Verroth Species Information

Verroth are the third sapient species of the Zeiophine system. And are found on all worlds within, alongside their Dross and Zeioph cousins. Much like the other two, it is thought that they were engineered by the Ixxithian civilization. Next to their cousins, the Verroth initially appear a bit lacking in natural gifts. But while Verroth might not have the adaptability of Zeioph, or the gifted intelligence of Dross, they have their own distinct advantages.

When it comes to swimming speed, Verroth are the single fastest of the 4 Zeiophine species in the water. In short bursts they have been clocked at speeds nearly 150 km/h with average sustained speeds of 80 km/h over long distances without resting. Verroth also possess rather durable bodies, with protective carapace in some vital areas. But their most visible attribute in that long sword like horn that makes up their snout. This serves both as an impressive weapon, and a key to their speed in water.

Verroth do fair the worst of all the Zeiophine sapients on dry land though, requiring a vaporator at any humidity level below around 98% to avoid drying out. Without the aid of a vaporator, Verroth also have difficulty taking in enough oxygen on land to physically exert themselves. In spite of this, their more durable physiology makes them a prime choice for soldiers, especially so for waterborne operations. Verroth are primarily found with in the Lapis Territories along with their cousin species.

Adult age:

22 ISY.

Average lifespan:

Biologically immortal.

Average height/length:

1.75-2.5m Juvenile, 3.5-5.5m Adolescent, 6-11m Adult, 12-20m+ Elder.

Dominant Gender:

Equal mix.

Physiology:

Out of all the Zeiophine sapients, Verroth physiology stands out the greatest. They have the least amount of features in common with their cousin species. The first and most noticeable difference outside their looks is being the least compatible to interspecies breeding, with a very low birth rate for hybrids. Their entire genital structure is different from the other three species as well, being vastly more internalized for pure Verroth versus their cousins.

Verroth lack a typical penis, unlike their cousin species. In males, and functioning hermaphrodites, there are a set of long tendril like claspers that serve to help hold a female close and stimulate the vaginal slit. But the ejaculate itself comes from a simple slit between the claspers that must be pressed up against a female's slit. Verroth also have a very strict breeding season, in which males will built up sperm before mating with females who begin to ovulate.

There is no internal pregnancy for Verroth, unlike the partially internalized birth cycles of their cousins. Instead Verroth directly lay eggs in larger quantities and let them hatch mostly on their own. Verroth parenthood is also somewhat limited, consisting mostly of protecting very young Verroth until their yolk sack is used up, continuing to feed them afterwards until parents can leave the young to hunt for themselves. In accordance with this, Verroth are quite well equipped to fend for themselves fairly soon after hatching.

Verroth females possess mammary glands, even when purebred. For purebred these reside where a male's claspers would be to either side of their genital slit. Sometime after laying eggs, these will become engorged and plump with a rather fatty protein rich milk to support the young. Though the lactation cycle is quite short, usually only half an Imperial standard year at most. Hybrids may have more typical breasts like Zeioph and Dross, that can stay plump even when not lactating.

Verroth are the least adept Zeiophine species on land, though not due to clumsiness. Verroth take in less oxygen on land than Dross and Zeioph, and are more susceptible to drying out. Generally without the aid of a vaporator, they can only spend 1-2 hours on land at a time without rehydrating their gills. Pouring water over their gills also has a very limited effect as well, though with some natural tool usage pre-empire Verroth mixed water and an extract from a native kelp-like plant to make a thick slime to keep their gills hydrated.

In hybridized Verroth, the gill dehydration issue is much less pronounced. Particularly with Zeioph hybridization they are able to produce their own thick slime and have a different gill structure that allows them to remain on land for much longer unaided. In water Verroth not only get the gases they need from dissolved oxygen, but also via electrolysis of the water itself too. Verroth gills contain electrocyte cells that allow them to decompose water to boost the available oxygen to them.

With this ability to gain much more oxygen in water, which is more limited than in air, Verroth actually excel in the water compared to their cousin species. Dross are noticeably more sluggish in the water, as well as Zeioph due to available oxygen. Whereas Verroth will not suffocate even in very oxygen poor and stagnant water. This respiratory effectiveness is complemented by a very, very efficient metabolism and digestive system. Verroth need a lot less food than their cousins per unit of body weight.

Verroth very efficiently make use of food nutrients, running at a variable body temperature to conserve energy. Unlike Dross and Zeioph who are mostly endothermic, Verroth are more mesothermic and can function at a great range of body temperatures without suffering harm. When needed they can heat themselves up by ramping up heat production inside cells designed for heat production, or let themselves cool off to ambient levels. When overheated and out of water, Verroth can sweat to cool off, though it impacts their longevity out of the water negatively.

Verroth are gifted with a very wide array of senses, combining the best that Zeioph and Dross have, with some of their own specific senses as well. Verroth have very acute eyes, with incredible photoreceptor density and a deca-chromatic set of color receptors much like Zeioph that include infrared, ultraviolet and even slightly down into the microwave band. Though the further toward the ends of their colour spectrum you get, the fuzzier the image they see is, particularly with microwaves.

Verroth also have strong electro receptors along their snouts, bills and down the flanks of their body. These organs can also sense sound and pressure variations in air and water, though work much better in water. Like most complex life, Verroth can innately feel which way is up in gravity, hot and cold, touch and balance on land. Along with the sensory organ along their sides, Verroth also have ears in their heads. These are mostly internalized, with no deep opening to keep water out.

Verroth have worse hearing on land than in water, this is through their chitinous head plates directing sound towards their ears from all directions, but particularly behind. But lacking large moveable ears like Zeioph and Dross tend to have, their sound directionality is poorer and requires them to move their heads a lot while in air. Verroth sense of smell is also quite impeccable, both in and out of the water. To compensate for dryness in the air, their nasal passages actually re-shape themselves to increase effective surface area and how air flows through them.

Almost everything about Verroth is geared towards a streamlined shape and speed. From their internalized genitals and not retaining breasts in females, to their long streamlined bills. Their skin is quite smooth, even though it is scaled, and coated with a very slick oily mucus to aid them in gliding through the water. Out of the water, this mucus dries quickly into a supple, lustrous, and waxy coat that helps protect their skin and scales from drying out.

When given the benefits of a vaporator on land, Verroth also have quite impressive sprinting and sustained running speeds. Complimenting their swift water speeds of a sustained 80 km/h and a bursts of up to 150 km/h, Verroth can take off in explosive dashes on land nearly matching their average sustained underwater speed for a few minutes at a time. Dropping to all fours Verroth have been clocked at up to 120 km/h for bursts of a few seconds with blustering acceleration.

Their sprinting speeds on land and sea combined with their thick resilient neck, long, sharp sword-like bill and a very protected skull and brain case to make a deadly melee weapon. The materials in a Verroth's skull include a number of super strong ceramic and organometallic compounds. This makes their bill strong enough to pierce most varieties of natural and manufactured infantry protection. Combined with their weight and speed this can be incredibly deadly to any prey with which a Verroth jousts.

As mentioned earlier, verroth are covered in a layer of slime to help glide through the water and keep out infection. On land this layer can dry out and flake over time or be rubbed off, unlike Earth fish though, Verroth readily secrete more. While on land Verroth will sweat when their skin gets too dry and refresh their protective slime. The slime itself has a somewhat oily nature to it, almost like warm butter. It smells mostly of the individual's musk and pheromones, particularly around the groin, perianal and neck areas.

The Verroth nervous system, much like their Zeioph cousins is based on optical principals with localized electrical impulses to maximize reaction speed. This combined with their perception of time and visual refresh rate makes Verroth able to react at speeds that many other sapients would think supernatural. In combination with their overall speed, this adds to their prowess as predatory creatures. Verroth also possess supplementary neuro clusters like Dross, though theirs are a bit less developed.

Much like their cousins, Verroth are well into the realm of Xenobiology. This is even apparent in their skeletal structure, using a non-biological matrix of metals in key areas for strength that surpasses any of their cousin species. Their limbs, spine, claws, snout and plates are all reinforced heavily with a metal lattice. Being non-biological, this lattice is hard to repair when damaged, and impedes overall growth. Usually it doesn't develop until a Verroth is fully mature and their growth rate has slowed.

Verroth have a body structure that changes rather drastically as they age as well, similar to what's seen in Avalonians. When first born, Verroth have a more quadrupedal build, with shorter limbs and a longer body. As they grow towards adolescence their limbs grow to full length and their posture becomes more and more upright along with their plates forming. Very young Verroth rarely venture out of the water unless accompanied by their parents. Older juveniles sometimes do hunt on land after being weaned off milk, but this is rare.

Verroth, at least when not hybridized, have rather unique genitals from their cousins. Ontop of being fully internalized, they lack a true penis. Instead males have a genital slit which they must press up against a female's before shooting their semen into them. In addition, they possess two long tendril like claspers that help in holding females during the mating process and holding their genital slit open. In females, these claspers take the form of long nipple like structures that protrude to feed young.

In males, milk production is rare, but possible. Generally a male's claspers will secrete a substance not unlike precum when they are aroused and teased that helps lubricate them during copulation. The more a Verroth's claspers are teased, the more they produce, leading to a misconception that these are penises. Further contributing to that is that Verroth urinate from their claspers, both males and females. During lactation for females, the urinary tract shuts down and they excrete uric acid in their feces.

Verroth possess two bladders, one for each clasper. Both are connected to their own filter organs, four in total. One of the two per bladder is much larger and well developed, with the other being more vestigial. Though if the dominant filter organ is lost, the vestigial one will grow to full size and replace it. Verroth physiology doesn't deal well with excess sugar, which is a problem since one of their main sources of food is sweet fruit. Excess sugar is generally eliminated via the urinary tract, making Verroth pee quite sweet.

On the digestive side, Verroth are somewhere between Zeioph and Dross in overall complexity. Verroth have a large primary stomach, followed by a smaller gizzard lined with denticles. Verroth tend to swallow their food whole and generally go after relatively large prey. Their jaws can open surprisingly wide, spreading at key points to accommodate this feeding habit. The Verroth rib-cage similarly relaxes and lets large prey pass their chest, their rib-cage itself extends down into their lower torso where the spars thin a bit and don't entirely close at the front.

Prey are kept in the mid and lower torso, distending the Verroth's belly quite heavily. Though over time this distension will spread out as more and more of their food enters the lower guts. Part of those lower guts are within a Verroth's tail, saving space in their lithe frames for that large stomach. The Gizzard is mostly for processing bone, grinding bone to dust so that Verroth can extract the nutritious marrow. The digestive process itself uses hydroxides much like Ixxith and Zeioph do in the stomachs.

Much like their cousins, Verroth stomachs have quite a bit of texture to increase surface area for beneficial gut flora. For Verroth, this takes the form of papillae and a reticulated honeycomb that is somewhat hidden by the papillae. When food reaches the lower guts, fermentative bacteria take over along with gut fauna similar to Dross and Ixxith. The small intestine is rather broad, with a spiraling internal structure to maximize surface area and rather long villi.

Being between Dross and Zeioph, Verroth can vary how much they extract from their food. Either fully processing it, or leaving enough nutrients it's still suitable to be eaten again. This is mostly used to help wean young onto solid food by giving them something easier to digest, while also seeding proper gut flora and fauna.

Behaviours:

Verroth are fairly aggressive and somewhat solitary creatures in the wild, particularly when young after leaving their parents. Owing to the fact younger Verroth are more animalistic, this makes them better equipped for life in the wild than that of civilized life. Many end up going wild and later returning to civilization, some of course do not return at all. They tend to hunt and remain alone until adolescence when they search for a mate. Once they find a mate though, they usually mate for life.

Some exceptionally healthy and fit males are polyamorous, having multiple females in a small harem. This behaviour isn't witnessed the other way around, with multiple males to a female in the wild, but is sometimes seen in socialized civilized Verroth. Homosexual behavior is also observed in both wild and civilized individuals. More frequent in weaker males who pare up to better challenge stronger ones for territory. These male pairs tend to use force to breed with females, and rarely keep continued social contact after the act.

Though a few two-male to one female polyamorous mateships have been observed in the wild, with more being common among civilized individuals. Males sharing a female always mate in tandem, using a position similar to Zeioph with one in front and one behind the female. Though due to the function of their genitals, they must inseminate the female one after the other. Mating is usually paired with courtship, even for established mates, which in Verroth can be quite a complex display.

Verroth mating displays primarily involve showings of their sails and manes combined with elaborate swimming and sometimes dances on land. These often combine with feats of speed and strength to impress a potential mate, and they aren't limited to one sex, being performed mutually. While initial courtship displays are the most flamboyant, in subsequent breeding seasons Verroth reenact them as a form of foreplay before breeding. A major part of Verroth courtship is appreciation and caressing of their sword like bills.

Two infatuated Verroth will spend long periods rubbing their bills together while quietly rumbling. This is often combined with light kissing of each other's lips that progresses into more open mouth kisses. Usually this step is the last before two Verroth breed, or at least share a moment of carnal passion. Verroth often find it difficult to breed outside their own species without these sorts of rituals being performed, though there are always exceptions to these norms.

Another part of breeding is sharing of scents. This is done via rubbing, and in some cases, peeing both on land and in water. Generally scent sharing happens during the display, but can sometimes continue well into the mating ritual. This scenting is important, as it allows the pair to share pheromones and aphrodisiacs to better facilitate arousal and mood for the act.

Verroth have a notable tendency to prefer being close to if not in water fully. They greatly love swimming about and notably grow depressed when deprived of such for too long. Small pools generally don't fulfil this need either, Verroth like getting out into open water where they can swim at speed.

Cultural Traits:

As one might expect, Verroth culture shares a lot in common with that of their Zeiophine cousins. And just like their Zeiophine cousins the culture varies from world to world within the Zeiophine system. One major point of difference from their cousins culturally stems from their difference in child rearing. As wild Verroth care less for their pups than the others when wild, culturally it's more normal for young Verroth to go off on their own sooner than other Zeiophine species.

This also means that biological family connections are less important for Verroth as well. Many set off on their own as soon as their parents have weaned them onto solid food. This means few end up with any deep familial attachments from childhood. It's also all to common for those who are held onto longer and raised, to have a dysfunctional relationship with their biological parents. It's usually during adolescence that Verroth settle down and build a family unit with which they become more attached.

This distant parent-child relationship does make them a bit of an odd sort in the Empire, next to most other species that are extremely attentive parents. Some Verroth, more deeply into Imperial culture, do abandon the normal practices of their race though, as do those more focused on the shared culture of the Lapis worlds. Young Verroth often live in the wild until their adolescent years, giving them a disadvantage in education as they start theirs later in life. Though Verroth retain neural plasticity well into their adulthood.

This basic education later in life has given the Verroth a reputation for being slow, something that more involved Verroth parents try to offset by forcing their young into earlier schooling. It is a growing trend in Verroth culture to educate young Verroth, and to push their offspring to over-achieve while being overly attentive. Given that this flies harshly in the face of instinct and natural parenting for their species, it has been causing a growing trend of rebellious and dysfunctional adolescent Verroth.

While not exactly Verroth culture, it's common on Zeiophine worlds for Verroth's excessively sweet urine to be bottled up and fermented into a sort of wine. Natural compounds found in their urine along with all the sugars combine with a yeast-like micro-organism from Zeiophine to make a slightly alcoholic and intoxicating drink laced with pheromones. The fermenting process itself sterilizes the resulting wine, and much of the salt sediments out leaving an ideal balance of sweet and salty.

Verroth themselves rarely drink this wine, usually only doing so when it originated from a lover as part of a cultural mating ritual that replaces attracting mates via urination in the wild. However the drink has made some headway in the Empire with more adventurous individuals. Some Verroth who are deeper into aspects of Dross culture will use drinking wine made from their fluids as part of dominance rituals in lieu of sexual acts of submissance. Others still use it as a means of flirting cross species.

Verroth culture places a fair bit of stock in the look and quality of sails and manes as well as other ray-fin structures. In the wild these are a sign of good health and good genetics. So exceptionally healthy looking manes are seen as a status symbol, and object of beauty in Verroth culture. Generally the Verroth gravitate to their normal lithe body type, though during the breeding season plumper females are a common sight. Plump females are seen as well fed and produce larger quantities of eggs due to having more energy stored up.

Much like their Zeiophine cousins, Verroth culturally wear minimal clothing, as it gets in the way in water. And before the Empire, their pre-industrial technology could not make tight fitted fabrics. Within the Empire bodysuits are common, with Verroth only wearing a little more clothing to accentuate the protective bodysuit. When going out for relaxation, Verroth usually dress down to show off their manes and sails as well as colours better. Their "fine evening outfit" is more akin to a bathing suit and shawl.

Enlisted Verroth typically wear the full uniform of the Imperial military, with adaptations to their physiology of course. Typically Verroth dress uniforms will keep their sail free to be shown off. While combat wear will cover over it to protect it and for the purpose of sealing air-tight when needed. Part of Verroth clothing choice is to cover up the vaporator they need while on land with shawls and light scarves. Though in some cases, civilians will have more decorative and elegant vaporators than the utilitarian military models.

Even before the Empire, Verroth found themselves developing a warrior culture. Their natural weapons and other gifts made them exceptional fighters. Their solitary nature played into it as well, letting them focus on their duties. This was mostly pushed by broader Zeiophine culture, in which weaker, slower Dross made use of Verroth as soldiers and guards in exchange for food and technology. The warrior caste is still pervasive even in modern Verroth culture, with many entering into military service in the Lapis Territories.

Given the militaristic nature of the Empire, this warrior culture doesn't hurt the Verroth within it one bit. Some Verroth do seek to shed the old stereotype, feeling their kind have more potential than just being soldiers. Though it's a hard one to shed, given most Verroth are perfectly happy to take up arms and become career soldiers. Attaining a prestigious military rank is also looked upon favorably by many Verroth, and is a life goal for many of the more conformist of their kind.

By far the largest concentration of Verroth is found on Zeiophine Gamma, known within the Lapis Territories as planet Verroth. This isolated world is perfect for the more isolationist Verroth. Due to its isolation the Verroth here have most strongly conformed to their oldest cultural principles instead of integrating with Zeiophine and Imperial cultures. Generally the only Verroth who leave Zeiophine Gamma are those bound for military service abroad.

History:

Verroth share much the same historic path as their cousin species. After the fall of the Ixxith civilization that likely created and seeded them around the Zeiophine system, the Verroth lived wild until Dross started an agrarian civilization that Verroth slowly merged into alongside Zeioph. This continued for many centuries in parallel across many of the Zeiophine worlds before Samira rose up to unite the three races under her banner on Zeiophine Prime.

The Verroth themselves were always more of a fringe race in Zeiophine society, owing to their more solitary natures. But since the Empire intervened, they have slowly but steadily become more and more integrated into Zeiophine society. By the time the Empire discovered and intervene to uplift the Zeiophine species, 90% of the planet was under allegiance to Samira, and with the help of Empress Revika, the other 10% quickly fell in line.

This of course would spread to the other Zeiophine worlds quickly with the help of the Empire. This extended to the Verroth, who had been loyal soldiers in Samira's army even before the Empire due to their impressive natural weapons and speed. Since then, the Verroth have formed the backbone of the military within the Lapis fleet. Their solitary nature makes Verroth quite adept at the life of a soldier, complimenting their natural ability.

It is quite likely the Verroth were modified by, if not created by the Ixxith civilization during its peak. Undoubtedly the lost civilization also spread them across the Zeiophine system alongside their cousin species. Much of this information is based on conjecture and spoken word history, with little physical evidence to back it up. But remnants of geo-engineering on some worlds in the system make it a likely scenario.

Being the most water-based of the three cousin species hailing from Zeiophine, Verroth historically didn't have typical dwellings. Instead opting to live and sleep in the open oceans of the worlds on which they dwelled. As they moved into society however, they took up residence in more typical domiciles on land and in the shallows offshore. These houses tend to be partly flooded, with pools for comfort where possible, including bed chambers to let them sleep while afloat.

Moving into Imperial society, Verroth use modernized homes that are similarly partly flooded. Though this have in-built filtration and aeration systems in the flooded portions. In space, Verroth typically sleep in sealed bags filled with water to save weight and space. These bags minimize water needed and have filters and aeration built in that connect directly to ship-board life support. Though with special moisture retaining bodysuits and vaporators, their viable range from water is greatly increased.

Even still, Verroth prefer to remain near larger bodies of water. This has historically constrained their populations around oceans and large lakes. Though there are some places where large indoor and outdoor pool facilities to serve Dross exist, but this is more the exception than the rule.

Glossary:

- **ISY:** The Imperial standard year, equal to about 3.1 Earth years.

- **Lapis Territories:** A set of Imperial worlds predominantly inhabited by Zeiophine species such as Dross, Verroth and Zeiophs along with other aquatic and semi-aquatic species.

- **Xenobiology:** Biology differing significantly from earth-biology. Generally based on non-carbon chemistry or entirely different groups of amino acids. Read also: Hypothetical Biochemistry

- **Zeiophine:** Often called the "Watery system of life and mystery", this system is quite an interesting one, home to 4 different sapient species of the Ixxith, Zeioph, Dross and Verroth. Atop the multitude of sapients, pre-Imperial arrival, many of the planets had shared fauna and flora, such as dross and Verroth being found on multiple worlds, alongside transposed non-sapients.

  Zeiophine itself is a somewhat dim orange main sequence star. Larger than Sol by 25 times, but only 2.5 times brighter. There are 12 total major bodies within the Zeiophine system, all of which show some at least minute traces of Ixxith setting foot upon them. The 4 worlds which fall into the habitable zone are all 80% or more water with exceedingly deep oceans.

- **Zeiophine Prime:** A watery and swampy world, more ancient than earth by a factor of two, and home to an incredible number of sapient species. Zeiophine Prime is divided into five main biomes, Predominantly caustic swamps, freshwater seas being next most common, volcanic mud flats, coastal forests, and lush grasslands in small strips making up a minority.

- **Verroth (Planet):** Named for the Verroth who were the most abundant sapient species found there. Zeiophine Gamma is the closest planet in the Zeiophine system to the parent star that falls in the habitable zone. Most of the above water areas as scorching deserts. The intense solar heating also makes for incredible humidity and thick water vapour clouds.

  Ordinarily, a world like Verroth would succumb to runaway global warming. However the Ixxith left behind a cocktail of special chemicals that keep Verroth's ozone layer thick, and also reflect enough solar energy away to keep the planet livable. Most life on Verroth exists very deep underwater save some more specialized species, to escape the heat of the surface.

  Due to the conditions on Verroth, reaching orbit is a challenge. Most conventional rockets cannot cope with its thick atmosphere and high winds make orbital elevators unlikely. The most common method to get into orbit is using a lighter than air platform to carry a rocket or space plane to the higher atmosphere before launching.

- **Vaporator:** A device that allows creatures with gills to breathe comfortably outside water whether or not they are amphibious.

- **Samira:** A Zeioph Dross cross-breed who managed to unite much of Zeiophien prime under her control. And with the help of the Empire, united the rest of the Zeiophine system into the Lapis Territories. Generally Samira is beloved by the other Zeiophine species, owing to her charismatic approach to conquering in lieu of violence for much of her conquest.

- **The Empire:** An interstellar Empire within the milky way, and the largest singular faction within it. Its full name is the Pan-Galactic Oligarchic Hibiki Empire. The Empire is built of many races with a fairly egalitarian society. While semi-autocratic, it's leaders are specifically engineered for the role of leadership.

- **Ixxith:** A feral but sapient species, believed to once be technologically advanced enough to have engineered all other sapient life within the Zeiophine system.

- **Dross:** Another cousin-species of the Zeioph, of similar origins and distribution as well.

- **Zeioph:** Another cousin species of the Dross and native to the Zeiophine system. Also likely engineered by the Ixxith.

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