

WAR Culture Package

Amironian Biata

The information found in this packet is in addition to the NERO International Biata Race Package.

Society:

The Biata clans native to Dyllaria make their home in the harsh badlands in the southern part of the region known as the Wastes of Amiron. They are nomadic hunter/gatherers and therefore have no established governmental structure. They roam in pack-like tribes in a harsh environment, which is not only dangerous but is also barely capable of supplying enough game for them to exist. Females dominate Amironian Biata society and males will always be extremely reluctant to look a female in the eye. While female Biata are almost always warriors, their male counterparts are generally rogues or healers.

The basis of Amironian culture is superstition and combat. The females are fierce warriors who use either a staff or sword, while dismissing the use of missile weapons. Males usually use a short or small weapon, as well as ranged attacks. Their style of battle magic is Necromancy, and many have condemned the entire race for this. Their preferred school of magic is always Earth, and their fear and hatred of Celestial Magic will prevent them from acquiring any use of it. The Biata population is small and isolated by their environment. They live under some of the harshest living conditions of any Dyllarian race. Amironian Biata are very proud of their heritage and who they are. While they will stand for a personal insult, if the situation calls for it, they will never stand for an insult to their race.

In 599, the Amironian Biata lost the knowledge of the how to forge and properly wield the Bastard Sword, a weapon renowned for its versatility. Many feel that this was in some way the doing of The Overlord, Tilicaf, who feared the weapon in the hands of both the Biata and local highlanders against his Dark Horde. There are also rumors that this lost knowledge was the result of a curse that was put on the Biata because of their refusal to join the Dark Horde against the civilized races of Dyllaria. Either way, the loss of this knowledge is very mysterious, and many Amironians have unsuccessfully sought a way to regain the knowledge.

Personality:

As a result of their harsh living conditions, Amironian Biata are often perceived as arrogant, rude, and even bossy. Females are commonly all of the above things while males are much more humble and some are even meek when dealing with female Biata. Females are much more outspoken than males, and their intense pride comes from having survived in their homeland for the bulk of their lives. Honor is a concept that is exercised when one gives his or her word to another in Amironian society. There is no dishonor for theft, murder, or betrayal. These are facts of life in The Wastes, and they are necessary tools of survival for nearly all Biata.

Biata should be somewhat logical in their approach to life. They generally tend to be very extreme in their viewpoints - either very good or very evil. In all cases however they will be very focused. They will follow a code of conduct and have a particular goal that coincides with their perceived meaning of life. Biata never do things "just for the heck of it." This does not mean that they are always cold and hard as iron. Biata have been known to display wonderful senses of humor and experience all sorts of feelings. Almost all Biata are strong-willed, and they will not easily be deterred. They are not rash, and they prefer to take their time when making decisions. The life expectancy of a Biata is like that of an Elf, so years to a Biata are not as meaningful as to Humans. Below is a rough outline of Biata aging:

Biata Aging

<u>Age</u>	<u>Stage</u>	<u>Human Equivalent</u>
0-3	Infant	0-2
4-7	Toddler	3-5
8-20	Child	6-8
21-70	Youth	9-11
71-90	Adolescent	12-14
91-100	Puberty	15-20
101-200	Young Adult	21-30

201-300 Mature	31-40
301-400 Middle Aged	41-60
401-500 Old	61-90
501+ Venerable	91 +

All Biata born before 590 will remember the growth of their feathers and claws. It was very new and unusual feeling for the Biata who lived through it.

Marriage:

The human concept of marriage is not present in Amironian Biata society. Females choose their mates and often have a collection of three to five to pick from. The system follows a harem-type structure in which the females may add or drop members as she sees fit. The males are not only the intimate companions of the female, but also act as her servants and tend to her children.

Birth:

As with other Biata, Amironian children are born totally covered in soft feathers. These usually fall out within a few months, leaving only those along the eyebrows as well as some sparsely dispersed in the hairline. The mother does not nurse the baby but instead leaves that up to the men. They are the child's keepers until it passes the Ceremony of Changing. This occurs at age twenty and usually lasts about a year. This ceremony is characterized by a period of learning and grueling trials that see the youth separated from the community along with all those of the correct age. During this time, those involved in the ceremony spend a year with a group of teachers known as the Lore Masters. For the entire duration of this period the child sees only the Lore Masters and the other twenty year olds. The females are taught to fight and win mates, while the males are taught domestic duties and the correct amount of subservience to observe when dealing with females.

The child loses its soft feathers during this time and begins to grow adult plumage. More colorful and larger, these feathers generally remain for the duration of the Biata's life. Amironian Biata children are raised on a mixture of goat's milk and deer's blood, which is a staple part of the diet of the entire culture. Before 590, the births of Biata were the same as that of a human.

Death:

Amironian Biata view death as a natural occurrence and therefore allow it to happen naturally in all aspects. A dead Biata is almost always relieved of all his or her worldly possessions and allowed to lie where he/she has fallen. Certain shaman-led groups practice cremation, but these are not common.

Interracial Relations:

Amironian Biata particularly like Barbarians, Highlanders, Half-Ogres, and Scavengers. Drae slavers from the Slaver's Peaks have conducted raids on the Amironian Biata for decades. This has created a backlash of hatred against the "dark hunters" as the Biata call them. Most Biata warriors will not hesitate to attack Drae, even in the face of overwhelming odds. Often the Biata will attack even Drae who are peaceful or friendly. They are indifferent to other races.

Family:

Biata society is organized in Katars or tribes. These Katars consist of a Matriarch (known as a Kataress) and her hunting group, plus all of her relative huntresses under her. The families are each headed by a huntress, and also includes her males and their children. The males tend to the children while the females spend nearly all day hunting game. A new Katar is formed when a Matriarch or Kataress dies or it gets so big that a single Kataress cannot meet its needs. This latter option happens only very rarely as each Kataress takes great pride in caring for her tribe, and to let a part of it break away is demoralizing.

The only structure found in an Amironian Biata community is the ponpor (pawn-pour). These small tents are used only for sleeping and are generally only big enough for the female and her males and children. Almost all of an Amironian's life is spent outside, and only extremely harsh weather or sleep will drive them indoors. As a result, Amironian Biata generally do not like buildings or being inside of them, and will seek the open sky at any available opportunity.

After completing the Ceremony of Changing, the children are required to choose their path in life. All females are groomed as huntresses while the males are generally taught domestic skills. Males also tend to

be herders and learn to handle livestock early on. Males tend to leave between the ages of 100 to 110 years in order to become part of a huntress' clan. Men are also traded along with livestock from tribe to tribe in order to maintain good relations.

Females are less numerous than males because when a huntress establishes her own dominance she often takes males from an older huntress. This often leads to combat in which the winner retains the males while the loser is slain. In a few rare instances the defeated female may just be banished, in which case she will most often roam the wastes alone until she dies.

In recent years, challenges have gone down and the exchange of males has become a political tool to insure alliances and friendships. This has been done mostly to prevent the loss of huntresses and as a concerted effort to make the Amironian Biata stronger.

Leisure:

Biata women enjoy hunting and combat above all other things. Their spare time is usually spent sharpening their skills in these areas. War with other tribes is not uncommon, but they are usually short-lived battles with few deaths. The men spend all of their time tending to the children and playing games with them. Occasionally a Biata male will learn the use of a weapon or earth magic in his spare time, but this is not commonplace.

Organization:

The various Kataresses meet once a year at Marena's Meeting. Lead by the five eldest Kataresses, this week long gathering is where the various huntresses meet to discuss trade, threats to the Amironian Biata, settle grudges, and compete in games to prove their worth. This festival/congress is named for Marena Redclaw.

Names:

Biata last names usually have to do with a bird or a part of a bird. The last name of each female comes from her Kataress. The last name of a male is that of his huntress. When a huntress forms her own Katar, she may choose what to name herself. Biata do not receive their last name until after they complete the Ceremony of Changing.

Heroes, Lords, and Legends:

Marena Redclaw: She lead over a hundred Biata (then Humans) from Evendar in the year 78 in hopes of finding a cure to the effects of the 1st Great Celestial Change. Eventually, she gave up the search and started the Biata stronghold of Fenstrosia in the Lanitian Highlands in 200. This stronghold grew into the Biata Kingdom of Fenstrosia.

Katara Morningdove: Last General of the Army of Fenstrosia. She led the group that killed the Fire Drake Amiron in 325 after it had devastated the Savannah of Romantis and destroyed the Kingdom of Fenstrosia. She organized the survivors of Amiron's attack into the current system of tribes in order for her people to survive in the devastated lands.

Bendrik Eagleshadow: He is the greatest Amironian archer to ever walk the lands of Dyllaria. He also fought with the forces of good in the Dark, Goblin, and Horde Wars. His greatest distinction within Amironian Biata society is that over 100 huntresses have won him in single combat so that he would be her mate.

Mia Blackhawk (My-yah) - A Biata legend that supposedly slew a Drae Lord and liberated over two dozen Biata slaves in the year 476. Her skill with a bastard sword was unparalleled.

Zandara Valeron - Inventor of the bastard sword. She instructed Mia Blackhawk in its use.

The Wanderbeast - This creature roamed the Wastes in search of tasty Biata. It was slain in 524, but stories of its return are still used to scare Biata children into being good.

Tara Goldtalon - Slew the Wanderbeast. Later died fighting off Drae slavers in 526.

Rhea Skylark – One of the best traveled of all Amironian Biata. Her adventures took her all the way to Elysia and beyond. She was known as a brave warrior with a short temper. She died fighting the Dark Horde in the Siege of Barin's Fort in 598.

History:

78

Marena Redclaw leads her followers in search of a cure to their feathers falling out. They venture south from Evandarr.

200

After 122 years of searching, Marena realizes that there is no cure for the Celestial Change and decides to settle her people in an area she discovers in southern Dyllaria. She names it the Lanitian Highlands after her mother. She names the city Fenstrosia after a city she visited in her youth.

304

The city of Fenstrosia starts trading with the Dyllarian Dwarves.

315

Marena Redclaw declares that her lands will be known as the Kingdom of Fenstrosia. This land encompasses most of the Lanitian Highlands and includes Fenstrosia and four other settlements. Marena herself takes the title of Prime Matriarch and rules from her stronghold atop a sharp and treacherous peak known as Windmere Spire.

345

Marena dies due to natural causes and her daughter Rhea becomes the leader of Fenstrosia.

363

Dwarven outcasts known as the Dark Dwarves begin to move into the Lanitian Highlands and encroach upon the Biata homeland. Prime Matriarch Rhea and her entire personal guard are killed in a skirmish against these intruders, leaving her first daughter Madagalane to claim the throne. Prime Matriarch Madagalane declares a week of mourning. Shortly after, the new ruler is not often seen publicly, and some say that she is ill.

364

The Prime Matriarch, at the urging of her closest advisors, declares that Fenstrosia will no longer trade with outsiders. This isolationist action cuts off nearly all contact with the outside world.

400

A noted and powerful huntress of the time, Katara Morningdove leads a military revolt against the monarchy. The people rise up to support her and the revolt lasts for only two months. The rebels kill Prime Matriarch Madagalane during the revolt and Katara places Madagalane's daughter Melesova on the throne. This helps to calm the protests of those who see Katara as wanting power for herself. One of Melesova's first decrees is the Doctrine of Motherhood that establishes a strict caste system that even more firmly entrenches women at the top of Fenstrosian society, and pushes males to the bottom most tier of the culture.

401 - 426

Fenstrosia enters a short but unprecedented time of peace and prosperity. This era comes to be called the Golden Age of Fenstrosia.

427

After a long period of sporadic skirmishes, fighting with the Dark Dwarves increases in intensity. The Dwarves begin openly attacking the Biata settlements and the people of Fenstrosia are up in arms. To make matters worse, the Dark Dwarves have allied themselves with local groups of Goblinoids. Together, these groups begin to win many victories against the Fenstrosian defenders.

449

The Dark Dwarves and their allies stage a midnight assault on Fenstrosia, catching most of the Biata forces unprepared. The enemies had moved stealthily into position in the dark of the night using tunnels known only to the Goblinoids. The battle is a slaughter. The defenders of Fenstrosia are forced to retreat to Windmere Spire and urge the Prime Matriarch into hiding. Melesova refuses to hide from her enemies, and takes a position on the wall among the brave Huntresses. The Razing of Windmere Spire is a glorious defeat for the Biata, and the Prime Matriarch is slain in the fighting. Few manage to escape the slaughter, but among them is the great huntress Katara Morningdove.

456

The fighting has gone poorly with the Dark Dwarves winning several decisive victories. The Biata have been forced into hiding, and they are slowly running out of safe havens. Realizing that there are no way her people can remain within the highlands, Katara leads the Biata north into the Vast Woods. The Dark Dwarves pursue ruthlessly, driving them through the forest and into the wastes. Once there, Katara realizes that the only way to increase the number of Biata is to divide her people and let the strongest survive. For this purpose, she creates the tribal system that is in use today.

460

The first meeting of the matriarchs is held. At the meeting, a now aging Katara is challenged for one of her mates, Bendrick Eagleshadow, and is defeated. Katara is banished.

465

Zandara Valeron forges the first bastard sword, and the Biata begin using this weapon to fight against the Drae slavers.

470

Mia Blackhawk starts leading attacks against the Drae to liberate Biata slaves.

476

Mia Blackhawk slays a Drae Lord while freeing over two dozen Biata.

520

The Wanderbeast first appears.

524

Tara Goldtalon slays the wanderbeast.

545

Some of the Kataresses join in the fighting against the Overlord's armies in the Goblin Wars. They fight bravely, and are influential in the outcome. Most of the Huntresses refuse to take part in something that they consider a Human affair.

568

Katara Morningdove dies fighting against Ogres in the Great Southern Forest (formerly the Vast Woods).

590

The Second Great Celestial Change causes almost all of the Biata to lose their mental abilities and to start to grow feathers and claws. Some feel that this is sign that it is time to move from the wastes. However, the council rules that, while any who wish to leave may, the wastes are their home and it has made them strong and they will remain. Some of the older Biata did retain their abilities, but not the knowledge of how to pass them on to others.

598

Some Katars join allied Human and Dwarven forces in the fight against the Dark Horde.

599

The Biata lose the ability to forge and use the bastard sword effectively in combat. Many feel that the Overlord Tilicaf has caused this out of fear of the weapon.

604

The year leading up to Marena's Meeting has seen a decrease in the numbers of Drae slavers coming into the Biata homeland. This is a matter of intense discussion at The Meeting, but by the end of the week-long gathering, it is determined by the Kataresses to be a good thing, even though the cause for the decline in attacks is unknown. Even the men have felt somewhat of a relief, though none of the Amironians are willing to lower their defenses as of yet.

605

While the absence of Drae slaving parties has been a boon to the varied tribes, some question the reasons behind it. One Kataress, Unara Finchbrow takes a small band of warriors and enters the Underway through caves in the Dragon's Fire Peaks in an attempt to find the cause. While there, Unara and her underlings encroach upon the underground caverns of a population of Flame Trolls. The Kataress and her party loot a burial cavern and slay several of the trolls while making their escape. The Trolls are outraged, and declare war on the Amironians. So begin the Amironian Troll Wars.

606

The war has moved along with much fighting on both sides, but not much ground given one way or the other. Then, late in the year, the Trolls score a decisive victory when they attack during Marena's Meeting and slay over 30 Kataresses in one blow. The event comes to be known as the Day of Blood among minstrels and storytellers. With the loss of so many strong leaders, the Amironians become even more scattered and tribal, and the next few years are a dark time.

608

With many new leaders in place, the Amironians begin to make some headway against the Trolls. Miraculously still alive after having been one of the most zealous combatants in the war to date, Unara Finchbrow leads a large force into the Troll homelands and scores a decisive rout in the Battle of Burning Stone. The Trolls carry on the fight for the next few months, but are eventually forced from their caverns and take flight to the north. So end the Amironian Troll Wars.

TALES

Dark Intruders

The Prime Matriarch lay in the shadows as still as the cool granite floor beneath her. At her side rested the dark-wood staff that had served her well for the better part of a decade. Almost jet in hue, the weapon's smooth surface reassured her as she held it tentatively, patiently waiting for the Dark Dwarf patrol that she knew would be seeking her out. The Dark Ones had surprised her once, but would not do so again.

In the seemingly endless silence of waiting, she allowed her mind to wander to the melee that had happened little more than an hour ago. She and her companions had gone out into the hills early yesterday morning in search of the enemy but had not encountered any of the Dwarves that day. There were signs of their passing, but all of the tracks seemed to be old and did not indicate where the intruders might have gone.

When night fell, the Biata made camp in a valley little more than a few hours travel from their home settlement of Fenstrosia. Resting safely within their own highlands and so close to the safety of their walls, Rhea ordered only a skeleton watch that evening. No one would dare attack such a large party, especially not one containing The Prime Matriarch and her personal guard.

When the Dwarves attacked, the Biata on watch were quickly overwhelmed but not before the alarm could be raised. Within moments of the first engagement the encampment had come alive and Rhea had sprung into action. Grabbing her staff and calling out words of encouragement to her warriors, she

joined the heart of the fray. Her tenacity and violence were so fierce that it seemed at first that she would defeat all of the enemies single-handedly. Soon however, the dire nature of the situation became apparent.

Rhea had never seen so many Dwarves. Truth told, she never even thought that there were as many Dwarves in the world as she had seen during that battle. Every time she thought the worst was over another wave of Dwarves poured out of the darkness. The Biata force slowly dwindled a little more with each wave of attackers. At one point Rhea looked around at her haggard band of defenders and counted fourteen heads, including her own – fifty had come with her that morning, and now they were reduced to fourteen tired souls. She knew they didn't have much left and that it was only a matter of time before they were all lost. That's when she decided it was time to attack.

Ordering ten of the Biata to scatter and find their way back to their homeland in whatever way they could, Rhea called the three best warriors to her side. Many of the ten promised to bring help when they could as they disappeared into the darkness, but Rhea knew that even if help did come that it would likely be too late. When the last of the ten were gone, Rhea and her small band of heroines plunged head-first into the darkness. Picking no particular direction, the Prime Matriarch and her party encountered no resistance at first, allowing them to entertain the possibility that the Dwarves had retreated. Just as this idea began to spread among the companions they ran headlong into the advancing line of Dark Dwarven attackers. The battle was fierce, but eventually the Biata became separated and the First Matriarch was forced to flee or be overwhelmed.

That's how Rhea Redclaw, Prime Matriarch of the Fenstrosian Biata, came to find herself lying quietly upon the stone floor of a shallow grotto, all alone and awaiting certain doom. When she first fled and lost her pursuers, she tried to circle back for the others but the Dwarves were too numerous. After that she tried to make her way toward Fenstrosia by direct routes and indirect routes, and each time ran into too many enemies to overcome. The Dwarves had her trapped, and they were looking for her.

As she quietly contemplated the fate of the three companions who had accompanied her on this suicide mission for what seemed like the millionth time, a subtle noise on the trail just outside caught her attention. It was a noise as soft as supple leaves rubbing together in a slight breeze, but she heard it nonetheless – was it a scuffling of feet, or maybe a brush of leather on stone? The second time she heard it she was sure that it was feet, moving deliberately and trying to keep from being heard. Rhea tensed and waited until the figure came into view.

As soon as Rhea saw the slouching form she knew that it wasn't a Dark Dwarf. Leaning heavily against the stone wall that formed the entryway to the shallow cave, the Biata moved slowly and was covered with blood. The Prime Matriarch sprang to her feet and snatched her mangled comrade from the mouth of the cave and pulled her back into the darkness. The Biata didn't make a noise, and collapsed on the stone floor with a thud. Kneeling over the newcomer, Rhea brushed the bloody hair back from the face of her companion just enough to tell that it was Jinsa Paletalon and that Jinsa's breathing, while shallow, was steady and rhythmic.

Immediately The Prime Matriarch went to the opening of her shelter. She gazed out into the half-rain of the late evening and listened. For several minutes she waited, but saw and heard nothing. Satisfied that there was no immediate danger, she eventually returned to her fallen companion's side.

Upon inspecting Jinsa's wounds, Rhea knew that it was a miracle that she was alive. The most obvious wound on the sleeping Biata was a nasty gash near her left temple that had matted her hair and covered her face with blood. A large bruise and irregular protrusion on her left side indicated at least one broken rib, and her right leg was broken below the knee so badly that Rhea was amazed that she could stand at all, let alone walk. Rhea did what she could to make her companion comfortable and went out to search for the things she would need to help heal Jinsa's wounds. As she left the cave she thought how futile this all would be once the Dwarves found them.

Several minutes later Rhea returned with a few sturdy pieces of wood and a full water skin. Quickly but carefully she washed Jinsa's face and splinted her shattered leg. Jinsa never woke, but when Rhea set the leg she grunted softly and her face showed a wince of pain. Rhea thought this was a good sign, and hoped that by some miracle if they remained hidden through the night that Jinsa could be saved.

Putting this thought out of her mind, Rhea sat down with her back propped against the hard stone wall. She would try and sleep a little, but only lightly so as to make sure that she could react quickly if they were found. As she dozed, the soft sounds of Jinsa's measured breathing comforted her dreams.

Rhea woke to the sound of guttural voices on the trail outside. Springing to her feet she looked quickly at Jinsa, and found her much the same as she had been when The Prime Matriarch had dozed off. Without another glance at her companion, Rhea move swiftly and stealthily to the mouth of her small cave.

By the light coming in from outside, she measured that dawn was soon approaching. Listening intently she heard the voices of Dark Dwarves arguing about some dice game from the previous evening. She heard four voices at different times while she sat there waiting, and guessed from the boot sounds that she heard that there couldn't be more than ten in the party. As the group moved closer to the cave, Rhea's body tensed in anticipation. She would have to be quick and deadly and use surprise as her advantage.

When the Prime Matriarch emerged from the hillside she caught the Dark Dwarves completely by surprise. They hadn't yet caught sight of the cave opening ahead of them, and she seemed to come out of nowhere. She moved fast, and two were down before the others could even react. As the remaining six fumbled for their weapons three more fell to her blows, and a fourth tumbled down the mountainside while trying to avoid her wrath. Two on one was no longer a fair fight, and when Rhea broke the jaw of the Dark Dwarf to her right, the other fell to his knees and begged for mercy. Without hesitation she delivered a thrust to his throat with her staff, sealing off his windpipe and stifling any sound that he had hoped to make. Mercy is for the weak, The Prime Matriarch thought as she slammed the staff into the base of the Dwarf's skull. He fell with a thud, dead before his limp form came to rest on the hard-packed trail.

Quickly surveying the slopes above and below her, Rhea saw that there were no signs of any other Dark Dwarves. She also knew that this would not be the case for long – the party she had just dispatched was a scouting party for sure. They would either be moving in advance of a larger force or were due to report back at regular intervals. She only had so much time to act, and she moved quickly.

First she gathered up the bodies of the Dark Dwarves one at a time, and moved them several hundred yards down the trail in the direction they had come to a small clearing near the bottom of a slope. There she hastily laid them out in mimicry of the battle scene that she just taken them from. Next, donning a pair of the Dark Dwarves' boots, she made several false trails in the small clearing in an effort to make it look like there was a battle here. When she finished she looked it over – it was well done, she thought. Maybe not well enough to fool Elven or Biata trackers, but she only had to fool Dwarves, and she thought that it might be enough for that.

The last part of her plan took her back up to the small cave where Jinsa still lay sleeping. Rhea sat with the wounded warrior for a few moments, holding her hand and keeping her company. She wasn't sure if the other could feel her presence, but she wanted her to know that she was not alone. When she had spared all the time she could, the Prime Matriarch rose and started toward the cave opening. At the last moment she stopped and returned to Jinsa's side. Taking a medallion from around her neck almost as an afterthought, she pressed it into Jinsa's hand and left hurriedly.

Once outside, Rhea began counter-tracking to remove any sign of footprints leading to or from the cave. She continued all the way down to the site of her new battle scene, and once there she tore a strip of cloth from her cloak. Holding the cloth in her mouth, the Prime Matriarch propped one of the fallen Dwarves' axes with the blade facing up and slammed her right calf into the cold steel. Pain shot through her leg, but she did not cry out. It was a measured blow, and she danced about the clearing in a battle parody, spreading droplets of her own blood here and there amidst the fallen Dwarves. When she was through she cleaned her wound thoroughly with her cloak and discarded it off to the side of the clearing, wrapping the torn strip around her leg to stop the bleeding.

Before departing, Rhea looked back up the trail toward Jinsa's resting place. She hoped that the obvious track of a wounded Prime Matriarch was enough to keep the Dark Dwarves from discovering her companion's cave, if only for a little while. She thought briefly about returning there and hiding out with Jinsa – maybe they could last long enough for help to arrive. If Jinsa woke up, maybe the two of them could even make it back to Fenstrosia. Rhea shook her head to clear those thoughts away. There was only one hope for Jinsa, and that was time bought with her blood – the blood of the Prime Matriarch. Without further delay she moved beyond the edge of the clearing and was gone.