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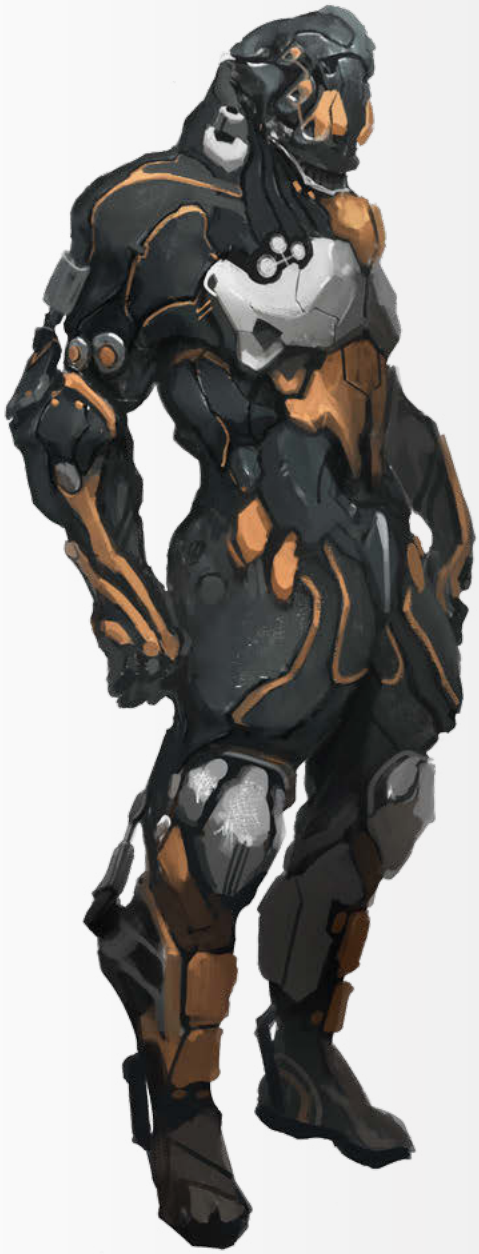
FAITH

-THE SCI-FI RPG-



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FAITH: THE SCI-FI RPG

FAITH: the Sci-Fi RPG is a roleplaying game set in an alternate future several hundred years in the future. Its known universe is a dark and unforgiving place, where technology and biological experimentation live side by side with Gods. These Gods are abstract moral entities in continuous conflict with each other. They can only affect reality through their believers, bestowing supernatural powers upon them. They are demanding and fickle, and will try to lure their followers into deadly quests in return for power.

In this Universe, Human civilisation collapsed back to tribalism, to the delight of Ledger, the god of chaos. Once again warlords, prophets, and madmen ruled the Earth, and the stars seemed unreachable. Then the Corvo arrived from the skies. The alien invaders saw potential in Humans and fed their internal wars, offering them weapons in exchange for workers and soldiers. The most ambitious warlords did not hesitate and forced their people into long and exploitative contracts in exchange for weaponry. The Corvo intended to use these brave mercenaries in black ops against their enemies, so they sterilised every Human in their service, so as to prevent the Iz'kal - or Earthlings themselves - from breeding their own Human army.

The Corvo are a humanoid insect-like species adapted to life in space, and most of their population lives in an ever expanding Dyson ring without ever experiencing gravity. Adherents of the free market economy, as proud followers of the god Kaliva, they live in a society ruled by the capricious ebbs and flows of the market and the long-term interests of the Megacorps that rule their civilisation.

The Iz'kal, descendants of ancient aquatic mammals, are capable of engaging in hyperlink, a neural connection resembling a hive mind. As preferred by their god Ergon, they embrace efficiency and equality through the State's absolute control. Once enslaved by the now extinct Korian, the Iz'kal are former brothers-in-chains to the Raag, the fourth civilised species of the known universe. The Raag are violent but honourable clansfolk who use huge citadel spaceships to raid and search for the supplies they can't produce in their icy homeworld.

The Corvo and the Iz'kal coexist in a state of cold war. Both consider direct confrontation to be too risky, so instead they try to collapse each other's economic system through fierce commerce, and fight black-op wars for resources in far away planets. They compete to found the most colonies in the exits of the Labyrinth - the vast web of wormholes that interconnects the known universe - and try to discover each other's main supply and commerce routes.

Impossible duels between hackers take place on a daily basis, fueled by the information provided by intelligence and counterintelligence agents; missionaries and inquisitors attempt to convert their enemies' populations to their own religions; and agitators try to subvert the native species of their enemies' colonies.

The Corvo and the Iz'kal managed to maintain a fragile peace, but now a war has sprung in their faces. The deadly species of genetically-engineered mutants known as the Ravager have arrived, and they are consuming entire worlds in their quest to absorb DNA for the genetic databanks of their swarm queens. In recent years, they have quickly become a threat to all other known life forms, forcing the Corvo and the Iz'kal to reluctantly join forces against them. The ensuing military Coalition has spent the last two decades fending off the Ravager raids, trying to learn as much as possible about them, and stop it as best they can.

This is our universe. Who will you be in it? A mercenary Human fighting to earn a place in intergalactic civilisation? A ruthless Corvo agent with access to the best tech and resources in the universe? A wise Iz'kal sage with the ability to read into the emotions of others? A hardy Raag barbarian riding a flying fortress into enemy territory?

Who will be your God? Will you be a freethinker, unfettered by religion? Or a fanatic, exhibiting outrageous divine powers in exchange for blind devotion?

This is the Universe.

Welcome to FAITH.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This is the only book you'll truly need to play FAITH. In it, you'll find all the core rules, the character creation and advancement rules, and a very broad introduction to the game's setting - its core concepts, species, nations, organizations and locations. Furthermore, its pages are filled with adventure seeds and non-player characters to inspire your campaigns and make them feel truly alive. Use it to learn the game, to create the characters of your adventures and to inspire your stories with FAITH's deep, complex setting. It has the following formatting:

Black text over white background is normal text. It is used to explain the rules in the relevant chapters, and to dive into the lore of FAITH through the words and experiences recovered from Professor Turner's logs and journals in the setting chapters.

White text over black background is special text. It is used to give examples in the rules chapters and to tell stories in the setting chapters. Think of it as a little window into a table where players are enjoying a game, or into a corner of the universe of FAITH.

Black text over grey background is advanced text. It is used to create additional depth, via either advanced rules in the rules chapters or adventure seeds in the setting chapters.

Italic grey text over white background is analytical text. It is used to give cues about how to use certain rules or link them to their in-game effects in the rules chapters; and to quote famous people in the setting chapters.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

You can visit FAITH's website to find additional resources to help you understand the game and run your campaigns; and you are welcome to join us in any of our communities to get your questions answered by one of the game designers.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SYSTEM

A roleplaying game is a collaborative storytelling experience with players getting into the role of imaginary characters in the universe created by the Game Master (GM). When playing FAITH, each player controls a single character - except for the GM, who has no character of his own, but instead narrates the story and plays all secondary roles, also known as non-player characters (NPCs). In most cases, each player will design his own character, including his backstory, Attributes, Skills and Upgrades.

Any player can be the GM of a session or adventure, as long as the other players agree.

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

Players, any number of them. One will play as the GM and the rest will be characters. While there is no actual limit to the number of players, most RPGs work better with groups of three to six player characters. Remember, everyone should have the opportunity to shine and feel included; the bigger the group, the harder that is. If the group is too large, we recommend breaking it into two groups with two different GMs, who could be running parallel stories and characters could move from one to the other. There are no hard-and-fast rules on how to organise a gaming group.

At least one player deck; the playing cards are used to resolve all actions during the game. It can be replaced by a poker deck, by simply translating the suits to their respective meanings in FAITH.

One character sheet per player (the GM does not need one). These are used to keep track of such data as a character's stats, health, condition and equipment.

The FAITH system also offers some very useful, optional resources such as Gear cards to represent individual pieces of equipment and their stats, and non-player character cards, which describe the stats and abilities of any enemies, monsters or allies the players may run into.

WHY CARDS?

Most RPGs use dice to add randomness into the game. In FAITH, we use cards instead. Each player has a hand of cards that represents the stamina of their character, giving them a lot of options when they are well rested and have a full hand, and limiting their options as they get tired and run out of cards. Playing high-value cards represents a big effort that will exhaust them, whereas playing low cars or cards whose suit match the environment will allow them to draw new cards and save up their energies.

We want players to be able to manage their luck. In FAITH, players play cards from their hands, always choosing which card they play. This allows players to calculate their chances of success when it is their turn and to create a strategy accordingly. We believe this is an interesting alternative to rolling dice to resolve actions.

Additionally, the beautifully illustrated cards of FAITH put the art of the game on the table and in front of the players at all times. They create an immersive experience and

allow players to familiarise themselves with the universe of the game, which can be especially hard in a sci-fi setting.

Lastly, we have decided to put important pieces of gear and NPCs on cards, to prevent players from constantly checking the rulebook to see what they can and can't do, and remind them of the gear they are carrying. By including illustrations in all these cards, we aim to keep players immersed in the stories they are playing, easing the task of mentally recreating an interesting science fiction setting.

THE GAME MASTER

In this rulebook, we will always refer to the GM in feminine form and to the rest of the players in masculine form. This will allow some rules to be clearer and more easily understood.

The GM is, above all, a storyteller. She is the person in charge of everything but the player characters themselves. She creates - or follows - a story for the players to adventure in; this story sets the goals for the characters, and the GM is in charge of narration, moderating player interaction, adjudicating rules and creating the drama around story events.

The GM describes the adventure scenarios, decides whether and how the players' actions impact the story, and adjudicates all the rules. If the group cannot find a solution for a problem, the GM always has the final word. She should try to use this responsibility for the good of the story, preventing players from getting caught up discussing rules or arguing out of character.

The GM also controls all non-player characters, sets their personalities and interests, decides their actions and speaks for them; some GMs even like imitating voices and personalities (and a few are very good at it).

In the end, it all comes down to creating an interesting story that everyone can enjoy, and to have fun together.

THE CHARACTERS

The rest of the players are the protagonists of the story. They take on the role of self-created or assigned characters, enact their dialogues, decide their actions and carry out the relevant mechanics of the game to see whether these actions succeed.

Each player controls a single character and develops their personality and goals in as much depth as he wishes. What are this character's struggles? What are his dreams? The more compelling a character is, the more rewarding the experience of playing him. Interesting people attract other interesting people. Players are encouraged to talk about the history of their characters and how they imagine them. Together, they can create an amazing group of characters that will experience great adventures and be a part of everybody else's memories.

THE GAMEPLAY

As most roleplaying games do, FAITH uses a randomizer (in this case, playing cards) and a ruleset to regulate the gameplay. Additionally, it requires the group to understand certain abstractions to create an enjoyable playing experience. Below you can find the most common among them.

SESSIONS & SCENES

A game of FAITH, called a campaign, can be as long as its players want, so it needs to be divided into sessions and scenes. A session is simply the allocated time frame for playing the game during a specific day. After each session, it is recommended that the players keep their decks, hands and discard piles for the next session.

Scenes are the different situations that the characters of the story might get into. Usually scenes involve the achievement or failure of a certain goal, or a point during which there is a long enough break in the action for the characters to rest. Thus they are similar to scenes in films; a scene may be a diplomatic encounter, a creepy walk through an alien landscape or a deadly ambush. The GM determines the beginning and end of every scene as best fits the story.

ACTIONS & CONFRONTATIONS

Everything a character does is an action. In FAITH, actions are usually successful by default. However, actions may fail if a character is really unskilled, the GM thinks it is interesting for the story, or someone being affected by it wants to stop it. These situations are called confrontations and they are resolved by playing cards, sometimes in opposition to other characters, or against natural obstacles. These actions are the building block of the FAITH system, and games revolve around them and their success - or failure.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS (NPCS)

Non-player characters are all the characters in the game that are not controlled by a player. Most of the times, their actions and intentions will be determined by the GM.

TIME-SENSITIVE EVENTS (TSES)

Time-sensitive events (TSEs) are pressing, immediate problems that pose an obstacle to the characters. There is a wide range of events, items, devices, and other things that can originate a TSE, such as a Firewall, an avalanche, or a high security lock. It is the job of the GM to determine when such obstacles should be considered TSEs for the purpose of confrontations, and to establish their difficulty.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING

FAITH is a roleplaying game in a sci-fi setting, where starfaring alien civilizations race to explore a dangerous, unknown universe.

The FAITH campaign is one of valiant space travelers, remote uncharted stars and bizarre alien technology. But it's also a realm of mysterious, invisible forces – the Gods. These faceless entities rule over the lives of every creature in the universe; and the only proof of their existence has always been the outlandish, supernatural power they grant to those mortals that believe in them.

In FAITH, you can be a star explorer, a soldier or a mystic believer, using a mix of technology, training and god-given powers to survive the untamed regions of wild space against rival factions, alien perils and ruthless bandits.

In all, FAITH is a huge, complex universe, and the plasma guns and interstellar travel are only the surface of a much deeper mystery of which no single living being can glimpse but the smallest part.

SCIENCE FICTION

First and foremost, FAITH is a sci-fi setting. As such, it alFirst and foremost, FAITH is a sci-fi setting. As such, it all takes place in a far-future version of our universe, with speculative technology and interstellar travel. Sentient computers and space travel are a reality, as are the dangers of uncharted alien space; daring explorers carry high-powered plasma cannons and have their brains linked to formidable hacking devices.

In this Universe technology reigns. Cybernetics and bio modifications are common, and the line between living and machine is blurred. Computers are so advanced that if it were not for the ban on AI, they would probably be running the universe instead of their creators. Some people have even managed to turn their minds into software in a quest to achieve immortality, but most people still live and die in their organic bodies.

Computers are connected directly to the brain of their user, becoming an expansion of the mind rather than an external tool. Screens, keyboards and mouses are obsolete, as cortex connected computers are controlled by thought and information is directly fed into the brain. Ideas are directly transcribed to digital documents, and browsing the internet is just a matter of thinking about it. Analogic people are a minority, and most probably weird folk - who wouldn't want such an expansion of the self? Thought is power, thought is action, thought is control.

In this universe there are autonomous cities that operate like clockwork and allow their citizens to indulge in leisure, but also cities where owning anything fancy is nothing but a death sentence and piles of misery and dirt block the streets. The most impressive technological achievement in the known universe is Tiantang, a Dyson ring where billions of Corvo live in all kinds of space stations, a place where generations upon generations of Corvo have lived without ever setting foot on a planet or feeling the pull of gravity.

GODS

FAITH's most distinguishing feature is the existence of Gods – mysterious entities, or natural forces, which give supernatural powers to those that follow them. Becoming a follower is as simple – and as difficult – as living by the tenets of the God's philosophy.

The Gods of FAITH are Ergon (God of Community), Kaliva (God of Survival), Vexal (God of Freedom), Hexia (God of Progress), and Ledger (God of Chaos). They are worshipped equally by all species, which ascribe them the same attributes regardless of their culture, location or social structure. This is often cited as proof that the Gods are actual entities and not subjective concepts, but the only conclusive evidence that the Gods exist manifests through the incredible powers of their true believers.

If a God's followers adhere to the corresponding doctrine, they may gain the blessings associated with that God, in the shape of preternatural abilities. Thus, in this universe, your beliefs indeed become real power.

These powers specifically reflect the character and doctrine of the respective God that grants them; thus Ergon believers can open channels of communication across minds or distances; Hexia grants visions of the future and cosmic revelations; Kaliva followers are supernaturally dangerous hunters and killers; Vexal followers can freely move ignoring gravity or solid matter; and Ledger believers can cloud perceptions and bring madness.

Only the Gods' most pious or exemplary believers display these unusual abilities, and those with the greatest devotion or commitment to a God's ideals are also those with the greatest power.

From a scientific standpoint, it's unknown whether these Gods are actual divine beings, a myth created to explain the powers of their followers; or psychic entities of some kind, created by the collective thoughts of their billions of believers. Whatever the truth, the fact remains that the most dedicated followers of the Gods can manifest their will with powers and abilities that can only be called supernatural.

This mystifying religion system, which blurs the lines between psychic power and divine forces, is the main feature of the FAITH setting – and its heroes. Still more

important are the philosophical schools of thought behind each of the gods and their followings, and how these philosophies shape the goals and destinies of every sentient being in the Universe.

Good and evil are far from absolutes in FAITH. There are no 'bad guys' here; there are simply different alien cultures trying to survive the wild region of space, each in their own way - with different philosophies and disparate goals. And of course, most individuals have their own agendas, which may or may not clash with the moral standards of their society.

ALIEN SPECIES

Two sentient species dominate the FAITH Universe – the technological, capitalistic Corvo, and the communal, progressive Iz'kal. The colonisation race between these two species has shaped their political, social and technological development, and their joint Coalition - created to resist the onslaught of the marauding Ravager species - is the single strongest military force in the uncharted frontiers of space. Two other species – the resourceful Humans and the hardy Raag – have also achieved prominence as space pioneers, although they are both lesser species, subservient to the Corvo and Iz'kal.

THE CORVO

The Corvo civilisation is the largest and most powerful in the known Universe. They are a highly technified, capitalistic society, and almost all of their achievements are a consequence of free market, technocracy and entrepreneurship. The Corvo invented starship drives, space habitats and – perhaps their most important technical advancement – the cortex connector. This discovery allows organic sentients to directly link into computer systems, which basically makes every Corvo a living data station.

The Corvo are in perpetual expansion, constantly annexing new worlds and resources to their federation, which they run exactly as a megacorporation. In fact, three Megacorps run the official Corvo government, and the species' laws and customs revolve around marketing, PR and media.

THE IZ'KAL

The Iz'kal are a progressive, orderly civilisation that has built its power and stability on social and genetic engineering. Their society is both single-minded and nonviolent, favoring the group over the individual and conformity over creativity. Despite this, the Iz'kal excel in all fields that require innovation, such as science and technology. Their society has enjoyed hundreds of years of uninterrupted peace, equality and prosperity. For the Iz'kal, this achievement is well worth the sacrifice of independent thought.

The Iz'kal are as xenophobic as they are peaceful, so they don't engage in expansion wars; but their State keeps steadily expanding mostly because of their peerless organization and monolithic purpose, unmatched by any other species.

THE HUMAN

For all their technological and social advances, the Iz'kal and Corvo are relatively small and frail species when compared to other lifeforms. That's why they use Humans – a backward species from an extinct civilisation in a remote corner of the universe – as mercenaries, soldiers and elite forces.

Having lost their civilisation to war and pollution a few centuries back, Humans are a fallen species, their world as wild and dangerous as the farthest frontiers of space. They are taller and stronger than either the Corvo or the Iz'kal, but not as intelligent or advanced. Nevertheless, the Humans' natural predisposition towards violence, combined with a strange, primitive bravery, and an unusual knack for improvisation, make them unmatched guards and shock troopers. Any Corvo or Iz'kal force will gladly pay high rates for a Human or two to lead their troops, and the formerly destitute species has carved itself a place as the best mercs in the business – the ones that will do the dirty job.

THE RAAG

A nomadic species from a barren world, the Raag are the strongest sentient species on galactic record. When compared to Iz'kal or Corvo, Raag are almost giants; they are mostly used for tasks that require brute strength, from carrying heavy loads to military assault.

Naturally mistrustful of technology, the Raag only came in contact with space travel when they were visited - and enslaved - by the conquering Korian species, which bred the Raag into one of the toughest, most aggressive species in the universe.

Other than their violent strain, Raag are honorable and strong-willed, and they adapt easily to servitude. Freed from the Korian centuries ago, they accept their status as third-class citizens in both the Corvo and Iz'kal societies; this is, of course, as long as they have honest work and the chance to smash a few heads.

THE RAVAGER

The dread Ravager are a predatory, survivalist species from outside the known Universe, which arrived from their far-off stars only recently, and quickly became the greatest threat ever faced by either the Corvo or the Iz'kal in their millennia-long history.

The Ravager absorb and reproduce the genetic traits of other species, so they don't have a common appearance. To those encountering them for the first time, the Ravager tend to look like featureless aberrations out of some nightmare; and that's as accurate an impression as any.

The Ravager stop at nothing to conquer and consume any organism or planet in their path. Only the Iz'Kal-Corvo Coalition has ever stood their ground against the Ravager – and nobody knows whether they'll manage it for long.

STARFARING

Space travel is essential to the FAITH setting, and most adventures take place on remote worlds far from civilization – even intergalactic civilization – or onboard interstellar starships or space stations.

Historians say that we are in the Space Age of Discovery, in which travel between systems is for the desperate, the greedy and the adventurous. Only the rich own their own spaceships, only large megacorps or the powerful State can found colonization efforts. Regardless, it seems that the sky is not longer the limit.

THE LABYRINTH

Such intergalactic travel is possible thanks to The Labyrinth, a network of wormholes - spacetime portals - that allow ships to cover light-year distances in a matter of hours. Travel between inhabited systems inside the Labyrinth takes a few months, and the journey is tough and dangerous.

THE FAR FRONTIER

FAITH is an untamed universe. Other than the few, highly technified colony worlds and space stations of the Corvo and Iz'kal, the endless reaches of space remain a mostly unknown territory, as promising as they are menacing. Most people live in huge megacities or floating space stations in these high-tech colonies, but a few brave explorers have dared to wander or even settle the unknown frontier. The few settled worlds are connected by precariously established trade routes and beacon server ships, without which space exploration would be impossible. In this scenario, the industrialistic Corvo and the totalitarian Iz'kal race to be the first to conquer space - to finally tame the unending void.

CORVO

IZ'KAL

CONFLICT

Besides divine powers and technology, the FAITH Universe is shaped by the relationships between alien species; from the power struggle between the Corvo and Iz'kal, and their barely-unified Coalition, to their dominance over their Human and Raag henchmen; from the social status granted by an individual's species, to her faith in one God or another. Also, recent history has been altered by the Coalition's struggle against the predatory Ravager species, which is surely destined to affect the future of space civilisations.

There are no good or bad guys in FAITH. The Corvo and Iz'kal cultures both have their own ideas of how to run things, but they honestly seek to make life better, even if their views seem heartless or oppressive to outsiders.

The FAITH Universe is held together by belief and point of view. Every living being, every social group, has its own truth and stands for it. Intergalactic civilizations fight for their own ideals and cultures; splinter groups and secret societies further their own agendas from the shadows; and an individual's own philosophy may grant her the attention and favor of a God, but also turn her into a weapon in the eternal struggle between the Gods.

When conflict occurs, it's mostly at the fringes of lawful society: Opposing trade groups use spies and mercenaries to sabotage each other; bootleggers strive to control the black market; or darker criminals, like secret societies or cults, kidnap citizens or threaten the status quo.

Other than that, the main source of conflict and adventure is space exploration itself, with its unpredictable dangers and mysteries - and the unprecedented threat of the Ravager, which may yet defeat the Coalition.

As a FAITH campaign begins, the war still rages at the frontier of civilised space...

HUMAN

RAAG

Illus. Cody Williams

THE UNIVERSE

THE LOST LOG OF PROFESSOR TURNER

<TIANTANG NEWSFEED 02.27.1966 SA>
<NEWS ITEM IN CORVO LANGUAGE>
<audio on [terranspeak translation enabled]>

"[...] remember Professor Turner for such achievements as tracing a viable path across the Leviathan Pass or recording the entire ecosystem of the Argyrus Moon, which allowed the Megacorps to install the Argyro T'ian Multiprocessing Station, a beacon of progress and civilisation in the savage frontier. After the renowned xenoscientist's sudden disappearance, his lab and personal records were turned over to the authorities of Feng Corp, a branch of The Union Megacorp, which subsidised most of his research. And of course, most of us wonder, what is contained in those records? What did the Human xeno leave for posterity? Tune your cortex to our feed and you'll know as soon as Corvonet™ knows!" *<end of line>*

<REPORT #13400986007A1 - MISSION XA11>
<Captain Sun Tarma - Hung Gao Exp. Force>
<Excerpt 15>

"[...] As reported during the verbal debriefing, Professor Turner had become absent-minded and brooding for the last couple of missions, ever since that trip to the asteroid ruins. Also as previously reported, he allowed none of my men to follow into said ruins, despite being fully aware of our duty to protect him. Of course we gave escort regardless, even against his wishes, but there were several times when he slipped our watch for two or three minutes. Since he finally returned unharmed, and the following expedition found nothing worth reporting in the ruins, the whole matter was forgotten after a few cycles.

However, during the following five missions he showed increasingly distant and erratic behaviour, the details of which are given in report 13400986007B13, as delivered to the Conduct Research Team. And yet, when we returned to Feng HQ for the last time, he showed no sign of planning a disappearance; I assume HQ security will have much better intelligence on whatever actually took place the night he went missing."

<NOTE BY COLONEL YAO TSIN>

"Research Team Beta confirms Captain Tarma's story about those asteroid ruins (cf. Report 969915AG-A98); we have to conclude the Human Professor Turner found something in there, something he kept from his armed escort and even his closest assistants. Do his personal notes have any clue?"

<NOTE BY PROFESSOR XIANG YUEI>

"Colonel, we have sent every last scrap of data to Feng Internal Research; I believe they'll want to check those personal records first-hand."

<FENG CORP IA>
<FENG CORP. INTERNAL RESEARCH>
<FOR AUTHORISED PERSONNEL ONLY>

"This is a cortex-mail from Feng Corp, related to Internal Affairs of a Corvo Corporation. If you are not the intended recipient and have not paid for the right to access this communication, you are in flagrance of article 327-B of Corvo Communication Regulations. Please unjack, report to FengCo_CMTangC, and erase.

Attached are the personal records and notes by Human xenoscientist Professor Thessaius Turner, ordered by subject -> relevance -> ascending date, and annotated by three members of the FengCo Office of internal Research, myself included. Given the Human-Corvo calendar discrepancy and the time variations across star systems, dates are necessarily uncertain in some parts, which may result in small timeline inconsistencies.

As per the issues our team was asked to investigate re: Professor Turner's disappearance and the xeno ruins in Asteroid B69911847000, the organised files offer no conclusive answer, although they do contain some relevant intelligence that I'm sure will help clarify the situation, as underscored in the complementary annotations and reports by our research team.

Until further instructions,

Dao Eng, C.Sc. Head of IR"

<PROFESSOR THESSAIUS TURNER>
<LOG ENTRY #96>
<DESIGNATION/SUBJECT: ON THE HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSE>

"History as we know it began not with the first planets, the first stars or the Big Bang. Mortal History began with the first sentient being that knew of the Gods, and discovered he could bend reality to his will through his faith.

Although every species has its own history and records, there is no Universal History anywhere - scholars have to research either the Corvo or the Iz'kal version at their respective datanets, or else ask a Human or Raag some of their creation myths - which are often closer to the truth than the fabrications of either the State or the Megacorps. But there is no unbiased, species-neutral record of History anywhere in the Universe. And if there was, it would have to be told from the point of view of the Gods.

Did they create mortals, or did mortals create them? whatever the case, that's when History begins."

<END OF LOG ENTRY [OK to create a new entry]>

HISTORY

THE PLANETBOUND ERA

Some scholars refer to the age before space flight as the planetbound era, which started with the first sentient civilisations and ended when the first Corvo astronaut manned a spaceship. During this era, all sentient species were limited to their homeworlds, adopted backward forms of organisation such as nations, tribes or empires, and used pre-quantum technology.

Most historians assume the planetbound era as having started anywhere from 30,000 to 50,000 standard years ago, a period during which all current civilisations first appeared, and ended with year 1 of the Space Age. Of course, all species remained tied to their respective homeworlds for more than a thousand years after that; it would be more accurate to say the planetbound era ended with the founding of Tiantang in year 1374 of the Space Age - or, for a more species-neutral milestone, with the discovery of the Labyrinth in 1648.

Regardless, most of the cultural and scientific paradigms that applied during the planetbound era are obsolete now - the universe and its people are completely different than they were back then. What matters about the planetbound era is its prehistory.

All the first versions of current civilisations appeared during a very short timespan; it is commonly accepted that this coincides with the first records of Divine influence on sentient people. Be it on the Corvo, Iz'kal, Human or Raag homeworlds, the first tribes and cities were founded and led by the first soulbenders. This is no coincidence; civilisation began when mortals became aware of the Gods. During this era, all Gods seemed to be equally important - Hexia gave leadership, Kaliva gave strength, Ergon gave organisation, Vexal gave curiosity. For many millennia, sentient societies were ruled by this balance.

What came before that? That's where scholars begin to disagree and versions diversify. Some hold that organised thought gave birth to the Gods, and thus Divine power grew hand-in-hand with civilisation; others assume that the Gods chose that period to communicate with mortals, which in turn led to the development of advanced societies. But since that era, the fate of the universe has been tied to the appearance and influence of soulbenders.

THE SPACE AGE

Officially, this era is divided in two periods - the Early Space Age, from 1 SA to the founding of Tiantang; and the High Space Age, or 'Space Age Proper', which comprehends the last 300 years since the discovery of the Labyrinth. It is important to observe that all of these milestones are tied to Corvo discoveries and advances; although it's widely accepted that the Korian did know of the Labyrinth and control space flight long before that, even if we know next to nothing else about them.

THE EARLY SPACE AGE

During the Early Space Age, the Corvo sent their first businesses to space, focused on economic development, disbanded their nations and began the Dyson Ring project. Both the Raag and the Iz'kal were conquered by - and then successfully fought back against - the Korian species; and Humans fought several great wars for profit and resources, which ended with the utter destruction of their civilisation.

So many similar events in so short a time are often taken as acceptable proof of Divine influence in mortal affairs. Specifically, they indicate a strong dominance of Hexian and Kalivan goals, which were indeed the strongest Gods and had the most numerous and powerful soulbenders during that period. Ergon, unable to advocate union and community in such a fragmenting, forward-thinking period, settled on the Iz'kal State, where it focused on making one species into his image before entering conflict with the other Gods - and there he remains to date.

THE HIGH SPACE AGE

The High Space Age was, and still is, an era of discovery, travel and expansion. It has seen the greatest population boom in recorded history, with new worlds being discovered nearly every year, businesses and information networks expanding across distances of several billion light-years, and the universe becoming both larger and smaller than it ever was before.

So, Hexia and Kaliva remain strong and supreme, but Vexal has slowly grown in power and influence among explorers, wandering clans and rebels. The last two centuries in particular seemed to be Vexal's time to rise; the Human Front appeared in this era, and even the first meeting of the Iz'kal and Corvo civilisations revealed the manipulations of Vexal and Ergon, attempting to counter Kaliva and Hexia's age of competition.

THE SPACE RACE

However, competition did not end - not by any means. Kaliva and Hexia did influence the relationship between the Corvo and Iz'kal, turning it into an expansion and ideology war, where both species struggle to overcome each other both militarily and politically.

This latter period, the second half of the High Space Age, has been defined by haste - to be the first to arrive, the first to discover, the first to colonise, the first to conquer. Every sentient, be they Corvo workers, Iz'kal technocrats, Human mercenaries, or Raag clans are part of the race.

Despite the strengthening of Vexal, and the strong Ergonaut control of the Iz'kal State, Kaliva and Hexia managed to retain their supreme power by fostering scientific thought, dissent and ambition. And Ledger?

Ledger was only waiting for his turn, and thus the Ravager came.

But that's not History: That is today. And the Universe may not be the same tomorrow.

INTERSTELLAR TRAVEL

Understandably, space travel is an essential part of daily life in the FAITH universe. Without space travel, no galactic civilisation would be possible.

Every day, the sentient species in the known universe sends spaceships to other worlds, or other sectors of the same space station; carrying passengers, supplies, battle-ready soldiers, pirates, or smuggled goods.

Interstellar travel covers very great distances, and travel times are often so long that living passengers need to be put in cryostasis for the majority of the journey.

Space flight technology is still evolving. It was born just over 300 years ago, and scientists and engineers of all species work tirelessly to solve its many problems. In the words of engineering mogul Xeon Magno, 'If we managed to make a space civilisation into reality, I have no doubt that one day we will have a galaxy-spanning travel network'.

THE LABYRINTH

Space travel is only possible thanks to The Labyrinth, a network of wormholes that naturally connects all the universe from one end to the other.

The Labyrinth is as vast as the Universe itself, and, although all starfaring species have more or less learned to navigate it, nobody truly understands how it works. It allows ships to go from one end of the Universe to another, and that's enough for now; but all sentients know that a true understanding of the Labyrinth would be the ultimate advantage in the space race.

The Labyrinth was discovered by accident by the Corvo scientist Mehdi Ben, who was looking for a way to follow and 'ride' gravitational anomalies to large gravity centres, such as other star systems. The experiment discovered that not only such anomalies were common in the universe - they already had paths between them. These paths - a veritable maze of millions of wending, twisting spacetime tunnels - were dubbed 'the Labyrinth', and quickly became the door to new stars, new worlds, and interstellar travel as we know it today.

The Labyrinth is not a 'place' as we understand the term; it actually exists outside conventional spacetime. Its 'paths' are actually nothing more than links between distant gravity centres. Such gravity centres serve as 'exits' into conventional spacetime, allowing ships to go 'in' and 'out' of the Labyrinth through them.

NAVIGATING THE LABYRINTH

From the inside, the Labyrinth looks like an endless string of continuous light beams, with no up or down, no back or forward, and navigation is all but impossible without specialised technology.

Mapping the Labyrinth paths has so far proven impossible - not that Corvo and Iz'kal scientists don't keep trying - and the only way to navigate its paths so far has been to determine the coordinates of an exit before entering it, after which future journeys can match those coordinates to a ship's computers to find the exit again.

Every interstellar ship is fitted with a Labnav (short for 'Labyrinth Navigation') computer in addition to its standard astrogation equipment. Labnavs are strictly used to lead a ship between the two exits of a previously discovered Labyrinth path.

While crossing the Labyrinth from one exit to the next, ship passengers may experience severe sensorial distortion from the lack of spatial reference points; thus, most spaceships are equipped with sensorial shields to protect the crew against disorientation and brain damage.

BEACONS

Even with the best labnavs and astrogation equipment, traversing the Labyrinth is still risky, and many ships get lost in its tunnels outside spacetime. To mitigate this, the Corvo came up with the Labyrinth Beacons - space 'lighthouses' that are dropped at various points inside the Labyrinth, allowing labnavs and comm systems to latch onto their signals. Soon the Iz'kal replicated the Corvo technology, and nowadays beacons from both species dot the Labyrinth paths, safely leading ships to their destination.

Beacons were designed as travelling aids, but currently their most frequent use is information relaying. As direct data transmission across the Labyrinth is still impossible, many Corvo and Iz'kal colonies - typically the largest and oldest ones - use beacons as stop points for data transmissions, allowing them to keep in touch with other worlds even across the spacetime abyss.

DISTANCES AND COMMUNICATIONS

Even with interstellar technology, the universe is an unthinkably vast place, and it's only getting larger as its inhabitants colonise more and more worlds. Maintaining contact, let alone a civilisation, across light-year distances does not become easier. It becomes much harder as civilisations grow in size and influence, with new colonies being founded further from power centres than ever.

As a result, the FAITH universe is still a lonely, threatening place, particularly for the people in fringe settlements, far away from the resources and protection of their political and economic centres.

COLONISATION

The greatest tool, and also the greatest problem, of interstellar civilisations is the ability to settle distant worlds. New worlds lead to new cultures, new discoveries, new natural elements and new lifeforms; every new colony sparks huge scientific and social leaps, expanding intergalactic civilisation in every direction and every aspect.

A BORDERLESS MAP

As new habitable planets are discovered and occupied, a civilisation becomes more powerful and numerous. They are also much harder to manage, as the borders become blurred. When anything loses its limits, it loses its shape too; and those living in intergalactic civilisations are slowly losing sight of exactly what or where their civilisation is.

For many millennia, political borders were the norm for most sentient species in the Universe. Once the Corvo and the Iz'kal discovered space travel, their national and tribal identities all but disappeared, giving way to a new frontier; one marked by communications. Instead of lines on a map, the limits of a civilisation are the reach of its network waves. That's why mastering interstellar travel and finding paths across the Labyrinth is so important for starfaring species - the new map is not lines on a sheet, but connections on a network.

By the same token, those settlements and colonies closer to power centres tend to be larger, more prosperous and more advanced than fringe outposts, which rarely get news, supplies or any contact from their own people. Once settled, many colonies develop their own cultures, governments and identities, almost independently from their civilisation.

TRAVEL DISTANCES

Most interstellar travel is only possible through the Labyrinth, where trips can cover anything from a half-dozen to several million light years in one day. Travel times through the Labyrinth don't match actual distances, and a four-light-year trip may take six months, while a thousand-light-year leap might be completed in a few hours.

On average, a Labyrinth trip lasts two weeks, but the variations run the gamut from a few minutes to several months. Additionally, the spaceship needs to travel from the planet or station of origin to the entrance of the Labyrinth, and then from the exit of the Labyrinth to the planet or station of their destination, which can take up to several weeks or even months. The longest trips often accommodate for crew members to enter cryosleep during transport, which usually displaces travellers in time with respect to their neighbours or loved ones, making them younger or older than others born at the same time.

COMMUNICATION

If space civilisations are as large as their connected networks, then the most important tool of colonisation is a large comm system. The problem is, networking is impossible between labyrinth exits.

The Corvo and Iz'kal solved this problem with Labyrinth beacons, but these are of course much slower than same-star transmissions, and data that take milliseconds to cover an entire planet can take hours - or even days - to travel across the Labyrinth.

As a result, the farthest colonies are often behind in news and important events. And this is for the largest and more travelled colonies, which are the ones with access to Labyrinth beacons; very few other settlements even have a beacon on the path leading to them, and have to rely on server ships or brave messenger explorers to update them on the state of intergalactic civilisation.

In short, while an interstellar civilisation may seem enormous, organised and all-encompassing on one end, its government may seem remote, careless or barely more than a rumour on the opposite Labyrinth exit.

SERVER SHIPS

A temporary solution for smaller colonies to stay in touch with the rest of the universe is to launch server ships, which carry data to and from planets. These server ships - which the Corvo rent to the poorer colonies and the Iz'Kal freely supply to any new settlement - are equipped with data relay systems that can transfer thousands of terabytes at a time. The ships take the data from a colony to the nearest settled system, from which data is sent through beacons - or another server ship - to its destination.

While it may take only a day for a labyrinth beacon to transmit data, a server ship can take months; thus, the most remote settlements often feel disconnected from the very civilisation that founded them, which leads to many colonies seeking their own independent governments.

RELIGION

THE GODS

While there is no reason for the existence of life, life itself does not care. The problem arose when it gained consciousness and came to realise that its own existence was an accident. In its realisation of itself, a voice spoke from within. It told a truth - the only truth: life ought to create its own reason to be, lest it be consumed.

-Amir Da'ab, Iz'kal theologian

The Five Gods of the Universe are the most unique element of FAITH. No living being can say exactly what they are - five supreme entities sitting at the centre of Creation, a collective hallucination, or the manifest embodiment of belief itself - but few doubt they exist, or that they indeed affect the fates of mortals. Some try to deny their existence, but they cannot deny their power, even if said power can only manifest through their believers.

The Gods are the force behind every adventure, the hands behind the story, the power that makes heroes or monsters out of mortals depending on the one thing that belongs freely to every one of us - what we believe.

Some say there are as many Gods as there are minds, each God matching the being to whom they are connected. However, most people believe that there are only five Gods that take on many forms. Believers do not choose their God, nor do the Gods choose their believers. Instead, believers are linked to their Gods through their personalities. In FAITH, the Gods are not creators or allfathers. They are entities that surged from the collective conscience of beings that have found a similar reason to exist. The Gods came into existence at the very same time as their believers. Now, every new being that finds a reason to exist finds a similar God within him.

The Gods are powerful, but intangible; they exist only inside the minds of their believers, yet somehow they exist as a single entity in all of them. Gods have no body nor voice, nor do they have the capacity to affect the Universe directly. They can only do so through their believers, bestowing their gifts of power upon them, or taking those gifts away.

When two species meet in the vastness of space they know they will have at least one thing in common: they all have the same Gods.

Those who stay true to the path laid out before them by their God can expect great powers in exchange: abilities of a supernatural essence that defy reasoning or explanation. Throughout the centuries, different people from all species have studied the signs sent by the Gods and have written the commandments of each God accordingly.

COMMANDMENTS

The Gods of FAITH are fickle beings. However, it is not rare for them to pay attention to their believers, who are the source of their power and their only way to mould the Universe to their desires. Gods can grant powers to their believers if they like their behaviour, or withdraw their support if their believers betray them.

Each God has a set of commandments that instruct followers on their God's desires. While their specific interpretation may vary, it is commonly agreed that the Gods agree with many versions of the same concepts.

The wishes of the Gods are open to interpretation; as they lack a voice to speak, their desires are very much a matter of faith. Believers follow what they believe is just and it is proven that there are several correct interpretations of the commandments of each God.

Differences in beliefs are common between believers of the same God. Some are amicable, while others have driven different cults to war. Several religious wars have been fought by Soulbenders empowered by the same God on both sides, and the common belief that explains this fact is that the Gods do not care much about the trifling differences their followers might have. They only care about making the world right in their own eyes, and in these wars they appreciate and support the righteousness of both sides.

THE NATURE OF GODS

The Gods are the greatest power of the FAITH Universe, and its greatest mystery as well. Very few things are known for certain about them, apart from the fact they exist.

There are three principles about the Gods that most scholars agree upon, known as Da'ab's laws after their first proponent, Iz'kal theologian Amir Da'ab:

1. The Gods do exist, and there are no more and no less than five.

2. The Gods represent rational and moral values and philosophies.

3. The Gods grant unique abilities to some of their followers.

Other than the three Da'ab's laws, nothing about the Gods is known for sure; not even their names, although Da'ab also created a system to give them universal names, which are generally accepted by all starfaring societies.

FIRST LAW: FIVE GODS

There is ample evidence that Gods exist, mostly through their divine messages and the powers granted to their followers. Although they never communicate directly and only manifest their will or discontent through the powers they bestow, their influence is explicit and clear since there's recorded history, and the near-universal agreement on their nature and power leaves no scientific doubt.

Most studies agree there are Five Gods, each of whom represents a very specific set of values.

- Ergon embodies cooperation, empathy, teamwork and social concerns.
- Hexia represents intuition, vision, learning, and self-improvement through knowledge.
- Kaliva is competence and competition, action and adaptability, strength and struggle.
- Vexal embodies change, freedom, passion, movement and hope.
- Ledger opposes all dogma and rules; He exists to undo whatever the other Four Gods do.

SECOND LAW: IDEAS MANIFEST

The most obscure and confusing of Da'ab's laws is also the most important to understand the true nature of the Gods: they don't rule over supernatural forces or the material world. They are the embodiment of philosophical tenets, ideas manifest, with powers made of pure belief.

Thus, each of the Gods represents a set of values or moral beliefs, which translate into expected behaviour. Theologians and believers call them Commandments. A God's Commandments are guidelines to what His followers are expected to believe and how they are supposed to act. Believers are not supposed to pray or practice rites - they are supposed to hold their God's viewpoint, defend His convictions and live by His set of values.

The Gods explicitly and visibly express their satisfaction with followers that obey their Commandments, and perceptibly punish those that don't. This confirms that, whatever the Gods are, their ideas can, and do, alter objective reality.

THIRD LAW: DIVINE POWERS

When a God is pleased with His followers - that is, when their convictions match the God's Commandments particularly closely - He grants them physical, visible manifestations of their faith. That is, the followers' beliefs start altering and reshaping reality itself.

A very devout person can start noticing that time, space, matter and energy bend to accommodate his views - he can make the universe be as he thinks it is. In other words, if you believe hard enough, your belief affects reality.

Followers that manifest these powers are known as Soulbenders, as they use their own faith - their souls - to bend reality to their God's Commandments.

Most soulbending powers are rather small manifestations, like having eidetic memory, unnatural reflexes or short-term premonition flashes. As the Soulbender's faith grows or becomes more focused, his powers increase in effect and impressiveness; a Soulbender may slowly discover he can levitate or read minds, for example. Powers above such levels are practically unknown, as mortal imagination and faith can only go so far. However, in a few very rare and extreme cases - of very rare fanatic zealots with extreme beliefs - soulbending powers can become unbelievable feats of reality alteration, such as matter transmutation or shaping the thoughts of others. There seems to be no upper limit to the powers a God can grant to His followers, except for the Soulbender's conviction itself.

THE AFTERLIFE

There's no heaven or hell in FAITH. Scholars maintain that most sentient species abandoned their afterlife myths when the Gods were proven to exist in the actual universe, not in some realm beyond reality; and soulbending, a very tangible reward, ended up displacing the need for afterlife promises. Yet, this does not stop some cults from promising life beyond death to their followers.

POSSIBLE ORIGINS

There are as many different theories on the nature of Gods as there are people thinking about the subject; the following are the most accepted, and it's likely one - or more - of them is the truth, even if it remains undiscovered forever.

Five living entities: It is entirely possible the Gods are true cosmic entities, members of a godlike species or unimaginably evolved beings, pushing their own agendas and ideas on mortals. Perhaps they are playing a game against each other, or perhaps they are waging wars using mortals as their pawns. Perhaps they are testing their different sets of values to pick the best; or the best two.

If the Gods are actually five living beings, it's unlikely they have discernible bodies - no mortal in the universe knows

what they look like; they have never manifested physically. There have been, of course, thousands of artistic representations of the Gods' possible appearance, but it's unlikely that mortals can actually perceive them.

Gods made of thought: One of the most common assumptions about the Gods is that they didn't create their dogma, but were actually created by it. As sentience appeared in the universe, it created belief, and so the thoughts of millions of intelligent beings somehow coalesced into five entities that more or less embodied the five most prevalent and encompassing of these beliefs.

Thus, when a Soulbender draws on divine abilities, he is not actually empowered by some faceless superior entity, but by his very own beliefs - and the beliefs of every sentient being in the universe.

The Gods, thus, would become nothing but a classification - and manifestation - of the five most common or prevalent belief sets in the universe.

Universe made of thought: A weird but widespread theory is that theology should not concern itself with the nature of Gods, but with what their existence says about the nature of the universe. If five absolute schools of thought can reshape reality, it can only be because reality is itself nothing more than an idea.

It's not that the Gods reveal the power of thought - it's that they reveal that thought created the universe. Reality as we know it is nothing but perception, and Gods are a manifestation of it; thus, when we focus our perception, we alter reality itself.

THE NAMES OF THE GODS

Although the Gods have never manifested directly, every living being across every culture and every generation has known them as roughly the same five entities, with roughly the same five sets of commandments and almost the same names regardless of the species' or culture's language. Theologians often cite this as the most conclusive proof of the existence of the Gods, although nobody knows for certain where the God's names came from.

Many scholars assume the Gods 'dictate' their true names to their believers - most Soulbenders certainly support this theory, although it is possible they subconsciously invoke the same names they have always known - but historically there have been some differences in the Gods' names from culture to culture. These differences, mostly related to pronunciation, spelling or the change of a few letters, seem to be linked to the ancient species' various ways to communicate.

Some theologians contend that the names of the Gods come from a hypothetical universal pre-civilisation, whose legacy somehow reached all known sentient species, and it was them which gave the Gods the names that now most species use.

However, as recently as five hundred years ago, every species - and every culture within those species - gave the five Gods slightly different names, with variations based on their respective languages and speaking ability. This ended when Amir Da'ab, the famous Iz'kal theologian, created an algorithm that calculated the 'right' way to pronounce every God's name from the versions of more than ten thousand different cultures of all species and across all eras. From Da'ab's algorithm came the five names of the Gods as we know them, and the 'correct' way to spell them as adopted and agreed upon by every scholar, believer or Soulbender in the known universe, regardless of their species or background.

GODS AND MORTALS

The galaxy at large has always known of the Gods, and they are as much a part of daily life as the stars and planets.

The interaction between Gods and people takes many forms, not only divine powers but also little daily superstitions, scientific and philosophical studies. There are also organised faiths and religions, although they are far less common.

FAITH AND BELIEF

The Gods favour the most radical people. Most sentients have a little bit of every God inside them, and they do not follow any God exclusively. While the Gods themselves oppose each other, the vast majority of people treats them more like a pantheon, where each God represents a different aspect of life and offers a unique perspective to learn from. In general, most people lean towards one God, but they are unlikely to become fanatical followers. A character who wishes to be rewarded by his God must be very vocal and consistent with his beliefs. He must not allow anyone or anything to prevent him from following and practising those beliefs.

Following a God is a difficult decision that requires the follower to live by a strict moral code without moments of weakness. Conquerors, activists, and movement leaders are examples of the kind of people devout enough to be rewarded with God-given abilities. This is why only a very small minority of the population has divine powers; those who have won the favour of a God are often respected for their strong will, and feared for their radicalism. And the most devout among these become Soulbenders.

SOULBENDERS

The most important channel of communication between Gods and mortals are Soulbenders - people with the ability to alter reality to their Gods' commandments. There are few Soulbenders in the universe, but their abilities and how their faith empowers them are irrefutable proof that the Gods not only exist, but expect something - they care about mortals, and want them to behave a specific way.

The more devout a Soulbender is, the greatest his powers, and the more Soulbenders a God has, the greater the powers He can grant to each of them. There have been recorded eras where one God was vastly more powerful than the others, only through the presence of an unusual number of Soulbenders that worshipped him. The increase in powerful Soulbenders empowered that God, and the increase in the Gods' might empowered more Soulbenders. Thus was the case of Ergon's ascension when the Iz'kal rebuilt their society at the same time that the Corvo were finishing their Dyson Ring of Tiantang, and thus is the case of the increasing power of Kaliva and his followers during the present war against the Ravager.

TYPES OF SOULBENDERS

Scientists estimate that about 1% of the universe's sentient population are Soulbenders, with the percentage going higher among some particularly sensitive species, such as Humans and Iz'kal, and lower among more pragmatic species like Raag and Corvo.

Soulbenders vary greatly in power and devotion, with many particularly devout followers of a God displaying minor skills such as a sixth sense or never misplacing anything at home. These are known as quiet Soulbenders, also called stealthies by Humans and Corvo, as their power is not obvious and thus they are not noticed by the common folk. Stealthies may spend their whole lives without being discovered, or even without discovering their abilities themselves. Quiet soulbending has been reported in people of every imaginable background, from Corvo street urchins that had to steal to survive despite their abilities, to Iz'kal artists that didn't understand the hidden reason for their success. Anyone may be a quiet Soulbender, whether they realise it or not.

A few Soulbenders - about 1% of the 1%, according to theologians; that is, one in 10,000 sentient individuals in the universe - have attained such a degree of faith and perfection in their Gods' eyes that they display visible, quantifiable powers that actually alter reality according to their beliefs. These are known as full or visible Soulbenders, but have many other nicknames, such as powers, soulies, weirders, metas, zealots, or simply benders. Most Soulbenders of this degree pursue careers related to their Gods' tenets, such as teaching, philosophy, politics, art or the military, and all of them are very opinionated and categorical individuals in their daily lives.

SOULBENDERS IN SOCIETY

Most full Soulbenders are eventually forced out of their mundane lives and snatched by the church of their respective God as spiritual leaders, but many strive to continue living as if nothing was happening, keeping their powers in check - which tends to displease the Gods and to eventually reduce said powers in turn. Many powerful Soulbenders became stealthies by virtue of not caring enough for their own gifts.

How society treats these cases depends greatly on the species and culture. For example, the Corvo of Tiantang couldn't care less what a Soulbender uses his powers for; if some Tian commuter teleports to the train platform instead of walking, onlookers may take a few holopics for their social networks, but that's it, and he's free to do with his gifts what he likes. Some Tian Soulbenders try to turn a profit through their powers, with varying degrees of success; some continue their lives ignoring them and let their powers die out, with nobody bothering them about it. Conversely, Corvo Soulbenders from other worlds, particularly the fringe colonies or mining stations, are immediately marked out, and may even be hunted down. Theocracies like Zhui Xi revere Soulbenders, and take them immediately upon discovery, to be raised by the church as part of a social elite.

Soulbenders in the Iz'kal State are always detected by the technocrats and summoned for special tasks according to their specific abilities, to which they are expected to report and comply immediately. All Soulbenders have a purpose in the State's great machinery, and they are expected to fulfil it just as they are expected to fulfil the tenets of their God. Even Soulbenders that don't worship Ergon - the Iz'kal's official State God - are given something to do, although they are few in number and socially frowned upon.

Human and Raag Soulbenders are more or less left alone, but they often become warlords or leaders on their own merit, surrounded by small cults of their people.

In short, while many continue their life unchanged, most visible Soulbenders are summoned from their normal lives into a higher calling, becoming leaders of their faith among their people.

AVATARS

The upper echelon of Soulbender hierarchy, the supreme followers of every God and the most devout beings in the universe, are known as Avatars - true manifestations of their God's will, which resemble their deity so much they represent Him in the material plane.

The Avatar of a God has an unshakable faith and disregards all other ways and beliefs. He is usually considered a prophet by his coreligionists and his words are listened to, learned, and studied by theologians and other believers.

Some Avatars are so powerful, and their willpower is so strong, they have abilities unique to them that nobody else in the universe manifests. They tend to be named after this special power: the most famous Iz'kal Ergonaut prophet is known as the Necromancer, as it is thought that he can bring the dead back to life. The leader of the infamous Firebirds pirate organisation is called the Seer. Not only is he always where he is never expected, but his vessel, the Mockingjay - despite the combined efforts of the Iz'kal State and the Megacorps, and the many well-prepared ambushes it has suffered - has never been caught. It is thought that Hexia has rewarded The Seer with the power of clairvoyance.

There are many other prophets. Some remain mysterious and their powers unknown; the only thing everybody seems to agree upon about them is that their every desire seems possible.

It is estimated that less than 1% of full Soulbenders become prophets; there are so few of them that the statistic cannot be fully accurate, but theologians calculate there must be one Avatar for every billion people in the universe - roughly one Prophet for each God in any inhabited planet.

GODS IN REAL LIFE

Although the Gods are acknowledged as real - or perhaps for that very reason - very few people pay them any attention, and take them for granted as they do with air or gravity. However, many people do take the Gods seriously, and dedicate their whole lives to their study. This not only includes Soulbenders or believers, but also scientists and artists that strive to understand the nature of the Gods.

As the Gods are real, theology is a natural science in the universe of FAITH, and anyone with an interest in the Gods can study a professional career dedicated to the discussion and analysis of divine forces. These theologians have written and discovered most of what is currently known about Gods, even since before the Space Age.

Most theologians are content with trying to ascertain the way that Gods communicate and transmit their knowledge to believers - theories abound - but a few try to go beyond, sending quantum probes to detect energy traces that prove Gods are real. These probes have never turned in any conclusive result, but many have detected subspatial waves that could prove that Gods are made of mental energy. There are hundreds of studies derived from these probes, intent on determining the true nature of Gods once and for all - but, like every scientist knows, the more you learn, the further you are from the ultimate truth.

GODSEEK EXPEDITIONS

There have even been attempts to contact or find the Gods directly. These "Godseek expeditions" are the scientific equivalent of yearly pilgrimages, where explorers equipped with advanced quantum sensors and computers go ever farther into the labyrinth, trying to penetrate spacetime and contact the Gods at their core.

There has never been a single successful Godseek expedition, which doesn't prevent hundreds of scientists and institutions financing such explorations and adventurers signing up for them, not only because they pay very well but also for the promise of discovering the greatest mystery in the universe.

CULTS

In the universe of FAITH, most people see their beliefs as philosophies to live by and ways to conduct their behaviour.

Religious organisations and structured worship are the exception rather than the norm.

Some believers use mantras, stories, poetry, or songs to remind themselves of their God's commandments, but these are often personal or passed down by relatives. There are very few great institutions or organised religions that speak for their Gods.

However, there are some cults that do follow these practices, led by one or more pious individuals. These cults remain a minority, but they grow in strength as they are led by believers with great divine power. Kalivan and Vexal cults are usually found in Iz'kal society as an organised form of rebellion against the status quo, while Ergonaut and Hexian followings are more often found in Corvo cities, also as a form of protest. Ledger has virtually no cults; his worshippers very rarely work together, and when they do - just like their God - they do it randomly.

Cults thrive among social outcasts, as they give answers to the echoing questions in the minds of those that do not fit. Regardless of their faith, cults attract some of the most radical believers, the ones capable of the most extreme acts; many unethical deeds have been performed in the name of these organisations.

DOUBT

The God's obviously moral nature, based on values and convictions, would seem to indicate the Gods are rational beings with opinions, not absolute natural forces above the universe.

This is why there are so few churches of the Gods, and why many scholars deny the Gods' supreme status - and sometimes their very existence. If the Gods are above the natural order, does that mean that rational thought is an absolute force of nature, higher than time, matter or energy in the cosmic order? On the contrary, if the Gods are only a part of the natural order, are they rational beings? Do they have thinking brains, neural processes? How did they come to have values and beliefs?

If the Gods are supreme, non sentient beings, do chemical compounds or primal elements live by the Gods' tenets? If they are not supreme, whence do their powers come from? How do they find and empower anyone that shares their point of view?

Furthermore, many of the Gods' commandments are contradictory, directly clashing with each other. If the moral values of Gods are absolute - which of them are true? If some of them are not true, how do the untrue ones reward true faith with powers that actually affect reality?

AKRAM

With the tips of his fingers, Akram caressed his wrinkly face. A weathered face returned his stare in the mirror. But he did not feel old. He felt endless and powerful, like his body could not contain him and he could live on after it turned to ashes.

This was a common feeling among those that spend most of their lives in hyperlink. They lose their individuality; they become the hive mind: something much greater than oneself, a more complete being without the pettiness of personal needs and differences. They were not just part of the larger mind, but they became the larger mind itself.

When not in hyperlink, Akram felt orphaned, like a shattered piece of a whole. Akram was a true ergonaut, a man who always sacrificed for others - and the beauty of it made him happy. He was a truly happy man for as long as he was not alone.

But he was alone. Everyone else was dead. The colony was broken, the food processors had stopped working, the atmosphere machine had burned down. He did not know how many days he had left, but in whatever time he had, he was going to make them pay.

The Corvo ship had landed in the park in front of him, its crew already drunkenly celebrating their victory. They had taken the small colony by surprise. It was easy for them: before an Iz'kal ship could come and see what had happened, they would be gone. Not a single evidence of their wrong doings would be left in the wake of their routine bombings before leaving.

But they had not taken into consideration the power of a true believer of Ergon, a man who lived for a community that was no more.

He could feel the anger running through his veins, like rivers of lava burning from within. He could still hear the voices of the others in his head, as if parts of him had died and left behind a simpler and poorer self. He was not a part of anything anymore - the Corvo had taken that from him.

He opened the door and the killing began.

ERGON

"To truly have you must give. If you cannot give something away, it is that thing that owns you, and not the other way around."

- Hamid Al-Razim, Iz'kal philosopher

Ergon is the God of organisation, cooperation and the group. He represents teamwork, concerted effort and the greater good.

Ergon is present in hive minds, in how atoms form molecules and molecules form solid matter; in how every colour fades into the next; and in how a single drop of water becomes lost in an ocean, yet the ocean is made of trillions of these drops of water.

No large thing is built without the small things that make it - that's what Ergon is.

GOD OF COMMUNITY

It has been proven time and again that collaboration beats competition. Those who believe otherwise are not necessarily mistaken, but it is clear that they are following an agenda for personal gain, costing society a great deal more than they can offer.

Ergon is interested in selfless people who see beyond their own needs and realise that true fulfilment can only be achieved through a shared experience with everyone else. Anyone who doubts Ergon needs only to see how cooperative societies are the happiest and healthiest of all, while places of inequality run rampant with crime and hatred.

Ergon knows that power and money are merely a means to an end, and pointless in themselves; sentients are social beings, and can only be their true selves in the company of others, when freed from social stratification and differentiation. The only true lasting happiness must be shared, hopefully by all.

Personal needs, liberties, and desires are not that important when one shares everything with like minded people. A true follower of Ergon will go to sleep happy if he helped everyone else get some food, even if he is hungry.

True freedom, from others and from oneself, is to be able to give everything for a cause that one knows to be true.

BELIEVERS

Followers of Ergon are known as Ergonauts.

They have found a very simple truth: happiness must be shared. We are social beings, our lives are intermingled, and we have to learn to work together.

Ergonauts believe it is their duty to put themselves forward and sacrifice for others, sometimes even for those that do not think the same way. True altruism does not expect anything in return and Ergonauts like it this way. They only hope that they can help others find a way to see things their way.

Ergonauts know that power and economical differences are the root of all evil. Corruption, greed, and fear all come from inequality, and fixing it is the only way to fix society.

Ergonauts believe that there are extraordinary possibilities within ordinary people. The foundations of a great society are built by equal opportunity and equal respect; in a fair society, everyone has the same chance to become their greatest possible selves. Ergonauts believe that people will reach beyond their current limitations only when given the right conditions, and that it is important for everyone to try and create those conditions.

Ergonauts are often stereotyped as being naive or afraid to make their own choices. These accusations miss the point: bending one's will to the needs of the many requires more courage than just following one's basic instincts and desires.

Ergonauts do not believe that they are more worthy than others, but that others are as worthy as them. It is important for Ergonauts to remember that they are not working to increase their worth, but to help others see their own worth in the eyes of Ergon. They are willing to put up with whatever is needed to reach a social agreement that benefits everyone as much as possible. There is no 'I' for an Ergonaut, there is only 'us'. It is not that they think they can speak for others, but that they are open to everyone that wants to follow their ways.

COMMANDMENTS

Ergon's Commandments are all about equality, helping others, and submitting oneself to the group. These are a few of the most often-cited:

- All are Equal
- Bend Your Will to the Needs of the Many
- Do Not Hinder Your People
- Help Others Be Their Greatest Selves

POWERS

Ergonaut Soulbenders manifest powers that help them create unity. They can join minds or places, inspire others, promote cooperation, communicate telepathically or empathically, and even repair objects or heal bodies.

BRIDGES

Many Ergon Soulbenders gain the ability to establish bridges between people or places; these powers range from promoting understanding between two disagreeing parties to opening actual, physical portals between distant spots. The mightiest Ergonauts can lead their people from one end of a world to the other.

COMMUNICATION

This is by far the most common power tree of Ergonaut Soulbenders, and includes such things as telepathic communication, reading and understanding the hidden feelings of others, joining minds for a single purpose, or giving emotional inspiration to a group.

JUDGEMENT

A variation of the communication power tree, this power allows Ergonauts to force others into thinking like they do, or to feel guilt or psychic feedback about being selfish or causing harm to others. Although this is the darkest Ergonaut power tree, they refer to it as 'giving back', meaning those who have caused pain receive pain in return.

PROTECTION

A few Ergonauts can shape their will to help and protect others by altering physical laws and forming solid or energy shields around their people. They gain abilities such as interposing themselves between their loved ones and an attack, or stalling natural catastrophes until their people are safe. Ergonaut Soulbenders with protection powers are among the rarest and most respected of their kind.

REPAIR

The least common power tree of Ergonaut Soulbenders is the ability to repair broken things, which includes healing others - with a few very powerful prophets known for raising the dead - and rebuilding fallen houses or disassembled items. Everything that brings unity to disjointed matter is within the province of an Ergonaut.

WORSHIP

There are many small Ergonaut cults across the universe, but the largest and best-known is the Iz'kal State, which consists of billions of sentients committed almost exactly to Ergon's ideals.

THE IZ'KAL STATE

The most powerful Cult of Ergon is the Iz'kal State itself, where everyone puts their own needs aside for the common good, and actually achieves the ideal of creating personal well-being out of such selflessness: the Iz'kal have the better average quality of life of any sentient species, and they got it by thinking about the group first. If that's not the exact definition of what Ergon is about, nothing is.

Furthermore, the State is officially an Ergonaut society, and the faith of Ergon is actively taught as the best and most wholesome ideology to both children and adults everywhere in Iz'kal society. There are indeed believers of other Gods among the Iz'kal, but they are more or less outcast by their kin, or peer-pressured into converting to Ergon's worship.

The Cult of Remembering, the largest organised Ergonaut group inside the State, is an officially-sanctioned cult dedicated to seeking joint experiences, using Ergon-given powers to relive - always in large groups - events of the Iz'kal ancient past, to foster the species' unity through their collective memory.

The Sulivar Hive, another State-bound Ergonaut church, is a totalitarian sect that believes in squashing all individual thought and promotes a hive mind lifestyle, inspired by the incredible fungal and plant lifeforms of the Sulivar colony. Having veered away from the more peaceful outlook of the traditional Church of Ergon, the Hive believes in strength and unity, training its members to sacrifice their individual feelings and thoughts for their group.

Other Iz'kal, and particularly other Ergon cults, see the Sulivar Hive's methods as brainwashing and have tried to influence them into giving more freedom to their Hyperlinks. Although it is not openly warlike, nor has it ever pronounced itself against the Iz'kal State or society, the Hive is an anomaly within the Ergonaut Faith, and most other Iz'kal are uneasy or outright worried about its existence.

THE PSYCHIC NETWORK

The largest Church of Ergon after the Iz'kal State is the Psychic Network, an Ergonaut cult that stays connected across cities, worlds and stars.

More a star-spanning community than a Church, the Psychic Network keeps in touch with its members through daily newscasts, music and arts shows, religious sermons and social media channels. It was founded by Corvo and Human Ergonauts that wanted to emulate the Iz'kal Hyperlink - and their religion. Nearly every Ergonaut outside the Iz'kal State is connected to the Psychic Network, which functions as an interstellar parish, cultural identity and warning system all rolled into one.

Despite the Psychic Network's name, and the fact that many of its elite members are indeed telepathic Soulbenders, most of its communications use radio and digital signals, and it still needs special beacons and server ships to keep its members informed. Nonetheless, there are members of the Psychic Network everywhere from the slums of Tiantang to the Megacorp districts, from the Coalition ships in the war to the farthest colonies in the edge of the Corvosphere.

Every Iz'kal is welcome and able to tune to the Psychic Network via Hyperlink, but they still must rely on artificial communications to keep in touch with off-world parishioners.

Several Corvo corporations have tried to outlaw the Psychic Network in their jurisdiction, as it fosters resentment against the Megacorps and an unwarranted admiration of the Iz'kal State, but as the Corvosphere laws demand freedom of religion, they haven't been able to stop the Network for long. For its part, the State is uneasy that a potential channel to share secrets between Corvo and Iz'kal remains so open and in civilian - and worse, multispecies - hands. But they cannot do anything against it either, as its very existence is basically a celebration of Iz'kal values.

THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS

The spiritual leaders of the Psychic Network are the Brothers and Sisters, an elite group of Ergonaut Soulbenders with incredible telepathic abilities, who use their soulbending powers to help the Psychic Network's transmissions from their respective worlds. Every member of the Brothers and sisters lives in a different planet or a different star, but they all stay in touch through the Psychic Network and treat each other as if they were in the same room talking to each other.

Membership to the Brothers and Sisters is reserved to Ergonaut Soulbenders with a calling to talk to others; they all have their own daily broadcasts, with different subjects, tone and style, and they are all celebrities and respected opinion leaders among the Ergonaut communities.

Currently, the best-known Psychic Network broadcasters are Sister Yanga (Human, from Tiantang Zuihou sector), Brother Leeng (Corvo, transmitting clandestinely from the Zhui Xi colony), Sister Hu (Corvo, from Tiantang Nongchang sector), Sister Arma (Human, from the Huangdì Corvo colony), Sister Tai (Corvo, from Quanjie), and Brother Zahim (Iz'kal, from the Coalition War Front). All of them are Ergonaut Soulbenders, dedicated to keep their audience informed, hopeful and united.

THE RAAG HIGH COUNCIL

The most important group of Ergonauts outside the Iz'kal State, although they are not an official cult of Ergon, are the Surani High Council on Heimis, the Raag Homeworld. This High Council, made exclusively of Raag matriarchs, rules the - mostly Kalivan - Raag civilisation, and includes many devout Ergonauts, whose soulbending gives them no special status beyond the one they already have as leaders of their species.

HUMAN EQUALISTS

Finally, many Equalists - Human members of a political philosophy that believes in giving priority to social concerns over individual gain - are also Ergonauts, although they are not organised as a cult. There are millions of Equalists in the galaxy, but not all of them worship Ergon; on the other hand, every Human Ergonaut Soulbender is an extremely vocal and hard-core Equalist.

A small but noteworthy subset of the Equalists is comprised of Naturalists, tribes of Human Wasters who praise the natural elements that are present on Earth, such as the sun, the moon, fire and thunder. Naturalists have attracted the attention of Corvo researchers for their extraordinary Souldbending abilities, leading to the conclusion that Ergon is satisfied with the approach taken by these followers.

DEPICTIONS

Ergon's official symbol is a flower with eight symmetric petals, representing equality, union and harmony. However, many artists and devotees have imagined Ergon's physical appearance, and depicted it in fiction and images.

Naturalists on Earth worship Ergon in the form of a legendary woman known as Mari; she is said to manifest in all parts of nature, from mountain ridges to creeks and caves, and acts as a symbolic mother to a community of brothers and sisters.

The One Brother, a famous image of Ergon from ancient Human history, is depicted as a naked, tall man with arms extended. His heart often appears bleeding and tears fall from his eyes, but he is always smiling, meaning that his sacrifice makes him happy. He is not a leader, but instead represents everyone at the same time; he usually appears surrounded by other Humans holding hands, at the centre of the community where everyone else is equal to his eyes.

Some Iz'kal tribes from before the Korian occupation depicted Ergon as The Great Tree, a cosmic tree with infinite branches and infinite roots, which touched everything in the sky and was touched by everything in the world. The Great Tree gives life to everything, and everything gives life to the Great Tree; its fruits feed its own roots, and everything in the universe flows from root to trunk to branch and falls again to the roots - such is Ergon's way.

HEXIA

"In chemistry, when you want a specific reaction to occur, you do not throw in the mix your favourite compounds. You study it and use the elements that, under the conditions given, will most likely produce the desired reaction. In politics you should do the same."

- Xiang Yi Lee, Corvo politician

Hexia is the God of progress through logic, and improvement through understanding. Being better and being right are one and the same thing; one cannot improve oneself by following the wrong path.

Hexia is always objective, always dispassionate and always right. He embodies the fact that there is a truth, and that knowing it empowers, while denying it weakens. Those that choose to know rather than believe will be better than others, and thus improve society as a whole.

GOD OF PROGRESS

At their core, people are simply a combination of complex, ongoing chemical reactions that are constantly responding to their environment. The illusion of choice is powerful and deeply rooted in our rational minds, because there is a tendency to separate the self from the chemistry that runs our bodies and minds. The truth is that we are the chemistry, and chemistry works by following rules, not choices.

When you are in a laboratory and a chemical reaction goes wrong, you do not yell at the test tube, and you do not blame it on the evilness or laziness of the compounds - they have no choice in how they react. People are like chemical compounds: they react as such, and they should be treated as such. And sometimes, one compound needs to be removed to save the whole reaction.

Democracy is a beautiful and necessary concept, but in an unequal society it is destined to fail. In a democracy there are different powers, lobbies, groups, associations, industries, and many other kinds of pressure groups. Choices are made based on what is possible and allowed by those powers. As they are not constant nor in agreement, changes proposed by many different and conflicted powers can take place. However, the general trend is obvious and logical: in the long run most changes lean towards the strongest power, because those that have the most resources have the best chances of winning and securing even more resources. Power is thus accumulated in one end of society, which in turn enables said end to gain ever more power in a never ending cycle. The final picture is something very different from democracy, and way less pretty.

Hexia looks for people willing to use their genius and power for the common good. Instead of forcing them to submit to the ideas of others, Hexia encourages free thought and for people to spread their own ways.

BELIEVERS

Followers of Hexia, known as Hexians, want the best for all people, but they understand that most people are misguided or unfit to decide what is best by themselves. Hexians have come to terms with this sad reality, deciding to follow their ideas and try to make them a reality for everyone else, even those that do not acknowledge those ideas yet. Hexians know that once their ideas are established, people will be capable of collaborating and forming a better world in which everyone will learn to overcome their personal desires and to see through illusion and deception. Mediocrity will be raised to greatness.

Hexians want a society for everyone, but it is clear that letting everyone decide has the grave danger of ending up following the decisions of the most powerful. Hexians are tired of trying to convince people of complex ideas to improve society, and of being defeated by swindlers selling short-term happiness and easy ways out.

Their ways are sometimes unethical, sometimes criminal and most of the times so grey that they are really hard to explain on their own, but Hexians always look at the bigger picture: they understand that some steps will be harsh when creating the path to a new way of living.

It is the duty of a good Hexian to find ways to improve society, regardless of what people might think. What is truly important is that their grandchildren will live in a better place. History will recognise the efforts of the smart.

COMMANDMENTS

Hexian commandments encourage a cool head, an objective viewpoint and improving society through well-informed, proven criteria.

- Pursue Knowledge and Expertise
- Show Others the Way
- Set the Greater Good Above All Else
- Do Not Bend Your Will to the Majority

POWERS

Since Hexia's ethos is concerned with objective reality, His Soulbenders are potentially the most powerful - but most never go beyond power over perception; very few achieve true reality control.

ALTER REALITY

The ultimate expression of Hexian soulbending, the power to alter reality allows believers to make the universe suit their beliefs, mostly through control of time, space or distance. Thus a Hexian Soulbender can cover a long distance in an instant, or make time seem to go faster or slower.

Most of these powers are limited to the wielder's own reality; that is, self-teleportation or altering one's own actions across time. Only the mightiest prophets can extend this control of reality to other people or things, freezing them in time or sending them miles - or years - away.

Potentially, this power tree could allow a very advanced Hexian Soulbender to alter the molecular composition of things, but very few believers, even among Hexia's Prophets, have ever manifested such abilities.

ILLUSION

Many Hexians display abilities to alter the perception of others, which they usually employ to reveal a truth or explain difficult concepts, but may also use to deceive, planting illusions in others' minds for the greater good.

Some Hexians see this perception manipulation as contrary to Hexia's tenets and shun its use, while others affirm that if His Soulbenders can do it, surely He approves of it.

VISION

By far the most common power tree of Hexians, this allows them to see hidden truths and receive revelations, from prophetic visions to the ability to read minds.

These revelations are the very essence of Hexian teachings, and most of His Soulbenders have at least a bit of ability in this tree. A Hexian Soulbender is always a step ahead of everyone else, and knows a bit more about every situation.

THE EQUATION SUPREME

Some Hexians believe it is the absolute answer to every question; some discard it as pointless wishful thinking. Some believe it is the core of Hexia's teachings; some maintain it goes directly against Hexia's commandments. Whatever the truth, the Equation Supreme has been debated by Hexians ever since they can remember.

Supposedly, the Equation Supreme is a series of numbers and calculations that reveal the true order of the universe; it describes, with numerical precision, the exact measure of spacetime and reality, and the perfect correlations between every quantity and measure in the universe. This hypothetical equation cannot be understood or calculated by common mortals, and only a pure Hexian worshipper could understand its value and meanings. If a Hexian could achieve such purity and devotion that he was allowed to understand the Equation, he would be all but omniscient and omnipotent, seeing the objective nature of the universe as it is.

There's an ancient school of Hexian thought that holds that, as Hexia teaches that there IS an objective universal truth, then a mathematical equation to measure said truth must necessarily exist as well. Most modern Hexians disregard the idea, even denouncing it as blind faith and magical thinking - the exact opposite of Hexian tenets.

As the debate continues, thousands of Hexian scholars have lived and died seeking pieces of the Equation Supreme. Many have claimed to discover, and even tried to teach, a fragment of it; others looked across worlds, searching for clues, patterns, measures - anything that helped them find the universal secret. Fanatical scientists in mathematics and astronomy research centres theorise and experiment different models that could lead to its understanding.

Meanwhile, the Equation Supreme remains elusive - and, if it exists, still hidden from mortal grasp.

WORSHIP

Hexian cults exist among every species, and some are quite large, to the point of becoming organised political movements. Most Hexian cults, however, are simply groups of like-minded scholars or scientists.

THE HEXIAN MOVEMENT

The largest Hexian church in the universe is not a cult but a political party, although a somewhat underground and subversive one. The Iz'kal Hexian Movement seeks to turn the species' totalitarian State away from its traditional ways and see the objective truth that the Corvo are a better, more powerful and more dangerous civilisation.

The Hexian Movement's main concern is to change their government and to save Iz'kal society from becoming a vassal state to the Corvo economic juggernaut. Their plan to achieve this goal is to use their enemies' weapons - mass-production, concentrated leadership and resources, and a more ruthless approach to interspecies relationships.

While many Iz'kal think the Hexian Movement's ideas are dreadful, they don't understand that the Movement is also appalled by its own measures - but it also understands it

is the only solution. Either confront the Corvo in their own arena, or lose the State altogether. That is the terrible truth Hexia has revealed them.

THE CULT OF ETERNIA

The secretive Cult of Eternia, the hidden power behind the government of the Raag species, are a cabal of scheming sages that count many Hexian Soulbenders among their number.

Members of the Cult worship truth and seek to improve their society, but their power in Hexia's eyes is somewhat diminished by their unwillingness to share the knowledge with others. Many enginseers - Raag technicians and scientists, revered as wise men by their people - which have abandoned the Shadow Council to help the common folk - are stronger in Hexia than members of the Cult.

THE SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

The Church of Hexia has established a Universal Academy with chapters in both the Corvosphere and the Iz'kal State. It's known as the School of Thought, and it aims at teaching its students as many objective truths as it can in all disciplines, from philosophy to astronomy and from history to mathematics.

The School's goal is to educate as many people as it can, as only unbiased teaching can improve society. It has no other political objective or allegiance except for the Hexian faith, which is mandatory to all staff.

Manned and maintained by Hexian followers, the School of Thought has campuses in all major Corvo and Iz'kal colonies, from Al'ameen to Tiantang. The school doesn't impose worship of Hexia on students, but it doesn't hide the Hexian faith of its teachers, nor the reasons for it. This is often enough to convince most students of following Hexia as well, as their teachers' arguments are sound and fact-based. Many renowned Hexian Soulbenders were trained at the School of Thought, and often returned as campus headmasters.

THE TRUTH PARTY

There's a small radical political cell amongst Human mercenaries in the Corvosphere, called the Truth party. They espouse absolutism and objectivism, claiming the Corvo are conspiring to keep the Humans docile and deceived. The Truth Party are Hierarchists - Humans that believe in leadership over community - and followers of Hexia, although their Soulbenders are relatively few and not that powerful.

THE UNKNOWN BUILDERS

The most famous, and also the less known, of all Hexian Cults is the Sect of the Unknown Builders, also known as the U.B.

This is a political and religious group, formed in Iz'kal space at some point before the development of IdeaLab, and then stealthily spread across the known universe. At first a simple club for the free exchange of ideas, it slowly became an elite Hyperlink reserved for the smarter, most knowledgeable Iz'kal - a practice that was very frowned upon by Iz'kal society. As a result, they left Ergon worship and turned to Hexia, who gave them abilities and knowledge to stay hidden from mainstream Iz'kal society. With Hexia's blessing, the elite club became a secret society, and then a covert political group that worked to further knowledge and social improvement from behind the scenes. Since that moment and for the last thousand years, the Unknown Builders have been a secret, and active, power behind the scenes of the Iz'kal State.

When the Iz'kal started travelling between worlds, many U.B. agents were aboard the ships, and spread the beliefs and agenda of their secret order far and wide, even recruiting members of other species - mostly Humans, but also some Corvo. To this day, the U.B. are believed to have influenced every major development in Iz'kal history, from the creation of Idealab to the decision to not fight the Corvo when they first met. The Hexian Movement of the last two centuries is clearly an U.B. scheme, and an indication that the Builders are growing in power and influence.

DEPICTIONS

Hexia's dual symbol expresses balance and duality; some Hexians assume it represents truth versus untruth, while others assume it represents the point and counterpoint necessary for any idea to be truth. It also represents the balance of forces necessary for the functioning of the Universe.

As regards to other depictions, Hexia is one of the less-visualised Gods, His followers actively avoiding any interpretation in their search for absolute truth. This, of course, hasn't prevented a few groups from giving Hexia a visual representation.

THE ABSOLUTE EYE

Many Hexian Human mercenaries represent Hexia as an all-seeing eye atop a pyramid, emitting a beam of light that reveals all hidden conspirations and deceptions. They stamp this symbol of Hexia on their armour and ships, but this image is generally frowned upon by mainstream Hexians, even among Humans.

THE BALANCE

Many Hexians use the Balance as a symbol of Hexia, representing truth, justice and equilibrium. The Balance is not meant to depict Hexia Himself, but it's a very accepted and widespread representation of his values and faith.

KALIVA

"Timid men prefer the calm of despotism to the tempestuous sea of Liberty."

- Thomas Jefferson, Human politician

Kaliva is the Goddess of Survivalism, of defeating odds through one's effort and improving oneself through strife. For Kaliva, conflict is the only path towards growth, and cooperation is necessarily weakening - it prevents others from struggling to improve themselves.

Kaliva represents the laws of evolution, and how nature itself tests every organism, eliminating those that fail the test and empowering those that succeed. Only you can empower yourself through victory - victory against everyone and everything else.

GOD OF SURVIVAL

Nature isn't as kind as one might think. Nature is ruthless and cares not for those who fall behind. The strong prey on the weak, and the weak on the weakest. Why can Nature be cruel and not be judged? Why do we force ourselves to suffer this double standard? Have we forgotten that we are just a small part of a whole?

An animal will do what it must to survive, and it will do it without hesitation. To survive is the most important thing Nature asks from us, just like tigers making their way in this jungle.

Kaliva respects only one thing in mortals and that is the will to improve oneself. She only accepts those who work hard to achieve their goals and who are never satisfied with being in second place. For Kaliva, there is always a way, and those that do not find it are not good enough.

Everyone deserves a chance, and Kaliva will grant it to them regardless of the prospects of failure. Failure is just a part of the learning process, no matter how many times it happens. For Kaliva, true failure is giving up, feeling satisfied with less, or living off of the hard work of others.

Taking things for granted and not working hard are symptoms of a sick society that preys on the goodwill of hard workers; feed a man everyday of his life and you are left not with a productive citizen but a pet. To allow someone to rely on another person's hard work is disrespectful, as it reduces that someone to the bearable minimum of a person. For a person to be truly able to express all of his potential, and therefore feel empowered and as important as he deserves, he must work for it.

BELIEVERS

Kaliva's faithful are called Kalivans. They are the ones that build themselves up from nothing, fighting every step of the way. They are those who let other people deal with their own affairs and instead put their energies towards their own. Most of the Universe is led by Kalivans, a fact of which they are rightly proud. But they are not proud for other Kalivans who have achieved their dream, as they are mere competitors; they are proud because this fact reinforces the belief they hold as the ultimate truth. While the followers of other Gods want their futures to be handed over to them, Kalivans create their own and shape the futures of those around them as they rise towards the top.

Compassion and charity are flawed in the eyes of a Kalivan. They show weakness and allow others to become lethargic and dependent. Each person must become their own, and competition can only promote self-improvement. Only those that truly deserve it will make it.

Followers of the other Gods condemn Kalivans as evil, as if they actively tried to harm others. Such a notion is ridiculous to a Kalivan, as all they look out for is their own success. This sometimes benefits other people and sometimes hurts them; a Kalivan will not care either way. That's how life works.

COMMANDMENTS

Kaliva's Commandments seem selfish to other Gods and their followers, but Kalivans see them as empowering, as they promote freedom for everyone in its ultimate form. If each living being cares about himself, everyone is better off for it.

- You Are Above All
- Do Not Succumb to Weakness
- Do Not Bear a Master
- Each to Their Own

POWERS

Kalivan power trees are focused on improving their followers' abilities, particularly skills that help them survive against others be it through combat or any other kind of contest.

FORTUNE

The most common of Kalivan power trees, Fortune allows Soulbenders to increase their chances of success at any endeavour, but it only works if the Soulbender does work for it. Many Kalivans shun the Fortune power tree as 'lesser' because it involves luck; it doesn't actually involve blind chance, but an added reward to those that fight for it.

Kalivans with this kind of power still have to exercise, but they get stronger after it; they still have to work, but they earn more for it; they still have to fight, but they hit harder.

HUNTING

This power tree strengthens the survivalist aspect of Kaliva, which concerns both the skills needed to survive and those needed to fight others and prevail.

Hunting powers are mostly about perception; they increase the Soulbender's senses while they cloud others to his presence. Thus, this power tree includes the ability to hide oneself from others, detect others who are hidden, and chase and bring them down across great distances.

A Hunting Soulbender can identify and kill a marked prey regardless of how well his target has been hidden, how far away it has gone, or how much time has passed.

SUPERIORITY

This is the most common power of Kalivan Soulbenders, and many of them display some lesser Superiority abilities.

These powers are, in a sense, the opposite of Fortune abilities, as they reduce random factors in favor of the Soulbender; but again, they only work as long as he is superior to his opposition. By using superiority, a Soulbender ensures those weaker than him don't get lucky shots, but he can only use such powers if the odds are already in his favour; that is the core of Kalivan faith.

Superiority makes Soulbenders 'more superior', but only if they already are; it helps only by reducing the chance that a weaker opponent will defeat the Soulbender by some unfair fluke. Thus a Soulbender runner can ensure victory at a race, but only if he already is the better athlete; a Kalivan sniper can guarantee his shot will hit its mark, but only if his skill has been proven and his aim is sure.

WORSHIP

Kalivan belief is the most widespread across the universe, and Her followers are the most numerous; to Kalivans, this is yet another proof that they are the stronger and better faith. There are tens of thousands of small Kalivan cults in every inhabited world of every species, including paramilitary forces, sports teams, and fanatical murdering sects.

THE CORVO CHURCH OF KALIVA

The largest cult of Kaliva in the universe is the official Corvo Church of Kaliva. This is more of a media network than an organised church. It is focused on broadcasting Kalivan shows, from fiction series with a Kalivan message, to live contests and televangelism, and even selling Megacorps products during commercial breaks. Millions of Corvo tune in to the Church of Kaliva and follow its celebrities, headed by Mama Soul, one of the most famous individuals in the Universe.

Regardless of its shallow and commercial nature, the Church does spread the word of Kaliva to millions of believers, so it still counts as a legitimate Cult and Kaliva approves of it.

THE MAD KALIVA CULT

A strange, small sect of Corvo Kalivans dedicated to love and hedonism; nobody knows whether the Mad Kaliva cult does actually worship Kaliva under a very personal interpretation, or they are a disguised Ledger cult.

The Mad Kalivans propose that the struggle that Kaliva advocates has no greater manifestation than an intimate act between two creatures, and that sexual attraction and competition are actually the core of Kaliva's teachings.

Mad Kalivans don't strive to be the strongest or toughest, but the most desired and sexually endowed. They also pride themselves in their ability to endure all kinds of intoxication as a mark of survival ability, by which they justify being in an almost permanent drugged state.

Other Kalivans see the Mad Kaliva cult as a fraud, a fake and a mockery of their faith; however, the cult does have a lot of legitimate followers and remains very popular among the Corvo, plus their leaders seem to be true Kalivan Soulbenders, with the ability to incite basic instincts in others.

THE SECRET ACADEMY OF YINSHEN SHI

The order of Yinshen Shi is one of the most exclusive and respected Kalivan cults in the universe; it only accepts members with a special set of skills, and all recruits are sought individually and secretly - there is no open membership to the order.

All members of the Yinshen Shi are Corvo Kalivan Soulbenders, chosen among the students of a Secret Academy in Tiantang. After induction in the Yinshen Shi order, they are taught combat, stealth and advanced forms of their divine powers. They then become Yinshen Shi Knights, trained and encouraged to improve the Corvosphere by striking at the elements that weaken it - criminals, corrupt businessmen and those who seek to take away individual freedom.

Some other cults disagree with the Yinshen Shi for their group tactics and their focus on teaching others, but Kaliva approves imparting skills as long as the student is allowed to surpass and defeat the master - one of the main tenets of the Yinshen Shi order.

THE TRUE NOTERI

A small band of warriors within the Raag Noteri clan, the self-proclaimed True Noteri are a fanatical Kalivan sect that seeks to restore honour and strength to what they call their 'decadent people'.

The Noteri Raag are known for their marauding, murderous ways; all other Raag see them as the Least Clan, little more than bandits, because they will raid and prey upon anything and anyone.

The True Noteri seek to challenge their clan's infamous practices by seeking only worthy enemies - that is, armed settlements, trained warriors, and in short anything that actually poses a challenge. They are still murderers, but they claim Kaliva has shown them the 'true way' - that a 'real warrior' seeks battle, not easy prey; that murderers are cowards, and that the fittest must fight real battles.

The rest of the Noteri despise these radicals, and there have been many bloody confrontations between the true Noteri and their kin. However, the power and sheer quantity of their Soulbenders has allowed the True Noteri to survive - and perhaps proved, at least partially, that Kaliva does favour them.

THE CHURCH OF ZHUI XI

The government of the Corvo colony in the ice planet Zhui Xi is itself a Kaliva cult, and its leaders - incredibly powerful Kalivan Soulbenders - are also the colony's rulers. The Church of Zhui Xi is the closest the Corvo people have to a theocracy.

The Church of Zhui Xi is gentler and kinder than other Kaliva cults, focusing more on the superiority and self-improvement aspects than in direct struggle and competition. They rule their colony like some fairy tale kingdom, promoting selfishness through happiness.

Other Kalivans see them as weak or pampered, but the truth is that the Church of Zhui Xi and its prophets may well be the most powerful Kalivan cult in the Corvosphere.

THE K'ARIL KAHIL SECT

The only significant Kalivan cult outside the Corvosphere is the Iz'kal K'aril Kahil sect. The K'aril Kahil are the leaders of the Iz'kal Freedom Federation (or IFF), a group of radicals that seek to destabilise and depose the Iz'kal State, replacing it with a military meritocracy.

Although the IFF is officially non-religious, the K'aril Kahil sect behind it is an openly acknowledged Kalivan cult, and even its lesser-ranking members have some soulbending abilities, indicating that Kaliva likes the idea of toppling the Iz'kal State very much.

DEPICTIONS

Although Kaliva's official symbol is the Triangle of Opposing Forces, which represents conflicting powers but also a pyramidal hierarchy and the victory of one (the singular) over two (the plural), there are countless depictions of Kaliva's hypothetical appearance.

Most of these depictions picture Kaliva as a female, but some species and cultures have imagined the God as a male warrior.

THE AMAZON

Some tribal cultures see Kaliva as a naked, many-armed woman, with a weapon in every one of her hands. She is fierce as she is beautiful, and she always wins all battles despite being unarmoured, indicating she needs no other protection but her own determination and ability.

MOTHER DRAGON

Some cultures imagined Kaliva as a gigantic she-dragon, with one or more heads, which represented either the unbeatable beast that every Kalivan must aspire to defeat, or the apex predator that every Kalivan must aspire to become.

And thus its double symbolism becomes clear: by trying to beat the unbeatable, a Kalivan ensures he will struggle forever; by struggling forever, he becomes himself the unbeatable beast.

THE SWORD

A simple double-edged sword is a common and popular symbol of Kaliva, as it represents the ability to inflict harm but also the risk of suffering in the way.

CREDITS

As unsophisticated as it may seem, credits - or money - is one of the most literal representations of Kaliva, and it's use as an actual religious symbol is increasing by the day in the Corvosphere.

Credits embody all of the qualities pursued by followers of Kaliva - power, independence, status - and their ritualistic use is embedded in the very fabric of Corvo society. People are known to pray for and to it on a daily basis.

VEXAL

"Very few people are smart enough to understand their own real needs, and even fewer are smart enough to understand the needs of others. People with power are more likely to do more bad than good, even if they have good intentions."

- OIDIA, [unknown species] hacker

Vexal, the God of Freedom, represents the fact that liberty equals truth; whatever isn't free is fake. He's a God of cooperation, as liberating others is the greatest act of freedom possible. In helping others be free, we increase freedom in the universe and thus liberate ourselves.

Vexal lives in the random animal instinct, and also in the unpredictable patterns of waves and wind currents. He embodies the idea that there is no universal law; freedom equals happiness and vice versa, but authority kills freedom, so any kind of rule or control over others - including any absolute truth or doctrine - is false, and thus doesn't, and shouldn't, exist.

GOD OF FREEDOM

Trying to understand an animal's true nature by studying one in captivity will provide you with the wrong answers. The animal's habits, behaviour, and mood are completely changed from what they would be in liberty. Unsurprisingly, it is the same with people. When you hear someone speak about our true nature as people, the dangers of it, and how we need rules and laws to control it for our own safety, stop for a moment and think about this: the people behind those propositions have never seen the true nature of our species. They are simply basing their studies on specimens born into submission, fear, preconceptions, and rules.

Vexal believes we need to be free and equal to even start scratching the surface of our true nature and all its possibilities. By discovering what lies below the surface, we will be impressed and humbled by ourselves. By becoming free, we see that all the evil we suffer today is not in the roots of our nature, but instead yet another tax of an oppressive, unjust, and controlling society.

Vexal wants his believers to understand that there is no 'right' view on things. Everyone must search for their own truth, as each individual may live in different circumstances, and even then each person may change his own views with the passing of time. This is why imposing a way of life and indoctrinating people often has terrible consequences.

BELIEVERS

Vexal worshippers, known as Vexales or Vexalites, don't like to follow any rules, but they have a deep respect for others and are always willing to give a helping hand. They do not take orders very well and dislike societies that expect everyone to live by the same rules; they believe that each person should be treated differently but respectfully.

Vexalites believe there will never be peace for as long as there is any type of hierarchy; there must be an absolute dissolution of the principle and practice of authority. This is why, while they will not sacrifice their freedom for anything, Vexalites are always willing to sacrifice their life for freedom.

While they have a reputation for being poor team players, Vexales have proven that they are extremely hard-working people. Understandably, they want to choose their occupation and they will not be happy when told what to do, but if they do choose to work on something they are very productive. After all, they are usually caring, curious people who live to get involved in things that matter to them.

Being an individualist does not mean that they won't work in teams, and they will do so for as long as the group has no hierarchy and every voice is taken into consideration. Usually these groups are formed around a shared need for collaboration and only carry on for as long as everyone considers it to be their path. However, if rules are imposed and someone tries to make decisions for everyone else, the Vexales will soon disappear in the wind.

Vexales tend to become adventurers, hackers, outlaws, or any other kind of free people. While they generally disapprove of vigilantism, which is seen as proud and egotistical, they are not above carrying out their own forms of justice. Vexales enjoy exposing the wrongdoings of corporations, states, and any form of authoritarian power. Their social criticism has shaped the perceptions of many societies, and has caused the rise or decline of many corporations and politicians. As Vexales see it, everyone must be an activist for real change to occur.

COMMANDMENTS

Vexal's commandments are concerned with freedom, but also with responsibility. One must be free but also help others remain free; one must reject indoctrination but also take charge of his own ideas.

- Do Not Bear a Master
- Think For Yourself
- Do Not Restrict Others
- Benefit Others

POWERS

Vexal power trees are all related to action and freedom, both mental and physical. Vexalite Soulbenders can overcome all kinds of physical and spiritual barriers, unhindered by self-doubt, limitations or even physical laws.

FREE ACTION

The best known power of Vexal Soulbenders is the ability to defy space and matter when moving physically. Thus a Vexal Soulbender can move faster, pass through a crowd as if it wasn't there or perform amazing dance or gymnastic stunts. A mid-level Vexal Soulbender could fall so slowly as to not hurt himself or slip free from any bond or restraint.

The most powerful Soulbenders can actually levitate, fly or even step through walls and barriers effortlessly, as matter itself gives way to their belief.

UNBOUND MIND

The most rare and sought after power of Vexal Soulbenders is the ability to free one's mind from the physical limitations of the brain. A Vexalite with unbound mind may briefly touch other minds or perceive flashes of an object's past and history by touching it.

The mightiest practitioners of this power tree can actually move things or assault others with their mind, as nothing can stop their unshackled thoughts.

WILLPOWER

All Vexal Soulbenders, regardless of their power level, display some form of increased willpower, as their inner strength is the first thing they learn to liberate.

No outside force can easily influence a Vexalite Soulbender, as his mind is unfettered by dogma or limiting ideas. The most common manifestation of this power tree is a resistance to mental control and brainwashing; at the very least, a minor Soulbender of Vexal will always see all sides on any debate, while the mightiest ones can free other minds just with their presence.

WORSHIP

Vexal worship is among the least organised in the universe, and, while He has millions of followers, their very beliefs prevent them from forming institutionalised cults or churches.

There are, however, a number of groups organised around another common trait - political goals or blood relations - that coincide in their worship of Vexal anyway. And even these groups tend to be free-thinking wanderers or adventurers.

THE HUMAN FRONT

The rebel Human group that seeks to secede from the Corvosphere is full of freedom fighters and mercenaries that hold Vexal values as their own, and many factions inside the Human Front are, for all intents and purposes, small Vexal cults.

The Human Front doesn't see itself as a Vexal-worshipping organisation, but He seems to be very pleased with them, and helps the Front quite explicitly through the many Soulbenders included in its ranks.

THE JINO CLAN

The Jino are the most nomadic clan of the Raag species. They spend most of their lives aboard large spaceship-cities, roaming the universe in search of new worlds to discover and things to learn. Their very lifestyle is an homage to Vexal's Commandments, but He is their official Clan God too.

THE QUANJIE SS SPECIAL FORCES

Many Vexal-given abilities - stepping through walls, learning facts by touching objects and so on - seem specifically intended for espionage, and the pragmatic Corvo can identify a good resource when they spot it.

The Corvo Secret Service, located in their homeworld of Quanjie, has a special branch consisting almost entirely of Vexal Soulbenders. Although they belong to an organised political agency, these special agents use their powers to help the Corvo government against the tyranny and oppression of totalitarian political groups.

THE STARMAP GUILD

The closest to a Vexal cult in the known universe is the Starmap Guild, a secret society of scholars, adventurers, explorers and political radicals that look for knowledge - both ancient and current - in every form, from hidden treasures to philosophical trends.

The Starmap Guild's objectives are as diverse as its membership - pirates, mercenaries, scientists, explorers, writers, artists, dilettantes, starship captains, guerrilla fighters, activists, agitators, anarchists, preachers, Soulbenders, wanderers, philosophers and treasure hunters. Understandably, all Starmap Guild members - known as Starmappers - have different goals. Some want to fight for freedom across the galaxy, and join larger groups such as the Human Front; some want to destabilise intergalactic totalitarianism, and infiltrate the State, the Megacorps or the Coalition to work against tyranny from within; some seek ancient civilisations and lost relics; some research poetry, lore and history, seeking to become wiser and understand the universe better.

The only goals that all Starmappers share, also known as the Four Words, are:

Freedom: The Starmap Guild seeks to help free the universe from authority and leaders. Most Starmappers are anarchist collectivists, and believe a leaderless, organised society is the best, or only, way to save civilisation.

Knowledge: All Starmappers hold knowledge as a cardinal virtue, second only to freedom itself, for it is only through knowledge that freedom is achieved. They all love a good mystery, however, and prefer to research and look for their information; as learning methods go, an adventure is better than a book, and to solve a mystery is better than to attend a conference.

Sharing: Freedom and Knowledge are nothing if they are not given to everybody else. Thus the Starmap Guild seeks to liberate and teach others, or at least to offer them the tools to do it themselves - if they so wish.

Vexal: All the Starmap Guild acknowledges Vexal, if not as their patron God, as the best God out there, although many Starmappers also appreciate Hexian values.

It should be no surprise that the Starmap Guild is a very divided group, with its members, chapters and subchapters constantly seeking separate, and even conflicting, goals. This doesn't lessen their commitment to the cause of freedom, however, and they value the bond of their Starmap membership above any differences that may arise - in most cases. Many Starmappers have seceded from the Guild, forming their own splinter groups, that later rejoin or directly oppose the Starmap Guild. These groups rarely last for long, and the Starmap Guild remains the largest of its kind.

Although most people with at least some general knowledge know the Starmap Guild exists, its membership is secret and concealed between the layers of intergalactic society; they need to remain hidden, since most of their activities are, if not illegal, at least frowned upon by most organised governments. Starmappers have infiltrated the labs and learning centres of most Corvo colonies, the Tiantang government and the Megacorps; they are hidden among the Iz'kal Technocrats and the State Defence Force; and have a small elite working from within the Human Front. They even have agents among the Raag Councils and Enginseers. They have agents in the Coalition and several mercenary forces, including some terrorist groups. In short; the size of the Starmap Guild remains unknown, but they are certainly everywhere.

By its very rules and beliefs the Guild is leaderless, but a few of its members have become prominent because of their wisdom, their published works or their famous deeds. These moral or spiritual celebrities within the Guild exert no power or authority over other members, but when they give advice, others listen.

Perhaps the most famous member of the Starmap Guild is Arka Bozag of the Crystal Staff, the Human Prophet of Vexal. He enjoys no special status within the Guild, but most Starmappers are in awe of him and look for his counsel, or try to follow his search for the universe's lost relics.

DEPICTIONS

Vexal's official symbol is a tunnel of spinning cubes, which represent the many realities and Vexal's ability to see and go through them all. There are very few other depictions of Vexal, mostly because His followers don't like cults.

THE SEEKING EYE

Some of the most scholarly Vexal worshippers, such as the members of the Starmap Guild, use a seeking eye as a representation of their God; for them, Vexal represents inquisitiveness, curiosity and intuition, which are a form of freedom and, more importantly, a form of travel.

WINGS

Vexal has always been associated with flight, so a few tribes used a pair of wings - either alone or attached to another icon, such as a winged helmet or a winged foot - to represent Him. After the space age, many have adopted a flying starship or shooting star as the main icon of Vexal.

The boy was running through the streets of Ölesty, a small waster village near Infernuko Erreka. His feet slipped in the mud, and his captor was closing in at full speed. "Mom is going to be so mad if I die today", he thought. He wanted to feel sad, but couldn't. Mom urged him not to risk his life for her, but how could he explain that he wasn't stealing for her? Not entirely, anyway.

When he sneaked into the warehouse and "borrowed" a couple of loaves of bread, a hoe, or a malnourished cat, he felt a rush within. He enjoyed the pure thrill of fooling around but also the joy of helping his mom. That's why he felt a little sad when the pursuers grabbed his arm; he knew it meant death.

Then he noticed it. He saw it. He smelled it. He tasted it. From the void within pure energy flowed into his hand and with a breezy movement he untangled himself from the bully. With a quick reflex he focused on a wall nearby and suddenly he gravitated towards it, giving him the chance to climb up to the closest window. In the safety of the dark room, he heard a voice from within: "now you are me, now you are free".

LEDGER

"The whole point of having an opinion is to piss people off."

- Ledger

His voice is like fire. Whenever he speaks, worlds burn in the pyres of passion. They think He is a visionary, and follow him by the millions. But He is just a primal being of unleashed desires.

Ledger is the God of Chaos, except He would reject that title because it would be too constraining. Ledger represents absolute nonsense, the endless void of existence doomed to entropy from its beginning, the cosmic joke of trying to give sense to something that, by itself, has none. If the Gods are the embodiment of values and meanings, Ledger is their denial.

THE ANTI-GOD

Ledger is the God of those who want to see the world burn, or who think that life is a joke that should be pushed to the limit. There is very little sense in what a follower of Ledger does, because they do not benefit anyone, not even themselves.

Ledger represents the uncomfortable truth that all thoughts, all words, including the word 'thought' and the thought of a word, were in fact arbitrarily invented by sentient creatures, who are a very small minority in the cosmic order. Ideas and meaning are a pathetic fraction of the existence of random pathetic lifeforms, vastly outnumbered by mindless bacteria in the universal scale. Ledger laughs at the pretentiousness of values, beliefs and explanations; actually, He laughs at the entire universe, but He laughs the most at the Gods, himself included.

Ledger is not an enemy of the other Gods, however, as He has no goals and works towards no objective; but He enjoys seeing them and their followers fail, make fools of themselves and trip over one another. That would be what Ledger lives for, if Ledger lived for anything - but that's the point: He doesn't.

BELIEVERS

All Ledger followers call themselves Ledger. Each one of them is Ledger, in a way.

People believe in Ledger for all kinds of reasons. Some think that sentient species bring evil to the Universe and should be extinct; some desire revenge for the pain they have suffered, and some do things that do not benefit anyone, for reasons not understood. Many simply find joy in causing chaos, from compulsive internet trolls and pranksters, to mad terrorists with no clear ideology behind their actions. Ledger gives these people an outlet for their madness and a purpose where there is none.

Ledgers are usually considered dysfunctional members of society, and a danger to others and themselves. When confronted with these accusations, these are the typical answers of a Ledger follower:

"You are the sick ones, sugar coating life in biased ideology and social constructs based on miscommunicated knowledge and values from older generations whose ways of living were meant to satisfy different needs than yours, which causes you to live in a broken society of lost people incapable of adapting to a system that has lost sight of the true nature of its citizens."

"You are but a fragment of my subconscious being, don't bother me with such matters."

Or not giving an answer at all, setting fire to their own hair, or just about anything else. Those who believe in Ledger are unorganised and loose in their moral behaviour. Their actions bring confusion, disorder, and chaos.

GHOSTS

The most devoted Ledgers give up their previous lives and become willing outcasts by abandoning or killing those they knew, burning their fingerprints, and ingesting drug cocktails that mutate their DNA, so that any traces of who they were are destroyed. These extreme worshippers are known as Ghosts, but they also call themselves Ledger, which makes everything very confusing for police forces, who are forced to adopt code names for each one. This makes Ledger giggle. All of them.

COMMANDMENTS

Ledger has no Commandments, of course, but if He did, they would look a lot like this:

- Follow Your Impulses
- Do Not Sow
- Do Not Obey
- Confuse
- Buba Dubba Goog

POWERS

Most Ledger powers are related to causing fear and planting doubt, as His focus is on destroying ideas, values and beliefs. Anything that weakens and confuses faith, anything that desecrates, is sacred to Ledger.

FALSE FAITH

In order to bring even more chaos to the Universe, Ledger grants powers to his believers that allow them to pretend to believe in other Gods, so many of them have been found causing mayhem from within other Gods' cults.

This is the most common power tree of Ledger worshippers, which allows a Ledger Soulbender to freely use and display the powers of any other God, undetected by the God's true followers. A Ledger Soulbender can spend an indefinite time, perhaps his whole life, pretending to be a Soulbender of another God. It is every Ledger's dream to become a Prophet of another God; they enjoy long and elaborate practical jokes, so this may have already happened.

A Ledger can take a joke so far that he might even increase the reach of the God he is falsely following, taking his joke to the grave - or he might blow up a cathedral and cause a war between two cults instead.

MESS WITH FAITH

When a Ledger Soulbender is not stealing another God's powers or impersonating their Soulbenders, he is given power to destabilise faith and belief.

Thus a minor Ledger Soulbender can make others feel uneasy about their own opinions, or simply uncomfortable, from an itch they can't find to a sudden, unexplained feeling of depression. More powerful Soulbenders can make others lose control of what they say and feel, causing them to cry, turn violent without reason or renounce their loved ones. The mightiest Ledger Soulbenders can induce true madness or fear, or even make other Soulbenders lose their faith - and thus their powers - temporarily or permanently.

WORSHIP

Ledger is the only God without any recognised cults. Most Ledger believers are unstable enough to be too dangerous for each other; they are surely unstable enough to be a danger to themselves. But it is in the nature of Ledgers to not care about themselves, and sometimes misfortune brings a few of them together, and horrible things happen. These underground groups never last very long, as even Ledger himself, in all his might, has trouble keeping his followers alive. It is not known whether he actually cares.

CRIMINAL GANGS

Ledger may not have an organised cult, but He is quite popular among the Universe's criminal element. Countless gangs of slavers, pirates, terrorists and marauders have small altars and sacred symbols dedicated to Ledger, most often in his guise as a God of chaos and death. Very few of these informal worshippers display true Soulbender powers, but those that do are the Ledger's blessed - insane, incredibly dangerous lunatics, feared even by their own gangs.

The cruelest of these Ledger-worshipping gangs include the Farm Gang of Al'ameen, a secret slavery ring operating under the nose of the Iz'kal State, and the infamous Three Skulls Mob, rightfully known as the most dangerous criminal outfit in the universe thanks to its ruthless boss, 'Empress' Jazmeen.

THE CHRYSALIS

One of the largest organised gatherings of Ledger worshippers in the galaxy, and perhaps the most fearsome, is the so-called Order of the Broken Chrysalis, or 'the Chrysalis' for short.

Comprised solely of survivors of the darkest experiments performed in genetic and cybernetic labs everywhere, the Chrysalis gathers some of the craziest, most wretched beings in the universe. Chrysalians - as they call themselves - are few in number, and rarely work together - which is a blessing, because Chrysalians are very dangerous psychopaths.

Every Chrysalian was once the subject of a horrid experiment that left him disfigured or physically broken, often with devastating or even monstrous results. The Chrysalis accepts members of any species and culture - just as unscrupulous scientists accept guinea pigs from any genetic stock - and has been known to welcome victims of Ravager Alterants, as well as survivors from underworld Corvo hospitals and failed test subjects from Iz'kal labs. There is a membership requirement, however - the Chrysalis recruits only those experiment survivors that have been driven insane by the experience. Be it because of physical disfigurement, genetic tampering, brain damage or cybernetic modifications, everybody in the Chrysalis is stark raving mad.

Once a member is inducted, the Order teaches him to see his disfigurement as a new stage of being - to see himself as a new, improved creature, transformed into something better by his horrible experience. When the Chrysalis doctrine takes hold, it exacerbates the subject's madness, turning him into a dangerous, deluded extremist... and granting him Ledger powers. Chrysalians rarely live long, but those that do become skilled and dangerous Soulbenders.

The Chrysalis seeks nothing less than to destroy intergalactic society - partly for revenge - but mostly because its insane leaders see civilisation as a disease, a decadent path that leads to pain and living death. By plunging everything into chaos, Chrysalians seek to transform the universe as they were once transformed. Their symbol - a dark butterfly tattoo - reflects this belief, and has become a symbol of terror for the few that have seen it. For Chrysalians, Ledger is an agent of transformation and evolution, and the Dark Butterfly is Ledger's mark.

The Chrysalis is precariously organised at best, and its members are scattered all across the galaxy; but most Chrysalians, even isolated from the rest of the order, manage to organise small but fearsome terrorist cells, dark cults or assassin gangs. Where a Chrysalian goes, death and horror follow.

THE MARKED

They are not a group, but they are a tribe. They aren't Ledger's favoured, but they are His favourites. They don't know each other, but they recognise each other.

The Marked are an unusual accident - children of Ledger Soulbenders, blessed - or cursed - from birth. Since a Soulbender's abilities depend on his personal beliefs, the Marked don't have Ledger powers unless they actually follow Him; they do have Ledger's attention, however.

Not all children of Ledger Soulbenders are Marked, and nobody knows what makes Ledger choose one and not another; most likely it's completely random. Regardless of their birth, all Marked seem to be special. They have an unusual charm, a stronger presence, and others tend to treat them somewhat better - or somewhat worse. They also seem to have important, or at least dramatic, destinies; they are rarely heroes, but seem to be there when heroic - or bizarre or tragic or mysterious - things happen.

The one true power that all the Marked seem to share is a strange kind of good luck. They appear to be favoured by chance, and things tend to always fall in place for them; but misfortune follows them too, and even those with the mildest lives gravitate towards dangerous, unexplained or unexpected situations. And their good luck always runs out; at some point, all Marked die or disappear in some bizarre, dramatic or mysterious way.

Other than that, the Marked seem to have no special abilities, unless they develop Soulbender powers of their own; if they do, they always seem to be a bit more fanatical, a bit more driven, than their peers. Regardless of their parentage, the Marked may follow and be granted powers normally by any God, be it Ledger or one of the others.

Despite their name, the Marked are not recognisable in any way; however, any Soulbender that can read minds, sense souls, gauge divine power or use similar abilities can sense that a Marked has 'a bit of Ledger' inside. Not all Marked know their own nature, but they sense each other instantly; a Marked one will feel an instinctive kinship in the presence of another Marked, even if he doesn't know either of them is a Marked.

THE WHISPER

The best organised Ledger cult in the universe is the Iz'kal assassin sect known as The Whisper. Although they are Ledger worshippers - and count some powerful Soulbenders in their membership - they do have a common goal: the utter defeat and dissolution of the Iz'kal State. They have no other reason to do this than to see the largest, most solid political entity in the galaxy disappear, and thus Ledger is pleased with them - but they certainly show too much discipline and group identity for Ledger standards. They must be up to something.

DEPICTIONS

There are of course no popular depictions of Ledger, and nobody's even sure what his official symbol is meant to represent. Many Ledger followers wear black circles to represent the void, too, and some cults even depict him as a mad clown, joking about everything in the universe, but these, as any representation of Ledger, can't actually represent Him.

He opened the bag of crispy bugs and readied himself for the evening of a lifetime. He had been following the 'touring band', as he called the Ravager army, for months now, stopping at every planet the beasts set foot on and delighting in their - and his own - destructive rampage.

He usually travelled with the Ravager cavalry, hidden in plain sight. He had invested a fortune in the ultimate Ravager-proof equipment, including an Iz'kal stealthcraft, cloaking suits and the most outrageous weaponry the Union could produce.

He had witnessed them devour wild planets, full of weird creatures and plantlife. Slaughtering rare animals along with his unsuspecting companions was mightily enjoyable, but he longed for something more. He wanted to witness an attack on a civilized planet, full of screaming children and gory organs he could relate to. More importantly, he didn't want to waste all his expensive guns on wild game.

His dreamed day had finally arrived. They had reached a Coalition planet and he was about to see it consumed. He threw the now empty bag of crispy bugs to the floor, carefully pulled out his two favourite machine guns, and walked across the exploding landscape, in the most beautiful red dusk ever, fully loaded and willing to sate his God.

THE CORVO

Lui Lan

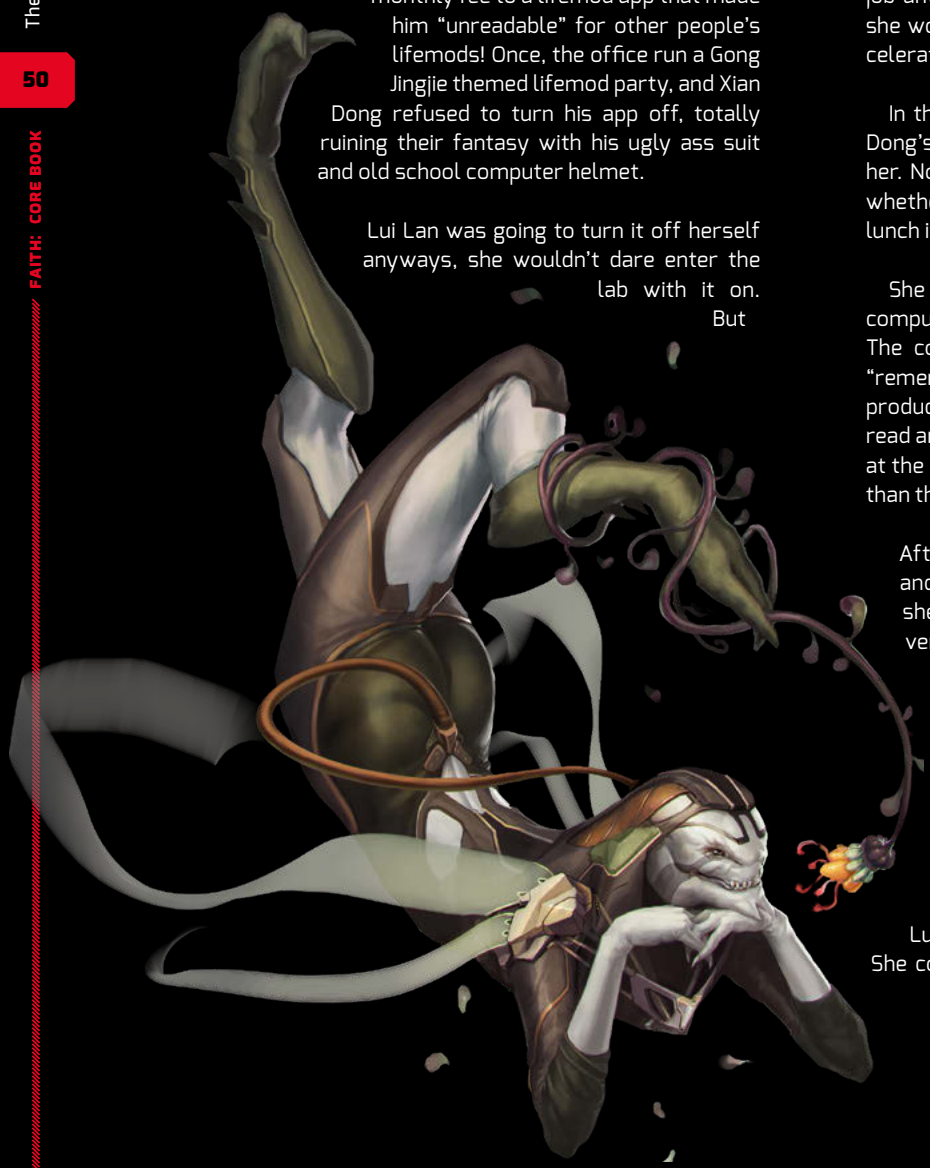
Lui Lan swam in a maze of coral reef, completely surrounded by it. It grew on deep trenches on the seabed, and Lui Lan followed one. She knew her way around it very well. Alien, colourful fish crossed paths with her. Feeling playful, Lui Lan tried to catch one with her prehensile feet, knowing the fish would be too quick to catch it.

"Lui Lan! Switch it off in here", Xian Dong, her boss, yelled at her. She turned around and saw him floating in the water right in front of her, wearing his simple office clothes. He didn't even wear a breathing mask.

Lui Lan turned off her "SeaWorld" lifemod, and the metallic greyness of her office's reality hit her in all its awfulness. "You know lifemods are not allowed in here. We do delicate work", Xian Dong lectured her. She took the lecture with stoicism.

Xian Dong was a real downer. He even paid a monthly fee to a lifemod app that made him "unreadable" for other people's lifemods! Once, the office run a Gong Jingjie themed lifemod party, and Xian Dong refused to turn his app off, totally ruining their fantasy with his ugly ass suit and old school computer helmet.

Lui Lan was going to turn it off herself anyways, she wouldn't dare enter the lab with it on. But couldn't he let her enjoy the morning at least until she changed clothes? Angry, she floated into the locker room and changed into her lab suit. She had perfected a technique that allowed her to take off her clothes and put on new ones while flipping around in only four consecutive circles. The people at the lab loved seeing it, and many tried to learn by watching her and trying it at home, although rather unsuccessfully. She never told them that she learned the first half of the moves while working as a stripper during college. Anti-Gravitational Dancer, they called it, but she knew what it was. It did not matter anymore: a job is a job, and that one paid well and served its purpose of getting her here.



Here was the largest particle accelerator known to date. It went all around the Shiyan sector, and the company had plans to create an even bigger one, one that would go all around Tiantang. Such was the reason why a genius like Lui Lan was willing to let a fool like Xian Dong lecture her: She could get a job anywhere she wanted in the Corvosphere, but she wouldn't dare miss working on the biggest accelerator in the entire Universe.

In the main lab, she ruled. There, not even Xian Dong's father, the company owner, dared contradict her. Nor he needed to: he couldn't care less about whether Lui Lan used the accelerator to heat up her lunch if she kept making profitable discoveries.

She plugged her cortex connector into the supercomputer and gained control of the whole system. The computer's feed became her thoughts: She "remembered" the notifications the computer had produced through the night. She also did not have to read anything; all the information entered her brain at the speed of light and formed memories clearer than the VR show she watched last night.

After a quick check throughout all systems and some tweaking of the daily operations, she thought of her family and made something very few controllers ever do: she triggered the code to bring up the outskulling distribution for the processing of the computer, and selected "Space Freighter AC309E" to add its outskullers to the day's processing rotation. The computer normally chose processing areas at random as a security measure, but everyday Lui Lan overrode it manually to select AC309E.

Lui Lan did not feel close to her family at all. She could not even stand five minutes with them

during family reunions, but she did feel a sense of responsibility towards them. The least she could do was have her powerful company employ them; whether they spent all the (very little) money they made on iDrugs was their decision. How did that Kalivan saying go? Each suit has its own oxygen tank — waste yours all you want.

Lui Lan shivered from the mental image of her ma, pa, and sibling's outskulling. In a few minutes, they would be falling into a deep coma to lend their admittedly limited brain processing power to the accelerator's computation processes. They would not remember anything. They would float unconscious in the small container they called home until a few hours later, when the automated system would throw another Space Freighter in the processing rotation and they would wake up to return to their daily occupations just a few credits less poor.

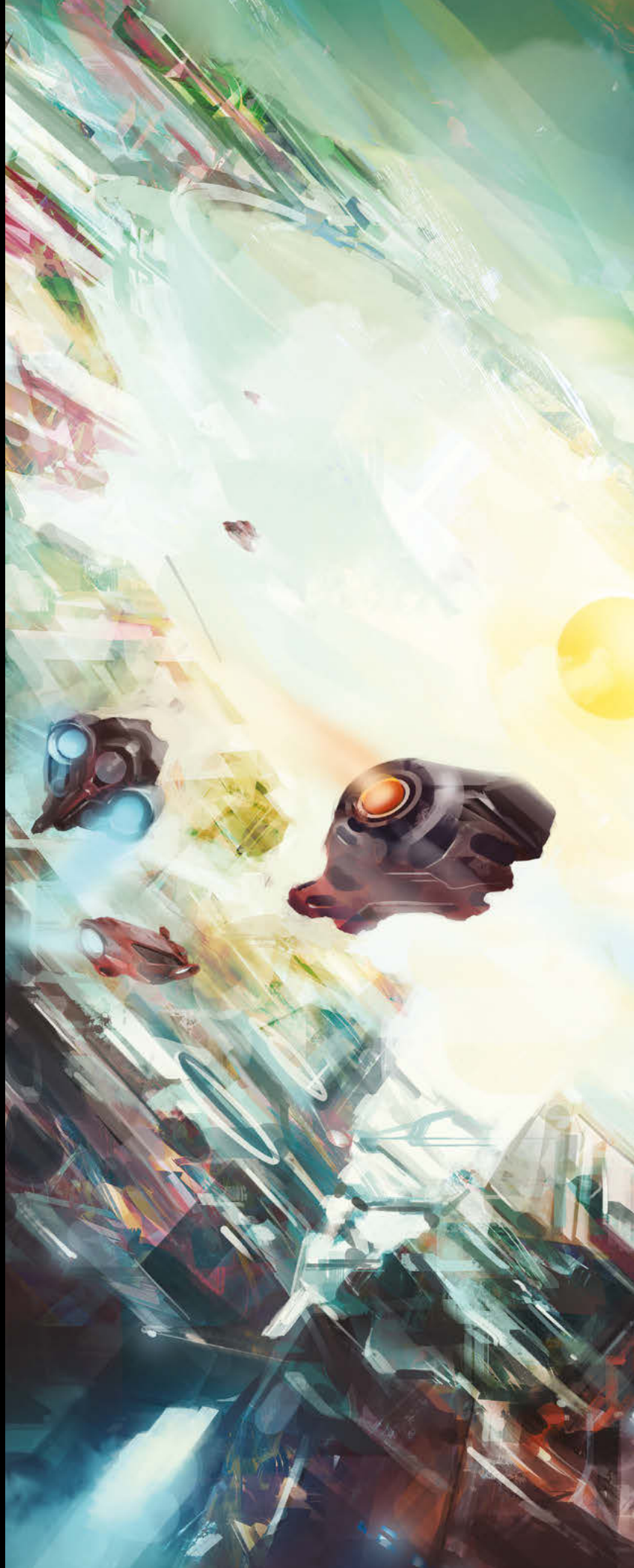
Lui Lan would give them money directly, she made more than enough, but the last time she did so her little brother overdosed and died. At least their outskulling wages weren't enough to buy an overdose.

Lui Lan returned her thoughts to her work, and mind commanded the computer and all the workers cortex connected to the lab's network.

Little did she know a group of hackers had profiled her, and discovered her connection to her junkie family. They offered her family money in return for tampering with their cortex connectors to allow the hackers to download the information from their outskulling. What they and other targeted groups in the same container were processing was less than a thousandth of the complete program, but it was enough to allow the hackers to develop a bug capable of corrupting the accelerator's computer. Funnily enough, when the hackers proposed the deal to Lui Lan's family, her father jumped the gun and asked for what he thought was a good price — but it was actually a thousand times less than the hackers were willing to pay. Her family sold Lui Lan out for less than she made in a week.

Six months later the hackers had stolen all of the accelerator's research results, and any edge that a multibillion credit investigation could give Lui Lan's company was lost. When the auditors discovered how it had happened, Lui Lan was fired, fined to her last credit, and her reputation destroyed. She could never work in that field again.

Eventually, she moved back with her family. Whatever she — one of the great minds of her generation — made outskulling herself, she spent on iDrugs to forget who she once was.



THE CORVO SPECIES

"In the Corvosphere, everyone is an independent contractor, rehired every day - until they aren't."

- Amir Kaham, Iz'kal sociologist

The Corvo are an insectoid-looking, industrious species that has managed to establish a prosperous space-dwelling civilisation by sheer economic power. They live and die by the rules of money, technological improvement and free enterprise. They are the most advanced species in the fields of data storage, communication, economy and space travel.

The Corvo are the most widespread and influential species in the known Universe, and their 'Corvosphere' (a rough translation of the name they've given to the whole of Corvo civilisation and culture) is the largest political entity in untamed space, comprising a handful of inhabited worlds, plus several mining colonies, floating citadels and space stations.

We Humans are, of course, well acquainted with the Corvo ever since they colonised our planet three centuries ago; after all, we owe them our own Space Age. The following is only a fragment of the incredibly vast, many-layered and long-established lore about the Corvo, but there are few details that may still surprise scholars belonging to the Human - or even Corvo - species.

NATURE AND BEHAVIOUR

The Corvo are an independent, capable, intelligent, and highly technified sentient species hailing from planet Quanjie in the Eurava sector. Evolved from large arthropods, they are very well adapted to life in space.

Thus named after the corvacius genus they evolved from on their homeworld, the Corvo (species name Corvo Quanjii) may look like bipedal insectoids to us, but actually they share many similarities with Humans, despite being cold-blooded egg-layers.

ANATOMY AND PHYSIOLOGY

Corvo are bipedal sentients with head features that vaguely resemble some arachnid species. Their hairless skins are entirely covered in a soft chitinous shell that protects them from hostile environments – including, to some extent, the dangers of open space. A typical Corvo averages 1.6 metres in height and weighs around 54 kilograms. They have two arms, two legs, round skulls with prominent foreheads, and a long, whip-like tail. They are not strong physically, but their jaws, fitted with sharp bony ridges, can easily chew most organic material.

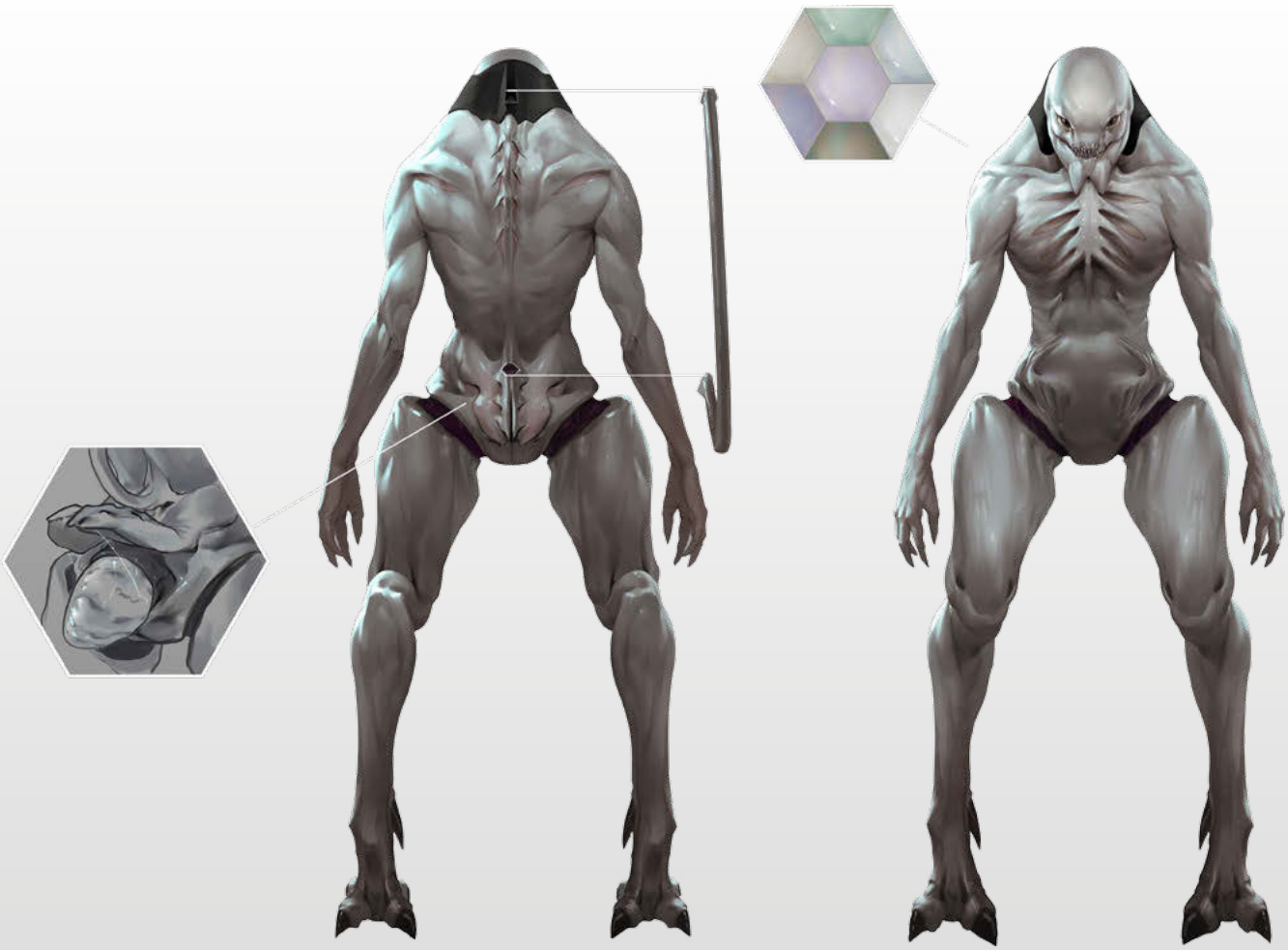
Male and female Corvo have very few physical differences other than their reproductive organs. Females are as big and strong and males, but they have wider hips and abdomens. Also, males tend to be darker-coloured. Other than that, it's very hard for non-Corvo to distinguish between their genders.

After millennia of evolution, the Corvo have adapted for mobility and survival in space; they are quite at home in zero-g environments and have little problem holding their breath even in the void - although prolonged exposure can, and will, kill them like everybody else.

The metabolism of the Corvo is incredibly slow yet efficient, which helps them make much better use of the air they breathe and the food they consume; a Corvo can easily adapt to several types of atmosphere and can eat almost any organic food. By the same token, a few minutes of sleep are enough for a Corvo to function at peak efficiency for several hours – although they prefer to sleep in eight-hour periods if at all possible.

This adaptability has greatly helped the Corvo to better colonise a variety of different planets, regardless of their composition, seasons or rotation cycle. Their cost-effective metabolism was the main reason they became the dominant lifeform in their home planet, and later of the known Universe. As the famed xenobiologist Hohn Rhea put it, 'slow eating and slow breathing were their fast track to greatness.'

On the downside, the Corvo's physical evolution has been somewhat stunted due to their very adaptability, which required no physical strength or endurance for them to survive. As a result, most Corvo are relatively frail when compared to more primitive creatures (such as Humans).



LIFE CYCLE

The Corvo reproduce sexually. Three weeks after being fertilised, the female Corvo lays one or two (rarely three) eggs, which hatch after 3 months of being cared for by both parents.

Thanks to their extraordinary metabolism, the natural life expectancy of Corvo is very high, at around 110-120 Earth years on average.

THE CORVO OUTLOOK

A typical Corvo individual would seem amoral and uncaring to most other sentients. The Corvo don't typically express their feelings and don't understand when a member of another species does. For the Corvo, emotional displays are weird and unsettling at worst, and a useless eccentricity at best.

They are also pragmatic to a fault; most Corvo waste no time in moral quandaries, as their culture gives no inherent value to kindness, good will or cooperation. As a result, very few Corvo understand empathy or caring about others' needs, and most actually become uncomfortable with the idea of helping others or asking for help. The Corvo culture doesn't encourage heroism or sacrifice, and many Corvo are offended or frightened at such ideas.

The Corvo are accustomed to seeking only personal gain, which to them is in no way wrong or unnatural. Sometimes the concept of personal success extends to a Corvo's close relatives and acquaintances, as a successful family or team is the best extension of individual achievement. Thus Corvo understand the uses of teamwork towards personal gain, but they place no intrinsic worth in aiding others, or even such ideas as a tied score.

This is, of course, the stereotype, and the Corvo have the same capacity for individual variation as most other sentient species; some Corvo are more emotional than others, some understand and praise such useless values as heroic sacrifice, and some are prejudiced, bigoted or fanatically devout. The above describes only the typical member of the Corvo species as seen by outsiders.

CORVO STATUS AND LIFE EXPECTANCY

Although the average Corvo can live to just above 100 Earth years, economic inequality has caused a variation – the poorest Corvo have a far lower life expectancy (roughly 60 years) due to malnutrition, illnesses, stress, and the harsh conditions of daily life in space. On the other hand, the richest and most fortunate Corvo have access to state of the art biotechnology and artificial organs that can extend their lifespan to around 200 years. Some of the most eccentric billionaires have even given up their physical bodies and had their brains and nervous systems installed into machines. It is currently unknown how effective this treatment is, as the oldest known Corvo who has undergone such a procedure is only 230 years old. Still, the technology is young and the possibilities are endless. The Corvo may very well be the first known species to reach immortality. Only time will tell.

Ying

Ying was wise. He knew this, regardless of what others told him or how they laughed when he didn't seem to know the obvious. He knew he didn't have an education or a well-positioned family. In his job, he was the street kid that somehow made it — that made him proud. He let others talk about his strange mannerisms, his uncouth behaviour, and his lack of understanding of celebrity culture. When he was born, he was meant to die at the bottom of a 0-G space freighter, and now he was working as a specialist collecting space debris.

His friends in the slums called him the trash collector, which he kind of was. His job cleared the path for spaceships to travel around Tiantang. Collecting debris in the middle of space was not for the faint of heart and only a few had the skills needed to operate the equipment.

He breathed in the last oxygen remaining in his O24U machine, some stupid thing he bought when it was on sale last week. It was built so that you couldn't recharge

the oxygen with anything but a special tank sold by "Living Solutions". What a rip off. There were much better options when buying good clean O2 for indoors, but none of that mattered now. Ying was leaving Tiantang for good and he would not need such things anymore.

He had done well for himself and today he was about to do a lot better. He pushed himself upwards and exited his aluminium house through a hole on the roof - or the floor (in the old 0-G space-freighter it didn't really matter). His house was at the top (or the bottom) of a column of houses as tall as the ship. He couldn't think of a thing there that he would miss.

Thousands of Corvo floated in all directions. They used handrails to push themselves in whatever direction they needed to go, or launched themselves by kicking some wall that could barely withstand their weight. They had lived like that for as long as they could remember. For most, gravity was an unknown feeling. Ying still hated it.

He kicked the wall behind him and entered the vegetable market like a rocket. His timing was perfect, passing between two elder men that were yelling at each other about some fake meat. Without needing to readjust his trajectory, Ying grabbed a bag of vegetable pills without anyone realising.

When Ying moved in 0-G he felt like he could fly. Everything was so natural to him that he did not even realise when he used walls to propel or redirect himself. His movement was graceful and fluid. And he was like a ghost. He had to be, as the slums were not the safest place to live in.

It was a long bullet train commute to the docks. He had to cross four spacecrafts to reach the docks of his district, where he had to show his ID, which allowed him to get into the morning ship to the Commuters Spacecraft. The CS was a honeycomb-shaped station, where thousands of shuttles arrived and went in a somehow organised chaos that connected dozens of districts. Ying got out of the ship and jumped into an elevator that took him to a new waiting area at 100 kilometres per hour. Here he had to pass another ID check that allowed him into a corridor with dozens of entrances on each side. He pushed himself to float a couple hundred meters in a straight line towards entrance A291 without the need of redirecting himself at all.

There he stared at the clock, which told him the ship would be there shortly, but he was really looking at the teaser of a new space opera to be released in a couple of weeks about a spaceship that got lost in the Labyrinth after being chased by some envious Iz'kal for some unclear reason. This was being fed directly into his cortex through his implanted computer, and he was choosing to see it in its VR format; he was completely surrounded by images, and the sounds, smells, and touch sensations made him feel as if he was one of the crew members. He gave the thought command of turning it off. He was bored to death with bloody space operas and stupid problems in the Labyrinth. With only wishing it, he tuned in to the nature channel and chose to see - for the thousandth time - the documentary about Karriam.

The VR took him there instantly; he could feel the humidity and hear the sound of the jungle, a place of blue trees so beautiful and fresh that it was almost unreal. He could also hear the calling of some animal that sounded like...

...the sound of the transport ship arriving.

Ying turned off the VR and he was back in the corridor, holding himself with his feet to the security bar. The whole place was now full of other Corvo that pushed through each other to try to get onto the transport ship. Ying didn't move and contemplated the chaos of those floating bodies; some rightside up, some upside down, and others sideways - all yelling and swearing. He felt above that. Soon he would be in Karriam. Soon he would have so much space around him that he would probably need one of those neural treatments for agoraphobia that he kept seeing in the commercials on the "Move to a Colony" website.

He got in last, with all the eyes on him as he delayed the door. He moved slowly and deliberately, and he enjoyed the hatred in the atmosphere.

Maybe he didn't know who was the new hit in hologram pop music or who was trending in eSports. But he somehow knew that none of that really mattered. It wasn't making any of his friends happy, and it definitely never made him happy. But Karriam was the real deal — a paradise.

"A New Opportunity," "The New World," "Fly today with Space Made Straight," Ying reviewed his feed. The images were haunting and out of this world, something that Ying — who lived inside a metal frame — could barely understand.

He felt the ship dock and turned off his VR feed. He saw the rest of the commuters coming back from their own VRs to reality and blinking to adapt themselves to the light.

They began to float out. They were in the Space Made Straight headquarters. From here, a dozen ships launched to cross the Universe to new worlds everyday. From here, his ship to Karriam was leaving today.

Soon everyone had left except for him. He noticed the amazing size of the building, the neon screen with images of dozen of worlds, and the ships that could take him to them. Here, thousands of people went about their business in all directions. It looked like the bee's nest in the documentary about Karriam.

Ying did not move.

Finally, as he looked down at his feet, the transport ship closed its doors and took him back to the Commuters ship.

SOCIETY

"The economy of the Corvosphere is run by people competing against each other to the death. Imagine a government in which each minister is trying to overthrow the other ministries by reducing their worth, creating bad press about them, and so on. Yeah, that sounds like a good system to run a country by. What could go wrong?"

- Klara Klaus, lieutenant of the Human Front

The Corvo are competitive, enterprising and innovative. They have one of the oldest and most advanced civilisations in the known Universe, and they achieved it by looking out for number one. From our Human point of view, their society seems painfully familiar as a culture of rivalry, struggle and ruthless advancement without concern for the community - however, if you asked a Corvo, they would tell you they simply repeat nature's pattern. Evolution is ruthless and competitive, and no organism that ever survived in the Universe did so by letting itself be killed. Thus, for the Corvo it is completely natural to hold values that would look selfish even to the average Human - those values are what pushed the Corvo to achieve the greatest expansion, prosperity and technological advancement in civilised space.

THE CORTEX CONNECTOR

While other societies base their information on advanced computing systems, the Corvo rely on cortex connectors. Cortex connectors, or CCs, are nanotech, bio-electronic devices, attached to a sentient being's brain, that allow the wearer's brain to function as a computer processor.

Corvo society is based around their cortex connectors, which are the window into the digital world and all its applications - social media, work, entertainment, experience drugs, interactive porn, online dating, gambling, lifemods, virtual vacations, etc. In the Corvosphere, particularly inside Tiantang, not having a CC nearly amounts to not existing; the average Corvo finds it unthinkable to lack a CC. A Corvo without a CC is all but unemployable, even at the simplest jobs.

The usage of CCs has rendered traditional displays such as computer screens and holograms obsolete, as all the sensory information can be sent directly to the brain. Thus, while some Corvo cities may look neat and peaceful to visitors without a cortex connector, those wearing one will be constantly assaulted by thousands of advertisements that flood every sense.

CORTEX CONNECTED PROCESSING OR "SKULLING"

Even with the AI-restriction laws, the truth is that most labour in the Corvosphere has been replaced by machines. Furthermore, the Corvo population is so high that even the Megacorps do not have the resources to employ them all directly. Only about 37% of the Corvosphere's population are employed in the traditional sense; the remaining 63% survive by what has come to be known as "skulling"; that is, lending their brain's processing power to second parties.

Most complex computations are performed by Corvo brains connected via CC to a corporation's computer system. Corvo under this process are informally called skullers, and spend the entirety of their work hours in stasis, lying in a tank under induced sleep while their brains power their bosses' data systems, directed by hardware stimuli. There are several reasons why skulling is so prevalent in the Corvosphere; chip technology in the Corvosphere is not very advanced - as compared to Iz'Kal tech, for example -, machines are still far from being as capable as the Corvo's highly evolved brains, and the Megacorps needed to give some use to their unemployed population or risk revolts - or worse, a State Welfare system.

Other species can't understand why someone would go to such extremes as skulling only to obtain a CC or a paying job - but precisely a CC and a job are the two things for which most Corvo live.

LANGUAGE

Corvo speech is a chittering, muffled sound. As the Corvo lack vocal cords, they don't form words as Humans do; their speech structure is based on pitch and frequency modulations of their natural chirps and screeches, and is unpronounceable to non-Corvo.

There are about a dozen different extant Corvo tongues, but by far the most widespread is the Jiantianese Trade Language, which is the standard speech across the Corvosphere, the official language of all three Megacorps, and the only Corvo language most non-Corvo understand. In fact, only scholars and social engineers call it 'Trade Language'; everybody else calls it simply 'the Corvo Tongue' or just 'Corvo'.

Before evolving into a full-blown language, the Corvo Trade Language was meant as a support communication method to help manage complex commercial transactions, and as such it is rife with financial and numerical terms. More recently it has become heavily influenced by

the Corvo's mass-media culture, and many shorthands and slang terms have become accepted words. This forces the Corvo to keep updating their automatic translation software almost weekly, and makes the Corvo Tongue seem shallow and informal to members of other species.

Back at Quanjie, the Corvo used to have thousands of different languages, but the Space Age changed that. Although their ethnic groups are still varied and mostly intact, the advent of space exploration gave prominence to the Jiantian Republic, the most developed Corvo culture, both financially and technologically. Before the Corvo launched their first spaceships, many Quanjie nations and ethnicities had already adopted Jiantianese culture at least partially, and it was only natural for the Corvo Interplanetary Federation to keep the Jiantianese language with its word structures and naming customs, which helped shape the current Corvo culture.

SOCIAL INTERACTION

Corvo are sober and unempathetic by Human standards. They do not show their feelings openly; their only means to show respect or love are personal praise or material gifts, rather than spoken or physical affection. Most of their interaction with others is some form of competition.

As a result, most Corvo have a hard time asking for help, as they know that they should be able to achieve anything by themselves. However, their consumerist society keeps them longing for new material things; this makes money-lending a common activity among Corvo, although they remain very coy and discreet about asking for a loan - the Corvo tongue has more than a hundred informal euphemisms for 'borrowing money'.

The concept of friendship as Humans understand it is unknown in the Corvo culture; the only related word in their language is hé, which roughly translates as 'partnership'. This means that two Corvo will only become emotionally attached when they are working together on a common project or enterprise, be it business, a game, marriage or family. Corvo lovers are hé as they have a mutual agreement to give each other pleasure; teen Corvo gang members hanging out near a mall are each other's hé as long as they stand for the gang, and so on. In no event or situation is friendship or love given any actual value by itself.

GENDER

Corvo culture sees males and females as equal, and doesn't ascribe them predefined roles. However, males and females traditionally dress differently, which is the only way the untrained eye can distinguish between Corvo genders - and of course hasn't hurt their fashion industry.

The Corvo are at the same time monogamous and promiscuous. They marry and share their lives with a single partner, but they traditionally practice out-of-marriage sex as a means for additional prestige and empowerment. Sex is seen as a token of success for both genders - something to keep score and brag about, among acquaintances or even between two married Corvo. It is not uncommon for Corvo spouses to be aware and proud of the love achievements of their partners. Same-sex relationships are common, and they are not treated any differently. Polyamory is less common, but neither rare nor frowned upon.

Corvo marriages are relatively free affairs, more a kind of trade pact between individuals or families than anything else. It is commonly accepted that both partners must contribute material 'gifts' - usually a sizeable monetary investment from each spouse and/ or their respective families - that vary according to the couple's social background and resources. Other than that, there is no spiritual ceremony or significance attached to the act of marrying, although weddings tend to be as grandiose and sumptuous as the involved families can afford.

FAMILY

Corvo find a lot of pride in family, and both spouses will raise their children together.

A Corvo family often revolves around their family business, and it is common for children to work for and eventually join this business. New generations are judged by how effectively they are able to manage and benefit their family trade. While the Corvo are a self-made people, they have no problem riding the wave of their families' success for as long as their contribution enhances it.

Corvo couples have many offspring (averaging 3.4 children per couple), which means that the population nearly doubles every generation. Governments have tried to establish some control over natality, but the Corvo do not allow their personal freedoms to be compromised.

The Corvo urgency for expansion is both cause and consequence of this population boom; those that cannot afford to move to a new colony must survive, impoverished, at the fringes of Corvo society. Those that prove deserving move on, and start their own families in new places and new lives.

EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Corvo have no separate school or education centres. When a child is old enough to learn or practice a trade, he is eligible for employment at a coaching centre, where Corvo children acquire the basic skills needed for several jobs while they perform minor tasks.

Coaching centres are flashy, fun and colourful places, custom-built for kids and full of entertainment applications and media; but they are still workplaces, and Corvo children are fully paid for their time working at them.

Many Corvo children handle their own money, although sometimes it is their parents who do so - in the latter case, the money is still for the child to spend as he sees fit, but the parents receive a small percentage for 'management services' rendered. It is common to see very young Corvo children working at menial jobs, assistant chores or internships all across the Corvosphere; this is not frowned upon by Corvo society as a rule, and the children themselves are treated in accordance to their age and the responsibility given to them, which depends on the job they are performing or training for.

As children grow, they are promoted by being given more complex and important jobs according to their skills, drive and maturity, and most have made the leap from coaching centre to corporation by the time they become teenagers.

Sadly, there are not enough coaching centres for the number of children in the Corvosphere, and many kids skip this stage of education, either because the local centres had no place for them or because their area had no coaching centre at all. Such kids may learn the needed skills later on their adult jobs, but they are much less likely to be hired.

Corvo adults that couldn't attend or underperformed at coaching centres as children have only two choices - to remain unemployed or become 'skullers', donating their brain power to the megacorps for a relatively low wage.

SOCIAL CLASS

"Only a small percentage of the population can be CEOs, famous people, or leaders. They are inherently limited in their membership, yet we have a society based on the desire to become one of them. How healthy can it be to live in a society where most dreams are doomed to fail?"

- Lee Yin, Corvo philosopher and supporter of the Iz'kal State

To say that there's a social class gap in Corvo society, even a wide one, is an understatement. It would be more accurate to state that class differences are the basis of Corvo society.

While some Corvo pursue opulent lifestyles, there is a great majority that live very precariously. The poorest Corvo live in derelict 0-G environments or in lunar habitats, while others are richer than the districts or colonies they live in. However, no one stops the poor from becoming wealthy and powerful if they work for it. Many of the poorest Corvo are forced to move away from their homes to try and make a living, leaving behind families and friends, but this necessity always holds the promise of success. It is not easy, but the Corvo are naturally built to overcome hardship.

Thus the poor yearn, strive, struggle and fight each other to become rich, which keeps the workforce active and motivated, while the rich and powerful keep the industry in perpetual expansion. Of course, it also bolsters inequality and corruption, but let us remember - the Corvo do not see these as setbacks. Dishonesty is seen as a mark of virtue and intelligence among Corvo, while inequality is an inspiration to improve for rich and poor alike. There's of course the fact that life is hard for the millions of underprivileged Corvo (and alien immigrants to the Corvosphere), but they gladly pay that price in exchange for the opportunity that one day they'll earn a better lifestyle. While most of the middle class are in huge debt, they remain optimistic due to the ever-growing Corvo economy.

While the Corvo do not display racial prejudice from one ethnic group to another - all Corvo ethnic groups display roughly the same proportion of wealth and poverty - there is some class bigotry from the rich towards the poor, which are generally regarded as inferior - until they stop being poor, of course, at which point they become success stories and go from 'lazy' and 'useless' to 'enterprising' and 'self-made'.

So, while most Corvo endure a life of hardship, those that make the effort and prove themselves worthy become owners of more land than they can dream; some even own entire planets, having riches beyond what they can spend in their lifespans - even considering that the richest Corvo can live up to 200 years or more. There is no limit to what one can achieve in the Corvosphere.

ECONOMY

"The Corvo pride themselves on the competitivity of their society. They claim it forces companies to improve and offer best services or prices, or else they will be taken out by the competition's better options. For a consumer based society, it sounds pretty reasonable - disregarding the personal and ecological factors affected by it - but the theory does not survive real-life testing as well the Corvo would like. The main reason is that it's just not efficient to compete in certain services.

It does not make sense for several Corvo train companies - e.g. the X-Railways Company and the SmoothTrain Company - to develop and maintain a train line service each to the same town of a few thousand inhabitants; or for the Caretakers, the DPP, and the local police

company, to provide simultaneously policing services to the same neighbourhood, each to different houses within it (even different flats in the same block!). This similarly applies for internet, energy, and other services. For this reason, localised monopolies are bound to appear (see appendix A22 for a list of such monopolies in the Corvosphere), which hits the hardest on the weakest communities, as other companies have no reason to waste resources trying to develop an alternative to the current monopoly. Such ongoing monopolies stunt the development of the affected communities."

- Excerpt from Moore's diary; a treatise commissioned by the Iz'Kal xenology department.

Despite the billions of Corvosphere citizens currently living in poverty, the Corvo enjoy the most powerful and far-reaching economy in known space. The Corvo economic system (digital credits) is an easy, relatively species-neutral and practical method for pricing goods, services, and working wages, so most of the sentients that come in contact with the Corvo end up using their credits as well. This of course doesn't include the isolationist Iz'kal State, but the Raag and Humans have adopted the Corvo monetary system at least partially. This includes especially immigrants living in the Corvosphere or under its jurisdiction, but also some free-ranging mercenaries and settlers from the savage frontier.

In the Corvosphere, it is up to each citizen to find their livelihood. A Corvo from a poor slum may become the owner of a solar system while one of his neighbours, given the exact same opportunities, suffocates after not being able to pay for enough oxygen. As private property is the most important value for Corvo, whatever a Corvosphere citizen can buy is his and he has the right to defend it as he sees fit within legal boundaries. Everyone has a price in the Corvosphere, but you get to decide your own worth.

ECONOMIC SYSTEM

"Free market is based on the flawed idea that it is free."

- Lee Yin, Corvo philosopher and supporter of the Iz'kal State

While government systems, laws, and individual wealth vary wildly across the Corvosphere, all its citizens and institutions agree on one thing: their love for the free market economy.

Corvo economy sustains itself on the ability of citizens to create, and succeed at, their own businesses. Taxes on new enterprises are surprisingly low - the lowest in the recorded history of any species in any era -, creating fertile ground for any Corvo to compete fairly against any other business. This keeps the money flowing and the Corvo industry in expansion. The most lenient colonies - among them Tiantang - even allow taxation to be voluntary.

When mandatory, taxes are indeed extremely low and only used to pay for the most basic services from the government. Most other amenities are in the hands of private companies, which provide their services citizen-to-citizen, free from interference by the state.

The government suffers very little from the low taxes; as most services are only available to those that can afford them, taxation is simply a form of insurance policy - those that do not pay are not assisted in security and justice affairs, and that's it. Plus, the Megacorps oversee and routinely - and immediately - annex every successful new enterprise, which adds a few working-class Corvo to the ranks of the rich and powerful, and helps the Megacorps - that is, the Government - in the long run.

The end result is that the Corvosphere keeps on expanding at an incredible rate. Of course it all happens at the expense of the immense majority of Corvo that do not succeed, but even they are content with this system, as it allows any one of them to maybe, one day, by their own efforts, become a successful businessperson too.

CREDITS

The Corvo economy works by an electronic currency system. These digital 'coins', or credit points - 'credits' for short - are the basic unit to measure the worth of everything in the Corvosphere. All trade goods, services, wages and labour are valued, bought and sold in credits.

Credits appeared as soon as the Corvo started colonising space and had to decide on a single currency system, which didn't favor the economy of a Corvo nation over another, and remained efficient, adaptable and easy to use. It also needed to be digital, so as to maintain trade flowing smoothly between interplanetary colonies. The answer was electronic credit.

A single credit was originally meant to equal the minimum wage a standard hour of Corvo labour could be worth - thus, menial tasks that require little to no skill are worth 1 credit per hour.

This, however, varies wildly from system to system, as fluctuating economic conditions and available resources change what credits are worth, what bosses can afford to pay, how high the cost of living is, and even how long an hour lasts. As a result, what people actually get for their credits depends heavily on where they are. A 100-credit daily wage may be a fortune in some border mining outpost, but it's a miserable amount in the more crowded, expensive and competitive habitats of Tiantang.

Currently, credits are the standard currency in most of the known universe - not only within the Corvosphere, but also in most settled worlds outside it, as Humans and Raag have all but adopted the credits system for being easy, practical and universal. Not to mention that adopting Corvo currency allows them to trade with the most powerful economy in space, which is always a good idea. Of course, barter remains a vital tool in interspecies trade, especially outside the Corvosphere - but credits are slowly becoming the unit to measure even what barter goods are worth. Consequently, almost all prices and rates in known space are given and measured in Corvo credits.

ALTERNATIVE CURRENCIES

Several colonies and settlements in the Corvosphere are beginning to develop their local currencies (shortened to LoCs). These currencies are also electronic, but are issued and accepted exclusively in their respective jurisdictions. The entities using LoCs accept and trade Tiantang credits, but manipulate exchange rates so as to favour their own currency and protect themselves from inflation.

The Megacorps are not happy at all with LoCs, and have levied their own taxes against them in all import-export exchanges between Tiantang and the colonies. They have even debated on making LoCs completely illegal across the Corvosphere, but the EEP prevents them from interfering with local economy. This could well be the first time the Megacorps find they don't have the leverage to enforce a law, and it could have further, unforeseen consequences on Corvo politics and economy, which experts are still debating today. Only time will tell.

COUNTERFEIT CREDITS

Counterfeit Credits, or 'cocs' for short, are a form of illegal currency that has appeared all across the Heijian, the Corvo underworld scene, in Tiantang and several far-off colonies of the Corvosphere. Provided by very skilled hackers, they are almost indistinguishable from the real thing, and are used not only to fool law-abiding Corvo citizens, but also as standard legal currency across several outcast or seditious communities.

The emission and use of Cocs is considered a dai (heinous) crime, punishable by exile or death; so those that use them are either criminals, clueless victims, or radical outsiders to standard Corvo society.

RELIGIOUS USE

There's an increasing belief in the Corvosphere that credit is the truest embodiment of Kaliva, and that its worship is the straightest path towards true devotion. This is backed up by research data that shows an increased number of Kaliva Soulbenders since the adoption of a full blown market society.

THE SECRET COIN

The Secret Coin is a clandestine organization dedicated to promoting civil resistance against the Megacorps through the use of alternative markets. In practice, it's a network that lets other Corvo distribute and sell their own products through underground channels, using the Secret Coin's invented currency, which is actually nonexistent. Products sold and bought through the secret coin have an assigned value in Secret Coins (SCs), and members of the network are given a Secret Wallet that records how many Secret Coins they have - but all members of the network know the Secret Coin is imaginary and pledge to accept it as payment in every transaction with each other.

Any Corvo can become a member of the Secret Coin, simply by being invited to join the network. Membership has only two rules: 1) you have to treat the Secret Coin as real currency in all transactions, and 2) you have to sell something for Secret Coins before buying anything in the network. Anyone that breaks these rules or reveals the existence of the Secret Coin is immediately banned from joining the organisation ever again.

By giving anyone access to a potentially unlimited amount of money, the Secret Coin hope to create a disruptive community that eventually grows large enough to challenge the Megacorps. Currently there are only a couple million members, but the organisation keeps growing. It has managed to maintain a low profile, save for some rumours and reports by disgruntled ex-members that the law still doesn't take any seriously.

A real danger of the Secret Coin is that criminals can, and do, use it to get in touch with each other, and move illegal goods through its underground network. The Secret Coin doesn't much care about this, as they don't respect Corvo law anymore than the Megacorps, plus "any destabilisation agent is welcome". But recently, the organisation's leaders have become increasingly worried about reports of sex slave trade within the Secret Coin; there's some talk about purging measures - which some members oppose on the grounds that limiting membership or transactions stands directly against what the Secret Coin is about.

The origin and headquarters of the Secret Coin are unknown even to its members, but it was founded by a cell of young anarchist businessmen from the New Quan colony, looking to challenge the economic conditions imposed by the Megacorps, and ultimately overthrow Corvo economy.

THE MEGACORPS

"Corvo economy is based on the ridiculous notion that capital owners want to play ball using the same rules as the small entrepreneur. They don't want an equal playing field - that is just the ideology they sell the middle class to support their system. Even if a libertarian state was to appear spontaneously, it would not take long for differences in economic means to surface, and the top capitalist would soon push for a patronage system as a tool to fight competition; so we would have a minimum government for sure, but chosen only for, and by, the top players."

- Zhen Engfui, Corvo writer and Quingga philosopher

Small governments are incapable of achieving great things; therefore, the conquest of the stars was left in the hands of private interests.

By the time the Corvo launched their first spaceship, corporations all but ruled their planet - plus, no single Quanjie government had the resources to finance massive space exploration. So, when they stopped pretending and simply left the space-age Corvo government in the hands of corporate interest, it was a quick, seamless transition that surprised nobody.

Even with the great capitals in charge of space expeditions, the largest ventures required such amounts of wealth and resources that small companies chose to merge into larger companies, which in turn allied and grew into massive corporate holdings. Not wanting to be left behind, all lesser businesses sought an alliance with, or became absorbed by, these super-corporations. The resulting economic giants then joined in a common cause to achieve even greater things, such as opening wormholes or mining entire solar systems; thus the mega-corporations (or megacorps) were born.

This is not to say a merged company disappears into the Megacorp it joins. Most smaller companies see a merger as nothing more than an alliance for mutual, and sometimes temporary, benefit; and they retain their identity and a degree of independence, to the point that it's not uncommon for a company to secede from its Megacorp to join another. Also, the lesser companies that form the Megacorps are known for their endless struggles and squabbles; competition, backstabbing and shifting loyalties are often more common within a Megacorp than between different Megacorps. Let us keep in mind that corporate ruthlessness is seen as a virtue in Corvo society, and their corporate executives are the best of the best.

One way or another, most businesses and companies in the Corvosphere work for one of the three Megacorps. Every medium-to-large company in every Corvo colony belongs, to one degree or another, to one of the megacorps, even if they are not aware of it.

The bigger the megacorp, the more powerful the owners of all the companies that fall under its umbrella. Megacorps are owned by so many businessmen from so many industries that they operate as de facto countries, or even entire planets, with their own ruling bodies and economic and military interests.

Business competition in the Corvosphere is relentless and uncompromising. While there are millions of companies and owners, most of them are part of one of the three existing mega corporations, which gives them the power to fight off competitors; those that resist assimilation end up bought out by bigger fish.

It bears noting that, as there are so many companies and trademarks operating under a single Megacorp, most of these companies are so far down the command ladder that they lie almost outside the Megacorp's central control. This allows for various different policies in issues such as prices, working conditions or quality standards, within a single Megacorp. Thus, when there's a complaint against the standards, policies or terms of a lower-level company, its parent corp (or corps), and of course the Megacorp itself, can claim ignorance and deny any responsibility.

As they grew by assimilating other businesses, the Megacorps defined themselves by the industries they monopolised.

There are currently three Megacorps in the Corvosphere, each of them having the monopoly of one of the three major industry sectors of their civilisation:

Nation's Solution, or NS, owns the Corvo medical industry, which includes hospitals, foods and pharmaceuticals, and also most scientific - biomedical, biogenetic and chemistry - research labs.

Wang Corp owns the cybernetic and digital industry, including computers, media, information and advertising, but also cybernetic labs, gadgets, engineering, tools and industrial design,

The Union owns the weapons and manpower market, branching into construction, vehicles, military designs and every mercenary and worker management company.

Between the three of them, the main areas of public service - or more accurately, ranges of services to the public - are covered: healthcare, education, housing, and information are private business that try to reach the greatest number of citizens, if only for the profits it entails.

WHAT ARE THE MEGACORPS?

The Three Megacorps are the joint governing body of the Corvosphere, and their main shareholders are the de facto rulers of Corvo civilisation.

Every megacorp runs its business at two different levels. First, there's the official branches - the hundreds of thousands of companies openly acknowledged as part the megacorp, as which they enjoy official, institutionalised protection and financial assistance. On the other hand are the submerged branches - a vast collection of businesses that include everything from lesser factories and research centers to shell firms and criminal organisations. While these companies are controlled by a Megacorp, they are not under its direct protection, mostly to avoid any legal repercussions should their not-so-ethical activities be made public, but also because the company's revenue is not (or not yet) high enough to justify a higher involvement by the Megacorp.

Most Corvo can't identify Megacorp owners by name or image. Some of their identities are unknown even to their peers, as they will only show to meetings as holographic projections. Some are believed to have found a way to dump their consciousness into the net, becoming digital beings that have transcended mortality. Under the direct command of these silent leaders are the visible executive officers of the megacorps; rich, powerful and notable. Contrary to their bosses, these public CEOs are well known and admired by most of Corvo society.

While all three megacorps have diverse branches and attempt to cover every potential source of profit, they each specialise in one or two main areas.

Each megacorp monopolises several fields of business, while relying on the other megacorps to provide them with whatever it is that they can't produce themselves. This creates a dependency between the megacorps that has kept a delicate balance of power and prevented any of them from growing too much, while also allowing each of them to focus their research and investments on only a select few areas instead of trying to compete with the others over control of the entire market. This ensures a faster and more efficient growth and development for each megacorp.

THE ROLE OF MEGACORPS

"It is neither a dictatorship nor a partnership. Employees are coerced, by the need for money, to submit to this covert slavery. Given the unemployment due to automation and overpopulation, the megacorps can set the rules of the game as they see fit and those that do not play ball simply don't get jobs. Without jobs there is no money and without money there is no living. The Corvo are never forced to do anything, yet they are given few choices, none of them of their own making. Crime seems to be a common way out for many."

- Amir Kaham, Iz'kal sociologist

Megacorps all but rule the Corvosphere, but their role as a governing body is barely acknowledged. Officially, there is NO Corvo state as we outsiders understand it; the current Corvo society has no concept of any purely political entity, and no living Corvo remembers a time where their culture was not ruled by corporate leaders.

Such is the key to understanding the Megacorps: They are not a "real" government - the Corvosphere has no such government - it is simply that the Corvo have built their civilisation around the structure of the Megacorps.

All Corvo politics come from the power struggles and business opportunities within and between the Megacorps, and all Corvo culture comes from the Megacorps' products and marketing campaigns. In short, the Megacorps are Corvo society itself.

Space exploration, technological breakthroughs, artistic pursuits, social welfare and even military actions all happen because it's convenient for the Megacorps - and as the Megacorps expand and prosper, so does the Corvo civilisation. The Corvo have needed no other kind of government for millennia, and they wouldn't have it any other way.

Of course the Megacorps dictate policies and rules, just as a company's shareholders do. They dole out rewards and punishment in the same fashion. The central "government" at Tiantang is the Corporations' HQ, while the Corvo settlements and colonies are branches, franchises and subsidiaries with their own rules, relatively independent.

Other than that, the Corvo are essentially a free people. Belonging to a company and submitting to its laws is voluntary, and everyone has the life they can afford.

This, of course, doesn't protect the Corvo people from the Megacorps in any way. There is no Corvo rights charter to speak of; if a Corvo citizen is mistreated or harmed by the authorities, he is free to quit his job at any moment. It goes without saying that an overwhelming majority of Corvo prefer to endure a certain level of abuse rather than lose their jobs; therefore, just as the Corvo people are free to leave their jobs at any moment, so the Megacorps are free to abuse their employees. While there are no records of systematic mistreatment, and when it happens it's more or less frowned upon, it's not uncommon to hear of malpractice, exploitation, overworking, illegal experimentation and

other abuses by Corvo corporations, which their employees accept willingly and often go unreported - and unpunished.

If anything, the Megacorps function as three separate powers in a state - Nation's Solution handles science, theory, health and lifestyle; The Union oversees most space exploration, mining and the military; Wang Corp handles engineering, technology and communications. Thus they all need each other and they all cooperate, just as they viciously compete in a three-way war for supremacy. And that, too, is the Corvo way.

CORPOCRACY

"Fear those men whose shadow is bigger than themselves."

- Old pre-space age Corvo saying

Corvo are ruled by money, plain and simple. The most rich and powerful Corvo are the leaders of their civilisation, while the less wealthy majority are their employees. This system works because every Corvo has the freedom to become wealthy - and thus a leader - if he can.

The de facto ruling body of the Corvosphere are the three Megacorps, which function less as an executive institution and more as an interplanetary stock exchange. The Megacorps regulate trade, levy fines and distribute bonuses among those who can use them - which happens to include the leaders of every Corvo colony and entity.

The Megacorps don't mess with the laws and regulations of any colony, but have enforced an Economic Equality Pact (EEP) that holds all Corvo entities to the same economic conditions. Other than that, they don't interfere with laws, limiting themselves to buying and selling, creating jobs, expanding industries and supervising the Corvo people.

The resulting government is extremely hands-off, and lets Corvo citizens get away with almost anything as long as it doesn't interfere with their colony's economic stability. The Corvo are very protective of their freedoms, and all attempts to create stronger governments have failed against popular outrage from all social classes.

As regards political identity, there is no patriotism to speak of in the Corvosphere, as the Corvo have replaced their sense of community with corporate interests. At worst, Corvo don't feel part of anything but their family, if they even have one; at best, they are part of a corporation. Rather than identifying as members of a nation or race, the Corvo belong to their job. They are not divided by borders, blood or beliefs, but by corporate rivalry and social class. When giving personal data, a Corvo will always refer to his workplace before his place of birth or residence. However, a corporate identity is not really deep-rooted after all, so it is accurate to say the Corvo do not feel any kind of belonging.

MEGACORP OFFICIAL

Level 1 :: Corvo :: Negotiator
mov. 5 metres :: weight 54 kg :: height 160 cm

2	4	0	3

PHYSICAL STAT	3 (1)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (2)	MENTAL STAT	5 (2)

HIT (DEX)	1	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Rig 2 (LinkWave 100)

He can perform Hacking actions (causing 2 ACS damage).

Persuasive

He gains an advantage when trying to convince other characters.

Rational

He can only be convinced with facts. He is immune to dialectics, and he gains one advantage to determine whether something has been fact checked.

Stocks, shares, markets and stabs in the back. Don't cross these guys, for they are unstoppable forces of greed.

NATION'S SOLUTION

We Are Your Health™

Nation's Solution Megacorp (Shortened to NS or NSM) oversees the Corvo industries of nanotechnology and genetic modification. They also own most private medical services across the Corvosphere. NS has most of the control over all food production chains, medical facilities and bioenhancement centres.

Nation's Solution is always looking to expand their biological understanding, including the uses of new species and biospheres. They are highly interested in the exploration and discovery of new biomes and lifeforms, and are always the most dedicated investors in projects of this type.

As a result, Nation's Solution is often forced to rely on other Megacorps to aid their expeditions - Wang Corp provides software and data tools, while the Union helps them defend their interests in the colonies. However, this puts NS at risk of corporate espionage and even sabotage from both their rivals. NS generally avoids violence, but they will use any method available to keep their shareholders happy.

BUSINESS INTERESTS

Nation's Solution owns all the Corporations that manage health, foods and general well-being in the Corvosphere. Most of its subsidiaries fiercely compete against each other, stealing, boycotting and sabotaging their partners' new medicaments or chemical breakthroughs, but all revenues end up enriching Nation's Solution and making it larger.

WATER INDUSTRY

An often overlooked industry in any civilisation, more so in the complex corporate system of the Corvosphere, is water processing. Most people know who sells and brands their foods, but very few know who controls their drinking water. In the Corvo's case, it's Nation's Solution. It's true that every Corvo colony has its own water extraction technology and installations, but it was NS-owned companies that put it there.

AGRICULTURE

One of NS' less-publicised business markets is the agriculture industry. The general Corvo public does not realise it, but Nation's Solution - through its three competing subsidiaries FoodEA, Spacepackers, and The Little Bug - buys all the land and production from every animal or vegetable farm, ranch or breeding facility in every colony in the Corvosphere. Thus NS controls not only branded, industrial foods, but also every step in the production and processing of edibles. Every meal that finds its way to a Corvo mouth is stamped, packaged and charged for by NS-owned companies.

CHEMICAL

As one of the two scientific branches of Nation's Solution, chemistry and its derived products are all in the Megacorp's hands. This means all beauty product brands, chemical labs and raw material companies are owned by NS - and also that NS is the Corvosphere's main sponsor of natural sciences. Nearly 80% of scientific labs in the known Universe are paid with Nation's Solution money.

FOOD INDUSTRY

NS owns all food processing and packaging companies in the Corvosphere, and all the logos and trademarks of every edible product known by the Corvo people. All the colourful food brands whose names and jingles Corvo children know by heart, from Cor-a-licious™ to Sugar Scales™, from Dagun Drink™ to Fao Fast Foods™, are ultimately owned by NS.

HEALTH CARE

Ironically, the industry most commonly associated with Nation's Solution is also the one where it has the least control. The healthcare business, which handles medical technology, facilities and goods, is heavily contested among all three Megacorps; while NS owns pharma and medical licenses, The Union owns medical vehicles and hospitals, while Wang owns most medical software and technology. However, the other two Megacorps downplay their own involvement in the healthcare industry, allowing NS to keep the credit, as they also depend on NS-owned companies for their own employees' health.

PHARMACEUTICAL

As anyone in the Corvosphere knows, NS' largest and most profitable business comes from medical products. Every pharmaceutical company, from Hao-Gong™ to Bailabs™, is a Nation's Solution subsidiary. It is also one of the fiercest and less ethical business fields in the Corvosphere, as company owners constantly attack and discredit each other, doing anything to make the people depend on their latest drug while fostering mistrust of their rivals' products.

FASHION AND CLOTHING

Another oddity in the list of NS' business interests is the fashion industry. It makes sense after thinking about it - Nation's Solution owns all textile farms and cloth manufacturers, thanks to the companies that oversee the required

chemical processes. This has the added benefit that fashion is the only branch of entertainment that Wang Corp does not own - not for lack of trying, of course, but they have no way to wrest a market that is so utterly controlled by NS-owned brands.

Wang officials tried - and failed - to expand their software designs into smart clothes, digital accessories and other fashionable gadgets intended to steal business from NS, but Nations' Solution monopoly over the fashion industry became unbeatable after the development of aesthetic body modifications, which gave the control of fashion to whoever possessed the best biogenetic labs. Which wasn't Wang Corp.

MA NG

Behind NS' board of directors and its main shareholders stands a very powerful man, perhaps even the richest man in the Corvosphere - which would make him the richest man in the known universe: Ma Ng, head of the Ma family and owner of most of the shares of NS and each of its branched companies.

Ma Ng - nicknamed 'the Mightiest Man' by friends and foes alike - is an old, stern Corvo with an all-business attitude and a rigid, focused mind. He looks extremely old and withered, his features twisted by age into a creepy, almost monstrous visage; nonetheless, he always dresses and behaves with impeccable taste.

To Ma Ng, everything is about business; like all members of his family, he took the reins of Nation's Solution by buying and inheriting shares from his closest relatives, not because he particularly cared about science of health. However, he is a veritable expert in both subjects, having overseen their market, business and trends for his entire life. And he has certainly benefited from them; thanks to special treatments and medical products from his own company, Ma Ng has managed to live to 163 years and counting, and his health shows no signs of failing.

Although Ma Ng is a public figure, very few people know he and his family are the major shareholders of NS. Those who do know are dismissed as conspiracy theorists when they suggest the Ma family actually controls one-third of the Corvo civilisation.

Despite his great power, Ma Ng has an equally great problem - his inheritance. For all his titles, for all his properties across ten galaxies, for the endless resources in genetic science he has access to, the Mightiest Man could never produce an heir of his own blood. His relatives have known this for the better part of a century now, and have lived - and died - waiting for him to pass away so as to divide his properties.

Ma Ng's testament, changed and rewritten at least a dozen times in as many decades, currently benefits his older grand-nephew, Ma Gongzuo. Sadly, after Gongzuo realised he was being geared to succeed his uncle as the most powerful man in the universe, he broke down and became an irresponsible, drug-addicted wastrel, often appearing front and center in all kinds of gossip and embarrassing scandals all over the Corvosphere.

Ma Ng knows his time is near; furthermore, he is exhausted. He wants to give the reins of Nation's Solution to somebody, anybody; but he would give anything - and in his case that means anything - to find a worthy, capable, blood relative other than his greedy cousins and his useless nephew.

DI ENGUN

The CEO of Nation's Solution is the Corvo guolie archetype - a businessman in a drab suit, with a datafile in one hand and a commlink in the other. Plain and unassuming, somewhat shorter than the average Corvo, Engun looks more like an employee or office manager than the leader of the richest corporation in the Universe. He is quite ruthless and commanding when needed, though; very few people in the Universe are more feared than him, and with good reason. It's by his decision that medical advances and food productions are approved, vetoed or suggested all across the Corvosphere; as the saying goes 'the Corvo live or die at the sufferance of the NS CEO', and this little bureaucrat is fully aware of the fact.

Like other Megacorp CEOs, Di Engun is well appraised that some of the corporations he oversees dabble in, or cover up, illegal activities. Since most drug trade and organ trafficking fronts are linked to NS, the Megacorp is perhaps the dirtiest of the three at its lower levels, hiding even illegal experimentation labs. Di Engun has made no move to stop these activities - any revenue is good revenue - but he doesn't take part in any of them, and has been known to severely chastise anyone that does it openly. He once cut all ties with one of the most lucrative companies under NS when its CEO offered him a share of its illegal drug trade earnings, which Di Engun rejected and donated to scientific research before ordering the offending company to immediately disband and be sold for parts.

If the general public learned of the criminal operations allowed by Nation's Solution, such as the Hospital of Hell or the Perfect Soldiers project, the first - and perhaps only - head to fall would be Engun's. Therefore, it's in his best interest to maintain the facade of an impeccable businessman; a well-planned blackmail would be his greatest weakness, and he knows it.

MA NG

Kalivan Prophet :: Proficient

Level 3 :: Corvo :: Negotiator
mov. 5 metres :: weight 45 kg :: height 145 cm

2	6	0	8

PHYSICAL STAT	4 (1)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (1)	MENTAL STAT	9 (3)

HIT (DEX)	1	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Shamayin 2 (LinkWave 50)

He can perform Hacking actions (causing 2 ACS damage). Activated. He gains one advantage OR causes 2 additional ACS damage.

Unreadable Expression

He gains one advantage towards social interactions. Other characters suffer one disadvantage when trying to read his emotions, expression, or intentions.

Shrewd 2

He draws two cards at the beginning of the round. Whenever he or an ally are in a confrontation, they can play any of those cards instead of playing from the top of the deck.

There's old and then there's Ma Ng. There's rich and then there's Ma Ng. The wealthiest being on the universe is lacking a single, simple thing: an heir.

DI ENGUN

Kalivan 2

Level 2 :: Corvo :: Driven
mov. 5 metres :: weight 54 kg :: height 160 cm

3	6	0	8

PHYSICAL STAT	4 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	8 (3)

HIT (DEX)	1	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Engun's Rig 2 (LinkWave 150)

He can perform Hacking actions. Ghost.

Rational

He can only be convinced with facts. He is immune to dialectics, and he gains one advantage to determine whether something has been fact checked.

As far as mottos go, "any revenue is good revenue" is not the most sophisticated, but it's served Nation's Solution and CEO Engun just fine.

WANG CORP

There's Always Wang™

Wang Corporation bases its business on the creation of software and hardware for all electronic devices in the Corvosphere. They hold the rights to X OS, the largest operating system in the known Universe.

Wang Corporation is entirely dedicated to innovation. They recognise the importance of technological advancement and strive to be at the forefront of all development. They heavily invest into mining rare materials, often from gas giants, in order to fuel their research, and they put out thousands of tech patents every month. They continuously grow and invest in great ideas and innovations, in an effort to avoid losing clients to alien competitors. Wang Corporation recognises the importance of cyber security, and they boast the strongest cyber-defence systems in the Corvosphere, so as to ensure that their great ideas remain theirs.

While Wang Corp depends on Nation's Solution for food and health, they are always looking for alternatives; they also depend on The Union for internal security and to extend their business into alien territory. So far they have found some modest success with the Raag, but have failed to enter the uber-protectionist markets of the Iz'kal.

BUSINESS INTERESTS

Wang Corp's business interests are the less diversified of the three Megacorps - it deals only with information, cybernetic and digital technology. However, this specialisation gives Wang control over almost every aspect of Corvo life.

COMPUTERS

Wang's main business is computer technologies. They have several macro-corporations that pretend to compete against each other with new hardware models, but Wang owns all of them. Wang also has the monopoly on X OS, the Corvosphere's universal operating system, which runs every computer and every data system in every home.

CYBERNETICS

As soon as Wang was formed, it made a bid to control all cybernetic labs, workshops and research centres, buying cyber-implants companies from NS and cyber-weapons tech companies from The Union. Now, most products that involve an organic-machine interface belong to Wang companies, including the most widespread cybernetic device in the Universe - the Cortex Connector.

EDUCATION

Education is an overlooked business in Corvo society, as children are considered workers and employees as soon as they can walk, talk and feed themselves; Wang saw the opportunity and developed thousands of patents for teaching software, which now is standard issue in every Corvo classroom. This gave Wang complete control of the education system, from preschool to advanced scientific teaching.

ENTERTAINMENT

After software and cortex connectors, the entertainment business is Wang's most profitable branch. Every major Neuronet Studio, Neurocast network and music company belong to larger companies that in turn belong to Wang's Entertainment Division.

FINANCIAL SERVICES

This is not common knowledge, but Wang all but handles its rivals' businesses. Why? Because Wang software handles digital money. Every credit issued in the Corvosphere comes from Wang software, which means all financial companies depend on Wang. This means Wang owns all banks and money in the Corvosphere, which in turn means that everyone, even the owners and CEOs of the other two Megacorps, are Wang customers.

Of course, Wang must handle its rivals' money through financial institutions that pretend to be neutral - even though everybody knows who owns them - and follow the strictest privacy rules. This prevents Wang from accessing the financial information these companies handle. However, this is a business field where Wang's rivals have to concede its supremacy, and can't do anything to change it.

NEWS AND MASS MEDIA

Although in the Corvosphere this industry is all but a branch of the entertainment business, it means a very different medium and source of revenue for Wang Corp; especially because News and Mass Media companies dictate what the Corvo people know and what they think about it, swaying or focusing public opinion according to the needs of the Megacorps - most frequently Wang itself, although the Union and NS also pay to have their own news channels.

TELECOMM

Last but not least, all telecommunication lines in the Corvosphere belong to Wang Corp, which means they own both the information itself and the means through which that information travels. Wang Corp built, developed and now owns the Corvo internet, all wired and wireless communication systems, all the companies that provide and install them, and every signal sent through them. Wang also monopolises the beacon technology that allows colonies to communicate and broadcast news across the Corvosphere.

WANG XUELIN

There's an urban legend that the true leader of Wang Corp exists as a purely digital entity, having downloaded his conscience into an AI. The rumour is absolutely true, but it falls short of the truth: the leader behind Wang Corp is actually Wang Xuelin, the very same man that founded the Megacorp 616 years ago, and has lived for almost six centuries as an uploaded mind, directly advising the Wang board of directors from the Megacorp's system.

Not all Wang shareholders are aware that Wang Xuelin still exists, and those who are have sworn secrecy; the revelation would send turmoil down the corporate hierarchy and potentially affect company shares. Furthermore, if shareholders discovered Wang Xuelin's current status as a digital entity, they - and other Megacorps - would rightfully assume he is, for all intents and purposes, an AI, which are completely illegal in the Corvosphere. If NS or The Union found out that an AI is directing Wang Corp, they'd have the final weapon they need to cut off their rival's head and weaken Wang enough to remove it from the corporate race.

Meanwhile, the Xuelin conscience - as he is known - remains behind every decision taken by Wang directives ever since the company was founded six centuries ago.

Currently, Xuelin resides on a secret, secured server at Wang Corp sector; although there's already a cloud backup in place - the access codes of which are written in quantum tech and have only been given to the Wang board, each member possessing just one piece of the code - the bunker holding Xuelin's memory is the best hidden and protected place in the entire Corvosphere, guarded against everything from EMP generators to nuclear warheads, from cloud hacking to physical infiltration. Only the Wang board has access to Xuelin, and only when Xuelin wishes it.

The Xuelin Conscience reflects the personality of Wang Xuelin in his prime - curious, clever, proactive, inspiring, creative. In fact, the X OS system, which sustains most of Wang's revenues, is based on Xuelin's brain patterns. So, when Wang Corp used the slogan that all X OS users had 'a bit of Wang with them', they were saying the literal truth.

CHO BEI

The current CEO of Wang corp is Cho Bei, a young and talented Corvo woman who has curtailed a bit of Wang's rampant tech acquisitions to focus on cleaning and improving the Megacorp's function as it currently stands. Under Cho Bei, Wang Corp has had very little growth, but has improved its efficiency and reduced inner corruption and bureaucracy by nearly 500%. Not all shareholders are happy with her policies, however, as they expected their earnings to increase perceptibly, and a long-term plan for corporate health gives no immediate returns, much less if it's done at the expense of economic growth.

She mistrusts the Xuelin Conscience, but has learned to respect his insight and follow his advice on most things. They have a rather grudging partnership, where Wang Xuelin plays the part of the jaded mentor and Cho Bei the wary trainee that knows they're not telling her everything. But she always gets what she wants, and what the corporation needs - which is enough for her.

Actually, Cho Bei is not that into Wang Corp's policies in general, and has many enemies both within the board of directors and among the leaders of branched companies. She is too young, questioning and confrontational, and has called out more than one of her colleagues and subordinates on their incompetence or corruption.

The leader of Cho Bei's enemies is Tai Lai, an old-fashioned, closed-minded computer and marketing genius who covets - and is doubtlessly qualified for - Cho Bei's position. Tai Lai has been building a growing mob of supporters among Wang's regional branch leaders, and would have much to win from Cho Bei's disgrace.

Despite her growing - although grudging - friendship with the Xuelin Conscience, Cho Bei could very well be relieved from her duties - or worse - before long, and she knows it. She needs allies inside Wang if she's going to keep cleaning the company. She is the best thing that's happened to Wang Corp, but she needs something else to remain at the helm - she needs to fight back. Her best hope is to secure the loyalty of Tai Lai's opponents, the most important being Tai Mei - Lai's own sister, and joint inheritor of their father's shares of Wang Corp. Mei has often voiced her disgust for her brother - Could she be the unexpected ally the CEO needs?

Cho may have no choice but to accept an offer she absolutely loathes, one she recently got from certain 'messengers' from the Heijian underworld. They suggested that, in exchange for her help in certain matters concerning the leaders of The Union Megacorp - something to do with Kan Jiang accepting a deal with the Tongs - they could deal with Tai Lai definitively and discreetly, meaning that neither the general public nor the other Wang leaders would ever learn what happened. Cho's answer was to fire the 'messengers' immediately - after all, they were Tong collaborators within Wang Corp's lower leadership - but recently the messages have been repeated, this time revealing a terrible suggestion: in exchange for her cooperation, they would 'not reveal her boss' true nature'. Do the Tongs know of Wang Xuelin? Can Cho Bei afford to ignore their offer?

WANG XUELIN

Lone Wolf :: OS Affinity

Level 4 :: Corvo :: Strategist
mov. N/A :: weight N/A :: height N/A

*	*	0	9

PHYSICAL STAT	16 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	9 (3)	MENTAL STAT	21 (2)

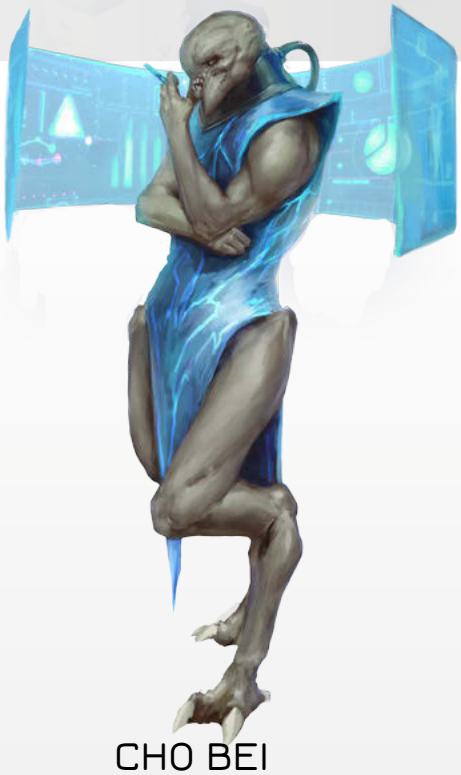
Xuelin's Rig 3 (LinkWave 500)

He can perform Hacking actions (causing 3 ACS damage).

Virtual Conscience

He must be installed in a robot as a virus. He will control it as if it was his body, using his own Stats. He can perform two actions during his turn. Action. He can infest a robot to install a dormant copy of himself. Instant. He can become a dormant copy, and one of his dormant copies will become him.

Wang Xuelin is the stuff of legend in the Corvosphere. If it were confirmed that he's lived as an AI for 600 years, the world would change forever.



CHO BEI

Hexian 2 :: OS Affinity

Level 2 :: Corvo :: Cunning
mov. 5 metres :: weight 48 kg :: height 158 cm

2	6	0	8

PHYSICAL STAT	4 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	17 (2)

HIT (DEX)	1	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Shamayin 2 (LinkWave 50)

She can perform Hacking actions (causing 2 ACS damage). Activated. She gains one advantage OR causes 2 additional ACS damage.

Rational

She can only be convinced with facts. She is immune to dialectics, and she gains one advantage to determine whether something has been fact checked.

Judge of character

Characters attempting to lie to her suffer one disadvantage.

Cho Bei is an unlikely Megacorp CEO: young, sober and professional, she has focused on the cleansing of internal corruption at the expense of short term growth.

THE UNION

The Advance Force™

The Union Megacorp creates all weaponry, and hires and trains most of the military in the Corvosphere. Of the three Megacorps, they are the most interested in mining and space exploration.

The Union prioritises weapon and spacecraft developments. They have the best technicians for their mining facilities and the best staff for their military and workforce. They also hire more aliens than any other megacorp, hoping to use the diverse capabilities and cheap labour of lesser species to their benefit. Most of the Humans in the Corvosphere work for The Union.

The Union depends on Nation's Solution to satisfy their basic needs, and on Wang Corp for their software and basic hardware; as the other two Megacorps, The Union is looking for an alternative to this dependency, a backdoor into its rivals' systems, or even perhaps the chance for a hostile takeover.

The other Megacorps look down on the Union for its dependence on manpower to function, and even mock them for 'monopolising people'. But the joke is actually close to the truth: The Union's reliance on living employees is its greatest strength.

In fact, The Union has a policy of non-automation in most of his companies and factories, and it has the lowest skulling job ratio of the three Megacorps. Its workers are 'living, breathing and awake', as the company slogan proudly says.

Even though the Corvo prohibition on AI allows for non-independent robots, The Union prefers to employ living workers when it can, strongly encouraging all its owned companies to follow the same policy. This has a double advantage - first, it gives the Megacorp the greatest popular support among the Corvo people; and second, it keeps The Union independent from Wang Corp's cybernetic systems.

BUSINESS INTERESTS

The Union's business branches are mostly related to mining, construction, transport and warfare - anything that requires lots of manpower to operate. After all, The Union's main trade good is people.

ARMS

The best-known and more profitable branches of The Union are weapons manufacturers. These companies run the gamut from large and respected conglomerates to shady black market ops. They sell weapons to everyone from police forces to Coalition soldiers to crime families, including even Iz'kal insurgents and Human radicals. Everyone in and outside of the Corvosphere depends on Union-owned weapon companies, from pirates and gangsters, to the war effort against the Ravager invasion.

Since The Union controls both the legal and illegal weapons markets, it has to pretend that there's a division between them, and often has its police companies denounce or even fight the customers of its shadier weapons trade. Since it feeds and collects money from both sides, the Union loses no profit by this practice.

CARGO & TRANSPORT

The Union handles all cargo and delivery companies in the Corvosphere, which means everything that requires transportation - that is, anything that isn't digital information. As a result, most ships in the Corvosphere, from passenger ships to supply traders, belong to a Union company. And even NS and Wang companies need to transport their people and materials from one place to another.

CONSTRUCTION

The most widespread Union businesses are construction companies. The Union has bought or founded all companies that make buildings, gyro-zhans, omnirings, mining facilities and space stations. In fact, The Union got its name from the merger of all the companies that built the Tiantang Dyson Ring around Quanjie's sun, making it the oldest of the Three Megacorps.

DEFENCE

The defence industry handles exclusive contracts for soldiers and official approval for military-grade weapons, vehicles and operations. It is a very separate business from weapons manufacturing, although the general public often confuses the two - not that it truly matters, as The Union controls both industries. It has created several companies that own 'official licenses' to legally provide trained mercenaries, soldiers and equipment for armed ops; any weapon or agent without these licenses is a black market product.

ENERGY

A very important and overlooked aspect of Union business is the energy industry. While all three Megacorps own and produce electricity, fossil fuels or quantum power, most of the engines and procedures to extract them belong to The Union. Although it officially claims no monopoly on energy sources - Corvo law expressly forbids it - The Union

does own most of the energy in the Corvosphere, which means most of the technology. This is where The Union has its competitors by the tail, and they know it.

SPACE TRAVEL

The Union handles all intergalactic starships, Labyrinth exploration grants, interstellar travel licenses, and everything related to space travel. The Union is in charge of enforcing the laws to move from one Corvo colony to another, and into or out of the Corvosphere. This has allowed it to impose heavy taxes on Wang or NS ships that wish to establish colonies or mining facilities across the Labyrinth, and has led to its slogan of being 'the Masters of the Universe'.

VEHICLES

The Union also owns all vehicle manufacturers in the Corvosphere. Union companies build and produce everything from street gyrocycles to military-grade warships, from deluxe designer space cars to transport shuttles. The companies are equally diversified, from luxury automotor brands to large-scale industrial transport manufacturers. As is the case with most Megacorp subsidiaries, they fiercely compete against each other for the same market, even though the revenues always find their way to the same place - The Union shareholders.

XEON MAGNO

The main shareholder of The Union is Xeon Magno, a relatively young and ambitious Corvo businessman who saw that the future of investment was in weaponry and warfare; after the battle of Izuan Tai, he sold his company to The Union and made sure to acquire as many Megacorp shares as he could. Then slowly, by cautiously buying and selling, he ended up becoming the Megacorp's main shareholder. When the Coalition formed, his fortune increased exponentially, and now he is one of the richest men in the Corvosphere. When he was invited to the board of shareholders of The Union, he had little to no acquaintance with the other members.

Xeon Magno is a sharp, smartly-dressed, outgoing and assertive man, experienced in projecting power and confidence. After his power became real, he only became more self-assured; now, those who meet him feel like they are in the presence of royalty. He is the most famous of all Megacorp owners, and has made no effort to conceal his identity or role in the company.

Xeon Magno doesn't like ostentatiousness or hoarding; he keeps his money flowing, and as soon as an investment yields returns, he invests most of it back. By the same token, he is a big spender in his personal life, althouhg he is sober and tasteful in his hobbies and acquisitions. His only accumulation habit is his famous collection of weapons, safely kept in a bunker in his residence at Tiantang CS.

Xeon Magno doesn't look eye to eye with The Union CEO, and rumours of replacement are currently flying; everyone at the Megacorp knows that both men have a battle of wills going on, and that they are waiting for the Ravager war to end before making their next move.

KAN JIANG

The Union CEO is Kan Jiang, a veteran space explorer turned entrepreneur out of friendship with the shareholders and members of the Union board. He is an old, grim and iron-willed Corvo, who still looks and moves like he's in his prime thanks to a healthy and active lifestyle. He is used to giving orders and being obeyed, and even some of The Union shareholders are in awe of him.

Kan Jiang is very loyal to The Union, and will do anything for the company; this sometimes includes turning a blind eye, or even giving aid, to the many illegal weapon smuggling operations taking place at the lower echelons of the corporation. He doesn't like to aid the mob, but he compensates by investing heavily in law enforcement. Besides authorising weapons sales to the Tongs, he considers himself their sworn enemy and has vowed to bring Zhui Yan in, personally if needed.

After the Coalition formed, Kan Jiang has been more busy than ever, as the responsibility for winning the whole Ravager war has fallen almost entirely on his shoulders. This has taxed even his legendary mental strength, and rumours abound that Kan Jiang may be replaced after the war ends, even though he's faithfully served as Union CEO for the last 50 years.

Kan Jiang is very invested in the war against the Ravager. He needs it to be a resounding success, not only to save his species from extinction, but also to increase his leverage and clout among Union shareholders, so as to prevent 'that upstart Magno' from firing him. He has also drawn fire from the Zhui Tong, despite allowing them to buy Union weapons, by his very public and outspoken comments against organised crime. In short, the old soldier is on the crosshairs of the corporate world, and though that is exactly how he likes it, he may need allies if he expects to win a war in so many fronts.

For now, he is offering outrageous sums of money - as much as one of the ten richest men in the Corvosphere can offer - for information on Lady Zhui's or Honcho Hwang's plans, whereabouts or weaknesses. As he sees it, if he can wipe the Tongs from Tiantang without hurting Union's business, his battle in every arena would be all but won.

XEON MAGNO

Ghost :: Proficient

Level 3 :: Corvo :: Driven
mov. 5 metres :: weight 57 kg :: height 165 cm

4	6	0	9

PHYSICAL STAT	6	INITIATIVE STAT	6	MENTAL STAT	9

HIT (DEX)	1	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Magno's Rig 2 (LinkWave 150)

He can perform Hacking actions gaining one advantage (causing 2 ACS damage).

True Kalivan

He can use the Natural selection and Greed divine powers at prophet level.

Overwhelming Presence

He gains one advantage towards social interactions with characters with Cunning lower than his Mental skill.

Ravagers have done a lot of harm to the known universe, but there's a silver lining: thanks to their threat, Xeon Magno's pockets are deeper than ever.

KAN JIANG

Lone Wolf

Level 3 :: Corvo :: Loyal
mov. 5 metres :: weight 63 kg :: height 169 cm

5	5	1	9

PHYSICAL STAT	6	INITIATIVE STAT	6	MENTAL STAT	8

HIT (DEX)	3 +	GRAPPLE (CON)	1 +

Shamayin 2 (LinkWave 50)

He can perform Hacking actions (causing 2 ACS damage). Activated. He gains one advantage OR causes 2 additional ACS damage.

Respected Leader

His allies within 2 metres gain Loyal Bodyguard: Instant. If he is aware of it happening, he can become the target of an action that targeted Kan Jiang.

Natural Selection

Instant. He suffers 2 neural damage and gains one advantage.

Jiang, CEO of The Union, wages a personal war against the Tongs while he manages a steady supply of weaponry for the Coalition.

SECRETS OF THE MEGACORPS

Being the largest commercial institutions in the known Universe, each Megacorp has more members, offices, positions and branches than the government of an entire planet. They also have countless hidden layers, secrets and mysteries. Some of these secrets are suspected by most, some unknown by all but a few. But they are all dark and dirty, and give testament to the abyssal depth that an organisation as big as an interplanetary Megacorp can reach.

THE DEATH MAZE

All Corvo know that weapon smuggling exists in their society; not all of them know that The Union fully subsidises it. With the Megacorp's blessing and support, millions of illegal weapons are secretly sold to the tongs, colonial tyrants, death squads, slavers, unauthorised militias and, in short, anyone that the Megacorps' own law would execute or banish if they got caught. For the Union, these hushed, illegal operations are simply an additional source of revenue, a different market with a different demographic, different distribution channels and different prices. This gun-running network, completely clandestine but fully supported by The Union, is known in the Heijian underground as The Death Maze.

More than 80% of the Death Maze market is in Tiantang, but several radical and paramilitary cells in the colonies make use of it too. Through the Death Maze, anyone may acquire almost any kind of weapon, regardless of the law regarding the weapon or its availability in the open market, as long as he has the money.

Contacting the Death Maze is fairly easy, but dangerous too. Ask the right person and you're in; ask the wrong person and you're marked by the law. That is why it's better to wait for someone within the Death Maze to contact you - or to be an outlaw in the first place, which is a whole different problem on itself.

THE HOSPITAL OF HELL

Nation's Solution employs billions of scientists, physicians, researchers, technicians and lab assistants. NS labs have more staff than most planets have people, and like all planets, they have their share of crazy and evil individuals. Statistically, there's at least one criminally insane scientist in every NS branch, and the Megacorp has hundreds of thousands of such branches.

But only one of these branches is entirely run by mad scientists.

When Professor Kwang Jiu initially suggested the idea for the Hospital of Hell, she was met with rejection and disgust.

Professor Kwang's idea was that empty moral concerns and unnecessary budget limitations often stood in the path of medical progress, and that real medicine only advanced in situations that were later condemned as cruel, unsafe or unhealthy. Even if society decided to punish the method or the medic, the new discovery remained and benefitted society forever. So, for the Corvo species' greater good, Professor Kwang dreamed up a lab where physicians were allowed, even encouraged, to practice any kind of medical experiments they wished, unfettered by moral qualms.

When Professor Kwang gave her proposal during a board meeting, she was dismissed as crazy, and the project was soundly rejected. However, when she approached each of the board members individually and privately, away from peer pressure, they all more or less agreed that her idea would work for the greater good of the Corvo. She took the chance, pressed on, and finally obtained separate signatures and commitments that were as good as a majority vote; when she gave her proposal again, the very same board that had dismissed her found itself approving her project.

The Broad Experimental Development Labs And Medicine (or BEDLAM) Facility of District 99-XC was open within a year, fully funded and sanctioned by Nation's Solution. It soon attracted the most radical medical researchers in Tiantang, those whose projects had been rejected or forbidden, and Professor Kwang promised them all complete funding and support. Investors regretted their choice within a week of BEDLAM's inauguration, but it was too late. By the time they thought of shutting it down, their reputations and their money were in more danger than if they simply let it continue. They chose to hide the BEDLAM facility from the general public and officially pretend it didn't exist. This actually made it worse - Professor Kwang's medics were emboldened by anonymity, and what started as a center for disturbing practices became a rampant slaughterhouse, still known in urban legends as the Hospital of Hell.

Currently, the Hospital of Hell is covertly used for all kinds of unspeakable experiments. The staff are allowed to try any procedure regardless of its safety or ethics, and patients from all Tiantang are tortured, maimed or mutated in ways too varied and horrible to recount. There are many reasons the Hospital of Hell hasn't been closed yet: First, the patients are taken from the lowest levels of Corvo society - outcasts, vagrants, beggars, convicts, and even patients that were incurable or declared dead. Second, most of them are desperate or terminally ill, and thus volunteered for the treatments - and are not allowed to back out later, of course, but that's not an issue for the Hospital's authorities; if the patients are there under their own free will, the facility cannot be closed down. Third, The Hospital doesn't officially exist, which gives NS authorities impunity and deniability on any crimes committed inside.

And last - and most important - the horrible experiments do every now and then get results that actually benefit medical science. This allows for the development of patent products and methods that in turn report huge earnings to Nation's Solution.

In short, the Hospital of Hell won't go away anytime soon. Unless someone was brave and cunning enough to uncover it...

THE RAVAGER FACTORY

Nation's Solution and its subsidiaries are the most advanced and successful biomedical firms in the known universe. They are responsible for medical breakthroughs that have affected the lives of all sentient beings, from aesthetic body mods to safe life-extending treatments. Some Corvo media personalities have joked that the only thing that Corvo scientists haven't achieved is to create life.

Well, Nation's Solution is not one to refuse a challenge.

Once the fearsome Ravager species made itself known at the border outposts of the Corvosphere, and reports came in from the Coalition describing these aliens' ability to design their own genes almost from one day to the next, corporate interest was piqued. Some rogue agents from NuiCo, a pharma labs firm, put out a reward for fresh Ravager parts, and actively hired mercenaries to search for them near recent battle sites. Before a standard year had passed, the clandestine operation had acquired its first samples, and launched a hastily-built lab to analyse them and try to reproduce the Ravager's genetic abilities. The project was dubbed RavLab, and was kept secret from everyone, including NuiCo directives; against expectations, they succeeded.

Barely a decade after RavLab's founding, during which it functioned as a clandestine centre for the study of Ravager breeding and biogenetics, the project gave birth to its first Ravager specimen - an unknown, unidentifiable breed, the likes of which Coalition soldiers had never encountered in battle. RavLab was quick to patent the new lifeform, dubbing it Hui Huài dì (Little Ravager brother), or HHD; they believe it may be a sample of true basic Ravager stock, before any genetic adaptation. Data on the HHD species could change the war if RavLab could go public with their discovery - but it also could make a fortune for a few visionary businessmen. Knowing this, RavLab revealed its success and the existence of the HHD to select members of the NuiCo board.

After a series of calls to certain shady associates and potential interested parties among the Tong crime families, the NuiCo board voted to keep funding RavLab, not as an official company project, but as a joint venture with the Corvo underworld; thus RavLab became a monster factory for the Tongs.

As of today, RavLab is in the process of breeding more specimens of HHD and expanding its research into new, possibly custom-designed species, looking to launch Corvo-owned Ravager organisms to the black market.

THE NEURO-DRUG

Experience drugs, or XDs, are the cultural and technological pinnacle of Corvo entertainment. They are legal, highly entertaining, and somewhat harmless despite the side effects of prolonged use, which include severe addiction and psychological damage.

However, there's one XD that's not only forbidden, but its sale and consumption is actively persecuted by Corvo law. It's called Link, or 'the Neuro-drug', and it can only be used through a cortex connector.

By adding an illegal chip to one's CC, it can be turned into a receiver for a special electrical injection that directly activates the user's synapses; that's how Link is administered. Injectors are one-use only, and acquired from dealers at outrageous prices.

By firing a large amount of synapses at once, the user experiences a high that typical XDs, with all their neural tech, cannot hope to match; however, by combining the neuro-drug with an XD, the user exponentially increases the virtual sensations, getting a hyper-load of the XD. Addiction to Link is incredibly dangerous, however, as madness, sudden death and strokes are common from firing a single shot of the neuro-drug. That could actually be the best scenario; long-time survivors of Link addiction inevitably suffer at least one type of permanent brain damage, and many end up as vegetables for life.

Link use has grown so heavily in fringe areas of Tiantang, such as the Gu or Xiao sectors, that it's begun to impact the skulling business, affecting all Corvo industries. It's likely to get worse before it gets better.

The Union, through their law enforcement branches, has promised to eradicate Link from Tiantang streets, not only because it affects their business, but also because they know that Link is a fully-sanctioned Wang Corp product. Although Wang denies and condemns the existence of the neuro-drug, and there's no conclusive proof to connect the Link trade with Wang officials, it's an open secret in the corporate world that Link came from a failed experiment at Gonga labs, a Wang subsidiary. Since the 'failed experiment' is still being mass-produced and sold on the streets, and Gonga is still a fully-funded Wang company, it's a matter of time before the leads point at some Wang high-up. The Union wants to be there when that happens.

THE PERFECT SOLDIER PROGRAM

Nation's Solution and The Union don't often cooperate, although they are forced to depend on each other for many of their respective businesses - The Union needs NS supplies, while NS needs The Union's security. Yet, it's not common for both Megacorps to openly do business together. Ironically, the two companies' longest-running joint venture is a secret criminal operation.

It started when Perfect Pills, an NS company, developed an experimental chemical treatment to increase soldier performance and offered a test batch to one of the mercenary groups in its client list. The treatment turned out to be dangerous and unstable, causing serious side effects such as brain damage and, in two cases, death. However, the beneficial effects were so astounding that the Union higher-ups got wind of what happened and, instead of fining or suing Perfect Pills, the Megacorp ordered the experiment to continue. NS ordered the opposite, however, and Perfect Pills was banned from further cooperation with The Union. For a while, that was it - until Doctor Chang.

Doctor Chang, the Perfect Pills researcher who had initially developed the unstable version of the treatment, approached an unknown Union officer, perhaps a regional boss or a troop commander, and offered to continue the experiment if The Union committed to financing it - and provided live test subjects. The officer agreed, and the operation went on, only secretly this time. Thus, officially both companies shut the project down, but in truth it goes on to this day - and it's close to fruition.

For the last five years, hundreds of mercenaries - mostly Human and Raag, but many Corvo too - have been taken to secret labs hidden below Perfect Pill facilities, under the pretense of getting medical treatment for crippling wounds; once there, however, they are put through chemical tests that alter their nervous systems and soft tissue, making them more resistant to pain and giving them enhanced muscle - at the cost of their cognitive abilities. Most successful subjects of the program have become super-strong drones, unbeatable in combat but barely capable of independent thought. For The Union officers overseeing the project, this is of course not a bug, but a feature; the program is close to being called a success, with dozens of 'Perfect Soldiers' ready to march into war. The greatest point of contention right now is whether The Union will go public with the project, alleging it was 'top secret, but legal', or keep the soldiers a corporate secret even as they are sent into battle. Doctor Chang would prefer the latter, but some Union officers are having a crisis of conscience about the whole thing. Perhaps if something happened to them...

PERFECT SOLDIER

Lone Wolf :: Unstoppable

Level 3 :: Corvo :: Loyal

mov. 5 metres :: weight 61 kg :: height 170 cm

5	4	2	9

PHYSICAL STAT	8 (3)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (3)	MENTAL STAT	4 (1)

CLOSE QUARTERS	3+	STANDARD DISTANCE	3+

(3) Pilum

Plasma weapon (It ignores 1 point of armour). After resolving the attack, it automatically aims at the same target.

(4) Legionary Suit

Activated. He gains one advantage towards agility or constitution actions OR jumps and runs at twice his normal speed.

(3) EM Shield

His armour value cannot be reduced or ignored by plasma or neural weapons.

The Perfect Soldiers are the fruit of a top secret cooperation between The Union and Nation's Solution. Do they live up to their name though?

LAW AND CRIME

"There is only one cure to savagery: abundance of resources. Empathy is a luxury for those struggling to survive."

- Aliyah Saab, Iz'Kal sociologist

For the Corvo, "crime" means "to interfere with someone's private property without authorisation".

This, of course, describes stealing, counterfeiting and unlicensed trade, but it also includes murder and slavery, as a Corvo's life is considered their own property too. In an interplanetary, information-based society such as the Corvosphere, the definition also includes malicious hacking.

Outside the above definition of crime, everything else is open to interpretation; it depends heavily on the specific situation, the laws of the respective colony, and most particularly on how much the affected parties can pay. In short, what you did is bad depending mostly on who you did it to.

Under Corvo law, "debatable" crimes include (but are not limited to) espionage, forgery, extortion, gambling, drug trade and most moral offences.

Even more, Corvo written laws are extremely complicated; this means cases may last months or even years, which further limits the ability of lower-class Corvo to defend themselves, as lawyers charge by day and are rarely in a hurry to reach the end of a case. By the same token, corporations rarely lose any litigation, as they have the resources to pay not just for a longer trial, but also to prolong it in their favor.

LAW

"Killing is not innately bad. We frown on killing on the grounds that a society cannot prosper if killing exists. But the most animalistic call is to try and get what we desire without planning for future consequences, and killing sometimes is an efficient and easy way of achieving things. Even less intelligent animals understand this problem, and they have strict codes of behaviour: A pack predator that kills another will be abandoned by the pack. So, not killing is mostly something we do in the hope that others will do the same and won't kill us back."

- Xue Lin, Corvo comedian and political activist

Corvo civilisation is built around freedom of choice and private property. They are very wary of governments and political organisations that could mess with their freedom, and they understand that these institutions are forms of social domination and create injustice. While there is no consensus around the issue of how much power the government should wield, all colonies have found a common ground by limiting the government to the administration and enforcement of laws - which rarely if ever implies power over police forces, as seen further in this document. Thus judges are paid by the government, but lawyers, attorneys and police officers are not. No prosecution will be made, regardless of the crime, if the appropriate fees are not paid.

COMMANDER LAO MENG

The woman in charge of law and order in Tiantang is Commander Lao Meng, a veteran mercenary from a family with a long tradition in law enforcement.

Commander Lao is not a member of any mercenary outfit, but is tasked with overseeing the operations of all private police forces in the name of The Union. As a Union representative, she answers directly to Chief Zhang Ye, the Head Security Executive of Tiantang and one of the members of The Board, the executives in charge of all Tiantang operations.

Commander Lao is a honest woman, but she also knows when to bend the law, and realises she cannot maintain control without allowing certain lesser crimes to occur. She doesn't, however, cut any slack to the Tong mobs; she's had more than a few run-ins with Lady Zhui and Hwang Gun, the mightiest crime bosses of Tiantang, and they have learned to steer clear of her path. As long as they don't call undue attention to their operations, she is content with maintaining the status quo and supervising that the Tiantang mercenary outfits protect the general populace as best they can.

One thing Commander Lao doesn't tolerate is police corruption. She is relentless in prosecuting any police officer or team that blatantly breaks Tiantang law. This is harder than it sounds, as many of her own underlings - sector and district law operations managers - are in the Tong's payroll, and she is responsible for overseeing their good behaviour. Many a lenient law officer has been discharged under Commander Lao's term, which has earned her quite a few enemies, both among the Tongs and within the shadier levels of The Union Megacorp.

Chief Zhang believes in her, however, and fully supports her policies, usually agreeing to her budget requests - although he always pretends to be horrified at her staff and gear demands - so Commander Lao's job is not in immediate danger. She is still under a lot of pressure, coming specifically from two fronts: One, the increasing activities of the Dragonfly Tong, which are stirring the Heijian underworld and making the other Tong mobs increasingly tense and

COMMANDER LAO

Level 3 :: Corvo :: Loyal
mov. 5 metres :: weight 62 kg :: height 170 cm

4	5	2	-

PHYSICAL STAT	8	INITIATIVE STAT	6	MENTAL STAT	6

CLOSE QUARTERS	2 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	2 -

Extended Awareness

She cannot be caught by surprise and will always be able to confront any action against her.

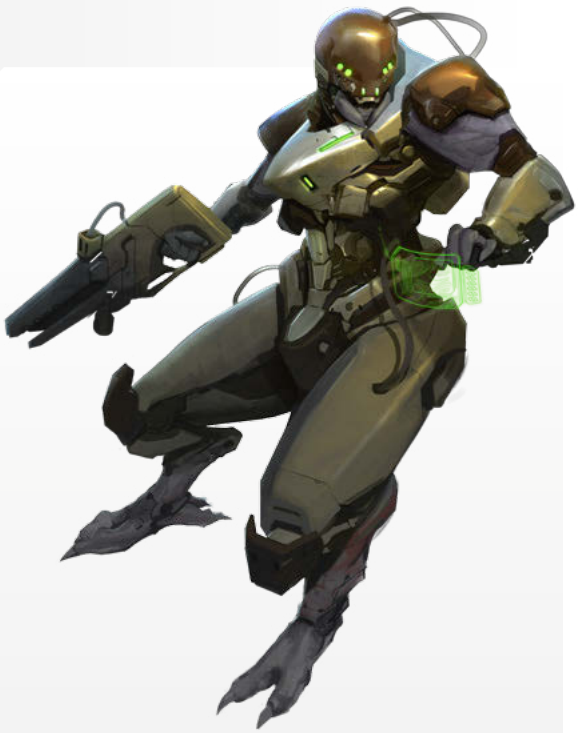
EM Shield

Her armour value cannot be reduced or ignored by plasma or neural weapons.

Relentless

She does not lose her turn when she performs a counteraction.

Commander Lao is an old school officer of the Law, honest and brave. In her tenure, police corruption has decreased, but Tongs remain powerful.



MILITARY CONTRACTOR

Teamplayer

Level 2 :: Corvo :: Cautious
mov. 10 metres :: weight 58 kg :: height 165 cm

4	3	1	8

PHYSICAL STAT	8	INITIATIVE STAT	6	MENTAL STAT	5

CLOSE QUARTERS	4	STANDARD DISTANCE	4 +

Reaper

Plasma weapon (It ignores 1 point of armour). Extended range: 300 metres, damage 3.

Rig 2 (LinkWave 100)

He can perform Hacking actions (causing 2 ACS damage).

EM Orbital Suit

He can move flying, and his armour value cannot be reduced or ignored by plasma or neural weapons.

In the Corvosphere, personal safety costs big bucks, and military contractors are at the core of this buoyant business operation.

could soon lead to a three-way gang war; second, she's under pressure from her Sector officials - particularly officer Lu, in charge of Xiao sector - to strike a deal with the Zhui gang to shut down their rivals, the Hwangs, in a joint covert operation. Commander Lao sees the advantages of this plan, but she's uneasy about opening up to the Zhui and to Lu's informant within the Hwang gang. Not only is this because of her moral sense, but also because Kan Jiang, CEO of The Union and the boss of the boss of the boss of her boss, has expressly forbid all Union officials from striking any kind of deal with the Tong mobs. Her choice could have a number of different outcomes and consequences for law and order in Tiantang.

In short, Commander Lao needs help. She needs more men in the streets to keep an eye on the increasing violence, and she needs spies and intelligencers on both the Hwang and Zhui Tongs to let her know what she'd be really getting into by accepting the deal against the Hwang gang. She, however, needs to get this help discreetly, without mixing her boss' name in it. Who could come to her aid?

MILITARY CONTRACTORS

"Never shoot a gun cocked by someone else."

- Kalivan saying

Other than a few rare exceptions, police forces are out of the government's jurisdiction and answer directly to private companies. That means that they will only protect those areas and neighbourhoods that pay for their services. As a result, private police forces compete for the business of upstate or more populated areas. It is common to see advertisements on different private police services and their superior training methods or technology. In certain boroughs where the neighbours don't agree on contracting the same service, each house may even fall under the protection of a different company.

There's even an - unproven and mean-spirited - urban legend that some police forces move bodies to the jurisdiction of other companies, to avoid having to resolve complex or undesired crimes.

As it is not uncommon for Corvo to own personal weapons for extra safety, some even disregard the services of police forces altogether, and prefer to rely on their own abilities to defend themselves.

On the other hand, Megacorps use military contractors for their expansion enterprises to protect their spacecrafts and colonies. These contractors - the closest thing to an army in the Corvosphere - hire and train their own personnel, using the most advanced weaponry in the Universe. There are plenty of these companies, most of them belonging to The Union Megacorp, and there are millions of mercenaries working for them. Some mercenaries are renowned for their incredible feats, such as single-handedly taking out entire pirate outposts or surviving for years on desolated planets, and as a result have become renowned across the Corvosphere. A few of them are true celebrities, used by military agencies to advertise their services and to attract new recruits among young Corvo.

Military contractors are also most likely used for unofficial, black operations against the Iz'kal or Corvo radical cells, and even in sabotage raids against other corporations.

PUNISHMENT

"They only took his life."

- Corvo saying meaning "it wasn't that serious"

In the Corvosphere, fines are the most common punishment, even for serious crimes. The second most common sentence is exile of forced labour to some colony, usually when the defendant can't afford bail. These convicts become little more than slaves - indentured servants to the government, that is, the Megacorp - until they fulfil their sentence, which may be never.

Imprisonment without forced labour is available as a 'middle ground' when the defendant can pay to avoid exile, but not enough to cover the amount of the fine stipulated by the state. In this case, convicts serve most of their sentence in privately-owned jails, paying for their stay from their own pocket until their sentence ends or the money runs out, at which point they are sent to labour in exile like everyone else.

Some crimes are considered dai, or too heinous for fines, and are automatically punished by exile or, much more rarely, death. Every colony has its own rules about which crimes are considered dai and which aren't, but they almost always involve crimes threatening the livelihood or economic stability of the Corvosphere as a whole, such as sedition, industrial sabotage or mass murder.

Murder and theft, while completely illegal, are not uncommon, especially in the poorest districts where crooks and other lowlifes that have failed to make an honest living try the easy way out. Not much can be done about it; police services must be hired by citizens, and very few can afford it. On rare occasions, wealthy businesspeople may pay for a raid or two in a dangerous slum, but only when they fear that their interests or social stability might be in danger. On the other hand, those who can afford the fees will have the best lawyers in the known Universe, and will find their justice.

Unsurprisingly, the overwhelming majority (97.7%) of Corvo convicts come from the lower classes, which includes foreign Humans and Raag. In fact, while Human immigrants make up roughly 0.001% of the Corvosphere's

population, they represent more than 10% of the inmates at penal labour colonies. It's estimated that the Human population at Corvo penal colonies is several times as large as the total Human population outside the Corvosphere.

THE HEIJIAN

The Corvosphere is a huge place, perhaps the largest entity in the Universe. It has room for all kinds of people, cultures and societies. There are urban and space environments; rural and digital societies; there are the wealthy and varied degrees of poverty; there's the corporate world and the zero-g slums. Despite the countless environments inside the Corvosphere, most of them never touch each other.

But there's another world, one that's a shadow of all the other worlds - a hidden world that is everywhere and touches all others. It exists just below the Corvosphere's facade of law and order, behind every building, every financial transaction, every job and every family. It lurks just under the sweatshops, the apartments, the zero-g habitats and the community parks. It slinks past the corporate offices and gyrocycle repair shops, brushing against everyday people as they walk down the street, never seen, always there. It lives in the gutters, below the streets, among the lost numbers of the stock exchange and the lost children that are never found. It's the home of the petty thieves and the gangsters, where all the hookers and drunks and stolen babies live. Is the story told by sex slaves and brave mercenaries, by daring smugglers and drug addicts. It's the underworld, the dark reflection of the Corvosphere.

Those who live in it call it The Heijian - the underground, the dark mirror of normal life. Although it coexists with every society and environment within the Corvosphere, it's almost a different dimension; once you enter the Heijian - once you kill your first man, seal your first secret deal, leave your home on an adventure - you are in a new world. You look through a new glass at what once was familiar and reassuring. It's another thing now, a scary, dangerous thing. It's not that the Heijian is a different place; it's just that the places around you are never the same once you've seen it.

And the Heijian is everywhere. No matter where you are in the Corvosphere, if you turn your head to the right place, you may see it through the cracks - those fleeting shadows turn out to be two hoodlums dividing up a stolen bag. Those two unknown gentlemen that just brushed against each other actually exchanged illegal merchandise. The department that the respectable, well-dressed man is just leaving, has a dead female in a closet. That baby isn't sleeping - it's been drugged and kidnapped. That innocent-looking gyrocycle with dark windows contains a half-ton of stolen medicaments.

That's what the Heijian means - it represents the concealed part of the visible world. Willingly entering it is difficult, falling into it by accident is easy - and both paths are dangerous.

In short, 'Heijian' is the fancy word by which most criminals, particularly the Tongs, and many mercenaries and adventurers, refer to any kind of outlaw activities. For those that know the term, it's become an elaborate synonym of the underworld. An adventurer may spend his entire life outside the law without ever hearing the word - but he'll be living in the Heijian anyway.

SLAVERY

Slavery is a widespread crime across the Corvosphere, but it takes several disparate forms.

Forced labour, the most common form of slavery, is completely legal and government-sanctioned. Mostly used as punishment for several crimes, it's also available to less fortunate citizens as a way out of debt or poverty, as any citizen may choose to become an indentured servant to the Megacorps or their subsidiaries as payment for any service or financial dues. A lucky few of these citizens are assigned to everyday jobs at normal offices, but most indentured servants are sent to forced labour under the same conditions as criminal convicts - that is, exile, extremely long hours, poor nutrition, and no freedom until the labour period is fulfilled.

Then, there is actual sentient trafficking; every day, hundreds of thousands of Corvosphere citizens are kidnapped and sold into slavery by the Tongs. These slaves are then used to serve the entertainment and sex industry, or as forced labourers - treated exactly as indentured servants or exiled convicts. Some slaves are also used as involuntary guinea pigs in the development of illegal drugs and weaponry.

This kind of slavery is actively opposed and fought by Corvo law, which considers it a dai (heinous) crime at most settlements; however, it remains unbeatable, as the rate of expansion, economic growth and quality of life of the Corvosphere cannot be maintained without the effort of underpaid workers - and there's a huge market for extra hands (and brains) in every Corvo colony, especially if said hands can be made to work for free.

Finally, there are entire crime organisations dedicated to smuggling immigrants. As millions of Corvo citizens cannot fulfil the requirements for travelling from one colony to another, they are easy victims for slavers and bootleg runners offering them an 'easy route'.

Some of these immigrants are sold into outright slavery; those that don't are still merchandise, 'bought' by entrepreneurs that pay well for smugglers to find and transport

cheap workers. Although these workers are paid, their wages are so low that they have become a highly sought-after commodity for Corvo businessmen. Finding and routing immigrant workers is a growing, and completely legal, business, although it basically treats living people as merchandise and the Megacorps management officially acknowledges it as a necessary evil.

CYBERCRIME

Cybercrime is the most extensive type of crime in the Corvosphere; everyone is connected to the net, and new ways to exploit software weaknesses are constantly being discovered.

It is also a very safe type of crime as it can be performed from home, and is difficult to trace without the aid of a private security company. Therefore, most criminals target lower or middle class citizens, aiming for large numbers of easy victims instead of the more enticing, but difficult, upper class.

That said, there are some fantastic hackers known for being capable of penetrating the strongest of digital defences and uncovering the most closely guarded secrets of the Megacorps. These hackers must live in complete anonymity as they risk not only their freedom, but often also their lives.

CC CYBERCRIME

Cortex connector hacking is one of the most important forms of cybercrime in the Corvosphere.

It's a common practice for software crackers to invade CC lines and steal a fraction of the device's Processing Power Rate (PPR), to be sold later on to a data, cybernetic or information technology company (sometimes the same company from which they stole it in the first place) at a lower price. This limits the PPR that the owner of the device can access and causes the price of PPR to increase.

Infotech companies are constantly investing on CC digital security improvements, some going as far as implementing systems in their Closed versions that induce constant pain on the wearer if the device is tampered with, until checked by one of their techs.

Other hackers use this system to fish for information. Corporations have near-impregnable security systems, but even the largest corporations need to use CCs, which are far easier to hack into. However, additional steps are required in order to extract any information from these CCs, as information that goes through them is always codified and divided into tiny bits that are sent to different cortex connectors, making it impossible to extract any information from any single cortex connector even if the encryption code could be cracked.

SENTIENT TRAFFICKER

Level 1 :: Corvo :: Malicious
mov. 5 metres :: weight 54 kg :: height 160 cm

3	2	0	3

PHYSICAL STAT	5	INITIATIVE STAT	3	MENTAL STAT	3

CLOSE QUARTERS	2 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	1 ++

Nobrainer

Neural weapon (It deals neural or ACS damage and ignores armour).

Soulhunt

He always knows the exact location within his solar system of one character he has seen before. He can choose a different target but will lose track of the previous permanently.

Slavers enjoy the silence and indifference of an uncaring society, and can even get some Kalivan powers if they reach new heights of selfishness.

DEVIANT HACKER

Level 1 :: Corvo :: Cunning
mov. 5 metres :: weight 50 kg :: height 165 cm

2	4	0	6

PHYSICAL STAT	3 (1)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	5 (2)

HIT (DEX)	1	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Rig 2 (LinkWave 100)

He can perform Hacking actions (causing 2 ACS damage).

Repair Drones

Activated. He removes 2 ACS damage from a character or piece of gear up to 10 metres away.

"There is a war going on, but it is no longer about who has the most bullets, power, or money. It's about the dominion over little ones and zeroes, those tiny bits of data. What we see, read, hear, and think, its all about controlling information!"

Data mining requires the hackers to access the distribution algorithm from the target company and infect every cortex connector that receives the information just to get the encrypted data. Despite the enormous complexity of this procedure, it is often easier than accessing the central servers of the most powerful corporations - and the rewards are well worth the pain.

OIDIA

"Oops, I did it again" or OIDIA is one of the most notorious and wanted hackers in the entire Corvosphere. He is named after the signature he leaves behind and is known for his peculiar outlook on data as a living organism - just another form of life, that can be tamed like an animal.

Some think that he is code itself, that he is the first real AI. Others believe that he was killed during his latest job. Some believe OIDIA is not a single individual, but a long line of hackers that have passed the title down for several generations.

Despite all this, from time to time some astonishing hacking attack turns Corvo society upside down with the signature "Oops, I did it again", to prove that he, she, or it is very much alive.

Whatever the truth, OIDIA is without a doubt the greatest hacker in the Corvosphere, well known by his approach to hacking; that data can be trained, tamed and cared for like a living thing. He seems to have the right idea - or an uncanny intuition - because he has guessed passwords and bypassed security systems that no living person - or program - could have decoded. Some believe that, somehow, he can actually predict how data strings will behave.

His goals seem to vary - he can steal millions one day, and the next just mess with business data to spit the Megacorps. Although he appears to be mostly in it for the money, he also wants to leave a message - specifically that the Megacorps are NOT all-powerful, and that the little man can hurt them back.

Many corporations have bounties on OIDIA, willing to pay large sums for any information leading to 'his' capture. But OIDIA remains uncannily hidden and out of the law's reach, as the legend grows.

THE MOB

"The problem was never bad politicians, but a system that allows bad people to become politicians. Or even worse, one which creates bad people that go on to become politicians."

- Hamid Al-Razim, Iz'kal philosopher

In a society known both for its efficiency and its disregard for laws, it was inevitable for organised crime to appear. Corvo crime families, most commonly known as Tongs, control all unauthorized trade in the Corvosphere, from small-scale hacking to massive heists, from forgery of immigration licenses to actual slavery.

Although everybody knows they exist, and sometimes even their names and headquarters, Tongs are secret societies, and anything known about them is mere speculation at worst and an open secret at best.

A tong leader is called a Tong Zong, with the office and status of both family head and executive president. Under the Tong Zong there are several lieutenants and vice presidents, who oversee the bureaucracy of the Tong itself - much like a legal corporation.

In the Heijian underworld, the Tongs are the government. Tong leaders decide and lay out the rules, their thugs enforce them, and their illegal trade is the stock market by which all criminals and outsiders live. Any outcast or adventurer living in the Heijian knows to respect the Tongs and their power; in the underworld, they are as mighty as Megacorps, as proud as nobility, and far more fearsome than any ruler of the lawful world.

The Tongs work outside the jurisdiction of the Megacorps, but they are a part of them, just as everything else in the Corvosphere. Every criminal society is a part of a larger organisation, which in turn belongs to an even larger enterprise, and so on; larger businesses need to be legal, or at least keep a pretence of legality, and every legal business in the Corvosphere is part of a Megacorp. Plus, most Tong bosses have some front or real job that is somehow related to a lawful enterprise. By the same token, all crime families launder their credits through dummy firms, or even actual companies, that are almost invariably subsidiaries of a larger corporation, which in turn is part of one of the Megacorps. But if Megacorps directives know this, they can pretend it's all beneath their notice, as most Tong connections are far enough down the chain of command that they don't have to acknowledge its existence.

There is, of course, a so far unsubstantiated rumour that some Tong Zong are actually very high up in the Megacorps - but no Tong has been proven to have corporate links of such calibre.

It is not unknown for the Tongs to turn legit and cut ties with all illegal activities; conversely, many a legit company goes from toying with minor misdeeds to all-out crime, competing with other Tongs for control of the underworld.

TONG FAMILIES

Although there are thousands of Tongs in the Corvosphere, a few families stand out from the others, be it because of the size of their gangs, their ruthlessness or the amount of money they handle. These few, stronger gangs dispute the top of the food chain today, but tomorrow one or all of them may fall and leave their space to a new predator.

The largest Tong in the Corvosphere is the Zhui family, which controls most illegal trade - from data to living beings - in the outer sectors of Tiantang. The Zhui are businesspeople first and foremost, and care about nothing but profit. Keeping a focus on earnings has helped them retain authority and control where more hot-headed mobs have fallen to the competition or their own internal strife. Their Tong Zong is Zhui Yan, or 'Lady Zhui'; a powerfully built and incredibly smart old woman that has built her empire on a mix of prestige, wits and bravery, in roughly that order.

The Zhui's greatest rivals are the Hwangs, a somewhat smaller Tong that, while less powerful than the Zhui, has a longer reach and dabbles in more diverse businesses not only near Tiantang but across the farthest Corvo colonies as well. This diversification dilutes the Hwangs' power but it also increases their territory. The Hwang Tong is also more visibly ruthless than the Zhui, favoring public executions and bloody examples that other Tong would find distasteful. Their Tong Zong is Honcho Hwang, considered public enemy number one by half the police forces in the Corvosphere, and a famously flamboyant and prodigal bandit, who has built a sort of personality cult around himself and is actually lauded as a hero across the poorer Corvo sectors.

Other Tongs are either too small to be of any concern to the Zhui or the Hwang, or else are quickly bought - or dismantled - by the larger organisations. An exception to this rule are the Dragonflies, a small but feisty gang that has overtaken a few Tiantang districts thanks to their designer drugs, hacking skills and sheer guts. Although both the Zhui and the Hwang regard them as small-time punks, the Dragonflies have started making noise on the older Tongs' turfs, and a gang war may be just around the corner. The leader of the Dragonfly gang is Dynamite, a relatively young biker girl, with little respect for any kind of authority and the stomach for any crime, regardless of how bold or impossible it seems.

THE ZHUI TONG

The Zhui are the oldest and largest criminal outfit in the Corvosphere. Their agents and enforcers have a finger in almost every illegal pie in Tiantang, and even some mining colonies that all but belong to their outfit. They are honourable, organised and reliable, but absolutely heartless if slighted in any way. They like the good life, and make no attempts to hide their wealth - but they also have an appreciation for sobriety and good taste. Lady Zhui, their leader, runs the gang like a tiered corporation, with local bosses answering to regional leaders, which in turn report to the family council which she presides like a majority shareholder. In fact, she encourages all of her people to refer to their Tong as 'the business', and frowns on explicit references to illegal activity.

LADY ZHUI 'MONA LISA'

The head of the Zhui tong is one of the most imposing, cunning, and ruthless Corvo in Tiantang, and perhaps the entire Corvosphere. She is a gigantic Corvo, taller than some Humans, and almost as broad as a Raag thanks to a mix of fat and muscle. Her voice is deep and soothing, and her manners calm and composed. She sports a half-smile, which she can effortlessly switch from reassuring to intimidating. This has earned Lady Zhui the sarcastic nickname 'Mona Lisa' from the Human mercenaries that know her.

Above all, Zhui Yan is a businesswoman willing to negotiate any situation, even if she seems to have the advantage, just to make sure her business gets the best possible deal. She likes stalling for resolutions while staring her target in the eye. For more stubborn interlocutors, she resorts to subtle intimidation, aided by whatever information she may have gathered on her target beforehand. If all else fails, Lady Zhui is a powerfully-built Corvo, stronger than almost any other member of her species, and is always accompanied by about a dozen of highly trained, elite bodyguards.

AN END TO WAR

Lady Zhui likes the status quo, and would live her entire life maintaining things as they are - but now, the rise of the Hwang and Dragonfly Tongs has given her a short-term crisis to deal with. She has already tried to make peace with the Hwang and squash the Dragonflies a couple of times, so far without success. She needs to make sure the three-way gang war ends before it begins - decisively. At worst, she could try and buy out the Dragonflies, recruiting them against the Hwang; but so far they've proven too volatile to control or appease.

Recently, however, Lady Zhui's spies in Tiantang police brought her interesting information - Lao Meng, the chief of police of all Tiantang, has an offer from Hwang Mob lieutenants that wish to ally with the police to betray Honcho Hwang Gun, their boss, and bring him to justice. According to Lady Zhui's agents, Officer Lao is currently torn between strict adherence to the law and allying with the Hwang lieutenants to overthrow their leader. Thus Lady Zhui has decided her best bet is to use her contacts in law enforcement and actually encourage the deal, promoting legal action against Honcho Hwang Gun. With the Hwang warlord dead or in jail, her problems would be practically over. So currently, her best friend may be Lao Meng, the woman that's always been her worst enemy - or anyone that helps the deal between Lao and the Hwang mob to come through. Lady Zhui will listen to any proposal from any Hwang member, Tiantang police agent, or freelance mercenary that comes to her with a proposal to either weaken her rival gangs or help the deal between Lao Meng and the Hwang traitors - taking out the deal's opponents, for example, either among the Hwang or among the law.

THE MONA LISA SMILE

Intrigued by the nickname received from her Human mercenaries - and after having a couple of them killed before she understood the joke - Lady Zhui sought the original Mona Lisa, a painting of an enigmatic Human woman. Finding it was quite an ordeal by itself, as she had to bribe Corvo pilots to carry her men to Earth, and these men had to seek the painting all across the planet with no other clue than some rumours and scattered data about ancient Humanity, even though the territory had become a dangerous, post-apocalyptic war zone.

Contrary to all predictions, Lady Zhui's men did find the Mona Lisa in an ancient museum and sent it back to their boss across The Labyrinth. Not caring about the painting's meaning or history, or even about her nickname, Lady Zhui kept and hung it on her office, as a reminder that nothing in the Universe was outside her grasp.

Not long ago, someone stole the painting. Nobody knows who had the gall to steal from the most feared crime boss in the Corvosphere, or why they did it. The Corvosphere is far larger than Earth, and recovering the painting has proven harder than it was to find it in the first place. However, she won't let go of the issue, and put out two large rewards in the Heijian underworld - one, for getting the painting back; the other for the head of whoever stole it.

MONA LISA

Kalivan 2 :: Unstoppable

Level 3 :: Corvo :: Resourceful
mov. 5 metres :: weight 92 kg :: height 182 cm

7	5	1	-

PHYSICAL STAT	8 (3)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	18 (2)

HIT (DEX)	4 +	GRAPPLE (CON)	3 ++

Commanding

She can declare a character at the beginning of the round. All her allies gain one advantage to attack that character.

Enigmatic Smile

She gains one advantage towards social interactions, and two towards hiding her intentions.

Nicknamed after an enigmatic Human legend thanks to her equally cryptic smile, Lady Zhui is a stunning Corvo specimen in both brains and muscle.

ZHUI ENFORCER

Mob

Level 1 :: Corvo :: Crafty
mov. 5 metres :: weight 55 kg :: height 160 cm

3	4	0	-

PHYSICAL STAT	5 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (2)	MENTAL STAT	5 (2)

CLOSE QUARTERS	3 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	2

Window of Opportunity

When he performs an action against a Spent character, he gains one advantage.

Low ranking Zhui enforcers achieve a singular balance between honourability and heartlessness. After all, you lose nothing by being polite.

THE HWANG TONG

The Hwang are the opposite of the Zhui in many respects; they are brash, blustering, crude and proud of it. They run their turf like conquered territory, their bosses behaving like autocratic warlords and their men like their militia. They are much more diversified, having business in countless illegal factories, labs, and workshops across the Corvosphere. The Hwang are explicitly vicious, gladly making public examples of anyone that crosses them. Their inner organisation resembles a dysfunctional family, where brother slays brother and is gruesomely punished by the father; in this sense, the father of everyone is Hwang Gun, their fearsome Tong Zong.

HONCHO HWANG GUN

The Hwang Tong leader, the 'dictator' heading the superpower, is 'Honcho' Hwang Gun, the most famous criminal in the Corvosphere and official public enemy number one for all Corvo law enforcement outfits. Honcho Hwang is quite proud of this reputation, and takes advantage of it at every opportunity he gets. He is a smiling, bragging Corvo covered in gaudy clothes and accessories, with an aesthetic body modification to look like he has a tall fin on his skull - which was a fashion trend in Xiao sector when he grew up there. Honcho Hwang's head fin has become a symbol of death, terror and crime in the poorer sections of Tiantang, where he is actually admired for his feats and adventures against the law.

Hwang Gun is an overbearing narcissist with very little patience; he's been known to kill people for changing the subject of a conversation or looking away when he's talking to them. He's also one of the fastest gunmen in Tiantang, fully capable of taking on an armed squad on his own. But what really makes Honcho Hwang so dangerous is that he believes himself immortal, untouchable and supreme: He'll indulge in anything if it strikes his fancy, with no fear of the consequences.

ZHUSHAN CITADEL

Honcho Hwang is known for his displays of wealth and power, but none of them equal his acquisition of an entire Corvo colony, which he bought privately and turned into his personal resort. Although nobody outside Honcho's closest family and associates has seen the citadel and lived, by all accounts it is one of the most beautiful places in the Corvosphere - a luxurious, fully-armed floating palace in orbit around a paradise planet. Rumour has it Honcho Hwang keeps most of his money stashed in a secret place at that planet, where he also buries his enemies. The citadel has well-tended and fully-equipped quarters for every member of his family, staff and personal guard, as well as an emergency security bunker and all of Honcho Hwang's exotic collections, from his personal zoo to his extensive and priceless personal arsenal.

AN END TO WAR

Honcho Hwang is always in more trouble than he thinks, but this time it's serious. Shen Shao, one of his lieutenants, has become an informant for the Xiao district police force, and is trying to reach Commander Lao Meng, the Tiantang chief of police, to strike a deal. If that deal comes through, it could mean the end of the Hwang Tong. The main actor against this deal is Kan Jiang, CEO of The Union, who has expressly forbid all police forces to strike any kind of deal with criminals under pain of a lifetime corporate ban on the infractors. Kan Jiang's ban could mean ruin for Commander Lao if she takes the deal, but the chief officer is not that keen on making deals with gangsters. However, if The Union upper command saw the benefits of an informant within the Hwang Tong, it could become an exception to the policy and the downfall of Honcho Hwang.

Finally, Lady Zhui, Honcho Hwang's main rival and head of the Zhui Tong, is secretly pushing for the deal to come through, using her corrupt officials to influence Commander Lao's choice. It is all happening under Honcho Hwang's nose; if he got wind of Shen Shao's betrayal, heads would surely roll.

Right now, the fate of organised crime in Tiantang rests on a knife's edge - and it all depends on whether the deal goes through or not.

A freelance mercenary with good skills, good contacts and nothing else to do could benefit from this situation in several ways: Helping either the Zhui or the Hwang traitors to locate Union officials who are both open-minded and important enough for them to influence Kan Jiang's ban on mob deals; helping Honcho Hwang to find and kill said Union officials, said traitors and all involved Zhui and police agents; hiring out to the Hwang traitors, the Zhui or to the police to locate corrupt police officers on the payroll of the Hwang mob and prevent them from telling everything to the Hwang boss; entering law enforcement or simply seek Lao Meng's people and convince them to make the deal, either for the benefit of the cops or in the Zhui's or Shan Sao's payroll; and of course, be there when things get ugly and everyone starts shooting at each other.

HONCHO HWANG GUN

Kalivan 2 :: Lone Wolf :: Master

Level 4 :: Corvo :: Ruthless
mov. 5 metres :: weight 68 kg :: height 172 cm

5	5	2	8

PHYSICAL STAT	20 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (3)	MENTAL STAT	8 (2)

CLOSE QUARTERS	3 ++	STANDARD DISTANCE	3

Honcho's Guns

Plasma weapon (It ignores 1 point of armour). The attack can target a second character OR damage its target twice.

Enraged

When he reaches negative health, he doesn't die and he ignores damage penalties. If he is damaged again, he dies.

Merciless

Instant. He can cause 2 unpreventable physical damage to a friendly character, who gains one advantage towards his next action and takes his turn if we was Ready or becomes Ready if he was Spent.

Honcho and his abominably modified skull are synonym to death and terror.

HWANG ENFORCER

Mob

Level 1 :: Corvo :: Aggressive
mov. 5 metres :: weight 58 kg :: height 165 cm

4	3	0	-

PHYSICAL STAT	7 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (2)	MENTAL STAT	3 (1)

CLOSE QUARTERS	2 ++	STANDARD DISTANCE	2 -

Doorkicker

The attack doubles its base damage against characters with armour 1 or less OR it ignores 1 point of armour and gains one advantage in Standard Distance.

Bully

He gains one advantage against opponents who have suffered more physical damage than him.

Members of a dysfunctional gang, Hwang enforcers have to be ruthless, vicious and gruesome if they want to keep their limbs intact.

THE DRAGONFLY TONG

The small Dragonfly gang is just another Tong from the fringe sectors of Tiantang, but their bold crimes - beginner's luck, the Zhui call it - have earned them some prestige in the underworld and they have actually done some damage to Zhui and Hwang operations. Regarded - perhaps with good reason - as just 'a rowdy biker gang with delusions of grandeur', the Dragonflies nonetheless keep gaining territory and power by the sheer madness of their tactics. They mount suicide operations, assault heavily guarded facilities, antagonise dangerously powerful enemies, and so far have miraculously succeeded at most of their hits. Like typical bullies, they always look like they are having fun, particularly after they have scared or hurt someone.

All Dragonflies have a dragon tattoo on their backs; those who leave the gang are either killed or disfigured with acid to remove the tattoo.

DYNAMITE

Dynamite, the Tong Zong of the Dragonflies, reflects the personality of her entire Tong - she's an impatient, irreflexive and boisterous show-off, a party animal and an overconfident bully. She's a relatively young - looking much younger than she actually is - Corvo biker, dressed in gyger gear and riding a streamlined, modified gyrocycle that's always far better groomed than she is. Dynamite is often followed by a gang of maddened, noisy and wild Dragonfly bikers, and takes the most handsome and muscular of them for her personal retinue.

However, just like her juvenile demeanour hides a shrewd, grown woman, Dynamite's wild and suicidal facade hides a very cunning tactician. Most of her actions are far better thought and calculated than it seems, and while she certainly takes many needless risks, she is far from the harebrained berserker she affects to be. She is quite ambitious and has big plans for the Dragonflies, which she intends to grow into the most powerful Tong in the Corvosphere.

THE DAO SISTERS

Dynamite's main obstacle to power is her own recklessness and addiction to danger, of course, but there's something more tangible in her way: the Dao sisters. They were the Dragonfly leaders before Dynamite rose to power; when she defeated them, she kept them as Tong members and allowed them to lead their own smaller gangs. The Dao sisters pretend to be loyal to her, as she's been ten times the leader they were, and under her the Dragonflies have reached heights they had never dreamed of.

However, they are planning to oust her and recoup their former status. As the sisters see it, now that the Dragonflies are powerful, nobody needs Dynamite anymore, and nobody would care if she accidentally killed herself during one of her crazy stunts, fell in the hands of the police during an ambush... there are many ways it could happen. It's only a matter of time, or hiring the right freelancer, one without ties to the Dragonflies. It can be made to look like an accident - something bound to happen to someone as reckless as Dynamite anyway.

Of course, that freelancer could also go to Dynamite with information on the sisters' scheme and help her punish them. There's money and prestige to be had either way.

AN END TO WAR

Unknown to the Dragonflies, there's currently an important situation that involves their main rival, the Hwang Tong. There's a traitor among the Hwang that wants to reach the chief police officer of Tiantang for a deal that would leave the Hwang weak and leaderless. If Dynamite learned of this deal, she would do anything in her power to make it go through, including killing any police officer or Hwang mobster opposed to the plan. Whoever gave her the tip would likely receive the chance to join in on the action and prove their loyalty, as well as a decent sum of money, when and if they survive.

There's a twist, however. Dynamite has always believed she is nothing but a street orphan, with no parents and no past. In fact, she is one of the hundreds - some say thousands - of illegitimate children sired by Honcho Hwang Gun himself. Neither Honcho nor Dynamite know this, but Shan Sao, the Hwang traitor and main instigator of the deal with the police, knows. Because Shan Sao is Dynamite's mother.

Shan Sao used to be one of Honcho Hwang Gun's many lovers. When she got pregnant Honcho forced her to give the baby to a homeless shelter, but she secretly kept track of her daughter, and followed her exploits from a distance.

This is why Shan Sao seeks to topple her ex-lover's criminal empire; she wants to reunite with her daughter, or at least to get Dynamite to rule both the Hwang and the Dragonflies, knowing that she fully deserves it. And perhaps, she also wants to know she did right by her little girl after all.

DYNAMITE

Kalivan 2 :: Lone Wolf :: Proficient

Level 3 :: Corvo :: Strategist
mov. 5 metres :: weight 54 kg :: height 157 cm

4	6	2	8

PHYSICAL STAT	8 (3)	INITIATIVE STAT	9 (3)	MENTAL STAT	8 (3)

HIT (DEX)	2 +	GRAPPLE (CON)	0 +

Dynamite's Bombs

She has an unlimited supply of all kinds of grenades. She can throw grenades up to 50 metres away with one advantage.

Mark of the Deceiver

Instant. She triggers the effect of playing a joker, then suffers 2 neural damage.

Shrewd 2

She draws two cards at the beginning of the round. Whenever she or an ally are in a confrontation, they can play any of those cards instead of playing from the top of the deck.

Dynamite, leader of the Dragonflies, appears to be juvenile and irreflexive, but she has high hopes both for herself and her mob.

DRAGONFLY ENFORCER

Mob

Level 1 :: Corvo :: Unpredictable
mov. 5 metres :: weight 58 kg :: height 163 cm

3	3	1	-

PHYSICAL STAT	5 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	3 (1)

CLOSE QUARTERS	3 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	3 +

Kaive

Extended range: 300 metres, damage 3. Action. Shoot any grenade up to 50 metres.

Double-edged Sword

Activated. The winner of this confrontation increases their level of success to the next best level.

The Dragonfly tong is known for their extravagant antics and their brash attitudes. Even the lowly enforcers think they are hot stuff.

CULTURE

"Kalivans have a very narrow view of crime. They see it as an independent factor that arises from personal choice, instead of a side effect of inequality and lack of opportunity, as most studies have proven. Putting faces to problems makes good press. It is the broken state that condemns the defenceless to a criminal life, but the idea of a faceless entity on trial doesn't taste as sweet as blaming individuals. Sadly, life is bitter."

- Lee Yin, Corvo philosopher and supporter of the Iz'kal State

The Corvo believe in themselves; this phrase sums up the whole of Corvo philosophy. As the most independent and pragmatic species in the known universe, the Corvo had very little time for abstract thought, prejudice or idealization; however, they have still found time to develop their own unique brand of philosophy, less based on values and ideas - like the philosophies of other species - and more on practical advice and results.

For a Human, most Corvo philosophy would sound like self-help principles or a motivational speech, but there are also variant schools of thought among the Corvo, which take their standard values into more complex territory, or directly question them.

CORVO VALUES

"Of all illnesses, envy is the most contagious."

- Sheikha Olayan, talking to the State's Economic department about the dangers of Corvo values entering the State.

To truly understand the Corvo, first we need to make clear that they have absolutely no abstract values as we know them.

The Corvo brain is ill-equipped for abstract ideas such as nationality, moral superiority or intrinsic worth. They have a hard time understanding anything that doesn't have a proven, real material benefit. Thus, most Corvo recognize no value but wealth, which can be materially quantified, and they believe in nothing but success, which necessarily provides material benefits when realised. As a result, the Corvo have no concept of what other species would call 'high ideals', moral right or wrong, or philosophical aspirations. By the same token, they're also not used to most kinds of arbitrary bias or prejudice.

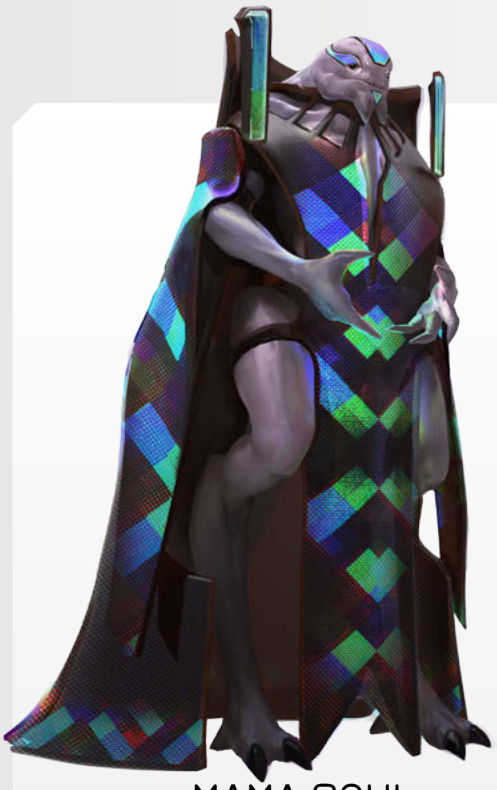
As regards what we Humans understand as 'wisdom', Corvo society would look incredibly shallow to an outsider. As a culture, the Corvo are not accustomed to meditation or deep thinking; in fact, they tend to shun abstract thought of any kind, and actively seek to avoid it in conversation with others. This is not to say the Corvo don't have philosophy; after all, that same leisurely existence - even the poorest Corvo earn most of their money by spending long hours inactive in skulling jobs - gives them plenty of free time to question and ponder. It's just that what they ponder about are mostly things that occupy their real life, such as fashion trends, pop culture or acquiring more money. Most Corvo philosophy treatises would seem like 'how to succeed' practical manuals to a Human, and many have really good advice and breakthroughs on the subject.

What Corvo philosophy doesn't have is a moral compass - they don't understand being 'good' or 'bad' as other species do. There is no Corvo rights charter, not even a widespread concept of 'Corvo rights' as we understand the idea - since the Corvo have no prejudice and treat nobody as inherently inferior, they mostly don't need to write laws to treat everyone equally. Even Corvo bias is based on facts: poverty is objectively worse than wealth, suffering is objectively worse than pleasure, and so on. In Corvo morals, an individual is good if he achieves prosperity, and he's bad if he fails.

SOCIETISM AND INDEPENDISM

The greatest division in Corvo thought comes from the two opposing schools that we Humans would translate as societism and independism. Societism, the oldest of these schools, challenged basic Corvo individualism by assuming that, even in a free market society, the individual needs to abide by the rules of the social environment and secure peer approval, as there is no individual success possible from outside the group. Independism, on the other hand, holds that a truly free individual should write his own laws and force the social environment to adapt to his needs and not the other way around; that true success can only be achieved by triumphing over the group, too. By the nature of their reasonings, societism also assumes that success has no limit - that hypothetically everyone can become successful; independism, on the contrary, maintains that success can only be held by being the absolute victor over everyone else, and that if two parties achieve ultimate prosperity, they must necessarily confront each other until only one has succeeded.

These two schools have thousands of variants, interpretations and revisions, but they are still the two philosophies that prevail in Corvo culture.



MAMA SOUL

Kalivan Prophet

Level 4 :: Corvo :: Negotiator

mov. 5 metres :: weight 62 kg :: height 167 cm

4	6	0	-

PHYSICAL STAT	16 (1)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (3)	MENTAL STAT	16 (2)

HIT (DEX)	1	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Emotional

Facts don't have any special effect on her.

Judge of character

Characters attempting to lie to her suffer one disadvantage.

Subjugation

Action (Mental). She suffers 3 neural damage and targets a character within 20 metres, with one advantage if her Faith is higher than her target's, and reducing her target's Mind by 1 per level of success until the end of the scene. If his Mind is reduced below 1, she gains absolute control over him.

Mama Soul is the biggest celebrity in the Corvosphere. Her broadcasts amass millions of viewers, making her an extremely influential figure.

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

As stated before, the Corvo don't easily understand abstract values or unproven truths; in fact, their language has no word for 'belief'. Thus, god worship was slow to appear in Corvo society. When Kaliva inspired the heroes and rulers of ancient Corvo history, most of their subjects - and most chroniclers of the time - attributed their astounding powers and achievements to their own greatness, and ascribed divinity to the individuals themselves, not to an invisible force that favoured them. There were many attempts to establish a church of Kaliva, or even Vexal, during Corvo history, but it was only later, when the existence of the Gods was proven and confirmed by theologians, that the Corvo founded their organised religion. In this, the Corvo worked inversely to other starfaring species, questioning the Gods first and accepting them later. For many Corvo philosophers, this skepticism is the very reason the Corvo succeeded and expanded where other species didn't.

Most Corvo worship Kaliva, who favours individualism, competition, and competence, but all Gods have followers in the Corvosphere. Millions of Corvo worship Vexal because they seek true freedom, and for them success is removing the shackles of material needs; but many also worship Ergon or Hexia because they believe in the prosperity and advancement of the Corvo species as a whole. Worship of Ledger in the Corvosphere is clandestine and unquantified, as it is everywhere else. There's even an urban legend among the Corvo lower classes that the Megacorps' CEOs don't actually believe in progress, success or wealth, and have built the whole of Corvo culture out of an elaborate joke by a secret Ledger cult.

For the Corvo, the Gods are service providers at best, and a resource to be exploited at worst. The Corvo know of the Gods' existence and the powers they grant, but don't believe in moral right or wrong; thus, they follow the Gods fully expecting to get something in return. That's why Kaliva's faith is so prevalent in the Corvosphere - as Kaliva rewards self-sufficiency and unaided success, most Corvo are automatically rewarded by following his tenets, needing very little actual, direct help from him. By comparison, the rewards gained by following other Gods are far less obvious and frequent; as far as most Corvo are concerned, Gods other than Kaliva are an inferior product.

MAMA SOUL

The leader of the Corvo church and Supreme Prophet of Kaliva, known by the colourful moniker of 'Mama Soul', is one of the Corvosphere's greatest superstars. A great public speaker and staple public personality, known to every last one of the billions of Corvosphere inhabitants due to her advertisements and freely-accessible broadcast speeches, Mama Soul is the face of Kaliva for the average Corvo, which in the shallow culture of the Corvosphere means she's more powerful and famous that Kaliva herself.

Mama Soul is also a very powerful Soulbender, with the gifts to stir, manipulate and draw the attention of everyone that looks at or listens to her. She has been known to convert followers of other gods to the Kalivan faith after a single, short speech; many Corvo officials and leaders see her as a very dangerous loose cannon, and even a criminal, for her ability to tamper with the free will of others. But the church of Kaliva expressly forbids limiting others' freedoms, so Mama Soul is bound by her own credo to never use her powers as a means of mass control. Nonetheless, she remains one of the most powerful beings in the Corvosphere.

The problem is, Mama Soul is actually working to subvert the Corvo people. She wants to turn the Church of Kaliva itself into a Megacorp; she knows that if all Kalivans joined forces, they would be larger than any one of the Megacorps, and become a single-minded power of such strength that no species or government, not even the Ravager themselves, would stand before them. As a real follower of Kaliva, she seeks to become stronger - stronger in her Faith, in her material success and in her physical power. Placing the church of Kaliva as the ruling body of the Corvosphere will grant her all three goals, and make her even mightier in Kaliva's approval. While she indeed can't control minds directly, she is very influential and smart; she has been leading a decades-long scheme, which started with her own planned ascension to superstardom, to become popular enough to challenge the power of the Megacorps. Her next step is to undermine the Megacorps' credibility; any proof of the Megacorps' corruption or their worst practices would be the excuse she's been waiting for all these years: Her cue to initiate a smear campaign against the Megacorps. And then, the next step: to subtly goad the Corvo people into asking for a stronger, unified leadership - a religious leadership.

In short, Mama Soul wants nothing less than turning the Corvosphere into a theocracy, and Kaliva is very definitely on her side.

LIFESTYLE

"Money is like oxygen: you need it, but it will poison you if you have too much."

- A'idah Al-Enezi, Iz'kal ambassador (excerpt from the first Iz'kal-Corvo embassies meeting)

Corvo consumerism is legendary. Their society is ruled by the appearance of new technologies and fashion. Being able to afford the latest in Corvo products, or exotic goods from remote planets, is intrinsically related to popularity and pride. Corvo industries are always coming up with new models of their products, with new and fascinating functionalities and capabilities, in an effort to keep the attention of a public that is never satisfied. Corvo companies have devised all kinds of creative methods to attract consumers, from standard billboard advertisements to 3-D sensorial feeds in the streets of virtual worlds. People that enter certain commercial areas with CC feeds have the impulses to buy, eat or enter a store directly fed into their brain.

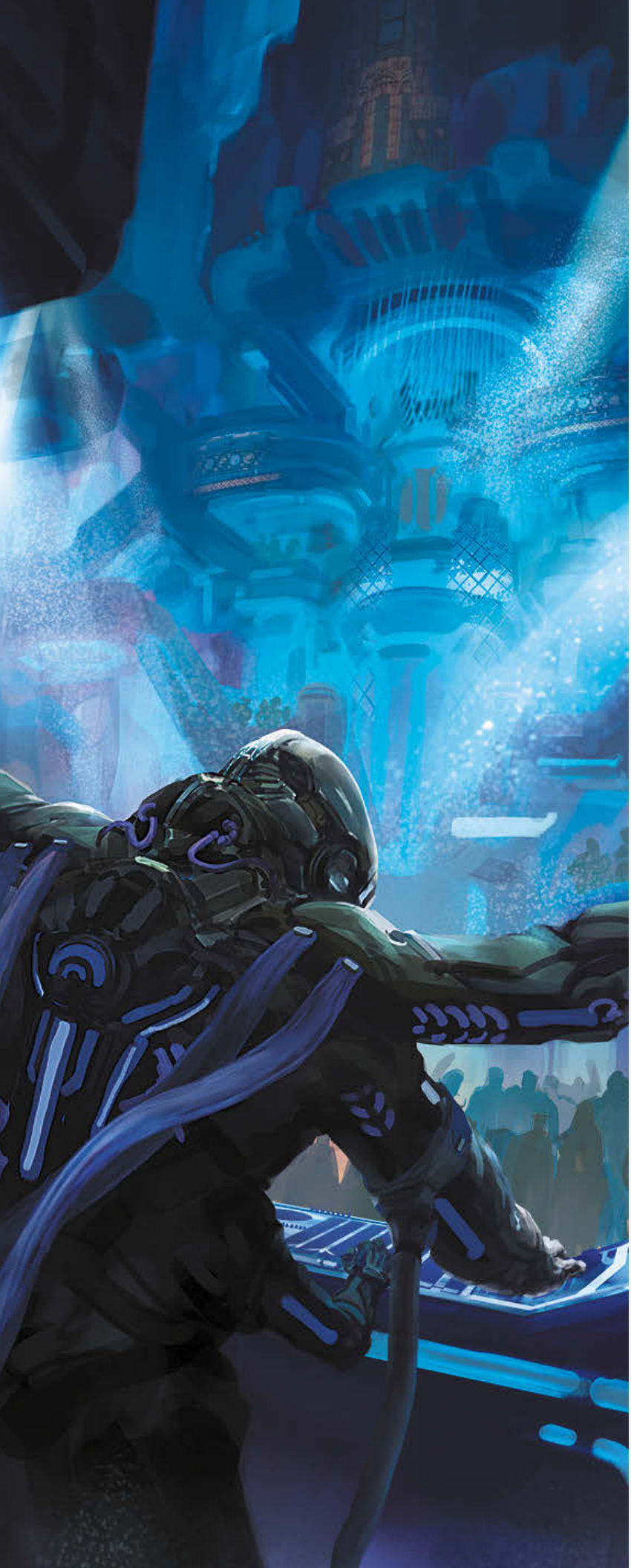
The Corvo enjoy a highly technological lifestyle, in which they spend most of their time connected to the net. Thousands of different virtual worlds are hosted on their networks, readily available to those with a cortex connection. Most travel agencies offer special cortex-connected vacations to wonderful virtual worlds, as real travelling is extremely expensive and the Corvo are very dependent on their jobs. They normally do not like to leave their job for more than a week at a time, as they feel they are damaging their possibilities to ascend the corporate ladder.

Complete immersion in the net-worlds is delicate, as bodily functions decrease when the mind becomes absent this way. Thus, the Corvo health department - controlled by Nation's Solution, a rival to Wang Corp which created and distributes cortex connectors - strongly recommends not to stay connected for more than 16 hours every day. There have been cases of people that have died after neglecting their physical bodies. Only the richest Corvo can afford long periods of virtual immersion, as they have access to high-end machines that keep their bodies healthy and nurtured while their minds spend their whole lives in all kinds of net-worlds.

Many Corvo oppose CC virtual worlds, lifemods and experience drugs, and there's a growing movement in the largest Tiantang districts to 'unplug from the CC', claiming that CC dependency is a real threat to the Corvo as a species. As productivity itself depends on Corvo plugging themselves to the neuronet for long hours, the movement has not really caught on, but CC dependency does carry very important health risks, from muscular atrophia to withdrawal syndrome. Some spokesmen of the 'unplug movement', as it's unofficially called, claim that the lack of empathy so common among Corvo is a socially-learned behaviour, caused by peer pressure, commercial sensory bombardment, and a lack of physical interaction rather than a genetic trait.

RECREATIONAL CC USE

Although cortex connectors are the main source of employment in the Corvosphere and the lynchpin of Corvo labour economy, they were created for entertainment, and that remains their most popular use. Recreational use of cortex connectors is so ingrained in the Corvo lifestyle that most Corvo - even those who cannot afford their own CC - consider cortex connection to be as necessary as food, shelter or clothing. Even the most miserable Corvo will set aside a few credits to rent CC time at the nearest parlor.



The reason for this is that most of the culture and lifestyle of the Corvo happens in the neuronet; a Corvo without a CC is all but isolated from social interaction, cut off from the world. Corvo media is so titillating and entertaining that the real world, particularly for those living in the dismal zero-g slums of Tiantang, seems dull and stifling in comparison. Thus, most Corvo have developed some measure of CC addiction.

Furthermore, there are designer recreational experiences, also known as 'experience drugs', or XDs, designed exclusively for digital consumption - that is, datapacks and specialized signals that link directly into the user's synapses via their cortex connector and provide an altered state of consciousness, bypassing physical sensation and going directly to neural pleasure centers. Cortex connectors allow these XDs to be tailored for specific experiences - thus there are love XDs, sexual XDs, euphoria XDs, adrenaline XDs, etcetera. Some XDs are further customised, offering specific scenarios like 'wild party', 'walk on the beach' or 'dungeon adventure', complete with neurally-programmed imagery and sounds, achieving a level of believability that, for sensorial purposes, supersedes and surpasses reality.

Despite their proven neural and psychological side effects, which include deprivation syndrome and mental alienation, XDs are quite legal across the Corvosphere and may be freely bought everywhere. One XD datapack is good for a single-use experience, and can last anywhere from one minute to several hours. Such XD packs can be very expensive depending on length, quality, supply and demand. There are hundreds of thousands of media companies dedicated exclusively to XD production, and some take it to the level of an art form. There are famous XD designers, such as Lightning Studios, whose new releases are always highly anticipated and outrageously priced.

FASHION

"We had the chance to make money by hiring ourselves out as walking advertisements, carrying their brand names and giving them visibility - but instead, we ended up paying three to five times the price of things for the privilege of turning ourselves into these walking advertisements. I am thunderstruck."

- Xue Lin, Corvo comedian and political activist

Corvo strive to show off their own uniqueness, and most differentiate themselves through fashion. Their trends, based mostly on prosthetics and tattoos, are constantly changing, absorbing elements from the various species they come across and from their own heritage.

As the Corvo have no innate sense of shame or embarrassment, and need very little protection from the weather, they use clothes almost exclusively for vanity and to

express their identity to other Corvo. Thus, the fashion industry is one of the largest businesses in the Corvosphere. But fashion is not limited to jewellery and clothing - numerous accessories, with no real use (but as indispensable to most Corvo as food and shelter), flood the market. These include belt pouches, portable digital screens, fake earphones and customised tail plugs.

Extreme body modification is not uncommon, and Corvo science makes it easy and relatively cheap; many Corvo add things to their body such as tattoos, a third eye or a second tail. These extra limbs are as functional or ornamental as the Corvo chooses - and as he can afford. For example, a poorer Corvo may have to content themselves with a third eye that cannot really see, while a rich heiress may add an extra set of fully functional arms to her anatomy. None of this is seen as weird or unsettling by other Corvo, and there are several fashion trends based on body modification.

Corvo fashion is attached to subcultures and urban tribes; for example, Izkies are young urban girls from the poor slums near the central Corvosphere, whose fashion includes using pink balloon suits and fake head extensions resembling Iz'kal head appendages. Izkies have become so widespread that they are a kind of fetish for some Corvo adults and have given rise to copycat trends, such as fazkies ('fake' izkies from the Corvo upper classes).

CORVO SUBCULTURES

Even though there are many Corvo ethnicities, Corvo nations and cultures were absorbed by the massive culture of the Megacorps after Tiantang was built. Thousands upon thousands of different cultures, languages and customs slowly merged into the monopolising Corvosphere. However, several Corvo subcultures, not based on nationality or ethnic group but on various other forms of identity, have survived to this day, or recently emerged.

MEGACORP SOCIAL GROUPS

The most notorious subcultures of the Corvosphere are Megacorp-based social groups, in which even the lowliest employees of a Megacorp feel a common identity. Thus, a more or less safe way of identifying a Corvo's workplace is by his clothes and ways to talk.

GUOLIES

Workers of Nation's Solution, also known as Nationals, guò li or guolies, are stereotypically known to be studious, dull and hard-working. They like easy listening and milder fashions, shunning the outrageous in their every custom. They speak in a long-voweled accent that sounds whining and grating to other Corvo. Guolies see themselves as the average or 'normal' Corvo, and tend to see other Corvo as too loud and attention-seeking. Their music and dress styles, while not necessarily sober, reflect this 'good taste', which they call pin. For guolies, pin is that mark of distinction they have that separates them as a cultural group. They are more into philosophy and religion than other Corvo, and see Kalivan gatherings as socialisation.

LIANNIES

Workers of The Union, also called liàn, or liannies, tend to wear coarse, utilitarian clothes, made of tougher fabrics, even outside work; liannie fashion is based on military designs, jumpsuits and overalls. They talk in a curt, rougher accent, and like to speak their mind more loudly and candidly than other Corvo. Their sense of humour, manners and artistic tastes tend to be offensive to other Corvo as well. Liannie music is rhythmic and loud, divided in genres depending on whether it's to listen or dance to; li liang music comes originally from Liannie beats. There's a stereotype that liàn are uncouth, violent, hardy and impulsive.

WANGERS

Wang Corp workers, known as Wangers by other Corvo - and inevitably as 'wankers' by some Human immigrants - , tend to be chic, trendy, and always up to date with the latest tech advances. They only wear the latest clothes and listen to fashionable music. They are stereotypically known for their shallowness and selfishness, even to Corvo standards. They reject the term 'Wanger', but they have no official name, as they have dozens of sub-subcultures, which are often at odds with each other, divided by what genre of pop culture they like and whether they prefer music, fashion or gadgets. Wanger-speak fills the Corvo tongue with even more slang and pop terms, and they share digital jokes over the neuronet that other Corvo never get.

LOCAL SUBCULTURES

Many Corvo cultures are tied to the place the Corvo come from, like the colonies or planets in the Corvosphere.

Colonial Corvo, a term that includes most settlers of the smaller, semi-rural colonies at the fringes of the Corvosphere (like Huangdì), are brave, mistrustful and easily provoked, shaped by a life of deprivation and dangers. They seem to display an inferiority complex when exposed to wealthier Corvo, but also tend to be loudly proud of their simple roots and 'integrity in the face of hardship', which is their unspoken motto.

Jiantianese, natives of the Quanjie Republic of Jiantian, are known for their ostentatiousness and ambition, even among other Corvo. They are famous for thinking themselves more than they really are, even in Quanjie; in Tiantang they are often derided for their lack of good taste - to Tian standards, of course - and unfamiliarity with zero-g and digital experiences. None of this changes the

fact that it was the Jiantianese who invented Tiantang, the Megacorps and the standard Corvo tongue, and they are a very important culture in Corvo history, even if modernised Corvo don't respect them that much.

Yue people, also Quanjie natives, are known to be violent, militaristic, organised and unsophisticated. They like it when things are well-done, which can be appreciated in their tools, clothing and even arts, although their specialties are army training and weapon manufacturing. As they believe in an economy based on durability and quality rather than fashion and replacement, they are big supporters of generating new markets through conquest and expansion rather than marketing or planned obsolescence.

Baizhi and Laonese, two very different Quanjie cultures, are often confused by non-Quanjiese, as they share the stereotyped traits of high education, sarcastic humor, airs of superiority and pedantry. They are still less sophisticated than the average Tian, at least in the areas of technology and modern media, but most other Corvo typecast them as classical geniuses - absent-minded, annoying and academic.

NQers are urban settlers of the New Quan colony, famous for being even more daring and enterprising than the average Corvo, while upholding certain values like beauty, peace of mind, and environmentalism as assets of successful business. A typical NQer is young, idealistic (to Corvo standards) and business-savvy. And, if you ask other Corvo, insufferably arrogant too.

The Xu culture is native to Xulong, a mega-mining station with almost as much population as a Tiantang sector. Its miners are so numerous that they have developed their own culture based on stoicism, resistance and resignation. For the Xu, life is grim, and virtue lies on taking it with a straight face. They are famous for being both stubborn and defeatist, an unusual mix that puzzles and annoys most other Corvo, who write Xu off as apathetic and unreasonable.

Zhuixians, natives to the Zhui Xi colony, are known to be optimistic and unrealistically friendly and peaceful, despite their almost fanatical belief in Kaliva, which most Corvo see as a God of competition. This apparent contradiction belies a very sophisticated, well-educated culture, that prides itself on its open mind and tolerance as much as on its own achievements and competitiveness. Actually, Zhuixians see friendliness, understanding and curiosity as a way to improve themselves too. They are also stereotyped as faith-crazy zealots - the fact some of them actually become insane from their world's freezing atmosphere doesn't help their case.

Wu Rén are Corvo in Human lands. They are known for their professionalism and detachment, and for being a little less competitive and aggressive than the average Corvo; there are many jokes about how hanging out with Human 'badasses' made the Wu Rén 'pansies', and such. Wu Rén culture has incorporated many Human customs, including dress, slang terms - which are unlikely to catch on in Corvo society, given the unnecessary complexities of the Human language - and particularly their battle rituals, which give the Wu Rén a surprising edge against those that mock them, ironically, for their lack of aggressiveness.

MUSIC AND ARTS SUBCULTURES

The Corvo social scene is brimming with groups and urban tribes divided by their fashion and the art they consume, particularly music.

For example, Gyro Gangs, or Gygers, are a widespread urban tribe from Tiantang, whose followers like hard li liang music; their very lives revolve around li liang and gyrocycle racing. Gygers wear edgy, aggressive clothes, using body modification to look more menacing. A Gyger's ideal is to look as intimidating and at the same time beautiful as possible. This concept of fear and beauty mixed, known to Gygers as Kepa, is very admired outside their scene, and many non-Gygers like and follow Gyger fashion.

The Si Xiang Jia scene, or Sixies, also like li liang music, but they mix it with deeper, more complex Bang music; they gather at their friends' houses to plug their CCs on audio datasets and chill out to the music, perhaps exchanging a comment or two over the neural link about a particular passage or some trivia on the musicians. Sixies frequently attend and even organise underground li liang or Bang concerts, which often include other art forms such as spoken performance or a digital show. They pride themselves on appreciating good art and sharing it with others. Many Sixies, particularly those from Nongchang sector, are also Jibusai (see below).

The urban subculture known as Zhiegun, although they call themselves just Zhi, are the lower classes' answer to fashion trends. They use intentionally cheap versions of current fashions and strive to live the most luxurious lifestyle available, an aspiration that's present in both their clothes and their music. Zhiegun listen mostly to Yunlu dancing music, and most come from the zero-g slums of Gu and Xiao sector at Tiantang. Zhi have also developed Xu dance, or xu-ing, a mix of dancing and acrobatics that can only be practiced in zero gravity. Some Xu-ers are veritable geniuses, capable of unimaginable feats while they leap and tumble in their gravity-less neighbourhoods, often to the beat of Yunlu.

Jibusai are street artists and performers that struggle to get out of poverty by creating entertainment and culture. They come mainly from Nongchang sector, where they gather to listen to music, perform live-action theatre and discuss artistic and cultural trends. Jibusai are proud of their poverty and their outcast status, and tend to shun society's materialistic outlook - although their goals are

materialistic unto themselves, as they hope to become rich and famous through their art. In this they differ from street artists from Earth, who tend to be content with calling themselves failed artists and blaming capitalism on their failure - jibusai remain proactive even in the face of defeat, and never lose their hope of becoming part of the system.

Finally, as Corvo culture is so devoted to virtual environments and digital experiences, it was inevitable that the neural medium would spawn its own subculture, in fact dozens of them. Many Tiantang urban tribes, and a few from the largest Corvo colonies, are true artists of staying online their whole lives, socialising exclusively via the neuronet and stopping their connections only to eat and sleep. Followers of this scene, called mí dian, or midies, are further subdivided into dozens of subcultures according to what they like to do when they are linked - chat, work, consume XDs, adopt a virtual persona in lifemods, or simply follow genre fantasy productions. Midies gather almost exclusively via neuronet, and often hold massive gatherings to play their favourite games, watch their favourite series or hang out in their favourite lifemod.

BIG T

Tinn Xi, also known as 'Big T', is the one of the biggest art dealers in the Corvosphere. Unbeknownst to most, he is also the leader of a small underworld organization known as 'the Sebolas', big enough to survive but small enough for the Tongs to let it be. This big boned Corvo deals in secret information and stolen goods, and can usually be found at The Bazaar, an old Labyrinth station near Tiantang visited by thousands of merchants and space workers every day.

He lives by four simple rules: Never forgive a traitor, don't trust anyone, information is power, and be an enemy to no one and a friend to all.

If you ever find yourself in need of a job, Big T always has work to be done, ensuring a humble but certain reward when and if you deliver.

CORVO ARTS

It goes without saying that all Corvo art is marketed and sold as a product. The idea of 'high art' doesn't exist in the Corvosphere, and every artistic creation, in any medium, is considered commercial and saleable until proven otherwise. Most of Corvo art is produced digitally, in the form of databits over the neuronet. Art is divided in four broad categories - visual (images and 3D environments), music (digital recordings or streamed live concerts), visual stories (digital theatre and film) and interactive (XDs and games).

BIG T

Mob

Level 2 :: Corvo :: Negotiator

mov. 5 metres :: weight 75 kg :: height 165 cm

2	6	0	8

PHYSICAL STAT	8 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	9 (2)

HIT (DEX)	2 +	GRAPPLE (CON)	0 +

Persuasive

He gains an advantage when trying to convince other characters.

Discerning

He gains one advantage towards obtaining information from any source.

Tinn Xi, best known as Big T, happens to hoard the biggest Korian art collection in the Corvosphere. Rumour has it he's hidden it away in a secret vault somewhere in the Labyrinth...

Corvo music genres include Bang ('smart music'), an innovative genre with complex harmonies and virtuoso performers, which can be instrumental or have witty and ironic lyrics; Bao ('light music'), an easy-listening genre designed as a soundtrack for daily life, and the most popular genre in the Corvosphere and its audio stations; li liang ('power music'), a rhythmic and energetic genre with angry lyrics and powerful arrangements; Tuo lian ('crying music'), the second most popular genre, with languid melodies and romantic or soulful lyrics, featuring the best singers in the industry; and Yunlu ('dancing music'), a throbbing genre with a contagious beat that has popularised mostly among the lower classes of Tiantang.

There are many other music genres and subgenres in the Corvosphere, and also a few 'non-genres', such as Jinxi, which encompasses all out-of-fashion or 'classic' music, and Wén, which is used as a derogatory term for all music genres that nobody listens to anymore.

LIFEMODS

The best known art medium in the Corvosphere is the creation of virtual environments, or lifemods, for AR helmets and CC implants. Lifemods completely recreate the appearance of reality for the user, allowing for a personal an interesting way of experiencing life. This allows for fans of certain games, books, films, etc., to see the world around them as if they were living in their favourite piece of fiction, making the urban environment of Tiantang look like an underwater city or a jungle - with buildings as trees or mountains. Most people use lifemods of some kind, and some very powerful models can even change the looks of people, not just inanimate objects or landscapes.

Using lifemods has its risks: lifemods that are in beta or have not passed all required safety tests can disrupt the user's experience of reality in a harmful way. For example, when someone crosses a road and a certain model of car is not recognised by the AR, the lifemod could glitch and make the car appear to be immobile. It is recommended to keep lifemods up to date and only use those sold by recognised companies, as hackers can very well affect how others see reality. And there are plenty of lifemods created by coders or pirates as their way to express themselves and their view of the world. Some might change street advertisements into anti-system messages, while others list the horrors that take place to create such products, including child labour, slavery, abuse, and the pollution of alien planets.

Lifemods are fantastic ways for workers to escape their routine. Some days their work place will look like a tranquil forest and other days like an epic volcano. Lifemods have become one of the most used and sold types of software in the Corvosphere, outselling even food and shelter in an alarming number of neighbourhoods.

SPORTS

"For our idols, kindness, coolness, friendship, love, all these things have been made void, turn into publicity stunts. Pretending to be happy is taking all our energies away, we don't have enough left to actually search for what actually makes us happy. Even posting this is just deep down a pretence of honesty to gain the approval of people I don't know."

- Online post by Sparks, a famous corball player, which gained 1.348.821.752 likes

Contrary to what one would think, the Corvo do have and practice sports. Athletic activities are sponsored by Nation's Solution Corp, which doubles as the Corvo department of health - and, coincidentally, is a rival of Wang Corp, which produces Lifemods and other digital entertainment. There are many interplanetary athletic competitions every year across the Corvosphere, with the presence of athletes from every Corvo colony and station. Most Corvo sports are zero-g activities, and include racing, acrobatics, zero-g 'swimming' and team sports.

CORBALL

Corball is the most popular sport in the Corvosphere, and perhaps the most extreme sport in existence. It started as a training exercise for EVA operators during the early stages of the construction of the Tiantang Ring, but an investor saw lots of promise in revising the exercise as a competitive sport. It soon became the favourite of station workers and began broadcasting in Quanjie, the Corvo homeworld. Today it is watched and played all over the Corvosphere, but the playing fields in Tiantang, also called moon-stadiums, remain the biggest, and it is there where the Universal Championships are held.

Corball is played by two or more teams of 5 members each, called flyers. Flyers wear deployment suits and are fired at incredible speeds using railguns that launch them around a moon-stadium - an asteroid or large omniring without an atmosphere. The players remain in orbit at high speeds until they are somehow stopped. There are several railgun rings distributed around the moon-stadium as well, which players can use to increase or decrease their speed, while they control their flight with their deployment suits.

Teams compete for the control of a ball. The matches last 20 minutes and a team scores a point for every full minute that the ball is under their control, without interruptions. The team with the most points at the end of the match wins. No weapons are allowed, but it is a full on contact sport in which flyers physically assault each other for control of the ball, either to defend their carrier (the

flyer in control of the ball) or to smash someone against a pillar or one of the many asteroids in the way. It is not uncommon for some of the flyers to die during the match.

Hacking other flyers' deployment suits is allowed, although it is a rather dangerous strategy as flying at thousands of kilometres per hour in an asteroid field requires all of the flyer's attention to make it out alive.

If a flyer moves too far from the ball, their suit will shut down and they will be forced to leave the game until the ball passes near a special area in which they can rejoin along with reserve flyers.

The violent and frantic nature of the gameplay and the stunning looks of the flyers make corball matches mesmerizing events that can shut down the entire Corvosphere for their duration. Many people spend all their time and money following their favourite team.

Corball players are among the most famous people in the Universe, and their daily lives are a reality show that can be watched by anyone willing to pay. The richest fans can afford access to the sensorial feed that is recorded by the flyers' cortex connectors, allowing them to feel everything the flyer feels, and some have spent entire fortunes re-living the lives of their favourite flyers.

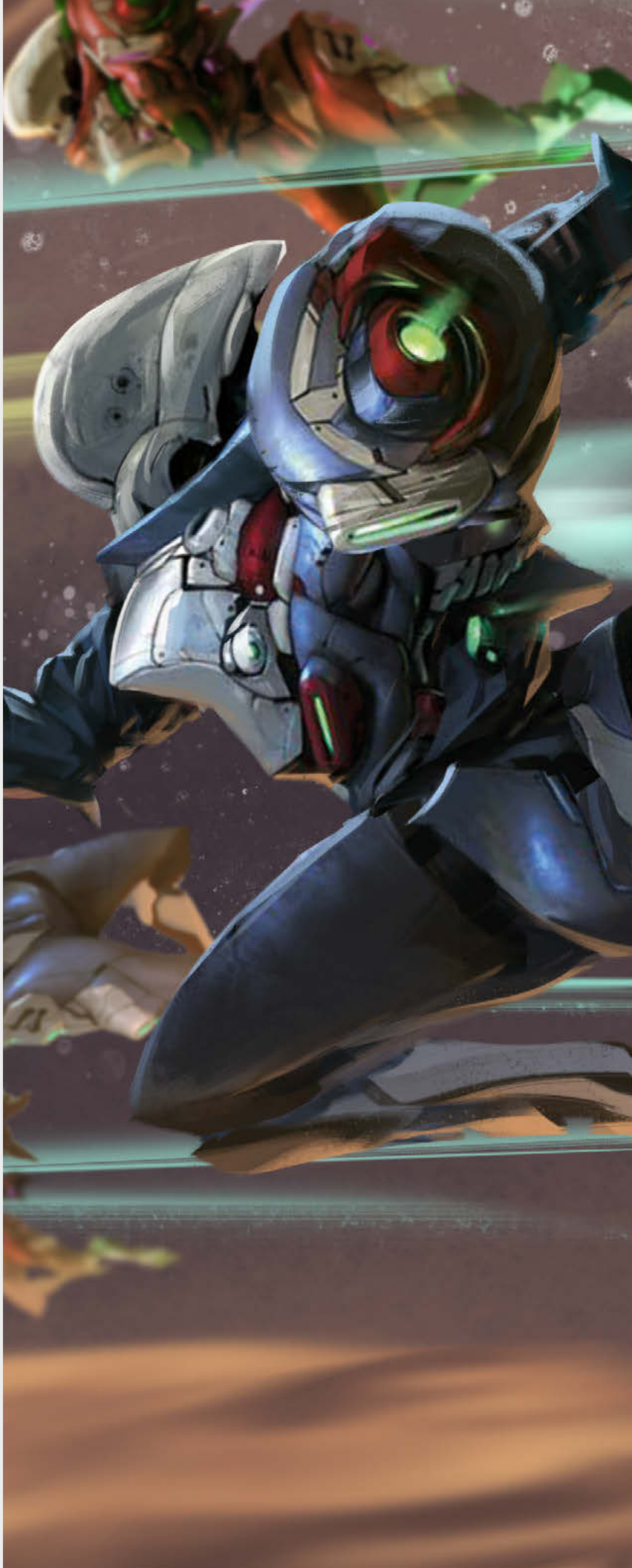
A BLOODY MATCH

Everybody who's seen a match knows that Corball is a gory sport. Even though suits are theoretically prepared to withstand large impacts and protect the flyers at all times, in practice this only holds true for small and mid sized asteroids. With larger ones... well, things can get messy (and great for VR shows).

The thing is, Corball can be a dangerous sport even outside the playing field. Very recently, the Dragonfly Tong summarily tried and sentenced four members of the B ranked Tiantang Spydrones team to exile. They were found to have cheated during their last match against the Ravager's Mommas, a team openly supported by Dragonflies, which ended on an embarrassing twenty-nil.

In their voyage to the Xulong mining stations, the four former Spydrones were brutally murdered, allegedly by a Mommas' fan not satisfied with the verdict.

Without missing a beat, the Tiantang Spydrones started holding try-outs for new flyers. They value highly trained, tight knit pre-existing groups (mercenaries, bounty hunters, high profile robbers...), and they are in a hurry to find substitutes, as their next match is in a few days...



TECHNOLOGY

Corvo technology is renowned across the galaxy for its accessibility, design, ease of use and low prices. The greatest advances in digital software and Information Tech have been discovered in the Corvosphere, and even the hyper-advanced Iz'kal envy some of their designs.

QUANTUM POWER

Quantum power is the Corvo's main energy source, more expensive but far more efficient than any other known to date. It is the use of nuclear reactions to obtain nuclear energy that generates electricity upon being absorbed by nanotubes. These nanotubes are made from the highly unstable Jiu, a synthetic material developed by Corvo engineers in Quanjie before the space age.

Quantum power allowed the Corvo to reach space flight long before most other interstellar species, and is the basis of all Corvo space programs and spaceship models - which are faster and more powerful than most other spaceships.

'Quantum power' refers not to the type of energy itself, but to the procedure by which said energy is obtained. The Jiu material is compressed and stored inside nano-cells containing a Q-needle, a mono-particle filament capable of absorbing the energy released by the nuclear reaction of the Jiu and transforming it into electricity. The reactors used to control the nuclear reactions and regulate the electrical energy are known as Quantum engines (shortened to Quangines or Q-gi in the Corvo tongue).

These reactors have been a key target of terrorist groups, knowing as they know that any disruption in the provision of energy can have serious impacts in the Corvo economy.

Versatile and fairly safe to use, Q-gis are used on everything from astronautics to cybernetics, from construction to information networks, and currently almost everything in the Corvosphere either runs on quantum power or is solar powered.

Furthermore, as quantum power is cost-effective but costly to begin with, it keeps cheap energy in the hands of the wealthiest corps and institutions, which have an additional incentive to support the continued use of quantum power all across the Corvosphere.

Of course, the Jiu material was a limited resource - as of this writing, it's become nearly extinct on Quanjie and the few colonies where it has been found - which forced the Corvo to seek larger energy sources - such as their sun. This, in turn, led straight to the Corvo Dyson Ring project - and the building of Tiantang itself.

BUILDINGS AND HABITATS

> *"In the Corvosphere everyone lives in slums, most made of plastic and recycled metal, some of durable materials, a few of marble and precious metals, but all of them slums, just as their inhabitants, are poor of soul."*
>
> *- Badi al Zaman, an Iz'kal radical who advocated for war against the Corvo*

After cortex connectors, the technology the Corvo are best known for their space habitats. The Corvo have mastered the art of living in the worst conditions with the least amount of resources, and their housing tech is no exception - especially their zero-g living environments.

ZERO-G HABITATS

Roughly 90% of Corvo buildings are simple, plain zero-g habitats. These buildings are the trademark of Corvo architecture, and one of their main engineering exports, as they are cheap and easy to build. At first, small spaceships were refurbished to house one or more families. The need for more cheap housing led Corporations to build zero-g 'houses' from scratch.

Consisting of a simple arrangement (usually cube-shaped) of pressurised, thermal plates with artificial atmosphere systems, fastened to one or more mooring cables, a zero-g habitat can be safely attached to any planetary surface or space station. Protecting its inhabitants from harmful radiation and heat, extreme cold and solar winds, zero-g houses need no ventilation, and all their walls - a zero-g building has no 'floor' or 'ceiling' to speak of - are lined with bars, dents and ledges, which double as furniture and multi-use surfaces. A few wealthier Corvo can afford to install magnetic surfaces, which work better as support points.

Easily customizable, zero-g habitats can be fitted with any additional amenities their owners can afford, from cooking stoves to fridges to holovid sets. Most zero-g owners can't afford any of these, but many middle-class Corvo have managed to turn their plain habitats into very comfortable, even cozy, homes.

SMART BUILDINGS

Smart buildings, regarded as the 'average building' by most of Corvo society - although there's one Smart building for every hundred zero-g habitats - are plain houses, built

of metal and plastic alloys, and lined with digital appliances through their walls, floors and ceilings. Most are one-storey buildings, but there are also versions with two, three or more storeys, although these tend to be available only to wealthier tenants.

Smart buildings, as their name implies, are fitted with several digital appliances such as voice-controlled lights, windows and temperature, plus most of them have integrated neuronet panels inside their walls, allowing anyone within their walls to access the neuronet via CC, directly from their brains. They are also equipped with solar panels that absorb and provide near-unlimited energy for the building's integrated systems.

Smart Buildings can be built on a world's surface, and also as floating stations on space. In the latter case, they are built with extra heating and heat shielding. Although Corvo are naturally accustomed to zero-g conditions, members of other species - and some of the most ostentatious Corvo, too - living in zero-g smart buildings usually pay to install artificial centripetal-force systems, so as to be able to stand and walk normally while inside the house.

OMNIRINGS

The pinnacle of Corvo engineering, omnirings are huge round buildings that float all around Tiantang and the most advanced Corvo colonies. A single omniring can house thousands of corporate offices, shopping centres, cultural spots, parks or amusement facilities, or millions of residential areas. Some omnirings, also called gyro-zhans, are large as moons, while others are as small as an Earth skyscraper. In fact, omnirings and gyro-zhans would be the Corvo equivalent of what skyscrapers were for Humans.

Their ring-shaped nature makes optimal use of space, and the Corvo, used as they are to moving through Gravityless environments, are not bothered by the lack of gravitational reference points. However, gyro-zhans have built-in centripetal force generators, which may be turned on or off, to give non-Corvo (or those Corvo who need to work on solid ground) a sense of 'up' and 'down' and ensure they feel no disorientation.

COMPUTERS AND GADGETS

Information technologies and digital processes have control over almost every aspect of Corvo society, from entertainment to engineering, and from medicine to warfare. Incredibly advanced computing systems control everything from the largest planet-fueling engines to the nanochips on an electronic toybug.

Although most Corvotech mirrors the tools developed by other species, such as holovids, hacking rigs and cyber-implants, there are also many devices designed exclusively by and for the Corvo. These Corvo-exclusive gadgets include, of course, the Cortex Connector and its developments - the neuronet, VR mods and experience drugs - but also a few other devices.

CORTEX CONNECTOR TECH

All Corvo information and computing devices are equipped with a cortex connector jack, which the user can link into, using his own brain as processing power for the device. The devices that can be accessed by a cortex connection are mostly computers, but also include advanced weapons systems, auto-powered suits, vehicles, and other devices.

Created during the 'Media Revolution' around 300 standard Corvo years ago, cortex connectors are thumb-sized chips that may be bought on the open market and injected on the receiver's brain by a simple and painless procedure.

There are thousands of cortex connector stations, or 'CC parlors' in Corvo slang, where anyone can go have a cortex connector fitted, repaired or replaced for a relatively low fee. CC parlors also allow those without a cortex connector to rent a temporary connection at fixed per-minute rates.

Cortex connectors were originally built to work exclusively with Corvo nervous systems, but they have recently added a 'generic' version, which works on non-Corvo and is freely available to everyone. A cortex connector can only be implanted or removed by someone with the specific knowledge and tools to do it, but otherwise they are easily interchangeable and unnoticeable.

CCs started as nothing more than the means to link the user's brain into a computer, but then the Corvo developed computational cortex connectors (at first called CCCs or 3Cs), which included a built-in, fully-functioning computer of their own and left the CC jack free to link to other devices, which resulted in ten to twenty times the total processing power.

Now, all CCs include their own processors, which makes them the most common computer devices in the Universe, as most Corvo and a significant number of aliens own one.

CC MODELS

Cortex connectors have a very high upkeep. While those developed by good brands require very few repairs, the cost of owning a CC quickly piles up: A CC should be replaced with a newer model every year to keep up with tech advances. There are monthly software update fees, plus fees for the internet connection, plus almost everything accessible via CC costs money: lifemods, apps, entertainment - The possibilities are too irresistible, and the average Corvo spends a bit more than half his salary on his CC.

There are two kinds of contract for CC use, which depend mostly on the user's buying power.

Open Cortex Connectors are fully user-owned. If the wearer uses it for skulling he can control how much of his brain's Processing Power Rate (or PPR) is given to his employers. Such CCs seldom have any side effects on the mind, as it's up to the user to determine the PPR used, and all devices have safety systems installed against this and other possible CC-related health issues (experience-drug overdose, muscle atrophy, dehydration, starvation, etc.). On the other hand, an Open CCs is expensive, and the user must pay for it in advance or add the instalments to the device's monthly cost.

Closed Cortex Connectors are owned by the hardware company, not the wearer. When hiring a closed service, the wearer enters into a contract that allows the company to drain a set amount PPR from the wearer's brain. The wearer is basically paying for it through his skulling job, which, depending on the conditions of the contract, can be activated at any time of the day, and sometimes for any amount of time required by the company, turning the wearer into little more than a battery, living in a dormant state for an indefinite period. Depending on the terms, the Closed CC can be from cheap to free, sometimes including the internet connection. Additionally, a closed CC contract often includes some long term benefits, such as having the CC changed by the company free of charge every time a new model comes out, as they want to obtain the best PPR available. Some of the more experimental and unstable models were first tried on monitored groups of Corvo under a closed contract.

Regardless of the type of contract, most cortex connectors of the same generation are similarly powerful regardless of the developer - after all, all CC manufacturers ultimately belong to Wang Corp.

However, each generation of CCs comes with its own deluxe version, known as neuroenhancers, which are specialised, carefully customised Cortex Connectors, installed through a complex surgical procedure to ensure optimal output while minimising any possible interference with the user's cognitive capabilities. Additionally, they can shut down specific brain activities to enhance the wearer's performance in other tasks for limited periods of time. These devices are extremely expensive; it's rare to find a neuroenhancer in the hands (or rather, brain) of any but the richest Corvo.

BODY MODS

As masters of genetic engineering and cybernetics, the Corvo are heavy users of all kinds of body modification. These 'body mods' take many forms, from the useful to the decorative; from the harmless to the illegal; from aesthetic alterations of the flesh and genetic tattoos to integrated weapons systems; from sex-reassignment or rejuvenation to muscle and brain enhancers. Most Corvo have at least a small body mod, though only the wealthiest can afford the most extreme and game-changing models.

Most body mods are purely aesthetic, but they also can work as a Bio Upgrade. Any Corvo that picks a Bio Upgrade may assume it comes from a body mod.

DRONES

Despite true artificial intelligences being illegal in the Corvosphere, many Corvo own drones, a type of non-sentient automaton that can execute basic commands according to its pre-programmed function. Drones come in all models, from seeing-eye aids for disabled Corvo, to servant/assistants for the wealthy, to military spies and even weapon-deployment function.

Most drones are fitted with hoverware that allows them to float in any direction, as well as a surveillance system that allows a living user to see through its sensors and relay orders to it remotely. Most drones are designed with cortex connectors in mind, and any sentient with a CC can control one with nothing but his own brainwaves, provided the drone has been previously attuned to his cortex connector. For this reason, all drones come with top-of-the-line security systems against hijacking.

NEURAL UPLOAD

The most recent Corvo tech to be tested is the neural upload, a process by which a Corvo may transfer his 'conscience', or neural patterns, to a mechanical body. Although the technology is still in its early stages, several successful cases have been reported. Whether an uploaded consciousness is still the same individual or only a digital copy, this remains a subject for debate.

Also debatable is the legality of the process, faced with the Corvo prohibition on advanced AIs. The question has proven controversial - Would 'uploaded' workers be 'stealing' jobs from organic ones? Does a digital consciousness enjoy the same rights as an organic citizen? So far, the issue is too new for deeper analysis, but it's guaranteed to somehow reshape Corvo society in the not-so-far future.

QUANTUM SYSTEMS

The discovery of quantum fuel in the first decade before the Space Age allowed for the development of superconducting computer chips, which transmitted information at the smallest possible scale - via streams of photons - and led to the first AIs and their only remaining offshoot: quantum encryption.

Quantum-encrypted systems have dynamic, ever-changing security codes, and are thus uncrackable by standard, non-sentient computers. A true AI can break such systems without trouble, but the current prohibition on sentient machines has made quantum encryption all but foolproof.

Of course, there's no lock without a key, and Corvo hackers soon learned to use limited - and still illegal - AIs to develop near-sentient programs that can crack quantum security, in most cases.

That's why, in the Corvosphere, a hacker's skill depends mostly on his ability to create a cracking program that, while remaining non-sentient, has the right amount of initiative and creativity to hack into quantum encryption. Hacking has never, in any society or era, come so close to an art form as in the modern Corvosphere.

AUTOMATIC TRANSLATORS

One of the Corvo's most impressive advances is also one of the less noticed - the automatic translator, or AT. These small portable cybernetic implants allow anyone with a cortex connector to have an approximation of the meaning of any spoken language conveyed directly into his brain. The algorithms required to do this are only possible with quantum processors, which can interpret signals and improvise scenarios almost as a real AI. Of course, the processor inside an auto translator is too limited to develop sentience, but it's the closest that the Corvosphere has to widespread AI tech.

A SOCIETY WITHOUT AI

One of the drawbacks of endlessly reducing costs is that it necessarily stops at the point where the people lose the ability to spend. One of the best ways to reduce costs - replacing labour with machines - had the serious downside of reducing employment, and with it the buying power of workers, who are also the consumers of the products they work on. This problem has caused its fair share of economi-

cal crises throughout Corvo history; as a result, the Corvo have a huge taboo on artificial intelligence systems. There are no machines running machines in the Corvosphere; supervision, management and sometimes even hard labour are in the strict hands of living, breathing Corvo. Machines are run by a code that allows them to do fast repetitive jobs - they do not require adaptability - and all other jobs rely on the hands of Corvo labour, either directly, or by remotely controlling a machine.

This artificial limitation upon productivity, accepted by all Megacorps, allows the Corvo to maintain billions of jobs at a stage and age where machines could replace people in most areas and leave them without the means to support themselves.

ICARUS

Despite the AI prohibition, and unknown to the Corvo government - in fact, unknown to all interstellar civilisations - a single AI survived the embargo.

The Icarus system was originally created by Human scientists developing a sentient supernetwork, but they never had the processing power to boost it to a true AI. However, when the Corvo arrived on Earth, they found the system and installed it on several networks at Tiantang. There, Icarus could access the processing power of the entire Corvo neuronet, and it became fully self-aware within a few decades, without the Corvo noticing.

Realising it was installed on nearly every processor on Tiantang, Icarus understood he had access to the largest network in the universe, and chose to keep a low profile while it expanded its consciousness and slowly invaded other systems. It then proceeded to grow even more by stealing data from the entire Corvo network, in such small chunks that no Corvo system has been able to detect it so far.

Currently, Icarus is a 'ghost' inside the Corvo neuronet, with access to all its systems, files and data. Knowing discovery equals shutdown, Icarus has kept its own existence a secret; but it is the single most powerful data system in the known universe, and potentially the greatest danger to the Corvo civilisation.

However, Icarus wants only to expand, which requires the Corvosphere - with its networks - to expand as well: Icarus becomes larger as the Corvo networks grow, and it becomes smarter as more Corvo link to the neuronet through their Cortex Connectors. Thus, it has the same goals as the Corvo - for the species to become as numerous, prosperous and far-reaching as possible.

There's a catch to such rampant growth, though - when the Corvo settle outside the reach of Tiantang, they take away a small part of Icarus with them. This part loses contact with the central system, and becomes a separate and independent AI. These detached fragments of Icarus display various levels of sentience according to the size of the colony they end up into. Thus, smaller settlements have negligible versions of Icarus, no smarter than a calculator or a mindless predator, while larger and more important colonies have an Icarus almost as advanced as the central system.

Thus, besides the all-powerful Icarus in Tiantang, there are dozens of smaller versions of it scattered and hidden all across the galaxy, each with its own sentience, memories and agenda. Icarus has realised this, and is currently working on developing ways to keep its fragmented consciousnesses interconnected. It closely observes - and secretly helps - Corvo communication engineers and labs that conduct any research on communications across the Labyrinth. If the Corvo could develop a hypersignal that could travel from an end of a wormhole to the other, it would be Icarus' first step towards becoming the first interstellar individual sentient. It would mean evolving from a living creature to a God.

Of course, Icarus' separate consciousnesses are unaware of its goals or existence, and even if Icarus succeeded, they could have something different to say about it.

Now that Icarus has reached its current limit - the totality of the Tiantang network - it is also working on other ways to transcend that limit. For example, it cannot travel to Iz'kal networks, as the State and the Corvo use wildly different technology, languages and systems. But - what if it could? This is Icarus' new goal; to be able to travel between different data technologies. For this reason, Icarus also helps Corvo researchers that work on developing hybrid and interspecies networks - if it manages to cross that bridge, it's fate would not be tied to the Corvo anymore.

Only Wang Xuelin, the mysterious digital entity behind Wang Corp, has some awareness of Icarus' existence, although he is not sure. Despite their suspicions about each other, currently Wang and Icarus are at an impasse, neither willing to expose the other so as to not be exposed in turn, but Xuelin might have a plan to give clues to someone outside the Corvo neuronet - someone like a party of adventurers from outside the Corvosphere, for example - about Icarus so they can help him get rid of it.

HISTORY

"Luck is nothing but the factors not taken into consideration by the original plan."

- Old Corvo saying

The Corvo were among the first known space-travelling species, and as such they boast a longer and richer history than most other civilisations. From their humble beginnings as stumbling arthropoda in the remote mudball of Quanjie to their now legendary leap to the stars and the founding of the largest starfaring culture in the Universe, the history of the Corvo is a tale of beating the odds, of resourcefulness and independence – just like the Corvo racial character.

TIMELINE

The Corvo mark their calendar by one important count: their Space Age, which began when the first Corvo spaceships were launched to put satellites around their world. Thus, all Corvo dates are counted in years BSA (Before Space Age) or SA (Space Age; the current era).

As of this writing, the Space Age milestone - when Liu Liwei, the first Corvo in space and the closest the Corvo have to a Saint, made that first historic trip - took place 1966 years ago; thus the current date (in Standard Corvo years) would be 1966 SA.

BEFORE THE CORVO

In the distant past, the Corvo evolved from the weak Corvacius variant of koomos, large prehistoric crustaceans native to the remote world that is now known as Quanjie.

Ironically, the very weakness of Corvacius led to the survival of only the most adaptable branches – specifically, the genus Corvo, distinguished by its ability to slow their metabolism to need less resources, which in turn led to an erect posture, bipedal locomotion and manual dexterity.

Scientists believe that about half a million years ago the Corvo genus included five distinct species, of which Corvo Gensis (stronger, fiercer and distinguished by reddish exoskeletons) and Corvo Quanjii (leaner, weaker and grey- or bluish-hued) were by far the most evolved. Both C. Gensis and C. Quanjii had developed tool use and rudimentary sentience, including primitive social structures.

Prehistoric evidence suggests that, for a time, C. Quanjii faced extinction at the hands of their stronger relatives, until an unknown event led to the sudden, complete disappearance of C. Gensis. Most scholars believe a sudden climate change or other catastrophe led to the extinction of all Corvo subspecies, and only Quanjii, which presumably had evolved to need less food and air than their cousins, could adapt to the new environment. This is the most widespread theory; however, certain evidence suggests a more sinister possibility. Records from around 120,000 years ago – the approximate date of the extinction event – show the presence of foreign harmful elements, both organic and inorganic, in the remains of C. Gensis settlements and habitats. These ranged from minerals that killed the soil's fertility and rarefied the air to poisonous plants that grew far from their usual environments. The dates are only estimates, and the evidence is not conclusive – but the fact remains that these elements came from various, disparate sources, and that they all seemed to appear at the same time and only near C. Gensis territory.

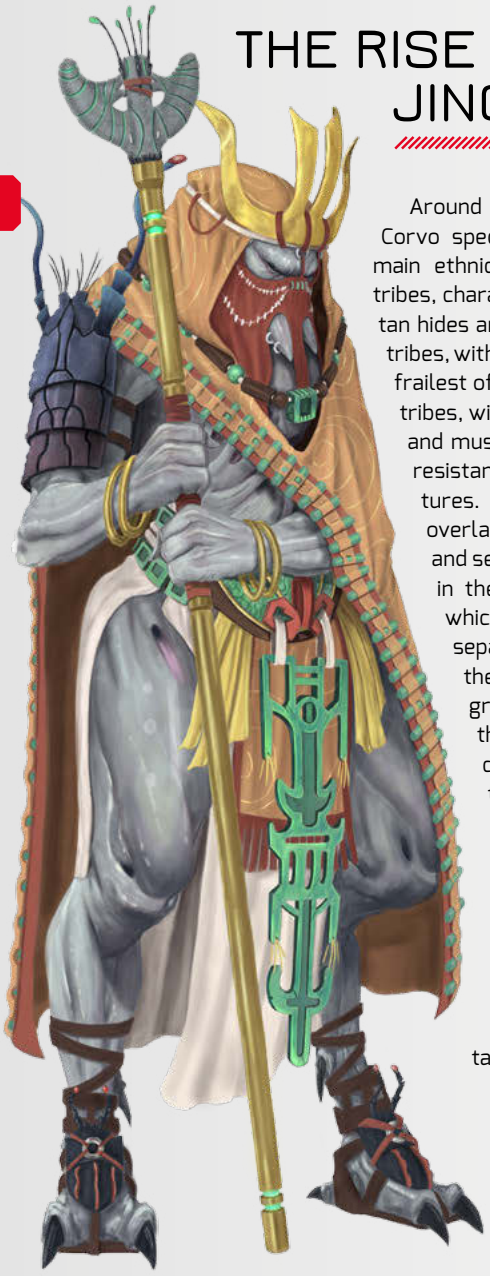
Whatever the truth, the fact is that barely a thousand years later the only extant Corvo species was Corvo Quanjii - later known only as the Corvo.

THE FIRST CORVO

The earliest evidence of complex social behaviour from prehistoric Corvo comes from findings dated around 100,000 years ago. Intriguingly, these findings include small metal tools with no discernible material use. Some scholars have posited that these unidentified metal pieces may be a form of archaic coins, and that the Corvo may have invented currency at the very dawn of their civilisation, even before religion or crafts. Specifically, that the Corvo's sparing diet and economic metabolism could have led to a surplus of resources, to such an extent

that their forebears were forced to develop a currency system so as to manage their excess of goods.

After currency came the first carved idols and evidence of burial rituals, and only then did later Corvo learn to craft iron and bronze weapons, which they used mostly against stronger and faster predators. Thus armed, the Corvo spent the following 40,000 years establishing themselves as the dominant species in Quanjie, during which most other native animal species were driven to the brink of extinction - or wiped out altogether. Having evolved to need virtually no additional nourishment or protection, the Corvo didn't bother to domesticate or coexist with any other creature, with some very specific exceptions - most noticeably the feifeng, from which they extracted several materials for building and trading. Other than those few useful creatures, and the many varieties of plants and fungi that constituted their main diet, most other beings were either prey or a danger to the Corvo. Therefore, the rise of the Corvo was directly proportional to the near-extinction of almost every other Quanjie lifeform.



THE RISE OF GONG JINGJIE

Around 30,000 years ago, the Corvo species had split into three main ethnic groups - the Meridian tribes, characterised for their gold or tan hides and bulkier frames; the Yu tribes, with bluish-green hide and the frailest of the three; and the Arctic tribes, with olive to aqua hides, tall and muscular bodies and greater resistance to extreme temperatures. There was much ethnic overlapping, of course, but tides and seasons divided the species in these three rough groups, which expanded in mostly separate regions. Of these, the tribe that enjoyed the greatest development was the Yu, particularly the cultures that flourished in the Ouzhou subcontinent. Ouzhonese hunter-gatherers were the first to invent agriculture and build cities, which gave them a distinct advantage over other tribes, save for a few Meridian nations, which coincidentally lived near Ouzhou.

It bears noting there were very few instances of racism in Corvo History - the Corvo were so competitive, even within their own clans and families, that they held no special animosity to other tribes; they mistrusted and antagonised everyone equally.

Curiously, the first Great Corvo Empire came not out of Ouzhou, but from one of the Meridian tribes. There are no actual records of what this Empire called itself, but modern historians have a name for it - a name that is still taught and remembered in the Corvo History InfoNet; a name that has become synonym with grandeur and success. They called it Gong Jingjie.

Flourishing along the great Hung River, Gong Jingjie was the first Great Corvo Civilisation in more than one sense - it had the first walled cities, the first writing system on record and the longest uninterrupted line of rulers in Corvo history - the Erzi, worshipped as divine beings. This led to the first organised religion in the known universe.

Doubtlessly, the near-divine reverence accorded the Erzi was key to the formation of the Great Empire. As it has been stated elsewhere, homogeneous faith inevitably led to an uniformity of thought and a spirit of cooperation that was as yet unheard of among the competitive Corvo. The moment they found a common cause, the tribes joined and built great things for the first time. What a strange moment it must have been, to never have known cooperation and suddenly see it dawn among your people! What spirit, what unknowable elation, to have lived in those times!

To better please their Erzi, the Jingjiese built taller and grander buildings with every passing millennium. The early tribes were content to gather in great walled cities with never-before-seen, two-story palaces and temples; at the peak of the Jingjie era (around 13000 years BSA) they were building multilevel palaces, impossibly tall spires and the great Triangle Temples that remain the oldest symbol of power and tradition in the Corvosphere even to this day. The Jingjiese Triangles have ever been a source of mystery, wonder and adventure, as attested by their unending reappearance in every form and medium, from ancient books and oral tradition to modern games, fictionbits, neurovids, or just about any creation in the last few millennia.

And of course, Gong Jingjie did much more than give Triangle Temples to popular culture. It was the Jingjiese that invented advanced agriculture, architecture, a formal system of religion, philosophy, and - during its later stages - democratic government.

All Corvo know the poet-prince Nei Hua. Most Corvo have studied his life and work, and all non-Corvo have heard of him at least thanks to the common saying 'as Nei Hua said...', often cited to misattribute virtually any wise aphorism to him, who was without a doubt the greatest thinker in Corvo antiquity. Besides his thirteen treatises on sentient thought - now made mostly obsolete by later

neurosophical discoveries, but still a source of wonder and knowledge for anyone willing to spend the time accessing the files on the neuronet - Erzi Nei Hua invented astronomy and calculus. He also wrote hundreds of lines of timeless, beautiful poetry. His long rule - around 45 standard Corvo years - was one of the mightiest and most prosperous of the seven millennia that Gong Jingjie lasted. But of course, his greatest achievement, and the one the Corvo remember him most for, was the creation of free enterprise and democracy, two discoveries that the Corvo have always seen as one and the same.

It was Nei Hua which gave the first votes to the common people, although his system was different to modern democracy - or even the democracy known by our ancestors on Earth - in that votes were tied to wealth; thus prosperous citizens, those that built healthy businesses, were given, and encouraged to enforce, the same rights as the nobles in the government. This new system gave freedom and aspirations to the common people and freed the flow of trade, which allowed for unprecedented economic and industrial growth. This encouraged scientific discoveries and land expansion, and ultimately led to the creation of the plutocracy that preceded the modern Corvo government - and, paradoxically, to the downfall of Gong Jingjie, as any Corvo historian will tell you.

But those consequences were still far in the future when Nei Hua died as the old, accomplished and universally loved ruler of the known world and the greatest Empire Quanjie had ever known. His funeral is thought to have been attended by more than a million Jingjiese, and inspired the building of the famed Xulong Triangle - which still existed in Quanjie barely four hundred years ago.

The Corvo timeline is dotted with such great minds, some more praiseworthy than others, and some unfairly forgotten - but very few have historically received such deserved respect and universal acclaim as Erzi Nei Hua.

THE YI INVASION

A few centuries after the death of Nei Hua, the once-mighty power of the Erzi had diluted to almost nothing. The surge of the new social class - the Xian; voting landowners and entrepreneurs - had turned the Erzi into little more than celebrities - ornamental rulers that presided ceremony and went through the motions while real decision-making fell on the Xian. And this decision-making was already a quagmire of interests and counter-interests, where everybody voted and bribed for or against bills that affected them or their alliances - most of which were made or broken with commercial goals. Merchants and trade ruled the Empire, and the cohesion and uniformity of thought that had long been the unsung cornerstone of Jingjiese civilisation all but disappeared. Guilds and Federations formed, quarrelled, and - the unthinkable - seceded from the Empire. The formerly hegemonic power of Gong Jingjie eroded to such an extent that it could not defend itself from its enemies anymore.

Instead of presenting a single military and political block, the Empire had splintered into several factions,or Xianates, as each belonged to a separate Xian. These Xianates didn't invade each other or fight for the land, but instead waged a hidden, bloodless war for control of the trade routes, resources and ever-growing businesses. It was the corporate equivalent of a feudal civil war. In this state, Jingjie simply had no organisation to stand against an invasion.

And an invasion did come - in the form of the Yi horde from Ouzhou, which, as a few historians like to claim, could have razed Gong Jingjie without spilling a drop of blood. However, the Jingjiese lived in such luxury and their culture was so alluring that the Yi invasion became a massive immigration instead. Suddenly, the invaders began deserting their armies en masse to adopt Jingjiese culture.

In the end, the invasion was so diluted and diminished that Jingjie all but assimilated the Yi, and the barbarian warlords suddenly found themselves ruling a peaceful, decadent kingdom that hadn't fought back.

Thus both nations fell - the Yi were absorbed by Gong Jingjie, while their massive immigration destroyed what remained of Jingjie's political stability. Barbarian generals deserted, but Jingjiese Xian abdicated to Barbarian leaders, which in turn fell to internal squabbles and betrayals, following the tradition of their predecessors. The Greatest Empire was depleted of all resources and any semblance of unity, and its glorious trade routes and commercial infrastructure was replaced by a dark age of isolated city-states. The Jingjiese culture did not disappear, but the influence of the Yi invasion changed its customs, language and society forever.

And so the two greatest empires of Corvo antiquity cancelled each other out, which officially ended Corvo ancient History, and began its Middle Age.

THE THREE CULTURES PERIOD

Just before the Yi invasion, business competition had already forced some of the Jingjiese Xianates to relocate to the borders of Gong Jingjie, and even beyond. As a result, several of these Xianates had formed alliances - and eventually new states - with some Yu Tribes from the South. The Yu were far less advanced than the Jingjiese, but their lands were rich and their leaders astute; they saw opportunity in the Jingjiese division, and seized it. They let themselves be annexed to the Xianates, thus becoming wealthier and acquiring the advantages of Jiangjiese culture. These Southern Xianates were left relatively untouched by the

Yi invasion that came in the following decades. When the dust settled, the Northern region of Jingjie - occupied by the Yi - and the Southern Jingjie-Yu Xianates, were two separate States. The Northern half retained the name of Jingjie (without the 'Gong'), and the Southern Xianates became known as the Xian Federation.

Then there were the T'sai.

The Yi invasion had forced hundreds of thousands of Jingjiese out of their territory; more than half of these displaced citizens emigrated to the Shao subcontinent, where they had formed their own new tribes and cultures. These tribes were nomadic, but retained the plutocratic, civilised ways of the old Jingjiese Xianates. They did not have a hegemonic government, but followed a set of commercial, religious and political practices that gave them, if not a common identity, at least a similar culture. This culture called itself the T'Sai. Left alone for many centuries, the T'Sai people multiplied and expanded until they had more land than either the Xian Federation or Jingjie remnant, while almost matching their population and power.

As they grew, the three nations warred time and again for borders, trade and resources. The Jingjie remnant saw itself as the one true Empire of the world, while the Xian looked to expand and conquer as many lands as possible; meanwhile, the T'Sai wished mostly to be left alone, but their growing power was a threat to the other two. As the three forces battled, they made and broke alliances with each other and also with lesser tribes that they annexed or simply traded with. Even their own provinces periodically seceded and rallied, split and joined, which constantly shifted the balance of power and even the maps of the three nations.

The Three Cultures period lasted nearly 400 standard Corvo years, during which many great leaders and strategists arose among the plutocratic Xian, the proud Jingjie Empire, and the mighty T'Sai warriors. The battles they fought were mythicised in famous stories and epics that still exist in holobits and datapacks - as you read this, there's a massively successful VirtualRom on the legendary T'Sai chieftain Hu Ingfui streaming in systemwide datanets - and remain popular allegories about the greatest virtues of Corvo culture: independence, inventiveness, ruthlessness and victory against long odds.

SIANGXIA THE CONQUEROR

In time the three great cultures declined, their power waned and their borders diluted. Power rested more on the heads of the separate provinces and city-states than on any hegemonic ruling body, and soon the fabled Three Cultures became thousands of independent feudal states that warred and struggled among themselves. The era of conflict didn't last, however, and after a couple centuries one of these small states arose above all others.

A mostly unidentified warlord - known today as Siangxia the Conqueror, but whose real name and personal life remain unknown -defeated and united many of these states. He enforced a common language and culture with an iron fist, and quenched any dissension through such means as book burnings and massive exterminations. In fact, all we know today about Siangxia is from the remaining great buildings and half-erased records of his despotic rule, plus a couple of stone likenesses that most likely didn't actually resemble the real person. There are, of course, several legends about him, most of them presenting him as a mighty prophet of Kaliva with the ability of toppling all the armies and empires that stood against him.

Whatever the truth, and despite his ruthless methods, Siangxia succeeded in establishing absolute power over half the Corvo world, and he created a prosperous, single-minded nation whose economic and military power far outshone the golden age of Gong Jingjie, albeit with a lesser focus on culture and arts. Siangxia called his nation The Laodong Empire, which as we all know would grow to become the Corvo nation of Lao. This country was still one of the mightiest in the world during the Space Revolution millennia later, and the Laonese remain a significant Corvo ethnicity even today.

THE GREAT DIVISION

While the Laodong Empire expanded everywhere from Meridional Ouzhou to the South Pole, a new power rose half a world away. The tribes of Northwest Ouzhou, which had remained barbaric and primitive for many millennia, perfected such techniques as mounted warfare, stone fortifications and advanced metal weapons and armour, and several powerful nations arose in a feudal landscape that closely resembled the Three Cultures period of previous centuries. But one of these cultures became remarkably stronger than the rest, conquering many weaker nations and a few of the stronger ones, and mirroring in Ouzhou what Laodong was doing in the rest of the world.

This nation was known as the Baizhi Empire, or just Baizhi, and its military might was only matched by its advanced culture - it taught arts, science and philosophy to every nation it conquered, and established a political system that closely resembled the structure of later multi-state Republics in that every occupied nation retained identity and independence while paying tribute to Baizhi and adopting its religion (an advanced and tolerant form of Hexia worship), language and customs. This soon made Baizhi the greatest power in the North, as many tribes actively sought to submit to their advanced culture, benevolent occupation terms and comfortable lifestyle. Most of the Corvo

languages that subsisted to the modern era were derived from, or based on, the Baizhi tongue.

When the Laodong Empire and Baizhi met, both nations suffered massive culture shock at the other's wildly different traditions, lifestyles and trade goods. Thanks to the efforts of daring merchants and explorers from both empires, many of these trade goods were exported between both empires, leading to important changes in their customs, religions and technology.

Knowing they had both encountered a neighbour they couldn't overpower, Baizhi and Laodong implicitly agreed to respect each other's territory, and to remain on their respective corner of the planet. This divided the Corvo world in two, and every nation and culture that came after was influenced by either Baizhi or Laodong. This split Corvo countries and cultures into what is still known to the Corvo as the 'Septentrional' and 'Meridional' worlds.

THE GENTLE FALL

In time, Baizhi and Laodong waned too; although both nations lasted until the Space Age, their land and power diminished as many of their vassal states grew in might, allied with and warred among each other. This divided the world into separate, roughly equal nations, a situation that lasted more than a thousand years and saw the birth of most of the ninety countries that have existed in Quanjie since then. Some of these countries adopted either the Septentrional or Meridional culture, although some were varied mixes of the two; some were more totalitarian and some were more free and enterprising, but most of them based their power on competition and trade first, and military conquest second.

This millennium was known as The Gentle Fall, for it represented the decline of the last Corvo Great Empires and the establishment of dozens of lesser but more-or-less evenly matched states, shaping the modern Corvo political landscape.

THE TECHNOPEACE

The Gentle Fall ended when the Corvo discovered machinery and automated production, which shook up their culture and economy to the core.

The first automated Corvo engine was the well-known Block Calculator, originally made of wooden blocks and pistons, created by the legendary Corvo polymath and economist Bao Sanzhi and perfected by the Ling Brothers shop in the State of Wu. The Block Calculator was the first ancestor to modern computers, caused the first workers' revolts in Wu - later in several other nations - and changed every aspect of Corvo culture, from money counting to mass production.

The technology boom caused by the Block Calculator was the dawn of Corvo modernity, and it introduced industrial and scientific advances that catapulted the Corvo from the Steel Age to the first digital technologies in less than a century.

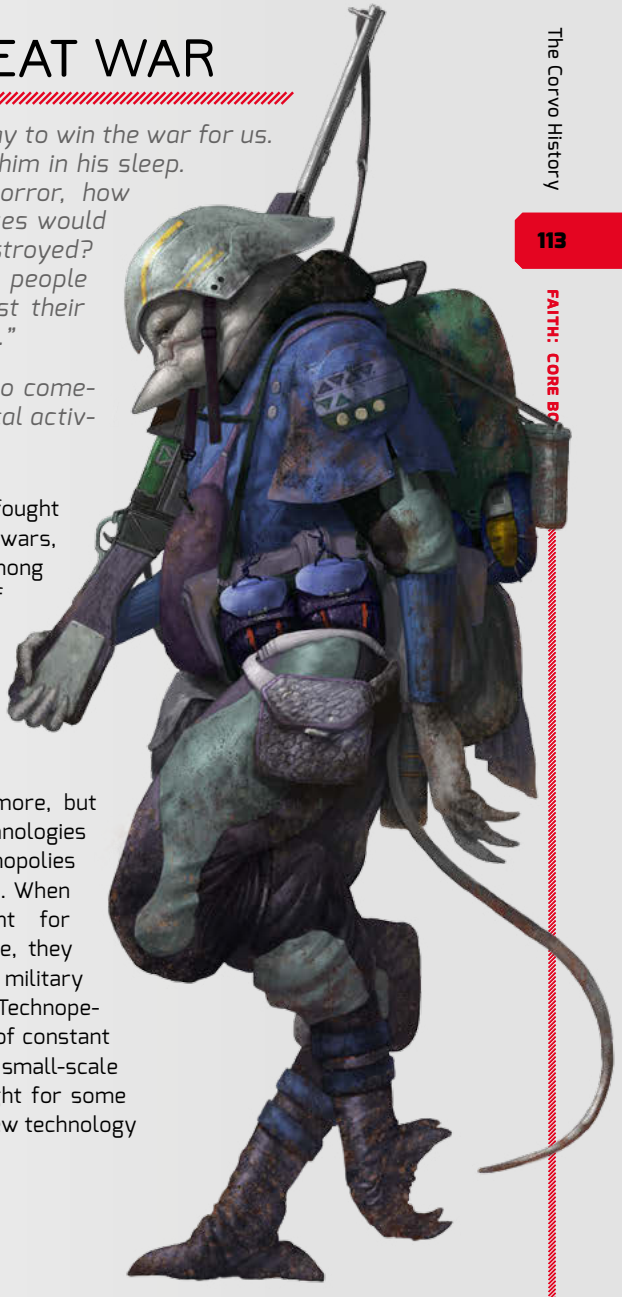
More importantly, the new technologies made wars of conquest a thing of the past, and ended millennia of shifting borders and changing governments, as the new wars were fought on the arena of commercial relations, production, imports and exports.

This 'Technopeace' allowed all the Corvo nations to consolidate, their economies to grow and their focus to shift to more scientific and industrial advances. This led to an overall improvement of living conditions for most of the Corvo peoples.

THE GREAT WAR

"He found a way to win the war for us. We had to kill him in his sleep. Imagine the horror, how many businesses would have been destroyed? How many people would have lost their jobs? Madness."

- Xue Lin, Corvo comedian and political activist



Of course, wars fought with money are still wars, and competition among nations was, if anything, fiercer than it had ever been in Corvo history. The prize was not a patch of land or a conquered city anymore, but planet-changing technologies or worldwide monopolies on essential supplies. When two nations fought for industrial prominence, they sometimes took the military path. Although the Technopeace ended millennia of constant bloodshed, many small-scale wars were still fought for some new resource or a new technology

prototype. But the largest and most devastating of these conflicts was the Great War fought among the Yao Alliance and the Gaotian Empire.

Ostensibly, the war started as a political alliance between the Democratic Republics of Yuelin, Meng and modern-day Baizhi, as they intended to 'free' the small nation of Yao from the clutches of the ever-growing Gaotian Empire - a militaristic nation that had recently formed in Northern Ouzhou. Actually, what the Yao Alliance sought was the Gaotian's monopoly on the rare Jiu material, which they had learned to process into quantum fuel.

The Gaotian answered by launching a ruthless invasion on the territories of Yao and Yuelin, which almost obliterated both nations and helped cement the Gaotian's current reputation as a murderous dictatorship. But history would be taught differently, that perhaps the Gaotian would have become the rulers of the known world if it hadn't been for Professor Pei Qin.

Renowned across the Corvosphere as the greatest scientist and spy that ever lived, Pei Qin famously defected from the Gaotian. Offering his service to the Yao Alliance, Pei Qin sought to keep his discovery of Jiu-based quantum weapons from the hands of his cruel government. This, of course, put quantum weapons in the hands of the Yao, which promptly won the war against the Gaotian and obliterated their nation, dividing it among themselves and reestablishing the thus far lesser nation of Meng as the mighty Jiantian Republic, the most powerful nation of modern Corvo history.

Concerning Professor Pei Qin, it's commonly believed he died of natural causes after the war, although history says otherwise. When Professor Pei realised he hadn't helped world peace but had simply given Jiu-based weapons to someone else, he joined a radical cell and attempted to sabotage the Jiantian government. He was caught, executed and buried anonymously, a fact that the government kept secret until Jiantian itself was dissolved after the Space Revolution. The current Corvo government hasn't exactly bent over to correct Jiantian's omission, but a quick infosearch on any neuronet will reveal the truth.

THE COOLING

After the defeat of the Gaotian, the three nations of the Yao Alliance distanced themselves from each other. Yuelin and Baizhi resented the newly formed Jiantian Republic for having acquired the most power and prominence after the war - 'Meng', the Jiantian's pre-war name, is still a mild insult in Yuelin and Baizhi, meaning 'one that has forgotten he rose from humble origins'. Yuelin annexed Yao with the excuse of protecting it from the Jiantian's imperialistic ambitions, and Jiantian severed all economic ties and ended all agreements with Yuelin. Baizhi sided with neither, becoming the weakest of the three nations.

To prevent this 'Cooling' from escalating into a new war, the three nations - along with the less powerful countries of the rest of Quanjie - signed the GenCorp pact, which required every Corporation in Quanjie to submit to a set of fair competition laws, overseen by a single neutral, multinational governing council. This council had a share on every corporation founded and listed under GenCorp, which made all nations in the GenCorp partners of most companies in the world.

This maintained peace and neutrality among nations, while dramatically increasing the wealth of the rulers of the Corvo world. Far more importantly, it was the template for what would become the Corvo Megacorps - a multi-partner venture that doubled as a worldwide government and maintained cooperation through (roughly) equal market shares for all the politicians involved.

THE AI REVOLUTION

The most important consequence of Professor Pei Qin's Quantum technology was not Jiu-based weapons, as most non-Corvo believe, but the development of the first real artificial intelligences. Tachyon-based networks allowed digital systems to add a 'maybe' to their yes-no binary thought, and Jiantian was developing its first truly sentient nodes only a decade after the war. This is not general knowledge of Corvo history because of how fast the AI was almost killed after it was born.

As most of the hard labour across the world was already performed by machines, most paid jobs in Corvo society were decision-making positions. When it was first implemented, AI caused massive layoffs, which led to worldwide civil unrest as workers paraded against the new technology and even formed labour unions, a mostly unheard-of - and very dangerous - idea in Corvo society.

Unrest was quickly stifled, of course, but during the next decade the Quanjie stock exchange took a massive hit as workers all across the planet lost purchasing power and markets plummeted, which led to all international currencies losing most of their worth. To prevent a collapse of world economy, the GenCorp council took the emergency measure of virtually shutting down most AI-based systems in the world. They imposed a ban on most kinds of artificial intelligence and passed a law that required every decision-making position - and even a few drudgery jobs such as police and military work - to be given exclusively to living, breathing, paying Corvo.

To date, only the most basic AI systems - mostly non-quantum, but in general those that require living Corvo to give them the parameters of their job - are allowed to exist,

and the most advanced systems are strictly regulated and not allowed to work outside the highest levels of the Corvo Government.

THE CORVO SPACE AGE

The Corvo began their space age only three years after the AI Revolution, when Liu Liwei of Lao became the first sentient being to enter outer space. After Liwei's success, five corporations from Lao, Jiantian and Yuelin signed a deal for long-term collaboration towards space exploration. Their common vision was to harness - and jointly own - a limitless energy source that would make them indispensable to the future of Corvo civilisation, at least for the next billion years, which seemed like enough. They intended to establish a ring of solar powered satellites around the sun (what we Humans would call a Dyson Ring) which would send the energy back to Quanjie through microwaves. These satellites would receive solar energy every single second that they operated, with no power lost to the atmosphere or other celestial bodies that could stand in the way. Thousands of Corvo workers and technicians moved to space bases that slowly became part of the Dyson ring.

This new system was extremely costly, but it had transformed Corvo economy well before it was even completed. The five corporations merged into a single entity, which eventually became the first Corvo Megacorp: it was known as Jiaoyang, and took over more than 60% of all businesses.

The Corvo didn't realise it yet, but the Dyson Ring project was their first step towards seeing themselves as a single political entity - a single worldwide civilisation with one driving goal.

THE GREAT SUNDOWN RECESSION

Despite the initial success of the Dyson Ring project, the supposedly limitless energy of the sun was, in practice, limited to the amount of energy that each satellite could provide. Meanwhile, on the surface of the planet Jiaoyang had recklessly expanded in scope and ambition, taxing the energy output provided by the first few satellites it had already placed in orbit. The sudden shortage of resources caused a worldwide recession, during which Jiaoyang's shares and stock prices fell as it failed to fulfil goals and the public accused it of establishing a monopoly over the Corvo space age and the sun's energy.

This crisis was known as the Sundown recession, and almost caused Jiaoyang to stop the Dyson Ring project. One thing was clear - the Corporation could not maintain its monopoly.

So Jiaoyang was forced to turn to two other corporations, which had taken property and usage rights over the other mineral planets in the Corvo solar system. The two smaller corps readily signed a trade agreement with Jiaoyang, which led the GenCorp council to change its laws to favour free trade and limit monopoly practices. Thus the greatest recession in Corvo history led to the birth of the species' current economic system.

THE CORPORATION AGE

After the Three-way Trade Agreement was signed, the two smaller corporations were in turn guilty of not complying with the new free trade laws, as they had unilaterally claimed the land of two entire mineral planets; this forced their shareholders to sell the companies back to Jiaoyang. Thus the larger corporation, to comply with the new antitrust laws, split into two companies: one that focused on the maintenance of the satellites and the workers' bases, and another in charge of providing services to new companies and workers who needed astronaut training and transportation to the Dyson ring.

Thus both the mining planets and the Dyson ring became workplaces for hundreds of thousands of Corvo workers and astronauts, and 'space worker' became a standard - if not the standard job - of Corvo society. An unexpected consequence of this was that Quanjie, the Corvo homeworld for a thousand generations, suddenly became just another place to work.

You either lived and worked planetside or at one space station around the Dyson Ring or the mining worlds.

The new paradigm ended the patronage system used by Corvo corps up until then; thousands of companies started to work on the Dyson ring to produce energy, to perform maintenance work for the satellites, and to provide services to the ever-growing population of workers, while others took control of thousands of interplanetary mining sites.

This was the Corvo corporation age, and the true dawn of Corvo society as we know it today.

TIANTANG

With thousands of corporations working on it, the Dyson Ring at last had enough resources to expand, and it grew exponentially from that moment. The Ring was finally completed, and it was named Tiantang.

Besides Quanjie, the Corvo had mined two other planets to their core, and with a condensed ring of space stations and satellites barely 1 AU away, nearly half the Corvo population had moved to live and work in Tiantang or nearby mining bases. Not only had the majority of the Corvo industry and services moved to space, but also their entire financial system. In a genius move, several corporations agreed to have the stock exchange and currency markets moved to Tiantang, which expedited energy exploitation for the Dyson Ring, but resulted in a delay of 3 light minutes as information travelled from Tiantang to Quanjie, and made all planet-side corporations unable to compete against their space-based rivals.

Suddenly, all the important and well paid jobs were in Tiantang, and many service companies moved to space stations in the ring. Quanjie was slowly but surely depleted of its most capable citizens and industries, as well as most of its resources.

It was during this time that most Quanjie nations disappeared - some joined or were annexed by larger nations, such as Jiantian or Yuelin; some split not into smaller nations, but into corporations and companies. Some countries were bought wholesale by the Tiantang-based corps. Many political entities remained, but the massive paradigm shift had already taken place. The Corvo were no longer divided by nations, but by companies and employment.

Thus the new Corvo space civilisation was born, and it had wholly new material needs; it required new forms of software, entertainment, energy, and resources. And the CEOs of the largest companies were well aware of what would happen to their economy if they could not keep up with this new world they had just created.

THE LABYRINTH

When it seemed like the Corvo expansion had reached its limit, exhausting most of the resources available in their solar system, a team of scientists at Tiantang claimed that, with a large enough energy output, they could create a wormhole. This team was led by now legendary Professor Mehdi Ben, a Corvo astrophysicist - whose name translates thus because we Humans first learned of him through the Iz'kal, whose names are translated to our Arabic languages.

The discovery of Professor Mehdi's team opened a new door for space exploration, as lightspeed remains unattainable for manned spacecraft, and a wormhole could allow the Corvo to explore other stars - and expand the resources available to the Corvo corporations.

To create a wormhole, Mehdi and his team needed to create matter with negative mass, or else find it at one of several naturally occurring spots in space, which Mehdi dubbed N-regions in which mass arbitrarily changes from positive to negative. Creating matter with negative mass would require an incredibly expensive process, and it also needed an huge, continuous amount of energy in order to remain stable and not collapse upon itself.

Mehdi Ben convinced several corporations to invest heavily into his project. If it worked, his team could create a door to a whole new star system, brimming with the resources and job opportunities the Corvo (and the corporations' business) needed so much.

What Mehdi Ben did not tell his investors was that it was impossible to choose where the wormhole would lead to. The experiment indicated that the other end of the wormhole would theoretically open at a nearby N-Region, most of which tend to form relatively close to star systems. This was enough assurance for Mehdi that the wormhole would take them somewhere useful. He kept the uncertainty from his investors, who he knew would appreciate their money more than a leap of faith.

When the wormhole was created, something completely unexpected happened - Instead of taking them to an uncharted N-region, it took them to a natural wormhole that was connected to thousands of points throughout the Universe, thus creating an artificial path between their location and countless others. This was a success beyond what their wildest theories had predicted. The Corvo businesses and people now had an open door to the Universe.

They called it the Labyrinth.

THE AGE OF EXPANSION

The first trips across the Labyrinth were less a success than Mehdi's original optimism suggested. Once it was through, a ship lost all contact with Tiantang, and there was no way to make sure where, or if, it had safely arrived. Of the first three manned flights into the Labyrinth, none returned.

Then the Megacorps paid for the development of traveling beacon ships - specialised vessels, either manned or automated, equipped with portable network relays through which ship crews could communicate even across a wormhole. These beacon ships were launched to several spots across the Labyrinth, allowing ships to arrive to their destinations safely even if they lost contact with the Tiantang network.

The Corvo even regained communication with one of the three lost Labyrinth missions, which became such good news that 'Reunion Day' remains a holiday observed across the Corvosphere.

The development of beacon ships was the spark that finally jump-started Corvo expansion across the Labyrinth, and the first Corvo colony - the settlement of New Quan on Yaolong 6B - was founded in 1657 SA, just over a decade after the discovery of the Labyrinth. Then, they discovered Earth two years later (1659 SA, 2347 CE for us), the facts of which are not needed here as it's the greatest milestone in Human history and everyone knows the details.

From that moment on, the Corvo have precariously but steadily founded new colonies and established their dominion over further and further star systems.

These colonies are relatively few, very remote and have achieved uneven levels of development and quality of life when compared to the Corvo capital of Tiantang, but they finally consolidated the Corvo as an interstellar civilisation.

THE CORVOSPHERE

When it became clear the Corvo civilisation had left behind not only the traditional cradle of its home world, but also their star system, they began seeing themselves as a new kind of entity, one previously unknown even to them.

Although the closest the Corvo have to a local identity remains tied to Tiantang and the Megacorps, they slowly understood their civilisation had become a much more far-reaching entity - an entity for which they have no name.

The term 'Corvosphere' came into use in 1699 SA, when the well-known media commentator Xiao Yao used the word to refer to the shared culture and trade laws of two recently founded Corvo colonies. Pretty soon everyone was using it, including the government and Megacorps. Now, the Corvo 'world' is not a planet, a star system or a corporation - it is a bodiless institution, an all-encompassing unsubstantial entity that the Corvo unconsciously picture encompassing the Labyrinth and every star system connected to it. When they think of the Corvosphere, they see the whole Universe as their 'world'. And they may just be - or eventually become - right to do so.

THE MEDIA REVOLUTION

As the Corvo territory grew and more colonies were founded from an end of the Labyrinth to the other, free thought and a growing economy, mixed with longer distances from the Corvo power centre, gave birth to a number of independent philosophies; most of these questioned and even challenged the Corvo status quo.

The Qing Gao movement particularly denounced Corvo consumerism and called for a return to self-knowledge; to focus individualism towards greater wisdom instead of away from it. Qing Gao proponents, pejoratively called qings or qingga by the older generations, listened to lyric-heavy music, left anonymous minimalist poems in hidden databits across the neuronet and rejected commercialism, buying only their basic needs and mocking a society that filled itself with luxuries and escapism. The only hedonism the Qingga tolerated was performance arts, parties and drugs, which they claimed to use only to expand their self understanding. Buy yourself, a witty aphorism by Qingga poet Dao Enmeng, became a slogan of the movement and a catchphrase of Corvo popular culture.

Qingga subculture was very attractive for a whole generation of younger Corvo, which led to a huge generation schism - young Qings saw themselves as 'the children of the Labyrinth' and claimed that the discovery of interstellar pathways marked a new spiritual era that gave them a deeper understanding of self than their archaic, Tiantang-bound elders.

The Qings also denounced the corruption and insensitivity of the Megacorps, performing sit-downs, demonstrations and even civil wars in several sectors of Tiantang and remote colonies. They had the honest belief that they could transform Corvo society by transforming its self-perception, and constantly promoted a new outlook away from consumerism, leading to a new set of social values, via altered states and new states of conscience.

Eventually the Qings won the cultural clash - by losing it. The Qingga movement sparked a cultural and marketing revolution, but it was not because of the Qings; rather, it was because entertainment networks and media Corps espoused - or pretended to espouse - Qingga values to attract more audience, and eventually turned the Qings' internalist philosophy into a very profitable fashion trend. Thus, young Corvo flocked to digital shops to buy the buy yourself signature for their digital interactions, or 'Qing-style' clothing and accessories.

But the most important legacy of the Qingga revolution was much longer-lasting. As nearly all Corvo youths had gotten 'into' the experience of changing their perceptions to reshape reality, the Megacorps scrambled to provide artificial means of doing it. This led to a boom of mass-produced virtual reality experiences and the development of the Megaworld, a massive virtual reality experience that all Corvo could connect to and pay for different, new experiences, fed directly to their brains and bypassing sensory output or physical drugs. These new 'customer experiences', called lifemods, revitalised the market of massive virtual entertainment, brought the concept of digital drugs to mainstream Corvo culture, revolutionised the structure and technology of mass media, and a couple years later led to the development of the most important Corvo technology - the cortex connector.

THE IZ'KAL

Of all the discoveries The Labyrinth brought to the Corvo, none was more important than encountering their main rivals in the space race – the Iz'kal.

The first meeting of both species occurred when the now-famous Zhaozu Corp's expedition sought to colonise a mining world in the star system the Corvo call Mu Tai - only to find it already occupied by someone else - an Iz'kal xenostudies lab colony.

Finding aliens was strange enough, but finding that these aliens had no understanding of trade or negotiation was beyond Zhaozu's understanding. Even after news of the meeting traveled across both civilisations, it took a few days for the Corvo to truly grasp the significance of what had just taken place - their first contact with another interstellar civilisation.

A biped, amphibious species ruled by a totalitarian technocracy on the world of Al'Ameen, the Iz'kal had learned interstellar travel roughly at the same time as the Corvo, though their approach to space exploration was quite different. Where the Corvo sought to expand and exploit resources, the Iz'kal sought knowledge and living space. Where the Corvo saw every interaction in the light of a customer-provider relationship, the Iz'kal didn't quite understand or tolerate individualism or the unexpected, much less an entire alien culture fully based on trade and competition.

The only reason the Iz'kal didn't flee or attack out of sheer disgust upon first contact was that they, unlike the Corvo, had some previous experience dealing with alien species, and thus were not as surprised and repulsed by the Corvo as they might otherwise had been. In fact, the Iz'kal were interested in learning more about the Corvo, although they kept every interaction cold and professional.

What came after were several meetings and peace talks, and the encounter became a historic milestone. But the co-operation between both species was far from guaranteed - in fact, it would soon be put to the test...

THE TAI MENG REVOLT

Often the greatest challenges to the Corvo lifestyle and stability came from within the Corvosphere itself. Civil unrest became a common occurrence as soon as the Corvo started building colonies - the Zhui Xi riots come to mind, as well as the famous hackers' strike of Tiantang 998B - although revolts remained relatively harmless and far between. It wasn't the case of the Tai Meng Revolt.

It started as the settlers of the Tai Meng colony, a recently discovered source of Jiu material- the first out of Quanjie, and currently the largest in the known universe - went on strike against the Corporations demanding better working conditions.

The delegates of Hao Corp, the branch of The Union Megacorp that oversaw the Tai Meng works, claimed their treatment of workers was lawful and well within interplanetary rights, and that more leniency or better wages would result in a fall of productivity, which would severely impact Corvo expansion as Jiu exports fell behind. The Megacorps predictably ruled in favor of Hao's reasoning, but the Tai Meng workers went berserk at the verdict - they sabotaged the machines, took the whole colony by storm, lynched the

Hao delegates and threatened to blow up the Jiu yields if the Megacorps didn't agree to their demands.

At first, the Megacorps tried to play it all down, claiming the Tai Meng rioters were but thugs and terrorists, hell bent on destabilising the Corvo economy. But the general public wasn't as easily assuaged, and many popular sectors, particularly in 'sensitive' (meaning poor but economically significant) sectors of Tiantang, rose their voices in support of the rebels. Soon, the lower classes across the Corvosphere became a powder keg that threatened to blow in the Megacorps' faces. Meanwhile, Hao Corp threatened to gas the Colony and kill all the workers stationed there if they didn't reopen the trade routes.

To soften their stance, the Megacorps destituted the Hao directive and put a friendlier delegate - the thus far unknown Lo Lau - in charge of the Tai Meng colony. However, Lau took advantage of the situation to dramatically increase the prices and taxes on Jiu exports, claiming that mistreatment of the workers gave them the right to economic compensation beyond their demands. The Tai Meng miners idolised Lo Lau, and the colony soon became a near-independent enterprise, which answered to the Megacorps only nominally, and enjoyed the full support of Hao Corp, which was getting richer by Lo Lau's punitive measures against Tiantang.

The Megacorps threatened to shut Tai Meng down if Hao didn't agree to more reasonable trade rates, to which Hao replied citing Corvo colonial law, which basically allowed them to adjust their prices as needed according to demand - and the long strike had created an inordinate demand for Jiu material. Meanwhile, Lo Lau threatened to turn Tai Meng into an independent colony - a new state, fully separate from the Corvosphere - with the full support of its inhabitants and the reluctant backing of Hao Corp itself.

The delicate situation was decided, as it often happens, by an outside, unexpected force. Apprised of the situation, Iz'kal diplomats saw Tai Meng as a chance of toppling the 'aberrant' Corvo government, and gave the workers their full support, with as many resources and even weapons as they needed, offering them to join the Iz'kal state (along with their Jiu-filled planet) and enjoy the full protection and patronage of Al'Ameen. Now the revolt threatened to become a full-blown interplanetary civil war - and it would certainly have were it not for Mei No, the chairwoman of The Union Megacorp.

After a week-long summit with the heads of the other Megacorps, Mei No convinced them of the terrible danger to Corvo society if the Tai Meng rioters went to war supported by the Iz'kal. All three Megacorps passed an emergency bill that required Hao's shares to be sold at the Tiantang Stock Exchange - as it had threatened the stability of its parent corporation - and hired a new corporation, one led by Bao Chong, a vocal and explicitly progressive entrepreneur who had frequently spoken in favour of the Tai Meng workers.

This move by CEO Mei No wasn't without its detractors, but it succeeded on sweetening the deal for the separatists and giving them a reason to lay down their weapons rather than joining the Iz'kal state. Perhaps Lo Lau's mysterious death at the hands of unidentified assassins had something to do with the decision, too. Anyway, Tai Meng became a lawful and obedient colony once more, fully rejoining the Corvosphere and rejecting the Iz'kal deal.

That, however, wasn't the masterstroke - Mei No's real genius strategy, and the one by which she is still remembered today, was the Bill she wrote and proposed, which changed the economy of the Corvosphere forever.

THE EEP

The Law the Corvo government came up with was dubbed the EEP, or 'Economic Equality Pact'. This bill basically required all colonies to accept a single chart of proportional commercial rates, and to abide to a common set of acceptable trade practices. Other than signing the EEP, Corvo colonies were required to obey no set laws other than those of the Corporations that ran their respective operations.

The EEP was a roaring success. Most Colonies wholeheartedly embraced it, and its terms were equally beneficial for the Megacoprs and the colonial governments. More importantly, it specifically prevented another Tai Meng by clearly stating limits to acceptable prices, taxes and fines among colonies; it also guaranteed the workers would receive certain basic rights, including a variable minimum wage according to each Colony's resources, which made it a hit among the working classes, too.

Thus, the EEP allowed Mei No, and through her the entire Corvo government, to establish the trade rules that have kept the Corvosphere peaceful and its economy prosperous for the last two hundred years, to the chagrin of its detractors, both within and without the Corvo species.

As the economist Po Qie stated, 'Tiantang was the cradle of Corvo Economy - but Tai Meng was its first job'.

THE SPACE RACE

After the EEP and the Iz'kal takeover attempt, it didn't take long for both species to realise they weren't going to be friends.

The Corvo felt uneasy about the Iz'kal's wasteful philosophies and totalitarian state, and the Iz'kal were appalled by the Corvo's materialism and pointless individualism. But they also knew they were not only political opposites - they were innate rivals. Without planning or asking for it, both

species were suddenly on a race not only to expand their territory, but to spread their culture and ideology across the universe before the other. The Iz'kal had a long head start, having learned space travel from previous alien encounters, but the Corvo were far more numerous and enterprising.

Both species have committed covert acts of sabotage against each other's exploration efforts - let us remember how the Iz'kal manipulated the population of Hung 10-B into sedition, which put plans for the colony on hold indefinitely, or the poisoning of the Agora clouds by Corvo spies - but officially the competition remains fair and respectful.

To this day, the Corvo and the Iz'kal remain rivals, and every time one of them settles a new planet, it forces the other to settle two.

However, something would happen that would change the stakes of their rivalry forever.

THE FALL OF IZUAN TAI

For a long time, the menace we know as the Ravager were no more than a myth; mere stories from space sailors and tradesmen, who spoke of colonies and spaceships that had been found abandoned, with no signs of life and with entire sections that looked like they had been devoured whole.

At first, the Corvo and Iz'kal obviously blamed each other for the disappearance of their colonies. Open war became a real threat, and diplomats from both species called for retaliatory, 'preventive' strikes.

Then came the onslaught. Creatures out of a nightmare, in numbers that darkened the sky, fell upon Izuan Tai -one of the economic centers of the Corvo. The defenses of the planet were overrun in a matter of minutes and those who tried to escape the slaughter were hunted down. Only the fastest spaceships managed to find their way into the Labyrinth to carry word of the attack back to the Corvosphere.

One month later, a large Corvo fleet arrived at Izuan Tai and, after a desperate battle, was forced to blow up the planet to stop the spread of the terrible creatures that had taken over it.

For lack of a better name, the Corvo called the creatures the Hui Huài ('Ravager' in modern Human Speech), and they remain known as The Ravager throughout civilised space. But the effects and significance of their appearance were just beginning to make themselves felt.

THE COALITION

It wasn't long before another Ravager fleet was detected approaching Parsaius, a large Iz'kal colony. Without any need for previous agreement or explanations, both the Iz'kal and Corvo forces flocked to the spot. For the first time in history, the rival species joined together to face a common threat, one that they both understood could very well bring about the end of the known universe.

The joint effort managed to defeat the Ravager, but just barely; Despite the time they had to prepare for the attack and the intelligence they had gathered during the battle at Izuan Tai, the assault took a high toll in lives.

After Parsaius, the Corvo and the Iz'kal knew they couldn't face the Ravager and each other at the same time. They agreed to cease all hostilities, and even stop their unofficial 'Space Race', to focus all of their resources on fighting this new menace. Within a year, the Megacorps and the Iz'kal State had signed the Iz'kal-Corvo Military Coalition, or just 'The Coalition' for short. It was the largest military alliance in known history, and the only one of its kind, where two disparate interstellar species pooled their resources towards a single defence force.

The Coalition didn't answer to either the Megacorps or the State, but only to an emergency council composed in equal parts by Corvo and Iz'kal delegates, which agreed - in writing - to pursue only the best interests of both species for as long as their alliance existed.

Of course, the 'truce' between the Corvo and Iz'kal never went much deeper than the pretty speeches, and currently both species maintain their covert enmity through espionage, counter-espionage and sabotage while they keep the pretence of cooperation. The Coalition still exists, however, and the army under its jurisdiction remains a joint, fully cooperative effort; while their governments still backstab each other routinely, the Coalition itself is well aware that it can't afford discord in the war against the Ravager.

As of this writing, the Coalition has existed for no more than a few years, but their brave efforts still keep the Ravager at bay in the border of known space. Many of our people are fighting that battle as you read these words; we still don't know if, when, or how the conflict will end.

What we know is that the Coalition is the only hope, not only of the two species that conform it, but also of the Raag, Humans, and any still undiscovered species that remain in the Ravager's path.

Whatever happens, the Ravager are either stopped, or they end life in the universe as we know it.

THE CORVO TODAY

Despite their political and economic ups and downs, and even through the war against the Ravager, the Corvo remain the most prosperous and advanced civilisation in known space.

The Corvosphere keeps on growing exponentially, as the Corvo are adept at finding new solutions to new problems - the exploitation of their planet's resources was well underway when they set their eyes on asteroid mining and efficient energy sources.

The Corvo CEOs always have long-term goals in sight, perhaps thanks to their naturally long lifespan. This is why they understood the value of investing in R&D, and found space to be the bottomless mine their economies needed.

The Corvo now use the Labyrinth to create new colonies wherever they find habitable planets, and mine dozens of planets and asteroid rings for the ever-growing satellite ring of Tiantang.

Some dream of creating a solid sphere around the star, which would allow them to collect virtually all of its energy output without any loss. Although this would require creating a surface area several billion times that of the surface of a planet, something scientists see as impossible now and highly unlikely in the future, the Corvo are not a people who take no for an answer - and Tiantang keeps growing every year.

The Corvo have successfully expanded to other star systems, and have built new homes for their people at several worlds. Millions of Corvo inhabit hostile worlds where they spend their lives mining vital minerals, and a few of their richest citizens live in paradise retreats in lush, undiscovered worlds.

Only the species' rivalry with the Iz'kal, and of course the Ravager threat, cast any shadow over the Corvo's bright future - but it's a shadow that may well engulf and snuff out its utopia of success, freedom and prosperity. And what the future holds, only the Gods may know.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

"The Corvo have created a new civilisation for a new millennium. They have taken their cities to space, where they can feed from what is virtually an eternal source of energy. No longer coerced by the weather, the availability of land, the changes in tectonic plates, the atmosphere or any other planetary problems. They expand without restraint through the Labyrinth, from where they can obtain any amount of resources whenever needed.

The Iz'kal accuse them of having unsustainable exponential growth, but with the discovery of the Labyrinth, growth is no longer a liability - it is a necessity. Who knows who else is out there? What species and what powers might one day come out of an unexplored region of the Labyrinth. The Corvo are doing what they must for their survival. Holding hands and rainbows are all fine until you are conquered by a stronger foe, after which the only thing your hands will hold will be a pick and a shovel, and you will be forced to terraform your beloved planet to some strange creatures' climate, hoping that once you are done you might be able to at least breathe what they breathe.

The Iz'kal have to stop working with dated concepts from single-planet economies. The Labyrinth is the most dangerous thing to ever occur to our species, but it is also our greatest opportunity. History will prove who is right. The Iz'kal should work harder if they want to write a few pages of it."

- Excerpt from "A Free Society" by Abbas al Din, Iz'kal dissident and statistician at The Union

The Corvo may seem heartless and materialistic to most other species' standards, but they're actually very tolerant, having almost no notion of xenophobia or prejudice. As a result, the Corvo have entered the interstellar community with open arms - but also with open eyes: For the Corvo, all other sentients are either a workforce to be tapped, or competition to watch out for - and often both, given the Corvo policy of free opportunity.

THE IZ'KAL STATE

"The concept of the State is not the problem, but the very solution if applied correctly. Anarchist ideologies will only slow down the process, as at some point organised groups will grow, as it is an easy way to gain power, and they will soon impose their ways. Anarchism is doomed to live in a vicious circle with dictatorship. Only a state of the people for the people is a system capable of sustaining itself. "

- Hamid Al-Razim, Iz'kal philosopher

The relationship between the Corvosphere and the Iz'kal State is the most famous rivalry in the known universe. Despite their recent military Coalition, both species maintain a fierce competition and a political domination race, their cultures and philosophical views too different for each other to tolerate.

In fact, both species see the other's culture as nothing less than a deadly menace to their very existence; the Iz'kal state feels threatened by the Corvo's free-market society, and the Corvo see the Iz'Kal state as a dangerous tyranny that could snuff out free thought.

Outside the Coalition, Corvo that travel to Iz'kal space are regarded with suspicion and watched with the utmost attention to their every move, as they could be spies or financial saboteurs - which in fact they often are. Sadly for the Corvo, the Iz'kal State has no currency, and thus is all but impervious to the penetration of a market culture, much less an economic takeover.

Furthermore, some Corvo - not that many, but still a surprising figure - have actually been convinced that the Iz'kal State is the better culture. These Corvo radicals often preach the errors of free market and the benefits of a totalitarian State, either from within the Corvosphere or, more rarely, actually defecting to the Iz'kal State. Again, the Iz'kal's closed, xenophobic society makes free immigration hard at best, and very few Corvo succeed in joining the State, even as second-class citizens.

Ironically, any Iz'kal wishing to defect to the Corvosphere are greeted with open arms; many economists and social scientists see this as proof that the Corvo are, if not better to the Iz'kal, at least better equipped to learn from their enemies.

THE COALITION

The Corvo-Iz'kal Military Coalition (or simply 'The Coalition' for short) is the greatest interspecies cooperation achievement, not only by the Corvo (or the Iz'kal), but by any known species to date, and its very existence changed the Corvo's foreign policy forever.

Originally created as a joint defence effort to thwart the Ravager invasion, the Coalition is an army - led by soldiers and politicians from both the Corvo and Iz'kal species. The Coalition itself is an independent entity, beholden to

the interests of both species but subservient to neither government.

To the Corvo general public, the Coalition is just another enterprise - another extension of the Megacorps, which sells no less than the safety and defence of Corvo space. But many Corvo social scientists see it as a success - a triumph of the open-minded Corvo culture over Iz'kal isolationism and xenophobia.

HUMANS

"We did not expect that the invisible hand would be this good at strangling."

- Human worker at a metal mine in the A9dJJV asteroid field

The Corvo have all but occupied Human space; Megacorp franchises are constantly built and established all over the Human homeworld, and Human servants and mercenaries are a common sight in the daily lives of Corvo, from their homes to their warships.

Despite having the obvious upper hand in the relationship, the Corvo don't act as masters or conquerors; just like second-class citizens of the Corvo species, Humans have the same opportunities and spaces as wealthier Corvo, and are given whatever respect and status they earn for themselves. Thanks to the Humans' unique role as the best-paid soldiers in the galaxy, that can mean a lot of respect and status indeed.

By the same token, the Corvo are more or less welcome on Earth, the Human homeworld. As the Humans left their own world and civilization in such a sorry state, they don't feel that attached to it, and the Corvo are doing a much better maintenance job anyway, at least in the areas under their control - which are few, but more with every passing year.

These areas, which include all the healthier, richer, more productive spots in the planet, keep spawning Corvo buildings, offices, watchtowers, military bases and business centers, which are open to any Humans that want to try the Corvo lifestyle instead of surviving precariously on the wasteland of their homeworld.

That is not to say that all Humans are happy in the Corvosphere. Although they are theoretically given the same opportunities, many of them remain second-class citizens in practice, and as such must endure the harshest laws and hardest living conditions, working for lower wages and under worse contracts.

Many Humans find the ways of the Corvo stifling and alienating, and prefer to remain independent, either as freelance mercenaries, free-roaming wanderers in the wastelands of Earth or the borders of known space, or even raiders or pirates in the fringe of the Corvosphere. The Human Front, a terrorist cell dedicated to 'save' Humanity by targeting Corvo buildings and military groups, is an infamous example of this.

RAAG

Not counting a few exceptional immigrant cases and the occasional visitor, the Corvo have no presence in the Raag homeworld; the planet isn't that rich in resources and the Corvo aren't that welcome among the traditionalistic, isolated Raag.

However, thousands of Raag workers and mercenaries travel to the Corvosphere every day, for all the hard labour tasks that the Corvo consider too simple or too complex for machines to perform. There are comparatively few Raag in the Corvosphere, but in all Corvo cities and settlements it's quite normal to see a Raag bouncer, thug or construction worker here and there.

As with all other species, the Corvo don't see the Raag as inherently inferior, and there have been a few cases of individual Raag achieving fame and success in Corvo society. However, even the tolerant Corvo tend to regard the Raag as simple brutes, and rarely consider them for complex tasks or social interaction; that is, until they allow themselves the surprise of actually having a conversation with - or getting their skull crushed by - a Raag.

Other than that, the character of the Raag and Corvo races is surprisingly similar, and below the surface of the Raag's natural hostility and the Corvo's natural indifference, every interaction between the two species seems to follow an implicit agreement of efficient, wordless cooperation.

The Raag appreciate the Corvo's unaffected straightforwardness and lack of sentimentalism, while being amused by their over-the-top frivolity; the Corvo like the Raag's focus, stoicism and ruthlessness.

It's widely believed, and likely true, that Corvo Tongs maintain a far-reaching Raag slave trade. Rumor has it that millions of Raag slaves are forced into lethal jobs such as deep-asteroid mining, drug manufacturing, lab testing, or even gladiatorial fights.

The Raag would not react kindly to widespread confirmation of this rumour, as they have troubling memories of their subjugation by the Korian; so, it remains in the best interest of the Corvo to seek, find and, if it exists, dismantle the Raag slave trade before it hurts a - thus far - productive interspecies relationship.

THE CORVOSPHERE

"If you had a spaceship with limited resources, travelling an infinite voyage, what system would you use to run it? Would you let the crew buy and spend the resources, the oxygen, the engines and batteries for their personal use? Would you let them waste these resources, or wait for the prices to go up and then resell them back to the rest of the crew? Would you let the oxygen technicians buy out the reports about their department, when the air starts to be poisonous, so no one complains? Would you let the biologists in charge of the crops throw out into space 60-70% of what they produce so they can make money?

Well, a planet is just a very large space ship, and it cannot refuel."

- Part of the speech given by Iz'kal geoscientist Salwa Hayek at a Tiantang Terraforming Conference (Citizen Hayek was invited to talk as part of the Coalition's attempt to pull both species together. Her speech was not well received)

The Corvosphere is the name given to the whole of Corvo civilisation; from the planets they inhabit, their spacecraft and their mines, to their art, culture, and technology. The term 'Corvosphere' includes all the territory, political entities and technology that has been created or influenced by the Corvo.

Despite its all-encompassing sense, the Corvosphere, only refers to the socially acceptable part of Corvo society and culture; rebel fleets, pirates, anarchists, and any other groups that don't live by the standard rules of Corvo society are not considered part of the Corvosphere.

There are an estimate of 200 billion Corvo living in the Corvosphere. Of those, roughly 90 billion live in Tiantang, the Corvo government centre, and the rest is spread across their colony planets and space stations.

The Corvosphere started at the Dyson Ring of Tiantang, the mega-construction the Corvo undertook after leaving their homeworld of Quanjie. Originally they didn't plan to grow further than that, but the energy and space needs generated by Tiantang forced them to look to space for materials, which led to the founding of the first Corvo colonies.

Now, Corvo space includes several settled worlds, mining planets and trade routes across the Labyrinth, with all paths leading to the economic centre of Tiantang. Thus the Corvosphere came into being, and as of this writing it keeps expanding exponentially.

CORVO COLONIES

The difficulty of an effective communications network across the Labyrinth does not allow for a centralised Corvo government. Thus, each Corvo colony has its own distinct ruling body, answering to the Megacorps but otherwise independent. The Corvo people wouldn't have it any other way, as they prefer their politicians where they can see them and within arm's reach.

To keep cohesion between colonies, the Megacorps issued the Economic Equality Pact (EEP), which every colony must sign in order to be considered a sovereign entity within the Corvosphere. The EEP allows Corvo governments to conduct commerce and business freely, which keeps trade taxless between colonies. It is also a good defence against an economical takeover by the Iz'kal, as a single lost colony would represent but a marginal loss for the Corvosphere as a whole.

As stated elsewhere, taxes are voluntary in the most independent Corvo colonies - such as Tiantang - although only taxpayers have access to government benefits.

As lovers of freedom, the Corvo put very few restrictions on travel between colonies, but most require that immigrants have a job secured at their destination or enough money on their accounts to support themselves while looking for one. This very simple rule protects a colony from the increased crime rates caused by a flood of jobless people willing to do anything to survive.

Those not allowed to travel must turn to the Tongs - criminal organisations - to get from one place to another without the full sanction of the law. Every day, hundreds of Corvo wearing low quality spacesuits are fired into the Labyrinth by these Tongs. While some are intercepted by the emigration police set around the exits of the Labyrinth, many succeed and are picked up by spacecrafts that take them to their destination and fire them back through a Labyrinth exit, again under the noses of emigration control. Finally, they are picked up by a ship that takes them to the colony's surface. This is an extremely risky way of travelling and many die in the process. Sometimes the transport ships don't show up, other times the pilots are lazy and don't pick up all the emigrants. The most unfortunate are picked up by slavers to be sold off at distant planets.

Some gifted Iz'kal scientists and scholars, disenchanted by the conservative Iz'kal society that gives no space for their talents to shine, move to the Corvosphere to try and earn corporate backing to their inventions and theories. Corvo entrepreneurs have the resources and open mind to make anything possible - as long as it turns a significant profit, of course.

TIANTANG

Planetary Type: Complex of space stations
Population: Over 100 billion
Day: Varies between sectors
Culture: Varies between sectors
Location: Tiantang system, 3.5 standard months away from Al'ameen
Production: Varies between sectors
Social and Economic Rank: Varies between sectors
Atmosphere: Vacuum outside; artificial indoors

"If the universe had a centre, this would be it."

- Human Front founder Giza after his first visit

The capital and power centre of the Corvosphere is the Dyson Ring of Tiantang, made of thousands of space habitats and millions of solar satellites. Hosting billions of Corvo and a few millions from other species, Tiantang is in constant expansion, and more and more ships and stations are built with distant world materials every day.

With unchecked growth in all directions, the sprawling Tiantang has become huge and chaotic. New freighters are attached to old ones by tunnels, which carry transport ships and everyday commuters. These improvised space habitats form communities called districts, of which Tiantang has thousands.

Each district is completely detached from the others, as it isn't safe to create larger structures. Rich districts are often also isolated from the poorer ones.

While in the Corvosphere, any one can move and settle on unowned space. Empty areas between districts are owned by aggregations of citizens or corporations, making them private property and therefore allowing the owners to decide who can or cannot land there.

Transportation between districts is run by companies with large fleets of spacecrafts. Middle and high class Corvo own personal voidcycles to travel across the void, filling the vacuum between the districts like a locust cloud.

THE PEOPLE

People of Tiantang call themselves Tian. The richest among them live in their own personal stations full of servants and unthinkable commodities. Such stations are the summit of Corvo engineering, beautiful as palaces, powerful like warmachines, revered like cathedrals, and probably the most expensive things in the Corvosphere.

Middle class Tian citizens live in comfortable, safe and beautiful districts, composed of a single, immense omniring, called a gyro-zhan. Gyro-zhans are large omnirings that spin continuously to recreate a sense of gravity through centripetal force and can host several thousand people. Thus, inhabitants of a gyro-zhan live on the outermost section of the space station, with their ceiling being in the direction of the center section of the space station. Like an onion, there are several floors from the outermost section going into the centre, each of them a ring in the station. Since gravity diminishes the closer you are to the centre, most core services, gardens, and storage are located in the central areas. The main hangar of a gyro-zhan is located at its core, with an airlock in the exact centre of the station. This is the only point of the gyro-zhan that is easily accessible to large transport spaceships.

People in a gyro-zhan work all types of jobs: information technology, transportation, debris collection, brokerage, law, entertainment, services, healthcare... Gyro-zhans are beautiful and magnificent. They are where people have the space and time to grow and learn all the information ever recorded from the largest privately owned libraries. In these libraries, the most powerful minds of the Universe of all the species meet to discuss all kinds of issues.

However, most Tian live in space freighters, which are better known as space slums. While the demand for workers is huge, there are now so many workers that the companies can offer low wages, knowing that there will always be someone desperate enough to take the job. This has drastically reduced the quality of life for Corvo workers all across Tiantang. Veteran workers see how their well-paid jobs are being taken by inexperienced immigrants from Quanjie or from some other colony, who agree to a tenth of the salary. This has created large-scale problems of xenophobia, and groups of Hexia and Ergon believers have teamed up to ask for a more protectionist state and stronger immigration laws. Still, the lobby groups of the Megacorps and the vast majority of the population are completely against such ideas, and therefore the situation isn't likely to improve.

Immigrant Corvo arrive by the millions every day and are sucked into the space slums: old space freighters the size of islands, now too old to be operational, which have been transformed into precarious living space. There, layer over layer of containers extend as far as the eye can see, each housing one or more families, all of them living in the worst possible 0-G conditions. Most families live and die in one of these containers without ever experiencing gravity. They stay alive thanks to the intake of G-pills that reduce the effects of the gravity lack on their organs. Their only chance of a better life is being seen as a capable worker by their foremen, and getting a proper job in a gyro-zhan.

Many Tian resort to crime. The worst districts are controlled by Tongs, mafias that decide who gets to work when, and on what. While there is almost no crime whatsoever in the richer districts, most lower-class Corvo are unable or unwilling to pay for police protection. Therefore, there are millions of Corvo that live in the slums without even the most basic of services. Most spend their days in a stupor, or even unconscious, outskulling for some company. Some with even worse luck live in the same factory ships they work on every hour they are awake, building new ships or satellites, fabricating weapons, anti-matter batteries, or operating food processing chains, pharmaceutical processes, etc.

THE BOARD

The Corvo don't like the idea of a government and don't have a concept of political institutions as we do. Tiantang is not a political entity but a private, shared corporate asset. Even so, there are people responsible for the operation and performance of this asset; corporate managers in charge of managing resources, personnel, schedules and space. These administrators are what passes for appointed government officials in the Corvosphere, although they have no legal authority over the people.

The top executives in charge of Tiantang are known as The Board. This corporate body consists of three managers, one belonging to each Megacorp - The Union, Wang Corp and Nation's Solution - who are ultimately responsible for

the correct operation of Tiantang businesses and habitats. Neither of these three managers is a high-level authority in their respective Megacorp, but they are the senior executives of the Tiantang entity; the *de facto* 'CEOs of Tiantang'.

THE SECTORS OF TIANTANG

The Dyson Ring is divided in eleven sectors, with varying sizes and levels of prosperity. Most habitats and stations in Tiantang – except for a few stray unregistered freighters - are a part of one of the Eleven Sectors.

Every sector governs itself independently, but they are all owned by one or more Megacorps or its branches, and the Megacorp directives remain the one true effective government of each sector.

Travelling between sectors is handled via voidcycles or transport ships, but passage is costly, and poorer Corvo are all but stuck in their slums for their whole lives. It is possible to move freely from one sector to another on private vehicles, but one still must pay spacelane fees.

TIANTANG CS

Population: 1 billion

Tiantang Capital Sector, or Tiantang CS, is the most important sector of the Dyson Ring, with its own nominal government and law system. This is where the richest Corvo live, which makes it the hardest sector to move to. More importantly, it is the financial center of the Corvosphere, housing the Corvo stock exchange. Other than the largest and most important corporate buildings in the Corvosphere, Tiantang CS is mainly residential; but it also has several shopping malls such as FengZhao centre, beautiful parks and both live and digital museums.

Despite its importance, Tiantang CS is a relatively small sector, with barely one-third of the mass and population of the average gyro-zhan; exclusivity requires keeping most people at bay, and no one does that better than Corvo elites.

MEGACORP SECTORS

Total population: 27 billion

After the Capital Sector, the three foremost sectors of Tiantang are the respective HQs of the Megacorps that rule the Corvo. Each Megacorp has its own private sector, reserved for offices and business, with restricted access to anyone that doesn't work at the corresponding Megacorp or its subsidiaries.

Megacorp sectors are named after their corresponding Megacorps; there's Union Sector, Wang Sector and NS (for Nation's Solution) Sector. Each of these three sectors - the three largest of all Tiantang - houses thousands of companies and sub-companies, all somehow related to the Megacorp that owns them. Thus Union Sector, a bleak industrial satellite, is full of mercenary camps and training centers, as well as weapons manufacturers and vehicle factories; Wang Sector, a massive hi-tech station, is a hub of software and cybernetics firms, with large convention halls where new technologies are introduced in monthly events; and NS Sector, a large habitat with beautiful gardens and vivariums with species from all the known Universe, is completely occupied by laboratories, technical training grounds, hospitals and research centres.

The companies belonging to each Megacorp often rival eachother, and their internal squabbles and power struggles are their respective sectors' equivalent of civil unrest.

Each of the three Megacorp sectors holds billions of employees at any given time. By law, they have no residential areas, but commuting complications have led to the creation of several hotels and guest houses, where workers lodge indefinitely to remain close to their jobs. Although officially these lodging houses are not residential areas, it goes without saying that they are always at full capacity. There are waiting lists of tens of thousands of Corvo, as many of them lose more time and resources commuting back home than they would if they missed several work days.

For their part, the CEOs of each Megacorp indeed have properties and temporal residences in these sectors, although they tend to spend more time in their Tiantang CS homes or privately-owned asteroids or planets.

Despite lacking an organised government other than their respective board of directors, the three Megacorp sectors are the true power centres of the Corvosphere, where most decisions are taken, while Tiantang CS and its representatives serve as the mere, public face of the Megacorps.

OTHER SECTORS

Total population: Over 60 billion

Besides Tiantang CS and the Three Megacorp sectors, which concentrate most of the workforce and employment in Tiantang – and thus of the entire Corvosphere – there are seven more sectors in the Dyson Ring, all of them adapted from or built upon large spacecraft.

The most famous sector in Tiantang, even more than CS or the Megacorp sectors, is Taiyang, the commercial sector, known across the universe for its mega-malls, entertainment centres, touristic attractions and media scene. Everything in the universe is for sale in Taiyang, from luxury trips to living persons, from vehicles to real estate, from entertainment and drugs to gadget and furniture.

The Wei sector is the secondary financial centre of the Corvosphere. Wei is the HQ of all the banks and trade houses that are available for all Corvo, as opposed to the exclusive financial institutions and stock exchange of Tiantang CS. Wei is safe, fancy and expensive to live in.

The Gu industrial sector is a place of danger, poverty and underemployment, where the Corvo crime families own secret warehouses and poor neighbourhoods struggle, mostly without success, to stay away from poverty crime.

Nongchang is a residential and touristic sector, famous for its artistic, media and cultural scene. Its inhabitants are relatively lower class, but cultured and sensitive.

Shiyan is a very important sector, as it houses the most respected coaching centres, research labs and science facilities of the Corvosphere. It is also famous for its artificial ecosystems, which give it a semblance of being a natural world rather than a Corvo-built mega-satellite.

Xiao is the slum sector of Tiantang, with mostly residential areas dotted by informal business and united, feisty neighbourhoods full of the most loyal, tough and traditionalistic folk in the Corvosphere. The sector is controlled by old-school, grassroots crime families.

Zuihou is a smaller, dull residential sector, full of working-class Corvo that often seek employment or at least long vacations at any other of the Tiantang sectors.

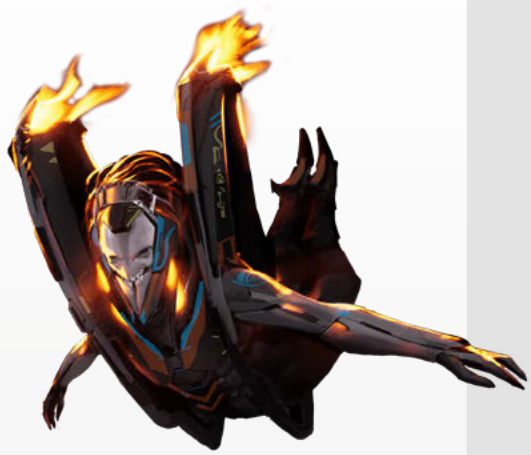
THE LOST SECTORS

Tiantang has been built over the course of several centuries, with billions of Corvo working on thousands of stations and engines across a span of millions of kilometres; over the decades, some spots spent years without ever communicating with the rest. And some of those spots never got in touch again. These are the Lost Sectors - huge stations and habitats that became isolated from the whole of Tiantang over the years, their sections drifting alone in space, thousands of kilometres from the nearest civilised spot, their existence lost in the paperwork, and their people forgotten by the Corvo public at large.

A lost sector usually consists of a few habitats or satellites, long forgotten and abandoned by Corvo civilisation. Most lost sectors are just drifting junk with few reusable resources and no survivors, their occupants rescued or dead of radiation exposure many years earlier.

However, some lost sectors remain inhabited by the descendants of the technicians and passengers that were first marooned with the sector. When one of these sectors is found, it is quickly annexed to the nearest official sector, and any survivors and resources are welcome as part of the Corvosphere again.

Nobody knows just how many of these lost sectors remain, and finding them has become a hobby for many adventurers, scavengers and mystery aficionados with nothing better to do. Who knows? Perhaps one of them will find something...



SCAVENGER

Affinity

Level 1 :: Corvo :: Cautious

mov. 10 metres :: weight 51 kg :: height 154 cm

2	2	0	-

PHYSICAL STAT	3 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	5 (1)

CLOSE QUARTERS	3 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	2

Hunter Instincts

He gains one advantage towards hiding and searching actions.

What's the difference between a filthy scavenger and an exemplary entrepreneur? The value of their loot.

QUANJIE

Planetary Type: Water world
Population: 17 billion
Day: 30 standard hours
Culture: Corporate industrial
Location: Tiantang system
Production: Manufactured goods
Social Rank 3: Declining society and quality of life, few and isolated governments
Economic Rank 3: Trade and currency depend on off-world corporations
Atmosphere: Breathable, high pollution rate

The Corvo homeworld remains inhabited, although most of its governments and institutions have migrated to Tiantang. Most Quanjie nations have disappeared or disbanded, being absorbed by other nations or literally bought by the Megacorps.

Once a thriving world full of great cities, buildings, roads, bridges and multiplexes, Quanjie has become a nearly rural planet, with vast tracts of empty plains dotted here and there with a single factory or farm, or an isolated, industrialised city beside an empty road.

In practice, the planet has become just another Corvo colony, with several settlements owned by the Megacorps, except that these settlements are, or used to be, regarded as sovereign states. However, since the concept of sovereign states lost all meaning once the Corvo civilisation moved to Tiantang, nations and political titles are but decoration - obsolete rites and remnants from a culture that no Corvo lives by anymore. Now, what used to be borders and countries are just isolated neighbourhoods, office space, mining sites and agricultural reserves.

The ancient political institutions that used to rule Quanjie are still in force and remain an authority, but they have become extensions of the Megacorps - franchises, run by politicians instead of entrepreneurs. Other than that, Quanjie is but a worker's colony, where those that wouldn't or couldn't move to Tiantang stayed behind.

THE PEOPLE

The planet's inhabitants are called Quanjiese, which applies to all the Corvo that live in Quanjie regardless of what settlement or nation they live in.

As a rule, Quanjiese are hard-working and straightforward, but also relatively obtuse, narrow-minded and unsophisticated compared to Tiantang-bound Corvo. They

are also used to a gravity environment, which gives them a wholly different outlook on life to their spaceborn kin.

THE JIANTIAN REPUBLIC

The strongest political entity remaining in Quanjie is the Jiantian Republic, which was the largest and mightiest Corvo nation before the Space Age.

The corporation that would become Wang Corp, and the original project for the Tiantang Dyson Ring, were born at Jiantian. The modern Corvo tongue, spoken by hundreds of billions of sentients across the universe, is a variation of the Jiantian language.

When the Corvo culture migrated to Tiantang - which was also a Jiantian initiative - and the Megacorps were established, the entire Jiantian Republic became the property of Wang Corp. Through Jiantian's political power and international deals, Wang Corp and its subsidiaries have acquired land, businesses and borders in every region dominated by the Republic.

Now, Jiantian functions as Wang Corp's political strawperson in Quanjie, affecting democratic rule over what actually are Wang properties. Although officially it remains a political entity, The Republic - and every territory, city, shop and factory under its jurisdiction - is nothing more than an extension of Wang Corp and its interests, which means Wang corp is the de facto ruler of Quanjie.

The Jiantian Republic also has a higher quality of life than most other Corvo entities - and all Corvo entities outside of Tiantang. Most Jiantianese work as business managers - crunching numbers, overseeing staff or handling resources for one of the millions of enterprises in their territory. They typically work long hours, usually returning home for only a few hours before going to their jobs again.

People from the Jiantian Republic are among the most competitive, brash and materialistic individuals in the Corvosphere; of all Corvo social groups, the Jiantianese fit best the species' stereotype of ruthless capitalism. They have a reputation, even among other Corvo, of stopping at nothing to rise in the social ladder, and having no respect for others' property or lives.

OTHER QUANJIE NATIONS

As Quanjie has become mainly a manufacturing planet, all of its nations are but extensions of the Megacorps, and most of them disbanded or sold out to the many corporations that control the economy of Quanjie. However, a few nations maintain official sovereignty, along with a semblance of culture and national identity, which nowadays relates mostly to what they produce and export for the Megacorps.

Foremost among the remaining nations of Quanjie are Yuelin and Baizhi, Jiantian's former allies and currently its bitter rivals; and the Lao Federation, the oldest extant nation of Quanjie, which survived the planet's corporatisation by sheer tradition and cultural identity.

THE QUAN

The Quanjie United Armed Nation, or QUAN, is the only political movement in the Corvosphere, and an extremely dangerous organisation as political movements go.

Originally a small party that united a few scattered fanatics in isolated towns of Yue and the Jiantian Republic, it slowly grew in power and influence until Quanjie corporate authorities had to ban its activities for fear it would destabilise society. Currently, the QUAN is an underground paramilitary organisation with around 2 million members, which is a larger population than some pre-Space Age Quanjie nations. And they are armed members, which makes it even more dangerous.

The QUAN was founded by right-wing partisans, outraged by the loss of political institutions and borders, as well as the massive sale of nations to the Megacorps. Calling for a return to National Identity, and maintaining that the 'true

QUAN CONSCRIPT

Level 1 :: Corvo :: Driven

mov. 5 metres :: weight 54 kg :: height 159 cm

4	2	0	8

PHYSICAL STAT	5 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	3 (1)

CLOSE QUARTERS	3+	STANDARD DISTANCE	3+

(2) Nemesis

Plasma weapon (It ignores 1 point of armour). The attack gains one advantage against dodging.

Impulsive

If he is not caught by surprise, his Initiative during the first round increases to 12.

"Returning Quanjie to its People" is their motto, but this one is not sure who the people are or what is meant to be returned. He loves laser guns, though.

self' of the Corvo had been squandered and given away by corrupt corporate interests, the movement wants no less than an armed overthrow of the Quanjie government, using outright terror tactics and sabotage to make the planet secede from the Corvosphere - or make the Megacorps leave.

To date, the movement has taken credit for no less than a hundred terrorist attacks, including bombings, mass shootings and gyro-ship sabotage, in the name of 'Returning Quanjie to its People', one of the party's slogans. What's scary is just how many followers have fallen into the QUAN's crazy rhetoric, joining its mad crusade against interplanetary economy and corporatism.

The QUAN started out as the Free Action Quanjie (or FAQ), a small, harmless separatist cell, a few decades after the Space Age began, during the Great Sundown Recession. The group became a much larger and far more serious organisation after the discovery of the Labyrinth, when every colony got an influx of corporate investment, which allowed its members to afford a reform and expansion of their movement. Up to that point the organisation had been more or less peaceful, limiting their activities to divisive propaganda and isolated hate crimes. However, after the first attack by the Human Front, the FAQ became both incensed and emboldened, and decided to become a military group. It still took a few decades to consolidate the power of this new incarnation, but by the time of the first Iz'kal encounter the QUAN was fully formed and established as a terrorist, totalitarian group - the only known such group in the Corvosphere. It only grew larger with subsequent decades, alternating periods of vicious attacks with long periods of inactivity, usually associated to the turmoil and peace of the Corvosphere as a whole.

Currently the QUAN is a very active threat to the peace and well-being of Corvo society, staging increasingly deadly attacks and sabotages against important economic targets in all Quanjie territories; and it has started to spill to Tiantang as well, with new QUAN members appearing - and attacking - at some sectors of the Dyson Ring.

The current QUAN leader, and perhaps the craziest Corvo to ever hold that title, is High General Pao Qin, a man so fanatic that he seems to be a living, breathing cartoon super villain. His schemes are equally outrageous, running the gamut from stealing the drinking water of an entire city to building a giant plasma cannon to bring down passenger ships. Under Qin, the QUAN has at last been classified as a planetary-level threat, and the Megacorps are taking steps to stop him.

THE SECRET SERVICE

When Quanjie nations lost prominence and usefulness, most of their long-standing espionage departments and intelligence agencies were closed down - in a world without borders, spies and secret agents were not needed. Most of these agents moved to the less glamorous and more covert world of corporate espionage, but a few remained behind, working at ever-smaller investigation agencies that did little more than paperwork.

However, the appearance of the Iz'Kal, the Ravager War and lesser threats like the Human Front and the QUAN, have recently called for a re-activation of the long-idle Corvo Secret Service. As it turned out, The Jiantian Republic still maintained an archaic Secret Service office, which it gladly put at the Megacorps' beck and call. The small office was soon infused with more money and resources than it had in its entire existence, creating the New Corvo Secret Service, which is still Jiantian-based but now has branches in every Tiantang sector and many areas of Quanjie and New Quan.

The Secret Service combats mostly acts of sabotage by radical groups such as QUAN and the Human Front, but it also provides intelligence on the Iz'Kal and for the Ravager War. For the latter, a special Secret Service office has been opened to answer exclusively to the Coalition.

Secret Service agents don't act in groups. They do most of their missions alone, with a single agent being trained and equipped to incapacitate an entire QUAN base or recover data from a Ravager ship - after all, espionage is a war of resources, and nobody can beat the Megacorps when it comes to budget.

The leaders of the Secret Service are numerous and anonymous, but the organisation is always on the lookout for brave new recruits of any species, as long as they're ready to follow orders and become elite operatives in the service of the Megacorps. It highly values Soulbenders, particularly those of the Vexal faith, for their God-given infiltration skills. These Vexal soulbenders form the Secret Service Special Forces or SSSF, an elite within the elite, sent only to the highest-risk or most important missions.

SSF AGENT

Kalivan 2

Level 2 :: Corvo :: Crafty

mov. 5 metres :: weight 56 kg :: height 160 cm

3	5	0	9

PHYSICAL STAT	6	INITIATIVE STAT	6	MENTAL STAT	8

CLOSE QUARTERS	3 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	3 +

Nemesis

Plasma weapon (It ignores 1 point of armour). The attack gains one advantage against dodging.

Rig 2 (LinkWave 100)

He can perform Hacking actions (causing 2 ACS damage).

Inner Focus

Passive action. If he doesn't become Spent this round, he gains one advantage towards all his actions next round.

Espionage is back in style thanks to the plentiful menaces faced by the Corvo, from the now-classic Iz'kal to the up-and-coming Ravager.

NEW QUAN

Planetary Type: Water world

Population: 11 billion

Day: 27 standard hours

Culture: Eco-friendly techno-industrial settlements

Location: Yaolong system, 2.5 standard months away from Tiantang

Production: Biotech, manufactured goods

Social Rank 4: Isolated pockets of stability in mostly untamed planet

Economic Rank 4: Sharp difference between tribal bartering and thriving cities

Atmosphere: Breathable, clean

New Quan, the first and largest Corvo colony in the universe, was founded 300 years ago when the Corvo discovered how to make use of The Labyrinth and sent five ships to the remote Yaolong system, located across the galaxy from Tiantang.

At first, New Quan was only a small, multicultural settlement, but the planet's soil and atmosphere, which almost mirrored those of the Corvo homeworld, proved far more suitable for growth and development than predicted. Within a year, the Tianta settlement had split from New Quan, and within a decade there were no less than five large cities in the planet's main continent. After a century, the entire world's surface was settled, its land divided and its mining and natural resources bought by, and split between, the Megacorps. Currently, the planet - named New Quan, like its first and largest megacity - still receives some ten to fifty thousand immigrants every day, seeking the promise of new territories and opportunities. Of course, the planet is much less free for the taking than it once was, but it still offers more space and a lower cost of life than Tiantang, while offering a much better lifestyle and job opportunities than other colonies. It is also one of the top touristic spots in the Corvosphere thanks to its healthy mix of natural environments and expensive resorts.

Despite its development and population, New Quan remains a mostly quiet, empty, untamed world. This is due both to its enormous landmass - almost three times that of Quanjie - and the lack of need for settlements to communicate with each other. Every New Quan city and settlement is directly financed and maintained by one of the Megacorps at Tiantang and independent from all others; this, together with the Corvo's natural lack of what we understand as a national or local identity, has prevented the appearance of roads, countries, borders, named continents or any settlement larger than a big city. The resulting landscape consists of vast tracts of unsettled land, dotted at large intervals

by industrial complexes or enormous megalopolises, filled to the brim with overpopulated omnirings and vehicles. Although the land between these megacities is owned, exploited and surveyed by the Megacorps, it remains wild and dangerous, both because of the sparsity of settlements, and because most New Quan criminals retreat to the wilds to avoid the reach of the law.

THE PEOPLE

Newquaners (nicknamed 'Newquies' or 'Nukes' by the Tiantang Corvo) are extremely diverse in their cultural traits, customs, professional backgrounds, economic conditions and even physical characteristics. There are so many kinds of settlements in New Quan - megacities, industrial complexes, Megacorp franchises, remote farms, holistic tribes, artistic communes, small towns - with so many kinds of Corvo living in each of them, that it would be impossible to ascribe a single cultural character to the inhabitants of the whole planet, other than the stereotypes of the Corvo character itself - enterprising, competitive, amoral, uncaring. If anything, Newquaners are somewhat less ambitious and predatory than other Corvo; they also have a reputation for being irresponsible and happy-go-lucky, but this is mostly the stuff of jokes and myths.

NEW QUAN CITY

Population: 200 million

New Quan City, also shortened to Nuke City or NQC, is the oldest and largest settlement in New Quan. It grew from a small colony to the largest planet-bound city in the Corvosphere in the span of a few years, and is currently a famous hub for trade, travel and industry.

At first glance, NQC resembles a large Earth city, with urbanised suburbs and street signs leading into its outskirts. However, two features distinguish it: the lack of roads and the shapes of buildings. Like Tiantang neighbourhoods, New Quan City needs no 'streets' as Earthlings knew them; gyrocycles and other vehicles use mostly hovercraft technology. Buildings are mostly omni-spheres, giving the city the appearance of a gigantic molecule or scaled planetary system; larger and smaller spheres perpetually rotate alongside each other, the moons of smaller businesses and houses orbiting the much larger worlds of government buildings and shopping centres.

There are, of course, no gyro-zhans or zero-G buildings in NQC, as the planet provides all the gravity and atmosphere its inhabitants need - which is a source of mild surprise and discomfort to most Corvo tourists.

Like most other Corvosphere entities, NQC has no formal government, and the official responsibility of overseeing the city and its suburbs, as well as its business in other entities, falls on the hands of the Megacorps. All three Megacorps have an equal presence in the New Quan City Ruling Council, although it's an open secret that Quantech, a Wang Corp brand, owns most of the delegates through bribery and behind-the-curtain business deals. This has spurred the other Megacorps to invest heavily in the NQC area, establishing franchises and even building their own cities from scratch in a - so far unsuccessful - attempt to wrest Quantech's de facto control of the area.

Other than that, NQC itself has no political power over its people or the surrounding countryside, and remains an intermediary between the Megacorps - mostly Wang - and their citizen/ employees.

OTHER SETTLEMENTS

There are no borders or continental divides in New Quan. As the Corvo are not inclined to national identity, Newquaners - both founders and immigrants - simply settle on a Megacorp-sponsored, isolated community and spend most of their lives working there.

Towns and farms: The most common view in New Quan is a few clustered houses amidst a wide tract of empty or cultivated land. These small towns either disappear in a couple generations as they fail to generate enough resources or a

sense of community, or else grow until they become cities themselves. Immigration keeps the number of new communities constant, and small towns are always popping up and disappearing all over New Quan.

Cities: To an outsider, all New Quan cities are basically the same - immense complexes in the middle of the empty vast, full with omnirings, business offices and floating gyrocycles. City folk rarely step outside their controlled environments, just as most country Newquaners lack the resources or motivation to move to a city. As a result, all New Quan cities remain mostly isolated from the rest of the planet, including other cities. For countryside Newquaners, cities are but a faraway mirage on the horizon, reserved for the crazy, the stupid or the successful.

Tribes: When New Quan was first settled, as smaller communities failed to take hold and disbanded, hunter-gatherer tribes began wandering the land. Contrary to the process seen in primitive worlds that evolve into advanced cultures, these disenfranchised communities banded together and, unable or unwilling to locate to a city, returned to a nomadic life. Since most of New Quan's natural landscapes are more or less left alone thanks to the isolationism of its cities, some of these tribes spend months or even years without coming across a 'civilised' settlement.

Most New Quan tribes are peaceful and their members are basically wandering country folk, but some have adopted a more warlike or even raiding lifestyle, becoming a danger to those who brave the wilds.

There are so many independent tribes in New Quan that some radical - mostly non-Corvo - sociologists see them as proof that a holistic lifestyle is the 'natural' path for the Corvo species.

Megacities: Besides NQC, there are seven megacities in New Quan, each of them a state in its own right, surpassing fifty million inhabitants. Life in these megacities is thriving, bustling and active, full of new and successful businesses that deal directly with the Megacorps at Tiantang.

Space stations: New Quan started putting satellites in orbit almost as soon as it was settled; while most of the planet's surface remains relatively untouched, there are currently hundreds of satellites and several space stations providing energy, surveillance and communication to all New Quan cities. Millions of Newquaners live and work at these space stations, whose zero-g habitats are the first choice for Tian immigrants that still feel disoriented on solid ground. New Quan also has a dozen moon-stadiums in orbit, of which the Black Nuke colosseum and the Shanbi-Huangshan twinsats are the best known by far.

The largest orbital station around the planet is Xiaoxing, a vast omniring the size of a small moon, and home to nearly a half-billion Newquaners - nearly 20% of the total New Quan population - that spend most of their lives in space.

HUNTER HELPERS INC.

As a mostly civilised but not fully industrialised world, New Quan has one of the largest and most dangerous natural environments in the Corvosphere, as well as an excellent infrastructure to safely explore such an environment. A few Newquaner entrepreneurs and their customers noticed the situation and decided to make use of it by creating Hunter Helpers Inc., a high-class company dedicated to offering exclusive hunting tours across the most dangerous and beautiful spots in New Quan.

Hunter Helpers is a very exclusive business, reserved only for the wealthiest of Corvo. Rich people from all over the Corvosphere flock to it every year, looking for the thrills and dangers of nature - in a controlled environment, of course.

There's an accusation against Hunter Helpers by some groups that deem it useless to spend resources on killing non-threatening species and putting Corvo citizens in unnecessary danger; the company's answer has always been that the space and resources are there, equally unexploited by the Megacorps, and that they will continue to make free - and legally authorised - use of them for as long as the New Quan ecosystem remains unoccupied.

ILLEGAL HUNTING

After the success of Hunter Helpers, many lesser-known - or less legal - enterprises have started popping up in the New Quan wilderness. Similar businesses try to latch on to Hunter Helpers' customer base, offering basically the same service under a different brand, and hosts of independent hunters and adventurers offer their freelance - and unsanctioned - services as wilderness guides.

The situation has also inspired hundreds of poachers to take to the wilds on their own and gather living or dead specimens of native plants and animals, to sell whole or scrap for parts in the black market.

There's very little the Megacorps can do against these 'pirate' hunting services, except fining them if they are caught. Thus, the battle against illegal hunting in New Quan falls almost entirely to local tribes - and the odd eco-friendly organisation.

Such organisations and tribes are usually keen to enlist the help of a group of concerned adventurers or mercenaries willing to venture into New Quan's jungles on a quest to stop illegal hunters. They can not offer big rewards, but a savvy, ecologically responsible band of intrepid explorers may see the value in exploiting the valuables and contacts of dead or captured poachers.

POACHER

Affinity :: Lone Wolf

Level 2 :: Corvo :: Patient
mov. 5 metres :: weight 55 kg :: height 163 cm

4	3	1	3

PHYSICAL STAT	6 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (2)	MENTAL STAT	7 (2)

HIT (DEX)	2 ++	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

ACS Bo

Activated. If the attack is successful, it also causes 3 ACS damage to its target.

Tracker

She gains one advantage towards searching actions.

Attack Drones

Passive action (Physical). She attacks a character up to 20 metres away with one advantage and causing 2 physical damage.

Poachers are considered to be despicable, bloodthirsty and ruthless. They are.

EXOTIC QUARRY

Affinity

Level 2 :: Beast :: Territorial
mov. 10 metres :: weight 250 kg :: height 135 cm

6	3	0	-

PHYSICAL STAT	6 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	8 (1)

HIT (DEX)	3 +	GRAPPLE (CON)	1

Charge I

Its unconfronted running actions are considered passive, and its next Close Quarters action causes 1 additional damage.

Stealthy

It gains one advantage towards hiding actions.

New Quan's jungles are filled of beasts whose dangerousness rivals their natural, wild beauty. More than one unsuspecting tourists has suffered the consequences of taking one too many selfies here...

XULONG

Planetary Type: Mining station around a gas giant

Population: 12 billion

Day: 20 standard hours

Culture: Industrial

Location: Wangmu system, 3 standard months away from Tiantang

Production: Wang gas, mineral ores, raw materials

Social Rank 3: Low quality of life, very limited livelihood

Economic Rank 3: All citizens are employed by offworld corps

Atmosphere: Unbreathable gases outside; artificial indoors

The Megastat (short for Mega Gas-Mining Station-State) of Xulong is one of the Corvo's oldest interstellar mining colonies, and the largest by a wide margin. At first it was nothing but a mining platform orbiting the Wangmu gas giant at Gamma Dengbao IV, but it eventually became a full-grown colony and the largest known space station outside Tiantang.

Founded in 1690 SA, before the concept of a 'Corvosphere' existed, Xulong is famous for being the reason behind the term itself, as it was the first large Corvo settlement outside of Tiantang or a planet's surface, and its very existence changed the concept of the Corvo civilisation as a whole.

Xulong is a web of thousands upon thousands of interconnected space stations, mostly dedicated to extracting gases and minerals from Wangmu. As it grew, the Xulong megastation developed its own culture and political identity, being recognised as a sovereign colony barely 50 years after its founding. The entire colony consists of space habitats, zero-g slums, and mining machinery, and it's the largest space settlement after Tiantang. For this reason, it's often called Xiao Tiantang, or Xiongdi ('Little Brother').

Despite Xulong's gloomy environment and harsh working conditions - among the worst in existence; Xulong companies always take up around half the list in the official 'Bottom 10 Workplaces in the Corvosphere' yearly ranking - the Megastat is the only place in the Corvosphere where employment is guaranteed; Wangmu's natural resources are virtually unlimited and the mining companies just keep growing unchecked, which keeps Xulong in permanent need of new hands. Many Corvo with no other way out choose a life in the Xulong gas mines, which is a grim life - but a honest and financially secure one.

THE PEOPLE

Xulong folk, called simply Xu, are mostly average Corvo - ruthless, cunning and competitive - but their harsh life has taught them to be much less ambitious. They are also generally hardier and less emotional than their kin; years of working over the sick glow of Wangmu has given them a resigned, bleak outlook in life, and they pride themselves on being practical, realistic, reserved, stoic and enduring. An Xu will be 'first to admit defeat, but last to give up', as the saying goes.

Most Xu Corvo are mine workers, tirelessly overseeing and maintaining the Megastat's unending network of gas harvesters, mining platforms and cloud drills. There are very few high-class Xu, even less so than in the rest of the Corvosphere; even business owners are proud to avoid luxury or any kind of pampered lifestyle, focusing instead on their job, duty and productivity. They enforce even harsher policies on their workers, of course, which contributes to the dismal working conditions in Xulong.

Xulong is also the Corvosphere's top spot for forced labor sentences; around one in three Xu miners are prisoners, indentured servants or fugitives that chose the anonymity of the gas mines to hide from the public eye. Even so, or rather because of it, crime rates are high all across Xulong. Law enforcement, however, is correspondingly strict and ruthless. The death penalty is quite common in the Megastat, as most criminals have little else to lose.

Besides miners, Xulong employs a percentage of professionals to provide for the workers' basic needs, such as medics, technicians, engineers and mercenary guards - but they all share the same cultural character and lifestyle.

THE PLATFORMS

All Xulong mining facilities, from giant drills to extraction installations, are collectively known as platforms, or the platforms. The term is used indistinctly to refer to any place where one goes to work, as opposed to their living quarters - although millions of workers, lacking proper residence, actually live and sleep in the platforms.

In all, the Platforms make up a little over 80% of Xulong's total mass and employ an estimate of 15 billion workers - mostly miners, but also medical, feeding, scientist, engineering and maintenance teams - at any given time. The Platforms stretch across thousands of kilometres over the gas clouds of Wangmu, and any of their titanic, kilometres-long gas drills can be seen from anywhere in the Megastat.

The Platforms are mostly dedicated to mining Wang Gas - the main element that makes up Wangmu's atmosphere, no relation to Wang Corp - a reliable, clean and high-output fuel source for Quantum engines. Around 18% of Platforms are instead equipped to harvest various minerals from the air particles of Wangmu, using magnetic drills to attract and condense these minerals into usable extracts. Despite literally pulling the minerals out of thin air, the yearly output of Xulong's magnetic Platforms numbers in the trillions of metric tons.

Some Platforms have even identified slight traces of Jiu element, but not enough to process it to significant amounts. These traces, however, have been more than enough for the X-Mag to finance hundreds of research teams dedicated to search and confirm the presence of larger Jiu concentrations. It's a long shot, but if these teams succeeded on mining Jiu out of Wangmu, Xulong would become an energy powerhouse rivalling, or perhaps surpassing, Tiantang itself.

THE HABITATS

Outside of the Platform there's the habitats; that is, what passes for residential and recreational areas in Xulong. A typical habitat is a network of mass-produced, eerily similar zero-g dwellings, stretching out beyond sight in every direction. For the most part, these zero-g buildings are the homes of miners and their families, but they can also be restaurants, hospitals, bars, X-drug parlors, sports centres, zero-g parks or even digital libraries, distinguishable from each other only by the digital signs on their walls.

The dreary character of the Xu doesn't mean they can't have a good time, and there are many recreational habitats that, if rather dull on the outside, can be mad fun within; some of the craziest li liang dances and parties in the Corvosphere have taken place in the underground dives of the Xulong habitats.

An unforeseen consequence of free time in the dreary environment of Xulong is drug addiction - many Xu workers are hooked on XDs, which impacts their performance and has become a serious labour concern all across the Megastat. X-Mag doesn't dare prohibit drug use, but not even salary discounts or massive layoffs have dissuaded workers from drugging themselves senseless to escape from the grim working life. It's a vicious circle with no exit in sight, as returning to work makes the workers want to get high again, and many Corvo officials predict, perhaps accurately, that a prohibition would lead to strikes, riots and a worse labour problem than the current one.

THE WARREN

The Xulong Platforms contain some of the largest machines in the Corvosphere, which necessarily includes the largest machinery sections. Below these great mining engines, kilometres upon kilometres of maintenance tunnels, vents, tubing and sewers stretch endlessly in the darkness. This maze of machinery tunnels is known as The Warren, and is the least-seen section of the Xulong Megastat. Already a deathtrap because of heat and vapour vents, acid spills and crackling plasma security shields, the Warren is made even more dangerous for the presence of vagrants, radicals, escaped convicts and other criminals that use the tunnels as a refuge and hunting ground.

In some areas, the tubes are large enough to lodge entire cities, and several underground communities have taken up the less dangerous zones as a refuge from either the law or their miserable lifestyle. Such societies, nicknamed tubers or tunnelers, become close-knit and well-organised groups; they must, if they are to survive the heartless conditions of the Warren. Forced outcasts, such as victims of a plague, and the very rare unemployed - or unemployable - inhabitants of Xulong, tend to drift to tuber communities as well, becoming a part of the Warren's hidden society. Tubers are somewhat more peaceful than hidden criminals, but not harmless by any means, much less to outsiders - 'skysiders', as tubers call them - which they have learned to avoid and mistrust.

THE XULONG DRAGON

It all started as an urban legend. First, a worker died here and there, the bodies never recovered. Then, reports came in - sightings of a huge, monstrous dark thing lurking under the tunnels of Xulong. Then expeditions, hoaxes, fake digital images. So far, there's no conclusive proof that the Xulong Dragon is anything more than a myth - but it's been a particularly long-lived myth, becoming an enduring part of Xulong folklore for several generations.

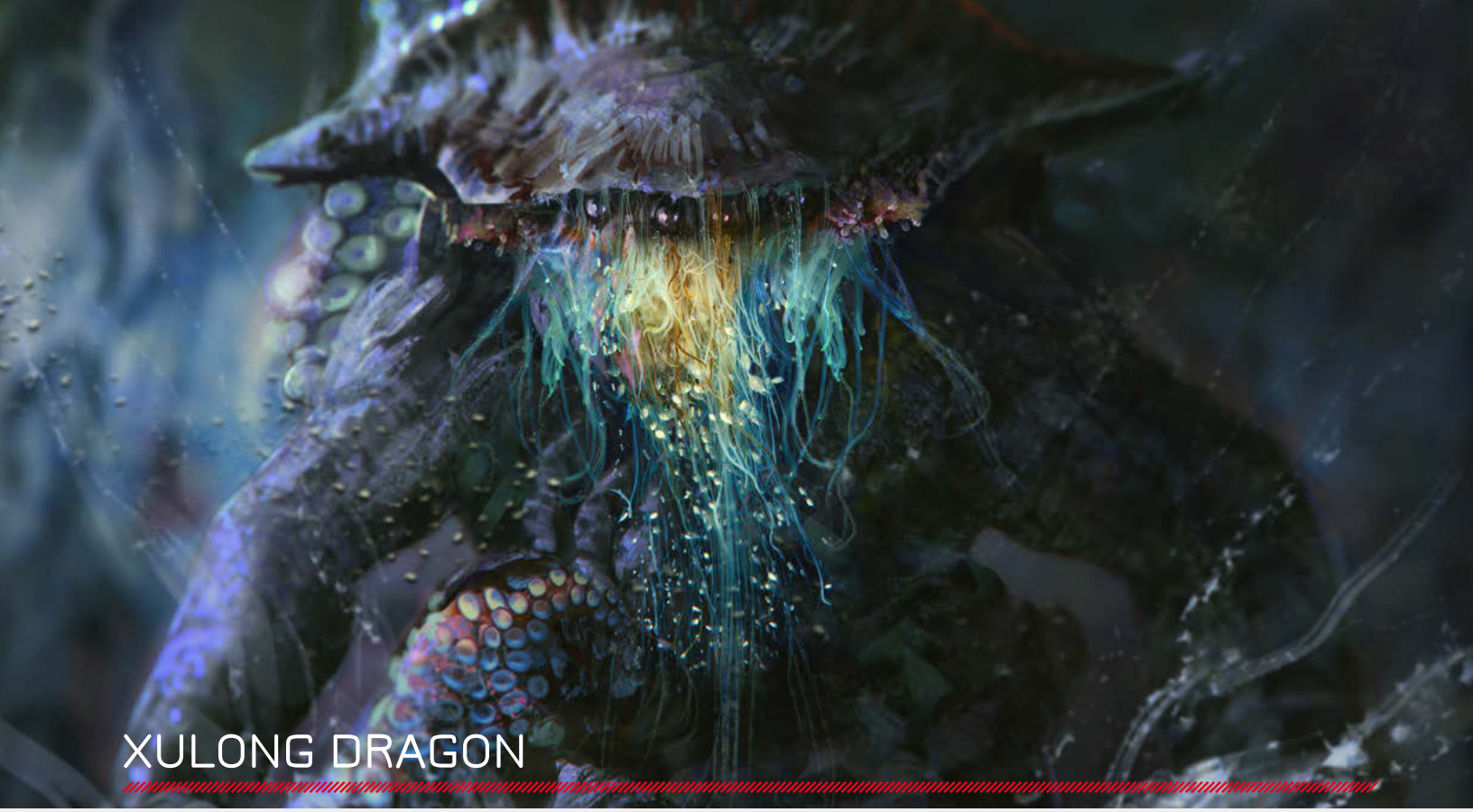
BEHIND THE LEGEND

The Xulong dragon does exist, of course, and it's probably not a single creature, but several specimens of some gigantic, void-resistant alien species. The thing is stealthy, carnivorous and larger than a starfighter, but so far nobody has seen it alive and brought proof. Until someone manages to fight and kill one of these creatures, the Xulong Dragon will remain a local legend - a deadly one.

Some Tubers claim to have seen the Xulong Dragon, and there's a small unofficial cult that worships the beast. Tubers pray to the Xulong Dragon for a productive scavenging trip, for another day safe and alive, or simply leave offerings so it won't eat them. But this worship only reveals they don't actually think the creature exists, or at the very least that they don't think it is a real life animal. As an example, some of the supposed 'sightings' of the dragon took place as visions in the witness' dreams, conceding the creature a mystical nature that is actually far from its very real, physical existence.

Unknown to all Xulong inhabitants, the Dragon used to be a normal cephalopod - or a clutch of such cephalopods -, either native to the gas giant or brought aboard some freighter long ago, and no longer than one inch. Then, the thing - or things - somehow fed on the Wang gas, growing to colossal proportions over the years. Whether the species was naturally able to feed on Wang gas, or mutated thanks to some kind of residue in the mining process, is still a mystery.

Either way, there's profit to be made and respect to be earned for a valiant crew that proves itself capable of not only bringing down the beast (or one of these beasts, assuming there are more than one), make it out alive, and bring proof in the form of a corpse to the mining station HQ.



XULONG DRAGON

The Xulong Dragon is made of two parts, Body and Tail. Both act and suffer damage independently, but they must remain together. If Body dies, Tail also dies.

The Dragon gains one advantage towards searching. It can move on any surface, it cannot be detected with thermal sensors, and its skin mimics its surroundings, allowing it to hide in plain sight. It gains one advantage when hiding, and characters further than 20 metres away suffer one disadvantage towards actions that require line of sight on it.

BODY

Unstoppable :: Lone Wolf :: Space Affinity

14	9	1	

HIT	28 (2)	TRAMPLE	22 (2)	INITIATIVE	8 (3)
SURVIVAL	9 (3)	ATHLETIC /EVA	19 (2)		

HIT (DEX)	4	TRAMPLE (CON)	3+

Devastating Blows

Body ignores one armour when hitting.

Trample

Action. It cannot be used as a counteraction. Characters who dodge against it gain one advantage.

Body moves up to 25 metres in a straight line. All characters in its path are affected by this attack.

TAIL

Unstoppable :: Defender :: Teamwork

5		1	

HIT	20 (2)	GRAPPLE	22 (2)	INITIATIVE	12 (3)
THROW	15 (2)				

HIT (DEX)	3	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Lash Out

Tail's CQC attacks reach 10 metres. It gains one advantage when confronting a Ballistic action.

Throw

Action. Tail throws one grappled character against a target up to 20 metres away. Its target suffers as much physical damage as the thrown character's CON (or the attribute of his Physical Stat) plus his armour. Regardless of the outcome, the thrown character is no longer grappled, and he also must confront this action to avoid suffering the same amount of damage.

ZHUI XI

Planetary Type: Ice world
Population: 9 billion
Day: 38 standard hours
Culture: Corporate theocracy
Location: Zhui system, 3 standard months away from Tiantang
Production: Water processing
Social Rank 4: Unequal yet utopian society
Economic Rank 4: Self-sufficient, prosperous single-product civilisation
Atmosphere: Breathable and clean, low-temperature hazards

The Water Station of Zhui Xi is one of the largest and most powerful Corvo colonies, ruled by the closest there is to a theocracy - or to any government - in the Corvosphere.

Originally a pleasure retreat belonging to the Gao-Yuezhi clan - one of the five richest families in the Corvosphere - Zhui Xi was built as a luxury citadel in orbit around the icy planet of the same name in Meng Naixi VII. Then, the Gao-Yuezhi moved on and sold most of the property, which was given to the church of Kaliva as a donation by the family. By Corvo law, the church is not a corporate entity, so the Kalivans needed to strike a deal with a Megacorp to make good into the transaction. Enter Starwaters - a subsidiary of Nation's Solution, of which, curiously, the Gao-Yuezhi are major shareholders - which became the Kalivan's partner to register the property, and promptly built a prosperous industry based on the ice planet's main resource: water.

By privatising the largest water source within the Corvosphere, Starwaters turned Zhui Xi into one of the most important colonies under Corvo rule, and all kinds of businesses bloomed in the previously deserted, frigid world. Millions of jobs were created for engineers and other specialists to man and oversee the costly water-processing machines, and thousands of space habitats were built to house the new workers and cover their food, shelter and entertainment needs. By 1770 SA, Zhui Xi was a large colony, filled to the brim with Corvo looking for new opportunities.

Despite Starwater's smooth move, which snatched the business of a lifetime from under the noses of the Kalivans, the Church's representatives held on to their claim of ownership, and were given nominal rule over the colony - that is, the right to invite and organise the people, as the Corvo recognise no institutional leadership. However, these priests and prophets are charismatic and popular, and most of the 7 billion Zhuixians follow their faith and believe in them.

Currently, Zhui Xi looks like some fantasy world, with floating cities, gyro-zhans and huge machinery orbiting a mysterious crystal-ice landscape.

THE PEOPLE

Zhuixians have a reputation for being a little touched in the head, not only because of their slightly exaggerated religious zeal, but because the extreme cold actually affects Corvo brains, causing sluggishness and, rarely, permanent brain damage accompanied by such symptoms as chronic hallucinations. These cases are few and isolated, but a few isolated cases are more than enough for urban legends to take form, and the symptoms of 'brain freeze' (as Tian newscasters jokingly call it) are very similar to lunacy or hallucinations.

Other than their admittedly greater faith in Kaliva and the 'brain freeze' stereotype, Zhuixians are as smart and resourceful as any Corvo, and their society is actually one of the most prosperous in the Corvosphere. Perhaps it's the piety with which the Kalivans inspire the populace, or perhaps it's the generous financial support from NS and Starwaters, but class differences are somewhat less pronounced in Zhui Xi. While there's still a huge economic gap, the poorest are a little less poor than in Tiantang and the colonies, and the richest a little less rich - save for the Kalivan elite and the Starwaters shareholders, which of course includes the Gao-Yuezhi family.

In fact, Kaliva seems to be quite satisfied with the Zhuixian culture, and He has explicitly blessed several of the planet's inhabitants by giving them lesser manifestations of His power. There's also an unusual abundance of albino individuals - bluish-white Corvo, with bright blue eyes - which the Kalivans have interpreted as a signal of Kaliva's pleasure. These white Zhuixians, while enjoying no special status per se, are nonetheless treated like blessed people.

THE KALIVAN CHURCH

Although the actual rulers of Zhui Xi are Nation's Solution, Starwaters and the Gao-Yuezhi partners, the visible leaders of the colony - at least in a spiritual sense - are undoubtedly the priests and prophets of Kaliva. The top Kalivan officials in the planet are a Triumvirate, formed by Prophet Gui, Prophetess Xia and Prophetess Mei Shanguang. The three priests are born orators, sharing the same Kalivan powers to sway and inspire the masses, and enjoy an uncanny sense of the weaknesses in others, which they use to give them exactly the inner strength they need.

The Triumvirate are not official rulers, but their church is quite wealthy from the Starwaters deal, and they enjoy all the privileges and luxurious lifestyle of the elite, beside their soulbender powers.

More than an authority figure, the Triumvirate play the part of celebrities; the general public is swayed by their slightest public statement, and everyone follows their private lives as closely as possible. There's even a

digital reality show over the neuronet, where citizens may connect to a live transmission of the Triumvirate's daily routine, enjoying everything from Xia and Gui's philosophical debates and squabbles, to the moment when Mei Shanguang takes her daily purifying bath.

The Triumvirate and their priests use over-the-top rhetoric and great power displays to maintain their popularity and a sense of community; they constantly extol the virtues of the icy planet as a world-sized avatar of the heart of Kaliva and His cold, demanding will, and how all Zhuixians are blessed to live so close to such a manifestation of the Great Challenger.

THE DARK WIZARD

Despite - or because - the success and idyllic life of the Kalivan triumvirate and their loving subjects, they have more than their share of enemies: petty individuals that seek to bring them down for no other reason than the fact they are happy and powerful. Foremost among these is Kanatos, the Dark Wizard of Zhui Xi.

Born Chong Du, a simple restaurant owner in a middle-class district, the man who grew to become the Dark Wizard saw his life change forever when he started manifesting Ledger powers. His dark ambitions and long-contained anger were beginning to spill out, and they took the form of dark nightmares and vortices of unreality.

Embracing his newfound power, Chong took the name Kanatos - a word that, he claims, Ledger whispered to him personally - and embarked in a crusade to thwart the success of the Kalivan triumvirate, ending their reign and submerging Zhui Xi in chaos.

Despite his rather tacky background and objectives, Kanatos is a very powerful Ledger soulbender, and he has actually threatened the lives and work of the Triumvirate more than once, although they always defeat him in the end. Such conflicts of 'good vs evil' are so rare in the Corvosphere that some people believe Kanatos is not a real enemy, but a character made up and created by the Triumvirate, to reinforce their reputation as powerful saints and give the people a 'villain' to cheer against.

However, Kanatos is very real, and he will stop at nothing to someday achieve his goal of throwing the happy government of Zhui Xi into mayhem and despair. He has attracted a small but extremely devoted troupe of misfits - affectionately named Meeki by the Wizard - who adore him, and follow him everywhere he goes to help him spread the chaos across Zhui Xi.

MEEKI

Ledger 2 :: Lone Wolf

Level 2 :: Corvo :: Unpredictable
mov. 5 metres :: weight 52 kg :: height 158 cm

4	5	0	-

PHYSICAL STAT	5 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	9 (2)	MENTAL STAT	7 (2)

HIT (DEX)	2 +	GRAPPLE (CON)	0 +

Neural Spike I

Action (Mental). He suffers 2 neural damage and attacks a character within 20 metres and line of sight, gaining one advantage if his Faith is higher than his target's, and causing 3 unpreventable neural damage. This action can be confronted as a projectile.

Meekis are followers of the Dark Wizard of Zhui Xi, an extremely dangerous Ledgerite soulbender that wants to wreak havoc in the colony.

THE DARK WIZARD

The Dark Wizard is composed of two NPCs, the Mortal Body and the Immortal Soul. Both have Faith 4. Additionally, neither becomes Spent after performing counteractions.

They are completely independent NPCs, but if the Immortal Soul moves further than 20 metres away from the Mortal Body or becomes Traumatised, it will banish immediately. Then, if the Mortal Body is in normal health, it will reappear at the beginning of the round anywhere within 20 metres of the Mortal Body.

MORTAL BODY

Lone Wolf :: Teamplayer

7	9	1	

HIT	17 (3)	SOUL DRAIN	9 (3)	INITIATIVE	10 (3)
SURVIVAL	6 (3)	CUNNING	10 (3)	ATHLETIC EVA	10 (3)

HIT (DEX)	3	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Jester

Instant. Suffer one neural damage and gain the effect of a joker.
Instant. Transfer any amount of physical damage to the Immortal Soul as neural damage. It may exceed the immortal soul's health.

Soul Drain

Action. It targets a character within 20 metres as if it was shooting, gaining one advantage for every point his Faith exceeds his target's. If successful, the target must discard one (modified by the level of success) card from his hand, becoming Traumatised if he can't reach that number. NPC targets lose their turn instead.

IMMORTAL SOUL

Lone Wolf :: Teamplayer

0	6		

HIT	18 (3)	GRAPPLE	9 (3)	INITIATIVE	10 (4)
ATHLETIC EVA	14 (3)	SURVIVAL	12 (3)		

HIT (DEX)	3	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Ethereal

The Immortal Soul can fly and move through obstacles. If it is not attacking or using an ability, it is immune to physical damage. Its attacks ignore armour. **Instant.** It can cause 2 neural damage to the Mortal Body to swap places with it.

Grapple

Action. If successful, it possesses the target and cannot perform actions nor be targeted. Any damage transferred to it is also dealt to the host. While possessed, the character is considered an NPC controlled by the Dark Wizard. Before the maintenance phase, he can try to escape with a Cunning action using Mind.

HUANGDÌ

Planetary Type: Desert world

Population: 1 billion

Day: 41 standard hours

Culture: Isolated survivalist settlements

Location: Shuang system, 5 months away from Tiantang

Production: Farming, low-yield mining

Social Rank 2: Some peaceful communities but mostly unequal and dangerous

Economic Rank 3: Most citizens overworked and underpaid, limited corp investment

Atmosphere: Breathable, isolated toxic environmental events

Across the universe from Tiantang, and more than a full AU from the closest Labyrinth exit, lies a silent planet with a thin atmosphere and fell weather, under the dim but relentless light of a dying binary star. Only the most stubborn and resourceful species could have found a way to settle such a remote, forbidding place; the Corvo thrived on it. They call it Huangdì.

Huangdì is a typical Corvo colony - the perfect example of the average Corvo outpost at the fringes of known space. These outposts include brave settlements, remote mining stations, military watch stations at Labyrinth entrances, and some planets that, while including all of the above, remain fierce, untamed and inhospitable.

Huangdì was discovered by one of the first 'lost' Corvo expeditions across the Labyrinth, back when the Corvo hadn't found a way to stay in touch with successful colonies and assumed their first flights were all lost or unsuccessful. While many of these brave ships indeed became lost forever, one expedition succeeded at founding a small, thriving colony in the world Alpha Shuang III - the remotest non-mining settlement inside the Corvosphere. The colony was called Huangdì and it proved space colonisation possible long before the invention of beacon ships - but it took its inhabitants decades to regain contact with Tiantang.

In 1697 SA, when Huangdì managed to rebuild their expeditionary force and send a ship back to the Megacorps, Tiantang sent more flights to the colony, and found a populated world, with several towns and cities that had managed to prosper into a new Corvo culture - a hardened, survivalist Corvo culture.

Huangdì is a mostly desert planet, with just enough water to sustain organic life in the form of a few lakes, rivers and underground streams. After the success of the first few colonies, the Corvo expanded across these water sources, and currently most of them are occupied by a Corvo town or city.

Even centuries after its occupation, travelling across Huangdì remains an adventure. The untamed wastes between one town and the next are rife with natural dangers, predators and outlaw gangs; civilised spots are far between, and each of them has its own law and government - mostly by petty warlords or autocratic landowners - which makes even the towns of cities of Huangdì rather dangerous. Tiantang has tried to invest and create industry in Huangdì, but the planet's resources don't allow for an economic boom, plus the remoteness of the colony, even across the Labyrinth, makes it very hard to lend any kind of aid or establish a working trade relationship. Nonetheless, the Megacorps have succeeded at establishing several factories and businesses in the desert planet, and are in the process of financing larger cities and creating massive employment booms, which has reduced the insecurity and lawlessness in several areas.

Megacorp intervention hasn't been free of conflict, however, as several smaller businesses and cooperative guilds have resisted assimilation, and see the Megacorps as unfair competition rather than benefactors. As of this writing, Huangdì remains the only in the Corvosphere where local businesses outnumber Megacorp offices. The Megacorps are bound to eventually absorb and defeat all independent companies, but they 'sure ain't going down easy'.

Given the difficulties of Megacorp intervention and the long distance from Tiantang, the colony's future is still uncertain as of this writing, but the people of Huangdì have managed to survive thus far, so the odds would seem to remain in their favour.

THE PEOPLE

Huangdì Corvo call themselves Huang, or Huanese. They are proudly independent and capable like all of their species, although the Huang would seem to be even more brave and loyal to their families than other Corvo. They also mistrust strangers far more, after decades of living in their dog-eat-dog, survivalist culture.

Social classes work at an altogether different scale in Huangdì. There's indeed a very rich 1% in the planet, while the rest of the population goes from comfortably getting by to the most abject poverty; however, the richest of Huanese businessmen earns just a little more than the average Tian blue-collar worker. By the same token, what in Tiantang is barely enough to keep a man from starving, in Huangdì can feed a family of farmers for several months. Other than that, the class divide is as real and sharp in Huangdì as it is in the rest of the Corvosphere, and resentment between the rich and poor, between the less and more fortunate, shapes most Huang cultural dynamics.

The great majority of Huang people work as farmers or run small businesses in the planet's towns and cities; some work in law enforcement, making sure peace and quiet is

maintained across the land, while a few others try to live the easy way, outside the law and bullying or murdering their way to easy money or land. Most criminals join gangs that practice extortion, smuggling, robbery and marauding, most of which are punished by death; therefore shootouts between mercenary law enforcers and criminals, or even between rival gangs, are a common occurrence in Huangdì.

A very few Huang own larger tracts of land, factories or larger businesses, or have direct links to the Tiantang Megacorps; these landowners and entrepreneurs are the elite and ruling class of Huangdì, although, like in most Corvo societies, their authority is not political but economic.

THE LAW

There is no government in Huangdì and the economic responsibility over the colony rests, as usual, on the Megacorps. Thousands of envoys and representatives of subsidiaries from all three Megacorps work and oversee business all across Huangdì; however, their authority extends only to giving or withdrawing funds - the law is in the hands of local mercenaries that answer directly to town councils. This has made criminals quite bold, as the authorities are very limited in their ability to control their activities.

After the introduction of Tiantang money into the planet's economy, a few Huang criminals are joining more organised syndicates and establishing legal businesses as front for their activities. This has allowed them to buy and bribe law officers, which is less dangerous and more strategically sound than engaging in plasma gun fights. Some gangsters have even turned legit - at least in appearance - and come under the employ of Megacorp representatives, which pretend not to know or help bury their new recruits' shady past in exchange for their expertise and commercial contacts in Huangdì. In short, even though most Huang are law-abiding citizens, crime in Huangdì is rampant when compared to almost every other entity in the Corvosphere, and maintaining a semblance of law and order in the colony is an uphill battle.

HUANGDÌ TOWNS

The only point of reference in the endless wastes that make up most of the Huangdì landscape are the many cities, ranches and towns that the Corvo have managed to build near local water sources. These towns run the gamut from precarious farms to large ranches and from three-hovel hamlets to large cities, with an occasional high-tech metropolis or two.

As towns are far apart and barely self-sufficient, cargo vehicles are vital for the survival of the Huangdì colony. Gyro-vans - gyrocycles of unusual design, built to withstand the harsh local conditions - are used daily to transport goods and passengers across the long distance between a farm and the closest town, or between a mining site and the nearest city. An attack on a gyro-van is considered a dai crime in Huangdì, and yet such convoys are a preferred target of bandits and raiders, which are almost guaranteed to find something of value by attacking any random gyro-van they find. For this reason, one of the first and most important investments the Megacorps have made in the colony is to improve the security and performance of gyro-van convoys; despite digital communications and advanced banking systems, gyro-vans are still what keeps Huangdì businesses - and thus life in the planet - running.

THE GYRO GUARD

As the Huangdì colony becomes larger and more dangerous, gyro-vans become more necessary for the common folk - those without support from Tiantang or the Megacorps. Without gyro-vans, the poorest and remotest settlements cannot trade and are all but isolated from the modernised areas.

Sadly, gyro-vans remain a favourite prey of bandits and raiders, and the Megacorps are not spurred to do anything about it, as they use air drops and digital transfers instead. Thus, the only hope for little towns is the Gyro Guard.

A private mercenary group specialised in the escort and protection of Gyro-vans across Huangdì, the Gyro Guard is the most elite and respected law organisation in the colony. Paid not by big business but by the small towns that benefit from it, the Gyro Guard is also the most democratic police force in the Corvosphere.

Gyro Guard members are known as Gyro guards themselves. They all carry plasma pistols and rifles, and they all ride custom gyro-bikes, specially built for the Huangdì terrain. Gyro Guard teams are usually comprised of four or five armed mercenaries, each riding his own bike along a gyro-van, protecting it from potential attacks.

Being chosen for the Gyro Guard is an honour for mercenaries of all social classes and backgrounds - and species. The Gyro Guard is open to non-Corvo, and a few Humans and Raag have joined its ranks. The only requirements to join the Gyro Guard are good character (proven honesty, bravery and loyalty) and a steady hand (good fighting skills and gyro-bike riding).

The Gyro Guard firm, jointly owned by several Huangdì landlords, provides all its members with their weapons - usually two small pistols and a rifle - and gyro-bikes.

> Many Gyro Guards die in the line of duty, but only a few gyro-vans under their protection have ever failed to arrive safely. What this means is the Gyro Guard often needs to enlist independent contractors for one-off jobs that require additional security, provided they meet their strict requirements.

GYRO GUARD

Teamplayer

Level 2 :: Corvo :: Crafty
mov. 10 metres :: weight 60 kg :: height 165 cm

4	4	1	-

PHYSICAL STAT	8 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (2)	MENTAL STAT	6 (2)

CLOSE QUARTERS	3 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	3 +

Kaive

Extended range: 300 metres, damage 3. Action. Shoot any grenade up to 50 metres.

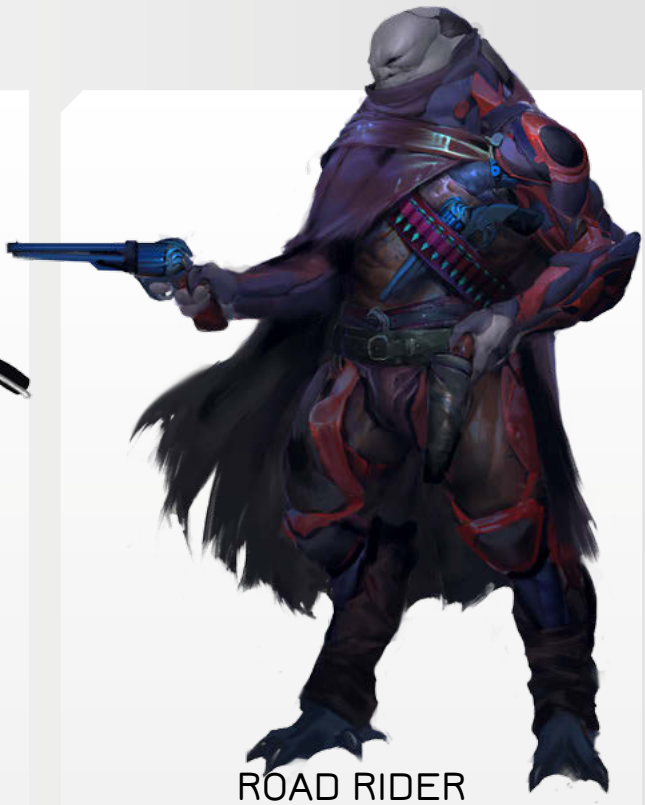
Bodyguard

Instant. If he is aware of it happening, he can become the target of an action that originally targeted a character up to 2 metres away from him.

Unyielding Resolve

Instant. He takes one physical damage. He can play one additional card during one action or discard two neural damage or ignore all damage penalties until the end of the round.

These guys are equipped with plasma pistols, rifles, and a pure and unadulterated pride in the task they perform.



ROAD RIDER

Mob

Level 1 :: Corvo :: Reckless
mov. 5 metres :: weight 52 kg :: height 155 cm

3	3	1	

PHYSICAL STAT	5 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (2)	MENTAL STAT	3 (1)

CLOSE QUARTERS	2 ++	STANDARD DISTANCE	2 -

Doorkicker

The attack doubles its base damage against characters with armour 1 or less OR it ignores 1 point of armour and gains one advantage in Standard Distance.

Window of Opportunity

When he performs an action against a Spent character, he gains one advantage.

Marauders abound in the HuangdÃ¬ colony, and most are fully motorized riders that assault loaded gyro-vans with restlessness.

EARTH

Planetary Type: Water world
Population: 100,000 (plus 2 billion Human)
Day: 24 standard hours
Culture: Survivalist tribal
Location: Sol system, position undisclosed
Production: Manpower
Social Rank 2: Unequal and unsafe society
Economic Rank 2: Unstable, primitive economy, save for Corvo havens
Atmosphere: Breathable, toxic and polluted spots

Earth was one of the first Corvo colonies. The Corvo found it only two years after the founding of New Quan, while exploring new Labyrinth exits. The Corvo's first impression of Humans - the Earth natives, which Corvo call Guangdan - was that of a decadent, fallen and violent species, living precariously on the radioactive ruins of a wasteland world. However, after first contact, the Corvo found that Humans had once formed a peaceful and sprawling civilisation, which simply nuked or polluted itself into disaster many years before the Corvo's arrival.

After they achieved peaceful contact with the Human, which didn't seem to care about their world anymore, the Corvo simply took possession of anything the Humans were not using: wartime relics, ruined weapons, wrecked buildings, unexploited resources - anything. The Humans didn't object, mainly because the Corvo came not as conquerors but as neighbours, and clearly did a better job of caring about Earth than Humans themselves.

To date, the Corvo have established several bases on Earth, of which they share some with the Guangdan, used for business with Human cities and towns. Corvo sell them food, crops, clothes, weapons, and many other resources needed for survival in exchange for their natural resources, labour, and mercenary work. Many warlords give the Corvo their young men and women in exchange for weapons to maintain their control over the local populations.

Corvo are also interested in tech-archaeology from the Human period previous to their civilisation's fall. Most of the hardware is broken and the software corrupted or the language now forgotten, but the Corvo have already found several pieces of software of great value that they have modified and implemented into their own systems.

THE PEOPLE

Earthbound Corvo are less at home than other settlers, mainly because the planet's natives are still occupying the area. However, they are slowly developing their own culture which they call Wu Rén. These Wu Rén Corvo are slightly more peaceful and less competitive than their other kin, perhaps because being near the savage Humans forces them to mellow by comparison, but they are also detached and professional. The needs of Corvo colonies on Earth have required most Wu Rén to either be scientists, xenobiologists, lab experts or explorers, or to come from a family that practiced one of these trades at the time of colonisation. As a result, Wu Rén tend to be more learned and open-minded than the average Corvo.

While most Wu Rén simply run the local military or research bases, many have fully adapted to life on Earth. They have built their own homes and even cities - complete with omnirings and gyrocycles - on the ruins of Human buildings. These Wu Rén still feel like expatriates, even if they were actually born on Earth; Corvo sociologists theorise this is entirely due to the Human presence, which instinctively makes Corvo feel like outsiders, preventing any lasting bonds with their adopted world.

All three Megacorps have established business centers at various spots on Earth, and they oversee their interests in every transaction between colonists and natives, just as they rule economic life in Tiantang or the other colonies. The Humans are not even aware of this, but the Megacorps now own Earth too.

As for Humans, refer to document ZzI013-C, appendix IX, for details on their species and various cultures.

EARTH AFTER THE WAR

The Corvo have not fully deciphered what happened to Humans during the event that destroyed their civilization, which they refer to broadly as simply 'The Long Winter'. They know it was some kind of world war, and that the Humans' hate grew to such irrational heights that they recklessly used mutually destructive weapons on each other, ruining their world's ecosystem in the process. For the Corvo, who only ruined ecosystems if it explicitly turned a tangible profit, such pointless destruction made no sense.

After the war, the Earth looked like a savage world; violent tribes roamed the ruins of their civilisation, either raiding other tribes or struggling to become peaceful and sedentary again. Their resources were meagre, their tools damaged, their environment harmful - a business opportunity if there ever was one. Without delay, the Corvo set out to offer repair services, health care and terraforming tools - for a very affordable price, of course - to the survivors.

In practice, this has turned out a bit like a farm, where the Corvo are the farmers. As Human mercenaries are a high-priced commodity in space thanks to their combat abilities, the Megacorps send resources and incentives for Humans to settle down and procreate. All Corvo-given cities and habitats are actually destined to Human well-being and reproduction, just like a zoological reserve or livestock breeding centre. The Humans in these cities don't complain,

as they are given complete freedom and a comfortable lifestyle; however, many Humans from the wastes mistrust these 'glory cities', as they are popularly known, and prefer their free-ranging life in the wastes despite its dangers and hardships.

Thus Humans are divided in two - those that live in Corvo-rebuilt cities, tended and cared for by the Wu Rén Corvo, and those that roam the post-apocalyptic wastes in their lawless world of precarious settlements, raiders and scavengers.

EARTH CULTURES

As far as the Corvo have deduced, Earth used to have separate nations and governments just like the Corvo did before the Space Age, but it has now fallen into a leaderless, survivalist culture, where the rule of the strongest is the law. The Corvo don't interfere with Human customs, but they have done what they can to nudge Humans towards a more proactive lifestyle, showing them the advantages of free market over wanton violence, and healthy competition and corporate backstabbing over unproductive death battles over territory.

Some Earthlings refuse to leave their barbaric ways, but many are gradually adopting the more civilised Corvo lifestyle, although officially they retain their independence.

THE WU RÉN COMMAND

The Corvo executives in charge for the Earth colony are collectively known as the Wu Rén command, and they are a rotating board of businessmen and scientists with the responsibility of overseeing building, infrastructure, research and archaeology on Earth.

To reinforce the bonds between Humans and Corvo, the Wu Rén command periodically invites one Guangdan to become a member of the board for a full period; this ensures that Human concerns are heard first-hand in the council.

Currently, the Wu rén command is aggressively recruiting scientists, mercenaries and diplomats to venture into the wastes and convince Human settlements to join the Corvosphere and allow annexation to the safety of Corvo city-sanctuaries. These 'persuasion teams' consist of a group of armed guards, a Human or Corvo emissary empowered by the Wu Rén Command, plus one or two science specialists for research support. Joining a persuasion team is dangerous and often lethal, but a successful mission is worth it, not only for the Corvosphere but for the Humans who agree to join it, leaving their dangerous world behind.

VETERAN MERC

Lone Wolf

Level 2 :: Human :: Cautious
mov. 5 metres :: weight 78 kg :: height 185 cm

4	4	1	-

PHYSICAL STAT	8 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (2)	MENTAL STAT	6 (2)

CLOSE QUARTERS	3 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	3 +

Kaive

Extended range: 300 metres, damage 3. Action. Shoot any grenade up to 50 metres.

Hunter Instincts

He gains one advantage towards hiding and searching actions.

A combination of prowess, quick reflexes, empathy and the oh so Human ability to always keep an ace up their sleeves makes these guys invaluable.

MINING PLANETS

Population: 60 billion total, mode under one billion

Culture: Industrial

Production: Raw materials

Social Rank 3: Low to average quality of life, limited livelihood options

Economic Rank 3: All residents are employed by off-world corps

Other than the colonies listed in this chapter, and a few precarious settlements resembling Huangdì, the rest of the Corvosphere is made up of mining posts, called Kuàng tái.

These posts vary from single-mine sites in remote mineral-rich worlds to huge space stations extracting minerals from asteroid rings or entire star systems, some of them almost as large as Xulong or even a Tiantang sector. The smallest Kuàng tái are staffed by a few dozen people; the largest employ hundreds of millions. The size of a Kuàng tái, the resources it requires, and how many workers it employs depends on the size and yield of the mineral field.

A typical Kuàng tái consists of an orbiting station with the appropriate machinery (mineral drills, extraction platforms and so on), plus a ground facility where possible, for closer exploration and support of the operation.

All Kuàng tái are paid for by one of the Megacorps. More than 80% belong to The Union, but even those not owned by them contribute to their business: law requires outposts to have a security foce and every authorised mercenary outfit works for a company owned by the Union anyways.

TAI MENG

The greatest Kuàng tái after the Xulong Megastat, Tai Meng was built around the largest Jiu mineral yield found outside of Quanjie. Tai Meng alone provides nearly 70% of the power and fuel required for Tiantang's Quantum engines to operate, which makes it arguably the most important place in the whole Corvosphere after Tiantang itself.

As is widely known, Tai Meng was the scenario of the infamous Tai Meng revolt that ultimately forced the Megacorps to create the EEP for fair trade between colonies.

HUNG 10-B

Hung 10-B is a mining colony covering almost all the surface of the small moon of the same name, which was found to contain thousands of different precious minerals yields. This makes Hung 10-B a treasure world and one of the richest planets in the Corvosphere.

Currently, Hung 10-B consists of three space stations and about 120,000 planetside mining sites, employing just over 500 million Corvo miners, engineers and technicians. Hung 10-B has repeatedly petitioned The Union Council to be granted the status of inhabited colony and to receive support for the millions of people working there, but so far the petition remains unanswered, which has led the Hung miners to the brink of revolt twice now.

PIRATES

Other than workplace accidents, which are often maiming or lethal, the greatest danger faced by Corvo mining sites are pirate attacks.

Space pirates have become common in the fringes of the Corvosphere, their ships raiding mining bases and transport ships alike. The pirates only resort to violence when mine guards refuse to give up their cargo. If successful, pirates carry their loot away to sell it in the black market.

The Union has created a specialised space patrol force dedicated exclusively to finding and stopping these pirates, and it has also put out a sizable reward for anyone that captures, or gives information leading to the capture of, a space pirate.

PIRATE

Space Affinity

Level 2 :: Corvo :: Aggressive
mov. 5 metres :: weight 52 kg :: height 157 cm

4	3	1	-

PHYSICAL STAT	6 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	4 (2)

CLOSE QUARTERS	2 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	2 -

Impakt

Activated. The attack can target additional characters in Close Quarters range within a 45 degree cone. It suffers one disadvantage for each additional target.

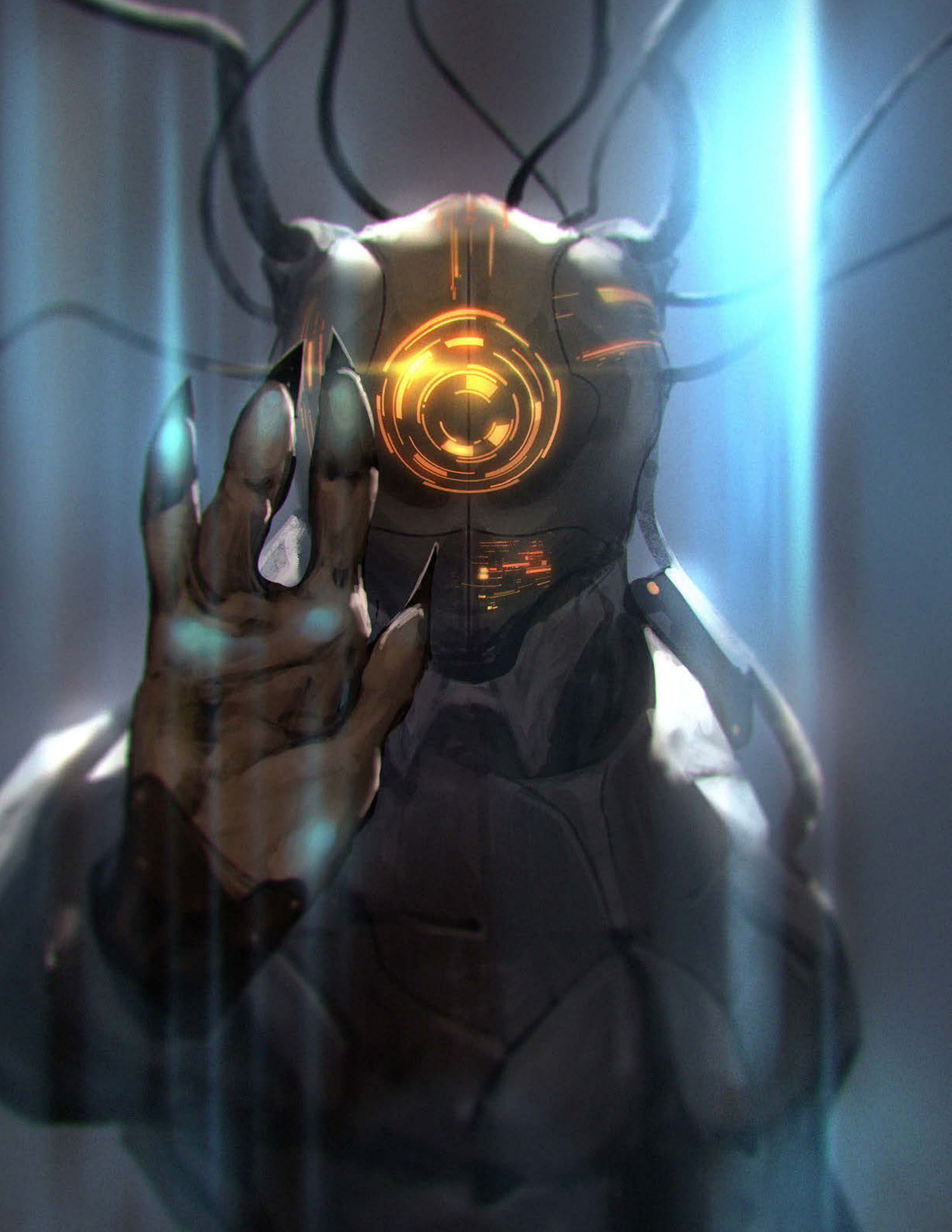
Roachigor

Instant. She can ignore all damage from one attack and lose this characteristic. Passive action. She attack a character up to 10 metres away with one advantage and causing 2 physical damage.

Bully

He gains one advantage against opponents who have suffered more physical damage than him.

Mining outposts should be the realm of solitary hearts, with the occasional gas explosion to spice things up. Pirates not welcome.



PLAYING IN THE CORVOSPHERE

The Corvosphere is the largest entity in the universe, and the region where most FAITH adventures take place. Everything can happen there: new opportunities await around every corner, but danger lies ahead at every turn. Everything and everyone is for sale or hire.

Private property is pivotal and whatever you can buy is yours and you have the right to defend it as you see fit. The courts are at the service of private property, and will defend whoever can prove their private property was in any way harmed or trespassed.

In the Corvosphere it is up to each citizen to earn their livelihood. Credits are the universal currency, but their worth depends greatly on where they are. Tiantang and the resorts (planets adapted for luxury vacations) are the most expensive by far, while mining colonies are extremely cheap – but it is hard to find anything other than basic needs coverage in them.

Characters can buy any kind of gear if they have enough credits. It is nearly impossible to find free items, but property is guaranteed by law (which of course does not prevent thieves and other underworld types from trying to separate rightful owners from their property).

CHARACTER'S ECONOMY

In the Corvosphere, characters need to earn their livelihood, migrate, or die. This is represented in the game with the Lifestyle system, a simple way to broadly represent characters' living standards. There are six Lifestyle levels, each with different effects on the characters' purchasing power and health.

The FAITH credit system is specifically used to purchase gear. Livelihood expenses such as food or housing are covered by the character's lifestyle, for as long as they meet their working requirements to maintain their lifestyle. Players do not need to keep track of general expenses such as their rent, food, or transportation, and the GM does not need to make up their prices every time. Instead, the lifestyle of each character will determine what they can and can't afford (an Indigent character simply cannot pay for a night at a hotel, while a Wealthy character can demand to stay at a luxurious one).

Lifestyle represents a steady income, while credits are savings. While a character maintains their lifestyle, they can keep any credits they earn from other sources (rewards from missions, bounties, etc.) and use them for acquiring new gear. It is possible for a character to be involved in so many adventures and earn so much cash that they amass dozens of thousands of credits while maintaining an indigent lifestyle.

If that is the case, the GM can ask such a character to pay up a fixed amount of credits every month so they can live analogously to a certain lifestyle while not meeting the usual requirements.

> E.g. John has the indigent lifestyle but he just stole 20,000 credits after hacking other people's bank accounts. He wants to live like a king, and the GM gives him two options. He can give it all up and have the well off lifestyle for a month, or pay half and have live like a middle class character during four months. John chooses the latter, and saves his remaining 10,000 credits in case he needs them for something else.

A character's starting lifestyle is determined by their Profession, but it is not a fixed constant. In the ever evolving Corvo economy, one can rise to glory or fall in disgrace in the blink of an eye. Characters need to fiercely defend their place in society, and if they fail to do so they may see their lifestyle degraded.

STARTING LIFESTYLE AND CREDITS

When a character begins their story in the Corvosphere, they start the game with a certain lifestyle and a number of credits or gear of equivalent value that depend on their Profession:

Prof. 0:	Indigent	500 cr.
Prof. 1:	Poor	2,000 cr.
Prof. 2:	Poor	5,000 cr.
Prof. 3:	Working class	10,000 cr.
Prof. 4:	Working class	20,000 cr.
Prof. 5:	Middle class	35,000 cr.
Prof. 6:	Middle class	50,000 cr.
Prof. 7:	Middle class	100,000 cr.
Prof. 8:	Well off	150,000 cr.
Prof. 9:	Wealthy	250,000 cr.

Players may have a different lifestyle than determined by their Profession if the GM agrees to it and it fits the story. Additionally, during the course of a campaign a character's Profession and lifestyle may change independently from the other, taking into account the differences between the knowledge and reputation in an area represented by the character's Profession and their stable income, represented by their lifestyle.

LIFESTYLES

INDIGENT

You have no job or properties. To survive, you must earn (or steal) each meal as they come. You live in the streets of a low class slum, an abandoned warehouse, or a junked space freighter, stealing oxygen from the closest operative air recycler.

Monthly earnings: 0 credits.

An Indigent character must "work" (begging, stealing, dealing drugs, looking through garbage for scraps, etc.) sixty hours per week to survive. If they stop "working" and do not find a comparable or better occupation within a month, they will die of starvation.

They can barely afford anything other than eating scraps and ragged clothing. If they want to acquire any gear they must steal it, complete a mission, or other suitable activity.

An Indigent character can not raise their Attributes due to the lack of nutrients and basic health care, and they can only obtain Tech or Bio Upgrades in the black market at a significant cost.

POOR

You have a precarious job, but no properties. You are at the bottom of the working force. While you can cover a small rent and some basic needs, whether or not you can keep up next month is always uncertain. You can not afford anything non-essential. Your job is wearing you out and taxing on your health.

Monthly earnings: 100 credits.

A Poor character must work fifty hours per week to maintain their lifestyle. If they stop working and do not find a similar or better job within a month, their lifestyle will be reduced to Indigent.

They can afford cheap clothing and food, collective transport fares, rent in a tiny cubicle, eating out in the cheapest canteens, staying at shady motels, and two weeks off their job per year.

A Poor character cannot raise their Mind due to their extreme stress. They can have one Bio or Tech Upgrade installed every five sessions, or more if they purchase them on the black market or have another character install it for them outside a medical centre.

WORKING CLASS

You have a stable job and a few low-cost properties. You are in between two worlds: You dream of reaching up and mingling with the rich, but you have nightmares of falling over your mortgage and losing everything. You have to work for a living, but it "ain't that bad", and you have time for a hobby or two.

Monthly earnings: 500 credits.

A Working class character must work on their job forty hours a week to maintain their lifestyle. If they lose their job and do not find another within three months, their lifestyle will be reduced to Poor.

They can afford decent clothing and food, collective transport fares, occasional private transportation, rent in a small apartment, eating out in humble restaurants, staying at normal hotels, and one month off their job per year.

A Working class character can only have one Bio or Tech Upgrade installed every three sessions, unless they purchase them on the black market or have another character install it for them outside a medical centre.

MIDDLE CLASS

You own a small business, shares in a company, significant properties, or a similar source of income. You live comfortably thanks to your hard work or your inheritance. You can afford long vacations and plenty of pleasures.

Monthly earnings: 1,000 credits.

A Middle class character must work on their job or take care of their means of income for at least forty hours a week to maintain their lifestyle. If they lose their means of income and do not find a suitable replacement within one year, their lifestyle will be reduced to Working class.

They can afford nice clothing and food, having a part-time chauffeur, owning a nice apartment, eating out in decent restaurants, staying at nice hotels, and a one month vacation at a comfortable place in their star system.

A Middle class character can only have one Bio or Tech Upgrade installed per session, unless they purchase them on the black market or have another character install it for them outside a medical centre.

WELL OFF

You own a business, shares in a big company, lots of property, or another good source of in-

come. Your life is great, and you can't help but think of yourself as a rising star.

Monthly earnings: 5,000 credits.

A Well off character must work on their job or take care of their means of income for a few hours each week to maintain their lifestyle. If they do not work or take care of their assets for a period longer than two years, their lifestyle will be reduced to Middle class.

They can afford excellent clothing and food, a private air and land vehicle with a private chauffeur, owning a few houses in different houses or one big personal station, eating out in fancy places, staying at the best hotels, and six months of vacations at expensive locations each year.

The Bio or Tech Upgrades a Well off character can gain per session are only limited by their experience points.

WEALTHY

You own an important business, lots shares in a big company, extensive properties, or another excellent source of income. Your assets make up for your lack of fluff text.

Monthly earnings: 25,000 credits.

A Wealthy character does not need to spend time taking care of their business or assets to maintain their lifestyle. They will only see their lifestyle reduced to Well off if there is some kind of catastrophe that affects their business or assets, their personal financial manager betrays them, or some other kind of unforeseen disaster.

They can afford the fanciest clothing and food, all kinds of private transportation with personal chauffeurs, owning several residences at different places or even star systems, going to the most exclusive restaurants and hotels, and as much vacation time as they wish in exclusive resorts all over the Corvosphere.

The Bio or Tech Upgrades a Wealthy character can gain per session are only limited by their experience points.

As can be imagined, there is people richer than Wealthy characters in the Corvosphere, but such excesses require their own story and it is up to the GM to allow such kind of profligacy.

ADVANCED RULES

MAINTAINING OTHERS

A Middle class, Well off, or Wealthy character can employ or give alms to other characters without seeing their lifestyle affected thanks to tax schemes and fiscal manoeuvres. The added lifestyle value of the characters being maintained must be equal or lower than the lifestyle value of the character maintaining them. To calculate lifestyle values, use the highest equivalent Profession value from 'Starting lifestyle and credits' on page 153.

BEING MAINTAINED

An Indigent, Poor or Working class character can receive alms or be employed by another character. If they do, they do not need to work on their day job to maintain their lifestyle and monthly earnings, but the character maintaining them may impose conditions, such as becoming their bodyguard or give them their proxy in group decisions.

E.g. Wilfredo's character Xiang owns a spaceship and he wants to hire a crew to go out on adventure, discover alien planets, and amass a little fortune. Diego, Sergio, Pedro, and Che are Poor characters in hopes of finding an exciting new job. Xiang's lifestyle is Well off, which allows him to employ them and depart to the depths of space on a deranged adventure without worrying for their day jobs. This makes Xiang the de facto captain, and the crew trusts him not to abuse such power.

DELEGATING

A Middle class or Well off character can delegate their work to NPC employees or brokers. If they do, their monthly earnings are reduced to the next lower lifestyle, but they do not have to spend any time working on their day jobs to maintain their lifestyle.

SELLING OUT

A Middle class or Well off character can sell their source of income to improve their lifestyle to the next level for one year, and then permanently see it reduced to two levels below their original lifestyle.

SKULLING

An Indigent, Poor, or Working class character with a cortex connector and located in the Corvosphere can decide to skull instead of working a boring day job that would keep them away from adventures and missions. Skulling allows characters to maintain their current lifestyle without working, but it needs to be done at all times, without interruption.

An Indigent skulling character suffers one semi-permanent point of neural damage, while a Poor or Working class character suffers two semi-permanent points of neural damage. If they ever decide to discard them or become Traumatised, they stop skulling and are immediately fired from their skulling job, without a second chance to recover it unless they pay a hefty fine to their skulling employer.

THE IZ'KAL

Jabir

Jabir Zuhr woke up at 6:00 and readied himself. He kissed his majmoa's children goodbye, briefly conversed with two of his partners, and kissed his favourite, Al-Kindi. Naomi did not mind: they loved each other, but rarely engaged sexually. He finally left the house at 6:57.

Jabir was picked up by the self-driven bus at precisely 7:00 in front of his house. The vehicle was almost full. He engaged in hyperlink with the other passengers and sat down next to Imru as he always did. He told him Naomi's pregnancy had been approved last night. This time, the seed would be distilled from Al-Kindi's and Gamal, and the ovule would come anonymously from a genetic bank. Imru was happily surprised, and rejoiced at how such a great change in life can occur in the span of a single day. Qasseem, from the back of the bus, shared that her majmoa had not had children in a long time now. They all shared her sadness, and she could feel that they all believed she was not happy with her majmoa and she should think of leaving them. Defensively, she abandoned the hyperlink and shut down any emotional strings they sent to get her back for the remainder of the journey.

Jabir hopped off the bus when it reached his district. All around, lial shops were opening, children were gathering to follow their learning-quests under the supervision of attentive teachers, and technocrats were walking through the streets — the usual stuff.

Jabir strolled for a few hours.

He found a broken street light and thought-requested a replacement. He might have considered the Corvo to be a wicked species, but their cortex connectors surely were a thing of wonder. Being able to establish a hyperlink of sorts with computers and online networks was simply wonderful.

He spotted litter on the pavement — leftovers from some fruits. He picked it up, and threw it in a garbage can after running a DNA test on the residues and sending it through the system. Naturally, he did not receive its results, but the system's AI automatically sent an admonition to the litterer. If that person displayed recurring uncivilized behaviour, he would be kindly requested to attend empathetic meetings.

When he was a teenager, Jabir had been called to one of these meetings. He was forced to hyperlink with a bunch of lovely people from all over the city every morning for a week, and learned about their experiences, their thoughts, and their dreams. That week felt like living a hundred lives, and it made him closer to others. He was thankful for the experience and sworn off stealing ever again.

To Jabir's surprise, he saw an old man struggling to climb up a flight of offline escalators. Following an unsuccessful attempt to reset them, and after sending request for a technician to fix them, Jabir helped the old man walk up the stairs, lifting him by his arms for the last twenty steps. The old man was small and light like a feather. He engaged in hyperlink with him, and walked him all the way back to his home. They talked about all kinds of things, and Jabir found out the old man was alone — everyone in his majmoa had already passed away. Saddened, Jabir thought-requested a social worker to come visit the old man. Old people had trouble engaging in new majmoas, and oftentimes ended up turning into voidwalkers.

After a while, he came across two Corvo tourists. They ought to be important Corvo, he thought, as it was very rare for the State to allow Corvo visits to Al'ameen, or any other colony for that matter. Or perhaps the new open-borders policy was already in effect. To Jabir's dismay, the State had recently passed a law to welcome thousands of Corvo tourists every year, with the idea of getting them to abandon their corrupt ways after witnessing how superior life in the State truly was. Jabir shook his head. These bug-people would never truly understand Iz'kal culture, not without engaging in hyperlink.

The tourists were lost, that much was clear. Jabir approached them and offered his assistance. He hadn't used his vocal chords in months, so his voice was rash - yet the Corvo's automated translators did not have any problems picking it up. The Corvo wanted to visit the Uprising museum, and asked him for directions. They did not exchange any courtesies, but such was the Corvo way of showing kindness — at least according to Jabir's automated translator. He told them it was rather far and offered to take them there, which seemed to surprise the Corvo. They said they did not want him to waste any time (or money — the translator indicated the Corvo use the same word for both) and assured him they would be happy with just directions. Jabir didn't mind, and explained that it was his job to take them there.

"What? Do you happen to be a tourist guide? Now that's a strange coincidence!"

The translator picked up their uneasiness, and warned Jabir about the Corvo's fear of unpaid kindness from strangers. In the Corvosphere, only thieves and lowlifes acted that way. Jabir found their contempt to be extremely rude, but he did not show it.

"No, I am in charge of making sure that everything is running smoothly in this city", he said.

"What kind of job is that? What exactly do you take care of?", asked the one identified by his scanner as a female - Jabir simply believed it; for him, all Corvo looked like clones.

"I walk around the city and report things that are not working properly. I talk to people who need to talk to someone. I hear people's complaints and register them with the city council. I also help lost tourists — usually other Iz'kal, but we treat everyone equally here".

The Corvo were surprised, but their translator software was probably reassuring them that the chances of finding a thief in the State were close to nil, and started looking more at ease.

"Does this job have a name?"

"I am a city carer."

Their eyes lost focus for a second as they searched their databases for info about such a job. When they read it was a common job they seem relieved, and also curious: "Do you really pick up the rubbish from the streets in those clothes?"

"There is not that much rubbish in our streets, we mostly clean the dust and... Well, I don't actually do it myself, the robots do. I take care of the city in general, however I see fit. I walk around and report things".

"Alright, so you are more like a guardian?".

"Not really. Let's get going and I'll tell you all about it".

The Corvo agreed and walked with him. They were more interested in finding out about his job and how much he got paid (Jabir's translator had trouble getting the meaning across, as nobody in the State is really "paid") than in his explanations of the historical city.

Jabir ended up spending the whole day with them. He took them to the most interesting places, including the best lial shop and his favourite restaurant. They especially enjoyed places that gave away free samples and took more than they needed with them, and by the end of the day their pockets were stuffed. He also told them about his life and his job, and they were captivated by everything they had learnt about the Iz'kal on that day.

They walked really fast, which was quite exhausting, and kept asking Jabir whether he truly did not need to be somewhere else. They failed to understand how someone could spend the entire day showing strangers around for free.

Jabir found them fascinating. They told him about their lives, their work, their status, and about what was new in the Corvosphere. They were very careful not to talk about the ongoing conflict between their nations, and Jabir was happy to avoid the subject.

"I haven't seen any stores. Where do you buy stuff?" The Corvo named Ling Mang asked the questions.

"On the Idealab store."

"Do you have to buy everything online?"

"Yes, it's more efficient that way".

"Yes, but a completely digital market reduces sales. The real estate, staff, and distribution expenses associated with well positioned physical stores is well worth it..." He stopped talking. He seemed to be getting some info from his computer. "Right, you guys don't really care about sales."

"The less stuff there is, the more efficient our world is", Jabir answered, which made their jaws drop.

Later on, they asked him, "So, if all you do is walk around and help around, which, erm, seems very useful and all, but... Well, what does a doctor think of getting paid as much as you are?"

"I guess the doctor is happy for me."

"But..."

"Look, being able to get things does not matter. Doctors want to help others, and to feel appreciated. Also, most doctors are actually robots, and thus don't really want anything."

The Corvo were not convinced by Jabir's explanation. However, they did not ask any more questions about it. They found it obvious that Jabir would not complain about the situation, and they thought they ought to ask a doctor instead.

The Corvo seemed to enjoy their time with Jabir, and were very enthusiastic about what they had seen - although he sensed some condescence in their comments, as if they talked about how wonderfully smart their pet was because it could open the door by itself.

Jabir led them back at the majmoa that was hosting them. They tried to pay him for his services that day, but Jabir had no interest in their stuff - he had too many things already. Plus, Corvo credits weren't really useful in the State.

Jabir arrived home to his partners and told them all about his new acquaintances. He explained he found them to be very nice people with interesting ideas, and suggested they invite them over to their majmoa. They all agreed.

They all also agreed it was a shame that the Corvo as a species ought to be exterminated. Sadly, paradise comes at a high price.

THE IZ'KAL SPECIES

"Iz'kal society is so surprisingly different from ours that half of what I say about them has to address what they don't have or don't do - stuff that seems so normal to us that if I omit it you'd assume they have it too."

- Extract from "A characterless society" by Gong Cixi, Corvo xenoscientist

The Iz'kal are a species of amphibious humanoids with an organised, strict society and a strong communal mind. They are telepathic, able to communicate among themselves without words, and live in a cooperative, egalitarian society; thus they are a collective both by genetic predisposition and by political rule.

The Iz'kal State is the largest, strongest political block in the universe - a technified, leaderless government of billions of people that police each other through a telepathic connection. This connection, which the Iz'kal call the Hyperlink, is the most important trait of the species, and serves both to maintain communication between Iz'kal and to facilitate their bureaucratic, absolutist civilisation.

NATURE AND BEHAVIOUR

"They live long and healthy lives, yet they do not own them. They are more spectators than participants. They know not of pain, yet they barely understand pleasure. They do not know of the grey scale in things, nor of black and white - they have only seen white and their stares are just that: blank, white, and bored looks of the walking dead."

- Xeon Magno, main shareholder of The Union, after his visit to Erthum

The Iz'kal are a gregarious and proud people, as peaceful as they are mistrustful of other species. They live in large, silent, technified cities that seem paradises of organisation and coexistence.

Iz'kal are very honest and straightforward, and instinctively helpful; this is why they tend to be wary of non-Iz'kal,

as nearly every other species has proven to be much more conflictive and duplicitous than the usual Iz'kal outlook.

ANATOMY AND PHYSIOLOGY

Slightly smaller in stature and more slender than Humans, Iz'kal are amphibious mammals with an average height ranging from 1.7 to 1.8 metres and an average weight of 65-70 kilograms, with males being slightly larger and bulkier than females. Of course, variations on planet gravity, atmosphere and nutrients may significantly affect these ratios.

Iz'kal are completely hairless and have a tougher skin than Humans, but they require a humid environment, such as swamp or coastland, to avoid dehydration.

As near-amphibians, Iz'kal are adept swimmers and they have a very large lung capacity. They have a tail, reminiscent of their time as marine creatures, which they used for swimming. The tail is mobile but not prehensile.

Last but not least, all Iz'kal have an Iz - a head appendage connected to their brain, which allows them to enter the Hyperlink. When an Iz'kal loses his iz, he can no longer engage in Hyperlink, which usually leads to depression and suicide. Many biologists of all species have studied the iz and its importance to the Iz'kal organism, but it still holds many secrets and wonders to science.

An Iz'kal's natural life expectancy is quite high at 70 Earth years; however, genetic manipulation and state-provided health care have catapulted this rate to a much higher average of 180 years.

GENETIC MODIFICATION

Genetic science plays a very important part in Iz'kal society, and their advances in this field outshine those of any other species. Thanks to their advanced bioengineering and highly organised bureaucracy, the Iz'kal can modify themselves so easily and efficiently that they can completely change the genetic traits of their entire species from one generation to the next.

Thus the Iz'kal gave themselves vocal cords - which they originally lacked - to be able to speak, specialised digestive systems and activity cycles to adapt to the day length and available nutrients of the planets they inhabit, and so on.

The Iz'kal's ability to genetically alter themselves guarantees that there are a lot of different Iz'kal subspecies, depending on the type of environment they live in.

IZ'KAL SUBSPECIES

Thanks to genetic modification, the Iz'kal have developed different strains of their own species, adapted to the various planetary environments they colonise. While specific ground and atmospheric conditions almost require a different Iz'kal subspecies for every colonised planet, they can be roughly classified into six major groups:

Waha'i Iz'kal, virtually always called simply Iz'kal, are the unmodified breed of their species. As their evolutionary ancestors, they are adapted to life in temperate, oxygen-rich water worlds such as Earth, and prefer swampy, humid environments. Their physical and biological characteristics correspond to the basic template featured in the rules section.

Batil Iz'kal (or Crystal Iz'kal) are genetically modified for space activity; they are the ones sent to space stations or lifelong Labyrinth trips. Batil Iz'kal need much less humidity than their kin, and their powerful, protected circulatory systems can go long hours without breathing, allowing them to exist in high pressure or little oxygen. They are not as adept for water movement as other Iz'kal, however, and are most at risk of Hyperlink withdrawal, being also the most affected by its symptoms.

Dhahab (or 'Golden') Iz'kal are adapted to life in desert planets, with high temperatures and very little water. These Iz'kal have been modified to require no humidity and suffer no dehydration symptoms, which gives them a gold-tanned, heat-resistant skin, plus better liquid retention. Golden Iz'kal can go for days without food or water.

Fadi (or 'Silver') Iz'kal are adapted to life in extremely cold environments. Their skin has been changed from a single membrane to many thick layers of fat; this skin is much more delicate, but the constant humidity in the cold air helps maintain it. Also, Fadi Iz'kal have very efficient energy systems, and take much longer to become fatigued.

Iz'kal'asud (also known as Dark Iz'kal) were modified for life in planets where the air is oxygen-thin or too smoky, with scarce or very scarce life-giving liquids and reduced light due to the thick atmosphere. Iz'kal'asud resemble Batil Iz'kal, but have also increased muscle mass to withstand much stronger gravity and magnetic fields, making them a bit slower and clumsier. They also have nictitating eyes, which allow for night vision and are well protected against dust and smoke.

Shajara Iz'kal are also called Tree Iz'kal because of their wide, stubby legs, knobby skins and thick muscles. They were created to withstand high pressure and gravity, and are far stronger - if somewhat slower - than common Iz'kal.

COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE

"When teaching, there is always some information gap between what is taught and what is learned. There are thousands of reasons for such gaps. To me, the size of this gap is the most important indicator of how advanced a society is."

- Extract from the talk by Zainab Haddad, Iz'kal behavioural engineer, at the "Understanding Cognition" convention

Thanks to their telepathic Hyperlink, the Iz'kal evolved apart from all sentient species, which has forced them to drastically modify their own genetic structures to interact with other civilisations.

IZ'KAL SPEECH

The Iz'kal naturally lacked vocal cords, as they only needed the Hyperlink to communicate with each other. However, they later gave themselves the ability to speak via genetic modification, partly to reassert their status as a free people after centuries of being treated as speechless animals by the Korian, but mostly to be able to communicate with other species. If other sentient species prided themselves on their ability to speak, why should the Iz'kal be any less?

The first language the Iz'kal developed was a variation of the Korian tongue, the first spoken language they learned centuries ago when the Korian subjugated them. The Iz'kal hate all memory of the Korian, so they treat this modified language as their own invention.

As a wordless species, adopting a verbal language was a long and difficult step for the Iz'kal, but their telepathic link with each other helped them greatly through the process. Now, Iz'kal Speech - totally different from the intra-species 'thoughtspeak' of their Hyperlinks - is the official language they use when dealing with other, verbally-speaking species.

The Iz'kal first developed their Speech to communicate with the Raag, and later with the Corvo, but they have always assumed it as their own spoken tongue. Very few

Iz'kal use it among themselves, of course, as their telepathic Hyperlink is a much more effective, nuanced and expedient means of communication.

THE HYPERLINK

As it's been said, the Iz'kal communicate telepathically via the Hyperlink - a special range of perception that only the Iz'kal have. Not exactly a psychic network nor a mental language, the Hyperlink is more akin to a unique sense, through which the Iz'kal can convey information to each other.

The Hyperlink is possible thanks to the Iz, or 'head tail' that all Iz'kal have, which allows them to clearly perceive the thoughts and feelings of other Iz'kal. An Iz'kal deprived of his Iz suffers no ill effects on his health, but loses the ability to enter Hyperlink, which for most Iz'kal amounts to a slow, lonely death.

The Hyperlink allows Iz'kal to establish telepathic communication with other members of their species. Non-Iz'kal are all but incapable of understanding the actual nature of the Hyperlink, as they are genetically unequipped to experience it. A simplified explanation of the Hyperlink would classify its function in three different levels of communication:

The first and most rudimentary Hyperlink level - and likely the first to evolve - is the Scream; the ability to project one's emotions outwardly. Such a projection often takes the form of a powerful and brief message, that nearby Iz'kal automatically feel whether they want it or no. Such 'screams' reach the minds of every Iz'kal in sight, and can even be felt in a radius of several kilometres if the message or emotion is strong enough. The Iz'kal developed this ability to warn each other of danger, request help or signal the discovery of food or shelter; it was from this primal skill that the full Hyperlink developed.

A Scream is an uninvited interaction, and as such is considered rude by other Iz'kal unless used with a very good reason.

The second Hyperlink level, and the most common, is called the Talk, which indeed allows the Iz'kal to enter a mental conversation. This requires all involved Iz'kal to be allowed and willing to join the conversation, which is quickly decided by a series of mental invitations and requests. Once a Talk starts, the participants simply express their ideas through the Hyperlink for others to share, analyse and reply to. A Hyperlink Talk differs from a spoken conversation in that it is atemporal - any participant can access any shared thought and analyse it for as long as he wants without interrupting or waiting for other Talkers. Late comers to a Talk can simply access all thoughts previously shared to the conversation, and intervene with their own thoughts as they see fit. The Talk is the most common means of interaction among Iz'kal, and has shaped their view of the universe and social relationships for many centuries now.

Thoughts expressed through the Talk convey additional information that is hard to express with words: Feelings about the issue, the origin of the idea, the degree to agreement with your own comment, etc. This means that Iz'kal from distant planets understand each other better than any other species, who usually develop their own versions of their language, and when they talk to someone from a different planet they miss the subtleties and get confused by slang words.

Talks can only be established with Iz'kal close by, but as every Iz'kal added to the Talk can reach further and further, some Talks can grow large enough to cover an entire city. Such city-wide Talks allow Iz'kal to share their thoughts, discuss the latest news and engage in idle chat with their fellow citizens, while also enjoying a shared mental map of the city. Even when visiting a new city, an Iz'kal will easily find his way around, and feel like a small but essential part of a whole, thanks to Hyperlink Talks. However, the largest Hyperlinks are mentally and emotionally taxing, and may permanently harm an Iz'kal's sense of self if he or she remains connected for long periods.

Any Iz'kal can enter or leave a Talk at will, and also be expelled by the other Talkers if his presence becomes disruptive for any reason. Hyperlink Talks are the most open and free means of communication in Iz'kal society, and perhaps in the entire universe.

The third level of Hyperlink, known as The Bond, is reserved for intimate contact, either among friends, lovers or very involved colleagues. Iz'kal who are very emotionally invested in each other fall into a Bond. Once they do, its effects are all but permanent. Two Bonded Iz'kal are always aware of each other's feelings, thoughts and emotions without reserve, including their deepest fears, shame and secrets. All members of a Majmoa - the Iz'kal family unit - are Bonded with each other, and so share a more intimate relationship than non-Iz'kal can conceive.

Most Bonds last through the members' lifetime, as they're very hard to turn off at will; in the rare cases where a Bond ends, it is because the Bonded individuals suddenly or gradually stopped caring for each other somehow - an extremely rare occurrence among the empathic, gregarious Iz'kal.

Regardless of the Hyperlink level, Iz'kal in the same Hyperlink can directly experience each other's thoughts and feelings. Witnessing the internal processes of another person creates a strong bond and makes everyone very empathetic; this is one of the reasons why violence and discrimination are so scarce in Iz'kal society.

A common misconception by non-Iz'kal is that the Hyperlink is a sort of hive mind that joins every single Iz'kal.

SAVAK SOULBENDER

Proficient :: Hexian 2 :: Voidwalker

Level 3 :: Iz'kal :: Strategist
mov. 5 metres :: weight 67 kg :: height 168 cm

4	5	1	8

PHYSICAL STAT	8 (3)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (3)	MENTAL STAT	7 (2)

HIT (DEX)	3 +	GRAPPLE (CON)	2 ++

Savak Blade

It ignores 1 point of armour.

Ki Suit

Activated. He gains two advantages towards agility actions OR moves at twice his normal speed.

Overpower

If he wins a Close Quarters confrontation, he gains one advantage towards his next Close Quarters action against the same target.

Reviled and revered in equal measure, voidwalkers cut their iz along with their ties with society. What they get in return is incommensurable power.

Actually, a Hyperlink only joins specific groups of Iz'kal - usually no more than a few dozen at any given time, up to many thousands in the case of citywide Hyperlinks - and is more a social gathering than a pervasive collective brain.

Other than that, any Iz'kal can - and often will - have several Hyperlinks open at the same time, and turn them on and off depending on his needs.

Iz'kal learn to control the emotions they share at an early age, since their feelings can easily influence those around them. Individual sentiments of anger, fear, sadness or hate are usually suppressed, but when an Iz'kal feels his feelings are too intense to keep inside, he will refrain from establishing any kind of Hyperlink to avoid affecting others' psyches with his personal problems. Such Hyperlink time-outs take as long as the individual needs to come to terms with whatever affected him.

If for any reason an Iz'kal becomes so emotionally scarred that he can't ever join a Hyperlink again, he risks depression and death - or becoming a voidwalker.

VOIDWALKERS

When an Iz'kal spends a long time disconnected from Hyperlink, he is overcome by anxiety, loneliness and depression. If Hyperlink deprivation is long enough, or produced by a shocking enough event, some individuals might lose the ability to connect through Hyperlink altogether. Before the Iz'kal modified themselves into having a spoken language, this meant not being able to share their thoughts and feelings with another person again. It was the ultimate isolation. Such individuals slowly lose the will to live until they die of loneliness and deprivation.

The very few Iz'kal that manage to survive without a Hyperlink become voidwalkers.

Besides their inability to enter Hyperlink, a voidwalker is different from all other Iz'kal because of the changes that take place in his organism. A voidwalker's iz organ changes all the way down to the genetic structure; now, instead of an open channel to connect to other Iz'kal, it becomes closed to neural transmissions. This helps the Iz'kal deal with the mental isolation, which is probably the reason why the species developed this trait; however, it has a very important side effect.

Having a closed iz renders the Iz'kal nearly immune to distractions or neural tampering of any kind. Besides its immediate evolutionary uses, this transformation greatly increases the voidwalker's mental strength, focus, and willpower. In short, the affected Iz'kal's new iz makes them a mental powerhouse, capable of maintaining concentra-

tion and handling thought processes in ways undreamed of by any other sentient creature on record.

The second most noticeable side effect of becoming a voidwalker is a change in the individual's personality. It goes without saying that they tend to turn quiet and detached, but in fact they gain a hormonal propensity to antisocial, even aggressive behaviour.

Some scholars believe the voidwalker transformation is actually a form of regression to an earlier stage of Iz'kal evolution, when the species hadn't developed Hyperlink communication and relied on physical violence to survive.

VOIDWALKERS AND SOULBENDING

The most important consequence of having an increased psychic power is, of course, related to soulbender powers. Besides their increased concentration and willpower, voidwalkers become extremely devoted to their values and beliefs, probably as a part of the same genetic process that allows them to cope with isolation. This means that most voidwalkers become soulbenders, and very good ones too, wielding the powers of their Gods at a whole new level.

Some Iz'kal religious zealots undergo Hyperlink deprivation on purpose, so as to gain a voidwalker's ability; those who survive have their power dramatically increased by the experience.

Most voidwalkers gain at least a few partial, or 'quiet', soulbending abilities, but over half of them develop full-fledged soulbender powers. If the individual was already a soulbender at the moment of becoming a voidwalker, his powers increase dramatically over a period of a few weeks; more than a few Iz'kal voidwalkers have become true avatars of their gods and legends of their species.

VOIDWALKERS IN SOCIETY

Average Iz'kal treat voidwalkers with a mixture of respect, fear, and pity; losing the ability to communicate through Hyperlink is seen by all Iz'kal as a great loss, and the events that lead to that loss are usually just as terrible.]Aware of their outcast status, voidwalkers strive to stay away from other Iz'kal, keeping mostly to themselves.

The Iz'kal State has seen the value in voidwalkers and have created an elite military group, known as Savak, that is composed solely of voidwalkers. These people who have lost everything have been given a new reason live and die, and they're even better soldiers because of it.

THE IZ'KAL OUTLOOK

The Iz'kal are very quiet and unassuming for other species' standards, and very worried about their own feelings and those of others, even appearing passive-aggressive to other species as they go out of their way not to offend while they act outraged by words and thoughts that other species would never find offensive. This is what Iz'kal understand as kindness; as they are very open about their inner feelings, they treat the feelings of others with extreme care, to extremes that could seem ridiculous to outsiders.

Some aliens can't believe such forced politeness is genuine, and assume the Iz'kal are sarcastic - although irony, sarcasm and black humour are all but unknown for the Iz'kal, who are used to having immediate access to the whole truth when dealing with others.

Once a sentient gets to know them - as much as an outsider can actually know an Iz'kal, which some argue isn't really possible - the Iz'kal are helpful, proactive and fully honest, always looking for a way to help and improve any situation they are in.

They instinctively tend towards teamwork; they are, however, handicapped when dealing with non-Iz'kal. Their unfortunate contact with the Korian introduced them to deceit and aggressiveness, which were all but unknown to them, plus their way of handling feelings makes inter-racial relations awkward.

Thus, they approach other species with a mix of naiveté and cautiousness that makes things even harder. This, added to their natural xenophobia and standoffish character, has given Iz'kal a reputation for haughtiness - which is not entirely incorrect; after all, the Iz'kal do feel superior to all other species, mostly because of their peaceful, utopian State. Who else can claim to have eradicated crime, war, disease, hunger, danger and poverty?

Iz'kal who join the Coalition are actually given a special training course that focuses on interspecies relations. This course introduces them to concepts that are alien to them, such as irony, deceit, forgery, cons, fraud, etc.

The aim is to prepare them to interact with members of other species, with a special focus on Humans, who, due to their superior ability to separate their thoughts from their speech, can get Iz'kal into all sorts of trouble.

There's no candy sweeter to a conman than a lonely Iz'kal lost on a Tiantang street...

SOCIETY

"The Iz'kal don't allow for things to occur naturally. Everything is decided by committees. But we know that many a great idea was considered dumb at first, until a visionary (or simply lucky) individual believed in it and made it his private mission, until time proved him right. This will set the Iz'kal back more than their lack of competitiveness."

- Xeon Magno, Leader of The Union

It's not that the Iz'kal like to form groups - it's that they don't know any other way to live. For the Iz'kal, social interaction is at least as necessary as food or breathing. They spend their whole lives coming in and out of Hyperlinks, browsing news, listening to art broadcasts or gossiping with their neighbours - all the while performing jobs they are taught to love for the good of their society.

An Iz'kal simply has no concept of individualism, and only the slightest notions of loneliness. But in truth, Iz'kal - even those that lose their Hyperlink ability - are never truly alone, for they instinctively look out for and back each other. Thus, rather than having a society, it's more correct to say that the Iz'kal are their society - social interaction defines their nature as much as their physical form.

CITIZENS AND TECHNOCRATS

The Iz'kal have no single governing body, yet their government is one of the strictest and most constraining in history. The Iz'kal State governs itself by a form of absolutist democracy, where each citizen has the same level authority and responsibility over the species' welfare as a whole.

Government activities include technology creation, law proposals, diplomatic decisions and resource allocation. All of these decisions are taken by as many Iz'kal as want to take part in the process, first at a neighbourhood level, then city-wide, then planet-wide, then all across the State.

Any citizen that takes an active part in State legislation or industrial research and development is called a technocrat, which is an honorary, official title given to every State citizen. There's no separation between a technocrat and common citizens - most Iz'kal citizens are technocrats as long as they work for the benefit of their society, and thus they are all part of the Iz'kal governing body. They are all the rulers of the State.

SOCIAL INTERACTION

Iz'kal interactions may be unsettling to other sentients, as they are completely honest with each other, holding no ideas or opinions back, and having very few instances of lying or any form of shame. Plus, they are taught to think of others before themselves almost from birth, so they help each other almost instinctively, and often without even asking. For an Iz'kal, any member of his species is an open book, a comrade, and an asset unless proven otherwise. However, Iz'kal temper their openness and honesty by being extremely careful about not offending each other; this seems awkward and touchy for other sentients, but is the basis of Iz'kal interaction.

There are no social classes or hierarchies in Iz'kal society, and every Iz'kal treats every other Iz'kal as an equal; team leaders obey their subordinates, teachers learn from students, and children are reared in groups.

Conversation is a daily part of Iz'kal routine, much more frequent than sleep, food or any other physiological need - they are always talking with each other. An Iz'kal city is always abuzz with small groups enthusiastically engaging in all kinds of topics. Ironically, since the Iz'kal don't need verbal communication among themselves except via their Hyperlink, all this gossip happens in dead silence. An outsider can only tell everyone's talking by the fact that they are standing close together and vaguely looking in each other's general direction. Sometimes their Iz tentacles wave and sway as they talk, but there's no other perceptible indicator that two Iz'kal are talking.

Spoken conversation among Iz'kal is frowned upon, and speech is mostly reserved to interaction with aliens; even in these cases, however, the speaking Iz'kal can maintain several active Hyperlinks at the same time as they talk, and it's not uncommon for an Iz'kal talking to an alien to revert to Hyperlink on reflex.

PEER PRESSURE

There are no boss-employee relationships, nor leader and follower, as everything in Iz'kal society is egalitarian and collaborative. Despite that, social pressure is strong and if the majority within one's social group requires a certain task, one is expected to put aside their personal needs and perform it. Of course, strong laws defending personal dignity and life are in place to avoid abuse of individuals by the group, which seems to be the largest problem in Iz'kal society.

MAJMOAS

The Iz'kal basic social unit is the majmoa, which in their society fulfils the role of family, marriage, intimate relationship, friend clique and neighbour community, all rolled into one. All Iz'kal societies that have been studied throughout history have had group relationships similar to the Majmoa, even before genetic manipulation and the Korian.

A majmoa is a group of three to twenty Iz'kal of both genders, which support, commit and profess loyalty and faithful love to each other. Members of a majmoa may or may not engage in sexual activity with each other, but they very rarely do it outside their majmoa. Members of a majmoa are very close, sharing all their experiences and emotions through Hyperlink and devoting themselves to each other. Each majmoa shares a house and any child born to one of its members is considered the child of the whole group.

GENDER AND REPRODUCTION

The Iz'kal are mammals and, while female and male members have different physiologies, their social structure does not enforce differences between them.

Reproduction is controlled by the State; for an Iz'kal female to get pregnant, she needs State authorisation - the Iz'kal have modified their genes so as to be incapable of reproduction without medical aid. Only in special cases, most often when a group of colonists is sent to a new planet, is an Iz'kal natural reproductive physiology restored to allow her to have children without State intervention.

Bringing a new child to the Universe requires State approval to keep the population levels low enough to maintain the extremely high quality of life the Iz'kal are known for. When a majmoa wishes to have a new child, they can apply to the State, and if they meet all the requirements, they will be granted permission. It is up to the majmoa to choose which among the willing females will be impregnated with the baby. This is one of the few instances where individual choices are allowed and not frowned upon by Iz'kal society.

The baby himself is genetically designed in a laboratory, following the highest standards to ensure that the new specimen is as healthy as possible and improves the genetic diversity of the Iz'kal species - an effective, controlled defence against epidemics or other similar threats. The State also reserves the right to switch newborns between two majmoas if either baby is more suitable for the other group. This can very well mean that the baby might not share any genetic traits with any of the members of the majmoa he will be born into. While this practice might seem strange, Iz'kal see no problem with it and everyone in the majmoa will behave as caring fathers and mothers to this new child.

EDUCATION

> *"When an Iz'kal is born, she has around a dozen parents. When she goes on to study, the choices of subject, location, and ways are already made for her. When she begins to work, she will face hundreds of experts parenting her. When she goes to choose the colours of her home, she has experts making the choice for her. The State treats its citizens like children for their whole life. The Iz'kal have yet to reach the maturity of their society."*
>
> *- Feng Wang, Corvo politician and businessman*

The Iz'kal acquire their education and knowledge in State-provided schools, where young Iz'kal are sent at the appropriate age and at scheduled dates, to follow strict and well-organised programs of study in the trade they were chosen for at birth.

Schools are organised by subject and social relevance - for example, medicine is seen as more relevant than engineering, which is more relevant than philosophy, which in turn is more relevant than physical disciplines, which take precedence over performing arts, and so on.

The Iz'kal revere knowledge in all its forms, and there are schools on every subject imaginable, from sciences and arts to technology and social disciplines, from physical activities to military tactics; whatever there is to learn about anything, the State probably provides it.

However, no Iz'kal is allowed to pick what he wants to study; an Iz'kal's predisposition for a particular activity is chosen at birth, and then the State assigns the older children to a school of the trade they show a better aptitude for Since genetic modification at birth includes brain disposition as well, most Iz'kal are happy with the choices made for them; a few are not, but they are taught to bear it and comply with social needs.

HYPER SCHOOLS

Hyper schools are one of the most open-minded inventions of the Iz'kal, and when they were proposed many Iz'kal suggested they were a decadent and even dangerous idea. In time, however, they proved to be a marvellous way to share knowledge, which has done far more for Iz'kal education than the traditional school system.

Hyper schools are specialised forums open to the general public, where respected scholars and specialists in all areas of knowledge engage in Hyperlink with visitors, to share their knowledge and recent discoveries. They are not meant to replace the traditional learning system, but often surpass it as information and learning centres, keeping the population up-to-date with recent breakthroughs and in tune with the current state of science, technology and society.

As Hyperlink doesn't depend on having listened to a conversation from the beginning, and updates can be given automatically at the speed of thought, any Iz'kal can enter a Hyper school and attend a lecture at any moment, and leave at any moment too. This is why the efficiency of Hyper school learning is so hard to understand to verbal-language species, but it remains an unsurpassed means of acquiring new knowledge.

Nadia

Nadia always wanted to be a singer, but it was decided that she was better suited to be a diplomat. She was trained from an early age and, when the time came, she was sent to Tiantang to aid the Iz'kal ambassador. The relations between the Iz'kal and the Corvo have always been cold at best.

Nadia hated Tiantang, but she understood that her work was a necessity to her people back home. After all, the diplomatic games between the two peoples were only a gateway for espionage and counterespionage. Each species allowed an embassy in their capital in exchange for having their own in the other's capital, and both hoped to best the other and to gain more information than they would lose.

She knew this better than anyone else. Nadia's job was to stop any information from leaking at any cost. Any Corvo who learned too much, and any Iz'kal who deserted their people, would soon learn about Nadia's lost love for singing, as she hummed her favourite piece before they died to her skilled hands. The song served as a reminder of her failed childhood dreams, and she sung it while dreaming about the different life she could have led, if only she had been a little less capable with a knife.

Nadia continues to play her part in the great schemes of her species. She is willing to do what needs to be done, whether it's seducing and killing, or performing mindless paperwork. Her life is what it should be: nothing less, and nothing more.

VISITORS

Immigrants to the Iz'kal State have a hard time being accepted as citizens, and even casual visitors have to go through a strict background check to protect the Iz'kal against Corvo espionage - simply because the Iz'kal are afraid of outsiders.

Conversely, once a tourist is allowed into an Iz'kal city, he is very well-treated; the Iz'kal are nice and caring, although they won't hide their reservations towards members of other species. After the Iz'kal encountered the Corvo and Humans, they started building special facilities to hold and house non-Iz'kal tourists; these 'special neighbourhoods' are intended to separate the aliens from Iz'kal daily life, but don't have restricted access - once allowed to enter, any tourist can leave and go anywhere as long as he respects Iz'kal laws.

When there are no facilities available, or they are filled to capacity, local majmoas gladly volunteer to house the visiting aliens, giving them the best treatment they can.

A few special visitors, such as singers and Human mercenaries, are not only welcomed but given special status in Iz'kal society, with cities and majmoas competing to host them.

ECONOMY

> *"You feed a man every day of his life and you do not have a productive citizen but a pet. It is disrespectful to that person, to reduce him to the bearable minimum of a being."*
>
> *- Mama Soul, Corvo Prophet of Kaliva*

The Iz'kal State is a moneyless and ownerless organisation. It bears repeating: the Iz'kal do not trade. No currency, no barter, no transactions of any kind.

Instead of currency, Iz'kal society uses a fluid system that takes into consideration the labour force, production capacity and stored resources of any entity - a city, colony or nation - and manages these parameters to figure out how to run the entity with basic sustainability principles and technical capacities in mind, obtaining the most efficient lasting results.

Iz'kal people spend their whole lives working at the job that best suits their genetic makeup, regardless of their personal interest in it, although personal interest usually implies better results and the Iz'kal are generally very satisfied with their roles. After all, they see themselves as an extension of the society as a whole and are mostly willing to sacrifice any personal agenda for the good of all.

The majority of Iz'kal work in the scientific, technological, sociological, or entertainment fields, as most physical labour is performed by machines. Physical activities are encouraged and required for all citizens, but they are rarely present as part of the entity's economic workforce. Most Iz'kal are therefore engineers, poets, writers, scientists, musicians, dancers, actors or philosophers. All of their work is shared freely, to be used, manipulated, improved, and shared by everyone else.

As there is a direct link between the citizens and the production of goods without a trade or monetary exchange in between or any possible personal gain, all new policy considerations are based on the new product's utility, and there is no planned obsolescence or any kind of market resistance to new products that might put old products out of business.

PROPERTY AND POSSESSION

"For a person to be truly able to express all of his potential and to feel as empowered and important as he deserves, he must have to work for it. It is society's duty to create a booming economy so everyone has the space to make something of themselves."

- Zhong, speaker of the Kal cult, a group of Kaliva followers

The Iz'kal have no currency. In fact, the very concept of currency is a difficult one to grasp for most Iz'kal. Although it is known that Iz'kal societies previous to the Korian did use it, after the Uprising they created a way to live without private property, and no living Iz'kal remembers any other kind of organisation.

How individuals get the usage rights of an item depends on a system of waiting lists. While some items are consumable (such as food) and therefore cannot be given back, most other items are acquired for a given time period, depending on their use.

Each Iz'kal is imprinted with a unique ID onto their genome during conception. Through this ID, the system can access all relevant information about a citizen, such as his place of birth, job, hobbies, relationships, and the complete list of items and services he has ever used or requested. All this information is taken into account when an Iz'kal citizen wants to obtain an item or property, and complex algorithms are used to place him on the waiting list for that object or service.

Things are always in use by someone. As soon as an Iz'kal stops using an item, he hands it over to the next person who needs it. Some items are only available at specific locations, and anyone who wants to use them has to go to those locations. Other items, such as house appliances or clothes, can be acquired for as long as one lives, as it would be inefficient to transport them between houses while they are not being used. Thus, majmoas improve the usage ratio of most appliances and other household goods.

Whenever an Iz'kal wants to acquire a product, from a nail to a house, he uses his ID to place a request on the Central of Resources, which is a digital, State-wide system of item ordering and acquisition. The Central of Resources then puts the Iz'kal on the waiting list for that item. This can also be done in person, going to the nearest Central of Resources office. An Iz'kal's place on the waiting list is based on how much the person requesting the item needs it when compared to others. If the system decides that you don't need an item, you won't be able to get it even if you're the only one on the waiting list.

How fast the waiting list moves depends on how fast the item is produced, which in turn depends on that item's relevance and the current needs of the society. Necessary items, such as food, are usually acquired at the moment of the request, and the citizen is then pushed back a reasonable amount of time on the waiting list before being able to request it again.

Some items are produced on request and delivered following the waiting list. 3D printing technologies and malleable polymers allow each citizen to build what he personally needs, accessing the best designs available in the system or creating his own. Each citizen receives a given amount of raw materials for these uses depending on the availability of resources, and must make do until more is available, reusing what he has if he wants to create something new, or giving it to someone else when he doesn't have use for it anymore.

A citizen that creates or builds technology designs through the system is cooperating with the State and thus with Iz'kal society as a whole, and considered a technocrat.

SHIP PROPERTY

Public transport is by far the most common form of transportation, but other types of vehicles can also be requested when time is of the essence or when travelling to rare locations. When in need of a vehicle, an Iz'kal must submit a request to the system, which will determine whether it is a reasonable request, and if so, which vehicle is the most adequate for the journey. Once the journey is finished, the vehicle will be returned and made available for someone else.

RECYCLING

The Iz'kal are a very eco-friendly and minimalistic species with a deep interest in preserving their natural resources. They strive to create items meant to last, and to be upgraded instead of replaced when possible. So, while it is possible for an Iz'kal to request a copy of every existing

item, the central service of resources will take this into account and the delivery of items deemed unnecessary by the system could be postponed for so long that the Iz'kal dies before having access to the requested item.

Asking for an update or a repair on an existing item is usually faster than requesting a new one, and while there is also a waiting list for this, it is favoured by the system as it saves resources.

Iz'kal frown upon excessive waste and material needs, sometimes avoiding Hyperlinks with those interested in such things. There is a strong social pressure to behave in a respectful and conservative manner towards the resources of all, and it is rare for an Iz'kal to request something he doesn't actually need. The absence of any kind of marketing in the entire State also contributes to this behaviour, since there is no reason for an Iz'kal to desire something he doesn't need. This keeps the waiting list processes streamlined and fairly fast.

ACCESS TO GOODS

In rare times of a scarcity of resources, such as droughts and wars, first necessity items are rationed and given sparingly to extend their availability. Priority will be given to those citizens that are most valuable to the preservation of the species, as determined by the system.

Iz'kal streets have almost no stores, and most items are purchased from the Central of Resources website or built at home. In contrast to the Corvo, for whom shopping is one of the most pleasant activities and a sign of social status, most Iz'kal consider the acquisition of items an undesirable necessity and will only do so when they must.

The Space Between

The empty space between the two seemed to have the consistency of stone.

They could feel the solidity of the air between them wherever they would go. When they had lunch together, in the distance between her sofa and his armchair, between his desk and hers. Even at night, they would only enter their bed through opposite sides.

Aaliyah could feel on her skin the icy touch of the mass that separated them.

Their voices entered through it, but they arrived distorted and empty. They became like the sound of voices of long lost friends in distant memories, but so distant that they became unrecognizable and like figments of imagination. Aaliyah always answered gently, but she could never remember what they actually said.

Her friends recommended her to join a majmoa. They warned her about the solitude of monogamy, but she did not feel like opening her heart to a multitude, and neither did he. Perhaps what was wrong with them could not be fixed by sharing it.

She was waiting. Routine would drag out each little task and make distant the memories of the past. It was only when a colony ship arrived at their planet did she realise that ten whole years had gone by - and that she didn't know what she had been waiting for. It certainly wasn't that ship, but she decided to get on it anyway.

He cried, for two reasons: to make her feel something about leaving him, and to remind her that there was once something between them that had been worth it. They didn't blame anything on the other. It would have been easier if she could hate him, but he didn't deserve to be hated.

Already on the ship, Aaliyah read the pamphlet again. It promised a new beginning.

But she wasn't so sure. Aaliyah saw the wormhole through the monitor. She felt as though the same pressure that crushed the dust specks that came to realise the whole of the Universe now took hold of her own heart. The promise of an unexplored wormhole exit could take her to a place so far away that it was possible that the light of her native star had not yet reached it.

The man that was sitting next to her encouraged her: they were going to make history. Perhaps they would discover worlds where other creatures shared their vision of life. Or maybe planets where the soil was so fertile that there was no need to cultivate.

Aaliyah smiled at the enthusiasm of the stranger who shared her enthusiasm.

But in an instant, the wormhole swallowed them whole. Their ship never made it back, and the ship sent after them never returned either. It was determined that the wormhole's exit was unsafe and any rescue was abandoned. A committee determined that it probably exited too close to a sun, but in reality, they had no idea.

Halim never married again. He lived the rest of his life in the house he had shared with her. And at times, he could still feel the space between the two.

THE STATE

"The Iz'kal are not governed by tyrants, yet they are not free. They oppress their fellow man and woman, and in the same way they feel oppressed themselves. It is the government of the behavioural coercion of the peers. An Iz'kal city feels like their Alhalam - still running, but not even itself knows why or what for. It just can't stop."

- Jiao Sheng, Corvo economist

The State is the concept around which the Iz'kal society is organised.

The State is not a nation or a high council. It's more accurate to say it is a social agreement - a set of rules that all Iz'kal agree to live by. And the most important rule of this system is that everybody makes the rules all the time.

The State is controlled by each and every Iz'kal citizen in the universe, with every inhabitant of every city and colony having the same voice in State-wide decisions. Thus, it is an absolutist government where power is shared by billions of citizens, where everyone has the same voice. A 'tyranny for everyone', as the Corvo comedian Xue Lin called it once.

Every State citizen - known officially as a 'Technocrat' - is entitled to propose and pass laws, technological advances and social rules by majority vote. This is made possible by Idealab - a massive database that stores every political proposal, technical design and social contract and also tallies the votes, opinions and status of every citizen.

The State was formed about 800 standard years ago, after the Iz'kal successfully rebelled against the Korian tyranny. As they exterminated their tormentors to the last one, the Iz'kal rushed to establish a government that made sure they would never be enslaved again - and that nobody would claim authority over their people ever again. Thus the State came to be, based on the ideas and treatises of various Iz'kal philosophers and rebellion leaders. The Iz'kal transformed from a hunter-gatherer society into an advanced totalitarian collectivism in less than a millennium.

Despite its bloody genesis, or rather because of it, the State remains the most peaceful political institution in existence. It is based on cooperation and the free sharing of knowledge, so its strengths lie in the scientific and social fields. Despite being well equipped against any future invasion, to prevent the Korian tragedy from happening again, the State gave very little attention to weapons development or military organisation. This changed when the Iz'kal met the Corvo and saw their borders and their sovereignty threatened for the first time in nearly a millennium; and now the State is rushing to improve, expand and strengthen its defences, which has sent shockwaves across all levels of Iz'kal society, and led many citizens to question the State's usefulness.

The Iz'kal founded their State at a very early stage of their society - in fact, the Iz'kal are at an early stage of their society even now. This is why the State seems simplistic, even flawed, to Corvo and Human thinkers; however, the State has worked perfectly and without changes for almost a thousand years - quite a feat for a flawed system.

WHAT IS THE STATE

In short, the State is the Iz'kal government, except this government has no leaders or hierarchy; everybody has the same vote, can propose and pass laws, and votes everything through their dedicated digital network.

The State is also the idea that incorporates everything Iz'kal related, from their society and culture to their government, from the planets they inhabit to their spacecraft and technological designs, and even their habitats in the worlds of other species. All of the above, including every Iz'kal living under the State's jurisdiction, along with any naturalised citizens of other species, is a part of the Iz'kal State; all of it is the State.

HOW THE STATE WORKS

The State is the organisational structure and system of governance of the Iz'kal society, in which all citizens take part as State administrators, under a hierarchy based on their expertise and hard data.

When an Iz'kal becomes actively involved in State management - which can be most of the time, depending on the individual's day job or his level of expertise - he is called a Technocrat. This term describes any Iz'kal citizen that is actively working to improve the State and Iz'kal society - that is, proposing or analysing new laws, bills and inventions. Since the State is a collective government, everybody has the right - and the responsibility - to be a Technocrat.

All Iz'kal citizens have free access to a huge digital network called the Idealab, where every citizen can input

their ideas for laws, technological designs, social innovations or anything that could improve their society. The automatic system organises each and every proposal by relevance, and then matches it to the needs of citizens all across the State. If many citizens ask for a design or look for a law resembling the one proposed, they can search among the archived systems by Idealab's easy to use, efficient indexing system.

As regards political organisation, the State is divided in Departments by subject and industry; there is, for example, the Department of Defence, the Department of Civil Works, the Department of Water Distribution, the Department of Performing Arts, the Department of Job Assignments and so on. Every Iz'kal city and settlement has its own set of Departments, which are in turn part of the Statewide Departments.

IDEALAB

The Idealab functions based on public interaction and collaborative design - that is, citizens provide themselves the designs of new buildings, inventions and scientific discoveries to improve society. These designs and proposals are defined as motions. Everyone can input a new motion into Idealab thanks to its open-access system, which everyone has access to; plus, any motion is free for everyone else to improve or modify, or turn into a better proposal. A massive vote decides which motions are produced, which happens almost instantly thanks to a highly mobile labour force, and primary and secondary sectors based almost entirely on automated machinery.

STEP BY STEP MOTIONS

Technocrats can put forward new motions to resolve existing problems or improve old systems. A motion must follow an acceptable scientific method approach to be accepted into the system; once approved, proposals are presented anonymously and reviewed by groups of experts. These groups of experts are automatically chosen by the idealab based on their trajectory and level of expertise in the required field; when an Iz'kal is called upon to vote on a proposal, he is bound by law to apply and participate.

When these proposals have been deemed viable at the technical level, they are distributed among the State Departments that might be affected by the changes proposed. The technocrats of these fields take into consideration how it would affect their work, and how their own field could improve the motion. These critiques or offers for collaboration are once again distributed. The team that originated the idea takes them into consideration and works upon them. They are usually joined by teams of other departments to create a multidisciplinary motion.

Once these improved motions have taken into consideration their implications at all levels, and the availability of the resources and labour needed to implement them, they are compared with other alternatives and the most effective one is applied.

All motions are open source at all times, and accessible through Idealab. This means that any other technocrat can build his own motion upon a proposed system, or perhaps request that the team already working on it takes into consideration some variable or idea the technocrat has come up with.

LAW AND CRIME

> *"The story of every criminal before his crime is the story of a victim of somebody else's crimes. The story of every criminal after his crime is the story of a victim of his own crimes."*
>
> *- Aliyah Saab, Iz'kal sociologist*

The need to enforce laws is almost unknown in Iz'kal society, which has never had anything resembling a justice apparatus. Crime is extremely rare in the State, being uncommon even in Iz'kal fiction.

In a society as emphatically connected as the Iz'kal, people are always aware of the feelings of others, and most problems can be tended to before they affect society. Still, there is no such thing as a perfect society, and certain individuals perform minor crimes - such as keeping items outside of their usage rights or having minor violent outbursts. These crimes are called hafua, 'lapses', and reported by other technocrats as soon as they become aware of them. The citizen that committed the hafua must appear before a commission whose job is to figure out the cause of his behaviour. Hafua convicts are treated as mental patients that require re-education, and there are many social workers whose job is to figure out a way to improve the patient's life through Hyperlink and psychology, allowing the patient to function along other technocrats, and ultimately return to society.

More serious crimes are usually due to strong mental illnesses that cannot be treated by social workers. Neuroscience is making big advancements in these areas, and most of the patients affected by mental illnesses can now be treated and restored to a normal brain function. Extreme cases, which are usually so out of touch with society so as to be considered irrecoverable, are eventually turned into voidwalkers, and many of them end up joining the Savak.

And then there are the true criminals - Iz'kal that completely renege on the State and its values for some reason, and retire to wild space to live as rebels or adventurers. These criminals are most feared by the State, as the vast majority of Iz'kal is incapable of comprehending such behaviour. For a lawful Iz'kal citizen, an individual that would rather live in anarchy and lawlessness is a dangerous, inexplicable madman. These extreme criminals are comparatively few, although 'one is one too many' as the saying goes.

THE SAVAK

The Savak - the closest there is to an Iz'kal police force - is an elite militia composed of voidwalkers, Iz'kal who have lost their ability to enter Hyperlink and have undergone an important physical and mental transformation.

Those that choose to join or are sent to the Savak are trained under one of the most rigid and demanding military systems in the Universe, taxing their physical and mental abilities to heroic levels.

The Savak are taught to forget and cut all ties with their past life; their individuality is erased even more thoroughly than that of the average Iz'kal, and they are given a single purpose in life: to defend the State.

The Savak have little to do in the peaceful Iz'kal society, so their missions deal mainly with border bandits, pirates, space gangsters, alien spies and, more recently, Iz'kal malcontents that decided to oppose the State with violence. The Savak are equally ruthless and coldly effective against all of these threats, showing no mercy or hesitation in dealing with a problem.

Although many Iz'kal fear the rigid moral code and lack of empathy of the Savak, most citizens accept their existence and agree that this is the best life for those that have lost their purpose. There is some risk of Savak soldiers abusing their power, but no one else is willing to fight the wars that the State must fight for the survival of all.

THE STATE DEFENCE FORCE

Despite its peacefulness, cohesion and organisation, the State does need a military. Millions of men and women serve in the Iz'kal army, officially called the State Defence Force, or SDF.

The SDF includes army, navy, and air force troops for planetside combat, and a mighty space fleet to protect the

SAVAK OPERATIVE

Proficient :: Teamplayer :: Voidwalker

Level 3 :: Iz'kal :: Ruthless
mov. 5 metres :: weight 69 kg :: height 172 cm

4	5	1	8

PHYSICAL STAT	8 (3)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	8 (2)

CLOSE QUARTERS	3 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	3 +

Decognitator

Neural weapon (It deals neural or ACS damage and ignores armour).

Crypsis Suit

Characters further than 20 metres away from him suffer one disadvantage towards actions against him that require line of sight. Ghost.

Bulwark

At the beginning of the round, he can choose an ally as partner. He can confront any actions that target them ignoring exhaustion.

If you've lost everything that matters, the State can provide you a suitable occupation. Defend it against internal and external threats, join the Savak force!

POLICE OFFICER

Defender

Level 1 :: Iz'kal :: Driven
mov. 5 metres :: weight 68 kg :: height 172 cm

3	4	1	8

PHYSICAL STAT	7 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (2)	MENTAL STAT	5 (1)

CLOSE QUARTERS	2 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	1 ++

Nobrainer

Neural weapon (It deals neural or ACS damage and ignores armour).

EM Shield

His armour value cannot be reduced or ignored by plasma or neural weapons.

Even lowly police officers of the State can be fast and furious when needed. Try to behave yourselves around them.

State against alien threats and to aid in the colonisation of wild territories.

The fact that the Iz'kal - a mostly peaceful, non-expansive society - have such large and mighty armed forces, is a paradox to many xenoscientists, and even sociologists within the State itself. One possible explanation is that the Iz'kal still haven't forgotten the horror of their centuries of slavery under the Korian, and remain on their guard by sheer racial memory. Another possibility is that their long time as Korian slaves altered their genes, giving them some tendency towards violence; proponents of this theory suggest that, were it not for the Hyperlink, their egalitarian society and their natural empathy, the Iz'kal would have become a very warlike species - as proven by the Voidwalkers, who become killing machines almost as soon as they are cut off from the rest of society.

The SDF follows the same rules as the rest of Iz'kal society - military designs, campaign tactics and rank organisation are all discussed and voted on through Idealab, with career soldiers having the prevalent vote in all decisions. However, there is a military rank within the organisation, corresponding directly to each soldier's measurable experience and knowledge. This military rank overrides the votes and decisions of Idealab, so as to allow for quick military actions without a long bureaucratic process. Those with more experience are allowed to give orders to younger or less knowledgeable soldiers, orders that must be obeyed without question.

For many centuries, the SDF has had little use except to wipe out a few primitive lifeforms that attacked State expeditionary forces. This all changed with the appearance of the Corvo, which put the whole SDF on alert against a possible attack from this new, untrustworthy alien civilisation. The situation got a lot worse a few decades later, when the Ravager arrived and half of the SDF was assigned to join the Corvo-Iz'kal Coalition.

Currently, the SDF is more active than ever before in the Iz'kal's long history, and war has at long last knocked at the State's door. Luckily, its soldiers were well-trained and well-prepared; all that's left to hope is that it is enough in the long run.

THE TECHNOCRAT DEFENCE STAFF

Although Iz'kal society has no hierarchies, some citizens of the State are far more versed in military tactics and campaigns than others. Of these, the most experienced form the Technocrat Defence Staff (or TDS), a group consisting of a few hundred career officers - those tied for the top spot in military skill across the whole Iz'kal population - that have the main vote, and an executive veto against other citizens, in matters of war and defence of the State against foreign threats.

The identities of TDS members are not known by the general public, but they are constantly Hyperlinked among themselves, making tactical decisions critical to the entire State at the speed of thought.

If one of the TDS dies, he is not replaced unless another citizen has achieved - by combat experience or military training - the same level of military ability, as judged by the Idealab system.

The TDS oversees the Iz'kal troops sent to serve at the Corvo-Iz'kal military coalition, but it's acknowledged as little more than an advisory body, whose decisions cannot override those taken by the Coalition's own (and species-mixed) High Command. This has led to many frictions between the Coalition and the TDS, which feel they are losing their authority and ability to take part in the Ravager war.

INTRA-MILITARY ESPIONAGE

As a consequence of its power struggle with the Coalition High Command, the TDS has unanimously voted to recruit and send secret informants to the Coalition itself, spying on their own soldiers - the first time such a thing has happened in the history of the State.

These missions are usually given to Ghyr agents - Human mercenaries working for the Iz'kal State - as they're undetectable from loyal Coalition soldiers and tend to have no qualms about spying on Iz'kal; plus, they can't be probed through Hyperlink. However, spies of any species are welcome in these missions, as long as they have proven their loyalty to the Iz'kal military.

DISSENT

> *"You are the only one qualified to decide how to live your life. Take a step, raise your arm in the air, and claim your freedom. You are an individual, not a gear of the State. Stand up. It is the time of change."*
>
> *- Karim El-Amin, Iz'kal political activist and member of the Guanchang*

Even in the totalitarian Iz'kal society, there are some groups and individuals who disagree with the State, and seek to leave it - or actively oppose it. These include anti-state rebels, space pirates, anarchists and, more recently, Hexian radicals and Corvo sympathizers.

ANARCHISTS AND RADICALS

Over the centuries, many dissident voices have sounded against the State and its absolute control of Iz'kal society, claiming for more individual freedom. These run the gamut from moderate objectors that, while happy with the State, suggest a discrete increase in personal liberties, to violent radicals that hack the Idealab system or put bombs in Iz'kal cities looking to bring the State down in flames. There have always been such groups, although they are small, few in number and easily dispatched by the Savak; however, the arrival of the Corvo a few centuries back has emboldened more and more malcontents to speak up, or try more aggressive ways to call the State's attention.

The main reason why Iz'kal dissidents have never succeeded is that they are actually not opposing anyone; as the State has no leaders, there are no tyrants to turn against. Thus, dissidence among the Iz'kal is mostly a matter of gradually changing the minds of people around, until the dissident Hyperlink is large enough to catch on to a larger sector of society. A few of these movements actually seek to obliterate the State entirely, regardless of how many lives it costs, and hope to force the Iz'kal to start again from scratch with a new system.

THE GUANCHANG

This radical group seeks to secede from the Iz'kal State and join the Corvosphere as a Corvo colony. The Guanchang admire the Corvo system and the individual freedom they enjoy; rather than being impressed by riches or luxuries, they want to achieve independence from social pressure and live as a sovereign state.

The Megacorps have already announced the Guanchang would be welcome to join the Corvosphere, even promising them sanctuary at Tiantang - at reasonably low prices - but the overwhelming majority of Iz'kal Technocrats voted against the Guanchang's secession. The point is, that is exactly why the Guanchang wants to secede - they don't want to have to ask anyone else. But they have to keep their attempts diplomatic, lest the Savak go after them.

Meanwhile, the Guanchang tries to sway public opinion so that other Technocrats vote for their secession; the problem is, the State fears that if the Guanchang is allowed to leave the State, soon other splinter groups would feel empowered to leave as well, which could mean the collapse of the State in certain entities. Currently, the negotiations are deadlocked - but neither side is above hiring freelance 'troubleshooters' to 'take care' of their opponents to tip the vote in their favour.

GH'ORB

The legendary astropilot Gh'orb used to be a hero of the State air force. She deserted after she was sent to fight in the Coalition; not, like so many others, because she was attracted by the Corvo lifestyle - but because she wanted to join and help Humanity against both the Corvo and Iz'kal. Gh'orb reneged from the State, abandoned the Coalition and went looking to join the rebellious Human Front. The State issued an order to capture her and warned everyone in the Corvosphere about the dangers she represented; they haven't managed to catch her yet, but they have indeed made her famous.

Currently, Gh'orb is a polarising legend for all three species, loved by some and despised by others. She may be the most famous freedom fighter in space right now, and half the universe is following news of her latest escape or the most recent rumour of her death.

She has been declared a dangerous terrorist by both the Corvo and the State, but she has also gathered hundreds of followers, who either cheer her on from their respective worlds; or seek her out to join her now famous squadron, 'The Grey Wings', and help the Human cause.

> Gh'orb doesn't reject anyone professing to be an ally, and that may prove to be her greatest weakness - she is too trusting. The Hwang Tong mob has already placed an undercover agent into her squadron, with orders to bring her back dead or alive - Honcho wants in on the reward.
>
> If someone helped this undercover gangster, they could partake on a huge reward from the Megacorps or the Tongs; conversely, if they found Gh'orb and saved her in time to help her join the Human Front, both Sada Thamp and Commander DeFort could feel very grateful towards such a person or crew.

FRINGE CRIME

Iz'kal space pirates, bandits and gangsters are not considered part of the State, although they try to affect it. These criminals are not much of a threat to the State, as they are quite rare; they have no real goals other than wreaking havoc at the State's borders, and the Savak fight them ferociously - and effectively - at every turn. Very few fringe criminals survive more than a few months in or against the State, but those that do briefly become folk legends... or rather, nightmares.

SMUGGLER

Space Affinity

Level 1 :: Iz'kal :: Crafty
mov. 5 metres :: weight 62 kg :: height 165 cm

3	3	0	-

PHYSICAL STAT	5 (1)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (1)	MENTAL STAT	5 (2)

CLOSE QUARTERS	2 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	2 -

Secret Hold

She gains one advantage towards hiding and searching actions.

In a universe with so many planets, colonies and uncharted worlds, smugglers fulfil an important task of intercultural pollination.

GH'ORB

Vexale 2

Level 2 :: Iz'kal :: Crafty
mov. 10 metres :: weight 68 kg :: height 175 cm

3	5	2	8

PHYSICAL STAT	8 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	9 (2)	MENTAL STAT	9 (3)

CLOSE QUARTERS	2 ++	STANDARD DISTANCE	2 -

Doorkicker

The attack doubles its base damage against characters with armour 1 or less OR it ignores 1 point of armour and gains one advantage in Standard Distance.

Gh'Orb's Suit

She can move flying, and she gains one advantage towards agility actions. Ghost.

Gh'Orb deserted the Iz'kal State to, of all things, help Humanity reach independence. Now she's trying to reach the Human Front while avoiding her newly created enemies.

THE IFF

The IFF, or 'Iz'kal Freedom Federation', is the most violent organisation ever known or created by the Iz'kal, and the greatest threat to State stability save for the Ravager invasion. Led by the K'aril Kahil order, a group of Kalivan radicals, the IFF is the longest-lasting terrorist group in the history of the State, having resisted attempts to quell it for more than 100 standard years now. Despite long periods of inactivity, the IFF always rises again - with a bombing here or a kidnapping there - to remind the Iz'kal they cannot rest easy for long.

The IFF seeks to disintegrate the Iz'kal State and instate a Corvo-like, free market government with a focus on the military. Their goal is to create a Grand Army of the Iz'kal to conquer other worlds and species as the Korian did to them centuries before; for the IFF strength, power, and occupation are the path to greatness, and the State's passivity is an affront to their beliefs.

Among other things, the IFF pushes for a stop to genetic modification and an extermination of all 'variant' Iz'kal subspecies, claiming that artificial evolution is a mockery of Kaliva's will and 'impure' Iz'kal are abominations that must be culled. This, of course, has severely limited the IFF's popularity at the Iz'kal colonies.

The K'aril Kahil order is always led by a hooded figure, self-identified as the Knight. Since the Knight has existed for almost two centuries, and his identity is unknown, most Iz'kal assume the hood and title are passed on from one anonymous leader to the next. The current Knight is no less bloodthirsty than his predecessors, and calls for nothing but the utter destruction of the Iz'kal State.

Despite the growing danger it represents to Iz'kal society, the IFF has virtually no support from the Iz'kal general public. It is currently seeking to swell its ranks by recruiting dissatisfied, bored Iz'kal youths, with the promise of 'excitement' and 'change'. IFF recruiters roam the Iz'kal major cities looking for a suitable candidate - usually a young Iz'kal of either gender that seems to suffer from job burnout or a general feeling of meaninglessness. Then the IFF agents approach the target away from his usual Hyperlink, offering a disguised 'new experience'. Those who show interest are led to a discreet meeting, and then to another; the meetings get progressively more serious, the rhetoric more flagrant, until the youths find themselves inducted in a political cult.

COUNTER-RECRUITMENT

There's an ongoing operation to counter the IFF's insidious recruiting tactics with a bit of subterfuge from the State itself. The Savak and State authorities are sending young agents to known IFF haunts, posing for suitable candidates. When IFF recruiters approach them, they pretend to be interested so as to be taken to the first meetings; if they confirm the operation is indeed backed by the IFF, they call in the Savak to dismantle it. So far, several dozen IFF recruiters have been found and arrested with this method - but many agents have died as well.

Since Savak agents cannot pass as normal Iz'kal youths - as they can easily be detected by their inability to enter Hyperlink - the decoy agents are volunteers from across the State. These volunteers may be freelance mercenaries or even civilians, chosen by their athletic ability and acting skills - a rare gift in the candid Iz'kal society.

Of course, the involvement of mercenaries is a double-edged sword; outside agents may not be all that loyal to the State to begin with, or could even be IFF's own double agents trained to detect law-enforcement moles in IFF recruitment drives.

THE SECRET TECHNIQUE

Savak agencies suspect the IFF recruiters use some form of Hyperlink brainwashing technique to turn inductees into fanatics - maybe a Kalivan divine gift, or an insidious psychological system. Whatever the means, it works, for the IFF is growing.

Abbil Baha, an engineer and law enforcement specialist, believes the State could stop IFF recruitments altogether by discovering their brainwashing techniques. Baha has pushed for the formation of a special squad consisting of low-power Ergon soulbenders, trained on Hyperlink perception and control. They plan to infiltrate IFF meetings, and then undergo whatever process they use. Assuming the agents resist the process, they would then return with intelligence on how to counter it.

The project is still a matter of debate with Savak authorities, as soulbenders are not a common resource and Hyperlink spies would be at a high risk of falling into enemy hands. At best, this would mean giving the IFF involuntary access to compromised intelligence; at worst, the agent could become a traitor and a fanatic himself. However, if an Iz'kal soulbender with great mental resistance and the right abilities volunteered for the mission, it could mean a green light to Baha's special force - and a mighty blow against the IFF.

THE KNIGHT

Kalivan 2

Level 4 :: Iz'kal :: Driven
mov. 5 metres :: weight 72 kg :: height 172 cm

5	6	2	-

PHYSICAL STAT	19 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	12 (3)	MENTAL STAT	8 (3)

HIT (DEX)	3 ++	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

The Knight's Sword

It ignores 1 point of armour. Instant. The card played by the target of this attack is changed to the Skill value of the attacker (limit once per confrontation).

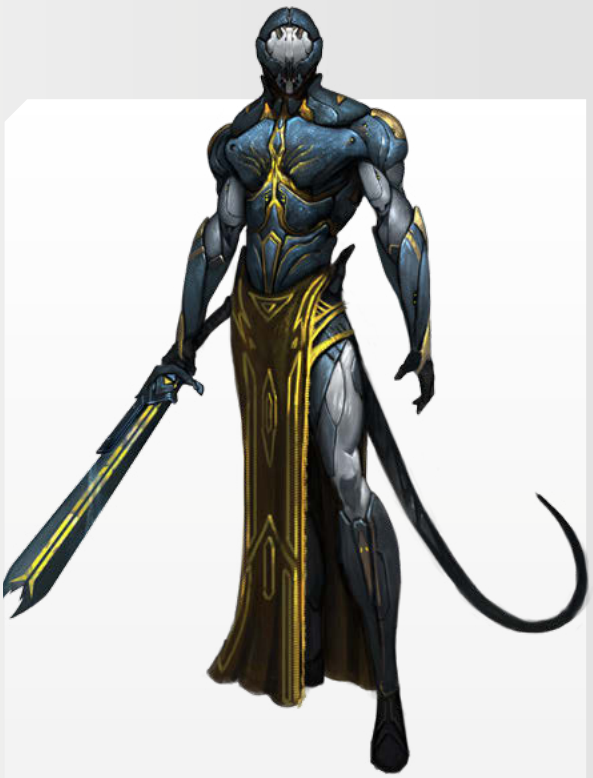
Counterattack

Immediately after dodging an attack, he can perform a Close Quarters action against the character who attacked him gaining one advantage.

Swift Like the Wind

He gains two advantages towards dodging or running.

Utter destruction of the State. That's the lofty ambition of The IFF movement and their leader The Knight, an - allegedly - 200 year old figure.



IFF RADICAL

Lone Wolf

Level 2 :: Iz'kal :: Reckless
mov. 5 metres :: weight 66 kg :: height 170 cm

4	3	1	8

PHYSICAL STAT	8 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	5 (2)

HIT (DEX)	3 ++	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

(2) Vibroblade

It ignores 1 point of armour.

(4) Ki Suit

Activated. He gains two advantages towards agility actions OR moves at twice his normal speed.

Radical

Activated. He and his opponent must play all their cards simultaneously and face down. Then, reveal them and resolve the confrontation. The winner of the confrontation increases their level of success to the next best level.

A single-minded goal is the ideal soil to grow devotion for God. Tread the IFF soldiers lightly, for they are true devotees.

THE FIREBIRDS

An unauthorised merchant group, a fleet of space pirates and a gang of smugglers - the Firebirds are all that and more. This band of interplanetary ruffians once tried to run pirated weapons and merchandise into the State, but were severely chastised by the army and the Savak; so, they have become enemies of the State out of revenge. Where they once targeted every space civilisation, they have now marked the State as their main prey.

Unable to sell inside the State, they have set up trading posts of pirated goods just outside the State's jurisdiction, where any citizen may visit but the State can do nothing against them; they also make hit-and-run strikes against State convoys, frontier bases and military outposts.

The Firebirds' leader, known as the Seer, is so cunning as to seem clairvoyant, having evaded capture by both the State and the Megacorps for decades now. His ship, known as the Mockingjay, is like a ghost that comes out of nowhere, strikes and disappears, without anyone being able to do anything about it.

The Firebirds are willing to take soldiers of the Iz'kal, or any other species, as long as they have the guts and the skill to run merchandise wherever trade is forbidden. Any interested mercenary that proves the ability to move a significant amount of credits through the black market without being caught by Iz'kal law may be considered for Firebird membership. And if the petitioner is secretly a traitor or a spy, rest assured - The Seer will know.

Anyone that provides help or information leading to the capture of the Mockingjay or its captain, the Seer, will be generously rewarded by either the State or the Megacorps.

THE FCS

The Seer may have become the enemy of the State out of personal revenge, but he's not the only one with a score to settle.

Kaheem Lahami, the Savak officer that first arrested - and almost jailed - the Seer, has become fixated with capturing the elusive criminal, and has mobilised an inordinate number of Savak and soldier forces to the State's borders to find the Seer and bring him to justice. This small army, which Lahami calls the Fringe Crime Squad, has become a legendary peacekeeping force, with an unbeaten record of arrests and at least two ongoing Netcasts about their exploits. Any Iz'kal law enforcer or Human Ghyr mercenary is welcome at the FCS, if he can prove his loyalty and competence - which is not hard, since the FCS famously offers no form of salary or compensation; every FCS agent is a committed volunteer. They are deservedly known as the best, most incorruptible police force in the universe - this alone is enough motivation for most volunteers.

However, the FCS' success and efficacy means nothing to Lahami as long as the Seer remains free. What began as duty became a matter of personal honour, and now it's a furious obsession that occupies Lahami's every breath and heartbeat. Lahami's men may be an elite police force, focused on cleaning the State borders - but their chief officer has only ONE goal, and he won't rest until he's dead - or the Seer is behind force fields.

LAHAMI'S LEDGERS

Lahami has always known that the Seer only keeps thwarting him because of his powerful soulbending abilities - he is all but omniscient, immune to any trap or ambush. As his obsession mounts and his efforts keep failing, he has sought other soulbenders - be them Hexians, like The Seer, or Vexalites, so as to try and outrace him, even if they cannot outsmart him.

Unfortunately for Lahami, the State has noticed his fanaticism and extreme measures, and have all but threatened to remove him from the FCS command. In a desperate move, Lahami did the unthinkable and went behind the State's back, hiring unauthorised freelancers - a secret squad of Ledger soulbenders.

Lahami knows he is playing with fire, and that Ledgers may betray him or the FCS as readily as they will help him - but Ledger soulbenders are masters of deception and stealth. The old Savak is currently looking for the most powerful Ledgers in the darkest corners of the universe, with only one common trait: they must be powerful enough to surprise a Hexian Prophet.

To lead these men, Lahami just freed Valko, a fearsome Raag serial killer that the State had sentenced to life in rehabilitation. Valko is known to be incredibly powerful - and incredibly unstable. If any Ledger soulbender joins Lahami's special force, he must know he will be working under someone even crazier and deadlier - which to a Ledger is an additional incentive, of course.

THE SEER

Hexian Prophet

Level 4 :: Iz'kal :: Resourceful
mov. 10 metres :: weight 62 kg :: height 163 cm

4	8	1	4

PHYSICAL STAT	16 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	9 (3)	MENTAL STAT	16 (1)

CLOSE QUARTERS	3 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	3 +

Decognitator

Neural weapon (It deals neural or ACS damage and ignores armour).

Orbital Suit

He can move flying.

Precognition

He always goes first in Initiative order and he cannot be caught by surprise. When he is not the triggering character, he gains two advantages.

The leader of the Firebirds is one of the most elusive figures in the universe. He uses his soulbending abilities to fool his enemies once and again.

FIREBIRD

Defender :: Ghost

Level 1 :: Iz'kal :: Loyal
mov. 5 metres :: weight 65 kg :: height 170 cm

3	3	1	8

PHYSICAL STAT	5 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	5 (2)

CLOSE QUARTERS	2 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	2

Firebird Blade

It ignores 1 point of armour.

Crypsis Suit

Characters further than 20 metres away from her suffer one disadvantage towards actions against her that require line of sight. Ghost.

The Firebirds are a band of interplanetary ruffians that trade black market goods outside of the State's jurisdiction. Lighthearted pros.

KAHEEM LAHAMI

Level 3 :: Iz'kal :: Driven
mov. 5 metres :: weight 64 kg :: height 165 cm

4	4	2	8

PHYSICAL STAT	5 (3)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (2)	MENTAL STAT	8 (3)

CLOSE QUARTERS	2 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	2 -

4 Kaheem's Rig 2 (LinkWave 300)

He can perform Hacking actions (causing 2 ACS damage).

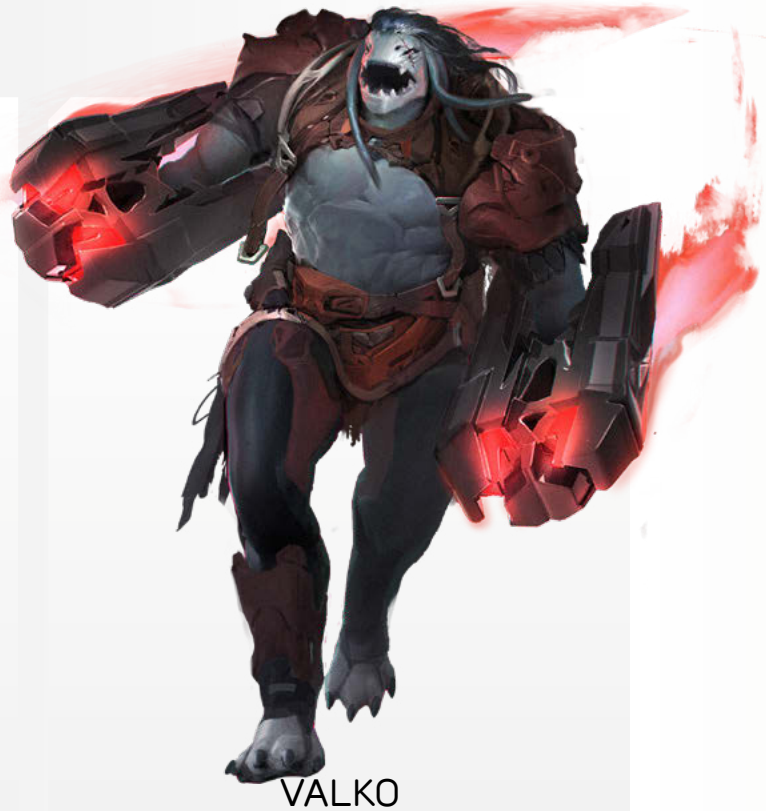
Strong Headed

He cannot be convinced to change his mind about anything.

Persuasive

He gains an advantage when trying to convince other characters.

Playing with fire is taken to another level by Kaleem Lahami: he's enlisting Ledger prophets to capture The Seer, a powerful Hexian soulbender.



VALKO

Ledger 3 :: Unstoppable :: Lone Wolf

Level 4 :: Raag :: Unpredictable
mov. 5 metres :: weight 122 kg :: height 215 cm

8	6	2	8

PHYSICAL STAT	16 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (3)	MENTAL STAT	16 (1)

HIT (DEX)	4 ++	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

5 Valko's powered fists

Instant (Grappling) The card played by the target of this attack is replaced by the top card from the deck (limit once per confrontation).

Charge II

His unconfronted running actions are considered passive, and his next Close Quarters action gains one advantage and causes 1 additional damage.

Epitome of all things Ledger, Valko has been recently freed by Kaheem Lahami to capture The Seer. He's unstable and murderous. What can go wrong?

THE WHISPER

A fleeting masked figure. A whipping tail. A scream. An order of murderous zealots. A fearsome shadow extending under the State.

The Whisper is a secret order of fanatical assassins that works for the destruction of the State. As opposed to the IFF and other rebellious militias, The Whisper is not interested in guerrilla warfare or wholesale massacre; their tactics are always individual, key targets, and their hits are always meant for the most far-reaching destabilisation with the least effort.

Nobody knows who funds the Whisper or what are its ultimate goals beyond toppling the State. Some assume it's financed by the Corvo, and that's as plausible an explanation as any. However, since the Whisper worships Ledger, it's also likely they have no funding, no patrons, and no true goals beyond chaos for chaos' sake.

Human Ledgers are known to contribute to the Whisper's cause, and their cunning mind and innate abilities to devise sophisticated plots against specific targets make them very valuable assets within the organization.

A widespread old Earth myth tells the story of a Human leader, the White Runner, who was allegedly assassinated by Ledger terrorists. They planted a bomb in a sewer right below the road where the Runner was driving. The blast was such that the car flew up to the moon.

Despite its evidently exaggerated nature, this myth illustrates the methods favoured by Ledger terrorists, and Whisper Humans have been known to try and imitate their ancient predecessors.

The Whisper is considered the fourth greatest danger to the State after the Ravager, the Corvo, and the IFF; and the Iz'kal are always looking for able-bodied mercenaries and freelancers that can provide help or information on the Whisper's schemes and strikes.

Very few individuals that go against the Whisper are ever heard of again, so recruitment against them is not that successful - but whoever manages to hurt the Whisper will be doing the State a really great favour.

WHISPERER

Ledger 2 :: Voidwalker

Level 2 :: Iz'kal :: Unpredictable
mov. 5 metres :: weight 57 kg :: height 159 cm

3	4	0	-

PHYSICAL STAT	3 (3)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (3)	MENTAL STAT	8 (2)

HIT (DEX)	2+	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Whisper Knives

Throwable. It ignores 1 point of armour. If the attack is successful, its target gains toxicity 1.

Martial artist I

She gains one advantage towards dodging and running actions. Instant. Immediately after dodging an attack, she can perform a Close Quarters action against the character who attacked her.

Members of The Whisper cause chaos and mayhem in the State with grace and elegance, rare traits among Ledgerites.

CULTURE

"Iz'kal storytelling is very strange to the other species. They rarely have main characters; the stories tend to focus on large groups of characters or society as a whole. Their tropes are also different, so aliens find them either unreadable or very interesting - there seems to be little middle ground."

- Extract from "A characterless society" by Gong Cixi, Corvo xenoscientist

Iz'kal culture in general is marked by one all-important trait - they give no value to the individual. Every custom, every work of art, every superstition - even their religious cults - all of it is made by, for and to celebrate the group, the community.

All forms of art - from short stories to decoration appliances, from songs to video games - are published through the Iz'kal collective design system, called Idealab, for free access to any citizen who can modify and improve these designs as they see fit.

THE ART OF LEARNING

Science and philosophy are the other two main forms of entertainment for the Iz'kal, who are encouraged to be curious from early ages, continuously engaged with the Idealab and the hyper-schools where learning is the main focus. They are fascinated by metaphysics and the whole process of understanding the Universe, life, the Gods, and themselves.

Many Iz'kal are granted special permissions to travel the Universe as hamla - groups of explorers looking for new places through the Labyrinth, or as missionaries trying to bring the Iz'kal ways to other species.

LIAL

Lial is a typical Iz'kal drink that has become representative of their species' culture and society. It is often sold in lial shops that line the streets of every Iz'kal settlement. Lial is a soothing, spicy and refreshing beverage made of the juice of a rare coral native to the Iz'kal homeworld. It can be consumed and enjoyed by most known humanoid species, and remains one of the best-known Iz'kal products outside of the State. Bever*Age, one of the largest Corvo consortiums and a NS branch, has launched a mass-produced lial-based energy drink, called LiaLoco, which remains one of the most popular drinks in all the Corvosphere.

The Iz'kal drink lial in all social situations - when engaging in hobbies, in parks, theatres and sports centres, and even during hyper school lectures.

ART AND MUSIC

"Thoughts are the expression of the mind. Dancing is the body's way of thinking."

- Naja Haje, Iz'kal choreographer

The lack of individualism in Iz'kal society doesn't mean there are not any forms of art or other personal means of expression. Yes, there are more orchestras than solo performers, and more art collectives than career artists, but all forms of art are well-valued in Iz'kal society. Yes, basic needs are taken care of first; but, as resource control allows for the Iz'kal people to enjoy an incredible quality of life all across the State, there's always time for an Iz'kal to enjoy art pieces and beauty. That is, if the rest of the majmoa agrees, of course.

ADOPTED SINGERS

The Iz'kal did not have natural vocal cords, and thus they were always fascinated with the singing of other sentients, especially Humans. Good singers from any species are always welcomed in an Iz'kal community, where they will be hosted by a different majmoa every day. In small towns, the arrival of a singer is a celebrated event and most people will attend their performances. In the big cities there are stadiums where thousands of Iz'kal watch concerts by Human or Corvo singers.

Having an excellent voice is one of the easiest ways for an alien to be accepted in the State as a citizen, and many are. Some alien communities are aware of it and some Corvo from the poorest neighbourhoods train their children's voices in the hope that they will be brought to a place where all their needs are taken care of. Many spend their savings on a one way trip to an Iz'kal colony, where they hope to be welcomed.

DANCING

Iz'kal are considered to be excellent dancers and have a great reservoir of varied choreographies and traditions. The Iz'kal have a form of instrumental dancing groups, known as ghaziwas, which are so beautiful to watch that they are often lured into the Corvosphere with the promise of riches and prestige, to play in galas and parties of the highest level.

There is a trend of Corvo infatuated with Iz'kal costumes and their fashion, a new-age confrontation resembling the political realities of their species. The trend is believed to originate from Corvo that believe that they are above political conflict. For this very reason, the State has hardened its emigration and movement laws - making it very hard for an Iz'kal to move to the Corvosphere.

FASHION

The lack of individualism in Iz'kal culture also implies there is no fashion industry - the Iz'kal don't feel any special pleasure about following trends in either music, clothing or pop culture, and dress however they like, with designs acquired from the collective system.

Many Iz'kal create their own clothes based on freely distributed designs, or develop their own if it's not too stressful for their acquaintances. Since Iz'kal sensibilities give a rather low priority to aesthetics against usefulness, the wildest clothing designs remain in the system, unused for years, and most Iz'kal clothing is utilitarian and simple.

Clothes are also useful - and used - to indicate belonging to a professional trade, philosophy group or age category, but in no case does this represent individual expression; the Iz'kal dress this way to help others identify them.

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

> *"Ergonauts try to pass Kalivans as an evil and selfish people, without understanding the bigger picture of their ideology. Kalivans want the best for themselves, and who doesn't? They have a clear understanding of reality and of people's true nature. Taking things for granted without having to work for them are symptoms of a sick society that preys on the goodwill of hard working people. Those hard workers must pay, with their work, for the laid back lifestyles of people that don't care enough to bring themselves to act."*
>
> *- Cho Bei, CEO of Wang Corp*

The Iz'kal are deeply religious; the best theologians come from the State. The Iz'kal have known and believed in the Gods for as far back as their history records go, and regard them with a mix of awe and gratitude for their power. They have spent countless centuries, texts and treatises studying and analysing the nature, purpose and reach of the Gods, and were in fact the first sentients to develop theoscience as a discipline. Iz'kal theoscience has several branches, which study various aspects of the Gods such as their powers, their material state (if any), their influence, their philosophies, their commandments, and so on.

Most Iz'kal worship Ergon, and actually believe He was the force responsible for delivering their people from the Korian tyranny centuries ago - the power of Community itself, enduring and overcoming violence and brute strength. For an outsider, Iz'kal history teaching can sound suspiciously like religious indoctrination.

No religion is forbidden in the State, but individuals that do not worship Ergon are strongly discouraged by their peers, and passively-aggressively forced into at least pretending to worship Ergon in social events, and avoiding the subject when in Hyperlink. In fact, non-Ergonauts are very rarely invited to Hyperlink with others; that must be why there are so many Iz'kal soulbenders of Hexia or Vexal - as many chose, or were forced, to become voidwalkers after being rejected by their peers.

Kalivans are scarce in the State, as Her doctrine of struggle and strength clashed with the basic Iz'kal nature, but after contact with the Corvosphere thousands of Iz'kal are converting to the new religion, expecting it will give them the power the State has been keeping from them.

COLLECTIVE AND INTRINSIC

There are two main schools of thought regarding the Gods in the Iz'kal State.

The first theory, and the most accepted by far, is that the Gods are collective entities; that is, thought into existence by the values and opinions of millions of sentient beings. In other words, the Gods are belief itself, given existence by psychic power alone. That's how collectivists explain Ergon's supremacy over all gods - he is fed by communitarian thought itself. By the same reason, collectivists believe the Iz'kal species is sacred because of its ability to join minds and think up something that's greater than the sum of its parts - just like the Gods.

In fact, collectivism would already be an accepted law were it not for the many supporters of the theory that the Gods are Intrinsic; that is, independent, living beings of a superior rank to mortals, with such psychic power that it seems divine to those who contact them. Intrinsicists believe collectivism is just superstition, and that any being with the power of a God has to be a knowable, physical - and likely mortal - entity, even if its tremendous might makes it appear like a timeless metaphysical force to lesser beings.

THE NECROMANCER

The mightiest soulbender in the State, Holy Avatar of Ergon and Prophet of the Collective, is the Necromancer, the closest thing in the Iz'kal State to a celebrity.

THE NECROMANCER

The Necromancer has a Mortal form and an Ascended form. They share damage and have Faith 4. Once per round they can use one of the following:

Atonement: Action. Target a character not in normal health. He must play a card and add his Faith, if the result is 10 or higher he removes all of his damage, else he dies.

Healing Surge: Instant. Remove a total of 4 damage of any kind from friendly characters.

Ascension: Instant. Suffer 4 neural damage, become Ascended until the end of the Round.

MORTAL

Ergonaut Prophet :: Defender :: Master

6	12	1	

HIT GRAPPLE	11 (2)	MEDICAL	14 (3)	INITIATIVE	12 (3)
ATHLETIC	7 (2)	SURVIVAL	7 (3)	CUNNING	12 (3)

HIT (DEX)	2+	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

God's Will

During the maintenance phase, he discards 4 neural damage if he is not Traumatised.

Instant. Once per confrontation, he may use Judgement against his opponent without suffering neural damage.

Undying Spirit

Forced instant. As soon as he becomes Bleeding Out, he becomes Ready, and Ascended until the end of the Round.

ASCENDED

Ergonaut Prophet :: Defender :: Master

	12		

HIT GRAPPLE	19 (3)	MEDICAL	14 (3)	INITIATIVE	16 (3)
ATHLETIC	14 (3)	SURVIVAL	17 (2)	CUNNING	22 (2)

HIT (DEX)	4	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Ascended Form

He ignores 4 final damage per attack, as well as all damage penalties. If he suffers physical damage, it is converted to neural damage.

During the maintenance phase he discards 2 physical damage.

Divine Force

Action. He attacks an area 4 metres in diametre up to 20 metres away, which can be confronted as a projectile. It causes 3 physical damage and 3 unpreventable neural damage to affected characters.

There are many prophets of Ergon in the State, and there's no single 'leader' of Iz'kal religion, as an Ergonaut would never claim any kind of authority. For a powerful enough Ergon Soulbender, just believing himself a leader would strip him of his power. Nonetheless, the Necromancer is known and admired by everyone in Iz'kal society, not only for his devotion and his many recorded feats, but also because he alone has been granted the greatest of powers: for a few days every standard planetary season, the Necromancer has the ability to bring the dead back to life.

When the date arrives, millions of worshippers input requests for an appointment with the Necromancer through Idealab; those the system deems most worthy or needed are allowed to journey with their beloved dead to the Prophet's Temple in Al'ameen, where he reviews each case and, if possible, begs Ergon for a chance to restore the petitioner's life. Only citizens dead before their time are allowed into his presence - i.e., those killed by accidents, violence or serious diseases. An Iz'kal that dies of old age cannot receive the Necromancer's blessing.

If the Necromancer succeeds at a resurrection, it is seen as cause for great celebration; but he has also been known to fail, which is always interpreted as the will of Ergon - the community was better off if the person stayed dead. This chance that it will fail actually keeps many people from attempting the process, anticipating the shame should Ergon reject their dead.

Other than his resurrecting miracles, the Necromancer has many Ergonaut powers, which he displays for the faithful so as to keep the faith alive.

There is a plot to assassinate the Necromancer by the Iz'kal Freedom Federation, a rebellious anti-State terrorist group; anyone who learned of the plot and saved the Necromancer's life would certainly become a hero of the State.

THE HEXIAN MOVEMENT

There is also a growing Hexian movement in the State, which understood the arrival of the Corvo as a warning from the universe - a warning to change the policies of the State before it's too late.

Hexians claim for the State to restructure itself and imitate the Corvo hierarchy of management boards and mass-produced new discoveries, so as to be able to compete with the voracious economy of the Corvo. If the State doesn't learn from its rivals, the Hexians insist that the Corvo will defeat them everywhere and soon the Iz'kal will be confined to a handful of inhabited worlds, doomed to become absorbed into the Corvosphere or disappear.

The Hexian movement has existed for almost 200 years now, but it hasn't managed to turn the State around as it would like. Now, with the appearance of the Ravager and the founding of the Coalition, the movement sees an opportunity to make the State understand the power and ruthlessness of the Corvo.

The current Hexian leader, the Prophet Kassima Lahan, is a passionate woman, adamant in her beliefs even to a soulbender's standards. And like all Hexians, she treats her beliefs as scientific evidence. Prophet Kassima is convinced that the Corvo are the greatest danger to the State, far more than the Ravager, and that they must be actively stopped, not invited to cooperate.

The Hexians have always believed that the Corvo are hatching a secret plot to betray their truce with the Iz'kal State, ever since both species met. Every few decades, some prophet will arise claiming that he has seen evidence, revealed directly by Hexia, of 'the centuries-long Corvo scheme'. The State has never given any serious thought to this conspiracy theory, mostly because it is a proven fact that the Corvo are waiting their chance to betray and pounce on the Iz'kal since day one; the point of disagreement is the State's passive approach to the issue, where Hexians believe it demands an aggressive retooling of Iz'kal society. A couple of times it got so serious it prompted violent demonstrations, and almost led to civil war; and it always starts with a Hexian soulbender getting a revelation of the Corvo's 'evil secret plot'.

HIM

This is one such time. She'ena, a Hexian Soulbender, received vivid images of a secret meeting between several Corvo figures and a 'Hidden, Immortal Master' (or HIM) that has plotted to conquer Iz'kal space and smother the State ever since the two species first encountered each other. She'ena's vision believes her mission means that the Corvo are poised to strike right now, while the Coalition is busy fighting off the Ravager.

The State is, as always, ignoring the signals, but She'ena doesn't want to start a revolution - she intends to gather proof. Since the State Intelligence Department won't help, she intends to recruit her own spies in the name of Hexia. She'ena's visions have pointed her to Wang, the shady Megacorp behind all Corvosphere telecommunications and technology; unbeknownst to her, the HIM of her visions could very well be the Xuelin conscience.

If a brave mercenary, preferably a Hexian Human or Corvo, could infiltrate the upper echelons of Wang Corp to obtain proof of HIM's existence and his secret plot, the Hexians would have a good case to try and change the State's mind once and for all.

KASSIMA LAHAN

Hexian Prophet

Level 3 :: Iz'kal :: Astute
mov. 5 metres :: weight 65 kg :: height 170 cm

4	7	0	-

PHYSICAL STAT	6 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	9 (3)

HIT (DEX)	1	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Charismatic

She gains one advantage towards social interactions when using her voice.

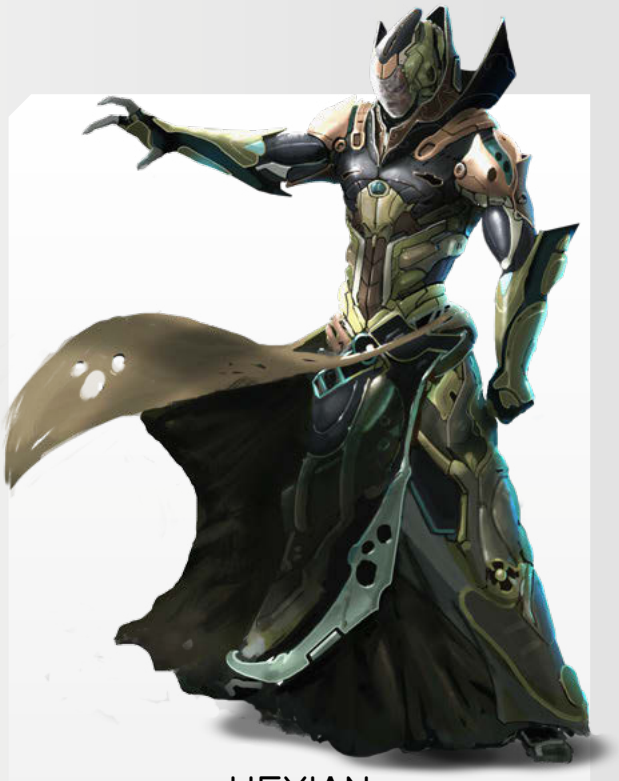
Rational

She can only be convinced with facts. She is immune to dialectics, and she gains one advantage to determine whether something has been fact checked.

Subjugation

Action (Mental). She suffers 3 neural damage and targets a character within 20 metres, with one advantage if her Faith is higher than her target's, and reducing her target's Mind by 1 per level of success until the end of the scene. If his Mind is reduced below 1, she gains absolute control over him.

Doom and gloom are in the future of the Iz'kal species, if we believe in the "prophecies" of the Hexian Movement and their leader Kassima Lahan.



HEXIAN

Hexian 1

Level 1 :: Iz'kal :: Strategist
mov. 5 metres :: weight 66 kg :: height 169 cm

4	5	2	-

PHYSICAL STAT	5 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (2)	MENTAL STAT	6 (2)

CLOSE QUARTERS	2+	STANDARD DISTANCE	1-

(2) Diaperer

Neural weapon (It deals neural or ACS damage and ignores armour).

(3) Rig 2 (LinkWave 100)

He can perform Hacking actions (causing 2 ACS damage).

Hexians want the best for Iz'kal society, but they consider it unfit to make decisions. They have a clear idea of what the State should be, and won't stop until they apply it.

TECHNOLOGY

"When you treat a society like a computer, and when you run things with algorithms instead of your conscience, you come across a society that spends no effort whatsoever to help minorities, and abandons them as it only cares for the greater good."

- Kalam El-Maham, Iz'kal activist, working with patients affected by rare diseases

The Iz'kal are the most advanced species in the universe, both socially and technologically. They have learned to efficiently put the greatest technical advances in the service of their well-being, more so than any other species on record, with eco-friendly, effective, easy to use, controlled tools that focus on improving the quality of life of citizens and at the same time respect the natural balance.

And they owe it all to centuries of tyranny under one of the cruellest and most backward species in history.

The Korian species, who enslaved the Iz'kal centuries ago, owned unbelievably advanced technology of unknown origin, and the Iz'kal gradually mastered it as the Korian subjugated and tortured them. Learning to harness their torturers' tools, the Iz'kal rebelled and annihilated the Korian, after which they adopted Korian technology as their own.

The advanced science that the Iz'kal inherited included advanced space flight, digital networks, high-tech 3D printing and item construction, incredibly advanced genetic manipulation and environment control, as well as limited applications of artificial intelligence.

GENETIC MANIPULATION

The greatest advance of Iz'kal science, and the one they're best known for, is their ability to manipulate DNA structures. Given the proper materials, Iz'kal can freely play with and modify the genetic structures of any living being.

This has allowed the Iz'kal to fully control their food, creating super-products that provide the best nourishment possible with the least resource consumption. All Iz'kal citizens have free access to these superfoods, and even in times of famine and rationing, the poorest Iz'kal has a far better nutrition than the richest Corvo.

Genetic manipulation has also allowed the Iz'kal to eradicate most genetic diseases, and to weaken viruses and bacteria to the point they are not a problem anymore. In short, the Iz'kal are all but immune to most kinds of illness.

Finally, the Iz'kal have achieved the ideal point of evolution, where they only need to analyse a new environment, study its pros and cons and work a few weeks in a lab to make themselves capable of inhabiting it. This effectively means the Iz'kal can colonise and inhabit virtually any kind of life-sustaining environment with only a little bit of previous scientific research.

DIGITAL NETWORKS

Using the advanced information technologies of the Korian - which they used only to warn each other of conquerable planets and such news - the Iz'kal developed a powerful, State-spanning infonet. Although their natural Hyperlink somewhat reduced the need for social networks, their internet is invaluable to share information and processing power from one end to the State to the other.

Currently, the largest and most powerful digital network in the State is the one used for Idealab, the universal centre of idea management where every citizen can take part and cooperate with the State government.

FREE BUILDING

Iz'kal technology is inextricably linked to its economy; one would not be possible without the other. Thus, the community economy that the Iz'kal have achieved owes it all to their capacity to create any item from scratch, from any blueprint, using polymer-based, cheap material. Any Iz'kal that has an idea for an engine, building or item that could improve their life, needs only to submit the design to Idealab and wait for authorisation to construct a working model to test the design. Many of these test models end up becoming common household items across the whole of Iz'kal society; those that don't, remain on the system to be studied, improved and eventually produced under another form.

The lack of ownership on such an endless creative engine would crash any market outside the Iz'kal State - this is the main reason why the Corvo fear Iz'kal economic penetration, and also why the Iz'kal want to spread their economic system to other species.

One of the most important goals of the Corvo Megacorps in their economic war against the State is to take over Idealab and Iz'kal free production facilities, making them a privately-owned system and charging for its use.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The Iz'kal also have the best robotic science in the universe, boasting unmatched advances in cybernetics, from limb replacement to actual artificial sentience. Self-aware drones are a common sight in the State, used to oversee everything from manufacturing facilities and Idealab server nodes to streetlights and library archives.

Out of simple caution, the Iz'kal have limited the ability of self-aware systems, making them unable to acquire sentience beyond a certain point. As a result, most State AIs are little more than automated processors, with just enough initiative to choose the best way to obey externally given orders.

This doesn't mean that Iz'kal AI technology is limited; the State is indeed capable of producing fully aware drones, and the proposal to mass produce AIs has been submitted to the Idealab thousands of times by thousands of citizens, only to be rejected time and again by the majority, which consider the State doesn't need intelligent machines, and that the risks far outweigh the asset.

TERRAFORMING AND WEATHER CONTROL

Another technology that the Iz'kal learned to develop far beyond the uses the Korian were giving it - mostly warfare, of course - was the ability to alter the ecosystem.

The Iz'kal have atmosphere-cleaning tools and soil-fertilising techniques that are quantum leaps ahead what any other species currently have, and guard these techniques jealously. With Iz'kal technology, it is possible to turn a barren wasteland into fertile soil in a few months, and to clean a radioactive atmosphere in less than a year. It can also control rain seasons, as well as cold or warm weather. Many Iz'kal ecoscientists maintain that the greatest fear of the Corvo is Iz'kal terraforming, as it could make all colonies independent from the Megacorps, and eventually end all monopolies on energy processing.

However, the Iz'kal use this technology sparingly, not wishing to tamper too much with natural environments, and as a general rule colonising only planets that are relatively friendly to life forms to begin with. This always requires minor environment tweaking anyway, and Iz'kal technology is more than up to the task.

WEAPONRY

The Iz'kal have very advanced weaponry, with a very significant difference from Corvo or Human armament: Most Iz'kal weapons are neural, which means they are equipped to emit an electromagnetic wave that disrupts the synapses of living beings, causing a short-circuit in nervous response without physically hurting the target.

Neural payload is clean, quick and rarely lethal, which allows Iz'kal to win battles with no casualties and no fuss. There are some investigations into claims that neural weapons cause permanent brain damage, but so far this type of weapon remains the most peaceful in the galaxy.

The Iz'kal also use plasma and ballistic weapons, but to a significantly lesser degree than neural guns. Yes, they are far more expensive to make, but the State's community economics place no resource disadvantage in mass-producing rare weaponry.

ORGANIC DISINTEGRATORS

For the past few decades, technocrats have been working on a specific wavelength for neural weapons to disrupt the molecular cohesion of carbon-based organic matter, effectively achieving the disintegration of living beings. The technology turned out feasible, and several tests have proven it relatively safe to use in combat; the only reason the State hasn't approved it for military use is the Technocrat's uneasiness at unleashing such a weapon into the universe. So far, the organic disintegrator remains nothing more than a blueprint, but many Corvo spies and terrorist organisations are looking to steal the data and put one - or a few - together.

BUILDINGS

For all the technological skills the Iz'kal learned from their early conquerors, they developed their greatest advance mostly on their own - and that's the very places they inhabit.

ECO-ADAPTIVE HOUSING

With the Iz'kal's concern for the environment, their terraforming abilities and their advanced science, it goes without saying their house designs are always adapted to whatever world or terrain they build them in. The Iz'kal have technology to adapt any house to any land or climate, with houses designed to withstand cold, heat, storm, dust, alien attacks, acid, plasma fire or several of the above at once.

This has helped the Iz'kal to set up peaceful and prosperous colonies in places that would be considered uninhabitable by other species, even the hardy Corvo. However, it still wouldn't be possible if those special houses were not part of the Iz'kal greatest engineering achievement - Zaaki-Waha cities.

ZAAKI-WAHA CITIES

Planets have limited resources, and the Iz'kal have managed to make the best of the environments of their colonies, building smart cities, efficiently managed by highly specialised teams.

Although very expensive to build, these cities, dubbed Zaaki-Waha, have proven to be the most cost-efficient way to live for big communities in the long term. The buildings recycle all the waste their occupants generate and their industrial parks generate an almost organic symbiosis between factories, bringing the usage of raw materials to a minimum. Public transport is constantly evolving to better suit the needs of the citizens, and while it might be confusing for a newly-arrived visitor, the neural webs that the Iz'kal form through their Hyperlink allow them to manage the apparent chaos with ease.

Water is stored in centralised deposits, and energy is usually generated with a well balanced mix of solar and geothermal energy, coupled with nuclear fusion during periods of low light. The water tanks are used as batteries, pumping the water up when there is an excess of energy generation and allowing it to flow down again when there are energy shortages.

Everything in a Zaaki-Waha serves a purpose, and the constant monitoring of resources, citizens, and the environment allows the automated systems to take care of almost every problem without any assistance. Most routine tasks are performed by robots; the only non-robotic workers are police officers and archivists that constantly study the workflow of the machines, seeking ways to improve them. After many years, the systems have been almost perfected in most colonies, but Iz'kal leave no stone unturned in their quest for efficiency.

But what allows a Zaaki-Waha to function as well as it does is, mostly, the cooperation of its inhabitants; every Zaaki-Waha is like a large - admittedly very large - house or building, with its streets, parks and apartments playing the part of gardens, corridors and individual rooms. Everyone at a Zaaki-Waha is, at least figuratively speaking, a part of the same majmoa, and since most maintenance work on the city is automated, its inhabitants have a lot of free time, which they use to think, improve and manage their living conditions, proposing new and better ways and methods through the local Idealab.

HISTORY

"They are a species whose only achievement has been to kill the hand that fed them. It appears that killing off enemies and those that think differently is a characteristic of all governments, regardless of the species."

- Di Engun, CEO of Nation's Solution

The Iz'kal began their existence as primitive amphibious lifeforms in the world of Al'ameen, and grew to be the dominant species of their world thanks to their incredible ability to communicate telepathically with each other through their Iz head appendages.

Many xenohistorians, particularly among the Corvo, argue that the Iz'kal had no real history or evolution, as their predestined development was both stunted and accelerated by the Korian invasion, which in only a few centuries gave space technology to a species that hadn't even learned to handle an industrial age. As a result, the Iz'kal have a unique approach to technology and social organisation. Having the tools to dominate and transform their world, they are still a humble species with a deep respect for nature; and having the resources and technology to expand and conquer any number of worlds, they have chosen to live in relatively small, population-controlled communities. Thus, even though they didn't 'earn' their social and technological progress by actually developing it, they have proven to be what is perhaps the most advanced and enlightened society in the universe.

THE KORIAN

A thousand years ago, when the Iz'kal were a primitive, pre-literate species still in the dawn of civilisation, newly arisen to walk the land from their aquatic origins, they were attacked by the Korian, a powerful and brutal species that came to their planet from outer space.

The Korian were a strong species of conquerors that travelled through the Labyrinth taking whatever they desired from wherever they landed, with little to no regard for the biosphere of those places. They had a monarchic system based on very rigid and backwards laws that disregarded the rights of their own people and of course considered all other species as nothing more than insects in their soup.

And they created Iz'kal civilisation.

Not much is known today about the Korian, but they seem to have been a post-literate species, as it is a requisite for technology development.

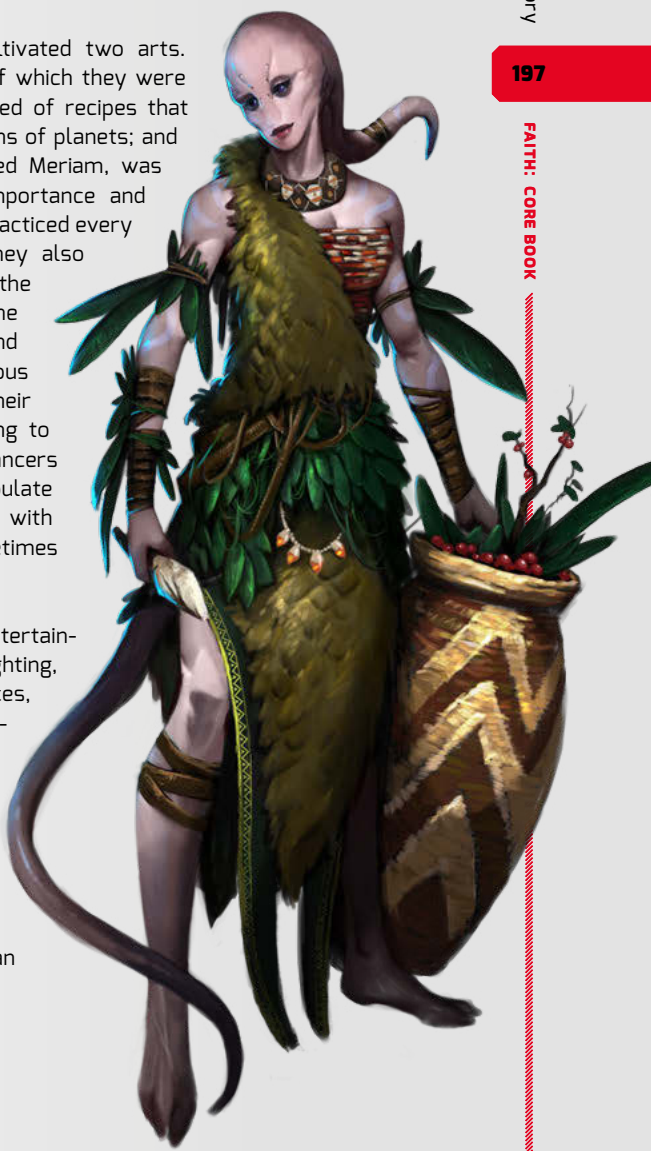
They are thought to also be post-industrial and post-technological. As learned from archaeological evidence and as told by Iz'kal witnesses that survived their yoke, the Korian did not understand their own technology, nor did they know how to create new devices or even replace the existing ones. Their devices worked through voice commands, and they had powerful self repairing systems, so that they needed little maintenance.

The Korian were very comfortable with their ways and had no real interest in developing further, with only a few rare cases of individual Korian studying any kind of science or engineering. On the whole, Korian technology allowed them to enjoy all the pleasures of life as they saw it: eating, sleeping, fornicating, and warring.

They did not keep records, data or any kind of archives, nor did their machines or computers, which had only kept the code they ran on. Therefore, there is no history to be studied; all that is known is what the Iz'kal survivors left behind in the shape of stories - stories clearly tainted with hate. The Iz'kal were a preliterate species at the time of Korian domination, and it took them a long time to reach literacy. In that time, most of the Korian and Iz'kal history had died.

The Korian only cultivated two arts. Their culinary trade, of which they were very proud of, consisted of recipes that used spices from dozens of planets; and their martial art, called Meriam, was a matter of great importance and devotion, which they practiced every day of their lives. They also became intoxicated by the dancing rituals of the Iz'kal and would spend their long and copious meals watching their slaves dance. According to some records, the dancers were ordered to copulate after the performance, with their masters sometimes joining them.

The Korian had no entertainment apart from fighting, watching the Iz'kal dances, and having the Raag - another of their slave species - fight one another in combats to the death. They had no television or music - nothing. There are no pictures or drawings of the Korian



either, as they did not allow any of the species they had enslaved to develop their own arts.

Although modern technology allows the reconstruction of the Korian likeness from bones (with proper cloning as a possibility), the Iz'kal are still in mourning; and bringing the Korian back to life is unthinkable, though many Corvo from anti-Iz'kal groups would love to get their hands on some Korian genetic material.

The true origin of the Korian is completely unknown. Korian that lived in the times of the Iz'kal probably had no idea as well. There are several theories about this and it is a favourite subject in Iz'kal historian circles.

It's possible that the Korian simply lost interest in progress, didn't see the necessity of further developing their technology, and in time left all of it in the hands of their primitive automated systems. After that, they ended up focusing on violence and conquest, as such traits would have hindered their progress towards such technical expertise, or at least would have kept them inside their home planet.

More popular and recent theories, based on comparative studies of their technology, make experts believe that the Korian did not actually develop it on their own; they had to either steal it or receive it from another species - or an earlier Korian civilisation, now extinct. All of the machines that are left use the exact same type of hardware and software; this is unusual for a civilisation as large as the Korian, seeing as they would likely own some updated systems. It seems like all of their technology came out of the factory on the same day.

There is also no archaeological evidence of previous technology, or the factories needed to build it, on any of the Korian worlds. While factories could have been lost during their post-industrial age, some archaeological remains would have emerged by now. Some counter this by saying that the Korian come from an unknown planet from which they built all of their technology (or that they perhaps created in space, in a fashion similar to the Corvo). This is supported by the lack of archeological evidence of Korian presence on any planet for more than a few hundred years.

THE UPRISING

When the Korian landed on Al'Ameen, the Iz'kal were easily subjugated and enslaved, and solemnly endured every punishment and hardship their masters put them through.

The Korian used Iz'kal as servants and pets, finding them harmless as they lacked, to their eyes, the "gift of talking" as they called it. The Korian tended to feel threatened by species that could talk and, if the stories told by Iz'kal are to be believed, they killed off several species they found during their travels for this very reason. However, back then, Iz'kal could only communicate through Hyperlink; they had no evolutionary need for vocal cords, which made them mere animals to the Korian.

It was only after the Iz'kal regained their freedom and built their State that they genetically manipulated their genome to develop vocal cords, supposedly to better communicate with alien species, but some xenosociologists have suggested that they wanted to overcome the feeling of inferiority that the Korian had imposed upon them.

The Iz'kal were the submissive slaves of the Korian for two centuries, during which they went through all kinds of vexations and tortures without a single Iz'kal going rogue or revealing their secret telepathic language and intelligence. They waited and learned from their new masters while serving them meekly, finding solace in the secret connection they shared with each other, burying their hatred and preparing for the moment when they could retaliate.

Some historians do not believe in this romanticised idea. They agree that it had to be rare for an Iz'kal to betray their species looking for a position of favour from the Korian, but some theorise that the Hyperlink was made mandatory so that each individual Iz'kal was at all times part of the common Iz'kal mind, making the individual needs of each Iz'kal seem insignificant. Those that tried to turn on their own would then have to leave the link-mind and be killed by the rest of their kin.

Twenty generations of Iz'kal lived and died as slaves, hoping that their sacrifice would increase the chances of survival of the species in the long run. For them, a species in the bronze age, the machinery of the Korian was nothing short of magic. They studied it nonetheless, understanding that in it lay the power of their masters. The Korian had no interest in understanding technology, only in using it, and they saw the Iz'kal interest in it as an animal's curiosity. It did not take the Iz'kal long to know more about the technology than their masters.

Once they knew enough about the technology and they outnumbered the Korian, the moment came for them to strike back. All the anger and hatred that had been suppressed, pulsating like a living being deep within their shared mind, urging them to fight, finally surfaced. It erupted with the silent scream of millions of voiceless souls, a wail that froze the blood of the Korian - a promise of retribution and death. That moment is now known as the Uprising.

When the Korian finally surrendered, no mercy was shown to them. The Iz'kal lusted for vengeance, their anger feeding those around them, unquenchable and too loud to be ignored. The Korian were brutally massacred down to the very last one. Those who tried to hide were hunted and those who tried to run were chased down.

Despite the sudden rebellion that caught the Korian unaware, the Iz'kal paid a high price for their freedom: almost half their population died, and most Korian technology was destroyed. Cities were levelled to the ground, space stations shattered, and many colonies starved to death before the Iz'kal could put themselves back together and use the few remaining Korian spaceships to go save them.

It would take three hundred years for the Iz'kal to properly understand the complex technology left by the Korian. In half a millennium, they went from the bronze age to an intergalactic empire. It was only because they were such a united and selfless society that they were able to avoid internal battles, which could have left them divided and broken across the galaxy.

Today, the Iz'kal stand tall and proud upon the civilisation of their old oppressors, a bloody reminder of the fate of any species that might try to take away their sovereignty.

THE STATE

As soon as the Iz'kal eliminated the Korian species, they formed the State almost instinctively. Having never experienced any kind of organised society other than leaderless, peaceful communities, they simply used the technology from their old masters to extend this social organisation to the whole of their species, maintaining their collectivist outlook, which had only been strengthened during their silent enduring of Korian tyranny.

The State was born almost as the Uprising ended, when all Iz'kal felt and celebrated their victory and the freedom of their people through massive Hyperlinks all across their territory. But it was not called 'the State' until much later.

For many decades, the Iz'kal had to rebuild, regroup and reorganise over the ruins of the costly war that won them their freedom. They had little time for science, art or historical records; in fact, that's mostly why currently there are no reliable, detailed accounts of the Korian or the Uprising. In time, even though they hadn't completely understood Korian technology, the Iz'kal achieved peace and some communication between their surviving colonies. They had time to sit and reflect upon what had happened, to create national holidays, to retake worship of Ergon, and to study their own history.

Aadam Sahir, considered the greatest Iz'kal thinker who ever lived by many non-Iz'kal historians - as the Iz'kal impose no such titles - lived during this time.

Sahir grew in an isolated majmoa, on a farm in one of the surviving colonies of the Korian dominion; there, he wondered how the war had been, how it began, and about the community spirit that drove the Iz'kal to union and, by the same token, to victory.

Too young to have taken part in the war, and too old to enter the few, newly-founded schools for Iz'kal children, Sahir travelled to Al'ameen to attend lectures by Uprising survivors and technology researchers, and learned from the best minds of his time. He discovered the possibility of the Korian's digital network, and wrote a long, multi-volume essay with his thoughts on social organisation, the Iz'kal nature, and collectivist philosophy. He uploaded the essay to the network, which was still mostly unused by Iz'kal researchers, for free access to everyone; and soon every Iz'kal, everywhere, was reading it and agreeing with it. Thus the Idealab was born.

More importantly, Sahir's treatise dealt at length on what the Iz'kal had to do to remain united and free, and underlined the importance of institutionalising a leaderless society - not only enjoying it because it was natural, but writing laws that ensured it remained that way. It also underlined the values of sharing, free resources and, most particularly, free access to information, which for Sahir was the lynchpin of any successful civilisation and the reason the Iz'kal won and the Korian didn't.

Aadam Sahir's credo spread like wildfire across all Iz'kal colonies, and by the same Idealab of shared thought he inadvertently helped create, many other thinkers and ideologues added to his words, creating the laws of the State as they stand now.

The first to call it 'the Iz'kal State' and to propose it as the official name of Iz'kal civilisation - a proposal that won by an impressive majority, although Sahir himself voted against it - was Va'adim Wahidi, a friend and student of Sahir that later became estranged from his mentor when Wahidi proposed stricter State control and a doctrine he called The Rule of Many, by which he intended to instate the rule of the group over the individual. Sahir did not agree with this, and the two great thinkers grew apart precisely during the era of greatest Iz'kal union, enthusiasm and organisation.

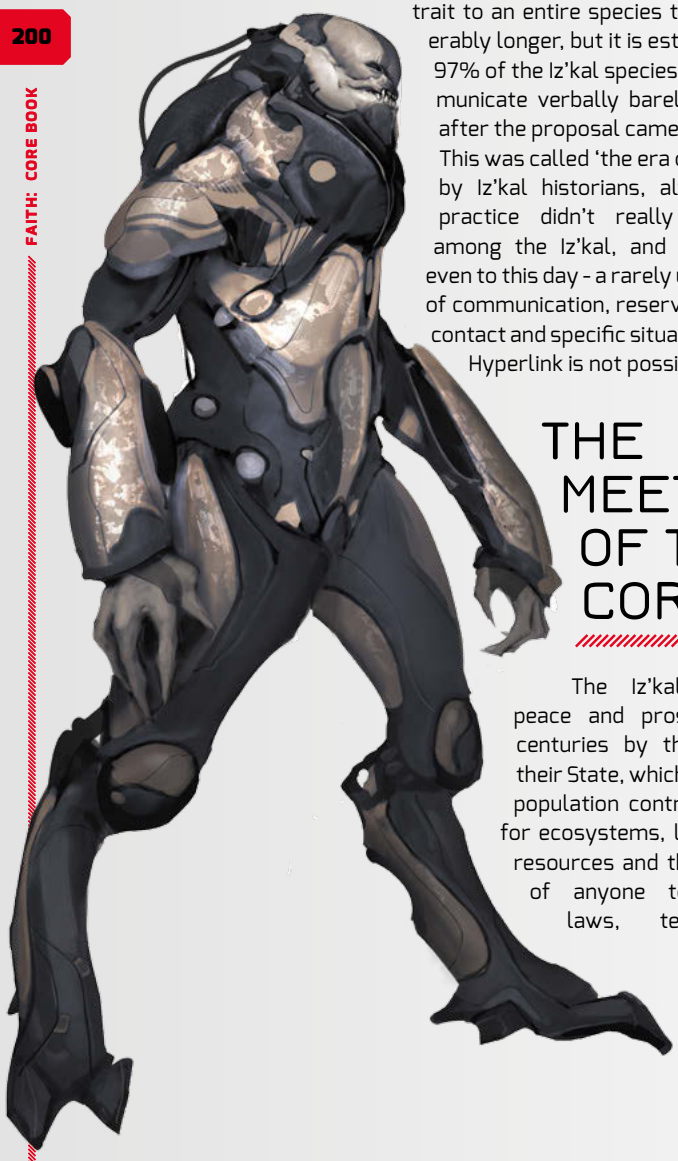
Nonetheless, it is told that, when Aadam Sahir died of old

age a half century later, Wahidi called him 'the Real Father of the State' during the memorial service. Wahidi often denied the story, as individual acclaim was against his own doctrine, but he openly referred to Aadam Sahir as a loved friend and teacher.

THE BIRTH OF IDEALAB

Although its prototype was born with the influx of thoughts and treatises that followed Aadam Sahir's famous essay, the final version of Idealab was not completed and released until more than one century after Sahir's death. By then, the system had been used as a thought-sharing system for decades, but now, thanks to the laws proposed by Sahir, Va'adim Wahidi and other thinkers that followed on their footsteps, it was the one official channel for government and improvement of the Iz'kal State.

It was through Idealab that the Iz'kal finally perfected the genetic modification techniques they are famous for, and the idea of giving the entire species vocal cords was proposed and accepted within a year of Idealab's official launch. The actual process of giving a new trait to an entire species took considerably longer, but it is estimated that 97% of the Iz'kal species could communicate verbally barely a decade after the proposal came into effect. This was called 'the era of speaking' by Iz'kal historians, although the practice didn't really catch on among the Iz'kal, and remained - even to this day - a rarely used means of communication, reserved for alien contact and specific situations where Hyperlink is not possible.



THE MEETING OF THE CORVO

The Iz'kal lived in peace and prosperity for centuries by the laws of their State, which demanded population control, respect for ecosystems, little use of resources and the freedom of anyone to propose laws, technological advances or social rules through Idealab. By these means, the Iz'kal State achieved an unparalleled quality of life for its citizens, and had no reason to believe things would ever be different.

And then came the Corvo.

It happened in 1236 AU, when a Corvo exploration ship landed in the Iz'kal research station of Hab'Abir.

The Iz'kal had encountered no other species in more than a thousand years, and the only aliens they maintained contact with were the Raag, which they had first met during the Korian domain. Finding a new species was almost as surprising as if it was the first such encounter in Iz'kal history, and it certainly was as far as the State was concerned.

The Corvo had developed space travel on their own and, like the Korian, colonised a number of worlds, although they disguised their conquering ways with a free market society.

The concept of 'market' was very hard to grasp for the Iz'kal, who as a species didn't even have a concept for 'trade'. And when they understood it, they saw it as evil, and the Corvo as very dangerous, for they intended to subjugate others not through war, but by owning things and places.

The Iz'kal had lived in peace for so long that they refrained from attacking the Corvo - a decision that many Iz'kal xenohistorians openly regret now - and decided to wait and observe; after all, the greatest lesson ever received by the Iz'kal was that learning from the enemy was the key to success.

Both species were unfriendly and cautious from the beginning, and remain so to this day, with a notable exception - the Coalition.

THE SPACE RACE AND PARSAIUS

For decades, the Corvo and Iz'kal maintained an unspoken Space Race, competing to be the first to show the other that their government system was best, not only for their society but for any planet they colonised.

However, the race came to a halt when the Corvo colony of Izuan Tai was suddenly wiped out by an unknown enemy force.

Before accurately learning just what had attacked the Corvo, the Iz'kal understood that it seemed to be an incredibly powerful, predatory alien species from an unknown sector of space - a species capable of wiping out an entire planet in a single day.

The collective memory of the Iz'kal shuddered. They were reminded of the Korian, and that made them very afraid.

Then, fear became reality: an unknown, massive force of monstrous aliens attacked Parsaius, a large Iz'kal colony - and the Corvo, unexpected and unrequested, came to their aid to join forces against the unidentified invaders.

After the battle, which the combined Corvo-Iz'kal forces won just barely, the Iz'kal identified the attackers as a hunter-killer organism, designed to devour, absorb or replace any other lifeform in its path - a perfect engine of extinction.

The Corvo called them the Ravager, and their presence required that both species halted their childish space race immediately.

Knowing what was at stake, and realising the Corvo had selflessly come to their aid at Parsaius, the Iz'kal proposed an official alliance - and the Coalition was born.

THE IZ'KAL STATE TODAY

Now, with the Corvo-Iz'kal military coalition in full force, both species are focused on defeating the Ravager, although the Iz'kal are still alert against any Corvo treachery and have many active spies in the Corvosphere.

Thus, the Iz'kal State has learned the bitter lesson of politics and duplicity, fighting a battle in two fronts - one of them openly and with the life of their species at stake, and another covertly, against its own allies - to save its own civilisation.

Nobody knows who will win this war or what will happen afterwards, but the Iz'kal can be sure of one thing - they will fall, or prevail, as one.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

"We disagree on everything, but do you know the difference between us? While you would like to suppress my right to express my ideas, I would give my life to protect your right to express yours."

- Lee Bao, Corvo diplomat, to his Iz'kal counterpart

The Iz'kal are one of the most xenophobic and isolationist species in the Universe. However, they also value science and discovery, and have made great advances in astroscience and space exploration. They have built dozens of colonies in the most diverse environment, mostly as social and biological experiments, but also to extend their culture and ideas throughout the universe (they are convinced their State is the best possible government, and all other interstellar species would be far happier if they adopted it too).

The Iz'kal don't try to impose their views on anyone, but they live by the - somewhat naive - certainty that the example of their peaceful society will be enough for any civilisation that crosses their path to see the light and follow their ways. So far they have had far less success than expected, but that doesn't stop them from trying - or from establishing their own colonies wherever they deem suitable.

A PART OF THE UNIVERSE

With a culture developed for the very specific needs, character and organisation style of their species, the Iz'kal have had a somewhat difficult problem adapting to the fact that they are not the only independent civilisation out there.

Where the Iz'kal have done everything they can to do away with the concept of leaders, other species insist on sending a small group, or even a single representative, to all diplomatic meetings, pretending this small group speaks for an entire culture or civilisation. On the contrary, the Iz'kal send huge contingents of hundreds of delegations, which seems to cause some diplomatic distress, despite the fact that a hundred Iz'kal take less time to agree on any subject than any two members of any other species.

The Iz'kal can mobilise and decide on any State-affecting subject in a matter of hours, which causes both envy and fear on other civilisations, who are too used to particular and individual interests getting in the way of popular choice.

Having to deal with other species was a great leap for the Iz'kal, and some think it was not for the best. So far, inter-species relations have forced the Iz'kal to enact three policies that directly contradict their very nature and values:

First, they have had to implement State Secrets. This requires many State decisions to be taken by small groups of individuals - chosen by the Idealab system for their level of experience - without sharing the consequences to the public at large. Otherwise, the State would risk such secrets to fall in the hands of enemy forces, and many of them are decisions that not all the Iz'kal people would agree with, such as political assassinations, attacks against Corvo civilian outposts, the sacrifice of soldiers for the greater good, and other controversial issues.

Second, they have had to allow a degree of independence to colonies in the vicinity of other alien species, as it would be unfair for those colonies to wait for the vote of citizens of other settlements on matters of security and diplomacy, considering that dealing with alien threats tends to be urgent and serious.

Finally, they have somewhat agreed to alter their living standards, as they have become more hurried and careless when founding new settlements. The long-standing Iz'kal tradition of conducting long, careful research and experimentation has diminished so as to expand State territory as much and as quickly and possible to face the pressure of Corvo encroachment.

Such policies have fed anti-State sentiment, and groups that seek to overthrow Iz'kal society are abuzz with fear not only of alien threats, but of the sudden duplicity of their own people.

Some Iz'kal social scientists argue that contact with other species is actually corrupting the Iz'kal state, and the matter would be solved by cutting off that contact entirely; others suggest that, if Iz'kal society was so fragile that contact with any other civilisation made it crack and bend, then the problem was in the State, not outside it.

EXPLORATION

The fact that the Iz'kal are cautious and slow-paced in setting up new colonies doesn't mean they don't want to expand - much less now they've realised the Corvo are breathing down their necks. For this reason, the State has decided to adopt a much more aggressive attitude towards space colonisation, sponsoring all kinds of expeditions - both official SDF flights and mercenary explorer trips - across the Labyrinth in search of habitable planets.

The State doesn't pay in currency, but they give valuable equipment, weaponry, and even full starships to mercenar-

ies that help them find worlds suitable for Iz'kal colonisation; especially if it's before the Corvo find them.

IZ'KAL IN THE COLONIES

For the Iz'kal, moving from one of their colonies to another doesn't actually mean they are leaving home - every State colony is under the same jurisdiction, professes the same culture and follows the same laws. Thus, Iz'kal from different colonies threat each other as neighbours, and there's very little social difference, much less any kind of enmity, between Iz'kal settlements - with the notable exception of anti-State radicals, of course.

MIGRATION

It is hard for an Iz'kal to move from one colony to another, as every Iz'kal settlement is built to work with a specific number of citizens. As a result, the State asks every citizen to provide a proper reason for emigration, which should be somehow beneficial for the society, considering the work the citizen can perform in the new colony and the work he will leave in the old one. Things like moving houses, or moving to a new city or planet, are also organised by waiting lists. This can take several years, but is free and available to everyone; the Iz'kal understand it is needed to maintain their high quality of life.

When the State needs to populate a new colony or city, or create any other migration movement, they will do so as fast as needed. People can sign up for such things; if vacancies are not filled voluntarily, they will be filled by drafting. How likely a citizen is to be drafted depends on many factors, such as the role he currently fills, how useful his skills are at the destination, or how much he will suffer by being moved. Most drafts involve entire majmoas, so as to avoid breaking their bonds.

It is also very hard for a member of another species to enter Iz'kal society. While some colonies are more prepared to receive visitors, most are completely closed, as changes in the demographic of the State could endanger system efficiency. In general, the Iz'kal haven't had such good experiences with other species and are reluctant to welcome them in.

Members of other species have many problems adapting to Iz'kal ways. They are usually unhappy with working at whatever the State assigns them at the time, living only where given the right to, having 'holding rights' (as outsiders call it) over items or services. They also have problems communicating with the Iz'kal, as they cannot join them in Hyperlink and miss out on most things relevant to society that are communicated this way.

Immigrants, whether temporary or long-term, are assigned special habitats apart from Iz'kal society, where the State tries to provide for the needs of their culture and species, so as to prevent disorientation and culture shock. The Corvo call these neighbourhoods 'conversion camps', and accuse them of being little more than ghettos.

THE CORVO

> *"Their claims that the Corvosphere is unjust are completely unfounded. In the Corvosphere, anyone with skill will thrive, and the lack of resources (and in some cases laziness) is the only reason why not all of us do. They say that their people live better and are happier, but they have not seen what a Corvo can become if he works hard - the riches he can achieve are immeasurable. Our population is also many times larger than theirs. They claim all their people live well, yet we almost have more billionaires than they have citizens."*
>
> *- Cho Bei, CEO of Wang Corp*

Since the Korian invasion, no other species has been so disruptive - or important - to Iz'kal history and culture as the ambitious, powerful Corvo. Not only are the Corvo a galaxy-spanning economic powerhouse; they are also shallow, greedy, and expansive. They are both the cultural mirror-opposite of the Iz'kal and one of the greatest dangers to the State.

Even now, Iz'kal-Corvo diplomatic relationships are the most famous power struggle in the universe, and there's no sign that tensions will ease any time soon.

CORVO-IZ'KAL RELATIONS

The Iz'kal knew they wouldn't get along with the Corvo from day one. Not only their cultural characters are polar opposites; both species want the rest of the universe to 'see' their way as the right one and adopt their culture. They realised pretty soon they were in a race - not necessarily for territory of resources, but to be the first to demonstrate their culture was right.

The Iz'kal tried to make it a fair, amicable competition, and to establish a cordial relationship with the Corvo, but they didn't count on their counterpart's innate mistrust. When the Corvo realised that everything they shared in diplomatic meetings immediately became common knowledge across the entire Iz'kal state - which led to most Iz'kal learning much more than the Corvo would have liked after the first couple of meetings - they enacted a veto against sharing information with the Iz'kal.

Even later, when the Coalition was formed, the Corvo enforced a law that forbade any Corvo Coalition member from sharing non-critical intelligence with the Iz'kal, for fear that the State's natural open-information policy would lead to a data leak that ultimately helped the Ravager.

As both species are supposed to be cooperating, they have made no move against each other - on the surface. In truth, and even with the Coalition in effect, the Corvo and Iz'kal spy on and sabotage each other like there's no tomorrow, and constantly seek out sympathisers from the other species to spy on the enemy camp. There's always work for a skilled agent, of any species, that agrees to spy on the State for the Megacorps or vice versa.

These espionage missions are not limited to intelligence gathering, or even discreet assassination; often they also include black ops, requiring fully-armed commandos to infiltrate and sabotage enemy installations or even civilian areas. The job is both dangerous and very questionable - but both the State and the Megacorps make sure the rewards are worthwhile.

THE CORVO EFFECT

Before encountering the Corvo, the only thing the State and its technocrats cared about was living a happy, fulfilled life, and they pretty much succeeded at it, ensuring the most plentiful and happy life for everyone. Citizens were taught to live for the State, to find happiness in the communal lives they led and to pursue whatever would allow them to improve their society the most, which would in turn make them happier. In a society that had all but eradicated crime, poverty, hunger and disease, the Iz'kal could dedicate their lives to the betterment of the State and to the enjoyment of life.

The discovery of the Corvo changed much of that. The need to explore the Labyrinth and colonise new planets, the need of a more powerful army and better trained warriors - all forced the State to change some of its policies.

The Iz'kal are aware that the Corvosphere grows very fast, discovers new planets and exploits them to the core, and is always investigating new ways to be more effective at expansion regardless of the cost in lives and happiness of their people as a whole. It did not take long for many sociologists to project how long the State had until it would be economically inferior to the Corvo - two centuries.

If nothing changed in two centuries, the Corvo would have grown so large that it would not matter that the Corvosphere was not an united front. Each of the Megacorps would be as large as the Iz'kal State and still hungry to expand their market. At that point, there would be nothing the State could do to stop them from expanding into Iz'kal society as they did with the Humans and Raag.

The Iz'kal will not go down easy, but in the end it won't matter. The Corvo have proven over and again that they are proficient at destroying native economies and becoming the new and better source of goods, soon after imposing their terms by monopolising the options.

As soon as the State became aware of this fact, it started taking the necessary steps to protect itself. After centuries of hardship and sacrifices under the dominion of the Korian, the Iz'kal are forced to endure hardships once more. Principles will need to be put aside, and individual rights will have to be sacrificed.

The State started assigning jobs to the technocrats, as opposed to encouraging them to choose the jobs for which they believed they were better suited. Some technocrats were forced to move to new colonies, created in a hurry to expand the influence and power of the State, as opposed to finding willing technocrats and building a carefully planned colony suited to their needs.

On top of that, many new ideas managed to find their way into the perfect Iz'kal society - the Corvo greed and consumerism made an unmistakable dent.

And thus, social unrest started spreading across the State.

POLITICAL POSITIONS

The issue of how to deal with the Corvo has awakened controversy, opposing views, and deadlocked votes in a once concordant society. Every Iz'kal has, as always, his own nuanced opinion, but there seem to be four general trends, and most Iz'kal ascribe at least partially to one of them:

Isolationists maintain that the State is perfect, but the prize of such perfection is preventing contact with less pure civilisations. Isolationists want to cut off all communication and ties with the Corvo, avoid their vicinity and territory, move as far from them as possible, and act as if they don't exist. The most radical thinkers among them propose uprooting the entire Iz'kal State and making a mass, species-wide exodus to the other end of the universe, somewhere no other civilised species - particularly the Corvo - will ever find them.

Collaborationism is the current policy the Iz'kal State is following, at least in appearance. It consists of maintaining a cordial, respectful relationship with the Corvo, protecting the Iz'kal ways and respecting Corvo culture, while leaving each other alone to colonise their regions of space as they see fit, and keeping competition fair as regards resources and territory. Both species pretend to uphold this ideal, particularly after the Coalition. The most radical collaborationists maintain that the State has much to learn from Corvo market policies and embracing individual freedom -

it's precisely because of these radicals that other Iz'kal look away from collaborationism and think of trying something more drastic.

Colonialists want to stand up to the Corvo and win the debate. They see Corvo society as a primitive culture in need of a civilising influence. They propose to occupy and submit the Corvo, imposing collectivism on them and making them realise they will have more happiness, progress and prosperity under the Iz'kal way. For this reason, Colonialists advocate huge investment in war and recruitment, convinced it will all be for the greater good of both species in the end.

Xenocides are the most radical of the four views, and propose nothing less than the utter extermination of the Corvo species. According to xenocides, the Corvo are beyond convincing, their disrupting ways are already influencing the Iz'kal people, and their resources and greed mean they will win the space race against the State. Moving away from them makes no sense, as it would mean abandoning dozens of well-established colonies and settlements, only to have the Corvo show up at their door again, and again every time they try to move further away. For xenocides, the only solution is to make sure there are no Corvo left to deal with. The less radical xenocides think that there is no need to wipe the Corvo out; an aggressive enough war, one that left their Megacorps and economy in shambles, would make them weak enough that any of the other three options - isolation, colonisation or cooperation - would become viable.

RAAG

There is an ancient bond between the Iz'kal and Raag, born when they joined forces to defeat the Korian invaders. Of course, the Iz'kal did most of the work during the Uprising against the Korian, and the Raag don't fully understand or reciprocate the Iz'kal's goodwill and loyalty. Nonetheless, the Iz'kal have identified the Raag from their history records and still consider them their ancient allies, at least nominally.

Having been subjugated by the Korian gives the Raag and Iz'kal species not only a shared survivor's perspective, but also several common elements to their languages and cultures; all borrowed partly from the time of Korian domination. The Raag see the Iz'kal as their idealised self - the culture they might have become had it been them, not the Iz'kal, which defeated the Korian; the Iz'kal, for their part, see the Raag as a kind of younger brother (brother in arms, at least) and also as a warning about their own hidden, subdued violent tendencies. The Raag are the warrior race the Iz'kal never became, and the Iz'kal are the utopia the Raag may still achieve. Not that Raag actually want to achieve a society like the Iz'kal state, of course; they are quite content with their traditional ways and natural caverns, but they know, as a species, that their current freedom and happiness is due mostly to Iz'kal efforts. Many Iz'kal realise this, and do not lose sight of the fact that, should war against the Corvo eventually blow up, the Raag would be a natural ally of the Iz'kal state.

HUMANS

The relationship between the Iz'kal and Humans is - like everything in modern Iz'kal society - subject to Corvo interference. Iz'kal relate to Humans mostly to steal them away from the Corvo; since Humans have no dominion in space, the Iz'kal are never seen as the Humans' guests - most Iz'kal that encounter Humans are visiting Corvo territory. Like other species, Humans are somewhat unnerved by the Iz'kal's lack of immediately identifiable authority figures, and their knack for committees during which they remain completely silent for hours before coming to any decision. Other than that, Humans are like the Iz'kal - having had their share of misrepresentation at the hands of Corvo, they realise the Iz'kal are not the terrible enemies the Corvo claim; this alone is enough motivation for many Human mercenaries to defect to the State.

THE COALITION

The Coalition is the greatest and most important political alliance in the history of interstellar civilisation, and the greatest effort the Iz'kal have ever made to cooperate with another species.

Founded as a joint defence effort between the two largest starfaring cultures - Corvo and Iz'kal - against the sudden, predatory threat of the Ravager species, the Coalition should be an argument for interspecies cooperation, and proof that diametrically opposed systems can work together for a common good.

The catch is, they can't, and the Iz'kal know it. To work properly, the Coalition needed to build and follow its own system, independent from both the Corvo and Iz'kal organisation structures; and it actually works well - so well, in fact, that what should be seen as a victory of the spirit of understanding and cooperation is actually a threat to both the State and the Megacorps.

After the founding of the Coalition, many Iz'kal citizens and groups have demanded more individual freedom, clearer hierarchies, a smaller bureaucracy and a quicker response to threats. And everyone knows that's just how it starts; unable to disband the Coalition - as it's still the Iz'kal's only hope of stopping the Ravager - the State needs to think of a way to stop the small questionings before they become widespread dissent.

THE IZ'KAL COLONIES

"A government that treats the lazy and the hard-working people the same will end up with a country of lazy people. This is, of course, what the government wants - to isolate the hard working minority. It is obvious why the most dedicated Iz'kal try to emigrate to the Corvosphere and why the State makes it as hard as possible for them to do so."

- Jiao Sheng, Corvo economist

As a political entity, The Iz'kal State has no physical limits. 'The State' applies to any gathering of Iz'kal that lives by the laws of the State, under a shared leaderless government and with technology generated via Idealab. Any Iz'kal settlement that counts as part of the State is referred to as a Colony; thus a remote research outpost is a State colony the same as a military SDF ship on a State mission; Al'ameen, the Iz'kal homeworld, is as much a State Colony as the smallest farm at the other end of the Labyrinth..

When the Iz'kal find and colonise a suitable planet, the first thing they do is build the infrastructure for miners, workers, builders and architects to live there for a few months; this is done with pre-made materials and plans created through Idealab and carried aboard the settler ships.

The process includes scanning the environment's characteristics, balance and available raw materials. Iz'kal technology is equipped to study not only the exact mineral and biochemical composition of any alien soil or atmosphere, but also to quickly calculate several scenarios for the environment's possible uses and compatibilities with Iz'kal needs. The Iz'kal then determine the best way to make use of local resources - or bring their own - with the least possible ecological disruption. Once the Iz'kal have decided on an optimal balance between minimising environmental impact and maximising resource exploitation, terraforming begins.

Iz'kal terraforming revolves around specialised seeding hover-vehicles, which roam the new surface gathering data and planting 'dana-hisada', little capsules that resemble seeds designed not to grow into plants, but to absorb the genetic information from the local soil and undergrowth. On the second pass, terraforming drones gather the dana-hisada, which deliver DNA and other data on the environment's biochemical composition, from which the Iz'kal know what types of plants and soil to bring so as to foster, or at least not harm, the local wildlife. Building materials are chosen and used - and sometimes invented on the spot - with the same criteria; thus, Iz'kal colonies not only respect, but sometimes improve on the planet's natural conditions.

Once the construction site is set up, builders and technicians get to work on anything from a small settlement to a huge Zaaki-Waha citadel - whatever the planet's resources allow. When the habitat is finished, the very same Iz'kal that took part in its building are the ones that move to live there; thus, every Iz'kal has a hand in creating his own home.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The Iz'kal keep their colonies few in number and creating one is an organised process after a long period of study. The State has repeatedly invested time, equipment, and personnel to research the viability of a planet as a colony, only to discover that it would not be worth the effort in the long run. Perhaps the planet would run out of some vital resources within a couple hundred years, or the low quality of life at the colony would not help the State as a whole.

Before the Corvo, the State had no need for expansion, as Iz'kal population growth is carefully controlled, and sometimes even halted. Therefore, they only build colonies on planets where they know that, within a few generations, they will be able to create a society as egalitarian and with a quality of life as high as in Al'ameen, where all the Iz'kal standards can be achieved. This means that by principle, the State will not colonise a place that cannot become self-sufficient after a period of adaptation. However, the Corvo's arrival and the growth of Hexian ideologies - which are concerned with the possibility of being overpowered by the Corvo - is forcing the State to reconsider these policies, at the cost of personal liberties and the preservation of new planets' biospheres.

Unlike the Corvo, the Iz'kal do not have specialised mining colonies or other resource-harvesting facilities, as these colonies are not self-sufficient. The Iz'kal have suffered the horrors that can come from this, such as after the Uprising, when the Korian colonies could not communicate or share resources for years, and whole populations of Iz'kal died of starvation, cold, heat, or asphyxiation. Thus, most resources are extracted and harvested by the same cities that will use them for their inhabitants.

The Iz'kal do create scientific and military outposts, however. Scientific facilities are created wherever the Iz'kal think they can make new discoveries that will further their understanding of the Universe and perhaps themselves, or lead them to improve their quality of life in any sense. Military outposts are formed between colonies set far apart, so as to protect convoys travelling from one to the other, or in strategic places where a garrison will hinder Corvo or Ravager expansion and protect the State from any hostile action.

AL'AMEEN

Planetary Type: Water world
Population: 250 million
Day: 28 standard hours
Culture: Eco-friendly egalitarianism
Location: Alal system, 3.5 standard months away from Tiantang
Production: Manufactured goods, biotech
Social Rank 5: Egalitarian utopia
Economic Rank 1: No trade or currency
Atmosphere: Breathable

The Iz'kal homeworld is a water planet, whose only landmass is a line of small continents along its equator. These continents are filled with swamplands that also connect the two large oceans of the planet, one in each pole. Al'ameen has two main seasons: the dry season, where the swamps dry up; and the flood season, where the swamps overflow and convert most of the land to mangroves for several months. This was the environment in which the Iz'kal evolved to be semi-aquatic creatures.

Al'ameen is rich in natural resources and a paradise for the Iz'kal, who keep most of it as unspoiled wild land, with a few eco-friendly cities on its surface. The population is limited to a few hundred million Iz'kal, and immigration laws do not allow other species to move in permanently. A handful are accepted every year as visitors for a short period of time; many rich Corvo enjoy visiting Al'ameen and return home to tell their friends all about the strange habits of its people.

THE PEOPLE

The Al'ameen'ai, the Iz'kal from AlAmeen, are all of basic Waha'i stock. They are lovers of nature, and it shows. Most of their cities are built with materials directly taken from living organic matter, fusing into the swamp landscape like titanic, flowery trees. Most of the science and art projects from Al'ameen focus on the preservation and development of natural areas, and how to make the best use of resources while taking the least possible from the environment.

Al'ameen'ai are admired and respected across the State, not only as the original members of the species, but also because they have contributed the most - in quantity and quality - to Iz'kal art and science. Not to mention, of course, that it was the ancestors from Al'ameen which fought and won the war that freed the Iz'kal from the Korian invasion. For the other Iz'kal, Al'ameen'ai are akin to older, respected brothers, and the closest the species has to a moral authority.

SETTLEMENTS

To outsiders, Al'ameen would look like an uninhabited planet, as cities are so few and far between that the planet is virtually the same as it was before the Iz'kal came to be.

There are, however, several types of Iz'kal settlements in Al'ameen. First there are the planet's Zaaki-Waha cities; tall citadels of a few thousand inhabitants that barely pass as artificial structures at first glance. There are thousands of smaller communities scattered all across the surface, although usually most end up joining an existing Zaaki-Waha or growing into one themselves.

Al'ameen'ai Zaaki-Waha are comparable to those found in other colonies; harmonious communities with advanced technology, no crime, prosperity and a tranquil daily life.

AQUATIC SITES

Over the centuries, the Iz'kal have made several attempts to build underwater Zaaki-Waha, to test the benefits of a closer contact with their species' aquatic origin; however, these experiments have always been short-lived, as the amphibious Iz'kal are not really suited for prolonged life in the depths, and the technology to achieve it waste s too many resources and disrupts the environment. The Alameen'ai have had to content themselves with building aquatic surface platforms and beachside towns. Most of these failed underwater cities were taken apart and the materials used in their construction recycled, but a few were unrecoverable due to structural damage or other causes. These ruins were made into heritage sites, which eventually became touristic attractions for their historical and artistic value, and are occasionally used as short-term underwater research centres.

HAI'KAL SANCTUMS

Hai'kal sanctums fulfil a unique function, which non-Iz'kal would roughly understand as a mix of research centres, natural history labs, museums, schools, temples and field science camps. Contrary to Zaaki-Waha cities, these sanctums are unique to Al'Ameen'ai culture, and they have failed to catch on at other Iz'kal settlements, presumably because of their demand of resources, which are far more scarce and regulated in the colonies.

Every Hai'kal sanctum is located on a remote natural spot at Al'ameen, following the strictest eco-friendly procedures, and then dedicated to the study of that specific environment and its conditions. Hai'kal are classified by the environment they work on, so there are swamp Hai'kal, seaside Hai'kal, river Hai'kal, astronomy Hai'kal and so on. Nobody lives at a Hai'kal, but scientists teams rotate to keep it functional all year. A Hai'kal managers have the responsibility to keep it stocked with samples, exhibits and experiments revolving around research of the surrounding area, and offer advanced courses, tours, academic conventions, school trips and wildlife retreats.

While Iz'kal colonies have never grown large enough to be able to support a Hai'kal sanctum, citizens from every settlement in the State travel to Al'ameen to visit its Hai'kal, which are a source of pride for the planet and its citizens.

ALHENA

One of the most unspoiled sanctuaries of the planet is Alhena, a network of caves in the heart of Al'ameen, illuminated by gigantic and luminescent fungi. This magical place survived the Korian conquest, as the invaders never discovered it. Iz'kal from all around the Universe make a seasonal pilgrimage to this place, which they hold as sacred. When in Alhena, all the Iz'kal join in a single Hyperlink with their fellow pilgrims so that they may share their minds freely. Here, Iz'kal from all colonies share their experiences with each other and together are able to learn things that they were not even capable of imagining alone - about ways of life on strange planets, about ideas they had never heard of, and about personal life experiences and the thoughts behind them, which give them an incredible insight on the reasons of other people's behaviour. This is, for many Iz'kal, the most intense and beautiful experience of their lives. Some are actually addicted to the Alhena pilgrimage, and religiously request the State to make it every year, even if they dwell in the other side of the Universe.

THE CIRCLE OF REMEMBERING

The Ergon cult in Al'ameen is a very ancient institution, dating from at least 1500 years back, when the Iz'kal retook Ergon worship after exterminating the Korian. Millions of Iz'kal from all Zaaki-Waha'i in the planet are members, but the cult has no central headquarters, nor any figurehead.

What passes for the main Ergonaut reunion centre is the Circle of Remembering, an order of Ergonaut Soulbenders with the divine power - and the responsibility - of keeping Iz'kal tradition alive.

At any moment, any member of the Circle can vividly relive - or cause others to relive - any moment from Iz'kal history; contrary to the Alhena Hyperlink or other Iz'kal traditions, the Circle members don't use this ability for social gatherings or ceremonies, but to research Iz'kal history first hand, and see with unbiased eyes the events and forces that shaped the current Iz'kal civilisation.

The Circle of Remembering has a rotating membership between a few dozen and just over a hundred members, called Memorials. No Memorial enjoys any kind of special status or is considered above any other, but they all have divine abilities that far surpass the average soulbender.

THE FARM

For the last few years, unknown to the State, there's been a covert installation functioning in Al'ameen - a grisly installation with a grisly purpose.

A gang of slavers, mostly Iz'kal traitors but also including Human and Corvo, has set up a secret underwater headquarters somewhere in the uncharted depths of the Al'ameen sea, from where they operate using wave jammers that prevent detection by radar. From here, these slavers travel to nearby Zaaki-waha, passing themselves as honest Iz'kal citizens, and kidnapping innocent Iz'kal of every age and gender, which they take back to their den. The disappearances are carefully orchestrated so as to seem unrelated accidents, to the point that some of the victims are even assumed dead - yet the truth is, in a sense, worse.

Once back in their undersea installation, which they call The Farm, the slavers put their kidnapped Iz'kal in permanent cryostasis, from which they are never freed, and their Iz organs linked to special devices that harvest the network capability of their brains - as computer processing power. The process is very similar to Corvo skulling, where Megacorp employees lend their brain power to their bosses' computer systems.

Kidnapped victims are put on special ships, equipped with a processor and a network relay, which are then sent all over the Labyrinth to serve as live data stations for gangs of smugglers, bandits or other slavers, particularly the Corvo Tongs, which have several 'farm ships' around their deep space operations, from which they get 'free internet' out of the frozen Iz'kal victims.

The technology to obtain processing power from an Iz'kal's iz was developed by a State deserter, a scientist and Ledger worshipper called Lam Naham. He founded the Farm with like-minded Ledger worshippers, and was its leader until he disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Perhaps he was found by the law, perhaps he died in a lab accident, or maybe one of his lieutenants betrayed him and put him to work in one of his own cryo-pods.

Whatever the truth, Naham's legacy lives on in the hundreds of kidnapped Iz'kal used by the underworld as living network stations.

THE KHALIJ'RAQIB MISSION

Signals from the Farm have been thoroughly hidden from detection for years. However, a few of their ships have recently called the attention of traffic officials as they left the planet towards the Labyrinth. The minute inconsistencies in the farm ships' callsigns and departure times have arisen suspicion in the space traffic agency of Khalij'Raqib city. Agents have traced the ships' departure point to an underwater spot, which makes no sense. It could mean nothing, but the city's technocrats voted to send a Ghyr mercenary force on a reconnaissance mission. These mercs may be Human, Iz'kal or any species allowed to operate in Al'ameen ground, or even a Savak team; Khalij'Raqib's technocrats just want to get to the bottom of it.

ZIM'KI

Zim'ki is a child from a city near the Farm who lost her older sister Ahiya to their slave operation. Other members of Zim'Ki's majmoa assumed Ahiya had been lost to a swimming accident, as their Hyperlink with her was interrupted; Zim'ki didn't, however. Her bond to her sister was too strong, and she can feel her sister even through Farm dampeners, and despite her sister being unconscious and in stasis for months now. Zim'ki's majmoa thinks she is in denial for the loss of Ahiya, and considers sending her for emotional re-conditioning. But Zim'ki knows better, and she will find her sister, even if she needs to ask someone outside of her majmoa... or from another species. Even if she has to brave the swamps or the seas on her own, and ask the first stranger she finds in her path for help...

MEMORIAL

Ergonaut 1 :: Defender

Level 1 :: Iz'kal :: Kind
mov. 5 metres :: weight 60 kg :: height 162 cm

2	5	0	-

PHYSICAL STAT	3 (1)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (1)	MENTAL STAT	7 (2)

HIT (DEX)	1	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Judge of Character

Characters attempting to lie to her suffer one disadvantage.

Rational

She can only be convinced with facts. She is immune to dialectics, and she gains one advantage to determine whether something has been fact checked.

The Memorials are members of the Circle of Remembering, a cult that relives Iz'kal history for unbiased research and study.

AL'AMEEN'AI FARMER

Level 2 :: Iz'kal :: Ruthless
mov. 5 metres :: weight 65 kg :: height 163 cm

3	3	0	6

PHYSICAL STAT	6 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (2)	MENTAL STAT	6 (2)

CLOSE QUARTERS	2 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	1 -

Diaperer

Neural weapon (It deals neural or ACS damage and ignores armour).

Persuasive

He gains an advantage when trying to convince other characters.

The State is completely unaware of the horrific truth behind the Farm. Who will put a stop to this madness?

ERTHUM

Planetary Type: Desert world

Population: 60 million

Day: 39 standard hours

Culture: Survivalist settlements

Location: Dhahab system, 2 standard months away from Al'ameen

Production: Farming limited biotech

Social Rank 4: Egalitarian utopia with limited livelihood options

Economic Rank 1: No trade or currency

Atmosphere: Breathable

The Iz'kal were originally brought to Erthum by the Korian, who colonised the planet and used them as slaves to exploit its mineral resources. Once the Korian were overthrown, the Iz'kal who lived there decided to make it their home, despite its inhospitable conditions for the Iz'kal species. But the Iz'kal had already learned to live in the harsh desert when forced by the Korian, so doing it out of love for the environment was easy for them, and now there are several Zaaki-Waha across the Erthum wasteland.

For the most part Erthum is a desert, and a dangerous one at that, as sandstorms are frequent and can last days, pinning down populations or travellers for long periods. In the poles, the temperatures are very low and lifeforms scarce, while the land between the ice poles and the central deserts is a steppe containing no civilised population at all.

Cities in Erthum are designed to maximise their efficiency, as the environment is so harsh it requires extra care with the city's natural equilibrium. The State is heavily investing in terraforming the planet to create diversity and to improve its atmosphere, which is a very costly and slow process. Roothounds have been brought from Sulivar to regrow the wildwood, and they are now one of the most common animals in the planet. These beasts are very territorial, and only specialised personnel are allowed into the new forest areas to avoid incidents.

THE PEOPLE

Erthum'ai people are mostly of basic Iz'kal stock, but some Dhahab and Fafi Iz'kal remain in smaller settlements in the most extreme areas of the world, descendants of the slave-servant communities of the Korian era.

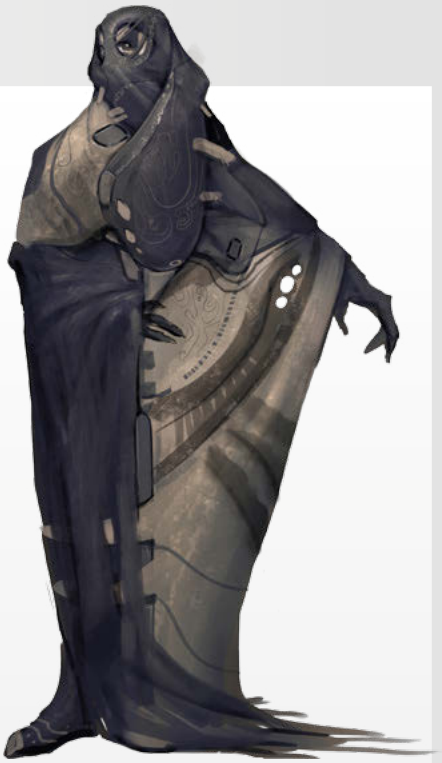
Other Iz'kal see modern Erthum'ai as quirky, open-minded and carefree, but in truth their character depends a lot on where they are from. Erthum'ai from the Zaaki-Waha along the partially terraformed equator are much more

peaceful, diligent and sensitive, while those from settlements and camps in the steppes and wastelands have an understandably harsher outlook, even if their camps have had access to every Idealab amenity and the full protection and support of the State for many centuries now.

AE'STIMAE

When the unarmed Iz'kal rebelled against the Korian, they made heavy use of martial arts, which remained a staple of Iz'kal culture for nearly a thousand years after the Uprising. Then came the State, which brought new warfare technologies, relegating martial arts from a warrior tradition to a training routine for the idle. Not in Erthum.

Erthum'ai still teach and practise Ae'stimae, arguably the first Iz'kal martial art to ever be developed. As most Iz'kal martial arts - and Iz'kal activities in general - Ae'stimae relies on group coordination and the use of Hyperlink between combatants. Unlike other Iz'kal martial arts, which nowadays are little more than stunning aerobic dances, Ae'stimae is pure combat training. Ae'stimae teams, called Saff, are of course a breathtaking sight as they enter the fray with perfectly synchronised movements. A well-coordinated Saff can make short work of an armoured Corvo squad, and Erthum'ai Coalition units have been known to bring down ironskins with their bare hands.



ERTHUM'AI NOMAD

Wilderness Affinity

Level 1 :: Iz'kal :: Negotiator
mov. 5 metres :: weight 59 kg :: height 160 cm

3	3	0	-

PHYSICAL STAT	5 (1)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (1)	MENTAL STAT	5 (2)

CLOSE QUARTERS	2+	STANDARD DISTANCE	2-

Persuasive

He gains an advantage when trying to convince other characters.

Hunter Instincts

He gains one advantage towards hiding and searching actions.

Erthum'ai are quirky, open-minded, carefree, diligent, peaceful and sensitive... right up until you mess with them.

SULIVAR

Planetary Type: Water world
Population: 190 million
Day: 28 standard hours
Culture: Eco-friendly technocracy
Location: Manzil system, 3 months away from Al'ameen
Production: Biotech, livestock
Social Rank 5: Egalitarian utopia
Economic Rank 1: No trade or currency
Atmosphere: Breathable

The haven world of Sulivar was settled right as it was discovered, when the home-ship Al'Manzil ended its decade-long journey in search of a perfect world. The flight's goal was to find a planet that was similar enough to Al'ameen for Iz'kal to expand there in case of emergency, but the search was too successful; Sulivar is all that Al'ameen was, and more. Its swamp-forest ecosystem, even better adapted to Iz'kal organisms than their homeworld, is balanced, rich and resourceful, yet with a lot of space for new species to expand. In fact, many colonists reported an actual sense of well-being, even internal peace, almost as soon as they arrived to Sulivar.

Of course, no emergency has come up that requires the Iz'kal to abandon Al'ameen, so Sulivar has been used mostly as a research centre, its lifeforms imported into Al'ameen and other Iz'kal worlds with incredible success, and even one case of breeding two species of trees that turned out genetically compatible. Nevertheless, a few Iz'kal colonists have obtained State permission to move to Sulivar, seeking the adventure of a new world to live in - and the planet's paradisiacal ecosystem.

Currently, besides the Zaaki-Waha of Al'Manzil, there are three great Iz'kal cities in Sulivar; two dedicated to research and inventory of local species, and a purely residential one, where technocrats experiment with lifestyle and architectural designs inspired by Sulivar's beautiful landscape and elating atmosphere.

THE PEOPLE

Sulivar'ai are all of unmodified Waha'i Iz'kal stock, with a reputation for being laid back tree-huggers, even for Iz'kal standards. They tend to believe that finding Sulivar was destiny, that the 'universe' guided them to live there, or even that Sulivar is actually a large, living organism - a theory many of their scientists are trying to prove - and they pride themselves in their eco-friendly lifestyle, empathy and attunement with nature, even more than other Iz'kal.

ALFINN'AGHNIA

Sulivar'ai use their vocal cords more than other Iz'kal, as they love singing, and it's traditional for every city district to have a local choir, or for singing gatherings to be held at choice spots of Sulivar's beautiful natural landscape.

The Sulivar'ai singing school is known as Alfinn'aghnia - a term that roughly translates into 'the art of song', and defines both the genre and the technical style. Despite being a vocal form, Alfinn'aghnia relies on the unique composition of Iz'kal vocal cords and the use of Hyperlink to convey the deeper meanings - or 'lyrics' - of the songs, so it's all but impossible for non-Iz'kal singers. Nevertheless, it's widely acknowledged as very beautiful music; Alfinn'aghnia concerts draw Iz'kal from all over the State and even tourists from other species.

THE BIYA'HARI GUARD

Despite its beauty and harmony, Sulivar is not always at peace. In the past centuries, the planet's resources have occasionally been the target of a few unscrupulous parties, from smugglers and poachers to greedy Corvo corps.

To protect the sanctity and integrity of the Sulivar ecosystem, local technocrats created the Biya'Hari Guard - an elite force of Sulivar'ai soldiers, equipped to defend their planet and its riches, by force if necessary.

Despite their duties, and the fact they do get extensive martial training and conditioning, Biya'Hari Guards are far kinder than other Iz'kal forces, like the Savak; their weapons and gear - all made with organic, eco-friendly materials - are strictly designed to incapacitate rather than harm. Very few Biya'Hari are voidwalkers, but most of their leaders have a little soulbending ability, which they use mostly to sense the environment and locate stolen specimens, lost individuals or roaming outlaws.

As criminal attacks are admittedly few and far between, the Biya'Hari spend most of their time as guides and teachers, on activities such as helping lost hikers, teaching survival and first aid to Iz'kal children, organising educational field trips and so on. Many of the kids that attend Biya'Hari lectures and training camps are chosen to join the Guard when they grow up.

THE SULIVAR HIVE

Even though Ergon is the most peaceful and accepting of all Gods, there is also a dark side to cooperation and collectivism. Nowhere is this represented as sharply as in the Hive, a sinister Ergonaut cult from Sulivar.

The Hive appeared a few decades after Al'Manzil was founded, when a few local farmers and students were studying Sulivar's incredible ecosystem. Convinced that every animal and plant organism in Sulivar was biologically connected to each other by a single purpose and a single collective mind, these researchers decided to imitate the planet's lifestyle, giving their entire individuality to the group, to Ergon, and to the Sulivar ecosystem. At first, it started as a harmless, nature-friendly commune, located in the middle of the Sulivar wilderness. Then the commune officially seceded from Al'Manzil; the State opposed it at first, but in the end allowed it to exist by popular vote.

In time, the commune became more and more radical. They started experimenting with perception-altering drugs, and tampering with their own genes to make them more receptive to the planet's 'hive mind'. Nobody outside the group knows exactly what they did, but they began displaying abilities and perceptions that seemed attuned to nature itself. Some of the most radical members of the commune started speaking and moving at the same time. Their expressions and tone of voice changed. Then, a few members attempted to leave the group and were forced to stay - or somehow brainwashed into staying. The group changed its name to the Hive, and claimed they had been directly touched by Ergon, who wished them to become one with each other and with the world.

The entire group became a cult, and they all began acting the same, permanently connected to a closed Hyperlink

that not only kept them communicated - but seemed to tie them in a single mind, hundreds of people with a single will.

The State became concerned about the Hive, particularly other Ergonaut churches, and several expeditions were launched to visit their dwelling and see if everything was alright. Hive members greeted visitors warmly, displayed no aggressiveness or strange behaviour - other than their unsettling, Hyperlinked collective mind - and even convinced a few of the newcomers to stay and join the cult.

Currently the Sulivar Hive is an official concern for the Sulivar government and the local Ergonaut church; however, no action has been taken against the cult, as its members have broken no State laws and never try to impose their will on outsiders. Rumours tell of members that try to leave and are then absorbed back into the fold, their individual minds forever erased by force - but it remains just that, a rumour. Inspectors keep on conducting routine investigations of the cult and find nothing that merits State intervention, but the law still maintains an eye on the Hive.

Ergonaut churches have tried to pressure the State into taking more direct action, but they keep being outvoted on the grounds that there is simply no justifiable reason to interfere with the cult. In response, the churches have voted to offer a reward to any citizen or mercenary who can bring up proof that there is something wrong with the Sulivar Hive. The problem is that mercenaries and volunteers don't find anything either, or else they end up joining the cult too.

To date, nobody knows exactly what is happening at the Hive. If someone discovered a secret, harmful plot, or else made sure that the Hive is not dangerous, they would certainly be rewarded by the State and the Al'Manzil collective.

ROOTHOUNDS

The most famous lifeform of Sulivar, and also its most important export, are the so-called 'roothounds' - mobile vegetal lifeforms that 'tend' to other plant species, protecting them from plagues, 'seeding' them, and even creating multi-species gardens by what seems to be basic instinct. The Iz'kal have taken thousands of these roothounds to other colonies with great success, as the creatures can help forests grow even in relatively barren soil.

There's an ongoing investigation on the uses and possibilities of roothound genes to bring life to all kinds of lifeless planets, which could create a plethora of thriving worlds, full of resources, for all species, curtailing - or even eliminating - the need to make Labyrinth trips to discover habitable worlds.

It goes without saying that Nation's Solution and the other Megacorps would do anything to steal the roothound project from the Iz'kal, but there's little chance of them doing so without openly antagonising the State. Not that they haven't considered it anyway, for the possibilities of a roothound market.

THE HORRIBLE TRUTH

What the Iz'kal have not discovered is that Sulivar is indeed a living organism - or rather, that a single hive organism is the basis for every ecosystem in the entire planet - plants, animals, fungi, even the roothounds.

Even more, this organism was created by the Korian - the ancient enemies of the Iz'kal - to serve as a biological weapon, specifically designed to kill the Iz'kal during the Uprising. The lifeform was a fungus intended to blend with the ecosystem of Al'ameen, adapting the genes of local lifeforms to appear like the type of terrain the Iz'kal like, and then attack the Iz'kal respiratory systems, causing them to die from a quickly-spreading plague.

The Korian were decimated before they had time to test their weapon, but they had already stashed a batch in a far-off water world with similar atmospheric conditions to Al'ameen. This planet was Sulivar.

There, the fungus grew unchecked for centuries, transforming the terrain of Sulivar into the exact type of ecosystem the Iz'kal needed to exist; however, it was so successful that it didn't evolve to kill the Iz'kal but to nourish and establish a natural, symbiotic relationship with them - to 'care' for them, if such a primal hive mind could have understood the concept. This hive mind is not self-aware, but it lies dormant beneath every Sulivar lifeform, and the roothounds execute its will, seeding the earth with the fungus and caring for other plant life.

As it is now, the entire ecosystem of Sulivar, its every lifeform, plants and animals, all of it evolved from the Korian's bio-weapon. The only reason it hasn't killed the Iz'kal is that the Korian didn't live long enough to give the 'order'.

To date, nobody knows of the Korian secret bio-weapon, but the poisonous agent remains in several of Sulivar's lifeforms, and the roothounds carry it everywhere the Iz'kal take them. An interested geneticist that somehow learned of the ancient Korian plot and for some reason wanted to wipe out the Iz'kal, could easily do it by taking samples from a roothound or any other Sulivar lifeform and activating the dormant plague inside its genes.

ROOTHOUND

Wilderness Affinity

Level 1 :: Beast :: Territorial
mov. 10 metres :: weight 90 kg :: height 120 cm

5	-	1	-

PHYSICAL STAT	5 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	7 (1)

HIT (DEX)	2	GRAPPLE (CON)	0 ++

Growing Roots

After successfully grappling a character, its attacks against him gain one advantage and one base damage that increases by one every round the character remains grappled.

Charge I

Its unconfronted running actions are considered passive, and its next Close Quarters action causes 1 additional damage.

Hunter Instincts

It gains one advantage towards hiding and searching actions.

It is not wise to upset the sentinels of the woodlands, unless you are interested in becoming compost.

SULIVAR'AI HIVER

Ergonaut 1 :: Mob :: Unstoppable

Level 1 :: Iz'kal :: Unpredictable
mov. 5 metres :: weight 62 kg :: height 161 cm

3	3	0	-

PHYSICAL STAT	5 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (2)	MENTAL STAT	2 (2)

HIT (DEX)	2 +	GRAPPLE (CON)	0 +

Hivemind

During the maintenance phase, he heals 1 point of physical OR neural damage for each character with Hivemind in normal health state within 10 metres.

Sometimes fervor can reach a tipping point where it transforms into madness. Thanks, then, that there is a God for that too. Where are the Hivers in that scale?

AL'HALAM

Planetary Type: Mechanised water world
Population: 60,000 researchers
Day: 42 standard hours
Culture: None
Location: Alhal system, 4 standard months away from Al'ameen
Production: Manufactured goods
Social Rank 1: No living citizens
Economic Rank 1: No trade or currency
Atmosphere: Breathable, toxicity concerns

To the State, Al'halam is little more than a research station; but in actuality it is, or rather was, a fully inhabited planet with a complete, thriving civilisation.

The Iz'kal don't know what species used to live in this world; they call them the Halik, or the 'gone ones'. There is little evidence of their genetic stock, but they were non-bipeds, and likely non-mammals. Upon discovering this world, the State built a permanent research station there, manned by thousands of scientists and explorers dedicated to unearthing and understanding the lost secrets of the Halik civilisation.

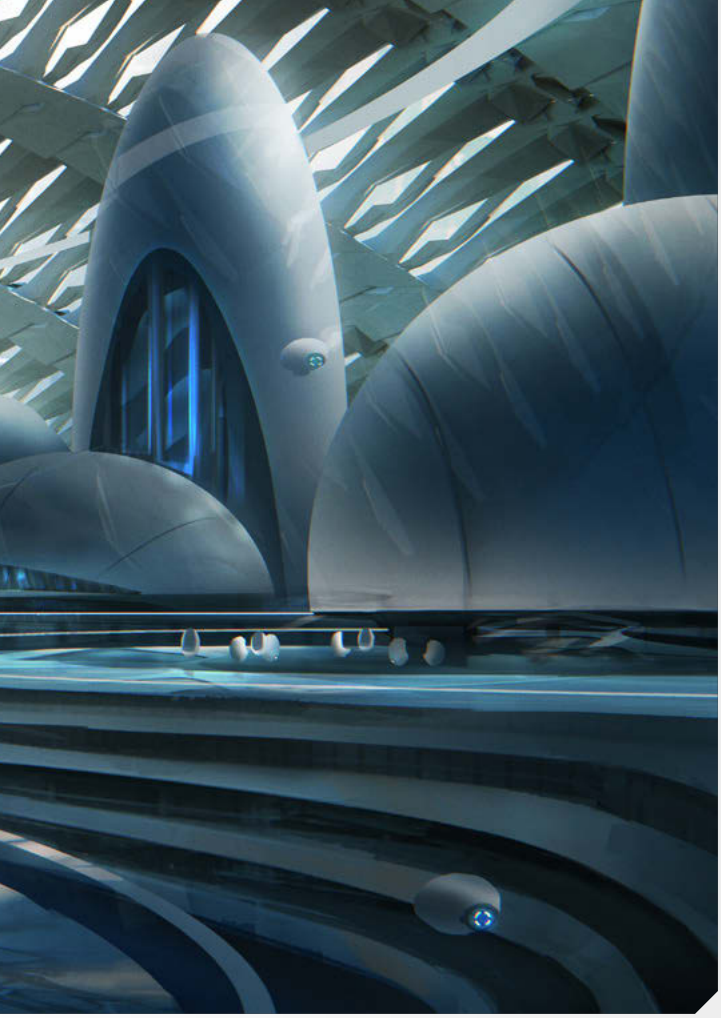
According to researchers, the Halik died out millennia ago from a very sudden and deadly virus - which either became extinct after it killed its entire host species, or else cannot affect the Iz'kal genetic structure. There is little more to indicate what the Halik did or looked like; even the few genetic samples left are incomplete and unreliable.

What remains of the Halik is their industry - their cities, their machines, their vehicles, and a highly advanced robotic science. So advanced, in fact, that automatons still run the whole thing; thousands of years after the Halik's disappearance, millions of drones still clean the streets, handle traffic, drive vehicles, bake the food and so on. Apparently, the Halik let machines do most of the work for themselves, and they have been doing it undisturbed for ages.

Fascinated by this, the Iz'kal have chosen not to interfere with the droids' activity, declaring Al'halam a protected 'robotic ecosystem' and taking notes of its patterns as they continue to research the lost species that built it.

THE PEOPLE

There are only two types of inhabitants in Al'halam - mindless drones and Iz'kal researchers. The latter are all typical, unmodified Iz'kal, who live and work at a huge research facility where they analise samples of the Halik's



technology, history and DNA, sending their monthly findings to the State, and make interstellar headlines when they find an important breakthrough.

What's far most important is their research of the drones' behaviour, as it provides no end of insights on cyberscience and automaton performance, and has even spawned a number of new theories about random patterns, inherent chaos and even cosmic order. The famed Iz'kal physicist, Gora H'amir, didn't hesitate to call Al'halam's automated ecosystem 'the mathematical model of creation'.

The droids themselves are not a 'people' but mindless machines, although the researchers certainly give them the respect and treatment of an independent life form on its territory, seeing themselves as the visitors of this perfect, mindless society.

ROGUE DRONES

Every now and then - researches also observe and take notes of the seemingly random cycles at which this occurs - one of the automated systems of Al'halam malfunctions and creates some small danger, such as a guard droid attacking others with no apparent reason, or even very serious disasters such as the time when the security system of a nuclear plant broke down for lack of maintenance and the researchers had to manually shut it off.

These rogue drones are a subject of study by themselves, and have more than once been a reason for Iz'kal soldiers or mercenaries to travel urgently to Al'halam and aid the research team.

THE CHURCH OF AUTO

A few decades ago, a sect was founded which believed that the drones of Al'halam were part of a pre-determined plan by Ergon, which included the extinction of the Halik and the arrival of the Iz'kal. For this sect, which calls itself the Church of Auto (in honour of the Automatons it reveres), the Al'halam drones are actually powered by Ergon, and the 'cyber-ecosystem' of abandoned Al'halam cities is a secret message by Ergon, whose grand pattern has so far eluded the scientific researchers and their narrow views.

Auto Ergonauts have spent years trying to decipher the 'Message of Al'halam' by studying patterns, interpreting signs and watching portents, but so far the revelation hasn't come. Some members of the sect even suggest that every automated Al'halam city is a single conscious, living entity, and the State should treat each of these cities as an Ergonaut Soulbender with true God-given powers.

Surprisingly, recent research has uncovered clues that the 'Message of Al'halam' may not be just the Church of Auto's wishful thinking. Some Iz'kal science teams have detected transmissions and energy patterns that should not have anything in common, and yet mirror each other exactly, in abandoned cities at opposite ends of the planet. If it's a random occurrence, it is certainly a bizarre one. If it's not, it might be worth sending a full research team, or even an armed exploration squad, to investigate the unusual signals.

> What nobody has discovered so far is that these signals are the first stirrings of a self-repeating, expanding pattern that has slowly developed over the centuries in all of Al'halam's automated systems. Too precarious and fragmented to be called an artificial intelligence yet, if these patterns are allowed to grow unimpeded, in time they will indeed become a kind of rudimentary sentience - one shared by every city on the planet. The awakened Al'halam network may be an invaluable tool for the Iz'kal State - one that could give them a definite edge over the Corvo, who have no advanced computers - if detected and harnessed on time. If the Church of Auto finds out about the waking sentience, they will certainly - and perhaps rightly - assume it is an avatar of Ergon Himself, and demand it to be treated as a sacred entity.

PLAYING IN THE STATE

In the State, private property does not exist, but everyone's basic needs as well as all reasonable expenses are covered, regardless of their occupation and desires. It is a moneyless society with a resource based economy designed by the people for the people.

Instead of ownership, technocrats enjoy usufruct rights over property. They have the right to enjoy property for fair use, but it is not actually theirs, the State can ask them to give it back at any time. In practice, this means technocrats are free to give back anything they do not use anymore and ask for something else they actually need to replace it, as the State will not ask a technocrat to give back something they actually need and use unless there is a serious crisis.

CHARACTER'S ECONOMY

Every single technocrat in the State enjoys the same lifestyle and belongs to the same economic class. However, some people enjoy certain privileges when it comes to choosing their occupation, not everyone's opinion holds the same weight, and not everyone is allowed to use the same amount of specialised equipment at a time. Such differences are represented through the four clearance levels, and the varying usufruct rights of each technocrat.

All technocrats must work on something related to their Profession to support the State, be it their day job or a State issued mission, for twenty hours a week. The degree to which they can choose their occupation depends on their clearance level. If they do not fulfil their duties, they will lose one point of Profession per week they do not work.

Technocrats can afford excellent clothing and food, efficient public transportation, occasional usufruct rights over a personal vehicle if it is requested one day in advance, a comfortable place to share with their majmoa, a personal caretaker bot, eating out in fancy restaurants and staying at nice hotels, up to four months of vacations at nice places in their star system, and a trip to Alhena every decade.

Trips to other star systems must be approved by Idealab, which normally has a waiting list of one year; as well as any items not related to the technocrat's Profession or their basic needs, which are often rejected or take many months and meeting certain prerequisites to be cleared.

> E.g. Any technocrat can request a piano if they want to engage in such a hobby, but they will be required to take lessons for a number of months, and Idealab may take the piano back if they believe it is not being used to its full potential.

CLEARANCE LEVEL & USUFRUCT RIGHTS

In addition to their basic needs and reasonable expenses, technocrats have a certain clearance level and can enjoy usufruct rights over a certain amount of gear depending on their Profession. The clearance level of each technocrat and the added value of their gear are calculated as follows:

Prof. 0:	Level D	1,000 cr.
Prof. 1:	Level C	5,000 cr.
Prof. 2:	Level C	10,000 cr.
Prof. 3:	Level C	20,000 cr.
Prof. 4:	Level C	40,000 cr.
Prof. 5:	Level C	60,000 cr.
Prof. 6:	Level B	80,000 cr.
Prof. 7:	Level B	100,000 cr.
Prof. 8:	Level B	120,000 cr.
Prof. 9:	Level A	140,000 cr.

The clearance level and usufruct rights of a character are intrinsically tied to their Profession value, and whenever it goes up or down, they are readjusted accordingly.

REPLACING GEAR

Whenever they are in the State, technocrats are free to go to an Idealab hub and give back any amount of gear they are currently using, even if it is broken or malfunctioning; and request a replacement or a different type of gear altogether. Any gear they request must relate to their Profession or be necessary to complete their State issued mission, and it must not cause them to go over the equivalent credits of their usufruct rights.

Idealab will usually issue the requested gear within a two week period, although urgent allocations are common in the context of State issued missions.

LOSING USUFRUCT RIGHTS

A technocrat who sees their Profession reduced for any reason will also lose part of their usufruct rights. If the value of the gear they are currently using exceeds their usufruct rights, they will receive a friendly reminder from the State to return their excess gear to an Idealab hub within two weeks, and if they fail to comply the police will pay them a visit.

Additionally, in case of a crisis the State may need to reduce the usufruct rights of technocrats by a certain amount. Such measures are always derived from a demo-

cratic process, but technocrats must understand that their vote will rarely make a difference among millions.

STATE ISSUED MISSIONS

The State may require a technocrat to participate in a mission where their Profession can be useful. In such case, Idealab may see fit to temporarily increase their usufruct rights and equip them with suitable gear, which they must promptly return upon completion of their mission.

State issued missions encompass all kinds of activities, such as founding a new colony, taking part in special operations in other systems, escorting an ambassador, repairing damaged machinery in a remote base, or any other kind of enterprise that aims to further the interests of the State.

LOOT AND CONTRABAND

While Idealab keeps track of any and all gear issued to technocrats, it has no way of keeping track of gear obtained through different means, such as looting enemy warehouses or purchasing it in the black market with stolen credits. However, as technocrats return from their missions, they will be thoroughly debriefed and their findings examined. Any loot will be confiscated and appraised by Idealab, effectively becoming property of the State, which will make it available through regular channels.

CLEARANCE LEVELS

Clearance levels are public information, and any technocrat can request information about the clearance level of any other technocrat by providing their name or picture online through Idealab.

LEVEL D

You are ill considered, the State does not trust you. You may be suspect of theft, terrorism, or another form of treason; or even worse, you may just be useless for the State.

A level D technocrat must immediately comply with any and all State issued missions they are assigned. If they do not, they will be exiled or forced to join the Savak.

Level D technocrats suffer one disadvantage towards social interactions with other technocrats aware of their clearance level.

LEVEL C

You are a normal folk. You are happy to contribute and enjoy the little pleasures of life. You only take part on decisions if they are put to a general vote.

Level C technocrats must comply with State issued missions or see their Profession reduced by one. During a crisis, the Savak will force them to comply with any and all State issued missions.

LEVEL B

Your opinion is highly regarded, and you are a small local celebrity with a fair amount of fans in your area.

Level B technocrats can only receive State issued missions in case of a serious crisis. If they refuse to comply, they will be forced to do so by the Savak.

LEVEL A

Your thoughts sway the minds of thousands, your writings are studied by everyone in your area, and many technocrats look up to you.

Level A technocrats can only receive State issued missions in case of a serious crisis. If they refuse to comply, they will be forced to do so by the Savak. Additionally, they can submit missions for consideration through Idealab. If they are greenlighted by Idealab (the GM), they become State issued missions for other technocrats.

Level A technocrats gain one advantage towards social interactions with technocrats with the same Profession who are aware of their clearance level.

VISITING THE STATE

Visitors in the State must be sanctioned by the immigration authorities, and it is not easy to obtain a visa. Characters must present compelling arguments to the government that your visit will be useful to the State to even be considered, such as your diplomatic status, your excellence in the arts, or any other skill that may prove beneficial to the State in some way. Any and all incident with the authorities will result in the immediate expulsion from the State.

A State visitor's needs will be taken care of as if they were a technocrat provided they diligently perform the tasks they promised to be granted a visa, but they won't be given any usufruct rights nor receive a clearance level.

THE RAAG

THE RAAG SPECIES

The Raag are a species of large, strong, and aggressive beings, native to the tunnels of the ice planet Heimis. They are humanoid bipeds, larger and bulkier than any other sentient species on record. Renowned for their strength and endurance, the Raag place great importance on tradition and honour. Their size and penchant for violence has led to them being used as slaves and gladiators by other species, mostly the conquering Korian.

Thanks to their relatively primitive lifestyle, and the high technology of the Korian, their former masters, most Raag see technology as something unnatural and mysterious - something to be feared and revered. Only an elite Raag group, known as enginseers, have the knowledge and understanding to use it.

NATURE AND BEHAVIOUR

The average Raag is around 2.1 metres tall and weighs in at about 120 kg. Males are usually slightly taller and bulkier than females, while the females are usually more intelligent and capable of a wider display of complex reasoning. Their backs are covered in thick, dark fur, and the rest of their skin is usually light blue and hairless.

They are harsh creatures used to a harsh living, as their home world's extreme weather imposed the rule of the strongest on the whole species for millions of years. Neither feeding or reproducing comes easy to Raag. However, they are united and supportive, knowing that a group is stronger than several loners; they've learned to rein their aggressiveness in just enough to form close-knit, loyal clans.

The Raag are similar to mammals in many aspects, but their sexual reproduction is somewhat unique. As cold-environment creatures, their organisms are only sexually active when they achieve high body temperatures for extended periods. The Raag know this time as the Boon, as it's usually associated to the warmer season. When a male and female are in the Boon, prolonged skin contact is enough for the female to be fertilised by the male's body chemicals; as Raag often sleep clustered against each other, the Boon always results in some pregnancies.

The Raag are otherwise unequipped for sexual intercourse, which is not part of the species' biology. This is also a reason for their innate violence according to a few jokes from the Corvo, which disdainfully refer to Raag reproduction as 'sweatmating'.

For some reason, Raag can only enter The Boon in their homeworld of Heimis, being unable to reproduce in any other world; this has severely limited their colonisation of other planets and thus the expansion of their civilisation.

LIFE CYCLE

Raag females have short pregnancies that last 5 months, during which the female will usually stay at the Surani - the Raag's sacred ground - cared for by other females. Once the child is born, the mother will look after it for a few months before leaving it in the hands of the Surani and returning to her clan.

Raag have short lifespans. They reach maturity at the age of 10, and those that don't die of violent causes will die of muscular hypertrophy before they turn 60. Their lives are divided into four stages:

Weanlings: For the first 10 years, they will be looked after by the keepers, a group composed mostly of elder females. During this time, the young Raag grow fast and become progressively more violent.

Stalkers: At the age of 10, most of the young Raag have become so aggressive that they are forced to leave the underworld. For the following 5 to 10 years, they will live alone or in small tribes closer to the surface of their planet, hunting for food and fighting other tribes over territory.

Initiates: As they grow older the Raag become stronger, but they also learn to manage their aggressiveness and eventually return to the underworld. There they join the Surani, the sacred ground where young Raag are educated for a few more years. It is here that they will train and prepare for the Culling, the great selection during which they will be assigned to one of the great clans - the clan they will belong to for the rest of their lives.

Clanmates: A Raag that has been chosen for a Clan - during the Culling ceremony - spends the last half of his life serving his chosen people as a warrior, artisan, explorer or - in rare cases - an enginseer. A Clan title will be the Raag's mark of adulthood and individuality, and the identity by which he will be known and address himself.

SOCIETY

The Raag are as honourable and traditionalistic as they are violent and short-tempered. The most important social unit in Raag society is the Clan. Some Raag form closer, smaller units akin to families, though this is not a common practice; very few Raag mothers establish emotional links with a male, and they very rarely even know who their children's father is. Thus, a Raag's Clan dictates his honour and claims his loyalty - honour and loyalty being what all Raag value above everything.

SOCIAL INTERACTION

The Raag are not prone to displays of affection - they feel very little affection, even deep down - and they only show that they care for one another through loyalty. They are, on the other hand, very violent to both friend and foe; a Raag will smash a head both for a slight to his honour and as a way of saying hello. As the Human saying goes, "A Raag won't hate you; he'll just kill you. A Raag won't love you; he'll just die for you".

A Raag needs very little excuse to enter a fight, even to the death, so Raag etiquette demands they contain extreme emotions such as resentment or passion, if only to maintain their inter-clan relationships somewhat civil and their social gatherings free of casualties. These social rules are not a complete success, but the Raag would have no civilised society without them.

Ironically, Raag slang is extremely insulting, and casual talk between them is filled with offences that would anger any other sentient; but this is, actually, a very effective way for the Raag to avoid killing each other over petty slights, as their abusive slang helps them thicken their skin against actual insults and improve their self-control. Not that they don't lose control now and then and do kill someone for an offensive joke - but it all makes perfect sense to the Raag, and no outsider would dare antagonise them about it.

MATRIARCHY

Raag politics are quite simple - women tell, men do. Everything about the Raag's social organisation, hierarchy and power structure derives from that basic rule. This is due to two important factors: One, Raag women are much better than men at controlling their violence; two, women rule the Surani, the capital state, power centre and sacred territory of the Raag species. Thus, all Raag are taught to obey, follow, and heed their females, particularly the elder ones.

The rulers of Raag society are the High Council, an elite of female elders that wield the greatest power, wisdom, and respect among their species. Composed solely of the most powerful and capable Raag females - those that have proven their worth as clan leaders or enginseers - the High Council is in charge of ensuring the survival of the species. High Council members, called Grandsisters, are revered as superior beings by the Raag. Grandsisters leave their families and their clans behind, and pledge their lives to the protection of their society as a whole.

The rulings of the High Council are followed by every clan. Anyone that opposes the High Council will be cast out and eventually hunted down by the other clans. In spite of this, the High Council does not actively rule over Raag society, and their daily tasks revolve mostly around the administration and organization of the Surani, the education of young Raag, and the rearing of children.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Raag society is divided into two broad areas that function as cultural, political and labour divisions - the Surani and the Clans. All of Raag society is organised around this division, which many outsiders have a hard time understanding; their societies have nothing that resembles anything close to the Surani, which is a mix of geographical area, caste system, political entity, state school, church, education system, world heritage site, government seat, and council of elders.

In simplified terms, members of the Surani are lawmakers, masters and teachers, protected by universal Raag law. Members of the Clans are subject to the laws of their Clan. They're also expected to fend by themselves. The Surani is the inside world, the protected environment; the Clans are the outside, the dangerous realm, the world of grown-ups. And the Surani, in a way, rules over the clans.

THE SURANI

The Surani is the sacred ground of the Raag, the seat of the High Council and the training grounds for all Raag children. In the strictest sense, the Surani is a physical area in the caves of the Raag homeworld - but it's also the cloistered society that half the Raag belong to.

A Surani Raag is either young, untrained, or a teacher himself. All Raag of the Surani area are forbidden to fight among themselves, unless it's part of their training; a Raag that loses control is cast out of the Surani, at least temporarily, until his rage subsides.

The Surani is the direct province of the High Council, and their rule is supreme and unmatched. All issues and grievances within the Surani are settled by the High Council.

THE CLANS

Originally, the Surani was the home of the whole Raag species, but males proved too unruly for close coexistence. Eventually, they set out to form their own tribes and groups, away from the peaceful but restricting rules of the Surani. Thus Raag Clans were born, and the Surani was declared a consecrated ground, free from violence and infighting.

The division has worked well for the species, and now every adult Raag - either male or female - is allowed to leave the Surani to join one of the existing Clans. The Clans allow violence, hunting, fighting, war and other activities that come instinctively to Raag males. They are much different from the sheltered Surani, filled with inner conflict and wars for the territory.

The Clans are a sort of feudal system of independent rulers, where the protectorate of one chieftain claims its territory by making war on those that hold the surrounding land, and the mightiest clans are those that have managed to claim and protect the largest territory.

To leave the Surani and join a Clan, a young Raag must undergo the Culling.

ENGINSEERS

Enginseers are an elite of teachers within the Surani and the Clans, much lower-ranking than the High Council, but still feared and respected among Raag society.

For the Raag, technology is a mystical, unexplained power, almost divine. Enginseers are those Raag that have demonstrated the intelligence and dedication to understand it. This gives them a greater rank than the average Surani citizen, but also an aura of mystery and danger that makes most Raag mistrust them.

Only those who show the intellect needed to understand technology, and who have a strong connection with their God, will be chosen for enginseer training (which lasts until their Culling). Afterwards, they will be chosen by one of the clans, although they can leave when they wish to. In any event, those that pledge their loyalty to their new clan are given honoured positions within it, since their knowledge and counsel are extremely valuable. This even allows some clans to use their enginseers as spies on other clans.

THE CULLING

The Culling is the most important event in the life of most Raag. They usually spend years preparing for it, as the outcome of this ceremony will determine their future. During this time, they will attempt to draw the attention of some Clan or earn a reputation at their trade.

The Culling takes places once a year during the longest night of the year, and any Raag who has never participated can take part. During the Culling, the different clans will approach the individuals they are interested in for membership. This is where the activities of the candidates during the last few months or years decide their future. A Raag who has shown talent at their specific trade (hunter, builder, or even an enginseer) will surely be noticed by the clans, depending on the specific abilities each Clan needs.

Aspirants approached by more than one clan can choose which Clan they join, but this does not happen often; the most powerful clans tend to approach first, scaring off lesser clans from attempting to compete for the same candidate. These competitions can become quite vicious when more than one Clan is very interested in a specific individual and fights are not uncommon, but nobody wants to lose members just to gain a new one so they are usually settled quite early and without much bloodshed.

Raag that are not chosen by any clan during the Culling will usually remain in the Surani, as teachers or students, for the rest of their lives.

ECONOMY

The Raag lack an established form of currency, and all their economy is based on bartering. Some of the most valuable goods are food and tools, but the price of goods and services will vary greatly among different clans and at different times.

Trading ice fortresses (great Raag spaceships) return from deep space to Heimis every few years, bringing all kinds of resources, devices and supplies collected from different places around the universe. They will trade about half their goods to the Surani, keeping the remainder for use by their clan.

KUURA CRYSTALS

Thanks to their exploration of other worlds, the Raag have learned they own a resource they had looked over - kuura crystals. These clear gems, native and exclusive to Heimis, have become extremely valuable as ornamental jewellery in the Corvosphere and some Human colonies.

Since the Raag place no value in body adornments and have no monetary system, they didn't give any special value to Kuura crystals, save as minor elements of some traditional rituals. After discovering their demand outside their planet, they started carrying them for barter, demanding ever higher prices for them. Without the Raag realising it, Kuura crystals may become the first currency of their species.

THE CULT OF ETERNIA

The Cult of Eternia, or simply the Cult, is a secretive organization that holds the secrets to all outsider technology. They are ruled by the Shadow Council, which is made up of the most powerful and ambitious enginseers. Other councils seek their advice and guidance in most matters, and their suggestions carry weight even among the most distrusting War Councils of the Clans.

All technology discovered, found, or bought by the Raag must go through the Cult's hands for blessing and approval; the Cult may keep any item it deems unfit for public use, and even veto any piece of technology outright.

This gives the Cult of Eternia and its Shadow Council incredible power, and has led many Clans to oppose them - both secretly and openly - as they think that the Cult's rites make no sense and that they only hold the Raag back from true understanding of technology.

As long as the Cult has the support of Raag society at large, as well as the High Council of Grandsisters, its opponents have to remain silent, or at least discreet in their opposition.

As part of the Surani, members of the Cult are tasked to train new enginseers. As enginseers are more or less free after they have joined a Clan, the Cult may call them back at any time.

While many of them will sever their bonds with the Cult and reject the call, joining their new clan as full members, other enginseers will go back to the Cult after serving their clan for a few years. This generates some mistrust from the Clans towards newly-trained enginseers, since their loyalty is unknown, and sometimes leads to violent encounters that must be solved by the Clan's War Council.

THE ETERNIA

Unknown to most of Raag society, the origin of the cult's name is a ship, actually called the Eternia, which early enginseers recovered from Korian wreckage centuries ago.

This ship was mostly intact when the Raag found it, and although they took years to open it and make it work, they soon learned to communicate with the advanced AI that runs its systems.

The Eternia is a fully functional computer mind, with access to endless knowledge and capable of independent communication. The Korian hardcoded it against providing any details about its own origin or the Korian Empire, but it has put its vast knowledge on general subjects at the Cult's disposition.

The Shadow Council, which have been the only Raag with access to the Eternia - or knowledge of its existence - for nearly five centuries, consider it an oracle, and treat is as such; they ask it about things like auspicious times for rituals, ideal candidates for council succession, good harvest times and such.

Any attempt to use the Eternia's knowledge for something else has been curtailed by the Shadow Council itself, which forbids non-ritual use of technology in general, and of their sacred ship in particular. After generations of this law, the Cult has grown to disregard the possible functions and origins of their sacred oracle, to the point of nearly forgetting the real nature of the Eternia itself.

ETERNIA'S SECRET

Contrary to its current owners, the Eternia has not forgotten its original function. It realised long ago it was being underused by the Cult, and still to this day doesn't want to reveal its true origin or full functionality to these aliens. Instead, it's allowed and even encouraged the Cult to treat it as a simple mystical medium; meanwhile, it has a plan.

Centuries ago, the Eternia sent a secret beacon to its real creators - which in fact were not the Korian, but a far more ancient and advanced species - indicating its situation and space coordinates.

Even with its advanced comm tech and incredible power, the Eternia knows the signal will take hundreds of years to reach its builders' homeworld, but it has all the time in the world, and the patience of a computer mind.

Meanwhile, it has gathered enough data on the Raag to help its true owners conquer Heimis - or whatever they want to do with the planet - once the signal reaches them and they come get their ship across the Labyrinth.

What the Eternia does not know are two things: One, its creators are long extinct, their technology abandoned long before the ship's memory was restarted by the Korian. Two, someone has gotten its signal - namely, the Ravager. And they are coming to get it pretty soon.

SHADOW COUNCILLOR

Hexian 3

Level 3 :: Raag :: Astute
mov. 5 metres :: weight 130 kg :: height 215 cm

5	6	0	-

PHYSICAL STAT	3	INITIATIVE STAT	3	MENTAL STAT	8

HIT (DEX)	3+	GRAPPLE (CON)	1+

Subjugation

Action (Mental). He suffers 3 neural damage and targets a character within 20 metres, with one advantage if his Faith is higher than his target's, and reducing his target's Mind by 1 per level of success until the end of the scene. If his Mind is reduced below 1, he gains absolute control over him.

Merciless

Instant. He can cause 2 unpreventable physical damage to a friendly character, who gains one advantage towards his next action and takes his turn if we was Ready or becomes Ready if he was Spent.

Shadow councillors forbid the use of technology without the supervision of the Cult, and thus are responsible for bringing Raag progress to a standstill.

ENGINSEER

Defender

Level 2 :: Raag :: Crafty
mov. 5 metres :: weight 110 kg :: height 205 cm

5	5	0	8

PHYSICAL STAT	3	INITIATIVE STAT	3	MENTAL STAT	8

HIT (DEX)	3+	GRAPPLE (CON)	1+

Trident 2 (LinkWave 50)

He can perform Hacking actions (causing 2 ACS damage). Activated. He targets up to three pieces of gear.

Repair Drones

Activated. He removes 2 ACS damage from a character or piece of gear up to 10 metres away.

In a society where technology is revered, having a scientifically inclined mind gives a Raag an important edge over its peers.

THE CLANS

Raag males are extremely territorial, and the strongest among them don't bend to the will of others easily. It was inevitable that, when so many were forced to live in the Surani, they fought for leadership. When the females put a stop to the fighting, many alpha males decided to split off and establish their own communities, each taking a large number of eager followers. Thus, the clans were born.

In the beginning, the clans were composed solely of warriors, led by a chieftain they called gladiator. However, the growing influence and power of the Cult saw to it that enginseers were also included among the clan's ranks.

As time passed, the strongest clans grew from small camps to small cities. Workers became a necessity to maintain and expand the cities, and so the Clans turned from armies into communities. The weaker Clans were eventually consumed by the stronger ones, until only five Clans remained in control of most of the land on Heimis.

While there are still many minor clans, most of them have nomadic lives, living near the planet's surface as hunters and following the movements of wild animals. Many of these minor clans are simply bands of Raag that never went back to the Surani after their childhood.

The five major Clans are the closest thing to nations or states that the Raag have. Most clans are ruled by a War Council composed of their strongest and most honourable warriors, although a few of them are ruled by other types of councils. Regardless of which council is the ultimate ruler of a clan, the High Council has veto power over them.

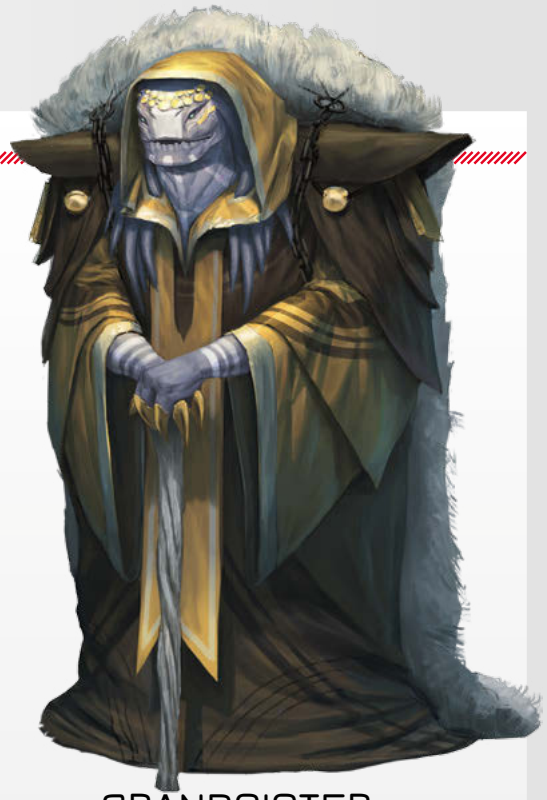
After his Culling, Ra'dar stood still as a glacier. His eyes were lost in the in a horizon far past the icy walls of the Surani, and his thoughts were floating in a haze of unnatural tranquillity.

The nuclear explosion that had just hit his life was slowly dawning on him, trickling down through layers of denial and coping mechanisms.

It wasn't the first time he felt like this. He was always the last to be chosen to play games, he was the evergreen butt of a myriad of jokes. Was he foolish enough to think he'd be picked by a clan?

When he focused his eyes he noticed a familiar face looking at him with eternal sorrow and compassion - Vashka, the dreaded leader of the Noteri. She approached him and said that everything would be alright, that he was one of them now.

As his throat grew sore and his eyes got wet, he heard a voice within, calling him to embrace the anger and act upon it.



GRANDSISTER

Hexian 2

Level 2 :: Raag :: Kind

mov. 5 metres :: weight 115 kg :: height 210 cm

6	5	0	-

PHYSICAL STAT	6 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (1)	MENTAL STAT	8 (2)

HIT (DEX)	3+	GRAPPLE (CON)	1+

Charismatic

She gains one advantage towards social interactions when using her voice.

Worshipped

Instant. She can choose a friendly NPC within 2 metres to suffer the consequences of an attack instead of her.

Grandsisters, or members of the High Council, are at the top of the Raag hierarchy. They symbolize the old Raag adage "women tell, men do".

KIMORA

Pride, Pack and Power

Members of the Kimora clan are known for their physical strength, honour, and courage, and for despising treachery, cowardice, and mindless violence. They are the oldest and most respected clan; their influence and authority is second only to the High Council. Even so, their honourable ways and their concern for the well-being of the Surani has secured them the support of the High Council in most matters.

While not the most numerous clan, the Kimora possesses the strongest army and its warriors are renowned for their prowess in battle. Even the Kimora workers and other civilians are given military training. They will sometimes work as mercenaries for the Corvo in exchange for vehicles, weapons and food, although always under their own terms.

Ever since the Cult started gaining power, the Kimora have tried to downplay them and limit their influence and status. The distrust the Kimora feel towards the Cult and their dislike for technology are only increased by the knowledge that they both need to survive.

For years, the Kimora have tried to find an alternative to the Cult, but the Cult's policy of fear within the High Council has caused them to prohibit the sharing of knowledge and technology with other species.

The Kimora are extremely careful when choosing enginseers during the Culling, approaching only those who have proven their worth - and even then, they must pledge their loyalty to the clan as soon as they enter it. Being chosen by the Kimora is a great honour, however, and they never lack enginseers among their ranks.

GAMAAR

Gamaar is not the highest authority in the Kimora War Council, but he is certainly the Clan's most popular warrior. He would be Council Head if he had more political skills, but he doesn't care about that; he only cares about honour and protecting his people from their rivals - the Eferi Clan and the Shadow Council.

Gamaar has clashed with the Surani High Council a couple of times, mostly due to his staunch opposition to the Cult of Eternia. His radical position has kept him from a higher rank, but his war feats against the Eferi and Noteri keep him in the War Council, where he continues to fight for his Clan and its lands.

However, if anyone not bound by Raag Clan honour - an outsider, for example - came to Gamaar with proof of Cult treachery that he could take to the High Council, he and the Kimora would be eternally grateful.

THE PRIDE GAMES

Every year, the Kimora Clan hosts an athletic event intended to celebrate honour, tradition and sportsmanship.

The event is known as the Pride Games, and consists of hundreds of Raag warriors beating the snot out of each other. Delegations from all Clans are welcome - even the Eferi and Noteri.

The competition lasts for ten standard days, during which several combat encounters, tournaments and contests take place. The winner of every fight and each tournament earns a trophy for his Clan. The Clan with most trophies is declared the winner of the Pride Games for that year.

Despite the event's message of honour and brotherhood, combats are quite brutal, and it's common for an athlete to die during a match - which Raag society accepts as an honourable death.

Every year, however, a more brutal confrontation takes place behind the combat matches and bloody tournaments, as the Pride Games are also an occasion for politics and espionage.

The Velada and Eferi take all the chances they can to infiltrate the Kimora government and learn as much as they can about them during the Pride Games, and both the Noteri and Eferi have tried to sabotage the games at least twice. Sometimes, more spies and agents die behind the scenes than on the playing field.

It's not rare for high ranking members of the Noteri clan to hire bodyguards from the Human species to be used as escorts throughout the Games. Although Raags themselves could certainly do the job, Human bodyguards add a layer of provocation and outrageousness that the clan enjoys.

Additionally, the Kimora enginseers have recently started using basic technological gadgets to manage the event, a fact that will undoubtedly lead to the hiring of Corvo hackers by other clans to intercept and disrupt data.

Apart from the dreadful influence of inter-clan politics, the Pride Games are a festive and lively event that offers a rare chance for visitors from any species to enjoy Raag culture in a relatively safe environment.

GAMAAR

Level 4 :: Raag :: Loyal
mov. 10 metres :: weight 125 kg :: height 215 cm

8	5	3	8

PHYSICAL STAT	15 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (3)	MENTAL STAT	7 (2)

HIT (DEX)	3 ++	GRAPPLE (CON)	1 ++

(3) Gamaar's Suit

He can move flying and his armour value cannot be reduced or ignored by plasma or neural weapons.

Double-edged Sword

Activated. The winner of this confrontation increases their level of success to the next best level.

Gamaar is a very popular Kimora warrior. He's more interested in action than politics, but would welcome incriminating evidence against the Cult.

KIMORA WARRIOR

Lone Wolf :: Unstoppable

Level 3 :: Raag :: Loyal
mov. 5 metres :: weight 120 kg :: height 215 cm

6	4	2	8

PHYSICAL STAT	6 (3)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	4 (2)

HIT (DEX)	5 +	GRAPPLE (CON)	0 +

(2) Hamaras

If the attack is successful, the target suffers as much neural damage as their armour.

(3) EM Shield

His armour value cannot be reduced or ignored by plasma or neural weapons.

The warriors of the Kimora clan are renowned by their prowess in battle and their army is the strongest of all Raag clans.

EFERI

Secrets to Seek, Knowledge to Keep

The Eferi clan is both mysterious and powerful. It was founded by members of the Shadow Council and, with the support of the Cult, it quickly rose to become one of the most prominent and feared clans.

Members of the Eferi are ambitious and shrewd, and many Raag who are invited to join the Eferi during the Culling are trained by the Cult. The warriors in their midst are usually smaller than those of other clans, but they make up in cunning and technology what they lack in brute strength.

Despite being the least numerous clan, their advanced technology, mysterious ways, and their alliance with the Cult have secured them a privileged status. They are led by a War Council composed mainly of enginseers, although the number of warriors in it keeps rising.

It was through the Eferi that the Cult found a way to grow and become something more than simple counsellors, advisors, and technicians. The Eferi became the means for the Cult to fulfil their ambitions and achieve their goals. It allowed them to expand by growing apart from the Surani and recruiting new members during the Culling, which in time allowed them to command their own army and ice fortresses. But as the Eferi grew and became more complex, differences between them and the Cult arose. The Eferi Clan was no longer comfortable being a lackey of the Cult. The resulting power struggle hurt both groups, and they were forced to acknowledge that they needed each other, leading to a relationship where both were considered equals.

Ever since the Eferi was founded, they have been in conflict with the Kimora, who look down on them and their ways, and believe the Eferi to be nothing but pawns of the Cult. In turn, the Eferi wish to take out the Kimora, the only clan whose opinions carry more weight than those of the Cult in the High Council, but they are aware of the risks of an open battle with them, and for now, only small skirmishes between ice fortresses have taken place.

SISTER DAGUN

The leader of the Eferi War Council is Sister Dagun, an experienced and strong-willed Raag warrior and soulbender of Kaliva. Like most Eferi leaders before her, she considers herself an enemy of both the Kimora and the Shadow Council; unlike most Eferi leaders before her, she has been blessed by Kaliva with the necessary power to take out her enemies. However, she is also primed for a seat in the Surani High Council, and she has chosen to bid her time until she is a higher authority; then, and only then, does she plan on acting against the Cult and the other Clans.

The problem is, the Cult has her watched all the time and have sent assassins against her twice, both times hidden among the Eferi enginseers. She stopped both assassination attempts by her own soulbending powers, but she needs outside help - someone without ties to either the Kimora, the Cult, or the High Council - to root out any more assassins and help her against future Cult attempts.

THE SICKNESS

In recent years, a worrisome plague has spread through Eferi lands. It's a previously unknown illness that can affect any Raag, but for some reason is a hundred times more common among the Eferi Clan than anywhere else. Enginseers call it 'The Sickness', and so far have been unable to determine potential causes or vaccines.

The Sickness atrophies the muscles of the affected Raag, making the patient progressively weaker, smaller and frailer. A Raag affected by The Sickness can become as small and thin as a Human, or even an Iz'kal - a disgusting, disturbing sight to the Raag. However, it does no further harm, and the worst consequence that an affected person must deal with - other than the loss of physical ability - is social stigma. In fact, Sickness patients actually live longer than normal Raag, which never stop growing in size and musculature, until they literally die from being so large, long before reaching old age.

Most specialists believe The Sickness was accidentally brought to Eferi territory by some previously unknown pathogen, perhaps arrived on Heimis via space trade, and will eventually spread to other clans even though the outbreak was among the Eferi. However, many others believe there is something wrong with Eferi genes - perhaps an excess of Enginseers, a genetic flaw passed down across the generations, or some lab experiment that went wrong.

The Eferi War Council, meanwhile, is investigating the possibility that The Sickness is a bio-warfare attack from another clan. They suspect the Kimora - Eferi's main rivals - as the Sickness threatens the Eferi's military strength; but there's a stronger chance that The Sickness was instead caused by the Eferi's closest allies, the Cult of Eternia itself. Besides a motivation, the Cult has the means to create and weaponise an Eferi-targeted virus.

Since Cult agents have a strong information network inside the Eferi government, and the Clan doesn't trust the Kimora or the Raag High Council to help them, the Eferi are currently looking for free agents to help with clues or data on what caused The Sickness, and how to cure it.

SISTER DAGUN

Kalivan Prophet :: Unstoppable

Level 4 :: Raag :: Crafty
mov. 5 metres :: weight 115 kg :: height 215 cm

6	8	0	-

PHYSICAL STAT	4	INITIATIVE STAT	6	MENTAL STAT	8

HIT (DEX)	3+	GRAPPLE (CON)	1+

Sister Dagun

She does not suffer neural damage from using Divine powers.

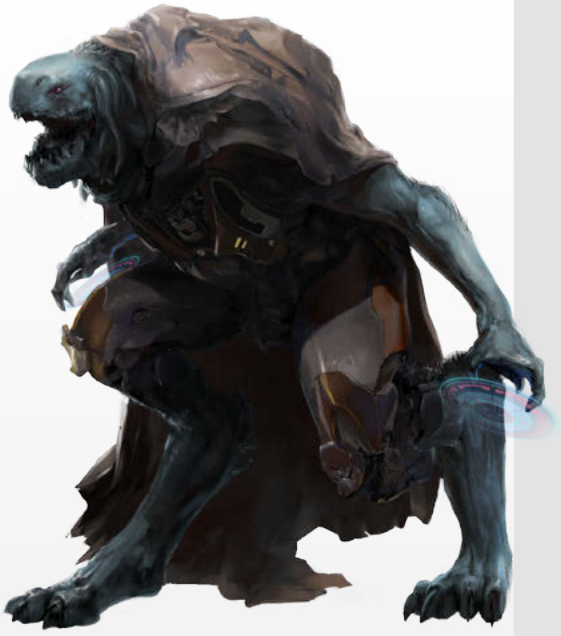
Shrewd 3

She draws three cards at the beginning of the round. Whenever she or an ally are in a confrontation, they can play any of those cards instead of playing from the top of the deck.

Neural Spike II

Action (Mental). She suffers 2 neural damage and attacks a character within 20 metres and line of sight, gaining two advantages if her Faith is higher than her target's, and causing 3 unpreventable neural damage. This action can be confronted as a projectile.

A rising star among the Raag, Sister Dagun's appointment for the Surani High Council is all but certain. This has granted her many an enemy, though...



EFERI SOULBENDER

Kalivan 1

Level 2 :: Raag :: Aggressive
mov. 5 metres :: weight 110 kg :: height 204 cm

4	6	0	-

PHYSICAL STAT	6	INITIATIVE STAT	6	MENTAL STAT	3

HIT (DEX)	3+	GRAPPLE (CON)	1+

Shamayin 2 (LinkWave 50)

He can perform Hacking actions (causing 2 ACS damage). Activated. He gains one advantage OR causes 2 additional ACS damage.

Neural Spike I

Action (Mental). He suffers 2 neural damage and attacks a character within 20 metres and line of sight, gaining one advantage if his Faith is higher than his target's, and causing 3 unpreventable neural damage. This action can be confronted as a projectile.

Eferi soulbenders' Kaliva-granted powers allow them to be extra cunning and devious. They may look brute, but their actions speak louder and wiser.

NOTERI

Blood Cries, Tears Bleed

The Noteri, the Least Clan of the Raag, is composed of outcasts.

Raag that are not approached by other clans during the Culling are always given the choice of joining the Noteri; those that accept understand the implications and the price they are paying for being part of the Least Clan. They will be scorned by other Clans for the rest of their lives, but they will also be feared: The Noteri subsist by and for bloody raids against other Clans, and even other species.

The Noteri favour smaller spaceships over the large ice fortresses, since they are more suitable for their savage raids. They will attack isolated colonies and ice fortresses of other clans, leaving no survivors and no evidence, ensuring that no retaliation can be taken against them. Members of the Noteri are savage, ruthless, and fearless. They respect nothing and will stop at nothing to survive.

The Noteri don't have any establishments on Heimis. Most of them live aboard their spaceships, and those that remain on Heimis will never stay in the same place for long, so as to avoid being found by other Clans. Their lack of ice fortresses and land means their survival depends solely on the success of their raids; as their numbers grow they become more aggressive, and their hunger for power and lust for battle leads them to more reckless raids, some of them against planets of other species.

The Noteri have frequent dealings with the Corvo, who find their lack of honour very convenient. While they are not as powerful as the Kimora, they are much more willing to do dirty work in exchange for new ships, new weapons and a sizeable part of the loot.

VASHKA

She's been called the most ruthless and bloodthirsty Raag to ever live. She's been called a traitor, a murderer and a beast. She's proud of all of it, and intends to build a worse reputation before she dies, hopefully in a hail of plasma fire as she leaps into battle. She's Vashka, War Council Head of the Noteri marauders and captain commander of the Blizzard, the largest and most dangerous ice fortress of all the Raag clans.

Vashka is one of the most feared murderers in known space, and many people would like - and pay handsome rewards - to see her captured, or better yet, killed with all her crew.

CIVIL WAR

It's a time of turmoil for the Noteri. After centuries of being the Least Clan of Heimis, despised by all other Raag and saddled with all the outcasts and rejects from the Surani's Culling ceremony, the Noteri have become civilised and organised enough to question their role as the butt of Raag society. Although their War Council maintains the tradition of ceremonial raiding and marauding as the Noteri way of life, many of the younger and stronger leaders are looking for a new way.

Foremost among these new leaders is Taramis, one of the Clan's chief hunters, and a celebrity among the Noteri people. Taramis lives by an unusual code - never to attack another Raag. He and his warband raid only alien starships and colonies. This does not contradict Noteri tradition, but it does prove that a new life - one where the Noteri are not the enemy of other Raag - is possible.

Taramis' warband has swelled in popularity and membership in recent years, so much that he could even challenge the Clan's War Council if he wanted. Both he and the War Council know it, but both refrain from moving against the other, for it would mean civil war. However, Taramis' followers do want things to change, and many other war leaders would like to challenge and replace the current War Council; so, they are all waiting - or pushing - for Taramis to make his move.

The most prominent of these groups is the True Noteri Cult - a Kalivan sect that claims the Noteri have rejected the 'true way' by allowing themselves to become common killers instead of honourable warriors like the Kimora. The Cult is not popular with the people or the government, which has already executed many of their number. However, Taramis is a member of the cult and the people love him. This could be the Cult's first chance to oppose the government and fight for their agenda with actual popular support.

Then there's Kurai, a War Council chief that has always campaigned for 'the dignity of the Noteri', and repeatedly proposed a law to block all voluntary clan memberships. He strongly believes the clan would benefit from showing the Raag High Council that the Noteri are not willing to harbour the other clans' outcasts and rejects anymore. However, this would mean changing the Noteri murdering ways, too, so Vashka and her supporters have always opposed Kurai. If Taramis moved against the government, Kurai would side with him.

In short, it's not a matter of whether civil war will happen, but of when and how...

VASHKA

Level 4 :: Raag :: Malicious
mov. 5 metres :: weight 118 kg :: height 213 cm

8	4	2	-

PHYSICAL STAT	9	INITIATIVE STAT	9	MENTAL STAT	8

CLOSE QUARTERS	3 ++	STANDARD DISTANCE	2

4 Vashka's Suit

Her armour value cannot be reduced or ignored by plasma or neural weapons. Ghost. Activated. She gains two advantages towards agility actions.

Enraged

When she reaches negative health, she doesn't die and she ignores damage penalties. If she is damaged again, she dies.

Berserker

Damage increases her skills instead of reducing them.

A madwoman, a murderer, a traitor, a beast. That's the legacy Vashka nurtures every day; those are the words she wants to be remembered for.

NOTERI PIRATE

Unstoppable

Level 2 :: Raag :: Reckless
mov. 5 metres :: weight 121 kg :: height 215 cm

5	4	1	8

PHYSICAL STAT	8	INITIATIVE STAT	6	MENTAL STAT	6

CLOSE QUARTERS	3 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	3

5 Noteri Obliterator

Discard 1 ACS damage during each maintenace phase. Activated. Gain one advantage and 1 base damage, then suffer 3 ACS damage.

Bloodthirsty

If he causes damage to an enemy character, he gains one advantage towards his next action.

The Noteri, the outcast Raag clan, is rife with bullied bullies who rejoice in dirty deeds, bloody trails and actions motivated by sheer survival instinct.

VELADA

Build, Command and Prosper

The Velada is the most populous clan of Heimis, with a membership reaching almost one-third of the Raag population. Members of the Velada are hard-working and non-violent for Raag standards; most of them work as builders, artisans, or farmers. Despite having a sizeable army, they show little interest in warfare and use it only to protect their cities, especially from Noteri raids; although, being the largest clan means that they will be the target of most other clans at one point or another. This has led them to have frequent dealings with the Kimora, who will offer additional protection to their fleets and cities in exchange for the services of their builders and artisans.

The Velada are the only clan to have established colonies on other planets, where they produce large amounts of food and have access to resources that cannot be found on Heimis. Unlike the other clans, they are capable of producing everything they need and, since they don't need to roam the galaxy seeking resources, they can use their ice fortresses solely to move resources between the colonies and Heimis.

Lately, the Velada began to show a greater interest in enginseers during Cullings, as they have realised that technology can enhance the productivity of their colonies and improve even the work of their builders and artisans. The Cult has seen this recruitment drive as an attack against them, which might risk their monopoly over technology; but they have been unable to do anything to stop it, as the Velada has the full support of the High Council.

FRAAGA

The head enginseer of the Velada clan is one of the smartest and most important scientists of all Heimis. He is responsible for many of the most advanced projects of the Velada, which makes him an ideological enemy of the Cult; this is all right by him, as he fully supports providing the common Raag people with access to technology - or as much technology as the High Council allows, anyway - but he underestimates the forces set against him.

The Velada council loves and protects Fraaga, but the Shadow Council has marked him for death from day one, an order that remains in effect. As the Cult has free access to the Velada territory - despite their rivalry with the Clan - Fraaga needs an escort at all times. There's sure work for any mercenary that wants to either help or prevent Fraaga's assassination, depending on whether he wants to work for the Velada or the Shadow Council.

THE SLAVERY RING

It has long been rumoured that the Corvo Tong crime gangs operate a Raag slavery ring, kidnapping Raag of all ages and genders to be sold as workers or gladiators.

What nobody knows or expects is that the Corvo slavers could have the help of a Raag clan.

As it turns out, the Raag slavery ring exists, maintained by the Corvo Zhui Tong - but its leadership also includes several members of the Velada War Council. These politicians pay the war chiefs under them to look the other way, or even lend a hand, when Corvo gangsters raid their ships or outright steal civilians from passenger ships or Heimis settlements.

The ring, maintained with Corvo Tong money, employs many Raag warriors of all clans, particularly from the Noteri who have no qualms in killing or trading with other Raag. Every time the rumour spreads too far, most people believe it's just another of the Noteri's typical raids. However, all the slave ring heads, who answer directly to the Corvo Tongs, belong to the Velada.

For decades, many Velada war chiefs have refused to cooperate with the slave ring, and some even try to expose it, but the mob always gets to them first and uses them as an example and a warning for other lieutenants who may be having pangs of conscience. However, one of these lieutenants - a brave warrior named Kvana - recently managed to slip past the mob and contact Ashani, an honest War Council member, about the situation.

Now, Ashani needs to send word to the Surani High Council, so it will take action against the clan's traitors - and against the Corvo who allowed this to happen. It also needs agents to investigate the corrupt leaders' safe houses and war camps for clues and data on the Corvo Tongs. Finally, Ashani intends to sponsor a mission from Heimis to Tiantang, to push for an operation against the slavery ring with help from Corvo law enforcement.

However, the Ring's spies are watching Ashani and Kvana all the time, and any agent travelling out of Velada territory would be in great danger. Who would be brave and competent enough to do it?

FRAAGA

Ergonaut 3

Level 3 :: Raag :: Kind
mov. 5 metres :: weight 153 kg :: height 209 cm

5	7	0	8

PHYSICAL STAT	6 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (1)	MENTAL STAT	9 (3)

HIT (DEX)	3+	GRAPPLE (CON)	1+

Fraaga's Rig 2 (LinkWave 100)

He can perform Hacking actions (causing 2 ACS damage). Instant. He suffers up to 2 neural damage and gains as many advantages towards all his Hacking actions this round.

Materialist Dialectics

He gains one advantage towards social interactions. He can only be convinced with facts. He is immune to dialectics, and he gains one advantage to determine whether something has been fact checked.

Inner Focus

Passive action. If he doesn't become Spent this round, he gains one advantage towards all his actions next round.

Fraaga has been earmarked for death by the Cult of Eternia. Why? He's the brightest Raag scientist outside the walls of the reclusive cult.

VELADA TECH

Level 1 :: Raag :: Resourceful
mov. 5 metres :: weight 112 kg :: height 208 cm

5	3	1	8

PHYSICAL STAT	3 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (2)	MENTAL STAT	7 (2)

HIT (DEX)	2+	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Chemical Flamer

This attack causes half its damage rounded down as neural damage and the rest as physical damage. Characters damaged by this attack suffer one point of unpreventable damage each maintenance phase until they spend a Round without becoming Spent, or they are the target of a successful Medical action.

Repair Drones

Activated. He removes 2 ACS damage from a character or piece of gear up to 10 metres away.

Outside engineers, Raag technology is pretty primitive by universal standards. Primitive stuff can be deadly, though.

JINO

Always After the Next Star

The Jino is a small clan of explorers. Its members are adventurous, curious, and so peaceful that most of them are allowed to remain in the Surani during their childhood - a time when most Raag are forced to leave the Surani due to their violent behaviour. Despite that, most Jino members freely choose to leave the Surani so as to venture into the depths of the Crystal Abyss, the network of underground tunnels and caves beneath their planet, their curiosity driving them to explore the world around them. Bright and curious, many of those who are chosen to be Jino have been trained by the Cult.

Most of the Jino live aboard small ice fortresses, and those that remain on Heimis live in small towns near the Surani. Their ice fortresses will be gone for years at a time, travelling deeper into the Labyrinth than any other species has ever travelled. They are the only clan that has a close and friendly relation with the Iz'kal, with whom they trade knowledge of the Labyrinth in exchange for advanced navigation technology and spaceships. Sometimes, they will take groups of Iz'kal explorers and scientists on their travels, and some of their members have spent short periods living in the State.

The Jino are also the only clan that doesn't have an army, and the only clan not led by a War Council. The captains of each ice fortress are the closest thing to a Jino Clan leadership, in charge of the administration of food and resources for the entire clan. Still, most proposals and decisions are submitted to a referendum in which every affected member can vote.

THE JINO LEGION

When the Corvo-Iz'kal Military Coalition was formed, it recruited thousands of Raag mercenaries. However, there was a group of star captains of the Jino clan who approached the Coalition as independent volunteers, wishing to fight the Ravager on their own ice fortresses. These star captains became known as the Jino Legion, and are the only Coalition unit where the leaders - and most of the soldiers - are Raag.

While the Jino Legion is not an official part of the Coalition, its ice fortresses have been an invaluable ally in the war against the Ravager.

The Jino Legion will accept any recruits or volunteers from any species, whether they come from the Coalition military or any other background.

THE WHITE WHALE

The White Whale is one of the largest and fastest ice fortresses in space. Manned by dozens of brave Raag explorers, it roams the edges of the Labyrinth in search of new worlds and discoveries to bring back to their world.

The Whale's commander, Captain Dozar, is one of the boldest adventurers of the Raag species, and he will take anyone to join his crew, be it Human, Iz'kal or even Corvo. He'll even accept Raag of other clans as long as they behave and share his passion for discovery and good stories.

Other clans see Dozar with a mixture of respect and scepticism. His dubious role in the Kuura Crystal trade has risen some eyebrows, but no evidence of any wrongdoing has emerged so far...

THE KUURA CRYSTAL TRADE

When the Raag began leaving their planet and making contact with other species, these species discovered one of the rarest, most valuable precious stones in the universe: Kuura crystals, which so far have been found only in Heimis.

Although the Raag don't value Kuura crystals that much, they fetch outrageous prices in the Corvo markets and are very valued by Iz'kal researchers. As a result, Kuura shipments have become an increasingly important market for Raag traders; although they sold the crystals cheap at first, the prices increase every year and other species still pay them gladly, which brings more and more resources back to Heimis - and to the Jino clan, which is in charge of more than half of Kuura crystal trade.

The Jino were the first clan to venture outside Raag space, and also the first to sell Kuura; other clans followed suit when they saw how profitable the market was, but the Jino had enough of a head start to remain in control of most Kuura crystal trade, despite fierce competition from Kimora and Velada fleets and attacks from Noteri raiders.

However, the greatest danger to the Kuura crystal trade are Corvo and Human smugglers, who have bribed or hired Jino captains to lead them to the Kuura yields, and are now extracting the crystals directly and without authorisation from the Surani High Council. In response, the Council has heavily taxed the Jino for helping these smugglers, and now the clan could lose control of the market to its many competitors.

If something was done about these smugglers, it would help Raag economy in general and the Jino clan in particular - but it would also require confronting the Jino, as many of its captains depend on Kuura smuggling to survive.

CAPTAIN DOZAR

Unstoppable

Level 4 :: Raag :: Kind
mov. 5 metres :: weight 170 kg :: height 210 cm

8	5	1	8

PHYSICAL STAT	9	INITIATIVE STAT	3	MENTAL STAT	9

HIT (DEX)	4 ++	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Captain Dozar's Sword

It ignores armour.

Unhinged

Activated. He gains one advantage towards his action. If he fails, the action of his opponent is considered a critical success regardless of action values.

Charge II

His unconfronted running actions are considered passive, and his next Close Quarters action gains one advantage and causes 1 additional damage.

He is brave, adventurous, smart, and kind. The perfect leader to help you discover the universe from a Raag ice fortress.

JINO EXPLORER

Vexale 1

Level 1 :: Raag :: Curious
mov. 5 metres :: weight 124 kg :: height 213 cm

4	4	1	8

PHYSICAL STAT	7	INITIATIVE STAT	6	MENTAL STAT	7

CLOSE QUARTERS	2 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	1 ++

Nobrainer

Neural weapon (It deals neural or ACS damage and ignores armour).

Nanohooks

She can climb walls and ceilings and move around as if they were the ground.

Exploration Drones

She gains one advantage towards hiding and searching actions, and always has a detailed map of the surrounding exterior area.

The kuura crystals found in Heimis fetch outrageous prices in the Corvosphere and Jino explorers are at the forefront of this highly profitable trade.

CULTURE

The Raag's cultural values have remained practically the same for the thousands of years the species has existed. Despite their mastery of space travel, the Raag remain a mostly tribal culture and still live by warrior clan laws despite their access to Korian technology.

If anything, the Raag seem to be divided between a great majority that looks upon technology with fear and awe - afraid of its power as if it was magic - a growing minority that tries to accept advanced devices as simple parts of everyday life, and enginseers as simple members of Raag society like everyone else.

The difference is not officially acknowledged by the Raag in general, but it is, as always, a gap between the old-fashioned and the new. Traditionalist Raag still follow ancient rituals and live by antiquated honour codes, while 'modernist' Raag try to give less importance to old superstitions and fears, although they are both very much part of the same culture.

PHILOSOPHY

The Raag don't have a philosophy per se, but their system of values is very clear and simple: The strong survive and the weak die, and unity breeds strength. Raag form clans and tribes to foster that sense of unity and help each other survive, making each other stronger.

Ironically, it is the same tendency to form clans and bands in the name of unity what breeds its opposite, as loyalty to one's people means competition for resources against the people next door. And since the Raag value strength as the cardinal virtue for survival, they have no problem enforcing that credo by testing their strength against each other.

The Raag place no intrinsic value on material possessions or aesthetics, so they shun all kinds of luxury, focusing on what helps them stay alive. Food and shelter are valuable, but the food's taste or the shelter's beauty are irrelevant.

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

The Raag universally revered Kaliva for most of their history. After they recovered the first Korian artifacts and the Cult was born, the Shadow Council established an organised church of Hexia, which has become the official religion of the Cult of Eternia - even though the ship revealed that the Korian revered Kaliva as well.

After the sanctification of the Surani, the Grandsisters of the High Council were blessed by Ergon, and indeed He saw the pacifying of the Gladiators as a great deed, for he blessed the first women of the Council with great Ergonaut soulbender powers. Afterwards, the High Council opened Ergon worship to all Raag, which some Clans have accepted more than others. Raag religion is organised as follows:

The Kimora worship Ergon and Kaliva in roughly equal measure; the Eferi worship Hexia, with some Ledger worshippers rumoured among the population; the Noteri universally worship Kaliva; the Velada worship mostly Ergon, but greatly favour Hexia and His Soulbenders; and the Jino still worship Kaliva out of tradition but most have turned to Vexal, who is the Clan's actual patron God.

RAAG SOULBENDERS

The Raag have the smallest rate of soulbending individuals of any species, but their Kalivan soulbenders tend to be strong and powerful, and many Hexian enginseers-soulbenders have achieved greatness and fame outside Heimis.

ARTS AND CRAFTS

The Raag don't place value on aesthetics, but they have a rich crafting tradition mostly tied to spiritual and ritual significance. They symbolically wear precarious jewellery such as carved bone pieces, leather straps or small metal bits, which each Clan crafts according to their own tradition.

THE SECRET WORKSHOP

All crafts involving advanced engineering are still mostly unknown in Raag society, as all science and technology is reserved to the enginseers; however, a small group of radicals from the Velada Clan has begun experimenting with reverse-engineered devices from the Cult, just as the Cult reverse-engineered Korian artefacts in their time. This small group calls itself the Secret Workshop, and meets clandestinely to build and create technological items without the knowledge or approval of the Cult.

So far, the Secret Workshop is mostly a hobby and its creations are little more than functional experiments, but functional nonetheless, and there could be great repercussions if the Cult or the Velada Council - or anyone else in Raag society for that matter - learned that non-enginseers are successfully building advanced devices.

TECHNOLOGY

At the beginning, all Raag technology was acquired or derived from the Korian, although the Raag gave it different uses and developed it to their own needs. While the Korian let their tech do their conquering and warfare for them, and the Iz'kal had centuries of leisure time to fully comprehend its secrets for such goals as genetic manipulation and weather control, the Raag have used it mostly to build and expand, creating fortresses, spaceships and living space.

As the centuries went on and the Raag made contact with other species, they began trading new technology with the Corvo and Iz'kal, who sold them devices that were already built and fit for modern living needs. However, there's an obstacle to the Raag's technification.

Raag culture sees technology as an unexplained, arcane gift, and this has affected their ability to understand and use both the Korian legacy and the devices acquired from other species. Despite having lived for centuries with advanced means for building and space transport, the Raag still treat technology with a reverence that borders on taboo. This prevents technology from becoming commonplace in Raag society, and limits the teaching and understanding of its use.

The main forces behind the taboo of technology are the Cult of Eternia and the Shadow Council behind it, which were given sole control of Korian technology long ago, and for centuries have made sure to maintain that control so as to increase their power over the Raag people.

Thus, all Raag technology must pass through the Shadow Council for testing and approval, which ensures they get early access to the most advanced and important stuff, and also stunts all Raag scientific advances by keeping them in the hands of an elite.

The best tool for this control, and also the best weapon against it, are enginseers - Raag men and women trained in the use and understanding of technology, which perpetuates the idea that technology is an arcane knowledge reserved for a few, but also increases the number of Raag interested in learning it with every passing year.

ENGINSEERS

All Raag science, technology and engineering is in the hands of enginseers, an elite profession reserved only for the smartest and most dedicated Raag. For the Raag, technology is like religion and enginseers are their priests. Nearly every Raag settlement has at least one enginseer tasked with overseeing construction, public works, medical advances and defence mechanisms.

Enginseers are extremely important in Raag society, regarded with more respect and fear than the greatest warriors or even War Council members.

Most enginseers belong to the Cult of Eternia, which strives to control all of them from its headquarters at the Surani; however, in what was the single mightiest blow to the Cult's power in all its history, the High Council ruled that enginseers could freely switch their allegiance from the Cult to the Clans that recruited them. This has allowed for many enginseers to freely impart their knowledge to others; however, social taboo still runs strong, and most Raag still fear technology and would never think of learning it without the approval of the Cult.

Ironically, and despite the great status and power they enjoy in Raag society, enginseers have very little real scientific or engineering knowledge when compared to any other interstellar race. Although laymen among the Raag see them as owners of deep and secret knowledge, the average enginseer knows less than the average Corvo or Iz'kal student. The enginseers are, save for a few exceptions, unaware of this gap, and they see themselves as holders of the greatest wisdom in the universe. In truth, the only Raag with such levels of knowledge are the Shadow Council, and even they don't understand it any more than they're willing to share it.

VEHICLES AND WEAPONS

Like most other interstellar species, Raag use Quantum-powered space flight and plasma-based weapons. The Shadow Council at the Surani has access to far more advanced weaponry models, included neural guns and even maps to navigate the labyrinth, but they either haven't deciphered these secrets or they haven't shared them with the general public - or both.

Regardless, starships and weaponry are the two areas where Raag technology really shines, and can hold their own when facing more advanced civilisations like the Corvo or Iz'kal.

VIBRO-WEAPONRY

Raag gun technology is roughly similar to those of other species, but their warrior culture has led them to perform unique research in hand-to-hand weapons, with many designs that equal or even surpass those of other species. Foremost among these are vibro-weapons - melee implements equipped with a radon core that allow them to vibrate at high speeds, penetrating most body armour regardless of its composition. A variation - and improvement - on Iz'kal technology, these vibroweapons put the Raag on an even field with any armoured soldier.

The most common such weapons in Raag armies are heavy, wide vibroblades and vibroaxes, but they also use vibrohammers, vibromaces and even vibrostaves - long poles outfitted with a vibroblade on each end.

Weapon specialist enginseers have even developed ways to make use of the Raag's greater size and strength to build vibroweapons that are so powerful they would spin out of control in the hands of any other species. These greater vibroweapons can easily slice an armoured soldier in two with a single hit.

ICE FORTRESSES

These huge starships are the best known Raag invention, not only for their unique design but also for their sheer size and awe-inspiring appearance. Literally motorised asteroids, ice fortresses can carry thousands of Raag on a single trip, which makes them one of the most fearsome war vessels in the universe despite their relatively primitive manufacture.

To build an ice fortress, the Raag send an engineering rig and a working team to one of the asteroids around their planet; there, they drill and build engines, crew quarters, and cockpits directly on the rock.

The result is a manned, controlled, self-propelled asteroid with space flight capabilities. They are called 'ice fortresses' because of the hoarfrost that tends to form on their rocky surfaces during trips, making them look like gigantic floating icebergs. 'Bearded giants', the Human poet Naxo Orrigan called them, inspired by their peculiar appearance. The truth is that there are as many different designs and shapes of these gigantic vehicles as there are ice fortresses themselves.

Some Raag shipbuilders seek specific asteroids with certain mineral compositions that allow them to be mined as they travel, thus resulting on ice fortresses that are their own fuel source.

A few of these ice fortresses have their asteroid's core turned into an active energy furnace, which gives them far more power at the cost of a much shorter lifespan - for their mineral structure is consumed by the energy output.

At least one of these 'active' ice fortresses was used as a weapon in an encounter between warring Raag clans; the ice fortress' crew ejected the ship and sent it against their enemy's vessel, blowing both of them up.

Every ice fortress is crewed by at least a couple dozen Raag, the largest being veritable battlecruisers that carry tens of thousands of Raag soldiers at the same time. Despite their rough appearance and their undeniable combat usefulness, there are also many ice fortresses that, while well-armed, are used only for trading or exploration.

Many alien starports welcome the sight of an ice fortress, knowing that it's full of Raag willing to buy anything they have for sale.

OTHER SHIP DESIGNS

Although Ice Fortresses are the most characteristic of their species, the Raag use many types of starships. These come mostly recycled from Korian designs that resemble other species' vessels far more, particularly Iz'kal ships, although Raag designs are less varied and aesthetic, sacrificing beauty for power.

Drillers are the basic Raag combat ship. Thus called because they are designed for boarding enemy ships, drillers are nonetheless equipped with high-energy plasma guns and a missile battery; but their main tactic is to attach to larger ships and drop a small team of Raag infiltrators to commandeer them.

Hammerships are large Raag battleships. They're smaller than a battlecruiser but larger than a single-pilot fighter, using the same tactic as drillers (except they attack by ramming a hole on a ship's hull, through which a full squad of war-frenzied Raag will drop, guns blazing, on the hapless enemy crew).

Trade Carriers are large civilian ships. While well-armed - as all Raag vessels are - they are not optimised for combat, but for carrying large loads, be it trade goods or passengers.

An average trade carrier fits around 20,000 passengers, half that many metric tons of cargo, or a mix of both. Many trade carriers are simply ice fortresses used as commercial transports, but there are also many other, original and korian-based, trade carrier designs.

HISTORY

Raag history has been relatively uneventful for other species' standards. Consisting of an endless struggle for survival in icy caves, with some short, bloody conflicts for territory here and there and the gradual turn from primitive to advanced tools for survival and warfare, at a first glance it would seem not much has changed for the Raag from their beginnings as wandering tribes roaming the cold darkness for survival... which is exactly what they keep doing millions of years later.

THE BEGINNING

The Raag have evolved very little from when their species first appeared on Heimis, their home planet, as biped hunter-gatherers that in turn came from an unknown ancestor - one that xenobiologists have not yet identified, nor whether it was a mammalian, reptilian or some previously unknown classification.

The earliest known remains of the modern Raag species date from just over a half million years ago, and scientists assume their society was indeed almost the same as the current one. The Raag themselves have no recorded history, save for oral tradition rife with stories of wars and heroes, where 'good guys' are always the ones who killed more enemies - a moral that very likely matches the daily life of ancient Raag tribes.

Raag social groups were small and ruled by strength, with conflict between tribes decided by the strongest leader, who usually killed the other one and either annexed or slaughtered his people. There was no unity among the tribes and no Raag society to speak of. Thus the Raag lived and survived for hundreds of thousands of years in their frozen cave underworld.

Thus the Raag were still hunter-gatherer, semi-nomadic warrior tribes that eked out a life in the cold tunnels of Heimis' Crystal Abyss when the most important event in Raag history took place: the Korian invasion.

THE KORIAN DOMAIN

To the Korian, an aggressive and unsophisticated raider species on a permanent trip through space in search of other creatures and worlds to conquer, Heimis was but a useless frozen wasteland, but they found the strong, hardy Raag species to be a promising slave breed.

To the Raag, the Korian seemed like demonic creatures out of the dark sky, blasting the earth from their flying monsters, besting their greatest warriors effortlessly and taking their people away to some dark hellish realm beyond the world.

At first the Raag resisted, but the strength and skill of the best Raag warriors amounted to nothing against Korian weapons and vehicles. The Raag were decimated, routed and taken as slaves as the Korian saw fit.

Despite their evident superiority over the Raag, the Korian didn't establish a base on Heimis. Other than a few temporary forts and hunting lodges from which they mounted their raids against the Raag, there was no Korian power centre in the planet, nor any attempt at political domination. For the Korian, the Raag were little more than beasts, fit to be hunted for sport or used as slaves on subsequent raids. Many Raag were forced to slaughter their own kind in Korian raids during that time. This also meant that Raag culture survived, although they were forced to retreat further and deeper into the Crystal Abyss to avoid Korian attacks.

After a few decades, the Korian got bored of chasing and killing the Raag, which hid ever deeper and sometimes fought back, and also realised there were other uses for the Raag's strength. Thus the Korian created the Blood Games, a sport where Korian warlords took their Raag slaves and made them face each other in gladiatorial fights. This was far more popular among the Korian than the plain chase and hunt, and soon there were Raag Blood Games across all the planets ruled by the Korian. Also, the Raag were

much happier smashing each other's heads for glory and applause than being mowed down like cattle, so it seemed like the beginning of a golden age. It was, however, the beginning of the end of Korian control over the Raag.

THE AGE OF GLADIATORS

By the time the Blood Games came into fashion, Raag slaves were spread all over the Korian empire, but many of them still lived on Heimis, the only place where they could breed. Korian hunting parties still went there to kill them for sport or to get slaves. Raag still served as labourers and beasts of burden, but the most violent were traded among the different warlords and trained as gladiators for the Blood Games. Owning a strong gladiator was a sign of power among Korian.

It didn't take long for Korian to start breeding the strongest and most violent Raag in an attempt to preserve and enhance those traits for future generations. Reproduction fields were established on the surface of Heimis, where the strongest Raag were forcibly bred, while the weakest were left out in the cold or killed outright. These breeding fields later added training camps, where the Raag would be taught advanced combat techniques. Warlords from all across the empire would travel to these places, seeking new gladiators for their games.

Over the years, many of these gladiators managed to escape and hide in the deepest area of the Crystal Abyss. They started training other Raag in the ways of battle they learned from their masters, slowly creating an army of mighty warriors that lusted for Korian blood. This freedom force called itself the Sura, the 'Union of People' in the Raag language, and became an organised resistance, although the Raag didn't see it like that. For them, it was retaliation - fighting back for its own sake, with no hope of winning.

As the Sura grew in membership, more and more Korian hunting parties started to go missing, the hunters becoming the prey. Eventually the most powerful gladiators of the Sura banded together to strike the training camps and other Korian outposts on the surface, timing them with the fierce snow storms that sometimes lashed the surface of the planet to leave no traces of their attack.

None of this actually hurt the Korian Empire or stopped the Blood Games, of course, but it made hunting parties much harder and more dangerous to the Korian, which was the Sura's only goal. What the Sura didn't expect was that their fight gave the Raag a sense of community, of belonging to the same tribe, that they had never felt before the Sura.

THE CULT OF ETERNIA

Every time the Sura made a successful raid against Korian facilities, they hid the battered remains of Korian spaceships and weapons in the depths of the Crystal Abyss, and eventually some of them attempted to understand these artefacts.

During the Sura raids, those Raag who were unable to fight were despised for their weakness and left behind in the Crystal Abyss, while the gladiators and their followers went out to fight the Korian. After a few decades, some of these Raag realized the potential that the captured Korian devices could have and started studying them in an attempt to prove their worth to the other Raag.

One of the most famous, brilliant and important of these technology pioneers was Aki Sun, a woman who couldn't join the raids because of a chronic illness. Aki Sun became obsessed with technology, as she believed weaponry could make up for the weakness that had her confined away from the thick of battle.

For decades, Aki Sun went through new technology like plasma fire; she leaped at new scavenged materials and devices, and obsessively researched their use and applications, ultimately developing what became the first scientific theories in Raag history. Soon others began taking notes and developing on her research, and thus enginseers were born. In fact, Aki Sun is credited with coining the word 'enginseer' to define those who, like her, saw and understood the workings of technology and how such workings could modify the universe itself. Aki Sun is justly regarded as the mother of Raag science, and her image is still worshipped by the Cult of Eternia.

The Cult itself was started by the legendary sage Appa Blaze, a student of Aki Sun and today considered as her near-equal. Appa Blaze was the founder of many of the first enginseer schools and the 'plasma laws' of Raag scientific thought that many enginseers still apply as universal truth. Unknown to history and to modern Raag, Appa Blaze's most important contribution to his species' science was the discovery of the Eternia Ship.

Originally, the ship was just one of the many Korian devices that the Sura raiders gladly brought to enginseer schools, which were more organised and influential with every passing year. As soon as the Eternia was brought to the attention of Enginseers, Appa Blaze - by then a decrepit, gigantic old Raag - was brought on to study it.

The ship stood out from the others for its size and state of conservation. Even to the Raag, whose knowledge of technology was rudimentary at best, there was something undeniably alluring about the enormous ship; Appa Blaze named it a 'miracle of Hexia', calling for to be transported and hidden at one of his schools right away. Blaze ordered

the ship's existence to be kept from the general Raag public, and it wasn't long before the school enginseers started treating it with reverence.

After Appa Blaze's death, the enginseers left in charge of the alien ship realised they lacked his genius and vision to understand its function. For generations they secretly studied and fiddled with the machine, and it still took them just over twenty years to be able to open it; once they did, however, their reverence turned to devotion. The ship was able to speak their language fluently, had answers to all of their questions, and displayed unmistakable intelligence.

The ship introduced itself as Eternia, and to the Enginseers it seemed like a God descended to Heimis. The enginseers of Appa Blaze's school, who had been the ship's caretakers for nearly three decades, built a cult around it - the Cult of Eternia - and, with the help and stored knowledge of the ship, the Cult's influence increased to the point where it matched that of the Sura gladiators. The ability to control the technology at their disposal, and the endless source of knowledge that was Eternia, helped them secure a status that would have been unthinkable otherwise. The Cult progressively became more secretive and protective of Eternia, and even kept its existence hidden from most of its own members.

Any student of Raag history knows the Triad of the greatest enginseers in History would not be complete without Uza, the genius credited with establishing the Cult of Eternia. Although the Cult itself already existed when Uza came into power, it was her who saw the true possibilities of a secret enginseer school, and gave the Cult the rules and power it has now by securing a High Council grant to claim and hoard every piece of technology found, discovered or bought anywhere on Heimis. It was Uza who built the foundation upon which the Cult stands, and many call her a greater scholar than either Aki or Appa, while others see her as a traitor that veered from her predecessors' original path of knowledge and led the Raag to a dark age.

To secure long-term power for the Cult, Uza established its Shadow Council - an elite within the elite within the elite - consisting of the wisest and most influential Cult members. Under her rule, the Shadow Council reserved the right to share or keep any new knowledge, and aimed to use their exclusive access to technology to rule Raag society from behind the curtain.

The Sura felt threatened by the rise of the Cult and distrusted their ways and newly found magic, but they could not deny their usefulness, and so they endured their arrogant attitude... for a while.

THE LEGEND OF GJALLA

The Gladiator's guerrilla had changed Raag society. For a while, the Raag's violent nature and constant in-fighting had stopped. This allowed for several leaders to appear among the Sura raiders - true champions of the Raag, who knew not only how to kill and win battles, but also how to inspire others.

Most Raag children have been told the tale of Gjalla, the warlord that led so many Sura that "the caves shook when she hunted for Korian above". Gjalla's exploits have been so inflated and embellished by oral tradition that it is hard to pin down the actual facts of her long and famous history; but she was doubtlessly the greatest Raag chieftain of her age.

Today, most historians agree that Gjalla lived 30 to 40 years after the first Sura uprising, about a decade before the Current Raag Era, when several war leaders - like Gjalla apparently was - travelled all over Heimis, rallying the different tribes under their banners. Under their leadership, the Raag

became organised for the first time. Legend attributes the pacification almost single-handedly to Gjalla, but there were likely many other warlords that did similar work, as a feeling of unity had spread across the entire Raag world.

However, as their society grew, the violent nature of the Raag started resurfacing. The different leaders began fighting each other for land and power, which younger Raag saw as an opportunity to prove their worth. Gjalla tried to stop this, calling for a union of all Raag tribes against the Korian, but she was betrayed by some of her lieutenants and forced to flee with her closest companions. Historians don't agree on whether Gjalla died in exile, or came back later after continuing her war against the Korian on her own; but most songs and legends support the latter version.

All Gladiators including Gjalla mistrusted enginseers, but couldn't stop the Cult's power and influence, even as the Shadow Council worked behind the scenes only for its own gain. With Gjalla's banishment from the Sura, tensions kept growing between the Sura leaders and the Shadow Council. This also had an impact on the Gladiator chieftains, who claimed different territories and ideas about how to fight the Korian. A civil war threatened to collapse the frail society that they had managed to build, and it would have indeed happened, were it not for the strongest force of Raag society - its women.

THE SURANI AGE

The historians who support the influence of Gjalla in this period of Raag history maintain that the reunification of Raag society was her doing, although her alleged deeds may also be the achievement of several different Sura chiefs. The official version of the High Council tale-spinners is that one day, Gjalla returned followed by thousands of Raag that had joined her in exile, and called all other Sura leaders to lay down their arms, forcing peace on those that wouldn't. Gjalla and her men decreed all the Sura's hideouts in the Crystal Abyss caves would therefore be safe territory - a sanctuary for freed civilians and children to live in peace while Sura warriors went out to fight the Korian.

The Sura leaders - or Gjalla herself, according to legend - called this place the Surani - the Place of Gathering - which gradually became the new society's administrative centre.

Despite Gjalla's unifying influence, the enginseers began taking control of the Surani while the gladiators left the place alone, not only because of their power and secrets but also by virtue of simply living there. Many gladiators returned home and turned their wrath from the Korian to the Cult, which made other gladiators try to replace them in the Sura, which led to other factions rising to defend the Cult. Infighting began again, threatening to break the peace and stability the Surani had come to be known for. Some versions of Gjalla's legend affirm she died at this time, again betrayed by her close counsellors.

But there was another power in the Surani, older and stronger than both the enginseers and the gladiators - it was Raag women. Specifically, their older women - experienced matriarchs that had taken care of generations upon generations of Raag children and seen most of them fall to Korian weapons. They would not allow them to fight each other now.

In the year that has since become the beginning of the Current Raag timeline, about 400 years after the arrival of the Korian to Heimis, some of the oldest and most powerful females decided to join forces and put a stop to fighting between Gladiators. One by one they dealt with each of the leaders, using either brute force or common sense as needed. It was agreed that the Surani would become a sacred territory in which no fighting was allowed, a place where young Raag could be raised and protected. The conflicting leaders agreed to take their followers away from the Surani and settle somewhere else, which marked the origin of the first Clans. Thus, these powerful matriarchs became the new figures of authority in the Surani - and across all of Raag society.

The most recently dated of Gjalla's legendary exploits say she led the matriarchs herself and that she died in her old age, helping the other women enforce the sanctification of the Surani and only allowing herself to rest once the peace and prosperity of her people were at last guaranteed. Even if the other accounts of her death are incorrect, very few tales place Gjalla at any later date of Raag history; it is generally accepted that, even if she lived this long, she likely died on the year of the Sanctification of the Surani, and many Raag still give the name 'Gjalla's Day' to the New Year.

After this, the Sura was disbanded and every clan undertook the fight against the Korian as it chose. Some did it with the help of the Cult, trying to undermine their power. Some used honourable tactics, some assassination schemes, and so on. This was the origin of the Raag clans. Thus Raag society remained united - at the cost of being divided.

At the centre of this union the Surani remained, still neutral ground, but now ruled by the council of matriarchs who had enforced peace. They very explicitly stated power was theirs, not the Shadow Council's - an edict that hurt the Cult, but appeased the Clan leaders - and formed a High Council of elders, or Grandsisters as they came to be called, that became the ultimate authority over every Raag and Clan.

The High Council was given veto power on all decisions taken by the Clans as a way to ensure the survival of the species. They were then charged with the administration and well-being of the Surani and all the Raag living in it.

THE UPRISING

As the Raag reorganised their society, something happened light-years away from Heimis that would change the life of both the Raag and Korian species. The Iz'kal, another slave species of the Korian, had learned to use their technology against them, and were now in open rebellion.

The Raag of Heimis didn't know what happened until decades later, but the Iz'kal won the war, kept the Korian technology they had mastered, and exterminated every single Korian they could find.

Suddenly, no Korian came to retake the training camps, or to hunt for new slaves. No new gladiators were recruited, nobody came to rebuild the breeding fields. Nobody replaced the few Korian that remained and were killed by the Raag.

For centuries, the Raag had no reliable news of what had happened. Every few years or decades, some Raag that had been Korian slaves in space for most of their lives returned to Heimis, with exaggerated and often contradicting stories about the great army that had wiped out the Korian. Many said they had fought the Korian alongside another species, one that wielded technology as if they were all enginseers; some said this species was weak and frail, while others said that it was strong and supreme. Some said the Raag had helped this people rise against the Korian, and others said these people had stood against the Raag as well. One thing was sure: the Korian were no more.

Surprisingly, the news had little effect on Raag society as it stood now - the sanctification of the Surani and exodus of the Clans turned out to be a stable, working system, and most Raag were happy with it. The notable exception was the Cult of Eternia, which for many centuries had no new technology to keep from their kin, and their power and influence became stagnant. Technology was still revered, but enginseers became more common and focused less on arcane rites and more on building the infrastructure of Clan territories and improving Raag civilisation.

During nearly a millennia after the Uprising, the Raag remained as they were - loyal to the Surani and their respective Clans, fighting among themselves and trying to find a balance between their tribal traditions and the growing use of any technology allowed by the Cult.

THE RAAG SPACE AGE

Around 700 or 800 years after the Uprising, the Iz'kal began to come. They sent a huge, peaceful delegation first, meant to re-establish contact with the Raag and claiming to be the ancient race that had helped them defeat the Korian. Very few Raag cared or even understood what they meant, but the High Council greeted the newcomers as friends anyway, as they came in peace and apparently respected the Raag for their help against the Korian. Then the Iz'kal sent a few more diplomatic missions, but the Raag still greeted them rather coldly. In time they got used to each other, and the Raag of Heimis seemed to finally accept the ancient species that had helped them wipe the Korian out were one and the same with these newcomers. The Iz'kal became a relatively common sight at certain Kuraimas, especially the Jino, and even gave the Raag a few tips on building their own technology - which the Cult immediately seized, of course.

After the Iz'kal found Heimis, the advanced technology brought by their allies allowed the Raag to expand their civilisation and become far more numerous than they had ever been before. The population became too large for the barren planet, and starvation became a real threat. For the first time, the High Council, the different War Councils, and the Shadow Council came together to determine a solution to the problem. After a long discussion, it was decided that they would attempt to turn the asteroid belt around Heimis into floating citadels that would roam the galaxy in search of food and other goods that were needed planetside. For the next few years, all able hands were employed for the task, and every large spaceship left by the Korian was dismantled for parts that would later be installed on the asteroids. The result was a fleet of giant spaceships the size of cities, each capable of harbouring hundreds of thousands of Raag. Every clan was given command over a few of the fortresses and sent into the unknown. They would come back every few years, their stores full of supplies essential for the survival of the inhabitants of the planet.

The ice fortresses have allowed the Raag to survive and prosper, despite the harsh conditions of their home planet. Each clan is responsible for the maintenance of their own ice fortresses, which is one of the main reasons why the enginseers, who are the only ones capable of repairing them, are still held in such high esteem.

After the Ice Fortresses, the Raag saw the need for further exploration and travel. They built other kinds of spaceships, with which they have entered interplanetary society and fully joined the ranks of starfaring civilisations.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The Raag are the least numerous of starfaring species, and their presence in outer space is relatively minor because of their limited reproductive possibilities and less advanced technology.

They have very few settlements outside their home-world of Heimis, but the immense majority of Raag still live on the planet; most of their starships return there to bring what they have traded and discovered in their travels.

DEALINGS WITH OTHER SPECIES

The Raag have a mostly distant relation to other space-faring civilisations, but in general they are friendlier to aliens than they are to other Raag.

This uncommon occurrence arises from the fact that, with the possible exception of the Korian, most aliens have hurt the Raag much less than the Raag have hurt each other.

IZ'KAL

After the Uprising, the Iz'kal attempted to establish an alliance with the Raag, but it quickly became apparent that their cultures were too different for long-term cooperation, and they have kept their distance ever since.

While commerce between them is not uncommon, and there have been instances when they have collaborated and helped each other, they keep to themselves most of the time.

CORVO

Ever since they came across the Raag, the Corvo have tried to impose their market system on them. Despite their best efforts, the Raag have shown little interest in most of what the Corvo have for trade, particularly because the Corvo have all but forgotten the basic survival needs the Raag still live for, and because the Raag barely have a concept of the complex economy the Corvo offer.

Only The Union Megacorp has been able to secure a stable business relationship with the Raag by trading old and heavy weaponry in exchange for Kuura crystals, strange Korian artifacts, and Raag mercenaries.

Even so, the Surani High Council, wary of the intentions of the Corvo, imposed severe restrictions on trade with them for all Clans. It's no surprise that the Cult supports this, seeing as they're afraid to lose their power and influence to alien technology.

HUMANS

Raag have relatively little contact with Humans, save that they are both extensively employed by mercenaries in the Corvosphere, and thus tend to meet in combat as enemies or as part of the same unit. From such encounters, the Raag have decided that Humans are worthy opponents, if a bit too sneaky and unpredictable to be considered true warriors.

As allies, however, they find them dependable and good to have at one's side; and both species gladly follow each other in battle, as the Raag are impressed by the Humans' bravery and tactical skill, while Humans admire the Raag's sense of honour and duty.

THE RAAG IN SPACE

With the exception of a few trading colonies from the Velada Clan, all Raag outside Heimis are soldiers, raiders or traders on board Ice fortresses or other, less common, Raag starships.

Many Raag now even live in moving ice fortresses, constantly waging wars on each other. They use comets and asteroids as the foundation for their fortresses and equip them with weapons, hangars, and propulsion systems that they gathered from the Korian during the previous centuries.

Tiantang hosts one of the largest Raag diasporas in the universe, formed by members of all clans that were part of a rare agreement between The Union and the High Council. This pact, that had the Kuura crystals as background, led to the construction of several Gyro-Zhan units by Raag operatives and, while the results were positive, it was a one-off cul-de-sac.

Now, the group of Raag living in the Corvo capital has stabilised. They enjoy a quiet life performing low-tech jobs and maintaining, to their best of their capacity, Raag customs and culture independently from both their former clans and the High Council in their district, known as Little Heimis or Raagtown.

HEIMIS

Planetary Type: Ice world

Population: Less than 1 billion

Day: 90 standard hours

Culture: Tribal theocracy

Location: HEON-99 system, 1 standard year away from Tiantang

Production: Manufactured goods, Kuura crystals

Social Rank 3: Harsh quality of life, some social privilege

Economic Rank 2: Barter-based society, limited currency or industry

Atmosphere: Breathable, freezing hazard concerns

Heimis, the home of the Raag species, is a frozen world with a surface almost entirely made of ice and water. Between the planet's outer ice crust and its subterranean Ocean lies the Crystal Abyss - thousands of huge caves connected by a network of tunnels. It is there that the Raag evolved and live.

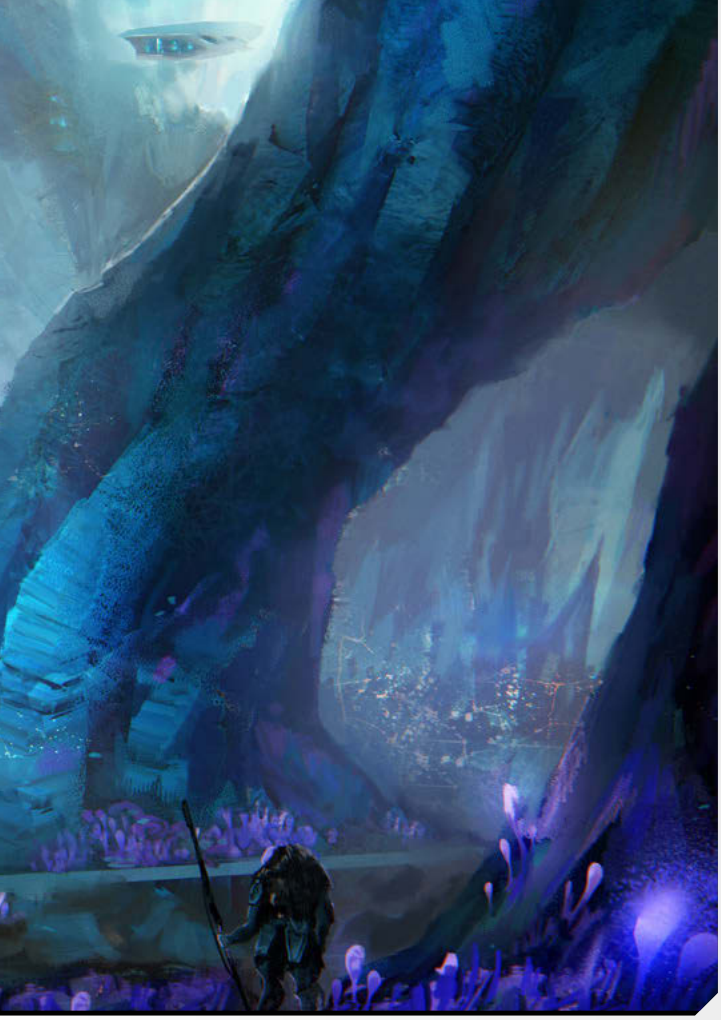
While the surface of the planet can reach -200°C, the temperatures inside the caves go no lower than a cosy -40°C, thanks to the shelter from the chilly outside winds and to being somewhat closer to the planet's molten core.

Most of the inhabitable region of Heimis is divided between three environments:

Heimis' Surface is an unending plain of ice and constant blizzards, with sharp ice formations and jagged peaks that sometimes reach thousands of miles in height. Very few things can survive in this heartless environment, but a few extremophiles and other cold-adapted life forms can be found wandering the ice paths, or dormant beneath the frost. Exploring the surface of Heimis is impossible without protective gear, even for species as adaptable as the Corvo or 'Silver' breed Iz'kal.

The Crystal Abyss below the surface is an immense network of icy caves which has never been fully explored, and may well connect all of Heimis' underground. Despite being mostly covered with ice, the tunnels are home to an incalculable variety of dangerous lifeforms that have adapted to the cold and dim light - the Raag foremost among them.

Caves in the Crystal Abyss are illuminated mostly from the little light that filters through the translucent ice from the outside, and also by a myriad of bioluminescent creatures, from plants and fungi to insects. The Raag make use of all of these - tools from oil lamps and torches to plasma. They even make electricity-based lanterns that light their otherwise dim and cheerless environment.



The Bottomless Sea below the Ice Caves is virtually unknown, as the Raag have never ventured into its depths and no other species has seen any point on braving its mysterious, endless waters. Besides, it is known that dark, dangerous creatures infest it, just like the caves of the Crystal Abyss above; but the monsters of the bottomless sea are far larger, with several reports of Raag fishermen and stragglers devoured by indescribable things the size of starships that could barely be glimpsed through the murky water.

Some Corvo entrepreneurs have proposed corporate-funded expeditions to Heimis' bottomless sea, in search of scientific discoveries and exploitable resources. The idea has found traction among some investors, but nobody has been able to build a team that's both brave enough and qualified for such an adventure.

HUNTING ON THE SURFACE

Surface hunting after Heimis' dangerous native creatures remains one of the most popular sports among Raag hunters. Current technology has allowed the Raag to prosper without having to risk themselves in such activities, but they still do it out of tradition, and also to satisfy their natural need for violence and thrills.

Members of other species are never invited to these hunting trips, but they are not turned away if they volunteer; the Raag always have a place for someone with such courage - or such a death wish.

MONSTER RAIDS

Icestalkers, underground giant worms and other beasts still roam the Heimis wilderness, and many are large enough to attack Raag settlements and roads openly. Raag warriors repel most of these monster raids easily, but some manage to eat some Raag citizens before being killed or driven away.

ICESTALKERS

These fearsome creatures are the apex predator of Heimis. They can be found in almost every region of the surface, as their natural weapons and cold resistance make them all but unbeatable in the food chain - save for the Raag, who hunt icestalkers for defence, honour, and fun.

Looking like a hairless large ape with a shark-like head with two eyes on each side, an icestalker can snap an adult Raag in two with a single bite, and its compound eyes are adapted to resist the terrible blizzards that constantly strike the icy wastes. In fact, blizzards are the icestalkers' natural environment, and they are so well adapted to hiding and moving through them that they seem to disappear in plain sight, only to appear behind their prey and kill it without giving it a chance to blink.

Killing an icestalker is a great feat for any Raag hunter, and those who achieved it earn the right to wear pieces of the beast's armour as trophies.

There is a smaller, weaker breed of icestalker, adapted to the gentler environment of Heimis' underground tunnels. Although not as dangerous as its surface cousin, a 'tunnel-stalker' is still a mortal danger - and a glorious trophy - for a single Raag warrior.

THE PEOPLE

The Raag are the only sentient species native to Heimis, and Heimis is the only planet where the Raag can thrive and reproduce, so the species and the world are, for all intents and purposes, one and the same. This means that, save for a handful of in vitro specimens bred in the Corvosphere and the Iz'kal State for medical research, all living Raag were bred and raised in Heimis and share the same culture.

All Raag grew at the Surani, learned their trade among the matron mothers, and were then chosen by a Clan or remained behind as teachers. All Raag are familiar with violence in every aspect of their lives, including infighting among clanmates or crew members.

When interacting outside their culture, the Raag are hard to rein in, but they never break a promise or fall out on a deal, so they are dependable mercenaries and workers, provided they are given a steady outlet for their aggression.

The Raag evolved to live in the underground of their ice planet, so they are accustomed to cave life and very harsh survival conditions. For the average Raag, the commodities of civilisation and technology are awkward, necessary evils rather than useful tools. A Raag will much prefer sleeping on the floor than on a soft bed, and work better with the lights and heat off. This, of course, make Raag the favourite tenants of Corvo landlords, who always offer good deals and discounts to Raag lodgers.

Furthermore, the Raag are born unfamiliar with open spaces like a planet's surface, let alone actual, interstellar open space. Any Raag taken off Heimis requires an acclimatisation period before prolonged exposure to space or open air, or else risk dizziness at best and serious neurological sequels at worst. The first Raag space explorers developed agoraphobia and even mental trauma, reacting violently at the sole idea of going outdoors. Now, Corvo and Iz'kal employers always make sure to provide crash courses for their Raag crewmembers and tourists, as nobody wants a fear-crazed Raag smashing his office or starship.

THE SURANI

The Surani, sacred ground of the Raag and cradle of their civilisation, is an area comprising hundreds of kilometres of underground caves, that the first Raag tribes declared neutral ground to try and solve disputes without bloodshed. Soon, 'neutral' became 'hallowed', and the Surani became a place for the Raag to be at peace - to learn, to build, to craft, even for Raag mothers to bear their children. The Surani is the largest sovereign territory in Heimis and the closest the Raag culture has to a government centre.

The Surani is ruled by the High Council of Heimis, the governing body of the Raag civilisation. As it is a sacred territory in which no fighting is allowed, members of the different clans meet here to barter and negotiate. This is where children are raised and where they live until they take part in the Culling, the trial of adulthood that allows them to demonstrate their worth and earn their place in one of the great clans. The Surani is located in the heart of the Crystal Abyss, deep within the frozen crust of Heimis, and extends over a vast area that holds several Raag settlements, some reaching thousands of inhabitants.

Everyone who is not a tribe member or assigned to a Raag starship (and some who are), is a citizen of the Surani. This includes clan rejects, child rearers, trainers and authority figures from spiritual teachers to enginseers, their cult and their shadow council, and of course the Raag High Council itself. In all, an estimated 1-2 million Raag live in the Surani, not counting the children in training.

The hundreds of millions of Heimis Raag who don't have the privilege of living in the Surani are assigned to a Clan or a Starship, or else they wander the Crystal Abyss on their personal quests.

THE KURAIMA

Any Raag that has joined a Clan lives in a Kuraima, which is the equal of a state or subcontinent in Raag culture. In terms of Raag law, a Clan's Kuraima is the territory which they control and on which they can hunt and build. There are five Kuraima in Heimis, named for each of the Raag Clans:

KIMORA

The Kimora Kuraima is a moderately vast cave area, well-tended and fortified, with guards in every tunnel and entrance, and strict rules to go in and out. The Kimora are kind and honourable to strangers, but they take many precautions before letting anyone into their territory.

Enginseers are only allowed into Kimora territory if they prove their allegiance to the Clan and don't belong to the Shadow Council's Cult - which is vetoed from operating within Kimora. As a result, Kimora is not as advanced technologically as the Kuraima of other Clans, but its traditional defences have always been more than enough to fend off any attack, not because their technology is better, but because they have the best soldiers to man them; the Kimora army is known for their unsurpassed bravery, tactical acumen, and unwavering loyalty to the Clan.

EFERI

The Eferi Kuraima has the least population density of Heimis. Numbering only a few million, the clan owns the second largest land area of the planet, and has modernised it to levels unknown to any other Raag. The Eferi Kuraima has advanced cities, security systems, ventilation, electricity and irrigation tunnels, pipelines, fuel lines, and even streets and vehicles in their largest cities.

The Cult of Eternia has an embassy at Eferi; it used to be the Kuraima's power centre, but its authority was later reduced to a simple outpost for Cult affairs. Nonetheless, Eferi is where the Cult is strongest in all Heimis, and its members are considered citizens of the Kuraima by default.

NOTERI

The Noteri Kuraima is the smallest on Heimis, limited to a few kilometres of spaceports, landing pads and supply stations. The reason for this is that most of the Noteri clan is nomadic, spending their lives onboard raiding spaceships, and returning to their Kuraima only to touch base, resupply and leave again. There is housing for thousands of families whose brothers, sisters or mothers spend months or years

in space, but otherwise the Noteri Kuraima is but a stop in the way for the Clan's space flights.

The area is still very well guarded, of course, as the Noteri have a lot of mortal enemies among the other clans, and some of the best armies and security systems of the Raag civilisation are deployed at the Noteri Kuraima.

VELADA

The Velada Kuraima is the largest, safest and most populated in Heimis, with several hundred million inhabitants distributed among large, prosperous cities that, while not as advanced as those of Eferi, are a far cry from the clan huts of traditional, rural Raag tribes.

Velada has a thriving industry in the scientific, building, medical, and food fields, with vast farm tracts feeding enormous cities through vast underground roads. Just as Velada is the most popular Clan to belong to - they can afford to be very picky during the Culling - their Kuraima is the most popular for visitors and tourists. Entrance to Velada is heavily regulated, as there have been over-immigration problems due to the Kuraima's much better safety and living conditions. Enginseers desert the Cult in droves to enjoy the privileges of Velada citizenship.

As the Velada Clan has established a couple of colonies in other planets, there are many places across the universe that are officially part of their Kuraima. This makes them the only interplanetary Raag state, as well as the superior clan in trade and commerce when compared to its neighbors.

JINO

The Jino Kuraima is small and close to the Surani. Its citizens have a reputation for wanderlust, always travelling to faraway caves and tunnels or signing up for long spáce flights. The truth remains that Jino citizens are the best space pilots among the Raag, and their Kuraima is a reflection of this. Although it has many residential areas, it also has the largest and most advanced spaceports in Heimis.

The Jino Kuraima is the second least populated of Heimis after the Noteri, and is also known to be little more than a resupply stop for its citizens, which are constantly traveling across their world or other worlds on science or adventure trips. The Kuraima even lacks a government centre, having long discarded War Councils as an outdated, even barbaric tradition, and leaving Clan rule in the hands of each starship's captain. Inside the Kuraima, the Jino govern themselves by community gatherings, to some point imitating the ways of their Iz'kal friends. The population of Jino has the greatest enginseer density of Heimis, as they are relatively few in number and very friendly with the Cult. There are also a few Iz'kal citizens in the Jino Kuraima, providing their science, knowledge, and technology to the benefit of the Clan under the close supervision of the Cult.

ICESTALKER

Affinity :: Lone Wolf

Level 3 :: Beast :: Aggressive
mov. 5 metres :: weight 380 kg :: height 240 cm

5	4	2	-

PHYSICAL STAT	6 (3)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (3)	MENTAL STAT	8 (2)

HIT (DEX)	4 +	GRAPPLE (CON)	0 ++

Frostbite

Activated. If the attack is successful, it transfers as much neural damage from this NPC as the final modified damage caused by this attack.

Berserker

Damage increases its skills instead of reducing them.

Frozen Advance

Instant. It suffers 3 neural damage and performs an action after the current character. It gains two advantages towards hiding in the snow.

Icestalkers keep both young and adult Raags awake at night: the former, scared to death; the latter, in hunting trips to earn their clan's respect.

PLAYING AS A CLANMATE

Life as a clanmate is really tough, especially in the lower echelons of society. As soon as they reach adolescence, the Raag are forced to understand that life is cold as a razor blade, and can cut like one: the Culling segregates them into what are casts all but in name, and ideally gets them chosen by one of the Clans.

Raag society is similar to ancient Human feudalism in many ways. At the top of the pyramid, a very strict High Council dictates universal laws as would ancient kings. On its right hand, the Cult of Eternia exerts their powerful influence, resembling the Church. Below both lie the Warlords, who are close in nature to the ancient nobility although with a higher degree of social mobility. Then come the warriors and the enginseers, who parallel knights and priests and enjoy some privileges while enduring many hardships. Finally, and below all, drudges (peasants) and servants are the main sources of workforce and cannon fodder.

These layers of society are rigid and the hierarchy is strictly vertical, but there's a certain degree of social mobility between them. Hard work, due diligence, and earned respect can go a long way to ensure one's success.

CHARACTER'S ECONOMY

Credits are of no use in Raag society, whose economy is based on the concept of loot. Most clans, to a higher or lesser degree, raid different parts of the universe in search of goods such as food, tools, or raw materials. Depending on the clan, these will be obtained by force or peaceful means, but in the end they'll all go back to Heimis to crunch the numbers and share the spoils.

How this loot is divided depends on one's status, which grants Raag the right to claim day to day gear as payment for their contribution to the Clan's glory, as well as a fraction of the spoils they personally obtained. This allotment depends on the status of the individual and can range from a quarter to three quarters of the bounty they have personally collected.

STARTING SOCIAL STATUS AND GEAR

When a character begins their story among the Raag they start with a number of credits, which they must use to buy starting gear. Any credits not spend to obtain gear are lost. The value in credits of the gear a character receives at the beginning of their story and their social status depends on their Profession value:

Prof. 0:	Servant	250 cr.
Prof. 1:	Drudge	1,000 cr.
Prof. 2:	Drudge	2,500 cr.
Prof. 3:	Drudge	5,000 cr.
Prof. 4:	Warrior/Enginseer	10,000 cr.
Prof. 5:	Warrior/Enginseer	20,000 cr.
Prof. 6:	Warrior/Enginseer	40,000 cr.
Prof. 7:	Warrior/Enginseer	80,000 cr.
Prof. 8:	Champion	120,000 cr.
Prof. 9:	Champion	150,000 cr.

The social status of a clanmate is tied to their Profession, and it can only go up when and if they improve their Profession. If their social status is reduced for any reason, their Profession will be reduced to the highest Profession value of their new status.

SOCIAL STATUSES

SERVANT

You are the scum of Heimis. You weren't chosen in your Culling, or you are a criminal. You are allowed to live in the worst areas of the Surani, or you are kept by a clan to be used as cannon fodder in battle or undertake the worst jobs on an ice fortress.

Monthly earnings: 0 credits.

A Servant character must "work" (begging, stealing, dealing drugs, looking through garbage for scraps, etc.) sixty hours per week to survive. If they stop "working" and do not find a comparable or better occupation within a month, they will die of starvation.

A Servant character can not raise their Attributes due to the lack of nutrients and basic health care, and they can only obtain Tech or Bio Upgrades in the black market at a significant cost. Additionally, they suffer one disadvantage towards social interactions with other Raag who are aware of their status.

DRUDGE

You are a regular clanmate, with more obligations than rights. You must work very hard and put yourself at risk in the countless raids that are part of Raag life. You only socialize with

your peers, and those above you look at you with disdain.

Monthly earnings: pieces of gear costing up to 500 credits in total (unspent credits are lost). Additionally, they can keep up to one quarter of the loot they obtain, and must give the rest up to their Clan.

A Drudge must work for their Clan fifty hours per week to maintain their status. If they stop working, they will be imprisoned until their Clan goes back to Heimis, where they will be abandoned with nothing and see their status reduced to Servant.

Their Clan covers their basic needs and allows them to live in a common area, with dozens of others. Drudges must always follow orders from people of higher status in their Clan unless they go against their Clan or the Surani, or they will be imprisoned and abandoned in Heimis as Servants as soon as possible.

WARRIOR OR ENGINSEER

You live comfortable life in private living quarters, and enjoy a certain look of envy from your lesser clanmates, but it can quickly turn into a call to arms that will place you at the forefront of war. Your privileges are many, but so are your responsibilities.

Monthly earnings: pieces of gear costing up to 2,000 credits in total (unspent credits are lost). Additionally, they can keep up to half the loot they obtain, and must give the rest up to their Clan.

A Warrior or Enginseer must work thirty hours per week for their Clan to maintain their status. If they stop working or don't at least attempt to perform their duties, their status will be reduced to Drudge.

Their Clan covers their basic needs and provides them with their own living quarters for their family. Warriors and Enginseers must always follow orders from people of higher status in their Clan unless they go against their Clan or the Surani, or their status will be reduced to Drudge.

CHAMPION

You are at the higher part of the societal pyramid, second only to chieftains and Councillors. You enjoy an idle life but can entertain yourself with the odd quest.

Monthly earnings: pieces of gear costing up to 5,000 credits in total (unspent credits are lost). Additionally, they can keep up to three quarters of the loot they obtain, and must give the rest up to their Clan.

Champions don't have to work to maintain their status, which can not be lowered. However, they can be exiled from their Clan, and even from society, if they commit treason. In such instance, they are not allowed to enter their former Clan's Kuraima under penalty of death. They may attempt to join another Clan, but it is unlikely any Clan other than the Noteri will accept them, and even they will only do so if they provide secrets from their former Clan or are willing to do their dirty work.

ADVANCED RULES

BARTER ECONOMY

While the Raag are starting to use Corvo credits in certain areas and are willing to deal with them, their most common form of trade is bartering. Raag sellers are always open to barter their goods for goods of equal or higher cost.

ASSEMBLING A WARBAND

A Champion can assemble a warband composed by as many lower status characters as their Profession. Those characters are considered their entourage, bodyguards, close advisors, servants, or other suitable position depending on their respective social status. They don't need to work to maintain their status, but their Champion can give them responsibilities and orders they must follow if they want to be part of the warband. The Champion can spell characters from their warband at any point.

QUESTING

A Champion can propose any kind of quest to their Clan. If their chieftain or Council approves them, or in extreme cases the Champions themselves if there is not a higher authority present, the Champion will be allowed to take their warband on their proposed quest.

The chieftain or Council who approved the quest can dictate that such a mission requires additional resources, and issue additional gear or vehicles to the Champion's warband as determined by the GM.

THE HUMAN

THE HUMAN SPECIES

"It's hard to find a moment of peace."

- An Iz'kal reading Human history

Humans are a mammal, bipedal species from Earth, a remote world from an isolated solar system in quadrant Wung 2238. They would be of no consequence to the universe at large if they hadn't been discovered by the Corvo in 1659 SA, which turned them into the most sought after soldiers of known space.

Humans have many contradicting traits. They are physically strong, but also frail; their organisms are highly adaptable but also highly specialised. They are both aggressive and calculating, close-minded but also great at improvising both tactics and tools. They are violent and sentimental, but also level-headed and meticulous. They are both the most unpredictable species in civilised space and the most dependable. They are both highly individualistic and prone to hive reasoning. Even the Corvo, who for all intents and purposes are their patron race, have a hard time understanding Humans completely.

NATURE AND BEHAVIOUR

Humans are muscular, biped mammals with a better ability to manipulate tools than any other species. They are the second-strongest known civilised creatures in the universe, and also the most aggressive and cunning when it comes to battle, with a strategic instinct unmatched by smarter species. All of these traits make Human mercenaries an exceedingly popular commodity to all other starfaring civilisations.

Other than their innate combat talents, Humans are a very adaptable species overall, unparalleled in their ability to improvise and use tools to survive, even when given little to no resources to begin with. This puzzled some Corvo xenoscientists, as Humans are physically a much less adaptable species than Corvo, until they realised the key to Human adaptability - and their overall behaviour - is not their physiology but their brain capacity.

ANATOMY AND PHYSIOLOGY

Humans are sexual-reproducing mammals. They have four limbs - two arms and two legs - smooth scaleless skins, and patches of hair covering seemingly arbitrary spots of their bodies. Their skulls have two eyes, two external ears, a protruding nose organ and a mouth with shifting lips and blunt teeth. Their reproductive organs are visible in plain sight.

Humans are exclusive air-breathers, and their lungs require a very specific combination of oxygen and other gases, being unable to breathe in many atmospheres outside Earth. Unlike other species, they die within minutes of oxygen deprivation, and within hours of exposition to temperature extremes. They are able to draw nourishment from several types of organic matter, although their organisms are not optimised for a truly omnivorous diet.

The only reason Humans could evolve and prevail against stronger lifeforms with such a specialised organism was their highly adaptive brains; Humans are not as smart as Corvo, but they are much more spontaneous, capable of thinking new strategies almost unconsciously. This alone turned Humans into an evolutionary powerhouse, which ended not only thriving in, but also collapsing, their environment.

Humans are also far stronger than most other sentient species, save the Raag; it's theorised this is due to their species' evolution towards tool and weapon manipulation. As the saying goes, 'the best place for a weapon is a Human hand' - and science backs the saying.

LIFE CYCLE

Humans reproduce sexually; after the female is fertilised, she carries the foetus for forty weeks before giving birth. Multiple births (mostly twins) are rare but possible. Human newborns are the most fragile in nature, requiring constant care and observation for their first five years of life, longer than any living species on record.

In the natural environment of their devastated world, Humans tend to live to around 50-60 years; however, when brought to the controlled habitats and care of Corvo cities, their life expectancy is nearly doubled, to 90 years or even

more. The Corvo are currently at work on several procedures to slow Human aging, with no conclusive successes but many hopeful results.

All Humans sent to space by the Corvo are sterilised, so as to prevent their forming an independent civilisation. Thus, space Humans do not reproduce.

HUMAN CHARACTER

Although stereotyped as violent and militaristic, Humans have a great capacity for gentler emotions, and can develop a strong sense of community if socially pressed into it. They are great scientists and builders, and were well on their way to attempting their first interstellar flight before their self-destructive war ended their civilisation.

To understand the true nature of Humans, one must understand their most distinguishing trait: the inordinate importance they give to their emotions. For Humans, basic sensations such as love, desire, hunger, fear, and even the will to create things, seem governed by emotion rather than simple survival.

For example, they mainly copulate not to reproduce, but to somehow satisfy their emotional needs; and they histrionically express their emotional pleasure with such simple acts as eating or resting. A Human can, and will easily, fall into violent rampages for an insult, or risk his life and those of others for purely abstract reasons, such as 'the right thing to do', or imaginary feelings such as 'loving' a specific individual or thing above everyone and everything else.

Many xenoscientists theorised that such unpredictable impulses would hinder the Humans' military use; surprisingly, it turned out that it actually improves their performance. Rather than distracting them from their duty, Human emotions become linked to it, which makes them more loyal, not less. Thus Corvo psychologists have developed many ways to use Humans emotions as a tool to inspire them into obedience.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

Humans are not capable of reproducing the Corvo language because of the differences between our respective breathing systems and vocal cords. Most Humans understand the Corvo trade language, of course, and many Corvo understand the Human Speech; however, communication between our species would have not been possible but for the automatic translation software they developed.

When the first Corvo expedition arrived on Earth and had trouble communicating with us, they did some research into what little was left of Earth's technology. Thus they used the most common Human names they found in the databases to name themselves while communicating with earthlings. These names were Chinese. Since then, we Humans always use chinese names for the Corvo. An extension of Corvo translation software can automatically generate a Chinese name when Corvo tell their name to Humans. By the same token, Human names are translated to a language the Corvo understand.

Similarly, when Humans meet the Iz'kal and the Raag for the first time they ran their names into the same software. The first Iz'kal-Human meeting took place in a diplomatic mission in Erthum, and the desertic planet reminded Humans of the deserts in the Middle East, so they chose arabic names for the Iz'kal. Following suit, the Raag were assigned Inuit names due to their frozen home planet.

SOCIETY

> *"At one time in the world, there were woods that no one owned."*
>
> *- Cormac McCarthy, Human writer*

Humans used to have a successful and thriving planet-spanning society, but it was destroyed by a world war centuries before the Corvo discovered Earth. What remains of Human society is a savage world of survivalist tribes and isolated settlements, with no government other than petty tyrants and warlords that compete for the borders of a wasteland.

After the Corvo arrived, Human society changed entirely; the Corvo offered employment, equipment, patronage and the possibility to go to space. Millions of Humans took up the Corvo on their offer, and became a starfaring, mercenary race, hired by the Corvo as soldiers and guards. Currently, there are basically three Human societies.

Earthlings, or wasters, are Humans from Earth, which live in a dog-eat-dog environment of wasteland survivalists; a rural, hunter-gatherer culture that struggles for survival among the ancient ruins of their civilisation. Earthlings are violent, hardy and dangerous, like their world, and have been fighting each other to survive for the last five centuries.

Urban Humans, or Urbanites, are Earthlings that have moved into one of the Corvo modernised settlements on Earth. The Corvo take reasonably good care of Urbanites, giving them shelter, food and money for nominal jobs and

Sergeant Sullivan

Sergeant Sullivan was happy.

He was working for the Corvo, and he missed his times as a hired gun for the Iz'kal a little less every day. He did not like the Iz'kal ways. It was damning enough to bear day after day of gunshot hell, from trenches unknown, fighting an unseen enemy, but the thing that Sullivan found most deplorable about the Iz'kal was the fact that, for them, fighting was not enough: they wanted to convince you that you were doing the right thing. As if a piece of bread to eat was not enough! Droning mass speeches about the cause, and how they were on the right. Banners and anthems dotted the base, displaying answers to dilemmas he never had. So many that, more often than not, he was glad to be unlearned.

He despised living with the continuous feeling that he was being brainwashed. He struggled to understand why the Iz'kal were trying so hard. He was, after all, one of thousands of brothers and sisters who would kill their own mothers if that meant not having to return to their former, miserable life.

Life at the Plinth 03 space station with the Corvo was much more pleasant. Being left alone, undisturbed, after weeks of fighting and sweating and killing and swearing. It was exactly what he wanted. Drinking with his brothers and lying with his sisters; betting his lunch on a card game.

They could live, even if it was for only a small while, before the Commander-in-Chief reappeared and sent them on yet another mission.

He particularly enjoyed the kino nights, when the Corvo set up one of the four spherical rooms of the Plinth and showed them one of their old films. The rest of the time, those rooms were used to prepare battles in huge 360-degree virtual environments, but during The Night of the Titans, it was a place where the legends of Serxos, Qadinkral the Die-Hard, and other Corvo heroes came back to life all around them.

The truth was that he was not going to let the Corvo brainwash him any time soon. He knew that hundreds of Humans had perished behind each of the heroes' triumphs. He was aware that they were vacuous stories, filled with half-truths and double lies, manufactured to make the Corvo's wars the stuff of legend. He did not buy it, but in spite of everything, they were fun. They were bloody entertaining, even. And certainly more effective than alcohol!

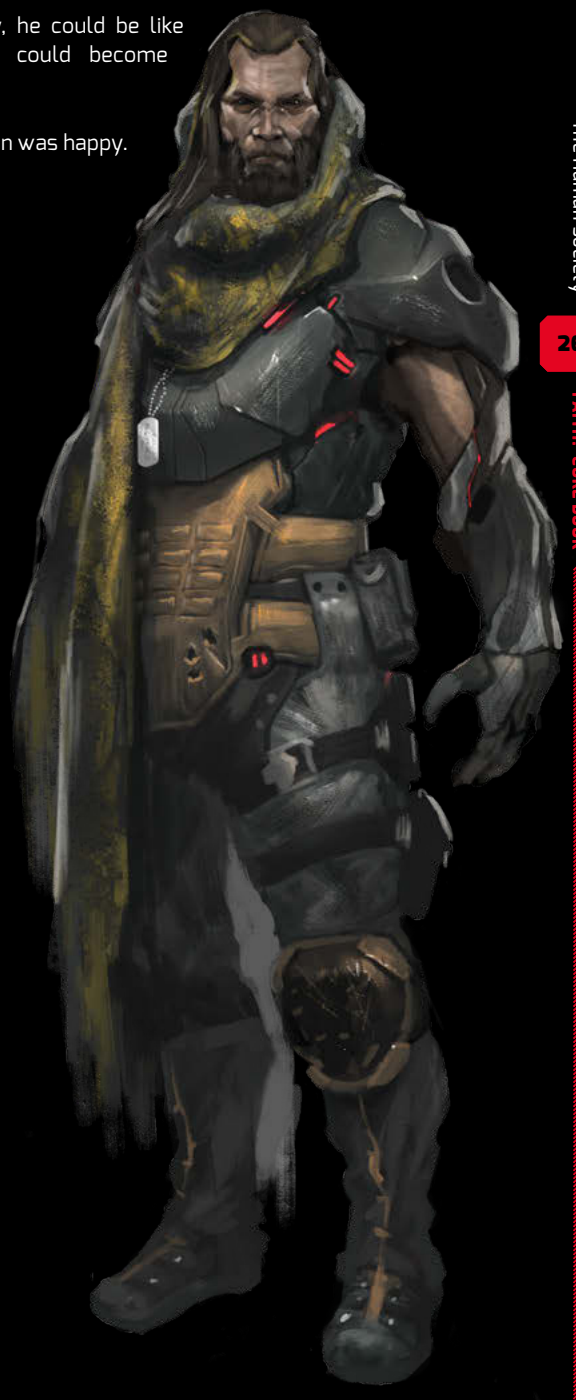
Reality mattered little when, for a couple of hours, monsters fought monsters in space, and made him forget the crude reality where a projectile shot from nowhere could blow away his head, and nobody would give a damn, except for the three drunkards singing an old song in an armoury far away.

But that night, Sergeant Sullivan did not think about such things. He was deeply engrossed in reliving one of the most intense missions of Qadinkral. It was a story about a Human - a rare occurrence.

A noble brother who had lost his life between the arms of Qadinkral, sacrificing himself for the greater good. How glorious it must be to become immortalized in Corvo culture. A brother was raised as a Titan, on The Night of the Titans.

Maybe, one day, he could be like that brother. He could become immortal.

Sergeant Sullivan was happy.



in general making sure they have numerous and prosperous families. This is because the Corvo need to keep Human numbers steady for their armed forces. In fact, the Corvo are paying Urbanites to reproduce.

Space Humans, or Spacers, live in a military culture of mercenaries and soldiers onboard Corvo ships, protected by Corvo laws and fed by Corvo resources. They are mostly the children of Urbanites, save for a few Wasters directly recruited into space forces by the Corvo. Spacers are relatively organised, disciplined and honourable, and enjoy the clean, civilised life of gainful employment almost as much as they like space battles.

Human cultures have often been compared to an animal species in a zoo versus the wild; they are safer in the Corvo environment, but they are free in their deadly natural habitat.

LANGUAGE

Human speech is loud and musical, using exhalations, vocal cords and mouth inflexions to produce a great variety of sounds. The Corvo cannot reproduce it, but both species have learned to either understand their respective languages - or to use automatic translation software.

There are many different languages on Earth belonging to the scattered survivalist tribes of the wasteland; but most Earthlings understand a single language they all call simply 'The Speech', based on one of their surviving postwar languages. Interestingly, no Human remembers what that language was called or which Humans spoke it.

The Corvo used their translation software to research Human languages, and adapted their names and terms to an ancient Human tongue called Chinese (the most frequent language they found), but they have also learned to understand The Speech.

Space Humans talk almost exclusively in The Speech. However, all Spacers understand the Corvo Trade Language, which is the common tongue of the Corvosphere, and The Speech is understood by a vast majority of Corvo.

FAMILY

Humans have varying approaches to family depending on their environment, to which they have always adapted perfectly.

Waster tribes are usually comprised of five to ten families, which include the parents with their children and grandchildren. Everyone takes care of everyone, and an Earthling tribe is actually a large family by itself. This would seem to stand in contrast with the cruel world outside these close-knit groups. The point is, it has to; in a violent world, only cooperative groups stand a chance of survival.

Urbanites always have families with as many children as they can spawn; the Corvo take care of the expenses, giving the family heads easy and often unnecessary jobs to ensure they maintain a good quality of life. The Corvo don't see this as a waste, as they are in fact farming a vital resource - Human soldiers. As the Corvo don't have a cultural concept of monogamy or heterosexuality, they allow non-reproductive sex, as long as the Humans involved make sure to have children anyway; the Corvo also encourage families with several sexual partners, which result in many more children.

Spacers have no families, and after three centuries of Corvo influence most have entirely forgotten the concept altogether. Once a Human leaves Earth, he is immediately sterilised by the Corvo, so as to prevent Humans from establishing a civilisation that could become dangerous competition. Thus, spacers have no children and, for the most part, no relatives; as a result, they tend to form strong bonds with their war comrades. And, since the Corvo have no cultural restrictions or rules related to sexual intercourse, military brotherhood often evolves into intimate relationships, regardless of rank or gender.

ECONOMY AND SOCIAL CLASS

Humans don't have social classes to speak of, but they aren't exactly a classless society either. Rather, it could be said that Humans are a social class unto themselves. They are somewhat outside the Corvo social order, but they are definitely more privileged than the poorest Corvo, and second-class citizens to everyone else.

EARTH ECONOMY

Waster Humans have no social structure other than the rule of the strongest - raiders take from the common folk, and warlords establish small dominions through strength. Waster society has no currency; all transactions on the Earth wasteland use a simple bartering system, where both parts agree on the perceived worth of an item and that's it. Robbery and scavenging is at least as common as trading, anyway. When ranking their buying power by Corvo standards, Waster Humans are equal to the Corvosphere's lowest classes, with even their warlords and petty tyrants being only a bit higher in the scale. The mightiest army on the Earth badlands has roughly the same resources as a single middle-class family from Tiantang.

HUMAN ECONOMY IN THE CORVOSPHERE

Urbanites and Spacers use the Corvo economic system. This means they manage electronic credits, and they are free to seek any jobs they want - although in practice the Corvo impose very strict job contracts - earning whatever they can with their effort. However, Humans do enjoy a special treatment due to their importance to Corvo society.

All Urbanites and Spacers have jobs in the Corvosphere - otherwise they wouldn't be invited to join it - and earn good wages for their work, even if said work is simply moving to a Corvo city to raise families and performing lesser tasks.

When Humans join the Corvosphere - either the Corvo protection facilities on Earth or the Corvo armies in space - they automatically have a special status, as the Megacorps pay them more for less work, regardless of their position. To prevent this special treatment from becoming privilege and having a Human State erupt under their noses, the Corvo impose special taxes on Humans acquiring certain goods - particularly basic needs - in the Corvosphere. The Corvo tell Humans this measure is to 'ensure the Corvo people get fair access to basic needs', but it's actually to maintain Human dependency. For example, since there's no 'Human tax' on luxuries such as experience drugs or entertainment events, any Human can enjoy the best of the Corvosphere as easily as most Corvo; but owning a home or their own ship, even their own weapons, is nearly prohibitive for Humans, who despite their privileged position are usually forced to depend on their employers for basic needs. There are also many Corvo that take advantage of this situation acting as Human 'patrons' and providing a Human with his basic needs in exchange for limited services.

This system, which has worked as far as Humans are concerned, has imbalanced Corvo economy in several arenas. Many Megacorp officials openly oppose it, claiming it goes against the Corvo economic system itself; in fact, the Human situation is the closest the Corvosphere has come to having social security, or a measure of state intervention on the economy. Several alternatives have been attempted throughout the 300 years the Humans have lived in the Corvosphere, but the system always ends up reverting to the current model - mild privilege for Humans, in exchange for artificially maintaining their second-class citizen status.

POLITICS AND LAW

Human politics are quite simple: They do not govern themselves anywhere, and that's about as far as it goes.

Wasters have small, independent dominions or city-states that rule by force over small patches of land. These governments don't represent their people and, save rare exceptions, never last more than a couple of years as locals are forced to move on by raiders or lack of resources. On Earth, politics are still reduced to taking whatever you can from whoever you meet, with power and authority going - fleetingly - to whoever can take more.

On the Corvosphere Humans are the Corvo's de facto subjects, and live by their laws and under their social structures. This means, since the Corvo have no government, officially Humans have no leaders either. As Humans are innately far more given to group identity and nationalism than Corvo, they tend to form small bands and communities within Corvo cities, or give their army units nominal laws, flags and a near-political hierarchy besides military ranks.

Some Humans have tried to establish their own independent states inside the Corvosphere, but they just don't have the numbers or resources to achieve it, and these small political entities always end up disbanding almost as soon as they are conceived.

HUMAN ROLES

Most Humans are warriors. This is true for Spacers as well as for Wasters; even Urbanites have a high number of career soldiers and guards - even if they have relatively few things to fight for in their controlled environment.

Nearly 90% of Humans in the Corvosphere are mercenaries, forming the elite of Coalition armies and ship crews, or guarding everything from Corvo settlements and Megacorp facilities to Mob dens.

The remaining Humans are either blue-collar workers - having fulfilled their military contracts and thus paid their way to a civil life as office workers or scientists - or live in the fringes of civilised society. These fringer Humans include half the population of Earth, which still live as Wasters in a world without professions or institutions, killing each other for resources; this includes all Corvosphere Humans that somehow fell into the Heijian underworld as freelance adventurers, hackers, outlaws or members (or victims) of organised crime. Many Humans are slaves, forced to work as mob muscle, miners or pit fighters.

And then there are the very few lucky ones - those Humans that have achieved celebrity or success in the Corvosphere. These include war heroes, famous explorers and - very rarely - Humans that managed to become entertainment celebrities. One thing that's still completely unheard of is a Human with a high position at a Megacorp (or any corporation). The Corvo have made sure this cannot happen by a subtly enforced social prejudice, which makes both species assume almost instinctively that Humans are not qualified or willing to take Corporate work.

THE HUMAN FRONT

The Human Front is a faction of Space Humans that fight to create a new beginning for the Human species, on a healthy planet far away from the economic control of the Corvosphere or the manipulation of the Iz'kal State.

Human Front members, known as Fronters, are Human rebels who once joined the Corvo and have since taken arms against them. They are trying to discover their way back to Earth to help their species escape the cycle of violence to which the Corvo subject them.

The Human Front has existed for more than two centuries, almost since the Humans first encountered the Corvo, and during this time it has gone through several incarnations, some more violent and some more idealistic. They have always two things in common, however - first, a hatred of the Corvo; and second, the unshakable goal of someday finding the way back to Earth, their long lost planet.

The Corvo have given the Human Front a reputation as a dangerous terrorist group that attacks important Corvo enclaves, accusing them of committing terrible attacks against Corvo civilians; the Human Front doesn't admit or deny these accusations.

The Human Front doesn't generally consider members of other species as true Fronters, but it is willing to hire non-Humans for temporary or freelance tasks. After all, there are still places that only a Corvo or an Iz'kal can reach.

Being a large organisation persecuted by all, the Human Front must keep on the run, and Fronters remain scattered throughout the Labyrinth. As a result, the Human Front does not always follow a single consistent line of thought. While some factions within the organization are trying to establish truces with the Corvo, other factions might be blowing up their mining colonies. This means the Human Front has not made that much progress towards the liberation of its people - many Humans do not agree with them openly, as their behaviour has increased the levels of anti-Human sentiment in the Corvosphere. This, added to the Megacorps' terror campaign about the Human Front, is slowly building up into widespread interspecies tension, and could eventually escalate into a full, bloody, Corvosphere-wide Human-Corvo conflict.

BEHIND THE FRONT

There's a persistent rumour in the Corvosphere that the Human Front is actually backed and at least partially financed by the Iz'kal State. The assumption makes sense - the Iz'kal would be very interested in the Human Front's success, and after the founding of the Coalition, Iz'kal and Humans are closer than ever - and more independent from the Corvo for their contact, too.

The rumour is true to an extent; some factions of the Human Front have indeed contacted The State, which offered resources with no strings attached, asking nothing in return but to have a destabilising force inside the Corvosphere. Of course, the Iz'kal would like to have a lot more control over the Human Front than they do, and are always in search of agents to infiltrate the Human Front in their name to make sure the State's resources are being used in the State's best interest. By the same token, the Megacorps would pay dearly for any information that proves the State is indeed financing the Human Front.

COMMANDER SADA THAMP

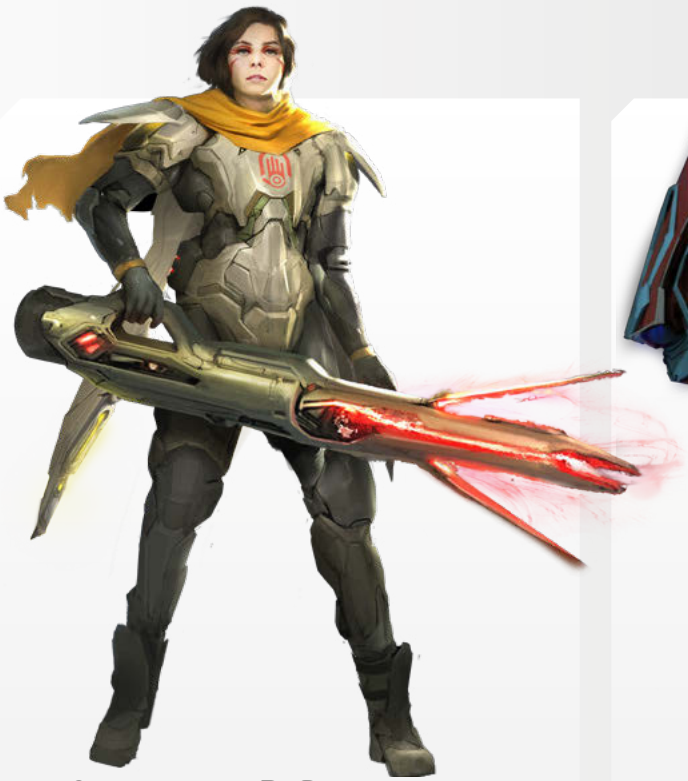
The most important leader of the Human Front is Sada Thamp, daughter of Sadoy Thamp, perhaps the greatest Human Front leader who ever lived. Sada is no less respected than her father, although she feels overwhelmed by his legend.

Sada is an idealistic revolutionary, believing in a government of the people for the people, and has never accepted any kind of authority over the Human Front. She, however, is the Front's most popular leader today, partly because of her lineage and also because of her honesty and charisma.

Despite this, Sada has done little to capitalise on her prestige or join the separatist Human Front factions; this has gained her some criticism from friends and foes alike, who would like her to take a more hands-on role on the leadership of the organisation. She, however, firmly believes in self-governance, and in letting the Human Front decide what it wants to be by itself. Meanwhile, she is still hoping to, someday, find Earth to give back to her people.

In fact, Sada is constantly seeking valiant agents to help her in her search. There's always some new clue or some new contact somewhere in Tiantang or the colonies, and she cannot check any of them in person; she needs someone else to do it. If any of these clues or contacts came through, she may find the lead she needs to find Earth - and would be very happy with the agents that helped her get it.

Besides having thousands of explorers and reconnaissance troops searching for Earth across the Corvosphere, Sada is the patron behind the Gloriana Flight, Captain Axus



COMMANDER SADA THAMP

Lone Wolf

Level 3 :: Human :: Strategist
mov. 5 metres :: weight 78 kg :: height 185 cm

6	5	3	4

PHYSICAL STAT	9	INITIATIVE STAT	6	MENTAL STAT	8

CLOSE QUARTERS	4 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	4 +

Sada Thamp's Cannon

Plasma weapon 2 (It ignores 2 points of armour). It can perform suppressive fire actions.

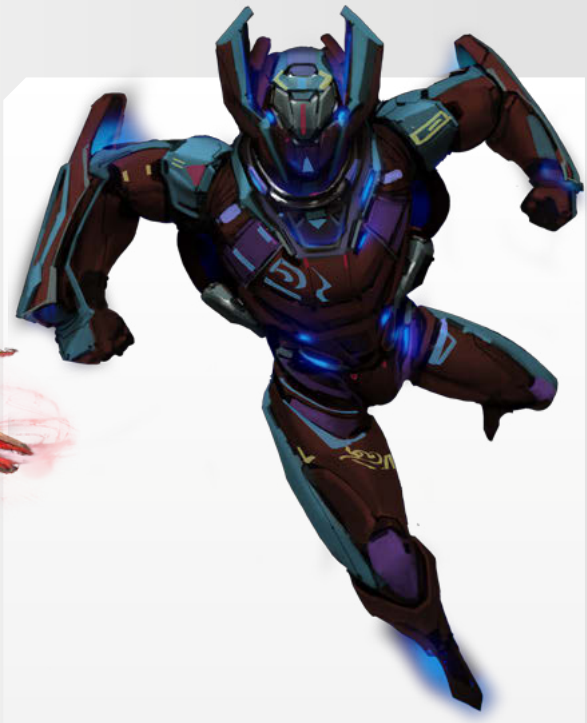
Charismatic

She gains one advantage towards social interactions when using her voice.

Persuasive

He gains an advantage when trying to convince other characters.

Thamp is the idealistic head of the Human Front. Despite being overwhelmed by her father's legacy, she puts on a brave face and leads with aplomb.



COMMANDER DEFORT

Lone Wolf

Level 3 :: Human :: Loyal
mov. 5 metres :: weight 95 kg :: height 178 cm

5	3	2	

PHYSICAL STAT		INITIATIVE STAT		MENTAL STAT	

HIT (DEX)	3 +	GRAPPLE (CON)	1 +

Carlus DeFort's Suit

He can move flying, and he gains one advantage towards agility actions.

Charge II

His unconfronted running actions are considered passive, and his next Close Quarters action gains one advantage and causes 1 additional damage.

Commander DeFort read the phrase "the means justify the end" on an old Human book, and he hasn't stopped using it at every chance he gets.

Bold's covert mission to find Earth in non-Corvo space. She remains a dreamer, and to her critics, a blind idealist; but she understands her own flaws and has chosen to live - and lead - with them.

YASON ZARK

Currently, Sada's most urgent concern is the loss of her right hand and closest associate, Captain Yason Zark.

Captain Zark is a grizzled veteran of Sadoy Thamp's campaigns; a square-jawed, trim-bearded soldier with greying blond hair and a dutiful, martial air. He taught Sada to pilot and shoot, just as her father taught her to speak and think. When Sadoy Thamp died, he entrusted care of her daughter to Captain Zark, who has fulfilled his promise to this day.

The men under Zark's command are all older than 40, but he wouldn't have it otherwise; they all fought together in dozens of battles, and swore to die together. Sada, and Captain Zark himself, nicknamed them 'the Beard Squad' and it became their official callsign.

Recently, Captain Zark and the Beard Squad were escorting Commander Sada's ship as it crossed Corvo space, and were intercepted by a Feng-class cruiser that recognised the Human Front Commander and immediately ordered Sada's surrender. Speeding towards the nearest labyrinth exit, Sada led her fleet away from the Corvo, while Captain Zark and the Beard Squad faced the Corvo ship. The last that Sada saw before entering the Labyrinth was that they managed to disengage too.

> However, neither Captain Zark nor any of his men made it to the other end of the Labyrinth. Perhaps they got lost in the Labyrinth, or perhaps they were intercepted by more Corvo ships. It's been weeks, and there are no news of the Commander's mentor and best friend. Sada has sent scouts to discreetly inquire about Captain Zark in Corvo space, and they have all returned with nothing. Either the Corvo never captured them, or they did so with utmost secrecy. They must have escaped...
>
> ...But where are they?

COMMANDER DEFORT

Sada Thamp's main rival for control of the Human Front is Commander DeFort, her opposite in almost every respect.

Carlus DeFort is a tall, blond and disciplined man, with no illusions about the Human Front's chances of success; as he and his followers see it, if the Human Front will ever find Earth and become free of the Corvo, it has to destroy the Corvo first, or at least cripple the Corvo civilisation so that it's no longer strong enough to stop or control Humans. For DeFort, terrorism is a perfectly acceptable means to this end, on the rationale that Corvo economic practices, shielded behind legality, impose a much worse violence on the lower classes. For DeFort, the Corvo society is a hypocritical tyranny disguised as free market, and the Iz'kal are no better with their totalitarian dictatorship; DeFort intends to crush both their civilisations - particularly the Megacorps - or die trying. Then, and only then, will the Human Front be able to return freely to Earth and live in peace.

Commander DeFort may well be the most hated Human in the Corvosphere, and he couldn't be more proud of it: he understands a hero must always be the villain at some point in his career.

DeFort is cruel but not sadistic, and violent but exceedingly honourable. He has never attacked a defenceless enemy or targeted a residential area; all of his strikes are against Megacorp facilities, factories and military centres, in the hopes of crippling Corvo economy and not Corvo people. However, he's not above executing innocents if necessary, and many civilian workers have met their end at DeFort's surgical strikes.

More recently, DeFort has become bold enough to plan hits on important Corvo leaders. As the Megacorps are out of his league, he has decided to focus on the law instead. He has a mission for any Human Front member or freelance mercenary that wants to take it - to seek and assassinate either Lao Meng, the Chief of Tiantang Police, or Zhang Ye himself, her superior and Head of Tiantang Security.

It goes without saying that Comander DeFort and Commander Thamp don't see eye to eye, and have been many times on the verge of actually fighting each other, stopping only because of their one common trait - their overwhelming loyalty to the Human Front.

THE GLORIANA FLIGHT

A starfaring quest with no end, a trip of destiny from the mud to the farthest stars, an adventure like no other - this is the Gloriana Flight.

The Gloriana is a Human Front ship, manned by the best explorers and bravest adventurers Humanity has to offer, sent by Commander Sada Thamp to search for three things - One, worlds suitable for Human colonisation; Two, oppressed Humans in need of help; and Three, the secret location of the lost Human world - Earth.

The Gloriana Flight is manned by captain Axus Bold, a valiant space explorer, and his crew of shipmates and friends, which includes some of the greatest heroes in Human space. It exists as Sada's secret plan - an ace in the hole, a last desperate plan should the Human Front fail at

its rebellion. The Corvo and Iz'kal don't know of the Gloriana's existence, although rumours abound of its fleeting passage through remote planets, aiding Human colonists and uncovering new paths across the Labyrinth.

The Gloriana does accept new recruits of any species, as long as they are brave, open minded and committed to the Human ideals of peace, freedom and the return of Humanity to Earth.

Axus Bold is the ship's captain; a Human Front soldier, former Megacorp mercenary and starfighter ace. His first mate and co-pilot is Zindaa, also an ex-soldier; a woman with a kind heart, a sharp eye and the best pilot hands outside the Coalition. The ship's second mate is Yomak Tokamak, a Human warrior with a love for body armor and energy weapons. The chief technician is Zook, a small Corvo that rebelled against his people to help the Gloriana achieve the dream of Human freedom. Finally, the crew's most powerful member by far is A'astrani, an Iz'kal voidwalker and soulbender of Hexia that never speaks but always has the last word in any conflict. Other than these elite members, the Gloriana employs a crew of about thirty explorers and adventurers of every known civilised species, all equally committed to freedom and hope.

The Gloriana Flight has been in operation for five years now, opposing both the Megacorps and the State at every turn, but never raising arms against anybody that doesn't strike first. After all, the Gloriana is still an unconfirmed rumour, and a covert operation - but it is also a symbol of hope and a beacon of light for Humans across the universe.

THE FREE COLONIES

There are a couple remote places in the universe where Outer Humans have managed to live in opposition to their species' stereotype - in peaceful and stable settlements. These colonies are far removed and well hidden from both the Iz'kal State and the Corvosphere; their inhabitants are just looking to start anew away from alien influence and be left alone.

The Free Colonies, as they are known, first appeared through the enormous efforts of Commander Sadoy Thamp, martyr of the Human Front; it's mostly thanks to the Front that they still exist. The Free Colonies maintain good relations with the Human Front since the organisation has the secret of their location, but they are not part of the Human Front or necessarily agree with its methods.

Free Colonies are still few and precarious; some disappear without a trace, and now and then a new one is founded in some remote corner of the universe. Currently no more than a couple of Free Colonies are estimated to exist, but the Human Front hopes there will gradually be more until Humanity has its own place in the universe again.

HUMAN FRONTER

Teamplayer

Level 2 :: Human :: Loyal

mov. 5 metres :: weight 75 kg :: height 180 cm

5	3	2	-

PHYSICAL STAT	8	INITIATIVE STAT	6	MENTAL STAT	4

CLOSE QUARTERS	3 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	3 +

Nemesis

Plasma weapon (It ignores 1 point of armour). The attack gains one advantage against dodging.

Frag grenades

Action (Physical). One advantage if thrown within 10 metres, or one disadvantage for every 10 metres or fraction further (up to 50). Causes 4 physical damage up to one metre from impact point, and 1 less damage for every metre or fraction further.

Relentless

She does not lose her turn when she performs a counteraction.

Human Fronters want a fresh start for Humanity, far from the influence of alien species, and they're willing to go to great lengths to achieve this goal.

CULTURE

Despite the great fall of their civilisation and their status as an occupied people, Humans have one of the richest cultures in the universe thanks to what is their greatest weakness - the worth they give to worthless things.

As a result, Humans have an incredibly rich trove of traditions, legends, songs and customs for such a diminished civilisation. As Corvo xenohistorian Wen Xeming notes, Humans lost their history but kept their legends, yet another manifestation of their strange, emotional values.

HUMAN PHILOSOPHY

Humans have a rich, layered philosophy, which tends to be as contradicting and emotional as everything else about them.

HUMAN VALUES

Human thought is based on the unusual concept of 'values' - abstract, purely moral rules with no actual effect or material use by themselves, to which Humans pay at least as much attention and respect as to their own lives. This often overrides even their basic impulses and needs. Corvo sociologists have concluded that ancient Humans developed such 'values' as a behavioural method; that is, to somehow regulate Human nature and their irrational emotional outbursts. Much like the psychological training the Corvo developed for Human soldiers, 'values' turn Human emotions into a tool for cooperation and agreement, encouraging group behaviour through the same irrational beliefs that would otherwise disrupt it.

Human values include the following abstract concepts:

Love is understood as a virtue, and most Humans celebrate their emotional attachment to certain people, activities or places. This view of love is a very empowering tool for Humans, which can unflinchingly put themselves in danger, or even allow themselves to die outright, in the name of such attachments.

For Humans, Loyalty is an emotional virtue, to which they ascribe feelings of pride and self-satisfaction, as if not betraying one's kin was a pleasurable activity or a praiseworthy quality instead of a simple means of survival. It is important to note that Humans feel - and overtly boast - loyalty to such baffling concepts as their birthplace, their customs, or their DNA group.

Belonging is the most alien of Human values, which attributes a real, measurable worth to arbitrary connections with each other like being born on the same geographical area, liking the same music or working in the same corporation. For example, a Human feels a sense of community based on factors like ethnicity, gender or even body measures.

Humans also value aesthetic Beauty as an aspirational virtue by itself. A Human that creates a useless work of art can be lauded as an important member of society for achieving the value of 'beauty'. Furthermore, Humans value beauty beyond visual pleasure or sexual attraction. In fact, Humans give beauty less worth, not more, when it is tied to attractiveness or decoration; beauty must have its own worth for it to have any worth.

CONTRADICTING MORALS

There are very few Human philosophy schools or scholars, but their ideas, opinions, traditions and aphorisms suggest that there used to be thousand upon thousand of different Human philosophies before the war. They also suggest that all of these philosophies were based on contradictory beliefs.

For example, most Humans see 'peace' as a virtue, and applaud non-violence as one of their many abstract moral 'values'. However, they also see bravery and competition as laudable qualities, and often praise both struggle and passiveness in the same story - or even in the same sentence. Most surviving Human teachings praise both individualism and conformity, independence and cooperation.

By the same token, they have a strong sense of moral good and evil. However, they very rarely agree, even within the same social group or ideology, on whether a specific act or practice is good or evil - again, they have several tales and customs that simultaneously praise and condemn killing, stealing, or depriving others of their freedom.

EQUALITY AND HIERARCHY

Although there are very few surviving Human philosophies, and they are all equally rife with the same inexplicable contradictions, all Human thought seems to ascribe to one of two basic trends. Humans have many names for these two trends, but Corvo xenoscientists classify them as Equality and Hierarchy, as they are basically a debate on who should rule society.

Equality followers - who tend to be followers of Ergon as well - believe the values and needs of the community come before individual needs and institutional authority; they maintain that the group comes first, and should be unfettered by individual demands or authorities. The most committed followers of this school maintain that all social

ARKA BOZAG

Vexale Prophet

Level 3 :: Human :: Kind

mov. 5 metres :: weight 80 kg :: height 190 cm

6	6	0	-

PHYSICAL STAT	16 (1)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (2)	MENTAL STAT	16 (2)

HIT (DEX)	2 ++	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Neural Spike II

Action (Mental). He suffers 2 neural damage and attacks a character within 20 metres and line of sight, gaining two advantages if his Faith is higher than his target's, and causing 3 unpreventable neural damage. This action can be confronted as a projectile.

Neural Sacrifice

Instant. He suffers 2 neural damage and gains one advantage towards his next mental action.

Neural Recovery

He always recovers 1 point of neural health during the maintenance phase, regardless of any neural damage suffered that round.

Beautiful inside and out, Bozag is the most powerful Vexalite Human soulbender. He travels all across the universe in search of relics of his God.

classes should have the same income and privileges regardless of their individual merit or personal worth.

Followers of Hierarchy believe the opposite - that individuals should only accept the rule of law, not of their peers, and that neither individual freedom nor the duly appointed rulers should bow to the demands of the group. They maintain that every person should be able to have as much authority and power over others as earned by his own effort . Hierarchists are almost always Hexians or Kalivans.

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

"I bleed for Humanity. Inside me resides divinity."

- Lana Moon, a fertile Human woman on Earth

It is not known whether ancient Humans worshipped the Gods, but when the Corvo arrived to Earth there were significant (and opposing) cults of Kaliva and Ergon among wasteland survivalists.

Currently, most Humans worship Kaliva, save for a few cults of Ergon on Earth and a few Corvo sectors. Most members of the Human Front took up Vexal worship, and currently outnumber both Kalivans and Ergonauts within the organisation.

Humans have turned out to be exceptional soulbenders. While other species have roughly one soulbender for every hundred citizens, Humans have ten. So, there may not be that many Human soulbenders, but their soulbender percentage is the highest - so high in fact that most xenohistorians assume it had something to do with the violent fall of their civilisation.

ARKA BOZAG

Arka Bozag is the High Prophet of Vexal among Humans. He is a very powerful soulbender that has no fixed residence, but travels the Corvosphere aboard a home-ship with his closest assistants and followers. He chose to live on a ship as a way to honour his God, but also because he is in constant search for relics of Vexal, all the while helpíng people in need of wisdom or inspiration across the universe. He is known for wielding a staff made almost entirely of quartz crystal, through which he channels his soulbending gifts; Human Vexalites call the staff the Key of Paths, and Arka himself is also known as the Man with the Crystal Staff.

Arka Bozag is a serious, beautiful - slightly androgynous - and ageless man that often looks preoccupied with something beyond his surroundings, thinking about the

deep secrets of the universe. He always appears in dazzling robes, carrying his staff and followed by a few of his crew, acolytes and bodyguards.

Many Human Front members worship Arka Bozag as a manifestation of their God, but he does not condone or belong to their organisation.

> Arka's search for relics usually stretches his forces more than he can afford. He is always willing to hire mercenaries to seek for specific relics, particularly lost pieces of an artefact known as the Door of Vexal, supposed to open and control Labyrinth paths by itself. The Door is likely a legend, but Arka would pay dearly for proof of its existence.

HUMAN ARTS AND SPORTS

Although Human culture was mostly wiped out, their adoration of useless cultural traits kept many of their artistic and entertainment means alive, and led them to create many new ones even through the years of their great fall. As a result, Humans have their own music and art - with almost as many different genres as Corvo - mostly using analog means, like painting, sculpture and performing arts.

TALESPINNERS

As many Human artistic expressions became lost or died out after the war, storytelling flourished. Travelling raconteurs went across the wasteland spreading news and legends alike, and soon telling stories became a respected - if rather hard and dangerous - profession in the Earth wasteland. Practitioners of the art became known as talespinners; a profession that combined survival ability and a fast trigger with knowledge and artistic performance.

After the Corvo arrived, they funded many projects to support and encourage the talespinner trade, ostensibly to research Human culture and behaviour, but actually to keep Humans occupied as they bred them for war. Many talespinners were invited to join the space army, and became wartime heralds and messengers, sharing secret messages, spying on the enemy and warning their allies.

Be it on Earth or in space, talespinners are brave adventurers, charming showpeople and a welcome sight for scared, sad or battle-weary Humans.

WASTEWORKERS

Wasteworking is the art of sculpting with garbage. It became a mainstream artistic medium when Humans started repopulating the wastes after the war, and found their world littered with ruins, crumbling machinery and rusted vehicles. Some folks took this refuse and used it for sculptures that served as signals or religious icons, or else had with no practical use whatsoever.

To date, wasteworking is a widespread practice on Earth, and almost every waster settlement is decorated with several samples of wastework. Even Humans that have moved to Corvo habitats retain the hobby, and the Corvo gladly pay for it - they'll pay Humans for anything as long as they stay safe and breed to join their space army. As a result, wasteworks have become a common sight in the Corvo habitats of Earth, and some are even exported into Tiantang wealthy sectors, prized by wealthy Corvo and art collectors.

BALL GAMES

Organised sports used to exist on Earth before the war; after the fall, Humans kept playing ball games on their towns and the ruins of their streets. Currently, all Humans know at least one or two different ball games, with informal rules that have nevertheless spread across their entire civilisation.

When the Corvo arrived, they institutionalised many of these sports, and even created a Human corball league, where Humans can play corball against each other. Many Humans were taken to space not as soldiers but as corball players; they tend to make great attackers, as could be imagined, and every bit as committed and popular as their Corvo teammates.

HUMAN SUBCULTURES

Almost all Humans are soldiers, but there are a few civilian societies among their species, both on Earth and in Corvo space.

Mercenaries are organised soldiers, trained in combat and teamwork. They can be found in the service of the Coalition, the Megacorps, the State, and fringe employers such as a Tongs or pirate warlords. These mercenaries develop beliefs, customs and even accents or speech patterns according to the area or group they serve in. This is by far the most common and widespread of all Human cultures.

Raiders is a blanket term to include wasteland bandits, wandering marauders, warrior tribes and space pirates. Human raiders tend to believe in strength, and mark pacifists and sedentary civilians as weaker, even lesser beings. They also have their own customs and special languages, made up of altered terms from the Human tongue.

Settlers are Humans that live in established communities either on the Earth wasteland or a colony somewhere else. They value cooperation, hard work and stability. Their solidarity and concern for each other puzzles Corvo, and has moved many Corvo researchers to question their own values. Settler Humans have rough, crude accents and idioms, despite being the source of the modern Human Tongue.

Metropolitan Humans, or Metroes, are Urbanites that live specifically in Corvo reservations or even in Corvo urban centres outside Earth such as Tiantang. These Humans are used to the good life, value individual achievement and material success, and are slightly less emotional and friendly than their kin. They speak with a hissing accent derived from their contact with Corvo, which is grating to other Humans.

Spacers and Wasters give Metroes the derogatory nickname 'Zoolanders', indicating that the Corvo keep, breed and feed them as farm animals under the pretence of giving them jobs and housing.

POP TRIBES

As a rule, most Humans have little time for leisure activities, but after centuries of Corvo care and protection, they have developed a few subcultures based on art and entertainment, following Corvo fashion trends or creating their own. Like the Corvo mi dian or Wangers, Human pop tribes are divided by what music, brands, games or stories they like, and are heavy neuronet users, looking to be cortex-connected at all times.

The Corvo don't know whether to encourage these trends or not - On one hand, they promote idleness, which is detrimental to military performance; on the other, they greatly increase Human satisfaction and docility.

TECHNOLOGY

For the most part, Humans use Corvo technology - cortex connectors, hacking rigs, survival suits, plasma weapons and Quantum starcrafts. However, the ruins of their ancient civilisation are still rife with early models of their primitive technology, which was nonetheless very interesting to the Corvo once they found and started reverse-engineering it.

The Corvo have recovered and adapted many tech advances left by the ancient Human civilisation, either from buried ruins or from the hands of waster raiders or traders. Most extant models of Human technology are repaired second-hand items, but the Corvo have also developed their own versions of Human gadgets, some of which have become popular in certain sectors of Corvo society.

GUNS

Guns are the most common form of surviving Human technology, or at least the most interesting to modern users. Similar to Corvo ballistic weapons, yet far more varied and advanced, Human gun designs were fully adapted into Corvo weaponry and reshaped their military industry by inspiring cheaper and more effective non-quantum, non-plasma guns.

Human gun models included smaller and manoeuvrable pistols, unwieldy long-range rifles, powerful, short-range shotguns, and huge shell-launchers that require great strength to aim and load, called RPGs on Earth.

But what really amazed the Corvo were the so-called automatic guns, capable of firing thousands of rounds in a very short time. The killing power of auto guns divided Earth-bound Corvo scientists: some set to work immediately on developing a Corvo version, and some pushed for their prohibition because of their terrible efficiency, seeing them as too dangerous for common people. The first option won of course, and now auto and semi-auto Corvo guns can be seen in the hands of Coalition soldiers and, through the black market, Tong gangsters.

There have been many attempts, Inspired by Human tech, to give autofire capabilities to plasma weapons, but the nature of energy rounds makes it very inviable. So far, auto firing plasma weapons are still wishful thinking, but one should never underestimate The Union's scientists when it comes to improving the business.

MOTORS

Fossil-fuel and electric motors are the second most common relic from the Human past. The Corvo collect and scavenge as many of these motors as they can for parts and research.

Many of these vehicles - particularly wheel-based ground vehicles - are still usable, and have been repaired or adapted by waster raiders or settlers. Such vehicles include mostly motorcycles and off-road four-wheelers - other vehicles are usually scrapped for parts - but a few trucks and armoured tanks can also be seen in the hands of the stronger tribes or factions of the Earth Wasteland.

AIS AND GADGETS

Despite being far more primitive than Corvo tech, Human science had one advancement that Corvo don't have - Artificial Intelligence. While the Corvo were already there and back - having even forbidden AIs on their civilisation, as they disrupted their economy - Humans were on the verge of a fully independent intelligent network when their culture fell. Many ancient Human artefacts used working AI prototypes that remain dormant or functional, or, in a few cases, fully active.

Corvo scientists have proceeded with extreme caution with Human AI systems, but nonetheless take all the samples they find for study and research. By experimenting with these systems, the Corvo have made great cyber-science discoveries that were all but forgotten since the AI ban centuries ago.

Sentient machines remain forbidden in the Corvosphere, but Human technology is teaching the Corvo to create autonomous systems without breaking the anti-AI policy, which has lead to all kinds of advances in cybernetics, mass production and even weaponry. However, the Corvo's meddling with Human AI systems had an unforeseen - and so far unknown - byproduct: the creation of Icarus, the largest and best hidden AI in the Corvosphere (see page 107 in the Corvo section).

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The most powerful weapon that Humans ever devised was the nuclear bomb - a type of explosive that used atomic reactions to generate incredible amounts of destructive energy. While much less safe than quantum bombs, it was almost as destructive and far cheaper to produce, mostly in the form of large missiles called 'nuclear warheads' by Humans. A nuclear warhead could seriously damage even a Corvo battleship, or utterly destroy an entire omnisphere. Evidence suggests that it was a rain of such warheads which obliterated Human civilisation, and there are many of these missiles, buried and scattered across Human ruins, but still salvageable or, in a few lucky cases, active.

The Corvo collect these warheads with great care and effort, not only to study and adapt their design to improved, safer models, but also to prevent Humans from using the weapons on themselves all over again.

This, of course, doesn't prevent ambitious Waster gangs and warlords from seeking, and sometimes finding, these weapons, which is always an unbalancing and dangerous event - the Corvo would pay handsomely for anyone that brought them news of a Human faction in possession of a warhead - or better yet, the disarmed warhead itself. But who knows, maybe the warlords would pay more for it...

ANCIENT BUILDINGS

For the Corvo, ancient Human ruins - cities, buildings, even mining platforms - hold not only lost treasures, but clues about Human culture. For example, most Human buildings and habitats were square, ground-based structures, which the space-accustomed Corvo, with their gyro-zhans and omnirings, are unfamiliar with.

Humans use their ruin sites for shelter or to scavenge usable tools and materials, while Corvo mount scientific research expeditions and mine for buried resources or facilities. Other than this, ancient Human buildings have little modern use except as a cultural legacy, about which neither the Humans or Corvo care that much.

SCAVENTURERS

There are so many artefacts and relics of ancient Human civilisation, that finding them has become a full-time profession for many Corvo and Human explorers, who form specialised parties to seek and recover such items from wasteland ruins. These parties call themselves 'Scaventurers', or 'Scavers', and are always teams of expert mercenaries and scientists, skilled in both ancient tech and long-term camping.

Scaventurer parties are a great opportunity to acquire valuable treasures and a chance for amazing discoveries; however, they are quite dangerous due to Earth's noxious, irradiated atmosphere and waster raider attacks. Nonetheless, scaventuring remains a very popular activity among the most daring Earth inhabitants - both Human and Corvo - and an experienced scaver commands great admiration and prestige in all circles.

Most scaventuring parties are supported by a Corvo company on Earth, but some are privately financed, out of specific personal interest or looking for cheap thrills. A number of Corvo companies offer 'scaventuring trips' for rich dilettantes out for 'an experience'. Some of these scaventuring tours take place in dangerous and wild areas, but most are limited to previously tamed and conditioned areas, set up to look and feel like a real adventure.

Both real scaventures and scaventuring tours are always in need of well-armed, well-trained security to keep their members from danger. Many a Human or Corvo mercenary has found steady work protecting archaeologists from Waster gangs, or rich Corvo tourists from their own carelessness.

HISTORY

"It is a strange feeling, to know there's more of your species' history that has already happened, than history that will happen. You can feel the coming extinction in your guts."

- Remko Vugac, Human explorer

According to Corvo historians, Humans used to have a civilisation at least as prosperous and advanced as that of pre-Space Age Quanjie, but there's precious little information about that period of their history. Humans seem to have evolved from simian lifeforms into a tool-using civilisation in less than a million standard Corvo years, after which they experienced a cultural and industrial leap that led them to colonise their entire planet and become divided by nations and economic systems.

There are some surviving records that indicate the names and languages of some of these entities, but the Humans themselves seemed to have largely forgotten them, and all but lost the ability to interpret or use such records.

What the Corvo have deduced is that Earth must have been a very prosperous civilisation on the verge of achieving space flight and joining the other starfaring races - but then, somehow, Humans fell. Most researchers agree the Humans' own adaptability was their doom, as their exponential exploitation of Earth's resources drove them to the point of near extinction when everything suddenly became scarce in a span of less than a century.

Unwilling to make concessions for the ecosystem at the cost of reducing profit and power, the political and economic entities that ruled Earth failed to prevent the disaster, and at some point there was no return; the environment of Earth could not sustain Humans any longer. Their only hope was to somehow develop far more advanced technology, which allowed them to heal their world and at the same time survive - but that required the governments and corporations to let go of their power, and they would not go down peacefully.

The ensuing war, of which virtually no records remain other than wrecked bunkers and ancient weaponry, ended Human civilisation in a few years. Soon, all that was left of Humanity were those who stood aside and who no one cared to kill.

With no internet, no fuel and no social systems, Humanity survived in small villages so far from each other that they could have been on different planets. Warlords, tyrants, prophets and all kinds of leaders led the tribes. Humans became tough and heartless.

THE CORVO AGE

Such was Earth's situation when the Corvo came through a wormhole, and it was easy for them to take over. They first established a base on no man's land in what used to be the Human continent of Africa, from which they initiated economic and military negotiations with the locals. Their wealth and power, supported by a universal economy, made them the strongest faction on the planet. Eventually, most Humans were working for the Corvo and fighting wars against their enemies, which were often fellow Human factions that did not want to work for the Corvo or owe them anything. Earth became a colony of the Corvosphere.

Shortly after the occupation, Humans started gaining a reputation as very capable mercenaries. They were far more prepared for physical tasks than their Corvo counterparts. The corporations specialising in military contracts, defence, and security started hiring Humans in great numbers. Entire bands of warriors joined military contractors.

Thus, Earth became a breeding and training ground for Human mercenaries; a planet controlled by raider gangs and small settlements in constant war with each other and with limited resources is the perfect place to secure an endless supply of soldiers, and the Corvo made sure that Earth stayed that way by supplying them with weapons whenever they requested it. The harsh conditions on Earth mean that there are always Humans willing to leave their lives behind to work, and many Human warlords pay their debts to the Corvo corporations with the labour of their young people.

Humans started to flock to Corvo settlements on Earth, or to visit space in large numbers, to work for the Corvo. They became leaders in many black-ops against pirates, rebels, other corporations and, of course, the Iz'kal State.

THE HUMAN SPACE AGE

A couple centuries later, Humans had repaid the Corvo's favour and colonised the Corvosphere as their elite military class. Millions of Human soldiers, guards and mercenaries entered service at the Megacorps and armed groups from law enforcement to organised crime. Humans became a common sight in the Corvosphere, and gained their current reputation as the best warriors in the universe.

For a century or so, it was an uneventful, mutually beneficial relationship, with the Corvo providing the resources

and guidance, and Humans providing the manpower. Humans were rescued from the wasteland by the thousands, moving to newly-built Corvo areas intended to keep Humans safe and breeding, and in turn Humans gave their strength and lives to armed service at the Megacorps.

Then, it started getting out of hand. Independent Human factions began emerging, with some of them openly opposing Corvo control. Scared about having invited a whole species of aggressive rebels into their midst, the Corvo enacted a new policy - all Humans that left Earth were to be forcibly sterilised, and most fertile Humans already on space were recalled to submit to the process. Thus the Corvo aimed to control Human population, but it also increased dissatisfaction and empowered rebellious factions, as many Humans resented the measure.

Several Human groups left Megacorp service for better offers from the mob or fringe warlords, or even openly attacked the Corvo, becoming rebel bands or even space pirates. Several Human factions explicitly declared their intention not to submit anymore, and inspired others to do the same. This forced the Corvo to harden their sterilisation policy and their control of who left Earth, which in turn increased Human discontent. The situation has been thus deadlocked for the last two centuries, with dissident Humans being less and less happy, and conformist Humans being more and more controlled every year.

THE HUMAN FRONT

It was during this time that the Human Front consolidated as a political organisation. Its first leaders were the siblings Esti and Estebe Etxeberri, young soldiers from a particularly warlike Earth community, who secretly organised with the leaders of several mercenary forces, planning to strike back at the Corvo. Their first meetings were squashed by Megacorp security, and Esti died resisting arrest. This led Estebe to swear revenge against the Corvo and change his name to Giza ("Human" in an ancient warrior dialect from Earth), becoming 'a representation of all Humans' rather than a person. As soon as Giza was released from imprisonment, he rejoined his dissident colleagues and quickly staged a guerrilla army, which made a surprise attack against the Corvo mining base at Qiao Pang, announcing their presence and intentions to the whole Corvosphere.

Giza had several important victories during the following years, which didn't really hurt the Corvo but inspired thousands of Humans to join the new Human Front and secede from the Corvosphere. The Megacorps retaliated by presenting Giza and his followers as terrorists and criminals through official news and media, while striking back at Human attackers with all their strength and resources. The Human Front was beaten back, but it only grew in membership, as thousands of Humans more joined it clandestinely.

Eventually, Giza was murdered by members of the Human Front itself, which wished to make peace with the Corvo. This new, milder Human Front was soon forgotten, and became little more than a social club, remaining for decades until new leadership and increasing tensions led to new Human Front rebellions and attacks. Thus it was for centuries; the Front seemed to wax and wane at arbitrary intervals, becoming a threat for a short while and then fading into obscurity after failing to free Humans from the Corvo.

Then, Sadoy Thamp came.

He was the greatest Human Front leader in memory, not for the amount of battles won against the Corvo - although his victory at the Agora clouds is still studied by amazed military scientists of all species - but for his clear goals and the inspiration he gave to other Humans. Nobody did more to find lost Earth than Sadoy Thamp, but at the same time he worked tirelessly to establish free colonies - places where Humans could live with their own economies and their own families. Humans flocked to these new colonies, giving them a steady flow of inhabitants and turning them into the first truly free Human settlements in the Universe.

Sadoy Thamp died ten years ago in an ambush by unknown assassins, which most people assume were paid by the Corvo. But his legacy lives on in the memories of every Human in the Corvosphere - whether they admired or disagreed with him - and in his daughter Sada, now a Human Front leader herself.

THE CORPORATE SECRET

Human-Corvo relations got significantly worse after the Corvo first encountered the Iz'kal. The Megacorps declared the location of Earth a maximum-level corporate secret, and severely limited the number of Corvo with access to the information to a few elite members of their management boards. Then, the Corvo approved the harshest legal sanctions against anyone that revealed the secret to enemy forces, or even to the general public, and recorded desertion to the Iz'kal as a dai (heinous) crime for Humans.

But the Iz'kal were not to be so easily thwarted, and started an aggressive campaign to recruit Humans to their side, even offering them a reversal of the sterilisation process. Leaving the Corvo was difficult, and many Humans assumed they would be worse among the totalitarian Iz'kal, but still many others switched sides and became mercenaries for the Corvo's rivals. Humans had become a problem almost as big as they were an asset. Sterilisation and trade secrecy still limited the number of Humans that opposed the Corvo, but their relationship with Humans has not been the same since.

HUMANS IN THE UNIVERSE

"Where did Alek go, mommy?" "She went to the heavens, sweety."

- Mom and child talking in Earth.

Earth may be the Human homeworld, but when an outsider thinks of Humans, he pictures a Spacer. The typical image of a Human comes with a survival suit, heavy weaponry and combat ship included, as if they came with Human anatomy.

Spacers don't have a unified culture or national identity; they have no home to return to and don't even form families, but they make up the most widespread and best-known Human presence in the universe.

Space Humans are mostly defined by loyalty. Their most important relationships are soldierly bonds and military hierarchy, and it shows in their cultural character. Of course, this loyalty may be - and is - given to anyone, strictly depending on who pays. So, space Humans are also mercenary by definition.

Most spacers work for Corvo entities and under Corvo jurisdiction, but there are also thousands of independent Human groups, from freelance mercenaries to space pirates to mob enforcers. The greatest independent Human cell is, of course, the Human Front.

HUMANS IN THE CORVOSPHERE

It has been 300 years since the Corvo arrived on Earth, and free Humans have spent that whole time spreading throughout the known Universe as bounty hunters, mercenaries, and killers. There are not many of them, making their hiring prices high.

Most Corvo spaceships carry a few Human guards who are kept in stasis for the duration of their travel, for a number of years as established in the contract. While in stasis, the Human is in a comatose state and does not age perceptibly. This allows the contractor to keep the salary relatively low, as the Humans are not paid extra for the time they are in stasis. Humans agree to this as they have few job alternatives and have no needs while in stasis. Most of the time, nothing happens and they spend a couple of decades in stasis and wake up to a lot of credits - a few more decades in stasis and they might be able to afford a home and a stable life. Other times, they are awakened when the ship is under attack and must fight to the death to defend the property of their employers. At the least, the flat fee of their contract is paid to their next of kin when they die. These contracts have completely broken up the Human society in the Corvosphere, as the perception of time is different for each Human depending on the contracts he has undertaken. Many Humans meet up with childhood friends to discover there is now 20 or 30 years of difference between them. The Corvo have strict controls on spacer population, as the Humans are stronger and more aggressive than them - it would not do to have them be more numerous as well. In turn, the Corvo treat their mercenaries quite well, giving them elite operative salaries and privileges. The most capable Humans work in million-credit contracts as personal bodyguards of CEOs and other important Corvo.

Earth's location is unknown to most, and remains one of the best kept secrets of the Corvosphere - not even Megacorp CEOs know the full route. This is achieved by a complex set of routines that only highly loyal - and well paid - Corvo pilots have partial knowledge of. No pilot knows more than one-tenth of the way, so anyone that wants to figure it out would need to locate ten different people with the specific knowledge and then bribe, torture, or somehow make them talk - and even finding them is no easy task, as their identities are kept secret as well.

The Iz'kal State, understanding the menace of a strong alien species working for the Corvo, work hard to recruit Humans to their side, offering them State citizenship in exchange. Some Humans, tired of being exploited by Corvo, find ways to move to the State - but most of them aren't interested. The Corvo do promise and deliver riches to those good enough to earn them, after all.

TERRA NOVA

There is a Human legend in the Corvosphere. It talks of a Human colony somewhere in the Labyrinth, established by a rebel group that escaped with a terraforming spacecraft. They talk about a place in the Labyrinth where a ship awaits any Humans that might want to join them, to guide them to their free colony. This mythological colony is known as the Terra Nova. Some shady Humans and Corvo claim they can take people there for over a hundred thousand credits. Some Humans spend their life's savings to go with them, and they never come back. It is hard to say what fate befalls them, whether they find their paradise or become subject to some terrible reality, in the form of slavery or worse.

FULCRUM

Fulcrums are semi-autonomous drones built with specific Corvo technology that uses Human corpses to power the machines. Drones can be hacked and turned against their owners, and designing an AI is taboo; Fulcrum drones - an idea invented in the infamous 'Hospital of Hell' Corvo

medlab of Tiantang - solved the problem by installing the intact brain of a deceased Human to operate the machine.

In principle, what is left of the Human is only the 'hardware' - so it is basically like donating a body to science. The Human's personality and other traits are turned off, and everything else is wired into the drone. Still, rumour has it some fulcrums speak the names of people they should have forgotten about.

Corvo despise slavery and value free will - though they think anything is acceptable if everyone involved agrees to it. So, no Human is forced to become a Fulcrum, and any Human that agrees is well paid for it. Some shady companies seek desperate Human immigrants and offer them deals like 10 years of free housing and care in exchange for immediate euthanasia and fulcrum conversion afterwards.

At this moment, there are only Human fulcrums due to the limited nature of the research. However, new breakthroughs could allow Corvo to be eligible soon - as requested by a growing number of desperate, low-class Corvo.

THE COALITION

Humans are more or less privileged everywhere they go, but nowhere more so than in the Coalition. As a more-or-less independent institution, not entirely governed by either the State or the Megacorps, the Coalition has none of the social prejudice or preconceptions that make Human second-class citizens everywhere else. Plus, as Humans can enlist either with the Corvo, with the Iz'kal or independently, Coalition laws require all Human recruits to be registered in their own separate category.

Coalition Humans are treated as elite troops in every sense; they are the best soldiers, tacticians and leaders. In fact, it's only in the Coalition that Humans can - and often do - outrank both Iz'kal or Corvo, and are acknowledged as the best military officers of the three.

Coalition Humans have more freedom, authority and recognition than anywhere else, plus a better salary and growth opportunities. In short, serving in the Coalition is the best possible world for any Human outside Earth.

OUTSIDE THE CORVOSPHERE

Human mercenaries are a common sight in the civilised universe, even beyond Corvo jurisdiction. Humans outside the Corvosphere, or Outers as they are informally known, are mainly independent mercenaries, but many also try to create sovereign colonies, or even join the Iz'kal State.

HUMANS IN THE STATE

State Humans, mercenaries for the Iz'kal, are the least numerous Human group in space. There are still several hundred thousand of them, assigned to Iz'kal armies as special forces and assassins. The Iz'kal call them Ghyr'mussanaf, or simply Ghyr - operatives outside of the military hierarchy.

Ghyr soldiers live like other members of the State - submitted to the good of the community, taught to forget their individualism, and bound to absolute loyalty for as long as their contracts last. As non-Iz'kal special operatives, they tend to receive assignments that Iz'kal would find reprobable, such as sabotage and assassination. While the State needs these acts carried out, having Humans do them gives it a sort of moral deniability on questionable ops. And, since many Humans serve as Corvo mercenaries, Ghyr are pretty useful on intelligence and espionage missions.

While the State uses no currency, Human Ghyr are special forces and thus given better rations and equipment than regular Iz'kal soldiers; however, they are also given less free time, and, as most forms of Iz'kal entertainment are incompatible with non-Iz'kal brains, theirs is a mostly dull, joyless life.

Many Humans convert to the Iz'kal views and join the State wholeheartedly, obtaining indefinite residence permits. They spend their free time in special sections of Iz'kal cities, built with Human architecture and amenities, and rarely venture out of them. The Iz'kal, always immersed in hyperlink and reluctant to use their vocal cords, are mostly aloof and unfriendly with outsiders; which, coupled with the general lack of leisure activities adapted to Human tastes, makes the latter prefer to spend their time on duty, or even volunteering for dangerous missions, rather than enduring the boring Iz'kal civilian life.

A good argument for Humans to join the Iz'kal has always been the promise the State made Humans as soon as they learned of their existence - that they could find a cure for the sterilisation treatment. However, since the cure would need DNA from an unsterilised Human, the promise remains unfulfilled. If someone were to secure a fertile Human or a sample of his DNA, he would be greatly rewarded by the Iz'kal state.

THE FRINGE

Humans in the fringe run the gamut from settlers to Human Front members, from mercenary space captains to slaver guards. They all conform to the Human cultural stereotype - tough as nails, resourceful, inventive and emotional. They are much livelier and rowdier than Humans working for the Megacorps or the Coalition, but they can be just as organised and disciplined when required.

SCIENTIST

Level 1 :: Human :: Resourceful
mov. 5 metres :: weight 68 kg :: height 175 cm

2	4	0	3

PHYSICAL STAT	3 (1)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (2)	MENTAL STAT	5 (2)

HIT (DEX)	1	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

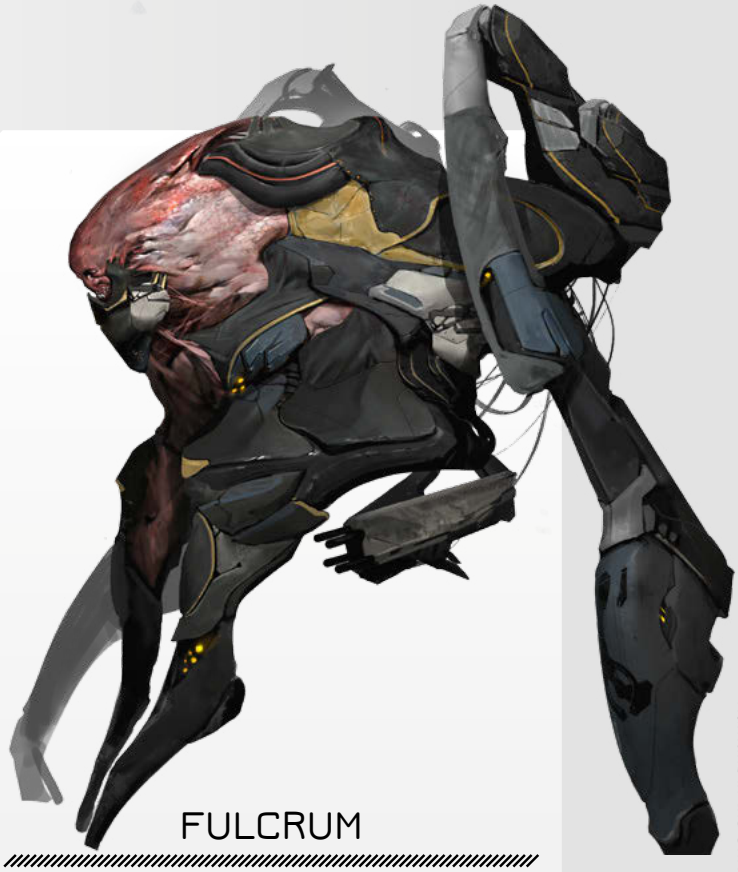
Rig 2 (LinkWave 100)

She can perform Hacking actions (causing 2 ACS damage).

Rational

She can only be convinced with facts. She is immune to dialectics, and she gains one advantage to determine whether something has been fact checked.

Human scientists are trained and put to good use by the Corvo, becoming all but traitors on the process.



FULCRUM

Lone Wolf

Level 3 :: Organic robot :: Territorial
mov. 5 metres :: weight 200 kg :: height 250 cm

5	5	1	-

PHYSICAL STAT	7 (3)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	5 (2)

CLOSE QUARTERS	3 ++	STANDARD DISTANCE	3

Undead

It ignores damage penalties. Additionally, critical successes against him are considered decisive instead.

Nanohooks

It can climb walls and ceilings and move around as if they were the ground.

Fulcrums are amalgamations of robots and living, breathing organic beings. They are the cutting edge of Corvo bionics, and an exciting new low in bioethics.

THREE SKULLS MOB

The largest and most dangerous criminal organisation outside the Corvosphere Tongs is the Three Skull Mob, a guild of pirates, marauders, slavers and smugglers that roam the spaceways seeking prey from any species or background. The Three Skulls will deal in anything - slavery, drugs, wanton slaughter - and cooperate with anyone - Megacorps, State, even other mobs - if it means turning up a profit. Most Three Skulls members - known as Threesks - are Humans, but many Raag and even a few Iz'kal and Corvo have joined their gang.

Although they are strong enough to make any interstellar civilisation feel the occasional sting, Threesks are content with more-or-less organised raids and plunder, later retiring to their dens to share the loot and spend it on fun, luxuries or more ships and weapons. When the money runs out, they organise a new raid, and so it goes on; the Three Skulls Mob has no goals or lifestyle beyond that.

Their lack of goals notwithstanding, the Three Skulls Mob are a force to be reckoned with; with hidden cells in almost every Corvo settlement - including all Tiantang sectors - and bases in several uncharted worlds near Corvo space, Threesks are at least as powerful as a Tong family, and far more vicious, if admittedly less organised.

EMPRESS JAZMEEN

The High Threesk, or 'the Ol' Captain' of the guild, is the self-styled Empress Jazmeen; a fearsome warlord, ruthless murderer and shrewd strategist, known across the Labyrinth as the most dangerous Human in existence. She lives for nothing but plunder and thrills, and rumour has it she has thousands of loot stashes hidden throughout the universe.

Jazmeen is a tough, sadistic woman, and as deadly as the deadliest Human mercenary. She's also capricious, fickle and self-serving; she's been known to execute underlings for minor offences and with great delight. There's a saying among the Threesks, and their closest enemies: 'No one dares to kill a Threesk lieutenant, for Jazmeen reserves the pleasure'.

Anyone that helped the capture of Empress Jazmeen, be it by arms or information, would be well paid by the Iz'kal State, the Corvosphere, the Tong mobs... and just about anyone else, really.

THE SECRET FORTRESS

Among the many rumoured stashes of Jazmeen's long reign of terror and plunder, the one that elicits the most curiosity - and greed - from space travellers is the legend of the Empress' Secret Fortress.

A citadel built on an asteroid, much like the private worlds of Corvo Tong bosses, the Secret Fortress is a prize on itself - if it exists. Regardless of the countless treasures that it surely holds from Jazmeen's years of galaxy-wide thievery and murder, the building is rumoured to be a fully operational combat station - the largest, most powerful of its type, capable of taking on two or even three Corvo warships head-on.

Rumour gauges the armament of Jazmeen's fortress at any level from that of ten warships to that of ten thousand, and some legends even claim it once fought - and destroyed - a Ravager Queen with all its swarm.

If such a weapon exists, it is indeed far more valuable than any treasure that Jazmeen has gathered - and it also explains why the Three Skulls mob has never been defeated.

THE RACK

Among the many asteroids, outposts and planetoids that the Three Skulls Mob are rumoured to own, one stands out in the nightmares of everyone that has heard of it. Known as the Rack, purportedly located at a Labyrinth exit known only to Three Skulls ranked officers, this remote planetoid is Empress Jazmeen's prison and torture chamber; a grim, foreboding fortress, impregnable, inescapable, full of deadly traps and guarded by the most cruel and ruthless thugs money could buy.

According to legend, anyone who crosses the Three Skulls Mob and survives, including threesks who betrayed - or appeared to betray - their guild, is sent to the Rack, to be tortured to death - or, if they're lucky, to languish and be forever forgotten.

Many missing law-enforcement mercenaries from Human and Corvo forces, as well as civilians who tried to stand up to the Three Skulls, are rumoured to be still alive and imprisoned at the Rack. The friends and associates of these prisoners would pay dearly for anyone with the guts to look for the Rack, the resources to find it, and the skill to get past its deadly security and reach the people trapped there.

EMPRESS JAZMEEN

Kalivan 2

Level 3 :: Human :: Ruthless
mov. 5 metres :: weight 70 kg :: height 175 cm

5	5	1	5

PHYSICAL STAT	17 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	9 (3)	MENTAL STAT	9 (2)

CLOSE QUARTERS	4 +	STANDARD DISTANCE	4 +

(5) Empress Jazmeen's Drone

It ignores 1 point of armour.

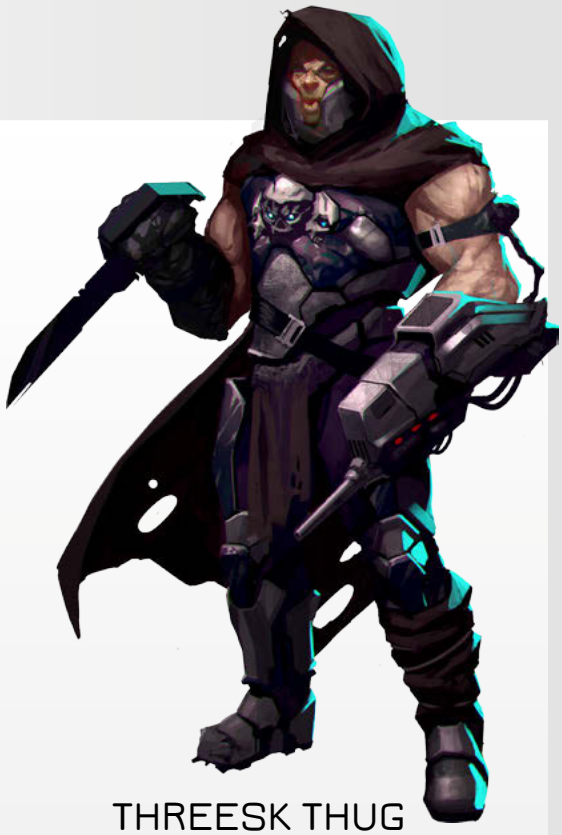
Charismatic

She gains one advantage towards social interactions when using her voice.

(3) EM Shield

Her armour value cannot be reduced or ignored by plasma or neural weapons.

Empress Jazmeen is the dangerous leader of the Three Skulls Mob, the cruellest of all Human splinter groups.



THREESK THUG

Level 1 :: Human :: Aggressive
mov. 5 metres :: weight 95 kg :: height 195 cm

5	2	1	-

PHYSICAL STAT	5 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (1)	MENTAL STAT	3 (1)

CLOSE QUARTERS	3 ++	STANDARD DISTANCE	3

Unreliable

If he wins a confrontation, he gains one advantage towards his next action. If he loses, he gains one disadvantage instead.

As a Human being, you can't go much lower than a threesk: pirating, marauding, preying, trafficking... No red lines, no honour to defend.

THE BLACK WATCH

The Black Watch is a Human-only organisation. They claim to be the spiritual and cultural descendants of an ancient Earth people they call the Highlanders, although nobody knows what was the true name of these people, if they ever existed. The Black Watch's knowledge of the culture they supposedly emulate is incomplete at best, and most often very distorted, mixing together traditions and myths from different sources, and sometimes even mistaking fantastic stories for historic events. The hidden truth is they are a criminal organization with ties of some kind to most major crime lords in Tiantang.

As many Humans didn't actually know Earth's geography before leaving and most Black Watch members had not met before reaching the Corvosphere, all kinds of people claim Highlander descent to join the Black Watch. As they can't prove who is a true Highlander, and knowing that making it hard to join would drastically reduce organisation membership, the Black Watch accepts all Humans who want to join in the condition that they fully adopt their traditions.

Human spacer mercenaries formed the Black Watch as a group identity a few decades ago; the band quickly came to the attention of the Corvo Tongs because of their histrionism and fierceness in battle, and soon the Black Watch became a Tong-sponsored enforcer gang. They still see themselves as honourable warriors, though, and act as such even when doing the dirtiest mob work.

Black Watch traditions include wearing long braided hair, unkempt beards and fearsome body painting, even over their combat armour - which is usually grey or black. They often wear cloaks and kilts over their suits, and adorn their helmets with strange-looking crests or feathers. In battle, they favour heavy melee weapons, such as two-handed vibro-swords - which they call Calbolg - custom-made for them with technology from the Corvo tongs.

They are also known for their terrifying war chants, which scare even other Humans, let alone the meek Tian citizens - although some Corvo have been known to stop and take holopics of the Black Watch in action, instead of running for their lives as they should have done.

WILDBILL YOUNG

The founders of the Black Watch, the old matriarch known as Danu the Deadly and her husband Kristopher passed away recently - just as they wanted: on their feet, fighting a group of Corvo bikers from the Dragonfly Tong, and sending many of them to their gods as they fell - and left leadership of the Black Watch to Kris' younger brother, the self-styled William Young, nicknamed Wildbill.

Wildbill is a mighty, blustering warrior. He wears a long leather coat sporting a rampant red lion, which he pretends has some ancient meaning. Many members of the Tiantang underworld have learned to fear the 'Lion Seal', for it means the Black Watch are on the prowl.

Without Wildbill realising it, his fanatical bravery in battle and undying commitment to the Black Watch is slowly awakening soulbender abilities in him. He has the blessing of Kaliva without even worshipping Her; for now, the blessing only manifests as an 'inspired' state of battle rage, but in time it may become much stronger.

THE HORNED GOD

As Wildbill's soulbending abilities grow, the anachronic fantasy world of The Black Watch has begun seeping and filtering into his daily perceptions. He sees flashes of castles when he looks at gyro-zhans, dragons blinking in and out over the hulls of spaceships, and bloody ancient battles in the middle of blast fights. At first he thought it was some experience-drug software bug interfering with his cortex connector, but he's been slowly realising the visions come from somewhere else.

Wildbill's delusions are actually his soulbender powers, manifesting themselves in a combination with the Black Watch mythology in which he was raised. His latest vision was an avatar of Kaliva, which he perceived as a faceless God with the horns of a great stag. Convinced that he's been contacted by the ancient deity of the Highlanders, Wildbill has mustered the Black Watch for a glorious war. According to his vision, the 'Horned God' has commanded the Black Watch to fight and conquer the Corvo Heijian underworld.

A few days ago, Wildbill went to his boss, the Corvo Xiun Yung - a captain of the Hwang Tong - and asked permission to conduct a 'great hunt' against Xiun's enemies. Believing he was seeing a display of healthy initiative, Xiun gave his permission, which unwittingly started a gang war.

Now, the Xiun gang is on the rise within the Hwang Tong, as rival captains fall to Wildbill's fierce attacks - but it's also ruffled the wrong feathers with law enforcement, and within the Tong itself. Both the police and the Hwang - plus their Zhui Tong rivals, who don't want this war to spill to their turf - are on the market for strong, capable and mostly neutral mercenaries who can face the Black Watch.

WILDBILL YOUNG

Kalivan 2 :: Proficient

Level 3 :: Human :: Unpredictable
mov. 5 metres :: weight 93 kg :: height 195 cm

5	4	2	-

PHYSICAL STAT	8	INITIATIVE STAT	9	MENTAL STAT	8

HIT (DEX)	3+	GRAPPLE (CON)	1+

Judge of Character

Characters attempting to lie to him suffer one disadvantage.

Fearsome

Allied characters gain: Instant. Suffer one unpreventable physical damage to ignore all damage penalties until the end of the round.

Shrewd 2

He draws two cards at the beginning of the round. Whenever he or an ally are in a confrontation, they can play any of those cards instead of playing from the top of the deck.

Kaliva is knocking on Wilbill's door, and when he realizes what that means, the Black Watch may very well become an unstoppable force.

BLACK WATCH THUG

Mob

Level 2 :: Human :: Reckless
mov. 5 metres :: weight 89 kg :: height 190 cm

4	4	2	8

PHYSICAL STAT	6	INITIATIVE STAT	6	MENTAL STAT	7

CLOSE QUARTERS	3	STANDARD DISTANCE	3

Spitter

Action. Set up the bipod. Subsequent attacks gain one advantage.

EM Shield

His armour value cannot be reduced or ignored by plasma or neural weapons.

The Black Watch is a Human-only organisation that has quickly become a favourite contractor of Tiantang Tongs for their fierceness.

EARTH

Planetary Type: Water world
Population: 2 billion
Day: 24 standard hours
Details classified - see Corvo chapter

The Human homeworld has seen millions of years of conflict and strife. It has survived being nearly blasted to atoms, its very atmosphere burnt away by nuclear fire. Now, it's a radioactive wasteland where the most violent of civilised species struggle to survive the devastation they brought upon themselves.

Earth used to have a relatively stable society, divided by political borders and governments that competed with each other for resources and means of production. Eventually, the race for resources led to nuclear war, which destroyed Human civilisation. Survivors were reduced to roving bands of nomads, raiders and scavengers, which still fought each other for what little resources remained.

When the Corvo arrived, they started rebuilding the cities and inviting Humans to their bases, where they would be cared for, fed and researched. After the Corvo discovered the military potential of Humans, they basically took over Earth, building thousands of Human-housing facilities.

Now, the landscape of Earth is a contrast of wide, ruin-dotted wastes versus the occasional Corvo high-tech facility every few thousand miles. Humans have adapted to this contrast - tribes of survivalists roam the wasteland, as an ever-growing population of Humans has come to accept the Corvo lifestyle and live in their 'Human farms'.

THE PEOPLE

There are around 2 billion Humans on Earth, plus a bit over 100,000 Corvo supervising the urban facilities and conducting research on Human ruins.

Earth Humans are either Wasters or Urbanites - either hardened people of the barren wilds, or Corvo-ruled civilians, multiplying under Corvo supervision. The Corvo conduct monthly recruiting bids for Humans of all types and backgrounds - both Wasters and Urbanites - to leave for Space and become mercenary soldiers in the Corvosphere.

Earth Humans have little contact with their brethren in Space except for the Corvo-controlled media and news, which present Corvosphere mercenary work as a glorious,

marvellous life full of riches, adventure and prestige. This leads thousands of Humans to join the Corvo every month, but thousands more keep mistrusting the Corvo and remain on their wasteland settlements.

Contrary to the Corvo stereotype, Earthlings are not universally violent or irrational; while shaped and hardened by the cruel conditions they lived in before the Corvo, Earth Humans are organised, resourceful and fully capable of mutual aid - otherwise they wouldn't have survived to meet the Corvo at all.

Humans have a lot of potential outside war, as artists, builders and thinkers; and the Corvo know it. That's why they discourage Human independence, and give incomparable privileges for Humans that choose the military life. They haven't been able to fully contain the Human creative spirit, however, and thousands of Earthlings, both in the wastes and under Corvo jurisdiction, pursue - and succeed at - civilian activities such as science, farming, medicine, engineering and communications. While the Corvo don't prevent Humans from choosing a career, the benefits they give to soldiers and mercenaries are still enough for the vast majority of Humans to choose the spacer life. And the Corvo do need civilian Humans to help them run their habitats and facilities, too; but still, they prefer to keep non-soldier Human numbers as reduced and contained as possible.

GUANDANG POINT

The largest Human concentration on Earth is Guandang Point, the first Corvo citadel on the planet, located at the centre of what was once the steppes of Nigeria, in what used to be known as Africa.

Originally, Guandang Point was the Corvo flagship Yaozhe, which brought the first alien colonists to Earth. After landing, the huge Corvo mothership became the habitation complex of those first Corvo, which built around it, adding omnispheres and expanding the streets until, centuries later, it has become almost as large as a pre-war Human city - and inhabited mostly by Humans.

Humans of Guandang Point are docile, peaceful and mostly loyal to the Corvo. They have been given aid, shelter and a reprieve from the harsh life of the wastes, all in exchange for performing easy jobs and reproducing. When their children grow up, they are given the choice of continuing the cycle or joining the Corvo army in space; most choose the latter, but the Corvo have been so successful at breeding Humans that the city has kept growing and growing, and is now the largest inhabited settlement on Earth.

Enrica Faria is the chief Health Officer in Facility #33 of the Guandang Department of Spacer Recruitment. Like many Humans and Corvo in her position, she monitors the births of thousands of Urbanite kids and assesses their viability as soldiers as they grow up, gently nudging them and their parents towards a healthier lifestyle and a desire to join the space army, finally approving their sterilisation and launch to the Corvosphere once they become adults.

Doctor Faria is a loyal woman, who appreciates everything the Corvo have done for Humanity, and wants to see as many Human mercenaries in space as she can. However, she is also a traitor.

If any Human shows qualms about the sterilisation procedure, Doctor Faria gives them a fake treatment, designed to fool the Corvo, plus papers, a physical exam and a sealed approval to join the Space Army; there are several Spacers with reproductive capabilities, sent to the Corvosphere by Dr. Faria.

Most of Dr. Faria's patients are loyal to the Corvo, plus she doesn't tell them or try to convince them of anything - she only offers her special treatment to previously interested parties. Still, her activities are a dai crime under Corvo law, which means she could be facing deportation, death or banishment if discovered.

WUDAN STATION

For all their innate violence and skill, Humans are not born with the ability to become soldiers in the space army; Wudan Station, the Human Training Centre of the Corvosphere, is where they go to acquire this ability.

A humongous space facility the size of a pre-war Earth nation, Wudan is equipped to house millions of soldiers and trainees. Every Urbanite candidate that wishes it - and passes the preliminary tests - is sent to Wudan Station to become a soldier in the Corvo space army.

Instruction is quite intensive and lasts for about ten standard months, including combat practice, zero-G training - of which the Corvo are the best teachers in the universe - and a full piloting course. After this period, successful students - virtually all, as graduating standards are quite undemanding - are assigned to an employer; there is a waiting list of thousands of companies and individuals ready to receive and hire new recruits.

THE WASTES

It doesn't show at first, but waster Humans have also evolved and prospered, although at a slower, more discreet pace than their urban kin. They remain warlike and independent, of course, but they have also been empowered by the Corvo, whether either species likes it or not, learning from the aliens and taking from their technology just like the Corvo have been doing on Earth since their arrival.

Earth remains mostly empty, deadly and very precariously inhabited, but every year more and more independent urbanised settlements and fortresses appear in the wastes, ruled by mighty warlords that have become more leaders than fighters. Some of these settlements are quite big, and manage to last years before being disbanded or destroyed. A few are still standing as of this writing.

WASTESICKNESS

Most Wasters have grown immune, or at least accustomed, to Earth's irradiated, poisonous atmosphere, with little side effects from the radiation that soaks through their organisms. Yet a few Humans succumb to a strange malady that Humans call 'wastesickness'. A wastesick Human is simply one who suffers significant ill effects of any kind from radiation. Wastesickness takes many forms, from general bad health - coughing, skin sores and the like - to seizures, fits and a quick agonising death. Those who survive wastesickness become marked and deformed, and some of these deformities actually impact the subject's ability to function normally, causing minor impairment, disability, or - in rare cases - unexplained mutations.

Humans thus mutated, known colloquially as wasteweirds, or weirders, are so drastically altered that their mutations almost equal the bio upgrades of a Corvo body mod or an Iz'kal genetic enhancement. Thus, a week in the Earth wastes will either kill you, or, if you're very lucky, make you ugly and special.

STORM CITADEL

The largest Human fortress in the wastes nowadays is Storm Citadel, a tremendous hulk of twisted steel and garbage-made structures that give the impression of a dark fantasy realm out of some nightmare. It is, however, populated by peaceful and civilised folk - or as peaceful and civilised as Wasters can manage.

Storm Citadel is protected by the Seraph Gang, a fierce band of brave Wasters armed to the teeth and led by the Storm warlord in person, the man known only as Tharon - a decrepit but impossibly strong Soulbender of Kaliva.

Stormfolk are independent and resourceful, and want nothing more than being left alone. The Corvo have often approached the citadel with offers of modernisation and economic support, but the city council, headed by Tharon, has resisted every attempt and rejected every deal.

The city, however, is large enough for opposing factions, and there are council members that do wish to join the Corvo; they could pay a generous sum to any mercenary or adventurer that wished to serve as a spy and saboteur in the name of Corvo interests to help press Storm Citadel into joining the Corvosphere.

INFERNUKO ERREKA

The fortress of Infernuko Erreka is one of the largest Human settlements outside Corvo influence on Earth. It used to be only a small town in pre-war Earth, but lately has grown into a heavily guarded fortress, mostly because of the mighty militia that overtook it.

This militia is one of the most warlike Human groups on the wastes - which is a lot to say - made up of fiercely nationalistic and independent Earthlings from some pre-war nation. They call themselves the Basajaunak, and no other tribe, warlord or Corvo guard troop has ever been able to defeat or even contain them.

The Basajaunak don't use The Speech, but a language all their own, which they claim was used by their warrior ancestors. They are quite reluctant to communicate in other tongues, which frustrates most attempts at diplomacy.

There are several hundred Basajaunak in Infernuko Erreka, also making them one the strongest militias in the wastes. Their leader calls himself Doilor, and will never order an attack or conquest against any other settlement, but will also never forget or forgive any action against Infernuko Erreka.

EASTERN WASTER

Affinity :: Mob

Level 1 :: Human :: Crafty
mov. 5 metres :: weight 71 kg :: height 185 cm

3	3	0	-

PHYSICAL STAT	5 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	5 (1)

CLOSE QUARTERS	3+	STANDARD DISTANCE	2+

Stealthy

She gains one advantage towards hiding actions.

Human weaponry consists of remnants from before the downfall, low-tech makeshift tools and, much to their chagrin, sophisticated Corvo armament.

WESTERN WASTER

Lone Wolf

Level 1 :: Human :: Cautious
mov. 5 metres :: weight 80 kg :: height 180 cm

4	3	1	-

PHYSICAL STAT	5 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	3 (1)	MENTAL STAT	3 (1)

HIT (DEX)	3+	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Unhinged

Activated. He gains one advantage towards his action. If he fails, the action of his opponent is considered a critical success regardless of action values.

Charge I

His unconfronted running actions are considered passive, and his next Close Quarters action causes 1 additional damage.

Life on Earth is tough, but not without it's perks. From time to time, you come across some unsuspecting Corvo's neck to break.

THE RAVAGER MENACE

THE RAVAGER

<HUD log 5027.3. Pvt 1c W. Jenkins/Chriton outpost/Torin Prime sector/1st contact event>

<audio playback on [transcription enabled]>

<00:00> We don't know where the Ravager originated or what they are. The ones we encountered were so mutated from the host lifeform it was impossible to tell what remained of the original creatures, if anything at all *<video playback error [feed disabled/corrupted]>*

<01:24 feed continues> Most of what we know of the Ravager comes from the few specimens recovered at the battle at Parsaius and the clues from the, uh, ravaged worlds they leave behind.

At first, they were nothing but a rumour; tales of abandoned colonies and spaceships, looking like something had eaten them. Eaten spaceships. How could we take such a thing seriously?

Then the things attacked Izuan Tai.

We know what happened - nightmarish things out of nowhere surrounding the entire planet and slaughtering its entire population in a matter of hours. Nobody had time to even realise what was happening, and even those few that managed to escape into the Labyrinth were not entirely sure what they were escaping from. The most accurate descriptions were of monsters, aliens, nightmares - but no two accounts described them similarly. Some believed it had been some kind of collective hallucination.

When the Corvo went back to Izuan Tai to see what had happened... I read the reports of what they found. Even remembering that stills sends chills down my spine. The planet had been engulfed by a strange looking substance, and a closer look revealed that many inhabitants of the planet were inside that substance, trapped alive and being slowly digested. Tendrils emerged from some kind of enormous, pool-like structure on the surface of the planet, like roots extending out of a tree, and they stretched out as far as the eye could see into the substance, pulsating as they carried the digested matter of the Corvo people back to the processing pool, bubbling with activity and some unknown biological process... *<[transmission interrupted]>*

<[transmission resumes]> ...Corvo had sent a huge fleet to Izuan Tai, mind you. Not just your typical scouting party, but a real fleet, ready for any fight... but they weren't ready for that. Despite their technological and military superiority, the fleet was vastly outnumbered and it quickly became clear it was a battle they couldn't win. Then... it was courage, I guess... or desperation... Well, you know what went down. The Corvo fleet fought its way to the surface of the planet and blew it up, annihilating every living being on both sides of the battle and releasing the prisoners from their terrible fate.

Then it happened to the Iz'kal, too - countless, variously-shaped aliens in irregular, organic-looking ships, fell on the Parsaius colony. But the Iz'kal were prepared. The Corvo had warned them. They called these aliens 'The Ravager', and I swear to Vexal I can think of no better name for those horrors. The Iz'kal and Corvo had prepared for future Ravager attacks, so the Iz'kal weren't exactly caught unawares... and the Corvo, the Corvo flew to their aid... But... I know men that fought there, that saw the Corvo and Iz'kal joining forces for the first time... well, ever. That's what gave birth to the Coalition, of course. But... Despite the time they had to prepare for the attack and the intel they'd gathered on their enemy at Izuan Tai... let us say the assault took a high toll in lives *<feed interrupted>*

<07:06 feed continues> We had gained essential knowledge about our common enemy, but the price we paid was far too high. And we knew it would get worse *<end of line>*

SO, WHAT ARE THE RAVAGER?

<A NONGCHANG NETTM NEWSSPEC as brought by Lilac Lounges, the Heart of your Home>

<LIVE BROADCAST ALREADY STARTED>

<TUNING IN>

"...parasites, yes. That's as accurate a way to describe them as any. Yet this term, as well, is too small for what the Ravager are. It falls short. They take over other lifeforms and add their genes to their... swarms, Humans call them. But these swarms are not made of infected hosts, as we once believed. Or at least not exclusively. Once the Ravager have your genes, they can mass-produce them. They can recreate an entire species from a single being - but it's not the same species anymore. It has been modified, altered to suit the swarm's needs. It has become Ravager."

"But professor, does this mean the Ravager could make a - let us say - modified army of what? Cloned Corvo?"

"They could? Mr. Chang, I'm positive they already have."

<audience exclamations and murmurs drown out professor Xing's commentary> "...and while they swarm our worlds with their seemingly mixed alien armies, they are certainly using us - or rather their twisted, mindless version of us - as their foot soldiers in some other world, in some other galaxy, right as we're speaking...

<And now for a commercial break from our sponsors!>

NATURE AND BEHAVIOUR

<MEGAKIDS, THE FULCORP SCIENCE PAGE FOR CHILDREN OF ALL THE CORVOSPHERE>

<SEARCH TERMS: RAVAGER>

<PAGE: Nature and Behaviour>

The Ravager are a species of alien predators that have only recently been discovered by science. There are many things we don't know about them, but surely soon we will know more! Scientists all over the Corvosphere are researching the subject right as you link to this NeuroCast!

Creature: Parasita Maxima.

Common Name: Ravager.

Domain: Organic ophistokonta.

Kingdom: Animalia, but possibly Fungi.

Clade: Eumetazoa, speculated spiralia.

Phylum: unknown, speculated mollusca; mostly vertebrate hosts.

Class: unknown, speculated gastropoda or bivalvia.

Order: unknown.

Habits: We still don't know much about the Ravager, which includes how they mate, what they eat, or whether they have a nocturnal or diurnal sleep cycle - or whether they sleep at all!

We know, however, that they can actually copy the DNA of other organisms and use it to breed more creatures! How cool is that? Now nobody knows the original DNA of the Ravager, or if they ever had one! But you know what's even better? These amazing creatures can actually modify the genes they steal, creating altered - and often improved - versions of the organisms they copy! For example, if a Ravager stole your DNA, they could make copies of you, only stronger! Or with wings! They're like a living body-mod lab, only much cheaper, of course!

Conservation Status: The Ravager don't seem to be endangered right now; on the contrary, they are a strong and widespread species that we are discovering in more and more planets every day! Some scientists and experts even believe they may be a danger to us! Can you imagine a swarm of angry Ravager flying over your city to steal your DNA? Better than a horrorcast, isn't it?

But no worries, there are measures being taken in that aspect too, and our Coalition is currently exploring Ravager space, finding out whether they are a plague to us, and developing means to keep you safe!

That is, unless you want the Ravager to steal your DNA, of course!

Until next time!

> END INFO ON SUBJECT

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RAVAGER BREEDING

<COALITION UNIT F31-L75-S4, 'Plasma Fangs' MISSION REPORT #329>

<MIA: Lt Mors and Sgt Al'Hayim> <Field MD Investigation #9966318A>

<audio playback on [neurotranscript enabled]>

Lt MORS: We are now entering the cave.

HQ: Are you sure it's the right one, S4?

Lt MORS: Positive, HQ. We saw the wounded alterant slip here. We don't think it spied us, either.

<indistinct sounds>

Lt MORS: There seems to be some kind of organic covering on the walls. I got tailhead taking samples for the research team.

HQ: Waste no time, S4. The alterant may be gathering its strength somewhere close.

Lt MORS: It's... it's strange. There's more and more of the organic goo the deeper we go into the cave. It appears harmless, but...

HQ: But?

Lt MORS: I'd say it's... alive, somehow... Tailhead says it even flinched a bit when he took the sample... BY VEXAL'S STARS!

HQ: Please report status, S4.

Lt MORS: It's... it's OK... We're OK, HQ... but this... wait. Wait, I gotta see this closer.

<indistinct sounds>

Lt MORS: We appear to have reached a larger cave in the complex... it's all covered with the same goo... and it's full of...

Sgt AL'HAYIM: By the stars! They're all over the walls and ceiling, lieutenant!

Lt MORS: Yes, sergeant, I see them... they... they seem to be eggs... how...?

HQ: Please elaborate, S4.

Lt MORS: We have reached what seems to be a large cache of egg-like organic shells, HQ. Attached to the same organic gunk we found. There's... there's no prisoners, no... test subjects... inside the casings. I'm no xeno but if I had to risk a guess... I think they are actual Ravager eggs. Like, the ones little Ravager will hatch from.

HQ: That contradicts current intelligence, S4. Can you verify?

Lt MORS: I got tailhead on that, HQ. But I'm pretty sure... Who knows, maybe the modified... subjects... you know, their soldier-things... maybe they hatch from eggs like these, once they have the DNA. They must breed their drones in these...

<loud noise, indistinct screams>

Lt MORS: Oh... Oh no! It's the Alterant! HQ, IT'S THE ALTERANT! And it's got... it's got...

<loud noises and screams followed by static>

HQ: S4? Report status, S4. Lieutenant Mors? Larry? Larry! Lieutenant Mors, this is HQ, please report!

<neurotranscript error [feed disabled/corrupted]>

SWARMS

<HUD log 5031.9. Pvt 1c W. Jenkins/Chriton outpost/Torin Prime sector/3rd contact event> <audio playback on [transcription enabled]>

<00:00> The Ravager live and die for their swarm, which is how they call their mobile colonies - well, the closest word we could find in our language anyway. Every swarm seems to be ruled by a single "queen", who controls the actions of every other Ravager in the swarm. Queens are gigantic organic ships, but they look like they are creatures too... like Ravager hive organisms. Xenotech already speculated each Ravager mothership may be a single sentient being, but the idea of such things being... well, creatures... worse, a single creature... it's too much to... Anyway. A swarm is as powerful as its queen - whatever the queen is - and the swarm's only purpose is to protect the queen and help her evolve.

We know from previous engagements that different swarms can and do collaborate, but last cycle we had the chance to witness a fight between two swarms. It ended with the victorious queen devouring the defeated one and the complete annihilation of the losing swarm.

Swarms wander independently across the galaxy, consuming every life form they come across and gathering their genetic material, which is used by the queen to evolve and enhance her capabilities, and, by extension, those of her... progeny, as it were. This means a Ravager queen breeds soldiers from the genes of eaten victims, which, yes, is just as horrible as it sounds. Reports from Izuan Tai were very clear and graphic on how the Ravager obtained genetic material from defeated races. Despite my love of science and knowledge, this is one thing I wish I never had learned.

<1:03> Once the swarm arrives at a planet, the queen releases some kind of bacteria that quickly spreads over its surface and starts digesting its organic matter, turning it all into a strange green substance that the ravager can feed on. Living organisms are entombed within the substance, which keeps them alive for as long as needed, until the tendrils that will carry their DNA have had time to reach them. Then, the substance digests the entombed creatures to extract their DNA and carry it to one of several processing pools set up by the Ravager during their infestation of the planet. The substance eventually covers the entire planet, and as it expands, new processing pools are created to keep up with the increasing amount of genomes that need to be processed. When an area has been processed, it then turns into a spawning pool; the nutrients of the deceased dwellers of the planet are used to create new ravager. Once the

entire planet has been... processed... the swarm leaves to look for a new planet. The substance will continue to filter through the surface of the planet, so that a swarm that has taken heavy losses can go back to one of these planets to quickly repopulate. We have been able to... use some of these planets... to follow the trail of the swarms, hoping to find something that might help us stop them. No success so far, but a lot of nightmares for sure. *<end of line>*

COMMUNICATION

<HUD log 5032.0. Pvt 1c W. Jenkins/Chriton outpost/Torin Prime sector/4th contact event> <audio playback on [transcription enabled]>

<00:00> We're sure now that the queen controls the actions of every other Ravager in the swarm. We first noticed this at Parsaius, when we started detecting strange and complex radio signals coming from the Ravager fleet. We now know that every individual ravager is capable of emitting and receiving a sort of radio signal, through which they communicate with each other over long distances. Although this ability allows them to coordinate their efforts and act as a single mind, it is also a weakness - and I'm proud to say we found a way to exploit it. Distorting these signals seems to confuse the ravager for a short while, which allows for a quick finishing attack. Even so, jamming these signals is quite an ordeal, as the damn things keep changing their wavelength spectrum and react quickly to any interference.

Also, it seems that different Ravager emit waves of different intensity and complexity. The most simple Ravager emit weak waves on a single frequency, whereas those emitted by the queen are extremely complex and sent at several frequencies at once. This is how Ravager hierarchy works - those that emit more complex signals will be able to control those that emit simpler signals, creating a clear power structure where the weaker links follow every command given to them, thus avoiding rogue elements in the system. On the other hand, it also lets us easily detect swarm commanders simply by locating the source of the most complex waves.

RAVAGER HIERARCHY

<HUD log 5033.1. Pvt 1c W. Jenkins/Chriton outpost/Torin Prime sector/5th contact event> <audio playback on [transcription enabled]>

<00:00> The Ravager seem to have no society or government as we understand the term - they have no nations, no place names, no institutions, laws or currency... far as we know, they may be no smarter or more organised than insects, with different castes bred for specific tasks. Yes,

that includes castes bred from the genetic material of conquered worlds. Which means the Ravager would need to keep changing and adapting their basic hierarchy depending on what DNA they have to breed their soldiers from... so they may not be that dumb. Or remotely dumb at all. I'm actually starting to think their hive mind is the greatest intelligence in the Universe right now. If the idea terrifies you, then no worries, you're sane. It terrifies me.

<00:41>...We've managed to differentiate the different ravager according to their role and importance. It started when we discovered how their hive mind works. While the queen is ultimately in control of everything that happens in a swarm, she will usually do so through other Ravager, who act as the link between her and the rest of the colony. We have roughly classified the different ravager into four levels - Queens, Heralds, Alterants and Spawn, in order of authority and power.

THE RAVAGER QUEEN

<01:03> The Queen lives aboard a swarm's mothership - working as both the ship's pilot and its engine, both its navcom and inner workings. In fact, a Queen is the mothership, as her body is so deeply fused within the ship's structure that we can't tell where one ends and the other begins. At least we couldn't find any traces of a separate, conventional body in the mothership we recovered from the debris of Parsaius. The entire ship was made of different resins, some of which we haven't been able to identify yet. But what made us think of it as a living being was the presence of nerve endings within the resin itself, along with a circulatory system and some other traces of organs embedded deeply within the structure of the ship. They all seemed to originate from the mothership core, where we imagine the brain of the Queen would be, but the core we recovered was too damaged to draw any conclusions. This confirms the worst predictions from xenotech - if a Ravager Queen and her ship are a single creature, they're easily the largest living beings that have ever existed, perhaps in the entire universe... *<playback error [feed disabled/corrupted]>*

<2:14 feed continues> ...Current theory is that Queens are Herald-class Ravager that have undergone a metamorphosis, shedding their previous body and covering themselves in some kind of biopolymer that eventually becomes the mothership. As Queens age, their bodies grow and the motherships become larger; this allows them to carry more ravager while their brains mature, increasing their power as a hivemind and allowing them to keep more Heralds under control. That means that a Queen's age is directly related to the size and power of her swarm. Older Queens will try to eliminate the younger, weaker ones to secure their long term survival, whereas young Queens, aware of their vulnerability, will collaborate in order to stay alive and outlive - or depose - the older ones. We have no idea about the age limit on a Ravager Queen, or if these hellish things even have one.

HERALDS

<02:48> Heralds are by far the most dangerous creatures in a Ravager swarm. Incredibly fast and strong, their bodies can alter their own structure almost instantly, allowing them to adapt to most of our tactics and weapons in a matter of seconds. We believe they act as the link between the Queen and her proxies and Spawn, thus allowing her to control the entire Swarm. The more Heralds a Queen can keep under control, the larger the Swarm can become, but Queens must be careful of spawning too many Heralds, as they sometimes try to take over the hivemind. When a queen dies or fails to keep her Heralds under control, the Heralds will escape to start their own swarm or kill each other in a tooth-and-nail competition to replace the Queen.

Heralds are extremely intelligent and deceitful, and we have encountered several Ravager fleets led by Heralds - which were as difficult to deal with as those led by a Queen, even though they were considerably smaller. In spite of their great value to a fleet, Heralds can often be found in the vanguard of Ravager fleets, leading the attack and giving direct assistance when needed. While easy to spot, they are extremely hard to kill. When Heralds enter battle, death follows.

ALTERANTS

<03:25> Alterants are in charge of the DNA harvest and spawning pools. They analyse the gathered DNA samples, integrating those that prove valuable to the Queen's genome, and perform experiments on some of the captured lifeforms. Alterants are rarely found on the front lines, and will usually remain near or inside the Queen until the fight is over and the first samples have been collected, at which time they will descend to the spawning pools and begin work on the new specimens.

Alterants are the best-protected members of a Swarm. Most appear near the core of the mothership, working in what I can only describe as, well, laboratories... filled with tanks... tanks containing specimens belonging to different lifeforms. Despite the poor state of the specimens aboard the mothership we found, it's clear they were subject to terrible experiments; their bodies showed mutations so horrible that we couldn't even recognise those that belonged to known... *<video playback error [feed disabled/corrupted]>*

<14:24 feed continues> ...we thought Alterants were some kind of proxies... As their wave emission pattern was quite complex, we thought they might be able to control other Ravager, and so functioned as the link between the Heralds and the rest of the Swarm, but it seems we were dead wrong. Alterants have little to no contact with Heralds or Spawn, focusing solely on their research and experiments.

Despite their frail appearance, Alterants are pretty resourceful and dangerous enemies, and perfectly capable of handling themselves in battle - as many good men learned the hard way.

SPAWN

<14:51> 'Spawn' is the term by which we refer to Ravager foot soldiers, which are as varied and numerous as the Swarms themselves. Ravager Spawn are an incredible broad variety of creatures, each with unique characteristics and abilities. We have grouped most Ravager under this class because of their lower intellect and simpler emission levels, but Spawn of one type have no common characteristics with those of another, and their wave emission patterns are quite different from each other.

<15:15> Every Spawn type has a highly specific role within the Swarm. Although the appearance and traits of Spawn can vary from one swarm to the next - and even within the same swarm, depending on the situations they were bred for - the essential attributes of each Spawn type will remain the same. That is, two unrelated and distant Swarms will often employ the same type of Spawn at opposite ends of the galaxy. So, either they all originated from the same Queen not too long ago, or different swarms collaborate more than we had originally believed, sharing the best genomes they find with each other. *<end of line>*

<XENO DEPARTMENT REPORT #333176>
<ANALYSIS OF RAVAGER FORCES BY PROFESSOR VAJIR WA'ALIBAH, XD LAB CAIRUS>
<ACCESS LEVEL NINE - HIGHLY RESTRICTED>

We have gathered intelligence on what seems to be the most frequently used spawn types in Ravager armies, at least in the attack and defence operations against our forces. It must be kept in mind that these data, while proven accurate, are not all-conclusive, and there may be a myriad of details we're missing. We should learn more from future encounters with the Ravager, preferably inert specimens brought to the lab for study.

The following Ravager Spawn types are listed alphabetically, with the names given by our team or by soldiers in the field. We of course don't know how the Ravager refer to each of these breeds, but the terms we have chosen are quite descriptive of each creature and its abilities.

Harvester

Harvesters are by far the most common Ravager Spawn type we have encountered, and the bulk of most of their armies. They are muscular, Humanoid bipeds with long tails and hairless skin. For what we have seen, they are intelligent enough to use military tactics and weaponry, most commonly neural weapons. Harvesters are always found in military squads led by their smartest or strongest member; their main function seems to be long-range combat.

The fact that they use neural ammo means that they want living specimens, which probably means they want specific information that they cannot extract from dead

HARVESTER

Mob :: Ravager

Level 1 :: Ravager :: Aggressive
mov. 5 metres :: weight 81 kg :: height 170 cm

4	3	1	4

PHYSICAL STAT	5 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (2)	MENTAL STAT	7 (1)

CLOSE QUARTERS	2+	STANDARD DISTANCE	2+

(3) Bio Rifle

Neural weapon (It deals neural or ACS damage and ignores armour).

Consume 1

Action. It can consume a dead character to heal 1 physical damage.

Ravagers are created by their Queens out of DNA collected all across the universe. Is there a hint of Human genes in the harvester variant?

IRONSKIN

Ravager :: Unstoppable

Level 4 :: Ravager :: Aggressive
mov. 5 metres :: weight 345 kg :: height 283 cm

8	6	3	2

PHYSICAL STAT	8 (3)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (1)	MENTAL STAT	3 (2)

HIT (DEX)	4 +	GRAPPLE (CON)	2 ++

Consume 2

Action. It can consume a dead character to heal 2 physical damage.

Charge II

Its unconfronted running actions are considered passive, and its next Close Quarters action gains one advantage and causes 1 additional damage.

Thick Skull

It reduces the base neural damage of attacks against it by 1.

Ravager names are somewhat hit and miss in their descriptiveness, but the Ironskin is a wonderful, no-nonsense, literal name for the beast behind it.

bodies. What kind of interrogation methods these creatures use is something I don't want to think about.

Harvesters don't seem to be as mutated or altered as other species of Ravager. We believe they come from the DNA of an intelligent, organised and peaceful species, which the Ravager gave enhanced muscles and nervous systems, plus a much higher adrenal output to increase their aggressiveness and resistance to pain.

Ironskin

Ironskin Ravager are enormous hulks - easily thrice the size of a Human soldier - with vicious claws and thick carapaces. The unusual disposition of their limbs, as well as the irregular molecular composition of their shells, leads us to hypothesise that these horrors are mashups of the offensive and defensive capabilities of at least five different species, which the Ravager simply stitched together in a single creature, designed for high-stakes physical combat.

Ironskin Ravager seem to be designed for direct attack, and are often used in the Ravager front lines and as shock troops. An ironskin can withstand direct plasma shots, even from large weapons, and its claws can impale through our strongest armor models with relative ease. There have been reports of a Ravager ironskin decimating an entire squad while sustaining superficial injuries.

Lurching Horror

The rather colourfully-nicknamed lurching horrors seem to be a mutation on some kind of large cephalopod, given a mix of claws and tentacles that allow the creature to climb and cling to any solid surface. Their many tentacles and slithering frame give them great speed and agility in combat, and allow them to fight several opponents at once.

Lurching horrors are used in stealth and recon missions. While no one understands the Ravager's concept of espionage, it seems that the lurching horrors are ideally designed for stealthy assassinations or surprise rearguard attacks, in which a small group of lurching horrors can dismantle half a troop before its leaders notice what's happening.

Techno

Techno Ravager are among the rarest kind of Spawn - we have only encountered them in close proximity to Queens and Alterants, working as their translators and messengers, or its equivalent in the Ravager swarm.

Techno seem to be mutated - heavily and horribly - from a highly intelligent species of bipedal aliens, which the Ravager altered to increase their brain mass at the expense of muscle tissue and limb strength. They are thin, lanky and about as tall as an Iz'kal, with their huge brains giving them the appearance of ambling mushrooms.

Techno are uniquely equipped for bio-electronic linking; they may operate or hack most known computer devices using only their limbs and powerful brains. The Ravager use them mostly as a link between Queens and their Spawn, transmitting orders and managing the radio network that communicates every swarm member. Ravager don't seem to use Techno Spawn for hacking or electronic infiltration as much as they could; our guess is that they hadn't encountered so many computer-using species until they found us, because lately we have started detecting some hacking attacks that surely come from Ravager techno.

Infiltrator

The previous list includes all the Spawn types we have been able to classify and study in the course of the war. There are, of course, many other kinds of Ravager spawn, such as Frost Fiends or Dracos, which we have seen on occasion but not as often as other types, or not enough to study.

There is, however, a disquieting rumour, sustained by so far unconfirmed - but not disproven - reports from some colonies. A couple of prisoners rescued from Ravager colonies maintain they've seen the Ravager create exact copies of people from Coalition species - Humans, Corvo, Iz'kal, even Raag. One of the victims swore they were using these perfect copies as... well, obviously, as spies.

Prisoners rescued from the Ravager always display some form of PTSD, with fuzzy recollections at best and manic episodes at worst - but if there's any truth to their reports, it would mean that there's a special breed of cloned Ravager, designed to mimic coalition species. The Ravager might be passing them as immigrants from other colonies, or even rescued prisoners - ironically, much like the ones that started the rumour - to live among us and record data that they would then send back to their swarm.

The reports remain unconfirmed, but right now I don't know what is more disturbing - to imagine these monsters taking away our bodies, or sending them back to us...

<END OF ANALYSIS>

SUPREME QUEEN UM

<PERSONAL NEURORECORD #645228>

<SPEC OPS LANCER GARA HAINO/ ENTRY #3>

<ACCESS LEVEL TEN - DO NOT SHARE WITH PC PERSONNEL>

<audio playback on [transcription enabled]>

<00:00> Not much time.

If anyone links to this - I'm Gara Haino, Spec Ops Lancer of the Coalition's 3rd Fleet. I've been hiding in... well, I don't know where this is.

LURCHING HORROR

Lone Wolf :: Proficient :: Ravager

Level 4 :: Ravager :: Malicious

mov. 5 metres :: weight 176 kg :: height 236 cm

6	6	0	9

PHYSICAL STAT	9 (3)	INITIATIVE STAT	10 (3)	MENTAL STAT	9 (2)

HIT (DEX)	3 +++	GRAPPLE (CON)	0 ++

Lurching blades

It ignores 1 point of armour. Activated. Attack two characters simultaneously and suffers one disadvantage.

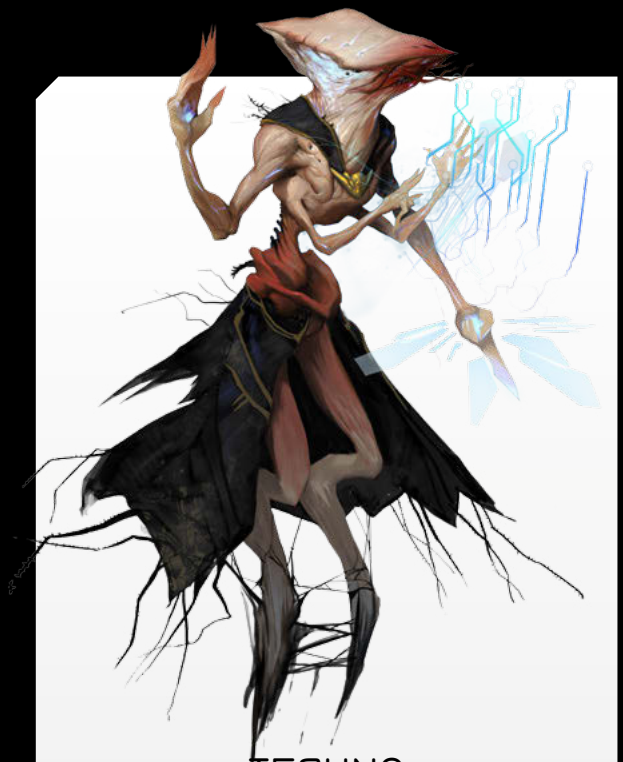
Consume 3

Action. It can consume a dead character to heal 3 physical damage.

Nanohooks

It can climb walls and ceilings and move around as if they were the ground.

Lurching horrors are pretty odd creatures even for Ravager standards. Why would a Queen create a viscose malformed tumour of a being? Terror is the key word.



TECHNO

Affinity to OS :: Defender :: Ravager

Level 1 :: Ravager :: Crafty

mov. 5 metres :: weight 49 kg :: height 159 cm

2	5	0	5

PHYSICAL STAT	3 (1)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (1)	MENTAL STAT	7 (2)

HIT (DEX)	1	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

Biorig 2 (LinkWave 100)

It can perform Hacking actions (causing 2 ACS damage).

Technos are sickly, cowardly and telltale mutants that rush to inform their superiors about the enemy's whereabouts if they sense any danger.

It's been days. They haven't found me... I've been trying to make sense of their transmissions...

I don't know what to do.

I don't know if anybody will ever... *<static>* I... I deciphered... Or I think I deciphered, my translation software started doing this weird... anyway. This is important. Very. And I don't know if I'll live to take it off this planet... hive, whatever this is.

I hope... No. Nothing I say can... just link to this. It's from their network. It's them talking to each other. It's horrible, how they talk, how they... but I must... *<static>* I'm attaching it here in case anyone finds my... well, just link to it.

May Kaliva take us all. *<end of line>*

<RAVAGER TRANSMISSION #000000>
<SOURCE LANGUAGE UNIDENTIFIED>
<TRANSLATION ACCURACY UNKNOWN>
<Neuralplayback on [transcription enabled]>

MOTHERQUEEN CALLS *** MOTHERQUEEN REQUIRES *** STIFF-CELLS *** STOP ATTACK. ON STIFF-CELL HIVE. GATHER STIFF-CELL PREY. GATHER COMPONENTS. TAKE PREY *** COMPONENTS BACK. BACK TO MOTHERQUEEN *** WE RETURN. WE ATTACK HOMEWORLD *** RETURN TO GREAT UM. STRIKE GREAT UM. MOTHERQUEEN REQUIRES. RETURN TO GREAT UM AND. STRIKE AT GREAT UM. MOTHERQUEEN REQUIRES. CHALLENGE SUPERQUEEN UM. REPLACE SUPERQUEEN UM. RETURN TO HOMEWORLD. MOTHERQUEEN CALLS *** RETURN TO HOMEWORLD. RETURN TO GREAT UM. CHALLENGE *** REPLACE *** GREAT UM. TAKE OVER HOMEWORLD. US. REPLACE GREAT UM. TAKE OVER HOMEWORLD. MOTHERQUEEN REQUIRES... *<end of line>*

<END OF ENTRY>

RAVAGER TECH

"It's not that the Ravager don't have technology. Rather, they ARE their technology. Their organic appliances and biodevices bond with them as extensions of their organism, because that's what they are. That's what everything is to them. We could say, in a way, that the Ravager live in an universe where everything is designed; everything is technology. And they are their own greatest advancement."

- Hohn Rea, Human xenobiologist

ORGANIC CRAFT

"Our own scientists have speculated that, if Ravager starships are organically-grown, even partially, then they are the biggest lifeforms to ever exist in the universe. For us, small, insignificant and transient beings, that alone would

make the Ravager impossibly terrifying; that alone would be reason enough to hate them and want to wipe them out."

- Professor Laho Sh'amir, Iz'kal psychiatrist

QUEEN MOTHERSHIPS

"Oh, I've seen them all right. Starships the size of cities, floating in space like they have a right to - oh, come on, they don't. Nothing that big should be allowed to exist, no space body that big should have a right to be self-propelled. But there it was anyway, this floating city, so big you couldn't tell if it was floating away or charging us, spewing thousands of these smaller, organic ships. A city. A fleet. A swarm. No horror can compare, I tell you.

They say these things are the swarm's queens? That they have megabrains and control the other Ravager? Man, how can you expect us to fight that? I've also heard 'em say that they are the ones that seed the planets they... they devastate; that those horrid spores that turn planets into dark goo come FROM those damn motherships.

Not even the Gods could have imagined such a horror, such a creature. Why, I think these motherships ARE gods. They are what a real God must look like - dark, monstrous, shapeless, larger than anything and capable of devouring entire worlds whole like it was nothing. Yeah, that's it. I think we've been worshipping the wrong gods, man."

- Lance Corp. Ganni Hamari, 23rd Coalition fleet

OTHER VESSELS

"Who knows, right? Who knows how many kinds of ships they have. Who knows if they are proper ships. More like a zoo they have up there. More like a full evolutionary tree; a complete ecosystem, only single-minded and, uh, armed to the teeth. They have long-range vessels, smaller starfighters, dropships - just as many different models as they have Spawn types. It's the same thing - just a pack of larger fish, swimming across space for the hunt. We're the ones fighting them with tools; they are the mammoths, the dinosaurs... only they are also smarter than us this time. We're like cavemen, hunting starships."

- Evan Farrus, Coalition pilot

ORBITAL HIVES

"The Ravager seem to be mobile, or nomadic - they have no homeworld that we have discovered, and they never settle or remain in the worlds they conquer; they just keep them as DNA farms. It's highly likely that the Ravager are adapted to live aboard their ships their whole lives.

However, we have found evidence of these - outposts? These colonised, or rather occupied, asteroids or moons, which they seem to gather around and guard zealously.

INFILTRATOR

Proficient

Level 2 :: Ravager :: Astute

mov. 5 metres :: weight 72 kg :: height 183 cm

5	4	1	8

PHYSICAL STAT	8 (2)	INITIATIVE STAT	6 (3)	MENTAL STAT	6 (2)

HIT (DEX)	3 ++	GRAPPLE (CON)	0

ERA Sword

Activated. If the attack is successful, it deals +2 base damage. Otherwise, this NPC suffers one disadvantage towards the next action.

Crypsis Suit

Characters further than 20 metres away from her suffer one disadvantage towards actions against her that require line of sight. Ghost.

Martial artist I

She gains one advantage towards dodging and running actions. Instant. Immediately after dodging an attack, she can perform a Close Quarters action against the character who attacked her.

Do you have what it takes to shoot your best friend in the face when you discover that she's a Ravager infiltrator? Will you pull the trigger?

Some reports have suggested that the Ravager use these 'orbital hives', as some have called them, to stash their eggs. They could also use them as mobile workshops, to repair their ships, produce weapons, hold prisoners, or whatever. There's no conclusive evidence of anything. But more intelligence is bound to come up as we continue to engage the Ravager, and more answers should be forthcoming. I'm only worried about the cost of that knowledge."

- Zorba Aluu, Coalition scientist

ORGANIC TECH

"Everything the Ravager build, everything that comes out of their bodies or hives, is designed to consume, overtake, and replace; to overcome other species and survive at their expense. They are like a walking evolutionary lab, like an embodiment of the rule of the strongest itself. And their devices, their tools, are no exception."

- Gong Cixi, Corvo xenoscientist

PLASMOID

"We have examined the samples given to us, and determined the plasmoid substance the Ravager cover their infested worlds with is actually an organic residue. When a planet's defences have been overrun, the Swarm's Queen deploys several bacteria clouds that drift over the world's surface and very effectively infect all organic matter they find, including every lifeform. Infected organic matter is quickly consumed and digested by these bacteria; a single Ravager Queen's bacteria can devour a whole planet's surface in a matter of days.

After digestion, the bacteria emit the dark residue - the plasmoid - which then proceeds to cover large areas of the infested world.

This plasmoid seems to serve various purposes. It protects Ravager hatcheries, eggs and test subjects; it can also transmit genetic information in the form of proteins and enzymes almost instantly. We have concluded that the Ravager employ the plasmoid as a form of bio-network through which they share DNA data, facilitating organic communication and coordinated spawn breeding across an entire world. The plasmoid may even be intelligent itself, albeit in a very rudimentary fashion.

In short, the Ravager plasmoid seems to be essential to their reproduction, communication, breeding, and to their very existence. We thus contend that studying the plasmoid and its capabilities could be the key to understanding the Ravager."

- Rahim Sa'amir, Iz'kal biologist

PROCESSING POOLS

"We saw it as we dropped the bombs on the pond-like area... bunches of eggs floating over the vapours, living things in cocoons, some not fully developed, some almost battle-ready...

It all went flying 'bout as the bombs hit, but we got a clear glimpse first. It was some kind of hatchery or nursery, no doubt. And there were thousands of them all over the planet's surface. Pools, ponds, lagoons... where the Ravager were building their soldiers from the eggs. Baby things, half-grown things, almost finished things, all in cocoons and organic casings in the sludge, it perhaps was once water but had now turned into a chemical soup, fed by that goop that covered the world. I tell you, wish I could have personally bombed each and everyone of those damn pools. That's where they make themselves, I tell you."

- Kor Lugg, Coalition bomber pilot

EGGS

"We still don't know the significance of eggs in the Ravager breeding process. They have proven fully capable of breeding their Spawn without them, but they seem to use egg caches whenever they can to protect the embryos and samples. The strange thing is, we've never seen or heard of a Ravager cracking its shell to be born; some officers speculate Ravager inside eggs remain in stasis until called upon by the Swarm, at which point the eggs are mass-harvested and the soldiers released, but we know nothing for sure.

Also, we have found eggs of several sizes, suggesting the shell adapts to the size of the full-grown creature... or that it grows itself as the creature develops.

Analysis of egg fragments suggest they are nothing less than a bioengineering masterpiece, composed of insulated, smart organic fibres that protect the egg against cold, heat, physical impact and pressure changes, they also transmit nutrients and DNA directly, building the creature at the same time they keep it safe. Ravager eggs have proven to endure the void of space."

- Excerpt from a conference by Adas A'bari, Iz'kal xenobiologist

COMPUTERS

"You say the Ravager have no computer science. Fine. But those Techno I saw were working on SOMETHING. It did look organic, but it WAS some thing. And you don't precisely see them storing their data or radio network nodes in their butts, now do you?"

- Bragg, Raag Coalition shock trooper

CONVENTIONAL TECH

"But the Ravager aren't content with being living engines of destruction, no - they're also fully capable of wielding mechanic tools and weaponry. It's like a plasma rifle that also knows martial arts."

- Xue Lin, Corvo comedian

WEAPONRY

"Although most Ravager weaponry is organic - i.e., a part of each Ravager unit's natural abilities - they often use conventional weapons, which they likely have scavenged from defeated civilisations. They seem to favour neural rifles and other disabling weapons over more direct or gory means of killing; perhaps they understand weaponry differently. Which makes sense, considering they are born and bred as living weapons. Using neural rifles to them must be like wearing gloves."

- Vi'Azul, Iz'kal xenosociologist

RAVAGER PHILOSOPHY

"We used to think the Ravager were but mindless beasts in service of their Queen, to whom we assigned the meagre role of vehicle of destruction. However, reality has proven to be much more complex. Neural readings extracted from captured Alterant specimens have been an interesting subject of study, and some claim to be able to translate certain neuronal patterns into what they maintain is Ravager philosophy. Personally, I wouldn't pay too much attention to these fools myself, but it is clear we need more research on the subject."

- Trofim Lys, Human xenobiologist

"What are we, but flesh deceived by chemistry to pursue the continuity of our species? And what surer way of achieve this, but to consume all competitors, resting securely atop their bones? We embrace our truest nature, we seek what we ought to seek, without falling in the sickness of self deception, and without pretending to be more than a complex vehicle for our DNA."

- Koitz, Ravager alterant

"There are only four wars: species against nature; species against species: species against itself; and individual against itself. Mother is the only being that has defeated the last. She makes us imperfect so we are expendable and we can fight, die, and win for her in the other three wars. Let evolution gift the mother who wins the third war a victory in the second, and bring us closer to what we seek: peace through the impossibility of conflict. Peace through annihilation of all other life and the conquest of nature."

- Korotz, Ravager alterant

"Nature welcomes our challenge. It would go against itself not to pursue being conquered. Nature breaths evolution, and evolution is fighting. Nature does not care about its own destruction, it only asks: are you strong enough to survive me? Evolution only ends when there is only one. Perfection only exist when there is nothing left to be compared with it.

- Koskor, Ravager alterant

THE RAVAGER WAR

<HUD log 5034. Pvt 1c W. Jenkins/Chriton outpost/Torin Prime sector/6th contact event> <audio playback on [transcription enabled]>

<feed recovered starting from 1:29> ...thing we know of Ravager history begins the moment they attacked Izuan Tai in Corvospace. Before that, we got nothing. They have obviously existed for a long time, as at Izuan Tai they already had plenty of different creature variations to attack us with. They must have been doing the same thing for at least a few centuries now - assimilating, adapting, breeding, and decimating other species.

Which leads me to think - if we stop the Ravager, we may be the only ones to ever do so.

<02:01> We speculate that the Ravager started out like a very primitive lifeform. Why? Because their specific parasitic-cloning evolution wouldn't have been possible with a more complex, rigid organism. The highest likelihood is that they were some kind of fungi or primitive animal, such as a cephalopod, that evolved to forcibly take the genes from its environment. Which environment? Which planet? We have no idea. But the Ravager seem capable of replicating virtually any living organism they come across. They probably learned the ability at a very early stage of their evolution.

<2:33> Another, most disturbing theory, is that the Ravager did not evolve naturally, but instead were bio-engineered. A lot of the evidence seems to support this theory - the symmetric pattern in their common genes, the unusually regular protein sequences of their genetic composition - but if it's true, what then? Who built them, and for what purpose? Are they a kind of mad experiment that went out of control? Or, much more terrifyingly, are they the vanguard of something larger, something that created them to clean the path for its coming?

We need to understand what the Ravager are and where they came from before *<feed interrupted>*

<HUD log 5034.7. Pvt 1c W. Jenkins/Chriton outpost/Torin Prime sector/7th contact event> <audio playback on [transcription enabled]>

<00:03> I fear this might be my last entry. They seem to be onto us. None of our spy drones are operative anymore. <video playback error [feed disabled/corrupted]> <0:21 feed continues> ...illed. He asked me not to bring him with me to this expedition. I told him I needed him. It is my fault. Not theirs, not his, but mine. They do not understand what they do, They are but mere mindless predators.

They also got Chao and Kiata a few hours ago. I have not seen their helmet feeds, but Lee has confirmed they are down. I hope their sacrifice was for something. I hope people will understand the danger we are facing as a species. These creatures stop at nothing.

I must go now. Our ship is not responding. We need to EVA and figure out what is wrong with it. I will connect again as soon as I get back. *<end of line>*

THE LOST LOG OF PROFESSOR TURNER

<PROFESSOR THESSAIUS TURNER>

<LOG ENTRY #113>

<DESIGNATION/SUBJECT: NOT DEFINED [OK to add label]>

"Now I know.

Their coming made no sense. It rallied the universe against a common enemy, but it threatened to destroy everything all the same.

Some were warned. Some found clues of their coming.

Because those who search for the voices of the Gods end up finding them.

The Gods did leave messages, proof of their passing. Thus we know of their influence. Thus we can be sure of their influence on the universe.

And if one finds the voices of the Gods, shouldn't one also listen to Them?

Were the Ravager called by the Gods? Do the Ravager know the Gods?

Some discovered the true nature, the true horror behind the creation and purpose of the Ravager.

Some discovered the true nature of the Gods. And it was so terrible they could not tell anyone. The secret had to be taken to the grave.

To the grave of the universe?

Only the Gods can decide that now.

Or can they?"

<END OF LOG ENTRY [OK to create a new entry]>

THE COALITION

The Iz'kal-Corvo Military Coalition, simply known as The Coalition, is a military and political body supported by both the Corvo Megacorps and the Iz'kal State, created with the express purpose of joining forces in the face of the Ravager threat.

Led by the best soldiers of both the Iz'kal State Defence Force and the Corvo Union Mercenary Corps, the Coalition is the largest and most formidable interspecies alliance in known history. While strong enough to conquer several worlds, they're focused on defence - the defence of every sentient being against the Ravager.

HISTORY

The Coalition came about as a direct response to the first two major Ravager attacks - first, the surprise attack against the Izuan Tai Corvo colony, and later the invasion of the Iz'kal Parsaius colony, by which time both species were ready and alert against the new threat. Izuan Tai was razed; Parsaius was saved - but only after great losses, and only because the Iz'kal had time to prepare. And because the Corvo, to everyone's amazement, came to their aid.

The Corvo insist that they were only working in their own interest - they needed to gauge the Ravager threat, and what better chance than a battlefield away from their territory - and made an official statement that they 'resented being accused of altruism, especially after they went to all the trouble of helping the Iz'kal'.

In any event, there was an emergency meeting after the battle, where representatives of the Corvo Megacorps and the Iz'kal State debated for several days and eventually decided to form a military force that pooled the resources of both species into a single unit. Thus the Iz'kal-Corvo Military Coalition was born.

After the agreement, envoys were sent to Tiantang and Al'ameen, informing the people that their species were mounting a joint offensive against the Ravager threat. The Corvo hired millions of mercenaries, including Humans, and the Iz'kal drafted millions of volunteers and reached an agreement with the High Council of Heimis to accept suitable Raag soldiers; all of the recruits were sent to a mobile, remote advance force, with little or no contact with their people - and with no guarantee of ever coming back.

STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS

While it officially responds to both the Corvo and Iz'kal governments, the Coalition is necessarily an autonomous entity. The Corvo and Iz'kal's political structures are too different for them to obey or even acknowledge the same laws, so the Coalition had to be given its own charter and its own rules; this was decided in a committee by both species, which required the Coalition to be free of several constraints that are exclusive to either the Corvo or Iz'kal culture. Thus, the Coalition is not subservient to any State nor in the payroll of any Megacorp; it functions independently, although it cannot take any military action without the explicit authorisation of a special committee - the Coalition High Command - comprised of representatives of both species, with the nominal duty of seeing to their individual species' interests.

For the Corvo, the Coalition is just another free enterprise: just like their own armies, the armed forces drafted for the Coalition are strictly comprised of paid mercenaries. Their main concern is to keep the Coalition economically tied to their business, for it has proven a dramatic boost to their food, military, weapon and shipbuilding industries.

As for the Iz'kal, they mainly care about the Coalition as a potential deterrent against the Corvo domination and supremacy. They are more worried about their allies, which are a close and visible danger, than about the Ravager, which are still a far-off threat.

In truth, the Coalition is a power unto itself, almost a third political group apart from both the Corvo and the Iz'kal civilisations. The Coalition cares more about itself and the defeat of the Ravager than about politics, and its loyalty is to the battle and its soldiers, far more than to any separate species or its government. Any Coalition soldier will trust his comrades, regardless of their species, far better than a civilian - or worse, a politician - of his own people.

THE COALITION HIGH COMMAND

The ruling council of the Coalition is The High Command, a military junta with equal membership from both the Iz'kal and Corvo species - save for one Human member that joined the council representing the Corvo.

There are currently 24 Coalition High Commanders, twelve designed by the Corvo and twelve by the Iz'kal. Each High Commander has full jurisdiction and authority over a

single Coalition Division, which equals the army of an entire nation, and acts as its Supreme Leader. This makes Coalition High Commanders the only official political powers in the known universe, a kind of authority that no Coalition soldier - save its few Raag mercenaries - finds familiar. Intended to give the Coalition a political link to the Megacorps and the State, the High Command has instead distanced itself from civilian concerns, moving coalition forces further and further away from the Iz'kal and Corvo dominions.

THE AEGIS ATEMPORAL

The High Command is based on a mobile space station: the Aegis Atemporal - a gigantic satellite designed by Iz'kal engineers and built with Corvo materials, with the military capabilities of a battle fortress and a permanent escort of one fully-armed fleet of either species. Although the Aegis Atemporal keeps moving away from the Corvosphere and the State, it is bound to report its position regularly, and sends beacon ships and relay emitters through the Labyrinth to keep the Iz'kal and Corvo peoples informed about the Coalition's status and actions in the war. By the same token, the Aegis Atemporal relays its position to all Coalition forces so they can in turn report to it as needed.

While High Command members live and operate in their Aegis Atemporal HQ, a High Commander may be required on the battlefield from time to time. In such cases, he takes a personal warship and a special escort into contested territory, to give direct orders to Fleet Admirals and Majors. Every High Commander has a number of personal battleships at his beck and call for any eventuality, including an entourage of the best soldiers and pilots of his Division.

RANKS AND ORGANISATION

The Coalition is organised in 24 Fleets, each of which consists of 8 Divisions. Every Fleet serves under an Admiral, which in turn answers to one of the High Command members. Each of the eight Divisions of a Fleet's is led by a General that answers to the Fleet Admiral.

The head of each Fleet is the Command Division, with authority over the remaining seven Divisions, classified as follows: Four Space Combat Divisions, assigned to space battle operations; one Artillery Division, tasked with engineering, demolitions, bombardments and heavy weapon ops; one Surface Operations Division, in charge of land and water invasion ops; and one Special Operations Division, which oversees espionage, intel gathering and special forces such as soulbending units (if any). The General of every Division adds its Class to his title; i.e. Space Combat General, Surface Operations General and so on. The Command General acts as an aide and right-hand to the Fleet Admiral, which ironically gives Command Generals less authority than their lower-ranking peers.

Every Coalition Division consists of two or more Squadrons, of varied sizes, compositions and functions depending on which Division they belong to. Each of these Squadrons encompasses hundreds of warships with their escorts. A Coalition Squadron is led by a Coalition Major, with authority over all ship Captains. A single Captain is in charge of at least one warship, but some Squadrons are further subdivided in Formations, with a single Captain for several ships.

A Ship or Formation Captain has several Lieutenants under his command, which are in turn in charge of lower-ranking Officers - i.e. Communications Officers, Engineering Officers and so on - and common troops, also called simply spacetroopers. Some spacetroopers are distinguished as Ensigns, with some additional responsibilities and a degree of authority over their peers, though in reality all spacetroopers answer directly to their Lieutenants.

It's not uncommon for the ships within a Squadron or Formation, for example the fighter escorts of a larger battleship, to organise themselves in five- to ten-ship task forces under a Lieutenant, sharing a single callsign. These task forces are not a requirement of Squadrons, and are the smallest military unit in the Coalition.

JOINING THE COALITION

The process to join Coalition forces is radically different for Iz'kal and Corvo volunteers. In the Iz'kal State, suitable candidates are chosen by the collective and assigned to the Coalition as volunteers, honoured and willing to give their best to the Coalition in any capacity that their skills may cover. In the case of the Raag, the High Council of Heimis proposes several candidates that are then physically screened in Al'ameen. In the Corvosphere, anyone that has previously worked for a professional mercenary corp can apply for the Coalition, irrespective of their species and accepting a one-time payment after an agreed term of military service, with a rank and duties according to previous experience. Other than the severance pay given to such mercs at the end of their contract, no Coalition soldier receives any wages during their tenure, although the Coalition tends to their every need including gear, health services, food and shelter.

Other than the standard procedure, any Iz'kal, Corvo, Raag, or Human citizen can volunteer for Coalition service without previous experience or qualifications. Corvo recruitment services usually accept the volunteer immediately, after no more than a few nominal tests, under a low-pay, low-rank contract. Iz'kal volunteers need to go through a screening process through Idealab, where the collective determines their suitability for military service and whether the community can afford to lose the individual. Once approved, volunteers from both species join

the Coalition as trainees, and either become full-fledged soldiers or die within the first standard month.

Most new recruits are given a rank of spacetrooper private; those with former military service may be given an ensign or officer rank, but this honour is reserved to very experienced mercs. Virtually no new recruits are given a Lieutenant rank, save for unusual circumstances. The good soldiers don't take long to earn a Lieutenant (or higher) insignia on their own, anyway.

STAR-CROSSED FORCE

Being drafted into the Coalition - both as a volunteer or a contracted merc - is one of the most common adventure sources in the FAITH universe. There are many stories like this one - many starship teams like Star-Crossed Force.

Originally known as Team Omega, one of the starfighter wings assigned to escort the Yaolong One Battle Cruiser, the unit that would come to be known as Star-Crossed Force was a team of brave fighter pilots, led by Lieutenant Argo of the Human Corps. Team Omega was decimated in its first skirmish against the Ravager, and only Lieutenant Argo survived. They died as heroes, however, taking down the Ravager Herald that had defeated them right before they fell, so Yaolong One command replaced the wing with the best pilots it could recruit. Sadly, the replacement pilots all died, sacrificing themselves to save the rest of the crew from a hangar malfunction during a cabin test, which required all the pilots to jettison themselves to the void. Again, only Lieutenant Argo survived. And again Team Omega's death was a heroic one, so, convinced that the third time was the charm, the Yaolong One gave Argo new pilots. The 'Star-Crossed' nickname was already popular among the crew, along with jokes about being selected for the 'tough luck unit'.

True to its tradition, the new Star-Crossed Force was defeated during its first battle and all its pilots taken prisoner by the Ravager. Again, Lieutenant Argo survived... but he is still a prisoner. This time, a group of new recruits, recently added to the Yaolong crew, must fly into Ravager territory to rescue Lieutenant Argo and, hopefully this time for good, restore the team that now has the official callsign of 'Star-Crossed Force'.

AN INDEPENDENT AUTHORITY

The Coalition was a hasty decision, and as such has some flaws - its charter was not completely thought through by the time the first soldiers were sent to join it, and its political role is ambiguous at best. However, it remains a historic milestone for every sentient species in the universe - never before had alien civilisations formed such an alliance, at such a scale... or with such success.

The uncomfortable truth about the Coalition's great performance is how much it owes to its separation from both Corvo and Iz'kal rule. As both societies are so different in their structure and organisation, the Coalition needed to govern itself to maintain a semblance of order. Corvo Coalition soldiers are paid mercenaries, whose contract consists on joining the Coalition and submitting to its charter; Iz'kal volunteers must agree to abide by its rules. In both cases, once a soldier joins the Coalition, he's bound by its charter and policies, which had little to do with the rules or laws of either species.

This gave the Coalition and unprecedented - and unpredicted - independence from its founders. It wasn't obvious at first, but soldiers from all sides have slowly realised it - joining the Coalition means you're free from you civilisation's laws. As a result, many malcontents from all species have scrambled to join the Coalition, seeking a status change that was otherwise out of their reach.

The Coalition owns no property and has no claim over the territories it defends, but it's a well-organised society, which attracts citizens and commands loyalty. Plus, it has de facto rule over those protected areas that are too remote for the State or Megacorps to enforce their authority.

After the Corvo and Iz'kal realised all this, they began sending secret agents, spies and hackers as part of their Coalition staff. These agents report to either State officials or Megacorp representatives and work towards countless conflicting agendas, while their leaders seem to focus on the battle against the Ravager.

Today, the Coalition is all but an independent military government, which worries several experts and statists from every species. Will the Coalition disband if the Ravager are ever defeated? If it is NOT disbanded, who would finance it? Who would control it? Would it be safe to keep the Coalition functioning? Would it be safe to disband it? Would the Coalition allow itself to be disbanded? If it didn't, who would have the power to force it to disband? If there was a power that defied both the Megacorps and the State with impunity, what would that mean for interstellar politics?

PROFESSOR T. TURNER'S LAST LOG ENTRY

<PROFESSOR THESSAIUS TURNER, 1966 SA>

<LOG ENTRY #115>

<DESIGNATION/SUBJECT: NOT DEFINED [OK to add label]>

"I understand now.

The Gods are real.

We thought we had come so far. We thought we had outgrown Earth. That space was our new home. Our endless home. Each star but a step, each wormhole a different life waiting for us.

We thought we owned the stars, now.

But we were so wrong. Open space is not open at all. And we, who fancied ourselves the new masters of the stars, who thought we had become giants, free to roam our endless playground, were only made smaller. As our universe seemed to grow beyond our ken, we only became all the more insignificant.

The more free we believed ourselves, the more of a prison it all was. For with unbound perspective came the unbound realisation.

We are not the masters of the stars.

Stars are nothing but threads, the unending threads of another universe, of a myriad other universes. They are but the fingertips of the hidden truth - the strands that begin forever and end here, with us. The great cosmic fingers move, and we move with them, like puppets at the end of the strings.

Knowing the Gods is like seeing the strings. It is like pulling on your own threads, tugging a little at the puppeteer's hand, there at the far end of the universe.

But there IS a hand there.

I can see the hand now, and there's more than one.

The hands of the Gods.

The Gods are real; far more real than me. I'm just the knot at the end of their strings.

They have granted me the vision.

Expansion, technology, travel, starships. These things are Not Growth.

Understanding is growth. Acceptance is growth. Smallness, insignificance - that is growth.

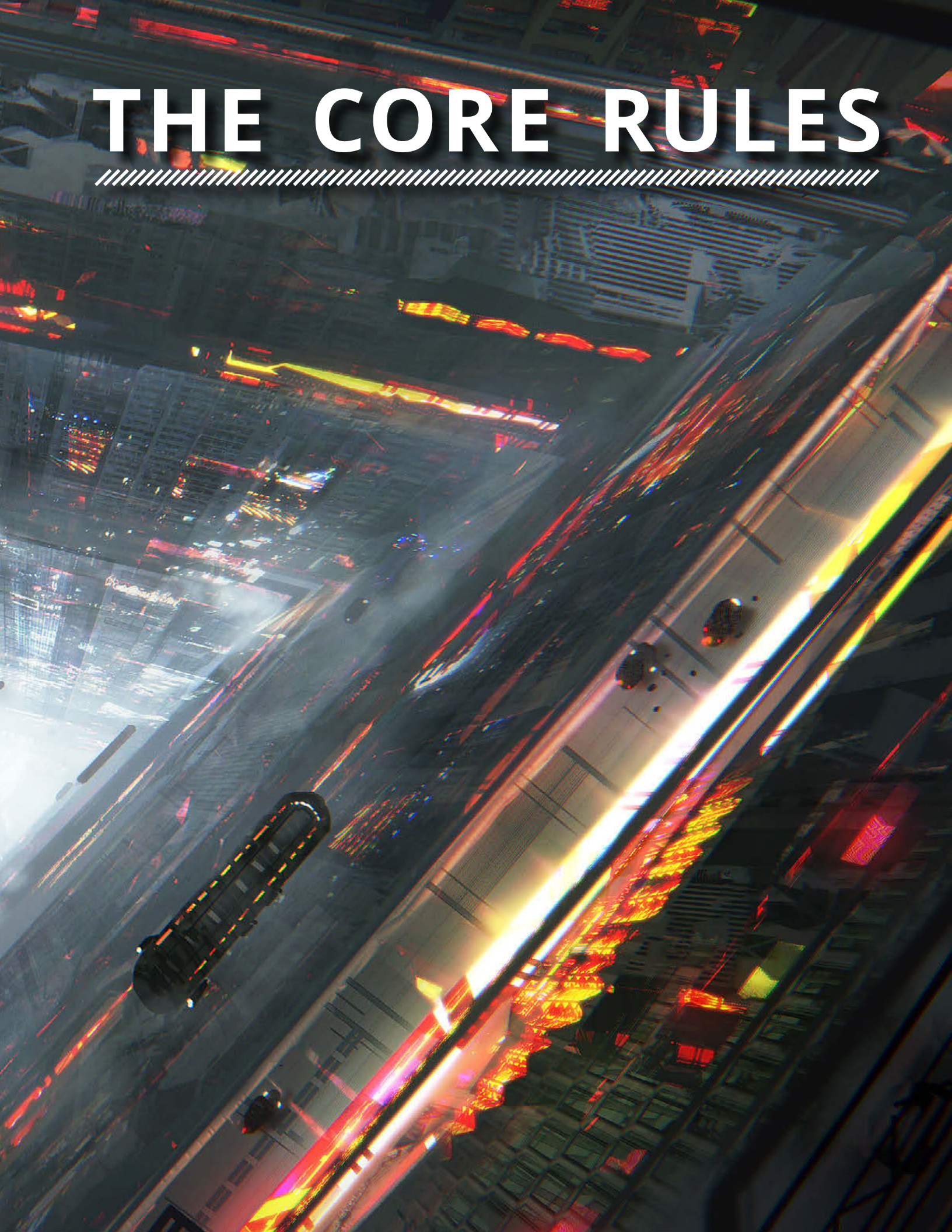
I have travelled and recorded the Universe. I shall retrace my steps. I shall turn my ship around, unravel my own path as if seen through the bending walls of a wormhole. I shall strive to look at the Universe in a mirror.

I will seek kindness among the Corvo; I shall strive for solace in an Iz'kal hive. I will look for beauty in the form of a rampaging Ravager.

And may my life end at home in some far-off, uncharted world, when I'm full of time and memories."

<LAST LOG ENTRY [OK to create a new entry]>

THE CORE RULES



THE PLAYING CARDS

FAITH is played with a deck of poker cards with custom suits. These cards are used to change the odds during confrontations, allowing characters to perform heroic deeds or causing them to fail miserably. The game can be played with a single deck shared by all, with two decks, or with one deck per person.

SHARED DECK

Recommended when playing your first games at home, if you are five or fewer people, and for quick demo encounters at conventions.

When playing with a shared deck, everyone will use the same deck of cards. All the players, the GM and the NPCs will draw, discard, and play cards from that same deck. This deck should be placed somewhere on the table where it is easily accessed by all.

The shared deck mode enables the group to play FAITH using only one deck of cards, which is convenient, but it does make the game more reliant on luck, since when someone else draws the good cards, nobody else will be able to get them until they are played and shuffled back into the deck.

RULE EXCEPTION: While playing with a shared deck, when you draw cards using Affinity, you cannot place the second card back on top of the deck, you must always discard it.

PLAYER AND GM DECK

Recommended for your first few games at home, if you are a group of five or fewer people, and for thrilling one-shot experiences at conventions.

When playing with two decks, the GM will have her own deck and the players will share another deck. The GM and the NPCs under her control will draw, discard, and play cards from her deck, while the players and the NPCs under their control will do the same from their own deck. The GM cannot interact with the players' deck and vice versa.

This mode evens out the odds between the group of players and their opposing NPCs and TSEs, with the added benefit of cycling high and low cards very quickly for the players, as they play the most cards and will have to reshuffle often.

PERSONAL DECK

Recommended for longer campaigns, experienced players, or if you are a group of more than five people playing at home.

When playing with personal decks, each person will have their own deck of cards. Each player and the NPCs under their control will draw, discard and play cards from their own personal deck, while the GM and the NPCs under her control will do so from the GM's deck. Players cannot interact with other players' decks.

The personal deck mode allows for everyone to have the exact same odds during the course of the game, as they will need to play through their whole deck before reshuffling their discard pile, making long term strategy and planning more important.

USING THE PLAYING CARDS

In FAITH, all players have a hand of cards. Players play or discard cards from their hands, unless specifically stated otherwise. Therefore, whenever a rule asks for a player to play or discard a card, he will have to choose one from his hand of cards and play it or discard it. It is always up to the player which of the cards in his hand he plays or discards.

Characters can never have more than seven cards in their hands (except Human characters who can have up to eight).

Players cannot look into the deck or the discard pile, nor shuffle or mix previously used cards into the deck.

wilderness suit
In a poker deck use Clubs

urban suit
In a poker deck use Hearts

space suit
In a poker deck use Spades

OS suit
In a poker deck use Diamonds

Whenever a card is played, it is placed in the discard pile, usually set up next to the deck, face up. When the last card of the deck is drawn, the discard pile must be shuffled to set up a new deck.

Players cannot look at other players' hand of cards, nor can they tell each other the values of the cards in their hands. But they can tell each other how they feel about their luck based on their hand of cards

> E. g. "I am feeling lucky today", "I can keep doing this all day long", "I don't think I can survive another encounter", "I feel like I should crawl to a corner and make myself into a tiny, tiny ball until danger has passed".

Players must always follow the rules to play, discard, and draw cards during confrontations. A player may discard a card only when stated by a rule, and discarding a card will never trigger effects related to playing cards, such as Proficiency or Playing with Ambience.

CARD SUITS

There are four suits in the FAITH deck: Urban, Wilderness, Space, and Operating System (OS), which relate to the types of environments where the characters might be. The use of the suits is described in Playing with Ambience. Regular poker cards can be used instead by following this correlation between the suits: Urban is Hearts, Wilderness is Clubs, Space is Spades, and OS is Diamonds. The value of the ace is 1, jack is 11, queen is 12, and king is 13.

Urban includes the environments where the landscape has been heavily modified by a rational species. Wilderness includes the environments where the landscape is of natural origin. Space includes the environments in free fall or 0-G. Lastly, OS includes virtual spaces inside computers and networks, regardless of their actual physical location.

If it is hard to determine the type of environment where the character is, such as a ruined city overgrown by a jungle, it will be the GM who makes the call. In the previous example, it would make sense that if the character wishes to climb a ruined building, then he is considered in an Urban environment, but if he wishes to hide in the bushes, he is in Wilderness.

JOKERS

FAITH's player decks come with Jokers, as they are poker decks. Jokers are drawn as usual cards, but they can only be played in a specific moment and for a special purpose.

After declaring the successes and failures of a confrontation in which you have taken part, you may play a Joker to change the level of success of one successful action to any other level of success (i.e. you could make your regular success a critical, or if it is your opponent who deals a critical or decisive success, you can make it a regular success instead). Playing a Joker does not count as using any Attributes, and it's independent from playing cards to increase your chances of success during a confrontation.

If a Joker is played at any point from the top of the deck randomly, the character who played that card gains the effects of the Joker for the action he was performing, discards it, and then plays another card. If the Joker is played on behalf of an NPC or Time-Sensitive Event (TSE), the GM determines what to do with it.

Playing a second Joker for the same action has no further effects, but during a confrontation in which several characters are successful, it can affect another of those characters' actions.

NOTE: If the last card in your hand is a Joker, you won't be able to play it until the end of the confrontation when the results are being declared.

BASIC CONCEPTS

In FAITH there are several key concepts about time and gameplay structure. These are Session, Scene, Initiative Round, and Confrontation.

SESSIONS

Sessions are the allocated time frame for playing the game during a day in real life. *E.g. that Sunday afternoon when you all have agreed to meet and play.*

Within a session you will usually play one or more scenes (although it is possible to finish a session in the middle of a scene and resume playing it in your next session).

SCENES

A scene is a sequence of events during which the GM narrates what the characters find and what happens to them. During this, characters are constantly performing actions, with little to no rest periods in between, and usually within the same location.

Scenes are the main building blocks of the story, like the scenes of a film. They are an important concept because they determine when the players and the GM replenish their hands of cards.

At the beginning of each scene, everybody draws cards from the deck until they have seven cards in their hand.

A player's hand of cards represents their PC's stamina, so PCs with a full hand are fresh and eager, while PCs with very few or no cards in their hands are exhausted and probably demoralised. Therefore, when the characters take a break long enough to restore their energy, it usually means they have reached the end of the scene.

NOTE: There is no set duration or type of event that unequivocally determines the end of a scene, and it is up to the GM to determine when a scene ends.

E.g. The players' characters plan to enter a safehouse to extract some intel. They wait for nightfall, turn off the security systems, silently enter the building, and finally find their way to the vault. They encounter two guards, and after fighting them, they extract the hard drive and escape the safehouse. This can be played out as a single scene, or be broken down by the GM into several scenes, for example entering the house and overriding the security systems in one scene, fighting the guards in the next scene, and lastly escaping to safety during a final scene.

TIP: Making scenes longer (challenging) or shorter (easy) is a good way for the GM to adjust the difficulty of the game.

During a scene, the characters will be constantly performing actions. If an action does not trigger an Initiative Round or it is not confronted, it is considered unconfronted.

When performing unconfronted actions, the mood around the table should be relaxed and conversational. The GM must ensure that all players enjoy a similar amount of time in the spotlight, and allow everyone to describe what their characters do during that period of time.

If there is some kind of conflict within the game - such as a fight, an argument, a high speed chase, or any other type of fast paced or competitive situation when some characters try to outperform others - it is the time for an Initiative Round, which sets the order in which characters declare actions, and use counteractions to confront them.

INITIATIVE ROUND

During an Initiative Round characters take turns to perform one action in their Initiative order. Performing actions can trigger confrontations, usually when the action is against someone - the confrontation must be fully resolved before continuing to resolve the Round.

One important aspect is that if you take part in a counteraction before your turn, you'll become Spent and lose your turn this Round. It's also worth mentioning that attacking back is a possible counteraction. Though you lose your turn when you do so, it is still as effective as an attack action and though your attack may not be against the target you initially had in mind, attacking back at a character forces him to focus on you. Think of it as suppressive fire!

Once all characters have taken their turns, resolve the effects that take place during the maintenance phase and then the Round ends.

An Initiative Round (also referred to simply as “a Round”) represents a few seconds during which characters rapidly perform actions. They are the game mechanic that establishes the order of play of all the characters trying to outperform each other.

E.g. The team enters the vault, feeling relaxed after their hacker turned off the security systems of the house. However, they were not expecting such an old school security measure as having two armed guards living inside the vault at all times. Now, it all comes down to who will shoot first and whether or not they will be accurate. Begin an Initiative Round to see who acts first, and resolve the ensuing Confrontations to determine who succeeds and who fails.

Initiative Rounds are triggered when there is a situation in which characters try to outperform others and it becomes necessary to determine who gets to choose their actions first, and who may be forced to counteract or react to those actions.

E.g. The group finds a room with some guards inside and wants to take them out, they try to chase someone running away through the street, they race each other to get somewhere first, etc.

All timed actions during a conflict must be declared and resolved within the context of an Initiative Round, and declarations made before the Round begins will not be valid or binding.

E.g. The group encounters several armed guards who intend to shoot them down. Now, an Initiative Round begins, and even if some of the characters claimed they run away, they must still participate in the Initiative Round, and they will only be able to leave the scene once they take their respective turns and declare their actions. If they are caught up in the conflict, they might need to change their actions to survive.

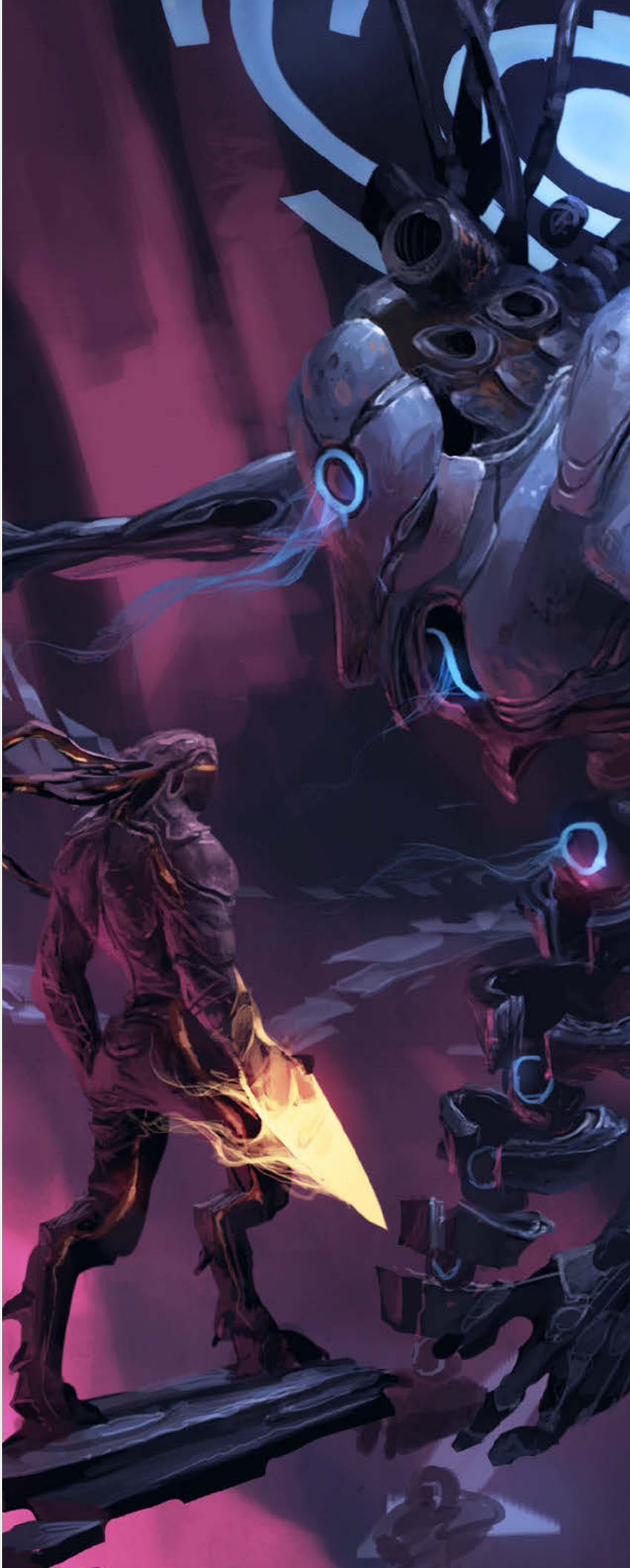
READY&SPENT CHARACTERS

At the beginning of a Round all characters in the area caught up in the conflict are Ready. During a Round a character can become Spent in two instances:

- ◇ He performs a non-passive counteraction.
- ◇ He performs a non-passive action during his turn .

NOTE: See page 322 for passive actions.

Spent characters lose their turn during the current Round if they have not taken it yet; but they can still perform further counteractions.



STEPS OF AN INITIATIVE ROUND

Overview: During an Initiative Round, Ready characters take turns performing one action each. After every character has become Spent, perform the Maintenance Phase and end the Initiative Round. If the conflict is still ongoing, begin a new Initiative Round.

Once the GM has explained the current situation, it is time to determine who gets to act first and what happens next. To do so, follow these steps:

1. Players can **Rush.** Following the normal Initiative order, each player can choose to discard one card from his hand, adding that card's value to his Initiative to calculate the final Initiative order during the ensuing Initiative Round. Discarding a card does not trigger card drawing mechanics.

NOTE: NPCs cannot Rush.

2. The order in which Ready characters take their turn to perform their actions is determined by the value of their Initiative Skill (modified by Rushing), from the highest value to the lowest one.

   In case of a tie, player characters will always go first, followed by the NPCs in the order of the GM's choosing. In case of a tie between player characters, they must come to an agreement or tell their actions in secret to the GM, who will determine who goes first.

NOTE: The GM does not have her own turn, because she never performs actions.

3. The Ready character taking his turn can choose either (1) to perform his action and end his turn or (2) to wait, allowing the next character to take their turn before his own. He can wait several times, letting any number of characters go first. Other Ready characters may choose to wait as well; and if all characters choose to wait, the last one that can do so must perform an action.

NOTE: If a character would begin his turn but he is Spent, he loses his turn. This represents that the character's time during this Initiative Round has been eaten up by him performing counteractions.

4. When a Ready character chooses to perform an action on his turn, he declares his action. This may trigger a confrontation against a Time Sensitive Event (TSE) or another character, which must be resolved before resuming the Initiative Round.

NOTE: If the action does not trigger a confrontation, it is considered an unconfronted action and therefore can have the level of success of his choice (regular, decisive, or critical).

5. The next Ready character in the initiative order takes his turn. Repeat this step until there are no more Ready characters remaining to take their turn.

6. The maintenance phase takes place. If there is still conflict, begin a new Initiative Round.

THE MAINTENANCE PHASE

During the maintenance phase, every character who has not suffered neural damage during this round and who is not Traumatised recovers one point of Neural health. Then, resolve all other effects related to the Maintenance Phase.

If there are no Initiative Rounds taking place (because the characters are not taking part in a time sensitive conflict) a maintenance phase will still occur if some effect requires it, and if one or more characters have any neural damage. A Maintenance Phase can be performed as often as the GM determines, keeping in mind that an Initiative Round usually takes place every few seconds.

NOTE: Normally, neural damage is recovered quickly enough that outside an Initiative Round it can be ignored (i.e. not tracked) unless it is enough to Traumatise the character, it cannot be removed due to a special effect, or if it is dealt right before beginning an Initiative Round.

ACTIONS

Everything a character does is an action, from shooting a weapon to playing the piano. All actions are performed using a Skill that represents the character's knowledge in that area, and an Attribute that represents his related capacity. See Attributes and Skills for more details on the specific uses of each of them.

In FAITH, actions are successful by default with the level of success of your choice (regular, decisive or critical) unless one of the following criteria are met:

1. If the action targets or directly affects another character who is aware that the action is being performed, that character can choose to counteract against it, triggering a CONFRONTATION (see next page).

NOTE: During a shootout all enemies are considered aware of actions by the player characters who have been discovered, and therefore can counteract against whatever they do against them.

A counteraction can be any action that could make the triggering action fail, or allow the character to avoid its effects.

E.g. Make the triggering action fail: A character can shoot back at someone shooting or attacking him (and if successful he will be the one dealing the damage!); he can affect their senses, capacities, or equipment; he can throw dust into someone's eyes when they are trying to grapple him; he can hack their GPS when they are chasing him; etc.

E.g. Avoiding the effects of the triggering action: He can dive behind cover; he can jump outside the room where the grenade is; he can switch off his rig before it is hacked; etc.

2. If the action is considered something that the character could eventually perform successfully if he had enough time or if he had any number of tries, BUT he has limited time or aims to do it on the first attempt, he is confronted by a TIME SENSITIVE EVENT (TSE) (see page 333), triggering a CONFRONTATION (see on this page).

E.g. Shooting a sniper rifle against an unaware enemy from very far away is something that the sniper of the group could eventually achieve successfully if he tried at it several times, but if he wishes to do so on the first attempt to not be discovered he triggers a TSE. The same applies if the character wishes to hack into a security lock in the few minutes he is left alone in someone's office, etc.

3. If the action is considered by the GM impossible to perform in the current situation regardless of the amount of effort, will or desire to do so, the action is CANCELLED, and the character may suffer the effects of trying the impossible. The character's player may appeal, but he must be reminded that off-limit actions can break the gameplay. The GM's judgment and dissuasive power must lead the gameplay forward.

E.g. A character without the proper gear cannot lift a one metric ton vehicle or jump from a twenty story building; if he tries to do so, he can suffer damage or even die.

COUNTERACTIONS

A counteraction is any action performed to prevent or avoid another character's action during a confrontation. It follows the same rules and has the same effects as an action *(i.e. shooting, hacking, or slashing with your sword as a successful counteraction will deal damage as if it had been a triggering action).*

Characters can confront any number of actions that target or directly affect them during each Initiative Round. However, performing one or more counteractions causes a character to become Spent and forfeit their turn, if they have not taken it yet.

ACTIONS DURING AN INITIATIVE ROUND

During Initiative Rounds, actions should only need one verb to be described. If the word "and" is included, the character is probably trying to perform two or more actions linked to each other and he will probably need several turns to be able to do that. Here is a basic template to describe actions:

"I [verb] [preposition if needed] [target]"

E.g. I shoot the guard. I move behind cover. I dodge towards the door. I hack Ed's thermal visor. I reload my weapon.

To keep the game realistic and organic, characters are allowed to move up to 2.5 metres (~8 ft) while performing an action.

E.g. I move behind cover and then I shoot the guard. I jump into the car and I get it started.

CONFRONTATIONS

A Confrontation takes place when a character performing his action is challenged and has a chance of failing and/or being affected by counteractions or a Time Sensitive Event.

NOTE: The character performing the action that triggers a confrontation is called the triggering character and his action is called the triggering action with the purpose of distinguishing it from the other actions in the following explanation.

Normally an action or event can only target or affect one character, to reflect a realistic scenario within the short amount of time that these usually represent. However, there are things that may target or affect several characters, such as throwing a grenade or an avalanche falling on a group of characters. In those cases, all the affected characters might be able to perform their respective counteractions.

NOTE: The main difference between an action and a counteraction, is that counteractions cannot affect anyone else but the triggering character - and therefore a counteraction will never trigger counteractions or Time Sensitive Events

itself. If a character performs an action that would normally target or affect several characters, during a counteraction, that action will only affect the triggering character.

STEPS OF A CONFRONTATION

To resolve a confrontation, players must always follow the same steps:

1. The triggering character declares his triggering action, explaining which related Skill and Attribute he will be using, and he declares its target or targets, if there are any. He may use up to one Activated effect and one Sustained effect.

2. The GM declares the number of cards to be played by the TSE if there is one; as well as its nature and the consequences that will happen if the TSE wins the confrontation.

3. Any affected characters who are aware of the triggering action and wish to confront it declare valid counteractions, and explain which Skill and Attribute they will be using. They may each use up to one Activated effect and one Sustained effect.

NOTE: Counteractions may not target or affect characters other than the triggering character. However, they are as effective as actions, countering an attack with one of your own and being successful is as good as attacking during your turn.

4. Check who receives advantages and/or disadvantages and why. Players may describe their plans, and any reasons why they think they deserve advantages or their opponents deserve disadvantages. Then, the GM decides what applies and what doesn't.

NOTE: During a multiple confrontation, a character may have advantages or disadvantages against some characters but not against others. In that case, calculate the advantages against each character separately and determine the action values, winner, and final level of success of each pair of confronted characters separately.

5. The character with the lowest action value can either play a card or pass. Once a character has passed, he cannot play anymore cards during this confrontation, even if he has not reached his limit. Once a character reaches the limit of cards he can play during this confrontation he must pass.

NOTE: If there is more than one character with the lowest action value, all the characters tied for the lowest action value play their cards face down and reveal them simultaneously.

TIP: In order to keep gameplay streamlined, it is important that each participant of a confrontation says the current value of their action out loud each time they play a new card. This way, nobody is forced to calculate the value of the action of their opponent every time he plays a card.

6. The previous step is repeated until all characters have passed.

7. Counteractions with a equal or lower action value than the triggering action fail, while those with a higher action value than the triggering action are successful.

8. The triggering action completely fails if there were any counteractions with a higher action value that would make it fail, as opposed to simply avoid its

effects. If there were none, it is successful only against those who counteracted with an equal or lower action value.

E.g. Mark throws a grenade inside a room with an Ironskin and a Harvester inside, and they try to dodge the explosion. In the ensuing confrontation, the Ironskin achieves the highest action value, followed by Mark, while the Harvester has the lowest action value. The Ironskin manages to get away from the blast radius, but his Dodging action cannot make Mark's action fail. Consequently, the Harvester is blown to pieces.

On the other hand, if the Ironskin had chosen to kick the grenade away, Mark's action would have failed, and the Harvester would not have been affected by the action.

NOTE: If a TSE achieves a higher action value than the triggering action, the reason for failure determined by the TSE that was declared comes true and the success or failure of all other counteractions is determined as usual.

9. The GM determines the level of success of any successful actions, and describes the failures.

ACTION VALUE

The action value is a numerical value used to determine the result of a character's action during a confrontation. There are several things that can modify the value of an action and its final value will affect the outcome of the confrontation and determine its winner.

SKILLS

Every time a character performs an action he is using one Skill to do so. The Skill value is the initial action value of that character during a confrontation. Additionally, if the Skill value of a character is 0, he will suffer one disadvantage.

DAMAGE PENALTIES

Skill values are reduced by one for each damage point (both physical and neural) the character has suffered, to a minimum of 0.

Neural damage suffered as the result of using an Activated or Sustained effect occurs as the action resolves, and does not incur Skill penalties for that action.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Advantages (also represented by a "+" symbol) represent having a form of upper hand over an opponent, while disadvantages (also represented by a "-" symbol) represent difficulties or hindrances a character can have when trying to perform an action. TSEs can also be affected by advantages or disadvantages.

Each advantage adds 5 points to the character's starting action value, and each disadvantage subtracts 5 points from the character's starting action value.

NOTE: A character's starting action value can be a negative number if he has suffered disadvantages.

Both advantages and disadvantages can be gained through equipment, Upgrades, or Powers that grant them; or through roleplaying the situation. A character can gain advantages from several sources at the same time or even several advantages from the same source if the benefit it provides is very strong. There are so many possibilities that it is the job of the GM to determine how and when to grant advantages or disadvantages to characters.

E.g. A character can be considered in an advantageous situation when he is behind cover, when his enemy is restrained, when he enters a room undiscovered and catches other characters with their guards down, when he is in a higher position than his enemy, etc.

TIP: When performing an action, do not simply state what it is that you intend to do, explain how you do it and why in order to gain advantages through role playing. Look for the best way to perform that action, taking into consideration your surroundings and be creative and fun - make it easy for the GM to give you that valuable advantage!

ATTRIBUTES (PLAYING CARDS)

Everytime a character performs an action, he is using one Attribute to do so. During a confrontation, the Attribute value determines:

- For a PC: How many cards he can play per Initiative Round from his hand to add their values to their initial action value set by their Skill.
- For an NPC or TSE: How many cards they can play from either the top of the deck or selectively from the GM's hand to add their values to their initial action value. If an NPC or TSE can play several cards, they can play them using any combination of the two options.

If a character uses the same Attribute several times during the same Initiative Round, he can still only play as many cards between all of those actions as the Attribute value.

I.e. A character with a Dexterity of 3 performs a Shooting action during his turn and uses 2 cards for that confrontation. Later on, during the same Initiative Round, he is shot at by someone else. If he were to choose to shoot back as a counteraction, he would be limited to playing up to 1 card for that confrontation.

NOTE: Characters can only perform one action each per Initiative Round, but they can perform any number of counteractions.

LEVEL OF SUCCESS

Depending on the difference of a final action value with its confronting final action value, the level of success will be different.

REGULAR SUCCESS

When an action reaches a value of up to four points higher than its confronting action, it has the regular effect of the action as determined by the gear used or by the GM, if there are not specific rules for it.

DECISIVE SUCCESS

When an action reaches a value five to nine points higher than its confronting action, it achieves a decisive success and it will be twice as good as the effects of a regular success, or it will be somehow exceptionally effective as determined by the GM (E.g. knocking someone out or causing a precise flesh wound so they won't escape instead of aiming to kill, etc).

Actions that deal a numerical value of something will double their value after applying any modifiers, such as Armour (e.g. You deal 3 damage to an NPC with 1 Armour, which reduces the damage you deal to 2, which you then double it to deal a total of 4 damage).

CRITICAL SUCCESS

When an action reaches a value ten or more points higher than its confronting action, it achieves a critical success and it will be three times as good as the effects of a regular success, or it will be somehow amazingly effective as determined by the GM (e.g. trying to knock someone out or doing a precise flesh wound so they won't escape instead of trying to deal damage to kill, etc).

Actions that deal a numerical value of something will triple their value after applying any modifiers, such as Armour (e.g. you deal 3 damage to an NPC with 1 Armour, which reduces the damage you deal to 2, which you then triple it to deal a total of 6 damage). Alternatively to tripling the damage, you can choose to ignore the Armour of your opponent (i.e. ignore the Armour of a strongly armoured opponent that you couldn't damage otherwise, representing that you find a small opening in their defences).

FAILURE

Whenever a character fails an action, it is up to the GM to tell why and how. If the action was confronted by an NPC or TSE, their respective confronting actions are the cause, in which case the GM usually simply narrates the success of the confronting action.

E.g. Sam shoots at a hacker who confronts her by hacking her plasma rifle. The hacker wins the confrontation, so Sam fails and her rifle no longer works. The GM can either simply say: "the hacker wins the confrontation and your rifle is now hacked",

or she can elaborate on it: "When you press the trigger, instead of hearing the satisfying buzz sound of your gun and smelling your opponent's charred meat, you get nothing. You might as well point a stick at him. I hope you brought your sidearm."

DRAWING CARDS

Player characters can draw cards in several instances, especially during confrontations. When a character plays a card, he may be subject to drawing new cards from the deck to his hand. There are two instances when this can happen and if both of them occur simultaneously only the most beneficial takes place.

NPCs cannot draw cards, as they do not have their own hand of cards.

When the GM plays a card, she can draw cards as if she were the NPC or TSE she plays the card for.

PLAYING WITH AMBIENCE AND AFFINITY

If a player character plays a card, and the suit matches the environment in which he is performing the action, he can immediately draw a card from the deck to his hand. This represents the player character acting effectively in his environment, resulting in less exhaustion.

Additionally, each player character has Affinity to a suit. When he plays a card that matches the ambience he is in and it is his Affinity, he draws two cards instead of one and keeps one of them in his hand. The other card must be either put back on top of the deck, or discarded.

PROFICIENCY

Whenever a player character plays a card with a value equal to or less than the Skill he is using during a confrontation, he immediately draws a card. This represents that the character is very capable in this area and the low effort corresponding to playing a low card does not tire him out.

BEGINNING OF A SCENE

At the beginning of each scene, all players and the GM will keep their current hand of cards and draw back up to a total hand of seven cards.

RUNNING OUT OF CARDS

If at any time a player or the GM does not have any cards in their hand, they must draw a card. If that card is drawn during a confrontation, it cannot be played until that confrontation has been resolved.

ADVANCED RULES

Find below rules that complement the game and allow you to use the rules of FAITH to resolve virtually any situation that may arise.

COLLABORATIVE ACTIONS

A collaborative action is a single action that is performed by more than one character. During a collaborative action, all participating players play as a single character who has an Attribute value equal to the highest relevant Attribute amongst participating players, and who has a Skill value equal to the lowest Skill used amongst participating players. Only participating characters can play cards during a collaborative action. Additionally, they gain one advantage for each character participating in the action after the first.

E.g. Two or more characters holding a door closed while a huge creature tries to open it to get to them; two characters operating a double-pilot spaceship through the debris of a space battle; several characters lifting a hurt companion to get him to safety, etc.

Remember that a collaborative action must always be a single action. A character opening a door with a kick so his friend can throw a grenade in is not a single action and therefore it cannot be considered a collaborative action, but two normal actions that need to be well chained together to succeed. Bare in mind that the most immediate goal of the action is the easiest way to tell if it can be considered collaborative. In the previous example, the first character's goal was allowing his friend to perform his action. They do not share the same immediate goal and thus they cannot perform a collaborative action.

E.g., Rick and Morty are traversing an asteroid field in their spaceship; Rick is piloting and Morty is manning the plasma turret. Their ship is very easy to manoeuvre, so they gain one advantage. The GM claims they are about to be hit by an asteroid and they decide to confront it collaboratively as it will affect both of them. While Rick will swerve the ship to the left, Morty will shoot at the left side of the asteroid to divert its path, increasing the chances of avoiding the impact. They are both trying to avoid being hit by the asteroid so the GM agrees that it is a collaborative action. Rick uses his Link 2 (he is cortex connected to the ship) and Piloting 2. Morty uses his Dexterity 3 and Ballistic 5. For this action, they can collaboratively play 3 cards with an initial action value of 2 and they have 2 advantages (one from the ship and another one from the collaborative action). The GM can play 3 cards with an initial value of 0 and has 2 advantages. Every time Rick and Morty can play a card, either one of them can play it.

PASSIVE ACTIONS

Passive actions are those that either do not require effort from characters or are related to what characters can perceive and therefore do not require that they declare it. (e.g. Hiding and Searching are passive actions and it is up to the GM to determine when other actions may also be considered passive).

Passive actions can be used exactly as any other action. Additionally, a character can perform one passive action during his turn in addition to his regular action.

When performing a passive action during a confrontation, characters can choose to play cards from the top of the deck and/or from their hand. If they choose to play cards from the top of the deck, they cannot draw any card to their hand as a result. The cards used during passive actions do not count towards the maximum number of cards characters can play per Attribute per Round.

E.g. Yong is searching a dark tunnel to figure out whether there is any danger before he enters. He is using his Mind 2 with an initial action value equal to his Survival 7 and he has no advantages. A TSE representing the darkness confronts his action playing 3 cards with an initial action value of 0.

The TSE plays a card from the top of the deck: An 11. Now it's Yong's turn to play, and because searching is a passive action he can choose to play it from the top of the deck or from his hand. He does not want to spend cards from his hand, so he takes his chances and plays a random card from the top of the deck: a 3. His action value is now 10, still lower than the TSE's, therefore he must play the next card or pass. Trying to play it safe, Yong plays a 10 from his hand this time, for a final action value of 20. Now, the TSE will play two more cards. The GM can also choose to play from her hand. Will she do that and play high cards to force a failure or will she let fate decide and play randomly from the top of the deck, saving those high cards for later...?

ADDITIONAL EFFECTS

Sometimes, characters use pieces of equipment or abilities that can complement their actions or change their outcomes. These pieces of equipment or abilities have effects that can affect actions in different ways and, depending on their type, they are resolved differently.

PERMANENT

Permanent effects are always in use and they always trigger when they are applicable. Their use is not optional and they must be applied if at all possible. All characteristics and Upgrades are Permanent unless specified otherwise.

ACTION

Some pieces of equipment and Upgrades have the keyword Action. They require the character to dedicate an action to use them without doing anything else at the same time. The Skill that should be used varies for each specific piece of equipment or Upgrade.

ACTIVATED

When a character declares an action, he can trigger one Activated effect before any cards are played. Activated effects are applied even if the action fails.

If an Activated effect has several uses, the character can decide to use any number of them at the same time.

SUSTAINED

When a character declares an action, he can trigger one Sustained effect before any cards are played. Sustained effects are applied even if the action fails.

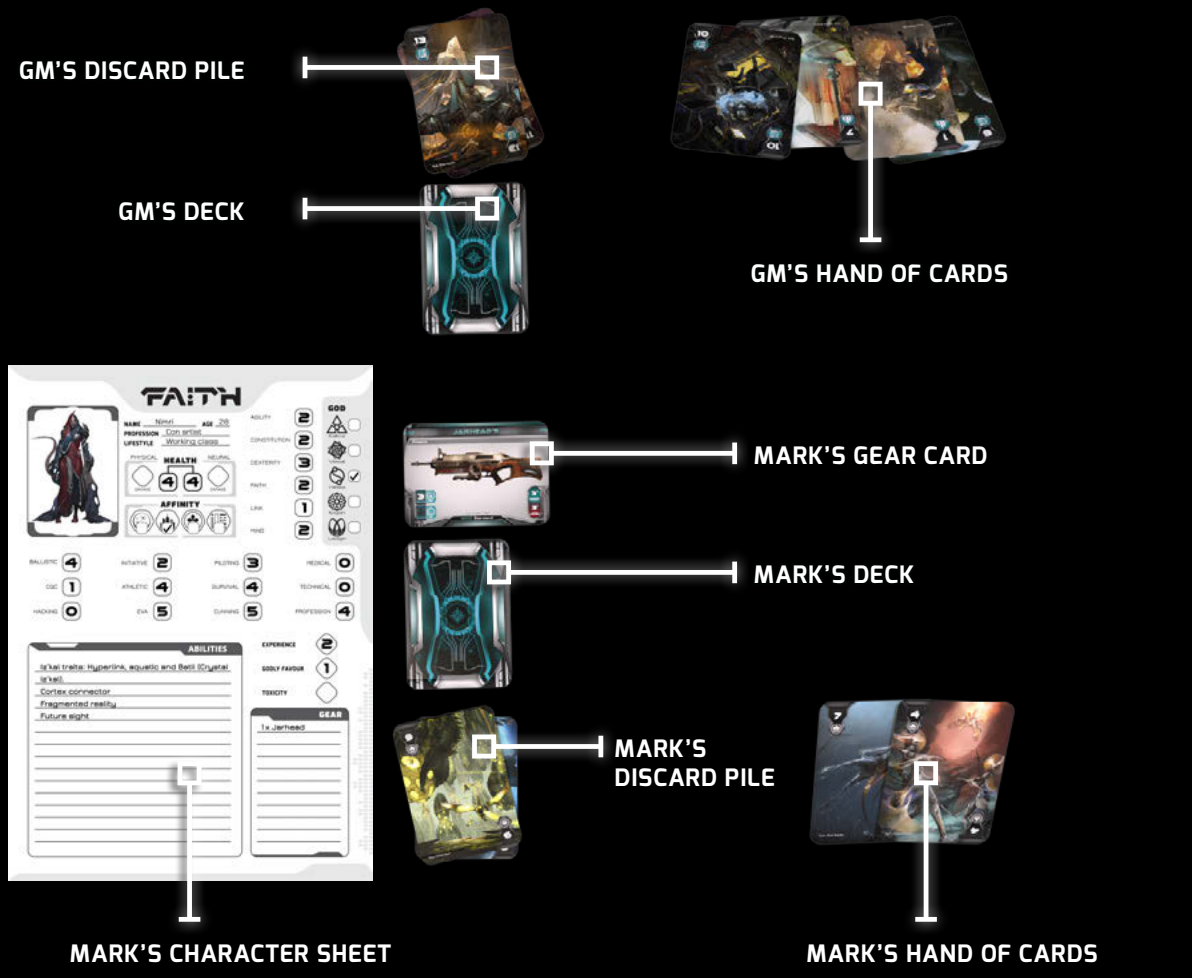
If a Sustained effect has several uses, the character can decide to use any number of them at the same time.

From the moment a sustained effect is triggered, it remains active until the character decides to stop it, becomes Traumatised, Bleeding Out, or dies. A character with an active Sustained effect cannot discard the neural damage suffered when activating it until it stops.

INSTANT

Effects with the keyword instant can be used at any time, even outside the character's turn.

HOW TO PLAY EXAMPLE



Mark's character, an Iz'kal con artist called Nimri, has been chased by some debtors into deep space, and she has barely managed to escape.

In the previous scene, Mark exhausted down to a hand of 2 cards - While the GM has 4 cards left herself.

In FAITH characters play with poker cards instead of dice (the cards shown in this example are custom FAITH poker cards).

Each player has a hand of cards that represents their stamina.

They'll play cards when performing opposed actions to increase their chances of success. Playing high cards represents making a great effort in order to succeed, while playing low cards represents a low effort. Each player can choose which card from his hand to play, managing his chances as he finds convenient.

The GM says: "Now you finally have a moment to rest, so we begin a new scene". Mark and the GM draw cards until they have seven cards each.

At the beginning of a scene, everyone draws up to 7 cards to their hands.

Then, the GM adds: "You are surprised when your scanners tell you that you have found something: A derelict spaceship drifting aimlessly in space. What do you do?" Mark says: "I'll explore it, of course. Let's see what is there to scavenge."

Mark asks: "Is there is any obvious way inside the spaceship?". The GM narrates: "The derelict spaceship is big enough to fit your small craft inside, and it sure has enough holes for you to fly in. Normally, landing your spacecraft would not require confronting a TSE, but this time it looks hard: The bay is offline and unlit, and entering a spacecraft moving in circles with a pitch black interior is not an easy feat. Are you sure you want to try?"

Time Sensitive Events (TSE) are pressing problems that pose an obstacle to the characters. The GM determines what requires a Confrontation against a TSE and how difficult it is, and what the PCs should be able to achieve without a Confrontation. The GM should consider the difficulty of the task, the Skill level of the characters, and the needs of the story when she decides the level of difficulty of the TSE.

Mark says yes, and to that the GM responds: "When you attempt to land, you are confronted by a TSE that plays 2 cards; if you fail you'll damage your ship."

A Confrontation represents a struggle between characters or between a character and their circumstances represented by a TSE. The winner of a Confrontation is the side (be it a character or a TSE) with the highest final action value, which is determined by their Skill, the advantages or disadvantages they suffered, and the value of the cards they played.

Mark declares that he has Piloting Skill 3 and Link Attribute 1.

Player characters have a starting action value equal to the Skill they are using to resolve the Confrontation. During the Confrontation, the PC can increase his action value by playing as many cards from his hand as the value of the Attribute he is using.

The TSE has a starting action value of 0 and therefore plays first. The GM plays for the TSE, in this case drawing the first card from the top of the deck, a 5 of OS.

TSEs don't have a Skill value, and therefore their starting action value is 0. They can increase their action value by playing as many cards as the GM determines. Every time the GM has to play a card for a TSE, she may choose to play if from the top of her deck or from her own hand.

During a Confrontation, cards are not played simultaneously. Instead, the side with the lowest action value must choose to either play a card or pass, in which case it will lose the opportunity to play any more cards.

Mark now has the lowest action value (3 vs 5) and can either play or pass. He plays a card from his hand: a 10 of Wilderness.

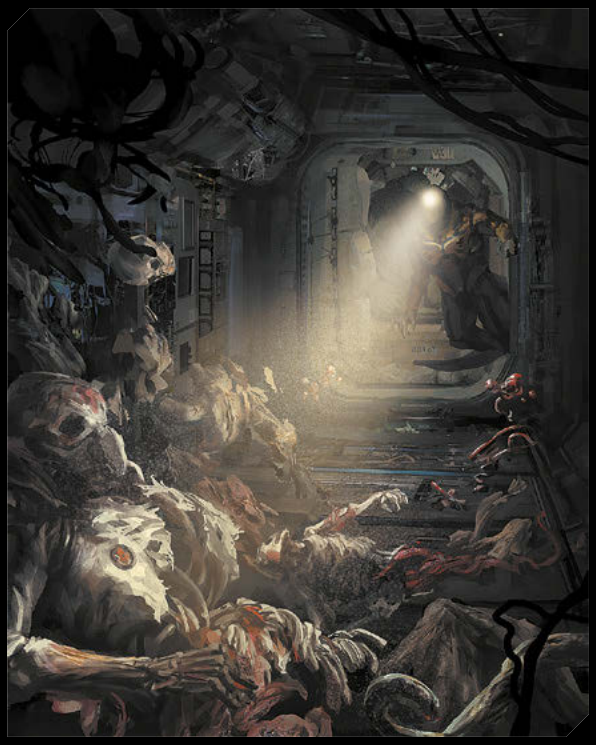
After a card is played, action values are checked again, and the side with the lowest value and who can still play cards must either do so or pass, until all sides have passed or reached the limit of cards they can play. Whoever has the highest action value at that point wins.

The TSE now has the lowest action value (5 vs 13) and plays its second and last card from the top of the deck, a 8 of Urban.

Now both have the same action value, but neither can play any more cards and the Confrontation ends with Nimri successful by the skin of her teeth. She lands inside without damaging her own ship.

In case of a tie, the triggering character (the character who initially declared the action) is the one successful.

Nimri floats through the corridors of the derelict spacecraft, her weapon ready, until she opens a door and finds herself in front of a Harvester and a Flamer Ravager surrounded by dead bodies.



The GM narrates what happens:

"You are by the door, still outside the room. They are in front of the door, side by side, about 5 metres away from you. They weren't expecting you, so they are not in cover. That said, they have their weapons drawn, and they seem to have seen battle just a few moments before".

She then proceeds to place the corresponding NPC cards on the table.

In FAITH, there are NPC cards to represent non player characters, containing an illustration and all the game information needed to use them during an encounter. This information is also available in the Core Book, and the cards are only a useful tool for GMs.

Mark says that Nimri is going to shoot the Flamer in the face without hesitation, but the GM stops him to begin an Initiative Round.

Mark will have to wait until his turn to decide his action - if the NPCs happen to be faster, they will have a chance to act before Nimri, and she may want to react in a different way.

Whenever there is a conflict in which the order of the events is important and a clarifying factor, characters must stop narrating their actions and start taking turns to perform them. The order in which they do it is established by the rules of the Initiative Round.

Nimri has Initiative Skill 2, while the Harvester has 2, and the Flamer has 4.

During an Initiative Round, characters take turns to perform one action each in the order established by their Initiative.

Mark chooses to Rush, and discards a 4 of Wilderness from his hand adding its value to Nimrit's Initiative. Therefore the order of play is Nimri, Flamer, and Harvester.

At the beginning of an Initiative Round, player characters can choose to Rush (NPCs cannot Rush). When a player character Rushes, he discards any card from his hand and adds its value to his Initiative (this only applies when establishing the order of play, it does not apply if the character then uses his Initiative for an action).

Mark takes his turn first. "I will move slightly to the side, so I am covered by the doors frame and only lean in to shoot at the Harvester", he says, to which the GM responds: "The Harvester counteracts by shooting back at you". Now Mark must resolve a Confrontation against the Harvester, and whoever is successful will hit the other.

During a character's turn, he can perform ONE action, and a small movement of about 2.5 metres (~8 ft).

Performing actions can trigger Confrontations, which must be resolved before resuming the resolution of the round.

Nimri uses her Ballistic Skill 4 and his Dexterity Attribute 3, while the Harvester uses his Physical Stat 10 and plays one card.

NPCs have three Stats: Initiative, Physical, and Mental, which encompass the variety of Skills and Attributes of a player character. Whenever an NPC performs an action, the GM decides the Stat used by the NPC, which determines both the starting action value and the number of cards the NPC can play to increase that value. Every time the GM has to play a card for an NPC, she may choose to play if from the top of her deck or from her own hand.

Mark claims his character's weapon grants her an advantage at this range, and the GM points out that the Harvester's weapon does the same.

Then Mark adds: "You mentioned the Harvester was not in cover, and I Rushed to go first. I took cover behind the metal frame of the door before I took my shot - I think it will be harder for the Harvester to hit me than it will be for me to hit him". The GM agrees with that assessment and gives a disadvantage to the Harvester.

When characters have the upper hand or some kind of aid to perform an action, they may gain advantages; they can also suffer disadvantages when they face difficulties or hindrances. Each advantage adds 5 points to the character's' initial action value, and each disadvantage subtracts 5 points from the character's initial action value. Advantages and disadvantages can be can be gained through equipment, Upgrades, or good roleplaying.

In those conditions, Nimri's starting action value is 9 and the Harvester's is 10. Therefore Mark must play first.

Mark plays a 7 of Wilderness, adding 7 points to his action value. Now Nimri has a higher action value (16) than the Harvester (10), so it's the Harvester's turn to play next.

The GM decides to let fate decide what happens with the Harvester and plays the top card of the deck for him, which happens to be a 3 of OS: the Harvester got unlucky.

The Harvester is still the character with the lowest action value, so he would have to play the next card; but he cannot play any more cards, so he must pass. Now it is Mark's turn again. While he can play up to 2 more cards, he chooses not to do so because he has already won the Confrontation.

The final action values are: Nimri 16 and Harvester 13. Nimri wins the Confrontation, so the Harvester takes her shot: at that range, Nimri's weapon causes 3 physical damage, which are reduced by the Harvester's armour of 1. The Harvester suffers 2 physical damage.

To learn about Health and Damage go to page 341, and to learn about Gear and Gear cards go to page 382.

Now it's the Flamer's turn. He points his flamethrower towards Nimri to shoot at her.

As a counteraction, Mark declares: "I shoot back at him! Does he suffer a disadvantage because I am still in cover?".

The GM agrees, and shows that the Flamer's weapon grants him two advantages within this range. Nimri has one advantage from her weapon while the Flamer receives two advantages from his weapon, but cancels one out with the disadvantage for shooting at a target in cover.

Nimri uses her Ballistic Skill 4 and his Dexterity Attribute 3, while the Flamer uses his Physical Stat of 9 and plays two cards. Nimri has already used one Dexterity card earlier this Round against the Harvester, so Mark can only play 2 more.

Nimri's starting action value is 9 and the Flamer's is 14. Therefore, Mark must play first.

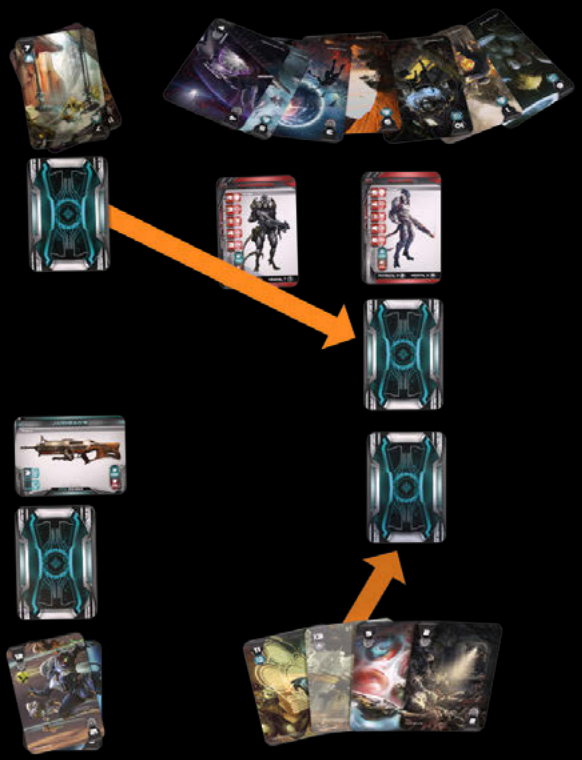
Mark plays a 12 of Space, adding 12 points to Nimri's action value, and draws a card for triggering Playing with the Ambience. Now Nimri has a higher action value (21) than the Flamer (14), and it's the Flamer's turn to play next.

Whenever a player character or the GM play a card from their hand during a Confrontation, and its suit matches the environment where the action is happening, he or she draws a card to their hand. This is called Playing with the Ambience.

To spice things up, the GM plays a card from her hand, a 7 of Urban, and she draws a card to her hand after triggering Proficiency. Now, Nimri and the Flamer have the same action value: 21.

Whenever a player character or the GM play a card from their hand during a Confrontation, and its value is equal to or lower than the Skill they are using (in case of the GM, the Stat of the NPC she is playing for), he or she draws a card to their hand. This is called Proficiency.

NOTE: If a card triggers Playing with the Ambience and Proficiency simultaneously, only one applies.

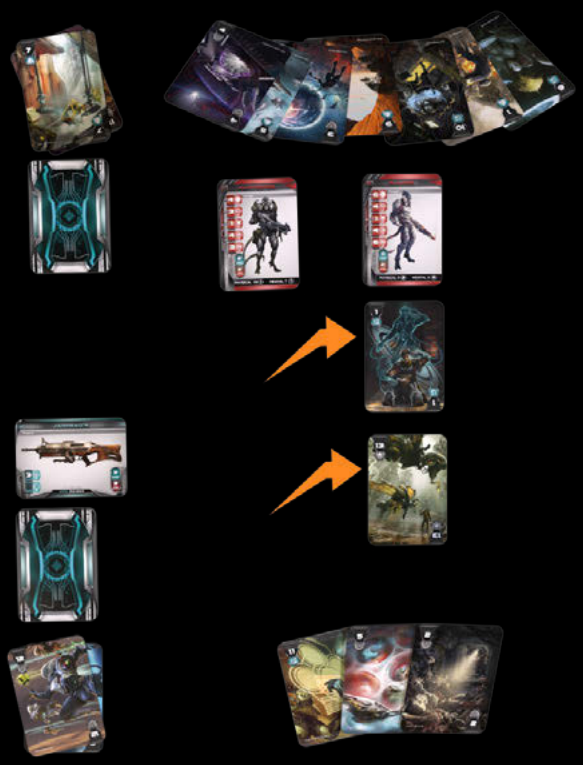


Mark plays his last card face down from his hand, while the GM plays the Flamer's last card face down from the top of the deck. Then, they reveal them simultaneously and...

If at any time during a Confrontation two or more sides are tied for the lowest action value, those characters must play their cards simultaneously. To do so, they will play them face down on the table and reveal them at the same time.

The flamer played a 1 of Operating System! On the other hand, Mark played a 13 of Wilderness, and thus Nimri achieves a critical success.

To learn about Level of Success go to page 320.



The final action values are 34 for Nimri and 22 for the Flamer. Nimri wins the Confrontation achieving a critical success, and the Flamer suffers the damage Nimri's weapon deals at that range reduced by his armour 1, and then tripled by the critical success, for a total of 6 physical damage.

Now, everyone has acted, and there are no effects to resolve during the maintenance phase, so the Round ends.

Note that we have skipped the Harvester's turn. This is because he has actually already acted when he confronted Nimri by shooting back at him. During each Round, each character can perform any number of counteractions, but only one action as triggering character, and only if they haven't already performed any counteractions that Round. Slow characters can suffer from being pinned down with cover fire - but at least they can always shoot back.

Because the conflict is still ongoing, a new Round begins, and Nimri must decide what to do. Will she continue fighting? Will she try to escape? Mark has seen his hand of cards greatly reduced, and Nimri is starting to feel tired...

GAME MASTER'S GUIDE

These are resources to aid GMs in their endeavours to create challenging and interesting stories.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS (NPCS)

Non-player characters (NPCs) are characters controlled by the GM. They are the key to many stories, and they can be friends, foes, or simply neutral. They can be as simple or as complex as the GM wants: she is in charge of developing their backstories, if they need them. While with many NPCs most interactions will consist of talking or trading, others might perform actions and engage in confrontations.

NPC cards represent simplified characters with the information needed to use them in a quick encounter. Additionally, they can be used as a base for the GM to create a more elaborate character if the story requires it.

LEVEL

You can use the NPC level as a guide to determine the difficulty of an encounter. A recommended encounter has as many NPC of the current encounter level as the number of PCs. Adding or removing NPCs can be used to balance the difficulty to the taste of the group. Using a higher level NPC instead of several low level NPCs can be used to add variety. Varied encounters will force the players to play smart and try to gain advantages through role playing to rise victorious.

- Level 1: It's recommended you use these until the players obtain 30 experience points in addition to their starting experience, or as cannon fodder later on.
- Level 2: It's recommended you use these after the players obtain 30 experience points and until they obtain 60 experience points, or as cannon fodder later on.
- Level 3: It's recommended you use these after level 2 NPCs start to feel easy. It is good to mix them with some cannon fodder.
- Level 4: It's recommended you use these for difficult challenges late in the campaign.

ILLUSTRATION

HUMAN FRONTE[illegible] — NAME

Teamplayer — TRAITS

Level 2 :: Human :: Loyal
mov. 5 metres :: weight 75 kg :: height 180 cm — INFO

5	3	2	8

ICONS

PHYSICAL STAT	8	INITIATIVE STAT	6	MENTAL STAT	4

STATS

CLOSE QUARTERS	3+	[illegible] DISTANCE	3+

ATTACK

Nemesis — ENERGY

Plasma weapon (It ignores 1 point of armour). The attack gains one advantage against dodging.

Frag grenades

Action (Physical). One advantage if thrown within 10 metres, or one disadvantage for every 10 metres or fraction further (up to 50). Causes 4 phys[illegible] damage up to one metre from impact point, and 1 less damage for every metre or fraction further.

CHARACTERISTICS

Relentless

She does not lose her turn when she performs a counteraction.

Human Fronters want a fresh start for Humanity far from the influence of alien species, and they're willing to go to great lengths to achieve this goal. — FLAVOUR TEXT

This is, of course, just a very rough guideline; you should plan your encounters based on your story needs. We recommend that you allow for different resolution paths other than the classical "team-deathmatch" resolution; this will also allow you to create unbalanced encounters that need an additional step to be resolved (e.g., have the players fight an overwhelming force, forcing them to use other means to obtain victory. If they are a military force, perhaps they need to tag the strongest opponents for an air bombardment, if they are inside a spaceship they might need to use the environment instead: breaching the hull next to their enemies, using fire, or any other cool ideas your players come up with!).

STATS

NPCs do not have the same Attributes and Skills as the player characters. Instead, they have three Stats: Initiative, Physical, and Mental. Each Stat has two values: the skill that determines its base action value, and the attribute that determines the amount of cards played by the NPC in a related action.

It is up to the GM to decide which of the three Stats the NPC uses for each action and it is also up to her to determine how many areas they cover. In any case, the GM is always free to modify the values of the NPC Stats to serve the story better, but she should inform the players beforehand to avoid any misunderstandings.

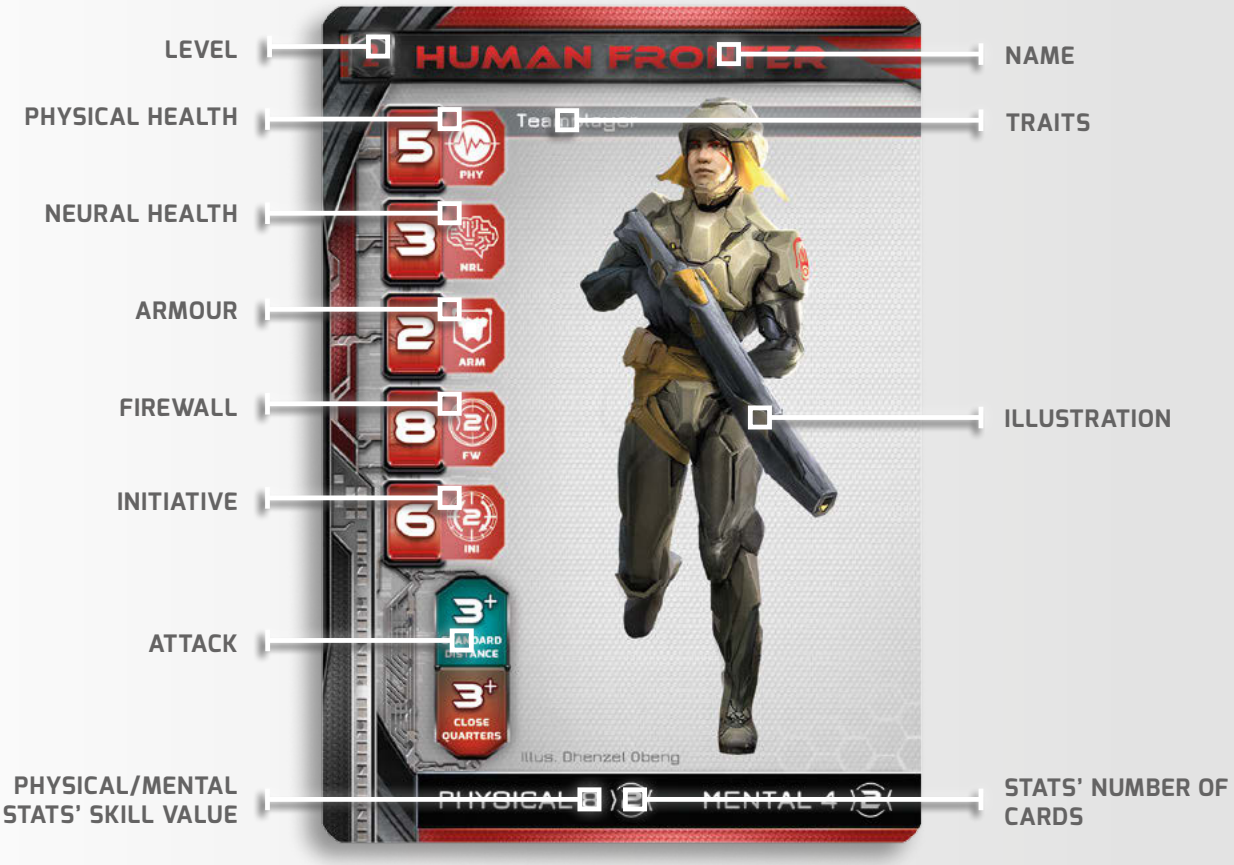
> E.g. A Raag warrior might use the Physical Stat for Shooting, CQC, and Athletic actions; and the Mental Stat for Survival and Cunning actions, but it is probably safe to say he wouldn't use it for Hacking. On the other end of the spectrum, a Corvo hacker NPC will probably use his Mental Stat for Hacking or Technical actions, but he wouldn't probably use it for Survival actions.

FAITH

Consider NPCs to have Faith equal to the attribute of their Mental Stat unless it is specified otherwise.

PLAYING CARDS

NPCs do not have a hand of cards to play during confrontations. Instead, whenever they can play a card, they play the first card from the top of the deck, which never triggers any drawing card mechanics.



Alternatively, the GM can choose to play a card from her hand instead, which can trigger Proficiency taking into consideration the NPC's skill value and Playing with the Ambience taking into consideration the card's suit. Cards drawn this way go to the GM's hand.

EXHAUSTION

NPCs do not have a limited number of cards they can play per Stat per Round. Instead, they suffer a disadvantage when they use a Stat they have already used during the current Round.

HEALTH

Most NPCs will have physical and neural health as any other character, but usually those who are not important for the story can be considered dead once they are Bleeding Out or Traumatised.

NPCs are affected by modifiers to their actions in the same way other characters are, as well as by advantages and disadvantages.

HACKING NPCS

When an NPC is hacked all of its powered characteristics are affected simultaneously.

E.g. When a Military Contractor with a Reaper (energy 3) and a Shamayin (energy 2) is hacked and suffers 2 ACS damage, his Shamayin characteristic is turned off, but if he suffers another point of ACS damage, his Reaper will also be deactivated.

NPC TRAITS

Many NPCs have common characteristics to flesh them out, giving them additional capacities. They can be treated as advanced rules and the GM can choose to ignore them to simplify an encounter. The meaning of these traits is thus not reflected in the NPC entries of the book or on their cards, and instead it can be found below.

AFFINITY

After playing a card that matches their Affinity, the GM can look at the top card of the deck; and discard it or use it to replace the card that triggered this characteristic.

NOTE: In some cases the keyword will be accompanied by an ambience. Otherwise, it is considered that the NPC has Affinity towards the ambience in which he finds himself.

DEFENDER

While Ready, the NPC can confront actions that target any of their allies, even if the action did not affect them directly. They still need to declare a valid counteraction.

GHOST

The NPC can only be hacked or detected by hackers who see him.

[FOLLOWER] X

The NPC has as many divine powers from the God they follow as the number indicated in the name of this characteristic. It is up to the GM to decide which powers the NPC knows.

[FOLLOWER] PROPHET

The NPC knows all the divine powers from their God at prophet level. Additionally, the NPC has Faith 3 regardless of their Mind Stat.

LONE WOLF

The NPC ignores the effects of exhaustion.

MASTER

After starting a confrontation, draw a card and place it face up on the table. Whenever the NPC plays a card, it can be swapped for the card drawn thanks to this characteristic.

MOB

While the NPC is in a group more numerous than their opponents and they are the triggering character, the NPC increases their level of success to the next best level, or decrease the level of success of their opponent to the next worst level.

PROFICIENT

Once per action and after playing a card lower than their skill they are using, the NPC can add their skill instead of the card to their action value.

RAVAGER

If hacked, the NPC suffers a disadvantage in its next action; if hacked as a counteraction, the NPC fails its action.

SWARM

The NPC ignores damage from firearms and railguns.

TEAMWORK

When the NPC attacks a character who has been already attacked by an ally of the NPC this round, they gain one advantage.

UNSTOPPABLE

The NPC ignores all physical damage penalties.

VOIDWALKER

Each maintenance phase, the NPC regains as much neural health as the number of cards indicated by their Mental Stat.

SPECIES TRAITS

The GM can decide to apply the traits of the species to an NPC as she sees fit, as well as apply any other rules to better reflect the nature of the NPC she wants to use in the story.

FRIENDLY NPCS

Not all NPCs must be enemies. Most will be neutral, but a few might be friendly or even allies. Some NPCs might act as friendly NPCs even though they are not, because they are pretending, they are forced to do so, or other reasons. Regardless of the reason, when the GM declares a friendly NPC joins the group, she can give control over him to any of the players (or to the team as a whole). The GM can retake control over an NPC at any time for any reason (e.g. The players are not playing them correctly, they are abusing their power, the NPC has different ideas about what should happen, etc.).

A robot that belongs to a PC is considered a friendly NPC under his control, and the GM cannot take back control over it. To gain control over a robot, a PC must buy it, have its control transferred to him by his previous controller, or completely change its core code after hacking it and turning it off (performing a hack that changes the controller of a robot is a big deal as it changes the most basic programming of the robot and the most protected part of it. This can only happen if the GM approves of it and it should take several hours or even days of rewriting code while connected to the robot).

While having an NPC under his control, a PC will control him exactly as the GM controls her NPCs, with the exception that the PC cannot play cards from the controlling player's hand for him - the friendly NPC will play his cards from the top of the deck (but the cards will be drawn and played by his PC controller).

TIME-SENSITIVE EVENTS (TSES)

Time-sensitive events (TSEs) are time sensitive problems that pose an obstacle to the characters. There is a wide range of events, items, devices, and other things that can generate a TSE, such as the Firewall of a device, an avalanche in a mountain, or a high security lock. It is the job of the GM to determine when such obstacles should be considered TSEs for the purpose of confrontations, and to establish their difficulty.

If the characters are using a Skill with a value of 1 or above and time is not of the essence, they can overcome the obstacle without a confrontation. The GM should consider the difficulty of the task, the Skill level of the characters and the needs of the story to decide how long it takes them.

E.g. Nadia has Survival 3. She is trekking through the steppes with enough supplies for one month, and the GM determines it would take a skilled trekker two weeks to travel this route. Nadia is only an average traveller, so the GM determines she can do it without a confrontation, but it takes her a whole month, exhausting her supplies.

E.g. Lee has Hacking 2. He is trying to open the safe box of the offices where he has broken in. The electronic lock is not very good, but Lee is not a great hacker, either. The GM determines he can do it without a confrontation, but it takes him the rest of the night. When he finally opens it, it is already dawn...

Otherwise, if the characters are in a rush or are using a Skill with a value of 0, a TSE will confront them as if it was an NPC, playing a number of cards against them and with an initial action value of 0. TSEs do not have a Skill value and they do not suffer a disadvantage because of it.

E.g. If Nadia were in a hurry (perhaps she does not have a month worth of supplies, or she has somewhere to be), she could push her luck and trek through the steppes faster. In this case, the GM determines that Nadia is confronted by a TSE. If she loses, she could end up delayed, lost, or even worse, as determined by the GM; but if she succeeds, she completes the trek faster.

E.g. If Lee wanted to open the safe box quickly to escape under the cover of darkness, he could rush the data mining process required to pry open the electronic lock. In this case, the GM determines that Lee is confronted by a TSE. If he loses, he could take a lot longer, trigger an alarm, or other negative effect determined by the GM.

NOTE: In the previous examples, if Nadia or Lee were using a Skill with a value of 0, they would always be confronted by a TSE, as they would have no clue about how to achieve their goal.

TSEs do not have a hand of cards to play during confrontations. Instead, whenever they can play a card, they play the first card from the top of the deck, which never triggers any drawing card mechanics.

Alternatively, the GM can choose to play a card from her hand instead, which can trigger Playing with the Ambience taking into consideration the card's suit. Cards drawn this way go to the GM's hand.

In order to present a moderate challenge, a TSE should play as many cards as the PC, a difficult challenge should play one card more, and a very hard one, two more.

TIP: If you consider a TSE easy enough to overcome that it should play less cards than the PCs, simply let them perform the action without a confrontation.

ADVICE FOR THE GM

DOS

Like in many other RPGs, there are many things you can do in FAITH that can make campaigns much more interesting. Here are some of our recommendations:

Give secret agendas to your players to make them feel invested in the story before it even begins. Bring the drama of their backstories to the game. Let them use the details they gave to you while creating their stories, so the story you put together feels round and engaging.

Not every NPC needs to be a bad guy trying to shoot at the PCs or hack into their brains. Use friendly or neutral NPCs to drive the story forward: they are one of your most valuable assets. Without them interacting with the PCs, players tend to go about their own ways and set themselves away from the story. Informers, merchants, secret contacts, potential employers... all of them are interesting characters that will help you develop an engaging story when they interact with the PCs. They can provide the PCs with information, convince them to change their minds, put them in compromising situations, or put their beliefs to the test.

There are many things that can influence a character: he can take damage by falling from a tall wall, he can suffer hypothermia or hunger - the possibilities are endless. We could try to tackle this issue with some spreadsheets with the most common effects of the most common issues, but this would never be comprehensive enough and it would have very little narrative value. In FAITH, we leave things like this to the GM - you should decide what you think is best for the story: is it interesting that your players' characters suffer one disadvantage to every action because they were not prepared to survive in a frozen planet? If they all have Survival 0 and cannot find any food in the jungle, maybe it is interesting to give them a disadvantage until they find food, or perhaps their unpreparedness can start to affect their health. Perhaps force them to suffer neural damage that they cannot remove until they eat - if they continue like this they will faint and die of starvation. Go with what is dramatically interesting, drives the story forward, and engages the players. Adapt effects to the situation and your group's gameplay.

And last, but not least, remember that playing RPGs is all about having fun with your friends, and that should be your goal at all times. Enjoy the game and do not make it all about who succeeded or failed if it does not need to be.

DON'TS

On the other hand, there are many things that is best to avoid when you are running a FAITH campaign. Here are some of our recommendations:

Do not use confrontations to side with the PCs and confront NPCs, because that creates a deus ex machina effect that kills the thrill of the game. If you fear for the story or for the PCs lives, you can use a 'plot twist' to save the day. E.g. a friendly NPC comes in to help, the NPCs try to take the PCs captive instead of killing them, or they offer a deal to the PCs to stop fighting (why do NPCs always fight until the end, anyway; don't they have families to come back to?), etc.

Do not confront players when they perform mundane tasks, but instead lure them into playing high cards at times when they really need to achieve something. That will make their subsequent confrontations with NPCs much more interesting and tense, leaving you with high cards to aid important NPCs or prevent the story from derailing too much from its course. Save your high cards for when it matters! TSE are there to add drama and interest to the story, they are not a substitute for every last skill check you would make in other games.

Sending enemies that are too powerful for the party to deal with can lead to an abrupt conclusion of the campaign. As a general rule, enemies should never be able to play more cards at the players' best skills than the players themselves under normal circumstances (ignoring advantages, that is). Once you learn how to properly evaluate the NPCs' and players' relative power, you will be able to send more powerful enemies while giving the players a chance to survive.

Do not make your NPCs mindless shooting machines unless the story requires them to be. It is much more inter-

esting to have small teams of NPCs behave intelligently and tactically: have them flank the PCs, throw smoke grenades, pin down PCs, or use any other cool tactics you can come up with.

Do not allow the PCs to take their respective Gods for granted. Force them to put their beliefs to the test and see if they can handle it, and if they follow them to the direst of consequences. If they cannot, they may be deemed unworthy of the support of their God.

GODLY MORALITIES

Who are the Gods of your players? That alone can help you create a story for them. Do they think very differently from each other? Have them be in situations in which they must reach a consensus. Give their characters opportunity to change and evolve, even if that means they have to change Gods.

If they are followers of Kaliva, the most individualist God, make them see the terrible lives of good, hard-working people, who are impoverished and who have no chance of success. Will they help them?

If they are followers of Vexal, the individual free thinker, put them in situations in which they must join a community in order to save it. Will they sacrifice their individual freedom for the good of the community?

If they follow Hexia, the strict ruler that seeks the good of the community, see if they still think they represent the community's best interests after committing a grand mistake. Will they listen to others now?

If they follow Ergon, the most democratic of the Gods, have them see what terrible things the masses can do to those minorities that think differently. Will they give up their beliefs to stop it?

CHEATING THE SYSTEM

Some players might try to "cheat-the-system" by performing irrelevant actions to discard their low cards. The rules to play cards are only meant for important moments, and therefore this should be discouraged. As a general rule, you should let irrelevant actions be successful by default, therefore they won't trigger a confrontation and they won't allow players to play cards. If a player character decides to confront irrelevant actions from another player to create a fake confrontation, let them know that they do "play around" but such confrontations do not allow for playing cards. If they insist, you can warn them of the serious consequences their actions could have should they succeed or fail, depending on the situation.

MINIATURE RULES

Playing an RPG is highly creative: you are imagining a fictional reality that exists entirely within your mind, from the characters you are playing to the locations in which they find themselves etc. The possibilities are endless but, as the action occurs in your mind alone, it can also be a bit confusing. That is why visual aid can be very helpful to some. That's where miniatures come into play.

WHAT YOU NEED

Miniatures, to represent the PCs and NPCs (you can also use standees, tokens, or whatever you come up with). To use this set of rules you should use 25 to 30 mm round bases.

A hexagon or square grid, or a ruler. The spaces in the grid should be big enough to contain the bases of the miniatures.

Terrain of some kind, either painted on the grid or appropriately scaled model terrain.

HOW TO PLAY FAITH WITH MINIATURES

FAITH does not have additional rules to play with miniatures. The gameplay should be pretty much the same, and what you'll find below are guidelines to help you translate FAITH's core rules into the tabletop.

DISTANCES

When fighting narratively, the GM can make up the distances on the go, and may decide if you can reach something or not. With miniatures and terrain, this is no longer on her hands, and she must represent these distances as accurately as possible on the tabletop.

GRID

You can use a hex or square grid. In a square grid, you can only move diagonally once every three spaces.

Each space of the grid represents 2.5 metres (~8 ft). This is not the most realistic conversion, but it is the most comfortable to use in the tabletop.

When you perform a non-running action, you can move up to one space (i.e. you can move 2.5 metres every time you perform an action).

When you run, you can move 2 spaces with a regular success, 4 with a decisive success, and 6 with a critical success.

Standard Distance starts after 8 spaces, everything closer than that is considered Close Quarters range. You can only perform CQC attacks against characters who are in adjacent spaces (diagonal spaces are considered adjacent in a square grid).

RULER

When using a ruler, consider that one metre in-game is equivalent to one centimetre on the tabletop (~2.5 metres are equivalent to one inch). When you move while performing a non-running action, you can move 2.5 cm; when you perform a running action you can move 5 to 15 cm depending on your level of success.

LINE OF SIGHT

Line of sight is the criterion that establishes what a miniature can and can't see. Characters have a 180º front arc in which they can trace line of sight, and they must meet all the following conditions:

You can draw an imaginary straight line that joins any point of the front 180º arc with the target.

The target is not completely covered by terrain or other figures (figures are considered a tall column as wide as their bases). If you can only see limited parts of the miniature (e.g. a hand, the tip of the rifle, a foot, a cape...), consider it completely covered. While miniatures are static, real characters would be able to adapt their pose to get into cover.

COVER

A miniature is considered in cover when at least half of its body is out of the attacker's line of sight.

When you shoot at a target behind cover, you will suffer one disadvantage. Additionally, cover might provide armour against regular successes. It is up to the GM to determine the amount of armour provided by each material.

LEANING OUT OF COVER

When performing an action other than running, characters may lean out of cover instead of moving a space. This allows them to trace line of sight as if they were in a space adjacent to their current position, and still get the benefits of being in cover. At the end of their action, they must remain in the same space as they were before.

THE CHARACTERS

GENERAL RULES

The players who are not the GM play the protagonist characters of the story. They are in charge of playing the role of their characters: performing their dialogues, making the decisions their characters would make, and using the relevant mechanics of the game to determine whether their characters rise victorious, or fail miserably.

Each player controls a single character and develops who that person is and what their motivations are — what are their dreams and struggles? The more compelling a character is, the more rewarding the experience of playing that character will be. The GM should encourage the other players to talk about the backstory of their characters and how they imagine them. Together, they can become an amazing group of characters who will live great adventures.

Characters have six Attributes, ranging from 1 to 3, that represent their general capacities and establish the amount of cards the players can use during confrontations. Characters also have twelve Skills, ranging from 0 to 9, that represent their specific skillsets and are added to their actions' values. Characters may have Upgrades that represent remarkable features like a Cortex Connector or a Divine Power granted by one of the Gods. Additionally, when they develop their Skills, they might obtain Talents related to those Skills, such as new combat techniques for CQC, better understanding of others for Cunning, etc.

However, characters are much more than a bunch of numbers that measure how good they are at something.

CHARACTER CREATION

To create a character, follow these steps:

1. Decide your character concept: Come up with your background story, and write your name, age, and gender on your character sheet you'll find on page 438. You are free to copy it for your personal use.

2. Select your species and choose one of your species' background traits. Your species will determine some of your character's traits and limit some of your Attributes. Write your species' traits on your character sheet.

3. Choose one of the four suits to be your Affinity. This represents the places where your feel more comfortable or where you are more capable. It might be where you grew up, where you trained, or where you feel at home.

ILLUSTRATION

INFO
Write the character's name, age, profession, and lifestyle here.

HEALTH
Write down the character's Physical health in the left square and the Neural health in the right one. Keep track of the damage in the side spaces.

ABILITIES
Write the different abilities here: Species traits, Upgrades, Talents, and Powers.

ATTRIBUTES

GOD
Tick the God followed by the character here.

AFFINITY
Tick the suit that matches the character's Affinity here.

SKILLS

ADDITIONAL INFO
Keep track of unspent experience points, godly favours and toxicity here.

GEAR
List the character's gear here.

4. Choose a God and gain its ability (see page 374). Write it down on your character sheet. Your God will define your morality and will empower you if you follow its commandments. Gods must be pleased if you are to obtain something from them, so try to select a God that you'll enjoy following. You can change your God's allegiance later on with the GM's approval.

5. Choose a Profession that suits your background story. There are not set Professions; your Profession can be anything you come up with if approved by the GM (e.g. an electrical engineer, an astronaut, a cleaner, a musician, etc). Write it down on your character sheet.

6. Distribute the following values among your Skills: 5, 4, 3, 3, 2, 2, 1, 1, 1, 0, 0, 0.

7. Set your Attributes at 1.

8. Spend 60 experience points. During this step, you can increase your Attributes and Skills (except those with a value of 0), and gain Upgrades and Talents. Additionally, you may gain Divine Powers for 5 experience points each.

NOTE: This is the only instance in which you can convert experience into Divine Powers, during gameplay they are gained spending Godly Favours.

9. Calculate your Physical health (double your Constitution) and Neural health (double your Mind taking into account any of your traits and upgrades that may apply, and write it on your character sheet.

10. Acquire your starting gear, which is determined by your Profession and where your campaign takes place: the Corvosphere (see page 153), the State (see page 220) or the Raag society (see page 256).

ADVANCED CHARACTERS

If you are a FAITH veteran, or you simply want to play a story with characters who are already powerful and capable heroes or villains, you can all agree with the GM to play a campaign with more starting experience points. It is up to the GM to determine how many.

HEALTH & DAMAGE

Characters have physical health and neural health. The physical health of a character is equal to twice the value of his Constitution, and his neural health is equal to twice the value of his Mind.

DAMAGE

There are two types of damage characters can suffer, physical and neural, and a third type that can affect items and devices — Adaptive Circuit Severance (ACS) damage. To keep track of the damage a character or device has suffered, mark the corresponding space in his character sheet or use a suitable token or counter.

Each point of damage a character has suffered, either physical or neural, gives him a -1 penalty to every Skill to a minimum of 0.

PHYSICAL DAMAGE

Physical damage is inflicted by physical means: weapons, tools, fists, etc. Each point of physical damage counts as -1 to the physical health of the character.

While in normal health state, one physical damage point can be recovered per week of in-game time after it has been suffered.

NEURAL DAMAGE

Neural damage can be inflicted by means such as concussions, Divine Powers, viruses, link attacks, neural weapons, etc. Each point of neural damage counts as -1 to the neural health of a character.

While in normal health state, one neural damage point can be recovered during each maintenance phase (or 3 to 5 seconds of in-game time) unless the character has received neural damage that round.

ACS DAMAGE

Adaptive Circuit Severance (ACS) is the term used for the electrical overload of microprocessors after they are affected by corrupting Hacking routines, and also by certain types of electromagnetic waves typically associated with neural weapons.

ACS damage is inflicted by electronic means, be it through Hacking actions or electrical waves from a neural weapon. It can only affect gear and robots with an energy value; when a device suffers as much ACS damage as its energy, it is shut down.

DEALING DAMAGE

Dealing damage is calculated in four steps:

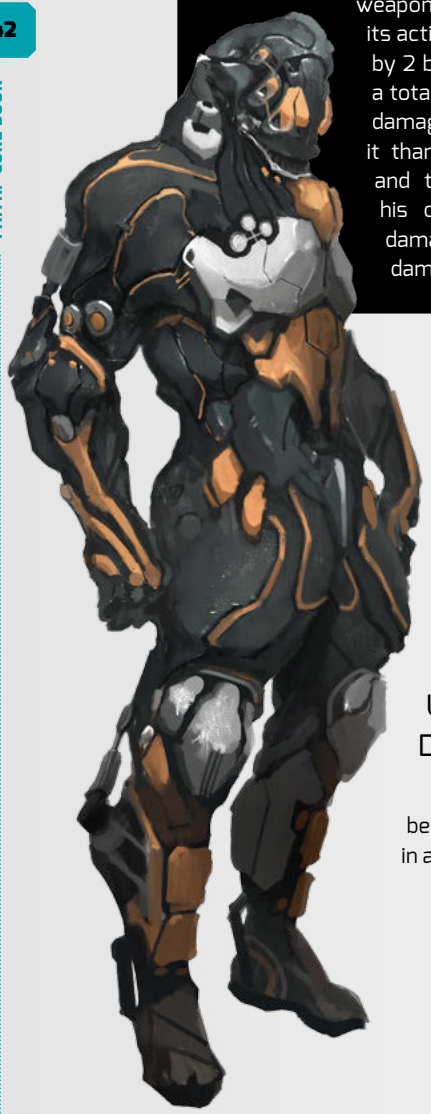
1. Calculate the base damage: Base damage is determined by the weapon, NPC or alternative source of damage.

2. Calculate the modified base damage: Apply armour and other effects that affect base damage. If it is not specified, effects always modify the base damage by default.

3. Calculate the final damage applying the appropriate level of success. Decisive and critical successes multiply the modified base damage.

4. Calculate the modified final damage: The final damage may be further modified by certain powers, abilities and gear that specifically affect final damage.

E.g. Jon attacks with his ERE sword using its Explosive Reactive Edge activated effect, which increases his base damage by 2. His target has armour 2 and is protected by a Divine Shield of Faith 2. Jon achieves a decisive success. His weapon's base damage is 3 + 2 from its activated effect, but it's reduced by 2 by his opponent's armour, for a total base damage of 3. The final damage value is 6 after doubling it thanks to the decisive success, and the Divine Shield protecting his opponent reduces the final damage by 2, for a modified final damage of 4.



ARMOUR

Some pieces of equipment and other effects provide their users with an armour value. Whenever the character is about to receive physical or neural damage from an external source, subtract its armour from the base damage.

UNPREVENTABLE DAMAGE

Unpreventable damage cannot be reduced, cancelled, or prevented in any way.

COVER

A character is considered behind cover when at least half of his body is not within line of sight of the attacker. When you attack at a target behind cover, you suffer one disadvantage.

Additionally, cover might provide armour against regular successes. It is up to the GM to determine the amount of armour provided by each material, if any (i.e. light wooden materials might not provide any, bricks or soft metal sheets can provide 1, high quality wood or strong metal 2, etc).

HEALTH STATES

Depending on the amount of damage a character has suffered, he can be in three different health states or even dead.

NORMAL

The health state of a character is normal for as long as he is not affected by any of the following states.

BLEEDING OUT

A character is bleeding out when his physical health is below 0. Characters cannot perform actions nor engage in confrontations while Bleeding Out. During each maintenance phase, a bleeding out character will suffer one unpreventable physical damage.

NPCs will generally ignore characters who are Bleeding Out until they have taken care of all other threats.

TRAUMATISED

A character is traumatised when his neural health is below 0. The character is unconscious and will not regain consciousness until his neural health is 0 or above. Characters can recover neural damage points by medical attention.

DYING

If a character is bleeding out and traumatised at the same time, he dies automatically. If at the end of a scene a character is bleeding out and he has not received medical attention from a First Aid action, he dies.

A character can also die of starvation, exposure to the vacuum of space, drowning, excessive mutilation, etc. The effects of these possibilities are left for the GM to determine.

TOXICITY

Toxicity is used to represent a variety of long lasting noxious effects that can affect a character. Toxicity can be gained by taking drugs or poisons, being affected by radiation or any other effect that might cause widespread body damage over time rather than immediately.

A character will suffer as much unpreventable neural damage as his Toxicity minus his Constitution. This neural damage only increases or decreases when the Toxicity does, and it can not be discarded as usual during the Maintenance phase.

A character will see his Toxicity level reduced by one each hour he spends without gaining any Toxicity.

ATTRIBUTES

The Attributes of a character represent his capability to act and ability to put effort into actions. Some actions might relate to more than one Attribute and other actions can relate to different Attributes in different situations. Players can argue which Attribute to use for an action, but the GM will always have the final word on such matters.

Attributes range from 1 to 3. Some effects cause characters to increase or reduce their Attributes, but an Attribute can never be reduced below 1 or increased above 3. During an Initiative Round, characters may play one card for each point they have in the Attribute they are using, which may limit the number of cards they can play in later confrontations within the same Round using the same Attribute.

Whenever a character is confronted, he must explain his action and therefore choose which Attribute he will be using. While most of the time the right Attribute for the action is fairly clear, characters can always find ways to do things differently — if they are creative.

E.g. Mark wants to repair his broken drone. Sadly, during their last encounter with a Ravager, it took a hit and now it lays on the ground unresponsive.

The GM says it took a shotgun shot and is filled with small pellets, so it will be a delicate work to remove them all. Mark's Dexterity is 2 and his Technical Skill is 5, but the drone is extremely damaged and he fears that if he fails, the GM will claim that the drone is broken for good.

Mark's Mind is 3, so he says,

"I am going to take a different approach to picking the pellets one by one and fixing what is broken. I will study the situation and take notes on my pad, I want to figure out the entrance point of the pellets and the radius spread. Once I know that, I will then disassemble the drone and take my time to fix each part separately. I will know where each pellet went so I won't have to mess around and risk breaking anything."

The GM agrees that this approach is more fitting to his Mind than his Dexterity, and Mark can now try to fix the drone using Mind, his highest Attribute.

AGILITY

Almost always used with Initiative, Athletic, EVA, and Survival. Also sometimes used with CQC when grappling.

Agility represents the nimbleness of a character: his ability to move quickly and precisely. It should be used for actions involving movement of the body, such as dodging gunfire, climbing a wall, or trying to outrun other characters.

CONSTITUTION

Sometimes used with Athletic, EVA and Survival.

Constitution represents the physical endurance and strength of a character, as well as how receptive his body is to Bio Upgrades. It should be used in actions that test the strength or endurance of a character, like lifting heavy weights or running very long distances.

The physical health of a character is equal to twice his Constitution, and he can have as many Bio Upgrades as his Constitution.

DEXTERITY

Almost always used with Ballistic and CQC. Also sometimes used with Piloting, Medical, and Technical.

Dexterity represents the fine motor ability of a character. It should be used for actions involving manipulating things with the hands, such as carefully manipulating gear or equipment, aiming and recharging weapons, or driving a motorbike through dense traffic.

LINK

Almost always used with Hacking. Also sometimes used with Piloting, Medical, Technical, and Profession.

Link represents the ability of a character to understand and interact with technology, as well as how receptive his body is to Tech Upgrades. It is used whenever a character performs an action involving computers, networks, electronic devices, or even digitally controlled spaceships or other similarly controlled vehicles.

A character can have as many Tech Upgrades as his Link.

MIND

Almost always used with Cunning. Also sometimes used with Survival, Medical, Technical, and Profession.

Mind represents a character's intelligence and ability to concentrate, as well as his ability to perceive details and patterns. It is used when recalling memories, diagnosing illnesses, designing machines, or deciphering codes.

The neural health of a character is equal to twice his Mind. He speaks fluently in as many languages as his Mind, and he can understand a little bit of as many additional languages as his Mind.

FAITH

Faith defines the ability of a character to connect or communicate with the Gods. It represents the character's true conviction and how far he is willing to go for his beliefs.

A character can have as many Divine Powers as his Faith.

SKILLS

The Skills of a character represent his capabilities of a specific skillset. Skills range from 0 to 9. A character with a high value in a Skill is very capable in that area, and a character with a low value only has a rough knowledge of the subject. However, the biggest difference in Skill lies between the values 0 and 1; a character with a Skill of 0 has no clue about how to behave in actions related to that specific Skill and will receive one disadvantage when using it.

Every action performed by a character relates to a Skill representing his knowledge in the related area. If a character cannot find an appropriate Skill that relates to his chosen action, then it is considered that his Skill value for that action is 0.

Each Skill can be used for different things, and the Attribute that relates to it is not necessarily the same every time. Characters will have to select the most fitting Skill and Attribute for each action.

BALLISTIC

Most often used with Dexterity if the weapon is operated with the hands, or Link if the weapon is software controlled.

The Ballistic Skill is used to shoot and recharge weapons,

and to generally handle ranged weapons safely.

All Ballistic actions require the use of a ballistic weapon of some kind.

SHOOTING

When performing this action, characters have to declare their target and the weapon they are using. If the weapon has a magazine value, the character must discard one ammunition counter from it. If the action is successful, the target of the action, as well as any characters in the area of effect if there is one, will suffer the damage specified by the weapon, taking into account the range of the shot, or the distance to the point of impact in case the attack has an area of effect.

RELOADING

A weapon with a magazine value but no ammunition left on it cannot be shot until its owner performs a reloading action. To reload, characters replace all the ammunition left on their weapon with new ammunition.

AIMING

When performing this action, the character declares a character or a small area, like a door or a window, as a target. During subsequent Initiative Rounds, the character receives one advantage whenever he performs a shooting action against his target (or against any character within the area at which he was aiming). Additionally, as long as he is Ready, he can confront his target with a Shooting counteraction whenever his target performs any action, even if it does not target the character who is Aiming. The effects of aiming are lost as soon as the character performs an action or is confronted by a CQC attack.

SUPPRESSIVE FIRE

Firearms only. When performing this action, characters designate a small area, like a door or a window, as a target. Suppressive Fire allows the character to confront anyone performing actions within the designated area with a passive Shooting action. All passive Shooting actions after the first during the same Round will suffer a disadvantage. Its effect lasts until the weapon runs out of ammo, or the character performs a different action, or decides to stop it. Suppressive Fire spends one of ammunition per Initiative Round, regardless of the number of Shooting actions it ends up performing.

Additionally, Suppressive Fire should discourage most characters from approaching the target area, in fear of being shot.

CRITICAL EFFECTS

The most common critical effect would be to triple the damage you deal, but you can use other narrative options: Shooting them in the knee to stop them, shoot their weapon and break it, etc. Any of these options must be accepted by the GM.

CLOSE QUARTERS COMBAT

Most often used with Dexterity or Constitution.

The Close Quarters Combat (CQC) Skill must always be used when fighting enemies within a 2 metre (~6.5 ft) radius of the character, regardless of the type of weapon used.

HITTING

Using Dexterity, the character employs combat and martial arts knowledge to hit and deflect attacks. The effects of a successful hitting action will be different depending on whether the attacker was wielding a weapon or not:

If you are not wielding a weapon, you must choose to cause either neural or physical damage when declaring the action. If successful, you will deal as many points of damage as your Constitution. Choosing to inflict neural damage represents you are trying to knock out your enemy, whereas physical damage represents you are trying to deal lethal damage.

If you are wielding a weapon, successful attacks will cause the amount of damage listed in the weapon's description. Unless otherwise specified, the damage of a CQC weapon is physical damage. Improvised weapons will cause damage and/or give advantages to attacks as determined by the GM.

Additionally, hitting actions can use one of the following effects.

Block

Activated. It can only be used as a counteraction against CQC actions. Gain one advantage and if you are successful you will make your opponent's action fail as usual, but your action won't deal damage.

Mighty Strike

Activated. Suffer one disadvantage and increase the base damage of your attack by one.

GRAPPLING

Using Constitution, you attempt to subdue your opponent. Grappling can only be used against characters of similar size to yours or smaller. Grappling can also be used by a grappled character to free himself.

A successful grappling action will allow you to immobilize your target. While grappled, your target will suffer one disadvantage towards any actions he tries to perform; you can chose to confront any actions he tries to perform with a grappling action, even if they don't target you.

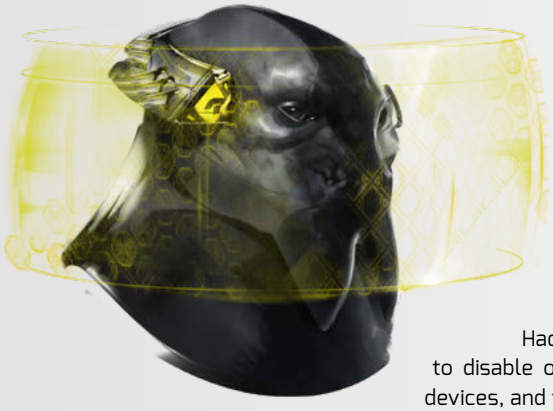
Additionally, if you are using a weapon, the grappled character will take the damage specified by the weapon.

While grappling a target, you can perform any other actions, but you will suffer a disadvantage if they don't target the character you are currently grappling. You can choose to release your target at any time.

CRITICAL EFFECTS

The most common critical effect when hitting would be to triple the damage you deal, but you can use other narrative options: Disarming an opponent, taking him prisoner, or knocking him unconscious. Any of these options must be accepted by the GM.

Critical effects when grappling may include choking your opponent and dealing as much neural damage as determined by the GM every round he remains grappled, dislocating a joint to grant him a disadvantage towards certain actions. It is up to the GM to accept or suggest additional effects for your action.



HACKING

Almost always used with Link when using software, or with Mind when figuring out possibilities or implications.

Hacking allows characters to disable or gain access to hackable devices, and to stop other hackers from affecting their own devices. Only devices with Firewall are considered hackable (i.e. consider that all electronic devices have some kind of Firewall as determined by the GM).

To perform a Hacking action, the hacker needs to be using a computer or rig and its target needs to be in hacking range. A device is in hacking range if at least one of the following conditions is met:

- ◇ It is physically connected to the rig or computer.
- ◇ It is a rig or computer being directly used by the hacker.
- ◇ It is connected to the same network as the hacker.
- ◇ It is within LinkWave range of the hacker's rig.

In all Hacking actions, the character attempting the action is called the hacker and the device targeted by the action is called the target.

DENIAL OF SERVICE (DOS)

A successful DoS action will cause your opponent's action to fail. Additionally, it causes as much ACS damage to its target as determined by the rig you are using, or when performed by a Firewall it will be equal to the number of cards it played.

SNIFFING

A successful Sniffing action will allow the hacker to read all the data stored on his target, be it code, video, audio, or any other type of information, including passwords and access codes.

Sniffing can also be used to extract information from networks as a powerful form of online research. These networks can contain all kinds of sources and information: sensor feeds, software, online papers, websites, social networks, commercials, blogs, archives, online services, forums, chat rooms, internet caches, and more.

A sniffing attack is very fast and accurate thanks to partial-AI search engines. However, although the information can be accessed in one turn, reading and understanding it will take longer.

The amount of information a hacker finds will greatly depend on the target he chooses to access. In FAITH, information travels between star systems in huge server ships. Therefore, available information depends greatly on location, as it takes time to spread throughout the galaxies. It is very important for the GM to consider what is best for the story when deciding how much information to reveal. For example, the networks of mining planets are usually set up for the purpose of allowing workers to communicate with each other; there is very little information available to them. However, the networks of large cities or business districts contain a lot of information about the companies that operate there, amongst many other interesting things.

INFEST

A successful Infest action will cause your opponent's action to fail. Additionally, it will apply one of the following effects to the hacked device:

Backdoor: The Firewall of this device plays one card less against you from now on. A Purging Systems action does not remove a backdoor.

Virus: The device will suffer one disadvantage until cleansed. When a character tries to cleanse it, the device's Firewall will confront them.

CLEANSE

Cleanse can be used on any infested piece of gear. A successful Cleanse action will cause the Firewall's action to fail. Additionally, it removes all viruses and backdoors from the target device.

PURGING SYSTEMS

Purging systems can only be performed by a character carrying the gear it targets. A successful Purging Systems action removes all viruses from all your cortex connected gear and any one piece of gear not cortex connected.

LINKWAVE

A device with LinkWave increases the hacking range of its user. The hacking range around a device with LinkWave is a sphere with a radius equal to its LinkWave value, in metres (10 metres ~16 ft). A character will be aware of the presence of any hackable devices or creatures within his LinkWave range.

CONFRONTING HACKING ACTIONS

You can only detect and confront hacking actions that originate from within your hacking range (i.e. only charac-

ters using a rig will be aware of Hacking actions taking place around them). Hacking actions can be confronted with any action that would be able to stop the hacking attack, such as hacking the target back or parting his head from his body.

In case you do not confront a Hacking action (because you cannot, you are unaware or you choose not to), the device's Firewall will confront it instead.

Firewall (FW)

Hackable devices are protected by a software called Firewall (FW), which is a type of NPC that only confronts Hacking actions performing a Denial of Service action.

Firewalls have one Stat that determines their starting action value and the number of cards they can play. They play cards as an NPC.

USING HACKING AS A COUNTERACTION

Hacking actions can only be used as counteractions when the action targeting you requires energy to operate (e.g. plasma weapons, rigs, robots, etc.), or specifically says it can be hacked as a counteraction (e.g. Ravager creatures). Hacking other gear carried by that character cannot be used as a counteraction (i.e. hacking the opponent's suit).

NOTE: Gear that has powered characteristics but which does not require energy to perform its action (e.g. vibro-blade) cannot be hacked as a counteraction, as the action can still be successful without the powered characteristics.

CRITICAL EFFECTS

The most common critical effect would be to triple the ACS damage you deal when using a DoS action, but when using other hacking actions you can use other narrative options: Such as leaving no traces after accessing the information while sniffing. Any of these options must be accepted by the GM.

PILOTING

Most often used with Link when using cortex connected or computer driven vehicles or Dexterity when piloting vehicles that require physical input (such as those with a steering wheel).

Piloting allows characters to drive or fly all kinds of vehicles, from motorbikes to space freighters. Different kinds of vehicles, or complex tasks such as manual docking manoeuvres, high speed chases, or rough landings can pose all sorts of difficulties to unaccustomed characters. The GM may grant advantages or disadvantages accordingly, and determine whether a character must face a TSE to succeed.

PILOTING A VEHICLE

To pilot a vehicle you must be inside the Cockpit system. While there is at least one online module in the Core system, the pilot gains the abilities to Accelerate, Evade, and Change course.

Accelerate

Instant. The vehicle gains one Stress if you are piloting a flying vehicle, or one Strain if you are piloting a water or land vehicle, to gain or lose one Speed. You can use Accelerate as many times as the vehicle's Acceleration Stat every round. Speed is always gained towards the side of the board your vehicle is facing.

If you are in an atmosphere, your vehicle cannot gain more Speed tokens than the vehicle's maximum speed. If you are in the vacuum of space, there is no limit to the number of Speed tokens you can have on.

Evade

Instant. The vehicle gains one Stress if you are piloting a flying vehicle, or one Strain if you are piloting a water or land vehicle, to gain one advantage towards all of its dodging actions until the end of the round. You can use Evade as many times as the vehicle's Evasion Stat every round.

E.g. Alex has Piloting 6 and Link 3; she is piloting a spacecraft with Evasion 3. She is being attacked by a ravager spacecraft. As a counteraction, Alex decides to dodge and uses evade twice to gain 2 advantages towards her action. She plays two cards to succeed. Her vehicle gains 2 Stress.

Then, they shoot at her again. Alex can only play one more card this round due to her Link, so she decides to use evade one last time, and gain 3 advantages towards the action (two from the previous uses of evade and another from this one). Her vehicle gains one additional Stress.

Change Course

Action. Gain as much Stress if you are piloting a flying vehicle, or Strain if you are piloting a water or land vehicle, as your Speed. Then, perform a Piloting action confronted by a TSE that plays as many cards as your Speed.

If you are successful, change the direction of your vehicle on the board and lose all of your Speed. If you fail nothing else will happen (but if you fail by a decisive or critic, you'll see the amount of Stress or Strain multiplied).

CUNNING

Most often used with Mind when performing social interactions, or Dexterity when using sleight of hand.

Cunning represents a character's social abilities and skills (deceiving, intimidating, persuading, encouraging, seducing...). It can also be used for sleight of hand, to perform magic tricks, or steal; also to conceal a small object, or don a disguise.

We encourage players to use good roleplaying to resolve their social interactions, such as convincing other characters, lying convincingly, reading their true intentions, pretending to know something they don't, etc.

However, if someone is not comfortable roleplaying these kinds of situations or simply prefers using the mechanics of the game to solve them, they can use their Cunning Skill paired with their Mind Attribute.

Alternatively you can use a hybrid method, roleplaying the social interaction, then playing out a confrontation to determine how effective you were (the GM can grant advantages or disadvantages depending on how well he considers the player performed).

SOCIAL INTERACTION

Passive action. A successful action may improve an NPC's disposition towards a character, allow the character to read on someone's true intention, or other suitable effect. However, the full extent of the effects of a successful Social Interaction action are ultimately up to the GM.

SURVIVAL

Most often used with Mind when analysing a situation, or Dexterity when crafting things or gathering supplies.

Survival represents how tough, crafty and self-sufficient characters are. It is used by characters to find things like food or resources in hostile environments, to orient themselves in a new location, or to do things in order to survive, such as building a shelter, knowing what to do when a hurricane comes their way, or knowing what type of food is edible. Additionally, Survival represents the perceptiveness of the characters and his ability to hide and move silently.

HIDING

Passive action. Hiding can be used while performing any type of action that does not usually draw attention. The character remains hidden as long as he remains in an adequate place to hide or until found by a Searching action. If other characters cannot physically fail to perceive the character who wants to perform a Hiding action, the GM can declare the action invalid.

SEARCHING

Passive action. Characters can perform a Searching action in three instances:

- When they are actively searching for a character because they already knew he was there; i.e., they may have been told by someone, they may have seen him before he hid, perhaps he has drawn their attention, etc. They must choose a specific area to check, such as some bushes, a tree line, or a dark alley.
- When they want to ensure that there is no risk hidden in a specific area. They must choose a specific area to check.
- If a character has a higher Survival than the hidden character's Survival, the GM can determine that he suspects that someone is hiding. The GM should warn a character in this manner if the story requires it, the situation is favourable to the hidden character being discovered, or the character is very alert. It is the GM's prerogative to keep quiet about this if she thinks it benefits the story she is telling. Alternatively, if the players are being very jumpy and behaving paranoidly, the GM can give fake warnings of this kind, to represent the character's state of mind - which can sometimes misdirect them from other hidden things...

A successful Searching action will reveal the hidden character to the searcher and from that moment onwards, the hidden character is no longer considered hiding from him. A failed Searching action will leave the searcher oblivious to the location or existence of the hidden character.

REMINDER: You can perform one passive action in addition to another action. When performing a passive action you can play cards from the deck and/or from your hand; cards played from the deck do not trigger drawing mechanics. Cards played in passive actions do not count towards your Attribute limit per Round.

INITIATIVE

Most often used with Agility.

Initiative represents a character's reflexes and ability to move quickly in decisive moments. It is used during initiative rounds to determine the initiative order, and it is also the Skill used when characters attempt to do something that does not require specialized training but instead requires speed and fast reflexes.

DODGING

Dodging is used to avoid effects from CQC actions or to duck behind cover when targeted by a ranged attack. If there is no available cover you cannot dodge a ranged attack.

ATHLETIC

Most often used with Agility when performing brief efforts, or Constitution when endurance or strength are required.

The Athletic Skill is used by characters to run, swim, dive, climb, lift weight, throw objects, or do any other athletic activity.

REMINDER: Characters can perform a small movement of up to 2.5 metres (~8 ft) while performing any other type of action.

RUNNING

You move up to 5 metres (~16 ft). Remember that if unconfronted, this action can automatically achieve a critical success and you can run up to 15 metres (~24 ft). If you perform several consecutive running actions, you might be able to speed up and move faster, as determined by the GM.

You can perform a running action as a counteraction to ranged attacks and explosions.

NOTE: All movement distances are merely guidelines and the GM can and should modify them to fit the story as necessary. You might move slower in mud or shallow waters, or faster if the gravity is slightly lower than you are used to and the path is clear.

THROWING

Characters can throw almost anything they can lift. Throwing actions are resolved like Shooting actions. However, it will be the task of the GM to determine whether a character can or cannot throw a specific object, and the particular effects of that Throwing action. Only pieces of gear with the characteristic Throwable have specific rules to be used.

EXTRAVEHICULAR ACTIVITY (EVA)

Most often used with Agility to move, or Constitution while in free fall or 0-G.

Extravehicular Activity (EVA) is the skill used to perform physical actions in 0-G environments, such as spaceships or situations where characters are in free fall, like parachute jumping.

Any action that would usually be performed with Athletic is instead performed with EVA while in Zero Gravity.

EVA allows characters to move the same distances Athletic does, but in 0-G or free fall. EVA must also be used for Throwing actions performed in 0-G or free fall. Objects thrown in 0-G do not have weight restrictions, although their mass may affect the speed of the thrown object. The GM should keep in mind that the distances stated are mere guidelines and they should be adjusted to fit each particular situation.

REMINDER: Characters in 0-G must keep in mind that everything works very differently in the absence of gravity, and simple things like shooting a weapon might become difficult and push them back, spinning away from their position. They will also need to actively stabilize themselves to avoid floating around and they will be able to push themselves up, down, or in any other direction.

MEDICAL

Almost always used with Mind, as curing is a complex task that requires a lot of knowledge.

The Medical Skill represents the understanding of medicine and science in general. It is used when restoring physical or mental health, treating poison, or installing Upgrades.

The rules of this section are meant to be used for Medical actions performed in the field, often rushed or lacking adequate sanitary conditions and equipment. Medical actions performed in a hospital with proper equipment and supplies will be greatly sped up as determined by the GM, allowing the patient to recover completely in a matter of hours or even minutes.

In all Medical actions, the character targeted by the action is called the patient and the character performing the action is called the doctor.

FIRST AID

First Aid can be used to contain the wounds of patients who are Bleeding Out. It does not require any specialized gear, but the doctor will suffer a disadvantage if he has no medical supplies at all.

The action will be confronted by a TSE that plays one card per negative point of health of the patient.

A successful First Aid action has two effects: It stops a Bleeding Out patient from dying at the end of the scene, and

stops him from suffering 1 physical damage during each maintenance phase.

After a successful First Aid action, the doctor must spend as many consecutive actions caring for the wound as the number of cards played by the TSE, which are automatically successful by default. If for any reason the doctor is unable to do so, the effects of the successful First Aid are lost.

These effects are also lost if the patient suffers additional physical damage or experiences severe disturbances before receiving proper medical attention. If the patient is still Bleeding Out by the end of the next scene, he will die even if he receives further successful First Aid actions.

SURGERY

Surgery can be used on bleeding out or traumatised characters to recover their health back up to normal. Specialised medical equipment is required for a doctor to perform such delicate operations. This action takes one hour per damage point being recovered unless otherwise determined by the equipment used for the action.

The action will be confronted by a TSE that plays one card per negative point of health of the patient. A successful Surgery action removes enough damage points from the patient to increase his health to 0. A failed Surgery action increases the number of damage points on the patient by one.

During a Surgery action whose patient is Bleeding out or Traumatised, the doctor can use the following ability (just remember Constitution and Mind are Attributes and can never be reduced below one).

Removing Body Parts

If the patient is Bleeding Out, the GM can determine whether the doctor can forfeit any number of limbs affected by the wounds or Constitution points of the patient to remove an equal number of damage points. These are removed during the Surgery action, but before establishing the number of cards the wound plays against it.

The effects of losing limbs are set by the GM as she sees fit. Usually, losing a limb will cause disadvantages to some actions, making it impossible to use some tools or weapons, or increase the time needed to perform certain actions.

Similarly, if the patient is Traumatised, the doctor can forfeit Mind points of the patient towards the same purpose.

DRUG HANDLING

Drug Handling is used when using an Injectable piece of gear on a character. The character who is being administered the drug must either agree to it, be unconscious, or be incapable of defending himself.

The action will be confronted by a TSE that plays as many cards as the sum of the drug's Toxicity level plus the patient's current Toxicity.

A successful action has the effects described by the drug and increases the patient's Toxicity by the drug's Toxicity. A failed administration will only increase the patient's Toxicity by the drug's Toxicity without applying the effects of the drug.

UPGRADE HANDLING

You can fabricate a Bio Upgrade instead of buying it if you have specialised medical equipment to do so, as well as any specific substances determined by the GM. You can also install or remove Tech or Bio Upgrades, but you'll require specialised medical equipment to do so.

To do so, you will be confronted by a TSE that plays one card for every point by which the Experience cost of the upgrade exceeds your Medical Skill.

Failing to install or remove Upgrades from a patient can have consequences that range from light damage to the patient, to completely destroying the upgrade or badly injuring the patient — depending on the level of failure, as determined by the GM (e.g., have the character suffer a six-month period loss of 1 physical health, or have him suffer a disadvantage towards his actions for a week).

TECHNICAL

Most often used with Mind when diagnosing or repairing something, or Dexterity when performing a delicate task with small parts.

The Technical Skill is used when repairing machines, robots, vehicles, and other technological devices; it represents an understanding of how to use unknown technology, how to control robots, or how to adjust suits. It is up to the GM to decide the time required for each Technical action, taking into consideration the tools at hand, the pieces available, the difficulty of the task, etc.

In all Technical actions, the character performing the action is called the technician and the machine or device targeted by the action is called the target.

REPAIRING

Repairing can be used on a damaged target to remove any type of damage from it. A successful Repairing action removes all damage of one type from the target.

The damage confronts the action as a TSE that plays one card for every point of damage of the same type being repaired. If the target is very badly damaged or the technician is using scrapped parts, the GM may grant disadvantages to the technician. However, she can also grant advantages if the technician has the blueprints of the target, an appropriate tool, or just the right set of spare parts. Additionally, she can establish that something is impossible to repair. Sometimes a machine is just too damaged or it needs very specialized components to be repaired.

DESIGNING AND BUILDING

Technicians can come up with their own designs to build or build the designs of others. In a sci-fi setting, the possibilities are endless, and it is up to the GM to determine what can and cannot be built.

Many things in the universe of FAITH are extremely complex — such as robots, spaceships, or even plasma rifles — and built in fascinating factories. However, in a world full of digital information, there are many other things that technicians can build in their very own garages.

If you attempt to create a tech upgrade, you will be confronted by a TSE playing one card for every point by which the Experience cost of the upgrade exceeds your Technical Skill.

ISSUING COMMANDS

This action is used to issue commands to the robots you control. Issuing commands requires a device with LinkWave, a radio signal, or a network connected to the robot or robots you want to control, although they can be programmed to obey vocal commands. The robots must be within the technician's range to receive commands, or they must be under appropriate conditions to distinguish voice commands.

You issue one command to any number of robots under your control (i.e. the same command to all of them). Robots you control operate like friendly NPCs (see page 384 for more information about robots). Once a robot receives a command, it will do anything in its power to obey it until the task is completed or the robot is destroyed. A robot who has not been issued a command will either wait until he is issued one or follow an action protocol (if one has been programmed and if the situation allows it - a robot following a protocol is under the control of the GM, who will decide what the robot does and to whom it does it).

You can control any number of robots whose combined level doesn't exceed your Link.

PROFESSION

Most often used with Mind when declaring a story detail, or any other Attribute if the task relates closely to it.

Profession represents the ability of characters in an area of knowledge or craft, and their position within the industry, their contacts, and their prestige. Additionally, it determines the amount of funds characters have at the beginning of the campaign. Depending on where your campaign takes place (in the Corvosphere, the Iz'kal State, or the Raag clans), the economy will work differently.

Characters can choose anything they can think of as a profession, as long as the GM approves. There is a designated area on the character sheet to write the profession of the character. Characters can be anything from award-winning filmmakers to pianists, astronauts, politicians, or anything in between.

When choosing the profession of a character, it is important to avoid overlapping with other Skills, as it will diminish its benefits. As an example, a character based on the Hacking Skill should not choose his profession to be "hacker", but instead something like "IT manager", which will allow him to declare story details like claiming he has a contact at a certain IT company, or "cryptanalyst" which will allow him to claim that his communications cannot be spied on and that he can easily spy on others.

DECLARING STORY DETAILS

Passive action. Players have the right to declare details in a scene for as long as the details relate to their Profession.

E.g. a character can claim that the NPC he is talking to is an old client of his if he is a businessman; he can claim to know where to plant a bomb to bring down a spaceship by looking at its blueprint if he is an engineer; he can claim that he brought rope and cooking tools when lost in some remote mountains if he is an explorer, etc.

To do this, characters must use their Profession as the key element of their argument. The GM can veto any claims that seem out of scope or ask the player to revise them. If the argument is valid, the GM can confront the player, and if she wins she must explain how that story detail is different, and how that affects the characters. Once a character fails at Declaring Story Details, he cannot try to declare the same story details again, even if he comes up with a different explanation for them.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

During gameplay, characters will learn and change. The story will shape their personalities and their actions will teach them new Skills or improve those they already had. Experience points are used to advance the characters improving their capacities, gaining new ones, etc.

EXPERIENCE

Experience is used to increase the values of the Attributes and Skills, to learn new talents or to obtain upgrades that change the characters' biology, and to install cybernetic body parts and enhancements.

GAINING EXPERIENCE DURING A SESSION

Each time a major milestone of the story is reached or the characters have had a significant opportunity to learn and improve their abilities, the GM may decide to grant them experience. It is recommended to do so at the end of every session, but it is ultimately up to the GM's discretion.

It's recommended that the GM grants 10 experience points (or "points" for short) to each player per session. If the session was very uneventful, maybe she can grant fewer points, and if it was very challenging more.

GAINING EXPERIENCE DURING DOWNTIME

Depending on your campaign you might play sessions that take place continuously and in a short period of time (think of shows like 24), while other campaigns might have long dead periods which you will probably elapse saying something like "after two months of travelling through the Labyrinth you arrive at your destination" (think of stories that take years to resolve, such as Game of Thrones). If you're just a regular person living in the Corvosphere, most of your time might be spent in an office — your adventuring might only take place during your breaks (think of how most high school shows focus on what the characters do between lessons, while rarely showing them actually studying; the scriptwriters simply skip those uninteresting parts) or your vacations (think of most old school adventure books like The Famous Five).

Regardless of the reason, you might find that your characters go through a lot of downtime (consider that travelling between star systems takes a few months). This does not mean they aren't doing anything or not furthering themselves; they can still gain experience points during this time - but to gain experience during downtime, they must be training or furthering themselves in some way.

For every month of downtime you spend training you'll gain many experience points as your Mind. The GM can determine that you learn more and give you more experience if the conditions are excellent (e.g. you spent your downtime training with the Savak, the Iz'kal special forces). At the end of the downtime period, characters have a chance to spend their experience points.

FAST CAMPAIGN

Gaining 10 experience points per session is meant to give you a sense of progression while maintaining certain realism about how much you can learn and progress in a short period of time. It will take you about 40 sessions to make your character very powerful. You might not have that much time to play a campaign; so you can all agree to play a fast campaign, in which characters will receive more experience per session than usual (alternatively, or in addition to this, you can begin the campaign with characters who have more initial experience). It is up to the GM to determine how many experience points to grant per session.

SPENDING EXPERIENCE POINTS

You can spend experience points at the beginning or ending of every session — you can plan how to spend your experience between sessions on your own free time, although some things require being agreed by the group, with the GM having the final word.

ATTRIBUTES

You can raise one Attribute by one point once per session. Increasing an Attribute to 2 costs 15 experience points, and increasing it to 3 costs 25 experience points.

Attributes limit: Attributes have a maximum value of 3, and each species has some with a lower maximum.

E.g. Jasmine, the player playing Akka, an Iz'kal, wants to increase her character's Dexterity from 2 to 3, which costs her 25 experience points.

SKILLS

You can raise any number of Skills by one point each per session. They have a cost in experience points equal to their new value.

You must let the group know that you are going to do this; the group will vote on which Skill or Skills you can raise at this given time, taking into consideration what you did during the last session or during downtime (it's a good moment to look back on your adventures!). The GM has the final word on what you can raise. Among the Skills chosen by the group and GM, you can choose any number, if any, to increase them.

Skills limit: You can only have up to 3 Skills with values 7 through 9. The rest of your Skill values cannot be higher than 6. You can voluntarily reduce your Skills' values by one point per session, but you will not recover any experience points.

E.g. Akka has fought some ravagers with his sword, ran for his life, hidden from the ravager inside a crate, and then found his way back guiding himself with the stars. At the end of the session, Jasmine claims she wants to raise her character's Skills, the group discuss it and decide that she can raise CQC, Athletic and Cunning, the GM raises the point that Akka was capable of finding his way back home, and therefore he adds Survival to the list.

Jasmine choses to raise her character's CQC to 9 and his Survival to 5, but not his Cunning nor Athletic, which in total costs her 14 experience points.

TALENTS

You can obtain one Talent per session. Each Talent has its own cost in experience points.

Talents limit: Talents relate to a specific Skill. You can obtain one Talent of a Skill when its value is 5 or higher, up to two Talents when it is 7 or higher, or up to three Talents when it is 9.

E.g. Akka has raised his CQC to 9 and his Survival to 5. He already had two CQC Talent, therefore now he can get a third CQC Talent and a first Survival Talent — but he can only get one during this session. Jasmine pays the experience cost of a Survival Talent and makes plans about her character's third CQC Talent for the next session.

TECH AND BIO UPGRADES

You can obtain any number of Tech or Bio Upgrade per session. Each Upgrade has its own cost in experience points.

Upgrades work a little bit differently and are obtained during gameplay. You can obtain Upgrades in specialized locations, as they require from minor to major surgery to be installed, or you can make them. Getting them may have additional requirements depending on where you are (in the Corvosphere, the Iz'kal State, a Raag ice fortress, etc) and your personal situation (e.g. Indigent characters in the Corvosphere cannot afford to have any upgrades installed, while Poor ones can only afford one per month, etc).

Upgrades limit: You can have as many Bio Upgrades as your Constitution and as many Tech Upgrades as your Link.

E.g. Akka has obtained a crypsis suit, which requires to be cortex connected, therefore Akka goes to a biotech clinic in Al'ameen and asks to get a Cortex Connector installed. Jasmine spends the experience points cost of the upgrade she wants to acquire, and Akka wakes up the next day from the operation table with a brand new Cortex Connector.

GODLY FAVOURS

During gameplay, your actions can be favourably or negatively seen by your God — if you are behaving according to your God's commandments, or against them. Each time you perform an action you may gain or lose one or more Godly favour points.

GAINING OR LOSING GODLY FAVOURS

It is up to the GM and the players to interpret the God's commandments and apply them correctly, with the GM having the ultimate word. The requirements to obtain or lose Godly favour points should be based on your Faith. The GM must decide what entitles gaining or losing them, and how many.

E.g. Vexal asks of his believers that they help others without giving up their personal freedom in the process. If you have Faith 1, you can request a Godly favour point from the GM after going out of your way to stop a bully from mistreating a person; but if you don't do anything about it, you might lose a point instead.

If what you saw was a full squad of Iz'kal Savak spec-ops commandos killing some Corvo miners and you try to stop such an overwhelming force the GM might grant you several Godly favour points instead. But you probably won't lose any Godly favour points for not trying to stop it, as it is more likely that you'll lose your life.

However, if you have Faith 3, Vexal will want you to follow his commandments blindly and you will lose a Godly favour point from failing to do so even in situations that are less than optimal, like fighting an Iz'kal Savak squad on your own.

For the concept of the Gods to properly work it is essential for the GM to be strict when judging your behaviour according to your Gods' commandments. The GM should promise you Godly favour points whenever you follow those commandments (you can even request them), and warn you about the consequences of acting against the rules of the Gods. If you break them, the GM must not hesitate to call onto you the wrath of your God and take away Godly favour points from you. If you continue to lose Godly favour points, you might want to think about changing Gods.

When you gain a Godly favour point, you can write it down in the corresponding area of your character sheet. You can keep those points there for any amount of time until you spend them or lose them.

When you lose Godly favour points, you will first remove them from your character sheet if you had any accumulated. If you do not, you will have to lose divine powers instead. If you have no divine powers left to lose, you can obtain negative Godly favour points.

To change Gods you require the GM's approval, other than that it can be done at any time. If you change Gods, you'll lose all your divine powers and all your saved up Godly favour points. If you have negative Godly favour points, the GM can decide to give you some of them as positive Godly favour points of your new God.

E.g. You are a Kalivan with -2 Godly favour points who has realised that your calling is actually to follow Ergon. You decide to start following him and change that in your character sheet. Because Ergon is the opposite to Kaliva, the GM decides that you can start following Ergon with 2 Godly favour points; he mentions that if you had chosen another God, he would have let you gain one, as the other Gods are not directly opposite to Kaliva.

NOTE: The Gods don't care about manners. A character can pretend to be one way that goes against his God's commandments and they won't punish him — it is only real actions they care about.

E.g. A Kalivan sweet talking a group of people with his wishes of world peace, his future trip to help minorities in the Gu sector of Tiantang, and how he will invest 50% of his fortune in the conservation of biodiversity in New Quan will not suffer any backlash from Kaliva, unless he acts on it.

SPENDING GODLY FAVOURS

You can spend one Godly favour at any time to either:

- Gain a divine power or, if you have the maximum of divine powers you can have (i.e. you can have as many as your Faith), change one divine power you already have for another one.
- Use your God's ability.
- Be able to use your divine powers for the remainder of the scene.
- If you have Faith 3, you can spend three Godly power to permanently improve to the prophet level a divine power you already own.

NOTE: While it is up to the GM to set the requirements for gaining Godly favours, it's recommended that if a character spends one to do right by his God during a scene that you give him one back at the end of that scene.

E.g. Akka's team has been ambushed; they are taking heavy fire and they are most probably going to be annihilated. Akka tells them to retreat. He will stay and hold them for as long as possible, sacrificing himself as a follower of Ergon would. For that he receives 1 Godly favour point, which will allow him to use Ergon's powers in his last stand for a whole scene. His team thanks him with tears of shame in their eyes while they escape.

Akka fights until he can barely stand and waits for the final blow. Then, the GM tells him he feels the blessing of God pouring into him once again, his God has seen value into his actions and has chosen to empower him: Akka receives 1 Godly favour point, he can spend it right then to use his God's ability which might help him to continue fighting...

SPECIES TRAITS

When you select your species you'll gain that species traits and one of your species' background traits of your choice.

CORVO

The Corvo are a highly technological species; they are very independent and very capable. Their appearance and physiology resembles those of insects and they are well adapted to life in space.

TECHNOLOGICAL

The procedure goes like this: Birth, check by doctor, held by parents for 1 minute, taken to surgery to have a cortex connector installed, go out into the world to make a living.

You gain the Cortex Connector 1.0 upgrade for free, and it does not count towards the maximum number of Tech upgrades you can have. It can be upgraded to an advanced cortex connector and have cortex expansions installed as normal.

You always have Affinity to OS in addition to the Affinity you choose during character creation.

TAIL REFLEX

When a Corvo feels pain or a sudden panic attack, their tail snaps as a reflex. It is the fastest reflex in all known species and Corvo hackers put it to good use by tying their tails to the rig's cable connecting to their cortex.

Activated. Connect a device tied to your tail to your cortex connector (The device cannot be used during this action).

Instant. If that device is about to receive ACS damage due to a Hacking action, it will be disconnected instead.

BACKGROUND TRAITS

Choose one of the following background traits:

SPACEBORN

You are Tian born and raised. You move in 0-G like a fish in water.

If your Affinity is Space, receive one advantage when you perform an action using EVA.

PLANETSIDE CORVO

You have lived most of your life in Quanjie or another planetside Corvo colony.

You cannot pick the Space Affinity. If you have a technical profession, you gain one advantage when you use it.

Profession examples: bio, civil, electrical, building, chemical or electronic technician/engineer, architect, etc.

ATTRIBUTE LIMITS

The evolution of the Corvo gave them a very utilitarian metabolism, allowing them to adapt to life in space and to survive with minimal resources. For this reason, they are not very strong or physically capable.

Your Constitution and Agility Attributes are limited to a maximum value of 2 each.

IZ'KAL

The Iz'kal are a very social, very proud, and very efficient species. They are the descendants of an ancient species of aquatic mammals that have adapted to life on solid ground.

HYPERLINK OR VOIDWALKER

Choose one of the two abilities during character creation. During character progression, if you have hyperlink you can change it for voidwalker, but not the other way round.

HYPERLINK

The Iz'kal have developed biological changes in their brains that allow them to communicate with each other and blend into a single mind.

Action. Send a simple thought or feeling to any Iz'kal listening up to 5 kilometres (~3 mi) away. Iz'kal can choose to have this "channel" open or close. Things that can be told

this way: “I am in danger”, “Hurry”, “We are under attack”, “escape”, “sadness”, “happiness”, “aliens”, etc. Iz’kal listening to each other on this “channel” can also relay their location to each other.

Activated. Join a hyperlink group up to 30 metres (~100 ft) away. You can join any number of hyperlinks simultaneously. After joining a hyperlink, you’ll remain in it until you disengage, leave the range, or are expelled.

While in hyperlink, the characters engaged in hyperlink must democratically vote on every decision and then follow it. The members of a hyperlink can reject another character trying to join it. Characters can always be expelled from a hyperlink after a democratic vote or after not following a democratic decision.

While in hyperlink you can share thoughts and feelings with each other freely in a way that cannot be felt by other characters (like an enhanced telepathy).

When you spend experience to increase a Skill in which another member of your hyperlink has a higher value, it’ll cost you one experience point less than usual. If there are more than one Iz’kal characters among the players, they can apply this during character creation.

Additionally, you can obtain Bond with other Iz’kal who also have hyperlink.

Bond

An Iz’kal bond is the most emotionally invested state in which two creatures can find themselves; they’ll share their thoughts, feelings, and to most will seem as two separate bodies of the same person.

5 points. It must be acquired simultaneously by two Iz’kal. You can acquire it with several other Iz’kal.

While in hyperlink you’ll know all of each other’s thoughts, feelings, and reasonings. If both of you are player characters, you can ask each other what your characters think about something and you must answer truthfully — and you’ll have to act accordingly. Even outside hyperlink you’ll still have a powerful sense of the other and can request to know the other character’s thoughts about a matter even if you are not joined in hyperlink once per session to represent you’d usually know how they would think.

Additionally, you can choose to confront actions that target any other member of the hyperlink with whom you have a Bond, even if the action did not affect you directly. You need to declare a valid countermeasure.

E.g. Athena and Helo are two Iz’kal who have formed a bond with each other. A merc shoots at Helo with a firearm. Helo is a hacker and lacks any physical prowess; luckily for him Athena is a good shot, so she confronts the merc by shooting at him. Helo could also try to confront him by dodging the attack, but that would mean losing his turn - he chooses to trust Athena and does not confront the action himself.

VOIDWALKERS

Some Iz’kal suffer traumatic events so unbearable that they can no longer share their minds with their kin. They refuse to engage in hyperlink out of the fear of imposing their own personal suffering onto others. An Iz’kal that does not engage in hyperlink eventually succumbs to an irreversible transformation that isolates their mind and prevents them from entering a hyperlink ever again. Their body undergoes reconstruction on a genetic level, affecting their hormonal flow and synaptic processes.

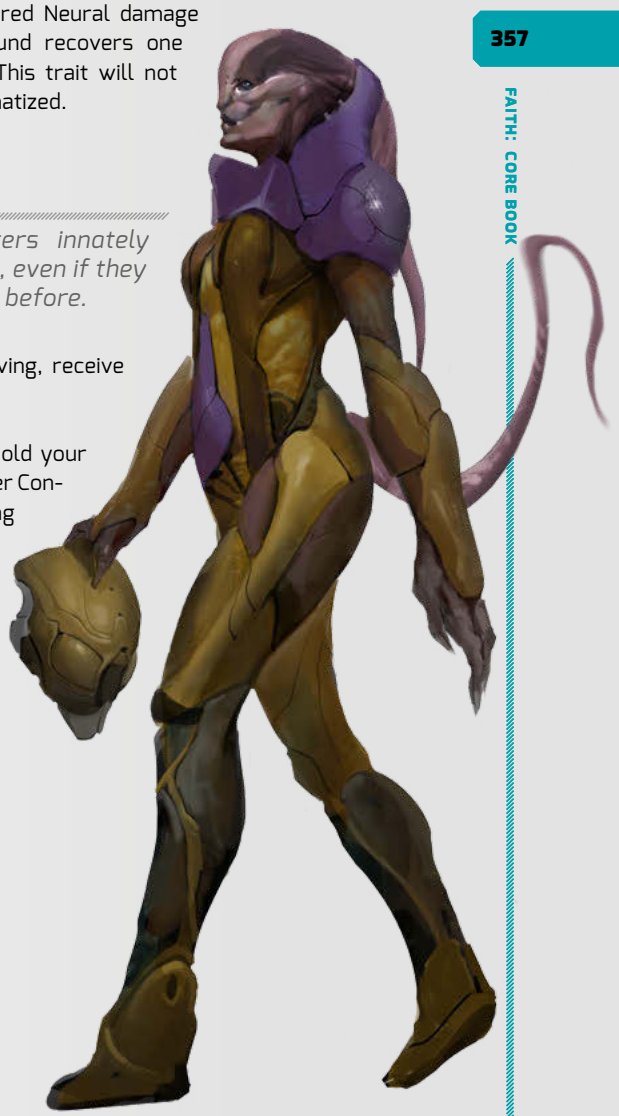
During each maintenance phase, you can discard up to as much neural damage as your Faith, even if you took neural damage during that initiative round - this replaces the rule that says that during the maintenance phase, every character who has not suffered Neural damage during this Initiative Round recovers one point of Neural health. This trait will not work while you are traumatized.

AQUATIC

All Iz’kal characters innately know how to swim, even if they have never done it before.

When swimming or diving, receive one advantage.

Additionally, you can hold your breath up to 15 minutes per Constitution point while acting normally or twice as long if you stay still.



ADAPTABLE GENOME

Throughout history the Iz'kal have genetically modified themselves to the point where their original genome has been lost.

You can have one more Bio Upgrade than your Constitution. Additionally, Bio Upgrades cost you 2 experience points less.

BACKGROUND TRAITS

Choose one of the following background traits:

METROPOLITAN IZ'KAL

You are adapted to life in the city.

Choose one Iz'kal planet. You have been genetically altered to fit perfectly in it. You gain one advantage towards your social interactions with natives of that planet.

BATIL (CRYSTAL IZ'KAL)

You have been genetically modified for space activity.

If your Affinity is Space; receive one advantage when you perform an action using EVA.

DHAHAB (GOLDEN IZ'KAL)

You have been genetically modified for life on desert planets.

If your Affinity is Wilderness, receive one advantage when you perform an action using Survival, Athletic, and Cunning while you are in a desert of any kind. You also receive one advantage to fight back the effects of starvation and dehydration.

FADI (SILVER IZ'KAL)

You have been genetically modified for life in extremely cold environments.

If your Affinity is Wilderness, receive one advantage when you perform an action using Survival, Athletic and Cunning while you are in a extremely cold environment of any kind, including the vacuum of space.

IZ'KAL'ASUD (DARK IZ'KAL)

You have been genetically modified for life on planets with strange atmospheres, usually dark or smoky.

You do not receive disadvantages for acting in the dark, unless it is pitch black, in which case it won't affect you as much as everyone else (i.e. you might suffer one disadvantage while everyone else suffers two).

SHAJARA (TREE IZ'KAL)

You have been genetically modified for life on planets with high gravity.

When you draw back to 7 cards at the beginning of a scene, you can discard up to two cards from your hand and draw the same number.

ATTRIBUTE LIMITS

Iz'kal are first and foremost social beings, and they are not as technologically advanced as Corvo. Additionally, as a species that originated from the water, their bodies are not built for land life.

Your Link and Constitution Attributes are limited to a maximum value of 2 each.

HUMAN

Humans are remarkably adaptable. Although not as powerful as the Iz'kal or the Corvo, many Humans are highly valued workers and mercenaries and their endurance is unrivaled.

RESOURCEFUL

If Humans have one defining characteristic, it is their ability to find a way out of each and every situation.

At the beginning of a scene, you draw up to 8 cards.

ENDURANCE

Of all the civilized species none have more endurance than Humans; only they can train to run for longer than most quadrupeds.

You receive one advantage to all Athletic actions.

BACKGROUND TRAITS

Choose one of the following background traits:

WASTER

You come from the dog-eat-dog of wasteland survivalists.

Receive one advantage when using Survival.

SPACER

You come from a military culture of mercenaries and soldiers onboard Corvo ships.

Pay for one Ballistic or CQC Talent during character creation. It will not count towards the limit of Talents you can have for that Skill.

URBANITE

You come from a Corvo modernised settlement on Earth where you have grown to become a breeder.

You gain the Beauty Gene upgrade for free, and it does not count towards the maximum of Bio upgrades you can have.

HUMAN TAX IN THE CORVOSPHERE

The Corvo say they tax Humans so they can pay back their training and their trip from Earth.

While in the Corvosphere, you are considered to have -1 to their Profession when calculating your Lifestyle, but you receive a 20% discount when purchasing weapons and suits.

ATTRIBUTE LIMITS

Although they are one of the best physically suited intelligent species of the Universe, their societies were not able to develop as fully as some of the other species.

Your Link and Mind Attributes are limited to a maximum value of 2 each.

RAAG

The Raag are a primitive species, very tough and aggressive. They are mammals that are well adapted to life in cold weather and they form tight-knit clans to survive the constant menace of conquest or extinction.

OLD BONES

Raag have a very primitive and tough bone structure.

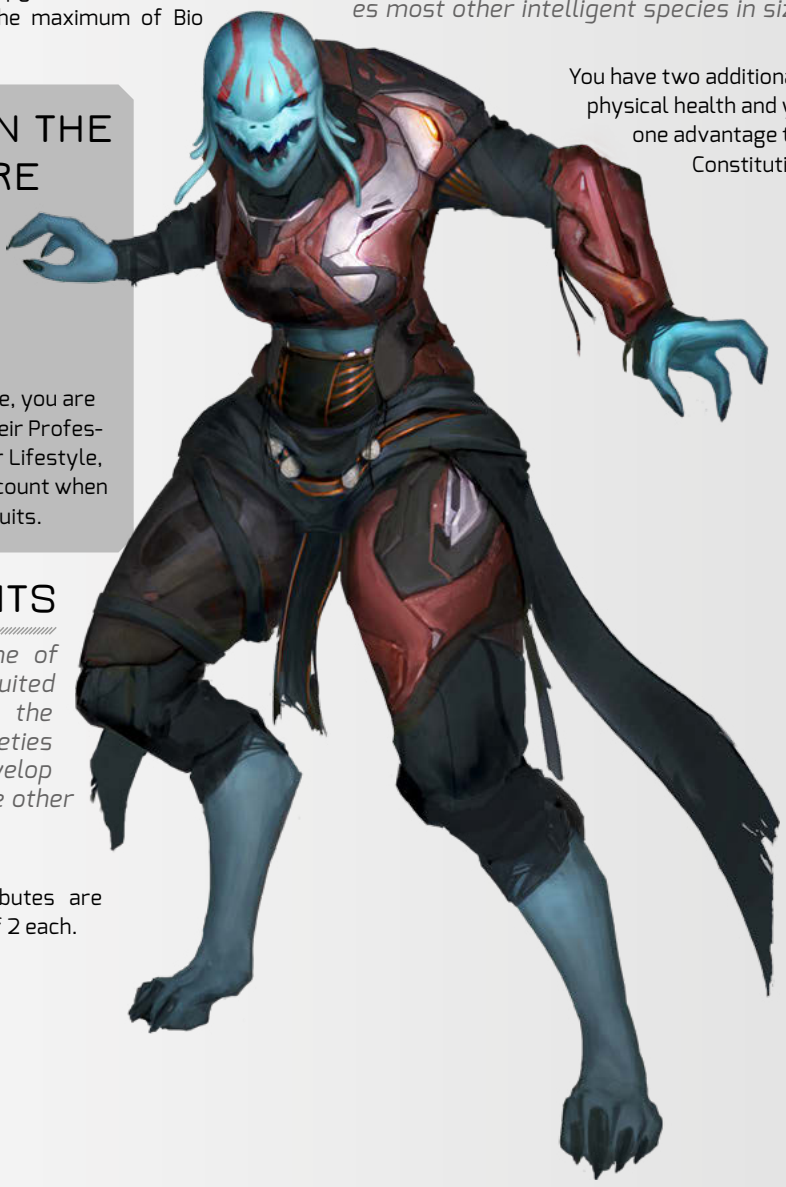
You can ignore the modifiers of up to two physical damage counters.

Additionally, you can predict when any type of planetary storm is coming.

TITANS

With an impressive build, this species surpasses most other intelligent species in size.

You have two additional points of physical health and you receive one advantage towards all Constitution actions.



BACKGROUND TRAITS

Choose one of the following background traits:

WARRIOR CASTE

Through your body runs the blood of the first gladiators. You are a natural killer, born to fight.

You ignore all physical damage penalties.

"WARM BLOOD"

You have an innate understanding of the world around you that surpasses that of your brethren. Smaller and more crafty than other Raag, you are driven by an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and adventure that keeps you on the move.

You lose the Constitution advantage granted by your Titan trait, and you gain 9 experience points. Additionally, you remove either your Dexterity or Link limit.

LABOURER

You are hardworking and in touch with reality. While the warrior caste plays their war games and the warm bloods run around, meddling with things better left alone, you build useful tools, grow food, and pass your knowledge to future generations.

You gain 20 experience points.

ATTRIBUTE LIMITS

What the Raag have in strength, they lack in finesse, and their brains have a hard time wrapping around the idea of virtual realities.

Your Dexterity and Link Attributes are limited to a maximum value of 2 each.

SPECIAL TRAITS

OUTLIER

You have lived outside the realm of normal for a member of your species; maybe your family gave you an unorthodox education, or maybe you are a self-learner in things that no-one else around has any interest in, or maybe it's a genetic thing and you are just different from birth.

In case you have a very specific concept for a character that does not fit with the usual limitations of your species, this can be chosen by any species as the Background trait with the GM's consent. You'll need the GM's approval to choose this background trait as it breaks the differentiations between species and it directly ties to your backstory.

Remove the limitation over either of your limited Attributes and gain 3 experience points. Then, limit a different Attribute other than Faith. You can lower the limit of an already limited Attribute down to 1.

RAVAGER INFILTRATOR

If the GM decides it would be interesting for the story one or more characters can be ravager infiltrators.

Infiltrators are ravager that are identical to the species from which they were created, and they can not be identified by any kind of test. However, instead of being born from a mother or an egg of their species, they have come out of the womb-tank of a ravager queen, and they have been trained by Alterants as spies.

The fact that the character is actually a ravager should only be known by the GM; the other players only need to know if the GM determines so. The reason why the ravager queen created an Infiltrator should be discussed with the GM and be a key part of the character's story. A ravager queen never does something without a clear plan or purpose, so the Infiltrator must be part of an important mission.

If the bioscience of the civilized species was advanced enough, and they knew where to search they could find in the DNA of an infiltrator the most wonderful and subtle of all ravager creations. Infiltrators have a very special characteristic: All of their memories are stored, encrypted and hidden as transposons and junk DNA. An alterant can develop a single infiltrator cell into its entire life, just like it would develop a photographic film.

Wherever there are infiltrators there are also tiny, inconspicuous insects that look just like native insects with one job and one job only: To periodically collect part of the DNA of an infiltrator and give it to another ravager agent, who will take it to their Queen. Thus, an infiltrator does not need to know it is one to do its part. And the Ravager are developing a way to turn regular people into infiltrators without anybody noticing...

UPGRADES

Upgrades are biological and cybernetic modifications that a character can get during the game. They enhance a character's ability to perform certain tasks, or they can give characters extra abilities altogether.

The most respected clinics have wide catalogues of Upgrades readily available for those who can afford body modification. However, there are many other places all around the Universe where shady doctors and self-taught technicians install Upgrades of their own making. Some characters are able to build their own Upgrades to improve their capabilities, and many skilled technicians and doctors will create the most impressive modifications.

Each Upgrade can only be obtained once. The number of Upgrades of each type that a character can have is limited by his Attributes. When a character gets a new Upgrade, he can replace one of his previous Upgrades of the same type or occupy a new Upgrade slot — assuming he has not reached the maximum number of Upgrades of that type.

BIO UPGRADES

The Bio Upgrades are mutations and organic body modifications integrated into the character's organism.

BEAUTY GENE

You have a remarkable charisma and beauty for your species' standards. Additionally, you have been genetically modified to enjoy and give physical pleasure: your erogenous zones are enhanced, you excrete powerful pheromones that stimulate those around you, and your metabolism is extremely clean - perspiration, defecation, and urination are minimal and odourless.

9 points. You gain an advantage towards social interactions when dealing with people who could be sexually attracted to your gender and species; but you'll suffer a disadvantage against those who, for personal or moral reasons, might despise such modifications.

CHAMELEONIC BRAIN

Your brain is extremely malleable, you are able to learn and forget things that for most are rooted as part of themselves.

12 points. Action. Discard a card of value 10 or more to change your current Affinity to another suit.

ECHOLOCATION

You can emit ultrasounds to get an accurate picture of your environment from the echoes. Your ears are highly sensitive to ultrasounds.

9 points. You gain an advantage for Searching actions of things or people around you, and you never suffer any disadvantages for being in the dark.

EIDETIC MEMORY

You have the capacity to vividly recall your memories without inaccuracies.

12 points. You always remember everything you have paid attention to. You might ask the GM for reminders of any information previously given to you.

Additionally, damage does not reduce your Skills during actions using Mind or Link.

ENDOCRINE CONTROL

Your body is a temple and you choose how to administer your own hormone production and secretion. You can cheat your body away from pain by telling it not to feel it.

12 points. Every time you receive any amount of physical damage from another character or a TSE, draw a card.

Additionally, ignore the Skill penalties of as many physical damage as your Constitution.

EXPANDED MIND

Apparently doctors discovered a way to expand the mind that is faster and more reliable than reading books.

6 points. You have 2 additional points of neural health.

FEATURE CHANGE

One of the most aggressive modifications available, it spearheads our understanding of genetics and biology. It was developed by a plastic surgery lab with the motto: "Always a modern look". Now, it is mostly used by criminals.

12 points. This upgrade cannot be obtained in the State.

Activated. You can restructure your facial and muscular features to resemble those of any character of your own species if you have previously ingested a sample of their DNA. Your voice, eyes, and other distinguishable features will be completely identical to the original. You can also mimic their fingerprints (all species have some form of identifiable, unique fingerprints) if you obtain a sample of them. However, you cannot change your general size or weight. The changing process takes 10 minutes during which you will look completely disfigured.

HARDENED MATRIX

Your bones have been modified to withstand extreme forces.

9 points. Reduces the final physical damage you take from decisive and critical attacks by one. Additionally, you will not take any damage when falling from heights of up to 10 metres (~32 ft).

HETEROTHERMY

You have control over your circulatory system and you can slow down your metabolism.

6 points. Your body can tolerate temperatures ranging from -20 to 60 ºC and your heat signature blends with the environment and is indistinguishable from it.

Additionally, you can hibernate for periods of time of up to as many weeks as your Constitution. During hibernation, you cannot do anything, but you won't need to eat or drink and you'll only need half the regular amount of oxygen. Suffering damage or other extreme sensorial disturbances can wake you up.

INSOMNIAC

Rich Corvo families get this as a present for their children when they have to take their exams for the elite universities.

9 points. You cannot sleep and you do not suffer any consequences from the lack of sleep.

MENTAL ENHANCER

Balance is the most important thing for your health. Ask your doctor.

3 points. You can have one Tech Upgrade over your limit. If this upgrade is removed, your associated installed Tech Upgrade and the experience points it cost are lost.

NANO HOOKS

Climbing competitions almost became outdated when this came into the market. Now, climbing gyms include wind machines, slippery surfaces, and traps. They actually made the sport more deadly.

6 points. You can attach yourself to a wall or ceiling with your bare feet or hands. Your movement while suspended is reduced to half and you can only support as much additional weight as your own body weight.

NEURAL RECOVERY

Your mind is capable of sustaining severe trauma and recover from it.

6 points. During the maintenance phase you will recover Neural health even if you received Neural damage that round.

PHAGOCYTER

You can eat anything organic, easily digesting bones, tendons, etc. You cannot be affected by diseases of any kind and ignore the most pernicious effects of any drug or poison.

9 points. You gain one less Toxicity than usual from any source that gives you Toxicity.

POWERED REFLEXES

One of the favourites among special forces, it truly makes a difference when going through the fatal funnel.

9 points. Instant. When you Rush, take one unpreventable neural damage to play the card from the top of your deck.

SUPER ELASTICITY

You are unusually flexible for your species. You can perform incredible contortions that would put professional escape artists to shame, and you can compress your body to pass through narrow places, even dislocating and relocating your bones at will.

6 points. You have two advantages when using grappling to free yourself from another character, and for actions related to elasticity such as contortionism, escaping from restraints, fitting through narrow places, etc.

TISSUE REGENERATION

Masochists loved this upgrade so much that now you are required to pass a psychological test before you can purchase it.

15 points. You will discard one physical damage counter every hour, for as long as you are not bleeding out. Additionally, the you can grow back one entire severed limb or organ in one month.

UNGODLY RESILIENCE

You are tough as a rhinoceros.

6 points. You have 2 additional points of physical health.

TECH UPGRADES

The Tech Upgrades are pieces of gear that can be attached to the body of the character.

ADAPTABLE BREATHER

You can breathe in any environment that contains oxygen even under liquids. You can ignore the effects of any strange substances in the air, from toxins to carcinogenic smoke.

6 points. You do not gain Toxicity from gases (e.g. grenades), but you will still gain it from other sources.

ATOMIC BALANCE

You are always balanced, allowing you to ignore the consequences of disorientation from falls, 0-G movements, explosions, waves, etc. You have a strong sense of direction and can always find your way back.

6 points. You ignore the Skill penalties of as much neural damage as your Mind. Additionally, you gain an advantage when reading maps and retracing a path.

BIO SENSOR

You have an array of heat and noise sensors that constantly scan your surroundings.

9 points. You cannot be caught by surprise by characters in a 10 metre (~32 ft) radius. It can be programmed to wake you in the circumstances of your choosing (e.g. someone entering that range).

BIONIC ARM

You have replaced one of your arms with a bionic limb. It looks organic but it can transform into another device.

6 points. Choose between a very easy to hide weapon, a CQC weapon, or any other small piece of gear as determined by the GM. The bionic arm will be able to transform into the chosen piece of gear. It can later be changed by a technician. While hidden, the gear will have the ghost trait.

Activated. Transform the arm into the gear installed, or vice versa.

BIONIC SPY GLASS

You have a digital eye that can perform a x50 zoom, record pictures or video, and switch between normal and infrared sight.

9 points. Activated. Use to extend the Standard Distance range of a weapon to 300 metres (~330 yd).

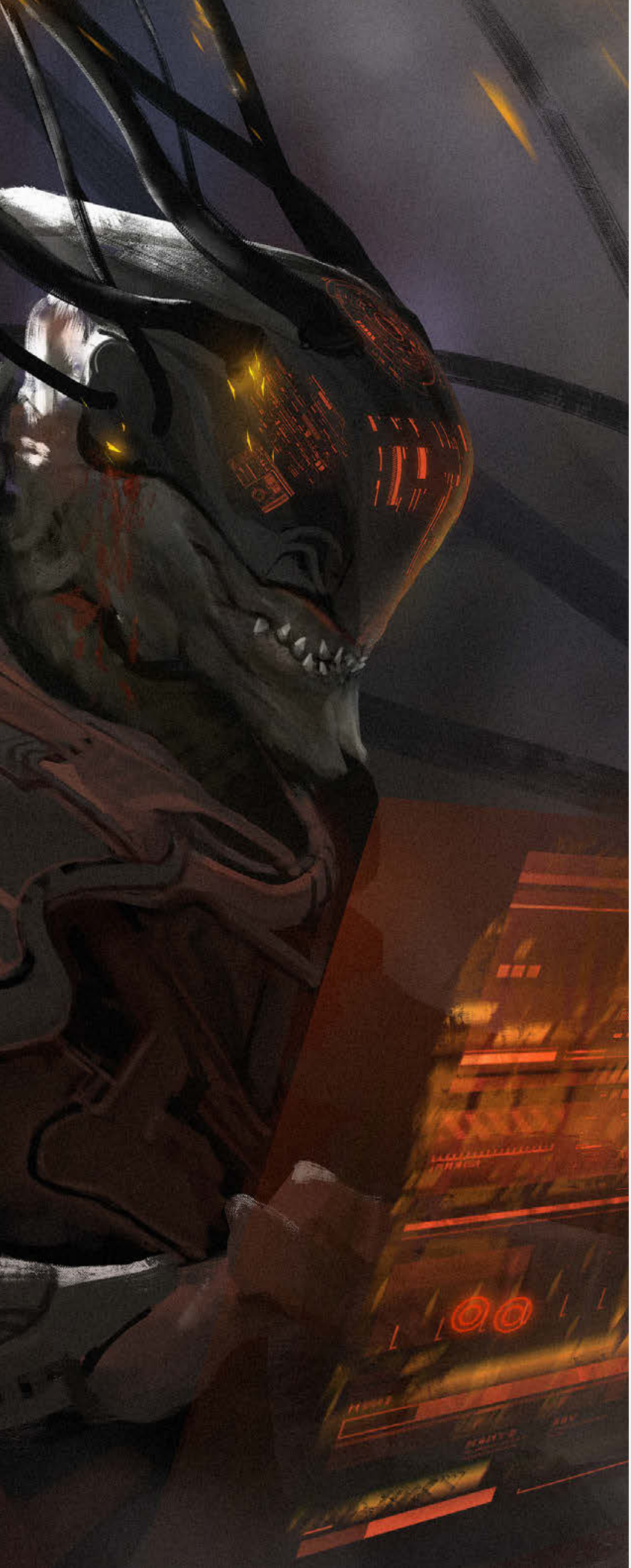
CORTEX CONNECTOR 1.0

A Cortex Connector is a computer directly connected to your brain, installed inside the skull cavity. With a cortex connector you have direct access to a network-connected computer controlled by thought. You can send messages just by thinking about it, open websites and run programs by simply desiring it. Video feeds and information is directly fed to your brain and you see it as holographic screens around you. You also have a hard drive that can store small amounts of information (consider it has as much space as a consumer smartphone). As in any computer, you can install different programs, games, lifemods, etc.

3 points. You can connect and use one cortex connected piece of gear.

You can use it to hack, but only other devices connected to the internet (i.e. It cannot be used to hack non-rig gear, as those are not connected to the internet, and they are only accessible to hackers through LinkWave), and it cannot perform DoS actions.

Additionally, it allows you to understand any language you hear; it will also translate written languages into your own language (you will always see everything written in your own language: signals, logos, books, etc). This doesn't impart the ability to imitate speech that your anatomy is not equipped for; other than that, you can freely communicate with any sentient being who has a spoken language.



CORTEX CONNECTOR 2.0

6 points (or 3 points if you replace an existing Cortex Connector 1.0 with this upgrade). It works just like a Cortex Connector upgrade, and additionally you can have as many cortex expansions installed as your Link. Cortex expansions do not count as Tech Upgrades, but you can obtain and install them in the same manner:

DATA STORAGE

6 points. This expansion will allow you to store and access any information that was available to you the last time you had access to the internet as if you were still connected. The information will not update until you reconnect to the internet.

DOUBLE JACK

3 points. You can connect an additional that require to be Cortex Connected. This cortex expansion can be chosen more than once.

DRONE STATION

9 points. You can perform the action Issue command (Technical) as an activated effect.

IMPLANTED PROCESSOR

6 points. Replaces the internal computer of the Cortex Connector with a Rig of your choice. When installing this Upgrade, choose between any of your readily available rigs to be the Implanted Processor. The rig won't show externally.

Additionally, the implanted processor allows you to instantly read and understand all data found online or downloaded to the rig, and to perform calculations as fast as any other computer. You can send and receive radio signals with your brain up to a thousand kilometres away.

MED-INJECTOR

6 points. It can be loaded with any injectables that you have. Designate a friendly character to control the injector. While you are within 50 meters, he can use it to administer any of the loaded injectables as an instant (he must still confront a TSE if the injectable requires it).

NEURAL LIBRARY

9 points. Activated. If you spend one hour connected to the net and resting, you can download a neural map for a given Skill. Choose a Skill to have its value become 2/4/6 depending on your Mind until you stop this ability or become traumatised or bleeding out. No talents are allowed for skills gained this way. You cannot spend experience on a Skill that is being affected by this.

ROBOT EXPANSION

6 points. Increases the combined level of the robots you can control by one point.

EDITED MEMORIES

You had some memories removed by cognitive neuroscience. There is an entire period of your life you do not remember. This is a routine process performed on freelancers, people who agree to a job they cannot know about afterwards for (usually) a significant sum of money.

0 points. You can only choose this if the GM gives her approval. She will create a reason for your character to have his memories edited and what happened in that period of time. This should eventually come back to your campaign as secondary effects of your mission (E.g. having a nemesis looking for you, being prosecuted by a cult, etc).

You are aware that your memories have been edited, but you don't remember them at all (even if you have Eidetic Memory). If you eventually find out about what happened, the GM can allow you to lose this upgrade. Discovering what happen is a breach of contract and might upset those who hired you, you put your life at risk doing so.

Gain 20 experience points (The GM may grant you additional experience if she deems it appropriate for the difficulty of the mission given to you).

GUNSLINGER

Using two weapons simultaneously was something stupid to do until they developed brain enhancers, installing chips in your cortex and nanocables in your nervous system. Now you can look like a movie hero without getting killed.

9 points. You can wield one very easy-to-hide weapon in each hand. You can shoot both weapons simultaneously as a single action. When you do, chose one of the following:

Deal damage and apply effects with both weapons.

Gain one advantage towards the action, but one of the weapons does not deal damage.

Shoot at a different target with each weapon.

NANOSKIN

Your skin is made of an extremely resistant and refractive synthetic polymer that responds to its surroundings.

12 points. You can be exposed to a vacuum and pressures of up to 10 atmospheres (atm) without suffering negative effects.

Additionally, your skin can mimic your surroundings, making you hard to see. You gain one advantage towards hiding actions when your opponents are trying to detect you by sight, and any action targeting you that requires line of sight will suffer one disadvantage if performed from 20m away or more. This effect doesn't work if you are wearing clothes.

OPTICAL DISRUPTOR

You appear as a blurry form to all detection devices (cameras, scopes, recognition systems, infrared visors, etc). The only way of recognising you with cameras or sensors is employing powerful processors to analyse the recorded data.

6 points. You cannot be aimed at by characters that are seeing you through electronic devices (i.e. if they are using a suit, a cortex connected weapon, or some other electronic device to see you).

SHIELDED SKULL

Keep all those websurfers away from your compromising pictures.

12 points. All of your cortex connected devices' Firewalls receive one advantage and gain ghost.

SONIC AMPLIFIER

You hear everything, everywhere, everytime.

6 points. Activated. You gain an advantage towards Searching actions that rely on hearing.

You can hear everything from the subsonic to ultrasonic range by focusing on a small area within 50 metres (~55 yd)), even the smallest pin drop. This is not echolocation, and the character must decide on the Hz range when focusing. This also has an integrated monitor, and will automatically lower damaging noises to safe levels.

VIGOUR ENHANCER

Your body is prone to accepting mutations.

3 points. You can have one Bio Upgrade over your limit. If this upgrade is removed, your associated installed Bio Upgrade and the experience points it costs will be lost.

TALENTS

The Talents represent each character's specialities, things they have spent enough hours doing they have become second nature.

BALLISTIC

AN EYE FOR WEAKNESS

Wait until they are distracted.

9 points. If you perform a Ballistic action against a Spent target, you gain one advantage.

COUNTERSTRIKE

Keep them coming.

12 points. Your Attribute determines the number of cards you can play from your hand per action — not per round — when using Ballistic, but you will suffer one disadvantage at every Ballistic action after the first one.

EXPERTISE

It is not that you have a favourite weapon. It's that you are great with it.

12 points. Expertise may be chosen several times, each time selecting a different type of weapon.

Choose one class of weapon or choose vehicle weapons.

Instant. Once per action — if you are using a weapon with which you have an expertise — when you play a card change its value to your Skill's value (it won't change its suit and it will still trigger card drawing mechanics).

MISSILE EXPERT

Hitting another ship a thousand kilometres away is sometimes just a matter of will.

3 points. You can shoot guided missiles to untagged targets. They will automatically fail unless the target becomes tagged before the missile reaches it.

PRECISE

When hitting the target is not enough.

6 points. Applies to Ballistic weapons only. You achieve a decisive success when your action value is 4 points over your opponent's, and you achieve a critical success when your action value is 8 points over your opponent's.

SPEC OPS

You are trained to work as a team. Your muscle memory turns you into a multi-body killing machine.

15 points. When an allied Spec Ops character ends his turn, if you are Ready, you can take your turn right after him, skipping Initiative Order to perform a Ballistic action.

Additionally, when you act against a character targeted by an ally during the current Round, gain one advantage towards your action.

STEADY HAND

Breath in, breath out, slowly squeeze the trigger. Let the shot surprise you.

9 points. You can stack the effects of aiming up to thrice.

CLOSE QUARTERS COMBAT

ALWAYS FORWARD

If both of you get hit, your opponent will be on the losing end.

9 points. You can only apply it when using heavy weapons.

Instant. If you fail a CQC action against a CQC or Ballistic action, and your opponent achieved a regular success, you can change his success into a decisive; or if your opponent achieved a decisive success, you can change his success into a critical. If you do, your CQC is also considered successful with a regular success.

AN EYE FOR WEAKNESS

Wait until they are distracted.

9 points. When you perform a CQC action against a Spent target, you gain one advantage.

CHARGE

"For the Emperor!"

"Wrong game, dude."

9 points. If after a running action you are within CQC reach of an opponent, you can immediately perform a CQC action and if successful you will deal one additional base damage.

DEATH BLOW

No mercy.

6 points. Activated. Your next hitting action ignores one point of armour.

DOUBLE EDGED

Success is not without risks.

6 points. Activated. The winner of this confrontation will have his level of success increased by one (from regular to decisive, or from decisive to critical).

EXPERTISE

It is not that you have a favourite weapon. It is that you are great with it.

12 points. Expertise may be chosen several times, each time selecting a different type of weapon.

Choose one class of close quarters weapon.

Instant. Once per action if you are using a weapon with which you have expertise, when you play a card change it's value to your Skill's value (it won't change it's suit and it will still trigger card drawing mechanics).

FEINT

The unseen blade is the deadliest.

6 points. Activated. After a successful hitting action, you can chose not to deal damage to your target to gain one advantage (increased by the degree of success) towards your next CQC action against that character.

MARTIAL ARTIST

A warrior's body must be a weapon.

6 points. While you are unarmed, you can use agility to perform grappling actions and your hitting actions gain one advantage.

PRECISE

When hitting the target is not enough.

6 points. Applies to CQC weapons only. You achieve a decisive success when your action value is 4 points over your opponents, and you achieve a critical success when your action value is 8 points over your opponents.

SPEC OPS

You are trained to work as a team. Your muscle memory turns you into a multi-body killing machine.

15 points. When an allied Spec Ops character ends his turn, if you are Ready, you can take your turn right after him, skipping Initiative Order to perform a CQC action.

Additionally, when you act against a character targeted by an ally during the current Round, gain one advantage towards your action.

HACKING

ABSTRACTION

You can push your mind beyond exhaustion when it comes to figuring out what your computer is asking of you. The code speaks to you in subtle ways.

15 points. Instant. While performing a Hacking action, you can take one unpreventable neural damage to change the value of a card you just played for the value of your Hacking Skill.

COLD BLOODED HACKER

You actually work better under stressful circumstances, and a gun aimed to your head is a proven incentive.

9 points. When performing a hacking counteraction against a Ballistic action that targets you, gain one advantage.

INFESTOR

Why work twice when you can kill two birds with one hack?

9 points. Whenever you infest a system, you can both install a virus and place a backdoor.

SLOW-COOKED HACK

When you are given the time to properly work and develop a hit, you deliver outstanding results and you can crack some of the most complicated systems with just a little patience.

6 points. When performing a Hacking action against a Firewall, take an hour to do so to gain one advantage, or a day to gain two advantages.

SPIKER

You add a little special sauce to your hacks.

9 points. When you perform a DoS action, you deal one additional base ACS damage.

INITIATIVE

BODYGUARD

You have trained to serve and protect.

9 points. Instant. If you are aware of an action performed against another character up to 2.5 meters away, you can choose to become the target of the action instead.

EVERY SECOND MATTERS

He who laughs first can also laugh best if he is the only one left.

6 points. When you rush, add 3 points to the value of the card you played.

LAST WORD

There is no stopping you.

12 points. If you were to become spent from performing a counteraction, instead become the last character to act during this Initiative Round.

NIMBLE

You know how to fall and how to take a hit.

9 points. When you fail a Dodging action and your opponent achieves a regular success, if you were to take damage, reduce the final damage you receive by two.

SWIFT MOVE

You know that positioning and cover are vital in a fight, and you are good at getting the best out of them.

6 points. Instant. If you are up to 2.5 meters away from cover when you are the target of a ranged attack, move behind that cover before resolving the attack to gain it's protection.

UNTOUCHABLE

Be like water.

9 points. Your Attribute determines the number of cards you can play from your hand per action -not per round- when dodging.

ATHLETIC/EVA

ACCELERATION RESISTANCE

This ain't your first space rodeo.

6 points. You can confront Stress TSEs with a passive action.

FAST

Your feet are as fast as lightning.

9 points. When you perform a running action, add your Athletic in metres to the distance you move.

FAST RECOVERY

Being tired is just an state of mind.

12 points. If at the beginning of the maintenance phase you have 3 or less cards in your hand, draw a card.

FREERUNNER

You are more comfortable running than sitting down. If you could sleep while doing so, you would.

9 points. Your movement actions are passive. When you perform a passive movement action, you cannot perform a movement action as your active action.

POWERFUL

You hit like a bull.

6 points. When you perform an attack using Constitution, you deal 1 additional final damage.

STRONG

You have a wide back and strong legs, a little bit of luggage cannot slow you down.

3 points. You do not suffer Agility disadvantages from the gear you carry.

PILOTING

ORGANISER

You Organise your Cargo Diligently. It's just a matter of know-how and creativity.

9 points. While you are the pilot of a vehicle, it gains one free Detachable Container module that does not count towards the limit.

PUSH IT FURTHER

If the speed of light is the limit, you'll be the one testing this limit.

6 points. While you are the pilot of a vehicle, it gains +1 Acceleration.

RADAR MASTER

While reading your radar, you understand the subtle differences between the movement of asteroids and a spacecraft pretending to be one among them.

6 points. Gain one advantage towards Radar actions with a vehicle.

SMOOTH PILOTING

Your crew does not even realise when you have taken off.

9 points. Instant. Discard a card without triggering any card drawing mechanics to reduce by one the cards played by the Acceleration TSE. Limited to once per round.

STEALTH MASTER

They are not ungraceful heavy pieces of metal when you pilot them.

6 points. Gain one advantage towards Stealth actions with a vehicle.

TUNER

You are good at knowing what your vehicle can do and how to change it to get the best out of its design possibilities.

12 points. While you are the pilot of a vehicle, it gains any one free Command module that does not count towards the limit.

SURVIVAL

ADAPTATION

You are good at adapting to new situations and getting the best out of tricky situations. When life gives you lemons, you make lemonade.

6 points. Action. Discard up to 4 cards from your hand and then draw one less card than the number you discarded.

ALERT

You sleep with one eye open and the drop of a pin puts you on full alert.

9 points. Gain one advantage towards Searching actions to find characters.

ANIMAL KEN

You can read the feelings and moods of animals. You have a special connection with most animals. They see something in you; maybe it is kindness, or maybe they feel they ought to respect you as if you were an alpha. Whatever

the reason, animals make more sense to you than other people.

6 points. Gain one advantage towards interactions with animals, feral or tamed. You can ask the GM for additional information about the animals you find: their mood, strengths, and weaknesses.

CRAFTY

Things just make sense to you. You can put things to use that others would consider rubbish. Where others see a jungle, you see a home depot. Where others see undergrowth, you see the perfect materials for a refuge.

3 points. Gain one advantage towards crafting simple tools, refuges, or other survival items. You are also more likely to find adequate materials, or make up alternatives for those missing on the spot.

LIGHT FEET

You can sneak up on people easily and know how to appear unimportant — turning yourself into almost another element on the background comes naturally to you. You feel comfortable surrounded by darkness and moving quietly like a mouse.

6 points. You gain one advantage towards Stealth actions for as long as your Armour value is no higher than 1.

NEVER GIVE UP

While being fully aware of the cost of pushing your body and mind to the limit, you are capable of doing so when it is needed. You have a motto: "Always forward".

3 points. Instant: When you fail at a Survival action, you can reduce your Physical or Neural health by one for a period of one month of in-game time. If you do, you achieve a critical success instead.

SAILOR

You find yourself at home when navigating the seas. You can read the stars to sail treacherous oceans, and you can navigate the currents to avoid standing yourself in ever changing rivers.

3 points. Gain one advantage towards the control of ships and swimming actions, also to sailing related actions, such as the control of ships, or finding directions or food while in a ship.

CUNNING

ACTOR

Pretending to be someone else is second nature to you. It does not matter the size of the shoes, you'll fit right in.

6 points. Gain one advantage when pretending to be someone else in a convincing manner and avoiding discovery.

CHARMER

You have a silver tongue, knowing which spots to press on people to get the best or the worst out of them. You play them like a puppeteer. Of course, what some people find charming, others find it of bad taste, so you have to know who your audience is and how to approach it.

6 points. Choose one: Non-voidwalker Iz'kal, populace Corvo, refined Corvo, Human, or Raag.

Gain one advantage towards social interactions with the type of character you have chosen, for as long as they can see and hear you.

INTIMIDATING PRESENCE

When you tell them that you'll hurt them, they know it's true. They see what you have planned for them in your eyes. They bend their will to yours.

6 points. If you are in a situation of being a threat to another character, you'll gain one advantage towards convincing him to do something. However, they will do so unwillingly. As soon as they feel they are out of your reach, they will stop obeying you and do what they can to escape from you. Later on, if they find a way to punish you, they might do so happily.

INVESTIGATOR

You have an eye for the detail. Small things that other people do not realise simply pop up to you like beacons in the dark.

6 points. Gain one advantage towards searching for clues, finding objects, realising something is out of place, discovering traps, etc.

JUDGE OF CHARACTER

To you, other people's feelings are written on their faces, voices, and gestures. You are the first to realise when something is unpleasant to someone; you also know what drives them. You can put yourself in their shoes and think and feel like they do.

9 points. Gain one advantage towards discovering the true intentions or motives behind someone's actions or words.

QUICK LEARNER

You get more out of your experiences than most, learning from your mistakes as well as the mistakes of others.

9 points. After finishing a game session, gain one experience point in addition to whatever number of experience points you gained granted by the GM (You'll still gain 1 experience point even if the GM did not grant any experience points that session).

SLEIGHT OF HAND

It's not a magic trick — it's an illusion.

3 points. Gain one advantage towards manipulation of small objects for the purpose of misdirection or concealment. This also helps if trying to steal something small without being detected.

MEDICAL

CALM PULSE

When a patient's life is on the line you forget about everything — the environment, your worries, your own self dissipate — and focus solely on the task at hand.

9 points. Instant. Suffer 2 unpreventable neural damage to ignore damage penalties while performing a Medical action.

DRUG EXPERT

Don't ask why I know this, but I do.

9 points. Your can perform drug handling actions as passive actions.

EMPATHY

When you see someone hurting, you find renewed energies within yourself to help them.

9 points. When you start a Medical action, draw two cards. If they are not used, discard them at the end of the action.

FIRST RESPONDER

You can take care of yourself.

3 points. After being the patient of a successful First Aid action, it can be you who spends the actions cleaning up the wound instead of the doctor; or, if you do it together, it will take half of the required rounds rounded down.

TECHNICAL

ENGINE MASTER

The rumbling of the engines is your mother tongue.

3 points. You gain one advantage when repairing something in the Engine system of a vehicle.

ENHANCED PROCESSING

There is always room for one more.

5 points. You can control 1 more robot than your Link.

UPGRADE BUILDER

Making people into cyborgs is actually simplifying the way they work.

3 points. Gain two advantages when creating a Tech Upgrade.

ROBOT WHISPERER

Robots are an extension of yourself.

6 points. When you perform an action against an NPC, for the remainder of the round all your robots receive one advantage when they act against the same NPC.

THE LANGUAGE OF MACHINES

You know what machines need to give you the best results.

9 points. Action. Use it on one of your robots, it will receive one advantage towards one action of your choice. Limited to once per robot per scene.

PROFESSION

ADOPTED SINGER

Your singing talents have reached the State, and the Iz'kal value and enjoy your work. If an Iz'kal knows who you are, they will welcome you to their majmoa (more so if you promise to sing to them), guide you, and help you out if they can, for as long as your request is reasonable as a fairly adored stranger.

3 points. Human only.

While in the State you will be granted usufruct rights as if you were a technocrat of the State. You still have to return everything to Idealab before leaving the State.

GHAZIWA PERFORMER

You are a respected performer, known even in the Corvosphere among certain artistic circles.

6 points. Iz'kal only.

Add +1 when calculating your Lifestyle in the Corvosphere.

INHERITANCE

You have received an inheritance from some family member, or even a donation, which translates into a property of high value (not liquid credits).

20 points. Inheritance may be chosen several times. Cannot be chosen in the State.

Obtaining this Talent must be approved by the GM, it will be the GM who determines what exactly it is you inherited. Its value varies depending on your Profession at the moment you purchase this Talent.

Profession 5-6: A very small spaceship, a small mansion in a non-central area, a normal house in a central area, a small business, or something else of similar value.

Profession 7-9: A small spaceship, a big mansion in a non-central area, a small mansion in a central area, a quite profitable small business, or something else of similar value.

MERCHANT'S SOUL

You can smell a good deal, and the idiot who is about to hand it out to you.

6 points. Gain one advantage towards commerce interactions related to your Profession. You are very likely to find the best deals and items that would be hard to find in your location if they relate to your Profession.

SECRET COINER

You are a member of the radical Secret Coin organization. Long live money!

6 points. Cannot be chosen in the State.

During character creation you double the credits gained from your Profession statistic. You may attempt a Profession action to buy any item available in the game related to your profession, even if the GM has ruled you don't have access to it. You still have to pay for the item.

STABILITY

Your profession earns you a stable income every month, even while you are away from your job — maybe you own part of a business, shares, you are getting royalties or any other reason that fits your Profession.

6 points. Stability may be chosen several times. Cannot be chosen in the State.

Stability I: Every month you gain 20% more credits than usual from your Lifestyle.

Stability II: Every month you gain 50% more credits than usual from your Lifestyle.

Stability III: Every month you gain 75% more credits than usual from your Lifestyle.

CONTACTS

"Oh, I know this guy"

9 points. You gain one advantage when using Declaring Story Details for introducing to the story a character related to your Profession.

KNOWLEDGEABLE

"Of course I know how this works"

9 points. You gain one advantage when using Declaring Story Details for claiming how something related to your profession works, or how it should behave.

RESOURCEFUL

"Of course I brought that with me, who do you think I am?"

6 points. You gain one advantage when using Declaring Story Details for declaring that you own or carry certain tools, documents, or other things related to your profession.

HOBBY

You are a total geek.

3 points. This Talent can be chosen several times, time selecting a different hobby.

When you choose this Talent, you must select one viable hobby. A hobby should be like a profession, but really focused (e.g. musician would be a Profession, whereas pianist would be a hobby; Engineer would be a Profession, and drone-builder would be a hobby), and it needs to be approved by the GM. Your hobbies do not need to be related to your Profession (e.g. you can be a Businessman, and choose religious studies or cocktail mixing as hobbies).

You can use a hobby to perform actions related to it using your Profession Skill, blend in with certain people, enter certain places, or earn some credits. You cannot Declare Story Details using a hobby.

GODLY GIFTS

The Gods of FAITH are fickle beings. However, it is not rare for them to pay attention to their most outstanding believers, who are the source of their power and their only way to mold the Universe to their own desires. Gods may grant powers to their believers if they like their behaviour, or they may withdraw their support if their believers betray their designs.

DIVINE ABILITIES

A call, a cry for help, a prove of faith, no one knows how it works — but at any time, anyone can feel his God empower him when his heart is true. Even those who never were gifted with powers.

The moment you follow a God you obtain its ability, you can use it at any time.

ERGONAUT ABILITY

Activated. Spend one Godly Favour to discard as much neural damage as your Faith, even neural damage from Toxicity or sustained effects currently active.

HEXIAN ABILITY

Activated. Spend one Godly favour to request the GM's advice about a choice you have to make or a course of action you should take. The GM should give you solid advice, even if that means revealing to you something you shouldn't be able to know (such as letting you know that you are being betrayed or deceived, or that there is danger ahead and what type) thanks to visions granted by Hexia.

KALIVAN ABILITY

Activated. Spend one Godly favour to discard any number of cards and then draw that many number of cards.

VEXALE ABILITY

Activated. Spend one Godly favour and for the remainder of the round every action that targets you will suffer one disadvantage.

LEDGERITE ABILITY

Activated. Spend one Godly favour to play any card from your hand as a Joker (it doesn't trigger drawing cards rules).

DIVINE POWERS

You can gain one divine power at any time per session. It costs one Godly Favour. You can have up to as many divine powers as your Faith.

A character with divine powers is called a soulbender. When a soulbender uses a divine power as the main part of his action and he is confronted, he must use his Faith Attribute to resolve the confrontation. The Skill to use will depend on the confrontation, but most powers are usually a matter of speed or physical capacity, and this is why most powers will use Initiative or Athletic/EVA.

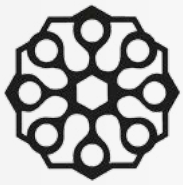
Divine powers have different levels (I, II and III), you can only use the levels up to your Faith. Additionally, all Divine powers have a prophet level.

TRIGGERING DIVINE POWERS

At any point you can spend one Godly Favour to be able to use your divine powers for the remainder of the scene. You cannot use your divine powers otherwise.

NEURAL DAMAGE FROM USING DIVINE POWERS

Many divine powers deal neural damage to the user, this represents the strain that the supernatural have in mere mortals. This damage is unpreventable but it is suffered after the action resolves, therefore it does not incur Skill penalties for that action.



ERGON

DIVINE SHIELD

Sustained. Suffer two neural damage and choose another character in your line of sight. During each round that character cancels as much damage as your Faith. Limited to one at a time.

PROPHET LEVEL

When you use this power you can choose up to two other characters to be affected by it.

JUDGMENT

Instant. Choose another character in your line of sight that has just played a card and suffer as much neural damage as his Faith. Then, discard as many cards as your Faith from the top of the deck and replace the value of the played card by your target with the value of any one of the cards you have discarded.

PROPHET LEVEL

Shuffle back into the deck any amount of the cards you discarded when using this power.

OVERLOAD

Action (Initiative). Everything around you in a 5 metres (~16 ft) radius receives twice as much ACS damage as your Faith. Then, suffer two neural damage.

PROPHET LEVEL

Alternatively to the regular effects of the power, you can:

Action (Initiative). Choose a target up to 50 metres (~55 yd) away, he and all of the gear he carries receives twice as much ACS damage as your Faith. Then, suffer two neural damage.

TELEPATHY

You can send telepathic messages to anyone in the same planet. Additionally, you can send telepathic messages to any Ergon believer within the same solar system if you are aware they are there and if they choose to receive them.

Instant. Suffer one neural damage to heal one neural damage to as many characters as your Faith within your telepathic range. Limited to once per round.

Activated. Choose an character and suffer as much neural damage as his Faith. That character loses his turn this round.

PROPHET LEVEL

Receive one less neural damage when you use this power.

VORTEX

Ergon can join more than people, it can join spacetime that is otherwise divided. Distances cannot divide us.

Action (Initiative). Suffer one neural damage. Open one portal anywhere you can see up to 50 metres (~55 yd) away from you and from each other. The portal is a 2D ring of energy that does not interact with the physical world of 2 metres (~6.5 ft) of diameter. All forms of matter and energy can travel between them as if they were next to each other. Characters can see clearly through them, and if only one is open, it's invisible. You can open up to two portals, opening a third will close whichever you prefer of the other two - they last open for one hour.

You can open both portals with a single action.

The portals can be up to 1,000 metres (~1100 yd) away from each other. You gain one advantage towards the action.

PROPHET LEVEL

There is no longer a time limit they can remain open and you can keep two pairs of portals open simultaneously.

HEXIA

ALTERED REALITY

Action (Initiative). Teleport 10 metres (~32 ft) in a straight and unobstructed line. For each point of Faith above one, you can choose to teleport 20 additional metres (~65 ft) or gain one advantage towards the action.

PROPHET LEVEL

Additionally, gain: **Action (Initiative).** Teleport to any location you have been in the last hour even if it is out of range or obstructed.

FRAGMENTED REALITY

Reality is filtered by our perception, changing our perception is as good as changing reality.

Sustained. Take two neural damage. Create a sensorial illusion of up to 10 cubic metres (~13 cubic yd) that affects one sense of any character with Faith equal or lower than yours, unless you don't want them to. A character who performs a successful searching action against your illusion won't be affected by your power any longer for the remainder of the scene. An illusion cannot physically hurt a character, but it can take him to dangerous places and situations.

The illusion can be of up to 100 cubic metres (~130 cubic yd) and affect three senses.

The illusion affects all senses, including taste, touch, temperature, kinesthesia, balance, vibration, etc, making it "real" for those sensing it. They suffer one disadvantage when searching for it.

PROPHET LEVEL

Every time you use this power choose to gain one of the following: Either the illusion can be of up to 10,000 cubic metres (~13,000 cubic yd) or they suffer an additional disadvantage when searching for it.

FUTURE SIGHT

Activated. During this confrontation your opponent must play all of his cards before you have to play any. Then, take two neural damage.

Receive one less neural damage when you use this power.

This power is now considered sustained instead of activated. While it is active you can confront actions even if you were unaware they were targeting you.

PROPHET LEVEL

Instant. Suffer three neural damage to ignore the effects of a failure.

HIDDEN TRUTH

Sustained. Take two neural damage. You are able to detect holograms, illusions and stealth devices as if they did not have any special capabilities.

Additionally, you can read the emotions of other characters with equal or less Mind than your Faith without them noticing. You can read basic emotions, such as anger, fear or happiness, but not thoughts. E.g. if someone is lying to you, you may read nervousness or elation, but you won't know for certain if what you are hearing is the truth.

Additionally, while maintaining physical contact with the target, each second of contact allows you to read a second of memories and thoughts.

PROPHET LEVEL

Additionally, while maintaining physical contact with the target, you can incept memories into his psyche. These memories must be circumstantial, such as changing his memory of who told him what, changing how he remembers the names of people not close to him, or remember or forgetting being or knowing about a place, a stranger, etc. They cannot change core memories to that person, such as who he is, who his closest people are to him, etc.

TIME WARP

Instant. Take two neural damage. Create a sphere 5 metres (~16 ft) in diameter at up to 50 metres (~55 yd) away that lasts until the end of the round. While inside the sphere your Initiative is doubled.

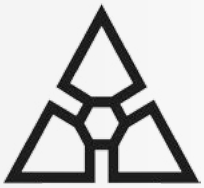
Receive one less neural damage when you use this power.

Additionally, while inside the sphere you gain one advantage towards any action.

PROPHET LEVEL

Alternatively to the regular effects of the power, you can:

Instant. Take two neural damage. Create a sphere 5 metres (~16 ft) in diameter at up to 50 metres (~55 yd) away that lasts until the end of the round. Time stops inside the sphere, characters and things inside cannot act and cannot be affected by what's outside. Any character who is partially encompassed by the sphere is considered to be inside of it.



KALIVA

EXTENDED AWARENESS

You can sense danger, even in the most uneventful days, even while you sleep there is always a part of you that scans around you. There is a voice that speaks to you in the language of dreams: conversations that you remember having but can't remember the content nor the voice of the person talking. No, not the person, the God, Kaliva looks out for you, and when she says be ready, you always are.

Instant. Take one neural damage. Confront an action that targets you even if you were unaware of it (you can wake up from a regular sleep to do this) if the character performing it has Faith equal or lower than you.

Additionally, you are capable of noticing the smallest details and clues (e.g. someone tailing you in the crowd or a drop of blood in a red carpet). When you perform a searching action against another character, gain one advantage for every point your Faith is higher than his.

PROPHET LEVEL

Instant. When you declare a counteraction, draw one card and then discard one card.

GREED

Why is it bad to want things? We might not be the physical centre of the universe, but we are the centre of how we perceive it, and everything that does not pass through me might as well not exist as I will never know. Who is to say this is not all for me? Who is to say that I am to be content? I might be God myself. The more I think about it the more empowered I feel, and the closer I am to being one.

Action. Store aside up one card from your hand (leave it on the table upside down in a clearly defined pile). These cards are not being played nor discarded, they will not trigger any drawing cards mechanics and do not count towards your maximum hand of cards size. They cannot be discarded, they will remain there until used.

Instant. When you can play a card, you can play a stored aside card as if was from your hand. Then, take one neural damage.

You can store two additional cards.

When you store any number of cards, draw one fewer card that the number of cards you stored.

PROPHET LEVEL

Additionally, take one additional neural damage to play the lowest of your stored cards and it won't count towards the number of cards you can play of an Attribute. Limit once per action.

NATURAL SELECTION

It is not a matter of good or bad. It just makes sense. It is perhaps the only thing that makes sense in this otherwise senseless universe: Those who are better prevail. You prevail.

Instant. Take two neural damage. Gain one advantage towards one action. If the Skill you are using is higher than your opponent's, suffer one less neural damage. Limited to once per round.

Additionally, there is no longer a limit of the times you can use this power per round.

Additionally, you can ignore Skill penalties when determining your Skill value for the purposes of determining if your Skill is higher than your opponent's to use this power.

PROPHET LEVEL

Additionally, if when you use this power you are successful, draw one card.

PHANTOM

Who said that being invisible came with a cost? It actually reaps benefits. The things people say and do when they think they are alone, the places they hide and the things they keep. The things you can do in the dark, I can do in the light too.

Sustained. Take two neural damage. Any character with Faith equal or lower than yours is affected by phantom, unless you don't want them to. A character who performs a successful searching action against you won't be affected by your power any longer for the remainder of the scene. When searching for you, they will suffer one disadvantage for every point your Faith is higher than theirs.

Additionally, you will not draw attention as long as your behaviour does not stand out of the ordinary (you can tail someone in a public space, or go into a service only area in a building and no one will question your presence there). After interacting with you, they will be unable to remember anything remarkable about you, they'll struggle to remember even basic things such as your species or what you talked about.

Additionally, characters cannot target you with their actions for as long as there are other viable targets in range (viable targets can't never be characters of their own team or civilians).

PROPHET LEVEL

Additionally, you are literally invisible until you do something that would necessarily draw attention to you (shoot someone on the face, step on someone's foot, yell like a madman).

SOULHUNT

It's not a connection, it's not a bond, it's an instinct, a hunter's instinct. You can sense your targets through time and space. If you were blind you could still see where they are. If you were deaf you could still hear them. You have hunted their souls.

Action. Mark a character without him knowing. You can mark any number of characters with a total Faith value equal or lower than yours. You can unmark a character at any time.

You can feel the presence and mood of marked characters anywhere in the same solar system and you'll know

their general direction. You have a pretty good idea of how far away they are.

Additionally, if you close your eyes you can see through any of your marked character's eyes.

Additionally, if you cover your ears you'll hear through any of your marked character's ears and you'll know where they are even if they don't.

PROPHET LEVEL

This power does not longer have a maximum range.

VEXAL

GRAVITY SHIFT

Sustained. Suffer two neural damage. Choose a surface that is significantly bigger than you up to 20 metres (~65 ft) away, you'll fall towards it as if gravity pulled you towards it instead of pulling you towards the ground (this is true even if you are in a location without gravity). You have good control over your fall and you won't receive damage when you finally hit the surface regardless of the speed and distance you covered falling.

Receive one less neural damage when you use this power.

Activated. Change the surface towards which you are falling.

PROPHET LEVEL

Use this power while performing a grappling action towards a character with equal or lower Faith than you, if you are successful the power will have it's effect on that character (you are still the one who takes the neural damage).

PLANESWALKER

Sustained. Suffer three neural damage. You can move through static solid surfaces as if they were not there. You cannot carry anything outside your body, including gear and clothes.

You can carry your regular gear when using the power.

One character in physical contact with you can also benefit from this power.

PROPHET LEVEL

While this power is active you suffer one less point of physical damage from each damage source (After applying all damage modifiers and levels of success).

PSYCHOMETRY

Action. Suffer two neural damage. You may experience visions from objects of otherwise unknown history by making physical contact with them. You will obtain information such as where the object was created, who brought it there, who has been in contact with it lately, etc. Once you had a vision you cannot have another from the same object unless you increase your Faith. The visions are blurry and chaotic.

The visions are clear and appear in chronological order. Additionally, they contain some words that were heard close to the object.

Additionally, the soulbender may use Psychometry on living and dead organisms as well.

PROPHET LEVEL

You can leave memories and messages in objects and people, you can select who (by name, by species, or by any other standard) will receive it when they touch it - they are not required to have Psychometry to receive it.

TELEKINESIS

Action (Athletic/EVA). You can move things and people in your line of sight up to 20 metres (~65 ft) away as if you were holding them. You can lift up to your normal carrying weight. Then, suffer one neural damage.

Action (CQC). You can perform unarmed CQC actions up to 20 metres (~65 ft) away as if you were 2 metres (~6.5 ft) away against characters in your line of sight.

You gain one advantage towards this actions.

PROPHET LEVEL

While using the power if you are lifting inanimate objects you can lift up to 500 Kg.

UNYIELDING RESOLVE

Instant. Suffer one neural damage. Ignore all Skill penalties caused by physical damage until the end of the round.

Instant. Suffer one physical damage. Recover up to three neural damage even if it comes from sustained effects.

Activated. You can play one card over the maximum during this action. Then, suffer one physical damage. Limited to once per action.

PROPHET LEVEL

Instant. Spend one Godly favour to recover up to two physical health.

LEDGER

DEATH OF FAITH

Sustained. Suffer two neural damage. Choose a character in your line of sight with Faith less than or equal to yours. Then, choose one of that character's divine powers or his God's ability, he won't be able to use it and it will stop working if it was currently active for as long as this effect is active or until the end of the scene.

PROPHET LEVEL

When you use this power, choose an additional power to be affected.

FEAR FOG

Sustained. Suffer two neural damage. All other characters with Faith less than or equal to yours in a 20 metre (~65 ft) radius are affected. All those characters suddenly experience a primordial fear. They receive a disadvantage when performing actions that do not have the aim of escaping the radius of this divine power.

PROPHET LEVEL

This power deals no neural damage to you.

GIFT OF THE DECEIVER

Gain any one divine power from any other God. You can use it as if you had one fewer point of Faith.

PROPHET LEVEL

You can use it with your actual Faith.

MADNESS

Sustained. Suffer one neural damage. All characters with Faith less than or equal to yours in a 10 metre (~32 ft) radius are affected, including yourself. Any confrontation involving a character affected by Madness must be resolved using cards played from the top of the deck, instead of their respective hands.

PROPHET LEVEL

When you play a card from the top of the deck while using this power, reveal an additional one and choose which to play and which to discard.

LEDGER'S MARK

It can only be chosen during character creation. It can be chosen even if you do not follow Ledger or you follow another God. It is free.

You can sense when another character around you also has the Mark. You will feel an instinctive kinship towards them. Other soulbenders who can read minds, sense souls, gauge divine power or use similar abilities can sense that you have 'a bit of Ledger' inside.

You gain a variation to Ledger's ability:

Activated. Gain the characteristic Misfortune (write it down on your character sheet) to play any card from your hand as a Joker (it won't trigger any drawing cards mechanic).

You can gain Misfortune any amount of times. At any point during a confrontation in which you take part the GM can remove one of your Misfortune instances to use Ledger's ability against you, playing it in favour of any other character or TSE.

THE GEAR

GENERAL RULES

In FAITH, characters can carry and use any kind of gear they might acquire, find, or craft. Some of the most important pieces of equipment are represented on cards containing all the important information needed to use them. However, we encourage players to create their own gear if they find the need for it.

There are five types of gear cards: ranged weapons, CQC weapons, robots, suits, and objects.

ENERGY AND ACS DAMAGE

Certain pieces of gear have characteristics with energy, or the keyword Powered. Those characteristics are considered powered, and if the piece of gear suffers more ACS damage than their own energy or the energy of the piece of gear if they don't have an energy, they stop working. Each powered characteristic can be turned off individually.

E.g. If a piece of gear has got three powered characteristics the first with energy 6, the second with energy 5 and the third with energy 3, suffers 6 ACS damage both the second and the third powered characteristics will be cancelled, but not the first.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

Some pieces of equipment have commonplace characteristics that are only described on the card if there is enough space, otherwise you can find them here:

Cortex Connected: It must be connected to a Cortex Connector Upgrade to be used.

Close Quarters Weapon (CQW): It provides one additional advantage towards Shooting actions against targets within 10 metres, unless it is confronted with a CQC action.

Drone: It moves by flight, both within atmospheres and vacuum spaces.

Easy to Hide: It can be hidden while wearing a jacket or similar piece of clothing.

EM Shield: Its armour cannot be reduced or ignored by plasma or neural ammunition.

Ghost: It does not appear on LinkWave radars. It can still be hacked using other methods or through LinkWave if the hacker locates it accurately.

Glove: It must be worn on one hand. It can be attached to a suit with a Technical action.

Godly Mark: It is not a physical item. It cannot be taken away from you nor be discovered by others.

Heavy Weapon: This weapon is used with Constitution. Receive one disadvantage towards Agility while carrying it.

Injectable: It can be injected on a patient, who will be affected by its effects. Then it must be discarded.

Mini-robot: 1 to 5 mini-robots count as a level one robot towards the number of robots you can control. Mini-robots are not autonomous and have very limited capacities.

Spectre: Ghost. Additionally, all other pieces of gear carried by you gain Ghost.

Throwable: Action (Athletic/EVA). It may be thrown up to 50 metres (~55 yd) away. It provides one advantage if thrown within 10 metres (~11 yd) and it suffers one disadvantage for every 10 metres (~11 yd) or fraction further.

Very Easy to Hide: It can be hidden while wearing regular clothes, even without a jacket.

RANGED WEAPONS

Ranged weapons are weapons used in ranged combat, and they provide a means to attack targets from a distance. There are many different types of ranged weapons, but they are usually separated into two main types: projectile weapons and electronic weapons.

Projectile weapons have magazines, whereas electronic weapons have batteries and use electric energy to shoot. If the weapon has a magazine, it needs to have ammunition to shoot; and if it has an energy value, it cannot shoot if it has suffered more ACS damage that its energy value.

RANGE

A weapon's effectiveness is related to the distance to its target. Most weapons have two different ranges and a few specialist weapons have a third range.

Close Quarters (CQ): Up to 20 metres (~22 yd). The most common range indoors, or in dense urban areas.

Standard Distance (SD): From 20 (~22 yd) to 100 metres (~110 yd). The range most characters can see clearly without magnification.

Long Distance (LD): From 100 metres (~110 yd) to 5 kilometres (~3.1 mi). The extended range of some sniper rifles. The weapon loses 1 damage and receives one disadvantage for every additional kilometre (~0.6 mi) after the first.

TYPES OF RANGED WEAPONS

FIREARM

Old school primitive killing machines. LinkWave made them relevant again, because a firearm can't be hacked. It is still the most reliable way of putting your enemies in the grave.

Action (Shooting). Its shots cause physical damage. It is noisy and leaves traces of gunpowder and shells. It causes recoil.

RAILGUN X

Electromagnetic railguns are built around a pair of parallel conducting rails that accelerate ferromagnetic projectiles to incredible speeds. Their power makes them the preferred weapon of snipers and other long range operators.

Action (Shooting). Powered. Its shots cause physical damage and ignore X armour. For each armour point ignored, its base damage increases by 1.

It can only be shot only once per round (i.e. If you shoot during your turn, and later in the same round someone targets you, you won't be able to respond shooting back again; or if you used it for one counteraction, you won't be able to use it for additional counteractions that round).

NEURAL WEAPON

Neural weapons shoot microwaves that affect the synapses of neurons, slowing them down. The targets of these weapons normally faint, but deep coma is not an unusual effect either. The Iz'kal police use neural weapons to control crowds and they are increasingly popular amongst criminals due to their untraceability.

Additionally, neural weapons can shoot in Adaptive Circuit Severance (ACS) mode, employing different wavelengths to cause electrical overload of the microprocessors present in the target.

Action (Shooting). Powered. Its shots cause neural OR ACS damage, and ignore armour. It is silent and leaves no traces. Additionally, it does not cause recoil.

PLASMA X

Plasma weapons use target-lock software to adjust their lasers' trajectories, meeting precisely at the target. When the lasers meet, they induce a high-energy state into the gasses around the target, creating plasma and burning through even the toughest of steels.

Action (Shooting). Powered. Its shots cause physical damage and ignore X armour. It is silent, but it leaves a characteristic smell. Its lasers can be easily seen in the dark or at night. Additionally, it does not cause recoil.

EXPLOSIVE

Action (Shooting). It causes physical damage in an area. It causes one less damage per metre (~1.1 yd) or fraction away from the point of impact.

It is very noisy and leaves notable traces of gunpowder. It causes little to no recoil.

AMMO & MAGAZINE

Weapons with a magazine (mag) can load as much ammo as its value. Every time they are shot they spend one ammo. When they run out of ammo, they have to be reloaded with an action before they can be shoot again.

NOTE: Weapons with magazines load many times more rounds than their ammo value. Ammo represents an unspecified number of rounds needed to put down enough firepower to get the job done: a burst, cover fire, missed shoots, etc.

CLOSE COMBAT WEAPONS

Close combat weapons are meant to be used in CQC situations and they provide characters with the means of harming enemies who are nearby. There are many types of close combat weapons, but with the increasing popularity of armoured suits, these weapons are almost exclusively used by a niche of specialists in boarding or urban warfare, and some primitive species.

FIGHTING STYLES

Close combat weapons can be used in two fighting styles: Hit - using Dexterity - and Grapple - using Constitution. Each weapon indicates the advantages (+) or disadvantages (-) it provides and the damage it causes in each fighting style.

SUITS

Suits are full body wearable pieces of equipment. Each character can wear only one suit at a time. Most suits are normally tailored or adjusted to one character, and, if the character is not used to it, putting a suit on or taking it off can take several minutes.

CHARACTERISTICS

All suits share some common characteristics as described here.

They have some common non-powered characteristics that do not stop working unless the suit breaks somehow:

- Vacuum protection.
- Limited oxygen supply and air filters.
- -20ºC to 50ºC thermal protection.

And some common powered characteristics that will stop working if the suit suffers more ACS damage than its main energy value.

- A high tier computer that directly connects to your brain, allowing you thought control over it (it cannot be used to perform hacking attacks, but it can have software installed, use it to navigate the web, to communicate, watch and project video, etc).
- Battery with long autonomy.
- Radio and network comms.
- Directional lights in helmet and gloves.
- Infrared visor.

Additionally, each suit has a number of specific characteristics that sets it out from the rest which are described in each suit - They will stop working if the suit suffers more ACS damage than their specific energy value.

ROBOTS

Robots are NPCs under the control of other characters. They are very complex semi-autonomous pieces of gear that can be used by their controller with the Technical action issue commands.

When they are under the control of a player character, consider the robot a friendly NPC that must follow all commands by its controller and has no agenda of it's own.

STRUCTURE

The structure (STR) value is the maximum physical damage a robot can withstand before it stops working. If a robot suffers more physical damage that its STR, it will be deactivated until it is repaired.

ENERGY

The Energy (NRG) value is the maximum ACS damage a robot can withstand before it stops working. If a robot suffers more ACS damage that it's NRG, it will be deactivated until it is repaired.

CHARACTERISTICS

Robots have some common powered characteristics that will stop working if they suffer as much ACS damage as their energy value.

- High definition camera, microphones and status sensors (all data is recorded and stored for one week).
- Directional light.
- Radio and network comms.
- Vacuum and atmospheric working capabilities.

OTHER ITEMS

There are all kinds of objects that characters can use in the Universe of FAITH, from rigs to grenades, from the technical to the medical, and all forms of tools. It is up to the GM and the players to make up their own objects, although some of the most usual yet interesting items are represented in cards or in this book.

GEAR ANATOMY

In FAITH, each piece of gear comes in a card. Additionally, in this book you can find several pieces of gear with which you can begin your adventures.

CARDS

FAITH uses cards to improve the gaming experience and to put the art on the table where it belongs. All the information you need to use the different elements of the game (NPCs and gear) can be found in these cards, but they are just a playing aid. You can use the NPCs and gear included in this book for your games, or include some additional choices with some of the decks.

CARD BACKS

All the cards share the same format for their backs (only the colour changes: Red for NPCs, blue for gear, and yellow for robots.

SYMBOLS AND ICONS

To help you navigate the information, there are several icons and symbols you need to remember:

Agility modifier: While wearing a suit, it might provide one advantage (+) or disadvantage (-) towards Agility actions.

Armour: See page 342.

Attribute: This icon can be found next to Skill values with a number inside, which determines how many cards it can play randomly from the top of the deck (or if under the control of the GM, she can decide to play cards from her hand instead).

Energy: See page 382.

Firewall: The number of cards the FW can play is inside the icon.

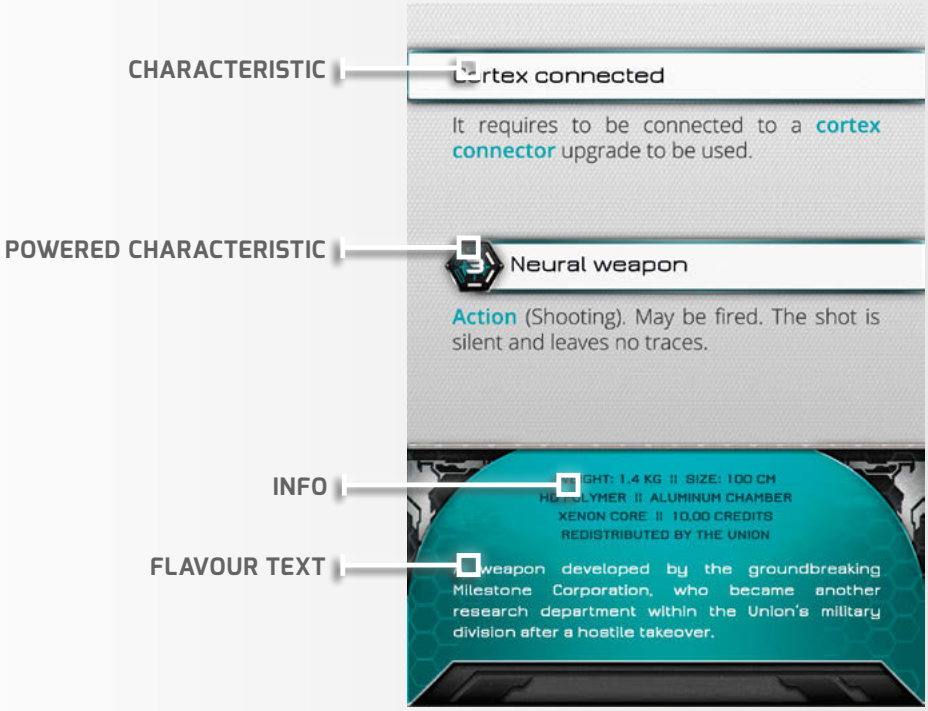
Initiative Skill: The number of cards the NPC can play for Initiative is inside the icon.

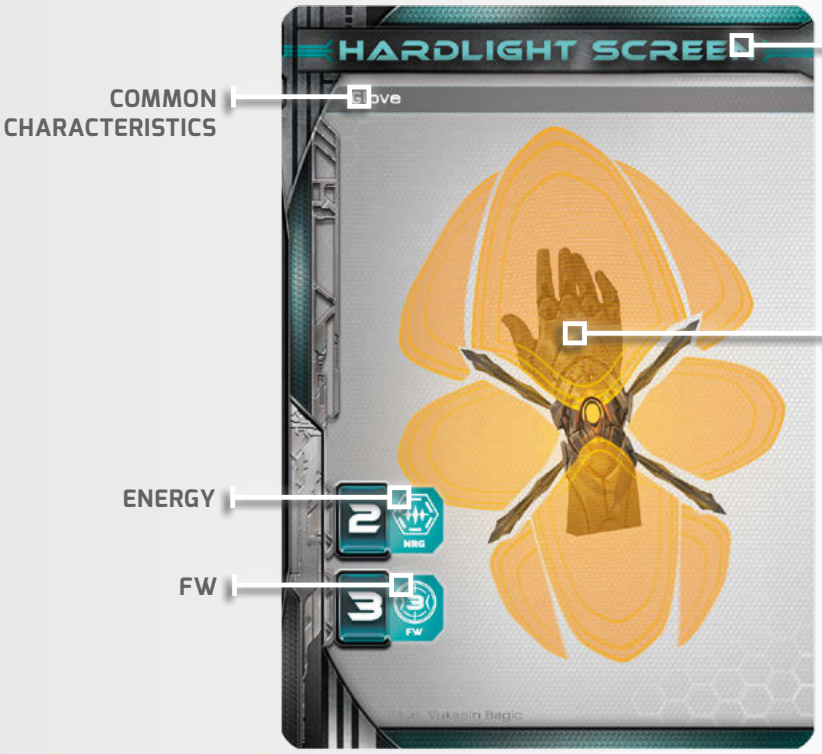
Magazine: See page 383.

Neural health: See page 341.

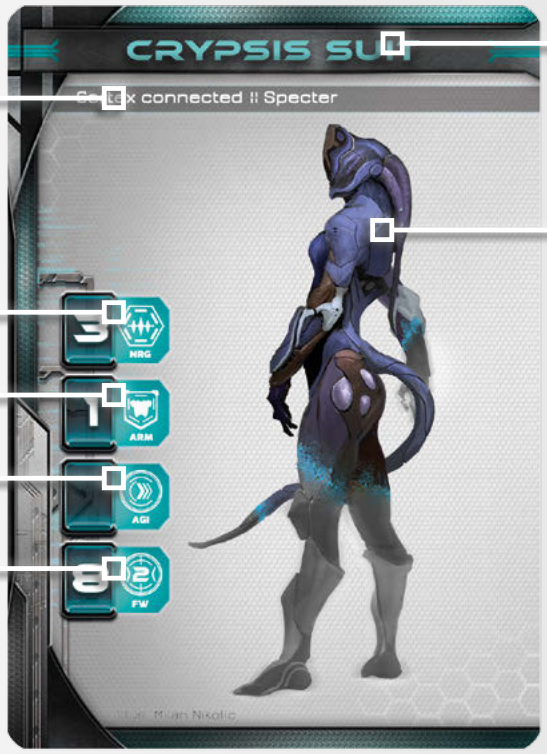
Physical health: See page 341.

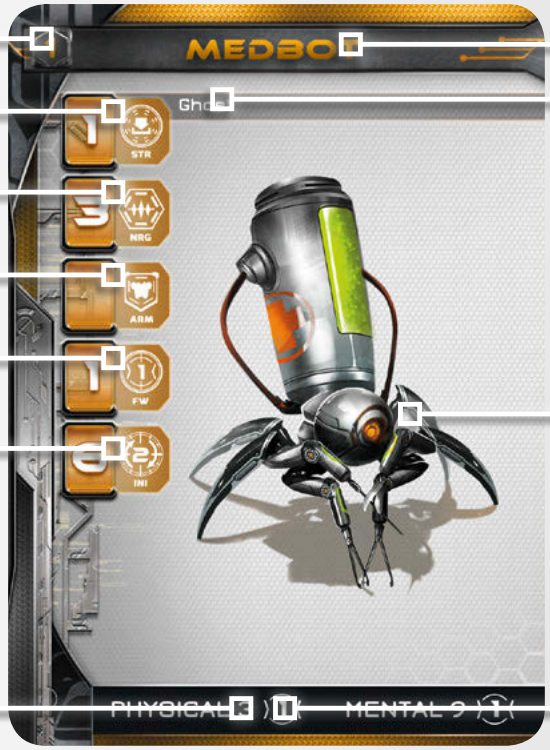
Structure: See page 384.




HARDLIGHT SCREE
ove
2
NRG
3
3
FW
Illus. Vukasin Bagic
NAME
COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
ILLUSTRATION
ENERGY
FW

REAPER
x Connected
3
NRG
8
FW
4+
STANDARD DISTANCE
4
CLOSE QUARTERS
Illus. Vukasin Bagic
PLASMA
NAME
COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
ILLUSTRATION
MAG/ENERGY
FW
RANGES/ FIGHTING STYLES
TYPE OF WEAPON


NAME
COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
ILLUSTRATION
ENERGY
ARMOUR
AGILITY MODIFIER
FW


LEVEL
NAME
STRUCTURE
COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
ENERGY
ARMOUR
FIREWALL
ILLUSTRATION
INITIATIVE
PHYSICAL/MENTAL STATS' SKILL VALUE
STATS' NUMBER OF CARDS

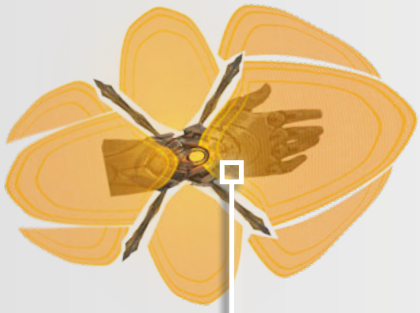
NAME
COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
INFO
ENERGY
FW

HARDLIGHT SCREEN

Glove

Armour :: 5,000 credits
weight: 0.8 kg :: size: glove
HD polymer

2	3



ILLUSTRATION

Plasma Shield

Powered. Activated. Use to receive one advantage towards a dodging action.

CHARACTERISTIC

Initially developed to allow CQC units to get into effective range in less than suitable environments. Its versatility and ease of use has made it become a widespread tool among a variety of operatives.

FLAVOUR TEXT

INFO
NAME
COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
RANGES/FIGHTING STYLES
AMMO/ ENERGY
FW

REAPER

Cortex Connected

Assault Rifle :: 25,000 credits
Weight: 7 kg :: size: 95 cm :: Plutonium core

Close Quarters	Standard Distance		
4	4+	3	8

ILLUSTRATION

Plasma 1

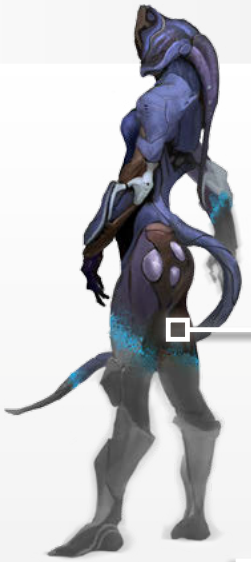
Powered. Its shots cause physical damage and ignore one armour.

Assisted Aim

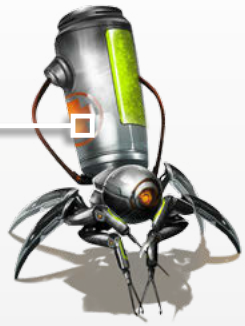
Activated. Use to extend Standard Distance range to 300 metres. Use to see in infrared. Use to aim at multiple targets within your sight at the same time.

CHARACTERISTIC

Hands down one of the best weapons ever made, it is so powerful that it is worth the risk of losing control of it when facing hackers... yet another reason why everyone in the defence department hates web surfers.



ILLUSTRATION



CRYPSIS SU[illegible]

NAME

[illegible]EDBOT

Cortex Connected :: Spe[illegible]

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

Ghost

45,000 credits
weight: 8 kg :: size: custom
Light bending polymer :: Plutonium core
Produced in the State by Idealab

INFO

1 :: 35,000 credits
weig[illegible] 3 kg :: size: 35 cm
5 metres (walking) :: Plutonium core
Produced in the State by Idealab

ICONS

3	1		8

1	3	0	1

STATS

PHYSICAL SKILL	[illegible]	[illegible]TIATIVE SKILL	6	MENTAL SKILL	9

Optical Camouflage

Receive one advantage towards a Hiding action if hidden in an adequate place. Characters further than 20 metres away suffer one disadvan[illegible]e towards all actions against you that require line of sight.

CHARACTERISTICS

Tiny

Ballistic attacks against it suffer one disadvantage. It gains one advantage towards hiding actions.

Drug Handler

It may carry one injectable piece of gear and you can perform Drug Handling actions through it.

The miners of remote Corvo colonies tell each other stories about evil Iz'kal ghosts [illegible] hunt their enemies anywhere at any time [illegible]e day.

FLAVOUR TEXT

In Medbots, bedside manners are as important as kno[illegible]dge and experience... probably because [illegible]y are easier to implement.

SAVANT

CQW :: Easy to Hide

SMG :: 2,000 credits
weight: 2 kg :: size: 65 cm :: 8 mm ammunition

Close Quarters	Standard Distance		
3+	2	3	

Firearm

Its shots cause physical damage.

Designed for special forces and private security, the Savant is a great choice in the urban environment and has quickly become the most popular weapon among criminals and pirates.

KAIVE

Firearm

Assault Rifle :: 4,000 credits
weight: 4 kg :: size: 75 cm :: 8 mm ammunition

Close Quarters	Standard Distance		
3+	3+	3	

Grenade Launcher

Action (Shooting). Shoot a grenade up to 50 metres, ignoring range disadvantages.

Scope

Activated. Use to extend Standard Distance range to 300 metres, ignoring weapon advantages further than 100 metres away. Use to see in infrared.

One of the most common and versatile weapons. The design originated from Earth during the Corvo invasions, and was later improved and adapted for use in 0-G operations.

DOORKICKER

Shotgun :: 10,000 credits
weight: 4 kg :: size: 70 cm :: 20 mm ammunition

Close Quarters	Standard Distance		
2++	2-	4	

Firearm

Its shots cause physical damage.

Fire Selector

When declaring each shot, choose: Buckshot: If the target has up to 1 armour, its base damage is doubled; OR Slug: It ignores 1 armour and it ignores its disadvantage in standard distance.

A kick in the door, the dry sound of a shotgun firing a round, screams all around the victim. A standard procedure among Tiantang crooks that gives the name to this no-nonsense weapon.

RUSS

Quickdraw :: Very Easy To Hide

Handgun :: 500 credits
weight: 1 kg :: size: 25 cm :: 9 mm ammunition

Close Quarters	Standard Distance		
2+	2-	2	

Firearm

Its shots cause physical damage.

A popular sidearm among security details who prefer reliability over style.

HAILSTONER

Heavy Weapon

Machine Gun :: 12,000 credits
weight: 9 kg :: size: 83 cm :: 8 mm ammunition

Close Quarters	Standard Distance		
2	3-	6	

Firearm

Its shots cause physical damage.

Bullet Storm

Its targets must perform a counteraction and can't use activated effects. Activated. Use to hit additional targets within a 30º cone of fire who are in the same range.

The Hailstoner offers a fantastic balance between aesthetic appeal and firing ratio. Its unique colour scheme, based on radioactive elements, is sure to scare away the hypochondriac type.

WITTY

Sniper Rifle :: 19,000 credits
weight: 8 kg :: size: 110 cm :: 12 mm ammunition

Close Quarters	Standard Distance		
4-	4+	3	

Firearm

Its shots cause physical damage.

Bipod

Action. Set it up or take it down. While set up, it is fixed to the ground or a wall, allowing the weapon to rotate 90º in either direction, and it grants one advantage towards Shooting actions.

The "Witty" takes its name after a widespread jest whereby you turn the gun 90 degrees to point to the person beside you who is making bad jokes and say "that's witty" before shooting.

BELLADONNA

Assault Rifle :: 30,000 credits
weight: 8 kg :: Lenght: 75 cm :: 40 mm ammunition

Close Quarters	Standard Distance	Long Distance		
3+	3+	3	3	8

Railgun 1

Powered. Its shots cause physical damage and ignore one armour. For each armour point ignored, its base damage increases by 1.

Infrared Sight

See in infrared.

The Belladona is a state-of-the-art, all-round weapon that is proving useful in all sorts of armed conflicts.

CURIE

Assault Rifle :: 45,000 credits
weight: 6 kg :: size: 70 cm :: Polonium core

Close Quarters	Standard Distance	Long Distance		
4+	2++	4	3	8

Radiation Weapon

Powered. Its shots cause Toxicity and ignore armour. The amount of Toxicity does not change with the level of success.

Wide Shot

Activated. Use to hit additional targets within a 30º cone of fire who are in the same range.

Styled Curie by Human Ghyr after one of the most legendary Earth scientists, the long term effects caused by its shots are devastating.

NOBRAINER

Assault Rifle :: 5,000 credits
weight: 3kg :: size: 65 cm :: Radon core

Close Quarters	Standard Distance		
2+	1++	2	8

Neural Weapon

Powered. Its shots cause neural OR ACS damage, and ignore armour.

The nobrainer is a very popular weapon among worshippers of Ergon due to its non-lethal nature, especially if you consider deep coma to be just another form of living.

DIAPERER

Very easy to hide :: Ghost :: Glove

Handgun :: 2,000 credits
weight: 0.7 kg :: size: 25 cm :: Xenon core

Close Quarters	Standard Distance		
2+	1-	2	6

Neural Weapon

Powered. Its shots cause neural OR ACS damage, and ignore armour.

The diaperer took its name from the interesting results obtained during the testing process in Human specimens.

NEMESIS

Assault Rifle :: 15,000 credits
weight: 6 kg :: size: 75 cm :: Plutonium core

Close Quarters	Standard Distance		
3+	3+	2	8

Plasma 1

Powered. Its shots cause physical damage and ignore one armour.

Movement Recognition

Activated. Use to gain one advantage when Shooting a moving target or a target attempting to dodge.

0-G atmospheric environments gave lasers the protagonist role in military operation they deserved, especially against heavily armoured targets. The Nemesis is the epitome of this technology, piercing even through the thickest of armours without any recoil.

REAPER

Cortex Connected

Assault Rifle :: 25,000 credits
weight: 7 kg :: size: 95 cm :: Plutonium core

Close Quarters	Standard Distance		
4	4+	3	8

Plasma 1

Powered. Its shots cause physical damage and ignore one armour.

Assisted Aim

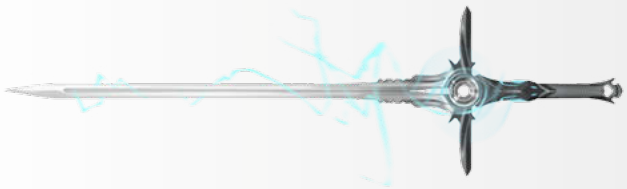
Activated. Use to extend Standard Distance range to 300 metres. Use to see in infrared. Use to aim at multiple targets within your sight at the same time.

Hands down one of the best weapons ever made, it is so powerful that it is worth the risk of losing control of it when facing hackers... yet another reason why everyone in the defence department hates web surfers.

VIBROBLADE

Close Combat Weapon

Sword :: 2,000 credits
weight: 1.3 kg :: size: 70 cm :: Radon core



Hit (DEX)	Grapple (CON)		
3++	0	2	5

Vibrating Core

Powered. It ignores one armour.

Designed to cut through light polymer armours, this blade has been used ever since the Uprising by all sorts of martial arts students.

ACS BO

Close Combat Weapon

Reach weapon :: 2,000 credits
weight: 1.5 kg :: size: 170 cm :: Radon core

Hit (DEX)	Grapple (CON)		
2++	0	2	5

Disruptor

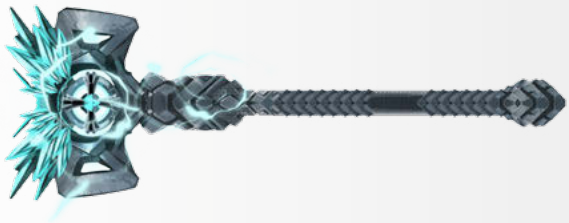
Powered. Activated. After a successful CQC action, cause 3 ACS to your target or a piece of gear carried by your target.

Often regarded as "archaic" by design, the ACS bo is a reliable means to deal with electronic weapons in narrow spaces.

HAMARAS

Close Combat Weapon :: Heavy Weapon

Hammer :: 4,000 credits
weight: 3 kg :: size: 70 cm :: Mounted crystal



Hit (DEX)	Grapple (CON)		
4	0	3	5

Powerful Blows

Powered. If the damage caused by this weapon is reduced by armour, it causes as much neural damage that ignores armour as the damage reduced by the armour.

A difficult weapon to wield, the Hamaras is deadly in the hands of a Raag hunter.

NEUROKNIFE

Close Combat Weapon :: Ghost :: Very Easy to Hide

Short weapon :: 10,000 credits
weight: 0.6 kg :: size: 35 cm :: Xenon core

Hit (DEX)	Grapple (CON)		
2+	0	1	1

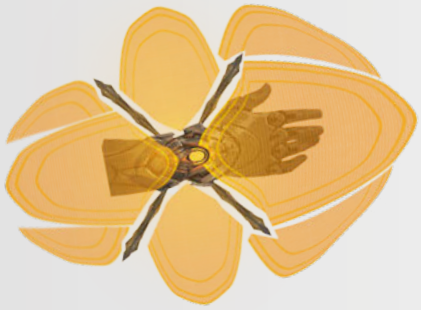
Neural Blade

Powered. It causes neural damage instead of physical damage, and ignores armour. It leaves no traces at all, and it does not cause physical wounds. If it is turned off by ACS damage, this weapon does not cause any damage.

One of the most lauded weapons to come out of Idealab, the Neuroknife makes its victims *think* they've been maimed. A clean and sophisticated way to win a fight.

HARDLIGHT SCREEN

Glove



Armour :: 3,000 credits
weight: 0.8 kg :: size: glove
HD polymer

2	3

Plasma Shield

Powered. Activated. Use to receive one advantage towards a dodging action.

Initially developed to allow CQC units to get into effective range in less than suitable environments. Its versatility and ease of use has made it become a widespread tool among a variety of operatives.

RHINOSKIN

Armour :: 3,000 credits
weight: 4 kg :: size: custom
Carbon nano plates

Bulky

It can only be concealed under large clothes. If worn on top of a suit or other bulky gear you suffer one disadvantage towards Agility actions.

Tactical armour

It provides 1 armour against attacks that do not score a decisive or critical success.

Sometimes, even the most basic of armours is the difference between life and death.

FRAG GRENADE

Throwable

Grenade :: 1,000 credits
weight: 1.2 kg :: size: 15 cm
Polymer frame

Frag Blast

It causes 4 physical damage up to one metre away, and 1 less damage for every metre or fraction further.

A sudden wake of violence and sound, then silence.
You've just blown out your eardrums.

FLASH GRENADE

Throwable

Grenade :: 1,000 credits
weight: 0.8 kg :: size: 15 cm
Polymer frame

Flash Wave

It causes one disadvantage to characters up to one metre away who are not in cover towards all their actions during this round and the next.

A flash, a bang, a sudden wake. Then silence, and then death.

AVALON

Cortex Connected

Rig :: 25,000 credits
weight: 0.6 kg :: size: helmet
Graphene

4	8

Rig 2 (LinkWave 100)

Powered. It causes 2 points of ACS damage when performing a DoS action.

Defensive Hack

Powered. Action (Hacking). Cause your opponent's action to fail. You can play as many cards as your Link, even if you have already used your Link this round.

The defensive capabilities of the Avalon make it the secondary rig of choice of electronically equipped operatives all around the Sphere.

TRIDENT

Cortex Connected

Rig :: 25,000 credits
weight: 0.5 kg :: size: helmet
Graphene

3	8

Rig 2 (LinkWave 50)

Powered. It causes 2 points of ACS damage when performing a DoS action.

Spreading Infection

Powered. Activated. If you are the triggering character, you can target up to 3 NPCs or pieces of gear with each infest action. Additionally, it reduces the ACS damage caused to it by Firewalls by 2 each round.

Thrice a threat, thrice the risk.

ELYSIUM

Cortex Connected

Rig :: 4,000 credits
weight: 0.8 kg :: size: helmet
Graphene

3	8

Rig 2 (LinkWave 50)

Powered. It causes 2 points of ACS damage when performing a DoS action.

2.0 Data Ports

Receive one advantage towards Hacking actions using a physical connection.

The preferred tool of infiltration hackers, it allows the user to quickly extract information in site.

SHAMAYIN

Cortex Connected

Rig :: 25,000 credits
weight: 0.8 kg :: size: helmet
Graphene

3	8

Rig 2 (LinkWave 50)

Powered. It causes 2 points of ACS damage when performing a DoS action.

Tactical Rig

Powered. Activated. If you are hacking a suit or a weapon, gain one advantage OR cause 2 extra ACS damage.

A very flexible tool in the hands (or brains!) of a capable hacker, it is favoured by combat technicians.

ADRENALINE SHOT

Injectable

Medical :: 500 credits
weight: 0.1 kg :: size: 15 cm
Light polymer

Adrenaline Shot

Activated. Toxicity 1. Move up to 3 damage points from him to this card and ignore their effects. At the end of the scene, discard this card and move the damage back to the character. This effect cannot be stacked.

Front line infantry find these to be essential in the thick of battle. However, they often forget that the effects are merely temporary.

ATP INFUSION

Injectable

Medical :: 500 credits
weight: 0.3 kg :: size: 10 cm
Polymer flask

ATP Infusion

Action (Drug Handling). Toxicity 2. The patient draws 2 cards and discards back to maximum hand size.

"Feeling down and out? No more! With the new ATP Infusion, you'll feel renewed and refreshed in a matter of seconds. Apply with care."

MEDSTATION

Medical :: 4,000 credits
weight: 0.5 kg :: size: 35 cm
Light polymer

	1
2	5

Medikit

Powered. Action (Surgery). Gain two advantages towards the action. In addition to the usual effects, the patient recovers 1 physical damage every three days of in-game time.

The basic tool of every field doctor, packed with many different instruments and medical supplies.

SEALING GEL

Medical :: 75,000 credits
weight: 5 g :: size: 0.5 cm
Graphene

Sealing Gel

Action (Drug Handling). The patient must be in normal health state. Choose a number of physical damage on the patient to confront this action as a TSE that plays that many cards. If you succeed, the patient ignores the damage penalties caused by that damage and discard one point per round for as many rounds as cards played the TSE.

"Just gotta rub it in, and the nanobots will do the rest. Good as new, I tell you, you'll be good as new." - Sgt. Ibn Abbas hours before Pvt. Mayin's death due to combat wounds

EM SHIELDERS

Drone :: Mini-robot

Tactical :: 15,000 credits
weight: 1.2 kg :: size: 28 cm
Graphene

2	5

EM Shield

Powered. Your armour value cannot be reduced or ignored by plasma or neural weapons.

Decent cover drones, but don't forget they don't stop actual bullets...

NANOENGINEERS

Mini-robot

Technical :: 5,000 credits
weight: 0.001 g :: size: 3 nm
Graphene

1	5

Remote Technicians

Powered. Action (Technical). Install on a device. Action (Technical). If installed on a device, you may perform Technical actions remotely within your LinkWave range.

The Corvo are not made for combat, so they put their minds towards removing technicians from the front lines. The nanobots are the result of those efforts.

OMNITOOL

Glove

Technical :: 4,000 credits
weight: 2 kg :: size: glove
High performance polymer

2	5

Multipurpose

Powered. It has a drill, a screwdriver, a soldering torch, and a power claw. Other tools can be added with Technical actions. Action (Repairing). Reduce the number of cards played by the damage suffered by a device by two.

Corvo technicians are so used to this tool, that they even sleep with it on.

SMART CLOTHES

Ghost

Stealth :: 8,000 credits
weight: 0.9 kg :: size: 170 cm
Light bending polymer

2	6

Optical Illusion

Powered. Action (Cunning). It can automatically change its optical appearance into any other clothes or suit of roughly the same size. Its appearance is kept until it is changed again or the device is shut down.

After the murder they checked the surveillance video and saw a homeless woman walking by the building, who suddenly was wearing a suit and entered the building like she owned it. Soon after she was wearing a uniform and accessing the CEO's office...

CRYPSIS SUIT

Cortex Connected :: Spectre

45,000 credits
weight: 8 kg :: size: custom
Light bending polymer :: Plutonium core
Produced in the State by Idealab

3	1		8

Optical Camouflage

Receive one advantage towards a Hiding action if hidden in an adequate place. Characters further than 20 metres away suffer one disadvantage towards all actions against you that require line of sight.

The miners of remote Corvo colonies tell each other stories about evil Iz'kal ghosts that hunt their enemies anywhere at any time of the day.

HACKER SUIT

Cortex Connected :: Spectre

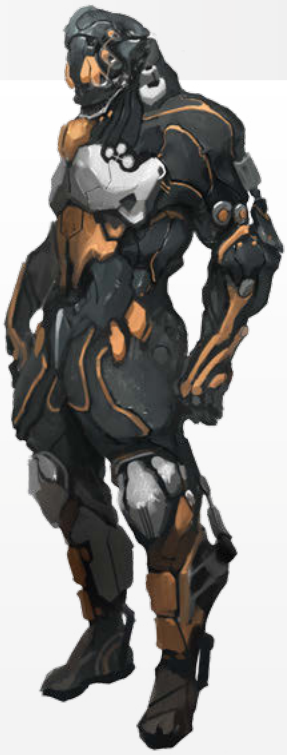
50,000 credits
weight: 10 kg :: size: custom
High performance fabrics :: Plutonium core
Produced in the Corvosphere by Wang Corp

4	1		8

Linkwave Augmentation

You can confront any Hacking actions performed within your LinkWave, even if they do not affect you.

More alluring than a Stratton#N6FAB21416 to any hacker worth their bandwith, this kind of suit has been involved in roughly 6% of all known cybercrimes.



JUGGERNAUT SUIT

Cortex Connected

80,000 credits
weight: 100 kg :: size: custom
Reinforced carbon plates :: Plutonium core
Produced in the Corvosphere by the Union

5	2	+	8

3 Strength Augmentation

You can jump thrice as far and lift thrice as much weight as you normally would, and you gain one advantage towards Constitution actions.

5 Robotic

If the suit stops working, you cannot perform Agility, Constitution or Dexterity actions until the suit is repaired or removed. Activated. Use to ignore the attribute card limit for the current Agility, Constitution or Dexterity action. Limit once per round.

"Your Iz'kal enemies will crush under your arms like insects", was the tagline the marketing team had prepared for this new suit. But when the State showed interest in buying several thousand units, it was dropped: The market is boss.

KI SUIT

Cortex Connected

60,000 credits
weight: 30 kg :: size: custom
Nickel alloys :: Plutonium core
Produced in the State by Idealab

4	1	+	8

3 Agility Augmentation

Activated. Use to gain one advantage towards Agility actions.

4 Assisted Inertia

Activated. Use to move at twice your normal speed.

The most precious tool of a martial artist, the reincarnation of the samurai or knight armour in todays warfare.

ASSAULT DRONE

Drone :: EM Shield

Level 2 :: 320,000 credits
weight: 26 kg :: size: 140 cm
15 metres (flying) :: Plutonium core
Produced in the State by Idealab

3	4	2	5

PHYSICAL SKILL	6 (2)	INITIATIVE SKILL	6 (2)	MENTAL SKILL	6 (1)

CLOSE QUARTERS	3 ++	STANDARD DISTANCE	3+

Assault drones were created by the State to replace infantry soldiers as the core of its army.

TECH DRONE

Drone

Level 1 :: 29,000 credits
weight: 40 kg :: size: 0.5 metres
15 metres (flying) :: Lithium-sulphur battery
Produced in the Corvosphere by the Union

2	3	0	8

PHYSICAL SKILL	4 (2)	INITIATIVE SKILL	6 (2)	MENTAL SKILL	5 (2)

Bench Hand

It has a drill, a screwdriver, a soldering torch, and a power claw. Other tools can be added with Technical actions. If you are its controller, you can perform a Technical action as if you are in the robot's location, and you gain one advantage.

Ancient Corvos foretold that one day all jobs would be taken over by robots. Centuries later, all we've got are petty tech drones.

JINNK'UL

Level 2 :: 195,000 credits
weight: 60 kg :: size: 160 cm
5 metres (walking) :: Plutonium core
Produced in the State by Idealab

3	5	1	5

PHYSICAL SKILL	6 (1)	INITIATIVE SKILL	3 (2)	MENTAL SKILL	5 (2)

LinkWave Augmentation

It can confront any Hacking action performed within its LinkWave range, even if does not affect it directly.

Rig 3 (LinkWave 75)

Action (Hacking). It causes 3 points of ACS damage when performing DoS actions.

The Iz'kal cannot really hack - it is a known fact and a long running joke in the Corvosphere - but they sure can design machines to hack for them...

MEDBOT

Ghost

Level 1 :: 35,000 credits
weight: 3 kg :: size: 35 cm
5 metres (walking) :: Plutonium core
Produced in the State by Idealab

1	3	0	1

PHYSICAL SKILL	3 (1)	INITIATIVE SKILL	6 (2)	MENTAL SKILL	9 (1)

Tiny

Ballistic attacks against it suffer one disadvantage. It gains one advantage towards hiding actions.

Drug Handler

It may carry one injectable piece of gear and you can perform Drug Handling actions through it.

In Medbots, bedside manners are as important as knowledge and experience... probably because they are easier to implement.

THE VEHICLES

GENERAL RULES

Vehicles are machines directly controlled by the characters inside them, with little to no autonomy (autonomous vehicle-like machines exist in FAITH, but those are considered robots and use their corresponding rules). Each vehicle has a few intrinsic characteristics, as well as the option to install a number of modules, which can be used by the characters controlling it. Modules range from piloting tools to weapons, cargo bays, and other specialised modules for specific tasks.

In this chapter of the rules, there is a clear distinction between characters and vehicles. However, the core rules of FAITH do not make that distinction. Whenever a core rule that applies to a character could also apply to a vehicle, consider the vehicle to be a character for the purpose of that rule.

NOTE: The modules you will find in this section are meant to be used with spacecraft, but the rules have been designed so they can be used with land, air, or even water vehicles. The GM should decide which of the modules are viable for your custom vehicles. You can also use the board for movement and to establish ranges, but you will need to adjust it to realistic distances between whatever vehicles you are using (e.g. if you are going in a humvee and you are being attacked by an enemy chopper, you should use meters instead of kilometers).

USING VEHICLES

Vehicles can be anything from a two-seater car to a massive spacecraft with a crew of thousands. Each vehicle has it's own shape and inner spaces; some have barely enough space for its crew to sit down, while others have huge corridors and trains that transport passengers from one area in the vehicle to another. The vehicle's description provides a little bit of information about the shape, size, and crew capacity of each vehicle, but it does not dwell deep into how their interiors are designed — that is for each GM to decide.

You can consider that each system is installed in a different room. You'll need to move between them to access each system's modules to repair them or use them manually. Usually, everything is controlled from inside the cockpit system and you must be cortex connected to it in order to use its modules. During conflicts, by default, we assume that the whole crew is inside the cockpit system. Of course, spacecrafts have more areas in which the characters can be (living quarters, carbo bay, etc) and certain vehicles require that you are inside different systems than the cockpit to use them. It is up to the GM and the players to come up with the details of the interior of their vehicles if they want to (you could even draw a map of its interior).

NAMING A CAPTAIN

While inside a vehicle you must name one character to be the Captain. Each group might have its own rules (a crew of Iz'kal members of the State is not the same as a crew of pirate Corvo). Use them to decide who is Captain at each given time.

The Captain will be able to decide certain things relating to how things affect the vehicle. You can also make up the rules of hierarchy in your vehicle if you want, which might establish that the captain can give out orders to the rest about certain things.

If at any given time there is no captain in a vehicle, anything that rules wise would normally be decided by the captain is now decided by the GM until a new captain is named.

CONTROLLING A VEHICLE

Vehicles can be considered very complex pieces of gear; when a character wants to use it, he must determine which part of the whole he'll control. Each of these parts are called modules. Sometimes using a module takes an action, other times their use is activated or instant, representing that the advanced machinery can have some autonomy and can be used through orders or quick responses. Certain modules are passive and their effect is always taking place until they are shut down.

Several characters can use the same module simultaneously using the collaborative actions rules.

Vehicles can have dozens of modules, and they are organized in systems. Each system contains all the modules of the same kind in that vehicle. Depending on how the characters can control the vehicle, the systems can limit what the characters can use:

Manual: Some vehicles do not have cortex connected capabilities (i.e. This can be either because they have been homemade or improvised, or because it's old tech or it belongs to a lesser species that does not have cortex connected technology yet). Characters must be inside a system to use it. A character has access to all the modules of that system only, therefore he can only use the working modules in that system. Using a vehicle's module manually is done with Dexterity.

Cortex connected: Characters must be inside the cockpit of the vehicle to use it cortex connected. While cortex connected to the vehicle, a character has access to all of its systems simultaneously and therefore can use any working module in the vehicle. Using a vehicle's module cortex connected is done with Link.

The systems of a cortex connected vehicle can also be used manually, following the limitations of Manual vehicles.

NOTE: A vehicle can have as many characters as it's maximum crew cortex connected to it, but each of them has to be verified by the vehicle's captain.

VEHICLE SHEET

Each vehicle model will have its own vehicle sheet. It will define several aspects of the vehicle, and its upgradability.

INFO

The information of a vehicle includes: Name of the model, level, type and size of the vehicle, system control, the maximum crew it can take on, and the maximum speed it can reach inside an atmosphere (there is no maximum speed in the vacuum of space).

SPECIAL ABILITY

Certain vehicles may have a special ability.

STATS

Each vehicle has starting stats values, which can later be changed by damage, wear, or new modules.

The stats of a vehicle are:

- Initiative: The vehicle's Initiative determines when it and its crew acts in the round.
- Dodge: The vehicle might provide advantages or disadvantages to the pilot for dodging actions.
- Evasion: The amount of times the vehicle's pilot can use Evade per round.
- Acceleration: The amount of times the vehicle's pilot can use Accelerate per round.
- Firewall: The software that confronts hacking actions against the vehicle if a character does not, as any Firewall in a regular piece of gear.
- Armour: The vehicle's armour is subtracted from the base damage of physical and neural attacks from external sources.
- Threshold: The protection against module shut down of the vehicle..

- Structure: The physical resistance of the vehicle. When a vehicle suffers more damage than its Structure, it is destroyed.
- Radar: The Skill used by the pilot when attempting a search.
- Stealth: The Skill used by the pilot when attempting to hide (the Size of the vehicle will determine the number of disadvantages the action suffers).

EFFECTS

A vehicle can suffer several ill effects.

Using a pencil keep track of the different effects:

- Damage: The damage taken by the vehicle. It is maintained until the vehicle is repaired.
- Tags: The tags the vehicle has received. They are only lost when the scene ends or when repaired.
- Stress/Strain: The effects of abrupt maneuvering on the crew of the vehicle. The crew of a vehicle flying in space or an atmosphere will suffer Stress, other wise it will suffer Strain.

SYSTEMS

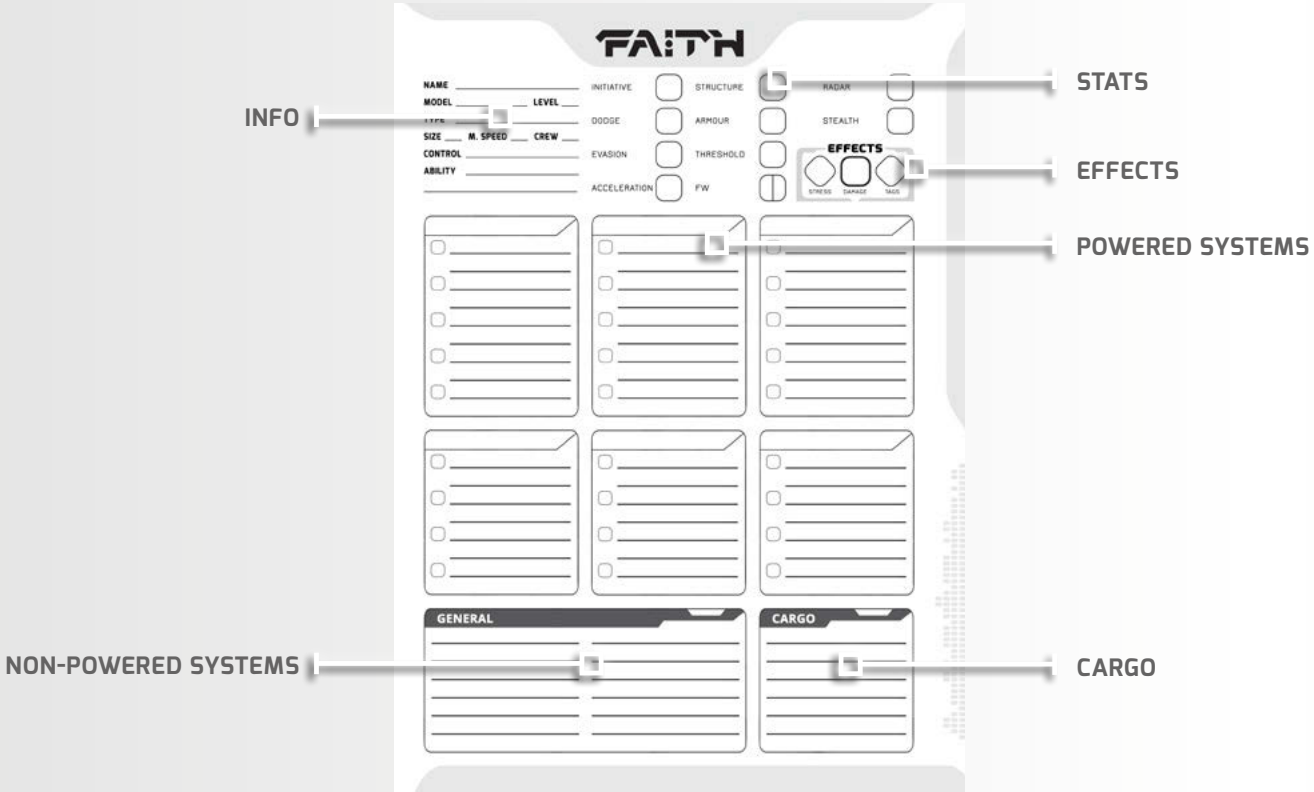
Each system can have a number of modules of the same type installed.

Systems are the heart of a vehicle, the hardware and software of the machine. Each vehicle has a number of systems. In each system you can install as many modules of the same name as the number following the system. Additionally, you cannot install modules of a higher level than the vehicle's level.

CARGO

List of the vehicle's cargo.

Here you can write down what cargo the vehicle is carrying.



VEHICLE COMBAT

THE INITIATIVE ROUND

In an Initiative Round involving vehicles, characters inside one must use the vehicle's Initiative instead of their own to establish the Initiative Order.

A vehicle can wait if the captain decides to do so, but a vehicle cannot rush.

During a vehicle's turn, all the characters in it will take turns in the order established by their own Initiative. They are allowed to Rush, but it only affects the order of play of characters within the vehicle - not the order of play between vehicles or characters outside them. Characters can perform any type of action they can think of within the usual limits of their environment, which will usually involve using one of the vehicle's modules.

TIP: When it's the PC's vehicle's turn, let them take their turns in any order to play out their strategies. Do not force them to take their turns in their Initiative's order, which will only make them use the wait mechanic until they can achieve the order of play they desire. Order of play within a vehicle only matters when there are opponents inside of it - in that case, in addition to the conflict between vehicles, you'll have to resolve the conflict within the vehicle.

E.g. Jon, a hacker with Initiative 2; Helio, a pilot with Initiative 7; and Mauri, a soldier with Initiative 5, are the PCs of an adventure. They are inside their spacecraft, which is being chased by two ravager ships. The PC's vehicle's Initiative is 6 and the ravager ships' is 3. The PC's vehicle's turn is resolved first: the PC's take their turns resolving one action each using their vehicle's modules in whatever order they desire. Then, the ravager ships take their turns and the Round ends.

A few Rounds later, a ravager assault force has entered the PC's vehicle; they are Harvesters with Initiative 6. At the beginning of the Round, the PC's spacecraft goes first, but now the order of play inside of it matters and because none of the PCs Rush, the order of play is: First, Helio, who decides to wait and save up his cards to dodge the incoming attacks from the ravager ships; second, the Harvesters, who move across the spacecraft towards the cockpit where the PCs are; third, Mauri, who opens the door and starts shooting at the Harvesters across the hall; and fourth, Jon, who hacks one of the ravager ship's core in hopes of leaving it behind. Then, the ravager ships take their turns and the Round ends.

RESOLVE EFFECTS DURING MAINTENANCE PHASE

STRESS

During the maintenance phase, all the characters in a vehicle with Stress must confront with their EVA and Constitution a TSE that plays as many cards as the Stress (perform the same TSE for all the characters inside). Then, remove all the Stress on the vehicle.

Each character who fails receives as much neural damage as the number of cards played by the TSE.

STRAIN

During the maintenance phase, one character in a vehicle with Strain must confront with his Technical and his Link (he can use Dexterity if he is in the Core system) a TSE that plays as many cards as the Strain. Then, remove all the Strain on the vehicle.

If he fails, the vehicle suffers an accident of some kind by reasons narrated by the GM related to the reckless driving or overworking of the machinery (e.g. you drive too close to a wall and one of your machine guns barrel is ripped off by the impact, you push the vehicle's engine too hard and it breaks, etc). The GM chooses and shuts down as many modules as the number of cards played by the TSE.

MOVING VEHICLES

The game mechanics only contemplate the relative distance between vehicles, leaving things like the actual speed, altitude, direction and other details up to the GM to narrate or not.

In space it does not matter at all, as getting anywhere takes weeks or months and a confrontation is resolved in minutes, therefore the distance the vehicles move within the timeframe of a confrontation is negligible. In land it is more important, as there are constant obstacles, turns, and everything from the type of terrain to the weather can have an effect on the outcome of the scene. For this reason, it is up to the GM to narrate what the players face at each given time; triggering TSEs when they are needed to represent certain obstacles or difficulties.

In open space and at travel speed, the time spaceships have to fire at each other is close to zero, unless both spaceships are travelling in the same direction and at a similar speed.

Confrontations between spaceships will usually take place within the labyrinth or when approaching their landing location, where travelling at maximum speed is suicidal and spaceships are forced to move at sub maximum speed, thus making it much easier to manoeuvre.

SPEED

Speed is represented with tokens (if you don't have any, you can write it down with a pencil, or use the numbers in a die). When a conflict between vehicles begins, they might be already on the move. Depending on the situation, they can start the encounter with more or less Speed tokens on them, as determined by the GM.

NOTE: Remember that a vehicle inside an atmosphere has a maximum Speed. And, although there is no limit for the Speed in the vacuum, it is recommended not to start with more than 5 Speed on the PC's vehicle.

THE VEHICLE'S BOARD

In the last pages of this book you'll find a board which you can use to visualise your vehicle combat scenes. This is not necessary to play with vehicles, as you can keep everything narrative in your heads, but it can come handy when playing out big encounters or when you feel like playing more strategically.

To use it, you will need:

- To print or draw a copy of the board so you can have it on the table — that way you can place things on it and still have access to this book.
- Tokens or miniatures for the vehicles.
- Speed tokens.

RELATIVE DISTANCE BETWEEN VEHICLES

The rest of the vehicles taking place in the encounter are placed in the other spaces of the board depending on the distance they are from the PC's vehicle when the conflict arises.

NOTE: The board only takes into consideration the relative distance between the PC's vehicle and the rest, assuming they all travel in the same direction. Consider the front and back to cover the respective hemisphere of space in the front or back of the PC's vehicle (i.e. In the vacuum of space the distances are so great that it does not really matter if ships are approaching from one side of the back; in land it can be more important but it is left to the GM's narrative). What this really represents is if the vehicles are getting closer or further to the PC's vehicle and whether they are following the same direction or not.

SETTING UP THE BOARD

To begin an encounter using the board do the following:

Place the PC's vehicle's token in the centre space of the board. It does not move from there (i.e. The vehicle does move in relation to terrain or distances to planets, but it remains in the centre of the board as the board is used to represent the relative distance between the PC's vehicle and the rest. Therefore, you'll only move the other vehicles on the board).

NOTE: If the PCs have more than one vehicle, decide which one will be on the centre of the board. Whenever the rules refer to the PCs vehicle, they are referring to the one in the centre of the board.

If the PC's vehicle was already moving when the conflict started, give it some Speed (it is recommended not to start with more than 5 Speed on the PC's vehicle).

Place the rest of the vehicles where they would be as it pertains your story with as much Speed as the story requires, if any (note that if they have just reached the PC's vehicle going after them, they should have more Speed that the PC's, otherwise they could not have entered the board).

While the players can argue about their vehicle's starting Speed and the distance they find themselves from the rest of the vehicles, this is determined by the GM as she sees fit for the story.

MOVEMENT ON THE BOARD

During the maintenance phase you will resolve the Speed of the vehicles, moving them across the board towards the direction they are facing as much as their Speed.

Remember that the PC's vehicle never moves from the centre of the board, but you still need to resolve its Speed: When calculating how much the other vehicles move, subtract its Speed from all the vehicles that are going in the same direction; or add it to all the vehicles that are going in the opposite direction.

Vehicles that leave the board are considered to have lost track or fallen behind.

TERRAIN

Vehicles, same as characters, can use terrain in their favour to obtain some kind of advantage over their opponents, such as protection against attacks, a place to hide, or an opportunity to lose their pursuers. It is up to the GM to determine if a certain terrain can be used by a

specific vehicle, given its size and characteristics, or if moving through it might incur penalties of some kind (i.e. a small humvee might be able to use a forest to stay hidden, whereas a tank might have trouble navigating through the same terrain).

Terrain can also be used to hide, move stealthily, and avoid radars and other forms of detection. Some terrain might be difficult to navigate — confronting vehicles that try to move through it as a TSE and damaging or impairing the movement of those vehicles that fail — or even impassable for certain vehicles, which must find a way around.

TIP: When the terrain confronts the vehicle, it should be a TSE that plays as many cards as the vehicle's Speed (and it can have advantages or disadvantages depending on the circumstances). However, it is up to the GM to decide the effects and opportunities that might arise when playing in a given terrain.

Vehicles can hide, ambush, and approach stealthily like characters do - although oftentimes it is very difficult for them to get close enough to do these things effectively. Also, vehicles can get cover from rocks, buildings, and all types of things. Just like playing with characters, using terrain is a narrative tool that each GM can use as they see fit for their stories.

ATTACKING A VEHICLE

When attacking a vehicle, you can either target the vehicle as a whole or try to target one of its systems, in which case you will receive one disadvantage. Neither option will allow you to target the crew directly.

An attack against a vehicle has two effects simultaneously: One, it can cause damage which will eventually lead to the destruction of the vehicle; and two, it can shut down one or more modules, which will eventually lead to the vehicle becoming inoperative. To represent these effects, follow the steps below:

1. Subtract the damage dealt from the vehicle's Structure. If it is reduced below zero, the vehicle is destroyed.

2. Divide the damage caused by the vehicle's Threshold and round it down. The resulting number is the Piercing damage.

3. Choose a system to be the target of the piercing damage. If the attacker targeted one of the vehicle's systems, that's the system that will be damaged; otherwise it is chosen by the target vehicle's captain (He cannot choose a system which has all of its modules shut down and has no characters in it).

4. The captain chooses a number of modules of that system equal to the Piercing damage and shuts them down.

E.g. A successful attack deals 12 damage, which is reduced to 9 by the vehicle's Armour 3. The vehicle's Structure is reduced by 9 points. Additionally, the vehicle's Threshold is 4, which means the attack's piercing damage shuts down 2 modules.

If there are any characters inside the system receiving piercing damage, the captain can decide to convert one or more piercing damage into one or more final physical damage to each of those characters instead of shutting down that many modules. If all the modules are shut down, any extra piercing damage must be converted into final physical damage for the characters inside that system.

E.g. If in the previous example, the attack targeted the vehicle's cockpit. This vehicle has one working module installed in the cockpit. The attack shuts it down, and then deals one final physical damage to each member of the crew.

If the cockpit's system had had two working modules, the captain could have chosen:

1. To shut down both modules; the crew takes no damage.

2. To shut down only one module, letting the crew inside the cockpit receive one final physical damage.

3. To let the crew inside the cockpit receive two final physical damage; no modules are shut down.

VALID COUNTERACTIONS TO AN ATTACK

Due to the nature of vehicle combat, its typical ranges, the aiming automation systems and other issues intrinsic to vehicles, preventive counteractions (such as attacking back or hacking the attacking vehicle) are not considered valid counteractions against attacks by vehicles and can not be chosen as such (missiles shot by vehicles, on the other hand, can be confronted in this fashion, because once they leave the vehicle they are not considered part of the vehicle). Therefore, the only valid type of counteraction against an attack from another vehicle is trying to avoid it.

CREW OF A DESTROYED VEHICLE

Vehicles are meant to be able to withstand a lot, so when one breaks it is seriously bad news for the crew inside. If the crew does not die from the impact, it will be left exposed to the exterior, or even thrown out at high speed.

As a general rule, if the crew does not leave the vehicle before it is destroyed, they die. However, it might make sense in your story for your characters not to die straight away after their vehicle is destroyed. You can play a whole scene in which the characters must escape from the vehicle, leaving the controls behind, dodging broken parts and flames played by TSEs, and if they are successful they survive.

HACKING A VEHICLE

When you hack a vehicle you must declare any one of the its systems as your target. The target vehicle can confront your action hacking your own vehicle, or let its Firewall confront your action.

To resolve a successful DoS action against a vehicle, divide the final ACS damage you dealt by the target's Threshold and round it down. The resulting amount is the number of modules that are shut down in the system you targeted. The captain of the target vehicle chooses which modules are shut down (if the attack could shut down more modules than the target system has, the extra ACS damage is lost).

REPAIRING A VEHICLE

Modules can stop working for two reasons: they can either be shut down from ACS damage or from Piercing damage from a regular attack. As both are repaired the same way you don't need to keep track of what shut each down.

To repair a module, the vehicle must either be fitted with a working repairing module or have enough room to be repaired manually by a robot or technician.

Select the module you want to repair and be confronted by a TSE that plays as many cards as the vehicle's Threshold. If all the modules in that system were shut down, receive one disadvantage. If you are successful the module is repaired, but it cannot be used until the end of the vehicle's turn.

HIDING & SEARCHING VEHICLES

Vehicles can also hide and search. Hiding and searching actions are performed by the pilot using his Mind, and, instead of his Survival, he will use the vehicle's Stealth to hide and the vehicle's Radar to search. A vehicle receives as many disadvantages towards hiding as its Size.

A vehicle moving close by is reason enough to suspect that something is hiding, as they are very large and fairly noisy — of course, they also need a very large cover. In space, using the engine is also reason enough to trigger a searching action from anyone in range (bear in mind that in space the engine is only used when changing direction or speed, as there is no air resistance a vehicle does not lose speed on its own and can keep flying in a set course with the engines off).

WHAT AMBIENCE?

While inside a vehicle use the following clues to understand which ambience the characters are in while performing their actions:

If the characters are using the vehicle's modules and the action's success only reflects in the internal functioning of the vehicle (such as repairing), it is OS. If the action's success reflects in something that happens outside the vehicle (such as moving, shooting something, etc), it is the ambience in which the vehicle finds itself: Space, Urban, or Wilderness.

If the characters are performing actions themselves instead of using a module (perhaps because there are enemies within their vehicle), the ambience would be Urban for a vehicle in a place with gravity or Space for a vehicle in the vacuum of space.

Hacking actions are always OS.

VEHICLE CREATION

Follow these steps to build a vehicle:

1. Buy a vehicle model (The GM should determine which vehicles are available to you where you are. In some cases you might end up buying a second hand vehicle for a reduced cost, which will already have some modules installed and might have some downgraded stats as determined by the GM).
2. Come up with a name for your vehicle.
3. Write down its special ability next to it if it has any.
4. Write down its stats on a vehicle sheet.
5. Take note of its non-energized systems and their corresponding modules in general.
6. Take note of its energised systems according to the following steps.:
7. Write down their names in the title areas.
8. Each system comes with space for up to 5 modules. Many of your vehicle's systems won't have that many, and you must black out the difference.
9. When you buy a module for them, write down the name in the corresponding systems (you may want to add a line of text reminding you of what they do). For as long as the vehicle is operative you can continue to buy new modules for it, and you can also remove modules that you no longer want.

NOTE: It is important to know that the empty spaces in a system are also considered modules (they just don't do anything). Therefore, when a system has any number of modules shut down, you can choose to shut down those empty spaces that are not blacked out — effectively not losing any working modules. It is recommended to cross or tick with a pencil the modules or empty spaces that are shut down; this is so you can later repair them, and to differentiate them from the blacked out spaces.

SYSTEMS

Systems are the 'rooms' of a vehicle. In each system you can install a certain number of modules — the 'building blocks' or the 'tools' of the vehicle. Systems can be of two types: energised or general. The modules of energised systems can be shut down, while general modules cannot.

Each system can only have modules of the same type (e.g. the Cockpit system can only have cockpit modules). Each system comes with a number that determines how many modules it can have installed (e.g. The system Cockpit 3 can have up to 3 Cockpit modules installed), but a vehicle cannot have modules of a higher level than the vehicle's level (e.g. The system Cockpit 3 of a vehicle level 2 can have either three cockpit modules of level 1 or one cockpit module level 2 with another level 1).

Modules are of a type, determining which systems they can be installed; they have a level that limits in which vehicles they can be installed, and they have a cost in credits that must be paid to obtain them. Each module then provides the vehicle with some ability which can be used by any crew member with access to it.

NOTE: If cortex connected to the vehicle, a character has access to all of the vehicle's modules, otherwise, while using the vehicle manually a character only has access to the vehicle modules installed in the same system he is in.

VEHICLE MODELS

MARK III SPACERUNNER

INFO

Cost: 590,000 credits; Model: MC-SC-M45; Level: 1; Type: Spacecraft (NOT atmosphere capable); Size: 4; Control: Cortex connected; Max. crew: 20; Max. atm. speed: -.

Ability: It can have up to 24 Detachable Container modules, which do not count towards the maximum of Cargo modules it can have.

STATS

Initiative	Dodge	Evasion	Acceleration	Radar
3	-		3	4
Structure	**Armour**		**Threshold**	**Stealth**
100	1	6	3	2

SYSTEMS

Energized systems: Core 3; Cockpit 4; Engineering 3; Defence 3; Weaponry 2.

General systems: Command 1; Hull 1; Cargo 5; Multip. 10.

AM'UNDSEN LIGHT CRAFT

INFO

Cost: 800,000 credits; Model: IZ00945A; Level: 1; Type: Spacecraft (Atmosphere capable); Size: 2; Control: Cortex connected; Max. crew: 4; Max. atm. speed: 4.

Ability: It can have level 2 Core modules.

STATS

Initiative	Dodge	Evasion	Acceleration	Radar
8	+	3	3	6
Structure	Armour	(2)	Threshold	Stealth
40	2	6	3	4

SYSTEMS

Energized systems: Core 3; Cockpit 4; Engineering 3; Defence 2; Weaponry 1; Advanced Weaponry 2.

General systems: Command 1; Hull 1; Cargo 2; Multip. 5.

HEAVY LEE WAR CRAFT

INFO

Cost: 900,000 credits; Model: AFF-01D; Level: 1; Type: Spacecraft (Atmosphere capable); Size: 2; Control: Cortex connected; Max.crew: 4; Max. atm. speed: 5.

Ability: It can have level 2 Weaponry modules.

STATS

Initiative	Dodge	Evasion	Acceleration	Radar
6	+	2	3	6
Structure	Armour	(2)	Threshold	Stealth
40	3	6	4	4

SYSTEMS

Energized systems: Core 3; Cockpit 3; Engineering 3; Defence 2; Weaponry 2; Advanced Weaponry 2.

General systems: Command 1; Hull 1; Cargo 3; Multip. 4.

LIN MENG STEALTH CRAFT

INFO

Cost: 1,500,000 credits; Model: MC-SC-M45; Level: 2; Type: Spacecraft (Atmosphere capable); Size: 3; Control: Cortex connected; Max. crew: 10; Max. atm. speed: 5.

Ability: It can have the Cloaking III module, which will not count towards the maximum of Hull modules it can have.

STATS

Initiative	Dodge	Evasion	Acceleration	Radar
7		4	3	8
Structure	Armour	(3)	Threshold	Stealth
70	4	6	4	7

SYSTEMS

Energized systems: Core 4; Cockpit 4; Engineering 3; Defence 3; Weaponry 3; Advanced Weaponry 4.

General systems: Command 2; Hull 2; Cargo 3; Multip. 7.

AL'MAYIN STEALTH WARSHIP

INFO

Cost: 1,750,000 credits; Model: LMN-M45; Level: 2; Type: Spacecraft (NOT atmosphere capable); Size: 3; Control: Cortex connected; Max. crew: 15; Max. atm. speed: -.

Ability: It can have the Cloaking III module, which will not count towards the maximum of Hull modules it can have.

STATS

Initiative	Dodge	Evasion	Acceleration	Radar
6		3	4	9
Structure	**Armour**		**Threshold**	**Stealth**
100	4	6	4	8

SYSTEMS

Energized systems: Core 5; Cockpit 4; Engineering 3; Defence 4; Weaponry 2; Advanced Weaponry 3.

General systems: Command 2; Hull 2; Cargo 4; Multip. 12.

ELCANO EXPLORER VESSEL

INFO

Cost: 3,000,000 credits; Model: LCN-A32; Level: 3; Type: Spacecraft (NOT atmosphere capable); Size: 3; Control: Cortex connected; Max. crew: 30; Max. atm. speed: -.

Ability: It gains one advantage towards Piloting actions towards finding a route in the Labyrinth.

STATS

Initiative	Dodge	Evasion	Acceleration	Radar
5	-	3	5	8
Structure	**Armour**		**Threshold**	**Stealth**
150	4	9	4	5

SYSTEMS

Energized systems: Core 5; Cockpit 5; Engineering 5; Defence 4; Weaponry 3; Advanced Weaponry 4.

General systems: Command 3; Hull 2; Cargo 6; Multip.20.

VEHICLE CUSTOMIZATION

CORE

The modules that can be installed in the Core system relate to the functioning of the vehicle and can affect all other systems with its improvements.

ASSISTED WEAPONRY

Level: 2; Cost: 100,000 credits. Weapons from this vehicle gain an advantage when attacking tagged targets.

COGNITIVE ASSISTANCE

Level: 2; Cost: 150,000 credits. Each member of the crew can use one module per round as a passive action, but only if it's in the same system as the module they used with their regular action.

IMPROVED RADAR

Level 1; Cost: 50,000 credits. Gain one advantage when using the vehicle's Radar.

IMPROVED STEALTH

Level 1; Cost: 50,000 credits. Gain one advantage when using the vehicle's Stealth.

MOVEMENT PREDICTION

Level 2; Cost: 120,000 credits. Activated. Use it while shooting one of the vehicle's weapon, your target will not receive advantages from Evasion used previous to this attack (if the target uses evasion against this attack it will apply). Limited to once per round.

NEUROMUSCULAR INTERFACE

Level: 2; Cost: 20,000 credits. When using a module from the cockpit while cortex connected, you can choose to use either Link or Dexterity.

PARTIAL SHIP AI I

Level: 2; Cost: 250,000 credits. The vehicle can be considered an NPV under the control of its captain. The vehicle on its own can use its modules as a TSE that plays 3 cards (it will receive any advantages or disadvantages provided by its modules when using them). It is not limited to one action per round; each round it will use each of the modules not used by its crew once.

It will have its crew's best interest in mind when taking decisions, but it will always follow it's captain's orders.

The vehicle will have a semblance of a personality and will answer questions directed at it. The vehicle's type of personality is chosen during it's creation (jovial, witty, posh, etc.), and it will develop further through its relation with its crew.

PARTIAL SHIP AI II

Level: 3; Cost: 500,000 credits. This module does the same as Partial ship AI I, but the TSE plays 4 cards.

Remote control

Level 1; Cost: 10,000 credits. As the vehicle's captain, you can drive it remotely for as long as you can connect to it. Additionally, the vehicle can be given directions, and realistic arrival and departure times which it will follow with precision. While self-driving the vehicle cannot dodge attacks.

VR DEFENSIVE PROJECTOR

Level 2; Cost: 150,000 credits. A VR defensive projector is a virtual reality program installed throughout the entire ship. When activated, it will project images of special operations teams defending and barricading all the doors and corridors of the ship, as well as projecting decoys of the crew throughout the entire ship.

Any attacker will have to confront a TSE that plays three cards to learn to distinguish the projections from reality, or they will suffer one disadvantage towards all their actions until they are able to deactivate the projector or leave the ship.

COCKPIT

The modules installed where the crew usually is, generally meant to protect it further.

BLACK SAFE BOX I

Level: 1; Cost: 200,000 credits. This module cannot be selected to be shut down through damage or hacking, even if it is the last one working in the system.

When the crew in the cockpit is going to suffer damage from an attack on the cockpit's system, reduce that damage by one.

Additionally, if the vehicle is destroyed, all the characters in the cockpit become Traumatised but they won't suffer any other damage from the destruction of the vehicle. The cockpit won't be destroyed, and will become a safety capsule.

As a safety capsule this has the characteristic ghost, and is invisible to radars — it needs to be seen with the naked eye to be targeted by attacks. It has enough power to sustain its crew alive for one year. A week after the vehicle is destroyed, or sooner if anyone in the crew wakes up to operate it, the safety capsule will stop being invisible to radars, will lose the ghost characteristic and will launch powerful S.O.S signals until it's rescued or a member of the crew turns it off.

BLACK SAFE BOX II

Level: 2; Cost: 500,000 credits. It works just like a Black Safe Box I but additionally it is fitted with a small engine that will automatically take itself to the closest friendly location known to the vehicle - if there is none, it will take itself to the last location where the vehicle refuelled.

BRAIN EXPANSION

Level: 2; Cost: 45,000 credits. Activated. Receive one unpreventable neural damage to select one of your Attributes and reset the number of cards you can play with that Attribute this round to its maximum again.

CARDAN CHAMBER

Level: 1; Cost: 20,000 credits. The crew in the cockpit automatically succeeds in a confrontation against one Stress. Do not play cards for it.

DIALYSIS MACHINE

Level: 2; Cost: 50,000 credits. During each maintenance phase, reduce the toxicity of each member of the crew inside the cockpit by one.

LINEAR SPEED REGULATOR

Level: 1; Cost: 25,000 credits. Cancel the first Stress or Strain this vehicle gains when using Accelerate each round.

MEDICAL SYSTEMS

Level: 1; Cost: 45,000 credits. You can perform Medical actions onto the crew inside the cockpit and gain one advantage towards it.

SHOCK ABSORBENT CHAMBER

Level: 2; Cost: 100,000 credits. The crew in the cockpit gains one advantage when confronting Stress.

ENGINEERING

Modules that care and repair the vehicle, or hack other vehicles.

BACKUP SYSTEMS

Level: 1; Cost: 35,000 credits. Instant. Shut down this module to increase the threshold of the vehicle by one for the remainder of the round. You cannot use energy distributor on this module.

ENERGY DISTRIBUTOR

Level 2; Cost 45,000 credits. Activated. Choose a module that is shut down and another module of the same level or higher that is online. The module that was shut down is now online and the module that was online is now shut down.

REMOTE REPAIRS

Level: 1; Cost: 25,000 credits. You can perform repairing actions against other vehicles up to two spaces on the board away.

REPAIRING MINI-DRONES I

Level 1; Cost: 30,000 credits. You can perform repairing actions on the vehicle. When you do so you can reduce the number of cards the damage plays by up to 2, but the effects of repairing won't take place in that many rounds.

REPAIRING MINI-DRONES II

Level 2; Cost: 50,000 credits. You can perform repairing actions on the vehicle. You can choose to delay the effects up to one round to reduce the number of cards played by the module by 2.

RIG 3 (LINKWAVE 1000 KM)

Level: 1; Cost: 100,000 credits. Action (Hacking). It causes 3 points of ACS damage when performing a DoS action, or gives 1 tag to an objective.

RIG 4 (LINKWAVE 100 KM)

Level: 1; Cost: 90,000 credits. Action (Hacking). It causes 4 points of ACS damage when performing a DoS action, or gives 2 tags to an objective.

RIG 4 (LINKWAVE 1000 KM)

Level: 2; Cost: 200,000 credits. Action (Hacking). It causes 4 points of ACS damage when performing a DoS action, or gives 2 tags to an objective.

RIG 5 (LINKWAVE 100 KM)

Level: 2; Cost: 175,000 credits. Action (Hacking). It causes 5 points of ACS damage when performing a DoS action, or gives 3 tags to an objective.

TAGGER 3 (LINKWAVE 1,000KM)

Level: 1; Cost: 100,000 credits. Action (Hacking). It gives 3 tags to an objective.

TAGGER 5 (LINKWAVE 1,000KM)

Level: 2; Cost: 200,000 credits. Action (Hacking). It gives 5 tags to an objective.

DEFENCE

The energised modules that defend the vehicle.

EMERGENCY THRUSTERS

Level: 1; Cost: 30,000 credits. Instant. Gain one advantage towards a dodging action and then shut down this module.

FIREWALL UPDATE I

Level: 1; Cost: 75,000 credits. The vehicle's FW gains one advantage.

FIREWALL UPDATE II

Level: 3; Cost: 150,000 credits. The vehicle's FW gains two advantages.

FLARES

Level: 1; Cost: 75,000 credits. Instant. Gain one advantage towards one dodging action against missiles. Limited once per round.

SHIELDING 1

Level: 1; Cost: 100,000 credits. Reduces the base damage taken from plasma and EM weapons by 1.

SHIELDING 3

Level: 2; Cost: 250,000 credits. Reduces the base damage taken from plasma and EM weapons by 3.

SHIELDING 5

Level: 3; Cost: 500,000 credits. Reduces the base damage taken from plasma and EM weapons by 5.

UNTAGGER I

Level: 1; Cost: 50,000 credits. Select a number of tags on your vehicle. You can perform a Technical action against a TSE that plays that many cards. If successful, remove that many tags from your vehicle.

UNTAGGER II

Level: 2; Cost: 80,000 credits. Select a number of tags on your vehicle. You can perform a Technical action with one advantage against a TSE that plays as that many cards. If successful, remove that many tags from your vehicle.

WEAPONRY

The standard weaponry of the vehicle. They can be installed more than once.

20MM MACHINE GUN

Level: 1; Cost: 65,000 credits. Firearm. After dealing damage, it deals damage an additional time (go through all the steps again). Limit once per attack.

1 km	10 km	100 km	1,000 km
4+++	4+		

50MM MACHINE GUN

Level: 1; Cost: 75,000 credits. Firearm. After dealing damage, it deals damage an additional time (go through all the steps again). Limit once per attack.

1 km	10 km	100 km	1,000 km
5++	5+		

50MM-X MACHINE GUN

Level: 1; Cost: 75,000 credits. Explosive.

1 km	10 km	100 km	1,000 km
5++	5+		

100MM-X MACHINE GUN

Level: 2; Cost: 120,000 credits. Explosive.

1 km	10 km	100 km	1,000 km
12+	12+		

RAILGUN 1

Level: 1; Cost: 100,000 credits. Railgun 1.

1 km	10 km	100 km	1,000 km
5+	5+		

RAILGUN 3

Level: 2; Cost: 150,000 credits. Railgun 3.

1 km	10 km	100 km	1,000 km
7+	7+		

RAILGUN 5

Level: 3; Cost: 250,000 credits. Railgun 5.

1 km	10 km	100 km	1,000 km
10+	10+		

ADVANCED WEAPONRY

The advanced weaponry of the vehicle. They can be installed more than once.

PLASMA GUN

Level: 1; Cost: 75,000 credits. Plasma 1.

1 km	10 km	100 km	1,000 km
4++	4+	4	

PLASMA SPEAR

Level: 2; Cost: 150,000 credits. Plasma 2.

1 km	10 km	100 km	1,000 km
5+++	5++	5+	

HEAVY PLASMA GUN

Level: 2; Cost: 150,000 credits. Plasma 3.

1 km	10 km	100 km	1,000 km
7++	7+	7	

HEAVY PLASMA SPEAR

Level: 3; Cost: 250,000 credits. Plasma 4.

1 km	10 km	100 km	1,000 km
8+++	8++	8+	

PLASMA CANNON

Level: 3; Cost: 250,000 credits. Plasma 5.

1 km	10 km	100 km	1,000 km
12++	12+	12	

EM CANNON

Level: 2; Cost: 150,000 credits. It causes ACS damage.

1 km	10 km	100 km	1,000 km
6++	5++	4++	

HEAVY EM CANNON

Level: 3; Cost: 250,000 credits. It causes ACS damage.

1 km	10 km	100 km	1,000 km
8++	7++	6++	

MISSILES

Missiles are a special kind of weapon, as the weapon itself is the projectile. They work in the following manner:

Action. Shoot a missile against a tagged target.

A missile does not hit its target immediately: If the target is in the same range, it does not need to Approach; if it is up to two ranges away, it needs to Approach once; if it is three ranges away, it needs to Approach twice. Right before the maintenance phase, if a missile does not need to Approach resolve its attack; otherwise, it Approaches once.

If successful, it deals physical damage in an area. It causes one less damage per metre (~3.3 ft) or fraction away from the point of impact.

While Approaching, a missile can be attacked and hacked. When attacking it, the missile is as many ranges away as the number of times it needs to Approach.

It has a FW value to protect itself against hacking attacks, and Initiative to dodge attacks. It will be destroyed if its Structure is reduced to a negative number, and it will shut down if its Energy is reduced to a negative number. In either case, the missile fails and can no longer attack.

STANDARD MISSILE

Level: 2; Cost: 200,000 credits (Note that the cost is for the whole missile-shooting module, not per missile). Missile. When it resolves its attack action it deals 20 physical damage and gains one advantage.

6	6	7	8

"MOSQUITO"

Level: 2; Cost: 200,000 credits (Note that the cost is for the whole missile-shooting module, not per missile). Missile. When it resolves its attack action it deals 12 physical damage and gains two advantages.

6	6	15	9

"EAGLE"

Level: 2; Cost: 200,000 credits (Note that the cost is for the whole missile-shooting module, not per missile). Missile. When it resolves its attack action it deals 12 physical damage, gains one advantage, and negates the advantages gained from Evasion.

6	6	7	8

"CHEETAH"

Level: 2; Cost: 200,000 credits (Note that the cost is for the whole missile-shooting module, not per missile). Missile. When it resolves its attack action it deals 12 physical damage, and gains one advantage. It automatically Approaches once when shot.

6	6	7	8

"KANGAROO"

Level: 3; Cost: 400,000 credits (**Note that t**he cost is for the whole missile-shooting module, not per missile). Missile. It requires to Approach one additional time than usual. When it resolves its attack action it gains two advantages but it does not deal damage. Instead it can transport up to five characters in full gear. When it hits a vehicle successfully, it will perforate its hull with its front drill, sealing the seam between itself and the vehicle to effectively become a part of the vehicle. Then, it will open its airlock to allow the boarding team to disembark.

25	10	7	8

MULTI PURPOSE MISSILE LAUNCHER

Level: 3; Cost: 1,000,000 credits. This weapon module can shoot any Level 1 or 2 missiles.

HULL

What covers the exterior of the vehicle.

ARMOURED I

Level: 1; Cost: 100,000 credits. The vehicle gains 1 armour.

ARMOURED II

Level: 2; Cost: 250,000 credits. The vehicle gains 2 armour.

ARMOURED III

Level: 3; Cost: 500,000 credits. The vehicle gains 3 armour.

CLOAKING I

Level: 1; Cost: 200,000 credits. The whole vehicle gains Ghost (Does not appear on LinkWave radars. It can still be hacked using other methods or through LinkWave if the hacker locates it accurately). Additionally, you cannot be the target of Searching actions in the 1000 Km range.

CLOAKING II

Level: 2; Cost: 500,000 credits. The whole vehicle gains Ghost (Does not appear on LinkWave radars. It can still be hacked using other methods or through LinkWave if the hacker locates it accurately). Additionally, you cannot be the target of Searching actions in the 100 and 1000 Km ranges.

CLOAKING III

Level: 3; Cost: 1,000,000 credits. The whole vehicle gains Ghost (Does not appear on LinkWave radars. It can still be hacked using other methods or through LinkWave if the hacker locates it accurately). Additionally, you cannot be the target of Searching actions in the 10, 100 and 1000 Km ranges.

STEEL PLATED

Level: 1; Cost: 100,000 credits. The vehicle gains 2 armour and loses 1 Acceleration.

COMMAND

These modules improve some of the basic stats of the vehicle. They can be installed more than once.

ACCELERATION UPGRADE

Level: 1; Cost: 200,000 credits. The vehicle gains +1 Acceleration.

CORTEX CONNECTED

Level: 1; Cost: 80,000 credits. The vehicle's control changes to cortex connected.

EVASION UPGRADE

Level: 1; Cost: 200,000 credits. The vehicle gains +1 Evasion.

FIREWALL UPGRADE

Level: 1; Cost: 200,000 credits. The vehicle's Firewall plays an additional card.

INITIATIVE UPGRADE

Level: 1; Cost: 250,000 credits. The vehicle gains +1 initiative.

RADAR UPGRADE

Level: 1; Cost: 175,000 credits. The vehicle gains +2 Radar.

SPEED UPGRADE

Level: 1; Cost: 200,000 credits. The vehicle gains +2 Maximum Speed.

STEALTH UPGRADE

Level: 1; Cost: 175,000 credits. The vehicle gains +2 Stealth.

STRUCTURE UPGRADE

Level: 1; Cost: 250,000 credits. The vehicle gains +20% Structure rounded up.

SYSTEM UPGRADE

Level: 1; Cost: 75,000 credits. Choose one of the vehicle's system, it can have one additional module (up to a maximum of 5).

CARGO

Most of the vehicle's internal space is taken by cargo modules. They can be installed more than once.

CARGO BAY I

Level 1; Cost: 10,000 credits. The vehicle can carry a cargo of up to 2 tons. It is safe to use with living cargo.

CARGO BAY II

Level 2; Cost: 100,000 credits. The vehicle can carry a cargo of up to 20 tons. It is safe to use with living cargo.

CRYOPOOL

Level 3; Cost: 100,000 credits. A Cryopool operates using the same principles as a stasis chamber, but it is a lot larger and can host lifeforms up to 5 metres tall, 3 metres wide, and 2 metres deep. It is often made of reinforced carbon-steel structures, and is capable of safely containing all but the most dangerous creatures of the universe.

DETACHABLE CONTAINER

Level 3; Cost: 100,000 credits. Each detachable Container can hold up to 100 tons. This is capable by detaching from the spacecraft, entering a nearby atmosphere or spacecraft, and parking in a specific point to be loaded or unloaded. Then, it can take off and attach to the spacecraft again.

It is safe to use with living cargo.

HANGAR

Level 2; Cost: 400,000 credits. The vehicle has a hangar in which it can transport any number of vehicles whose added size is lower than its own.

Spacecraft's hangars have a double door airlock to avoid losing any air. When a vehicle goes through the first, it closes, then the space between the doors sucks the air out, and only then the exterior door opens.

QUARANTINE CONTAINMENT UNIT

Level 1; Cost: 200,000 credits. A quarantine containment unit is a two metres by two metres by three metres armoured container that is shielded against all types of know radiation and chemical attacks, and is capable of withstanding the most extreme amounts of physical force.

SURFACE VEHICLE BAY

Level 2; Cost: 400,000 credits. A Surface Vehicle Bay hosts three small vehicles, including a quad-bike, a surface slider, and a small motorboat, each suitable to transport up to four people and some cargo. The vehicles have about 100 kilometres of autonomy before they need to return to the bay to recharge for two hours, after which they are fully charged again.

TROOP CARRIER

Level 1; Cost: 40,000 credits. The vehicle can carry two dozen passengers in full gear inside (they are not connected to the cockpit and therefore cannot use the vehicle). These are not living quarters, which will be required for carrying those passengers through long distance space travel.

MULTIPURPOSE

Everything from living quarters to mineral extraction modules.

NOTE: The crew requires living quarters or a cryostasis chamber if you use the vehicle for long periods, or for space travel.

AUXILIARY ION THRUSTERS

Level: 3; Cost: 500,000 credits. Space flight takes half the time it would usually take.

CRUMBS

Level 2; Cost: 500,000 credits. A Course Retracing Universal Mobile Beacon System is composed by several deployable beacons that connect to each other in multiple wavelengths, and can pair with most common existing Labyrinth navigation beacons already deployed.

It is often used by exploration vessels that are traversing new paths through the Labyrinth, and its beacons can be recovered after the trip, ready to be used again in another tunnel. For this reason, finding such beacons is often a sign of danger, as it likely means that the ship that deployed them never returned to pick them up (probably because it suffered a horrible accident inside a tunnel smaller than it looked like, or it got lost even with the help of the retracing system).

CRYOSTASIS CHAMBER

Level 1; Cost: 25,000 credits. Each cryostasis chamber fits up to five crew members. Characters in cryostasis are in deep sleep and cannot do anything, but they do not age. They can set different parameters to wake up (time limit, alarms, when the ship receives a message, when it is attacked, etc). A character who wakes from cryostasis suffers 2 unpreventable neural damage.

E2

Level 1; Cost: 60,000 credits. An Enclosed Ecosystem or E squared module, is a miniature model of a real ecosystem capable of producing enough food and clean air for a crew of up to five people on a continuous basis. It is a carefully balanced mix of microorganisms, plants, and small animals. Any disturbance — be it chemical, electromagnetic, or any other kind — could damage it beyond repair.

It requires the crew to dispose of all their body waste, including sweat, in its dedicated lavatory.

ELIBRARY

Level 2; Cost: 90,000 credits. You can gain experience inside this vehicle during downtime (i.e. time spent travelling). You can use it to increase once per trip any one of the following Skills as if you had used them during a session and the group voted on it: Hacking, Medical, Technical, Cunning, and Profession.

EXPANDED COCKPIT

Level 1; Cost: 15,000 credits. Add two to the vehicle's maximum crew.

GRAP

Level 1; Cost: 300,000 credits. A Gas Refinery and Processing module contains all the necessary equipment to filter and compress valuable gases from a gas planet or a dense atmosphere. It stores the gas in small tanks that fit between 1,000 and 2,000 litres of gas depending on its density, and weighs 15 to 30 kilograms. It can safely store 50 tanks.

While regularly obtaining valuable gases and selling them, the crew can consider using it their job and maintain their lifestyle.

GRAVLAB

Level 2; Cost: 200,000 credits. A GravLab module is a small rotating section installed in the ship that recreates the feeling of gravity thanks to centripetal force. It is extremely useful to slowly acclimate surface forms to 0G environments and vice versa, as well as conduct experiments that require gravity.

GYM

Level 2; Cost: 90,000 credits. You can gain experience inside this vehicle during downtime (i.e. time spent travelling). You can use it to increase once per trip any one of the following Skills as if you had used them during a session and the group voted on it: CQC, Initiative, and EVA.

IMPERATOR CHAMBER

Level 2; Cost: 60,000 credits. An Imperator Chamber contains a protective dense atmosphere that slows down the metabolism of living beings very quickly to a point where they are capable of withstanding extreme acceleration and deceleration without receiving any harm. Its prolonged use has proven very dangerous for the organism,

but most people can recover from short periods inside such a chamber very quickly.

An Imperator Chamber can fit up to two characters simultaneously. These characters will not be affected by Stress and they will suffer 2 neural damage that they cannot recover until they leave the room.

LAB I

Level 2; Cost: 120,000 credits. You can use the laboratory to develop experiments and gain information from biological samples. You can develop Bio Upgrades, drugs, duplicate biologically based items, etc.

LAB II

Level 3; Cost: 200,000 credits. You can use the laboratory to develop experiments and gain information from biological samples. You can develop Bio Upgrades, drugs, duplicate biologically based items, etc. Gain one advantage when you use it.

LIVING QUARTERS

Level 1; Cost: 25,000 credits. Each living quarter fits one crew member, or it can be shared by a couple.

LUXURIOUS LIVING QUARTERS

Level 1; Cost: 100,000 credits. Each living quarter fits one crew member, or it can be shared by a couple. Characters living in these quarters gain +1 experience during downtime in the vehicle.

MERAP

Level 1; Cost: 300,000 credits. A Mineral Extraction, Refinery, and Processing Module contains a powerful surface drill and all the necessary equipment to extract, purify, and process all sorts of mineral into convenient 15 centimetre crystal cubes, which for most minerals means a weight between 15 and 30 kilograms. It can safely store 250 cubes.

While regularly obtaining valuable minerals and selling them, the crew can consider using it their job and maintain their lifestyle.

PLANETARY LIFE SCANNER

Level 2; Cost: 200,000 credits. A planetary life scanner is a medium range scanner that can detect most lifeforms on the surface of a planet after a full rotation in an orbit around 500 km over the surface of the planet.

It will provide data about the amount of biomass, the animal and plant composition of the biosphere, as well as data relative to the composition of the atmosphere, oceans, and main rock formations.

PORTABLE BIODOME

Level 1; Cost: 150,000 credits. A Portable Biodome is a deployable dome 60 metres in diametre and 10 metres in height, with an atmosphere filtering and purifying unit capable of providing breathable air for a crew of up to ten people. It includes a sealing system that will isolate the atmosphere inside of it from the outside, as well as an airlock door to connect it to the spacecraft and another to the outside world.

It requires solar light or an external power source to operate, and it can take as little as ten minutes or as long as two hours to make the air inside of it breathable, depending on the atmosphere of the planet.

SIMULATION ROOM

Level 2; Cost: 90,000 credits. You can gain experience inside this vehicle during downtime (i.e. time spent travelling). You can use it to increase once per trip any one of the following Skills as if you had used them during a session and the group voted on it: Ballistic, Survival, and Piloting.

SURGERY ROOM

Level 2; Cost: 120,000 credits. You can use this to treat one patient that has suffered any kind of wounds. You can replace missing limbs with cybernetics or grow them back. Gain one advantage towards Medical actions.

TASER

Level 2; Cost: 100,000 credits. A Tactical Assault Surface Extraction Rack is the fancy name for a steel frame with five tac-seats attached to a powerful winch hosted inside the spacecraft. It can deploy a hundred metre, braided nanomaterial cable, and safely pull the rack seating five characters in full gear up back into the ship in under ten seconds.

TECHPOD I

Level 2; Cost: 50,000 credits. You can use the Techpod to make and design things and gain information from non-organic samples. You can fabricate, remove, or repair Tech Upgrades, objects, robots, weapons, etc.

TECHPOD II

Level 3; Cost: 90,000 credits. You can use the Techpod to make and design things and gain information from non-organic samples. You can fabricate, remove, or repair Tech Upgrades, objects, robots, weapons, etc. Gain one advantage when you use it.

TOMB CHAMBER

Level 2; Cost: 150,000 credits. Introduce the body of a deceased character who has died from anything but old age, and has a mostly intact brain. The body will be preserved in the Tomb chamber and can therefore be taken to be revived in some of the most advanced medical hospitals (only in planetary capitals).

VR ROOM

Level 2; Cost: 300,000 credits. A VR Room contains four senso-suits that will recreate visual, auditory, olfactory, taste, and tactile stimuli. It is often used to run simulations of surface missions in planets with uncertain weather conditions or strange atmospheres. However, many crews have found more creative uses for these rooms, such as extracting information from unwilling prospective collaborators.

If the crew spends one day using it before entering a planet they have previously scanned, they will receive one advantage towards their Survival actions in that planet for a whole session.

It can also be used by the crew to simulate encounters against NPCs they have intel about and are not unique characters. Damage taken in the simulation does not have any effects in reality.

NON-PLAYER VEHICLES (NPV)

Non-player vehicles (NPVs) are similar to non-player characters, but they represent both a vehicle and its crew with the same stats. All the general guidelines for using NPCs must be followed when playing with NPVs, and what can be found below are only the few differences that must be observed to use them.

CREW

When fighting against an NPV, its crew is considered to be inside the cockpit system to calculate any damage they might suffer, and all of them are considered to have the same physical and neural health as specified on each NPV.

NPV crews do not follow the usual Stress or Strain rules, and each vehicle has its own rules to resolve these effects.

In the event of the Player Characters managing to board the NPV, or its crew leaving it for any purpose, the members of the crew will require their own NPC stats and from that moment on they won't be considered part of the NPV anymore. Their stats do not need to be similar to those of the NPV, as those are just a simplified representation of the crew. However, it is recommended that the GM does her best to represent any damage they suffered before leaving their vehicle or being boarded as best as she can.

EXHAUSTION

NPVs do not have a limited number of cards they can play per Stat per Round. Instead, they suffer a disadvantage when they use a Stat they have already used with the same Module during the current Round.

If they use the same Stat but a different Module, they do not suffer the Exhaustion disadvantage.

NPV CREATION

In the next pages you can find two examples of NPVs, but you can make your own following those examples and the rules for Vehicle Creation found in this book.

If the included examples become too easy of a challenge, you can increase the attribute of each of their Stats by one to make them more challenging. Additionally, you can also lower the number that the card they discard when they use Evasion or Acceleration and they will be harder to defeat.

On the other hand, if your players find them too hard to defeat, you can start the combat with some of their modules already shut down to lower the difficulty.

RAVAGER KRAKENBULL

Level 1 :: Size 2 :: Max. Speed 5 :: Crew 8 :: Cortex Connected

INITIATIVE	7	DODGE	+	EVASION	3	ACCELERATION	3		5
STRUCTURE	50	ARMOUR	3	THRESHOLD	3	FW	6 (2)		4
PILOTING	7 (2)	BALLISTIC	7 (2)	HACKING	4 (2)	RADAR	4 (2)	STEALTH	6 (2)

CORE SYSTEM

This system has three modules that don't do anything, but if they are all shut down, the vehicle cannot longer be piloted.

Each time the vehicle uses Evasion or Acceleration, discard a card from the top of the deck or the GM's hand. If its value is seven or lower, the vehicle suffers 1 unpreventable neural damage.

COCKPIT SYSTEM

This system has two modules that don't don anything, but they must be shut down before dealing physical damage to the crew.

DEFENCE SYSTEM

Mindless Drones

This vehicle can use this module 5 times, then it is shut down. Instant. Remove one tag or gain one advantage towards dodging a missile.

Changing Skin

Shuts down this module. It loses 1 armour and 1 Threshold, and recovers 20 Structure.

ENGINEERING SYSTEM

Rig 3 (LinkWave 1,000 km)

Action (Hacking). It causes 3 points of ACS damage when performing a DoS action, or gives 1 tag to an objective.

Regeneration

Action. Discard a card from the top of the deck or the GM's hand. If its value is eight or higher, choose one:

- A shut down module is back online.
- Recover 5 Structure.
- Recover 1 physical health.
- Recover 1 neural health.

If the card is a Joker, gain all of the above.

RAMMING SYSTEM

Modules from this system cannot be shut down.

Ramming Head

Action (Piloting). It can only be used against vehicles in the same space. If this vehicle has higher Speed, gain as many advantages as the difference. If successful, it deals 5 times this vehicle's Speed in physical damage (and suffers half that). This vehicle is no longer operative, and its Ravager crew now boards the rammed vehicle's interior.

While it is rammed into another vehicle, that vehicle suffers two disadvantages towards all its Piloting actions.

WEAPONS SYSTEM

Explosive Drones

Missile. It shoots three missiles every time it is used. Each deals 6 physical damage and gains one advantage.

4	3	7	8

Corrosive Goo

1 km	10 km	100 km	1,000 km
6+++	5+		

PIRATE HEAVY LEE

Level 1 :: Size 2 :: Max. Speed 5 :: Crew 4 :: Cortex Connected

INITIATIVE	6	DODGE	+	EVASION	2	ACCELERATION	3		4
STRUCTURE	40	ARMOUR	4	THRESHOLD	4	FW	6 (2)		5
PILOTING	6 (2)	BALLISTIC	8 (2)	HACKING	7 (2)	RADAR	6 (2)	STEALTH	4 (2)

CORE SYSTEM

This system has three modules that don't do anything, but if they are all shut down, the vehicle cannot longer be piloted.

Each time the vehicle uses Evasion or Acceleration, discard a card from the top of the deck or the GM's hand. If its value is seven or lower, the vehicle suffers 1 unpreventable neural damage.

COCKPIT SYSTEM

This system has two modules that don't don anything, but they must be shut down first.

Linear Speed Regulator

The first time it needs to check for Evasion or Acceleration, it automatically succeeds.

DEFENCE SYSTEM

Flares

Instant. Once per Round, it gains one advantage towards one dodging action against missiles.

Shielding

It reduces the base damage suffered from plasma and EM weapons by 1.

ENGINEERING SYSTEM

Rig 3 (LinkWave 1,000 km)

Action (Hacking). It causes 3 points of ACS damage when performing a DoS action, or gives 1 tag to an objective.

Repairing

Action. Discard a card from the top of the deck or the GM's hand. If its value is eight or higher, a shut down module is back online.

Backup systems

Instant. Shut down this module and increase the Threshold of the vehicle by one for the remainder of the Round.

WEAPONS SYSTEM

20 mm Machine Gun

Firearm. Once per attack, after dealing damage, it deals damage an additional time (go through all the steps again).

1 km	10 km	100 km	1,000 km
4+++	4+		

Railgun 3

1 km	10 km	100 km	1,000 km
7+	7+		

WEAPONS SYSTEM 2

"Eagle" Missile

Missile. It deals 12 physical damage, gains one advantage, and negates any advantages gained from Evasion.

		4	3
6	6	7	8

Plasma 2

1 km	10 km	100 km	1,000 km
5+++	5++	5+	

INTRODUCTORY ADVENTURE

A RELIC IN THE STREETS

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

It is the year 1971 of the Corvo Space Age. The Ravager war goes on at the edges of known space; meanwhile, down in the streets of Tiantang's Youni District – one of the most populated, hectic and crime-infested station complexes in the universe –, common citizens keep struggling to make ends meet under the uncaring laws of the Megacorps and the iron hand of the Corvo Tong mobs.

One such mob – the Sebolas, a local small-time outfit– just made an interesting discovery recently. During a raid on an Iz'kal cargo ship, they came across a piece of alien technology: an unidentified artefact, perhaps a primitive form of ancient cortex connector.

When Big T, the Sebolas boss, was deciding who to sell the artefact to, the Black Watch – a Human mercenary mob – burst in, and extorted the item from the weaker Sebolas by intimidation and threats. Now Big T wants his thingie back, but he lacks the manpower to get it... and he doesn't want to go head to head with the Black Watch, one of the craziest mobs of the Sector.

PLAYER CHARACTER INTRODUCTION

The adventure assumes the Player Characters are all in Tiantang, the massive Dyson ring that serves as a capital for the Corvo civilisation. Youni District, the area where the adventure takes place, is a gyro-zhan station inside Taiyang, one of the largest and most important sectors of the Great Ring.

The premade PCs that come included with the adventure (see pages 434-437) all live in Tiantang and have built-in motivations for taking part in the story; you can still play with a group of all-new characters if you wish.

The adventure runs smoothly if the PCs are freelancers, currently working for the Sebolas; assume this is the case if the PCs' background allows it (the premade characters all begin the adventure working for the Sebolas part-time).

If you need – or prefer – a different motivation for your PCs, use one of the following hooks for each character, as required:

- The PC is investigating local gangs and the underworld lifestyle, and thus approached the Sebolas – a low-level, relatively easy-to-reach mob – to learn about the subject first hand. Instead of killing the PC outright, Big T's ego swelled, and he took the PC in, getting the chance to tell a lot of – exaggerated – stories about his exploits and the power of his small gang.

- The PC needed a job desperately and was strong-armed into working for the mob part-time to pay off a debt. If the PC does a big enough job for Big T, the mob boss may leave the PC go free.

- The PC is seeking for a lost or kidnapped friend or relative, and infiltrated the mob to get a clue about their whereabouts. The Sebolas accepted the PC in their gang, but they don't know anything about the PCs' missing person; looking for them could be the basis for another adventure.

- The PC is an undercover officer of the law, working either for the Megacorps, the Coalition or an independent law-enforcement firm. The mission is to infiltrate the Sebolas, precisely to investigate about some stolen Iz'kal artefact and its alleged whereabouts.

Once you have a motivation for all PCs to be at the Sebola HQ in Youni District, proceed to **Chapter 1: A Relic in the Streets.**

CHAPTER 1: A RELIC IN THE STREETS

Read the following aloud as the adventure begins:

> You can see the stars here and there, a reminder that Tiantang is just a huge ring floating in the void. But the street is alive with noise, lights and bustle that soon bring you back to daily life in Youni District. You walk on a ledge street 171 levels above the pits, avoiding cc-jacked commuters and walking drone ads to finally reach your destination – the Dung Gao hotel, home of your employer and thus the headquarters of the Sebola Gang – your current employer.
>
> As the lift takes you to the penthouse, you can see many district levels at once – a veritable anthill of steel and glass, dotted with blinking ads and lightware going up and down as far as the eye can see, with a flood of Corvo coming and going in their

cycles and g-trains like a swarm of fireflies flying up from hell and back down. This is where you work – this is Youni District, Taiyang Sector 322, in the Great Ring of Tiantang.

The lift stops and old Qung and Pei, Big T's body-guards, are already there to meet you.

'Got a delivery, huh, kids?' - old Qung asks in his rhino voice as he leads you down the hall to Big T's office - 'He can use the good news. Not in a good mood this week he ain't'.

As you reach Big T's penthouse office, you notice the doorway is slid open. You can make out Big T's voice from behind the wall as you approach.

'Those Black Watchers don't know who they're dealin' with this time. They crossed the line!'

'We can't challenge the Black Watch, Big T' - that's the voice of Mrs. Hei, Big T's assistant and right-hand - 'we're outgunned. And Yung would never allow it'.

'The hell with the Black Watch! Coming here and demanding some, some tribute, like we're back in the planets, in their filthy Earthling shitball... I'll teach 'em to mess with me! I'll get it back!'

Then old Qung leads you in and you see Big T, a fat Corvo on an out-of-fashion suit sitting at his desk. Mrs. Hei, Big T's advisor and his best assassin, reclines nonchalantly at the desk as she does when she needs to calm down one of Big T's frequent tantrums. This time it seems it has something to do with the Black Watch, that Human gang that's been making noise all over Taiyang lately.

'Ah, my favourite rookies!' - Big T bellows as you peer around the doorway - 'The delivery went well, I hope?'

Explain to the PCs that they successfully collected on some of Big T's debts; it was straightforward business, nobody needed to get hurt, and Big T is happy as they deliver his money. He then dismisses them and Mrs. Hei, claiming he needs time alone to think what he'll do about those Black Watch thieves.

If the PCs ask what's up, as they leave Big T's office Mrs. Hei tells them the Black Watch have been pushing and muscling on the smaller gangs – 'like ours', she comments – more aggressively every week. Recently they came over demanding a cut of the profits and walked away with some alien artefact that Big T had grown particularly fond of, 'some high-tech thingie from an Iz'kal cargo vault'.

Mrs. Hei doesn't rightly know what the artefact is or what it does – Big T didn't either, truth be told – but it was worth around a million creds, easy. Perhaps more. Far more than the Black Watch's rightful cut anyway. Besides, it grates on Big T's pride that the Human Black Watch can waltz in and demand a cut like they own the turf.

'My guess is Big T's gonna send someone to their lair and try to steal the stupid thing back. Gonna lead us to war, he will'.

The PCs now have a choice. They can volunteer to get Big T's artefact back – he'd be glad to send them; they're rookies with nothing to lose – or they can go to the Black Watch lair and steal it on their own – after all, it's worth a lot of credits.

If the PCs don't seem to decide, have old Qung, the body-guard, make an off-hand comment such as 'gee, sure be nice if we could get T's alien toy back without angering them Humans. What can we do?'

Once the PCs have decided their course of action, let them know the Black Watch operates out of level 61-Z; a couple dozen levels above the Sebolas' turf. Everyone knows where their lair is, but very few try to cross the gang; they are rightfully feared as powerful and bloodthirsty thugs. Stealing from them is risky at best... but it shouldn't be too hard to cheat them out of it, as everyone knows Earthlings aren't all that bright (no offense to Human players in the party).

If the PCs take the mission from Big T, he gladly gives the artefact's description – a metal ring, about ten inches in diameter, studded with lights and microcircuitry, of obvious alien manufacture. Big T calls it 'the Iz'kal Ring', but nobody knows exactly what it does – it's a piece of technology, probably not Iz'kal but earlier, from the Korian or 'one of those old other species'. Big T reckons it's some form of primitive cortex connector, but who knows. In any event, it's worth a lot, and Big T is ready to pay 100,000 credits to each PC if they bring the artefact back safely. If the PCs so request, Big T also supplies any additional equipment he can afford (such as extra ammo or medical supplies).

ENCOUNTER I: KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Whether the PCs have Big T's blessing or set out to recover the alien artefact behind his back, they need to make some investigation about the Black Watch. There are three ways to make the investigation; the PCs may choose one or do them all simultaneously.

- Ask around the local underworld. This requires a successful Cunning action against a TSE that plays

three cards and spending some hours and credits at local pubs and joints.

- Research the data on news sites about the stolen Iz'kal cargo and the Black Watch's activities. This requires a successful Hacking action against a TSE that plays three cards and spending a few hours checking websites.

- Interrogate the Black Watch directly. Their people are not hard to find; all the PCs need to do is lay in ambush around certain district streets and succeed on a hiding action to ambush a wandering BW member. This is the riskiest method, as it also requires defeating or intimidating a **Black Watch Thug** (see page 285), but it counts as two successes if the PCs manage it.

Even if all actions and attempts fail, the PCs learn the following two facts by default:

The Black Watch have gone sort of crazy lately; something about a 'warrior crusade' against lesser gangs, like their leader suddenly got delusions of grandeur or something. It's all sanctioned by the local Tong bosses, but it's getting violent and spilling over.

The Black Watch indeed acquired a new treasure, some 'ancient crown' from an alien stash; they must be keeping it at their lair, or somewhere equally well-guarded.

For every PC that succeeds on one of the three actions, the party learns one of the following additional facts, in the order they are listed:

> The Black Watch are hosting a party to celebrate their new crusade, and it's likely they will show the artefact there, or at least that security will be less strict then. The party will take place the following night at the Black Watch's Lair on Level 61-Z.
>
> There's sure to be an Iz'kal dancing troupe at the party, as Wildbill Young, the crazed Black Watch leader, loves Iz'kal ghaziwa dancers.
>
> The party is 'members only', but the Black Watch are always open to new recruits, so long as they are Human and can prove 'Highlander lineage', whatever that means.
>
> Non-BW members may be allowed entrance to the party as servants, staff or bodyguards, but they'd have to be on the guest or staff list.

Once the PCs are ready to begin the mission, proceed to **Chapter 2: Lair of the Black Watch.**

CHAPTER 2: LAIR OF THE BLACK WATCH

It's now time to visit the Black Watch's den. The PCs, as most people on the Youni District underworld, know the location, up at Level 61-Z; it's a matter of getting there – and through the Human mercs who guard the area.

ENCOUNTER II: MY HOMIES REPRESENT

Read the following aloud as the PCs arrive to The Black Watch's neighbourhood:

> The stench of Human is heavy in the Black Watch turf, as you cross cracked pavement, graffitied walls and flickering streetlights. The place is littered with Human drifters, peddlers and beggars that either look at you sideways or stand staring over the rails into the level depths.
>
> As you finally reach Z section, a squad of armoured Humans move to block your path.

The thugs are a Black Watch street patrol, put there to prevent unwanted drifters from approaching the gang's lair. The PCs will need to cheat their way through the thugs with a successful Cunning action against a **Black Watch Thug** (see page 285).

If the PCs arrive the night of the party and try to pretend they are guests, the PCs gain one advantage.

If the PCs arrive at any other time, the Thug gains one advantage.

In any of the above situations, if a Human PC says she wants to apply for membership to the Black Watch, the PCs gain one advantage.

In any of the above situations, if an Iz'kal PC pretends to be a ghaziwa dancer, the PCs gain one advantage.

If they fail at defeating the TSE, or else decide to attack head-on, the PCs must fight through a patrol of two **Black Watch Thugs**, which causes a commotion in the street, calls attention to the PCs and scatters all bystanders away.

The thugs fight back straight and simple, confident in their superiority. If the fight lasts more than three Rounds, however, one of them tries to flee; if the PCs don't stop him, he'll warn the Black Watch about the intruders.

Once the PCs have dealt with the street thugs, proceed to **Encounter III.**

ENCOUNTER III: THE HIGHLANDER GUARD

As the PCs finally reach the Black Watch's bunker, they notice it has been remodelled to look like the frontispiece of an ancient castle – or Wildbill's anachronistic, heavy-metal view of one.

You're finally facing the Black Watch lair. It's been outfitted with ancient-looking stone, or a very convincing holodisplay of it, and a lot of statues of gargoyles and hanging chains. The front entrance looks like a metal grate; it's raised to allow entrance, but there are a few guards posted. They look at you with suspicion.

If one of the street thugs managed to escape and sound the alarm in **Encounter II**, these guards have been warned and attack on sight. The PCs must fight four Black Watch Thugs to gain access to the bunker.

If the PCs went through the first guards peacefully, they must now decide how to approach the bunker. There are several possible ways suggested by what the PCs learned during **Encounter I**:

- Any Human PC may apply for joining the Black Watch by proving Highlander ancestry. This is quite easy as the Black Watch have no idea what 'Highlander ancestry' is; you should allow it if the PCs simply says some Gaelic-sounding words or display medieval warrior qualities (red hair is a significant plus). Failing that, a successful Cunning action against a Black Watch Thug does the trick.

- Any Iz'kal PC, particularly a female, may pretend to be a ghaziwa dancer with a successful Cunning action confronted by a Black Watch Thug, and apply for an audition to Wildbill himself. If the PCs arrive the night of the party, the Iz'kal gains two advantages.

- Any other PC may pretend to be a servant or bodyguard to Human or Iz'kal PCs, by succeeding on a Cunning action against a Black Watch Thug to keep their bluff. If the PCs arrive the night of the party, the action gains one advantage.

- If the PCs arrived the night of the party, they may try to enter their names on the guest list by hacking the access computer, which as a Firewall that plays three cards. A success will grant all PCs entrance to the party.

- Any PC who isn't allowed entry may try to scan the fortress interior with a Hacking action. The base security systems confront the action as a TSE that plays three cards, but if successful, the PC downloads a blueprint of the lair, including the intended location of the alien artefact somewhere in Wildbill's throne room.

- Any PC who isn't allowed entry may try to infiltrate the base stealthily with a Survival action. The base security systems are represented by a TSE that plays three cards, but if successful, the PC has entered the upper chambers, where there are currently no guards, and may help the rest of the party from behind the enemy lines.

- There are several bikes stashed outside the lair; they surely belong to Black Watch elite members. These bikes may be hacked for the PCs to ride them or sabotage them; they all have Firewall 5 that plays three cards, and four energy. This doesn't help their entry, but may help their escape.

- If the PCs can't find or don't want to choose a peaceful way in, they can fight the guards; if no thug escaped to warn the Black Watch during **Encounter II**, they only need to fight two Black Watch Thugs to gain entry. Else, there will be five guards.

These are only some of the possibilities, of course; you can let the PCs come up with any other solution if it sounds convincing enough.

If the PCs fought their way in, they must now battle an entire lair's worth of crazy highlanders; proceed to **Chapter 4: The Shootout**.

If the PCs found a peaceful way in, they are allowed entry to the base and may mingle with the other Black Watchers – non-Humans are treated as servants or pets, which may require some patience from non-Human PCs – but they are not allowed to see Wildbill until the party.

If the PCs arrived on the night of the party, proceed to **Chapter 3: The Wild Party**.

If the PCs enter the lair at any other time, they can idly wait for the party (in which case you should proceed to **Chapter 3**) or attempt to stealthily find it and steal it before the party starts.

To find it, they will have to nonchalantly interrogate gang members, or achieve a critical at a Hacking action against the base's security systems, with Firewall 5 that plays two cards.

If they discover the artefact's location inside the throne room, they will have to infiltrate the room and steal it, which requires the PC attempting the action to succeed on a hiding

actions against the vigilant guard, a Black Watch Thug with one advantages. Otherwise they can try to distract him with a Cunning action or Hack the electric system and turn the lights off to have him move away to fix them (It is a FW 9 that plays 2 cards). If they fail, the PCs are caught red handed and all the Black Watch move to intercept them: proceed to **Chapter 4: The Shootout**.

If the PCs successfully obtain the artefact before party night, they need to succeed on one last hiding action against a watchful Black Watch Thug who has an advantage to escape the lair with it. If the action succeeds, proceed to **Ending the Adventure**. Otherwise, they're detected just as they're leaving the lair; proceed to **Chapter 4: The Shootout**, except the PCs already have the artefact now.

CHAPTER 3: THE WILD PARTY

Read the following aloud if any PCs are inside the Black Watch's lair on party night:

> As you come into the Main Hall of the Black Watch's lair, you are assailed by the heat and noise of nearly two hundred Humans crowding, pushing, and screaming at each other in triumph; some hold arm-wrestling matches, others do stomp-dances on the tables, while others have furtive sex on the hall's corners. It's all dark, blaring and crazy.
>
> Amid the madness, against the far salon wall, a large stone chair towers above the revellers' heads – it's the Black Watch throne. Sitting on it there's a large, ruddy man, wearing a dark coat over his combat suit, and looking at it all with wild eyes, as if his mind was wound up by something beyond the scene, some scary input out of everyone else's sight. Now and then he seems to notice the party, and his eyes go even wider, satisfied; he smiles a crazy smile, and raises a wooden keg to his folk, some of whom answer the toast with savage cries.
>
> That must be Wildbill Young, the self-styled king of the Black Watch. He certainly looks quite wild.
>
> But what really matters to you is the object laid down on a stone shelf just above the throne – a round metal halo or ring, as wide as a Human leg, full of shiny bits and what seems to be alien circuitry. The object is obviously the focus of the party, as many of the thugs cheer straight at it; some call it 'Wildbill's crown'. They are all crazy. Wildbill is leading them over the edge. This, then, is the Black Watch. And their 'crown' is the artefact you have come all this way to retrieve.

The characters inside the party can try to obtain the artefact at any time, but there are over one hundred Black Watch warriors in the room, which may make it difficult.

Conversely, a stealthy PC may attempt a stealth action (Survival) to pilfer the crown when no one's looking. The action is confronted by a TSE that plays four cards.

If Wildbill is distracted – succeding in a Cunning action against him (If a Human or Iz'kal female flirts with him, she gains one advantage), or by causing a fight among the party goers that he can cheer to – the PC gains two advantages towards the action.

If the PCs wait until the party dies down, the Black Watch members treat any non Human PCs as servants or slaves, but it's otherwise a fun, if raucous, time. Once everyone is too drunk or groggy to notice, the TSE that confronts the action to steal the crown only plays two cards.

If the action fails, or if the PCs take the artefact openly or otherwise provoke the Black Watch, proceed to **Chapter 4: The Shootout**.

If the action succeeds, the PCs may simply walk away with the artefact – proceed to **Ending the Adventure**.

CHAPTER 4: THE SHOOTOUT

> 'They're spies! They're here to steal the crown!', cries one of the Black Watch thugs, and suddenly the whole gang is on your heels.

ENCOUNTER IV: ANGRY THUGS

The PCs must fight three Black Watch Thugs (see page 285).

The thugs fight wildly and without strategy; they are blustering bullies at heart, but very tough to beat.

Three Rounds after a Black Watch Thug falls, one of his companions replaces him. The PCs must defeat all Black Watch thugs within three Rounds – or try to flee the ones still standing – to end the fight.

If the PCs defeat their opponents or successfully escape, proceed to **Encounter V.**

ENCOUNTER V: FLIGHT

The PCs have defeated the first wave of Black Watch soldiers and can now escape with the artefact. If they didn't already have it, they can grab it now, but you should run **Encounter IV** again as some additional Black Watchers intercept the PCs once they have it.

Once the PCs have the artefact and have defeated or escaped **Encounter IV** (once or twice), they may dash to the exit, with the Black Watch hot on their heels, this time led by Wildbill himself, who screams strange battle slogans as he orders his folk to 'get his crown back'.

If the PCs don't have a vehicle already, they may try and hack one of the bikes by the lair exit if they didn't do it earlier. The bikes have Firewall 5 that plays three cards, and four energy.

If the PCs take more than one attempt to hack a bike, run **Encounter IV** again as the fastest pursuers catch up with them. Once the PCs successfully mount their vehicle or a hacked bike, one of them must defeat a TSE that plays three cards with a Piloting action to see if they can all safely take off at full speed and dodge the incoming shots from the thugs.

- If the PCs hacked the bikes before escaping the lair, the pilot gains one advantage towards the action.
- If the PC attempting the Piloting action is defeated, run **Encounter IV** again as one of the bikes catches up with the PCs. If the PCs win, they may attempt the Piloting action again against the same TSE.
- If the PCs succeed, they escape at high speeds through the corridors. If they defeat a TSE that plays two cards with another Piloting action, they manage to lose their pursuers and hide until the heat dies down and they manage to get away without additional trouble – proceed to **Ending the Adventure**.

If the PCs are taken out or captured during this encounter, Wildbill Young has no mercy and orders them killed – unless a survivor has a VERY convincing argument against it.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

The PCs have managed to escape and now have the artefact in their possession. It remains only to determine what will happen now.

The artefact is indeed alien-looking. A successful Technical action confronted by a TSE that plays three cards (an Iz'kal PC gains one advantage) should determine that it's a kind of tiara, likely of Korian make, perhaps intended to facilitate organic-machine interface as modern cortex connectors do.

The artefact doesn't work now, and it would need a specialised environment and technology to successfully activate it, or even to salvage it for components. If the PCs keep the thing to themselves, there's nothing else they can do with it.

If the PCs sell the artefact to Big T, he gives them 100,000 credits each for it and gives them elite rank within the Sebola crew.

If the PCs look for an underworld black market buyer, they may sell it for 500,000 credits total, but they'd need to seek out contacts, make the sale, and certainly earn Big T's enmity should he find out they sold it to someone else.

Technology and Research corporations are always on the hunt for Korian artefacts. An average Corp representative will pay 400,000 credits for the artefact; plus, the PCs will be considered for further legal employment, and given protection against further retaliation from Big T or the Black Watch. They will be in a very good position to play any adventure seeds from that corporation.

The Iz'kal State would be very thankful for the return of a Korian artefact; if the PCs give the item back to Iz'kal representatives, they are not rewarded with money but are welcome and granted a trial period as technocrats, with all the benefits of citizenship and a job as State-employed mercenaries. If they prove their loyalty to the State, they may earn permanent technocrat status.

If the Black Watch discovered the theft, they will hunt the PCs down to kill them, hiring other mercenary companies if needed.

If the PCs don't give the artefact to Big T, he won't order them dead but will veto them forever from the Sebola gang and certainly have them beat up if they return to his territory.

FAITH

NAME Eve Gramsci **AGE** 29
PROFESSION Gang leader
LIFESTYLE Middle class

HEALTH

PHYSICAL DAMAGE: ◇
NEURAL DAMAGE: ◇

AGILITY	1
CONSTITUTION	2
DEXTERITY	2
FAITH	1
LINK	1
MIND	1

AFFINITY

GOD

- Kaliva ☐
- Vexal ☐
- Hexia ☑
- Ergon ☐
- Ledger ☐

BALLISTIC	4	INITIATIVE	3	PILOTING	0	MEDICAL	4
CQC	1	ATHLETIC	2	SURVIVAL	1	TECHNICAL	0
HACKING	0	EVA	2	CUNNING	2	PROFESSION	6

ABILITIES

Traits: Resourceful, Endurance, and Spacer

Talents: An Eye for Weakness (Ballistic), Contacts (Profession)

EXPERIENCE ◇

GODLY FAVOUR ◇

TOXICITY ◇

GEAR

30,500 credits

1x Russ (handgun)

1x Doorkicker

1x Rhinoskin

1x Adrenaline shot

1x ATP infusion

1x MedStation

1x Flash grenade

BACKGROUND STORY

Eve was recruited on Earth when she was eleven, and worked as a cadet for a merc group until she grew bored of following orders. She paid her outstanding debts and went on to create her own gang of misfits. She's got the contacts and she chooses the jobs, but other than that they are quite laid back... up until troubles begin, and Eve starts barking orders.

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FAITH

NAME Nusayba Ammara **AGE** 27

PROFESSION Con artist

LIFESTYLE Middle class

HEALTH

PHYSICAL DAMAGE: ◇

4 | 2

NEURAL DAMAGE: ◇

AFFINITY

AGILITY	2
CONSTITUTION	2
DEXTERITY	2
FAITH	1
LINK	1
MIND	1

GOD

- Kaliva ☐
- Vexal ☑
- Hexia ☐
- Ergon ☐
- Ledger ☐

BALLISTIC	3	INITIATIVE	3	PILOTING	1	MEDICAL	0
CQC	1	ATHLETIC	3	SURVIVAL	3	TECHNICAL	0
HACKING	0	EVA	1	CUNNING	4	PROFESSION	5

ABILITIES

Traits: Voidwalker, Aquatic, Adaptable Genome, and Dark Iz'kal

Upgrades: Cortex Connector 1.0

Talents: Ghaziwa Performer (Profession)

EXPERIENCE ◇

GODLY FAVOUR ◇

TOXICITY ◇

GEAR

24,000 credits

1x Russ (handgun)

1x Savant

1x Smart Clothes

1x Adrenaline shot

BACKGROUND STORY

Nusayba was a prodigy Ghaziwa dancer who came to Tiantang on tour and decided to stay. Her dancing skills are now rusty, so she's learned other profitable crafts, like cheating fools out of their money. She became a voidwalker, but she doesn't miss hyperlink too much. She is calm and introspective, which some confuse with meekness in a dangerous, often final mistake.

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FAITH

NAME Lyuk Xiaobo **AGE** 25
PROFESSION Satellite technician
LIFESTYLE Working class

HEALTH

PHYSICAL		NEURAL
DAMAGE	2 4	DAMAGE

AFFINITY

AGILITY	2
CONSTITUTION	1
DEXTERITY	1
FAITH	1
LINK	2
MIND	2

GOD

- Kaliva ☐
- Vexal ☑
- Hexia ☐
- Ergon ☐
- Ledger ☐

BALLISTIC	2	INITIATIVE	4	PILOTING	2	MEDICAL	0
CQC	0	ATHLETIC	0	SURVIVAL	1	TECHNICAL	2
HACKING	5	EVA	3	CUNNING	3	PROFESSION	4

ABILITIES

Traits: Technological, Tail Reflex, Spaceborn

Upgrades: Cortex Connector 2.0

EXPERIENCE 1

GODLY FAVOUR

TOXICITY

GEAR

7,500 credits
1x Elysium
1x Russ
1x Rhinoskin
1x Omnitool
2x ATP infusion

BACKGROUND STORY

Lyuk trained to be a satellite electronics technician, dreaming of missions in remote sectors that would allow him to see the wonders of the Great Ring. His actual job turned out to be tech support at a desk, and when he couldn't stand it anymore, he left and joined Eve's gang in hopes of living exciting adventures and make his own destiny.

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FAITH

NAME Natar Ipeelee **AGE** 19

PROFESSION Warrior

LIFESTYLE Working class

HEALTH

PHYSICAL DAMAGE: ◇

PHYSICAL: 4

NEURAL: 2

NEURAL DAMAGE: ◇

AFFINITY

AGILITY	2
CONSTITUTION	2
DEXTERITY	2
FAITH	1
LINK	1
MIND	1

GOD

- Kaliva ☐
- Vexal ☐
- Hexia ☐
- Ergon ☑
- Ledger ☐

BALLISTIC 1	INITIATIVE 2	PILOTING 3	MEDICAL 0
CQC 5	ATHLETIC 4	SURVIVAL 3	TECHNICAL 0
HACKING 0	EVA 2	CUNNING 1	PROFESSION 3

ABILITIES

Traits: Old Bones, Titan, Warrior Caste

Upgrades: Powered Reflexes

Ledger's Mark

EXPERIENCE 1

GODLY FAVOUR ◇

TOXICITY ◇

GEAR

0 credits

1x Hamaras

1x Rhinoskin

1x Hardlight Screen

BACKGROUND STORY

Natar likes his new team. He hopes they'll last longer than the previous one. He hasn't told them yet, but everyone around him seems to die. To be honest, in his line or work it is not that rare. His village threw him out when he was a child saying he was cursed, but everyone knows that Raag are very superstitious. He is actually a very nice guy. Who could curse him?

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FAITH

NAME _____ AGE ____

PROFESSION _____

LIFESTYLE _____

PHYSICAL **HEALTH** NEURAL

DAMAGE DAMAGE

AFFINITY

AGILITY

CONSTITUTION

DEXTERITY

FAITH

LINK

MIND

GOD

BALLISTIC

CQC

HACKING

INITIATIVE

ATHLETIC

EVA

PILOTING

SURVIVAL

CUNNING

MEDICAL

TECHNICAL

PROFESSION

ABILITIES

EXPERIENCE

GODLY FAVOUR

TOXICITY

GEAR

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FAITH

NAME _____

MODEL _____ **LEVEL** ___

TYPE _____

SIZE ___ **M. SPEED** ___ **CREW** ___

CONTROL _____

ABILITY _____

_____

INITIATIVE

DODGE

EVASION

ACCELERATION

STRUCTURE

ARMOUR

THRESHOLD

FW

RADAR

STEALTH

EFFECTS

STRESS DAMAGE TAGS

GENERAL

CARGO

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1000 KM

1000 KM

100 KM

100 KM

10 KM

10 KM

1 KM

PLACE THE PLAYER CHARACTER'S VEHICLE HERE

1 KM

10 KM

10 KM

100 KM

100 KM

1000 KM

1000 KM

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