



WHEN HOPE IS THE ONLY THING LEFT.



THE UNIVERSE OF FAITH

In all places where life can exist, it will exist.

The known Universe consists of a few hundred habitable planets where six species intelligent enough to develop civilizations have met. There are thousands of other species with some level of self awareness or even metacognition, and the total number of known species is innumerable, as species evolve and become extinct constantly.

While about 80% of the discovered animal species breathe oxygen and 99.9% have an organic carbon-based chemistry, scientists do not dare set limits to the life forms that could exist. One of the main reasons why more different life forms have not been discovered is that most of the research and exploration is limited to planets where the intelligent species can survive. However, some exploratory missions on deep gas giants have yielded the discovery of virus-like forms that are not composed of carbon.

As the newest models of spaceships extend the range and speed of space travel, and increased energy needs necessitate more exploration, contact with strange life forms

and new worlds will undoubtedly become more common. There are well-founded interests in exploring and harvesting resources from such fascinating places.

The fine line between the living and the lifeless is perhaps an arbitrary concept. It has been completely redefined with the invention of extremely capable artificial intelligences and the discovery of the strange new viruses. Every expedition through an unexplored wormhole is a new experience, leaving exploration teams wondering what they will find or who they will meet. It is a certainty that there are more species to be discovered, but no one knows if they will be friend or foe.

The Universe is still a thing of wonder: a place of which very little is known, and the capacity to traverse it is very limited. But the existence of the Labyrinth, a natural network of wormholes connecting thousands of star systems, makes it possible for the species of the Universe to traverse it within their lifetimes.

Many theorise about the relation between the Labyrinth

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.

Sandra 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 unrecognisable and like figments of imagination. Sandra always answered gently, but she could never remember what they actually said.

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, Sandra read the pamphlet again. It promised a new beginning.

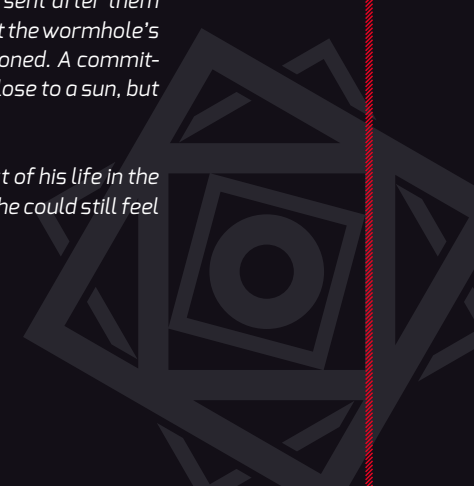
But she wasn't so sure. Sandra saw the wormhole through the monitor. She felt as though the same pressure that crushed the dust specks that came to realise the whole of the Universe now took hold of her own heart. The promise of an unexplored wormhole could take her to a place so far away that it was 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.

Sandra smiled at the enthusiasm of the stranger that shared with her his conviction.

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.

Jack 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.



and the Gods. Some say the Gods live inside it, others that Gods are space-time itself and wormholes are the tool they use to bring their believers together. Nothing is yet proven, and while scientists disregard most of these popular theories, no one can explain why the Labyrinth leads to so many star systems with habitable planets and sentient species, despite the majority of the Universe being so vastly empty.

LIFE IN SPACE

Vacuum causes the lungs to remove all gases from the bloodstream, which results in loss of consciousness within 9 to 12 seconds due to lack of oxygen in the brain. Death by hypoxia (lack of oxygen irrigation in tissues) follows after a couple of minutes. Exposed body fluids like saliva and tears instantly boil at body temperature, and the steam from other body fluids bloats the body to twice its normal size. Spacesuits often include compression bands that prevent these symptoms even in an event of suit decompression, but then the body has to deal with other issues like embolism and decompression sickness, which can cause crippling pain and even death.

Congelation is not a pressing danger due to the low rate of heat loss in space, although harmless frost may appear around the mouth, eyes and other areas with exposed fluids. On the other hand, radiation does present a real threat, with symptoms ranging from severe sunburn in a few seconds of exposure and temporary damages to the immune system to all sorts of cancer after long term exposure, unless using proper electromagnetic shielding or taking appropriate drugs.

Solar flare events may even prove fatal within minutes, and even when it is not so, the reappearance of older diseases already present in the body may prove equally lethal in the long term unless treated accordingly.

Weightlessness has many different effects on a living body. The most severe, long lasting effects are bone and muscle mass loss; and short term effects include disorientation, nausea, and a wide array of distorted sensorial perception including smell, taste and vision.

There are ways to reduce the impact of most effects associated to living in space thanks to the development of O-G pills, but a comprehensive list of all their side effects is yet to be made available to the general public and some groups have raised their concerns about the safety of such drugs.

SPACECRAFTS

The control rooms of spaceships are not visually impressive. There are not thousands of bleeping lights and buttons. There are not countless screens and dozens of workspaces for each specialist. Generally, there are only a



few seats in front of an empty wall, with each seat having a cortex connection at the height of the neck. It is here that the pilots are able to connect themselves to the ship, and become part of the ship itself.

Spacecraft pilots do not need to read or see pertinent information, in the normal sense. They innately know and learn the information, like memories, as it uploads to their minds in real time. As events occur, the pilots are made aware and, within milliseconds, the semi-AI of the ship uploads relevant data from its memory banks directly to their minds, such as situational solutions for the pilots to process. In this heightened state of mind, pilots are able to process and make decisions reflexively. The spacecraft becomes an extension of their body.

WORMHOLES

Wormholes are massive distortions in the space-time continuum, resembling giant spheres. They bend space-time in strange ways that allow matter to go through them and travel to another corner of the Universe. The duration of travel could be shorter (or longer) than the time it would take an object to travel between the two points via standard methods, even if it could reach the speed of light. Consequently, a wormhole has a weak 'anti-gravitational' field, pushing away matter rather than pulling it in.

The theory of general relativity states that nothing can exceed the speed of light, and so far this remains true for all the known species. Wormholes allow spaceships to circumvent this rule by forming a path between two locations

that is shorter than the path outside of the wormhole. It was once believed that they could not be found naturally, but this has since been proved wrong.

While wormholes have been proven extremely useful for space travel (in fact they are the only known form of travel between star systems within the lifespan of a traveller), they can be very dangerous environments. The twisted space-time and the 'echo' effect can cause an inexperienced traveller to become lost, or end up in unexpected places.

In addition, and perhaps more importantly, a wormhole is not constant in space. Its size can expand and shrink, its length can vary, and its 'mouths' (entrance and exit) can move in space. A wormhole may close upon itself unexpectedly if not kept stable, crushing anything caught too close to it in the same way a black hole would. In fact, an unstable wormhole can turn into a black hole.

MOVEMENT

The first concept to understand is that a wormhole is closed space loop. The wormhole is a tunnel without walls, yet if a traveller does not move following the direction of the wormhole, that traveller will be moving in circles - even if his ship is in fact trying to move in a straight line. Essentially, aiming in the wrong direction and shooting a missile could lead to shooting oneself.

The bigger problem is that there are no points of reference or any sign of the correct direction to actually move somewhere. Spaceships will navigate a wormhole by sending signals in all directions and waiting for them to circle back - the direction in which the signal does not return is the correct direction of the wormhole. This is a very good system in the smaller parts of the Labyrinth, where it takes only seconds for the signals to return, but some areas of the Labyrinth are so large that the process takes hours or even days.

Still, this method isn't perfect. When a signal does not come back after waiting for very long, travellers cannot know if it is because it is still travelling through a large loop or if it left the Labyrinth through one of the exits.

WORMHOLE COMBAT

Crafty pirates are able to use the characteristics of wormholes against their victims, such as when facing a spaceship with shielding on its front. When engaged by an enemy from the front, the obvious action to take is to shoot straight-on, hoping to cause damage. However, an experienced captain could use the space loop to his advantage, shooting backwards and have the missiles hit the enemy spaceship in its rear. Similar strategies can be used to attack an enemy by surprise, striking from an angle they did not expect.

As the loop affects light, it is possible for one to see several copies of themselves in all directions when in a small tunnel. While this can be used to navigate the loop, it can also be used in battle to scare attackers, making it more difficult for them to identify one's position or the number of allied ships.

COMMUNICATIONS

Laws of physics apply as normal inside the wormhole - they just have to bend to the curvature of space and time. Consequently, the propagation of electromagnetic waves (communication, light, lasers) must follow the curved space. As such, various effects may occur: observers inside the wormhole may see duplicates of themselves when looking in the direction of a loop, and any communication signal would also be duplicated resulting in an 'echo'

"Sir, we have found the cure."

"And it's a hundred years too late."

"I know."

If AT-01 were human, it might have asked why MK-41 continued its search, nearly a century later. But AT-01 understood the compulsion of another robot to finalise its work.

"What is left for you to do?"

"Nothing, my code is empty."

If MK-41 were human, it would have been happy to achieve its life goal. But MK-41 had no feelings. It just stood there.

AT-01 moved on, its code always had something for it to do. And that made it neither happy or unhappy.

Alhalam is a planet whose inhabitants died tens of thousands of years ago. Their species went extinct, exterminated by a devastating disease. Their functional (but now pointless) robots continue to work and keep the cities tidy and full of resources. These ghost cities maintain their robots through their Self Conservation Robotic System, that fixes any robots that might be broken, corrupted, or that would otherwise act outside of normal duties. Sometimes, a robot might have a problem that was not programmed to be fixed by the system, leaving it to roam on its own with its unusual new behaviours.

Alhalam is under the control of the Iz'kal, and they have chosen to not interfere or establish any colonies on it to honour the memory of the old species that once lived there (and the strange microcosms that its peaceful robot inhabitants have achieved).

A team of iz'kal researchers have established themselves on the planet and continue to observe and learn from what is left by the extinct race and from the inorganic tecnosystem left by them.

effect. An experienced navigator, however, can find the right angle to send a signal and bounce it off the curves of the wormhole to make it reach otherwise unreachable spots. This same technique can be used to foil the interception of messages and other forms of communication. This is especially useful when attempting to communicate in secret between close-by ships, but the distance between colonies is so large that messages sent this way often end up corrupted, distorted, or lost in space loops. It is not rare for a travelling ship to receive signals than have been there for years.

These facts imply that communication between two exits of a wormhole is hard and intermittent at best: the only reliable method is sending a spaceship through with the information in their systems to be downloaded on arrival. This is very taxing and only done when necessary. However, between two important systems, there is always a spaceship or a fleet full of servers that crosses the wormhole daily or weekly, bringing all the necessary information to the other system. These server ships are highly desired targets of pirates and hackers, and are thus strongly defended or are disguised as civilian ships. But in the most remote systems, like some mining colonies, news can take weeks or even months to arrive, until a spaceship brings them new tools or an empty cargo ship returns from a shipment.

SPACE EXPLORATION

The discovery of the Labyrinth completely changed the landscape of space exploration. The Corvo, who had made rigorous but primitive strides towards wormhole technology, put their research on hold as they did not need to create their own wormholes anymore. The Labyrinth, a gigantic web of naturally occurring, interconnected wormholes - a web with more exits than can be counted - is very treacherous to navigate. Some tunnels are so narrow that only the tiniest of robot probes can navigate them without colliding into themselves, while others contain entire star systems. Many teams have been sent to explore its tunnels but very few have returned; as communication inside the wormhole is extremely complicated, one can only wait.

The Corvo and the Iz'kal started to explore the Labyrinth as soon as they were capable, unaware of the other as they mapped, conquered, and exploited the resources of dozens of star systems. Since they found the Labyrinth, the growth of the Corvo had been exponential - at least until their first encounter with an Iz'kal colony. For the first time in their age of exploration, they had met another species as advanced and as powerful as themselves.

The first contact was tense and all attempts at a diplomatic and friendly relationship had failed. Their civilisations were too different, their moral codes disparate. To each,

Tall and impossibly beautiful, the gates towered above the small party. They were covered in exquisite carvings depicting a beautiful city that was no more. The grand doors, inducing mixed feelings of awe and tranquility, guarded the entrance to the Chamber of Reminiscence, a sacred place in which the Iz'kal stored their history in resonance stones.

At first, Keler had been reluctant. Entering the chambers was considered a serious offense - let alone stealing the Greatstone - but after the last meeting he had come to realize that the Council would never support his request unless he had a way of forcing their hand. Finally, he sought out Fassir and agreed to work with him. The plan was simple enough: they would enter the Chamber of Reminiscence on the night of the Reckoning (the anniversary of the night the Korian were annihilated) when no one was guarding it. That was where Fassir's help would be invaluable. As counselor and guardian of the memories, he was in charge of the keys to the chamber.

Keler could sense the unease of his companions as if it was his own, or maybe it was his own uneasiness that tinted all of their thoughts through the hyperlink. He wasn't sure, but at this point it didn't matter. Each and every one of them was committed to the plan. Each and every one was aware of the consequences should something go wrong. And they knew that this was what had to be done if they wanted to be heard.

Just outside the chamber, Keler took out the crystal key. The size of a clenched fist, the key shone with a pale blue light that casted gloomy shadows around them. He approached the keyhole and inserted the crystal into the square opening. Light radiated from the stone, along the carvings in the doors like rivers flowing through twisted paths. Suddenly, the light vanished and the doors opened in total silence.

They stood at the edge of a large circular pit that extended downwards as far as the eye could see. A thin metal walkway led from the doorway to a spiral staircase situated in the center of the opening, which descended to the bottom of the pit. Additional walkways radiated from the staircase towards the walls at every level. The walls were lined with resonance stones that were the size of skulls. And they were shaped like skulls too, glowing with a tenuous red light, like embers on a dark night.

Every step along the walkway was announced by a metallic clang that echoed down the pit, a bright sound that invaded the absolute silence that reigned over the place. As they reached the staircase and began their long trip down, they felt exposed, as though they were being watched by the thousands of stones lining the walls, staring at them with accusatory but vacant eyes.

After a time that felt like an eternity, they reached the bottom of the pit and found themselves facing a low

the other represented decay and evil. One wanted freedom, and the other wanted community. They tried to stop communications, to keep the other away, but both species were too involved with the Labyrinth. They had grown into it, and their colonies and their interests lied within it. In each species' quest for expansion, interaction would be inevitable: often one would spend enormous amounts of resources to explore a system, only to find that the other had arrived first. There were two choices: start a war or go somewhere else. Open war was not an option on the table: the destructive power of both civilisations ensured the complete annihilation of both sides, with no one left to enjoy the spoils. And both sides were not ready for a full scale space war, especially in a place as strange as in the Labyrinth - where things can go south at the smallest miscalculation.

The relationship between the Corvo and the Iz'kal had to continue. They met, they discussed, they fought, and they hated. An agreement was created, and the rules of intergalactic exploration and conquest were drawn. It was very simple: there could be no attacks between the two civilisations and whomever landed first on a planet had all rights to it.

The space race began. Each species wanted the best planets, either to colonize them or to mine them. They set up their flags everywhere they went, whether it was a

habitable paradise or a desolated rock. And while the rules were fair, the space race resulted in plenty of dirty tactics.

Expedition teams into new territory would disappear regularly, followed by the discovery that the other species had already claimed that territory for themselves. The governments took advantage of the fact that communication was difficult, and that it was hard to find proof of foul play. The war was slow, silent, and deadly.

The Corvo and the Iz'kal now coexist in a state of cold war, as direct confrontation is nearly impossible. They compete for resources and try to collapse their opponent's economic systems through fierce commerce. They fight black-op wars on remote planets, while incredible duels between hackers take place on a daily basis, fuelled by the information that intelligence and counterintelligence agents provide them. Missionaries and inquisitors convert their rivals' populations to their own Gods, and agitators stir the native species of planets under their enemies' domain into rebellion.

However, each species has its own internal conflicts, as many religions coexist and their greedy Gods are always hungry for expansion. Prophets, politicians, and businessmen all struggle for control. The universe holds its breath, waiting to see who will fall first and what will be the fate of the known species.

tunnel, a bright white light visible at the other end. Slightly bent so as to avoid the ceiling of the corridor, they walked the short distance that separated them from their objective, their fear and anxiety conquered by a much stronger feeling of reverence. They reached the Chamber of Ascension, the only thing visible in it a prism-shaped crystal that irradiated a bright white light, in spite the rest of the room which was covered in absolute darkness.

Keler stretched his hand towards the stone but froze midway. Fear, primal and savage, flooded his thoughts, so intense that for a moment he thought he might faint. As soon as he recovered, he turned around looking for the source of the commotion. His eyes focused on a lone figure standing in the opening of the corridor they had just crossed. Despite its relaxed stance, it was impossible to ignore the threat it posed, and its eyes were unmistakably filled with contempt and the promise of death. Keler's mind raced as he tried to find a way out of their situation.

Even if voidwalkers were as powerful as the stories told, this one was still alone against nine high sevans, powerful and capable casters. His thoughts were quickly echoed by those around him as they prepared to fight their uninvited guest. Keler would have been amazed by the speed with which the figure moved towards his companions, if only he had been alive when it happened.

A second figure gently held his lifeless body as it fell, before joining the first in a terrible dance of death.



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.

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, or 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 stays 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: REWARDS & PUNISHMENTS

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 differences are amicable, while others have driven different cults to war. Some religious wars have been fought by soulbenders empowered by the same God on both sides. 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.

It is up to the GM and the players to interpret the God's commandments and apply them correctly. The extension and severity of each commandment should be based on the character's Faith attribute and the amount of Divine Upgrades he has.

Example: Vexal asks of his believers that they help others without giving up their personal freedom in the process. For a follower with Faith 1 and one Divine Upgrade, this can mean that the character should try to help others when he can and share with others when he is able, but for a follower with Faith 3 and several Divine Upgrades, this can very well demand a whole new level of intensity. Perhaps he should actively try to find ways to benefit the people around him and to share as much as possible, all while following his own path and without taking orders, in true Vexal fashion.

For the concept of the Gods to properly work it is essential for the GM to be strict when judging the behaviour of the players according to their Gods' respective commandments. The GM should promise them future rewards whenever they follow those commandments, and warn them about the consequences of acting against the rules of the Gods. If they do not follow the commandments, or they break them, the GM must not hesitate to call onto the players the wrath of their God and tell them they have lost their powers for the rest of the session. If they continue to behave that way, she must remove a Divine Upgrade from their character board without the chance of recovering any experience points spent to acquire it. Players will need to make amends with their God and gain more experience to regain that Upgrade.

CULTS

In the universe of FAITH, most believers see their beliefs as philosophies to live by and ways to live their lives. Faith and religion are not often followed through organizations or structured worship.

Some believers use mantras, stories, poetry, or song to remind themselves of their God's commandments, but these are often personal or passed down by relatives. There are no great institutions or organized religions that speak for their Gods.

However, there are some cults that do follow these practices, where one or more members lead. 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 no cults and they very rarely work together and when they do, like their God, they do it randomly. These cults prosper among those rejected by society, as they give answers to the echoing questions in the minds of those that do not fit. The cults, regardless of their faith, attract some of the most radical believers of all and many unethical choices have been made in the name of these organisations.

GODLY FAVOURS

The Gods of FAITH favour the most extreme kinds of people. Most others have a little bit of every God inside them, and they do not follow any God exclusively. While the relationships between the Gods themselves are adversarial, the vast majority of the population of the Universe 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 do 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 who are more likely to follow a God and who are devout enough to be rewarded with mighty powers. 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 even more for their radicalism.

Witnessing the use of such powers is a thing of wonder. It will often be the talk of the town for those that see it.

AVATARS OF GOD

The Avatar of a God has an indestructible faith and disregards all other ways and beliefs. He is usually considered a prophet by the followers of the same God and his words are listened to, learned, and studied as sacrosanct.

Some Avatars are so powerful, and their willpower is so strong, that they are capable of powers never seen before. Most are named from 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 the Mocking Jay, his vessel, has never been caught, in spite of the combined efforts of all the megacorps and the many well prepared ambushes it has suffered. It is thought that Hexia has rewarded him with the power of clairvoyance.

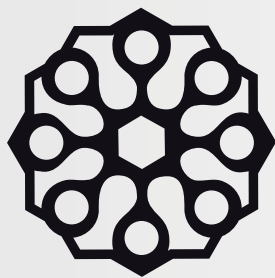
There are many other prophets. Some remain mysterious and their powers unknown, with the only things ever said about them is that their every desire seems possible.



Characters must follow the commandments of their God if they want to be able to gain and use their powers. These Divine Upgrades are gained by spending experience points and their acquisition requires the approval of the GM, who will be the ultimate judge of the character's behaviour according to his God.

Reminder: If a character continuously role-plays in a way that puts him against his God, the GM should consider what other God fits him better and offer him to pledge allegiance to that God instead. He will lose all the Divine Upgrades he has now, but he will be able to gain new ones from this new God. If he were to change his God in an epic manner, the GM can give him any number of Divine Upgrades of his new God, up to the same number he had before. It is recommended to keep it at one -after all, the character must still prove himself worthy to his new God in the long run.

ERGON



It has been proven time and again that collaboration beats competition. Those that 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.

When will they see that power and money are merely a means to an end? Don't they realise that those things are pointless in themselves? We are social beings and we can only be our true selves with others, and when freed from social stratification and differentiation. The only true, lasting happiness must be shared, hopefully by all.

ERGON'S COMMANDMENTS

- All are equal
- Thou shalt not hinder thy people
- Thou shalt bend thy will to the needs of the many
- Thou shalt help others be their greatest selves

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.

Ergonauts 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.

They believe that they must 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 in the same manner.

They know that power and economical differences are the root of all evil. Corruption, greed, fear, and envy all come from these differences among people. Creating equality is the only way to banish these aspects of social alienation.

Ergonauts believe that there are extraordinary possibilities within ordinary people. The foundations of a great society are built by equal opportunity and equal respect; equality grants people the opportunity 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 strive to be a part of and to create those conditions.

Many cynics ridicule Ergonauts for being naive and for being afraid to make their own choices. They miss the point: bending one's will to the will of the many requires more courage than just following one's basic instincts and desires.

If one should doubt Ergon, they only need to see how Ergonaut societies are the happiest and healthiest of all, while places of inequality run rampant with crime and hatred.

Ergonauts do not believe that they are more worthy than others, but that others are as worthy as them. It is important for them to remind themselves that they are not working to increase their worth, but to help others see their own worth in the eyes of Ergon.

They do not see themselves as above anyone else and 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 wish to include everyone in their ways.

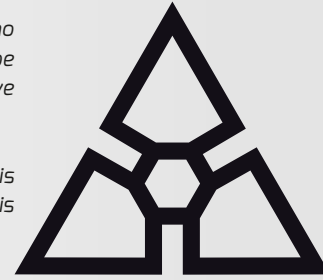
Personal needs, liberties, and desires are not that important when one shares everything with like minded people. A true Ergonaut will go to sleep happy if he helped everyone else get some food, even if he is hungry. True freedom, from others and from oneself, is to be able to give everything for a cause that one knows to be true.

"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

KALIVA

Nature isn't as pure 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. I am just another tiger making my way in this jungle.



KALIVA'S COMMANDMENTS

- Thou shalt be above all
- Thou shalt not succumb to weakness
- Thou shalt not bear a master
- Each to their own

Kaliva respects only one thing in mortals and that is the will to improve oneself. Kaliva 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.

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 man or woman, and competition can only promote self-improvement. Only those that truly deserve it will make it.

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 being a parasite who lives 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.

Followers of the other Gods defame Kalivans by calling them out as evil, as if they actively tried to harm others. Such a notion is ridiculous to a Kalivan. All a Kalivan looks out for is his own well being. This sometimes benefits other people and sometimes it hurts them. It is the harsh necessity of life.

Kalivans are those that create themselves from nothing. Those who fight every step of the way. Those that 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 proud (and rightly so). 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.



"Timid men prefer the calm of despotism to the tempestuous sea of Liberty." - Thomas Jefferson, human politician

VEXAL

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.

We need to be free and we need to be equal to even start scratching the surface of our true nature and all its possibilities. I think we will be impressed and humbled by them. I think we will 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'S COMMANDMENTS

- Thou shalt not bear a master
- Thou shalt not restrict others
- Thou shalt think for thyself
- Thou shalt benefit others

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

People who believe in Vexal are those who do not 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 pretend that everyone has to live by the same rules; they believe that each person should be treated differently but respectfully.

They 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 own freedom for anyone, they might be willing to sacrifice their own life for a good cause.

While they have a reputation of being poor team players, many 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 when they do choose to work on something they are very productive. After all, they are usually caring and 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 are usually adventurers, hackers, outlaws, or any other kind of free people. While they generally disapprove of vigilantism, which is seen as proud and egotistic, they are not above carrying out their own forms of justice. Vexales enjoy exposing the wrongdoings of corporations, states, and any form of imposing power. Their social criticism has shaped the perceptions of many societies, and has caused the rise or decline of many corporations and politicians. Everyone must be an activist for real change to occur.

"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." - OIDA, [Unknown species] hacker



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.

HEXIA'S COMMANDMENTS

- Thou shalt pursue knowledge and expertise
- Thou shalt show others the way
- Thou shalt set the greater good above all else
- Thou shalt not bend your will

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.

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

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.

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 charmers 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 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 just.

"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

LEDGER



He has a voice that 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'S COMMANDMENTS

- Follow your impulses
- Do not obey others
- Do not sow
- Confuse

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.

People believe in Ledger for all kinds of reasons. Some think that the 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.

Ledger believers are usually considered dysfunctional members of society, and a danger to others and themselves. When confronted with these accusations, Ledger followers have responded with these answers: "No answer"; sets fire to his hair; "you are the sick ones, sugar coating life with 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 those of yourself, 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"; "how would I know?"; "you are simply a fragment of my subconscious being, don't bother me with stupid questions."

Those who believe in Ledger are unorganised and are loose in their moral behaviour. Their actions bring confusion, disorder, and chaos.

The most devoted believers give up their previous lives and become 'ghosts' 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. Every single ghost calls 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.

Ledger is the only God without an organised cult. 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 for themselves, and sometimes misfortune brings a few together and horrible things happen. They never last very long, as even Ledger himself, in all his might, has trouble keeping his followers alive. It is not known if he even cares.

In order to bring even more chaos to the Universe, Ledger grants powers to his believers that allows them to pretend to believe in other Gods, so many of them have been found in other Gods' cults. It is every Ledger's dream to become a prophet of another God. They enjoy long and elaborate ongoing jokes, so it is possible that this has 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. Who knows.



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



BRING THE TRUE FAITH TO THEM.



THE CORVO

The Corvo are an independent and capable people. They are smaller in size than humans, averaging 1.6 metres in height and 54 kilograms in weight, and they have adapted to life in space. Their capital Tiantang is a sector of the Dyson ring that circles their dwarf star.

Male and female corvo have very few physical differences other than their reproductive organs. The females have wider hips and abdomens, and have lighter colours, but they are equally big and strong. The Corvo reproduce sexually. A few days after being fertilised, the female corvo lay their eggs, which hatch a few weeks later after being cared for by both parents.

Thanks to their slow metabolism, their natural life expectancy is very high at around 110-120 Earth years, but lower class corvo can expect to live to only 80 years, due to malnutrition, illnesses, stress, and the conditions of living 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 are said to have even given up their physical bodies and have 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.

Originally from Quanjie, a planet with a day/night cycle of 30 Earth hours, a corvo would normally sleep for 8 of those 30 hours. However, each corvo colony has their own unique sleep cycle, and those that live in them have adapted accordingly. They are omnivorous, but their diet depends greatly on the planet they inhabit and the resources available.

CORVOSPHERE

The Corvosphere is the amalgamation of everything corvo related, from the planets they inhabit, their spacecrafts, and their mines, to their art, culture, and technology. It is considered to be every single thing that is related to and sometimes affected by the influence of corvo society.

Rebel fleets, pirates, anarchists, and any other groups who do not accept the ways of common corvo society are not considered part of the Corvosphere.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

The Corvo do not show their feelings openly, and they show their respect or love for others by making them proud or giving them gifts, rather than with words or physical affection. Most corvo have a hard time asking for help as they know that they should be able to achieve anything by themselves, but the consumer society to which they belong keeps them longing for new material things. While most of the middle class are in huge debt, they remain optimistic due to the ever growing corvo economy.

The Corvo are at the same time monogamous and promiscuous. They marry and share their lives with a single partner in a very similar fashion to ancient humans, but sex is seen as a token of power for both sexes, something to be scored and bragged about among friends. It is not uncommon for corvo spouses to be aware and proud of the love achievements of their partners.

Female and male corvo are considered equal in their culture and they do not have predefined roles. Same sex relationships are common and they are not treated any differently.



Corvo strive to show off their own uniqueness, and most differentiate themselves using tattoos and prosthetics. Their fashion is continuously reinventing itself, absorbing elements from the various species they come across and from their own history. It is common for males and females to dress differently, and to the untrained eye that is the only noticeable difference between the two.

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 business. 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 a lot of children (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. Corvo civilisation has a huge need for expansion, and those that cannot afford to move to a new colony see themselves impoverished in an endless cycle of generations incapable of moving forward. As a result, crime rates are extremely high in the Corvosphere.



CORVO SOCIETY

Corvo consumerism is legendary. They are extremely engaged with new technologies and fashion. Being able to afford luxury goods from remote planets is intrinsically related to popularity and pride. Their 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 areas with sensorial feeds salivate with hunger as they can smell and taste the restaurant's menu just by walking nearby.

They 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 them for more than a week at a time, as they feel they are damaging their possibilities to ascend.

Complete immersion in the net-worlds is delicate, as bodily functions decrease when the mind becomes absent this way. Thus, corvo normally do not stay connected for more than 15 to 18 hours per day. There have been cases of people that have died by neglecting their physical bodies. Only the richest people can afford to be installed into high-end machines that keep their bodies healthy and nurtured while their minds spend their whole lives in all kinds of net-worlds.

LIFEMODS

The most renowned type of art in the Corvosphere is the creation of lifemods for AR helmets and implants. Lifemods completely recreate the appearance of reality for the user, allowing for a personal and interesting way of experiencing life. This allows for fans of certain games, books, films, etc., to see life 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 ones can even change the looks of people, not only things.

Using lifemods has its risks: lifemods that are in beta or that 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 (such as 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. It has by far become one of the most used and sold types of softwares.

CORBALL

Corball is the most extreme sport there is and it is by far the most popular one in the Corvosphere. It started as a training exercise for EVA operators during the early stages of the construction of the Dyson Ring, but an investor saw lots of promise in revisiting the exercise as a competitive sport. It soon became the favourite of the workers in the stations and started to be broadcasted in the home planet of the Corvo, Quanjie, as well. Today it is seen and played all around the Universe, but the playing fields in Tiantang are

“Luck is only the factors not taken into consideration in the original plan.” – Old corvo saying



still the biggest, and it is there where the Universal Championships are held.

Corball consists of two or more teams of 5 members each. Players wear deployment suits and are fired at incredible speeds using railguns that put them in orbit around a moon or asteroid without atmosphere. They remain in orbit at high speeds until they are somehow stopped. There are several railgun rings distributed around the moon as well, which players can use to increase or decrease their speed, while they control their flight with their deployment suits.

Teams must compete for the control of a ball. The matches have a duration of 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 contact game in which players physically assault each other for control of the ball, to defend their carrier (the player in control of the ball), or to send someone to their death against a pillar or one of the many asteroids in the way. It is not uncommon for some of the players to die during the match.

Hacking other players' 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 player's attention to make it out alive.

If a player moves too far from the ball, their suit will shut down and they are forced to leave the game until the players pass by an area in which they can rejoin along with reserve players. Additionally, players can spend points gained in the match to launch orbital attacks against certain areas of the moon field, dropping dozens of explosive projectiles and often incapacitating or killing the majority of players caught in the blast. This established the corball motto, “the safest place is under your opponent,” and forces all players to stick together, as those that overtake or stay behind the pack are the ones likely to be targeted. Spending points is a risky move, however, and more than one match has been lost by a team targeting opponents who had been left behind and then losing the ball to the opponents who were nearby.

The violent and frantic gameplay and the stunning looks of the players make corball matches mesmerizing events that 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, their daily lives a reality show that can be seen by anyone willing to pay. The richest fans can afford access to the sensorial feed that is recorded by the players' cortex connectors, allowing them to feel every-



thing the player feels, and some corvo have spent entire fortunes living the lives of their favourite players.

FREE MARKET

The difficulty of an effective communications network through the Labyrinth does not allow for a centralised corvo government. Thus, each colony has its own distinct government, much to the satisfaction of the corvo citizens who prefer their politicians close. They are united under the Economic Equality Pact (EEP) which allows them to conduct commerce and other businesses freely and which keeps trade taxless between countries. It is also a good defence against an economical takeover by the Iz'kal.

While government systems, laws, and power are not equal between any of the corvo colonies, they all share one thing: their love for the free market economy.

Corvo civilisation is built around freedom of choice and private property. They are very wary of government institutions and other organisations that could hinder the expression of 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 control of the police, and the administration and enforcement of laws. The most laissez-faire colonies - among them Tiantang - even allow taxation to be voluntary. They see it as another form of insurance policy; those that do not pay taxes are not assisted in security and justice affairs.

When mandatory, taxes are extremely low and only used to pay for the most basic services of the government. Most other service departments are in the hands of private companies and free from the monopolistic power of the state to interfere between free transactions among people. Corvo are very protective of their freedoms, and all attempts of creating more powerful governments have been stopped by angry mobs of outraged citizens from all social classes.

Economic differences are extreme among corvo: some live in the most rotten misery at the bottom of retired O-G space-freighters 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. It is not easy, but the Corvo understand this fact better than any other species in the universe.

Those that really deserve it and fight for it can become owners of more land than any man can imagine; some own even entire planets, having riches beyond what they can spend in their life spans, which stands true for even the



“That’s libertarians for you – anarchists who want police protection from their slaves.”
– Kim Stanley Robinson, human writer

corvo whose life span extends for centuries. There is no limit to what one can achieve in the corvo system.

The Avoidance of an AI-Caused Recession

Capitalism’s endless struggle to reduce costs can have a costly effect upon itself, as one extremely effective way of reducing costs is by replacing labour with machines. This has the downside of reducing employment and therefore reducing the acquisitive power of workers, who are also the

“Kalivans have a very narrow view of crime, they see it as an unconnected factor that arises from personal choice, instead of seeing it as a side effect of inequality and lack of opportunity as most studies have proven. Blaming individuals and putting faces to problems makes good press and allows you to blow justified anger upon someone. The idea of a broken state (and not a particular person) that condemns the most defenceless to a criminal life cannot leave the sweet taste of revenge. Sadly, life is bitter”. Lee Yin, corvo philosopher and supporter of the Iz'kal State.

consumers of the products. This problem is responsible for many long economical crises and depressions (and perhaps a few revolts and coup attempts) throughout corvo history. As a result, there is a huge taboo on AI in corvo society. There are no machines running machines in the Corvosphere, and it is a corvo's duty to supervise production lines, etc.

Machines are run by 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 in a time where machines could replace people in most areas and leave them without the means to support themselves.

If you were to ask Xiang if machines could talk, she would say yes; even those that have no voice have a way of making themselves understood by those who listen.

Machines were simpler and purer than people. They had no evil or good in them. They functioned and that was it. No ulterior motives, no secret agendas.

Xiang wished that she was a cyborg. Her body had all the technological upgrades she had been able to afford. Most people wait until their natural body parts give out to factory accidents or disease, but not Xiang. She replaced her own arm for a bionic one that could turn into all the tools she needed to build drones. At least if she were to lose it now, it wouldn't hurt, she thought happily.

She wished for people to be more like machines: happy little beings that worked hard to do their best and who never went out of their way to make other people's lives miserable. And when machines failed, it was because they were broken rather than because of something they could be at fault for. She believed that machines were like people, in that if you never stopped to listen to what they had to say, they ended up broken.

Like her brother. If he had been a machine, Xiang could have repaired him. Or even better, she could have listened to him, and helped him before he broke.

LAW

Judges are paid by the government, but lawyers and attorneys are not. No prosecution will be made, regardless of the crime, if the appropriate fees are not paid.

Killing and murdering is completely illegal but not uncommon, especially in the poorest districts, where crooks and other lowlives too weak to make a living for themselves try to take what others have earned through their hard work. Not much is done about it, however. Police services must be hired by citizens and only sometimes will a corporate businessman pay for a raid in the deepest favela hell, and only when they fear that their interests might be in danger or when civil order starts to disappear.

On the other hand, those who can afford the fees will have the best lawyers in the Universe, and will find their justice.

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 "Fear those whose shadow is bigger than themselves." - Old pre-space age corvo saying  
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MIGRATION

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 While some corvo have the most fantastic and opulent lifestyles imaginable, there is a great majority that live in a very precarious situation. Many of them are forced to move away from their homes to try to make a living, leaving behind families and friends. As lovers of freedom, the corvo colonies put very few restrictions on immigrants, but most do require that they have a job secured at their destination or that they have enough money in their accounts to support themselves while looking for one. This very simple rule is a must as a colony can see its crime rates increase when inundated with people who cannot find a job and who must do what they can to survive.

Those that are not allowed to travel must turn to the mafias, who are the only ones capable of getting them to places where they are not wanted. Everyday, hundreds of corvo put on low quality spacesuits and are fired into the Labyrinth by these mafias. While some are intercepted by the emigration police set around the exits of the labyrinth, the majority pass by and are then picked up by a spacecraft inside the Labyrinth, which takes them to their destination and fires them through the Labyrinth exits to pass the emigration control that is there as well. 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 do not pick up all the emigrants. The most unfortunate are picked up by slavers to be sold off at distant planets.

## MILITARY CONTRACTORS AND PRIVATE POLICE

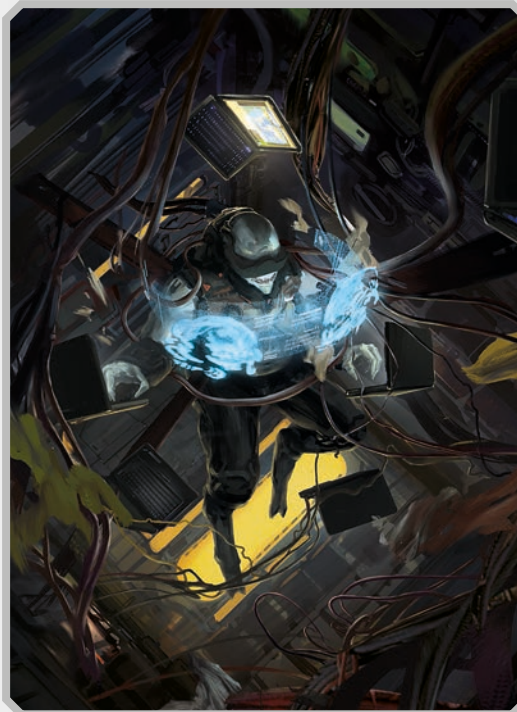
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 Although there are exceptions, police services are usually unrelated to the government and belong to private

companies. That means that their services will only be available to those areas and neighbourhoods that pay for their services. As a result, private police forces compete for the business of the best neighbourhoods. It is common to see advertisements about different private police and their superior training methods. Certain areas can become very complicated when the neighbours do not agree on contracting the same service and each house is under protection from a different company. Some conspiracy theorists talk about how some police forces move bodies to areas of other companies to avoid having to resolve complex or undesired crimes.

It is not uncommon for corvo to own personal weapons for extra safety. Some even disregard the services of police forces and prefer to rely on their own abilities to defend themselves.

On the other hand megacorps use military contractors for their expansion enterprises, protecting spacecrafts and colonies. These contractors hire and train their own personnel, using the most advanced weaponry in the universe, and they are the closest thing to an army in the Corvosphere. There are plenty of these companies, with 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 famous stars in the Corvosphere. Some of them are really popular, and they are used by military agencies as role models for young corvo to try and attract new recruits.

Military contractors are also believed to be responsible for many black operations against the Iz'kal, rebel groups within the Corvosphere and the Labyrinth, and even against other corporations.



CYBERCRIME

Cybercrime is the most extensive type of crime, due to the fact that 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 for discovering the most



"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 lovely 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 an 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," Abbas al Din, iz'kal dissident and statistician at The Union.

closely guarded secrets of the megacorps. These hackers must live in complete anonymity as they not only risk their freedom, but sometimes their lives.

"Oops, I did it again" or OI DIA 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 way of looking at data as a living organism - as 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 might believe that he was killed during his latest job. But 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 is very much alive.

"Killing is not innately bad. Our contempt for killing comes from the reasoning that a society cannot prosper if killing exists. Organic creatures have evolved to be efficient and to be able to get what they need when they want it. The most animalistic call is to try to obtain what you want without planning for future consequences, and killing sometimes is a good and easy way of achieving things. Even less intelligent animals understand this problem, and they have strict codes of behaviour. A wolf 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

MEGACORPS

Small governments are incapable of achieving great things and therefore the conquest of the stars was left in the hands of private interests. The largest ventures required such amounts of wealth and resources that small companies chose to merge into larger companies, which allied and grew into massive corporate holdings that assimilated all lesser businesses, who did not want to be left behind. When these economic giants merged to achieve greater things such as opening wormholes or mining entire solar systems, the mega corporations were born.

The bigger the megacorp, the more powerful the owners of all the companies that fall under their umbrella become. Megacorps are owned by so many businessmen from so many industries that they operate as de facto countries with their own interests.

Competition is relentless and uncompromising. While there are millions of businesses and owners, most of them form part of one of the three existing mega corporations. Being part of one gives them the power to fight off competitors and those that resist assimilation are soon bought out

by bigger fish. In all the corvo colonies all the companies belong, one degree or another, to one of the megacorps, even if they are not aware of it.

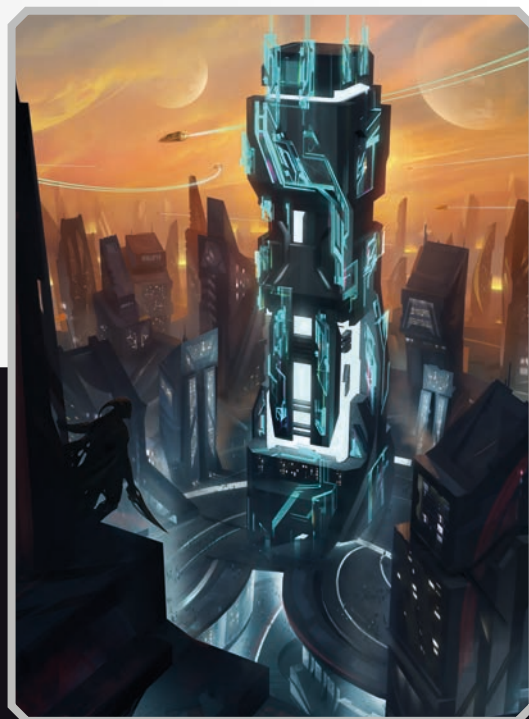
While all megacorps have diverse branches and attempt to cover all potential sources of profit, they specialise in one or two main areas of goods and services.

NATION'S SOLUTION

Nation's Solution is the megacorp that oversees the corvo industries of nanotechnology and genetic modification. They also provide the main private medical system for the corvo people. Nation's Solution has most of the control over the food production chains, the medical centres and the bio-enhancement centres within the Corvosphere.

Their investment interests lay within those areas and they are always interested in expanding 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 they invest the most out of any company into these types of projects.

As a result, Nation's Solution is forced to rely on other megacorps to aid their expeditions. They are looking for ways to not depend on Wang Corp for their devices, fearing corporate espionage and sabotage. They also depend on The Union to defend their interests in the colonies and in mining areas, but are always wary of the convenient failure of an agreement. Nation's Solution generally dislikes the need for violence, but they will use any method available to keep their shareholders happy.



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"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
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WANG CORPORATION

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

Wang Corporation is entirely dedicated to innovation. They recognize the importance of technological progression and seek 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 are able to create thousands of tech patents every year. They are always growing and investing in great ideas and innovations in an effort to avoid losing clients to alien competitors. Wang Corporation recognizes the importance of cyber security, and they boast the strongest cyber defense systems in the Corvosphere, ensuring that their great ideas remain theirs.

They are looking for alternatives to the Nation's Solution health and food systems for their workers, fearing that a monopoly could heavily affect their worker's productivity.

They also depend on The Union for most of their sales, and so their success is intrinsically tied to a rival megacorp. They would like to extend their businesses into other species' economies. They have found success with the Raag, but have failed in the uberprotectionist markets of the Iz'kal.

THE UNION

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The Union Megacorp creates all weaponry and hires and trains most of the military in the Corvosphere. They also invest the most in mining and space exploration.

The Union is deeply interested in weapon and spacecraft developments. They have the best technicians for their



mining facilities and they seek to recruit lesser species to their military and their workforce, utilising their diversified capabilities and their cheap labour. Most of the humans in the Corvosphere work for The Union.

They are not happy to deeply depend upon Nation's Solution to satisfy their workers needs for basic resources. The Union fears being left with no health care system and no food in a moment of war or critical expansion.

The Union would love to find an alternative to Wang Corp for their software and hardware needs; they hope to be able to produce everything in-house in the future. They are studying if Wang Corp might have left back doors in their systems for future use, perhaps in a hostile takeover attempt.

"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? [...] 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 condemned to be broken ones? [...] 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 condemned to live in a vicious circle with dictatorship. Only a state of the people for the people is a system capable of sustaining itself." - From "The shameful Sphere" Lee Yin, corvo philosopher and supporter of the Iz'kal State.

"Corruption is the use of the tools of the state to the benefit of the individual in a capitalist system. They claim it is the fault of the tools that the system is corrupted, yet they understand that people kill people, and not weapons. Weapons are just tools, aren't they?" - Aklaq N'eil, raag engineer.

"Never shoot a gun cocked by someone else." - Kalivan saying

CORVO HISTORY

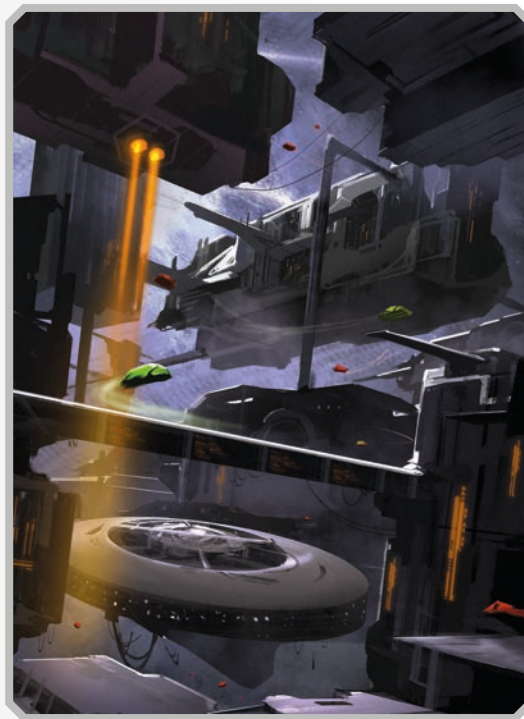
Modern corvo are the only extant members of the Corvacius Clade, a branch of great corvides characterised by erect posture and bipedal locomotion, manual dexterity, and increased tool use, and a general trend towards larger, more complex brains and societies.

The oldest specimen known in the corvo ancestry is about 120,000 years old. The Corvo began to exhibit evidence of behavioural modernity around 30,000 years ago, after which they soon occupied most of their planet. The spread of the Corvo had a profound impact on every environment they urbanised.

The general growth of the Corvosphere has always been exceptionally fast. This is because 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 energies more efficient than fossil fuels. The corvo CEOs keep sight of the long term plans of their businesses - perhaps it was their long life expectancy that gave them the necessary perspective. This is why they understood the value of investing in R&D, and it was space that proved to be the bottomless mine that their economies needed.

SPACE AGE

The Corvo began their space age 2,000 years ago when Liu Liwei became the first corvo to enter outer space. Five corporations of three different countries with a common vision signed a deal for long term collaboration. They were looking for what they thought would make them indispensable to the future of their species: an endless energy source. At least for the next billion years, which seemed like enough. Their plan was to establish a ring of solar powered satellites around the sun (a Dyson ring in human jargon) and send the energy back to their planet with a system of microwaves. These satellites would receive solar energy every single second they were operative, with none of it being lost to the atmosphere nor to other celestial bodies that could stand in the way. Thousands of corvo workers and technicians moved to space bases that became part of the Dyson ring.



This new system was extremely costly, but it had transformed the 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 it took over more than 60% of all businesses.

There was a complication. Each satellite could only provide so much energy, and the subsequent rapid expansion of the Corvo required more energy than what the Dyson ring could provide. Thus was the beginning of a great recession, known as Sundown. The public accused Jiaoyang of creating a monopoly over the Dyson ring's energy production, which ultimately led to the crisis. These accusations damaged their reputation and caused their stock prices to fall hard.

Jiaoyang could not continue to expand the Dyson ring. There was a shortage of materials which could only be provided by the two corporations that had taken over the real estate of the remaining rocky planets in the system. Jiaoyang had to agree to open the Dyson ring to other businesses, and the free commerce treaty that was signed set the basis for a truly free and competitive economy. On the other hand, the two corporations that had unilaterally claimed the land of two whole planets were found guilty of not operating within the free market, and they were sold for parts by their shareholders. Jiaoyang split into two companies: one that focused on the maintenance of the sat-

ellites and the workers' bases, and another one in charge of providing services to new companies and workers that needed astronaut training and transportation to the Dyson ring.

Both the planets and the Dyson ring became places of investment and growth, resulting in the erasure of the previous patronage system. 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. Others worked on the mining sites of the neighbour planets, which were otherwise mere rocks where life could not exist.

TIANTANG, A SPACE BASED ECONOMY

With enough material to keep up with the expansion of the Dyson ring, its growth was almost exponential. The ring was finally completed, and its capital sector was named Tiantang. The Corvo had mined two planets to their core, and with a condensed ring of space stations and satellites at 1AU of their star, almost half the corvo population had chosen to move to live and work in Tiantang or nearby mining bases. Not only had the majority of the industry and services moved to space, but also their entire financial system. In a genius move by several megacorps, they had the stock and currency markets moved to Tiantang, which resulted in a delay of 3 light minutes as information travelled from Tiantang to Quanjie, and forced all planetary corporations to be unable to compete in the big leagues.



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.

The need for material things, for new software, entertainment, energy, and resources, was ever growing. The CEOs of the largest companies were well aware of what would happen to their economy if they could not keep up with their growth.

THE ARTIFICIAL WORMHOLE

When it seemed like the corvo expansion had reached its limit, exhausting most of the resources available in their solar system, the great mind of Mehdi Ben and his team of scientists found a solution: they claimed that with enough energy output they could create a wormhole. Creating a wormhole is the summit of all technological advances in space travel engineering. No form of energy has ever been able to push the speed of a manned spaceship even close to of the speed of light, and thus wormholes were the only theoretical way to travel between star systems within the lifespan of any of the recognised sentient species.

The creation of a wormhole is the most complex task known today and can be highly dangerous. It requires the presence of matter with negative mass, which can be either created or found in regions of space known as N-regions, in which mass arbitrarily changes from positive to negative. Creating this form of matter is extremely expensive, and thus a relatively close N-region is normally sought when planning the creation of a new wormhole. It also needs an enormous amount of energy to be continuously fed into it in order to stay stable and not collapse upon itself.

Mehdi Ben convinced several megacorps to invest heavily into his concept. If it worked, they could create a door to a whole new star system, full of the resources and job opportunities they needed.

What Mehdi Ben did not tell his investors was that it was impossible for him to choose where the wormhole would lead to. The only conclusion they could reach based on their experimental data was that the other end of the wormhole would open at a nearby N-Region. While they are scarce, most star systems have one of these regions within a week of subluminal travel. N-regions become more scarce the further you are from a star, though the reason for this relation has not been discovered yet.

This was enough assurance for Mehdi that the wormhole would take them close enough to another star system and its resources. He knew the risks of telling this to the shareholders, who would appreciate money more than a leap of faith, so he kept it a secret from everyone.

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 connection 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, which they called the Labyrinth.

NOW

The Corvo now use the Labyrinth to create new colonies wherever they find habitable planets, and mine dozens of planets and asteroid rings for Tiantang, their ever growing Dyson ring. 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 a no for an answer and the Dyson ring keeps growing every year.

The Corvo have expanded to other worlds in other star systems and have built new homes for their people. Millions of corvo inhabit hostile worlds where they spend their lives mining vital minerals. It is also believed that wonderful planets have been discovered, that are now inhabited by only the richest corvo.

CORVO HABITATS

The Corvo have expanded to other worlds in other star systems and have built new homes for their people. Millions of corvo inhabit hostile worlds where they spend their lives mining vital minerals. It is also believed that wonderful planets have been discovered and are now inhabited by only the richest corvo.

QUANJIE

Quanjie is the home planet of the Corvo. It is the place where they evolved and where the majority of corvo lived for nearly a millennium since the beginning of their space age. Deforestation and heavy mining has made Quanjie a poor place to live, with barren land and a weak atmosphere. The population has been greatly reduced and there has been a business exodus to Tiantang.

The only industries left on Quanjie are the exploitation of rare woods and raising large animals for meat that cannot be kept in Tiantang. Both trades are highly sought after in the Dyson ring. However, the population of Quanjie is far too large for its poor ecosystem and life is harsh for all



but the richest of the inhabitants. Those who have enough money will often try to move to the Dyson ring to look for opportunities.

TIANTANG

The Dyson ring of Tiantang is composed of thousands of space habitats and millions of solar satellites. Hosting billions of corvo and a few million inhabitants from other species, it is ever growing, and even more ships and bases are constantly being built with materials brought in from distant worlds.

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, you cannot forbid someone from moving and establishing in unowned space. However, empty areas between districts are completely 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 transportation companies, which have large fleets of spacecrafts. Middle and high class corvos own personal space cars that fill the vacuum between the districts like locusts.



Private habitats

The most rare and exotic habitats are owned by exceedingly wealthy or highly reputable individuals. Most are small planets, moons, or asteroids turned into luxurious paradises. The number of private habitats in existence is unknown, but many famous people talk about their visits and how the experience was like a dream far beyond their sensorial capacities to fully enjoy it. These places are, of course, protected by the best security contractors and their location is kept a secret from the common people.

The richest of corvo society live aboard their own personal spaceships with all the commodities and servants their capabilities deserve. These spaceships are the summit of the corvo engineering, large and beautiful as palaces, powerful like war machines, revered like cathedrals, and probably the most expensive things to ever exist in the Corvosphere.

Middle class citizens live in comfortable, safe and beautiful districts, composed of a single spacecraft called a gyro-zhan. Gyro-zhans are round spacecrafts that spin continuously to recreate a sense of gravity through centrifugal force. 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 transport spaceships.

People in the gyro-zhans work all types of jobs: information technology, internet, transportation, debris collection, brokerage, law, entertainment, resource management, services, health care, etc. These stations 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 matters.

Iz'kal geniuses disenchanted by their conservative and not-merit based society move to Tiantang to try to earn the patronage of a megacorp for their inventions and theories. The corvo have the resources and open mind to make anything possible happen, for as long it makes them back their investment and then some, of course.

Several thousand corvo live in each of these stations, but most of the population live in space freighters, which are better known as space favelas.

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 of corvo workers in 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 corvos arrive by the thousands every day and are sucked into the space favelas: old space freighters the size of islands, now too old to be operational, have been transformed into slums where layer over layer of containers extend as far as the eye can see, each housing one or more families, and all of them living in O-G in the worst possible conditions. Most families live and die in one of these containers, without ever experiencing gravity. Their bodies are kept alive thanks to the intake of G-pills that minimise the effects of the lack of gravity 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 resort to crime. The worst districts are controlled by mafias who decide who gets to work when, and on what. While there is almost no crime whatsoever in the richer districts, the majority of the lower class corvos are unable or unwilling to pay for police protection. Therefore, there are millions of corvo that live in the favelas without even the most basic of services.

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.

In Tiantang, the upper class can eat and enjoy anything they can imagine. The middle class usually travels once or twice per year to a tourist colony and enjoys the entertainments available in Tiantang the rest of the time: they can eat out several times per year, but mostly eat algae and other food products that can grow in space. Gyro-zhans have tanks of algae used both as food and energy source. The algae is fed with organic waste, imported minerals and sunlight. The lower classes are usually restricted to virtual entertainment and a diet based on fodder, insects rich in proteins, and compressed algae.

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. Let others talk about his strange mannerisms, his uncouth behaviour, or his lack of understanding of celebrity culture. When he was born, he was meant to die at the bottom of a O-G space freighter, and now he was working as an specialist collecting space debris.

His friends in the favela called him the trash collector - which he kind of was. His job allowed 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 specialized 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 matters 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 from a hole on the roof - or the floor (in the old O-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, when they were not launching themselves by kicking some wall that could barely withstand their weight. They had lived like that for their whole lives. For most, gravity was something they had never felt. Ying still hated it.

He kicked the wall behind him and entered the vegetable market like a rocket. His timing was perfect and he passed 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 O-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 favelas 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 large ship, in the shape of a honeycomb, where thousands of transport ships arrived and went in a somehow organised chaos that connected dozens of districts. Ying got out of the ship and jumped into an elevator, which moved at 100 kilometres per hour and took him to a new waiting area. 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 gets 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, so 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 of 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



“YOU ARE BUT A
MORTAL BODY. I

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 was delaying 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, out of this world, something Ying, who had lived all his life 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 Ying who was the only one left in the transport. 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 he looked down at his feet.

The transport ship closed its doors and took Ying back to the Commuters ship.



PUPPET STRUNG TO THE FATE OF YOUR
SHALL FREE YOU." - LEDGER, CHAOREN

THE IZ'KAL

The Iz'kal are a gregarious and proud people. Slightly smaller in stature and more slender than humans, they live in large cities on the surface of the planets they colonise.

Iz'kal are mammals with an average height of 1.8 metres for males and 1.73 for females. The average mass of an adult iz'kal is 70 kilograms for males and 65 kilograms for females, but this is highly dependent on the gravity of the planet they grow up in and many other factors such as exposure to sunlight and nutrition.

Their life expectancy is quite high at 70 Earth years, but with genetic manipulation, an urbanite iz'kal with access to the free care system of the State can live up to 180 years.

Iz'kal are completely hairless and have a tougher skin than humans, but their skin has a tendency to dry up. This is why they live in swamplands and along coasts whenever possible. They are adept swimmers and they have a very large lung capacity.

Before genetic manipulation, the Iz'kal had no vocal cords and had evolved to communicate through hyperlink. After the Uprising, in which the Iz'kal wiped out the Korian, they developed an advanced civilisation and modified themselves genetically to develop vocal cords to be able to communicate in a universe that they shared with many other species.

They have a tail, reminiscent of their time as marine creatures, which they used for swimming. They can still control its movement, but they cannot grab anything with it. They have a head appendage that contains an organ connected to the brain called the iz, which allows them to enter hyperlink. Although it has been studied in depth, there is still much to learn about it. When an iz'kal loses his iz, he can no longer engage in hyperlink, which usually leads to depression and suicide. Very few iz'kal can live without the hyperlink, and those who do so become 'voidwalkers', suffering heavy changes on their organs and even at a genetic level.

Iz'kal modify themselves genetically to adapt to the star cycle and environmental conditions of the planet they inhabit, allowing them to eat whatever is available. However, they tend to have vegetarian diets.

THE STATE

The State is the concept that incorporates everything that is iz'kal related, from the planets they inhabit, to their spacecrafts and their mines, and even their districts in shared planets with other species.

Rebel fleets, pirates, anarchists and any other type of groups who do not accept the ways of their common society are not considered part of their society or the State itself.

HYPERLINK

Iz'kal can form neural networks with other members of their species. While connected, individual thoughts merge, creating a large single mind influenced by every individual. This connection is known as a hyperlink.

While in hyperlink, iz'kal get a pretty good picture of the feelings and reasonings of all the other members. Witnessing the internal processes of another person creates a strong bond and makes everyone very empathetic. This is one of the reasons the levels of violence and discrimination are so low within their society.



A hyperlink can only be achieved by reaching out to others close by, and as the network increases in size, the mind processing capability of the joint mind grows stronger. Any number of iz'kal can join the same hyperlink if they are close enough to any of the members already in it. In urban areas, iz'kal tend to form large networks, allowing them to share their thoughts, discuss the latest news and engage in small talk with their fellow citizens, while also enjoying a shared mental map of the city. Even when visiting a new city, an iz'kal will find his way around very easily and will always feel like a small but essential part of a whole.

In their houses, iz'kal share a more personal hyperlink with their home community, but they can transition to the main city hyperlink very quickly. In rare cases, hyperlinks are formed between the society as a whole to tackle matters that pertain them all. Such large hyperlinks are tiresome to the individual and some fear what it might do to an iz'kal's individuality.

An iz'kal can choose to disconnect from a hyperlink at any time, but to be able to join or create one with another individual, all its members must be willing to accept him. Most iz'kal have no trouble connecting with any other

members of society and share their interests and motivations. In fact, most of the relevant decisions in the personal life of an iz'kal are made while in hyperlink.

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 they are too intense to keep inside, they usually exile themselves from the hyperlink to avoid affecting others' psyches with their personal problems. The hyperlink exile takes as long as the individual needs to come to terms with whatever affected him; some iz'kal are so damaged that they never join a hyperlink again, and they become voidwalkers.

THE VOIDWALKERS

When an iz'kal spends a great amount of time disconnected from hyperlink, he becomes anxious and has a feeling of loneliness that can easily turn into a deep depression.

If the separation from hyperlink is long enough or produced by a shocking event of great magnitude, some individuals might never be able to connect with others through hyperlink ever again. In times previous to the addition of the vocal cords to the Iz'kal, this meant that a voidwalker could never talk with another person again.

The change affects the iz organ, which develops a new function for itself that increases the mental strength of the Iz'kal (it is thought to be an evolved trait to reduce the risk of suicide) and makes the voidwalkers excellent soulbenders, allowing them to wield the powers of their Gods at a whole new level. Some radicals put themselves through this ordeal on purpose in order to obtain this ability, but they are forever changed.

The voidwalkers are treated with a mixture of respect, fear, and sadness, for 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. They tend to be lonely and quiet, trying to stay away from other iz'kal and keeping mostly to themselves. Their mental strength and determination make them extremely valuable to the State, and many voidwalkers enter the ranks of the Savak, the elite force in charge of state protection.

The Iz'kal State has seen value in this trait and their elite military group, known as Savak, is composed solely of voidwalkers. That most of them are people who have lost everything makes them even better soldiers, as they are given a new reason to live and die for.

“‘For your own good’ is a persuasive argument that will eventually make a man agree to his own destruction.” – Janet Frame, human writer





“It is dangerous to be right when the government is wrong.” - Voltaire, human writer, philosopher and historian

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

In their personal lives, iz'kal engage in majmoas, which are usually group relationships of three to ten members of both genders, but they stay faithful to that particular majmoa. Monogamous relationships are rare and seen as restrictive. Although not all members of the majmoa engage in sexual activity with all the others, they are all very close to each other, sharing all their experiences and emotions through hyperlink and devoting themselves to each other. Each majmoa shares a house and any child born is considered the child of the whole group.

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 government. New citizens are genetically engineered during conception and pregnancy cannot occur without medical intervention. Only in rare cases, such

as when a group of colonists is sent to a new planet, are they modified so as to restore their natural reproductive physiology.

Bringing a new child to the Universe requires governmental 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 female will be impregnated with the baby. This is one of the few instances where individual choices are allowed and not frowned upon.

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 extends the genetic diversity of the iz'kal species in case of epidemics or other similar threats. This can very well mean that the baby might not share any relation to any of the members of the majmoa he will be born into. While this might seem strange, iz'kal see no problem whatsoever with this and everyone in the majmoa will behave as caring fathers and mothers to this new child.

All iz'kal societies that have been studied throughout history have had group relationships of this kind, even before genetic manipulation and the Korian.

ENTERTAINMENT AND ART

The Iz'kal did not have natural vocal cords, and thus they were always fascinated with the singing of other species, especially of humans. Good singers 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 do so. Some alien communities are aware of it and in the poorest neighbourhoods the children train their 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.

Iz'kal are considered to be excellent dancers and are

“When an iz'kal is born, he or 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.

“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

very kin to learn and practice all the arts imaginable. So much so, that some instrumental and dancing groups known as ghaziwas are lured into the Corvosphere, with the promise of richness, to play in galas and parties of the highest level. There is a trend of corvo infatuated with the 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 who 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.

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 groups of explorers looking for new places through the Labyrinth, or as missionaries trying to bring the iz'kal ways to other species.

Zahid was selected by the school of Furusiyya at the age of six. He had been genetically manipulated before birth and he had showed aptitude. He was told he would become a warrior: a martial artist born to defend his nation. He would not understand what this meant until much later in his life.

Throughout his years, he proved that he had what was needed to be a great warrior, but he was a disobedient student and his ideas often clashed with those of his masters. While he loved his art and his fellow Furusiyya students, he did not agree with the methods and the values of his school. It was during a verbal confrontation that Zahid had taken a master's gesture as an attack, and promptly took him down, resulting in his permanent expulsion from Furusiyya.

Zahid became an outcast, wandering from one place to the next, longing for a purpose. He decided he would travel to learn from other martial arts, and come back to Erthum to create his own school - one where new ideas would be heard.

He now travels from world to world through the Labyrinth, learning the techniques of other species. He will show his old masters their own arrogance and how there is so much more to learn and improve.

RESOURCE-BASED ECONOMY

The iz'kal are organised around a concept called the State. The State is the organisational structure and system of governance of the iz'kal society in which all citizens, called technocrats, take part as the administrators of the State based on their expertise and hard data.

The State works as a moneyless and ownerless organisation. Instead, it uses a fluid system that takes into consideration the labour force, the production capacity, and the reserves of resources of the colony, and manages these parameters to figure out how to run the colony 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 them, 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 willing to sacrifice their personal agendas for the good of all.

On the other hand, the majority of iz'kal only work in the scientific, technological, sociological, or entertainment fields, as most of the physical labour is performed by machines. Most iz'kal are therefore poets, writers, scientists, musicians, engineers, dancers, actors, philosophers, etc. All of their work is shared freely, to be used, manipulated, improved, and elevated by all others.

There are no boss-employee relationships, nor leader and follower, as everything is collaborative. Despite that, social pressure is strong and if the majority within one's department asks them to perform a certain task, they are obligated to perform it, putting aside their personal needs. 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.

The State is based on public interaction and collaborative design, facilitated by open-access systems, open feedback programs, a high mobile labour force, and primary and secondary sectors based almost entirely on automated machinery.

Technocrats can put forward new motions to resolve existing problems or improve old systems. To do so, they must follow the scientific method approach. The proposals are presented anonymously and are reviewed by groups of

"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 Alharam, still running, but not even itself knows why or what for. It just can't stop [...] 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, CEO of The Union, after his visit to Erthum.

experts. When these proposals have been deemed viable at the technical level, they are distributed among the 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 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 at all times open source and accessible through the State's main system, Idealab. This means that any other technocrat can build his own motion upon it or perhaps request that the team already working on it takes into consideration some variable or idea the technocrat has come up with.

As there is a direct link between the citizens and the production of goods without an exchange in between (as in monetary systems) or possible personal gain, all new policy considerations are based on their utility and there is no market resistance to new products that might put old products out of business, nor planned obsolescence.

ZAKI-WAAHA 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 zaki-waaha cities 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 the 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 recently visitor, the neural webs formed through hyperlink by iz'kal 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 zaki-waaha 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 and 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 do not like to leave any stone unturned in their quest for efficiency.

"Reader, suppose you were a slave. And suppose you were an iz'kal. But I repeat myself." - Bill Mordok, human comedian, paraphrasing Mark Twain

ECONOMIES OF THE MAJMOA AND THE INDIVIDUAL

The Iz'kal have no currency and, for them, it is a difficult concept to grasp. Although it is known that iz'kal societies previous to the Korian did use it, after the Uprising they created a system of living without private property.

How individuals obtain the usage rights of something depends on a system of waiting lists. While some items are consumables (such as food), and therefore cannot be given back, all others are acquired for a period of time depending on the utility of the item.

Public transport is by far the most common form of transportation, but spaceships can be requested when time is of the essence or when traveling to rare locations. When in need of a vehicle, a request will be submitted 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. Things are always being used by someone. As soon as one stops using them, they are handed over to the next person who needs them. Some items are only available at specific locations, and anyone wanting to use them will have 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. The majmoas also improve the usage ratio of most appliances and other household goods.



Whenever an iz'kal wants to acquire a product, he places a request on the system and is put on the waiting list for that item. This can be done through the internet or in person by using one's ID. His 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 someone doesn't need an item, they won't be able to get it even if they are the only one on the waiting list.

Each iz'kal is given a unique ID which is imprinted onto their genome during conception. Through this ID, 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, can be accessed.

All this information is taken into account when an iz'kal citizen wants to obtain something and complex algorithms are used to place him on the waiting list for that object or service.

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 technocrat to build what he personally needs, accessing the best designs in the Idealab or creating his own. Each technocrat 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 they have if they desire to create something new or giving it to someone else when they don't have use for it anymore.

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 that are able 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 as long as his entire life span.

Asking for an update or a repair for an existing item is usually faster than requesting a new one, and while there is also 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

“The story of every criminal previous to 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

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.

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 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 corvo, for whom shopping is one of the most pleasant activities and a sign of social status, iz’kal consider it an undesirable necessity and will only do so when necessary.

The national drink of the Iz’kal, the lial, is often sold in lial shops that line the streets. Lial is consumed in all social situations, when engaging in hobbies, in parks, theatres and sports centres, and in hyper schools. Hyper schools are places where respected individuals in different areas engage in hyperlink with visitors to share their knowledge and recent discoveries. They are not meant to replace traditional learning systems, which also exist, but are fantastic places to find out about what is new in the fields of one’s interests.

The streets are almost silent even when busy, as iz’kal do not talk among them, but join each other in hyperlink. To the other species this is an eerie experience, seeing thousands of people walking in all directions without a single word being spoken, the only noise the sound of the friction of the clothes and their steps.

POLICE AND THE SAVAK

For many years there has not been a police force in iz’kal society. Crime is extremely rare, and is even uncommon in iz’kal fiction. In a society as empathically connected as the Iz’kal, people are always aware of the feelings of those around them and most problems can be tended to before they affect society. Still, there is no such thing as a perfect society and certain individuals do perform minor crimes, such as people taking things outside of their usage rights. These crimes are reported by other technocrats as soon as they become aware of the crime. The ‘criminal’ must appear before a commission whose job is to figure out the cause of his behaviour. Criminals are treated as mental patients who require re-education and there are many

social workers whose job is to figure out a way to improve the criminal’s life (socially rather than economically) to the usual levels of other technocrats, ultimately restoring that person to society. This is usually done by psychoanalysing the criminals, and having them enter hyperlink with people that can connect with them and help them improve.

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. Those so out of touch with society that they are irrecoverable are eventually turned into voidwalkers, and many of them end up joining the Savak.

The Savak is composed of voidwalkers, iz’kal who have lost their ability to enter hyperlink and who have undergone an important physical and mental transformation. Those that so choose are trained under one of the most rigid and demanding military systems in the Universe. They are given a single purpose in life: to defend the State. Although many fear their rigid moral code and lack of empathy, most iz’kal accept and agree that this is the best life for those that have lost their purpose. The risk of these soldiers abusing their power is there, but no one else is willing to fight the wars that the State must fight for the survival of all.



MIGRATION

It is quite hard for an iz'kal to move from one colony to another, as each colony is built to work with an specific number of citizens. As a result, the State asks that one provides them with a proper reason for the emigration, which should be somehow beneficial for the society (taking into consideration the work he can accomplish in the new colony and the work he will stop doing in the old one). Things like moving houses, or moving to a new city or planet are also organised with waiting lists. This can take several years, but is free and available to the totality of the society so the iz'kal endure as they understand it is needed to maintain their privileged lifestyle.

When the State needs to populate a new colony or city, or create any other migration movement, they will do so as fast as it is needed. People can sign up for such things, and if the vacancies are not filled voluntarily, they will be filled by drafting. How likely a citizen is of being 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 entitle entire majmoas to avoid breaking such bonds.

It is also very hard for a member of another species to come into iz'kal society. While some colonies are more open to visitors and are prepared to receive them, most are completely closed, as changes in the demographic of the State could put the efficiency of the system at risk. These colonies are called conversion camps by the corvo. 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 the corvo call it) over items or services, etc. 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.

THE HEXIAN MOVEMENT

When the Iz'kal met the Corvo, everything changed. It did not take them long to understand that they were incompatible and that they had to share a universe that technology was rendering progressively smaller (in spite of its continual expansion).

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 hungry to expand their market. At that point, there would be nothing the State could do to stop them from expanding into the iz'kal society the same way they did with the humans and the Raag.

The Iz'kal would not go down easy, but in the end it wouldn'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 sadly personal rights need to be sacrificed. The Hexian movement claims that the Iz'kal need to grow as fast as the Corvo or they will lose everything.

"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 KORIAN AND THE IZ'KAL UPRISING

A thousand years ago, when the Iz'kal were a primitive preliterate 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. They were easily subjugated and enslaved. They solemnly endured every punishment and hardship their masters put them through. 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.

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 monarchist system based on very rigid and backwards laws that disregarded the rights of their own people and of course considered all other species nothing more than insects in their soup.

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. Back then, iz'kal could only communicate through hyperlink. They had no evolutionary need for vocal cords and this 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 communicate better with alien species, but some think 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 having a single iz'kal go rogue and revealing their secret language and intelligence. 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 favor from the Korian. However, some theorize 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 linkmind and would be assassinated by the others.

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 laid 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 animalistic and inferior 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 of them. 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 of their population died and the vast majority of the 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 korian spaceships left 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 being an intergalactic empire. It was only because they were such a united and selfless society that they were able to not fall to internal battles that 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 their sovereignty from them.

"They are a species whose only achievement has been to kill off 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." - Sun Qingzhou, CEO of Nation's Solution

THE KORIAN CIVILISATION

The Korian are thought to have been a post-literate species. While it is unknown if they ever were literate, it is agreed by all the experts that if the Korian did develop their own technology they must have been.

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 ones or even replace the existing ones. Their technology worked through voice commands and they had powerful self repairing systems so that their tech did not age.

The Korian were very comfortable with their ways and had no real interest in developing further (only a few rare cases of individual korian are thought to have been interested in such matters). It allowed them to enjoy all the pleasures of life as they saw it: eating, sleeping, fornicating, and warring.

They did not keep records, data, recordings, or any other 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 by historians, 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 at that moment were a preliterate species and it took a long time after the Uprising for the Iz'kal to reach literacy. In that time most of the korian and iz'kal history had died.

The Korian only cultivated two arts. The culinary arts, of which they were very proud of, consisted of recipes that used spices from dozens of planets. Their martial art, called Meriam, was practised every day of their lives. They became intoxicated by the dancing rituals of the Iz'kal and would spend their long and copious meals watching their slaves dance, which (according to some records) were requested to end with copulation between the dancers, with their masters sometimes joining them.

"Their claims of injustice among us are completely unfounded. In the Corvosphere, anyone with skill will thrive, and the lack of resources (and in some cases laziness) is the reason why not all of us do. They say that their people live better and 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 a million times larger than theirs. They claim all their people live well, yet in the Corvosphere, there are more billionaires than they have people." - Fang Wang, CEO of Wang Corp

watching the iz'kal dances, and having the Raag 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 them back to life is out of the picture. Many corvo from anti-iz'kal groups would love to get their hands on some korian remains to do so.

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. The often recognised theory (but not the most supported one), is that the Korian lost interest and didn't see the necessity of further developing their technology, and in time left all of its use in the hands of their primitive Als. After that, they ended up focusing on violence and conquest, as no one really believes that those traits could have been present prior to their technological peak. Such violent tendencies would have been their doom, or at least would have kept them within their home planet.

Recent and more supported theories based on comparative studies of korian technology make experts believe that the Korian did not actually develop it themselves; they had to either steal it or receive it from another species, or another korian civilisation now extinct. All of the machines left (and the remains from the Uprising that were available



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.

to be studied) use the exact same type of hardware and software, which is unusual for a civilisation as large as the Korian, who 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 the existing tech on any of the korian planets. 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 it in space similar to the Corvo). This is supported by the lack of archaeological evidence of korian presence on any planet for more than a few hundreds years.

IZ'KAL HABITATS

The Iz'kal inhabit many different planets, and although they built it upon the remains left by the Korian, their civilisation is eminently different from their former masters'.

AL'AMEEN

The original planet of the Iz'kal is mostly flat and composed of dozens of small continents along its equator. The 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, in which the swamps dry up and another, in which the swamps grow large 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 a rich planet in natural resources and it is a paradise for the Iz'kal, who keep most of it as wild land, with very few ecofriendly 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.

Even fewer are allowed to visit 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 it was never discovered by them. Iz'kal all around the Universe make a pilgrimage to this place. When in Alhena, all the iz'kal join in a single hyperlink with all 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 people have for their behaviour. This is, for many iz'kal, the most intoxicating and beautiful experience possible. Some are addicted to it and travel to Alhena once a year, even if they live in the other side of the Universe.

ERTHUM

For the most part, Erthum is a desert, and a dangerous one at that, as sandstorms are abundant and can last days, pinning down populations or travellers for long periods of time. In the poles, the temperatures are very low and almost lifeless, while the land in between the ice poles and the central deserts is a steppe containing no civilised

population at all.

Cities in Erthum are built to be efficient and to maximise their productivity. The environment is so harsh that it requires them to be extra careful with their natural equilibrium. They are heavily investing in terraforming the planet to create diversity and to improve its atmosphere. This is a slow process as they must take all the different variables into consideration. Roothounds have been imported from Sulivar to regrow the wildwood, and they are now one of the most common animals found in the planet. They are very territorial, and only specialised personnel is allowed into the new forest areas to avoid incidents.

THE COLONIES

The Iz'kal keep their colonies few in number and creating one is an organised process after a long period of study. Many times has the State invested time, equipment, and personnel to research the viability of a planet as a colony, only to discover that it would not be worth it in the long run. Perhaps the planet would run out of some vital resources within a couple hundred years. The State has 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 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 mining colonies or other places only used for their resources, 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.

They do create scientific and military outposts, however. Scientific outposts are created wherever they think they can make new discoveries that will further their understanding of the Universe and perhaps themselves. Military outposts are formed between colonies set far apart to protect convoys between them, or in strategic places to hinder the growth of the Corvo and to protect the State from any attempt at war.



FOOD FIGHTS

He had scouted the battlefield thrice and only dust and a sickly greenish mist were moving. He was the only survivor. The skinny Iz'kal soldier felt proud for a moment, but soon enough an overwhelming stream of dread flooded his body again; there was no one else.

There has to be someone else, please let there be someone else, he thought to himself. The Iz'kal continued walking, ignoring as best he could the pain of his shattered foot and the feeling that half of his face was missing.

Then he heard a gobble nearby. It repeated persistently, as if it were trying to attract his attention. As one of the few interpreters of his battalion, he knew what the sound was immediately. He spotted a milky lump not far from him, half buried in the sand, covered by similar bodies. He carefully removed them, uncovering his dying enemy, and offered her what she was asking for. Did etiquette and procedural guidelines matter anymore? he asked himself. He unsheathed a flask from his belt and gave the stranger a sip of "Hero's Mana", also known as "Captain's Cum" in the human barracks. When he observed the Corvo more closely, he realised she was not buried at all but had lost the lower half of her body in combat. He hoped she had enough stomach remaining to hold the Mana inside her damaged body.

"I thank you, Iz'kal." The liquid dripped from the Corvo's mouth, giving new life to the dried blood on her chin. He knew some Corvo where snow white when they were not wearing all the technological gibberish they were known for, but this one's swollen face was so pale it hurt to look at it.

"I think it is only you and me." The Iz'kal said. 'First I give her a drink, and then I start chatting with her. This must be treason somewhere. Well, it is of little importance now', he thought.

"The last standing. We should be named heroes." The Corvo stated, then laughed raucously. "It is a shame no one is ever going to find out."

"What do you mean? Why wouldn't they...?"

"Don't play the fool with me, boy. You already know what I mean." He did know, but he didn't want to hear it.

"I... I have no idea what..."

"You know what kind of battle this was. You know this wasn't a fight for land or money, for we fought on a tiny moon covered in dust. You know it wasn't for honour; for only the traitors, the worthless, and the damned were sent here to fight. Tell me boy, which group do you belong to?"

"Shut up! Stop talking!"

Food Fight was the nickname given to these offensive strikes, to honour the fact that both armies threw their scraps and leftovers into one another's faces. His mother had laughed

at the wordplay, while his father asked for respect to those who perished for an honourable cause. At least father will be proud. He doubted so. If you thought about it, it was undeniable that these encounters had a reason to be. Someone had to try out the newest weapons, or the ones that had expired long ago. Even the defective ones had to be tried, those that exploded in your hands before throwing them at the enemy. Someone has to see what works when everything else fails.

"Do you see that green haze? Of course you do, you've still got one eye left on that mangled face," laughed the Corvo. "That was our secret weapon. Laser radiation. Point and zzzzt! Custom post-nuclear treatment straight into the heart of those you hate the most. What could go wrong? When we opened the container, the four soldiers that guarded it were already dead. We assumed it was a leak, and we realised where we were at that point. It was too late."

"It didn't matter..."

"Exactly. At least we were going to have fun for a while. How grand would it be to leave this world winning your last battle, right?"

The Iz'kal looked at her. She seemed so frail, as if she would crumble like ash were he to touch her.

"Laughing and singing, we prepared to engage. And then... Half our forces blew up in the air, and with them our dreams of being remembered as heroes. We wanted to be the first to survive such a battle."



“WITHOUT THE

"Don't speak as if it were over! We're alive! I'm alive!"

"That's right, we keep breathing. That increases our likelihood of dying."

"Silence!"

"That green shit is in the air, and the more you breathe in the quicker it kills you. In a few hours you will be rattling on the floor, begging for mercy, but I won't be here to help you anymore."

"I don't need your solace! I can't stand this anymore!" The Iz'kal's hands were shaking, but there was enough strength left in him to point his handgun at the Corvo.

The dying Corvo looked away. "What I am saying is if you think a rescue team is going to arrive before... well... You surely must know how it works. They will send a science team, covered head to toe with those protective suits, and they'll just collect weaponry remnants to study them. But you... you won't be here by then. Accept the truth, it's easier that way."

Nobody knew they were in a Food Fight until it had started. It dawned on you once you disembarked, once you saw the rest of the lowlifes that were going to fight with you, once you were given a weapon that made you fear for your life. Then you reflected on your foolish acts, the things that brought you there. You were sentenced to death without knowing why.

Who did you wrong? What did you miss? He couldn't bear it anymore. He just wanted the pain and suffering to end. Now.

He pointed the gun to his head, put it in his mouth, and closed his eyes. His hands were shaking. He bit the barrel until it hurt. He caressed the trigger and then... opened his eyes.

"I can't do it. I want everything to end, but I just... can't," he stammered. And then he wept.

"I can."

"How?" asked the Iz'kal.

"We could help each other. We are the last ones standing in this stupid quarrel. We are the heroes of this shit. I will fall soon, but you... you shared Mana with me."

The Iz'kal looked into the red, misty eyes of the Corvo for a long time, and nodded. He handed her the gun. The Corvo took it in her shaking hand and, with great effort, pointed at the Iz'kal.

"Thank you." said the interpreter. He closed his eyes.

"No, thank you." - "Why?" - "Because now, I've won."

She pulled the trigger.



STATE THERE IS NOTHING." – JALAN & SHEKH

THE HUMANS

Due to their exponential exploitation of Earth's resources, humanity had driven itself to the point of near extinction. Mighty nations fell under the weight of their own pride and corruption. The only hope for humanity was to somehow develop their technology far further than it currently was. They could not.

War was the terrible answer, and soon after, 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 grew 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.

Then 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 the old continent of Africa and initiated economic and military negotiations with the locals. Their economic capacities, 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 specializing in military contracting, defense, and security started hiring humans in great numbers. Entire bands of warriors joined military contractors.

Earth became a breeding and training ground for human mercenaries. A planet controlled by dozens of factions 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 lords pay their debts to the corvo corporations with the labour of their young people.

The humans started 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 fear of humans running out of control in the Corvosphere, or even moving to work for the State, gave way to the first clause of every human space labour contract: that they must agree to genetic sterilization, a process that attacks their reproductive capacities on such a level that is

beyond any sort of repair. The process does not have major effects on the person, but it is known to stop female menstruation. Reverting this process is impossible, although some iz'kal claim that they could perform such a task if they had access to the DNA of a non-sterilized human. The corvo corporations have a very strict methodology when interacting with Earth to avoid the possibility of that DNA reaching the State.

Earth's location is unknown to most, and it is one of the best kept secrets of the Corvosphere - not even the CEOs of the megacorps know the totality of the route. This is achieved by a complex set of routines that only highly loyal - and well paid - corvo pilots have partial knowledge of. Someone who would want to figure it out would need to bribe, torture, or somehow make ten different people talk, and even this is no easy task, as their identities are kept secret as well.

Regardless, humans became valuable and wanted, and the Corvo were unable to keep them all on their side. Many humans changed sides to the State for a better offer, as loyalty was something they did not have for their new



bosses. The Iz'kal State, understanding the menace of strong aliens species working for the Corvo, work hard to recruit humans to their side. They offer them citizenships in exchange for several years of work defending their borders and interests. Many humans, tired of being exploited by corvo, find ways to move to the State, but most of them do not find the idea of being a citizen of the State appealing at all. The Corvo do promise and do deliver riches to those that are good enough to gain them. The most capable humans work in million credit contracts as personal bodyguards of CEOs and other important corvo.

Most corvo spaceships carry a few human guards who are kept in stasis for the duration of their travel, or 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 low, as the humans are not paid extra for the time they are in stasis. Humans agree to this as they have few economical choices and they have no needs while in stasis. Most of the times, nothing happens and they spend a couple of decades in stasis and wake up to a roll of bills - a few more decades in stasis and they might be able to afford a home and support a family. Other times, they are awakened when the ship is under attack and must fight to the death to defend the property of their contractors. At the least, the flat fee of their contract is paid to their next of kin when

"It is a strange feeling when you know that there is more of your species' history that has already happened than history that will happen. I can feel the coming extinction in my guts." - Remko Vugac, human explorer

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 in 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.

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.

It has been 300 years since the arrival of the Corvo to Earth, and free humans have spread throughout the known Universe as bounty hunters, mercenaries, and killers. There are not many of them, making their hiring prices high, and their fortunes uncertain.

A few human groups have taken arms against the mega-corps, stealing the ships they were supposed to protect, and now live within the Labyrinth or in some unexplored space. They are nomads, pirates, or warlords who sell their work to the highest bidder. The strongest faction of this kind is the Human Front.

HUMAN FRONT

The Human Front is a faction of humans obsessed with the idea of creating 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 State. They 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 brothers and sisters escape the circle of violence. The Human Front is classified as a dangerous terrorist group that attacks important corvo enclaves and has been accused of committing terrible attacks against corvo civilians - the Human Front remains silent in this regard.

The Human Front is characterized by not accepting members of other species, but they are willing to hire them



for contractor jobs if needed. After all, there are still places that only a corvo or an iz'kal can reach.

Being a large organization persecuted by all, they must keep on the run and are dispersed throughout the Labyrinth. As a result, the Human Front does not always follow a single consistent line of thought. When some segments of the organization are trying to establish truces with the Corvo, other segments might be blowing up their mining colonies. This means that the Human Front has not made big advancements for the liberation of their people - many humans do not agree with them openly, as their behaviour has increased the levels of xenophobia in the Corvosphere against humans, who are seen as terrorists (or at least, troublemakers) by the media, and most of the population.

FULCRUM

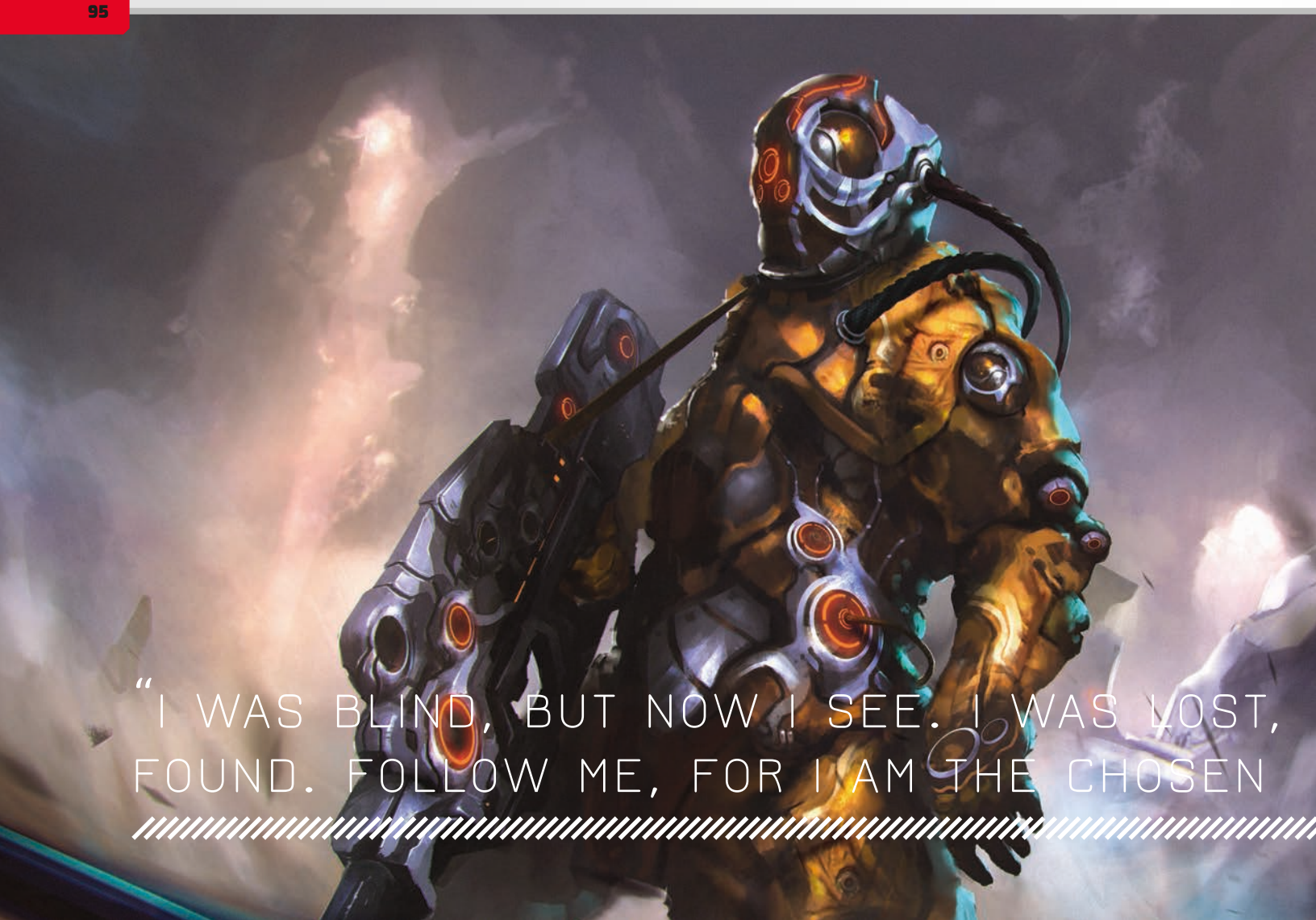
Fulcrums are humans 'recycled' by the Corvo, into semi-autonomous machines. Robots can be hacked and turned against their owners, and designing an AI is taboo (while semi-AI are extremely expensive). The solution found by the Corvo is to install a deceased human with an intact brain to operate the machine. Their personality and other traits are turned off and everything else is wired into the machine.

In principle, what is left of the human is only the 'hardware' - so it is basically like donating a body to science. Still, there have been stories about how some fulcrums speak the names of people they should have forgotten about.

Humans are not forced into this, as corvo despise slavery and value free will - though they think anything is acceptable if everyone involved agrees to it.

Security companies offer big pay cheques to living humans so that they can use their bodies when they die to create a fulcrum. Some shady companies offer quite gruesome deals to very desperate human immigrants in exchange for their bodies, such as 10 years of housing and care in exchange for a prompt euthanization afterwards.

At this moment, there are only human fulcrums due to limited and specified research. However, as more and more poor corvo request to be part of these programs out of desperation, research is being made to allow them to take on those kinds of deals.



"I WAS BLIND, BUT NOW I SEE. I WAS LOST, FOUND. FOLLOW ME, FOR I AM THE CHOSEN

NIGHT OF THE TITANS

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.

“At one time in the world, there were woods that no one owned.” - Cormac McCarthy, human writer

BUT NOW I'M
ONE.” - ARTYOM

THE RAAG

The Raag are a species of large, strong, and aggressive beings. They are native to Heimis, a planet covered in a thick layer of ice with a liquid ocean underneath. Below the ice crust lies the Crystal Abyss, huge caves connected by a network of tunnels, where the Raag evolved and live. While the surface of the planet reaches temperatures of -200°C , the temperatures inside the caves are a cozy -40°C .

Many raag now live in gigantic space 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.

Renowned for their strength and endurance, they place great importance on tradition and honor. Most of them see technology as something that is unnatural and mysterious, something to be feared and revered. Only the engineers, trained by the Cult, have the knowledge and understanding necessary to use it.

THE SOCIETY

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.

For the first 10 years, they will be looked after by the keepers, a group mostly composed of elder females. During this time, they grow fast and become progressively more violent.

At the age of 10, most of them 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 on the surface of the planet, hunting for food and fighting other tribes over territory. As they grow older, they become stronger, but they also learn to manage their aggressiveness and eventually return to underworld, where they will join the Surani for a few 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, to which they will belong for the rest of their lives.

Raag have been found to only be able to procreate in Heimis, which has prevented them from colonizing other planets. They have short pregnancies that last 5 months, during which the female will usually stay at the Surani, being taken care of by other females. Once the child is born, they will look after them for a few months before leaving

them in the hands of the Surani and returning to their clan.

Social Structure

Heimis is divided into two main areas, the Surani, and the many clans' Kuraima. The Surani, ruled by the High Council, 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, a 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 upon which several settlements can be found.

Composed solely of elder females, who are more capable of restraining their violent nature than their male counterparts, the High Council is the highest form of government in raag society and it is in charge of ensuring the survival of the species. The members of the High Council are revered by the other raag as only the most powerful and capable females, those that have proven their worth as clan leaders



or engineers, are chosen by the High Council to join their ranks. Those females that enter the High Council will leave behind their families and their clans, and pledge their lives to the protection of their society. The rulings of the High Council are followed by every clan, and a clan that refuses to do so will be cast out and exterminated by the other clans. In spite of this, the High Council does not usually issue commands to the entire society, and their daily tasks revolve around the administration and organization of the Surani, the education of young raag, and the raising of the children.

The rest of the population will live in their clan's Kuraima (the territory which they control and on which they can hunt and build), or aboard one of the space fortresses assigned to them. Most clans are ruled by a War Council composed of their strongest and most honorable 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.

The Cult is a secretive organization that holds the secrets to korian technology. They are ruled by the Shadow Council, which is made up of the most powerful and ambitious engineers, who are feared and respected by all the other raag, although they are distrusted by many. Other councils seek their advice and guidance in most matters, and their

suggestions carry weight even within the most distrusting War Councils.

As members of the Surani, the Cult is tasked with the training of new engineers. Only young raag that show the intellect needed to understand technology, and who have a strong connection with their God, will be chosen for this training (which lasts until they enter the Culling). Afterwards, they will be chosen by one of the clans, although they can leave when they wish to, or the Cult calls them back. While many of them will sever their bonds with the Cult and join their new clan as full members, others will go back to the Cult after serving their clan for a few years. This creates mistrust towards new members trained by the Cult, since their loyalty is unknown, and sometimes leads to violent encounters that must be solved by the War Council. On the other hand, those that pledge their loyalty to their new clan are given honorable positions within it, since their knowledge and counsel are extremely valuable.

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.

It takes place once a year, during the longest night of the year, and any raag that has never participated can take part. During the Culling, the different clans will approach the individuals they are interested in. Those approached by more than one clan can choose which of those clans they want to join, but this does not happen often as the most powerful clans tend to approach first, scaring off lesser clans from attempting to compete for the same candidate. Those raag that are not chosen by any clan will usually remain in the Surani 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 value of the different goods and services will vary greatly among different clans and at different times.

The ice fortresses come back to Heimis every few years, bringing all kinds of resources and tools collected from different places around the universe. They will give out close to half of their goods to the Surani and the other half will be used by their clan.

Dealings with Other Species

After the Uprising, the Iz'kal attempted to establish an



alliance with the Raag, but it quickly became apparent that they were too different from each other and they began to keep their distance. While commerce between them is not uncommon, and there have been instances when they have collaborated and helped each other, they will keep to themselves most of the time.

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 had to offer, and only The Union has been able to secure a stable business relationship with them, by trading old and heavy weaponry for strange korian artifacts and raag mercenaries. Even so, the High Council, wary of the intentions of the Corvo, imposed severe restrictions to the kinds of dealings that the different clans could make, and the Cult, overprotective of their secrets, has refused any dealings with any other species, afraid of losing their power and influence.

THE AGE OF THE GLADIATORS

The Raag lived under the rule of the Korian for a hundred years before the Iz'kal were enslaved. Although they were spread all over the korian empire, many of them still lived on their home planet, the only place where they could breed. Korian hunting parties would often go there and hunt them down like wild animals for fun or to sell them as slaves. They served as labourers and as entertainment, and the most violent were traded among the different warlords and trained as gladiators for the Blood Games. Owning a strong gladiator was seen as a sign of power among korian.

It didn't take long for korian to start breeding the strongest and most violent raag among themselves in an attempt to preserve and enhance those traits for future generations. Reproduction fields were established on the surface of Heimis which later turned into training fields. 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 hid in the deepest area of the Crystal Abyss, which would later become the Surani. They started training other raag in the ways of battle that they had been taught by their masters, slowly creating an army of mighty warriors that lusted for korian blood.

As their numbers grew, more and more korian hunting parties started to go missing, the hunters becoming the prey. Eventually the most powerful gladiators started attacking the training fields 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. The battered remains of the korian spaceships and weapons became hidden in the depths of the

Crystal Abyss, and would eventually be studied by those raag who attempted to understand them. This marked the origin of the Cult of Eternia and the first engineers.

The Cult of Eternia

During the age of gladiators, those raag that were unable to fight were despised for their weakness and remained in the Crystal Abyss while the gladiators and their followers went out to fight the Korian. Some of these raag quickly 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.

Among the ships that the Raag managed to capture, one stood out from the others, and it was called Eternia. Even to the Raag, whose knowledge of technology was rudimentary at best, there was something undeniably alluring about Eternia, and it wasn't long before the cultists started treating it with reverence. It took them almost 2 years to be able to open it, and once they did, 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. With the help of Eternia, the Cult's influence increased to the point where it matched that of the 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 their own members.

The gladiators 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.

A Fight for Supremacy

The raag originally lived in small tribes that were governed through strength. There was no unity among the tribes and no raag society to speak of. All of that changed after the arrival of the gladiators, under the korian occupation. They travelled all over Heimis, rallying the different tribes under their banners. Under their leadership, the raag became organized for the first time. It was during this time that the Surani was created, first as the place for civilians and children to live in and later as the administrative center of the society.

However, as the society grew, the violent nature of the Raag started resurfacing. The different leaders began fighting each other over power, which younger raag saw as an opportunity to prove their worth. A civil war threatened to collapse the frail society that they had managed to build, until some of the oldest and most powerful females decided to join forces and put a stop to the fighting. 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 different leaders agreed to take their followers away from the Surani and settle somewhere else, which marked the origin of the first clans.

The High Council was given veto power on all decisions taken by the clans as a way to ensure the survival of the species. Besides that, they were tasked with the administration and well-being of the Surani and all the raag living within it.

THE ICE FORTRESSES

After the Uprising, most of the surviving raag came back to Heimis. The population became too large for such a 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 then roam the galaxy in search of food and other goods that were needed at Heimis. 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 harboring 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 explains why the engineers, who are the only ones capable of repairing them, are held in such high esteem.

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 of them were forced to live so close, fights would arise for leadership. When the females put a stop to the inner fighting, many of the alpha males decided to split off from the community and establish their own clan, and each took with him a large number of eager followers. Thus, the different clans were born. In the beginning, the clans were composed solely of warriors and each was led by a gladiator. However, the growing influence and power of the Cult saw that they 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 small armies into small communities. The weaker clans were eventually consumed by the others 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 on the surface of the planet as hunters and following the movements of wild animals. Many of these clans are composed of raag that never went back to the Surani after their childhood.

The members of the **Kimora** clan are known for their physical strength, honor, 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 honorable 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, they possess the strongest army and their warriors are renowned for their prowess in battle. Even the 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 they will always do so under their own terms.

Ever since the Cult started gaining power, the Kimora have disregarded them and attempted to limit their influence and status. The distrust the Kimora feel towards the Cult and their dislike for technology are only enhanced by the knowledge that they need both to survive. For years, the Kimora have tried to find an alternative to the Cult, but the Cult's culture 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 engineers during the Culling, approaching only those that 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 honor and they never lack engineers among their ranks.

The **Eferi** clan is both mysterious and powerful. It was funded 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.

The 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 force.

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 engineers, 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 counselors, 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 separating themselves from their dependence on the Surani, and by allowing them to recruit new members during the Culling, eventually allowing 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, and they were no longer comfortable being lackeys of the Cult. The resulting power struggle hurt both of them, and they were forced to acknowledge that they needed each other. An alliance ensued in which 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 them to be nothing but pawns of the Cult. 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.

The **Noteri** is composed of outcasts. Those who are not approached by other clans during the Culling are given the choice of joining the Noteri. Those who join understand the implications and the price they are paying for being part of the clan. They will be scorned by other clans for the rest of their lives, but they will also be feared. The Noteri favor 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 nothing to implicate them, ensuring that no retaliation can be taken against them. The members of

the Noteri are savage, ruthless, and fearless. They respect nothing and they 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, to avoid being found by those in 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.

They have frequent dealings with the Corvo, who find their lack of morals 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 and weapons and a sizeable part of the loot.

The **Velada** is the most populous clan, and almost one third of the raag population belongs to it. The members of the Velada are hard working and non-violent for raag standards and 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



“MALIINA SMASH.”

dealings with the Kimora, who will offer additional protection to their fleets and cities in exchange for the services of their builders and artisans.

They 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.

The Velada have started to show a keen interest in the engineers during the Culling, as they have realized that they can enhance the productivity of their colonies and probably even improve the work of their builders and artisans with their help. The Cult has seen this as an attack against them that might risk their monopoly over technology, but they have been unable to do anything to stop it as it has the full support of the High Council.

The **Jino** is a small clan of explorers. Its members are adventurous, curious, and so peaceful that during their childhood, when most raag are forced to leave the Surani due to their violent behaviour, they were allowed to remain there. Despite that, most of those who join the Jino choose to leave the Surani of their own will to venture into the

depths of the Crystal Abyss, 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 their population lives 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, traveling deeper into the Labyrinth than any other species has ever traveled. 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 of time living in the State.

The Jino are the only clan that doesn't have an army and also the only clan not led by a War Council. The captains of each ice fortress are the closest thing to a leader in the clan and they are 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 member affected by it can vote. Since the different ice fortresses are filled with like-minded raag who share the same curiosities, the outcome of the referendums tends to be pretty unanimous and those who voted otherwise behave in a civil manner.



MALINA KILL. YOU DIE.” — MALINA

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 since, by the time we first encountered them, they had mutated to the point where 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 our current knowledge about them comes from the few specimens that have been recovered from the battle of Parsaius and from the clues that can be found on the ravaged worlds they leave in their wake.

For a long time, they were no more than a myth; they were 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.

Of course, it was the Corvo who blamed the Iz'kal for the disappearance of their colonies, and the Iz'kal retaliated by blaming the Corvo when it happened to their own. Open war became a real threat.

Then came the onslaught. Creatures out of a nightmare, in numbers that darkened the sky, fell upon Izuan Tai, the economic center 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's system. The reports of what they found stills sends chills down my spine. The planet had been engulfed by a strange looking substance, and a closer look revealed that the inhabitants of the planet were inside that substance, trapped alive and being slowly digested. Tendrils emerged from a large 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, which was bubbling with activity.

Despite their technological and military superiority, the fleet was vastly outnumbered and it quickly became clear that it was a battle they couldn't win. In a last act of courage and desperation, the fleet fought its way to the surface of the planet and blew it up, annihilating both sides and releasing the prisoners of their terrible fate.

It wasn't long before another ravager fleet was detected approaching Parsaius, a large iz'kal colony. For the first time in history, the Iz'kal and the Corvo joined forces to face a common threat, one that they both understood could very well bring about the end of the known universe. Despite the time they had to prepare for the attack and the knowledge that they had gathered about their enemy during the battle at Izuan Tai, the assault took a high toll in lives. <video paused>

<07:06> We had gained essential knowledge about our common enemy, but the price we paid for it was far too high. <end of line>

THE SWARM

<HUD log 5031.9. Pvt 1c W. Jenkins/Chriton outpost/Torin Prime sector/3th contact event> <audio playback on [transcription enabled]>

<00:00> The Ravager live and die for their swarm, which is the name given to each of their colonies. Every swarm is ruled by a single queen, who controls the actions of every other ravager in the swarm. A swarm is as powerful as her queen, and it's sole purpose is to protect the queen and help her evolve.



Although the initial wave of attacks made it clear that different swarms will sometimes collaborate, we have been able to witness a fight between two swarms that ended up in the victorious queen devouring the defeated one and the losing swarm being completely annihilated.

The swarms wander 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. We have been enlightened as to how this genetic material is obtained thanks to the reports from Izuan Tai. Despite my unquenchable thirst for knowledge, this is one thing I wish I never had to learn.

DEVOURERS OF WORLDS

<1:03> Once the swarm arrives at a planet, the queen releases bacteria that quickly spread over its surface and starts digesting its inorganic matter, turning it into a strange 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 back to processing pools have had time to reach them. It is at this moment that the substance digests the entombed creatures to extract their DNA. The substance even-

tually 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. The areas that have been processed turn into spawning pools; 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 it to look for a new planet. The substance will continue to erode 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, although we haven't had much success so far. <end of line>

THE HIVEMIND

<HUD log 5032.0. Pvt 1c W. Jenkins/Chriton outpost/Torin Prime sector/4th contact event> <audio playback on [transcription enabled]>

<00:00> It is clear to me now that the queen controls the actions of every other ravager in the swarm. We first noticed this during the battle of Parsaius, when we started detecting strange and complex radio signals coming from the ravager fleet. We now know that every ravager is capable of emitting and receiving radio signals 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 we have been able to exploit, since distorting this signal seems to confuse them for a short while. Even so, jamming these signals is a complex task as they continuously change their wavelength spectrum and quickly react when any interferences affect them.

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. It is through this mechanism that the hierarchy of the ravager is established. Those that emit more complex signals will be able to control those that emit simpler signals, creating a clear power structure in which the weaker links will follow every command given to them, thus avoiding rogue elements in the system. On the other hand, it also means it is possible to detect the commanders of the swarms by simply locating the source of the most complex waves.

ORGANIZATION OF THE SWARM

<00:41> The discovery of the hivemind has allowed us to differentiate the different



ravager according to their role and importance. While the queen is ultimately in control of everything that happens, she will usually do so through other ravager, who act as the link between her and the rest of the swarm. This has led us to classify the different ravager into four levels, the highest one being the queen and the lowest being the spawns. The other two levels correspond to the heralds, second to the queen, and the alterants.

The Ravager Queen

<01:03> The queen lives aboard the mothership, or rather, she is the mothership, as her body is so deeply fused with the ship's structure that it is impossible to tell where one ends and the other begins. We couldn't find any traces of a conventional body on 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 core of the ship, where we imagine the brain of the queen would be, but the core of the mothership we recovered was too damaged to draw any conclusions. <video playback error [feed disabled/corrupted]> <2:14 feed continues>

Our current theory is that the queens are heralds that have undergone a metamorphosis, shedding their previous

body and covering themselves in a biopolymer matrix that eventually becomes the mothership. As the queens age, their bodies grow and the motherships become larger, which allows them to carry more ravager aboard them. At the same time, their brains mature, increasing their power as a hivemind and allowing them to keep more heralds under control. That means that the age of the queen is directly related to the size of the swarm and its power. 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. There is no available knowledge on the approximate lifespan of a ravager queen.

The Heralds of Extinction

<02:48> The heralds are by and far the most dangerous creatures in a ravager swarm. Known as the Heralds of Extinction, they are impossibly fast and strong; their bodies can alter their structure almost instantly, allowing them to adapt to most situations and threats in a matter of seconds. We believe they act as the link between the queen and her proxies and spawns, thus allowing her to control the entire swarm. The more heralds the queen can keep under her control, the larger the swarm can become, but the queens must be careful when spawning too many heralds, as they will sometimes try to oppose the hivemind. When a queen dies or is unable to keep the heralds under control, the heralds will escape to start their own swarm or kill each other and the queen so that they may take her place.

"SOME FOOD IS NOISIER THAN OTHER." —



They are extremely intelligent and deceitful, and we have encountered several ravager fleets led by heralds (without any queen) that proved to be as difficult to deal with as those that were led by a queen, although they were considerably smaller in size. In spite of their great value to a fleet, the heralds can often be found in the vanguard of the ravager fleets, controlling everything and assisting where needed. While easy to spot, they have proven extremely hard to kill. When they enter battle, death follows.

The Alterants

<03:25> The alterants are in charge of the DNA harvest, and of the spawning pools. They analyze the DNA samples that are gathered, integrating those that prove valuable to the genome of the queen, and they perform experiments on some of the prisoners. They are rarely found on the front lines and will usually remain near the queen until the fighting is over and the first samples have been collected, a time at which they will travel to the spawning pools to begin working on the new specimens.

The alterants are the best protected members of the swarm. Most of them can be found near the core of the mothership, working in what I can only describe as laboratories filled with tanks, where specimens belonging to different species can be found. Despite the poor state of the specimens aboard the mothership we found, it was evident that they had been subjected to terrible experiments and their bodies showed mutations so horrible that

it was hard to recognize even those that belonged to known species.<video playback error [feed disabled/corrupted]>
<14:24 feed continues>

Alterants were initially known as proxies, since we believed them to act as the link between the heralds and the rest of the swarm, but it has become quite clear that this is not a role they usually perform.

Our initial assessment of their role as proxies came from the analysis of their wave emission pattern, which is quite complex, indicating they are probably able to control most of the other members of the swarm. Even so, they seem to have little interaction with them, focusing solely on their research and experiments. Despite their frail appearance, we know them to be resourceful and dangerous enemies perfectly capable of handling themselves in combat.

The Spawns

<14:51> The spawns refer to a broad variety of creatures, each with unique characteristics and abilities. We have included in this group all the remaining ravager, since, although the different creatures in the group don't have anything in common and their wave emission patterns are quite different from each other, they all have a highly specific role within the swarm and display a rather basic intellect. Although the appearance and traits of the spawns can vary from one swarm to the next (and even within the same swarm depending on the environment they were designed for), the essential attributes of each kind of spawn will remain the same. This tells us that they either all originated from the same queen not too long ago or that the different swarms collaborate more than we had originally believed, sharing with each other useful genomes that they have come across. <end of line>

<HUD log 5034.7. Pvt 1c W. Jenkins/Chrton 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 is 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 for nothing.

I have got to go now. Our ship is not responding, We have to EVA and figure out what is wrong with it. I will connect again as soon as I get back. <end of line><last diary entry [press OK to create a new entry].>

