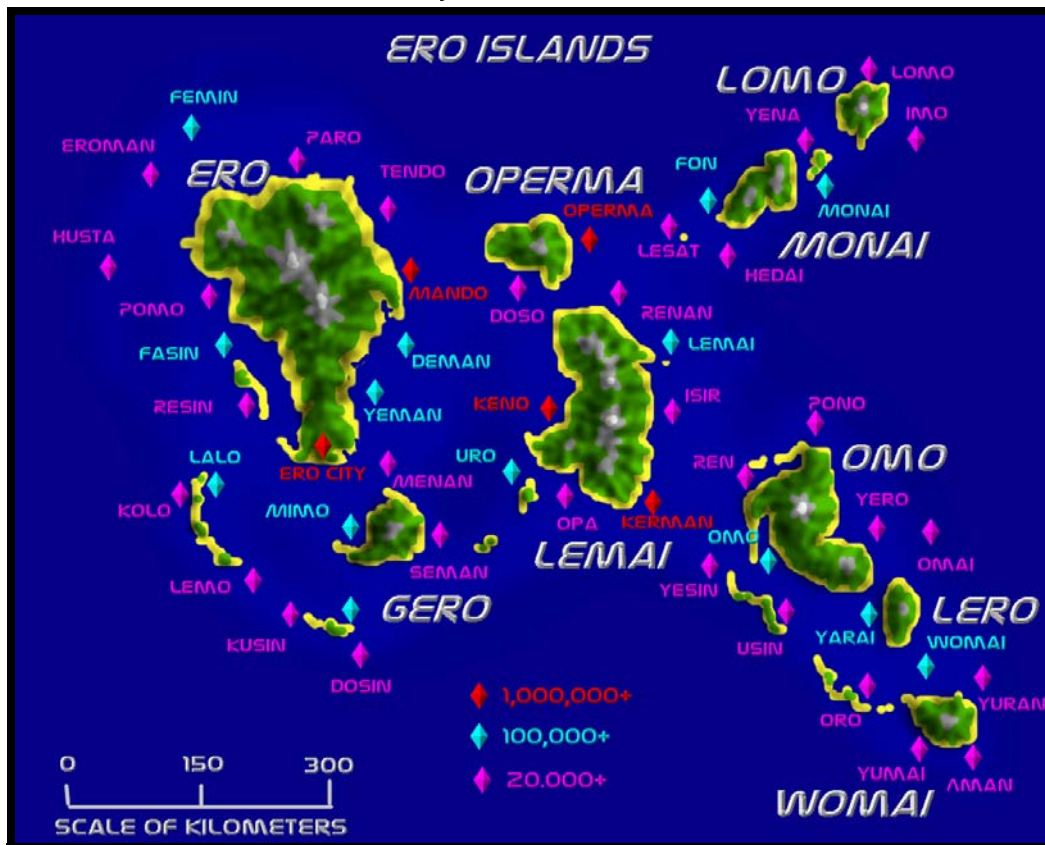
THE ERO ISLANDS - A HIGH ISLAND CHAIN

The Ero Islands are located slightly north of the equator, the nearest land mass being Dero Reef to the east-northeast. The Ero Islands are located over a hot spot under the ocean floor through which magma rises to the surface and beyond. Ero, the largest island, has two active volcanoes, as does the second largest island, Lemai. The smaller islands of Operma and Gero also have active volcanoes. The volcanoes on the other 5 islands of the chain are dormant or extinct. Kalinero, the higher of Ero's two volcanoes, rises to 5125 meters above sea level.

Some of the more interesting evolved earth fauna found in the chain include the Kini, a type of dwarf mastodon found on Ero, the Lomano, an almost hairless gibbon found on Lemai, and Omo's Guma bird, a 4 meter tall crane. There are endless local varieties of tropical creatures from Old Earth, several of whom went extinct long before the Diaspora.

Ero City is located on a bulge of land on the south coast of Ero. Here is the ground spaceport and the administrative apparatus of the planetary government. Ero City is blisteringly hot. The temperature averages 125 degrees F with very high humidity. No one goes outdoors during the day when it can reach 140 degrees F. The city comes alive at night, with many nightspots catering to the tourist trade.

THE ERO ISLANDS, A TYPICAL HIGH ISLAND GROUP



Around the islands, in the shallow waters surrounding them, is the bulk of the population of the islands. In these waters was bred the first Pamat sea plant, whose plastic-like sap was key in creating the Vantor civilization. The shallow sea between Ero, Operma, Lemai, and Gero is one of the cradles of Vantor civilization. In addition to Pamat, Dero and Feman were also first cultivated here. Tourist guides from Ero city regularly take their charges to show them the original Pamat sand molds on the eastern beaches of Ero, still extant after two millennia.

The seas around the Ero Islands are densely populated. The cities of Ero City, Mando, Keno, Operma, and Kerman all have over a million inhabitants, and there are many other large cities in the island area. Only Ero City, and a few of its suburbs, is built on land. Most of the others are traditional Vantor bubble cities, built underwater and roofed in domes of Pamat plastic. A few are floating platform cities in the newer style, where Humans, Sastras and Tagris feel more at home.

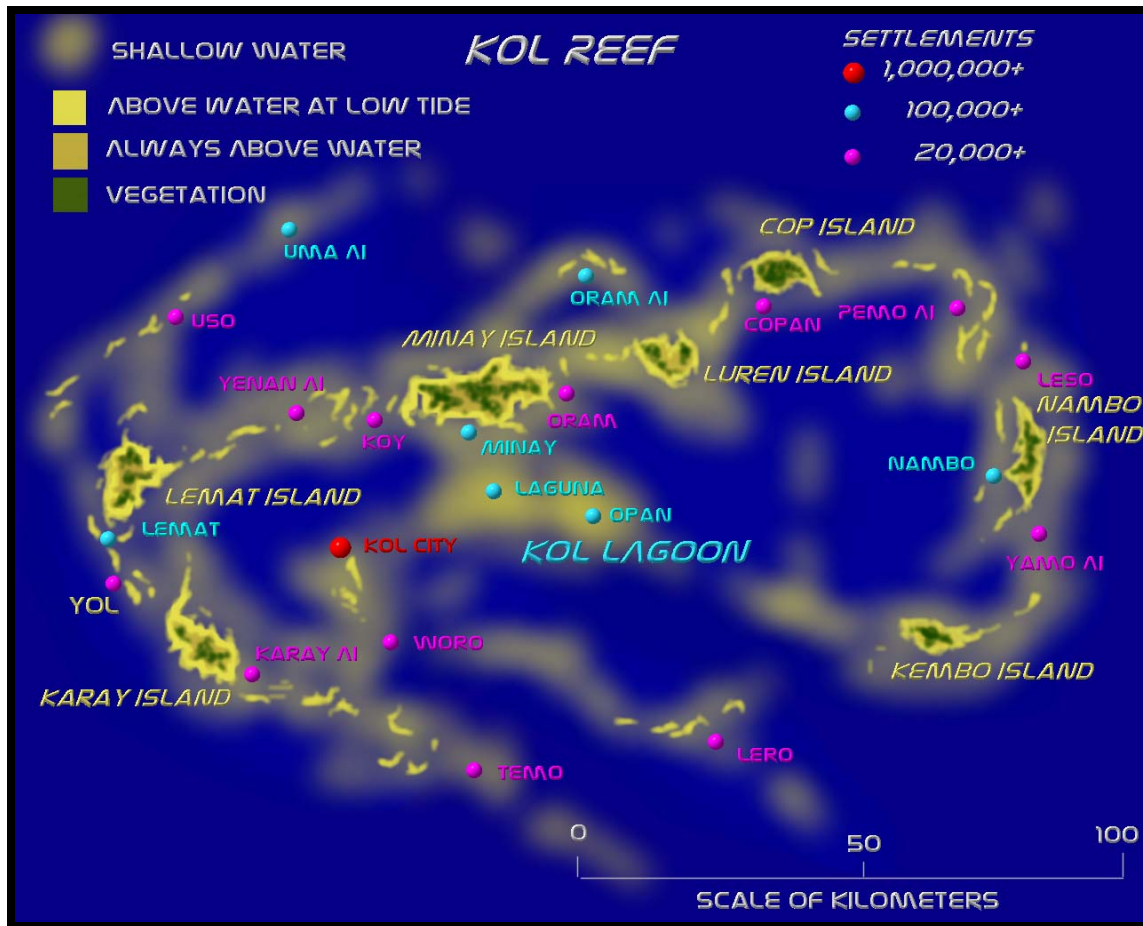
KOL REEF - REEF AND LOW ISLANDS

Kol Reef is located somewhat south of the equator, almost exactly opposite the Ero Islands. The reef surrounds a wide, shallow lagoon, with an entrance to the south. Six low islands are part of the reef, Karay, Lemat, Minay, Luren, Cop, and Nambo. Minay is the largest, at almost 15 miles long. The highest point of the reef, on Minay, is a mere 17 meters above the high tide mark. The land fauna on the islands is limited to rodents, reptiles, and several species of flightless birds. In very strong storms, waves will wash completely over the low islands, and the fauna survives only by clinging to the trees.

Kol City is the metropolis of the reef, a bubble city in the western half of the lagoon. The bottom of the lagoon is given over to intensive aquaculture, and wherever the light of Plush reaches, there are sea plants. Vantors, having no particularly great amount of dry land, have developed a different sort of mining. They have bred plants which uptake and concentrate the metals in the seawater and ocean floor, which they then separate out and use. Kol Reef is a center for this Phyto-mining, which along with Pamat plastic, gave them a truly unique indigenous culture.

Along with the Phyto-mining, food plants and cultured fish thrive in the warm, sheltered, sunny waters. Tesa fruit grows in amongst the kelp forests, and from it a fiery liquor is distilled and exported. Silversides and kenno are bred in pounds, protected from the sharks and native predators like the omat by sonic fences, and glass of unusual heft and clarity is made from the kithke skeletons which make up much of the reef.

KOL REEF - A REEF AND LOW ISLAND AREA



Vantor settled Kol Reef nearly a millennium ago, from the Gersay Islands, and the lagoon is very much shaped by the hand of Man. Archeological digs near Cop have uncovered a treasure trove of ancient artifacts from this period. The waters near Cop have been designated a Planetary Treasure, and the University of Copan is famed throughout the Cluster for the excellence of its archeologists.

The floating city of Laguna is a vacation city for non-Vantor, and has perhaps the hottest nightlife of any place on Faren outside of Ero City. Nambo is an ancient city, famed for its exquisite architecture. Lemat boasts an Aquacultural College of superb quality. Kol City serves as the hub of the local transportation network, and houses the local financial and political centers. A shuttle runs directly to the orbital spaceport from Kol City.

YUL SEAMOUNT - A NEW LAND BENEATH THE WAVES

Yul Seamount is situated almost on the equator, 3000 miles to the west-northwest of Kol Reef. Yul was first settled only twenty seven years ago, making it the latest seamount settlement on Faren. As such is almost a frontier land, and the work never ceases. Yul has rich deposits of liquid hydrocarbons, mostly depleted on Faren, and much of the economy of the Seamount depends on drilling and tapping the pockets, and on refining the output. The seamount itself is composed of several linked plateaus, called "rises", which come close enough to the surface to permit settlement. The largest rise, Great Rise, is home to Yul and five other, smaller settlements. The rises are forbidding and beautiful, with a wild look unusual on a world so long settled as Faren. Only one other rise has more than one settlement on it, Long Rise. The other rises, Pemo, Samay, Lefai, Wamay, and Usu, all house one settlement each. Drilling and extraction of hydrocarbons is the entire reason for the settlements, and many of the workers are young and unmarried, and thus unlikely to be permanent settlers.

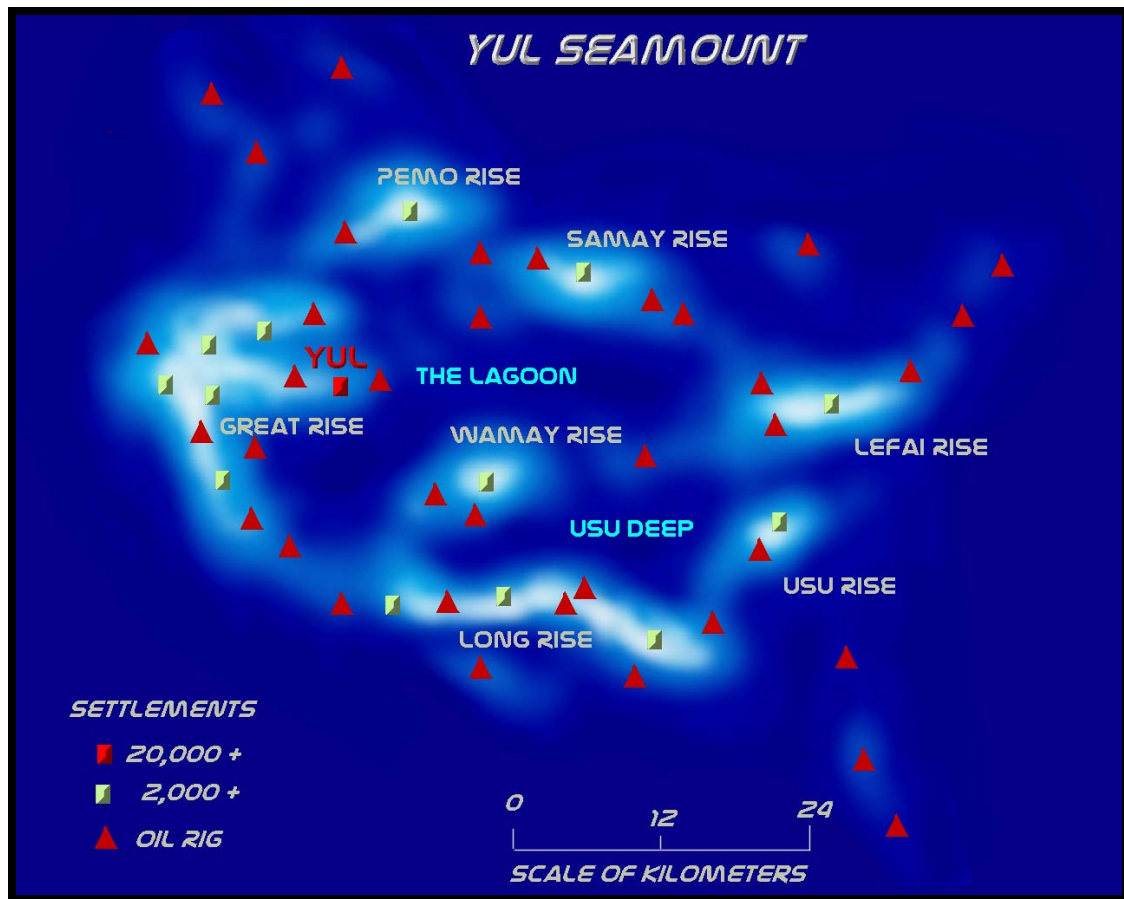
The city of Yul is the oldest settlement, and serves as the local hub of commerce. Some of the other settlements are literally raw, all being floating cities constructed on the spot to house the workers. Only Yul itself is more than a floating city, with some traditional Vantor bubble structures clustering about the central area. There is some minor aquaculture around Yul, but for the most part, the seamount is wild. Frontiers like Yul Seamount tend to attract the more adventurous in any society, and Yul is no exception. The riggers and crackers are well paid, and they like to party when not working. Yul city boasts an amazing concentration of nightclubs, gambling casinos, saloons, and other disreputable establishments.

The citizens of the city of Yul are trying to clean the city up, to become something more than a hydrocarbon boomtown, and have established fledgling institutions of a more lasting quality. The workers still come to Yul to spend their credits, though, and it will be a while before it is seen whether the efforts of the Yul people are substantial enough to make a real difference.

Yul is home to the new Faren Hydrocarbon Institute, which trains chemists and prospectors for the industry. There is also a thriving industry which hunts wild fish to help ease the seamount's chronic food import situation. Some local aquaculture farms have begun producing more than they consume, and this also helps. As yet, the new settlements are still too dependent on exploiting the hydrocarbon reserves to be self-sufficient.

The crime rate on Yul Seamount is higher than average, and the local lawmen are busy, but most infractions involve fisticuffs and drunkenness rather than the more planned sort of crime usual in more settled communities. Still, there is a lot of money in and around the Yul Seamount settlements, and where there is money, there is opportunity for theft, smuggling, and all sorts of monetary crimes.

YUL SEAMOUNT - A NEWLY SETTLED AREA BENEATH THE WAVES.



AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF FAREN

Faren has 3 distinct populated life zones, the High Islands, The Reefs and Low Islands, and the Seamounts. The High Islands were the initial birthplace of the Vantor species, and as long as the Vantor needed the use of land, it was the only place on Faren they could live. Vantors developed first on the Kemay Islands and radiated out from there. There are old folk tales of "tailless Vantor", which were apparently less successful adaptations of the original Homo Erectus. The Vantor displaced these tailless cousins, and they disappeared from the history of Faren entirely.

As a side note, the ocean currents on Faren, without land to deflect them, circle the planet in bands from east to west at the equator and from west to east near the poles. The ancient Vantor knew this, and took advantage of them to spread from island chain to island chain. Even today, all Vantor know that "The poles takes you east and the center takes you west", which saying mystifies most non-Vantor.

As the Vantor grew more and more adapted to the water life, they grew less dependent on the land, and thus were able to settle the reefs. This began happening about 2 millennia ago. This second expansion of the Vantor greatly expanded their land area and consequently their population. It was during this expansion that many of the traditional characteristics of Vantor life were invented, such as bubble cities, intensive aquaculture, and domestication and breeding of plants for selected qualities.

About the time that the Vantor and Diasporan Humans met, Vantors had developed to a high level of technology using indigenous methods. The estimated tech level was high TL7, almost 8. The Vantor quickly integrated their technology with that of the humans, and a close cooperation was born.

During this time, the first seamounts were being colonized. This process was slow, and never actually completed, because the availability of other planets siphoned off many Vantor who would otherwise have colonized the seamounts. The vast majority of Vantor, however, prefer their homeworld, and the colonization process is ongoing. It should be pointed out that far more Vantor live on Vantornom, the designated new home of Vantors, than live on the old homeworld. The shallow seas of Vantornom offer many more places for settlement than on Faren, but Vantors still think of Faren as the original homeworld, and tourism is a vital part of the economy of Faren.

MOTHER'S MILK SKILLS OF FAREN

Mother's Milk skills are those skills learned before age ten, when character development begins, which are fundamental skills of the culture they grow up in. All StarCluster characters have four mother's milk skills, which vary according to the culture they grew up in. All Farenese know how to **Swim**. This is the most fundamental aspect of life on Faren. Farenese babies are put in water at birth and have no fear of water. Vantors, with their powerful tails, can swim far faster and longer than Humans, Sastras, or even Tagrisi, but even people of those species who grew up on Faren know how to swim.

The three distinct life zones of Faren have different lifestyles. The three other bonus mother's milk skills vary from lifestyle to lifestyle. In the High Islands, the communities are large, crowded, and noisy. People skills are vital growing up in such a community, so all characters growing up in the High Islands areas have a bonus skill of **Streetwise**. This basic interplay of large numbers of people also gives High Islands characters a bonus skill of **Negotiation**, because such characters need to know how to achieve a workable compromise. This also leads to the third bonus skill for High Islanders, **Psychology**, because knowing the basic needs and wants of others is a vital skill in this type of community.

In the Reef and Low Islands communities, knowledge of raising plants and animals in the ocean is truly indispensable. Here is where most of the basic foods and raw materials of Faren are grown, so the Reefers gain **Aquaculture** as a bonus skill. Related to this, a fundamental knowledge of **Biology** is gained, as is the bonus skill of **Husbandry**. With these skills, a child of the reefs is able to function in this type of community.

On the Seamounts, existence is more raw and wild. A child growing up in this type of community is expected to fend for itself, and a bonus skill of **Blade, Unarmed, or Melee** is appropriate, as chosen by the player. As the seamount settlements are small and widely separated, a bonus skill of **Course** allows the character to find its way to where it wants to go. Vehicles are vital to this dispersed community, and characters from the seamounts are given a bonus skill of **Driving** to enable them to commute these distances.

NEW PROFESSIONS:

Aquafarmer:

A person who raises crops in and under the sea

Prerequisite: Biology, Aquaculture

Waiver: 15%

Yr. Income: 80 Start, 80 jump

1	2	3	4	5	6
Chemistry	Chemistry	Mineralogy	Biology	Planetology	Planetology
Aquaculture	Aquaculture	Biology	Mineralogy	Husbandry	Swim

Phytominer:

A person who extracts minerals via plant uptake

Prerequisite: Minerology, Biology

Waiver: 15%

Yr. Income: 150 Start, 150 Jump

1	2	3	4	5	6
Chemistry	Chemistry	Mineralogy	Biology	Planetology	Planetology
Mineralogy	Mineralogy	Biology	Aquaculture	Biology	Swim

Tour Guide:

A person who guides others in wilderness sightseeing journeys

Prerequisite: CHAR 9 or more, END 8 or more

Waiver: 30%

Yr. Income: 70 Start, 70 Jump

1	2	3	4	5	6
Streetwise	Drug	Streetwise	Drug	Unarm	Driving
Blade	Melee	Low Tech	History	Low Tech	END
Swim	CHAR	History	Swim	History	Planetology

Rigger:

A person who sets up and maintains liquid hydrocarbon drilling equipment

Prerequisite: STR 5 or more, Mechanics or Engineering College

Waiver: 20%

Yr. Income: 150 Start, 150 Jump

1	2	3	4	5	6
STR	AGY	Gun	Melee	Unarm	Drug
Mechanics	Swim	Mineralogy	Mechanics	Electronics	STR

Cracker:

A person who cracks liquid hydrocarbon into useful product

Prerequisite: Chemistry, Mineralogy or Engineering College

Waiver: 80%

Yr. Income: 200 Start, 200 Jump

1	2	3	4	5	6
Chemistry	Chemistry	Mineralogy	Biology	Planetology	Planetology
Chemistry	Mineralogy	Chemistry	Electronics	Mechanics	Mineralogy

Phytprospector:

A person who scouts for the best sites for Phytomining

Prerequisite: END 8 or more, Mining+2

Waiver: 20%

Yr. Income: 150 Start, 300 Jump

1	2	3	4	5	6
Mineralogy	Mineralogy	Biology	Aquaculture	Biology	Swim
END	Research	Swim	Electronics	Research	AGY

Aquarancher:

A person who raises aquatic animals for food or other use.

Prerequisite: Husbandry, Aquaculture

Waiver: 15%

Yr. Income: 80 Start, 80 Jump

1	2	3	4	5	6
Aquaculture	Aquaculture	Biology	Mineralogy	Husbandry	Swim
Aquaculture	Husbandry	Husbandry	Swim	Swim	AGY

Fish Hunter:

A person who hunts fish underwater for food and profit

Prerequisite: END 8 or more

Waiver: 30%

Yr. Income: 50 Start, 50 Jump

1	2	3	4	5	6
Swim	END	Course	END	Course	AGY
Mechanics	Course	Driving	Electronics	Driving	Mechanics