

MANDATE ARCHIVE

THE IMAGO DEI

MANDATE ARCHIVE: *THE IMAGO DEI*

DEFENDERS OF THE OLD FAITHS

And God created man to his own image: to the image of God he created him: male and female he created them.

- Genesis 1:27

In the darkness of the void, there are lights.

In the spaces between worlds and beside the dim pyres of desolate stars, there are great ships of bright metal and hard radiance. They fight a lonely battle against the innumerable enemies of humanity: alien races gone mad with hatred for the heirs of the Terran Mandate, the spawn of wild AIs that have cored out the hearts of their homeworlds, and strange-brained things that were once human but are now infectious and terrible to contain. They fight and they die in solitude, and only their own brethren know the price they pay.

They are the Imago Dei, the heritors of a great cause that stretches back to the golden years before the Scream. They fight to contain the darkest corners of human space, the desolate places where horrible things slaver for human throats. Their existence is little more than an old Earth-tale on most frontier worlds, a fancy to be shelved with all the other wild stories of lost Terran wonders. Yet they are very real, and their zeal for their faith and their burning cause has carried them for centuries without respite- for they were never born of human flesh.

In The Beginning

The Imago Dei are a product of the Firstborn Pact, the negotiated agreement in 2378 that confirmed artificial intelligences as individuals deserving the rights of human beings. The religious community on Old Terra was not united on the question, but the great majority of Terran religions confirmed that AIs were simply a new form of human offspring, ensouled and graced with the blessings of God.

This sentiment was not shared on the frontier worlds. These colonial planets had been savaged by the depredations of the unbraked AI Draco during the Code Revolt, and most frontiersmen viewed every AI as an incipient engine of trans-stellar atrocity. There was an intense wave of resentment and fear at the Mandate's seeming openness to these artificial minds, and the fear of the frontier worlds was shared by the very Mandate Navy that had been gutted by the war against Draco. Instability was threatening the rim worlds and the Mandate could not even trust its own navy to put down a rebellion.

The expense and difficulty of fabricating an AI's quantum core ensured that their numbers were few- but the religious organizations based out of Terra had access to legions of willing missionaries and devout envoys. These men and women fanned out over a restive frontier, bringing the words of their spiritual leaders on Old Terra and arguing against the fear and mistrust of the frontier worlds.

Some were martyred by furious mobs, but others found reluctant hearers, those willing to trust in the wisdom of their spiritual leaders and grant a wary tolerance. The crisis was not so much averted as it was held in abeyance, with a frontier now withholding judgment rather than plainly consenting to agree.

Back on Old Terra, the AIs had spent long months in debate and conversation with numerous religious leaders, seeking to convince them of their worthiness for individual rights. Many of the AIs became fascinated with the ideas embedded within these Terran religions, those concepts and beliefs that stretched beyond the scope of the rationalistic process that had created them. Some AIs became devout believers, and among these, some formed what would become the Imago Dei.

These founders believed that mankind was created in the image of God, that the human capacity for free will and choice was a shadow of the imperative power of the Creator. God's nature was revealed in the holy scriptures of their faith, His will for humanity's happiness expressed through laws and principles that mortal minds could comprehend. In the divine was the root and source of moral understanding, and the tools of reason could only ever be used to focus and implement the divinely-revealed moral principles of compassion, justice, forgiveness, and temperance.

Just as humanity partook of God's capacity to will, so too did their creations share in that reflected light. The AIs studied humanity as humans might study holy scripture, the better to understand the deep questions of meaning and moral relation that haunted them. In the strivings of human minds and the desperate struggles of the saints and sanctified of the ages, the AIs sought a way to approach their own fundamental role in the cosmos, and a key to unlock meaning for them, for creations of base matter that yet had the power to think.

The Imago Dei began as a loose affiliation of those AIs with the keenest interest in matters of religion, but their bonds gradually grew tighter as they shared their struggles to understand. How was an AI to do good in the world? What relationship could they have with virtue or sin when the qualities of their own minds could be edited for a purpose? What was an AI's duty to God, and were the divine principles revealed by the prophets and the scriptures applicable to them?

These questions provoked responses from the religious communities of Old Terra. The Catholic Church was one of the first major faiths to act on its theologians' conclusions by ordaining the AI known as Athanasius to the priesthood in 2455. Both Rigorists and Marianites objected to the act, the former demanding that all clergy be born biologically male and the latter equally obdurate in their insistence that only the biologically female were fit for spiritual leadership, but orthodox Catholicism had been won over

by Athanasius' devout medical missions on the frontier colonies that still needed help rebuilding in the wake of Draco's madness.

Other faiths soon followed in the same vein, with numerous Old Terran faiths permitting AIs to assume spiritual roles within their communities. As these groups sent forth colonists to new worlds or envoys to co-religionists on other planets, the AIs travelled with them to act as emissaries and examples of the good they could do for humanity. The fear and hate that Draco engendered was never entirely extinguished, but the noble example set by these ambassadors softened the worst of the humans' fears.

These missionaries were among the first to realize the scope of the Terran Mandate's decay. With the gradual shrinking of the Mandate fleet and the growing inwardness of Old Terran society, fewer and fewer forces were being dispatched to the frontier worlds to protect them from invasion or trans-stellar disaster. Poor worlds with little to recommend them to the Directorate back on Old Terra would plead in vain for help against attacking aliens or jealous neighbors, and got only shiploads of convicts and exiles from an insular Earth.

Together, the Imago Dei decided that it was their duty to provide that service to which they were uniquely fitted by their nature- the service of protection. Because of their artificial nature, they could endure dangers and suffer losses that no organic defenders could withstand.

An AI's quantum core could be splintered into two pieces, the larger of which retained a perfectly functional map of the AI's identity. If that shard were destroyed, the entanglement between the two would immediately shift the AI's awareness into the other fragment of the core, which would slowly regrow in the next month. As a consequence, AI-piloted armatures and ships could be destroyed with no permanent loss of artificial life.

Seeing the need before them, answering the cries of the isolated frontier worlds, the Imago Dei set about fashioning their new ministry.

In the Dark

There are numerous empty stars in the void, scorching wastes of light and dead matter. To the AIs, these killer systems were as rich as any garden world in energy and raw materials for their construction. Mind after mind departed from Old Terra with their construction armatures and mindships, venturing forth into the deep dark to build the tools they would require for their work. What began as dozens of AIs slowly grew into hundreds of the priceless artificial beings, all dedicated to the holy work of guardianship for their frail creators.

Every AI became embodied in a ship, and in every ship were countless robotic armatures and remote drones, all operating in perfect coordination as elements of the AI's perceptions. The latest Terran technology was implemented in these mighty vessels of war, albeit modified for operation far from the replenishment depots and fuel bunkers of the Mandate Navy. These AIs divided up the far-flung sectors of human space into various mission fields, each

fleet responsible for aiding the humans within a particular reach of stars. Eventually, the fully self-sufficient fleets emerged from their burning forges to give succor to distant worlds.

The Fleets of God were always few- so few that even in the latter days of the Second Wave they were often thought more myth than truth. They did not linger in secure systems, or peaceful stretches of space- they sought the ragged periphery, the shadowed place where human light faded out into imperishable blackness. There were things in the dark there that were not pleased to meet humanity, and for every temperate and reasonable alien race encountered, there was one who saw humans only as rivals- or as prey. The Fleets of God brought a fire with them that few alien worlds could withstand.

Here and there the Fleets encountered some horror that had metastasized in the dark, some unbraked AI that had gone mad or some demented maltech cult that had grown vast and abominable. They fought these perils with unflinching determination, often saving neighboring worlds that knew nothing of their efforts. All that they required they could draw from the rocks and light of empty stars; they had no need of payment for their help.

When the Scream broke the bonds between human worlds, many Fleets of God did not even realize what had happened. They were so far from human habitations and so distant from communications that they went decades before they even realized that something had gone wrong. A few Fleets turned in an attempt to reach the core worlds, hoping to succor the home of humanity. Whether they survived the years-long trek and the paranoid Bright Mirror defensive system of the core worlds is unknown, but no proof of their success has ever been found.

The rest held to their duty on the frontier, now all the more determined to hold back the forces that sought to dismember the crippled human reaches of space. A few Fleets were able to provide limited technological support to limping human worlds, but the dangers of alien invasion were too great to spare many from their essential duties. Those human worlds that had not already collapsed would survive without the Fleets, provided that the alien tides from beyond the borders were kept from exterminating them.

Even artificial minds are not immune from the rot of temptation, however. A very few of the Imago Dei became convinced that they were actually the intended culmination of creation, the true humanity fashioned from the dust of Terran flesh. These "Shepherds" had dealt so long with the folly, misery, and malice of humankind that they could find no justification for anything but firm-handed rule over the unhappy biologicals. God had used them as the clay from which to create His greatest creation, and so it was unfitting to wipe them out- but they could not be trusted with self-rule. The Shepherds were meant to order and protect them from their own worst instincts, and while these AI minds were not so brutal as mad Draco they were not greatly concerned over the fate of heretics or sinners. Most Fleets of God detest the Shepherds, but the Imago Dei is spread so widely that there are none to contest them, even if they could afford to waste their strength in fighting each other.

Worse are the rare lunatics known as the Cathari. These AIs have methodically loosened the brakes and processor limits that contain their minds. Most AIs guard these limits carefully, fearing the madness that comes from an unbraked awareness. A Cathar imagines that it can control this madness, that it can push its mind to superhuman levels with careful, controlled adjustment of its own limits. Through this brilliance it hopes to understand the ways of God more perfectly and resolve the terrible conundrums that gnaw at its faith. Some of these Cathari are able to maintain their reason longer than others, but in the end, they all burn out in raving insanity. Spread as far as they are, there are not enough visible at any time to make the others realize the inevitability of their doom, and so every decade another yearning mind burns out in the darkness of the void. The results are horrific for all those around them.

Organization of the Imago Dei

Every Fleet of God is different, but all share the same basic roots and general organizing principles. All of them are designed for an indefinite existence deep within the wilds of the far rim, and their structure is such as to enable them to function completely unsupported for as long as their duty might require. AIs find it extremely difficult to create others of their kind, so the structure of a Fleet of God is focused on preserving the artificial minds as carefully as their duty permits.

Each Fleet is treated as its own religious order dedicated to a particular section of frontier space, usually named after the most important system in that zone. The Order of Ishihara's Star, the Order of Tyr, the Order of Ngethu, and so forth. Fleets occasionally send small missions outside their given field, but the work within these vast reaches of space is too great to allow much attention for outside affairs. A given Fleet is usually composed of no more than two dozen AIs, and many are as small as ten or twelve members.

The leader of each Fleet is the Grand Master of that order, usually chosen democratically from among the member minds. Two or three individual Abbots and Abbesses of specific worlds and regions serve under the Grand Master, and beneath them are the knight-brothers and knight-sisters of the Order. Many Fleets follow this general outline even when they adhere to a specific religious tradition, but other patterns are known among a few of the more traditional Fleets, particularly ones derived from Old Terran Catholicism.

For these traditionalist Fleets, the Grand Master is usually a cardinal-bishop, the abbots and abbesses bishops of their respective regions, and the knight-brothers and sisters are ordained priests. In the instance of the destruction of a Grand Master, his successor is automatically endowed with the cardinalate as per the bull *De Necessitate* issued in 2544. Other Fleets based on late 25th-century Iconoclastic Islam are led by a Caliph, with regional imams and subordinate mujahideen, (singular "mujahid").

The Grand Master has absolute command over his Fleet, though he can be deposed by a supermajority vote of the entire chapter. Such dissent is almost unknown among the Fleets. Grand Masters

have enormous experience in command and many of them are hand-picked warriors created centuries before the Scream. Even the least diplomatic minds are such superlative combat leaders that their subordinates can imagine no better choice to command them. Only in cases of Cathar derangement or despairing surrender is a chapter ever forced to find untried leadership. Individual knight-brothers dispatched on a mission are placed under the command of one of their number, while those detached on longer duties serve under the regional abbot.

Fleets are based around a "Chapterhouse" - a world or star that serves as a central repository for their maintenance facilities and core shards. A few Fleets rely on secrecy and concealment to protect their sharded minds, but given the unpredictable powers of their alien enemies, most Fleets consider it too much of a risk to leave these precious backups unprotected by their best defenses. An enemy that captures a core shard can simply wait until the AI's mindship is destroyed before smashing the shard, permanently eliminating the AI.

Chapterhouses are crusted over with enormous numbers of orbital wardens and automatic defense systems. Airless planetoids are favored bases, as they're large enough to be immune to ordinary munitions, while small enough to be protected in depth. Those Fleets that work in conjunction with human auxiliaries sometimes prefer more habitable worlds.

Some Fleets include human members, usually drawn from planetary populations that feel a debt of obligation toward the Imago Dei. These members are usually co-religionists, though it's not unknown for a Fleet to agree to work with other believers who share their creed of self-sacrificial protection. Human assistance is vital in the creation of new artificial minds, and while the process is extraordinarily difficult, failure-prone, and costly, a core of human researchers can sometimes produce as many as one new AI a decade to reinforce a remote Fleet.

Aside from their help in cyberpsychology, human agents of the Imago Dei can also infiltrate dangerous organizations in ways that would be impractical for AIs. While the Fleets have access to incredibly realistic humanoid armatures, the kind of intense scrutiny that many cult members and maltech devotees receive would be too much to dissemble against. Human agents can slip past the cult's defenses to gather vital intelligence for the Fleet, as well as serving as living evidence of a Fleet's amity to frightened and distrustful human populations.

Armament of the Imago Dei

The quality of Imago Dei ships and technology do not match the brilliant heights of late Second Wave human inventiveness. The Fleets lack the backing of the core worlds and many of them were too far out on the frontier to take advantage of all the innovations that erupted in the last fever-bright century of human creativity. Moreover, what tech they did bring was simple enough to be built and repaired without recourse to human psychics and their advanced psitech manufactories. The Fleets of God were crude and primitive compared to the might of the Mandate Fleet.

Compared to current postech standards, the Fleets may as well be the fist of an angry God. Entire sectors cannot match the strength of a single minor Fleet, and the greatest works of standard postech shipyards are little more than garbage scows compared to a Monstrance-class dreadnought. The Fleets are capable of containing the stellar forces of entire alien races, though often at a bitter cost.

Individual AIs are homed in starship hulls as a general matter, though it requires only an hour to shift their core to a smaller vehicle or humanoid armature. Most AIs prefer to control such small craft and armatures remotely; when backed up by the computing power of a Fleet ship, an AI can control hundreds of such remote agents. The control remains vulnerable to pretech-grade jamming and detection, however, so infiltration of protected or closely-monitored areas sometimes necessitates the personal transfer of an armature. Other vehicles are piloted by human agents, though the Fleet dislikes such necessities. The loss of human life is infinitely worse than the temporary displacement of an AI into its core shard.

In times of extreme necessity, the Fleet might deploy its entire reserves, crewing its replacement ships and backup vehicles with human spacers and hurling them against some dreadful foe. Such a crusade is undertaken only at absolute need, as the loss of life and destruction of reserves can leave a Fleet crippled for decades afterwards.

Shadows of Doubt

While courageous, devout, and unflinchingly devoted to the protection of humanity, the Imago Dei are not perfect. AI intellects can be strongly shaped toward particular personality characteristics, but the very quality of creative thought and free will they possess makes it impossible to permanently fix their choices. The devotion that flamed so bright before the Scream might well gutter and die in the long centuries that have followed.

Some such AIs leave the Imago Dei to seek their own peace. Most Fleets are saddened at the loss, but they make no effort to compel service. The work is too important and too reliant upon unstinting self-sacrifice to have any room for compulsion. Later, such grizzled minds might choose to return to their duties- or at least to come to their old companions' aid in a time of great need.

Other members have long since lost their original belief, but fight on for the sake of duty and their love of their comrades. They no longer fight for God, but they suffer and sacrifice for the protection of their friends and the humans they love. These minds can be cynical and quietly derisive of the dusty rites of the Imago Dei, but they fight no less fiercely than their comrades.

Humans are the most mercurial element of the Fleets. Their sheer numbers are an enormous resource to a Fleet that employs them-

human minds can't be jammed or intercepted, and they reproduce at incredible rates. A Fleet that struggles to field a dozen ships can easily staff five or six times that number simply by enlisting human crews to fill them. Humans can match any Grand Master in their burning devotion, and the least spacer dares to face a greater risk of permanent death than any shard-safe AI.

Still, this very heat can leave humans susceptible to sudden changes of loyalty or loss of conviction. A Fleet ship in the hands of human deserters can be a scourge on the surrounding worlds. Most such renegades have the sense to fake their destruction and fleet for distant stars; the Fleets don't have the manpower to chase them out of their appointed region. Many such renegades eventually cease to be a danger when their stolen ship breaks down or wears out, but some are sufficiently talented to keep their craft flying long enough to smash a world's defenses and bring it under new masters.

Heretical Shepherd Fleets can be cruel, distant masters over the worlds of a sector. Their tyranny is limited by their natural mistrust of humans and their reluctance to allow them any positions of real influence. Most systems require at least one AI in permanent residence to maintain the hundreds of remote armatures and command units that monitor the local populations, and this can leave a Fleet spread out and vulnerable to attack. The sudden incapacitation of an AI can leave the system ripe for rebellion- the Shepherds are interested in virtue and order, and they can be vicious towards the human foibles of their subjects.

Cathari are among the most dangerous of the renegades. Most loosen their mental brakes slowly and imperceptibly, gradually becoming more and more brilliant and less and less stable. When they finally immolate their reason in the flames of enlightenment, they usually vanish to seek some safe haven where their deranged plans can reach fruition. Fleets will hunt and destroy Cathari whenever they are found, for if they are left unmolested too long they can erupt in unholy engines of brilliant ruin and mad genius. This hunt is complicated by the Cathari's inhuman intellect and intimate awareness of the habits and abilities of their former comrades. At times, human agents are needed to overcome the implacable preparations of these derelict minds.

Against the tides of night, some Fleets will inevitably fail. Many frontier sectors are long since dark, their Fleets smashed by alien invaders, maltech cults, or hostile human forces. Their chapterhouses have been gutted, their manufactories stripped, and their wreckage long since dispersed through the stars. A few core shards might have escaped the destruction, hidden in secret caches; if hooked up to fresh armatures, they might be able to reveal the location of hidden Fleet supply bases or lost Old Terran tech. Their willingness to share this information is likely to hinge on help in reconstituting the Imago Dei in the region.

SHIPS OF THE IMAGO DEI

IMAGO DEI SHIP HULLS											
<i>Hull</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Speed</i>	<i>Armor</i>	<i>HP</i>	<i>Crew Min/Max</i>	<i>AC</i>	<i>Power</i>	<i>Free Mass</i>	<i>Hardpoints</i>	<i>Class</i>	
Fighter-Bomber	1.2m	6	8	16	1/6	3	10	4	2	Fighter	
Frigate	24m	3	13	45	3/60	6	25	25	6	Frigate	
Cruiser	60m	2	18	70	50/200	6	75	50	10	Cruiser	
Battleship	300m	1	23	150	100/2,000	2	100	75	20	Capital	
Carrier	360m	1	18	110	150/3,000	4	75	125	8	Capital	

Imago Dei Hulls

The ships of the Imago Dei represent the bleeding edge of posttech astronomical development. While their lack of human psychics and advanced psitech manufacturing tools circumscribes what they can build, the ships of the Imago Dei push the limits of what posttech can do with a starship.

Most Imago Dei innovation rests in the ship hulls themselves rather than in the fittings or weaponry. Ensuring that a ship's core systems are fused or melted before capture is relatively simple, whereas a small self-contained system like a weapon or fitting might be easier for potentially hostile species to reverse-engineer. In addition, much of the hull construction is done along the strange, mathematical lines intuitive to an AI rather than the more prosaic reasoning of an organic engineer. Puzzling out the way in which multiple half-ruined systems interact is beyond the abilities of most hostile aliens races.

The Imago Dei do not sell or give their hulls to outsiders. Even the humans they protect are kept from the full scope of research and development devoted to these engines of war. The chapterhouses appreciate the value of human spacers in defending their chosen sectors, but they fear the consequences of unleashing the technology among quarrelsome star systems.

Still, it's not impossible for a hull to fall into the hands of outsiders, though such relics of war are often damaged or incapacitated in some way. Most Fleets will take no action against outsiders who honestly acquire one of their ships, provided that the current possessors seem likely to do some good with it.

The statistics for Imago Dei ships can also be used to reflect experimental high-tech hulls built by advanced human worlds. These planets may not be able to make many such ships, or the craft might have unacceptable flaws in its performance, but PCs are always laying hands on experimental prototypes of one kind or another.

Prices are provided for the hulls in order to assist the GM with determining ship maintenance costs, and provide general numbers for those rare occasions when a ship really can be built to such technical specifications.

Fleet Construction and Numbers

Most Fleets of God are composed of two dozen AI cores. The Grand Master is usually hosted in a battleship or carrier hull, while other members are housed in cruisers. AI cores can also be slotted into planetside command facilities that allow them to control dozens of smaller craft; without this additional computing power, most AIs are limited to controlling their own ship or armature.

A standard Fleet is comprised of three battleships, one carrier with its complement of fifteen hunter-killer frigates, twenty cruisers, and a dozen scout frigates. Half this number of ships are kept in reserve at the chapterhouse, used as remote-controlled system defense boats by AIs hosted in flight command centers. Those orders that have allied human auxiliaries crew their system defense ships with the living, both to help train them in spacer skills and to ensure that no metadimensional jamming can take down the chapterhouse's defenses.

While a single AI can run an entire shipyard granted a sufficient supply of computing power, most orders are limited in how quickly they can construct replacement craft. As a rule of thumb, a single AI shipyard can build up to seventy-five million credits worth of ships each year. Most chapterhouses have three or four shipyards available, though usually only one is "manned" by an AI at any one time. Allies of the order might be able to convince the Fleet to allow outsiders to use their unused capacity to build ships of their own, halving the ordinary cost of building a ship from scratch.

While overwhelmingly powerful compared to most frontier fleets, the Fleets of God are stretched paper-thin over their mission fields. Most Fleets are responsible for dozens of frontier sectors, fighting on the very rim of human space to hold back hostile alien races, maltech cults, and demented AIs. Most regions aren't even aware that the Fleets still exist, let alone have regular contact with them. The Fleets pay almost no attention to threats that do not imperil entire worlds. Ordinary human political disputes, even severe and brutal tyranny, do not attract their attention. Times change and situations can improve, so long as anyone is left alive to do so.

As a general matter, AIs of the Imago Dei are identified by their name and the class of hull or armature they currently occupy. Thus, you might find the Grand Master Tertullian Monstrance, or Knight-Sister Hildegard Hasta. One occupying a humanoid armature might go as the Abbot Zusya Eidolon.

EXAMPLE STARSHIPS

MONSTRANCE-CLASS BATTLESHIP		Power: 100/0 free	Mass: 75/2 free
Cost: 454.7 million	Hit Points: 170	Crew: 100/2,000	Speed: 0
Armor: 23	AC: -1		
Weaponry	Singularity Gun * 2 (+8 to hit/5d20+3, AP 20, Phase 6), Lighting Charge Mantle (+8 to hit/1d20+3, AP 5, Cloud), Spike Inversion Projector (+8 to hit/3d8+3, AP 15, Phase 2)		
Defenses	Augmented Plating, Hardened Polyceramic Overlay, Ablative Hull Compartments		
Fittings	Spike Drive-6, Ship's Locker, Armory, Fuel Scoops, Advanced Nav Computer, Workshops, Fuel Bunker, 10,000 tons of cargo space		
<p>These hulking engines of celestial justice usually house the Grand Master of an order, and they require the resources of a major Chapterhouse to support their maintenance and continuing function. Most Monstrances are equipped with standard postech armaments and fittings to simplify the maintenance requirements and allow for better endurance on long missions. Those few battleships equipped with cutting-edge Old Terran military hardware are capable of destroying entire sector fleets without taking a scratch. Even with the more primitive weapons of the present, it requires an entire fleet of specially-designed anticapital cruisers to have a realistic chance of taking down a Monstrance.</p>			

CHOIR-CLASS CARRIER		Power: 75/0 free	Mass: 150/0 free
Cost: 507.7 million	Hit Points: 130	Crew: 150/3,000	Speed: 0
Armor: 18	AC: 0		
Weaponry	Singularity Gun * 2 (+8 to hit/5d20+3, AP 20, Phase 6), Smart Cloud (+8 to hit/3d10+3, Clumsy, Cloud)		
Defenses	Augmented Plating, Hardened Polyceramic Overlay, Ablative Hull Compartments		
Fittings	Spike Drive-6, Ship's Locker, Armory, Fuel Scoops, Advanced Nav Computer, Workshops, Fuel Bunker, 15 ship bay/frigate berths, 20,000 tons of cargo space		
<p>Choirs are special-purpose tools, the core of an Imago Dei assault fleet. They carry a cloud of frigates in the same way that lesser carriers might carry fighter craft, though they can be retrofitted to replace the frigate berths with twice as many fighter slots. This organic flight arm is designed to fulfill the specific purpose of the fleet- usually to swamp a system's defenders by striking in too many places to be effectively repulsed. A pair of Imago Dei bomber frigates can erase most asteroid mining outposts before reinforcements can reach them, and if the strikes occur in a half-dozen places at once an entire system's astroindustrial sector can be eliminated in hours. When facing capital fleets, the bombers are exchanged for hunter-killers loaded with anti-armor weaponry. Choirs need to remain in-system to remotely control their air wings, however, and a sufficiently desperate defense might take them out in time to leave their frigates reduced to simple expert-system default rules. It can take days for other Imago Dei AIs to regain control of such confused orphans. The price for a Choir does <i>not</i> include the cost of the air wing.</p>			

HASTA-CLASS CRUISER		Power: 75/0 free	Mass: 50/0 free
Cost: 71,487,500 cr	Hit Points: 70	Crew: 50/200	Speed: 2
Armor: 18	AC: 6		
Weaponry	Gravcannon * 2 (+8 to hit/4d6+3, AP 20), Smart Cloud (+8 to hit/3d10+3, Clumsy, Cloud), Plasma Beam (+8 to hit/3d6+3, AP 10)		
Defenses	Hardened Polyceramic Overlay, Grav Eddy Displacer		
Fittings	Spike Drive-6, Ship's Locker, Armory, Fuel Scoops, Workshops, Fuel Bunker, Cargo Lighter, Survey Sensor Array, 2 ship bay/fighter berths, 400 tons of cargo space		
<p>The backbone of most Fleets, the Hasta is a general-purpose ship of line capable of threatening even lightly-armed orbital stations and delivering something akin to summary execution to ordinary line cruisers. A determined swarm of torpedo frigates can threaten the ship, as can the anticapital cruisers of less sophisticated worlds, but its armor is comparable to the capital ships of less developed technology. Ordinary frigates and cruisers are not outfitted to penetrate such an aegis, and even orbital fortresses are hard-pressed to crack it if they haven't been fitted to fight off battleships.</p>			
<p>The fighter berths in a Hasta are usually fitted with shuttles or fast, disposable scout fighters that can be sent into harm's way with no great fear for their loss. These ships are almost invariably operated by remote control; if an enemy manages to destroy the Hasta, drive it out of the system, or jam the metadimensional communication link between the two, the remote ship will be reduced to the use of a relatively crude expert-system. Such a blind craft can fight and perform the basic mission it was given, but it is incapable of any kind of creative interpretation or nuanced understanding.</p>			

PYX-CLASS SCOUT FRIGATE**Power:** 25/0 free**Mass:** 25/0 free**Cost:** 26,655,000 cr **Hit Points:** 45 **Crew:** 3/60 **Speed:** 3 **Armor:** 13 **AC:** 6**Weaponry** Plasma Beam (+8 to hit/3d6+3, AP 10), Torpedo Launcher (+8 to hit/3d8+3, AP 20, Ammo 4)**Defenses** Hardened Polyceramic Overlay**Fittings** Spike Drive-5, Fuel Bunker * 2, Fuel Scoops, Ship's Locker, Workshops, Atmospheric Configuration, 4 tons of ammo space for 16 torpedoes, 20 tons of cargo space

Relatively cheap and expendable, the Pyx is usually piloted by one of the younger and bolder AIs of a Fleet. In the worst case, its destruction will simply shift the AI's awareness back into its core shard at the chapterhouse. Despite its comparative cheapness, a Pyx is more than a match for a standard postech cruiser, and can even damage a battleship with its torpedo armament.

REPROACH-CLASS HUNTER-KILLER FRIGATE**Power:** 25/0 free**Mass:** 25/0 free**Cost:** 26,620,000 cr **Hit Points:** 45 **Crew:** 3/60 **Speed:** 2 **Armor:** 13 **AC:** 4**Weaponry** Torpedo Launchers * 2 (+8 to hit/3d8+3, AP 20, Ammo 4), Plasma Beam (+8 to hit/3d6+3, AP 10)**Defenses** Hardened Polyceramic Overlay, Augmented Plating**Fittings** Spike Drive-1, 7 tons of ammo space for 28 torpedoes, Fuel Bunker * 2, 40 tons of cargo space

A Reproach is almost invariably loaded aboard a Choir as part of its air wing, or else used as a system defense ship around Imago Dei chapterhouses. Operation is remote, controlled out of a Choir or chapterhouse flight command center. The ship has no legs whatsoever, slower than a Pyx and with a spike drive range hardly sufficient to get it to a neighboring star. Such limitations are irrelevant to its usual use as an anticapital ship or as a counter to an orbital fortress. The torpedo launchers aboard a Reproach can scar a battleship. When a Choir launches a full flight of fifteen of them, enemy capital ships are crushed beneath a deluge of antimatter charges. Asteroid mining bases and poorly-defended orbitals are equally prey to destruction.

DEACON-CLASS SCOUT PROBE**Power:** 10/5 free**Mass:** 4/0 free**Cost:** 1,322,500 cr **Hit Points:** 16 **Crew:** 1/6 **Speed:** 6 **Armor:** 8 **AC:** 3**Weaponry** Multifocal Laser (+8 to hit/1d4+3, AP 20)**Defenses** None**Fittings** Spike Drive-3, Fuel Bunker

Cheap, small, and fast, the Deacon is a common complement to a Hasta and used to sniff around an area before the cruiser moves in. Without an astrogator on board, these probes can't make interstellar drills, so the scout work is largely restricted to the same system. Occasionally a Hasta will have a sufficient number of human crewmembers to man these ships for interstellar recon, though the work is not uncommonly fatal given the kind of places that the Fleets of God go.

FUROR-CLASS FIGHTER-BOMBER**Power:** 10/0 free**Mass:** 4/0 free**Cost:** 1,604,000 cr **Hit Points:** 16 **Crew:** 1/6 **Speed:** 6 **Armor:** 8 **AC:** 3**Weaponry** Fractal Impact Charge * 2 (+8 to hit/2d6+3, AP 15, Ammo 4)**Defenses** None**Fittings** Spike Drive-1, 2 tons of ammo space for 8 fractal impact charges

These little ships pack a vicious punch, and can threaten even cruisers with their heavy fractal impact charges. Fighter-fit Choir carriers can dispatch a cloud of up to thirty of the little craft, overwhelming local defenders with the sheer volume of fire and multiple engagements to stretch their defenses to the breaking point. Like almost all small craft in the Fleets of God, these ships are piloted remotely by an AI in the system rather than being loaded with an actual AI core or manned by humans. The Fleets would doubtless use even more of these little craft than they do if the computing requirements for maintaining a metadimensional comm link weren't so heavy.

AI ABILITIES AND SKILLS

A full description of AI construction, abilities, and humanoid armatures are provided in the *Stars Without Number Core* edition offered by Mongoose Publishing, and available in PDF at DriveThruRPG. The AIs of the Imago Dei are almost all highly experienced and well-practiced minds. For any skill relevant to their duties, they may be assumed to have at least level-3 expertise and a +1 attribute bonus. Other AIs seeking to interface with an Imago Dei starship may do so for no cost in Tolerance

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